

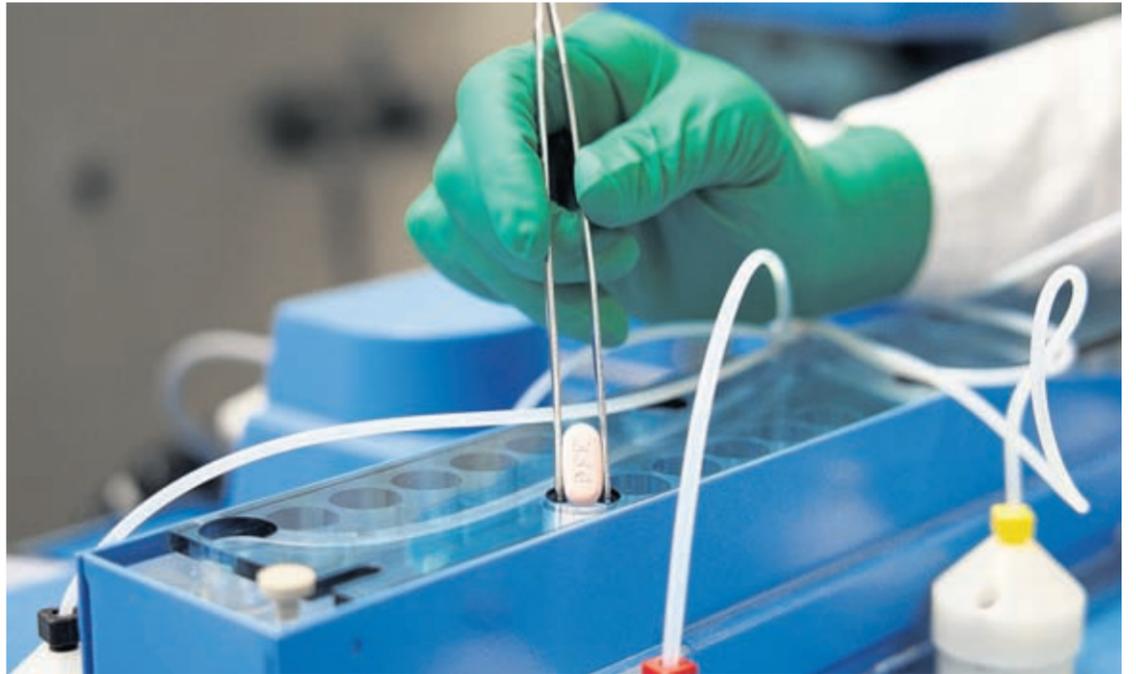


Aruba's ONLY English newspaper

COVID-19 pill rollout stymied by shortages as omicron rages

By MATTHEW PERRONE
AP Health Writer
WASHINGTON (AP) — Two brand-new COVID-19 pills that were supposed to be an important weapon against the pandemic in the U.S. are in short supply and have played little role in the fight against the omicron wave of infections. The problem is that production is not yet at full strength and that the pill considered to be far superior, Pfizer's, takes six to eight months to manufacture. While the supply is expected to improve dramatically in the coming months, doctors are clamoring for the pills now, not just because omicron is causing an explosion of cases but because two antibody drugs that were once the go-to treatments don't work as

well against the variant. "This should be a really joyous time because we now have highly effective antiviral pills," said Erin McCreary, a pharmacist and administrator at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. "Instead, this feels like the hardest and most chaotic stretch of the pandemic." The pills — and other COVID-19 drugs, for that matter — are being carefully rationed, reserved for the highest-risk patients. "January is going to be a terrible month with a million cases a day," said University of North Carolina virologist Dr. Myron Cohen. "Most people will do perfectly well, but we have to select out the people who won't and give them the drugs we have available." The Food and Drug Ad-



Associated Press

ministration authorized the two pills from Pfizer and Merck late last month based on studies showing they cut the risk of severe

disease and death when given shortly after symptoms appear. They are the first COVID-19 treatments patients can take at home,

and thus could reduce the burden on hospitals.

Continued on Page 2



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COVID-19 pill rollout stymied by shortages as omicron rages

Continued from Front

The U.S. didn't make the kind of mass purchases in advance that it did with vaccines.

Because of the time it takes to manufacture Pfizer's pill, Paxlovid, the company says it can supply only about 250,000 courses of the treatment by the end of this month.

The U.S. has ordered enough Paxlovid to treat 20 million people, but the first 10 million orders won't be delivered until June.

White House COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients said this week that the government collaborated with Pfizer to help speed up development of the pill by several months, and that officials continue to work with the company to look for ways to boost production.

Pfizer said it is adding capacity: "We expect to use our strong manufacturing capabilities and our extensive supplier network to continue to improve output rapidly."

Merck's pill, molnupiravir, is easier to manufacture and available in greater quantities.

But final testing showed it was far less effective than Pfizer's pill and carried significant risks, including the potential for birth defects when taken by pregnant women. As a result, it is considered the last-choice option under federal guidelines.

Merck said it has delivered 900,000 courses of the drug and is on track to ship all 3 million ordered by the U.S. by the end of the month. Since last month, the government has sent states enough Pfizer pills to treat 164,000 people, allocating them by population. That approach is coming under fire from some states with heavier caseloads.

The amount allocated to New York — enough to treat about 20,000 people — is just not enough, said Health Commissioner Dr. Mary Bassett.

"We need more of these drugs in order to make them alter the course of the pandemic and reduce hospitalization," she said.

State guidelines generally recommend doctors give priority for the drugs

to those at the highest risk, including cancer patients, transplant recipients and people who have lung disease or are pregnant. New York's guidelines also recommend prioritizing certain racial and ethnic minorities, given their higher rates of severe illness and death. States are distributing the pills differently.

In Michigan, all initial shipments went to 10 pharmacies in the hardest-hit areas. Pennsylvania, Maryland, Texas and many other states have distributed the pills more widely, so that at least one pharmacy in each county carries the drug.

Despite the strict prescribing guidelines, some patients have been able to get the pills through luck and persistence.

Craig Campbell, a website manager from Desert Hot Springs, California, began leaving messages with his doctor immediately after testing positive for COVID-19 and developing a 101-degree fever. Despite having no underlying health conditions, he was soon able to get a prescrip-

tion. The only pharmacy dispensing the drug was more than an hour's drive away, so Campbell had a friend pick it up for him.

"I felt a bit privileged in a way," he said. "The odds that it would land in my plate in the right amount of time were pretty extraordinary."

At the same time, there is a shortage of antibody medications, the infused or injected drugs that can head off death and hospitalization. Only one of them, from GlaxoSmith-Kline, appears effective against omicron, and it, too, is being rationed.

Federal officials are limiting shipments of it to about 50,000 doses per week. This week, the government announced it is buying 600,000 more doses, on top of 400,000 purchased in November.

At the UPMC hospital system in Pennsylvania, the staff can treat fewer than 1,000 patients per week with antibodies, down from as many as 4,000 earlier in the pandemic.

Doctors and nurses around

the U.S. have developed complex means of deciding who should get the scarce medications, based on patients' symptoms, their underlying medical risks, where they live and whether they are healthy enough to travel for an infusion.

"What do we have on hand?" is the first question, said University of Maryland Medical Center's Dr. Greg Schrank. "Among those therapies, what's the most effective and how can we direct it to the people that we know are of greatest risk?"

The increasingly complicated treatment picture comes as exhausted, frustrated hospital workers try to manage rising admissions.

As of Sunday, nearly 128,000 Americans were in the hospital with COVID-19, surpassing the all-time high of around 125,000 last January. While fewer COVID-19 patients now require intensive care, the surge is pushing hospitals to the breaking point.

Considering that threat, Pfizer's pill arrived just in time, Schrank said. □



Associated Press

By **GISELA SOLOMON**
Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — The Pan American Health Organization said Wednesday it expects omicron to become the predominant coronavirus variant in the Ameri-

cas in the coming weeks, where confirmed cases have reached record levels.

The health agency added that although healthcare systems face challenges with rising hospitalizations,

PAHO: Omicron to become dominant variant in Americas shortly

vaccination has meant that COVID-19 deaths have not increased at the same rate as infections.

"While delta is still causing new infections in the Americas, based on current trends, omicron is on track to become the dominant strain in our region," Carissa Etienne, director of the agency known by its initials PAHO, said during an online news conference.

PAHO said coronavirus virus infections across the Americas almost doubled to 6.1

million on Jan. 8, from 3.4 million cases on Jan. 1. The number of cases was 250% higher than a year earlier, when there were 2.4 million. It said that in the first week of 2022, deaths related to COVID-19 in the Americas increased 31% from the previous week.

The omicron variant, which spreads more easily, has been detected in 42 of the 56 countries and territories of the Americas.

The United States is reporting the highest number of

cases, while Canada is also registering a rebound. In the Caribbean, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic have seen the highest increases, while Belize and Panama have seen rises in Central America.

