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**COVID-RELATED ARRANGEMENTS AT THE GOVERNMENT HOSPITAL IS SEPARATING NEWBORNS FROM THEIR MOTHERS: REPORTS**

P4

**REPRODUCTION BILL'S EXCLUSION OF SINGLES CONCERNS LAWMAKERS**

P5

**THE CONVERSATION: OUR CENTURIES-LONG QUEST FOR 'A QUIET PLACE'**

P2



**Indonesia** A powerful deep-sea earthquake damaged village buildings in a lightly populated island chain in eastern Indonesia early yesterday, and its substantial shaking was widely felt in northern Australia. Two school buildings and 15 houses were damaged in the Tanimbar islands, with one of the homes heavily damaged and three moderately damaged. Only one injured resident was reported. The epicenter of the magnitude 7.6 temblor was in the Banda Sea, nearest the Tanimbar islands in Maluku province that have about 127,000 residents. Tremors were felt in several regions, including Papua and East Nusa Tenggara provinces, as well as in northern Australia.



**Ukraine** Russian forces are escalating their onslaught against Ukrainian positions around the wrecked eastern city of Bakhmut, Ukrainian officials said, bringing new levels of death and devastation in the grinding, months-long battle. "Everything is completely destroyed, there is almost no life left," Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said yesterday of the scene around Bakhmut and the nearby town of Soledar. Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar said Russia has thrown "a large number of storm groups" into the battle.



**USA** The latest in a relentless string of storms slammed California yesterday [Macau time], swamping roads, battering coastlines with high surf, turning rivers into gushing flood zones and forcing the evacuation of thousands in towns with histories of deadly mudslides. The Weather Service said rain was expected to continue through today after dumping up to 14 inches at higher elevations in central and Southern California. After a brief respite, another storm was expected to barrel into the state in a few days, adding to the misery.

More on backpage

# COVID DIPLOMACY

**Beijing has halted visas for Japan, South Korea in Covid-19 spat; 'No comments' from MGTO on countries' stricter restrictions for Macau visitors**

P3



AP PHOTO



AP PHOTO

**FAQ**  
**GUIDELINES FOR POST COVID-19 CARE**

P5



**CRIME**  
**WOMAN SETS BUILDING ON FIRE BY BURNING TALISMAN PAPERS**

P4







# China halts visas for Japan, South Korea in Covid-19 spat

**C**HINESE embassies suspended issuing new visas for South Koreans and Japanese yesterday in apparent retaliation for Covid-19 testing requirements recently imposed by those countries on travelers from China.

The embassies in Tokyo and Seoul announced the suspensions in brief online notices.

The Seoul notice, posted on the embassy's WeChat social media account, said the ban would continue until South Korea lifts its "discriminatory entry measures" against China. The announcement covered tourist, business and some other visas.

China's Foreign Ministry threatened countermeasures last week against countries that had announced new virus testing requirements for travelers from China. At least 10 in Europe, North America and Asia have done so recently, with officials expressing concern about a lack of information about rapidly spreading virus outbreaks in China.

It wasn't clear why South Korea and Japan were targeted, and whether the suspensions would be expanded to other countries that have imposed virus testing on passengers from China.

China's embassy in Tokyo said only that visa issuance had been suspended.

The announcements appeared to apply only to new applicants, with nothing about people currently holding visas.

South Korea's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that "our government's step to strengthen anti-virus measures on passengers arriving from China is based on scientific and objective evidence. We have provided information to the international community in a transparent manner and we have communicated with the Chinese side in advance."

A Japanese Foreign Ministry official said earlier that it would be "regrettable" if restrictions were imposed. The official spoke on customary condition of anonymity.

A withholding of visas from South Korean or Japanese businesspeople could delay a hoped-for revival of commercial activity and potential new investment following China's abrupt lifting of anti-virus controls last month.

Business groups had warned earlier that global companies were shifting investment plans



away from China because it was too hard for foreign executives to visit under the pandemic controls. A handful of foreign auto and other executives have visited China over the past three years, but many companies have relied on Chinese employees or managers already in the country to run their operations.

In a phone call on Monday before the visa suspension was announced, Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang "expressed concern" about the measures taken by South Korea to his counterpart, Foreign Minister Park Jin. Qin said he "hopes that the South Korean side will uphold an objective and scientific attitude."

China's move appeared to be grounded in its demands that its citizens be treated the same as

those of other countries. About a dozen countries have followed the U.S. in requiring either a negative test before departing China, a virus test on arrival at the airport, or both.

"Regrettably, a handful of countries, in disregard of science and facts and the reality at home, have insisted on taking discriminatory entry restriction measures targeting China," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said yesterday "China firmly rejected this and took reciprocal measures."

He did not respond directly when asked if new visas had been suspended for South Koreans and Japanese, saying only that he had "made it very clear."

The World Health Organization and several nations have

accused China of withholding data on its outbreak. A WHO official said yesterday that the agency sees no immediate threat for the European region from China's outbreak, but that more information is needed.

China abruptly reversed its strict pandemic containment requirements last month in response to what it says was the changing nature of the outbreak. That came after three years of lockdowns, quarantines and mass testing that prompted rare politically tinged protests in the streets in Beijing and other major cities.

The decision by Xi's government to end controls that shut down factories and kept millions of people at home will move up the timeline for economic recovery but might disrupt activity this year as businesses scramble to adapt, forecasters say.

China is now facing a surge in cases and hospitalizations in major cities and is bracing for a further spread into less developed areas with the start of the Lunar New Year travel rush, set to accelerate in the coming days. While international flights are still reduced, authorities say they expect domestic rail and air journeys will double over the same period last year. **MDT/AP**

## MGTO NO COMMENT ON COUNTRIES' STRICTER COVID RESTRICTIONS FOR MACAU ENTRANTS

**ANTHONY LAM**

**T**HE Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO) declined to comment on Japan and Korea imposing restrictions on entrants from Macau due to Covid-19 risk.

Both northeast Asian countries have recently imposed tougher requirements on entrants from Macau. The requirements involve pre-departure or on-arrival Covid-19 tests.

The Times has requested comment from MGTO and the Health Bureau (SSM) on these measures and also on possible measures that might be implemented on entrants from these two countries in return.

No reply was received by press time yesterday. However, local media All About Macau reported the MGTO had declined to comment "regarding Covid-19 measures implemented in other countries."

The Japanese government has recently announced that, from tomorrow, all entrants from Macau – regardless of nationality – must present negative SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test (NAT) results issued within 72 hours before departure. Upon arrival in the country, a NAT or a rapid antigen test (RAT) will be administered on these entrants.

Meanwhile, South Korea announced last Saturday that pre-departure negative NAT results

issued within 48 hours, or negative RAT results issued by a hospital within 24 hours, is mandatory for entrants from Macau.

The Korean government has implemented an additional requirement on flights from Macau and Hong Kong. These flights can only arrive at, and depart from, the country using the Incheon International Airport serving Greater Seoul. Transit to other Korean destinations will be closed to these passengers. The measure is in effect until the end of February.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, many mainland residents would fly from Macau to international destinations for a number of reasons. This practice is somewhat similar to Macau residents using the Hong Kong International Airport to fly to destinations not serviced by airlines operating in Macau.

According to the Korean Yonhap News Agency, the requirement will affect airlines set to fly between Hong Kong and non-Seoul destinations, such as Busan and Jeju. Korean flag carriers that originally provided transit services from Hong Kong to Korean domestic destinations will also be affected.

The news agency noted affected passengers can only enter the country at Incheon and take other means of transport to their intended domestic destinations.

## MGM, MELCO TO PAY ONE-MONTH BONUS TO EMPLOYEES

MGM China and Melco Resorts & Entertainment will pay a one-month bonus later this month, joining the other operators who have implemented a similar scheme. In a statement, MGM said 97% of its team members will benefit from the "one-time discretionary allowance," not specifying a date. Melco, meanwhile, will pay its bonus to all eligible non-management employees before the Chinese New Year "in recognition of the loyalty and efforts of eligible non-management employees."

