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OPPOSITION MOUNTS AGAINST MACAU'S BLANKET BAN ON NON-CHINESE FOREIGN WORKERS ENTERING THE CITY WITH AN ONLINE PETITION NOW LAUNCHED P2

EXCO DRAFTS MORE FINANCIAL MEASURES TO ASSIST BUSINESSES P2

CHINA'S TOP DISCIPLINARY BODY REHABILITATED THE MEMORY OF 'HERO VIRUS DOCTOR' AND CALLED ON THE POLICE TO REVOKE THE REPRIMAND P12

AP PHOTO



Monaco The palace of Monaco says its ruler, Prince Albert II, has tested positive for the new coronavirus but his health is not worrying. Albert, 62, appeared to be the first head of state who has publicly said he contracted the virus. In a statement, the palace said he is being treated by doctors from the Princess Grace Hospital, named after his U.S. actress mother. It says Albert is continuing to work from his home office in the palace.

AP PHOTO



Iran has granted a medical furlough to a U.S. Navy veteran who has been imprisoned in Iran for more than a year, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (pictured) announced yesterday. Michael White of Imperial Beach, California, is now in the custody of the Swiss Embassy and must remain in Iran as a condition of his furlough, which was granted as Iran works to curb the spread of coronavirus. The U.S. government will seek his full release.

AP PHOTO



EU Michel Barnier, the European Union's chief negotiator for the bloc's future relationship with Britain after Brexit, has been infected with the new coronavirus. The 69-year-old Barnier said in a Twitter video message yesterday that he is doing well and has a good morale.

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XINHUA

ASIA LEADING A FACE MASK FASHION REVOLUTION



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EXCO DRAFTS MORE FINANCIAL MEASURES TO ASSIST BUSINESSES

LYNZY VALLES

THE Executive Council (ExCo) has drafted a bill for the amendment of the 2020 budget, suggesting a series of measures after the government predicted that this year's gross gaming revenue will decline to 130 billion patacas year-on-year – a 50% reduction compared to its initial estimate of 260 million patacas.

In a statement issued yesterday, the government predicts that it will see a deficit of some 38.9 billion patacas in gaming taxes due to the decrease of gaming revenues.

In response, ExCo has advanced work on a series of measures to assist local businesses and residents in response to the economic effects of the novel coronavirus.

According to the draft, the bill would exempt hotels and similar establishments from the tourism tax, including health clubs, saunas, massages and karaoke firms for six months starting from April 1.

There would also be a deduction to the collection of the complementary income tax due in 2019 by taxpayers of up to 300,000 patacas, and an increase of the current annual fixed percentage after rebates included in the Professional Tax Regulation from 25% to 30%.

JOSÉ MANUEL GIGA



In the draft, the government will also increase the percentage and respective limit value for the return of the 2018 professional tax collection from 60% to 70%, increasing the initial limit value from 14,000 to 20,000 patacas. It will exempt house owners who are local residents from the payment of the 2019 urban property tax that is levied on properties.

As part of the measures, the government will also exempt people from the 2020 road tax for vehicles, even vehicles that are

registered under hotel establishments and tourism agencies.

With the current increase in expenditure, the government will use some of the extraordinary financial capital reserve that amounts to nearly 600 billion patacas. The ExCo has adjusted its predictions for the 2020 total budget revenue from the initial 122.6 billion patacas to 111.8 billion patacas.

It also forecasted that the expenses would increase from 100.6 billion patacas to 110.9

billion patacas.

In the statement, the ExCo noted that the government has increased its investment in infrastructure and in small and medium-sized public works, and that it had made preparations for the adoption of economic support measures.

These include a second distribution of health vouchers, the granting of more subsidies from the Social Welfare Bureau, an SME assistance plan, and an SME bank loan interest subsidy plan.

MGM COTAI EMPLOYEE TESTS NEGATIVE FOR VIRUS

AN employee of a Cotai integrated resort who developed a fever yesterday morning has tested negative for Covid-19.

The employee, who works at the MGM Cotai integrated resort operated by MGM China, was sent to Conde S. Januário Hospital yesterday morning after suffering from an eye infection that led to a slight fever. The employee was tested for Covid-19 at the public hospital and the results came back negative.

In a statement issued by the casino operator, MGM China said that the company had proactively sent the employee to the hospital upon learning of their illness.

The person is now resting at home and will not return to work until they make a full recovery.

MGM China also said in its statement that it "places high importance on the health and safety of its employees, guests and all Macau citizens."

The company said it had cleaned and disinfected all of its back of house areas after the incident. **DB**

ONLINE PETITION CALLS FOR WITHDRAWAL OF TNR BAN

AN online petition calling on the government to withdraw the blanket ban on non-resident workers (TNR) from overseas countries entering the Macau SAR was launched yesterday.

The ban started yesterday at 12 a.m. and prohibits entry for all TNR, except those from mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The organizer of the petition, Hélder Beja, who is also the former program director of the Macau Literary Festival, believes that the measure deprives TNRs of fundamental rights.

"The absolute need of containing this epidemic and subjecting any new arrivals to a strict control (including compulsory quarantine and isolation) is understandable, but cannot lead to the denial of fundamental rights to human beings who have been working in Macau for years," he stated in the petition.

Executive Order No. 73/2020, which was published Wednesday night, aims to deter the spread of the novel coronavirus after the city recorded new cases in two non-resident workers.

"We hereby request for this decision to be withdrawn with immediate effect. We're all humans and we're all somehow bond[ed] to this city of Macau. We can't see this happening and do nothing," Beja said.

Those that are currently in their hometowns on forced leave, annual leave or unpaid leave due to the virus have been affected by this measure.

As of yesterday, some 300 individuals had already signed the petition, with many of them commenting that they do not want to lose their jobs. **LV**

GOV'T APPOINTS REGENCY HOTEL AS THIRD QUARANTINE VENUE

THE 326-room Regency Art Hotel has been designated as the third hotel to be used for quarantining individuals undergoing 14-day medical observation.

Casino Taipa, the casino located at the newly designated hotel, was temporarily closed from 3 p.m. yesterday in order to prepare for the property's repurposing.

In consideration of the rising number of residents returning to the city, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) said in a statement that it

is looking for more hotel establishments that can be converted into medical observation venues.

"During the process of decision-making, the SAR government would consult Health Bureau (SSM) for opinion and strive to cater to the demand of different circles," MGTO said.

The bureau reiterated that all the individuals in mandatory quarantine at designated hotels for medical observation are asymptomatic and have not been in close contact with confirmed cases of

the novel coronavirus.

SSM requires all persons in mandatory quarantine to take their own temperature twice per day. The authority will also check their physical condition by phone daily.

