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**A LOCAL MAN HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN SCAMMED OUT OF RMB137,000 BY A NON-RESIDENT WORKER FROM THE MAINLAND EMPLOYED IN A WATCH SHOP IN MACAU** P5

**COUTINHO CALLS FOR ANOTHER ROUND OF CONSUMPTION CARDS, SUPPORT FOR SME** P3

**PORTUGAL AND ITALY FAVORITES IN PLAY-OFFS' THRILLER** P11



AP PHOTO



**Japan's** government lifted a warning of potential blackouts for the Tokyo region yesterday as weather and conservation efforts improved, but the supply outlook still appears fragile with several coal-fired plants offline. The energy shortfall came as people used more power to keep warm on an unusually cold, snowy day and followed an earthquake last week that caused several coal-fired plants to temporarily stop generating electricity.

AP PHOTO



**Sri Lankan** lawmakers have approved reforms to a harsh anti-terror law that rights groups have long criticized, as the country looks to shore up its trade relations with the European Union amid its worst economic crisis in memory. The vote on the anti-terror law followed a European Parliament resolution last year that called for a preferential trade scheme with Sri Lanka to be used as leverage for rights reforms in the South Asian country.

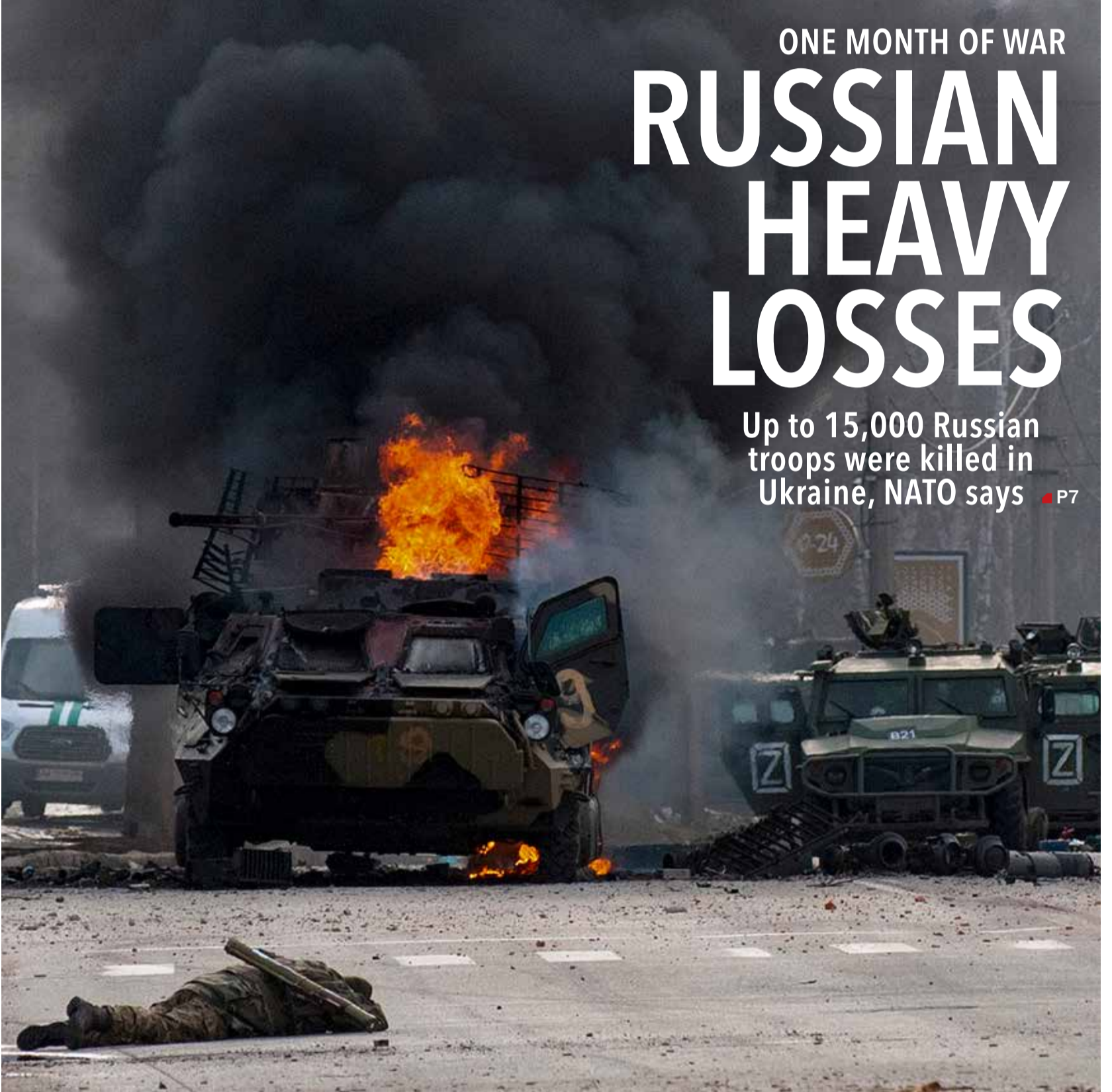
AP PHOTO



**India** A major fire in a scrap warehouse killed at least 11 people and injured four others yesterday in India's southern Hyderabad city, police and officials said. Police said 15 laborers were sleeping in the shop when fire caused by a short-circuit broke out, trapping the people inside. The laborers were from the eastern state of Bihar and had come to Hyderabad for employment.

More on backpage

AP PHOTO



## ONE MONTH OF WAR RUSSIAN HEAVY LOSSES

Up to 15,000 Russian troops were killed in Ukraine, NATO says P7

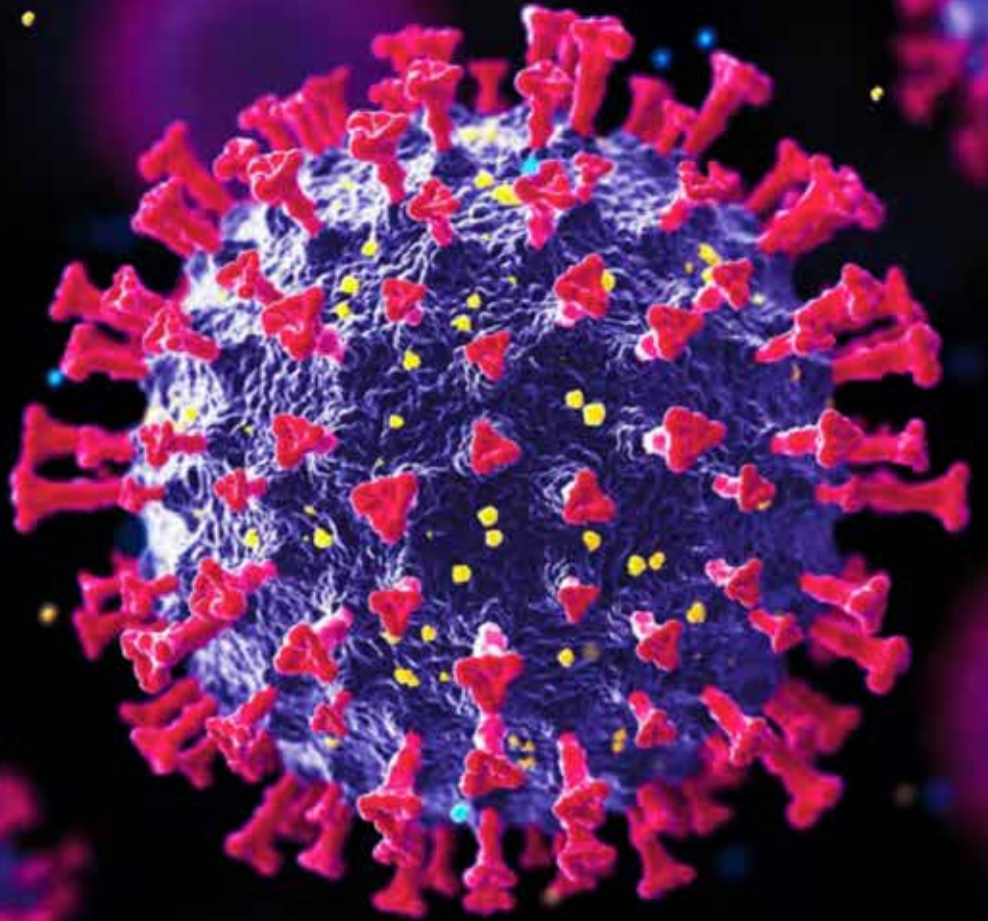
XINHUA



## MU5735 MYSTERY IN A BLACK BOX

P6

# WHAT IS THE NEW COVID-19 VARIANT BA.2, AND WILL IT CAUSE ANOTHER WAVE OF INFECTIONS?



**PRAKASH NAGARKATTI**  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

A new omicron subvariant of the virus that causes COVID-19, BA.2, is quickly becoming the predominant source of infections amid rising cases around the world. Immunologists Prakash Nagarkatti and Mitzi Nagarkatti of the University of South Carolina explain what makes it different from previous variants, whether there will be another surge in the U.S. and how best to protect yourself.

