

The Macao SAR Government urges:

Let's all persist;
 Avoid crowd gathering;
 Wash hands frequently;
 Wear a mask properly;
 Declare health conditions;
 Reduce leaving Macao.

Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre

Greater Bay Plan CTM
\$158 / 6GB
 Data Increase Again

MGM CHINA ANNOUNCED UNIQUE EMERGENCY RELIEF MEASURES DESIGNED TO AID THE CASH FLOW OF SMES P2

MACAU PEOPLE POWER ASKS FOR SECOND CASH HANDOUT IN 2020 P2

MSAR AIRPORT HAS ONLY 11 ROUTES IN OPERATION, MOST OF THEM OPERATED BY HOME CARRIER, AIR MACAU P5

Portugal registered its first two cases of the new coronavirus, both in people who had recently returned from abroad. Health Minister Marta Temido told a news conference yesterday. Both men were taken to hospital in Porto and were in a stable condition and in good general health. One case was discovered in a 60-year-old man who had recently traveled to Italy and another one in a man, 33, who had returned from Valencia in Spain.



Italy The coronavirus outbreak in northern Italy has so overwhelmed the public health system there that officials are taking extraordinary measures to care for the sick, seeking to bring doctors out of retirement and accelerate graduation dates for nursing students. The region of Lombardy has been the epicenter of Italy's outbreak. Most alarmingly, 10% of Lombardy's doctors and nurses are out of commission, because they tested positive for the virus and are in quarantine.



New York With the viral outbreak spreading to more countries, the price of oil has dropped precipitously as global demand weakens even further. That has sent shares tumbling for oil giants like Exxon and Chevron while smaller producers with idling rigs continue to slash jobs. Hundreds of new cases of the virus that causes the COVID-19 disease have been announced in recent days outside of China.

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LAWMAKERS WANT EXTENSION OF ECONOMIC HOUSING APPLICATIONS

RENATO MARQUES



VIRUS SPREADS IN THE WEST AS CRISIS SEEMS TO EASE IN CHINA

AP PHOTO



P6-7,8

CINEMATHEQUE TO UNDERGO THREE-MONTH RENOVATION

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) will be renovating the Cinematheque from June until August of this year. The IC's announcement came in the form of a reply to lawmaker Sulu Sou's previous inquiry about the Cinematheque and Macau people working in film production. On March 31, 2017, Cinematheque was first opened. In June 2019, the building started recording rainwater leakage due to heavy rains. Subsequently, the film projector developed mold and continuously malfunctioned. The building itself also recorded paint peeling off the external walls. As of January 17, a total of 653 movies were played at this cinema.

NEW CAR EMISSIONS REQUIREMENT POSTPONED

The local government has postponed the restrictions on emission requirements to August 14 of this year. The restriction policy requires all of Macau's newly imported cars to meet the emissions equivalent to Euro 6. Originally, the new restriction was planned to enter into force from February 15 of this year. The sale of cars which were imported before this date and those that do not meet the Euro 6 standard will be banned. This delay means that more time will be given for the sale of unqualified vehicles. Previously, the local government upgraded the city's car emission standard from Euro 4 to Euro 5 in 2018.

MAINLAND POSTPONES UNIVERSITY EXAMS FOR MACAU STUDENTS

The mainland education authority has postponed its university entrance exams for Macau students due to mainland China's epidemic prevention control measures. China's Ministry of Education has adjusted the schedule for at least two exams involving Macau students, including a joint university entrance exam on the mainland. The entrance exam's registration system deadline still remains as March 15, with the final confirmation of registration and the exam date to be announced later. The postgraduate program exam, which was initially scheduled to take place on April 18 and April 19, will also be postponed, with the final exam date not yet confirmed.

MGM ANNOUNCES RELIEF PLAN TO SHORE UP SME CASH FLOW

MGM China has announced new relief measures designed to shore up small businesses in Macau reeling from the economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak.

The new measures, dubbed the "first-of-their-kind" by the casino operator, are designed to aid the cash flow of small and medium-sized enterprises in Macau. They include initiatives titled "Down Payment for Future Business" and "14-day Fast-track Payment".

The "Down Payment for Future Business" initiative is aimed at helping selected local SME vendors that are facing financial stress amid the economic slowdown. According to MGM, eligible vendors will receive an advance down payment from MGM for future orders or services.

Furthermore, all of the company's local SME vendors will benefit from "14-day Fast-track Payment", whereby MGM will pay them within 14 days upon receiving their deliverables.

In a statement issued yesterday, MGM said it hopes that these measures will increase the cash flow of SMEs, helping them to sustain their business while the economic conditions remain subdued. According to the statement, the measures come after MGM China conducted a survey



with over 600 local SMEs that enjoy a long-term partnership with the casino operator.

The new announcements build upon earlier relief measures announced by MGM. The company was the first integrated resort operator to announce a 15-day rent-free period for all retail tenants, followed by an extension of rent-free period for tenants in need. The company also launched the "MGM SME Anti-Epidemic Support" program to help clean the shops, offices, warehouses and even business

vehicles of 120 local SMEs over the next two months, assisting them to maintain a high standard of hygiene necessary to prevent a further outbreak of the virus in Macau.

Grant Bowie, CEO and executive director at MGM China, said that the casino operator regards SME vendors as "important business partners," adding that "the latest financial assistance program is a testament to our confidence in them."

"We also strongly believe that under the leadership of the Ma-

cau SAR Government, the economy will recover after the epidemic and SMEs will stand a better chance of achieving sustainable development," said Bowie, as cited in the company statement.

"MGM goes all out to offer our local SME vendors a quick relief from the hardship, including rolling out this game-changing financial assistance program to help them keep their business afloat. We wholeheartedly hope that we can help them alleviate financial burden and ride out the storm." **DB**

Macau People Power asks for second cash handout in 2020

JULIE ZHU

Local association Macau People Power has asked the Macau government to consider a second cash handout for 2020. The request comes after the government confirmed it would start distributing the handout, formally known as the Wealth Partaking Scheme, several months earlier than normal.

Talking to the Times, the association revealed its plan to visit the government headquarters today

in order to submit a letter requesting more money from the SAR government.

Association head Si Tou explained that Covid-19 has affected the income of many of the city's workers, both gaming and non-gaming employees.

The business closure of companies in some industries is another reason behind this association's cash handout call.

"From the opinions we have collected [from our members], the government can either give two cash handouts in two di-

fferent phases or give two cash handouts in a one-off stint in April," said Si Tou, adding that it would help a large number of workers in the territory.

According to Si Tou, the public is more concerned about whether there will be a second cash handout than whether the money will be issued in April, several months earlier than usual.

In addition to its claim to speak on behalf of "a large number of residents," the association represents some of the city's

drivers, including occupational drivers, taxi drivers, casino shuttle bus drivers, and tourism bus drivers.

Since the beginning of Hong Kong's protest movement opposing extradition legislation to China, some tourism bus drivers have seen less business. As the Times previously reported, many drivers rely on commission to earn a living, meaning that their incomes have declined along with falling visitation, according to Si Tou.

As a result of the eco-

nomical woes caused by both the epidemic and the ongoing Hong Kong protests, the city's drivers want the government to help them in more ways besides the cash handout.

In addition to a second cash handout, local drivers hope that the Macau government can provide relief to households heavily burdened with home mortgage payments by postponing the payment deadlines for both the principal balance and the interest rate.

The drivers have not ruled out the possibility of taking other measures if the local government fails to respond to their appeals. Other measures include organizing demonstrations, they said.

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Health Bureau chief defends Hubei rescue operation

ANTHONY LAM

DIRECTOR of the Health Bureau (SSM), Lei Chin Ion, said that the current outlook for a mission to repatriate about 50 Macau residents from central China's Hubei province is positive.

