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North Korea Kim Yong Ju, the younger brother of North Korea founder Kim Il Sung who was once regarded as the country's No. 2 official before his nephew was anointed as the next ruler, has died, state media reported yesterday. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, the grandson of Kim Il Sung, expressed "deep condolences" over the death and sent a condolence wreath, the official Korean Central News Agency reported.



Indonesia A court yesterday handed down prison sentences for five men accused of being involved in killing a Sumatran elephant and illegally trading its ivory, as local conservation authorities look to protect the endangered species. Jainal, the poacher who killed the elephant and cut off its head, along with Edy Murdani, a man accused of being the first point of sale for the ivory, were both sentenced to three and a half years in prison with a fine of \$3,487.

Iran will allow the United Nations' nuclear watchdog to reinstall cameras damaged at a site where it has centrifuge parts and manufacturing material. The decision will see cameras put back at Karaj, which came under what Iran describes as a sabotage attack in June. Iran since had refused the International Atomic Energy Agency access to replace cameras damaged in the incident.



US The Navy announced yesterday it tested a laser weapon and destroyed a floating target in the Mideast, a system that could be used to counter bomb-laden drone boats deployed by Yemen's Houthi rebels in the Red Sea. The test saw the USS Portland test-fire its Laser Weapon System Demonstrator at the target in the Gulf of Aden, the body of water separating East Africa from the Arabian Peninsula.

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THE CONVERSATION

COMIC BOOK INTRODUCES KIDS TO KEY CONCEPTS AND CAREERS IN CYBERSECURITY

KARA DAWSON,
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

THREE 9-year-old girls are huddled around a Caesar wheel, an ancient tool for sharing secret messages.

Cracking a code is one of many challenges the girls complete to help characters in CryptoComics escape a mysterious cyberworld into which they've been drawn.

CryptoComics is a curriculum designed to teach elementary school children – particularly girls of color – about cybersecurity – the practice of keeping digital information safe – and related careers. It also teaches about cryptology – the science of making and breaking codes. The girls partake in this program as part of their after-school activities in Atlanta.

Led by a team of educators and researchers, CryptoComics strategically integrates a digital comic book, apps and unplugged activities, such as painting rocks with ancient symbols and making invisible ink. It also features stories about cybersecurity professionals who are women. CryptoComics is freely available on cryptocomics.org.

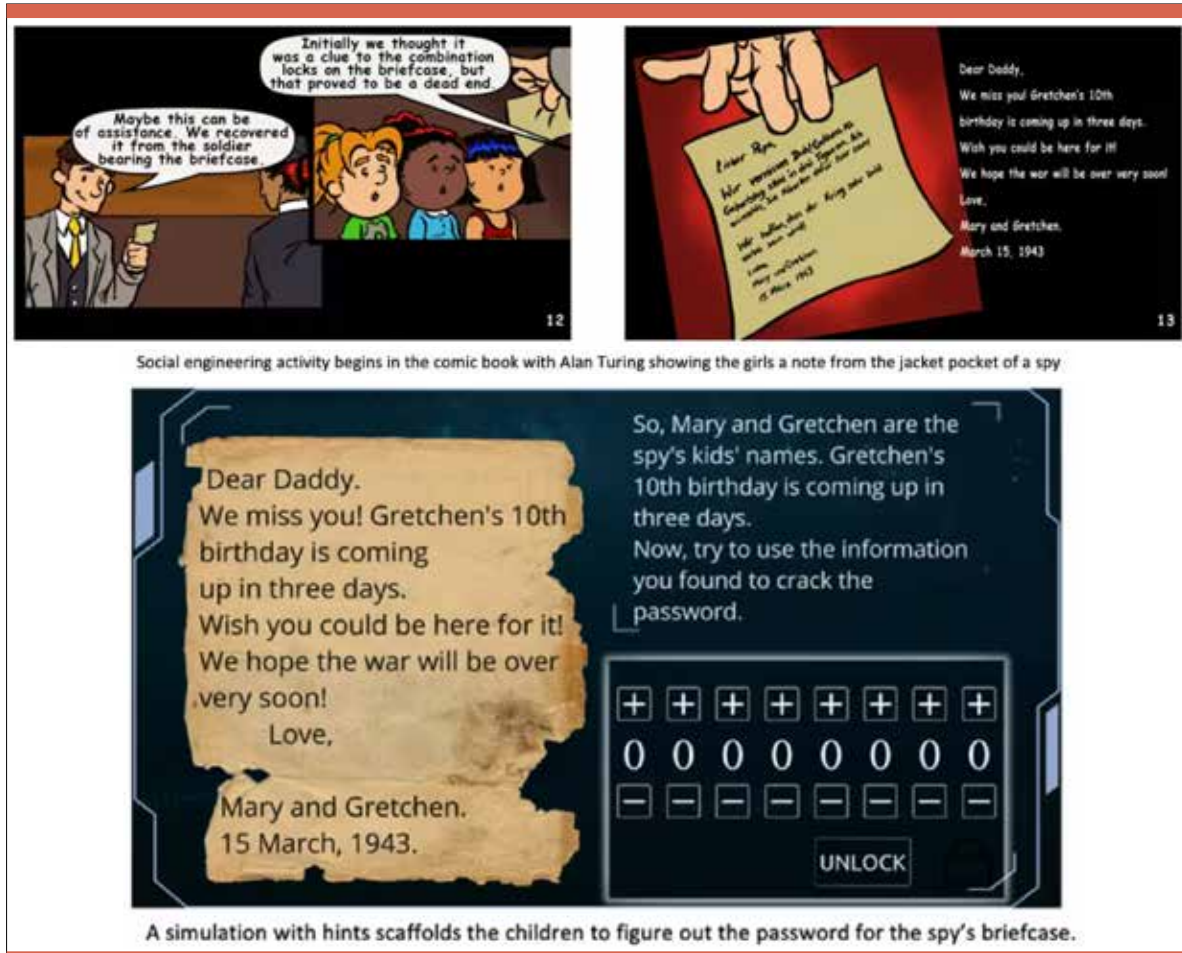
We are both researchers in educational technology and STEM education. We are examining how the program – which we both helped develop – increases awareness about careers in cybersecurity.

The overall objective of the program is to spark girls' interest in careers in cybersecurity. While it will take years to determine whether the program has the desired effect, early research shows that participants come out knowing about more potential jobs in cybersecurity than they did before.

Kids who've participated in the program have told researchers they "liked those jobs introduced in CryptoComics because they keep us safe from hackers." They also liked that "you get to work on a team to figure out codes and break them."

VAST REACH OF CYBERATTACKS

Cybersecurity touches just about everyone in some way or another – from adults in the workplace and banking to school-



Social engineering activity begins in the comic book with Alan Turing showing the girls a note from the jacket pocket of a spy

A simulation with hints scaffolds the children to figure out the password for the spy's briefcase.

children. For instance, cybercriminals have been launching cyberattacks against U.S. schools at a record pace – as many as two per school day in 2020. Hackers also target individuals who use public Wi-Fi.

Cybersecurity professionals will likely be in demand for the foreseeable future. The federal government projects 33% growth in jobs in cybersecurity and related fields over the next decade or so. Yet women are highly underrepresented in the profession, making up only 11% of information security analysts.

Part of the reason is that young girls often don't see themselves going into a field like computer science. But research shows that the attitudes elementary school children have toward STEM careers like cybersecurity can be changed. CryptoComics was designed to bring cybersecurity learning and career awareness to third to fifth grade girls through an engaging after-school curriculum.

The comic book, designed by media artist D.A. Jackson, begins when three friends – Akila, Carly and Bai – find a West African souvenir box belonging to Akila's

grandma. Akila takes a picture of the box with her tablet. Suddenly, she and her friends are sucked into a mysterious cyberworld.

As Akila narrates the story, students follow the girls and her little brother, Jabari, who communicates with the girls through the tablet. They crack codes and ciphers and solve puzzles. They also learn the history of cryptology and basics of cybersecurity to help the girls escape the cyberworld.

The six chapters of the comic book progress from basic information about codes and symbols to current cybersecurity practices such as creating safe passwords. Children explore important historical developments in cryptology approaches and technologies like the Navajo Code Talkers and the WAVES program. The Navajo Code Talkers were U.S. Marines of Navajo descent who used their native language to send secret messages over radio waves during WWII. WAVES – Women Accepted for Voluntarily Emergency Service – was a division of the U.S. Navy in which female cryptologists worked during WWII.

Children also use a variety of ciphers and codes to encrypt and

decrypt information. This helps the comic book characters during their cyberadventure. Activities are grounded in symbols from different cultures such as a scytale from Greece, pictograms from West African and Native American culture and Freemason Pigpen ciphers.

The curriculum culminates with games and simulations in which the children learn about cybersecurity. They learn to defend their device against the person who hacked Akila's tablet. They learn about safe password practices and how to protect themselves from brute force password cracking – that is, using a program or guesswork to try every possible password combination; phishing scams that use fake emails to get people to click on malicious links; and social engineering attacks.

For example, the comic book characters learn about social engineering when they go back in time to the British Government Code and Cypher School – now known as GCHQ. This is where they meet a WAVES servicewoman named Dorothy who turns out to be Akila's grandma. They

also meet Alan Turing, a real-life WWII cryptanalyst.

Dorothy, Alan and the comic book characters work to crack a briefcase password using a letter found on a spy. Meanwhile, students participating in the curriculum work to crack the code via a simulation. Students learn that social engineering is a process hackers use to figure out passwords based on personal information such as a birth dates or names of family members.

PREPARING FOR CYBERSECURITY CAREERS

Over 200 elementary school-age students – 73% girls – from diverse backgrounds in 16 after-school programs across the Southeastern U.S. have participated in CryptoComics. Preliminary research, which we oversaw, has found that children enjoy the curriculum, learn how to encrypt and decrypt information in different ways and demonstrate awareness of cybersecurity professions. They also transfer knowledge and skills gained in CryptoComics to real-life experiences.

Teachers we have spoken with also say the curriculum "can be a game changer" for participating girls. The teachers report that students "quickly retained" concepts such as enciphering and deciphering – making and breaking different kinds of messages and codes.

Some students struggled with reading the comic book. They said they wanted audio support but they didn't want a monotone computer voice. Instead, they wanted the audio "to act like the characters." As a result, we recruited local voice actors to narrate the comic book.

The narration can be used by students who struggle with reading or who simply prefer listening to stories. Teachers confirmed that "the narrated version of the actual comic book itself has helped tremendously." It has made the curriculum more accessible for struggling readers.

Tremendous career opportunities exist in cybersecurity. CryptoComics represents just one way to better position young children – and especially young girls – to take advantage of these opportunities.

