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A CRIME IN WHICH A HONG KONG DRUG CARTEL USED EGGROLL CANS TO CONTAIN NARCOTICS AND SEND THEM BY MAIL TO MACAU HAS BEEN BUSTED

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COMMITTEE CRITICIZES UM CONSTRUCTION'S BUDGET EXECUTION

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A NEW ASSOCIATION WILL LAUNCH TODAY WITH AN AIM OF PROMOTING ALL ASPECTS OF CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

P4

AP PHOTO



Japan Three crew members of a Japanese crab fishing vessel died yesterday after a collision with a Russian freighter in the Sea of Okhotsk, north of Japan's Hokkaido island, officials said. The Japanese vessel overturned following the collision. The Russian cargo ship rescued all five crew members, but three were confirmed dead after arriving at the port of Mombetsu. Japan's government spokesman Katsunobu Kato said.

AP PHOTO



India Heavy rain and a high tide lashed parts of eastern India and neighboring Bangladesh as a cyclone pushed ashore yesterday in an area where more than 1.1 million people have evacuated during a devastating coronavirus surge. Cyclone Yaas already had caused two deaths and damaged homes as heavy rains pounded Odisha and West Bengal states before the storm began making landfall in the late morning.

AP PHOTO



Syrians in government-held areas of the war-torn country headed to polling stations early yesterday to vote in a presidential election guaranteed to give President Bashar Assad a fourth seven-year term. The vote is the second presidential election since the country's conflict began 10 years ago and has been dismissed as a sham by the opposition and Western countries, including the United States. The post has been held by members of the Assad family for five decades.

More on backpage



LEAVING JAPAN

In a domino effect, Macau gaming operators or investors dropped plans to bid for IRs in the industry's so-called new frontier citing pandemic and economic reasons, but MDT went on to investigate if there's more to it

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STEVEN DIAZ

CITY RECORDS FIRST CASE OF INDIAN COVID-19 VARIANT IN QUARANTINE

P3

2ND-LEVEL COVID-19 CLOSE CONTACT FROM GUANGZHOU QUARANTINED IN MACAU

The Macau Health Bureau has been notified by the Guangdong Health Commission that a second-level close contact of a Covid-19 positive case from Guangzhou, Guangdong, has entered Macau. The local bureau has traced the 28-year-old man, who stayed in a Londoner Hotel room since May 25, and brought him to quarantine at the Public Health Clinical Center. The man has received one negative PCR result so far. The bureau added that his risk to the community was low.

MUST LAUNCHES NATIONAL-GRADE LOCAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER

The Macau University of Science and Technology has recently launched the Chinese Academy of History – Macau History Research Center. After the opening ceremony, the university debuted the Macau History Forum, where academics and scholars discussed the difficulties in researching Macau history, new literature found on Macau history, as well as the Pan-Pacific Silk and Silver Road, among other topics. President Gao Xiang of the Chinese academy, meanwhile, stressed that Macau history is an unalienable part of Chinese history. The entity aims to construct an institution of discourse in the study of Macau history.

HEALTH CENTERS NO LONGER SELL MASKS FROM TODAY

Following the 30th round of the Centralized Mask Supply Scheme, which commences today, government health centers will terminate their participation in the scheme. The responsibility of selling the resources, the government announced, will depend on collaborating community pharmacies and associations, reducing the number of points of sale to 72. Children's masks, meanwhile, will only be available at 56 community pharmacies, where each eligible buyer can purchase 30 children's or 30 adult-sized masks at a time. Masks with defects can be exchanged at government health centers.

REMOTE REGISTRATIONS FOR PROPERTIES IN SOME GUANGDONG CITIES NOW POSSIBLE

Macau buyers of properties located in some Guangdong cities, such as Zhuhai and Jiangmen, can now process their registration without crossing the border. Meanwhile, mortgages in Macau over properties located in Guangdong can also be partially processed now. Purchasers who have mortgages with collaborating financial institutions will not be required to make the trip across the border to process their mortgages. According to a Mainland directive, the concept of remote registrations for properties will be promoted in Guangzhou, Foshan, Huizhou, Dongguan, among others.

CPU MEMBER EXPRESSES CONCERNS OVER BUILDING-LINKING FLYOVERS

RENATO MARQUES

A member of the Urban Planning Committee (CPU) raised concerns over the ownership and responsibility for the inter-building flyovers used to provide access to pedestrians.

The question was raised by CPU member Lo Chi Kin during the discussion of the urban conditions plan (PCU) of a building located at a land plot next to the Avenida Marginal do Patane yesterday.

Lo noted that the building has two pedestrian flyovers that link it to two other buildings located immediately next to it over the streets and to different road sidewalks, taking the opportunity to raise the issue of clarifying who owns such structures.

"Technically the flyover is part of the building and it is connected to its façade but in case it needs to be repaired or maintained, who will take responsibility for this? Is it the government or the building owners?" Lo, who is a vice president of the Board of Directors of the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM), questioned, adding that the matter will become relevant if, in the future, problems arise from such structures. In such an event, there should be a clear definition of who is responsible for the inter-building flyovers to avoid legal disputes.

Addressing the issue, direc-



tor of the Land, Public Works and Transport Bureau (DS-SOPT), Chan Po Ha, who also assumes the presidency of the committee, added that in normal circumstances these flyovers become part of the public space upon being built, and so they are the responsibility of the IAM for management.

"We will stipulate that in the [land concession] contract between the government and the building owners," Chan said.

Committee member Choi Wan Sun agreed with Lo on the need to clarify the issue of ownership, since there are several buildings where this type of structure exists. Additionally, "In the future, this might happen in many more and different places," she said, noting Zone A of the new landfills.

The debate was brought to

an end by the vice president of the committee, Iau Teng Pio, who said, "We should not discuss this matter here today. We [the committee] do not have the competencies to address this matter," Iau said, despite noting that Lo was correct regarding the government's need to take this matter into account.

In a further explanation, a staff member of the DSSOPT acknowledged that there are many situations still to be discussed regarding the building and land plot but, "on this committee, we are only issuing the PCU. Basically this means we are deciding on the basic guidelines for the urban planning of the land plot," adding that such discussion should occur at a later stage and in a different committee.

LAND PLOT WITH SPECIAL RESTRICTIONS

The PCU of a very small land plot, located at Calçada do Botelho, across Saint Anthony's Church was once more under discussion at the CPU meeting.

A significant area of the small piece of land is to be designated for public use to enlarge the street and sidewalk. The conditions for the remainder of the plot are now being settled.

Due to the location, the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) has noted a series of conditions that will apply to the remaining area. Such conditions include the non-usage of glass as the main façade material as well as mirrored windows. Even the color of the building is subject to a restriction and cannot surpass 80% on the scale of saturation and brightness.

On the topic, the committee member and architect André Lui questioned the need for such strictness over the color of the building.

IC's vice president Deland Leong explained that "Requirements are stricter in that area due to the land plot being located within the protection zone [of the historical center] as well as the surroundings including the [Saint Anthony's] Church. For this reason, reflective glass and very vibrant colors should not be used."

Legislative committee criticizes budget execution for UM construction

THE University of Macau (UM) did not do well in terms of reviewing the budget executions for its construction projects, lawmaker Mak Soi Kun and president of the Legislative Assembly's Committee Following-up Public Finance Affairs, said yesterday.

Mak was referring

to the staff dormitory construction project of the university. He pointed out that the project commenced in the second quarter of 2020. However, in the budget executive report submitted by the university, the same project was listed as having commenced in the first quarter of this year.

He saw the university as not being rigorous in reviewing its project or reports.

He also criticized the university for not listing out engineering checkpoints for the project, hindering the government's effort to monitor its progress in a timely manner.

The committee also

reviewed the Investment and Development Expenditure Plan (PIDDA) of the first quarter of this year. Mak revealed that the permitted Investment and Development Budget was MOP18.5 billion, with actual expenditure amounting to MOP272 million.

That said, the bud-

get execution rate was 14.7% and budget use rate was 69.9%. The use rates of 73 projects were zero.