The assessment was made during a 10-minute explanation of the rationale behind the operation during yesterday's daily press conference.

The health authority head started off the press conference by acknowledging that he was aware of comments online in opposition to the government's decision.

"I hereby thank the general public for their comments on the matter, particularly those in support of the government and care

for our medical staff," the chief said.

He tried to lighten the mood by joking about his frequent coughing at press conferences. "I'd like to also thank the public's concern for my health," Lei said with a smile. "My cough has improved a lot actually. I assure you that I'm not infected with Covid-19."

Lei noted there are some comments that should be taken into consideration by the government and that there are many other comments that need clarification.

"The main source of pressure is our duty to take good care of our people," the Health Bureau chief explained. "At the same time, this mission is difficult."

The sense of duty and the level of difficulty, in the director's opinion, are not mutually exclu-

sive. In addition, Lei said that the government has prepared for the worst-case scenario and the most delicate contingencies to minimize all possible risks. He stressed that the government has been concerned with the wellbeing of all residents stranded in the central Chinese province.

"Scientifically, quarantine and treatment of a contagious disease should be conducted locally," the chief reiterated. "Now we see the appropriate timing and requisite conditions to conduct the repatriation."

The requisite conditions, he explained, include the relatively stable condition in Macau in terms of outbreak. Although Lei reminded people to remain vigilant, Macau has seen 27 days without a new case as of yesterday.

Another advantageous condition is that the outbreak in Wuhan is relatively contained as of late, which allows certain government resources in the Chinese city to be mobilized to assist Macau in the retrieval mission.

With improving epidemic conditions in the province, it is considered safer for stranded people to

leave home and go to the airport to return to Macau.

However, there was one aspect that the SSM chief wanted to clarify during yesterday's press conference.

"[On Sunday] I attributed the pressure [to retrieve the Macau residents] to the media. But I want to stress that we are aware of the media's responsibility to monitor the government and keep it informed of public opinion. This is completely reasonable," the chief stated.

He hoped that the general public would not put the blame on the media, and in turn place pressure on journalists. He also stressed that the SSM is open to suggestions in order to continually improve its work.

Lei said he recognized that some comments indicated concern about the welfare of the staff going to Wuhan. "Our colleagues indeed have a sense of mission. There were about 1,000 people signing up [to work in] the repatriation mission," the chief disclosed. "I feel proud of my colleagues."

On social media, netizens stated that some of these returnees-to-be did not even have a household in Macau and as such, they should not be repatriated.

In response, Lei explained that the government was aware of this. According to the chief, the government has the legal duty to repatriate Macau residents outside of Macau should any unpredictable situation transpire.

FIFTH PHASE OF MASK SALE

Today sees the commencement of the fifth phase of face mask sale, under the government's distribution plan. Health Bureau Director Lei Chin Ion reminded members of the public that they need not rush to purchase their supply during the first few days. Masks will be sold in the same manner as in previous

phases of distribution, namely in bundles of 10 masks per resident costing a total of 8 patacas. Meanwhile, the Federation of Trade Unions has announced it will terminate three points of sale: its venues at Lake Side Economic Housing in Taipa, at Fai Chi Kei and near the Border Gate.

Local netizens say they oppose repatriation plan

JULIE ZHU

SOME Macau local residents have expressed anger and disagreement over the local government's recent decision to bring home Macau residents that have been hitherto stuck in Hubei Province.

Earlier this week, the local government announced the decision. According to the plan, the Macau government will arrange a chartered flight on Saturday to bring home residents in Hubei.

Health Bureau Director Lei Chin Ion has made it

clear that the risks of spreading Covid-19 in Macau due to this charter flight will have to be borne by all members of the local community.

However, some members of Macau's community have expressed anger and disapproval regarding the chartered flight.

On a Facebook post reporting on the decision to arrange the chartered flight, some Macau netizens condemned the request of their fellow SAR residents still trapped in Hubei Province.

"I strongly oppose. It is

unfair for the "real Macau people" who have been home for months. It is even more unfair to the paramedics who will go back to pick them up," one user wrote.

Another Facebook user endorsed the local government's care for Hubei's Macau residents, but still believes that it would be better if those Macau residents in Hubei stayed in Hubei in order to avoid the risk of virus transmission onboard the aircraft.

Many other users worry that once these residents return, they might spread

the virus locally.

Others doubted the "authenticity" of some of these Macau residents, believing that they are in fact mainland investors who have a Macau identification card but live in mainland China.

Some netizens also directed their anger toward Portuguese-language journalists for the arrangement of the extraction. Online comments accuse Portuguese-speaking journalists of unrelenting questioning on matters related to Hubei's Macau residents, which put pressure on the government.

There were also comments condemning the local government for not having consulted the opinions of all members of Macau before arranging the flight.

Lawmaker Au Kam San told the Times yesterday that Macau is obliged to "rescue" these local residents if they are willing to return to Macau. The Times reported yesterday that 15 of 65 Macau residents confirmed to be in Hubei Province had indicated to the Macau authorities that they did not wish to come back to the SAR.

Nevertheless, Au thinks that the local government should provide further explanation on the decision.

In particular he raised concerns about the change in opinion of the local government in the past 10 days.

According to Au, senior government officials including SSM director Lei Chin Ion and Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Ao Ieong U, had been opposed to the operation to repatriate the Macau residents only 10 days ago.

"At least there needs to be a consensus in the society," said Au. "Now, it is obvious that there is still some controversy, and I believe there is not a consensus."

WANTED: EXTENSION OF ECONOMIC HOUSING APPLICATIONS, SAY LAWMAKERS

ANTHONY LAM

AMID the partial or full suspension of public and private services deemed necessary by the government as part of its response to the Covid-19 outbreak, the Housing Bureau has not announced its intention to extend the ongoing application period for subsidized housing.

More commonly known as economic housing, the subsidized housing scheme is a policy to ease the housing burden for qualifying local residents. Since it is not a policy serving the entire population, applications must be submitted to the government to commence a person's participation.

The current application round opened on November 27 last year, and will end on March 26. Last month, all government offices were forced to close or operate at minimum capacity due to epidemic control and prevention.

As a result, the Housing Bureau suspended its applications. Banks and some offices were also not in operation, meaning that some prospective applicants were unable to obtain the required documents to make an application.

Despite public services returning to normal yesterday, both the Health Bureau (SSM) and the Public Security Police Force (PSP) continuously remind the general public to stay vigilant and avoid gathering in crowds.

Both entities have encouraged people to avoid buying face masks at the start of each phase of mask sale, so as to avoid the formation of crowds. The Finance Bureau has announced a postponement of the deadline for certain tax declaration procedures, including those for income tax.



When the government announced its resumption of public services, the Housing Bureau also announced it would resume accepting economic housing applications on March 2. Complaints from netizens over the absence of an extension were on several news outlets and social media pages.

The Times attempted to reach out to the Housing Bureau for comment, but did not receive a reply by press time.

Yesterday, local news outlet Macao Daily News published photos on its online edition showing long queues at the door

of the Housing Bureau.

When asked whether an extension is preferred, lawmaker Agnes Lam said it is "absolutely needed".

"It is reasonable to extend the application period," the lawmaker told the Times.

Lam is not alone in seeing grounds for an extension. Holding similar views are lawmakers Au Kam San and Ella Lei. Both affirmed that an extension was crucial. All parties agree that if the Housing Bureau does not extend the application period, such a decision will go against the government's effort in fighting Covid-19,

particular with regard to their efforts to discourage people from forming crowds.

"Some members of the public have reached me or my colleague, Ron Lam, about the complications of the application [procedure]," said commentator, Johnson Ian. "They complained that the application period should have been longer." As a result, he strongly recommends the government to extend the application period.

