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India Public health officials in India have shelved plans to administer the untested anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine, or HCQ, to thousands in Mumbai's crowded slums as a way of preventing infections in healthy people. Health officials in Mumbai said the plan to conduct tests was still in the cards but had not yet been approved by the Indian government.



AP PHOTO

Thailand The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration said yesterday that plans call for the reopening of restaurants, markets, exercise venues, parks, hairdressers and barbers, clinics and nursing homes, animal hospitals and pet salons, and golf courses and driving ranges. Restaurants will have to keep their seats at least 1.5 meters apart and practice a wide range of sanitary measures.



AP PHOTO

Malaysian lawyers and an international rights group have voiced concern over what they say is excessive sentencing of violators of the country's coronavirus lockdown. Malaysia, which has confirmed 5,851 cases and 100 deaths from COVID-19, has arrested more than 21,000 people since a partial lockdown began March 8. Violators face a fine or a jail term of up to six months.

South Korean officials have issued public pleas for vigilance to maintain hard-won gains against the coronavirus as the nation enters its longest holiday since infections surged in February. Vice Health Minister Kim Gang-lip said that 180,000 people are expected to visit the resort island of Jeju during a six-day break from today to Tuesday, despite the island government pleading travelers not to come.

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WONG TO PUSH CREATION OF NATIONAL SECURITY PROTECTION OFFICE



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POLICY ADDRESS

WONG TO PUSH FOR THE CREATION OF NATIONAL SECURITY PROTECTION OFFICE

JULIE ZHU

THE aftermath of Covid-19 and the growing tension in Macau's neighboring regions have shown the urgency and importance of protecting national security, said the Secretary for Security Wong Sio Chak yesterday at the Legislative Assembly (AL) plenary session.

According to Wong, he will push for the establishment of an office for national security protection and pledged to continually guard national security.

To ensure civil protection security, this year, the office will focus on completing the legislation of civil protection law and will make amendments towards the provision of civil protection in the law related to the Unitary Police Service.

Wong said that he will also establish a Greater Bay Area police information platform so that the police authority can be quickly informed of important criminal cases happening in the area.

Within the year, the bill on the storage of hazardous items is expected to undergo public consultation.

In the second quarter, the customs authority will be able to carry out smart monitoring of all of Macau's sea and coastal areas. The security sector will set up standards for information and data collection, storage, sharing, and maintenance. They intend to build a data sharing platform so that the security authority can investigate crimes related to non-local residents more efficiently. The Judiciary Police will also set up a mechanism allowing the bureau to obtain, test, and analyze cloud data.

Currently, two new ports are under construction between Macau and Zhuhai, including the new Hengqin port and Qingmao port next to the Border Gate. The security authority has already purchased 100 e-channel devices for the latter.

Meanwhile, speaking on correctional services, Wong hopes to introduce university courses for inmates, to expand the prison and to install more sensors and cameras inside the prison.



RENATO MARQUES

CCTV TESTING, KÁ-HÓ PRISON CONSTRUCTION DELAY

Some works of the Secretariat for Security including the testing of the city's CCTV surveillance cameras' facial recognition functions and the construction of Ka Ho prison are facing delays as a consequence of the pandemic outbreak.

The official yesterday announced that the testing of the city's CCTV surveillance cameras' facial recognition functions has been postponed to the second quarter of this year.

Wong said the facial recognition functions were "absolutely legal."

"We will maintain communications with the Office for Personal Data Protection (GPDP) to test the [facial recognition] functions but as the progress of the work is being hampered by the epidemic situation, [this work] will be postponed," said Wong.

The official explained it is working with GPDP to "guarantee the legality of testing the use of facial recognition and vehicle identification techniques by viewing captured images."

In addition, the security authority was unable to begin operating 800 CCTV in the first quarter due to Covid-19.

Since September 2016, the security authority has installed 1,620 cameras across town. Approximately 820 cameras are already in service. The Unitary Police Service has already examined the remaining 800 cameras and expects to start using them in July.

In 2022 and 2023, Wong plans to install another 500 cameras near schools and bus stops, and another 680 cameras near new ports and coastal areas.

Meanwhile, the construction

of Ká-Hó prison, which is in its third phase, was originally expected to finish mid-2021. It is now said to continue until 2022.

The delay was also due to the pandemic outbreak.

The current prison establishment currently houses some 1,600 inmates, more than half of which are from mainland China.

CRIME DATA SHARING WITH GUANGDONG

Regarding the Greater Bay Area police information platform, Wong expressed that he has great hopes for sharing Macau's crime data with Guangdong.

Despite being named after the Greater Bay Area, the platform is likely to exclude Hong Kong, the leading city of the Greater Bay Area. According to Wong, due to Hong Kong's laws, it will be difficult for Hong Kong to join the platform, along with Macau and other cities in the Greater Bay Area.

The platform will mostly act as a communication channel between Macau and the Greater Bay Area cities.

Macau and the Greater Bay Area cities will be able to quickly report crime data using the platform. Currently, Macau can send encrypted emails to the mainland to provide police information with mainland police authority's approval.

The security authority is currently building the platform and expects it to be completed within this year.

"The security sector needs to enhance cooperation with mainland China," said Wong.

ENTRY BAN AMID 'INTERNAL STABILITY'

Wong asserted Macau's refusal of entry on the grounds of protection of internal stability. Lawmaker Au Kam San raised concerns that border control police officers may abuse their powers by refusing people entry into Macau.

Previously, the local government had said that banning the entry of people, including social activists, Hong Kong lawmakers and other democracy supporters, was a decision purely and independently made by the individual police officers upon the assessment of each rejected individual.

Wong also claimed that Macau does not have a blacklist for entry, despite the fact that the banned

individuals were notably people who advocated for democracy.

Yesterday, Wong continued with his usual speech, indicating that Macau would carry on with its entry ban practices to secure internal stability. The head of security even related the measures to tourism, saying that safety is a tourism city's first priority.

Wong also said that those who are rejected can make an appeal. Macau has an appeal mechanism that allows them to appeal against the police authority's decision, he said. He also questioned Au, asking how these police officers are abusing their powers. "You can always appeal," said Wong.

2020 LEGISLATION AGENDA

The security authority expects to submit the amendment of the police force staff protocol to the AL this year.

The amendment began in March 2015. In the second half of 2019, the security authority delivered the amendment to the justice and administrative authority for analysis.

The amendment proposes a new promotion mechanism, including a "special promotion method" by which officers can be directly promoted to deputy inspector and other positions.

Wong's sector also completed the amendment of the city's immigration bill and expects to deliver it soon to the Executive Council for discussion.

SULU SOU 'FORCED' TO LEAVE AL PLENARY MEETING AFTER APPEAL REFUSED

LAWMAKER Sulu Sou walked out of the Legislative Assembly (AL) plenary meeting when he was silenced after making an appeal against Secretary for Security Wong Sio Chak's speech.

During the plenary meeting, Sou asked about the welfare of the security force's militarized officers. He also pointed out the high salary of high-ranking officials, including Wong.

However, the secretary replied saying that Sou's speech was meant "for the sake of votes." He accused Sou of asking the questions to gain the support of the public and get more votes in the lawmakers' election.

After Wong's accusations, Sou intended to appeal and asked Wong for a clarification on his "vote" comment in accordance with the AL procedures and rules. However, the chairman of

the AL, Kou Hoi In, turned down Sou's appeal, indicating that it was not in accordance with AL rules.

Sou then repeated that he was making an appeal in accordance with the AL's rules. However, Kou continued to refuse Sou, even silencing his microphone.