In South America, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and Brazil have all registered rising numbers of cases, with Argentina and Paraguay reporting a 300% increase in coronavirus cases over the past week, according to the health organization. □

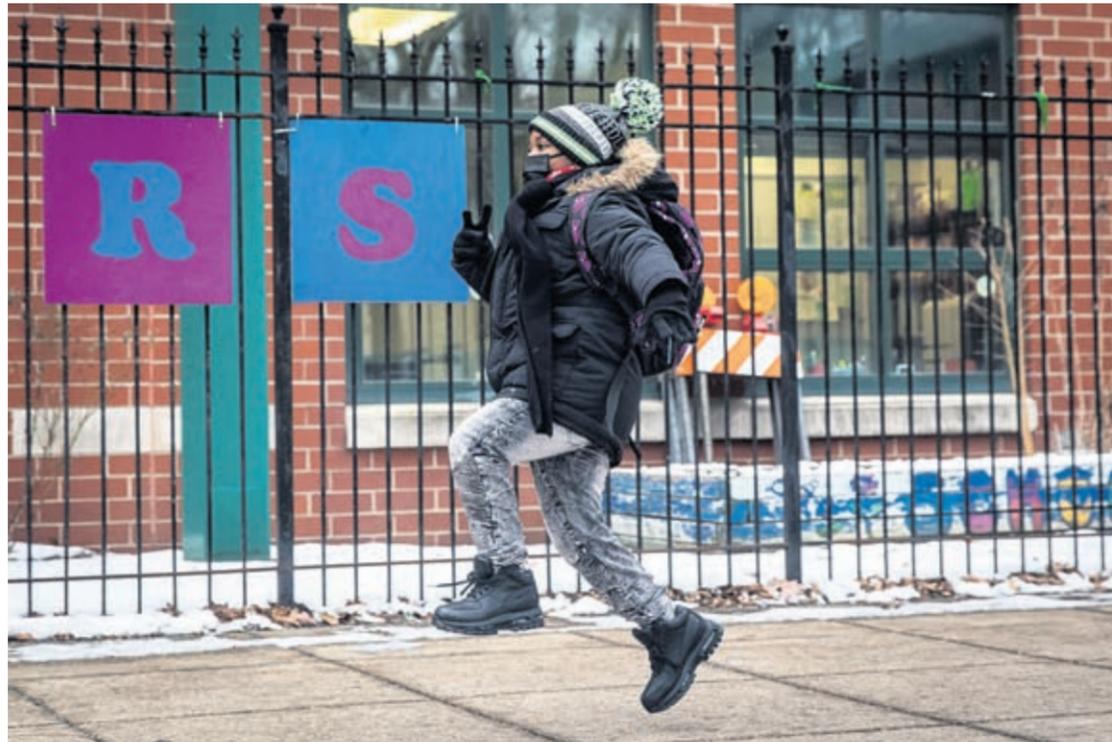
Chicago teachers accept COVID deal, keeping kids in school

By SOPHIA TAREEN and
KATHLEEN FOODY
Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Students in the nation's third-largest school district returned to classrooms Wednesday after Chicago Public Schools canceled five days of classes amid a standoff with the teachers' union over COVID-19 safety protocols.

Their return happened the same day the full membership of the Chicago Teachers Union narrowly gave their stamp of approval to the hard-fought safety plan that includes expanded testing and metrics to shut down individual schools during outbreaks. It passed with roughly 56% of the vote. Leaders of the union gave their tentative approval two days earlier allowing students to return. They urged members to accept it, acknowledging that teachers didn't get initial demands including a commitment to flip to remote learning districtwide during a surge of COVID-19 infections.

"This vote is a clear show of dissatisfaction with the boss," Union President Jesse Sharkey said in a statement, referring to Mayor Lori Lightfoot. "This agreement covers only a portion of the safety guarantees that every one of our school communities deserve ... Our members' vote today represents a union's, and a city's, frustration with



Associated Press

a mayor that has simmered since the beginning of this pandemic.

Lightfoot and Schools CEO Pedro Martinez issued a joint statement saying they were pleased with the vote and the agreement would guarantee "predictability and stability for the rest of the school year" in the roughly 350,000-student district.

"We all agree we must prioritize the health and well-being of everyone in our school communities including our kids, families, and staff," they said.

Chicago's struggles to keep educating children during the omicron variant's surge are similar to those faced by districts across the coun-

try, but the latest high-profile fight between teachers and Lightfoot, a Democrat, forced attention from the White House and governor's office.

The union, which voted last week to revert to online instruction, told teachers not to show up to schools starting Jan. 5 while talks took place. Lightfoot has referred to the union action as an "illegal work stoppage." Both sides filed complaints with a state labor board.

Lightfoot — who disclosed Tuesday that she had tested positive for COVID-19 and was isolating at home — repeatedly refused to agree to remote learning districtwide. She also op-

posed teachers' demands for a testing program that could randomly test all students unless their parents opted out.

For parents and students in Chicago, the return to schools brought mixed emotions, along with staffing and attendance issues due to infections.

Trinity Washington, a freshman at a high school on the city's Northwest Side, said she supported the teacher's push and plans to be more cautious about keeping a mask on at school. She noted that a school dean has contracted COVID-19 and is on a ventilator.

"I feel like everyone should just go home and stay vir-

tual because it feels like everyone in our building is just getting sick and sick and sick," she said.

Some schools reported being short-staffed and lower attendance with students out sick or in required isolation following close contact to a person with COVID-19. District officials said about 89% of teachers reported to schools. The district's online COVID-19 infection tracker showed more than 13,000 students and adults were in quarantine on Wednesday. Some individual classes reverted to remote instruction following infections in the two-day window students returned before the union standoff. One school in the city's heavily-Mexican neighborhood of Little Village was particularly hard hit with "up to 10 classrooms" flipping to remote learning Wednesday, according to the district.

Derrontae Gonzalez, the mother of a 5-year-old boy and a 12-year-old girl in Chicago schools, said she understands why teachers pushed for stricter COVID-19 protocols. But she told The Chicago Sun-Times that the days of cancelled classes were difficult, particularly for her son who has a learning disability.

"I'm not concerned," Gonzalez said of the return. "I think the school takes precautions to make sure kids are safe. And I make sure my kids have masks." □

Manatee feeding experiment starts slowly as cold looms

By CURT ANDERSON
Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — An unprecedented, experimental attempt to feed manatees facing starvation in Florida has started slowly but wildlife officials expressed optimism Thursday that it will work as cold weather drives the marine mammals toward warmer waters.

A feeding station established along the state's east coast has yet to entice wild manatees with romaine lettuce even though the

animals will eat it in captivity, officials said on a news conference held remotely. Water pollution from agricultural, urban and other sources has triggered algae blooms that have decimated seagrass beds on which manatees depend, leading to a record 1,101 manatee deaths largely from starvation in 2021. The typical five-year average is about 625 deaths.

That brought about the lettuce feeding program, part of a joint manatee death response group led by the

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It remains a violation of state and federal law for people to feed manatees on their own.

"We have not documented animals foraging on the lettuce," said Ron Mezich, chief of the joint effort's provisioning branch.

"We know manatees will eat lettuce." During winter months, hundreds of manatees tend to congregate in warmer waters from natural springs



Associated Press

and power plant discharges. Because this winter has been unusually mild in Florida so far, the animals have been more dispersed. "They're moving, but they

are not being pressed by cold temperatures yet," said Tom Reinert, south regional director for the FWC. "We expect that to happen." □

Probe finds 'unintentional mistakes' in Petito police stop

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — An investigation has found that Utah police made "several unintentional mistakes" when they stopped Gabby Petito and her boyfriend before she was killed in what became a high-profile missing person case. The independent report released Wednesday examines a stop by police in the tourist town of Moab on Aug. 12. Officers investigated a fight between Petito and her boyfriend Brian Laundrie but ultimately determined Petito was the aggressor. They allowed the couple to leave after requiring them to spend a night apart.

Police body camera video of a visibly upset Petito, 22, was widely viewed as the investigation unfolded and raised questions about whether a more robust police response could have prevented her death.

"Would Gabby be alive today if this case was handled differently? That is an impossible question to answer despite it being the answer many people want to know.

Nobody knows and nobody will ever know the answer to that question," wrote Capt. Brandon Ratcliffe, from the police department in Price, Utah, who prepared the report. The officers stopped the couple during a cross-country trip, after their van was seen speeding and hit a curb near the entrance



Associated Press

to Arches National Park. Laundrie, 23, said on the video the couple got into a minor scuffle that began when he climbed into the van with dirty feet.

Petito faulted her own desire to keep the converted camper van clean, and Laundrie declined to press charges.

She was reported missing a month after the traffic stop, and her strangled body was discovered Sept. 19 on the edge of Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming.

Laundrie was the only person ever identified by law enforcement officials as a person of interest in the case. He was found dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound in a swamp after returning alone to his parents' home in Florida. Both were originally from Long Island, New York.

