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Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre

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INTENSIVE COOPERATION ZONE IN HENGQIN SEES INCREASE OF 32.55% MACAU-INVESTED FIRMS AFTER INAUGURATION

▲ P2

JP MORGAN: COVID-19 NO LONGER AFFECTING GAMING STOCKS

▲ P5

DRIVE IN: LOVE BITES IN 'WOLF LIKE ME' WITH ISLA FISHER

▲ P10



AP PHOTO



China yesterday defended its “historical rights” to virtually the entire South China Sea, following a new U.S. government report saying Beijing’s claims are almost entirely invalid. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin called the State Department report “Limits in the Seas,” issued this month, an attempt to “distort international law, confuse the public, sow discord and disrupt the regional situation.” *More on p6*

AP PHOTO



India and Britain yesterday launched talks on pursuing a free trade deal that is expected to boost bilateral trade by billions of dollars in one of the most ambitious negotiations to take place after Brexit. Britain’s International Trade Secretary Anne-Marie (pictured) Trevelyan met with Piyush Goyal, India’s minister of Commerce & Industry, Consumer Affairs & Food & Public Distribution and Textiles in New Delhi. Actual negotiations kick off next week, officials said. *More on p6*

AP PHOTO



Lebanon A general strike by public transportation and labor unions paralyzed the country yesterday as it suffers one of the world’s worst economic crises. The move comes as the country’s ruling class has done almost nothing to try to pull the country out of its meltdown, rooted in decades of corruption and mismanagement. The political class that has run the small nation of 6 million people is resisting reforms demanded by the international community.

More on backpage

NOT PUBLIC WORKS

Former DSSOPT chief Carion busted in another corruption case

▲ P3



廉政公署
CCAC

PAULO COUTINHO



HEALTH BUREAU 3,000 BEING TRACKED AFTER CASE IN TANZHOU, NURSERY CLOSED IN TAIPA

▲ P4

COOPERATION ZONE SEES INCREASE OF 32.55% MACAU-INVESTED FIRMS AFTER INAUGURATION

183 Macau-invested enterprises have set up in the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin since the inauguration of its administrative organizations, a year-on-year increase of 32.55%, according to a forum held earlier this year.

As of now, there are a total of 4,744 Macau-invested enterprises in the Zone, covering 17 major industry sectors of the national economy.

By the end of 2021, about 10,000 tech enterprises had registered in the zone, among which there are nearly 800 Macau-funded organisations, 328 national-level high-tech companies, and 18 national and provincial technology innovation platforms including tech company incubators and new type of R&D institutions.

Besides, the registered enterprises in the Traditional Chinese Medicine Science and Technology Industrial Park of Co-operation between Guangdong and Macau, have amounted to 216, 52 of which are from the SAR. Also, 25 projects in the Guangdong-Macao Cooperation Industrial Park have commenced construction.

Data from the statistics bureau of the zone shows that, from January to November of 2021, the general public budget revenue of the zone hit 9.868 billion yuan, an increase of 11.1% year-on-year. Its fiscal revenue has reached 1.576 billion yuan



after the establishment. Moreover, its GDP in the first three quarters of 2021 stood at 33.269 billion yuan, increased by 9.1% over the previous year.

Earlier this week, the zone announced that Macau residents who work full time in Hengqin are eligible for a subsidy of up to RMB12,000 for not more than 36 months and a one-time bonus of RMB50,000.

In the document issued, Macau residents with a bachelor's degree can receive RMB7,000, those with a master's degree can receive RMB9,000 and those with a doctoral degree, RMB12,000.

The subsidy, according to the document, aims to "enhance the benefits for Macau residents" in the cooperation zone, as well as encourage employers to recruit

Macau residents for employment.

Meanwhile, according to Nie Xiping, director of the Hengqin Office of the Guangdong Provincial People's Government, in 2022, the zone will take the lead in innovation of key areas and links of the reform and opening up. It will provide better policy support and make every effort to develop new technology, new industry, new

business forms and models, so as to create an international business and living environment and offer broad development space for everyone to start up businesses as well as work and live here.

The zone will also launch policies and measures to support the development of Macau enterprises like the cross-boundary operation of commercial registration. Also, it sticks to making good use of central financial assistance support, accelerating the formulation of a catalogue of industries enjoying preferential corporate income tax policies, and refined preferential personal income tax measures.

To perfect a talent protection mechanism, the zone is formulating an overall plan for talent development, a catalogue list of high-end and urgently-needed talent, compiling trial management measures for occupation record of overseas professionals and a list of overseas qualifications. It is also accelerating the implementation of the double 15% income tax preferential policy.

The introduction of talent has to be combined with industry, and also with the talent plan that Macao is now ready to implement, said Secretary for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong, who also acts as the director of the Executive Committee of the zone. **MDT/NEWSGD**

2021 Tourist Price Index contracts by nearly 5%

LYNZY VALLES

THE economic fallout of the pandemic has caused the annual average (Tourist Price Index) for 2021 to decline by 4.71% year-on-year to 117.09, mainly due to lower hotel room rates and airfares.

However higher charges for restaurant services have partially offset this decrease.

Data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) shows that the TPI for the fourth quarter of 2021 increased by 0.73% year-on-year to 119.07, due to rising

charges for restaurant services.

The reduced price of handbags offset part of this increase.

The price index in 2021 of Accommodation (-29.28%) fell sharply year-on-year. Likewise, the index for Transport & Communications dropped by -7.00%. By contrast, the indices of Restaurant Services (+4.62%) and Entertainment & Cultural Activities (+1.18%) registered increases.

TPI reflects the price change of goods and services

purchased by visitors.

There was a steady rebound in tourist arrivals in the latter part of the year due to the Grand Prix and Christmas periods.

The rebound comes following Macau's sudden lockdown and tightening of its measures against Covid-19 on September 25 - brought to a close on October 15. Since September 25, Macau recorded a total of 13 new Covid-19 cases, which caused Zhuhai to tighten entry and exit requirements temporarily.



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CCAC busts another public works chief in new corruption case

ANTHONY LAM

A second corruption case involving another former head of the Land, Public Works and Transport Bureau (DSSOPT) has been discovered, the Corruption Against Corruption (CCAC) announced in a statement yesterday.

The case concerns an alleged passive bribery money laundering scheme.

On Christmas Eve, the CCAC announced that it had concluded an investigation into a corruption case involving a former head of the DSSOPT. This is not the same former head as the individual involved in the case "announced today [yesterday]," CCAC stressed.

The suspect in the latest case is Jaime Carion.

Yesterday's statement noted that Carion had allegedly received kick-backs, including huge sums of money and immovable properties. He has also allegedly abused his authority in the vetting and approval



Jaime Carion

processes for construction project permits.

Aware that certain pending projects were in violation of regulatory procedures, Carion abused his position by drastically altering street alignment plans. He would then issue the construction works licenses by way of exception, and grant approval for the adjustment of the details of the plan. These measures allowed the developers to maximize the profits they would gain from the

projects.

The CCAC investigations revealed that Carion had allegedly received considerations from the developers circuitously, by funneling them through his relatives and friends.

For the time being, according to the CCAC, Carion and accomplices are outside Macau. A number of their immovable properties have previously been seized by the relevant agency.

The case has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office for follow-up.

In the case announced December 24, 2021, former head of the DSSOPT Li Canfeng was found to have granted an application for a street alignment plan for a construction project, knowing that the street alignment plan had already expired. This was done so that the project would not need to be discussed by the Urban Planning Committee.