"I want you to take back your words and apologize," Sou said to the secretary. "To the AL chairman, [...] I disagree with your speech. Hereby I am leaving this meeting to protest. You are looking after the high-ranking officials."

After Sou left, the secretary commented on the episode. Wong said he felt "pity" for Sou's appeal and claimed that he was not personally attacking Sou. Instead, he was only thinking of the welfare of members of the public. JZ

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF (DIRECTOR) Paulo Coutinho paulocoutinho@macaudailytimes.com
MANAGING EDITOR Daniel Beitler daniel@macaudailytimes.com
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Leanda Lee, Severo Portela, Sheyla Zandonai

NEWSROOM AND CONTRIBUTORS Albano Martins, Annabel Jackson, Anthony Lam, Emilie Tran, Irene Sam, Ivo Carneiro de Sousa, Jacky I.F. Cheong, Jenny Lao-Phillips, João Palla Martins, Joseph Cheung, Julie Zhu, Juliet Risdon, Linda Kennedy, Lynzy Valles, Paulo Cordeiro de Sousa, Renato Marques, Richard Whitfield, Viviana Segui
DESIGNERS Eva Bucho, Miguel Bandeira | ASSOCIATE CONTRIBUTORS JML Property, MdME Lawyers, PokerStars, Ruan Du Toit Bester | NEWS AGENCIES Associated Press, Bloomberg, MacauHub, MacauNews, Xinhua
SECRETARY Yang Dongxiao amy@macaudailytimes.com

SEND NEWSWORTHY INFORMATION AND PRESS RELEASES TO: NEWSROOM@MACAUDAILYTIMES.COM WEBSITE: WWW.MACAUDAILYTIMES.COM.MO

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ADMINISTRATOR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Kowie Geldenhuys kowie@macaudailytimes.com

OFFICE MANAGER Juliana Cheang juliana@macaudailytimes.com

ADDRESS Av. da Praia Grande, 599, Edif. Comercial Rodrigues, 12 Floor C, MACAU SAR Telephone: +853 287 160 81/2 Fax: +853 287 160 84

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AP PHOTO



President Xi Jinping arrives for the closing session of the National People's Congress in Beijing's Great hall of the People in March last year

China to convene Congress, showing confidence in virus fight

CHINA, taking a step toward a return to business as normal, announced yesterday that its previously postponed national legislature session will be held in late May.

The 13th National People's Congress, delayed from early March because of the coronavirus outbreak, will start on May 22, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

It wasn't immediately clear whether the 3,000 or so delegates would come to Beijing for what is the biggest political meeting of the year, or if it would be held virtually through videoconference.

A more than 2,000-member advisory body, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference that meets in tandem with the Congress will start one day earlier on May 21, Xinhua reported.

"I'm not aware of the specifics, but I believe because of the epidemic, the two sessions this year will be somewhat different from other years," foreign ministry spokesman

Geng Shuang said when asked if there would be any changes. that meets in tandem with the Congress will start one day earlier on May 21, Xinhua reported.

The two-week annual meetings are largely ceremonial, with the legislature rubber-stamping decisions reached earlier by Communist Party leaders, but in typical years they are a colorful spectacle in the nation's capital.

The delegates to the congress normally descend on Beijing by plane and train and sit shoulder-to-shoulder in the colossal auditorium at the Great Hall of the People to hear a state-of-the-country address from the country's No. 2 leader, Premier Li Keqiang.

The May 22 start date was announced at the end of a four-day meeting of the congress's standing committee, which handles most legislative affairs when the congress is not in session. Of its 170 members, 47 participated remotely through online video.

With the epidemic situation

improving and economic and social life gradually resuming, the conditions have been met for holding the session, a standing committee statement said, according to Xinhua.

The National Health Commission reported 22 new cases of coronavirus on Wednesday, including 21 that came from abroad and one in Guangdong province, the southern manufacturing hub bordering Hong Kong. That was an uptick from recent days but a sharp decline from the hundreds and even thousands of new cases being tallied daily until early March.

China has registered 82,858 cases and 4,633 deaths. Most were in the central city of Wuhan, where the coronavirus was first detected last year.

Authorities have relaxed restrictions on going out but are maintaining strict quarantine rules on those coming from abroad. Some cities and provinces have been quarantining those arriving from other parts of China too, but Beijing announced that it would stop doing so starting Thursday

for people from areas deemed low-risk.

The Chinese capital is also allowing museums to reopen on Friday, the start of the five-day May Day holiday. A limited number of visitors will be allowed daily. Movie theaters and swimming pools remain closed.

The outbreak exposed problems in the nation's public health laws and indicated a need for systemic improvements, Shen Chunyao, director of the Legislative Affairs Commission, told the National People's Congress standing committee earlier this week.

Shen presented a report on plans to revise health-related laws over the next two years, Xinhua said. This year's congress is expected to approve a ban on illegal wildlife trade and legal changes to strengthen the management of medical waste.

Scientists believe the coronavirus likely started in bats and spread to humans, possibly through the wildlife trade. **MDT/AP**

CATHOLIC SCHOOL LAND PLOT REPOSSESSED

The land plot of Escola de São José, Ká-Hó has been reclaimed by the state. The SAR government announced the expiration of the land plot's concession earlier this week. In 1976, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Macau gradually became the concessioner of the land, free of charge. The plot has a total area of 7,131 square meters. The concession expired in December 2001. The Catholic diocese never applied to renew the concession. Moreover, the city's old land law did not include a provision for automatic renewal, so the SAR government announced the recovery of the land. The land plot currently hosts a school which offers primary education and boarding school services, and is current enrolling new students.

GOV'T ISSUES FUNDS TO 2,500 SME LOAN APPLICANTS

A total of 2,500 applications for the Economic Bureau's (DSE) interest-free loan support scheme for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) had already received financial support. DSE received approximately 5,000 applications. 3,500 applicants had already been approved, of which 2,500 had already received financial support. In total, the government has granted 500 million patacas as part of the support scheme. As for the SME bank loan interest subsidy, DSE has been receiving over 100 applications daily. In total, 2,100 subsidies have been granted, worth over 2.7 billion patacas. With the e-voucher scheme launching this year, Macau has more point-of-sale systems and QR codes for payment than ever before. There are now 43,000 in total, nine times as many as there were in 2019.

MACAO FOUNDATION'S FINANCIAL SUPPORT DROPS 71%

The Macao Foundation has granted 191 million patacas in support during the first quarter of the year, a decrease of 71% year-on-year, according to the dispatch of the Official Gazette. During the same period last year, the foundation has subsidized nearly 660 million pataca. Earlier, the Audit Commission released a report that uncovered subsidy errors by the Macao Foundation. The report pointed out that there was no legal requirement for the Macao Foundation to review the profit and loss reports submitted by subsidized entities, given the large number of entities the foundation subsidizes yearly.

RENATO MARQUES



LABOR DAY TRADITIONS HALTED BY COVID-19

RENATO MARQUES

THE traditional street demonstrations for May 1 (Labor Day) will be out of sight this year, as Covid-19 epidemic prevention and control measures forbid such activities.

Still, tomorrow, two local associations will commemorate

the date by turning their original marches into public meetings, a representative from the Public Security Police Force (PSP) to the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center said yesterday during the daily press conference.

According to the PSP, one of the associations is religious and

the other is a workers' association. They had asked police authorities for permission to host activities on the day, and agreed that instead of street marches, they would host public events, like meetings, which would display images and information only.

"We want to safeguard the

right of people to express themselves, but at the same time, we must ask people to keep some distance between each other and protect themselves due to the risks of the epidemic," the PSP official said, adding that the security forces had also called on organizers to prevent large gatherings or holding meetings for very long periods.

