



**THE WORLD TABLE TENNIS TOURNAMENT, WHICH DEBUTED LAST YEAR, WILL RETURN TO MACAU WITH THE WTT CHAMPIONS MACAO 2021 CHINA STARS EVENT**

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AP PHOTO



**South Korea** Hundreds of small business owners rallied in South Korea's capital yesterday, calling for the withdrawal of a curfew and tough coronavirus restrictions on restaurants, cafes, gyms and other facilities. The protesters pumped their fists in the air and chanted, "Guarantee the right to live!" and "Scrap restrictions on business operations!"

AP PHOTO



**Myanmar** A landslide at a remote jade mine in northern Myanmar's Kachin state killed one person and left at least 70 missing yesterday and a search and rescue operation was underway, rescue officials said. Reports were scant from the area in Hpakant, which is the center of the world's biggest and most lucrative jade mining industry.

**Thailand** Fighting between Myanmar government forces and ethnic guerrillas has sent about 4,200 villagers fleeing across the border into Thailand over the past week, a Thai army officer said. That number includes more than 2,500 who fled into Thailand on Friday from territory held by the ethnic Karen minority.

**Australia** New COVID-19 cases in Australia's most populous state surged to a pandemic record yesterday, as Prime Minister Scott Morrison met with state leaders to discuss preventative measures. Morrison emerged from the national cabinet meeting again rejecting lockdowns and mask mandates imposed by the federal government.

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# FROM BANGKOK TO TIMBUKTU

AP PHOTO



**Omicron is leaving the world on the verge of a nervous breakdown, but South Africa's case drop may show new variant peak has passed**

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AP PHOTO

**CHINA SANCTIONS ON US OFFICIALS OVER XINJIANG AFFECT MACAU, HK**

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RENATO MARQUES

# SECRETARY LEI: LOCAL ECONOMY GROWING STEADILY

THE local economy remains on track for a stable recovery, the Secretary for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong said in comments to the media on the sidelines of the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) anniversary reception.

Lei added that current data indicates the economy has good growth momentum. He stated that, nonetheless, the expansion of sources of tourists, the stabilization of the economy, and the securing of employment will be the government's priorities for the upcoming year.

Citing statistics from the first 11 months of 2021, Lei noted that gross gaming revenue has recorded a 49.9% growth year-on-year, while visitor arrivals have also risen by 31.8% year-on-year. The Secretary also remarked that gross domestic product saw a 27.5% growth year-on-year in real terms from January to November this year, which in his opinion forecasts good results for the close of 2021.

On the topic, Lei said "sin-

ce the start of December, there has been a daily average of 30,000 visitor arrivals to Macau, with an average length of stay of 3.3 days. The longer the visitors stay, the more they will spend in Macau, benefiting various sectors."

To face the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and the economic crisis that has resulted, Lei said the MSAR government will continue to increase investment in public infrastructure spending, and maintain domestic demand. He added that ongoing work with neighboring cities on epidemic-control and prevention work – namely the easing of border restriction measures – will also be one of the government's priorities in boosting economic recovery.

When asked about the gaming promoters (junkets) situation, Lei said that – according to the feedback on the public consultation document intended to an amendment to the Legal Framework

for the Operations of Casino Games – the government is aiming to "optimize the supervisory regulations for gaming promoters."

These new regulations should establish a regime that bans junkets from engaging in several activities permitted for many years under the current laws, such as providing loans to gamblers.

Lei added that the government has received several notices regarding the cessation of cooperation from gaming concessionaires or sub-concessionaires with the junkets.

He noted that that the regulator, the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau, has been following up closely on that matter. He remarked that the government would not tolerate any "responsibility-shifting that might risk creating a negative impact on the community, nor any acts that harmed the legitimate rights of employees."



## SUNCITY WORKERS GUIDED INTO JOB INTERVIEWS

**DISMISSED** workers from gaming promoter Suncity Group are being guided by the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) towards job interviews, the Secretary for Economy said on the sidelines of the SAR anniversary reception. When engaged on the topic by the media, Lei Wai Nong updated the figure for the dismissed workers requesting help from DSAL to 461. Of these, the DSAL has already begun a job matching session. The bureau

has successfully contacted around 200 of these workers so far, and 96 were present and completed the first round of interviews. Lei added that 106 more have said they wish to attend the session. Lei explained that – of the 461 workers that filled cases concerning wages, dismissal compensations, or paid leave-related issues – there remains a significant number who had not taken their annual leave, and need to be compensated for this.

### GOV'T'S GASTRONOMY PROMOTIONAL VIDEO WINS UNWTO ACCOLADE

The promotional video created by the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO), "Sustainable Gastronomy Day 2021 – Preserving Macanese Cuisine," was awarded in the category of "Tourism and the Decade of Action" for the Asia-Pacific Region in the 2021 UNWTO Tourism Video Competition. The promotional video was released on Sustainable Gastronomy Day, June 18 this year. The video features MGTO director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, Chef of Macao Institute for Tourism Studies Educational Restaurant Hans Lee Rasmussen, Macanese Chefs Florita Alves and Otilia Novo, and a number of aspiring chefs. They collectively shared their views on sustainable gastronomy and on how to keep Macanese cuisine relevant for future generations.

### CE REPORTS TO BEIJING ON GOV'T WORKS

The Chief Executive (CE) Ho Iat Seng will travel to Beijing on a four-day visit to report to state leaders about the government's works and on the policy blueprint for next year. While in the capital, the CE will meet with officials from ministries and committees of the central government. The Chief-of-Office of the CE's Office Hoi Lai Fong will accompany Ho on his duty visit. While the CE is in Beijing, the Secretary for Administration and Justice Andre Cheong Weng Chon will be Acting Chief Executive.

### 22ND HANDOVER ANNIVERSARY

# Ho Iat Seng pledges safeguards for national security

**CHIEF** Executive Ho Iat Seng has pledged that Macau will continue to build and refine legal systems and enforcement mechanisms safeguarding national security, as well as continuing to push forward on its construction and development projects.

Ho was speaking at a flag-raising ceremony and reception to mark the 22nd anniversary of Macau's return to the motherland and the establishment of the Macau SAR.

Ho stated that the Macau SAR government will implement the targets and tasks set out in the policy address for 2022 and in its second five-year plan (2021-2025). In doing so, it will promote steady economic recovery



while consolidating epidemic control, speeding up appropriate economic diversification, and better integrating into the country's overall development, Ho said.

He also pledged continuous efforts towards optimizing works related to people's livelihood, and the advancement of construction of the Guangdong-Macau in-depth cooperation zone in Hengqin.

According to Ho, throughout the past year of pandemic-prevention work and economic recovery processes, the citizens of Macau "never gave up supporting and cooperating with the government."

Some 940 guests attended the reception, including: Ho Hau Wah, vice chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference; Fu Ziying, director of the

Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Macao SAR; and Liu Xianfa, commissioner of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the region.

Prior to the reception, a flag-raising ceremony was held at the Golden Lotus Square. The delegation of the mainland Olympians, who are in Macau for a three-day visit, also attended the ceremony.

"I'm very proud to be here to celebrate the anniversary together with our Macau compatriots," said table tennis Grand Slam winner Ma Long. "It means a lot to me."

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Garrison of the Macau SAR also held a flag-raising ceremony on Monday morning. LV

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WTT MACAO

# Table Tennis champions return to Macau next month

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE World Table Tennis (WTT) tournament, which debuted last year, will return to Macau with the WTT Champions Macao 2021 China Stars event, organizers announced on Tuesday in a press conference held at Banyan Tree Hotel.

The event – dubbed one of the most successful sporting events of last year in its world debut – will return to Macau and the Tap Seac Multisport Pavilion from January 19 to 23.

Although the event's line-up of players has not yet been unveiled, organizers said that the competition "will bring together world-leading elite players playing in three categories: men's singles, women's singles, and mixed doubles. They will demonstrate excellent techniques and skills, and provide spectators with exciting matches."

The competition will retain



the format and rules of last year's WTT Macao 2020, and it is expected that some of the best players in the world will parti-

cipate. Those from the mainland will compose the majority of players due to the current pandemic-related border res-

trictions. However, some others from the Greater China region and beyond may also join.

The only major novelty for

this year is the addition of the mixed doubles category alongside the singles matches.

Tickets for the event will go on sale from January 5 and details on the competitors will be announced around the same time, organizers added.

Ma Long and Xu Xin, Olympic champions and Chinese national table tennis players, also took part in the press conference. They both took part in the tour of the Chinese Olympic athletes to Macau over the weekend.

Ma was the winner of the WTT Macao last year in the male category, while the female division was won by Sun Yingsha.

