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THE PHILIPPINES YESTERDAY REPORTED A RECORD HIGH NUMBER OF NEW COVID-19 CASES FOR THE THIRD DAY, LOGGING 33,169 INFECTIONS

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REAL ESTATE REBOUND?



Indonesian authorities yesterday granted emergency authorization for the use of five different Covid-19 vaccines as booster shots that will prioritize vulnerable groups. Penny Lukito, head of Indonesia's Food and Drug Monitoring Agency, said Sinovac, Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Moderna and Zifivax vaccines would be distributed as a third vaccine shot in the country. Lukito added there are several additional vaccines that are currently in the process of clinical trials to obtain emergency use permits.



Myanmar A court sentenced ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi to four more years in prison yesterday after finding her guilty of illegally importing and possessing walkie-talkies and violating coronavirus restrictions, a legal official said. Suu Kyi was convicted last month on two other charges and given a four-year prison sentence, which was then halved by the head of the military-installed government.



Kazakhstan authorities said yesterday that nearly 8,000 people were detained by police during protests that descended into violence last week and marked the worst unrest the former Soviet nation has faced since gaining independence 30 years ago. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev described the events as a "terrorist aggression" against the country and dismissed reports of the authorities fighting peaceful demonstrators as "disinformation."

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THE CONVERSATION

WHAT WILL 2022 BRING IN THE WAY OF MISINFORMATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA? 3 EXPERTS WEIGH IN

At the end of 2020, it seemed hard to imagine a worse year for misinformation on social media, given the intensity of the presidential election and the trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic. But 2021 proved up to the task, starting with the Jan. 6 insurrection and continuing with copious amounts of falsehoods and distortions about COVID-19 vaccines.

To get a sense of what 2022 could hold, we asked three researchers about the evolution of misinformation on social media.

ABSENT REGULATION, MISINFORMATION WILL GET WORSE

ANJANA SUSARLA, PROFESSOR OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

While misinformation has always existed in media – think of the Great Moon Hoax of 1835 that claimed life was discovered on the moon – the advent of social media has significantly increased the scope, spread and reach of misinformation. Social media platforms have morphed into public information utilities that control how most people view the world, which makes misinformation they facilitate a fundamental problem for society.

There are two primary challenges in addressing misinformation. The first is the dearth of regulatory mechanisms that ad-

dress it. Mandating transparency and giving users greater access to and control over their data might go a long way in addressing the challenges of misinformation. But there's also a need for independent audits, including tools that assess social media algorithms. These can establish how the social media platforms' choices in curating news feeds and presenting content affect how people see information.

The second challenge is that racial and gender biases in algorithms used by social media platforms exacerbate the misinformation problem. While social media companies have introduced mechanisms to highlight authoritative sources of information, solutions such as labeling posts as misinformation don't solve racial and gender biases in accessing information. Highlighting relevant sources of, for example, health information may only help users with greater health literacy and not people with low health literacy, who tend to be disproportionately minorities.

Another problem is the need to look systematically at where users are finding misinformation. TikTok, for example, has largely escaped government scrutiny. What's more, misinformation targeting minorities, particularly Spanish-language content, may be far worse than misinformation targeting majority communities.

I believe the lack of independent audits, lack of transparency in fact checking and the racial and gender biases underlying algorithms used by social media platforms suggest that the need for regulatory action in 2022 is urgent and immediate.

GROWING DIVISIONS AND CYNICISM

DAM HEE KIM, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF COMMUNICATION, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

"Fake news" is hardly a new phenomenon, yet its costs have reached another level in recent years. Misinformation concerning COVID-19 has cost countless lives all over the world. False and misleading information about elections can shake the foundation of democracy, for instance, by making citizens lose confidence in the political system. Research I conducted with S Mo Jones-Jang and Kate Kenski on misinformation during elections, some published and some in progress, has turned up three key findings.

The first is that the use of social media, originally designed to connect people, can facilitate social disconnection. Social media has become rife with misinformation. This leads citizens who consume news on social media to become cynical not only toward established institutions such as politicians and the media, but also toward fellow voters.

Second, politicians, the media and voters have become scapegoats for the harms of "fake news." Few of them actually produce misinformation. Most misinformation is produced by foreign entities and political fringe groups who create "fake news" for financial or ideological purposes. Yet citizens who consume misinformation on social media tend to blame politicians, the media and other voters.

The third finding is that people who care about being properly informed are not immune to misinformation. People who prefer to process, structure and understand information in a coherent and meaningful way become more politically cynical after being exposed to perceived "fake news" than people who are less politically sophisticated. These critical thinkers become frustrated by having to process so much false and misleading information. This is troubling because democracy depends on the participation of engaged and thoughtful citizens.

Looking ahead to 2022, it's important to address this cynicism. There has been much talk about media literacy interventions, primarily to help the less politically sophisticated. In addition, it's important to find ways to explain the status of "fake news" on social media, specifically who produces "fake news," why some entities

and groups produce it, and which Americans fall for it. This could help keep people from growing more politically cynical.

Rather than blaming each other for the harms of "fake news" produced by foreign entities and fringe groups, people need to find a way to restore confidence in each other. Blunting the effects of misinformation will help with the larger goal of overcoming societal divisions.

PROPAGANDA BY ANOTHER NAME

ETHAN ZUCKERMAN, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF PUBLIC POLICY, COMMUNICATION, AND INFORMATION, UMASS AMHERST

I expect the idea of misinformation will shift into an idea of propaganda in 2022, as suggested by sociologist and media scholar Francesca Tripodi in her forthcoming book, "The Propagandist's Playbook." Most misinformation is not the result of innocent misunderstanding. It's the product of specific campaigns to advance a political or ideological agenda.

Once you understand that Facebook and other platforms are the battlegrounds on which contemporary political campaigns are fought, you can let go of the idea that all you need are facts to correct people's misapprehensions. What's going on is a more complex mix of persuasion, tribal affiliation and signaling, which plays out in venues from social media to search results.

As the 2022 elections heat up, I expect platforms like Facebook will reach a breaking point on misinformation because certain lies have become political speech central to party affiliation. How do social media platforms manage when false speech is also political speech? **MDT/THE CONVERSATION**

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REAL ESTATE

Centaline: city will see 6,000 residential transactions this year

ANTHONY LAM

A regional property agency in Macau forecasts that the city will see at least 6,000 transactions of residential properties this year.

Centaline Property held a press conference yesterday to reflect on last year's real estate market and give opinions on the coming year.

Jimmy Lo, the senior regional sales director of the agency, is optimistic that the city's tourism industry will achieve a certain level of revival from the second quarter of this year, adding that he is confident in the long-term economy of the city and the income of its people.

He suggested that residential properties in new communities, such as Taipa, Fai Chi Kei and the Pearl of the Orient in Areia Preta, may see higher prices. Speculators may be eyeing properties near casinos, as their prices have been on the low side recently.

Overall, the residential market will see a majority of first-time purchasers, with buyers looking for larger apartments at prices higher than HKD8 million running behind. Lo said that in recent years, demand for the latter type of apartment has been incubating.

Looking to commercial properties, Jack Lei, the senior regional sales director for commercial properties, revealed that the sale prices for both office spaces and industrial building units saw a drop.

Office spaces dropped from 4% to 9.4% in price, while indus-



trial units dropped 6% to 10%.

Lei noted that office spaces prices were under pressure from properties in Hengqin and those built by the government for its own use.

He forecast that the vacancy rate for office space will continue a rising trend this year unless the city sees border normalization and thus new companies setting up offices in Macau. However, investors may opt for industrial units instead because they incur lower costs for self-occupancy, as well as generating stable rental.

A 5% rise in rental prices may be expected this year, he added.

In terms of shops, the city has seen a 60% fall in prices for properties near casinos. Those in or close to tourism districts retain-

ned stable prices or rents. The executive did not elaborate on the cause of this decrease.

Despite the lengthy pandemic, more people have chosen to attempt running their own busi-

nesses, with the city seeing 30% more completed shop leases in the past two years than in pre-pandemic times. The rise was also helped by landlords willing to lower rents.

The rental market for shops in tourism districts was weaker than in communal districts.

