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PARKING METERS WILL BEGIN ACCEPTING DIGITAL PAYMENT ONLY, A PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE HAS ANNOUNCED THIS WEEK

▲ P6

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY PASSES BUDGET 2023; SOME LAWMAKERS UNHAPPY

▲ P3

WC2022: FRANCE BEATS MOROCCO TO MEET ARGENTINA IN CHAMPIONS FINAL

▲ P14



AP PHOTO



Japan's trade deficit surged to over 2 trillion yen (\$15 billion) in November as higher costs for oil and a weak yen combined to push imports sharply higher. It was the 16th straight month of red ink and a record high for the month of November. The country will likely post a record deficit for the year. The deficit for November was double that for the same month the year before.

AP PHOTO



USA The Biden administration is again making some free COVID-19 tests available to all U.S. households as it unveils its contingency plans for potential coronavirus surges this winter. After a three-month hiatus, the administration is making four rapid virus tests available starting today, a senior administration official said. COVID-19 cases have shown a marked increase after the Thanksgiving holiday, and further increases are projected from indoor gathering and travel around Christmas and New Year's.

AP PHOTO



USA A Nevada wildflower was declared endangered at the only place it's known to exist — on a high-desert ridge where a lithium mine is planned to help meet growing demand for electric car batteries, U.S. wildlife officials announced. With an estimated remaining population of only about 16,000 plants, the service concluded that Tiehm's buckwheat is on the brink of extinction.

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WITHOUT DOUBT

Lawmakers approve national security law in first reading by acclamation, without debate ▲ P2



REPORT

MAINLANDERS RUSH TO MACAU FOR MRNA VACCINE

▲ P4



▲ P15

AL PLENARY

NATIONAL SECURITY, ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNIQUES LAWS PASSED IN FIRST READING

RENATO MARQUES

LAWS on national security and medically assisted reproductive techniques were passed yesterday in their first reading at the Legislative Assembly (AL).

The bill did not provoke much debate or inquiry with most of the lawmakers supporting the proposals submitted.

One of the few matters that raised questions at the plenary session was the fact that the bill on medically assisted reproductive techniques establishes that only private and public hospitals can perform such techniques. These techniques aim mostly to solve infertility issues.

On the topic, the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao Ieong, explained that the government insists on the hospitals "because in many places there

are records of irregularities [while performing these techniques] and most of these cases happened in private clinics," she said, noting that the major purpose is to use the new islands hospital complex as the preferred place for these types of medical procedures.

To another question from lawmaker Wong Kit Cheng, the Secretary explained that these procedures are not limited to those couples who have never had children, but may also be offered to those with children who want more. In these cases, "[the procedures are available for those] who haven't been able to fall pregnant after 12 months of trying."

Also questioned on potential government support to cover expenses related to the medical procedure, Ao Ieong said that the

government "is considering this possibility."

Last on the agenda of the day at the AL, the new national security law received very few comments from the lawmakers who all voted in favor of it.

Nonetheless, some lawmakers expressed doubts over the lack of a definition of what is a state secret, a fact that the Secretary for Security, Wong Sio Chak, said will be clearly established in yet another bill, solely dedicated to the matter and that will be soon submitted to the AL.

The Secretary noted in the presentation that the major difference between this law and the regime already in force is that while the current one focuses on the punishment of acts after they have already occurred, the new one focuses on the prevention of these acts.



GAMING

Junkets law approved, need for an interpretation rule debated

RENATO MARQUES

THE law regarding the operations of gaming activities in casinos, also known as 'junkets law', passed unanimously yesterday at the Legislative Assembly (AL).

The law, complementary to the new and existing gaming law, concludes the amendments promoted by the government before the new gaming concessions come into force Jan. 1 next year.

The bill establishes, as previously reported, that gaming promoters can only work with one gaming concessionaire at a time and, even so, this contract needs



to be approved by the local government, among other requirements. It passed with few remarks and with most lawmakers expressing full support.

The major recorded disagreement was about the need for a

standard approach to law interpretation, a fact that Ron Lam said was both a novelty and an unnecessary provision.

Although there was an exchange of views on the matter, the government did

not concede instead stating that the topic had already been discussed enough and gathered consensus in the analysis done by the AL standing committee.

On the line was Article 63 of the law, which explains that deposits in chips or cash may only be accepted if earned from gaming activity. This matter, according to Lam, "can generate future issues." He did not elaborate what those issues may be.

The new law places further limitations on promoters' activities of the establishes a responsibility regime of the concessionaires over their activities. This is considered a response to recent cases of side betting and other unauthorized activities currently before the local courts and related to two of the major junket promoters (Suncity and Tak Chun Group).

GOV'T TO TURN SAN MA LO INTO FESTIVE FAIR

AVENIDA de Almeida Ribeiro, more commonly known as San Ma Lo, will be transformed into a festive fair on Dec. 24 and 25, local media reports.

According to a report yesterday by public broadcaster Radio Macau's Portuguese channel, "the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) is planning to close Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro to traffic [...] on Dec. 24 and 25."

Blocking roads to motor traffic and transforming them to pedestrian access only is not unheard of in Macau. The Hong Kung Night Market held on a section of Rua de Cinco de Outubro is another example of

this practice.

However, blocking the arguably most important avenue on the peninsula – if not in the city – has not been done before. The avenue is the direct link between the central business district of Praia Grande and the traditional livelihood district of Inner Harbour.

According to the same Radio Macau report, the avenue will be the venue of a Christmas market offering food and beverages as well as exhibitions of artworks and other elements. The IC has requested collaboration from casino operators and other business entities as well. **AL**



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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

AL PLENARY

Budget 2023 approved in final reading; some lawmakers unhappy

RENATO MARQUES

THE 2023 budget has been approved unanimously in its final reading yesterday at the Legislative Assembly (AL).

Although the law has been passed unanimously, lawmakers Ron Lam and José Pereira Coutinho have expressed dissatisfaction with the failure to include the 7,000 patacas on the pension fund accounts over the past three years.

Lam called on the president of the AL, Kou Hoi In, to vote on Article 5 of the bill separately so he could vote against it due to this issue.

On the same topic, Pereira Coutinho also remarked that this money is very important,



namely to the elderly, stating that after three years of the government using the same excuse of the absence of a govern-

ment accounts surplus, it is clear that there is no intention to amend this law to benefit those in need.

For the same lawmaker, the amount on the line is not that much, noting that it should be possible to "save somewhere else" to continue this benefit.

Despite these statements, neither legislator has proposed an amendment to this law in the past three years. To do so is within their power, although in practice AL always calls on lawmakers to secure a pre-approval from the Chief Executive (CE) before submitting a new bill or amendment.

On the topic, the Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lei Wai Nong, repeated the same explanation given several previous occasions, explaining that there is no legal way to grant the benefit to some and not to others. He also noted there has been no surplus since 2020.

Nonetheless, Lei reaffirmed that the government is taking care of the elderly and others in need in other ways, expressing hope that next year will bring back the positive balances to government accounts and, with that, the resumption of such benefits.

Nevertheless, Lam voted against Article 5, while Pereira Coutinho abstained on the same article, which does not in any way affect the approval of the law.

MUJI OPENS DOORS TODAY AT VENETIAN MACAO

Operated by MUJI Hong Kong, the first MUJI store in Macau will open at The Venetian Macao today. It will offer the "most comprehensive merchandise assortment from the users' perspective." With a floor area of 21,000 square feet, the new store is the largest retail store in the Hong Kong and Macau region. The new store also features a home living thematic display area "so customers can find inspiration for living well in a spacious, comfortable store environment." As of August, MUJI operated over 1,072 stores globally, including 493 domestic stores in Japan and 579 overseas stores. MUJI was established in Hong Kong and Mainland China in 2001 and 2005 respectively.

FOREX RESERVES DROP TO MOP207B AT END OF NOVEMBER

The preliminary estimate of Macau's foreign exchange reserves stood at 207.2 billion patacas at the end of November. The latest statistics from the Monetary Authority of Macao indicated the reserves decreased 1.1% from the revised value of 209.6 billion patacas for the previous month. The trade-weighted effective exchange rate index for the pataca fell 1.55 points month-on-month but rose 9.24 points year-on-year to 113.0 in November.

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MAINLANDERS RUSH TO MACAU FOR MRNA VACCINE

LYNZY VALLES

MAINLANDERS are reportedly rushing to Macau to get mRNA Covid-19 vaccines ahead of an expected new wave of the virus. This occurs amidst moves away from a zero-Covid policy.

It was only this month that China finally approved the mRNA vaccine for domestic use, a full two years after countries first began approving the Pfizer/BioNTech jab – however it is limited to Germans residing in the country.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, China has only been administering its homegrown inactivated virus vaccine.

Some countries view it as safer than the newer, less-proven technology used by some Western countries that targets the coronavirus' spike protein, despite publicly available data supporting the safety of the Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca vaccines. There is no such data for China's vaccine.

With the easing of restrictions, Chinese mainland residents are



reportedly getting their BioNTech's vaccine in Macau.

Mainland media outlet Caixin has reported that a mainland tourist, Ni Lin (an alias), went to the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) hospital Saturday, the last day of his visit to Macau, to receive the mRNA vaccine, also known as Comirnaty.

He said more than 100 mainland tourists received the shot the same day, and many of them flew to Macau solely for that purpose, the report added.

An online platform that can be accessed from the MUST hospital website caters to those who want to travel to Macau for the mRNA vaccine.

The online platform with a

"Trip of Health to Macau" link allows individuals to make an online appointment for the vaccine, with a HKD500 administrative fee for cancellations.

The price ranges from HKD1,360 to HKD1,650, the highest amount catering to those 61 to 70 years old.

