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COVID-19: TIANJIN ORDERS MORE MASS TESTING OF RESIDENTS P6



AP PHOTO



Indonesia kicked off a Covid-19 booster campaign for the general public yesterday, prioritizing third shots for the elderly and people with compromised immune systems. The government hopes to provide 21 million booster shots in January to people who received their second jabs at least six months ago. Some 117 million people in Indonesia have already received two doses of the vaccine.

AP PHOTO



India's top court yesterday said it will take up a petition seeking prosecution of several saffron-robed Hindu religious leaders for allegedly making highly provocative speeches against Muslims at a closed-door meeting last month. Three Supreme Court judges said they were issuing a notice to the Uttarakhand state government that they will investigate the case next week.

AP PHOTO



Kazakh authorities said they detained 1,678 more people in the past 24 hours over their alleged participation in the violent unrest that rocked the former Soviet nation last week, the worst since Kazakhstan gained independence three decades ago. The additional detentions, reported by authorities in Almaty, brought the total number of arrests to about 12,000. More than 300 criminal investigations into mass unrest and assaults on law enforcement officers have been opened.

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HENGQIN BONUS

Hengqin launches series of subsidies for Macau companies, workers for cooperation zone projects P5



MACAU REGATTA, THE ONLY INT'L SAILING EVENT IN GBA THIS YEAR P2



COVID-19 OMICRON MAY BE HEADED FOR A RAPID DROP P8

**PHILIPPINE
REPATRIATION
FLIGHT POSTPONED**

The Philippine Consulate General in Macau has announced the postponement of the repatriation flight scheduled on January 25 in view of "technical challenges on the part of our service providers." The consulate noted that it will continue to closely coordinate with all concerned stakeholders to secure the earliest possible flight for Filipinos in Macau, while ensuring the safety and health of passengers during the repatriation flight and the compliance with standing health protocols upon their arrival in the Philippines. Covid-19 cases in the Philippines continue to surge from the end-of-year holiday period.

**REGIONAL
ENTREPRENEURSHIP
COMPETITION OPEN
FOR APPLICATION**

The 2022 Bank of China Trophy One Million Dollar Macao Regional Entrepreneurship Competition is now open for applications. All students currently studying at tertiary institutions in Macau and Macau residents studying at higher education institutions outside Macau are eligible to apply. The cash prize for the Macau regional competition is more than MOP 110,000. The top three winners of the regional competition will advance to the final for a chance to win RMB1 million and obtain further funding. The regional competition is title-sponsored by the Bank of China Macao Branch and hosted by the University of Macau. It aims to encourage college students to start their own businesses by providing a platform to connect the students with entrepreneurs and potential investors.

**UM OPEN DAY
MOVED ONLINE**

Due to the pandemic, this year's Open Day of the University of Macau will be moved online. Students, parents, and friends from Macau and overseas can participate in the Open Day activities online, between 11:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. this Sunday. Activities on the Open Day will include an online opening ceremony, admissions talks, academic talks, admission consultation, exhibitions, games, and a lucky draw. Students who are interested in studying at UM can learn more about departments or programmes of their choice.



MACAU REGATTA, THE ONLY INT'L SAILING EVENT IN GBA THIS YEAR

RENATO MARQUES

THE 2022 MGM Macao International Regatta, scheduled to set sail today, will be the only international-level sailing event to take place in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) this year, Shao Xianli, Chairman-Jury of the event, said yesterday at a press conference from the organizers.

During the press conference, Shao said he hopes that all participants can enjoy and make the most of this event as it will be the "only international sailing event [to take place] this year in the Greater Bay Area," noting further that he hopes it will be a fruitful one.

The event, which runs from today until Sunday, involves 35 teams divided into three categories. These are: the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Cup Regatta, for vessels classified under the International Rating Certificate (IRC), which allows different vessels to race together according to a performance handicap; the Macao Cup International Regatta, in which all competitors will be using Beneteau First 40.7 vessels; and the International Catamaran Invitational competition in which Hobie16 catamarans will be used.

A plurality of teams (14) will compete on the Hobie 16 catamarans in the event to be held

at the waters south of the Inner Harbor channel off the Macau Science Center.

This competition will also be the closest to the spectators, as it can be observed from both the Peninsula and Taipa shorefronts.

At the press conference, the president of the Sports Bureau (ID), Pun Weng Kun, said that through this event, people in Macau would hopefully become more interested in sports in general and on water sports activities in particular, expressing hopes that the public will not only watch the races but also take part in a series of side events including sailing demonstrations, workshops and a photography competition which will run concurrently with the main event.

"Macau is a vibrant city and we hope that during their stay, participants and guests [for the event] they can [sense] our sports culture as well as our traditions and tourist attractions," Pun also said.

In his turn, Kenneth Feng, president, chief Strategic and financial officer of the title sponsor of the event, MGM China Holdings Ltd, noted that the event is a perfect metaphor for the start of the new year, which is time to "set sail on a new journey."

Feng also noted the significance of the event which will include

around 300 sailors as well as international judges and umpires certified by the World Sailing, who, by coming to Macau to participate in this event, will prove that Macau is a "safe travel destination for all."

Feng also noted the historical importance of the marine event in a region historically connected to the rest of the world by the sea, expressing hopes that through sport, Macau would enter a new era of international water sports, fostering the cross-industry development of the "Tourism + Sports."

MACAU REPRESENTED BY ONE TEAM IN EACH CATEGORY

The Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) will be represented in the competition by one team in each sailing category.

In the IRC, the Macau flag will be flown by the FMA Marine Linglang Sailing Team who will set sail on a Tartan Ten 33 sailboat led by skipper Xu Xingpang. U Chio U will captain the Beneteau First 40.7 from Wanboofish Sailing Team, representing Macau on the Macao Cup International Regatta. Finally, Gonçalo Lestro and José Ferreira Pinto will represent Macau in the smaller sailing competition as Team Vidrinhos.

In total, the regatta counts on the participation of several international participants from countries including Portugal, Canada, South Africa, Japan, Germany, and the Netherlands on top of a majority of Chinese participants from several regions, including many experimental sailors from the Island of Hainan.

SAIL PAST TODAY AND SUNDAY

IN one of the events promoting the 2022 MGM Macao International Regatta, a sail past will take place today and on Sunday, January 16, starting around 9 a.m.

The sail past, composed of sailboats participating in the competition will sail from Macau Fisherman's Wharf area, pass the Macau Science Center, the Kun

lam Ecumenical Center, and the Governador Nobre de Carvalho Bridge, making a U-turn beside the Macau Tower to return to the waters at the southeast of the Peninsula by the same course. The population may watch the colorful parade from boats next to the shore between the Science Center and the Macau Tower.

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Footprint recording may become mandatory by Jan 15

ANTHONY LAM

FOOTPRINT recording will become mandatory on January 15, contrary to the government's promise of a gradual rollout, the Times was told recently.

Yesterday, a local supermarket started requiring customers entering the establishment to scan the government-provided QR code to record their footprints. When the supermarket staff were told that, according to the government, QR check in is still voluntary for the time being, a staff member replied, "Next time you come here, it will be mandatory."

She added that "the footprint recording action will be required from January 15."

On Monday, Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao Ieong, told the press that "the government will [continue to] observe the situation before gradually implementing mandatory itinerary registration [footprint recording] when [the public] becomes familiar with the function."

Last Thursday, Dr. Leong Iek

ANTHONY LAM



Hou, division head for the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), told the regular health press conference that the footprint recording action is voluntary.