Introducing the Hengqin property market, Lo pointed out that Macau, with nearly 22% of the share, became the second-largest trader after Zhuhai and ahead of other Guangdong province cities. Other jurisdictions collectively take up 32.2% of property leases and trades in Hengqin.

With 15 projects expected to kick off this year on Hengqin, Lo said that the island will see 1.77 million square meters of new property spaces this year.

Hengqin's property market will be lively this year, as it is being positioned nationally as a core development and its mingling with Macau is expected to become closer and more frequent.

GOV'T GETS 600 APPLICATIONS FOR RENTAL DROP

SINCE October last year, the Financial Services Bureau (DSF) has received 631 applications for lowered rents.

The government announced a series of measures last October in the hopes of helping local small and medium enterprises to survive the economic impact of the current pandemic.

Taxes were lowered to encourage

landlords to decrease rents, so as to ease burdens on their tenants. The DSF sets up a specific counter to handle related applications.

The DSF reiterated that, under normal conditions, landlords can submit a filled M/4A form alongside required documents to get their lowered rent registered. Their property taxes for that particular year will then be lowered accordingly.

Security Secretary encourages police to 'work pragmatically'

FORESEEING that law enforcement will be increasingly challenging due to a changing environment, Secretary for Security Wong Sio Chak encouraged local police to keep up their good work in a speech given as part of Police Day of China celebrations yesterday.

Wong re-visited the ideal of the authorities – proactive, communal and transparent policing – to encourage his team. They should, he said, motivate and improve themselves,

as well as stay close to the public to broaden their horizons.

As "police officers in the new era," local police should work pragmatically and responsibly to make greater contributions to the overall security of the country and the social stability of the city, the senior official added.

Mentioning national security, the senior official pledged that the security branch "is committed to safeguarding the authority of the Constitution and the

Basic Law. It will also constantly improve and refine the legal system and action mechanism regarding national security."

However, law enforcement authorities will not shirk from combating smaller crimes, he added.

He also recounted that the police departments helped with several major health actions last year.

The Police Day of China, as Wong put it, was established last year to highlight the diligence and loyalty of the country's police. **AL**



FSS REMINDS EMPLOYERS TO PAY CONTRIBUTIONS

The Social Security Fund (FSS) reminds employers to pay mandatory system contributions for their local long-term employees for the fourth quarter of 2021. In addition, arbitrary system beneficiaries can pay their contributions in January. The FSS calls on employers and arbitrary system beneficiaries to use electronic payment channels as much as possible. If there were no changes to local long-term employees during the quarter, payments can also be made at the Municipal Affairs Bureau's Public Services Centres and substations, or at the payment counters of designated banks.

GENERAL YE TING'S FORMER RESIDENCE TO HOST THEATER PLAY

The theatre production Back Home, part of the 21st Macao City Fringe Festival organized by the Cultural Affairs Bureau, will be staged at General Ye Ting's Former Residence, which will close in preparation today and for the weekend, remaining open tomorrow. Back Home is from the Edinburgh Fringe Showcase and is a participatory performance, transporting the audience to Wuhan after the outbreak of the novel coronavirus two years ago. The audience will play roles and tell stories of returning home and facing the unexpected future, presenting the charm of the theatre.

UM, ALIBABA DHARMA ACADEMY WIN PRIZES AT TRANSLATION COMPETITION

The Natural Language Processing & Portuguese-Chinese Machine Translation Laboratory (NLP2CT), part of the University of Macau's Faculty of Science and Technology, participated in the Metrics Shared Task at the Sixth Conference on Machine Translation with the translation team from Alibaba Dharma Academy. They won first prize in five of the eight automatic translation quality tests, as well as two second prizes and one fifth prize, outperforming competitors such as Google and Unbabel.

ASSOCIATION REUNITES PERFORMERS WITH DISABILITIES FOR FRINGE

THE Comuna de Pedra arts and cultural association is once again participating in the Macao City Fringe with the second edition of Todos Fest! until January 23.

Featuring performances, workshops, sharing and screening sessions, the mini-festival unites local artists, volunteers, elderly people, individuals with physical and mental disabilities and inclusive art practitioners from various parts.

Hot on the heels of a successful run at the Macau Arts Festival, The Never-ending Task of Lust for Failure reunites performers from the Association of Parents of the People with Intellectual Disabilities of Macau and Theatre HORA from Switzerland to express their personal stories,



ideas, needs and desires through music and improvisation from January 17 to 19.

Led by two local choreographers, senior participants from

the Casa Ricci Elderly Centre will attend the Body Workshop for the Elderly, exploring their past through body movement. After the workshop, they will tell

of their experiences in Macau through dance and demonstrate the beauty of ageing and their creative flair at Dancing Veins on January 15 and 16.

Separately, Hong Kong inclusive artist yuenjie MARU will once again lead a symbiotic dance workshop for individuals with physical and mental disabilities. A one-day experience is also offered on January 22 and 23 for those who are interested in experiencing inclusive art, with his dance method DanceAbility and some elements of symbiotic dance as its creative core.

On January 22 and 23, screenings of the documentary Our Journey Together, directed by Macau videographer Os Wei, will show the audience how Comuna de Pedra has been working with different disadvantaged groups and the positive influence of inclusive arts spaces for everyone.

Comuna de Pedra was first established in 1996. It has been focusing on physical and dance theatre productions, both on stage and site-specific, as well as the promotion of arts education, with the aim of developing more artistic possibilities and cultivating culture in Macau. **LV**



JOLLIBEE OPENS THIRD BRANCH IN FAI CHI KEI

Philippines fast food giant Jollibee opened its third branch in Fai Chi Kei yesterday, just after four months of opening its Taipa branch. The catering chain opened its first restaurant in Macau in 2018, where it drew large Filipino crowds lining up as early as 8 a.m. In the Philippines, Jollibee Foods Corporation (JFC) operates the largest food service network, operating 2,967 restaurant outlets. Jollibee Worldwide, a unit of JFC's, has completed the acquisition of Hong Kong-based Tim Ho Wan in August 2021 by paying USD53.25 million for the 15% share that it did not yet own. Now, the firm fully owns the Michelin starred restaurant chain.

QUARANTINE REQUIRED FOR ARRIVALS FROM TIANJIN DISTRICTS

Due to the current epidemiological situation in Tianjin Municipality, as of 5:00 p.m. on January 10, all individuals who have been in Xinzhuang Village or Xianshuigu, Jinnan District, Tianjin Municipality on or after December 27, 2021, will be subject to medical observation for 14 days. People who have been to these places and entered Macau will have their health code changed to yellow, and must undergo self-quarantine for a period of 14 days from the date they left the designated places. During this period, a maximum of five nucleic acid tests must be taken, specifically on the first, second, fourth, seventh, and twelfth days from the start of the isolation period.

CRIME

University student accused of sexually harassing tourist

RENATO MARQUES

A 23-year-old man from the mainland, studying in a local university, is accused of sexually harassing a 20-year-old mainland woman visiting Macau as a tourist, the Public Security Police Force (PSP) announced yesterday during the regular joint press conference of the police forces.

According to the victim's testimony to the PSP on January 8

(Saturday), she met the man on the street in the Cotai area around noon on January 7. Understanding that she was a tourist and had little knowledge about Macau, the man offered to guide her around.

They exchanged contact details, and met again later that day, walking around the city. The woman said that, around 7 p.m., the man touched her waist. The victim said that she immediately rejected his touch and he

stopped, but later, while the two were having dinner at a restaurant located at Avenida da Praia Grande, the man forcibly kissed her and touched her genitals.

She told police that she fled the restaurant and went back to her hotel. After arriving there, she thought about confronting the man regarding his behavior, but realized that she had been blocked from contacting him. She then made a complaint to the PSP.

While re-entering Macau from the mainland on January 8, the man was detained and taken for questioning.

He admitted having touched her waist and having tried to kiss her at the restaurant, but he said that he was just trying to seduce her. He also refused to admit having touched the woman's genitals, claiming that he was only massaging her legs as she was tired from walking.

These arguments did not convince the police, who said they had reviewed footage from the surveillance cameras and have enough evidence to prosecute the man.

