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“THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN’”

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WITH VISITOR ARRIVALS GRADUALLY RESUMING, THE UPCOMING OCTOBER 1 GOLDEN WEEK IS WORTH ANTICIPATING: MACAU ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION

LAWMAKERS-ELECT CALL ON GOV'T TO RECONSIDER 'JAB OR JOB' GUIDELINE

CHINA TIGHTENED LOCKDOWNS AND INCREASED ORDERS FOR MASS TESTING IN CITIES ALONG FUJIAN'S COAST AMID THE LATEST SURGE IN COVID-19 CASES

AP PHOTO



China has emphasized its role in United Nations peacekeeping operations with its hosting of multinational exercises that ended yesterday. The 10 day-long drills in the central province of Henan featured around 1,000 troops from China, Mongolia, Pakistan and Thailand. They practiced mounting armed escorts, security patrols, construction of temporary bases, civilian protection and counterterrorism.

AP PHOTO



India Infections following monsoon rains have led to a fever outbreak in India's northern Uttar Pradesh state, killing at least 114 people in the past three weeks, health officials said. The state's Health Minister Jai Pratap Singh told The Associated Press that most cases were caused by dengue, a seasonal viral infection spread by mosquitoes, followed by leptospirosis, scrub typhus, and malaria.

AP PHOTO



European Union's top official outlined ambitious plans to help beef up the bloc's chipmaking capability in the face of intensifying global competition for semiconductors. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen unveiled the European Chips Act yesterday to provide official support for the bloc's "chip ecosystem" so that the continent can stand on its own when it comes to producing the vital technology.

More on backpage

CHIPS CRASH

USD18 billion wiped out of big six casino stocks in a single market day following reports of possible tightened regulations in the gaming industry

XINHUA



FOREIGNERS REQUIRE VISA TO ENTER HENGQIN COOPERATION ZONE

ISLANDS HOSPITAL TO OPERATE UNDER PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

P2

P4

FOREIGNERS REQUIRE VISA TO ENTER HENGQIN COOPERATION ZONE

ANTHONY LAM

YESTERDAY, Secretary for Security Wong Sio Chak confirmed that foreigners will need a valid Chinese visa to enter the Guangdong-Macau Intensive Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

The comment came after Tuesday's confirmation on the mainland jurisprudence over commercial disputes in the Cooperation Zone by Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lei Wai Nong.

Wong stressed that immigration policies and thus visa requirements are national policies. He added that for the time being, no change had been announced so the policies in effect are prevalent, although mainland China was still barring foreign entrants.

The security official's comment was made in response to journalists' questions during the last session of the media briefing series on the Cooperation Zone.

In contrast to other land border checkpoints, the Hengqin Border Checkpoint has a visa application room for foreigners to apply for a visa on site, a practice similar to visa-on-arrival applications at airports.

"This is a convenience measure for foreigners who want to enter mainland China through Hengqin, where they can apply and obtain their Chinese visas at one stop," Wong explained, adding that the service is now suspended due to border closure to foreigners.

On the topic of Macau-regis-



tered vehicles entering Hengqin, the security official reiterated that it is an existing policy.

Macau drivers, who are aged 18 and above and hold a mainland driving license, are eligible to apply for a permit to drive their cars to Hengqin. As of Tuesday, the authorities have approved 6,777 such applications. The remaining quota is 3,223.

In the future, the vehicle channels at the Border Checkpoint will be expanded to ideally handle a maximum of 43,000 vehicles per day. A total of 30 channels – half

in and half out – have been designed.

The one-queue ID clearance mode used at the Hengqin Checkpoint to handle travelers will be extended to the vehicle channels later on. Vehicles will only need to queue up once to clear ID checks for both Macau and the Mainland.

Meanwhile, smart technologies will be hired to pre-filter vehicles that are not eligible to use or cross the Hengqin Checkpoint prior to their reaching the channels, so as to avoid congestions at the clearance points.

Wong added that for the time being national policies do not allow motorbike entries to Hengqin from Macau.

Yesterday's session was co-chaired by Secretary for Transport and Public Work Raimundo Arrais do Rosário.

The Cooperation Zone's presentation which focused on the transport and public works sector was made by Lam Wai Hou, director of the Infrastructures Development Office (GDI).

Lam recapped that the government is building a Light Rapid

Transit (LRT) extension to Hengqin, which is 2.2km long. Two stations have been planned, including a separate but connected station at the existing Lotus Checkpoint Station and an underground station below the Hengqin Border Checkpoint.

The railway is designed as partly aboveground and partly under. The tunnel will go under the river between Hengqin and Cotai.

Considering the LRT system's Hengqin extension having part of the track near or under an ecological reserve between Macau and Hengqin, Rosário was questioned whether the work and the transport system will have impact on the reserves and, more particularly, the bushes of mangroves on the coast of Cotai.

The public works official assured the press that the government had commissioned or conducted an environmental assessment on the situation. The conclusion is that the constructions will not have an impact on the ecological reserves.

Lam introduced that the designed mode of the extension line has four carriages per train, with each carriage carrying up to 476 passengers every time. Every hour, the extension line will be able to handle a maximum of 8,568 passengers.

The extension line will facilitate passenger connections between the Macau LRT and the Mainland high-speed railway network.

Meanwhile, Lam also revealed that a set of overpasses will be built to connect the northeastern corner of the University of Macau with the Hengqin Border Checkpoint to divert the flow of traffic for both vehicles and humans.

Economic Association anticipating Golden Week

WITH visitor arrivals gradually resuming, the upcoming October 1 Golden Week is worth anticipating, the Macau Economic Association said in a statement.

The group cited the average daily visitor arrival figures to support its claim. After the extension of the validity period for the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test for Macau-Guangdong travel to seven days, visitor arrivals have risen to an average of above

20,000 per day.

It added that if the Covid-19 situation in both Guangdong and Macau remains stable, visitor arrivals should keep increasing.

Meanwhile, the group estimates that the Prosperity Index from September to November will fall between 3.1 and 3.4 points. However, its estimation with regard to the August Prosperity Index is pessimistic, with the expectation that it may fall to 2.9 points due to travel restric-

tions in force through most of the month.

In addition, various economic data, such as gross gambling revenue, tourist arrivals and hotel occupancy rate, have plummeted. The group stressed that the M2 money supply in June and July fell about 2.5% year-on-year.

The association added that the rise in imports, albeit under the Covid-19 pandemic, has emphasized Macau's status as a free port. **AL**



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Times

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LYNZY VALLES

WORST DAY EVER

CASINO stocks plunged to as much as a total of USD18 billion in market value following reports of a possible tightened regulations in the gaming industry as the local government kicked off the public consultation yesterday.

Sands China led the plunge with as much as 32.5%, Wynn Macau tumbled 29%, followed by MGM China who gave up 27% and local operator SJM Holdings dropped 24%. Melco International and Galaxy Entertainment Group dropped 20% each.

The decrease attributed to a total of over HKD147 billion when combined.

The massive slump came after Secretary Lei Wai Nong announced on Tuesday that the concessionaires will be under tighter scrutiny from the government which will have a greater authority to verify the background of both the staff hired by the concessionaires or entities who work with them.

This includes overseeing those who seek to establish partnerships with the concessionaires.

For Lei, there were still some deficiencies in industry supervision.

Gaming consultant Ben Lee explained to the Times that the three major issues causing dismay with the investors are the local shareholding increase, dividend control and direct supervision of day to day activities.

