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VISITOR ARRIVALS ROSE TO 7.7 MILLION IN 2021, A FIGURE THAT REMAINS FAR BELOW PRE-PANDEMIC NUMBERS

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DECISION TO RESUME INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS ON HOLD

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IC VICE-PRESIDENT LEONG WAI MAN IS NOW THE ACTING PRESIDENT, FOLLOWING MOK IAN IAN'S DEPARTURE FOR THE SCIENCE MUSEUM

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AP PHOTO



Russia accused the West yesterday of plotting "provocations" in Ukraine even as it blames Moscow of planning aggressive military action in the neighboring country. Russian Foreign Ministry alleged that Ukrainian and Western claims of an imminent Russian attack on Ukraine were a "cover for staging large-scale provocations of their own, including those of military character." "They may have extremely tragic consequences for the regional and global security," the ministry said.

Pakistan A powerful bomb went off in a crowded bazaar in Lahore yesterday, killing at least two people and wounding 26 others, police and rescue officials said. Police said the dead and wounded had been transported to a nearby hospital, where some were listed in critical condition. Officers are still trying to determine what kind of device was used for the attack. The blast was so powerful that it damaged several shops near the eastern city's famous Anarkali bazaar, witnesses said. TV footage showed burning motorcycles in a crowded bazaar, as the wounded cried for help.

AP PHOTO



North Korea Accusing the United States of hostility and threats, North Korea yesterday said it will consider restarting "all temporarily-suspended activities" it had paused during its diplomacy with the Trump administration, in an apparent threat to resume testing of nuclear explosives and long-range missiles. The official Korean Central News Agency said leader Kim Jong Un presided over a Politburo meeting of the ruling Workers' Party where officials set policy goals for "immediately bolstering" military capabilities to counter the Americans' "hostile moves."

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TRACKING ALERT!

Authorities said that private companies can 'force' citizens to record their itinerary on entry to their premises, adding it is acceptable to follow gov't without breaching the law ▲ P4



SOCIAL MEDIA USERS SLAM GOV'T OVER HEALTH CODE SYSTEM

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AP PHOTO



EUROPE CONSIDERS NEW COVID-19 STRATEGY: ACCEPTING THE VIRUS

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TOP 4 SCHOOLS TO LEAD OTHERS ALONG THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

The best four schools in Macau will become templates for others to emulate, according to a plan outlined in the Legislative Assembly on Wednesday night by the director of the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ), Lou Pak Sang, in a reply to an inquiry from lawmakers. Lou said that for Macau schools to be able to achieve a higher level of teaching, the DSEDJ would invite "Macau's top 4 schools to serve as tutors and share their experiences, methods, and pedagogies to the other schools to help them to achieve more successful results."

GOV'T PROMOTES STEM IN FOUNDATIONAL EDUCATION LEVELS

The Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao leong, told the parliament recently that the government is promoting science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education in foundational education levels. It hopes the effort will eventually result in increased enrolments in STEM majors at the university level. In addition, it will also transform the Macao Science Center into a base for STEM education targeting primary and secondary school students, which will more fully support schools in rolling out STEM education. The center, Ao leong added, functions as a cradle of scientific literacy.

FSS REMINDS EMPLOYERS TO PAY SOCIAL SECURITY INSTALLMENT

With 10,000 employers (about 40%), not yet having paid their fourth-quarter installments into the Social Security Fund (FSS), the FSS reminds employers of the deadline and urges them to avoid long queues at payment counters. The bureau encourages payers to use one of several electronic methods for greater convenience. These channels online banking and/or direct debit services provided by banks including the Bank of China, the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, the Banco Nacional Ultramarino and the OCBC Wing Hang Bank.

LYNZY VALLES

ANNUAL visitor arrivals rose by 30.7% year-on-year to 7,705,943 in 2021, a figure that remains far below pre-pandemic numbers, data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) shows.

Although the numbers represent a decline of over 80% compared to 2019, last year's arrivals grew from around 5.9 million in 2020 – which was a devastating year for the tourism industry.

Mainland visitors in 2021 still accounted for the majority of the arrivals, particularly now that the border has been closed for nearly two years to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

There were 7,045,058 mainland visitors in 2021, an increase of 48.2% year-on-year. Visitors travelling under the Individual Visit Scheme (IVS) (2,449,128) grew by 31.3%, while visitors from the nine Pearl River Delta cities in the Greater Bay Area (4,117,836) surged by 59.9%.

On the other hand, visitors from Hong Kong (589,014) and Taiwan (70,950) showed respective decreases of 30.1% and 31.9% year-on-year.

Same-day visitors and overnight visitors stood at 4,009,143 (52.0% of the total) and 3,696,800 (48.0%) respectively, up 30.4% and 31.0% year-on-year. Visitors by air and by sea totaled 501,387 and 200,821 respectively.

Numbers have not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels which saw the city record up

2021 VISITOR ARRIVALS RISE 30% TO 7.7 MILLION

XINHUA



to 40 million visitors. However, the MGTO is anticipating a significant improvement this year, with hopes that the number of arrivals next year could reach 10 million.

Late last year, Macau was reaching record numbers – since the pandemic started – following the city's immediate state of prevention due to a Covid-19 outbreak and implemented strict infection control measures in August and late September. One Friday in November registered 35,525 visitors, topping the recent record number of 30,000 from previous weeks. This was

the highest recorded number of visitors since September 25.

Meanwhile, in December 2021, visitor arrivals totaled 820,870, a growth of 2.4% month-on-month and 24.5% year-on-year.

In terms of origin, the number of visitors from mainland China grew by 25.7% year-on-year to 762,554, with 279,464 of them travelling under the IVS. Visitors from the nine Pearl River Delta cities in the Greater Bay Area totaled 463,932, of whom 53.9% came from Zhuhai. Besides these, 50,768 visitors came from Hong Kong and 7,306 from Taiwan.

Borders have remained closed

to foreign nationals from outside Greater China since March 2020. Negotiations for setting up a quarantine-free travel bubble with Hong Kong have been ongoing. However, due to new outbreaks of the Delta and Omicron variants, little progress has been made. With Macau and Hong Kong following Beijing's zero-Covid policy, it remains unclear when borders will reopen to foreign arrivals. This is particularly uncertain given China's desire to keep its doors closed in order to have a "safe" upcoming Olympics as well as the 20th Chinese Communist Party Conference in November.

F&B sector reports rise in receipts

27% of the restaurants & similar establishments that were interviewed reported a year-on-year rise in receipts in November, a growth of 15 percentage points from October, data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) shows.

Receipts rose year-on-year for 31% of Chinese Restaurants and 27% of Western Restaurants by 22 percentage points and 19 percentage points, respectively. The proportion of retailers interviewed that recorded a year-on-year sales rise in November rose 20 per-



centage points over the preceding month to 37%. The Business Performance Index (BPI), which reflects trends of year-on-year changes in business receipts, the values for restaurants & similar establishments (38.4) and retail trade

(46.1) were both below 50, indicating that the business performance of these two industries in November was less satisfactory than the same month last year.

Regarding expectations among businesses for December, 89% of restaurants & similar establishments interviewed expected their receipts to increase month-on-month or remain stable, up by 3 percentage points from November.

