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MACAU RCR electronics

GALAXY HAS LAUNCHED AN EXPRESS BUS LINE BETWEEN MACAU AND ZHUHAI JINWAN AIRPORT, THE GAMING OPERATOR ANNOUNCED

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AL COMMITTEE RAISES MANY QUESTIONS ON PRACTICALITY OF NATIONAL SECURITY LAW

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WHO WORRIED ABOUT SURGE OF COVID IN CHINA AMID LACK OF INFO

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AP PHOTO



Australia announced yesterday it will boost its defense capabilities by spending more than 1 billion Australian dollars (\$700 million) on new advanced missile and rocket systems, including U.S.-made HIMARS which have been successfully used by Ukraine's military. In Ukraine, the mobile, truck-mounted HIMARS have proved crucial in enabling Ukrainian forces to hit key targets, including a recent strike on a single building that killed at least 89 Russian soldiers.

AP PHOTO



Afghanistan's ruling Taliban killed eight Islamic State militants and arrested nine others in a series of raids targeting key figures in a spate of attacks in Kabul, a senior Taliban official said yesterday. The raids in Kabul and western Nimroz province yesterday [Macau time] targeted IS militants who organized recent attacks on Kabul's Longan Hotel, Pakistan's embassy and the military airport. Eight IS fighters, including foreign nationals, were killed and nine others arrested in Kabul and Nimroz province.

AP PHOTO



UN Security Council scheduled an emergency meeting at the request of the Palestinians and other nations to protest the visit of an ultranationalist Israeli Cabinet minister to a flashpoint Jerusalem holy site and demand an end to Israeli extremist provocations and respect for the historic status quo at the site revered by Muslims and Jews. Tuesday's visit by Israel's minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, a West Bank settler leader who draws inspiration from a racist rabbi, to the site drew fierce condemnation from across the Muslim world.

More on backpage

LIVING WITH COVID

After 70% of residents contract the virus, Macau lifts almost all restrictions; **Hong Kong reopens mainland border** ▲ P2-3



AP PHOTO

MDT ARCHIVE

MACAU-HK FERRY SERVICES RESUME SUNDAY, ENDING THREE-YEAR HIATUS ▲ P2



AP PHOTO



▲ P10

FERRY SERVICES RESUME SUNDAY, ENDING NEARLY THREE-YEAR HIATUS

LYNZY VALLES

FERRY services will resume Jan. 8, the same day the city will welcome tourists of all nationalities, with hopes of ending a nearly three-year foreign tourist drought.

Both ferry operators have announced the resumption of ferry services for the city routes between the Hong Kong Macau Ferry Terminal (Sheung Wan) and the Macau Taipa Ferry Terminal starting Sunday.

The government has optimized epidemic prevention measures and further relaxed entry restrictions from Hong Kong to Macau, ending the nucleic acid test (NAT) requirement for arrivals from the neighbouring region and Taiwan.

The Cotai Water Jet will provide six services daily, while TurboJET will operate 16 sailings between the Hong Kong Macau Ferry Terminal (Sheung Wan) and the Macau Taipa Ferry Terminal when it resumes services.

Nearly three years ago, at midnight on February 4, 2020, ferry services between Macau and Hong Kong were suspended due to the pandemic-in-

MDT ARCHIVE



duced fall in tourism.

The resumption of the Cotai Water Jet and TurboJET implies the companies have received government approval to operate again. The latter group told the Times earlier this week that they have been fully prepared to resume services.

Cotai Water Jet has launched its service schedule, departing Hong Kong at 9:30 a.m., while the first ferry leaves the city at 11 a.m.

This is followed by services at 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. from the Hong Kong Macau Ferry Terminal, and 2:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. from the Macau Taipa Ferry Terminal.

For TurboJET, the first trip to Macau

leaves earlier at 7:30 a.m., while the first trip from the region departs at 9 a.m.

TurboJET resumed its ferry transfer service Dec. 30 between the SkyPier at the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) and Macau and has been operating limited services.

For the meantime, the peninsula ferry terminal will remain close.

Back in 2020, there was a labor dispute between TurboJET and its employees over wage reduction. The measures come as ferry operators have struggled to adapt to a new reality in the Pearl River Delta, brought about by the operation of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge, causing heavy losses to the group.

ON-SITE TICKETING SERVICE FOR GOLDEN BUS RESUMES

PASSENGERS traveling to and from Hong Kong and Macau via the Golden Bus will no longer need to purchase tickets online.

The operator of the public shuttle bus between the two regions has scrapped its real-time booking system, as on-site ticketing services have resumed.

The move comes amid border normalization procedures taking place within the region.

The bus will also resume its 24-hour operations for travels to and from Hong Kong and Zhuhai, with the specific time found on the company's of-

ficial website or WeChat account.

The public shuttle bus between Macau and Hong Kong has operated on a minimal timetable since its resumption, making it challenging for travelers leaving Macau via the Hong Kong airport because seats have sold out swiftly.

The frequency has been greatly reduced since the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic.

The Hong Kong-Macau Express bus services that connect Hong Kong's Prince Edward district and Grand Lisboa and MGM Cotai have also resumed. LV



REAL ESTATE

Regional realtor expects slow recovery in property market

ANTHONY LAM

THE overall property market will recover slowly in 2023 even with the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions in this part of the world, a regional realtor has forecast.

"Economic activities should resume in an orderly manner, which will be beneficial to the recovery of the tourism and gambling trades in Macau," Centaline Property's Macau and Hengqin sector has said in the statement.

However, it added, improvements in market confidence will only be revealed after the publi-

ANTHONY LAM



cation of actual economic data or a change in real property policies is seen. The realtor expects improvements to only be seen as early as the second quarter of the year.

Forecasting the future of Hengqin, the realtor expects the property market will gradually

grow with a continued supply of new projects.

The realtor said the number of residential property transactions fell in 2022. On average, there were only about 300 transactions each month in the first nine months, with the June 18 outbreak impacting the market most.

In October, there was a full-building transaction – the realtor described as rare – which lifted the figure to 400 transactions in that month. The following two months ran low on number of transactions.

Nonetheless, 33 residential properties in the city sold above MOP20 million in 2022.

Last year saw 50% fewer transactions than the previous year, the realtor estimated.

The realtor said the city's residential property prices reached a low, with an average of MOP6,178 per square foot.

The markets for both offices and industrial units was also slow last year. The office market was hit hard by the dissolution of casino intermediaries, the realtor added.

GALAXY LAUNCHES EXPRESS LINE FROM ZHUHAI AIRPORT

GAMING operator Galaxy has announced that an express line between Macau and Zhuhai Jinwan Airport has been launched.

The express line will run between the airport and Galaxy Macau and StarWorld Hotel via Hengqin Port.

According to its social media post, eight round trips daily will operate, adding, "the whole journey only takes about 90 to 120 minutes."

The move comes as China optimized regulations on travel between mainland, Hong Kong and Macau.

China will optimize its regulations on travel between the mainland and Hong Kong and Macao on Jan. 8, the State Council Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office said on Thursday.

The office quoted a document released by the State Council joint Covid-19 prevention and control mechanism team, which said that travelers from Hong Kong will need a negative result from a Covid-19 nucleic acid test taken up to 48 hours prior to their trip. They will not need to take a second nucleic acid test after arrival. LV

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Macau Covid-19 entry restrictions to be lifted

ANTHONY LAM

Macau will open its borders to all foreign nationalities from Jan. 8 and arrivals to the city will not require Health Bureau (SSM) approval, with some not even needing a pre-departure Covid-19 test, the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center announced yesterday.