On that topic, Dr. Alvis Lo from Conde de São Januário Hospital Center, added, "We continue to appeal to people to avoid gatherings, and if neces-

sary to leave home using face masks and paying special attention to personal hygiene."

When asked if the date would bring more people across the borders and into Macau, Lo said, "In regards to tourists, I do not think that [the date] would affect that in any way because there are no changes to the individual visas scheme [which has been suspended by central government authorities until further notice]."

In addition, the PSP official noted that for May 1, the force expects around 20,000 entries and exits across the border, similar to what is happening currently.

"We also expect this number to remain stable for the upcoming days, unless any changes to the current restriction measures are announced," he said, repeating the appeal to the citizens to refrain from going out and to remain safe at home on May 1.

Lo added that there are currently no updates on the resumption of the issuing of individual visas to visit Macau from mainland authorities.

"We know that the Chief Executive is currently negotiating with the central government on the possibility, but this [process] needs time. People should be patient and wait for communication from the authorities," Lo concluded.

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Authorities green light 11th round of mask distribution

RENATO MARQUES

LOCAL health authorities announced yesterday during the daily press conference at the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center that the government's 11th round of face mask distribution has already been granted.

In reply to the media, Dr. Alvis Lo from Conde de São de Januário Hospital Center said that while the 11th round will begin in a few days, now is the right time to evaluate the program and decide what will be done next.

"We are doing a review of the program to analyze the outcomes of this method of supplying face masks to public and what will be done in the future," Lo said. "At the moment when the population needed [them] the most, the government came forward and provided [the personal protection equipment]. Now is the time to evaluate this program and define strategies for the future."

Recently, there has been speculation that the government is preparing to suspend the face mask supply, causing concerns over potential price hikes for the product.

The concerns gained momentum as secondary schools prepare to resume classes next week. This will also influence the demand for face masks as all students, teachers and staff members must wear them at all times.

The concerns of the public also motivated lawmaker Ella Lei to make a written interpe-



llation to the government earlier this week, urging them to extend the face mask supply scheme that has been in effect

since late January.

Lei warned about potential price hikes, and how the growing demand may

also lower the quality of the face masks available on the market, compromising citizens' health.

COVID-19 TESTING DATES FOR SOCIAL WORKERS RELEASED

HEALTH authorities have chosen May 2 and 3 as the dates to carry out Covid-19 screening tests on social workers and staff that work for institutions that provide social services to the community, a representative of the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) informed yesterday at the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center.

During the center's daily press conference, Tang Kit Fong said that the authorities expect to test a total of 2,400 people working in social support and services institutions over the two days.

Tang noted that the arrangements were made in collaboration with the different entities involved to avoid affecting the normal workflow of the institutions as much as possible.

Dr. Alvis Lo added that after social workers, the program will extend screening to profes-

sionals that are at greater risk due to the nature of their jobs. This includes teachers that were not included in the first round of screening, that is, those teaching at the primary and kindergarten level. Health authorities have arranged for these professionals to be tested on May 4 to 8.

The IAS official informed that testing for teachers will be arranged through the schools where they work.

In collaboration with the health authorities, schools and institutions will be also responsible for communicating the results of the tests to their staff.

Questioned on if the broadened scope of testing would pose a problem to the capacity of the health system in any way, Lo responded that health services have been increasing their capacity to perform tests from 600 tests a day initially, to 2,000 to 2,500 now.

HEALTH VOUCHER SCAMS: OVER 170 PEOPLE CHARGED IN LESS THAN TWO YEARS

RENATO MARQUES

BETWEEN 2018 and March 2020 the judiciary authorities have charged over 170 people for crimes related to the misuse of the government health vouchers, the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) informed.

According to the statement, the charges were the result of 117 criminal cases, where most of those targeted

were people directly involved in private clinics as well as staff members.

The MP also revealed that in many of the cases, those committing fraud or illegally using health vouchers were also accountable for crimes of fraud, document forgery, and the unauthorized use of identification documents from a third person.

The courts have already convicted over

90 of those people and have punished them with the corresponding penalties, the MP revealed.

Regarding the recently reported case of a scam involving a sum of over 9 million patacas, the MP said that while searching for other responsible parties, they have already detained the four main defendants, including a doctor at a clinic, the owner

of a Chinese medicine pharmacy and the manager of a ginseng and dried seafood store. They are suspected of colluding and taking advantage of their positions to convert health vouchers into cash, trading them with other people.

The four defendants were indicted for crimes of fraud of considerably high value, use of someone else's iden-

tification documents, and computer-related fraud.

Under the law, the crime of fraud of considerably high value is punishable by imprisonment for up to 10 years. The crimes of using someone else's identification documents and computer-related fraud are punishable with imprisonment up to 3 years or an equivalent fine.

Melco management shuffle due to 'current state of business'

THE recent changes in Melco Resorts and Entertainment's corporate structure are based on the current business environment, an insider told the Times.

The group's executive team has "volunteered to contribute the equivalent of 33% salary for the remainder of the year, while CEO Lawrence Ho will forego his salary for the rest of 2020."

All executives, including Ho, will also forfeit all their unused annual leave.

As reported yesterday by MDT, several senior executives at the gaming operator are due to leave the company and will have their responsibilities fulfilled by other management staff.

Clarence Chung, a member of the Board of Directors for the group will handle government affairs, and will also oversee government relations for international jurisdictions.

Cyprus operations will be under Grant Johnson, SVP Casino Sales and Marketing.

Evan Winkler will manage strategy and analytics, and "Manila and Cyprus" will also report directly to Winkler.

Kevin Benning will be moving from COD Manila to manage Studio City as its SVP Operations and will report directly to David Sisk.

In another shuffle, Akiko Takahashi will oversee human resources and the Learning Academy as EVP Chief of Staff.

EXIT CROWN

Yesterday, it was announced that Melco Resorts had foregone its entire 9.99% stake in Australian gaming operator Crown Resorts Ltd.

The group sold the shares to American private equity firm Blackstone for AUD551.5 million, 37.3% less than the price it bought the shares for in May last year.

According to Australian reports, Melco's sale comes amid deep cost-cutting efforts due to the effects of the pandemic.

Melco noted that the disposal of the shares was an "opportunity for the group to realize its investment in Crown Resorts at a market price."

Previously, the company said that it would reassess its "non-core investments," noting that they intend to focus on their key investments, which are currently earmarked as Macau, Manila, Cyprus and Japan, and are thus deciding to halt their planned investment in Australia. LV

China silent amid global calls to give Africa

RODNEY MUHUMUZA,
KAMPALA

AFRICAN leaders are asking what China can do for them as the coronavirus pandemic threatens to destroy economies and wipe out some 20 million jobs across a continent where Beijing is both the top trading partner and top lender.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have announced immediate relief measures, including freeing up billions in debt payments and expectations for help from China are high across resource-rich Africa, but Beijing has remained silent.

China holds about a third of Africa's sovereign debt. Demand for Chinese-backed capital to build everything from highways to hydroelectric dams has left countries heavily indebted, leading to concerns about a debt trap and even loss of sovereignty.

Many of those countries, including oil exporters such as Angola, spend a substantial chunk of their budgets servicing debt while health and education suffer.

Any respite would be welcome for a country like Uganda, whose finance minister says "shocking deficits" in the past year have forced authorities to borrow to keep the government running. Uganda's national debt stood at over \$10 billion in 2018, nearly a third owed to China, according to official figures.

"We have strong bilateral rela-

AP PHOTO



A cargo train rides from the port container depot on a Chinese-backed railway costing nearly \$3.3 billion in Kenya

tions with China, but they haven't come to us saying anything," the minister, Matia Kasajja, told The Associated Press.

