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**Hong Kong** authorities ousted an opposition legislator from his seat yesterday after finding him to be insufficiently loyal amid Beijing's tightening grip on the semi-autonomous city. Cheng Chung-tai of the populist Civic Party was disqualified from the legislature after he "failed to fulfil the legal requirements and conditions on upholding the Basic Law and bearing allegiance" to Hong Kong, the government said in a statement.



**Japan** suspended use of about 1.63 million doses of Moderna vaccine yesterday after contamination was found in unused vials, raising concern of a supply shortage as the country tries to accelerate vaccinations amid a Covid-19 surge. The health ministry said contamination was reported from multiple vaccination sites. Some doses might have been administered, but no adverse health effects have been reported so far, officials said.



**Thai** authorities arrested a fifth police officer in connection with the death of a drug dealer who was allegedly killed while being shaken down in custody for cash, but were still searching yesterday for two others, including the suspected ringleader, a police colonel accused of funding a lavish lifestyle through corruption. All five suspects in custody, including a major and a captain, were brought yesterday before a judge who ordered them held without bail on charges of dereliction of duty, torture and murder.

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# GAMES 2025 COMES TO MACAU

Macau, HK, Guangdong to host China's 15th National Games in 4 years

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INTERVIEW WITH JOSÉ CHAN RODRIGUES

## LANGUAGE A BARRIER TO FOREIGNERS MARKETING WITH EMERGING TECH

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## TOURISM ARRIVALS GAIN MOMENTUM WITH EXTENSION OF NAT

P2

# ASSOCIATION: LANGUAGE A BARRIER TO FOREIGNERS MARKETING WITH EMERGING TECHNOLOGY

FOR the time being, marketing using livestreaming is “still quite a Chinese thing,” José Chan Rodrigues, director-general of the Macau Livestreaming Association, admitted in an interview with the Times.

More commonly known as José C.R., and a veteran master of ceremonies in Macau with occasional appearances in mainland China, Rodrigues explained the trend to non-Chinese speakers.

Unlike foreign Internet users who livestream to discuss various topics unrelated to marketing, livestreaming has become a popular trend in mainland China for businesses to market their products and services.

Moreover, according to Rodrigues, the technology is also used to assist in brand-building and promotion of brand image.

Livestream marketing is an ever-present activity on China's own online shopping platform, Taobao, with businesses conducting livestreaming to promote their services and products. They do so either by themselves or by commissioning influencers,



known in China as Key Opinion Leaders.

In China there is even a specific term for this activity. “Dai Huo,” which in Chinese means “bringing goods,” is the term used to describe the use of influencers to encourage consumption and boost sales.

The activity is similar to the practice of hiring icons or enter-

tainers as brand spokespeople to promote products and services, which businesses believe will encourage consumption among fans of these icons or entertainers.

Rodrigues has been commissioned by the Macao Government Tourism Office and Sands China, among other entities, to run livestreaming activities to promote products and services. For exam-

ple, he has appeared in several Macao Weeks to help highlight Macau's tourists' attractions.

However, the trend has not yet gained its weight in the non-Chinese speaking community as in the Chinese-speaking community.

“Language is a prominent factor,” Rodrigues explained on the under-popularity of livestream marketing in the non-Chinese speaking community, especially within the Greater China Region.

With most livestream marketing campaigns conducted on Chinese platforms and in the Chinese language, it can be quite difficult for non-Chinese speakers to understand the activity, let alone emerge into it and be attracted by the contents.

Furthermore, as the livestreamer admitted, the activity “still retains a very Chinese nature” that foreign companies or small retailers may not understand the mode of operation of the activity.

Of course, larger companies that have a localized marketing team are able to operate the activity.

Rodrigues introduced that various platforms have different requirements on livestream marketing. He said Taobao, for example, requires all livestream to include products that are sold on the platform. It means that livestreamers cannot merely promote their shops or brands, which is permitted on some other platforms.

Although not gaining the same popularity in the non-Chinese speaking community, Rodrigues admitted that more foreigner-oriented livestream marketing campaigns are emerging, especially in Hong Kong.

“I believe the lingual diversity in Hong Kong will help the trend develop in the non-Chinese speaking world,” Rodrigues said, adding that these livestreams take place on Facebook and Instagram.

He is also confident that the development of the trend will be swift in the non-English speaking world because, he said, countries with a TV shopping background will easily migrate to online shopping, which relies heavily on livestream marketing. **AL**

## TOURISM ARRIVALS GAIN MOMENTUM FOLLOWING EXTENSION OF NAT

LYNZY VALLES

MACAU recorded over 21,000 tourist arrivals on Wednesday — the highest number of visitors in a single day following the tightening of border measures in early August.

Following the discovery of Delta cases on August 3, the government immediately imposed stricter regulations on border entrants, discouraging tourists in neighboring regions from visiting the city.

Since then, Macau saw a downturn in mainland visitors, as Zhuhai reduced the validity period of nucleic acid tests from 24 hours to 12 hours.

Recently, border



restrictions have been eased, and the validity period for nucleic acid tests for border crossing is again seven days.

In a statement, the Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) said that it has resumed its promotion of Macau to mainland visitors. It is publishing news updates via its of-

ficial accounts on WeChat, Weibo, Xiaohongshu and Douyin, and conducting promotional campaigns which include special travel offers, such as hotel and air ticket coupons.

The city's gross gaming revenue also recovered from August 16 to 22, registering a revenue increase of

55% week-on-week. The GGR dropped as much as 48% for the first week of August when compared with the previous week. The weekly total of 125 million patacas is “the lowest daily GGR since late September last year,” brokerage Sanford C Bernstein Ltd stated.

GBA

## SHENZHEN TO OFFER UP TO RMB5B OFFSHORE BONDS IN HONG KONG

SHENZHEN is set to offer offshore local government bonds of up to RMB5 billion in Hong Kong over the rest of the year, according to an official statement.

The announcement includes detailed arrangements for the dissemination of the bonds, which primarily involves seeking eligible underwriters, lawyers, and financial agents.

As per the statement seen by newsgd.com, underwriters will engage in the offering process wholly, from drawing up plans to finalizing the offers.

Several qualifications are to be met for eligible candidates: legal international financial institutions that own branches in China, which qualify for bond offering in Hong Kong; a wealth of foreign underwriting experience, and underwriting prece-

dents in China after 2019; and professional competence and advantages as well as a willingness to coordinate.

Liu Guohong, director of the Finance and Modern Industry Department in the China Development Institute, believes the rationale behind the offer is that lower offshore interest rates can help relieve debt repayment pressures for local governments.

More importantly, diverse overseas tenders are expected to boost the RMB's international popularity, encouraging greater use of the currency in trade and easing exchange rate controls.

