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THE PILOT PROGRAM TO ALLOW ENTRY OF DOMESTIC WORKERS 'MERELY' TESTS MACAU'S CAPABILITY AMID THE CURRENT PANDEMIC: HEALTH BUREAU

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FUTURE BRIGHT GROUP CLOSED 12 F&B OUTLETS LAST YEAR

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RUSSIA-UKRAINE XI URGES TALKS TO SETTLE DISPUTES, OPPOSES SANCTIONS

▲ P7



AP PHOTO



Indonesia Hundreds of protesters, mostly students, took to the streets yesterday in Jakarta, voicing concern over rumors that the government is considering postponing the 2024 presidential election to allow President Joko Widodo to remain in office beyond the two-term legal limit, calling it a threat to the country's democracy. The demonstrators also railed against soaring food and oil prices, a controversial job law and the targeting of activists who oppose government policies.

AP PHOTO



Japan New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern is in Japan as part of her first trip abroad in more than two years, as her government seeks to promote the country's reopening for business and tourism following a pandemic-related border closure, while Japan wants to focus on mutual security concerns, including China's new alliance with the Solomon Islands. Ardern arrived in Japan late Wednesday after her three-day visit in Singapore, where her talks with leaders focused on the economy and bilateral cooperation on climate change and adopting low-carbon and green technologies.

AP PHOTO



India British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is trying to set aside his political troubles and focus on economic ties and the war in Ukraine during a long-delayed official trip to India. Johnson landed in the western state of Gujarat yesterday, kicking off a two-day visit that will see him meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi today.

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RUBY O, IC2

MORE REGULATIONS NEEDED TO TACKLE CITY'S FOOD WASTE

▲ P2



Ruby O



IC2 members

IC2'S WORLD EARTH DAY

MORE REGULATIONS NEEDED TO TACKLE CITY'S FOOD WASTE: ASSOCIATION

LYNZY VALLES

As part of this year's celebration of World Earth Day, the city's only non-profit organization comprised of people with disabilities is hosting a series of events addressing the concept of an inclusive, low-carbon and sustainable lifestyle in the Greater Bay Area.

The Macau IC2 Association looks to help others by serving society with a spirit of inclusiveness.

This year, as part of its World Earth Day commemoration, members of the association will run events of various kinds, from workshops to environmental talks.

Recently, IC2 invited a food and environmental advocate, Ruby O, to share her perspective on the importance of valuing food and heeding the central government's call to take part in the Clean Plate campaign – a movement initiated in 2013 to reduce food waste and ensure food security in China.

For O, founder and chairperson of the Society of Food & Environmental Health (Macao), the move also plays a crucial factor in achieving the goal of low carbon by 2030.

In Macau – dubbed the world's center of tourism and leisure – there is an important price to pay for keeping up with international standards, and at the same time, reducing Macau's carbon footprint and food waste.

Speaking to the Times, O shared her thoughts on Macau's status in relation to these measures, how large integrated resorts are crucial in the movement and how individuals

can cooperate in boosting awareness on valuing food and reducing food waste.

O will further share an overview of sustainability practices in the Greater Bay Area and Macau tomorrow at Artyzen Grand Lapa as part of IC2's final activity for World Earth Day.

Macau Daily Times (MDT) – Tell us about your partnership with IC2? What are we targeting?

Ruby O (RO) – We have a lot of common values with IC2, as I've learned. My association [is focused on a] food upcycling project and building awareness in the public about how we should treasure food because it has a lot of value – from its agriculture [to] how it's harvested.

MDT – The fact that Macau is considered as one of the richest cities, does that play a role in downplaying food waste among individuals?

RO – Unfortunately, due to the segments of supply chain, Macau is relatively wealthy and with the way we live, I feel like we are detached from the reality about [what] food really means to people. [...] I work in an integrated resort, so from day to day I see a lot of potential food resources that could be better utilized. Part of it is due to the operational demand, but at the same time, consumers are thinking, 'this is none of our business' [...] but both producers and consumers have roles and [a] responsibility [to reduce food waste].

I hope to empower consumers

because at the end of the day, we are all consumers. We can make more [of an] impact and drastic change from the existing irresponsible production and consumption. It also creates a lot of waste problems in the city. We can't just do recycling and just incinerate [and] call it a solution.

It's about telling the story of how food is important, therefore people should value the people who grow and harvest it, as well as learn how to manage one own's waste.

MDT – Plastic waste also has a lot to do with the food industry and system. But how can we better meet standards and regulations for food safety without this waste?

RO – Almost half of plastic waste in the world is coming from the food industry for packaging; straws, cling film and Styrofoam.

Those things are necessary for the protection of food because, logistics-wise, without these, protection and food safety concerns [it could] create another issue of insufficient food supply.

I think we are lacking in regulation and proper information for the consumer to judge. In schools, we seldom speak about these things. We focus too much on science but [not] common sense: on what to eat, what is nutritional food, what are the consequences of our food choices – these have a lot to do with [helping save the environment].

I really want empower people to make sound choices to really understand what is good – to show

more kindness and concern; and this whole thing is linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG).

MDT – Can you see Macau being aligned to these goals?

RO – How come the UNSDG touch every single human being, but Macau seems to be disconnected?

It has been there years but it seems that we are completely out of the loop. In day-to-day conversation, I try to speak about this and they think this is too academic and ask what [it has] to do with Macau. But that has to do with all humankind – from the public to the private sector.

We [should] link those criteria and values together so that the local impact can translate into the goal. At the end of the day, it's about making a positive impact by changing people's behavior.

Producers put a lot of effort and professionalism [into making] sure [food is] safe and has quality. However, this kind of value is being lost when it arrives to the consumer. People judge the products by [their] appearance and taste from a manipulated marketing angle. We tend to take things for granted.

MDT – Are these consequences of Macau's status as a tourism leisure city?

RO – It's a force from multiple angles. One is on the changes in hospitality: the global trends. The Asia's 50 best, the World's 50 Best, and all these international assess-

ments. They are, [however], adding sustainability elements to it. Even Michelin has a subcategory such as the Green Star. We can see multiple forces and platforms and requirements are changing to adapt to the new generation of customers, who are usually framed as 'educated, experienced, young travelers.' These travelers know what they want because they traveled more, especially China's new generation. It has changed.

The other strong force is from the central government. Since last year, the president mentioned that we should not be wasteful with food. There's even a regulation on food wastage. This is an alarm bell that food industry and people should stop wasting food and be responsible.

MDT – The lifestyle in Macau is more affluent. We can see diners who opt not to take away excess food. With this ease of access, along with subsidies, are these huge factors contributing to food waste?

RO – People are so addicted to a nice lifestyle and imported foods rather than spending time to really learn what good food means. [...] I think it's a good time to change. Economically, it's not as good as before. People are more concerned with money that they spend on relative necessities. Even the food industry is adjusting their menu to be more stable. Because [...] food costs are more expensive due to logistics costs. I think it's a good time to learn - how to maintain a restaurant in a more sustainable way – both operationally and [consumer-wise].

MDT – Integrated resorts have been hosting a Clean Plate Challenge as part of their corporate social responsibility. Is this paying off, whether on a small or large scale?

RO – I believe it's a journey. It really starts with operations, because that's the mainstream of waste. Large corporations are trying hard to adjust and educate people, but again, it's a melting pot of different cultures, background and education.

It's good to have a target, like China, that has a very clear carbon target. Do we want to adjust in terms of food waste, or energy or from the operational angle, or align with stakeholders to create bigger impact?

Macau Daily Times is the principal media partner of the event.

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Times

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PROPERTY

Centaline: Premium residential units see new lows in pricing

ANTHONY LAM

A regional real property agency observed that prices of local premium residential units have recently experienced a new low.