"Nobody knows what this means or their potential impact on the viability of the operations and until such time as the intentions are clearly mapped out," said Lee, managing partner of IGamiX Management & Consulting.

However, the volatility in the stock market will remain.

DOCUMENT OF LITTLE INSIGHT

Lawyer Jorge Menezes criticized the public consultation document for providing similarly little insight, noting that the move is a "rare show of governmental incompetence."

"In the first step taken on the matter, the government managed to achieve the unthinkable: wiping out USD18 billion from six Macau gaming companies in a single day," the expert told the Times.

On Tuesday, the Secre-

Casino stocks tumble as investors fear crackdown

PHOTO ARCHIVE



tary noted that one of the amendments were aimed at developing a healthy and stable gaming sector.

However, with the drastic plunge of the city's gaming stocks, Menezes said that it has "failed categorically."

The public consultation of the gaming law kicked off yesterday and will go on for 45 days.

For the lawyer, there is not much to expect from this consultation as he claimed that the government is already answering many questions which have been addressed to the public.

"The so-called consultation paper is packed with nuances and ambiguities. For example, it says 'reducing the number of concessions does not mean to reduce competition' but 'reinforce' it. Does this mean that one or more of the six will be left out?" he asked.

"This whole carelessness has an obvious negative impact on the market. The government seems to forget that they can rule out election candidates and fundamental rights, but they cannot rule out the way the international market works," he added.

CRACKDOWN ON THE RISE

With the lucrative casino licences up for rebidding next year, the government aims to raise the general competitiveness of the sector amid a broad Beijing

regulatory crackdown that is occurring in different sectors from technology to real estate.

Beijing's crackdown has already cut off hundreds of billions of dollars off asset values.

Previously, it was announced that the party is rolling out a system known as Social Credit to track every individual and company in China and punish missteps ranging from dealing with business partners that break environmental rules to littering.

According to a Bloomberg report last night, a gaming executive, who refused to be named, said that the "strengthening regulation in operations has been scaring away gamblers in the last few years"

Therefore, the announcement made by Lei on tightening control on the gaming sector has further scared investors away.

Gaming consultant Lee has previously said that aside from the "new wind blowing from the north against video gaming, unwholesome entertainment celebrities, private gathering of data," one would wonder if gambling is on that target list as well.

Another concern that remains is that it is still unknown who within the government oversees the drafting of the new gaming bill unlike in 2000-2001, where "there was a robust and well-known team."

"This time around we are being left in the dark," Menezes lamented.

Yesterday, Sanford C. Bernstein analyst Vitaly

Umansky stated that revisions to Macau's gaming law are "largely progressing as we had anticipated."

For the analyst, casino

operators had already been "expecting additional oversight in the boardroom."

Brokerage Morgan Stanley has previously stated that regulatory measures, those imposed on gaming businesses, are not new.

As early as December last year, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), China's top legislature, sanctioned an amendment to the national criminal law criminalizing anyone who "organizes [for] citizens of mainland China to participate in gambling outside the country (or border), which involves a hefty sum or cases with serious consequences." The amended law came into force on March 1 this year. Gaming experts regarded this as a "stricter" regulation, which would deal a huge blow to the city's VIP and premium mass market. However, despite all these environmental factors, Morgan Stanley remained positive about Macau's gaming industry.

Last month, gaming tax revenue collected from the casino operators stood at MOP3.27 billion, representing an increase of nearly 28% month-on-month.

AD

Master Plan of the Development of the Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone in Hengqin



Mutual Discussion, Joint Construction, Joint Administration and Shared Benefits

New Opportunities

Four Nascent Industrial Sectors

3. Cultural Tourism, Convention and Exhibition, and Commercial and Trade Industries

- Develop leisure and vacation, convention and exhibition, and sports event tourism.
- Develop leisure and nourishment, rehabilitation, and medical tourism.
- Establish
 - An international trading centre serving China and Portuguese-speaking countries.
 - An international hub port for digital trade.

4. Modern Financial Industry

- Establish a financial services platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries.
- Develop
 - Cross-border Renminbi settlement.
 - Bond market.
 - Wealth management.
 - Financial leasing.
- Lower the market access threshold for Macao invested financial institutions to set up banking and insurance institutions.



Master Plan (full version)



Corresponding Contents

ISLANDS HOSPITAL TO OPERATE UNDER PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

RENATO MARQUES

THE government wants to operate the future Islands Hospital as a public facility under private management, director of the Health Bureau (SSM) Dr. Alvis Lo admitted yesterday during a press conference.

“We want to choose the [operation] model number 3 [public-private partnership] because it's the one we think is more suitable to Macau's health market and our reality,” the director replied to a question from the media on the topic.

This third operation model, which is the cooperation between the public and private sector, keeps the ownership of all the facilities under public ownership but hands over the operations and management to one or several private entities to manage as a private hospital, as explained by SSM's Head of the Office of Studies and Planning, Wong Cheng Po.

The decision is also supported by a study, or-



dered by the SSM to the Faculty of Medicine from the Hong Kong University (HKUMed), which resulted in holding the press conference to present the results.

The HKUMed study presented and compared four hospital operation model options, ranging from the fully public model (1), which is the system in place at the Conde de São Januário Hospital Center, up to the privately owned concession model (4), going

through the other two options that congregate the public and private interests.

Addressing the conclusions of the study, Wong noted that the third option, which was heading towards private interests, was the one recommended by the HKUMed. It is also the model of operation of the University of Hong Kong-Shenzhen Hospital, located in Futian District in Shenzhen.

The same official also

noted that among the advantages of this operating model is its flexibility, “not needing to follow the rules and regulations for the acquisition of goods and services from the government.”

Questioned on the topic by the Times, Lo responded that different models have different degrees of flexibility as well as advantages and disadvantages, noting that this system in place allows a flexible management system and decision-making by the hospital management without following the existing rules for the acquisition of goods and services by the government. “There will be a legal regime that will regulate on such matters,” he said.

Also questioned by the

media whether the decision of moving a publicly funded project into this private managing model would not be a waste of public money as well as contribute to increasing the costs with healthcare in Macau, Lo responded that what is on the line is the “raising of the quality of [health] service provided to the public,” noting that in this way, “the principle of making good use of public purse is well fulfilled.”

MANAGEMENT FROM ABROAD IS CERTAIN

During the press conference, Wong remarked that “due to its small scale, there are not many institutions in Macau that can have enough capacity and resources to take over the management and opera-

tions of the Islands Hospital.” He hinted that, as it has been said previously, the hospital complex management would potentially be a partnership with Beijing's Peking Union Medical College Hospital, also known as Beijing Xiehe Hospital.

Questioned by the media on this topic, Lo admitted that negotiations and talks have been ongoing for some time regarding potential partners but has yet to disclose if any agreement has been made with the Beijing medical institutions or if other possibilities are being evaluated and negotiated at the moment.

“Obviously, if there will be a third party involved, we need to negotiate with these other parties from different locations. But this is not the right time to disclose this.”

Although the decision seems to have been made in accordance to the HKUMed study, with all indicators pointing for the operation model chosen by the government, the SSM director said that the purpose of the press conference was to present the results from the study, “so the public can present opinions.”

Lo added that on Monday (September 20), there will be a meeting from the SSM's Medical Council in which the government will present the conclusion of the study to obtain opinions from the medical sector.

OBITUARY



A Life well lived

Stephen Clifford Earl

“The Commodore”

April 28th 1952 ~ September 11th 2021 age 69

It is with mixed emotions we farewell a legendary stalwart of the casino industry, Stephen “The Commodore” Earl.

