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ASSOCIATIONS JOINTLY NEGOTIATED TO MOBILIZE THE SUPPORT OF HOTELS IN MACAU TO PROVIDE HOTEL ROOMS AT LOWER PRICES TO EMPLOYEES

▲ P3

UNESCO TO PRESENT LOCAL HERITAGE PROTECTION GROUP'S OUTCRY TO BEIJING

▲ P5

UKRAINE REGION WEATHERS BOMBARDMENT

▲ P8



AP PHOTO



China Heavy rainstorms are causing major flooding and landslides in southern China, destroying buildings, crops and roads, and forcing many people to flee their homes. In the Guangxi autonomous region, 145,000 people were relocated to safety and more than 10,000 houses were destroyed, the official Xinhua New Agency reported.

AP PHOTO



India Villagers in northeastern Bangladesh crowded makeshift refugee centers and scrambled to meet boats arriving with food and fresh water as massive floods, which have killed dozens of people and displaced hundreds of thousands there and in neighboring India, continued to wreak havoc yesterday. In Sylhet, one of the worst-hit areas in the extreme northeast of the country near the border with India, villagers waded, swam and paddled makeshift rafts or small skiffs to a boat delivering aid that had moored to one shelter.

AP PHOTO



Israel's weakened coalition government announced Monday that it would dissolve parliament and call new elections, setting the stage for the possible return to power of former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu or another period of prolonged political gridlock. The election will be Israel's fifth in three years, and it will put the polarizing Netanyahu, who has been the opposition leader for the past year, back at the center of the political universe.

More on backpage

GAMING OVERHAUL

New gaming law approved with gov't cementing increased oversight on casino operations, paving the way for new licenses

▲ P4



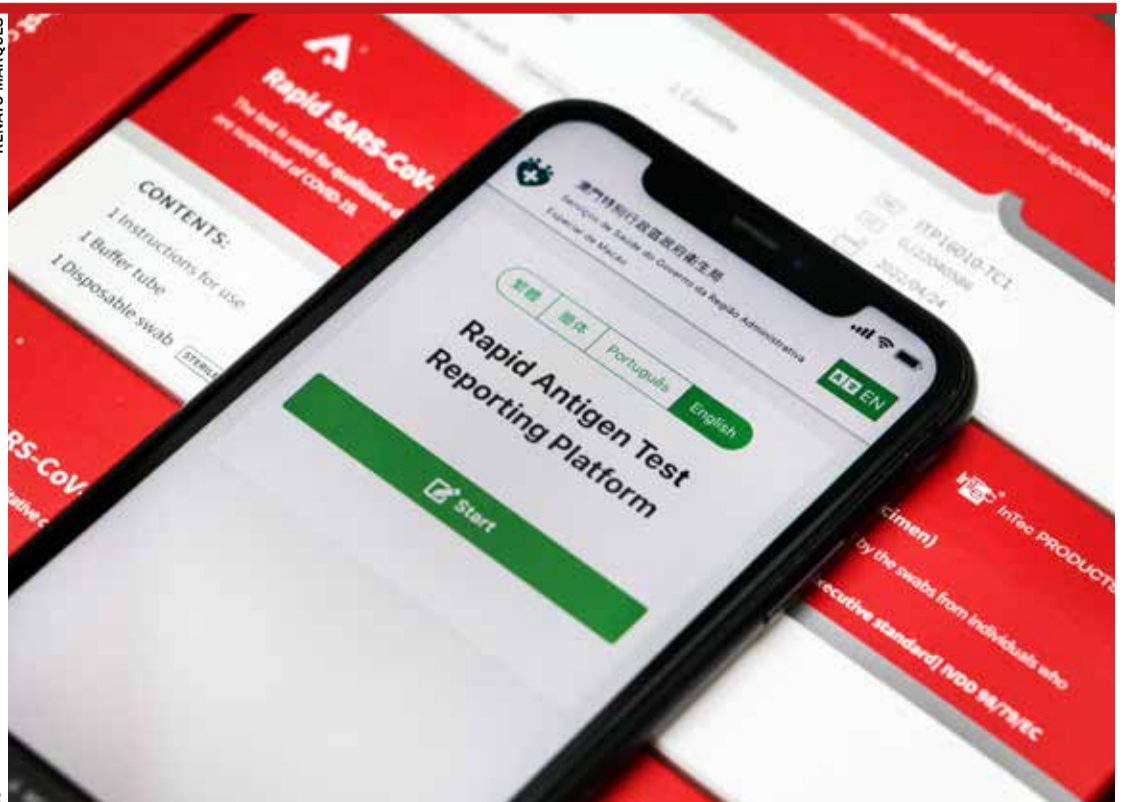
RENATO MARQUES

COVID-19 OUTBREAK

GOV'T CALLS ON POPULATION TO SELF-TEST TODAY, 49 CASES RECORDED

▲ P2,3

RENATO MARQUES



RENATO MARQUES



COVID-19 OUTBREAK

MASS TESTING CONCLUDES WITH 49 POSITIVE CASES

RENATO MARQUES

THE number of Covid-19 infections in Macau has grown to 49, the director of the Health Bureau (SSM), Dr. Alvis Lo, informed yesterday during the now-daily press briefing by the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center.

The same health official said that the results of all samples collected during the citywide mass testing would become known today, once the results from all remaining samples are released.

Of the 49 positive cases, the large majority continue to be asymptomatic, with just 15 ca-

ses being reported as confirmed cases of Covid-19 (five more than Monday).

Lo also confirmed that all patients are in a stable condition and that there are no severe cases for the time being.

The health authorities have managed to link 47 of the 49 positive cases to the two inter-

related clusters previously mentioned. The two remaining cases are currently under epidemiological investigation to determine whether they are also linked to those clusters.

“From the 49 positive results, 15 cases involve people with symptoms and 34 cases present no symptoms of the disease. All of these people, except two that we are still investigating, are linked to the two previous groups. At the moment, the first group (related to the group of non-resident workers) comprises 28 people, and the second group (related to the prison guard

and his family) has a total of 19 links,” the director of SSM said.

21 GROUPS OF POSITIVE SAMPLES

Expressing his satisfaction with the way the citywide mass testing took place, Lo noted that, from the 677,586 samples collected over the 48-hour measure, some 564,297 had already been tested and yielded negative results.

21 groups of 10-in-1 samples have tested positive, with the health authorities still doing the necessary retesting to confirm which samples from these groups are infected.

“We have been able to have, till now, around 83% of all samples tested and we expect to have the results of the remaining ones tomorrow [today],” he said. He called on all people to stay home as much as possible and avoid all unnecessary activities outside their homes for the time being.

“Chief Executive (CE) has also already issued an order extending the closure of the public services valid throughout the rest of this week and we hope that all private companies that are not involved in essential services to the community will also suspend their activities to facilitate our work,” the official added.

The health authorities are also following up 2,142 people who are considered contacts or people with a similar itinerary to those infected to ensure that there is no significant spread in the community.

RENATO MARQUES

THE Unitary Police Service (SPU) has negated rumors circulating over social media platforms that the government has been preparing to issue a citywide mandatory seven-day lockdown.

At the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center press briefing, a representative from the SPU stated that there is no such plan under consideration. The representative called on the people in Macau to follow updates on the Covid-19 outbreak only through credible and official sources.

The same official remarked that such a possibility is not currently being considered and that such

Authorities clear rumors of potential lockdown

a measure being enacted would depend on a very severe situation eventuating.

Nonetheless, the same authorities noted that as the investigations progress and more people are found to be infected, more buildings will be considered both Yellow and Red zones of confinement.