MDT/THE CONVERSATION

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HAO VS LVS

Witness says claim is exaggerated, plaintiff rejects report

RENATO MARQUES

A witness for the defense in the Asian American Entertainment Corporation's (AAEC) case against Las Vegas Sands Corporation (LVS), has given evidence supporting the assertion – already made by another defense witness – that the AAEC's claim for compensation is exaggerated and unjustified.

AAEC, which is owned by Taiwan businessman Marshal Hao, brought the case against local units of LVS after LVS abandoned the partnership for a concession license tender. AAEC seeks compensation for breach of contract.

An employee of the consulting firm NERA Economic Consulting, Inc. (NERA), named Wang, was called by the defense to give testimony at the First Instance Court (TJB). Wang said that the plaintiff's calculations for the compensation claim only took into account the profits reported by the LVS to the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) and did not take into account investments made over time by the operator.

Questioned by the defense lawyer Luís Cavaleiro de Ferreira, Wang explained that there are two main reasons why the consulting company disagrees with the AAEC's claims. Firstly, even if the contract had not been breached, AAEC would not be able to support the tender for a concession. Secondly, Wang claims that Hao's compensation case has many incoherencies and absurdities.

According to Wang, not only did the plaintiff base his claims only on the reports delivered to DICJ, the claim was calculated based entirely on balance sheets for years



when a profit was recorded, disregarding years when investment exceeded the profit. Furthermore, Wang stated that AAEC also ignored LVS' expenses for construction, financing, and taxation.

Finally, the NERA report shows that AAEC's potential investment amounted to only MOP8.8 billion, that is, 14 times less than the MOP120 billion investment allegedly made by the LVS between 2002 and 2020. Wang considered this factor as decisive in calculating the proportionality between the parties.

In this regard, the report from NERA also concludes that after the breach of contract, AAEC did not try to invest in the local gaming market through other avenues, such as participating in the various gaming companies.

Wang said that this fact led NERA to infer that AAEC had "no financial capacity or will to invest in Macau gaming market" beyond the initial stated investment of MOP8.8 billion noted on the letter of intentions signed with LVS.

Questioned by Cavaleiro de Ferreira, Wang said, "in my opinion [compensation claims] should be based on the investment concretely done or officially stated," referring to the letter of intentions.

AAEC DISAGREES WITH NERA'S CONCEPT OF 'PROFIT'

The plaintiff, represented by lawyer Jorge Menezes, has rejected the conclusions reached by the NERA report, criticizing it on several points, specifically on the report's concept of "profit".

Menezes argues that the court cannot agree with the report's assertion that the plaintiff's claim contains many serious errors and absurdities, and even hinted that the report may be biased.

The lawyer argued that the report signed by Wang on behalf of NERA contains analysis that does not make mathematical sense.

"How can the court can accept that [according to the definition of profit made by the consultant] LVS had hardly any profits in most of the years of operation, yet, in

many years the same company made big dividend payouts to their partners," Menezes said. He noted the example of one year in which the company distributed almost MOP22 million in dividend payouts to its partners, as shown by official reports.

The TJB judge presiding over the sessions agreed with Menezes on this point, noting that "dividends do indicate that there are profits to be shared."

According to the analysis in the NERA report, up to the end of 2020, AAEC is not entitled to claim more than MOP400 million in compensation. The report adds that due to the poor performance in 2021, in which extra investments were made by the gaming concessionaire, the amount at the end of this year should be even lower.

The defense also asked Wang to make some calculations based on the criteria, showing that the sum LVS hypothetically owes AAEC could even amount to a negative figure.

Refusing to make such a calculation, the witness reaffirmed that the most important fact in calculating any potential compensation would be the difference in the amount invested by AAEC and LVS, which he also admitted will need additional adjustment as the local gaming operator Venetian Macau Limited continues to make further investments.

The case is now reaching its final stage. Wang's appearance at yesterday's double session was scheduled to be the final testimony in the case.

Hao is seeking damages equal to 72.5% of LVS's parent companies' profits in Macau, estimated at around MOP96 billion (USD12 billion).

MACAO ORCHESTRA TO PERFORM NEW YEAR CONCERT

The Macao Orchestra will present the "Starry Vienna – New Year Concert" at 8 p.m. on December 31, at the Macao Cultural Centre Grand Auditorium. Due to the absence of soprano Yuanming Song, who will be unable to visit Macau because of the pandemic, the program has been altered. The orchestra will celebrate the New Year with musical celebrities: it will be conducted by renowned Chinese female conductor Zhang Jiemin, and perform several works with famous Chinese soprano Zhang Liping. The "Starry Vienna – New Year Concert" features a number of musical pieces, including the Overture to the Operetta "Waldmeister" by Johann Strauss II, the 2nd movement from Symphonie Fantastique by Berlioz and the Dance of the Hours by Ponchielli.

GUANGDONG, MACAU AND PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING COUNTRIES SEEK MORE COOPERATION

The China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) Guangdong and Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institution recently held a conference to promote products and business opportunities for Portuguese-speaking Countries (PSCs) and Macau. The event is being held in Foshan, Zhaoqing and Jiangmen for enterprises in Guangdong and Macau to tap more market potential amid the further development of the GBA. Food suppliers from PSCs and Macau have promoted branded products, including wine, coffee, sea salt, snacks and beer, to over 400 buyers representing consumer goods, wine, catering, retailing & wholesale and other industries at this event.

UM COMPLETES DIGITAL HUMANITIES PROJECT

The Department of History of the University of Macau (UM) has completed the Digital Humanities Project: www.QingMaps.org. The project consists of three vast maps produced during the Qing dynasty and enables searches, analyses and annotations of approximately 70,000 place names. Associate professor Mario Cams is in charge of the project, which he created with the help of 12 UM students and colleagues from Leiden University in the Netherlands. The result of a five-year long research project, QingMaps is an interactive map analysis and research visualization tool for students and researchers. Three multi-sheet maps, produced at court during the Kangxi (1721), Yongzheng (1728) and Qianlong (1766) reigns, are now fully searchable.

Remaining workers at House of Dancing Water laid off



THE remaining 50 workers at the House of Dancing Water show in the City of Dreams have been laid off, according to TDM Radio.

In November last year, work permits of 137 foreign employees working at The House of Dancing Water – an internationally acclaimed show that has been suspended since June 2020 due to the Co-

vid-19 pandemic – were not renewed.

A recently dismissed employee of the show confirmed to the Times that they were called to a meeting and was informed about the notice. However, despite being dismissed from the show, he was offered a job at Melco.

In a reply to the Times, the City of Dreams re-

marked, "The pandemic has had a major impact on the entertainment industry. Given current travel restrictions, The House of Dancing Water show will continue on a hiatus for longer than previously anticipated."

"The colleagues who have been working in support of the theatre and remained employed since the show was suspended have been offered alternatives. Most were presented new career opportunities and will be transferred to other positions within the group," the firm added. LV



NEW ASSOCIATION SET UP TO PROMOTE PSYCHOTHERAPY AS A PROFESSION

ANTHONY LAM

THE Macau Society of Registered Psychotherapists (MSRP) plans to conduct professional training, Henry Lao, director-general of the newly-inaugurated group, has stated.

"At our inauguration ceremony we have invited professionals from the four places across the Strait to give lectures," Lao said, adding that these professionals have shared their frontline clinical experiences at the lecture.

Previously, the group has also held a discussion on interpersonal psychotherapy, which is encouraged by the WHO. It was attended by

members of the public and industry professionals to examine how psychotherapy theories can be put into practice and localized.

"We are also open to using the mass media to promote mental health," Lao added.

Previously, Prof. Brian Hall, academic of global public health at the New York University Shanghai, told that Times that the local government has acted wisely in codifying the Master's in Clinical Psychology as the threshold for psychotherapist registration in Macau. However, he pointed out that no institution in Macau is now offering a Master's program in the field.

Questioned about this discrepancy, Lao said that the association is more than willing to facilitate the introduction of these courses, for "it will not only train local talents, but also localize the mode of psychotherapy."

He said that the association will request the government to help with the opening of a Master's program.

More importantly, he stressed that it is not simply a question of the level of education, but the accreditation of the program is also essential. New programs should comply with certain international standards.

When asked to discuss what standard should be

adopted, whether it be the American Psychological Association (APA) or another framework, Lao reminded the public to "bear in mind that in America the minimum threshold for practice is doctorate level." He admitted that Macau will not have sufficient supply of psychotherapists. He hinted that a standard from mainland China, Hong Kong or Taiwan may be adopted.

For two years the University of Macau offered a Master's program, but it has since been withdrawn.

The group's aims include promoting the development of psychotherapy as a profession and improving its quality of service. Only Macau registered psychotherapists will be accepted for membership.

Lao explained that immediately after the establishment of the association in 2019, the city went into Covid-19 lockdown. The management thus decided to postpone the inauguration ceremony to a more suitable date.

Gov't rolls out new central securities depository

SECRETARY for Economy and Finance, Lei Swai Nong, thanked authorities in Beijing for helping to establish the Macau Central Securities Depository (MCSD) and the securities market, in his speech at the launch of the facility, yesterday.

Lei said that authorities in Beijing have guided the Monetary Authority of Macao (AMCM) in coordinating the establishment of the facility. He stressed that the facility shall operate registration, trustee and clearance services according to the core principles of regulation, safety and efficiency.

The China Central Depository & Clearing Co., Ltd. (CCDC), which Lei introduced as having years of experience in developing, maintaining and holding securities, has also offered assistance for the new local securities facility.

In his speech, Lei stressed that a CSD is an indispensable piece of financial infrastructure in a mature bond market. He added that the MCSD is "a new source of momentum to Macau's modern financial industry and adequate economic diversification."

At the same occasion, Xu Liangdui, vice president of the CCDC, revealed that the incubation of the system started in 2019 and the CCDC swiftly assisted in the establishment of the facility.

Lei added that the launch of the facility in Macau is going to accelerate the development of modern financial services in Macau. It will also enrich the ecology of the trade and promote adequate economic diversification through empowering operational entities.

With the facility, he said, Macau will be transformed into "an important off-shore market of the Chinese currency, an international wealth management center and the portal for Chinese bonds."

On the first day of operation, the MCSD saw two different bonds begin trading: the agencies being the Bank of China, Macau Branch and the Bank of Communications, Macau Branch. **AL**

OVER 200 INQUIRIES FILED AT NEW OFFICE CATERING DISMISSED WORKERS

ANTHONY LAM

THE newly established office to address cases of workers dismissed from junket companies and casino VIP rooms has received a total 208 inquiries, according to recent data.

Recently, the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) and the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) expressed concerns about "the impact of the Suncity incident on their employees' labor relations."