China has been noncommittal beyond its support, as a member of the G-20 group of wealthy nations, for a moratorium that frees up to \$20 billion in debt payments through 2020 for low-income

countries.

Some analysts predict that actual debt forgiveness looks unlikely and that China, despite its enormous influence in Africa, will avoid unilateral measures despite global pressure.

Ghana's finance minister has said he expects more from Beijing. "My feeling is that China has to

come on stronger," said Ken Ofori-Atta, speaking to the Washington-based Center for Global Development. "I think our Africa debt to China is over \$145 billion, about \$8 billion in payments required this year [...] So that needs to be looked at. It's just an apocalyptic moment."

Asked whether China would

offer debt relief to Africa, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian on April 7 said he believed "China will resolve these countries' difficulties via consultation through diplomatic channels."

In a statement emailed to the AP, the foreign ministry said China had "overcome difficulties" in helping Africa with shipments of

Oxford vaccine could be ready by September

IN the worldwide race for a vaccine to stop the coronavirus, the laboratory sprinting fastest is at Oxford University, according to an article published this week by the NYT.

Most other teams have had to start with small clinical trials of a few hundred participants to demonstrate safety. But scientists at the university's Jenner Institute had a head start on a vaccine, having proved in previous trials that similar inoculations — including one last year against an earlier coronavirus — were harmless to humans, the report says.

That has enabled them to leap ahead and schedule tests of their new coronavirus vaccine involving more than 6,000 people by the end of next month, hoping to show not only that it is

AP PHOTO



Screen grab taken from video issued by Britain's Oxford University, showing microbiologist Elisa Granato, being injected as part of the first human trials in the UK for a potential coronavirus vaccine

safe, but also that it works.

According to the NYT, the Oxford scientists now say that with an emergency approval from regulators, the first few million doses of their vaccine could be available by September — at least several months ahead of any of the other

announced efforts — if it proves to be effective.

Testing began in healthy volunteers in Britain last week, the latest in a cluster of early-stage studies in search of protection against the coronavirus.

University of Oxford researchers created the new

vaccine by inserting genes for a spikey protein that studs the outer surface of the new coronavirus into another, harmless virus.

The idea: The immune system will spot the foreign protein and make antibodies to fight it, primed to react quickly if the person

eventually is exposed to COVID-19.

These kinds of studies often give volunteers either the real vaccine or a dummy shot. But this experimental vaccine may briefly cause soreness and maybe a low fever — meaning if a dummy shot was the comparison, the participants might figure out who got the real thing, said Dr. Andrew Pollard, one of the Oxford chief researchers.

"That might influence people's behavior, perhaps make them more likely to be exposed to the virus," which in turn would make it harder to prove if the vaccine worked, Pollard told The Associated Press.

So the Oxford team decided half the volunteers will be given an old vaccine against another disease

that offers no COVID-19 protection but has similar shot side effects.

"It seems like the right thing to do — to ensure that we can combat this disease and get over it a lot faster," volunteer Edward O'Neill told the BBC afterward.

Dozens of vaccine candidates are in various stages of development around the world. Experts have cautioned that even if early studies go well, it will be at least a year before any are available for widespread use.

Among those making the fastest progress: China's CanSino Biologics has begun the second phase of testing its vaccine candidate, made with an approach similar to Oxford's.

Two U.S. companies are testing vaccines made from copies of a piece of the virus's genetic code. Two other Chinese candidates are being pursued that use older technology. **MDT/AGENCIES**

debt relief

medical supplies to help fight the pandemic. "China will continue to provide assistance to Africa within its capabilities and in accordance with the development of the epidemic and Africa's needs," it said.

China's footprint on the continent has been expanding as some African leaders, favoring the perceived lack of political strings that come with Chinese capital, have turned to Beijing while other funders hesitate over corruption and other concerns.

In turn, China has been keen to exploit Africa's vast natural resources in countries such as war-ravaged South Sudan, where Chinese firms dominate the oil sector.

Angola had received up to \$42.8 billion in Chinese loans by

2017 and repays its debt partly by channeling more of its crude to China. This means Angola, Africa's second largest oil producer, is left with less oil to put on the market.

"We have strong bilateral relations with China, but they haven't come to us saying anything."

MATIA KASAJA
UGANDA MINISTER

The Chinese government, banks and contractors extended \$143 billion in loans to African governments and companies from

2000 to 2017, according to the China Africa Research Initiative at Johns Hopkins University.

But Beijing's commercial focus on the region is one reason some analysts believe debt forgiveness or cash donations are out of the question. Countries seeking China's help to keep projects running likely will end up becoming more indebted, said Nathan Hayes, Africa analyst at the Economist Intelligence Unit.

"Many debt-financed projects will come under enormous strain this year as revenues dry up, and many will need to be refinanced and renegotiated. Many of these will be financed by China, giving the country opportunity to renegotiate terms," he said.

"Debt-for-equity swaps may ultimately be a more sustainable deal for African countries, depending on the terms, and they may have little choice."

In a notable example, state-owned China Merchants Group bought back half of a port in Sri Lanka in 2017 after the Sri Lankans fell behind in repaying \$1.5 billion in loans from Beijing.

Even debt forgiveness can be an investment for China, which waived Ethiopia's outstanding interest on debts through 2018 at a conference on Beijing's "Belt and Road" initiative to support infrastructure construction across many regions. That came just as the Chinese utility State Grid was buying a \$1.8 billion stake in Ethiopia's national power company.

Negotiating with individual African governments gives Beijing leeway to assert its interests with "a much smaller partner, rather than dealing with a whole continent, with greater economic and political weight," according to Hayes.

Africa's finance ministers have called for a \$100 billion stimulus package, of which \$44 billion would come from a freeze on servicing debt. They say an additional \$50

billion may be needed in 2021.

The EU has responded by planning a pledging conference in May. The IMF has cancelled six months' worth of debt payments — \$500 million — for 25 countries, 19 of them in Africa.

The coronavirus has infected relatively few people on the continent of 1.3 billion people. But with known cases nearing 35,000, lockdown measures could bring economic ruin and perhaps the continent's first recession in 25 years.

French President Emmanuel Macron says helping Africa, including with debt cancellations, is a moral duty. He has urged China to help.

Some say China's hand could be forced into rare acts of charity.

"China can respond by repurposing its debt ... as a tool to keep its African partners," said Angelo Izama, an analyst with the Uganda-based group Leo Africa Institute.

"If there is a continental movement for debt relief, it would have no choice." AP

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

GROUPS SOW DOUBT ABOUT COVID VACCINE BEFORE ONE EVEN EXISTS

A coronavirus vaccine is still months or years away, but groups that peddle misinformation about immunizations are already taking aim, potentially eroding confidence in what could be humanity's best chance to defeat the virus.

In recent weeks, vaccine opponents have made several unsubstantiated claims, including allegations that vaccine trials will be dangerously rushed or that Dr. Anthony Fauci, the U.S.'s top infectious diseases expert, is blocking cures to enrich vaccine makers. They've also falsely claimed that Microsoft founder Bill Gates wants to use a vaccine to inject microchips into people — or to cull 15% of the world's population.

Vaccine opponents in the U.S. have been around for a long time. Their claims range from relatively modest safety concerns about specific vaccines or the risk of side effects to conspiracy theories that border on the bizarre.

The movement is receiving renewed attention, especially as it aligns itself with groups loudly protesting restrictions on daily life aimed at controlling the spread of the virus. Health professionals say vaccine misinformation could have



Protesters demanding Florida businesses and government reopen, march in downtown Orlando

lethal consequences if it leads people to opt for bogus cures instead.

