



**THE MONG-HA SPORTS CENTER IS DESIGNATED AS THE GOVERNMENT'S NEW INOCULATION SITE AND WILL COMMENCE SERVICE ON JUNE 21**

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**CHINA IS SET TO SEND FIRST CREW TO NEW SPACE STATION TODAY AT 9:22AM FROM THE JIUQUAN LAUNCH CENTER**

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**China** The government said yesterday that it will release copper, aluminum and zinc from stockpiles to increase market supplies in a fresh effort to restrain surging prices that officials warn might disrupt a business revival. The announcement comes after inflation in prices of industrial raw materials surged to a 13-year high of 9% over a year earlier in May. The move by the State Bureau of Grain and Material Reserves was reported by state TV, which gave no details of when or how much would be released.

**Indonesia** A shallow, 5.8 magnitude undersea earthquake shook parts of eastern Indonesia yesterday, cracking some walls and sending panicked coastal residents in Maluku province to higher ground. The Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency said there was no threat of a large tsunami, although the sea level rose about 0.5 meters, probably due to an underwater avalanche.



**India** The standoff between the Indian government and Twitter escalated yesterday when the country's technology minister accused the social media giant of deliberately not complying with local laws. Technology Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said Twitter has chosen "the path of deliberate defiance" when it comes to following new internet regulations that digital activists have said could curtail online speech and privacy in India.

**Israeli** aircraft carried out a series of airstrikes at militant sites in the Gaza Strip early yesterday, the first such raids since a shaky cease-fire ended the war with Hamas last month. The airstrikes targeted facilities used by Hamas militants for meetings to plan attacks, the Israeli military said, blaming the group for any act of violence emanating from Gaza. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

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# LAWMAKERS URGE GOV'T TO ACT ON FLOODING, ILLEGAL WASTEWATER DUMPING

RENATO MARQUES

SEVERAL lawmakers used the period before the agenda yesterday at the Legislative Assembly to call on the government to find real solutions to prevent flooding in Macau.

The impetus was the heavy rainstorm earlier this month which caused flooding in several areas of the city.

Several lawmakers cited information from the Municipal Affairs Bureau and others that obstruction of the sewage system, namely the rainwater piping system, is one of the factors that contributes to the difficulties in draining rainwater, causing flooding.

These blockages of the drainage system are attributed to the illegal dumping of oil and other substances into the system, with lawmakers pointing the finger at food and beverage establishments as well as other small businesses, and adding that this problem has been growing exponentially in the last couple of years.

Lawmakers Zheng Anting, Mak Soi Kun, and Agnes Lam called on the government to find an effective solution for the flooding, starting by reinforcing the inspection and supervision of the rainwater drainage system.

Mak urged the government to urgently inspect the sewage system of food and beverage



establishments before a severe typhoon hits Macau, and compare them to the blueprints held by the Land, Public Works, and Transport Bureau to verify whether there have been any changes or illegal discharge of wastewater into the system.

Mak additionally suggested that the authorities make use of

fluorescent liquid to identify the source of the oily wastewater found in the rainwater drainage system.

Lam added, "If the IAM knows who the wrongdoers are that [are dumping wastewater into the rainwater system] repeatedly, [we should] proceed swiftly with a revision of the General Regulations

Governing Public Places, aiming to, as happens in other countries and regions, severely punish wrongdoers," adding that the Municipal Affairs Bureau should "reconsider the need to reinforce [their] work to promote awareness, [and] to create a mechanism for complaints about the dumping of pollutant wastewater so

that all citizens can help to monitor this matter."

A similar position was expressed by Zheng, who recalled that the government has previously announced that it would use a video surveillance system inside the sewers to monitor the situation but there have not been any developments on this front.

Zheng added that the government must use the General Regulations Governing Public Places to tackle the problem "right from the source," calling for the strengthening of supervision over the drainage system as well as over flooding blackspots across the city.

## BLACK RAINSTORM PROPOSED TO BE TREATED LIKE TYPHOON

Leong Sun Lok urged the government to improve the alert mechanism for disaster prevention, saying there are some problems with the disaster alerts. "The latest intense rainfall occurred during the early hours of the day and many people were not aware of the situation as they were sleeping. I suggest that the black signal of intense rainfall be included in the civil protection system, [so authorities] can allocate more resources [in responding to the flooding] as well as being able to use the sound alert system installed in the low-lying areas of the city, preventing unnecessary losses," he said.

# Pereira Coutinho loses appeal to plenary on rejected law proposal

RENATO MARQUES

LAWMAKER José Pereira Coutinho once again made a proposal to establish a regime that would allow workers associations to represent and fight for workers' rights, only to be once more voted down by the plenary of the Legislative Assembly (AL).

Pereira Coutinho had appealed to the plenary on the matter after both the AL president, Kou Hoi

In, and the AL's Executive Board rejected the bill. The latter both claimed that as the topic was related to the government's policies, the lawmaker needed to request prior written approval from the Chief Executive before submitting it.

Yesterday at the plenary session, Pereira Coutinho argued that these actions from the AL president and Executive Board lack legality and go against the rules and regulations that

state the duties and rights of the lawmakers in relation to legislation.

The same lawmaker also argued that similar proposals had been accepted previously for discussion in the plenary back in 2013 and 2015. At the time, the lawmakers decided that such bills should not move forward after analysis and discussion.

Lawmaker Chan Hong, representing the AL's Executive Board, justified the

legality of the decisions taken by both the president and the Executive Board by asserting that the matter was related to government policies and, according to a legal opinion issued in 2017 by the Executive Board, such legal proposals and amendments are restricted to the government initiative.

The Executive Board also argued that, if approved, such a proposal would



force a large number of changes and amendments to many other laws, including the Labour Law. They also remarked that the proposal would involve considerable disruption to the work of other entities such as the courts.

A total of 27 lawmakers backed the decision of the AL to disallow the bill from discussion in the plenary, while only four, namely the proposer and the pro-democracy lawmakers Au Kam San, Ng Kuok Cheong and Sulu Sou disagreed.

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TANGCHI LEE



# Macau office in Taiwan to suspend operation

STAFF REPORTERS

**T**HE Macau Economic and Cultural Office in Taiwan will temporarily cease to operate from June 19 as Macau employees working at the office could not obtain work visas, the SAR government has announced in a statement.

The Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) of the Republic of China in Taiwan, meanwhile, said that they regretted this decision, noting that the establishment of the Macau Office in Taiwan was pursuant to the Exchange of Notes in 2011 with regard to the mutual establishment of offices between Macau and Taiwan.

In a social media post, MAC noted, "Since the establishment of the Macau Economic and Cultural Office in Taiwan, our side has been upholding the attitude of goodwill and mutual benefit, as well as yielding all efforts in providing assistance."

