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MACAU'S PLAN TO WELCOME CHINESE OLYMPIC MEDALISTS REMAINS IN PLACE FOR THE TIME BEING, PUBLIC HEALTH DOCTOR LEONG IEK HOU SAID P4

FURTHER AMENDMENTS TO ELECTORAL SYSTEM PROPOSED IN SECOND FIVE-YEAR PLAN P4

EXTRA: STEVEN SPIELBERG'S ROUSING 'WEST SIDE STORY' REVIVAL P14



China Rescuers yesterday were trying to reach 21 people trapped by a flood because of illegal mining for coal in northern China, authorities said. The accident happened about 11 p.m. Wednesday in Xiaoyi city in Shanxi province, a major coal-producing region southwest of Beijing. Water was being pumped out of the mine, and the water level was falling, the Xiaoyi government said in an update on social media.



US The Navy said it rescued five Iranians suspected of smuggling drugs after they apparently set fire to their stash on board a traditional sailing vessel off the coast of Oman. The Navy released aerial surveillance footage showing the traditional ship, known as a dhow, as it sailed in the Gulf of Oman. Those on board pour a liquid, likely an accelerant, over the cargo hold as the Navy approaches. Smoke then pours from the vessel after those on board apparently set the fire, with an explosion rocking the ship.

El Salvador's congress voted to strip a politician accused of making a deal with the country's powerful street gangs of the legislative immunity that had prevented his prosecution. Sixty-six of the Legislative Assembly's 84 lawmakers voted to support the attorney general's petition to open Norman Quijano to prosecution. Twelve lawmakers from his conservative party left the chamber for the vote.

More on backpage

WORKING NUMBERS

Gov't budget for 2022 deemed unrealistic by lawmakers, economists P2



JUNKET CRISIS
MORE WORKERS FROM SUNCITY CALL FOR HELP, TALLY RISES TO 318

P2

ANTHONY LAM



SIN FONG
LEGAL ACTION TO BE TAKEN ON INDIVIDUAL BASIS

P3



Ella Lei

Ho Ion Sang

Leong Sun lok

Ngan Iek Hang

Pereira Coutinho

Ron Lam

Song Pek Kei

CLOSURE OF VIP ROOMS, JUNKET OPERATORS, DOMINATE AL PLENARY

RENATO MARQUES

THE cessation of gaming promoter Suncity Group's operations – and the consequent loss of a large number of its employees' jobs – dominated lawmakers' attention in yesterday's plenary session at the Legislative Assembly (AL).

Attending the AL to present and debate the Budget Law 2022 bill, the Secretary for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong was grilled by several lawmakers on the topic. Debate focused on the government's forecast of MOP130 billion of gross gaming revenue (GGR) for 2022.

Lawmakers Leong Sun lok, Ella Lei, José Pereira Coutinho, and Ron Lam were some of the most active critics of the government. They considered the figure put forward too optimistic, particularly given the instability created in the VIP gaming sector by the closure of its largest operator and the consequent suspension of cooperation between several gaming operators and junkets in the VIP market.

Along with the cessation of operations and resultant loss of all revenue generated by junkets, the loss of thousands of jobs is likely to create further problems for the government – especially the potential increase in people seeking income support.

"I suspect that MOP130 billion of GGR for next year might be too optimistic," said Leong, noting the closure of the VIP rooms and

the potential impact on gaming revenue.

Ella Lei remarked that lawmakers are very concerned about this matter because of the potential consequences for the market.

"Just one [junket] company [can trigger the unemployment] of over 1,000 workers. If more will close, how [can the government] handle this?" Ella Lei asked.

Pereira Coutinho followed Leong and Lei's line of questioning, asking the government to downgrade its GGR projections.

"We need to be more realistic and less optimistic regarding the gaming results for next year," said Coutinho.

"The government explains this [figure] with an increase of visitation from tourists but we don't see this happening. What we see is that those that are currently coming cannot even support the SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) in the Food and Beverage sector [alone], [a sector seeing] more [closures] every day and more people relocating out of Macau. I think saying that it is prudent to forecast [the GGR] in MOP130 billion is an exaggeration," Pereira Coutinho said. He called on the government to focus on reducing government expenditure instead.

"The Light Rapid Transit (LRT) is stopping for six months. I think that it should stop for far longer than six months," Coutinho said, as an example. "If we cannot reach that amount [of GGR] we will

be into trouble, and we will end up needing to use the reserves again."

Coutinho called on the Secretary to provide assurances to lawmakers that borders will reopen, especially to Hong Kong, and that more visitors will come from both the neighboring region and the mainland – preferably in tour groups.

Secretary Lei dodged the question, saying only that local authorities are constantly working together with neighboring authorities to ease border restrictions and increase visitation "as soon as possible."

In his reply, Lei Wai Nong stated that VIP rooms are part of the casinos and as such are under the purview of the concessionaires, implying that the government will undertake these responsibilities.

In the period before the agenda, a total of seven lawmakers spoke. Apart from the four already mentioned, Ngan Iek Hang, Ho Ion Sang, Song Pek Kei delivered inquiries to the government, calling for swift action on the junkets and their dismissed employees. They claimed that if the government does not address this issue and identify an immediate solution, much economic and social damage will be done as a result of the immediate loss of thousands of jobs.

Pereira Coutinho took the claim even further, calling on the government to "force" gaming concessionaires to reinstate the workers within their teams.

Other lawmakers, including Leong and Ngan, noted these workers are mostly young people with minimal skills and academic qualifications, a situation which creates significant challenges in finding other jobs compatible with their lifestyles.

SEPARATE REGIME FOR WEALTH PARTAKING SCHEME

Asked by lawmaker Ron Lam about government measures to financially support the community, the Secretary noted that the wealth partaking scheme, also known as annual cash handouts, may be transformed into a separate program with its own rules.

"For now, the [wealth partaking] scheme is a policy. We can think about turning it into a regime. But we need to take into account the residents abroad that cannot return to Macau at the

moment, due to the pandemic. We can discuss this [topic] if there is consensus, but [if we do this] it needs to be within a regime to be enforced progressively for a period of maybe five to 10 years," Lei said.

Asked by Lam about the reinstatement of the government's investment of MOP7,000 per year into the Central Provident Fund, Lei repeated the response given on previous occasions. That is, the amount invested is determined by a government account surplus. In the situation of a budget deficit, as the government has had since 2020, this would be impossible, as it would breach the law.

In response, lawmaker Lam requested the president of the AL to hold a separate vote for number 1 of Article 5 of the bill which relates to the topic, so he could express his objection to the cessation of investments next year.

Despite fears that the 2022 budget would need to be amended, the bill was passed on its final reading with votes in favor from all lawmakers present.

318 SUNCITY WORKERS CALLING ON DSAL FOR HELP

THE number of former employees of the gaming promoter company Suncity Group requesting help from the government regarding their dismissal is now 318, the Secretary for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong reported yesterday at the Legislative Assembly. In response to lawmakers' questions on the matter, Lei updated the figure, saying: "As of today [yesterday], 318 workers [have] requested help from the Labour

Affairs Bureau (DSAL). The bureau is already following up on their cases and is trying to find ways to re-employ these workers. [These] include several job posts, such as drivers, cashiers, croupiers, and other professions," Lei said. In the session, lawmakers noted that other staff members not directly related to gaming activities, such as marketing and public relations, are also requesting assistance.

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ANTHONY LAM

SIN FONG INAUGURATION

Legal action to be taken on individual basis

RESIDENTS of the reconstructed Sin Fong Garden Building have failed to come to a collective decision regarding legal action against the original developer, vice president of the building's residents' association Chan Un Cheong said yesterday.

After nine years of various procedures, debates and arguments, the building's residents marked the completion of the project with a ceremony yesterday.

As well as the original building's developer, it is understood that there are other potential defendants, including the developer of the planned building adjacent to Sin Fong, originally named SOHO Residence.

After the collapse of Sin Fong, billboards announcing SOHO Residence were removed from the construction site

Speaking on the sidelines of the ceremony, Chan said that the association has not come to a consensus as to whether legal action should be taken against the potential defendants. It will be at each individual owner's discretion if they sue the stakeholders.

Former president of the association Wong Man Sang said in response to this that, though he is very happy that the reconstruction is finally complete, he

ANTHONY LAM



will certainly sue whoever was responsible for the collapse of the original structure.

He said the lawsuit is necessary to obtain financial compensation for what happened, and to get justice for all apartment owners in the building.

Wong revealed that the reconstruction costs amounted to about HKD1,400 per square foot. Most of the owners needed loans to pay for it, although some are wealthy enough to meet the cost up front.

Another owner, surnamed Ho, said that she wouldn't mull over

it too much, and that the most important thing is moving back into the building. There are other owners who worry that they may eventually need to sell their rebuilt apartments, as they lack funds to pay for mortgages taken during reconstruction.

The reconstruction was funded by owners' savings or mortgages issued by the Bank of China, Macau Branch.

A resident of the original Sin Fong Garden Building told the Times that she had been eagerly anticipating the completion of the reconstruction. "The wait has been so long," she said, adding that she had become a mother during these nine years.

She believes some owners or residents will not move back into Sin Fong. "After all, it has been nine years. Many of them might have made new friends in their new neighborhood already," she explained.

Most owners, including the head of the association, hope that ownership registration can be completed as soon as possible to put an end to the anxiety that has plagued them for nine years.

According to Chan, ownership registration will only be conducted after the government – specifically the Housing Bureau and the Land, Public Works and Transport Bureau – finishes the site checks and issues a certificate of acceptance.

Representatives from the residents' association, the Macau Social Enterprise Ltd., the builder, and other organizations were present at the ceremony. Some residents who are anticipating a return to their old-but-renewed residences also attended the event.

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LIFESTYLE

FURTHER AMENDMENTS TO ELECTORAL SYSTEM PROPOSED IN SECOND FIVE-YEAR PLAN

ANTHONY LAM

IN the second Five-year Plan published by the government yesterday, a section was dedicated to further amendments to the electoral system, including but not limited to the conditions of oath taking.

This Five-year Plan covers the years from 2021 to 2025.

The plan stated that the government will further change the election system to ensure that "Macau is governed by patriots".

