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FOUNDER & PUBLISHER Kowie Goldenhuys EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Paulo Coutinho www.macaudailytimes.com.mo

N.º 3951 **TUESDAY** T. 13°/20° Air Quality Moderate
15 Feb 2022

“THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN’”

MOP 8.00 HKD 10.00 2305 4271

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AP PHOTO



Japan A team from the International Atomic Energy Agency yesterday began its review of Japan's plan to begin releasing more than a million tons of treated radioactive water into the sea from the wrecked Fukushima nuclear plant — a review that Japan hopes will instill confidence in the plan. The 15-member team is to visit the Fukushima plant today and meet with government and utility officials during its five-day mission.

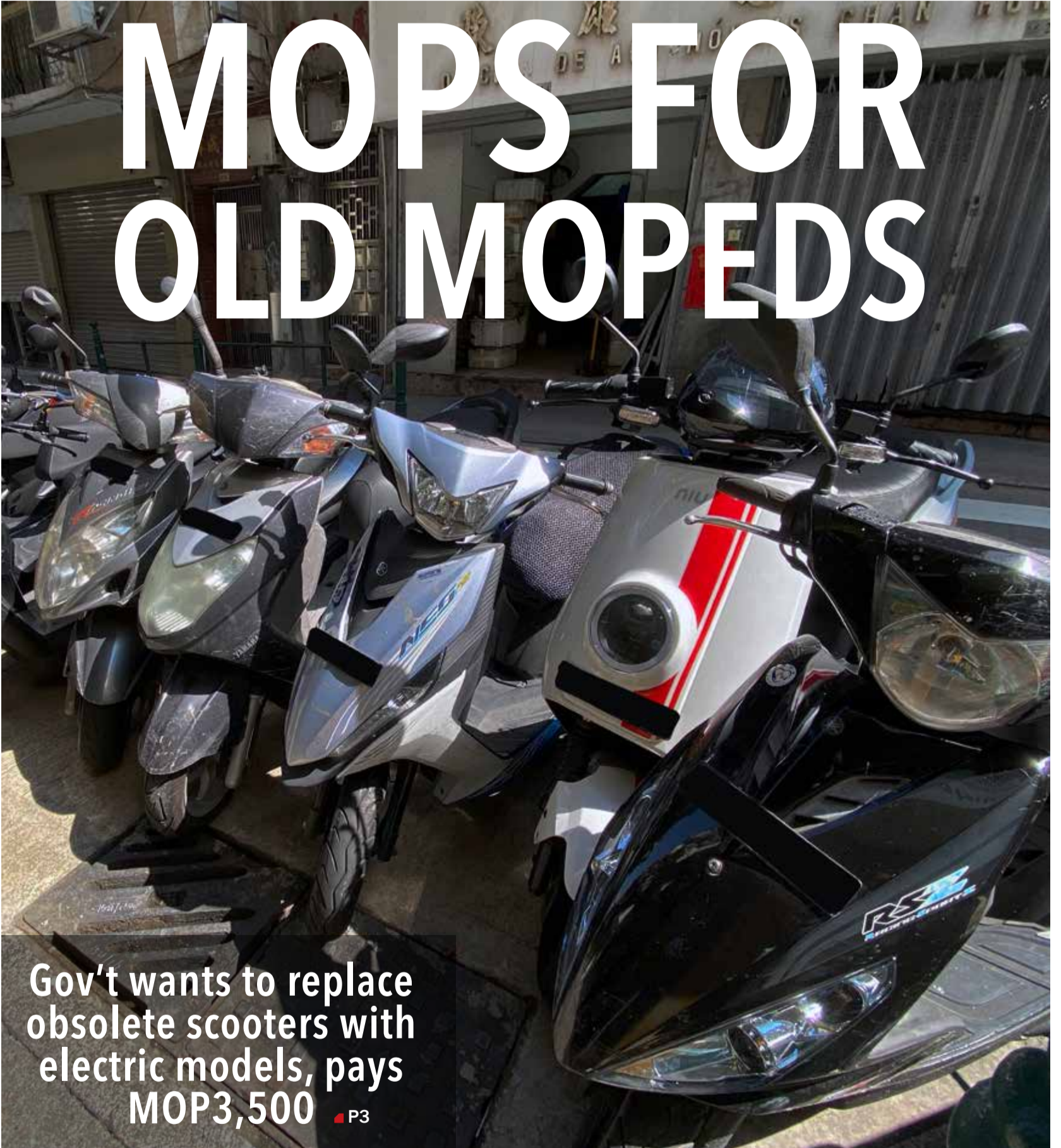
US Former President Donald Trump has criticized the Biden administration over its handling of North Korea, at an event in South Korea that included as a guest speaker former Vice-President Mike Pence. Several former leaders and top officials participated virtually or in-person at the weekend event in Seoul jointly sponsored by the Cambodian government and the Universal Peace Federation, an organization linked to the South Korea-based Unification Church, a religious group known for its mass weddings and global business and media interests.

AP PHOTO



Poland, the largest European Union nation to border Ukraine, is making preparations to accept Ukrainian refugees in the event of another Russian attack on that country. But the Polish government hopes that worst-case scenario can be averted. Similar preparations are being made across the region, particularly in those nations which share borders with Ukraine. As other countries draw down their diplomatic missions in Ukraine, Poland says it is for now keeping its diplomatic operations in place in case they are needed to facilitate a large-scale exit of Ukrainians.

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FOREIGN DOMESTIC WORKERS' ENTRY STILL 'NOT AN OPTION'

ANTHONY LAM

BRINGING in foreign domestic workers is still not an option, Wong Chi Hong, director of the Labor Affairs Bureau (DSAL), insisted in a reply to lawmaker Bruce Lei Chan U's inquiry.

Despite holding a position in the Macao Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM), Lei asked the bureau about importing domestic workers from outside of Greater China to ease demand.

Wong pointed out that, in the light of his consultation with the Health Bureau (SSM), allowing foreign workers from outside Greater China to enter Macau would be risky, "because Covid-19 is booming around the world."

Still citing the SSM, Wong stressed that the foreign domestic workers favored by employers in Macau are mostly from high-risk countries. Bringing them in to work in communities in Macau



would pose high risks, the official hinted.

He highlighted that the government currently makes exceptions for the arrival of foreign workers in two circumstances; firstly if they come on the purpose of participa-

ting in important business, academic or professional activities; or secondly if they have stayed in mainland China, Macau or Hong Kong for at least 21 days.

Foreign workers who do not meet either of the two criteria are

not allowed to enter Macau, although approval is on a case-by-case basis.

"For the time being, we will not consider approving the import of foreign workers who do not meet these criteria," Wong said in the

reply. "The government may adjust its policies in due course after close consideration and evaluation of risks," he added.

In his inquiry, Lei noted that Hong Kong had resumed taking in foreign domestic workers in August 2021. Certain restrictions apply and the main aim of the scheme was to ease demand for domestic workers.

In the same inquiry, the lawmaker also expressed his concerns about the quality of domestic workers – local or non-local – currently serving households in Macau. He followed up his question by citing cases of violence initiated by domestic workers.

In response, the DSAL director noted that the bureau has been offering domestic work courses in collaboration with various associations since 2012. Employers are encouraged to recommend these courses to their domestic workers.

Furthermore, information for improving legal literacy has been disseminated in different channels and languages, the bureau director emphasized, adding that 350 attendees were recorded at seminars held in 2021.

GAMING COMMITTEE EXPRESSES CONCERNS OVER CASINO OPERATOR EXECUTIVES' DUAL NATIONALITY

LYNZY VALLES

THE question of the backgrounds of managing directors of casino operators under the gaming law amendment was tabled yesterday by the Second Standing Committee.

Led by Chan Chak Mo, the committee is set to question the government on the standards and requirements it has set for casino administrators, such as whether those holding dual nationalities are eligible for such positions.

Speaking yesterday at the committee meeting, Chan was quoted on TDM Radio as saying, "we are going to ask the government what the scope in management power of this delegated administrator is and [their] suitability. There is also the question of nationality: whether or not dual nationality is allowed, since the role of delegated administrator is intended for permanent residents of the MSAR."



Chan also expressed concerns over the patriotism of senior executives of casino operators.

Last month, in the first reading of the gambling law amendment, most lawmakers were concerned with the termination of "satellite casinos."

"Satellite casinos" refer to those not located in premises owned by the gambling concessionaire operating the casinos. There are currently 20 of these.

Lawmaker Lei Leong Wong warned the government that they should prepare for the worst, because this matter concerns a

workforce of at least 7,000 people. "Counting supporting staff [as well], the figure may reach 15,000," the lawmaker said out, hinting that the government must handle the problem with extreme care.