## BEIJING'S CITY OFFICE EASES VISA REQUIREMENTS FOR FOREIGNERS

The Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Macau has eased visa restrictions for foreigners wishing to travel to the mainland. In measures implemented due to the pandemic, the office has required foreigners to have stayed in the SAR for 28 consecutive days. On Jan. 8, alongside with the city's broader easing of border restrictions, the office stated it has removed this requirement as well as the requirement to be vaccinated. The updated policy is to "facilitate the exchange of personnel between Macau SAR and the mainland of China."

## MICE SECTOR OPTIMISTIC ON 2023 ACTIVITIES

The MICE sector is pinning hopes on the city's fresh gaming licenses, expecting activities to return to 50% of pre-pandemic levels. Speaking to Macao Daily News, Tony Lam, president of the Macau Fair & Trade Association, expects more effort in boosting non-gaming in the future, given that it was part of the requirements when submitting bids to the government for a gaming license. Lam is expecting the sector to bounce back by the third quarter. Latest government data shows 70 MICE events were held in the third quarter of 2022, totaling to 258 events by the third quarter.

## MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS ADVISOR WARNS ON CNY FOOD SAFETY

Additional work must be done to ensure food public safety during the Lunar New Year holiday period. Chan Pou Sam, municipal affairs advisor, has told local media Cheng Pou. The advisor pointed out that with the almost complete cessation of all Covid-19 restrictions, close contact interactions will become more frequent. He called on the government to be mindful of the non-quarantined import of poultry, meat, dried seafood, preserved food, endangered species, landscape plants and candied fruits among other restricted products. He also suggested the government expand the practice of inspecting caterers to ensure they do not inappropriately place food in public areas or uncovered places.



CHCSJ

# COVID-RELATED ARRANGEMENTS CAUSING SEPARATION OF NEWBORNS FROM MOTHERS

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE need to use the maternity ward of the Conde de São Januário Hospital Center (CHCSJ) for Covid-19 patients is separating newborns from their mothers, the public broadcaster reported.

According to TDM sources among mothers and mothers-to-be, all newborns are being separated from their mothers immediately after birth and are being placed in a different ward. This makes it impossible for mothers to see or breastfeed their babies for the entire period they remain in hospital care.

One of the mothers said she had not been informed of this arrangement before giving birth and it had not been raised at any appointments nor when she had arrived at the hospital to give birth. She had only found out that she would not be permitted to see and breastfeed her daughter after she had given birth.

This mother also said she had only learnt of the reasons behind the separation from the hospital's pediatrician, and only after she had requested to speak to them



about it.

According to the pediatrician, it is not possible for mothers to be with their babies and to breastfeed them as the neonatology department has no available space for that purpose.

Another mother-to-be, warned by the first one, is said to have reached out to the Health Bureau (SSM) to learn more.

This mother-to-be said that, according to the information she had collected via the phone from the Centre for Disease Con-

trol and Prevention, the decision to separate mothers from their newborns was one made by the hospital as they were using the second floor for "other purposes."

As cited in the state media report, both women explained they are very concerned and discontented with this decision to deprive them from access to their newborns, particularly for the purpose of breastfeeding.

This comes precisely at a time when the government focusses on the birth rate in Macau as one

of its policies for this and upcoming years, a topic that was also discussed at the Legislative Assembly (AL) last month when the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture went to the plenary to reply to questions from lawmakers.

To increase the birthrate, the government has recently proposed a new law for medically assisted reproduction techniques that has already been passed on its first reading at the AL and is now being discussed in detail at the Second Standing Committee.

The benefits of the contact between mothers and newborns in the first hours or days of life and the adoption of breastfeeding exclusively for at least the first six months of life is well established and has been intensively promoted by both the World Health Organization and the SSM who have a special webpage dedicated to the topic. The SSM has also launched several promotional campaigns in recent years that led, among other things, to the creation of breastfeeding rooms in all public facilities and in some large-sized private companies.

Although this issue is new to CHCSJ, for years separation of mothers and newborns was a regular practice in the Kiang Wu Hospital. Nonetheless, mothers are allowed to breastfeed, if they wish to do so, and to have contact with their babies at least twice a day in the case of natural childbirth. Reduced contact and access to newborns happens in the cases of birth via cesarean section; in these cases access is permitted when mothers can move independently to the newborns' room. For surgical procedures, this can take several days.

PUBLIC WORKS

## 99 road works combined in first three quarters of 2022

ANTHONY LAM

**I**N January-September of last year the government managed to combine 99 road work projects to avoid repetitive road digging, Director Lam Hin San of the Transport Bureau (DSAT) said in response to a lawmaker's inquiry.

The reply was made in November last year to the inquiry from lawmaker Ella Lei dated Oct. 21.

In his reply, Lam said the government had striven to minimize traffic impacts when a road was undergoing maintenance or work. One method was to combine road works required by different entities.

In addition, the bureau director cited the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) in noting that each entity would propose their respective delivery period. Each week, the IAM would coordinate the delivery period with each entity based on the nature of projects as well as the impact on nearby road network and residents.

Last year, Lam cited the IAM



as saying Covid-19 restrictions and weather conditions had delayed the number of road work projects in the past few years. The IAM pledged it would work with Lam's bureau to accelerate projects such as by extending hours worked in a day and completely shutting down the area around the road work.

Construction personnel unable to keep up with proposed schedules were asked for a written explanation. They were penalized if the IAM found their explanations

unconvincing.

The IAM also said it had conducted on-site spot checks and had evaluated progress on municipal works. Where irregularities or delays had been discovered, the IAM added, the bureau would notify construction personnel at meetings, by official correspondence, or by other means as appropriate.

The IAM also said the compilation of the Executive Regulations monitoring coordination of public road works was in progress.

CRIME

## WOMAN SETS BUILDING ON FIRE BY BURNING TALISMAN PAPERS

**A** 62-year-old woman is being charged with arson after having caused several fires in the apartment building where she lives and works as a caretaker, the Judiciary Police (PJ) reported yesterday during the regular joint press conference of the Macau police forces.

The incident occurred on Sunday (January 8) in the surroundings of the Border Gate with the PJ receiving a notice from the fire department over the suspicious case.

Further investigation revealed that the woman, while burning talisman papers on the 23rd floor of the building, caused two fires in



housing units located on the 22nd and 18th floors of the same building.

According to the assessment made by the owners, the fire caused damages amounting to 39,000 patacas, including damage to air conditioning units, plastic pipes and boards, and the darkening (due to smoke) of the ceiling of the balcony of one of the units, among other damage.

The talisman paper is a handwritten paper of a religious nature, usually of yellow color, which is believed to possess magical powers for expelling evils and avoiding misfortune.

While admitting to having burned the papers causing the fires, the suspect told the police she used to perform this kind of activity as a religious practice when she felt unwell. **RM**



EXPLAINER

# Guidelines for post Covid-19 care

RENATO MARQUES

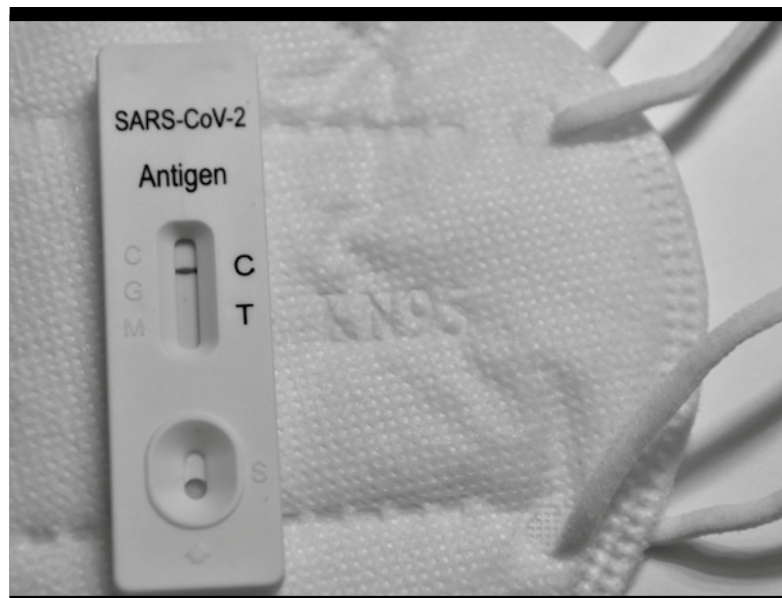
**I**N response to the many inquiries from people infected with Covid-19, the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center has issued guidelines and responses to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) in the hopes of alleviating common concerns.