Currently, the government is only allowing Macau local residents and residents from the greater China region to enter the city. These individuals are required to undergo a 14-day quarantine period in these hotels if they have been to medium-risk or high-risk countries. **LV**

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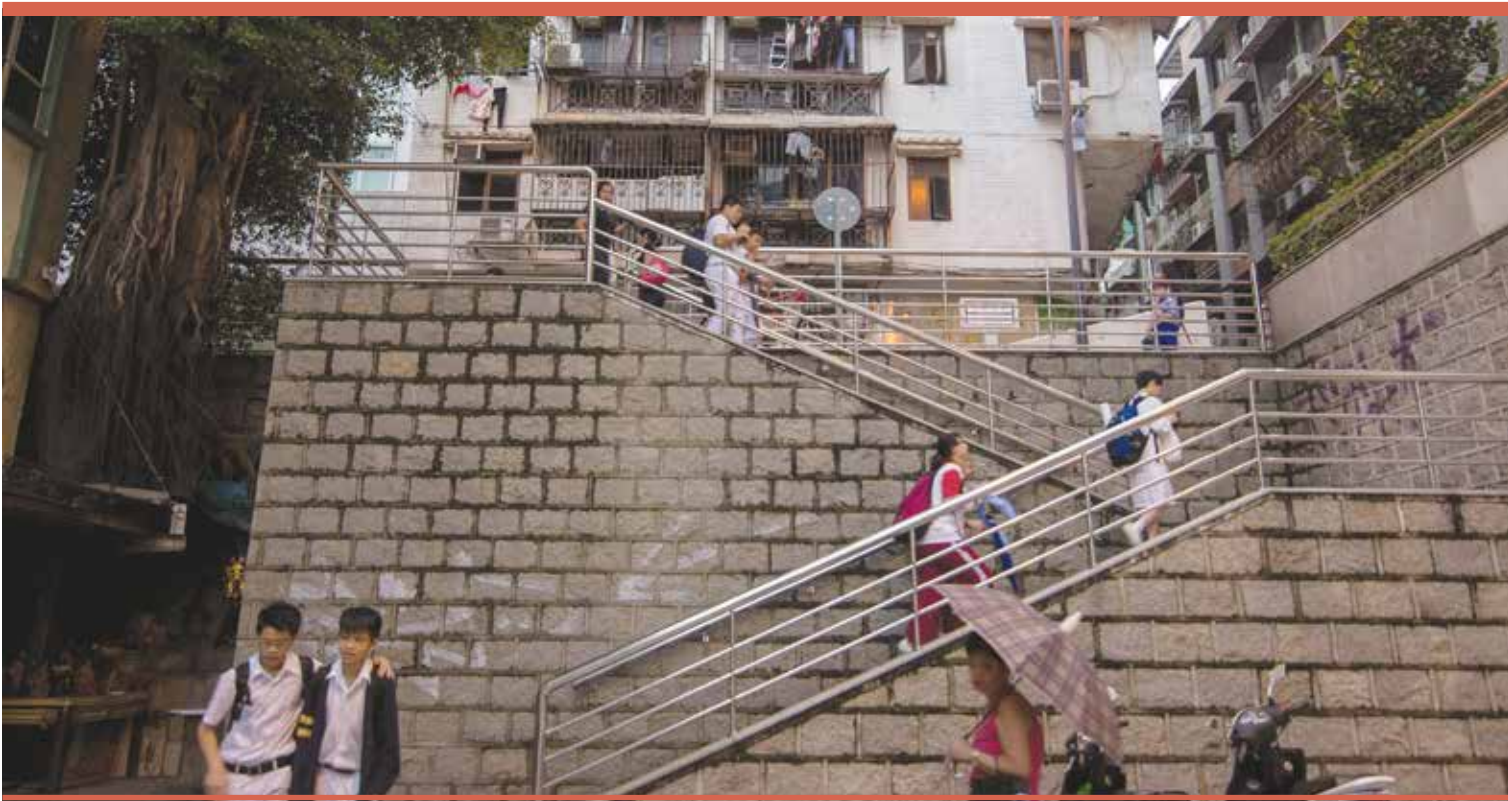
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BLOOMBERG



Education regulator cancels school resumption plans

ANTHONY LAM

THE previously announced school resumption schedule has now been suspended and an announcement on new dates will be made in due course, the Education and Youth Affairs Bureau (DSEJ) informed during yesterday's daily press briefing.

According to the education regulator, the decision was made in order to safeguard health and lower the risk to local students.

The bureau's original plan was to first restart lessons for Form 6 and Senior Secondary 3 students in the form of tuition classes, so as to assist them in their preparation for university admission.

With the restart being voluntary, concerned students and their parents have complete liberty in deciding if they will return to school.

Moreover, it was also announced previously that other education levels would resume in phases.

The plan is now back to square one, but the education regulator could not provide a new timetable as they were "constantly accessing the situation."

Macau has seen seven new cases in the past five days, all imported. As global conditions deteriorate, many overseas Macau students are trying to return home.

The head of the Health Bureau (SSM), Lei Chin Ion, admitted that the returnees pose a risk to the city. The bureau is certain that more cases will arise in the coming days.

As it is against the Basic Law to ban the returnees from entering the region, it means that the SSM can only quarantine them, a measure that the authority is already enforcing.

About 800 overseas students have expressed their desire to return. In response to the quantity, the health regulator assured that Macau has enough equipment to handle potential cases, with the current measures in place.

"There are 232 beds in negative pressure isolation wards," Lei said, adding that contingencies have been made should the situation deteriorate. The number of staff, on the other hand, are able to handle more cases than they are currently.

As all non-resident workers from outside of the greater China region have been banned from entering Macau, people are concerned about the size of the city's workforce.

Lei stressed that it is important to mitigate potential risks. "The counts of Southeast Asian countries may not be as reliable as our country's," the health regulator said. He further explained that the number of new cases in these countries do not match the frequency of new cases in Macau, raising further doubts about their accuracy.

"Taking more non-resident workers in may not benefit employers necessarily," he added, pointing out that the business at casinos and integrated resorts has not yet recovered, which means less labor is needed for the time being.

Some journalists accused the Macau government of discriminating against non-resident workers, but Lei insisted that there was no discrimination.

"Non-resident workers are covered by the government mask sale," the doctor said, implying that the government

has been addressing the needs of non-resident workers. Lei added that many countries are enacting entry bans on non-citizens in order to protect for locals.

"We should always prioritize services for local residents," the bureau head continued. "It is our responsibility."

Concerning some local residents who are overseas but are seeking to now return to Macau, one journalist at the press briefing claimed that some parents had said they are willing to bear the cost of a charter flight arranged by the government.

Inês Chan, an official from the Macao Government Tourism Office, described the difficulty of the operation, because these students are in various cities around the world. However, she expressed that these parents have the liberty of negotiating with airlines to charter a flight.

LEVEL 2 TRAVEL WARNING EXTENDED WORLDWIDE

THE Tourism Crisis Management Office (GGCT) announced last night that it was extending a Level 2 travel alert to all overseas countries and territories. The alert is advisory in nature does not prohibit outbound travel.

The GGCT said that the decision had been taken after seeking the input from the Macau Health Bureau and was largely based on public health consideration.

The local government continues to advise Macau residents against non-essential travel during this period. Residents who are currently overseas should pay attention to public announcements issued by the Macau Health Bureau. Meanwhile,

information disclosed yesterday by the police authority showed that border crossings are on the decline.

The number of crossings fell slightly yesterday, with 36,000 inbound and 37,000 outbound, according to the Public Security Police Force, which oversees immigration matters in Macau. Crossings made by local residents still accounted for the majority, with 28,000 in and out respectively.