In yesterday's meeting, Chan said that the committee does not know the situation of each satellite casino because some are operating in commercial and residential buildings, while others are installed in hotels. Therefore, they will raise the matter with the government once the bill comes before the Legislative Assembly.

CITY'S URBAN MASTER PLAN ANNOUNCED AS EXECUTIVE REGULATION

MACAU'S Urban Master Plan was finally promulgated yesterday in the form of an Executive Regulation, alongside a separate ordinance enacting the categorization of land use. The two laws come into effect today.

The Urban Master Plan will determine the use of city's land over the next 20 years. After extensive public consultation last year, the plan was finalized at the end of January, 2022.

Under the plan, the city will be divided into different zones for specific uses. Current industrial areas in Areia Preta and Fai Chi Kei, for example, will eventually be converted to commercial, residential or leisure facilities, the

government has said.

Last month, the government approved the Master Plan 2020-2040, which integrates the commercial, industrial and tourism and entertainment districts as land use categories for economic activities.

Commercial zones are essentially intended to accommodate trade and service activities, such as offices, financial activities, retail sales, restaurants, conventions and exhibitions.

The area aims to create conditions to "encourage people to work in the areas where they live and to promote a balance between professional and residential functions." AL



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DIRECTOR & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Paulo Coutinho paulocoutinho@macaudailytimes.com
ASSISTANT EDITOR Lynzy Valles
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Leanda Lee, Severo Portela, Sheyla Zandonai

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

A MACAU TIMES PUBLICATIONS LTD PUBLICATION

ADMINISTRATOR & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Kowie Geldenhuys kowie@macaudailytimes.com

OFFICE MANAGER Juliana Cheang juliana@macaudailytimes.com

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

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Gov't wants to replace 'obsolete' mopeds with electric models, offers MOP3,500

RENATO MARQUES

THE government wants the owners of small motorcycles (also known as scooters or mopeds) to replace them with new, electric-powered models, the Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) announced yesterday in a press conference.

The government is aiming to remove a high number of these motorcycles, mostly running on two-stroke engines, from the streets, because the DSPA claims they account for a significant share of air pollution in Macau.

The DSPA is therefore offering owners MOP3,500 compensation for each eligible motorcycle that is replaced by a new electric version.

The subsidy will be provided through the Environmental Protection and Energy Conservation Fund, with the government forecasting that it expects to invest somewhere between 9 and 20 million patacas in this trial project.

At the press conference, the deputy director of DSPA, Ip Kuong Lam, said that with this measure the government aims to reduce up to 10% of hydrocarbon emissions and up to 7% of carbon monoxide emissions, improving the air quality in Macau.

In addition to the MOP3,500 subsidy that the government is providing, vehicle owners who apply for this project will also be exempt from the two registration fees for the new vehicles, namely the MOP900 fee to issue a provisional license plate, and the MOP3,600 or 4,400 fee for issuing a formal license plate (according to the vehicle category).

Asked about DSPA's expectations for the project, director Raymond Tam said that the bureau aims to attract the participation of between 10% and 30% of owners of these vehicles, a rate which translates to between 2,550 and 7,650 motorcycles.

Tam explained that this trial project comes after a previous project, implemented by DSPA in 2017, that aimed to reduce the number of two-stroke engine vehicles.

"Back in 2017, we had the successful participation of 52% of the vehicle owners. These were good results. Now we are targeting the remaining ones that are still in use, as well as other old-age motorcycles that fall outside of the current emission standards," Tam said.

All motorcycles that were first licensed on or before June 30, 2009, regardless of the type of engine (two- or four-stroke) are eligible for the program.

The program starts on March 1 and runs until December 31 this year, with Tam adding that this is a trial project aiming to ascertain the level of interest from owners in trading in their old motorcycles for new, more environmentally friendly vehicles.

"If this pilot project gathers interest and proves successful, we can consider extending it in time or to other types of vehicles," he said, while also questioned on environmental solutions for heavy-duty diesel vehicles.

PLENTY OF OPTIONS

Asked by the Times about the lack of options for motorcycle owners and difficulties related to the charging of electric scooters, Tam responded that "there are currently 22 models of electric motorcycles on sale in Macau. We believe that with the [more widespread] usage of this type of vehicle, more models from other manufacturers might also come. The goal [of the project] is precisely to make the use of these vehicles common."

Regarding battery charging, Tam added that the DSPA has been working with the Transport Bureau (DSAT) to provide more charging stations, especially in public car parks.

"We have been working on this also together with manufacturers and importers who have placed also battery-swapping [stations] in at least nine locations to facilitate the battery charging," Tam said.

According to the DSAT website, there are currently 10 different manufacturers offering a total of 18 e-scooter models in Macau.

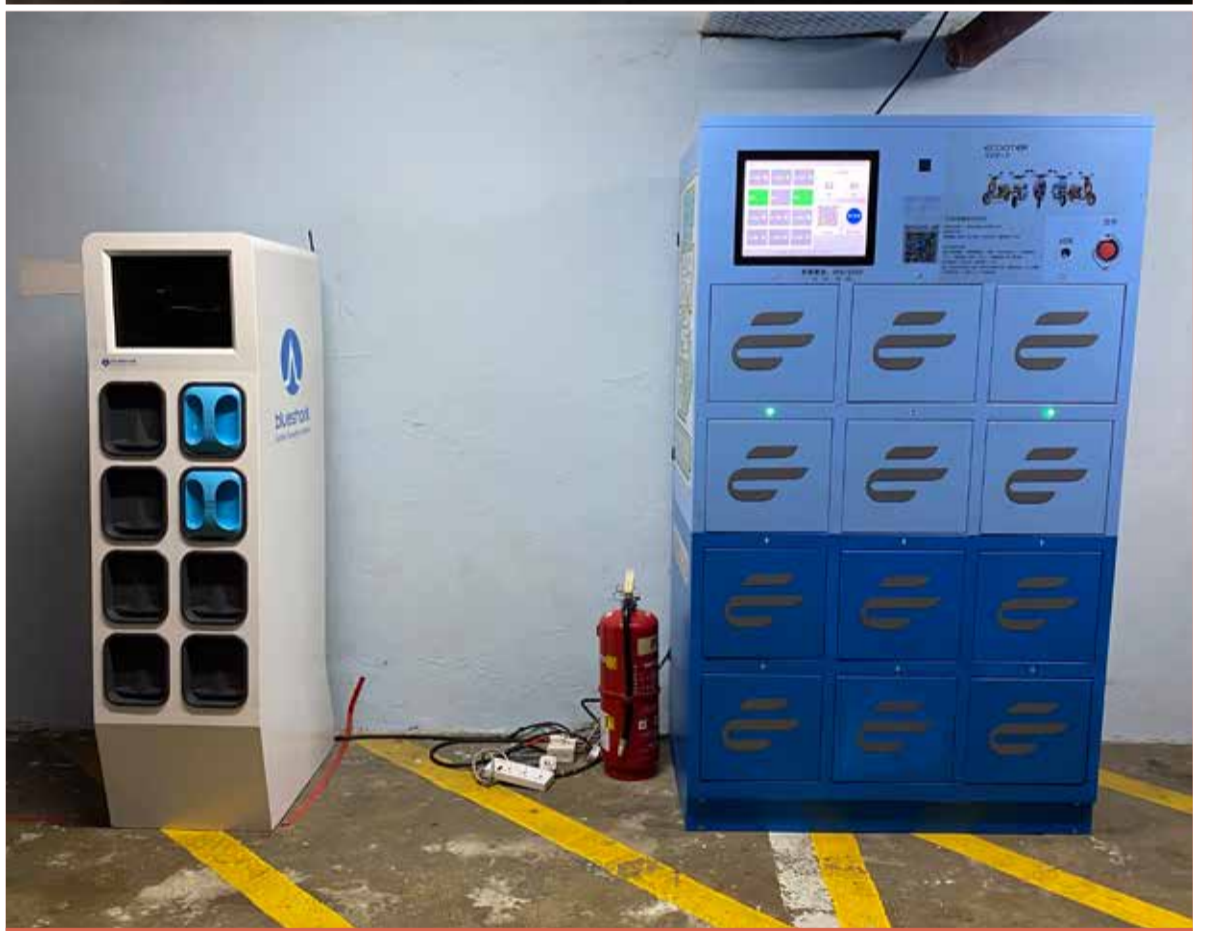
Brands available include Blueshark, Doohan, Ecooter, Mega, Moden, Ninebot, Niu, Sunra, Sun-ron and Tromox.

All the brands feature products made in mainland China and which are barely known to the general public with the exception of Niu, Ninebot (formerly Segway), and Ecooter, which have gained high market share worldwide.

Shanghai-based Blueshark has also already seen some recognition beyond borders, but the others remain mostly unknown, which does not contribute to public trust in the products.

