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THE STAR-STUDED LINE-UP OF TABLE TENNIS PLAYERS ARRIVED IN THE CITY FOR THE WTT CHAMPIONS MACAO 2021 FROM JANUARY 19 TO 23

P5

PRESIDENT XI REJECTS ‘COLD WAR MENTALITY,’ PUSHES COOPERATION: DAVOS

P6

CHINA'S ECONOMY GROWS 8.1% IN 2021, SLOWS IN SECOND HALF

P10



China has restored railway freight traffic with North Korea that had been suspended over pandemic concerns, its foreign ministry said yesterday. Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said the connection across the Yalu River between China's Dandong and Sinuiju in North Korea had been restored after “friendly consultation between the two sides.”

North Korea fired two suspected ballistic missiles into the sea yesterday in its fourth weapons launch this month, South Korea's military said, with the apparent goal of demonstrating its military might amid paused diplomacy with the United States and pandemic border closures. The missiles were launched four minutes apart and flew around 380 kilometers on a maximum altitude of 42 kilometers before landing in waters off the country's northeastern coast.



Philippines People who are not fully vaccinated against Covid-19 were banned from riding public transport in the Philippine capital region yesterday in a desperate move that has sparked protests from labor and human rights groups. The Philippines's vaccination campaign has been dogged by public hesitancy and delays, while the highly contagious omicron variant has fueled a recent spike in infections.

New Zealand and Australia were able to send military surveillance flights to Tonga yesterday to assess the damage a huge undersea volcanic eruption left in the Pacific island nation. A towering ash cloud since Saturday's eruption had prevented earlier flights. New Zealand hopes to send essential supplies, including much-needed drinking water, on a military transport plane today.

More on backpage

NOT SO PERMANENT RESIDENCY

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P4



RENATO MARQUES

COVID-19
SHENZHEN SEES FIRST OMICRON CASE

P2



XINHUA

MUST TO SEND STUDENTS TO SUN YAT-SEN HOSPITAL FOR INTERNSHIPS

P5

GAMING

CASINO PROFITS IN BILLIONS ON FIRST TRADING DAY AFTER AMENDMENT ANNOUNCEMENT

LYNZY VALLES

MACAU'S big six have gained a whopping HKD42.2 billion on their first day of trading this week, lifting the overall market value of the casino operators to some HKD469 billion.

The gains follow the government's announcement on Friday that it will issue up to six casino licenses to operators, alleviating concerns among executives about reports and forecasts that the number of concessions would be reduced.

By the close of the Hong Kong market yesterday, shares in the casino operators sailed up to 65.53% — 15% of their market value.

Sands China's shares skyrocketed to 22.3%, closing with a gain of 14.6%, the biggest daily percenta-

ge gain since October 2011, according to a report issued by Reuters.

Wynn Macau recorded a jump of as much as 19.1%, closing up 11.9% in its best day since March 2020.

Shares in Galaxy Entertainment, MGM China, SJM and Melco finished up with gains of between 4.8% and 11.7%.

Meanwhile, as cited in the report, the market value of U.S. casino operators, including Sands China, Wynn Macau, MGM China and Melco, gained as much as HKD43.23 billion.

Macau authorities revealed the amendments to the Macau SAR's Gaming Law No. 16/2001 that stipulate a maximum of six concessions and a concession duration capped at 10 years with three years for exceptional extensions.

The amendment ruled that no sub-concessions will be allowed.

Following such announcement, Citi raised its target prices for the six Macau casino operators by 8% to 14%.

"The proposed bill would remove the current sub-concession structure, but not change to the competitive dynamics ultimately," Jefferies wrote in a research note.

As the government crackdown on junkets continue, Jefferies' analysts expect long-term pressure on VIP business.

On Friday, following the announcement that was made at 3 p.m., casino's shares recorded a surge of up to nearly 17%. Operator Wynn Resorts jumped 8.6%, Las Vegas Sands increased by 14% and Melco Resorts rose nearly 17% higher.



Photo taken last week shows an area under temporary lockdown due to the resurgence of Covid-19 in Longgang District of Shenzhen

COVID-19

Shenzhen sees first Omicron case

OF the 163 new local Covid-19 cases identified in the past 24 hours in mainland China, nine were in Guangdong province, with Shenzhen seeing its first Omicron infection.

Tianjin city and Henan province are the epicenter of this wave of the virus. An infection was also detected in Guangxi province.

Zhuhai detected five infections, Shenzhen two and Zhongshan a single case. The cases in Zhuhai are residents of Nanping township of Xiangzhou district. They are all close contacts of previously detected cases.

The venues attended by infected individuals in all cities, as well as their workplaces, have been cordoned off.

To curb the spread of Covid-19, Zhuhai decided to launch three rounds of citywide nucleic acid testing from Sunday to Tuesday, close the scenic spots in the city and suspend dine-in services of the restaurants in Xiangzhou District.

Mulling the cause of the recent virus detections, authorities in Zhuhai suspected that they might have been caused by contaminated imported goods.

Similarly, other reports have suggested that the recent new virus cases in Beijing originated in incoming mail.

According to authorities, the virus recently detected looks like samples found previously in the US and Singapore.

Transport services to and from affected areas will be reduced or suspended, with yesterday seeing the start of the country's annual "Spring Relocation" — a period when non-local workers return to their hometowns for Lunar New Year celebrations.

Authorities also announced yesterday that the Zhuhai-Hong Kong route of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge shuttle bus will be suspended from today. **AL**

HEALTH CODE

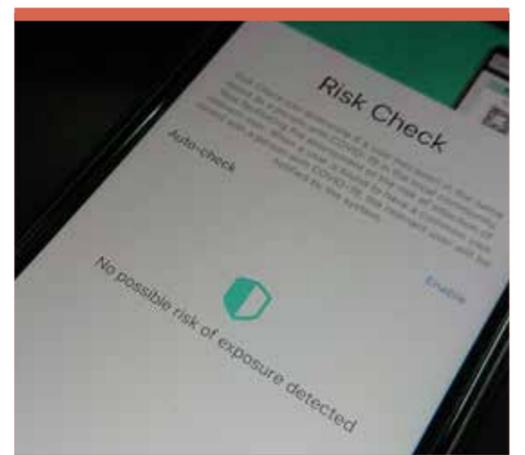
SSM DEFENDS SECURITY OF 'COUNTER-SCAN'

YESTERDAY, the SSM issued a statement defending its "counter-scan" footprint recording function as secure from personal data breaches.

The "counter-scan" function is to allow operators of establishments to scan the health code of users to record their visit, in contrast to users scanning the venue's QR code with their own device.

