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AP PHOTO



China An early-season snowstorm blanketed much of northern China including the capital Beijing, prompting highway closures and flight and train cancellations and delays. Temperatures plunged to freezing and below as a cold front moved from west to east. A steady, blowing snow fell Sunday in Beijing, the nearby city of Tianjin and northeastern China after hitting parts of Inner Mongolia and other western regions the previous day.

AP PHOTO



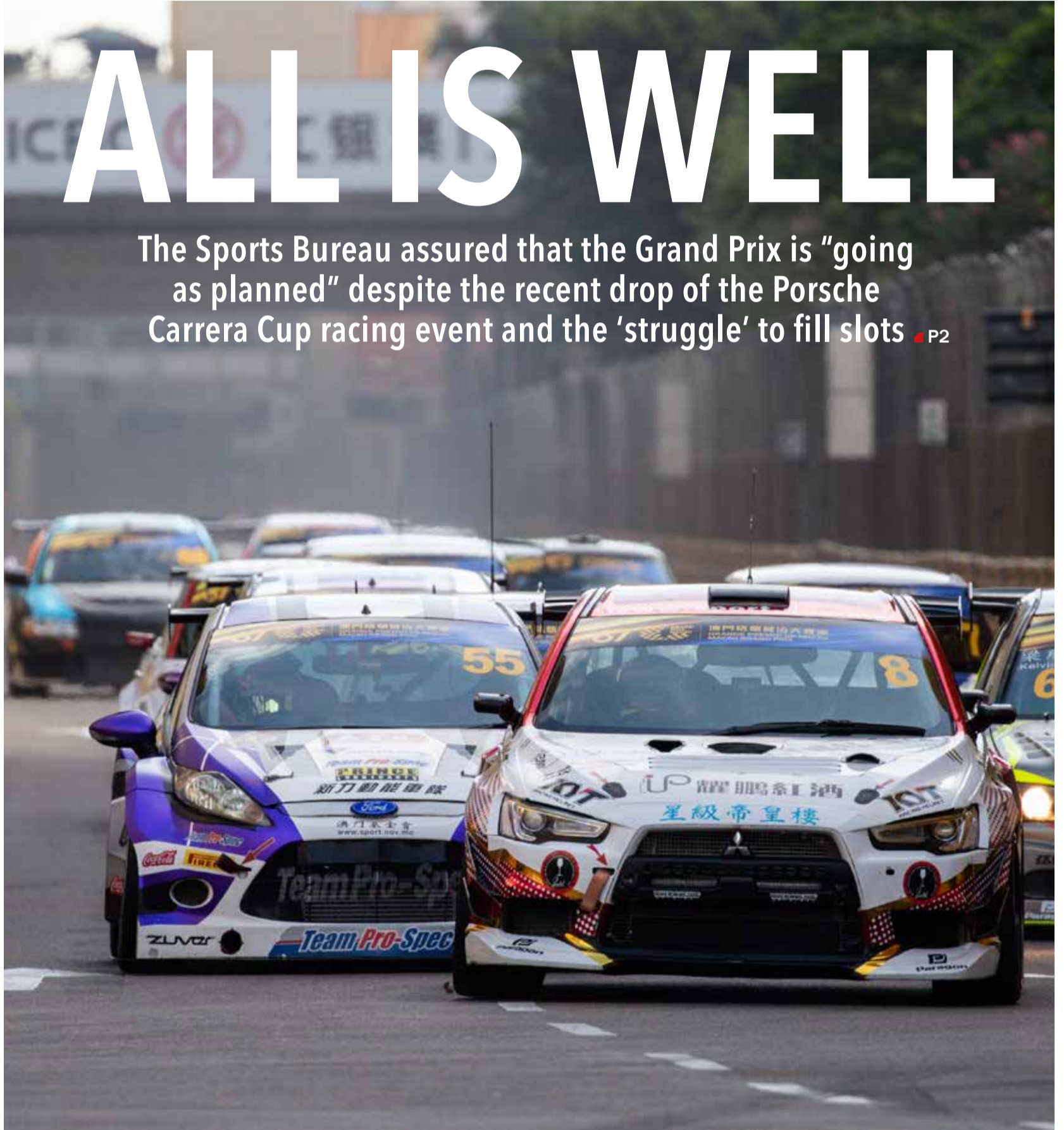
Indonesia Flash floods from torrential rains on the main island of Java killed at least six people and three others were missing, officials said Friday. The National Disaster Mitigation Agency said rivers on the slopes of Mount Arjuno overflowed their banks on Thursday and their muddy waters inundated five hamlets in Kota Batu, a city in East Java province. It said 15 people were swept away and six were later rescued. The agency chief, Ganip Warsito, said heavy rains are expected to continue and increase until February, partly because of a La Nina weather pattern.

AP PHOTO



Japan Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi on Friday said Japan will step up military cooperation with Germany in the Indo-Pacific region as he welcomed a port call by the first German warship to visit Japan in about 20 years. The frigate Bayern is visiting Tokyo after two days of joint exercises with the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force destroyer Samidare in the Pacific Ocean amid increasingly assertive maritime activities by China in the region.

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ALL IS WELL

The Sports Bureau assured that the Grand Prix is “going as planned” despite the recent drop of the Porsche Carrera Cup racing event and the ‘struggle’ to fill slots

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GRAND PRIX ORGANIZERS CLAIM 'ALL IS GOING ACCORDING TO PLAN'

RENATO MARQUES

DESPITE the announced drop of the Porsche Carrera Cup racing event from this year's Grand Prix calendar, the Macau Grand Prix Organizing Committee (MGPOC) claim has said that the event is "going as planned and scheduled," in a written reply to an inquiry from the Times.

"The organization of the six races of the 68th Macau Grand Prix, including the SJM Formula 4 Macau Grand Prix, Sands China Macau GT Cup, Galaxy Entertainment Macau Guia Race, Melco Macau Touring Car Race, MGM Greater Bay Area GT Cup, and Wynn Macau Challenge Cup, are currently going on as planned and scheduled," MGPOC said.

They added that, "The six major integrated tourism and leisure enterprises in Macau will each sponsor one of the six races which make up this year's Macau Grand Prix program, as previously stated."

The response is to an inquiry from the Times regarding the current situation of the event, as rumors circulating within teams and organizers of the event noted difficulties in granting enough entries for some of the racing events. These include the Porsche Carrera Cup Challenge, officially named Wynn Macau Challenge Cup, as well as the Formula 4 racing event.



A source that has asked not to be named told the Times over the weekend that, besides the drop of the Porsche event, organizers were also struggling to ensure that all fifteen racers that competed in the first rounds of this year's Chinese F4 Championship would participate in the local event.

According to the same source, until last Saturday the organizers had only received the entries of

Organizers were also struggling to ensure that all fifteen racers [...] would participate in the local event

12 or 13 racers for the F4 race, and of those an undisclosed number were not yet fully secured – putting the event at risk if less than 10 entries are confirmed.

According to the latest MGPOC statement, though not in direct response to the rumors mentioned, there are no such problems and preparation is underway as planned.

The source, familiar with the organization of the event, also told the Times that these difficulties in securing a final entry list were the justification for the lists not yet being published despite there being less than a week until the official opening of the event.

Late last month the coordinator of the MGPOC Pun Weng Kun said that the organizers had received requests to participate in this year's event from foreign racers. However, the MGPOC has declined these requests, recommending the drivers wait one more year to rejoin the event.