China will dispatch seven Tokyo 2020 athletes including Ma, Xu, Fan Zhendong, Chen Meng, Sun Yingsha, Wang Manyu and Liu Shiwen, as well as Wang Chuqin and Liang Jingkun.

Doo Hoi Kem and Ho Kwan Kit from Hong Kong, China, Li Jie from the Netherlands and Poland's Li Qian are also expected to compete.

The event was the only international sports event to be ranked in the top ten international sports news in 2020 by China Central Radio and Television.

Similar to last year's edition, Galaxy Entertainment Group will be the title-sponsor of the event.

AD

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LIFESTYLE

### SECRETARY CONFIRMS ONLY VACCINATED TRAVELERS CAN TRAVEL QUARANTINE-FREE TO HK

The Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Ao Ieong U has confirmed that those applying for quarantine-free travel between Macau and Hong Kong must ensure that a minimum of 14 days have elapsed since their second jab of a two-dose Covid-19 vaccination course. A valid nucleic acid test will also be required for those wishing to travel. According to Ao Ieong, there would be a quota system for this type of travel during the trial stage. Said quota for quarantine-free travel between Macau and Hong Kong will be set in proportion to the numbers allocated for the quota for quarantine-free travel between the mainland and Hong Kong. The Health Bureau will deploy a vetting mechanism for applicants for this travel, she added.

### E-CONSUMPTION CARDS TO BE RECONVERTED TO REGULAR MACAU PASS AFTER DEC.31

Information from the Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED) notes that, after December 31 when the electronic consumption subsidy program finishes, all electronic consumption cards will be automatically reconverted for regular use as Macau Pass cards. If card owners have a self-imputed available balance on their cards, this will be transferred onto the reconverted card. However, all amounts remaining on the cards from the government subsidy will be removed and refunded into the government's accounts. Given this, the DSED reminds users to spend the subsidy and discount amounts as soon as possible, until the end of this month.

### OLYMPIC ATHLETES CLOSE TOUR WITH VISITS TO COMMUNITY ASSOCIATIONS

China's Olympic athlete delegation's three-day tour closed with visits to several community centers and neighborhood associations. The 68-member delegation, divided into smaller groups, visited a total of three local community and social services centers. These sites were run by the Women's Association of Macau, the Macao Federation of Trade Unions, and the General Union of Neighborhood Associations of Macao. The athletes joined the community in activities including table tennis, rice-dumpling making, singing, and dancing. The delegation left Macau in the afternoon in different groups. Some members of the delegation departing via Macau International Airport, while others left the SAR via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge Port.

# CHINA SANCTIONS ON US OFFICIALS OVER XINJIANG AFFECT MACAU, HK

**T**HE chairwoman and three members of the U.S. panel are barred from visiting mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau, and any assets they have in the country will be frozen, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said.

Zhao identified those targeted as chairwoman Nadine Maenza, deputy chairman Nury Turkel and members Anurima Bhargava and James Carr. Zhao gave no indication whether they have assets in China.

China announced sanctions yesterday on four members of the U.S. government's Commission on International Religious Freedom in retaliation for penalties imposed on Chinese officials over complaints of abuses in the country's northwestern Xinjiang region.

The tit-for-tat sanctions add to spiraling tension over Xinjiang.

AP PHOTO



Uyghurs and other members of the faithful pray during services at the Id Kah Mosque in Kashgar in far west China's Xinjiang region

Washington has banned imports from the region that might be made with forced labor, while activists are calling for a boycott of February's Winter Olympics in Beijing. China has denied accusations of abuses and earlier retaliated by publicizing calls for boycotts of foreign shoe and clothing brands.

China threatened to retaliate

after the U.S. Treasury announced sanctions Dec. 10 on two officials accused of involvement in repression of Uyghurs and other mostly Muslim minorities in Xinjiang. Beijing is accused of mass detentions, forced abortions and other abuses.

Treasury targeted Shohrat Zakir, chairman of the region's government from 2018 until ear-

ly this year, and Erken Tuniyaz, who holds the position now and previously was deputy chairman.

"The United States should withdraw the so-called sanctions and stop interfering in Xinjiang's affairs and China's internal affairs," Zhao said. "China will make further responses in accordance with the development of the situation." MDT/AP

## Melco to bring W Hotels to Studio City Phase 2

**M**ELCO Resorts & Entertainment has announced its strategic partnership with Marriott International intended to bring the W Hotels Worldwide brand to Studio City Phase 2.

Scheduled for opening as part of Studio City Phase 2 in December 2022, W Macau - Studio City is set to become an "iconic addition in the world class leisure destination through its detail-driven, unexpected design, signature Whatever/Whenever service and innovative programming," the gaming operator announced in a

statement.

The Times previously reported that one of the hotels within Phase 2 was rumored to be home to Macau's first W Hotel. However, a spokesperson of the company declined to comment on the matter in a reply to the Times.

W Macau - Studio City is expected to feature 557 guestrooms, including: 127 suites and wellness facilities, a spa, a fitness centre and an indoor swimming pool.

The hotel is set to "amplify Macau's social scene with its high energy public spaces and culinary

experiences."

Living Room (W's signature take on the hotel lobby) and WOobar will be the social hub for guests to connect. Two destination dining venues will offer a menu of "international cuisine with an Asian twist and a specialty restaurant featuring the finest Chinese and Portuguese dishes."

Guests can look forward to a W Sound Suite, the brand's own on-site recording studio. The new hotel will offer a total of 1,100 square meters of event and meeting space. LV



## TWO NEW RECYCLING CENTERS OPENED



### RENATO MARQUES

**I**n an effort to expand the community's network of recycling facilities, the Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) opened two new Recycling Centers yesterday to allow for round-the-clock neighborhood recycling.

The new centers - located at Rua de Inácio Baptista, Praia do Manduco, and Rua da Ponte Negra, at Taipa - join the existing network of now six recycling centers located

around the Peninsula and Islands, as part of a project implemented in November 2018.

The previous four centers are located in the Seac Pai Van, Ilha Verde, Toi San, and Iao Hon districts.

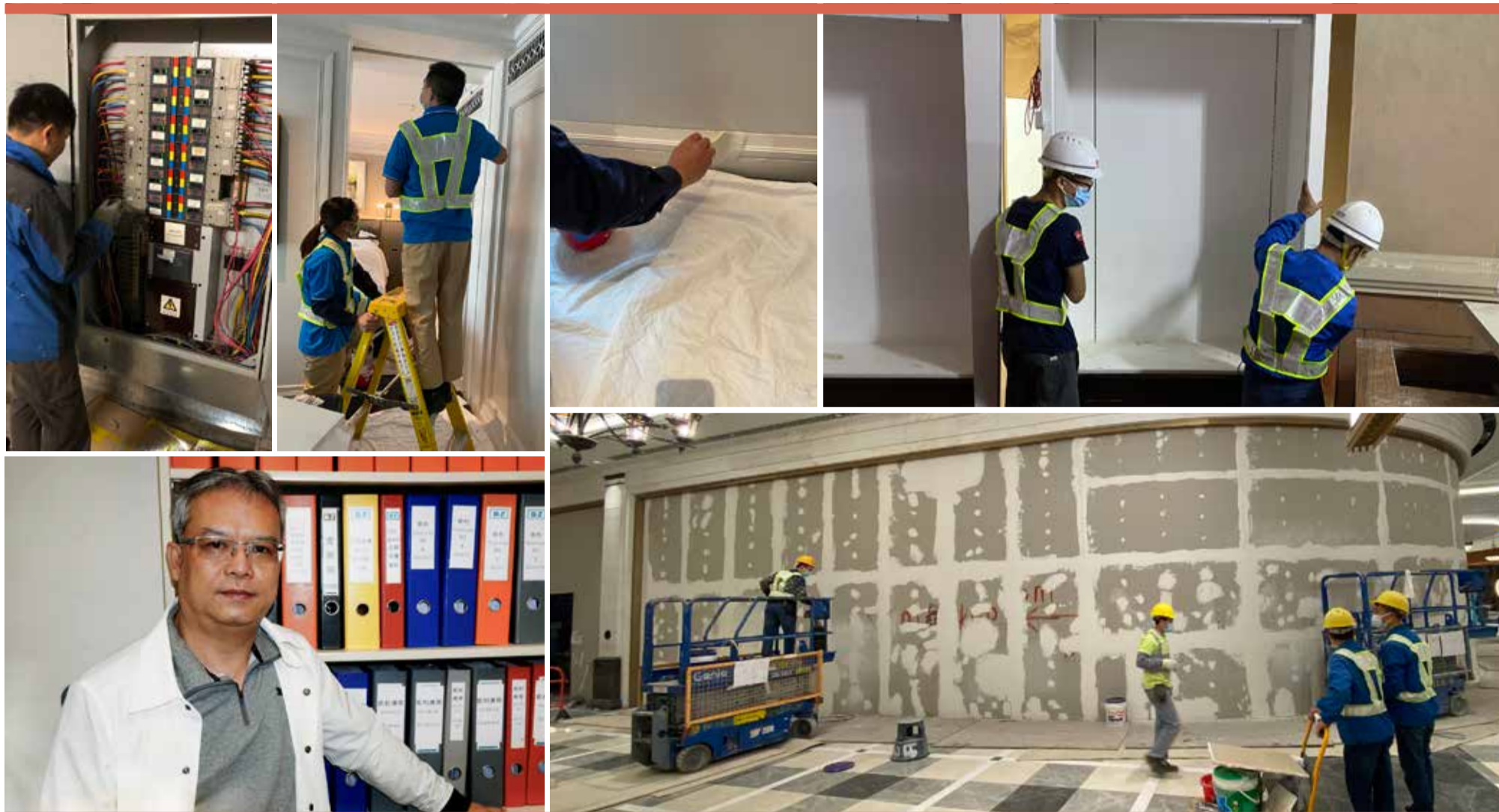
DSPA stated that the two new centers are designed to respond to the needs of citizens, and to encourage them to engage in environmentally responsible action.