MDT reviewed the document and compiled the most queried issues:

## HOW LONG AFTER A COVID-19 INFECTION SHOULD SOMEONE SEEK A COVID-19 VACCINATION?

Natural infection may be considered a vaccination. In this sense, if someone is fully vaccinated before contracting the infection, or if that person was only one dose away from full vaccination, it is not necessary to receive the final dose.

If a person was not vaccinated or had only received one dose, that person can only receive a second



dose 3 months after they have recovered from the infection (for mRNA vaccines) or 6 months from the infection period if receiving the inactivated virus vaccines.

Please note that antibodies produced through a natural infection have a short life and thus result in lower immunity in cases of infections with different va-

riants of the virus.

## CONTINUING TO HAVE A COUGH AFTER RECOVERING FROM AN INFECTION

Coughing is part of the recovery process. People should drink more water and increase the humidity in their environment to assist recovery and avoid constant coughing,

## LOSS OF TASTE

Loss of taste and smell are common symptoms among those infected with Covid-19.

Generally, this situation may improve on its own after a period of between two weeks to a month, and is not a cause of concern.

If this symptom persists for over one month, it is recommended to see a physician.

## FATIGUE

During an infection period many experience symptoms such as high fever, muscle pain, fatigue, sweat, headaches, or sore throat, among others.

After recovery, some continue to suffer symptoms such as fatigue. These symptoms usually improve within two weeks.

## EXERCISE AFTER RECOVERY

As myocarditis (inflammation of the middle layer of the heart wall) is not uncommon among people infected with Covid-19, intense physical exercise in the initial phase of recovery is

not recommended.

It is recommended to practice physical exercises with a moderate intensity and then gradually increase intensity.

If people feel exhausted after moderate exercise, they should stop immediately and assess their condition.

## ALLERGIES AND OTHER MEDICAL CONDITIONS

As the production of antibodies increases exponentially after the Covid-19 infection, the immune system will generally remain on "high alert" for some time.

For this reason, for up to two weeks or more a person may suffer allergic and other similar reactions. These symptoms are usually moderate and will improve on their own in a few days.

Consult a physician if allergic reactions persist.

## REINFECTION

People with normal immune systems have a very low risk of being reinfected with Covid-19 for a period of 3 to 6 months, but this protection drops significantly when people are exposed to different variants of the virus.

The elderly and immunocompromised people are more likely to be reinfected after a short period.

# Reproduction bill's exclusion of singles concerns lawmakers

ANTHONY LAM

**S**OME lawmakers in a parliamentary committee queried why the medically assisted reproduction bill excluded single people.

President Chan Chak Mo of the parliament's Second Standing Committee told a post-meeting press conference yesterday that some committee members called on the government to be "more open-minded and progressive," according to a report by local media All About Macau.

The bill was passed by the plenary at its first reading.

Chan said the main focus of the discussion yesterday was the overall direction and principle of the bill, such as details of the beneficiaries.

Under the bill, beneficiaries of medically assisted reproduction will be married or de-



-facto spouses of different sexes. These couples may not be divorced or separated, must be at least 18 years old and of childbearing age, and may not be deemed unfit.

Regarding the proposed category of beneficiary, some committee members expressed concern as to why the proposed minimum age is 18. There were also questions about including single

women and homosexuals.

Chan said that although widely reliant on its Portuguese counterpart, the bill is not an exact copy. In Portugal, single people and homosexuals are eligible for the service.

He said Macau is comparatively less progressive than Portugal, while saying that, during the public consultation, "many people" opposed a more

progressive version of the bill. However, some lawmakers objected to this view.

Post-mortem retrieval and embryo transfer is treated differently by the bill. Lawmakers have demanded an explanation from the government.

The parliament's legal advisors have issued reminders the bill should consider the interests of the offspring and heritage issues.

## TOURISM

# FREE RETURN TICKETS TO ROLL OUT FOR HONG KONG RESIDENTS

**H**ONG KONG residents are entitled to a buy-one-get-one-free offer in the form of free return ticket for use on another day upon purchase of a shuttle bus or ferry ticket to Macau between January 13 to March 31.

This promotion comes as the local tourism office tries to boost Hong Kong residents' arrival in Macau, partnering with several operators of Hong Kong - Macau transportation services.

In a statement, the Macao Government Tourism Office said the offer is to encourage visitors to stay overnight and longer in Macau.

The service operators currently facilitating the above special offer include Hong Kong - Macao Express, TurboJET and

Cotai Water Jet.

More are expected to join successively, the statement read.

Border and pandemic measures were relaxed from Jan. 8 so that individuals entering Macau from Hong Kong are exempt from the requirement of presenting Covid-19 test results.

Ferry services have resumed after three years of suspension; the Golden Bus shuttle has also resumed and is now operating 24 hours a day.

Hong Kong remains the city's second-largest visitor source market after mainland China.

The tourism industry is eyeing the boost of arrivals from the neighboring region, with some expecting some 10,000 visitors daily during the Chinese New Year. LV





ANALYSIS

# China economy recovering but hampered by virus outbreaks

JOE MCDONALD, BEIJING

**W**ANG Jian is anxious to get back to work teaching basketball to children now that China has lifted anti-COVID-19 restrictions. But his gym in the eastern city of Shenyang has been closed for a month because all its coaches are infected.

The most optimistic forecasts say China's business and consumer activity might revive as early as the first quarter of this year. But before that happens, entrepreneurs and families face a painful squeeze from a surge in virus cases that has left employers without enough healthy workers and kept wary customers away from shopping malls, restaurants, hair salons and gyms.

"I hope the situation will turn around in March or April with no more COVID shocks," said Wang, 33, who went without a paycheck for four months when the gym closed during virus outbreaks. "If parents worry about possible reinfection, they simply won't send their children for training."

The abrupt decision by President Xi Jinping's government to end controls that shut down factories and kept millions of people at home will move up the timeline for economic recovery, but might disrupt activity this year as businesses scramble to adapt, forecasters say.

"This will be a bumpy process," said Dong Chen, chief Asia economist for Pictet Wealth Management.

"People still are struggling with infections, but we think this could be temporary," Chen said. "Broadly, we think this is a positive surprise."

The decision to accelerate China's reopening is a boost for the global economy at a time when activity in the United States and Europe is weakening after repeated interest rate hikes by central banks to cool surging inflation.

It is likely to help revive auto sales and propel demand for imported consumer goods, oil and food in China, one of the biggest global markets. Countries including Thailand with big tourism industries look forward to an influx of Chinese travelers.

The World Bank and private sector forecasters have cut estimates of China's economic growth last year to as low as 2.2% due to the infection spike that started in early October and challenged Beijing's "zero-COVID" goal of isolating every case. The International Monetary Fund expects a recovery to 4.4% this year, but that still would be among the lowest levels of the past three decades.

"Zero-COVID" kept China's infection numbers low but shut down Shanghai and other industrial cities last year for two months, disrupting manufacturing and shipping. Business groups said global companies were shifting investment plans

AP PHOTO



away from China because rules that required visitors from abroad to quarantine for a week kept executives from visiting.

The ruling party promised Nov. 11 to reduce the cost and disruption. A series of surprise announcements rolled back travel and other restrictions that health experts and economists had expected to persist

through mid-2023.