## WHAT IS BA.2, AND HOW IS IT RELATED TO OMICRON?

BA.2 is the latest subvariant of omicron, the dominant strain of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19. While the origin of BA.2 is still unclear, it has quickly become the dominant strain in many countries, including India, Denmark and South Africa. It is continuing to spread in Europe, Asia and many parts of the world.

The omicron variant, officially known as B.1.1.529, of SARS-CoV-2 has three main subvariants in its lineage: BA.1, BA.2 and BA.3. The earliest omicron subvariant to be detected, BA.1, was first reported in November 2021 in

South Africa. While scientists believe that all the subvariants may have emerged around the same time, BA.1 was predominantly responsible for the winter surge of infections in the Northern Hemisphere in 2021.

The first omicron subvariant, BA.1, is unique in the number of alterations it has compared to the original version of the virus – it has over 30 mutations in the spike protein that helps it enter cells. Spike protein mutations are of high concern to scientists and public health officials because they affect how infectious a particular variant is and whether it is able to escape the protective antibodies that the body produces after vaccination or a prior COVID-19 infection.

BA.2 has eight unique mutations not found in BA.1, and lacks 13 mutations that BA.1 does have. BA.2 does, however, share around 30 mutations with BA.1. Because of its relative genetic similarity, it is considered a subvariant of omicron as opposed to a completely new variant.

## WHY IS IT CALLED A 'STEALTH' VARIANT?

Some scientists have called BA.2 a "stealth" variant because,

unlike the BA.1 variant, it lacks a particular genetic signature that distinguishes it from the delta variant.

While standard PCR tests are still able to detect the BA.2 variant, they might not be able to tell it apart from the delta variant.

Is it more infectious and lethal than other variants?

BA.2 is considered to be more transmissible but not more virulent than BA.1. This means that while BA.2 can spread faster than BA.1, it might not make people sicker.

It is worth noting that while BA.1 has dominated case numbers around the world, it causes less severe disease compared to the delta variant. Recent studies from the U.K. and Denmark suggest that BA.2 may pose a similar risk of hospitalization as BA.1.

## DOES PREVIOUS INFECTION WITH BA.1 PROVIDE PROTECTION AGAINST BA.2?

Yes! A recent study suggested that people previously infected with the original BA.1 subvariant have robust protection against BA.2.

Because BA.1 caused widespread infections across the world, it is likely that a significant

percentage of the population has protective immunity against BA.2. This is why some scientists predict that BA.2 will be less likely to cause another major wave

However, while the natural immunity gained after COVID-19 infection may provide strong protection against reinfection from earlier variants, it weakens against omicron.

## HOW EFFECTIVE ARE VACCINES AGAINST BA.2?

A recent preliminary study that has not yet been peer reviewed of over 1 million individuals in Qatar suggests that two doses of either the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines protect against symptomatic infection from BA.1 and BA.2 for several months before waning to around 10%. A booster shot, however, was able to elevate protection again close to original levels.

Importantly, both vaccines were 70% to 80% effective at preventing hospitalization or death, and this effectiveness increased to over 90% after a booster dose.

## HOW WORRIED DOES US NEED TO BE ABOUT BA.2?

The rise in BA.2 in certain parts of the world is most likely due

to a combination of its higher transmissibility, people's waning immunity and relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions.

CDC data suggests that BA.2 cases are rising steadily, making up 23% of all cases in the U.S. as of early March. Scientists are still debating whether BA.2 will cause another surge in the U.S.

Though there may be an uptick of BA.2 infections in the coming months, protective immunity from vaccination or previous infection provides defense against severe disease. This may make it less likely that BA.2 will cause a significant increase in hospitalization and deaths. The U.S., however, lags behind other countries when it comes to vaccination, and falls even further behind on boosters.

Whether there will be another devastating surge depends on how many people are vaccinated or have been previously infected with BA.1. It's safer to generate immunity from a vaccine, however, than from getting an infection. Getting vaccinated and boosted and taking precautions like wearing an N95 mask and social distancing are the best ways to protect yourself from BA.2 and other variants.

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COVID-19

# Mail quarantined 70-hours before distribution

ANTHONY LAM

**A**LL incoming mail will be quarantined in the indoor parking lot of the Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) for 70 hours before being distributed, a spokesperson of the bureau announced yesterday.

Under the coordination of the Government Information Bureau, the CTT demonstrated the process by which all incoming packages are sanitized.

Wong San San, division chief for public relations and central archive of the CTT, told the press that even though all mail will be sanitized at the border checkpoints upon arrival in Macau, they will be still be held at the parking lot for sanitization.

The parking lot is located at the CTT Building near the Transport Bureau headquarters.

The exterior wrapping and packaging of the mail – both parcels and documents – will be sanitized at the parking lot before remaining there for 48 hours. Wong said this is the second phase of the sanitization process.

In the third phase of sanitization, the exterior wrapping and



packaging will be cut open so that individual mailing units can be sanitized.

During the sanitization process the contracted cleaners will spread sanitizing liquid on all sides of each mailing unit.

The process was introduced in the second half of January, having received recommenda-

tions from the Health Bureau and following guidelines from the mainland's post office, Wong explained.

As the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) conducts SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid spot checks on incoming cargo, Wong was asked if the CTT conducts the same procedure. She restated that the

bureau conducts sanitization on all incoming mail, before confirming that no nucleic acid spot checks are done.

Wong revealed that on average, the city receives 3,000 to 4,000 mail packages monthly. Compared to pre-Covid figures, the number of packages received recorded a single-digit decrease.

ECONOMY

# Coutinho calls for another round of consumption cards, support for SMEs

RENATO MARQUES

**L**AWMAKER José Pereira Coutinho continues to urge the government to provide a new round of financial support using consumption cards.

Coutinho made the call in a written inquiry to the Legislative Assembly. He noted that due to the current situation in Macau and the low chances of the borders reopening and normal economic activities resuming in the short term, companies, namely Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), have been filling for bankruptcy or ceasing to trade, leading to the firing of many workers.

"The pandemic has dealt a hard local blow. The support for families and businesses remains



insufficient because of the development of the pandemic in the neighbo-

ring regions. [This] makes it necessary to urgently implement a new round

of cash support, namely with the monetary injection in electronic cards,"

Pereira Coutinho said.

He stressed that, "the support for young and low-skilled job-seekers should be strengthened to help them adapt to changes in the labor market. More support is still needed to capitalize on viable SMEs."

The lawmaker wants the government to publicly state its macroeconomic plans for the post-pandemic period, and how it intends to assist the recovery of the economic, social, and labor sectors that have been "devastated by Covid-19."

This response should include a plan for the creation of well-paid jobs in the sector of new technologies, he said.

The lawmaker is also reiterating his calls for a thorough reform of the public administration sector. Coutinho says that this would provide security for those approaching retirement as well as provide an incentive for younger generations to work in the public sector.

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES ON THE RISE

Tang Yuk Wa, deputy director of the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS), has revealed that over the past two years during which Macau residents have lived under a series of Covid-19 restrictions, the number of domestic violence cases has slightly increased. In 2021 the city saw 81 such cases: an average of 5.8 cases per month. This year, however, the city has so far recorded an average of six cases per month. The increase amounted to about 3.5%. The frequency of child abuse has also risen significantly. Tang also revealed that the past two years have seen more domestic violence lawsuits.

## NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION HOSTS MENTAL HEALTH FORUM

General Union of Neighborhood Associations of Macau (UGAMM) held a forum yesterday to discuss mental health support. In his speech, Chan Ka Leong, executive director of the UGAMM, admitted to the occurrence of social problems and pandemic fatigue, commenting that pandemic-control measures have put extra mental pressures on residents. He pointed out that managing mental health is key to social stability and to fighting Covid-19. Moreover, mental and physical health are closely connected, Chan said. The forum, which was held online, saw participation of mental health practitioners from both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

## MACAU LEGEND LIKELY TO BE SUSPENDED FROM HKSE

Hong Kong-listed Macau Legend Development Ltd says it expects its stock to be suspended from quotation on HKSE from 9 a.m. on April 1. In report yesterday, cited by GGRAsia, the company said this was because it "may not be able" to publish its 2021 annual results "on or before" March 31, as required under stock market rules. The company added this was "due to the travel restriction and quarantine measures occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic, which inevitably brings difficulties to the financial reporting and consolidation process of the company's operations, and thus will require additional time to complete the process." Macau Legend oversees a number of "satellite casinos."

# GOV'T SAYS CITY LINKS CHINA TO LUSOPHONE COUNTRIES IN TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

ANTHONY LAM

**M**ACAU is strategically well placed to connect China and Lusophone countries in the field of technology, Tai Kin Ip, director of the Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSE-DT), said.

The bureau recently hosted a forum to discuss technological development in Macau. The event saw attendees from both China and Lusophone countries.

In his speech, Tai highlighted the countries which are supporting Macau in benefiting from the special advantages of the One Country, Two Systems Principle and the close relationship between China and Lusophone countries.

Developing sophisticated and innovative technologies is a way to "adequately diversify" the city's economy, a goal that Beijing has directed the SAR government to pursue.

As such, Macau should



make use of the bi-lateral free trade agreements to further all areas of Sino-Lusophone cooperation.

On the same occasion, representatives from Brazil and Portugal, who spoke via video-link, stressed that Lusophone countries possess excellent resources for science and innovation.

They showcased eight in-

cubators and 20 start-ups to represent the scientific and innovative power of the two countries. They stressed that businesses in the two countries are greatly interested in the Chinese market.

It is hoped that Macau will play an effective mediatory role in helping Brazilian and Portuguese businesses to enter the Chinese market, as

well as to achieve technological progress through collaborating with businesses and institutions on the mainland.

Other representatives from the Zhuhai government, the University of Macau, PwC Consultancy and the Macau Young Entrepreneur Incubation Center also shared their ideas with the forum.



GBA

## NEW LEGISLATION TO ALLOW MACAU, FOREIGN MED DOCTORS TO WORK IN HENGQIN

**ZHUHAI** will introduce new regulations to allow more Hong Kong, Macau and foreign health professionals to work in Guangdong-Macau in-depth cooperation zone in Hengqin, Zhuhai city, according to a press conference on Zhuhai's annual legislative work recently.

Through legislation, Zhuhai aims at providing more convenience for Macau residents to work and live in the In-depth zone in Hengqin.

In recent years, several local regulations have been issued to provide convenience and legal protection for Hong Kong and Macau professionals in the field of medicine, architecture, law, social work and tourism to work in Hengqin, followed by a series of cross-border professional qualification and practice measures.

So far, a total of 204 residents from Hong Kong and Macao have been licensed to practice law in the mainland GBA cities. And there are now 60 Macao doctors working at Hengqin Hospital. Previously, doctors in Hong Kong and Macao have to pass the mainland qualification exams to practice at mainland hospitals. However, now they can also receive qualifications by registering at the place of practice.

Meanwhile, with the implementation of "Hong Kong and Macao Medicine and Equipment Connect" since 2021, a policy allowing for the import of medicines and equipment that are already in the markets and used in public hospitals in Hong Kong and Macau, more pharmaceutical products and medical devices that are urgently needed by patients have now been introduced to 5 eligible medical institutions in Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhongshan and Zhuhai, which has further promote the integration of health care in GBA. **MDT/NEWSGD**

# Winter Olympic mascot linked to MUST

**L**IU Pingyun, chief executive of the team that designed one of the mascots for the Beijing Winter Olympics, worked on the project while he was studying for a PhD at the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST).

The recently concluded Winter Olympics had two mascots, namely Bing Dwen Dwen and Shuey Rhon Rhon. Liu took part in the design of Bing Dwen Dwen.

At a seminar celebrating the 22nd Anniversary of MUST, the designer revealed that the 10 months during which Bing Dwen Dwen was developed overlapped his studies, making the mascot closely connected with MUST.

Liu is still pursuing his PhD at the institution.

Inspired by the national treasure of the panda, Bing Dwen Dwen is the personified integration of the animal and a piece of crystal. The outer layer of its head took its inspiration from the helmet, a common piece of equipment in winter sports.

The "window of the hel-



met," meanwhile, is a representation of a main venue in the Winter Olympics, the National Speed Skating Oval. The red heart in its left palm symbolizes the Chinese people welcoming participants.

As Liu explained, the core concept of the mascot started with the formulation and communication of the national image. The design team then added details to suit the

symbolism, presentation and goals of the games.

To support his participation in the design process, Liu analyzed a research paper on the visual designs of the Beijing Winter Olympics.

Liu revealed that Chinese thinking and philosophies also played a major role in the design process.

He said that the philosophical values of "not taking

credit for contributions" and "making selfless contributions" were key to the conception of the mascot. He stressed that these values stimulated and fortified the team when faced with difficulties and challenges.

Liu said that his bravery in overcoming difficulties and achieving innovations are the embodiment of the values of MUST. **AL**

## FAST FERRIES SHEKOU-HK AIRPORT RESUME SERVICE

**SHENZHEN** Shekou Port resumed its high-speed ferry service to Hong Kong International Airport and Greater Bay Area cruises yesterday. Passengers must provide negative nucleic test results within 48 hours to board. For the time being, there will be two sailings on each route a day and services will gradually return to normal. Ferry service and cruises were suspended on March 15 to help prevent COVID-19 transmission.

CRIME

# Local man scammed over 'industrial visas'

RENATO MARQUES

A local man has reportedly been scammed out of RMB137,000 by a non-resident worker from the mainland employed in a watch shop in Macau, the Judiciary Police (PJ) informed yesterday during the regular joint police press conference.

The victim reportedly knew the suspect from the watch shop, where the two men often talked.

In one of his visits to the store, the victim told the suspect that a friend of his on the mainland wanted to visit Macau, but had been unable to obtain a tourist visa.

The suspect then said that he knew someone in the neighboring city of Shenzhen who owned a large construction company. He said that this company had two unused quotas for an "industrial visa" which would allow mainland residents to enter Macau for commercial and business activities.

He also told the local man that his friend was asking for RMB36,000 in compensation for each of these visas.

The victim agreed to have the two quotas filled, and he was asked to pay 70% of the sum (RMB50,400) in advance, with the remaining 30% to be paid when the visas were ready.

The suspect also told the victim that it would take about 15 days to process the applications.



He also told the victim that, through this friend in Shenzhen, he had discovered an investment opportunity in the construction of a large-scale tourism resort in Sanya, Hainan, and asked the victim if he was interested in investing in the project.

After the two weeks, the suspect informed the victim that the visas were ready, and sent him a photo of the purported visas, asking for the payment of the re-

maining 30%. The local man paid the sum, also adding some extra money for the spurious investment in the Hainan resort.

Later the victim contacted his friends who were waiting for the visas on the mainland, but they said that they hadn't received visas from anyone. The victim then attempted to contact the salesman, but found that he had been deleted and blocked from his contacts.

After the complaint was filed with the PJ, the PJ opened an investigation and called for help from the Interpol delegation in China to investigate the alleged visas.

According to the information received, this visa type does not exist and the suspect had been lying from the start.

On returning to Macau on March 21, the suspect was detained by police and taken into

questioning.

He admitted to having lied about the visas as well as the investment in Hainan, saying that he had taken the victim's money to the casino.

The police also discovered the WeChat conversation between the two men on the suspect's phone, substantiating the local man's accusation. The victim claims to have been defrauded of RMB137,000 in total.

CRIME

# Recyclables collector steals door 'by mistake'

RENATO MARQUES

A 50-year-old Vietnamese woman working as a collector of recyclable materials has been accused by a store owner of stealing the steel door from his store.

Earlier this week, the store owner, who sells stoves and other gas appliances, removed the metal gate from his store and placed it beside the shop.

Later that day, the woman was roaming the city with a cart searching for recyclable materials when she saw the gate and collected it.

The man reported the theft to the Public Security Police Force (PSP), who, after reviewing footage from the store's surveillance cameras identified the wo-

man and began to search for her.

She was finally caught later that day in Taipa. She admitted to the PSP officers that she had collected the metal door which she later sold to a recyclables collection point and received 50 patacas for it.

