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**PROPERTY SALES DOWN 2.2% YEAR-ON-YEAR TO 8,800, TRANSACTION VALUE FELL 2.6% TO MOP50 BILLION IN 2021** P5

**SURVEY FINDS 80% AGREE ON TAIPA FOOTBRIDGE EXTENSION** P4

**BEIJING WINTER OLYMPICS BECOME MOST WATCHED GAMES IN US** P6



**Japan** announced yesterday it will ease its tough Covid-19 border controls by increasing the number of people allowed to enter each day and reducing quarantine requirements following criticism that its current policy is unscientific and xenophobic. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said the daily entry cap will be raised to 5,000, including Japanese citizens and foreign residents, from the current 3,500 beginning March 1. The decision is good news for foreign scholars, exchange students, business travelers and technical internship workers who have been unable to enter, but does not cover tourists.



**Singapore's** president has ordered a delay in the execution of two men sentenced to death who are believed to be mentally disabled, a lawyer said yesterday. The order from President Halimah Yacob came after lawyers for the two men filed a new legal bid to stop their hanging after losing several previous appeals. The two, who were convicted of smuggling drugs into the country, originally were to be executed on Wednesday.



**Thai** royalists stepped up their campaign to drive out the country's branch of rights group Amnesty International, handing over copies of a petition to government ministries that they say is backed by more than a million signatures. About 200 protesters gathered opposite Government House in Bangkok. Representatives from the Labor Ministry and the National Security Council accepted envelopes containing their demands. The group later submitted the petition to the Interior Ministry.

More on backpage

# BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY

**Health authorities make contingency plans for potential Covid-19 outbreak while civil servants must complete vaccination before February 21** P2



## TUESDAY PLENARY AL COMMITTEE AWAITS GOV'T REPLY ON GAMING BILL QUERIES

COVID-19

# GOV'T ORDERS CIVIL SERVANTS TO COMPLETE VACCINATION BEFORE FEB. 21

RENATO MARQUES

**A**LL civil servants eligible for vaccination must receive two doses (primary vaccination) of a vaccine against Covid-19 before February 21, the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center said yesterday during the regular weekly briefing.

Although there are just three days between this communication and the deadline established, Dr. Leong Iek Hou, coordinator at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention said that this requirement should not pose a problem since the vaccination rate among those professionals is already high.

According to the figures cited by Leong, 83.6% of all civil servants have already received two or three doses of the vaccine and 85.6% have already received at least one dose of the vaccine.

Those who cannot be vaccinated due to legitimate medical reasons will remain exempt from these requirements, and must continue to present valid negative nucleic acid test (NAT) results every seven days to be allowed to continue to work.



The deadline for the vaccination of civil servants comes at the same time as the measure requiring all travellers over 12 years of age returning to Macau from Hong Kong or Taiwan to present a valid certificate demonstrating that they have completed their primary vaccination (two doses for most vaccines).

Exceptions are the Janssen-Cilag vaccine and CanSino Bio adenovirus vaccine, both of which have a primary vaccination plan of a single dose, and the Zhifei

Longcom ZIFIVAX, which has a primary vaccination plan of three doses.

Leong also reaffirmed that in cases where the primary vaccination course was completed over seven months ago, people must receive a booster shot to enter Macau.

"We demand that people complete the primary vaccination scheme. In cases where they have received two doses, but over seven months have elapsed since their last inoculation, then they

must vaccinate with a third dose to comply with our entry requirements," Leong explained.

Regarding whether the measures applicable to Hong Kong and Taiwan will be extended to visitors from the mainland, Leong said, "We don't discount the possibility of imposing this requirement on other people."

### SHORTER QUARANTINE FOR TAIWAN ARRIVALS

Concurrent with the new measures banning non-vaccinated

people from entering Macau from Hong Kong or Taiwan, health authorities have also adjusted quarantine measures for these travelers.

From midnight on February 21, those who enter Macau or who have already entered but have travelled from Hong Kong or Taiwan within the past 21 days must undergo 14 days' quarantine under medical observation.

The measure remains unchanged for Hong Kong, but amounts to a reduction for Taiwan travelers from the current 21-day quarantine period.

As Leong explained, people arriving from Taiwan who have remained there for at least 21 days before entering Macau must undergo a "rigorous seven days" of self-managed observation of their health, after completing their 14 days in quarantine. "Rigorous" means that they are banned from entering the mainland, and during these seven days they must mandatorily undergo three NATs, on the second, fifth and seventh days. If they fail to comply with these rules, their Health Code will turn yellow until they fulfill these obligations," she concluded.

COVID-19

# Health authorities make contingency plans for potential outbreak

RENATO MARQUES

**L**OCAL health authorities have prepared contingency plans for a potential outbreak of the Omicron variant of Covid-19 in Macau, Dr. Leong Iek Hou, coordinator at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said yesterday.

According to the official, the situation currently remains calm and under control.

"We have 276 isolation beds from different levels of care. If necessary,

we will organize our staff and put our contingency plans into force," Leong said. "For the time being, we only have eight asymptomatic patients [using some of the isolation facilities] in the Public Health Clinical Center in Coloane. But we have a preliminary project ready to come into force in case of an outbreak," she added.

The same official also noted that at the time of the press briefing from the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination

Center, no results from the nucleic acid tests (NAT) taken by the first batch of local students who returned from Hong Kong were known.

The students, as well as others returning from the neighboring region, will have to wait for the results at the Hong-Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge Port. From there they will be taken either to hotel quarantine facilities or, if the NAT results return positive, to the Health Bureau's isolation facilities.

### REDUCE OVERSEAS SHOPPING

Leong said that to prevent a potential outbreak of the Omicron variant in Macau, local people should refrain from buying products online from outside Macau.

She said that acquiring goods from affected areas poses a risk, as the parcels have a short travel period in which the virus can survive and be active.

"We are demanding that logistics companies implement some disin-



fection measures, but the best way is to reduce shopping from abroad. People should also pay attention when reading newspapers and magazines from Hong Kong – after reading them,

they should wash their hands well," Leong said. Leong also advised people to wear surgical masks and gloves when handling parcels and letters in the mail.

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# Committee awaits gov't reply on gaming bill questions

ANTHONY LAM

**T**HE parliament's Second Standing Committee has finished its preliminary discussion of the gaming law amendments and awaits government's answers to its questions on Tuesday.

The committee held meetings for four days in a row to discuss the bill.

At the post-meeting press conference yesterday, the committee president, indirectly-elected lawmaker Chan Chak Mo, refrained from giving a definite date for the meeting with government officials in attendance. He was asked about the matter twice during the press conference.

He elaborated that the committee will compile the list of questions, which will ultimately include those raised by the parliament's legal advisors, and deliver it to the government.

"The government will then need time to study our questions before giving us answers. Techni-

ANTHONY LAM



cal meetings may even be needed," Chan said. "So I can't give you a definite date on which we will return [to discuss] the bill."

However, on further questioning, the lawmaker again stressed that the committee is aiming to pass the bill at the plenary by

June 26, the deadline for current legislation.

He also admitted for the first time that the government did request the parliament to work on the bill quickly.

Adding to this, Chan explained that the swift review of the bill is possibly because the provisions are uncontroversial. The main topic at yesterday's session was the compatibility between the existing law and the new bill.

Concerning the actual provisions, Chan said that there was confusion regarding Article 19, which stipulates the designation of a managing director in each concessionaire, who should legally hold 15% of the company's shares.

However, committee members wanted to understand the meaning of the appointment, given that the law also permits the concession to be managed by a legal entity or a management company. The question of who has greater authority requires clarification.