"[This action] is encouraged [voluntary] and is not mandatory," Leong said at the press conference, adding that venue opera-

tors may register entrants' information "with pen and paper."

The supermarket admitted customers who declined to conduct footprint recording. However, the security guards at a local department store were instructed to block customers who refused to record their footprint.

This inconsistency raises con-

cerns about the public education concerning the scheme, if they will not be able to enter commercial establishments without using the function.

To former lawmaker Au Kam San, the decision to block customers was incomprehensible, since he thought commercial establishments would be more concer-

ned with the convenience of their customers. "It's rare that the commercial sector does more than the government requires," Au said.

He questioned whether this was an appropriate time to make the recording action mandatory, when the city is relatively calm in terms of the Covid-19 pandemic condition. "The [anticipated] rollout of mandatory footprint registration contradicts the government's effort in promoting Macau as a safe tourism destination to Mainland tourists," Au pointed out. "Making [footprint recording] compulsory at this time may trigger a fear among Mainland tourists that Macau has new cases or has become less safe."

In contrast, lawmaker Ron Lam said that he personally accepts the requirement. He cites a legal argument in support of his position. Lam said he does not see that these commercial establishments are breaking any laws by requesting that their customers scan the footprint recording codes.

However, Lam added that in actual practice, the scanning of the codes must incur certain problems, which both the public and the government should address.

An inquiry has been sent to the Health Bureau, regarding its response to commercial stores making footprint registration mandatory. The bureau said that the matter will be addressed at the regular press conference today.

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The houses are set in the heart of the World Heritage Site of the Douro Valley and its famous winery landscape where the worlds Ports are produced. Both restored relics overlooking the Rio Douro, these eight rooms houses have been blessed with gorgeous wooden floors, plush queen beds and marble baths; the best have dazzling river views. But it is the welcome that makes this place stand out from the crowd.



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MACAU LAWYER ENTICES BRITS GET PORTUGUESE RESIDENCY AMID BREXIT

ANTHONY LAM

TO British, Portugal is the best place to migrate to, with a "smaller population, less crowded environment, nicer weather and wonderful seafood," a local lawyer said yesterday.

Jeff Yen, managing partner at Nuno Simões & Associados, made yesterday a presentation at a breakfast briefing hosted by the British Chamber of Commerce in Macao (BritCham Macao) on the Portuguese immigration scheme, dubbed the "Golden Visa of Portugal."

Amid Brexit, the lawyer said, it makes sense for British investors and entrepreneurs to consider getting Portuguese residency, which will eventually become nationality if the applicants fulfill certain criteria.

With Portugal remaining in the EU, Portuguese citizens are entitled to enjoy the EU's freedom of movement and employment. The latter, after the UK's departure from the EU, will not be as convenient as it was.

On the other hand, Portugal has a more preferable tax system than in the UK. Citizenship of Portugal will also support visa-free travel to 188 countries and living, working and studying across the EU and EEA.

Initiated in 2012, the "Golden



AP PHOTO

Visa" program has so far generated nearly EUR6 billion income by about 10,000 families. Yen pointed out that the latest policy allows British applicants to obtain freedom of movement across Schengen states once the visa gets approved.

Purchase of properties in the country's three largest cities, na-

mely Lisbon, Porto and Algarve, will not make the applicant eligible for the visa program. However, Yen pointed out that the outskirts of these cities are as nice and convenient as the cities.

Yen introduced that a purchase of real property for as low as EUR280,000 will be sufficient to trigger the application. Of cou-

urse, these properties are in low-density area, of old ages and require refurbishment.

To transform the visa into citizenship, an applicant will need five years of time, besides a clean criminal record, no unpaid tax in Portugal and obtaining a pass in the purpose-oriented Portuguese language test.

21ST MACAO FRINGE OPENS AT IAO HON VENDING AREA

ANTHONY LAM

THE 21st Macao City Fringe Festival opened yesterday at a vending area in Iao Hon, in a day which many enjoyed by playing chess, shopping and chatting with friends.

The opening ceremony was held in a leisure area opposite the St. Joseph the Worker Church.

Themed "Margin Break", this edition of the Fringe Festival offers a series of programs for the public to experience different forms of art and to promote greater artistic exchanges in the community. This year's Fringe Festival features less traditional genres and presentation of artworks.

Tickets for the 21st Macao City Fringe Festival are available through the Macau Ticketing Network.

On the sidelines of the opening ceremony, Mok Ian Ian, president of the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), was asked the reason why the event is taking place in Iao Hon: a traditional grassroot and relatively elderly district of the city, and how the bureau intends to promote arts and culture in the district.

In response, Mok reiterated that the principle of the IC is that culture is a matter for the general public, and that the bureau did not want to present culture as inaccessible. "We can actually see, in recent years, IC events have been made part of daily lives," she said. "We hope various forms of arts can exist in various communities."

She also restated that in past editions of the Macao Arts Festival, there has been at least one performance held in the Iao Hon Market Garden. "We want to bring arts to the doorsteps of people who don't regularly approach arts," Mok explained. "Especially when the Fringe Festival has the motto 'The City as Stage, The Population as Audience.'"

The goal which the IC aims to achieve, Mok said, is that a grocery shopper can appreciate the arts while they are on the way to the shops or returning home. "We want to use the cultural base of Macau to build up an artistic atmosphere," Mok added.



ANTHONY LAM

Mok Ian Ian

DSAL receives 766 complaints in the month since Suncity closure

LYNZY VALLES

A total of 766 complaints have been filed regarding the subsidiaries of junket operator Suncity, businesses which have ceased trading, according to data from the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL).

In addition to the subsidiaries, the bureau received 21 complaints from employees of "companies related to Suncity."

In a statement, the DSAL reiterated that those affected employees who failed to obtain a re-signation certificate and who do not meet the eligibility criteria for the bureau's subsidized training programs, can ask the DSAL for help.

Recent figures show



that, as of January 7, 389 people (37.5%) of the 1,036 candidates participated in job-matching sessions specifically organized by the DSAL for former junket employees.

The bureau has orga-

nized seven specialized job-matching sessions thus far, aiming to reemploy 1,036 candidates who sought the DSAL's assistance after losing their jobs following the closure of several casino

VIP rooms.

On December 10, the Suncity Gaming Promotion Company officially ceased operations, the company announced in a notice to its employees.

In the notice, the com-

pany explained that operations ceased because of the suspension of cooperative relationships with the gaming concessionaires, as well as the need to cooperate with judicial procedures following the detention of the company's CEO, Alvin Chau.

Secretary for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong has already indicated that the termination of junket operator's business operations would affect the unemployment rate, which stands at 3.8%.

However, he pledged that the government would provide support for the affected employees.

Back in June 2021, Suncity offered exit bonuses for staff who signed up for the group's voluntary resignation package. The final sum could be as much as 15 months' salary for each employee, the exact amount depending on the staff member's position.

COOPERATION ZONE

Hengqin offers subsidies for Macau workers and businesses

LYNZY VALLES

MACAU residents who work full time in Hengqin are eligible for a subsidy of up to RMB12,000 for not more than 36 months and a one-time bonus of RMB50,000.

In a document issued by the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, Macau residents with a bachelor's degree can receive RMB7,000, those with a master's degree can receive RMB9,000 and those with a doctoral degree, RMB12,000.