The store owner claims that the door is worth as much as 4,000 patacas and has pressed charges against the woman for theft.

According to the PSP spokesperson, the woman is not a legal worker in Macau and has a temporary permit to stay in Macau, which is only valid until April 5 this year.

The case of the alleged theft has been referred to the Public Prosecutions Office.





Rescuers conduct search operations at the site of the plane crash in Tengxian County in Guangxi

MU5735

# ONE 'BLACK BOX' FOUND IN CHINA EASTERN PLANE CRASH

NG HAN GUAN  
& KEN MORITSUGU, WUZHOU

A Chinese aviation official said yesterday that one of the two "black box" recorders had been found with its casing in severely damaged condition, two days after a China Eastern flight crashed in southern China with 132 people on board.

The exterior is so damaged that investigators were not able to tell whether it was the flight data recorder or the cockpit voice recorder, said Mao Yanfeng, the director of the accident investigation division of the Civil Aviation Authority of China.

"The exterior appearance of the black box is severely damaged," Mao said at a news conference.

Mao gave no information about the condition of the recording

device inside. An all-out effort is being made to find the other black box, he said.

Images released by state broadcaster CCTV showed workers placing a bright orange, mud-caked cylinder into a labeled, clear plastic, zip-close bag.

Recovering the so-called black boxes — they are usually painted orange for visibility — is considered key to figuring out what caused the crash.

The search for clues into why a Chinese commercial jetliner dove suddenly and crashed into a mountain in southern China had been temporarily suspended earlier yesterday as rain slickened the debris field and filled the red-dirt gash formed by the plane's fiery impact.

Searchers had been using hand tools, drones and sniffer dogs

under rainy conditions to comb the heavily forested slopes for the flight data and cockpit voice recorders, as well as any human remains. Crews also worked to pump water from the pit created when the plane hit the ground, but their efforts were suspended around midmorning because small landslides were possible on the steep, slick slopes.

The black box was found in the afternoon. The flight data recorder captures information about the plane's airspeed, altitude, direction up or down, pilot actions, and performance of all key systems. The cockpit voice recorder captures sounds including conversations and background engine noise during the flight.

Mao and other officials at the news conference said members of the air crew were healthy, the air-

craft had a clean maintenance record, the weather had been good during the flight and the crew had been in regular communication with air traffic controllers prior to going into a dive.

Relatives of passengers began arriving yesterday at the gate to Lu village just outside the crash zone, where they, along with reporters on the scene, were stopped by police and officials who used opened umbrellas to block the view beyond.

One woman was overheard saying her husband, the father of their two children, had been on board the flight.

"I'm just going in there to take a look. Am I breaking the law?" she said. The woman and a companion were then escorted away and reporters told to stop filming.

Another man, who gave just his surname, Ding, said his sister-in-law had been on the plane. He said he hoped to visit the site but had been told little by the authorities.

"We're just coming here to have a look," said Ding, adding, "My heart sank all of a sudden," upon hearing about the crash. He too

was escorted away.

China Eastern Flight 5735 was carrying 123 passengers and nine crew from Kunming in Yunnan province to Guangzhou when it crashed Monday afternoon outside the city of Wuzhou in the Guangxi region. All 132 people on board are presumed killed.

Investigators say it is too early to speculate on the cause. The plane went into an unexplained dive an hour after departure and stopped transmitting data 96 seconds into the fall.

An air-traffic controller tried to contact the pilots several times after seeing the plane's altitude drop sharply, but got no reply, a grim-faced Zhu Tao, director of the Office of Aviation Safety at the Civil Aviation Authority of China, said at a Tuesday evening news conference.

"As of now, the rescue has yet to find survivors," Zhu said. "The public security department has taken control of the site."

China Eastern is headquartered in Shanghai and is one of China's three largest carriers with more than 600 planes, including 109 Boeing 737-800s. China's Transport Ministry said China Eastern has grounded all of its 737-800s, a move that could further disrupt domestic air travel already curtailed because of the largest COVID-19 outbreak in China since the initial peak in early 2020.

The grounding order did not imply any mechanical problems with the fleet, but was an "act of responsibility toward passengers," the chairman of China Eastern's Yunnan province subsidiary said at yesterday's news conference.

The Boeing 737-800 has been flying since 1998 and has a well-established safety record. It is an earlier model than the 737 Max, which was grounded worldwide for nearly two years after deadly crashes in 2018 and 2019.

Monday's crash was China's worst in more than a decade. In August 2010, an Embraer ERJ 190-100 operated by Henan Airlines hit the ground short of the runway in the northeastern city of Yichun and caught fire. It carried 96 people and 44 of them died. Investigators blamed pilot error. **MDT/AP**

TAIWAN

# Gov't considers extending four-month military conscription

TAIWAN is considering extending its four-month compulsory military service, its defense minister said yesterday, amid concerns about the self-governing island democracy's tensions with China, which have been underscored by

Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng said the government would not implement any changes immediately but he vowed it would release the results of its internal research re-

gardless of what it decides. Any changes would only be effective a year after being announced and would be made following consultation with legislators, he said.

"Currently, we are still in the research stage. This

year we will definitely have results," Chiu said.

Some in Taiwan have suggested the four-month compulsory military service should be longer.

In recent years, China has stepped up its military pressure on the self-

ruled island, which China claims as its own territory, sending fighter jets flying toward Taiwan on a near-daily basis.

Many experts have drawn comparisons of the Taiwan-China situation to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February. However, the situation does not fit a simple narrative, and experts have so far said military action from China is unlikely. The war in Ukraine did prompt a lawmaker from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party in

Taiwan to publicly say it is "necessary" to extend the mandatory service period.

Russia's war against Ukraine has drawn sympathy in Taiwan, where the public raised more than \$10.6 million in five days to help fund Ukrainian refugee relief efforts.

Taiwan has more than 215,000 members in its military, with the majority being volunteers. Taiwanese men over the age of 18 are required to serve for four months in the military. **MDT/AP**

PUTIN'S WAR

# NATO: 7,000 to 15,000 Russian troops dead in Ukraine

NEBI QENA  
& CARA ANNA, KYIV

**N**ATO is estimating that 7,000 to 15,000 Russian soldiers have been killed in a month of fighting in Ukraine.

A senior NATO military official said last night the estimate was based on information from Ukrainian officials, what Russia has released — intentionally or not — and intelligence gathered from open sources.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity under ground rules set by NATO.

One month of war, Ukraine is still defiant. With its government still standing and its outnumbered troops battling Russian forces to bloody stalemates in multiple places, Ukraine is scarred, wounded, mourning its dead but far from beaten as it braces for a second month of bombing, combat, casualties and resistance.

When, on Feb. 24, Russia unleashed its Ukraine invasion force in Europe's biggest offensive since World War II and floated the prospect of nuclear escalation if the West intervened, a lightning-swift toppling of Ukraine's democratically elected government seemed possible.

But with yesterday marking four full weeks of fighting, Russia is instead bogged down in an increasingly attritional, costly and uncertain military campaign, with untold numbers of dead, no immediate end in sight, and encircled by western sanctions biting hard on its economy and currency. U.S. President Joe Biden and key allies meeting in Brussels and Warsaw this week will discuss possible new sanctions and additional military assistance for Ukraine.

Repeatedly pushed back by hit-and-run Ukrainian units armed with Western-supplied weapons, Russian troops are shelling targets from afar, falling back on tactics they previously used in reducing cities to ruins in Syria and Chechnya. Major Russian strategic objectives remain unfulfilled: The capital Kyiv has been repeatedly hit but not taken or even encircled.

More shelling and gunfire shook the city again yesterday, with plumes of black smoke rising from the western outskirts, where the two sides battled for control of multiple suburbs. A shopping mall and buildings were hit, injuring four people, the city administration reported.

In the south, the port city of



Mariupol has seen the worst devastation of the war, under weeks of siege and bombardment. So far, the Ukrainian forces' defense has prevented its fall. That is thwarting the Russian aim of opening up another permanent and secured land link from the Crimean peninsula, seized from Ukraine in 2014, to Russia.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says 100,000 civilians remain in the shattered city that has been struck from the air, land and sea. Repeated efforts to get desperately needed food and other supplies to those trapped have often failed.

"They bombed us for the past 20 days," said 39-year-old Viktoria Totsen, who fled from Mariupol into Poland. "During the last five days, the planes were flying over us every five seconds and dropped bombs everywhere — on residential buildings, kindergartens, art schools, everywhere."