Public concerns have been expressed over where the data collected by a "counter-scan" will be stored. The SSM has previously emphasized that this data will be stored on the establishment's device and not transferred to government servers.

The SSM provided an assurance that



health codes will not be screen-captured, adding that the data will only be stored for 28 days. No identifiable personal data will be collected, the SSM pledged.

Although the risk of health codes being screen-captured has been pointed out, the SSM did not further address the problem.

Former lawmaker

Sulu Sou recently expressed that vague terms and conditions for the footprint recording app may leave room for personal data privacy breaches.

Over the weekend, Sou stressed that in the app's terms and conditions, it would "automatically record [...] the websites browsed at the time when the app is used." **AL**

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Macau report passed by Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering

ANTHONY LAM

THE 2021 report submitted by the Macau government, evaluating its efforts to counter money laundering, has been adopted by the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG), the Financial Intelligence Office (GIF) announced in a statement.

The APG is an international organization for Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT). This is the second follow-up report since the publication of the APG Mutual Evaluation Report of Macao SAR in 2017, the GIF noted.

The GIF noted that the Macau government submitted its first regular follow-up report in 2019 and successfully upgraded three Financial Action Task Force (FATF)



recommendations to largely compliant ratings.

With these upgrades, according to the GIF, Macau became the first member

state to pass all 40 FATF recommendations on technical compliance assessment, of all globally evaluated members at that time.

Statistics from FATF showed that, as of late November 2021, 120 members out of 206 have been evaluated, with only five getting "straight As." In addition, Macau has achieved satisfactory ratings in six of 11 effectiveness outcomes, making it the best performing member.

The GIF said that, after nearly two years of collaboration and communication between member agencies of the Interdepartmental Anti-Money Laundering/Combating of Financing of Terrorism Working Group and itself, the report was adopted by all APG members in December.

Macau maintained the complaint and largely compliant ratings (considered passing grades) of all 40 FATF technical compliance recommendations.

The GIF pledged that it will "remain vigilant as always to the continuous changes in the global financial market, continue to promote the practical implementation of AML/CFT laws and regulations, and strive to safeguard the financial and public security of Macau." The future focus of APG mutual evaluations will be the effectiveness of implementation, with more stringent requirements for passing.

HK TESTS FIND HEAVY METAL IN COFFEE, INCLUDING PRODUCTS IN MACAU MARKET

The Hong Kong Consumer Council has tested 49 ground or powdered coffee products – many available in Macau – and discovered various levels of heavy metals and pesticides in a number of samples. Only three products, namely coffee beans by UCC, coffee capsules by The Coffee Academics and instant coffee by M&S Food, were found to be free of pesticides. The Illy Intenso – bold roast coffee beans – had the highest levels of lead and tin in the tests. The council reminds consumers to be mindful of their caffeine intake as excessive consumption may be harmful. It also pointed out that decaffeinated coffee does not contain zero caffeine.

AMENDED TAX INFORMATION EXCHANGE LAW TO TAKE EFFECT APRIL 1 ONCE PASSED

A parliamentary committee has set April 1 as the date for the reviewed Tax Information Exchange Law to come into effect, as it concludes its work on the law review. The bill will then move to the plenary for voting. The amended version will have no stipulation on offshore businesses, as these types of operations have been banned. Other amendments now in the bill include a requirement for customers to prove the source of funds to financial institutions at the time of opening a new financial account, regardless of their status with the institution. Institutions are also required to retain data for a certain period of time.

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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 world's 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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NOT SO PERMANENT RESIDENCY

RENATO MARQUES

MOST people living and working in Macau under a non-permanent residency permit (non-permanent BIR) usually have a goal of reaching the “notorious” seven years. This is the point at which, in theory, a non-permanent resident can request the status of a permanent resident.

Most wouldn't expect this “permanent” residency status to have an expiry date, but according to an investigation by the Times into the matter, this is not so clear.

Information from the Identification Services Bureau (DSI) confirms that, according to the stipulations of Clause 2 of Article 2 of Law No. 8/1999 (Law of Macau Special Administrative Region Permanent Resident and Right of Abode), “if Macau SAR permanent residents with foreign nationality (excluding Portuguese, and persons who have Chinese and Portuguese descent) have not ordinarily resided in the SAR for 36 consecutive months or above, they will lose the right of abode,” the DSI explained in a written reply to the Times's inquiry.

Additionally, the DSI said that, in such cases and if a resident fails to provide a valid reason for their long absence from the SAR, the [former] permanent resident will not lose their status completely but, instead will be granted a non-permanent resident card.

“Persons that have not resided in the Macau SAR for 36 consecutive months can explain their reasons in written form to

the DSI when renewing their resident identity card. The DSI will consider the actual situation of the person concerned. If the DSI accepts the reason provided, the person will be issued with a permanent resident identity card. Otherwise, the person will be issued with a non-permanent resident identity card,” the DSI said.

As explained to the Times, this does not just concern those who acquired permanent resident status by residing in Macau for a period of over seven years, but also those who were granted this status by birth.

In the same response, the DSI noted that there is no time limit for the renewal of an expired permanent resident identity card, and the law does not hold any penalty or fine for those who do not renew their cards before the expiration date.

Still, the DSI advised, “to avoid hassle, residents whose identity card has expired are advised to go through the formalities to renew their identity card as early as possible.” The bureau added, “normally, the resident status of Macau SAR permanent residents will not be affected after their identity card expires.”

The revocation or downgrade of residency status also carries a series of potential complications and a reduction to several benefits. It is well-known that the wealth partaking scheme, which provides annual cash handouts and other subsidies, is different for people with non-

-permanent and permanent residency status.

Additionally, only permanent residents are entitled to many other benefits such as being part of the government's Provident Fund, and being able to apply for a civil service job within the government or government-run departments.

If a permanent resident fails to provide a valid reason for their long absence from the SAR, [they] will be granted a non-permanent resident card

Other differences can be found in the requirements to establish and register companies in the SAR, as well eligibility to run to the Legislative Assembly elections, among many other aspects of life in Macau.

CHANGES TO NON-PERMANENT RESIDENCY RULES

Changes have also been made recently to requirements for the renewal of non-permanent residency authorizations, with the new Legal Regime for Immigration Control, Permanence, and Residence Permits coming into force from November 15 last year.

This new regime states in article 42 that a residency permit is terminated if renewal was not requested within the period of the previously-granted permit. That is, if a person

does not apply to renew their non-permanent ID card before its expiration date, the permit is immediately terminated.