He was sent to the Public Prosecutions Office to be accused of the crime of sexual harassment.

CRIME

MAN DETAINED BY PJ FOR FALSE CRIME ACCUSATION

RENATO MARQUES

THE Judiciary Police (PJ) have detained a 33-year-old man, a non-resident worker in the civil construction sector, for having made a false criminal accusation, a PJ spokesperson announced yesterday.

The case goes back to last Friday (January 7), when the man reported to the PJ that, after performing a currency exchange deal in Cotai on January 3, he had been approached by two police officers in uniform that stopped him and took 40,000 patacas he had on his person, claiming the money had been seized

as part of an anti-crime operation.

The man also said that after the event he had gone to a police station asking about the operation, but that the Public Security Police Force (PSP) had informed him that this type of operation did not exist.

Investigating his report, the PJ learned that the man was lying to police and had given false testimony about events that had never actually occurred.

When taken for questioning, the man admitted that he had lied so that he could obtain a document from police where it was stated that he

had lost such an amount.

He admitted to PJ investigators that his family back in the mainland had requested that he send this amount, but since he did not have any money because he had gambled it away in the casino, he decided to attempt this play.

According to the PJ, the man had lost about HKD20,000 in the casinos, comprised of his salary (about 15,000 patacas) and some 5,000 patacas borrowed from a friend.

He will now be prosecuted for having made false declarations to the police and having reported a false criminal accusation.



UM points to Hong Kong university as benchmark for tuition fee hike

LYNZY VALLES

THE University of Macau (UM) has justified hiking tuition fees by up to 40% by explaining that the university took into consideration tuition fees in Hong Kong for undergraduate and postgraduate students.

A dispatch in the March 2021 Official Gazette indicates that the new tuition fees for undergraduate local students in four-year courses is MOP37,500 per year, up from MOP30,000. Overseas students, including those from Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China, will see a staggering tuition fee hike of 40%. From the next academic year, they will be required to pay MOP104,200 per year – totaling up to MOP521,000 for those in five-year degree programs.

In a statement, UM said that it used Hong Kong Polytechnic University as a benchmark for the new tuition fees.

The tuition fees for local students in undergradua-



te programs at Hong Kong Polytechnic University are MOP43,400 per year, while those for its master's degree programs are MOP143,700.

"The tuition fees for local students at UM will still be much lower than those of Hong Kong after the adjustment. In addition, the tuition adjustment will only apply to new admissions and will not affect existing students," the university explained.

Previously, UM rector

Yonghua Song expressed his views on the hike, saying that the increase looks "greater [as a percentage] because the baseline was too low."

UM said that it is "committed to ensuring that budget adjustments will not affect student scholarships, fellowships, or teaching expenses after the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020."

In addition to reserving funds for scholarships for local undergraduate students in

the 2022/2023 academic year, the university is still soliciting support from the community to provide scholarships.

Recapping the scholarships awarded in the 2021/2022 academic year, the university said that it awarded a total of MOP4 million in scholarships, sponsored by prominent members of the community, to more than 400 students.

According to its data, the university received 28 fellowship applications and 24 were approved.

Last year, 167 applications for instalment payment of tuition were received and all were approved.

In a bid to mitigate the impact of the pandemic, the university has reduced tuition fees two years in a row, including a one-time fee remission of MOP5,200 for first-year local undergraduate students or local undergraduate students resuming their studies in the 2021/2022 academic year, and a one-time tuition fee remission of MOP6,000 for students in the same category for the 2022/2023 academic year.



GOV'T FINALLY RETRIEVES PLOTS A3 AND A4 OF NAM VAN

THE government has finally retrieved two plots of land located at Nam Van Bay, identified as Lots A3 and A4. The two adjacent plots, totaling 8,732 square meters, are located between the Avenida Doutor Mário Soares and the Avenida Comercial de Macau and were part of the group of land plots reclaimed by the government due to the expiration of concessions.

In a multi-departmental operation yesterday, led by the Land, Public Works and Transport Bureau, the government cleared the land and fenced the plots.

The authorities took this action following the expiration of the period granted by the government for the previous concessionaires to voluntarily clear the plots of any possessions and deliver them to the government.

It is not yet known what the intentions of the government are for these plots, but Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng said during the Policy Address for 2022 that the government intends to grant some of the unused land reserves via an auction process.

Under the hammer are those plots which have been reclaimed in the past few years due to the expiration of concessions.

The aim of the land auctions is to put the land in the hands of private developers. **RM**

MUST survey finds local consumers losing confidence in spending

ANTHONY LAM

MACAU consumers showed less confidence spending on commodities in the fourth quarter of last year, according to a study by the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST).

The score for the Consumer Confidence Index (CCI) in Q4 is 75.75 out of 200, with 200 being completely confident and zero indicating a complete lack of confidence. The passing benchmark is set at 100, a lower score indicating insufficient consumer confidence.

The 2021 Q4 index was lower than that of the preceding quarter by 6.66 points or 8.08%.

All six criteria considered in the calculation recorded a decrease in score. The six criteria are: local economy,



employment conditions, stock investment, standard of living, price levels and property purchases.

The score for the local economy criterion recorded the steepest fall, which was 12.51%. The remaining scores recorded falls of 10.55%, 8.84%, 6.59%, 6.25% and

3.52% respectively.

The MUST researchers interviewed 706 respondents, all aged 18 years or older, from December 3 to 27. The CCI reflects an individual's view on the prosperity of the economy during the relevant quarter. It has been used to for economic projections

and to predict consumption trends.

Explaining the CCI for Q4, MUST researchers pointed out that the index could not continue its rising trajectory from the previous quarter.

They hinted that the instability of the current pandemic was the bad news, amid some good news regarding the intensive cooperation zone in Hengqin and the recovery of the mainland economy.

In terms of CCI, last year opened low at 75.13 with a further drop in the second quarter to 68.11. Perceptions of the economy then warmed up to reach a CCI of 82.41.

The study is a regular project conducted by MUST, in collaboration with four higher education institutions in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. The first study was conducted in Q4 of 2008.

JI XIANZHENG INAUGURATED AT FORUM MACAO

Ji Xianzheng was inaugurated yesterday as the new Secretary-General of the Permanent Secretariat of the Forum for Economic and Trade Co-operation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries – Macao (Forum Macao).



Before taking office at Forum Macao, Ji was the deputy director of the Department for European Affairs of the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, responsible for all commercial and economic matters between China and European countries.

He also worked as a diplomat in the Economic and Commercial Department of the Chinese Embassy in Portugal and between 2009 and 2018 assumed the role of Economic and Commercial Advisor at the Chinese Embassy in Spain and the Chinese Embassy in Venezuela. An expert in diplomacy and trade, Ji has deep knowledge of both Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries. **RM**

COVID-19

TIANJIN ON PARTIAL LOCKDOWN AFTER OMICRON FOUND

STATE broadcaster CCTV said the government has divided Tianjin and its 14 million residents into three levels of restrictions, starting with lockdown areas where people are not allowed to leave their homes at all.

In control areas, each household is allowed to have one family member leave to buy groceries every other day, while in prevention areas, people must remain inside their immediate neighborhoods.

Buses and trains from Tianjin to Beijing have been suspended and people are being told not to leave the city unless they have pressing business.

The city began mass testing of all its residents on Sunday after a cluster of 20 children and adults tested positive for COVID-19, including at least two with the omicron variant. Another 20 people tested positive on Sunday, bringing the total to 40. Officials said earlier that



Commuters in Beijing

the virus has been circulating so the number of cases could rise.

China has stepped up its strict zero tolerance strategy in the runup to the Olympics, which open Feb. 4. The Chinese capital is 115 kilometers northwest of Tianjin and many people regularly travel back and forth by car or on a high-speed rail link that takes less than one hour.

Elsewhere, millions of people are being confined to their homes in Xi'an and Yuzhou, two cities that are farther away but

have larger outbreaks traced to the delta variant. Residents of Xi'an have been under lockdown for more than two weeks, but the number of new cases in the city of 13 million fell to just 15 yesterday in a sign that restrictions could soon be lifted. Yuzhou is a city of about 1.1 million people in neighboring Henan province.