Moreover, as the bill proposes

requiring the managing director to hold Macau SAR residency, the committee also seeks clarification as to whether having Chinese nationality is essential and whether persons of multiple nationalities are eligible.

The clarification is critical because the bill also provides for the revocation of concessions on national security grounds. On this point, the committee also wants the government to further define "national security", despite the city having its own National Security Law.

The committee is also seeking an explanation from the government on the "associated responsibilities" in the bill connected with the management of the concessionaires. The lawmaker did not elaborate on this because the provision exists in many articles, but he gave an example nevertheless. He queried who would be answerable when associated responsibilities were under investigation: the entire senior management or the managing director alone?

Article 47, on the other hand, proposes six scenarios in which a concession may be terminated. In only two of these scenarios will a concessionaire be compensated: if the concession is bought out by the government, or if it is terminated due to public interests.

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## UM APPOINTS NEW VICE-RECTOR

The University of Macau (UM) has appointed Mok Kai Meng as vice rector (student affairs), the university announced in a statement. An expert in civil engineering, Mok has



held various positions at UM, including as the Dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology (FST), inaugural Dean of Honours College (HC), and Master of Henry Fok Pearl Jubilee College (HFPJC) since 1997. The new vice rector received a bachelor's degree in civil engineering in 1986 from the University of Washington, where he also obtained his master's degree in 1988 and doctorate in 1992. He joined UM in 1993.

## MACAU'S INT'L ASSETS RISE TO MOP2.3B

According to the statistics released by the Monetary Authority of Macao, the proportion of international investment by the local banking sector rose in the fourth quarter of 2021. By the close of 2021, total international assets had increased by 7.1% from the previous quarter to MOP2,311.4 billion. Within this total, external assets rose by 7.6% from the third quarter to MOP1,764.5 billion, while local assets in foreign currencies also increased by 5.4% to MOP546.9 billion. The international share of total banking assets increased to 86.3% from 85.9% at the end of September 2021, while the share of international liabilities in total banking liabilities rose to 83.9% from 83.8%.

## GAMING

# S&P DOWNGRADES CREDIT RATING ON LVS, SANDS CHINA AMID SLOW RECOVERY

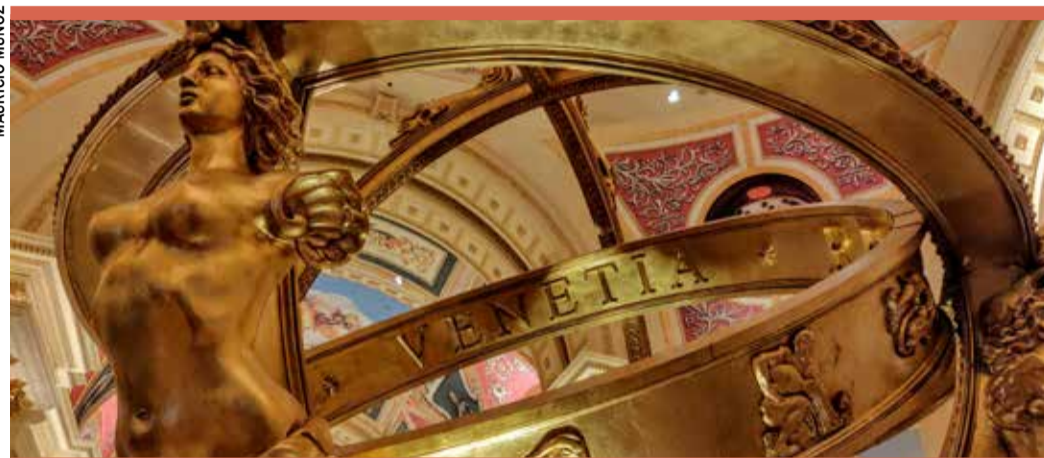
LYNZY VALLES

S&P Global Ratings has downgraded the issuer credit rating for Las Vegas Sands (LVS) and Sands China, due to a slower recovery unfolding for Macau's gaming sector amid rising Omicron cases and travel restrictions.

S&P now rates the company BB+, down from BBB-, as it expects LVS' leverage to reach the ratio of about 7x at the end of this year, which stands at about the 4x downgrade threshold at the previous rating level.

"We revised our base-case forecast for Macau because we believe that the resumption of travel between Macau and mainland China in 2022 will be slower than we initially anticipated amid rising Omicron cases and tightening junket activity," the firm said in a statement.

"We believe the mass gaming segment will recover



over the long term, given China's growing middle class' high propensity to game, improving infrastructure between mainland China and Macau and expanding hotel supply," it added.

However, the firm clarified that the predictability of the recovery timeline is "less certain because it is difficult to assess whether China will maintain its policies for zero tolerance of Covid-19 throughout the pandemic's third

year."

The Omicron outbreak globally is leading to tighter restrictions on international travel, hampering economic recovery.

S&P has forecasted that the city's gross gaming revenue (GGR) is set to recover up to only 40% of the 2019 level. This is far below the previous forecast of up to 70%.

The brokerage JP Morgan had earlier said that it would not attempt to forecast the ci-

ty's gaming recovery for 2022, following uncertainties amid the ongoing Covid-19 crisis and the subsequent economic fallout and strict border measures.

The analysts admitted that they are less confident in their numbers than they were a year ago, noting that the investment bank had modeled that in 2021, mass and VIP GGR would recover to 75% and 35% of 2019 levels respectively.



## CRIME

# PAIR ARRESTED FOR TNR QUOTA FRAUD

ANTHONY LAM

A man and a woman have been detained for alleged document forgery with the aim of securing entry permits for non-resident workers (TNRs), the Judiciary Police (PJ) announced at a special press conference yesterday.

The PJ revealed that the two

are accused of falsifying personal details, which were used to apply for TNR permits. In addition, they are also believed to have sold TNR quotas for profit.

The detained suspects are named Lam, 50 years of age, and Wei, 48. There are five other suspects in the case who were registered as employees in Lam's open business. The five suspects admi-

tted to giving Lam their personal details in order to register for Social Security benefits without having worked in the company.

However, these five denied that they were aware of the TNR fraud.

During investigations into an online scam in September last year, the PJ found a suspect holding a TNR ID card – colloquially known as the Blue Card – without having employment in Macau.

The suspect confessed to the police that it was purchased on the mainland for 100,000 Chinese yuan.

Further investigations revealed that TNRs were hired for two businesses, both of which are owned by the same legal entity. The PJ believed that five people were fraudulently registered as employees of the businesses, for whom 11 TNR quotas have been issued.

On February 15, the PJ searched the businesses and discovered that seven out of the 11 did not work at the establishments.

Lam admitted to the Social Security applications but denied the fraud involving TNR quotas. Meanwhile, Wei confessed that she operated the TNR quota racket herself and so far has made a profit of 350,000 Chinese yuan.

The PJ added that some TNRs connected with the case have not yet been apprehended.

## IC CALLS FOR TAP SEAC MARKET VENDORS

THE Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) is calling on stall operators and creative handicraft workshops for the Tap Seac Craft Market that will be held at the square from April 21 to April 24.

Application are open until March 4.

The upcoming craft market will be held four days a week instead of three days a week, from Thursday to Sunday for two consecutive weeks. There will be 133 handicraft and creative gastronomy stalls each week in a bid for cultural and creative units to have the opportunity to participate in the event.

Applicants for stalls may apply online through the "Tap Siac Craft Market" website at

www.craftmarket.gov.mo.

All products applied for sale in the proposal must be original designs, and the minimum number of types of products for sale is 10, the IC reminded.

