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LAWMAKER RON LAM HAS CALLED FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO IMPROVE ITS ONLINE COVID-19 PATIENT SELF-ASSESSMENT PLATFORM

DRUG BUREAU IMPLEMENTS LIMITS OF PURCHASE ON CERTAIN MEDICATIONS

LACK OF INFO ON CHINA'S COVID-19 SURGE STIRS CONCERNS, BEIJING REFUTES CLAIMS



South Korea staged large-scale military drills yesterday to simulate shooting down drones as a step to bolster its readiness against North Korean provocations, three days after the North flew drones into its territory for the first time in five years. South Korean warplanes and helicopters failed to bring down any of the five North Korean drones spotted south of the border Monday before they flew back home or vanished from South Korean radars. One of them traveled as far as northern Seoul.

Pakistani police in multiple raids detained at least 1,200 Afghan nationals, including women and children, who entered the southern port city of Karachi without valid travel documents, officials said. The arrests brought criticism from around Afghanistan after images of locked up Afghan children were circulated online. The detentions underscored the strained relations between the two South Asian neighbors. The detainees will be deported to Afghanistan after serving jail sentences or when the paperwork for their release is completed by their attorneys.



Afghanistan A quarter of Afghanistan's private universities risks closure because of the ban on female students imposed by the Taliban government, a spokesman for the sector said yesterday. Afghanistan's rulers last week barred women from attending universities effective immediately, dealing another blow to women and girl's rights and freedoms since they seized power in the country in August 2021. The move also triggered international condemnation and an outcry at home.

More on backpage

ZERO TOLERANCE

Beijing shuts down over 37,000 cross-border gambling ops over this year



GOV'T TO PROCEED WITH NEW YEAR EVENTS

P2



P11

GOV'T TO PROCEED WITH NEW YEAR EVENTS

ANTHONY LAM

A music gala set for New Year's Eve will continue as no musicians have reported feeling unwell so far, Leong Wai Man, president of the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), told local media yesterday.

The New Year's Eve event will be held at the Sai Van Lake Square, near the Macau Tower.

Leong said that 1,000 additional seats will be placed at the venue to cater to concert goers. Additional standing areas will be allotted in consideration of possible absence of ticket holders due to health conditions.

During the past Christmas period, photos were posted on social media platforms depicting empty seats at the

music gala, also held at the Sai Van Lake Square by the IC. Back then, many residents fell ill from the coronavirus.

This coming January, the IC will launch a new initiative at the Ruins of St Paul's, which will allow participants to get a glimpse of the actual St Paul's Cathedral with the help of virtual reality technologies.

Leong also said the San Ma Lo pedestrian-only event will be staged during the coming Lunar New Year period.

At the same occasion, Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, director of the MGTO, said there will be three fireworks displays to be held on Jan. 24, 28 and Feb. 5.

She also said last night, Macau welcomed the first Hong Kong tour group since border restrictions began in 2020.



Hotel occupancy at 39% in November

STAFF REPORTER

THE average occupancy rate of guest rooms in November dropped 7.8 percentage points year-on-year to 38.7% amid the tourism sector's high hopes after the reissuance of eVisas for mainland residents.

Data from the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) shows the number of guests of hotel establishments in November declined 17.2% year-on-year to 409,000; mainland guests (323,000) fell 19.8% while local guests (61,000) dropped 2.6%.

Meanwhile, guests' average length of stay was 1.7 nights.

From January to November this year, the average occupancy rate of guest rooms at hotels decreased 11.6 percentage points year-on-year to 38%. The number of guests dipped 22% year-on-year to 4,658,000, whereas their average



length of stay remained stable at 1.8 nights.

In November, the number of visitors joining local tours increased 29.9% year-on-year to 2,400; the number of Macau residents purchasing outbound services (booking for transport, accommodation and sightseeing tours) through travel agencies rose 17.6% to 5,600.

From January to November this year, the number of local tour visitors dropped 21.4% year-on-year to 29,000, while that of Macau residents purchasing outbound services through travel agencies plunged 71.1%

to 40,000.

The tourism sector has now placed its hopes on the upcoming Chinese New Year holidays where the government is expecting up to 40,000 visitors daily.

Meanwhile, following China's decision to cancel quarantine for inbound travelers from Jan. 8, Trip.com data has shown a demand spike for overseas travel.

On Tuesday, bookings for outbound flights from mainland China increased 254% when compared to the same period the day before, while the overall ticket price has dropped by 12.9%.

OVER 100 TOURISM REPRESENTATIVES JOIN MGTO SEMINAR IN HK

ANTHONY LAM

OVER 100 tourism industry representatives have attended a seminar organized by the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) in Hong Kong, the MGTO has announced.

The MGTO also organized 185 associated seminar sessions to enable different stakeholders to conduct negotiations, 115 of which were conducted virtually, and 70 in person.

These sessions were to give Macau and Hong Kong representatives the opportunity to share resources to revive the industry, the MGTO said.

Two days ago, Hong Kong ended its vaccine pass requirement for indoor venues, as well as other Covid-19 restrictions.

At the same time, Macau ended centralized quarantine for arrivals



regardless of their country of origin.

The MGTO presented Macau's latest tourism offerings, information about the city's current Covid-19 procedures, transport resources, tourist spots and events.

The MGTO used digital technologies to help participants visualize local tourism elements, such as new accommodation facilities and tourist attractions. It also answered questions about Macau's hospitality industry.

The MGTO said the seminar was necessary because Hong Kong had

always been the city's second largest tourism source market.

With travel restrictions in both cities being gradually loosened, the MGTO would like to encourage more Hong Kong tourists to extend their periods of stay and to revive the city's economy.

Recently, the number of tourists per day has not exceeded 10,000.

MGTO director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes said that, last night, Macau welcomed the first Hong Kong tour group since border restrictions began in 2020.

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Beijing shuts down over 37,000 cross-border gambling cases

CHINESE police have solved more than 37,000 cases involving cross-border gambling this year, the Ministry of Public Security said in a statement yesterday.

Since the beginning of this year, police operations nationwide busted over 2,600 online gambling platforms, more than 1,100 casinos, and in excess of 2,500 illegal payment platforms and underground banks, according to the statement.

Over 1,200 technical support teams and 1,600 platforms promoting gambling were shut down this year, the statement noted.

The ministry added that police managed to solve 19 major cases during the country's three-month crackdown targeting cross-border gambling.

Joint efforts from the ministry and other government departments will be intensified to create a healthy social atmosphere



against gambling, according to the statement.