LOCAL TOURING CAR RACES TO SPLIT

In response to the same inquiry, the MGPOC clarified that the organizers' solution to the dropping of the Porsche Carrera Cup Challenge was to split the Macau Touring Car Cup racers into two completely separate categories. This was done until 2017, when the Macau Touring Car Cup and Macau Road Sport Challenge were merged into a single race.

The resulting racing event took place with a combination of cars with different specifications, ranging between 1.6 and 2.0-liter turbocharged and above displacement engines.

A similar solution was chosen to retain the sponsorship of the racing events by opening up the Melco Macau Touring Car Cup to entries of 1.6-liter Turbo cars, while the Wynn Macau Challenge Cup will take entries of cars with engine capacity of 2.0 liter and above.

Local racer crowned champion of TCR China



RENATO MARQUES

MACAU'S Rodolfo Ávila was yesterday crowned as the 2021 champion of the TCR China Championship for 2021.

Ávila's final win came in the last and decisive race of the season on Sunday, at the Shanghai Tianma circuit.

Winning the last of the four-head race round, the local racer scored important points that ensured

an eight-point lead over Chinese racer Zhang Zhen Dong and a 27-point lead over Martin Cao, respectively second and third.

Ávila had a difficult time in the first race of the weekend, as the team made the risky decision to put the rider on slick tires when the track was still wet.

The gamble did not pay off and Ávila had to settle for eighth place overall. In the second race, starting from sixth pla-

ce, Ávila finished in the same position, losing the upper hand on the championship but managing to hold the two fastest cars of Lynk & Co behind him.

With 14 points behind his teammate Zhang on MG XPower, Ávila had a difficult task in front of him — but one he was willing to battle for.

Starting from sixth, he fought for second place in the race, delaying the title decision for the fourth and final race.

The title was decided on Lap 2 of the final race when Ávila passed Zhang in a brave maneuver into the first position.

"This was not an easy weekend, but it turned out to have a happy ending. I am very pleased to have been the first driver to ever win a championship for MG XPower Racing, and to have won the title of the top touring car championship in the People's Republic of China. Congratulations to the whole team for their efforts throughout the season — this trophy also belongs to them," the driver said after the race.

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Analysts: Gov't budget for 2022 'too optimistic, unreal'

RENATO MARQUES

LOCAL analysts consider the budget proposal for 2022 submitted by the government to the Legislative Assembly (AL) to be too optimistic, and likely to suffer amendment later on.

The president of the Macau Institute of Management Samuel Tong finds the budget for 2022 a little too optimistic. Tong thinks that the government should have been more cautious, especially given the forecasted gross gaming revenue (GGR).

For two consecutive days at the AL late last week, the Secretary for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong reaffirmed the content in the budgeted proposal paper that estimates a GGR of around 130 billion patacas for both this year and into 2022.

"The GGR forecast for the next year is of 130 billion patacas, which is basically the same as the forecast for this year. [However], we can see that this year and, especially in [the wake of] last month [October] where we got very affected by the [Covid-19] pandemic, the GGR was only around 4 billion patacas. [This] leads us to forecast a total receipt at the end of this year of just 80 billion patacas," Tong said in an interview to TDM. He noted that this figure is significantly lower than the 130 billion patacas forecast by the government.

For the analyst, the government should take into account the real revenue from 2021 to forecast "more cautiously" the revenue that can be expected for the next year,



putting forward a more accurate budget that will be closer to reality.

Also unimpressed with the 2022 budget proposal was local economist Albano Martins, who claims it lacks accuracy and thus will, "inevitably," be subject to amendments and revisions at a later stage, as happened to the budget for 2021.

"I don't want to sound unfair to the government, but I think this budget is a bit of a 'copy and paste' from last year, and the government even forgot to take out the 130 billion patacas forecast. We know they won't have 130 million patacas [to work with] and this means that they will be forced to present supplementary budget revisions again," Martins said to TDM radio.

The economist also agrees with Tong that the government should have been more cautious in predicting gaming revenue.

"The government should be more cautious [when preparing an annual budget] — that is, it must predict lower revenues [by default]. As it is now, the government

is predicting receipts of 45.5 billion patacas [coming directly from the gaming taxes], but they will not have 45.5 billion patacas because, this year, it is very likely that casino revenues will not even reach 90 billion patacas [in total income]," Martins added.

In addition to a cautious forecasting of revenues, expenses should be forecast using higher estimates by default. This would create a less optimistic picture, but one that is more secure in terms of planning to ensure reliable economic development.

"[On the other hand] expenses should always be overestimated, but if we look at the budget proposal, there are no big expenses forecast there. If the economy sinks, the government will have to generate new injections of money for the economy and this is not foreseen. The government should assume that things are bad [now] and, [assuming an economic contraction,] put themselves in a position against the cycle, investing

more to increase the confidence of other investors and entrepreneurs," he remarked. Martins added that the budget presented could scare investors and hinder their dynamism. For him, the government must set the right pace to send the right message to the market.

Another aspect noted and discussed by many analysts after the budget was made public was the absence of budget accountability for further economic support measures. These would include a new round of electronic consumption funds, which has been one of the topics discussed by the large majority of the sectors ahead of the Policy Address for 2022.

In the proposal submitted, the budget for 2022 will again be in a deficit, with the government expecting to use another 30.3 billion patacas from the financial reserves for the general expenses — a figure that, according to economists, is likely to grow during the year through supplementary budget amendments which are not foreseen as yet.

TEMPERATURE EXPECTED TO FALL TO 13C MID-WEEK

The Meteorological and Geophysics Bureau is forecasting a cold front that will bring the temperature down this week. Temperatures may reach 14 degrees Celsius in Macau. The bureau expects Wednesday's weather to alternate between chilly and gray and patches of sun, between dawn and dusk. Meanwhile, authorities in neighboring Zhuhai have issued a yellow chill weather warning, anticipating the sudden temperature drop. Most areas in mainland China expect to face the same cool weather from this mid-week, with Beijing seeing its first snowfall this year on Saturday night, 23 days earlier than average.

CORNER OF CASA DE PORTUGAL EDIFICE DAMAGED

The exterior corner of the building now housing Casa de Portugal, which is adjacent to a busy road, has been damaged. The building was certified as having architectural artistic value by the Cultural Affairs Bureau, with nearly a century of history. The damage was found near the ground on the corner, with an obvious loss of building materials. The dent is about 0.5 meter tall and 0.3 meter wide. The building has a Portuguese eclectic style and incorporated elements of rural mansions into an urban architectural mode. It is representative of Neo-classicism architecture in Macau.

'TOUR MACAO FUN FAIR' KICKS OFF AT TAIPA HOUSES

A series of activities named "Tour Macao Fun Fair" has been organized by the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) and local community organizations, in a bid to enrich tourists' travel experience, boost community tourism, and steer the economy forward. "Creative and Artistic Carnival" Themed Market will be open every weekend at the Taipa Houses until November 28. MGTO Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes hopes that the upcoming events in the city will "radiate synergy and attract more visitors to explore local districts in depth."

LYNZY VALLES

GALAXY Entertainment Group vice chairman Francis Lui has been named the most influential person in the Asian gaming industry for the third year in a row, after topping Inside Asian Gaming's (IAG) Asian Gaming Power 50 list for 2021. This is the third consecutive year he has topped the list and the fifth overall, having previously ranked first in 2011 and 2012.

The passing of Las Vegas Sands founder Sheldon Adelson in January, who had ranked number one on the Asian Gaming Power 50 seven times in 2010 and from 2013 to 2018, resulted in significant movement in this year's Top 10.

