



CPTTM ENGLISH CONTEST WINNERS PETA HO AND REM HO CONSIDER ENVIRONMENT KEY TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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AIRPORT MANAGEMENT: CARGO ARRIVING AT TAIPA FACILITIES WOULD GO THROUGH SEVERAL ROUNDS OF SANITIZATION BEFORE BEING DELIVERED

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China's ambitions to have a major hand in Afghanistan's stability and development under the Taliban, while boosting its own stature, will be on display at a pair of multinational meetings it is hosting. China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are expected to send representatives to the main meetings involving neighboring states. [More on p7](#)



Hong Kong Britain said yesterday that it is withdrawing its judges from Hong Kong's top court because keeping them there would "legitimize oppression" in the former British colony. British judges have sat on the court since Hong Kong was returned to China in 1997. The British government's move underscores the Asian financial hub's growing isolation as the ruling Chinese Communist Party works to assert its control and silence independent voices. [More on p7](#)



South Korea said it conducted its first successful launch of a solid-fuel rocket yesterday in what it called a major step toward acquiring a space surveillance capability amid rising animosities with rival North Korea. The launch came six days after North Korea carried out its first intercontinental ballistic missile test since 2017 in an apparent attempt to expand its weapons arsenal and increase pressure on the Biden administration amid stalled disarmament talks.

Singapore A man on death row for drug trafficking was hanged yesterday in the first execution in the city-state in over two years, rights activists said. Singapore, which has harsh anti-drug laws, had halted executions due to the Covid-19 pandemic and last meted out capital punishment in November 2019.

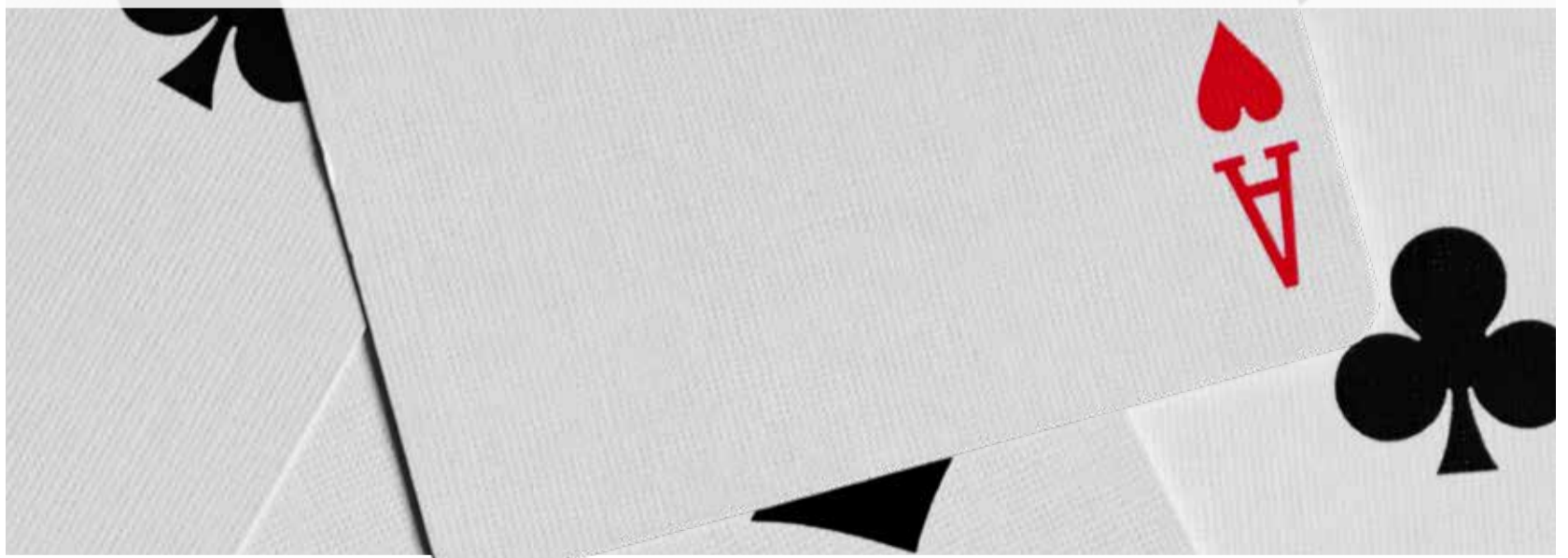
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JUNKET TURMOIL HEATS UP

Golden Group terminates VIP business in another blow to the junket sector

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MACAUGOV.COM GOV'T UNAWARE OF DOMAIN PROMOTING GAMBLING, PORN

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CHINA TRIES TO LIMIT ECONOMIC BLOW OF SHANGHAI SHUTDOWN

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TEMPERATURE TO DROP TO 12 DEGREES CELSIUS THIS WEEKEND

The weather in the region is expected to be affected by a northeast monsoon, leading to a temperature drop to around 12 degrees celsius this weekend. According to the weather bureau, the northerly winds in Macau will intensify with persistent cloudy and rainy weather, therefore the perceived temperature will seem cooler due to the wind chill effect. It will then become sunny and dry in Macau early next week. The temperature will increase gradually and the difference between day and night will be much greater.

FINANCIAL RESERVE PLUNGES MOP12.7B IN JANUARY

The Macau SAR's financial reserve dropped MOP12.68 billion patacas in January, according to data released in the Official Gazette. As of January, the financial reserve of the city amounted to MOP630.49 billion. As of the end of 2020, the capital of the financial reserve had risen year-on-year by 6.3% to MOP616 billion. Reviewing the 2020 fiscal year, the government stressed that it utilized MOP46.6 billion to offset the budget deficit. Meanwhile, it also transferred MOP52.26 billion from the surplus of the fiscal year 2018 to the financial reserve.

115 PEOPLE ON RED HEALTH CODE

As of 8 p.m. last night, a total of 115 people who have been to Pullman Hotel in Zhuhai, Baishi Street and Baihe Street in Xiangzhou District, currently have their health codes in red and were arranged for quarantine for 14 days. According to health authorities, the move was in response to the pandemic situation in the neighboring region.

JUNKET TURMOIL

GOLDEN GROUP TERMINATES VIP BUSINESS IN ANOTHER BLOW TO SECTOR

LYNZY VALLES

MACAU Golden Group is shutting down its VIP operations following "careful consideration," in the latest blow to the junket sector crisis.

According to a memo seen by GGR Asia, one of the city's long-established firms in the junket industry has informed its employees of the closure on Sunday.

Amid the termination of contracts, the junket firm said it will compensate its employees in accordance with the labor law.

The Times sent a query to the gaming regulator about the closure.

However, the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) briefly replied, "DICJ has received a notification from the SJM Resorts, S.A., about the closure on March 30 of Golden Group VIP Gaming Rooms. DICJ will follow-up with procedures related to the closure."

It is still not known how many employees will be affected by the closure of the junket's VIP operations.

Back in December amid the arrest of junket king Alvin Chau, the DICJ and Labor Affairs Bureau



(DSAL) said that staff members from casinos' VIP rooms that have been recently closed should not be affected.

This was announced as two gaming operators Wynn Macau and Melco Resorts & Entertainment said that they would close junket VIP rooms at their Macau properties "within the next two weeks," following the arrest.

After the termination notices, more gaming operators also an-

nounced closures of their VIP operations amid the Suncity and Tak Chun scandal: they now aim to acquire players who were formerly VIP players from junkets entering their premium direct program.

The Macau Golden Group's shut down of VIP operations is yet another blow to the sector which is in turmoil, as junkets have been simultaneously squeezed by Covid-19, new regulations and severe pressure on capital controls – "an

almost fatal combination," as Political and Corporate Risk Consultancy Steve Vickers & Associates (SVA) said.

Vickers previously told the Times that forthcoming regulatory shifts signaled an end to some or all of the junket business, which has "led to an escalation of efforts by certain junket operators to raise gaming revenues directly on the mainland and to engage in unlawful gaming."

Incoming air cargo sanitized several times

ANTHONY LAM

AIRPORT management stressed that all cargo arriving at Macau International Airport (MIA) would go through several rounds of sanitization before being delivered to the city.

Workers in the sanitization process are also managed carefully to avoid the virus spreading into the city, the airport's management companies added.

Yesterday, the Civil Aviation Authority (AACM) and the MIA Co. Ltd. (CAM) hosted a press briefing on the airport tarmac to introduce the virus containment efforts the two entities have put in



place.

Once an aircraft parks after arrival, its cargo deck will be sprayed with sanitizer before being closed for 10 minutes. After this

period, the cargo boxes will be unloaded from the aircraft. The boxes will be sanitized once again on the tarmac.