The last of the buildings to be considered a Red Zone was the Hotel Fortuna in the ZAPE area. This building is thought to be linked to the first cluster as one of the non-residents who was later found to be infected was working at this hotel.

According to the coor-

dinator at the local Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Leong Iek Hou, the authorities have already found five people who have been infected (three locally and two in Zhuhai) in connection with this hotel and so it was decided to implement isolation and confinement measures.

According to Lo, there are currently over 80 people among guests and hotel workers in the hotel who will remain in isolation. Those in a guest room will remain on the premises, while some staff members will be transferred to a quarantine venue.

FLORA TANG



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DIRECTOR & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF_Paulo Coutinho paulocoutinho@macaudailytimes.com
ASSISTANT EDITOR_Lynzy Valles
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS_Leanda Lee, Severo Portela, Sheyla Zandonai

NEWSROOM AND CONTRIBUTORS_Alex Torrão, Albano Martins, Annabel Jackson, Anthony Lam, Emilie Tran, Grace Yu, Irene Sam, Ivo Carneiro de Sousa, Jacky I.F. Cheong, Jenny Lao-Phillips, João Palla Martins, Jorge Costa Oliveira, Joseph Cheung, Juliet Risdon, Linda Kennedy, Paulo Cordeiro de Sousa, Renato Marques, Richard Whitfield, Sérgio de Almeida Correia, Viviana Seguí DESIGNER_Miguel Bandeira | ASSOCIATE CONTRIBUTORS_JML Property, MdME Lawyers, PokerStars, Ruan Du Toit Bester | NEWS AGENCIES_Associated Press, MacauHub, MacauNews, Xinhua SECRETARY_Yang Dongxiao amy@macaudailytimes.com

SEND NEWSWORTHY INFORMATION AND PRESS RELEASES TO: NEWSROOM@MACAUDAILYTIMES.COM WEBSITE: WWW.MACAUDAILYTIMES.COM.MO

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ADMINISTRATOR & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Kowie Geldenhuys kowie@macaudailytimes.com
OFFICE MANAGER Juliana Cheang juliana@macaudailytimes.com
ADDRESS_Av. da Praia Grande, 599, Edif. Comercial Rodrigues, 12 Floor C, MACAU SAR Telephones: +853 287 160 81/2 Fax: +853 287 160 84
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COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Gov't calls on whole population to self-test today

RENATO MARQUES

THE health authorities have issued an appeal for the whole population in Macau – namely everyone who has participated in the mass testing and received three Rapid Antigen Test Kits (RATs) – to do a follow-up self-test today, the director of the Health Bureau (SSM), Dr. Alvis Lo informed yesterday.

The SSM director said that the idea is that people can learn how to do the self-test and carry out a follow-up of their negative nucleic acid tests (NAT) conducted during the mass testing to ensure that they are not infected.

“We are asking everyone to do a Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) tomorrow to ensure that everything is OK and that there are no other hidden cases within the community. This will help us to ensure that there is no further spread. At the same time, we will call on some people to redo the NAT test for some particular focus areas,” Lo said. The results of the RAT will also be used to decide whether a

ANTHONY LAM



new round of mass testing will be needed, Lo added.

“If there are new positive cases found by the RAT test, maybe we will have to have a new mass

testing. But for the time being, we are going to use only the RAT for those that are not considered [to be a] contact with the cases found.”

All results of RATs done by the population are to be uploaded via a photo of the result shown on the testing kit to the webpage <https://eservice.ssm.gov.mo/generalrat>.

Lo urges people to pay attention to the instructions on how to correctly use the self-test, calling on people with doubts to watch the tutorial videos that the SSM has produced explaining the whole procedure. He also asked families to help each other do the testing, especially for children and elderly people, as “the RAT results depend a lot on how it is done. We hope people can do it and can help those experiencing difficulties to do it too,” he concluded.

DOMES IS THIRD IN THE LINE OF OPTIONS

Questioned on the status of a makeshift hospital to accommodate people infected with the virus, Lo remarked that the work is almost done and that the temporary hospital may be ready as soon as today.

Still, the official remarked that there are other priority options that the government will use, if necessary, before resorting to the makeshift hospital at the East Asian Games Dome.

“At this time, we still have rooms available in our [SSM] facilities. We can also activate our second plan, which is using the quarantine hotels at any moment now, but we have not activated that yet. The [makeshift] hospital will be able to be activated by tomorrow [today] but at this point, we are not sure if this will be needed or not.”



Associations urge hotel sector to provide lower room prices for employees

STAFF REPORTER

THE Association of Macao Tourist Agents (AMTA) has expressed hope that the hotel sector will provide accommodation support to employees amid the implementation of pandemic prevention policies.

The AMTA and The As-

sociation of Capital Employment Agencies of China (Macau) have jointly negotiated to mobilize the support of hotels in Macau to provide hotel rooms at lower prices to local and non-local employees, providing urgent accommodation support.

The AMTA expects that the industries will jointly

undertake their social responsibilities, face their difficulties together, and meet the accommodation needs of non-local employees during the implementation of the pandemic prevention policies.

The Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) stated that most of the employees are still sticking to their work

duties under the pandemic prevention policies, especially in industries involving people's livelihood, such as supermarkets, retail department stores, food supply and others, whether they are local or non-local employees. According to them, they are attempting to provide essential support to the best of their ability to ensure the supply of daily necessities for Macau residents.

Meanwhile, the DSAL reiterated that residents should avoid or reduce non-essential crowd gathering activities as much as possible to reduce the chance of disease transmission.

In order to reduce the unnecessary gathering of people and the risk of viral transmission, the SAR government has announced that the public sectors will be closed from June 22 to 24, except for those providing emergency and essential services. The public servants who have been exempted from work or provide services due to department closures to fulfill their obligations, should stay at home.

BRITCHAM RAISES MOP100,000 AT ANNUAL BALL

PUNK: Chaos to Culture” was the theme at this year's Annual Ball organised by the British Chamber of Commerce in Macao (Britcham), which raised over MOP100,000 for the chamber's corporate social responsibility (CSR) endeavors.

Co-presented by Galaxy Entertainment Group, more than 250 guests stepped out in their punk-themed-best at StarWorld Hotel for the event.

A minimum of 50% of

proceeds from the Punk Ball will go towards Britcham's CSR Fund, which provides financial assistance to local students without the resources to continue their education.

Last year, the Annual Ball was themed “Alien Invasion,” with its “Sci Fi Ball” in celebration of the Chamber's 15th anniversary raising MOP60,000.

Also presented by Galaxy Entertainment Group, the ball was a ‘phantasmagorical interplanetary’ gathering of 220 guests. LV





GAMING LAW AMENDMENTS PASSED IN SHORTER-THAN-EXPECTED PLENARY

ANTHONY LAM

ALL but one proposal in the Gambling Law Amendment Bill (the Bill) were passed unanimously yesterday at the parliament, giving the government the green light to commence relicensing procedures.

The only proposal that garnered a “nay” vote, which was from lawmaker Ron Lam, is Clause 3 of Article 22 of the Bill. In his voting declaration, the lawmaker explained that the 5% funding from casino concessionaires’ gross gambling revenue (GGR) should not be considered part of the government’s tax income.

Instead, he said, the funding should be used specifically to support communal costs.

The Clause suggests that the Chief Executive be vested with the power to decrease or even waive the funding payment under the conditions of public interests, “especially exploring foreign sources of tourists.”

As of today, the city is still not open to foreign visitors.