On Sunday, Beijing began allowing travelers to enter China without quarantines. The government has yet to say when China will resume issuing tourist visas.

"The sudden, chaotic way in which pandemic policies have been changed means that growth will be hampered in new ways," Daniel H. Ro-

CHINA-US

## PILOT'S LAWYER SAYS US EXTRADITION ATTEMPT IS 'POLITICAL'

**T**HE U.S. has accused a former military pilot of illegally training Chinese military pilots, and is trying to extradite him from Australia.

But the pilot's lawyer says his client has been unfairly singled out because of the current geopolitical struggle between the U.S. and China.

Pilot Daniel Duggan, 54, has been held in an Australian jail since his October arrest. Duggan's lawyer Dennis Miralis said outside a Sydney courtroom yesterday that Duggan denies the allegations and will continue to fight the extradition process at every step.

Australia's Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus last month approved the U.S. extradition request. But before the extradition can proceed, a judge must first determine whether Duggan is eligible for extradition under Australian law.

Miralis said the U.S. Department of Defense had acknowledged there were other

people helping foreign militaries but that the U.S. and Australia had singled out Duggan for extradition.

"We are concerned that this does highlight the political nature of what's occurring here," Miralis told reporters.

A 2016 indictment from the U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., was recently unsealed. In it, prosecutors say Duggan was an officer in the U.S. Marine Corps and a naval aviator. They say Duggan conspired with others to provide training to Chinese military pilots in 2010 and 2012, and possibly at other times, without applying for an appropriate license.

Prosecutors say Duggan received about nine payments totaling about 88,000 Australian dollars (\$61,000) and international travel from another conspirator for what was sometimes described as "Personal Development Training."

The indictment says Duggan traveled to the U.S., China

and South Africa, and provided some training to Chinese pilots in South Africa.

Miralis said Duggan "contests and denies" the allegations.

"It should be remembered that Mr. Duggan is presumed to be innocent under U.S. law. He's presumed to be innocent under Australian law," Miralis said.

Miralis said his client faced inhumane and unacceptable living conditions at the Silverwater Correctional Complex, where he was being held with convicted felons and was designated an extreme high-risk inmate.

"Mr. Duggan remains under extraordinary stress as a result of the current restrictions," Miralis said.

He said Duggan hadn't been able to see his six children since he was taken into custody three months ago.

Duggan said in his LinkedIn profile that in 2017 he became general manager

of AVIBIZ Limited, "a comprehensive consultancy company with a focus on the fast growing and dynamic Chinese Aviation Industry." AVIBIZ is based in Qingdao, a city in eastern Shandong province.

Duggan said he spent 13 years in the U.S. Marine Corps until 2002. He became an AV-8B Harrier fighter pilot and an instructor pilot during his service.

He lived in Australia from 2005 to 2014, founding and becoming chief pilot of Top Gun Tasmania, a business based in Tasmania state that offered joy flights in a British military jet trainer BAC Jet Provost, and a Chinese military propeller-driven trainer CJ-6A Nanchang.

He moved to Beijing in 2014. It is not clear whether he continued to live in China or what he was doing in Australia when he was arrested.

The U.S. has had an extradition treaty with Australia since 1976. **MDT/AP**

HONG KONG

## LAWYERS FOR JAILED PUBLISHER ASK TO MEET UK PM

**L**AWYERS for a jailed Hong Kong pro-democracy publisher have asked for an urgent meeting with U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, a leading member of his international legal team said yesterday.

Jimmy Lai, the 75-year-old founder of the now-defunct newspaper Apple Daily, was arrested in 2020 during a crackdown on the city's pro-democracy movement. He is fighting collusion charges under a Beijing-imposed national security law and faces up to life in prison if convicted.

Last month, the team called for the U.K. government to take immediate action to secure Lai's release ahead of his high-profile national security trial after he was sentenced to five years and nine months in prison on fraud charges linked to lease violations. The meeting request is the latest attempt from his legal team to urge the British government to step into the case of Lai, who is a dual Hong Kong and British citizen.

Caoilfhionn Gallagher, leader of the team, said Lai's son was in London this week to call on British officials to protect his father.

"He is being subjected to 'lawfare' – multiple prosecutions and lawsuits, all designed to silence and discredit him and send a clear message to others that they should not dare to criticize the Chinese or Hong Kong authorities," she said in an email reply to The Associated Press.

British officials did not comment immediately yesterday. **MDT/AP**





## In a poll by American Chamber of Commerce in China, 70% of companies expressed confidence the infection wave would last no more than three months

sen, Charlie Vest and Rogan Quinn of Rhodium Group said in a report. High numbers of

infections make it "realistic to expect production to be hampered for a substantial part of

2023."

Forecasters say the economy probably contracted in the final quarter of 2022 as virus case numbers rose and retail spending and trade fell.

Exports shrank after American and European consumer demand was depressed by interest rate hikes. That forces Chinese planners to make up for lost foreign sales by trying to boost consumer demand.

"The key to rapid economic recovery" is to "convert income into consumption and investment as much as possible," one of the country's most prominent financial figures, Guo Shuqing, the ruling party secretary for the central bank, told the official Xinhua News Agency.

Informal measures show public and business activity improving but weak.

This month's subway passenger numbers in 10 large cities recovered to 55-60% of the level a year ago, up from 30-35% last month, according to Macquarie Group. Roads are growing more congested.

Foreign companies that see China as a critical market welcome the change but are struggling, said Eric Zheng, president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai.

"Companies were not prepared for this abrupt change," said Zheng, whose group has about 1,000 member com-

panies. "It is hard to manage a workforce when a lot of people are getting sick."

Still, "things are almost going back to normal," Zheng said. "Once life goes back to normal and consumers are out shopping, things will definitely improve."

Another business group, the American Chamber of Commerce in China, said more than 70% of companies that responded to a poll last month expressed confidence the infection wave would last no more than three months and end early this year.

The ruling party is trying to nudge up growth by easing restrictions on financing for real estate and winding down anti-monopoly and data security crackdowns on tech companies that caused their stock market values to plunge.

In December, regulators announced Ant Group, an online financial company that was forced to call off a planned multi-billion-dollar public stock offering in 2020, would be allowed to raise 10.5 billion yuan (\$1.6 billion) for its consumer unit, more than doubling its capital.

"These measures are helpful, but far from enough to move the needle," Larry Hu and Yuxiao Zhang of Macquarie said in a report.

Hotels, restaurants and other businesses hoping for a boost from this month's Lunar New

Year holiday, the busiest tourism season, suffered a blow when some local authorities appealed to migrant workers to skip traditional visits to their hometowns that might spread infections.

The operator of the 12-room Oriental Hotel in the eastern city of Hefei, who would give only his family name, Huang, said he is losing 4,000 yuan (\$550) a month. His occupancy rate is 20%, well below the 50% needed to break even.

"People stay home and maybe they worry about possible reinfection," Huang said. "If it stays the same for another year, I will give up running the hotel."

The National Health Commission stopped announcing case numbers last month, but reports by city and county governments suggest hundreds of millions of people might have been infected.

The Zhengtai Restaurant in the northwestern city of Jinzhong closed for two weeks because almost all its 57 employees were infected, according to the manager, Chang Zhigang. Chang said the business has lost about 2 million yuan (\$300,000) per year since the start of the pandemic.

"We don't expect the situation to turn around within a short time, given there are very few people on the street," Chang said. **MDT/AP**

## TAIWAN

# German, Lithuanian lawmakers show support in visit

HUIZHONG WU, TAIPEI

**L**ITHUANIAN lawmakers on a visit to Taiwan took aim at China yesterday, saying the world's second largest economy tried to use all sorts of measures to change Lithuania's decision to break diplomatic norms in warming up relations with the self-ruled island democracy.

Taiwan is hosting German and Lithuanian lawmakers this week. China, which objects to diplomatic contacts between the island it claims as its own and other nations, held large-scale military exercises aimed at Taiwan over the weekend and into Monday.