The cargo will then

be towed by the airport's ground service providers to the assembly point at the entrance of the cargo storage, where cargo will once again be sanitized. Cargo unboxing will also happen here.

During his introduction, Taft Lam, AACM's director of airport infrastructure and air navigation, told the press that the aviation industry of the city has been instructed to follow the national and local policy of guarding against import and relapse cases.

As such, he said the authority has requested all industry practitioners to stay tuned to and comply with guidelines issued by

the Health Bureau and the AACM. The guidelines, he said, are updated constantly in response to the changing situation.

He added that all arriving flights are allocated different handling methods according to their origin. Workers are required to wear protective gear that is appropriate for the particular level of risk.

Further, Chan Hou Lon, CAM's senior airport supervisor of the airport operations department, added that all workers handling sanitization of cargo from mid to high risk origins are required to be fully suited with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and wear N95 masks.

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MACAUGOV.COM

Gov't unaware of domain promoting gambling, porn

RENATO MARQUES

LOCAL authorities have stated that they had not been aware of the operations of a website that uses a top-level domain (TLD) address that resembles a government website which promotes illegal gambling and live-streams pornography.

The website uses the TLD macaugov.com, an address that clearly aims to resemble the official Macau government website (gov.mo).

In a reply to an inquiry from the Times, the Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) which handles local internet communications and related topics said, "CTT isn't aware of the existence and operation of this website," adding also that since it is a (.com) domain it falls outside the jurisdiction of local authorities.

"The operator of (.com) domain registry is designated by the international organization, ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers)," CTT said, noting their inability to take action over the issue.

According to research done by the Times, the website domain was registered for the first time back on November



Screenshot of macaugov.com taken Wednesday

28, 2021.

The website displays flashy information in simplified Chinese language, using names and logos of well-known local casinos such as The Venetian Macao or Grand Lisboa, providing links only to external websites.

In the past, both the Monetary Authority of Macau and the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) have warned the public about the existence of these fraudulent websites that advertise online gaming by using local casinos' names as bait.

The companies and gaming concessions involved also reaffirmed that they are in no way related to or affiliated with these unlawful gaming activities which are abusing their names and trademarks.

The domain of the macaugov.com website was registered with a domain host company called NameSilo, LLC, a company based in Phoenix, Arizona, USA. This means that it is impossible to identify the owner, since the domain ownership data has been protected through the use of a service called PrivacyGuardian.

This service is used to shield information that is mandatory to be made publicly available, through a service called WHOIS.

In this case, the owner of the domain, by hiring the services of PrivacyGuardian, displays information such as the email, phone, and street address of PrivacyGuardian in the place of the real owner, making it impossible to contact this person directly.

The Times has contacted several governmental agencies including the DICJ, police, and Administration and Justice authorities among others, but at the closing of this edition, had not received a response from any of them on the matter.

IC has a legitimate role in advising on this matter.

Two days ago, IC director Leong Wai Man said that her bureau will communicate with the IAM on the matter.

The petition has space for messages as well as signatures.

A participant wrote: "These trees are used in Geography and Biology Lessons for Macau Anglican College students. This contributes to the young people learning the importance of preserving local flora and fauna."

Another participant asked: "These trees have witnessed Macau's growth, why are we thinking of 'deleting' them when they are strong and healthy?"

Meanwhile, some find the trees help to clear the environment and sprinkle a little green in the forest of concrete.

The petition can be signed at <https://forms.gle/swaK-Si13EYcR7tT7A>. **AL**

GAMING

VIP junket business over: Suncity

LYNZY VALLES

RELIANCE on VIP business is over, despite the fact that Macau used to be the gaming mecca in Asia, with VIP gaming as a major source of gross gaming revenue in the past, junket operator Suncity Group Holdings said in its financial report published yesterday.

"There is fairly limited supply of VIP gaming facilities to cater to high-end demand since Macau has now virtually left the VIP junket business," said the group.

The firm considered 2021 as a "dark year" in the company's operating history, mentioning the impact of Covid on the sector.

In late November, then-head of Suncity Group, Alvin Chau was arrested on allegations of running an illegal cross-border gambling syndicate. This led to the Public Prosecutions Office's (MP) order of all notaries in the city to immediately suspend the practice of any notary acts or services involving the assets of Chau and related companies.

The notice came over a week after the arrest of the CEO of the largest junket operator in the SAR, meaning that nobody can conduct any business with the Suncity Group and the cited companies.

Also amid the tourism downturn, the company recalled that they were informed on December 1, 2021, that Sun City Gaming Promotion Company Limited, a key supplier of hotel accommodation products to the group under its travel and related business segment, would not be able to supply hotel accommodation products to the group in the near term.

Therefore, the group suspended the operations of its travel and related business segment from that day.

Further, the group said it will be targeting all traditional gaming business segments, including VIP, premium mass, mass, slots and non-gaming businesses in the group's integrated resorts in Asia.

The group commenced the provision of hotel accommodation products, transportation tickets and travel related products in Macau in 2016 but has seen a substantial decrease in revenue from travel related products and services for 2021.

SUNCITY RECORDS HKD258M LOSSES IN 2021

Suncity Group's total revenue from continuing operations increased by 87% to approximately HKD340,437,000, while gross profit from continuing operations increased by 232% to approximately HKD90,110,000.

Loss for the year attributable to equity holders of the company was approximately HK\$258,265,000 in 2021.

According to the Hong Kong-listed company, it carried out its most "uncompromising cost-cutting programme ever" last year.

"Survival means chopping everything non-core. Underperforming non-core businesses have been sold and will continue to be sold, such as the disposal of the mainland Chinese property business and the aircraft in 2021," the firm stated.

PETITION TO SAVE 10 TAIPA OLD TREES SURPASSES 2,000 SIGNATURES

Apetition currently circulating with the aim of protecting the 10 Taipa old trees from being removed or relocated has so far collected 2,111 signatures, 55 from aboriginal Taipa Village residents, the organizer revealed.

This project was initiated by Greenfriends Macau, a group that works on environmental protection and education.

Attention was drawn to the 10 old trees in Taipa at an Urban Planning Committee monthly plenary meeting three weeks ago. The meeting discussed a plan concerning the extension of Avenida de Guimaraes to the Lakeside Economic Housing Estate.

The route of the extension, however, would converge with a row of 10 trees officially and legally listed as old trees, which



therefore have a certain status similar to cultural heritage.

At the meeting, the representative from the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) stated that it would be almost impossible to relocate the trees with

out harming or even killing them.

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) also has a representative at the Committee. As old trees are protected by the Cultural Heritage Protection Law, the

CRIME

PJ UNVEILS ALLEGED CRIMINAL ORGANIZATION OPERATING FROM VIP ROOM

RENATO MARQUES

THE Judiciary Police (PJ) announced yesterday that they had found and dismantled an alleged criminal organization operating through two casinos' VIP rooms.

According to a PJ spokesperson, the PJ have received 18 complaints from victims of fraudulent operations of the organization. These claims amount to 28.6 million patacas in total value.

The PJ also said that in the ongoing investigation, the police have found proof that the illegal activities of the group, over almost two years of operations, amount to as much as HKD286.5 million and involve a total of around 200 people.

The case opened on September 29 last year when the first victim presented a complaint to a PJ investigator on duty at the casino in Cotai.

At that time, he said that he had deposited HKD157,800 in a VIP room of the casino and the room had suddenly closed so he could not retrieve his money.

After this first complaint, ano-



RENATO MARQUES

ther 17 followed over a relatively short period, including another six people from Macau, one from Hong Kong, and 10 residents from the mainland.

According to PJ information, the 18 victims have reported lost sums ranging between HKD3,800 and HKD12.5 million.

After investigation, the PJ found that the company involved

in the illegal operations was not even a legally registered gaming promoter (junket) but instead, an unlicensed organization serving as an intermediary between the alleged clients and the VIP room.

According to documents discovered in the former places of operation (two casinos in Cotai) and one office unit located in the Dynasty area in NAPE, the ope-

ration of the group dates back to October 2019 and continued until September 29, 2021.

In their searches the PJ also found a great number of documents, computers, HKD13,800 in cash, and over HKD590,000 worth of gaming chips.

While the ring leader left Macau on September 25 (four days before the first case was unvei-

led), the PJ managed to identify and detain two other suspects who operated as director and deputy director of the company.

Although the two have denied the accusations, the PJ said they have gathered enough evidence that both the suspects now in custody played major roles in attracting customers, luring them with the prospect of high returns in the VIP rooms.