The DSAL has previously noted having received several inquiries and requests for help and so the bureau has



decided to set up a special counter at the Tai Peng Industrial Building branch, in

the surroundings of the border gate.

On the first day of the of-

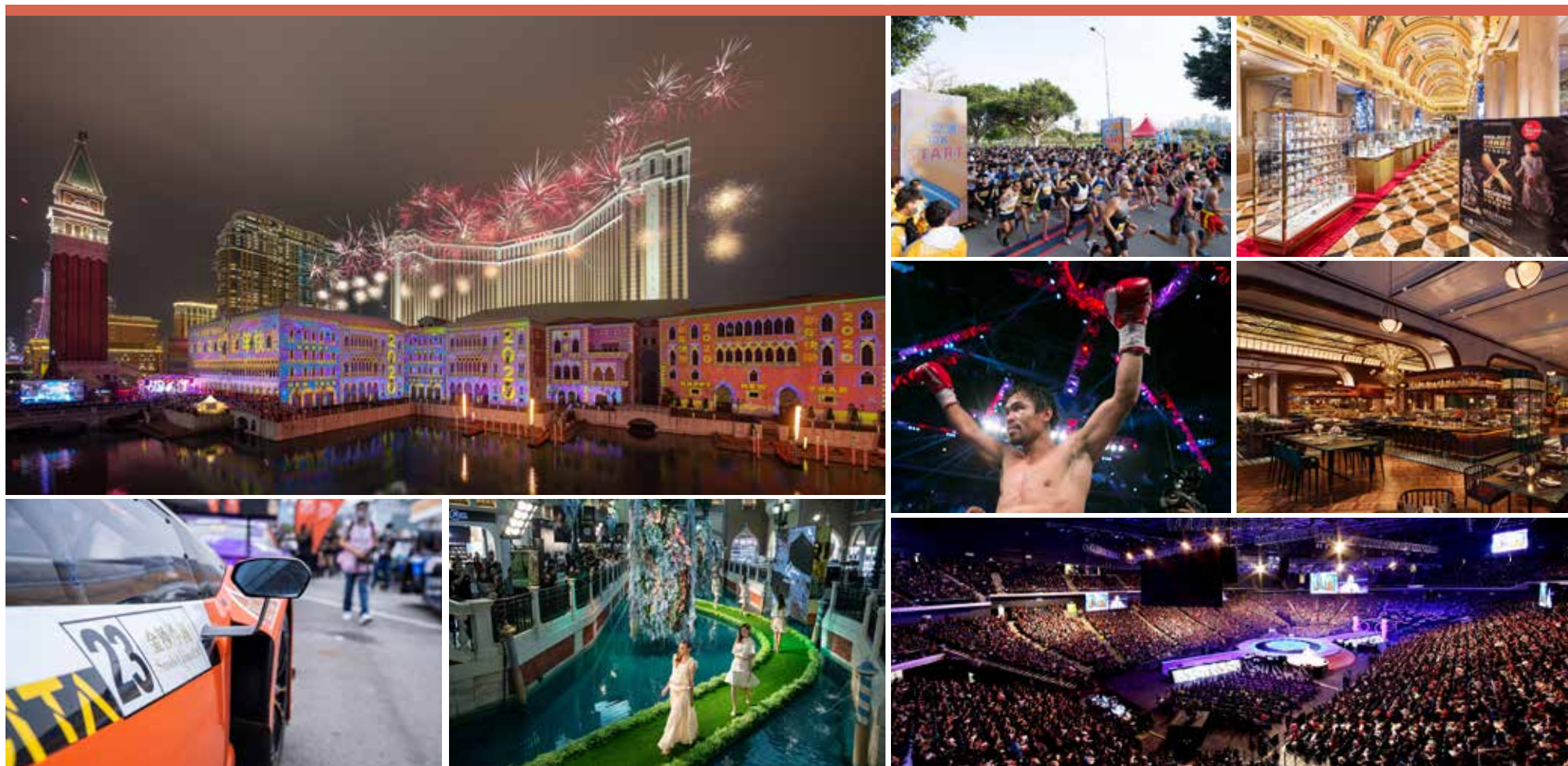
fice on Monday, 22 out of 23 individuals registered for job-matching at the DSAL office near the Border Gate were former employees at Suncity Group.

The bureau has also received several inquiries and complaints online and through telephone.

When asked how long it would take the bureau to handle these requests, an acting department head at the DSAL said it would depend on each individual case. The bureau will confirm and follow-up with the employers after receiving the requisite information from the help-seekers.



ANTHONY LAM



SANDS China continues to strive to nurture and develop industries to boost economic diversification amid the heavy blows dealt by the global health crisis on the city's economy.

As a company deeply rooted in Macau, Sands China aims to promote the synergistic development of non-gaming elements and the advancement economic diversification – a common goal that all sectors of the Macau community are working together to achieve.

As the government accelerates the "Tourism+" concept, Sands China seeks to lend its support by utilizing its non-gaming facilities – the largest-scale of such facilities in Macau – including 12,000 hotel rooms, MICE space, retail space, entertainment venues, diverse food and beverage outlets and options, and family-friendly leisure facilities.

Sands China is heeding the call to actively cultivate industries suitable for Macau. In doing so, the integrated resort operator has dynamically extended its effort to help attract the ever-expanding middle-class market, extend visitors' length of stay, stimulate consumer spending, and promote the development of family and MICE tourism.

The move is in line with the government's push to develop Macau into a world centre of tourism and leisure, as well as its recent strategic plan to promote "Tourism+."

EXPANDING MICE SPACE

Macau's current MICE space has increased nearly 12-fold compared to when the city's MICE industry first started in 2005. Over the years, Sands China has welcomed 2 million MICE

Sands China boosts dynamic efforts to drive city's diversification

attendees, compared to the city's 38,000 MICE attendees in 2002 – representing a massive 53-fold increase. Sands China's MICE facilities have attracted a significant number of multinational giants to hold their grand-scale meetings in Macau, such as Herbalife, Jeunesse Global and Tupperware, as well as some of the world's leading information technology companies.

QUADRUPLING MACAU'S RETAIL SPACE

Sands China's success and the success of Macau go hand-in-hand. For more than a decade, Sands China has invested in helping the business industry thrive and grow, contributing to the development of local enterprises along the way.

In 2006, Macau had a total retail space of approximately 27,800 sqm. The opening of The Venetian Macao in 2007 quadrupled that number. Today, Macau's retail space measures 460,000 sqm, with Sands China offering the largest retail space in the city. From 2002 to 2019, the city's retail sales have experienced a compound annual growth rate of 17%.

MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT

After the 2007 opening of The Venetian Macao, the integrated resort business model not only helped drive the rapid growth of the retail industry, but also brought a wide range of large-scale

entertainment options to Macau, attracting non-gaming customer bases such as families and business travelers to the city.

The world-class entertainment offerings of Macau's integrated resort operators have enriched the city's non-gaming elements, helping raise Macau's international profile.

In terms of the seating capacity of Macau's entertainment venues, Sands China owns a total of six arenas and theatres, accounting for over 20,000 seats.

The Venetian Macao is home to the 15,000-seat Cotai Arena, which has long been the only Asian venue in Pollstar's Top 100 Arena Venues worldwide and has played host to many live concerts by some of the world's most famous stars since its opening in 2007. Headliners over the years include the Rolling Stones, Celine Dion, Mariah Carey, Katy Perry, Lady Gaga, Rihanna, Maroon 5, Bruno Mars, Big Bang, EXO, Jacky Cheung, Eason Chan, Jay Chou, and Sammi Cheng, among many others. The venue has also hosted a number of sporting events, such as boxing matches featuring world-famous Manny Pacquiao and Zou Shiming, and tennis and basketball exhibition matches.

To date, the company's venues have attracted an accumulated total of 4.6 million attendees, and have hosted more than 610 performances since 2007.

The company is also more

than willing to offer venue support to different types of international and local performances and to accommodate venue sponsorship requests by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (ICM), such as for the Macao International Music Festival and the Macao Art Festival, as part of the company's supportive measures to cultural development.

ART AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Sands China has brought a wide spectrum of art and cultural events to the city, in order to provide opportunities for cultural enrichment, nurture local art talent, and to let locals and visitors enjoy a true diversity of integrated resort experiences.

The company has been a dynamic supporter of the International Indian Film Academy Awards (IIFA Awards), the Asian Film Awards, and the Huading Awards, among others.

It also seeks to support international and local art and cultural exhibitions. Just one example is Art Macao, the mega international arts and cultural event organised by the Macau government to promote art in city. Sands China collaborated with internationally renowned ceramic artist and curator Caroline Cheng to present two popular ceramic exhibitions for Art Macao: All That's Gold Does Glitter – An Exhibition of Glamorous Ceramics (2019) and Project

Sands X: Beyond the Blue – An Exhibition of Ceramic Extraordinaire (2021).

SPORTS TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Sports has been identified as key to the diversification of Macau's economy, with the SAR government strengthening its promotion of sports tourism in 2020. And since setting foot in Macau, Sands China has been bringing in a variety of large-scale international sporting events.

These international events include boxing matches featuring the world-famous Manny Pacquiao and Zou Shiming, tennis and basketball exhibition matches, a football legends clinic, golf tournaments and clinics, the 2021 Sands China Macao International 10K Run, The Grand Prix, and others. The company has not wavered in its support of sporting events in Macau, notwithstanding the difficulties brought on by the pandemic environment.

THE NUMBERS

- No. of guests welcomed over the years: 754 million +
- No. of hotel rooms: 12,000+
- MICE space: 154,000+ sqm
- Retail space: 191,000+ sqm
- No. of entertainment venues: 6 theatres and arenas of varying sizes
- No. of seats: 20,000+

ANTHONY LAM

CRIME

POLICE FIND NEW METHOD OF CREDIT CARD FRAUD

A new form of credit card fraud exploiting on contactless payment methods has been discovered by the Judiciary Police (PJ) in the course of their investigations, the authority announced yesterday.

At the special press conference, the local police pointed out that the new fraud type was found in a joint operation with the Hong Kong Police, codenamed "Soaring Star."

The police found that the criminal syndicate would distribute stolen credit card data to its subordinates, usually recruited online, and ask them to link the data to contactless payment systems.

These subordinates would then be instructed to make purchases at retailers. The purchased merchandise would then be given to the senior members of the syndicate and transferred to Hong Kong or mainland China.

According to yesterday's announcement, at least one syndicate was found abusing credit card data using this method.

In September this year, one card issuer reported an abuse to the PJ involving 11 foreign credit cards and MOP150,000. The-

ANTHONY LAM



se cards were used to purchase goods in the Northern District.