Zelenskyy, speaking Tuesday in his nightly video address to his nation, said efforts to establish stable humanitarian corridors for Mariupol residents are almost all being "foiled by the Russian occupiers, by shelling or deliberate terror."

He accused Russian forces of seizing one humanitarian convoy. Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said the Russians were holding captive 11 bus drivers and four rescue workers along with their vehicles.

The head of the International Committee of the Red Cross traveled yesterday to Moscow for expected discussions with Russian foreign and defense officials on

prisoners of war, the conduct of hostilities, aid delivery and other humanitarian issues.

"The devastation caused by the conflict in recent weeks, as well as eight years of conflict in Donbas, has been vast," Peter Maurer, the ICRC president, said.

A senior U.S. defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity to give the Pentagon's assessment, said Russian ships in the Sea of Azov added to the shelling of Mariupol.

The hands of one exhausted Mariupol survivor shook as she arrived by train in the western city of Lviv.

**"We have seen indications that the Ukrainians are going a bit more on the offensive now."**

THE PENTAGON

"There's no connection with the world. We couldn't ask for help," said Julia Krytska, who was helped by volunteers to make it out with her husband and son. "People don't even have water there."

Russian forces also bombed and destroyed a bridge in the encircled northern city of Chernihiv that crossed the Desna River and connected the city to Kyiv, regional governor Viacheslav Chaus said. Deliveries of humanitarian aid and evacuations of civilians went through that bridge. Local authorities have warned of a humanitarian disaster in the city, with no water or electricity.

But as Biden embarked yesterday on a four-day trip to Europe to shore up pressure on Russia, the Kremlin said Russian President Vladimir Putin hasn't yet achieved his aims in Ukraine.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov insisted that the military operation was going "strictly in accordance with the plans and purposes that were established beforehand."

Putin's aims remain to "get rid of the military potential of Ukraine" and to "ensure that Ukraine changes from an anti-Russian center to a neutral country," Peskov said.

Western officials say Ukrainian resistance has brought much of Russia's advance to a halt and that Russian forces are facing serious shortages of food, fuel and cold weather gear, leaving some soldiers suffering from frostbite. Britain's defense ministry said yesterday the war in northern Ukraine is largely "static," with Russian forces trying to reorganize.

"We have seen indications that the Ukrainians are going a bit more on the offensive now," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters separately in Washington. He said that was particularly true in southern Ukraine, including near Kherson, where "they have tried to regain territory."

Russia's far stronger, bigger military has many Western military experts warning against overconfidence in Ukraine's long-term odds. Russia's practice in past wars in Chechnya and Syria has been to grind down resistance with strikes that flattened cities, killing countless civilians and sending millions fleeing.

But Russian forces appeared unprepared and have often performed badly against Ukrainian resistance.

The U.S. estimates Russia has lost a bit more than 10% of the overall combat capability it had at the start of the fight, including troops, tanks and other materiel.

The invasion has driven more than 10 million people from their homes, almost a quarter of Ukraine's population, according to the United Nations.

Thousands of civilians are believed to have died. Estimates of Russian military casualties vary widely, but even conservative figures by Western officials are in the low thousands.

Talks to end the fighting have continued by video. Zelenskyy said negotiations with Russia are going "step by step, but they are going forward."

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he saw progress "coming into view on several key issues," and that the gains are enough to end hostilities now. He gave no details.

In their last update on March 15, Mariupol officials said at least 2,300 people had died in the siege. Accounts from the city suggest the true toll is much higher, with bodies lying uncollected. Airstrikes the past week destroyed a theater and an art school where many civilians were taking shelter.

Zelenskyy said more than 7,000 people were evacuated from Mariupol on Tuesday. Those who remain suffer "in inhuman conditions, under a full blockade, without food, without water, without medicine and under constant shelling, under constant bombardment," he said.

Before the war, 430,000 people lived in Mariupol.

Perched on the Sea of Azov, Mariupol is a crucial port for Ukraine and lies along a stretch of territory between Russia and Crimea. It's not clear how much of the city Russia holds, with fleeing residents saying fighting continues street by street.

Further west in the seaside city of Odesa, street musicians played Tuesday under cloudless skies as barricades lined the streets and couples parted ways at the station in tears, as residents prepared for a potential escalated Russian assault.

Fondly known as the Pearl of the Black Sea, Odesa was awash with a bittersweet air — sandbags and security forces clashing with romantic jazz rippling from the train station speakers.

"I can't understand what has happened," said Igor Tpsi, a 56-year-old musician who's been playing the drums on the streets of Odesa for over three decades.

At the central station, a young man on the platform said goodbye by phone to his girlfriend sitting inside the train. Only a pane of glass separated them. **MDT/AP**

UK

# Downing Street vows to help families facing cost-of-living crisis

DANICA KIRKA, LONDON

**B**RTAIN'S Treasury chief is pledging to respond to Russia's war in Ukraine and a cost-of-living crisis hitting working families when he delivers his spring budget statement today [Macau time], facing a new inflation rate that is the highest in 30 years.

Rishi Sunak didn't offer details on specific policy proposals but said Britain would continue its "unwavering" support for Ukraine and seek to strengthen the domestic economy to counter the threat posed by Russia.

"So when I talk about security, yes, I mean responding to the war in Ukraine," Sunak said in remarks released ahead of the statement. "But I also mean the security of a faster-growing economy. The security of more resilient public finances. And security for working families as we help with the cost of living."

Sunak has come under increasing pressure to an-



Rishi Sunak, Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer

nounce further measures to help consumers facing what one economist has called "the biggest year-on-year fall in household incomes in a generation." Utility bills are set to rise by more than 50% in April, on top of a planned income tax increase and consumer prices accelerating at the fastest pace in decades.

Inflation increased 6.2% in the 12 months through February, a 30-year high, the Office for National Statistics

said Wednesday. The spike was driven by rising prices of energy, goods and food and comes as the Bank of England has raised interest rates three times since December to try to cool off inflation.

The managing director of grocery firm Iceland, Richard Walker, told the BBC that the pressure to keep prices down was "relentless." He called for action on high energy prices.

"It's incredibly concerning. We're hearing of some

food bank users declining potatoes and root veg because they can't afford the energy to boil them," he said.

The bad news doesn't end there. Economists now estimate inflation will peak at close to 9% this year as the war in Ukraine further boosts food and energy prices. That's double the 4.4% forecast government advisers made in October.

The spring statement Sunak will deliver to the House of Commons is a midyear update on public finances. It often includes policy announcements that respond to new challenges facing the government. Some politicians are calling for increased defense spending amid rising tensions between NATO and Russia due to the war in Ukraine.

The economic and security picture looks much bleaker now than when Sunak released his budget in October.

Rising inflation is likely to curtail economic growth and squeeze government finances. Some economists now suggest gross domestic product will grow less than 1% next year, compared with the 2.1% forecast by the Office of Budget Responsibility when Sunak released his fall budget.

Politicians and consumer advocates have suggested that the government could help ease the cost-of-living crisis by delaying a planned 1.25% income tax increase set to take effect next month. **MDT/AP**

shelter, safety.

"We haven't seen a lot for longer-term efforts really," she said. "And that will continue to be important."

Malloch-Brown says Open Society has supported Ukraine with about \$230 million in donations since the nation declared its independence from the former Soviet Union in 1991.

"The \$230 million has been primarily invested in developing the sort of civil society and democratic space that has made Ukraine so different from ... Russia," Malloch-Brown said.

Open Society believes its history within Ukraine and its contacts in the country are tools that must be used to keep the nation's culture intact "by continuing to invest in human rights defenders and journalism and the civil society, which sustain the country's democracy," Malloch-Brown said. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1992 PUNCH ENDS 150 YEARS OF SATIRE



Punch, Britain's oldest satirical magazine, is to close after suffering crippling losses of £1.5m a year.

The decision ends a publishing tradition dating back almost 151 years.

It is expected to publish its final issue on 8 April after circulation plummeted from highs of 175,000 sales in the 1940s to 33,000 in the present day.

Publisher United Newspapers Group, which also owns the Daily Express, made the announcement today and said it was beyond recovery unless another buyer is found.

UNG managing director Graham Wilson said he would continue searching for a buyer but would not reveal any likely candidates.

There have been many rumours in recent years Punch would fold.

A £700,000 campaign to promote the magazine during its 150th anniversary last year did little to boost flagging sales.