Worldwide, famous brands in addition to Niu include the UK's Super Coco, the world-famous Italian Vespa in its "Elettrica" version, German BMW C-Evolution, Spanish Rieju and French Peugeot, as well as some big Chinese manufacturers like Lifan which have international recognition but are not yet available on the Macau market.

RENATO MARQUES



USER EXPERIENCE NOT SO PLEASANT

One of the bigger disadvantages of electric scooters lies in the need to charge the batteries. Unlike electric cars and bigger electric motorcycles (also not yet popular in Macau), scooters mostly use removable battery packs. This means that, to charge the batteries, users need to physically remove the battery packs from the vehicle and either take them home to charge or, if that is not possible, swap the batteries in the designated public car parks. Some scooters are sold with rented batteries

that allow users to simply swap a discharged one for another fully charged battery and continue to ride.

Each battery pack (most scooters have two) generally weighs 10 to 12 kilograms, which leaves many users disappointed and reluctant to swap combustion engines for the electric system.

In Macau, only some public car parks are equipped with battery charging or swapping stations, and these are provided by only two of the brands (Blueshark and Ecooter).

Niu scooters allow both the re-

moval of the battery pack to charge, or the motorcycle itself being plugged into a power socket, a feature which has helped make the scooters into market leaders.

According to figures provided to the Times by Niu's local representative, the brand has already sold over 200 of Niu's scooters, including the N1S, NGT, NQI Sport and U1 Pro models.

Another disadvantage that electric scooters face compared to gasoline-powered versions is that most of the storage space under the seat is lost, as the space is used for batteries and power cords.

CRIME

MAN APPREHENDED FOR MANUFACTURING, CONSUMING COCAINE

ANTHONY LAM

A Tanzanian man has been arrested for allegedly “illegally manufacturing and consuming [a] psychiatric and anesthetic substance,” the Judiciary Police (PJ) announced in a special press conference yesterday morning.

The PJ obtained clues related to the case in the form of criminal intelligence.

According to the police, the man entered Macau on a tourist visa in 2020 and had been staying in the city since then. Although he had since pleaded guilty for a crime, his appeal was upheld. Following this, he had been allowed to stay in Macau with a temporary permit.

The male suspect, named Yusufu, 29 years old and reportedly unemployed, was caught on the night of February 12 when leaving the inn at which he was staying. The inn is located in the city's Central District.

The suspect was on his way to a taxi when PJ inspectors intercepted him. He was then taken to his room at the inn for the room to be searched and any contraband seized.



In the room, inspectors discovered and seized a block of cocaine weighing 5.68 grams, a package of liquid cocaine weighing 26.02 grams and equipment for the manufacture of illicit substances. The substances were valued at around MOP260,000.

Cash in patacas, as well as in Hong Kong and US dollars, was also found in the room, to a total value of about MOP63,400.

Despite his arrest, the PJ said that the suspect declined to reveal cer-

tain details which the police did not disclose. However, he did admit to consumption of illicit substances.

He also said that he purchased the substance in liquid form from an African man. He then processed it into powdered form in his room at the inn for resale. He had done this for the past three months, but had only stayed at the inn for a month or so.

The PJ noted that this type of one-stop operation for the manufacture and sale of illicit substances is rare in Macau.

GBA

GUANGDONG TO PROMOTE INFRASTRUCTURE IMPLEMENTING HK, MACAU RULES

GUANGDONG is pledging to boost efforts to advance the development of Hengqin and Qianhai cooperation zones, improve working mechanisms and policy systems, and give new reform to the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) in 2022.

It was announced by Li Xi, Secretary of the CPC Guangdong Provincial Committee, when outlining the province's plan for GBA development at a recent meeting held by the Office of the Leading Group for Developing the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area in Guangdong last week.

Li indicated that, over the past year, Guangdong, together with Hong Kong and Macau, has made new progress in promoting the development of the Greater Bay Area while seizing opportunities offered by the Hengqin and Qianhai cooperation zones and the building of a high-level talent platform in the GBA.

Last September, China issued plans to build a Guangdong-Macao cooperation zone in Hengqin and deepening the reform and opening up of the Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Modern Service Industry Co-operation Zone.

Since then, Guangdong

has made efforts to advance the construction of the two cooperation zones.

Besides the plans regarding Hengqin and Qianhai, Guangdong will also strengthen collaborative innovation and industrial cooperation in the GBA, and make GBA a global platform for scientific and technological innovation, as well as foster the development of emerging industries.

Li also stated that Guangdong will promote infrastructure connectivity and harmonize related relevant rules of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau, push ahead with a GBA connectivity initiative and enhance market integration.

Guangdong plans to deepen the cooperation to improve people's livelihoods and cultural exchange in the GBA, work on regulatory convergence in the areas of employment, education, medical care, and social security, and build an aesthetically pleasing bay area that is ecologically safe, environmentally attractive, socially stable and culturally vibrant.

Furthermore, Guangdong will coordinate pandemic prevention and control, as well as exchange and cooperation in the GBA. **MDT/GDNEWS**

COVID-19

Hong Kong to vaccinate 3-year-olds amid new Covid-19 surge

HONG Kong plans to offer COVID-19 vaccines to children as young as 3 as infections rage through the semi-autonomous Chinese city.

The announcement late Sunday came ahead of another surge in cases. The city reported a record 2,071 new cases yesterday, with that number expected to double the next day with more than 4,500 preliminary positives identified.

In Macau, the government has approved lowering the age limit for China's inactivated vaccine to three years old, down from 12 years of age since November.

This comes several months after China has begun to allow those aged between three and 12 years old to get its homegrown Covid-19 vaccine shots.



In Hong Kong, the age limit was 5 years old.

Hong Kong schools extended a suspension of in-class teaching for two weeks to March 6,

The wave blamed on the omicron variant has already prompted new restrictions limiting in-person gatherings to no more than two households. Hong Kong residents have been rushing to grocery stores to stock up on vegetables and to hair salons to get haircuts.

Authorities have imposed lockdowns on residential buildings wherever clusters of infections are identified, and have already banned public dining after 6 p.m.

Only vaccinated people will be permitted in shopping malls and supermarkets, while places of worship, hair salons and

other businesses have been ordered to close. Immunizations using Chinese maker Sinovac's vaccine for children aged 3 and above will start being administered today.

Hong Kong has adopted mainland China's “zero tolerance” approach to dealing with the pandemic that requires quarantines, mask mandates, case tracing and lockdowns of buildings, neighborhoods and entire cities, even when only a few cases are detected.

Beijing officials and Chinese state media say adopting a “living with the virus” policy as some countries have done would overwhelm Hong Kong's medical system.

The city has as recorded more than 25,000 Covid-19 cases and about 220 deaths from the virus. **MDT/AP**

SME CREDIT APPROVED BY BANKS DROPPED 37.5% IN H2 2021

In the second half of 2021, the new small and medium enterprise (SME) credit limit approved by Macau banks totaled MOP12.1 billion, a drop of 37.5% from the first half of the year, according to statistics released Friday by the Monetary Authority of Macao.

During the same period, the outstanding balance of SME loans decreased 1.2% from end-June 2021 but increased 7.0% from a year earlier, to MOP93.4 billion.

Compared to the last survey period, outstanding SME loans in manufacturing industries rose 0.9% whereas those in wholesale and retail trade and construction and public works sectors dropped 3.3% and 1.7% respectively.

Since the start of the pandemic, the authorities have repeatedly amended annual public budgets, drawing on some MOP100 billion from the vast local financial reserves to compensate for increased expenses due to economic stimulus to counter the impact of the pandemic.

In response to the pandemic's economic effects, the SAR government has launched the SME Bank Loan Interest Subsidy Scheme to provide interest subsidies to eligible SMEs that have obtained bank loans to combat the epidemic, subject to a ceiling of 4% and a loan ceiling of MOP2 million, for a maximum of three years. **JW**

Group forecasts Q1 rise in Prosperity Index

ANTHONY LAM

THE city's Prosperity Index may rise from 2.8 – its level at the end of last year – to 3.1 at the end of April, the Macau Economic Association (ACEM) has forecast.

Based on existing data and scenarios, the ACEM expects the index for January 2022 will remain at the same level as December 2021. For February, a small increase of 0.1 is expected.

The group did not justify its prediction of a minor increase, but it is believed to be related to the Lunar New Year holidays that launched the month.

Preliminary data shows that tourist arrivals have risen quite significantly, with the figure reaching 28,000. Two hotel operators – Angela Leong from SJM Resorts, S.A. and Linda Chen from Wynn Macau Ltd. – reported that some hotels have recorded full occupancy.

Data from the government, meanwhile, revealed an average hotel occupancy rate of 60%.