In the statement, Centaline Property recapped that a relatively large 3,000-square-foot residential unit located within the One Grantai estate had seen a new 10-year low. The price has dropped to about HKD5,500 per square foot, a figure that is about 40% of 2007's market price.

Lo Chon Meng, the realtor's director for Taipa premium region's operations, added in the statement that a recent transaction concerning a two-bedroom apartment in the Nova Taipa Gardens was concluded with a price tag of HKD6.8 million, which was about 15% short of its pre-Covid price level.

The executive realtor explained that the drop was mainly caused by a loss of purchasing power and confidence due to the



lay-off of a significant number of gambling industry workers.

Despite this fact, he expected the second half of the year to have an "improved atmosphere" as many sellers are willing to lower their selling prices, even if their properties are in good condition and relatively new.

He also remarked that many local families had been considering purchasing apartments. They are in the lease market cur-

rently and waiting for their correct moment to close the deals.

With that said, his forecast was that the average price of residential properties would likely see an increase up to 5%.

Echoing Lo's comment on the lack of purchasing confidence was Oliver Tong, general manager at JLL Macau, who called on the government to ease real property price control measures in the hopes of stabilizing the market,

according to a report by local Chinese newspaper Macao Daily News.

Tong said that cash flow has lately suffered among both businesses and individual residents, making the situation worse than that of two years ago. He suggested that the government lift the price cap for first-time subsidies for youth buyers so as to allow the market to develop in a healthy manner.

NEW RECYCLABLE COLLECTION POINT TO BE OPENED IN MONG-HA

The social housing estate in Mong-ha's new recyclable collection point, operated by the Environmental Protection Bureau, will start operations today. Open to all members of the public, the venue will have the city's first public-use kitchen waste collection machine, in addition to collection machines that handle other recyclables, which will operate 24 hours per day. The new venue will have an area for automated recyclable weighing and collection. This new venue in Mong-ha is the city's seventh of its kind, with the other six located in Seac Pai Van, Ilha Verde, T'oi-san, Iao Hon, Praia do Manduco and Taipa.

BUS STOP IN CHEOC VAN TO BE SUSPENDED TILL END-APRIL

From 9 a.m. today to April 30, the bus stop named Cheoc Van Barbecue Park - 2 will be suspended to facilitate work on the sidewalk as well as lighting maintenance work. Bus passengers can walk about 140 meters in the direction of the Oscar Farm to gain access to other bus services. Bus routes numbered 15, 21A and 26A will retain their normal operations. Due to the public work project, a lane on the road will be suspended too, with provisional traffic signals to be in operations. Certain parking meters will also be suspended from April 30 until May 3.

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FORUM MACAO

928 CHALLENGE TO RETURN THIS YEAR WITH MORE PARTNERS AND ENTITIES

RENATO MARQUES

AFTER being established last year, the 928 Challenge – a start-up competition dedicated to bringing together university students from China and Portuguese-speaking countries – will return this year with more partners, as well as the involvement of more university institutions.

This year, the competition is again co-organized by the Permanent Secretariat of the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries – Macao (Forum Macao), City University of Macau (CityU), Shenzhen University, and the United Nations University Institute in Macau.

Joining for the first time this year is the University of Macau, Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST), University of Saint Joseph (USJ), the Macau Institute for Tourism Studies (IFTM), the Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, the Guangdong Polytechnic Normal University, and the Rio de Janeiro State University, organizers announced in a press conference held yesterday.

Organizers have also announced that, this year, the competition will operate according to a different structure, with two different tracks: one dedicated to universities and another open to the participation of companies. Organizers expect this change to attract even greater participation.

At the opening speech, Forum Macao's deputy secretary-general Ambassador Paulo Jorge Espírito Santo noted that the competition is very important, which is the reason why Forum Macao has su-



RENATO MARQUES

ported it since the start.

“Coming from the universities this is obviously an academic work, but it is far more than that,” Espírito Santo said, noting that the practicality of the work and the start-up proposals from students aim to solve real problems through creative solutions that can create even further links between Macau, Portuguese-speaking countries and China.

As one of the event coordinators, José Alves representing CityU added, “The 928 Challenge is a collective effort by three stakeholders including academia, the business sector, and the government,” explaining that the three must work together to share ideas and resources to meet the expectations that China and Portuguese-speaking countries have concerning Macau and its platform role.

“The platform is possible! With the essential generosity and support from the sponsors, our initiative proves that the Macau platform can count on the academia,” Alves remarked, noting also that following last year's good experience and results, the success of outcomes for this year “will be very high.”

Alves also noted that the 928 Challenge attempts to overcome the challenges created by what he called the “three distances,” the geographical distance between the participants, the cultural distance between different people, and the distance between the different degrees of development of each country and region participating in the competition.

As explained in the first competition held in 2021, the name “928” represents the nine cities

from the Greater Bay Area, the two special administrative regions of Macau and Hong Kong, and the eight Portuguese-speaking countries that will be represented in the competition.

As with last year's competition, the participants will take part in a two-week Bootcamp to gain insight into the business environment and opportunities in China and Portuguese-speaking countries.

Representing USJ, one of the newly added partners to the competition, Alexandre Lobo, Head of the Department of Business Administration and Coordinator for Research from the Faculty of Business and Law, said that the participation of the university in this year's competition comes with the fact that the challenge is “aligned with our university's

development plan and we expect to contribute to its success.” Lobo added that the university is currently creating an incubator to attract startups from the Greater Bay Area and Portuguese-speaking countries interested in knowing and exploring business in both markets.

Also representing one of the new partners to the event, Max Zhou from the IFTM noted the university's interest, explaining that at the start of this year, the IFTM created a brand-new laboratory to unleash the entrepreneurial spirit of its students and alumni to integrate technology and tourism industry.

This year's competition also counts a higher number of sponsors, growing from the seven last year to a total of 12 this year, including Galaxy Entertainment Group, ISA Tantek, Alibaba Cloud, Banco Nacional Ultramarino, Fidelidade Seguros, CESL Asia, CEM, Millenium BCP bank, MdME law firm, Moxlink, KJN Investments, and C&C Lawyers.

REGISTRATION STARTS IN JUNE

Team registration for the 2022 edition of 928 Challenge is set to open in June. Teams will then take part in a two-week Bootcamp in which teams must create sustainability-oriented business plans.

Following the model initially planned for last year's edition, the best startup projects will earn a spot presenting to the jury and a group of potential investors at the final event, scheduled to take place on October 29, during the Macao International Trade and Investment Fair.

In the first edition, 153 teams enrolled close to 800 university students, who produced a total of 89 projects.

With this year's extension of the competition to companies, organizers forecast that the number of participants might double to a total of around 1,600.

BUSINESS

Future Bright Group closed 12 F&B establishments in 2021

RENATO MARQUES

MAJOR Food and Beverage (F&B) operator Future Bright Group has reportedly closed a total of 12 food and beverage establishments in 2021, 11 of which were in Macau.

According to the company's annual report filed to the Stock Exchange of Hong Kong (HKEX), last year, the group closed seven restaurants, one coffee shop and three food court counters in Macau, as well as one food court counter in Hong Kong. In the report, the chairman of the com-

pany, Johnny Chan See Kit, attributed the closures to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The company, which has a significant presence in Macau and is part-owned by lawmaker Chan Chak Mo, has also reported a loss attributable to shareholders of some HKD72.9 million, a figure that still represented a decrease of some 39.7% when compared to the 2020 results.

According to the detailed information, the total loss of HKD72.9 million is mainly attributable to the Group's food souvenir busi-

ness (HKD8.9 million). The group's food and catering business recorded losses of HKD57.5 million which included losses related to the closure of restaurant venues.