The proposal may also include services offering cultural and artistic experiences. If the number of eligible applicants exceeds the number of places available, IC will select the stall operators by drawing lots.

The Tap Seac Craft Market is a distinctive brand in the cultural and creative market held in spring and autumn annually since 2008, providing a platform for cultural and creative practitioners to display and sell their products. LV



# Survey finds 80% agree on Taipa footbridge extension

**N**EARLY 80% of respondents from a recent survey supported extending Taipa's major footbridge to the neighborhood of the Lakeside Economic Housing Estate.

The survey was conducted by the Choi In Tong Sam Association and the Islands Office of the Macao Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM). The former is closely connected to the FAOM.

Some 842 valid responses were received in the survey.

Currently, the major footbridge in Taipa connects the Stadium Station of the Light Rail Transit (LRT) to the roundabout near Pou Long Garden residential estate. It provides a walking option for people moving within the main community of Taipa.

The survey runners made five suggestions to the government in order to refine the neighborhoods in Taipa, namely ramp up civil education on maintaining cleanness of the facility, increase the number of trash cans along the footbridge, clarify the category of land in Taipa, eradicate obstructions in the nei-



ghborhood of the Lakeside Estate and speed up the urbanization of the north of Taipa.

They explained that the population in Central Taipa, according to the 2021 Census, has surpassed 75,000. Although many modern buildings have been developed in the northern part of Taipa, the neighborhood still remained dodgy due to tangled ownership of land in the district.

The scenario, according to the survey runners, has brought regular traffic chaos and floods across Taipa.

On the urbanization of Taipa North, the survey runners poin-

ted out that it is needed in order to facilitate the extension of the footbridge, as the imagined bridge will pass over certain unused land. They suggested the government to move forward with the urbanization promptly.

Respondents were also concerned with the price, the duration, the design, the dirt-resistance and durability of the material used of the extension, as well as the traffic detour during the construction work.

There have been a handful of severe car crash incidents since the opening of the footbridge. **AL**

## PROPERTY TRANSACTIONS TOTAL MOP49.8B IN 2021

**T**HE number of building units and parking spaces transacted decreased 2.2% year-on-year to 8,802, and the transaction value fell 2.6% to MOP49.77 billion in 2021.

Data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) shows that the purchase and sale of residential units fell 482 year-on-year to 6,001 units.

The total transaction value dropped by 5.0% to MOP40.80 billion, with the value of existing residential units (5,431 units) and pre-sale residential units (570) amounting to MOP36.66 billion and MOP4.14 billion, respectively.

The average prices of residential units in the Macau Peninsula (MOP100,514) and Taipa (MOP105,680) reduced by 1.6% and 1.9% respectively, while the average price of tho-

se in Coloane (MOP121,760) grew 1.3%.

As for non-residential units, the average price per square meter of usable area of office units fell 4.4% year-on-year to MOP106,137, while that of industrial units rose 8.9% to MOP52,105.

Throughout 2021, 11,959 real estate purchase and sale contracts were signed, and the number of properties involved (14,194) went up 16.1% year-on-year. Moreover, 11,088 mortgage contracts were signed, and the number of properties involved (14,835) fell 0.8% year-on-year.

Regarding construction in the private sector, 7,372 residential units were at the design stage, 1,804 under construction, and 437 under inspection, as at the end of 2021. **LV**



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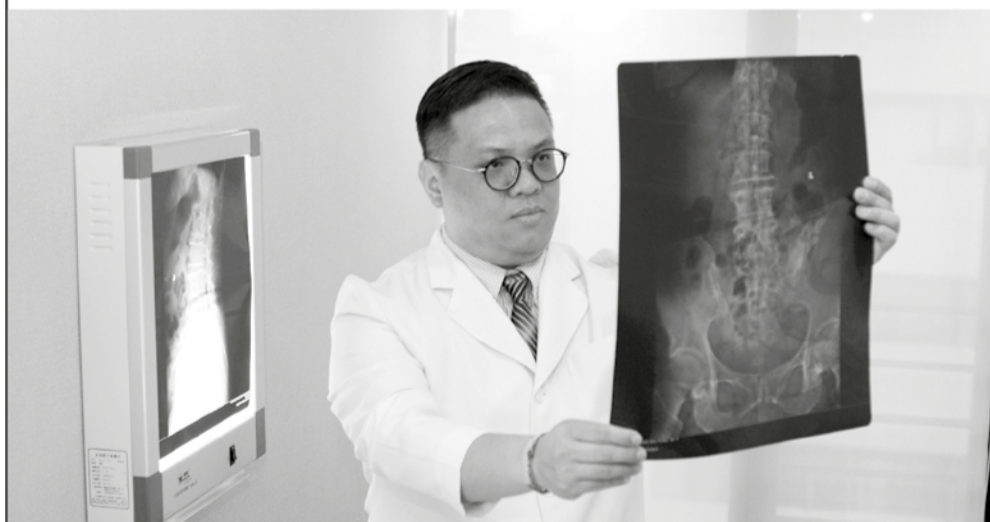
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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

# BEIJING WINTER OLYMPICS BECOME MOST WATCHED GAMES IN US DESPITE 'DIPLOMATIC BOYCOTT'

**M**ORE than 100 million Americans have watched the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, where many U.S. athletes continue to show their talents, skills and sportsmanship, and share memorable experiences inside and outside competition venues.

With a boom in streaming services and a habitual use of social media, the 2022 Olympics, which have made Beijing the first city to host both winter and summer Games, could become the most-viewed video programming in U.S. history, according to media industry insiders.

The popularity of the ongoing event among ordinary Americans and the friendship between U.S. and Chinese Olympians showcased in the Games have lampooned the Washington-led farce of a so-called "diplomatic boycott" of the Games, and convincingly attested to the new Olympic motto of "Faster, Higher, Stronger - Together."



## WIDELY WATCHED

It "definitely sent a positive message that the world will endure," Marianne Chase, a retired elementary school teacher in Houston, the southern U.S. state of Texas, told Xinhua about the opening ceremony of the Beijing Winter Olympics. "We all need that right now."

Chase was among the 16 million viewers in the United States tuning in to watch the technology-driven, visually-pleasing kickoff of the Games earlier this month despite a time difference of at least 12 hours across multi-

ple NBCUniversal platforms.

More than 100 million Americans have since watched the Games on the networks of NBCUniversal, the U.S. media conglomerate has announced, adding it has also become "the most streamed Winter Games ever with 2.23 billion minutes consumed."

"Considering that Olympic videos on YouTube and TikTok are going to rack up hundreds of millions of views, I wouldn't be surprised if these Olympic Games end up being one of the most-viewed video events in U.S. history," Michael So-

colow, a media historian at the University of Maine, was quoted by The Washington Post as saying.

While most winter sports fans across the United States have watched the Games and cheered for their favorite teams and athletes at home or game-watching parties, others have chosen to have a try on their own.

Over the past weekend, amid romantic vibes, residents and visitors in Washington, D.C. had fun skating inside the ice rink at the National Gallery of Art's Sculpture Garden, surrounded by magnificent works of art and towering sculptures.

Miles away at The Wharf - the U.S. capital's iconic waterfront destination, those who had "missed your Olympic qualifier" were able to compete in multiple disciplines, including ice corn hole and curling, with televisions mounted on a wall inside a bar nearly replaying figure skating and curling matches in Beijing.

Ice hockey enthusiasts also feel excited about the Games, where the U.S. women's team is seeking to defend the gold medal they won four years ago, and the men's team is looking to get back to the podium for the first time since 2010.