Other professionals also mentioned that offshore offers are injecting greater liquidity and lowering risk for the local debt market, and can reflect regional differences in repayment capacity and credit rating. **MDT**

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# Guangdong, SARs to organize 2025 National Games

ANTHONY LAM

**T**HREE administrative regions of China — Guangdong province and the Special Administrative Regions of Macau and Hong Kong — will co-organize the National Games in 2025, it was announced on the country's government portal.

The proposal was approved by the State Council. It will be the first time for both Hong Kong and Macau to host the Games.

The finances of the Games will rely on the three administrative bodies, on top of a one-off financial subsidy from the central government.

The General Administration of Sport of China and the three governments are required to comply with the directives of the Communist Party of China and the State Council to hold a Games of "simplicity, safety and brilliance," with consideration of the social and economic status of each territory.

The central government also requires that existing venues be

XINHUA



fully utilized and budgets rigorously monitored to better control the costs, standards and scale of the Games. Pandemic control is also a topic of concern.

In response to the announcement, the Macau government issued a statement to express happiness.

"The decision of allowing Macau

to participate in the organization of the mega comprehensive sporting event, which has the highest status and largest scale across the country, invigorates local residents and

athletes," the local government stated.

It disclosed that the idea began with the Guangdong government inviting both SARs to discuss the possibility of co-organizing the 2025 National Games. After extensive study and discussion, the three governments decided that there would be sufficiently strong conditions to co-organize the event.

According to the statement, the local government expects that, by co-organizing the Games, progress will be made in the development of sport among the three territories, which will eventually align with the country's overall development.

With the full title of the National Games of China, the countrywide event debuted in 1959. It takes place every four years in different provincial-level administrative bodies across the mainland.

The country's capital of Beijing has organized the greatest number of Games, held five times in 1959, 1965, 1975, 1979 and 1993.

This is the third time Guangdong is organizing the Games, following previous efforts in 1987 and 2001.

An upcoming Games will open on September 15 this year in Shaanxi Province with 34 sports running, amounting to 387 events.

AD

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RENATO MARQUES



COVID-19

## GOV'T PRESENTS DETAILED PLAN FOR FUTURE MASS TESTING

RENATO MARQUES

**T**he health authorities yesterday presented their detailed plan for a potential second round of mass nucleic acid testing (NAT) of the whole population of Macau.

The plan was unveiled by the director of the Health Bureau (SSM), Alvis Lo, during yesterday's press briefing on the Covid-19 situation in Macau.

According to Lo, the plan resulted from analysis of the results obtained from the first mass testing held earlier this month and took into account both the opinions collected by different government departments involved, and feedback from the population.

"We have held several meetings and [have] already acknowledged what [work] we did not do well, as well as [having] collected the opinions of the different sectors and the citizens," Lo said.

Although the plan incorporates improvements in five different areas, the one that Lo highlighted as the primary focus concerns the long waits and agglomerations of people queuing up for the test sampling.

To avoid a repeat of that scenario, the director said that for future mass testing there will be a stricter system of NAT scheduling which must be followed by citizens. There will also be a

higher number of NAT sampling collection posts and an increased number of collection booths per post. These are among other measures aimed at facilitating access and flow for citizens to undertake the test, including those that have mobility issues or difficulties booking the test.

### MORE POSTS, BOOTHS AND ADDED ACCESSIBILITIES

Among the most significant changes to be made is the addition of 10 new sample collection posts to the previous 42.

### The primary focus concerns the long waits and agglomerations of people queuing up for the test sampling

The number of collection booths covered by the 52 posts will also grow from the previous 269 to 367, including those from the 10 new posts and additional booths at all of the other 42 posts.

"For people with special needs we will have 10 posts that will have special corridors [to fast track these people] and we will also have seven posts that will be solely dedicated to caring for people with special needs," Lo said, adding, "For people with the need to cross

the border, we will have 14 posts where they can have the test done, at their own cost."

Previously, there were only four of these paid posts.

According to the official, the booking system will also allow people to see the waiting time at each post and how many people are currently waiting.

Lo also clarified that, in case people need to cross the border, they must choose one of the 14 posts that offer the service of uploading the test result to the health code. Otherwise, "for the general public they will not receive the results of the test. It won't appear in their health code anymore, as happened on the first time," Lo said. He explained, in response to media questions, that in the case of a positive test, the health authorities will

contact that person directly to perform another test, this time at the Conde de São Januário Hospital Center.

### MASS TESTING TASK FORCE

Another change that will result from the increase of posts and sample collection booths is the need for more human resources to handle testing.

For that purpose, the health authorities will operate with a "mass testing task force" that includes approximately 6,000 staff members involved in the first

mass testing, and an additional 2,650 people recruited among health professionals and other volunteers.

"We have recruited around 650 physicians and other health professionals, as well as 2,000 volunteers, to participate [from the mass testing tasks]," Lo said, adding that such a task force for the NAT will include five sub-groups allotted to different tasks.

Lo has said that physicians and other health care staff from the private sector will be collaborating for these tasks, along with dentists, therapists, and even Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioners.

A significant part of the group of volunteers will be people linked to the education sector, remarked the Education and Youth Development Bureau deputy director, Kong Chi Meng.

He explained that these people will mostly be performing

tasks connected with registration, personal data checking, and other administrative tasks needed to hasten the process.

The goal of health authorities is for the process to be completed in a maximum of three days, and that each person need not wait more than 30 minutes to complete the full testing.

### BACKUP AND CLOUD SYSTEM TO PREVENT FAILURES

Another improvement made is the use of a new backup system for online booking of the NAT, along with a backup for the health code also to be lodged in the cloud.

According to Lo, the idea is to prevent any failures due to high traffic or other network problems, claiming that, in the case of a failure of the main system, the government can guarantee that a swap to the backup system can happen in just 15 minutes.

The police authorities will also help providing accurate data in real-time on the status of the collection posts with more people waiting, and as such the forecast waiting time for each post, in order to help citizens make the best choice in the moment.

## FAMILY INFECTED WITH DELTA VARIANT RECOVERING WELL

**DURING** yesterday's press briefing from the local health authorities on the Covid-19 situation in Macau, the coordinator of the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center Dr. Leong Iek Hou announced that the local family of four infected with the Delta variant of Covid-19 are recovering well. Having undergone treatment, they have now been

moved to the Public Health Clinical Center in Coloane, where they will complete the final stage of their recovery.

The family has been in isolated treatment since August 3, when they were identified as infected. The case prompted the decision to conduct mass testing for the whole population.

ELECTIONS 2021

# CAEAL cordons off Tap Seac Square for campaign launch

**A**S the campaign period starts tomorrow, authorities have cordoned off Tap Seac Square for traffic flow control.

In previous elections, all candidate lists would kick off their campaign at the Square as the clock ticked midnight. The Legislative Assembly Electoral Affairs Commission (CAEAL) has announced that this year, there will be no mass campaign commencement event.