The index for March and April is expected to reach 3.1 points. The association referred to the IMF's economic and financial conclusions on Macau released

last month, which projects that the city will have 15% growth in GDP this year and 23% next year.

In addition, the IMF report also predicts that Macau's GDP may surpass pre-Covid levels in 2025.

Given this optimism, the ACEM remains wary of difficulties. It specifically pointed to the high transmissibility of the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2, which may cause potential complications for the global economic recovery.

Meanwhile, two major economies, China and the US, are expected to see economic slow-downs more severe than initially predicted. This may bring the projected global economic recovery rate down from 4.9% to 4.4%, according to a forecast by the IMF.

Political factors are also critical for achieving or obstructing further recovery in Macau, the association pointed out. For example, geopolitical complications currently observed between the US, Ukraine and Russia are among the many factors to consider.

These factors may, according to the IMF and as cited by the ACEM, result in weak productivity and inflation in fuel, food and



metal prices.

The epidemiological conditions in Hong Kong are also a factor of concern for Macau, as tighter restrictions will mean slower normalization of border crossings. Pre-Covid, tourists from Hong Kong accounted for nearly 20% of all visitor arrivals in Macau.

In terms of gaming revenues, analysts are expecting slightly higher gaming revenue for February following the increase in visitor numbers to the region during the Lunar New Year.

Bernstein Research forecasts gross gaming revenue (GGR) for February will likely be up 29%

from January. January GGR dropped 20.3% month-to-month to MOP6.34 billion. This decline coincides with a series of new outbreaks in the neighbouring region, causing local authorities to impose strict border entry measures to deter the spread of Covid-19 variants.

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XINHUA INSIGHT

ANTI-PANDEMIC APPROACH SUITS NATIONAL CONDITION, BENEFITS WHOLE WORLD

DONG YUE

EVERY now and then, some Western media criticized China's anti-pandemic approach of clearing COVID-19 infections in a timely manner, arguing it's too rigid to sustain and detrimental to global recovery.

Actually, the criticism has misinterpreted the approach and ignored its proven effectiveness and flexibility. As a matter of fact, by doing so, the world's most populous country has not only avoided a formidable caseload and death toll, but also ensured a swift recovery and remained a powerhouse for the global economy.

A PATH SUITABLE FOR CHINA

China's anti-pandemic approach is by no means equal to zero tolerance for any new infections. As Chinese health experts have expounded, instead of achieving zero infections, China's regular prevention measures aim to ensure early detection, a swift response, targeted containment and effective treatment.

If China were to follow the model of "coexistence with the virus," it would be reporting "hundreds of thousands" of daily new cases "even in a highly underestimated outbreak scenario and under the most optimistic assumptions," according to a study of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

In the face of the unpreceden-

ted health crisis, every response strategy comes with a cost. But for Chinese policymakers, saving people's lives is their top priority.

An effective control of the pandemic, they believe, serves as a prerequisite for reviving the economy, and that safeguarding people's health and promoting economic and social development are not mutually exclusive, but mutually reinforcing.

The strong domestic measures China has taken to control COVID-19 for the past two years have provided a solid basis to revitalize its economy, said Lawrence Loh, director of the Center for Governance and Sustainability at the National University of Singapore.

Last year, in defiance of the impact of the pandemic, China recorded an 8.1-percent growth year on year, outpacing other major economies.

In its latest edition of the Democracy Index, the Economist Intelligence Unit, a research and analysis division of the Economist Group, said Chinese citizens seem to appreciate Beijing's success in containing the pandemic. The aforementioned facts can explain why.

A CHOICE BENEFITTING WORLD

Globally, China's approach of clearing COVID-19 infections in a timely manner has demonstrated its sense of responsibility as a major country.

Should China take the rather laid-back approach seen in some Western countries, the resulting impact on the global pandemic fight and economic development would be grave. In this regard, the United States' failed pandemic response is a reminder.

What's more, with its economic engines roaring, China has played a major role in stabilizing and energizing global growth.

"COVID has created an uncertain world, and therefore any country or supplier which can remove the clouds of uncertainty with the sunlight of certainty is to be welcomed and supported," said John McLean, chair of the Institute of Directors for the City of London.

Despite isolationism and protectionism stoked by the pandemic, China continues to expand its opening-up and promote international cooperation.

China's foreign trade reached 6.14 trillion U.S. dollars in 2021, up 21.4 percent year on year and crossing the 6-trillion-dollar threshold for the first time. Exports rose 21.2 percent, while imports went up 21.5 percent.

In the southern Chinese province of Guangdong, electrical appliance manufacturer Midea Group produces 47 percent of the world's magnetron, safeguarding the pandemic-battered global supply chain for microwave producers such as Panasonic and Bosch.

"Amid the spread of the coro-

navirus, China is demonstrating abilities to rapidly restore business activities and economic growth," said Yana Leksyutina, a professor at St. Petersburg State University. "With a high rate of economic recovery, China has become a driver of global economic growth."

A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF CHINA'S APPROACH

China's efforts to coordinate pandemic control and economic growth have convinced an increasing number of observers around the globe that China's strategy best suits its own national conditions and also benefits the whole world.

Over the past two years, China's anti-pandemic measures have prevented a huge number of deaths at home and ensured that everything from iPhones and Teslas to fertilizer and car parts continues to flow to the rest of the world, said a recent article published by Bloomberg.

"The alternative is a massive surge in infections and deaths that could bring global supply chains to a halt, sending inflation higher," it said.

China has had repeated outbreaks, but these flare-ups have all been quenched by government controls like the recent lockdown of the city of Xi'an, according to the report.

"While these restrictions have led to temporary shutdowns of ports and factories, the coun-

try's industries have so far come through the pandemic remarkably unscathed," read the article.

On Feb. 4, the opening ceremony of the Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022 garnered global acclaim. The ongoing sports gala has given foreigners another glimpse into China's mode of combatting the pandemic, which has ensured both the athletes' safety and the smooth running of the competitions.

Athletes have given "positive feedback" on the organization of the Beijing Winter Olympics, Olympic Games Executive Director of the International Olympic Committee Christophe Dubi has said.

"Many athletes wrote that the conditions are heavenly," Dubi was quoted by Russia's TASS news agency as saying recently.

"You don't hear that often, believe me. It is very difficult to organize competitions in such conditions. So, it is great that we see these laudatory reviews," he said.

For Fawzi Nijem, who is among the production and technical personnel from the United States, the epidemic prevention and control measures like wearing an N95 mask and staying in the closed-loop all the time are "very strict."

"I understand it," he added. "The government is trying to find a balance, as the pandemic will not go away very soon," Nijem said. XINHUA

JOHN LEICESTER, BEIJING

IN her mind, Cathy Chen pictures a scene that she herself says could be drawn from a TV drama: Falling into the arms of her husband after long months apart, when he meets her off the plane from Beijing. Scooping up their two young daughters and squeezing them tight.

"I just imagine when we're back together," the Olympic Games worker says, "and I just can't control myself."

So athletes from countries where the coronavirus has raged can compete in the Olympic host nation with few infections, China's workforce at the Winter Games is making a giant sacrifice.

Severing them from lives they were busy living before the Olympic circus came to town, more than 50,000 Chinese workers have been hermetically sealed inside the Great Wall-like ring-fence of virus prevention measures that China has erected around the Games, locked in with the athletes and Olympic visitors.

The Olympians jet in for just a few weeks with their skis, skates, sleds and other gear. Chinese workers who cook, clean, transport, care for them and otherwise make the Winter Games tick are being sequestered inside the sanitary bubble for several months. As Olympians bank memories to cherish for a lifetime, their Chinese hosts are putting family life on ice.

The sacrifice has been made larger by its timing: the Olympic run-up overlapped with the ushering in on Feb. 1 of the Lunar New Year, the biggest and most precious annual holiday in China. As their loved ones feted the advent of the Year of the Tiger, Olympic workers hooked up with them as best they could via video calls from inside the "closed loop."

That is the soft-sounding name Chinese authorities have given to the anti-viral barrier they've built with high walls, police patrols, thickets of security cameras, mandatory daily tests and countless squirts of disinfectant — separating the Winter Games from the rest of China.

Chen found a spot in the workers' underground canteen of the main Olympic press center for a New Year video-call with her husband, Isaac, and their two daughters, Kiiara, aged six, and 18-month-old Sia. They were gathering with extended family for a celebration dinner. Chen keeps a screen grab from the call on her phone. She also has a photo of the four of them posing together on Dec. 26, the day Chen flew from their home in southern China to take up her Olympic job in Beijing.

At Winter Olympics, virus fight waged with worker sacrifices



Olympic Games worker Cathy Chen

She works at a Chinese medicine exhibition space in the Olympic press center. Initially hesitant about the prospect of months apart from her family, Chen subsequently decided that the opportunity to mingle with overseas visitors and promote the pharmaceutical company she works for couldn't be turned down. She is also hoping for triple pay for having worked through the Lunar New Year holiday.