"It comes around once every four years, really. So you gotta watch it when it comes. You're also gonna be waiting for a long time," Peter Lombardi, a high schooler from the U.S. state of New Jersey, told Xinhua.

For quite some time, Washington has gone to great lengths to mount pressure on Beijing by using the Games as a political tool and manipulating allies as anti-China pawns under the cloak of protecting human rights. But its "diplomatic boycott" has been foiled and ridiculed as the Beijing Winter Olympics are gaining ex-

treme popularity around the world.

"Olympics are very popular in Norway," Norway's Chef de Mission Tore Oevreboe told Xinhua in Beijing. "We don't believe in boycott. We want to participate."

"Boycotting is not good," Italian speed skater Michele Malfatti told Xinhua, hailing the volunteers of the Beijing Winter Olympics as very kind and the life in Beijing as very good.

## COMPETING WHILE SHARING

Many Olympians from the United States have turned to social media to share athletic highlights, honorable and emotional moments, and behind-the-scene stories at the Villages. NBCUniversal said late January that Olympics-related content had already garnered over 18 billion views on TikTok.

"Everyone at home, thank you. Snowboarding, thank you," legendary U.S. snowboarder Shaun White said in a short video posted on TikTok on Saturday, which also featured pictures of him at the Genting Snow Park in Zhangjiakou.

The 35-year-old snowboarder finished in fourth place in the men's halfpipe final last week, ending his career as a three-time Olympic gold medalist, a 13-time Winter X Games champion, and a six-time World Cup event winner.

While staying at the Olympic Village, White has been more than ready to respond to questions asked by some of his 1.5 million followers on TikTok. One of the viral clips showed him delightfully introducing traditional Chinese dishes for which he has a keen appetite, including "Sweet and Sour Pork," "Kung Pao Chicken" and "Dandan noodles." "In between competitions, I have just been eating," he answered frankly. "The food is so good."

Tessa Maud appeared to have been a "part-time reporter" when she was not competing in the women's half pipe. Apart from a "Chinese food series" launched on TikTok, the U.S. snowboarder produced content on her training, pins she had exchanged with other athletes, and even packing procrastination.

U.S. luger Summer Britcher and her teammates had

a surprising encounter with a life-sized Bing Dwen Dwen, and they asked the shy and polite chubby bear to share the elevator with them.

"We love you," one voice said joyfully, though the cabin became immediately overcrowded when Bing Dwen Dwen moved in.

## TRUE SPORTSMANSHIP

After the United States beat China in the mixed doubles round robin earlier this month, China's curling duo Fan Suyuan and Ling Zhi presented their American counterparts, Vicky Persinger and Chris Plys, with a set of pin badges featuring Bing Dwen Dwen.

The American duo later tweeted that they felt "honored to receive these beautiful Beijing 2022 pin sets in a wonderful display of sportsmanship by our Chinese counterparts." Phill Drobnick, coach of U.S. men's curling team, referring to it as "what the Olympics are all about."

China's Gu Ailing, who took the gold in the first-ever Olympic big air freestyle skiing competition, and Mathilde Gremaud, the bronze medalist from Switzerland, together consoled Tess Le-deux of France who finished in second place at Shougang Big Air in Beijing.

China's veteran freestyle skier Xu Mengtao, a four-time Olympian and the runner-up at Sochi 2014, finally realized her dream of winning an Olympic gold in the women's aerials on Monday.

Relieved and emotional, 31-year-old Xu burst into screams and tears before receiving a huge, long hug from American freestyle skier Ashley Caldwell, who just nearly missed out on the podium. "Taotao! Olympic Champion!" Caldwell greeted Xu referring to her nickname, adding, "I am so proud of you."

"Some of the best love is found in friendship," tweeted CBC Olympics, Canada's official Olympic and Paralympic broadcaster. "Caldwell may have missed the podium in Beijing, but her reaction to Mengtao Xu winning gold on home soil warrants a perfect score."

"True sportsmanship transcends borders," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying commented on Twitter. **XINHUA**

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FMCC Breakfast Meeting  
Wednesday, 23 February 2022

**Introduction:**  
Sustainable development is listed as one of the key priorities in the new 2022 draft gaming laws. Whilst Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) strategies are considered as key indicators of the effectiveness of corporate sustainable development, how important are they to businesses? Join us and hear from Mr. Vincent Mossfield regarding the potential insurance implications of ESG to businesses operating within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau GBA.

**RSVP before 2p.m. on 21 February**  
info@francemacau.com or Tel: (853) 6803 0673  
[www.francemacau.com](http://www.francemacau.com)

**Date: Wednesday, 23 February, 2022**  
**Time: 9:00a.m. - 10:30a.m.**  
**Venue: Sofitel Macau at Ponte 16**  
Baccara Ballroom, 6th floor

- 2022 FMCC members join free-of-charge\*
- Guests and non-members @ MOP188\*
- \* Breakfast included

Organizer: FRANCE MACAU Chamber of Commerce 法國澳門工商會  
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# SANDS CHINA NEWS

## We Support: Sands China strengthens local procurement

As a key developer of large-scale integrated resorts, Sands China must source products and services that are world-class. In doing that, Sands China is strongly dedicated to strengthening the community by purchasing from local suppliers – heeding the government's call to support local firms.

In line with that goal, Sands China has been launching a series of programs for Macao's local SMEs over the last several years, in a bid to support local suppliers and to help them uphold high international service and production standards in their operations."

In support of Macau's development into a world-class destination, Sands China was the first gaming operator to launch an SME supplier support program with the Macao Chamber of Commerce in 2015.

As part of that program, Sands China launched the Sands Procurement Academy in 2017, which it co-organised with the Macao Chamber of Commerce and the Macao Productivity and Technology Centre (CPTTM). The academy is the first-of-its-kind industry training, focused on delivering practical knowledge to local SMEs, and is an initiative under the company's F.I.T. Program, whose SME support pillars are Financial Support, Invitational Matching and Training and Development.

The achievements of Sands China's SME supplier support program include:

- More than 6,300 training hours delivered
- Nearly 370 suppliers trained
- Over 330 graduating suppliers among 10 cohorts
- Local procurement spend: 84% → 91%
- Local SME procurement spend: 14% → 21%
- Procurement spend on local SMEs, Macao young entrepreneurs, and "Made-in-Macao" enterprises: 50% → 60%
- 24 local supplier roadshows for Sands China team members, generating MOP 20 million in sales for 79 local suppliers
- SME Expedited Payment Programme offers shortened 7-day payment terms
- Supplier Open Day and Invitational Matching sessions helped create new business opportunities between Sands China and local SMEs
- Two straight years of the three-day Sands Shopping Carnival provided free business platform for local SMEs and Sands retailers: over 100,000 visits each year, and 500+ booths featuring 250+ SMEs each year

*"Our success and the success of our local SME suppliers go hand-in-hand"*  
Sands China Ltd. President Dr. Wilfred Wong



HONG KONG

## Covid-19 surge among prisoners fuels outbreak

FACING an outbreak of COVID-19 among prisoners, Hong Kong is moving infected inmates to an isolation facility as the city struggles to snuff out a record number of cases by implementing China's "zero tolerance" strategy.

The Correctional Services Department said yesterday that the Sha Tsui facility on Lantau Island was designated for quarantining infected prisoners, whose numbers are expected to grow.

Seven prisoners had tested positive for COVID-19, while the number of confirmed cases in the southern Chinese financial hub of about 7.5 million people hit 4,285, double the daily average reported earlier in the week.

Health care facilities in Hong Kong are beginning to overflow, and the city's Caritas Medical Center was forced to treat patients in beds outside the hospital. Others were waiting in tents to be admitted.