In the future, DSAP intends to open more of these centers according to the

different areas of the city and the availability of venues that can hold them.

As the Ponte Negra Center entered into operation, the recycling stations installed on the street under the "Green Points Program" ceased operation and will soon be relocated to other areas.

In the same statement, the bureau reminded the population that, in line the Chief Executive order No. 122/2021, the import of disposable plastic straws and non-biodegradable plastic disposable drink mixers will be banned from January 1 next year.



# Sands China's SMEs: thriving and growing

**S**ANDS China Ltd. has always believed that its success and the success of Macau go hand-in-hand.

As a company deeply rooted in Macau, Sands China has been investing back into the community that it serves to help it thrive and grow, contributing to the development of local enterprises along the way.

In line with the government's call to support local firms, Sands China has launched a series of measures to further strengthen its well-established local procurement strategy.

Local firm Hoi Pak Engineering Company Limited is a testament to Sands China's commitment to support local enterprises as part of its corporate social responsibility efforts.

Hoi Pak Engineering launched in 2016 and mainly undertakes interior alterations, renovation works, electrical and mechanical repairs and material supply services.

With a team of 23 staff members with a wealth of experience, the company's commitment to integrity and professionalism has enabled them to maintain good relationships with their clients in the past.

Sands China expects all suppliers who wish to do business with them to meet all governmental standards and pass rigorous background inspections. In turn, the integrated resort operator

expects all its suppliers to also hold their own suppliers to these same high standards.

Aligning with the Macau government's initiative to "buy local," Sands China began working with Hoi Pak Engineering in 2016.

For the past five years, the engineering firm has been carrying out renovation and refurbishment works mainly for the back-of-house team member areas of Sands China's integrated resorts, as well as repairing individual hotel rooms and refurbishing furniture.

For Homer Fung, Head of Hoi Pak Engineering Company Limited, he considers working with Sands China a "rare opportunity," adding that his client's demand for quality has prompted the company to continuously improve its services.

One way that Fung worked toward that goal was by enrolling in the Sands Procurement Academy. The academy is part of Sands China's E.I.T. programme, which offers Financial Support, Invitational Matching, and Training and Development for local SMEs. E.I.T. targets both existing and new local Sands China suppliers as part of Sands China's Local Small, Medium

and Micro Suppliers Support Programme. It seeks to continually increase and strengthen procurement between Sands China and local SME suppliers by enhancing their capabilities.

For Fung, his company has greatly benefited from attending the academy's courses – even

**“Despite the impact of the pandemic on the local economy, Sands China continued to carry out renovation and expansion works, allowing our company to secure jobs during the difficult period of the pandemic.”**

HOMER FUNG  
HOI PAK ENGINEERING COMPANY LIMITED

amid the pandemic crisis that has been taking a toll on local businesses.

“Despite the impact of the pandemic on the local economy, Sands China continued to carry out renovation and expansion works, allowing our company to secure jobs during the difficult period of the pandemic. Sands China has always paid on time so that SMEs do not have to bear the pressure of liquidity,” said Fung.

Through the firm's partnership with the gaming operator, Hoi Pak Engineering has been able to gain more exposure in Macau, which has helped them develop their business in the market.

“For example, during the pandemic, according to the government's pandemic prevention guidelines, a social distance of at least one metre must be maintained between seats in the casino and some equipment must have additional dividers,” said Fung.

“Our company was responsible for designing and supplying materials for Sands China. Later on, we received requests from other gaming operators for the same type of equipment and we provided quotations. With the experience of working with Sands China, we

believe that our company will be able to further expand its business,” he added.

The local firm expressed hopes that its partnership with Sands China will continue in the future and that it would be able

to participate in more large-scale projects to enrich its business experience.

“The company will also actively expand its scale in response to demand. We will also continually improve the skills and capabilities of the team to provide more professional and efficient services to Sands China,” said Fung.

Sands China believes that although Hoi Pak Engineering Company Limited is small in size, the local SME has been pragmatic and dedicated, as it has always followed the agreed-upon procurement process, such as by providing timely quotations for each transaction.

Sands China has long-pledged to continuously support local SMEs, allowing them to gain experience and capacity for working with large-scale international corporations, as well as providing opportunities for a wider scope of SMEs to benefit from the skills and knowledge offered by the company's Sands Procurement Academy.

## SME TIP FROM SANDS CHINA

**SANDS CHINA LTD.** encourages its suppliers to continuously enhance their diverse knowledge and skills through learning and training. Service providers may wish to attend more Sands Procurement Academy courses organized

by the gaming operator in the future to enhance the efficiency of cooperation and communication between the two parties. In 2020, 89% of Sands China's total procurement spend went to local enterprises.



#METOO

## PENG SHUAI TELLS PAPER SHE NEVER WROTE OF BEING ASSAULTED

CHINESE tennis star Peng Shuai has denied saying she was sexually assaulted, despite a November social media post attributed to her that accused a former top Communist Party official of forcing her into sex.

Lianhe Zaobao, a Singaporean Chinese-language newspaper, posted video of Peng it says was taken Sunday in Shanghai in which she said she has been mainly staying at home in Beijing but was free to come and go as she chose.

"First of all, I want to emphasize something that is very important. I have never said that I wrote that anyone sexually assaulted me. I need to emphasize this point very clearly," Peng told the newspaper's reporter.

The reporter did not ask how or why the lengthy and highly detailed Nov. 2 post appeared or whether Peng's account had been hacked.

The newspaper said it interviewed Peng at a promotional event for the Beijing Winter Olympic Games which begin Feb. 4. She was filmed on the observation deck of a facility where she watched a freestyle ski competition alongside former NBA star Yao Ming and other Chinese sports figures.

Peng dropped out of sight after the accusation against former Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli briefly appeared on her verified Weibo social media before being swiftly removed. Screen shots of the post were shared across the internet, drawing widespread concern about Peng's safety from politicians, fellow tennis stars and the Women's Tennis Association, which announced it was suspending all events in China indefinitely.

Following the posting, the three-time Olympian and former Wimbledon champion appeared standing beside

a tennis court in Beijing, waving and signing oversized commemorative tennis balls for children. The foreign arm of state TV also issued a statement in English attributed to Peng that retracted her accusation against Zhang.

WTA chief executive Steve Simon questioned the emailed statement's legitimacy while others said it only increased their concern about her safety. In the Lianhe Zaobao interview, Peng said she wrote the statement in Chinese and it was later translated into English but that there was no substantive difference in meaning between the two versions.

Zhang, 75, was a member of the party's all-powerful Politburo Standing Committee until 2018 and a top lieutenant to president and party leader Xi Jinping. He has not appeared in public or commented on Peng's accusation.

Simon said the move to put a halt to the tour's play in China, including Hong Kong, came with the backing of the WTA board of directors, players, tournaments and sponsors. It was the strongest public stand against China taken by a sports body — and one that could cost the WTA millions of dollars.

Simon has made repeated calls for China to carry out an inquiry into the 35-year-old Peng's accusations and to allow the WTA to communicate directly with the former No. 1-ranked doubles player and owner of titles at Wimbledon and the French Open.

The IOC has taken a different tack, with top officials saying they believe Peng is fine after video-chatting with her.

The controversy surrounding Peng has added to protests over Beijing's hosting of the Winter Games because of the government's human rights abuses. MDT/AP

CARRIE LAM IN BEIJING

## President Xi endorses Hong Kong's new election system

CHINESE leader Xi Jinping yesterday endorsed Hong Kong's first legislative elections held under new laws ensuring that only "patriots" who have shown loyalty to Beijing could run as candidates.