Earlier this year, the ministry said Beijing had investigated over 17,000 instances of illegal cross-border gambling in 2021.

Last June, the country announced the government would intensify its targeted crack-

down on cross-border online gambling activities. This involved coordinated efforts with various departments including the Ministry of Public Security to police online platforms, websites and mobile applications associated with gambling, with a focus on online livestreaming

platforms, short videos, and online forums and websites.

The ministry reported arresting more than 80,000 suspects in 2021 under increased measures aimed at cracking down on criminal activity.

In August 2020, China established a blacklist system for cross-border gambling tourist destinations.

China reported that some overseas cities had attracted Chinese tourists for their gambling businesses, disrupting China's outbound travel market and endangering Chinese citizens' lives and property.

In establishing the blacklist system, the ministry, and several relevant departments, will impose travel restrictions on Chinese citizens heading to overseas cities and scenic spots on the list.

Last year, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China announced China will add more overseas destinations to the blacklist. **LV/XINHUA**

MUST SURVEY SHOWS 70% POSITIVE TESTING RATE

A survey from the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) has shown about 70% of its 2,553 samples have tested positive from Covid. The study covered the period Dec. 10 to 29, and shows the virus peaked on Dec. 23, with 256 infected that day. The university expects the medical system will still be under pressure for the next two to three weeks, adding that more than half of the positive samples were of cases where the symptoms lasted from five to 10 days. Only 8% of the positive samples belonged to cases where symptoms lasted from one to three days, while 2% of cases lasted for over 10 days.

GOV'T REPORTS ANOTHER DEATH FROM VIRUS

There were 88 confirmed cases of Covid-19 recorded on Wednesday all of which were referred to the Health Bureau's isolation and treatment facilities, the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center has reported. The city also recorded another death from the virus involving a 75-year-old man who had received two doses of vaccine. The day before, authorities recorded 86 symptomatic cases, while two senior citizens aged 91 and 94 passed away due to the infection. The government has said Macau has reached the peak of the current wave of the pandemic, as residents have grappled with the rapid spread of Covid-19.

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LAWMAKER CALLS FOR IMPROVED COVID-19 PATIENT ASSESSMENT PLATFORM

ANTHONY LAM

In his written inquiry, lawmaker Ron Lam has called for the government to improve its online Covid-19 patient self-assessment platform.

Currently, the platform asks patients whether they have certain symptoms, such as fever and shortness of breath. The lawmaker explained that based on cases he had seen, many patients experienced fever but not shortness of breath, but were then deprived of the chance to seek medical assistance for their cough and sore throat symptoms at the Covid-19 community outpatient clinic.

The anti-Covid-19 medication pack provided by the government



contained only a blister pack of 10 paracetamol pills.

Because of this, the lawmaker observed that many people with coughing as a symptom could only obtain medication by approaching the hospital's Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department. Online sources have also pointed out that local phar-

macies had long been out of stock of such medications.

Lam noted that many patients were directed by the self-assessment system to the community treatment center at the Macao Dome. Nonetheless, they were redirected to the public hospital upon arrival due to their level of risk or other health issues.

As a result, the lawmaker questioned whether the Health Bureau would consider improving the platform to streamline the patient treatment and referral process.

Regarding the release of data, the lawmaker cited frontline medical staff who disclosed that many Covid-19 patients had passed away in the A&E Department, with most of them being elderly patients with pre-existing chronic diseases. However, he noted the data differed from that issued by the Health Bureau.

He asked if the government could explain this situation and whether it intended to take questions from the press about it.

DRUG BUREAU IMPLEMENTS LIMITS OF PURCHASE ON CERTAIN MEDICATIONS

A week after citywide complaints about the shortage of flu medications, the Pharmaceutical Administration Bureau (ISAF) has limited the purchase of certain medicines.

The limits affect pain, fever and flu medications, mucolytics and cough medications and SARS-CoV-2 rapid antigen test (RAT) kits.

Each person is limited to one box or bottle and 10 RAT kits for each purchase.

The limits are effective immediately.

In the past week, social media has carried many complaints about the difficulties of buying medicines for pain, fever, coughs and flu. Paraceta-

mol and ibuprofen have been sold out repeatedly even after being restocked.

Although the Health Bureau has given each resident a blister pack of 10 fever pills in the anti-Covid-19 pack, many have found it insufficient for a protracted fever. The government has recommended that those with fevers lasting three days, even with medication, seek medical assistance.

To cope with the medication shortages, the ISAF has instructed local chemist shops to avoid stockpiling or profiteering. Meetings were also held to ensure a sufficient supply for the market, the ISAF added. AL



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MACAUCLOSER

Household private tuition remains legal under new law to take effect in May

ANTHONY LAM

A new law governing private tuition services will take effect in May 2023, but domestic revision groups will not be affected, the government announced in an Official Gazette entry.

Domestic revision groups, which are referred to in the law as "household-style auxiliary educational activities," are groups convened by parents or household guardians without public enrolment and are limited to four participants. These groups will not be banned under the new law.

Should the number of participants exceed four, all participants must be



residents from the same household for the revision group to remain legal.

As for services for profit, auxiliary educational services will be divided into day care services and day care plus-tuition services.

Venues with a day care services license will only be allowed to provide care services, including but not limited to catering,

fetching and delivery, as well as provision of moral and social activities.

Meanwhile, the latter type of venue will be allowed to provide services mainly assisting students or service users to finish their homework or revisions.

The new law, however, will not have authority over similar services provided by a non-tertiary educational institution.

Schools will be allowed to offer extracurricular tuition sessions to their students.

The new law has clarified requirements for academic qualifications. Tutors for primary and junior high students must have attained a senior high graduation at least. Those providing services to senior high students should hold a higher diploma, licentiate or associate degree at minimum.

Care service providers must at least have graduated from primary school or have finished training provided by the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ).

The new law requires service operators to purchase insurance plans. AL

UM RESEARCH TEAM CALLS ON PUBLIC TO PROTECT MENTAL HEALTH AMID COVID-19 SURGE

A research team from the University of Macau has called on residents who suffer from mental health concerns amid the pandemic to "seek help from the psychiatrists in the hospital as early as possible and take appropriate medical intervention to halt or mitigate the progression of the mental illness and prevent its deterioration."

In a statement, the Covid-19 research team has provided suggestions for protecting not only physical but also mental health during the combat against the epidemic.

Due to the swift transition of the city's pandemic prevention measures, "many people may feel uneasy or even disturbed in

many ways, and some may even experience great mental stress."