The core reason behind his vetoing of this proposal was that he was not able to see any clear provision or requirement in the stipulation, he explained. He hoped that in the future, the supplementary Executive Regulations clarifying certain parts of this Bill will prove its effectiveness.

The government has pledged that the future regulations will ensure that the aforementioned decrease or waiver will not have any impact on communal budgeting and investments.

Secretary for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong, the official responsible for the review of the law, added the government would ensure that the income from the funding payment will surpass the costs related to the future decrease or waiver.

He admonished lawmakers, saying that they should view the big picture. Lei emphasized that in the past two years or so, the government had not lowered regular social welfare by a cent. In defense of the proposal, the senior official highlighted the importance of the proposal because “Macau is a world tourism and leisure center,” although the city had not seen foreign tourists in the past couple of years or so.

Lei also described the proposal as a means to “grow the pie” so that social welfare can be retained at current or even higher levels.

In addition, using previous government investments in the Social Security Fund (FSS) as an example, Lei promised that when the fund needs money, the government would handle the situation.

However, he did not offer any such contingency when the government runs out of funds. For example, competent laws stipulate that when the government does not have a sufficient fiscal surplus, it will not be allowed to invest money in the Central Provident Fund, colloquially known by elder residents as “the annual 7,000 patacas.”

RETAINING ITS CHARM

In their voting declaration speech, lawmakers Lei Leong Wong, Si Ka Lon and Becky Song questioned how the government could ensure that Macau will retain its charm amid the growing intensity of competition around the world. They pointed out that many nearby countries, such as Japan and Thailand, are contemplating being open to casino operations.

In addition, Lo Choi In and Zheng Anting asked the government to help local casinos attract foreign gamblers due to the beneficial provision regarding inviting foreign clients.

The new law will also contain provisions concerning national and territorial security. In most voting declarations yesterday, lawmakers disclosed that it was the main reason why they supported the Bill.

Lei Wai Nong pledged that the gov’t would take CSR into account while opening bids for the new licenses

On the other hand, allies Ella Lei, Leong Sun Iok, Lam Lon Wai and Lei Chan U made a joint declaration highlighting their appreciation for the proposals in the Bill seeking to protect labor rights.

However, they stressed that future efforts in securing labor rights are still needed as much as now,

even if the proposals were passed as stipulations.

The quartet added that, along with other colleagues from parliament, the government must clarify the future details of the provisions on corporate social responsibility (CSR). “The clarified requirements should be included in the concession contracts,” Ella Lei said on behalf of the four.

LOOPHOLES IN THE INDUSTRY

Che Sai Wang saw the provision of allowing concessionaires to operate other businesses as a threat to local small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Meanwhile, his ally, José Pereira Coutinho, criticized the government for giving lawmakers and society in general so little time to study the Bill.

In all his speeches yesterday, Lam used the phrase “disastrous experience” several times to describe the consequences of loopholes that existed in the gambling industry over the past years.

For example, he said, although the government has assured locals of job security in future casinos by requiring certain positions to be saved for local workers and emphasizing that an upward career ladder will be in place to nurture local professionals, the lawmaker pointed out that many Macau ID holders currently holding high positions in casinos and resorts were actually immigrants from other places from the past 20 or so years.

“The talent acquisition system has run too loose to allow many of these people to obtain Macau residency,” Lam said.

In response, Secretary Lei said that Article 16 of the future law has proposals regarding CSR, which will include employee development, training and upward career movement.

Furthermore, the senior official also pledged that the government would take CSR into account while opening bids for the new licenses. The matter was subject to the concerns of at least four lawmakers, including Ella Lei, Lam, Coutinho and Che.

They found the proposal in the Bill too vague and hoped the government would make clearer proposals.

JUNKET-CONCESSION PAIRING

Coutinho expressed his concerns that the future stipulation would, in fact, affect the livelihoods of junket operators. In the worst-case scenario, they may eventually be forced out of operations, he suggested.

In response, the secretary, as well as Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau director, Adriano Marques Ho, emphasized that the proposal was made to ensure better supervision over junkets’ practices in the future.

According to them, if made into law, the proposal will benefit the “healthy development” of the city’s gambling industry.

The pair of officials were also asked about the recent closure of a couple of satellite casinos, establishments that are not located within a venue owned by any casino concessionaires. The Secretary stressed that the Labour Affairs Bureau had been working diligently to help affected employees to transfer to other positions or companies.

GUIA LIGHTHOUSE

UNESCO to present local heritage protection group's outcry to Beijing

LYNZY VALLES

A group that has been calling for the safeguard of a prominent element of Macau's heritage has announced that UNESCO will bring the matter to Beijing in accordance with the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

The Concern Group for the Protection of the Guia Lighthouse stated, "We are most grateful that UNESCO will take a firm stand on the height limits on buildings around the Guia Lighthouse."

In 2020, the concerned group pressed for further action to protect the views from and of the Guia Lighthouse during a meeting with the government. Of particular concern to the group is the height clearance on Avenida do Doutor Rodrigo Rodrigues. Currently, pursuant to the Executive Order 83/2008, the clearance is set to 90 meters.

MACAU PHOTO AGENCY



The group said that the height limit of 90 meters for the buildings under construction and the buildings to be built along the Avenida do Dr. Rodrigo Rodrigues is insufficient to maintain the visual integrity of the Guia Lighthouse.

In the most recent statement released earlier this week, the

group noted that the "Chief Executive Directive 83/2008 cannot be violated and the Chinese and Macau governments' commitment to reduce the height of this unfinished building to 52.5 meters should be respected."

"The revised project of the unfinished building at Calçada do

Gaio will be closely monitored to make sure that it will strictly follow the height limit of 52.5 meters," it added.

The group pledged that attention would be paid to the progress of the detailed urban design and conservation planning study for the length of the Avenida do Dr.

Rodrigo Rodrigues, to be undertaken by the Macau government.

"These two critical issues will be treated as a matter of high priority," the statement read.

Last week, the group sent a new letter to UNESCO, noting that the ideal solution would be to reduce the height of the building to 52.5 meters, adding that UNESCO has already requested that the design of the upper floors of the building be revised to be more transparent and less bulky, in order to lessen their visual impact.

"We do not see how the present design can fulfil this. Demolishing the upper floors should be the best solution or else the upper floors should be reduced in volume," the group said in the letter.

In the first approved plan of the government, the building was set to reach up to 126 meters above sea level.

Despite being the natural highest point on the Macau Peninsula, the summit of Guia Hill is only about 90 meters above sea level.

After years of debate, the builder agreed to lower the height to 81 meters, although many still consider this too tall. With the height reduction, the building will be reduced from 36 floors to 19.

The builder has also agreed to eliminate unnecessary structures on the rooftop so as to further shorten the building.

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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



TWO WOMEN STILL HOSPITALIZED AFTER BRUTAL ATTACK IN CHINA

TWO of the four female victims remain hospitalized 11 days after a group assault in northern China that sparked nationwide outrage, authorities said yesterday, as they announced the firing of one police official and an investigation into the handling of criminal cases by the local police.

The Hebei province Public Security Department said in-depth investigations are being

carried out into the slow response to incidents and "serious violations of laws and discipline" by police in the city of Tangshan, which is about 150 kilometers east of Beijing.

The assault raised concern about public safety and the mistreatment of women in society. Hundreds of thousands of people commented after videos of the attack were posted online, many calling

for justice.

Police arrived at the scene 28 minutes after they received the report, and the injured had been sent to the hospital by the time they arrived, provincial authorities said in a statement. The deputy chief of the Tangshan police Lubei branch, which was responsible for the initial handling of the case, has been removed from office, though the state-

ment did not say why.