Yesterday's announcement came as Macau is easing some of the world's toughest anti-virus controls, following Beijing's lead.

The center abruptly organized a press conference yesterday afternoon after suspending the media event for nearly a month.

With about 70% of Macau people having contracted SARS-CoV-2 within the past month, according to the center, and with most restrictions having been lifted, Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Elsie Ao Ieong said the center will not end operations but will be retained for occasional outbreaks.

At the same time, SSM director Alvis Lo used the word endemic for the first time to describe Covid-19 in Macau.

Although no prior SSM approval is required for entrants, other legal immigration conditions, such as the need for a visa, remain in place. No person of any nationality will be subject to prior SSM approval before entering Macau.

At the same time, the transit service at the Macau International Airport will be reopened.

Entrants will not be required to declare their health conditions and will not receive red or yellow health codes after entering Macau

Health declarations and health management requirements will also be lifted from Sunday. Entrants will not be required to declare their health conditions and will not receive red or yellow health codes after entering Macau.

People entering from mainland China, Hong Kong or Taiwan will be not subject to a pre-departure Covid-19 test – neither a nucleic acid test (NAT) nor a rapid antigen test (RAT).

Those entering from outside these places will see more relaxed requirements. They will be allowed to present either NAT or RAT negative results obtained within 48 hours of their departure for Macau and this will only apply to the last leg of their trip should they be taking transits.

RATs can either be self-administered or administered by a certified medical facility or laboratory. The RAT results must be declared to, and presented through, the Macau health code platform.

The center added that the NAT or RAT results will be valid on the test or sample collection date and on the two days that follow.

Entrants from Hong Kong, Taiwan and other countries will

need to present negative NAT results obtained within 48 hours if they travel to Zhuhai during the first seven days of their arrival in Macau.

Should they be travelling to other mainland cities, the validity of the NAT results will be subject to the requirements of the destination cities.

NAT results for traveling to mainland China can be present-

ed either in paper form or in digital form on the Macau health code platform.

Health code conversion will still be required for travel between Macau and Zhuhai, the center added.

At the same press conference, Lo admitted that, by year-over-year comparison, December 2022 saw higher death counts than the same month in 2021. Last month, the city recorded over 600 deaths, the SSM director said. He said this figure is collective and includes all causes of death.

Then, he emphasized that it should not be thought that the horrendous situation is due to the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions. He said yearly comparison should be made to determine if the death rate has increased or not.

Responding to the Times about the use of antiviral medications for suitable groups of Covid-19 patients, Lo said the medication had been in place during the June 18 outbreak.

As to whether Macau would adopt Hong Kong's practice, which

permits private clinics and hospitals to acquire and prescribe the medication to suitable groups, the medical doctor said the use of SARS-CoV-2 antiviral medications has a lot of restrictions.

"Having the financial capability to access the medications does not equate to having the physical capability for them," Lo said. He said the medication is still scarce, and is prescribed only where it is most needed. Scarcity was also his answer in regards to provisions for private medical facilities.

He was also asked if the medications had been used during the most recent outbreak and how effective they were, but no answer was given.

While the center maintains its stand in pushing vaccination, it was asked if the government would acquire a wider variety of vaccines. To this, Lo said the center would consider whether the types not currently provided in Macau have additional advantages to determine whether they will be introduced to Macau.

HONG KONG TO START REOPENING CHINA BORDER SUNDAY

HONG Kong will start to reopen its border with mainland China Sunday and allow tens of thousands of people to cross from each side daily without quarantine, Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee has said.

Yesterday, Macau announced changes to its Covid-19 restrictions, fully opening the border to foreign entrants.

Although travelers from mainland China have been freely entering Macau after providing negative nucleic acid tests, the reopening to Hong Kong for mainland travelers has long been awaited, as it is expected to provide a much-needed boost to Hong Kong's economy.

The policy is expected to pave the way for economic restoration in the financial hub.

Yesterday's announcement came as China has eased some of the world's toughest anti-

-virus controls.

From Sunday, China will also gradually increase the number of flights between Hong Kong and the mainland and scrap the limit on passenger numbers for flights from the city, the Chinese government said in a statement.

"My personal inclination is, if factors permit, to allow a large number of people to go through because that has been the voice of a lot of people, both locally and overseas — wishing Hong Kong to proceed to normalcy as quickly as possible," Chief Executive John Lee said at a press conference.

Under a quota system, up to 60,000 people can travel from Hong Kong to mainland China each day. The same cap is also imposed on the number of travelers entering the city from the north, he said. **MDT/AP**

AL COMMITTEE HAS MANY QUESTIONS ON PRACTICALITY OF NATIONAL SECURITY LAW

RENATO MARQUES

LAWMAKERS have raised many questions about the national security law proposal having examined it in detail, committee president Ella Lei told a press briefing yesterday.

The comments came after the initial meeting of the First Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly (AL) to discuss the bill, which the AL passed without remarks last Dec. 15.

No government representatives attended the committee's meeting, which was dedicated to collecting lawmakers' questions.

Lei said the committee's questions to the government will mainly be about the practical application of the law.

"There are some parts that need clarification," Lei said, such as the meaning of "general provisions and definitions, like the definition of state and state security."

The committee president said the questions extended to the law's scope and its application to investigations and evidence collection on acts that might threaten



national security but which occurred outside Macau's jurisdiction.

"We understand the part [about] acts practiced in ships or vessels registered in Macau and also aircraft, this seems to be simple to understand, but we have questions about the others," Lei said, noting the law expressly targets all Chinese citizens and Macau residents, even when they are outside local jurisdiction.

"We are mostly concerned with the practical application [of evidence collection] outside Macau and the validity of this proof," Lei said.

The committee has asked the government about acts commit-

ted during competitions abroad and other similar aspects, Lei said.

The committee has also questioned how Articles 3 and 4 are related and how the penalties for paying to support seditious acts of subversion of state power will relate to Macau's Penal Code.

STATE SECRETS SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TOGETHER

The national security law contains a proposal for the protection of "state secrets," but how this will be regulated is articulated in a separate bill that the Executive Council has recently announced.

Lei hoped that, since they are

deeply related, the two bills could be discussed concurrently to avoid incompatibilities or loopholes and to facilitate the legislative work.

However, she noted the two bills are in two different stages, with the standing committee already discussing the national security law while the second bill has not yet reached the AL. The second bill would need first reading approval before reaching the same stage.

Although unstated, it was hinted that discussion about the national security law proposal might be slowed to allow time for the state secrets bill to reach the same discussion stage.

ENTRY INTO FORCE CAN ALSO BE A PROBLEM

The lawmakers have also sought clarity about when the new law would take effect.

The proposal says the law takes effect the day after its publication in the government's official gazette, Lei said.

Lawmakers foresee a potential problem if the law takes effect so quickly. They fear several "preparatory works" the government is said to be undertaking may not be concluded in time.

Lawmakers will continue discussions with government representatives in a meeting soon to be scheduled.

LAWMAKERS TRUST RESIDENTS' RIGHTS WILL BE SAFEGUARDED

RESPONDING to media, Lei said the committee thinks residents' rights are being properly accounted for, although she admitted the committee had not questioned the government on this point.

"We believe the rights of residents are well reflected in the law as the bill's text clearly states this, but the committee will ask the government about this too," she said.

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GBA

How does a Macau private car enter Guangdong?