As of yesterday, the Housing Bureau has received about 8,000 applications for subsidized housing. A previous application round

in 2013 saw a total of more than 42,000 applications received.

"Considering the popularity of economic housing project, I expect there will be at least 30,000 more applications [...] in the next two weeks or so," said Ian. His prediction is conservative compared to Au's, which suggests the number may soar to 45,000 in total. "After all, the Bureau is offering 3,011 flats this time," the lawmaker pointed out.

Au also did not see any reason not to extend the application period. "The flats won't be built [for] at least five years," the lawmaker said. "Unless the flats are already here, an extension won't cause a huge problem."

Ian, Au and Lam also said that they all consider the required documents for application to be excessive.

Business owners are required to submit profit and loss accounts signed by a certified accountant or auditor.

"A large number of local companies are small to medium-sized. It is a complication for them to hire accountants or auditors to verify their accounts," said Ian.

These documents are unnecessary, Au argued, because there is no such requirement in the governing law. "The law hasn't changed. It means that the Housing Bureau is asking for excessive documents," the lawmaker said. "It makes sense for the Bureau to require this when an applicant wins the chance to purchase a flat. But asking for such documents at the very beginning is simply overburdening the people."

Lam thinks that the government should think of other ways to collect this type of financial information.

HEALTH

Private clinics allowed to return to business

RENATO MARQUES

THE service suspensions of most private clinics and practice physicians were lifted yesterday, the Health Bureau (SSM) informed. In a statement, the SSM noted that after the appeal made for the suspension of the medical offices and clinics on February 4 as part of the response measures from the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center, the SSM concluded that current conditions allow for the reopening of clinics.

of clinics.

The SSM has issued a guide with recommendations for the management of patients after reopening. The document guidelines should be strictly followed by private clinics and physicians, and as such, they should provide only limited services depending on the nature of the clinic and not address any cases that might be related to the coronavirus.

The SSM also noted that will it conduct inspections at such clinics to ensure that the private practice

medical sector is complying with the health authorities' guidelines.

Although clinic services are allowed to resume, the SSM continues to call on residents to avoid visiting doctors' offices where possible. If there is an urgent need, residents should strictly follow the recommendations issued by the SSM regarding visits to any healthcare facilities.

From yesterday morning, the SSM also resumed normal services at public healthcare facilities, including the Conde de São

Januário Hospital Center (CHCSJ) out and inpatient services, chemotherapy and dialysis.

Regarding the outpatients' medical appointments, the SSM issued also a special warning for patients not to arrive at the hospital earlier than only a few minutes ahead of the scheduled time so as to avoid the unnecessary gathering of people that might facilitate potential infections.

Visits to patients hospitalized at CHCSJ continue to be suspended and preventive measures such as checking body temperature, use of face masks and mandatory completion of the personal health declaration form are still in force.



RENATO MARQUES

RENATO MARQUES

Macau airport operating just 11 routes after airlines axe flights

THE outbreak of the Covid-19 coronavirus and the consequent restrictions imposed by many countries and regions in regard to border crossings have led to the suspension of the majority of flights in and out of Macau.

As of yesterday, the Macau International Airport (MIA) had only 11 routes in operation, with most of the flights operated by home carrier, Air Macau.

The Air Macau flights to Shanghai, Beijing, Bangkok, Hanoi, Nanning, and Taipei were part of a long list of routes operated by the carrier that have been temporarily suspended. Others, however, remain open.

The major routes still serving travelers are those that connect to Bangkok in Thailand, and Taipei in Taiwan. Two airlines operate routes to these cities: Bangkok routes are being operated by Air Macau and Air Asia, while Air Macau and Eva Airways service the Taipei route.

The remaining flight routes in operation are all for Southeast Asian countries with Air Asia flying to Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Lanmei Airlines to Cambodia's Sihanoukville and JC Cambodia International to the capital city, Phnom Penh.

As the Times reported, most of the other flights in and out of Macau will remain suspended for all of March with a total of 24 carriers announcing full cancellations until the end of the month.

Among those who have announced suspensions is local operator Air Macau, as well as nine mainland carriers: China Eastern Airlines, China Southern Airlines, Juneyao Airlines, Shanghai Airlines, Zhejiang Loong Airlines, Hainan Airlines, Xiamen Airlines, Shenzhen Airlines, and Spring Airlines. Taiwan's Eva Airways, Tiger Air

MACAU PHOTO AGENCY VIA UNSPLASH



Taiwan and Starlux Airlines have also announced the cancellation of several routes and schedules.

South Korea's Jejuair, Air Busan, Jin Air, Tway Air, and Eastar Jet have followed Philippines Airlines and Cebu Pacific Air, from the Philippines, in continuing to keep their aircrafts grounded.

Flights to Vietnam by Vietnam Airlines and Bamboo Airways have also been affected, with all routes from the two carriers being removed from departure announcement boards.

In the neighboring region of Hong Kong, the scenario does not seem any brighter, especially for its flag-carrier, Cathay Pacific.

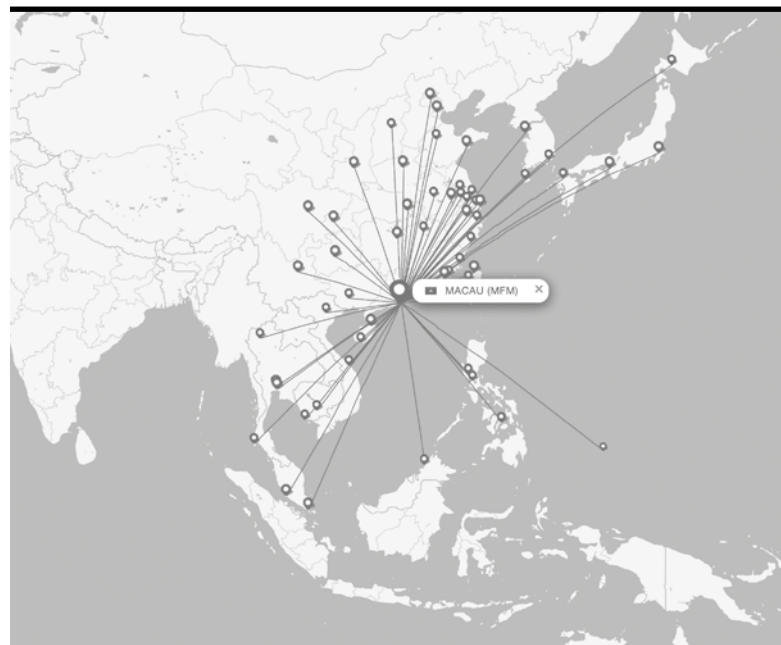
According to a report from South China Morning Post, the Cathay Pacific Group has cur-

rently about half of its fleet sitting on the tarmac at any given time and has scrapped more than three-quarters of its weekly flights this month alone.

The report adds that the situation for Cathay seems not to have reached its lowest point yet, quoting sources within the company that suggested more planes could be soon grounded as more flight schedulers face cuts.

In reply to the SCMP, a spokesperson from Cathay admitted that the company is continuously assessing the fleet to adjust to market demands.

Last week, Cathay informed that around 19,000 of the company's 25,000 employees would take unpaid leave to cope with the lack of service demand.



A map of all Macau International Airport connections, including those suspended

Alipay HK and WeChat Pay HK now accepted in local stores

MAINLAND China's mobile and online payment platform Alipay HK, together with WeChat Pay HK, can now be used at the city's Macau Pass terminals across retail outlets in the Macau SAR.

"To promote the economic development of local merchants in Macau after the Covid-19 epidemic and enhance the experience of overseas tourists, Macau Pass and

Alipay HK and WeChat Pay HK's cross-border mobile payment cooperation has been officially opened," local firm Macau Pass S.A. announced.