Sunday's elections for the 90-seat Legislative Council were swept by politicians backed by China's ruling Communist Party. Just 20 seats were directly elected, and the turnout of 30.2% was the lowest since the British handed Hong Kong over to China in 1997.

All candidates were vetted by a largely pro-Beijing committee before they could be nominated.

Xi told Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam in Beijing yesterday that after the elections, he is certain Hong Kongers will join in "realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."

"The execution of the

new election system adheres to the "one country, two systems" principle," Xi said, referring to the increasingly threadbare framework under which Hong Kong was to retain its own political, social and financial institutions for 50 years after being transferred from British rule.

"Our fellow Hong Kong citizens will promote the glorious tradition of loving their country and Hong Kong," Xi said.

The elections had been postponed for a year — ostensibly due to a spike in COVID-19 cases — after the opposition swept elections for district councilors.

They followed widespread and increasingly violent anti-government protests in 2019 that prompted Beijing to impose a sweeping National Security Law on Hong Kong, followed by a reorganization of the electoral process and transformation of

the makeup of the Legislative Council to stack it with pro-Beijing loyalists.

The opposition camp criticized the elections, with the largest pro-democracy party, the Democratic Party, fielding no candidates for the first time since the 1997 handover.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said Monday there were "multiple reasons" for the decline in voter turnout.

"It is not only the impact of the pandemic, but also the disruption and sabotage of anti-China elements in Hong Kong and external forces," Zhao said at a daily briefing.

Some overseas pro-democracy activists, including London-based Nathan Law, had urged a boycott of the vote, saying the elections were undemocratic. Under the new election laws, incitement to boycott the voting or to cast invalid

## Hong Kong election defines

ELECTIONS for Hong Kong's Legislative Council on Sunday mark the culmination of Beijing's campaign to rein in the body that had once kept it from imposing its unrestrained will over the semi-autonomous territory.

Since the city was handed over from British to Chinese rule in 1997, with a promise by Beijing to keep Western-style freedoms for 50 years, demands for expanded democracy inspired protest movements in 2014 and 2019. But they were largely ignored and subsequently crushed by security forces.

Here's a look at the events that resulted in the dramatic changes to Hong Kong's electoral system:

### THE 2014 UMBRELLA MOVEMENT

Also known as "Occupy Central" for the business district where pro-democracy protesters gathered, the movement got its name from the umbrellas activists used to shield themselves from police pepper spray. Nearly 1,000 people were arrested in what marked the city's most tumultuous period since



China took control of the territory. A government proposal would have allowed the city's 5 million eligible voters to vote for the city's leader for the first time. But the package was rejected by pro-democracy lawmakers and activists because the power to select up to three candidates would remain in the hands of a 1,200-member group of tycoons and other elites viewed as sympathetic to the mainland Chinese government.

### 2019 EXTRADITION LAW PROTESTS

The government then withdrew the proposal and current Chief Executive Carrie Lam was selected by an electoral committee. In February 2019, the government introduced an extradition bill it said would plug holes in the territory's regulations on handing over criminal suspects to jurisdictions where they were wanted, including mainland

# Hong Kong's 'patriots only' election

votes could be punished by up to three years in jail and a 200,000 Hong Kong dollar (\$26,500) fine.

Prior to her departure for Beijing, Lam, who is under a U.S. visa ban, said she expected to "cover a wide range of issues on this particular duty visit because through two very decisive acts of the central authorities, Hong Kong is now back on the right track of 'one country, two systems.'"

In a joint statement released by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the foreign ministers of Australia, Britain, Canada, New Zealand and the United States expressed "grave concern" over the erosion of democratic elements of Hong Kong's electoral system and growing restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly.

"Protecting space for peaceful alternative views is the most effective way to ensure the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong," they said. MDT/AP



## Sees dramatic changes by Beijing

China. Opponents said that put citizens at risk of being extradited on political charges to the mainland, where legal rights are considerably weaker and where they could face torture and abuse. After street marches and limited clashes between protesters and police, Lam announced she was suspending the bill on June 15, although it was not formally withdrawn until October.

### GROWING PROTESTS, VIOLENT CLASHES

The movement snowballed into four demands, including an investigation into police tactics and the release of arrested demonstrators. Some also called for Lam to resign and said they want true universal suffrage. All demands were ignored. On July 1, the anniversary of Hong Kong's handover, hardcore demonstrators stormed the legislature. Hundreds of young protesters broke windows, defaced official symbols and spray painted slo-

gans. The council was not in session and officers retreated further inside the building.

### THE CRACKDOWN

As the year wore on, increasingly violent clashes erupted nightly, culminating in November in a lengthy dramatic showdown at Hong Kong Polytechnic University where students had stockpiled homemade incendiaries. Police stormed the campus, arresting more than 1,000 mostly students, and cutting off support for large protest action. Police also arrested senior opposition figures, while the pro-democracy camp won big in elections for district councilors. The movement held a symbolic primary to choose candidates for legislative elections due in September 2020 amid calls to paralyze all parliamentary activities to force concessions. Lam decided to postpone the elections, citing COVID-19 infections.

### NATIONAL SECURITY LAW

Chinese officials declared conditions in Hong Kong are no longer conducive for the passage of national security legislation, and the ceremonial national parliament in Beijing will act on it instead. The National People's Congress on June 30, 2020, passed the National Security Law targeting secessionist, subversive and terrorist activities, as well as collusion with foreign forces, with penalties of up to life imprisonment. Scuffles break out in the Hong Kong legislature, where four lawmakers were disqualified under the provisions of the new law and 15 others resigned in solidarity. Six other lawmakers were expelled earlier after altering their oaths of office.

### ELECTORAL CHANGES

The Chinese parliament on March 11, 2021, passes a resolution to alter Hong Kong's election law that many saw as effectively ending the "one country, two systems" framework under which Hong Kong

was to retain its separate legal, political and financial institutions for 50 years. By a vote of 2,895-0, with one abstention, the assembly voted to give a pro-Beijing committee power to appoint more of Hong Kong's lawmakers, reducing the proportion of those directly elected, and ensure that only those truly loyal to Beijing are allowed to run for office. The move expanded the size of the chamber from 70 to 90 seats, with mem-

bers of the Election Committee, a strongly pro-Beijing body responsible for electing the chief executive, making up 40 of those. Another 30 seats are elected by business groupings known as "functional constituencies." The number of directly elected representatives was reduced from 35 to 20. Five seats elected from among district councilors were abolished altogether.

### ONLY PATRIOTS CAN RUN FOR OFFICE

Candidate vetting rules included in the changes ensure that anyone even suspected of being less

than overwhelming loyal to Beijing will be weeded out. Hong Kong is moving toward the authoritarian Communist Party strictures in place in mainland China. The U.K. and U.S. have condemned the electoral changes while Beijing and its supporters call them mere refinements to improve efficiency. In a Dec. 7 interview with Communist Party newspaper Global Times, Lam said the elections would be "more representative with more balanced participation." She said the goal is to elect those who are patriotic to govern the city. MDT/AP



PANDEMIC

# Thailand, Southeast Asia reimpose quarantine as concerns grow over omicron

BUSABA SIVASOMBOON & PATRICK QUINN, BANGKOK

**T**HAILAND yesterday decided to immediately reimpose a mandatory quarantine for visitors and suspend a “test-and-go” scheme for fully vaccinated arrivals as concerns grow over the spread of the omicron variant of the coronavirus, the government said.

The decision is a blow to efforts to revive Thailand's battered tourism sector ahead of the peak holiday season.

Government spokesman Thanakorn Wangboonkongchana also announced the suspension of “sandbox” programs that allow visitors to remain and move around specific locations, except for the resort island of Phuket, where he said it will stay in effect.

“This is not to shut off tourists but to temporarily suspend arrivals,” he said. He added that the decision would be reviewed on Jan. 4.

He said about 200,000 people who have registered for the “test-and-go” scheme, known as Thailand Pass, but have not yet entered Thailand will be allowed to come. They will be subject to a coronavirus test on arrival and a second test seven days later at the expense of the government. He did not provide further details.

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha said Thailand will not accept any new applications for the “test-and-go” program.

“Today we no longer accept more applications for travelers. No new applications,” he told reporters. “We have about 200,000 travelers who already registered. No other restrictions apply for these people, but we will have to track them.”

He added that “from now, we are back to the old system of quarantine when entering.”

The decision came after Thailand recorded its first case of domestic transmission of the omicron variant



last week, when a returning resident tested negative on arrival but later tested positive and infected members of his family. The few other positive cases were all caught after testing on arrival and quarantined.