However, Tap Seac Square was placed under a lockdown yesterday afternoon.

The authorities – it is still unclear whether the Public Security Police Force or the CAEAL – have set up mobile fences in front of the venue, surrounding the poster board for campaign materials.

Two openings will be set up near the current Central Library and the future Central Library.

The CAEAL announced that, due to concerns about the pandemic and the possible risks caused by gathering crowds, certain areas on the Square will be opened with li-



imited access only. Only journalists, election workers and a maximum of 10 representatives from each list will be admitted to the special area during the last hour of the day.

They will all have their body temperatures tested and health codes checked, and will be required to wear a face mask throughout the event.

Despite the restrictions on the number of candidate list personnel, the CAEAL stressed that no similar restrictions will be placed on journalists. However, it reminds news outlets to assign “an appropriate number” of journalists due to health concerns. **AL**

## BALANCE OF PAYMENTS AT SURPLUS OF USD2.66B IN 2020

**M**ACAU'S overall balance of payments (BOP) in 2020 preliminarily recorded a surplus of MOP21.3 billion, the SAR's monetary watchdog has announced.

The Monetary Authority of Macao (AMCM) said in its latest report that the current account surplus amounted to MOP23.7 billion, and financial non-reserve assets showed a net increase of MOP31.9 billion.

The BOP — which is comprised of the current account, the capital account and the financial account — is a statistical statement that summarizes the external transactions of an economy with the rest of the world.

In Macau, exports of goods increased by 129.3% year-on-year, while imports of goods rose marginally by 0.1%. As a result, the merchandise trade deficit narrowed from MOP84.0 billion in 2019 to MOP64.6 billion.

Service exports fell by 75.3%, mainly attributable

to falling exports of travel services affected by Covid-19, while service imports also dropped by 36.3%.

Therefore, the services account surplus fell from MOP310.0 billion in 2019 to MOP60.4 billion in 2020.

The primary income account, which reflects cross-border flows of factor income, recorded a net inflow of MOP40.1 billion last year. The secondary income account, which covers current transfers between Macau residents and non-residents, recorded a net outflow of MOP12.2 billion in 2020.

Financial non-reserve assets registered a net outflow of MOP31.9 billion in 2020, representing a decrease of MOP46.9 billion compared to the net outflow in 2019.

Reserve assets in the financial account (after price, exchange rate and other adjustments) rose by MOP21.3 billion compared to an increase of MOP12.1 billion in 2019, reflecting that the overall BOP remained in surplus. **MDT**

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# CPC releases key publication on its mission, contributions

**T**HE Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee yesterday released a key publication on the party's mission and contributions.

The document, titled "The CPC: Its Mission and Contributions," stressed that over the past hundred years, all the struggles, sacrifices and efforts made by the CPC and by the Chinese people under its leadership have been directed to one goal - the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

It added that "achieving national rejuvenation is the historic mission of the CPC," and the party "has made an unbreakable commitment to bring the people a happy life."

It also pointed out that the CPC is dedicated to the people and forever puts their interests first. It said the CPC follows the underlying trends of social development and respects the people's principal role in making history.

The CPC pursues the lofty goal of working for the wellbeing of the Chinese people, and it does everything in the interests of the people, the document said.

The document said that Mar-



xism is the single guiding ideology, the very soul of the CPC, and the banner under which it strives.

According to the document, in order to achieve independence, development, and prosperity, the CPC must have robust and decisive leadership.

"It is the CPC's solidarity and

unity, its firm leadership, and its strong governance capability that have rallied and united hundreds of millions of the Chinese people and overcome a multitude of difficulties and crises," it said.

Also, the document said the CPC has always been able to maintain vigor and vitality and

stand at the forefront of the times despite the many hardships it has endured in the past hundred years.

This is because the Communist Party has constantly engaged in significant self-reform while leading the people in a great social revolution. To maintain its health

and vigor, the CPC exercises effective self-supervision, practices strict self-discipline in every respect, consistently pursues improvement, and advances with the times, the document said.

Moreover, it stressed that the CPC is a political party that seeks happiness for the people and progress for humanity. The CPC has always pursued the shared human values of peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy and freedom. It has championed internationalism, stood on the right side of history and the progressive side of humanity, and contributed to world peace and development.

At a press conference yesterday, Wang Xiaohui, deputy head of the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, said the document expounds the idea, practices and achievements of the CPC's governance in China, shedding light on the issue about where the CPC comes from and where it is heading.

The document, which includes a preamble, a conclusion and five chapters, gives the answer about what kind of political party the CPC is, Wang said.

Upholding the banner of socialism and adhering to the road of peaceful development, the CPC will deepen exchanges with political parties from all over the world, promote cooperation among countries to seek common development, and make constructive efforts in building a better world, he added. XINHUA

## COVID-19

# Experts on WHO team say search for virus origins has stalled

**T**HE international scientists dispatched to China by the World Health Organization to find out where the coronavirus came from said yesterday [Macau time] the search has stalled and warned that the window of opportunity for solving the mystery is "closing fast."

Meanwhile, a U.S. intelligence review ordered up by President Joe Biden proved inconclusive about the virus's origin, including whether it jumped from an animal to a human or escaped from a Chinese lab, The Washington Post reported Wednesday.

In a commentary published in the journal Nature, the WHO-recruited experts said the origins investigation is at "a critical juncture" requiring urgent collaboration but has instead come to a standstill. They noted among other things that Chinese officials are still reluctant to share some raw data, citing concerns over

patient confidentiality.

Earlier this year, WHO sent a team of experts to Wuhan, where the first human COVID-19 cases were detected in December 2019, to probe what might have triggered the pandemic now blamed for nearly 4.5 million deaths worldwide, with more than 10,000 people a day succumbing despite more than 5 billion doses of vaccine administered.

In their analysis, published in March, the WHO team concluded the virus probably jumped to humans from animals, and they described the possibility of a laboratory leak as "extremely unlikely."

But the WHO experts said their report was intended only as a first step and added, "The window of opportunity for conducting this crucial inquiry is closing fast: any delay will render some of the studies biologically impossible."

For example, they said,

"Antibodies wane, so collecting further samples and testing people who might have been exposed before December 2019 will yield diminishing returns."

China said Wednesday that officials should "concentrate on other possible avenues that may help trace the origin" of COVID-19 and suggested studies should be pursued in other countries.

Fu Cong, a director-general in China's Foreign Ministry, agreed it is a "pity" the search for COVID-19's origins has stalled but said it wasn't China's fault. "China has always supported and will continue to participate in the science-based origin tracing efforts," he said.