These digital payment platforms have acquired regulatory approval from the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, which authorizes them to facilitate mobile-based payments and peer-to-peer transactions for residents.

"Macau Pass hopes to provide Hong Kong visitors with a convenient electronic payment and consumption experience in Macau, promote spending by visitors to Macau, bring business opportunities to local merchants in Macau, and accelerate the economic recovery after the epidemic has eased."

As reported last month, Macau Pass is the most widely instal-

led e-payment method in supermarkets and convenience stores in Macau.

Some 92% of the shops - in a survey conducted among 176 shops - accepted Macau Pass as a means of transaction. The second most popular e-payment method is AliPay, with about 91% of the surveyed shops accepting it. WeChat Pay has an acceptance rate of 74% across the responding stores. LV

OPENING OF HENGQIN PORT DELAYED

THE opening of the new Hengqin port has been postponed, Secretary for Administration and Justice André Cheong Weng Chon has announced.

Previously, Cheong said that the port could start operations in the first quarter of this year. That deadline has been pushed back due to the current epidemic situation.

The port's construction and facility installation has been completed. However, due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the Zhuhai and Macau governments are not able to currently conduct the human traffic simulation test across the port. The test will only occur as soon as the epi-

dem becomes stable.

The Macau local government will be paying rent to mainland China to use their land for one of the port's checkpoint facilities. Cheong said that the rent will be "very low" and merely "symbolic", but declined to disclose the exact amount.

In addition to the rent, the local government will also be paying the electricity and water bills for the facility. The Chairman of the Second Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly (AL) Chan Chak Mo reported that the rent will not be included in the bill but will be determined as a written contract between Macau and Zhuhai. JZ

Virus fuels dread and angst even as China see

HYUNG-JIN KIM
& MATT SEDENSKY, SEOUL

THE number of new virus cases in China dropped to its lowest level in six weeks yesterday and hundreds of patients at the outbreak's epicenter were being released, while a grimmer reality set in elsewhere, with swelling infection numbers and growing dread that no area could fend off the illness.

Clusters of infections in South Korea, Italy and Iran continued to expand and Covid-19 was raising distress and reshaping routines around Europe and across the Atlantic in the United States.

Major cities including Jakarta, New York and Berlin grappled with their first recorded cases. Schools emptied across Japan, mobile hospitals were planned in Iran, and the Mona Lisa, accustomed to droves of staring tourists, hung in a vacant room of the shuttered Louvre in Paris.

"Just about everywhere, the cases are rising quite quickly in a number of countries," said Ian Mackey, who studies viruses at the University of Queensland in Australia.

Malaysia and Portugal were the newest places to detect the virus. More than 60 countries around the world — including nine of the 10 biggest — have found infections, with a global count of nearly 89,000 people affected by the illness. Even as alarms grew louder in much of the world,



AP PHOTO

Malaysia and Portugal were the latest places to detect the virus. More than 60 countries have found infections

yesterday brought positive signs from China, where the outbreak started.

China's economy delivered hopeful cues, with mainland Chi-

nese stock benchmarks charging back 3% and data showing progress in restoring factory output after weeks of disruptions related to the outbreak.

The country reported 202 new cases of the virus, its lowest daily count since Jan. 21, and the stricken heart of the health crisis, Wuhan, said 2,570 patients were

released. At the largest of 16 temporary hospitals that were hastily built in Wuhan in response to the outbreak, worries over the availability of supplies and protective

MORE THAN 89,000 INFECTED, OVER 3,000 DEAD

THE new virus first detected in China has infected more than 89,000 people globally and caused over 3,000 deaths. The latest figures reported yesterday by each government's health authority:

- Mainland China: 2,912 deaths among 80,026 cases, mostly in the central province of Hubei
- Hong Kong: 98 cases, 2 deaths
- Macao: 10 cases
- South Korea: 4,335 cases, 26 deaths
- Italy: 1,694 cases, 34 deaths
- Iran: 1,501 cases, 66 deaths
- Japan: 961 cases, including 705 from the Diamond Princess cruise ship, 12 deaths
- France: 130 cases, including one on the French Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, 2 deaths
- Germany: 130 cases
- Singapore: 106

- United States: 80 cases, 2 deaths
- Spain: 71
- Kuwait: 56
- Bahrain: 47
- Thailand: 43 cases, 1 death
- Taiwan: 41 cases, 1 death
- United Kingdom: 35 cases, 1 death
- Malaysia: 29
- Australia: 24 cases, 1 death
- Canada: 24
- Switzerland: 24
- Iraq: 21
- United Arab Emirates: 21
- Norway: 19
- Vietnam: 16
- Sweden: 14
- Austria: 14
- Israel: 10
- Lebanon: 10
- Netherlands: 10
- Belgium: 8
- Croatia: 8
- Greece: 7
- Finland: 6
- Oman: 6
- India: 5
- Russia: 5
- Denmark: 4
- Mexico: 4
- Pakistan: 4
- Algeria: 3
- Czech Republic: 3
- Philippines: 3 cases, 1 death
- Qatar: 3
- Romania: 3
- Belarus: 2
- Brazil: 2
- Egypt: 2
- Georgia: 2
- Indonesia: 2
- Portugal: 2
- Afghanistan: 1
- Andorra: 1
- Armenia: 1
- Azerbaijan: 1
- Cambodia: 1
- Dominican Republic: 1
- Ecuador: 1
- Estonia: 1
- Iceland: 1
- Ireland: 1
- Lithuania: 1
- Monaco: 1
- Nepal: 1
- New Zealand: 1
- Nigeria: 1
- North Macedonia: 1
- San Marino: 1
- Sri Lanka: 1