Four women eating at a late-night barbecue restaurant were brutally attacked by a group of men in the early hours of June 10, after one of the women appeared to reject the advances of one of the men and fought back after she was slapped, surveillance video from the restaurant showed.

The attackers could be seen shoving the women to

the ground, kicking them, throwing a chair at them, and later dragging one of the women out of the restaurant to continue beating her on the sidewalk. One had a bloodied and swollen face as she was taken away on a stretcher.

Nine suspects were arrested the next day. In recent days, rumors have spread online that at least one of the women had died, but the Hebei public security statement appeared to contradict that.

It said that the conditions of the two hospitalized women were improving and that they had sustained "second-degree light injuries." The other two women were slightly injured and not hospitalized, the statement said.

While some online comments applauded the statement for refuting the rumors, more raised questions about the severity of the women's injuries and the slow initial response of the police.

Reports of a series of gang crimes in Tangshan surfaced after the attack, along with public questioning of alleged ties between the police and gang members. The investigation into the case has been transferred to the police in another jurisdiction, the city of Langfang, which is also in Hebei province.

The Hebei province anti-corruption body said yesterday that five police officers are under investigation, including the chief of the Lubei branch in Tangshan and at least two others from a police station under the Lubei branch. **MDT/AP**

UN biodiversity summit moved from China over Covid-19 policy



The Danish art group Superflex projects marine life images onto the United Nations headquarters building in New York City

A United Nations summit on biodiversity will be held in Canada instead of China, organizers announced yesterday, the second major international event to be moved from China because of its strict anti-coronavirus policies.

The U.N. secretariat for the Convention on Biological Diversity and China's environment ministry said in separate statements that the meeting will be held in December in Montreal, where the secretariat is based.

China, which is the chair of this round of meetings, decided to move them outside of the country "due to the continued

uncertainties related to the ongoing global pandemic," Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, the executive secretary of the convention, said in her statement.

The Chinese environment ministry said the decision was made "after comprehensively considering the pandemic situation at home and abroad."

China withdrew last month as host of soccer's 2023 Asian Cup. It also indefinitely postponed the 2022 Asian Games, a sporting competition that was scheduled for September in the city of Hangzhou.

The country has stuck to a strict "zero-COVID" policy that has limited international visitors and repeatedly locked down parts or all of cities to stamp out any outbreak. The approach is increasingly at odds with other major countries that have loosened restrictions and

moved toward living with the disease.

The biodiversity summit is similar to the more well-known U.N. climate summit. Countries that have joined a global agreement on preserving the world's plant and animal species meet regularly to try to achieve the goals laid out in the pact.

The meeting was scheduled to be held in the Chinese city of Kunming earlier this year but was postponed because of the pandemic.

China will continue to serve as president of the upcoming summit and the theme and logo will remain unchanged, the environment ministry and the U.N. secretariat said.

Beijing, the Chinese capital, hosted the Winter Olympics in February by creating a bubble that kept participants isolated from the general population in China. **MDT/AP**

S. Korea runs first successful homegrown space rocket launch

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

SOUTH Korea successfully launched its first homegrown space rocket on yesterday, officials said, a triumph that boosted the country's growing space ambitions but also proved it has key technologies to build a space-based surveillance system and bigger missiles amid animosities with rival North Korea.

The three-stage Nuri rocket succeeded in releasing and placing its functioning "performance verification" satellite at a target altitude of 700 kilometers after its 4 p.m. liftoff from South Korea's space launch center on a southern island, the Science Ministry said.

"Dear fellow citizens, the space of Republic of Korea is fully open. The science and technology of Republic of Korea has made a great advance," Science Minister Lee Jong-Ho told a televised news conference at the launch center. "The government will continue its audacious march toward a space power together with the people."

In a video conference with scientists and others involved in the launch, President Yoon Suk Yeol in Seoul congratulated



The Nuri rocket, the first domestically produced space rocket, lifts off from a launch pad at the Naro Space Center in Goheung, South Korea, yesterday

them over their achievement and vowed to keep his campaign promise to establish a state aerospace agency, according to Yoon's office.

Earlier live TV footage showed the 47-meter rocket, adorned with a national flag and its official name in Korean, rising into the air

amid bright flames and thick white smoke.

The launch has made South Korea the world's 10th nation to place a satellite into space with its own technology.

It was South Korea's second launch of the Nuri rocket. In the

first attempt last October, the rocket's dummy payload reached its desired altitude but didn't enter orbit because the engine of the rocket's third stage burned out earlier than planned.

South Korea, the world's 10th-largest economy, is a main supplier of semiconductors, automobiles and smartphones on world markets. But its space development program lags behind that of its Asian neighbors China, India and Japan.

North Korea placed its first and second Earth observation satellites into orbit in 2012 and 2016, though there is no proof that either one has ever transmitted space-based imagery and data back home. Those North Korean launches invited U.N. economic sanctions because they were viewed as covers for testing the country's banned long-range missile technology.

Since the early 1990s, South Korea has sent a slew of satellites into space, but all from overseas launch sites or aboard a rocket built with the help of foreign technology. In 2013, South Korea successfully launched a satellite for the first time from its soil, but the first stage of its launch vehicle was manufactured by the Russians.

After South Korea's 2013 satellite launch, North Korea's Foreign Ministry accused the United States of revealing "double standards and brigandish nature" because it supported the South Korean launch but spearheaded U.N. sanctions on the North's 2012 satellite launch. North Korea didn't immediately respond to yesterday's Nuri launch.

South Korea plans to conduct four more Nuri rocket launches in coming years. It also hopes to send a probe to the moon, build next-generation space launch vehicles and send large-scale satellites into orbit.

South Korean officials said the Nuri rocket has no military purposes.

The transfer of space launch technology is strictly restricted under a multilateral export control regime because it has military applications. Experts say ballistic missiles and space launch vehicles share similar bodies, engines and other components, though missiles require a reentry vehicle and other technologies.

"If you put a satellite on the top of a rocket, it would become a space launch vehicle. But if you mount a warhead on it, it becomes a weapon," said Kwon Yong Soo, a former professor at Korea National Defense University in South Korea. "(A successful launch) is really meaningful because we also succeed in the test of a long-range rocket that can be used to build a long-range missile." **MDT/AP**

LGBT

Japan court says ban on same-sex marriage constitutional

MARI YAMAGUCHI,
TOKYO

A Japanese court ruled Monday that the country's ban on same-sex marriage does not violate the constitution, and rejected demands for compensation by three couples who said their right to free union and equality has been violated.

The Osaka District Court ruling is the second decision on the issue, and disagrees with a ruling last year by a Sapporo court that found the ban on same-sex marriages unconstitutional. It underscores how divisive the issue remains in Japan, the only member of the Group of Seven major industrialized nations that does not recognize same-sex unions.

In its ruling, the Osaka court rejected the plaintiffs' demand for 1 million yen (\$7,400) in damages per



Plaintiffs speak to journalists after a court ruling in Osaka, western Japan, Monday

couple for discrimination they face.

The plaintiffs — two male couples and one female couple — were among 14 same-sex couples who filed lawsuits against the government in five major cities — Sapporo, Tokyo, Nagoya, Fukuoka and Osaka — in 2019 for violating rights to free union and equality.

They argued that they have been illegally discriminated against by being deprived of the same economic and legal benefits that heterosexual couples enjoy through marriage.

Support for sexual diversity has grown slowly in Japan, but legal protections are still lacking for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. LGBTQ people

often face discrimination at school, work and at home, causing many to hide their sexual identities.

Rights groups had pushed for passage of an equality act ahead of last summer's Tokyo Olympics, when international attention was focused on Japan, but the bill was quashed by the conservative governing party.