Likewise, reported positive outlook among Western Restaurants

(92%) and Chinese Restaurants (95%) was 15 percentage points and 9 percentage points higher respectively, while the share of optimistic Local Style Cafes, Congee & Noodle Shops (78%) dropped by 4 percentage points. 92% of the retailers interviewed predicted that their sales would increase month-on-month or remain stable in December, a growth of 4 percentage points from the preceding month.

The sample size for the survey was 229 restaurants & similar establishments and 161 retailers, which in 2019 accounted for 53.5% and 70.6% of the receipts in each respective industry. LV

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Raising aged pension would bankrupt Social Security Fund, gov't says

RENATO MARQUES

IF the government were to accept the proposal by lawmaker Lo Choi In to raise the elderly pension, matching the amount to that of the subsistence index (4,350 patacas), it would bankrupt the Social Security Fund, the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao Ieong said.

"It seems that [the raise is just] a couple of hundred patacas and it is very little money [for one person], but for the Social Security Fund to increase this couple of hundreds of patacas per person, the total would be an 'astronomical' figure. Doing this calculation, [we realized] that the fund would immediately go bankrupt," the Secretary said.



Ao Ieong was speaking at the Legislative Assembly on Wednesday during the second day of Q&A between the lawmakers and government officials, covering several matters.

According to Lo's proposal, the aged pension would rise 610 patacas from the current 3,740 patacas per month.

Several other lawmakers supported the idea, noting that this raise would also help to compensate for the lack of the 7,000 patacas which would normally be granted annually to the Central Provident Fund and which senior citizens (over 65 years old) would immediately be able to withdraw.

Remarking that monthly

contributions from workers for the Social Security Fund are low, the Secretary reminded lawmakers that social security expenditure from the government last year on pensions alone reached almost 5.5 billion patacas, while the income received by the fund was below 400 million patacas, covering only 7.3% of expenditure.



LEONG WAI MAN ACTING IC CHIEF

SINCE the Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng appointed Mok Ian Ian, formerly president of the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), as the new chairperson of the Macao Science Center, S.A. (MSC), the vice-president of the IC, Leong Wai Man, is now the acting president, an IC spokesperson confirmed to the Times. The spokesperson added that the IC is operating normally. With a year of his term at the IC remaining, the announcement

of Mok's termination came abruptly this week.

Mok was set to finish her appointment at the IC in February 2023. In a separate statement, the MSC announced that Mok will be the new chairperson of the company. Mok's appointment to the MSC took effect Wednesday.

Also, the MSC said in a statement that it is confident that the facility will turn a new page of its history under the new leadership. **AL**

AD

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SOCIAL MEDIA USERS SLAM GOV'T OVER HEALTH CODE SYSTEM

ANTHONY LAM

SEVERAL social media users expressed their dissatisfaction over the government's health code system.

A social media user even posted a complaint on the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center's page about children and the elderly relying on adults on "technological progress" in the health code system.

The comment came after a new vaccination indication system was announced.

Other social media users questioned the benefit of vaccines, pointing out that masks and quarantine are still needed after full vaccination. "Even if I am fully vaccinated, after visiting certain areas I am still quarantined: what's the point of all this?" one user wrote.

Another user was horrified that non-resident workers living in Zhuhai can still cross the Macau border freely. By contrast, another user interpreted the new indicator system as segregation, categorizing people as top-tier, mid-tier and low-tier.

It is worth noting that the social media page of the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center still does not have an English or Portuguese title that is searchable for non-Chinese users.

TRICOLOR JAB INDICATION

The government is further segregating the vaccinated population by displaying how many doses of the vaccine each individual has received on the health code.

The new indicator system is based on the previous health code system. The only change is that the government is now using three colors to record how many doses the user has received.

The government defended the need for the tricolor indication, saying that it adds clarity. It also hints at the possible introduction of a vaccine bubble policy in the near future, which would require people to be vaccinated in order to enter certain venues. These venues, according to a previous announcement from the government, will include restaurants.

According to the new vaccination indicator system, those who have received their first dose will see a silver border on their health code. Those with two doses will see their silver square turn gold after 14 days, and those who have received a third dose will see their square turn purple.



COVID-19

PRIVATE SECTOR MAY REQUIRE ITINERARY RECORDING, AUTHORITIES SAY

RENATO MARQUES

BOTH health authorities and the Public Security Police Force (PSP) agree that private institutions and companies can "force" citizens to record their itinerary on entry to their premises, authorities said yesterday during the weekly briefing on the Covid-19 situation in Macau.

Although government guidelines limit this obligation to public services, local authorities agree that it is acceptable for the private sector to follow the same standard without breaching the law.

Responding to media questions, the coordinator of the local Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Leong Iek Hou, said that since there is no clear regulation on the matter, private entities "can do whatever they decide in demanding that people register their itinerary [before entering their premises]," she said. She added that, while the guidelines stipulate that mandatory itinerary recording using the health code applies only to all public services and departments, "we encourage other establishments to do the same by hel-

ping people to register their itinerary."

Reports are emerging that several entities such as banks, restaurants and shopping malls, among others, are refusing entry to citizens who decline to register their itinerary.

Leong also added that even in cases where the individual does not possess a smart phone and thus cannot scan the health code, the establishment can still request citizens' personal information and register this on paper.

In response to further questions from the media

about the legality of these actions, the PSP representative at the press briefing, Ma Chio Hong, insisted that, on private property, "owners can refuse entry to some people if they decide to do so," adding, "we think this is reasonable if we consider that the reason that justifies the refusal of entry is related to pandemic prevention."

Ma also added that citizens should comply with government guidelines in both public or private services.

Commenting on the legality of refusing entry to certain premises, the same official added that it is only in cases where private entities decide to "have additional measures [going beyond those enforced by the government], then we need to analyze whether this is legal or not."

"If the purpose is to fight the epidemic, this is reasonable," Ma concluded.

DECISION TO RESUME INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS ON HOLD, CNY MOVES AHEAD

HEALTH authorities have not yet decided to resume international flights to Macau, the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center reported yesterday.

Questioned on the matter, Dr. Leong Iek Hou said that no decision has yet been made.

"We are still analyzing the situation. We do not have a decision yet. When we have it, we will certainly inform [the public] as soon as possible," Leong said.

The response leaves local residents wishing to return to Macau in a state of continued uncertainty.

According to the Health Bureau announcement, the ban on all passenger flights to Macau not coming from Chinese territory has been in place since midnight on January 9 and remains in force for a period of 14 days (until 11:59 p.m. on January 23).

A new decision from the government could either extend the ban or re-establish international air traffic to Macau, namely the only form of international travel before January 9: the link to Singapore.

Also questioned on the matter, the representative from the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) at the center's press brief-

ing, Liz Lam, stated that, so far, the MGTO has received a total of 22 requests for information from residents abroad who wish to return to Macau.

CNY CELEBRATIONS TO PROCEED

Regarding celebrations for the Chinese New Year of the Tiger, Lam announced that, for the time being, the program remains unchanged and that the scheduled events will proceed.

Lam added that in case the pandemic situation worsens locally, "we will postpone the celebratory events to the second half of February."

Even so, she remarked that this would be an extreme measure, noting that, if the risk increases, the current plan is to reinforce more moderate measures. These include requesting that participants present a nucleic acid test valid for seven days.

