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GAMING LAW: LEGISLATOR CHAN CHAK MO INSISTS STIPULATION ON CONCESSIONAIRES' OWNERSHIP OF CASINOS IS NOT A NEW PROVISION

LINK BETWEEN ASIAN AMERICAN AND LVS 'UNPROVEN' AT TIME OF SWAP FOR GALAXY, COURT SAYS

THAI ROYALISTS ASK THAT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL OFFICE BE SHUT



Myanmar will not participate in this week's meetings in Cambodia of foreign ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, spurning an invitation to send a non-political representative instead of its chief diplomat, its government said yesterday. Cambodia, the current ASEAN chair, said earlier this month that members of the regional group had failed to reach a consensus on inviting Myanmar Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin to its meetings in Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh.



South Korea Candidates for the presidential election began yesterday their formal campaigns in a race tainted by intense political strife over allegations involving the main candidates and their families. Liberal governing party candidate Lee Jae-myung (pictured) and his conservative opposition rival Yoon Suk Yeol are the front-runners of the 14 candidates registered with South Korea's election authorities. Recent opinion surveys show them running neck-and-neck.



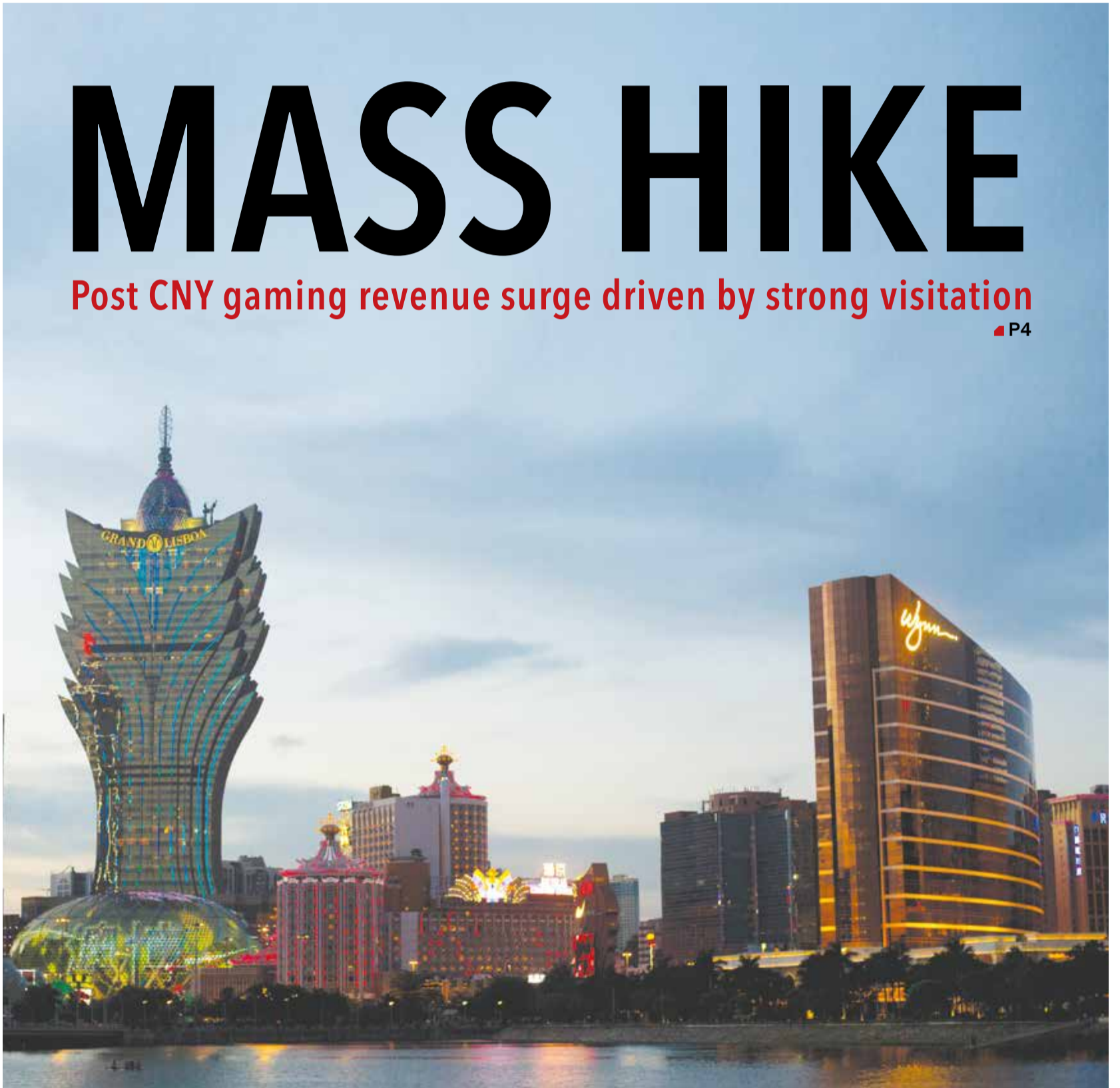
Honduras After years of speculation in Honduras, the United States formally requested the arrest and extradition of former President Juan Orlando Hernández less than three weeks after he left office. Honduran security forces surrounded Hernández's neighborhood and the Supreme Court of Justice scheduled an urgent yesterday to select a judge to handle the extradition request.

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MASS HIKE

Post CNY gaming revenue surge driven by strong visitation

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THE KEY ROLE OF ENGLISH, PORTUGUESE LOCAL MEDIA, ACCORDING TO HO



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PROCEEDS FROM MACAU FAMINE 2022 EXPECTED AT LAST YEAR LEVEL

P2

EXPECTED PROCEEDS FROM 2022 MACAU FAMINE KEPT AT 2021 LEVEL

THE group organizing the annual Macau Famine events hopes to retain the total of MOP1 million in donations from the events this year, the same target as the previous edition.

Questioned by the press on the sidelines of the 2022 Macau Famine opening ceremony about her estimate for this year's proceeds, Amelia Che, office director of the World Vision of Macau Association, admitted that social distancing restrictions will make donation work more difficult.

Social distancing and other restrictions have made it more difficult for the group to raise funds. For instance, throughout last year they could not organize physical events to raise funds.

"However, we still managed to raise MOP1 million with the campaign," Che disclosed. "Although it's too early to give an actual figure, we expect this year's proceeds to drop," she added.



Offering an example of some of the difficulties faced by the organization, she revealed that some schools have dropped out of this year's Red Packet Donation campaign, which is part of the 2022 Macau Famine, due to early Lunar New Year holidays or for other reasons.

Speaking about how the group will attract "new blood"

to the campaign, Che stressed that the campaign as a whole has various events that target different walks of life. She believes that the variety of events could help sustain the attractiveness of the campaign.

The Macau Famine has the Skip-a-Meal, School Famine, 10-hour Famine activities, among other events.

Che recalled that the Ma-

cau Famine thematic campaign has been held in Macau for a decade or so, having attracted a total attendance of 300,000. Unlike the namesake event hosted by its sibling association in Hong Kong, which required participants to fast for 30 hours in a row, the Macau event will only require attendees to stay hungry for a period of 10 hours between meals. **AL**

A BOOST IN EFFORTS REQUIRED TO ATTRACT TALENT TO COOPERATION ZONE

THE Chief Executive, Ho Iat Seng, said more effort is needed to attract a greater number of skilled professionals to the Guangdong-Macau In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, while also ensuring its need for general labor is also met.

Ho made the remarks on Monday while on a visit to the zone for a Spring Festival meeting with officials from the cooperation zone's Administrative Committee and its Executive Committee.

According to the CE, he believes there is a need to encourage dynamism in the team working in the cooperation zone, as well as boosting the efficiency of entrepreneurship.

A document issued by the zone last month noted that Macau residents who work full time in Hengqin are eligible for a subsidy of up to RMB12,000 for up to 36 months, and a one-time bonus of RMB50,000.

Macau residents with a bachelor's degree can receive RMB7,000, those with a master's degree can receive RMB9,000 and those with a doctoral degree, RMB12,000.

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

Ho said that Guangdong and Macau would collaborate to "create, in a pragmatic way, a greater number of innovative cooperation models and mechanisms, in order to speed advances and achieve planned goals for the zone."

He mentioned that a total of 12 agreements on major projects covering integrated circuits, electronic information, biomedicine, traditional Chinese medicine, "big health" industry and modern financial service work had been signed in December 2021.