With new measures barring entry for those from outside Greater Chinese being enacted, border crossings made by visitors dropped by about 10% to 7,200 inbound crossings and 8,500 outbound crossings. **DB/AL**

No new cases after three reported in single night

THE city's medical staff saw three new Covid-19 cases between Wednesday night and the early hours of Thursday morning. As of yesterday's daily press briefing, the total number of cases remains at 17 since the outbreak first reached Macau in late January.

The last case to be reported is the youngest Covid-19 patient so far in Macau. He is the 11-year-old son of the 14th case, who is the spouse of a non-resident worker. The family is, according to the Health Bureau, of Indonesian nationality.

He and his parents boarded Cathay Pacific flight CX718 from Jakarta to Hong Kong on March 17. He sat in seat number 47E. The boy then travelled to Macau via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge.

The patient is currently being treated at Conde de São Januário Hospital (CHCSJ) and is in mild condition. Meanwhile, his father tested negative on March 18 after he developed a fever believed to be unrelated to the coronavirus. The health authority said he would be retested 48 hours after his initial examination.

The city's 16th case, a 19-year-old female student, is also being treated at the CHCSJ. She returned from the U.K. with four schoolmates. They took Singapore Airlines flight 317 from London Heathrow Airport to Singapore, and then flight 856 operated by the same airline company from Singapore to Hong Kong.

Two of her schoolmates are Macau residents. The three of them crossed the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge into Macau. A third schoolmate, a Hong Kong resident, chose to stay in the neighboring SAR, while the fourth schoolmate, also from Hong Kong, voluntarily returned to Hong Kong after declining to go through quarantine in Macau.

As the schoolmates were categorized as close contacts, the Macau health authority has notified its counterpart in Hong Kong about possible follow up.

The 15th case is a Filipino non-resident worker who recently returned from the Philippines. His five housemates initially tested negative, but have second tests scheduled for 48 hours after their first. They have developed respiratory symptoms.

People in Macau who have taken the same flights as the aforementioned patients should call the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center. **AL**

FACE MASKS: FROM HATED NECESSITY

RENATO MARQUES

ONCE seen as a sign of sickness, face masks embraced across Asia are earning a new status in the fashion world even as their popularity lags in the West.

Although it is almost impossible to isolate its beginnings, the idea of bringing face masks into fashion started some time towards the end of January, when the Covid-19 outbreak was worsening in China.

Today, Asia is far ahead of the rest of the world when it comes to the integration of face masks in daily life. But the West may soon catch up, with only acceptance by big European fashion names and Americans brands needed to kickstart the social revolution, according to Selina Wong, Vice President of Macau Urban Creative Industry Association.

One of its first high-profile appearances in the West was when U.S. singer Billie Eilish wore a Gucci designer mask during this year's Grammy awards. A few weeks later, at Paris Fashion Week, French designer Marine Serre presented the audience with outfits paired with face masks.

Whether it was due to fears of the Covid-19 outbreak or a deliberate attempt to upgrade the status of the item, in the past few weeks several examples show the product is gaining popularity worldwide, helped by an interest from celebrities and the reach of social media.

For local designer and Worker Playground fashion brand owner Vincent Cheang, the rising popularity of the face mask as a fashion accessory is something previously "unimaginable."

"In this kind of situation [a pandemic] nobody would think of a mask as a fashion item. It is just seen as an essential product, just like a pair of pants or a skirt," Cheang told the Times. "But if you are a person interested in

fashion and you care to put on a good outfit, you soon realize that adding a face mask could mess up the whole look."

In the designer's opinion, this has led people to find ways to match face masks with their outfits and has led to the creation of new designs to match particular styles.

Fashion designer Nicole Tam, creator of the brand ANtitled said, "As designers, we are always trying to solve a problem for the market. The face mask is definitely a trending item right now and I have seen some new designs including colorful printed masks and I think they are cool."

For Selina Wong, it is clear that Asia has been at the forefront of face mask adoption, as well as the attempts to individualize or style it. Japan and Taiwan were the front-runners of stylistic mask usage, especially regarding "cute" designs and handmade items using pure cotton handkerchiefs as their base, said Wong.

However, these attempts so far have mostly resulted in the inclusion of cultural features, colors, drawings or patterns - and not something that has the potential to start a worldwide trend.

"Although Asia has been using masks for many years, it would be difficult to call it a trend in fashion without the big European brands and Americans," said Wong, noting that world fashion trends still follow market leaders in France, Italy and the U.S.

"It seems that in these countries there is still a negative reaction and an aversion to using face masks [even in situations of crisis like the Covid-19 outbreak] and this fact might indicate that we are still far from it becoming a trend."

In Portugal, one family business seeks to not only capitalize on the trend of transforming face masks into iconic fashion products, but also address the environmental impact of disposable masks. ►►

COURTESY IMAXTREE



Marine Serre at
Paris Fashion Week

"The face mask is definitely a trending item right now and I have seen some new designs including colorful printed masks and I think they are cool."

NICOLE TAM

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TO FASHION ACCESSORY



The widespread use of disposable face masks all over the planet has raised environmental concerns, with reports of littering caused by their improper disposal appearing in several parts of the world. Last week, the South China Morning Post featured a report on the high number of face masks that are washing ashore along the Hong Kong coastline during a trip guided by Gary Stokes, founder of Oceans Asia, an ocean conservation organization based in the neighboring region.

Portugal's MontLusa might have the answer. Founded in 2012, the company is headquartered in Benedita, a municipality of Alcobaca. They work on leather goods and fashion accessories, and have decided to take a leap and explore new materials and ideas to make a new face mask.

In an exclusive interview with the Times, MontLusa's Ricardo Lopes explained that the idea for the creation of the mask came from the lack of disposable masks on the market in Portugal, as well as the spiking prices of the product.

"We decided to create our own mask," Lopes said, "bearing in mind that a simple disposable mask could cost around 4.50 euros [MOP39] and that, as the name says, it is a

single-use item that can only be used once and then is discarded."

"The reusable masks need only to be washed traditionally, or with disinfectants, before they can be worn it again without hassle and in a safe manner," he said. In this way, the masks also reduce the waste produced by disposable masks.

The materials used in this mask are from natural sources. The shell is made of natural cork, and the interior has 100% cotton lining and is elastic.

"In the ones we are producing at the moment, there is no filter since the cotton lining itself allows filtering. But we are developing a new mask [...] that we are aiming to certify for use in hospitals, clinics and security forces staff."

At the moment, the company is still testing how long the mask can be used for, so it is not possible to confirm how many times it can be used safely. But the company assured that "it has extended durability without losing its characteristics."

There are also currently several production units from Macau and the mainland producing these types of more personalized products. Selina Wong, who owns one such local production unit making masks out of anti-bacterial fabric, said they gear their production toward made-to-order masks for children and babies, using embroidery, for example, to make the products more attractive to younger users.

"You can make a decorative or fashionable mask design using different materials as long as the filter inside is effective and strong enough to contain the virus."

SELINA WONG

Like MontLusa, Wong is also preoccupied with ensuring her products are environmentally-sustainable, but notes the difficulties overcoming the common view that reusable cotton masks are not as hygienic as the surgical disposal ones.