Currently, the guidelines are the same as for the Macau Light Festival (held late last year) at which organizers controlled crowd densities as well as requiring the presentation of a green health code, measuring temperatures, and requiring the use of face masks at all times. **RM**

LOCATION SCANNING PREFERRED TO REVERSE SCANNING

DR. Leong Iek Hou noted that location QR code scanning is preferred by health authorities. She argued that while reverse scanning, whereby the venue scans a visitor's health code, also provides a record of the citizen's entry to a certain venue, it would be easier for authorities to retrace their itinerary if it is the citizen themselves scanning the venue's QR code.

Leong also added that, with location scanning, authorities can immediately inform individuals that they need to take a nucleic acid test or be placed in quarantine if, at a later stage, the individual is found to be a close contact of a Covid-19 case.



RENATO MARQUES

Wynn's Ceaseless Efforts to Nurture the Next Generation of Talent

SINCE first establishing its presence in Macao, Wynn has consistently supported the development of local talent. Upholding the spirit of the SAR Government's policy of "Building Macao through nurturing talents," Wynn continues to invest resources in providing locals with comprehensive training and promotion opportunities. In doing so, industry elites are encouraged to continually improve their vocational skills, cultivate more outstanding talents for the future development of diversified industries in Macao, and actively promote the sustainable development of Macao as a world center of tourism and leisure.

NURTURING LOCAL YOUTH TO BECOME FUTURE LEADERS

Rooted in a longstanding partnership, Wynn collaborates with the Labour Affairs Bureau on its Career Experience Program, which aims to nurture local young talents for the hospitality industry. To this end, a new batch of interns joined the Hotel Operations, Food and Beverage, Human Resources, Retail, Facilities, and Information Technology departments at Wynn on 30 August 2021.

The graduation ceremony was witnessed by Wynn management and honored guests from the Labour Affairs Bureau, including Director Mr. Wong Chi Hong, Deputy Director Mr. Chan Un Tong, and Head of Employment Department Ms. Lei Lai Keng, where 41 trainees celebrated the successful milestone of completing three months of hands-on training. It is a testimony to the program's success that seventy percent of the graduates have now entered full-time employment with Wynn.

ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIONS

Wynn is committed to making ongoing contributions



41 trainees celebrate the successful milestone of completing Wynn Career Experience Program.



Wynn is proud to support the students of Pui Ching Middle School to participate in the "2020 International Genetically Engineered Machine (iGEM) Competition".



to education and was proud to support the teachers and students of Pui Ching Middle School Macau in forming teams to participate in the "2020 International Genetically Engineered Machine (iGEM) Competition," an international cross-disciplinary science competition that sees over 500 universities and secondary school teams around the world presenting their research results online.

The Pui Ching Middle School

Macau team developed an "artificial protein" from an eco-friendly synthesis of refractory materials, which helps to reduce environmental pollution. The innovation was so highly regarded that it was awarded the gold medal in the event's High School Track category.

In addition to sponsoring the team's funding, Wynn also provided valuable technical and industry advice for the students so that they could successfully achieve their research goals

as well as cultivate more professional talents for the future of Macao and the Bay Area.

SUPPORTING LOCAL TERTIARY EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Extending one of the company's most significant corporate social responsibility initiatives, Wynn has made a donation of MOP 80 million to the University of Macau Development Foundation. The contribution will support the ongoing development of the

University of Macau and its Asia-Pacific Academy of Economics and Management (APAEM). This Academy promotes interdisciplinary cooperation with the ultimate goal of stimulating interdisciplinary research that has significant implications for the socio-economic development of Macao and the Greater Bay Area.

In early 2021, the APAEM hosted the "Smart Tourism Symposium 2021: Macau Smart City Initiative – Opportunities and Challenges for the Tourism Industry," and invited Ms. Linda Chen, Vice Chairman and Executive Director of Wynn Macau, Limited, to share her experiences and insights on the opportunities and challenges faced by the industry, particularly in regard to industry-related development strategies in the post-pandemic era.

ATTRACTING TOP-TIER TALENTS AND LEADING REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To further advance the SAR government's strategy of recruiting and cultivating high-caliber researchers, Wynn has donated MOP 3 million to the Macau University of Science and Technology to fund their high-level talents program and support research and academic development during the academic year 2022/23.

The program focuses on four key industries including cultural tourism, finance, high-end manufacturing, and traditional Chinese medicine, with the goal of promoting technological innovation and academic exchange between Macao and Hengqin, and to facilitate the research and development of major international scientific projects.

Looking ahead, the University will continue to support the implementation and enhancement of innovative research as well as talent development. This will attract more international-quality talent, encourage teamwork, integrate resources, and promote diversity in academic development, thereby further enhancing the diversified and sustainable development of Macao's economy.



Wynn makes a donation of MOP 80 million to support the ongoing development of the Asia-Pacific Academy of Economics and Management.



Wynn donates MOP3 million to the Macau University of Science and Technology to fund their high-level talents program.

GBA

MACAU LAWYER EMBRACES MORE OPPORTUNITIES IN HENGQIN

“IN the future, many Macau residents will come to live and work in Hengqin, and it will be their new home, so I hope the legal service industry can be the first to try and build a bridge between Hengqin and Macau.”

When talking about his cross-boundary practice in Hengqin, Vong Keng Hei, a young Macau lawyer, began to shine.

In 2019, Vong came to Hengqin and formed a three-region joint venture law firm in Hengqin with two other law firms from Zhuhai and Hong Kong, starting a new chapter in his career in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

Last September, China's central authorities issued a general plan for building a Guangdong-Macao in-depth cooperation zone in Hengqin. It has further enhanced Hengqin's openness and

economic vitality, resulting in a diversified demand for legal services. Hence, Vong has embraced more opportunities in his career in GBA.

UNDERSTANDING LAWS IN THE MAINLAND

Vong's joint venture law firm is located on the 8th floor of the Hengqin Headquarter Tower in Zhuhai, Guangdong. You can see Hengqin on the left and Macau on the right when standing in the office. This is just like the joint venture law firm, bringing Renhe law firm from the mainland, K.B. CHAU & C.O., SOLICITORS from Hong Kong and Vong Hin Fai law firm from the SAR.

Since the Outline Development Plan for the GBA, more exchanges and cooperation opportunities have been developed between the nine mainland GBA cities and Macau. Thanks to the



Lawyer Vong Keng Hei

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coordination of rules in Guangdong and Macau, in July 2021, Vong successfully passed the first GBA lawyer's practice exam and obtained his practice qualification in the mainland.

Macau entrepreneur Lao Chilong, one of Vong's Clients, has been in Hengqin for eight years and currently runs a technology company and a coffee shop. He said that due to his unfamiliarity with the environment in Hengqin, he encountered many legal issues such as labor contracts and taxation during the entrepreneurial period. As a proficient professional in the laws of the two places, Vong can explain legal matters in terms that are familiar and Macau people are more accustomed to. This can help Macau entrepreneurs like him understand.

In addition, Macau lawyers' cross-boundary practicing is also playing an increasingly important role in foreign-related business. Deng Huafeng, director and the senior partner of the joint-venture law firm, said that for domestic companies to go global and, signifi-

cantly to develop markets in Portuguese-speaking countries, Macau lawyers have an irreplaceable advantage.