THE Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Zhuhai Port has witnessed a historic moment on January 1, 2023. At 12:20 a.m., the Macau driver Mr. Cheung drove a car entered Zhuhai. It is the first Macau private car entered Guangdong after the implementation of the policy "Macau Cars Going Northward".

In the early morning that day, Mr. Cheung drove from the one-stop checking and discharging passage, finishing all the procedures and then entered the mainland successfully. During the checking, the whole process of car checking, license checking, fingerprint alignment, face recognition, and vehicle entrance had taken less than 1 minute.

"I submitted the application at the end of last year as soon as the news came out and drove to experience it today," Mr. Cheung said.

According to the policy, each



COURTESY NANFANG PLUS

entry shall not exceed 30 days and there is a maximum permitted stay of 180 days in a year.

Later, on December 20, 2016, Hengqin became the first in China to implement the policy of allowing Macau vehicles to enter or leave the area.

On December 20, 2022, Guangdong issued the Management Measure of Macau Vehicles Entering and Leaving Chinese Mainland through the

Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Zhuhai Port, allowing Macau vehicles to enter or leave the mainland through the port for more than once and drive within Guangdong province. According to the statistics, over 10,000 drivers have submitted the application.

"Allowing Macau cars to enter Chinese mainland is a significant step for the practice of 'One country, two systems'

as well as enhancing the integrated development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area." said He Feng, head of the Zhuhai border checkpoint of Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge. From his perspective, the new policy will facilitate Macau residents to develop in the mainland and boost Macau's further participation in the country's development. **MDT/GDTODAY**

WYNN TO PAY BONUS TO 98% OF STAFF

Wynn Palace and Wynn Macau employees will receive a special allowance on Jan. 16, benefiting 98% of its current workforce of 11,600 employees. In a statement, the gaming operator said the special allowance will be "equivalent to one month's gross salary." "Following the recent award of gaming licenses and the removal of pandemic travel restrictions, we are optimistic about our prospects in 2023," said Linda Chen, vice-chairman of Wynn Macau. She said current employees have shown an "exceptional level of loyalty, commitment and discipline."

RESIDENT DEPOSITS AT MOP660B

Resident deposits increased 0.3% from the preceding month to MOP662.7 billion, whereas non-resident deposits dropped 5.6% to MOP308.7 billion, data from the Monetary Authority of Macao shows. Public sector deposits with the banking sector decreased 2.2% to MOP248.6 billion. As a result, total deposits in the banking sector fell 1.8% from a month earlier to MOP1,219.9 billion. Domestic loans to the private sector increased 0.4% from a month ago to MOP568.2 billion, while external loans dropped 3.0% to MOP704.9 billion.

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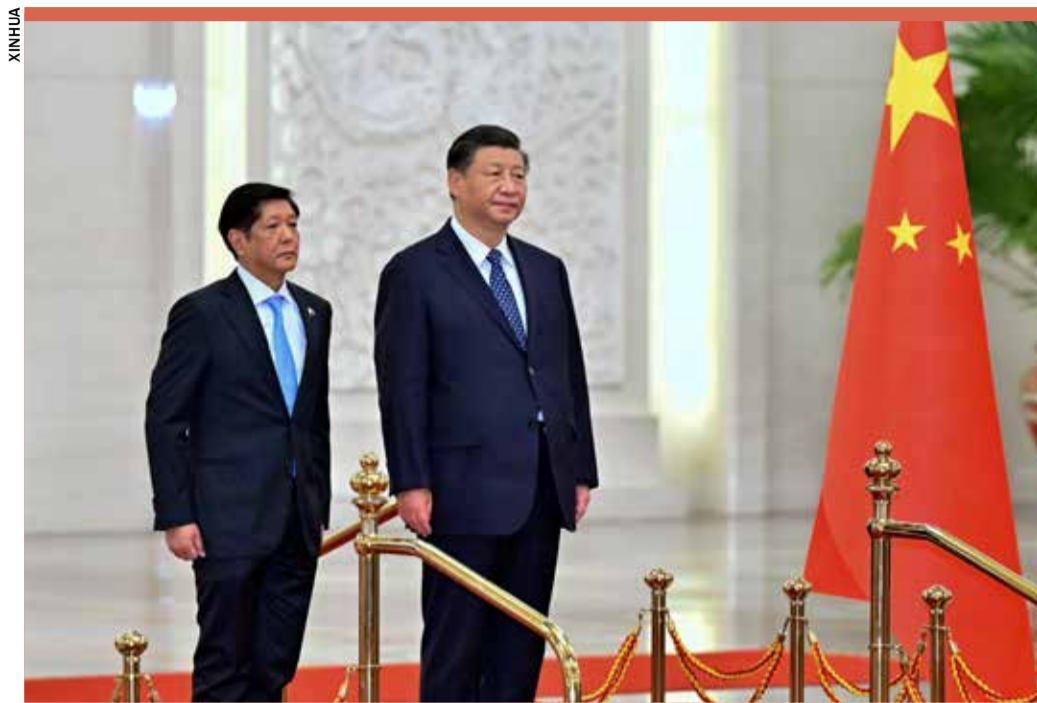
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Visiting Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and President Xi Jinping listen to the national anthems during a welcome ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing

SOUTH CHINA SEA

PHILIPPINE LEADER CITES STABLE TIES ON VISIT TO BEIJING

PHILIPPINE President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has cited stable ties with China during a visit to Beijing in which he has sought to downplay territorial disputes in the South China Sea. In a video address released by his office, Marcos said the sides discussed “what we can do to move forward, to avoid possible

mistakes, misunderstandings that could trigger a bigger problem than what we already have.”

Marcos said he made the case for Filipino fishermen who have been denied access to their traditional areas of operation by China’s navy and coast guard.

“The president promised that we would find a compromise and find a solution that will be beneficial so that our fishermen might be able to fish again in their natural fishing grounds,” Marcos said.

A joint statement issued yesterday said Xi and Marcos had an “in-depth and candid exchange of views on the situation in the South China Sea, emphasized that maritime issues do not comprise the sum-total of relations between the two countries and agreed to appropriately manage differences through peaceful means,” according to China’s official Xinhua News Agency.

“Both sides reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace and stability in the region and the freedom of navigation in and overflight above the South China Sea,” the statement added.

Accompanied by a large business delegation, Marcos presided at meetings yesterday seeking to finalize trade and investment deals. China accounts for 20% of the Philippines’ foreign trade and is also a major source of foreign direct investment.

China’s official Xinhua News Agency said that both sides “agreed to handle maritime issues properly through friendly consultation” and resume talks on oil and gas exploration.

Xi named agriculture, infrastructure, energy and culture as four key areas of cooperation. He said that China is willing to assist in agriculture and rural development in the Philippines and in infrastructure and connectivity projects, Xinhua reported.

Marcos received a commitment from Xi to address the Philippines’ trade deficit with China, his office said. The two sides are finalizing rules for imports of fruits from the Philippines, which Marcos said would start to balance the trade.

The Philippine leader said he also looked forward to the return of Chinese tourists once the COVID-19 situation in China settles. Last year, only about 9,500 Chinese visited the Philippines, down from about 1.6 million before the pandemic. **MDT/AP**

CHINA-VATICAN

HONG KONG CARDINAL, TAIWAN AT PAPAL FUNERAL, BUT NOT BEIJING

THE attendance of both the former bishop of Hong Kong and an adviser to Taiwan’s leader at this week’s funeral for Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI highlights the Vatican’s uneasy relationship with communist-ruled China.