Another 60 cases were reported yesterday in Henan, two of them of the omicron variant, found in the city of Anyang and apparently brought from Tianjin by a college student

on Dec. 28, state media outlet The Paper reported. The provincial capital of Zhengzhou has been conducting mass testing and closed its schools. Another 24 cases were reported in the city yesterday.

The first two cases confirmed in Tianjin were a 10-year-old girl and a 29-year-old woman working at an after-school center. Both were infected by the omicron variant. In subsequent testing of close contacts, 18 others tested positive and 767 tested negative as of Saturday night. **MDT/AP**

DIPLOMACY

BEIJING ACCUSES US OF INCITING LITHUANIA OVER TAIWAN

BEIJING yesterday accused Washington of inciting Lithuania to "contain China" in a feud over the status of self-ruled Taiwan after U.S. officials expressed support for the European Union-member country in the face of Chinese economic pressure.

Lithuania is the latest flashpoint in China's campaign to pressure companies and foreign governments to adopt its positions on Taiwan, Tibet and other sensitive issues.

"The United States has instigated the Lithuanian authorities to undermine the 'one-China principle,'" said a foreign ministry spokesman, Wang Wenbin. "It has supported, aided and abetted them in going further down the wrong path to achieve its political calculations to contain China."

American and Lithuanian officials say China has blocked imports from the northern European country since the Taiwanese government was allowed to open a trade office there under the

name Taiwan.

In a phone call last week, U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai expressed "strong support" to a European official for Lithuania "in the face of economic coercion," Tai's office said in on its website.

Taiwan and China have been ruled separately since splitting amid civil war in 1949. The mainland's ruling Communist Party never has controlled the island but claims it as part of Chinese territory and threatens to invade.

The U.S. and most other governments, including Lithuania, have diplomatic relations only with Beijing but maintain commercial and informal political ties with Taiwan's democratically elected government. Most governments acquiesce to Chinese pressure by requiring Taiwanese entities to operate under the name Chinese Taipei.

Beijing retaliated for Lithuania's move by expelling the Lithuanian ambassador. Lithuania has closed its embassy in Beijing. **MDT/AP**

AD

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DIPLOMACY

Arab Gulf foreign ministers head to Beijing for meetings

FOREIGN ministers from Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf states are visiting Beijing for meetings with officials from the world's second largest economy, a leading consumer of oil and source of foreign investment.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry yesterday gave no details of the agendas for the visits, but said they were expected to "deepen relations between the two sides."

The meetings running through Friday will include the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain, along with the secretary general of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

China and the U.S. are increasingly jockeying for influence in the Middle East, where Chinese companies have found markets for goods and services ranging from highways to military drones. China's economy is heavily reliant on Middle



Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal Bin Farhan Al-Saud

Eastern oil and gas and Beijing has also maintained close ties with Iran amid its nuclear ambitions and disputes with other Gulf nations.

China and the Gulf nations have "provided each other with firm support on issues concerning their core interests, and have promoted practical cooperation in various fields with fruitful results," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin

said at a daily briefing yesterday.

Participants in the meetings were given as Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud, Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah, Omani Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi, Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Alzayani and Gulf Cooperation Council Secretary General Nayef Falah Al-Hajraf. **MDT/AP**

Sri Lanka seeks Chinese debt restructuring amid crisis

KRISHAN FRANCIS, COLOMBO

THE president of debt-ridden Sri Lanka yesterday [Macau time] asked China for the restructuring of its loans and access to preferential credit for imports of essential goods, as the island nation struggles in the throes of its worst economic crisis, partly due to Beijing-financed projects that don't generate revenue.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa told visiting Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi that it would be "a great relief to the country if attention could be paid on restructuring the debt repayments as a solution to the economic crisis that has arisen in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic," according to a statement from his office.

Rajapaksa asked Wang for a concessionary credit facility for imports so that industries can run without disruption, the statement said. He also requested assistance to enable Chinese tourists to travel to Sri Lanka within a secure bubble.

Wang and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, the president's brother, later visited Colombo's Port City, a reclaimed island developed with Chinese investment, where they opened a promenade and inaugurated the sailing of 65 boats to commemorate the 65 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

In his speech at the Port City Wang said a persistent and unchecked pandemic has made economic recovery difficult and the two countries must take the

AP PHOTO



Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, left, and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, center, inspect the Chinese funded sea reclamation Port City project in Colombo

anniversary of the diplomatic ties to work closer together.

He did not elaborate nor announce any relief measures.

Wang arrived in Sri Lanka on Saturday from the Maldives on the last leg of a multinational trip that also took him to Eritrea, Kenya and the Comoros in East Africa.

Sri Lanka faces one of its worst economic crises, with foreign reserves down to around \$1.6 billion, barely enough for a few weeks of imports. It also has foreign debt obligations exceeding \$7 billion in 2022, including repayment of bonds worth \$500 million in January and \$1 billion in July.

The declining foreign reserves are partly blamed on infrastructure projects built with Chinese loans that don't make money. China loaned money to build a sea-

port and airport in the southern Hambantota district, in addition to a wide network of roads.

Central Bank figures show that current Chinese loans to Sri Lanka total around \$3.38 billion, not including loans to state-owned businesses, which are accounted for separately and thought to be substantial.

"Technically we can claim we are bankrupt now," said Muttukrishna Sarvananthan, principal researcher at the Point Pedro Institute of Development. "When you have your net external foreign assets have been in the red, that means you are technically bankrupt."

The situation has left households grappling with severe shortages. People wait in long lines to buy essential goods like milk powder, cooking gas and kerosene. Prices have increased

sharply, and the Central Bank says the inflation rate rose to 12.1% by the end of December from 9.9% in November. Food inflation increased to over 22% in the same period.

Because of a currency shortage, importers are unable to clear their cargo containing essentials and manufactures are not able to buy raw materials from overseas.

Expatriate remittances have also fallen after the government ordered the mandatory conversion of foreign currency and exchange rate controls.

Ratings agency downgrades have resulted in Sri Lanka losing much of its borrowing power. In December, Fitch Ratings noted an increased probability of credit default.

The Central Bank has added a currency swap in Chinese currency worth \$1.5 billion to the

reserves, but economists disagree whether it can be part of foreign reserves or not.

Wang's visit has again highlighted the regional power struggle between China and India, Sri Lanka's closest neighbor that considers the island part of its domain.

Before Wang spoke with Sri Lankan leaders, the top Indian diplomat in the country on Sunday morning inaugurated a train service from a station near Colombo to the north using compartments provided through an Indian loan facility.

An Indian embassy statement quoted Vinod Jacob recalling "the priority placed by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on ties with Sri Lanka in line with the 'Neighborhood First' policy."

He said that a recent statement by India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar that India would support Sri Lanka in difficult times was an affirmation of that policy in the current context.

"We can see Sri Lanka being saddled between India and China for a potential bailout package," said political analyst Ranga Kalansooriya.

"India is dragging its feet for some time while China is trying to manipulate the situation to the maximum," he added.

China considers Sri Lanka to be a critical link in its Belt and Road global infrastructure initiative. Relations were recently strained over a shipment of Chinese fertilizer that allegedly contained harmful bacteria, and business agreements that were inked with China's rivals, the United States and India.

Kalansooriya said that China was unlikely to bail Sri Lanka out of its economic crisis.

"They will look for more business opportunities, fishing in the troubled waters of economic doldrums in the country," he said. **MDT/AP**

PHILIPPINES

Authorities report third day of record virus cases

THE Philippines yesterday reported a record high number of new COVID-19 cases for the third day, logging 33,169 infections.

The positivity rate, or percentage of tested people whose results came out positive, also soared to 46%, another record high since the pandemic started two years ago.

Monday's tally brings the Philippines' total infection count nearer to the 3 million mark at 2,998,530. The death toll stood at 52,293 with 145 new dea-

ths recorded.

Officials said they are assuming that local transmission of the highly contagious omicron variant is driving the current spike in cases.

Some experts have called for increased restrictions as cases surge and hospital operations are being hobbled by the number of infected health workers. But officials said on Monday that there is still no need to raise the alert to the fourth level of the five-step alert system.