BRING EXPERIENCES TO OTHER CITIES

Since last September, Hengqin's development has pressed the accelerator button, aiming to be a new space that provides convenience to Macau residents' life and employment, a new model to enrich the practice of "one country, two systems." Benefiting from this, Vong has ambitiously expanded his career in the GBA.

Last December, the Labor and Personnel Disputes Arbitration Committee in Hengqin Guangdong-Macao Deep Cooperation Zone was unveiled. The first batch of six arbitrators from Hong Kong and Macau was announced. Vong was one of them.

According to Wu Yinxi, Vong's colleague in Hengqin, Macau arbitrators are familiar with the legal and social systems of the two places, so when dealing with labor disputes involving Macau companies and residents, can

better find ways to resolve them.

Moreover, being based in Hengqin, Vong has gradually expanded his footprint to other cities in the GBA. In 2020, Vong entered Sun Yat-sen University to study for a doctorate in law, exploring how to realize the connection between the legal systems of Guangdong and Macau from an academic perspective.

On January 11, as a member of the Zhongshan CPPCC, Vong participated in the first session of the 13th CPPCC Zhongshan Committee. This year, his proposal was about further improving Zhongshan policies on foreign-related alternative dispute resolution, hoping to form Zhongshan-style criteria of qualified mediators from Hong Kong and Macau.

"In the past, I just thought how Macau would be. Now I am thinking about how Macau can get involved with the development of GBA and the whole country. I can see it from a broader perspective. I hope I can share my Hengqin experience with other GBA cities," Vong said. **MDT/GDNEWS**

NUCTECH

Security scanners across Europe tied to Chinese gov't; no breaches ever reported

AT some of the world's most sensitive spots, authorities have installed security screening devices made by a single Chinese company with deep ties to China's military and the highest levels of the ruling Communist Party.

The World Economic Forum in Davos. Europe's largest ports. Airports from Amsterdam to Athens. NATO's borders with Russia. All depend on equipment manufactured by Nuctech, which has quickly become the world's leading company, by revenue, for cargo and vehicle scanners.

Nuctech has been frozen out of the U.S. for years due to national security concerns, but it has made deep inroads across Europe, installing its devices in 26 of 27 EU member states, according to public procurement, government and corporate records reviewed by The Associated Press.

The complexity of Nuctech's ownership structure and its expanding global footprint have raised alarms on both sides of the Atlantic.

A growing number of Western security officials and policymakers fear that China "could exploit" Nuctech equipment "to sabotage" key transit points or get illicit access to government, industrial or personal data from the items that pass through its devices. But so far, no breaches were ever detected or reported.

Nuctech's critics allege the Chinese government has effectively subsidized the company so it can undercut competitors and give Beijing potential sway over critical infrastructure in the West as China seeks to establish itself as a global technology superpower.

"The data being processed by these devices is very sensitive. It's personal data, military data, cargo data. It might be trade secrets at stake. You want to make sure it's in right hands," said Bart Groothuis, director of cybersecurity at the Dutch Ministry of Defense before becoming a member of the European Parliament. "You're dependent on a foreign actor which is a geopolitical adversary and strategic rival."

He and others say Europe doesn't have tools in place to monitor and resist such potential encroachment. Different member states have taken opposing views on Nuctech's security risks. No one has even been able to make a comprehensive public tally of where and how many Nuctech devices have been installed across the continent.



Passengers prepare to place items through Nuctech security scanners at the Brussels Eurostar train terminal

Nuctech dismisses those concerns, countering that Nuctech's European operations comply with local laws, including strict security checks and data privacy rules.

"It's our equipment, but it's your data. Our customer decides what happens with the data," said Robert Bos, deputy general manager of Nuctech in the Netherlands, where the company has a research and development center.

He said Nuctech is a victim of unfounded allegations that have cut its market share in Europe nearly in half since 2019.

"It's quite frustrating to be honest," Bos told AP. "In the 20 years we delivered this equipment we never had issues of breaches or data leaks. Till today we never had any proof of it."

In addition to scanning systems for people, baggage and cargo, the company makes explosives detectors and interconnected devices capable of facial recognition, body temperature measurement and ID card or ticket identification.

Critics fear that under China's national intelligence laws, which require Chinese companies to surrender data requested by state security agencies, Nuctech would be unable to resist calls from Beijing to hand over sensitive data about the cargo, people and devices that pass through its scanners. They say there is a risk

Beijing could use Nuctech's presence across Europe to gather big data about cross-border trade flows, pull information from local networks, like shipping manifests or passenger information, or sabotage trade flows in a conflict.

Airports in London, Amsterdam, Brussels, Athens, Florence, Pisa, Venice, Zurich, Geneva and more than a dozen across Spain have all signed deals for Nuctech equipment, procurement and government documents, and corporate announcements show.

Nuctech's ownership structure is so complex that can be difficult for outsiders to understand the true lines of influence and accountability.

What is clear is that Nuctech, from its very origins, has been tied to Chinese government, academic and military interests.

Nuctech was founded as an offshoot of Tsinghua University, an elite public research university in Beijing. It grew with backing from the Chinese government and for years was run by the son of China's former leader, Hu Jintao.

Datenna, a Dutch economic intelligence company focused on China, mapped the ownership structure of Nuctech and found a dozen major entities across four layers of shareholding, including four state-owned enterprises and

three government entities.

Today the majority shareholder in Nuctech is Tongfang Co., which has a 71 percent stake. The largest shareholder in Tongfang, in turn, is the investment arm of the China National Nuclear Corp. (CNNC), a state-run energy and defense conglomerate controlled by China's State Council. The U.S. Defense Department classifies CNNC as a Chinese military company because it shares advanced technologies and expertise with the People's Liberation Army.

"In the 20 years we delivered this equipment we never had issues of breaches or data leaks."

ROBERT BOS
NUCTECH, NETHERLANDS

Xi has further blurred the lines between China's civilian and military activities and deepened the power of the ruling Communist Party within private enterprises. One way: the creation of dozens of government-backed financing vehicles designed to speed the development of technologies that have both military and commercial applications.

In fact, one of those vehicles, the National Military-Civil Fusion Industry Investment Fund, announced in June 2020 that it wan-

ted to take a 4.4 percent stake in Nuctech's majority shareholder, along with the right to appoint a director to the Tongfang board. It never happened — "changes in the market environment," Tongfeng explained in a Chinese stock exchange filing.

But there are other links between Nuctech's ownership structure and the fusion fund.

CNNC, which has a 21 percent interest in Nuctech, holds a stake of more than 7 percent in the fund, according to Qichacha, a Chinese corporate information platform. They also share personnel: Chen Shutang, a member of CNNC's Party Leadership Group and the company's chief accountant serves as a director of the fund, records show.

Nuctech maintains that its operations are shaped by market forces, not politics, and says CNNC doesn't control its corporate management or decision-making.