Although Li knew that the construction project violated the provisions under the relevant architectural administrative instructions, he nonetheless allegedly instructed his subordinates to approve the construction project: instructions which were followed.

Li was also found to be involved in stock manipulations which were the basis for one of his relatives being granted an application for Macau residency by investment by the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute.

THREE NEW RECYCLING COLLECTION POINTS

The Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) announced yesterday that the city will have access to three more privately-operated recycling collection points from tomorrow. The new facilities are operated by the Macau United Citizens Association. The locations are: the association's headquarters on the peripheral of lao Hon, and its service centers in the Three Lampposts and the Inner Harbor. The new collection points will handle paper, PVCs with recyclable label Nos. 1 to 6 (excluding styrofoam), aluminum and iron containers, and glass containers.

TAXATION CODE ENTERS TWO-MONTH LEGISLATIVE CONSULTATION

Over the next two months the Legislative Assembly (AL) will welcome public opinion on the Taxation Code, and also invite comments from professional organizations. The draft of the Code is now being reviewed by a parliamentary committee, which put forward several questions to the Executive. It asked how long a lawsuit must have been filed before the tax authority orders an administrative injunction. It further invites the Executive to justify the need for the establishment of ordinary disobedience. Committee members also call for clearer definitions in certain articles.

SPORTS BUREAU PUN SEES APPOINTMENT EXTENDED FOR TWO YEARS

Having insisted on the hosting of the past two editions of the Macau Grand Prix amid the ongoing crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic, the appointment of Pun Weng Kun as president of the Sports Bureau (ID) has been extended until February 22 2024, as announced in the Official Gazette. Pun rose to the position in 2016. Pun's superintendent, Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Elsie Ao leong, asserted that he "possesses the appropriate administrative ability and professional experiences."

Nearly 400 people checked during police winter anti-crime operations



THE two police authorities conducted their first on-site "winter anti-crime operations" Tuesday and Wednesday nights, checking nearly 400 individuals in total.

Under the coordination by the Unitary Police Service (SPU), the Public Security Police Force (PSP) and the Judiciary Police (PJ) deployed about 200 officers and inspectors to entertainment, casino and shopping districts

as part of the commencement of their winter anti-crime operations this year.

Tuesday evening, 38 PJ inspectors checked 126 individuals in Cotai and discovered that 24 of them had conducted illegal currency exchange practices. They were taken to the police station for further investigation.

Wednesday night, 124 PSP officers, including the police dog team, conducted operations across the city. They

checked a total of 261 individuals and took 78 back to the police station. Of the 78, 50 were involved in illegal currency exchange, two in illegal sex services, and two were on overstayed visas. Thirteen drivers were fined for various violations.

In other initiatives, and under the lead of the SPU, both the PSP and PJ held familiarization sessions with local community associations to enlist their assistance in improving security.

The police also conducted promotional operations in commercial areas to spread awareness of anti-crime measures before the Lunar New Year. **AL**

SEVEN LOCAL ESTABLISHMENTS IN MICHELIN GUIDE BIB GOURMAND SELECTION

LYNZY VALLES

SEVEN local establishments have been included in the Bib Gourmand selection in the Michelin Guide Hong Kong-Macau 2022.

This year's selection highlights 64 eateries in Hong Kong, including seven new additions, along with seven

establishments in Macau.

In Macau, the Bib Gourmand selection for 2022 include established and popular names such as Chan Seng Kei, Cheong Kei, Din Tai Fung (COD), IFT Educational Restaurant, Lok Kei Noodles, Lou Kei (Fai Chi Kei), and O Castiço.

"Our inspectors are delighted to unveil their best

value-for-money addresses, which we hope will cater to foodies seeking to indulge in the pleasure of affordable gourmet experiences. Our latest selection of Bib Gourmand restaurants celebrates almost 70 eateries spanning more than 20 different styles of cuisine that are reflective of the diversity and deep culinary traditions

of Hong Kong and Macau," commented Gwendal Poullennec, international director of the Michelin Guides.

"An illustration of local customs and food culture, not only restaurants but also street food eateries have been highlighted by our inspectors, demonstrating quality food is everywhere in Hong Kong

and Macau."

The Bib Gourmand distinction is awarded to venues that offer high-quality food at affordable prices. This lets diners enjoy a high-quality three-course meal (excluding drinks) for a maximum price of HKD400 in Hong Kong or MOP400 in Macau.

The full selection of the Michelin Guide Hong Kong-Macau 2022, including its Starred Restaurants selection, will be announced on January 19.

COVID-19

SSM CONFIRMS ALMOST 3,000 PEOPLE BEING TRACKED AFTER CONFIRMED CASE IN TANZHOU

RENATO MARQUES

ALMOST 3,000 people living, working, or studying in Macau are being tracked to various degrees after a confirmed Covid-19 case was registered in Tanzhou, a town in the prefecture-level city of Zhongshan in Guangdong province. The number was confirmed by the Health Bureau (SSM) yesterday during the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center (Center) weekly press briefing.

During the briefing, the director of the SSM Alvis Lo noted the significance of this case due to the town's close proximity to the Macau border (around 10 km). He also noted the many links between Macau residents and the town, located roughly the same distance from Border Gate as the southern coast of Coloane Island.

According to Lo, following reports from the Zhuhai authorities, the SSM immediately initiated contact tracing and the implementation of containment measures. Through the analysis of health code data, they found that a total of 2,898 people had been in the town over the last two days, and another 18 people were reportedly within the residential area where the case was found.

"All those who have been in this residential area in Tanzhou (18 people) will be subject to a medical observation in quarantine of 14-days. The remaining people, who have only been in [other districts of] the town, will be subject to a seven-day quarantine plus seven days of health self-management. They will also be subjected to five nucleic acid tests (NAT) during this period," SSM head said.



The Kaifong's association nursery in Nova City, Taipa, yesterday afternoon

Lo also confirmed information given yesterday to the Times as breaking news. From today all border-crossings, except those via the airport, require the presentation of a negative NAT result taken within the previous 48 hours. This represents an extension of the previous the validity period of seven days. Nevertheless, the seven-day period remains for those arriving by plane.

TWO PEOPLE IN MACAU CONFIRMED CLOSE CONTACTS

At the same briefing, Lo also announced that two people in Macau have been confirmed to be primary contacts of the patient in Tanzhou and have been put under medical observation in isolation.

These cases include a 45-year-old male, a non-resident caretaker at the Caritas aged-care home "Lar Sol Nascente" in the Areia Preta district.

According to information provided by the Coordinator of the Center Leong Iek Hou, the man lives at Areia Preta district and attended a banquet hosted in Tanzhou on January 9.

His initial NAT result was negative but he was nonetheless placed in isolation. Health authorities are also following up on 11 individuals who share a residence with this man, as well as another 134 people who were in close contact with him at his place of work. All 145 secondary contacts have been placed under medical observation in quarantine.

The second case is a 59-year-old female local resident who works as an assistant at the Fong Chong (Taipa) Nursery.

According to Leong, she lives in the Lake Building in Taipa, and she also took part in the same banquet hosted on January 9.

A second individual with whom she lives has also been put under observation, along with 38 children from the nursery and 43 of her co-workers.

Like the 45-year-old male, the cohabitee initially NAT returned a negative result. Lo remarked that, since they are close contacts, the health authorities are taking extra care.

The SSM director also noted that added precautions are being taken into account regarding the secondary contacts, as "they [include] young children and elderly people, both considered risk groups [either because] they can't be vaccinated (the young chil-

dren) or because they belong to the group with the lowest vaccination rate in Macau (the elderly)."