The capital region Me-

tro Manila and several provinces and cities are under Alert Level 3 until January 15. Prohibited activities include in-person classes, live voice and wind instrument events, contact sport, and fairs. Operations of casinos and gatherings in residences of people who do not belong to the same household are also not allowed. Restaurants, gyms, barbershops, and other establishments can operate only at 30% capacity indoors for fully vaccinated customers and 50% outdoors. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



A man receives a dose of Moderna's Covid-19 vaccine at the Makati Coliseum in Makati City

AP PHOTO



Pupils wear face masks as they attend class at Kitante Primary School in Kampala this week

UGANDA

Schools reopen, ending world's longest lockdown

RODNEY MUHUMUZA,
KAMPALA

UGANDA'S schools reopened to students yesterday, ending the world's longest school disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The reopening caused traffic congestion in some areas of the capital, Kampala, and students can be seen carrying their mattresses in the streets, a back-to-boarding school phenomenon not witnessed here for nearly two years.

Uganda's schools have been fully or partially shut for more than 83 weeks, the world's longest disruption, according to figures from the U.N. cultural agency. The shutdown affected more than 10 million learners.

The East African country of 44 million people first shut down its schools in March 2020, shortly after the first coronavirus case was confirmed on the African continent. Some classes were reopened to students in February 2021, but a total lockdown was imposed again in June as the country faced its first major surge.

For many parents, the

reopening was long overdue. "Inevitably, we have to open up schools," said Felix Okot, the father of a 6-year-old kindergartner. "The future of our kids, the future of our nation, is at stake."

The country's schools cannot "wait forever" for the pandemic's end, he warned.

The protracted school lockdown proved controversial in a country where measures aimed at stemming the spread of the virus were ignored by many. Vaccine skepticism, even among health workers, remains a problem, with growing reports of fake COVID-19 vaccination cards sold in downtown Kampala.

Many students returning to school are believed to have had no help during the lockdown. Most public schools, which serve the vast majority of children in Uganda, were unable to offer virtual schooling. The Associated Press reported in November on students in a remote Ugandan town where weeds grew in classrooms and some students worked in a swamp as gold miners.

Some critics pointed out that the government

of President Yoweri Museveni — an authoritarian who has held power for 36 years and whose wife is the education minister — did little to support home-based learning. Museveni justified the lockdown by insisting that infected students were a danger to their parents and others.

"There are many things which can't be predicted right now. The turnout of students is unpredictable, the turnout of teachers is unpredictable," said Fagil Mandy, a former government inspector of schools now working as an independent consultant. "I am more worried that many children will not return to school for various reasons, including school fees."

Mandy also noted concern that a virus outbreak "will spread very fast" in crowded schools, urging close monitoring by school administrators.

Welcoming the reopening of Uganda's schools, Save the Children warned that "lost learning may lead to high dropout rates in the coming weeks without urgent action," including what it described as catch-up clubs.

The aid group warned in a statement yesterday

of a wave of dropouts "as returning students who have fallen behind in their learning fear they have no chance of catching up."

It remains to be seen how long Uganda's schools will remain open, with an alarming rise in virus cases in recent days. In the past week health authorities have been reporting a daily positivity rate in excess of 10%, up from virtually zero in December. Museveni has warned of a possible new lockdown if intensive care units reach 50% occupancy.

Hoping for a smooth return to school, authorities waived any COVID test requirements for students. An abridged curriculum also has been approved under an arrangement to automatically promote all students to the next class.

Uganda has received foreign support toward the reopening of schools.

The U.N. children's agency and the governments of the U.K. and Ireland announced financial support focusing on virus surveillance and the mental health of students and teachers in 40,000 schools. They said their support was key for Uganda's school system to remain open. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1973 FIRST OPEN UNIVERSITY DEGREES AWARDED



The first graduates from the Open University (OU) have been awarded their degrees after two years studying from home.

Out of the 1,000 students who sat the final exams, 867 were successful.

The Open University enrolled its first students in 1971 and has since grown to become the biggest university in the country with more than 40,000 students on its books.

The idea of learning from home was designed to appeal to mature students, but from next year the OU will be opening its doors to 18-year-olds as well.

OU Vice Chancellor, Dr Walter Perry, is delighted with the progress of his students - and insists the degrees which have been awarded are on a par with the best universities in the country.

He said: "I always said the one thing we must never do is have a different standard from the standard that pertains throughout Britain.

"To give a student a second-rate degree would be dreadful. It's doing damage not doing good."

For many people, the OU is offering them a second chance to study.

Dr Perry said: "The qualities of our students are often very different, in the first place they are adult, experienced in life and jobs, not just straight out of school. They have achieved their degree by the most difficult method of getting a degree yet devised by the wit of man.

"Therefore they have qualities of determination and staying power that are quite unusual and I think will come to be recognised by industry as very important qualities for employers."

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The Open University currently has 200,000 students on its books - some 26,000 of them are studying OU courses from outside the UK.

The OU continues to offer high quality teaching. Of the 23 courses assessed by the university course watchdog, the Quality Assurance Agency, 17 were rated as "excellent".

There are no entry qualifications for undergraduates - but about 70% of students successfully complete their courses.

In March 2000, the OU held the UK's first online graduation ceremony. Students from as far afield as Taiwan, Finland and the United States took part.

About a quarter of current students are now doing all or part of their courses online.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Try to satisfy both of your needs. If you're willing to cut loose you will find yourself in the midst of an exciting encounter. If you can get away for a vacation, do so.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 You need some rest. Try to be patient and understanding. Join groups of a humanitarian nature. Opportunities will come through long term investments.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 Travel will be favorable. Resist overspending on luxury items. Your home environment may be hectic, which could result in emotional upset if you aren't well organized.

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 Don't forget family obligations. Enjoy some socializing today. Control your temper by getting immersed in your work. Avoid distractions.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 Your emotional reaction will be dependent upon your partner's responsiveness. You need more space for the whole family. Your creative input will be appreciated by your boss.

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Get proper medical attention and confront your situation decisively. Don't be afraid to confront situations concerning loved ones in order to solve any problems that may exist.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 Concentrate on work. Sentimental feelings may make it difficult to get much done at work. Opportunities to expand your circle of friends will result in possible new romantic encounters.

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 You will do your best work on your own. You will have to be sure not to burn the candle at both ends. However, be careful with luggage; it may be rerouted.

SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 You must get out and mingle. Avoid friction with your mate. Don't make any unreasonable promises. Travel opportunities should be your first choice.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Helping children may be rewarding and challenging. Plan a nice evening for two. Jealousy may be a contributing factor to your emotional ups and downs.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Your family may not be pleased with your decisions. You have a lot to offer. Relatives will not agree with the way you are dealing with your personal problems.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 You must be extremely careful not to let relatives or friends interfere in your personal life. Your emotional reaction will be dependent upon your partner's responsiveness.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

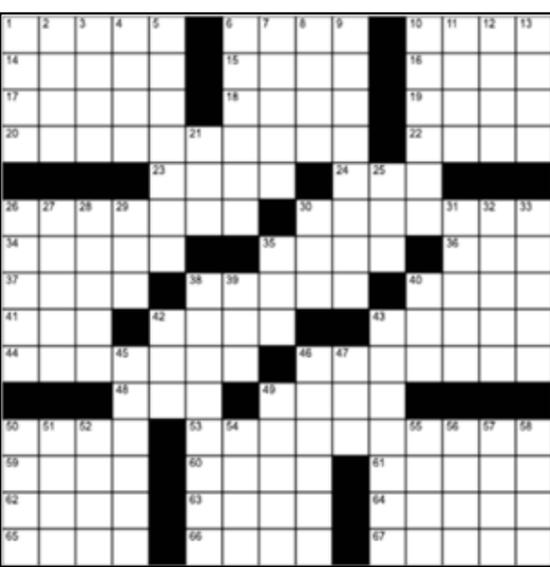
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-8	0	fine
Harbin	-20	-14	cloudy
Tianjin	3	11	cloudy
Urumqi	2	11	fine
Xi'an	8	15	cloudy
Lhasa	-8	-5	fine
Chengdu	9	16	cloudy
Chongqing	6	16	cloudy
Kunming	3	9	overcast
Nanjing	17	21	cloudy
Shanghai	2	6	fine
Wuhan	3	8	cloudy
Hangzhou	-25	-18	cloudy
Taipei	-1	6	fine
Guangzhou	11	18	cloudy
Hong Kong	16	19	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	-15	-9	snow
Frankfurt	-2	6	overcast
Paris	-1	5	overcast
London	1	9	rain
New York	-8	-6	fine