"We needed sales to go up by thousands but they only went up by hundreds," David Thomas, the editor, said. "We did our best but it just wasn't enough."

Losses have been blamed partly on advertisers shifting to the rising number of colour supplements in weekend newspapers.

But its main failure is seen as not having kept up with the competition.

The magazine which once set the pace of political satire was outwitted in the circulation department by the racier Private Eye and the schoolboyish Viz magazine.

Ironically, its bid to keep up with these competitors also alienated traditional readers.

The magazine, which became a British institution, has carried articles by William Makepeace Thackeray and A. A. Milne as well as cartoons by the likes of Sir John Tenniel, the illustrator of "Alice in Wonderland".

It was founded in 1841 in the back room of a pub in the Strand.

Mark Lemon, a brewery manager who wanted to become a writer, Henry Mayhew, a lawyer-turned-journalist and the noted engraver Ebenezer Landells decided to publish a new magazine.

It would combine humour, stylish illustrations, political debate and a social conscience with a fresh audacity which became its hallmark.

Courtesy BBC News

POLAND

## A NEW FUND DIRECTS ITS SUPPORT TO UKRAINE'S LONG-TERM NEEDS

**T**HE humanitarian needs of more than 10 million displaced Ukrainians have quickly become staggering. Yet Mark Malloch-Brown, president of the Open Society Foundations, warns that longer-term problems resulting from Russia's invasion will grow ever larger if they aren't sufficiently addressed now.

Experts report an "unprecedented" outpouring of aid for food, medicine and other essential needs of Ukrainians. Comparatively few donations, though, have been earmarked for maintaining Ukraine's culture or democratic foundations.

To address that cause, Open Society Foundations has launched the Ukraine Democracy Fund with a \$25

million pledge, in hopes of raising \$100 million. The foundations, launched by billionaire investor George Soros, are now one of the world's largest funders of democracy, human rights and justice groups.

"Keeping their civil society alive absolutely is the key bit," said Malloch-Brown, who has also served as the United Nations deputy secretary general. "Otherwise, it's a hollow victory. If you neglect or lose that civil society piece, you've lost what this was ultimately all about."

Since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, the philanthropy research organization Candid has catalogued \$440 million in grants and \$333 million more in

pledges for the victims. Those totals do not, however, include individual donations or donations from nonprofits and corporations that haven't yet publicly reported their gifts, meaning that the actual amount of aid is much higher.

"By many measures, this has been an unprecedented philanthropic response by organizations, by individuals," said Laia Grino, Candid's director of data discovery. "Some groups have said that this has exceeded what they were able to raise for COVID-19, what they raised for racial equity, the response to the crisis in Afghanistan."

Grino noted that the bulk of those donations are for immediate needs — food,



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

## YOUR STARS



### ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Don't hesitate to look for alternatives that will enable you to raise the kind of donations you need to do the job right. Take time to listen to children and help them with projects that seem impossible to them.



### TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Conflicts over joint finances are likely. You may find yourself in the limelight for the wrong reasons. Don't be too confident that coworkers are on your side.



### GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

Educational pursuits can bring interesting, helpful people. You can make major accomplishments while on short trips. You need to make your lover feel wanted, not like a piece of the furniture.



### CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

You may be out of sorts if you have been extravagant or have let children or friends take advantage of you financially. Your best efforts will come through making changes in your home.



### LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Anger could lead to problems. You need to do something energetic and different. Your ability to get the job done will result in added responsibility and possible promotion.



### VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

You must be careful not to reveal secrets or get involved in gossip. Pleasure trips will promote new romantic encounters. Your creative imagination will help you in coming up with unique ideas.



### LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

You will be best suited to doing things around the house or inviting friends over for a visit. Your positive attitude and intellectual outlook will draw others to you.



### SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

You will earn recognition for the work you are doing. You can make money but not through harebrained schemes or gambling. Do your job and don't ask for favors.



### SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Friendships could be terminated quickly if disappointments occur. Red tape could be impossible to clear up today. Valuable information can be yours if you listen to those with experience.



### CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Be very careful while in transit or while traveling in foreign countries. Your ideas will be well received. New love connections can be made through group associations.



### AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Finish overdue paperwork and catch up on letter writing and reading. You can accomplish a lot if you work out of your home today. You will meet some interesting people if you attend promotional functions.

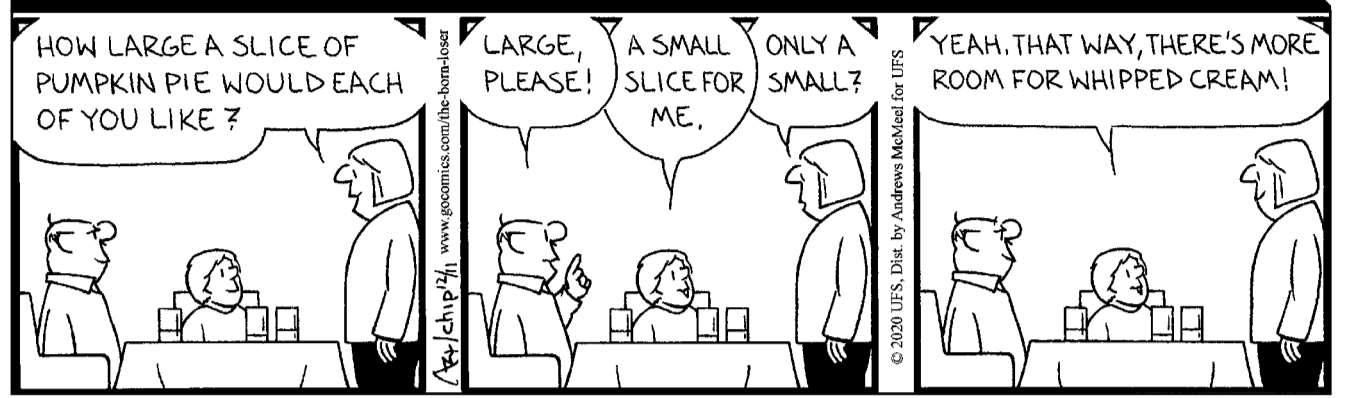


### PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Anger could lead to problems. Find out all you can; secret enemies may lead you astray. You need to challenge yourself. Try not to donate to organizations if you can hardly afford to take care of yourself.

## The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



## SUDOKU

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

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

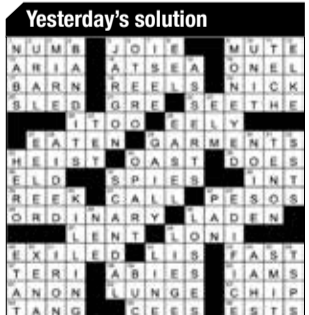
## WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	1	13	cloudy
Changchun	-1	5	rain
Chengdu	10	18	overcast
Chongqing	12	20	cloudy
Fuzhou	12	16	overcast
Guangzhou	14	21	rain
Guiyang	6	14	overcast
Haikou	22	27	cloudy
Hangzhou	6	13	cloudy
Harbin	-4	9	cloudy
Hefei	3	14	overcast
Nanjing	4	14	cloudy
Shanghai	7	14	overcast
Taipei	16	19	rain
Wuhan	4	13	cloudy
Hong Kong	19	20	rain
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	-2	9	rain
Frankfurt	3	19	clear
Paris	6	21	clear
London	4	18	overcast
New York	9	12	rain

## CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Type of ray; 6- Butler's love; 11- Distress signal; 14- Masterful; 15- Breakfast fruit; 16- Whadja say?; 17- Bingo!; 18- Extripate; 20- Bleat of a sheep; 21- Othello villain; 23- A Simpson; 24- Argentine plain; 26- Forsake; 28- More sore; 30- Fine fur; 31- Weaving machines; 32- Viscounts' superiors; 33- Short mo.; 36- Makes brown; 37- Company emblems; 38- Must've been something \_\_\_; 39- Cheer for Manolete; 40- Up; 41- Strike hard; 42- Seine spot; 43- Hockey player, e.g.; 44- Fast time; 47- Parasite; 48- Stradivari's teacher; 49- Agreement; 50- French article; 53- Purgative; 56- Salad green; 58- Hydrocarbon ending; 59- One who cries "uncle?"; 60- Emcees; 61- Airline to Stockholm; 62- Verbal flourishes; 63- Go-aheads;

DOWN 1- Dress; 2- 1998 Sarah McLachlan hit; 3- Funnel-shaped device for magnifying sound; 4- Dashboard abbr.; 5- Occasionally; 6- Last letter of the Greek alphabet; 7- Submarine; 8- Pie-mode link; 9- Curtain holder; 10- Creatures; 11- Fragment; 12- Money spent; 13- Luster; 19- Sugar source; 22- Spring mo.; 25- Intentions; 26- Biblical brother; 27- OPEC units; 28- Violist's clef; 29- Lumpy fuel; 30- Wise ones; 32- Red fluorescent dye; 33- Unreliable; 34- Novel ending; 35- Ale, e.g.; 37- Old Italian money; 38- Apple product; 40- Shining; 41- Incomplete; 42- Course; 43- Dry, as wine; 44- Speed contests; 45- Maytag brand; 46- Ships' officers; 47- Shoe ties; 49- Size of type; 51- Ferrara family; 52- Flat sound; 54- Inlet; 55- English poet Hughes; 57- Fish eggs;



## USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

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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	
Airport 59 888 88	



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TRADE

# US AGREES TO LIFT TAXES ON BRITISH STEEL, ALUMINUM

**T**HE United States has agreed to lift tariffs on British steel and aluminum, mending a rift between allies that dates back to the Trump administration.