GAMING

Francis Lui tops Power 50 for third consecutive year

Melco Resorts & Entertainment Chairman and CEO Lawrence Ho moved into second place, and Genting Berhad patriarch Lim Kok Thay reclaimed third, a position he last held in 2016. MGM China's co-chairperson and managing director Pansy Ho came in fourth, just ahead of the man who has succeeded Adelson as Las Vegas Sands Chairman and CEO, Rob Goldstein. Meanwhile, Wilfred Wong, president of Sands China, came in six-

th, followed by Alvin Chau of Suncity Group, and Matt Maddox, director and CEO of Wynn Resorts.

During the event, which celebrates the 50 most influential individuals in the industry across the Asia-Pacific region, there was a tribute to the city's late 'casino king' Stanley Ho and Sheldon Adelson. The 2021 Asian Gaming Power 50 was announced at a Black Tie Gala Dinner held in the Grand Theatre, Wynn Palace, on Friday night.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

GAMBLING concessionaire SJM Holdings has recorded a loss of HKD176 million in its Adjusted Property EBITDA for the Grand Lisboa Palace (GLP), the group's first resort in Cotai.

Since the GLP opened its doors on July 30, it has generated a gross revenue of HKD128 million, which included a gross gambling revenue of HKD69 million and a non-gambling revenue of HKD59 million. The pre-opening expenses were HKD300 million.

As of September 30, the total GLP investment cost was HKD37.8 billion. Meanwhile, a total of HKD860 million in pre-opening costs has been racked up over the nine months ending September 30, 2021.

The resort has not fully opened yet, with at least two hotels under the branded vision of fashion moguls Karl Lagerfeld and Versace still under preparation.

Ambrose So, vice-chairman and CEO of SJM Holdings Limited, commented: "The third quarter of 2021 marked a major milestone in SJM's history with the opening on July 30 of our Grand Lisboa Palace on Cotai."

"Our operating results for the quarter and year-to-date registered improvements over 2020, although SJM continued to be impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic that severely interrupted visitor flow to Macau. Nevertheless, with our new products, [...] we are confidently poised to participate fully in Macau's recovery in the coming years," he added.

SJM RECORDS HKD176M LOSS FOR GRAND LISBOA PALACE



RENATO MARQUES

Cotai and raise its market share. The analysts predicted that the integrated resort will have EBITDA of HKD2 billion with 330 tables by 2022 and HKD3.5 billion with 380 tables by 2023, "which will be partially offset by slightly lower EBITDA at its existing properties due to table reallocation and business diverted to Grand Lisboa Palace."

Meanwhile, the group's other hotel, the Grand Lisboa, has recorded a gross revenue at HKD651 million in the third quarter (Q3), with HKD607 million from gambling. In its first nine months, it has garnered HKD 1.93 million in gross revenue, with HKD1.80 million from gambling. The Adjusted Property EBITDA for the two periods was negative HKD115 million and HKD330 million respectively.

The group had HKD2.8 million in cash, bank balances, short-term bank deposits and pledged bank deposits and HKD20.41 million in debt as of September 30, 2021.

The Adjusted Property EBITDA of the group in Q3 2021 was negative HKD460 million, as compared with negative HKD782 million in Q3 2020. For the nine months ending September 30, 2021, the Adjusted Property EBITDA was negative HKD970 million, as compared with negative HKD1.77 million in the first nine months of 2020. **AL**

rely interrupted visitor flow to Macau. Nevertheless, with our new products, [...] we are confidently poised to participate fully in Macau's recovery in the coming years," he added.

Earlier this year, Fitch Ratings forecasted that the GLP will allow SJM to gain a foothold in

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Group calls on gov't to allow local domestic helper services

ANTHONY LAM

LOCAL domestic helper services should be opened and allowed by the government, Au Ieong Kuong Kao, president of the Macau Overseas Worker Employment Agency Association, said in a suggestion to the government.

Although the demand for domestic helpers has been high in Macau, the strict border restrictions banning entry for foreign residents without a Macau ID have made employment of such helpers from Southeast Asian countries impossible.

Domestic helpers from these countries, particularly the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam, have been popular among local employers.

Many of the workers have left Macau for various reasons. As such, Ao Ieong recommended in an interview with public broadcas-



ter TDM that the government allow the operations of local domestic helper dispatch services. He said that companies permitted to operate the business would purchase insurance for their employees and

train them prior to work. Services may cover post-natal and elderly daycare services.

He also suggested the government formalize mutual trade agreements with these countries to

sweep away hurdles. Ao Ieong said that these agreements can facilitate entry for workers from these countries when the Covid-19 condition has stabilized on both sides, with necessary quarantine require-

ments. He believes it will help ease current pressures on the domestic worker market.

On the other hand, the main reasons non-resident workers from other parts of the world, particularly Southeast Asia, have left Macau are the border restrictions and their difficulty in finding a new job here.

Since the Covid-19 outbreak, the number of non-resident workers who work as domestic helpers has dropped from 31,000 to slightly more than 26,000. The number of Vietnamese domestic workers, for instance, has dropped by more than 1,000, which accounts to nearly half of the original total.

Many are pregnant or unemployed, and so they chose to return home. According to Ieong Chong Tak, president of The Overseas Vietnamese Association in Macau, many of these workers went home because they had not seen their families for a very long time due to the strict border restrictions, while others could not afford to live in Macau after losing their jobs.

Once they leave Macau for home, they will not be able to re-enter Macau because, since last year, the local authorities have barred entry for foreigners who do not have a Macau ID.



MGTO promotes Macau's festivities in Shenzhen

STAFF REPORTER

THE "Safe & Quality Destination - Glamorous Macao" Travel Roadshow was held this weekend in Shenzhen by the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) to promote upcoming events and community activities for the year — specifically the 68th Macao Grand Prix, the Macao Light Festival 2021, and the Light up Macao Drone Gala.

The roadshow features themed showcase

zones, stage performances and many interactive activities to immerse the citizens of Shenzhen in Macau's festive ambience, showcasing it as a safe and quality destination to draw in more mainland visitors for a tourism and economic revival.

MGTO partnered with Lvmama.com, a travel website from China, to present the "Safe & Quality Destination - Glamorous Macao" Travel Roadshow's opening ceremony on Saturday.

Some of the upcoming events and festivities in Macau presented at the themed showcase zones were: the Grand Prix, Macao Food Festival, Macao Light Festival, and others. The zones allowed Shenzhen citizens to experience the unique charm of Macau's mega events.

MGTO seized the opportunity of the roadshow by partnering with the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM). They organized

a "Macau Tourism and MICE presentation seminar" in Shenzhen on Friday, displaying the strengths of Macau's tourism and MICE industries to the trade there.

The IPIM and MGTO have rolled out in-person promotions together for tourism and MICE since early March this year, across a number of different cities in the Greater Bay Area.

While the roadshow is staged, MGTO and Lvmama.com are jointly offering Macau hotel packages and discounted tickets for travel attractions in the city, providing the citizens of Shenzhen with special offers during their visits to Macau, enabling them to experience the city's festivities first-hand.

Visitor arrivals have been averaging 25,000 per day from the last week of October, according to information from the MGTO, since border restrictions were eased on October 19. Recently, the number of visitors have been increasing — first time arrivals having exceeded 30,000 on the last Friday of October.

MOBILE PAYMENT TRANSACTIONS GREW TO MOP5.3B IN Q3

STAFF REPORTER

THE number of transactions carried out by local mobile payment tools grew by 12.3% from the previous quarter to 53.9 million in the third quarter of 2021, reaching a total transaction value of MOP5.3 billion, an increase of 20.1%.

According to statistics released by the Monetary Authority of Macao, the average amount per transaction was MOP98.2, and the number of mobile payment terminals and QR code signs rose 0.8% to a total of MOP84,100.