Thailand and other countries in Southeast Asia eased entry restrictions for fully vaccinated travelers in November in an effort to kickstart tourism, a major revenue earner that collapsed with the start of the pandemic. But with the exception of Thailand, few have attracted the return of many foreign visitors due to complex entry requirements.

Bali, a prime tourism destination, has had only a few dozen foreign tourists since it reopened, and Cambodia and Vietnam have also struggled.

Starting in November, Thailand began reopening to fully vaccinated visitors without quarantine, easing a lockdown that caused massive job losses and hardship. Tourism accounted for some 20% of the economy before the pandemic.

With the onset of omicron, Thailand and other countries in Asia moved swiftly to block entry from an initial group of African nations. But Thailand kept its “test-and-go” program active for fully vaccinated travelers from more than 60 countries.

Under the scheme, fully vaccinated visitors had to show negative results from RT-PCR tests before flying

and upon their arrival had a second PCR test. They had to spend their first night in a government-approved hotel awaiting their test results. If the results were negative, they could travel anywhere in Thailand.

Thailand had by far the most ambitious program in the region to allow travelers to enter and move around the country. It eased restrictions after a successful vaccination program that has seen 100 million doses administered to its population of about 60 million people. Booster programs are already underway around the country.

COVID-19 cases have steadily been dropping, with 2,476 new cases and 32 deaths reported yesterday. Thailand has recorded 2,196,529 cases and 21,346 deaths since the start of the pandemic.

Thailand tested the waters with a “sandbox” program under which it reopened Phuket in July to fully vaccinated visitors without quarantine, allowing them free movement on the island for 14 days and then onward travel throughout the country. It then cut the requirement to seven days, but actively tracked visitors and required them to undergo RT-PCR tests on day one and seven.

Since Thailand reopened to tourists on Nov. 1 with “test-and-go,” it has received 290,000 visitors, 130,000 of them in November. Last week, Phuket even

had fully booked resorts.

Thailand shut its borders to most foreign visitors in April last year after local transmission of the coronavirus started to climb. Foreign tourist arrivals in 2019 were almost 40 million but plunged to 6.7 million in 2020, with most of those visitors coming in the first quarter.

The government had targeted 1.5 trillion baht (\$44.6 billion) in revenue from tourism in 2021. Thailand recorded 3.4 trillion baht (\$101 billion) in income from the tourism sector in 2019.

Most countries in Asia have reported only a handful of omicron cases so far, or in the case of India, about 200.

India, which also opened to vaccinated tourists in November, has since suspended commercial international flights until Jan. 31 as global alarm over the variant grows. Still, international travel has continued via a number of flights from countries that India had agreements with.

Japan, where the vast majority of the population is vaccinated, now bans entry to most foreign nationals.

Mainland China, Macau and Hong Kong have continued to ban tourists from entry. Visitors face tight entry restrictions and mandatory 14- to 21-day quarantines depending on which part of the country they arrive in. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1992 QUEEN'S CHRISTMAS SPEECH LEAKED



A national newspaper has published the Queen's Christmas speech two days ahead of schedule sparking a full investigation from the BBC into the unprecedented leak.

Buckingham Palace today denounced as “very regrettable” the publication of the Queen's traditional annual speech in the Sun newspaper ahead of its broadcast on the BBC.

It signalled a clampdown on the future availability of the speech to the world's press and warned other media organisations against reporting information from the newspaper.

The publication, spread across the centre pages of the newspaper, is virtually word-for-word the text of the five-minute broadcast, recorded at Sandringham.

There are some suggestions the broadcast may have been picked up by a satellite TV enthusiast who then passed it to the Sun. Others point to a BBC mole.

A total of 120 audio and video copies of the broadcast was distributed yesterday by satellite to media organisations.

The publication embargo spells out the radio broadcast should not be before 0900 GMT on Christmas Day and the television broadcast not before 1500.

Palace aides regard the broadcast as crown copyright and its advance publication may be interpreted as a breach of that.

But the Sun's assistant news editor Leaf Kalfayan said the paper came by the story by “good, old-fashioned techniques”.

It had not broken any embargoes and had obtained the information by legal means.

The BBC said it viewed the leak with “concern” and hoped it would not mar the sense of occasion engendered by the Queen's broadcast.

A spokesman said the tapes were distributed yesterday and by 1700 GMT up to 40 UK broadcasters had received copies.

This year's message has been eagerly awaited after the Queen witnessed the break-up of the marriages of her sons, Andrew and Charles, Princess Anne's divorce and a fire at Windsor Castle.

The Queen has also had to endure the publication of Andrew Morton's controversial book on the Princess of Wales and yield to demands she should pay income tax.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

The source of the leak has never been found. The Queen described her “sombre year” with the now infamous phrase “annus horribilis”. Many aspects of the broadcast were subsequently changed with the venue switching from Sandringham to Windsor Castle and Buckingham Palace, and many media outlets not receiving the text of the address until late on Christmas Eve. Buckingham Palace also ended the BBC's monopoly on the rights to produce the speech, to share it with Independent Television News (ITN) on a rotating basis. It was widely interpreted as a deliberate snub to the BBC in retaliation for its Panorama interview with the Princess of Wales in November 1995.

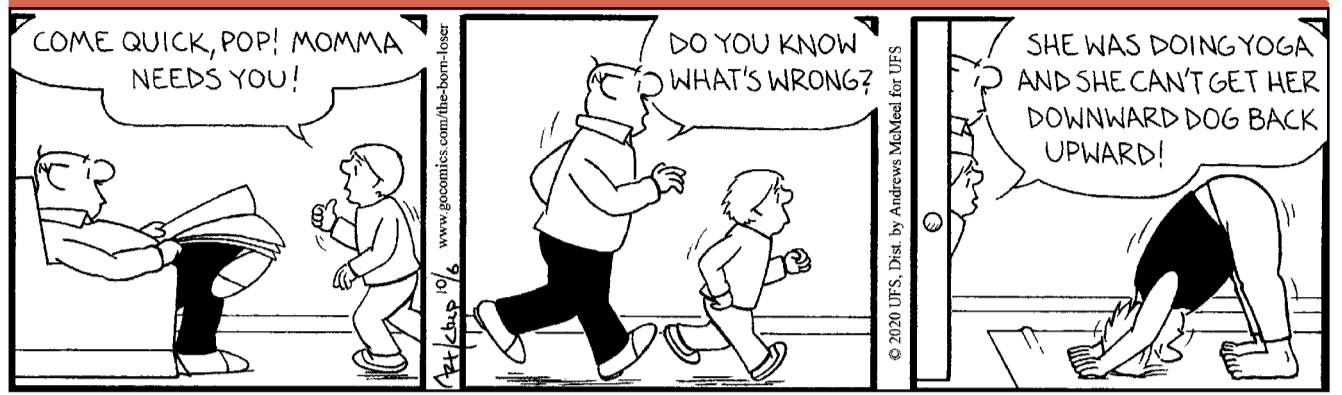


MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

 <b>ARIES</b> Mar. 21-Apr. 19 You can make money if you are careful not to let it trickle through your fingers. You can pick up some overtime today. You can make a huge difference to children if you are able to put yourself in their shoes.	 <b>TAURUS</b> Apr. 20-May. 20 Pay attention to small but important details. Try to avoid functions that will bring you in contact with those you find difficult to get along with. Don't forget that you've only heard one side of the story.
 <b>GEMINI</b> May. 21-Jun. 21 You will learn a great deal from people with different cultural backgrounds. There might be one who is quite willing to take the credit for your work. You can pick up information that will give you an edge.	 <b>CANCER</b> Jun. 22-Jul. 22 Resist the temptation to gamble. Risks will not be profitable. Investments will not be as they appear today. Do something together and you'll be surprised how sweet a deal you can make.
 <b>LEO</b> Jul. 23-Aug. 22 You will expand your circle of friends if you join groups. Look at your options before making commitments that could jeopardize your financial position.	 <b>VIRGO</b> Aug. 23-Sep. 22 Don't jump into investments too quickly. Don't be too quick to react. You should include children in your activities. Responsibilities with respect to older relatives may be a burden.
 <b>LIBRA</b> Sep. 23-Oct. 22 Look into career choices and courses being offered. Real estate investments will be profitable. Trouble could be brewing at home.	 <b>SCORPIO</b> Oct. 23-Nov. 21 Your ability to be practical in business will help. You should be putting in some overtime. Develop some of your good ideas.
 <b>SAGITTARIUS</b> Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Don't let them blame you. Comfort is a necessity. Check your motives. You may be somewhat emotional concerning a rather private matter.	 <b>CAPRICORN</b> Dec. 22-Jan. 19 You'll be dropping friends for no apparent reason. Too much talk might lead to hassles. You need to do something energetic and different.
 <b>AQUARIUS</b> Jan. 20-Feb. 18 You need to focus on yourself, not on others. You can make positive changes in your home. Put your time and energy into home improvement. Be careful not to hurt someone's feelings.	 <b>PISCES</b> Feb. 19-Mar. 20 Be confident in your endeavors and others will believe in your efforts. If you're feeling uncertain, spend some time alone and reevaluate your motives as well as your needs.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