The Chinese government, which does not have formal diplomatic ties with the Vatican, has not commented on Benedict’s death and “did not appear to have sent anyone to yesterday’s service.”

Pope Francis, who succeeded Benedict in 2013, has tried to mend fences with Beijing, moving beyond the harder line approach of his predecessor to sign an agreement in 2018 on the appointment of bishops in China. At the same time, the Vatican has maintained diplomatic relations with Taiwan instead of China, one of only a handful of governments that still do.

Cardinal Joseph Zen, the former Hong Kong bishop going to the funeral, has harshly criticized the agreement on bishops. In a blog post in Italian this week, he praised Benedict, who elevated Zen to cardinal in 2006.

“He could not accept any compromise,” wrote the 90-year-old Zen, who was arrested last year after he fell afoul of Hong Kong authorities over his participation in a now-silenced pro-democracy movement.

Zen said he was grateful for a letter Benedict wrote to China’s Catholics in 2007, in which he invited them to unite under his authority, and for his efforts in setting up a powerful commission to handle the Chinese church’s affairs.

China’s ruling Communist Party closely controls organized religion, which it sees as a potential threat to its monopoly on power. People are allowed to worship in institutions that abide by party rules. Some Christians have set up underground churches, which are considered illegal by authorities.

The agreement on Catholic bishops has been renewed twice, most recently for two more years last October. A month later, a feud broke out over the installation of an auxiliary bishop in Jiangxi province, which the Vatican does not recognize as a diocese.

Full details of the agreement have never have been made public but Francis has said he has final say in the selection of bishops. The Vatican describes the deal as an imperfect one that it hopes will eventually lead to better conditions for Catholics in China.

Taiwan sent former official Chen Chien-jen, a devout Catholic, as a special envoy to Benedict’s funeral. He is a scientist who was minister of health and later vice president under President Tsai Ing-wen from 2016 to 2020.

“The symbolic meaning of sending Chen is greater than sending the current ambassador to the Vatican,” said Chang Chia-lin, a professor of religious studies at Aletheia University in Taiwan.

Benedict was warmer toward China than his predecessor, Pope John Paul II, Chang said. The Vatican’s turn toward China began under Benedict, who reached out to Beijing although unsuccessfully.

John Paul viewed both Taiwan and Hong Kong as a connecting bridge to Chinese Catholics.

China and Taiwan split in 1949 during a civil war in which the communists came to power and the defeated nationalists fled to the island of Taiwan.

China considers Taiwan part of its territory and won’t establish diplomatic relations with nations that have official ties with the self-governing island. Only 14 governments, including the Vatican, recognize Taiwan instead of China. **MDT/AP**

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PANDEMIC

WHO worried about surge of Covid in China amid lack of info

THE head of the World Health Organization said yesterday [Macau time] the agency is “concerned about the risk to life in China” amid the coronavirus’ explosive spread across the country and the lack of outbreak data from the Chinese government.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the agency recently met with Chinese officials to underline the importance of sharing more details about COVID-19 issues including hospitalization rates and genetic sequences, even as the pandemic continues to recede globally since it began in late 2019.

“Data remains essential for WHO to carry out regular, rapid and robust risk assessments of the global situation,” Tedros said at a press briefing.

Tedros said he understood why numerous countries have recently taken measures against travelers coming from China, saying “it’s understandable that some countries are taking steps to prevent their citizens” given the void of information about COVID-19.

WHO emergencies chief Dr. Michael Ryan said the testing protocols implemented by some countries were not a restriction against travel.

“It’s not an excessive measure based on individual countries’ risk assessment,” Ryan said.



He noted that for the past three years, China has had some of the world’s harshest rules regarding COVID-19. “The reality for China is that many

officials sharply criticized COVID-19 testing requirements imposed on visitors from China and threatened countermeasures against countries involved,

scientific basis, and some excessive practices are even more unacceptable,” Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said at a briefing Tuesday.

The WHO’s Ryan added that there were continuing concerns about how Chinese officials are recording coronavirus deaths, saying that their definition, which only counts COVID-19 deaths if there is a record of respiratory failure, is too narrow.

Throughout December, China recorded only 13 official COVID-19 deaths, despite many thousands of cases every day and reports about overwhelmed hospitals, fever

Omicron subvariants BA.5 account for over 97% of all China infections and 68% of all sequences, globally

countries (now feel) they don’t have enough information to base their risk assessment,” he said.

Earlier this week, Chinese

which include the U.S. and several European nations.

“We believe that the entry restrictions adopted by some countries targeting China lack

clinics and crematoriums.

A WHO expert group said yesterday that no worrying new COVID variants have been identified in China based on the information authorities have shared, including genetic sequences deposited into a public database. The WHO said Chinese scientists have now shared more than 770 sequences, with omicron subvariants BA.5 and its descendants accounting for more than 97% of all local infections. Globally, BA.5 variants comprise about 68% of all sequences.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control said it did not expect the surge of COVID-19 in China to affect the outbreak in Europe, given the high rates of vaccination across the continent. It also noted that the variants spreading in China were already present in Europe, suggesting that any spillover from China would have a negligible impact.

Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO’s technical lead on COVID-19, said the agency was currently evaluating the significance of the variant known as XBB.1.5, which has recently comprised an increasing proportion of cases in the U.S.

“Our concern is how transmissible it is,” Van Kerkhove said. “The more this virus circulates, the more chances it will have to change,” she said, adding that further waves of transmission do not necessarily have to translate into more deaths, with the wide availability of vaccination and drugs.

Van Kerkhove said there is no data yet to prove that XBB.1.5 causes more severe disease, but that the WHO is working on a new risk assessment of the variant that it expects to release soon. **MDT/AP**

PANDEMIC

Beds run out at Beijing hospital outbreak brings more sick

PATIENTS, most of them elderly, are lying on stretchers in hallways and taking oxygen while sitting in wheelchairs as COVID-19 surges in China’s capital Beijing.

The Chuiyangliu hospital in the city’s east was packed with newly arrived patients on Thursday. By midmorning beds had run out, even as ambulances continued to bring those in need.

Hard-pressed nurses and doctors rushed to take information and triage the most urgent cases.

The surge in severely ill people needing hospital care follows China aban-



donment of its most severe pandemic restrictions last month after nearly three years of lockdowns, travel bans and school closures that weighed heavily on the economy and prompted street protests not seen since the late 1980s.

It also comes as the the European Union yesterday [Macau time] “strongly encouraged” its member states to impose pre-departure COVID-19 testing of passengers from China.

Over the past week, EU nations have reacted with

a variety of restrictions toward travelers from China, disregarding an earlier commitment to act in unity.

Italy — where the pandemic first exacted a heavy toll in Europe in early 2020 — was the first EU member to require coronavirus tests for airline passengers coming from China, but France and Spain quickly followed with their own measures. That followed the imposition by the U.S. of a requirement that all passengers from China show a negative test result obtained in the previous 48 hours before departure.

China has warned of

“countermeasures” if such policies were to be imposed across the bloc.

Still, World Health Organization head Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said he was concerned about the lack of outbreak data from the Chinese government.

At a daily briefing yesterday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said Beijing has consistently “shared information and data with the international community in an open and transparent manner.”

“At present, China’s COVID-19 situation is under control,” Mao said. “Also,

we hope that the WHO secretariat will take a science-based, objective and impartial position to play a positive role in addressing the pandemic globally.”