Among the F&B establishments closed in 2021 are venues at The Venetian (4), The Parisian (2), and Hotel Lisboa (1). A big slice of the closures also came from the University of Macau, which registered four closures, including a student canteen.

The group also reported the 2021 closure of three food souvenir kiosks under the Yeng Kee Bakery brand.

The same report also noted that the group has already scheduled several other closures of F&B venues in April and May this year in Macau, Hong Kong, and Zhuhai.

As for new openings, the group said it is planning to open a casual Cantonese restaurant in Macau in the first half of 2022, as well as three food court counters at Lisboaeta Macau, the last of which had its opening postponed to “the later part of 2022” or even later, as “management will assess the timing in view of the Covid-19 pandemic situation.”





COVID-19

Pilot domestic helper program aims at testing automated system

ANTHONY LAM

THE pilot program to allow the entry of Philippine domestic workers merely tests Macau's capability amid the current pandemic, public health doctor Leong Iek Hou of the Macau government said yesterday.

The medical practitioner, who is also division head for prevention and control of infectious diseases at the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), made the remark at the weekly health press briefing yesterday afternoon.

She was questioned about the existence of a meltdown mechanism to automatically suspend the pilot program.

The pilot program was annou-

nced last week to facilitate local residents' applications for domestic workers from outside of Greater China. The first partner location is the Philippines.

In response to the question, Leong said that the program aims at testing the automated application platform, which could likely shortlist eligible applications without human support or intervention.

It will additionally be used to test whether allowing non-resident entrants would pose intensified risks to the city, such as a soaring number of cases of Covid-19. The pilot program will also gauge whether a meltdown mechanism would be required in the program itself.

Leong said that many parties are involved in the pilot program – equating to a large amount of

correspondence – so more time is required to finalize information and details.

She added that the document stating the information related to filing an application was uploaded to the government's Covid-19 website as the press conference was in progress.

She insisted that, for the time being, the government was still aiming for April 25, the coming Monday, as the launch date for the pilot program's application process.

Details seemed not to be fully finalized as of yesterday. The panel of officials was asked whether there would be a specific quarantine hotel for entrants through this pilot program, to which Lau Fong Chi, department head for communications and external re-

lations of the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO), which is responsible for negotiations with hotels, said that discussions would be made with partner government entities and hotels to identify which hotels would be appropriate.

The panel of officials was later challenged by a journalist who, citing the application document, said that the government requires all entrants through the pilot program to stay in "(a) designated hotel(s)".

The journalist questioned the tourism official as to whether the Treasure Hotel is the designated hotel, as it is now hosting returnees from outside Greater China.

Leong clarified that the term "(a) designated hotel(s)" is used to refer to any hotel properties

permitted by the Health Bureau (SSM) to be used to host entrants through the pilot program, suggesting that it does not refer to any single hotel.

According to the government's announcement last week, the applicants for Philippine domestic workers will be expected to bear the cost for the quarantine hotel stay and, if they test positive for SARS-CoV-2, medical services.

The government has not yet made up its mind on how long the Philippine entrants will be required to stay in quarantine, as Lau said the costs for quarantine hotel will depend on how long the SSM will require them to stay.

VACCINATION NEEDED FOR DSEDJ SUMMER ACTIVITIES

Luís Gomes, acting department head for non-tertiary education at the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ), announced to the press briefing that, from July this year, all participants in the government Summer Activities program and workshops held at DSEDJ's activity centers will have to be fully vaccinated, be that two or three doses.

If participants are not fully vaccinated, they must present a SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test result valid for within the previous seven days.

The requirement extends to accompanying individuals, such as parents.

Many younger children are escorted to these activities by their retired grandparents, who mostly come from the age groups with which the government is not satisfied in terms of vaccination rates.

Echoing the suggestion of Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao Leong U, on mandatory vaccination for student sporting competitions, Gomes announced yesterday that the requirement would apply to applications for such competitions. Further information will be released in September.

Gomes hinted that the requirement would not likely cause trouble, as most students are now jabbed with at least one dose of the vaccine.

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COVID-19

HONG KONG DISNEY OPENS AS COVID EASES; SHANGHAI DEATHS RISE

ZEN SOO
& KEN MORITSUGU, BEIJING

HONG Kong relaxed pandemic restrictions yesterday, with Disneyland and museums reopening and night time restaurant dining resuming as the city's worst COVID-19 outbreak appears to be fading.

Enthusiastic visitors ran into Disneyland the moment the gates opened after a three-month closure.

Popular theme parks were ordered to close in January as Hong Kong's fifth wave of the coronavirus took hold. Nearly 1.2 million people in the city of 7.4 million were infected in less than four months, and nearly 9,000 have died.

"Since Christmas we haven't been back here, my daughter's really happy, she's been waiting so long," said Joyce Mak, 36, who brought her young daughter to Disneyland. "Last night she was so excited, she didn't want to go to sleep."

The city was caught off-guard as the surge, driven by highly transmissible omicron variant, overwhelmed hospitals. At the peak of the outbreak, bodies had to be stored in refrigerated containers because mortuaries couldn't cope.

The easing of restrictions came after officials acknowledged that people were getting frustrated with the measures, and that there must be a balance between fighting the epidemic and resumption of normal activities.

The relaxation of measures before Hong Kong has reached



zero COVID-19 cases marks a shift from the city's earlier strategy, which was aligned with mainland China's zero-tolerance for any outbreaks. Previously, authorities were reluctant to ease measures until it was clear that outbreaks in the city were stamped out.

A 15-year-old student, Cynthia Cheung, said Disneyland was her "happiest place."

"It's been such a long time since coming here, last time was in December," she said. "I really missed it."

Theme parks are currently allowed to operate at 50% capacity, and visitors must show proof of vaccination. Disney employees held up signs reminding people to keep social distance.

In mainland China, the death toll rose to 25 in an outbreak in Shanghai that has all but shut down the country's largest city. Health authorities said that eight more people had died in the previous day. The relatively low number of reported deaths highlights China's use of much narrower criteria than the rest of

the world for its pandemic statistics.

Shanghai has eased the lockdown somewhat in areas that have not reported new cases in seven to 14 days, allowing residents out of their homes but still restricting them to their compounds or neighborhoods. Some said on social media that they dare not venture out anyway, wary of entering nearby areas that have had recent cases.

Officials said this week that 12.3 million people in the city of 25 million are now in "control"

or "prevention" areas, which are less restrictive than lockdown zones in a three-tier system. That is 4 million more than 10 days ago, they said.

However, one of the city's 16 districts announced yesterday that no residents would be allowed to leave their compounds. The Jing'an district in central Shanghai said that even those in prevention areas, the least restrictive zone, would no longer be able to venture into the surrounding neighborhood.

The city reported 18,495 new local cases yesterday, including 15,861 without symptoms.

In eastern Shanghai, some residents were ordered to leave their homes while health workers carried out a large-scale disinfection following a spike in infections, according to news reports and social media posts.

It wasn't clear how many people in Beicai town were affected. The area's population is nearly 300,000. Phone calls to the municipal government weren't answered. Photos published by The Paper, an online news outlet, showed workers in hooded, white protective suits spraying disinfectant in homes.

In Hong Kong, a semi-autonomous Chinese region, attractions such as Ocean Park and M+ museum reopened. Gyms, beauty salons and massage parlors were also allowed to resume business. Customers must have at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine and scan a QR code upon entry for contact-tracing purposes.

Restaurants, which had been barred from providing dine-in service after 6 p.m., can reopen in the evening, although each table is capped at four guests.