Although the committee was satisfied with the budget use rate, it considered that the Financial Services Bureau's supervision could have been more rigorous and efficient. AL

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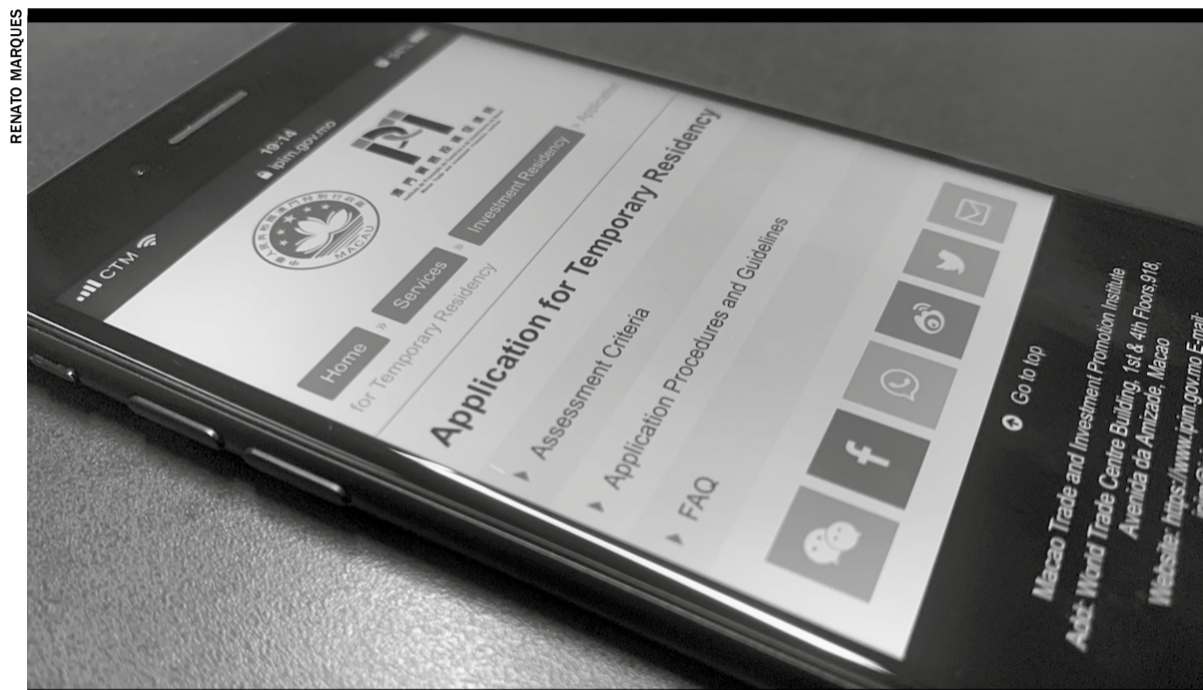
AL committee proposes to allow provisional residential permit holders as residents

ANTHONY LAM

A parliamentary committee has proposed to the government to allow new immigrants on provisional residential permits to be considered as residing in Macau even if they do not stay overnight in the city.

Justifying the suggestion, lawmaker and president of the committee Si Ka Lon pointed out that there had been cases in which the applicants who were athletes were required to spend extensive time outside the city for training purposes, making them not able to stay overnight in Macau.

He added that some professionals, such as doctors and accountants, could not renew their immigration applications because they were only given the payment receipt, colloquially known as the "street-roaming paper," issued by



RENATO MARQUES

the Public Security Police Force.

He criticized the government for not upholding the concept of the Greater Bay Area. "The govern-

ment wants people to integrate into the Greater Bay Area, but they don't allow people to work in Macau and live in the Greater Bay,"

he said, adding that he hoped the future legislation would be streamlined to address the matter.

On the sidelines of the com-

mittee meeting, Lau Wai Meng, President of the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM), declined to comment on the committee's proposal on the grounds that the new immigration legislation was under public consultation.

Meanwhile, from December 2018 to the end of 2020, the IPIM reviewed 3,268 cases of technical immigration or immigration by major investment in which the applicants had not yet obtained permanent residency. Among these, 1,439 cases concerned technical immigration.

While reviewing these cases, the IPIM investigated applicants' employment circumstances and habitual residences. As for immigration by investment, the IPIM checked the operating condition of the relevant businesses. These businesses also had to submit financial reports signed by third-party auditors.

MICE sector sees 68 events in Q1

LYNZY VALLES

A total of 68 meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) events were held in the first quarter of 2021, including 61 meetings and conferences (-56 year-on-year) and seven exhibitions (+4 year-on-year).

On account of the increase in exhibitions, the number of participants and attendees surged by 71.7% year-on-year to 138,000, according to the latest data from the Statistics and Census Service.

The number of participants in meetings and conferences declined by 61.5% year-on-year to 6,523 in the first quarter. Meetings and conferences with a duration of four hours or more totalled 36 (-47 year-on-year), with 4,529 participants (-67.0% year-on-year).

All of the seven exhibitions were organized by non-government organisations and the number of attendees soared by 109.2% to 132,000. The average duration of the exhibitions in the first quarter went down by 0.1 days year-on-year to 2.9 days, whereas the total floor area used rose by 73.7% to 13,000 square meters.



According to information on the seven exhibitions provided by the organizers in the first quarter, their receipts and expenditure amounted to MOP6.22 million and MOP4.77 million respectively.

Earlier this year, the government had vowed that it would strive to launch the Exhibition Curation and Arrangement training program in the second or third quarter of 2021.

This scheme is aimed at bolstering the infrastructure of the local MICE sector to help it be better prepared

for the future tourism revival after the Covid-19 pandemic subsides.

Several MICE events were cancelled last year due to the pandemic outbreak in Macau in late January 2020, which was subsequently felt worldwide.

The MICE sector then came to a standstill, with the number of MICE events held in Macau falling by around 76% year-on-year to only 362.

Meanwhile, the exhibitions in the first quarter of 2021 attracted a total of 420 exhibitors and 5,608

professional visitors, with locals comprising 94.5% and 95.6% of the respective totals.

Earlier this month, the government announced that three large conferences – mainly corporate conferences – will be held in Macau by the end of June. It is estimated that over 8,000 people will attend the conferences and it is expected that this will "boost the peripheral industries such as retail, catering and hotels, and stimulate the economic recovery of the community."

COVID-19

CITY RECORDS FIRST CASE OF INDIAN VARIANT

LYNZY VALLES

THE 51st confirmed case of Covid-19 in Macau, detected a few days ago, was found to be SARS-CoV-2 variant known as B.1.617 – which is widely known as the Indian variant.

This is the first time that this variant has been diagnosed in Macau.

According to a statement from the The Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre, the new case reveals that Macau is under the "potential threat of infection with the new type of coronavirus."

The center has then urged all residents who have not been vaccinated to administer vaccines as soon as possible.

The new strain was first discovered in India in December last year, and is currently causing a wide outbreak in the region.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has classified it as a "variant that deserves global attention" and "a worrying variant."

On Tuesday night, the center reported that the 51st imported case of Covid-19 is a Macau resident who recently traveled to several foreign countries and returned to Macau on May 19, tested positive late Monday for Covid-19.

He was classified as an asymptomatic imported case.

The 39-year-old male resident is unemployed and "denied that he had previously been diagnosed with Covid-19," the authorities said in a statement early Tuesday.

According to the statement, the man was inoculated in Macau with two doses of Sinopharm's inactivated vaccines between February 11 and March 11.

CRIME

DRUG TRAFFICKING IN EGGROLL CAN BUSTED

ANTHONY LAM

A crime in which a Hong Kong drug cartel used eggroll cans to contain narcotics and send them by mail to Macau has recently been busted, the Judiciary Police (PJ) announced yesterday.

The cartel used real eggrolls as camouflage on top of the narcotics in the cans. A narcotic user and three traffickers, all local residents, have been arrested. The narcotics seized by the police amounted to HKD90,000 in the black market.

During its preliminary investigation, the local police discovered that two of the suspects, aged 35 and 37 years respectively, often requested pick-up service from a taxi driver, who is suspected to be related to the crime.

In an operation on the evening of May 25, the PJ arrested the 37-year-old suspect while he was selling four packs of cocaine, each amounting to HKD900, to the 28-year-old suspect, who is the narcotic user in the case and was also arrested.

Later, the PJ conducted a search at an inn room rented by the 37-year-old and seized 49 more



VOLODYMYR HRYSCHENKO

packs of cocaine and two packs of methamphetamine, which weighed 27.79 grams in total, amounting to HKD90,000 on the black market. The fourth suspect was arrested during the search.

The next day, the PJ deployed a team to arrest the taxi driver at his residence in the Northern District. The man admitted to assisting with the crime. He has taken equal shares in each transaction.

The PJ believed that the criminal acts have been ongoing for three to four months already.

MAN SCAMS PEOPLE FOR GAMBLING MONEY

The PJ busted a case in which a senior local man scammed money from mainland job seekers.

He has tricked at least 38 people, appropriating 190,000 Chinese yuan to gamble in casinos. After lo-

osing all the money, he fled to mainland China but was caught while re-entering Macau recently.