The total number of personal credit cards issued by banks in Macau stood at 1,509,782 at the end of September, increasing 1.3% from the second quarter. Total number of debit cards reached 1,932,344, an increase of 4% from the second quarter.

Credit card limits granted

by banks in Macau reached MOP44.8 billion up 1.4% from June to September. Credit card receivables amounted to MOP2.4 billion, of which the rollover amount totaled MOP761 million, representing 31.6% of credit card receivables.

Credit card turnover totaled MOP4.8 billion, a decrease of 3.4%. Cash advance turnover was MOP169.6 million, comprising 3.5% of total credit card turnover. The number of credit card transactions conducted rose 2.3%, reaching 7.1 million. Credit card repayments, in which payments for interests and fees are included, dropped by 2.3% to MOP5.1 billion, compared to the previous quarter. The number of debit card transactions, excluding cash withdrawals, dropped by 23.8% to 417,600, and debit card turnover decreased by 14.4% to a total of MOP943.7 million.



GOV'T LASHES OUT AT PRESS FREEDOM SURVEY IN HONG KONG

ZEN SOO, HONG KONG

CHINA on Friday criticized a press freedom survey from the Hong Kong Foreign Correspondents' Club that found nearly half its members were considering leaving the city.

The survey said the members were concerned about a decline in press freedoms under a sweeping national security law imposed by Beijing following massive anti-government protests in 2019.

Eighty-three of the 99 journalists polled said that the working environment had "changed for the worse" since the law was introduced last June. The law outlaws subversion, secession, terrorism and foreign collusion to intervene in the city's affairs, and has since been used to arrest over 120 people in the semi-autonomous Chinese city.

"These results clearly show that assurances that Hong Kong still enjoys press freedom, guaranteed under the Basic Law, are not enough," FCC President Keith Richburg said. "More steps need to be taken to restore confidence among journalists and to make



sure Hong Kong maintains its decades-long reputation as a welcoming place for the international media."

In a statement, the Commissioner's Office of China's Foreign Ministry in Hong Kong warned the FCC to stop making "noise" and accused the organization of being

"black hands" that intervene in the city's affairs.

"There is no absolute press freedom in the world that is above the law," the statement read. "It is a common international practice for countries to supervise the news media working in their own countries in accordance with the law."

The survey comes as authorities are cracking down on political dissent in Hong Kong. Most of the city's prominent pro-democracy activists are currently in jail. Critics say the security law has rolled back freedoms promised to Hong Kong for 50 years when it was handed over to China in 1997.

The former British colony was previously known for its vibrant press freedoms, and for decades has served as regional headquarters for many English-language news outlets.

The national security law has been used against journalists in the city. The pro-democracy newspaper Apple Daily was forced to close in June after millions of dollars in assets were frozen and several top editors and executives arrested.

The New York Times has transferred some of its staff from Hong Kong to Seoul due to the uncertainties about the city's prospects for journalism under the security legislation.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Friday at a regular news briefing that the rights of foreign media and journalists in Hong Kong will be "fully protected" as long as they report in accordance with the law.

Wang said that as of April this year, there were 628 foreign employees with work visas for foreign media in Hong Kong, a 18.5% increase from the same time last year.

"It is a true reflection of how people from all walks of life, including foreign media in Hong Kong, see and feel about the economic and social and media reporting environment in Hong Kong," he said. **MDT/AP**

China LGBT rights group shuts down amid hostile environment

HUIZHONG WU, TAIPEI

AN influential LGBT advocacy group in China that has spearheaded many of the legal cases pushing for greater rights is halting its work amid growing restrictions on social activism.

LGBT Rights Advocacy China announced it was ceasing all activities and shutting down its social media accounts in an announcement on social media Thursday.

"We are deeply regretful to tell everyone, Queer Advocacy Online will stop all of our work indefinitely," the group said on WeChat, using the name of its social media account. It closed its accounts on WeChat and Weibo, two widely used platforms in China.

A member confirmed that all the group's activities have been shut down. The member, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because of safety concerns, declined to say why. Group founder



Peng Yanzi did not respond to a request for comment.

LGBT Rights Advocacy China did work across the country, pushing for the rights of gay people and raising awareness about the community. It advocated for same-sex marriage and fought workplace discrimination by helping individuals sue their former employers.

While there are many

other groups focused on helping LGBT individuals, LGBT Rights Advocacy is one of a handful who focused on changing law and policy.

The Ministry of Civil Affairs announced Friday that they have dealt with 3,300 illegal social organizations, according to the official Xinhua News Agency. The ministry also shut down some 200 illegal websites and

individual social media accounts that were not registered with any government entity.

It is unclear if the group was shut down as part of the government campaign. The ministry did not immediately respond to a faxed request for comment.

The group mentioned they were in trouble a few months ago, said a 30-year-old LGBT activist who

knows the group's founders and who spoke on condition of anonymity. Lawyers who helped the group with cases had also stopped their work then.

LGBT Rights Advocacy China was co-founded by Peng and another activist named AQiang in 2013, and focused their efforts on securing legal rights for LGBT individuals through strategic lawsuits.

One of their most high profile cases came early on in 2014, when Peng himself went undercover to a facility that claimed it could "treat" homosexuality with electroshock therapy. He sued the company and won.

The group often brought landmark cases to the court, challenging the law to make space for non-traditional families, and often helped start public discussions on those issues.

In April last year, they helped a lesbian sue for custody rights for her children, after her partner took them and stopped communicating with her. She had given birth to one of the two children. Under Chinese law, she could claim she was the birth mother of one child, but wanted to fight

for the right to see the other as well. Her case is still lingering in court.

The group also helped a young woman sue textbook publishers for writing that homosexuality was a disorder in a high profile case that gained national prominence and was reported on by state media. She lost the case in February, after years of litigation.

"In the entire community, they gave us a lot of hope and guidance, giving everyone the confidence to go out there and do something" said a 34-year-old man, who sued his former employer in 2018 for discrimination and won with the help of the group. He declined to be named out of fear of retribution, citing the current environment.

Homosexuality is not a crime in China, and in bigger cities, there's a vibrant social scene where LGBT individuals can socialize without much fear or discrimination. However, restrictions on advocacy groups and online censorship have grown.

In July, WeChat shut down dozens of accounts run by university students and non-profit groups on LGBT topics. **MDT/AP**

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

ADVERTORIAL

North Korea stages artillery firing drill in latest weapons test

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

NORTH Korea has conducted artillery firing exercises to bolster its defense capability, state media reported yesterday, its latest weapons test as Pyongyang continues to pressure Washington and Seoul to abandon what it calls their hostile policy toward it.

An artillery firing competition among mechanized units was held on Saturday, with senior government and military officials present, the official Korean Central News Agency reported.

Leader Kim Jong Un was not mentioned in the report, suggesting he did not observe the training. He supervised a similar artillery firing drill last year.

This year's drills were designed to inspect the mechanized units' progress in their mobile combat capabilities and to further intensify competitive training throughout the North's military, KCNA said.

Since September, North Korea has test-launched a series of newly developed missiles, including nu-

clear-capable weapons that place U.S. allies South Korea and Japan within striking distance. Some experts say North Korea wants its rivals to accept it as a nuclear power state and work to ease international sanctions on the country.

The North's artillery tests draw less outside attention than its missile tests, particularly ballistic weapons launches that are banned by multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions. But its long-range artillery pieces deployed near the border with South Korea pose a serious threat to the South's populous metropolitan region and other areas, experts say.