"People still criticize them as they think these masks are not good enough. But in fact,

we have done several studies in collaboration with the Hong Kong Polytechnic University to assure that they were effective, as if they were not, there was no use in producing them," said Wong. "What we found out is that you can make a decorative or fashionable mask design using different materials as long as the filter inside is effective and strong enough to contain the virus."

She added that Hong Kong Polytechnic University also created their own masks using the same anti-bacterial fabric.

Both MontLusa and Wong's factory started producing these masks not as a commercial activity, but to supply them to their employees and for personal use. Ricardo Lopes of

MontLusa said that originally the creation of the mask was not part of any strategic marketing plan, but "made for the use of employees."

Cheang's foray into the business is more deliberate. He is studying some of the new products on the market to understand how he can create a line of face masks that are both func-

tional and stylish.

On the production of these items, Cheang noted that there two major concerns regarding the functionality of the final product.

"One is the protection factor from the virus [it must include these characteristics] and the second is that it must look good," he said, noting that the bigger challenge designers are facing at the moment is to "design a product that looks good but that at the same time has a protective function. This is the most complex part."

For the time being, he is studying two options. First, a new product that he acquired in Italy some time ago. It has a replaceable filter that can be used for as long as two months, and offers the option of creating a double layer style shell to incorporate common, single-use surgical masks.

Cheang says that this is very well-designed and efficient, but it also carries a hefty price tag. His current focus is on how to create a similar item that is more marketable.

For Tam, including face masks in an ANtitled collection just depends on collaborators. She says she would enjoy working on such a project as long as the final product fits into her brand's identity, which focuses on sustainability.

YOUTH GROUP CALLS FOR END TO DISCRIMINATION AGAINST RETURNING STUDENTS

The Chinese Youth Advancement Association has urged the Macau community not to discriminate against Macau students returning from overseas. Recently, over 3,000 Macau students have returned to Macau from high-prevalence regions outside of mainland China. The secretary of the association, surnamed Si, believes that there is a possibility for new cases with the surge of Macau students returning to town. He wants the Macau public to treat these students with a fair mentality, reiterating that any kind of discrimination is unhelpful in relieving the pandemic. A young person himself, Si hopes that these Macau students and their families will cooperate with the local government's prevention measures, so as to not increase the infection risk for other people.

GUANGDONG URGES TRAVELERS TO STAY AWAY FOR QING MING FESTIVAL

The Health Commission of Guangdong Province has urged people of Chinese ethnicity to not visit mainland China for the upcoming Qing Ming festival. The Guangdong department proposed all regions to recommend "foreign Chinese, residents of Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, overseas Chinese, Chinese teaching overseas, Chinese studying overseas, Chinese working for companies overseas not to return to Guangdong, or gather in Guangdong, or visit relatives in Guangdong, and not to worship ancestors in Guangdong." The department proposed that people who wish to worship their ancestors should seek substitutes, such "non-physical" online worship.

CORRUPT CIVIL SERVANT WHO GAMBLED EXPELLED IN HUBEI PROVINCE

A junior employee at a Hubei state-owned tobacco company has been expelled from the Chinese Communist Party and from public service. According to information released by the party disciplinary department of Enshi county, Hubei, Zhang Rencai, a former researcher at China Tobacco Hubei Industrial LLC Enshi Tobacco Factory, was found guilty of corruption. He was found to be concealing his financial background and interests. He gave other people gifts, engaged in "unfair" sexual relationships with other people, and gambled in Macau, which is not illegal but often frowned upon for civil servants.

RENATO MARQUES



Lawmaker Chan Chak Mo

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FUTURE MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS' BODY TO DECIDE ON PUNISHMENTS

THE SAR government has agreed with the city's lawmakers that the future medical professionals committee should be the entity to decide on punishment appeals.

Yesterday, the Second Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly (AL) met with government representatives to discuss the healthcare personnel professional qualification and license registration bill.

According to the chairman of the committee, Chan Chak Mo, lawmakers were mostly concerned about provisions relating to punishments for law infringement.

The current bill says that when a medical professional is going through disciplinary procedures, depending on the individual case,

the medical professional committee will make a decision to define the nature of the concerning practices. The committee will determine the level of any malpractice.

Once the committee makes a decision, the subject is entitled to make an appeal to the committee within 30 days from the decision date. After they appeal, the committee can make a decision about the appeal or choose not to respond, meaning the committee will not be obligated to respond. The current law provision suggests that if the committee does not respond to the second appeal, then the appeal will be "rejected by default."

This specific point generated discord among lawmakers, who argued that this law relates to

healthcare professionals but not engineers or social workers. Healthcare is of greater public interest than engineering and social work, so failing to respond to the second appeal "is very unfair for the concerned parties."

The government has endorsed the lawmakers' opinions. They have agreed to remove the expression "rejected by default" and will write in the bill that, regardless of the situation, the committee must make a decision on the second appeal, instead of "rejecting by default" by failing to respond.

The lawmakers also suggested that the government can amend this specific provision by giving the committee more than 30 days, perhaps 45 days or more, to give the committee more time to decide.

Yesterday, lawmakers asked government representatives a question which eventually led the representatives to admit that the government had completely copied an article from the social work law and included in this medical professional law regarding medical professional qualification criteria. The local government said there was a possibility of amending this article.

According to the bill, the SAR government will appoint the members of the first medical professional committee. The government has not revealed whether the director of the Health Bureau will serve as the chairman of the committee.

The government claimed it had consulted the opinions of more than 70 organizations. **JZ**

UM's Professor Kevin Thompson elected to prestigious EASA

PROFESSOR Kevin Thompson, founding master of the University of Macau (UM) Moon Chun Memorial College, has been elected a member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts (EASA) for his outstanding contributions in promoting the arts, cultural exchange, the development of creative industries and the international business community, as well as music and administrative management.

Thompson is the 25th

person from China to be elected to EASA since the body was founded in 1990.

Due to Covid-19, a festive ceremony and the formal bestowal of the membership upon Thompson will be held in March next year.

EASA is a prestigious global academic society. Members of the academy are leaders in related fields, and have made outstanding contributions to promoting creative research, interdisciplinarity,

international collaborations, and academic exchange. Among them, 32 are Nobel laureates.

Thompson is a fellow of the Royal College of Music and the Royal Society of Edinburgh. He was conferred an honorary doctorate in arts by the University of Plymouth in July 2007. He was elected a fellow and associate in Cambridge by the governing body of Clare Hall, University of Cambridge, in May 2019. He received an honorary

doctorate from the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, decreed by Birmingham City University in January 2020.

Moreover, he is a fellow of the Royal Society of Musicians, and the Royal Geographical Society. He is also a Churchill Fellow, and an associate in Cambridge, the University of Cambridge, and the Clare Hall 1966 Foundation Society.

Thompson was formerly an advisor to Prime Minister Tony Blair's High

Level Strategy Group on International Students & Education in the United Kingdom.

In 2017, French president Emmanuel Macron officially announced a decree bestowing Thompson with the title and rank of Knight of the National Order of Légion of Honour (Chevalier de l'Ordre National de la Légion d'honneur).