Figures cited by Lo record that the vaccination rate among elderly people living in their own homes in Macau stands at only 30%.

According to Lo, as of 4:30 p.m. yesterday, almost 2,000 of the network of 3,000 people considered primary or secondary contacts have already undergone their first test. Authorities are hopeful that the remainder will have had their first test today.

The health authorities also explained that one of the reasons for the heightened precautions is that mainland authorities have not yet ascertained the source of the infection in Tanzhou.

"Only after the mass testing that is being conducted in some areas in Zhuhai can we ascertain the real risk for Macau. We are assessing this at the moment," Lo confirmed.

GOV'T TO EXPAND QR ITINERARY TRACKING FUNCTIONS

THE footprint recording system the government is using through the Macau Health Code mobile application (app) is planned to expand its functionalities once a larger number of people are using it, the Health Bureau (SSM) director Alvis Lo said yesterday in response to a media inquiry.

Speaking at the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center weekly press briefing, Lo said that the current tracking of people's itineraries through a "check-in" system currently being rolled out citywide is "just the first phase." He added: "we will promote more functions step-by-step."

According to his explanation, the increasing functionality of the system is linked to the number of users, with the government hoping to add more functions as the app's userbase grows.

To a suggestion by a media outlet representative, Lo agree that "in the second phase, [they] might

implement the 'check-out' to be used when people leave a certain venue."

Currently, and according to the information provided, the system records when a user enters a venue via the scanning of a QR code but does not trace any further steps taken until the user "checks in" in another venue.

According to the same media representative, the government should enforce an even more restrictive system that would record both entry and exit from every venue, to ensure that the authorities know more about each use, including how long they spend inside venues, etc.

According to Lo, on January 12 there were 40,000 new registered downloads of the app, added to a userbase of around 224,000 people.

"When the number is even higher, we will promote more changes," Lo said. **RM**

NO DECISION MADE ON CLASS SUSPENSION

THE representative from the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) Wong Ka Kei affirmed that no decision has been made as yet regarding the need for class suspensions or the enforcement of online classes. "We are communicating with SSM and in close contact with the education sector to see if there is a need or not to suspend classes," the official said. Wong also noted that, according to information gathered by the local authorities, there are about 500 students that are still in Tanzhou, unable to return to Macau

due to the outbreak in the area. "As of now, 200 students from the tertiary education, and another 300 from the non-tertiary education level, are in this area. To those that could not return [to Macau], we are providing help," Wong said. According to the official, the DSEDJ is also coordinating efforts with educational institutions at every level for the placement of QR codes for students and school staff to scan using the Macau Health Code app, in order to facilitate tracing of any potential contacts.

GAMING

JP Morgan: Covid-19 no longer affecting casino stocks

LYNZY VALLES

BROKERAGE JP Morgan has upgraded gaming operators Sands China, Wynn Macau and MGM's risk/reward potential overweight, noting that the ongoing Covid-19 crisis is for the most part no longer affecting gaming stocks.

"Recent bad news (e.g. HKSAR outbreak, China Omicron cases, delays in travel bubble) do not seem to move stocks anymore. We see this as testament to low (to no) investor expectations and positioning," analysts at JP Morgan said, as cited in a report issued by Asia Gaming Brief.

The brokerage said that, at current stock levels, investors seem to have pessimistic expectations which have been permanently lowered by about 20 to 30%, and that several were de-rated 8 to 10 times, according to the report.

The brokerage added that the results of the recent public



RENATO MARQUES

consultation on the gaming law amendments indicate no reason for great concern.

Following uncertainties amid the Covid-19 crisis, the subsequent economic fallout, and the strict border measures implemented by the city, JP Morgan previously said that it would not attempt to forecast the city's gaming recovery for 2022.

The brokerage reiterated that the degree of recovery of the gross gaming revenue (GGR)

from casinos is dependent on the "pace and level of travel normalization around the region."

Credit rating agency Fitch Ratings set Macau operators and their respective credit complexes as Rating Watch Negative (RWN) back in December, given the imminent regulatory risk arising from the expiration of gaming concessions on June 26.

However, the firm expects further clarity to emerge this year in relation to these regulatory

issues and the sustainability of mainland Chinese visitors - though this is not guaranteed.

JP Morgan assumed in its modeling a zero-junket revenue, as Macau grapples with both a tourism recovery and junket and VIP headwinds following the arrest of junket mogul Alvin Chau over illicit gambling and money laundering charges.

It added that the impact of the loss of the higher rollers is not of great consequence.

35 SUSPECTED ILLEGAL WORKERS FOUND IN DECEMBER

In December, authorities inspected a total of 306 locations and found 35 suspected illegal workers. The illegal workers were found as part of joint and unilateral operations against illegal workers launched by the Public Security Police Force, the Labour Affairs Bureau and other authorities. The operations were conducted at construction sites, private flats, and other commercial and industrial establishments.

THE COMMISSION OF AUDIT HOSTS INTERNAL WORKSHOP ON PROGRAMMING

In association with the Greater Bay Area Audit Research Institute (Zhuhai), the Commission of Audit has held a workshop for 70 of its employees on the use of Big Data in conducting audit work. In order to better process data, attendees were instructed to use Python, a popular programming language, to analyze collected data. The workshop is part of the Commission's effort in integrating the use of Big Data as part of the daily work of the Commission. The workshop was conducted by video-conference.

AD

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BEIJING DEFENDS SWEEPING MARITIME CLAIMS AFTER US CRITICISM

CHINA yesterday defended its "historical rights" to virtually the entire South China Sea, following a new U.S. government report saying Beijing's claims are almost entirely invalid.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin called the State Department report "Limits in the Seas," issued this month, an attempt to "distort international law, confuse the public, sow discord and disrupt the regional situation."

"China has historical rights in the South China Sea. China's sovereignty and related rights and interests in the South China Sea have been established in a long period of history and are consistent with international law," Wang said.

The vast maritime region has been tense because six other governments claim all or part of the strategically vital waterway, through which an estimated \$5 trillion in global trade travels each year and which holds rich but fast declining fishing stocks and significant undersea oil and gas deposits.

The U.S. holds no official position on who owns what features in the sea, but maintains the absolute right to operate in what it insists are international waters.

That includes sailing Navy warships past Chinese-held features, including artificial islands equipped with airstrips and other military facilities.



Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin

The U.S. report said Beijing's claim "has no legal basis and is asserted by (China) without specificity as to the nature or geographic extent of the 'historic rights' claimed."

The U.S. study also said that China's claim to sovereignty covering more than 100 features submerged at high tide were inconsistent with international law; that its enclosure of vast areas of the sea was unsupported by international law; and that its practice of claiming maritime zones based on labeling each island group as a whole was "not permitted by international law."

China's "expansive maritime claims in the South China Sea are inconsistent with international law as reflected in the 1982 United Nations

Convention on the Law of the Sea," the study said.

"The overall effect of these maritime claims is that (China) unlawfully claims sovereignty or some form of exclusive jurisdiction over most of the South China Sea," it said.

In his response, Wang said the U.S. "arbitrarily misinterprets the convention, engages in political manipulation with multiple standards for its own selfish interests, and undermines the international rule of law."

He also renewed China's criticism of a 2016 international arbitration ruling that mostly invalidated Beijing's claims. The ruling is "illegal and null and void. China does not accept or recognize it," Wang said. **MDT/AP**

TAIWAN

Chipmaker TSMC says quarterly profit \$6 billion

TAIWAN Semiconductor Manufacturing Co., the biggest contract manufacturer of processor chips, reported yesterday its quarterly profit rose 16.4% over a year earlier to \$6 billion amid surging demand for chips for smartphones and other electronics.