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**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	-2	1	overcast
Harbin	-20	-12	fine
Tianjin	6	20	fine
Urumqi	7	12	cloudy
Xi'an	6	12	overcast
Lhasa	-2	2	snow
Chengdu	12	16	overcast
Chongqing	8	22	cloudy
Kunming	1	16	cloudy
Nanjing	16	21	rain
Shanghai	6	14	cloudy
Wuhan	-25	-16	fine
Hangzhou	2	15	fine
Taipei	-10	1	cloudy
Guangzhou	14	19	cloudy
Hong Kong	17	19	cloudy
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	-12	-14	snow
Frankfurt	3	4	cloudy
Paris	8	11	overcast
London	7	12	rain
New York	1	3	overcast

**CROSSWORDS**

**ACROSS** 1- Capital of the Ukraine; 5- Appraise, charge per unit; 9- "Peter Pan" pirate; 13- \_\_\_ Grows in Brooklyn; 15- Desktop picture; 16- Shepherd; 17- Reposes; 18- Nair rival; 19- Actress Heche; 20- Galena, e.g.; 21- Actress Harper; 23- Dried grape; 25- Bay; 26- Native Israelis; 27- Like barber poles; 30- Fail to tell the truth; 31- Awkward boos; 32- Credulous; 37- "Rule Britannia" composer; 38- Eye sores; 40- Wyoming resource; 41- Large percussion instrument; 43- Outdoes; 44- German article; 45- Otagia; 47- In working order; 50- Microsoft game system; 51- Middy nap; 52- Rabbit's tail; 53- Nor. neighbor; 56- Terminates; 57- Branta sandvicensis; 59- Perfected; 61- To \_\_\_ (perfectly); 62- Retain; 63- Sharp pain; 64- Swabbies; 65- Work without \_\_\_; 66- Kitchen addition;

**DOWN** 1- Syrup brand; 2- Roman road; 3- Gaelic language of Ireland or Scotland; 4- Spot checker?; 5- Washed lightly; 6- Breezes through; 7- Foot digit; 8- Intestines; 9- Flight segment; 10- Brainy bunch; 11- Bandleader Skinnay \_\_\_; 12- Biblical garden; 14- Bars legally; 22- Adam's madam; 24- Genesis victim; 25- Quotes; 26- Swing around; 27- Thick slice; 28- When said three times, a 1970 war movie; 29- Flows; 32- Hoops venue; 33- Mountaineer's tool; 34- Winter pear; 35- Narrow strip of wood; 36- Otherwise; 38- Ceylon, now; 39- Air; 42- It's owed; 43- Thin soups; 45- Unless; 46- "Aladdin" monkey; 47- Utah's \_\_\_ Mountains; 48- Passover meal; 49- Donkeys; 51- Chair; 52- Dagger of yore; 53- Agitated state; 54- Took off; 55- Upper hand; 58- Still, in poetry; 60- Suffix with Capri;

**Monday's solution**

H	E	R	K	E	L	I	A	H	A	L	F
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R	O	B	B	E	A	T	E	N	R	I	T
B	O	S	C	R	O	I	S	R	A	E	L
S	A	T	I	N	A	C	H	E			
S	A	G	A	S	L	U	K	E	W	A	R
S	C	R	E	W	S	I	D	E	S	T	O
L	E	E	S	T	A	I	R	E	L	D	
A	N	N	I	T	A	R	T	S	M	I	L
U	F	A	N	D	E	R	S	T	E	R	N
C	O	L	U	M	N	T	E	N	E	V	E
A	N	I	L	U	N	I	T	E	H	A	R
S	T	A	G	W	A	L	T	A	E	R	S
H	O	M	E	P	E	A	R	D	E	S	

**USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

Emergency calls 999	Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
Fire department 28 572 222	Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
PJ (Open line) 993	Telephone - Report 1000
PJ (Picket) 28 557 775	Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
Customs 28 559 944	
S. J. Hospital 28 313 731	
Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333	
Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300	
IAM 28 387 333	
Tourism 28 333 000	
Airport 59 888 88	



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NERDWALLET

# WAIT, WHOM SHOULD WE TIP FOR THE HOLIDAYS — AND HOW MUCH?

LAURA MCMULLEN

**YOU'RE** likely planning to give some extra love to family and friends this time of year. But what about your dog walker or babysitter? If you haven't already, consider showing appreciation for your service providers with a gift or bonus gratuity.

After all, now is the time to "say 'thank you' and wish people well for the next year," says Lizzie Post, who hosts the "Awesome Etiquette" podcast and is based in Burlington, Vermont.

The kind sentiment around gifting and tipping is clear, sure, but the specifics can be confusing. How much do you give, and to whom? And what if the idea of shelling out more cash around the holidays turns your insides to egg-nog?

You'll find answers to these questions below, but first, let's discuss timing. There's no need to get your tips, gifts and notes delivered by Christmas, and it's fine if you missed Hanukkah or are running behind on Kwanzaa. Shoot for some time around the new year.

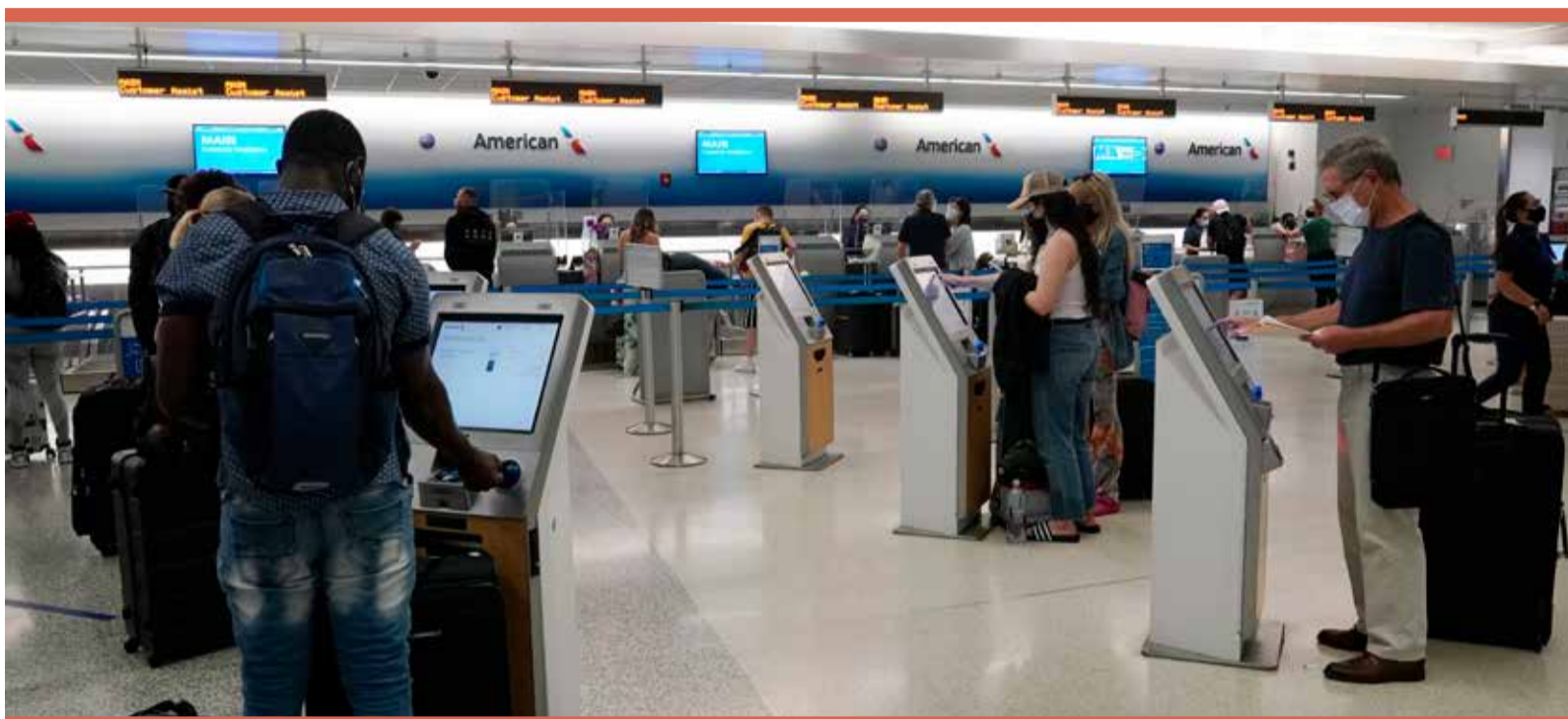
### WHO SHOULD RECEIVE GIFTS OR EXTRA GRATUITY?