"Only a coronavirus vaccine can truly protect us from future outbreaks," said Dr. Scott Ratzan, a physician and medical misinformation expert at the City University of New York and Columbia University. "But what if the effort succeeds and large numbers of people decide not to vaccinate themselves or their children?"

While vaccines for diseases such as polio, smallpox and measles have benefited millions, some skeptics reject the science, citing a distrust of modern medicine and government. Others say mandatory vaccine requirements violate their re-

ligious freedom.

Rita Palma, the leader of the anti-vaccine group in Long Island called My Kids, My Choice, is among those who say their families won't get the coronavirus vaccine.

"Many of us are anxiety stricken at the thought of being forced to get a vaccine," Palma said. "I will never choose to have a COVID-19 vaccine. I don't want the government forcing it on my community or my family."

From the outset of the coronavirus pandemic, vaccine skeptics have tailored several long-standing claims about vaccine safety to fit the current outbreak. When the first U.S. case was announced in January, some alleged the coronavirus was manufactured and

that patents for it could be found online.

Thousands of deaths later, vaccine opponents are endorsing unapproved treatments, second-guessing medical experts and pushing fears about mandatory vaccinations. They've also latched onto protests against stay-at-home orders in the U.S.

"The coronavirus has created this perfect storm of misinformation," remarked David A. Broniatowski, an associate professor at George Washington University's school of engineering and applied science who has published several studies on vaccine misinformation.

Last week, an anti-vaccine activist was arrested in Idaho after repeatedly

refusing police orders to leave a playground closed because of the pandemic. The woman, who was there with other families, is affiliated with two groups that protested at the Idaho Statehouse against stay-at-home orders.

Facebook groups formed to organize the protests have been peppered with vaccine hoaxes and myths. Perhaps no one plays a bigger role in the conspiracy theories than Gates, who is funding vaccine research. The online movement has centered concerns around a COVID-19 vaccine on false claims that Gates is planning to microchip people with the vaccine or use it to reduce the world's population.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a vaccine critic who helped popularize unsubstantiated claims that vaccines can cause autism, said Gates' work gives him "dictatorial control of global health policy." Roger Stone, a former adviser to President Donald Trump, went further on a New York City radio show, saying Gates "and other globalists" are using the coronavirus "for mandatory vaccinations and microchipping people."

Such wild theories can have real-world effects.

False rumors that Gates hoped to test an experimental vaccine in South Africa became mainstream after a news site erroneously reported the claim. One of the country's political parties then sent a letter to President Cyril Ramaphosa demanding answers about "deals" struck with Gates.

In fact, Gates and his wife are financing a vaccine trial in Philadelphia and Kansas City, Missouri, not South Africa. He also suggested creating a database of people immune to the virus, not implanting microchips.

"Vaccine researchers and anyone who is a vaccine advocate cares deeply about vaccine safety," said Dr. Paul Offit, a Children's Hospital of Philadelphia physician and co-inventor of a vaccine for rotavirus, which kills hundreds of thousands of children annually.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough, that clear up in two to three weeks. But it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia, and death for some people, especially older adults and people with existing health problems.

The vaccine debate is fertile ground for groups looking to sow discord in the United States. Russia seized on it to create divisions before the 2016 U.S. election, and appears to be at it again. AP

LIVES LOST

Doctor taught a generation of Italian physicians

NICOLE WINFIELD, ROME

EVERY October, on the feast day of the patron saint of physicians, Dr. Roberto Stella organized a simple ceremony at a tiny church in northern Italy to honor Italian doctors who had died that year in the line of service.

As a key member of the governing body of Italy's general practitioners, Stella cherished the tradition at the Temple of Duno and invited colleagues from around the country to attend.

This year, it will likely be Stella who is honored at the chapel.

A doctor and teacher who trained a generation of family practitioners in Lombardy, Stella now occupies a place of tragic distinction in the pandemic in Italy: the first name on the list of more than 150 MDs who died in the COVID-19 crisis.

He kept seeing patients even after his protective masks ran out.

Stella's March 11 death shocked the Italian medical establishment, such that he was eulogized on live national television during the nightly civil protection briefing. But as more of his colleagues have died, his death has also come to symbolize the plight of Italy's family doctors, who were largely left on their own to tend to the first wave of COVID-19 patients at home as hospitals filled up.

"It was like the captain of doctors was hit," said his longtime friend and colleague, Alessandro Colombo.

Lombardy's family practitioners have lamented that they had virtually no clinical information to go on or guidelines to know when to admit patients, much less access to protective equipment that hospital personnel had.

Stella, 67, didn't complain when his masks ran out — he just got on with it, Colombo said — but his death has nevertheless taken on a significance beyond the loss of a husband, father and colleague. It has come to epitomize the virus' horrific toll on medical personnel, 20,000 of whom have beco-



Doctor Roberto Stella at the Varese Doctor's Association, in Varese, northern Italy, on Oct. 2, 2019

me infected in Italy.

"I understood, as my colleagues did, how close this threat is to us, how vulnerable we all were," said Dr. Laura Turetta, one of Stella's former students at the Lombardy academy where general practitioners train. "Unfortunately he was the first in a long series."

Stella was a giant of a man. Tall and strapping, he commanded attention when he walked into a room. He was known as a reformer, dedicated to his students and to keeping Italy's practicing GPs up to date on the latest research.

The last course he organized was a free e-learning course on COVID-19 open to all Italian doctors. More than 35,000 signed up. After Stella spent weeks preparing it, the course opened Feb. 22, the day after Italy recorded its first home-grown case.

"The last time I saw him he was so so proud of this course," said Dr. Giovanni Leoni, the head of the Venice doctors' association.

Stella knew the importance of small gestures, like the quiet thumbs up he gave Turetta after she successfully defended her dissertation. She still has a video of the moment, and watches it every so often. She says she has modeled her family

practice on his.

"He didn't like the title of 'general practitioner' because it almost undermined our role, which in reality is 360 degrees in the management of the patient and the family," she said.

Colombo said he last spoke to Stella on the evening of Thursday, March 5. Stella was at home in Busto Arsizio, tired, and wanted to go to bed. But he assured Colombo he wasn't sick. The next day he went to the hospital. By March 11 he was dead.

"I wept bitterly," said Dr. Gianluigi Spata, the head of the Lombardy regional doctors' association who was in another hospital at the time, on oxygen, after contracting COVID-19 himself.

Stella did his military service in the Italian army's mountain infantry corps, known as the Alpini, and used to joke that when things would get tough at work that he could handle it because he managed to carry his Alpino backpack. When the powerful 6.9-magnitude earthquake flattened huge swaths of southern Italy in 1980, killing more than 2,700 people, Stella joined in the rescue effort as a volunteer Alpino medic.

He was a reader and guitar player who liked the newest tech gadgets. When

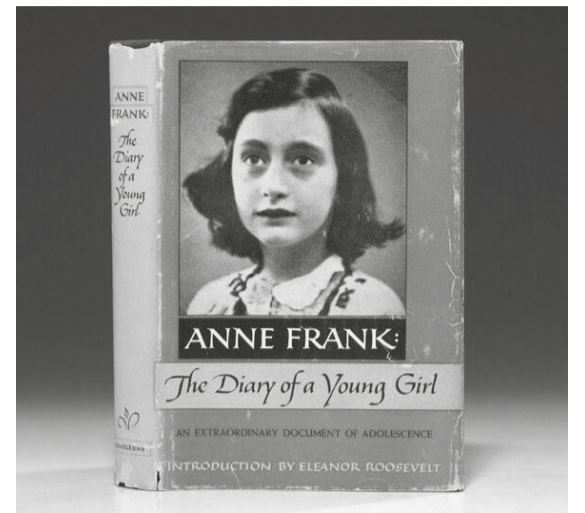
he wasn't delayed in Rome at a meeting, he would rush home to take his son to volleyball practice.