Utah law says police should cite an aggressor in domestic violence assaults. In this case, the officers determined Petito had been the aggressor but didn't cite

anyone, finding the incident was more of a mental or emotional health break. One officer who argued against citing her said Laundrie might bail her out of jail and then have "more control over her."

That officer told investigators that if he had known she was in life-threatening danger he would have taken his own time to follow them. "I would have done anything to stop it if I would have known that was coming ... I am devastated about it."

The City of Moab praised the officers, saying they "showed kindness, respect and empathy in their handling of this incident."

The 102-page report, meanwhile, faulted the officers for not issuing a citation and not talking to a 911 caller who had reportedly seen the fight differently — the couple outside their van and a man slapping a girl.

Still, it found that the officers did what they thought was right at the time, and responsibility for Petito's death lays with her killer alone.

The report recommended improved training, especially in domestic violence investigation, and that the officers involved be put on probation or have existing probation extended.

Ratcliffe wrote that while it may have been true that Petito was the aggressor in the specific fight Moab police investigated, that wasn't necessarily the tenor of their relationship.

"There have been many times in my career where someone who we know from past experience to be a long-term victim of domestic violence, gets arrested for committing an act of domestic violence against their long-term abuser," Ratcliffe wrote. "It's very likely Gabby was a long-term victim of domestic violence, whether that be physically, mentally, and/or emotionally." □

U.S. jobless claims rise by 23,000 to 230,000

By **PAUL WISEMAN**
AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits rose last week to the highest level since mid-November, but still low by historic standards.

U.S. jobless claims climbed by 23,000 last week to 230,000, the Department of Labor said Thursday. The four-week moving average, which smooths out week-to-week blips, rose nearly 6,300 to almost 211,000.

The weekly applications, a proxy for layoffs, have risen in four of the last five weeks, a period that runs in tandem with the spread

of the omicron variant. Yet the jobs market has bounced back strongly from last year's coronavirus recession. Jobless claims had fallen mostly steadily for about a year and they dipped below the pre-pandemic average of around 220,000 a week.

"The rise in claims likely reflects an increase in layoffs due to the surge in COVID cases," said economists Nancy Vanden Houten and Kathy Bostjancic of Oxford Economics. "Claims may remain elevated in the near term, but we expect initial claims will gravitate back to the 200k level once the omicron wave passes. Encouragingly, there are indications that cases from the

omicron variant are peaking." Altogether, 1.6 million people were collecting jobless aid the week that ended Jan. 1.

Companies are holding onto workers at a time when it's difficult to find replacements. Employers posted 10.6 million job openings in November, the fifth-highest monthly total in records going back to 2000. A record 4.5 million workers quit their jobs in November — a sign that they are confident enough to look something better.

The job market has bounced back from last year's brief but intense coronavirus recession. When COVID-19 hit, governments ordered lockdowns, consumers hunkered

down at home and many businesses closed or cut back hours. Employers slashed millions of jobs in March and April 2020, and the unemployment rate rocketed to 14.7%.

But massive government spending — and eventually the rollout of vaccines — brought the economy back. Last year, employers added a record 6.4 million jobs — but that still was not enough to make up for the unprecedented 9.4 million jobs lost in 2020. And hiring slowed in November and December last year as employers struggled to fill job openings.

Still, the unemployment rate fell last month to a pandemic low 3.9%. □

Frustration grows as Dutch Cabinet mulls future of lockdown

By MIKE CORDER

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) —

The new Dutch government met Thursday to discuss whether to extend or ease its coronavirus lockdown amid growing anger among owners of businesses that have been shuttered for weeks.

The Netherlands has been in a strict lockdown since mid-December, with measures including all non-essential stores, bars, restaurants, cinemas, theaters and museums closing their doors, while European neighbors such as Germany and Belgium have imposed far fewer restrictions. That has led to frustration particularly in towns and cities close to the borders that are seeing people shuttling across borders to shop or dine out. The lockdown is in place until at least the end of Friday. Prime Minister Mark Rutte and new Health Minister Ernst Kuipers will hold a press conference Friday evening to announce the future of the measures. Dutch media, citing unnamed sources in The Hague, reported that the government plans to ease the lockdown by allowing non-essential stores to resume business with people



Associated Press

who make appointments, permitting businesses like hairdressers and gyms to reopen and letting university and other higher education students return to classes. Elementary and high schools re-opened earlier this week. The government did not comment. Some businesses are planning to open their doors on Saturday regardless of whether lockdown measures remain in force. Shop owners in the Wyck neighborhood of the southern city of Maastricht, near

the borders with Germany and Belgium, posted messages on social media to say they would open from noon until 5 p.m. on Saturday, and stores in other towns made similar plans. In Dordrecht, near Rotterdam, business owners made their views clear by renaming shopping streets Antwerp—a reference to a Belgian city that has drawn thousands of Dutch visitors during the lockdown. The city's mayor, Wouter Kolff, tweeted that he had "a lot of understanding and

appreciation for this playful action by our Dordrecht entrepreneurs." Despite the Dutch lockdown, which was imposed until at least midnight Friday, an omicron-fueled surge in infections has seen record numbers of new cases in recent weeks, although hospital and intensive care unit admissions have fallen. When the lockdown was announced on Dec. 18, the head of the Dutch public health institute, Jaap van Dissel, described it as a preventative

measure that would "buy time" for more people to get booster vaccines and for the nation's health care system to prepare for a possible new surge in infections. The booster drive was slow to get started in the Netherlands, but has gathered pace in recent weeks. Just over 86% of adults are fully vaccinated and 45% have had a booster shot. Many businesses are now calling for a relaxation of measures despite omicron spreading even more easily than previous coronavirus strains. Early studies show omicron is less likely to cause severe illness than the previous delta variant, and vaccination and a booster still offer strong protection from serious illness, hospitalization and death. Two prominent organizations representing Dutch businesses this week added their influential voices to calls for an easing. "Policy should be fully focused on reopening the economy from Jan. 15," the employers and small business organizations said in a joint statement. "The lockdown is no longer feasible for entrepreneurs or for society as a whole and all other countries in Europe are also largely open." □

French teachers go on strike over handling of pandemic

By SYLVIE CORBET

The Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French teachers voiced anger at the way the French government is handling the pandemic in schools, denounced confusing rules and called for more protection during a nationwide strike on Thursday.

Exhausted by the pressures of surging COVID-19 cases, many teachers answered the call by 11 unions to protest virus-linked class disruptions and ever-changing isolation rules.

France is at the epicenter of Europe's current fight against COVID-19, with new infections topping 360,000 a day this week, driven by the highly conta-

gious omicron variant. Health Minister Olivier Veran announced on Twitter Thursday that he tested positive for the virus and was self-isolating in order to continue working. The teachers' strike puts the government of President Emmanuel Macron under additional pressure a week after opposition lawmakers delayed implementation of a key measure that mandates proof of vaccination for entry into restaurants, cultural and sport facilities. Teachers want clarifications on rules and more protections, such as extra masks and tests to help relieve the strain. Among those at a demonstration in Paris' city center

was English teacher and SE-UNA union member Lilia Larbi who said that people are "fed up" with the situation at school. "The strike is not against the virus, it's against bad communication, changing rules... and the bad handling of the sanitary crisis," she said, adding that the government "is denying reality." Larbi said she taught to only three children in her class on Wednesday because colleagues either tested positive for COVID-19 or were waiting for test results. "We feel like we're babysitting" rather than teaching, she said. Paris teacher Frédéric Le Bihan expressed "exaspera-



Associated Press

tion" at the confusing "orders and counterorders." Within a span of a week, authorities changed the rules on testing schoolchildren twice. Le Bihan said teachers are under additional pressure from parents who expected them to implement gov-

ernment directives "which is not possible." Fatna Seghrouchni, a teacher in the Paris region and member of the Federation Sud Education union, said teachers are being asked "to do things without having the means to do them." □

Russia won't rule out military deployment to Cuba, Venezuela

By **VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV**
and **EMILY SCHULTHEIS**

Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia on Thursday sharply raised the stakes in its dispute with the West over Ukraine, with a top diplomat refusing to rule out a Russian military deployment to Cuba and Venezuela if tensions with the United States mount.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, who led the Russian delegation in Monday's talks with the U.S. in Geneva, said he could "neither confirm nor exclude" the possibility of Russia sending military assets to Cuba and Venezuela if the talks fail and U.S. pressure on Russia mounts.

The Russia-U.S. negotiations in Geneva and a subsequent NATO-Russia meeting failed to narrow the gap on Moscow's security demands amid a buildup of Russian troops near Ukraine. While Moscow demanded a halt to NATO expansion, Washington and its allies firmly rejected that as a nonstarter.