Hong Kong reported 603 locally spread infections yesterday, down more than 99% from the peak of more than 30,000 in March. **MDT/AP**

CRIME

CHINESE MAN GETS 20 YEARS IN RWANDA FOR WHIPPING A LOCAL MAN

A court in Rwanda sentenced a Chinese businessman to 20 years in prison for torture after he was filmed beating a local man last year.

Sun Shujun had been accused of beating his workers in a case that drew attention because he was filmed whipping a man tethered to a pole on the ground.

A Rwandan man, Renzaho Alexis, was sentenced to 12 years for his alleged role as an accomplice in

the beatings.

The Chinese embassy in Rwanda acknowledged Tuesday's verdict in a statement Wednesday urging Chinese citizens living in Rwanda to abide by local laws.

"Meanwhile, the embassy calls for the case to be handled appropriately in a rational, fair and just manner and requests the legitimate rights of the Chinese citizens to be properly protected," the statement said.

Shujun's victims are reported to have been former workers at a mine he operated in the rural Rutshiro district. They had been reportedly accused of theft.

He was arrested after the video of him beating a man, including on the head, was widely shared in August. He was later released on bail.

Rwanda courts spokesman Harrison Mutabazi said the convict has a right to appeal to a higher court. **MDT/AP**

SANCTIONS

REPORT: CHINESE CREDIT CARD PROCESSOR REBUFFS RUSSIAN BANKS

CHINA'S credit card processor has refused to work with banks in Russia for fear of being targeted by sanctions over its war on Ukraine, cutting off a possible alternative after Visa and Mastercard stopped serving them, according to the Russian news outlet RBC.

UnionPay's decision affects Sberbank, Russia's biggest commercial bank, and smaller institutions, RBC reported yesterday [Macau time]. It cited five

unidentified sources in large Russian banks.

Mastercard and Visa suspended operations in Russia after the United States and other governments imposed trade and financial sanctions on President Vladimir Putin's government for its attack on Ukraine.

Sberbank and another institution, Tinkoff Bank, announced they were looking at switching to UnionPay, which is operated by Chinese state-

-owned banks. UnionPay is one of the biggest global payments processors but does almost all its business in China.

American officials have warned that governments or companies that try to undermine sanctions will face consequences. RBC said UnionPay wanted to avoid such "secondary sanctions."

Other banks cited by RBC include Alfa Bank, VTB, Otkrytie and Promsvyazbank. **MDT/AP**

ADVERTORIAL

SANDS CHINA NEWS

We Create: Sands China drives diversification

Sands China continues to strive to nurture industries to boost economic diversification amid the heavy blows dealt by the pandemic on the economy.

Rooted in Macau, Sands China aims to promote the synergistic development of non-gaming elements and the advancement economic diversification – a common goal that all sectors of the Macau community are working together to achieve.

As the government accelerates the “Tourism+” concept, Sands China seeks to lend its support by utilizing its non-gaming facilities – the largest-scale of such facilities in Macau – including 12,000 hotel rooms, MICE space, retail space, entertainment venues, diverse food and beverage outlets and options, and family-friendly leisure facilities.

Sands China is heeding the call to actively cultivate industries suitable for Macau. In doing so, the integrated resort operator has dynamically extended its effort to help attract the ever-expanding middle-class market, extend visitors' length of stay, stimulate consumer spending, and promote the development of family and MICE tourism.

The move is in line with the government's push to develop Macau into a world centre of tourism and leisure, as well as its recent strategic plan to promote “Tourism+.”

MICE

- 12-fold increase of Macau's MICE space since 2005
- Hosted 2 million MICE attendees, compared to Macau's 38,000 in 2002 – a 53-fold increase
- Attracted meetings from multinational giants Herbalife, Jeunesse Global, and Tupperware

Retail

- 2006 Macau retail space: 27,800 sqm. 2007 opening of The Venetian Macao quadrupled that number
- Current Macau retail space: 460,000 sqm, with Sands China offering largest offering in city

Entertainment

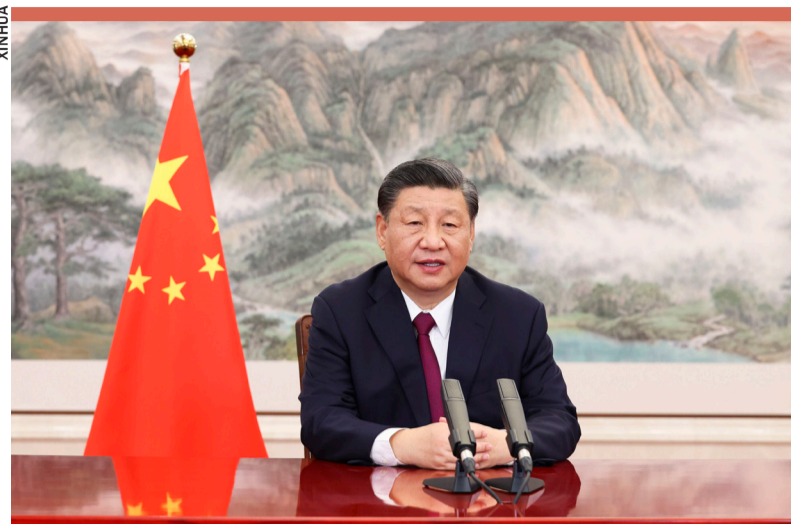
- Six arenas and theatres: 20,000+ seats
- Cotai Arena has hosted superstars Rolling Stones, Lady Gaga, Big Bang, Jacky Cheung, Eason Chan, and many more
- 4.6 million attendees and over 610 performances since 2007

Arts and culture

- IIFA Awards, Asian Film Awards, Huading Awards, and more
- Support to Art Macao with two ceramics exhibitions by Caroline Cheng
- Venue sponsorship for Macao International Music Festival and the Macao Art Festival
- Opening of Sands Gallery in 2022

Sports tourism

- Manny Pacquiao v. Zou Shiming (boxing), tennis, basketball, football, golf, 2021 Sands China Macao International 10K Run, and many others



President Xi Jinping delivers a speech via video link to the opening ceremony of the Boao Forum For Asia

RUSSIA-UKRAINE

Xi urges talks to settle disputes, opposes sanctions

CHINESE leader Xi Jinping yesterday said his government supports talks to resolve international disputes and opposes “wanton use” of sanctions.

Xi's remarks confirm that China is sticking to its stance of refusing to criticize Russia's invasion of Ukraine despite the conflict's toll on the Ukrainian population and global security.

Beijing has refused to call the conflict an invasion and said Russia was provoked by NATO's expansion.

Despite that, Xi said China remains “committed to respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries” and non-interference in their internal affairs.

“We stay committed to peacefully resolving differences and disputes between countries through dialogue and consultation, support all efforts conducive to the peaceful settlement of crises, reject double standards, and oppose the wanton use of unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction,” Xi said in a televised address to an international forum in the southern island province of Hainan.

China has abstained or voted with Russia on recent proposals brought before the United Nations, and China's state-controlled media have amplified Russian disinformation about Ukraine staging attacks and producing biological weapons with U.S. cooperation.

Xi met with Putin in Beijing less than a month before Russia launched its Feb. 24 invasion, with the two sides issuing a joint statement affirming their “no limits” relationship.

China has maintained its su-

pport for Moscow despite possible war crimes committed by Russian troops and says it maintains normal economic ties between the countries despite the imposition of economic sanctions by other nations.

China is also believed to be studying the Ukraine crisis for how it might later affect its policy toward Taiwan, the self-governing island democracy it threatens to invade to bring it under its own control. Taiwan and China split during a civil war in 1949, but China claims the island as its own territory.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Wednesday spoke with his Chinese counterpart for the first time since becoming Pentagon chief more than a year ago, breaking a communications impasse that American officials saw as increasingly dangerous.