He accused the U.S. of "hyping the lab leak theory" and trying to shift the blame onto China, and implied the coronavirus might be linked to high-level American research labs, suggesting the United States invite



Security personnel clear the way for a convoy of WHO team to enter the Huanan Seafood Market during the field visit in Wuhan, last January

WHO to investigate some of its installations.

Marion Koopmans and her WHO-recruited colleagues listed a number of priorities for further research, including conducting wider antibody surveys that might identify places where COVID-19 was spreading undetected, both in China and beyond, testing wild bats and farm-raised animals as potential reservoirs of the virus, and investigating any credible new leads.

Some other scientists fear the best opportunities to collect samples might have been missed during the first few weeks after some of the earliest human cases appeared linked to a Wuhan seafood market.

Chinese researchers collected hundreds of environmental samples immediately after the coronavirus was found, but it is unclear how many people or animals were tested.

"Once you have wildli-

fe traders shifting over to other kinds of employment because they're worried about whether they'll be able to do this anymore, that window starts to close," said Maciej Boni, a Pennsylvania State University biology professor who has studied virus origins and was not part of the WHO team.

Still, Boni said scientists might be able to pinpoint COVID-19's animal source by hunting for closely related viruses in species like raccoon dogs, mink or ground squirrels. But he said it could take about five years to do the kind of extensive studies necessary.

The search for COVID-19's origins has become a bitter source of dispute between the U.S. and China, with increasing numbers of American experts calling for the two Wuhan laboratories close to the seafood market to be investigated, something China has flatly rejected and branded "scapegoating." MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



VIETNAM

# Harris says she urged Hanoi to free political dissidents

ALEXANDRA JAFFE,  
HANOI

U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris said she raised issues of human rights abuses and restrictions on political activism in her conversations with Vietnamese leaders this week, but offered no indication those talks bore fruit.

"We're not going to shy away from difficult conversations. Difficult conversations often must be had with the people that you otherwise may have a partnership with," she said at a news conference in Hanoi yesterday.

Harris said she spoke with Vietnamese leaders in particular about the release of political dissidents, but did not describe the outcome of those conversations. Vietnam has faced criticism for restrictions on freedom of expression and the press and a crackdown on people it deems political dissidents. But Harris didn't respond when asked why the U.S. criticizes China for similar abuses, but is seeking a stronger partnership with Vietnam.

Her comments capped a weeklong trip to Southeast Asia during which

she met with top officials in Singapore and Vietnam in a bid to strengthen U.S. engagement in the region to counter Chinese influence there. Harris unveiled a number of new U.S. agreements and aid for both countries in areas including cyberdefense cooperation with Saigon and coronavirus aid to Vietnam, which is struggling with a new surge in the virus and low vaccination rates.

But yesterday, she turned her attention to issues surrounding civil liberties and human rights in Vietnam. Harris participated in what her team billed as a "changemakers" event with activists working on LGBTQ rights and climate change.

"It is critical that if we are to take on the challenges we face that we do it in a way that is collaborative, that we must empower leaders in every sector, including of course government but community leaders, business leaders, civic society, if we are to maximize the resources we collectively have," she said.

In her news conference, Harris also fielded questions on the chaotic U.S. exit from Afghanistan, but did not respond directly

when asked how the U.S. would evaluate success in the evacuation mission.

At a time when U.S. officials have warned of possible terrorist threats against Americans attempting to leave the country through Kabul's airport, Harris also ignored a question on whether Americans are safer now that the U.S. has departed the country.

While Harris has emphasized that her visit to Southeast Asia is intended to foster a positive relationship with countries in the region and expand U.S. cooperation and involvement, she also ramped up Biden administration rhetoric toward China, issuing repeated warnings to Beijing to end its aggression in the disputed South China Sea.

"We need to find ways to pressure and raise the pressure, frankly, on Beijing to abide by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and to challenge its bullying and excessive maritime claims," she said Wednesday.

Harris avoided the unscripted gaffes that overshadowed her first foreign trip, to Guatemala and Mexico in the spring, where her declaration to migrants — "do not come"

— and her flip dismissal of questions about her refusal to visit the border drew criticism from both Republicans and Democrats. Harris took questions from reporters at multiple points that trip, and sat for an extended cable news interview.

In turn, Beijing responded to Harris accusing the U.S. of merely defend 'the hegemony and their interests' in the South China Sea.

In Asia, Harris stayed focused on her meetings with officials and Biden administration talking points on China. While questions surrounding the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan dominated her first day in Singapore, Harris emphasized the same message delivered by President Joe Biden and his aides — that the U.S. must remain focused on the evacuations, and not recriminations about what went wrong.

On her trip home, Harris will stop at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Hawaii to meet with servicemembers. Then she'll turn her focus to U.S. politics at an event in the San Francisco area for California Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, who is facing a recall attempt. MDT/AP

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## GREAT TIMES

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AFGHANISTAN

# US says up to 1,500 Americans await airlift as threats grow

ROBERT BURNS,  
WASHINGTON

**S**ECRETARY of State Antony Blinken said as many as 1,500 Americans may be awaiting evacuation from Afghanistan, a figure that suggests the U.S. may accomplish its highest priority for the Kabul airlift — rescuing U.S. citizens — ahead of President Joe Biden's Tuesday deadline despite growing warnings yesterday of terror threats targeting the airport.

Untold thousands of at-risk Afghans, however, were still struggling to get into the Kabul airport, even many thousands of other Afghans already had been flown to safety in nearly two weeks of round-the-clock flights.

Several of the Americans working phones and pulling strings to get out former Afghan colleagues, women's advocates, journalists and other vulnerable Afghans said they were still waiting for U.S. action to get those remaining Afghans past Taliban checkpoints and through U.S.-controlled airport gates to promised evacuation flights.

"It's 100% up to the Afghans to take these risks and try to fight their way out," said Sunil Varghese, policy director with the In-

ternational Refugee Assistance Project.

Blinken, echoing Biden's earlier declarations during the now 12-day-old evacuation, emphasized at a State Department briefing that "evacuating Americans is our top priority."

He added, "We're also committed to getting out as many Afghans at-risk as we can before the 31st," when Biden plans to pull out the last of thousands of American troops.

As more nations began shutting down their own evacuation flights and pulling out ahead of the United States' troop withdrawal, there were new European warnings of terror threats. British Armed Forces Minister James Heappey told the BBC yesterday there was "very, very credible reporting of an imminent attack" at the airport, possibly within "hours."

On Wednesday, the U.S. Embassy in Kabul issued a security alert warning American citizens away from three specific airport gates, but gave no further explanation. Senior U.S. officials said the warning was related to ongoing and specific threats involving the Islamic State and potential vehicle bombs, which have set U.S. officials on edge in the final days of the American drawdown. The officials insisted

on anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss ongoing military operations.