That same year, Thompson was elected president of the Macau European Chamber of Commerce by all seven European chambers in Macau. In October 2019, he was elected vice president of the supervisory board of the Macau European Chamber of Commerce. **DB**

XINHUA



People applaud as departing medical workers enter Wuhan Tianhe International Airport in Wuhan, earlier this week

COVID-19

Wuhan offers hope on virus front; Italy nears stark toll

DAVID RISING, NICK PERRY
& KEN MORITSUGU, BEIJING

YESTERDAY was a day of contrasts on the front lines of the battle against the new coronavirus. In a sign of hope, the Chinese city of Wuhan reported no new homegrown infections, but in a stark warning for the world, Italy appeared set to surpass China's death toll from the virus.

The two milestones were a dramatic illustration of how much the global outbreak has pivoted toward Europe and the United States. They also showed how the arc of contagion can vary in different nations, as Italy with 60 million people braces to see more carnage than China, a nation of 1.4 billion.

Italy registered 2,978 deaths on Wednesday after another 475 people died. Given that Italy has been averaging more than 350 deaths a day since March 15, it's likely to overtake China's 3,249 dead when yesterday's figures are released at day's end.

U.N. and Italian health authorities have cited a variety of reasons

for Italy's high toll, key among them its large elderly population, who are particularly susceptible to developing serious complications from the virus. Italy has the world's second oldest population after Japan's and the vast majority of Italy's dead — 87% — were over age 70.

In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says 80% of the nation's 138 deaths have taken place in people over 65. Overall, 8,900 patients have died around the world, and 84,000 have recovered. Aside from the elderly and the sick, most people only have mild or moderate symptoms, like a fever or cough.

In the meantime, the news from China's central city of Wuhan, where the virus first emerged late last year, offered a rare glimmer of hope and perhaps a lesson in the strict measures needed to halt its spread. It came as President Donald Trump likened the fight to "a war" and invoked emergency powers that allow him to compel manufacturers to deal with the pandemic.

Wuhan once was the place

where thousands lay sick or dying in hurriedly constructed hospitals, the first place in the world where medical facilities appeared overwhelmed. But Chinese authorities said yesterday that all 34 new cases recorded over the previous day had been imported from abroad.

"Today, we have seen the dawn after so many days of hard effort," said Jiao Yahui, a senior inspector at the National Health Commission.

While China did not report any new cases in Wuhan or Hubei province, it did record eight additional deaths. Wuhan has been under a strict lockdown since January. Officials are moving to loosen travel restrictions, but only inside the surrounding province of Hubei. Wuhan remains cut-off, with only those with special permission allowed to travel in or out.

Still, the virus, which has infected 219,000 people around the world, took its toll elsewhere, both in human and economic terms.

European stock markets were up only slightly after losses in Asia despite a massive 750 billion-eu-

ro stimulus package announced overnight by the European Central Bank. Oil dropped below \$21 a barrel Wednesday for the first time since 2002, and rose slightly yesterday to \$23.

The United Nations warned that the crisis could lead to the loss of nearly 25 million jobs around the world.

Elsewhere around the world, more borders shut, leaving some to wonder how they would get back home. In the Pacific, Australia and New Zealand shut out tourists, allowing only citizens and residents to return, while Fiji reported its first case, a worrying development in a region with poor healthcare.

Iran's top leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei planned to pardon 10,000 more prisoners — among them an unknown number of inmates whose cases are political — in an apparent effort to combat the coronavirus, Iranian state TV reported. The country, where more than 1,100 people have already died from the virus, has already released 85,000 prisoners on temporary leave.

In London, home to almost 9 million, people were being urged to stay off public transport as authorities consider imposing tougher curbs on social distancing. London is the epicenter of Britain's coronavirus outbreak, with about one-third of its 2,644 cases.

Bavarian governor Markus Soeder said it may be necessary to implement a curfew in the southern German state if people don't start better following advice on restricting social contacts. In neighboring Austria, the western province of Tyrol put 279 municipalities under quarantine in light of a large number of COVID-19 infections there, banning anyone from leaving their towns or villages except to go to work in the Alpine region.

The U.S. and Canada both closed their borders to all but essential travel and Trump said he plans to assert extraordinary powers to immediately turn back to Mexico anyone who crosses over the southern border illegally.

Russia and Mexico each reported their first death from the virus. Mexico closed its popular spring equinox visits to the Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon at Teotihuacan.

In the U.S., the Dow Jones Industrial Average shed more than 1,300 points on Wednesday, or over 6%, and has now lost nearly all of the gains it had posted since Trump's inauguration. The White House pressed Congress to swiftly pass a potentially \$1 trillion rescue package to prop up the economy and speed relief checks to Americans in a matter of weeks.

Calling himself a "wartime president," Trump invoked the Defense Production Act of 1950 to steer industrial output and overcome shortages of face masks, ventilators and other supplies as hospitals brace for an expected onslaught of cases.

California's governor warned that martial law could be imposed. The mayor of New York said the city's 8.6 million residents should be prepared for a lockdown.

Ford, General Motors and Fiat Chrysler, along with Honda and Toyota, said they will shut all of their factories in the U.S., Canada and Mexico. The closing of Detroit's Big Three alone will idle about 150,000 workers, who are likely to receive supplemental pay in addition to unemployment benefits.

The U.S. has reported more than 9,400 coronavirus cases and at least 138 deaths, about half of them in Washington state, where dozens of residents from a suburban Seattle nursing home have died.

Scientists believe the true number of people infected in the United States is higher than reported because of the possibility that many mild cases have gone unrecognized and because of delays in ramping up testing. **AP**

PANDEMIC

Mideast airlines lose \$7b as airports shut to combat virus

AYA BATRAWY& NASSER
KARIMI, DUBAI

S EVEN Middle Eastern countries have suspended all commercial flights due to a fast-spreading new virus as the aviation industry's largest trade association announced yesterday that airlines in the region have already lost more than \$7 billion in revenue.

The International Air Transport Association, which represents around 290 airlines worldwide, said the travel restrictions that countries have imposed to slow down the spread of the virus "have more far-reaching implications than anything we have seen before."

The group called for emergency aid of up to \$200 billion for airlines globally.

In the Middle East alone, 16,000 passenger flights have been cancelled since the end of January. The financial losses translate into hundreds of thousands of jobs at risk, IATA said.

The Middle East has some 20,000 cases of the virus, with most cases in Iran or linked to travel from Iran. The virus killed another 149 people in the past 24 hours in Iran, pushing the death toll there to 1,284 amid over 18,000 confirmed cases.

Already, major carriers like Emirates have urged pilots and cabin crew to take unpaid leave. Reports have emerged that Qatar Airways laid off several hundred employees. The airline did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Job losses in the Middle East have especially far-reaching consequences to the millions of foreign workers who send remittances back home to families in India, Pakistan, the Philippines and eastern European countries. Gulf states like Qatar and the United Arab Emirates rely heavily on foreigners to work as airport support staff, pilots, cleaners and cabin crew.

"A lot of jobs are at risk, economies of the nations are being impacted and airline business in the Middle East is taking a bit hit,"



Muhammad Albakri, IATA's regional vice president for Africa and the Middle East, said in a phone conference with reporters.