"The Special Administrative Region Government resolutely safeguards the Central People's Government's rights of decision to [Macau's] political system, which includes the election system, and implements the foundational principle of 'Patriots governing Macau,'" it stated.

To achieve this, the government said it will systemize "the positive and negative lists of pledging allegiance, [and] the relevant mechanism for qualification review and regulate occupational activities of legislators, so as to guarantee the rights of governance of Macau are firmly held by patriots."

It also said that it would "nur-

ture a healthy election culture and continuously improve the quality of democratic election." Moreover, it will "lawfully complete various elections and ensure their fair, just, open and clean implementation."

The government admits that public opinion is not consulted very effectively and that the advisory bodies are inefficient. It stated that it would therefore improve the system for the consultation of public opinion, along with reviewing the functions and structures of the many advisory bodies. It added that it would "strengthen public participation" in these advisory bodies.

The government stressed that it would nonetheless strengthen the roles of "patriotic associations."

Years ago, when the government restructured the then Civic and Municipal Affairs Bureau (IACM), it declined to add election of advisory members to the charter of the new Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM). The public expressed concerns at the time that the advisory members of the IAM would not speak in the public interest, subverting the purpose of the advisory board.



ANTHONY LAM

Despite its stated aims, the government has not detailed how it will achieve these goals.

Further, according to the plan, the city will have consolidated its position as a global tourism and recreational centre, and expanded its position as a service platform for business and trade cooperation between the Chinese mainland and Portuguese-speaking countries. By

2025, it will also steadily advance the construction of a base for exchange and cooperation with Chinese culture as the mainstream, co-existing with multiple cultures.

The SAR aims to make substantial progress in the areas of: appropriate economic diversification and better governance; greater cultural prosperity; continuous improvement of people's

livelihood; better integration into the country's overall development; and the further improvement of the legal system and enforcement mechanism on safeguarding national security.

The SAR government publicly solicited opinions on the plan from mid-September to November, collecting over 3,000 opinions and adopting those with wide public support.

GOV'T SIGNS COOPERATION WITH NHC FOR ISLANDS HOSPITAL

The SAR government has signed a memorandum of cooperation with the mainland National Health Commission (NHC) for the management of the Islands District Medical Complex project. Under the recommendation of the National Health Commission, the SAR Government will collaborate with Peking Union Medical College Hospital to operate and provide services in the Islands Health Care Complex. According to a statement, "the purpose of the memorandum is to promote the implementation of the Islands District Medical Complex project. The government of the Macau SAR will promote special legislation in accordance with the local legal system."

IPIIM ORGANIZES BUSINESS TRIP TO HENGQIN

The Macau Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIIM) recently organized a business delegation of 30 members of the Macau convention and exhibition sector to visit the In-depth Cooperation Zone between Guangdong and Macau in Hengqin. During their stay in Hengqin, visits were made to commercial hotels, exhibition grounds, annual meeting facilities and other convention and exhibition facilities. IPIIM said that it also allowed the delegation to take in the planning and services of the tourist areas in the Cooperation Zone in order to bolster exchange and cooperation in the fields of conventions, exhibitions and trade between the two locales.

Light still green for visit by Chinese Olympic medalists

ANTHONY LAM

MACAU'S plan to welcome Chinese Olympic medalists remains in place for the time being, public health doctor Leong Iek Hou, coordinator at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said yesterday.

The comment was made at the weekly health press briefing, when she was asked if the visit of the medalists will be affected, postponed or canceled, given that the epidemic condition is intensifying in mainland China.

Leong said that the medalists are now under quarantine in the mainland, which began after their visit to Hong Kong. They will take a Covid-19 nucleic acid test (NAT) to determine if they are fit for travel nearer the date.

"I believe the visit will continue as planned," Leong said.

In regards to the long-anticipated border normalization between Macau and Hong Kong, the public health doctor said that no update was



SHINOSUKE ANDO

available. She reiterated that the matter is still under discussion between the Special Administrative Regions and the mainland.

There are currently no new factors under consideration, implying that the Omicron variant is not yet a factor in discussions between the two jurisdictions.

Although Health Bureau (SSM) officials have noted that footprint registration is not mandatory, the SSM is expanding the coverage of the registration QR code to social services facilities.

Currently, such QR codes are posted at public service offices, the SSM's healthcare facilities and public buses. Previously, both Leong and Director Alvis Lo of the SSM have stated that code scanning would be voluntary, though they encouraged the public to use the app.

At the press briefing, Leong disclosed that the SSM is striving to expand coverage of the code to catering establishments, healthcare facilities and entertainment venues.

A reader reported to the Times yesterday that a bus dri-

ver told a passenger who paid for the ride in cash to scan the footprint registration QR code on the bus to register the trip.

Regarding the price of Macau NATs, Leong said that, due to higher salary costs in Macau, there is no room for lower prices. Zhuhai has once again lowered the price of NATs in the city.

SSM SWITCHES TO 'DYNAMIC CASE CLEARING'

Given that many have expressed disagreement with the "zero-tolerance" policy in Covid-19 control, Leong was asked whether there would be changes to the city's strategy.

In response, the public health doctor said in compliance with the mainland's "dynamic case clearing" tactic, the city's authorities will work to contain any new cases within a short period of time.

"The core [tenet] of the tactic is early identification," Leong said.

She added that the public should accept the possibility of new cases and of community infections from imported cases. She admitted that the vaccine is not currently 100% effective because the virus is becoming increasingly resistant.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



Sands China growing by leaps and bounds in both footprint and commitment

OPERATING in the industry for nearly two decades, Sands China Ltd. has grown by leaps and bounds. The company upholds an unwavering belief in committing the best to its team members and guests, recognizing this belief as one of the company's most important values.

Based in Macau with a strong team of more than 26,000, the company has always instilled in its employees a strong sense of organizational commitment.

With the launch and opening of Sands Macao in 2004, the company linked itself to the Macau community, for both the good and bad times.

Without a doubt, the integrated resort developer has always believed in investing in Macau and its community – bringing Venice, Paris, and then London to Macau.

Sands China has pledged and invested over USD15 billion over the past nearly 20 years, an investment that represents the company's commitment to the SAR and the local community, helping transform Macau into what it is today. Part of that investment and transformation has been in the development of local talent and local enterprises. Currently, 91% of the integrated resort developer's managers are local residents and in

2020, 89% of Sands China's total procurement spend went to local enterprises.

Sands China is confident in Macau's future and remains committed to long-term investment in non-gaming amenities, promoting economic diversification and boosting Macau's evolution into Asia's leading leisure and business tourism destination.

With the government's aim of positioning and developing Macau into a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure, Sands China continues to offer the largest retail space in the market, innovative cuisine and new concept restaurants, the best themed accommodation for all walks of life and a full team of experienced talent.

The company also has 6 entertainment venues that have catered to some 4.6 million audience members.

The scale of Sands China's existing and ongoing investments enables the international firm to play its part in supporting the local economy in Macau, including its support of local employment, the community, and the city's small and medium-sized businesses.

Through the company's wide array of programmes – such as its Sands Cares Ambassador programme for volunteerism, which currently counts over 3,300 team members – Sands China hopes

that it will contribute to the overall well-being of society and play its part in promoting social harmony.

PROFESSIONALISM EDUCATION EFFORTS

Sands China aims to bolster the professionalism of its team members through various initiatives, including Greater Bay Area visits, professional literacy training courses, professional lectures, and various professional exchange activities.

The company recently hosted a special screening of the film "The Battle at Lake Changjin" for its team members at Cinema Alegria. It is the fourth film screening Sands China has hosted for its team members, as part of the company's ongoing efforts to build their professionalism and deepen their understanding of national development and the mainland.

Dr. Wilfred Wong, president of Sands China Ltd., said: "Professionalism education remains an important priority for Sands China. We hope that through this screening of 'The Battle at Lake Changjin,' our team members can continue to gain deeper understandings of Chinese history and culture. And as our national identity strengthens through connections to our past, like with this film, we hope team members will

continue to feel inspired to make contributions to the advancement and development of the nation."

COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION

Sands China made its 15th consecutive donation of scholarship and fellowship money to several Macau tertiary institutions this year, an annual initiative that is part of the company's ongoing support of higher education in Macau.

Sands China's total donation amount for tertiary scholarships and fellowships in Macau has reached MOP 12.4 million, benefiting almost 1,500 students since 2006.

COMMITMENT TO SPORTS DEVELOPMENT

Since 2007, Sands China has brought a number of large-scale international sports events to Macau, including boxing and golf competitions, among others, as part of the company's contribution to sports development.

Early this year, the city's first-ever 10K run, the "2021 Sands China Macao International 10K," was title sponsored by Sands China, who invested MOP8 million in the event.

It was the company's goal to both encourage regular exercise in Macau while also boosting tourism and the economy during the

COVID-19 pandemic as the region continues making strides in its pandemic recovery.

This year, Sands China was also the title sponsor of Sands China Macau GT Cup, which welcomed race car drivers from around the world to compete in the city's signature auto racing event, the Macau Grand Prix.

The sponsorship is part of the company's continuous support of promoting the Tourism+ initiative.

COMMITMENT TO BOLSTERING ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Sands China hosted the largest sale event in Macau at over 560 booths during the three-day 2021 Sands Shopping Carnival. It provided a free business platform for local SMEs and Sands retailers amid the pandemic period, while providing a fun weekend destination and summer hotspot for local residents and tourists.

The company is very pleased to support the economic revival initiative of the Macau SAR government with the carnival and has pledged to remain dedicated to nurturing the development of local SMEs. This free platform provides more business opportunities, and with the combination of local and international brands, creates an effective synergy that benefits all.



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The Venetian Macao



2008 AUG
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Sands Cotai Central



2016 SEP
The Parisian Macao



2020 OCT
Grand Suites at Four Seasons



2021 FEB
The Londoner Macao – Phase 1

MACAU EXPANDS SATELLITE POSITIONING SYSTEM

To facilitate the application of satellite positioning technology in Macau, Cartography and Cadastre Bureau (DSCC) has completed the enhancement of the "Macao Satellite Positioning Reference Station Service (MoSRef)". It now supports the BeiDou Navigation Satellite signals, and provides more efficient highly-accurate positioning services for professional users in the fields of surveying and mapping, geographic information, and many others. DSCC said it continues to improve fundamental surveying and mapping services, and has established four continuously operating satellite positioning reference stations.