Speaking in an interview with Russian RTVI TV, Ryabkov noted that "it all depends on the action by our U.S. counterparts," pointing to Russian President Vladimir Putin's warning that Moscow could take military-technical measures if the U.S. provokes the Krem-



Associated Press

lin and turns up military pressure on it.

While voicing concern that NATO could potentially use Ukrainian territory for the deployment of missiles capable of reaching Moscow in just five minutes, Putin has noted that Russian warships armed with the latest Zircon hypersonic cruise missile would give Russia a similar capability if deployed in neutral waters.

Zircon, which Putin said flies at nine times the speed of sound to a range of more than 1,000 kilometers (620

miles), is hard to intercept and could be fitted with conventional or nuclear warheads. It's set to be commissioned by the Russian navy later this year and installed aboard its frigates and submarines.

Ryabkov's statement followed his comments last month comparing the current tensions over Ukraine with the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis when the Soviet Union deployed missiles to Cuba and the U.S. imposed a naval blockade of the island. That crisis ended

after U.S. President John F. Kennedy and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev agreed Moscow would withdraw its missiles in exchange for Washington's pledge not to invade Cuba and the removal of U.S. missiles from Turkey. Soon after his first election in 2000, Putin ordered the closure of a Soviet-built military surveillance facility in Cuba as he sought to improve ties with Washington. Moscow has intensified contacts with Cuba in recent years as tensions with the U.S. and its

allies mounted. In December 2018, Russia briefly dispatched a pair of its nuclear-capable Tu-160 bombers to Venezuela in a show of support for Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro amid Western pressure.

Ryabkov said a refusal by the U.S. and its allies to consider the key Russian demand for guarantees against the alliance's expansion to Ukraine and other ex-Soviet nations makes it hard to discuss such issues as arms control and confidence-building steps that Washington says it's ready to negotiate.

"The U.S. wants to conduct a dialogue on some elements of the security situation ... to ease the tensions and then continue the process of geopolitical and military development of the new territories, coming closer to Moscow," he said. "We have nowhere to retreat." Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov also described this week's talks as "unsuccessful" even though he noted "some positive elements and nuances." "The talks were initiated to receive specific answers to concrete principal issues that were raised, and disagreements remained on those principal issues, which is bad," he said in a conference call with reporters. □

UK government cuts COVID isolation period to 5 days, from 7



Associated Press

By **SYLVIA HUI**

Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British officials said Thursday the self-isolation period for people in England who test positive for COVID-19 will be

reduced from next week to five full days, instead of seven.

Health Secretary Sajid Javid also said that early signs indicate that the rate of hospitalization from the

coronavirus in the country is starting to slow.

Javid told Parliament that official data suggested two-thirds of people are no longer infectious by the end of the fifth day after they test positive. He said that starting Monday, those infected can leave isolation from the start of day 6, after taking two negative tests.

Currently, those infected can be released from self-isolation after seven days if they test negative on both days six and seven.

Javid urged people to continue to self-test for the virus, so that "we can restore the freedoms to this coun-

try while we're keeping everyone safe."

The U.K. saw record numbers of daily confirmed infections over Christmas and New Year, topping 200,000 cases on some days, as the more transmissible omicron variant spread rapidly. Industries from retail to education, and infrastructure like public transport and postal services, have been severely disrupted because scores of workers had to isolate and could not go to work. Javid told lawmakers that although hospitals will "remain under significant pressure" over the coming weeks -- with almost 17,000 COVID-19 patients in hos-

pitals in England -- the current wave of the pandemic has not seen an increase in intensive care patients.

Official data showed "encouraging signs" that cases were falling in London and eastern England, he added, but infections were rising elsewhere in the country. Javid stressed that vaccines, testing and antiviral treatments continue to be the best way to "protect our health and our freedoms as we learn to live with COVID."

The U.K. has entered the third year of coping with the pandemic "but this virus is not going away," he added. □

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Dutch king won't use carriage criticized for colonial image

By MIKE CORDER
Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — The Dutch king ruled out Thursday using, for now at least, the royal family's "Golden Carriage," one side of which bears a painting that critics say glorifies the Netherlands' colonial past, including its role in the global slave trade. The announcement was an acknowledgement of the heated debate about the carriage as the Netherlands reckons with the grim sides of its history as a 17th-century colonial superpower, including Dutch merchants making vast fortunes from slaves. "The Golden Carriage will only be able to drive again when the Netherlands is ready and that is not the case now," King Willem-Alexander said in a video



Associated Press

message. One side of the vehicle is decorated with a painting called "Tribute from the Colonies" that shows Black and Asian people, one of them kneeling, offering

goods to a seated young white woman who symbolizes the Netherlands. The carriage is currently on display in an Amsterdam museum following a lengthy restoration. In

the past it has been used to carry Dutch monarchs through the streets of The Hague to the state opening of Parliament each September. "There is no point in condemning and disqualifying what has happened through the lens of our time," the king said. "Simply banning historical objects and symbols is certainly not a solution either. Instead, a concerted effort is needed that goes deeper and takes longer. An effort that unites us instead of divides us." Anti-racism activist and co-founder of The Black Archives in Amsterdam, Mitchell Esajas, called the king's statement "a good sign," but also the "bare

minimum" the monarch could have said. "He says the past should not be looked at from the perspective and values of the present ... and I think that's a fallacy because also in the historical context slavery can be seen as a crime against humanity and a violent system," he said. "I think that argument is often used as an excuse to kind of polish away the violent history of it." The Netherlands, along with many other nations, has been revisiting its colonial history in a process spurred by the Black Lives Matter movement that swept the world after the death of Black man George Floyd in the United States. □

Majority of COVID patients in German ICUs not vaccinated

BERLIN (AP) — Most COVID-19 patients in intensive care in German hospitals aren't vaccinated, data published on Thursday indicates. The data from Germany's intensive care association DIVI showed that 62% of

ICU patients whose vaccine status was known had received no protective shots against the coronavirus. Unvaccinated people make up about a quarter of the German population. Almost 10% were only partially vaccinated while 28%

of ICU patients were fully inoculated, it said. About 72.3% of the German population has received at least two jabs, while 45.1% have also had a booster shot. Germany's independent vaccine advisory panel on Thursday endorsed booster shots for children and adolescents aged 12 to 17. The expert committee said children in that age range should receive the mRNA shot made by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech at least three months after their last vaccination. Germany has seen a steady rise in cases in recent weeks as the Omicron variant has started spreading throughout the country. □



Associated Press

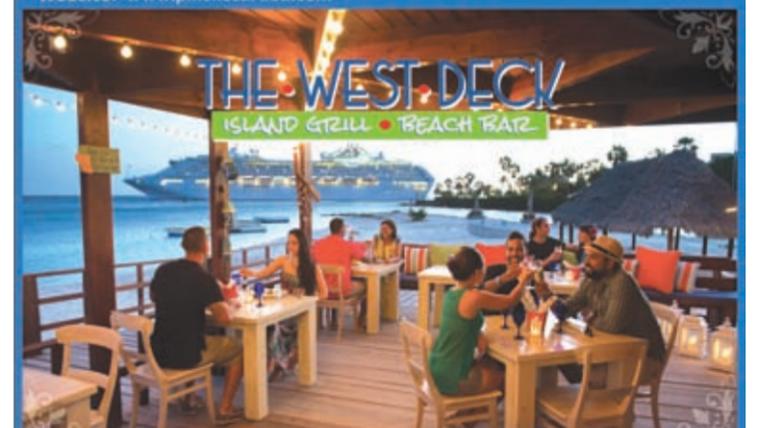
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Travellers' Choice 2020

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Travellers' Choice 2020

Hunter choose Aruba to celebrate his Bar Mitzvah

PALM BEACH — On December 27, 2021, Hunter Scott Javeline celebrated his Bar Mitzvah in Aruba. When a Jewish boy turns 13, he has all the rights and obligations of a Jewish adult as he becomes a full member of the Jewish community. To celebrate this special occasion, Hunter chose our lovely island, Aruba, to mark this special day in his life.

Hunter was Bar Mitzvahed in Beth Israel Synagogue in Oranjestad under the spiritual leadership of Rabbi Kripper. Hunter received his formal Judaic training at South Huntington Jewish Center in Melville, New



York. Hunter has been coming to Aruba since he was 10 months old. His mother, Beth has been coming to Aruba since she was a little girl. She and her husband, Barry have a Time Share at

Playa Linda Beach Resort. Hunter's grandpa, Shelly, has been coming to Aruba for over 40 years. Other family members have Time Shares in Aruba. For Hunter, Aruba is his "second home". They remem-

ber well, when there were only 4 hotels on the main road – The Concord, Carib Hilton, Americana and Holiday Inn. They remember well when there were only 30 taxi cabs available, island wide, to transport them from the airport to their hotel. Now, there are over 564 taxi cabs. Hunter loves the weather here. He loves the water and the restaurants. Since he has been coming here for so many years, he has become friends with so many people – many who visit and many who live and work here. The people here have become his "second family". Staff at Playa Linda



know him well. It comes as no surprise that Hunter chose to be here on his special day. Hopefully, Hunter and his future spouse will celebrate another special occasion – his wedding – in Aruba where he has so many fond memories. □



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Charles Maclean honored as Emerald Ambassador

PALM BEACH — Recently, the Aruba Tourism Authority (ATA) representative, Marouska Heyliger had the great pleasure in honoring many loyal Aruba visitors with their distinctive certificates. These certificates are a way to say "Masha Danki" for continuously choosing Aruba as a favorite vacation destination. The titles are as following: 10+ years "Distinguished Visitor", 20+ years "Goodwill Ambassador" and 35+ years "Emerald Ambassador".