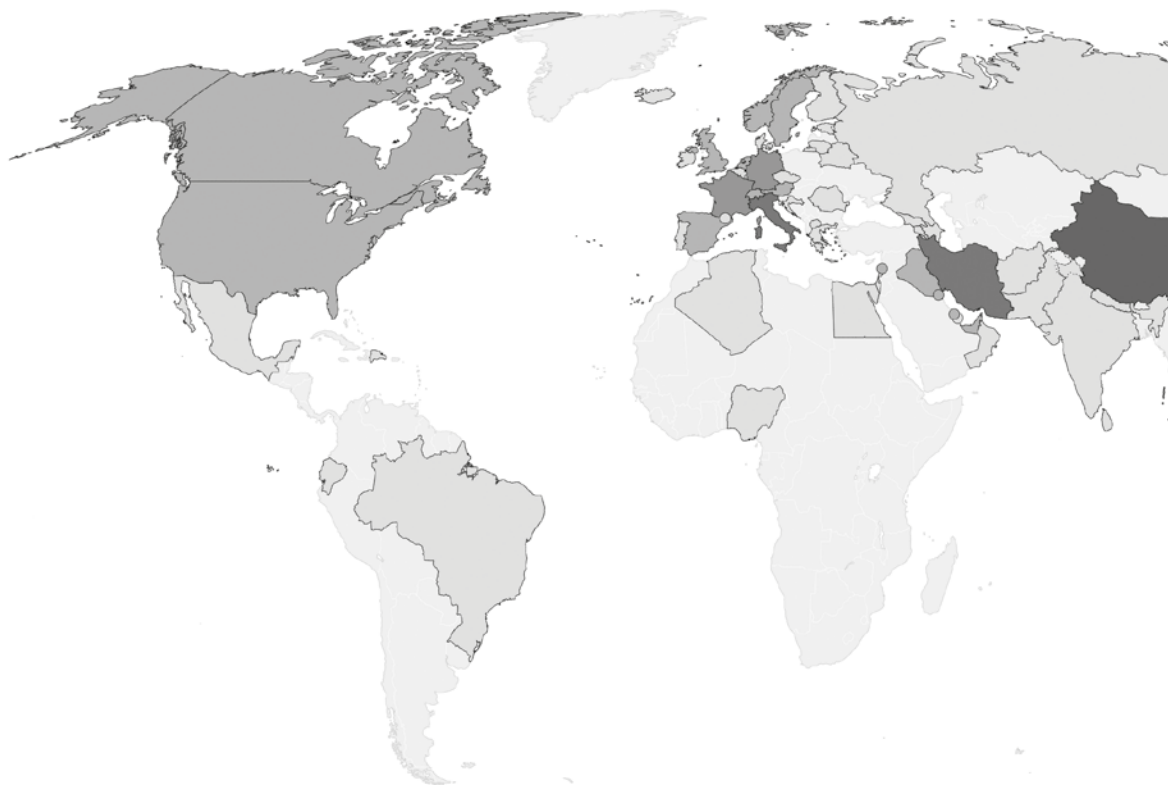
89,555 3,056

Confirmed cases worldwide

Deaths worldwide

Jurisdictions with cases confirmed as of 2 March 2020, 19:45 GMT+8

■ 1-9 ■ 10-99 ■ 100-999 ■ 1,000-9,999 ■ 10,000 or more



BLOOMBERG

s signs of hope

gear abated and pressure on medical staff eased.

Dr. Zhang Junjian, who leads a temporary hospital at an exhibition center in Wuhan which has a staff of 1,260, said optimism was high that the facility would no longer be needed in the coming weeks.

"If nothing special happens, I expect the operation of our makeshift hospital ... could complete its historical mission by the end of March," Zhang said.

China's sunnier news came two months into its outbreak. In the places the virus has spread more recently, the problems continued to magnify.

South Korea, with the worst outbreak outside of China, said it recorded 599 new cases of the virus Monday, bringing the total to 4,335. The death toll there rose to 26.

To cope with the influx, the country said hospitals would be reserved for patients with serious symptoms or preexisting conditions, with mild cases now routed to other designated facilities.

"If we continue to hospitalize mild patients amid the continued surge in infections, we would be risking overworking medical professionals and putting them at greater risk of infections," said the country's vice health minister, Kim Gang-lip.

South Korea said it would keep its schools closed longer than previously announced, with a planned reopening of March 9 delayed another two weeks to March 23. And the leader of a church that's

blamed for being the source of the country's largest cluster of infections bowed in apology.

"We also did our best but weren't able to contain it fully," said Lee Man-hee, the 88-year-old leader of the Shincheonji church, which some mainstream Christian groups reject as a cult.

In the Middle East, a worsening situation in Iran was accompanied by concern for its top leaders after a member of the council that advises Iran's supreme leader died of COVID-19.

Iran has confirmed 1,501 cases of the virus and 66 deaths, but many believe the true number is larger. Its caseload surged more than 250% in just 24 hours.

Major Shiite shrines remain open despite civilian authorities' calls to close them. The holy cities of Mashad and Qom, where Shiites often touch and kiss shrines in a show of faith, have had high numbers of infections. The Revolutionary Guard said it would install some mobile hospitals in response and authorities have been cleaning the shrines with disinfectants.

"We will have two difficult weeks ahead," said Ali Raibiei, a spokesman for the Iranian government.

Meantime, Israel, an enemy of Iran, was deciding whether Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stays in power. Among the voting sites were 15 stations especially for quarantined people who may have been exposed to the virus.

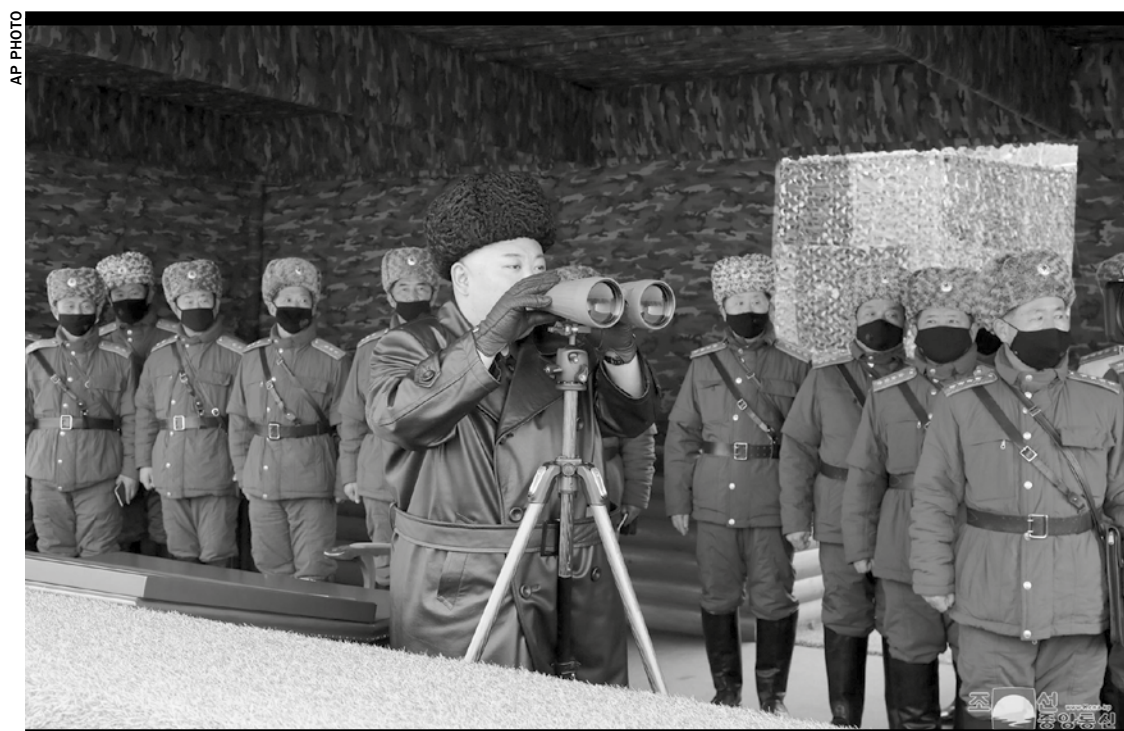
In Europe, leaders braced for worsening caseloads after the count surged in France and Italy over the weekend. Italy's number of infection ballooned by 50% in 24 hours to 1,694.

The Louvre, the world's most popular museum, remained closed as its 2,300 workers expressed fears the site's international appeal could make it a prime target. At Fashion Week in Paris, attendees passed up kisses, instead greeting each other with elbow touches. In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel's outstretched hand was rebuffed by her interior minister at a meeting with migrant groups.

In the United States, authorities have counted at least 80 cases of the virus, two fatal, and concern was driving some to wipe store shelves clean of bottled water, hand sanitizer and other necessities. Both deaths were men with existing health problems who were hospitalized in Washington state.

Investors awaited Wall Street's opening after rallies in Asian markets. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, though, lowered its forecasts for global growth this year and said the world economy could shrink this quarter for the first time in more than a decade.

"Global economic prospects remain subdued and very uncertain," the agency said. AP



North Korea fires presumed short-range missiles into the sea

KIM TONG-HYUNG
& HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

NORTH Korea fired two presumed short-range ballistic missiles into its eastern sea on Monday, South Korean officials said, resuming weapons demonstrations after a months-long hiatus that may have been forced by the coronavirus crisis in Asia.

The launches came two days after North Korea's state media said leader Kim Jong Un supervised an artillery drill aimed at testing the combat readiness of units in front-line and eastern areas.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the projectiles were fired from an area near the coastal town of Wonsan and flew about 240 kilometers (149 miles) northeast on an apogee of about 35 kilometers (22 miles). It said the South Korean and U.S. militaries were jointly analyzing the launches. JCS officials later told reporters that the weapons were presumed to be short-range ballistic missiles.