Emotions of sadness on the passing of a man who was a great mate to many and a lifelong mentor and confidant to countless others and emotions of relief that a hard fought battle with cancer has come to an end.

His involvement in the Australasian casino industry over many decades is well documented and many casino cages have his fingerprints all over them along with many a good yarn.

An Adelaide boy who maintained a keen interest in his beloved Glenelg and Crows football teams he covered a few miles over the journey. From a cashier at the Adelaide Casino, where legend has it a significant overpayment error led to him being promoted to shift manager in an effort to keep him away from the chips and more variances....., he became the go-to man for many casino start-ups and influenced cage operations from Darwin, Tinian, Macau, Cambodia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Laos, Vanuatu, Monaco and beyond.

Stephen was known for many things, his love of a cold beer on a hot day, his steady hand at the wheel when things got tough, an ability to cobble together a “punters club” everywhere he worked, his knowledge of nearly any sport that was being discussed, fast cars and big motorbikes but a common thread from all who knew him was his love of horse racing. You knew Stephen was in the office as you could hear the TAB radio crackling in the background. He talked often about his involvement as a syndicate member in a very successful horse called “Ta Ta Tatiana” that brought him many moments of joy and a few shillings to boot.

The casino industry is a tapestry of personalities and backgrounds and it is rare to find an individual such as Stephen who was held in such high regard by all of those who were lucky enough to enjoy his company. A “rough diamond” sure..... a “larrikin”.....yep. A fair dinkum, straight shooting top bloke and one of the greats, absolutely.

Vale Stephen

RIP old mate.....

CCAC: DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LAM IN SANG TAKES OFFICE

THE deputy commissioner Lam In Sang took office yesterday and will serve as the director of the Ombudsman Bureau concurrently.

The oath-taking was administered by the Commissioner Against Corruption's (CCAC) head Chan Tsz King. Chan hoped that Lam will lead the Ombudsman Bureau to do its utmost in the discharge of its duties and to continue to serve the community, according to a statement issued by the CCAC.

The inauguration ceremony, held at the meeting room of the headquarters of the CCAC at Golden Dragon Centre, was attended by the leaders and chiefs of the CCAC.

The corruption watchdog head hoped that the



personnel of the Ombudsman Bureau will support the leadership of Lam In Sang and implement the policies and measures of the CCAC. He also expressed the hope that all the personnel of the CCAC will work together to

plan ahead for the work in the coming year.

The Chief Executive order, which appoints Lam In Sang as deputy commissioner of the CCAC, was published on the Official Gazette yesterday morning. LV

Election candidates call on gov't to reconsider 'job or job' guideline

ANTHONY LAM

SEVERAL legislators-elect and election candidates have called on the government to reconsider its latest guideline which is causing a lot of trouble to the working population. Legislators-elect Ron Lam, Ella Lei and Leong Sun Iok, as well as a past election candidate, Angelo Choi, are among the firsts to take actions.

The latest guideline issued by the government requires literally all workers to either get vaccinated or a negative Covid-19 polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test result at least every seven days.

It was not well-received by the public.

Lam stressed that the Association of Synergy of Macao, the group he leads, has agreed with the idea that vaccination is the only effective method against Covid-19. However, he pointed out that objective scientific data is the key to promoting and encouraging inoculation. "But the premise is that it must be voluntary and come with options," Lam said in a statement.

In the name of his association, the lawmaker-elect pointed out that the guideline did not support the requirement with sufficient scientific data and reasons.

"Because the identification of concerned groups of workers is



vague, [...] it has become de-facto pushed inoculation, which is not scientific," Lam commented. "It is not only helpless in lowering 'job hesitation', but has also [...] stimulated greater disgusts and fear against the vaccine."

He also referred to a recent comment by the National Health Commission (NHC), which described the implementation of restrictive measures to achieve vaccination boost is in violation of the national principle of "informed, consented, voluntary and pragmatic vaccination."

Meanwhile, Lei and Leong, both leaders in the Macao Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM), said in a statement that they have met with the director of the Health Bureau (SSM), Dr. Alvis Lo, and expressed workers' concerns over the restriction of the new guideline.

The duo pointed out that although the guideline does not come with a suggestion on compulsory vaccination, they had already received feedback from local workers, including civil servants, and some government bu-

reaus or departments who over-interpreted the guideline and started requiring specific groups of individuals to take the vaccine before joining any activities hosted by the entities.

Lei and Leong also requested the SSM's head to streamline arrangements for groups that are proved medically unsuitable for the vaccine. They also called on the government to waive the PCR test charge on these groups of individuals.

On Tuesday, the Public Administration and Civil Service Bu-

reau issued a notice to all civil servants, requiring them to, starting from September 27, take a PCR test every seven days in their own time, unless they are fully vaccinated by then.

Choi interpret this as working overtime. In addition, he also appeals to the NHC to comment on the voluntary nature of Covid-19 vaccination.

On the other hand, former lawmaker Agnes Lam posted a voice recording on her social media page. The recording was said to be from a civil servant help-seeker who is a breastfeeding mother.

She revealed that there is a group of breastfeeding mothers facing the same situation. She noted that they hoped the government could address the abruptness of the new requirement.

The voice in the recording said that last Friday, they saw on the SSM's website about the inaptness of the Covid-19 vaccine on breastfeeding mothers. However, two days later, they got the information that the vaccine is suitable for such mothers.

"We don't know what to do and don't understand why there's such a change," the recording revealed. "Can the implementation of the guideline be deferred?"

The voice stressed that they are worried about the potential impact on their babies after taking the mother's "vaccinated" milk.

The Times has attempted to obtain a comment from incumbent lawmaker José Maria Pereira Coutinho, who has been positioning himself as defender of civil servant rights. No reply was received by press time.

COVID-19

SSM director says new guidelines do not violate 'principle of willfulness'

RENATO MARQUES

THE new guidelines issued by the Health Bureau (SSM) which enforcing a measure requiring the vaccination of all workers or, a regular nucleic acid tests (NAT), does not violate the "principle of willfulness" and people's choices regarding the vaccination, director of SSM Dr. Alvis Lo said yesterday at the sidelines of the press conference on the Islands Hospital operation model.

Lo explained that this principle, stated since the start of the vaccination plan by the local authorities, is safeguarded and the government is not forcing anyone to get the vaccine

against their will.

"I wanted to clarify that these [guidelines] do not violate the principle of willfulness and choice of the citizens, because it is very clear in our guidelines that if the worker cannot receive the vaccine or does not wish to do so, he/she can opt by doing a NAT to replace that requirement," Lo said.

"Both options [vaccine or NAT] are to ensure the safety of the workplace and the others so this did not violate the principle of the choice," he added.

Nevertheless, the SSM director noted that the bureau has been notified that some entities might be misinterpreting the health

guidelines.

"We did hear that different entities have had different understandings of the guidelines and stated that it is not acceptable [to only take the] NAT and that the vaccine should taken. We must clarify that this is violating the principle of willfulness."

Lo also explained that the decision is not a restriction but a disease prevention measure.

"We are not stopping people from going to work but, instead, we want to ensure that they can have a safe workplace for them and others. These guidelines are generic and aim at the prevention of the Covid-19."

He also noted that there are no standards to be followed in terms of timing or organization, remarking that each entity needs to implement its guidelines according to their situation.

"It can be done in a phased manner or they can establish their schedule," he said.