The subsidy, according to the document, aims to "enhance the benefits for Macau residents" in the cooperation zone, as well as encourage employers to recruit Macau residents for employment.

The subsidy, under the zone's "Interim Measures for Supporting the Employment of Macau Residents in Hengqin," also allows new employees from Macau an employment subsidy at the rate



of RMB5,000 and the cumulative benefit will not last more than three years.

Macau professionals who provide services in fields including architecture, planning, design and Chinese medicine, may

apply for a one-time subsidy of RMB50,000 to RMB100,000 for their first business registration and set-up in the cooperation zone.

Also, Macau residents who have registered an enterprise in

the cooperation zone which has been in normal operation for three months, who act as the business' legal representative, hold more than 50% of its shares, and who go through employment registration according to the re-

gulations, will be given a one-time entrepreneurial subsidy of RMB50,000.

Macau residents who participate in domestic vocational skills training and obtain vocational skills grade certification and then go to work in the cooperation zone may apply for the Vocational Skills Improvement Subsidy. The subsidy standard of Guangdong Province will increase by 30%. A one-time reward of RMB2,000 will be given to Macau residents employed in the cooperation zone who have obtained international professional certification or a Macau vocational skills certificate.

Under the employers subsidy, for employers that employ Macau residents and conform to the industrial development direction of the cooperation zone, a subsidy of RMB30,000 per person per year will be given, and an employer who employs more than 30 Macau residents will receive a one-time superimposed bonus of RMB200,000.

The subsidy period does not exceed three years. The maximum annual subsidy for each household unit may not exceed RMB3 million.

These measures are in accordance with the Employment Promotion Law of the People's Republic of China, the statement underlined.



Galaxy relaunched voluntary resignation scheme

RENATO MARQUES

THE "New Life Starter Program," commonly known as the voluntary resignation scheme, has been re-launched by the Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG), with the aim of reducing the company's workforce, the GEG confirmed in a statement to the Times.

The program, initially

launched last year, aimed to reach a mutual agreement between the company and some of its staff members who were considered redundant in some departments, granting the workers a one-off ex-gratia payment of MOP380,000 in exchange for their voluntary resignation.

Last year, the program was mostly aimed at Pit Su-

pervisors from Table Games Department, a strategy which was received positively by the workers.

In a statement issued yesterday in response to an inquiry from the Times, the GEG said that it would re-launch its New Life Starter Program "for gaming operations and related team members."

As before, team mem-

bers who choose to participate in the program will receive a one-off ex-gratia payment of an undisclosed amount: a sum which the company says is determined "according to [the employee's] department and job position."

According to posts circulated on social media by a group representing gaming workers, the GEG is now offering the program to croupiers, who are offered "compensation" of up to MOP270,000 for their voluntary resignation as well as to pit supervisors in the table games department (who are offered an ex-gratia payment of MOP380,000). The scheme also extends to pit managers who are eligible for a payment of MOP520,000.

In the statement, GEG noted that "many of the participated team members believed that the program had helped them respond to the advice and consider new opportunities outside of the gaming industry," adding that "the re-launch of this program is hoping to be able to offer a chance to team members who would like to explore new career goals and start a new chapter in life."

NEW AXA PLAN ALLOWS RESIDENTS TO 'SEIZE CURRENCY POTENTIALS'

INSURANCE giant AXA Hong Kong and Macau recently launched the "FortuneXtra Savings Plan" to "help customers seize currency potentials and accelerate wealth building with exceptional flexibility to suit changing trends and needs," the firm announced in a statement.

Kevin Chor, AXA's Chief Life and Health Insurance Officer, said, "In September 2021, Hong Kong recorded a six-year record high for non-US Dollar foreign currency deposits, equivalent to over HKD 2 trillion. In particular, RMB customer deposits increased by more than 25% year-on-year."

According to Chor, the firm saw a huge demand for foreign currencies: a trend corroborated in a survey jointly conducted by AXA and an indepen-

dent research agency in November 2021.

Approximately 70% of the respondents, said Chor, currently hold foreign currency savings or investment, of which insurance products constitute the third most common form of investment after bank deposits and stocks.

In terms of currencies favored, the Euro is one of the most popular choices together with the United States Dollar (USD) and the Renminbi (RMB). "These survey findings inspired us to launch FortuneXtra which provides exceptional potential return and unmatched flexibility to meet the market needs, underscoring AXA's commitment to be a life-long partner to our customers," Chor said.

FortuneXtra provides policies with a choice of nine currency options. LV



COVID-19

TIANJIN ORDERS MORE MASS TESTING OF RESIDENTS

The northern Chinese city of Tianjin ordered a second round of COVID-19 testing of all 13 million residents yesterday following the discovery of 97 cases of the omicron variant during initial screenings that began Sunday.

Residents were asked to remain where they are until the results of all the nucleic acid tests are received, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

Xinhua said authorities have carried out almost 12 million tests so far, with 7.8 million samples returned. Infections were first reported on Saturday in the city that is only about an hour from Beijing, which is to host the Winter Olympics from Feb. 4.

High-speed rail service and other forms of transportation between the cities have been sus-

pending, leading to some disruptions in supply chains, including for packaged food items sold in convenience stores.

Tianjin's COVID-19 prevention and control office said all who have tested positive in the initial testing round were found to have the omicron variant, of which China has so far only reported a small number of cases. The source of the outbreak is still unknown and many who are spreading the variant may be doing so unwittingly because they show no symptoms.

Also in the north, two college students who traveled earlier this month by train from Tianjin tested positive for the virus yesterday in the city of Dalian, city officials said. There was no word on what variant they had contracted.

The omicron variant spreads

even more easily than other coronavirus strains, and has already become dominant in many countries. It also more easily infects those who are vaccinated or were previously infected by other versions of the virus. However, early studies show omicron is less likely to cause severe illness than the delta variant, and vaccination and a booster still offer strong protection from serious illness, hospitalization and death.

Millions more Chinese are under lockdown in cities under the strict "dynamic zero-case policy" that has allowed China to largely contain major outbreaks, although at considerable cost to local economies.

Hong Kong has closed kindergartens and primary schools after infections were discovered among

students, banned flights from the United States and seven other countries and held 2,500 passengers on a cruise ship for coronavirus testing yesterday as the city attempts to stem the emerging omicron outbreak.

Hong Kong has tightened pandemic-related restrictions in recent days after discovering the omicron variant had spread beyond people arriving from overseas.

In total, China announced 166 new cases of COVID-19 in the 24 hours before yesterday, including 33 in Tianjin and 118 in Henan province but just eight in the city of Xi'an, home to the famed Terracotta Warrior statues and major industries, where a lockdown was imposed Dec. 23.

Authorities also released news of an inspection to Henan last week by Vice Premier Sun Chunlan, who called for stepped-up measures to prevent the spread of both the delta and omicron variants. COVID-19 has spread to three cities in the province, including Yuzhou, Anyang and the provincial capital Zhengzhou, prompting travel bans and various levels of lockdown.

"It is necessary to do a good job in guaranteeing the living needs of the people in the closed and controlled communities, ensure the basic medical needs of the people during the epidemic period, and ensure that the people's demands can be responded to and resolved in a timely manner," Sun was quoted as saying.

Some Xi'an residents have complained about their inability to obtain food and other daily necessities.

China has sacked or otherwise punished a number of officials for dereliction of duty related to the pandemic response, including

failing to prevent new infections. Yesterday, Anyang authorities cited 61 government departments and 11 officials in violation. Punishments ranged from verbal warnings to dismissal, according to a city government notice.