Charles Maclean from Massachusetts received the honorary title of Emerald Ambassador.

Maclean has been coming to Aruba for over 37 years. Throughout the years, Playa Linda Beach Resorts has been what he calls 'his second home'. Together with his wife Cynthia Maclean, who happened to be Mrs. Massachusetts International 2022 and son, they enjoy every minute spend on their beloved island. The honoree stated that he loves coming to the island for its beautiful weather, friendly people and the beaches.

On the pictures are the honoree with his family, together with Yvette, representative of Playa Linda Beach Resort and Marouska of ATA. □

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Finance Minister shares details of national budget 2022

ORANJESTAD – During the weekly press conference held, the Minister of Finance Xiomara Maduro gave information about the National Budget 2022.

The Minister shared the numbers that stand out for the year 2022, the changes that stand out compared to the 2021 budget, the financial needs for 2022, and the advice of the CAFT on the budget 2022 draft, including the government opinion.

Most notable changes

Minister Maduro shared the numbers that stood out within the budget and changes compared to the 2021 budget. Personnel costs for 2022 have increased by 8 million to provide the 50% reduction of 12,6%. Service and Products increased by 26 million and are related to the introduction of the Family Justice Center, Bureau Cannabis, the Innovation Directorate, and to cover costs of the PPP projects that increase each year. The interest costs have increased by 8 million to cover 1014 million owed to the Netherlands and local lenders. Subsidies have increased by 10 million to help pay for the 50% of the 12,6% reduction. Direct taxes are forecasted to generate 64 million extra due to the 50% payment of the 12,6% reduction and the stop of financial support. Indirect taxes are estimated to increase by 42 million due to the improved economy. Investments increased by 16 million to help cover the required provisional solutions

for the RWZI plant. Revenues are estimated to increase by 162 million based on an improved economy and the termination of financial support. Expenses will see a 120 million drop due to the elimination of the financial support.

The government needs 1305 million

According to the Minister, the total financial needs for 2021 were 1651 million florins, of which 1360 million to cover debt services and 291 million to cover the deficit. The debts services consist of 346 million foreign debts, and 904 million is payable to the Netherlands for their loan to cover the costs of the Covid pandemic. The 110 million is to be paid to local lenders. To help cover some of these debts, the Netherlands provided another loan of 523.1 million in September 2021. It covered 177,1 million foreign debts in 2021 and 346 million in 2022. As regards the Covid19 loan received from the Netherlands, the Government of Aruba is already negotiating with the Dutch authorities to refinance it as it will mature in March 2022. The local debt of 110 million will be financed by the local market as agreed with the Netherlands. The government must cover the 291 million deficit with liquidity support from the Netherlands or through loans from the local financial market. To implement Budget 2022, the Government of Aruba needs 1305 million florins.

Advise CAFT and the government reaction

The CAFT requests to reduce the service and

products expenses to the 2020 level. According to the Minister, this is technically impossible since 2020 was not a regular operational year. The CAFT wants to eliminate the 50% cut of the 12,6%. The government is awaiting the Council of Ministers of the Kingdom of the Netherlands' decision before making any changes. The CAFT requested to stop the salary subsidies controls before April 1, 2022, and to include this amount in the Budget of 2022. The government complied with the CAFT on this point. The CAFT also requested the to provide a financial overview of the fiscal changes in the Landspakket. According to the Minister, they anticipate 160 million for 2023, but since the law is not complete yet, they can not give a detailed overview for now. However, they can include in the budget through a note of amendment.

The CAFT also wants the government to eliminate the 2% reduction of the payroll tax introduced in January 2021. The government considered this in their fiscal changes in point C in the Landspakket. They can make the necessary changes through the note of amendment. CAFT also wants the government to explain the investment of 16 million in the RWZI. The government explained that this was a provisional solution since it does not have the 60 million to build a new facility. In other words, the government rejected advice 1 and 2. Advice 3 and 6 were changed before sending the budget draft to the Advisory Council, and advice 4 and 5 will be carried out through a note of amendment. □

DOW completes maintenance work at three beaches

ORANJESTAD – Approximately two months ago (November 9, 2021), the Department of Public Works (DOW) started the Beach sand project,



which comprised beach replenishment.

The DOW added sand to three well-known beaches, namely Arashi, Boca Catalina y Eagle Beach to combat erosion. DOW started with the project on November 9, 2021, at Arashi, followed by Boca Catalina and Eagle Beach. They transported approximately 635 yards of white sand to Arashi, 160 to Boca Catalina, and 2400 to Eagle Beach. The beaches were replenished because there were many stones where white sand used to be. Therefore there was less space on the beach. This maintenance work is not done every month but at beaches where erosion occurs. With white sand transported from other areas, the beaches are now more accessible for beachgoers to enjoy. The



ministry in charge of Infrastructure reminds everyone to take care of Aruba beaches that are part of our cultural heritage. □



ORANJESTAD — Aruba's rich, multicultural past is reflected in our cuisine, architecture, artwork, traditions, and warm, friendly people. What began as a fishing outpost for Amerindians has changed hands between the Spanish and Dutch throughout the centuries, and is now a diverse constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

First Inhabitants

The first known inhabitants of the island of Aruba were the Caiquetio Indians of the Arawak tribe from Venezuela. During the Pre-Ceramic period, 2500 BC - 1000 AD, this seminomadic tribe fished, hunted, and gathered food, depending mostly on the sea for survival. They created tools out of roughly flaked stones and shells, and lived in small family groups in the coastal

areas known today as Malmok and Palm Beach. In the beginning of the Ceramic period, 1000 - 1515 AD, these Indians established five large villages and started producing corn and yucca. Scaled-down versions of two of these Amerindian villages, as well as a representation of an Amerindian dwelling, can be seen at the Archaeological Museum of Aruba. The museum also houses the remains of ceramic urns, coarse pottery, and jewelry made by the Caquetios, with some of the artifact fragments dating back to 1000 AD. Rock drawings and carvings created by the Caquetios have withstood the test of time, and you can see them for yourself at Fontein Cave in Arikok National Park and at the Ayo Rock Formation. These paintings suggest that the Caquetio

A peek into Aruba's past and how it has shaped the unique island we know today

Indians may have come to the island after fleeing attacks from the Carib Indians, who are indigenous to the northern part of South America. The Caquetio Indians were still on the island when it was discovered by Spanish explorers.

The Spanish

In 1499, Spanish explorer Alonso de Ojeda discovered Aruba, kicking off the colonization of the island by the Spanish. Due to the relatively low rainfall on the island, the colonizers did not believe that Aruba was a good place for plantations or crop growing. In 1513, the Spaniards enslaved many of the Caquetio Indians and sent them to Hispaniola to work on plantations and in mines. Some Indians returned to Aruba in 1515 and were recruited as laborers for cattle and horse breeding operations. Approximately nine years after Alonso de Ojeda landed on Aruba, the Spanish Crown appointed him as the first governor of the island. Aruba stayed under Spanish control for 137 years.



1845.

The Dutch

Because of Aruba's strategic location, the Dutch occupied the island in 1636 in order to protect their salt supply from the South American mainland while also ensuring a naval base in the Caribbean during their Eighty Years' War with Spain. The Dutch recruited the Caquetio people to build farms and raise cattle for meat that would be sold and shipped to other islands. During the Napoleonic Wars, the British invaded and took control of Aruba, but the Netherlands took it back in 1816. Aruba officially became part of the Netherlands Antilles in

Status Aparte

Aruba seceded from the Netherlands Antilles in 1986, a victory much fought for by political activist and local hero Betico Croes. In this process of "Status Aparte," Aruba obtained a separate status as an autonomous country in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Initially, the plan for Aruba was to become fully independent. However, in 1990, Aruba decided to indefinitely postpone this plan, and in 1995, the petition for full independence was completely repealed. □

Source: aruba.com

More than \$100,000 in Cash Prizes! The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba has ended its amazing campaign Mega Win \$100,000 Cash Giveaway 2021

PALM BEACH — The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba ended its amazing campaign for 2021: Mega Win \$100,000 Cash Giveaway on December 31st, 2021, where they raffled \$100,000 in cash prizes amongst their visitors. It was a very successful campaign and the winners were extremely excited to welcome the New Year 2022 with amazing cash prizes.