Blinken said the State Department estimates there were about 6,000 Americans wanting to leave Afghanistan when the airlift began Aug. 14, as the Taliban took the capital after a stunning military conquest. About 4,500 Americans have been evacuated so far, Blinken said, and among the rest "some are understandably very scared."

The 6,000 figure is the first firm estimate by the State Department of how many Americans were seeking to get out. U.S. officials early in the evacuation estimated as many as 15,000, including dual citizens, lived in Afghanistan. The figure does not include U.S. Green Card holders.

About 500 Americans have been contacted with instructions on when and how to get to the chaotic Kabul airport to catch evacuation flights.

In addition, 1,000 or perhaps fewer are being contacted to determine whether they still want to leave. Blinken said some of these may already have left the country, some may want to remain and some may not actually be American citizens.

"We are providing oppor-

tunity," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said of those Afghans, who include dual Afghan-American citizens. "We are finding ways to get them to the airport and evacuate them, but it is also their personal decision on whether they want to depart."

On a lighter note, the U.S. military said an Afghan baby girl born on a C-17 military aircraft during the massive evacuation will carry that experience with her. Her parents named her after the plane's call sign: Reach.

She was born Saturday, and members of the 86th Medical Group helped in her birth aboard the plane that had taken the family from Kabul to Ramstein Air Base in Germany.

Two other babies whose parents were evacuating from Afghanistan have been born over the past week at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, the U.S. military hospital in Germany.

In Washington, Blinken emphasized that the U.S. and other governments plan to continue assisting Afghans and Americans who want to leave after next Tuesday, the deadline for Biden's planned end to the evacuation and the two-decade U.S. military role in Afghanistan.

Biden has cited what he U.S. says are rising security threats to U.S. forces, including from an affiliate of the Islamic State terror group, for his determination to stick with Tuesday's withdrawal deadline.

The U.S. Embassy has already been evacuated; staff are operating from the Kabul airport and the last are to leave by Tuesday.

Biden said this week he had asked his national security team for contingency plans in case he decides to extend the deadline. Taliban leaders who took control of Afghanistan this month say they will not tolerate any extensions to the Tuesday deadline. But Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen tweeted that "people with legal documents" will still be able to fly out via commercial flights after Tuesday.

U.S. troops are anchoring a multinational evacuation from the airport. The White House says the airlift overall has flown out 82,300 Afghans, Americans and others on a mix of U.S., international and private flights.

The withdrawal comes under a 2020 deal negotiated by President Donald Trump with the Taliban. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1979 IRA BOMB KILLS LORD MOUNTBATTEN



The Queen's cousin, Lord Louis Mountbatten, has been killed by a bomb blast on his boat in Ireland.

One of the earl's twin grandsons, Nicholas, 14, and Paul Maxwell, 15, a local employed as a boat boy, also died in the explosion.

The attack was followed only hours later by the massacre of 18 soldiers, killed in two booby-trap bomb explosions near Warrenpoint close to the border with the Irish Republic.

The IRA has already admitted carrying out the attack on Lord Mountbatten.

A statement from the organisation said: "This operation is one of the discriminate ways we can bring to the attention of the English people the continuing occupation of our country."

Lord Mountbatten, aged 79, and his family had traditionally spent their summer holiday at their castle in County Sligo, north west of Ireland.

They were aboard his boat, Shadow V, which had just set off from the fishing village of Mullaghmore, when the bomb detonated around 1130 BST.

A witness said the blast blew the boat "to smithereens" and hurled all seven occupants into the water.

Nearby fishermen raced to the rescue and pulled Lord Mountbatten out of the water.

But his legs had been almost severed by the explosion and he died shortly afterwards.

Other survivors were pulled out of the water and rushed to hospital.

At least one person is believed to be in a critical condition.

The attack has called into question the security arrangements surrounding the Mountbatten party. Lord Mountbatten never had a bodyguard.

The local police kept watch on Classiebawn castle for the one month a year Lord Mountbatten spent there.

But his boat was left unguarded in the public dock in Mullaghmore where it was moored.

The village is only 12 miles from the Northern Ireland border and near an area known to be used by IRA members as a refuge.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

Another passenger on the boat, the Dowager Lady Bra-bourne, 82, died the day after the attack. Lord Mountbatten was given a state funeral. Six of the soldiers who died at Warrenpoint were buried the same day in local churches. Thomas McMahan, 31, was convicted of the three murders. He had been detained in the area by police on suspicion of driving a stolen car two hours before the bomb went off. McMahan was set free in 1998 under the Good Friday Agreement.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

**ARIES**  
Mar. 21-Apr. 19  
You're capable of doing it all today. The moon roams through steady Taurus today, helping you hone in on your untapped talents so you can take a closer look at the current state of your finances.

**TAURUS**  
Apr. 20-May. 20  
Today's skies work to help you come out of your withdrawn headspace. The moon floats through your sign, illuminating any personal tender spots within that need for greater care and attention.

**GEMINI**  
May. 21-Jun. 21  
Your quiet twin is clamoring for attention today, Gemini. The moon's presence in peace-seeking Taurus today signals the time of the month where you habitually pull away and recharge.

**CANCER**  
Jun. 22-Jul. 22  
As a Cancer, you endlessly dote on the loved ones in your life. Today's skies find you needing that same love returned back to you, as the moon cruises through down-to-earth Taurus.

**LEO**  
Jul. 23-Aug. 22  
You're at the top of your game right now, Leo. Even if you feel like you're just again finding your footing, today's skies encourage you to push ahead with career projects.

**VIRGO**  
Aug. 23-Sep. 22  
As a Virgo, it's critical for you to break away from energy consuming mental patterns. Friday's skies help you do just that, as the moon moves forward into peace-seeking Taurus.

**LIBRA**  
Sep. 23-Oct. 22  
Today's skies encourage you to return to your feelings and honor them with a therapeutic approach to release, as the moon floats through peace-restoring Taurus.

**SCORPIO**  
Oct. 23-Nov. 21  
You can't help but tune into that story and notice any imbalances that need correcting, as the moon roams through your opposite sign of simplicity-seeking Taurus.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Nov. 22-Dec. 21  
Even if its nearly the weekend, you're ready to put in the work today. Luna slides through steady Taurus, sending your attention towards incomplete workloads and looming to-do lists.

**CAPRICORN**  
Dec. 22-Jan. 19  
You're ready to return to your sense of joy today, Capricorn. The moon's presence in sensual Taurus increases your appetite for pleasure, play, and stage time with your own talents.

**AQUARIUS**  
Jan. 20-Feb. 18  
Luna's presence in earthy Taurus directs your focus towards your roots and family connections, and her easy connection with the sun allows for intimate moments and healing conversations.