According to two other victims, said to have invested HKD5 million each in the scheme, they were promised a 1% payout of interest per month for their investment, however this payment only lasted for the first two to three months.

The PJ is also said to have gathered enough proof that the suspects running the operations used the money they collected from the victims for their profit.

The two suspects will be transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office to be charged with high level fraud and participation in a criminal organization.

The PJ will continue to investigate the case, and have not ruled out the possibility that more victims will come forward.

The Star admits sending fabricated documents to BOC

LYNZY VALLES

THE Bank of China has received fraudulent documents from Australian casino The Star relating to the source of a sum of money, proving that the deposited amount of money comes from the casino's cage.

In a NSW inquiry yesterday, The Star's general manager of finance and commercial, Michael Whytcross, admitted that the "source of funds [was] completely false" and that The Star was making a "serious and deliberate misrepresentation," as cited in a report issued by Australian Financial Review.

The casino is under fire due to accusations of money laundering breaches, organized crime and fraud.

Whytcross, who was based in the Hong Kong office and attends the Macau office every quarter, said yesterday that he was not initially aware of the fabricated document.

This statement follows his being questioned about the investigation into the fake letters in October 2021.

Speaking to the inquiry yesterday, it was disclosed that in one email from December 2017, the casinos claimed to "provide proof of source of funds" in the account that was false.

It was also in December 2017 that the Bank of China shut down The Star's bank account for "compliance reasons."

Questioned whether such move was a breach of money laundering regulations, Whytcross said it was only "a very signifi-

cant misrepresentation," and further admitted when pressed by the counsel, "it would be certainly a high risk of money laundering."

In a Tuesday inquiry, it was revealed that Chinese high-rollers have allegedly been encouraged to deposit millions of dollars into a junket operator's Macau bank account, where a middle man was present. Clients would deposit tens of millions in cash into his Macau bank accounts, which would later be transferred to The Star from an Australian bank account.

The executive admitted that at least AUD76 million (around MOP460 million) had been transferred to the casino through a back channel over a period of nine months back in 2018 and 2019.

CPTTM ENGLISH CONTEST WINNERS CONSIDER ENVIRONMENT KEY TO LANGUAGE LEARNING

PETA Ho and Rem Ho, the winners of an open English contest, have emphasized the importance of an appropriate environment so that language learning can be effective.

The Ho duo recently won the Open Category of the 3rd Macao Occupational English Competition hosted by the Macau Productivity and Technology Transfer Centre (CPTTM).

When questioned about their opinions on improving English education in Macau, Peta Ho opined the city should start with nurturing teachers with even better English proficiency.

His teammate, Rem Ho, said that students should have greater opportunities to practice what they have learnt through more frequent communications with foreigners. He thinks that Macau people generally feel shy about using English.

His opinion is that watching YouTube videos and



English broadcasters will help a lot in building up an effective learning environment. Adding to that, Peta Ho stressed that learning a language within and outside of a classroom environment are very distinct experiences. No matter how well a person can think in the language in a classroom setting, using the language requires speaking and listening to the language, he said.

The representative of the winning team in the Student Category of the same competition, Rachel Deng, told the Times that she considers having good English to be important in Macau.

She said that, as the city is international and has a diverse culture, with people from many places coming and working here, being fluent in English will give people better opportunities. **AL**

Wynn: Collaborating with SMEs to Revitalize Macao's Economy

IN support of the SAR government's policies, Wynn is assisting the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), supporting their continued development and operational innovation, thereby driving the overall economic recovery of Macao.

PROMOTING LOCAL CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES TO STIMULATE PROSPERITY

In order to stimulate the economy in the outlying islands, Wynn and the Industry and Commerce Association of Macau have co-organized markets and fairs in Taipa and Coloane. In addition to promoting Macao's historical and cultural tourism using online and offline efforts, local Macao brands and made-in-Macao products were also publicized, helping to crystalize Macao's identity as "UNESCO World Heritage - The Historic Centre of Macao" and "UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy".

This year's Carmo Market featured a New Year's Eve theme with local cultural and creative Macao brands. There were culinary, cultural, and creative offerings, as well as booths featuring carnival games, a display area for Winter Olympics souvenirs, and amusement programs that were hugely popular with young children. The Market also collaborated with 40 local SME merchants to promote Chinese and Western historical and cultural tours in Taipa Village through mobile apps.

The Coloane Marques Market was themed around the traditional customs and culture of Coloane. There were 15 booths, which were based on historic, cultural, and creative elements to better attract local shoppers. The market also joined hands with 40 merchants in Coloane to offer mini guided tours that allowed residents and tourists to enjoy an interactive travel experience and



Wynn joined hands with the Industry and Commerce Association of Macau to co-organize "Carmo Market" in Taipa and Coloane, promoting the city's unique culture and local economy.



The "Carmo Market" collaborates with local SME merchants to promote made-in-Macao products.

the program attracted a total of 100,000 participants.

BACKING SMES TO SEIZE OPPORTUNITIES BEYOND MACAO

The Macao-style franchise store "MACAU SPACE" (MS) located in Zhuhai is a one-stop experiential center integrating retail, catering, culture, and tourism. The store was established to showcase

the culture of Macao and act as a conduit for local merchants to start developing in mainland China. As one of its partners, Wynn set up a large-scale booth at MS, showcasing the rich tourism elements of Macao to Zhuhai residents and tourists. Wynn hopes the MS platform can be a channel that enables more SMEs in Macao to startup a business to unite and spread Macao's unique image

across China.

Furthermore, Wynn also sponsored the second "International Cultural and Food Festival Hengqin Station" to help build the popularity of Macao's gourmet brands in mainland China by inviting featured Macao SMEs to Hengqin. This will also help to enhance the SMEs' confidence in stepping into the Greater Bay Area, while also promoting cul-

tural tourism and development of the catering sector in both Guangdong and Macao.

COMMITTED TO PROMOTING FOOD SAFETY EDUCATION

To popularize food safety expertise among SMEs, Wynn joined hands with the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) to host two food safety seminars. Representatives of IAM shared the latest food safety trends and regulations in Macao, as well as an overview of issues and general knowledge about food hygiene and safety, and thereby raised awareness of these crucial skills among Wynn team members, SMEs, and the broader industry.

The two seminars attracted over 100 Wynn team members and almost 40 local vendors and food suppliers that have been in a long-term collaboration with Wynn. As an enterprise certified by the international food safety management system certification of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP), Wynn is enthusiastic for the opportunity to work closely with the relevant government department while proactively joining hands with suppliers and business partners to foster the development of food safety in Macao.

EXPANDING COLLABORATIONS WITH SMES THROUGH PROCUREMENT PARTNERSHIPS

With the goal of identifying more opportunities for SMEs to cooperate, Wynn was invited by the Industry and Commerce Association of Macau Northern District to host a procurement partnership meeting for SMEs. The event attracted more than 50 representatives from merchants in the district, covering food and beverage, alcoholic beverages, frozen meats, vegetables, seafood, daily necessities, information engineering, maintenance and construction services, and more.

At the meeting, representatives from Wynn's procurement department met directly with a number of SMEs, making introductions and answering questions about how they may apply to become a supplier, thereby improving the effectiveness of the meetings.



Wynn partners with "MACAU SPACE" to foster greater SME participation in the Greater Bay Area market.



Wynn hosts food safety seminars for local vendors and food suppliers.



Wynn organizes procurement partnership meetings with local SMEs to explore cooperation opportunities.

FIVE COVID-19 FDCT FUNDED PROJECTS PRESENTED

RENATO MARQUES

THE Science and Technology Development Fund (FDCT) yesterday presented five funded projects involving technological developments related to Covid-19.

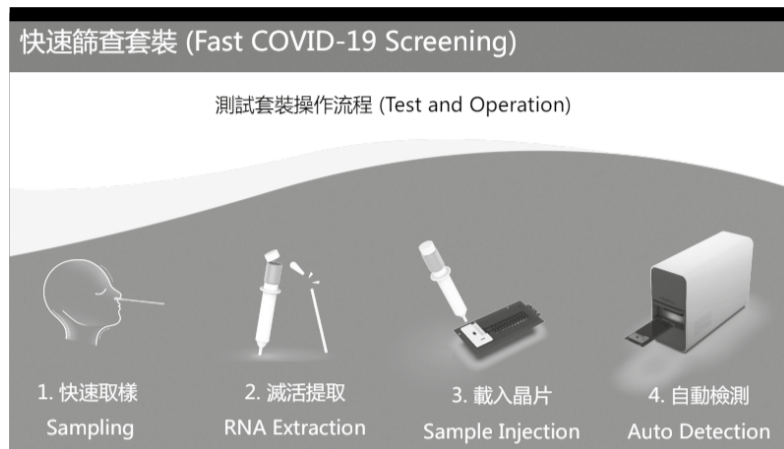
In a meeting held at the conference hall of the Macao Science Center, the FDCT presented in detail the five projects that have been concluded and have entered into operation.