Ensuring the Olympics are free of any outbreaks is a key concern of the ruling Communist Party. Athletes, officials and journalists are operating in a closed-loop bubble to prevent them from coming into contact with the general public from the time they arrive in Beijing until their departure. If fully vaccinated, they will not have to undergo the standard 21-day quarantine.

In addition, the International Olympic Committee has issued a document advising attendees to avoid crowded places such as bars and restaurants and avoid physical contact with others five days before departing.

Attendees are required to provide two negative PCR tests before they travel and will be tested twice daily while in China.

Participants should "absolutely not let your guard down" even after testing negative, the IOC said.

China has banned fans from outside the country from attending and it appears Beijing plans to distribute only a small number of tickets to carefully selected spectators.

Along with lockdowns, China has used mask mandates and detailed case tracing to restrain major outbreaks.

It has vaccinated nearly 85% of its population, according to Our World in Data. The shots have helped reduce the severity of disease, although Chinese vaccines are considered less effective than those used elsewhere.

China says it currently has 3,476 active COVID-19 cases. **MDT/AP**

AVIATION

US airlines say China is forcing them to cancel some flights

U.S. airlines say China has blocked more than a dozen recent and future flights from entering the country, which has been tightening already-strict COVID-19 travel restrictions.

China ordered the cancellations after some passengers tested positive for COVID-19 on flights that arrived in China in late December, according to industry officials.

American Airlines said yesterday [Macau time] that six of its flights from Dallas-Fort Worth to Shanghai in late January and early February have been canceled. United Airlines said it was forced to cancel six flights from San Francisco to Shanghai later this month. Delta



Air Lines said it canceled one flight last week and another this Friday to Shanghai. Airlines for America,

which represents the largest U.S. passenger and cargo carriers, said it was discussing the matter with

U.S. and Chinese government officials to find ways to minimize the impact on travelers.

The Biden administration had no immediate comment.

The blocking of flights is the latest development in a dispute between the two countries over international flights and rules designed to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

China has been ratcheting up travel restrictions after recent outbreaks of COVID-19 as it prepares to host the Winter Olympics in early February. China limits capacity on inbound flights — currently to 75% — and requires passengers to be tested before departure and after arriving in the country.

If passengers test positive, the airline that carried them can be forced to cancel two

to four flights, depending on the number of positive cases.

Last month, Delta said new requirements for cleaning planes between flights caused a plane bound for Shanghai to return to Seattle. The airline said the new rules extended the time planes would need to sit on the ground in Shanghai, and weren't workable. The Chinese consulate in San Francisco lodged a protest over Delta's decision.

In 2020, the Trump administration backed down from a threat to block four Chinese airlines after China agreed to let United and Delta resume limited operations that were shuttered earlier in the pandemic. **MDT/AP**

DIPLOMACY

China and Russia block UN support for sanctions on Mali

EDITH M. LEDERER,
UNITED NATIONS

RUSSIA and China blocked the U.N. Security Council yesterday [Macau time] from supporting new sanctions on Mali for its military leaders' decision to delay next month's elections until 2026, a blow to the restoration of democracy in the troubled West African nation.

Kenya's U.N. ambassador, Martin Kimani, said after closed-door discussions on the proposed French-drafted statement endorsing the sanctions imposed by the West African regional group ECOWAS he was "disappointed" that the council couldn't agree on what he called a "relatively mild" press statement.

Kimani said the Security Council's failure to support ECOWAS' actions spurred its three African members -- Kenya, Ghana and Gabon -- to speak to reporters to fully back the regional bloc's position, "including the imposition of sanctions on the military authorities in Mali to ensure an expedited transition to constitutional rule."

Mali has struggled to contain an Islamic extremist insurgency since 2012. Extremist rebels were forced from power in Mali's northern cities with the help of a French-led military operation, but they regrouped in the desert



Col. Assimi Goita meets with a high-level delegation from the West African regional bloc known as ECOWAS, at the Ministry of Defense in Bamako, in August 2020

and began launching attacks on the Malian army and its allies. Insecurity has worsened with attacks on civilians and U.N. peacekeepers.

In August 2020, Malian President Boubacar Ibrahim Keita was overthrown in a coup that included Col. Assimi Goita. Last June, Goita was sworn in as president of a transitional government after carrying out his second coup in nine months. The junta initially had agreed to hold a new election in late February but the military leadership now says the presidential ballot will not take place until

2026 because of deepening insecurity across the country, giving Goita four more years in power.

ECOWAS leaders responded Sunday, calling Goita's delayed timetable "totally unacceptable" and saying it "simply means that an illegitimate military transition government will take the Malian people hostage during the next five years."

They imposed new sanctions, suspending most commerce and financial aid to Mali, closing land and air borders with other members of ECOWAS and activating the bloc's standby force, saying

it "will have to be ready for any eventuality."

The United States, United Kingdom, France and other Security Council members joined the Africans in supporting ECOWAS' actions.

British deputy ambassador James Kariuki called Mali's decision to delay elections "deeply disappointing," saying "it brings into question the transitional authorities' commitment to democracy and the rule of law, despite assurances given to members of this council during our visit to Bamako last October."

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield accused Mali's transitional government of a "blatant lack of political will ... to make progress toward organizing elections" and said a five-year transition "extends the pain of the people."

The three countries also strongly criticized the presence of the Russian private military company, the Wagner Group, in Mali.

French Ambassador Nicolas De Riviere reiterated his country's condemnation of the deployment of mercenaries from the Wagner Group "who are known to threaten civilians, loot resources, violate international law and the sovereignty of states." He expressed regret that Mali's transitional authorities "are using already limited public funds to pay foreign mercenaries instead of supporting the national forces and public services for the benefit of the Malian people."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said that the company has a "legitimate" right to be in the West African nation because it was invited by the transitional government, and he has insisted that the Russian government is not involved.

Mali's U.N. ambassador, Issa Konfourou, told the Security Council there are no mercenaries on Malian soil. He said Russian trainers are in Mali to advise and train its military on the use of military equipment acquired by the government from Russia.

Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said: "Hysteria around the Russian company is yet another manifestation of double standards, for it is clear that the market for such services is monopolized by Western countries." **MDT/AP**

HONG KONG

'Patriots only' legislature convenes first session

HONG Kong's legislature convened yesterday for the first time since elections last month that were held under new legislation ensuring that only "patriots" who have proven their loyalty to Beijing could run as candidates.

The 90-seat Legislative Council, known as LegCo, is now completely dominated by Beijing's allies. Leading opposition figures are in jail, exile or have been intimidated into silence, and non-aligned media outlets forced to close.

The largest pro-democracy party, the Democratic Party, decided not to field candidates rather than lend legitimacy to what it regards as a fundamentally undemocratic process. Just 20 of the seats were directly



elected, and the turnout of 30.2% was the lowest since the British handed Hong Kong over to China in 1997. All candidates were vetted by a largely pro-Beijing committee before they could be nominated.

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam opened yesterday's

session, using the opportunity to criticize former legislators who she said were "anti-China and who have attempted to destabilize Hong Kong, had tried to politicize council businesses and made it difficult for LegCo to fully perform its functions."

Since the expulsion or resignation of opposition legislators, the council has enjoyed a "fruitful year marked with a constructive and interactive relationship between the LegCo and the executive authorities with remarkable achievements," said Lam, who along with several members of her government is under a U.S. visa ban.