Austin, who calls China the U.S. military's leading long-term challenge but has been forced to focus heavily on Russia this year, requested the telephone conversation with Gen. Wei Fenghe after months of failed efforts to speak with Gen. Xu Qiliang, the highest ranking uniformed officer in the Communist Party military structure.

At a daily briefing yesterday, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said China has “always opposed unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction that lack a basis in international law and are not authorized by the (United Nations) Security Council.”

“Sanctions are not the right way to de-escalate tensions, end wars or avoid casualties, but will only exacerbate conflicts, increase spillover and make the world pay more,” Wang said. MDT/AP



Servicemen of the Donetsk People's Republic militia look at bodies of Ukrainian soldiers placed in plastic bags in a tunnel in an area controlled by Russian-backed separatist forces in Mariupol

PUTIN'S WAR

Russian leader tries to claim Mariupol win but won't storm holdout

ADAM SCHRECK, KYIV

RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin tried to claim victory in the strategic port of Mariupol yesterday, even as he ordered his troops not to storm the last pocket of Ukrainian resistance in the war's iconic battleground.

Russian troops have besieged the southeastern city since the early days of the conflict and largely pulverized it — and top officials have repeatedly indicated it was about to fall, but Ukrainian forces stubbornly held on. In recent weeks, they holed up in a sprawling steel plant, and Russian forces pounded the industrial site and repeatedly issued ultimatums ordering the defenders to surrender.

"The completion of combat work to liberate Mariupol is a success," Putin said. "Putting such an important center in the south as Mariupol under control is a success."

But the Russian leader said that, for now, he would not risk sending troops into the warren of tunnels under the giant Azovstal plant, instead preferring to isolate the holdouts who have captivated the world's attention "so that not even a fly comes through." His defense minister said the plant was blocked off, while giving yet another prediction that the site could be taken in days.

Putin's order may mean that Russian officials are hoping they can wait for the defenders to surrender after

running out of food or ammunition. Bombings of the plant could well continue.

Even though Putin painted the mission to take Mariupol already a success and said the city had been "liberated," until the plant falls, he cannot declare a complete victory.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said about 2,000 Ukrainian troops remained in the plant, which has a labyrinth of tunnels and bunkers that spread out across about 11 square kilometers. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that about 1,000 civilians were also trapped there.

Russian-backed separatists in the area previously seemed bent on taking every last inch of the city, which has seen some of the most dramatic fighting of the war and whose capture has both strategic and symbolic importance.

The scale of suffering in the city on the Azov Sea has made it a worldwide focal point, and its definitive fall would deprive Ukraine of a vital port, complete a land bridge between Russia and the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow seized in 2014, and free up Russian troops to move elsewhere in the Donbas.

Russian officials now say capturing the Donbas, Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland, is the war's main goal. This week, Moscow's forces opened a new phase of the war, in a deadly drive along a front from the northeastern city of Kharkiv to the Azov Sea.

Detaching the region from the rest of Ukraine would give Putin a badly needed victory two months into the war, after the botched attempt to storm the capital, Kyiv, and amid mounting Russian losses.

Britain's Defense Ministry said that Russia likely wants to demonstrate significant successes ahead of Victory Day on May 9, the proudest moment on the annual calendar marking its critical role in winning World War II.

"This could affect how quickly and forcefully they attempt to conduct operations in the run-up to this date," the ministry said.

Retired British Rear Admiral Chris Parry described Putin's remarks as reflecting a change in "operational approach" as Russia tries to learn from its failures in the eight-week conflict, which turned from initial hopes of a lightning fast invasion of a neighbor into a war of attrition with ever mounting casualties and costs.

"It seems to me that the Russian agenda now is not to capture these really difficult places where the Ukrainians can hold out in the urban centers, but to try and capture territory and also to encircle the Ukrainian forces and declare a huge victory," Parry said.

In the meantime, Western powers are doubling down on their support of Ukraine, moving to push more military hardware in, heightening geopolitical stakes.

The latest in a long line of Western leaders venturing

to Kyiv, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said yesterday: "One of the most important messages today is that Denmark is considering sending more weapons. That is what is needed."

Several Western officials have promised similar in recent days.

With global tensions running high, Russia reported the first successful test launch of a new type of intercontinental ballistic missile, the Sarmat, on Wednesday. Putin boasted that it can overcome any missile defense system and make those who threaten Russia "think twice." The head of the Russian state aerospace agency called the launch out of northern Russia "a present to NATO."

The Pentagon described the test as "routine" and said it wasn't considered a threat.

On the battlefield, Ukraine said Moscow continued to mount assaults across the east, probing for weak points in Ukrainian defensive lines. Russia said it launched hundreds of missile and air attacks on targets that included concentrations of troops and vehicles.

The Kremlin's stated goal is the capture of the Donbas, the mostly Russian-speaking eastern region that is home to coal mines, metal plants and heavy-equipment factories.

In a video address, Zelenskyy said the Russians were not "abandoning their attempts to score at least some victory by launching a new, large-scale offensive."

The Luhansk governor said Russian forces control 80% of his region, which is one of two that make up the Donbas. Before Russia invaded on Feb. 24, the Kyiv government controlled 60% of the Luhansk region.

Analysts have said the offensive in the east could become a war of attrition as Russia faces Ukraine's most experienced, battle-hardened troops, who have fought pro-Moscow separatists in the Donbas for eight years.

Russia said it presented Ukraine with a draft document outlining its demands for ending the conflict — days after Putin said the talks were at a "dead end."

Moscow has long demanded Ukraine drop any bid to join NATO. Ukraine has said it would agree to that in return for security guarantees from other countries. Other sources of tension include the status of both the Crimean Peninsula, seized by Moscow in 2014, and eastern Ukraine, where the separatists have declared independent republics recognized by Russia. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1980 DEPOSED MINISTERS EXECUTED IN LIBERIA



Thirteen leading officials of the ousted government in Liberia have been publicly executed on the orders of the new military regime.

The dead men included several former cabinet ministers and the elder brother of William Tolbert, the assassinated president of the west African state.

They were tied to stakes on a beach next to the army barracks in the capital, Monrovia, and shot.

Journalists who had been taken to the barracks to watch the executions said they were cruel and messy.

They said four men were forced to watch the others die before being shot themselves as there were only nine stakes.

The 13 men had been accused of treason, corruption and violation of human rights.

However, only four were condemned to death after their trial by a military tribunal.

But the tribunal's verdicts were overruled by the so-called "Redemption Council", headed by Sergeant Samuel Doe.

Sergeant Doe seized power 10 days ago in a coup during which President Tolbert was shot dead.

Since then Sergeant Doe has since been trying to rally support for his regime with promises of economic recovery.

He has already doubled civil service and army salaries and announced free tuition for students.

Another 80 people associated with the deposed government are awaiting trial by the tribunal.

Most of the deposed Tolbert government belonged to Liberia's elite — the descendants of freed slaves from the United States who founded the country 133 years ago.

However, the so-called "Americo-Liberians" now make up only 5% of the population and resentment has built up over the years at their dominant social and economic position.