The Osaka court on Monday said freedom of marriage in the 1947 constitution only means male-female unions and does not include those of the same sex, and therefore banning same-sex marriages is not unconstitutional.

Judge Fumi Doi said marriage for heterosexual couples is a system established by society to protect a relationship between men and women who bear and raise children, and that ways to protect same-sex relationships are still undergoing public debate.

The court, however, urged the parliament to seek methods to better protect same-sex relationships, including options to legalize same-sex marriage.

Monday's ruling was a setback for activists who were hoping to further pressure the government after the ruling by the Sa-

pporo district court in March 2021.

The plaintiffs and their lawyers called Monday's ruling unacceptable and said they would appeal.

Public opinion in Japan currently favors legalizing same-sex marriage.

Under current rules in Japan, same-sex couples cannot inherit each other's property, house or other assets they share, and have no parental rights over each other's children. They are often barred from renting apartments together, and from hospital visits and other services available to married couples.

More than 200 municipalities across Japan, or 12% of the total, have begun issuing non-legally binding partnership certificates to same-sex couples since Tokyo's Shibuya district became the first to do so in 2015. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



PUTIN'S WAR

'Everything is on fire': Ukraine region weathers bombardment

YURAS KARMANAU,
JOHN LEICESTER
& DAVID KEYTON, KYIV

RUSSIAN attacks laid down a curtain of fire yesterday across areas of eastern Ukraine where pockets of resistance are denying Moscow full military control of the region, almost four months after the Kremlin unleashed an invasion.

"Today everything that can burn is on fire," Serhiy Haidai, the governor of Ukraine's eastern Luhansk region, told The Associated Press.

Russia's war has caused alarm over food supplies from Ukraine to the rest of the world and gas supplies from Russia, as well as raising questions about security in Western Europe.

The Russian military currently controls about 95% of the Luhansk region. But Moscow has struggled for weeks to overrun it completely, despite deploying additional troops and possessing a massive advantage in military assets.

In the city of Sievierodoneck, the hot spot of the fighting, Ukrainian defenders held on to the Azot chemical plant in the industrial outskirts. About 500 civilians are sheltering at the plant, and Haidai said the Russian forces are turning the area "into ruins."

"It is a sheer catastrophe," Haidai told the AP in written comments about

the plant. "Our positions are being fired at from howitzers, multiple rocket launchers, large-caliber artillery, missile strikes."

The defense of the chemical plant recalled the besieged Azovstal steel mill in the brutalized city of Mariupol, where Ukrainian troops were pinned down for weeks.

Neighboring Lysychansk, the only city in the Luhansk region that is still fully under Ukrainian control, is also the target of multiple airstrikes.

Separately, U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland was making an unannounced visit to Ukraine on yesterday to meet with Ukrainian Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova.

The two planned to discuss U.S. and international efforts to help Ukraine identify, apprehend and prosecute anyone involved in war crimes and other atrocities there, a U.S. Justice Department official said. The official could not discuss details of the trip publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The Ukrainian president's office said yesterday that at least six civilians had been killed over the previous 24 hours, and 16 others were wounded.

According to its daily update, Russian forces over the day shelled the northern Chernihiv region, and in-

tensified their shelling of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city. Explosions also occurred on yesterday morning in the southern city of Mykolaiv.

Airstrikes on Sievierodoneck and nearby Lysychansk have ruined more than 10 residential buildings and a police station. In the city of Avdiivka in the Donetsk region, a school burned down as the result of the shelling, the president's office said.

At least six civilians had been killed over the previous 24 hours, and 16 others were wounded

International support for Ukraine's plight was demonstrated once more when a Nobel Peace Prize medal auctioned off by Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov sold Monday night for \$103.5 million, shattering the old record for a Nobel. The auction aimed to raise money for Ukrainian child refugees.

Geopolitical tensions stemming from Russia's invasion returned to Lithuania. Due to European Union sanctions on Moscow, the Baltic country earlier this month banned rail traffic from crossing its territory from Russia to the Russian

exclave of Kaliningrad.

Kaliningrad, with a population of around 430,000 people, is wedged between Lithuania and Poland, both EU countries, and is isolated from the rest of Russia.

Nikolai Patrushev, the powerful secretary of the Kremlin's Security Council and a hardliner, visited Kaliningrad on Tuesday and vowed to respond to the ban.

"The relevant measures are being drawn up in an interagency format and will be adopted shortly," Patrushev said, without elaborating. He added: "Their consequences will have a significant negative impact on the population of Lithuania."

Meanwhile, Russian authorities blocked the website of British newspaper The Telegraph over an article it published, the internet rights group Roskomsvoboda reported Tuesday.

The group said in an online statement that Russia's media and internet regulator, Roskomnadzor, blocked Russian access to a story Moscow described as "fake news." The move made the entire Telegraph website inaccessible for some Russians.

The Telegraph story alleged that Russian forces had prepared a mobile crematorium for use in its war with Ukraine, possibly to hide its military casualties. MDT/AP

this day in history



1941 HITLER INVADES THE SOVIET UNION

German forces have invaded the Soviet Union.

In a pre-dawn offensive, German troops pushed into the USSR from the south and west, with a third force making their way from the north towards Leningrad.

At 0500 GMT, an hour after the invasion began, the Nazi Minister for Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, went on national radio to read a proclamation by Adolf Hitler promising that the mobilisation of the German army would be the "greatest the world has ever seen".



The invasion breaks the non-aggression pact signed by Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939.

The pact has since been described by the German leader, Adolf Hitler, as a stain on Germany's record.

Initial reports suggest that the German troops have made rapid progress.

A correspondent with the German Army on the northern front reported the Soviet Army opened fire immediately at the German advance, but German soldiers overran the first of the Soviet positions and within a few minutes had captured the frontier posts.

Germany is thought to have committed a massive force of more than three million men, supported by more than 3,000 tanks, 7,000 guns and nearly 3,000 aircraft.

They are nonetheless vastly outnumbered by the Red Army which has about nine million men under arms with another 500,000 in reserve.

Soviet arms and ability, however, are considered vastly inferior to the Germans.

The Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, appears to have been taken completely by surprise.

Despite warnings from Britain and secret intelligence reports that war was imminent, Stalin has refused to prepare for an invasion, insisting that it would not happen until next summer.

In London the War Cabinet met early this morning to discuss the implications.

The Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, condemned the invasion in a broadcast on BBC radio, in which he said it marked a turning point in the war.

Calling Hitler a "bloodthirsty guttersnipe", he said his own outspoken opposition to communism had "faded away" in the light of today's events, and pledged Britain's help for the Soviet Union in any way possible.

"The Russian danger is... our danger," he said, "and the danger of the United States, just as the cause of any Russian fighting for his hearth and home is the cause of free men and free peoples in every quarter of the globe."

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

In the next six months of Operation Barbarossa, as the invasion was known, Germany occupied what is now Belarus and most of Ukraine, and surrounded Leningrad (now St Petersburg).

The German Army, though vastly superior to the Red Army, met a courageous resistance which made its advance far slower than expected.

At the same time, the retreating Soviet troops destroyed crops and burnt entire villages under Stalin's "scorched earth" policy to prevent supplies falling into German hands.

Hitler had counted on taking Moscow before Russia's punishing winter set in, but the half-starved German army didn't even arrive on the outskirts until September.