"My boss is happy," she said. "Because it's tough work."

Her Games will end with the closing ceremony next Sunday. Like all Chinese workers when they exit the bubble, she will then be quarantined in Beijing for a week or two. Only then, a full two months after she kissed them goodbye, will come the much-anticipated reunion with her family.

"I can't wait one more day," she said. "I miss my younger baby most."

Because China's ruling Communist Party does not allow workers to organize independently and with no free trade unions, there's not a whisper of public complaint about labor

conditions inside the bubble.

Many are doing mundane and repetitive tasks and working weeks without days off. Battalions of cleaners constantly wipe and disinfect surfaces. Hospital doctors have been re-tasked to the relatively unskilled job of taking oral swabs for the daily coronavirus tests that are mandatory for all games participants. Volunteers and guards count people in and out of venues, tracking numbers with ticks on sheets of paper. But none will be heard griping publicly about the Olympic endeavor that the Communist Party is using to showcase its rule.

The sacrifice has been made larger by its timing: the Olympic run-up overlapped with the ushering in of the Lunar New Year

The bubble has been in force from Jan. 4, a month before President Xi Jinping declared the games open. After five weeks of loop life, the most critical things workers will say is that they're losing track of time, that days

resemble each other, and that they're longing for a break from canteen food: too bland for those from regions with cuisine laced with fiery chili peppers, too unvaried for the many who long for home cooking and comforts.

Publicly, on the other hand, everyone agrees how privileged they are to be doing their bit, no matter how small. And all say that locking them in is a small sacrifice to prevent the coronavirus from jumping the barrier to their families, friends and everyone else outside. More than 1.3 million tests had turned up 432 positives by Day 10, but there were no reports of contamination leaking from the Olympic bubble.

Volunteer worker Dong Jingge misses her grandparents and has an unglamorous Olympic task: She guards the door of a walled-off dining space for Olympic visitors subject to extra health monitoring because they previously tested positive. She counts them in and out, and asks them to disinfect their hands.

The interactions are improving her English, the 21-year-old student enthuses. Her hi-

ghlight so far was bumping into International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach. He gave her a small metal lapel pin of the Olympic rings.

Her mother, outside the loop, was thrilled. "Such a rare opportunity, an unforgettable moment," she messaged when Dong posted a photo of her prize. Scheduled to also work through the Paralympic Games in March that follow the Olympics, Dong expects that her total stay inside the loop and post-loop quarantine will together add up to nearly three months.

Olympic driver Li Hong says he's living his "dream" ferrying visitors and workers from venues on his overnight shift. He has been told to expect the equivalent of just under US\$80 per day, which should add up to a tidy sum when he gets home by the end of February, after two months in the bubble.

But he's in it for the experience, he says, not the money nor the expectation that Olympic service might look good on his membership application if he tries to join the Communist Party.

"I said to myself, I'm over 50. In my lifetime, I should serve the country," he said. "It feels great." MDT/AP



War, peace, stalemate? Week ahead may decide Ukraine's fate

MATTHEW LEE &
VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV,
WASHINGTON

EVEN if a Russian invasion of Ukraine doesn't happen in the next few days, the crisis is reaching a critical inflection point with European stability and the future of East-West relations hanging in the balance.

A convergence of events over the coming week could determine whether the stalemate is resolved peacefully or Europe is at war. At stake are Europe's post-Cold War security architecture and long-agreed limits on the deployment of conventional military and nuclear forces there.

"This next 10 days or so will be critical," said Ian Kelly, a retired career diplomat and former U.S. ambassador to Georgia who now teaches international relations at Northwestern University.

The Biden administration on Friday said an invasion could happen at any moment, with a possible target date of Wednesday, according to intelligence picked up by the United States, and Washington was evacuating almost all of its embassy staff in Kyiv, Ukraine's capital.

A phone call between President Joe Biden and Russian leader Vladimir Putin on Saturday did nothing to ease tensions. Biden and Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, spoke yesterday [Macau time].

Even before the latest U.S. warnings and diplomatic moves, analysts saw this as a critical week for the

future of Ukraine.

"Russia and the United States are approaching a peak of the conflict of their interests regarding a future shape of the European order," Timofei Bordachev, said head of the Center for European Research at Moscow's Higher School of Economics. "The parties may take action against each other that will go much farther than what was considered admissible quite recently," he said in a recent analysis.

In the week ahead, Washington and NATO are expecting Moscow's formal response after they rejected its main security demands, and major Russian military drills in Belarus, conducted as part of a deployment near Ukraine, are to end. The fate of the Russian troops now in Belarus will be key to judging the Kremlin's intentions.

At the same time, the Winter Olympics in China, often cited as a potential deterrent to immediate Russian action, will conclude Feb. 20. Although U.S. officials have said they believe an invasion could take place before then, the date is still considered important.

And an important international security conference is taking place in Munich next weekend, with Vice President Kamala Harris, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and top European officials planning to attend.

Putin has warned the West that he will not back down on his demand to keep Ukraine out of NATO. While Ukraine has long as-

pired to join, the alliance is not about to offer an invitation.

Still, he contends that if Ukraine becomes a member and tries to use force to reclaim the Crimean Peninsula annexed by Moscow in 2014, it would draw Russia and NATO into a conflict.

His foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, has asked Western nations to explain how they interpret the principle of the "indivisibility of security" enshrined in international agreements they signed. The Russian Foreign Ministry said on Friday that it would not accept a collective response from the European Union and NATO, insisting on an individual response from each country.

Seeking to counter NATO's argument that every nation is free to choose alliances, Moscow has charged that NATO violated the principle and jeopardized Russia's security by expanding eastward.

"Russia's bold demands and equally blunt U.S. rejection of them have pushed the international agenda toward the confrontation more than ever since the height of the Cold War," Bordachev said.

He argued that closer relations with China have strengthened Moscow's hand. "Whatever goals Russia could pursue now, it can plan its future in conditions of a full rupture of ties with the West," Bordachev said.

Russian officials have emphasized that negotiating a settlement over Ukraine depends squarely on the United States and

that Western allies just march to Washington's orders.

In the past, Russia had sought to build close contacts with France and Germany in the hope that friendly ties with Europe's biggest economies would help offset the U.S. pressure. But those ties were strained by the poisoning in 2020 of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who spent five months in Germany convalescing from what he described as a nerve agent attack he blamed on the Kremlin. Russia has denied its involvement.

More recently, Russian officials have criticized the position of France and Germany in the deadlocked peace talks on eastern Ukraine, holding them responsible for the failure to persuade Ukrainian authorities to grant broad self-rule to the Russia-backed separatist region, as required by a 2015 agreement.

In a break with diplomatic rules, the Russian Foreign Ministry last fall published confidential letters that Lavrov exchanged with his French and German counterparts in a bid to prove their failure to help make progress in talks.

Speaking after the latest fruitless round of those talks, Kremlin representative Dmitry Kozak bemoaned the failure by French and German envoys to persuade Ukraine to commit to a dialogue with the separatists, as the agreement stipulated.

Despite the tensions with both Paris and Berlin, Putin spent more than five hours talking to French President Emmanuel Macron last Monday and will host German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Tuesday. Putin said he was grateful to Macron for trying to help negotiate a way to ease the tensions and said they would talk again.

Moscow also just reopened a window for diplomatic contacts with Britain, hosting the foreign and defense secretaries for the first round of talks since ties were ruptured by the 2018 poisoning in Britain of former spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter.

Lavrov's meeting with Liz Truss was frosty, but British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace's talks with Russia's defense minister, Sergei Shoigu, appeared more businesslike, with the parties emphasizing the need to maintain regular contact to reduce the threat of military incidents. **MDT/AP**

this day in history



1989 SOVIET TROOPS PULL OUT OF AFGHANISTAN

Soviet troops are withdrawing from Afghanistan, nine years after they swept into the country.

A convoy of Soviet armoured vehicles travelled the 260-mile (418km) journey to the USSR border while other soldiers left aboard an Ilyushin 76 transport aircraft.

Earlier, the Soviet government had announced the departure of the last troops although snow had delayed a five-day airlift from the Afghan capital Kabul.

The journey is especially dangerous on the Salang Pass through the Hindu Kush Mountains, where more than 10,000 mujahideen operate.

The mujahideen - Afghan Islamic fighters - have been involved in heavy battles to try to force a Soviet retreat.

Huge snow drifts are blocking the southern approaches to the pass, while the descent on the northern side is a wall of ice.

Russian forces are not alone in leaving Afghanistan. Families of Afghan refugees have been crossing the border into Pakistan.