North Korea likely tested one of its new road-mobile, solid-fuel missile systems or a developmental "super large" multiple rocket launcher it repeatedly demonstrated last year, said Kim Dong-yub, an analyst from Seoul's Institute for Far Eastern Studies. Experts say such weapons can potentially overwhelm missile defense systems and expand the North's ability to strike targets in South Korea and Japan, including U.S. bases there.

Kim Jong Un had entered the new year vowing to bolster his nuclear deterrent in the face of "gangster-like" U.S. sanctions and pressure, using a key ruling party meeting in late December to warn of "shocking" action

over stalled nuclear negotiations with the Trump administration.

He also said North Korea would soon reveal a new "strategic weapon" and insisted the country was no longer "unilaterally bound" to a self-imposed suspension on the testing of nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missiles. But Kim did not explicitly lift the moratorium or give any clear indication that such tests were impending and seemed to leave the door open for eventual negotiations.

South Korea's presidential office said National Security Director Chung Eui-yong discussed the launches with the South's defense minister and spy chief, and that the officials expressed "strong concern" over the North's resumption of testing activity, which could raise military tensions.

Japan said that it had not detected any projectile landing in its territory or its exclusive economic zone, and that no sea vessels or aircraft had been damaged.

"The repeated firings of ballistic missiles by North Korea is a serious problem for the international community including Japan, and the government will continue to gather and analyze information, and monitor the situation to protect the lives and property of the people," the Defense Ministry's statement said.

The recent lull in North Korea's launches had experts wondering whether the North was holding back its weapons displays while it was fighting the coronavirus, which state media has described as a matter of "national existence." Some analysts speculated that the North cut back training and other activities involving large gatherings of soldiers to reduce the possibility

of the virus spreading within its military.

Kim's latest show of force is apparently aimed at boosting military morale, strengthening internal unity and showing that his country is doing fine despite outside worries of how the North would contend with an outbreak.

North Korea in previous years has intensified testing activity in response to springtime military exercises between South Korea and the United States that it has described as invasion rehearsals. But the allies announced last week that they were postponing their annual drills due to concern about the coronavirus outbreak in South Korea, with soldiers from both countries being infected.

The launches were the latest setback for dovish South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who despite the North's indifference has repeatedly pleaded for reviving inter-Korean engagement. In a speech on Sunday marking the 101st anniversary of a major uprising against Japanese colonial rule, Moon called for cooperation between the two Koreas to fight infectious diseases amid the COVID-19 outbreak in Asia.

Amid the deadlock in larger nuclear negotiations with the Trump administration, Kim has suspended virtually all cooperation with South Korea in the past months while demanding that Seoul defy U.S.-led international sanctions and restart inter-Korean economic projects that would jolt the North's broken economy.

North Korea has yet to confirm any COVID-19 cases, although state media have hinted that an uncertain number of people have been quarantined after exhibiting symptoms. AP





A pedestrian wearing a face mask crosses a street in northern Tehran

IRAN

Virus kills member of council advising Iran's supreme leader

A member of a council that advises Iran's supreme leader died yesterday after falling sick from the new coronavirus, state radio reported, becoming the first top official to succumb to the illness that is affecting members of the Islamic Republic's leadership.

The death of Expediency Council member Mohammad Mir-mohammadi came as Iran announced the virus had killed 66 people among 1,501 confirmed cases in the country.

Iran has the highest death toll in the world after China, the epicenter of the outbreak.

Mirmohammadi died at a north Tehran hospital of the virus, state radio said. He was 71.

The council advises Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as well as settles disputes between the top cleric and parliament.

His death comes as other top officials have contracted the virus in Iran.

Those sick include Vice President Masoumeh Ebtekar, better known as "Sister Mary," the English-speaking spokeswoman for the students who seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979 and sparked the 444-day hostage crisis, state media reported. Also

sick is Iraj Harirchi, the head of an Iranian government task force on the coronavirus who tried to downplay the virus before falling ill.

Iran has reported 978 confirmed cases of the new virus with 54 deaths from the illness it causes, called COVID-19. Across the wider Mideast, there are over 1,150 cases of the new coronavirus, the majority of which are linked back to Iran.

Experts worry Iran's percentage of deaths to infections, around 5.5%, is much higher than other countries, suggesting the number of infections in Iran may be much higher than current figures show.

Iranian government spokesman Ali Rabiei, himself addressing journalists by teleconference over concerns about the virus, acknowledged the challenges remaining for the Islamic Republic.

"We will have two difficult weeks ahead," he said.

Trying to stem the outbreak of the new coronavirus, Iran also on Monday held an online-only briefing by its Foreign Ministry. China as well has held similar teleconference briefings.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi opened the online news con-

ference addressing the outbreak, dismissing an offer of help for Iran by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Iran and the U.S. have seen some of the worst tensions since its 1979 Islamic Revolution in recent months, culminating in the American drone strike that killed a top Iranian general in Baghdad and a subsequent Iranian ballistic missile counterattack against U.S. forces.

"We neither count on such help nor are we ready to accept verbal help," Mousavi said. He added Iran has always been "suspicious" about America's intentions and accused the U.S. government of trying to weaken Iranians' spirits over the outbreak.

Judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi acknowledged some people had begun stockpiling medical supplies for profit in the country, urging prosecutors to show "no mercy for hoarders."

"Hoarding sanitizing items is playing with people's lives and it is not ignorable," Raisi said.

Raisi also urged officials to grant "maximum" leave to prisoners. Activists have raised concern about the spread of the new coronavirus in Iran's prisons.

The British Embassy meanwhile has begun eva-

uations over the virus.

"Essential staff needed to continue critical work will remain," the British Foreign Office said. "In the event that the situation deteriorates further, the ability of the British Embassy to provide assistance to British nationals from within Iran may be limited."

While Iran has closed schools and universities to stop the spread of the virus, major Shiite shrines have remained open despite civilian authorities calling for them to be closed. The holy cities of Mashhad and Qom in particular, both home to shrines, have been hard-hit by the virus. Shiites often touch and kiss shrines as a sign of their faith. Authorities have been cleaning the shrines with disinfectants.

Police have arrested one man who posted a video showing himself licking the metal enclosing the Imam Reza shrine in Mashhad, the most-important Shiite saint buried in the country, according to reports by semi-official news agencies. In the video, the man said he licked the metal to "allow others to visit the shrine with peace of mind."

Meanwhile, the virus outbreak saw itself dragged into the yearslong boycott of Qatar by four Arab nations over a political dispute. AP

this day in history



1966: BBC TUNES IN TO COLOUR

The BBC has announced plans to begin broadcasting television programmes in colour from next year.

Britain will be the first country in Europe to offer regular programming in colour.

The announcement was made in the Commons by the Postmaster General, Anthony Wedgwood Benn.

The new service is expected to cost the BBC between £1m and £2m per year, for an initial four hours of television per week on BBC2, rising to 10 hours a week after 12 months.

The colour programmes will still be available on ordinary television sets in black and white. A colour receiver will cost about £250 and there will be a supplementary licence fee.

David Attenborough, controller of BBC2, will be responsible for overseeing the new colour service.

He said the promised four hours of colour programming was based on what the BBC could produce from its own studios and did not include imported programmes.

He said the popular Western series, *The Virginian*, and the *Danny Kaye Show* were both available in colour, but currently shown in black and white.

Mr Attenborough denied the colour programmes would all be re-runs of old shows: "We have to remember that 95% of people initially will not be seeing these programmes in colour, they'll be seeing them in black and white. The shows that BBC2 will be scheduling will be exciting new shows in black and white. They'll be that much more exciting and newer in colour."