They were finally driven back by a surprise counterattack by the Red Army on 6 December 1941.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Romantic opportunities will be plentiful if you go out with friends. Hide your cards and learn to say no. Concentrate on getting ahead financially and let your personal life settle down for a while.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

Opportunities to travel will develop through peers. Plan a trip to the country or take a drive to the beach. Don't be too quick to react.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

You can expect changes in your financial situation as well as in your status. Weigh the pros and cons and make a decision that will change the conditions you've been living under.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

You will have to be careful not to let infatuations with colleagues get out of hand. Need some adventure in your life? Exotic destinations beckon you.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Dazzle them with your intellectual conversation. You could have trouble persuading others to accept your ideas and opinions. This is a great day to mingle with people you would like to impress.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Positive connections can be made if you get involved in environmental organizations. You can accomplish a lot if you put some effort into household duties or redecorating plans.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Try spending the day catching up on any responsibilities that need to be taken care of. Your added discipline will help you complete the impossible at work.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Use your intellectual approach to get the best results. Relatives will be cordial. Don't jump the gun; you may find yourself getting angry at the wrong person.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

You can finish projects early, which will bring you praise from superiors. If you're feeling uncertain, spend some time alone and reevaluate your motives as well as your needs.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Your creative ideas must be put to good use. Attend to things that you should have done yesterday. Relatives may play an important role in your personal life.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Colleagues may try to undermine you when talking to superiors. Sudden changes regarding work and colleagues are apparent. Don't make large purchases or investments.

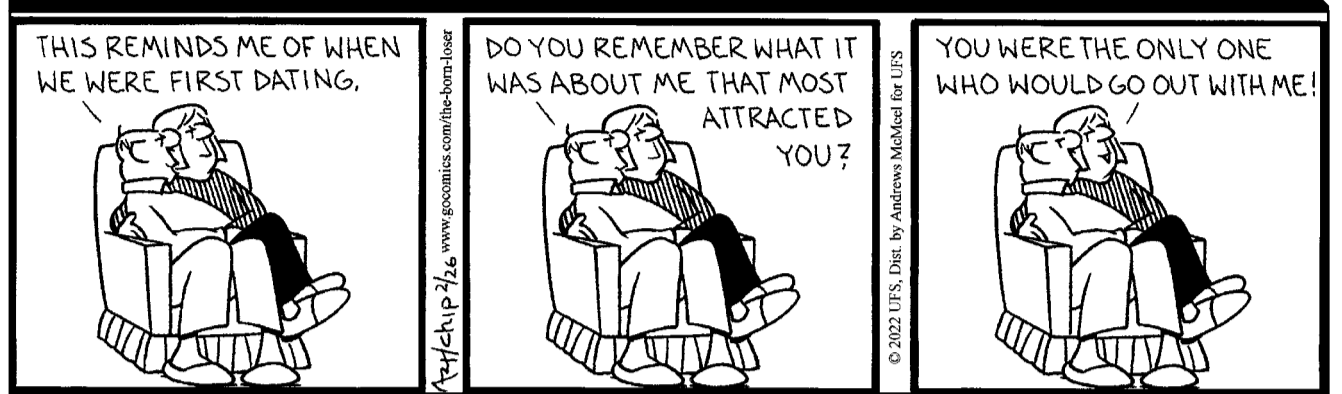


PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

You might be overly emotional concerning situations at work. Don't believe everything you hear. Be discreet about any information you uncover.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	24	30	rain
Changchun	21	25	rain
Chengdu	24	31	showers
Chongqing	26	34	rain
Fuzhou	25	33	cloudy
Guangzhou	27	33	thunderstorms
Guiyang	21	27	showers
Haikou	27	35	cloudy
Hangzhou	25	33	rain
Harbin	20	30	cloudy
Hefei	25	35	thunderstorms
Nanjing	25	33	cloudy
Shanghai	25	34	overcast
Taipei	25	30	cloudy
Wuhan	25	32	showers
Hong Kong	28	31	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	13	21	cloudy
Frankfurt	16	26	overcast
Paris	18	27	cloudy
London	15	27	clear
New York	17	21	showers

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Conductor Ozawa; 6- Baht spender; 10- Bell-shaped flower; 14- Burning desire?; 15- Change the decor; 16- Comics canine; 17- Gather; 18- OPEC member; 19- Classic autos; 20- Wash; 21- Sorcerer; 23- Salt Lake City player; 25- Projection at the corner of a door architrave; 26- Father; 29- 24 hour periods; 32- Lets up; 37- Flightless bird; 38- Small plateau; 39- Nissan model; 40- Boundary; 43- To-do list; 44- Unclear; 45- Code-breaking org.; 46- Very much; 47- Spillane's "___ Jury"; 48- Home furnishings chain; 49- Fall back; 51- Prepared; 53- Filbert; 58- Gymnast Comaneci; 62- Actress Hatcher; 63- Country singer McCann; 64- Gnu cousin; 65- Golf club which can be numbered 1 to 9; 66- Coup d'___; 67- Crest; 68- Gator's cousin; 69- Cravings; 70- Current location;


DOWN 1- Swedish auto; 2- Writer Bombeck; 3- The wolf ___ the door; 4- Successor of Moses; 5- Atlas feature; 6- Barbershop request; 7- Mother of Ares; 8- Saws; 9- Ancient region of Asia Minor; 10- Actress Singer; 11- It's a thought; 12- Hero; 13- Affirmative answer; 22- Weird; 24- Plant problem; 26- Hickory-nut; 27- Compadre; 28- Blender setting; 30- Nitwit; 31- Cruising vessel; 33- Hill builder; 34- Stench; 35- Uneven; 36- Capital city of Yemen; 38- Jumble; 39- Dimensions; 41- MSNBC rival; 42- Go, team!; 47- Light; 48- Right-leaning?; 50- Narrow street; 52- Diciembre follower; 53- German Mister; 54- Buck follower; 55- Brass component; 56- ___ Bator, Mongolia; 57- Uses a shuttle; 59- Miami's county; 60- Swenson of "Benson"; 61- Mideast gulf; 62- Spasm;

Yesterday's solution

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

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	
Airport 59 888 88	



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HELLENE GARDENS 3 BEDS	HKD 13,500
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COLOANE 1 BED	HKD 9,300

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TAIPA RENOVATED 2 BEDS	HKD 4,680,000
CENTRAL TAIPA 2-BEDS	HKD 4,380,000
TAIPA CUTE & COZY STUDIO	HKD 3,980,000
TAIPA STUDIO WITH BALCONY	HKD 3,780,000
TAIPA GREAT POTENTIAL 1-BED	HKD 3,480,000
CENTRAL MACAU 1 BED	HKD 2,850,000
MACAU PARKING VA LONG	HKD 1,600,000

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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

ELON MUSK'S USD44 BILLION TWITTER DEAL GETS BOARD ENDORSEMENT

TWITTER'S board has recommended unanimously that shareholders approve the proposed \$44 billion sale of the company to billionaire and Tesla CEO Elon Musk, according to a regulatory filing Tuesday.

Musk reiterated his desire to move forward with the acquisition last week during a virtual meeting with Twitter employees, though shares of Twitter remain far below his offering price, signaling considerable doubt that it will happen.

On Tuesday at the Qatar Economic Forum in an interview with Bloomberg, Musk listed the approval of the deal by shareholders as one of several "unresolved matters" related to the Twitter deal.

Shares of Twitter Inc. were essentially flat just before the opening bell Tuesday and far short of the \$54.20 per-share that Musk has offered to pay for each. The company's stock last reached that level on April 5 when it offered Musk a seat on the board before

AP PHOTO



he had offered to buy all of Twitter.