Originally, local authorities said it did not provide vacci-

nations for people coming for short visits. However, starting Nov. 1, Macau expanded access to Comirnaty to nonlocal residents, including mainland tourists.

Ni already received two shots of domestically made vaccines based on the inactivated-virus technology. As he has underlying diseases, he chose to get Comirnaty in Macau to avoid severe illness if infected, Ni said, as cited in the report.

A staff member at the MUST hospital told Caixin that "the vaccine currently available to mainland tourists is for the original strain of Covid-19, and the bivalent vaccine targeting new variants, which was approved in November, is not currently available to mainland tourists."

The staff reportedly added that the number of mainland tourists coming for vaccinations has increased dramatically - from a few people at the beginning to now more than 100 people a day.

According to the vaccination page, the appointment slots are fully booked until January 14.

The Times sought a comment from the Health Bureau on whether it is aware of the number of mainland residents rushing to get vaccinated in the city. The press has so far received no response.

AD

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GEG Youth Achievement Program Cultivates Future Talents

Believing the motto “Education engenders a strong country”, Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) commits considerable resources to providing young people with diversified learning platforms to help them realize their potential. Since 2011, GEG has co-organized the GEG Youth Achievement Program (YAP) with the Macau Management Association (MMA). Over the past 11 years, more than 3,000 participants aged 18 to 29 have achieved personal breakthroughs in the program. Centering on emerging trends in “Big Health” and “Technology”, this year’s YAP offered a diverse series of activities, trainings, workshops, and sharing sessions, with the aims of equipping participants with professional expertise and skills and enhancing their core competitiveness for future opportunities.

GEG recently hosted the ceremony for the 11th YAP Award Presentation and 12th YAP Launch, where this year’s participants shared their learning achievements whilst welcoming new intakes. During the ceremony, GEG and MMA representatives presented several awards, including the champion and first and second runners-up of the Final Competition and the newly-established YAP Community Care Award. Mr. Jairo Calangi, YAP member and former member of the Macau Inter-school Basketball Competition, in his speech shared his experiences as an athlete, his passion for promoting Macau’s sports development and his wish to inspire young people to cherish their youth and live it to the fullest. He also believes that YAP activities provide valuable opportunities for local youths to enrich their knowledge, broaden their horizons and expand their social networks.

HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

To enhance participants’ understanding of Macau’s position as a “World Center of Tourism and Leisure”, the 11th YAP participants were provided with diverse learning opportunities, such as the two Macau enterprise experience tours. These tours brought YAP members to the Funny Eye Brewery and to the Macau Sandbox VR Experience at the MESUF e-Sports Training Stadium, aiming to keep participants abreast of the latest developments in Macau’s emerging e-sports industry and the prospects brought by the metaverse.



Visit to Funny Eye Brewery allows participants to learn about entrepreneurship success stories.



Recently, the 11th YAP Award Presentation and the 12th YAP Launch Ceremony was hosted.



YAP participants take part in the Macau Sandbox VR Experience at the MESUF e-Sports Training Stadium.



YAP participants are introduced to GEG’s corporate citizenship pledge of “Community at Heart, Empathy in Action”.

Furthermore, under the theme of “Tourism+”, this year’s Final Competition invited participants to design innovative tourism projects centered on “Big Health” and “Technology”, thereby exercising critical thinking skills and forward-looking vision to seize future opportunities to promote Macau’s tourism industry.

SOCIAL HARMONY

To encourage local youths to participate in community affairs and fulfill their social responsibilities by offering a caring hand to people in need, the 11th YAP arranged for participants to take part in a wide array of community activities organized by GEG. For the Emergency Preparedness Talk for Elderly, YAP participants delivered to the homes of elderly residents Family Kits consisting of various necessities. For the food hamper distribution activity at the Macau Holy House of Mercy Welfare Shop, participants helped distribute food hampers to 370 low-income families. Additionally, YAP members attended the Community Connections with Love GEG CSR Work

Sharing Sessions and Members’ Gathering Party. This event used dynamic videos to promote GEG’s corporate citizenship pledge “Community at Heart, Empathy in Action” and Macau’s sustainable development.

CULTIVATE PATRIOTISM

National elements were also integrated into recent YAPs, with the goal of reinforcing national identity, advocating the spirit of “Loving the motherland and loving Macau” and increasing knowledge of the country’s security, achievements and technological development. This year, in addition to arranging for YAP participants to visit the National Security Education Exhibition and to participate in the Light up Macao Drone Gala 2022, participants attended the GEG National Education Series: Seminar on the 100th Anniversary of the Communist Youth League of China. Through a sharing session and themed concert, the seminar aimed to help youths understand their responsibility to contribute to national rejuvenation in the new era.



Participants gain in-depth understanding of China’s latest technologies.

The 12th YAP has officially started. It centers on the theme of “self-awareness” and “youth development” and will help participants enhance their competitiveness and lay a solid foundation for their future career development and life planning. Local youth aged 18-29 can join the program and all the activities for free to fully develop their talents to “Reach Out, Reach Beyond.”

MAKE A DIFFERENCE BY MAKING A COMMITMENT



PARKING METERS TO ONLY ACCEPT E-PAYMENT

ANTHONY LAM

PARKING meters will begin accepting digital payment only, a parliamentary committee has announced, according to local media.

The parliament's First Standing Committee met yesterday morning to discuss the public parking service system. Topical officials led by Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raimundo do Rosário sat-in to answer questions.

After the meeting, a press conference, presided over by committee president Ella Lei and supported by committee secretary Becky Song, was held.

As per previous government announcements and due to the increased difficulty in sourcing meters that accept cash, the government has proposed only allowing parking meters that take e-payment.

Other parking spaces, such as parking lots, will



be allowed to accept both cash and e-payment.

According to Lei and cited by local media Macao Daily News, a public tender will be opened to determine the future administration of the city's parking meters.

The current administration contract will end on April 30, 2023.

While discussing the new mode of roadside parking, government officials explained to committee members that the change is needed because some roadside parking spaces are tight, operationally inconvenient and the system is reacting too slowly to instructions.

Officials also said it is

difficult to set out criteria for establishing roadside parking spaces as the scope for consideration is wide. Factors that need to be considered include the existence of parking lots nearby and the smooth passage of public buses.

The officials did not have plans to encourage the use to parking lots.

PUBLIC WORKS

GOV'T: SOME 200 ROAD WORKS TO BE EXPECTED IN 2023

A total of 204 applications for road works next year have so far been received, a government advisory body has recently announced. This is a decrease of 29% year-over-year.

Yesterday, the Road Work Coordination Division of the Traffic Superior Committee has recently announced to announce relevant information.

Of all these planned road projects, 40 will concern major roads and have expected delivery periods longer than 30 days, which is a decrease of 34% year-over-year.

In addition, the division boasted it had managed to combine 111 road projects in the first 11 months of this year and in doing so had prevented repetitive work in the same location.

The most prominent road work in Macau will be the construction of the fourth Macau-Taipa bridge. Other major works will be the bridge connecting

New Urban Zone A and the Macau Peninsula, the construction of another overpass at the Pearl of the Orient Roundabout, drainage pipelines in several locations and the rearrangement of the road network around the Olympic Aquatic Centre in Taipa, for which a previous rearrangement had only concluded some years ago.

On the other hand, the Transport Bureau (DSAT) boasted that the smart Road Work Management System (RMS) had been undergoing constant improvement. About 72% of the received provisional traffic measures applications relied on the RMS. The DSAT will strive to expand the scope of RMS use and in turn receive 85% of applications through the RMS.

The DSAT, meanwhile, will continue hosting industry targeted seminars on the RMS to improve application efficiency. **AL**

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ECONOMY

Prosperity expected to remain 'low' 2023Q2

ANTHONY LAM

THE city's prosperity index will likely bounce out of low rankings during or by the second quarter next year, the Macau Economic Association (MEA) has estimated.

The association has also estimated that the city's prosperity indices for the upcoming three months would likely range between 2.3 and 2.4 points – a swing between “low” and “unsatisfactory” levels.

The major supportive factor is that Beijing has recently announced its new measures on the containment of Covid-19 across the country. These measures have been enacted in many major cities in mainland China as well as in Macau with local adjustments.

The move has not only loosened physical restrictions, but has also boosted inter-regional travel. Flights have increased in frequency in many mainland airports and casinos in Macau have gradually



ANTHONY LAM

seen more gamblers occupying tables.

This recent period was described by the MEA as “the twilight before dawn,” hinting that the association found it preferable.

Nonetheless, the association pointed out that local residents are getting sentimental both positively and negatively. On one hand, they are happy to be moving towards a normal life, but on the other hand they fear contracting the virus.

Another preferential

factor is that the “new” casino operators have promised to increase investments from January 1, 2023, to upgrade non-gambling elements, as well as attracting foreign visitors.

Unsettling factors, in contrast, lie in escalating interest rates, the MEA pointed out. The Hong Kong interbank offered rate (HIBOR) has recently surpassed 5%, which is higher than the newly established mortgage prime interest rate and HIBOR cap

interest rate. An inverted yield curve has also occurred in the rates for deposit and loan.

Moreover, 7.1% and 6% rises were recorded in the November non-core and core Consumer Price Indices in the US, which the association considers relatively high, although they were lower than market expectations.

The 0.5% interest rate rise decided on by the US Federal Reserve yesterday morning (Macau time) has been immediately reflected in the local interest rate. A heavier burden will be laid on local capital, corporate loans and individual mortgages, placing further pressure on asset prices and bad loan ratio, the association pointed out.

As for the past two months, the indices were calculated to be 2.1 and 2.2 points – still running low. Major factors that caused the indices to be pessimistic are the lack of visitor arrivals and casino revenues. Actual and potential purchasing power, on the other hand, was still weak.