In the same month, another card issuer reported a case to the PJ, involving 829 foreign credit cards, which were used to make 913 transactions over two weeks,

amounting to MOP11.95 million. These purchases were made at two retailers in Cotai.

Since the evidence displayed included a packing list issued by Apple, the company is believed to be a victim.

The card issuers reported a combined loss of MOP5.7 million.

This new form of fraud differs from the familiar method, which uses stolen credit card data to purchase products within online video games. This older method

was also found in the recent operation.

Two of the suspects apprehended admitted that they were looking for part-time jobs when they were hired by the syndicate. They were given the credit card data and asked to link it with their Apple ID. They were then instructed to make purchases using that Apple ID in online video games.

The police were told that each purchase equated to MOP10 in remuneration for the suspect who made the purchase.

One suspect told the police that he used to play one of the online video games concerned, and wanted the money he spent on the game refunded, a request the game operator refused to honor.

He was then instructed by members of the syndicate to use the credit card data pairing method and make extensive series of purchases in different online games, so that it would trigger Apple's systems to detect these transactions abnormal and process a refund.

This older method has affected at least six Macau credit cards, involving a total of MOP42,600.

Meanwhile, in Hong Kong, local police arrested five males and two females connected to the fraud.

SAR to increase cooperation with Jiangsu Province

MACAU will increase cooperation in several areas with the eastern province of Jiangsu during the period of the country's 14th Five-Year Plan from 2021 to 2025, according to an agreement signed by both sides.

Macau and Jiangsu will step up cooperation in over 10 areas, including science, technology, economy, trade, modern service, education, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), exhibitions and youth exchange, according to the agreement signed during the Jiangsu Week currently being held in Macau.

Lei Wai Nong, secretary for economy and finance of the Macau SAR government, said that Macau will continue to host a series of events, including the Jiangsu-Macau Industrial and Commercial Summit for Portuguese-speaking Countries, and promote trade be-



tween Jiangsu as well as other mainland provinces with Portuguese-speaking countries.

Hui Jianlin, a senior Jiangsu official, said the province has taken advantage of the summit (which has been held each year for the past 10 years) to maintain close exchanges with Macau and Portuguese-speaking countries, witnessing rising trade volumes year by year.

During Jiangsu

Week, a series of events have been held to showcase the achievements of different cities in Jiangsu on ecological and cultural fronts.

The city of Yancheng exhibited its migratory bird sanctuaries along the coast of the Yellow Sea-Bohai Gulf of China (Phase I), which was inscribed on the World Heritage List by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

(UNESCO) in 2019.

The exhibition showcased bird sanctuaries with virtual reality technologies, and visual and audio effects to create immersive experiences for visitors to learn about the sanctuaries, which are home to the world's largest continuous mudflat seashore, about 280 species of fish and more than 500 species of invertebrates. MDT/XINHUA

HENGQIN

30 FAMILIES PAINTED MAINTENANCE HOLE COVERS TO CELEBRATE MACAU'S RETURN TO MOTHERLAND

A total of 30 families from Macau and Hengqin of Zhuhai painted maintenance hole covers in Huahai Changlang (Flowery Corridors) of Hengqin Island in Zhuhai to celebrate the 22nd anniversary of Macau's returning to the motherland.

Besides maintenance hole cover paintings, families were invited to participate in interactive games on garbage sorting and greeting cards exchange, allowing families from Macao and Hengqin to interact closely.

"These colorful paintings and greeting cards make

me feel warm," said a tourist surnamed Feng. Huahai Changlang (Flowery Corridors) is a famous tourist site in Hengqin island, attracting many families from both Macao and Hengqin every weekend.

The event was co-hosted by the General Union of Neighbor Association of Macao Guangdong Office and Da Hengqin Public Facility Management company, with great support from Lianhua Community of Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin. MDT/NEWSGD.COM



Davis Fong calls on casinos to switch focus to foreign tourists

ANTHONY LAM

CASINOS' modes of operation should adapt to attract tourists from other places, gambling academic Davis Fong Ka Chio said on the sidelines of an event yesterday.

Fong said that with policy changes in the source market, local casinos should change their target from mainland tourists to those from other points of origin, adding that before the partial opening of the casino market, the city saw many tourists from markets such as Japan and Southeast Asia.

In the long term, he said, casinos should consider switching their focus or expanding their sources of clients, as far as the law permits.

On the topic of junkets, Fong pointed out that previously these establishments have had multifaceted operations, hinting that junkets will continue to operate in Macau. To achieve this, operators

PHOTO ARCHIVE



should react swiftly to market changes.

Illustrating his point, Fong said that a larger restaurant usually has both a main dining area and VIP rooms.

Questioned whether Macau will be affected by the lack of tourist arrivals from other source markets as the border

remains closed to these tourists, Fong replied: "The pandemic will end someday."

With the rumor circulating in the past month that Hong Kong may normalize its border with Macau, the academic suggests that the industry start promotions in Hong Kong. This would help com-

pensate for the lost Southeast Asian arrivals.

Fong expects that mid-2022 will see gradual border normalizations with rising vaccination rates and the introduction of effective medication. He believes that in the long term, Southeast Asian tourists will return to Macau.

Fong is also confident that the gross gambling revenue will reach MOP100 billion in the coming year. "After all, mainland tourists have waited for external travel for quite some time already," he added.

Up to date figures show that the government has collected nearly MOP31.28 billion direct taxes on gaming between January 1 and November 30, an increase of 15.1% compared to the same period last year. The figure is far from the government's expectation of collecting MOP50.1 billion in direct taxes from the industry this year.

BERNSTEIN: JUNKETS WILL 'DISAPPEAR'

BROKERAGE Sanford C. Bernstein implied in a memo yesterday that junkets will "disappear," yet "players may well shift and we forecast that between 15-30% of junket VIP business could shift back to premium direct and premium mass and

potentially more." Analysts at the brokerage noted that Sands China has had the least exposure to the VIP market at only 26%, whereas Wynn, Galaxy and Melco had higher VIP exposure at 49%, 48% and 45% respectively.

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www.iftm.edu.mo

Macao Institute for Tourism Studies (IFTM), a rapidly growing public higher education institution in Macao devoted entirely to education and training for the tourism and hospitality industry, invites applications for the following full-time teaching posts. Successful candidates are required to teach in both daytime and evening programmes/courses.

School of Continuing Education

- ◆ **Lecturer in Heritage and Tourism (1 vacancy) - Ref. No. 009/AC/2021**
should be able to teach in English and Chinese with the following subjects that are related to:
 - designing thematic tour routes in Macao
 - tourist attractions and tourism planning
 - introduction to heritage and tourism studies
 - UNESCO world heritage sites interpretations
 - Historic Center of Macao and Macao tour guiding**Requirements:** must have a Master's degree or above in the relevant area. Bachelor degree in heritage management and a valid tour guide license would be preferable.

- ◆ **Lecturer in Chinese Culinary (1 vacancy) - Ref. No. 010/AC/2021**
should be able to teach/develop in English and/or Chinese with one or above subjects related to:
 - Chinese Culinary [Cantonese, Dim Sum, cuisines of other Chinese provinces]
 - Food Service Operations and Management
 - Food and Beverage Cost Control
 - Food and Beverage Revenue Control
 - Food and Beverage Quality Control
 - Food and Beverage Purchasing Control and Management
 - Planning and Control for Food and Beverage Operations
 - Food Safety, etc.**Requirements:** must have a Master's degree or above in the relevant area. Holders of national or international Chinese culinary certificates would be preferable.

Candidates who do not meet the listed requirements above, or who do not upload supporting documents together with their online applications (including graduation certificates, transcripts, employment testimonials indicating positions and complete service durations with exact start dates and end dates issued by current/previous employers for the requirements) need not apply for the vacancies.

Candidates are expected to engage in research and industry collaborations, and teach/develop the subject areas above. For a full list of subjects in the current curriculum and details of the academic units, please visit www.iftm.edu.mo.

Annual Taxable Remuneration and Benefit:
MOP\$47,820 - MOP\$87,960 (salary index: 430 - 540)
- The current local income tax rate ranges from 7% to 12%. Exchange rate: approx.USD1 = MOP8.
- The position and remuneration offered will be commensurate with academic qualifications, higher education teaching and professional experience.
- For benefits and FAQ, please refer to *Job Vacancies* at IFTM website <http://www.iftm.edu.mo/visitors/job-vacancies>.

Type of Contract:
Individual Service Contract (個人勞動合同)

Selection:
The selection panel consists of the relevant head of academic department, coordinators and faculty members. Outside members may also be invited. Selection will be based on (1) documentary evaluation, (2) mock teaching and interview.

Application and Documents Need to be Submitted:
Apply **online** at IFTM website (<http://www.iftm.edu.mo/visitors/job-vacancies>) and upload the following **required** documents in PDF format:

- Copies of graduate certificates of all academic degrees awarded and transcripts for the academic qualifications required as above
- Employment testimonials issued by current/previous employers, indicating positions and complete service durations (with exact start dates and end dates) for the current/past full-time teaching experiences in tertiary education institutions or relevant full-time working experiences
- Identity card or passport copy
- Full resume
- Cover letter
- List of academic journals or articles published (if available) with ISBN

Applications will not be considered if the required qualifications and teaching experiences are not supported by certificates, employment testimonials and/or documents listed above or no identity card or passport copies are provided at the time of submission of application.

Application closes on 14 January 2022

- The selected candidates are expected to assume duty in the second quarter of 2022 or earlier.
- Final result name list will be announced on IFTM website around first quarter of 2022.
- Please note that ALL application materials must be received by the closing date (Macao time). Application received by IFTM after the closing date will only be included in the next round of recruitment, if applicable.
- Personal data provided by applicants will be kept confidential and used for recruitment purpose only.

For application and details, please visit <http://www.iftm.edu.mo/visitors/job-vacancies> or scan the QR code.
For enquiries, please send to Job Vacancies On-line enquiry.
<http://www.iftm.edu.mo/visitors/job-vacancies/job-vacancies-on-line-enquiry>



MGM WINTER GO!

Create priceless memories this winter with your loved ones at MGM COTAI. This one-of-a-kind holiday event is inspired and dedicated to the winter sports season, and features an exciting line-up of festive entertainment and activities, as well as gourmet pleasures to delight your palate like never before. Discover the ultimate getaway experience here and get ready for some amazing sportive adventures!

Step into the Spectacle and feast your eyes on the glittering winter-sports-themed decorations all around you. The striking centerpiece, The Ski Tree, is a large-scale six-meter-tall installation, created using snowboards to celebrate the much-loved winter sport. Not only it is a symbol of life and strength, it is also a tribute from MGM to this year's biggest sport event.