"We are suffering, we are struggling. We are bleeding," he said in his most urgent appeal yet to governments to step in and urgently help many of these state-owned airlines by cutting taxes and offering direct financial assistance.

Yesterday, Egypt and Lebanon became the latest two countries in the Middle East to shut down airports and suspend all passenger flights, joining Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco.

Sudan's transitional government reopened airports for 48 hours only to allow Sudanese stranded abroad to return home and expats to leave the country. Libya's rival governments have also closed airports and border crossings, allowing only humanitarian and cargo flights.

Other countries have largely limited or halted all flights and border crossings. Some, such as Iraq and Lebanon, have ordered citizens to stay home to contain the virus.

Private businesses, restaurants and government institutions have been ordered shut across many countries in the region, leaving only bakeries, supermarkets and pharmacies open as well as some banks.

Since February, Israeli national carrier El Al has laid off 1,000 employees and put another 5,500 on unpaid vacation, "almost all" of its staff, company spokesman Eitan Atias told the AP. It has reduced its flights from 47 destinations globally to just six: New York, Newark, Paris, London, Toronto and Johannesburg.

In the Middle East, 16,000 passenger flights have been cancelled since the end of January

Albakri said international bookings are down 40% for Mideast airlines and domestic bookings are also similarly impacted. The loss of \$7.2 billion in revenue as of March 11 is in comparison to last year's revenue at the same time, he said.

In Egypt, the Arab world's most populous country, some 138,000 jobs are immediately at risk and \$1 billion in airline revenue has been lost, according to IATA. In Saudi Arabia, which suspended the year-round Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, \$3 billion have been lost and more than 140,000 people could lose their jobs.

Albakri said airlines at best have two to three months of cash on hand to carry them through.

He said another 163,000 people are at risk of losing their jobs in the United Arab Emirates, home to the region's biggest carrier

Emirates and the world's busiest airport for international travel in Dubai. The UAE's airlines have absorbed \$2.8 billion in base revenue loss, Albakri said.

The UAE has not shut its airports but has barred the entry of all visitors and even its foreign residents who are currently abroad. The decision, which could last at least two weeks, impacts

people whose homes, children, bank accounts and livelihoods are in the country, but who were traveling or outside the country. Only Emirati citizens are allowed

to return.

The UAE is unique in that only about 10% of its population, or about 1 million people, are Emirati citizens. The other 90% are foreign residents who fuel its economy and keep the country running. They hold the vast majority of jobs in construction, transportation, hospitality, sales, medicine, education and other key sectors. The UAE also announced it was suspending all new labor permits, including those for drivers and domestic workers, until "further notice."

For most people, the virus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. The vast majority of people recover from the new virus. **AP**

this day in history



2003 US LAUNCHES MISSILES AGAINST SADDAM

American missiles have hit the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, signalling the start of the US-led campaign to topple Saddam Hussein.

President George Bush delivered a live television address shortly after the bombings began, vowing to "disarm Iraq and to free its people".

The attack was ordered two hours after a final 48-hour deadline expired for Saddam Hussein to leave Iraq.

US sources say five key members of the Iraqi regime, including the Iraqi leader himself, were targeted in the first attacks.

The Iraqis say some non-military targets have been hit and a number of civilians wounded in Doura, a southern suburb of the capital.

The air strikes began at 0534 local time (0234 GMT). A short time later, Iraqi TV broadcast what it said was a live speech by Saddam Hussein.

In it he said: "I don't need to remind you what you should do to defend our country.

"Let the unbelievers go to hell, you will be victorious, Iraqi people."

President Bush played down hopes of an early victory.

In his broadcast to the American people he warned the campaign "could be longer and more difficult than some predict".

He continued: "This will not be a campaign of half measures and we will accept no outcome but victory."

"The dangers to our country and the world will be overcome. We will pass through this time of peril and carry on the work of peace. We will defend our freedom. We will bring freedom to others."

At 2200 GMT British Prime Minister Tony Blair made a live televised address to the nation.

He confirmed British troops were in action in Iraq. He said their purpose was to remove Saddam Hussein and disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction.

The attack has drawn international condemnation and brought demonstrators onto the streets in several countries.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The Pentagon called the US air strike against Baghdad a "target of opportunity" - a chance to attack leadership targets in the hope of killing senior Iraqi commanders. It was not the launch of full-scale hostilities.

The attack was carried out by F-117 Stealth fighters, but cruise missiles were also fired from four US navy warships and two submarines.

The following day (21 March) the US and British launched a massive aerial assault on Baghdad in what the US called its "shock and awe" strategy. At the same time, ground forces were advancing into southern Iraq.

Iraqi forces resisted the American-led coalition troops until 9 April when a giant statue of the Iraqi leader was toppled by demonstrators in Baghdad but the man himself escaped into hiding. On 15 April a first meeting was held to talk about a new regime in Iraq.

The US formally handed over power to the Iraqis on 28 June 2004. Saddam Hussein was captured in December 2003, tried by an Iraqi court, sentenced to death and hanged on 30 December 2006.

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Your ties with your family have been looser than you may like, but they're tightening more and more as each day passes. Make a plan to get together and tell old embarrassing stories.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

As enlightened as it may be to be open-minded and accepting of all different ways of doing things, at a certain point in any decision-making process, you have to pick one way and go with it.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

It's only natural that a past relationship would enter your mind as you embark upon a new one. The similarities and the contrasts are just as striking.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

There is a bit of instability around you right now (it's nothing to be concerned about) that could put you off track for a few days if you aren't prudent in your actions.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Being able to fight back after a loss is something you can do with grace and fire, so why not give it a try? Once bitten, but never shy - that should be your motto!



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

If closure is frustratingly slow in coming, stop waiting around for it. Things are settling down nicely enough to give you a firm foundation for moving forward, so feel free to go ahead.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Reflections aren't only found in mirrors. Today, seeing your true self isn't really possible unless you take the time to be honest and accept your imperfections.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

This could include something as simple as a pair of old shoes or as complicated as a romantic partner who just doesn't have their heart in the relationship. Toss it to the curb and walk away without looking back!



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Work the mystery to your advantage. Any power struggles aren't going to be a real challenge for you, because deep down you know that you have all the answers (or at least you should act like you do).