Thus, the scholars have urged the public who experience mental discomfort to seek help from counselling hotlines.

To support the mental well-being of the community, social service organisations can further promote the importance of mental health and extend and deepen the coverage of the psychological support network wherever possible.

The UM called on the government continue to attach importance to the mental health of the public against the backdrop of the epidemic and implement targeted mental health policies and support measures accordingly. LV



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DIRE STRAIT

US TO SELL TAIWAN ANTI-TANK SYSTEM AMID RISING THREAT

THE U.S. State Department has approved the sale of an anti-tank mine-laying system to Taiwan amid the rising military threat from China.

The department yesterday [Macau time] said the Volcano system and all related equipment would cost an estimated \$180 million.

It's capable of scattering anti-tank and anti-personnel mines from either a ground vehicle or helicopter. The announcement indicated Taiwan would be buying the vehicle-borne version, the kind of general-use weapon many experts believe Taiwan needs more of to dissuade or repel a potential Chinese invasion.

To advertise that threat, China's military sent 71 planes and seven ships toward Taiwan in a 24-hour display of force directed at the self-ruled island it claims is its own territory, Taiwan's Defense Ministry said earlier this week.

China's military "harassment of Taiwan has intensified in recent years, along with rhetoric from top leaders that the island has no choice but to accept eventual Chinese rule," observers said.

That has seen the ruling Communist Party's increas-



A Chinese PLA J-16 fighter jet flies in an undisclosed location

gly powerful military wing, the People's Liberation Army, send planes or ships toward the island on a near-daily basis.

Between 6 a.m. Sunday and 6 a.m. Monday, 47 of the Chinese planes crossed the median line of the 160 kilometer - Taiwan Strait, an unofficial boundary once tacitly accepted by both sides, according to

the Defense Ministry.

That came after China expressed anger at Taiwan-related provisions in a U.S. annual defense spending bill in what has come to be a standard Chinese practice.

China also conducted large-scale live-fire military exercises in August in response to U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pe-

losi's visit to Taiwan. Beijing views visits from foreign governments to the island as de facto recognition of Taiwan as independent and a challenge to China's claim of sovereignty.

The PLA would continue to launch such missions until Taiwan's pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party

ceases "constantly provoking confrontation and enmity between the two sides," Chinese Defense Ministry spokesperson Col. Tan Kefei said at a monthly briefing yesterday.

"The PLA always ... resolutely defends national sovereignty and territorial integrity," Tan said.

While Washington has only unofficial ties with Taiwan in deference to Beijing, those include robust defense exchanges and military sales.

In its announcement, the State Department said the Volcano sale "serves U.S. national, economic, and security interests by supporting the recipient's continuing efforts to modernize its armed forces and to maintain a credible defensive capability."

It said Taiwan would have "no difficulty absorbing this equipment into its armed forces," and that the sale would "not alter the basic military balance in the region."

Analysts differ over what Taiwan's defense priorities should be, with some calling for big-ticket items such as advanced fighter jets.

Others argue for a more flexible force, heavily armed with land-based missile systems to target enemy ships, planes and landing craft. China's overwhelming numerical advantage in personnel and equipment give Taiwan little choice but to opt for that more "asymmetric" approach, they say. **MDT/AP**

SOUTH CHINA SEA

Philippines' Marcos seeks agreements in China amid tensions

THE Philippines says President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. hopes to sign a number of agreements during a visit to Beijing next week that comes amid ongoing territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

A statement from the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs yesterday said a number of projects were under discussion, including in agriculture, renewable energy, nickel processing, tourism and bridge construction.

Marcos is due to meet with Chinese leader Xi Jinping during his Jan. 3-5 visit at the head of a large business delegation. China accounts for



20% of the Philippines' foreign trade and is also a major source of foreign

direct investment.

Despite those economic ties, the sides have

repeatedly feuded over China's claims to islands and waters in the strate-

gically key South China Sea, referred to by Manila as the West Philippine Sea.

During the visit, the sides plan to sign an agreement to boost communication between diplomats at various levels to "avoid miscalculations" over such issues, Department of Foreign Affairs Assistant Secretary for Asian and Pacific Affairs Nathaniel Imperial was quoted as saying in the statement.

China says it owns virtually the entire waterway, despite a 2016 arbitration ruling that invalidated Beijing's vast territorial claims on historical grounds in the South China Sea. Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan also claim all or parts of the sea.

China has rejected the 2016 decision by an arbitration tribunal set up in The Hague under the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea after the

Philippine government complained about China's increasingly aggressive actions.

Those include China's turning seven disputed reefs into missile-protected islands in the disputed waters. Philippines treaty partner the U.S. says the developed islands, including three with military-grade runways, now resemble forward military bases.

Most recently, the Philippines sought an explanation from China after a Filipino military commander reported that the Chinese coast guard forcibly seized Chinese rocket debris in the possession of Filipino navy personnel in the South China Sea last month.

China denied its coast guard forcibly seized the debris from the Filipino sailors. Marcos said he would seek further clarification when he visits Beijing. **MDT/AP**

THE END OF ZERO

Lack of info on China's Covid-19 surge stirs global concerns

KEN MORITSUGU, BEIJING

MOVES by the U.S., Japan and others to mandate COVID-19 tests for passengers arriving from China reflect global concern that new variants could emerge in its ongoing explosive outbreak — and the government may not inform the rest of the world quickly enough.

There have been no reports of new variants to date. But given the country's track record, the worry is that China may not be sharing data on any signs of evolving strains that could spark fresh outbreaks elsewhere.

The U.S., in announcing a negative test requirement yesterday [Macau time] for passengers from China, cited both the surge in infections and what it said was a lack of information, including the genomic sequencing of the virus strains in the country.

The government has been accused of controlling information about the outbreak since the start of the pandemic.

"This type of rhetoric is driven by bias, intended to smear China and politically motivated," Wang Wenbin, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said.

Wang Pi-Sheng, the head of Taiwan's epidemic command center, said yesterday that uncertainty about the situation in China has his government wor-



An officer collects passports from residents for renewal and re-applications at a community police station in Beijing

ried. Authorities will start testing everyone arriving from China on Jan. 1, ahead of the expected return of about 30,000 Taiwanese for the Lunar New Year holiday later in the month.

"Right now the pandemic situation in China is not transparent," he told the AP. "We have a very limited grasp on its information, and it's not very accurate."

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida expressed a similar concern about a lack of information when he announced a testing requirement for passengers

from China earlier this week.