**PISCES**  
Feb. 19-Mar. 20  
The moon's presence in peace-seeking Taurus pushes you to get expressive- think journaling, long phone calls, or even singing in the shower. Aim to get your message out however feels best.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

**EASY**

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

**EASY+**

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

**MEDIUM**

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	6			8	5
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**HARD**

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6	4				
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	5	3			2
			4	7	3
1					

**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	19	29	fine
Harbin	17	24	cloudy
Tianjin	23	31	overcast
Urumqi	19	26	cloudy
Xi'an	19	23	rain
Lhasa	22	28	fine
Chengdu	26	34	cloudy
Chongqing	26	33	thunderstorms
Kunming	26	33	cloudy
Nanjing	19	26	showers
Shanghai	25	34	cloudy
Wuhan	25	34	overcast
Hangzhou	17	24	thunderstorms
Taipei	22	25	rain
Guangzhou	12	24	cloudy
Hong Kong	21	27	cloudy
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	13	23	overcast
Frankfurt	12	18	rain
Paris	13	21	overcast
London	12	20	overcast
New York	23	32	overcast

**CROSSWORDS**

**ACROSS** 1- Kachina doll maker; 5- Single things; 10- Solemn assent; 14- Son of \_\_\_; 15- Bicycle part; 16- Knowledge; 17- "Alice" diner; 18- Saline; 19- Chew on; 20- Mythical moon-dwellers; 22- Sumptuous meal; 23- Fish and chips fish; 24- Hold up; 25- Person who makes wine; 29- Gaily; 33- Busy; 34- Woeful word; 36- Operatic solo; 37- Letters on a Cardinal's cap; 38- Kick out; 39- Part of ETA; 40- Blab; 42- Sly look; 43- The devil; 45- Collection of weaponry; 47- Eccentricity; 49- Firearm; 50- If I \_\_\_ a Hammer; 51- It's a wrap; 54- Secession; 60- Seed cover; 61- \_\_\_ is human...; 62- Emperor of Rome 54-68; 63- Meat dish; 64- Late bedtime; 65- Very small; 66- New Orleans is The Big \_\_\_; 67- 4th letter of the Greek alphabet; 68- Switch back?;

**DOWN:** 1- Poor actors; 2- Double curve; 3- Haul; 4- Six legged creatures; 5- Upward trend; 6- Tidy, without fault; 7- Goofing off; 8- Makes lace; 9- Cunning; 10- Branch of mathematics; 11- \_\_\_ Lisa; 12- Historical periods; 13- Salamander; 21- Not one; 22- In favor of; 24- Observe the Sabbath; 25- Prospect; 26- \_\_\_ alia; 27- Negates; 28- "Bolero" composer; 29- PC shortcut; 30- Fuming; 31- Turkish money; 32- Threads; 35- Fairway position; 38- Dash; 41- According to law; 43- Minn. neighbor; 44- Moderately slow, musically; 46- Church lady; 48- Teaching of the Buddha; 51- Rescue; 52- Disaster \_\_\_; 53- Narrow inlets; 54- Tibia, e.g.; 55- Spool; 56- Quod \_\_\_ demonstrandum; 57- Small dam; 58- Florence's river; 59- It's used to walk the dog; 61- Director Browning;


**Yesterday's solution**

L	I	B	R	A	L	E	S	E	B	E	T	S
A	N	E	E	D	E	T	T	A	A	L	E	E
R	O	S	S	I	A	T	A	T	U	S	E	R
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G	U	T										
C	A	A	N									
A	I	D										
P	R	O	F	E	S	S	I	O	N	A	L	I
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C	O	E	N									
O	M	N	I									
N	E	S	T									

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**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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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

MARK KENNEDY, MDT/AP

DRIVE IN

# 'THE PROTEGE' IS A SLEEK AND DERIVATIVE DIVERSION

MAGGIE Q should really be the star of "The Protege." She's in virtually every scene, whether covered in blood or couture. But top billing for this thriller goes to Michael Keaton, who saunters in by the 22-minute mark. What does a girl have to do?

Q fans will just probably be grateful that she manages to make it to the last scene of the film alive, given all the shooting, explosions, knives and torture in "The Protege," a sleek derivative diversion.

She plays Anna, an orphan adopted by a very wealthy veteran assassin — played by Samuel L. Jackson — and is molded into an elite assassin herself. In her spare time, she runs a rare book shop in London, as most elite assassins do.

One day, Keaton's character stops by. He's a rival elite assassin who can quote obscure Edgar Allan Poe poems by heart as well as recognize a great pair of Manolo Blahnik pumps. Like her, he can ID a gun's brand simply by hearing it cocked. "I find you interesting," he tells her. Audience members may perk up at this moment: This IS interesting.

The reemergence of a decades-old assassination then triggers the plot into overdrive, taking us from London to Da Nang, Viet-



Maggie Q and Michael Keaton in a scene from "The Protégé"

nam. Someone is murdering everyone that Q's Anna holds dear. Somehow she holds it together. After all, there's no crying in assassin movies.

It's at this point that the film wants too much, stretched between a blood-soaked, martial arts-and-gunplay revenge flick and a dance between would-be

lovers. It is "Mr. & Mrs. Smith" mashed with "La Femme Nikita," which is funny because a CW series version of "La Femme Nikita" starred Q from 2010-13.

"I'm going to find out who killed my friends," Anna declares. "I'm going to end their life and anyone standing in my way." The filmmakers are very ver-

sed in cool, chic professional-led violence. It is written by Richard Wenk ("The Equalizer" film franchise) and directed by Martin Campbell ("Casino Royale").

Q has some lines that slay, like when she's bleeding badly and told she doesn't look so good. "Oh, I don't know. Nothing an apple martini and a liter of AB+

won't fix." Or, in a testy showdown with a rival: "Let's hope this doesn't get messy. These are my favorite shoes."

But so many cliches abound. Do all baddies have to drive shiny black Range Rovers and wear thick gold necklaces over their turtlenecks? Do all mob bosses have to swim in an luxurious indoor pool surrounded by frescos while opera plays? Are evil security details so dumb that they use drones and helicopters but can be tricked by a simple haircut?

At the film's center is Q but there is a hollowness there.

Keaton adds a delightfully unstable, wry humor and electricity — "I could put two in the back of your head and go make a sandwich," he boasts to Anna — and Jackson is Jackson, spewing truth bombs and jokes, threatening to steal the film away from both of them.

All this climaxes in a series of clumsy attempts to end the movie, finally doing so with a clunky final scene that's either bad film editing or writing. It's like something that Keaton's character says earlier to Anna: "I'm not gonna lie to you: There's not much chance this ends well for you." He's right.