People who test positive are

required to quarantine either in hospitals if they have serious symptoms or in government-run facilities for light or asymptomatic cases.

China's leader Xi Jinping has ordered the central government to provide Hong Kong with resources to stabilize the outbreak, including rapid antigen tests, medical expertise and supplies.

China has tamped down major outbreaks through its strict "zero tolerance" policy that involves quarantining incoming travelers, total lockdowns, extensive contact tracing and mass testing millions of people.

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam has stuck to the same strategy despite the city's greater population density, higher incomes and more service-oriented economy than in mainland China. Last week, the entire upscale Discovery Bay neighborhood in Hong Kong was ordered to undergo testing after authorities found traces of the virus in its sewage. **MDT/AP**

## US ACCUSES CHINA OF BACKING AWAY FROM FREE-TRADE COMMITMENTS

THE United States has accused China of failing to meet its commitments to the World Trade Organization and says it is exploring new ways to combat aggressive Chinese trade practices.

In its annual report on Chinese compliance with WTO rules, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative said yesterday [Macao time] that China isn't keeping the promises it made to open its markets to foreign competition when it joined the 164-country Geneva-based agency in 2001.

"China has instead retained and expanded its state-led, non-market approach to the economy and tra-

de," said U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai. "China's policies and practices challenge the premise of the WTO's rules and cause serious harm to workers and businesses around the world."

Among other things, the United States repeated longstanding accusations that China uses subsidies and regulations to favor its own companies at the expense of foreign competitors; floods world markets with cheap steel, aluminum and other products; and forces U.S. and other foreign companies to hand over prized technology as the price of access to Chinese markets. **MDT/AP**



A Ukrainian serviceman walks to a frontline position outside Popasna, the Luhansk region in eastern Ukraine

UKRAINE CRISIS

# NATO says Russia misleads world on troop movements

VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV,  
YURAS KARMANAU, KYIV

**N**ATO allies accused Russia of misleading the world by saying it was returning some troops to bases, reporting that Moscow has instead added as many as 7,000 more forces near its tense border with Ukraine. The alliance warned yesterday that the buildup has only strengthened its resolve.

After a handful of positive signals from Russia that eased tensions earlier in the week, the pendulum appeared to be swinging in the opposite direction again. The NATO chief welcomed Kremlin offers to keep pursuing diplomatic solutions, but he and others warned that the U.S.-led alliance has still seen no sign of the military withdrawal that Moscow announced.

"We have seen the opposite of some of the statements. We have seen an increase of troops over the last 48 hours, up to 7,000," said British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace ahead of a meeting of the western alliance in Brussels.

"We are deadly serious," he added, "and we're going to face the threat that is currently being posed."

That squared with what a U.S. administration official

said Wednesday.

Russia has massed an estimated 150,000-plus troops near its ex-Soviet neighbor, sparking concerns that an attack is imminent. None materialized Wednesday, as feared, and Ukrainians spent the day defiantly celebrating their unity and resolve to face down any Russian threat.

Moscow said several times this week that some forces are pulling back to their bases, but it gave virtually no details that would allow an independent assessment and Western leaders quickly cast doubt on those statements. Yesterday, NATO allies knocked down the Russian assertions again — and warned that they are ready to counter any aggression.

"The consequences of this mass buildup — nearly 60% of Russia's land combat forces on the border of a sovereign nation — will get you the opposite effect," Wallace said.

Russia denies it is plotting an invasion but says it must be allowed to protect its security interests. It wants the West to keep Ukraine and other former Soviet nations out of NATO, halt weapons deployments near Russian borders and roll back forces from Eastern Europe. The U.S. and its allies have roundly re-

jected those demands, but they offered to engage in talks with Russia on ways to bolster security in Europe.

Even as Russia seemed to try to lower the temperature this week, the Western allies maintained that the threat of an attack remained high.

Maxar Technologies, a commercial satellite imagery company that has been monitoring the Russian buildup, reported continued heightened military activity near Ukraine, including a new pontoon bridge and a new field hospital in Belarus. It also said that some forces had left an airfield in country, a Russian ally, but it was unclear where they went.

A senior U.S. administration official said some forces arrived only recently and that there had been a marked increase in false claims by Russians that the Kremlin might use as pretext for an invasion. The official said those claims included reports of unmarked graves of civilians allegedly killed by Ukrainian forces, assertions that the U.S. and Ukraine are developing biological or chemical weapons, and claims that the West is funneling in guerrillas to kill Ukrainians.

The official was not authorized to speak publicly about sensitive operations and spoke to The Associa-

ted Press on condition of anonymity. The official did not provide underlying evidence for the assertions.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken told ABC News that Russian President Vladimir Putin "can pull the trigger. He can pull it today. He can pull it tomorrow. He can pull it next week. The forces are there if he wants to renew aggression against Ukraine."

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy also dismissed the Russian claims.

While Ukraine braces for a potential invasion, tensions soared in the conflict in the country's east where Russian-backed separatists have been fighting Ukrainian troops since 2014.

Yesterday, separatist authorities in the Luhansk region reported an increase in Ukrainian shelling along the tense line of contact, describing it as a "large-scale provocation." Separatist official Rodion Miroshnik said that rebel forces have returned the fire.

Ukraine disputed the claim, saying that separatists had shelled its forces, but they didn't fire back. The Ukrainian military command charged that shells hit a kindergarten building in Stanytsia Luhanska, wounding two civilians, and cut power supply to half of the town.

An observer mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe is yet to offer its assessment of the situation.

There are concerns that a flare-up in the east could be used by Russia as a pretext for rolling across the border — though there was no sign yet that the fighting was larger than what typically happens. Russia in turn, aired worries that hawkish forces in Ukraine encouraged by the West could launch an attack to reclaim control of the rebel areas — the plans Ukrainian authorities deny.

A 2015 deal brokered by France and Germany helped end the worst of the fighting in eastern Ukraine.

The U.N. Security Council is scheduled to hold its annual meeting on the agreement today [Macau time]. Russia, which holds the rotating council presidency this month, will chair the meeting. At last year's council meeting, Russia clashed with the U.S. and its Western allies over the conflict in eastern Ukraine and a similar confrontation is expected this year. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1981 THATCHER GIVES IN TO MINERS



Mrs Thatcher's Conservative Government has withdrawn plans to close 23 pits in its first major u-turn since coming to power two years ago.

President of the National Union of Mineworkers Joe Gormley is confident the government's intervention will avert the threatened national miners' strikes.

Secretary of State for Energy David Howell made the concessions at two hours' of crisis talks in Whitehall involving union leaders and Department of Trade and Industry officials.

At the negotiations — brought forward several days by the government — Mr Howell acknowledged the miners' main demands about coal imports and subsidies to the National Coal Board.

The government agreed to reduce coal imports from eight million to five-and-a-half million tonnes over the next year and to provide more money for the Coal Board, struggling under the withdrawal of operating subsidies after the 1980 Coal Industry Act.

As a result the Coal Board has dropped the programme of pit closures it announced on 10 February.

Mr Gormley is due to meet the 25-member executive of the NUM tomorrow morning and says he will advise against an indefinite strike by the nation's 240,000 miners.

"I hope the explanation we shall give to the executive will be enough to convince them there is no need for a ballot. The whole situation is different," he explained.

However vice-president of the NUM and leader of the Scottish pitmen Michael McGahey said: "I am very far from satisfied with the meeting, which only amounts to promises to review the situation.

"On the real issues there are no concrete agreements."

His views are shared by much of the coal industry's left-wing and over half the country's coalfields are already affected by unofficial strikes.