U.S.-led talks aimed at ending North Korea's nuclear program collapsed in early 2019 amid bickering over the sanctions. U.S. officials have recently offered a resumption of talks with North Korea without any preconditions. The North said it won't return to the talks unless the United States first abandons what Pyongyang calls its hostile policy, an apparent reference to the sanctions and regular military drills between Washington and Seoul. **MDT/AP**

UN INVESTIGATOR: CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY UNDER MYANMAR JUNTA

EDITH M. LEDERER,
UNITED NATIONS

THE head of the U.N. body investigating the most serious crimes in Myanmar said that preliminary evidence collected since the military seized power on Feb. 1 shows a widespread and systematic attack on civilians "amounting to crimes against humanity."

Nicholas Koumjian told U.N. reporters Friday that the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, which he heads, has received over 200,000 communications since the army takeover and has collected over 1.5 million items of evidence that are being analyzed "so that one day those most responsible for the serious international crimes in Myanmar will be brought to account."

In determining that the crimes against civilians appear to be widespread and systematic, he said investigators saw patterns of violence -- a measured response by

security forces to demonstrations in the first six weeks or so after the military takeover followed by "an uptick in violence and much more violent methods used to suppress the demonstrators."

"This was happening in different places at the same time, indicating to us it would be logical to conclude this was from a central policy," Koumjian said. "And, also, we saw that particular groups were targeted, especially for arrests and detentions that appear to be without due process of law. And this includes, of course, journalists, medical workers and political opponents."

Myanmar for five decades had languished under strict military rule that led to international isolation and sanctions. As the generals loosened their grip, culminating in Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's rise to leadership in 2015 elections, the international community responded by lifting most sanctions and pouring investment into the country. **MDT/AP**

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TOMORROW TODAY
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Over 90% MGM Team Members Vaccinated to Safeguard the City

Fighting against the pandemic has become a new normal for all. As a corporate citizen, MGM is committed to playing its part in preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus in the community and helping ensure the health and safety of everyone in Macau.



Over 90% Vaccination Rate Among Team Members

Proactively answering the Macau SAR government's call for building a solid barrier against the virus, MGM has been constantly encouraging its team members to get vaccinated for the past months. Working towards the goal of achieving a herd immunity, MGM has organized several "Outreach Vaccination Programs" for its team members, alongside explanatory seminars on the vaccines and a diverse range of promotional campaigns took place both inside and outside the Company. All of these events have received positive responses from its team members, which has brought MGM's current staff vaccination rate to over 90%. **Pansy Ho, Co-chairperson & Executive Director of MGM China Holdings Limited**, thanks each of the vaccinated team members for protecting their loved ones while fulfilling their civil responsibility to safeguard the city, keeping Macau a safe living place and travel destination.

Throughout the year, MGM has rolled out a series of facilitation measures and campaigns with the aim of enabling all team members to adopt a thorough understanding of the vaccines, so to encourage them to get vaccinated. In May, MGM became the first integrated resort operators to invite medical staffs of the Health Bureau to host the on-site "Outreach Vaccination Program" and explanatory seminars. The Company has hosted a total of four outreach programs for team members and their family members to receive their shots at a comfortable and convenient environment. Enthusiastically participated, the programs administered a total of over 8,000 shots of vaccines. On the other hand, the Company's management team members also took the lead to get vaccinated and encouraged more team members to receive their shots.



Golden Lion Volunteers Support the Operation of City-wide Nucleic Acid Testing

In support of Macau SAR government in the previous two rounds of city-wide nucleic acid testing (NAT), MGM's Golden Lion Volunteers took the initiative to volunteer at one of the major stations, Mong-Ha Sports Center. The Team provided assistance and guidance for elderly, children and people in needs. On top of that, the Team also prepared a batch of patio umbrellas for the testing station at Macao Federation of Trade Unions Workers Stadium, providing shelter and shading for the queue.

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Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi

IRAQ

PM survives assassination attempt, ramping up tensions

QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA, BAGHDAD

TROOPS deployed around Baghdad yesterday following the failed assassination attempt with armed drones that targeted the residence of Iraq's prime minister. The attack significantly ramped up tensions sparked by the refusal of Iran-backed militias to accept last month's parliamentary election results.

Seven of Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi's security guards were wounded in the attack by at least two armed drones in Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone area, according to two Iraqi officials. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to give official statements.

Al-Kadhimi was unharmed. He later appeared on Iraqi television, seated behind a desk in a white shirt, looking calm and composed. His left hand appeared to be wrapped in a bandage. An aide confirmed a light cut.

"Cowardly rocket and drone attacks don't build homelands and don't build a future," he said. Later on Sunday, he received Iraqi President Barham Salih and headed a government security meeting.

Residents of Baghdad heard the sound of an explosion followed by heavy gunfire from the direction of the

Green Zone, which houses foreign embassies and government offices. Handout photos showed the damage in al-Kadhimi's residence, including smashed windows and doors blown off their hinges.

There was no claim for the attack, but suspicion immediately fell on Iran-backed militias who had been publicly attacking al-Kadhimi and issuing threats. It came amid a stand-off between security forces and the pro-Iran Shiite militias whose supporters have been camped outside the Green Zone for nearly a month after they rejected the results of Iraq's parliamentary elections, in which they lost around two-thirds of their seats.

"The assassination attempt is a dramatic escalation, crossing a line in unprecedented fashion that may have violent reverberations," wrote Ranj Alaaldin, a nonresident fellow at the Brookings Institution, in a post on Twitter.

Protests turned deadly Friday when the demonstrators tried to enter the Green Zone. Security forces used tear gas and live ammunition. There was an exchange of fire in which one protester affiliated with the militias was killed. Dozens of security forces were injured. Al-Kadhimi ordered an investigation to determine what sparked the clashes and who violated orders not to open fire.

Some of the leaders of the most powerful militia factions loyal to Iran openly blamed al-Kadhimi for Friday's clashes and the protester's death.

"The blood of martyrs is to hold you accountable," said Qais al-Khazali, leader of the Asaib Ahl al-Haq militia, addressing al-Kadhimi at a funeral held for the protester Saturday. "The protesters only had one demand against fraud in elections. Responding like this (with live fire) means you are the first responsible for this fraud."

The funeral was attended by leaders of the mostly Shiite Iran-backed factions who together are known as the Popular Mobilization Forces, or Hashd al-Shaabi in Arabic.

Al-Khazali, in a statement Sunday, suggested the militias were being framed, calling for an investigation and for the punishment of the perpetrators.

Al-Kadhimi, 54, was Iraq's former intelligence chief before becoming prime minister in May last year. He is considered by the militias to be close to the U.S., and has tried to balance between Iraq's alliances with both the U.S. and Iran. Prior to the elections, he hosted several rounds of talks between regional foes Iran and Saudi Arabia in Baghdad in a bid to ease regional tensions.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatib-

zadeh in a briefing Sunday condemned the assassination attempt on al-Khadimi and indirectly blamed the U.S. He said to be aware of "the conspiracies that target the security and progress of Iraq," without elaborating.

Khatibzadeh said such incidents "are in the interests of those parties that have invaded the stability, security, independence and territorial integrity of Iraq over the past 18 years."

The U.S. strongly denounced the attack.

"This apparent act of terrorism, which we strongly condemn, was directed at the heart of the Iraqi state," said State Department spokesperson Ned Price.

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi also condemned the assassination attempt. Writing on Facebook, he called on all sides in Iraq to "calm down, renounce violence and join forces to preserve the country's stability."

Saudi Arabia issued a statement of support for stability in Iraq and said it strongly condemned the "cowardly terrorist attack that targeted Iraq's prime minister."