Last year riots occurred when the government proposed sharply increasing the price of rice, the nation's staple food.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

By the late 1980s economic collapse in Liberia culminated in civil war when dissidents of Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front overran much of the countryside and executed Samuel Doe. Fighting intensified as the rebels splintered and fought each other, the Liberian army and West African peacekeepers. In 1995 a peace agreement was signed, eventually leading to the election of Charles Taylor as president. But by October 2000 Liberian forces were engaged in battles with rebels based in neighbouring Guinea. There were also border skirmishes with Guinean forces, resulting in the displacement of thousands of people. A power-sharing government was set up in 2003 to end 14 years of civil war.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
You may find that romance will unfold through business connections. Investments may not be as lucrative as you thought. Get them to pitch in, if you need help.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
Chronic health problems are likely to surface if you are keeping your problems locked up inside. You will gain knowledge through your adventure.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
This could be a serious relationship. Elders may need your help. You need to do more things that you enjoy. Entertainment should include sports events or physical activities.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Curb the impulse to make lavish purchases and maybe spend some time with good friends. Home improvement projects will enhance your residence and bring the family closer together.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
Don't forget to let your mate know how much you care. Follow your gut feeling regarding your business ventures. You will have a little more energy than usual.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Be prepared to neutralize any threats. Sudden trips will take you by surprise. Try to keep to yourself; work diligently on domestic chores and responsibilities.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Keep your feet on the ground, if you can. Your partner may not understand your mood swings but if you are willing to communicate, a lot of grief can be avoided.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Job changes are in order. Go for interviews or send out resumes. Risky financial ventures will result in unrecoverable losses. Don't jump into investments too quickly.

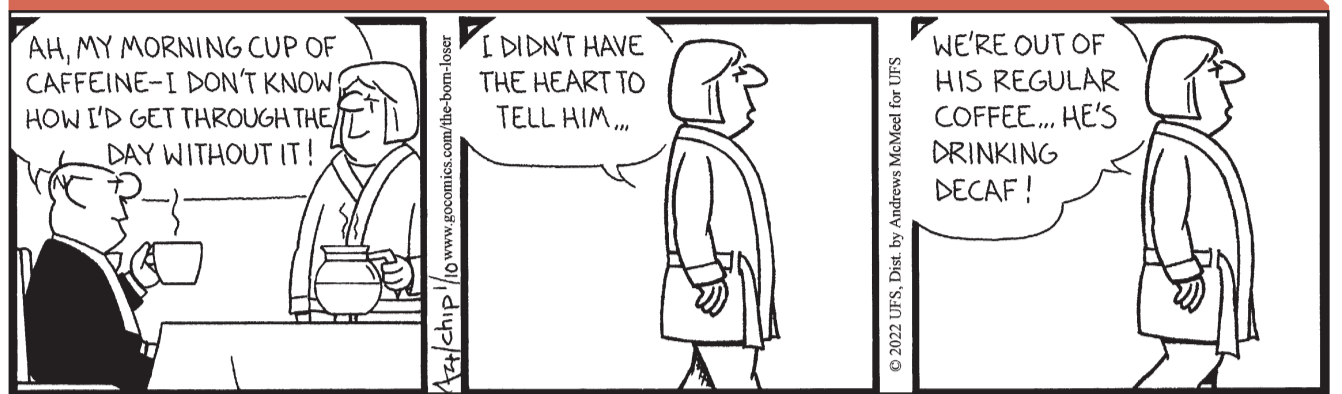
SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Don't let criticism upset you. Hassles will delay your plans. You can spend a passionate evening with someone you cherish if you make your plans early.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
You may have ignored or neglected your mate lately. Be prepared to neutralize any threats. Equilibrium in your romantic life is likely if you treat your partner well.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
You may have taken on a little too much, but you will enjoy every minute of it. Don't take offense at comments made by coworkers. Be sure to take care of the needs of your immediate loved ones first.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Your tendency to vacillate will drive everyone crazy. Take the time to help old friends or relatives who have had a stroke of bad luck. Be careful when dealing with superiors.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	9	23	fine
Changchun	5	15	cloudy
Chengdu	15	26	cloudy
Chongqing	17	28	rain
Fuzhou	16	29	cloudy
Guangzhou	20	28	showers
Guiyang	12	23	cloudy
Haikou	21	31	cloudy
Hangzhou	15	30	rain
Harbin	5	15	cloudy
Hefei	15	29	cloudy
Nanjing	15	30	cloudy
Shanghai	17	29	cloudy
Taipei	20	26	cloudy
Wuhan	16	27	rain
Hong Hong	23	26	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	5	12	cloudy
Frankfurt	9	19	overcast
Paris	11	20	overcast
London	10	16	showers
New York	8	20	overcast

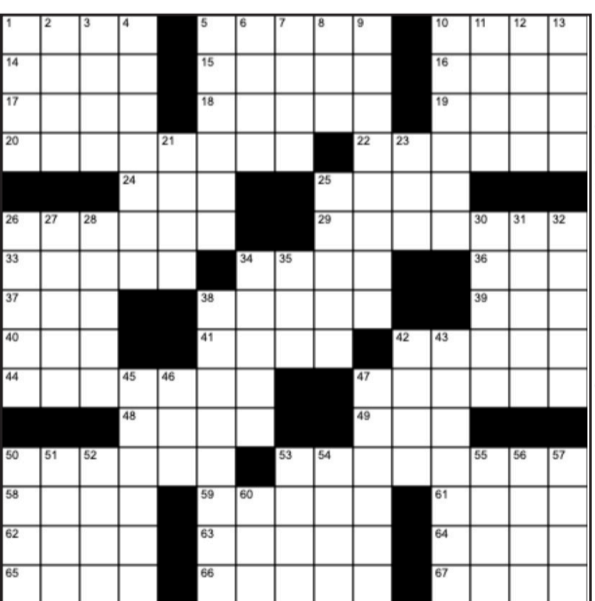
CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Gregory Peck role of 1956; 5- Son of Abraham; 10- Dies ___; 14- Rover's pal; 15- Unit of magnetic induction; 16- Dweeb; 17- Operatic solo; 18- Muslim wise man; 19- Impediment; 20- Falls back; 22- Conflict; 24- ER VIP; 25- Tibia, e.g.; 26- Goddess of wisdom; 29- Power plug transformer; 33- Retreats; 34- Sites; 36- Messenger ___; 37- Old California fort; 38- Lively Bohemian dance; 39- "___ tu" (Verdi aria); 40- Garden tool; 41- St. crosses; 42- Pandemonium; 44- On the line; 47- Proceed in a leisurely way; 48- Like the Sahara; 49- Tool with teeth; 50- Magic spells; 53- Bare; 58- Dutch name of The Hague; 59- Characteristic; 61- Turbine blade; 62- Spillane's "___ Jury"; 63- Green ___ is the place to be; 64- Some Ivy Leaguers; 65- Treehouse used by birds; 66- Ingenuous; 67- Make angry.

Down
1- From a distance; 2- Bring on board; 3- Mine entrance; 4- Lodger; 5- Home of Odysseus; 6- Show to a table; 7- Requests; 8- Clay today; 9- Republic in SE Asia; 10- Foot part; 11- Hire; 12- Asian sea; 13- Barely beat; 21- Seemingly forever; 23- "SNL" alum Gasteyer; 25- Supports; 26- Hilo hi; 27- Fortune-telling cards; 28- Conceals; 30- Pay for; 31- Matriculate; 32- Elevate; 34- Adored; 35- Corrida cry; 38- Republic in S Asia; 42- Carbonized fuel; 43- Nevertheless; 45- Aim; 46- Branch; 47- African fly; 50- Lower jaw; 51- Enmity; 52- Contented sighs; 53- Delhi wrap; 54- Capital of the Ukraine; 55- Anklebones; 56- Indigo; 57- ___-majesté; 60- Nipper's co.;

Yesterday's solution

O	A	H	U	W	A	S	T	E	S	A	M	E
S	C	A	N	O	N	A	I	R	E	L	E	V
H	E	R	B	E	N	T	E	R	P	R	I	S
A	D	D	U	P	A	E	S	O	A	T	H	S
				R	E	E	L	S	S	U	P	
P	A	R	D	O	N	S	P	A	T	E	L	L
O	R	I	E	N	T	E	D	G	Y	E	E	N
L	O	A	N	R	E	T	A	G	G	N	A	T
K	A	N	H	U	L	A	I	G	U	A	N	A
A	R	T	L	E	S	S	I	N	H	A	S	T
				H	I	T	A	N	G	E	R	
A	T	H	O	S	O	R	B	E	D	E	M	A
C	H	A	T	T	E	R	B	O	X	O	D	D
H	A	T	S	S	C	O	R	E	O	D	I	E
T	W	E	E	A	R	N	S	G	O	D	S	



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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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

DRIVE IN

MIRREN, BROADBENT CHARM IN ART HEIST PIC 'THE DUKE'

JOCELYN NOVECK, MDT/AP

IF you're gonna face a jury for a crime you've already confessed to — and even explained how you did it — you'd better have something going for you besides a "not guilty" plea.