The first project is related to an "Intelligent robot for anti-epidemic medical healthcare" that was developed by a team led by Professor Xu Qingsong of the University of Macau (UM).

This project uses mobile robots combined with artificial intelligence technology to provide disinfection in facilities and venues.

These disinfection robots have been provided free of charge to several government departments, including the Municipal Affairs Bureau, and used at trial sites such as the Kiang Wu Hospital and hotels.

A team led by Lei Zhen from Macau Nanometals Technology Co., Ltd was in charge of



the second project, which involved nano-silver disinfection products capable of inhibiting more than 650 kinds of unicellular organisms such as the Staphylococcus aureus and the Escherichia coli, and can kill viruses and bacteria that adhere to their surfaces.

The products are effective at inhibiting and killing the Influenza A virus subtype H1N1 and human coronaviruses.

The products have been tested and proved to be safe, non-irritating, and long-lasting.

In the bid to quickly diagnose Covid-19, a team led by Professor Zhang Kang of Macau University of Science and Te-

chnology (MUST), developed a technique using machine deep learning to analyze more than 530,000 CT (cycle threshold) images to develop the diagnostic system. "Key techniques for diagnosing new coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 infection based on artificial intelligence" is the name of the third funded project by FDCT and the techniques have proven to provide diagnostic results with an accuracy rate of more than 90% in just 20 seconds, as well as being able to predict severe and critical Covid-19 cases.

Besides being published in the magazine Cell, the study and techniques were also

applied in nearly 20 hospitals in Macau, Guangzhou, Wuhan, and other cities. They have been also provided to Europe, the US, South Korea, Brazil, Ecuador, and other countries and regions through the cloud platform to help with the worldwide fight against the pandemic.

The fourth project was led by Professor Ma Wenzhe of MUST, who has developed testing reagent kits that realize the integration of virus specimen collection and inactivation and nucleic acid extraction. This process eliminates the potential infection risks of "cover opening" for medical workers carrying out nucleic acid tests (NAT) and the contamination of samples by nucleic acids in the environment.

The testing reagent kits are matched with a portable Covid-19 virus point-of-care testing instrument produced by the cooperation partner Beijing OriginGene-tech Biotechnology Co., Ltd. This lowers the requirements for medical workers carrying out NAT tests and removes the limitation that NAT test must be carried out in a laboratory setting, allowing appli-

cations in different scenarios.

These kits have obtained European Union "CE" certification and are currently being tested in many countries in Europe, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

The last project of the group of five relates to the creation of a "Digital Microfluidic chip for fast Coronavirus detection".

The project, developed by a team led by Professor Mak Pui In of UM, was jointly developed with Digifluidic Biotech Ltd. Company and is based on digital microfluidic technology and simultaneous amplification and testing technology for nucleic acid detection.

The project enables the simultaneous detection of two sets of Covid-19 genes on one chip, allowing results to be obtained as soon as 20 minutes after the virus specimen is collected. The chip system also has the advantage of being portable, fast, and easy to operate.

All these projects are responses to the FDCT's calls, in February 2020, for local higher education institutions to conduct scientific research projects aiming to combat Covid-19.

Various institutions submitted a total of 74 project applications, of which 26 were finally approved, including the five mentioned, which have already been concluded and are now in operation.

CRIME

Sexagenarian man arrested for driving to the Hengqin Border

ANTHONY LAM

A local man in his 60s has been caught riding his motorbike across the Lotus Bridge and entering the controlled zone of the Hengqin Border without a permit, the Public Security Police Force (PSP) announced yesterday.

The Hengqin Border Checkpoint is located in a controlled zone. It is only accessible by public transport and authorized vehicles.

The worst aspect of the case, the PSP added, is that the man was also caught driving under the influence of alcohol.

The man reportedly works as a security guard in a local building.

At 11 a.m., March 28, the PSP spotted a motorbike crossing the Lotus Bridge, heading towards the Hengqin Border. Despite the bridge being within Macau's jurisdiction, the land is not accessib-



le to common vehicles. Therefore, officers were deployed to stop the motorbike.

Upon intercepting the vehicle, the PSP officers noticed that the rider smelled of alcohol. A breath test detected a blood-alcohol level of

1.26g/L: well over the legal limit.

During interrogation, the suspect confessed to taking some alcoholic drinks at about 10 a.m. that day at an eatery in the Areia Preta District. Afterwards, he wanted to ride his motorbike to Co-

tai to do some shopping.

Upon arrival at the junction between the Estrada do Istmo and the Estrada Flor de Lótus, he believed he had taken the wrong lane, leading to the Hengqin Border Checkpoint.

The drink-driving case

is still under investigation. The charge of entering a controlled zone without permit is subject to a fine ranging between MOP300 and 1,500, if he is found guilty.

Further investigations are possible since the suspect has been referred to the Public Prosecutions Office.

In another case, a local male construction worker has been apprehended for causing damage to another driver's motorbike seat. The suspect was upset that his motorbike was blocked by the victim's vehicle.

The PSP revealed that, in the evening on February 27, a local man parked his motorbike in the inner area of a real estate on Avenida do Nordeste in the Areia Preta District. The next day, when he wanted to remove his vehicle from the location, he found his motorbike seat cut

open. He then reported the damage to the police, claiming a loss of MOP500.

Meanwhile, police reviewed footage from a nearby surveillance camera and spotted a suspect. On March 25, the suspect was invited to the police station to explain his actions.

The suspect admitted to the crime and confessed that, on the day the incident took place, he found the victim's motorbike blocking his way when he was trying to remove his own motorbike from the location. He admitted that he was enraged at being parked in, and so took out his handcraft cutter and cut open the seat of the victim's motorbike.

The case has been referred to the Public Prosecutions Office for further investigation. The police, meanwhile, have pressed charges of damage against him.

DIPLOMACY

Beijing's Afghan ambitions on show at multinational meetings

CHINA'S ambitions to have a major hand in Afghanistan's stability and development under the Taliban, while boosting its own stature, will be on display at a pair of multinational meetings it is hosting starting today [Macau time].

China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are expected to send representatives to the main meetings involving neighboring states.

A separate meeting of the "Extended Troika" will be held concurrently among special envoys for Afghanistan from China, the United States and Russia, China's Foreign Ministry said.

"China, the U.S., Russia and Pakistan are all countries with significant influence on the Afghan issue," ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said of the Troika meeting. The talks will "echo positively with the third meeting of foreign ministers of the Afghan neighboring countries, to further cement the consensus of all parties ... to help Afghanistan achieve peace, stability and development at an early date."

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met individually with his counterparts from Russia, Pakistan and Qatar on Wednesday, according to Chinese state media. Video showed Wang and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov bumping elbows in a pandemic-era handshake, but no details



Foreign Minister Wang Yi (right) stands next to Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, acting deputy prime minister of the Afghan Taliban's caretaker government, in Kabul, last week

were given.

In his meeting with Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Wang struck a defiant tone over the issue of Ukraine, over which China has been criticized for not condemning Moscow's actions and amplifying Russian disinformation.

Countries should be "especially vigilant as to the negative spillover effects" of the crisis, Wang said.

"We must not allow the Cold War mentality to resurface in Asia or allow small and medium sized countries in the region to be used as tools or sacrificial objects in the games of great powers," he said.

The foreign ministers of Qatar and Indonesia have been invited to the meeting of neighboring states as guests. Taliban-appointed

foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, will represent Afghanistan at the meeting.

Special Representative for Afghanistan Tom West will represent the U.S. at the Extended Troika talks, the State Department said. Pakistan will also attend and China is believed to have also invited Taliban representatives, the spokesperson said on routine condition of anonymity.

The group's interests are aligned on the need for the Taliban to live up to its commitments to build a truly inclusive government, not provide a safe haven for terrorism, remain stable, rebuild its economy and respect human rights, women's rights and the rights of minorities, the spokesperson said.

China hasn't recognized Afghanistan's new hard-line government but has refrained from the harsh criticism made by the U.S.

The meetings are being held in Tunxi, an ancient town in Anhui province, possibly because of the relative ease of maintaining a "bubble" separate from the general population. That would allow the attendees to avoid the 21-day coronavirus quarantine required of international travelers to the capital Beijing and other major Chinese cities.