When it comes to celebration, bigger is indeed better. On display via the colossal LED screen is a visual feast of the most exhilarating winter sports to inspire your inner athlete. More fun-filled moments await at the Spectacle. Dive into a magical ocean and meet our charming new penguin friends at the 'Sea Odyssey', as they prance and swim with their aquatic mates in this upbeat show. The giant LED screen behind lights up the sports atmosphere, giving an agile and energetic edge to the popular marine performance.

The MGM Spectacle continues to mesmerize with its underwater inhabitants; but this season, the experience is made even more enchanting with the sounds of sweet melody and singing from the 'Music Marathon'. Presented by MGM and StarMusic Center, this 2-hour music extravaganza brings together 60 junior pianists performing a continuous flow of 30 classic winter songs - just like a marathon. The performance starts from 3pm to 5pm on 26th December, so make sure you don't miss out on this special sonic offering.

Boost your journey with some unique decorations to liven up the festivities at home, as well as to celebrate the season of winter sports. Drop by the MGM MACAU Pastry Bar or MGM COTAI Art de Christmas Booth for Handmade Christmas Pieces. Inspired by the winter sports theme and made with everyday objects, each Christmas piece is handcrafted by the MGM Floral team, ensuring your holidays blossom with vibrant color and sportive cheer.

Make your day even merrier with a sweet escape at Anytime. The special menu features a unique winter-sports-inspired afternoon tea set that will send you on an athletic journey full of wonders. For those looking to get creative, roll up your sleeves and join the Festive Donut Decoration Workshop and Gingerbread Cookie Decoration Workshop, where you can create your own wintry dessert - a delicious way to share the holiday cheer. Find out more details about the sporty culinary delights on the next page.

MGM COTAI is ready to take your holiday season to new levels of wintry fun and excitement. Immerse in the winter-sports vibe and soak in the holiday cheer with friends and family for an unforgettable celebration.





Winter Festive Afternoon Tea Set



Cheese & Chocolate Fondue



Winter Festive Pastry

WINTERY SWEET ESCAPE AT MGM

As the year draws to a close with the winter holidays ahead of us, it is the perfect time to welcome the new year ahead. MGM is bringing the snowy winter charms to MGM COTAI, welcoming all guests to immerse into the true sparks of winter wonderland in Macau, with a delightful array of seasonal dining delicacies.

Bringing vividness to the cold winter days, a limited-edition box set of five-colored donuts is specially created by MGM's pastry team to bring a warm, happy smile for everyone. Each donut comes with a velvety cream filling of specific flavors, from green tea, chocolate, dulcify chocolate, to strawberry and lemon. Inspired by winter sports and seasonal ingredients, every Saturday and Sunday in December, indulge in all the sweets your heart desires with the *Winter Festive Sugar Crush*, where you can pick your favorites from an all-you-can-savor lineup of over 20 kinds of winter-themed desserts and warm, savory snacks. There will be also *Winter Festive Afternoon Tea Set* an assortment of 10 flavors seasonal pastries and savory bites.



Winter Festive Sugar Crush

Get cozy with a pot of *Cheese Fondue* that features a conventional recipe of three types of Swiss cheeses: Gruyère, Tête de Moines and Emmental, melted in low heat along with white wines and Kirsch. While overlooking the wintery snow sports village at the Spectacle, fill your heart and appetite with our *Chocolate Fondue*, a pleasantly sinful blend of 58% dark chocolate with a dash of white and milk chocolate. This pot of guilty pleasure is served with fresh fruits, marshmallow, homemade madeleine, and other petite pastries to double the joy of indulgence. Another must-try for chocolate aficionados is the *Cocoa Bombs* – a one-of-a-kind hot chocolate specialty drink. Enjoy the

aroma and beautiful sight of a chocolate balloon loaded with marshmallow and cocoa powder melting into a velvety hot chocolate with steaming hot Japanese milk – and it gets extra delicious to savor under a winter ski village setting at the Spectacle.



Cocoa Bomb



Winter Festive Donuts

Continue to celebrate the holidays with a delightful showcase of festive treats, such as *Hot Cocoa*, traditional *Gluhwein*, and other small individual cakes to adopt a celebratory presentation.

With a tummy full of delicious treats, why not get your hands on to create your own goodies to bring home with? Join us at our *Winter Festive Donut Decoration Workshop* and *Gingerbread Icing Cookie Decoration Workshop* on weekends and enjoying some quality parent-children time making your very own edible masterpieces. Turn your imaginations into reality during our fun and interactive decorating workshops during weekends in December. Each session is priced at MOP 150; a 50% discount is offered upon presenting same-day receipt of any food and beverage spending within MGM MACAU and MGM COTAI.

From now until January 29, 2022, **Anytime** will open till 12am every Thursday to Saturday, where you can celebrate the happiest season and share the moments under the starry snowy night. There will also be an extensive selection of seasonal gifts to save everyone from the hassle of festive shopping for loved ones. Let's celebrate as we look forward to 2022! For more information, please visit mgm.mo or call (853) 8806 8888.

HARVARD PROFESSOR'S TRIAL A TEST OF DOJ'S CHINA PROSECUTIONS

THE trial of a Harvard University professor charged with hiding his ties to a Chinese-run recruitment program is the latest bellwether in the U.S. Justice Department's controversial effort to crackdown on economic espionage by China.

Opening statements in the trial of Charles Lieber, the former chair of Harvard's department of chemistry and chemical biology, begin today [Macau time] after jury selection was completed yesterday in Boston federal court.

Lieber's trial is among the highest profile cases to come from the U.S. Department of Justice's so-called "China Initiative," which was launched in 2018 under former President Donald Trump but has faced criticism that it harms academic research and amounts to racial profiling of Chinese researchers.

Federal prosecutors and Lieber's defense team didn't comment, but in legal filings ahead of trial, prosecutors said they'll show Lieber deliberately made false statements about his participation in a Chinese university program to protect his reputation and career.

Lieber's lawyer, Marc Mukasey, argued in his trial brief that prosecutors will be unable to prove that he acted "knowingly, intentionally, or willfully, or that he made any material false statement." He also stressed Lieber, who remains on paid leave from Harvard, isn't charged with illegally transferring any technology or proprietary information to China.

"The government has this wrong," Mukasey said last year. "When justice is done, Charlie's good name will be restored."

Lieber was arrested last January on allegations that he hid his involvement in China's Thousand Talents Plan, a program designed



Harvard University professor Charles Lieber

to recruit people with knowledge of foreign technology and intellectual property to China.

Lieber, prosecutors said, was paid \$50,000 a month by the Wuhan University of Technology in China, given up to \$158,000 in living expenses and awarded more than \$1.5 million in grants to establish a research lab at the Chinese university.

In exchange, prosecutors say, Lieber agreed to publish articles, organize international conferences and apply for patents on behalf of the Chinese university.

He's pleaded not guilty to the charges, which include two counts of making false statements to authorities and four tax offenses for failing to report income from the Wuhan university.

At the time, Lieber was one of the biggest names — and one of the few not of Chinese origin — swept up in the wide-ranging China Initiative, which was ostensibly launched to prosecute trade secret theft, hacking, and economic espionage.

The effort also focuses on threats to national infrastructure and "efforts to influence

the American public and policymakers without proper transparency," according to the Justice Department's website.

The department hasn't provided a comprehensive list of all the cases prosecuted under the initiative and their outcomes, but said yesterday that the tally includes at least nine economic espionage prosecutions, seven theft of trade secrets cases and 12 matters involving fraud on universities or other grant making institutions.

Hundreds of faculty members at Stanford, Yale, Berkeley, Princeton, Temple and other prominent colleges, meanwhile, have signed onto letters to U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland calling on him to end the initiative.

The academics say the effort is compromises the nation's competitiveness in research and technology and has had a chilling effect on recruiting foreign scholars. The letters also complain the investigations have disproportionately targeted researchers of Chinese origin.

Even Andrew Lelling, a former U.S. Attorney for Massachusetts

who was an early leader on the nationwide effort and whose office brought charges against Lieber, believes the initiative needs reform.

"The Initiative has drifted and, in some significant ways, lost its focus," he wrote in part on LinkedIn last week.

Lelling, who is now in private practice, declined to comment directly on the Lieber case yesterday, but argued that cases like it were important in bringing attention to the growing threat of economic espionage by the Chinese entities.

"If the U.S. government doesn't know the extent of U.S. research collaboration with China, it can't properly develop policy in that area."

At the same time, Lelling argued that prosecutors should play out the remaining cases to their conclusion and focus on only the most serious cases against academics going forward.

"Three years later, the academic community is fully aware of the issue," he said. "Schools have tightened their disclosure requirements in this area and researchers are very worried about government enforcement. In short, deterrence has been achieved."

Wyn Hornbuckle, a DOJ spokesperson, said that the department is reviewing its approach to countering threats posed by the Chinese government and will provide additional information in the coming weeks.

Garland told lawmakers during an October hearing on the initiative that China remains a "serious threat" to American intellectual property in terms of espionage, cyber incursions and ransomware.

But he also stressed that "cases will not be pursued based on discrimination, but only on facts justifying them." **MDT/AP**

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian yesterday reiterated that "China firmly opposes any forms of official and political exchanges between Taiwan and countries having diplomatic ties with China."

Zhao called on countries to "earnestly abide by the one-China principle."

In a commentary, the Communist Party tabloid Global Times called the visit "an insignificant stunt by trivial French politicians," citing a Chinese expert. **MDT/AP**

TAIWAN FRENCH MPs ARRIVE IN THE ISLAND FOR VISIT AMID CHINA TENSIONS

A group of six French lawmakers arrived in Taiwan for a five-day visit yesterday, following a similar trip led by a group of French parliamentarians in October that China sought to discourage.

François de Rugy, the head of the Taiwan Friendship group in the National Assembly, the lower house of France's Parliament, is

leading the latest delegation's visit, which will include meetings with Taiwanese leader Tsai Ing-wen and other senior cabinet officials.

"We wish to have exchanges on all dimensions of the relations between Taiwan, the EU and France on the economy and culture and all the issues at stake for our

countries," de Rugy told reporters at the airport.

In October, another group of French lawmakers led by Sen. Alain Richard met with Tsai, Taiwanese economic and health officials, and the Mainland Affairs Council. That visit was part of regular parliamentary exchanges that had been ongoing for years.

China tried to get the previous visit called-off, with its embassy in France saying ahead of time that it would not only damage China's core interests and undermine Chinese-French relations, but would also impact France's own "reputation and interests."