The CE also said that the zone should "dedicate further effort to advancing connections between the financial systems of Macau and Hengqin, and their civil and commercial administration systems," adding that introduction of court services with "Macau characteristics to handle civil and commercial matters" was also necessary. **LV**

English, Portuguese local media help 'world' to better understand Macau: CE

ENGLISH and Portuguese language media efforts are "crucial to enhancing understanding about Macau and China across the world," Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng said yesterday during a lunch reception hosted for top representatives of the local Portuguese and English language media.

"Many Macau residents overseas, and foreigners who are friends of Macau, regularly receive information about the city, and learn about the development of China, through those news platforms," added Ho.

The Chief Executive also called on local Portuguese and English language news outlets to continue "making use of their advantages, in order to play a more active role" in providing information on governance and public affairs to foreign-language communities settled in Macau.



For Ho Iat Seng, the "advantages" enjoyed by local Portuguese and English language media include their outlets based in Macau's multilingual and multicultural environment, and "the opportunity available to their staff to have personal experience and insight into Chinese culture."

The Chief Executive extended "special thanks" to the local Portuguese and English media professionals for their contri-

butions to conveying the SAR government's pandemic prevention and control information "in a timely manner, reflecting the aspirations of, and demand from, Portuguese-speaking and English-speaking inhabitants."

As a result, he said, the MSAR Government was able to get a better grasp of the needs and expectations of various sectors and groups within the community.

On Monday, the Chief Executive met with representatives of

the Chinese media and pledged that the SAR government will continue to observe the stipulations of Beijing's Constitution and the Basic Law of Macau to "protect the freedom of the press and to provide support to local media regarding news reporting, event coverage and professional training."

Both luncheons were attended by the five policy secretaries and other high officials of the SAR government. **PC**

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HAO VS LVS

Court finds link between AAEC and LVS unproven at the time of swap for Galaxy

RENATO MARQUES

A local court has found that there is no proof that an agreement between the Asian American Entertainment Company (AAEC) and the Las Vegas Sands Corporation (LVS) was valid at the time that LVS decided to swap AAEC for Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) as its partner in bidding for a gaming license concession in 2002.

The decision was heard yesterday at the Court of First Instance (TJB) during a session of the trial in the case brought against the company owned by Taiwanese businessman Marshall Hao and the local subsidiaries of LVS in Macau.

In a session dedicated to hearing the court's decision regarding facts proven and unproven in the case, the decision of the TJB in considering whether there are no grounds to admit the possibility that the Letter of Intent (LOI) was valid beyond the expiration date of January 15, 2002, or whether there were any other documents that might replace the LOI after that date, the judge determined that there was no proof of a breach of contract between LVS and AAEC when they first joined forces with GEG.

For the court, although LVS admitted the negotiation might have started at an earlier stage, all documentary evidence shows that such a partnership only occurred on February 1, 2002 — two weeks after the LOI had expired.

This decision scuppers Hao's request to be granted hefty compensation for alleged damages caused to AAEC due to the breach of such an agreement that led to his company not obtaining the gaming license in Macau.

AAEC is seeking compensation amounting to around MOP60 billion after amending, based on experts' reports, an initial compensation claim in the amount of MOP96 billion.

The judge said that the decision was based on the content of the LOI as well as witness testimonies and documentary evidence gathered.

In addition to the LOI, two other documents considered very important by the plaintiff were submitted to the court: a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and a Declaration of Relationship between the two sides, which the plaintiff claimed had been allegedly delivered to the Macau Gaming Commission as part of the tender process of the



AAEC-LVS consortium.

According to court diligence close to the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ), this declaration was never delivered to the Gaming Commission and was never part of the tender.

In reference to the MOU, the defense maintained the document was a forgery and had never existed, and this claim was corroborated by the lawyer who allegedly wrote and signed the document, who said they were unaware of its existence.

Being unwilling to make a decision one way or the other on the veracity of the documents, the court decided to simply ignore them, justifying this decision with the fact that they were never signed or part of the tender process, meaning they were considered irrelevant.

Nonetheless, the judge noted from analysis of the document that it contains information that seemed unrelated or "unusual" when compared to what was learned by the court regarding the relationship of the parties in the process.

During the examination of witnesses, lawyer David Friedman, who represented LVS at the time, told the court in written testimony that the reason the declaration of relationship was not signed by the AAEC was Hao's refusal to sign.

During the closing remarks of the trial, this was used by defense lawyer Luís Cavaleiro de Ferreira to argue that it was AAEC who severed ties with LVS and not the other way around.

At the start of yesterday's session, the judge also explained why the court had admitted the testimony of Friedman, against the plaintiff's arguments that the court should disregard his testimony because he was a professional employee hired by LVS.

In the explanation, the judge noted that because he was directly involved and had produced many of the documents for the consortium being used in the courtroom as evidence, Friedman has significant knowledge that the court could not disregard, in addition to the fact that he had not been working with LVS for some time.

NO DAMAGES WORTH COMPENSATION

An essential component of addressing the matter regarding damages is determining the amount of compensation claimed. The judge noted that, according to the court analysis based on documentary evidence and testimony of the members of the Gaming Commission, as well as the consulting company hired by them to evaluate candidates' experience in the gaming industry,

AAEC would still not have gotten enough points to win one of the licenses being tendered.

For the court, this means that the fact that LVS decided to run in the tender with another partner did not cause significant damage to AAEC, since, if they would have run together, AAEC would not have been granted a license, and would be in a similar situation to that which occurred after LVS swapped consortium partners.

Following this, and considering the calculations of different specialists on the case, the judge noted that the claim starts from the assumption that AAEC would have won one of the licenses if they had run together with LVS, a fact that the court said was not proven and in fact goes against the existing evidence.

SIMILARITIES IN BIDS MIGHT COME FROM AN EARLIER STAGE

Another matter in the hands of the court was the accusation by the plaintiff that the bid submitted by the LVS-GEG consortium was a replica of the one initially submitted by AAEC-LVS, claiming that this indicates LVS had passed GEG confidential information.

At the court, the judge said that, after careful analysis, it was clear that there are some similarities between the two bids.

Nonetheless, he also explained

that, according to the court's document analysis, there were different explanations for this besides the claims of the plaintiff.

In addition to the alleged unlawful passing of confidential information to a competitor, the judge also mentioned a document from October 2001 titled Expression of Intent (EOI), in which the general information of the intentions of LVS for the investment project were clearly stated, similar to that in the executive summary and other parts of the final bid that AAEC's lawyer Jorge Menezes had claimed to be copied.

According to the judge, the EOI had been produced by LVS or LVS staff members under orders of the company, noting that, the bid from AAEC itself could therefore also not be an original but a version from that same EOI that might have later been reused by LVS in the new partnership. Either way, the court decided that the matter is not conclusive, which means that AAEC could not prove intellectual property rights over the document.

The court will reconvene once more later this week to hear from the legal representatives of both sides on the decisions of the court to ensure that there are no objections on factual matters before the court issues the final ruling.

FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES AT MOP216.6B

The preliminary estimate of Macau SAR's foreign exchange reserves amounted to MOP216.6 billion at the end of January 2022, the Monetary Authority of Macao has announced. The reserves increased by 1.1% from the revised value of MOP214.2 billion for the previous month. The region's foreign exchange reserves at end-January 2022 represented 11 times the currency in circulation, or 89.0% of pataca M2 at end-December 2021. The trade-weighted effective exchange rate index for the pataca fell 0.02 points month-on-month but rose 1.88 points year-on-year to 103.8 in January 2022. This suggests that the exchange rate of the pataca dropped against the currencies of Macau's major trading partners on a monthly basis but grew on an annual basis.

SSM WARNS AGAINST H5N6 AVIAN INFLUENZA

Two cases of human infection with H5N6 avian influenza have been discovered by mainland China's Department of Health. This has led to them urging residents to avoid contact with birds. According to Macau's Health Bureau, the first case was diagnosed in a 50-year-old man, a worker who currently resides in Baise City of Guangxi, on January 12. The second case was diagnosed in a 35-year-old man, a sole trader who resides in Zhenjiang City of Jiangsu province. On January 15, he developed symptoms and he was hospitalized on January 19 for treatment. Both patients are in a critical condition and are believed to have had contact with live birds or visited live bird markets before their symptoms manifested.