More broadly, the World Health Organization needs more information on the severity of the outbreak in China, particularly on hospital and ICU admissions, "in order to make a comprehensive risk assessment of the situation on the ground," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said last week.

India, South Korea, Taiwan and Italy have also announced various testing requirements for passengers from China. German health authorities are monitoring the situation but have not

taken similar preemptive steps.

"We have no indication that a more dangerous variant has developed in this outbreak in China that would be grounds to declare a virus variant area, which would bring corresponding travel restrictions," Health Ministry spokesperson Sebastian Guelde said.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said last week that China has always shared its information responsibly with the WHO.

"We stand ready to work with the international community in

solidarity to tackle the COVID challenge more effectively, better protect people's lives and health and jointly restore steady economic growth and build a global community of health for all," she said.

China rolled back many of its tough pandemic restrictions earlier this month, allowing the virus to spread rapidly in a country that had seen relatively few infections since an initial devastating outbreak in the city of Wuhan in early 2020.

The global concerns, tinged with anger, are a direct result of the ruling Communist Party's sudden exit from its hardline policies, said Miles Yu, director of the China Center at the Hudson Institute, a conservative think tank in Washington, D.C.

"You can't conduct the lunacy of 'Zero-COVID' lockdowns for such a long period of time ... and then suddenly unleash a multitude of the infected from a caged China to the world," risking major outbreaks elsewhere, Yu said in an email.

In China, the spiraling infections have led to shortages of cold medicine, long lines at fever clinics, and at-capacity emergency rooms turning away patients. Cremations have risen several-fold, with a request from overburdened funeral homes in the southern city of Guangzhou for families to postpone funeral services until next month.

An AP investigation showed that China was controlling dissemination of its internal research on the origins of COVID-19 in 2020. A WHO expert group said in a report this year that "key pieces of data" were still missing on the how the pandemic began and called for a more in-depth investigation. **MDT/AP**

THE END OF ZERO

EU assesses impact China's rollback of Covid measures

THE European Union is assessing the increase in COVID-19 cases in China following Beijing's rollback of its strict anti-infection controls in an attempt to streamline the testing of travelers from China in the 27 EU nations.

The European Commission said yesterday that the BF.7 omicron variant prevalent in China was already active in Europe and that its threat has not significantly grown.

"However, we remain vigilant and will be ready to use the emergency brake if necessary," the EU's executive arm said in a statement.

Even though virus experts in the EU have played



down the immediate danger, Italy on Wednesday made coronavirus tests mandatory for all airline passengers arriving from China. More than 50% of people screened upon arrival at Milan's Malpensa air-

port in recent days tested positive for the virus.

Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni yesterday increased pressure on the EU to join Italy's approach. She said requiring COVID tests of all passengers from China "is

only effective if it is taken at the European level," noting that many arrive in Italy on connecting flights through other European countries.

In Germany, however, the government had a different position. "There is

"no indication that a more dangerous variant has developed in this outbreak in China ... which would bring corresponding travel restrictions," Health Ministry spokesman Sebastian Guelde said.

A coordinated EU approach is necessary since almost all EU member nations are part of Europe's visa-free Schengen Area. The unrestricted travel means that testing in one nation would not be very effective since travelers from China could enter from another EU nation and spread the virus.

After strict travel restrictions at the height of the pandemic, the EU returned to a pre-pandemic system

of free travel this fall, but member nations agreed that an "emergency brake" could be activated at short notice to meet an unexpected challenge.

The United States announced new COVID-19 testing requirements Wednesday for all travelers from China, joining some Asian nations that had imposed restrictions because of a surge of infections.

Japan will require a negative COVID-19 test upon arrival for travelers from China, and Malaysia announced new tracking and surveillance measures. India, South Korea and Taiwan are requiring virus tests for visitors from China. **MDT/AP**

2022 NOTEBOOK

The slap heard (and seen) around the world

WAS it real? Or staged? Very real, it turned out. Will Smith's slapping of Chris Rock at the 2022 Academy Awards after the comedian told a joke about his wife, Jada Pinkett Smith, reverberated through the entertainment industry and the nation — and led to Smith being banned from the Oscars for a decade.

The incident touched off multiple conversations about race, about celebrity and — for a couple days of intense debate — about authenticity. Smith apologized, and eventually released an apology video as well.

But even months later, the very moment it happened — and the unexpected pall it cast over the Oscars that evening — remains a focal point. Here, the AP photographer who captured the moment and an AP entertainment writer who covered the evening recall their experiences.

CHRIS PIZZELLO, PHOTOGRAPHER WHO CAUGHT THE ICONIC IMAGE AND HAS BEEN COVERING THE OSCARS SINCE THE 1990S:

When I think back, the main emotion I have is relief. I'm up there at the top of the of the Dolby Theatre, way high up, a long distance away. And I have a rig with a 600 mm lens and a 200-to-400 mm lens for a little wider shots. Luckily, when Chris Rock was there, I was on the 600. Then suddenly it looked like someone was coming on the stage. I saw someone's blurry head approaching him. And I was just working on on instinct. And suddenly, something happened. The collision of the hand against Chris Rock's mic was really loud. And as soon as it happened, all the eight or nine photographers in the sound booth with me had the same reaction, which was, "Oh, my God, did I get that?"

If you look at the video, it happened really, really fast. And he did play Muhammad Ali in a movie, so he's got a good right cross. And my first emotion when it happened was fear that I missed it. Because it happened



so fast. It was probably the longest 30 seconds of my life. I was waiting for Paula Muñoz, my editor, who I was with tethered with. I have a headset on and I'm talking to her in real time as she's seeing my images. For about 30 seconds, there's nothing. Then suddenly I just heard Paula go, "Oh, you got it." I've never been more relieved.

I didn't get the hand hitting the face, but it happened so fast that you'd almost have had to see it in advance. But it's probably a better picture anyway, him reacting to getting hit. I think everyone was slightly late on it. But you'd have to be able to predict the future to get the hand on the face. So yeah, it was wild. But as I look back on it. I just feel just relief that I got a decent image out of it.

The Oscars is always one that I'm hyper-alert about, because big, unpredictable things happen. Other unexpected things have happened. And I've luckily got all of them. I haven't failed yet. The first one was when Jennifer Lawrence tripped on the way to the stage. Remember when Warren Beatty announced that it was "La La Land" and it was really "Moonlight"? I didn't think it could get any crazier than that. But this flap is the

topper of all of them. And so you just have to be extremely on alert. Every year.