Speaking to reporters about the visit, Chinese

HONG KONG

Major fire traps hundreds in tower, 12 injured

HUNDREDS of people were trapped on the rooftop of a Hong Kong skyscraper after a major fire broke out yesterday, as firefighters rushed to rescue them and put out the blaze.

The fire started in the early afternoon at the World Trade Centre on Gloucester Road in the city's popular Causeway Bay shopping district, according to a government notice. The 38-story tower houses both offices and a mall.

At least 12 people were sent to hospital for treatment, according to authorities.

Dense smoke was seen billowing out from the building, and photos and videos from those trapped inside showed poor visibility as smoke filled restaurants and stairways of the building.

About 300 people evacuated to the top of the building while waiting to be rescued, police told local media.

Tens of people trapped in the building had also jammed into narrow areas on an open-air podium on the fifth floor, peering over the edge as they awaited rescue.

Preliminary investigations by the police suggested that the fire had broken out in the electrical switch room located on the first floor of the shopping mall, before spreading to the scaffolding that surrounded part of the building, according to local newspaper South China Morning Post.

Firefighters had used an extendable ladder to rescue the people on the fifth floor. Other people were said to be trapped in restaurants in the mall, added the local newspaper.

A total of about 1,200 people were evacuated from the building, according to local media reports.

The fire was upgraded to a level three incident, according to a police notice. Fires are graded on a scale of one to five, with five being the most severe. As of 3:06 p.m., authorities said the fire was under control.

Two breathing apparatus teams and two water jets were mobilized to help fight the blaze, police said. **MDT/AP**

HUNGER

Virus hits Asian food security, as millions go hungry: FAO

ELAINE KURTENBACH,
BANGKOK

THE prolonged pandemic and surging prices are undermining food security for millions of people in Asia, with 1.8 billion lacking access to healthy diets, a report by the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization said yesterday.

The report says access to food worsened in 2020 and deteriorated further this year as governments struggled to keep outbreaks at bay by restricting travel and other activities.

With progress toward alleviating hunger stalling, the FAO is urging comprehensive measures to improve food security, part of a push toward what experts call a "food systems" approach.

David Dawe, senior economist at the FAO's regional office for Asia and the Pacific, said the organization's food price index rose by nearly a third in the past year. The price of vegetable oils, which are critical



AP PHOTO

People wait for free food outside an eatery in Ahmedabad, India

for health, soared 74%, he said.

Rising global commodity prices affect the costs for consumers, in "another blow to the poor, who spend a large percentage of their income on food and are struggling to recover from the impacts of COVID-19," Dawe said.

"Food producers have also faced more recent challenges after

the initial impact of the pandemic including rising fuel and fertilizer prices," he said.

A transformation of systems to improve food security needs to revolve around the needs of the many small-scale farmers in the region and other vulnerable groups such as indigenous peoples, women and children, the FAO report says.

It notes that nearly 16% of people in South Asia are undernourished and that for the region as a whole undernourishment is at its highest level in a decade, at 8.7%.

Access to adequate food is worst in North Korea, with more than 40% of its people undernourished. But hunger is an urgent problem also in Afghanistan, Papua New Guinea

and East Timor.

Conditions across the region are still better than they were in 2000, but progress in recent years has slowed and in some cases reversed. In 10 countries in the region, more than 30% of children under 5 years old suffer from stunting, or low height for age — a common measure for how well fed they are. In another eight countries, between 20%-30% do.

Such deprivation has long-lasting consequences, as children suffer from weaker health and fail to achieve their full potential.

Millions among those children suffer from wasting, a potentially more dangerous condition due to inadequate food or prolonged illness. In 2020, more than 31 million children in the Asia-Pacific were affected by wasting, and that number could rise to 40 million by the end of 2022 if current trends continue.

The FAO and others working on hunger are urging that efforts focus on broader issues than just raising the amount of food that is produced — a crucial step but one that does not ensure families can actually afford healthy diets.

The challenge is in devising policies to improve food systems to cope with pandemics, natural disasters, poverty, political instability and other challenges that get in the way of improved access to enough food. **MDT/AP**

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AP PHOTO



An F-35 fighter jet arrives at the Vermont Air National Guard base in South Burlington, Vt. (file pic)

MIDEAST

UAE suspends talks on USD23b weapons deal with US

NOMAN MERCHANT,
WASHINGTON

THE United Arab Emirates yesterday suspended talks on a \$23 billion deal to purchase American-made F-35 planes, armed drones and other equipment, in a rare dispute between Washington and a key U.S. ally in the Persian Gulf.

The Emirati Embassy in Washington said it would "suspend discussions" with the U.S., though meetings at the Pentagon this week between the two sides on other matters will be held as planned. "The U.S. remains the UAE's preferred provider for advanced defense requirements and discussions for the F-35 may be re-opened in the future," the embassy said in a statement.

The proposed sale of 50 F-35s to the UAE came at the end of former President Donald Trump's administration, emerging from a deal that saw the Emiratis formally recognize Israel. President Joe Biden's administration put the deal on hold after he took office, in part due to criticism

of the UAE and Saudi Arabia over their yearslong war in Yemen, which has sparked one of the world's worst humanitarian crises and continues today.

Also included in the deal are 18 advanced drone systems and a package of air-to-air and air-to-ground munitions.

Emirati officials blame an American insistence on restrictions on how and where the F-35s could be used and say they are a violation of the UAE's sovereignty.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the U.S. is prepared to move forward with the sales if the Emiratis decide to do so.

"We've wanted to make sure, for example, that our commitment to Israel's qualitative military edge is ensured, so we wanted to make sure that we could do a thorough review of any technologies that are sold or transferred to other partners in the region, in-

cluding the UAE," he told reporters at a news conference in Kuala Lumpur with Malaysia's foreign minister on Wednesday.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters that U.S. requirements on the use of American-made military equipment "are universal, non-negotiable, and not specific to the UAE."

The UAE has long worked with the US on counterterrorism, but tensions between Washington and Abu Dhabi have risen over UAE's growing cooperation with China

"The U.S. partnership with the UAE is more strategic and more complex than any one weapon sale," Kirby said.

A person familiar with the matter said the U.S. believes the Emiratis' move now is a negotiating tactic to try to move the process along. The person, who was not authorized

to comment and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the UAE letter notifying the U.S. of the suspension was written by a relatively low-level official.

The Wall Street Journal first disclosed the suspension of negotiations.

The UAE has long worked with the U.S. on counterterrorism and allowed the entry of people fleeing Afghanistan during the chaotic U.S. withdrawal earlier this year. But tensions between Washington and Abu Dhabi have risen over the UAE's growing cooperation with China.

Last week, a top Emirati diplomat acknowledged the UAE stopped construction on a Chinese facility at an Abu Dhabi port that America considered a military base. The Journal first revealed the presence of the alleged facility.

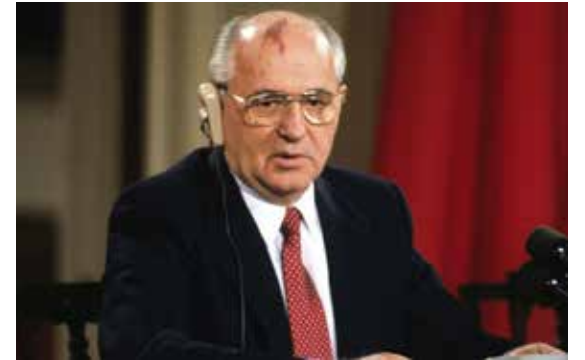
"We took these American concerns into consideration and we stopped the work on the facilities," the

diplomat, Anwar Gargash, told a meeting of the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. "But our position remains the same, that these facilities were not really military facilities."

He described the discussions between the UAE and the U.S. "as quite frank." MDT/AP

this day in history

1984 GORBACHEV VISIT TO BRITAIN A 'SUCCESS'



Mikhail Gorbachev, the man widely tipped as the next leader of the Soviet Union, has spent five hours in "very friendly" talks with the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, according to British Government officials.

But Soviet officials described the talks much less enthusiastically as "business-like".

Topics discussed at Mrs Thatcher's country residence Chequers included ending the arms war and improving communications between the Eastern Bloc and the West.

It came after Mr Gorbachev signalled his desire for reduced tensions when he arrived at Heathrow airport yesterday.

"Opportunities for the prevention of nuclear war exist. These opportunities must be used to the full," he said yesterday.

But talks between Mrs Thatcher and the second-in-command at the Kremlin did not include contentious issues such as human rights in the Communist state.

Official sources remained tight-lipped on the exact exchange of words but did reveal the two delegations did not agree on the causes of world problems but were united on the importance of diffusing them.

The meeting lasted longer than expected and it is understood Mr Gorbachev gave Mrs Thatcher a private message from the country's president Konstantin Chernenko.

It outlined the Soviet Union's commitment to arms talks with America which will be held in three weeks' time.

Today's talks appear to signal a thaw in relations between the West and the Soviet Union.

The visit itself is a significant development in the relationship between Britain and the USSR as Mr Gorbachev is the first Soviet politician of his stature to visit in 28 years.

His eight-day stay in the West is the longest of any statesman from behind the Iron Curtain.

Once the talking was over Mr Gorbachev and his wife Raisa enjoyed sightseeing in London, visiting the library from where Lenin first produced his newspaper Iskra in 1903.

The couple, followed by a large security entourage, also visited the British Library and saw the seat where Karl Marx wrote Das Kapital.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1985 after the death of Chernenko, and became president in 1988.

He tried to reform the USSR by restructuring the economy, known as "perestroika", and encouraging greater openness - "glasnost".

But his reforms did not go far enough - they failed to stimulate the economy and sparked off greater demands from Soviet republics for independence.

In August 1991 Mr Gorbachev was almost ousted in an attempted coup by Communist hardliners. He returned to power but had lost so much prestige that by December he was forced to resign.

The USSR ceased to exist and fractured into single states. Since then, Mr Gorbachev always popular in the West, has become a regular on the celebrity guest speaker and seminar circuit.

He is seen as one of the people responsible for ending the Cold War and won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990.

His wife Raisa died in September 1999 from cancer.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Use these vibes as an opportunity to check in with your body and appreciate your surroundings before the energy picks up again. You'll feel a shift when the moon changes signs into Gemini...

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
Checking in with your finances is also encouraged under this cosmic climate, though you'll need to avoid the urge to spend any extra money you find hiding in your accounts.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
While the morning may feel like it's dragging a bit, dear Gemini, you'll experience a significant shift this afternoon when the moon moves into your sign.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
You should wake up feeling well-rested, though dragging yourself out from the comfort of your bed could be difficult. Your mind will get a pick-me-up this afternoon when the moon changes signs into chatty Gemini.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
Do your best to take care of any professional responsibilities lingering on your to-do list this morning as the moon finishes up its journey through Taurus.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Professional opportunities could manifest for you this afternoon, dear Virgo, as the Gemini moon forms an alliance with the north node, activating the sector of your chart that rules career.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
You'll want to create some space for free time this afternoon, when the moon changes signs into Gemini, putting you in an adventurous mood.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Be sure to send your partner or crush a sweet yet grounded message this morning as the Taurus moon finishes up its journey through your seventh house.