Further talks between union leaders and Mr Howell are planned for a week today when he will give more precise details of the scale of the government's assistance.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

The next day the NUM told all miners to return to work after the executive voted to accept the concessions made by the government and coal board by 15 to 8, with one abstention. Some left-wing pits maintained unofficial stoppages and there were pickets outside the NUM headquarters in London.

Militant miners' leaders called off these strikes on 20 February.

The government provided £300m of financial assistance to the industry and prevented official strike action, although pockets of discontent remained.

Joe Gormley resigned as president of the NUM in April 1982 to be replaced by leftwinger Arthur Scargill.

Mr Scargill went on to lead the miners in a year-long strike — the longest ever in the UK — from March 1984, when the Coal Board announced the closure of 20 pits.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

**ARIES**  
Mar. 21-Apr. 19  
Evasion is likely if you aren't direct about your feelings. You will gain a lot if you listen. Your home environment appears to be a little shaky.

**TAURUS**  
Apr. 20-May. 20  
If you take on too much, you will find yourself in martyrdom. You don't need to pay out in order to have fun. Your ability to do detailed work will dazzle those who are less creative.

**GEMINI**  
May. 21-Jun. 21  
You may have a hidden adversary who would love to prove you wrong. You will reap the rewards for your kind actions. Try not to skirt issues if you think you'll hurt someone's feelings.

**CANCER**  
Jun. 22-Jul. 22  
Your intellectual wit will bring greater popularity with your peers. Your diplomacy will be of utmost importance today. Don't make promises.

**LEO**  
Jul. 23-Aug. 22  
You may want to have a heart-to-heart talk with a close and trusted friend. You need to control your temper and deal with the situation rationally.

**VIRGO**  
Aug. 23-Sep. 22  
Pleasure trips will be a form of healing for your emotional state of mind. You will easily blow situations out of proportion. Talking to those you trust and respect will help you sort out any problems.

**LIBRA**  
Sep. 23-Oct. 22  
Your involvement in groups will be favorable for meeting new and exciting individuals. You will be up and down emotionally. Your fickle nature may cause jealousy.

**SCORPIO**  
Oct. 23-Nov. 21  
Catch up on overdue paperwork. If you are not already, think about going into business for yourself. Be sure you get accurate information.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Nov. 22-Dec. 21  
Changes in your home will be positive. Your lover may be annoyed if you have been flirtatious or not attentive to their needs. You may want to take a look at courses offered at a local institute.

**CAPRICORN**  
Dec. 22-Jan. 19  
You can count on getting a pat on the back for your efforts. Real estate investments could be prosperous. This will not be the day to have minor surgery.

**AQUARIUS**  
Jan. 20-Feb. 18  
Your ability to be a self starter will help get things done and motivate others. Your ability to dazzle others with your unique and innovative ideas will attract attention.

**PISCES**  
Feb. 19-Mar. 20  
You will want to complain about the injustice that is going on. Lend an ear to children; it can make a difference. Catch up on your correspondence and reading.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

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

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

**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	-9	0	cloudy
Harbin	-18	-6	cloudy
Tianjin	4	8	rain
Urumqi	7	11	rain
Xi'an	9	12	overcast
Lhasa	-9	-2	fine
Chengdu	8	11	rain
Chongqing	7	9	rain
Kunming	2	6	rain
Nanjing	21	26	rain
Shanghai	1	6	rain
Wuhan	-22	-9	fine
Hangzhou	-1	4	snow
Taipei	3	5	overcast
Guangzhou	13	18	rain
Hong Kong	17	18	rain
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	-12	-14	snow
Frankfurt	3	4	cloudy
Paris	8	11	overcast
London	7	12	rain
New York	1	3	overcast

**CROSSWORDS**

ACROSS 1- Warning; 6- Reasoning; 11- Nipper's co.; 14- French composer Erik; 15- Musical drama; 16- Awfully long time; 17- Overture; 18- Unit of volume; 19- Pestle for payment; 20- Land in water; 22- Holmes's creator; 24- Ill-fated; 28- Teased; 30- Oppose; 31- Polynesian porch; 32- Reef material; 33- Drying; 37- What \_\_\_ bid?; 38- Gets under control; 39- Water tester; 40- Expressed in a symbol; 43- Use a soapbox; 45- Nut of an oak; 46- Dry red table wine; 47- Sandy; 49- Liturgical prayer; 50- \_\_\_ Gay; 51- Actress Harper; 52- Part of UNLV; 53- Farm birds; 56- Ercees; 61- Pothook shape; 62- Scheduled; 63- Western; 64- Frat letter; 65- Approaches; 66- Les \_\_\_ Unis;

DOWN 1- Tempe sch.; 2- One circuit; 3- Dug in; 4- Oysters \_\_\_ season; 5- Curative; 6- Hard candy; 7- Mayberry moppet; 8- Acquire; 9- High dudgeon; 10- Pertaining to the heart; 11- Color anew; 12- Was able; 13- Actress Heche; 21- Wild blue yonder; 23- Auricular; 24- Remove a covering; 25- Model Campbell; 26- Song part; 27- Born in the \_\_\_; 28- Swiss city on the Rhine; 29- Black cuckoos; 31- Geneva's lake; 33- Pyramid category; 34- Maker of Pong; 35- Short letters; 36- Effectiveness; 38- Horse's gait; 41- Follow; 42- Polygon having eight sides; 43- Comfortably familiar; 44- Far out!; 46- \_\_\_ in Charlie; 47- Grind together; 48- Martini's partner; 49- Hangs on to; 50- Util. bill; 51- Nicholas II was the last Russian one; 54- Chemical ending; 55- Greek H; 57- Muesli morsel; 58- RR stop; 59- Hanoi holiday; 60- Grads-to-be;

**Yesterday's solution**

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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Tai Nin **HKD 3,590,000**

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DRIVE IN

# FINDING YOURSELF IN 'THE WORST PERSON IN THE WORLD'

LINDSEY BAHR,  
MDT/AP FILM WRITER

**T**HERE is a fallacy of youthful restlessness that's easy to forget when it's mostly in the rear-view mirror: It's possible to both not know what you want while also being pretty sure of what you don't. Becoming who you are isn't some coherent, linear path with a definitive ending that comes in the form of finding the right person or the right job, getting married or having a baby, no matter what romantic comedies would like you to believe. It's a chaotic and messy process of elimination with casualties big and small.

At 29 going on 30, Julie, the woman at the heart of Joachim Trier's "The Worst Person in the World," is in the thick of this unrest though neither she nor we know this when we get our first glimpse of her smoking in a black slip dress alone at the edge of a party. Played by the beguiling Renate Reinsve, Julie is the picture of cool glamour, her hair tied back in a casually elegant ponytail. It almost looks like the end to something. We'll soon

AP PHOTO



Herbert Nordrum, left, and Renate Reinsve in a scene from "The Worst Person in the World"

come to find that it is, but not in any way we've been conditioned to expect. This moment actually happens relatively early in the film, which is playfully structured in 12 chapters with a prologue and epilogue.

Julie has already made some big decisions by the time we drop in on her life — she's gone from studying medicine to psychology to photography, left a serious boy-

friend, taken up with a professor and had some flings, sporting a variety of hair and clothing styles in the process. It's amusing watching her try on different versions of herself. But things slow down a bit when she meets and connects with Aksel (Anders Danielsen Lie), a comic book artist in his mid-40s.