"The Protege," a Lionsgate release, is rated R for strong and bloody violence, language, some sexual references and brief nudity. Running time: 109 minutes. ★★☆☆

AD

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TASTE OF EDESIA

# A perfect summer staycation

IRENE SAM, MDT

FOR those who are eager to plan a staycation in Macau this summer or want to recommend a hotel to friends from the mainland, **Mandarin Oriental, Macau** would be a great choice. Many of us who have been there all love its location at the waterfront with stunning views towards Nam Van Lake, the Macau Tower and the South China Sea. For city dwellers, it is a true respite.

The non-gaming lakeside urban retreat has one of the best spas and food and beverage outlets in town. A lazy individual who does not want to go anywhere during their staycation can just stay at the hotel and eat at their all-day dining restaurant highlighting Chinese and contemporary western cuisine. After enjoying dishes such as Wagyu tenderloin and Alaskan black cod, one could head to Vida Rica Bar for award-winning handcrafted cocktails.

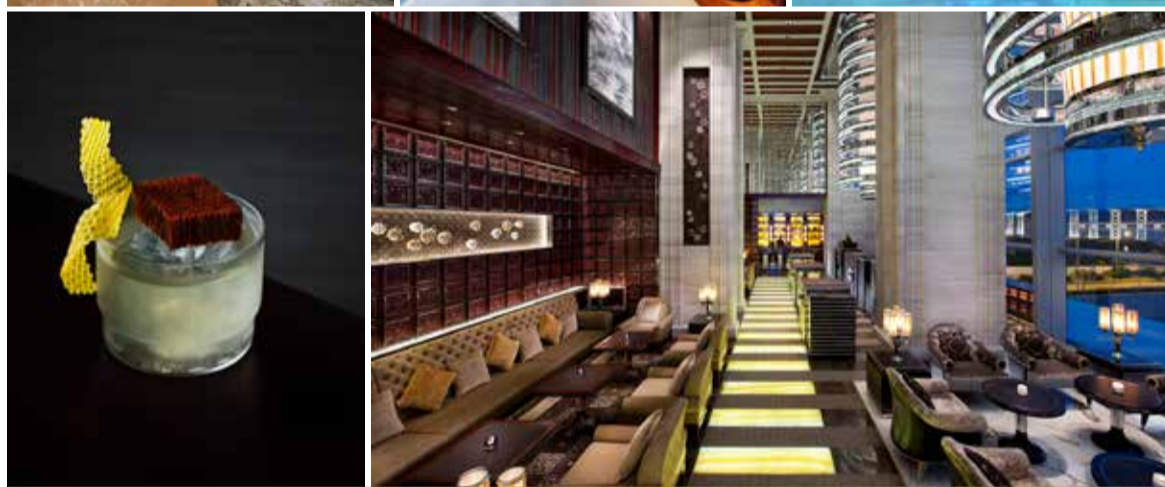
A true masterpiece of design, Vida Rica Bar has been listed amongst the world's best bars in the "Asia's 50 Best Discovery" list. "50 Best Discovery" is the leading platform for gastronomic enthusiasts and an extension of the annual "Asia's 50 Best" ranking of bars. The venues featured on "50 Best Discovery" received

votes from the industry leading panellist of "Asia's 50 Best Bars". It is the very first time that Vida Rica Bar made it onto the coveted list. A bar that is famously known for its artisanal cocktails and spectacular Macau sunsets, the menu highlights concoctions inspired by a cinemathèque theme, in collaboration with local movie producers and the Macau arthouse cinema.

For guests who are craving for South East Asian delights such as laksa and Hainanese chicken rice, signature afternoon tea and healthy bites, Lobby Lounge is Macau's living room and the place to be seen. For dessert aficionados, The Mandarin Cake Shop showcases freshly made cakes with whimsical designs and delicious flavours.

A tranquil and relaxing staycation would not be complete without a visit to the spa at Mandarin Oriental, Macau, which has four individual treatment rooms, three couple suites and the exclusive Oriental Spa suite, where one can surrender the body and mind to a journey of serenity.

Meanwhile, the pool deck provides a fully equipped fitness and wellness centre as well as an outdoor temperature-controlled swimming pool. With unparalleled waterfront views, it is perfect for yoga and mediation sessions.



## Macau Racing Tips

By Davy Chiu, MDT



### MACAU GOLD CUP (TRIPLE CROWN -3RD LEG) 1800 METRES TURF

2021-08-29 | Sun | 18:00

THIS race is the highlight feature of the closing down of the 2020/2021 racing MJC season. I do wish I could bring you a winner before the current season end this Sunday. The Macau Gold Cup is a race that every horse owner, trainer and jockey want to win. Looking at the race card it should be a very straight forward race between the two MJC highest rating horses; **Star of Yiu Cheung** and **Sacred Capital** in equal weight terms. I am more inclined to the winning chance of Star of Yiu Cheung because of his barrier draw in gate 7, and Sacred Capital which drawn wide in gate 10. Both horses are in good form and has good track works back up for the race. Why don't we do a quinella and a place quinella with our usual each way bet on Star of Yiu Cheung this Sunday. Good Luck!

**Race 5 | Horse No.2 Star of YIU CHEUNG Win & Place bets; Quinella and Place Quinella on Horse No.1 SACRED CAPITAL and Horse No.2 STAR OF YIU CHEUNG**



**OPINION**

**World Views**

Frank Jordans, MDT/AP

**WITH MERKEL GOING, CANDIDATES FAIL TO INSPIRE GERMAN VOTERS**

It's not that politics bore him; quite the opposite. But Christoph Gillitzer is stumped by whom to vote for in Germany's federal election next month.

The retired engineer says he usually backs the underdog, yet the choices on offer Sept. 26 don't have him convinced.

"It's really difficult this time," he said on a dreary Berlin morning this week.

Like Gillitzer, a large chunk of the German electorate remains undecided going into a parliamentary election that will determine who succeeds Angela Merkel as chancellor after her 16 years in office.

Recent surveys show that support for political parties has flattened out, with none forecast to receive more than a quarter of the vote.

Merkel's center-right Union bloc and the center-left Social Democrats are neck-and-neck in the polls, closely followed by the environmentalist Greens, who are making their first bid for the chancellorship.

"This is the first time that an incumbent chancellor hasn't run again in a German election, so we have a completely new table of candidates," Gregor Zons, a political scientist at the Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf, said. "For voters who have until now chosen Merkel, the situation is confusing."

Germany's long-serving leader announced in 2018 that she wouldn't seek a fifth term, sparking a series of messy leadership contests that ended with her party nominating Armin Laschet, the governor of North Rhine-Westphalia state, as its top candidate.