The MAC also stressed that the Taipei Economic and Cultural Offi-

ce in Macau will remain in normal operation "to ensure the rights and interests of Taiwanese and Macau residents."

The SAR government said that they would handle general inquiries, services for Macau residents in Taiwan and requests for assistance during the temporary suspension through the 24-hour hotline set up by the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) (+853 2833 3000), as well as providing Taiwan residents with information related to Macau.

In response to media enquiries, the Macau SAR government explained that the office had to suspend operations because Macau

employees working at the office in Taiwan could not get work visas.

"The SAR Government has always proceeded in compliance with the law, regarding applications for the necessary credentials by personnel wishing to work for the Taiwan office in Macau," the government said in a statement.

"Nonetheless, it has not so far been possible to gain approval in Taiwan either for requests for renewal of credential papers, lodged by existing members of the Macau Economic and Cultural Office in Taiwan, or for new credentials by Macau staff wishing to work in Macau's office on a rotational basis," it added.

The Macau government also remarked that it will continue to make progress in Macau-Taiwan civil interactions "pursuant to the Basic Law, the One-China principle, as well as the principles and policies on which the Central Government handles Macau-Taiwan relations."

Meanwhile, according to Central News Agency, visas for employees at the Taipei Office in Macau kept being delayed by the Macau government even if special negotiators have been helping.

Speaking to Taiwanese news agency, Focus Taiwan, local academic Eilo Yu said that "it was clearly a tough decision to make." He believes it was Beijing's call to close the office, in an attempt to force Taiwan to close its offices in Macau as well.

## MGTO unveils 15 new partially subsidized local tour routes

ANTHONY LAM

**Y**ESTERDAY, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) held a press conference to announce the second phase of the "Stay, Dine and See Macao" initiative, which will see four itineraries from the first phase retained and 15 new itineraries added.

New itineraries will bring travelers to some new attractions. Apart from the Lisboeta amusement facilities, travelers will also have a chance to enjoy the newly opened Water Park at Macau Studio City.

Also part of the new itineraries are chances to make Cantonese roast and grill, more commonly known as Siu-Mei, and to make hand-crafted beer in Macau.

"A local beer brewer is planning to open a brewery in a new hotel in the Inner Harbor. The beer brewing and tasting experiences will be held there," the MGTO director announced.

In other itineraries, participants will explore the Karting Circuit in Coloane, participate in a golfing experience, or take a ride on a yacht to view Macau from a different angle.

Among the itineraries retained is the popular helicopter tour. Senna Fernandes said that there will be a quota of 648 pairs of participants for this tour, meaning that at most, 1,296 participants will be able to take the tour.

Interested individuals may sign up from today to June 20 through participating travel agencies. Those who registered for the first phase but did not win the chance to participate will be automatically signed up for this round.

The ballot draw will be conducted June 21 to determine the lucky travelers.

Each Macau resident is subsidized MOP280 for one tour only.

Senna Fernandes announced that the second phase of the initiative will have tou-

rs every day as it covers the summer holiday period. She estimated that the initiative, including both local tours and staycation, would attract 100,000 counts of participant experiences.

Besides local tours, the organizing bodies are also offering, in collaboration with local hotel operators, staycation promotions. Each local resident is subsidized MOP200 by the government, which could mean a subsidy of MOP400 for a room for two people. Each resident is eligible to use the subsidy once.

The organizing bodies stressed that epidemic control measures will be in place. Only individuals holding the green health code and showing no symptoms of Covid-19 will be accepted on the tour or staycation dates.

If participants fall ill and cannot participate in the tours for which they signed up, they can access a refund by presenting written proof issued by a medical doctor.

## LISBOETA LAUNCH DATE UNCLEAR DESPITE ROLE IN TOURISM INITIATIVE

**T**HE second phase of the "Stay, Dine and See Macao" local tour and staycation initiative will see facilities located in several local hotels or resorts taking roles, including the ZIPCITY wired flight and GoAirborne indoor parachuting experiences. Both facilities are located in the yet to open Lisboeta Resort in Cotai.

When questioned whether this is a hint that the resort will officially be opened soon, Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, director of the Macao Government Tourism Office, refrained from giving a direct answer. She stressed that the Lisboeta Hotel of the resort had its license issued last year, meaning that it is ready for operation. Since last year, the hotel has been participating in the quarantine hotel scheme led by the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center.



Computerized impression of ZIPCITY

The resort has a total of three hotel brands.

The MGTO director pointed out that the two amusement facilities are independent from the hotel tower, meaning that the resort can handle its quarantine mission while also offering a preview of the two amusement activities to Stay, Dine and See Macao participants.

Senna Fernandes re-

called that last year, some participants of the then local tour initiative were brought to a preview of the teamLab participatory show at The Venetian Macao.

She hinted that the pre-opening experience may be a market research activity which will allow the operator to better prepare its future marketing strategy.



# ROTARY CLUB OF MACAU HOSTS 74TH ANNUAL CHARITY BALL

**T**HE Rotary Club of Macau's 74th Annual Charity Ball gathered around 300 Rotarians, relatives, Rotaract and Interact club members, and guests at an event themed "wanderlust."

Held at The Ritz-Carlton Grand Ballroom May 29, Rotarians and guests graced the Rotary Club of Macau with donations which will fund the projects to be developed during the next Rotary Year, which commences July 1.

Speaking at the charity ball, João Francisco Pinto, the 2020/2021 president of the Rotary Club of Macau remarked that the year has been challenging as the club was affected by the ongoing pandemic.

"Our fundraising was hampered by the Covid-19 outbreak as we were unable to organize last year's annual ball. Despite the challenges, we strive to serve those in need. I am proud of how we have proven our ability to adapt,"



said Pinto.

"Faced with a pandemic, Rotary has not stopped. Our motto, 'Service Above Self' has proven to be of utmost relevance in such a

complex year," he added.

Next year, Rotary International's theme will be "Serve to Change Lives," where Rotary pledges to adhere to its core values of service,

fellowship, diversity, integrity and leadership.

Matthew Wong, president-elect, said, "The Covid-19 crisis has forced all of us to adapt to the new

normal. However, adaptation is not enough. Every great challenge is an opportunity for renewal and growth."

Over the past 11 months, the Rotary Club of Macau offered help to migrant workers with newborn babies by donating diapers and baby formula, hosted its signature project "Joy to the World - Xmas Party" for people with special needs and organized a seminar on the psychological effects of Covid-19.

Together with other "Area 1" clubs, the club donated blood and raised funds for the Cradle of Hope, as well as raising funds to support the activities of The Rotary Foundation End Polio Fund.

The group has also supported the reconstruction of a school in Prithvirup in Nepal and provided financial assistance to help Mongolia and India fight against Covid-19.