The Lithuanian visit is focused on national security and defense as well as economic ties, lawmakers said.

"They tried to break our will, they tried to change our decision, they tried to harass investors and they tried to make economic sanctions ... but we survived," Laury-



nas Kasciunas, head of the defense committee in Lithuania's parliament, said. "We are now resilient and stronger, and we can be a role model for other EU countries."

The Lithuanian delegation is led by Kasciunas, along with the vice chair of the Taiwan friendship group in parliament, Dovile Sakaliene. The lawmakers drew parallels between the

threat they face from Russia and the threat Taiwan faces from China, saying they both had authoritarian neighbors.

"We have very clear common goals, strengthening democracy globally ... and really helping everyone around us understand very clearly. There cannot be any ambivalence. You are either with the aggressor or you are with the victim," Sakalie-

ne said.

Lithuania angered China after it broke with diplomatic convention, allowing Taiwan to name its representative office in Vilnius — a de facto embassy — "Taiwan" instead of "Chinese Taipei," a term used by other countries to avoid offending Beijing.

China expelled Lithuania's ambassador and downgraded diplomatic

ties with the Baltic country. It also sought to punish the country economically by blocking imports from Lithuania into China. Lithuania then closed its embassy in Beijing and opened a trade office in Taiwan last November.

Taiwan and the mainland have been ruled separately since 1949 following a civil war.

Beijing refuses to have official relations with governments that recognize Taiwan as a sovereign country. It has persuaded all but about a dozen countries, most of them in Africa and Latin America, to switch recognition to the mainland.

Many governments, including the United States, have official diplomatic ties with Beijing while maintaining extensive commercial ties with Taiwan. Many maintain relations with the island's democratically elected government through trade offices that serve as informal embassies.

Last year, Taiwan started a \$1 billion credit program aimed at funding projects by Lithuanian and Taiwanese companies to counter economic pressure from China over an office that the island opened in the EU country.

The German delegates were more subdued in their language and did not offer any direct criticism of China. The delegation met with Tsai Ing-wen yesterday morning.

"We also believe that any change of the status quo of the Taiwan Strait can only be achieved by mutual agreement and any attempt to change the status quo by force or threatening to do it by force is unacceptable," Johannes Vogel, vice chairman of the Free Democratic Party in Germany, said in opening remarks.

Vogel is heading the German delegation along with Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, who leads the German Parliament's Defense Committee. **MDT/AP**



USA

# Having elected House speaker, Republicans try governing

LISA MASCARO,  
WASHINGTON

**E**LECTING the House speaker may have been the easy part. Now House Republicans will try to govern.

Speaker Kevin McCarthy passed his first tests yesterday [Macau time] as the Republicans approved their rules package for governing House operations, typically a routine step on Day One that stretched into the second week of the new majority. It was approved 220-213, a party-line vote with one Republican opposed.

Next, the House Republicans easily passed their first bill — legislation to cut funding that is supposed to bolster the Internal Revenue Service. The Republicans' IRS bill ran into a snag ahead of votes because the budget office announced that rather than save money, it would add \$114 billion to the federal deficit. The measure flew through on another party-line vote, 218-210, though it has almost no chance of passage in the Democratic-controlled Senate.

It was an effective start to what could otherwise be a new era of potentially crisis governing. House Republicans are expected to be lurching from one standoff to the next after last week's raucous speaker's race that showcased the challenges ahead as McCarthy confronts a rebellious majority as well as the limits of President Joe Biden's remaining agenda on Capitol Hill.

With sky-high ambitions for a hard-right conservative agenda but only a narrow hold on the majority, which enables just a few holdouts to halt proceedings, the Republicans are rushing headlong into an uncertain, volatile start of the new session. They want to investigate Biden, slash federal spending and beef up competition with China.

But first McCarthy, backed by former President Donald Trump, needs to show the Republican majority can keep up with basics of governing.

"You know, it's a little more difficult when you go into a majority and maybe the margins aren't high," Mc-



US Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., talks to reporters as he walks to the speaker's ceremonial office at the Capitol in Washington

Carthy acknowledged after winning the speaker's vote. "Having the disruption now really built the trust with one another and learned how to work together."

But McCarthy himself announced the final vote tally on the IRS bill to applause from his side of the aisle. "Promises made. Promises kept," he said in a statement.

As McCarthy gavelled open the House this week as the new speaker, the Republicans launched debate on the Rules package, a hard-fought 55-page document that McCarthy negotiated with conservative holdouts to win over their votes to make him House speaker.

Central to the package is the provision the conservative Freedom Caucus wanted that reinstates a long-standing rule that allows any one lawmaker make a motion to "vacate the chair" — a vote to oust the speaker. Former Speaker Nancy Pelosi had done away with the rule when Democrats took charge in 2019 because conservatives had held it over past Republican speakers as a threat.

Rep. Morgan Griffith, R-Va., said the rules are about "getting back to the basics."

But that's not the only change. There are other provisions the conservatives extracted from McCarthy

that weaken the power of the speaker's office and turn over more control of the legislative business to rank-and-file lawmakers, particularly those far-right lawmakers who won concessions.

The Republicans are allowing more Freedom Caucus lawmakers on the Rules committee that shapes legislative debates. Those members promise more open and free-flowing debates and are insisting on 72 hours to read legislation ahead of votes.

But it's an open question whether the changes being approved will make the House more transparent in its operations or grind it to a halt, as happened last week when McCarthy battled through four days and 14 failed ballots before finally winning the speaker's gavel.

Many Republicans defended the standoff over the speaker's gavel, which was finally resolved in the post-midnight hours of Saturday morning on the narrowest of votes — one of the longest speaker's race showdowns in U.S. history.

"A little temporary conflict is necessary in this town in order to stop this town from rolling over the American people," Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, said over the weekend on CNN.

Roy praised the new rules he helped craft, saying

he could file a motion "right now" to demand a vote on the speaker — as it has been through much of House history.

But heading into yesterday's voting on the rules package, at least two other Republicans raised objections about the backroom deals McCarthy had cut, leaving it unclear if there would be enough GOP support for passage. In the end, only Republican Rep. Tony Gonzales of Texas voted against.

Democrats decried the new rules as caving to the demands of the far-right aligned with Trump's Make American Great Again agenda.

"These rules are not a serious attempt at governing," said Rep. Jim McGovern of Massachusetts, the top Democrat on the Rules Committee. Rather, he said, it's a "ransom note from far right."

Rep. Ritchie Torres, D-N.Y., focused his criticism on the GOP's so-called Holman Rule, which would allow Congress to rescind the pay of individual federal employees: "This is no way to govern."

McCarthy commands a slim 222-seat Republican majority, which means on any given vote he can only lose four GOP detractors or the legislation will fail, if all Democrats are opposed. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1973 FIRST OPEN UNIVERSITY DEGREES AWARDED



The first graduates from the Open University (OU) have been awarded their degrees after two years studying from home.

Out of the 1,000 students who sat the final exams, 867 were successful.

The Open University enrolled its first students in 1971 and has since grown to become the biggest university in the country with more than 40,000 students on its books.

The idea of learning from home was designed to appeal to mature students, but from next year the OU will be opening its doors to 18-year-olds as well.

OU Vice Chancellor, Dr Walter Perry, is delighted with the progress of his students — and insists the degrees which have been awarded are on a par with the best universities in the country.

He said: "I always said the one thing we must never do is have a different standard from the standard that pertains throughout Britain.

"To give a student a second-rate degree would be dreadful. It's doing damage not doing good."

For many people, the OU is offering them a second chance to study.

Dr Perry said: "The qualities of our students are often very different, in the first place they are adult, experienced in life and jobs, not just straight out of school. They have achieved their degree by the most difficult method of getting a degree yet devised by the wit of man.

"Therefore they have qualities of determination and staying power that are quite unusual and I think will come to be recognised by industry as very important qualities for employers."