Border guards have reported that a dozen families have crossed through the Khyber Pass in the last few hours.

Over the past two months, up to 20,000 have fled heavy fighting between the mujahideen and Soviet troops.

A handful of foreign correspondents have been allowed to join the Soviet convoy leaving Kabul, but only for the relatively safe last stretch of the journey, which has been secured by soldiers.

President Sayid Mohammed Najibullah's Soviet-backed Afghan government has acknowledged the complete withdrawal of soldiers with a brief statement.

"I express my appreciation to the people and government of the Soviet Union for all-round assistance and continued solidarity in defending Afghanistan," the president said.

Ahead of the departure, the mujahideen fired four rockets at the capital, with three landing in the airport area and the fourth on shops.

At Kabul's airport, most international and domestic flights are arriving and departing as usual.

According to latest BBC reports, Kabul is surrounded by a mujahideen force of around 30,000, with the city under artillery and rocket "bombardment".

Machine-gun and artillery fire could be heard during the night and this morning while a sign at the British Embassy reads "closing down temporarily". The American embassy has put up a sign which says "extended holidays for all staff - date of return not fixed".

A diplomat has reported that President Najibullah, although tired, is still defiant and is determined to play a role in the future of Afghanistan.

The Soviet daily newspaper Trud has revealed that some garrisons have been looted.

The return of the Red Army coincides with the decision by Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev to cut the Soviet armed forces by up to 500,000, with the Kremlin emphasising the heroism of those who fought in the war.

On the streets of Kabul there is a heavier presence of armed police and queues for bread are as long as ever.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

On 24 December, 1979, President Leonid Brezhnev sent in troops to support the struggling communist government. Thousands of Soviet troops intervened to prop up the pro-communist regime, leading to a major confrontation that drew in the US and Afghanistan's neighbours.

During the Soviet occupation about a million Afghans lost their lives as the Red Army tried to impose control and millions more fled abroad as refugees. Soviet deaths were estimated to be around 15,000.

The Soviet authorities hailed the withdrawal from Afghanistan as a victory although many people felt the exit marked a major humiliation of the Red Army's military power.

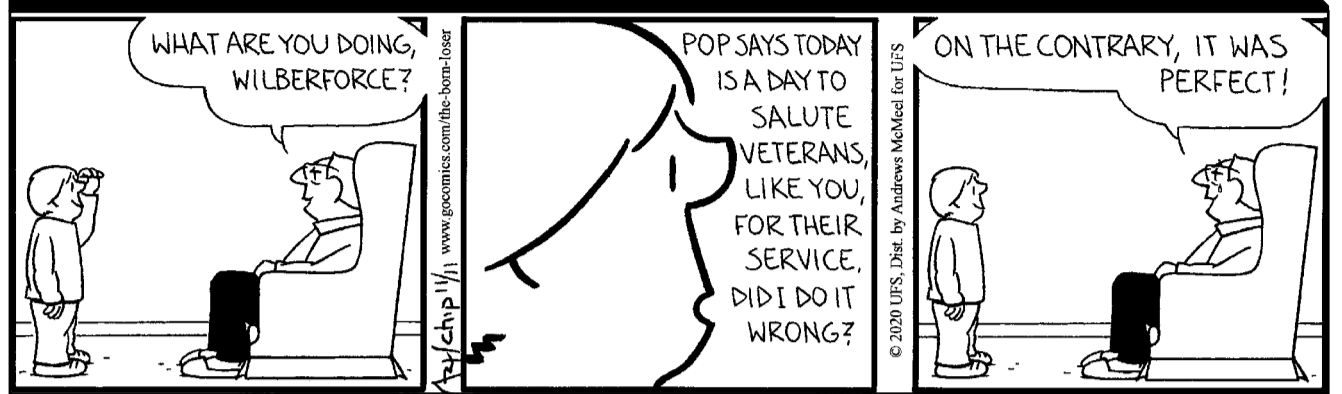
The civil war continued following the Soviet withdrawal, as the mujahideen pushed to overthrow President Najibullah, who was toppled in 1992.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

<p>ARIES  Mar. 21-Apr. 19 You can make money if you pursue your own business. Accept the inevitable and continue to do your job. You may want to take a look at your direction in life.</p>	<p>TAURUS  Apr. 20-May. 20 If you can work at home, do so. Use your inventiveness to find solutions. You may be thinking of starting your own business.</p>
<p>GEMINI  May. 21-Jun. 21 Your childlike quality may get you into big trouble today if you neglect your responsibilities. You'll have amazing ideas, but superiors may try to block your attempts at implementing them.</p>	<p>CANCER  Jun. 22-Jul. 22 You can write beautiful love letters today. Try to be as mellow as possible. You will have a childlike approach today, big hearted and full of spunk. Your high energy should be spent pleasing your mate.</p>
<p>LEO  Jul. 23-Aug. 22 You should catch up on correspondence. Don't let your personal partner hold you back. Get busy trying to make more money. Socially, you need a fast paced form of entertainment.</p>	<p>VIRGO  Aug. 23-Sep. 22 You should socialize with clients or upper echelons of your industry if possible. Your greatest enjoyment will come through social activities and pleasure trips.</p>
<p>LIBRA  Sep. 23-Oct. 22 Pay attention to small but important details. If boredom has set in, find new and unique directions that offer interesting friendships. Be cautious while traveling to foreign countries.</p>	<p>SCORPIO  Oct. 23-Nov. 21 Don't trust others with private information that could be used against you. Sudden changes regarding your circle of friends could prove interesting and stimulating.</p>
<p>SAGITTARIUS  Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Lending and borrowing may be a problem. Control those desires to cast your fate to the wind. Your lack of interest in your partner is a problem. Catch up on overdue phone calls and correspondence.</p>	<p>CAPRICORN  Dec. 22-Jan. 19 You can expect to have some problems with skin, bones, or teeth if you haven't taken proper care of them. Unique forms of entertainment could capture your attention and bring about a romantic interest.</p>
<p>AQUARIUS  Jan. 20-Feb. 18 You could come into extra cash. Opportunities for travel must be carefully considered. Travel or short trips will probably be your best outlet. You could be blind to the defects of those you love.</p>	<p>PISCES  Feb. 19-Mar. 20 Put your plans into motion by presenting your intentions to those who should be able to give you financial support. Try not to get into disputes that will lead to estrangements.</p>

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

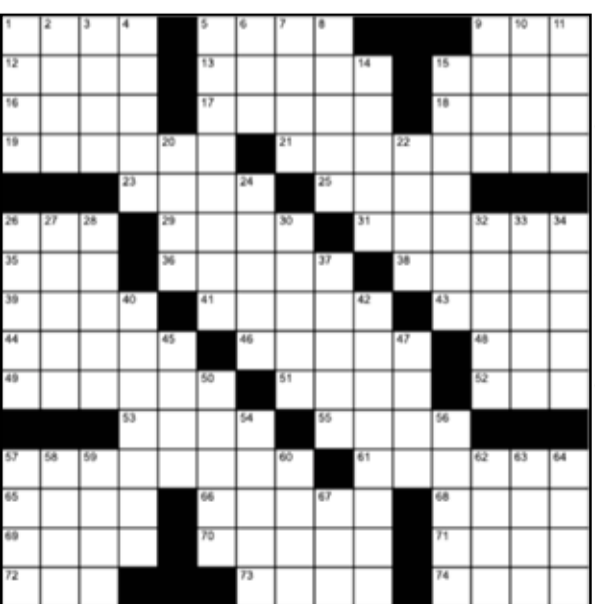
	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-5	5	fine
Harbin	-21	-14	cloudy
Tianjin	3	11	fine
Urumqi	1	9	fine
Xi'an	6	11	overcast
Lhasa	-5	0	fine
Chengdu	10	15	cloudy
Chongqing	5	15	cloudy
Kunming	1	6	overcast
Nanjing	17	20	cloudy
Shanghai	1	12	fine
Wuhan	-22	-16	cloudy
Hangzhou	-3	10	fine
Taipei	-15	-2	fine
Guangzhou	10	18	fine
Hong Kong	16	20	fine
WORLD			
Moscow	-12	-14	snow
Frankfurt	3	4	cloudy
Paris	8	11	overcast
London	7	12	rain
New York	1	3	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Broadway opening; 5- Infatuated; 9- President pro ____; 12- ____ accompli; 13- New wing; 15- Sign over; 16- Sommer of film; 17- Hiding place; 18- Hurler Hershtiser; 19- Eccentric person; 21- Section of an orchestra; 23- River sediment; 25- Pitchfork-shaped letters; 26- Vietnam's ____ Dinh Diem; 29- Melodies; 31- Full-scale; 35- Done, to Donne; 36- Parasite; 38- Midway state; 39- Break, card game; 41- Brings up; 43- Lowly worker; 44- Ancient region of Asia Minor; 46- Reduces speed; 48- Choke; 49- Child's toy; 51- Son of Isaac and Rebekah; 52- ____ glance; 53- Golfer Aoki; 55- Foul mood; 57- Acts; 61- Increase; 65- Stead; 66- Part of TNT; 68- Pulls in; 69- Orsk's river; 70- Dutch painter Jan; 71- Corrida cries; 72- Kind of school; 73- Hang-up; 74- Resting place;