Show your generosity to providers you see consistently — at least four or five times throughout the year, says Crystal L. Bailey, director of The Etiquette Institute of Washington (in D.C.).

These are typically people "who you developed a closer professional relationship with, whose services you greatly appreciate," she adds.

So, if you get your hair cut by whoever is available and don't know their name, don't worry

AP PHOTO



about a gift or extra gratuity. But, if you're a regular client of a specific hairdresser, and they know just how to do your 'do, consider showing some year-end generosity.

Gifts or tips may also be appropriate for child care professionals, teachers, housekeepers, personal trainers and dog walkers. "That list is going to be a little different for everybody," Post says.

So think about who's regularly helped you out — like the apartment super if they've had to unlock your door several times.

### WHO GETS GRATUITY, AND HOW MUCH?

Tip people whom you pay directly. For example, say you typically give a provider cash or pay electronically with a card swipe or an app like Venmo or PayPal. Bailey says it's fine to use the same

payment methods to leave them a large year-end tip.

How much to tip depends on your finances and what you're comfortable giving. Bailey suggests tipping up to the amount of a single service. So, if your every-other-month massage is \$75, she says, "I'd tip them \$25, \$50 or up to that \$75." Or, she says, double your typical tip.

However much you give, put that money in a card "with a note of your gratitude," Post says.

### WHO GETS GIFTS, AND WHAT KIND?

Gifts and gift cards are better for providers you don't pay directly. You wouldn't give your kid's teacher cash, for example, but Bailey says a gift card would be fine. For extra credit, go with a gift card for a nearby coffee shop or restaurant, she adds, which

makes the gesture more personal and supports a local business.

Consumables can make good gifts, too, according to both Bailey and Post. A plate of cookies, for example, works particularly well as a shareable group or staff gift. If you make those cookies yourself, Post suggests including a list of ingredients or common allergens, like nuts.

Try to avoid gifts that take up a lot of space, Bailey says, as well as personal items, such as clothes or scents.

### WHAT IF I CAN'T AFFORD TIPS AND GIFTS?

All this year-end generosity isn't meant to break your budget, Post says. And while these tips and gifts are customary, she says, "they're not guaranteed bonuses."

If giving all this money is stres-

ful (or not feasible), Post suggests you "breathe, and think about your own life and what works for you."

Maybe you give no tips or gifts this year. Or perhaps you give to only a few providers. In that case, "prioritize who has really been invaluable to you this year," Post says.

Words can go a long way, too, she adds. Always write a note, whether you tip someone or not. If you typically give a large year-end tip but can't afford it this year, Post suggests briefly explaining that in the note. Otherwise, your provider may wonder if they did something wrong.

For the rest of the note, Post says, don't overthink it. Thank the provider for their wonderful service, she says, and wish them well for the year ahead.

MDT/NERDWALLET

## CORPORATE BITS

### MGM to pay discretionary bonus to eligible team members



MGM announced that a one-time discretionary allowance will be paid to eligible non-management

team members — as such, 95% of its team members can be rewarded. In a statement, the ga-

ming operator said that the one-time discretionary allowance is equal to one month's salary and will be paid in two installments before and after 2022 Chinese New Year.

Pansy Ho, co-chairperson and executive director of MGM China Holdings Limited, said "2021 was another year of adapting to changes. Still, our Golden Lion team strive their best to ride out of the storm. [...] The allowance is our appreciation [for] and recognition of the relentless effort and hard work of our team members in the past year, [who encouraged] us to sail together for our new chapter of 15th Anniversary."

### GEG invests USD10 million in corporate green bond



Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) recently invested USD10 million in a green bond issued by Mingyang Smart Energy Group, the gaming operator has announced in a statement.

This is the first corporate

green bond issued in Macau, with Bank of China Limited (Macau Branch) acting as the Joint Global Coordinator and the Sole Green Structuring Advisor for the issuance. The bond is listed on the Chongwa (Macao) Financial Asset

Exchange Co., Ltd. (MOX).

"This initial green bond supports the integrated development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area, as well as the development of Macau's financial market," the firm stated.

This represents GEG's third investment in corporate social responsibility (CSR) and green bonds.

Headquartered in Zhongshan City of Guangdong Province, Mingyang Group is a clean energy integrated solution provider and the first private entity to issue bonds in Macau. Proceeds from the bond sale will fund the construction of green-energy projects.

**FOOTBALL**

# EPL club Arsenal's ads for crypto tokens banned in Britain

**P**REMIER League club Arsenal's promotion of fan tokens broke advertising regulations and have been banned in Britain for taking advantage of consumers' inexperience in cryptocurrencies.

The London team said fan tokens were used to encourage participation and were different to cryptocurrencies, which are virtual currencies used as a means of payment.

The Facebook and website posts included a video featuring players Ben White, Calum Chambers and Kieran Tierney.

The Advertising Standards Authority said in an announcement yesterday the ads took advantage of consumers' inexperience or credulity and trivialized investment in crypto assets, failed to illustrate the risk of the investment and did not make clear the "token" through the Socios company was a crypto asset, which could only be obtained by opening an account and exchanging with another cryptocurrency.



Token buyers can also make money in return by trading the digital assets at a price determined by the market's supply and demand, and ultimately by the team's performances and actions, so can fluctuate significantly.

Owners can sell and trade their tokens using Chiliz, one of the many cryptocurrencies based on blockchain technology.

Socios lists almost 50 partnerships with clubs, including Premier League champion Manchester City, Barcelona, Juventus and Paris Saint-Germain. The clubs and Socios tout

the tokens as a means of giving fans a say in decision-making but that is often reduced to votes on which songs to play ahead of games rather than anything substantial.

Britain's Financial Conduct Authority categorizes the tokens as crypto assets, a complex and sophisticated investment subject to frequent change in value and one that could potentially lead to large losses.

"We acknowledged that the ads did not promote the fan tokens as an investment or financial product," the advertising watchdog, the ASA, said.

"However, the product was a crypto asset regardless of how it was promoted and the ads did not contain any information that capital gains tax (CGT) could be payable on profits from investing in crypto assets. We therefore considered the potential tax implications were not made sufficiently clear to consumers considering investing in it."

The club said it promoted the tokens responsibly by reminding fans they only needed one token to vote in decisions, and that they should only purchase what they could afford. It also urged buyers to seek independent financial advice if required.

"The ads trivialized investment in cryptoassets and took advantage of consumers' inexperience or credulity by not making clear that CGT could be payable on profits from investing," the ASA said. "We concluded the ads were irresponsible and breached the code."

The Arsenal Supporters' Trust has previously raised concerns about the Socios partnership. **MDT/AP**

**OLYMPICS**

# ORGANIZERS SAY TOKYO GAMES COST \$1.8B LESS THAN EXPECTED

**T**HE Tokyo Olympics cost \$1.8 billion less than anticipated, local organizers said yesterday, 4 1/2 months after the Games ended.

Organizers said the estimated official costs were \$13.6 billion. Officials said part of the reduction was because there were no fans — forced by the pandemic — and therefore vastly reduced labor costs. They also said other outlays were lower than expected.

Official estimates over the last year said the costs would be \$15.4 billion. However, government audits over several years suggested the real costs were much higher — perhaps twice the official estimates.

Olympics costs are notoriously difficult to track, and there is always debate about what are and what are not Olympic costs. A study by the University of Oxford concluded that Tokyo was the most expensive Olympics on record.

Organizers indicated final expense figures would not be available until after spring 2022 with venues still being restored and contracts still subject to revision.

The biggest blow to the budget was the loss of \$800 million in ticket sales, a shortfall that has to be made up by Japanese government entities. **MDT/AP**

AD

**"TRY THIS"**  
BY  
**ALEX TORRAO**  
COMING SOON

**THE ROADHOUSE**  
MACAU  
FAST BIKES  
ROCK & ROLL MUSIC  
FOOD AND FUN  
**THE ROADHOUSE MACAU**  
IS MACAU'S MOST POPULAR BAR FOR BLUES, BOOZE AND ROCK.  
COME ON DOWN AND LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL.

OPINION

World Views

Lauran Neergaard & Carla k. Johnson  
 MDT/AP Medical Writers

**BOOSTERS KEY TO FIGHT OMICRON, LOT STILL TO LEARN**

The new omicron variant took only a few weeks to live up to dire predictions about how hugely contagious it is but scientists don't yet know if it causes more severe disease even as the world faces exploding cases just before Christmas.