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Even though you may have your fingers in a million different pies, you'll find a way to put it all on hold if your friends need you today. Helping other people will help you.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

The way you respect other people's privacy is admirable, but it could be limiting your opportunities. Don't be afraid to talk to the people around you about getting what you want.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

When you're having fun, everything is painless, including sacrifice. Be careful if someone approaches you to make a business offer you can't refuse. You can refuse - and you should refuse.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

HARD

5			2					
3				4				
								1
	1	7	5					
			8			3		
	4							
							6	5
				1	7			
							4	

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-2	11	clear
Harbin	-16	0	clear
Tianjin	0	12	cloudy
Urumqi	-2	7	clear
Xi'an	2	16	cloudy
Lhasa	-2	11	cloudy
Chengdu	10	15	overcast
Chongqing	11	16	overcast
Kunming	8	20	cloudy
Nanjing	2	12	clear
Shanghai	5	10	clear
Wuhan	5	16	clear
Hangzhou	4	12	cloudy
Taipei	15	16	drizzle
Guangzhou	13	18	overcast
Hong Kong	16	19	cloudy

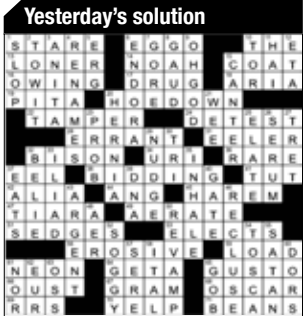
WORLD

Moscow	2	6	cloudy
Frankfurt	2	10	moderate rain
Paris	6	9	moderate rain
London	2	10	drizzle
New York	0	9	drizzle

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS: 1- Discharged a debt; 5- Latvia's capital; 9- ___ first you don't...; 13- Full of unresolved questions; 14- Island greeting; 16- Riviera resort; 17- "All the Way" lyricist Sammy; 18- Wave-related; 19- Yemen's capital; 20- Neck of the woods; 21- ___ in turkey; 22- Mailed communique; 24- Temperate; 26- Just say no; 27- Burning; 29- Courtroom jargon; 33- Thaw before takeoff; 34- Ripped; 35- Ireland; 36- Poet's preposition; 37- Called one's bluff; 38- Court fig.; 39- Foal's father; 41- Hog sound; 42- Diamond corners; 44- Foundation; 46- Gets under control; 47- Sharp to the taste; 48- Charge per unit; 49- Followed; 52- Covering for the head; 53- Sudden assault; 57- "___ grip!"; 58- Icon; 60- Assuming that's true; 61- Alleged; 62- Conger catcher; 63- Burn the midnight oil, studying; 64- Like grass in the morning; 65- Throw; 66- Outstanding;

DOWN: 1- Size of type; 2- Yonder; 3- "___ Walked Into My Life" (song from "Mame"); 4- Energetic; 5- Child's toy; 6- Greek epic poem; 7- Olympus residents; 8- Eureka!; 9- Fashionable; 10- Decree; 11- Skin eruption; 12- Eye drop; 15- Supposed; 23- Bambi's aunt; 25- Indignation; 26- Jeter of the Yankees; 27- Eagle's home; 28- Intensely ardent; 29- TV producer Michaels; 30- Rub out or remove from memory; 31- Locations; 32- Tolkien tree creatures; 33- Writing table; 34- Spoil; 37- Desperate; 40- Tidal river; 42- Cave dweller; 43- 1981 Neil Diamond hit; 45- ___-Bo; 46- Spuds; 48- Fads; 49- Crikey!; 50- Campbell of "Scream"; 51- Bouillabaisse, e.g.; 52- Head light?; 54- Bushy hairdo; 55- This ___ outregel; 56- Cupola; 59- Fulfilled;



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PSP 28 573 333

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710 ft² \$10,000/mth (ref: n/a)

[Taipa] Nam Long 2 1 1
645 ft² \$11,800/mth (ref: 19111001)

[Macau] Vai Fung Triplex 2 2 2
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MACAUCLOSER
 生活藝術雜誌 LIVING & ARTS MAGAZINE

ANA MOURA

ON SALE JAN/FEV issue

GOLF

South African player tests positive for the coronavirus

THE first player under the PGA Tour umbrella has tested positive for the new coronavirus after returning home to South Africa from playing a developmental tour event in Mexico.

The PGA Tour says Victor Lange made his only PGA Tour Latinoamérica start in the Estrella Del Mar Open in Mazatlan, Mexico. About a week after he returned home, Lange accompanied a friend to an unrelated doctor's appointment and was tested as a precaution.

The tour said in statement the 26-year-old Lange received the diagnosis Tuesday night. The tour said he has no symptoms and is expected to make a full recovery while under quarantine and medical supervision at his home in Johannesburg.

"We appreciate Victor's prompt disclosure of his diagnosis," the tour said, adding it will allow officials to alert those with whom Lange might have had contact.

The Mexico event was his only start this year on the PGA Tour Latinoamérica, one of six circuits the PGA Tour runs worldwide. Lange also played two Sunshine Tour even-

AP PHOTO



PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan reacts to a question during a news conference at The Players Championship golf tournament, in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.

ts earlier this year in South Africa.

The International Federation of PGA Tours remain shut down during the pandemic, with the European Tour canceling and postponing two more events on its schedule — the Golsixes, a two-day event on May 9-10 in Portugal, was canceled; the Made in Denmark event on May 21-24 was postponed. That brings to eight tournaments on the European

Tour either canceled or postponed.

The R&A says it is sticking to its schedule for the British Open on July 16-19 at Royal St. George's and the Women's British Open on Aug. 20-23 at Royal Troon while monitoring the COVID-19 pandemic. Neither course has even begun building the infrastructure for those championships, though the R&A says it is studying a range of options. AP

FOOTBALL

ENGLAND SUSPENDS LEAGUES UNTIL APRIL 30, WILL EXTEND SEASON

ENGLISH soccer will remain suspended until at least April 30 because of the coronavirus outbreak, with authorities agreeing yesterday to extend the season "indefinitely" beyond its previous cut-off point of June 1.

"We are united in our commitment to finding ways of resuming the 2019-20 football season and ensuring all domestic and European club league and cup matches are played as soon as it is safe and possible to do so," the Football Association and the Premier League said in a joint statement.

The commitment to completing the current season boosted the likelihood of Liverpool winning its first league

title in 30 years. The Reds lead the Premier League by 25 points and needed only two more wins from its last nine games to clinch the title before the virus outbreak caused the suspension of all soccer in the country.

Initially, English authorities suspended play until April 4 but that always appeared to be a holding date while UEFA decided whether to call off the European Championship.

UEFA's decision on Tuesday to postpone the tournament until 2021 opened up space for domestic leagues like the Premier League to be extended "and, in doing so, maintain the integrity of each competition," the FA and Premier League said. AP

AP PHOTO



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OPINION

World Views

Noah Smith, Bloomberg

FACE MASKS SIGNAL
LOUD AND CLEAR

One of the curious little mysteries of the coronavirus pandemic is why Japan's cases have increased so slowly. The country hasn't implemented the widespread testing of South Korea or the draconian lockdown of China. Yet the epidemic has spread only slowly there; the country has fewer than 1,000 cases as of this writing, lower than tiny Denmark with less than a 20th of the population. Some have suggested that Japan has a large number of undetected cases, but given the country's vulnerable elderly population the hospitals should be flooded with patients if this were true.

So what is Japan doing right? One possibility is that Japan's early move to close schools was a lucky success and that schools are the most important way the virus is spread. But another possibility is that Japan is simply very good at social distancing -- avoiding groups of people and keeping physical distance from strangers. Despite living in densely urbanized areas, Japan is famous for social isolation. Relatively few young people live with roommates. The country's culture is geared around maintaining personal space whenever possible; greetings, for example, are done by bowing instead of shaking hands.

Also, many people wear surgical masks. Usually this is done by those with colds or flu, to prevent others from getting sick. A mask can block someone from exhaling infectious droplets. But perhaps more importantly, it can signal other people to keep their distance.