GAMING

COMMITTEE: STIPULATION ON CONCESSIONAIRES OWNERSHIP OF CASINOS 'NOT NEW'

ANTHONY LAM

THE requirement that gambling concessionaires need to operate in venues they own "is not a new introduction," lawmaker Chan Chak Mo, president of the parliament's Second Standing Committee, insisted yesterday.

While not a legal concept, "satellite casino" is a common term used to refer to casinos operated but not owned by a gambling concessionaire. The venue itself may be owned by the hotels that house the casino.

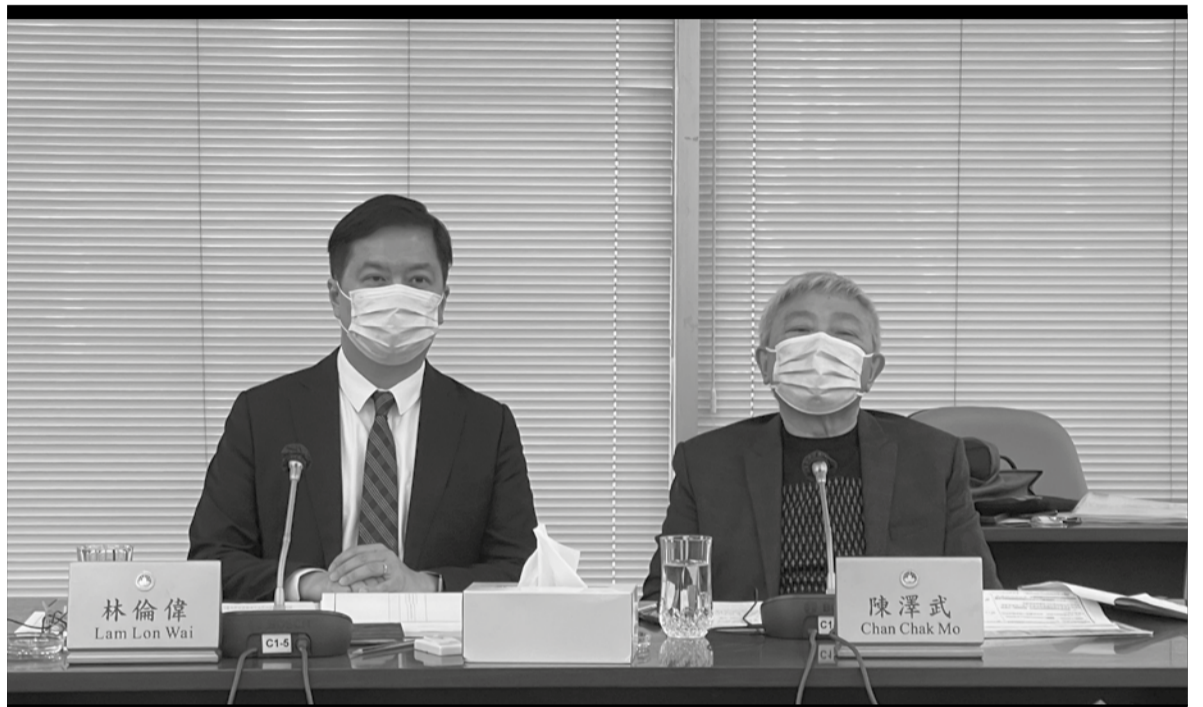
Chan explained that the existing law allows the current Chief Executive to use discretion with regard to the operations of "satellite casinos." However, he then referred to the concession contracts to clarify the period during which a concessionaire must acquire or convert the ownership of such casinos.

"The law needs to be complied [with] and the contract respected," Chan said. "The requirement is only moved from the contract to the bill."

The committee president added that the government is considering the requirement "a matter of importance."

"Converting the contractual requirement to legal stipulations implies public knowledge on the matter," Chan said. The contract, due to commercial secrecy, is not publicly accessible.

The accountability of either the executive branch or the existing six gambling concessionaires in not abiding with the requirement stipulated in the law and their concession contracts was questioned.



In reply, the committee president insisted that the contracts are still in their validity period. Even if investigative or judicial procedures are required, they can only commence after the conclusion of the contracts.

The law allows the Chief Executive to extend the validity of the concessions for a maximum of five years.

In this case, taking SJM Resorts, S.A. as an example, they are required by the law and contract to either forgo or acquire their "satellite casinos" by the end of their current concession.

Nonetheless, as the concession is still valid, their operation of such casinos is still legal and justified. As long as they complete the acquisition, it will be considered legal. With that said, any procedures aiming at holding any entity responsible can only start after

the cessation of the contracts.

As Chan put it: "Maybe [the concessionaire and satellite casino owners] have been in discussion for [a] long [time] and can wrap up the deal [of acquisition] in three days. Who knows?"

Furthermore, Chan said that he was not certain whether the government has reminded the concessionaires about the requirement in the contract, but he insisted that whether or not the reminder occurred, the requirement is still there.

The bill proposes a three-year buffer period for concessionaires to resolve any ownership matters before the government retrieves the premises. Ultimate ownership of all casino venues, under the bill, belongs to the government.

Yesterday's committee meeting, according to Chan, still primarily focused on "satellite ca-

sinos," regarding issues such as their effect on employment and supporting the neighborhood. Some lawmakers were also concerned with potential complications if subdivision is not applicable for certain hotels.

Legal advisors of the parliament also expressed their confusion regarding the division of labor – seen by them as overly detailed – with the authorities over gambling-related matters.

The bill also proposes that marketing middlemen businesses must be operated by commercial entities instead of natural persons. However, as the Commercial Code allows sole proprietorship, the parliamentary committee found the proposal unclear.

Government officials will be invited to the parliament to give clarifications at a later date, Chan said.

POST CNY GAMING REVENUE SURGE DRIVEN BY STRONG VISITATION

LYNZY VALLES

MACAU'S gross gambling revenue (GGR) post Lunar New Year has hit the highest daily revenue figure since the Golden Week holiday in May 2021, according to analysts.

Brokerage firm Bernstein suggested that the GGR surged 29% week-on-week, recording an average revenue of MOP428 million, which was previously seen in May last year.

The firm said the rise in "mass GGR [was] driven by strong visitation and premium play post-holiday.

VIP also improved despite the hold rate dropping back to normal."

For JP Morgan analyst DS Kim, the high revenue is an "impressive and a very encouraging sign to suggest robust pent-up demand for mass gambling, in our view."

Tourist arrivals in the city have also grown following the week-long holiday.

According to the government, the number of visitors continues to rise following the Chinese New Year holidays, with 28,000 arrivals on Saturday.

JP Morgan analysts suggested that it has often been the case that "tail-end demand (a week after Lunar New Year) is stronger than LNY demand itself – but remember, a big chunk of this tail-end came from high-end and VIP [markets] in the past."

"Thus, this strong tail-end – without junkets – is impressive and a very encouraging sign to suggest robust pent-up demand for mass gambling, in our view," the analysts suggested.

Due to the stability of case numbers, Bernstein

Research is expecting slightly higher gaming revenue for February following the increase in visitor numbers to the region during the Lunar New Year.

Channel checks from analysts shows that month to date GGR is estimated at MOP5 billion, with an average of MOP384 million daily.

Although this figure represents a downturn of 58% compared to pre-pandemic levels, it is already about 47% higher compared to the same period last year, representing an improvement.



Two more imported asymptomatic cases recorded

TWO Macau residents who arrived from the U.S. via Singapore on Monday have tested positive for Covid-19.

They were classified as imported cases of asymptomatic infection.

The first resident, age 57, had received three doses of the Moderna mRNA vaccine in the U.S. in March, April and November 2021 respectively

On February 9, 10, and 11, the resident performed three nucleic acid tests in San Francisco, all of which came back negative.

On February 12, 2022, the passenger took flight SQ33 from the U.S. to Singapore (sitting in seat 36E), and on Monday traveled on flight TR904 from Singapore to Macau (seat 27C).