According to article 46, a termination at any point of the process will also entail the loss of all time counted towards the acquisition of permanent resident status.

Another situation to consider is that outlined in article 45 of the same law, under which if a request for a residency permit or renewal is approved, the person involved has a maximum of 90 days to pick up this document (which should be later submitted to the DSI for the issuance of an ID card). If this does not happen within 90 days, this person will be barred from requesting a new residency permit for a period of two years.

Yet another potential stumbling block is the new deadlines imposed for the renewal of residency applications. In the past, any person could submit a renewal application before the expiration date

of their ID card, but the new law establishes that renewal applications can only take place up to 120 days (four months) before the expiration date of the ID card. Importantly, if the application is not made within the first 60 days of the 120 day period, it is subject to a fine ranging from MOP2,000 to MOP5,000 depending on the timing. This provision is Number 3 of Article 40 of the Administrative Regulation No. 38/2021, which regulates some parts of the immigration law.

All these rules and regulations, as well as the changes recently enacted, are particularly important and relevant at a time when Macau is under numerous restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Long quarantine periods and other restrictions on those arriving from abroad, as well as the border restrictions enforced in connection with the neighboring region of Hong Kong, have made it difficult for Macau residents abroad to access international flights that allow their return to the SAR.

Currently, and at least until January 24, there is a measure in place prohibiting any flight originating outside China from carrying any passengers into Macau, including local residents returning home.

OUTDATED ADDRESS, PHONE LEADS TO FINES OF UP TO MOP6,000

An important aspect of the new immigration law to take heed of is the fact that article 98 establishes that if a residency permit holder (a non-permanent ID card holder)

fails to update the authorities of any change of home address or any contact details within 45 days, they incur a fine that ranges between MOP2,000 and MOP6,000.

MUST to send students to Sun Yat-Sen Hospital for internships

JING WU

THE Faculty of Medicine of Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) announced that they have signed a cooperation agreement with the First Affiliated Hospital of Sun Yat-sen University (Sun Yat-Sen First Hospital), and students will now be sent there for clinical placements.

According to the collaboration framework, MUST's Faculty of Medicine will regularly send students to Sun Yat-Sen First Hospital for both clinical placements and internships.

The signing ceremony for the collaboration agreement was held on January 13 at the conference room of Sun Yat-Sen Hospital's History Hall in Gangzhou.

The organizers said of the agreement: "In order to enhance the development



and exchange of medical services, the two parties reached an agreement based on the principle of 'mutual support, friendship and cooperation, mutual benefit and win-win.'

The two parties have agreed to provide each other with the necessary support in terms of teachers, venues and

resources for clinical teaching practice of the students.

"Academic researchers from both parties will jointly apply for research funding projects in both places, make arrangements for mutual subject leaders and co-investigators, and accept post-doctoral fellows and postgraduate stu-

dents from the MUST to undertake short-term research work in the laboratories," the agreement stated.

The framework also mentioned that, every year, they will co-host an academic exchange seminar to "capitalise" on the strengths of their international universities and to promote cultural exchange between the East and the West, and the Chinese culture through the development of the Greater Bay Area.

At the signing ceremony, representatives from both sides expressed their hopes for a more extensive strategic cooperation and an enhancement in research and teaching between the two institutions.

The representatives are also aiming for "the establishment of closer ties through complementary strengths, so as to jointly nurture 'outstanding medical talents' for Macau and contribute to society."

WTT CHAMPIONS PLAYERS ARRIVE IN TOWN

THE star-studded line-up of table tennis players arrived in Macau for the upcoming WTT Champions Macao 2021 China Stars which will be held from January 19 to January 23.

Presented by Galaxy Entertainment Group, the tournament will bring together table tennis players, including Olympic champions Ma Long, Fan Zhendong, Xu Xin, Liu Shiwen, Chen Meng, Wang Manyu and Sun Yingsha, plus other renowned players such as Liang Jingkun, Wang Chuqin, Lin Gaoyuan, Wang Yidi, Chen Xingtong and Doo Hoi Kam.

The players will compete in three categories: men's singles (16 players), women's singles (16 players) and mixed doubles (16 pairs). Cheong Chi Cheng from Macau is also invited to play in the men's singles.

The first two matchdays will feature Round of 16 matches in all categories.

Quarterfinals in all categories will be held on January 21.

The penultimate day January 22 will see the quarterfinals in men's and women's singles, as well as the semifinals and final of mixed doubles. The semifinals and finals of the men's and women's singles will take place on 23 January. **LV**

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XI REJECTS 'COLD WAR MENTALITY,' PUSHES COOPERATION

JAMEY KEATEN, GENEVA

CHINESE President Xi Jinping called yesterday for greater world cooperation against COVID-19 and said China would send an additional 1 billion doses of vaccine to other countries, while urging other powers to discard a "Cold-War mentality" at a time of rising geopolitical tensions — a veiled swipe at the United States.

The Chinese leader touted his country's efforts to share vaccines, fight climate change and promote development at home and abroad as he delivered the opening speech of a virtual gathering hosted by the World Economic Forum. The online event is being held in place of its annual January meeting in Davos, Switzerland, because of health concerns linked to the coronavirus pandemic.

The global outbreak that has claimed over 5.5 million lives and upended the world economy was another theme. In a panel session on the virus, Moderna's CEO said the vaccine maker was working on a single-shot booster for both COVID-19 and the flu, while U.S. infectious diseases expert Dr. Anthony Fauci lamented as "very disturbing" the reluctance of many Americans to follow basic measures like mask-wearing and getting vaccinated.

"This is such a formidable virus," Fauci said, noting the difficulty in achieving herd immunity against COVID-19 because of the



Chinese President Xi Jinping delivers a keynote address for the 2022 World Economic Forum virtual session in Beijing yesterday

tendency of immunity to fade, even after vaccination. "You make the virus have an advantage when you don't implement in a unified way all the very well-recognized public health measures, particularly the vaccines."

Xi, who hasn't left China since the coronavirus emerged in early 2020, said in his speech that China has exported over 2 billion doses of its COVID-19 vaccines to over 120 countries and international institutions. He announced plans to provide an additional 1 billion — including a donation of 600 million doses to Africa and an extra 150 million to Southeast Asia.

By comparison, managers of the U.N.-backed COVAX program to ship vaccines to developing countries announced over the

weekend that it has now delivered 1 billion vaccine doses.

Xi touched on standard themes from previous talks to international audiences, including responding to trading partners' complaints by promising to open China's state-dominated economy wider to private and foreign competition.