This campaign started in October 2021 where all members of The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba could participate in this campaign. A total of 20 finalists were selected through the raffle tickets in the raffle box and also through the Top Player Points Race promotion. The amount of \$100,000 in cash prizes was divided as follows:

- 1 x \$25,000 cash

- 2 x \$15,000 cash
- 2 x \$10,000 cash
- 2 x \$7,500 cash
- 1 x \$5,000 cash
- 2 x \$2,500 cash
- 10 x slot credit prizes of a total of \$7,500

The lucky winner of the first prize was a local member and most of the cash prizes were won by local members as well. The Casino

at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba is very pleased to see the enthusiasm of all its loyal members and sends congratulations to all the lucky winners.

Additionally, The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba offers a thoughtfully-tiered player reward program called 'Elevate', featuring exclusive benefits and events for members. Members can earn

points for both slot machines and table games and receive cash redemption from slot machine points, while accumulated table comps can be redeemed towards enjoying the hotel's celebrated amenities, including complimentary rooms nights, dining, and spa. The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba is known as the island's luxury casino where guests enjoy exceptional personalized service, a great selection of table games and state-of-the-art slot machines for a casino experience like no other.

For more information about the Elevate Tier Program and other promotions, visit us at The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba VIP Desk or call us at 527-2276/ 527-2277 and we will be delighted to assist you. □

How Europe is trying to deal with its gas crisis

By DAVID McHUGH

AP Business Writer

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP)

— Europe's natural gas crisis isn't letting up. Reserves are low. Prices are high. Utility customers are facing expensive bills. Major Russian supplier Gazprom isn't selling gas like it used to.

It all raises the question: How exactly is Europe, which imports most of its energy, going to make it through the winter without a gas disaster, especially if the season turns out to be colder or longer than usual?

Here's how the European Union, home to 447 million people, will try to deal with the crisis:

THE PROBLEM IS LOW STORAGE LEVELS: Utilities turn to gas stored in underground caverns to handle sudden additional demand for gas for heating or electricity. Europe started 2021 with gas storage only 56% full, compared with 73% a year earlier. The reasons vary: cold weather last winter, lack of Russian deliveries on the spot market and robust demand in Asia for liq-

uid natural gas that comes by ship. Europe's association of pipeline operators says cold weather would mean needing to import 5% to 10% more gas than the maximum volumes observed in recent years to avoid the risk of shutoffs.

AS A RESULT, GAS PRICES HAVE SOARED: The benchmark price in Europe is around 80 euros per megawatt hour, more than four times its level of 19 euros at the start of 2021 and up from as low as 4 euros in 2020. Prices have eased from as much as nine times their level at the start of last year. That price shock is hitting utility bills, alarming consumers and politicians.

EUROPE IS RELYING ON HIGH PRICES ATTRACTING MORE SUPPLY: Analysts at Rystad Energy used ship-tracking data last month to watch 11 tankers bringing liquid natural gas, or LNG, to Asia make U-turns in the middle of the ocean to take advantage of lucrative sales in Europe. With prices so high, traders were tempted to divert cargoes to Europe even if they had

to offer 100% of the price as compensation, analysts at data firm Energy Intelligence said.

"I wouldn't say that LNG is 100% enough, but it will play a very important role" in Europe's energy solution, said Xi Nan, head of liquid natural gas markets at Rystad.

RUSSIA HASN'T SENT AS MUCH GAS: State-owned Gazprom has sold less short-term gas and hasn't filled as much of its European storage as it normally does, but Russian officials emphasize that the company has met its supply obligations under long-term contracts.

Analysts believe Russia may be underlining its desire for Europe to approve the Nord Stream 2 pipeline to Germany that bypasses Poland and Ukraine. There also are increased tensions over Russian troop deployments near the Ukraine border.

The EU's antitrust chief said Thursday that Gazprom's limitations on supplies is "thought provoking" amid the surge in prices, asking



Associated Press

the company and other suppliers for an explanation. Competition Commissioner Margrethe Vestager described Gazprom's attitude as a "quite rare behavior in a marketplace."

A MILD WINTER IS KEY: Weather in Europe and Asia has so far been relatively mild, more liquid gas is on the way, and high prices have forced industries to use less by cutting back on production. Meanwhile, Norway, among Europe's suppliers, has stepped up with more pipeline gas.

"It means we can get through this winter with Rus-

sian flows being as low as they are," said James Huckstepp, manager for Europe, Middle East and Africa gas analytics at S&P Global Platts. "I wouldn't say crisis averted yet, because there is still risk of low temperatures, and there is very little storage buffer."

IN THE SHORT TERM: European governments are offering cash subsidies to consumers to soften the blow. Sweden became the latest Wednesday by announcing 6 billion kronor (\$661 million) to help households most affected by higher electric prices. □

After wave of cancellations, Delta sees recovery in 2022

By DAVID KOENIG

AP Airlines Writer

Delta Air Lines lost \$408 million in the final quarter of 2021, dragged down by a COVID-19 surge that rocked the airline in December, and the carrier predicted Thursday that it will suffer one more quarterly loss before travel perks up in spring and summer.

CEO Ed Bastian said 8,000 employees have contracted COVID-19 over the last four weeks. Sick workers and winter storms have led to more than 2,200 cancelled flights since Dec. 24. Cancellations have dropped sharply in the past few days, but the spate of spiked flights cost the airline \$75 million and the latest outbreak, caused by the omicron variant of the virus, is expected to push the industry's recovery back by two months.

"I don't think we're going to see a pickup in bookings or

travel during January and probably the first part of February," Bastian said in an interview. "It's always the weakest part of the year, and it's going to be that much weaker because of omicron. We need confidence in travel returning once the virus recedes."

Delta expects omicron infections to peak over the next few days and then decline rapidly as it has in South Africa and — more slowly — in the United Kingdom.

Omicron has halted a long, slow rise in travel and thrown it into reverse. So far in January, the number of people flying in the U.S. is down 20% from same month in 2019 — worse than the 16% declines in November and December. Earlier this week, United Airlines CEO Scott Kirby sent a letter to employees saying that 3,000 employees had tested positive for

COVID-19. On a single day at Newark, nearly a third of United's staff called out sick and the airline has cut back on scheduled flights systemwide.

Both airlines have about 74,000 workers.

Delta expects to lose money in January and February and for the first quarter as a whole. Revenue this quarter will likely be 72% to 74% of pre-pandemic levels, Delta said, about the same as the fourth quarter. Costs other than fuel will jump about 15% from 2019, and jet fuel is getting pricier too. However, the Atlanta company expects to return to profitability in March — when spring break could help fill planes, especially if coronavirus infections are falling.

Several thousand hires are likely this year as Delta bounces back from the pandemic, Bastian said. The company set aside

\$108 million for special profit-sharing payments of \$1,250 for each current employee.

The thank-you payment to employees comes as a new skirmish breaks out between largely non-union Delta and the nation's largest union of flight attendants. The union accuses Delta of pressuring employees to return to work too soon after contracting the virus.

Delta lobbied the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention last month to reduce the recommended quarantine period from 10 days to 5 days for vaccinated people who contract the virus, with Bastian and other Delta officials saying that the 10-day standard may significantly impact our workforce and operations."

The CDC made the change, with its director, Rochelle Walensky, ex-

plaining on NPR that "we started to see challenges with ... airline flights and other areas."

Delta's fourth-quarter loss compared with a profit of \$1.1 billion in the same quarter before the pandemic.

Excluding losses on some investments and profit-sharing, Delta earned \$170 million, or 22 cents per share. That easily topped per-share projections on Wall Street of 14 cents, according to a FactSet survey.

Revenue was \$9.47 billion, down 17% from \$11.44 billion in the fourth quarter of 2019, but well above the \$9.02 billion predicted by industry analysts.

Shares of Delta Air Lines Inc. jumped almost 5% at the opening bell Thursday. All other major U.S. airlines rose strongly as did most of the travel industry with booking sites, hotels and cruise lines moving higher. □

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 40 Barrel

1 Sound piece from a smithy
41 Map division

6 Absolutely not
43 Castle part

11 California cager
44 Game piece

12 President born in Hawaii
45 Stretches over

13 Rust, for one
46 Cheese choice

14 Trifled
15 Army address

16 Farm measure
3 "Ran" director

18 Letter after zeta
4 Homer's neighbor

19 Low digit
5 Terrific

20 Crew need
6 Imaginary

21 Young one
7 Bassoon's kin

23 Soothing ointments
25 GI-entertaining org.

27 Maui souvenir
28 Gets ready

30 Fabric worker
33 Overtly

34 Corn unit
36 Ring legend

37 Gist
39 Ray-gun sound

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Yesterday's answer

8 "Spirited Away" director
28 Like some convalescent care

9 Last letters
29 Pouchlike part

10 Tall boot
31 Brightens

17 Corn core
32 Turns red, perhaps

22 Language work
33 Lab

24 Was a pioneer
35 Takes ten

26 Starting bids
42 Highway rescue

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A X Y D I B A A X R
is L O N G F E E L O W

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three I's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

1-14

CRYPTOQUOTE

Y Q Z J K O Z ! C A P , R N M , D A N S Q
E L O O Q M N K L O L B Y Q Z J K O Z , D
W M L C Z Q S Q Y N K O A L J Z N M I I
O A D M E Z O A N O C L M ' O C L Y W .