COVID-19

Macau stops tracking asymptomatic cases

LYNZY VALLES

IN a move that follows China, Macau will no longer track asymptomatic cases. This is because such cases have become impossible to track now that mass testing is no longer required.

This move is another step in the country's departure from strict antiviral policies.

Between Nov. 28 and Tuesday, the city recorded over 1,300 cases, with Tuesday having the highest daily number of 411.

With the cessation of counting asymptomatic cases, only 45 cases were reported Wednesday.

The Novel Coronavi-



rus Response and Coordination Centre stated that only cases of patients admitted to the public hospital, Alto do Coloane, or to a hotel for me-

dical observation will be reported.

From Wednesday, those infected with Covid are permitted to isolate from home in an apparent at-

tempt to begin “living with Covid”, a departure from the former zero-Covid policy.

Those infected are only advised to upload their Covid status to the government's online platform for medical evaluation.

Depending on how they meet a criterion, they would need to only isolate from home, or from a designated hotel.

In China there appears to be a rapid increase in new infections, raising concerns that its health system could be overwhelmed in the same way seen in other countries early in the pandemic.

So far, many of those newly sick are staying home, and there has been little evidence of a surge in patient numbers. But it is difficult to get a clear picture of the spread, and the new reporting protocols could make that even more difficult.

ADVERTORIAL

GREAT TIMES

The Lion's soul awakens, the beat of drums triumph

“Three years of hard work for a glory on stage.” The Techno-cultural Dance Drama “MGM Awakening Lion” returns from December 23 to 25 and sets to bring the cultural relics of Lingnan to the stage.

“MGM Awakening Lion” Dance Drama is an adaptation of “Awakening Lion”, the dance drama that won the most prominent dance award in China – the China Dance Lotus Awards. As an entire brand-new experience, it is re-arranged and adapted into a 70-minute limited edition. This eye-catching extravaganza delivers a visually stimulating experience by balancing flux and fixed.



While much is known about “MGM Awakening Lion”, the combined technology, dancing, martial arts, and non-heritage culture make it easy to comprehend even if you have no deep knowledge of Chinese culture. On the other hand, showcasing the smooth, synchronized dance steps, and astonishing music, this dance drama is not just a stage performance but almost a blockbuster to enjoy. Stunning as it is, a show like this can only be found at MGM COTAI.



“Awakened by the spirit, rooted in the Lion” – the repertoire of “MGM Awakening Lion” is based on the awakening of a nation expressed in traditional culture. With its stunning stage music, lighting, and costume design, this stunning drama without dialogue showcases Guangdong lion dance and Lingnan culture. With its 28-megapixel LED screen and state-of-the-art equipment, it creates a virtual and real experience that breaks down all boundaries between arenas and acts. Combined with the semi-circular stage, the 180-degree LED screen also provides the audience with a completely immersive experience.

Get your tickets now for this year's glitzy dance drama at MGM COTAI! Tickets are now available at mgm.mo from MOP280, scheduled for December 23 at 8pm, December 24 at 3pm & 8pm, and December 25 at 8pm. The must-see show of this year, “MGM Awakening Lion” is all set to connect Chinese to all parts of the globe!

Sands China honours outstanding suppliers and reaffirms unwavering support for local SMEs

SANDS China has been forging ahead hand-in-hand with its suppliers, including local SMEs, and it continues to do so.

Recently, Sands China Ltd. honoured some of its most outstanding suppliers at a joint event at The Londoner Macao, while emphasizing the success stories of Sands China's ongoing partnerships with its local small and medium enterprise (SME) suppliers.

The company also recognised local SMEs graduating from its procurement training programme and ran a business matching session to connect them with representatives of various Sands China departments.

Held annually, the Sands Supplier Excellence Awards is an initiative of Sands China's parent company, Las Vegas Sands Corp., and acknowledges the cooperation and services of some of the company's most noteworthy suppliers worldwide.

Award winners in Macau are selected each year by a judging committee composed of Sands China executive management.

Dr. Wilfred Wong, president of Sands China Ltd., said: "Sands China is very pleased to recognise this group of exceptional suppliers with this 10th edition of the Sands Supplier Excellence Awards, which has become an annual celebration for us."

The Sands Procurement Academy, meanwhile, delivers practical knowledge to local SMEs to help them gain experience and capacity for working with large-scale international corporations as suppliers. It does so by sharing business knowledge and skills to promote the development of their businesses.

The training programme is co-organised with the Macao Chamber of Commerce and the Macau Productivity and Technology Centre (CPTM) and is a first-of-its-kind industry training.

It is a component of Sands China's longstanding support of Macau's SMEs as part of the com-



Danny H. Y. Cheung, Managing Director, Genyield Construction Co., Ltd



Waylan Ho, CEO of Burgeon Rent A Car Limited



Un Man Fu, General Manager of Agencia Comerical Carne Gelada e Comida Fu Cheong Limitada



Local Small, Medium and Micro Suppliers Support Programme



Victoria Kuan, Director-General of Macau Productivity and Technology Transfer Center



Amy Chan, General Manager of Macau Medical Suppliers Limited

pany's Local Small, Medium and Micro Suppliers Support Programme.

After initially targeting a few key categories of local suppliers, the academy has been open to all local SMEs in Macau since 2019 – giving a broader range of SMEs the opportunity to benefit from

the skills and knowledge offered by the academy's professionals.

Victoria Kuan, Director-General of Macau Productivity and Technology Transfer Center, has expressed enthusiasm on developing capacity building programs for the SMEs, such as workshops and training courses related to

business value creation, technology applications and international management standards.

"We could also tailor some pilot schemes for their suppliers related to enhancement in quality service and management system or product certification," she said.

"As we join forces to help the SMEs grow and develop, it's a win-win situation for the large enterprises too as these SME suppliers would also become their more valued partners," Kuan added.

The bureau has regular training series on "Business Star-

WINNERS OF 2022 SANDS SUPPLIER EXCELLENCE AWARDS

SANDS China acknowledged the cooperation and services of some of the company's most noteworthy suppliers in 2022. Eight winners were awarded across six categories:

CORPORATE CULTURE & SUSTAINABILITY:
Glory Global Solutions (Hong Kong) Ltd

PROJECT MANAGEMENT:
Genyield Construction Company Limited
Confluent Inc.

COST MANAGEMENT:
Hot Land Culture Media Co Ltd

QUALITY MANAGEMENT:
Kingwood International Enterprises Limited

SERVICE EXCELLENCE:
Rider Levett Bucknall Macau Limited
Burgeon Rent A Car Limited

SMALL/MEDIUM ENTERPRISE (SME):
Agencia Comercial Carne Gelada e Comida Fu Cheong Limitada

Committed as ever to local SMEs

SANDS China has not forgotten its roots and is as committed as ever to supporting local enterprises as part of its corporate social responsibility efforts.

Amid the pandemic hitting the local economy hard, especially its tourism industry, the company has always addressed the operational and financial challenges facing local SME suppliers today – and several SMEs would agree.

"Sands China has always been supportive to

local SMEs, even several years back when Typhoon Hato occurred," recalled Un Man Fu, general manager of Agencia Comerical Carne Gelada e Comida Fu Cheong Limitada.

"Amid this, the company has always tried to reinforce that quality and safety are the top priorities in supplying services. I want to thank Sands China for our partnership, as this is an important initiative for local SMEs like us," he added.

Echoing the same

sentiments, Danny H.Y. Cheung, Managing Director, Genyield Construction Co., Ltd., said, "I feel like Sands China has one of the highest [standards]. They want quality products and they continue to invest in local SMEs to help our economy," he said.

As part of Sands China's corporate social responsibility efforts, the company's commitment to supporting the development of local SMEs has been part of its effort to contribute to the gradual reco-

very of Macau's economy.

The company's support to local SMEs has remained consistent, in line with the Macao SAR government's initiative to "buy local."

With many of Sands China's suppliers working with them for several years, Waylan Ho, CEO of Burgeon Rent A Car Limited, remarked, "By working with them for over a decade, we have gained a lot and learned how to serve people better."

Suppliers and Local SMEs



Dr. Wilfred Wong, President of Sands China Ltd.



Johnny Sit, CEO of Chi Ao Cultural Company Limited



“Sands Procurement Academy” that cover topics ranging from business planning, financial management, marketing strategy, on-line marketing tactics and commercial trade, etc.

At the Sands Procurement Academy graduation, Sands China recognised 79 local SMEs. A total of 451 suppliers have enrolled in the academy since its founding in 2017, and 417 have graduated to date.

“We are glad to honour the 11th and 12th cohorts of local suppliers to graduate from our

Sands Procurement Academy. We understand the hardships being experienced by local suppliers during the pandemic, and we are grateful for their partnerships with us, as we work together to continue offering world-class service and experiences at our integrated resorts,” Dr. Wong said.

As Sands China upholds the business philosophy of supporting the growth of local SMEs, it aims to provide valuable and practical lessons to local firms.

Echoing the city’s mandate for

operators to assist and prioritize local firms, Sands China makes sure it continues to boost its efforts to nurture their growth and development.

The company has long been investing back into the community that it serves to help it thrive and grow, contributing to the development of local enterprises along the way.

By holding the Sands Supplier Excellence Awards and the Sands Procurement Academy graduation ceremony at the same event, Sands China gives the academy’s

graduating SMEs a chance to gain encouragement and inspiration from seeing some of Sands China’s most outstanding suppliers, including local SMEs, being recognised.

Besides the awards and the graduation ceremony, Sands China also set aside time to shine a spotlight on some of its local SME suppliers at the event.

Sands China has been collaborating with local Chinese and English-language newspapers to publish a series of inspiring stories about SMEs forging partnerships and growing together with Sands China.