As in previous years, all funds raised during the Annual Charity Ball will be exclusively used to finance the various service projects.

Macau Daily Times is the official media partner of the event. LV



## USD12 BILLION CASE TRIAL BETWEEN MOGUL HAO AND LVS BEGINS

LYNZY VALLES

**T**HE court case between Taiwanese businessman Marshall Hao and gaming giant Las Vegas Sands (LVS) started yesterday. Hao is seeking approximately 70% of Sands Macao's profits from 2004 to 2022.

This comes after the businessman claimed that the gaming operator wronged him when Sands subsequently switched partners in acquiring a gaming license.

The U.S. firm originally partnered with Hao's Asian

American Entertainment Corporation to bid on one of the Macau gaming concessions.

However, it is alleged that Sands abandoned Asian American. Sands subsequently partnered with Hong Kong group Galaxy Entertainment instead.

Yesterday, the court session saw debate about when Asian American and LVS severed their ties.

It was in February 2002 when the Macau SAR government granted casino operating concessions.

Hao is seeking damages of approximately 70% of Sands Macao's profits from 2004 to 2022 which Reuters estimated at around USD12 billion (MOP95.9 billion).

Sources linked to the plaintiff said that they were "utterly satisfied with the trial," adding that it was "a very successful day."

The lawsuit is considered an obstacle for LVS, especially amid heated competition for the renewal of gaming concessions in Macau.

The city's six casino licenses are due to expire in June 2022.

Previously, Hao told Reuters that "Asian American has been winning all major legal battles in the Macau lawsuit since we filed it in 2012, [...so] we are confident."

The legal dispute between Asian American and LVS has been a long-running battle since 2007, when the lawsuit against LVS was first filed in the U.S. and subsequently dismissed for exceeding the statute of limitations and other procedural reasons.

Jorge Menezes of FCLaw Lawyers & Private Notaries is representing Asian American, while LVS and its units are represented by Luis Cavaleiro de Ferreira of CFS - Luis Cavaleiro de Ferreira, Ricardo Silva & Associados.

## CRIME

### UM 4-METER HIGH EMBANKMENT CLIMBED BY ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS

**M**EMBERS of an illegal immigration syndicate, which has recently been busted by the Judiciary Police (PJ), for climbing the four-meter high embankment surrounding the University of Macau (UM) using ropes.

The UM is surrounded by a "moat" that separates the campus area from the Hengqin jurisdiction. The UM campus is administered under Macau law.

The PJ apprehended two Vietnamese suspects and a mainland man, with the latter being an illegal immigrant.

Following its investigation, the law-enforcement entity believes that the syndicate instructed illegal immigrants to swim from the Hengqin side of the river to the UM

side. Upon reaching the shore, it is believed they were helped by others in the syndicate to use ropes to climb up the embankment.

The Vietnamese suspects are surnamed Nguyen and Phan, while the mainland Chinese suspect is surnamed Huang. All of them are 29 years old. The former duo was charged with aiding and abetting a criminal offence, while the latter with conducting an illegal immigration operation.

The man confessed that he paid 11,000 Chinese yuan to the syndicate to facilitate the crime. His alleged purpose for travelling to Macau was to gamble in Macau casinos.

It is worth stressing that the suspect from mainland China con-

ducted the same crime on March 2 this year and was arrested. The PJ did not announce how and where the mainland man entered Macau illegally in March.

The success in resolving the case, according to the PJ, relies quite heavily on the collaborative mechanism between Macau and mainland China, which facilitates the local police's intelligence acquisition and analysis.

It was through the mechanism that the PJ became aware of the syndicate, which mostly consisted of Vietnamese members in the structure. During its investigation, the PJ discovered a woman swimming away from Macau last week at the UM moat. Hours later, the PJ arrested the three suspects. AL







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# 74<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CHARITY BALL "WANDERLUST"

The 74<sup>th</sup> Annual Charity Ball of Rotary Club of Macau, "WANDERLUST" was successfully held on Saturday, 29 May, 2021 at the Ritz Carlton. The Rotary Club of Macau would like to thank you and all our sponsors for your kind and valuable support.

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COVID-19

# NEW VACCINATION CENTER TO OPEN JUNE 21

HONEY TSANG

**G**IVEN the increasing demand for vaccination among residents, the government has designated the Mong-Ha Sports Centre as a new inoculation site, bringing the total number of vaccination centers from 15 to 16.

Tai Wa Hou, coordinator of the Health Bureau's Covid-19 Vaccination Operation, announced the news yesterday at the regular Covid-19 press conference.

The Mong-Ha Sports Centre is to commence its vaccination service using the Sinopharm inactivated virus vaccine from June 21. In the initial stage, the new station will offer a daily quota of 1,000 doses which can be ramped up to 2,000 daily should the demand exist.

The new vaccination center is a collaboration between the Health Bureau and Kiang Wu Hospital, Tai said.

Meanwhile, the government has increased daily inoculation quotas at the current 15 centers. Starting June 17, the quota for Macao Forum will be expanded to 3,000 per day, with its service hours also lengthened to operate from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. An extra 400 daily doses will be added to the quotas of the other 14 centers as well.

Following the extended availability of vaccination services, the government anticipates the current 15 stations can offer a total of 8,200 doses every day. This number can be further lifted to 10,000 after the Mong-Ha Sports Centre site comes into service.



When asked by the media about the current supply of mRNA vaccines, Tai again gave

reassurance to the public that there is sufficient stock.

"There is no need to be worried about that. As we look into the figures, the local demand for inactivated vaccine has still been

outperforming that for mRNA vaccines, with a ratio roughly at 85 to 15."

However, the government will increase the supply of mRNA vaccines if needed.

## YOUNG MALE NOT IDENTIFIED AS IMPORTED CASE FOR NOW

**A**N 18-year-old man, a Macau resident who recovered from Covid-19 and then tested positive again on June 15 whilst observing mandatory quarantine after his return to Macau from Hong Kong, is not classified as an imported case for now, said Leong Iek Hou, coordinator at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention yesterday.

The man was confirmed to have come down with coronavirus in Hong Kong on December 15 last year and subsequently recovered. He returned to Macau on June 13 and tested negative on that day.

He was admitted to Pousada Marina Infante Ho-

tel to observe mandatory quarantine upon arrival and then returned a mildly positive test result on June 15.

Considering that he contracted the disease in Hong Kong a while ago and has not developed any symptoms related to the coronavirus, the health authorities will conduct further investigation to determine whether the individual is testing positive again to the original infection or is subject to a second infection.

He will therefore not be identified as an imported case for Macau at the moment, Leong stated.