At a meeting yesterday [Macau time] in Baltimore, the U.S. and the U.K. announced a deal that would remove taxes on British steel and aluminum that comes in below new quotas on the imports. The British agreed to lift retaliatory tariffs on U.S. exports, including whiskey.

In 2018, President Donald Trump imposed tariffs of 25% on imported steel and 10% on aluminum, calling the foreign metals a threat to U.S. national security — a move that outraged the British, Europeans and other longstanding American allies. Although President Joe Biden had criticized Trump for alienating America's friends, he was slow once taking office to undo the metals tariffs, popular in the politically important steel-producing states.

AP PHOTO



Last year, the Biden administration reached a deal with the European Union, agreeing to drop the tariffs on EU metals that come in below new import quotas and continuing to tax imports that exceed them.

Critics said all along that Trump's steel and aluminum tariffs did little to address the

real problem confronting American producers of steel and aluminum: overproduction by China. But the United States already shuts out most Chinese steel.

Under the agreement announced Tuesday, Chinese-owned steel companies in Britain must undergo annual audits to ensure that cheap

Chinese steel can't slip into the United States tariff free.

American whiskey producers welcomed the resolution to the trade standoff.

"Distillers throughout the United States are cheering the end of this long tariff nightmare," Chris Swonger, CEO of the Distilled Spirits Council, said in a statement. **MDT/AP**

TECHNOLOGY

# ZTE SAYS PROBATION ENDS AFTER CLASH WITH WASHINGTON

**Z**TE Corp. said yesterday a U.S. judge has allowed a probation period to end after the telecom equipment maker was nearly destroyed in a clash with Washington over its dealings with Iran and North Korea.

In 2018, then-President Donald Trump barred ZTE's access to American components amid rising tension with Beijing over technology and security. The company had pleaded guilty the previous year to shipping equipment to Iran and North Korea in violation of U.S. rules and agreed to pay a \$1.2 billion fine.

ZTE agreed to pay an additional \$1 billion, replace its executives and be scrutinized by U.S.-appointed monitors to regain access to U.S. technology. The company sells smartphones and network equipment that use American processor chips and other technology.

The company, headquartered in the southern city of Shenzhen, said its probation ended as planned Tuesday after a federal judge in Texas declined to take further action.

ZTE promised in a statement to make compliance with laws and regulations "the cornerstone of its strategic development." **MDT/AP**

AD

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FOOTBALL

# World Cup spot on the line for Portugal and aging Ronaldo

TALES AZZONI

**A**T 37 years old, it's no secret time is running out for Cristiano Ronaldo.

Playing at a high level is not getting any easier, and the opportunities to compete in top tournaments are becoming scarce.

Missing out on the World Cup, at his age, could mean he's never playing in soccer's showcase event again.

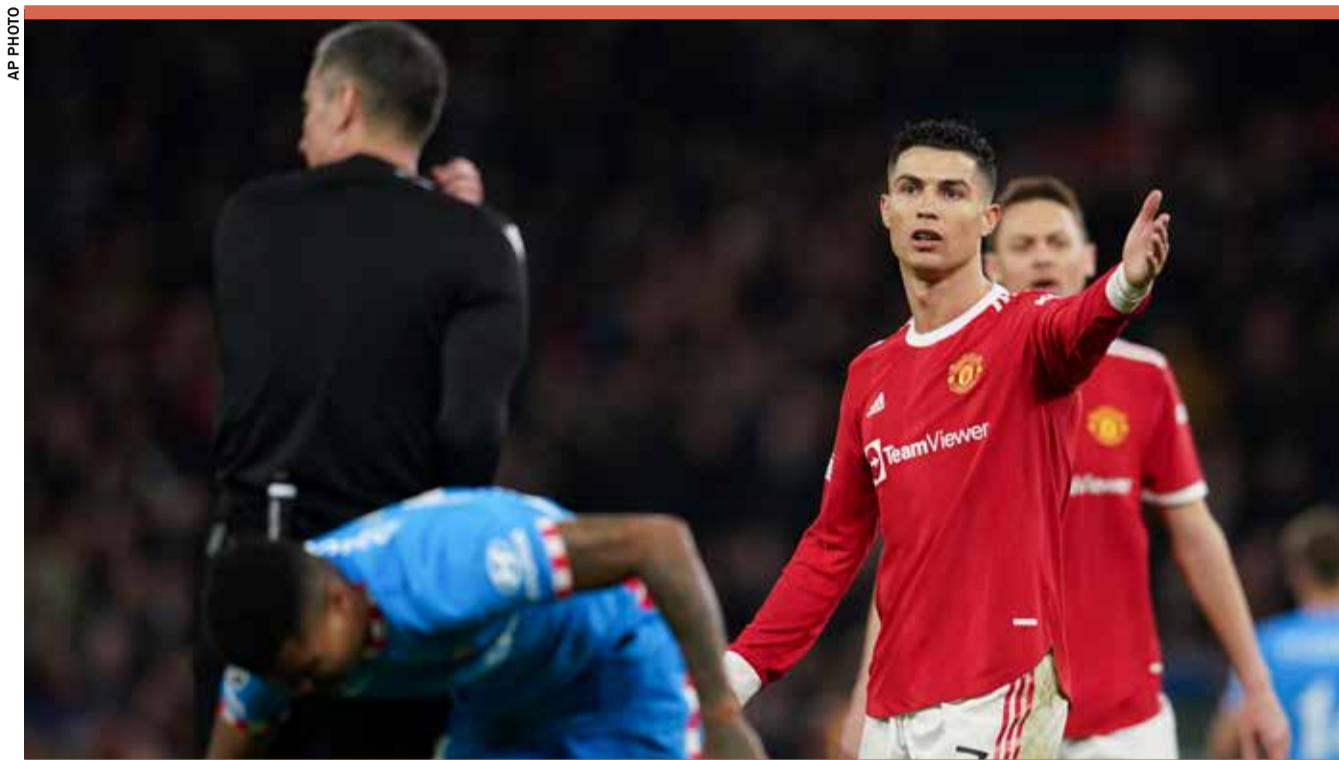
Portugal faces two must-win games in the European qualifying playoffs, beginning tomorrow [03:45am] when it hosts Turkey. The winner then plays next Tuesday against the winner of European champion Italy vs. North Macedonia for a ticket to Qatar.

Although no one knows if Ronaldo would still play in the next World Cup at age 41, not qualifying for this one would be one of the biggest setbacks of his career.

Ronaldo tried not to think past the task at hand, though.

"Totally focused on the 2022 World Cup," he said this week on Instagram. "As always, I'm proud to represent Portugal. We know it won't be easy. We have the maximum respect for the opponents that we will face and they have the same goals as us. But together we will fight to put Portugal where it deserves to be. Let's do it!"

Ronaldo is trying to make it to his 10th consecu-



tive major tournament. He is the only player to have scored at least once in the finals of nine top tournament in a row, a streak that started at the 2004 European Championship and includes four other Euros and four World Cups.

He is the active Portugal player with the most World Cup goals with seven, two shy of Eusebio.

Portugal was relegated to the playoffs after a heart-breaking 2-1 loss to Serbia at home in the final Group A game in November, when the hosts opened the scoring but conceded the deciding goal in the 90th minute. A draw would have been enough for Portugal, which is trying to qualify for the World Cup for the sixth straight time.

Only two consecutive victories will do now.