But Laschet's star took a dive last month when his home state was hit by deadly floods and the 60-year-old governor made a series of missteps that included laughing in the background during a somber speech by Germany's president. He also flip-flopped on the urgency of addressing climate change, which experts say has made disasters such as floods more likely.

The Greens saw their ratings jump in April after nominating Annalena Baerbock, 40, as the party's candidate for chancellor and announcing the news at a smoothly staged event that contrasted with their rivals' squabbling.

The bump in the polls didn't last long. Baerbock's lack of executive experience and a flap over plagiarism in a book she wrote ended up costing her party support.

Recent polls by German public broadcasters ARD and ZDF show few voters want either Laschet or Baerbock as chancellor, boosting the previously tepid ratings of Olaf Scholz — Germany's finance minister and vice chancellor — and his Social Democratic Party.

The former Hamburg mayor and federal labor minister was once nicknamed "Scholzomat" for what critics said was a habit of frequently repeating the same phrases regardless of what question he was asked.

Lately, the 63-year-old minister has played up his long experience in government while deftly avoiding the lime-light over crises such as the floods and Afghanistan.

Scholz's main achievement at the moment "lies in not making any mistakes," political scientist Zons said.

The Social Democrats have benefited from this cautious approach. One poll this week gave the party a small lead over the Union bloc — its first for many years.

Stefan Wurster, a professor of policy analysis at the Technical University of Munich, cautioned that the candidates' personal ratings remain historically low, with a sizeable chunk of the electorate still opting for "none of the above."

"Many people don't decide who to vote for until they reach the voting booth," he added.

Gillitzer, the retired engineer, remains undecided.

"Scholz cuts the best figure, but he doesn't come across as entirely clean either," he said, citing the finance minister's unclear role in two major financial scandals.

Merkel has taken a back seat in the Union bloc's election campaign, and its billboards are devoid of the German leader's familiar face this year.

"Predecessors who are ending their political work should hold back — that is my position, my firm conviction," she said in a rare appearance as her party opened its official campaign last weekend.

Even the party's worst result under her chancellorship — 32.9% of the vote in 2017 — appears a long shot at the moment.

Two suicide bombers and gunmen targeted crowds massing near the Kabul airport last night, in the waning days of a massive airlift that has drawn thousands of people seeking to flee the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. At least 13 people were killed and 15 wounded, Russian officials said.

A U.S. official said the complex attack was "definitely believed" to have been carried out by the Islamic State group, whose affiliate in Afghanistan grew out of disaffected Taliban members who hold an even more extreme view of Islam.

At least 13 people died and 15 were wounded, according to Russia's

Foreign Ministry, which gave the first official casualty count. Pentagon spokesman John Kirby also confirmed the blasts, saying one was near an airport entrance and another was a short distance away by a hotel.

The U.S. official said members of the U.S. military were among the wounded. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss ongoing operations.

Even as the area was hit, the official said evacuation flights continued to take off from Kabul airport, which Western governments earlier warned was a target.

More on p8

AP PHOTO



**GREEK HEALTH CARE WORKERS PROTEST AGAINST MANDATORY VACCINES**

**WORKERS** at public hospitals in Greece held a five-hour work stoppage yesterday to protest a government decision making vaccination against Covid-19 mandatory for all health care workers in the public and private sector.

About 300 hospital workers rallied outside the health ministry in Athens to protest the measure, which goes into effect on September 1. The government has made clear that no extension will be granted.

Those working in the public and private health care sector and those working in care homes who haven't received at least one dose of the vaccine by that date, or who don't have a certificate of recent recovery, will be suspended from work.

The public hospital workers' union said that while it supports the vaccines, it opposes making them mandatory.

"We will not leave defenseless the health care and social care workers who have a personal right to vaccination," the union said. "Patients are not at risk of catching the coronavirus from health care workers. Hospitals are filling up again with patients suffering from

the coronavirus which they caught in the community."

Health Minister Vasilis Kikilias said those who were protesting against the measure were "small minorities" who frequently protest about an assortment of issues related to the national health system.

"They are in the opposite direction of the majority of Greek society, which wants to protect public health," he said.

Speaking on Skai TV, Kikilias announced the start of a pilot program to have mobile vaccination units administering shots in town squares outside churches. The program would start this Sunday on the island of Crete, the minister said, and would expand to the country's main cities.

Greece has been seeking to boost its vaccination drive with a series of incentives. It has been seeing a steady increase in confirmed coronavirus cases and deaths, as well as hospitalizations and intubations, over the past several weeks. ICU beds for Covid-19 patients are more than 69% full, while regular Covid-19 wards are 45% full, health ministry figures show.

On Tuesday, Kikilias said that "significantly more than 90% of patients who are in Covid ICUs are unvaccinated," without specifying whether some of them had received one vaccine dose and weren't yet fully vaccinated.

More than 11 million vaccine doses have been administered, with 5.6 million people now fully vaccinated in this country of about 11 million people.

Covid-19 vaccines are freely available in Greece to anyone over the age of 12. Vaccination is not mandatory except for those in the health care sector, but on Tuesday the government announced new testing requirements and restrictions on access to various venues for people who are unvaccinated.

The measures, which will be in effect from Sept. 13 until March 31, include mandatory weekly or twice-weekly testing for unvaccinated public and private sector workers, and indoor access to venues such as restaurants, bars, cafes and entertainment venues allowed only for those with a certificate of vaccination or recent recovery. MDT/AP

**Israel** said that it would be easing commercial restrictions on the Gaza Strip and expand entry of goods to the Palestinian enclave following days of heightened tensions. The announcement came after hundreds of Palestinians demonstrated Wednesday near the Israeli border, calling on Israel to ease a crippling blockade days after a similar gathering ended in deadly clashes with the Israeli army.

**UK** Police in London arrested a man on suspicion of contaminating food in three supermarkets by injecting them with syringes. Local authorities advised shoppers at the stores in the west London area of Hammersmith to throw away their purchases after the suspect was detained. Authorities have not identified how many items were tampered with or if the syringes had anything inside.

AP PHOTO



**Spain** A judge in a decision cheered by environmentalists has put a halt to backup plans for the construction of a giant telescope in the Canary Islands — eliminating at least for now the primary alternative location to the preferred spot in Hawaii, where there have been protests against the telescope. Construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope, or TMT, on Hawaii's tallest mountain, Mauna Kea, has been stalled by opponents who say the project will desecrate land held sacred to some Native Hawaiians.

AP PHOTO



**Brazil** Thousands of Indigenous people marched toward Brazil's Supreme Court to pressure justices expected to issue a ruling with far-reaching implications for land rights. Wearing feather headdresses and with their bodies painted, they sang and danced along their 5-kilometer route. The group, which has been camping all week in the capital behind the National Theater, is comprised of some 6,000 people from 173 ethnic groups across the country.