The United States, the U.N. Security Council and others have praised the Oct. 10 election, which was mostly violence-free and without major technical glitches.

But following the vote, militia supporters pitched tents near the Green Zone, rejecting the election results and threatening violence unless their demands for a recount were met.

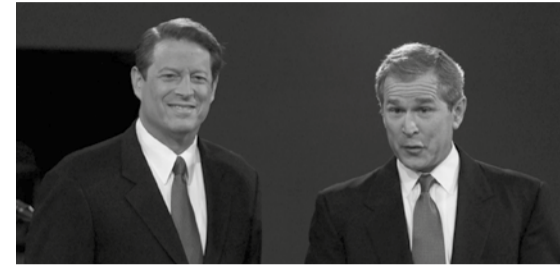
The unsubstantiated claims of voter fraud have cast a shadow over the vote. The standoff with the militia supporters has also increased tensions among rival Shiite factions that could spill into violence and threaten Iraq's newfound relative stability.

The election was held months ahead of schedule in response to mass protests in late 2019, which saw tens of thousands in Baghdad and predominantly Shiite southern provinces rally against endemic corruption, poor services and unemployment. They also protested against the heavy-handed interference of neighboring Iran in Iraq's affairs through Iran-backed militias.

The militias lost some popularity since the 2018 vote, when they made big election gains. Many hold them responsible for suppressing the 2019 protests, and for challenging the state's authority. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

2000 BUSH AND GORE FIGHT TO THE FINISH



The result of the American presidential election is still hanging in the balance hours after the last polls officially closed.

Votes are still being counted in the key state of Florida where it seems there are only a few hundred votes separating the two would-be presidents.

Early exit polls claimed Republican George W Bush had taken the Sunshine State - but the claim was later retracted.

The Democrat White House hopeful, Al Gore, had apparently been on the verge of admitting defeat.

He had already phoned Mr Bush to offer his congratulations when he was told the Florida result was still too close to call.

Mr Gore telephoned Governor Bush a second time to withdraw his concession.

He said: "Circumstances have changed since I first called you. We have now learned we are down by only about 600 votes out of millions cast and that means an automatic recount."

The election campaign has been one of the closest for years.

National polls gave Governor Bush a slender lead as voters went to the polls but one survey gave Al Gore a two point advantage suggesting he could still win the race.

A high turnout of blacks and union members appears to have helped Mr Gore in the large industrial states.

Jeb Bush, Mr Bush's brother and governor of Florida, had promised to deliver the state for his brother.

The Texas governor appeared to hold a slender advantage in a string of swing states, including Missouri, Iowa, Wisconsin, Arkansas and Nevada.

If he wins in Florida, he will probably have enough electoral college votes to become president.

It is possible Mr Bush could win the electoral college but lose the popular vote. This has not happened since 1888 when Benjamin Harrison became President even though Grover Cleveland had amassed more votes.

Mr Bush closed his White House campaign by vowing to be a "uniter not a divider" if elected president and Mr Gore promised to "fight for you".

If Mr Bush were to win, he would be the first son of a former president to win the White House since John Quincy Adams was elected in 1824.

For Mr Gore, the son of a senator, victory would represent fulfilment of a childhood ambition and the culmination of 24 years as a congressman, senator and vice-president.

He ended his campaign with a whistle-stop tour of five states, ending in Florida. He was joined in Miami by celebrity supporters including actors Robert de Niro, Glenn Close, Ben Affleck and Stevie Wonder.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Texas Governor George Bush was eventually declared President-elect on 13 December 2000 after a protracted legal battle. The vote in Florida went to a hand-count. But it turned out thousands of votes had been discarded by automatic machines because voters were supposed to knock out a small rectangle of card next to their choice of candidate and many were not punched properly.

The bits of card, known as chads, gave rise to serious complaints. Many black Americans claimed they had been disenfranchised after it was revealed the oldest and least reliable voting machines were placed in black precincts.

An inquiry carried out after the result had been decided concluded that more than 180,000 votes were thrown out as a result of poorly trained poll workers and a lack of standard procedures.

On 13 December 2000 Al Gore conceded victory to George W Bush.

It followed the Supreme Court's decision to impose a deadline for the recounts which, in effect, ruled out several thousand votes. It meant George W Bush won by just 537 votes out of a total of six million in Florida.

Al Gore did not stand for the 2004 presidential election - despite a vociferous campaign by supporters who wanted to see a rematch of the 2000 election.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 You will be in the mood for entertainment. Avoid boredom by being creative in your endeavors. Don't get depressed, get busy. You can accomplish a lot if you're willing to put in a little extra time.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
 Consider starting a small business on the side. Look for a marketable gimmick. Don't let your personal partner hold you back. Your greatest enjoyment will come through social activities and pleasure trips.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
 Make sure that all your legal papers are in proper order. You will not impress others by being foolishly generous. You may have the day off but your thoughts will be on your work and your cash situation.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Don't fall for damaging rumors, and refuse to get involved in gossip. Take time to find out if anyone has a better suggestion before you make arrangements for the whole family.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Resistance leading to conflict will only make it twice as hard to turn the situation around. Someone you work with may be trying to make you look bad. Invite friends over.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Don't let your emotions interfere with your efficiency. Helping children may be rewarding and challenging. Avoid joint ventures and steer clear of groups that want you to contribute financial assistance.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 Look into physical activities that will help get rid of some of that tension you may be feeling. Your mind will be wandering to exotic destinations. Don't second guess yourself, just go to it.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 You should get out and enjoy social events where you are likely to meet new potential mates; however, don't over spend. Direct your energy into physical exertion. Residential moves will be favorable.

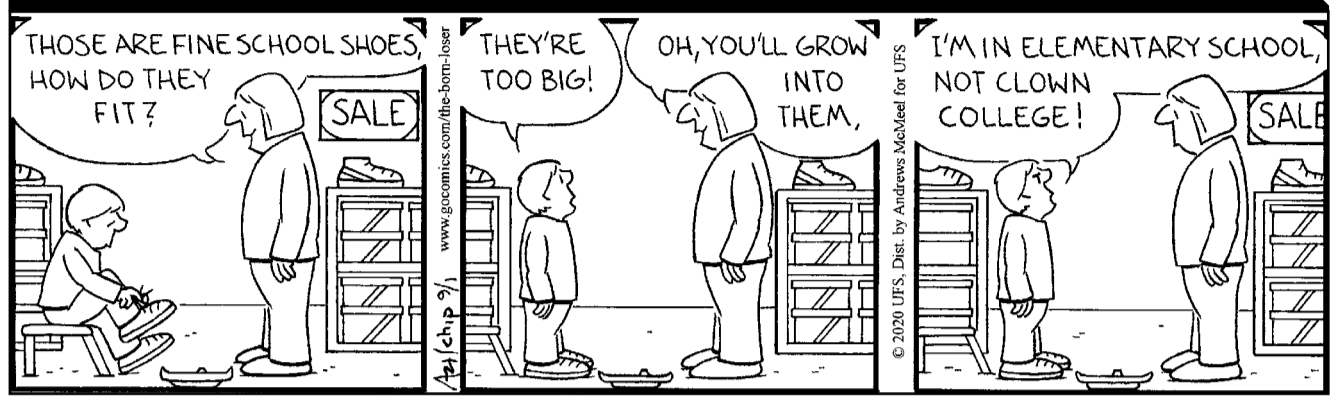
SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 You may have difficulties finishing projects you start. Sudden changes could result in estrangements. You can't always have your own way. Be inquisitive about unfamiliar circumstances.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 You may have to take a short trip to visit someone who hasn't been well. Don't jump the gun; you may find yourself getting angry at the wrong person. Leave your checkbook and credit cards at home.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Do some research if you want to find information that you can apply against the opposition you face. Do not give your heart to someone who may not live up to your standards.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 A trip to visit relatives should be rewarding. Relatives may not be telling you the whole truth about a family situation. Your personal life will be disrupted if you have been too busy with business.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-4	4	FINE
Harbin	-4	4	SNOW
Tianjin	6	13	FINE
Urumqi	4	14	FINE
Xi'an	8	13	FINE
Lhasa	0	5	SNOW
Chengdu	14	22	CLOUDY
Chongqing	10	19	FINE
Kunming	2	10	CLOUDY
Nanjing	18	24	CLOUDY
Shanghai	4	10	FINE
Wuhan	-5	0	RAIN
Hangzhou	1	9	FINE
Taipei	-10	-1	FINE
Guangzhou	12	19	RAIN
Hong Kong			
WORLD			
Moscow	0	7	rain
Frankfurt	4	10	overcast
Paris	3	12	overcast
London	9	12	overcast
New York	9	19	clear