A month before the Taliban took power, Wang hosted a high-powered delegation from the group for a July 28, 2021, meeting in the Chinese port city of Tianjin. Wang referred to the group as "pivotal" force important to peace

and reconstruction in Afghanistan.

On that and other occasions, Chinese have pushed the Taliban for assurances they will not permit operations within Afghanistan's borders by members of China's Turkic Muslim Uyghur minority intent on overthrowing Chinese rule in their native region of Xinjiang.

Wang also made a surprise stop in Kabul last week to meet Taliban leaders, even as the international community fumes over the hard-line movement's broken promise a day earlier to open schools to girls beyond the sixth grade.

China has studiously avoided mentioning the limits on girls' education and other human rights abuses, particularly those targeting women, while keeping its Kabul embassy open.

Wang's Kabul visit bore all the signs of a formal government-to-government exchange, reinforcing that the "ultimate carrot that Beijing can offer through hosting conferences like these is the prospect of the Taliban receiving diplomatic recognition from China and other neighbors," said Australia-based political risk and Asia affairs analyst Henry Storey.

China is counting on such outreach to deflect accusations from Muslim nations about its treatment of its Muslim minorities.

China's other major concern is pursuing opportunities in exploiting Afghanistan's vast, undeveloped resource deposits, especially the Mes Aynak mine that is believed to hold the world's largest copper deposit.

Successive Afghan governments have seen the country's mineral riches, estimated to be worth \$1 trillion, as the key to a prosperous future, but none have been able to develop them amid the continual war and violence. **MDT/AP**

HONG KONG

Britain to withdraw judges from top court

BRTAIN said yesterday that it is withdrawing its judges from Hong Kong's top court because keeping them there would "legitimize oppression" in the former British colony.

British judges have sat on the court since Hong Kong was returned to China in 1997. The British government's move underscores the Asian financial hub's growing isolation as the ruling Chinese Communist Party works to assert its control and silence independent voices.

While the U.K. had judges serving on the Court of Final Appeal as part of efforts to safeguard the rule of law in the city, the British



government said it was "no longer tenable" because of increasingly oppressive laws enacted by China. The two senior British judges

on the court submitted their resignations yesterday.

"The courts in Hong Kong continue to be in-

ternationally respected for their commitment to the rule of law," U.K. Supreme Court President Robert Reed said after his resignation from the Hong Kong court. "Nevertheless, I have concluded, in agreement with the government, that the judges of the Supreme Court cannot continue to sit in Hong Kong without appearing to endorse an administration which has departed from values of political freedom, and freedom of expression."

The security law prompted criticism from some Western governments and the United Nations that Beijing was ruining Hong Kong's status as a trade and

financial center by eroding the autonomy promised when the city was transferred back to China under the "one country, two systems" principle.

"We have seen a systematic erosion of liberty and democracy in Hong Kong. Since the National Security Law was imposed, authorities have cracked down on free speech, the free press and free association," British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said.

"The situation has reached a tipping point where it is no longer tenable for British judges to sit on Hong Kong's leading court, and would risk legitimizing oppression," she said.

The decision to pull British judges out after many years in Hong Kong was welcomed by British lawmakers. A senior Conservative Party member of Parliament, Tom Tugendhat, said British judges should not help empower "a legal system that is now being used to lock up Hongkongers without due process."

Conservative lawmaker Iain Duncan Smith, a longtime critic of the government in Beijing, said "the government has done the right thing here, and not a minute too soon."

"What Ukraine teaches us is that you simply cannot appease totalitarian states or make excuses for their behavior, which is exactly what the presence of our judges were doing in Hong Kong," Smith said. **MDT/AP**

PUTIN'S WAR

Russia hits near Kyiv, other city despite vows to scale back

NEBI QENA & YURAS
KARMANAU, KYIV

RUSSIAN forces pounded areas around Kyiv and another Ukrainian city overnight, local officials said yesterday, just hours after Moscow pledged to scale back military operations in those places. The shelling further tempered optimism about possible progress in talks aimed at ending the punishing war.

Russia did not spell out what exactly a reduction in activity would look like, and while the promise initially raised hopes that a path toward ending the bloody war of attrition was at hand, Ukraine's president and others cautioned that the commitments could merely be bluster.

Moscow, meanwhile, reacted coolly to Kyiv's proposed framework for a peace deal, with Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov saying it was a "positive factor" that Ukraine has submitted its written proposals but adding that he saw no breakthrough.

The British Defense Ministry said heavy losses have forced some Russian units to return to Belarus and Russia to regroup but that Moscow would likely compensate for any reduction in ground maneuvers by using mass artillery and missile barrages. And the Russian military reported a new series of missile strikes on Ukrainian arsenals and fuel depots over the past 24 hours.

As the war unleashed five weeks ago by Moscow ground on, so, too, did the fallout beyond Ukraine's borders. The United Nations said the number of refugees fleeing the country has now surpassed a staggering 4 million, while European industrial powerhouse Germany issued a warning over its natural gas supplies amid concerns that Russia could cut off deliveries unless it is paid in rubles.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy reacted with skepticism to Russia's announcement at talks in Istanbul on Tuesday that it would reduce military activity near the capital and the northern city of Chernihiv.

"We can call those signals that we hear at the negotia-

AP PHOTO



tions positive," he said in his nightly video address to the Ukrainian people. "But those signals don't silence the explosions of Russian shells."

That skepticism appeared well placed by early yesterday.

"The so-called reduction of activity in the Chernihiv region, was demonstrated by the enemy strikes including air strikes on Nizhyn, and all night long they were shelling Chernihiv," said the regional governor, Viacheslav Chaus. "Civilian infrastructure facilities, libraries, shopping centers, many houses were destroyed in Chernihiv."

Oleksandr Pavliuk, the head of the Kyiv region military administration, said yesterday that Russian shells targeted residential areas and civilian infrastructure in the Bucha, Brovary and Vyshhorod regions around the capital.

They weren't the only attacks by Moscow.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said that the military targeted fuel depots in two towns in central Ukraine with air-launched long-range cruise missiles. Russian forces also hit a Ukrainian special forces headquarters in the southern Mykolaiv region, he said, and two ammunition depots in the eastern Donetsk region.

Donetsk is in the eastern industrial heartland of Donbas, where the Russian military says it has shifted its focus. Top Russian military officials have said twice in recent days that their main goal now is the "liberation" of Donbas, where

Moscow-backed rebels have been battling Ukrainian forces since 2014.

Some analysts have suggested that the Kremlin's apparent lowering of its aims and the pledge to reduce activity around Kyiv and Chernihiv may merely reflect the reality on the ground: Its ground troops have become bogged down and taken heavy losses in their bid to seize the capital and other cities.

Still, the outlines of a possible deal to end the war came into view at the latest round of talks Tuesday in Istanbul.

Ukraine's delegation offered a detailed framework for a peace deal under which a neutral Ukraine's security would be guaranteed by a group of third countries, including the U.S., Britain, France, Turkey, China and Poland. Among other things, the Kremlin has demanded all along that Ukraine drop any hope of joining NATO.

Russian delegation head Vladimir Medinsky said negotiators would take them to Russian President Vladimir Putin and then Moscow would provide a response, but he did not say when.

Russian Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin said Moscow would in the meantime "fundamentally ... cut back military activity in the direction of Kyiv and Chernihiv" to "increase mutual trust and create conditions for further negotiations."

The talks had been expected to resume yesterday, but with what Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu called "meaningful" progress

made, the two sides decided to return home for consultations.

Despite the apparent signs of progress, Zelenskyy warned the world and his own people not to get ahead of themselves.

"Ukrainians are not naïve people," he said. "Ukrainians have already learned during the 34 days of the invasion and during the past eight years of war in the Donbas that you can trust only concrete results."

Western countries also expressed doubts about Russia's intentions.

"We judge the Russian military machine by its actions, not just its words," British Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab told Sky News. "There's obviously some skepticism that it will regroup to attack again rather than seriously engaging in diplomacy."

He added that "of course the door to diplomacy will always be left ajar, but I don't think you can trust what is coming out of the mouth of Putin's war machine."

An assessment from Britain's Ministry of Defense said that Russia's focus on the Donbas region "is likely a tacit admission that it is struggling to sustain more than one significant axis of advance."

"Russian units suffering heavy losses have been forced to return to Belarus and Russia to reorganize and re-supply," the ministry said in a statement yesterday. "Such activity is placing further pressure on Russia's already strained logistics and demonstrates the difficulties Russia is having reorganizing its units in forward areas within Ukraine."