DOWN 1- Not many; 2- Racer Yarborough; 3- Polynesian carving; 4- Anatomical passages; 5- It flickered, to make Ingrid mad.; 6- Hill dweller; 7- Chew on; 8- Author of fables; 9- Polo of "Meet the Parents"; 10- Steinbeck; East of ____; 11- Blend; 14- Language with click consonants; 15- Marsh marigold; 20- Clock face; 22- Pickle flavoring; 24- Woody inhabitants of forests; 26- Polite refusal; 27- Where Columbus was born; 28- Praying figure; 30- Fish covering; 32- Last Greek letter; 33- Wolf pack member; 34- Friendly Islands; 37- ____ Perot; 40- Pathetic; 42- Farewell appearance; 45- Too; 47- Clubs, e.g.; 50- Merits; 54- Leaves out; 56- Mortise insert; 57- Purple fruit; 58- Hibernia; 59- Went through, as the paper; 60- Type of gun; 62- Soccer legend; 63- Salt Lake City hoopsters; 64- Attention-getting sound; 67- "Michael Collins" actor;

Yesterday's solution



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

ANALYSIS

OLYMPICS DISTRACT FROM CHINESE SOCCER'S PUZZLING PREDICAMENT

JOHN DUERDEN

ONE good outcome for men's soccer in China is the timing of the Winter Olympics in Beijing, which has been a national distraction from another failed World Cup qualifying campaign.

For now. But after the Winter Games close on Sunday, soccer's global soccer showpiece events will again become big talking points among Chinese sports fans — particularly the vastly different performances of the men's and women's national teams.

The history of the Chinese men's national team is littered with disappointment and failure, feelings that are heightened when the women's team is successful. Rarely has the contrast been as great as it is now.

The chances of the men's team qualifying for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar officially ended Feb. 1 in a 3-1 loss to Vietnam. Five days later, the women's national team secured a spot in the 2023 World Cup, to be co-hosted by Australia and New Zealand, with a stirring 3-2 comeback win over South Korea in the final of the Asian Cup in India. The Beijing Olympics started in between.

When the champion women's players returned to start 21 days of quarantine, they were greeted in the city of Suzhou with fans holding banners with the message: "You can always trust Chinese women's soccer."

Similar messages have appeared

AP PHOTO



China's women win at the Asia Cup in Mumbai earlier this month puts more pressure on men's national team

in newspapers and across social media since the win.

"There has always been so much pressure on the Chinese men's national team and the women winning is going to only step up that pressure," Tom Byer, a former advisor to China's Ministry of Education and Sport, told The Associated Press.

The men's team has one win and two draws from eight games in the last round of Asian qualifying for the World Cup, with two

matches still to play next month and no chance of making it to Qatar.

In contrast, the way the women qualified for 2023, winning their ninth Asian title — and first since 2006 — was especially satisfying for supporters. The so-called Steel Roses were 2-0 down to South Korea at halftime when coach Shui Qingxia made a bold substitution and replaced star player Wang Shuang with Zhang Yanlin, who inspired a comeback

victory that was clinched with almost the last kick of the game.

Shui, who won the title five times as a player, is now the toast of Chinese soccer. The next step is to challenge the best in the world next year.

"We will try our best to catch up with Europe and the United States," Shui said. "Winning the championship will definitely increase self confidence. China Women's football has fighting ability and fighting spirit, but only by

improving mentally, physically, technically and tactically, as well as physical fitness, can we go further."

There is less optimism in the men's game, which is struggling domestically as well as internationally. The 2021 Chinese Super League season was overshadowed by financial issues. Jiangsu FC, the then defending champion, ceased operations as part of a cost-cutting drive by its owners.

This came after years of famous foreign players and coaches signing for clubs in the league, making the CSL the biggest spending in the world for a time in 2016-17.

There was also massive investment in youth development with one of the biggest projects being Evergrande's academy in Guangzhou. It was noted that Zhang Linyan, who scored for China in the women's Asian Cup final, is a graduate of the school while there has been no male student to have similar success.

China's only appearance at the men's World Cup was in 2002, when it was staged in Asia for the first time and co-hosted by Japan and South Korea.

Byer, a specialist youth coach, believes that development of the men's national team should start by concentrating on success at underage tournaments and, for now, forget World Cups.

"The focus needs to be taken off the men's senior team and put on what's happening at the younger ages," Byer said, who pointed to various Asian youth competitions that have been stepping stones for the women to their current success. "China needs to start doing well in the Asian Under-16 tournaments like the women do. There is no shortcut."

MDT/AP

BEIJING 2022

Russian skater can compete, but medal ceremony won't be held

RUSSIAN teenager Kamila Valieva has been cleared to compete in the women's figure skating competition at the Winter Olympics despite failing a pre-Games drug test, setting her up for an attempt at a second gold medal.

Whatever happens on the ice, Valieva will not get a medal ceremony moment in Beijing. Nor will any skater who finishes in the top three with her.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport cleared Valieva to skate less than 12 hours after a hastily arranged hearing that lasted into early yester-

day morning. A panel of judges ruled that the 15-year-old Valieva, the favorite for the women's individual gold, does not need to be provisionally suspended ahead of a full investigation.

The court gave her a favorable decision in part because she is a minor, known in Olympic jargon as a "protected person," and is subject to different rules from an adult athlete.

"The panel considered that preventing the athlete to compete at the Olympic Games would cause her irreparable harm in the circumstances," CAS Director

General Matthieu Reeb said.

Now, Valieva and her fellow Russian skaters can aim for the first podium sweep of women's figure skating in Olympic history. The event starts with the short program today and concludes Thursday with the free skate.

The International Olympic Committee said yesterday afternoon that if Valieva finishes in the top three, there will be no medal ceremony during the Games. There will also be no ceremony for the team event won by Valieva and the Russian team a week ago.

"It would not be appropriate to hold the medal ceremony," the IOC said.

Valieva landed the first quadruple jumps by a woman at the Olympics as the Russian team won gold in a dominant performance.

The decision not to award medals also affects Nathan Chen and the rest of the second-place American team, who will leave Beijing unsure if they won silver or gold. It would be Chen's second gold of the Games. If Valieva and Russia are disqualified, Japan moves up to silver and Canada wins bronze. MDT/AP

AP PHOTO



Kamila Valieva, of the Russian Olympic Committee, leaves the ice after a training session

BEIJING 2022

Eileen Gu advances on busy day of freestyle at Olympics

EDDIE PELLIS, ZHANGJIAKOU

TRYING for three gold medals in one Olympics is a hectic business. So it was no surprise that Eileen Gu was a skier in a hurry yesterday.

China's burgeoning freestyle superstar munched on a fried dumpling filled with chives and vermicelli noodles while she awaited her score in slopestyle qualifying. It came up. She had made it through to the final. And then she rushed over to practice on the halfpipe, where the contest starts later this week.

After opening with a mistake-filled trip down the deep-frozen slopestyle course that put her qualifying in jeopardy, Gu nailed the second run on a sunny, minus-7 degree F (minus-21 degree C) day at the Genting Snow Park.

She scored a 79.38 — good for third, and comfortably among the top 12 who moved into today's final.

"I didn't have time to sit in the lodge," Gu explained hours later, once her halfpipe practice was

AP PHOTO



China's Eileen Gu competes during the women's slopestyle qualification

complete. "I'm a very aggressive practicer. For me, practice is go-go-go. I brought lunch. I was eating on the t-bar. I was done by the time I got to the top, and ready to drop in immediately."

The 18-year-old Gu has strug-

gled in qualifying in both of her Olympic events so far. She fell once during last week's big air preliminaries and had to nail a pressure-packed third jump to ensure her spot in the final, where she went on to capture the

gold medal.

"Qualifying is the most nerve-wracking thing," she said. "It's not a something where I want to be in that position, but I'm proud that I consistently perform under pressure. I put it down on my last

run, scaled the difficulty back to focus on consistency, and I was happy to put it down."

Gu, whose Chinese name is "Gu Ailing," has a chance to take over the final week of the Olympics.

Born in the United States and competing for her mother's home country of China, she has been dominating the airwaves on commercials, and on the mountain. She is trying to become the first action-sports star to win three medals at the same Olympics.