After a night together, he tells her they shouldn't go on, that their age difference will become a pro-

blem, that he's entered a new phase in his life and she still has to find herself. Only hurt awaits them, he explains. So naturally she falls in love with him and is soon claiming closets and bookshelves for herself in his apartment as "The Way You Look Tonight" plays happily in the background. For a time, this feels like life — she gets a job in a bookstore and writes a piece that does well online — but some-

thing, she feels, isn't right.

There is a refreshing honesty in this script, penned by Trier and his longtime collaborator Eskil Vogt, that engages with nuance and the impossible complexities of life in a way that most "rom-coms" avoid like the plague. We can see clearly that Aksel was right at the beginning. We can also understand why they continue on even beyond the logical end to their story, like when they find they're at an impasse not just on the topic of children but even the reality of spending weekends away with his friends who have them. To her, having a baby signals the end of something that she's not ready for. To him, it's a new beginning. They're both right and they're both wrong. And because life is messy, it's in this crisis that she crashes a party, meets Eivind (Herbert Nordrum) and is reminded that life and interesting strangers exist outside of her comfortable, contained world with Aksel.

The film itself does have an end, by the way, and a satisfying one at that. But it's also not a conclusion. Just seemed important to note.

**"The Worst Person in the World" is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for "sexual content, graphic nudity, drug use and some language." Running time: 128 minutes. ★★★★★**

AD

- 合夥人 PARTNERS:**  
 官樂怡 Rui José da Cunha<sup>o</sup>  
 山度士 Álvaro Rodrigues<sup>o</sup>  
 馬天龍 Nuno Sardinha da Mata<sup>o</sup>  
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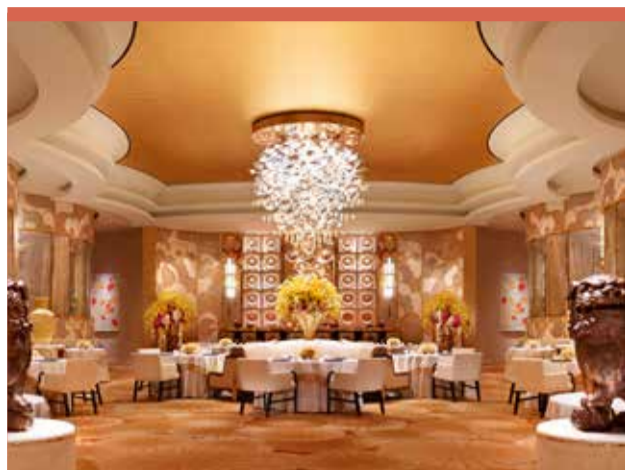
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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



André Chiang



Wilson Fam



TASTE OF EDESIA

# Reinventing classics

IRENE SAM, MDT

**N**EXT month, Wynn Palace's two-Michelin-starred Sichuan restaurant - Sichuan Moon - will launch a brand new world view of Sichuan cuisine, presenting "colour of taste" as a concept to unveil the Discovery Menu. The restaurant's Culinary Director Chef André Chiang showcases the taste of Sichuan cuisine through new ideas and modern methods, leading diners to explore a refreshing and contemporary interpretation of Sichuan culinary arts.

The restaurant recently welcomed Executive Chef Wilson Fam, who perfectly executes the endeavours of Chef André with a top culinary team at Sichuan Moon. Paying tribute to the classics while developing breakthrough by way of innovation is the aim of Sichuan Moon. The gastronomical style is timeless and showcases the charm of modern Sichuan cuisine.

Presenting traditional Sichuan cuisine through spectrum of colours and

using visuals to express "taste", the "colour of taste" invites one to imagine each dish, adding spectacular hues and psychological perspective to the experience. Among them, Chef André uses the French classic consommé resulting from clarifying stock to be served with Sichuan classic chicken mousse. Paired with white truffle bird's nest confit, it is sprinkled with ground black truffle and Iberian aged Spanish ham. The layering enriches every spoonful of the savoury and smooth wonder. Truffle with Traditional Chicken Mousse and Consommé is becoming a classic and a highlight on the new menu. Inspired by Zhong Dumplings known as "Shuijiao" in ancient times which is famous for its sauces, Chef André analysed eight different selections in his sauces, deconstructed and enhanced them layer by layer, then pairing them with Japanese lobster sashimi marinated with "Ma La" spicy sauce. Together with potato soufflé stuffed with cold tofu, "Ma La" Lobster "Zhong

Dumpling" presents the essence of Zhong Dumpling - numb, spicy, fresh and fragrant- in an innovative way. Through the colours of flavours, guests can envision the complexity and variations arranged and get a feeling of the origins and transitions of flavours in Sichuan cuisine.

Sichuan Moon further launches a quintessential Classic Menu that retains the traditional characteristics of Sichuan cuisine and must-try unique signature dishes of the restaurant, which includes Peppercorn Flavoured Duck Foie Gras and Mushrooms Royale, Secret Recipe - King Crab Leg, revamped Signature Snack, Burnt Scallop with Green Chili and Masterpiece Ma-Po Tofu. These traditional dishes reflect classics in an innovative manner, so that guests can rediscover them again. Chef André also came up with new desserts for the Classic Menu- Reinvented Classic Dessert and Fermented Rice Koji Ice with Osmanthus Snow. Indeed, guests can explore the gastronomic history and culture of Si-

chuan through a journey of the province's cuisine at Sichuan Moon.

While Chef André designed Classic Menu and Discovery Menu by combining Sichuan and international high-quality seasonal ingredients, Wynn's team of professional sommeliers and tea masters carefully match each dish with rare brews and tea, showcasing the elegance and sophistication of Sichuan cuisine. The team of Sichuan Moon tea masters strives to heighten the experience to perfection through carefully selecting material elements of tea culture such as tea leaves, water, charcoal, pots, and utensils, providing guests with a variety of precious teas from all over the country. Among them Agarwood Pu Erh, which is known as "the first of all fragrances," Signature Pipachá with port wine aroma that aged in Niepoort port 'pipas' of Portugal. Chef André also selected pure water from the Mount Gongga glacier- which has the highest altitude in Sichuan- to brew various kinds of tea, enhancing their nuances and elegance. While delighting in the pleasure of tea, guest can enjoy art performances from the tea master, relishing the exclusive taste experience.



## ROAST CHICKEN

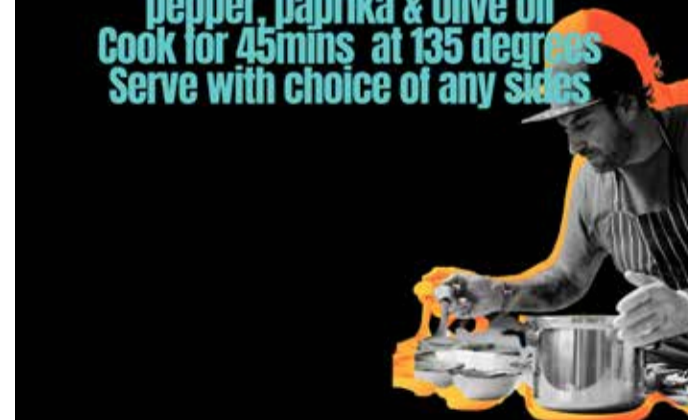
### INGREDIENTS

- Whole chicken
- Garlic
- Onion
- Salt & Pepper
- Paprika
- Olive Oil



## KNOW HOW

- Preheat oven to 180 degrees
- Rub chicken with garlic, salt, pepper, paprika & olive oil
- Cook for 45mins at 135 degrees
- Serve with choice of any sides



## RECIPES

[www.eighty8s.com](http://www.eighty8s.com)



BY ALEX TORRÃO  
MDT

**OPINION**

**China Daily**  
 Editorial, China Daily

**IT'S NOT ALL DIVISIONS AND TENSIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND THE WEST**

At a time when the world seems beset by intractable problems and rising tensions, the positive tone of Wednesday's telephone conversation between President Xi Jinping and his French counterpart, Emmanuel Macron, was a welcome tonic to the general mood of pessimism that prevailed at the start of the year.