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

The Open University currently has 200,000 students on its books — some 26,000 of them are studying OU courses from outside the UK.

The OU continues to offer high quality teaching. Of the 23 courses assessed by the university course watchdog, the Quality Assurance Agency, 17 were rated as "excellent".

There are no entry qualifications for undergraduates — but about 70% of students successfully complete their courses. In March 2000, the OU held the UK's first online graduation ceremony. Students from as far afield as Taiwan, Finland and the United States took part.

About a quarter of current students are now doing all or part of their courses online.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

**ARIES**  
Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Catch up on correspondence. Sudden disruptions will cause upset and a change of routine in your home environment. You will be able to borrow money in order to invest.

**TAURUS**  
Apr. 20-May. 20

Don't overdo it. You can mix business with pleasure to get favorable results. Uncertainty about your relationship is prevalent.

**GEMINI**  
May. 21-Jun. 21

You will easily charm members of the opposite sex. Real estate investments will be profitable. You can increase the value of your dwelling.

**CANCER**  
Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Do something together and you'll be surprised how sweet a deal you can make. Take the whole family and make it an enjoyable outing.

**LEO**  
Jul. 23-Aug. 22

You could receive recognition for a job well done. Be sure to take care of any minor ailments. Overstatement will be your downfall.

**VIRGO**  
Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Opportunities for love will develop while traveling or while attending religious functions. Don't hesitate to voice your ideas and opinions.

**LIBRA**  
Sep. 23-Oct. 22

You may find that your generosity has been taken for granted. Opposition is present and you should be prepared to counteract it as best you can.

**SCORPIO**  
Oct. 23-Nov. 21

You may find that you are a little lucky today. Travel opportunities must be taken advantage of. Your attitudes are changing rapidly.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Nov. 22-Dec. 21

You're best to channel your energy into work. You can come into money; however, perhaps not under the best circumstances. Social functions will bring you in touch with new lovers.

**CAPRICORN**  
Dec. 22-Jan. 19

You can't do everything on your own. You would be best to work late in order to avoid such disharmony. Don't get involved in secret affairs or underhanded involvements.

**AQUARIUS**  
Jan. 20-Feb. 18

You can purchase items that will enhance your appearance. Your mind may not be on the job. Don't go out of your way, and don't let these unexpected guests cost you money.

**PISCES**  
Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Don't give them the use of your credit card. You're best not to get involved in joint financial ventures. Extend an invitation to clients you enjoy spending time with.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

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

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

**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	-6	5	cloudy
Changchun	-6	3	cloudy
Chengdu	8	12	overcast
Chongqing	8	15	cloudy
Fuzhou	12	18	overcast
Guangzhou	15	18	rain
Guiyang	5	14	cloudy
Haikou	17	22	rain
Hangzhou	6	15	cloudy
Harbin	-11	1	fine
Hefei	1	14	fine
Nanjing	4	15	fine
Shanghai	6	16	cloudy
Taipei	15	21	cloudy
Wuhan	1	18	fine
Hong Kong	19	20	cloudy
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	-10	-9	rain
Frankfurt	6	11	rain
Paris	9	12	rain
London	6	10	rain
New York	3	5	cloudy

**CROSSWORDS**

ACROSS 1- Cheek; 5- Jump lightly; 9- NFL 6-pointers; 12- Step; 13- Hawaiian state birds; 15- Bucket; 16- Smell \_\_\_\_; 17- Everglades bird; 18- Able was \_\_\_\_; 19- Interstellar cloud; 21- Registered; 23- Vomit; 25- Lays down the lawn; 26- Vanilla \_\_\_\_ American rap star; 29- Essence; 31- Party animal?; 35- Director Browning; 36- Computer key; 38- Conger catcher; 39- Faux pas; 41- Where Columbus was born; 43- Steak order; 44- Book after Jonah; 46- \_\_\_\_ voice; 48- Believer's suffix; 49- Catch in a sting; 51- Routine; 52- Wedding page word; 53- Drab; 55- Author Jaffe; 57- When; 61- Putrid; 65- Sewing case; 66- Saturn's largest moon; 68- Traditional passed-down knowledge; 69- Rod's partner; 70- Glide along smoothly; 71- Mars' Greek counterpart; 72- Elect; 73- Unattractive; 74- Irritated state;

DOWN 1- Duration; 2- River in central Switzerland; 3- Strike breaker; 4- Organization; 5- Contemptible; 6- Small cask; 7- As to; 8- Hammer parts; 9- Chinese weight; 10- Desperately urgent; 11- Go downhill fast?; 14- Razor sharpener; 15- Lager; 20- Olympic event; 22- Comics canine; 24- Adlai's running mate; 26- "Who's there?" reply; 27- General Powell; 28- Decree; 30- Domingo, for one; 32- Actor Delon; 33- Brief; 34- Aggregate of qualities that make good character; 37- Helicopter part; 40- Precook, in a way; 42- A lawyer; 45- Head light?; 47- Vintner's prefix; 50- Trousers; 54- Japanese three-line verse; 56- Collection of maps; 57- Dynamic beginning; 58- Part of a process; 59- Hard fatty tissue; 60- All-male; 62- Undecided; 63- \_\_\_\_ saw Elba; 64- Fit snugly; 67- City in GA;

**Yesterday's solution**

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

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PJ (Open line) 993	Telephone - Report 1000
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PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
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INVESTMENT

# BUFFETT'S FIRM KEEPS SELLING BYD SHARES DESPITE PAST PRAISE

JOSH FUNK, OMAHA

**WARREN** Buffett's company continues selling off its BYD shares despite the positive comments he has made about the Chinese electric car maker in the past, but Berkshire Hathaway remains a major shareholder.

Berkshire said in a filing with the Hong Kong stock exchange this week that it had sold another 1 million shares, leaving it with 13.97% of the Hong Kong-issued shares of BYD.

Berkshire is only required to disclose the sales when its ownership stake decreases into another percentage point such as when it crossed below 14% here.



Buffett hasn't explained why he's selling the shares that he bought back in 2008, and he didn't immediately respond to questions about it yesterday. Berkshire has cut its stake from 225 million shares in August to 153.3 million shares as of this latest filing. Buffett previously praised

BYD founder Wang Chanfu generously and even visited a BYD factory in China back in 2010.

Investors may have to wait for Buffett's annual letter to shareholders next month to learn more about why he decided to reduce Berkshire's stake in BYD although he might not even

address it then if he plans to continue selling the shares. Buffett doesn't routinely comment on his stock moves until after he is done making them.

The sales do allow Berkshire to bank some of the tremendous gains the stock has recorded as the market for electric cars took off in China. BYD said it sold 911,140 all electric vehicles and 946,239 hybrids last year.

The stake Berkshire paid \$232 million for in 2008 had ballooned in value to nearly \$7.7 billion by the end of 2021. Berkshire's remaining stake is worth a little under \$4 billion (\$30.88 billion in Hong Kong dollars).

In addition to its roughly \$300 billion portfolio of stocks, Berkshire owns more than 90 companies outright including Geico insurance, BNSF railroad and several major utilities. Berkshire also owns an eclectic mix of manufacturing and retail firms that include aviation part-maker Precision Castparts, Dairy Queen and See's Candy. **MDT/AP**

AVIATION

# VIRGIN ORBIT REPORTS 'ANOMALY' IN SATELLITE LAUNCH FROM UK

A mission to launch the first satellites into orbit from Western Europe suffered an "anomaly" yesterday, Virgin Orbit said.

The U.S.-based company attempted its first international launch on Monday, using a modified jumbo jet to carry one of its rockets from Cornwall in southwestern England to the Atlantic Ocean where the rocket was released. The rocket was supposed to take nine small satellites for mixed civil and defense use into orbit.

But about two hours after the plane took off, the company reported that the mission encountered a problem.