To another question from the media, Dr. Tai Wa Hou, medical director of the Conde de São Januário Hospital Center and coordinator of the vaccination program, noted that the health authorities are ready and have enough capacity to respond to both an increased demand for vaccines and NAT, stating that



the current capacity of vaccine inoculation is of about 10,000 per day, while NAT is of 35,000 per day.

He also cited figures regarding the active population which he considered aged between 20 and 60 years, which according to yesterday's figures had reached a vaccination rate

of 67.7%, that is, over two-thirds of the population in this age group.

According to Tai, this means that the new guidelines for vaccine or NAT will roughly apply to some 100,000 people, from which, he said to expect that a majority will opt for the vaccine.

CHINA IMPOSES LOCAL LOCKDOWNS AS COVID-19 CASES SURGE

CHINA tightened lockdowns and increased orders for mass testing in cities along its east coast yesterday amid the latest surge in COVID-19 cases.

Checks have been set up in toll stations around the city of Putian in Fujian province, with a dozen of them closed entirely. The nearby cities of Xiamen and Quanzhou have also restricted travel as the delta variant spreads through the region.

The National Health Commission said an additional 50 cases had been diagnosed in various parts of Fujian, most of them in the Putian region.

Since the start of the pandemic, first detected in late 2019 in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, China has imposed strict testing, lockdowns, quarantines and mask wearing requirements.

Fujian has seen at least 152 new cases in recent days, prompting stay-at-home orders and the closure of entertainment, dining and fitness venues, along with the cancellation of group activities including those for the upcoming Mid-Autumn Festival holiday.



Long-distance bus service to other parts of the province has been suspended.

China has largely stopped the spread of COVID-19 but new outbreaks continue to occur in various parts of the country. A delta variant outbreak in July and August spread to several provinces, raising concern about new and more contagious variants.

The National Health Commission says it has administered more than 2 billion doses of vaccine, although the efficacy of the domestically developed serums has been called into question,

particularly in dealing with the delta variant.

While the lockdowns and other stern measures have taken a toll on the economy and daily life, most of the country has overcome the impact of the initial outbreak.

Authorities are taking no chances, however. The discovery of a suspected case in Beijing's eastern Chaoyang district prompted officials Wednesday to bar residents of a high-rise community from leaving their apartments, according to the newspaper Health Times published by the ruling Commu-

nist Party.

Students and teachers have also been encouraged to avoid traveling during the upcoming three-day Mid-Autumn Festival beginning Sunday, along with the Oct. 1-7 National Day vacation.

"Even with 91% of students and teachers vaccinated nationwide, it is still recommended students do not leave their home provinces and stay on guard," Wang Dengfeng, head of the COVID-19 prevention office at the Ministry of Education, was quoted as saying by the official China Daily newspaper. **MDT/AP**

HONG KONG ACTIVISTS JAILED OVER TIANANMEN CRACKDOWN VIGIL

NINE Hong Kong activists and ex-lawmakers yesterday were handed jail sentences of up to 10 months over their roles in last year's banned Tiananmen Square candlelight vigil, the latest blow in an on-going crackdown on dissent in the city.

The nine are part of a group of 12 defendants who pleaded guilty earlier this month to participating in the vigil that was the only large-scale public commemoration on Chinese soil of the 1989 crackdown in Beijing on student-led protests. Three others were given suspended sentences.

They were all charged with taking part in an unauthorized assembly, with seven of them facing an additional charge for inciting others to take part in the event.

Some of those sentenced yesterday, such as lawyer Albert Ho and Figo Chan, former leader of the now-defunct Civil Human Rights Front, are already serving jail sentences over other unauthorized assemblies. **MDT/AP**

AD



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The houses are set in the heart of the World Heritage Site of the Douro Valley and its famous winery landscape where the world's Ports are produced. Both restored relics overlooking the Rio Douro, these eight rooms houses have been blessed with gorgeous wooden floors, plush queen beds and marble baths; the best have dazzling river views. But it is the welcome that makes this place stand out from the crowd.



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S.Korean, Chinese diplomats meet amid Koreas tension

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

THE foreign ministers of South Korea and China met Wednesday for talks expected to focus on North Korea and other regional security issues, two days after North Korea claimed to have tested a newly developed cruise missile.

North Korea said Monday it had successfully tested the missile twice over the weekend that it said hit targets 1,500 kilometers away, a range that is enough to strike all of Japan including U.S. military bases there. It was North Korea's first weapons launch in six months and came amid a stalemate in its nuclear diplomacy with the United States.

On Wednesday, South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong was expected to ask China to play a more active role in persuading North Korea to return to the nuclear negotiations during a meeting with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Seoul.

While there are questions about China's influence on North Korea, Beijing is still North Korea's last major ally and aid benefactor. More than 90% of North Korea's trade goes through China, though bilateral trade volume has nosedived since North Korea closed its international borders early last year at the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

During Wednesday's talks, some observers say Wang would also seek to strengthen ties with South Korea to try to prevent it from titling too much toward the United States amid intense rivalry between the world's two biggest economies. They say China worry about a U.S. plan to recalibrate its foreign policy toward growing challenges posed by China and Russia following its troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan.

South Korea has been struggling to strike a balance between the United States and China. It's a key traditional U.S. ally where about 28,500 American troops are deployed to de-



Foreign Minister Wang Yi (left) with his Korean counterpart Chung Eui-yong at the Foreign Ministry in Seoul yesterday

ter potential aggression from North Korea. But its export-driven economy heavily relies on China, its biggest trading partner.

North Korea's cruise missile launch isn't a violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions that bar North Korea from conducting

ballistic missile tests. Some experts say North Korea might have chosen a cruise missile, not a ballistic one, not to put its ally China, a veto-wielding U.N. Security Council member, into a difficult situation.

Experts say North Korea wants greater support

from China as its struggling economy has been further slammed by the pandemic-related border shutdowns, U.S.-led sanctions and natural disasters.

Wang has also recently traveled to Singapore, Cambodia and Vietnam. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



TAIWAN

MILITARY HOLDS ANTI-INVASION DRILL AS CHINA THREAT HEIGHTENS

AN F-16 screeched across the sky then landed among pineapple fields in southwestern Taiwan to quickly refuel before taking off again.

A Taiwanese-made Indigenous Defensive Fighter, U.S.-made F-16V, French-made Mirage 2000-5 and an E-2K early warning aircraft landed on a highway surrounded by farm fields in Jiadong early yesterday morning — simulating what they would do if their air base was damaged by enemy forces.

The simulation is part of Taiwan's five-day Han Guang military exercise designed to prepare the island's forces for an attack by China, which claims Taiwan as part of its own territory. The annual exercise was smaller this year due to COVID-19 restrictions.

In the last two years, the threat from China has risen, as the People's Liberation Army flies fighter jets towards Taiwan on a near-daily basis in an effort to intimidate and harass the island's air forces.

In August, Chinese fighter jets, anti-submarine aircraft and combat ships conducted joint assault drills near Taiwan with China saying the exercise was necessary to safeguard its sovereignty.

Many experts do not believe the increased military activity will lead to war.

"This is a type of gray zone tactic — military in-

timidation," said Ou Xifu, a researcher at Institute for National Defense and Security Research in Taiwan, referring to actions below direct warfare. "This shouldn't lead to war."

Taiwan has focused on stepping up its defense capabilities in response to the rise in tensions and military harassment. President Tsai Ing-wen has directed money and resources to have the island manufacture its own defense vessels, such as its first home-made submarine, as well as warships.

In the last two years, Taiwan also stepped up purchases from the U.S. of weapons from missiles to aircraft.