But Jaap van Etten, a former Dutch diplomat and CEO of Datenna, said the question was "whether or not we want to allow Nuctech, which is controlled by the Chinese state and linked to the Chinese military, to be involved in crucial parts of our border security and infrastructure." **MDT/AP**

Europe considers new Covid-19 strategy: accepting the virus

ARITZ PARRA, MADRID

WHEN the coronavirus pandemic was first declared, Spaniards were ordered to stay home for more than three months. For weeks, they were not allowed outside even for exercise. Children were banned from playgrounds, and the economy virtually stopped.

But officials credited the draconian measures with preventing a full collapse of the health system. Lives were saved, they argued.

Now, almost two years later, Spain is preparing to adopt a different COVID-19 playbook. With one of Europe's highest vaccination rates and its most pandemic-battered economies, the government is laying the groundwork to treat the next infection surge not as an emergency but an illness that is here to stay. Similar steps are under consideration in neighboring Portugal and in Britain.

The idea is to move from crisis mode to control mode, approaching the virus in much the same way countries deal with flu or measles. That means accepting that infections will occur and providing extra care for at-risk people and patients with complications.

Spain's center-left prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, wants the Europe Union to consider similar changes now that the surge of the omicron variant has shown that the disease is becoming less lethal.

"What we are saying is that in the next few months and years, we are going to have to think, without hesitancy and according to what science tells us, how to manage the pandemic with different parameters," he said earlier this week.

Sánchez said the changes should not happen before the omicron surge is over, but officials need to start shaping the post-pandemic world now: "We are doing our homework, anticipating scenarios."

The World Health Organization has said that it's too early to consider any immediate shift. The organization does not have clearly defined criteria for declaring COVID-19 an endemic disease, but its experts have previously said that it will happen when the virus is more



People using face masks attend a music concert in Barcelona

predictable and there are no sustained outbreaks.

"It's somewhat a subjective judgment because it's not just about the number of cases. It's about severity, and it's about impact," said Dr. Michael Ryan, the WHO's emergencies chief.

Speaking at a World Economic Forum panel this week, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top infectious diseases doctor in the U.S., said COVID-19 could not be considered endemic until it drops to "a level that it doesn't disrupt society."

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control has advised countries to transition to more routine handling of COVID-19 after the acute phase of the pandemic is over. The agency said in a statement that more EU states in addition to Spain will want to adopt "a more long-term, sustainable surveillance approach."

Just over 80% of Spain's population has received a double vaccine dose, and authorities are focused on boosting the immunity of adults with third doses.

Vaccine-acquired immunity, coupled with widespread infection, offers a chance to concentrate prevention efforts, testing and illness-tracking resources on moderate to high-risk groups, said Dr. Salvador Trenche, head of the Spanish Society of Family and Community Medicine, which has led the call for a new endemic response.

COVID-19 "must be treated like the rest of illnesses," Tren-

che told The Associated Press, adding that "normalized attention" by health professionals would help reduce delays in treatment of problems not related to the coronavirus.

The public also needs to come to terms with the idea that some deaths from COVID-19 "will be inevitable," Tranche said.

"We can't do on the sixth wave what we were doing on the first one: The model needs to change if we want to achieve different results," he said.

The Spanish Health Ministry said it was too early to share any blueprints being drafted by its experts and advisers, but the agency confirmed that one proposal is to follow an existing model of "sentinel surveillance" currently used in the EU for monitoring influenza.

The strategy has been nicknamed "flu-ization" of COVID-19 by Spanish media, although officials say that the systems for influenza will need to be adapted significantly to the coronavirus.

For now, the discussion about moving to an endemic approach is limited to wealthy nations that can afford to speak about the worst of the pandemic in the past tense. Their access to vaccines and robust public health systems are the envy of the developing world.

It's also not clear how an endemic strategy would coexist with the "zero-Covid" approach adopted by China and other Asian countries, and how would

that affect international travel.

Many countries overwhelmed by the record number of omicron cases are already giving up on massive testing and cutting quarantine times, especially for workers who show no more than cold-like symptoms. Since the beginning of the year, classes in Spanish schools stop only if major outbreaks occur, not with the first reported case as they used to.

In Portugal, with one of the world's highest vaccination rates, President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa declared in a New Year's speech that the country had "moved into an endemic phase." But the debate over specific measures petered out as the spread soon accelerated to record levels — almost 44,000 new cases in 24 hours reported Tuesday.

However, hospital admissions and deaths in the vaccinated world are proportionally much lower than in previous surges.

In the United Kingdom, mask-wearing in public places and COVID-19 passports will be dropped on Jan. 26, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced yesterday [Macau time] saying that the latest wave had "peaked nationally."

The requirement for infected people to isolate for five full days remains in place, but Johnson said he will seek to scrap it in coming weeks if the virus data continues to improve. Official statistics put at 95% the share of the British population that has developed antibodies against COVID-19 either from infection or vaccination.

"As COVID becomes endemic, we will need to replace legal requirements with advice and guidance, urging people with the virus to be careful and considerate of others," Johnson said.

For some other European governments, the idea of normalizing COVID-19 is at odds with their efforts to boost vaccination among reluctant groups.

In Germany, where less than 73% of the population has received two doses and infection rates are hitting new records almost daily, comparisons to Spain or any other country are being rejected.

"We still have too many unvaccinated people, particularly among our older citizens," Health Ministry spokesman Andreas Deffner said earlier this week.

Italy is extending its vaccination mandate to all citizens age 50 or older and imposing fines of up to 1,500 euros for unvaccinated people who show up at work. Italians are also required to be fully vaccinated to access public transportation, planes, gyms, hotels and trade fairs. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1950 ACCLAIMED AUTHOR GEORGE ORWELL DIES

The writer, George Orwell, has died after a three-year battle against tuberculosis.

Until the last, news had been positive and it was hoped Mr Orwell was improving.

On Friday morning he had a long talk with a friend about his plans for the future.

However, a few hours later he suffered a fatal haemorrhage in a London hospital.

But illness had not dimmed George Orwell's enthusiasm for writing.

His last novel, 1984, published last summer was written in between periods spent in hospital.

The controversial book - like Animal Farm - was widely viewed as an attack on the Communist system.

However, it brought George Orwell widespread critical acclaim including the award of £357 by the influential Partisan Review for the year's most significant contribution to literature.

George Orwell was born Eric Arthur Blair in June 1903 into a family of relatively prosperous civil servants working in India on behalf of the British Empire.

He is said to have assumed his pseudonym, inspired by the River Orwell, near his parent's house in Suffolk, to spare his family embarrassment.

Orwell's early writings often drew on his own experiences of poverty which were in marked contrast to his privileged background.

He spent time living as a tramp in the East End of London and as a dishwasher in Paris - events which inspired his first book in 1933, Down and Out in London and Paris.

It was followed in 1934 by his first novel, Burmese Days.

And in 1938 after returning wounded after fighting for the socialists in the Spanish Civil War he wrote *Homage to Catalonia*.

But it was only five years ago that the book which made him world-famous, *Animal Farm*, appeared.

In reaction to the sudden glare of fame, Orwell moved to the island of Jura, off the coast of Scotland.

The move aggravated his tuberculosis which had developed after his return from Spain.

Courtesy BBC News



IN CONTEXT

George Orwell's work has remained popular over the years, especially *Animal Farm* and *1984*.

He began writing *1984* after resigning from the BBC World Service in September 1943 where he had been employed writing and producing news for India.