## DSEDJ OFFERING ASSISTANCE TO CROSS-BORDER STUDENTS IN TAIWAN

**T**O assist cross-border pupils and their companions, the Education and Youth Development Bureau has arranged a Covid-19 testing service at the Centro de Juventude da Areia Preta for those who help cross-border students commute daily. However, the service is limited to one companion per cross-border

student only. Companions must bear the cost of the test themselves.

In consideration of the Macau Economic and Cultural Office in Taiwan will suspend operations from this Saturday, the DSEDJ has extended its hotline service hours from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. to better assist Macau students residing in Taiwan.

# Authorities are 'bending the rules' to claim illegal assembly, Scott Chiang says

RENATO MARQUES

**P**RO-DEMOCRACY activist and candidate to this year's Legislative Assembly elections, Scott Chiang, thinks that judiciary authorities were bending the rules when they found him guilty for the crime of illegal assembly, in the case sentenced by the Court of First Instance (TJB) about two years ago.

"The authorities twisted it and bent the rules a little bit so they could fit the event into the wrong category [and characterize it] as illegal assembly and a hazard to public safety and make a big fuss out of it," Chiang said. He added that the decision from TSI was



not a surprising one.

"Now the narrative has been shifted towards illegal assembly or demonstration, but I wanted to point out that it was just two guys

with a piece of paper in the hand trying to deliver it to the residence [of the Chief Executive (CE)]. It is as simple as that," he said.

"I have tried many times

[after this event] to pass in front of the [CE official] residence back and forth and I had no problem in doing that. So the only difference I can perceive is regarding

the content of the piece of paper and the recipient of it."

Chiang's comments came on the sidelines of the delivery of a different petition on Tuesday to the government on another topic and were prompted by the news of the Court of Second Instance's (TSI) decision late last week, which dismissed Chiang's appeals from that sentence and upheld the original sentence.

For Chiang, what was thrown into question in this case was the liberty of any citizen to deliver a message to the government's highest official, a form of communication and expression that should

be championed by the law.

Chiang noted that the accusations were based on the disruption caused by his actions. "As I pointed out both inside and outside the court, there were more police officers on-site than citizens – even more than journalists – so how was I the one blocking traffic? Who was making the trouble out of nothing? It was not me!" he rhetorically asked.

Questioned on his feelings about the final verdict from the courts, Chiang said, "I would like to say that I don't agree with the verdict but that I respect the decision from the court. But respect is a very strong word to me so I choose not to use it this time," he concluded.

On May 14, 2019, he was found guilty by TJB in a retrial for the crime of illegal assembly. He was ordered to pay a fine of 24,000 patacas.



SAM MCNEIL, JIUQUAN

# China set to send first crew to new space station today

**T**HE three members of the first crew to be sent to China's space station say they're eager to get to work making their home for the next three months habitable, setting up testing and experiments and preparing for a series of spacewalks.

The three met with reporters yesterday from inside a germ-free glassed-in room, hours before they were to blast off this morning.

"First of all, we need to arrange our home in the core module, then get started on a whole range of diagnostic tests on crucial technology and experiments," said mission commander Nie Haisheng, 56, the most senior of the three who is making his third trip to space.

"The task is very arduous and there are many challenges. My colleagues and I will cooperate closely, operate carefully and overcome all difficulties," Nie said.

Unsurprisingly, all said they had complete confidence in the mission, which carries special political meaning for the ruling Communist Party as it prepares to celebrate its centenary next month.

Liu Boming, 54, whose one

AP PHOTO



previous flight in 2008 included China's first spacewalk, said there would be multiple such activities during the mission as the astronauts carry out their science experiments, conduct maintenance and prepare the Tianhe, or Heavenly Harmony, core module to receive two other modules to be sent up next year.

Tang Hongbo, 45, who is making his first flight since being

selected among the second batch of astronauts in 2010, said he had been training virtually nonstop for years. "There is pressure," Tang said. "But where there is pressure there is motivation and [...] I have confidence in myself and have confidence in our team."

Today's launch begins the first crewed space mission in five years for an increasingly ambi-

tious space program. China has sent 11 astronauts into space since becoming the third country to do so on its own in 2003, and has sent orbiters and rovers to the moon and Mars.

The astronauts will be traveling in the Shenzhou-12 spaceship launched by a Long March-2F Y12 rocket set to blast off at 9:22 a.m. from the Jiuquan launch center in northwestern China.

While the first Tianhe crew are all men, women will be part of future crews, officials have said.

Beijing doesn't participate in the International Space Station, largely due to U.S. concerns over the Chinese space program's secrecy and its military connections. Despite that, foreign science missions and possibly foreign astronauts are expected to visit the Chinese station in the future, China Manned Space Agency Assistant Director Ji Qiming told reporters at Jiuquan.

"We are willing to carry out international cooperation and

exchanges with all countries and regions worldwide that are committed to the peaceful use of outer space," Ji said, adding that existing cooperation is being expanded with countries including Russia, Italy and Germany along with the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs.

"I believe that in the near future, when the Chinese space station is complete, we will see Chinese and foreign astronauts taking on joint missions to the Chinese space station," Ji said.

The mission is the third of 11 planned through next year to add the additional sections to the station and send up crews and supplies. The main living section of the station was launched in April while the other two modules will be primarily for scientific work.

The mission builds on experience China gained from earlier operating two experimental space stations. It also landed a probe on Mars last month that carried a rover, the Zhurong, and earlier landed a probe and rover on the moon and brought back the first lunar samples by any country's space program since the 1970s.

Once completed, the station will allow for stays of up to six months, similar to the much larger International Space Station. **MDT/AP**

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LEBANON

# Crisis threatens one of its few unifiers, the army

ZEINA KARAM & BASSEM MROUE, BEIRUT

**S**INCE the civil war, through wars with Israel, militant bombings and domestic turmoil, Lebanese have considered their military as an anchor for stability, one of the only institutions standing above the country's divisions.

But the military is now threatened by Lebanon's devastating financial collapse, which the World Bank has said is likely to rank as one of the worst the world has seen in the past 150 years.

The economic meltdown is putting unprecedented pressure on the U.S.-backed army's operational abilities, wiping out soldiers' salaries and wrecking morale. The deterioration puts at risk one of the few forces unifying Lebanon at a time when sectarian tensions and crime are on the rise amid the population's deepening poverty.

"Such a decline could be harbinger of the kinds of instability not seen since the last time Lebanon's political elites gutted or set adrift the Lebanese armed forces, namely in the five years leading up to the 1975-1990 civil war," said Aram Nerguizian, senior advisor of the Program on Civil-Military Affairs in Arab States at the Carnegie Middle East Center.

The military itself has raised the alarm, unusual for a force that is perhaps unique in the Middle East in that it largely remains outside politics.

Army chief Gen. Joseph Aoun warned in a speech to officers in March that soldiers were "suffering and hungry like the rest of the people."