— O A L R N Z Q H D Z L M

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: A WISE MAN CAN LEARN MORE FROM A FOOLISH QUESTION THAN A FOOL CAN LEARN FROM A WISE ANSWER.
— BRUCE LEE.



Associated Press

The heat stays on: Earth hits 6th warmest year on record

By SETH BORENSTEIN
AP Science Writer

Earth simmered to the sixth hottest year on record in 2021, according to several newly released temperature measurements.

And scientists say the exceptionally hot year is part of a long-term warming trend that shows hints of accelerating.

Two U.S. science agencies NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and a private measuring group released their calculations for last year's global temperature on Thursday, and all said it wasn't far behind ultra-hot 2016 and 2020.

Six different calculations found 2021 was between the fifth and seventh hottest year since the late 1800s. NASA said 2021 tied with 2018 for sixth warmest, while NOAA puts last year in sixth place by itself, ahead of 2018.

Scientists say a La Nina natural cooling of parts

of the central Pacific that changes weather patterns globally and brings chilly deep ocean water to the surface dampened global temperatures just as its flip side, El Nino, boosted them in 2016.

Still, they said 2021 was the hottest La Nina year on record and that the year did not represent a cooling off of human-caused climate change but provided more of the same heat.

"So it's not quite as headline-dominating as being the warmest on record, but give it another few years and we'll see another one of those" records, said climate scientist Zeke Hausfather of the Berkeley Earth monitoring group that also ranked 2021 the sixth hottest. "It's the long-term trend, and it's an indomitable march upward."

Gavin Schmidt, the climate scientist who heads NASA's temperature team, said "the long-term trend is very, very clear. And it's

because of us. And it's not going to go away until we stop increasing the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere."

The last eight years have been the eight hottest on record, NASA and NOAA data agree. Global temperatures, averaged over a 10-year period to take out natural variability, are nearly 2 degrees (1.1 degrees Celsius) warmer than 140 years ago, their data shows.

The other 2021 measurements came from the Japanese Meteorological Agency and satellite measurements by Copernicus Climate Change Service in Europe and the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

There was such a distinctive jump in temperatures about eight to 10 years ago that scientists have started looking at whether the rise in temperatures is speeding up. Both Schmidt and Hausfather said early signs point to that but it's hard to know for sure.

"I think you can see the acceleration, but whether it's statistically robust is not quite clear," Schmidt said in an interview. "If you just look at the last the last 10 years, how many of them are way above the trend line from the previous 10 years? Almost all of them." □

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Painting by Marsden Hartley last seen 40 years ago is found

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — A painting by the American modernist Marsden Hartley that had been missing for 40 years was found in a bank vault, a significant step toward recovering the works of an increasingly appreciated artist who considered himself "the painter of Maine." The painting, "Friend Against the Wind," was completed in 1936 and had its last known public display at a Portland gallery in 1980, when it was sold to a private collector. When the collector died last year, his estate contacted Maine art historian Gail Scott and said the painting had been stored at a vault in a Portland bank to protect it from theft. Scott, who has not revealed the name of collector, is working with the Bates College Museum of Art in Lewiston, Maine, to catalog Hartley's works. The Portland Press Herald reported Monday.

Scott this summer got to see the 12-by-17-inch (30-by-43 centimeter) painting made by Hartley in honor of Canadian friends who drowned in a hurricane, the newspaper reported. "It took a couple of months, but sure enough, I walked down to the Key Bank in downtown Portland and into the big vault and there was this painting that I had never seen in color and had never seen in person," Scott told the newspaper. Scott and others knew of the painting's existence from a black-and-white photo that had been included in a 1987 exhibition catalog. The whereabouts of some 240 of about 1,650 of Hartley's paintings or works on paper are not known. "Hartley is increasingly recognized as one of the most significant American modernists of the 20th century," museum director Dan Mills told the newspaper. "He is also one of the few of his generation and stat-

ure who does not have this kind of comprehensive scholarship available." Scott and the Bates museum are collaborating on the Marsden Hartley Legacy Project to track down his works. The project is being funded by the Horowitz Foundation for the Arts and the New York-based Vilcek Foundation, the newspaper reported. A native of Lewiston, Hartley was born in 1877 and died in Ellsworth in 1943 after traveling extensively. Maine remained a touchstone of his identity throughout his itinerant life, according to the Bates museum. His heirs granted the Hartley Memorial Collection to the museum, which includes the largest collection of his drawings, as well as some of his tools and items from his studio. □

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Temperatures in the upper ocean are at record levels, with major consequences

Kevin Trenberth University of Auckland

(THE CONVERSATION) The world witnessed record-breaking climate and weather disasters in 2021, from destructive flash floods that swept through mountain towns in Europe and inundated subway systems in China and the U.S., to heat waves and wildfires. Typhoon Rai killed over 400 people in the Philippines; Hurricane Ida caused an estimated US\$74 billion in damage in the U.S.

Globally, it was the sixth hottest year on record for surface temperatures, according to data released by NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in their annual global climate report on Jan. 13, 2022. But under the surface, ocean temperatures set new heat records in 2021.

As climate scientist Kevin Trenberth explains, while the temperature at Earth's surface is what people experience day to day, the temperature in the upper part of the ocean is a better indicator of how energy is accumulating on the planet.

The Conversation spoke with Trenberth, coauthor of a study published on Jan. 11, 2022, by 23 researchers at 14 institutes that tracked warming in the world's oceans.

Your latest research shows ocean heat is at record highs. What does that tell us about global warming?

The world's oceans are hotter than ever recorded, and their heat has increased each decade since the 1960s. This relentless increase is a primary indicator of human-induced climate change.

As oceans warm, their heat supercharges weather systems, creating more powerful storms and hurricanes, and more intense rainfall. That threatens human lives and livelihoods as well as marine life.

The oceans take up about 93% of the extra energy trapped by the increasing greenhouse gases from hu-

man activities, particularly burning fossil fuels. Because water holds more heat than land does and the volumes involved are immense, the upper oceans are a primary memory of global warming. I explain this in more detail in my new book "The Changing Flow of Energy Through the Climate System."

Our study provided the first analysis of 2021's ocean warming, and we were able to attribute the warming to human activities. Global warming is alive and well, unfortunately.

The global mean surface temperature was the fifth or sixth warmest on record in 2021 (the record depends on the dataset used), in part, because of the year-long La Niña conditions, in which cool conditions in the tropical Pacific influence weather patterns around the world.

There is a lot more natural variability in surface air temperatures than in ocean temperatures because of El Niño/La Niña and weather events. That natural variability on top of a warming ocean creates hot spots, sometimes called "marine heat waves," that vary from year to year. Those hot spots have profound influences on marine life, from tiny plankton to fish, marine mammals and birds. Other hot spots are responsible for more activity in the atmosphere, such as hurricanes.

While surface temperatures are both a consequence and a cause, the main source of the phenomena causing extremes relates to ocean heat that energizes weather systems.

We found that all oceans are warming, with the largest amounts of warming in the Atlantic Ocean and in the Southern Ocean surrounding Antarctica. That's also a concern for Antarctica's ice and sea level rise – heat in the Southern Ocean can creep under Antarctica's ice shelves, thinning them and resulting in calving off of huge icebergs.

In what ways does extra ocean heat affect air temperature and moisture on land?

The global heating increases evaporation and drying on land, as well as raising temperatures, increasing risk of heat waves and wildfires. We've seen the impact in 2021, especially in western North America, but also amid heat waves in Russia, Greece, Italy and Turkey.

2021 saw several destructive cyclones, including Hurricane Ida in the U.S. and Typhoon Rai in the Philippines. How does ocean temperature affect storms like those?

Warmer oceans provide extra moisture to the atmosphere. That extra moisture fuels storms, especially hurricanes. The result can be prodigious rainfall, as the U.S. saw from Ida, and widespread flooding as occurred in many places over the past year.

The storms may also become more intense, bigger and last longer. Several major flooding events have occurred in Australia this past year, and also in New Zealand. Bigger snowfalls can also occur in winter provided temperatures remain below about freezing because warmer air holds more moisture.

If greenhouse gas emissions slowed, would the ocean cool down?

In the oceans, warm water sits on top of cooler denser waters. However, the oceans warm from the top down, and consequently the ocean is becoming more stratified. This inhibits mixing between layers that otherwise allows the ocean to warm to deeper levels and to take up carbon dioxide and oxygen. Hence it impacts all marine life.