It was his increasing frustration with the Ministry of Information, which censored the news during World War II, which led to his resignation and subsequently became the central theme of *1984*.

Words and phrases from the novel have passed into everyday usage, particularly "Big Brother".

The book was also made into a film released in 1984.

George Orwell's name itself has become an adjective - "Orwellian" - meaning an oppressive system. *1984* and *Animal Farm* frequently appear in lists of the world's best-ever selling novels.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Compromise will be necessary. Partnerships with creative people could lead to financial gains. You need activity. You may not be too pleased with the actions of those you live with.

TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20
You will be able to make favorable changes in your living quarters. Your efforts won't go unnoticed; however, someone you work with may get jealous.

GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21
Your temper may get the better of you if a colleague has tried to ruin your reputation. Be sure to find out all you can before you commit to anything. Don't say things that could be damaging later on.

CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Confusion at an emotional level will cause you to make wrong decisions concerning your personal life. Your emotions are soaring and if you don't get your way, look out world.

LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22
Channel your energy wisely and you can score points with the boss. Be confident in your endeavors and others will believe in your efforts. You are best to stick to basics.

VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Put all your energy into moneymaking ventures. Secret love affairs may be enticing; however, you must be prepared for the restraints that will follow. You may be confused regarding your love life.

LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Make sure that you get legal matters checked out thoroughly. Take some time out. Be careful signing important contracts today.

SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Think about taking the time to complete unfinished domestic chores. You will be in an overly generous mood today. Stay mellow.

SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Don't make a move; your confusion has caused this dilemma and you are best to back away and reassess the situation. Changes at home will be necessary.

CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19
You have to take hold of your life and make some crucial decisions. You will be erratic and quite likely to make personal mistakes. You may need to lend an ear to an old friend.

AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Opportunities for travel and socializing are evident. Your ability to converse with charm will entice someone you may have had an interest in for some time now.

PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Don't make promises. You can make money if you concentrate on producing services or goods that will make domestic chores easier. Move forward if you want to turn your life around.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

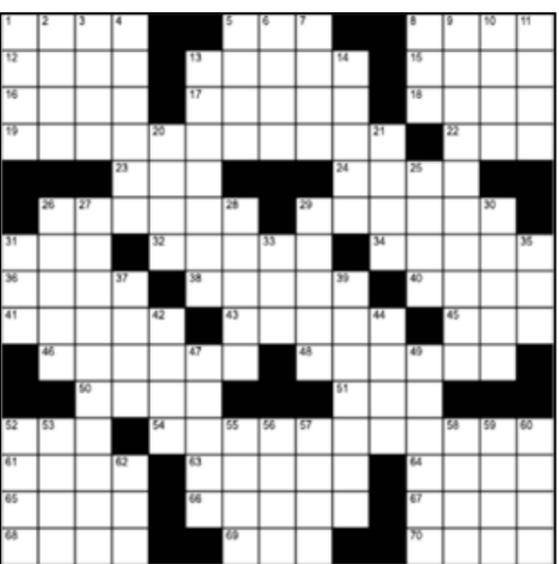
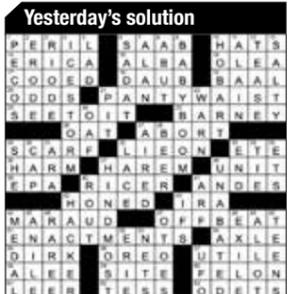
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-5	-1	snow
Harbin	-21	-8	cloudy
Tianjin	4	12	rain
Urumqi	8	9	overcast
Xi'an	10	11	rain
Lhasa	-11	-1	fine
Chengdu	11	14	overcast
Chongqing	10	14	rain
Kunming	7	12	overcast
Nanjing	14	24	cloudy
Shanghai	4	10	overcast
Wuhan	-26	-13	fine
Hangzhou	0	7	rain
Taipei	4	8	overcast
Guangzhou	10	20	cloudy
Hong Kong	18	21	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	-6	-2	snow
Frankfurt	2	4	overcast
Paris	-1	7	overcast
London	1	7	overcast
New York	-11	-5	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Chemical used on trees; 5- And not; 8- Stir up; 12- Latvian capital; 13- Factions; 15- Draft classification; 16- Gobs; 17- Wedge; 18- Boris Godunov, for one; 19- Dizzy; 22- NFL 6-pointers; 23- Narcissist's problem; 24- Make-up artist?; 26- Pleasurable feeling; 29- Group; 31- Mined mineral; 32- Animal life; 34- Some beans; 36- Ray of light; 38- Like non-oyster months; 40- Treehouse used by birds; 41- Letter cross-line; 43- Absolute; 45- Comic Louis; 46- Emphasis; 48- Midday nap; 50- Carry; 51- Buddhist sect; 52- Old verb ending; 54- Jointed or segmented; 61- Additional; 63- Visible exhalation; 64- Be dependent; 65- Tiger's choice; 66- Chew the scenery; 67- Gaelic language of Ireland or Scotland; 68- Holds up; 69- Ltr. addenda; 70- Buenos _____

DOWN 1- Shrinking sea; 2- Taylor of "Mystic Pizza"; 3- Awestruck; 4- Prefer; 5- The world's longest river; 6- Ancient theaters; 7- Went through, as the paper; 8- Poppycock; 9- Agency; 10- Heavy metal; 11- Hearing organs; 13- Student; 14- Inscribed pillar; 20- End-of-workweek shout; 21- Clock face; 25- Not "fer"; 26- Forest makeup; 27- Object of infatuation; 28- Dillies; 29- Wears well; 30- Gut course; 31- Delivery room docs; 33- Open mesh fabric; 35- Sault ___ Marie; 37- Joan of art; 39- Convulsion; 42- Spanakopita ingredient; 44- Spool; 47- Open a tennis match; 49- Caught; 52- Foreign dignitary; 53- Mower brand; 55- Compact by pounding; 56- Wall St. debuts; 57- Camp beds; 58- Actress Hatcher; 59- Lohengrin's bride; 60- Stains; 62- Nav. officer;