The technique for delivering the colour service has not been finally agreed. European leaders are meeting in Oslo in Norway later this year to decide on a single system which will enable countries to be able to exchange programmes.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Europe adopted the Phase Alternation Line or PAL system for broadcasting in colour. It works at 50 frames per second, slower than the National Television System Committee adopted in the US, but with a higher resolution. BBC2 broadcast its first colour pictures from Wimbledon in 1967. By mid 1968, nearly every BBC2 programme was in colour. Six months later, colour came to BBC1. By 1969, BBC1 and ITV were regularly broadcasting in colour. The number of households owning a colour TV licence shot up from 275,000 to 12 million by the early 70s. David Attenborough began a career in broadcasting in 1952, one of his first series was the popular "Zoo Quest". He was made Controller of BBC2 in 1965, then Director of Programmes with responsibility for both networks. He resigned in 1973 to return to programme making.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

A global agency says the spreading new virus could make the world economy shrink this quarter for the first time since the international financial crisis more than a decade ago.

In a special report on the impact of the virus, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development said yesterday that the world economy is still expected to grow overall this year and rebound next year.

But the OECD lowered its forecasts for global growth in 2020 by half a percentage point, to 2.4% — and said the figure could go as low as 1.5% if the virus lasts long and spreads widely.

In addition to the “considerable human suffering” the virus has wrought, with more than 3,000 deaths worldwide, the OECD said “Global economic prospects remain subdued and very uncertain.”

The last time the world economy shrank on a quarter-on-quarter basis was at the end of 2008, when a shock to the financial sector caused turmoil for businesses around the world and mass layoffs. On a full-year basis, it last shrank in 2009.

The OECD said China's reduced production is hitting Asia particularly hard but also companies

WORLD ECONOMY MAY SHRINK BECAUSE OF VIRUS, WATCHDOG SAYS

around the world that depend on its goods.

It urged governments to act fast to prevent contagion and restore consumer confidence.

The Paris-based OECD, which advises developed economies on policy, said the impact of this virus is much higher than past outbreaks because “the global economy has become substantially more interconnected, and China plays a far greater role in global output, trade, tourism and commodity markets.”

The last time the world economy shrank on a quarter-on-quarter basis was at the end of 2008

China's viral outbreak has already disrupted global supply chains and cut business profits. And as the disease spreads, economists now worry about a graver scenario: That quarantines and greater caution among con-

sumers will lead people to cancel travel plans, skip restaurant meals, avoid stores or stay home from work.

Already the European Union's markets commissioner, Thierry Breton, estimated Monday that the virus has cost Europe 2 billion euros (\$2.2 billion) this year in tourism revenue alone, mainly because of the drop in number of Chinese tourists. Things are expected to get worse for Europe with the eruption of cases in northern Italy and the cancellation of events like the Venice Carnival.

Investors seem to expect central banks to come to the rescue by cutting interest rates, particularly in the U.S. But experts note that lower rates cannot fix the problem.

Lower rates can lead people and businesses to borrow and spend, which can boost economic activity. But they can't make sick people healthy, reopen factories whose workers are kept home because of quarantines or restart supply chains in areas of the world struck by the outbreak. AP



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Union fans on the tribune display a banner reading "Son of a bitch" against TSG Hoffenheim club patron Dietmar Hopp during the German Bundesliga vs Bayern Munich

FOOTBALL

Showdown with fans leads to chaos in Germany

CIARÁN FAHEY, BERLIN

THE German soccer federation's power struggle with fans escalated dramatically over the weekend when Bundesliga games were interrupted by protests with the threat of being called off.

Fans at several games unfurled banners with criticism of the federation and crude messages for Hoffenheim backer Dietmar Hopp, leading to stadium announcements against the abuse and referees leading teams off the field.

Bayern Munich's game at Hoffenheim on Saturday ended with the teams passing the ball back and forth in midfield for the last 13 minutes, while Hopp and Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge applauded from the sidelines and the Hoffenheim fans applauded from the stands.

Bayern was already leading 6-0 but no more soccer was played after some of the traveling support had insulted Hopp.

"It's the hateful face of soccer," said Rummenigge, one among a host of club officials condemning the abuse.

There were hold-ups, too, at Dortmund's game against Freiburg, where both sets of supporters displayed banners criticizing the federation, and again on Sunday when Union Berlin fans unfurled banners first accusing the federation of taking "two steps back," then insulting Hopp while displaying his face behind a cross-hairs. There were similar insults from Borussia Mönchengladbach fans the previous weekend.

Referees were instructed to use FIFA's three-step procedure for dealing with the abuse, a measure originally developed for combating racism. It almost led to the abandonment of the games in Berlin and Hoffenheim after referees went to Step 2.

The protests were sparked by the federation's decision on Feb. 21 to ban all Dortmund fans from Hoffenheim's stadium for two years because of their repeated chants against Hopp.

The 79-year-old billionaire has been a target since Hoffenheim was promoted to the Bundesliga in 2008. Previously in the fifth division, Hoffenheim's ascent through the leagues was made possible thanks to steep investment from its former youth player, a co-founder of software giant SAP.

Rival fans resent Hoffenheim's ascent at the expense of another team without a billionaire backer. They also object to Hopp's opposition to the league's 50-plus-1 rule, which protects clubs from takeovers by a majority stakeholder. Hopp was granted an exception in 2015 because of his long support of the club.

Hoffenheim has hit back against the abuse. At least 33 Dortmund fans were identified and banned from its stadium in 2018 because of abuse leveled at Hopp the previous season. A club employee also used a high-frequency sound system to drown out Dortmund chants in 2011.

The latest league-wide protests are about more than just Hopp, however. Fans have pointedly accused the federation of renege-

on in its 2017 promise to end the "collective punishment" for supporters for misdemeanors after making its sanction against every Dortmund fan.

There are other gripes, too. Last night games have been scrapped from next season because of repeated fan protests. There has been an ongoing struggle over pyrotechnics at games, banned by the federation, but considered a vital part of game-day experience by many supporters.

Bayern fans have been critical about their own club's sponsorship links to Qatar, and have campaigned, like others, against issues like homophobia, sexism, anti-Semitism and racism.

The Bayern fans who insulted Hopp at Hoffenheim on Saturday issued a statement the following day.

"It is hardly surprising that the (federation) allows itself be influenced by a patron and breaks its promises to refrain from collective penalties," fan group Südkurve München wrote on their website. "What is significantly more frightening is the accomplishment of Hopp's 10-year-old demand for criticism of himself and 'his' club to be equated with racial discrimination and punished accordingly. On one hand this leads to the trivialization and ridicule of actual racial abuse and violence, and on the other it illustrates the blatant failure of the federation after such incidents."

The federation's strong response to the insults against Hopp has left it open to accusations of hypocrisy. Hertha Berlin player Jordan Torunarigha was subjected to racist abuse during a German Cup game at Schalke on Feb. 4, but the monkey chants went unnoticed by the referee and the defender was sent off in extra time for a reaction after getting increasingly upset.

Others pointed to the federation's treatment of billionaire Schalke chairman Clemens

Tönnies, who faced no sanction from the league after making racist comments about Africans at a public meeting last August.

Schalke said Sunday that its team would immediately leave the field if there were any defamatory chants made or banners shown during Bayern's German Cup visit on Tuesday, or Hoffenheim's visit in the league on Saturday.

BAG, an organization representing fans, criticized the federation for not using the same three-point measures for "any incident of racism, sexism or the like," and it warned of a "dead end" in the relationship between the federation and fans.

Berlin's Der Tagesspiegel newspaper referred to Rummenigge's "hateful face of soccer" comment, saying that it would be more appropriate when applied to workers building World Cup stadiums and dying in Qatar, or to soccer officials hiding away millions in taxes.