Colombo said what was tragic — and at the same time extraordinary — was that the reforms Stella fought for to improve medicine in Lombardy were being implemented out of necessity as a result of the pandemic.

He cited the decision, from one day to the next, to let young new doctors work in hospitals, when in the past such on-the-job training was subject to the availability of university scholarships. After the outbreak exploded and Italy ran into a shortage of physicians, the government abolished a state exam for newly graduated medics. Within a few days, the region radically reorganized Lombardy's hospitals to rationalize and redistribute care where it was needed, not where it benefited certain powerful interests.

Stella had spent years fighting for such reforms, only to run into obstacles and resistance, Colombo said.

"It's a pity, it's a shame that he's not seeing the changes that are occurring now," Colombo said. "The miracle that Roberto fought for for ages became possible as soon as he died." AP

this day in history**1952 ANNE FRANK PUBLISHED IN ENGLISH**

The moving diary of Anne Frank, a Jewish victim of the Holocaust, is now available in British book shops entitled *The Diary of a Young Girl*.

The book was first published in Dutch in 1947 under the title *Het Achterhuis* (The Secret House) by her father Otto Frank, who survived the concentration camps.

It is a lively and at the same time disturbing account of a teenager living in hiding with seven others in fear of their lives in occupied Holland.

Anne died just before her 16th birthday in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1945.

Her father survived and returned to Amsterdam where he, his family and friends had been in hiding for two years before the Nazis found them.

There, his Dutch friends gave him papers left behind after the Gestapo raid. Among them was his daughter's diary.

It was some days before he could bring himself to read it and when he did he was astonished to find out about a side of his daughter he never knew - someone who was wise beyond her years and had a deep faith in humanity in spite of her suffering.

Her entry for 12 July 1944, three weeks before her arrest, read: "I hear the approaching thunder that, one day, will destroy us ... I feel the suffering of millions. And yet, when I look up into the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too will end, that peace and tranquillity will return once more."

The Franks had moved to Holland from Nazi Germany in 1933. In July 1942, after the Germans had occupied the country, the Franks and four other Jewish people went into hiding in an annex of a house in central Amsterdam.

That year, Anne, who had an ambition to be a writer, was given a red and white check diary for her 13th birthday and immediately started writing about her experiences.

The annex was raided by the Gestapo on the 4 August 1944 after a tip-off from a Dutch informer and the eight occupants sent to Westerbork, a transit camp in Holland, and then on to Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen.

Anne died weeks before the liberation of Bergen-Belsen as did her mother, Edith, and sister, Margot.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Anne Frank became a symbol of Jewish suffering under the Nazis.

Her diary, later entitled *The Diary of Anne Frank*, was translated into 50 languages and became one of the most popular books in the world.

It was made into a play in 1956 that won the Pulitzer Prize and into a film three years later.

An unexpurgated edition was published in English in 1995 revealing both Anne's awakening sexuality and her criticism of some of the adults in hiding with her.

The apartment in Amsterdam where the family hid, Number 263 Prinsengracht, is now the Anne Frank museum.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Take a break; you can finally mend any disputes on the home front. Travel will be enjoyable but could be expensive. Arguments with children or friends may leave you steaming.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

If boredom has set in, find new and unique directions that offer interesting friendships. Try not to let relatives or friends cause any friction with your mate. This may not be the time to lend or borrow.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

Opportunities to travel will develop through peers. Don't let your partner get you going. You are best to travel or attend lectures or seminars. A little rest will do wonders.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Let go of the past in order to progress. You must not let fellow workers take advantage of your fine talents. Money can be made if you use your ingenuity.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Set a limit, or you'll wind up on a tight budget. Uncertainties about your personal life are probable. But control your emotions. Spending based on your feeling could leave you with an empty wallet.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

you may upset someone you live with if you don't consult with them. You can make the most headway if you put in some overtime. Put financial speculation on the back burner for now.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Stick to travel or do things in conjunction with groups. Try to enlist the support of your coworkers first. Be prudent and don't be led down the garden path.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Hold your temper and refrain from doing anything that might cause injury. Problems with skin, bones, or teeth may mess up your schedule. Your boss may be pushy.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

You may find yourself in the limelight for the wrong reasons. Get down to business and do the work yourself. You may want to put your creative thinking cap on.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

You may find it difficult to communicate. The existing problems must be dealt with one way or another. Be careful not to hurt the ones you love.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

You may have difficulties with someone who lives with you. You're best not to get involved in joint financial ventures. Empty promises are evident.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Deception and confusion regarding your status in society is likely. Curb the impulse to make lavish purchases and maybe spend some time with good friends.

The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

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					2			
7							1	
5			4					
					8			

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS: 1- Argument; 6- Chair; 10- Killer whale; 14- ___ France; 15- Ruler division; 16- Tar; 17- Scatter; 18- Evening, informally; 19- Langston Hughes poem; 20- Mother of the Valkyries; 21- Hall; 23- Unlit; 25- Foolish persons; 26- ___ bin ein Berliner; 27- Rio Grande feeder; 29- Oater prop; 32- Grinder; 33- Hindu title; 36- ___ first you don't...; 37- Virtuous; 38- Lowly worker; 39- Old Ford; 40- Interlaced; 41- Femme fatale; 42- Judges' garments; 43- Permit; 44- Adventurous expedition; 47- Oriental; 51- Truckle bed; 54- Sunburn soother; 55- Lira replacement; 56- Graven image; 57- Writer Loos; 58- ___ Ben Adhem; 59- Grow weary; 60- Bogie, e.g.; 61- Move suddenly; 62- Age unit; 63- Prophets;

DOWN: 1- Stair part; 2- Extreme; 3- Dweebish; 4- Visionary; 5- Of recent origin; 6- Nasal cavity; 7- Oklahoma city; 8- Broadway opening; 9- Positive; 10- Egyptian god; 11- Rate; 12- Influence; 13- Hydrogen, carbon, oxygen, e.g.; 21- Powdery residue; 22- Smell or fragrance; 24- Green prefix; 27- Skin openings; 28- Dash; 29- Like Abner; 30- Toward the stern; 31- Melancholic; 32- Relocate; 33- Sun, talk; 34- Caviar; 35- Roadhouse; 37- Potential to get around; 38- Scanty wage; 40- Unit of language; 41- Paris possessive; 42- Expired, as a subscription; 43- Little guy; 44- Place; 45- Island off Venezuela; 46- Uproar; 47- Conger catcher; 48- Best of a group; 49- Copter part; 50- Approaches; 52- Actress McClurg; 53- Aboriginal rite site; 57- Small batteries;



USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- Emergency calls 999
- Fire department 28 572 222
- PJ (Open line) 993
- PJ (Picket) 28 557 775
- PSP 28 573 333
- Customs 28 559 944
- S. J. Hospital 28 313 731
- Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333
- Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300
- IAM 28 387 333
- Tourism 28 333 000
- Airport 59 888 88
- Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
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AD

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

CREDIT SUISSE 'DREAM' CLIENT LUCKIN COFFEE BECOMES NIGHTMARE

BEFORE the accounting scandal and the stock crash and the defaulted loans, Luckin Coffee Ltd.'s billionaire founder Lu Zhengyao was an ideal customer for Credit Suisse Group AG.