His comments come as tensions between the United States and China have simmered on topics like Taiwan, intellectual property, trade, human rights and the South China Sea.

"We need to discard Cold War mentality and seek peaceful coexistence and win-win outcomes. Our world today is far from being tranquil," said Xi, through a translator. "Protectionism and unilate-

ralism can protect no one. They ultimately hurt the interests of others as well as one's own. Even worse are the practices of hegemony and bullying, which run counter to the tide of history.

"A zero-sum approach that enlarges one's own gain at the expense of others will not help," he added. "The right way forward for humanity is peaceful development and win-win cooperation."

Xi said China "stands ready to work with" other governments on climate but announced no new initiatives and offered no resources. He said it was up to developed countries to provide money and technology.

After Xi spoke, Moderna CEO Stephane Bancel said during a session on the future of COVID-19

that he hoped the U.S.-based company would have a combined vaccine booster ready to test in advanced research in the second quarter, saying a best-case scenario would be if the single shot covering both flu and COVID-19 would be ready for use next year.

"I don't think it would happen in every country, but we believe it's possible to happen in some countries next year," Bancel said.

Moderna has been heavily criticized for prioritizing distribution of its COVID-19 vaccines to rich countries; only a fraction of its supply has gone to poor countries via COVAX. He said the company was aiming to make about 2 to 3 billion doses this year and hopes to have data from a new vaccine tweaked to address the omicron variant in March.

In a panel on technology cooperation, access to broadband internet was raised as an inequality issue and an expensive gap that needs to be filled. Speakers like Verizon Communications CEO Hans Vestberg said transparency around protecting the privacy of people's data will be crucial, including collaboration between corporations and governments.

The annual Davos gathering usually takes place in person in the Alpine snows of eastern Switzerland, drawing hundreds of business leaders, cultural elites, academics and government leaders. Leaders of countries like Germany, Colombia and Japan were set to address the gathering that runs through Friday.

On tap today were speeches by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. **MDT/AP**

DEMOGRAPHICS

Births fall in 2021, as workforce shrinks

JOE MCDONALD, BEIJING

THE number of babies born in China fell again last year, official data showed yesterday, adding to pressure on the ruling Communist Party's ambitions to boost national wealth and influence with a workforce that has been shrinking for a decade.

Some 10.6 million babies were born, the government said, down 12% from the 12 million reported earlier for 2020.

The total population stood at 1.413 billion at the end of 2021, an increase of 480,000 from the previous year, the National Bureau of Statistics reported.

The decline in birth rates could undercut the ruling party's plans to develop technology and self-sus-



taining economic growth based on consumer spending rather than exports and investment.

The fall in population growth has prompted warnings China, where economic output per person is

below the global average, might face a "demographic time bomb" and have too few workers to support a growing number of elderly people.

The ruling party has enforced birth limits since 1980 to restrain population growth and conserve resources. But leaders started to worry after the working-age population peaked at 925 million in 2011 and started to drop earlier than expected.

Authorities eased birth limits starting in 2015. But couples are put off by high costs, cramped housing and job discrimination against mothers.

The percentage of people aged 16 to 59, the official working age population, edged down to 882.2 million, or 62.5% of the

total, from 63.3% reported in the 2020 census. That is down from 70.1% a decade ago.

Demographers say the working-age share of the population might fall to half by 2050.

There were 267 million people aged 60 and above, or 18.9% of the total, up from 264 million, or 18.7%, in 2020.

The looming worker shortage comes as President Xi Jinping's government boosts spending on its military and efforts to create global competitors in electric cars and other technologies.

Japan, Germany and some other rich countries face the same challenge of supporting aging populations with fewer workers. But they can draw on investments in factories, technology and foreign assets. By contrast, China depends on labor-intensive farming and manufacturing.

The party took its biggest step in 2015 when rules that limited many couples to having only one child were eased to allow two.

China's birth rate already was falling before the one-child rule, paralleling trends in South Korea, Thailand and other Asian economies. The average number of children per mother tumbled from above six in the 1960s to below three by 1980, according to the World Bank.

Demographers say official birth limits concealed a further fall in the potential number of children per family.

The one-child limit, enforced with threats of fines or loss of jobs, led to abuses including forced abortions. A preference for sons led parents to kill baby girls, prompting warnings millions of men might be unable to find a wife, and fueling social tension. **MDT/AP**

JAPAN

Kishida says virus measures, defense top priorities

MARI YAMAGUCHI, TOKYO

JAPANESE Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told parliament yesterday that fighting the pandemic and strengthening defense are his government's top priorities.

Kishida delivered a speech opening this year's parliamentary session hours after North Korea test-fired two possible ballistic missiles — its fourth tests this month.

"I will devote my body and soul to win this fight against the coronavirus," Kishida said, calling it a "national crisis." He urged people to help each other overcome the pandemic.

The Japanese capital reported 3,719 new cases yesterday. Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike and the heads of three neighboring prefectures where infections are also surging agreed to jointly ask Kishida's government to place the region under "pre-emergency" status and move toward restrictions such as working from home and shorter hours for eateries.

The government's decision is expected within days.

"In Tokyo, all residents now face the risk of becoming patients or the close contacts of patients, a situation that could paralyze the social infrastructure," Koike said. "I hope to work together to protect the lives and health of residents of our prefectures while

AP PHOTO



Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida delivers his policy speech at the lower house

maintaining social and economic activity."

Kishida reiterated his plan to keep Japan's stringent border controls in place, banning most foreign entrants until the end of February, while the country tries to speed up COVID-19 vaccine booster shots and reinforce its medical system to support an increasing number of patients being monitored or treated at home.

The highly transmissible omicron variant has driven infections

higher and started to paralyze medical and public services in some areas as more people are forced to self-isolate. Japan last week trimmed its 14-day quarantine period to 10 days.

Kishida urged companies to promote remote work, and called on schools to make flexible use of online classes. Booster shots began last month with medical workers and so far less than 1% of the population has had their third dose.

Japan recently cut the waiting

period between second and third shots for elderly people to six months from eight. In part because of a shortage of imported vaccines, most younger Japanese are not expected to get their turn until March.

In his speech, Kishida also addressed what he said was an "increasingly severe and complex" regional situation. "I'm determined to protect the people's lives and daily life," he vowed.

North Korea's repeated test-firings of ballistic missiles "are

absolutely not permissible and we should not overlook its significant progress in missile technology," Kishida said.

North Korea on Monday fired two possible ballistic missiles which Japanese officials said landed off its eastern coast.

North Korea's nuclear and missile development, along with China's rapid military buildup, have already prompted Kishida's government to raise Japan's military budget.