UM ESTABLISHES QUALITY STANDARDS FOR CHINESE MEDICINE

Research teams at the University of Macau (UM) have made progress in pushing forward the standardization and international standing of Chinese medicine. This work includes forging business partnerships, nurturing talent, and creating platforms for international cooperation, which will support the moderate diversification of Macau's economy, the university said in a statement. The teams led by Professor Wang Yitao and Professor Li Shaoping have also established quality standards for a dozen Chinese medicinal plants, to be published in authoritative periodicals, in order to support the health industry in Macau and other parts of the Greater Bay Area.

DSEDJ EXPECTS 5,300 NEW KINDERGARTEN ENROLLEES IN 2022

STAFF REPORTER

THE Central Registration System for first-time kindergarten students for the academic year 2022-23 will be open from January 6 to 20. The Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) aims to optimize the school enrolment process, easing parents' uncertainty by allowing them to apply and get results before the start of the academic year.

Parents can apply either online using the Central Registration System or in person at DSEDJ counters across three locations, the DSEJ's Kindergarten and Primary Education Division chief Ng Mei Kei said during the discussion of the system in a press conference yesterday.

The bureau expects that the number of students enrolling for the first time will exceed 5,300, however the number of vacancies at local



kindergartens is sufficient to meet the demand.

The Central Registration System will not have a registration order, as the schools have no limit on the number of registrations or interviews.

The Central Registration System allows parents and guardians to apply to up to six different schools. To complete the applications, they must enter the child's personal data as instructed and submit a

passport style photograph.

Schools will then release the dates and times of the interviews, with DSEDJ noting that the process will receive special attention so that admission interview schedules do not clash with each other. The interviews will be held between February 26 and March 27.

On April 8, the schools will release their lists of admitted students concurrently. Parents have until April 10 to confirm their acceptance of the spot offered through the DSEJ website.

Schools will also release the list of the admitted students that were initially waitlisted on April 11. This will begin the process's final stage, in which parents must confirm the student's registration in person between April 12 and 14.

Enrolment for students to fill any remaining vacancies will open from April 19. This phase is also open to students who were not admitted in any of the schools they applied for or students who missed the initial registration period. In these cases, parents should approach the schools directly to complete the registration process.

AD

Let's act in compliance with the "Courtesy Living Charter" Bear responsibilities

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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



POSITIVELY IMPACTING LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Melco continues to mobilize volunteers for Simple Acts of Kindness

MELCO Resorts & Entertainment prioritizes the needs of its local communities and is committed to making a positive impact. The company works hand in hand with community partners to support social wellbeing through unique and differentiated CSR programs.

In 2020, Melco Chairman & CEO Mr. Lawrence Ho deployed the company's workforce en masse to support the local community during work hours, encouraging all colleagues to care for the community through Simple Acts of Kindness.

Within the first three months, approximately 7,000 Melco volunteer participants were mobilized for Simple Acts of Kindness, contacting over 1,600 organizations, participating in more than 530 activities and supporting more than 100 local NGO community partners and Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Beneficiaries included the elderly, single families, long-term patients, children and other local groups in need.

Melco's proactive and innovative CSR initiatives, as highlighted by its continued Simple Acts of Kindness initiative, has been recognized by 2020 Industry Community Awards as winner of the 'Community Award - Asia'. Earlier this month, the company was named 'Outstanding Corporate for Volunteerism' for the third con-



secutive year by Association of Volunteers Social Service Macao.

1,000-STRONG VOLUNTEER ELDERLY VISIT

In cooperation with Centro de Servicos de Assistencia "Pang On Tung" de Macau, Melco recently mobilized a 1,000-strong volunteer team to visit approximately 550 elderly households in Macau between November 29 to December 13.

Melco initiated the long-term collaboration with Pang On Tung to have volunteers visit elderly households and assist with greeting calls from the NGO's headquarters. Since May 2020, nearly 2,800 Melco volunteer participants have been deployed, dedicating nearly 6,800 hours to helping Pang On Tung elderly. Often remaining indoors due to pandemic-related safety measures, the elderly beneficiaries have been excited to meet and chat with Melco's volunteers who have been bringing gift

bags and necessity kits together with warm seasonal greetings.

WARMING THE COMMUNITY

In late November, nearly 1,000 Melco volunteers joined hands in a scarf knitting project to bring extra warmth to the local community for Christmas. After dedicating more than 8,000 intensive work hours to the project over the course of two weeks, Melco volunteers produced a total of 1,000 hand-knitted scarves. The scarves, together with additional festive gifts, were delivered to 10 local organizations including Concordia School for Special Education, Lar da Nossa Senhora da Misericórdia, Macau Autism Association, Women's General Association of Macau, Cheng Chong Elderly Building, Macao Center for the Blind, Sheng Kung Hui 'Star of Hope' Youth Home, St. Francis Homes for the Elderly and Macau Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM) Ka Ao Nursery Home.

Among the participating volunteers were quite a few complete beginners. Tim Ho, Executive Housekeeper at Altira Macau was one of them, he said, "This was my first ever knitting experience. It was really confusing to start with – and I made so many mistakes. But after the first night, I finally got the hang of things. I hope that the elderly recipients of the scarves can feel my warm season's blessings despite my amateur knitting!"

GREEN INITIATIVES

Promoting sustainability also forms part of Melco's Simple Acts of Kindness initiative. Recently, Melco volunteers cooperated with the Municipal Affairs Bureau to shoulder the task of cleaning local hiking trails and beach barbecue areas, working together to protect the environment and giving back to the community. A total of 130 volunteers took part in four cleaning activities to remove plastics and debris from the areas, jointly contributing to the city's environmental protection.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

From November through January 2022, Melco is expected to deploy 2,500 volunteers to

support the work of local social welfare organizations including Pou Tai Integrated Service Centre for the Elderly, Baptista Oi Kwan Service Center of Macau – Harmony Villa, The Association of Rehabilitation of Drug Abusers of Macau, Macau Special Olympics (MSO), FAOM Northern District Integrated Service Center, FAOM Barbosa Community Center, FAOM Mong Ha Elderly Service Center, MSO Complexo De Serviços Ngai Chun and MSO Blissful Center.

COLORING YOUNG LIVES

Melco volunteers also visited Macau Caritas Arco-Iris Youth Home in late November to renovate the house's murals together with its young residents, adding bright colors to the walls and bringing a new atmosphere. Participating volunteer Wong Ka Lok of Table Games, Studio City, said, "A colorful and uplifting environment may be more meaningful than toy donations for children and young people living in institutions. I had the opportunity to create art murals with the young residents and I could feel their creativity and innovation through the project."



Pontos-chave do Segundo Plano Quinquenal de Desenvolvimento Socioeconómico da Região Administrativa Especial de Macau (2021 - 2025)

Objectivos de desenvolvimento

Até ao ano de 2025, o conteúdo do Centro Mundial de Turismo e Lazer será enriquecido, a função da Plataforma de Serviços para a Cooperação Comercial entre a China e os Países de Língua Portuguesa reforçada e a construção da "Base de intercâmbio e cooperação que, tendo a cultura chinesa como predominante, promove a coexistência de diversas culturas" progressivamente implementada. A diversificação adequada da economia obterá êxitos substanciais e a qualidade de vida da população encontrar-se-á continuamente melhorada. Serão também alcançados uma maior prosperidade cultural e um nível de gestão governamental mais elevado, a par do aperfeiçoamento do sistema jurídico de defesa da segurança nacional e do mecanismo de execução, da melhor integração na estratégia de desenvolvimento nacional, da boa concretização dos objectivos faseados da construção da zona de cooperação aprofundada entre Guangdong e Macau na ilha de Hengqin, do estabelecimento preliminar da estrutura de desenvolvimento integrado de Hengqin e Macau, do reforço contínuo do dinamismo, energia, criatividade, competitividade e sustentabilidade do desenvolvimento de Macau, bem como da realização de um desenvolvimento "trabalhado, excelente, com características e lindo" para Macau se transformar numa cidade moderna, bonita, feliz, segura e harmoniosa.

Princípios básicos

Governança conforme a lei; melhor servir a população; desenvolvimento diversificado; motriz de inovação; abertura, tolerância e pragmatismo.

Crítérios de elaboração

Articulação com o 14.º Plano Quinquenal nacional e com o 1.º Plano Quinquenal de Macau; implementação do programa político do Chefe do Executivo; consideração da realidade de Macau; persistência na orientação pelo problema.

Tarefas principais

Apoio às indústrias emergentes e promoção de um desenvolvimento diversificado; optimização das acções vocacionadas para o bem-estar da população e promoção da prosperidade cultural; reforço do planeamento urbanístico e construção de uma cidade propícia para habitar, aperfeiçoamento da ordem jurídica e elevação do nível de governação; aproveitamento das vantagens específicas e integração no desenvolvimento nacional.

1. Aceleração da diversificação adequada da economia

- Criação de uma estrutura industrial apropriadamente diversificada**
- Empenho no desenvolvimento das indústrias-chave; consolidação e valorização das indústrias tradicionais; exploração do espaço para o desenvolvimento da economia através da cooperação regional e internacional.
- Fomento do desenvolvimento da indústria de saúde tomando como ponto de partida a investigação, o desenvolvimento e o fabrico dos produtos da MTC; aperfeiçoamento do sistema de apreciação e aprovação da MTC; reforço da promoção do investimento da indústria da MTC; estabelecimento de uma plataforma do desenvolvimento científico e industrial da MTC.
- Aceleração do desenvolvimento do mercado de obrigações; desenvolvimento da gestão de fortunas e das actividades de locação financeira; promoção da construção de infra-estruturas financeiras; estudos sobre o estabelecimento do mercado de títulos denominado em RMB.
- Impulsão da inovação tecnológica e o desenvolvimento da indústria de tecnologias avançadas; optimização do ambiente de desenvolvimento de inovação; maximização das potencialidades dos quatro laboratórios de referência do Estado; integração na estratégia nacional de desenvolvimento das tecnologias.
- Impulsão do desenvolvimento das indústrias culturais e desportivas; reforço da protecção e da inovação do direito de propriedade intelectual das indústrias culturais e criativas de Macau; lançamento de mais eventos desportivos de marca e de alta qualidade.
- Consolidação e melhoramento do sector de turismo e lazer integrado; promoção do desenvolvimento ordenado e saudável do sector do jogo de acordo com a lei e do desenvolvimento integrado de "Turismo+".
- Promoção da valorização e reconversão das indústrias tradicionais; incentivos ao desenvolvimento da marca "Made in Macau"; promoção do desenvolvimento da "economia sede" em Macau.
- Elevação da competitividade das PMEs**
- Optimização das políticas e medidas de apoio às PMEs e implementação contínua e inovação dos planos de apoio ao desenvolvimento dessas empresas, dinamizando a economia comunitária.
- Apoio ao desenvolvimento inovador das PMEs e melhoramento do serviço destas através de finanças digitais.
- Melhoria contínua do ambiente comercial**
- Revisão e alteração da legislação e dos regulamentos legais impeditivos do desenvolvimento económico, dando prioridade ao aperfeiçoamento do sistema jurídico financeiro.
- Aperfeiçoamento do serviço público; simplificação das formalidades para a constituição de empresas; reforço dos serviços de investimento.