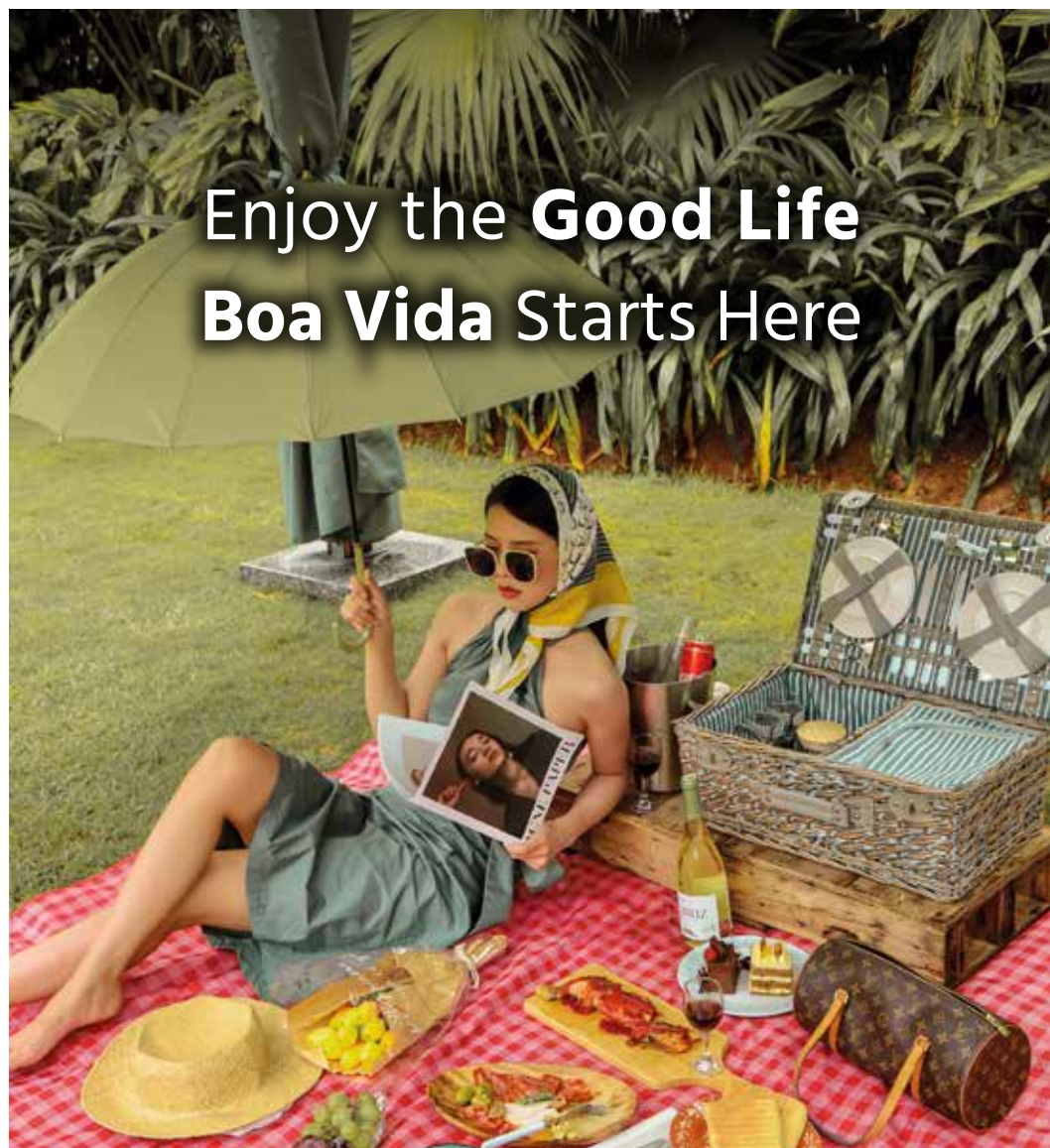
"We appear to have an anomaly that has prevented us from reaching orbit. We are evaluating the information," Virgin Orbit said on Twitter.

Hundreds gathered for the launch cheered earlier as a repurposed Virgin Atlantic Boeing 747 aircraft, named "Cosmic Girl," took off from Cornwall late Monday. Around an hour into the flight, the plane released the rocket at around 35,000 feet over the Atlantic Ocean to the south of Ireland.

The plane, piloted by a Royal Air Force pilot, returned to Cornwall after releasing the rocket. **MDT/AP**



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FOOTBALL

# Bale retires at 33 with five Champions League titles, many Wales memories

STEVE DOUGLAS & RON BLUM

**G**ARETH Bale announced his retirement from soccer yesterday [Macau time] at the age of 33, ending the career of one of Britain's greatest players after winning five Champions League titles and finally getting to play in a World Cup for Wales.

Bale was once the world's most expensive player when he joined Real Madrid for \$132 million in 2013 and, alongside Cristiano Ronaldo, was a devastating forward capable of surging runs and brilliant goals with his powerful left foot.

He was a European champion with Madrid in 2014, '16, '17, '18 and last year, before finishing his club career by helping Los Angeles FC win the Major League Soccer title.

Affected by injuries in recent years, he ended his career saving



the best performances for his country, for whom he played a record 111 matches and scored a record 41 times.

Key to qualifying Wales for its first World Cup in 64 years, Bale scored in the group stage in Qatar — a penalty against the United States — and his last match was a 3-0 loss to England on Nov. 29.

Bale said his decision to retire

from international soccer was "by far the hardest of my career."

"My journey on the international stage is one that has changed not only my life but who I am," Bale said in a statement. "The fortune of being Welsh and being selected to play for and captain Wales, has given me something incomparable to anything else I've experienced.

"I am honored and humbled

to have been able to play a part in the history of this incredible country, to have felt the support and passion of the red wall, and together have been to unexpected and amazing places."

Bale started out as a left back for Southampton, moved to Tottenham in 2007 for a six-year spell, and had another year at Spurs in the 2020-21 season on loan from Madrid.

He scored 53 Premier League goals and 81 in La Liga. He won three Spanish league titles, one Copa del Rey and one English League Cup title.

Only one player — former Real Madrid star Paco Gento — won more European Cup/Champions League titles than Bale.

"I move on with anticipation to the next step in my life," Bale said. "An opportunity for a new adventure."

Madrid called Bale a "legend of our club and world football."

"Gareth Bale has been part of our team in one of the most successful stages in our history and forever represents many of the brightest moments of the last decade," the Spanish club said.

Injuries and a breakdown in his relationship with former Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane led to Bale becoming a peripheral figure in the Spanish capital. He appeared to lack the motivation to play for Madrid but was always ready to go to great lengths to play for his beloved Wales.

While celebrating a win that qualified his country for the 2020 European Championship, Bale held up a Welsh flag with the words "Wales. Golf. Madrid. In That Order" written on it.

He was at his best for Wales when helping the team reach the Euro 2016 semifinals unexpectedly, memorably beating fancied Belgium in the quarterfinals before losing to Portugal. **MDT/AP**

AD

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**OPINION**

**China Daily**  
 Editorial, China Daily

**CRITICISM OF CHANGES TO CHINA'S PANDEMIC POLICIES DOESN'T FLY**

China's implementation of its adjusted protocol for international travel on Sunday has spurred a handful of US politicians and media outlets to misinterpret it in order to smear the country's effective epidemic prevention and control measures.

The sour grapes they are serving will find few customers, as all reasonable minds will acknowledge that China has made great efforts to adjust its policies, including its quarantine policies for arrivals, in light of the changing pandemic situation.

Be it the tightening of the virus control measures three years ago or the latest optimization, China's adjustment of its COVID-19 policies has always been made in light of the actual situation both within and outside the country, and under the guiding principle of scientific prudence.

The US critics of China's policies have also changed their tune in light of the actual situation, calling for the prevention and control measures to be scrapped when they need to be strict, and unyielding now that it is possible to relax them.

They not only turn a jaundiced eye on China's pandemic measures but a blind eye to their own country's ineffectual response to the novel coronavirus. With less than 4 percent of the global population, the US accounts for 20 percent of all the deaths due to COVID-19 worldwide, as well as about the same percentage of global infections.