In February last year, the suspect, 66 years of age and surnamed Leong, came across a woman in an eatery in Zhuhai. Leong later told the woman that he could arrange for mainland residents to work at construction sites in Macau. The cost for each referral was 5,000 yuan.

The woman believed him and arranged for 38 of her friends and relatives to seek employment from the man between February and July last year.

The man made a fake company stamp on the internet to make his story seem more credible.

After losing contact with the man, the woman reported the case to the PJ on January 20, 2021. The PJ arrested the man on May 24 when he tried to re-enter Macau through the Border Gate.

STAY ALERT AND PROTECT YOUR CREDIT CARDS

The PJ has received reports of nine cases of credit card fraud between May 24 and 25. Cards of local residents have been used to make online transactions in various currencies such as the US Dollar, the Sterling Pound and the New Zealand Dollar, which was a newer currency for such cases in Macau.

With all currencies converted to the pataca, the victims have been defrauded of MOP233,266 in total. The bank will return the money if the victims are proved unlinked to the crime.

GOV'T TO CONTINUALLY ROLL OUT PROMOTIONS IN SHANGHAI TO ATTRACT TOURISTS

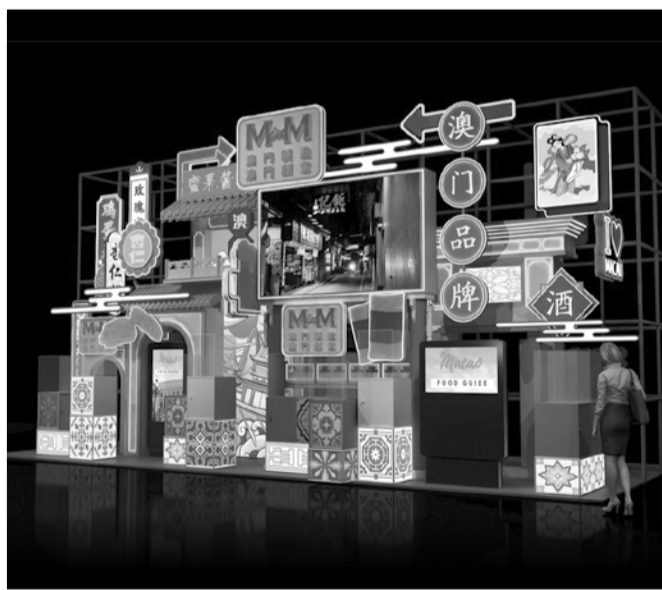
LYNZY VALLES

THE Macau SAR is again set to host a mega roadshow in Shanghai to entice visitors to visit the city, which has been described as a "healthy, safe and quality destination."

According to the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), the "Macao Week in Shanghai" roadshow will be held from June 3 to 7, with gastronomic promotions, Macau tourism and MICE presentation seminars, business matching and networking events to promote its diverse elements of "tourism +".

The event seeks to attract Mainland visitors for travel and spending in Macau to spur tourism and economic revival.

During the roadshow, spectators can enjoy wonderful performances scheduled at the main stage, including a Lion Dance, Dragon Dance, Portuguese Folk Dance and Wing Chun Martial Arts, all of which are inscribed on the Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the SAR.



Rendering of a themed zone in "Macao week in Shanghai"

Over RMB110 million worth of special travel offers on air tickets, hotel accommodation, dining and other tourism products will be on sale at the roadshow and relevant platforms.

The organizer will also roll out an extensive promotional campaign for the Macao Week in Shanghai through various online and offline platforms while leveraging the wide influence of different key opinion leaders (KOLs) from the Main-

land. Meanwhile, the MGTO, Bellagio by MGM Shanghai and MGM Macau will together roll out a gastronomic promotion from June 4 to 17 that will "radiate Macau's glamour as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy."

The Macao Week in Shanghai will unfold a mega roadshow along the Yuanmingyuan Road Pedestrian Street at Waitanyuan, Huangpu District.

HALFTONE TO CATER TO PHOTOGRAPHY ENTHUSIASTS

LYNZY VALLES

A new photography association will launch today, aiming to promote all aspects of contemporary photography.

At 6:30 p.m. today, a total of 18 photography enthusiasts who are part of the new group are set to showcase a series of photographs in an exhibition at the Portuguese Library entitled "Halftone."

According to one of the founding members, Gonçalo Lobo Pinheiro, Halftone is an inclusive association open to all those interested in photography as an artistic and/or documentary expression, regardless of their experience.

"The association proposes to promote the photographic work of its members, as well as organising exhibitions, publishing magazines, books and monographs, organising debates and developing pedagogical and educational projects," Pinheiro told the Times.

Currently, Portuguese enthusiasts make up the majority of the associa-



GONÇALO LOBO PINHEIRO

tion's members. With its launch today, the association hopes to reach more members, with a goal of 50 members towards the end of the year.

The association also hoped that enthusiasts from the Chinese community would join the group.

Halftone will publish a photography magazine three times a year. This magazine is slated to have 40 pages with the portfolios of each members.

Halftone members are now working on the program of activities for the next two years, which will include exhibitions,

workshops and conversations about photography.

According to Pinheiro, the process of creating the association, as well as the exhibition, was quick, adding that a dedicated website for the association will also be launched today.

"The process was quite fast. We have all been imbued with soul and heart and things have been flowing. Everything has been happening since the beginning of this year," he said.

The basement of the Portuguese Library will serve as headquarters for Halftone, allowing the association to develop its activities from there.

Businessman Rosário pleads not guilty in cryptocurrency investments fraud trial

RENATO MARQUES

THE trial of the fraud case involving cryptocurrency investments began this Tuesday at the Court of First Instance. The case involves a total of 71 victims and a sum of around 20 million patacas. In the defendant's stand for the first session of the trial was local businessman Frederico dos Santos Rosário who was accused of fraud, along with the other defendant, Hong Kong resident Dennis Lau.

Day one of the trial was dedicated to the initial allegations in the case and hearing the evidence of the first five witnesses. Rosário pleaded not guilty, denying all the charges.

He argued that it was Lau who was responsible for the alleged investment plan and that he never received any



ANDRÉ FRANÇOIS

money from the investors.

According to the defendant's testimony, he is in the same position as around 40 people who also made investments, the majority of whom were his relatives and family members and included Rosário's wife, parents, and many long-term friends.

He said to the court that he met Lau back in 2017 during an e-sports event held in Macau. During this time,

the Hong Kong businessman invited him to be part of the investment scheme based on cryptocurrency mining.

He said to have himself invested an initial sum of HKD150,000, equivalent to 10% of shares in the company that was operating the investment.

Rosário is considered responsible for attracting the investment of a large number of local investors who lost

their money in the fraudulent scheme, having hosted several meetings and events to attract investors at the Macau Civil Servants Association (ATFPM), an association where his mother, Rita Santos, is chairman of the general assembly.

Santos was also mentioned by several investors who noted that it was her notable image, fostered by several positions that she has held over the years in Macau, that caused them to trust the investment.

Both mother and son have denied any illegality, claiming that they are also part of the group that fell victim to the investment fraud.

The five witnesses heard on the first day confirmed that they had made payments to the Hong Kong businessman through bank cheques.

The next session of this trial is scheduled for July 20.

MELCO HOSTS SEMINAR ON GBA ENTREPRENEURSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

MELCO Resorts & Entertainment hosted a seminar titled "Follow your Dreams" with the aim of providing team members with practical knowledge of the Greater Bay Area's (GBA) business and entrepreneurship opportunities.

In a statement, the gaming operator reaffirmed its support for the government's direction for development in the GBA.

Some 300 colleagues were invited to participate in the virtual and in-person event, where young entrepreneurs in Macau and the GBA spoke about the business environment and development opportunities.

Kent Wong, Chief Advisor of Melco Resorts & Entertainment, said, "The GDP of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area is close to USD1.7 trillion. It is one of the most open and economically vigorous regions in the country, and has huge development potential."

"I hope that after the event, our colleagues will have gained a deeper understanding of the job market and workplace culture in the Greater Bay Area," he added. LV



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HONEY TSANG

GAMING

When bureaucratic irresolution and

EVER since Japan's parliament, the National Diet, ratified the Integrated Resort (IR) Promotion Act in 2016 and ensured the IR Implementation Bill in July 2018 — the stamps of approval of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's administration that legalized gaming and the issuance of three casino licenses in Japan — the world's casino operators had been strenuously jockeying for footholds in this untouched yet apparently lucrative mecca.

It ought to be a win-win scenario for all, in which the Japanese government could ride on the momentum of gaming activities to turbocharge its tourism and economy, and the winning casino operators might rake in hefty profits from legions of global tourists attracted to Japan and a stable supply of local gamblers.