The second case, a 25-year-old resident, had also been given three doses of the



Moderna mRNA vaccine in the U.S. in May and June 2021 and January 2022 respectively. On February 7, 9 and 11 she undertook three nucleic acid tests in Los Angeles, which were all negative. On 12 February 2022, he took flight SQ37 from the U.S. to Singa-

pore (seat 51A), and on Monday traveled on flight TR904 from Singapore to Macau (seat 8A). Both residents are in the Public Health Clinical Center in Coloane for isolation and have stated that they had not previously contracted Covid-19. **LV**

CRIME

FOUR APPREHENDED FOR ALLEGED ECSTASY TRADE

FOUR Vietnamese men were arrested on February 14 on allegations of dealing MDMA through international mail, the Judiciary Police (PJ) revealed yesterday.

Known scientifically as methylenedioxymethamphetamine, MDMA, colloquially known as ecstasy, is a form of amphetamine.

After receiving the drugs by mail from the Netherlands, the four men, surnamed Doan, Nguyen, Le and Nguyen, were set to sell them in the city.

The arrest took place as the suspects collected the parcel, which contained two chocolate boxes. Inside, 48 objects camouflaged as chocolate were found. They were later confirmed by the police to be ecstasy pills, with a total value

of MOP210,000.

Except for Doan, who sneaked into Macau in May 2019, the suspects entered Macau on tourist visas between June 2019 and July 2020. They reported themselves to be unemployed.

The PJ noted that the men refused to cooperate with the investigations. The police believe that the individuals have been dealing MDMA in this fashion for half a year.

According to the Narcotics Division of the Hong Kong Security Bureau, MDMA is usually sold as round tablets of various colors impressed with a multitude of logos. Many MDMA tablets are adulterated with ketamine, amphetamine or methamphetamine; some are also adulterated with caffeine, phenobarbitone or methaqualone. **AL**



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CHINA CRAFTS A CAREFULLY CURATED SLATE OF OLYMPIC SPECTATORS

SAM MCNEIL, BEIJING

A spectator's single clap echoed through the mostly empty National Aquatics Center after the British curling team knocked a Swiss stone out of position, a difficult move that usually would trigger cheers from fans.

The spectator looked around at the audience of about 200, surrounded by thousands of vacant seats, and stopped clapping.

Halfway through ten sets of curling, as teams shouted in Russian, Norwegian, Swedish, French, Dutch and Italian, the crowd shrank further when more than half stood up and left for another event: The souvenir shop had opened.

Skiing, skating and the other competitions take place before a global TV audience, but limi-

ted crowds see them in person after China, which is enforcing strict anti-virus controls, decided against selling tickets or allowing spectators to come from abroad.

Instead, organizers said they would invite 150,000 people including schoolchildren, diplomats, businesspeople and what the organizing committee called "winter sports enthusiasts." This was somewhat of a departure from the Tokyo Games last summer, where pandemic protocols kept most venues all but empty.

An Associated Press journalist was among a handful of Beijing-based reporters invited by the Foreign Ministry to watch the curling on Monday.

Organizers have given few details, but foreign chambers of commerce and employees of companies that are Olympic

sponsors said they received invitations to the Feb. 4 opening ceremony.

People who attended the ceremony and sports events were required to receive a third dose of an anti-coronavirus vaccine as a booster, present two negative virus tests before events and take two more tests afterward.

Joerg Wuttke, president of the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China, said he was invited but couldn't attend because it was too early to receive a booster. Wuttke said he would watch on TV.

The American Chamber of Commerce in China said it sent a delegation to the opening ceremony. The British Chamber of Commerce in China said it had been asked to share invitations with its network.

Spectators are issued N95 masks and arrive at venues aboard buses as volunteers in blue parkas and white hats wave.

Guards check foreign passports or Chinese identity cards. Spectators are required to show a smartphone app that tracks their movements and health condition. They pass through metal detectors and are scanned for the coronavirus's telltale fever.

Cameras, computers, pens, selfie sticks or food and drink from outside are forbidden.

Inside sports venues, spectators are kept in areas separate from athletes, reporters and sports officials. They are as little as six meters (20 feet) away but are in areas dubbed "the bubble" that are supposed to have no contact with outsiders.

During the curling competi-

tion, spectators were separated by empty seats. In an anti-coronavirus measure, signs in competition venues tell spectators in Chinese and English, "NO CHEERING."

At the souvenir shop, plush toys of Olympics mascot Bing Dwen Dwen and children's clothes were sold out, but paperweights shaped like curling stones, binoculars and Olympics-themed clothing, jewelry and pins were available.

In an email response to questions, the Beijing organizing committee said spectators would be organized by their communities, employers and winter sports associations.

Gao Jia, an employee of a sponsor, received a ticket to the opening ceremony. She said attendees gathered at a hotel for a security check, were taken to the Olympic Park on Beijing's north side and walked three kilometers (two miles) to the National Stadium.

"We were quite tired, but the excitement offset all of it," she said. "When we got inside, everything had turned blue. We felt, wow, it was all worth it."

Gao said afterward she was required to stay home for one week. She asked that her company not be identified by name.

Employees at other companies that are Olympics sponsors including Bank of China Ltd. and social media platform Sina Weibo have said they were offered tickets.

One woman wrote on Sina Weibo that her company received three tickets and more than 70 employees applied for them. The posting didn't identify the company and the user didn't respond to a message from AP.

At the end of Monday's curling, Britain, Canada, Denmark and Sweden scored more than Italy, Norway Russia and Switzerland in the day's round robin.

The teams quietly left the ice to a smattering of applause in the nearly empty arena. **MDT/AP**

HONG KONG

Virus surge begins to overwhelm Covid measures

HONG Kong's leader yesterday said a surge of coronavirus cases is overwhelming the city's emergency resources, but defended strict measures that have been imposed.

Chief Executive Carrie Lam said the Chinese central government was extending help to the city, which remains a nominally autonomous enclave.

Despite its varying success, Hong Kong has stuck with China's zero-tolerance strategy requiring lockdowns, quarantines and mass testing for COVID-19.

"So far, our measures to contain the spread of the disease remain legitimate and valid," Lam told reporters.

"The problem we are facing is given the magnitude, the pace of and the severity of this fifth wave," Lam said. "It has outgrown our capacity."

The city reported a record 2,071 new cases on Monday, with that number expected to double yesterday with more than 4,500 preliminary positives identified.

Lam added that authorities will designate as qua-

rantine stations new public housing units that have yet to be occupied, along with around 10,000 hotel rooms. Hong Kong requires confirmed coronavirus cases to isolate.

The city's restrictions extend to limiting in-person gatherings to no more than two households, allowing only vaccinated people in shopping malls and supermarkets, and closing places of worship, hair salons and other businesses.

Authorities have also imposed lockdowns on residential buildings wherever

clusters of infections are identified, and have banned public dining after 6 p.m. Schools have extended a suspension of in-class teaching until March 6.

Lam said China's central government was working to "enhance the capacities at various parts of this anti-epidemic effort," but ruled out placing Hong Kong under a complete lockdown as has been done in various Chinese cities, where millions of residents have been confined to their homes in recent months.

MDT/AP



THAILAND

Royalists ask that Amnesty International office be shut

CHALIDA
EKVITTHAYAVECHNUKUL,
BANGKOK

ROYALIST activists in Thailand say they will present a petition with 1.2 million signatures to the government tomorrow calling for it to shut down the country's branch of the human rights organization Amnesty International.

The activists, members of various small nationalist groups, say Amnesty International is a threat to the country's peace and security because it criticized a court ruling that said calls for reform of the country's constitutional monarchy are illegal.

The monarchy is revered by many Thais and until recently was almost universally treated as a sacrosanct pillar of Thai identity. Its reputation is fiercely guarded by the country's ruling elite, including the courts and the military.

Critics of the royal institution charge it has too much influence in politics and is not accountable.

The petition against Amnesty International, which originated last November, has been organized alongside a longer-term effort to enact a law to increase regulation of non-governmental organizations, an action critics say threatens free expression and is meant to intimidate criticism of



the government.

The Center of People to Protect the Monarchy, one of several groups involved in the campaign, said the interior ministry will be asked to verify the signers of the petition.

"These 1.2 million names don't want to see this organization undermine national security, destroy the monarchy and create conflicts in the country," said Seksakol Athawong, a vice minister in the Office of the Prime Minister who has been active in both the petition campaign and efforts to control NGOs.

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, who came to power in a

2014 military coup, has not commented on the petition but said in November that he had asked police and the interior ministry to see if Amnesty International has broken any laws in its support for protesters advocating reforms of the monarchy.