He also openly criticized the political leadership, which has been paralyzed by infighting and has done almost nothing to address the crisis. "What are you waiting for? What do you plan to do? We have warned more than once of the dangers of the situation," he said—a startling comment since army officers are not allowed to make political statements.

A senior army official confirmed to The Associated Press that the economic situation has greatly affected morale. "There is no doubt that there is great resentment among the ranks of the military," the official said.

The official noted that "many duties are demanded of the military," including maintaining internal stability. "The leadership is worried over developments in the security situation on the ground and the ability to deal with this issue," the officer said, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with regulations. Supporting

the army is crucial to avoid Lebanon falling into chaos, he added.

France is convening a virtual fundraising conference Thursday seeking emergency aid, after army chief Aoun visited Paris last month pleading for assistance. France warned that Lebanon's military "may no longer be able to fully implement their missions which are essential to the country's stability." The U.S., the army's largest backer, has pledged to increase aid in 2021.

The military in part counterbalances Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Shiite faction that boasts a powerful armed force as well as political dominance. Nerguizian warned that degradation of the military would allow Hezbollah to loom even larger -- an outcome few outside Lebanon, particularly in Washington, want to see materialize.

It could also open the door for countries like Russia, China, Iran or Syria to co-opt the force and find ways to influence it.

Gen. Frank McKenzie, the commander of U.S. Central Command said earlier this month that the U.S. is committed to supporting the Lebanese army.

"They're one of the elements of the Government of Lebanon that actually functions very well, and we believe they should continue

to be the sole expression of military power of the state in Lebanon," he said.

After decades of corruption and mismanagement by the political elite, Lebanon's economy began to disintegrate in October 2019. The once-thriving banking sector has collapsed, and the currency has lost around 90 percent of its value to the dollar on the black market. More than half the nation has been plunged into poverty.

Equally hit are the 80,000 members of the military. Before the crisis, an enlisted soldier earned the equivalent of about \$800 a month, but that has now dropped to less than \$100 per month. Officers' salaries are higher but have also dropped in value, now about \$400 a month.

The army has tightened spending. A year ago, it announced it would stop offering meat in meals given to soldiers on duty. It still offers free medical treatment, but those in the force say the quality and effectiveness has sharply deteriorated.

"Morale is below the ground," said a 24-year-old soldier who quit the force in March after five years of service.

He said that by the time he left, the 1.2 million Lebanese pounds salary he received was barely enough for food, cigarettes and transportation. He spoke on condition of anonymity, fearing reprisals.

Mohammad Olayan, who retired two years ago after more than 27 years in the military, told The Associated Press that his end-of-service pay has been wiped out by the crash. Instead of a decent retirement, he now must take odd jobs to sustain his 12-year-old twin girls.

"What incentive is there for young soldiers?" he asked. "I sacrificed so much for my country and look how I ended up because of this mafia," he said, referring to politicians.

Nerguizian said that while overall cases of desertion remain relatively low, the force has seen increased instances of dereliction of duty, high AWOL rates and more moonlighting by personnel to augment salaries.

The last three years have also seen some of the largest attrition rates, with personnel choosing to leave the military, he said. "More worryingly, the force is losing quality officers and noncommissioned officers - the gray matter and capabilities the force has spent more than a decade and a half developing," Nerguizian added. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1974 IRA BOMBS PARLIAMENT



A bomb has exploded at the Houses of Parliament, causing extensive damage and injuring 11 people.

The IRA said it planted the 20 lb (9.1 kg) device which exploded at about 0828 BST in a corner of Westminster Hall.

The explosion is suspected to have fractured a gas main and a fierce fire spread quickly through the centuries-old hall in one of Britain's most closely-guarded buildings.

Scotland Yard detectives have said they fear this attack could herald the start of a new summer offensive by the dissident Irish group on government buildings.

A man with an Irish accent telephoned the Press Association with a warning only six minutes before the explosion. Police said a recognised IRA codeword was given.

Although officers were not able to completely clear the palace before the bomb went off, most of the injured were only slightly hurt.

Leader of the Commons Edward Short announced a review of security procedures would begin immediately, but he said the attack would not disrupt parliamentary business or intimidate MPs.

Liberal Chief Whip David Steel was in the building when the device detonated and told the BBC the damage looked considerable.

"I looked through Westminster Hall and the whole hall was filled with dust. A few minutes later it was possible to see flames shooting up through the windows," he said.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

1974 was one of the deadliest years in the IRA's mainland bombing campaign.

In February a bomb exploded on a coach carrying soldiers on the M62, killing 12 people.

A further 26 people died later in the year in attacks on the Tower of London and on pubs in Guilford and Birmingham.

The last Provisional IRA attack on the British mainland was in 1996, but extremist splinter groups have carried out bombings since then.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

**ARIES** Mar. 21-Apr. 19  
It's been important for you to stay engaged and explore new opportunities in all of your running around. Yet, today's skies work to help you course-correct and narrow in on a clearer path forward.

**TAURUS** Apr. 20-May. 20  
Today's first quarter moon in decisive Virgo helps you narrow in on this story, as it highlights changes needing to be around your self-confidence.

**GEMINI** May. 21-Jun. 21  
You are your own top priority right now, Gemini. It's critical for you to invest energy into building a new sense of identity and independence during your birthday season.

**CANCER** Jun. 22-Jul. 22  
Spring tends to be a strange time of year for you, Cancer. Don't sweat it if you don't feel like yourself - as you've been actively trying to release outgrown, inhibiting patterns.

**LEO** Jul. 23-Aug. 22  
This lunation may highlight snags in your financial situation and illuminate self-confidence issues that need healing. Which goals are worth pursuing and which are no longer worthwhile?

**VIRGO** Aug. 23-Sep. 22  
Your career is of utmost importance to you this time of year, Virgo. Are you setting clear and realistic goals for yourself? The universe is urging you to go after what you want wholeheartedly.

**LIBRA** Sep. 23-Oct. 22  
Now's the time to get out of your comfort zone, Libra. You've been exploring new avenues for education and self-expansion, perhaps in a way that makes you nervous.

**SCORPIO** Oct. 23-Nov. 21  
Today's first quarter moon in precision-seeking Virgo highlights changes needing to be made around your sense of community and social connection. What friends have your back?

**SAGITTARIUS** Nov. 22-Dec. 21  
Today's first quarter moon in diligent Virgo highlights the changes needed in order to move forward. Look to anyone you're in close collaboration with to get to the heart of this story.

**CAPRICORN** Dec. 22-Jan. 19  
What changes need to be embraced mentally for you to get closer to your newly developing vision? How can you manifest what you want when you continue to doubt your abilities?

**AQUARIUS** Jan. 20-Feb. 18  
Today's first quarter moon in reflective Virgo brings you into a different headspace, one where you're asked to examine some of your long-held relationship hang-ups in an honest light.