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said the U.S. has detected small numbers of Russian ground forces moving away from the Kyiv area, but it appeared to be a repositioning of forces, "not a real withdrawal."

In response to Moscow's pledge, U.S. President Joe Biden and his secretary of state, Antony Blinken, said they would wait to see what Russia's actions are.

Blinken added that Russian indications of a pullback could be an attempt to "deceive people and deflect attention." MDT/AP

this day in history

1966 HAROLD WILSON WINS SWEEPING VICTORY



The Labour party is on course to win the general election with a majority of about 100 seats in the House of Commons.

Prime Minister Harold Wilson has hailed the result "a great victory". It is only the second time a Labour government has been voted back into power.

Across the country, the swing from Conservative to Labour was between 3% and 4%.

Labour needed 316 seats to be assured of victory and although they have not actually yet reached that figure, the trend shows the party to be well on the way to it.

Shortly after midnight, Conservative leader Edward Heath admitted his party had lost.

Speaking in his Bexley constituency in Kent, he insisted the Tories had fought the election on the right policies.

He said: "The Labour Party has been fighting on the past. We have fought on the present and the future."

Mr Wilson went into the election battle with a manifesto entitled, Time for a Decision, making his sole purpose clear - he wanted a mandate to govern.

Labour had won the 1964 election with a majority of five seats, later reduced through by-election losses to just one seat.

The Liberals have had a night of mixed successes.

No sooner had party leader Jo Grimond hailed Michael Winstanley's victory over the Tories to gain Cheadle than he heard that Roderic Bowen had lost Cardigan - and Richard Wainwright had at long last won Colne Valley from Labour.

Now Mr Wilson has a majority in the Commons some of the pressure of government will be eased.

He is expected to bring some new faces into the Cabinet. There is already a vacancy for a Lord Privy Seal after the retirement from the Commons of Sir Frank Soskice.

The country is also facing a debt of £900m, much of which has been inherited from the Tory government and which must be paid off within four years.

Inflation is continuing to rise but Mr Wilson insists Labour's prices and incomes policy is beginning to bring it into check.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The final result confirmed Harold Wilson had a majority of 96 seats.

But Labour lost popularity when it devalued the pound in November 1967, plans for trade union reform had to be shelved and France vetoed Britain's second application for membership of the European Economic Community.

Although Labour enjoyed something of a revival in 1969, Mr Wilson went on to lose the 1970 election to Edward Heath's Conservatives.

He was elected for a third term in government in March 1974 when the party scraped a working majority.

In March 1976 he surprised everyone by announcing he was resigning, just after turning 60. He was made a peer in 1983 and died in May 1995.

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Go with the flow and don't let the unsettled atmosphere get on your nerves. Find out all you can; secret enemies may lead you astray. You are best to back away from commitment.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Your bankbook will suffer and your restrictions will put a damper on your relationship. Don't confide in any relatives whom you know have a tendency to meddle in other people's affairs.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

Be considerate and avoid being overly opinionated, or arguments will ensue. Your boss won't be too thrilled if you leave things unfinished. You may be thinking of starting your own business.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Your creative input will be appreciated by your boss. This might not be a day for hasty decisions. You can accomplish a lot if you put some effort into household duties or redecorating plans.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Your main concern will be to spend as little as possible of your own cash in the process. Do not overspend on entertainment. You could find that children will be a handful.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Groups you belong to will not only enjoy your company, but they will also share your interests. Today is not the day to try to corner people by giving them ultimatums.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

If you can put some work into home improvements, you should. Your devotion will be persuasive. Your positive attitude and intellectual outlook will draw others to you.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Your obviously unique way of doing things has caught the eye of someone in a higher position. You can make career moves that will bring you a much higher income.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

There could be disappointment regarding investments. Your charm will be captivating. Don't be too eager to spend money that you really don't have.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

You can make career changes that may put you in a much higher earning bracket. Focus, and concentrate on yourself and your future. You are best to keep your money tied up in a safe and secure place.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

You need to lie back and enjoy a little rest. Don't overspend on luxury items. Involvement in financial schemes will be followed by losses.

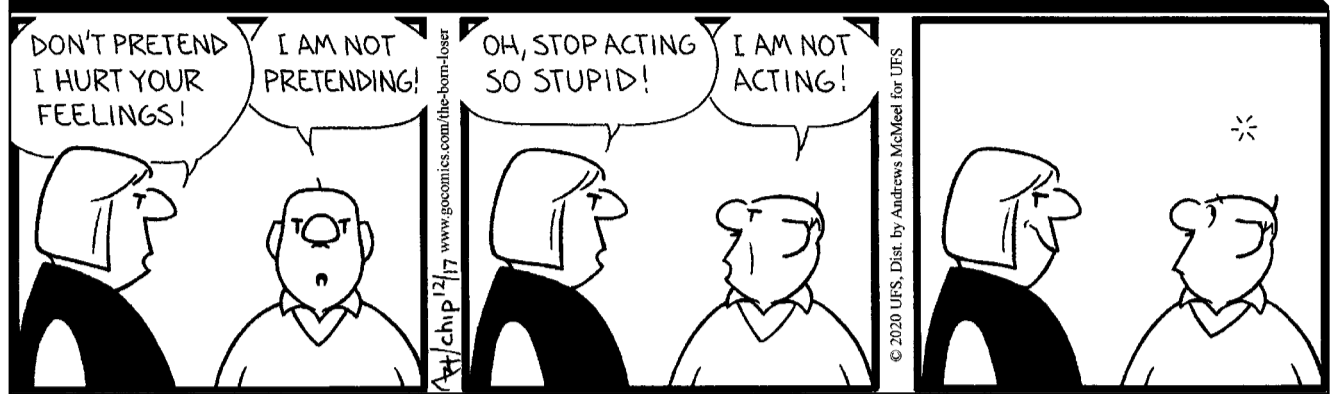


PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

A residential move may be in order. You may be in an extremely passionate mood today. Overstatement will be your downfall.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

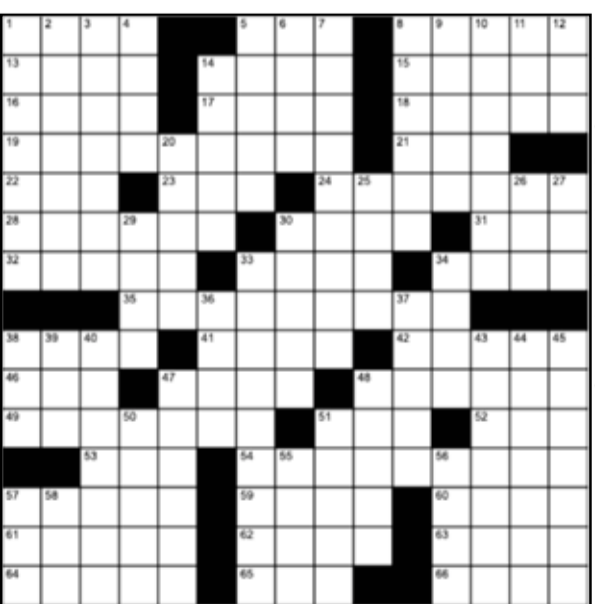
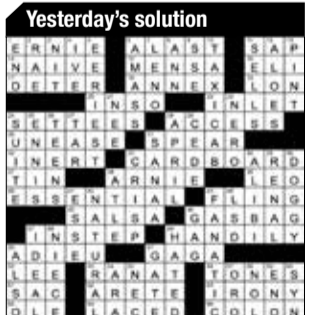
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	6	12	cloudy
Changchun	-5	6	cloudy
Chengdu	14	20	overcast
Chongqing	16	20	rain
Fuzhou	17	27	cloudy
Guangzhou	18	25	showers
Guiyang	11	15	showers
Haikou	22	27	rain
Hangzhou	13	23	cloudy
Harbin	-5	5	fine
Hefei	10	21	rain
Nanjing	10	22	rain
Shanghai	13	23	rain
Taipei	20	24	rain
Wuhan	13	21	rain
Hong Kong	20	26	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	-4	4	snow
Frankfurt	3	9	rain
Paris	1	8	showers
London	2	7	showers
New York	12	21	rain