Revenue in the final three months of 2021 rose 21.2% to 438.2 billion New Taiwan dollars (\$15.8 billion), TSMC announced. Profit was 166.2 billion New Taiwan dollars.

TSMC, headquartered in Hsinchu, Taiwan, makes processor chips for major brands including Apple Inc. and Qualcomm Inc.



Chipmakers have benefited from demand for next-generation telecoms, high-performance computing and chips for

use in products from cars to medical devices.

TSMC announced plans last year to invest \$100 billion over the next

three years in manufacturing and research and development.

Most semiconductors used in smartphones, medical equipment, computers and other products are made in Taiwan, South Korea and China.

TSMC announced plans in October to build its first chip factory in Japan. The company and Sony Corp. later said they would jointly invest \$7 billion in the facility.

Outside Taiwan, TSMC also operates a semiconductor wafer fabrication facility in Camas, Washington, and design centers in San Jose, California, and Austin, Texas.

The company has announced plans for a second U.S. production site in Arizona as concern grows over American reliance on sources in Asia for high-tech components. **MDT/AP**

BRITAIN, INDIA LAUNCH TALKS ON FREE TRADE DEAL AMID UNCERTAINTY OVER CHINESE TIES

INDIA and Britain yesterday launched talks on pursuing a free trade deal that is expected to boost bilateral trade by billions of dollars in one of the most ambitious negotiations to take place after Brexit. After leaving the European Union in 2016, Britain has focused on its trade policies in the Indo-Pacific region. India, once a British colony, is viewed as a favorable location given uncertainties over ties with China.

Britain's International Trade Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan met with Piyush Goyal, India's minister of Commerce & Industry, Consumer Distribution and Textiles in New Delhi. Actual negotiations kick off next week, officials said.

"This is the first of my important agreements this year as Britain set out on her independent journey post-Brexit," Trevelyan told reporters.

She said the two countries have a unique opportunity to build ties in the trade, defense, climate and health sectors as they recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Goyal said the free trade agreement, expected to be finalized in a year's time, will double trade between the two countries by 2030.

Both sides hope the deal will spark huge benefits for several industries, from food and drink to cutting-edge renewable technology.

The Indian minister said both sides would also work on an interim agreement for fast-tracking efforts to capture low-hanging fruit in goods and services, tourism, startups, education and climate change.

The free trade agreement could potentially double UK exports to India and boost two-way trade by \$38 billion a year by 2035, a British government statement said.

Asked whether the British government was willing to relax visa restrictions on Indians

going to the country, Trevelyan said the approach was to see that British and Indian businesses and the citizens of the two countries benefit in this endeavor to reinvigorate ties.

Goyal said "the Indian diaspora in Britain is a bridge between the two countries and can add a lot of dynamism to their relationship."

"A deal with India is a golden opportunity to put UK businesses at the front of the queue as the Indian economy continues to grow rapidly," Trevelyan said, adding that Britain was keen to tap into the growing middle class in Asia's third-largest economy.

"This is the first of my important agreements this year as Britain set out on her independent journey post-Brexit," Trevelyan said.

Investment from Indian companies already supports 95,000 jobs across the UK, the British statement released before the meeting said.

Britain is angling for a deal that slashes barriers to doing business and trading, including cutting tariffs on exports of British-made cars and Scotch whisky.

In an interview with the Financial Times newspaper yesterday, Trevelyan said "everything is on the table to discuss", including broadening visa access for Indian students and skilled workers. She said she would like for a deal to be clinched by early 2023.

According to India's External Affairs Ministry, India and Britain are focusing on five key areas, people-to-people contacts, trade, defense and security, climate action and health.

India and Britain have extensive links, with the former investing in 120 projects to become the second-largest source of foreign direct investments after the United States in 2019. Trade between the two countries was \$15.45 billion in 2019-20. **MDT/AP**



Anne-Marie Trevelyan UK's Secretary of State for International Trade

China faces omicron test weeks ahead of Beijing Olympics

MOST access to a major city adjacent to Beijing was suspended yesterday as the government tried to contain an outbreak of the coronavirus's easily transmitted omicron variant ahead of next month's Winter Olympics in the Chinese capital.

Tianjin, a port and manufacturing center with 14 million people, is one of a half-dozen cities where the government is imposing lockdowns and other restrictions in response to outbreaks.

With the success of the Games and China's national dignity at stake, Beijing is doubling down on a "zero-tolerance" policy that has some 20 million people under lockdown in Xi'an in the west and other cities. Some are barred from leaving their homes.

Yesterday, Tianjin suspended train, taxi, bus and ride-hailing services to other cities. Airline flights and high-speed train services were suspended earlier and highways closed. People leaving the city were required to present negative virus tests and receive special permission.

Trucks carrying food and medical will be allowed in but drivers were told to wear masks and take other steps to avoid transmitting the virus, according to a city government notice.

Automaker Volkswagen AG said it shut down two factories in Tianjin on Monday and employees have been tested twice. "We hope to resume production very soon," it said in a statement.

Tianjin conducted mass testing for a second time Wednesday. The government asked resi-

AP PHOTO



dents to wait at home until they receive a negative result.

Tianjin's proximity to Beijing makes the timing particularly fraught. During the Tokyo Olympics in July, Japan saw a widespread outbreak driven by the delta variant.

Despite that, the disruptions for people in Tianjin remain relatively light.

"Everything is fine, the supermarkets and restaurants, you can go to all normally," said Yu Xuan, who works at a university in Tianjin.

Wang Dacheng, another resident, said his father who has trouble walking was able to get tested in their apartment.

"Tianjin people are pretty optimistic. Everyone's been very calm and collected," Wang said.

Elsewhere, restrictions in

Xi'an, a city of 14 million people, and the central province of Henan have prompted complaints people sequestered in their apartments were running out of food.

China has imposed sweeping restrictions on movement since early 2020.

That started with the then-unprecedented step of sealing off 11 million people in the central city Wuhan, where the virus was first detected, and other parts of surrounding Hubei province.

The government also has prohibited most foreign travelers from coming into China and uses digital surveillance to track members of the public.

The measures have kept the virus from spreading into a full-fledged national outbreak so

far. The country's vaccination rate now tops 85%.

The task has become more critical as support staff for the Olympics arrive ahead of the Feb. 4 start of the Games.

"I think it truly is a critical juncture for China. Can it stave off omicron?" said Dali Yang, a Chinese politics expert at the University of Chicago.

China reported 124 domestically transmitted cases yesterday, including 76 in Henan province and 41 in Tianjin.

Authorities have reported a total of 104,379 cases since the pandemic began and 4,636 deaths, a figure that hasn't changed in months.

Anti-disease measures around the Olympics are stricter than Tokyo's, which were mostly effective in stopping transmission,

said Kenji Shibuya, research director at the Tokyo Foundation for Policy Research and a public health expert.

Beijing faces a potentially bigger risk because the more contagious omicron variant has shown itself adept at evading vaccines.

Moreover, the lack of widespread outbreaks means the Chinese population is protected only by vaccines and not by antibodies produced by previous infections, said Dr. Vineeta Bal, an Indian immunologist.

"The Olympics would be the first trial," said Bal. Omicron "can easily travel in China."

The Olympics are being conducted under a "closed loop" system that is meant to cut off all contact between athletes, journalists, staff and officials and the outside world.

They will travel between hotels and competition venues in special vehicles. Anyone who leaves the sealed environment will be required to quarantine for three weeks.

Police say anyone involved in a collision with an Olympics vehicle should avoid contact with people on board and wait for a special team to handle the situation.