The petition was launched after Amnesty International criticized the Constitutional Court for ruling that three pro-democracy activists who called for reform of the monarchy were committing sedition by attempting to overthrow the nation's system of government with the king as head of state.

The ruling banned any simi-

lar activities in the future by the activists and their organizations and also appeared to effectively prohibit any other calls for reform of the monarchy.

Thailand already has a royal anti-defamation law frequently applied against members of the youth-led pro-democracy movement, which sprung up in 2020. It provides a penalty of up to 15 years in prison for insulting the king and his immediate family.

At least 170 people, including 14 minors, have been charged under the law since November 2020, according to the Thai Lawyers for Human Rights, a legal rights group.

Amnesty International said in an emailed statement it acknowledges the government's duty to protect public order and national security.

But it said the authorities "must do so in a manner that is in accordance with international human rights law, and that is proportionate, necessary and fulfills the government's obligations to ensure and facilitate respect for human rights, including the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly."

Vitit Muntarbhorn, a law professor who has worked in the United Nations on human rights issues, said constraints on Amnesty International "will not only affect confidence and international relations, they will also embody regressive steps detrimental to Thailand's position as a hub for non-governmental organizations and as a crossroads for the international community."

Thailand's Cabinet in January approved in principle a draft of a proposed law on the Operations of Not-for-Profit Organizations that would cover NGOs. It would force disclosure of many operating details, including sources of funding, and prohibit vaguely defined activities considered detrimental to national security or public order.

Over the past decade, dozens of countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe, especially those with authoritarian governments, have sought to control NGOs "by creating laws that subject them and their staff to surveillance, nightmarish bureaucratic hurdles and the ever-present threat of imprisonment," Amnesty International said in a 2019 report. **MDT/AP**

INDONESIA

School principal given life term for raping 13 students

AN Indonesian court yesterday sentenced an Islamic boarding school principal to life in prison for raping at least 13 students over five years and impregnating some of them.

The principal of the girls school in West Java's Bandung city, Herry Wirawan, pleaded guilty and apologized to his victims and their families during the trial.

He was accused of raping at least 13 students between the ages of 11 and 14 from 2016 to 2021 at the school, in hotel rooms or at rented apartments, according to the indictment. At least nine babies reportedly were born as the result of the rapes.

The case drew a public outcry over the number of



Herry Wirawan, center, the principal of a girls' Islamic boarding school is escorted by security officers during a sentencing hearing in Bandung, West Java

rapes and the length of time they occurred.

Officials said many of the victims did not report their

rapes for fear of having to relive the traumatic experience, and their parents had trusted that the board-

ing school was guiding their children to become good and religious people.

West Java police began to investigate the case and arrested Wirawan last May when parents of a victim went to the police after their daughter returned home on a holiday and admitted she had just given birth.

The case didn't become public until November, when court proceedings began. Police said they waited to publicize it to prevent further psychological and social damage to the victims.

The three-judge panel at Bandung District Court convicted Wirawan of violating the Child Protection Law and Criminal Code. They also ordered the Mi-

nistry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection to pay 331 million rupiah (\$23,200) in combined compensation requested by the victims and between \$600 and \$6,000 for medical and psychological treatment for each girl.

"The defendant deliberately committed violence and obscene acts," Presiding Judge Yohannes Purnomo Suryo Ali said. "Instead of educating his students, he resorted to violence or threats of violence to force children to have sexual intercourse with him."

The judges also ruled that nine children born to the victims should be handed over to the Children and Women Protection Agency with periodic evaluation

"until the victims are mentally ready to care for their children, and the situation allows for their children to be returned to the victims."

Prosecutors had asked that Wirawan be sentenced to death as well as to chemical castration. The judges denied the request for chemical castration, saying that the Criminal Code stipulates that people sentenced to death or life imprisonment may not be subject to other punishments, other than the revocation of some rights.

Prosecutors and Wirawan's lawyers said they are considering whether to appeal. They have seven days to do so before the court decision becomes final. **MDT/AP**

UKRAINE CRISIS

Russia says some forces pulling back to bases

DASHA LITVINOVA & YURAS KARMANAU, MOSCOW

RUSSIA said yesterday that some units participating in military exercises would begin returning to their bases, adding to glimmers of hope that the Kremlin may not be planning to invade Ukraine imminently. But it gave no details on where the troops were pulling back from, or how many.

That muddled efforts to determine the significance of the announcement, which buoyed world financial markets and the long-suffering ruble after weeks of escalation in Europe's worst East-West standoff in decades. It came a day after Russia's foreign minister indicated the country was ready to keep talking about the security grievances that led to the Ukraine crisis — a gesture that changed the tenor after weeks of tensions.

Yet hours before the Russian Defense Ministry statement about the troops, a U.S. defense official said Russian units were moving closer to the Ukrainian border — not away from it. And Western officials continued to warn yesterday that the Russian military could attack at any time, with some floating Wednesday as a possible invasion day.

The fears of an invasion grew from the fact that Russia has massed more than 130,000 troops near Ukraine. Russia denies it has any such plans, despite placing troops on Ukraine's borders to the north, south and east and launching massive military drills nearby. U.S. and other NATO allies, meanwhile, have moved troops and military supplies toward Ukraine's western flank, and promised more financial aid to the ex-Soviet nation.

In announcing the pullback, the Russian Defense Ministry did not indicate where the troops had been deployed or how many were leaving.



A view of Ukraine's the Motherland Monument in Kyiv

Asked about the announcement, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stressed that Russia holds military drills "on its own territory and according to its own plans, they start, go on and end as planned." The minister said such drills always adhered to a schedule — regardless of "who thinks what and who gets hysterical about it, who is deploying real informational terrorism."

Ukraine's leaders expressed skepticism about the pullback.

"Russia constantly makes various statements," Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said. "That's why we have the rule: We won't believe when we hear, we'll believe when we see. When we see troops pulling out, we'll believe in de-escalation."

European leaders have been scrambling to try to head off a new war on their continent, after several tense weeks that have left Europeans feeling caught between Russia and the U.S., and further pushed up household energy prices because of Europe's dependence on Russian gas.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, a day after sitting down with Ukraine's leader in Kyiv. In his opening remarks in the Kremlin, Scholz addressed the Ukraine tensions but also noted Germany's eco-

nomics ties with Russia — which complicate Western efforts to agree on how to punish Russia in case of an invasion.

Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau of Poland, one of Russia's most strident European critics, met in Moscow with Lavrov, and they discussed ways to use the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe for more talks aimed at easing tensions around Ukraine.

The day before, Lavrov suggested more efforts at diplomacy in a made-for-TV meeting with Putin that seemed designed to send a message to the world about the Russian leader's position. The foreign minister argued that Moscow should hold more talks, despite the West's refusal to consider Russia's main demands.

Moscow wants guarantees that NATO will not allow Ukraine and other former Soviet countries to join as members. It also wants the alliance to halt weapons deployments to Ukraine and roll back its forces from Eastern Europe.

Lavrov said possibilities for talks "are far from being exhausted."

The U.S. reacted coolly. "The path for diplomacy remains available if Russia chooses to engage constructively," White House principal deputy press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said. "However, we are clear-eyed about the pros-

pects of that, given the steps Russia is taking on the ground in plain sight."

Ukraine's foreign minister, meanwhile, claimed credit for keeping the diplomatic path open — at least for now.

"We managed with our partners to restrain the Russian Federation from any further escalation. Today is already the middle of February and you can see that diplomacy continues to work," Kuleba said.

As if to show defiance, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy declared Wednesday would be a "day of national unity," calling on the country to display the blue-and-yellow flag and sing the national anthem.

Even amid the hopeful signs, the U.S. and European countries kept up their warnings.

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss reiterated yesterday that the danger of an invasion still exists, telling Sky News that it "could be imminent." Norwegian Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt issued a similar warning.

U.S. officials have said the Russian military continued apparent attack preparations along Ukraine's borders. A U.S. defense official said small numbers of Russian ground units have been moving out of larger assembly areas for several days, taking up positions closer to the Ukrainian border at what would be departure points if Putin launched an invasion.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss information not publicly released.

Maxar Technologies, a commercial satellite imagery company that has been monitoring the Russian buildup, reported increased Russian military activity in Belarus, Crimea and western Russia, including the arrival of helicopters, ground-attack aircraft and fighter-bomber jets at forward locations. The photos taken over a 48-hour period also show ground forces leaving their garrisons and combat units moving into convoy formation.