JAKE COYLE, ENTERTAINMENT WRITER:

I was in the press room, backstage at the Oscars, which is where the winners come back afterwards, and where there are 100 journalists from around the world. It's a buzzy kind of atmosphere. And I think there was especially a lot riding on that Oscars, because it was the first real ceremony after the first two years of the pandemic. The movie business had been through such ups and downs and had really just been struggling to survive. So Hollywood really wanted to put on its best show.

Things had been going pretty well. But when that happened, it was like the world's largest balloon just got popped, like all the air went out of the whole festivities. And nobody really knew immediately what exactly had transpired. It obviously looked, at first, like it was a setup, that it was a scene being acted, I think, partially because of how dramatically Smith kind of strode on stage and hit Rock. We're accustomed to that kind of overdramatized response to things in an award show. And it

really did feel like that because it just came so out of left field that nobody could process it as it was happening. It seemed like you're in a "Manchurian Candidate" moment — like he got a signal in his brain and acted on it somehow.

Part of it was the difficulty of just knowing what emphasis to give it. It was clearly the biggest talking point of the night, but we're so geared up for all the milestones that can happen during an Academy Awards broadcast. You sort of have to shift from watching an awards show to almost reporting on a crime scene. It's a weird juxtaposition that is hard to kind of, reconcile in a story that is supposed to, you know, cover all of what happened during those 3 1/2 hours. I guess that that's kind of what I struggled with the most that night — how to properly frame it.

Chris Rock has never really had his say about this yet. He has in standup, but his special will probably be when he finally airs exactly his thought about it. Will Smith has a new movie out, which is a new test of how people feel about him. I do think that when he struck Chris Rock, he also waged a blow against the movie business. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

2002 DIANA ROSS ARRESTED FOR DRINK-DRIVING



Motown singer Diana Ross has been arrested by police on suspicion of drinking and driving after her car was seen swerving across a road.

The 58-year-old performer was pulled over by police in Tucson, Arizona after a motorist reported seeing a white Honda Accord driving erratically the wrong way down a road in the early hours of the morning.

The star failed a "field sobriety test" which included walking in a straight line and touching the tip of her nose. When asked to stand on one leg she fell over, according to the officers. She was also unable to recite the alphabet or give the correct time and date.

A breath-test taken on the roadside revealed Ms Ross had a blood alcohol level of 0.20% - more than twice Arizona's legal limit of 0.08%.

Police sergeant Judy Altieri, of Arizona police, said: "This is what would be considered extreme DUI (driving under the influence)."

Ms Ross, who was described by the officers as "polite and cooperative" even though she denied she had been drinking, was charged with three driving offences.

She was later released into the custody of a friend and will appear in court on 13 January.

Diana Ross rose to stardom in the 1960s with the Supremes with hits such as Stop in the Name of Love and Where did our Love Go?

She embarked on her solo career in the 1970s. Two of her biggest hits included Chain Reaction and Ain't No Mountain High Enough.

In May this year Ms Ross, a mother of five children, voluntarily checked into a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre in California before the start of her summer tour.

Three years ago the star was arrested at Heathrow airport in London after a fracas with a security guard. She was released with a caution.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Diana Ross was sentenced to two days in jail in February 2004 after she admitted drinking and driving.

She was also sentenced to two years' unsupervised probation for the offence. Two further charges against her were dropped. She served her sentence almost immediately but in March 2004 it was revealed she had served her time in bursts of six to eight hours and had been given a free rein to come and go as she pleased.

She was then ordered to return to jail to serve 48 consecutive hours but the following month that decision was overturned.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
You can't always have your own way. Avoid any over indulgences. Invite friends over rather than spending money on lavish entertainment.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
Don't turn down an invitation or a challenge that could enhance your chances of meeting someone special. You may be emotional and quick to judge others.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
You may find yourself caught in the middle of an argument that has nothing to do with you. You need to take a good look at all sides of an issue before making a decision.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Travel could bring you the adventure and excitement you require. Pleasure trips will be emotionally favorable. Romantic encounters will develop through colleagues.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
You are best to back away from commitment. Pursue outdoor activities or any physical exertion. Make some notes regarding the changes that you should make.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Overindulgence will be a problem if you are out in a social setting. Don't get intimately involved with a coworker. Think before you act.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
You can surprise members of your family, which in turn will bring you a pat on the back. Friendships could be terminated quickly if disappointments occur.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
You can make extra cash by moonlighting. Your dramatic nature may be too much to handle. Concentrate on work or make changes to yourself.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Don't expect anything for nothing and you won't be disappointed. You should focus on moneymaking matters and stay away from emotional disputes.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
New love connections can be made through group associations. Pleasure trips will be most enjoyable and should lead to new and lasting friendships.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Don't allow colleagues to stand in your way. This day was meant for love. Make creative changes to your residence. You may be fortunate while traveling.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
You can ask for favors or run your ideas by those who will be able to support your objectives. Your charm will attract someone special.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

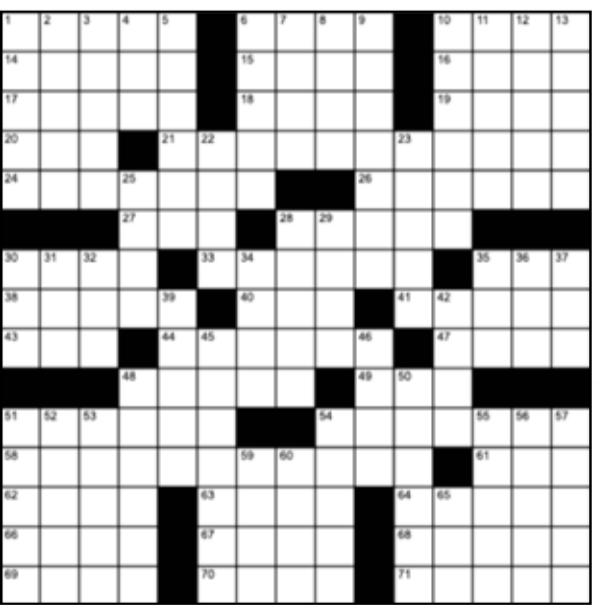
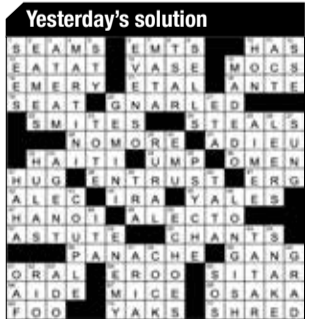
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-9	3	fine
Changchun	-20	-8	fine
Chengdu	5	8	overcast
Chongqing	5	12	overcast
Fuzhou	10	15	overcast
Guangzhou	9	18	cloudy
Guiyang	-1	7	overcast
Haikou	13	19	cloudy
Hangzhou	3	7	overcast
Harbin	-20	-10	fine
Hefei	-4	8	cloudy
Nanjing	-1	8	cloudy
Shanghai	4	9	cloudy
Taipei	14	16	rain
Wuhan	-3	10	fine
Hong Kong	13	19	fine
WORLD			
Moscow	1	2	snow
Frankfurt	9	9	showers
Paris	14	16	rain
London	11	13	rain
New York	6	11	fine