As well as ensuring the healthy upward trajectory of Sino-French ties, with multiple agreements reached on deepening their cooperation in areas such as agriculture, green manufacturing, finance, aviation and third-party markets, the two leaders also underscored the two countries' mutual desire to strengthen their comprehensive strategic partnership by carrying out dialogues to enhance their cooperation in the space, cyber, polar and maritime fields, as well as boost their military dialogues and exchanges at all levels.

Thanks to the efforts of both sides, bilateral cooperation has yielded fruitful results in recent years despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Last year, bilateral trade exceeded \$80 billion, and China's total imports of agricultural products from France increased by 40 percent year-on-year. As France holds the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first six months of this year, the reinforcing of friendly Sino-French ties can also contribute to the positive development of China's relations with the bloc as a whole.

By holding a correct understanding of each other, and adhering to mutual respect, dialogue and cooperation, the two sides can work together to establish more common ground and steer China-EU relations in the right direction for new development and mutual benefits, as Xi said.

Xi commended France for enhancing the solidarity of the bloc and strengthening its strategic autonomy, and told Macron that China is ready to work with France to make a success of the China-EU Leaders' Meeting and a new round of high-level dialogues aimed at promoting greater alignment.

Since Xi and Macron have both had recent meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin, the two leaders also exchanged views on the latest developments in the Ukraine crisis, with Xi reiterating that a comprehensive settlement of the Ukraine issue should be pursued through dialogue and consultation. They also exchanged views on the on-going negotiations in Vienna aimed at reviving the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal, to which both countries are party, agreeing to step up their joint efforts to ensure the talks yield satisfactory results.

As Macron said, the current international situation is fraught with tension. The resolve of China and France to stand together and forge more common ground sets a good example for countries to tide over this difficult time through unity and cooperation. That is a sorely needed roborant.

**JAPAN'S DEFICIT REACHES 8-YEAR HIGH AS ENERGY IMPORTS SOAR**

Japan racked up a 2.2 trillion yen (\$19 billion) trade deficit last month, an eight-year high, as the cost of energy imports soared, the government said yesterday.

The Finance Ministry said exports edged up 9.6% in January from the same month the previous year. Imports jumped 39.6%, resulting in the sixth straight month of trade deficits, it said.

The amount is the biggest since January 2014, when the trade deficit totaled nearly 2.8 trillion yen.

Koya Miyamae, a senior economist at SMBC Nikko Securities, said the trade deficit tends to rise in January because of the New Year's holidays, which pushes exports down.

"But even taking that into consideration, the deficit is huge," he said.

Japan imports almost all its oil and gas. Prices have soared to multi-year highs recently, adding to global concerns about inflation. Tensions in Ukraine amid worries about a Russian invasion have pushed prices still higher.

Meanwhile, Japan's currency, the yen, has weakened against the U.S. dollar as the Federal Reserve prepares to raise interest rates to counter inflation. Higher rates tend to push the dollar higher against other currencies because they create more demand for dollar-denominated investments.

**THE BUZZ**

AP PHOTO



**G-20 FINANCE LEADERS EYE WAYS TO SUPPORT PANDEMIC RECOVERY**

**NINIEK KARMINI, JAKARTA**

**C**OUNTRIES must avoid tensions and cooperate to support a recovery from the pandemic as it lingers in many parts of the world, Indonesian President Joko Widodo told a gathering of top financial leaders of the world's largest economies yesterday.

"The winter is coming," Widodo said in welcoming finance ministers and heads of central banks of the Group of 20 industrial nations.

"The pandemic is far from over, and the global economy is struggling," he said. "During this situation, no single country could recover alone. All countries are interconnected, no one is isolated."

The G-20 financial gathering comes as many economies are treading a precarious path between raising costs of borrowing to cool inflation and helping to support recoveries from the pandemic.

Worries over potential conflict in Ukraine are an added unwelcome source of uncertainty, Widodo said, warning against antagonisms at this time.

"It is not the time to create new tensions that could affect global recovery, let alone jeopardize

the world peace as we've currently seen in Ukraine," he said. "It is necessary that every party puts an end to rivalry and frictions."

Officials were attending the meetings both in person and online, given troubles with travel and quarantines due to outbreaks, mostly of the omicron variant of coronavirus, that are plaguing many countries.

Host Indonesia is among many countries in Southeast Asia that have endured severe waves of infections, though vaccinations have helped quell the worst of outbreaks.

The fourth most populous nation with 274 million people, it has reported nearly 5 million cases and 145,622 deaths. In the past month, 690,518 new cases have been reported.

Indonesia is the world's 10th largest economy and is located in the fastest growing region — at least before the pandemic swept the world, disrupting business and travel while killing nearly 6 million people.

Surging prices for food and energy are among the challenges the financial leaders confront as they discuss how to best nurture a global economic recovery, Indonesian Finance

Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati told G-20 participants.

"Inflation risk remains skewed to the upside, driven by supply chain disruption, labor market mismatches, wage pressure, and higher energy prices," she said, adding that such problems have been "more persistent than previously expected."

The International Monetary Fund has forecast that world economic growth will slow to 4.4% in 2022 from 5.9% in 2021, following a 3.3% contraction in 2020.

Mulyani emphasized the need for coordination between countries in different stages of recovery.

The U.S. Federal Reserve is pulling back on massive support for markets and businesses, preparing to raise interest rates as soon as next month to cool inflation that jumped to 7.5% in January — the highest rate in 40 years.

Consumer prices rose to a record 5.1% in the 19 countries that use the euro last month and to a nearly 30-year high in the United Kingdom.

Indonesia's central bank has also moved to curb inflation. But some other economies have yet to bounce back from the havoc caused by the pandemic. **MDT/AP**

**New Zealand** said it will not deal with Myanmar under a major 15-nation trade agreement, the world's largest that took effect this year, citing the deadly violence and democratic setbacks in the Southeast Asian country after the military seized power last year. Two Asian diplomats told The Associated Press that New Zealand notified other members of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, which includes China but not the United States, that it would not recognize Myanmar's "instrument of ratification" — the key document binding a country to the free trade pact — because it opposes its military-led government.

AP PHOTO



**Pakistan** awarded Microsoft co-founder and billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates its second highest civilian honor yesterday, in recognition of his work to alleviate poverty and diseases like polio and tuberculosis. On a daylong visit to the capital, Islamabad, Gates was given the prestigious Hilal-e-Pakistan award by President Arif Alvi in a televised ceremony, after he met with Prime Minister Imran Khan at his office.

**Kuwait's** constitutional court has struck down a contentious law long used to criminalize transgender people by forbidding the "imitation of the opposite sex." After weeks of deliberation and years of campaigning by human rights groups, the court ruled that the vague law policing people who dress and behave like the opposite sex was "inconsistent with the constitution's keenness to ensure and preserve personal freedom." The law had set the maximum penalty for cross-dressing at one-year in prison or a fine of \$3,300.

AP PHOTO



**Germany** Authorities said yesterday they are investigating whether one of the train drivers involved in a fatal collision this week ran a stop signal. One man, an Afghan refugee in his 20s, died, and dozens of people were injured in the crash earlier this week on a commuter train line in Ebenhausen-Schaeftlarn, south of Munich.