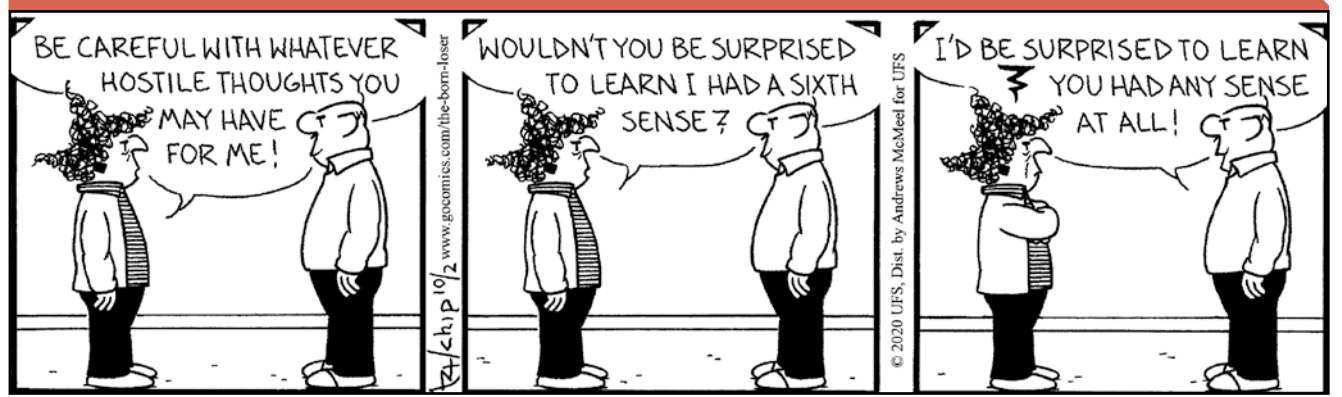
SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Try your best to ground and stay on task this morning as the moon finishes up its journey through Taurus, allowing you to tie up loose ends and handle any business that needs tending to.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Have some fun with your fashion sense today, as the Taurus moon takes its final steps through your fifth house, encouraging you to express yourself aesthetically.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
An opposition between the moon and Mars could lead to feelings of regret if you throw yourself into an activity without proper planning and thinking ahead.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Take some time to focus on domestic organization this evening, dear Pisces, as the Gemini moon shines a light on the sector of your chart that rules the home.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

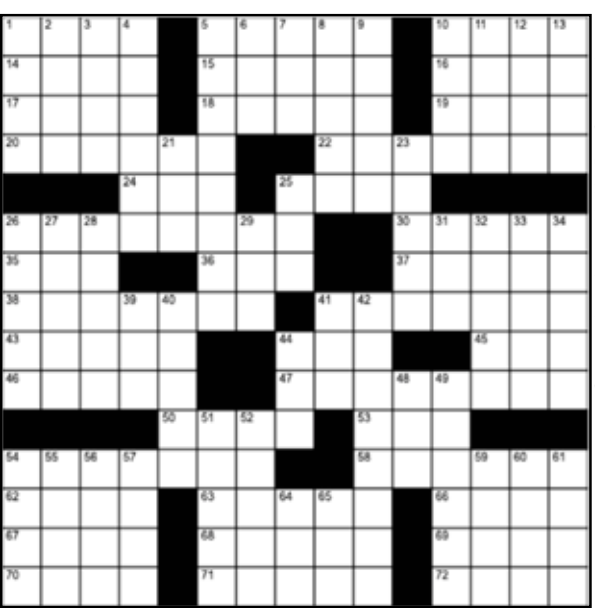
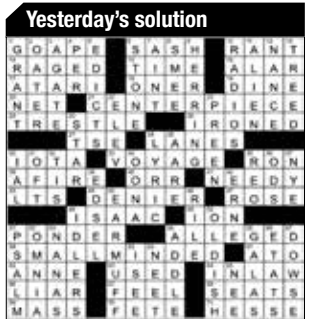
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-4	5	cloudy
Harbin	-12	-6	snow
Tianjin	10	15	rain
Urumqi	9	12	overcast
Xi'an	10	12	rain
Lhasa	-3	6	fine
Chengdu	17	25	cloudy
Chongqing	13	18	rain
Kunming	7	11	rain
Nanjing	21	25	cloudy
Shanghai	10	14	rain
Wuhan	-16	-12	snow
Hangzhou	7	12	rain
Taipei	-13	-4	fine
Guangzhou	17	24	rain
Hong Kong	21	26	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	-1	2	snow
Frankfurt	6	8	fog
Paris	6	9	cloudy
London	6	11	rain
New York	12	15	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Monetary unit of South Africa; 5- Magna ___; 10- Meat substitute; 14- To ___ (perfectly); 15- Fall bloomer; 16- Indigo source; 17- Dress; 18- Software buyers; 19- Emit coherent light; 20- Unfold; 22- Love affair; 24- Actor Beatty; 25- Royal Indian; 26- Cowboy; 30- Garden pest; 35- Consumed, usually food; 36- Decide; 37- New Zealand aboriginal; 38- Staying power; 41- Deserter; 43- Gum; 44- Young dog; 45- Hydrocarbon ending; 46- Fields; 47- He owns the place where backpackers crash in Europe?; 50- Gazed at; 53- Catch some rays; 54- Pertaining to the fingers; 58- Checked; 62- Fighting; 63- One who cries "uncle"?; 66- Gee whiz!; 67- He played Ricky; 68- Eucalyptus eater; 69- Take ___ your leader; 70- CPR experts; 71- Play chords; 72- There oughta be ___!

DOWN: 1- Prego competitor; 2- ___ impasse; 3- Soft ball brand; 4- Expose as being false; 5- Large kettle; 6- Mule's sire; 7- Numbered rd.; 8- ___ firma; 9- Burning desire?; 10- Currency unit in Western Samoa; 11- Son of Judah; 12- Money-related; 13- Peter Fonda title role; 21- "Michael Collins" actor; 23- Heat home; 25- Nonsense; 26- Iraqi port; 27- Absolute; 28- Discontinue; 29- ___-Locka, Florida; 31- Touch lightly; 32- The Hilton, e.g.; 33- Peace goddess; 34- More urgent; 39- Actress Farrow; 40- Atlas feature; 41- Status follower; 42- Against the current; 44- High degree; 48- ___-Bo; 49- Riddle; 51- Jerks; 52- Prufrock's creator; 54- Miami's county; 55- Romantic couple; 56- Essential point; 57- How sweet ___!; 59- Christmas song; 60- It is in Spain; 61- Arab sailing vessel; 64- Canal zone?; 65- Actor Gulager;



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
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AD

AP PHOTO



A merchant examines a jade stone displayed at the Gems Emporium in Naypyitaw, Myanmar

MINING

MYANMAR GEMS INDUSTRY TARGETED IN PUSH FOR SANCTIONS

ELAINE KURTENBACH,
 BANGKOK

HUMAN rights activists are lobbying major jewelers to stop buying gems sourced in Myanmar as a way to exert pressure on Myanmar's military leaders by limiting profits from the country's lucrative mining industry.

A report by the group Global Witness released yesterday outlines how the army is involved in gemstone mining despite a moratorium on new licenses put in place before the military seized power on Feb. 1, ousting the government of Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

It comes as legislation is pending in the U.S. Congress, the Burma Act of 2021, which would prohibit all U.S. imports of

Myanmar gemstones.

"There is no such thing as an ethically sourced Burmese ruby," Clare Hammond, senior Myanmar campaigner at Global Witness, said in a statement. "These gemstones are sold as symbols of human connection and affection, yet the supply chain is steeped in corruption and horrific human rights abuses."

Last week, luxury jeweler Harry Winston announced it would no longer buy gemstones with Burmese origins regardless of when they were imported.

Indian jewelry company Vaibhav Global said in late November it had removed all listings of products including Myanmar gems while it investigates their sourcing. Vaibhav's products are sold widely online, including on

Amazon, Overstock and Walmart's sites.

Tiffany & Co. never resumed using Burmese gems after U.S. sanctions against Myanmar were lifted in 2016 when the country was in the midst of political and economic reforms following decades of military rule. Cartier, Signet Jewelers - the owner of the Zales, Kay Jewelers and Jared chains - and Boodles also have declared they are not sourcing gemstones from Myanmar.

But prized Burmese "pigeon blood" rubies and other beautiful gemstones are easily available on many e-commerce sites, as are costly items of jewelry adorned with gems from strife-torn Mogok and other mining areas.

Global Witness and other groups are urging all retailers of

gems and jewelry to follow suit in halting purchases and sales of such products, describing the jade and gemstone sector as one of the military's most important sources of funding, especially following the takeover 10 months ago that has ignited widespread political turmoil.

Smuggling and illicit sales make it hard to know exactly how big the industry is, but revenues from sales of jade, pearls and gemstones are estimated to run into the billions of dollars.

Myanmar's "natural resource wealth is proving to be a lifeline for the generals," the report says. "For decades the military has consolidated its rule by looting the country's valuable natural resources."

Confronted with widespread

public opposition to their seizure of power, the military has engaged in mass torture, launched attacks on medics and forcibly disappeared thousands of people. Since February, soldiers and police have killed at least 1,300 people and arrested more than 10,800, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which monitors deaths and arrests.

Two state-run Myanmar conglomerates, Myanmar Economic Corp. and Myanma Economic Holdings Ltd., dominate the jade and gems trade through various subsidiaries. Other gem traders are thought to be associates of Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, who led the military takeover.

The U.S. and other governments have imposed sanctions on some military-affiliated companies, army leaders and their families. One of the companies subject to sanctions is Myanma Gems Enterprise, which is in charge of licenses and permits for mining gems and jade and collects revenues from their sale.

The Global Witness report, which analyzed official data, estimates that the gemstone industry alone generated revenues of \$346 million to \$415 million when it was in full operation, though much of the gems trade is conducted through illicit channels.

Suu Kyi's government suspended renewing or granting new licenses in 2016 and the last existing license expired in 2020. So mining activity now is unauthorized, or at least not based on publicly disclosed licensing.

Much of the mining is in Mogok township, where most of Myanmar's rubies, sapphires and other gems are unearthed. With big operators not in business, mining is mostly done by hand under perilous conditions, the report said.