Kishida repeated his plan to consider development of a controversial pre-emptive strike capability that would "drastically strengthen" Japan's defense power, especially for islands in southwestern Japan. Tokyo is particularly concerned about China's increasingly assertive maritime activity in the region and rising tensions in the Taiwan Strait.

He is to hold an online summit with U.S. President Joe Biden on Jan. 21 as the two leaders seek to strengthen ties, Tokyo and Washington announced yesterday.

Kishida called the U.S. alliance "the lynchpin of Japan's diplomatic and security policies."

Kishida, who is from Hiroshima, which the U.S. attacked with an atomic bomb in World War II, said he seeks "a world without nuclear weapons" and plans to hold a conference with former and serving world leaders on phasing out nuclear weapons. He said he hopes the first meeting will be in his hometown this year.

Kishida pledged to promote energy reforms to reach carbon neutrality by 2050. He said he supports the use of "innovative" nuclear energy such as nuclear fusion technology as well as renewables to meet the goal. **MDT/AP**

Djokovic lands in Serbia after deportation from Australia

NOVAK Djokovic arrived in his native Serbia yesterday after being deported from Australia because he was not vaccinated against COVID-19, ending his hopes of defending his Australian Open title.

The tennis star's exit from Australia closed at least the first chapter in a dizzying drama that has resonance in the world of elite sports, Australian pandemic politics and the polarized debate over the COVID-19 shots. But even as one saga appeared to close, another opened as questions arose over whether he would be barred from the next Grand Slam tournament, the French Open.

A plane carrying the No. 1-ranked player from his stopover in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, touched

AP PHOTO



down in the Serbian capital, Belgrade, where he is expected to receive a hero's welcome.

Djokovic had argued in an Australian court he should be allowed to stay and compete because a recent coronavirus infection meant he was exempt from

strict vaccination rules. But Australian authorities cited the public interest in revoking his visa, saying his presence could stir up anti-vaccine sentiments and that kicking him out was necessary to keep Australians safe.

The Grand Slam started

yesterday in Melbourne, where Djokovic has won nine titles. He had hoped this year to win his 21st Grand Slam singles trophy there, breaking the record he shares with rivals Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal for the most in the history of men's tennis. Federer is not playing while recovering from injury, but Nadal is competing.

Even as he flew home from Australia, doubts arose over whether Djokovic would be able to play in the French Open. A member of the French Parliament said a new law that will exclude unvaccinated people from sports venues, restaurants and other public places will apply anyone who wants to play in the tournament.

The comments yesterday from Christophe Cas-

taner and a tweet from the sports minister late Sunday marked a reversal from prior plans to create a "bubble" around the tournament, scheduled for late May into June.

France's sports ministry said once the new law is in place, there will be no exceptions until further notice.

For now, a warm welcome likely awaits Djokovic, who has overwhelming support in his native Serbia where his closest family lives. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic has accused the Australian government of "harassing" the top-ranked tennis star and urged him to return where he would be welcomed.

Djokovic flew to Australia with a visa issued after he received an exemption to play in the tournament

because he had recently recovered from COVID-19. But border said that exemption wasn't valid and moved to deport him.

A legal battle ensued, but ultimately Australia's immigration minister revoked his visa, and judicial panel upheld that decision.

Vaccination amid the pandemic is a requirement for anyone at the Australian Open, whether players, their coaches or anyone at the tournament site. More than 95% of all Top 100 men and women in their tours' respective rankings are vaccinated. At least two other men — American Tenny Sandgren and Frenchman Pierre-Hugues Herbert — skipped the first major tournament of the year due to the vaccine requirement. **MDT/AP**

USA

After Biden's first year, the virus and disunity rage on

ZEKE MILLER &
CALVIN WOODWARD,
WASHINGTON

FROM the inaugural platform, President Joe Biden saw American sickness on two fronts — a disease of the national spirit and the one from the rampaging coronavirus — and he saw hope, because leaders always must see that.

"End this uncivil war," he implored Americans on Jan. 20, 2021. Of the pathogen, he said: "We can overcome this deadly virus."

Neither malady has abated.

For Biden, it's been a year of lofty ambitions grounded by the unrelenting pandemic, a tough hand in Congress, a harrowing end to a foreign war and rising fears for the future of democracy itself. Biden did score a public-works achievement for the ages. But America's cracks go deeper than pavement.

In this midterm election year, Biden confronts seething divisions and a Republican Party that propagates the delusion that the 2020 election, validated as fair many times over, was stolen from Donald Trump. That central, mass lie of a rigged vote has become a pretext in state after state for changing election rules and fueling even further disunity and grievance.

In the dispiriting close of Biden's first year, roadblocks stood in the way of all big things pending.

The Supreme Court blocked his vaccinate-or-test mandate for most large employers. Monthly payments to families that had slashed child poverty ran out Friday, with no assurance they will be renewed. Biden's historic initiative to shore up the social safety net wallowed in Congress. And people under 40 have never seen inflation like this.

After his lacerating speech in Atlanta invoking the darkest days of segregation, he saw his voting-rights legislation run aground when Democratic Sen. Krysten Sinema of Arizona announced her opposition to changing Senate rules to allow the bill to pass by a simple majority.

Altering the rules would only "worsen the underlying disease of division infecting our country," she said.

For all of that, Barack Obama

AP PHOTO



was on to something when he paid his old vice president an odd compliment late in the 2020 campaign. Elect Joe Biden, he said, and after four years of flamboyant Trump dramas, folks could feel safe ignoring their president and vice president for a spell.

"You're not going to have to think about them every single day," Obama said. "It just won't be so exhausting. You'll be able to go about your lives."

Indeed America saw normalcy, some say dignity, return to the White House. Pets came back and so did daily press briefings for the public.

The Trump-era political muzzle came off public-health authorities, freeing them to confuse the public all on their own.

First lady Jill Biden's studied "Love" jacket at a global summit not-so-subtly countered the "I Really Don't Care, Do U?" jacket her predecessor wore in a visit to a migrant child detention center.

The discipline, drive and baseline competence from the new White House produced notable results. Biden won a bipartisan infrastructure package that had eluded his two predecessors, coming away with a legacy-shaping fix for the rickety pillars of industry and society.

Biden steered more judges through Congress to the federal bench than any recent predecessor. He won approval of a Cabinet that was half women and a minority of white people for the first time. More than 6 million people are back at work and half a billion COVID-19 vaccines have been put in arms, but the nation has a long way to go to return to its pre-pandemic state.