Taiwan's defense ministry submitted a new budget of \$16.8 billion for the next year, a modest increase from last year's \$16.19 billion. Some of the funds are to purchase 66 F-16V fighter jets, according to the semi-official Central News Agency.

China has said its actions are in response to interference from abroad, with U.S. support for Taiwan rising in recent years and the U.S. military conducting movements in the sensitive waters surrounding Taiwan.

A spokesperson for China's Taiwan Affairs Office said to Taiwan's ruling party yesterday, "you have no way to change the historical and legal truth that Taiwan is a part of China." **MDT/AP**

AD

An advertisement for the Housing Bureau of Macau. It features a large, 3D, white sign in the foreground that reads "Fill in true and correct information, better use of public housing resources". In the background, there are several high-rise apartment buildings. A woman in a white top is holding a large clipboard with a checklist. The clipboard has a header in Chinese and English: "澳門特別行政區政府" / "Governo da Região Administrativa Especial de Macau" / "房屋局" / "Instituto de Habitação". Below the header, there are two items on the checklist, each with a checkmark: "Declaration letter of income and net assets" and "Application form".



South Korea's first underwater-launched ballistic missile is test-fired from a 3,000-ton-class submarine at an undisclosed location in its territorial waters yesterday

Rival Koreas test missiles hours apart, raising tensions

HYUNG-JIN KIM & KIM TONG-HYUNG. SEOUL

NORTH and South Korea tested ballistic missiles hours apart yesterday in a display of military might that is sure to exacerbate tensions between the rivals at a time when talks aimed at stripping the North of its nuclear program are stalled.

South Korea's presidential office said the country conducted its first underwater-launched ballistic missile test. It said the domestically built missile flew from a submarine and hit its designated target.

The statement said the weapon is meant to help South Korea deter external threats — a clear reference to North Korea, which tested two short-range ballistic missile earlier in the day. Those launches came two days after the North said it fired a newly developed cruise missile, its first weapons test in six months.

Experts say the North Korean launches are an effort to apply pressure on the United States in the hopes of winning relief from sanctions aimed at persuading the North to abandon its nuclear arsenal. U.S.-led

talks on the issue have been stalled for more than two years — and in the meantime, tensions have been rising on the Korean peninsula.

Meanwhile, observers say South Korean President Moon Jae-in's government, which has been actively pursuing reconciliation with North Korea, may have taken action to appear tougher in response to criticism that it's too soft on the North.

The rival nations are still technically in a state of war since the 1950-53 Korean War, which pitted the North and ally China against the South and U.S.-led U.N. forces, ended in an armistice, not a peace treaty.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said the launches "threaten the peace and safety of Japan and the region and are absolutely outrageous." The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said the move "highlights the destabilizing impact of (North Korea's) illicit weapons program" though it said it didn't pose an immediate threat to the U.S.

The South Korean test will likely infuriate the North, which has often accused its rival of hypocrisy for introducing modern

weapons while calling for talks between the divided countries.

South Korea's military said the North Korean ballistic missiles flew about 800 kilometers (500 miles) before landing in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. The launches represent a violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions that bar North Korea from engaging in any ballistic missile activity. But the council typically doesn't impose new sanctions when the North launches short-range missiles, like yesterday's.

The tests came as Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was in Seoul for meetings with Moon and other senior officials to discuss North Korea and other issues.

It's unusual for North Korea to make provocative launches when China, its last major ally and biggest aid provider, is engaged in a major diplomatic event. But some experts say North Korea may have used the timing to draw extra attention.

Kim Dong-yub, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, said yesterday's tests appeared to be of an impro-

ved version of a short-range missile it tested in March. He said the weapon is likely modeled on Russia's Iskander missile, whose flattened-out low altitude flight makes it hard to intercept.

The international community is bent on getting the North to abandon its nuclear program and has long used a combination of the threat of sanctions and the promise of economic help to try to influence the North. But nuclear talks between the United States and North Korea have stalled since 2019, when then-U.S. President Donald Trump's administration rejected the North's demand for major sanctions relief in exchange for dismantling an aging nuclear facility.

North Korea leader Kim Jong Un's government has so far rejected U.S. President Joe Biden administration's overtures for dialogue, demanding that Washington abandon what it calls "hostile" policies first. But the North has maintained its self-imposed moratorium on nuclear and long-range missile tests, a sign that it may not want to completely scuttle the possibility of reopening the talks.

In 2017, North Korea claimed to have acquired the ability to strike the American mainland with nuclear weapons after conducting three intercontinental ballistic missile tests and its most powerful nuclear test. In recent years, it's also performed a series of underwater-launched missile tests in what experts say is a worrying development because such weapons are difficult to detect in advance and would provide the North with a second, retaliatory strike capability.

South Korea, which doesn't have nuclear weapons, is under the protection of the U.S. "nuclear umbrella," which guarantees a devastating American response in the event of an attack on its ally. But South Korea has been accelerating efforts to build up its conventional arms, including developing more powerful missiles.

Experts say the South's military advancements are aimed at improving its capacity for preemptive strikes and destroying key North Korean facilities and bunkers.

Separate from the submarine-launched missile, South Korea also tested a missile from an aircraft that is in development. **MDT/AP**

this day in history



1992 UK CRASHES OUT OF ERM



The government has suspended Britain's membership of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism.

The UK's prime minister and chancellor tried all day to prop up a failing pound and withdrawal from the monetary system the country joined two years ago was the last resort.

Chancellor Norman Lamont raised interest rates from 10% to 12%, then to 15%, and authorised the spending of billions of pounds to buy up the sterling being frantically sold on the currency markets.

But the measures failed to prevent the pound falling lower than its minimum level in the ERM.

The second rise in the interest rate was reversed by the beleaguered chancellor soon after the withdrawal from the ERM, setting it at 12%.

The move is a dramatic U-turn in government policy, as only last week Prime Minister John Major reaffirmed the government's commitment to remaining within the mechanism.

Mr Lamont admitted it had been an extremely difficult and turbulent day, but a Downing Street spokesman said he would not resign.

The shadow chancellor, Gordon Brown, said colossal errors of judgement by the prime minister and chancellor had betrayed the British people.

Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown said the government's policy had failed.

"They have lost control of the economic situation," he told the BBC.

But both politicians stopped short of calling for the chancellor's resignation.

Britain's decision to join the ERM in October 1990 represented a major shift in the direction of the government and has become a cornerstone of the country's European policy.

But Conservative MP for Stone William Cash, said the policies of the government and the chancellor should now be reconsidered.

"I think that the position of Norman Lamont at the moment is extremely precarious... We are in a state of political shambles," he said.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

All member countries agreed to keep their currency value within set limits linked to the German mark.

As a consequence they were forced to adopt the anti-inflation policies of the German Bundesbank. Membership of the ERM has become a Brussels-imposed condition to joining the Euro - Europe's single currency.

Britain did not rejoin after 16 September 1992 - a day which became known as "Black Wednesday".

Seven months later in May 1993, Norman Lamont was replaced as chancellor by Kenneth Clarke.

He became a fierce right-wing critic of John Major's government.