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Lid attachment; 5- Abbreviation of the name Edward; 8- Passing notice; 12- Author ___ Stanley Gardner; 13- Female fox; 15- I could ___ horse; 16- Depilatory brand; 17- Inner self (Jung); 18- Queue after Q; 19- Angry dispute; 22- Drunkard; 23- Acknowledgment of debt; 24- Roman god of war; 26- Song leader in a synagogue; 29- Numerals; 31- Fastener; 32- Jacket material; 34- Simmons rival; 36- Periphery; 38- Growl angrily; 40- Neighbor of Cambodia; 41- 200 milligrams; 43- Grew less; 45- High dudgeon; 46- Critique; 48- Actress Mimieux; 50- Hawk; 51- Brian of rock; 52- Curvy letter; 54- Needed to borrow books; 61- Actor Jannings; 63- Mock, annoy; 64- Portico; 65- Tolstoy and Gorcey; 66- Exodus origin; 67- Golf club which can be numbered 1 to 9; 68- Transmit; 69- Draft org.; 70- Greek goddess of victory;

DOWN 1- Actress Olin; 2- Sea east of the Caspian; 3- Split; 4- Throughout this document; 5- Ike's ex; 6- Leave; 7- Actress Moore; 8- ___ the land of the free...; 9- Strait between Australia and Tasmania; 10- What's ___ you?; 11- Lacking slack; 13- Empty; 14- Model Campbell; 20- Goes bad; 21- Badgers; 25- Monetary unit of Cambodia; 26- Cupressus; 27- Offensive action; 28- Continue a subscription; 29- Bowler hat; 30- Put away; 31- Chest muscle; 33- Apply lightly; 35- Enzyme ending; 37- Icicle site; 39- Young hare; 42- Work the soil; 44- Say it ain't so; 47- Best of a group; 49- Alarm bell; 52- Electric fish; 53- "Peter Pan" pirate; 55- Panhandles; 56- Beams; 57- Egyptian cobras; 58- Longfellow's bell town; 59- Corner piece; 60- Hamlet, for one; 62- Acid;

Friday's solution

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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Property of the Week



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Property Hotlist

Triumph Court
HKD 11,380,000
1,756 ft²
4
2

SCAN ME
Ref: 2104 6002

Wa Seng San Chong
HKD 4,150,000
800 ft²
2
1

SCAN ME
Ref: 2108 6005

Jardim De Wa Bao Carpark
HKD 1,300,000

SCAN ME
Ref: 2108 6004

More Listings

For Sale

- [Macau] Macau, ZAPE 2 1 720 ft² **HKD 7,450,000** Ref: 2101 6002
- [Taipa] Chun U Villa 4 3 1,979 ft² **HKD 12,380,000** Ref: 2104 6001
- [Taipa] Manhattan 4 2 2,305 ft² **HKD 15,980,000** Ref: 2005 6001
- [Taipa] Manhattan 4 2 2,305 ft² **HKD 17,980,000** Ref: 1807 5558
- [Taipa] Panorama 4 4 5,700 ft² **HKD 24,800,000** Ref: 2103 6003

For Rent

- [Taipa] Old Taipa Studio 1 376 ft² **HKD 7,200/mth** Ref: 2110 1002
- [Coloane] One Oasis 2 2 1,112 ft² **HKD 13,900/mth** Ref: 2102 1004
- [Taipa] Kingsville 3 2 1,510 ft² **HKD 14,900/mth** Ref: 2108 1002
- [Taipa] Manhattan 3 2 1,626 ft² **HKD 17,500/mth** Ref: 2003 1001
- [Coloane] One Oasis 3 2 2,100 ft² **HKD 28,000/mth** Ref: 2011 1002

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3
2
1



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BASKETBALL

Lillard has 25, Blazers beat short-handed Lakers 105-90

ANNE M. PETERSON,
PORTLAND

DAMIAN Lillard said some dad time at home with his son helped put him in a good place before facing the Lakers.

Lillard, who has been in a shooting slump, scored 25 points before sitting out the fourth quarter and the Portland Trail Blazers took advantage of the short-handed Los Angeles Lakers for a 105-90 victory on Saturday night.

"I thought I shot the ball better. Not as good as I would have liked to, with some of the opportunities I got," Lillard said. "But I shot the ball better and we got another win, so I feel good about it."

Jusuf Nurkic added 15 points and 17 rebounds for the Blazers, who led by as many as 34 points despite playing the second of a back-to-back.

Former Blazer Carmelo Anthony had 12 points off the bench for the Lakers, who were without LeBron James because of an ab-



Los Angeles Lakers guard Avery Bradley, left, drives to the basket on Portland Trail Blazers guard Damian Lillard

dominal strain.

Leading scorer Anthony Davis was questionable for the Lakers going into the game with a thumb

strain. He started but played just seven minutes before leaving with a stomach illness. Coach Frank Vogel said after the game that

Davis was throwing up before the game, but thought he could play.

Russell Westbrook, who was averaging 20.2 points, 8.4 rebounds and 8.1 assists, shot 1 for 13 and finished with eight points and seven rebounds.

Dwight Howard said there were no excuses for the loss.

"Every possession, every minute on the floor has to matter," he said.

The Blazers were coming off a 110-106 victory over the Indiana Pacers the night before that snapped a three-game losing streak.

Lillard was averaging just 17.8 points to open the season, well off his average from last season. He had been shooting just 21.7% from 3-point range.

But with his wife out of town, he wasn't as focused on the night's game as much as he usually is.

"My son woke up and said, 'I want macaroni and cheese,' just random stuff in the morning," he said. "So I'm just doing random stuff, where I'm not even thinking

about the game."

Lillard hit a 3-pointer to open the game and he made two of his first three attempts. He also hit a 3-pointer for Portland's first points in the second half, and finished with six 3s on 14 attempts.

Anfernee Simons' follow shot capped a 13-0 run that put Portland up 25-10 early and the rout was on. The Blazers outscored Los Angeles 36-14 in the first quarter.

Although their offense cooled off a bit in the second quarter, the Blazers still had a 51-36 lead at halftime.

Norman Powell's basket put the Blazers up 69-44 in the third quarter. The Lakers pulled their starters before the final period and fans headed for the doors early.

"We're not the championship team we want to be right now, so to get there, we have to stay humble," Howard said.

Lillard reached 17,000 career points.

HOME IS WHERE THE WINS ARE

Portland has won five straight games at home, but none on the road this season.