Chinese President and head of the ruling Communist Party Xi Jinping praised the elections as adhering to the "one country, two systems" principle, referring to the increasingly threadbare framework under which Hong Kong was to retain its own political, social and financial institutions for 50 years after being transferred from British rule.

The elections had been postponed for a year — ostensibly due to a spike in COVID-19 cases — after the opposition swept elections for district councilors.

They followed widespread and increasingly violent anti-government protests in 2019 that prompted Beijing to impose a sweeping National Security Law on Hong Kong, followed by a reorganization of the electoral process and transformation of the makeup of the Legislative Council to stack it with pro-Beijing loyalists.

The session opened as Hong Kong struggles with a new wave of COVID-19 infections related to the global spread of the omicron variant.

Twenty lawmakers ski-

pped the opening session after joining a large birthday party that sparked fears of a new omicron cluster when a guest tested positive for the coronavirus.

Hong Kong has also closed kindergartens and primary schools after infections were discovered among students, banned flights from the United States and seven other countries and held 2,500 passengers on a cruise ship for coronavirus testing on Wednesday as the city attempts to stem the emerging omicron outbreak.

Lam appeared to rule out imposing a new lockdown at this time.

"If we want a stricter approach, we could only stay home — it can only be done with a curfew," Lam said. "Today I don't think we are at the stage where we have to apply stricter measures to deal with the pandemic." **MDT/AP**



AP PHOTO

COVID-19

Omicron may be headed for a rapid drop in Britain, US

MARIA CHENG & CARLA K. JOHNSON

SCIENTISTS are seeing signals that COVID-19's alarming omicron wave may have peaked in Britain and is about to do the same in the U.S., at which point cases may start dropping off dramatically.

The reason: The variant has proved so wildly contagious that it may already be running out of people to infect, just a month and a half after it was first detected in South Africa.

"It's going to come down as fast as it went up," said Ali Mokdad, a professor of health metrics sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle.

At the same time, experts warn that much is still uncertain about how the next phase of the pandemic might unfold. The plateauing or ebbing in the two countries is not happening everywhere at the same time or at the same pace. And weeks or months of misery still lie ahead for patients and overwhelmed hospitals even if the drop-off comes to pass.

"There are still a lot of people who will get infected as we descend the slope on the backside," said Lauren Ancel Meyers, director of the University of Texas COVID-19 Modeling Consortium, which predicts that reported cases will peak within the week.

The University of Washington's own highly influential model projects that the number of daily reported cases in the U.S. will crest at 1.2 million by Jan. 19 and will then fall sharply "simply because everybody who could be infected will be infected," according to Mokdad.

In fact, he said, by the university's complex calculations, the true number of new daily infections in the U.S. — an estimate that includes people who were never tested — has already peaked, hitting 6 million on Jan. 6.

In Britain, meanwhile, new COVID-19 cases dropped to about 140,000 a day in the last week, after skyrocketing to more than 200,000 a day earlier this month, according to government data.

Numbers from the U.K.'s National Health Service this week show coronavirus hospital admissions for adults have begun to fall, with infections dropping in all age groups.

Kevin McConway, a retired professor of applied statistics at Britain's Open University, said that while COVID-19 cases are still rising in places such as southwest England and the West Midlands, the outbreak may have peaked in London.

The figures have raised hopes that the two countries are about to undergo something similar to what happened in South Africa, where in the span of about

a month the wave crested at record highs and then fell significantly.

"We are seeing a definite falling-off of cases in the U.K., but I'd like to see them fall much further before we know if what happened in South Africa will happen here," said Dr. Paul Hunter, a professor of medicine at Britain's University of East Anglia.

Dr. David Heymann, who previously led the World Health Organization's infectious diseases department, said Britain was "the closest to any country of being out of the pandemic," adding that COVID-19 was inching towards becoming endemic.

Differences between Britain and South Africa, including Britain's older population and the tendency of its people to spend more time indoors in the winter, could mean a bumpier outbreak for the country and other nations like it.

On the other hand, British authorities' decision to adopt minimal restrictions against omicron could enable the virus to rip through the population and run its course much faster than it might in Western European countries that have imposed tougher COVID-19 controls, such as France, Spain and Italy.

Shabir Mahdi, dean of health sciences at South Africa's University of Witwatersrand, said Euro-

pean countries that impose lockdowns won't necessarily come through the omicron wave with fewer infections; the cases may just be spread out over a longer period of time.

Yesterday [Macau time], the World Health Organization said there have been 7 million new COVID-19 cases across Europe in the past week, calling it a "tidal wave sweeping across the region." WHO cited modeling from Mokdad's group that predicts half of Europe's population will be infected with omicron within about eight weeks.

By that time, however, Hunter and others expect the world to be past the omicron surge.

"There will probably be some ups and downs along the way, but I would hope that by Easter, we will be out of this," Hunter said.

Still, the sheer numbers of people infected could prove overwhelming to fragile health systems, said Dr. Prabhat Jha of the Centre for Global Health Research at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto.

"The next few weeks are going to be brutal because in absolute numbers, there are so many people being infected that it will spill over into ICUs," Jha said.

Mokdad likewise warned in the U.S.: "It's going to be a tough two or three weeks. We have to make hard decisions to let certain essential workers continue working, knowing they could be infectious."

Omicron could one day be seen as a turning point in the pandemic, said Meyers, at the University of Texas. Immunity gained from all the new infections, along with new drugs and continued vaccination, could render the coronavirus something with which we can more easily coexist.

"At the end of this wave, far more people will have been infected by some variant of COVID," Meyers said. "At some point, we'll be able to draw a line — and omicron may be that point — where we transition from what is a catastrophic global threat to something that's a much more manageable disease."

That's one plausible future, she said, but there is also the possibility of a new variant — one that is far worse than omicron — arising. **MDT/AP**

this day in history



1991 BLOODSHED AT LITHUANIAN TV STATION

At least 13 people have been killed and more than 140 injured by the Soviet military in the capital of Lithuania as Moscow continues its crackdown on the Baltic republic and its drive for independence.

Troops broke through the defences set up by more than 1,000 protesters who had gathered to protect a Lithuanian radio and television centre at about 0200 local time.

Soldiers then smashed through the glass windows of the station and overwhelmed defenders armed with sticks.

A sound truck moved through the city telling residents that power was being assumed by the National Committee for Salvation, a group formed by the small pro-Soviet faction of the Lithuanian Communist Party, three days ago.

"Lithuanians, do not resist," the military said. "Your government has deceived you. Go home to your families and children."

Many of the Lithuanians refused to retreat under the attacks and sporadic gunfire continued for at least 90 minutes.

The television and radio stations, which broadcast throughout the republic, went off air after the assault.

Just before the radio station shut down, an announcer said: "We address all those who hear us. It is possible that (the army) can break us with force or close our mouths, but no one will make us renounce freedom and independence."

The broadcast facility was one of several buildings seized by Soviet troops in Vilnius since they began cracking down on 11 January. Yesterday, tanks ploughed into unarmed demonstrators in Vilnius before soldiers opened fire on a crowd attempting to defend a government building.

The assault represents a major escalation in the Soviet Government's use of force against the republic.

It is the bloodiest military attack on peaceful citizens since troops killed nine nationalist demonstrators in Georgia in 1989.

Despite the attack, it is not immediately clear what role Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev had in ordering the assault.