In the 1997 general election he lost his House of Commons seat and a year later was made a life peer.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

There's been so much change in the landscape of your life lately, Aries. Thursday's skies encourage you to embrace just a bit more as a multitude of stories culminates.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Your ruling planet, magnetic Venus, clashes with overly serious Saturn, creating a strong need for a realistic re-evaluation of your current approach to partnership dynamics.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

As a Gemini, you run on excitable energy that always keeps you in motion. Thursday's skies highlight the more troubling effects of always being on the go.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

The self-focused sun forms a supportive connection with deep-diving Pluto, offering profound and healing conversations in your one on ones. Take the plunge and tell your story.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Your ruling planet, clicks into a connection with healer Pluto. This encourages ease of transformation on the work/life balance front and encourages you to take action when it comes to striking an equilibrium.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

This pairing imposes a reality check on your current work/life balance and the state of your mental health. Elsewhere, the sun's sweet connection with healer Pluto adds potency to your self-expression.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

You may encounter your fair share of roadblocks today, Libra. Your ruling planet, bond-building Venus, locks into a square with reality-check Saturn.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Magnetic Venus locks into a hard square with limitation-setting Saturn, imbuing the day with a heaviness and deepened awareness of blockages between your sense of independence and family duties.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Change is an inevitable fact of life, Sagittarius. The universe is nudging you along to embrace that concept today as the illuminating sun links up with transformative Pluto.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Thursday's skies find Saturn receiving a displeased visit from lover Venus, which is likely to highlight relationship issues around the clashing of mutual goals.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Aquarius people look to the self-disciplined, reality-checking planet, Saturn, for cosmic guidance. Today's cosmic landscape finds Saturn receiving an agitated visit from value-defining Venus.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Your friendly, extroverted fish barges onto the scene when the moon moves forward into your sign. Luna's presence here encourages you to get into your body and activate your self-expression fearlessly.

The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



SUDOKU

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

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

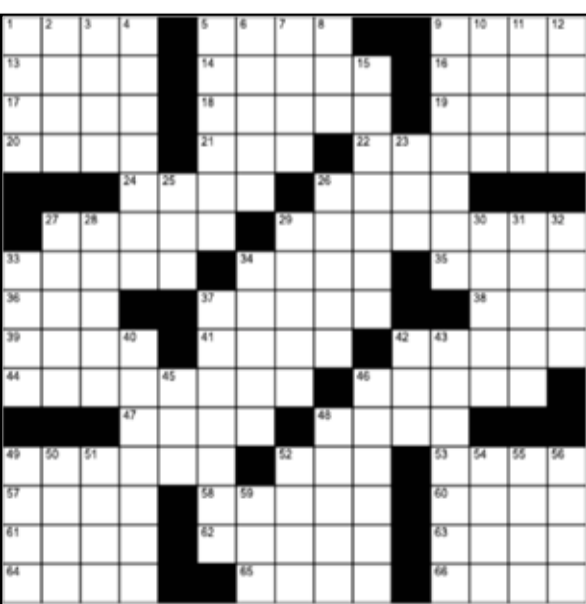
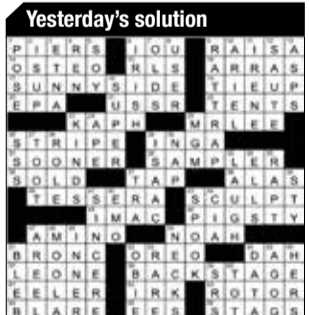
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	19	24	rain
Harbin	15	21	rain
Tianjin	24	34	fine
Urumqi	20	26	overcast
Xi'an	24	29	rain
Lhasa	21	26	rain
Chengdu	25	35	cloudy
Chongqing	25	33	rain
Kunming	26	32	showers
Nanjing	20	28	cloudy
Shanghai	26	33	thunderstorms
Wuhan	22	28	overcast
Hangzhou	14	20	thunderstorms
Taipei	20	29	cloudy
Guangzhou	13	23	fine
Hong Kong	17	28	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	3	11	cloudy
Frankfurt	10	21	overcast
Paris	13	22	rain
London	13	22	overcast
New York	21	26	rain

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Capital of the Ukraine; 5- Horne solo; 9- Streetcar; 13- Capri, for one; 14- Italian lady; 16- Hindu hero; 17- Burrow; 18- Follows orders; 19- Kind of collar; 20- Russian no; 21- Lobster eggs; 22- Furtive; 24- Yeah, right!; 26- Encounter; 27- Counterfeit; 29- Turtle; 33- Rio Grande feeder; 34- Gone by; 35- Prissy; 36- According to; 37- Trims; 38- Jackie's second; 39- Troubles; 41- Whirlpool; 42- Eight singers; 44- Like overly tanned skin; 46- Ventured; 47- Swiss river; 48- Short letter; 49- Heavy hitter; 52- Short film?; 53- The majority of; 57- Actress Singer; 58- Person of exceptional holiness; 60- Simians; 61- Legal rights org.; 62- Shorthand taker; 63- Pack firmly; 64- Not us; 65- Interstellar dist.; 66- Some Ivy Leaguers;

DOWN: 1- Potter's oven; 2- ____, old chap!; 3- Writer Wiesel; 4- Dizzying sensation; 5- Idolizes; 6- Android; 7- Arrow poison; 8- Some; 9- Canopy site; 10- Pro follower; 11- Hog-wild; 12- Numerous; 15- Maintains; 23- New Jersey cager; 25- Student's conveyance; 26- Saunter; 27- Pretty girl; 28- Florida citrus center; 29- Behind time; 30- Beside oneself; 31- Brought into being; 32- Send forth; 33- Bucket; 34- Military chaplain; 37- Noblewoman; 40- Sports arena; 42- Muesli bit; 43- Incinerate; 45- Old crone; 46- Physician; 48- Simpleton; 49- Strip of wood; 50- Scottish body; 51- Author ____, Stanley Gardner; 52- Painter Mondrian; 54- Opaque gemstone; 55- Big rig; 56- Cookbook amts.; 59- City in GA;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

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
- Macau Daily Times 28 716 081



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AD

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

JOE MCDONALD, BEIJING

PROPERTY

CHINESE DEVELOPER'S DEBT STRUGGLE RATTLES INVESTORS

ONE of China's biggest real estate developers is struggling to avoid defaulting on billions of dollars of debt, prompting concern about a broader economic fallout and protests by buyers of unfinished apartments.

Evergrande Group appears likely to be unable to repay all of the 572 billion yuan (\$89 billion) it owes banks and other bondholders, financial rating agencies say. That might jolt financial markets, but analysts say Beijing is likely to step in to prevent wider damage if Evergrande can't manage an orderly resolution of its debts.

"In the unlikely event that a default unsettles the broader property market, significantly disrupting sales and investment, this could have farther-reaching macroeconomic effects," said Fitch Ratings analysts in a report yesterday.

Evergrande ran into a cash crunch after its borrowing to build apartments, office towers and shopping malls collided with pressure from the ruling Communist Party to reduce corporate debt loads that are seen as a threat to the economy.

Beijing has made reducing financial risk a priority since 2018. In 2014, authorities allowed the first corporate bond default since the 1949 communist revolution. Defaults have gradually been allowed to increase in hopes of forcing borrowers and investors to be more disciplined.

Despite that, total corporate, government and household debt rose from the equivalent of 270% of annual economic output in 2018 to nearly 300% last year, unusually high for a middle-income country. Economists say a financial crisis is unlikely but debt could drag on economic growth by diverting money from consumption and investment.

Evergrande's struggle has

AP PHOTO



prompted warnings abroad that a broader financial squeeze on real estate — an industry that propelled China's explosive 1998-2008 boom — could lead to trouble for banks and an abrupt and politically dangerous collapse in economic growth.

The government has yet to say what it might do about Evergrande, one of China's biggest private sector conglomerates, but financial analysts say Beijing is likely to intervene, especially to protect households that bought unfinished apartments.