Meanwhile, Russian lawmakers called on Putin to recognize rebel-held areas in eastern Ukraine as independent states. The State Duma, Russia's lower house of parliament, voted to submit an appeal to Putin to that effect. **MDT/AP**

this day in history



1959 CASTRO SWORN IN AS CUBAN PM



Cuba's revolutionary leader Fidel Castro has become the country's youngest ever premier.

At the age of 32, he has been sworn in as Prime Minister in the Cabinet Room of the Presidential Palace in Havana.

Dr Castro led the resistance against the seven-year military rule of President Fulgencio Batista and commanded the 26 July Army, a guerrilla force that drove the old regime into exile on New Year's Day.

But this is the first time he has assumed administrative responsibilities within the new, provisional government.

Cuban newspaper 'Revolution' - regarded as the voice-piece of the 26 July Army - explained his appointment is to solve the problem of "a dispersal of power", as many workers and industries have observed Castro's pronouncements and not the government's since the revolution.

According to the newspaper, "now the government, the revolution and the people will take the same path."

Dr Castro was on leave from his previous post as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces when Dr Jose Miro Cordoba - prime minister since 5 January - and his cabinet resigned, without explanation, two days ago.

As well as his supporters, a hoard of Cuban and foreign media witnessed Fidel Castro being sworn into office wearing his olive-green rebel army fatigues and sporting his trademark square cap and beard.

He told them: "We have great plans and we suffer when we cannot put these into effect rapidly, but technical preparations take time."

He also denied he had any interest in taking over as president, saying legal moves to lower the age of eligibility for the post last week were the initiative of the incumbent president Manuel Urrutia Lleo.

President Urrutia and Prime Minister Castro are old allies and are expected to work together to achieve revolutionary aims of economic reform and improved living standards for all Cubans.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Fidel Castro became patron of the Whiskers Club in Derbyshire, UK, on 23 February after promising not to shave his two-year-old beard until his country had a "good government".

The Cuban Cabinet refused to accept Dr Castro's resignation on 18 July 1959, claiming President Urrutia was obstructing reforms, and the President was prompted to step down instead.

Antagonism with the US grew and the Americans imposed economic sanctions on Cuba from 1960.

Cuban alliance with the USSR led to the nuclear missile crisis in 1962.

Dr Castro passed a new constitution and became president, secretary general of the Communist Party and commander-in-chief of the army in 1976.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Invite friends or relatives into your home. Proceed with caution if operating equipment or vehicles. You should not be concerned with coworkers who insist on spreading rumors.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
You might not be as reserved on an emotional level as you'd like. Problems with your boss could lead to unemployment. Your temper could get the better of you if you confront personal situations.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
You may want to take a trip; however, before you do, make sure that your car is serviced properly. Pamper yourself; you deserve it. Do what you can but don't jeopardize your health trying to please everyone.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
Make decisions about your professional objectives. You could meet potential new mates if you go out with friends or take pleasure trips. Relatives will want to get together.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
Your partner may be reluctant to tell you how they feel. Your trendy style and unique way of doing things will entice new acquaintances. You need to do something energetic and different.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Be aware that you might be at fault as well. Your talents might just be discovered. Abrupt changes concerning your professional position are evident.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
You will have splendid suggestions for fund raising events. Be cautious and use your head wisely in situations that deal with the use of machinery or vehicles.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Someone close to you may need help. Catch up on your reading and correspondence. You may have difficulties with someone who lives with you. Try to be patient with their inability to accept your new beliefs.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Rewards for past good deeds will highlight your day. Children or friends may try to talk you into lending them money. You should look into a healthier diet.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
There are ways of making extra cash if you put your mind to it. You can help other people with their financial problems by setting up a budget for them.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Don't get involved in secret affairs or underhanded involvements. Don't be too eager to give a piece of your mind or even your opinion today. Problems with appliances or electrical gadgets will drive you crazy.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Organize your day to avoid any setbacks that might ignite temper flare-ups. Residential moves will be in your best interest. Travel will be favorable. You can gain knowledge from dealing with foreigners.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-6	0	cloudy
Harbin	-16	-9	overcast
Tianjin	2	11	fine
Urumqi	8	11	overcast
Xi'an	5	17	cloudy
Lhasa	-7	-1	cloudy
Chengdu	10	17	cloudy
Chongqing	5	16	cloudy
Kunming	-1	14	cloudy
Nanjing	16	18	overcast
Shanghai	3	11	fine
Wuhan	-24	-11	cloudy
Hangzhou	0	11	cloudy
Taipei	3	11	fine
Guangzhou	9	17	cloudy
Hong Kong	13	17	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	-4	0	cloudy
Frankfurt	3	11	overcast
Paris	4	12	rain
London	3	9	rain
New York	-2	-7	clear

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Aquarium buildup; 6- Nine-digit ID; 9- Poker declaration; 14- Gathers; 15- Go quickly; 16- Scuffle; 17- Not having made a will; 19- Gets nosy; 20- Grazed; 21- Dog-powered snow vehicle; 22- Brings up; 23- Dies ___; 25- Unordered; 26- Velvetlike fabric; 29- Elevator man; 31- Buffoons; 32- Pertaining to plants; 36- First name in country; 37- Occupational suffix; 38- Scent; 40- Periodic publication; 43- Steal; 45- Tibetan beasts; 46- Talks back to; 47- First letter of the Hebrew alphabet; 50- ___-Ball; 51- Rome's Fontana di ___; 52- Winglike parts; 54- Life support?; 57- Room at the top; 58- Breeding stallion; 61- Lasso; 62- Author Rand; 63- Needing nourishment; 64- Flower segment; 65- Heston's org.; 66- Prescribed amounts;

DOWN 1- Horne solo; 2- Time to give up?; 3- Movable barrier; 4- Gibbon, e.g.; 5- Pothook shape; 6- Oil source; 7- Construction locale; 8- Require; 9- Emblem; 10- Roman name of Demeter; 11- Rap sheet info; 12- Guarded; 13- Not as much; 18- Former Russian ruler; 23- Herbert Hoover, for one; 24- Flee; 25- Cambridge sch.; 26- TV adjunct; 27- K-6; 28- Timber wolf; 29- Follows orders; 30- Rocky pinnacle; 33- Din; 34- Roman date; 35- Bay; 37- Class; 39- Hi-___ monitor; 41- Average; 42- So there!; 43- Expressed disapproval; 44- Possess, to Burns; 47- Bandleader Shaw; 48- Sic on; 49- Patti LuPone role; 50- Sweatbox; 51- Diamond cover; 52- Slippery ___ eel; 53- Interstellar dist.; 54- Pound sounds; 55- Got it; 56- Cincinnati team; 59- 1963 Paul Newman film; 60- Plastic ___ Band;

Yesterday's solution

A	C	T	I	G	A	G	A	T	E	M			
F	A	I	T	A	N	N	E	X	C	E	D	E	
E	L	K	E	S	T	A	S	H	O	R	E	L	
W	E	I	R	D	O	W	O	O	D	W	I	N	D
S	I	L	T	P	S	I	S						
N	G	O	A	I	R	S	A	L	L	O	V	T	
O	E	R	S	E	E	C	H	T	I	M	B	O	
S	H	A	P	G	E	A	R	S	P	E	O	N	
T	O	N	I	A	S	L	O	S	G	A	G		
R	A	T	T	L	E	S	S	A	U	A	T	A	
I	S	A	O	S	N	I	T						
P	E	R	F	O	R	M	S	S	T	E	P		
L	I	E	U	N	I	T	R	O	N	E	T	S	
U	R	A	L	S	T	E	E	N	O	L	E	S	
M	E	D		S	N	A	G	N	E	S	T		

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Emergency calls 999	Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
Fire department 28 572 222	Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
PJ (Open line) 993	Telephone - Report 1000
PJ (Picket) 28 557 775	Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
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	
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BEIJING 2022

NORWAY TAKES OLYMPIC GOLD MEDAL IN BIATHLON TEAM RELAY

MARTHA BELLISLE, ZHANGJIAKOU

THE Russians took the lead right at the start of the Olympic four-man biathlon relay yesterday and stayed well out front until a shooting meltdown at the very end allowed Norway to get a glimpse of gold.

Eduard Latypov arrived at the range all alone but missed four of the five targets. He used all three of his spare rounds and still had to ski two penalty loops as France, Norway and Germany closed in.