2. Promoção da optimização das acções vocacionadas para o bem-estar da população

- Concretização ordenada da política "habitação de diferentes níveis"**
- Conclusão das 3 obras de habitação social; promoção das obras de habitação pública da Zona A dos Novos Aterros e na Avenida Wai Long; organização de 3 concursos de habitação económica no mínimo.
- Concretização, de forma ordenada, da construção da habitação para a classe sanduíche, sendo empreendida a construção de cerca de 7.000 a 10.000 fracções da habitação para a classe sanduíche nos próximos cinco anos.
- Implementação do plano piloto da residência para idosos, estando prevista para a construção de cerca de 1.800 fracções.
- Fornecimento oportuno de terrenos destinados à habitação privada, impulsionando o desenvolvimento saudável do mercado imobiliário.
- Elevação dos níveis dos cuidados médicos e da saúde**
- Aperfeiçoamento do mecanismo de contingência na área de saúde pública local, elevando os níveis dos cuidados médicos e da saúde.
- Conclusão da construção do Complexo de Cuidados de Saúde das Ilhas e optimização contínua dos cuidados de saúde comunitários e especializados.
- Aperfeiçoamento do sistema de segurança médica e apoio ao desenvolvimento das instituições de saúde sem fins lucrativos e privadas.
- Intensificação da cooperação inter-regional na área de saúde, facilitando a participação dos residentes no sistema de seguro básico de saúde do Interior da China e a consulta médica transfronteiriça.
- Desenvolvimento da actividade do desporto, realizando, com êxito, os Jogos Nacionais de 2025, em colaboração com Guangdong e Hong Kong.
- Garantia eficaz dos direitos e interesses de emprego dos residentes**
- Manutenção da estabilidade do mercado de emprego e garantia da prioridade dos residentes no acesso ao emprego.
- Alargamento do âmbito de destinatários das acções de formação em serviço e reforço da competitividade no emprego dos residentes.
- Aperfeiçoamento dos mecanismos de acesso e saída dos TNRs e combate contínuo ao trabalho ilegal.
- Aperfeiçoamento dos regimes jurídicos da área laboral e promoção da criação de uma relação laboral harmoniosa.
- Aperfeiçoamento do sistema do regime de segurança social**
- Promoção da implementação do regime da segurança social de dois níveis.
- Apoio à comunidade mais carenciada.
- Garantia dos direitos e interesses das pessoas portadoras de deficiência.
- Promoção do desenvolvimento de serviços sociais e da construção de instalações.
- Garantia dos direitos e interesses das mulheres e crianças.
- Resposta activa ao envelhecimento da população.
- Avanço no desenvolvimento de cultura, educação, juventude e talentos**
- Reforço da salvaguarda do Centro Histórico e das relíquias culturais de Macau; optimização das instalações de hardware e software dos locais de exposições culturais; promoção da criação da "Uma Base".
- Asseguração do investimento de recursos; optimização do sistema de educação; promoção do desenvolvimento coordenado da educação; exploração do desenvolvimento de mercantilização do ensino superior.
- Reforço das acções vocacionadas para a juventude, melhoria da política de juventude para apoiar o desenvolvimento dos jovens e cultivação do sentimento patriótico, apoiando o desenvolvimento juvenil.
- Intensificação da formação de quadros qualificados locais.
- Estabelecimento de um sistema de introdução de quadros qualificados compatível com o desenvolvimento socioeconómico.



3. Promoção aprofundada na construção de uma cidade com condições ideais de vida

- Coordenação na promoção da construção urbana**
- Promoção da elaboração do Plano Director de Macau; aperfeiçoamento dos planos de pormenor das diversas zonas.
- Reforço da gestão da reserva dos terrenos; planeamento racional do aproveitamento dos recursos dos solos existentes e incrementais.
- Impulsão dos processos legislativos do "Regime jurídico da renovação urbana"; concretização dos trabalhos nos âmbitos da habitação para troca e habitação para alojamento temporário.
- Gestão e aproveitamento científico das áreas marítimas; impulsão da elaboração do plano das áreas marítimas e da legislação do aproveitamento das áreas marítimas.
- Aperfeiçoamento contínuo das infra-estruturas urbanas**
- Melhoramento das instalações municipais.
- Aceleração da construção de novos tipos de infra-estruturas.
- Garantia do fornecimento de energia.
- Garantia do abastecimento de água.
- Optimização profunda do ordenamento do transporte urbano**
- Aperfeiçoamento da rede de transportes marítimos, terrestres e aéreos; promoção ordenada da construção de "Uma estação, Três linhas" no sistema de metro ligeiro; aperfeiçoamento das infra-estruturas aeronáuticas de Macau.
- Criação de um sistema de transportes públicos conveniente e confortável; construção de um ambiente pedonal conveniente e sem barreiras.
- Protecção do ambiente ecológico**
- Aperfeiçoamento dos regulamentos e planeamentos relacionados com a protecção ambiental; promoção da protecção ecológica.
- Empenho em atingir o pico de emissões de CO2 antes de 2030; reforço da investigação na área da neutralidade de carbono.
- Assunção contínua da liderança por parte do Governo da RAEM no uso dos veículos eléctricos.
- Intervenção conjunta da população na construção de uma sociedade de reciclagem e economizadora de recursos.
- Reforço da cooperação regional a nível da protecção ambiental.



4. Elevação do nível da governação pública

- Aperfeiçoamento do sistema de defesa da segurança nacional**
- Aperfeiçoamento contínuo da construção do regime jurídico da defesa da segurança nacional; optimização do mecanismo de execução da defesa da segurança nacional.
- Concretização plena do "Conceito Geral da Segurança Nacional"; consolidação da base da sociedade sobre o princípio "Amar a Pátria e Amar Macau"; intensificação da sensibilização e educação sobre a defesa da segurança nacional.
- Intensificação da prevenção conjunta e resposta aos riscos circundantes.
- Aperfeiçoamento do sistema de governação baseado no primado da lei**
- Aperfeiçoamento dos regimes e mecanismos complementares à implementação da Constituição e da Lei Básica; estabelecimento e melhoramento dos regimes jurídicos estreitamente relacionados com o desenvolvimento socioeconómico e com a vida da população.
- Consolidação da base político-social do princípio "Um país, dois sistemas".
- Promoção do melhoramento dos mecanismos diversificados de resolução de litígios.
- Promoção da cooperação judiciária inter-regional e internacional.
- Aprofundamento da reforma da gestão da Administração Pública**
- Integração e aperfeiçoamento da estrutura administrativa.
- Aperfeiçoamento do regime de gestão dos trabalhadores da Administração Pública.
- Elevação da eficiência dos serviços da Administração Pública.
- Aceleração do desenvolvimento de Macau digital.
- Reforço da supervisão das empresas de capitais públicos e dos fundos autónomos.
- Aperfeiçoamento contínuo das acções de combate à corrupção e de auditoria.
- Aperfeiçoamento do sistema de segurança da cidade**
- Optimização do sistema de alerta e resposta de emergência sobre os riscos de segurança da cidade; aperfeiçoamento do sistema de gestão de segurança da cidade; empenho no tratamento dos problemas de inundações.
- Implementação sucessiva do conceito do reforço policial com recurso à tecnologia; intensificação do policiamento inteligente e a capacidade de execução da lei.
- Intensificação da cooperação regional na prevenção e controlo conjunto.



5. Melhor integração na conjuntura geral do desenvolvimento nacional

- Aceleração da construção da zona de cooperação aprofundada entre Guangdong e Macau em Hengqin**
- A zona de cooperação aprofundada é uma nova plataforma para a promoção do desenvolvimento da diversificação adequada da economia de Macau, um novo espaço de conveniência para a vida e o emprego da população de Macau, um novo paradigma da implementação do princípio "Um país, dois sistemas", e um novo patamar de promoção da construção da Grande Baía Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau.
- A missão central do projecto zona de cooperação aprofundada é promover o desenvolvimento da diversificação adequada da economia de Macau. No âmbito da zona de cooperação aprofundada, dar-se-á importância à promoção do desenvolvimento das diversas indústrias, de marca local, na inovação científica, fabricação de alta tecnologia e MTC, através do desenvolvimento das actividades de cultura, turismo, convenções e exposições, comércio e finanças modernas, entre outras.
- Introdução de reformas inovadoras aos aspectos prioritários e nos procedimentos-chave; maximização do potencial das políticas, de modo a criar um novo sistema com elevado grau de abertura em articulação com o de Macau.
- Participação empenhada na construção da Grande Baía Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau**
- Promoção ordenada da circulação célere e eficiente dos factores de produção; aperfeiçoamento da construção das infra-estruturas transfronteiriças; melhoramento do nível da supervisão inteligente da passagem fronteiriça; facilitação das actividades individuais de investimentos transfronteiriços; promoção e optimização contínuas da "circulação de veículos de Macau no Interior da China".
- Estudo sobre a articulação das regras e dos mecanismos de cooperação inter-regional; prestação de apoio às empresas de Macau no pleno aproveitamento das políticas preferenciais no âmbito do CEPA permitindo-lhes deslocar-se à Grande Baía Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau e explorar oportunidades comerciais.
- Criação de um círculo de vida de boa qualidade na Grande Baía Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau; conjugação dos serviços públicos relacionados com a vida da população tais como a educação, a saúde, o apoio aos idosos, bem como ligação dos sistemas de segurança social; prestação de apoio à inovação, ao empreendedorismo e ao emprego dos residentes de Macau na Grande Baía.
- Consolidação da construção da Plataforma entre a China e os Países de Língua Portuguesa**
- Realização dinâmica do intercâmbio e cooperação económica e comercial entre a China e os países de língua portuguesa; promoção da troca comercial entre o Interior da China, Macau e os países de língua portuguesa; realização do intercâmbio e da cooperação cultural sino-usófona.
- Realização de grandes eventos no âmbito da Plataforma Sino-Lusófona e concretização da construção de uma plataforma financeira; enriquecimento das funções da Plataforma de Serviços para a Cooperação Comercial entre a China e os Países de Língua Portuguesa; melhoramento contínuo dos efeitos práticos da Plataforma.
- Participação e apoio à construção de "Uma Faixa, Uma Rota"**
- Desenvolvimento pleno das vantagens da plataforma de Macau, localizada no ponto de encontro da nova conjuntura de desenvolvimento do "duplo ciclo económico" do País; promoção do livre fluxo do comércio e da integração financeira com os países e regiões envolvidos na iniciativa "Uma Faixa, Uma Rota".
- Desenvolvimento pleno do papel de Macau como "Uma Base"; intensificação da divulgação da cultura chinesa e do intercâmbio humano e cultural a nível internacional; promoção da comunicação entre os povos.
- Continuação com empenho da organização do Fórum de Economia de Turismo Global e de outras convenções e exposições temáticas com influência internacional; alargamento do intercâmbio com o exterior.