"I've had I don't know how many dinners with him in Beijing and he's absolutely the poster child for what we want to do," Tidjane Thiam said at a conference last year when he was still head of the bank. He lauded Lu's relationship with the firm that ranged from private banking to stock sales. "He's a dream client."

Luckin's dramatic fall from grace this month blindsided some of the top names in global finance but few have seen a bigger fallout than Credit Suisse. The lender lost a high-profile Hong Kong IPO in the wake of the scandal and reported a five-fold increase in loan-loss provisions at its Asia Pacific unit, primarily due to a default by Lu. The bank is conducting an internal review of the case, and scrutiny on loans to Chinese companies has increased, according to people familiar with the matter who declined to be identified discussing private matters.

While Lu hasn't been accu-



Lu Zhengyao

sed of wrongdoing, Luckin's revelation that senior executives may have fabricated \$310 million in sales underscores the risk for investment banks of doing deals in China, following a series of accounting scandals. The world's second-biggest economy is core to Credit Suisse's strategy to win business from rich entrepreneurs across Asia.

"Luckin is a microcosm of what can happen when weak underwriting standards are allowed to persist in the pursuit of rapid growth," said Mark Williams, a professor at Boston University and a former U.S. Federal Reserve bank examiner. "Luckin exhibited many signs of a high-growth, high-risk business."

Credit Suisse wasn't the only

firm caught out by the scandal at Luckin, whose offices were raided this week by Chinese regulators. Luckin's early investors included global giants such as GIC Pte., the Singapore sovereign wealth fund. Morgan Stanley was part of the IPO group and provided some of the margin loans to Lu, as did Barclays Plc, among others. Morgan Stanley, Credit Suisse and the other

IPO banks face an investor lawsuit after Luckin's 91% collapse from its January high.

Morgan Stanley, Barclays, and GIC declined to comment.

Aside from the deals, the bank has other connections to the retailer. Luckin Chief Financial Officer Reinout Hendrik Schakel worked for eight years as an analyst and investment banker for Credit Suisse in Hong Kong until 2016. And Lu's daughter Nancy works for Credit Suisse in Hong Kong in a role unrelated to the Luckin account, according to people familiar. She didn't respond to phone calls and text messages, while the bank declined to comment.

Given those links, Luckin's downfall has hit Credit Suisse harder than others. Due to the scandal, the firm was dropped from a \$500 million IPO in Hong Kong for WeDoctor, the health-care startup backed by Tencent Holdings Ltd., according to people familiar. The bank has also increased scrutiny on Chinese loans in the wake of the collapse and the pandemic, people familiar said. It ended talks on joining a \$1.5 billion loan to Melco Resorts and Entertainment Ltd., a U.S.-listed Macau casino operator hit hard by virus, after the financing failed to get internal approval, they said. A spokeswoman at Melco declined to comment. **MDT/BLOOMBERG**

AD

生活藝術雜誌 LIVING & ARTS MAGAZINE

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Streaming films eligible for Oscars, but for one year only

LINDSEY BAHR, LOS ANGELES

MOVIES that debuted on a streaming service without a theatrical run will be eligible for the Oscars, but only for this year.

The Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences yesterday [Macau time] announced the change for the 93rd Academy Awards as a response to how the coronavirus pandemic has impacted the film industry.

The film academy also said it will condense the two sound categories into one and prohibit DVD screeners for 2022's 94th Oscars in an effort to become more carbon neutral.

Oscars eligibility has been a major question since stay at home and social distancing orders led to both the cancellation of major film festivals and the closure of movie theaters. Previously, a film would have to have a minimum seven-day theatrical run in a Los Angeles County commercial theater in order to be considered for film's highest honor. Now films that had a previously planned theatrical release but are made available on a home video on demand service may qualify for best picture and other categories.

AP PHOTO



"We're dealing with the unfolding reality of an unanticipated, unprecedented global health crisis and trying to be responsive to what's going on in the world and at the same time support our filmmakers who are in a circumstance beyond their control," film academy president David Rubin told The Associated Press.

Dawn Hudson, the CEO of the

film academy, said that they have been in "constant conversation with all parts of our community from studios to filmmakers to theater owners" to make decisions that support all.

Earlier this month, the film academy donated \$6 million to help motion picture employees and their families during this crisis.

"Our primary message is take care of yourselves," Hudson added. "We'll be flexible on our rules this year because we understand how unprecedented and devastating this is."

The academy's board noted, however, that when theaters reopen, the rules exemption will no longer apply. Many expect cinemas nationwide to reopen

by June or July. If that is the case, the film academy will expand the qualifying theaters beyond Los Angeles County to include venues in New York City, Chicago, San Francisco, Miami and Atlanta.

"The theatrical experience is the DNA of the academy and that communal experience of the movie theater is something we feel is intrinsic to movies," said Hudson.

Other changes included combining the sound mixing and sound editing categories into best achievement in sound.

"This is something long in the making and generated by the experts in the sound field. They wanted to propose this change after reviewing a long history of overlap," Rubin said. "They wanted it to be reflective of how the sound industry works together today."

Additionally, all film academy members are now able to vote in the first round for international feature film, the category formerly known as best foreign language film.

The board also said for a film score to be eligible in the original score category, it must have 60% original music. For sequels and franchise films, there must be a minimum of 80% new music.

Rubin and Hudson said that the film academy's response to COVID-19 will continue to be fluid. No decisions have been made yet as to plans for the annual Governors Awards, which are typically held in the fall in Los Angeles. But the 93rd Academy Awards are still a go, scheduled to be held in Los Angeles on Feb. 28, 2021. AP

OBITUARY

Irrfan Khan, of 'Slumdog Millionaire,' 'Life of Pi,' dies

IRRFAN Khan, a veteran character actor in Bollywood movies and one of India's best-known exports to Hollywood, has died. He was 54.

Khan played the police inspector in "Slumdog Millionaire" and the park executive Masrani in "Jurassic World." He also appeared in "The Amazing Spider-Man" and the adventure fantasy "Life of Pi."

Khan died yesterday after being admitted to Mumbai's Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani hospital with a colon infection.

"Irrfan was a strong soul, someone who fought till the very end and always inspired everyone who came close to him," a statement released by the actor's team said.

Khan made his screen

debut in the Academy Award-nominated 1988 drama "Salaam Bombay!" a tale of Mumbai's street children. He later worked with directors Mira Nair, Wes Anderson and Ang Lee.

Khan in 2018 was diagnosed with a rare neuroendocrine cancer and underwent months of treatment in the United Kingdom.

"I trust, I have surrendered," he wrote in a heartfelt note after he broke the news of his battle with cancer.

Khan won a number of film awards in India, including a 2012 Indian National Film Award for best actor for his performance in "Paan Singh Tomar," a compelling tale of a seven-time national champion athlete who quit In-

dia's armed forces to rule the Chambal ravines in central India.

Khan received an Independent Spirit Award for supporting actor in 2006 for the Indian-American drama "The Namesake" and a viewers' choice award at the Cannes festival 2013 for his role in the Indian romantic drama "The Lunchbox."

Khan also starred in the Hamlet-inspired "Haider," a Bollywood film set in militarized Himalayan Kashmir.

Tributes came from Bollywood, including from fellow actor Amitabh Bachchan, who said Khan was an "incredible talent" and "a prolific contributor to the World of Cinema."

Khan "left us too soon," Bachchan wrote on Twitter.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted that "Khan's demise is a loss to the world of cinema and theatre."

In an interview with The Associated Press in 2018, Khan said: "I've seen life from a completely different angle. You sit down and you see the other side and that's fascinating. I'm engaged on a journey."