However, Japan's IR game plan seems to have been teetering on the brink during the recent months, with more gaming operators backing out of the IR race at close intervals.

They include, but are not limited to, the U.S.-based casino behemoth Las Vegas Sands which took its chips off a Yokohama IR bid in May 2020, followed by an official withdrawal from Yokohama IR by another U.S. giant Wynn Resorts in February 2021.

Among Macau's casino operators, Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) also gave up on the Yokohama IR marathon on May 17. Days prior to GEG's exit, Macau's junket conglomerate Suncity Group declared its departure from Wakayama IR venture on May 12.

To many gaming experts, investors cascading out of Japan's IR development came as no surprise. They point to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic weakening Japan's economy and the overly protracted red tape involved in the IR tender process, also dubbed request-for-proposal (RFP). Both factors arguably bear the same weight to investors, dashing their hopes in this high-stakes venture.

Ben Lee, managing partner of IGamiX Management & Consulting, was among one of those who remain skeptical about the prospect of Japan's IR development. In an interview with the Times, he candidly pointed out: "The Japan market was always an overhyped story."

"The inability of the Japanese government to be concise on the issue is paralleled by their seeming indecisiveness on Covid-19 actions as well as the Olympics, and appears to be the final trigger for the operators to pull the plug on what is already a long-drawn-out affair," he said.

IR BIDS THAT TAKE FOREVER

Japan has all it takes to be a happy hunting ground for international gaming operators. In 2019,

the pre-pandemic era, the gross domestic product (GDP) of Japan totaled over USD5 trillion. Its GDP did experience its sharpest plunge of 6.4% in the last quarter that year since 2014 due to sales tax hike and hits of typhoon, but was still sufficient to make Japan the world's third-richest countries, following the U.S and second-place China.

For the full year of 2019, Japan welcomed a record high tally of 31.9 million foreign travelers, up 2.2% year-on-year. Holidaymakers from China contributed the lion's share, or over 70% of total visitor arrivals to Japan, followed by 17.5% by South Korea, 15.3% by Taiwan, and 7.2% by Hong Kong.

These beefy statistics had injected great doses of confidence into IR bidders, vying to be one of the three casinos to be established in Japan. Up to now, Japan is still one of the few highly-developed economies without the encroachment of casinos.

Nevertheless, the IR tender is more laborious than anyone could have imagined. For tenderers to win an IR bid in Japan, they have to submit their IR proposals via RFP application to the interested cities. These cities had previously declared interest in IR investment and reached an agreement with its prefecture on such a development.

Afterwards, both city and prefecture would vet and single out the winning bidder based on preset yardsticks. Following this, the selected tenderer and respective prefecture would have to team up to conceive a comprehensive plan for their proposed IR project — which will later require approvals from prefecture-level assembly and, ultimately, the Japanese government.

The original application period for local governments, together with their chosen IR partners, to submit joint proposals to the national government was set as January 4 to July 31 2021. However, in December last year

Japan's government announced that the application period would be pushed back nine months to October 1 2021 to April 28 2022, due to the hindrance of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Owing to the adverse impact of the coronavirus, the government is eyeing to open the first integrated resort in the late 2020s, at best.

Prefectures of Japan are also

BLOOMBERG



one another's rivals in this IR race. The more world-class the partnership a prefecture can forge with the winning bidder, the higher the odds that it is selected by the national government as one of the three casino sites.

As of now, casino operators

" [Since] China's recent edicts on anti-gambling, the [VIP] target market segment has all but evaporated for Japan.

BEN LEE

have still been bogged down in the RFP process. Across Japan, there are four cities that have proclaimed their intention to run for the IR battlefield: Osaka, Yokohama, Wakayama and Nagasaki.

FOUR PROSPECTIVE IR SITES

Osaka, the second largest metropolitan area and one of the most-visited cities in Japan, was

touted to be the most combative and promising candidate in the IR race. Back in 2014, Ichir Matsui, governor of the Osaka Prefecture, made it clear that the city would transform Yumeshima island into an IR paradise, which will also host The World Expo in 2025. The authorities previously planned to open Japan's first probable IR by 2025 to tie in with the mega event.

There were seven casino operators taking part in Osaka's RFP: Genting Singapore Ltd, Wynn Resorts, Galaxy Entertainment Group Ltd, Las Vegas Sands Corp, Melco Resorts and Entertainment Ltd, and MGM Resorts International.

However, MGM, with its local business partner ORIX, is now the only qualified candidate left for the IR bid in Osaka, following the withdrawals of six of its former rivals over the past two years.

In MGM's earnings calls for the first quarter of 2021, CEO and president of MGM Resorts International Bill Hornbuckle reaffir-

med his conviction in investing in Osaka IR.

Having seen many drop-outs, in February the Osaka government made amendments to its IR Implementation Policy, which reopened the application process for new applicants to sign up for RFP until April 6, 2021 to ensure a fairer tender. It also introduced relaxed entry requirements on accommodation and event spaces to enable the winning operator to carry out expansion projects on the IR site in the future.

The RFP deadline for Osaka IR was set for July 20. It is evident that the city failed to meet its original IR opening timetable by 2025.

Should Osaka be chosen by the national government in the final selection process, the world may see an IR at Yumeshima in 2027, the earliest. This was stated by Hiroshi Mizohata, director of the Osaka Convention and Tourism Bureau, in an IR Forum Online, hosted by the Japan IR Association earlier in April.

Yokohama, bearing the geographical advantage of lying to the south of Tokyo, is considered the next strongest rival. Many operators have shown interest in inves-

COVID pandemic jabs Japan's IR bubble



ting in this region, but there are only four left in the race: Genting Singapore, Melco, Sega Sammy, and Shotoku.

The latest investor to give up on Yokohama was GEG, this month. The group's vice-chairman Francis Lui stated in a release: "[We] have decided to not participate at [Yokohama IR] this time. We will continue our dialogue to support Japan in achieving its goal to develop a sustainable and world class IR industry."

In May 2020, the late Sheldon Adelson, founder of Las Vegas Sands stated his decision to pull out of Yokohama IR tender. "The framework around the development of an IR [in Japan] has made our goals there unreachable. (...) It is time for our company to focus our energy on other opportunities," he stated in the press release.

Wakayama prefecture, located in the Kansai region with a close proximity to Osaka, was another fledgling contestant. Its RFP application period closed in January and registered two candidates – Macau-based Suncity Group Holdings and Canada-based Clairvest Neem Ventures, though the first backed off early this May.

Chief Executive Officer and director of Suncity Group Alvin Chau attributed the withdrawal to Covid-19 pandemic, saying: "the time it takes for the IR applications to be finalized is longer than expected. As a business operator, we decided to make the hard decision [to withdraw the project] after careful consideration."

Nagasaki, on the island of Kyushu and the third largest island in Japan, was the last to declare their place competing for an IR license. In March, three entities were shortlisted for its IR bid: Casinos Austria International, Oshidori International Development, and Niki Chyau Fwu Group.

JAPAN'S GAMING TRADITIONS

Alongside its IR pursuit, Japan has two long-established gaming industries - the money-making pachinko and horseracing markets.

Pachinko — a mechanical gaming activity comprised of a mi-

xture of arcade games and slot machines — is undoubtedly a common obsession for the locals. According to Japan Today, the industry used to generate USD200 billion annually and contributed 4% of Japan's total GDP.

It is estimated that one out of



"Macau is a legend for its difficulties with junkets and triad societies, and the Japanese authorities will be mindful to avoid these pitfalls."

STEVE VICKERS

11 Japanese plays Pachinko once a week, Sung-Yoon Lee, professor of Korean studies at Tufts University told Business Insider.

Ben Lee echoes the professor's remarks. "Pachinko parlors achieved an extremely high level of penetration into every small city and town that would not be replicated by any potential IRs."

Such a fact makes Lee doubt

the real clamor of Japan's casino market. "The potential of the market was always questionable as analyst after analyst used the pachinko market as an indicator of the potential size for casinos," he argued.

Since the pandemic hit the world, Pachinko parlors went under at a rapid pace. According to a report published in April by IAG, the number of Pachinko parlors stood at 8,063 by end of March, down 647 year-on-year and 111 month-to-month.

Meanwhile, Japan's horseracing has bucked the trend, managing to weather the pandemic storm and registering a yearly growth of 103.5% in 2020, thanks to the support of local online wagerers.

Lee speculates the Japanese do not appear to have the same propensity to gamble in casinos as the other Asian cultures, notably the Chinese.

The locals' intense penchant for Japanese traditional gaming activities prompted Ben Lee to be more suspicious as to whether the IRs would pan out as the government expected.