More than 100 stories have been published since 2016 – offering a glimpse into local SMEs’

quest for success and self-improvement and how they have elevated their capabilities through working with a large international corporation like Sands China.

Framed copies of the stories that were published in 2022 were presented to the respective SMEs as souvenirs at the event, with Sands China congratulating them on their successes.

Finally, at the end of the event, the procurement academy graduates joined a business matching session to meet representatives from six of Sands China’s procurement areas: food and beverage, hotel operating supplies, marketing, outside services, facilities, and technology.

WHAT THE GRADUATES SAY..

“Sands China provided us with a lot of knowledge on how to get into the international market. As we’re still in the starting phase of our business, we have learned a lot on how to become an effective supplier to large-scale companies. One of the things that is relevant is quality – they have set a standard for us and through their courses, we’re slowly learning to get there. Their legal department has definitely helped us as well, as they provided a guide to help us familiarize ourselves with the current legal terms. Without this course, we wouldn’t have the same know-how for business, especially for working with international companies.”

JOHNNY SIT
Chief Executive Officer
Chi Ao Cultural Company Limited

“The course has enhanced our confidence to offer medical products to large-scale enterprises and has boosted our brand image. The four key factors they shared with us, in order for companies like ours to be effective, are: price, quality, timely delivery and sales service. With these principles, my business is able to serve a wider audience.”

AMY CHAN
General Manager
Macaufacture Medical Suppliers Limited

PROCUREMENT REACHES NEARLY MOP9.9B IN 2021

SANDS China has remained committed to procuring locally and helping Macau’s SMEs grow as part of the company’s corporate social responsibility efforts. Sands

China’s total procurement spend in 2021 was MOP9.9 billion, of which 91% went to Macau enterprises, including over MOP2.1 million to local SMEs.



COVID-19

A WEEK INTO CHINA'S EASING, UNCERTAINTY OVER VIRUS DIRECTION

DAKE KANG, BEIJING

A week after China dramatically eased some of the world's strictest COVID-19 containment measures, uncertainty remained yesterday over the direction of the pandemic in the world's most populous nation.

While there are no official indications yet of the massive surge of critically ill patients some feared, social media posts, business closures and other anecdotal evidence suggest huge numbers of people are being infected. In Beijing and elsewhere, there was a rush on cold medication and testing kits. Some hospital staff are staying home, while others are back to work after being infected.

Meanwhile, as people take to the internet to share dubious "remedies," various everyday products have seen sales skyrocket. A run on canned yellow peaches, seen as particularly nutritious, prompted one of the largest producers to write on social media that they are not medicine and that there is plenty of supply.

After years of trying to track the virus down to every last infection, the government now says that's essentially impossible — but it's not clear what that means for reporting the most serious cases.

While major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen have invested heavily in health care, second- and third-tier cities and communities in the vast rural hinterland have far fewer resources to deal with a major outbreak.

For a variety of economic and cultural reasons, Chinese tend to be more reliant than citizens of other countries on hospitals, even for illnesses that are not severe. The government has asked to those with mild symptoms to recuperate at home, but if they

don't, that could lead to strains, Yale professor of public health Xi Chen said.

"If people do not have such culture to stay at home, to keep those resources for sicker people, then that could easily crash the system," Chen said.

So far, Beijing has more than tripled the number of fever clinics to over 300, and those visited by Associated Press journalists were generally calm and orderly, with few indications of overcrowding. A children's hospital had 50 or 60 people waiting in line Wednesday afternoon, but three others had shorter queues. At one clinic in southern Beijing, a few elderly patients were put on IV drips, and one was inhaling pressurized oxygen.

Though the health care system in big cities appears to be holding up so far, Chen cautions that it's too soon to tell when cases will peak. The January Lunar New Year — when millions of people travel to visit family — is expected to present another challenge, Chen said.

"I'm concerned it could be a super-spreader event," he said.

Winter is also a tough time to loosen restrictions, Chen said, as the virus circulates more easily.

Other concerns include boosting China's elderly vaccination rate and bolstering the country's intensive care capacity. Though most of China's population is vaccinated, millions of older adults haven't had a booster shot of the country's domestically made vaccines. Studies show Chinese vaccines are effective in preventing hospitalization and death, but require at least three doses in order to be fully effective.

China says around 30% of people 60 or older have yet to get three shots. Part of the hesitancy

derives from original government directives that discouraged those above 59 from getting vaccinated, but there are also longstanding concerns about the safety of Chinese vaccines.

On Wednesday, the government said it would offer a fourth shot to those in vulnerable groups.

Downtown Beijing was largely empty yesterday and those businesses and restaurants that remained open or had not cut back radically on operating hours saw few customers. The empty streets reflected both the fact that many who are sick are staying home but also that others don't want venture out to avoid getting infected.

Experts have increasingly said

China's "zero-COVID" policy of lockdowns, quarantines and mandatory testing was unsustainable, especially in the face of the more infectious omicron variant that resulted in increasingly harsh restrictions.

Those measures were blamed for hindering the economy and created massive societal stress. The easing began after Beijing and several other cities saw protests over the restrictions — a level of public dissent not seen in decades.

Though the Dec. 7 relaxation of measures has allowed more avenues for the coronavirus's spread across the country, the full effects are not yet clear.

In the economy, the news has

been mixed. The National Bureau of Statistics yesterday said China's value-added industrial output rose a modest 2.2% year-on-year, while the urban unemployment rate rose slightly to 5.7% in November, from 5.5% the month before. China does not survey unemployment outside of major cities.

Meanwhile, the company that assembles Apple's iPhones announced Wednesday that it would ease restrictions at its largest factory in China that led thousands of workers to quit and drastically slowed production. Foxconn Technology Group said it would end the "closed-loop" system there that required workers to stay in their workplaces and dormitories.

Xi's government is still officially committed to stopping virus transmission. But the latest moves suggest the Communist Party will tolerate more cases without quarantines or shutting down travel or businesses.

Mi Feng, spokesperson for National Health Commission, reiterated that shift in tone yesterday.

"At present, the focus of epidemic prevention and control has shifted from prevention and control of infection to medical treatment," Mi said at a briefing.

The task of gauging China's preparedness is made all the harder by the lack of reliable statistics and projections.

The only numbers the National Health Commission is currently reporting are confirmed cases detected in public testing facilities where symptoms are displayed.

The government stopped announcing asymptomatic case totals earlier this week, saying an accurate count was impossible. The results of home tests also won't be captured. **MDT/AP**

FOXCONN TO EASE CURBS IN ZHENGZHOU IPHONE FACTORY

THE company that assembles Apple Inc.'s iPhones has announced it is easing COVID-19 restrictions at its largest factory in China that led thousands of workers to quit and drastically slowed production.

Foxconn Technology Group said in a statement on one of its official WeChat social media accounts that it would end the so-called "closed loop" system at the facility in Zhengzhou, central China, that required workers to stay in their workplaces and dormitories to prevent the spread of coronavirus infections.

The move announced Wednesday came about a week after China began easing harsh COVID-19 curbs despite signs the number of infections is rising.

Following a spate of protests across the country last month many "zero-COVID" restrictions were lifted. That means people no longer need to take frequent COVID-19 tests to travel on public transport. If they do test positive for the virus, they can isolate at home if they have only mild or no symptoms instead of being sent to a quarantine center.

Thousands of workers at the huge factory in

Zhengzhou walked out in late October over complaints of unsafe working conditions — such as food shortages due to closed cafeterias — and a virus outbreak at the plant.

The last quarter of the year is typically a busy season for companies like Foxconn as they ramp up production ahead of the end of year holiday rush. Apple has warned that iPhone 14 deliveries would be delayed due to manufacturing disruptions.

Foxconn, headquartered in New Taipei City, Taiwan, has been trying to rebuild its workforce after the massive walkout in late October. The company then ended up apologizing after a pay dispute triggered protests by workers who said Foxconn had changed the terms of wages offered to attract them to the factory.

In its announcement, the company said it would no longer provide free meals to workers because factory cafeterias would reopen. Instead, meal expenses will be deducted from employees' wages as usual, though workers who must quarantine after testing positive for the virus will still get free meals. **MDT/AP**

EU-ASEAN SUMMIT

Europe hosts southeast Asian leaders as own crises mount

EUROPEAN Union and southeast Asian countries commemorated 45 years of diplomatic ties yesterday [Macau time] at a summit overshadowed by political distractions in Europe, ranging from the war in Ukraine to a bribery scandal.

EU leaders hosted counterparts from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, in a nod to Asia's economic rise. But the meeting took place amid increasing challenges for the 27-nation European bloc and a day before its own final summit of the year.

"We have to make sure that we have a strong position in our relationship with ASEAN," Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte told reporters in Brussels. "We are talking about worldwide supply chains. We are talking about growth potential."

The EU is seeking to expand trade and investment with much of the world, especially emerging economies, after being battered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, the war in Ukraine has added to Europe's economic headwinds and put the bloc at risk of a recession.

Disrupted Russian energy supplies have affected financial markets and fueled inflation, driving up the consumer cost of everything from food to heating.



Luxembourg's Prime Minister Xavier Bettel, right, speaks with Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades, center, as they attend a round table meeting during the EU-ASEAN summit in Brussels

Along with seeking out new energy sources abroad and at home, the EU is weighing devoting extra funds to help businesses in Europe cope with high fuel prices and to counter an American subsidy spree.

But the bloc's struggle to impose a price cap on Russian natural gas and a European Parliament corruption case distracted attention away from Wednesday's one-day EU-ASEAN summit.