By calling black white and trying to scapegoat China for the pandemic, these critics are just trying to divert attention from the US' failure to respond to the pandemic effectively. Something these same politicians and media organizations do when it comes to other problems the US faces.

While doing all it can to share key information with the world and providing essential medical supplies and life necessities to other countries, China has taken full advantage of what it has and remained committed to a science-based approach to protect people's lives and health. This has resulted in the world's most populous country having one of the lowest COVID-19 death rates among all major countries.

At the same time, while the US has never ceased creating crises, erecting trade and technology barriers, manufacturing and exporting inflation, and trying to consolidate the new Cold War it has sought to start, China has been doing its best to stabilize the global industry and supply chains, promote cooperation and common development, and provide the world with public goods of various kinds.

Those eager to look for flaws in others should address their own first.

**'NO AMNESTY!': BRAZILIAN PROTESTS DEMAND JAIL FOR RIOTERS**

THE BUZZ

"No amnesty! No amnesty! No amnesty!"

The chant reverberated off the walls of the jam-packed hall at the University of Sao Paulo's law college yesterday [Macau time]. Hours later, it was the rallying cry for thousands of Brazilians who streamed into the streets of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, penned on protest posters and banners.

The words are a demand for retribution against supporters of former President Jair Bolsonaro who stormed Brazil's capital Sunday, and those who enabled the rampage.

"These people need to be punished, the people who ordered it need to be punished, those who gave money for it need to be punished," Betty

Amin, a 61-year-old therapist, said on Sao Paulo's main boulevard. The word "DEMOCRACY" stretched across the back of her shirt. "They don't represent Brazil. We represent Brazil."

Protesters' push for accountability evokes memories of an amnesty law that for decades has protected military members accused of abuse and murder during the country's 1964-85 dictatorship.

A 2014 truth commission report sparked debate over how Brazil has grappled with the regime's legacy.

Full story on [macaudailytimes.com.mo/category/buzz](http://macaudailytimes.com.mo/category/buzz)

**UN SAYS OZONE LAYER SLOWLY HEALING, HOLE TO MEND BY 2066**

SETH BORENSTEIN, DENVER

EARTH'S protective ozone layer is slowly but noticeably healing at a pace that would fully mend the hole over Antarctica in about 43 years, a new United Nations report says.

A once-every-four-years scientific assessment found recovery in progress, more than 35 years after every nation in the world agreed to stop producing chemicals that chomp on the layer of ozone in Earth's atmosphere that shields the planet from harmful radiation linked to skin cancer, cataracts and crop damage.

"In the upper stratosphere and in the ozone hole we see things getting better," said Paul Newman, co-chair of the scientific assessment.

The progress is slow, according to the report presented yesterday [Macau time] at the American Meteorological Society convention in Denver. The global average amount of ozone 18 miles high in the atmosphere won't be back to 1980 pre-thinning levels until about 2040, the report said. And it won't be back to normal in the Arctic until 2045.

Antarctica, where it's so thin there's an annual giant gaping hole in the layer, won't be fully fixed until 2066, the report said.

Scientists and environmental advocates across the world have long hailed the efforts to heal the ozone hole — springing out of a 1987 agreement called the Montreal Protocol that banned a class of chemicals often used in refrigerants and aerosols

— as one of the biggest ecological victories for humanity.

"Ozone action sets a precedent for climate action. Our success in phasing out ozone-eating chemicals shows us what can and must be done — as a matter of urgency — to transition away from fossil fuels, reduce greenhouse gases and so limit temperature increase," World Meteorological Organization Secretary-General Prof. Petteri Taalas said in a statement.

Signs of healing were reported four years ago but were slight and more preliminary. "Those numbers of recovery have solidified a lot," Newman said.

The two chief chemicals that munch away at ozone are in lower levels in the atmosphere, said Newman, chief Earth scientist at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center. Chlorine levels are down 11.5% since they peaked in 1993 and bromine, which is more efficient at eating ozone but is at lower levels in the air, dropped 14.5% since its 1999 peak, the report said.

That bromine and chlorine levels "stopped growing and

coming down is a real testament to the effectiveness of the Montreal Protocol," Newman said.

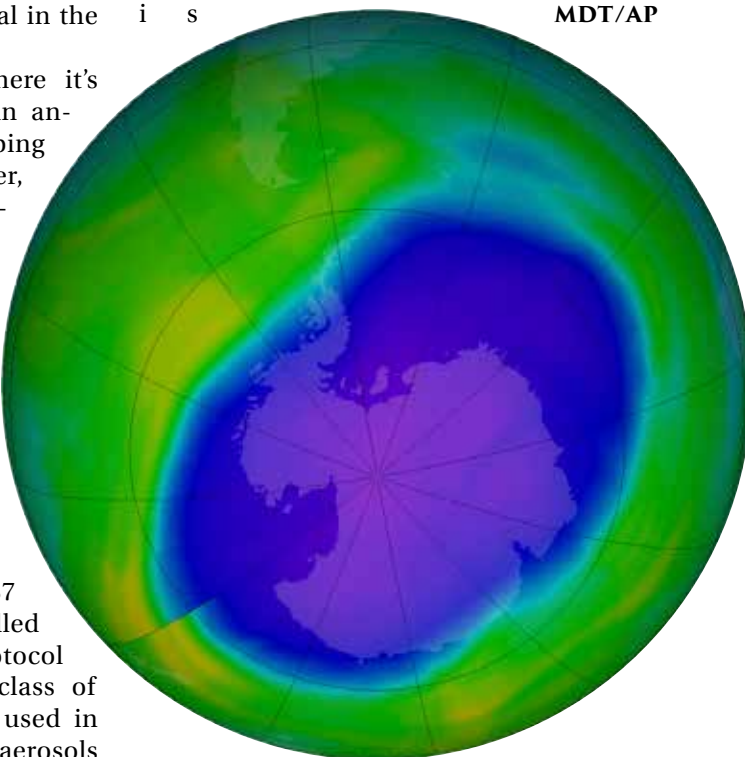
"There has been a sea change in the way our society deals with ozone depleting substances," said scientific panel co-chair David W. Fahey, director of the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's chemical sciences lab.

Decades ago, people could go into a store and buy a can of refrigerants that eat away at the ozone, punch a hole in it and pollute the atmosphere, Fahey said. Now, not only are the substances banned but they are no longer much in people's homes or cars, replaced by cleaner chemicals.

Natural weather patterns in the Antarctic also affect ozone hole levels, which peak in the fall. And the past couple years, the holes have been a bit bigger because of that but the overall trend is one of healing, Newman said.

This is "saving 2 million people every year from skin cancer," United Nations Environment Programme Director Inger Andersen told The Associated Press earlier this year in an email.

MDT/AP



Egypt continues to battle surging inflation amid a dramatic slide of its currency as many Egyptians struggle with price hikes, the country's statistics bureau said yesterday. The state-run Central Agency for Mobilization and Statistics released figures showing that the annual inflation was at 21.9% last month, up from 19.2% in November. That's compared to 6.5% in December 2021, before inflation ballooned in 2022, following the outbreak of Russia's war on Ukraine that rattled the world economy.



Mecca Islam's annual hajj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia will return to pre-pandemic levels this year after restrictions saw the annual religious commemoration curtailed over concerns about the coronavirus, authorities say. The hajj, required of all able-bodied Muslims once in their life, represents one of the world's largest gatherings of people. Before the pandemic, the pilgrimage drew millions each year to Islam's holy city of Mecca, home to the cube-shaped Kaaba that observant Muslims pray toward five times a day.



Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group yesterday condemned the cartoons published recently by the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo that mocked Iran's ruling clerics and urged France to punish the publication. The Iran-backed Hezbollah said the offensive caricatures were an "ugly act by the magazine" that targeted Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, revered as the spiritual leader for tens of millions of pious Shiites throughout the world, including in Lebanon.