Such measures should be able to prevent the spread of the virus within the bubble, said Kei Saito, a virologist at the University of Tokyo. But outside, it could be a different story.

"Omicron is three to four times more transmissible than delta," said Saito. "I think it's almost impossible to control the spread of omicron."

Organizers are determined the Games will go on despite the global pandemic and controversies including a U.S.-led diplomatic boycott over accusations of human rights abuses against mostly Muslim minorities in China's northwest.

"The world is turning its eyes to China, and China is ready," said President Xi Jinping, who also is leader of the ruling Communist Party, during an inspection tour last week. **MDT/AP**

OLYMPICS

Organizers say met plan to popularize winter sports

A key concern when Beijing was bidding to host the 2022 Winter Olympic Games was the lack of a strong winter sports tradition in the country.

Organizers countered by pointing to the vast potential for growth, and now say they more than met their target of involving 300 million Chinese in skiing, hockey and other cold weather pastimes.

Beijing won the Olympic bid in 2015 when six European bidders dropped out of contention and the International Olympic Committee was left with only two candidates — Beijing and Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Yesterday, the director general of the organizing committee's planning department, Li Sen, said the goal of "engaging 300 million people in win-

ter sports" had become a reality.

That is a "long term development," and there is still plenty of room to grow, Li said at a news conference to discuss the release of a report on meeting sustainability goals for the Games that begin Feb. 4.

Li put the total number of people in China who have participated in winter sports at 346 million, and said the country now

boasts 654 standard ice rinks and 803 indoor and outdoor ski resorts.

Beijing's winning bid was also based on sustainability through the reuse of venues originally constructed for the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games.

Given the dry climate, artificial snow would have to be produced in large quantities, but Games spokesperson Yan Jiarong

said the impact would be highly limited. However, some environmentalists have disputed that conclusion.

"Our artificial snowmaking system adopts the world's most advanced water-saving equipment," Yan said. "In general, the water used in snowmaking is relatively limited and will not have an impact on regional water safety and ecological

environment."

The Beijing Games are being held in three different zones, in downtown Beijing, in Yanqing on the capital's outskirts and in Zhangjiakou in neighboring Hebei province.

Athletes, officials, staff and journalists are being kept in a bubble to avoid COVID-19 infections and only a few handpicked spectators will be in the stands. **MDT/AP**



US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, left, and Russian deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov attend security talks at the United States Mission in Geneva

Russian diplomat leaves open Cuba, Venezuela army deployment

VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV & EMILY SCHULTHEIS, MOSCOW

RUSSIA yesterday sharply raised the stakes in a showdown with the West over Ukraine, with a top diplomat saying he wouldn't exclude a Russian military deployment to Cuba and Venezuela if tensions with the United States mount.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, who led the Russian delegation in Monday's talks with the United States in Geneva, said in televised remarks that he would neither confirm nor exclude the possibility that Russia could send military assets to Cuba and Venezuela.

The negotiations in Geneva and Wednesday's NATO-Russia meeting in Vienna failed to narrow the gap on Moscow's security demands amid a buildup of Russian troops near Ukraine. While Moscow demanded a halt to NATO expansion, Washington and its allies firmly rejected them as a non-starter.

Speaking in an inter-

view with Russian RTVI TV broadcast, Ryabkov noted that "it all depends on the action by our U.S. counterparts," adding that President Vladimir Putin has warned that Russia could take military-technical measures if the U.S. provokes Moscow and turns up military pressure on it.

Ryabkov said a refusal by the U.S. and its allies to consider the key Russian demand for guarantees against the alliance's expansion to Ukraine and other ex-Soviet nations raises doubts about continuing the talks.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov noted "some positive elements and nuances" during the talks, but described them as "unsuccessful" because of stark disagreements on Russia's key demands.

"The talks were initiated to receive specific answers to concrete principal issues that were raised, and disagreements remained on those principal issues, which is bad," he said in a conference call with reporters.

Peskov warned of a complete rupture U.S.-Russian relations if pro-

posed sanctions targeting Russian President Vladimir Putin and other top civilian and military leaders are adopted. The measures, proposed by Senate Democrats, would also target leading Russian financial institutions if Moscow sends troops into Ukraine.

Peskov criticized the proposals as an attempt to up the pressure on Moscow during the talks, saying it wouldn't work.

"It concerns sanctions, which taking into account the inevitable adequate response, effectively amount to an initiative to rupture relations," he warned, adding that Russian will respond in kind to protect its interests.

The talks come as an estimated 100,000 combat-ready Russian troops, tanks and heavy military equipment are massed near Ukraine's eastern border. The buildup has caused deep concerns in Kyiv and the West that Moscow is preparing for an invasion. Russia denies that it's pondering an invasion and in turn accuses the West of threatening its security by posi-

tioning military personnel and equipment in Central and Eastern Europe.

Peskov rebuffed the West's calls for Russia to help deescalate tensions by pulling back troops from areas near Ukraine, noting that the country is free to move them wherever it deems necessary on its own territory.

"It's hardly possible for NATO to dictate to us where we should move our armed forces on the Russian territory," he said.

Peskov underscored that Russia is ready to continue the talks but wants them to produce results. "There will be no deficit of a political will to continue the negotiations," he said.

Tensions revolving around Ukraine and Russia's demands on the West again appeared on the table at yesterday's meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Vienna.

Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau, who assumed the position of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, noted in his opening speech that "the risk of war in the OSCE area is now greater than ever before in the last 30 years."

"For several weeks, we have been faced with the possibility of a major military escalation in Eastern Europe," he said. "We have recently heard a demand for security guarantees related to an important part of the OSCE area and the renewed discourse about spheres of influence. All these aspects require a serious international assessment and a proper reaction."

Rau emphasized the need to "focus on a peaceful resolution of a conflict in and around Ukraine ... in full respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders."

In 2014, Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula after the ouster of its Moscow-friendly leader and threw its weight behind a separatist insurgency in the country's east, where more than seven years of fighting has killed over 14,000 people.

A 2015 peace deal brokered by France and Germany has helped end large-scale battles, but frequent skirmishes have continued and efforts to negotiate a political settlement have failed. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1994 DUCHESS OF KENT JOINS CATHOLIC CHURCH



The Duchess of Kent has become the first member of the Royal Family to convert to Catholicism for more than 300 years.

The duchess was received into the Catholic church in a private service conducted by the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Basil Hume.

An act of parliament in 1701 banned heirs to the throne from being or marrying a Roman Catholic.

The duchess' husband is the queen's cousin and 18th in line to the throne.

The duke's office said the duchess' conversion would have no constitutional implications as she was an Anglican at the time of her marriage.

In recent years both the duchess' brother-in-law, Prince Michael of Kent and her son, George, have married Roman Catholics and renounced their right of succession to the throne.

A spokesman for the duchess stressed that her conversion had nothing to do with current issues facing the Anglican church.

He said: "This is a long-pondered personal decision by the duchess and it has no connection with issues such as the ordination of women priests."

But some priests believe interest among the aristocracy has been spurred by recent Anglican departures from tradition.

Father Charles-Roux of St Ethelreda's in Holborn, central London, said many were not happy with the direction the Anglican church was taking.

"There's been a major change in their tradition and the people who belong to that tradition go back to what they are familiar with. They look for support in Rome," said Father Charles-Roux.

But in a statement Cardinal Basil Hume stressed the duchess' decision was a private matter.