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Flax refuse; 6- Scrutinize; 10- Buddy; 14- Maker of Pong; 15- Mandlikova of tennis; 16- Arizona Native American; 17- Shakespearean sprite; 18- Queue after Q; 19- Very much; 20- Inflammation of the gums; 22- Fast time; 23- Motion picture; 24- Compass pt.; 26- Remove obstruction from; 30- Pan-fried; 34- Claw; 35- Env. notation; 36- Heston's org.; 37- Langston Hughes poem; 38- Specimen of genus Aquila; 40- Med school subj.; 41- PC linkup; 42- Teen spots?; 43- Employ again; 44- On in years; 46- Distinct sort or kind; 48- ___ dreaming?; 49- Really moved; 50- Farrow and Hamm; 53- Patrician rank; 59- Limerick language; 60- ___ yellow ribbon...; 61- Scheduled; 62- Island of Hawaii; 63- Inwardly; 64- ___ of Two Cities; 65- Cry; 66- Billiard implements; 67- Fields of comedy;

DOWN 1- Dutch name of The Hague; 2- Longfellow's bell town; 3- Drops from the sky; 4- Remnant; 5- Nonmetallic element; 6- Contract; 7- Class of Indian society; 8- Against; 9- Sicken; 10- Ski lodge; 11- Gap; 12- Atop; 13- Baseball glove; 21- Singer Damone; 25- Sky light; 26- Functional; 27- Birth-related; 28- Light-colored hair; 29- Elton's john; 30- Letters on a Cardinal's cap; 31- World-weariness; 32- Clear the boards; 33- Palm fruits; 35- Get on; 38- Like the moon in the earth's shadow; 39- ___ port in a storm; 40- Former nuclear agcy; 42- Branch; 43- British soldier; 45- Relax; 46- Squirts; 47- Architect I.M.; 49- Inscribed pillar; 50- Feline line; 51- Dies ___; 52- Tennis great Arthur; 54- Hokkaido native; 55- Enthusiastic about; 56- Rat-___; 57- Anklebones; 58- Fencing sword;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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



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 Ref: 2104 6002 1,756 ft² 4 1/2 2 1/2

FOR SALE

REDUCED

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 Ref: 2106 6003 1,131 ft² 2 1/2 2 1/2

Rain Dance Property
 "We dance until it's SOLD!"

Hellene Gardens **HKD 7,680,000**
 Ref: 2109 6001 1,663 ft² 3 1/2 2 1/2

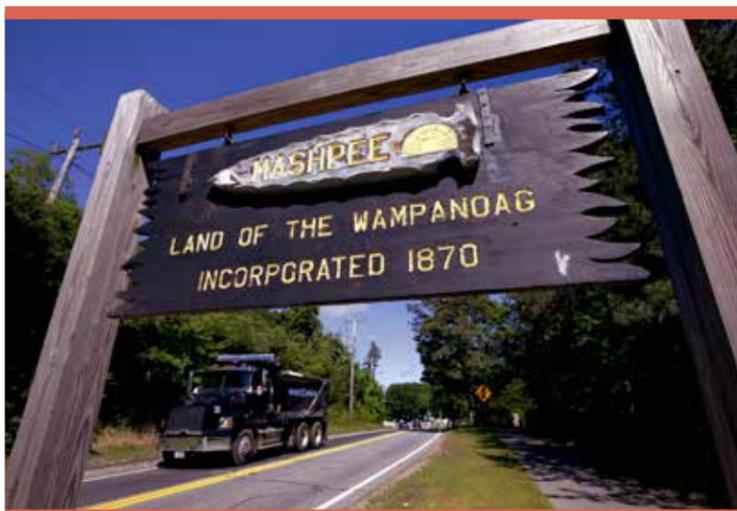
AD

GAMING

NEWLY AFFIRMED, TRIBE LOOKS AT CASINO PLANS WITH FRESH EYES

PHILIP MARCELO, BOSTON

AP PHOTO



As he begins his first full year in office, the new head of a Massachusetts tribe says he intends to take a cautious approach to gambling while turning attention to social challenges and other economic opportunities for its members.

Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe Chairman Brian Weeden, who is 29 and is the youngest ever to hold the post, said last month's decision by President Joe Biden's administration to affirm the tribe's reservation and reverse a controversial Trump-era order gives the tribe legal footing to continue pursuing its long standing casino dreams.

But he said tribal leaders also want members to look at the idea with fresh eyes, given how much the landscape for gambling has changed.

Massachusetts currently has three major casinos — MGM Springfield, Encore Boston Harbor and the slot parlor Plainridge Park. The separate Aquinnah Wampanoag tribe has also broken ground on a more mo-

dest gambling hall on Martha's Vineyard, though that's been mired in legal uncertainty. And state lawmakers are weighing legislation to legalize sports betting in Massachusetts.

"We're back to the drawing board, basically," said Weeden, who took office in May, in a wide-ranging interview Thursday. "There's still an appetite for gaming. It just needs to be a smart approach. It has to be different from the past. We need to learn from our mistakes and proceed

with caution."

Meanwhile, anti-casino residents in Taunton, the city where the Mashpee Wampanoag project is proposed, have asked a Boston federal judge to reopen their legal challenge.

They argue, as they have before, that the tribe wasn't eligible for a reservation because it wasn't an officially recognized tribe in 1934, the year the federal Indian Reorganization Act, which laid the foundation for modern federal Indian policy,

became law.

The opponents have also argued the tribe's lands in Taunton shouldn't have been included in its reservation because they're some 50 miles from the tribe's home base on Cape Cod and weren't part of the tribe's historical domain. The tribe's reservation encompasses about 170 acres in the town of Mashpee and another 150 acres in Taunton.

Weeden said the latest legal challenge won't deter the tribe, which traces its ancestry to the Native Americans whom the Pilgrims encountered centuries ago but which was federally recognized only in 2007.

Just prior to last month's decision, the tribe extended its deal with its Malaysian casino developer partners, Genting Berhad, for another year, according to Weeden.

But he said the tribe, which has roughly 3,000 members, is looking to reach new financial terms to rein in its debt to the gambling giant, which is about \$600 million and growing, but which comes due only if a gambling hall actually opens. Com-

pany spokespersons didn't respond to emails seeking comment.

Weeden said tribal members should also consider whether to scale back their casino ambitions.

Before litigation and the Trump administration order derailed it, the tribe broke ground in 2016 on a \$1 billion resort casino in a former industrial park. Dubbed First Light, the resort was to include a hotel and shopping, dining and entertainment options, including a water park.

Opting to build a more modest slot parlor or bingo hall, Weeden said, would exempt it from a 17% state tax on gaming revenues, even if it meant not being able to offer popular table games like blackjack and poker.

Weeden said the tribe also shouldn't rule out abandoning the casino plan altogether and finding other ways to bring financial stability to the tribe. He'd like to see it look into opening tax-free smoke shops, tax-free gas stations, recreational marijuana shops, and other economic development initiatives on its lands.

"We need to exercise our sovereignty," Weeden said. "Casinos are just low-hanging fruit."