ADVERTORIAL

SANDS CHINA NEWS

Sands China Recognised in Dow Jones Sustainability Index

Only integrated resort company named to DJSI Asia Pacific in 2021

Sands China Ltd. has been recognised by the S&P Dow Jones Indices by qualifying as a constituent of the Dow Jones Sustainability Asia Pacific Index, making it the only integrated resort company included in the DJSI Asia Pacific.

The prestigious index recognises the world's leading companies for their performance in environmental and social issues, as well as practices for responsible governance. Sands China's inclusion in the index is a testament to its industry-leading performance in environmental, social and governance (ESG) efforts. In the world Consumer Services space, Sands China was one of only three companies named in the Asia Pacific index.

Sands China made significant strides in 2021 in achieving measurable advances in categories like its employee development program, corporate citizenship and philanthropy, and supply chain management. Examples of some of those initiatives include the Sands China Academy, The Londoner Macao Training Series, the Sands China International Strategic Leadership Programme for Integrated Resorts, recruitment workshops for new university graduates, and the funding of hospitality programs at seven local universities.

"Environmental sustainability and corporate social responsibility are core values of our company," said Sands China Ltd. President Dr. Wilfred Wong. "We are therefore very pleased to be recognised by Dow Jones in the DJSI Asia Pacific. Our gratitude and congratulations go to our hard-working and dedicated team members for their daily efforts to put our corporate values into practice, making our properties exemplary in our industry."

Sands China executes the People, Planet and Communities corporate social responsibility platform of parent company Las Vegas Sands through a variety of initiatives that include programmes such as the Sands ECO360 global sustainability programme; the Sands Cares corporate giving and community engagement programme; and the Sands China Academy, a team member professional development programme. Sands China's strong track record in sustainable business performance through the economic value and social impact it has delivered is part of its commitment to serve the Macao community and contribute to making it a better place to live and work.



AP PHOTO



Beijing Olympic athletes and their garbage face restrictions

BEIJING Winter Olympics organizers say measures to prevent cross-infections between athletes and the outside world are being extended to holding their garbage inside the bubble dividing the two.

Officials said yesterday that a team of special workers will be deployed to collect and transfer garbage inside the bubble to prevent the risk of coronavirus leaking out into the outside world. The Beijing Games begin Feb. 4.

Ma Boyang, who is in charge of Olympic village planning and operations, said the waste will be held at temporary storage sites, to be transferred later for central processing.

China has stressed the possibility of the virus being transmitted on inanimate objects, particularly frozen food.

Most experts have ruled out the possibility of infection through such channels, saying the packaging carries only minute traces of virus, most likely deposited there by workers.

With the spread of the omicron variant, concerns have again turned to preventing infections among athletes that could lead to quarantines for as long as five weeks.

Yan Jiarong, a spokesperson for the organizing committee, said health authorities were continuing to monitor the situation, but believe the "relevant preventive measures in the guidebook for pande-

mic prevention have undergone rigorous scientific evaluation and are effective in ensuring safety and preventing the spread of the epidemic."

In the event of a positive test for the virus within the bubble, authorities would follow the same protocols as they would were it detected outside, Yan said.

"We believe that these measures can effectively reduce the risk of the pandemic and that they can not only ensure the safe and convenient participation of athletes and all Olympic personnel in training, matches and work, but also protect the health and safety of the Chinese people," said Yan.

The country has taken drastic measures, including frequent lockdowns and mass testing, to handle domestic outbreaks, although it has yet to stamp out infections entirely.

The National Health Commission yesterday announced 69 new cases of domestic transmission, mainly in the eastern province of Zhejiang, far from the Games venues. China has detected at least two cases of the omicron variant.

The spread of the mutation of the virus is the latest challenge to face the Beijing Games, already beset by technical and political challenges ranging from a lack of flights for athletes and staff to a diplomatic boycott from the U.S. and others to protest China's human rights abuses. **MDT/AP**



#METOO VICTIMS FACE ABUSE, PAYBACK FOR GOING PUBLIC

HUIZHONG WU, TAIPEI

HUMAN resources and upper management wouldn't deal with her accusation of sexual assault, a former employee of Alibaba said. So she went into the busy cafeteria at the Chinese e-commerce giant's headquarters and screamed out her plight.

Now she's facing online harassment, accusations of lying from the wives of the two men she accused and a defamation lawsuit from a Alibaba vice president who was forced to resign. And, she revealed recently, the company fired her.

Women in China often face such troubles if they choose to speak publicly about sexual assault. In multiple high-profile cases, particularly during China's brief #MeToo movement in 2018, victims were sued by the men who allegedly harassed them. Some have been targeted with online harassment and censored from speaking about their cases.

In the most high-profile case, former Chinese tennis star Peng Shuai disappeared from public view after accusing former high-level official Zhang Gaoli of sexual assault. Her accusation was quickly scrubbed from the internet and discussion of it remains heavily censored.

In such a climate, women's rights activists fear that fewer victims will be willing to speak up.

"This is helping the wrong-

doer, and makes the workplace environment even worse, and it's an attack on the next woman who wants to stand out," said #MeToo activist Zhou Xiaoxuan.

The former Alibaba employee told the Dahe Daily, a provincial Chinese newspaper, that she would not encourage other women to come forward, given her own experience of being attacked online and called a liar.

But she said in written responses to questions from The Associated Press that she would continue her fight. She is being identified only by her last name, Zhou, because of harassment concerns.

"I believe, if there's one case of someone being fired because of upholding their own rights, then there may be more and more such cases, and future victims of sexual assault may have an even more difficult time seeking justice," she said.

Zhou accused a fellow Alibaba employee, surnamed Wang, and a client surnamed Zhang of sexual assault during a work trip in July. She said she woke up in her hotel room to find Wang kissing and groping her. She also said Zhang molested her while they were all at dinner. The wives of both men, who were not there, have publicly denied the accusations.

Police detained both men in August on suspicion of "forcible molestation", but released Wang after 15 days, the longest

one can be held under administrative detention. Prosecutors dropped the investigation into Wang, though Alibaba fired him. Zhang, the client, is in police custody and a criminal case is pending.

Initially, Zhou thought she would get justice. Alibaba's CEO Daniel Zhang pledged in a public memo in August to create an anti-sexual harassment policy, and senior leaders vowed to improve management, she said. Two executives Zhou accused of not responding to her allegations resigned. One has since sued her.

"So even though I was already covered in scars, I was still willing to trust the company, and cooperate with the company," she said in her answers to AP.

Yet, last month, she got a termination letter accusing her of hurting the company. The letter from Alibaba subsidiary Zhejiang Tmall Technology Co. Ltd. said she was dismissed for spreading false information about her assault and about the company's handling of the issue.

Alibaba has not responded to requests for comment on Zhou's termination.

Other victims have faced similar obstacles.

A recent report by researchers from Yale Law School found only 83 civil cases in public Chinese court databases related to sexual harassment or molestation between 2018

and 2020. Among them, 77 were brought by the alleged harasser against companies or the victims. In just six cases, victims sued their harassers.

A large share of the few women who brought forward accusations against harassers during China's #MeToo movement have faced defamation suits and have lost. That includes journalists Zou Sicong and He Qian. A court ruled in January that they had defamed more prominent journalist Deng Fei, because they did not provide enough evidence the incident had occurred.

Deng sued them after they published an account on WeChat in 2018 saying Deng had lured He, then 21, to a hotel room in 2009 to discuss story ideas, pulled off her clothes and tried to kiss and grope her. He and Zou appealed the ruling, which was upheld a second time by courts. They plan another appeal in a higher court.

Victims face a higher burden of proof in the courts, even when they are being sued.

In 2019, a Beijing court ruled that a young woman, Wang Qi, defamed Zhou Fei, an official at the World Wildlife Fund in China, by accusing him of forcibly kissing her while they worked together. The court ordered Wang to issue a formal apology.

Zhou Xiaoxuan, the activist who has become the face of China's #MeToo movement, sued state TV host Zhu Jun only after he sued her for defamation first. She accused him of groping her when she was a young intern at CCTV.

Zhou got a lot of public support for her case early on and was able to give interviews. These days, her Weibo account

has been banned from posting for a year. She said she gets messages attacking her every day.

#MeToo activists, helped by public support in 2018, pushed for changes to China's laws, including defining sexual harassment in the country's broad ranging Civil Code, which was ratified last year.

Experts say the national law lacks teeth since it doesn't lay out any punishments. Enforcement depends on local level regulations and how courts interpret the law and those regulations. Also, many companies lack sexual harassment codes with explicit punishments and mechanisms for redress.