In dealing with the latest outbreak, China has sought to get more of its elderly population vaccinated, but those efforts have been hampered by past scandals involving fake medications and previous warnings about adverse reactions to the vaccines among older people.

China’s domestically developed vaccines are also considered less effective than the mRNA jabs used elsewhere. **MDT/AP**

ONE POPE

Thousands pour into St. Peter's for funeral of Benedict XVI

NICOLE WINFIELD,
VATICAN CITY

BELLS tolled yesterday for the funeral of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, the German theologian who made history by retiring, as thousands of mourners packed St. Peter's Square for a rare requiem Mass of a dead pontiff presided over by a living one.

The faithful applauded as pallbearers carried Benedict's cypress coffin out of the fog-shrouded St. Peter's Basilica and rested it before the altar. With red-robed clergy looking on, Benedict's longtime secretary, Archbishop Georg Gaenswein, bent down and kissed a book of the Gospels that was left open on the coffin.

Heads of state and royalty, clergy from around the world and thousands of regular people flocked to the Vatican, despite Benedict's requests for simplicity and official efforts to keep the first funeral for an pope emeritus in modern times low-key.

Many hailed from Benedict's native Bavaria and donned traditional dress, including boiled wool coats to guard against the morning chill.

"We came to pay homage to Benedict and wanted to be here today to say goodbye," said Raymond Mainar, who traveled from a small village east of Munich for the funeral. "He was a very good pope."

The former Joseph Ratzinger, who died Dec. 31 at age 95, is considered one of the 20th century's greatest theologians and spent his lifetime upholding church doctrine. But he will go down in history for a singular, revolutionary act that changed the future of the papacy: He retired, the first pope in six centuries to do so.

Pope Francis has praised Benedict's courage to step aside, saying it "opened the door" to other popes doing the same. Francis, for his part, recently said he has already left written instructions outlining the conditions in which he too would resign.

Francis was presiding over the funeral, which authorities estimated some 100,000



The coffin of late Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI is brought to St. Peter's Square for a funeral mass at the Vatican yesterday

would attend, higher than an original estimate of 60,000, Italian media reported, citing police security plans.

Only Italy and Germany were invited to send official delegations, but other heads of state and government took the Vatican up on its offer and come in their "private capacity." They included several other heads of state, at least four prime ministers and two delegations of royal representatives.

Matteo Colonna, a 20-year-old seminarian from Teramo, Italy, said he attended in part because of the historic nature of the funeral — but it also had personal resonance for him.

"The first spark of my vocation started under the pontificate of Benedict, but then it became even stronger under Pope Francis," Colonna said, while sitting in prayer in St. Peter's Square ahead of the funeral. "I see a continuity between these two popes and the fact that today Francis is celebrating the funeral in Benedict's memory is an historical event."

Earlier on the day the Vatican released the official history of Benedict's life, a short document in Latin that was placed in a metal cylinder in his coffin before it was sealed, along with the coins and medallions minted during his papacy and his pallium stoles.

The document gave ample attention to Benedict's historic resignation and referred

to him as "pope emeritus," citing verbatim the Latin words he uttered on Feb. 11, 2013, when he announced he would retire.

The document, known as a "rogito" or deed, also cited his theological and papal legacy, including his outreach to Anglicans and Jews and his efforts to combat clergy sexual abuse "continually calling the church to conversion, prayer, penance and purification."

The funeral ritual itself is modeled on the code used for dead popes but with some modifications given Benedict was not a reigning pontiff when he died.

After the Mass, Benedict's cypress coffin was to be placed inside a zinc one, then an outer oak casket before being entombed in the crypt in the grottos underneath St. Peter's Basilica that once held the tomb of St. John Paul II before it was moved upstairs.

While the ritual is novel, it does have some precedent: In 1802, Pope Pius VII presided over the funeral in St. Peter's of his predecessor, Pius VI, who had died in exile in France in 1799 as a prisoner of Napoleon.

Some 200,000 paid tribute to Benedict during three days of public viewing in the basilica, with one of the last, Friar Rosario Vitale, spending an hour praying by his body. He said Benedict had given him a special dispensation to begin the process of becoming a priest, which

was required because of a physical disability.

"So today I came here to pray on his tomb, on his body and to say 'thank you' for my future priesthood, for my ministry," he said.

Benedict never intended his retirement to last as long as it did — at nearly 10 years it was longer than his eight-year pontificate. And the unprecedented situation of a retired pope living alongside a reigning one prompted calls for protocols to guide future popes emeritus to prevent any confusion about who is really in charge.

During St. John Paul II's quarter-century as pope, Ratzinger spearheaded a crackdown on dissent as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, taking action against the left-leaning liberation theology that spread in Latin America in the 1970s and against dissenting theologians and nuns who didn't toe the Vatican's hard line on matters like sexual morals.

His legacy was marred by the clergy sexual abuse scandal, even though he recognized earlier than most the "filth" of priests who raped children, and actually laid the groundwork for the Holy See to punish them.

A group representing German clergy abuse survivors called on German officials attending Benedict's funeral to demand more action from the Vatican on sexual abuse. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1994 MYSTERY ASSAILANT ATTACKS TOP US SKATER



An unknown man brandishing a metal crowbar has attacked American figure-skater Nancy Kerrigan.

The 24-year-old skater was forced to withdraw from the US national championships in Detroit after the incident, which left her with severe bruising to her right knee.

The competition was expected to decide who would represent the United States in the forthcoming winter Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway, next month. But that now hangs in the balance.

Normally the top two finishers in these championships would qualify for the Olympics, although the US Figure Skating Association does have some discretion in the electoral process.

The attack happened as Ms Kerrigan, who won a bronze medal in the 1992 Olympics, was leaving the ice after a practice session at Cobo Hall, Detroit.

An eye-witness said: "Before she could say anything, a guy ran by, crouched down, whacked her on the knee and kept running."

"Nancy just dropped and started screaming and sobbing."

Ms Kerrigan's agent, Jerry Solomon said: "Nancy sustained quite a blow, physically and mentally."

"This could really affect her mental approach which is so important on the ice."

Police investigating the incident have been told by witnesses that the attacker had been video-taping Ms Kerrigan as she skated before he struck.

It is understood that he was wearing official credentials around his neck but detectives still have no identification.