"Everything is riskier now because omicron is so much more contagious," said Dr. S. Wesley Long, who directs the testing lab at Houston Methodist Hospital — and over the past week has canceled numerous plans to avoid exposure.

Omicron now is the dominant variant in the U.S., federal health officials said Monday, accounting for about three-quarters of new infections last week.

The speed that it's outpacing the also very contagious delta variant is astonishing public health officials. In three weeks, omicron now makes up 80% of new symptomatic cases diagnosed by Houston Methodist's testing sites. It took the delta variant three months to reach that level, Long said.

The mutant's ability to spread faster and evade immunity came at a bad time — right as travel increased and many people let down their guard. But what the omicron wave will mean for the world is still unclear because so many questions remain unanswered.

Here's the latest on what's known and what's still to learn about omicron.

Vaccines around the world do not offer as much protection against omicron as they have against previous versions of the coronavirus. However, vaccines still help — a lot. Lab tests show while two doses may not be strong enough to prevent infection, a booster shot of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine produces virus-fighting antibodies capable of tackling omicron.

Antibody levels naturally drop over time, and a booster revived them back up again, by 25 times for Pfizer's extra shot and 37 times for Moderna's. No one knows exactly what level is high enough — or how long it will be before antibody levels begin dropping again.

After a booster, the protection against an omicron infection still appears about 20% less than protection against the delta variant, said Dr. Egon Ozer of Northwestern University.

But if the virus gets past that first line of defense, the vaccinated have additional layers of protection.

"The vaccines are going to protect you against severe disease, hospitalization and death," said Houston Methodist's Long. "And that's really the most important thing."

Those extra defenses include T cells that mobilize to beat back the virus, plus memory cells that, once reactivated, race to make more and stronger antibodies.

Also, a prior infection doesn't seem to offer much protection against an omicron infection although, like with vaccination, it may reduce the chances of severe illness.

In South Africa, where omicron already has spread widely, scientists reported a jump in reinfections that they hadn't seen when two previous mutants, including delta, moved through the country.

In Britain, a report from the Imperial College of London on Friday found the risk of reinfection from omicron was five times higher compared to the earlier delta variant.

Health experts say anyone who's survived a bout of COVID-19 still should get vaccinated, because the combination generally offers stronger protection.

Scientists are trying to decode the dozens of mutations that omicron carries to figure out what else is going on. Researchers in Hong Kong recently reported hints that omicron may multiply more quickly in the airway than delta did, although not as efficiently deep in the lungs.

What scientists can't measure is human behavior: Many places were relaxing restrictions, winter forced gatherings indoors and travel has jumped right as omicron began spreading.

It's still too early to know — especially given that if the vaccinated get a breakthrough infection, it should be milder than if omicron attacks the unvaccinated.

Early reports from South Africa suggested milder illness but doctors were unsure whether that's because the population is fairly young — or that many retained some protection from a recent delta infection.

[Abridged]

China yesterday defended its international scientific exchange programs in the wake of the conviction of a Harvard University professor charged with hiding his ties to a Chinese-run recruitment program.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said China manages such exchanges along the same lines as the U.S. and other countries.

U.S. agencies and officials should not "stigmatize" such programs and "instead do something conducive to China-U.S. scientific and people-to-people exchanges and cooperation," Zhao said.

Charles Lieber, 62, the former chair of Harvard's department of

chemistry and chemical biology, pleaded not guilty to filing false tax returns, making false statements, and failing to file reports for a foreign bank account in China.

Lieber's defense attorney, Marc Mukasey, had argued that prosecutors lacked proof of the charges, maintaining that investigators kept no records of their interviews with Lieber prior to his arrest.

Prosecutors argued that Lieber, who was arrested in January, knowingly hid his involvement in China's Thousand Talents Plan to protect his career and reputation. The Chinese program is designed to recruit people with knowledge of foreign technology and intellectual property who could pass secrets on to China.

**SOUTH AFRICA'S CASE DROP MAY SHOW OMICRON PEAK HAS PASSED**

ANDREW MELDRUM,  
 JOHANNESBURG

**S**OUTH Africa's noticeable drop in new COVID-19 cases in recent days may signal that the country's dramatic omicron-driven surge has passed its peak, medical experts say.

Daily virus case counts are notoriously unreliable, as they can be affected by uneven testing, reporting delays and other fluctuations. But they are offering one tantalizing hint — far from conclusive yet — that omicron infections may recede quickly after a ferocious spike.

South Africa has been at the forefront of the omicron wave and the world is watching for any signs of how it may play out there to try to understand what may be in store.

After hitting a high of nearly 27,000 new cases nationwide on Thursday, the numbers dropped to about 15,424 on Tuesday (yesterday, Macau time). In Gauteng province — South Africa's most populous with 16 million people, including

the largest city, Johannesburg, and the capital, Pretoria — the decrease started earlier and has continued.

"The drop in new cases nationally combined with the sustained drop in new cases seen here in Gauteng province, which for weeks has been the center of this wave, indicates that we are past the peak," Marta Nunes, senior researcher at the Vaccines and Infectious Diseases Analytics department of the University of Witwatersrand, told The Associated Press.

"It was a short wave ... and the good news is that it was not very severe in terms of hospitalizations and deaths," she said. It is "not unexpected in epidemiology that a very steep increase, like what we saw in November, is followed by a steep decrease."



Gauteng province saw its numbers start sharply rising in mid-November. Scientists doing genetic sequencing quickly identified the new, highly mutated omicron variant that was announced to the world on Nov. 25.

Significantly more transmissible, omicron quickly achieved dominance in South Africa. An estimated 90% of COVID-19 cases in Gauteng province since mid-November have been omicron, according to tests.

**89 countries hit by omicron variant: WHO**

And the world seems to be quickly following, with omicron already surpassing the delta variant as the dominant coronavirus strain in some countries. In the U.S., omicron accounted for 73% of new infections last week, health officials said — and the variant is responsible for an estimated 90% or more of new infections in the New York area, the Southeast, the industrial Midwest and the Pacific Northwest.

Confirmed coronavirus cases in the U.K. have surged by 60% in a week as omicron overtook delta as the dominant variant there. Worldwide, the variant has been detected in at least 89 countries, according to the World Health Organization.

In South Africa, experts worried that the sheer volume of new infections would overwhelm the country's hospitals, even though omicron appears to cause milder disease, with significantly less hospitalizations, patients needing oxygen and deaths.

But then cases in Gauteng started falling. After reaching 16,000 new infections on Dec. 12, the province's numbers have steadily dropped, to just over 3,300 cases Tuesday.

"It's significant. It's very significant," Dr. Fared Abdullah said of the decrease.

"The rapid rise of new cases has been followed by a rapid fall and it appears we're seeing the beginning of the decline of this wave," said Abdullah, working in the COVID-19 ward at Pretoria's Steve Biko Academic Hospital.

In another sign that South Africa's omicron surge may be receding, a study of health care professionals who tested positive for COVID-19 at Chris Hani Baragwanath hospital in Soweto shows a rapid increase and then a quick decline in cases.

"Two weeks ago we were seeing more than 20 new cases per day and now it is about five or six cases per day," Nunes said.

But, she said, it is still very early and there are several factors that must be closely watched. **MDT/AP**

**Germany** A former nurse at a home for the severely disabled in eastern Germany was convicted of murder and given a 15-year sentence yesterday for killing four residents. The state court in Potsdam ordered the 52-year-old woman sent to a psychiatric hospital, German news agency dpa reported. She also was convicted of attempted murder and ill-treatment of people in her care.

**French** Health Minister Olivier Veran said yesterday that omicron infections are spreading fast and that the coronavirus variant will become the dominant infection in the last days of 2021. Speaking to BFMTV, Veran ruled out additional restrictions on public life and said the government's main effort to stop the spread of the virus is a robust vaccination campaign, including vaccination of children aged 5-11 that started yesterday.

**Greece**'s coast guard says one migrant has died and dozens are feared missing after a boat sank off the coast of the island of Folegandros. The body of the unidentified man was recovered during an ongoing search and rescue operation launched yesterday after the boat sank some 180 kilometers southeast of Athens. The coast guard said 12 people, all believed to be from Iraq, had been rescued and transported to the nearby island of Santorini.



**Portugal** yesterday announced a slew of new restrictions over Christmas and the New Year, making working from home mandatory and shutting discotheques and bars beginning Saturday night. Also, a negative test result must be shown to enter various venues. Portugal will impose exceptional measures on the holidays, including having a negative test result to enter restaurants and public celebrations. And on New Year's Eve, no more than 10 people can gather in the street, and drinking alcohol outdoors will be prohibited.