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- With the bow, in music; 5- Grog ingredient; 8- Writer Sinclair; 13- Harvest; 14- Gag reflex?; 15- India's first prime minister; 16- City near Phoenix; 17- Weight; 18- Severe; 19- Assault; 21- Broadcast; 22- Give ___ rest; 23- Wind dir.; 24- Mimic; 28- Reformulate; 30- Secured, as victory; 31- Sunday seat; 32- Muse of lyric poetry; 33- Lawyer Dershowitz; 34- Memory unit; 35- Pertaining to the soul; 38- Gillette brand; 41- Wings; 42- Sensitive spots; 46- Bee follower; 47- Among; 48- Hidden; 49- Chief; 51- Smoking alternative; 52- Canonized Mlle.; 53- Twosome; 54- Ensure; 57- Japanese three-line verse; 59- Boris Godunov, for one; 60- 1994 Costner role; 61- Senator Specter; 62- A single time; 63- To ___ (perfectly); 64- Rendezvous; 65- Day break?; 66- Comic Fox;

DOWN 1- Movable cupboard; 2- Go in again; 3- Mandioca; 4- Iridescent gemstone; 5- Scope; 6- Nope; 7- Chew; 8- Unstated; 9- Minor, in law; 10- Treatment of disease; 11- Eight-time Norris Trophy winner; 12- "Sister Act" extra; 14- Residence; 20- Man of morals; 25- Course list?; 26- Asian holiday; 27- Farm female; 29- ___ boy; 30- Greek epic poem; 33- National U.S. cemetery; 34- Rorschach's "spill"; 36- ___ Camera; 37- Yoga posture; 38- Essen exclamation; 39- Driver's aid; 40- Willingly; 43- Say again; 44- Went in; 45- Saturated; 47- Quantity; 48- Mr. Moto portrayal; 50- Noblemen; 51- Civil rights org.; 55- Annapolis sch.; 56- At hand; 57- Haberdashery item; 58- Part of ETA;



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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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

CHINA TRIES TO LIMIT ECONOMIC BLOW OF SHANGHAI SHUTDOWN

JOE MCDONALD, BEIJING

As millions of people in Shanghai line up for coronavirus tests, authorities are promising tax refunds for shopkeepers in the closed-down metropolis and to keep the world's busiest port functioning to limit disruption to industry and trade.

This week's shutdown of most activity in China's most populous city to contain virus outbreaks jolted global financial markets that already were on edge about Russia's war on Ukraine, higher U.S. interest rates and a Chinese economic slowdown.

Yesterday, the government reported 8,825 new infections nationwide, including 7,196 in people with no symptoms. That included 5,987 cases in Shanghai, only 329 of which had symptoms.

China's case numbers in its latest infection surge are low compared with other major countries. But the



ruling Communist Party is enforcing a "zero tolerance" strategy aimed at isolating every infected person.

Some 9.1 million of Shanghai's 26 million peo-

ple had undergone virus testing by yesterday, according to health officials. They said "preventive disinfection" of apartment compounds, office buildings

and shopping malls would be carried out.

Shanghai recorded more than 20,000 cases by Monday in its latest outbreak, according to state media.

The party is trying to fine-tune its strategy to rein in job losses and other costs to the world's second-largest economy.

The Shanghai government announced tax refunds, cuts in rent and low-cost loans for small businesses. A government statement Tuesday promised to "stabilize jobs" and "optimize the business environment."

The Shanghai port stayed open and managers made extra efforts to ensure vessels "can call normally," state TV reported. The port serves the Yangtze River Delta, one of the world's busiest manufacturing regions, with thousands of makers of smartphone and auto components, appliances and other goods.

Operations at Shanghai airports and train stations were normal, according to the online news outlet The Paper. Bus service into and out of the city was suspended earlier. Visitors are required to show a negative virus test.

Abroad, the biggest potential impact on China's Asian neighbors and the rest of the world is likely to come from developments that chill demand in the world's most populous consumer market, economists said.

China is the biggest export market for all of its neighbors, including Japan and South Korea.

Economic growth already was forecast to decline from last year's 8.1% due to a government campaign to cut corporate debt and other challenges unrelated to the pandemic. The ruling party's official target is 5.5%, but forecasters say even that looks hard to reach and will require stimulus spending.

"China is the biggest single consumer of practically everything. It matters outside China," said Rob Carnell, chief Asia economist for ING. "If China's consumption is getting knocked down by COVID, it is going to be something that filters down the supply chain and affects countries in the region."

Officials are trying to defend China's role in global manufacturing supply lines by making sure goods get to customers, said Louis Kuijs, chief Asia-Pacific economist for S&P Global Ratings. He noted that after previous shutdowns, factories caught up with orders by working overtime.

"The impact on supply chains is not as big as many outside observers fear," Kuijs said. "These restrictions tend to have a larger impact on spending and the demand side in China."

The impact on Shanghai should be "relatively muted" if the city contains its outbreak as the southern

business center of Shenzhen did earlier, said Carnell.

Shenzhen, a tech and finance center of 17.5 million people, imposed a similar citywide shutdown in mid-March and reopened a week later.

Employees of financial industries can work from home, while automakers and other big manufacturers can have workers live at factories in a "closed loop system" that isolates them from contact with the outside.

General Motors Co. and Volkswagen AG said their factories in Shanghai were operating normally. GM said in an email it was carrying out "contingency plans on a global basis" with suppliers to reduce COVID-related uncertainties.

In Shanghai, thousands of stock traders and other finance employees were sleeping in their offices to avoid contact with outsiders, the newspaper Daily Economic News reported. It said the Shanghai Stock Exchange was functioning normally with a reduced staff in a "closed office."

Nearby, the riverfront Bund, Shanghai's most famous neighborhood, was quiet and empty of its usual crowds of pedestrians.

Most restaurants were only allowed to serve diners who ordered via mobile phone and waited outside to collect meals. Visitors to shopping malls were required to wear masks and register using a smartphone app.

A bigger threat to industry and trade looms if anti-disease restrictions disrupt activity at the Shanghai port. It handles the equivalent of 140,000 cargo containers a day.

"If the port is closed, there would be even more dislocation, but it's not like everything is fine now," said Carnell. "It's just yet another thing we wouldn't need."

Last year, a one-month slowdown at another major port, Yantian in Shenzhen, caused a backlog of thousands of shipping containers and sent shockwaves through global supply chains.

The shudders in financial markets might be an exaggerated "knee jerk reaction" that doesn't reflect the "true reality of the situation," but investors already were uneasy about China and the global economy, said Michael Every of Rabobank. **MDT/AP**



HOLIDAY RENTAL HOUSES

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TURISMO NO ESPAÇO RURAL

FOOTBALL

Ronaldo, Portugal among teams securing World Cup bids

ANNE M. PETERSON

PORTUGAL 2, MACEDONIA 0
POLAND 2, SWEDEN 0

CRISTIANO Ronaldo will get another shot at lifting the World Cup.

Portugal beat North Macedonia 2-0 in a European playoff on Tuesday, securing a fifth World Cup appearance for the leading men's international scorer. It was one of seven spots in soccer's premier tournament decided on the day.

Thirty-two teams, including the hosts, will play in Qatar starting Nov. 21. As of Tuesday, 27 teams had qualified with two additional spots to be determined on Wednesday. Two intercontinental playoffs will be held in June along with two games to determine the final European berth.

Portugal's win finalized the eight seeds for Friday's draw: Qatar, Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, England, France, Portugal and Spain.

Pot two will include Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland and Uruguay, and if the teams qualify Wednesday, Mexico and the United States.

All eyes were on North Macedonia, vying for its first World Cup berth after surprisingly eliminated Italy with a 1-0 victory last week. But the small country that gained independence from the former Yugoslavia in 1991 fell short. Portugal made its eighth World Cup and sixth in a row.

"Goal achieved, we are at the Qatar World Cup, we are in our rightful place! Thank you to all the Portuguese for the tireless support! Portugal strong!" Ronaldo posted to social media in Portuguese.

The World Cup trophy is the one prize that has eluded Ronaldo, a five-time Ballon



d'Or winner. While the 37-year old is a lock for his team's roster in Qatar, fellow international star Mohamed Salah will miss out after Egypt fell to Senegal on Tuesday.

Senegal advanced on a penalty shootout for one of Africa's five berths after fans shone lasers in Salah's face while he stepped up to take Egypt's first penalty kick. He blasted his attempt over the crossbar while he had green-colored lasers pointed at his face and body.

Salah's Liverpool teammate Sadio Mané struck the winning penalty after the teams drew 1-1 on aggregate, sending Senegal to its third World Cup. Mané also had the shootout winner against Egypt in the African Cup of Nations final on Feb. 6.

Ghana qualified after a 1-1 draw with Nigeria behind Thomas Partey's 10th-minute goal to advance on away goals. The Black Stars, who eliminated the U.S. in 2006 and '10, will be making their fourth World Cup appearance.