"I think it's a lot of achieve-

ments, a lot of accomplishment, in the face of some very serious obstacles," Biden's chief of staff, Ron Klain, told The Associated Press on the cusp of Biden's second year. "The Biden presidency remains a work in progress."

Matthew Delmont, a civil rights historian at Dartmouth, expected more from Biden by virtue of his decades of experience as a savvy operator in the capital.

He had anticipated a far more effective COVID-19 response and more urgency, sooner, in countering the rollback of voting rights and tilting of election rules that Republicans are attempting.

"There's something to be said for the professionalism of the White House and not going from one fire to the next," Delmont said. "What I worry is that the Washington he understands isn't the Washington we have anymore."

Political science professor Cal Jillson at Southern Methodist University in Dallas said Biden has displayed "warning track power" — the ability in baseball to hit long but not, as yet, over the fence.

In Biden, Jillson sees a leader who brought the even keel that Obama had talked about but also one who only rarely delivers a speech worth remembering.

"While there are vast partisan differences in how Biden is seen, in general he is seen as stable but not forceful," he said.

In large measure, Biden's innate civility and predictability brought the sort of climate change that the world could get behind.

Here once more was a president who believed deeply in alliances and vowed to re-

pair an American reputation frayed by the provocateur in office before him.

There would be no more puzzling feelers about buying Greenland. No more doting looks at Russian President Vladimir Putin — instead, Biden stepped up diplomatic confrontation over Putin's designs on Ukraine. There would be no eerie uplit gatherings around glowing orbs with rulers of dissent-crushing Arab countries like Trump's photo op with the Saudis.

But the world also witnessed Biden's debacle in Afghanistan, a chaotic withdrawal that brought more than 124,000 to safety but stranded thousands of desperate Afghans who had been loyal to the U.S. and hundreds of U.S. citizens and green-card holders.

Discounting warnings from military and diplomatic advisers, Biden misjudged the Taliban's tenacity and the staying power of Afghan security forces that had seen crucial U.S. military support vanish. He then blamed Afghans for all that went wrong. Millions of Afghans face the threat of famine in the first winter following the Taliban takeover.

All presidents enter the world's most powerful office buoyed by their victory only to confront its limitations in time. For Biden, that happened sooner than for most. A polarized public, Trump's impeachment trial and an evenly divided Senate saw to that.

Meantime, day after day, event after event, it was the virus that commanded Biden's attention. "That challenge casts a shadow over everything we do," Klain said. "I think we've made historic progress there but it's still a challenge." MDT/AP

this day in history

1996 GREEN GROUPS JOIN BYPASS BATTLE



Six major environmental organisations today added their support to the growing anti-bypass campaign in Newbury, Berkshire.

Friends of the Earth, the Council for British Archaeology, Greenpeace UK, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Wildlife Trusts and the World Wide Fund for Nature all voiced disapproval of the new road scheme.

In a joint statement they said that a solution to the serious traffic problem was needed but that "the proposed bypass route is not the answer".

It said: "Traffic on the A34 in Newbury will be back to the intolerable levels of today within five to 10 years of the bypass opening."

Yet supporters of the scheme say the new road will provide essential relief to the congested town centre.

Contractors began work in earnest on the project last week but have since suffered numerous delays and setbacks.

Clearance has been hampered by well-organised activists employing effective disruption tactics.

Protesters have built tunnels and tree houses and are using themselves as human shields to prevent security men and diggers from moving in.

The ensuing conflict over the future of the prime countryside has become known as the 'Third Battle of Newbury' after the two 17th century English Civil War battles that took place in the same area.

Yesterday contractors supplied as many as 300 of their own security guards.

350 trees were felled, and there were 39 arrests.

In a separate development, Thames Valley Police have asked the government to help meet the rising costs of the enterprise.

They fear that policing the protest could cost up to £12 million.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Support for and protest against the Newbury bypass have been long-standing. Both have been active since the 1980s.

Protest camps remained on the route until 1997 and protesters continued their campaign which included a fight for the protection of a local rare snail habitat.

The road cost in excess of £100m and took 34 months to complete. It was opened in November 1998.

In total more than 1,000 people were arrested over the course of Britain's most notorious road protest campaign.

While 1996 was the 100th anniversary of the birth of the motorcar, the anti-Newbury bypass campaign made a major contribution to the debate about how to counter ever-increasing levels of traffic on Britain's roads.

CHINA'S ECONOMY GROWS 8.1% IN 2021, SLOWS IN SECOND HALF

JOE MCDONALD, BEIJING

CHINESE leaders are under pressure to boost slumping economic growth while they try to contain coronavirus outbreaks ahead of next month's Winter Olympics in Beijing.

The world's second-largest economy grew by 8.1% last year, but activity fell abruptly in the second half as the ruling Communist Party forced China's vast real estate industry to cut surging debt, official data showed yesterday.

Growth sank to 4% over a year earlier in the final three months of the year, fueling expectations Beijing may need to cut interest rates or stimulate the economy with more spending on public works construction.

That slump is likely to worsen, leading to "more aggressive measures to boost growth," Ting Lu and Jing Wang of Nomura said in a report.

Yesterday, the Chinese central bank cut its interest rate for medium-term lending to commercial banks to the lowest level since early 2020, at the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

Asian stock markets ended the day mixed following the dual announcements. China's benchmark Shanghai Composite Index gained 0.6% while the Hang Seng in Hong Kong lost 0.7%. The Nikkei 2225 in Tokyo rose 0.7%.

Lingering Chinese economic weakness has potential global repercussions, depressing demand for steel, consumer goods and other imports.

China rebounded quickly from the pandemic, but activity weakened last year as Beijing tightened controls on borrowing by real estate developers, triggering



a slump in construction that supports millions of jobs. That made consumers nervous about spending and investors anxious about possible defaults by developers.

Consumer spending has suffered after authorities responded to virus outbreaks by blocking most access to cities including Tianjin, a port and manufacturing center near Beijing, and imposed travel controls in other areas.

Their "zero-COVID strategy" aims to keep the virus out of China by finding and isolating every infected person. That has helped to keep case numbers low but is depressing consumer activity and causing congestion in some ports.

The ruling party has stepped up enforcement ahead of the Feb. 4 start of the Winter Games, a prestige project. Athletes, reporters and officials at the Games are required to stay in sealed areas and avoid contact with outsiders.

Growth in consumer spending, the biggest driver of economic growth, fell to 1.7% over a year earlier in December from the previous month's 3.9%.