In March, the southern city of Shenzhen issued a new guidance from nine departments including the education ministry and the Public Security bureau on sexual harassment prevention in the first such "systematic" document of its kind.

For now, Zhou, the ex-Alibaba employee, can only wait for the courts.

Zhou's lawyer, Du Peng, said in a message they are waiting for the criminal case court hearing for Zhang and petitioning the court to reopen the case against Wang.

Zhou, who chose to answer questions only in written form, said she has felt emotionally "unsteady." She vacillates from being "overstimulated and excitable" to "depressed and passive." But she said she would not waver in seeking justice.

"My attitude is resolute," she wrote. "I will not accept the result of the company's unsympathetic, unreasonable and illegal way of dealing with this."
MDT/AP

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

HYUNG-JIN KIM

NORTH KOREA

Kim Jong Un's decade of total but isolated rule

SINCE assuming power 10 years ago today, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has ruled the isolated country with absolute power, significantly expanded its nuclear arsenal and become the North's first ruler to hold a summit with a sitting U.S. president.

But now, he's hunkering down and struggling to revive a dilapidated economy battered hard by pandemic-related border shut-downs, toughened U.N. sanctions and mismanagement.

When he inherited power upon the death of his father and longtime ruler Kim Jong Il, there were questions about the future of North Korea. Little was known about the then-27-year-old son who was taking his family's dynastic rule into a third generation. But Kim Jong Un quickly consolidated his power by orchestrating a spate of brutal purges and executions that removed his potential rivals including his own powerful uncle.

With a firm grip on power, Kim has carried on his family's nuclear ambitions and diverted much of his country's scarce resources toward programs to build nuclear-tipped missiles capable of reaching the U.S. mainland. His provocative run of nuclear and missile tests in 2016-17 placed North Korea a step closer to its goal of possessing such func-

AP PHOTO



tioning intercontinental ballistic missiles, but they also led North Korea to face stricter U.N. sanctions and deepened international isolation.

Entering 2018, Kim abruptly took conciliatory gestures by sending a delegation to the Winter

Olympics held in rival South Korea and telling visiting South Korean envoys that he was willing to place his nuclear program on the negotiating table. Some critics accused Kim of just trying to weaken the sanctions, buy time and perfect his weapons program, but then-

-U.S. President Donald Trump accepted Kim's offers for unprecedented summit talks between the leaders of the two countries.

In 2018-19, Kim met Trump three times and held summits with other world leaders including South Korean President

Moon Jae-in, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin. These meetings gave Kim the diplomatic legitimacy that his government had long desired.

The high-stakes nuclear diplomacy triggered a rare mood of rapprochement on the Korean Peninsula, such as athletes from the rival Koreas marching together during the Olympics' opening ceremony and their singers performing in each other's territory. North Korea also demolished its nuclear test site and released American detainees, while the U.S. and South Korean militaries suspended or canceled some of their regular drills.

But such moves were short-lived, as the Kim-Trump diplomacy eventually collapsed in 2019 due to wrangling over the sanctions.

Since early last year, Kim has largely shut his country's borders as part of draconian anti-virus measures that experts say are taking a heavy toll on his country's already troubled economy. He called ongoing difficulties "the worst-ever" and compared them with a 1990s famine that killed hundreds of thousands.

But there are no signs that Kim will return to talks with the United States anytime soon. Instead, he has repeatedly warned he will bolster his nuclear and missile arsenals unless Washington drops its hostility against Pyongyang. MDT/AP

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AP PHOTO



PANDEMIC

British surge seen as warning on omicron but responses vary

DANICA KIRKA & MIKE CORDER, LONDON

SPIRALING infections in Britain driven in part by the new omicron variant of the coronavirus sent shockwaves yesterday into the rest of Europe, fueling a familiar dread that tighter restrictions will scuttle holiday plans again this year.

Much remains unknown about omicron, but increasingly officials are warning that at the very least it appears more transmissible than the delta variant, which was already putting pressure on hospitals from the United States to the Netherlands. With so many questions outstanding, uncertainty reigned over how quickly and how severely to crack down on everything from travel to Christmas parties.

After the U.K. recorded the highest number of confirmed new COVID-19 infections Wednesday since the pandemic began, France tightened entry rules for those coming from Britain.

In England, the chief medical officer urged people to limit who they see in the festive period — though there has been much debate about how much should be canceled. In the U.S., meanwhile, the White House insisted there was no need for a

lockdown, despite signs that omicron was gaining ground there.

Globally, more than 75 countries have reported confirmed cases of the new variant. In Britain, where omicron cases are doubling every two to three days, the variant is expected to soon replace delta as the dominant strain in the country. Authorities in the 27-nation European Union expect omicron to be the dominant variant in the bloc by mid-January.

In addition to hints that it's more contagious, early data suggest omicron may be milder but better at evading vaccines. Experts have urged caution in particular on drawing conclusions about how mild it is because hospitalizations lag behind infections and so many variables contribute to how sick people get.

Also, even if omicron proves milder on the whole than delta, it may disarm some of the life-saving tools available and put immune-compromised and elderly people at particular risk. And if it's more transmissible, more infections overall raise the risk of more serious ones.

EU leaders gathering in Brussels for a summit today [Macau time] sought to balance tackling the surge of infections

across the continent while keeping borders open.

But ahead of the meeting, European nations already were acting to rein in the spread of the virus.

France said it will slap restrictions on travelers arriving from the U.K. — which is no longer part of the EU — putting limits on reasons for traveling and requiring 48-hour isolation upon arrival. The new measures will take effect first thing Saturday.

French Prime Minister Jean Castex said the measures are being imposed “in the face of the extremely rapid spread of the omicron variant in the U.K.”

The abrupt move comes after weeks of political tensions between France and Britain over fishing rights and how to deal with migration in dangerous small boats across the English Channel.

It also comes as France's government is desperately trying to avoid a new lockdown or stricter measures that would hurt the economy and cloud President Emmanuel Macron's expected campaign for April presidential elections.

Greece announced Wednesday that all travelers to the country will have to show a PCR test with a negative result starting

Sunday whether they are vaccinated or not. Italy this week also required negative tests from vaccinated visitors, raising concerns that similar moves elsewhere will limit the ability of EU citizens to travel to see friends and relatives over the holidays.

Portugal's Prime Minister António Costa said he intends to keep tighter COVID-19 border controls in place beyond their planned end on Jan. 9 due to the threat from the highly infectious new omicron variant. In Greece,

England's chief medical officer warned the situation there is only likely to get worse during the holidays.

Professor Chris Whitty described the current situation as two epidemics in one — with omicron infections rising rapidly even as the country continues to grapple with the older delta variant, which is still causing a large number of infections.

Whitty advised people to limit their social contacts, putting a priority on those that are the most important.

Fearing a raft of canceled parties and a general drop in business at the height of the crucial and lucrative Christmas season, British restaurants and pubs demanded government help yesterday. They said concerns about the new variant have already wiped out 2 billion pounds (\$2.6 billion) in sales over the last 10 days.

Jonathan Neame, chief executive of pub and brewery Shepherd Neame, said the grim warnings will plunge his business back to the start of the pandemic.

“We've seen a significant number of cancellations and that's accelerating every day, and will accelerate even further after the news last night, which seems to have thrown us back into that sort of zombie world of the first week of March, of the pandemic last year,” he told Times Radio.

The Music Venue Trust said that a catastrophic drop in attendance and advance ticket sales have hit the industry since the government announced tougher restrictions last Wednesday, “placing the entire sector back on red alert for the risk of permanent closures.” **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1942 BRITAIN CONDEMNS MASSACRE OF JEWS

The British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, has told the House of Commons about mass executions of Jews by Germans in occupied Europe.

Mr Eden also read out a United Nations declaration condemning “this bestial policy”.

He said news of German atrocities sent in by the Polish Government and widely reported in the press this month would only serve to strengthen allied determination to fight Nazism and punish all those responsible.

After his announcement the House rose and held a one-minute silence in sympathy for the victims.

Mr Eden described how the German authorities, who have already stripped the Jews of their basic human rights, were now carrying out “Hitler's oft repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe”.

He described how hundreds of thousands of men, women and children were being transported from all German-occupied territory “in conditions of appalling horror and brutality” to Eastern Europe.

In Poland, Jewish ghettos were being “systematically emptied” except for the able-bodied who were being sent to labour camps. “None of those taken away are ever heard of again,” he said.

Those who are sick or injured are left to die of exposure or starvation or killed in mass executions.

The House then heard him read out a declaration made by the governments of Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, the United States, the UK, the USSR, Yugoslavia and the French National Committee.

It condemned “in the strongest possible terms this bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination” and made a “solemn resolution to ensure that those responsible for these crimes shall not escape retribution”.

He said the United Nations would try to give asylum to as many refugees as possible but that there were “immense geographical difficulties” as well as security procedures to overcome.

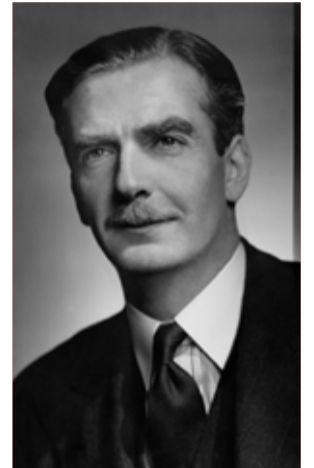
James A De Rothschild, Labour MP for the Isle of Ely, made an emotional speech on behalf of British Jewry thanking Mr Eden and the United Nations for their declaration.

He said there were many first-generation Jews living in England who believed they had had a lucky escape from the concentration camps.

Four days ago, synagogues all over Britain held a day of mourning as a mark of concern for the massacre of the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe.

The Chief Rabbi Dr JH Hertz called on all Jews to commemorate “the numberless victims of the Satanic carnage”.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has also expressed his outrage in a letter to The Times earlier this month condemning “a horror beyond what imagination can grasp”.



Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

From 1933 when Hitler came to power, German Jews were deprived of civil rights, persecuted, physically attacked, imprisoned, and murdered.

As Germany took over Europe many more thousands were shot in Russia and other Eastern European countries, by mobile killing squads or Einsatzgruppen.