CAUTIOUS OF CASINOS CRIMES

The road to IR development became bumpier when Tsukasa Akimoto, the then cabinet office deputy minister for IR development, was accused of receiving bribes of JPY3 million from China's 500.com, a Chinese gambling operator, allegedly to buy Akimoto off to enter Japan's casino market. Akimoto pleaded not guilty to the charge in March.

The bribery scandal has tarnished Japan's visionary IR project. It drove the Japan Casino Regulatory Commission (JCRC) to publish a raft of stringent draft gaming regulations in April, in a bid

to ensure Japan thrives on casinos with the lowest number of gaming-related crimes as possible.

In May, Nagasaki prefecture launched a webinar to raise public awareness about gam-

bling addiction as it expected a possible IR in the future.

In an exclusive interview with the Times, Steve Vickers, CEO of Steve Vickers and Associates (SVA), a specialist political and corporate risk consultancy, said: "I am sure that the Japanese authorities are keen to keep standards high, and would look much more to the Singapore model than the

Macau model as a way forward." "Macau is a legend for its difficulties with junkets and triad societies, and the Japanese authorities will be mindful to avoid these pitfalls. Japan has had an unfortunate history with organized crime in the pachinko business and seems determined not to repeat such problems," he said.

THE ROAD AHEAD

In 2018, Goldman Sachs Group, an international investment bank, forecast Japan's casino market to be valued at JPY1.75 trillion, if the operation of three resorts are in full swing. Such a figure may skyrocket Japan to be the world's second-biggest gambling market, after Macau.

But the emergence of Covid-19 has caused a paradigm shift among the investment directors of global casino operators. The ongoing pandemic uncertainties, coupled with the habitual procrastination of the Japanese government, had virtually dried up bidders' enthusiasm.

Vickers expects that the opening of IRs will take "considerably longer," and the Japanese government is unlikely to speed up the process.

When asked by impact of the recent drop-outs of Macau casino operators from Japan IR tender on the local gaming sector, Lee said it will be "minimal."

"The Japan IR story was always a hidden tussle between the foreign operators wanting a slice of the perceived domestic Japanese market vs the [Japanese] government seeing it as an opportunity to develop an international VIP market. With China's recent edicts on anti-gambling, the latter target market segment has all but evaporated for Japan," he added.

There has been a belief circulating in the global gaming industry that Japan would prefer US operators to Chinese enterprises, given the close ties between Japan and the U.S., and on-and-off tensions between Japan and China.

In response to this, Vickers suggested that these underlying political reasons will make global investors "cognizant of the geopolitical tensions between the US and China, and what that could mean for Chinese businesses investing in Japan."

With the pandemic showing no obvious signs of abatement, Lee and Vickers agreed that it is still far from clear if operators would resume their pursuit for Japan IRs.

Japan has been grappling with current economic downturn. In the latest figure released by the Japan government, the national GDP shrank 5.1% year-on-year, or 1.3% from the preceding quarter in the first quarter of 2021 just as Japan endures a fresh Covid-19 resurgence.

"For now, though, such investments are probably not a priority, either for the companies or for the government," said Vickers.

Actor John Cena faces backlash in China over Taiwan comment

ACTOR and professional wrestler John Cena has apologized to fans in China after he called Taiwan a country in a promotional interview for his upcoming film and became the latest celebrity to face the fury of Chinese nationalists.

In a short video posted yesterday [Macau time] on Chinese social media site Weibo, Cena did not refer to Taiwan or go into much detail about the incident, which occurred earlier this month when he was doing a promotion for "Fast & Furious 9" with Taiwanese media.

"In one interview, I made a mistake," he said in heavily accented Mandarin Chinese. "I need to say now that this is very, very, very, very, very important. I love and respect China and the Chinese people. I'm very, very sorry. As for my mistake, I really apologize for it."

In his interview with TVBS, a Taiwanese cable channel, Cena was also speaking in Mandarin when he said Taiwan would be the first "country" to be able to see the film. That led to an uproar in China, which



Actor John Cena: fast & furious

considers the self-governing democracy its own territory to be taken back by force if necessary.

It was unclear if Cena's apology worked, as many comments on Chinese social media in response to his video were negative. Likewise, Cena was also facing scorn back in the United States, where Sen. Tom Cotton called the apology "pathetic" and others lashed out at him on social media as a "coward."

Global companies and celebrities seeking to maintain access to the lucrative Chinese market have to tread a

fine line on many issues as online nationalistic outrage can spark boycotts.

China has increasingly pressured foreign firms over their statements on Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Tibet, the South China Sea and other issues Beijing considers sensitive.

Airlines and other multinational companies have been pushed to refer to Taiwan as a part of China on their websites or risk damage to their business in China.

Chinese state broadcaster CCTV cut ties with the NBA for a year in response to a tweet by Houston Rockets

general manager Daryl Morey backing pro-democracy protesters in Hong Kong, even though the post was quickly deleted.

News about Chloe Zhao, a Chinese director, winning an Oscar was censored in April after old interviews surfaced where she said that she grew up in a place where there were "lies" everywhere.

Meanwhile, "Fast & Furious 9" appeared to be doing well in China despite the uproar. The film has taken in \$155 million at the box office in China since it opened on May 21, according to local media reports. **MDT/AP**

HONG KONG

Legislature due to approve curbs on public vote

HONG Kong's legislature is expected to change electoral laws to drastically reduce the public's ability to vote for lawmakers and increase the number of pro-Beijing lawmakers making decisions for the city.

Once approved, the amendments mean the city's national security department will check the backgrounds of potential candidates for public office and a new committee will be set up to ensure those candidates are patriotic.

The number of seats in Hong Kong's legislature will be expanded to 90, with 40 of them elected by a largely pro-Beijing election committee. The number of legislators elected directly by Hong



Kong voters will be cut to 20, from the previous 35.

Debate is scheduled before the legislature votes on the bill, but little to no

opposition is expected. The body's members are largely pro-Beijing after opposition lawmakers resigned en masse last year in protest over the

ousting of four deemed to be insufficiently loyal to Beijing.

The changes to Hong Kong's elections come as Beijing further tightens control over the semi-autonomous city that saw months of anti-government protest and political strife in 2019.

China's parliament in March endorsed changes to the city's electoral system, which then led to Hong Kong's proposals.

They are the latest in a string of moves to ensure people elected to office or serving the city are loyal to Beijing. An amendment the legislature approved earlier this month requiring the city's over 400 district councilors — who mainly deal with municipal matters — to take an oath pledging their loyalty to Hong Kong and to upholding its mini-constitution.

The oath was previously required only of legislators and government officials such as the chief executive. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1994 DISSIDENT WRITER SOLZHENITSYN RETURNS



Alexander Solzhenitsyn has flown back to his native Russia after 20 years of exile in the United States.

His plane touched down in the far eastern port of Magadan from Anchorage, Alaska, and he was greeted by 2,000 people, given flowers and the traditional welcome gift of bread and salt.

The 75-year-old Nobel prize winner paid tribute to the millions of victims of Soviet repression.

"Today, in the heat of political change," he said, "those millions of victims are too lightly forgotten, both by those who were touched by that annihilation and even more so by those who were responsible for it."

He arrived with his wife Natalya, aged 54, and the youngest of his three sons, Stephan, aged 20, along with a group of reporters documenting his historic journey.

He plans to travel right across Russia by train stopping off to meet ordinary people and catch up on 20 years of absence.

He should arrive in Moscow in about two months' time, where a house is being built for him and his wife on the outskirts of the capital. The couple already own a flat in the city centre.

They have kept their house in Vermont for their sons who are American citizens.

Imprisoned by Stalin for a total of ten years for political dissent, Solzhenitsyn was stripped of his citizenship and expelled from the Soviet Union in 1974 for attacking the regime.

In 1990 Mikhail Gorbachev restored his citizenship and the following year dropped treason charges against him.

The Russia Solzhenitsyn is about to see may well have restored freedom of speech but it is plagued with economic problems, rising unemployment and organised crime.

In his comments over the past few weeks the writer has indicated he will play a moral and social role and not get involved with politics - but he has already criticised President Boris Yeltsin for allowing the country to become polluted by Western ways.

His return has received a mixed press in Russia. Neza-visimaya Gazeta called him "shamelessly outdated, with no understanding of Russia or the West". The newspaper Izvestia was more charitable - "Whatever Solzhenitsyn's political views," wrote Konstantin Kedrov, "he is bigger than politics."

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Alexander Solzhenitsyn arrived in Moscow on 23 July after a two-month odyssey across Russia by train. He was met by about 1,000 people - a mix of admirers and protesters. He expressed his shock at what he had seen on his journey, and attacked the leaders of the new Russia for betraying its people.