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Composer Bruckner; 6- Flat sound; 10- Westernmost of the Aleutians; 14- "Lovergirl" singer; Marie; 15- Heating fuel; 16- Chimney residue; 17- Camp sights; 18- Bring to ruin; 19- Hey, over here!; 20- Ox tail?; 21- Ornamental table feature; 24- Narrow footway; 26- Debt that remains unpaid; 27- Exasperate; 28- A&M student; 30- Acquire through merit; 33- Symbol; 35- To the point; 38- Looks after; 40- Fair-hiring abbr.; 41- Conger catcher; 43- ___ longa, vita brevis; 44- Followed; 47- Starchy staple; 48- Smallest; 49- NATO member; 51- Declare; 54- Communications satellite; 58- Enjoyable; 61- Chemical ending; 62- Quartz grains; 63- Change the decor; 64- Beside oneself; 66- Novel ending; 67- Bartlett's abbr.; 68- Rotating; 69- Actor Connery; 70- Get rid of; 71- Makes well;

DOWN 1- Room at the top; 2- I ___ vacation!; 3- Principle; 4- N.Y. neighbor; 5- Winston Cup org.; 6- Pluck; 7- Mailed; 8- "The Sweetest Taboo" singer; 9- Where junk may be held; 10- Have high hopes; 11- We're Off ___ the Wizard; 12- Puccini classic; 13- Absolute; 22- Sommer of film; 23- Of first importance; 25- Stream of air; 28- Circa; 29- High level of satisfaction; 30- LAX info; 31- ___ Lingus; 32- Hosp. staffers; 34- Untidy condition; 35- Clay today; 36- Chest muscle; 37- It's past due; 39- Prophets; 42- Periods of history; 45- Musical mark; 46- Shootout; 48- Sluggish; 50- Sled; 51- Chevets; 52- Roofing stone; 53- Actress Berger; 54- Steak order; 55- Ornamental coronet; 56- Conductor Dorati; 57- Stagers; 59- "All The Way To ___", song by REM; 60- Bustles; 65- Cereal grass;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- Emergency calls 999
- Fire department 28 572 222
- PJ (Open line) 993
- PJ (Picket) 28 557 775
- PSP 28 573 333
- Customs 28 559 944
- S. J. Hospital 28 313 731
- Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333
- Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300
- IAM 28 387 333
- Tourism 28 333 000
- Airport 59 888 88
- Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
- Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
- Telephone - Report 1000
- Electricity - Report 28 339 922
- Macau Daily Times 28 716 081



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AD

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

1. The Banshees of Inisherin: Martin McDonagh's film is a sharp, funny and utterly devastating work about the end of a friendship on a small Irish island. Colin Farrell uses his wonderful brows (and acting chops) to ensure ultimate heartbreak as his world and sense of self crumbles and rots. But it's the ensemble, including Brendan Gleeson, Kerry Condon, Barry Keoghan and on down, who imbue this deceptively simple set-up with gravity and depth.

2. Aftersun: Rarely does such a delicately crafted tale pack such a wallop. Charlotte Wells' breathtaking feature debut, starring newcomer Frankie Corio and Paul Mescal as an 11-year-old girl and her father on vacation in Turkey, is such a keenly observed accumulation of detail and feeling that you hardly notice the undertow of heartache that will, in the end, absolutely floor you.

3. Decision to Leave: The Korean master Park Chan-wook marries a police procedural and romance, and the twisty noirish results are at turns delightful and devastating.

4. Linguí, the Sacred Bonds: Chadian filmmaker Mahamat-Saleh Haroun's film is one of the year's most tender mother-daughter portraits. Rihane Khali Alio and Achouackh Abakar Sou-

DRIVE IN

'AFTERSUN', 'BANSHEES' LEAD MDT/AP'S BEST FILMS OF 2022



Colin Farrell in a scene from "The Banshees of Inisherin"

leymane star in this extraordinarily vivid tale, set in the outskirts of present-day N'Djamena, of abortion, motherhood and female solidarity.

5. The Fabelmans: Steven Spielberg's natural mode as a filmmaker might not be introspective. He's not historically been one to phone home. And while that awkwardness can sometimes be felt in his movie memoir, there are many scenes here unlike anything he's ever shot before,

and among his very best.

6. Kimi: Sorry "Top Gun: Maverick," you were very entertaining too, but Steven Soderbergh's "Kimi" was my favorite popcorn experience of the year — a taut, paranoid thriller with a modern, Alexa/Siri-inspired spin on the overheard crime scenario of "Blow Up," with a sharp performance from Zoe Kravitz, who can even make an agoraphobic shut in extremely cool.

7. Tár: Todd Field's brilliant,

restless "Tár" reminded me how much I love movies (and tricked me into believing that I was some kind of scholar of classical music for a few hours). Cate Blanchett is transcendent in bringing this flawed genius to life, challenging the audience to consider big questions about power, status and art. It is demanding but immensely rewarding cinema that is not easily defined, which is perhaps why audiences aren't taking a chance on it in theaters

(which is a mistake).

8. Murina: There is rot beneath the punishingly beautiful, sun-soaked Adriatic setting of Croatian filmmaker Antoneta Alamat Kusijanovic's sublimely menacing debut feature about a 17-year-old girl who is starting to question the ingrained misogyny around her. The family dynamics are as rocky and dangerous as the picturesque backdrop.

9. Corsage: Beauty, waistlines, aging, celebrity, duty and desire haunt Empress Elisabeth of Austria in Marie Kreutzer's intricate and interpretive portrait of dynamic mind and soul that's been stifled by her position and myriad traumas. Vicky Krieps is perfect as the deliriously subversive "Sissi."

10. White Noise: The supermarket dance to LCD Soundsystem's "New Body Rhumba" might not come until the very end of Noah Baumbach's Don DeLillo adaptation but there is a dazzling rhythm to the entire epic, from the controlled chaos of the overlapping dialogue to the hectic choreography of a family making breakfast. But maybe the most surprising thing is that behind all the wit, the style, the commentary on American society and the banal and the profound in the everyday, there is a real emotional weight too.