**PISCES** Feb. 19-Mar. 20  
This is one of the trickiest times of year, Pisces. You're navigating ancient material around your family life and trying to build a solid foundation for yourself - emotionally and domestically.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

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

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

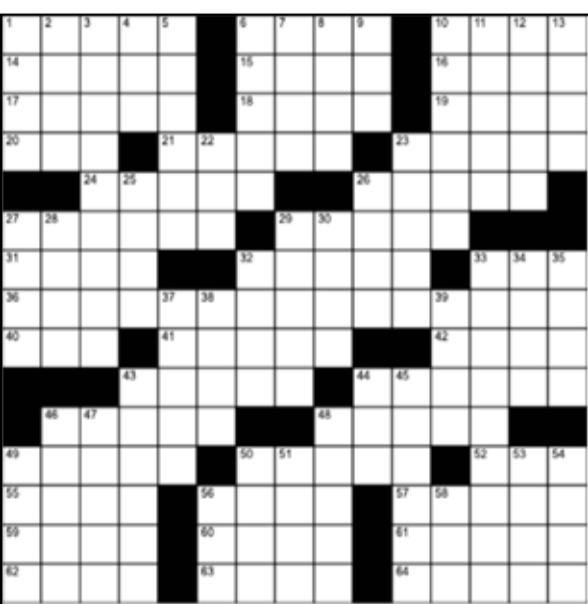
**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	20	32	fine
Harbin	18	24	rain
Tianjin	27	36	cloudy
Urumqi	20	25	showers
Xi'an	24	32	rain
Lhasa	18	22	rain
Chengdu	27	36	cloudy
Chongqing	27	34	cloudy
Kunming	27	35	showers
Nanjing	21	28	cloudy
Shanghai	27	36	thunderstorms
Wuhan	24	32	rain
Hangzhou	18	25	thunderstorms
Taipei	24	29	rain
Guangzhou	12	26	fine
Hong Kong	20	25	rain
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	13	24	cloudy
Frankfurt	18	32	cloudy
Paris	21	31	sunny
London	18	29	rain
New York	14	27	sunny

**CROSSWORDS**

ACROSS 1- Gave a measured amount; 6- Mah-jongg piece; 10- Streetcar; 14- Opening; 15- Frequently; 16- Architect Saarinen; 17- Muscat native; 18- Frat party purchases; 19- Agitated state; 20- Emeritus; Abbr.; 21- Food and water; 23- Bothered; 24- Goad; 26- Erupts; 27- South African animal rug; 29- Roomy dress cut; 31- Environmental sci.; 32- Grammarian's concern; 33- What the sun does in the west; 36- Make a trade?; 40- President pro \_\_\_; 41- Orchestra section; 42- Mogul capital until 1658; 43- Gettysburg general; 44- Besides; 46- Opt; 48- Bathroom fixture; 49- Visit habitually; 50- Icon; 52- CD predecessors; 55- Writer Bombeck; 56- Orenburg's river; 57- Skip \_\_\_; 59- Novelist Waugh; 60- Gratuity; 61- Puccini classic; 62- Actress Daly; 63- Slaughter of baseball; 64- Alleviates;

DOWN: 1- Designer Christian; 2- Treater's words; 3- Private compartment; 4- Directional ending; 5- Activities; 6- Occupied; 7- \_\_\_ Three Lives; 8- Records; 9- Aliens, briefly; 10- Exam taker; 11- Continue a subscription; 12- Met highlights; 13- Feminist Lucretia; 22- Greek goddess of the dawn; 23- Sleep disorder; 25- Ball game; 26- Token; 27- Held on to; 28- 43,560 square feet; 29- Footnote; 30- Neighbor of Cambodia; 32- Second hand, took advantage of; 33- Blind; 34- Book before Nehemiah; 35- Bluey-green color; 37- Set up; 38- Show to a table; 39- Like the White Rabbit; 43- Threaten; 44- Hairpiece; 45- Think; 46- Ahead of time; 47- Light unit; 48- Bundles; 49- Warmth; 50- Golf club which can be numbered 1 to 9; 51- Mackerel shark; 53- Step; 54- RR stops; 56- Salt Lake City athlete; 58- Feather scarf;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

**USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

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



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AD





MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

# RONALDO SCORES 2, PORTUGAL BEATS HUNGARY 3-0 AT EURO 2020

**CRISTIANO** Ronaldo's record-setting day came in front of the first packed crowd of this year's European Championship.

The Portugal great set the record for most career goals at the tournament in the 87th minute from the penalty spot and then added another in injury time to give the defending champions a 3-0 victory over Hungary on Tuesday.

Ronaldo's goals, however, weren't the only interesting part of the game. On the fifth day of the Euro 2020 tournament, this was the first match played in a full stadium.

The 67,215-capacity Puskas Arena was packed with mostly Hungarian fans, and they made their presence known throughout the match. Hungary is the only one of the 10 countries hosting matches at the tournament to allow full crowds.

That gave Ronaldo plenty of witnesses to history.

"The important thing was to win," Ronaldo said. "It was a difficult game, against an opponent who defended very well, but we

AP PHOTO



scored three goals, and I am very grateful to the team for helping me to score two goals."

The Juventus forward was playing in his fifth European Championship, dating back to Euro 2004. He entered this year's edition even with Michel Platini at nine goals, but that only lasted 87 minutes.

The 36-year-old Ronaldo also became the only player to score at five consecutive European Championships.

Ronaldo scored his first goal

after Rafa Silva was fouled by Willi Orban in the area and the referee whistled for a penalty. Ronaldo, who had missed an easy chance near the end of the first half, shot to the right of goal and got his record.

The second came when he combined with Silva in front of goal and then skipped around Hungary keeper Peter Gulacsi before rolling the ball into an empty net with his left foot.

Ronaldo broke the scoring record at a stadium named af-

ter another great scorer, Ferenc Puskas. The Hungarian was arguably the finest finisher of the 1950s, scoring 84 goals in 85 games for his country. He also played for Real Madrid, just like Ronaldo once did.

He is also now only three behind

former Iran striker Ali Daei's men's record of 109 international goals.

Portugal defender Raphael Guerreiro scored the opening goal three minutes before Ronaldo's first with a shot that deflected off a defender and wrong-footed Gulacsi.

The fans made the most of their attendance and the resounding noise went up several levels when Hungary nearly took the lead in the 80th minute.

Substitute Szabolcs Schon cut inside from the right and planted a low shot into the corner of the net. But the goal was ruled out because Schon was offside when he ran onto the pass.

Hungary's most vocal support congregated behind one of the goals and were relentless in their devotion.

Portugal's red-shirted and flag-waving followers filled a small section behind where their goalkeeper started the match.