In December 1998, the author refused to accept a state award from President Boris Yeltsin to mark his 80th birthday.

He developed a more cordial relationship with President Vladimir Putin. In September 2000, the two men spent three hours together discussing Russia's destiny. He died in August 2008, at the age of 89.

Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, whose reforms led to the end of communism in the country, said Solzhenitsyn played a key role in undermining Stalin's totalitarian regime.

His works "changed the consciousness of millions of people", Mr Gorbachev said.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

The visionary Sagittarius moon focuses your energy toward educational pursuits, travel plans, and experiences that get you outside of your comfort zone.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

It's okay if you feel like you're floating off into outer space today, Taurus. Your ruling planet, magnetic Venus, spends the day in a square with foggy Neptune.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

Today's skies make it hard to stay grounded in reality, Gemini. Lean into the need to drift and dream, as romance-hungry Venus squares off with illusionist Neptune.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Bond-building Venus spends the day in a reality-bending square with Neptune, making it easy to get lost in disorienting dreams or visions of past lovers.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

The playful Sagittarius moon pushes you to lean into pleasure over productivity. Elsewhere, bond building Venus squares off with dizzying Neptune, creating mixed feelings around your current aspirations.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Elsewhere, luxury-loving Venus tangos with dizzying Neptune. This aspect suggests it's best to wait on entering into career-oriented partnerships or making big financial purchases.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Let yourself coast through Today's enchanting skies, Libra. Your ruling planet, magnetic Venus, finds herself locked into a reality-melting square with Neptune.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

On the other, beware of seeing your romantic interest through rose-colored glasses. Elsewhere, the fiery Sagittarius moon pushes you to actively share your talents.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Messenger Mercury enters its retrograde phase today, launching you into an introspective phase of re-evaluation around your current relationship stories.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

As a Capricorn, you replenish your energy by being alone. Aim to reconnect with your need for solitude, rest, and peace today, as the moon coasts through pensive Sagittarius.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

You need to find your community today, Aquarius. Reach out and reconnect with your cherished friends and let them uplift your spirits and inspire you into action.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Lover Venus dances with reality-melting Neptune. This aspect can make it difficult to concentrate mentally, but provides a poetic charm to your voice that would be a shame to waste.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

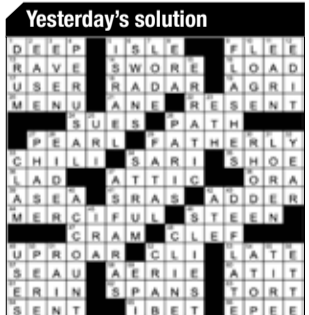
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	19	32	cloudy
Harbin	17	30	clear
Tianjin	16	18	rain
Urumqi	17	25	overcast
Xi'an	20	28	cloudy
Lhasa	16	26	clear
Chengdu	23	30	rain
Chongqing	26	33	cloudy
Kunming	18	26	rain
Nanjing	15	19	showers
Shanghai	18	21	rain
Wuhan	15	25	cloudy
Hangzhou	15	21	rain
Taipei	10	22	rain
Guangzhou	18	27	cloudy
Hong Kong	27	37	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	16	25	rain
Frankfurt	7	17	rain
Paris	7	14	rain
London	6	16	rain
New York	17	30	rain

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Stormed; 6- Mischievous child; 9- Devoutness; 14- Mindlessly stupid; 15- Goose egg; 16- Chicago's airport; 17- Purity; 19- Admit; 20- Droop; 21- Bird feed; 22- Chair designer Charles; 23- ___'act (intermission); 25- Owning much land; 26- Quash; 29- The last Mrs. Chaplin; 31- Buffoons; 32- Fragile; 36- Cross inscription; 37- ___ Lingus; 38- Lubricates; 40- Pension; 43- Furtive; 45- Very, in Versailles; 46- Hare hole; 47- Stickum; 50- Psychic; 51- Wash; 52- Basin; 54- Sister of Zsa Zsa; 57- Shed ___; 58- Not changed; 61- Old; 62- ___-X; 63- Practice; 64- Measured with a watch; 65- KLM rival; 66- Kett and James;

DOWN: 1- Journalist Jacob; 2- Editor Wintour; 3- Jets or Sharks; 4- Ambient music pioneer; 5- Last mo.; 6- Type of sanctum; 7- House rodents; 8- Answered a charge; 9- European weasel; 10- Do ___ a Waltz?; 11- Words on a Wonderland cake; 12- Reliable; 13- Cravings; 18- Adlai's running mate; 23- Newsman Newman; 24- "Sister Act" extra; 25- Singer DiFranco; 26- Biol., e.g.; 27- It parallels a radius; 28- Emerged; 29- Follows orders; 30- Bruins great Bobby; 33- ___ is human...; 34- Make-up artist?; 35- Actress Sommer; 37- Grazed; 39- Equivalent wd.; 41- Spoke; 42- Dander; 43- Bulge; 44- Dundee denial; 47- Singer LaBelle; 48- Starters; 49- Oil source; 50- Graceful birds; 51- Strong woody fiber; 52- Insects; 53- Draft classification; 54- Quod ___ demonstrandum; 55- Lyra's brightest star; 56- Citrus coolers; 59- Calendar col.; 60- Cornerstone abbr.;



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- 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
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- Electricity - Report 28 339 922
- Macau Daily Times 28 716 081



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AD

SHIFT IN FORTUNES

OLD-SCHOOL TYCOONS OF HONG KONG ARE LOSING TO CHINA'S MOGULS

SHIRLEY ZHAO

THE prediction was vintage Jack Ma, as provocative as it was prescient.

"This is the era of the internet," the Chinese billionaire proclaimed in October 2013, just weeks after his plan to take Alibaba Group Holding Ltd. public in Hong Kong had been scuttled by regulators. "It no longer belongs to Li Ka-shing."

Ma's dig at the famed Hong Kong tycoon raised plenty of eyebrows at the time, but few would disagree with him now. The past few years have seen a remarkable shift in fortunes between China's tech-savvy moguls and their old-school Hong Kong counterparts - a trend that shows few signs of fading any time soon.

Even as Xi Jinping's government moves to curb the clout of Ma and some of his peers, the combined wealth of China's 10 richest people has surged threefold since 2016 to \$425 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index. For Hong Kong, it doubled to \$218 billion during the same period. Li, once Asia's richest person, is now ranked No. 13, several spots below Ma, who eventually listed Alibaba in New York in 2014.

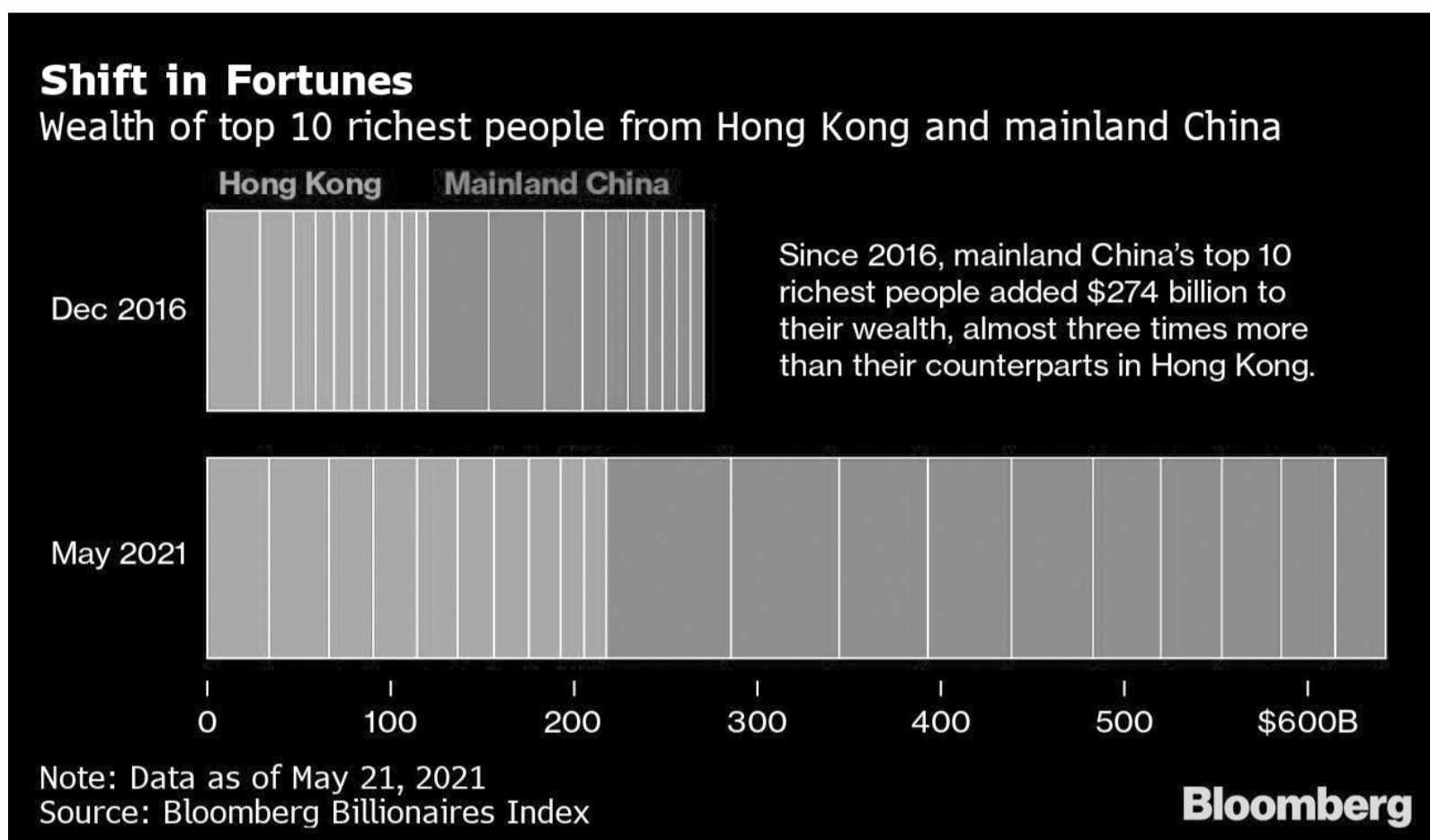
The changes underscore the fading relevance of Hong Kong businessmen who built their empires on real estate, ports, infrastructure, telecommunications, aviation and retail.