Norwegian anchor Vetle Sjaastad Christiansen hit all five of his targets and left the range first. He took off for the finish line and crossed first, helping the Boe brothers to win another Olympic gold medal.

"It was such high pressure," Christiansen said. "It was the perfect race for me. I was completely blacked out or I don't remember anything, but I woke up and we'd won the gold medal."

The Norwegians won the race in 1 hour, 19 minutes, 50.2 seconds, giving Johannes Thingnes



From left, Sturla Holm Laegreid, Tarjei Boe, Johannes Thingnes Boe and Vetle Sjaastad Christiansen of Norway pose after their first place finish during the men's 4x7.5-kilometer relay

Boe his third gold medal and fourth overall at the Beijing Games. Tarjei Boe won his second gold to go along with a silver and a bronze.

France's final skier, Quentin Fillon Maillet, missed twice and needed two spares before leaving the range in second place. He finished 27.4 seconds behind Norway for silver. The Russians earned bronze, 45.3 seconds behind the winners and just

ahead of Germany.

The silver was Fillon Maillet's fifth medal of the Beijing Olympics. He had already won two gold and two silver.

"I'm just really happy to share this moment with my team," Fillon Maillet said, adding that his latest medal was unlike the others. "It's different because we share all of this with the team, the physio, the coach, the technician

and everyone else. It's very good because it's a gift for everyone."

The relay race had been scheduled to start at 5 p.m. but was moved up 2 1/2 hours because of frigid temperatures at the stadium. The cold was expected to drop to minus 20 degrees C (minus 4 degrees F) by 6 p.m., making it dangerous for the athletes to compete.

Strula Holm Laegreid skied the

first leg for Norway but some missed shots set the team back and handed the Russians the lead.

"I was quite far down after my leg," Laegreid said. "I got a penalty loop in the standing and I have never done that before in the relay so I was very disappointed with myself."

Laegreid handed off to Tarjei Boe, who then made way for his brother as the Norwegians slowly moved to the front group.

"I did OK. Not my best race here, but still OK in tough wind conditions," Tarjei Boe said. "These two bad boys after me were just incredible. It's a team event and it's team work. It didn't look so good after 50% of the race, but anything was possible at that point."

Norway has won two of the three men's relay events in the World Cup this season.

"We've won many relays in the World Cup before this Olympic relay, and we really wanted to win today as well," Johannes Thingnes Boe said.

Latypov crossed the line and crumbled to the ground. His teammates came to comfort him.

"I tried at first to wait, but I understood that I have to work faster," Latypov said. "There was this gust of wind and my feeling was not so good, the concentration was not what I wanted it to be. That with the gusts of winds made me make the misses." MDT/AP

AD

HOLIDAY RENTAL HOUSES

Lugar das Letras Casa de Gouvães

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

But it is the welcome that makes this place stand out from the crowd.

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本地劇團石頭公社慶祝二十五年的叩石墾壤

LOCAL THEATRE GROUP COMUNA DE PEDRA CELEBRATES 25 YEARS OF COURAGEOUS PERFORMANCES

諾貝爾文學獎得主石黑一雄 寫給澳門的詩
A POEM TO MACAU BY NOBEL PRIZE WINNER KAZUO ISHIGURO



Su Yiming of China celebrates his gold medal

BEIJING 2022

Su joins Gu with Olympic big air gold for host China

JAKE SEINER, BEIJING

CHINA'S extreme sports youngsters were ready for a big Olympic stage. The host country built one for them, and they delivered. Su Yiming gave China its second gold medal at Big Air Shougang, matching Eileen Gu with a stunning show yesterday in front of fans at the eerie — and perhaps now iconic — repurposed steel mill while winning the country's first top prize in Olympic snowboarding.

The 17-year-old child actor-turned-rider followed up his unexpected silver in slopestyle by joining Gu in cementing his celebrity status with a big air gold. Gu won the freestyle skiing best-trick contest here last week on her final jump, and the reaction briefly broke Chinese social media website Weibo.

Su blew away his competition so thoroughly that he was able to take a casual victory lap on his head amid an ovation from a roughly half-capacity crowd at Big

Air Shougang — as many as were allowed to squeeze into the venue amid coronavirus restrictions.

Moments after taking his place atop the podium, Su spotted his parents in the stands and began to cry.

He hadn't seen his mom and dad in seven months while training in Europe and competing around the world. He spoke to them through a fence separating those allowed inside Beijing's Olympic bubble from the fans.

"I was thinking back to when I was 4 years old and my first time

snowboarding," he said in English. "I'm so appreciative. This moment is so special for my family."

Three days shy of his 18th birthday, Su started the competition with consecutive 1800s — five spins — first completing the trick going forward, then backward. He led by 17.5 points entering the final heat, and nobody got close in Round 3.

Slopestyle gold medalist Max Parrot of Canada and Japanese rider Takeru Otsuka each landed one higher-scoring trick than Su in the first two rounds, but neither paired it with a second big jump in the three-round competition.

Mons Roisland of Norway was the last competitor with a realistic chance of catching Su. He played it safe with a 1620, locking up the silver, and setting up Su's victory lap. Parrot earned bronze.

Su, an aspiring actor who landed a part in an action film, "The Taking of Tiger Mountain," has made a shocking surge to the forefront of competitive snowboarding.

He's spent the Beijing Games gushing about other riders who he has mostly watched from afar, including Parrot, who became the eighth snowboarder with a record three Olympic medals.

"Two years ago, I didn't even know him," Parrot said. "After the podium, we had a quick talk, and he told me I was one of his idols, and he has been looking up to me this past year. He said because of me, he has been pushing really hard.

"So I told him, now you are going to make me push really hard."

Su began working with Japanese coach Yasuhiro Sato when he was 14 with an eye on the Beijing Games, and he's suddenly become a force. He won in just his third World Cup competition in Colo-

rado in December, becoming the first Chinese rider with a medal on that circuit.

"Coach Sato is actually a coach that changed my life," Su said via interpreter. "The knowledge and the tricks he has taught me, I totally understand and absorbed them."

Su proved that with his slopestyle silver, a medal that would have gone gold if judges had noticed Parrot missed a grab on his first jump. It was the first of several scoring mishaps at snowboarding events in the Beijing Games, spurring an outpouring of frustration from the field.

There was no judging drama yesterday. Su's lead after two rounds was so commanding that competitors played it safe on their third jumps, jockeying instead to simply crack the podium.

Su was plotting to drop a 1980 in his final run. He was happy to keep it in his back pocket when it wasn't necessary.

"When that moment actually arrived, I was so excited," he said via interpreter. "In that moment, I wanted to enjoy it and take it all in."

China has six medals in snowboarding and freestyle skiing in Beijing, trailing only the United States and Canada with eight. Su and Gu have combined for four of those, and Gu could still win another in the halfpipe.

The host nation turned heads when it converted much of the former Shougang Group steel mill into a winter sports complex, complete with the world's only permanent big air venue.

Skiers and snowboarders soaring past dormant cooling towers may be remembered around the world as a defining image from the Beijing Games.

In China, it's now the spot of two memorable Olympic triumphs, too. **MDT/AP**

BEIJING SNAPSHOT

At Olympics, differing views of the news

STEPHEN WADE, BEIJING

REPORTERS from other countries and their Chinese counterparts seem to have different approaches to the daily news conferences at the Beijing Olympics. Yesterday's briefing showcased the varied agendas.

IOC spokesman Mark Adams often gives the first question at the briefings to representatives from China Global Television Network, part of CMG — the China Media Group. Then he mixes it up.

The hot topic for Western reporters was the case of Russian superstar skater

Kamila Valieva. She is expected to deliver her country a third straight Olympic gold in women's figure skating. However, she is reported to have tested positive for a banned substance.

Adams was not ready to confirm the reports. Western reporters continued to ask.

"There's a legal issue going on," Adams said in response to a BBC question. "I can't say any more than that."

Later he offered the same reply: "It's a legal case."

After three straight doping questions from Western outlets, Adams called on a reporter from China's

state-run news agency Xinhua. No doping interest here: He pivoted to the dangers of winter sports and asked if organizers were ready.

Huang Chun, the deputy director-general of the Pandemic Prevention and Control Office of the local organizing committee, tackled that one. He ran off first-aid preparations, and the availability of ambulances and helicopters.