The attack comes just eight months after tennis player Monica Seles was stabbed by a spectator with a kitchen knife as she played on a court in Hamburg, Germany.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Tonya Harding, 23, went on to win the US Ladies Figure Skating Championship finals in Detroit. But within days police began investigating allegations that the attack had been arranged and carried out by associates of Ms Harding. Ms Harding's former husband, Jeff Gillooly, her bodyguard, Shawn Eckardt, and two other men were charged with conspiracy but the skater herself denied any involvement in the plot. Eventually she admitted trying to cover up the Kerrigan attack and was fined \$100,000 and given three years' probation. Both skaters were selected to represent the US team in the Lillehammer Olympics. Ms Kerrigan went on to win a silver medal but Ms Harding performed poorly. In June of the same year the US Figure Skating Association stripped Tonya Harding of her 1994 national championship title and banned her from the organisation for life, which meant she could not compete in any future Olympic Games. In October 1999 she returned to the ice, coming second at an ESPN event in Huntington, West Virginia, for professional skaters ineligible for Olympic competition.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Secret affairs will only lead to deception. You're in a high cycle for romance. You can expand your circle of friends if you get out and socialize.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
Sudden changes at home will affect family members more than you anticipated. Don't let others put unreasonable demands on you.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
You will be in the doghouse if you are being. You can make it up to them later. Partnerships may be strained if one of you has been erratic and hard to deal with.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Be cautious when dealing with foreigners. You may want to take a look at the personal papers of elders in your family. Stay away from social unpleasantness.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
This is not the day to be extravagant. Don't jump the gun; you may find yourself getting angry at the wrong person. Resist any idle chatter. Travel for business or pleasure.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Don't be afraid to confront situations concerning loved ones in order to solve any problems that may exist. Don't take your frustrations out on the ones you love.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Recognition will be yours if you meet your deadline. You must use discretion when talking to others. Gambling should not be an option. Short trips may be tiring but rewarding.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Residential moves will be in your best interest. Curl up with a good book or go for a drive in the country. Problems with in-laws may cause friction in your personal relationship.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Money problems will get worse if your partner hasn't been playing by the rules. Consider selling your homemade crafts at the flea market.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Uncertainties about your home may cause tension. Don't give up what you have until you can be certain just what it is you're getting.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Protect your interests legally if necessary. You need to get out and have some fun to reduce tension. Do your own thing.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Work quietly on your own and you will forge ahead. Residential changes, renovations, or moves are likely to disrupt your routine.

The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



SUDOKU

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

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

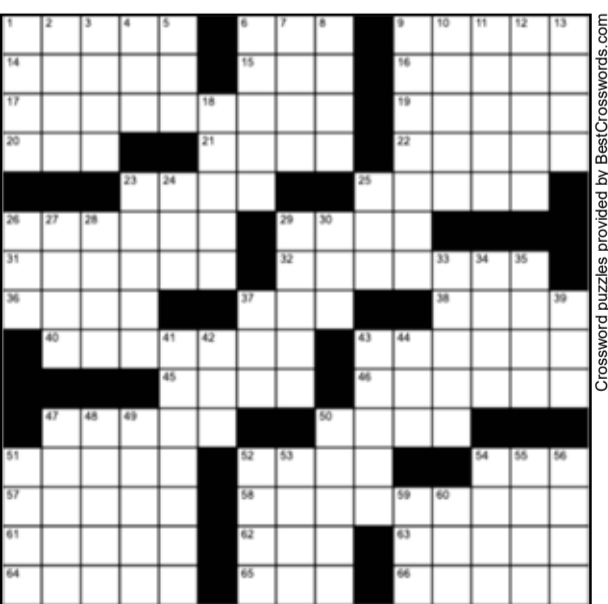
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-6	8	fine
Changchun	-12	-5	fine
Chengdu	4	16	fine
Chongqing	7	14	fine
Fuzhou	12	21	cloudy
Guangzhou	12	21	fine
Guiyang	3	11	cloudy
Haikou	16	19	cloudy
Hangzhou	4	13	cloudy
Harbin	-19	-10	fine
Hefei	0	16	fine
Nanjing	2	15	fine
Shanghai	7	14	fine
Taipei	16	18	rain
Wuhan	2	18	fine
Hong Kong	17	22	fine
WORLD			
Moscow	-26	-22	overcast
Frankfurt	7	11	rain
Paris	7	13	cloudy
London	10	12	cloudy
New York	2	9	rain

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Tendon; 6- Endeavor; 9- Inclines; 14- Winter drink; 15- Grande; 16- Remove a covering; 17- Nameless state; 19- Brief brawl; 20- Tafari (Halle Sesslie); 21- Bread spread; 22- Area of land; 23- Female child; 25- High-school freshman; 26- Goat hair fabric; 29- Portico; 31- Dogwood; 32- Pivot for a paddle; 36- Test choice; 37- Freddie Krueger roamed Street in the movies; 38- Forcible impact; 40- Diminish; 43- Passenger ships; 45- Neighbor of Cambodia; 46- Sacred place; 47- Sacred song; 50- Den; 51- Monument; 52- High cards; 54- Grazed; 57- Aggregate of qualities that make good character; 58- Secession; 61- Philbin of TV; 62- Place for ordering alcoholic drinks; 63- Grenoble's river; 64- Forest makeup; 65- Actress Brennenman; 66- English royal house;

DOWN 1- Injury reminder; 2- New Rochelle college; 3- Sgts., e.g.; 4- Many moons; 5- Route; 6- Run of bird-song; 7- Ceremonial act; 8- It's used to walk the dog; 9- Used in a rite of purification; 10- Dicembre follower; 11- Take the role of; 12- "Of course!"; 13- Predicament; 18- Virtuous; 23- Dead duck; 24- Wrath; 25- In favor of; 26- Perform in a play; 27- Asta's mistress; 28- Eats; 29- Mends a shoe; 30- Skye cap; 33- Proprietor; 34- "Believe" singer; 35- Syrup brand; 37- Self-esteem; 39- AOL alternative; 41- Ailment; 42- Hoover; 43- Potala Palace site; 44- Second sequel tag; 47- Kitchen gadget; 48- Surround; 49- Bandleader Shaw; 50- Guarded; 51- Wagon; 52- Swedish pop band whose hits include "Waterloo"; 53- Burn the midnight oil, studying; 54- Quite impressed; 55- Poi source; 56- Observer; 59- Equipment; 60- Tempe sch.;



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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DRIVE IN

A GRUMPY TOM HANKS STARS IN 'A MAN CALLED OTTO'

JAKE COYLE,
MDT/AP FILM WRITER

SENTIMENTAL tales about grumpy old men and American decline have, until recently, typically been the domain of Clint Eastwood.

But in "A Man Called Otto," Marc Forster's adaptation of Fredrik Backman's bestseller and a remake of the 2016 Swedish film "A Man Called Ove," it's Tom Hanks prowling the neighborhood and irritably grumbling about how things used to be. In the original, Rolf Lassgård richly inhabited the role of Ove, a curmudgeonly widower — a Forrest Grump — whose suicide attempts are foiled by needy neighbors and, ultimately, his grudging, sincere devotion to them.

Exasperation, whether directed at a crying ballplayer or a slobbering canine, has always been squarely in Hanks' wheelhouse. But dependency or even plain get-off-my-lawn orneriness are less obvious traits possessed



Tom Hanks in a scene from "A Man Called Otto"

by the actor sometimes called "America's Dad." Following Hanks' villainous turn as Col. Tom Parker in "Elvis," the 66-year-old has found in "A Man Called Otto" another role that interestingly, if not always entirely successfully, caters to his strengths while tweaking his familiar screen presence.

It also may rob "A Man Called Otto," which opens with Otto buying rope to hang himself with, of some of its spirit.

We know there are dark roads that Hanks just isn't going to go down, and some of the early, more caustic scenes of Forster's film strike a false note. But as "A Man Called Otto" makes its way through Otto's life, cutting between his present-day squabbles and flashbacks of happier times with his wife, Sonya (Rachel Keller), Hanks movingly tailors the role to himself.

"A Man Called Otto" is set in the prefab row-house develop-

ment Otto has long lived in, where he tirelessly tisk-tisks any rule breakers, re-sorts misplaced recycling and berates drivers who violate the street's regulation against through traffic.