The new chair says he also intends to focus more on homelessness, substance use and other social ills facing the tribe. **MDT/AP**

AD

- 合夥人 PARTNERS:**
 官樂怡 Rui José da Cunha^o
 山度士 Álvaro Rodrigues^o
 馬天龍 Nuno Sardinha da Mata^o
 趙魯 Zhao Lu^{o*}
 馬傑安 João Nogueira Marques^o
- 大律師 ASSOCIATES:**
 高文軒 Adelino Correia^o
 羅普齡 Zelina Rodrigues^{*}
 白秀蘭 Susana Batalha^o
 馬潔冰 Maria João Marques^o
 陶義德 António Isóo de Azeredo^o
 白穎怡 Iclia Berenguel^o
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 馬秀文 Sofia Mendes Martins^o
 飛嘉華 Carlos dos Santos Ferreira^o
 杜力信 Nelson de Azevedo^o
 宋哲言 João Gonçalves Assunção^o
 莫永誠 Rui Velez de Moura^o
 安東尼 António Manuel dos Santos^o
 巴慧雅 Vera Bastos^o
 歐文傑 Miguel Evaristo^o
 陳芷喬 Joana Chan^o
 顏曉蓉 Teresa Xiaorong Yan^o
 諾瑪莉 Maria Noras^o
 康靜雅 Viviana Hong^o
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 黃瀚賢 Frederico Vong^o
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 戴博晴 Tai Pok Cheng^o
 吳佩愉 Ng Pui U^o
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 潘卡莉 Candice Pun^o
 陳子健 Kimi Chan^o
 伍福賢 Domingos Ng^o
 劉慧敏 Amanda Liu^o
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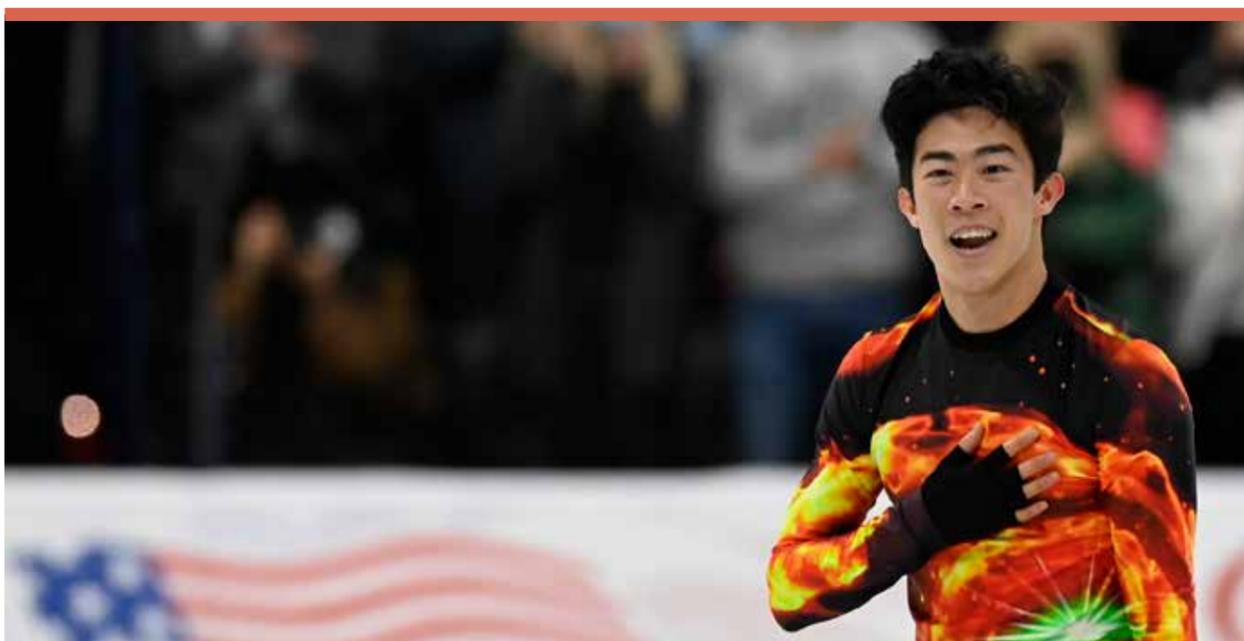
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AP PHOTO



Nathan Chen competes in the men's free skate program during the U.S. Figure Skating Championships in Nashville, Tennessee

FIGURE SKATING

Chen wins sixth straight US championship

DAVE SKRETTA,
NASHVILLE (TENN.)

NATHAN Chen had landed some of the most difficult jumps in figure skating, soaring through the air with a dizzying array of quads and flawlessly stringing together incredible combinations to leave the crowd wanting more.

Figures that he would faceplant on a simple step sequence.

It didn't matter, though. Nor did a mistake on one of his four quadruple jumps. Chen was that much better than everyone else at the U.S. Figure Skating Championships yesterday [Macau time], winning the free skate with 212.63 points and scoring 328.01 in all — good for his sixth consecutive title by nearly 26 points over 17-year-old wunderkind Ilya Malinin.

"Silly things happen all the time. Am I to expect that? Probably not," Chen said with a smile and shrug. "It was a dumb little moment. I just got wrapped up in that moment and lost my footing. It is what it is. Make sure I don't do that again."

Chen's six titles are the most by a men's skater since Todd Eldredge won his sixth in 2002, and he is the first to win six in a row since two-time Olympic champion Dick Button won seven straight in the

1940s and '50s.

Vincent Zhou followed an exceptional short program with a calamitous free skate, barely edging Jason Brown for third place. But both wound up making the Olympic team ahead of Malinin when the selection committee chose the experience of Zhou and Brown over the youngster's soaring ability and bright future.

"That's definitely my dream, to go to the Olympics," Malinin said, "and definitely I think I deserve to go, especially with everything I've gone through. This has really changed my life."

It has been a remarkable four-year run for the 22-year-old Chen since a shockingly poor short program at the Pyeongchang Games cost him a shot at an Olympic medal. Chen won 14 consecutive events, from national titles to world championships and everything in between, before losing to Zhou at Skate America in October.

That turned out to be a blip: Chen won Skate Canada the very next week.

He underscored his readiness for Beijing when he broke his own national record in the short program, a throwback to his "La Boheme" program from a couple years ago that featured a pair of soaring quads and scored 115.39 points.

Then, Chen put his rea-

diness in all CAPS with his performance in the free skate.

Wearing a costume adorned with a supernova, Chen blasted off into another level to music from "Rocketman" with a score that beat his own Grand Prix best this season of 307.18 points. And he topped the 322.36 points his biggest rival in Beijing, two-time Olympic champ Yuzuru Hanyu, scored in winning the Japanese national title last month.

Malinin, whose parents both skated for Uzbekistan at the Olympics, had a three-point lead after the short program over longtime fan favorite Jason Brown, whose odyssey getting to Nashville — five canceled flights, four airline changes, three airports, two countries and about 33 hours of traveling — made him a winner regardless of his performance.

Malinin, the self-proclaimed "quad god," hit a huge opening quad lutz and quad toe loop to set the tone for his program. He also hit a quad salchow later in the performance to finish second with 302.48 points.

It was enough to beat everyone but Chen at nationals. It wasn't enough to make it to Beijing.

"It feels like I've been through every scenario: the young kid that makes it, the guy left off the team.

I've been in every situation," Brown said, "and I so feel for him. It's really difficult. There's no easy

way no matter how you look at the field."

Known far more for his artistry than his jumping ability, Brown fell on an opening quad salchow during his program set to haunting music from the film "Schindler's List." But he rallied to land the rest of his jumps, including two triple axels, to finish with 289.78 points — less a point behind Zhou's quad-heavy program.

"It's been a really tough go to get here, and I don't mean that in just the last 72 hours," Brown said. "The last two years especially, it was really trying my best to stay grounded, focus on what I can control, and I finally had that moment of release when the program was over."

Zhou, who was sixth at the 2018 Games, also showcased during nationals the soaring quads it will take to challenge Hanyu and the rest of the high-flying Japanese team for the top podium step in Beijing. He just didn't land enough of them.

Zhou stepped out on his opening quad lutz, hit

his next three quads, then fell apart with a fall on his second quad lutz — a jump he kept falling on during warmups. He also fell during his triple axel-double toe loop combo later in the program.

"The simplest, most honest answer is that I was so nervous my body just froze up on me," Zhou said.

If he makes the team, Zhou is one of the few American athletes that could have family in the Olympic crowd. Foreign fans are barred from attending, but Chinese citizens will be allowed to buy tickets. Zhou's parents, both computer scientists in Silicon Valley, moved from Beijing when he was young, and all four of his grandparents still live in China.