Many gemstones are processed in Thailand and by the time they are imported their origin has become unclear, it said. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

Jiang Nan by Jereme Leung restaurant to feature east coast Chinese cuisine



The Venetian Macao's Jiang Nan by Jereme Leung restaurant, in partnership with renowned celebrity master chef Jereme Leung, features the best of

Jiangnan cuisine, showcasing the authentic flavours of Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang.

Born in Hong Kong, Chef Jereme honed his craft in

Singapore, and has been active on the Chinese culinary scene ever since. Chef Jereme was a judge on the Chinese edition of MasterChef for several years, and appeared in the popular food documentary 'A Bite of China'. While celebrating the essence of traditional Chinese gastronomy, Chef Jereme has made bold refinements that give it a modern and global dimension.

"Through the use of fresh, high-quality ingredients and contemporary cooking techniques, we will present an elevated dining experience. An evolving seasonal menu means there will always be new and surprising additions to delight customers," commented the Chef.

MGM attains Mirror Post Hong Kong accolade



MGM has received the Outstanding Corporate Social Responsibility Award at the 9th Outstanding Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Award Ceremony organized

by Mirror Post of Hong Kong. This is the Company's fourth CSR accolade received from the organizer.

Kenneth Feng, president, chief strategic and financial

officer of MGM said, "It is a huge honor for MGM to attain this regional CSR accolade once again, which exemplifies our endeavors and contributions towards our local community, our team members and all the way to environment protection are widely recognized by different sectors."

The 9th Outstanding CSR Award Ceremony took place in Hong Kong earlier this month.

The award aims to promote the traditional good virtues of Chinese enterprises and corporate social responsibilities, with the gold of achieving a win-win sustainable development for both enterprises and the society.



Amnesty flags Qatar rights abuses with French soccer body

HUMAN rights activists in France have urged the country's soccer officials to pay attention to rights violations of migrant workers in Qatar a year before the World Cup.

Amnesty International activists unveiled a giant banner yesterday in central Paris on the French soccer federation's building. "Thousands have died in Qatar and the soccer federation has not said a word," the banner reads. Lola Schulmann, an advocacy officer with Amnesty in Paris, said the group has

repeatedly asked soccer officials for a meeting to discuss the issue of human rights violations of migrant laborers who have worked in Qatar to build World Cup stadiums and other infrastructure for the tournament, which starts in November 2022. "Unfortunately, we have

no response from the federation," Schulmann said.

Schulmann said there are 2 million migrant workers in Qatar and "every day they see their rights violated." She added that the banner "is our message to the national federation that we care about their rights."

Qatar has refused criticism of its labor laws and practices and World Cup organizers have repeatedly said they have been unfairly scrutinized despite overhauling their legislation.

In a report released last month, Amnesty said Qatar has not delivered on the promise it made to the International Labor Organization in 2017 to end the migrant workers' abuse and exploitation. Workers across the country are still "left at the mercy of unscrupulous employers, facing wage theft, unsafe working conditions," the report said.

Workers are still prohibited from forming unions to collectively fight for their rights while justice evades them and compensation for abuse remains scarce, allowing employers to exploit their workforce with impunity, Amnesty said in its latest report on the World Cup in the Gulf country. **MDT/AP**



BARCLAYS TO INVEST USD40M IN ENGLISH WOMEN'S SOCCER AS SPONSOR

BARCLAYS is doubling its investment in English women's football as part of its sponsorship of the top two divisions.

younger girls over the next three years, compared with 15 million pounds under the first deal with the FA from 2019.

The bank has extended a deal through 2025 to be the title sponsor of the Football Association-run Women's Super League and it will also now be linked to the second-tier Championship.

"Barclays have played a crucial role in the growth of women's and girls' football," Kelly Simmons, the FA's director of women's professional game, said in a statement. "So it is excellent news that they are committing to a new record investment in the women's and girls' pyramid until 2025." **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

PEAK TRAVEL PERIOD CALLS FOR CIRCUMSPECTION

With 51 locally transmitted novel coronavirus infections reported on Monday, among which 44 were in Zhejiang province, there is no doubt that the country is still in the long tail of the resurgence of the virus that started about two weeks after the National Day holiday in October.

Those were all the Delta strain of the virus. More worrying, since it comes when the peak travel period is just around the corner, two overseas returnees were found to be infected with the highly transmissible Omicron variant; one in Tianjin on Thursday last week and one in Guangzhou on Monday. That should warn the nation that the new enemy is finally at the gate, about half a month after it was identified by the World Health Organization.

Since the uptick in trips for the New Year holiday will segue into the Spring Festival travel season, which comes early this year on Jan 31, and that overlaps with the Beijing Winter Olympic Games that begins on Feb 4 and closes on the 20th, the country has every reason to be on the highest alert against another wave of the virus, which has not yet exhausted its ability to prove its vitality.

Some are urging the authorities to repeat the cautionary call of last year for people to refrain from traveling and celebrate the Spring Festival where they are. That would certainly reduce the chances of infection. But heeding the urging of the government, many of those working far from their homes, who number about 300 million, have not returned home for a Spring Festival family reunion for two years in a row.

Since the latest clusters of infections are concentrated in a handful of places, such as the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, and Zhejiang, Heilongjiang and Yunnan provinces, and the transmission chains have largely been cut thanks to efficient and prompt responses, as long as the people follow the epidemic protocols and the local authorities fulfill their duties, people wishing to travel to and from low-risk regions should be allowed to do so, unless the situation takes a turn for the worse.

With about 2.6 billion doses of vaccines having been administered nationwide as of Monday, normalizing the Spring Festival holiday will justify the nation's confidence in the country's scientific epidemic prevention and control model which is based on efficient management and implementation, the application of big data and people's cooperation.

The purpose of epidemic prevention and control measures is to enable people to safely go about their normal lives.

In other words, since about 80 percent of the population will have been vaccinated by the end of this year, which will be close to the 83 percent required for herd immunity as experts advise, the country should make all-out efforts to create the necessary conditions so that people can enjoy family reunions during Spring Festival.

PHILIPPINES DETECTS COUNTRY'S 1ST OMICRON CASES

The Philippines said yesterday it has detected its first cases of the omicron strain in two travelers who arrived recently from Japan and Nigeria.

The Department of Health said the omicron variant was detected in a Filipino man, who flew back home from Japan on a Philippine Airlines flight on Dec. 1. The second case was detected in a Nigerian national, who arrived in Manila from his country via Oman Air on Nov. 30.

Both travelers tested positive for the coronavirus after arrival and the results of additional tests showed that they were infected

by the omicron strain, the department said.

The two are confined in a government-run isolation facility without any symptoms, the health department said, adding it was checking whether any of their fellow passengers in their flights to the Philippines had been infected too.

"We continue to remind the public not to let their guard down, to religiously observe minimum public health standards and call upon all those unvaccinated to get their jabs as soon as possible," presidential spokesman Karlo Nograles told a televised news conference.

THE BUZZ

AP PHOTO



AP PHOTO



EU The head of the European Union's executive commission warned Russia on that the bloc has a battery of additional sanctions ready if Moscow decides to invade neighboring Ukraine. On the eve of an EU summit on the issue, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that beyond scaling up and expanding existing sanctions, the EU can adopt "unprecedented measures with serious consequences for Russia."

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping held a video call yesterday to discuss bilateral relations and international affairs, a summit that comes amid heightened tensions between Moscow and the West over a Russian troop buildup near Ukraine's border. In their opening remarks, Putin and Xi hailed relations between Russia and China, with the Russian leader declaring them "a proper example of interstate cooperation in the 21st century."

Germany Police carried out raids yesterday in an investigation of alleged threats to kill a state governor and others by opponents of coronavirus restrictions and vaccinations. They said they found weapons including crossbows, but it wasn't clear whether they were usable. Five properties in Dresden and one in the nearby town of Heidenau were searched in an investigation of suspected preparations for a serious act of violence, police said on Twitter.

AP PHOTO



Haiti With fuel in short supply all across Haiti, some neighbors in the northern city of Cap-Haitien saw the crash of a tanker truck as a chance to scoop up valuable spilled gasoline. But then the truck exploded, unleashing a fireball that swept across people and homes, and local officials say at least 75 people died. Early reports indicate that the tanker was trying to avoid an oncoming motorcycle when it veered and flipped.

US COVID DEATH TOLL HITS 800,000, A YEAR INTO VACCINE DRIVE

THE U.S. death toll from COVID-19 topped 800,000 yesterday [Macau time], a once-unimaginable figure seen as doubly tragic, given that more than 200,000 of those lives were lost after the vaccine became available practically for the asking last spring.

The number of deaths, as compiled by Johns Hopkins University, is about equal to the population of Atlanta and St. Louis combined, or Minneapolis and Cleveland put together. It is roughly equivalent to how many Americans die each year from heart disease or stroke.

The United States has the highest reported toll of any country. The U.S. accounts for approximately 4% of the world's population but about 15% of the 5.3 million known deaths from the coronavirus since the outbreak began in China two years ago.

The true death toll in the U.S. and around the world is believed to be significantly higher because of cases that were overlooked or concealed.

A closely watched forecasting model from the University of Washington

projects a total of over 880,000 reported deaths in the U.S. by March 1.

President Joe Biden noted what he called a "tragic milestone." He again called on unvaccinated Americans to get shots for themselves and their children, and urged the vaccinated to get booster shots.

"I urge all Americans: do your patriotic duty to keep our country safe, to protect yourself and those around you, and to honor the memory of all those we have lost," Biden said. "Now is the time."

Health experts lament that many of the deaths in the United States were especially heartbreaking because they were preventable by way of the vaccine, which became available in mid-December a year ago and was thrown open to all adults by mid-April of this year.

About 200 million Americans are fully vaccinated, or just over 60% of the population. That is well short of what scientists say is needed to keep the virus in check.

"Almost all the people dying are now dying preventable deaths," said Dr. Chris Beyrer, an epi-

demiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "And that's because they're not immunized. And you know that, God, it's a terrible tragedy."

When the vaccine was first rolled out, the country's death toll stood at about 300,000. It hit 600,000 in mid-June and 700,000 on Oct. 1.

The U.S. crossed the latest threshold with cases and hospitalizations on the rise again in a spike driven by the highly contagious delta variant, which arrived in the first half of 2021 and now accounts for practically all infections. Now the omicron variant is gaining a foothold in the country, though scientists are not sure how dangerous it is.

Beyrer recalled that in March or April 2020, one of the worst-case scenarios projected upwards of 240,000 American deaths.

"And I saw that number, and I thought that is incredible — 240,000 American deaths?" he said. "And we're now past three times that number." He added: "And I think it's fair to say that we're still not out of the woods." **MDT/AP**