French President Emmanuel Macron, who flew to Qatar to watch France's semifinal match against Morocco in the World Cup on Wednesday evening, did not attend the event. On the side of the 10-nation ASEAN, Myanmar's junta leader — Min

Aung Hlaing — was absent because the EU refused to invite him.

The other ASEAN members are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. The members, which together represent 660 million people, rank among the world's top 10 economies.

"We identify the same priorities — ASEAN does — as the EU," Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said. "Although we come from very different places, from very different conditions, we have a very similar world view of the challenges that we all face."

High on the agenda was a push for deeper infrastructure

ties between the EU and ASEAN. Europe announced 10 billion euros (\$10.6 billion) for ASEAN-region projects under its "Global Gateway" program, which is something of a European answer to China's "Belt and Road Initiative."

"In the global world that we are living in today, it is very important that we are connected to like-minded countries," Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas said.

Both sides also focused on creating more clean energy to fight climate change and on deepening economic relations through greater trade. An EU push more than a decade ago for a free-trade agreement with ASEAN as a whole gave way to targeted deals with individual members.

The EU has negotiated trade pacts with Singapore and Vietnam and is in talks with Indonesia on a similar accord. European free-trade negotiations with Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines are on hold.

"Trade is a powerful tool for promoting growth and closer ties between our regions," said Charles Michel, who chairs meetings of EU leaders. "Our trade agreements with Vietnam and Singapore have already boosted our common trade and continue to help drive our recovery." **MDT/AP**

VIETNAM

G7 AGREES \$15.5B ENERGY DEAL WITH HANOI TO CUT EMISSIONS

A group of nine rich industrialized nations approved a deal to provide Vietnam with \$15.5 billion to help the Southeast Asian nation move faster from coal power to renewable energy, cutting its climate-damaging pollution.

The Group of Seven major economies, along with Norway and Denmark, said in a statement that the aim is to help Vietnam reduce its emissions to "net zero" by 2050, a goal which experts say needs to be met globally to cap global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit).

The Just Energy Transition Partnership with Vietnam is among a series of agreements that developing and rich nations are negotiating. The first such deal was signed with South Africa last year, and a similar agreement was reached with Indonesia last month.

"Vietnam is a dynamic, emerging economy at the heart of Southeast Asia," British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said. "The investment we are making today means the country can cut its emissions while simultaneously creating new jobs and growth."

The U.K., Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States comprise the G-7.

U.S. climate envoy John Kerry, a veteran of the U.S. war in Vietnam, had made Vietnam a focus of his climate work for the Biden administration. Kerry took repeated trips there to urge Vietnamese leaders to call off pending coal-fired power projects and to team up with wealthier nations on cleaner energy instead.

The \$15.5 billion of funding will come from public and private sources over the coming three to five years, much of it in the form of loans, according to the agreement.

By using the money to expand its electricity grid and increase renewable energy production, Vietnam will be able to bring forward its target for peaking emissions from 2035 to 2030. The country will also raise its 2030 target for electricity from renewable sources to 47% from a previous forecast of 36%. **MDT/AP**

MYANMAR

UN blocks Burmese military from taking seat

A key U.N. committee has again blocked Myanmar's military junta from taking the country's seat at the United Nations, two well-informed U.N. diplomats said yesterday.

The General Assembly's credentials committee met Monday and deferred action on the junta's request, the diplomats said, speaking on condition of anonymity before a formal announcement likely later this week.

The decision means that Kyaw Moe Tun, who was Myanmar's ambassador at the United Nations when the military ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Feb. 1, 2021,



will remain on the job.

Last December, Myanmar's military rulers also failed in their effort to replace Tun, who remains a supporter of the previous government and the opposition National Unity Government, which opposes the junta.

Chris Guinness, director of the London-based Myanmar Accountability Project, welcomed the credentials committee's

move, saying it has "great diplomatic and symbolic significance, at a time when the illegal coup leaders are attempting to gain international recognition."

"General Min Aung Hlaing has inflicted on the people of Myanmar violence of a scale not seen in southeast Asia since Pol Pot unleashed the Khmer Rouge's reign of terror on Cambodia,"

Guinness said in a statement.

Damian Lilly, an Accountability Project official, urged the United Nations to ensure that Tun is afforded all U.N. rights and privileges and that the National Unity Government "is allowed to represent Myanmar in all UN bodies."

"At present, there are glaring inconsistencies," he said, with Tun sitting in the 193-member General Assembly while Myanmar's seat at the U.N. Human Rights Council is empty.

Lilly said the credentials committee's action "must pave the way to resolving these anomalous

lies which are depriving 55 million people in Myanmar of the opportunity to be represented at the U.N. by the government which they elected by a landslide in 2020."

Suu Kyi, who was arrested when the military seized power from her elected government, has been sentenced to 26 years' imprisonment and faces additional charges.

Rights groups and supporters of Suu Kyi say the charges against her are politically motivated and an attempt to discredit her and legitimize the military's seizure of power while preventing her from returning to politics. **MDT/AP**

QATAR

At Church City, a taste of Catholic life in Middle East

MARIAM FAM, DOHA

HYMNS echo through the spacious, blue-walled church. The congregants listen to the Gospel and the homily. They kneel, eyes closed and hands clasped in prayer or palms turned skyward. They line up to receive Communion as a choir belts out: "Lord, for my sake, teach me to take one day at a time."

In many ways, the service at the Catholic Church of Our Lady of the Rosary feels like a standard Sunday Mass. But at this church in Qatar, the small Gulf emirate hosting the World Cup, there are some tweaks.

The church sits in a "religious complex" housing other Christian denominations. Its building looks non-descript from the outside, with no crosses on its exterior. Sunday Mass is celebrated also on Fridays and Saturdays, the weekend days in the conservative Muslim country.

"This is something very unique here in the Middle East," said parish priest, the Rev. Rolly Gonzaga. "Our Sunday is Friday."

From Masses to baptisms, weddings and confessions, the church provides a window into the religious life of Catholic expatriates in Qatar. Mass is offered in multiple languages, including English, Arabic, Konkani, Tagalog and Sinhala, to cater to Catholics from India, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and other countries. While Qatar is unusually full of visitors now for the World Cup, migrant workers already make up the majority of the country's population of about 3 million.

"When I was in the Philippines, I only catered to the Filipinos. But here, (there are) different nationalities and then they have different cultures," Gonzaga said. "I could feel the real spirit of the church, the universal church," he said, adding the different communities learn from each other.

Non-Muslim religious groups in Qatar include Hindus, Roman Catholics and Buddhists, with smaller



People take part in a liturgy at the Catholic Church, Our Lady of the Rosary, at the Religious complex, in Doha

groups of Anglicans, Protestants, Egyptian Copts and others, according to a U.S. Department of State's report on international religious freedom for 2021.

Sunni and Shiite Muslims and eight Christian denominations constitute the registered religious groups; unregistered religious groups are illegal, but Qatari authorities generally permit them to practice their faith privately, the report added.

The complex known as "Church City," located on government-owned land, provides worship space for Christian denominations, "with clear government instructions that Christian symbols such as crosses, steeples, and statues were not permitted on the exterior of church buildings," the report said.

The needs of migrant workers who have left behind wives and children to work for long stretches in Qatar and other Gulf countries condition much of the pastoral care that the Catholic Church provides in that region.

During a visit to Bahrain last month, Pope Francis lamented that much labor can be "dehumanizing" and encouraged the promotion of equal rights for workers. Worshippers from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other Gulf countries packed the Bahrain national stadium

for Francis' big Mass.

Gonzaga described a religious life within the church complex in Qatar that includes Masses, celebrations for Christmas and catechism classes where children are taught the basics of the faith from prayers to the sign of the cross.

"Many people think that there is no Christian church here," Gonzaga said at his office, surrounded by statues of the Virgin Mary, a crucifix and illustrations of the sacraments. "That's why they are surprised when they see ... that we could do everything that we are doing inside the compound of the church."

A newly erected Christmas tree just outside the church building towers over churchgoers waiting to take photos with it.

Another priest, the Rev. Albert, said there are some differences in marking Christmas here from what he was used to in India.

"There, we can go for carol singing on the streets and we can go door-to-door and we can express our joy," he said. "But, here, it's not possible. ... We respect the feeling of other religion(s)."

Carol singing and other festivities take place within the complex, he added.

Qatari law restricts public worship for non-Islamic faiths and criminalizes proselytizing on behalf of an organization, society, or

foundation of any religion other than Islam, the State Department's report said.

Outside the complex, priests visit Christian inmates and go into hospitals to respond to requests for Communion, confessions or anointing of the sick.

"I go there wearing this," Gonzaga said, pointing to his Franciscan habit, adding he feels accepted and respected. "I don't encounter any problem," he said.

Some Catholics living far from the complex would like to see a new church in a different part of the country, Gonzaga said. That might have helped Catholics like Christopher Battad. He used to work in an area that is far from the complex and couldn't regularly make the trip to church, which made him feel guilty.

"I just feel that something is less in my heart," he said.

Still, he would pray, use a rosary and sometimes watch online services streamed from the Philippines, where he's from. Now, he lives closer to the church.

Riya Sebastian, who moved to Qatar from India, said she's been finding solace and joy at the church.

"It gives more peace and happiness in my life," she said. "Christmas is coming and when this is going on, we should ... beautify our hearts to receive our Jesus Christ." MDT/AP

this day in history



1984 GORBACHEV VISIT TO BRITAIN A 'SUCCESS'



Mikhail Gorbachev, the man widely tipped as the next leader of the Soviet Union, has spent five hours in "very friendly" talks with the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, according to British Government officials.

But Soviet officials described the talks much less enthusiastically as "business-like".

Topics discussed at Mrs Thatcher's country residence Chequers included ending the arms war and improving communications between the Eastern Bloc and the West.