"The prospect this year for consumer spending to rebound back to pre-pandemic levels has certainly dimmed," David Chao of Invesco said in a report. "All eyes are on whether policymakers will evolve their zero-COVID pandemic policies."

Officials have urged the public

to stay where they are during the Lunar New Year holiday instead of visiting their hometowns. That will cut spending on travel, gifts and banquets during the country's most important family holiday.

Forecasters have cut this year's growth outlook to as low as 5% due to the debt crackdown and coronavirus.

"Downward pressure on growth will persist in 2022," Tommy Wu of Oxford Economics said in a report.

Compared with the previous quarter, the way other major economies are measured, the Chinese economy grew 1.4% in the final three months of 2021. That was up from the previous

quarter's 0.2%.

Chinese exports, reported Friday, surged 29.9% in 2021 over the previous year despite a global shortage of semiconductors needed to make smartphones and other goods and power rationing imposed in major manufacturing areas.

Exporters benefited from reviving global demand while their foreign competitors were hampered by anti-virus controls. But economists say this year's trade growth is likely to be weak and export volumes might shrink due to congestion at ports.

"With supply chains already stretched to capacity, last year's boost from surging exports can't be repeated," Julian Evans-Pritchard of Capital Economics said in a report.

Auto sales fell for a seventh month in November, declining 9.1% from a year earlier, reflecting consumer reluctance to commit to big purchases.

Chinese leaders are trying to steer the economy to more sustainable growth based on domestic consumption instead of exports and investment and to reduce financial risk.

In mid-September, factories in some provinces were ordered to shut down to meet official targets for reducing energy use and energy intensity, or the amount used per unit of output.

One of the country's biggest developers, Evergrande Group, is struggling to avoid defaulting on \$310 billion owed to banks and bondholders. Smaller developers have collapsed or defaulted on debts after Beijing reduced the amount of borrowed money they can use.

Chinese officials have tried to reassure investors over the risks of wider problems, saying any impact on lending markets can be contained. Economists say a potential Evergrande default should have little effect on global markets. **MDT/AP**

CORPORATE BITS

GalaxyArt showcases bamboo artworks in exhibition



Starting from today to May 15, 2022, GalaxyArt, managed under the Galaxy Entertainment Group Foundation, will present "Art of Bamboo: from Qilin to Contemporary Art" exhibition

where exquisite bamboo artworks by Hong Kong artist Louis To will be featured.

"The artworks reflect the unique charm of intangible cultural heritage and de-

monstrate how traditional Chinese culture is embedded in the Macau community," Galaxy Entertainment Group said in a statement.

The "Art of Bamboo" incorporates four sections to show the essence of bamboo artworks, including art pieces of the Chinese mystical animals Qilin and Chiwen, the use of bamboo crafts in the daily lives such as the building of performance stage, the combination of contemporary bamboo crafts and the Western culture, as well as a documentary which gives a glimpse into the art of making of the delicate bamboo artworks.

Melco celebrates the Year of the Tiger with festive offerings



Kids' City is offering a Chinese New Year themed crocheted bag DIY workshop until February 10, where participants can explore their creativity and bring home their handmade souvenirs.

There are also stage shows and fun games available daily for kids to enjoy with their families during the festive period, Melco announced in a statement. Meanwhile, the Chinese

New Year pudding gift box can be purchased at Golden Pavilion, Jing Ying and Northern Noodle House at City of Dreams.

Also, from January 31 to February 15, Jade Dragon will be showcasing its festive set menu, limited-time dim sum items and Chinese New Year specialties.

Michelin one-star Cantonese restaurant Ying has also prepared an array of Chinese New Year delicacies including lucky dim sum and "Poon Choi" set for guests to enjoy with families and friends.

From January 28 until 31, two 8-course Reunion Set Menus for four persons will be on offer.

Former NBA great Yao Ming addresses Peng Shuai, Olympics

KEN MORITSUGU, BEIJING

FORMER NBA great Yao Ming said yesterday he and others had a pleasant talk when they met last month with Chinese tennis player Peng Shuai, whose disappearance after making a sexual assault allegation against a former government official raised international concern.

He also said it is unfortunate that Novak Djokovic won't play at the Australian Open because of his COVID-19 vaccination status. But Yao added that he isn't qualified to judge Australia's pandemic policies.

Yao, who played for the Houston Rockets from 2002-11 and is now president of the Chinese Basketball Association, used stories and humor to deflect challenging questions at a news conference to promote the Beijing Winter Olympics, which open in 18 days.

Asked about China's relations with the U.S., which has announced a diplomatic boycott of the



Peng Shuai

Beijing Games, Yao likened sporting and cultural events to the community temple gatherings he went to as a child in Shanghai.

"On that occasion, even with the neighbors I had bickered with, I would nod my head (in greeting)," he said. "Then we went on

with whatever we needed to do. I think we need more of this kind of temple gathering."

He also called sports a bridge for communication, saying there are sometimes collisions on bridges, but "we hope we can keep the bridge."

Peng, who won Grand Slam titles in women's doubles, denied making the assault allegation to a Singapore newspaper on the same day photos of her with Yao and two former Olympians were posted on social media. The photos appeared to be part of a cam-

paigned to respond to international demands that Peng be allowed to talk freely about her situation.

Yao said that he has known Peng for about 20 years. The four Chinese sports figures were photographed on an observation deck from where they watched a winter sports exhibition.

"We had a pleasant chat," he said. "We asked many questions about the game as we were not familiar with snow sports."

At one point, it was unclear if he said Peng was OK. Some, including the translator for the news conference, heard her say "she was fine that day," but others thought Yao said "we were all fine that day."

The International Olympic Committee, which has been pressured to move the Games from China because of human rights concerns, came under further fire after IOC President Thomas Bach held a video call with Peng. An IOC statement said that she assured Bach and others that she was well.

Regarding Djokovic, Yao said he is not familiar with Australia's pandemic measures, "so I'm not in a position to comment if he did right or wrong."

But, he said, "speaking as a former athlete, I think it's a pity for a player to lose such an opportunity and for the spectators to lose an opportunity to enjoy watching the player's skills." **MDT/AP**

- 合夥人 PARTNERS:**
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OPINION

China Daily
Editorial, China Daily

DYNAMIC CONTROL AND PREVENTION APPROACH WILL CONTINUE TO KEEP COVID-19 AT BAY

Will China's anti-COVID-19 approach continue to work in responding to the sporadic waves of infections related to the Omicron variant? This is of great concern given the fact that this new variant has proved to be highly contagious.

To date, imported cases related to the Omicron variant have been reported in 14 provinces and municipalities in the Chinese mainland. That is not surprising with the new variant rapidly becoming the major source of infections in the United States and an increasing number of countries in Europe and elsewhere.