On a weekend when Bayern won 6-0 and opened a three-point lead in the Bundesliga, no one was talking about the soccer played. AP



Dietmar Hopp (center) patron of TSG 1899 Hoffenheim, and former soccer player and board member of FC Bayern Munich, Oliver Kahn (right), leave the field after the match

OPINION

Our Desk

Lynzy Valles



PAID ACADEMIC SERVICES

Dissertation papers are mostly required in support of candidature's completion of an academic degree. These dissertations give the author the platform to outline his or her research and findings. Such papers also test the independent research skills they have acquired throughout their time at the university.

I have had several encounters wherein students purchase essays, research papers, theses and all kinds of assignments needed for specific classes.

From animation homework, video editing, photography to written articles, you name it, it has been purchased.

I remember back in university when the whole class barely slept for a few days due to a difficult animation project to be handed in to a strict professor.

The task was to create a game using the codes discussed in class – which was an extremely painful challenge for students like me who were not really interested in coding.

On the day we presented our final works, we found out that one of us actually did not have a hard time creating his work as he just bought his project a few days before the deadline.

If I recall it rightly, he bought the project for \$30.

These kinds of services are rampantly available online and people can be completely anonymous in buying them.

The question is, how can professors determine whether these are really the works of their students?

Plagiarism is a big no in the academic world. But I think this also stands for ensuring assessments are completed by the student.

There are several websites that accommodate the service of selling papers, with some guaranteeing their clients that their services are "plagiarism-free, always on time and written to standard."

"If we are a minute late, the works is on us – it's free!"

"If the work we produce contains plagiarism, we'll pay out a \$500 guarantee."

I am aware that academic experts have the necessary online tools and system to determine whether the works of the students – particularly dissertation papers – are plagiarized.

However, the number of platforms that offer these assignments for sale services also seem to be increasing.

One website claims that one in five students have at least thought of hiring a dissertation writing service. For a fee of \$500, one can get a master's thesis of 20 pages (which may be equivalent to a chapter) done within 15 to 30 days.

A familiar tool that detects whether a work is plagiarized is Turnitin – a prevention tool designed to help faculties evaluate the originality of student work by comparing the submitted works to other electronic documents available online. At least for the University of Macau, as cited in their website, the teaching staff are entitled to request a Turnitin submission.

Thus, to avoid plagiarism, students are encouraged to document all sources and quotes and reference them correctly.

Those that are particularly wealthy enter the Ivy League schools in the United States by paying bribes just to be guaranteed places at these universities.

These stories are mostly familiar among affluent Chinese families.

There have been hundreds of cases which include students caught cheating by falsifying SAT results, and paying other people to take English tests on their behalf.

According to reports, the parents of a Chinese student paid \$90,000 for a personal agent to assist him to get through the whole university application process, guaranteeing three to five offers from universities in the Top 60.

With all these services made available and easily accessible, how can one trust that a certain diploma or acceptance at an Ivy League school was actually made possible with "hard work?"

CHINA MANUFACTURING SLUMPS AS ANTI-VIRUS CONTROLS BITE

THE BUZZ

China's manufacturing plunged in February as anti-virus controls shut down the world's second-largest economy, but companies are confident activity will revive following government stimulus efforts, according to two surveys.

The data add to growing signs of the disease's cost. Global stock markets have tumbled more than 10% since mid-February as outbreaks in Iran, Italy and South Korea fueled fears the virus will spread.

Chinese factory activity fell at its fastest rate and to its lowest level

on record as anti-disease efforts closed factories and disrupted supplies, according to surveys by a business magazine, China's statistics agency and an industry group.

A monthly purchasing managers' index released yesterday by Caixin magazine fell to 40.3 from January's 51.1 on a 100-point scale on which numbers below 50 show activity contracting.

Despite that, business confidence rose to a five-year high after the ruling Communist Party launched efforts to revive industry with tax cuts and other aid, Caixin said.

AP PHOTO



CHILD DIES AS MIGRANTS RUSH TO CROSS GREEK-TURKISH BORDER

COSTAS KANTOURIS, KASTANIES

GREEK police fired tear gas at migrants trying to push into Greece from Turkey through the land border yesterday, and a child died when a dinghy boat capsized during a sea crossing, after Turkey opened its frontier for migrants and refugees to enter Europe.

The child's death, reported by the Greek coast guard, was the first since thousands of migrants began massing at the frontiers with Greece over the weekend after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced an easing of restrictions on those wishing to cross to Europe.

Turkey's announcement, initially by an official on Thursday, marked a dramatic departure from a previous policy of containing the hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants in Turkey. Erdogan apparently aims to pressure Europe into offering Turkey more support in dealing with the fallout from the Syrian war to its south.

Erdogan said yesterday that Western leaders had started to call him urging him to reverse the border opening. He said he told them, "It's done, the doors

are open now. You will have your share of this burden now." He added that soon "the number of people going to the border will be expressed in millions."

Thousands of migrants tried to find a way across Turkey's land border into Greece, which has made clear its borders will remain closed. Dozens managing to pass through either border fences or fording the river there. As Greek police fired tear gas, a group of several hundred holding white flags shouted "peace, peace," asking to be let into Greece. Others were trying to reach Greek islands from the Turkish coast.

Turkey's decision to ease border restrictions came amid a Russian-backed Syrian government offensive into Syria's northwestern Idlib province. That offensive has killed dozens of Turkish troops and led to a surge of nearly a million Syrian civilians fleeing toward Turkey's sealed border, threatening a dramatic new influx of displaced into a country that already hosts 3.5 million Syrian refugees.

Fighting on the ground in Idlib continued yesterday, with heavy clashes between Syrian government forces and Turkish-backed fighters. Syrian

troops retook the strategic town of Saraqeb, which lies on the Damascus-Aleppo highway, although violence continued nearby. The Kremlin said Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin would meet in Moscow on Thursday for talks on Idlib.

The Greek coast guard said 48 migrants on a dinghy heading to the island of Lesbos, accompanied by a Turkish patrol vessel while in Turkish waters, deliberately overturned their boat once in Greek waters, triggering a rescue operation yesterday.

The coast guard said they rescued the migrants, including two children who were hospitalized, one of them unconscious. Resuscitation efforts on the unconscious child, a boy aged around 6 or 7, failed, the coast guard said. The other child was considered out of danger. Their nationality was not immediately available.

Greek authorities said that in the 24 hours from 6 a.m. local time Sunday, they thwarted 9,877 attempts to cross the northwestern land border, either through the fence or across the Evros River, which runs along the frontier. Authorities arrested 68 people and charged them with illegal entry. AP

France Coronavirus cases surged in Italy, and France closed the world-famous Louvre Museum as the epidemic that began in China sent fear rising across Western Europe, threatening its tourism industry. New battle fronts in the battle opened rapidly, deepening the sense of crisis that has already sent financial markets plummeting, emptied the streets in many cities and rewritten the routines of millions of people. More than 89,000 have been infected, on every continent but Antarctica.

AP PHOTO



Philippines A recently dismissed security guard freed dozens of hostages and was subdued by police after walking out of a shopping mall in the Philippine capital yesterday, ending a daylong hostage crisis in an upscale commercial district near the police and military headquarters, officials said. The former guard, identified as Archie Paray (pictured), left the mall in San Juan City in metropolitan Manila with the remaining hostages, who were then secured by police.

AP PHOTO



India The death toll in New Delhi from riots last week between Hindus and Muslims rose to 46, officials said yesterday, a day after false rumors of new violence led to panicked calls to police in many parts of the city. The riots in New Delhi began over a disputed new citizenship law, which led to clashes in which hundreds were injured.

AP PHOTO



Israelis were voting yesterday in the country's unprecedented third election in less than a year to decide whether longtime Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (pictured, right) stays in power despite his upcoming criminal trial on corruption charges. Netanyahu, the longest serving leader in Israeli history, has been the caretaker prime minister for more than a year.