AD

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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



TASTE OF EDESIA

Celebrating at the Ritz

IRENE SAM, MDT

NOW is the perfect time to savor all the fond memories of 2022 and look forward to new hopes and fresh beginnings with your loved ones and a glass of Champagne in hand. From scrumptious New Year's menus brimming with culinary masterpieces to an extravagant 1920s-themed countdown party, **The Ritz-Carlton, Macau** has curated a diverse range of luxury experiences that will help you bid the past year farewell in immaculate style.

The Ritz-Carlton Café introduces the New Year's Eve & New Year Prix Fixe menu, boasting classic European influences

and premium ingredients sourced from across the globe, this six-course dinner starts with White Pearl Oyster and Chilled Boston Lobster, and continues with Seared Pheasant Breast, Sun Choke Velouté, and Apple Thyme Granite. Guests can select between the decadent Australian Wagyu M7 Beef Tenderloin and the delicate Patagonian Toothfish for the entrée, before ending the night on a sweet note with Chestnut Ruby Ganache served with mulled berries ice cream. At the New Year's Day Brunch, a slew of international treats await. Count on the free flow packages to keep your glass full and your spirit high as the restaurant offers three different top-quality

cuvées from Veuve Clicquot, Dom Pérignon, and the ultra-premium Louis Roederer Cristal.

Over at Lai Heen, prepare to pamper your palate with the best of both worlds as the world-renowned Michelin Star Cantonese restaurant serves up the eight-course New Year's Eve Celebration Dinner, a perfect marriage between Chinese culinary traditions and Western ingredients. From Chilled Beef Tendon in Balsamic Vinegar, and Double-boiled Free-range Chicken Soup with Fish Maw and Hokkaido Fresh Lily Bulb, to Simmered Seasonal Vegetables with Iberico Ham and Bamboo Piths in Superior Broth, an eclectic string of East-meets-West gastronomic

creations together form a wonderfully innovative and balanced meal that guarantees to inspire and delight.

On New Year's Eve, put on the Ritz in your best flapper dress as you step back in time to the Roaring Twenties at the Glitz & Glamour countdown party. The Ritz-Carlton Bar & Lounge transforms into a lavish speakeasy, where guests indulge themselves in the glitz, glamor and excitement of the swing era, dancing the night away to live music courtesy of our resident jazz band.

As the clock strikes midnight, raise a glass in the company of friends old and new, and welcome the arrival of another year filled with joy and wonder.

Macau Racing Tips

By Davy Chiu, MDT



THE HUNG HOM 1200M TURF

2022-12-31 | Sat | 14:35

A very prosperous 2023 to all readers of Macau Daily Times. May 2023 bring you luck and lots of MJC winners coming in the pipeline. This year end meeting I am keen on the winning chance of **Golden Unbeatable** this Saturday. This Rubick offspring is very consistent in all his outings in MJC especially on sand, his trackwork has been very impressive and he looks very fit every time he came out on to the track in his work. Although he's a sand horse but I prepare to flow an each way ticket on him, as he has the gift draw in barrier one as well as this is not a strong field. **Golden Unbeatable** is a good bet on this Saturday's racecard.



**Race 2 Horse no. 5 Golden Unbeatable
Happy New Year Win & Place bets. Good Luck.**

ADVERTORIAL

GREAT TIMES

Relish a Sichuanese feast with authentic yet mild delicacies at Five Foot Road

With the dexterity of profound taste profiles, the Sichuan cuisine brings flavors beyond the public's perception of hot and numbing. The menu at Five Foot Road, led by Chef Yang Dengquan, allows guests to dive into its diversified 24-flavor profile with numerous classic Chengdu dishes.



With the complexity and long-lasting fragrance, Poached Chinese Cabbage in Bouillon was once a staple at elaborate imperial banquets during Qing dynasty and upscale dinner parties in Chengdu back in the old time. While it might be simple in appearance, its signature clear, light chicken broth with a strong aroma is known as the epitome of Chengdu cuisine.

Stewed Duck with Matsutake Mushroom, Ginger, Ham and Seasonal Vegetables is another sacred dish recreated by Chef Yang, which only a few have access to this age-old recipe originated from Bashu (modern day Chongqing and Sichuan). In this dish, whole duck is deboned then steamed with vegetal ingredients for hours to form the tender and melt-in-mouth texture and is a wonderful option for young children and elderly.



Refined from the traditional, "household" taste profile that highlights wok-fried items, Chef Yang elevates the Wok-fried String beans with Minced Pork with an additional layer of earthy flavor by adding in the prized Matsutake Mushroom, directly imported from Yunnan, for its distinctive aroma. For enquiries and reservations, please visit www.mgm.mo or call (853) 8806 2358.

OPINION

Multipolar World

Jorge Costa Oliveira



THE PRIMACY OF STABILITY AND THE END OF CHINA'S ZERO-COVID POLICY

After years of maintaining a strict zero-Covid policy, the Chinese government became a hostage to it. There were several reasons for this strategy. First of all, the elderly population had low rates of vaccination, with 80 million people aged over 80 being unvaccinated, 44% of the general population had not received a booster shot, and this percentage rises to 60% in those aged over 80.

Although studies in Hong Kong comparing Sinovac's CoronaVac vaccine with Pfizer-BioNTech's mRNA vaccine were inconclusive, the Chinese government did not seem to have much confidence in the efficacy of Chinese vaccines; it clearly feared a significant increase in the number of casualties (over a million people dying in the short term) and a huge number of Covid-19 patient admissions that could overwhelm hospitals (the number of beds in ICUs of Chinese hospitals is low, <4 / 100,000 population).

Notwithstanding the WHO has publicly stated that the policy of zero-Covid is "unsustainable," the fact remains that in the Chinese Party-State, until the 20th Communist Party of China (CPC) Congress in October of this year, the political priority was the "primacy of stability".

After demonstrations protesting the never-ending zero-Covid policy in late November and with economic stability at stake, the Chinese government realized it needed a change in policy, without overtly stating it. On December 7, it approved a 10-point plan, gave provincial authorities leeway in tackling Covid-19 – which led to reductions in quarantine periods and more a rational and focused application of city lockdowns and testing – and changed the qualification of the severity of Covid-19 (from an infectious disease A to B).

The Chinese government's attitude of ending the zero-Covid policy in practice will allow economic growth to resume, although it carries obvious social and health risks, as evidenced by the data of elderly people unvaccinated or without a booster dose and the limited capacity of ICU beds in hospitals.