At their peak, when the former British colony was the indispensable gateway to a rapidly developing mainland China, Li and his peers were courted by Beijing for their business acumen and access to overseas capital. These days their political clout is waning and their businesses are increasingly viewed by investors as stale.

What's more, Hong Kong's future as a financial hub is facing an existential threat as China's Communist Party chips away at the "one country, two systems" framework that has underpinned the city's success for decades.

One consequence has been a dramatic slide in the stock-market valuations for Hong Kong's biggest conglomerates. Over the past five years, five of the city's top groups - CK Hutchison Holdings Ltd., New World Development Co., Henderson Land Development Co., Sun Hung Kai Properties Ltd. and Wharf Holdings Ltd. - have consistently traded at deep discounts to their net assets.

Their shares now fetch just 0.5 times book value on average, versus 10 for the five companies controlled by some of China's richest tycoons, data compiled by



Bloomberg show.

"The main businesses of the large Hong Kong companies don't have much growth," said Andy Wong, founding partner at LW Asset Management in the city. "Investors prefer to focus on growth more than on a company's value," he said, adding technology-driven sectors are attractive, especially after the pandemic.

While private family offices of some of the city's tycoons have pivoted to high-growth investments, their listed businesses have been slow to catch up. On the other hand, their counterparts across the border have leveraged technology to provide a range of consumer services and create wealth. Chinese tycoons have also benefited from the \$14.3 trillion economy's quick recovery from Covid. China was the only major economy to expand last year, while Hong Kong saw back-to-back contractions in 2019 and 2020.

Most of China's richest billionaires come from the tech industry, including Tencent Holdings Ltd.'s Pony Ma, Bytedance Ltd. founder Zhang Yiming and NetEase Inc.'s William Ding. The wealth of Zhong Shanshan, China's current richest person and founder of bottled water giant Nongfu Spring Co. is almost \$69 billion, more than double that of Li's.

Many of Hong Kong's business empires owe their success to government policies that encouraged only a small group of dee-

p-pocketed developers to bid at auctions of land parcels, a system that turned Hong Kong into the world's most expensive property market. The windfall from rising prices allowed the tycoons to diversify into utilities, retail, ports and infrastructure.

But that formula has been difficult to replicate in larger markets like mainland China due to high capital requirements, local competition and regulatory barriers, said Richard Harris, founder of Hong Kong-based Port Shelter Investment Management.

Many of the city's tycoons have focused on defending their current turf rather than expanding into new businesses

For instance, Sun Hung Kai Properties Ltd.' land bank in mainland China is just about 2.3% of that held by Country Garden Holdings Co., a Guangdong-based developer controlled by billionaire Yang Huiyan.

The result is that many of the city's tycoons have focused on defending their current turf rather than expanding into new businesses, Harris said. "Many of them are quite happy making sure they don't lose" what they have, he said.

Yet even that has proven difficult in recent years as Hong Kong's economy was battered by

anti-government protests and the pandemic.

Sun Hung Kai Properties, the developer led by billionaire brothers Raymond and Thomas Kwok, reported the biggest decline in underlying profit since 2013 for the year ended June. Swire Pacific Ltd., one of city's two centuries-old British trading firms, recorded an underlying loss last year, the first since listing in 1959. Its flagship Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd. is struggling despite a government-led rescue.

CK Hutchison, the flagship of the diversified empire Li built after his family fled to Hong Kong from the mainland as refugees in 1940, saw its first profit drop since a revamp of the conglomerate in 2015. As tensions rise between China and the West, the CK group is facing headwinds overseas. Australia blocked it from acquiring a local gas pipeline operator over national security concerns in 2018.

Some of Hong Kong's conglomerates have started looking further afield for growth opportunities. New World Development Co., which is into infrastructure building, hotels and shopping malls, is accelerating its expansion into insurance, health care and education in mainland China. Chief Executive Officer Adrian Cheng has said he wants to grow the non-property service businesses. Much of the effort "revolves around non-traditional businesses," a spokeswoman said.

Swire Pacific is investing in

health-care groups in mainland China. Jardine Matheson Holdings Ltd., the owner of luxury hotel group Mandarin Oriental International Ltd., is partnering with private equity firm Hillhouse Capital Management Ltd. to look for investment opportunities in Greater China and Southeast Asia.

Representatives for Sun Hung Kai declined to comment, while CK group and Wharf didn't respond to requests for comment. Swire said the group's financial strength and ability to invest remain strong, and is looking at new sectors. Henderson Land said it's been diversifying from property, with a strong presence in Hong Kong and China, and has been incorporating sustainable technologies.

Li's personal investment vehicle, Horizons Ventures, has been investing in plant-based food, renewable energy and digital services. The firm's early bet in Zoom Video Communications Inc. surged to \$11 billion last year during the pandemic, or one-third of Li's wealth. He was also an early backer of Facebook Inc., Spotify Technology SA and Siri.

The post-pandemic recovery will be crucial for Hong Kong's tycoons to consider similar bets on emerging industries, according to Falcon Chan, a partner at Deloitte China.

"It's critical to think about what's the next big bet," Chan said. "What some of these big guys do in the next one or two years will have a tremendous impact if they want to pivot." **MDT/BLOOMBERG**

TOKYO GAMES

Major Japan newspaper Asahi calls for Olympic cancellation

JAPAN'S Asahi Shimbun newspaper yesterday called for the Tokyo Olympics to be canceled with the games set to open in less than two months.

It is the first of Japan's major newspapers to make the move and joins some regional newspapers that have recently added to the growing opposition to holding the Olympics.

Coming out against the Olympics could be significant since the newspaper, like many in Japan, is a sponsor of the postponed Tokyo Games that are scheduled to open on July 23. Asahi is typically liberal-leaning and often opposes the ruling party led by Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga.

"We cannot think it's rational to host the Olympics in the city this summer," the newspaper said in its editorial under a headline that read: "We Demand PM Suga Decide Cancellation."

"Distrust and backlash against the reckless national government, Tokyo government and stakehol-



ders in the Olympics are nothing but escalating," the editorial added. "We demand Prime Minister Suga to calmly evaluate the circumstances and decide the cancellation of the summer event."

Asahi has a morning circulation reported at 5.16 million, and 1.55 million for its evening edition. It is second in circulation

behind Yomiuri Shimbun, and subsequently is the second largest circulating newspaper in the world behind Yomiuri.

Despite the editorial, there is no indication the International Olympic Committee or local organizers have any plans to pull the plug on the games. But opposition is mounting with only a tiny per-

centage of Japanese people now vaccinated.

Tokyo organizing committee CEO Toshiro Muto said yesterday he was aware of the editorial, but offered little response.

Asahi is one of about 70 local Olympic sponsors that have chipped in almost \$3.5 billion to the organizing committee budget. It is also one of a half dozen newspapers that are sponsors.