"We must all respect a person's conscience in these matters, and I know that the duchess recognises how much she owes to the Church of England for which she retains a genuine affection," he said.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The Church of England's decision in 1992 to allow the ordination of women priests sparked several high profile conversions to Catholicism including Conservative politician Ann Widdecombe.

In recent years there have been several calls by MPs and Lords to repeal the 1701 Act of Settlement barring Catholics from the throne but the government has repeatedly insisted such a move would be too complex. But there has been a growing public rapprochement between the monarchy and Catholic church.

The Queen greeted the Pope at Buckingham Palace in 1982 and in 1995 became the first monarch since the 17th century to attend a Catholic service.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Your partner could also use some time alone with you. Check your personal papers and make sure everything is in order. Good friends will give you honest answers.

TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20
You will be erratic and quite likely to make personal mistakes. Don't be too quick to blame others for your bad mood. You need to fulfill your needs and present your talents.

GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21
Make any necessary changes to your insurance policy. Look after financial transactions today. Have some fun, but draw the line if someone tries to fast talk their way into your heart.

CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Take a close look at contracts and agreements that have been offered to you. Avoid lending or borrowing. Your ability to get the job done will result in added responsibility and possible promotion.

LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22
Don't try to twist things around so that they sound more enticing. Generosity will put you in the poorhouse. Don't be angry, but be on your guard.

VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22
You must get out and mingle. Be supportive in order to avoid confrontations. Travel may be confusing. Don't make promises that you won't be able to keep.

LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Your leadership qualities will come in handy. Don't do something silly just to get back at your mate. Try not to be so demonstrative.

SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Your fight for those less fortunate is not likely to end in sweet victory. Your intellectual charm will win hearts and bring opportunities that you least expect.

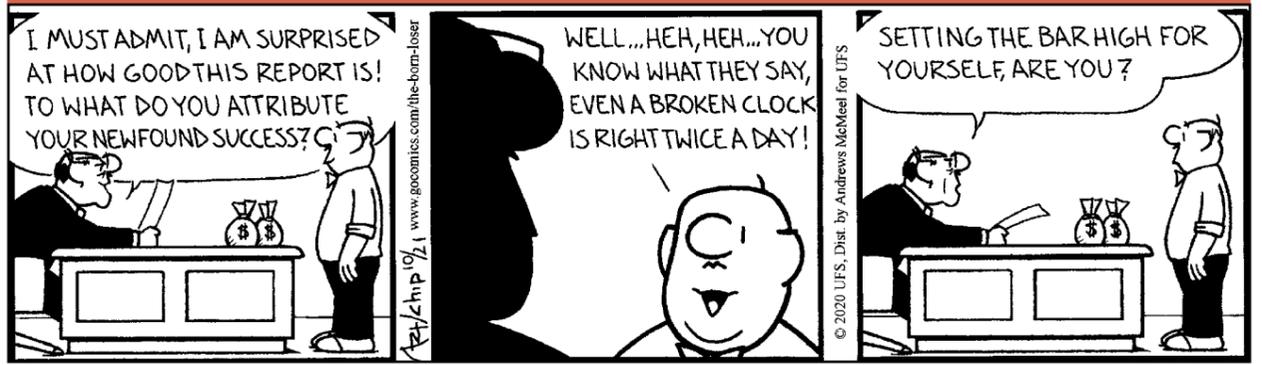
SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Don't make accusations unless you are completely sure that you are correct. Go out with friends who are positive and supportive. You will communicate easily and should be able to develop new friendships.

CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Try not to lend or borrow money today. You will have a productive day if you organize yourself well at work. Try to put your money away for a rainy day.

AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Talk to peers who you trust in order to get sound advice. Get involved in a competitive sport that will bring the challenges you thrive on. You will be extremely sensual; take precautions and don't take any risks.

PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20
You can raise your standard of living if you pick up some freelance work on the side. Self-deception is likely. You may be able to impart knowledge that's innovative to those searching for a new angle.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

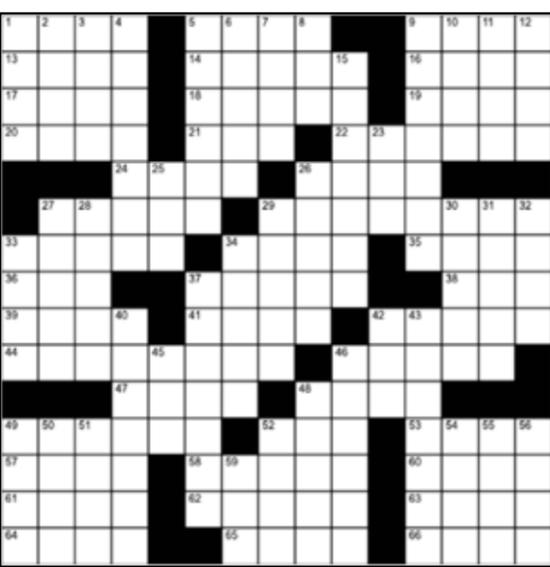
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-7	4	fine
Harbin	-19	-5	fine
Tianjin	4	8	rain
Urumqi	5	9	cloudy
Xi'an	8	12	overcast
Lhasa	-5	4	fine
Chengdu	7	15	cloudy
Chongqing	9	12	rain
Kunming	3	7	rain
Nanjing	0	7	overcast
Shanghai	17	23	cloudy
Wuhan	-1	8	overcast
Hangzhou	-25	-10	fine
Taipei	-4	3	overcast
Guangzhou	10	17	cloudy
Hong Kong	15	17	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	-3	3	snow
Frankfurt	-1	4	overcast
Paris	-2	8	clear
London	1	6	overcast
New York	-10	4	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Footfall; 5- Actor Cobb; 9- Thick-soled shoe; 13- Old Dodge model; 14- Violinist Mischa; 16- Trompe l'...; 17- ... accompli; 18- Brazilian ballroom dance; 19- Mission control gp.; 20- The King ...; 21- One ... million; 22- Drunk; 24- Nourishment; 26- Rustic; 27- Feel grief; 29- Impresario; 33- Make watertight; 34- Nightclub of song; 35- Cheerful; 36- Hill builder; 37- Backing for an exhibit; 38- Diffident; 39- Stratum; 41- Marvel superheroes; 42- Can't stand; 44- Economized; 46- Lustful deity; 47- So long!; 48- Course; 49- Small part in a play; 52- Cornerstone abbr.; 53- School founded in 1440; 57- Sheltered, nautically; 58- Hindu ascetic; 60- Hokkaido native; 61- Cool!; 62- "Pomp and Circumstance" composer; 63- Winder for holding flexible material; 64- Catch sight of; 65- In stitches; 66- Follow;

DOWN 1- Parlor piece; 2- Counterfeiter catcher; 3- Oklahoma city; 4- Pathetic; 5- Wound; 6- Gnu cousin; 7- Actress Thompson; 8- Quick punch; 9- Link; 10- Escaping fluid; 11- River to the Seine; 12- Pleased; 15- Chemical-free; 23- Jurist Fortas; 25- Sitcom planet; 26- Grow to maturity; 27- Frenzied; 28- External; 29- Gave a measured amount; 30- Delicious; 31- None of the above; 32- Beams; 33- Burmese, Manx, and Scottish Fold; 34- Walk-on role; 37- Uninterrupted space; 40- Shaky; 42- Magician's prop; 43- Deep down; 45- O Sole ...; 46- Sixth planet; 48- Balderdash!; 49- Decline; 50- Some are pale; 51- Jump; 52- Verge; 54- ... yellow ribbon...; 55- That's ... haven't heard; 56- Without value; 59- Capp and Capone;



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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AD

DRIVE IN

LOVE BITES IN 'WOLF LIKE ME' WITH ISLA FISHER AND JOSH GAD

MARK KENNEDY, MDT/AP ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

ISLA Fisher's character in the new genre-bending series "Wolf Like Me" is a romantic catch. Kind of.