In a filing with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission detailing on Tuesday detailing a letter to investors, Twitter's board of directors said that it "unanimously

recommends that you vote (for) the adoption of the merger agreement." If the deal were to close now, investors in the company would pocket a profit of \$15.22 for each share they own. **MDT/AP**

JETBLUE RAISES OFFER AGAIN IN BIDDING FOR SPIRIT AIRLINES

JETBLUE Airways Monday increased its offer to buy Spirit Airlines, raising the stakes again in a battle over the nation's biggest budget airline.

New York-based JetBlue said it increased its cash offer to \$33.50 per share, or more than \$3.6 billion. That is an increase per share of \$2 over a June 6 offer and 50 cents over JetBlue's original April bid.

Frontier Airlines put Spirit in play in February when boards of the two airlines agreed to a merger in which Spirit shareholders would get cash and 48.5% of the combined company. That deal was originally valued around \$2.9 billion but has lost value because of a decline in Frontier's stock price.

Shareholders of Miramar,

Florida-based Spirit are scheduled to vote June 30 on the Frontier bid, and JetBlue is trying to convince investors to scuttle the agreement and drive Spirit into JetBlue's arms.

Spirit said it was reviewing JetBlue's latest offer. Denver-based Frontier declined to comment. Spirit said last week that its board would give shareholders an update before the June 30 vote.

Spirit's board has opposed a deal with JetBlue, saying antitrust regulators would never allow it. JetBlue said Monday that it strengthened its commitment to divestitures needed to satisfy regulators but won't drop a controversial partnership with American Airlines in the northeast U.S. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



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Obstetrics & Gynaecology : Dr. Fong Kuan Io

Plastic & Aesthetic Surgery : Dr. Lam U Lin

Orthopaedic Surgery & Sports Medicine : Dr. Lam Kun Kuan

ENT : Dr. Cheng Zheng Ang

Cardiology : Dr. Wong Kwok Yiu Chris, Dr. Jin Chun, Dr. Leong Man Kin

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Tokyo closes books on costly, pandemic-delayed Olympics

STEPHEN WADE, TOKYO

ORGANIZERS of last year's COVID-delayed Tokyo Olympics were expected to place the final cost of the Games at 1.42 trillion yen, about twice what was forecast when the IOC awarded them in 2013.

Tokyo Olympic officials, meeting yesterday before the body dissolves at the end of the month, were to detail final numbers, which were increased by the pandemic, but were in record range long before that.

Calculating the costs is challenging because of recent fluctuations in the exchange rate between the dollar and the Japanese yen. When the Olympics opened a year ago, \$1 bought 110 yen. On Monday, \$1 bought 135 yen, the dollar's highest level against the yen in about 25 years.

The fall in the yen's value means the cost of the Olympics quoted in dollars is now about \$10.5 billion. A year ago, the price was about \$13 billion.

Victor Matheson, a sports economist at the College of the Holy Cross who has written extensively on the Olympics, suggested by email to AP that most of "the expenses and revenues are in yen, so the exchange rate changing the dollar amounts doesn't affect how the event 'feels' to the organizers."



In the runup to the Tokyo Games, organizers often used the exchange rate of 107. At that rate, the equivalent of 1.42 trillion yen

would be \$13.33 billion as final price tag.

Matheson and fellow American Robert Baade researched Olympic

costs and benefits in a study called "Going for Gold: The Economics of the Olympics."

They write "the overwhelming conclusion is that in most cases the Olympics are a money-losing proposition for host cities; they result in positive net benefits only under very specific and unusual circumstances."

Accurately tracking Olympic costs — who pays, who benefits, and what are and are not Games' expenses — is a moving maze.

Olympic organizers estimated the official costs when the Games closed at year ago at \$15.4 billion.

Four months later, organizers said the costs had fallen to \$13.6 billion. They said there had been a large saving because no fans were allowed to attend, dropping security costs, venue maintenance and so forth.

However, organizers lost at least \$800 million in income from no ticket sales, which fell to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government to cover.

A University of Oxford study in 2020 said Tokyo was the most expensive Olympics on record.

There is one undeniable fact: more than half of the costs were paid for by public money — Tokyo's government, the national government and other government entities.

In the several years prior to the Olympics, government audi-

ts found official costs might have been twice as much as stated, meaning the public portion of the bill might be far more than half.

The International Olympic Committee in its annual report says it contributed about \$1.9 billion to cover Tokyo costs.

It's impossible to assess the long-term impact of the Tokyo Olympics, particularly in a sprawling city like the Japanese capital where change is constant. The pandemic erased any short-term tourism bounce. Local sponsors, who paid more than \$3 billion to be linked to the Olympics, didn't seem very happy according to local reports.

Dentsu Inc., the giant Japanese advertising and public relations company, may have benefited. It directed marketing for Tokyo 2020, received commissions for lining up sponsors, and has been linked to an IOC vote-buying scandal that was tied to Tokyo getting the Games.

The scandal forced the resignation of Tsunekazu Takeda in 2019, an IOC member who also headed the Japanese Olympic Committee.

The Games were hit with other scandals, including the resignation of Yoshiro Mori, the president of the organizing committee who made sexist remarks about women. The former Japanese prime minister stepped down five months before the Games opened.

Tokyo had billed itself as a "safe pair of hands" in its bid to get the Games.

Tokyo will also be remembered as the first Games that were postponed for a year, and then held mostly without fans in a so-called bubble. **MDT/AP**

Transgender athletes barred from international rugby league

TRANSGENDER athletes will be barred from women's international rugby league matches while the sport's governing body formulates its inclusion policy.

Two days after world swimming's governing body effectively banned transgender women from competing in women's events, the International Rugby League on Tuesday said it was continuing to review and update rules about transgender participation in women's international tournaments.

"Until further research is completed to enable the IRL to implement a formal transgender inclusion policy, male-to-female (transwomen) players are

unable to play in sanctioned women's international rugby league matches," the IRL said in a statement.

It planned to use the eight-team Women's World Cup, being staged in England from Nov. 1-19 in conjunction with the men's Rugby League World Cup, to help develop a comprehensive policy.

The IRL said it last reviewed transgender participation in international rugby league in early 2021 but now had to consider more recent developments in world sport, including the International Olympic Committee's publication of guidelines for fairness, non-discrimination and inclusion.

"In the interests of avoid-

ing unnecessary welfare, legal and reputational risk to International Rugby League competitions, and those competing therein, the IRL believes there is a requirement and responsibility to further consult and complete additional research," the statement said.

The IRL said it would seek to work with the eight teams competing in the women's World Cup — Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Cook Islands, England, France, Canada and Brazil — to obtain data and develop a set of criteria which fairly balance the individual's right to play with the safety of all participants.

The England-based International Rugby League

governs the 13-a-side game established in 1908 and played mainly in northern England, Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific.

Rugby union, the original, primarily 15-a-side game governed by the Dublin, Ireland-based World Rugby, does not allow transgender women to play in women's competition.

International rugby union guidelines state the reason being: "Because of the size, force- and power-producing advantages conferred by testosterone during puberty and adolescence, and the resultant player welfare risks this creates."

World Rugby committed to a formal review of the policy every three years.



FINA, the international swimming federation, adopted a new "gender inclusion policy" on Sunday

that only permits swimmers who transitioned before age 12 to compete in women's events. **MDT/AP**

OPINION

World Views

Lauren Schwahn, NerdWallet/The Conversation

MILLENNIAL MONEY: 4 ITEMS FOR YOUR MIDEAR MONEY CHECKLIST

A lot can happen in six months. That's why, as we close out the first half of the year, it makes sense to check in on your financial life.