In January 1942 leading SS leader Reinhard Heydrich announced to the Wannsee conference plans for the so-called “final solution to the Jewish problem”, a systematic massacre designed to create a “Jew-free” Reich.

Jews were transported to concentration camps, slave-labour camps and extermination camps. There they were herded into gas chambers and their bodies burned in crematoria.

By the end of the war in 1945, more than six million Jews had been murdered in those countries occupied by the Nazis.

Three million of them were from Poland. Other minorities such as gypsies, political and religious opponents, the handicapped, and homosexuals were also killed.

Nazi war criminals were tried at Nuremberg and 12 men were sentenced to death in 1946.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Meanwhile, a connection between the moon and Saturn can help you set social boundaries where they're needed, so don't be afraid to draw lines if necessary.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

The Gemini moon shares a sweet connection with the healing asteroid Chiron this morning, helping you reconnect with your worth and belief in yourself.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

If there are any rifts within your friendships that need ironing out, now would be the time to make peace, thanks to a sweet connection between Luna and the healing asteroid, Chiron.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

These vibes could get a little cerebral for you, which in turn might elevate your stress levels if you don't hold onto your emotional, mental, and spiritual center.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

As afternoon rolls in, your focus will shift to romance and self-care when the moon aspects Saturn, activating the sector of your chart that rules matters of the heart.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Your professional life will be buzzing today, darling Virgo, as the Gemini moon shines a light on the sector of your chart that rules career matters.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

While today's lunar placement in Gemini will bring chatty and cerebral energy to the collective, you'll be in a surprisingly peaceful and elevated mood.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

This cosmic connection will trigger the sectors of your chart that rule health and transformation, allowing you to shed trauma or stress by taking care of yourself.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

It's no secret that you're a flirt, darling Sagittarius, and today you'll be true to this form as the Gemini moon activates the sector of your chart that governs love.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

It's time to examine how stress impacts your physical condition and look for ways to combat any outside influences that might be weighing down on you.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

You'll be in a sassy mood today, darling Aquarius, as the Gemini moon illuminates the sector of your chart that rules self-expression and fun. If ever there was a time to let down your hair, it's today.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

A connection between Luna and Saturn points to the fact that you might be overdue for deep cleaning and focusing on domestic duties will have a therapeutic element to it.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-7	0	fine
Harbin	-19	-13	fine
Tianjin	8	11	cloudy
Urumqi	7	12	cloudy
Xi'an	8	11	rain
Lhasa	-8	-2	overcast
Chengdu	14	20	rain
Chongqing	12	17	cloudy
Kunming	4	7	rain
Nanjing	20	23	cloudy
Shanghai	4	12	fine
Wuhan	-20	-16	fine
Hangzhou	1	10	fine
Taipei	-18	-8	fine
Guangzhou	14	21	rain
Hong Kong	13	20	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	-3	1	snow
Frankfurt	5	7	fog
Paris	3	9	overcast
London	7	9	cloudy
New York	5	14	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Grammarian's concern; 6- ___ Mahal; 9- Barely enough; 14- Taboos; 15- Author Umberto; 16- Red River city; 17- Logo; 19- Golfer with an army; 20- Polo Grounds hero; 21- Aha!; 22- Like non-oyster months; 23- Shrivelled, without moisture; 25- Sticky stuff; 26- Marionette; 29- Start of something small?; 31- Revolt-leader, old-style; 32- Collection of weaponry; 36- ___ dancing is popular with cowboys!; 37- TV planet; 38- At any time; 40- Abounding; 43- Took steps; 45- Sunburn soother; 46- Doze; 47- Growl angrily; 50- Badgers; 51- Maker of Pong; 52- Derrick; 54- O Sole ___; 57- Wand; 58- Tapered eating implement; 61- World-weary; 62- Bad-mouth; 63- Skinflint; 64- Conger catcher; 65- Fair-hiring abbr.; 66- Extremely;

DOWN: 1- A law ___ itself; 2- Kind; 3- Med school subj.; 4- Deity; 5- Nationality suffix; 6- Fluff, as bangs; 7- Plot unit; 8- One-liner, e.g.; 9- Very alert person; 10- Monte ___; 11- Building addition; 12- Clamorous; 13- Rail supports; 18- Hilarity; 23- Carousel; 24- Common Market abbr.; 25- Printing widths; 26- Crony; 27- Single entity; 28- Sheet of stamps; 29- A Simpson; 30- Annoy; 33- Drai!; 34- River in central England; 35- Moon of Jupiter; 37- Lennon's love; 39- Weightlifter's unit; 41- Sailor; 42- Laid up; 43- Rascal; 44- Graffiti; 47- Old; 48- Birth-related; 49- "___ by any other name..."; 50- Snare; 51- French clergyman; 52- A follower; 53- Presidential battleground state; 54- Atomizer output; 55- Bakery worker; 56- Gumbo thickener; 59- Dallas sch.; 60- "___ the cows come home";

Yesterday's solution

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- IAM 28 387 333
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DRIVE IN

STEVEN SPIELBERG'S ROUSING 'WEST SIDE STORY' REVIVAL

JAKE COYLE,
MDT/AP FILM WRITER

WE'RE so rife with reboots and remakes today that it can take a moment to gauge just what Steven Spielberg's "West Side Story" is. It isn't a papere-d-over modernizing or a thinly disguised reread. It's a feat of reconstruction. Spielberg, Tony Kushner and Steven Sondheim have taken the original play and reworked it from the inside, burrowing into the DNA of "West Side Story" and its characters to recast, reconsider, deepen and clarify one of the 20th century's most iconic musicals.

It is, I think, a better movie than the 1961 original, by Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins, in almost every respect. The Sharks, the Puerto Rican gang who squares off with the white Jets in 1950s New York, have been a given a new and fuller life, bringing "West Side Story" into balance and righting some of the wrongs of the original in its stereotyped depictions. Rachel Zegler's María, Ariana DeBose's Anita and David Alvarez's Bernardo are, to remarkable degree, what makes this "West Side Story" sing. And the story, as scripted by Kushner, is more emotional and complex than ever, fully realizing the "Romeo and Juliet" tragedy while shading the '50s gang strife with notes of today's divisions and battles of gentrification.

And, yet, as fully realized and impeccably crafted as this "West Side Story" is, I'm not sure it matches the power and force of the original. As problem-filled as that movie was 60 years ago, with Natalie Wood as the Latina María, its potency is impossible to shrug off. There was Robbins' electric choreography, the expressionist Panavision color and Rita Moreno — my god, Rita Moreno — a dynamo of almost overwhelming talent. The 1961 "West Side Story" was propelled by a teeming, lurching mid-century America energy — a surge of bodies in motion, syncopated with finger snaps. This "West Side Story" comes out of a different cultural moment, one of tasteful renovation — three 20th century titans of the arts, like master remodeling craftsmen, shifting and rearranging the play's latticework of scaffolding, brick and fire escape.

Delayed a year by the pandemic, "West Side Story" (Dec. 10 in theaters) arrives with a glow of eulogy, coming on the heels

of Sondheim's death at 91. "West Side Story," originally staged in 1957, was Sondheim's first musical. (Robbins conceived it, with music by Leonard Bernstein, book by Arthur Laurents and lyrics by Sondheim.) Six decades later, it's Spielberg's first musical, too. Spielberg, naturally, doesn't finally wade into song and dance with some little one-act but with possibly the most beloved musical there is. (He does, after all, know a thing or two about sharks.) When it comes to big-screen grandeur, there's still nobody who does it better.

What's immediately apparent is that Spielberg, with his regular cinematographer Janusz Kaminski, has elected for a paler, desaturated palette and a slightly grittier, more grounded sense of place. The opening shot skims over a giant pile of rubble — "slum clearance" to make way for the Upper West Side's Lincoln Center. (That bit drew chuckles at the screening I attended, at Lincoln Square's Walter Reade Theatre.) With the wrecking ball coming for San Juan Hill and a new, wealthier New York to build, the days are numbered for both the Sharks and the Jets. Their turf war is misguided from the start; they're both about to have no turf, at all. Corey Stoll's Lieutenant Schrank (superior of Brian d'Arcy James' Officer Krumpke) spells it out for them: A remade neighborhood is coming that won't have room for Puerto Ricans like the Sharks or "the last of the can't-make-it Caucasians."

Its narrative, context and authenticity that give Spielberg's "West Side Story" its own verve. It most definitely still plays the hits, but the film feels less like a Broadway-to-screen transfer than a cinematic staging of a classic. The set pieces are often extraordinary. "In America" moves from the sound stage to the street in an on-air showstopper. "One Hand, One Heart," in which Tony (Ansel Elgort) and María speak their private wedding vows, has been uprooted to the Cloisters, where it shines with a holy tenderness. Some classics — "I Feel Pretty," performed inside Gimbels department store (where María works as a cleaner) — may be too familiar to sound new again. But songs like "Cool" are thrillingly alive, in part because Spielberg's nimble camera is in on the dance, an eager partner to Justin Peck's choreography.

But as much as these are set pieces — and as beautiful as

AP PHOTO



Ansel Elgort as Tony (left) and Rachel Zegler as Maria in "West Side Story"

Zegler's voice is — what makes them work so well is that they aren't isolated, but come out of the more fully formed interiors of the characters. Tony is just out of prison and staying in the drugstore basement of a new character, Valentina (Moreno, connecting movie past and present). His best friend, Jets leader Riff (Mike Faist, terrific), is itching for a fight with the Sharks, and Faist plays him with a hint of mean, knowing despondency. Looking down on Puerto Ricans, he seems to realize, is all he has.

The Sharks, meanwhile, are led by Alvarez's Bernardo: boyfriend to Anita and older brother to María. There is more talking in this "West Side Story," and that includes Spanish without subtitles that intermingles with English. It's one of many details that endeavor to add authenticity to a drama with new layers of meaning. Not only are Bernardo, Anita and María wrestling with their standing in America, they are seizing a place in this deeply American musical. (Each actor does so, beautifully.) The blade-gleaming

ethnic war at the heart of "West Side Story" is here less of a ready substitute for the Montagues and Capulets than a metaphorical battleground for today's discord, with plenty of pain and injustice to go around, and maybe some measure of hope.