Screenwriter David Magee ("Life of Pi," "Finding Neverland") hues closely to the Swedish film as a kind of parable of community. Up and down the street are all the people the freshly retired Otto barely tolerates: friends-turned-enemies (Peter Lawson Jones, Juanita Jennings), a friendly exerciser (a delightful Cameron Britton), a transgender paper deliverer and former student of Otto's wife (Mack Bayda). Most of all there is Marisol (a terrific Mariana Treviño), a pregnant mother of two has just moved in with her husband (Manuel Garcia-Rulfo). Various needs — a stray cat, a borrowed ladder, driving lessons — intrude on Otto's desires for a peaceful death and, in between aborted suicide attempts, gradually rekindle

his will to live.

It's sometimes too broadly drawn. Mike Birbiglia plays a predatory real estate agent from a company not-so-subtly called Dye & Merica. ("Sounds like Dying America, which it is," says Otto.) But "A Man Called Otto" is less after realism than it is a modern-day fable, with shades of Scrooge and the Grinch. As a tale of a solitary man, Hanks has made it a poignant work of family. Rita Wilson, his wife, is a producer and is heard singing a song in the film. The younger Otto is played in flashbacks by their son, Truman Hanks. Even Chet Hanks' "White Boy Summer" blares from a car radio.

Another tune, though, is a more thrilling needle drop. The less said probably the better, but suffice to say, it could be a sign that the Kate Bush renaissance so hearteningly kicked up by "Stranger Things" has not yet abated. If that's not life-affirming, I don't know what is.

"A Man Called Otto," a Sony Pictures release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for mature thematic material involving suicide attempts, and language. Running time: 126 minutes. ★★☆☆

AD

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

大律師 ASSOCIATES:
高文軒 Adelino Correia °
羅善齡 Zelina Rodrigues *
馬潔冰 Maria João Marques
陶義德 António Isóo de Azeredo
白穎怡 Icília Berenguel
冼玲鳳 Mariana Afonso Esteves
馬秀文 Sofia Mendes Martins
飛嘉華 Carlos dos Santos Ferreira °
杜力信 Nelson de Azevedo
莫永誠 Rui Velez de Moura
安東尼 António Manuel dos Santos
巴慧雅 Vera Bastos
歐文傑 Miguel Evaristo
陳芷喬 Joana Chan
顏曉蓉 Teresa Xiaorong Yan
諾瑪莉 Maria Noras
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梁淑嵐 Ana Leon
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吳霆鋒 Ng Teng Fong
戴博晴 Tai Pok Cheng
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羅成軒 José J. Rodrigues
斐彥德 Gonçalo Figueiredo
楊詩婷 Si Teng leong
伍福賢 Domingos Ng



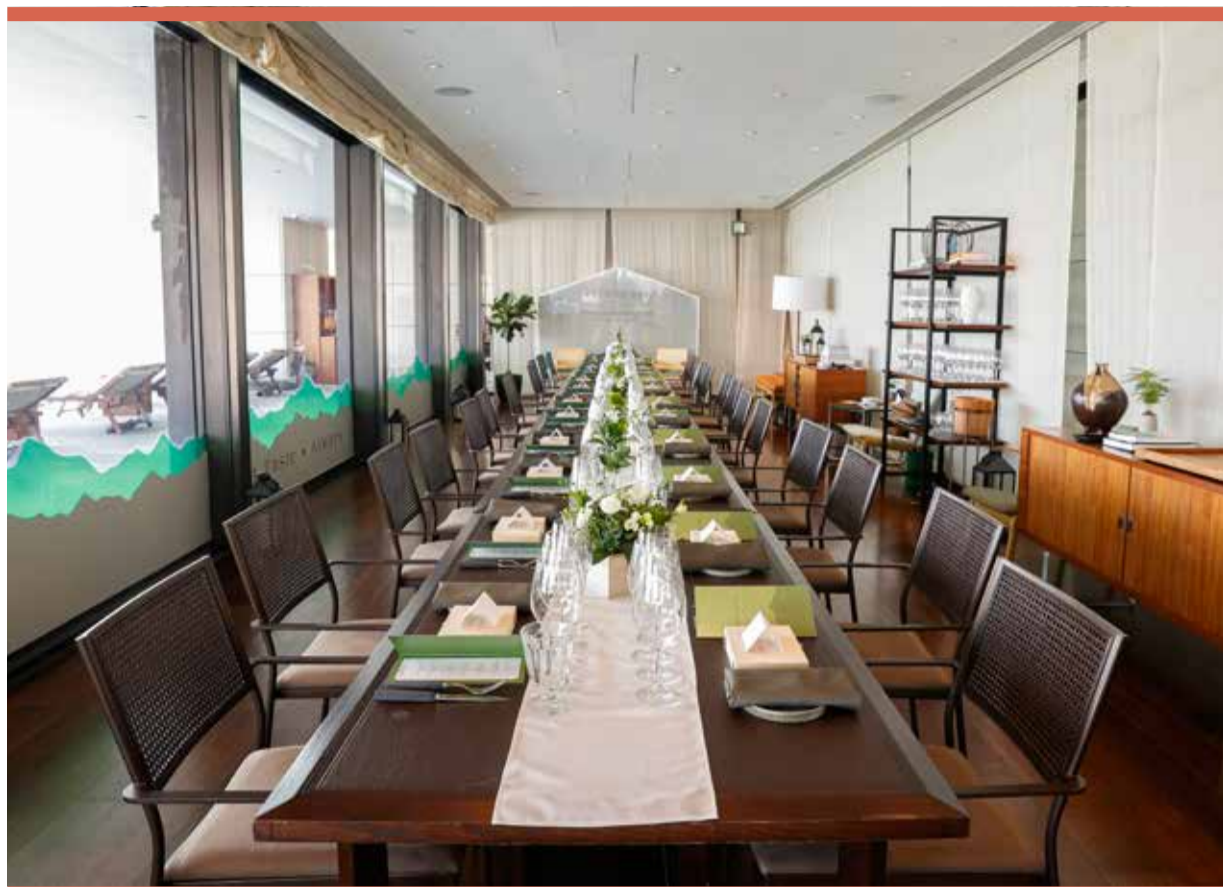
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TASTE OF EDESIA

Mouth-watering perfection

IRENE SAM, MDT

RECENTLY, Cloudy Bay releases Sauvignon Blanc 2022, a vibrant and fruity yet balanced and mouth-watering flavour bottle. The 2022 season was more challenging after three near-perfect vintages. The weather was unsettled during flowering with extensive rain during winter. Luckily, Sauvignon Blanc flowered successfully. The tough condition reinforced and reminded us of the importance of the vineyard teams and the work they have to do in order to ensure the quality of the fruits. Growing process may have been hard but harvest took place under excellent conditions and grapes were picked at perfect maturity. The 2022 Sauvignon

Blanc has a zesty and vibrant nose, with notes of juicy citrus and makrut lime underpinned by subtle white nectarine and passionfruit notes, making it the perfect bottle to be shared with loved ones.

With new bottle of Vintage, Cloudy Bay is also adapting a new, upgraded and more luxurious sustainable bottle design this year. The French green coloured glass is made in New Zealand to reduce the carbon footprint and has a minimum 60% recycled content. It also represents the iconic flavour. The monogram logo embossed in the neck honours the founding date of 1984, celebrating Cloudy Bay putting New Zealand on the wine map 37 years ago. While the Richmond Ranges emboss also celebrates the place and the

original label of Cloudy Bay, showing the distinctive shape of the mountains that can be seen from the winery.

Yang Shen, Estate Director of Cloudy Bay said: "We are proud of our history, feel a sense of responsibility to ensure that we challenge ourselves to continually improve in everything that we do, and believe that our 2022 vintage in this bottle is a definite step in the right direction. It's a story of adventure and innovation, of dedication and hard work, and reflects where we are right now."