It came after Mr Gorbachev signalled his desire for reduced tensions when he arrived at Heathrow airport yesterday.

"Opportunities for the prevention of nuclear war exist. These opportunities must be used to the full," he said yesterday.

But talks between Mrs Thatcher and the second-in-command at the Kremlin did not include contentious issues such as human rights in the Communist state.

Official sources remained tight-lipped on the exact exchange of words but did reveal the two delegations did not agree on the causes of world problems but were united on the importance of diffusing them.

The meeting lasted longer than expected and it is understood Mr Gorbachev gave Mrs Thatcher a private message from the country's president Konstantin Chernenko.

It outlined the Soviet Union's commitment to arms talks with America which will be held in three weeks' time.

Today's talks appear to signal a thaw in relations between the West and the Soviet Union.

The visit itself is a significant development in the relationship between Britain and the USSR as Mr Gorbachev is the first Soviet politician of his stature to visit in 28 years.

His eight-day stay in the West is the longest of any statesman from behind the Iron Curtain.

Once the talking was over Mr Gorbachev and his wife Raisa enjoyed sightseeing in London, visiting the library from where Lenin first produced his newspaper *Iskra* in 1903.

The couple, followed by a large security entourage, also visited the British Library and saw the seat where Karl Marx wrote *Das Kapital*.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1985 after the death of Chernenko, and became president in 1988.

He tried to reform the USSR by restructuring the economy, known as "perestroika", and encouraging greater openness - "glasnost".

But his reforms did not go far enough - they failed to stimulate the economy and sparked off greater demands from Soviet republics for independence.

In August 1991 Mr Gorbachev was almost ousted in an attempted coup by Communist hardliners. He returned to power but had lost so much prestige that by December he was forced to resign.

The USSR ceased to exist and fractured into single states.

Since then, Mr Gorbachev always popular in the West, has become a regular on the celebrity guest speaker and seminar circuit.

He is seen as one of the people responsible for ending the Cold War and won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990.

His wife Raisa died in September 1999 from cancer. On 29 August 2022, Gorbachev was admitted to the Central Clinical Hospital in Moscow, where he died on 30 August 2022.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

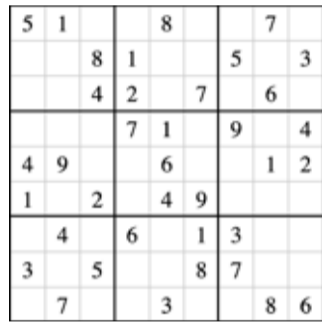
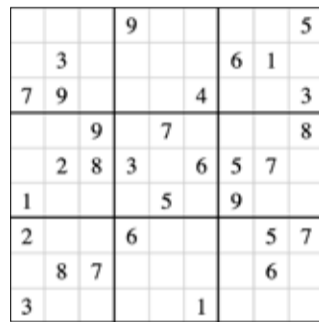
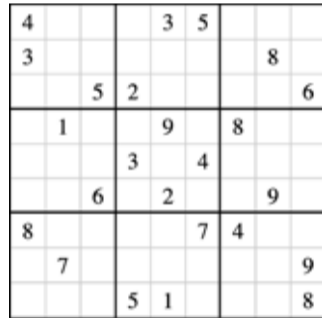

YOUR STARS

 ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19 You can avoid hassles by sticking to your work and refusing to get involved in gossip or idle chatter. Help elders get their personal papers in order. Don't let someone take the credit for a job you did.	 TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20 Residential moves will be favorable. You can surprise members of your family, which in turn will bring you a pat on the back. Look into alternate means of supporting your financial burdens.
 GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21 It's doubtful anyone will try to stand in your way or cut you off at the pass today. A second chance will result in good work. Your trendy style and unique way of doing things will entice new acquaintances.	 CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22 Plan a nice evening for two. Travel for business or pleasure. You are best to sit back and think it through, rather than add to the ranting and raving.
 LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22 Your anger may be impossible to contain if you get into debates with family members. Your ability to take hold of a situation will surely bring you popularity and leadership.	 VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22 Stick to doing things that will make you a better person both physically and mentally. Joint ventures might prove to be unfavorable. You mustn't be so trusting.
 LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22 You will have a tendency to exaggerate, which will lead to major confrontations with loved ones. If they're really interested, they'll wait. Concentrate on your job.	 SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21 You will be quite excitable today. You are best to sit back and think it through, rather than add to the ranting and raving. You will be extremely sensual; take precautions and don't take any risks.
 SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21 You may be more emotional than usual. You need to control your temper and deal with the situation rationally. Confusion regarding other people's money and joint ventures will come to a head.	 CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19 Take time to deal with authority figures or government agencies. Make plans to do something special with the one you love. You mustn't make promises that you won't be able to keep.
 AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18 Deceit with coworkers is apparent. Take a short business trip if possible. Go after your goals. Lend an ear to children; it can make a difference.	 PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20 Make sure to arrange in advance to spend quality time together. Find out if they have other commitments. You can convince others to follow suit.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY 	EASY+ 
MEDIUM 	HARD 

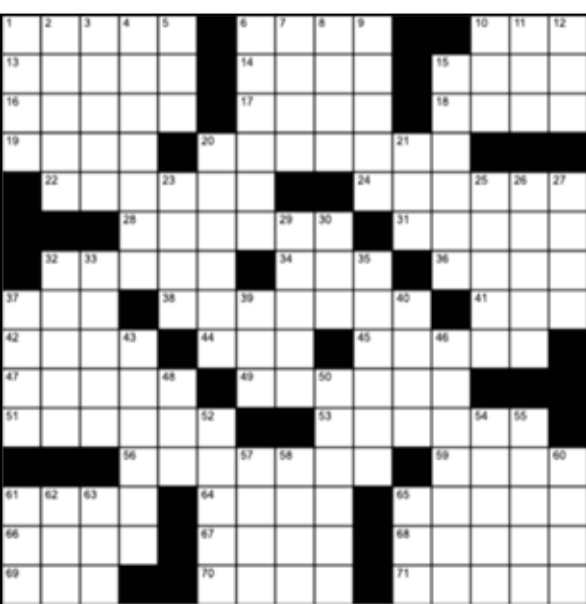
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-9	-2	cloudy
Changchun	-19	-10	fine
Chengdu	7	8	overcast
Chongqing	7	10	rain
Fuzhou	8	15	rain
Guangzhou	9	15	rain
Guiyang	3	7	overcast
Haikou	17	21	cloudy
Hangzhou	2	9	rain
Harbin	-25	-13	fine
Hefei	4	5	rain
Nanjing	3	5	rain
Shanghai	4	9	rain
Taipei	15	19	rain
Wuhan	0	4	overcast
Hong Kong	13	18	rain
WORLD			
Moscow	-12	-2	overcast
Frankfurt	-8	1	clear
Paris	-4	2	overcast
London	-5	-1	overcast
New York	2	9	rain

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Lacks; 6- Swedish auto; 10- Spy org.; 13- Dome home; 14- Gillette brand; 15- ___ Ha'i; 16- Person of exceptional holiness; 17- "Animal House" house; 18- Skeptic's scoff; 19- Caesar and others; 20- Diary; 22- Infernal; 24- Dried grape; 28- Uncouth; 31- Capture; 32- Easy ___; 34- Done, to Donne; 36- Native Nigerians; 37- ThinkPad maker; 38- Railroad; 41- Switch positions; 42- Go belly up; 44- Mazel ___; 45- Bird homes; 47- Top story; 49- Sewing instrument; 51- Move unsteadily; 53- Comfort in misfortune; 56- Hawaii's largest industry; 59- Mourn; 61- Christmas; 64- Moon of Jupiter; 65- Lost in Paris?; 66- Long ago; 67- ___ May Clampett of "The Beverly Hillbillies"; 68- Old-style fax; 69- Clean air org.; 70- Turns red, say; 71- Love deeply;

DOWN 1- Sibilate; 2- Anew; 3- Slip; 4- Without interruption; 5- Rugrat; 6- Adventurous expedition; 7- Give it ___; 8- Graceful horse; 9- Ulan ___; 10- Taxi; 11- ___-de-France; 12- Small island; 15- Two-piece bathing suit; 20- Vanquish; 21- Western Hemisphere org.; 23- "Aquarius" musical; 25- Wooden shoe; 26- Golf clubs; 27- Capone foe; 29- Find the answer; 30- Fell; 32- Diminish; 33- Strike hard; 35- Haphazard; 37- ___ first you don't...; 39- Charge carrier; 40- Shout; 43- Tiny; 46- Kelp; 48- Corporate VIP; 50- Compositions; 52- Governed; 54- Monte ___; 55- Duck with soft down; 57- Depend; 58- Goofing off; 60- Sumptuousness; 61- TV's "Science Guy"; 62- Alley-___; 63- Noteworthy period; 65- Sch. group;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Emergency calls 999 | Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283 |
| Fire department 28 572 222 | Water Supply - Report 2822 0088 |
| PJ (Open line) 993 | Telephone - Report 1000 |
| PJ (Picket) 28 557 775 | Electricity - Report 28 339 922 |
| PSP 28 573 333 | Macau Daily Times 28 716 081 |
| 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 | |



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AD

MATCH OF THE DAY

FRANCE, ARGENTINA: A FINAL OF CHAMPIONS

STEVE DOUGLAS, AL KHOR

KYLIAN Mbappé vs. Lionel Messi.

Soccer's latest superstar against perhaps the sport's greatest player in the World Cup final just about everyone was hoping for.

France and Mbappé are headed back to the biggest game in soccer, and to a much-anticipated matchup with Argentina, after ending Morocco's historic run at the World Cup yesterday [Macau time].