The president of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin, condemned the violence and called for the withdrawal of troops sent to Lithuania and the other Baltic republics - Latvia and Estonia.

Yeltsin warned the Federation Council, the country's highest policy-making body: of "an escalation of violence" across the Baltic region.

US President George Bush also denounced the action by the Soviet military and warned that it could harm Soviet-US relations. "There's no justification for the use of force against peaceful and democratically-elected governments," he said.

"The thoughts and prayers of the people of the United States are with them, and particularly with the Lithuanian people who have experienced a great tragedy.

"We condemn these acts which could not help but affect our relationship."

Lithuania was seized by the Soviet Union after World War II, along with Latvia and Estonia.

Last March, it became the first of several Soviet republics to declare independence from the Soviet Union.



Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The final number of civilians killed in the crackdown was 14. The conflict over the Baltic states continued to escalate as Soviet troops stormed a police academy in Latvia just two days after the assault on Lithuania.

Troops occupied the three states and tension continued to mount until the failed Moscow coup in August that year. Boris Yeltsin eventually recognised the independence of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania on 7 September and all three were admitted into the United Nations later that month.

By the end of the year, the Soviet Union was replaced by the Commonwealth of Independent Republics, with many states gaining full independence.

As a result, President Mikhail Gorbachev stepped down from office after seven years as leader of the Soviet Union on Christmas Day 1991.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Do a little investigating if there is someone at work you don't trust. You can learn a great deal if you listen to those who are older or more experienced.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
You must be careful not to ignore the needs of the youngsters in your family. Take the time to close deals that have been up in the air. Get motivated and follow up on some self-improvement resolutions.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
Romance is quite possible if you are willing to approach someone who interests you. Make sure that you make reservations early. Generosity will put you in the poorhouse.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
You can buy or sell if you're so inclined. Your ability to be practical in business will help. You can make a huge difference to children if you are able to put yourself in their shoes.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
You will be appreciated for the competence you exhibit and for taking on responsibilities. This may not be your day if you are overly melodramatic and unnerving everyone around you.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Social events will be plentiful. Your determination may make you a little overbearing when dealing with others. Major moves will be emotional and not necessarily to your benefit.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
You may want to take a trip; however, before you do, make sure that your car is serviced properly. Be prepared to counteract the damage that adversaries are about to create.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
You can bet officials will be waiting for you when you do. Promotions will be yours if you have acted professionally in times of crisis. Romantic opportunities will be plentiful if you get out and mingle.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Don't let others make you feel guilty or insecure. You may be more emotional than usual. Listen to the complaints of others. Take a look at your legal position.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
You can ask for favors or run your ideas by those who will be able to support your objectives. Try not to attempt to do something unless you are fully intent on following through with the plans.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Try to include friends and relatives in your activities. Your intellectual charm will win hearts and bring opportunities that you least expect. You're in the mood to spend money.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Financial limitations may add to your depression. Minor accidents could occur if you don't take precautions. Go directly to the source if you want to know exactly what's been going on.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

HARD

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

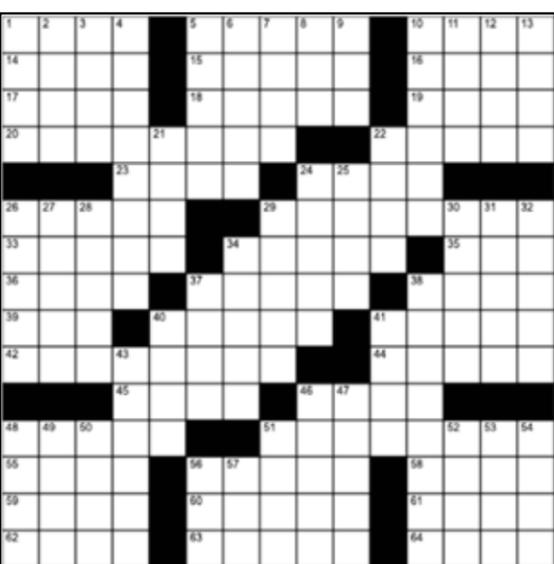
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-8	3	fine
Harbin	-20	-10	cloudy
Tianjin	1	12	cloudy
Urumqi	6	12	overcast
Xi'an	9	12	overcast
Lhasa	-9	0	snow
Chengdu	6	13	fine
Chongqing	7	16	cloudy
Kunming	5	8	overcast
Nanjing	0	8	fine
Shanghai	2	6	cloudy
Wuhan	0	9	fine
Hangzhou	-25	-15	cloudy
Taipei	-2	9	cloudy
Guangzhou	8	18	cloudy
Hong Kong	14	17	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	-13	-19	clouy
Frankfurt	-1	4	cloudy
Paris	1	4	overcast
London	1	7	overcast
New York	-2	5	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- PDQ; 5- Luau greeting; 10- Arizona Native American; 14- Very small quantity; 15- 3 grains troy weight; 16- War god; 17- Go-getter; 18- Name; 19- Rod's partner; 20- Soft-shell clams; 22- Steak order; 23- Lays down the law; 24- Prefix with -drome; 26- Moist; 29- Enticing; 33- Related on the mother's side; 34- "South Pacific" hero; 35- First name in horror films; 36- Together, in music; 37- Dry as ___; 38- 100 centavos; 39- Accelerate; 40- In agreement; 41- Assert as a fact; 42- Applying a remedy; 44- Mother-of-pearl; 45- Like pie?; 46- It's owed; 48- Bronze medalist's place; 51- District; 55- The last Mrs. Chaplin; 56- Wall painting; 58- Me neither; 59- Order in the court; 60- Of first importance; 61- River to the Caspian Sea; 62- ___ Dogg; 63- Sucrose; 64- Spouse;

DOWN 1- Helps; 2- Chimney residue; 3- To ___ (perfectly); 4- Sponger; 5- Was Hamlet; 6- Dens; 7- Scraps; 8- Actor Holbrook; 9- Had a little lamb; 10- Place of shelter; 11- Black-and-white cookie; 12- Hammer head; 13- It's deserted in fantasies; 21- Method; 22- Not false; 24- Dress style; 25- Fashion mag; 26- Compassion; 27- Below; 28- Purple shade; 29- Encompassed about; 30- Pertaining to the small intestine; 31- Polite refusal; 32- Garden figure; 34- D. ebumum, a tropical tree; 37- Garage sale sign; 38- Metallic element; 40- Somewhat; 41- "Power Lunch" network; 43- Add fizz; 46- Stage play; 47- Conger catcher; 48- Large village; 49- Israeli round dance; 50- Monogram ltr.; 51- Bluenose; 52- Asta's mistress; 53- Pluto's tail?; 54- Mah-jongg piece; 56- AWOL pursuers; 57- S.A. country;



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

BANKING

BANK OF AMERICA SLASHES FEES FOR ACCOUNT OVERDRAFTS

KEN SWEET, NEW YORK

BANK of America slashed the amount it charges customers when they spend more than they have in their accounts and plans to eliminate entirely its fees for bounced checks.

It's the latest move by the nation's biggest banks to roll back the overdraft fees they long charged customers, fees that often amount to hundreds of dollars a year for frequent overdraft users.

The bank based in Charlotte, North Carolina, will cut the overdraft fees it charges customers to \$10 from \$35 starting in May. It will also stop charging fees for non-sufficient funds — which are levied when it rejects a transaction — better known as bouncing a check.