Yaroslav Paniot had a rough go, too. The young skater had the crowd rocking with his Elvis-inspired free skate, then earned their admiration, too, when he tried gamely to go on following a problem with his skate. He ultimately had to withdraw. **MDT/AP**

AD

An advertisement for The Roadhouse Macau. The background is a dark wood panel with a decorative border. At the top, a red banner reads "THE ROADHOUSE". Below it is a graphic of a guitar with two motorcycle engines on either side. A red banner below the guitar reads "MACAU". Below that, three smaller banners read "FAST BIKES", "ROCK & ROLL MUSIC", and "FOOD AND FUN". At the bottom, there are three circular images: a motorcycle, a band performing on stage, and a hand holding a Guinness beer. Below the images, the text reads "THE ROADHOUSE MACAU" and "IS MACAU'S MOST POPULAR BAR FOR BLUES, BOOZE AND ROCK. COME ON DOWN AND LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL."

OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

**RACIST REMARKS
 SIGN OF PERSISTENT
 XENOPHOBIA**

Shelley Luther, a Republican candidate for the Texas House of Representatives, put the racism against Chinese in the United States and its neo-McCarthyism on full display when she tweeted recently that “Chinese students should be BANNED from attending all Texas universities. No more Communists!”

The remarks were outrageous as they directly run counter to the US Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlaws discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. It is therefore no surprise that they immediately drew widespread criticism, including a strong censure from Houston Democrat Gene Wu who said such statements are “ignorant, hateful, and incite violence against not only Chinese Americans, but all Asian Americans”.

The US has always been the top destination for Chinese students seeking to study abroad. In the academic year 2019-20, there were roughly 370,000 Chinese mainland students enrolled at US universities and schools, accounting for 35 percent of the total number of international students in the country. International students create jobs, drive research, and have become the US’ greatest foreign policy assets, according to the Association of International Educators. For example, international students contributed nearly \$41 billion to the US economy in 2019, and during the 2018-19 academic year, they created or supported more than 458,000 jobs — or three jobs created for every seven international students who chose to study in the US. Not to mention the key role they have played in promoting cross-cultural understanding that will surely benefit future state-to-state relations.

Yet Chinese students have been increasingly caught up in the deteriorating relations between the US and China, with many of them being unjustifiably portrayed as threats to US national security. Former US president Donald Trump explicitly called “most Chinese students spies”. Some US lawmakers have also introduced legislation to ban Chinese students from graduate or postgraduate studies in science, technology, engineering or mathematics.

Racist violence and discrimination linked to the COVID-19 pandemic targeting Asians and people of Asian descent have been on the rise in the US partly due to some politicians inciting such attacks. The latest remarks by Luther show how challenging it remains to address racism and xenophobia in the US.

Discrimination and violence against Chinese were once rampant in US history driven by fears that they were taking away jobs and bringing in diseases, which culminated in an 1882 law banning Chinese immigration. This is a stain on US history, and people with a sense of justice must remain on high alert to prevent it from recurring.

**MICHAEL LANG, WOODSTOCK FESTIVAL
 CO-CREATOR, DIES AT 77**

Michael Lang, a co-creator and promoter of the 1969 Woodstock music festival that served as a touchstone for generations of music fans, has died.

Michael Pagnotta, a spokesperson for Lang’s family, said yesterday [Macau time] the 77-year-old had been battling non-Hodgkin lymphoma and passed away Saturday at New York’s Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

“He was absolutely an historic figure, and also a great guy,” Pagnotta, who said he had known Lang for about 30 years, told The Associated Press. “Both of those things go hand in hand.”

Along with partners Artie Kornfeld, John Roberts and Joel Rosenman, Lang put together the festival billed as “three days of peace and music” in the summer of 1969 as the Vietnam War raged.

**THE
 BUZZ**



Firefighters work outside an apartment building after a fire in the Bronx, NYC

**SEVERAL WITH GRAVE
 INJURIES AFTER NYC FIRE
 THAT KILLED 19**

**DAVID PORTER,
 NEW YORK**

DOCTORS worked yesterday to save the lives of several people gravely injured when smoke from a fire knocked them out or trapped them in their apartments in a New York City high-rise building. Nineteen people, including nine children, died in the blaze.

Dozens of people were hospitalized, and as many as 13 were in critical condition after Sunday’s fire in the Bronx, already the city’s deadliest in three decades.

Investigators determined that a malfunctioning electric space heater, plugged in to give extra heat on a cold morning, started the fire in the 19-story building.

The flames damaged only a small part of the building, but smoke escaped through the apartment’s open door and turned stairwells — the only method of flight in a building too tall for fire escapes — into dark, ash-choked horrors.

Some people could not escape because of the volume of smoke, said Fire Commissioner Daniel Nigro. Others became incapacitated as they tried to get out. Firefighters found victims on every floor, many in cardiac and respiratory arrest, said Nigro.

Limp children were seen being given oxygen

after they were carried out. Some who fled had faces covered in soot.

Firefighters continued making rescues even after their air supplies ran out, Mayor Eric Adams said.

“Their oxygen tanks were empty and they still pushed through the smoke,” Adams said.

Fire Commissioner Daniel Nigro said an investigation was underway to determine how the fire spread and whether anything could have been done to prevent or contain the blaze.

The building is equipped with smoke alarms, but several residents said they initially ignored them because alarms were so common in the 120-unit building.

Large, new apartment buildings in the city are required to have sprinkler systems and interior doors that swing shut automatically to contain smoke and deprive fires of oxygen, but those rules don’t apply to thousands of the city’s older buildings.

Building resident Sandra Clayton grabbed her dog Mocha and ran for her life when she saw the hallway fill with smoke and heard people screaming, “Get out! Get out!”

Clayton, 61, said she groped her way down a darkened stairway, clutching Mocha. The smoke was so black she couldn’t see, but she could hear neighbors wailing and

crying nearby.

“I just ran down the steps as much as I could but people was falling all over me, screaming,” Clayton recounted from a hospital where she was treated for smoke inhalation.

In the commotion, her dog slipped from her grasp and was later found dead in the stairwell.

Jose Henriquez, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic who lives on the 10th floor, said the building’s fire alarms would frequently go off, but would turn out to be false.

“It seems like today, they went off but the people didn’t pay attention,” Henriquez said in Spanish.

He and his family stayed, wedging a wet towel beneath the door once they realized the smoke in the halls would overpower them if they tried to flee.

Luis Rosa said he also initially thought it was a false alarm. By the time he opened the door of his 13th-floor apartment, the smoke was so thick he couldn’t see down the hallway. “So I said, OK, we can’t run down the stairs because if we run down the stairs, we’re going to end up suffocating.”

“All we could do was wait,” he said.

The fire was New York City’s deadliest since 1990, when 87 people died in an arson at the Happy Land social club, also in the Bronx. MDT/AP

Afghanistan An explosion in eastern Afghanistan near the border with Pakistan yesterday killed nine children and wounded four, according to the office of a Taliban-appointed governor. A statement from the governor’s office said the blast took place when a cart selling food items struck an old, unexploded mortar shell in the district of Lalopar, in eastern Nagarhar province.



US Senior U.S. and Russian officials launched special talks on strategic stability yesterday as part of a flurry of diplomatic activity in Europe this week aimed at defusing tensions over a Russian military buildup on the border with Ukraine, though no major breakthrough was immediately in sight. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov and his delegation arrived under Swiss police escort at the U.S. diplomatic mission for face-to-face talks with Wendy Sherman, the U.S. deputy secretary of state, and her team.

Norway Conscripts have been ordered to return their underwear, bras and socks after the end of their military service so that the next group of recruits can use them. The Norwegian military said yesterday that it is struggling with dwindling supplies, in part due to the pandemic. The Norwegian Defense Logistics Organization said this move is necessary as it provides the Armed Forces with greater garment volumes available for new soldiers starting their initial service.



France President Emmanuel Macron traveled to the French Mediterranean coast yesterday to talk about internal security, making a pit stop in the city where an extremist drove a cargo truck into Bastille Day crowds in 2016, killing 86 people and injuring hundreds more. Macron has yet to officially confirm he is running for a second term in the election this spring, but his visit to the French Riviera had campaign overtones in a stronghold of Valérie Pécresse, a conservative who is seen by many as his most significant challenger.