That backdrop casts the romance between María and Tony in starker relief, and two actors — the sensational breakout Zegler and a never-better Elgort — have a warm chemistry. From the first time they see each other through the swirl of a school dance, their eyes are locked on one another. A lot of Elgort's performance, with a touch of Marlon Brando's melancholy sweetness, is in simply looking at María. Their rapport reaches a crescendo in the duet of "Tonight."

But that moment feels obscured by more than the fire-escape ironwork that cages it. It's possible that there are issues to the musical that can't be overcome. Is it better to let a once-one-sided view of race in America recede into the past? It remains, for instance, ridiculous how

María shrugs off the death of her brother in the final act. It's a disservice to her character that squanders some the magic that's accrued.

Yet this "West Side Story" succeeds most as a revival not just of Robbins' musical but of the best of classical, studio-made, big-screen cinema. It goes without saying that that's an imperiled species today — because of the pandemic, yes, but also because of other deeper currents in the movie industry. (The studio this was set up with was swallowed just before filming began.) "West Side Story" in that way feels as much like a revival as it does a swan song for a grand style of moviemaking that will hopefully persist, as María sings, "somehow, someday, somewhere."

"West Side Story," a 20th Century Studios release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America for sequences of some strong violence, strong language, thematic content, suggestive material and brief smoking. Running time: 156 minutes.★★★★

TASTE OF EDESIA

A heart warming Christmas

IRENE SAM, MDT

CHRISTMAS is a magical time. To celebrate, **Grand Lisboa Palace Resort** launches traditional Christmas favourites and joyous New Year celebratory menus. At Jardim Secreto, guests can wander through the perfectly manicured greens, landscaped patios and gazebos, surrounding the ornate dome centrepiece. Illuminated by the dazzling sparkle of 160,000 shimmering lights, the European-styled gardens are cast in an ethereal glow perfect for an enchanting evening.

For a sumptuous buffet, one can head to The Grand Buffet, where an ensemble of festive favourites for lunch and dinner includes Honey Glazed Ham with Root

Vegetables, Maple Glazed Butternut with Pecan, Shepherd's Pie; Roasted Turkey with Cranberry and Gilbert Sauce, as well as La Perilla barbecue options which are

available in the evening.

To savour the familiar flavours with a twist this festive season, one can consider to eat at Mesa, a contemporary Portuguese restaurant manifesting the quality, authenticity, and farm-to-table philosophy of dining. Presenting authentic Portuguese Christmas and New Year's Eve feasts, Mesa is the place to be for a heart-warming meal. Culinary delights include Feijoada, Roupá Velha, and Carabineiro and can be paired with exquisite Portuguese wines. Sate hearty appetites with these distinctive dishes that showcase the Portuguese tradition of gathering and sharing among family and friends during a time of festivities. In addition, an array of New Year's Eve countdown offers are available where guests can sip champagne, relish delicious petiscos, and enjoy the Portuguese tradition of wishing raisins during the countdown.



AD

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OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

CHINA AND RUSSIA STRENGTHEN RESOLVE TO UPHOLD INTERNATIONAL FAIRNESS AND JUSTICE

In their virtual meeting in June, President Xi Jinping and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin agreed to extend the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation that was signed 20 years ago and strengthen the two countries' practical cooperation.

Building on this consensus, in their virtual meeting on Wednesday, the two leaders highlighted that the two countries will further deepen and advance the development of their "back-to-back" strategic cooperation and all-round pragmatic cooperation based on mutual trust.

After reviewing the outcomes of the two countries' relations and cooperation this year, the two leaders laid out the top-level designs for the development of bilateral relations next year, and compared notes on key international and regional issues of common concern.

Over the past year, Sino-Russian ties have withstood the tests of the COVID-19 pandemic, and have reached an all-time high in all aspects. And by cooperating on energy security, cybersecurity and other security issues, the two sides are contributing to the stability of the international situation.

It is not only their expanding common interests in bilateral pragmatic cooperation, but also their shared belief in the principles of the UN Charter and relations based on mutual respect that have prompted them to come closer to each other and other like-minded countries. With a common resolve to uphold multilateralism and safeguard the international system with the United Nations at its core and the world order based on international law, the two countries have firmly supported each other on issues concerning each other's core interests and major concerns, and conducted in-depth consultations and candid exchanges on major issues of mutual concern in a timely manner. The two leaders made clear that the two sides will strengthen their efforts in these regards.

The high global attention paid to Wednesday's meeting attests to the hopes many countries have that China and Russia would uphold the UN-centered international order and counterbalance the efforts of the United States and its "valued followers" to shape it to their will.

Despite the unceasing efforts of the US-led club of tricksters to defame and stigmatize China and Russia, the two countries will continue to serve as indispensable ballast for the UN system and oppose the remodeling of the international order that is heavily weighted to favor the exploitative practices of the West and firmly oppose the hegemonic moves and Cold War mentality that are disguised as "multilateralism" and "rules-based".

As President Xi said, the two countries should carry out more joint actions to safeguard their security interests more effectively and further strengthen collaboration and cooperation to have a bigger say in global governance and international affairs.

A summit of European Union leaders today [Macau time] is trying to coordinate action to tackle the surge of coronavirus infections across the continent and the emergence of the new omicron variant while keeping borders open.

With the festive season looming, the bloc's leaders want to avoid a confusing mixture of rules and to ensure all 27-member states are on the same page and that COVID-19 certificates continue to guarantee unrestricted travel.

But alarming rises in infections have prompted many European governments to implement public health measures and

new restrictions in recent weeks. France will restrict arrivals from Britain because of fast-spreading omicron cases, putting limits on reasons for traveling and requiring 48-hour isolation upon arrival. The new measures will take effect first thing Saturday.

The European Council, which brings together EU leaders to set the bloc's political agenda, said before the talks in Brussels that "any restrictions should not undermine the functioning of the single market or hamper travel between EU member states and to Europe."

AP PHOTO



A rescuer assists a girl as they wade through flooding caused by Typhoon Rai in Cagayan de Oro City

RESCUERS BATTLE STRONG TYPHOON LASHING SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES

JIM GOMEZ, MANILA

A powerful typhoon slammed into the southeastern Philippines yesterday, toppling trees, ripping tin roofs and knocking down power as it blew across island provinces where nearly 100,000 people have been evacuated.

Coast guard personnel were rescuing residents stranded by chest-deep waters in a southern province, where pounding rains swamped villages in brownish water. In southern Cagayan de Oro city, footage showed two rescuers struggling to keep a month-old baby inside a laundry basin above the waters and shielded from the wind and rain with an umbrella.

Forecasters said Typhoon Rai further strengthened with sustained winds of 195 kilometers per hour and gusts of up to 270 kph as it blew from the Pacific Ocean into the Siargao Islands. There were no immediate reports of casualties or major damage.

"I'm scared and praying here in my house that this stops now. The wind outside is so strong it's cutting down trees," Teresa Lozano, a resident of eastern MacArthur town in coastal Leyte province, told DZMM radio by telepho-

ne, adding roofs of nearby houses were damaged and that her farming village had lost power.

Disaster-response officials said about 10,000 villages lie in the projected path of the typhoon, which has a 400-kilometer-wide rain band and is one of the strongest to hit the country this year.

The coast guard said it has grounded all vessels, stranding nearly 4,000 passengers and ferry and cargo ship workers in dozens of southern and central ports. Several mostly domestic flights have been canceled and schools and workplaces were shut in the most vulnerable areas.

More than 98,000 people have been evacuated to safety, the government's disaster-response agency said. Crowding in evacuation centers was complicating efforts to keep people safely distanced after authorities detected the country's first infections caused by the omicron variant of the coronavirus. Intensified vaccinations were also halted in provinces likely to experience stormy weather.

The Philippines is among the hardest-hit in Southeast Asia by the pandemic, with confirmed infections of more than 2.8 million and more than 50,000 deaths. Quaranti-

ne restrictions have been eased and more businesses have been allowed to reopen in recent weeks after an intensified vaccination campaign helped reduce infections to a few hundred from more than 26,000 in September. The detection of the omicron cases this week, however, has set off the alarm and the government renewed calls for people to avoid crowds and get vaccinated immediately.

Gov. Ben Evardone of Eastern Samar province said he suspended vaccinations in his region of nearly half a million people due to the typhoon. More than 70% of villagers in the province have gotten at least one shot, and Evardone expressed concern because some vaccines stored in Eastern Samar will expire in a few months.

Overcrowding is unavoidable, he said, in the limited number of evacuation centers in his province, where more than 32,000 people have been moved to safety.

"It's impossible to observe social distancing, it will really be tough," Evardone told The Associated Press. "What we do is we cluster evacuees by families. We don't mix different people in the same place as a precaution." MDT/AP

Israeli government has said it was donating 1 million coronavirus vaccines to the U.N.-backed COVAX program. The Foreign Ministry said the AstraZeneca vaccines would be transferred in the coming weeks, a decision that was part of Israel's strengthening ties with the African countries. "I am delighted that Israel can contribute and be a partner in eradicating the pandemic around the world," said Foreign Minister Yair Lapid.

Russia The Kremlin said yesterday that Russia submitted draft documents outlining security arrangements it wants to negotiate with the United States and its NATO allies amid spiraling tensions over Ukraine. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said a senior Russian envoy stood ready to immediately depart for talks in a neutral country on the proposal.

AP PHOTO



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged European Union leaders to swiftly impose new sanctions on Russia before it invades his country, and warned that acting after any conflict would be far too late. Speaking to reporters in Brussels, Zelenskyy said Ukraine stands ready to enter into talks with Russia to ease tensions, but that Russian President Vladimir Putin does not so far appear willing to come to the table.

Germany A court convicted a 31-year-old man yesterday of 89 counts of attempted murder for driving his car into a crowd celebrating Carnival last year. A regional court in the central town of Kassel sentenced the German man, whose name wasn't released for privacy reasons, to life in prison. The defendant drove his car through a crowd of people, including 26 children.

France will restrict arrivals from Britain because of fast-spreading cases of the omicron coronavirus variant, putting limits on reasons for traveling and requiring 48-hour isolation upon arrival, the government said. The new measures will take effect first thing tomorrow, just after midnight, "in the face of the extremely rapid spread of the omicron variant in the U.K.," French Prime Minister Jean Castex said in a statement.