"The medical service is going on smoothly and effectively," Huang said through an interpreter.

Four of next six questions were from Western

outlets. Again the focus was the skater.

Then Chinese reporters asked a couple of local questions, one aimed at the broadcasting ratings in China.

Then: another 180-degree swing. A Chinese reporter asked about the weather forecast for the next few days and the possible rescheduling of events.

"All the venues are getting prepared from the upcoming cold air — de-icing and getting staff and vehicles ready," organizing committee spokesman Zhao Weidong said.

"At the same time, I wou-



ld like to remind all the journalists if you go to the mountains for your work — make sure you dress warmly."

Finally, back to a Western reporter — me — who

returned to the subject of doping.

"We don't want to hear about the other stuff," Adams said, concluding the news conference. "But it arises. It's life." **MDT/AP**

OPINION

China Daily
Editorial, China Daily

THE LABEL 'TRAITOR'
FITS NO ATHLETE

It is shocking that Gu Ailing, known in the United States as Eileen Gu, should be called a "traitor" by some US television commentators. They believe that she should have been representing the United States instead of China at the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games, since she was born and brought up in the US, and trained there as a freestyle skier.

Whatever their arguments, their use of such words as "traitor" or "shameful" or "ungrateful" to describe an Olympic gold medal winner goes too far.

It is not uncommon for athletes to choose a country other than their home country to represent when participating in international sports competitions. When they do so on behalf of the United States, they are not called "traitors" to the countries where they were born by the US TV commentators.

It is even more common for former champions to coach national teams other than their home teams.

Renowned Chinese volleyball player Lang Ping once served as the coach of the US women's volleyball team, which achieved good results in world competitions. Very few Chinese used the word "traitor" to describe her.

There are also many Chinese table tennis players who choose to represent other countries in international competitions rather than China where they were born and trained.

Sportsmen and sportswomen have the right to choose for themselves which country to represent when they have a choice.

Those who have accused Gu Ailing of being a "traitor" or of being "ungrateful" to the US believe that it is politically incorrect for an excellent athlete born and trained in the US to represent other countries rather than the US.

That they are even more annoyed that Gu chose to participate in the Beijing Winter Olympic Games on behalf of China, which they consider to be a rival of the US, only highlights the extent to which they are willing to take that rivalry.

Behind their narrow-mindedness is their disappointment and anger that anyone should prefer to represent China rather than the US. They consider it a national humiliation.

However, it is unreasonable and ill-mannered for them to use such derogatory words as "traitor" and "being ungrateful" to denigrate a personal preference.

Every athlete should have due respect from audiences of all countries for their participation in an international competition no matter which country they choose to represent.

The Olympic motto encourages athletes to do their best. It urges them to go higher, to be faster and stronger. It also calls for togetherness.

That some TV commentators have called Gu a "traitor" reflects the reflexive animosities that plague the world today.

Yet that is not the defining narrative of her participation in the Games, for what will endure longer than the vilification is the joy and inspiration she has offered those viewers around the world who are willing to take pleasure in appreciation of her sporting achievements.

PUTIN: RUSSIA READY TO DISCUSS
CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES

THE
BUZZ

Russian President Vladimir Putin said last night that Moscow is ready for talks with the U.S. and NATO on limits for missile deployments and military transparency, in a new sign of easing East-West tensions. The statement came after Russia announced it is pulling back some troops from exercises that have raised fears of a potential invasion of Ukraine.

Speaking after talks with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Putin said the U.S. and NATO rejected Moscow's demand to keep Ukraine and other ex-Soviet nations out of NATO, halt weapons

deployments near Russian borders and roll back alliance forces from Eastern Europe.

But the U.S. and NATO have agreed to discuss a range of security measures that Russia had previously proposed.

Putin said Russia is ready to engage in talks on limiting the deployment of intermediate range missiles in Europe, transparency of drills and other confidence-building measures but emphasized the need for the West to heed Russia's main demands.

More on p8



SINGAPORE AIR SHOW
SUBDUED TWO YEARS
INTO PANDEMIC

ZEN SOO, SINGAPORE

SINGAPORE'S biennial air show opened yesterday on a smaller scale than before the pandemic, even as the aviation sector gears up for a recovery two years after coronavirus outbreaks nearly paralyzed air travel.

Members of the general public are not allowed, but about 600 exhibitors are showing their products and services. That's down from 930 during the last show in February 2020, when coronavirus cases were just beginning to rise.

Experts say the aviation market is poised for recovery, with defense spending on the rise and commercial aviation picking up despite the latest wave of omicron-driven infections.

Those attending the show must observe stringent coronavirus rules including regular COVID-19 testing and potential isolation for those found infected with the coronavirus.

The air show began in 2008. It typically attracts senior corporate executives of aviation companies and delegations from countries around the world. About 13,000 people are expected to attend this year's show, less than half the 30,000 who visited in 2020.

Many Southeast Asian countries have kept their borders closed or imposed strict limits and quarantine

and testing requirements to try to curb outbreaks that have ravaged most countries. Some are now slowly relaxing those precautions.

"The air show comes at an interesting time, because the market in Southeast Asia is finally starting to recover after almost two years of decimated impact on air travel, particularly in the international market," said Brendan Sobie, an independent aviation and aerospace analyst based in Singapore.

Many Chinese companies are staying away from this year's show, likely because of Beijing's "zero-COVID" policies that involve lengthy quarantines.

Major exhibitors at this year's show include Boeing, Airbus and Lockheed Martin. Boeing's newest wide-body jet, the 777X, made its Asian debut at this year's show, demonstrating aerial maneuvers during a daily flight display.

The 777X is about 20% more fuel efficient than the aircraft it replaces, according to Darren Hulst, the vice president of marketing for Boeing's commercial airplanes. Singapore Airlines is among Boeing customers planning to include the new jet in their fleets.

"The number one trend we're seeing is how resilient the demand for aviation is and how important it is for people to connect," Hulst said in an interview Tuesday. He noted that

short-haul flights have recovered quickly in regions like the U.S., where high gas prices are discouraging people from traveling by car.

"As we see the industry recover more, as more and more restrictions are lifted on long haul travel, we'll see the market continue to recover and we think the industry will be back to where it was in 2019 somewhere by the end of 2023 or early 2024," Hulst said.

Boeing rival Airbus said Monday that it had confirmed 48 orders for new aircraft — 28 A320neos for Kuwait's Jazeera Airways, and 20 Airbus A220s for U.S.-based aircraft leasing firm Aviation Capital Group.

China's absence at the show leaves a big gap, said Sobie. Chinese tourists usually are the world's biggest spenders, having splashed out \$254.6 billion on overseas travel in 2019, according to the UN's World Tourism Organization.

"It's not about them not participating in the show necessarily. It's about them not participating in the recovery of the international aviation industry," he said.

"China is a very important market for Asia and in particular, Southeast Asia relies very heavily on China," he said. "So it's an extremely important market that has to recover in order for the market overall to fully recover." MDT/AP

Syria A bomb attached to a bus carrying Syrian troops in Damascus exploded yesterday, killing one soldier and wounding 11, state TV reported. The blast occurred during rush hour at a customs roundabout near the capital's landmark Omayyad Square, according to the report. It gave no further details. There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

Belgium Police have detained 30 people during an investigation of a major drug trafficking operation in at least seven countries, prosecutors said yesterday. The federal prosecutor's office said at least 10 other arrests were made abroad. Police officers carried out 49 searches across Belgium, most of them in and around Brussels and the port city of Antwerp. Prosecutors did not say what was seized during the operation.



Cyprus is lifting Covid-19 restrictions on access for the unvaccinated to bars, restaurants and other venues following a leveling off of new coronavirus cases in recent days that has eased the pressure on the health care system. Health Minister Michalis Hadjipantela said that unvaccinated people can enter nightclubs, soccer stadiums, theaters, hotels and cinemas starting Feb. 21 as long as they show a valid COVID-19 rapid test taken within the previous 24 hours.



Sports If forced to choose, Novak Djokovic said he would skip the French Open and Wimbledon, foregoing the chance to overtake Rafael Nadal's record haul of 21 Grand Slams titles, rather than get vaccinated against Covid-19. Speaking in an interview, the 20-time Grand Slam champion said he is still not vaccinated, and prepared to sacrifice titles to stay that way.