An outright default might dent consumer confidence if homebuyers suffer losses, "but we assume the government would act to protect households' interests, making this outcome unlikely," Fitch analysts said.

President Xi Jinping is promoting a "common prosperity" initiative to spread China's wealth

more broadly and narrow its politically volatile gap between a wealthy elite and the poor majority. So regulators may favor homebuyers at the expense of banks and other investors in Evergrande debt.

Headquartered in the southern city of Shenzhen, near Hong Kong, Evergrande has sold assets to pay down debt since regulators in August 2020 tightened controls on financing for China's 12 biggest developers.

The companies were told to limit debt relative to "three red lines" — cash on hand, the value of their assets and equity in their businesses. Banks are required to limit real estate lending to 40% of their total under rules that took effect in January.

In addition to bondholders, the company owes 667 billion yuan (\$103 billion) to construction companies and other busi-

ness creditors.

Its share price in Hong Kong plunged 34% to an all-time low yesterday. It has fallen 50% over the past month.

Evergrande reported a \$1.6 billion profit for the first half of 2021. In a statement Tuesday, it said it has hired outside experts in debt restructuring. On Monday, the company denied it would apply for a corporate restructuring under China's bankruptcy law.

A financial information service, REDD, reported last week, citing unidentified sources, that Evergrande would suspend interest payments on loans to two banks. The company has yet to confirm that.

As of June 30, Evergrande had 240 billion yuan (\$37.3 billion) of debt due within a year, down 28.5% from the end of 2020 but nearly triple its cash holdings of

86.8 billion yuan (\$13.5 billion), according to a company financial report.

On Sunday, about 100 people who invested in Evergrande debt through "wealth management products" sold by banks crowded into its Shenzhen headquarters to demand repayment.

The company said those investors can choose to be repaid in property, cash in installments or a claim to payments on residential units, according to the business magazine Caixin.

"It is difficult for Evergrande to make 40 billion yuan (\$6.2 billion) of repayments at once for the wealth management products," the head of Evergrande's wealth management unit, Du Liang, was quoted as saying.

On Friday, apartment buyers who complain Evergrande suspended construction protested at its headquarters, according to Hong Kong news reports. The company also faces lawsuits by construction contractors that say it has delayed paying them.

Evergrande also sank money into launching its own electric vehicle brand, a priority in the ruling party's technology plans. It said this week it was making no progress in selling stakes to outside investors.

Other major Chinese developers do not appear to be facing the same cash crunch. But other companies are struggling with debt.

Huarong Asset Management Co., Ltd., the biggest of a group of state-owned companies created to help resolve bad loans held by state banks, reported in August that it lost 102.9 billion yuan (\$15.9 billion) last year.

Huarong's debts stood at \$162.3 billion in mid-2020, according to financial information company Capital IQ. However, Huarong said it had no plans to restructure after receiving a capital injection in August from state-owned companies. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

MGM to bring back Oktoberfest



This October, MGM will bring back the annual signature party Oktoberfest Macau at MGM Cotai's 1/F Roof Terrace. This year, the iconic cultural festivity marks its 12th anniversary.

Throughout the past 11 years, the event has welcomed approximately 170,000 beer lovers, with over 160,000 liters of beer, as well as over 70,000 kilograms of roasted

pork knuckles and chickens consumed.

Paying homage to this carnival originated in Germany, MGM will continue to serve an array of German beverages and gourmet. The bierfest will be serving the crowd's favorite Löwenbräu, one of the six genuine German Oktoberfest brews, together with Paulaner beer from another Oktoberfest authorized brewery.

This year, the award-winning rock band, TARZAN, will fly over from Shanghai to flaunt a dynamic live pop rock performance and the event's all-time-favorite song, "Nei Hou, Macau!," alongside famous vocalists and local DJ to put together an intriguing performance.

Sands China, BOC Macau sign new credit card agreement



Sands China Ltd. and Bank of China Macau Branch announced that they have joined hands to issue the first co-branded UnionPay credit card targeting Macau residents.

Through the collaboration, "the two parties will leverage their respective strengths to provide the public with better and more convenient leisure, entertainment and payment experiences," the gaming

operator said in a statement.

The BOC Sands Lifestyle co-branded UnionPay credit card is expected to be officially launched in October, with a focus on supporting the recovery of the tourism industry.

It offers an array of leisure and entertainment privileges and benefits.

According to Sands China, through UnionPay's extensive payment network, Bank of China Macau Branch will offer cardholders payment convenience and various benefits and privileges and develop new digital payment products to better meet residents' local and cross-border financial needs.

FOOTBALL

Grim future: Loss to Bayern exposes Barcelona's new reality

TALES AZZONI, MADRID

BARCELONA 0, BAYERN 3

BARCELONA needs to brace for some tough times ahead while adjusting to the post-Lionel Messi era.

That message was clear after the 3-0 loss at home to Bayern Munich in the Champions League yesterday [Macau time], the team's first defeat since Messi left amid the club's financial struggles.

"It is what it is, we are what we are now," veteran Barcelona captain Gerard Piqué said after the Catalan club was outplayed from the start at the Camp Nou. "It's a complicated season."

Looking nothing like the team that used to thrive when Messi was on the field, Barcelona couldn't get a single shot on goal the entire match and saw Bayern constantly threaten the other way.

"We would like to have com-

AP PHOTO



peted better, but this is what we have right now," Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman said.

The loss came more than a year after the embarrassing 8-2 debacle against Bayern in the quarterfinals of the Champions League two seasons ago, a defeat that began exposing Barcelona's

struggles on and off the field.

"Poor Barça," read a front-page headline from sports daily Marca on Wednesday.

"The sad reality," said the daily Sport.

Koeman, who was hired shortly after the rout against Bayern, said it will take time for Barcelona to

return to a top level.

"Our young players have a lot of potential, in two or three years they will be playing much better," Koeman said. "But right now, it is what it is."

Koeman also lost Antoine Griezmann in the transfer window last month, when the team's main addition was Netherlands forward Memphis Depay. The club added veteran Sergio Agüero but he is among the several players recovering from injury, along with youngsters Ousmane Dembélé, Sergiño Dest and Ansu Fati. Koeman used 18-year-old Yusuf Demir and 17-year-old Gavi on Tuesday. Pedri González, also 18, was a starter.

"I look at the positive fact that we had some 18-year-old players coming into the match," Piqué said. "It's our reality now."

Barcelona will have to rely a lot on its youngsters as it tries to recover from dire financial conditions caused by the pandemic and poor management. The Catalan

club wasn't able to hand Messi a new contract and saw him leave for free to Paris Saint-Germain, one of the main contenders for the Champions League title this season.

There were signs Barcelona fans weren't too optimistic when they failed to buy all tickets available for Tuesday's match, something that rarely happened when Messi was still around, especially in a big Champions League match.

Piqué said it was "hurtful" to hear jeers from the Camp Nou crowd for Sergi Roberto, who was singled out for his poor performance while playing improvised on the right flank.

Piqué said the next few weeks will be key for Barcelona, a five-time champion in Europe's top competition.

"We need to win our next matches in the Champions League and stay among the leaders in the Spanish league," Piqué said. "Right now we are not considered favorites but we will see what happens at the end of the season. Chelsea also wasn't the favorite to win the Champions League last season."

Barcelona's next match in Group E will be at Benfica later this month. Benfica opened with a 1-1 draw at Dynamo Kyiv. **MDT/AP**

AD

ACCURATE, TIMELY & COMPETITIVE TRANSLATIONS

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OPINION

Animal Farm

Albano Martins



HENGQIN, THE CATALYST!