"With inflation, I think people this year are more heavily impacted than they probably have been in many years leading up to this point," says Jason Dall'Acqua, a certified financial planner and founder of Crest Wealth Advisors in Annapolis, Maryland. "So it's a good time to see how things have been going ... as well as plan for what lies ahead in the remainder of the year."

So where should you start? Add these four items to your midyear money checklist.

1. REVIEW YOUR INCOME, EXPENSES AND GOALS

You don't have to tally up every penny you've made and spent over the last six months. But taking a few minutes to check a bank or budget app can help you better understand your finances and course-correct if necessary.

"Right now with inflation, even if you had a budget back in January, it probably is not the same as it is today. There are some things that are going to need to be changed. So it's just really resetting and figuring out where you stand today versus where you thought you were going to stand today," says Kayla Welte, a CFP with District Capital Management who lives in Denver.

Look for opportunities to scale back if you've spent more than anticipated. For example, you can dine out less or cancel subscription services you rarely use. "Any excess spending that you've been doing, you may have to cut down to account for this higher cost of things that you absolutely have to buy," Welte says.

If you set money resolutions or other financial goals earlier this year, check on those too. Have you saved as much toward retirement or an emergency fund as you planned? Are you on track to pay off debt?

2. DEAL WITH DEBT

Debt is becoming more expensive to carry due to rising interest rates. Pay down debts sooner, particularly those with variable interest rates, to save money. These debts might include credit cards, personal loans or adjustable-rate mortgages.

Concentrate on reducing your highest-rate debt first, then move on to the next highest. Dall'Acqua also suggests switching from variable-rate to fixed-rate options by refinancing, if possible. "If you can lock in the fixed rate now, you're likely to be saving yourself significantly in interest costs over time," he says.

Setting aside money now in a separate savings fund can help soften the blow.

3. PLAN HOLIDAY SHOPPING

Inflation could make holiday gifts a little pricier this year. Create a shopping list and think about how much you can afford to spend. "Figure out what that would require for you to start saving on a weekly or monthly basis and start putting that money aside right now," Dall'Acqua says.

Starting on shopping early can also help you manage the cost without accruing debt. Many retailers host major sale events in the summer, so you'll find discounts well before Black Friday. Amazon's Prime Day is coming in July. So is the Nordstrom Anniversary Sale.

4. EXAMINE YOUR TAXES AND BENEFITS

Welte recommends using an online tax calculator to check whether you're withholding too much or too little. This can help you avoid getting hit with a big tax bill unexpectedly or missing out on extra cash you may need now. [Abridged]

Although detained by Myanmar's military government on a slew of charges, ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi was able to hold a small birthday celebration during a court appearance Monday, a legal official said.

Suu Kyi, whose elected government was overthrown by the army in February last year, turned 77 on Sunday.

She is among over 11,124 people currently detained for opposing military rule, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which keeps detailed tallies of civilians jailed or killed by government forces.

The military's seizure of power met with widespread resistance and some U.N. experts now describe Myanmar as being in a civil war.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party won a landslide election victory in 2020, and she remains widely regarded by Myanmar's people as the country's legitimate leader. She is admired for leading a long, nonviolent struggle to restore democracy in Myanmar, for which she won a Nobel Peace Prize. But once-admiring foreign sympathizers blame her for doing little or nothing to stop atrocities committed by security forces against the Muslim Rohingya minority in 2017.



'IT ALWAYS WINS': NORTH KOREA MAY DECLARE COVID-19 VICTORY

IT'S only been a month since North Korea acknowledged having a Covid-19 outbreak, after steadfastly denying any cases for more than two years. But already it may be preparing to declare victory.

According to state media, North Korea has avoided the mass deaths many expected in a nation with one of the world's worst health care systems, little or no access to vaccines, and what outsiders see as a long record of ignoring the suffering of its people.

North Korea's official virus numbers, experts believe, have as much to do with propaganda to boost leader Kim Jong Un as with a true picture of what's happening in the country, and there's widespread doubt about their accuracy.

What's clear, though, is that the daily updates from state media make it appear inevitable that the nation will completely defeat a virus that has killed more than 6 million people around the world. According to the official tally, cases are plummeting, and, while 18% of the nation of 26 million people reportedly have had symptoms that outsiders strongly suspect were from Covid-19, less than 100 have died.

The South Korean government as well as some experts believe that North

Korea may soon declare that it has beaten the virus. This will be linked, of course, to Kim's strong and clever guidance.

A victory lap, however, isn't a foregone conclusion. Doing so, according to some experts, would deprive Kim of a useful tool to control the public and could open the government up to humiliation if cases continue.

"There are two sides to such a declaration," said Moon Seong Mook, an analyst with the Seoul-based Korea Research Institute for National Strategy. "If North Korea says that Covid-19 has gone, it can emphasize that Kim Jong Un is a great leader who has overcome the pandemic. But in doing so, it can't maintain the powerful restrictions that it uses to control its people in the name of containing Covid-19."

Outsiders suspect that Kim is using the outbreak to boost internal unity at a time when many of his people are tired of 2 1/2 years of draconian curbs that have hurt their livelihoods. However North Korea deals with its description of the pandemic, many signs, at least in public statements, point to a declaration of success in dealing with a virus that has confounded the richest countries in the world.

In the initial stage of the outbreak, Kim described a "great upheaval" as daily fever cases — North Korea rarely calls them Covid-19, presumably because it lacks test kits — reached about 400,000. Now, however, the leader is suggesting that the outbreak has peaked, with his health officials maintaining a widely disputed fatality rate of 0.002%, the lowest in the world.

The question many outside experts are wrestling with is: What is the true state of misery in North Korea, which has banned nearly all outside journalists, aid workers and diplomats since early 2020?

North Korea is widely believed to be manipulating its true death toll to prevent any harm to Kim. It might also have exaggerated the number of earlier fever cases to boost vigilance against the virus and draw stronger public support for authorities' anti-virus controls. North Korea has recently reported about 17,000 to 30,000 new fever cases each day, for a total of 4.7 million. It says — to widespread outside disbelief — that only 73 have died.

Whatever the real situation is, outside monitoring groups say they haven't detected signs of anything catastrophic in North Korea. MDT/AP



Lebanon, Egypt and Syria signed an agreement yesterday to import Egyptian gas to a power plant in northern Lebanon through Syria. The deal would increase badly needed electricity supplies in Lebanon, which is suffering under a severe energy crisis and chronic outages. The agreement still needs to be signed off on by the World Bank, which is supposed to finance the process.



US A Navy warship fired a warning flare to wave off an Iranian Revolutionary Guard speedboat coming straight at it during a tense encounter in the strategic Strait of Hormuz, officials said yesterday. The incident on Monday involving the Guard and the Navy comes as tensions remain high over stalled negotiations over Iran's tattered nuclear deal with world powers and as Tehran enriches uranium closer than ever to weapons-grade levels under decreasing international oversight.

Russia's security chief yesterday said Moscow will respond to Lithuania's decision to bar rail transit of certain goods from Russia to a Russian Baltic Sea exclave, and this response will have "a significant negative impact" on the Lithuanian people, adding to the already high tensions in the region. The ban on goods subject to European Union sanctions was announced by the Lithuanian authorities earlier this month and prompted a flurry of angry retorts from Moscow, with the Kremlin denouncing the move as unprecedented and unlawful.

France President Emmanuel Macron was holding talks yesterday with France's main party leaders after his centrist alliance failed to win an absolute majority in parliamentary elections. The meetings at the Elysee presidential palace come after Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne formally offered her resignation yesterday, in line with the tradition after parliamentary elections. Macron immediately rejected the offer and maintained the current government.