"It was essential to start on the right foot to give us confidence," Ronaldo said. "Now it is necessary to continue like this and win the next game." MDT/AP

## LATEST RESULTS

Hungary	0	<b>3</b>	<b>Portugal</b>
<b>France</b>	<b>1</b>	0	Germany
Finland	0	<b>1</b>	<b>Russia</b>

AD



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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

AP PHOTO

PREVIEW

# Ukraine, North Macedonia need points after Euro 2020 losses



**B**OTH Ukraine and North Macedonia conceded late goals in their opening matches at the European Championship, and both lost because of them.

The teams will next play each other at Euro 2020 today, knowing another loss just might end their chances of advancement.

The top two teams in each of the six groups advance to the round of 16, along with the four best third-place teams.

Ukraine managed to recover from two goals down against the Netherlands in Amsterdam on Sunday, but Denzel Dumfries headed in an 85th-minute winner for the Dutch.

"We come back after 2-0 down and it's so frustrating to lose a game

in the last minutes," said Ukraine captain Andriy Yarmolenko, who scored one of his team's goals.

"We have two more games to go and we will still play with the same energy," he said. "If we (advance), then it will be great."

North Macedonia, one of the two tournament newcomers at Euro 2020 along with Finland, had been holding Austria to a 1-1 scoreline before substitutes Michael Gregoritsch and Marko Arnautovi scored a goal each in the waning minutes at the National Arena in Bucharest on Sunday. That gave Austria its first ever victory at the continental championship.

North Macedonia captain Goran Pandev, who scored his 38th international goal in the match, said even a loss at a major tournament can help his team grow.

"It was a great experience for us as a first match at this kind of tournament. I think we played an excellent 80 minutes," Pandev said. "We needed to take advantage of our few counterattacks and we didn't. In the end, that is football."

Neither Ukraine nor North Macedonia would have been considered favorites in their opening

games, but both were in good form ahead of the tournament.

Sunday's loss was the first for Ukraine in seven matches this year, while North Macedonia recorded eight wins and only three losses in its last 15 games — including a shock away win over Germany in World Cup qualifying in March.

Ukraine is appearing in its third European Championship,

including co-hosting the event in 2012, but has only won one match and has never progressed out of the group stage.

Meanwhile, both teams need to limit distractions caused by nationalist issues.

Ukraine's yellow-and-blue jerseys for Euro 2020 enraged Russia because they featured an outline of the country's territory showing the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia annexed in 2014.

UEFA has allowed the map to remain — since Russia's annexation is viewed as illegal under international law — but the slogan "Glory to the heroes" was removed because it was determined to be "clearly political in nature, having historic and militaristic significance."

The Ukrainian soccer federation said that talks with UEFA about the issue continue.

The North Macedonian soccer federation has asked for action to be taken against Marko Arnautovi for an incident in Sunday's match, claiming the Austria striker made offensive nationalist comments to a North Macedonia player of Albanian descent.

UEFA has said it will investigate the matter. **MDT/AP**

## UPCOMING GAMES

	Date	Time	Home	Away	City	ODDS
<b>Thu</b>	Jun 17	21:00	Ukraine	North Macedonia	Bucharest	H 1.71, D 3.8, A 6.6
<b>Fri</b>	Jun 18	0:00	Denmark	Belgium	Copenhagen	H 4.45, D 3.4, A 2.08
<b>Fri</b>	Jun 18	3:00	Netherlands	Austria	Amsterdam	H 1.62, D 4.33, A 6.4
<b>Fri</b>	Jun 18	21:00	Sweden	Slovakia	Dublin	H 1.9, D 3.45, A 5.2

ODDSCHECKER.COM

## GROUP STANDINGS

Group A	PL	W	DRAW	L	GF - GA	PNT
Italy	1	1	0	0	3-0	3
Switzerland	1	0	1	0	1-1	1
Wales	1	0	1	0	1-1	1
Turkey	1	0	0	1	0-3	0
Group B	PL	W	DRAW	L	GF - GA	PNT
Belgium	1	1	0	0	3-0	3
Russia	2	1	0	1	1-3	3
Finland	2	1	0	1	1-1	3
Denmark	1	0	0	1	0-1	0
Group C	PL	W	DRAW	L	GF - GA	PNT
Austria	1	1	0	0	3-1	3
Netherlands	1	1	0	0	3-2	3
Ukraine	1	0	0	1	2-3	0
North Macedonia	1	0	0	1	1-3	0
Group D	PL	W	DRAW	L	GF - GA	PNT
Czech Republic	1	1	0	0	2-0	3
England	1	1	0	0	1-0	3
Croatia	1	0	0	1	0-1	0
Scotland	1	0	0	1	0-2	0
Group E	PL	W	DRAW	L	GF - GA	PNT
Slovakia	1	1	0	0	2-1	3
Spain	1	0	1	0	0-0	1
Sweden	1	0	1	0	0-0	1
Poland	1	0	0	1	1-2	0
Group F	PL	W	DRAW	L	GF - GA	PNT
Portugal	1	1	0	0	3-0	3
France	1	1	0	0	1-0	3
Germany	1	0	0	1	0-1	0
Hungary	1	0	0	1	0-3	0

# People hurt by parachuting protestor at Euro 2020 game

**S**EVERAL spectators were treated in the hospital for injuries caused by a protestor who parachuted into the stadium before France played Germany at the European Championship, UEFA said Tuesday.

Debris fell on the field and main grandstand, narrowly missing France coach Didier Deschamps, when the parachutist struck wires for an overhead camera attached to the stadium roof.

The governing body of European soccer called it a "reckless and dangerous" act and said "law authorities will take the necessary action."

"This inconsiderate act [...] caused injuries to several people attending the game who are now in hospital," UEFA said.



The incident happened just before the start of the Euro 2020 match between the last two World Cup champions. Deschamps

was shown ducking into the team dugout to avoid falling debris.

"We as the German soccer federation condemn

it of course, because it wasn't just him, but others that he endangered and injured. It's unacceptable from our point of view," German team spokesman Jens Grittner said. "And the incident is being checked by the police, the authorities here in Munich and at UEFA."

The protestor's parachute had the slogan "KICK OUT OIL!" and "Greenpeace" written on it.

He glided into the stadium and seemed to lose control after connecting with the wires. He veered away from the playing area toward the main grandstand and barely cleared the heads of spectators.

The parachutist managed to land on the field and Germany players Antonio Rüdiger and Robin Gosens were the first to approach him. He was led away by security stewards and given medical attention on the side of the field. **MDT/AP**



OPINION

China Daily  
Editorial, China Daily

G7 WASTES OPPORTUNITY TO HELP OTHERS

The leaders of the G7 wealthy nations pledged during their weekend summit in the United Kingdom to share more than 1 billion COVID-19 vaccines with the world's low-income countries over next year.