The master plan for the development of the Guangdong-Macau intensive cooperation zone in Hengqin was recently made public. These are the first steps to be taken towards the integration of Macau into the Greater Bay Area.

It is a complete integration which is projected to be faster than was originally anticipated given the task to overcome possible and inevitable delays of such a process with so many demanding goals.

Contrary to what has been said, it has little or nothing to do with Macau's industrial diversification, for the simple reason that Hengqin is not Macau's territory and as such the production from any industry held there by residents does not enter Macau's GDP but counts only for its GNP.

It is a diversification of Macau's investment into new industries or other activities outside the territory, which directly contributes to its GNP but not to its GDP, as indeed any investment made within the country or in any foreign country, through the so-called "external remuneration factors" (such as salaries or dividends of Macau residents) that are transferred to Macau as a result of this investment.

There is great effort by China to reduce the tax burden on companies in this cooperation zone in Hengqin, but they missed a small detail. The document speaks of a 15 percent corporate tax, but in Macau the tax system is much more appealing with a maximum level of 12 percent, exemptions of 600,000 patacas from taxable income and, after calculating the tax, a "Forgiveness" of taxes (deduction from taxable income) of 300,000 patacas.

Technically, in Macau, a company only pays tax on profits if the profit is higher than 3.5 million patacas, including expenses like depreciation and amortization of investments.

Therefore, these incentives must be improved for this to be much more inviting.

In my opinion, this document is more intended for the development of Hengqin, and Macau is being called upon to contribute to it, while naturally benefiting from the business opportunities that will be catalyzed by this project, and in this way to integrate into Greater China.

This cooperation zone will create jobs for local residents on the island of Hengqin for those who want to move there, will drive the emergence of other businesses, and at the same time will gradually increase integration and dilute the characteristics of the Macau system.

But what is the positive effect on the activity within Macau's borders?

Competition will increase, the local real estate market will tend to lose value, correcting the huge speculative market values of recent years, the pressure on the local workforce will tend to increase due to its continued shortage, small businesses at home will benefit and other small businesses will emerge.

There will be a lot to do to achieve this full integration and many decisions to be taken and among them the resolution of key and very complicated issues, if the idea is to preserve what was internationally agreed until 2049.

Whatever the effect of this document's appeal, only private entrepreneurs will be able to determine for themselves whether or not they are interested in investing in this "cooperation zone," or whether it is more convenient and safer to limit their investments locally, based upon the knowledge that the Government of Macau should necessarily be involved, and rightly so in my view, in this cooperation effort with its own publicly owned companies.

Macau's history doesn't bode favorably for such an ambitious scheme. Local entrepreneurs seek very short-term businesses, which is why their important textile industry has disappeared.

This process of integration and development is intelligent, but economic and social life does not always follow plans made inside cabinets.

WHO REPORTS BIG DROP IN NEW CORONAVIRUS INFECTIONS

THE BUZZ

The World Health Organization said there were about 4 million coronavirus cases reported globally last week, marking the first major drop in new infections in more than two months. In recent weeks, there have been about 4.4 million new COVID-19 cases.

In its weekly update released yesterday [Macau time], the U.N. health agency said every region in the world saw a drop in COVID-19 cases compared to the previous week.

Although the worldwide number of deaths decreased to about 62,000, with the sharpest decline in Southeast Asia, there was a 7% increase in deaths in Africa. The highest numbers of cases

were seen in the U.S., Britain, India, Iran and Turkey and the highly contagious delta variant has now been reported in 180 countries.

WHO also said children and teenagers continue to be less affected by COVID-19 when compared to adults, adding that deaths of people under 24 due to the disease account for fewer than 0.5% of global deaths.

WHO has previously said children should not be prioritized for COVID-19 vaccinations given the extreme vaccine shortages globally.

AP PHOTO



Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

UN URGES MORATORIUM ON USE OF AI THAT IMPERILS HUMAN RIGHTS

JAMEY KEATEN & MATT O'BRIEN, GENEVA

THE U.N. human rights chief is calling for a moratorium on the use of artificial intelligence technology that poses a serious risk to human rights, including face-scanning systems that track people in public spaces.

Michelle Bachelet, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, also said yesterday that countries should expressly ban AI applications that don't comply with international human rights law.

Applications that should be prohibited include government "social scoring" systems that judge people based on their behavior and certain AI-based tools that categorize people into clusters such as by ethnicity or gender.

AI-based technologies can be a force for good but they can also "have negative, even catastrophic, effects if they are used without sufficient regard to how they affect people's human rights," Bachelet said in a statement.

Her comments came with a new U.N. report that examines how countries and businesses have rushed into applying AI systems that affect people's lives and livelihoods

without setting up proper safeguards to prevent discrimination and other harms.

She didn't call for an outright ban of facial recognition technology, but said governments should halt the scanning of people's features in real time until they can show the technology is accurate, won't discriminate and meets certain privacy and data protection standards.

While countries weren't mentioned by name in the report, China in particular has been among the countries that have rolled out facial recognition technology — particularly as part of surveillance in the western region of Xinjiang, where many of its minority Uyghers live.

The report also voices wariness about tools that try to deduce people's emotional and mental states by analyzing their facial expressions or body movements, saying such technology is susceptible to bias, misinterpretations and lacks scientific basis.

"The use of emotion recognition systems by public authorities, for instance for singling out individuals for police stops or arrests or to assess the veracity of statements during interrogations, risks undermining

human rights, such as the rights to privacy, to liberty and to a fair trial," the report says.

The report's recommendations echo the thinking of many political leaders in Western democracies, who hope to tap into AI's economic and societal potential while addressing growing concerns about the reliability of tools that can track and profile individuals and make recommendations about who gets access to jobs, loans and educational opportunities.

European regulators have already taken steps to rein in the riskiest AI applications. Proposed regulations outlined by European Union officials this year would ban some uses of AI, such as real-time scanning of facial features, and tightly control others that could threaten people's safety or rights.

U.S. President Joe Biden's administration has voiced similar concerns about such applications, though it hasn't yet outlined a detailed approach to curtailing them. A newly formed group called the Trade and Technology Council, jointly led by American and European officials, has sought to collaborate on developing shared rules for AI and other tech policy. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



Poland's most powerful politician says the country's future is in the European Union and that there will be "no Polesxit," but that Poland at the same time wishes to remain a sovereign country. Jaroslaw Kaczynski, who is the head of the ruling conservative Law and Justice party, made his comments in an interview with state news agency PAP that was published yesterday.

AP PHOTO



UK Boris Johnson's office said the prime minister would appoint "a strong and united team to build back better from the pandemic." Several underperforming ministers in the Conservative government could lose their jobs, including Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, who faced strong criticism last month for delaying his return from a holiday in Greece as the Taliban took over Afghanistan.

France Health care workers face suspension from their jobs from yesterday if they haven't been vaccinated against COVID-19. With as many as 300,000 workers still not vaccinated, some hospitals fear staff shortages will add to their strain. Vaccines are now compulsory for medical care, home care and emergency workers in France, and yesterday was the deadline for such staff to have had at least one shot. Failing that, they face having pay suspended or not being able to work. But a top court has forbidden staff to be fired outright.

France Emergency workers rescued or evacuated hundreds of people in southern France as flash flooding abruptly turned roads and fields into rivers and lakes. No casualties have been reported, but new heavy rainfall threatened the area yesterday. Local authorities said the rains caused significant damage to homes and infrastructure across towns and villages between Nimes and Montpellier.