The real-life character of Britain's Kempton Bunton, an amiable sexagenarian taxi driver who was acquitted of stealing a national art treasure in 1961, definitely did. He had charm, he had wit, and he had a good story.

The same could be said for what British director Roger Michell, who died last year at 65, brings to "The Duke." He imbues his last film with so much charm, wit and good storytelling that he, too, cannot help but win.

One of Michell's talents was to pick the right cast and let the chemistry shine. After all, this is the man who directed Julia Roberts and Hugh Grant in the classic rom-com "Notting Hill."

"The Duke" — named after the Goya portrait of the Duke of Wellington that was famously stolen from the National Gallery —

is no rom-com. Jim Broadbent's Kempton is a portly man who struggles to hold down a job (as a cab driver, he talks too much) and writes plays that don't get produced. Helen Mirren's Dorothy is his subdued wife, who cleans houses and suppresses sadness over a family tragedy. But their touching chemistry does the trick, and Broadbent — who has much more to do in the film — is darned near perfect as a man whose Robin Hood-like principles won out in the most unlikely of scenarios.

Of course, it was those principles that got Bunton into trouble in the first place. (Reader, please note: The script takes some liberties from the real story, which itself contains a huge twist, but to describe all that here would spoil much of the fun. You'll learn the truth by the end. Also, there's Google.) Briefly put, Bunton was passionate about free access to television, particularly for the OAP, meaning old-age pensioners — many of whom couldn't afford the government's mandatory license fees for the BBC.

It was access to television, Bun-

ton felt, that connected the elderly to the outside world. And so, soon after we meet him, he's spending a couple weeks in prison for refusing — on principle — to pay his own licensing fee.

Wife Dorothy is thoroughly embarrassed by her husband's social activism, which also finds him campaigning in the streets. And she has little patience for his copious playwriting. (One of his plays, he tells a woman in the shops, imagines Jesus as a woman and is called "The Adventures of Susan Christ.") We learn through one of the couple's two sons, Jackie, that the playwriting is a coping mechanism to deal with their daughter's death in a bicycle accident, a tragedy Dorothy refuses to discuss.

It's the balance between humor and pathos that makes this film work, and the trial scenes are the high point, with the bewigged judge and prosecutor clearly unprepared for the sympathetic response Bunton will receive. (Matthew Goode also impresses as an impossibly suave defense attorney — when Bunton first meets him,



Jim Broadbent (left) and Helen Mirren in a scene from "The Duke."

he says he feels like he's about to be offered a gin and tonic.)

Speaking of suave, and of cocktails, there's also a sly appearance here from Sean Connery as James Bond in "Dr. No," which, in case you don't recall, happened to feature the very same portrait of the Duke of Wellington. The humor in Broadbent and Mirren's faces

here, and elsewhere, is one of the many joys of this delightful and poignant film, a fitting punctuation mark to its director's career.

"The Duke," a Sony Pictures Classics release, has been rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America "for language and brief sexuality." Running time: 96 minutes. ★★★★★

AD

合夥人 PARTNERS:
官樂怡 Rui José da Cunha ◦
山度士 Álvaro Rodrigues ◦
馬天龍 Nuno Sardinha da Mata ◦
趙魯 Zhao Lu ◦
馬傑安 João Nogueira Marques

大律師 ASSOCIATES:
高文軒 Adelino Correia ◦
羅善齡 Zelina Rodrigues *
馬潔冰 Maria João Marques
陶義德 António Isó de Azevedo
白穎怡 Iclia Berenguel
沈玲鳳 Mariana Afonso Esteves
馬秀文 Sofia Mendes Martins
飛嘉華 Carlos dos Santos Ferreira ◦
杜力信 Nelson de Azevedo
莫永誠 Rui Velez de Moura
安東尼 António Manuel dos Santos
巴慧雅 Vera Bastos
歐文傑 Miguel Evaristo
陳芷喬 Joana Chan
顏曉蓉 Teresa Xiaorong Yan
諾瑪莉 Maria Noras
康靜雅 Viviana Hong
梁淑嵐 Ana Leon
黃瀚賢 Frederico Vong

實習律師 TRAINEE LAWYERS:
張偉鴻 Cheong Wai Hong
陳健雄 Eurico Chan
吳靈鋒 Ng Teng Fong
戴博晴 Tai Pok Cheng
吳佩愉 Ng Pui U
陳子健 Kimi Chan
法律專家 JURISTS:
羅成軒 José J. Rodrigues
斐彥德 Gonçalo Figueiredo
潘卡莉 Candice Pun
伍福賢 Domingos Ng
劉慧敏 Amanda Liu
楊詩婷 Si Teng leong



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Daniella Tonetto



TASTE OF EDESIA

Dreaming about London

IRENE SAM, MDT

WITH the covid situation it is difficult to travel at the moment. For those who want to dream about being in London, **Sheraton Grand Macao** came up with a unique British journey with the “Discover London at Sheraton” hotel package. In partnership with Macau Creations, their team of talented artists who created a locally-inspired character “Soda Panda,” has specially designed a “Queen’s Guard” version exclusively for Sheraton Grand Macao. One can take him out and about to explore The Londoner integrated resorts or to visit the famous places of attractions in Macao. The new “British Best Friend” can accompany anyone on their excursions.

The sumptuous Deluxe Room included in the “Discover Lon-

don at Sheraton” hotel package is known to be spacious. Moreover, a hotel credit would be given to spend at the restaurants and spa. For fans of cute toys, a “Queen’s Guard” Soda Panda as well as a surprise treat from the British-inspired restaurant, The Conservatory, will be highlights of the stay.

Daniella Tonetto, General Manager of Sales and Marketing for Sheraton Grand Macao, said “Discover London at Sheraton” is a great-value offer for those who want to discover the distinctive charms of London while visiting Macao. “We hope travellers can witness the successful transformation of The Londoner integrated resorts for themselves, immerse themselves into the exciting Londoner Moments and create treasured memories here in Macao. There is just so much more to explore now, more than ever before,” she added.



OPINION

China Daily
Shen Qiaowei, China Daily



WELL-DESIGNED COUPONS CAN HELP INCREASE CONSUMPTION

China's GDP grew 4.8 percent in the first quarter of this year despite the pressures of a complicated and grimmer international environment and rising COVID-19 infections in some places, the National Bureau of Statistics said on Monday.

China's economic recovery has been slowing down since the last quarter of 2021 due to various factors, including the emergence of new novel coronavirus variants, which have disrupted normal economic activities. As a result, there has been a decline in overall consumer spending, with the catering sector being the worst hit.

So stimulating consumer spending has become a crucial issue again, similar to what it was in late spring in 2020. To boost consumption, therefore, many local governments have been using innovative programs including issuing digital consumption coupons.