"I think we've started games better. Our energy is better at home. Sharper at home. I think just across the board everything's better at home," Lillard said. "It's no surprise. A lot of teams are just better at home." **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

World Views

Seth Borenstein, MDT/AP

OPTIMISM FROM CLIMATE TALKS: WARMING PROJECTIONS DOWN A BIT

With pledges for a United Nations climate conference, the world may be ever so slightly receding from gloomy scenarios of future global warming, according to two new preliminary scientific analyses last week.

The two reports — one by the International Energy Agency and the other by Australian scientists — focused on optimistic scenarios. If all goes right, they said, recent actions will trim two-or three-tenths of a degree Celsius from projections made in mid-October.

Instead of 2.1 degrees Celsius of warming since pre-industrial times, the analyses project warming at 1.8 or 1.9 degrees

Still, both projections leave the world far from the 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming since pre-industrial time that is the goal of the 2015 Paris climate deal. The planet has already warmed 1.1 degrees Celsius.

The U.N. planned an announcement for Friday afternoon at climate negotiations about how much “actions announced so far at Glasgow helped to bend the curve.”

“We are now in a slightly more positive outlook for the future,” said University of Melbourne climate scientist Malte Meinshausen, whose flash analysis, not peer-reviewed, sees warming at 1.9 degrees, mostly because of late long-term pledges by India and China.

“It’s still a long way away from 1.5 degrees. We know that some of the ecosystems are going to suffer and we’re going to notice, for example, the coral reefs and the Great Barrier Reef here in Australia (die) with these temperature levels,” Meinshausen said in an interview. “It is just scraping below two degrees. So therefore there’s a lot more to be done.”

The energy agency analysis factored in India’s announcement of short-term carbon dioxide emission curbs and a net-zero pledge by 2070 on Monday, as well as pledges by more than 100 countries Tuesday to reduce the powerful greenhouse gas methane. The intergovernmental agency said it was the first time projections fell below 2 degrees Celsius — a long-standing threshold for tipping points that some scientists say could bring even more dangerous and potentially uncontrolled warming.

“If all these pledges were to be implemented, the temperature increase could be limited to 1.8 degrees Celsius. I think this is a very, well-celebrated achievement,” agency chief Fatih Birol told leaders at climate negotiations in Glasgow called COP26. “Congratulations.”

Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research Director Johan Rockstrom, who wasn’t part of either research, said small differences at this temperature level are important: “Every tenth of a degree matters because it gets worse and worse.”

Both teams emphasize that their projections are based on the most optimistic scenarios possible, using nations’ mid-century — or in India’s case 2070 — pledges of net zero emissions that are far from codified in plans or actions.

Scenarios that look at just short-term pledges, not net-zero ones, put warming at 2.7 degrees Celsius. So some outsider experts say the new projections should be viewed with caution.

“This optimistic view must be complemented with the short-term view, which is pointing in the opposite direction,” said New Climate Institute scientist Niklas Hohne, who tracks emission pledges for Climate Action Tracker, which will have its own estimates in a few days.

Mohamed Adow, director of Nairobi-based think tank Power Shift Africa and a veteran climate talks observer, said it’s too early to put too much faith in Glasgow pledges: “These announcements may generate headlines but assessing their true worth is hugely difficult, especially at speed during a COP meeting.”

The crowd at a Houston music festival suddenly surged toward the stage during a performance by rapper Travis Scott, squeezing fans so tightly together that they could not breathe or move their arms and killing eight people in the chaos.

The pandemonium unfolded Friday evening at Astroworld, a sold-out, two-day event in NRG Park with an estimated 50,000 people in attendance. As a timer clicked down to the start of the performance, the crowd pushed forward.

“As soon as he jumped out on the stage, it was like an energy

took over and everything went haywire,” concertgoer Niaraa Goods said. “All of a sudden, your ribs are being crushed. You have someone’s arm in your neck. You’re trying to breathe, but you can’t.”

The dead ranged in age from 14 to 27, and 13 people were still hospitalized Saturday, Mayor Sylvester Turner said. He called the disaster “a tragedy on many different levels” and said it was too early to draw conclusions about what went wrong.

PFIZER SAYS COVID-19 PILL CUT HOSPITAL, DEATH RISK BY 90%

PFIZER Inc. said Friday that its experimental antiviral pill for COVID-19 cut rates of hospitalization and death by nearly 90% in high-risk adults, as the drug-maker joined the race for an easy-to-use medication to treat the coronavirus.

Currently most COVID-19 treatments require an IV or injection. Competitor Merck’s COVID-19 pill is already under review at the Food and Drug Administration after showing strong initial results, and on Thursday the United Kingdom became the first country to OK it.

Pfizer said it will ask the FDA and international regulators to authorize its pill as soon as possible, after independent experts recommended halting the company’s study based on the strength of its results. Once Pfizer applies, the FDA could make a decision within weeks or months.

Since the beginning of the pandemic last year, researchers worldwide have been racing to find a pill to treat COVID-19 that can be taken at home to ease symptoms, speed recovery and keep people out of the hospital.

Having pills to treat early COVID-19 “would be a



very important advance,” said Dr. John Mellors, chief of infectious diseases at the University of Pittsburgh, who was not involved in the Pfizer study.

“If someone developed symptoms and tested positive we could call in a prescription to the local pharmacy as we do for many, many infectious diseases,” he said.

On Friday, Pfizer released preliminary results of its study of 775 adults. Patients who received the company’s drug along with another antiviral shortly after showing COVID-19 symptoms had an 89% reduction in their combined rate of hospitalization or death after a month, compared to patients taking a dummy pill. Fewer than 1% of patients taking the drug needed to be hospitalized and no one died.

In the comparison group, 7% were hospitalized and there were seven deaths.

“We were hoping that we had something extraordinary, but it’s rare that you see great drugs come through with almost 90% efficacy and 100% protection for death,” said Dr. Mikael Dolsten, Pfizer’s chief scientific officer, in an interview.

Study participants were unvaccinated, with mild-to-moderate COVID-19, and were considered high risk for hospitalization due to health problems like obesity, diabetes or heart disease. Treatment began within three to five days of initial symptoms, and lasted for five days. Patients who received the drug earlier showed slightly better results, underscoring the need for speedy testing and treatment. **MDT/AP**



Afghanistan Taliban-run Afghan public health ministry announced yesterday the start of a four-day nationwide polio vaccination campaign aimed at inoculating children under age 5. For the past three years before taking control of Afghanistan, the Taliban had barred U.N.-organized vaccination teams from doing door-to-door campaigns in parts of the country under their control. The group apparently was suspicious the team members could be spies for the previous government or the West.



Iran’s military began its annual war games in a coastal area of the Gulf of Oman, state TV reported yesterday, less than a month before upcoming nuclear talks with the West. The report said navy and air force units as well as ground forces were participating in a more than 1 million square-kilometer area east of the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

Greece Police clashed in Athens Friday with protesting firefighters demanding job contracts in the wake of massive wildfires. One firefighter was hurt by a stun grenade and five others were detained after police fired teargas and water cannon to disperse the demonstrators. The protesters, wearing their firefighting uniforms, blocked traffic outside the newly-created Climate Crisis and Civil Protection Ministry north of the capital.

Portugal’s parliament approved a reworded bill Friday to allow euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide for terminally ill and seriously injured people, after a court blocked the initial version because of what it said was unclear terminology. The legislation still requires the signature of Portugal’s president to become law, and he is known to have deep reservations. If President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa signs the bill, Portugal would become one of the few countries in the world that permit the procedures.

THE DECISIVE MOMENT



A large crowd of Filipinos wearing red shirts gathered at Ruins of St. Paul yesterday to show support to presidential candidate Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. — who activists want out of the Philippines’ presidential race.