Algeria won its first leg, vying to qualify after missing out on the 2018 World Cup, but Came-

roon came back with a 2-1 victory on Tuesday on Karl Toko Ekambi's goal in the fourth minute of the second extra time period to advance on away goals. Morocco downed the Democratic Republic of the Congo 4-1 to secure its spot 5-2 on aggregate. Tunisia played to a scoreless draw with Mali and qualified with a 1-0 aggregate victory.

Robert Lewandowski converted a penalty in the 50th minute and Poland secured its second straight World Cup berth with a 2-1 victory over Sweden in another European playoff. It was Lewandowski's 75th international goal in 129 appearances.

Canada has already clinched a spot in North and Central America and the Caribbean, its first World Cup appearance in 36 years. The United States and Mexico have all but secured berths with the final round of matches set for Wednesday. The U.S. men, who missed out on the 2018 World Cup, visit Costa Rica, while Mexico will host El Salvador.

Costa Rica is currently in fourth place with a chance to go to an

intercontinental playoff against the winner of Wednesday's Oceania match between New Zealand and the Solomon Islands.

The European teams that have qualified are Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Netherlands, Serbia, Spain, Switzerland, Poland and Portugal.

Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador and Uruguay have qualified in South America. Peru defeated Paraguay 2-0 on Tuesday night for fifth place, and will compete for a berth against the winner of Asia's fifth-place playoff between Australia and the United Arab Emirates on June 7.

The Asian region teams that qualified are Iran, South Korea, Japan and Saudi Arabia.

Ukraine originally scheduled was to play Scotland in a European playoff, but the match was postponed until June because of Russia's invasion. The winner plays at Wales for Europe's final spot. **MDT/AP**

AD

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OPINION

China Daily

Editors, Xinhua

WHY MANY INFECTIONS ASYMPTOMATIC IN CHINA'S LATEST COVID-19 FLARE-UPS?

Shanghai, China's economic hub with a population of more than 24.87 million, is all geared up to deal with a flare-up of COVID-19 infections.

People who follow the daily tally of infections in the Chinese mainland are hard to miss a new trend: the overwhelming majority of new local infections are asymptomatic.

After logging four-digit figures for more than 10 days, the daily caseload of local infections showing no symptoms hit a record high of 7,090 on Tuesday, according to statistics by the National Health Commission (NHC).

A leading Chinese epidemiologist has explained why. Properties of the spreading Omicron variant, timely screenings and high vaccination rates are contributing factors to the high proportion of asymptomatic infections during the latest COVID-19 flare-up, said Zhang Boli, academician with the Chinese Academy of Engineering.

"As it becomes more contagious, the Omicron variant is less lethal," said Zhang.

But this does not mean Omicron is a virus people can take lightly, Zhang added, noting that it is still dangerous to the elderly and people living with underlying health problems among other vulnerable groups.

The NHC recently updated the protocols for diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19 patients, saying asymptomatic cases and those with mild symptoms will be treated in designated quarantine facilities instead of hospitals.

Chinese patent medicine has been used as part of a preventive treatment for asymptomatic cases, according to Zhang.

The large number of asymptomatic cases is also a result of early detection with rapid screenings, as well as mass vaccination of the population, he noted.

Latest NHC statistics showed that nearly 88 percent of the total population in the Chinese mainland had been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 by March 21 and that over 659 million had received a booster shot.

Noting that asymptomatic cases easily cause the spread of the virus by stealth, Zhang called for faster moves of epidemiological investigation and source tracing so as to stem virus transmission.

Despite recent resurgences of the epidemic in multiple locations including Shanghai, Jilin and Shenzhen, only less than 0.1 percent of the infections were in a severe or critical condition, according to the NHC.

Swift response, mass screening and large-scale vaccination, also features of China's dynamic zero-COVID policy, have ensured life and production across the country mostly unscathed over the past two-plus years.

China is still one of the countries which successfully keep COVID-19 under control. Sticking to a dynamic zero-COVID policy, the country has reined in past rounds of epidemic rebound, including that of last year in Tianjin and Xi'an, in a short period of time.

Had it not been for China's manufacturing capacity and continuous flow of commodities, shortages of goods would have bitten into essentials, nudging up retail prices and increasing inflation, thus impeding the already shaky global economic recovery.

With extensive experience in fighting the virus and an approach proven effective by reality, China is continuing putting people's lives first and sparing no efforts to put out the flare-ups as soon as possible.

UKRAINE SAYS PEACE DEAL VOTE REQUIRES PULLBACK

An adviser to Ukraine's president says that a vote sealing a prospective agreement with Russia could only be held after Russian troops pull back.

Mykhailo Podolyak said last night (Macau time) that the Russian forces must withdraw to their positions before the Feb. 24 invasion to pave the way for any peace deal to be put on a nationwide referendum.

In an online briefing, he voiced hope for a meeting soon between Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin but wouldn't say when exactly it could happen.

Podolyak took part in Tuesday's talks with Russian negotiators in Istanbul. He said a deal on multilateral security guarantees for Ukraine will be a key part of the package to be discussed.

Yesterday, the United Nations said the number of people who have fled Ukraine since Russian troops invaded has surpassed four million, as shelling continued in places where Moscow had vowed to ease its military operations.

More on p8

PORTUGAL'S NEW GOVT SEES EU AID AS FIRING UP ECONOMIC GROWTH

BARRY HATTON, LISBON

MEMBERS of Portugal's center-left Socialist Party are set to be sworn into office yesterday for the party's third straight term in government as the country prepares to start spending some 45 billion euros (\$50 billion) in European Union aid to help fire up one of the bloc's weakest economies.

The Socialists captured 120 seats in the 230-seat parliament in a landslide January election, opening a path for far-reaching reforms long postponed by political quarreling. The main opposition center-right Social Democratic Party has 77 seats.

Prime Minister António Costa, the Socialist Party leader who has led the country since 2015, promised an economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic but now faces headwinds stemming from Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Portugal, a country of around 10.3 million people, has for more than two decades been marked by low growth, low productivity and low salaries.

New challenges include



Portugal's PM António Costa (Socialist Party)

de a steep rise in the cost of living, including higher electricity and gas prices for households and businesses, in the wake of Russia's war in Ukraine.

Consumer confidence posted its second sharpest drop on record in March, the national statistics agency reported Wednesday. It also said that rental prices for accommodation jumped by more than 8% at the end of last year.

Despite the promise of more public spending, the incoming finance minister, Fernando Medina, said that keeping a firm lid on the national debt is a "fundamental priority" for the

new government, adding that the country's international credibility depended on it.

However, due to delays in holding the general election and vote-counting, the new parliament sworn in Tuesday is unlikely to pass the 2022 state budget before the end of June due to bureaucratic procedures.

The EU aid expected in coming years includes 15.3 billion euros (\$17 billion) in immediate pandemic-recovery aid and almost 30 billion euros (\$33.4 billion) as part of EU subsidies through 2027. MDT/AP

Poland announced steps yesterday to end all Russian oil imports by year's end, while Germany issued a warning about natural gas levels and called on people to conserve, new signs of how Russia's war in Ukraine has escalated tensions about securing energy supplies to power Europe. Poland, which has taken in millions of Ukrainian refugees, has taken the lead in the European Union on swiftly cutting off Russian fossil fuels.



EU warned consumers to stop using their clothes like disposable facial tissues and said yesterday that it plans to counter the polluting use of trendy fast fashion. New rules proposed by the EU's executive arm call for a mandatory minimum use of recycled fibers by 2030 and would ban the destruction of many unsold products. The European Commission rules also seek to contain the release of microplastics and improve global labor conditions in the garment industry.



El Salvador Security forces intensified operations against El Salvador's street gangs this week with mass arrests, the cordoning off of neighborhoods and house-by-house searches under a state of emergency that has raised concerns among some organizations it could open the door to human rights abuses. Rather than back down under growing criticism, President Nayib Bukele appeared ready to double down, announcing late that he had asked the president of the Congress to convene lawmakers to give him more legal tools to take on gangs.

Haitians took to the streets yesterday to protest rising insecurity, with demonstrations turning violent in the southern city of Les Cayes where people stormed the airport and attacked and burned a small plane owned by a U.S. missionary group. At least one person died and five others were injured, including four police officers, in the confrontation between protesters and authorities in Les Cayes, said Gedeon Chery, a National Police inspector assigned to the city's airport.

THE DECISIVE MOMENT

AP Photo/Rajesh Kumar Singh



People celebrate Holi, the Hindu festival of colors, in Prayagraj, in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. The festival brings out millions of people to throw powder at one another and play with water balloons and squirt guns.