"Of course, different press organizations have different views. And that's very natural," Muto said, adding local partners, or sponsors, continued to offer "support."

Senior IOC member Richard Pound said in an interview with Japan's Jiji Press last week that the final deadline to call off the Olympics was still a month away.

"Before the end of June, you really need to know, yes or no," Jiji quoted Pound as saying.

The British Medical Journal called last month for a hard look at going forward with the Olym-

pics. Local medical officials have also been skeptical, and billionaire businessman Masayoshi Son suggested over the weekend that the IOC was forcing the Olympics on Japan.

"Right now, more than 80% of the nation's people want the Olympics postponed or canceled," said Son, the founder and CEO of SoftBank Group Corp. who also owns the SoftBank Hawks baseball team.

"Who is forcing this to go ahead, and under what rights?" Son added.

Asahi also criticized the IOC, calling it "self-righteous" and also lambasted IOC vice president John Coates. Last week, Coates was asked if the Olympics would be held if a state of emergency were in force.

"Absolutely, yes," he replied.

The newspaper said there was a "huge gap" between Coates' words and the sentiments "of the people."

"Despite its overgrown size and excessive commercialism and many other problems, the Olympics have been supported because of empathy for its ideals. [...] But what is the reality now?" Asahi asked.

On Tuesday, the Japanese government said a warning by the United States to avoid travel to Japan would have no impact on holding the Olympics. **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

**PANDEMIC CALLS FOR
 UNPRECEDENTED UNITY**

Although the sporadic locally transmitted cases appearing each day over the past two weeks might appear inconsequential in comparison to the situation in many other countries, the extreme vigilance the country has exercised toward them explains why it managed to bring the novel coronavirus largely under control last year, even before COVID-19 vaccines became available.

The cluster of infections in Anhui, Liaoning and Guangdong provinces seem to have been effectively checked, and the appearance of these new cases has prompted more people to get vaccinated — more than 10 million doses of vaccines are now administered each day nationwide.

According to the National Health Commission, as of Tuesday, about 530 million doses of vaccines had been administered on the Chinese mainland. It took about 25 days for the number of administered doses of vaccines to increase from 100 million to 200 million, but only seven days for the number to rise from 400 million to 500 million.

If this growth trend can be maintained, the country will be able to have between 900 million and 1 billion people vaccinated by the end of this year, raising its vaccination rate to 70 percent to 80 percent, the level required for herd immunity.

By achieving this goal, China, which has about one-sixth of the world's population, would undoubtedly make another huge contribution to the world's fight against the pandemic.

So far China has produced more than 800 million doses of vaccines — of those 300 million have gone to other countries — and its vaccine output will probably exceed 3 billion by the end of this year. That will lay a solid foundation not only for the country's own vaccination drive but also for it to export and donate more vaccines to other countries.

President Xi Jinping announced at the Global Health Summit last week that as well as providing an additional \$3 billion in international aid over the next three years to support the fight against COVID-19 and promote social recovery, China will continue to provide the world with vaccines to the best of its ability. It also supports waiving intellectual property rights on COVID-19 vaccines, and is encouraging Chinese vaccine companies to transfer technologies to other developing countries and carry out joint production with them.

It is therefore almost predictable that China will continue to be the largest supplier of COVID-19 vaccines to the developing and least-developed countries.

With repeated resurgences around the world and frequent mutations, the novel coronavirus is still wreaking havoc. To clinch an early victory against the virus and restore economic growth, all stakeholders should follow China's example of putting people first and looking beyond their own borders so as to ensure a coordinated, systemic and effective response to the pandemic. The world must work and stick together to help each other, particularly those countries most in need.

Portuguese authorities say they are speeding up their COVID-19 vaccination drive nationwide after prompting an outcry by saying inoculations would be accelerated only in the Lisbon region.

The Lisbon and Tagus Valley region has recently seen an infection uptick, and on Tuesday it accounted for almost half of Portugal's new daily cases, with 175.

The region extends more than 140 kilometers north from the capital and more than 80 kilometers to the east, with a population of around 3.6 million people.

Two weeks ago, a Lisbon soccer team won the national title, sending tens of thousands of fans into the streets to celebrate, many of them without masks.

The Health Ministry announced yesterday [Macau time] that Lisbon region residents in their 40s could start getting vaccine shots starting June 6 and people in their 30s starting June 20.

Three hours later, amid protests from other cities about regional discrimination, the government said the stepped up rollout would cover the whole country.

AP PHOTO



Dr. Francesco Zambon

**WHO ASKED TO REVIEW
 SPIKED ITALY REPORT,
 WHISTLEBLOWER CASE**

NICOLE WINFIELD, ROME

WHISTLEBLOWER protection groups urged the World Health Organization yesterday to launch an independent review into the case of an Italian researcher who reported being pressured to falsify data in a now-spiked WHO report into Italy's coronavirus response.

The groups, including Transparency International, Whistleblowing International Network and some 30 other public health and anti-corruption groups, sent an open letter to the president of the World Health Assembly. The assembly, WHO's highest decision-making body, is made up of all WHO member states and is meeting this week.

In the letter, the signatories called for the U.N. agency to commit to reforming its whistleblowing protection policy. They said the Italian researcher, Dr. Francesco Zambon, had suffered retaliatory treatment for having reported the incident within WHO's internal ethics system.

Zambon resigned in March, saying he had been isolated and marginalized after he complained inter-

nally, and then publicly, about the scandal.

Zambon has said he was pressured by a then-assistant director general, Dr. Ranieri Guerra, to falsify data about Italy's preparedness going into the pandemic in a report he and other researchers were writing to help other countries prepare as COVID-19 swept across the globe last year.

**The open letter says
 the spiking of the Italy
 report deprived the
 world of vital public
 health information
 as the pandemic was
 expanding in Europe**

Emails and drafts of the report show Guerra wanted the report to say that Italy had "updated and reconfirmed" its pandemic preparedness plan in 2016. Zambon says Italy's plan dated from 2006 and refused to make the change.

The report was published May 13, 2020, but was taken down from the website a day later, after WHO's Beijing office flagged politically sensitive problems with a timeline about the virus' origins in China. Zambon says he corrected the timeline and had the report reprinted, but WHO never re-posted

it or distributed it.

WHO has said the report contained factual inaccuracies and was published prematurely and without securing all approvals. It has said WHO didn't pressure anyone, and that the decision to withdraw the report was taken by its regional European headquarters.

Guerra, for his part, has said he had no role in the decision to withdraw the report. In a legal filing to Bergamo prosecutors who are investigating Italy's COVID-19 toll, Guerra said the pandemic plan didn't need to be updated during the time he was in charge of prevention at the Italian health ministry, from 2014-2017.

The open letter says the spiking of the Italy report deprived the world of vital public health information as the pandemic was gaining a foothold in Europe. Italy was the first country in the West to be hit hard.

And the letter said the alleged retaliation against Zambon for having drawn attention to it "highlights serious failures of WHO's whistleblowing policy — an essential element of any institution's good governance." MDT/AP

Oman Police fired tear gas yesterday at demonstrators in a flashpoint city amid unrest over the sultanate's floundering economy and mass layoffs. It wasn't immediately clear what sparked the police action in Sohar, a city some 200 kilometers northwest of the capital, Muscat. Demonstrators had marched and collected around an overpass that has been a rallying point. Activists posted videos online showing some demonstrators responding by throwing rocks.

AP PHOTO



Belarus' authoritarian president defended yesterday his decision to tell a passenger jet to land in his country and accused European leaders of waging a "hybrid war" to "strangle" his nation by ordering up new sanctions for diverting the flight and arresting an opposition journalist who was aboard. Speaking before lawmakers and top officials, President Alexander Lukashenko maintained his contention that there was a bomb threat against the Ryanair flight and called it an "absolute lie" that a fighter jet he scrambled was forcing the passenger plane to land in Minsk.

AP PHOTO



Italy Police arrested three people yesterday in the cable car disaster that killed 14 people in northern Italy, saying workers placed a clamp on the emergency brake to deactivate it as a patchwork repair — one that prevented the brake from engaging when the lead cable snapped. The revelations, obtained during an overnight police interrogation of the suspects, turned the horror of the disaster into outrage, given the tragedy appeared to have been an entirely preventable.

Switzerland An air force fighter jet crashed during a training fight in the Alps yesterday, the Defense Department said. The pilot was able to eject safely and was unhurt. The Tiger F-5 jet crashed in the Melchsee-Fruitt area in the central Swiss Alps, the department said on Twitter. Military investigators were looking into the cause of the crash.