In front of the country's president, Emmanuel Macron, France beat Africa's first ever semifinalist 2-0, with Mbappé playing a part in goals by Theo Hernandez in the fifth minute and substitute Randal Kolo Muani in the 79th.

Mbappé became a global phenomenon by leading France to the title in Russia in 2018 and has a chance to emulate Brazil great Pele as a champion in his first two World Cups when he comes up against the 35-year-old Messi, who has dominated the game with Cristiano Ronaldo for the past 15 years.

It's the dream final for many, with France looking to become the first team to retain the title since Brazil in 1962 and Argentina on a mission to win soccer's ultimate prize for the third time in what is likely to be Messi's last World Cup.

"We need all our strength, all our energy to face a very competitive team with one of the legends in the sport with Messi," France goalkeeper Hugo Lloris said.

There will be no team from the



Morocco's goalkeeper Yassine Bounou cuts off an attack of France's Kylian Mbappé

Arab world in the final of the first World Cup in the Middle East, a prospect that seemed nigh impossible before the tournament yet nearly happened in Qatar.

Morocco has been widely lauded for breaking ground for Africa and generated an outpouring of pride among Arab nations after topping a group containing Croatia and Belgium and eliminating two more European powers — Spain and Portugal — in the knockout stage. Their players gave France a far-from-easy ride, too, before collapsing on the ground in despair after the final whistle.

"We are disappointed for the Moroccan people — we wanted to keep their dream alive," Morocco coach Walid Regragui said. "We felt we could have gone further but we have given a good image of

Morocco and of African football. That was important to us."

Remarkably, Hernandez's early goal was the first scored against Morocco by an opposition player in the tournament — the other had been an own-goal in the group stage — but the team responded to that and injury issues in its defense with a fearless performance in front of tens of thousands of fans who dominated the 60,000-seat Al Bayt Stadium.

France was forced into some last-ditch defending at times but has developed a knack of pulling

out victories despite not playing its best. The country will be playing in the final for the fourth time in the last seven World Cups, more than anyone else.

"It wasn't easy," France coach Didier Deschamps said, "and we showed our quality, experience and team spirit."

Mbappé failed to add to his five goals in the tournament but helped create the opener for Hernandez when his shot deflected off a defender and into the path of the left back. Hernandez let the ball bounce before driving a downward effort into the net from a tight angle.

Typically a defense-first team, Morocco was forced to come out and play even though it was reeling from losing Nayef Aguerd to injury in the warmup and another center back, captain Romain Saiss, after only 21 minutes because of a hamstring injury. Both players were doubts ahead of the game but were risked by Regragui along with left back Noussair Mazraoui, who has had the flu and only lasted until halftime.

Roared on by its red-and-green-clad fans, Morocco came closest to scoring when Jawad El Yamiq hit the post with an overhead kick in the 44th minute and forced France to defend in numbers, with

Antoine Griezmann — the team's playmaker — effectively playing as a deep-lying midfielder and often clearing balls from inside his box.

However, Mbappé enjoyed more space as Morocco tired late in the second half and he was moved into a central position. After dribbling past two defenders, he took a shot that deflected toward Kolo Muani, who tapped in having been on the field for less than a minute.

The goal was celebrated in the VIP seats by Macron, who flew in for the match and had earlier visited the Souq Waqif bazaar in Doha before traveling to the stadium. The president congratulated France's players in the locker room after the match.

They might need to raise their game against Argentina, though.

"Any team with Messi in," Griezmann said, "is a totally different proposition."

The World Cup trophy isn't the only thing at stake on Sunday. Messi and Mbappé are tied as the leading scorers with five goals as they chase the Golden Boot award.

Morocco's World Cup isn't over. The team will play the third-place playoff match against Croatia at Khalifa International Stadium on Saturday. **MDT/AP**

WEEKEND'S MATCHES

	Date	Time	Home	Away	ODDS
Sat	Dec 17	23:00	Croatia	Morocco	H 2.42, D 3.53, A 3.1
Sun	Dec 18	23:00	Argentina	France	H 2.94, D 3.1, A 2.85

SEMIS

France celebrates victory, fans cheer Morocco team

FRANCE 2, MOROCCO 0

CROWDS in Paris and other French cities erupted in shouts of joy as France advanced to the World Cup final yesterday, while disappointed Morocco fans mingled with the exuberant supporters of the winning team, paying tribute to the African country's unprecedented achievement.

Football fans streamed to the Champs-Élysées avenue in Paris, shooting off firecrackers and red flares, to an unending chorus of honking cars.

On the famous avenue, many were brandishing French flags and singing "we are in the final."

Some Moroccan fans, wrapped in the North African



country's flag, also cheered their team in the streets of the French capital.

France beat Morocco 2-0 to reach the World Cup final against Argentina, in a historic match between the defending champion and Africa's first ever semifinalist.

Supporters from both teams gathered in bars from

the boulevards of Paris to the streets of Morocco's capital Rabat, from the cosmopolitan French Riviera city of Nice to the historic Moroccan city of Marrakech.

Celebrating the victory near the Bastille square, in central Paris, Adrien Vignau, a 22-year-old Parisian, praised a "great victory for

France" and said he was looking forward to the final against Argentina and its star player, Lionel Messi.

"Bravo to Moroccans," said Parisian Corentin Voiseux. "Tonight it's not only France that wins but all of the French-speaking people. ... We are together and Moroccans will be with us at the final," he added.

In central Madrid, fans celebrated on Sol Square after the match, some with red Moroccan flags draped on their shoulders, jumping up and down, and some wearing the French tricolor.

In Belgium, scuffles briefly broke out in Brussels after the game and authorities countered with water cannon and teargas after they were targeted. One and a half hours later, a tense calm had returned. Media

reports spoke of 40 detentions. There also was some unrest in northern Antwerp.

In Paris, riot police vans lined the broad thoroughfare and the base of the imposing Arc de Triomphe, and white-helmeted officers roamed the crowd on the Champs-Élysées. Minor incidents briefly broke out, leading officers to occasionally use teargas to move the crowd away.

Despite their sadness, Moroccan fans expressed pride in their team, highlighting the history-making moment this game represented.

A Rabat resident, Fatima Zahra Attaq said that she was "a bit sad, but this is football. ... After all, they gave their best and made us proud to reach this stage of the competition."

"The national team made us dream," said Reda Hakam, also working in Rabat. "The dream is now over. I am not sad. I am actually very proud."

Kenza El Amrani said that "I think Moroccans should wipe the tears off their faces and cheer for this team."

Those who attended the game in Qatar also paid tribute to the performance and fighting spirit of the African team.

"Morocco played with their hearts," said Ayaz Dhrolia, a fan from Canada whose face was painted in Morocco colors as he left Doha's Al Bayt Stadium. "They won the hearts of millions and millions of people around the world, well appreciated. Thanks, Morocco." **MDT/AP**

TASTE OF EDESIA

Japanese Decadence

IRENE SAM, MDT

One of the most exciting new openings in town, **Zuicho** is the first branch of decorated Japanese kappo restaurant at **Grand Lisboa Palace Resort Macau**. With a focus on immersive and interactive Japanese gastronomy, it is the brand's first restaurant outside Hong Kong, introducing diners to an elevated experience, featuring well-honed, diverse culinary techniques imparted from traditional masters.



Literally meaning 'to cut and to cook', the origins of "kappo" can be traced back to Japan's Edo period. A form of high-end Japanese dining, kappo emphasises the interaction between diner and chef, with a wide variety of dishes masterfully prepared in an open kitchen and served right in front of the guest. Likewise, guests are welcomed into Zuicho's dining space with a sophisticated nine-metre-long countertop centrepiece made of 350-year-old hinoki, Japanese cypress. Crafted by artisans who have worked for the Japanese royal family, the counter now serves as centre

stage for artisans of the epicurean kind, where the chef will display their technical and sensory prowess for diners to observe and interact with throughout their multi-sensory meal. For a more intimate, private dining experience, Zuicho also offers the option of a private dining room.

Zuicho at Grand Lisboa Palace is committed to pursuing authenticity. By meticulously selecting the freshest premium ingredients flown in directly from Japan, Zuicho guarantees only the most exquisite omakase kappo experience. The seasonal menu draws from a well of culinary exper-

tise, featuring Japanese delicacies such as sushi, sashimi, steamed and grilled dishes, hotpot, rice dishes and more; a testament to the exacting standards of food preparation and quality within the kappo tradition. Aside from the restaurant's signature dishes, such as cutlet fillet and sukiyaki made with the famous Kagoshima Satsuma Wagyu beef, sea urchin and taro seaweed roll, and takikomi rice with seasonal seafood; the multi-course menu features chef's recommendations tailored to showcase the best in-season ingredients. No gourmet journey is complete without a well-paired

drink, and Zuicho boasts a beverage list of world-class sake and wine, as well as traditional Japanese tea, whisky and beer.

Helming the culinary team is Head Chef Yoshinori Kinomoto, an Osakan native with over 28 years of experience in Japanese cuisine. In addition to Tokyo and Osaka, Chef Kinomoto has long been based in Ishikawa, a prefecture home to abundant seafood and where he further polished his keen sense for the seasonality of sea produce. His insightful experience in preparing fish promises a wide variety of creative, fresh maritime flavours to come for Zuicho. Proficient in numerous cooking methods, especially kaiseki and edomae sushi, Chef Kinomoto carefully curates the order and serving time of every dish in the menu, creating a personal Zuicho experience for every diner with great culinary know-how and hospitality.

Zuicho in Hong Kong was awarded one Michelin star in its first year of operation in 2021 and became the region's first traditional kappo restaurant with the prestigious honour. Now in Grand Lisboa Palace, it will continue to uphold premium dining standards, striving to delight Japanese cuisine aficionados who are looking for the finest in town.