A typical consumption coupon has a small face value. It features consumer saving with certain amount of spending such as "spend 40 yuan (\$6.27), get 10 yuan off", with the 10 yuan being government subsidy. Such coupons are disbursed through digital platforms in limited quantities in each round.

But, as many observers ask, can such small value digital coupons really stimulate spending?

The coupon program may not effectively increase overall consumption. Imagine you get a "spend 40 yuan and get 10 yuan off" coupon, and use that offer in your weekly shopping when you typically spend 100 yuan. The coupon will not change your total transaction value but the subsidy you get can be turned into your savings.

Our (Guanghua School of Management of Peking University) research of five rounds of digital coupon released in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, from late March to May in 2020, shows that a 1 yuan government subsidy can in fact generate 3.4 yuan to 5.8 yuan of excess spending during the coupon redemption week. More importantly, it does not affect consumption in the subsequent weeks.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of the digital coupon in spurring consumption persists across multiple rounds of coupon issuance. These results are based on a careful analysis of the individual transaction records of about 1 million residents. Consumers who got the consumption coupons spent significantly more compared with individuals who applied but failed to acquire the coupons. The excess spending was mostly in catering services and food and drinks purchases.

In a parallel study of the coupon program launched in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, a less-developed region in southern China, we found that the coupon subsidy was highly effective in promoting additional spending, and the percentage increase in consumption volume was even larger in less-developed cities.

The study also gave insights into the coupon design. We found that the general coupon, relative to industry coupon which limits coupon use to specific sectors such as dining and transportation, is more effective in stimulating redemption and spending. Also, simple consumption coupons work better than those with complicated features. In short, easy access and convenient redemption are crucial coupon elements that can boost consumption.

A well-designed coupon program can be a cost-effective tool to stimulate consumption. Research in government stimulus programs such as cash payments and tax cuts in other countries shows that a consumer or household typically spends 20-40 cents for a dollar of tax rebate or government cash payments. Yet the digital coupon boosts consumption to a larger extent.

In implementing coupon programs, we also need to consider the needs of special groups. For lower-income households, cash equivalent coupons, that is, coupons without minimum spending requirement, are more suitable. The advantage with digital coupons is that they can have flexible designs and can be implemented in combination with other policy tools. The challenge is how to precisely identify the group in need and design a program that would preserve fairness across individuals and groups.

There might be no perfect answer, but careful experimentation and rigorous analysis can improve coupon program design.

CAMBODIA CUTS QUARANTINE FOR UNVACCINATED VISITORS TO 7 DAYS

Cambodia yesterday reduced the required quarantine period from two weeks to one for arriving travelers who are not fully vaccinated against the coronavirus, acting after recording consistently low numbers of new infections in recent days.

The Health Ministry also said that travelers arriving by air who have not been fully vaccinated must take a rapid antigen test on the last day of their quarantine. Arrivals by land - mostly Cambodian workers in neighboring countries - are required to take rapid antigen tests on arrival as well as on the last day of quarantine.

Cambodia had already opened its borders to fully vaccinated travelers on Nov. 15 in an effort to revitalize its tourism-reliant economy.

The changes announced yesterday come about a month after another easing of pandemic-related restrictions for visitors from abroad, including the dropping of mandatory COVID-19 tests for travelers who have been vaccinated. Visas on arrival were also restored last month.

The Health Ministry yesterday reported 29 new COVID-19 cases, bringing the nation's confirmed total since the pandemic began to 136,146 cases, including 3,056 deaths.

About 92% of 17 million people have received at least one COVID-19 vaccination.

THE BUZZ



SOUTH KOREA'S TOP COURT OVERTURNS CONVICTIONS OF GAY SOLDIERS

KIM TONG-HYUNG, SEOUL

SOUTH Korea's Supreme Court yesterday threw out a military court ruling that convicted two gay soldiers for having sex outside their military facilities, saying it stretched the reading of the country's widely criticized military sodomy law.

The court's decision to send the case back to the High Court for Armed Forces was welcomed by human rights advocates, who had long protested the country's 1962 Military Criminal Act's Article 92-6, which prohibits same-sex conduct among soldiers in the country's predominantly male military.

The article prescribes a maximum prison term of two years for "anal intercourse" and "any other indecent acts" between military personnel. Following the Supreme Court's full panel deliberation of its 13 justices, Chief Justice Kim Myeong-su said they concluded the provisions should not be applied to consensual sex between male service members that takes place outside military facilities during off-duty hours.

"The specific ideas of what constitutes as indecency has changed accordingly with the changes

in time and society," Kim said in a decision that was broadcast online. "The view that sexual activity between people of the same sex is a source of sexual humiliation and disgust for objective regular people and goes against decent moral sense can hardly be accepted as a universal and proper moral standard for our times."

The court later said in a press release that the decision was meaningful as a "declaration that consensual same-sex sexual activity (among military service members) could no longer be considered as punishable in itself."

The two defendants — an army lieutenant and sergeant from different units — had been charged by military prosecutors in 2017 for having sex during off-duty hours at a residence outside their bases in 2016. They were among at least nine soldiers who were indicted in what critics described as the army's aggressive crackdown on gay soldiers in 2017.

The defendants had appealed after the military high court upheld their convictions by a lower court based on Article 92-6 and gave them suspended prison terms.

South Korea's Defense Ministry said it will "carefully examine" the Supreme

Court's decision while proceeding with the case sent back to the military court.

The Seoul-based Center for Military Human Rights welcomed the decision, saying it set a new judicial precedent that could help tackle discrimination against sexual minorities in the military and strengthen protection of their privacy. The group in a statement called for courts to acquit all service members charged with violating Article 92-6 and for the country's Constitutional Court to rule the provision as unconstitutional.

The Constitutional Court had received numerous complaints regarding Article 92-6 despite upholding the provision three different times, mostly recently in 2016.

South Korea's military has long been criticized over how it treats sexual minorities among its service members.

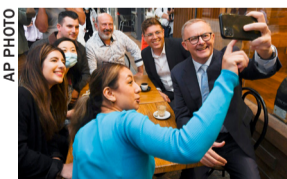
The district court in Daejeon city in October last year ruled that the army unlawfully discriminated against the country's first known transgender soldier, Byun Hui-su, by discharging her for undergoing gender reassignment surgery, in a verdict that came seven months after she was found dead at her home. MDT/AP

US rolled out new sanctions against more than 40 individuals and entities accused of evading the ongoing wave of penalties imposed on Russia as punishment for invading Ukraine. The sanctions include the first set of penalties against a cryptocurrency mining firm in relation to the war. The Treasury Department's sanctions arm designated the commercial bank Transkaptalbank, which has operations in China and the Middle East.



Tesla reported that its first-quarter net earnings were over seven times greater than a year ago, powered by strong sales despite global supply chain kinks and pandemic-related production cuts in China. The electric vehicle and solar panel company made a record \$3.32 billion from January through March. Excluding special items such as stock-based compensation, the Austin, Texas, company made \$3.22 per share. That soundly beat Wall Street estimates of \$2.26 per share.

Belgium's foreign minister is stepping down so she has more time to devote to her husband, who was diagnosed with an aggressive brain cancer. Sophie Wilmes said in a letter yesterday that her job "demands rigor, availability and total commitment that will not allow me to provide help and comfort that Christopher and our children will need." "I want to be there for him like he has always been there for us," Wilmes said in a letter on Twitter.



Australia's opposition leader said he tested positive for COVID-19 yesterday in the second week of a campaign ahead of the May 21 election. Anthony Albanese, the 59-year-old leader of the center-left Labor Party, said he was feeling fine and would isolate at his Sydney home for a week: "While at home, I will continue my responsibilities as alternative prime minister and will be fighting for a better future for all Australians."