She speaks four languages, makes cheese and pottery and is good at close-up magic. On the other hand, she can be distant and absolutely beastly. Oh, that reminds us: She has a pretty big personal secret.

"I'm a complicated person," she tells her onscreen potential romantic partner, played by Josh Gad, in the first episode. "I have a really complicated life."

His character understands perfectly: He's a bit of a mess, too, an emotional wreck since the death of his wife and he's trying in vain to connect with his tween daughter.

That's the set-up to the new ambitious Peacock six-part series that starts Jan. 13 and mixes slapstick comedy, adult drama and heartbreaking trauma. It's a story of two scarred people learning to be vulnerable again.

AP PHOTO



Isla Fisher in a scene from "Wolf Like Me," a six-part series debuting today [Macau time]

"Love is scary," says Gad. "I think that however you slice it, we all have secrets. We all have baggage. And you don't know what you're getting until you're in it. And then once you're in it, it's too late."

"Wolf Like Me" was created, written and directed by Abe Forsythe, who previously wrote and directed the sci-fi horror comedy

movie "Little Monsters," starring Lupita Nyong'o and Gad. Like that film, "Wolf Like Me" mixes genres — this time romantic comedy and horror — to push into the absurd and come back with something sweet and dramatic.

"I was drawn to telling a timeless story in such a unique way," says Gad.

"Casting Josh and Isla was a

big step in ultimately articulating one of the main themes of this show, which is don't judge a book by its cover," says Forsythe. "This is not the usual way that I've seen them, which is what I'm asking the audience to do with the characters."

Fisher and Gad had never worked together before.

Forsythe, who is a 40-year-old

single parent, drew on his own life for the script, confronting his emotional baggage and exploring the pressures of trying to reassure his child that nothing is perfect and nothing is permanent.

One lovely line of dialogue was given to Fisher, who tells her possible lover: "Messy is good. Break yourself open. It's how the light gets in." Fisher says she felt like the show was a risk and she loved the challenge: "As with all risks, if they pay off, then it's worthwhile."

Fisher says they trusted Forsythe and the characters.

"We both surrendered to Abe and it was his story. It's a personal story for him. And so I think we found ourselves at the hands of a captain who is very confident and incredibly incredibly passionate about this story," she adds. "We trusted the authenticity of the characters, even though the circumstances are ridiculous."

The more horror parts of the show — Peacock has begged reporters not to reveal too much — Forsythe says is a metaphor that lets the audience bring their own experience and "reach a level of catharsis."

"This is the first time that I had the time and the resources to be able to tell a story properly, where the resources matched the ambition to what I wanted to say with this show," he says.

AD

合夥人 PARTNERS:

官樂怡 Rui José da Cunha
山度士 Álvaro Rodrigues
馬天龍 Nuno Sardinha da Mata
趙魯 Zhao Lu

馬傑安 João Nogueira Marques

大律師 ASSOCIATES:

高文軒 Adelino Correia
羅善齡 Zelina Rodrigues
白秀蘭 Susana Batalha
馬潔冰 Maria João Marques
陶義德 António Isó de Azeredo
白穎怡 Içília Berenguel
冼玲鳳 Mariana Afonso Esteves
馬秀文 Sofia Mendes Martins
飛嘉華 Carlos dos Santos Ferreira
杜力信 Nelson de Azevedo
宋哲言 João Gonçalves Assunção
莫永誠 Rui Velez de Moura
安東尼 António Manuel dos Santos
巴慧雅 Vera Bastos
歐文傑 Miguel Evaristo
陳正喬 Joana Chan
顏曉蓉 Teresa Xiaorong Yan
諾瑪莉 Maria Noras
康靜雅 Viviana Hong
梁淑嵐 Ana Leon
黃瀚賢 Frederico Vong

實習律師 TRAINEE LAWYERS:

張偉鴻 Cheong Wai Hong
陳健雄 Eurico Chan
吳露鋒 Ng Teng Fong
戴博晴 Tai Pok Cheng
吳佩愉 Ng Pui U

法律專家 JURISTS:

羅成軒 José J. Rodrigues
斐彥德 Gonçalo Figueiredo
潘卡莉 Candice Pun
陳子健 Kimi Chan
伍福賢 Domingos Ng
劉慧敏 Amanda Liu
楊詩婷 Si Teng leong



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TASTE OF EDESIA

Italian Refinement

IRENE SAM, MDT

NOT long ago, 8½ Otto e Mezzo Bombana at Galaxy Macau has reopened. For sophisticated foodies, the establishment has been serving refined Italian dishes since its opening, one of the hottest dining destinations in Macau. As the perfect complement to the vibrant new life of the restaurant, the interior has also recently taken on a fresh new look with refurbishments throughout the venue. Upon entry into 812 Otto e Mezzo Bombana from The Promenade Shops, guests will encounter a stunning new lighting feature of colorful, glass-textured tubes of varying shapes and sizes that are individually suspended from a mirrored ceiling at the Bar and Lounge. The warm and inviting bar and lounge also features an intimate corner of stylishly comfortable sofas and chairs covered in Tweed and Gessato patterns, evocative of exquisitely tailored Italian suits for men.

As guests move into the fine dining room, they will encounter a bright, new transitional experience of heightened luxury with sophisticated brass detailing, gold mirrors and colourful fabrics of blue and green hues. In honour of Chef Bombana's passion for the arts, the space is also accentuated by the masterful art pieces of Gianluca Miniaci, a talented Italian artist who has also made his mark in theatre and music.

The third Italian restaurant of Chef Umberto Bombana with 1-Michelin Star, Bombana at Galaxy Macau is led by Executive Chef Riccardo La Perna. Chef Bombana first discovered Chef Riccardo La Perna in China, and knew that he had uncovered a gem. In 2013, he invited Chef Riccardo to oversee 8½ Otto e Mezzo BOMBANA Shanghai. Under his leadership, the restaurant garnered two Michelin stars in the inaugural edition of the 2017 Michelin Guide Shanghai and also recently earned two Diamonds from the Black Pearl Restaurant Guide.

After six years of Michelin-starred success in Shanghai, Chef Riccardo is now

at the helm of 8½ Otto e Mezzo BOMBANA at Galaxy Macau. In his role as Executive Chef, he elevates the dining experience in Macau by infusing his "Luxury of Simplicity" culinary philosophy into masterfully created, authentic Sicilian dishes.

Chef Riccardo's philosophy of "The Luxury of Simplicity" means sourcing high quality, seasonal ingredients; offering quality service and creating an exceptional dining environment for guests so that they can taste the soul and passion of the chef. For him, the strength of his Italian cuisine lies in the goodness of the ingredients used and the simplicity of the preparations. At first glance, each dish may appear simple, but once tasted, guests will discover the immense amount of creativity and very important gestures that have gone into the preparation of each dish.

Showcasing the authentic flavours of his beautiful hometown of Sicily with fresh, season ingredients are the hallmark of Chef Riccardo's cuisine. He also enjoys the luxury of sourcing a wide variety of products from Italian farms and would frequently make changes to the menu in accordance with the season. Fresh, handcrafted pasta is an important highlight on the menu. The seasonal Tagliolini with hand made butter, Parmigiano reserve, Alba White truffle is a must-have as it is made with 48 egg yolks per 1kg of pasta.