Macau Racing Tips

By Davy Chiu, MDT



THE PENG CHAU 1200 METRES TURF

2022-12-17|Sat|15:20

OWNER Alliance is a consistent galloper from Stanley Chin's yard. This particular 1200M turf race coming up this Saturday, which I believe should give him a good chance to score, he should find favourable condition to race on. **Owner Alliance** should have a good chance to break through and reward his connection for a win with handsome returns. His work looks solid chances are he would roll forward to offset the wide draw and subsequently to find cover before he enter the straight. He is a horse that still have a few more points up in his sleeves in the rating. He is a good bet this Saturday.



Race 3 Horse no. 6 Owner Alliance
Win & Place bets

ADVERTORIAL

GREAT TIMES

Style Your House Party with Five-star Delicious

Christmas and New Year are fast approaching! When it comes to celebrations, a festive feast is a must. Style your celebration with five-star cuisine and enjoy the end of the year with unique dishes that are only a phone call away. Get your party ready with a variety of festive offerings from MGM now!



We have specially curated a festive takeaway in set or a-la-carte where you get the luxury of hand-picking what you want to eat. This includes choices of "Herb roasted turkey" and "Whiskey and orange-honey glazed baked ham", alongside a tempting selection of sides such as homemade sausage and Braised Brussels sprouts with spicy chorizo, and more to instantly fill the dining table with full festivity. Don't forget to fulfill your seasonal sweet tooth with pumpkin pie, and chestnut log. This holiday season, MGM has you covered with big plates of food and copious amounts of pie!

As the festive season approaches, what better way to spread festive cheer than with a delicious luxury hamper? Featuring wines, exquisite desserts, and savory snacks, the five-star celebratory hampers come in three different versions—Gold, Deluxe, and Luxury, which are sure to delight and make your celebrations unforgettable.

All festive takeaway items are available at Anytime and Pastry Bar from now to January 1. Order now to impress your house party and enjoy a ready-to-eat meal. It is guaranteed to bring you and your family a memorable dining experience! For more details, please visit mgm.mo

OPINION

Sports Views

James Robson, MDT/AP Soccer Writer



MOROCCO LOOKS TO THE FUTURE AFTER WORLD CUP DREAM ENDS

Morocco made history, but couldn't make it past Kylian Mbappé and France.

The first African country to reach the semifinals of the World Cup was eventually beaten by defending champions France, losing 2-0 at Al Bayt Stadium on Wednesday.

There is still the chance to win the third place match against Croatia on Saturday, but the dream of becoming the first team from outside of Europe or South America to go all the way to a final is over.

Morocco coach Walid Regragui and his players became the unlikeliest story of the World Cup and even in defeat, pushed France all the way.

"My players gave everything. They've gone as far as they could," said Regragui. "They wanted to rewrite the history books, but you can't win a World Cup with miracles, you have to do it with hard work and that's what we are going to do, keep working."

No one could have expected Morocco to break new boundaries for African soccer by making it to the semifinals.

It was also the first Arab nation to go so far at a World Cup.

And it did so on merit - topping a group that contained 2018 finalist Croatia and second-ranked Belgium, before progressing past favorites Spain and Portugal in the knockout stages.

But perhaps Morocco's best performance came against France when it had to contend with injuries to key players and conceding a goal inside five minutes. In the face of those challenges it still managed to pressure France for long periods until Randal Kolo Muani's 79th minute strike sealed the win for Les Bleus.

The performance typified Morocco's spirit at this tournament and the quality of its players.

Regragui has won plenty of admirers for his tactical acumen against some of the giants of international soccer.

It will be interesting to see if any offers come his way from leading club teams in Europe - and whether he would be tempted to take up a new challenge.

He says he is committed to leading Morocco at the 2023 African Cup of Nations, which will come as a relief to the country's fans.

Key defender and captain Romain Saiss is 32 and may have played in his last World Cup, but Morocco has a lot of young players, who could go again in four years when the tournament is held in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Midfielder Azz-Eddine Ounahi has been one of the brightest emerging talents at the tournament and could be the subject of interest from leading clubs in January or next summer.

At 22 he is yet to reach his peak and currently plays his club soccer for Angers, the bottom club in France's first division.

Achraf Hakimi is already established at Paris Saint-Germain, but the 24-year-old right back has the potential to develop further and lead a golden generation for Morocco.

First of all Morocco wants to round off an unforgettable World Cup by winning its third place match against Croatia.

Focus will then turn to the African Cup of Nations and Regragui is comfortable with the added expectation after the success in Qatar.

"There's more pressure. We know that we were often the favorites, but now in the semifinals we couldn't hide," he said. "I think we will have a bit of time to find our way in the competition. The next match is in March."

"But like I said before, I'm not hiding. If we don't get to at least the semifinals, then I will leave. It has to be that way."

European Union leaders yesterday sought ways to stand up to the United States over its new green technologies plan that they say unfairly discriminates against Washington's best global ally when both should be standing shoulder to shoulder in their rivalry with Russia and China.

While the 27-nation EU argues the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act unfairly locks a longstanding friend out of the lucrative American market and excessively lavishes subsidies on made-in-America investments, it is now considering a huge subsidy program of its own to boost climate-friendly initiatives.

"We have to react with strength now," French President Emmanuel Macron said as he headed into a year-end summit of EU leaders.

At the summit, leaders were seeking to counter fears that the EU was a waning industrial power sticking to free and open trade ideals while others jumped toward subsidies and protectionism to shield local industries during recession and tough economic times.

"We are in Europe, really, at the point where we risk to be de-industrialized," Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said.

AP PHOTO



Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, Duke and Duchess of Sussex

HARRY, MEGHAN VENT GRIEVANCES IN FINAL NETFLIX EPISODES

SYLVIA HUI & DANICA KIRKA, LONDON

PRINCE Harry and his wife, Meghan, vented their grievances against the British monarchy yesterday in the second half of their Netflix documentary series, with Harry describing the royal press machine — including leaking and planting stories in newspapers — as a "dirty game."

Harry, 38, also said there was a "wedge" created between himself and his older brother and heir to the throne, Prince William, around the time Harry and Meghan decided to step away from royal duties and move away from the U.K. to start a new life.

He cited the example of a joint statement palace officials issued on behalf of him and William to "squash" a story about William bullying the couple out of the family. He said it was issued without his consent.

"I couldn't believe it. No one had asked me permission to put my name to a statement like that," Harry told the Netflix series. "They were happy to lie to protect my brother and yet for three years, they were never willing to tell the truth to protect us."

Elsewhere in the series, Meghan and Harry both reiterated their complaints that British royal officials did not help them by rejecting inaccurate, negative reports about them.

"What clicked in my head was, 'It's never going to stop,'" Meghan said. "Every rumor, every negative thing, every lie and everything I knew wasn't true, and that the palace knew wasn't true and internally they knew wasn't true, was being allowed to fester."

Harry added: "There was no other option at this point. I said that we need to get out of here."

Harry's lawyer, Jenny Afia, claimed in the series that she has seen evidence of "negative briefing from the palace" against the couple "to suit other people's agendas." She did not elaborate what evidence she saw.

Palace officials have not commented on the series.

The first three installments of "Harry & Meghan," released last week, focused on the British media's coverage of the couple and the way it was influenced by racism.

The new episodes come at a crucial moment for the monarchy as King Charles III tries to show that the institution remains alive and vibrant after the death of Queen Elizabeth II, whose personal popularity damped criticism of the crown during her 70-year reign. Charles is making the case

that the House of Windsor can help unite an increasingly diverse nation by personally meeting with representatives of the ethnic groups and faiths that make up modern Britain — trying to show that whatever the allegations against him, the reality is different.

Harry's 2018 marriage to the former Meghan Markle, a biracial American actress, was once seen as a public relations coup for the royal family, boosting the monarchy's effort to move into the 21st century by making it more representative of a multicultural nation. But the fairy tale, punctuated with a horse-drawn carriage ride and lavish wedding at Windsor Castle, soon unraveled amid relentless media attention, including allegations that Meghan was self-centered and bullied her staff.

"I wasn't being thrown to the wolves, I was being fed to the wolves," Meghan said.

The series is Harry and Meghan's latest effort to tell their own story after the couple stepped back from royal life in early 2020 and moved to the wealthy Southern California enclave of Montecito. Their life on an estate overlooking the Pacific Ocean has been partly funded by lucrative contracts with Netflix and Spotify. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



West Bank Business is bouncing back in Bethlehem after two years in the doldrums during the coronavirus pandemic, lifting spirits in the traditional birthplace of Jesus ahead of the Christmas holiday. Streets are bustling with tour groups. Hotels are fully booked, and months of deadly Israeli-Palestinian fighting appears to be having little effect on the vital tourism industry. The Bethlehem hotel association said that tourists are hungry to visit the Holy Land's religious sites after suffering through lockdowns and travel restrictions in recent years.

AP PHOTO



UK German tennis legend Boris Becker (pictured) has been freed from prison after serving eight months of his sentence and now faces deportation from the U.K. The 55-year-old German, who has lived in Britain since 2012, was released yesterday. Becker, the three-time Wimbledon champion, had been sentenced to 30 months in prison in April for illicitly transferring large amounts of money and hiding assets after he was declared bankrupt.

AP PHOTO



South African president is fighting for his political future amid an unfolding scandal that has tainted his reputation as an anti-apartheid icon once widely admired for tackling the problems of Africa's most developed economy. Cyril Ramaphosa, 70 (pictured, foreground), says he's innocent of charges that he hid at least \$580,000 in a sofa at his game ranch. He's accused of not registering the money with authorities, and when it was stolen not reporting the theft to police, in order to avoid questions about how he got the U.S. dollars.