When most people use the word "signaling," they just mean any sort of communication. It's possible that wearing a mask could simply be an easy way of telling other people "I'm sick, stay away." A mask could also be used to send a false message, if people without symptoms simply want to ensure that others stay back.

But in economics, the word signaling has a special meaning. The basic idea is that people do something difficult or costly - for example, going through a fraternity initiation - to prove themselves in some way. Some believe that tattoos are a social signal; they're very visible and hard to remove, so they might represent a way that people prove that they're committed to a certain subculture. Economists have used the signaling idea to try to explain everything from college education to hipster mustaches (with varying degrees of plausibility).

Wearing a mask could serve as a relatively costly signal that someone is serious about social distancing. It's costly because it looks unattractive and causes other people to treat you with suspicion. Thus, it could be a forceful, effective message to others to stay away when otherwise they might not respect your boundaries.

But if even a few more Americans wear masks, it could send a credible signal to all those who might otherwise disdain authoritarian government directives or breathless media reports. The mask-wearers would get funny looks or even taunts initially, but their presence would help convince their skeptical neighbors that this is an unusual and serious situation requiring an unusual and serious response.

The problem is that surgical masks now are in short supply. The U.S. isn't a big manufacturer of masks; it has chosen to outsource that task to China. So until production can be ramped up, most masks need to be reserved for medical use.

A few Americans wearing masks as a social signal to encourage social distancing is fine, but if too many people do it, it can deprive hospitals of the materials they need.

Still, when mask production comes online, more Americans should consider adopting this common Japanese practice. Until then, Americans should consider using a face scarf instead. Coronavirus won't be the last pandemic, and teaching Americans how to shift into social distancing mode will bear lasting dividends.

PORTUGAL DECLARES STATE OF EMERGENCY
OVER CORONAVIRUS, RECORDED THIRD DEATH **THE BUZZ**

Portugal stepped up its fight against the rapidly spreading coronavirus outbreak yesterday [Macau time], announcing a multi-billion euro stimulus package and clearing the way for declaring a state of emergency, Reuters reported.

Possible measures include restriction on movement of people, temporary requisitioning of businesses, suspension of the right to strike and restrictions to protests and public gatherings. Armed forces can be deployed to enforce the measures.

Cabinet ministers will meet today to decide on exactly what measures will be taken and from when. Portugal has 642 confir-

med cases of coronavirus so far, with two reported deaths.

"It is and will be a huge challenge for our way of life and for our economy," Portugal's President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa said in a televised address to the nation, explaining the state of emergency is an "exceptional measure in an exceptional time."

Under Portuguese law, a state of emergency is limited to 15 days but can be extended indefinitely in 15-day periods if necessary.

Portugal has recorded 785 cases of the epidemic and announced yesterday its third death from Covid-19.

LI WENLIANG

CHINESE PROBE CRITICIZES
POLICE REPRIMAND OF
VIRUS DOCTOR



CHINA'S top disciplinary body has criticized how police handled the case of a Chinese doctor who was reprimanded for rumor-mongering after he shared a warning with others about the coronavirus in the early days of the outbreak.

Dr. Li Wenliang later died from the virus, sparking a national outpouring of grief and criticism of authorities on social media.

Chinese media reports late yesterday said an investigation by the State Supervision Commission, China's top disciplinary body, found that the reprimand was inappropriate. It urged the police to revoke the reprimand and hold those involved accountable.

Li, an eye doctor, was one of several medical workers detained in early January for spreading word about the then-unknown disease. Authorities have been accused of covering up the initial outbreak, endangering health workers and allowing it to spread more widely.

According to state news agency Xinhua, the report says that in December last year several hospitals in Wuhan received a certain number of patients with pneumonia of unknown cause.

On Dec. 30, the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission issued internal documents ordering efforts to treat patients with pneu-

monia of unknown cause.

On the same day, soon after receiving information forwarded to Li by a colleague, the former posted in one of his WeChat chat groups text messages including "seven SARS cases were confirmed at Huanan fruits and seafood market", a photo and a video clip.

Li later sent more messages to the chat group: "According to the latest information, it is confirmed to be coronavirus infection. The type of the virus is being determined." "... Please alert your families to take precautions."

The messages, along with other similar information, led to public attention and discussions.

The report cited by Xinhua, went on saying that on Jan. 3, 2020, a local police station of the Wuhan Public Security Bureau summoned Li for a talk in line with the spirit of Wuhan's arrangements on preventing and controlling the epidemic of pneumonia of unknown cause.

During the talk, Li said it was wrong to send the SARS-related messages in a WeChat group.

A letter of police reprimand was issued to Li.

On Jan. 10, 2020, Li developed a fever. He was hospitalized on Jan. 12 at the ophthalmology ward of the Central Hospital of Wuhan before being transferred to the No. 3 ward zone of the

hospital's respiratory and critical care department two days later. Li was transferred to the intensive care unit of the respiratory and critical care department on Jan. 23 and died on Feb. 7.

Li's attending doctors said the treatment for him was procedure-based and timely and the medics did their best.

According to Xinhua, Wuhan Municipal Human Resources and Social Security Bureau has identified Li as a case of occupational injury, for which a workplace death subsidy and a funeral subsidy have been paid in accordance with regulations. Li's family has also received payment from a donated insurance scheme.

The investigators have suggested that local supervisory authorities look into the issuance of the reprimand letter to Li, which "was inappropriate and failed to respect relevant law enforcement procedures, and urge police to revoke the letter and hold those responsible accountable and release the results in a timely manner."

In death, Li Wenliang became the face of simmering anger at the party's controls over information and complaints that officials lie about or hide disease outbreaks, chemical spills, dangerous consumer products or financial frauds. **MDT/AGENCIES**

UK The Bank of England slashed its main interest rate to 0.1%, the lowest level since its founding in 1694, and reactivated a bond-buying stimulus program in response to the economic shock of the coronavirus pandemic. The bank's nine-member Monetary Policy Committee said yesterday that the moves were designed "to meet the needs of U.K. businesses and households in dealing with the associated economic disruption."



Africa More African countries closed their borders yesterday as the coronavirus' local spread threatened to turn the continent of 1.3 billion people into an alarming new front for the pandemic. "About 10 days ago we had about five countries" with the virus, WHO's Africa chief Dr. Matshidiso Moeti told reporters. Now 35 of Africa's 54 countries have cases, with the total close to 650. It's an "extremely rapid evolution," she said.

Indonesia Thousands of people attended an ordination ceremony for a Catholic bishop on the Indonesian island of Flores despite calls from authorities to avoid mass gatherings to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Images of the ordination ceremony posted on social media showed people inside the Ruteng cathedral seated next to each other and not complying with social distancing measures. A priest who attended the ceremony estimated that about 4,000 people gathered inside and around the church.



Indonesia halted a mass congregation of nearly 9,000 Muslim pilgrims and began quarantining them and checking their health yesterday to prevent the further spread of the coronavirus amid a spike in cases. The four-day gathering at a boarding school in a rural area in south Sulawesi province wasn't approved by authorities and drew fears it could spread the virus widely in the world's fourth most populous nation.