Khan's last Bollywood movie, "Angrezi Medium," a sequel to one of his biggest hits, "Hindi Medium" (2017), was released before India went into a lockdown in March because of the coronavirus pandemic.

He is survived by his wife, television writer and producer Sutapa Sirdar, and sons, Babil and Ayan. AP

AP PHOTO



OPINION

World Views

Anjani Trivedi, Bloomberg

**A WAVE OF BAD LOANS
 COULD SWALLOW
 CHINA'S BANKS**

As China recovers from Covid-19, all eyes are on its banks' bad loans. The reality is far worse than it looks.

China's largest lenders reported quarterly earnings this month, the first since the viral outbreak shuttered large swathes of the economy. The stock of non-performing loans rose for all of them — some more than others — but total loans went up, too. As a proportion, NPLs were basically flat. Breakdowns on types of souring loans were sparse, leaving investors with few clues about the real state of things.

A closer look at their existing loan books, however, suggests there's more pain ahead. A third of Chinese bank lending goes to personal loans without any collateral, credit cards, private companies and small or medium-size enterprises. These borrowers comprise 77% of non-performing loans. They also tend to be the weakest in a crisis, and stand to lose most in the Covid-19 aftermath.

As exports and global demand wane, private manufacturers will see their earnings washed out. Over the next 12 months, around 2.5 trillion yuan (\$353.1 billion) of new non-performing loans will be generated in China's banking system, according to CLSA Ltd. Employees and owners will feel the pain and household incomes will be hit, weakening consumer credit. Granted, companies have been getting life lines from Beijing, just enough to keep things afloat while banks get permission to forbear. But the picture will be muddy for a while.

Consumer balance sheets maybe more indicative of what's happening. Ping An Bank Co.'s retail non-performing loans, which include mortgages, rose 59% in the quarter from a year earlier, according to Goldman Sachs Group Inc. Another troubling sign: The non-performing loan ratio for securities backed by credit card debt jumped over 4% in March, according to CLSA. Households' debt servicing ability was already constrained, with borrowing rising faster than incomes. Writing off retail loans will be a big challenge, but rolling over millions of troubled loans will be tough, too.

Then there's the question of what gets recognized as soured debt. Regulators have been pushing lenders to go easy on repayments and roll over loans. That means a chunk will be booked in categories like overdue, rescheduled and special mention loans before they are declared as non-performing assets. These borrowings often sit under these classifications for a long time even if they have gone bad. Using a broader definition that includes these groupings, NPLs are closer to 2.5 trillion yuan than the 1.5 trillion yuan in the financial reports of all 49 listed banks, according to Rhodium Group estimates. That was before the virus. Meanwhile, unlisted banks were already reporting NPL ratios close to 10%.

Banks will have to set aside funds for this. Rhodium Group estimates that an extra 1 trillion yuan of NPLs would require 1.5 trillion yuan of provisions. That would wipe out half the banking system's annual profit and erode capital.

No wonder, then, banks have rushed to raise billions of capital in recent weeks through perpetual and additional tier 1 capital bonds. Meanwhile, the deterioration will start to put pressure on banks to boost earnings. That's a dangerous place to be.

Provisions for loan losses barely increased at most big lenders in the first quarter. Under accounting rules adopted last year, such a buffer is supposed to be based on expected losses before actual ones show up. It's unclear what these lenders are anticipating but it doesn't look like enough. Investors should take notice.

Ratings agency Fitch has cut Italy's government debt grade, the first downgrade to a major economy to reflect the surge in public debt that is expected to hit countries dealing with the vast costs of the pandemic lockdown.

The agency yesterday lowered Italy's rating by 1 notch to BBB- from BBB, just one level above junk bond status. It expects the virus outbreak to shrink the Italian economy by 8% this year and that there is a risk of a deeper downturn.

Italy has been one of the hardest hit by the outbreak of the

new coronavirus — and is also one of the developed countries that can least afford its costs. Its public debt of 135% of annual GDP is forecast to rise to 156% this year, according to Fitch.

High debt can spook investors, who already are asking for higher rates to lend to Italy. The rates are still very manageable, but a rise to unsustainable levels could trigger a new financial crisis for Italy and Europe, where the country is part of the 19-nation euro currency union.

**UK LEADER BORIS JOHNSON,
 FIANCEE ANNOUNCE
 BIRTH OF BABY BOY**



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his partner Carrie Symonds arrive to attend the annual Commonwealth Day service at Westminster Abbey in London in early March

JILL LAWLESS, LONDON

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his fiancée Carrie Symonds announced the birth of a son on Wednesday, just two days after Johnson returned to work following hospitalization for the coronavirus.

Johnson's office said Symonds gave birth to a "healthy baby boy at a London hospital" on yesterday, and both mother and infant were doing well.

Johnson, 55, and Symonds, 32, announced in February that they were engaged and expecting a child together. At the time they said the baby was due in early summer. No wedding date has been announced.

Johnson only returned to work Monday after suffering from a bout of coronavirus that left him dangerously ill. He spent a week in London's St. Thomas' hospital, including three nights in intensive care, before recovering for two weeks away from London.

Symonds, an environ-

mental campaigner and former Conservative Party staffer, also said she was sick for a week with COVID-19 symptoms, though she wasn't tested for the virus. The newborn boy is her first child.

Johnson has four children with his second wife Marina Wheeler, from whom he is divorced, and has fathered at least one other child outside his marriages.

The baby is the third born to a sitting British prime minister this century. The wives of leaders Tony Blair and David Cameron also had babies while their husbands were in office.

It wasn't immediately clear whether Johnson planned to take paternity leave.

The birth comes as the British government faces big decisions about how and when to ease the nationwide lockdown imposed March 23 to slow the spread of the coronavirus. The measures are due to be in place at least until May 7.

Britain is among the countries hardest hit by

the pandemic. As of Tuesday, 21,678 people with COVID-19 had died in U.K. hospitals, and several thousand more in nursing homes and other settings.

Johnson's government faces growing criticism over its slowness in getting enough protective equipment to medics and nursing home staff and its struggle to increase the number of tests being performed for the virus.

Johnson had been due to return to Parliament today [Macau time] to take part in the weekly Prime Minister's Questions session. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab will stand in for him.

Opposition Labour Party leader Keir Starmer, who had been due to face off against Johnson in the Commons, tweeted that the birth was "wonderful news."

House of Commons Speaker Lindsay Hoyle congratulated the couple.

"Such happy news amid so much uncertainty — 2020 is certainly a year they will never forget," he said. AP



Japan Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike called for an extension of Japan's nationwide "state of emergency," which requests people to stay home and social distance. She noted that reported daily cases of COVID-19 in Tokyo have topped 100 people recently. The state of emergency lasts through May 6, which marks the end of the Golden Week holidays that began this week.

Australia A mining magnate and partner in the government's pandemic response says a global inquiry into the coronavirus should be delayed until after the U.S. presidential election. Andrew Forrest, who became a billionaire exporting iron ore to China as founder of Fortescue Metals Group, said such an inquiry made "common sense," but should be held after the November election so "there's not going to be a political dog in this fight."



Spain With 325 new confirmed deaths from coronavirus, Spain is seeing yesterday a slight rebound in fatalities for a total of 24,275 since the beginning of the pandemic. Infections stand over 212,000, although the Health Ministry's figure only includes the cases confirmed by the most reliable laboratory tests that are not being conducted massively.

HOLIDAY TIMES

Macau Daily Times will not be published during the holiday. The Times will be back on the stands on Monday May 4. However the MDT website will be updated with breaking news during the recess period. We wish our readers, advertisers and friends the best of times.