"It's not the ideal situation, but it is what it is and we have to face it with responsibility," Liverpool forward Diogo Jota said. "We can't make too much drama about it. It's a soccer match and I believe we can win and make it to the World Cup."

To make it harder for Portugal, coach Fernando Santos has a depleted squad heading into the game against Turkey because of injuries, suspensions and the coronavirus.

His regular-starting defenders are both out — Pepe because of COVID-19 and Rúben Dias because of an injury.

Santos also won't be able to count on goalkeeper

Anthony Lopes, defender Nelson Semedo and midfielders Renato Sanches and Rúben Neves because

of injuries, while defender João Cancelo is out because of a suspension. Failure in the playoffs

could also mean the end of the road in the national team for the 39-year-old Pepe, and maybe even for coach Santos, who has been at Portugal's helm since 2014.

**ITALY, UKRAINE, AND WAR**

Only one country can advance from each of the three four-team brackets. Italy hosts North Macedonia in the semifinals, potentially setting up a straight shootout on Wednesday [03:45am] between two of the continent's heavyweights for a place in Qatar.

Russia's war with Ukraine is impacting the other two brackets. Russia was banned from competing in the playoffs, so Poland was awarded a bye into next week final, where the team will host either Sweden or the Czech Republic. Ukraine had been drawn to play Scotland but that match has been postponed until June. The other two teams in that bracket — Wales and Austria — will meet in Cardiff, with the winner having to wait up to three months before taking part in the playoff final. **MDT/AP**

ODDSCHECKER.COM

World Cup European Qualifiers		Friday 25th March 2022		
		Home	Draw	Away
03:45	Italy vs North Macedonia	1.2	8.2	21
03:45	Portugal vs Turkey	1.4	5.2	10
03:45	Sweden vs Czech Republic	2.06	3.35	4.2
03:45	Wales vs Austria	3	3.05	2.9

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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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**OPINION**

**China Daily**  
 Editorial, China Daily

**REFINED  
 ANTI-PANDEMIC  
 TACTICS TIMELY**

The National Health Commission recently revised its guidelines on COVID-19 nucleic acid testing, asking places with newly emerged infections to conduct “targeted-area testing” based on local prevention and control conditions, rather than “mass testing” as previously required. It also stipulates that such testing be completed within 24 hours, as compared with the previous 48 or 72 hours.

The revised guidelines will help public health officials to designate areas where people need testing in a more scientific and accurate way, and thus make the process to identify the potential sources of infection more efficient. The changes have been made in line with the country’s evolving epidemic situation in which the more infectious Omicron variant has become the dominant strain of the novel coronavirus causing new infections.

The authorities have already updated the national anti-pandemic protocols, which now allow patients with mild symptoms to go to centralized quarantine facilities instead of hospitals, and exempt people with very low viral loads from being classified as positive cases.

The slew of changes being introduced reflect the new thinking of the authorities as the country wages its latest battle against the virus. With 2,591 locally transmitted cases reported by the National Health Commission on Wednesday, the central authorities are seeking to refine their anti-pandemic tactics in a bid to minimize the costs of the stringent prevention and control measures on people’s livelihoods and economic activities.

The changes to the testing requirements and anti-pandemic protocols have injected more confidence among the people that the country can win the fight against the fresh wave of the virus while also keeping the economy going. The moves have been especially welcomed by the public given the severe disruptions to the operations of small businesses and harm done to people’s livelihoods by the zealotry of some local officials who have resorted to indiscriminate lockdowns and mass testing to try to contain the resurgence of the virus.

After combating the virus for over two years, and with more than 80 percent of the population vaccinated and people’s full support, local governments at various levels should be proficient in dealing with any resurgence of the virus, as the virus prevention and control measures have become well targeted and can be implemented with the minimum costs.

For the country to win final victory in the anti-virus fight, officials must make sure that they gain public support by transparently implementing anti-pandemic methods that are scientific and accurate and in line with the local realities. Only by doing so can a solid foundation be laid for the country to get the virus completely under control.

**TEENAGE PILOT STARTS AROUND-THE-WORLD FLIGHT FROM BULGARIA**

Like brother, like sister.  
 A Belgian-British teenage pilot hopes to join his sister in the record books after starting his attempt to become the youngest person to fly around the world solo in a small plane yesterday.

With his parents looking on, 16-year-old Mack Rutherford (pictured) took off from an airstrip west of Bulgaria’s capital, Sofia, in windy but clear conditions. If successful, he would displace Travis Ludlow

of Britain who was 18 when he set the record in 2021.

Only two months ago, his 19-year-old sister, Zara Rutherford, set the world record for the youngest woman to fly solo around the world when she touched down in Kortrijk, Belgium, on Jan. 20.

Born into a family of aviators, Mack Rutherford has flown hundreds of hours with his dad, Sam, who is a professional ferry pilot. His mother Beatrice is a private pilot.



THE BUZZ



AP PHOTO

**AIRLINE OFFERS NONSTOP 17-HOUR FLIGHTS FROM NEW YORK TO NEW ZEALAND**

**NICK PERRY,  
 WELLINGTON**

NEW Zealand’s flagship airline said yesterday it has started selling tickets for direct flights to and from New York, a new route that will take more than 17 hours southbound and be among the longest nonstop flights in the world.

Air New Zealand had intended to start the route from Auckland to John F. Kennedy International Airport in 2020 but then the pandemic hit. The first flights will now begin in September.

For two years, the South Pacific nation imposed some of the world’s toughest border restrictions. But the government announced earlier this month that it would reopen to tourists from the U.S. and many other countries by May 1 as the pandemic threat receded.

Greg Foran, the airline’s chief executive, told The Associated Press he thought that inbound demand to New Zealand would initially exceed outbound demand.

“I think there’s a bunch of people on the east coast of America who are going to love the opportunity to come here direct,” he said.

Foran said that things like the war in Ukraine and the zero-COVID policy in China had made Europe and Asia less desirable destinations.

**“I think there’s a bunch of people on the east coast of America who are going to love the opportunity to come here direct.”**

GREG FORAN  
 AIR NEW ZEALAND

“You’ve gone through a pretty tough couple of years in the U.S. and here’s a brand new destination,” he said. “You turn up at JFK, you catch the plane at 9 o’clock at night and you land at 8 o’clock in the morning in New Zealand.”

Flights on the Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner are scheduled to last 16 hours northbound, helped slightly by the prevailing winds, and 17-and-a-half hours southbound. Time

differences can help make it seem more like an overnight flight — albeit a long night — coming into New Zealand.

The Mayo Clinic lists long periods of uninterrupted sitting, including on flights, as a risk factor for developing deep vein thrombosis, or blood clots, that usually occur in people’s legs.

Foran said there was no evidence that flights of 16 or 17 hours posed any extra health risks and that passengers would be able to get up and do some light exercise as required. He said the airline was looking at lots of ways to improve the flying experience for passengers.

The new flights would be about 14,200 kilometers each way and tickets start from about 2,000 New Zealand dollars (\$1,400) roundtrip.

Singapore Airlines currently offers the longest regular direct flights, from Singapore to New York, that cover about 15,300 kilometers and take 18 hours and 40 minutes. **MDT/AP**



AP PHOTO

**Afghanistan** In a surprise decision the hardline leadership of Afghanistan’s new rulers has decided against opening educational institutions to girls beyond Grade six, a Taliban official said yesterday on the first day of Afghanistan’s new school year. The latest setback for girls’ education is certain to receive widespread condemnation from the international community that has been urging the Taliban leaders to open schools and give women their right to public space.



AP PHOTO

**New Zealand** will remove many of its Covid-19 pandemic mandates over the next two weeks as an outbreak of the omicron variant begins to wane. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said yesterday that people will no longer need to be vaccinated to visit places like retail stores, restaurants and bars from April 4. Gone, too, will be a requirement to scan QR barcodes at those venues.

**Israel** A knife-wielding Arab man yesterday killed four people and seriously wounded two others in the southern city of Beersheba before he was shot dead by armed residents, police said. Police said the attacker careened his car into a cyclist and stabbed five people across a swath of the city center. Amateur video footage posted online appeared to show armed bystanders shooting and killing the attacker at the scene.

**French** energy giant TotalEnergies said it has decided to halt all its purchases of Russian oil and petroleum products by the end of the year at the latest. The French company said in a statement that it will “gradually suspend its activities in Russia” amid the worsening situation in Ukraine. It stressed “the existence of alternative sources for supplying Europe” with oil.