Local cases of the Omicron variant have been identified in Central China's Henan province and Northeast China's Liaoning province as well as Guangdong province since the first two local cases of this new variant in the country were detected on Jan 8 in Tianjin. The source of the latest case of this variant identified in Beijing on Sunday is not yet clear.

The rapid rise in the number of new infections in the rest of the world and what has happened in the Chinese mainland in recent days verify the fact that it will be more difficult to cut off the spread of this variant of the virus.

Yet it does not mean the mainland's dynamic approach will not be able to stop the large-scale spread of the virus. The detection of the cases related to the variant suggests that the country's nucleic acid test is still sensitive to the variant although there might be an increasing number of asymptomatic cases, which increases the degree of complexity and difficulty of screening those who are infected.

The rocketing rise of infections in European countries and the US by no means suggest that China will suffer the same fate as their approaches in response to the pandemic have been different from that of China from the very beginning.

It is not that the governments in these countries failed to understand how detrimental the pandemic would be to the security of people's lives and the growth of their economies. They also wanted to adopt strict prevention and control measures as China has done. However, they do not have the institutional mechanisms to enable them to do so.

However difficult the battle will become against the much more contagious Omicron variant, the Chinese government will mobilize all social resources in concerted efforts wherever local cases are detected, along with careful epidemiological investigations to find out the source of infections while placing close contacts under medical observation.

China has accumulated experience in how local governments at all levels can effectively organize communities and various organizations to build a firewall against the large-scale spread of the virus.

PHILIPPINE DICTATOR'S SON DEFEATS BID VS. PRESIDENTIAL RUN

THE BUZZ

The son of former Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos defeated yesterday a bid to disqualify him from the May 9 presidential race but still faces other petitions from human rights victims and others who have raised alarm over atrocities under his late father's rule.

The Commission on Elections rejected a petition arguing that Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. should be barred from public office for having been convicted of failing to file income tax returns from 1982 to 1985 and stating in his candidacy papers that he had never been found guilty of a crime. The ruling is appealable.

"Respondent did not deliberately attempt to mislead, misinform or deceive the electorate," the ruling said.

Marcos Jr. has led in popularity polls ahead of the election. "This is one challenge down," commission spokesman James Jimenez told reporters. "But there are other challenges still pending."

He said there five other petitions against Marcos Jr.'s candidacy, three of which have been consolidated into one case. Marcos Jr.'s name will be included on the ballot, which will be printed soon, despite the pending petitions, Jimenez said.

AP FILE PHOTO



OXFAM: TAX RICH TO FUND VACCINES FOR POOR HIT BY PANDEMIC

KELVIN CHAN, LONDON

ANTI-POVERTY organization Oxfam called yesterday for governments to impose a one-time 99% tax on the world's billionaires and use the money to fund expanded production of vaccines for the poor — part of an effort to combat global inequality widened by the coronavirus pandemic.

The ranks of the super-rich have swelled during the pandemic thanks to ample financial stimulus that pumped up stocks, the group said. Meanwhile, poor countries have suffered more than their share from COVID-19 because of unequal access to vaccines, which have mostly gone to rich nations, Oxfam said in a report aimed at informing discussions at the World Economic Forum's online gathering of political and business leaders this week.

"The pandemic has been a billionaire bonanza," Oxfam International Executive Director Gabriela Bucher said in an interview. "When governments did the rescue packages and pumped trillions into the economy and to financial markets in order to support the economy for all, what happened is a lot of it went

into the pockets of the billionaires."

Vaccine development has been one of the pandemic's success stories but Bucher said they've been "hoarded by the rich countries" seeking to protect pharmaceutical monopolies.

Since the pandemic erupted in March 2020, a new billionaire has been minted almost every day. The fortunes of the world's 10 richest men — including Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos and Bill Gates — more than doubled to \$1.5 trillion, making them six times more wealthy than the world's poorest 3.1 billion people, Oxfam said.

Meanwhile, 160 million more people have been forced into poverty during the pandemic, Oxfam said, citing numbers from the Forbes 2021 Billionaires List, Credit Suisse's Global Wealth Databook and the World Bank.

Oxfam called for rich countries to waive intellectual property rules on COVID-19 vaccines in an effort to expand their production.

A one-off 99% tax on the 10 richest men's pandemic windfalls could earn more than \$800 billion and be used to fund that effort and other progressive social spending, the group said.

The money "would be able to pay for vaccines for the whole world, have health systems for everyone," Bucher said. "We would also be able to compensate for the damage of climate change and have policies that address gender-based violence," while still leaving the 10 billionaires \$8 billion richer than they were at the start of the pandemic, she added.

It's not all doom and gloom. The group noted that the U.S. and China, the world's two biggest economies, are starting to consider policies aimed at countering inequality, such as raising tax rates on the rich and taking action against corporate monopolies.

"The point is extreme inequality is not inevitable and this is why it brings us hope," Bucher said.

Oxfam has long sought to inspire debate at the annual gathering of business and political elites typically held in the Swiss ski resort of Davos. The pandemic forced organizers to put off the event for a second year, instead holding virtual sessions where political leaders will be joined by business executives and campaigning groups such as Oxfam. **MDT/AP**

Abu Dhabi A possible drone attack may have sparked an explosion that struck three oil tankers in Abu Dhabi and another fire at an extension of Abu Dhabi International Airport yesterday that killed three people and wounded six, police said. Abu Dhabi police identified the dead as two Indian nationals and one Pakistani. Police said an investigation was underway.

AP PHOTO



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday visited Albania to talk with Prime Minister Edi Rama on strengthening bilateral ties and also inaugurate new apartments funded by Turkey for Albanians left homeless by the 2019 earthquake. Upon landing Erdogan immediately headed to the northwestern town of Lac, where Turkey has funded the building of a complex with 522 apartments at a cost of 42 million euros.

AP PHOTO



Greece yesterday imposed a vaccination mandate for people over age 60, as coverage remains below the European Union average and a recent spike in infections has sustained pressure on hospitals. Older people failing to get vaccinated will face penalties, starting at a 50-euro fine in January and followed by a monthly fine of 100 euros after that.

AP PHOTO



Switzerland Seven activists have gone on trial over charges including alleged trespassing and resisting arrest, over their roles in a campsite protest against the expansion of a limestone quarry in rolling Swiss countryside. The defendants, who are being tried separately in rapid-succession hearings this week, are the first among some 40 people who are facing court action over the show of civil disobedience at Mormont hill.