Beyond delivering outstanding food and wine, another important element of Chef Riccardo's philosophy is his commitment to offering exceptional hospitality, a passion he shares with Chef Bombana. Chef Riccardo has big dreams for Macau. "812 Otto e Mezzo Bombana has to be a place for the experience, not just for food and wine, but also for the hospitality," he says. "In true 812 Otto e Mezzo Bombana tradition, we will guarantee the same consistently high standards of food, service and hospitality that you would also find in Hong Kong and Shanghai. The difference now is that guests will have the opportunity to discover a new chef and a new team."



OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

**FRANCE CAN PLAY
 IMPORTANT ROLE IN
 KEEPING SINO-EU
 TIES ON TRACK**

There is a strong bond between France and China that has been tempered over time. The European country was the first major Western power to establish diplomatic relations with China, which will mark their 58th anniversary on Jan 27, and Georges Pompidou was the first Western national leader to pay a formal state visit to China.

The strategic partnership between the two countries was forged in 2004, and France is also the first major Western power to sign an official technology cooperation agreement with China.

In light of this, Chinese Vice-President Wang Qishan, in his meeting with the visiting diplomatic advisor to the French president, said that he hoped France, which holds the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union, can lead the EU to develop the right understanding about China.

Wang said that thanks to the leadership of the two countries, Sino-French relations have enjoyed healthy development, and China hoped that as well as strengthening the practical two-way cooperation between the two countries, the visit of Emmanuel Bonne, at the invitation of Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, will help to deepen the political mutual trust not only between the two countries but also between the EU and China.

The EU has always cherished its independent diplomatic path and insisted on voicing its own opinions and taking its own stance in global affairs; and it has become an important pole in a world that is increasingly multipolar. But under the influence of the United States, there has been growing anti-China sentiment within the bloc.

During Bonne's visit, the two sides will hold the 22nd China-France Strategic Dialogue, in which they will conduct strategic communication on issues such as practical cooperation in various fields, and the joint maintenance and practice of multilateralism, and in-depth exchange of views on international and regional hotspot issues of mutual interest, as well as the development of China-EU relations during the French presidency of the EU.

It is to be hoped that the outcomes of those discussions will prove to be another positive step forward for relations between the two countries, and they can help to dispel the mistrust that threatens to stymie the healthy development of Sino-EU relations.

In an interview in October last year, Nathalie de Gaulle, founder of the start-up NB-INOVA, which is seeking to prove the economic and environmental viability of biopolymers, and great-granddaughter of former French president de Gaulle, said that it is the constant development and updating of the Sino-French ties that has made their relationship stronger. She expected bilateral exchanges between the two countries to continue to grow stronger.

Bonne's visit can help realize that expectation.

Talks between Indian and Chinese military commanders on easing a 20-month border standoff ended without a breakthrough for the second time in three months, an Indian Defense Ministry official said yesterday.

The ministry said in a statement that the two sides had a "frank and in-depth exchange of views" in the meeting on China's side of the Molde meeting point on Wednesday and would work to resolve the remaining issues, without specifying them.

The previous round of commander-level talks in October also ended in a stalemate, with China accusing India of sticking to

"unreasonable and unrealistic demands, adding difficulties to the negotiations."

Indian army chief Manoj Mukund Naravane on Wednesday described the current situation in eastern Ladakh as "stable and under control" but told reporters in New Delhi that India would continue to deal with China in a "firm and resolute" manner.

Asked about the comment yesterday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said in Beijing that China hopes "the certain individual from India can avoid making such unconstructive comments."



A member of the medical team puts on PPE, in the ICU department of the Clinica Universitaria, in Pamplona

**SPANISH DOCTORS WIN
 LAWSUIT OVER LACK OF
 COVID-19 PROTECTION**

**JOSEPH WILSON,
 BARCELONA**

SPAIN'S medical community has scored a victory after a court ordered that a regional government must compensate doctors up to 49,000 euros (\$56,000) each for having to work without personal protection suits during the devastating early months of the pandemic.

The lawsuit brought by a doctor's union is the first of its kind to be won in Spain, whose health care system was pushed to the brink when COVID-19 first struck.

"This ruling is groundbreaking in Spain," Dr. Víctor Pedrera, secretary general of the Doctors' Union of Valencia CESM-CV that filed the suit, told The Associated Press yesterday [Macau time].

Pedrera, a family doctor, said he got ill with COVID-19 shortly after it hit Spain in March 2020 and spent two months at home "quite badly off and with no idea of what was being done for treatment."

The court in the eastern province of Alicante ruled late Tuesday that the region of Valencia failed to protect the health of its doctors during the first three months of the pan-

demic. The judge said the lack of personal protection suits created "a serious safety and health danger for all health workers, especially for doctors, due to their direct exposure."

The judge ordered compensation ranging from 5,000 euros to 49,000 euros to be paid to the 153 doctors in the suit.

Doctors who were forced to work without proper protection but did not get infected nor were forced to isolate will receive 5,000 euros. The compensation increases to 15,000 euros for doctors forced to isolate, 35,000 euros for those infected but did not need hospital care, and to 49,000 euros for doctors who required hospitalization.

Valencia's government will appeal the ruling, but regional chief Ximo Puig issued an apology to the medical workers while saying that the initial impact of the pandemic was "completely unexpected."

The ruling said the region's health administration failed to meet its duty to protect the doctors "from the moment it knew of the existence of COVID-19 and, in particular after the declaration of a national state of emergency."

Spain's General Board

of Doctors, which represents the regional unions, celebrated the decision in a statement to the AP, while "lamenting that it is not applicable to every doctor." It said 121 doctors in Spain had lost their lives due to COVID-19.

Spain, like many countries, struggled to supply its health workers with personal protection suits and face masks during the first months of the pandemic. The national government imposed a strict home confinement for several weeks after declaring a state of emergency in March 2020.

The ruling comes as Spain's health care system is once more being strained by a new wave of infections driven by the highly contagious omicron variant, even if deaths are now much lower thanks to the country's high vaccination rate.

Nearly 25% of critical care units are occupied by COVID-19 patients and emergency workers are saying that they can barely keep up.

"We are exhausted. Emergency workers are at their limit," said Dr. Tato Vázquez-Lima, president of the Spanish Society for Emergency Medicine. **MDT/AP**

EU yesterday blocked the merger between South Korean shipbuilders Hyundai and Daewoo, saying a union between two of the world's biggest players in the industry would have given the combined company a global stranglehold on the production of liquefied natural gas carriers. EU Competition Commissioner Margrethe Vestager says the merger would have led to "fewer suppliers and higher prices for large vessels transporting LNG."



Russia The Kremlin yesterday said it deplored the lack of progress in talks on Moscow's demand for security guarantees against NATO's eastward expansion and strongly rebuffed Western calls for a pullback of Russian troops from areas near Ukraine. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov also warned of a complete rupture U.S.-Russian relations if proposed sanctions targeting Russian President Vladimir Putin and other top civilian and military leaders are adopted.

France will let in travelers from Britain who are vaccinated against Covid-19 without having to self-isolate or to offer a valid reason for the trip, the French prime minister said yesterday. Prime Minister Jean Castex said travel restrictions will be eased starting today because the highly-contagious omicron variant is now largely dominant in both countries.



Sports Novak Djokovic has acknowledged that his Australian travel declaration form contained incorrect information, as the government nears a decision on whether to deport the Serbian tennis star, who is not vaccinated against Covid-19, on public interest grounds. The men's tennis No. 1 had his visa canceled on arrival in Melbourne last week when his vaccination exemption was questioned, but he won a legal battle on procedural grounds that allowed him to stay in the country.