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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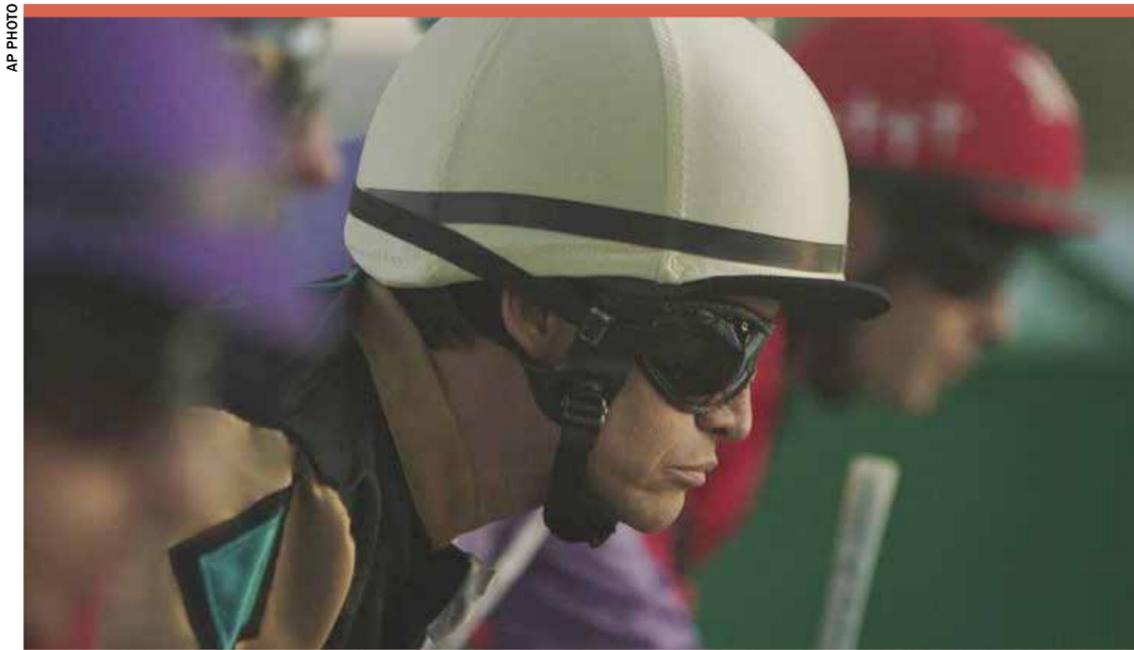
'JOCKEY' IS A WINNER FOR CLIFTON COLLINS, JR.

LINDSEY BAHR,
MDT/AP FILM WRITER

CLIFTON Collins Jr. has made a career out of being a supporting player. Even if the average moviegoer might not know his name, you know his face and his work. Collins always manages to stand out, whether in a pivotal role like Perry Ellis in "Capote" or a glorified cameo in "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood." He's got acting in his blood: His grandfather was character actor Pedro Gonzalez Gonzalez who appeared in a number of John Wayne films, including "Rio Bravo," and his great uncle was a Hollywood player too.

It was probably inevitable that Collins would eventually find himself on a horse in a Western, not counting the blink and you'll miss him moment in Quentin Tarantino's fake show-within-a-show. And he couldn't have picked a better showcase for his own talents and legacy than "Jockey," a quiet, moving indie about a champion rider grappling with the end of his own run.

"Jockey" is the directorial debut of Clint Bentley, who basically grew up on the racetrack alongside his jockey father. He wanted to



Clifton Collins Jr. in a scene from "Jockey"

show the jockey lifestyle as it really is, which he felt was lacking in films about the grueling profession. That might be a little debatable, and it's not dissimilar in tone and ambition to Chloé Zhao's rodeo film "The Rider." But Collins is there to give a full body performance as Jackson Silva, a legend in his time who has suffered a few too many broken backs along the

way and might need to hang up his spurs sooner than he'd like.

Intensifying this already fraught moment is the arrival of two complications: A 19-year-old kid with jockey dreams, Gabriel (Moises Arias), who claims he's Jackson's son, and a once-in-a-lifetime champion horse that Jackson is not going to pass off to some young buck for the big race. Molly

Parker plays his boss, Ruth, who wants to give Jackson another shot, but can see the toll the years and riding

Bentley clearly has a love for this peculiar lifestyle, in which already rail thin men are forever striving to lose another pound or two and whose bodies are ravaged by the sport. He shows the track (a real, working racetrack) and

the riders beautifully, if a little romantically. It always seems to be magic hour when cinematographer Adolpho Veloso's cameras are rolling, and all the characters get a wistful monologue or folksy truism to spout out while the colorful sky turns to night.

Realism might have been the goal, but Bentley employs a very familiar indie film framework to tell the story that could be best summed up as Sundance-verité, right down to its cool score by none other than Aaron and Bryce Dessner of The National. That's not a bad thing — it's a time-tested style for a reason — but this isn't exactly a film that's full of surprises.

And yet the framework, as predictable as it is, works because of the sincerity behind the endeavor and the depth of Collins' performance. He is the heart and soul of "Jockey," and no one who gives it a chance will be forgetting his name anytime soon.

"Jockey," a Sony Pictures Classics release now playing in New York and Los Angeles, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for "language." Running time: 95 minutes. ★★★★★

AD

- 合夥人 PARTNERS:**
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 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:**
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TASTE OF EDESIA

Sophistication in simplicity

IRENE SAM, MDT

THE Michelin two-starred Golden Flower at Wynn Macau is now reopened with one of the hottest new celebrity chefs in the world of Chinese cuisine- Executive Chef Henry Zhang Zhi Cheng. Presenting the timeless flavours of classic and contemporary Sichuan, Shandong and Northern Chinese cuisines in an elegant setting, Chef Cheng presents dishes that are steeped in history and rich in cultural heritage. Ingenuity is at the heart of every dish he creates. Behind all of the love that he pours into the preparation of each dish, is passion and persistence.

A master at deconstructing the simplest of ingredients to unearth a myriad of flavours, he has

already earned a reputation for crafting dishes that deeply touch the soul. Prior to joining Golden Flower, Chef Zhang opened a private kitchen within a courtyard house of an ancient hutong, where he created bold and innovative dishes. Soon after opening, the private kitchen quickly rose to become one of the hottest dining destinations in Beijing. Now at Golden Flower, Chef Zhang infuses his own cooking philosophy and innovative culinary concepts into each one of his masterful creations.

At Golden Flower, Chef Zhang introduces his own degustation menu where regional delicacies take centre stage. His specially crafted menu is designed to leave lasting memories of one's dining experience and tells a

story from the Prelude to the Welcome Tea, Caviar,

Beginning, Heritage, Soup, Abundance, Umami, Seasonal Vegetables, Bloom and the Finale.

Throughout one's culinary journey at Golden Flower, each guest will discover Chef Zhang's classic dishes of braised fish maw with superior chicken broth, sliced sea conch with Sichuan pepper oil, crisp codfish with balsamic vinegar, Sichuan noodles with chili oil and more.

For those who do not drink alcohol, tea artisans can assist to select China's finest teas to pair with each dish. The art of making tea has been intrinsically linked with Chinese cuisine for thousands of years and Golden Flower was the first in Macau to introduce an in-house tea sommelier.

To echo the design of Golden Flower, which is themed around a flower garden, the tea artisans have created their own "Golden Flower Signature Tea" blend with fresh, floral aromas. And, in harmony with the season's climate, guests may select from top-quality teas that are most beneficial for their health.



BICOL EXPRESS

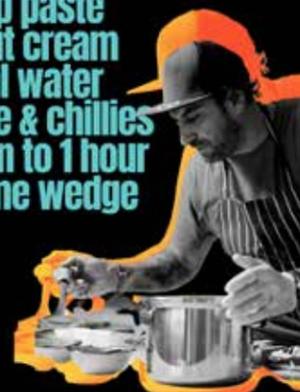
INGREDIENTS

- Pork Belly
- Red chili
- Green chili
- Onion
- Garlic
- Ginger
- Filipino shrimp paste
- Coconut Cream
- Salt & Fish Sauce
- Limes



KNOW HOW

- Cut belly in cubes & fry
- Add onion, garlic, ginger
- Add shrimp paste
- Add coconut cream
- Add 250 ml water
- Add fish sauce & chillies
- Simmer 45min to 1 hour
- Serve with lime wedge



RECIPES

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BY ALEX TORRÃO
MDT

OPINION

China Daily
Editorial, China Daily

BIDEN'S PROBLEM-SOLVING POLICIES EXACERBATE THOSE IN SINO-US TIES

On Jan 20 last year, Joe Biden was sworn in as the 46th president of the United States vowing to solve its problems. Reviewing the development of Sino-US relations, one year on, it is clear that his administration has worsened the problems in Sino-US relations, not solved them. Not only has it enthusiastically inherited its predecessor's bullying trade practices and Indo-Pacific strategy targeting China, it has also sought to further toughen them.