While checks are no longer widely used, NSF fees can come from automated payments like utility bills. Bank of America, the nation's second-largest bank, says roughly 25% of its overdraft/NSF fee revenue each year came from NSF fees. Overdraft fees typically come when someone makes a purchase on a debit card that exceeds the available cash in their account.

Altogether, Bank of America estimates the steps will cut its overdraft-fee revenues by 97% from where they were in 2009, the year before it started taking incremental steps toward reining in overdraft-fee revenues.

"This is the final step in the journey we've been on," said Holly O'Neill, president of retail banking at BofA, in an interview. "We have good financial solutions for clients without them having to rely on overdraft, but



we will still have overdraft if it is needed."

Consumer groups and politicians applauded the measure, particularly with Bank of America's size as the largest consumer banking franchise in the country.

"I've been working to reduce or eliminate overdraft fees for 20 years and to give them credit, they really did listen," said Martin Eakes, CEO of the Center for Responsible Lending. "This could potentially hundreds of millions of dollars staying in customers' accounts instead of going toward fees."

It remains to be seen whether the decision by BofA — a leader

in the retail banking industry — to cut overdraft fees will pressure other banks to take similar measures.

"Banks are going to take different approaches. Some are going to eliminate them, reduce them, others will remain in denial about how damaging these fees are. But now they have competitive pressure" said Lauren Saunders, associate director for the National Consumer Law Center. "Any bank that is not seriously considering reforming their overdraft practices is just hurting themselves in the long term."

The bank is also eliminating two smaller fees as well. It will

no longer allow customers to overdraft their accounts at the ATM and will eliminate a \$12 fee it charged customers when the bank automatically moved money from one account to another to avoid an overdraft, often moving money from a long-term savings account into the customers' primary checking.

Overdraft has its origins in banks providing a service for a fee to customers who may have not balanced their checkbook correctly and wanted a bank to honor a purchase. But the widespread use of debit cards changed this courtesy into a routine source of revenue for banks. If a customer

lacked funds in their account, a \$5 coffee could end up costing \$35 because of overdraft fees.

Overdraft fees became lucrative for the industry but at the same time made banks a target for consumer advocates and regulators. After the financial crisis, Democrats put the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and other regulators in charge of reining in overdraft fee revenue. The CFPB under President Biden has decided to take another look at overdraft fee practices.

"For many big banks, overdraft fees are still the steady, reliable, predictable, easy revenue that shareholders love," said Rohit Chopra, the CFPB's director, in December.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Massachusetts and a long-time critic of banking practices like overdraft fees, called BofA's announcement "a step in the right direction" on Twitter.

"Big banks should eliminate these fees altogether," Warren said.

Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio and the chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, called BofA's decision a "good first step toward banks eliminating overdraft fees altogether."

For years, BofA has slowly cut back on its overdraft fee practices. It got rid of overdraft fees tied to debit card purchases in 2010 and created a checking account in 2014 that did not allow customers to overdraft. The SafeBalance account is now the bank's most commonly opened account.

But BofA and the broader industry were not ready to get rid of overdraft fees altogether until recently. Many banks froze the fees they charged customers during the first year of the pandemic and industry still booked record profits. While overdraft fees fell for the first time in six years in 2020, the industry still collected over \$30 billion in fees from such practices that year. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

JW Marriott Hotel Macau announces CNY offerings



Hotel Macau this Chinese New Year as the culinary talents behind Man Ho Chinese Restaurant and Urban Kitchen have prepared fes-

tive delicacies that are sure to be a treat for reunions with beloved families and friends.

Man Ho Chinese Restau-

rant will bring in joy and good luck to guests with three special Chinese New Year Set Menus, and a range of auspicious a-la-carte dishes, all available from January 29 to February 7.

The set menus will feature traditional festive dishes that are opulent to authentic Chinese New Year gathering.

Urban Kitchen, meanwhile, will introduce an exuberant range of Chinese New Year offerings, available between January 31 and February 3 (close on February 2). Celebrate togetherness with a Fortune Dish, or "poon choy", which serves four and requires preorder one week in advance.

Wynn launches festive dining experiences



In celebration of the Year of the Tiger, Wynn is pleased to be collaborating with talented local artists. Five local designers from the Macau Illustrators Association — Frank Wong Wang Chi, June Zhuo Zhi Jun, Zoe Ho Ka I,

Taylor Hu Hao Kai and Elsa Lo Pui Si — have joined together with Wynn to create five uniquely designed "Fortune Tiger" Chinese New Year greeting cards for an auspicious year ahead. Wynn is also honored to be

working in partnership with renowned Macau calligrapher, Ung Choi Kun, the gaming operator announced in a statement.

By blending traditional and innovative techniques, Ung's calligraphy is an "elegant display of traditional Chinese culture and spreads blessings for a healthy and prosperous New Year."

Meanwhile, the two Michelin-starred Wing Lei restaurant at Wynn Macau will prepare traditional Chinese New Year dishes, while Wing Lei Palace will present Cantonese classics for Chinese New Year with a traditional and innovative flair for guests of Wynn Palace.

FOOTBALL

Chinese broadcaster ordered to pay EPL \$213M over TV rights

A Chinese broadcaster has been ordered to pay the English Premier League at least \$213 million by the High Court in London over the collapse of one of the competition's most lucrative international rights agreements.

The league terminated the deal last year after PPTV failed to pay two installments of the rights fees owed, citing a change to the schedule caused by the 100-day pandemic-enforced pause in fixtures in 2020 and the lack of fans in stadiums when games resumed in June.

Given the season concluded eventually, the judge rejected the argumen-



ts made by the streaming service, which is owned by Suning, the Chinese retail giant that also controls Italian champion Inter Milan.

"In many commercial contracts events may transpire other than as anticipated by one, or even both, contracting parties,"

Judge Peter Fraser said in a ruling published yesterday [Macau time]. "That does not mean that the court will re-write the parties' bargain and impose different terms upon them to suit those later events. That is not the function of the law of contract."

The judge said the lea-

gue payments of \$210.3 million and \$2.673 million should be made by the broadcaster's parent company, PPLive Sports International, along with interests and legal costs.

The Premier League said it would "now begin the process of recovering the fees and costs owed by PPLive."

The judge pointed out in his ruling that the broadcaster had even "failed to pay a substantial amount of outstanding legal fees" owed to its lawyers last year.

Inter Milan is due to play in England in March when it is hosted by Liverpool in the round of 16 of the Champions League. **MDT/AP**

TENNIS

DJOKOVIC: NOT ISOLATING AFTER COVID INFECTION WAS 'ERROR'

NOVAK Djokovic knew he'd tested positive for COVID-19 when he attended a newspaper interview and photo shoot in Serbia last month, saying yesterday he made an "error of judgment" and should have immediately gone into isolation.

In a statement posted to his social media accounts, the tennis star also blamed "human error" by his support team for failing to declare that he had traveled in the two-week period before entering Australia.

Upon arrival, his visa was revoked and then later reinstated in an ongoing saga over whether he should be allowed into the country despite not being vaccinated against COVID-19. The back and forth has provoked outrage in Australia and overshadowed the lead-up to the Australian Open.

Djokovic acknowledged the lapses when he sought to clarify what he called "conti-

nuing misinformation" about his movements after he became infected last month — though he did not say spell out what inaccuracies he was referring to.

The statement was posted while the men's tennis No. 1 was in Rod Laver Arena holding a practice session, his third on the tournament's main court since being released from four nights in immigration detention.