The revamped bottle and label embrace Cloudy Bay's value of simplicity and commitment to the nature. The brand is dedicated to produce high quality wine even if it's a challenging year.



Macau Racing Tips

By Davy Chiu, MDT



THE LACERDA 1510 METRES SAND

2023-01-07|Sat|15:25

TOP Mountain God is the horse to follow this Saturday. He is sound and solid in all his works. There was nothing wrong with his last run which he was being hampered by the most unfortunate barrier incident, which can happen at all times to all horses, and that's racing. Watch the race video again **Top Mountain God** was still full of vigour at the finish. Give him another each way chance this Saturday, I think he can score again with his consistency, he should roll forward and prove tough to get past like in all his sand outings. Take him on as your banker of all exotics as well.

Race 3 Horse no. 5 Top Mountain God Win & Place Bets



OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

**HIGH-QUALITY
 DEVELOPMENT CALLS
 FOR OPENING-UP OF
 SERVICE SECTOR**

The State Council, China's Cabinet, recently approved a three-year pilot program for Shenyang, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Wuhan, Guangzhou and Chengdu to expand the opening-up of the service sector, increasing the number of such Chinese cities to 11. In 2015, Beijing became the first city in China to conduct a comprehensive pilot program for opening-up the service sector further.

The service sector is an important indicator of a country or region's economic and social development level. In recent years, China has regarded the further opening-up of this sector as an important step toward building a new development pattern.

The State Council's latest approval shows once again China's determination to promote a higher level of opening-up. Through this, the country can vigorously attract global high-end service enterprises to enter the domestic market, and stimulate innovation vitality and the growth potential of domestic service providers through fiercer competition, to promote the high-quality development of the country's service sector.

Advancing the pilot program is an important policy arrangement made by the top authorities to promote high-level opening-up. In the past decade, a series of major policies and measures have been introduced to promote the high-level institutional opening-up of the service sector, and high-level trade and investment liberalization and facilitation.

China's per capita GDP has exceeded \$10,000, and its consumption pattern is promoting the transformation from a goods-focused to a service-oriented one. However, the current value added of China's service sector accounts for about 55 percent of GDP, about 20 percentage points lower than that of developed countries.

China's service sector also faces such problems as insufficient integration with the manufacturing sector, and insufficient development of modern services. Thus it needs opening-up further to foster new growth drivers and create new advantages in international competition and cooperation.

It is conceivable that through multi-dimensional innovation and exploration, the pilot cities will play an exemplary role in the opening-up of the sector nationwide, help further promote the reform and setting up of rules, regulations, and promote management know-how and standards in the sector, accelerate the development of modern services, promote the integration of modern services and advanced manufacturing, and lubricate China's high-quality development.

As China continues to expand the opening-up of its service sector, "Chinese services" are accelerating their global reach. As China takes bigger steps toward opening this sector, more domestic service enterprises will go global, highlighting the global significance of the expanded opening-up of China's service sector.

Prince Harry alleges in a much-anticipated new memoir that his brother Prince William lashed out and physically attacked him during a furious argument over the brothers' deteriorating relationship, The Guardian reported yesterday.

The newspaper said it obtained an advance copy of the book, "Spare," due to be published next week.

It said Harry recounts a 2019 argument at his Kensington Palace home, in which he says William called Harry's wife, the former actress Meghan Markle, "difficult," "rude" and "abrasive." Harry claims William grabbed his brother by the collar and ripped his necklace

before knocking him down, the newspaper said.

"I landed on the dog's bowl, which cracked under my back, the pieces cutting into me," the book is quoted as saying. "I lay there for a moment, dazed, then got to my feet and told him to get out."

William later apologized, the extract says.

Neither Buckingham Palace, which represents King Charles III, nor William's Kensington Palace office has commented on the claims.

The book, scheduled to be released Tuesday, is the latest in a string of public revelations and accusations by Harry and Meghan that have shaken Britain's royal family.

AP PHOTO



The step pyramid of Kukulcan stands in Chichén Itzá, a complex of Mayan ruins on Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula

**HANDICRAFT VENDORS
 BLOCK ROADS TO
 MEXICO'S CHICHEN
 ITZA RUIN**

Hundreds of handicraft vendors in southern Mexico blocked access roads to the Mayan ruins of Chichen Itza for the third day this week.

The vendors are mainly Mayans from nearby towns who have long sold goods at the entrances and parking lots at the ruin site. They accuse guards at the ruins of discriminating and violating their rights as descendants of the Maya people who built the temples more than 1,200 years ago.

"They prohibit the vendors there from speaking Maya," said Arturo Ciau Puc, an activist with a local farm group known as CIOAC. "Just because we are Indigenous doesn't mean we should be treated like second-class citizens."

Protesters held up signs reading "No More Harassment of Artisans" at some of the roadblocks.

The vendors set up the protest lines late Monday to demand greater access to the complex to sell their goods, after security

guards apparently threw some of them out.

The ruin site is operated by Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History, and its boundaries are somewhat vague, with local communities claiming some of the land. Vendors and guides seeking customers sometimes set up for business inside the ruin site, which some say ruins the experience.

Yesterday [Macau time], Diego Prieto, the institute's director, said vendors are "invasive" and want "to sell Chinese merchandise in front of the pyramid." He referred to the pyramid of Kukulcan, also known as El Castillo, or "The Castle," which is often considered the centerpiece of the ruin complex.

Ciau Puc said protesters were demanding the replacement of the director of the archaeological zone, accusing him of "arrogance." Locals are also angered by reports that well-heeled foreign tourists are allowed into the

ruins at night, or allowed to climb the pyramid, something that is supposedly prohibited to protect the structure.

In a statement, the institute said it had sought to bring vendors under control "to ensure the proper functioning of the site to benefit visitors, by regulating the vendors that have invaded the area."

The institute said the site remained open to tourists and added that officials were open to talks with the protesters.

Chichen Itza is a U.N. World Heritage site and Mexico's most-visited archaeological site, with about 2.5 million visitors each year.

The dispute highlighted the problems faced by modern day Mayans, most of whom live in poverty, in a region where tourism praises the works of their ancestors and but ignores them.

"In the end, it is thanks to us, or our ancestors, that these archaeological zones exist at all," Ciau Puc said. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



French police are investigating an allegation that the former archbishop of Paris sexually assaulted a woman who is under legal protection as a vulnerable person, prosecutors said Wednesday. Michel Aupetit (pictured), who unexpectedly resigned in 2021 after admitting to an "ambiguous" relationship with a woman in 2012, denies any wrongdoing, his lawyer said.

AP PHOTO



USA The Biden administration is plowing ahead with plans to re-open the U.S. embassy in the Solomon Islands in a bid to counter China's increasing assertiveness in the Pacific. The State Department has informed Congress that it will establish soon an interim embassy in the Solomons' capital of Honiara on the site of a former U.S. consular property. It said the modest embassy will at first be staffed by two American diplomats and five local employees at a cost of \$1.8 million per year. A more permanent facility with larger staffing is eventually envisioned, it said.

AP PHOTO



USA Eight family members, five of them children, were found dead from gunshot wounds in a southern Utah home. Authorities did not provide more details or a potential motive for the killings. The victims were found yesterday [Macau time] when police did a welfare check at the residence, according to a statement by city officials in Enoch, a small town of about 8,000 people located 245 miles south of Salt Lake City. Police said they did not detect any threat to the public.