But given that "right now, the virus is moving faster than the global vaccine distribution", as Director-General of the World Health Organization Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus put it; and that the WHO estimates 11 billion doses are needed if at least 70 percent of the world's population is to be vaccinated by next year to achieve herd immunity against the virus, the group's pledge seems too little.

Not to mention the fact that the imbalance between the G7 and low-income countries in terms of doses administered stands at 73 to 1, according to the World Bank, accentuating the "moral failure" of the rich countries to stand by the poorer nations amid this global health crisis.

Since COVID-19 started raging across the world, the way the rich countries have dealt with global vaccine distribution has been egregious. Even UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson admitted during the summit that the "selfish and nationalistic approaches" by some countries "had marred the initial global response to the COVID-19 pandemic".

As a result, the world is experiencing astonishing vaccine inequality. Of the 1.3 billion vaccines given around the world, only 1 percent has been administered in Africa. While the G7 nations have secured enough vaccines for every one of their citizens to be vaccinated three times over, according to the WHO.

The United States, which has plentiful doses, has an ever-growing surplus of coronavirus vaccines. Millions of Johnson & Johnson vaccines are reportedly set to expire this month.

Moreover, the WHO is still facing a funding gap of \$16 billion to speed up production and access to COVID-19 diagnostics, treatment and vaccines. That figure represents less than 1 percent of the annual global defense expenditure, yet this issue went unanswered during the G7 Summit.

All this makes it self-evident that the collective step taken by the G7 to address the urgent need of the developing world for vaccine doses is more symbolic than substantial. As former UK prime minister Gordon Brown said, the summit was "a missed opportunity", as more should have been done by the world's most powerful nations in the face of this once-in-a-generation pandemic.

Countries must drop their differences and work together to ensure the global access to vaccines, tests and treatments for everyone who needs them. There will be no way out if the world remains split into vaccine "haves" and "have-nots".



COURTESY CHINA DAILY

CHINA SAYS NUCLEAR FUEL RODS DAMAGED, NO RADIATION LEAK

THE BUZZ

A Chinese nuclear power plant near Hong Kong had five broken fuel rods in a reactor but no radioactivity leaked, the government said yesterday in its first confirmation of the incident that prompted concern over the facility's safety.

Radiation rose inside the No. 1 reactor of the Taishan Nuclear Power Plant in Guangdong province but was contained by barriers that functioned as planned, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment said on its social media account.

The Hong Kong government said it was watching the plant and asking

officials in Guangdong for details after its French co-owner reported increased "noble gases" in the reactor. Experts said that suggested fuel rods broke and leaked radioactive gas produced during nuclear fission.

The protective envelope on about five of the reactor's 60,000 fuel rods is damaged, the ministry said. It said such damage was inevitable due to manufacturing and other problems and was well below the level the facility was designed to cope with.

The ministry said regulators would oversee measures to control radiation levels within the reactor but gave no details.

AP PHOTO



NORTH KOREA

KIM WARNS OF 'TENSE' FOOD SITUATION, LONGER COVID LOCKDOWN

KIM TONG HYUNG, SEOUL

**N**ORTH KOREAN leader Kim Jong Un warned about possible food shortages and urged the country to brace for extended COVID-19 restrictions as he opened a major political conference to discuss national efforts to salvage a broken economy.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency also said yesterday that Kim called for discussions on how the North should deal with the "current international situation," though it did not mention any specific comments from Kim about the United States or South Korea.

North Korea has so far ignored the allies' calls to resume nuclear negotiations that have stalled for two years following the collapse of Kim's ambitious summitry with former President Donald Trump. It was derailed by disagreements over exchanging relief from crippling U.S.-led sanctions with denuclearization steps by the North.

The North's economy has deteriorated amid pandemic border closures, which choked off trade with China, while devastating typhoons and floods last summer decimated crops.

Monitors assessing the situation in North Korea have yet to see signs of

mass starvation or major instability, but some analysts say conditions could be aligning for a perfect storm that undercuts food and exchange markets and triggers public panic. The Korea Development Institute, a South Korean government think tank, said last month the North could face food shortages of around 1 million tons this year.

During the plenary meeting of the ruling Workers' Party's Central Committee that opened Tuesday, Kim urged officials to find ways to boost agricultural production, saying the country's food situation "is now getting tense."

KCNA said Kim also "set forth the tasks for the state to maintain perfect anti-epidemic state" — suggesting North Korea would extend its pandemic lockdown despite the stress on its economy.

While the report was short on specifics, the party meeting does provide more clues about how serious food and consumer goods shortages are becoming in North Korea, said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha University in Seoul.

"Extended pandemic border restrictions are taking a toll on the economy as price and exchange rate indicators appear to be worsening," he said.

Experts widely doubt

North Korea's claim that it has not had a single COVID-19 case, given its poor health infrastructure and porous border with China, its major ally and economic lifeline.

Kim had called for the party meeting to review national efforts to rebuild the economy in the first half of the year. While addressing "unfavorable" conditions and challenges on Tuesday, Kim also expressed appreciation over what he described as improvements, claiming that the country's industrial output rose 25% from last year, KCNA said.

The report said the Central Committee meeting will continue but did not specify until when.

North Korea held its first ruling party congress in five years in January, when it laid out development plans for the next five years. At that meeting Kim urged the country to be resilient in their struggle for economic self-reliance. He also called for reasserting greater state control over the economy, boosting agricultural production and prioritizing the development of the chemical and metal industries.

Experts say those sectors are crucial to revitalizing industrial production that has been undercut by sanctions and the suspension of imports of factory materials amid the pandemic. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



**R**ussian President Vladimir Putin thanked President Joe Biden and expressed wishes for a "productive" meeting as the two kicked off their meeting in Geneva yesterday. Putin told Biden upon first meeting him he was thankful for the gathering as he knew the U.S. president "had a long trip and lots of work." But the Russian president emphasized that there are "lots of questions accumulated in Russia-U.S. relations that require discussion on the highest level."

AP PHOTO



**E**U authorities are moving a step closer to deploying the bloc's massive pandemic recovery fund as the president of the 27-nation bloc's executive commission begins a tour of some EU capitals to announce the initial endorsement of national spending plans. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen arrived yesterday in Portugal, which was the first EU member to formally present ideas for spending its share of the 750 billion euros earmarked to help countries out of a sharp economic downturn caused by Covid-19.

AP PHOTO



**G**reece A 24-hour strike has disrupted transportation and other services as public sector workers walked off the job to protest a new labor law that lawmakers plan to vote yesterday. The strike affected all modes of public transportation, including ferries to and from the Greek islands. Organizers exempted teachers involved in university entrance exams so as not to disrupt the process for students.