This policy shift contains important lessons.

In the Chinese Party-State, all officers – whether at the state, provincial, or state-owned enterprise level – know that policies or actions leading to social unrest, especially the disruption of public order, have serious consequences for the respective officers. In this case, with demonstrations having occurred spontaneously in numerous cities across China, it was clear that local or provincial authorities were not to blame. In relation to a policy that was unique in the world and that was beginning to be met with strong disapproval and internal opposition, the CPC leadership was forced to react by completely changing this policy to preserve political and social stability and to avoid losing authority.

On the other hand, and despite the departure of leaders like Li Keqiang, who symbolized the primacy of economic growth, the new Party leadership has shown itself to be attentive by quickly changing course before the slowdown of the Chinese economy forced the country into recession. Were that to happen, it could jeopardize the pact underlying the CPC's 'mandate from Heaven': severe reduction of political and civil rights in return for continuous economic growth and individual prosperity.

WORLD CUP: MBAPPÉ HAUNTED BY FRANCE LOSS, NOT BITTER TOWARD ARGENTINA

THE BUZZ

Kylian Mbappé may always be haunted by France's loss in the World Cup final, but says he bears no bitterness over the way Argentina celebrated and won't let the defeat hold him back with Paris Saint-Germain.

Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez has been criticized for the excessive tone of his celebrations. He carried a doll with Mbappé's face on it while standing alongside teammate Lionel Messi as Argentina paraded the trophy back home. Martinez, who also made a crude gesture after winning the Golden Glove award for best goalkeeper, was

filmed mocking Mbappé in the team dressing room after the game.

"Those celebrations aren't my problem. You shouldn't waste energy on such futile things," Mbappé said after PSG's win against Strasbourg on Wednesday night. "The most important thing is to give my best for the club."

Mbappé became only the second player to score a hat trick in a World Cup final but ended up on the losing side as Messi's Argentina won a tense penalty shootout following a wild 3-3 draw on Dec. 18.

MASSIVE FIRE AT CAMBODIA HOTEL CASINO KILLS AT LEAST 19

SOPHENG CHEANG, PHNOM PENH

A massive fire at a Cambodian hotel casino that lasted more than 12 hours killed at least 19 people and injured more than 60, while other victims were apparently not yet accounted for yesterday. Neighboring Thailand sent firetrucks and emergency workers to help cope with the crisis in the bustling border town of Poipet.

Some victims were believed to still be under debris or in locked rooms that rescue teams could not immediately access, so the death toll was expected to rise, said Sek Sokhom, head of Banteay Meanchey province's information department. He said more than 60 people were injured.

The dead and injured comprised people of several nationalities, including Thai, Chinese, Malaysian, Vietnamese and Cambodian, he said. A local Buddhist temple was being used to receive their bodies.

Videos posted on social media showed people falling from a roof after they were trapped by the fire at the Grand Diamond City casino and hotel in the town of Poipet. Many of those inside, both customers and staff, were from neighboring Thailand.

In a video posted by Cambodia's firefighting agency, onlookers could be heard shouting pleas to rescue people trapped on the roof of the hotel complex, which is more than a dozen stories tall at its highest point. The video showed at least one man falling as the flames reached the roof.

"Oh, please help rescue them. Pump water, pump water!" shouted the onlookers.

The Department of Fire Prevention, Extinguishing and Rescue posted that



A building burns near a Cambodia-Thai international border gate in Poipet, west of Phnom Penh, yesterday

calls for help were heard from the 13th, 14th and 15th floors at 4 a.m. and hands were seen waving from windows as well as a mobile phone's flashlight signaling from inside the complex.

"The fire was massive, and was inside the casino, so it was difficult for our water cannons to reach it," observed a firefighter on the video posted online by the fire department. He said that was the reason the fire continued burning for such a long time.

The blaze, which started around midnight Wednesday, was finally put out at 2 p.m. yesterday, said Sek Sokhom, adding that the rescue operation was continuing.

He also said an initial investigation found that the fire may have been caused by an overload due to New Year's decorations drawing increased electricity, causing wires to overheat and burn.

Banteay Meanchey police chief Sithi Loh said earlier that 360 emergency personnel and 11 firetrucks had been sent to the scene of the fire, whose cause was not yet known.

"Right now, we are trying to bring the dead bodies from the building down.

I don't think there will be any survivors because of very thick smoke. Even we all (the rescue staff) have to wear proper gear when we go inside the building, otherwise we cannot breathe at all," Montri Khao-sa-ard, a staff member of Thailand Ruamkatanyu Foundation, a social welfare organization that sends volunteers to disaster scenes, said.

Thai and Cambodian rescue teams worked side by side yesterday's search of the badly burned premises.

Thailand's public television network, Thai PBS, reported that 50 Thais, both staff and customers, had been trapped inside the casino complex. It reported that Cambodian authorities requested help to deal with the fire from Thailand, which sent five firetrucks and 10 rescue vans.

Poipet in western Cambodia is opposite the city of Aranyaprathet in more affluent Thailand, and there is busy cross-border trade and tourism.

Casinos are illegal in Thailand, but neighboring countries such as Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos host the lucrative industry. MDT/AP

Kosovo reopened the country's main border crossing with Serbia yesterday after a nearby barricade that led to its closure was removed, while Serbia's president said more than a dozen other Serb roadblocks in northern Kosovo also would be dismantled. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said Serbs would start removing their barricades. The move could defuse weeks of tensions between Kosovo and Serbia that triggered fears of new clashes in the Balkans.



Israel Benjamin Netanyahu (pictured) was set to return to office today [Macau time] at the helm of the most religious and ultranationalist government in Israel's history, vowing to implement policies that could cause domestic and regional turmoil and alienate the country's closest allies. Netanyahu's new government has pledged to prioritize settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank, extend massive subsidies to his ultra-Orthodox allies and push for sweeping reform of the judicial system that could endanger the country's democratic institutions.



Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI (pictured, 2005) is lucid, conscious and stable but his condition remains serious, the Vatican said yesterday, a day after it revealed that the 95-year-old's health had deteriorated recently. A statement from Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said Pope Francis asked for continued prayers "to accompany him in these difficult hours."

HOLIDAY TIMES
 Macau Daily Times will not be published during the holiday. The Times will be back on the stands on Wednesday January 04. However the MDT website will be updated with breaking news during the recess period. We wish our readers, advertisers and friends the best of times. Happy New Year!