Tess Ledeux of France and Mathilde Gremaud of Switzerland have a chance at two medals. The second- and third-place finishers from big air each made it into the top 12 for slopestyle. So did Kelly Sildaru, who skis for Estonia. Like Gu, she is entered into all three events — big air, slopestyle and halfpipe.

All action on the slopestyle course was pushed back 24 hours after qualifying was postponed because of a windswept snowstorm that hit the mountain Sunday. That made getting to Monday's halfpipe practice a rush.

Nobody has been in a bigger hurry than China's newest daredevil, who skied for the U.S. team before making the switch in 2019.

"I've had a couple good days of practice," Gu said. "So, hopefully, I can put it down and represent myself well, represent China well and represent the U.S. well."

MDT/AP

AD



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Casa do Brasil

INVITES

Carnaval Costume Party

Saturday March 5th
Live Show Dança Brasil
Live DJ
Free entrance
From 10pm till late

At The Roadhouse Macau

R/C, Shop E-G016-G019, Broadway Hotel, Rotunda do Dique Oeste, Taipa

OPINION

World Views

Vladimir Isachenkov, MDT/AP



IN RUSSIA'S UKRAINE PLANS, HOW MUCH DOES THE MUD MATTER?

The Russian expression “tanks don't fear mud” is common enough that it's been the title of a short-lived Russian television series and can be found stenciled on car windows.

And it's yet another reason why any Russian decision to invade Ukraine is likely to depend very little upon fears that a spring thaw will hinder tanks from crossing boggy ground. Russia's military has, in addition to tanks and other armored vehicles that are well equipped for mud, a range of fighter jets and missiles that are the hallmarks of any modern military.

U.S. President Joe Biden has said that Russia is essentially in position for an invasion of Ukraine “assuming that the ground is frozen above Kyiv,” the Ukrainian capital that is only 75 kilometers from the border of Belarus, a key Russian ally. It's not the first time an American official has invoked Russia's need for frozen ground to stage an invasion.

But analysts trying to figure out how Russia could invade say any assault would start with air and missile strikes, likely targeting Ukrainian military sites.

“If Putin agrees to an invasion, then it won't be tanks or ships in the vanguard, but rather aircraft and missile forces. The first targets for them will be air defense systems and the missile defense force, command posts, critical infrastructure, after which the advantage of Russian forces in the air and upper hand on land and sea are guaranteed,” said Mykola Sunhurovskiy, a military analyst at the Kyiv-based Razumkov Center think tank.

Some Ukrainian analysts have acknowledged that the country's air defenses are insufficient in case of a massive Russian assault. Kyiv has prodded its Western allies to provide the country with modern air defense systems in addition to ground combat weapons provided by the U.S., Britain and others.

Sunhorovskiy said “the only deterrent is the West's position and the readiness of millions of Ukrainians to fight to the end.”

The Kremlin, which has denied having any Ukraine invasion plans, has scoffed at an argument that it wants to see the ground frozen to launch an attack on Ukraine. Ukrainian officials agree that frozen ground or mud isn't an issue.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov pointed at the argument to taunt British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss following their icy talks in Moscow on Thursday.

“They say that Russia is waiting for the ground to freeze like a stone so that tanks could easily roll into Ukrainian territory,” Lavrov told reporters. “The ground was like that with our British colleagues, with numerous facts we cited bouncing off them.”

Konstantin Sivkov, a Russian military analyst, said even if there were a ground incursion, Russian battle tanks are significantly lighter than Western armored vehicles and don't get bogged down.

“Our tanks are much better suited for advancing on muddy terrain, there is nothing to worry about,” Sivkov said in remarks carried by the FAN news outlet. “A thaw can only stop Western tanks.”

South Korea's parliament yesterday approved plans to provide a special time for COVID-19 patients to vote during the March 9 presidential election as the country grapples with a record-breaking omicron surge.

The proposed revision of an election-related law will take effect if it is endorsed by the Cabinet Council and signed by the president — steps widely considered a formality since the governing and opposition parties have already agreed on the measure.

Voters diagnosed with highly infectious diseases such as COVID-19 and others placed in quarantine would be allowed to vi-

sit polling stations and cast ballots after regular voting closes at 6 p.m., according to a copy of the legislation on the website of the National Assembly. The special voting time would close at 7:30 p.m.

Virus patients who have already applied for postal ballots in a now-ended registration period can still vote by mail, according to the National Election Commission.

Commission officials said they will work out details such as whether to install separate polling booths for sick voters and what protective gear polling officers would wear.



NEW ZEALAND

ARDERN SIGNALS HARSHER STANCE ON VACCINE PROTEST

NICK PERRY, WELLINGTON

NEW Zealand's prime minister yesterday said protesters who oppose coronavirus mandates were using “intimidation and harassment,” as authorities appeared to take a harsher stance toward the convoy of demonstrators that has disrupted the capital of Wellington for nearly a week.

Police initially let the protesters set up tents and camp on the grounds of New Zealand's Parliament before arresting 122 people on Thursday and then backing off again. The size of the protest dropped to a few hundred last week but increased again to around 3,000 over the weekend.

Speaking with reporters, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern signaled the thinning patience of authorities.

“I very clearly have a view on the protesters and the way that they've conducted their protest because it has moved beyond sharing a view to intimidation and harassment of the people around central Wellington,” she said. “That cannot be tolerated.”

Parliament Speaker Trevor Mallard tried to make the protesters uncomfortable last week by turning on lawn sprinklers and blasting out decades-old Barry Manilow songs and

the 1990s hit “Macarena” on a repeat loop.

Police yesterday told protesters to move their illegally parked vehicles as soon as possible, offering them alternative parking at a nearby stadium.

“Wellingtonians have the right to move freely and safely around the city so all roads being clear is a top priority,” said Superintendent Corrie Parnell, the Wellington district commander.

The protesters, who oppose coronavirus vaccine mandates and were inspired by similar protests in Canada, appear fairly well organized after trucking in portable toilets, crates of donated food, and bales of straw to lay down when the grass turned to mud.

Despite the arrests and scuffles with police last week, dozens of tents remain on Parliament's grounds, with cars and trucks blocking surrounding streets. Protesters lined up for a breakfast of barbecued sausages and schnitzels after surviving a weekend of torrential rain.

Kacheeya Scarrow drove her van about 380 kilometers (235 miles) from the town of Taupo to join the camp out.

“All I want is the mandates lifted, and freedom of choice,” she said. “I'm not anti-vax, I'm not pro-vax. Everybody should have the right to choose what they

want to do with their own body.”

Another protester, 70-year-old Joanna Plows, said the government had usurped the right “to choose whether or not we have medical intervention.”

New Zealand has mandated that certain workers get vaccinated against COVID-19, including teachers, doctors, nurses, police and military personnel. A vaccine pass is also required to enter most stores and restaurants.

The protests come just as New Zealand experiences its first widespread outbreak of COVID-19, after keeping its borders closed for much of the pandemic. Daily case numbers jumped to a new high of nearly 1,000 yesterday, up from about 200 per day just five days earlier.

However, not a single patient was in intensive care, thanks in part to a vaccination rate of 77% and what experts have described as the comparatively less severe symptoms of the omicron variant.

New Zealand was spared the worst of the pandemic after it closed its borders and implemented strict lockdowns, limiting the spread of the virus. The nation has reported just 53 virus deaths among its population of 5 million.

Ardern said the timing of the mass camp out couldn't be worse. MDT/AP

Pakistan is allowing nuclear rival India to deliver tons of wheat to Afghans struggling through intensifying food shortages, two foreign ministry officials said yesterday. Under a deal with New Delhi, dozens of trucks from Afghanistan will be allowed to collect wheat from India by way of Pakistan's Wagha border near the city of Lahore, beginning Feb. 21. The trucks filled with wheat will then head back to Afghanistan's Jalalabad city via Pakistan's Torkham border the next day, the officials said. They spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to media on the record.



Germany One man died and eight others were hospitalized in serious condition after drinking spiked Champagne at a bar in Bavaria, German prosecutors said yesterday. The man who died was 52 years old, and the others were between 33 and 52, police told German news agency dpa. “There were things in it that normally are not in Champagne,” senior prosecutor Gerd Schaefer said. “It had a toxic, a poisonous effect.”



Mexico has acknowledged that the U.S. government has suspended all imports of Mexican avocados after a U.S. plant safety inspector in Mexico received a threat. The surprise, temporary suspension was confirmed late Saturday on the eve of the Super Bowl, the biggest sales opportunity of the year for Mexican avocado growers — though it would not affect game-day consumption since those avocados had already been shipped. Avocado exports are the latest victim of the drug cartel turf battles and extortion of avocado growers in the western state of Michoacan, the only state in Mexico fully authorized to export to the U.S. market.