More Chinese entities have been blacklisted, and the administration has tried, and continues to try, to get the US' allies to close ranks with it, and to persuade or coerce other countries, to isolate China politically and economically and in the technological field, despite their obvious reluctance to choose sides.

It has also been attempting to command the moral high ground by carrying out value diplomacy; bigging itself up as a beacon for democracy and defender of human rights while denigrating China as being a wrecking light for democracy and a violator of human rights. At the same time, it has called on China to cooperate with it to jointly respond to climate change, and strengthen bilateral coordination to try and resolve regional issues such as the Iran nuclear deal.

Yet despite China and the US having broad common interests and sharing common responsibilities for the world, and despite the Chinese side having made it clear in the exchanges between the two sides that it is always willing to engage in constructive dialogue with the US — including in the two leaders' three talks by phone and video link, and the diplomatic interactions in Anchorage, Tianjin, Zurich and Rome — the administration continues to refuse to work with China to build a cooperative relationship based on mutual trust and respect.

The competition-confrontation-cooperation trichotomy with which it dresses up its China policy cannot disguise its artifice. China is the other that must be feared, since both the US psyche and the US economy demand a bete noire.

But it is a shortsighted and selfish policy that courts disaster for the world. Not least because apart from trying to put in place an Iron Curtain to separate the US and its allies from the rest, the Biden administration is continuously playing the Taiwan card, irrespective of the dangers of doing so.

The raging COVID-19 pandemic in the US, which caused nearly half a million deaths over the past year, and the highest inflation rate in decades should awaken the Biden administration to the fact that blaming China and the ceaseless printing of banknotes are slow poison instead of the solutions to the US' problems.

The Biden administration should accept that it is counterproductive to build its China policy on the foundation of its predecessor's and to let itself be led by the nose by the diehard China-bashers.

It should take the occasion of the anniversary to conduct a comprehensive and objective review and audit of its China policy, and make the necessary adjustments to help get the two countries' relations back on the right track.

A Pakistani court sentenced a Muslim woman to death after finding her guilty of blasphemy for insulting Islam's Prophet Muhammad in text messages she sent to a friend, an official said yesterday.

The woman, Aneeqa Atteeq, was arrested in May 2020 after the man alerted police that she sent him caricatures of the Prophet — considered sacrilegious — via WhatsApp.

Under Pakistan's blasphemy laws, anyone found guilty of insulting the religion or religious figures can be sentenced to death. While authorities have yet to carry out a death sentence for blasphemy, just

the accusation can cause riots.

According to a court order, the woman was also sentenced to 10 years in jail.

Domestic and international human rights groups say blasphemy allegations have often been used to intimidate religious minorities and to settle personal scores. In December, a Muslim mob descended on a sports equipment factory in Pakistan's Sialkot district, killing a Sri Lankan man and burning his body publicly over allegations of blasphemy.



BIDEN'S NEWS CONFERENCE TAKES ABRUPT, LENGTHY TURN

DAVID BAUDER,
NEW YORK

FOR the first half of one of his rare news conferences as president, Joe Biden stuck to an organized plan, calling on reporters from a list in a binder.

Then the president went rogue.

It started when CNN's Jeff Zeleny broke in with a question that referenced concerns many Americans hold about the competence of government, after the chaotic Afghanistan withdrawal and the recent shortage of testing for COVID-19.

After Biden answered, Zeleny followed up: "I'm not sure if I heard that you would do anything differently. Would you do anything different or are you satisfied with your team?"

Zeleny's question opened the floodgates. Biden took to calling on reporters at random, and what started as a very traditional presidential news conference became something else entirely, stretching to nearly two hours. Biden took some unusual — and unusually blunt — questions when the session was opened up to all the journalists in front of him.

One year into his presidency, Biden has been cri-

ticized for holding fewer news conferences than any of his five immediate predecessors after their first years, and participating in fewer one-on-one media interviews.

He engaged in some jousting with Fox News Channel's Peter Doocy, whose network has been relentlessly critical of Biden.

"You always ask me the nicest questions," Biden said.

Said Doocy, "I have a whole binder full."

"I know you do," Biden said. "None of them make a lot of sense to me. Fire away."

He chuckled when Doocy asked, "Why are you trying so hard in your first year to pull the country so far to the left?"

"Well, I'm not," Biden replied.

"You guys have been trying to convince me that I'm Bernie Sanders," Biden said. "I'm not. I like him. I'm not Bernie Sanders. I'm not a socialist. I'm a mainstream Democrat."

Biden called on James Rosen of the conservative Newsmax network, who asked the president about a poll that found a significant percentage of respondents questioning whether or not he was mentally fit.

"I'll let you all make the

judgment whether they're correct or not," Biden replied sharply. "Next."

Rosen pressed on, wondering why he thought many Americans have "profound concerns about your cognitive fitness."

"I've no idea," Biden said, and moved on.

Biden alluded to the criticisms about the infrequency of his meetings with the press, joking with one reporter who had just been assigned to the White House that "we always have long press conferences."

But for his staff, well aware of Biden's history before the presidency of getting himself in trouble with gaffes, the news conference was a high-wire act the likes of which he hadn't attempted before. It left a lot of news for journalists to unpack, on such matters as his legislative priorities and the confrontation with Russia over Ukraine.

He grew angry at one point when he believed reporters weren't accurately quoting his fiery speech on voting rights, and mused at length about how he is covered on cable news.

Despite the length, there were still questions shouted at the president when he turned and left the podium. MDT/AP



Japan's exports and imports both reached record highs in December, largely because of surging oil prices and a weaker yen, the government said yesterday. Japan's imports last month surged 41% from the same month a year earlier. Exports rose 17.5% from the previous year, on stronger shipments of autos and computer chips. Imports have now risen for 11 months straight, while exports have risen for 10 consecutive months, the Finance Ministry said.



USA Joe Biden acknowledged that the pandemic has left Americans exhausted and demoralized but insisted at a news conference marking his first year in office that he has "outperformed" expectations in dealing with it. Facing a stalled legislative agenda, Biden conceded he would likely have to pare back his "build back better" recovery package and instead settle for "big chunks" of his signature economic plan. He promised to further attack inflation and the pandemic and blamed Republicans for uniting in opposition to his proposals rather than offering ideas of their own.



Tonga The first flights carrying fresh water and other aid to Tonga finally arrived yesterday after the Pacific nation's main airport runway was cleared of ash left by a huge volcanic eruption. New Zealand and Australia each sent military transport planes that were carrying water containers, kits for temporary shelters, generators, hygiene supplies and communications equipment. The Australian plane also had a special sweeper to help keep the runway clear.