The nine-time and defending Australian Open champion remains in limbo before the year's first tennis major starts next Monday. The stakes are particularly high since he is seeking a men's record 21st Grand Slam singles title.

He won a legal battle on procedural grounds Monday that allowed him to stay in the country, but he still faces the prospect of deportation because his exemption from COVID-19 vaccination rules has been questioned. **MDT/AP**

AD

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OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

ARRIVAL OF OMICRON GETS ALARM BELLS RINGING

Anyang, a city with a population of 5 million in Henan province, was locked down on Monday. It is the third city to hit the pause button in China over the past month, highlighting the challenge the country still faces in its fight against the novel coronavirus.

There were 110 locally transmitted infections reported in the Chinese mainland on Monday, among which 87 were in Henan, 13 in Shaanxi province and 10 in Tianjin. As of Tuesday noon, Tianjin has reported a total of 97 cases since last weekend.

It is not only the numbers themselves that have prompted the local authorities to make the decisions to lock down these cities but more importantly they have been spurred to do so by the potential of the virus to inflict damage on public health, social stability and the economy should the infections spread.

Arguably the only major country to have adopted a zero-tolerance approach in its fight against the virus, China has always acted quickly so it can seize the initiative — which many countries have surrendered long ago. Thanks to its perseverance and inputs into its zero-case strategy, particularly the over 80 percent vaccination rate, the last death caused by the virus on the mainland dates back to January last year.

As such, although the number of infections are low, the lockdowns are not unreasonable. Particularly since the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games will soon open and the Lunar New Year holiday is just three weeks away and this is a peak travel period.

Notably, the cases in Tianjin and Anyang are the highly infectious Omicron variant of the virus, and according to the Tianjin epidemic prevention and control department, the variant might have been transmitting in the port city with a population of 14 million for at least two weeks before it was identified last weekend, with the origin of the infections remaining unknown. That the cases in Anyang can be traced back to Tianjin means the cross-region transmission of the Omicron variant is already a reality. Neighboring Beijing and Hebei provinces must be on the highest alert.

A national transport hub in Central China, Henan has every reason to take strict measures to cut the transmission chains of the virus in its jurisdiction as is being done in the provincial capital Zhengzhou and neighboring Xuchang. Without such efforts, Henan could easily become a steppingstone for the virus to extend its transmission chains nationwide, which would undo what the country has achieved over the past two years.

The tranquility of people's lives in the rest of the country is partly attributable to those bravely fighting on the front line in the affected regions. But the battle against the virus is a people's war, and people are either already engaged in the fight in some capacity or in reserve.

The whole country must raise its vigilance again and overcome any sluggishness or complacency, as now is another critical phase in the seesaw battle with the virus that treats all encounters as its first.

RAT WHO DETECTED LAND MINES IN CAMBODIA DIES IN RETIREMENT

THE BUZZ

A land mine-detecting rat in Cambodia who received a prestigious award for his life-saving duty has died in retirement, the charity for which he had worked has announced.

Magawa, an African giant pouched rat, passed away last weekend, said an announcement on the website of APOPO, a Belgium-headquartered non-profit group. The organization trains rats and dogs to sniff out land mines and tuberculosis.

"All of us at APOPO are feeling the loss of Magawa and we are grateful for the incredible work he's done," the announcement said. Ma-

gawa was born in November 2013 in Tanzania, where APOPO maintains its operational headquarters and training and breeding center. He was sent to Cambodia in 2016.

The death of Magawa was announced a day after three mine removal experts working for another group were killed by an accidental explosion of an anti-tank mine in Cambodia's northern province of Preah Vihear.

APOPO's office in Cambodia posted condolences for the three dead and one wounded from the Cambodia Self Help Demining group.



BORIS APOLOGIZES FOR ATTENDING LOCKDOWN PARTY

JILL LAWLESS, LONDON

PRIME Minister Boris Johnson has apologized for attending a garden party during Britain's coronavirus lockdown in 2020, saying there are things the government "did not get right."

Johnson is facing anger from public and politicians over claims he and his staff flouted pandemic restrictions by socializing when it was banned. Some members of his Conservative Party say he should resign if he can't quell the furor.

Johnson acknowledged for the first time yesterday that he was at the May 2020 garden party at his Downing Street office, though he said that he had considered it a work event.

Johnson told lawmakers in the House of Commons: "I want to apologize. ... With hindsight, I should have sent everyone back inside."

Opponents and allies alike want Johnson to come clean about whether he attended a gathering in May 2020, when Britain was under a strict lockdown imposed by Johnson to curb the spread of the coronavirus. Johnson has so far declined to comment on reports he was at the "bring your own booze" get-together in the garden of his

Downing Street residence.

An invitation to the "socially distanced drinks" gathering was emailed to about 100 people by a senior prime ministerial aide. At the time, people in Britain were barred by law from meeting more than one person outside their household.

Johnson's lunchtime appearance at the weekly Prime Minister's Questions session in the House of Commons will be his first public appearance since details of the party emerged. On Tuesday, a spokesman declined to comment on the allegations, citing an ongoing investigation by a senior civil servant, Sue Gray, into several alleged parties by government staff.

Johnson has previously said that he personally broke no lockdown rules, but his troubles are mounting.

Angela Rayner, deputy leader of the opposition Labour Party, said Johnson's refusal to say whether he was at the May 2020 party was "astounding."

"People have been reflecting about what was happening to them at the time in May and many people are still grieving their loved ones who they weren't able to say goodbye to at the time, and to think the prime minister was laughing and partying

is just unforgivable," she told the BBC.

Rayner said that if Johnson had "lied to the British public, lied to Parliament and he has attended parties during lockdown, then his position is untenable."

The scandal dubbed "partygate" has become the biggest crisis of Johnson's two-and-a-half years in power. During the U.K.'s first lockdown, which began in March 2020 and lasted for more than two months, almost all gatherings were banned. Millions of people were cut off from friends and family, and even barred from visiting dying relatives in hospitals. Thousands were fined by police for breaking the ban on gatherings.

So there has been widespread anger at claims Johnson's Conservative government flouted the rules it had imposed on the rest of the country by holding garden parties, Christmas get-togethers and office quiz nights in Downing Street, which is both the prime minister's home and his office.

Opposition politicians are calling for Johnson's resignation. More worryingly for the prime minister, many members of his own party are increasingly concerned about Johnson's judgment and leadership. **MDT/AP**



Germany's president called yesterday for a thorough debate over plans for compulsory coronavirus vaccinations in the country, saying such a drastic measure needs to be comprehensively justified. Chancellor Olaf Scholz has backed calls for a vaccine mandate and lawmakers are expected to begin debating a bill later this month. Polls show a majority of people in Germany back compulsory vaccination against Covid-19, but a vocal minority opposes the idea.



Austria's foreign minister said that the European Union wants to help Lebanon escape its economic meltdown, but only if the country's leaders clean up Beirut's affairs. Alexander Schallenberg told reporters after meeting his Lebanese counterpart in Beirut that Lebanon should reach a deal with the International Monetary Fund, move forward with the investigation into the August 2020 port blast and restructure the hard-hit banking sector.



Somalia A large explosion outside the international airport in Somalia's capital killed at least eight people and wounded nine others yesterday, a local doctor said. Dr. Abdulkadir Adam with Medina hospital shared the toll with The Associated Press. Witnesses at the scene said a passing U.N. convoy appeared to be the target in the Mogadishu blast near a checkpoint leading to the heavily fortified airport.