We found that the top 500 meters of the ocean has clearly been warming since 1980; the 500-1,000 meter depths have been warming since about 1990; the 1,000-1,500 meter depths since 1998; and below 1,500 meters since about 2005. □

Nigeria lifts its ban on Twitter after 7 months

By **CHINEDU ASADU Associated Press**

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — The Nigerian government has lifted its ban on Twitter, seven months after the West African country's more than 200 million people were shut out of the social media network.

Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari directed that Twitter's operations can resume on Thursday, according to the director-general of the country's National Information Technology Development Agency. Kashifu Inuwa Abdullahi said that was only after Twitter agreed to meet some conditions, including opening an office in Nigeria.

Nigeria suspended Twitter's operation on June 4, citing "the persistent use of the platform for activities that are capable of undermining Nigeria's corporate existence." The action triggered criticisms as it came shortly after the social media network deleted a post by Buhari in which he threatened to treat separatists "in the language they will understand."

This week's action "is a deliberate attempt to recalibrate our relationship with Twitter to achieve the maximum mutual benefits for our nation without jeopardizing the justified interests of the company. Our engagement has been very respectful, cordial, and successful," Abdullahi said in a statement.

A spokesperson for Twitter did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

In addition to registering in Nigeria during the first quarter of 2022, Abdullahi said Twitter has also agreed to other conditions including appointing a designated country representative, complying with tax obligations and acting "with a respectful acknowledgement of Nigerian laws and the national culture and history on which such legislation has been built."

The lifting of the ban, though a good thing, offers little hope because "whether the government likes it or not, one thing they have actually done is that they have gagged Nigerians," said Idayat Hassan, who leads the West Africa-focused Centre for Democracy and Development.

"They have violated the right to receive and impact information," Hassan said, adding that the Nigerian government should instead prioritize "openness and effective information flow."

There are no official estimates of the economic cost of Twitter's shutdown in Africa's most populous country since June 4 when it was announced, but NetBlocks, which estimates the cost of internet shutdowns worldwide, said Nigeria could be losing N103.1 million (\$251,000) in every hour of the blockade.

In the course of the shutdown, many young people have been finding a way around the ban by turning to virtual private network (VPN) apps, but corporate services — some of which the Nigerian economy relies on — have remained shut out.

Authorities have also set the ball rolling on regulating other social networks in the West African country. In August 2021, information minister Lai Mohammed told the government news agency that "we will not rest until we regulate the social media, otherwise, nobody will survive it."

But the government's claim it must regulate social networks to fight fake news has been repeatedly contested by many activists.

While it is true that "the weaponization of information to spread fake news in Nigeria is quite high," an emphasis on countering fake news just online is actually defeating the purpose because it is both online and offline in Nigeria," said CDD director Hassan. □

Texts, pictures lead to 1st doping case under new US law

By EDDIE PELLIS

AP National Writer

DENVER (AP) — Nigeria's top Olympic medal hopeful was thrilled. The drugs her doctor sent were working.

"Eric my body feel so good," Blessing Okagbare said in a text not long after running the 100 meters in a personal-best 10.63 seconds. "Whatever you did is working so well."

"Eric" is Eric Lira, a naturopathic doctor in Texas, who on Wednesday became the first person charged under a landmark U.S. law designed to add legal accountability to a global anti-doping system that has long struggled to regulate itself.

Okagbare was the highest-profile sprinter in a country with a history of doping problems, one that could be facing more scrutiny under the auspices of the Rodchenkov Act that was passed in 2020 to root out cases like these.

"It's not winning if you take illegal substances — it's cheating," said FBI Assistant Director Michael J. Driscoll, who helped spearhead the investigation.

The texts between Lira and Okagbare were among the 10 pages' worth of evidence the U.S. Attorney's Office in Manhattan unsealed in a criminal complaint. The attorney's office said Lira distributed the drugs, including human growth hormone and erythropoietin, a blood-building hormone, "for the purpose of corrupting" the Tokyo Olympics.

The 33-year-old Okagbare, who won a silver medal in the long jump at the Beijing Games in 2008, is not specifically named in the complaint. But the description of "Athlete 1," along with her racing and suspension history, matches Okagbare to a "T" — from the 10.63 she was excited about in mid-June to the provisional suspension she received in late July for a positive test for human growth hormone.

That suspension was announced only hours before Okagbare was to run in



Associated Press

the 100-meter semifinals in Tokyo. The Athletics Integrity Unit, which oversees the anti-doping effort in track and field, had previously said Okagbare tested positive for a blood booster in Nigeria in June.

She was charged with failing to cooperate with the investigation after she disobeyed an order to produce "documents, records and electronic storage devices" in relation to the other charges, the AIU said at the time.

Anti-doping officials say the ability to detect doping and suspend Okagbare, who was considered a strong medal contender, before she raced was a victory in and of itself — one that prevented another chapter in the long cycle of medals being stripped and re-awarded years after an infraction takes place.

Okagbare did not return text messages left on her cell phone by The Associated Press. She has been mostly silent, other than a tweet last year: "When it's time to say anything, I will and it will be worth the

wait," she said.

Even before Okagbare's suspension, there was trouble brewing in Nigeria, which, to anti-doping regulators, was considered a "high risk" country because of flaws in its testing program. The AIU announced 10 Nigerian athletes would not be allowed to participate in the Olympics because they did not meet anti-doping testing requirements in the lead-up to the Games.

It is this history that points toward Nigeria potentially being further targeted under the auspices of the Rodchenkov Act. More than individual athletes, the law was passed to go after people and organizations that fund and promote doping schemes.

Critics of the act, including the IOC and the World Anti-Doping Agency, insist the law is too far-reaching and gives too much power to U.S. authorities to prosecute transgressions that occur outside America's borders. But shortly after the charges were unsealed, several big names in the anti-dop-

ing world were lauding the first case to come under the new law.

"Collaboration between law enforcement and anti-doping agencies can considerably strengthen the ability to detect serious doping, as is alleged in this case," said Brett Clothier, the head of the AIU.

Working off a tip from a whistleblower, authorities accessed Okagbare's cell phone and saw messages in which she requested four doses of "honey," which investigators determined was a reference to HGH.

There were also several text messages between Okagbare and Lira, some of which also mention an "Athlete 2," who lived in Florida and has not been identified.

One text came on June 7, about 10 days before Okagbare ran her personal best: "I had a bad race yesterday, Eric. Upset, angry, and disappointed."

A few days later, Athlete 1 wrote to Lira that she "took 2000ui of the 'E' yesterday, is it safe to take a test this morning? Remember I took

it Wednesday and then yesterday again. I wasn't sure so I didn't take a test."

A few days after that, Okagbare ran the 10.63 — a personal best that, even though it was wind-aided, made her very happy.

While her suspension has been in place since last year, the Rodchenkov Act was designed to cast a wider net, one that has now nabbed Lira, the alleged provider whose next hearing was set for next Tuesday.

"Today's action is entirely appropriate and puts real teeth into anti-doping enforcement, while also setting an example of international cooperation and fair play for future generations," said the namesake of the law, Grigory Rodchenkov. Rodchenkov was the director of the anti-doping lab in Moscow where much of Russia's plot to undermine the system in advance of the 2014 Olympics in Sochi took place.

He has been living in hiding since coming forward as a whistleblower about the Russian scheme. □

China faces omicron test weeks ahead of Beijing Olympics

By HUIZHONG WU

Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Most access to a major city adjacent to Beijing was suspended Thursday as China tried to contain an outbreak of the highly contagious omicron variant, which poses a test to its "zero-tolerance" COVID-19 policy and its ability to successfully host the Winter Olympics.

Tianjin, a port and manufacturing center with 14 million people, is one of a half-dozen cities where the government is imposing lockdowns and other restrictions as part of a policy that aims to track down every virus case. But the outbreak in a city so close to the Olympic host is particularly worrying.

Throughout the pandemic, authorities have been especially protective of Beijing since it is the seat of government and home to senior politicians. With the Games opening there in just over three weeks and China's national pride on the line, the stakes are even higher now.

On Thursday, Tianjin suspended train, taxi, bus and ride-hailing services to other cities. Flights and high-speed train services were canceled earlier and highways closed. People leaving the city were required

to present negative virus tests and receive special permission.

Elsewhere, more than 20 million people under lockdown in China, including in the western city of Xi'an. Some are barred from leaving their homes.

That's all part of the sweeping restrictions on movement China has repeatedly imposed since early 2020. It started with the then-unprecedented step of sealing off 11 million people in the central city of Wuhan, where the virus was first detected, and other parts of surrounding Hubei province.

Along with mass testing and digital surveillance of people's movements, those measures have kept the virus from spreading into a full-fledged national outbreak so far. The country's vaccination rate now also tops 85%.

Other countries that tried a similar zero-tolerance approach have abandoned it, deciding instead to try to live with the virus, while mitigating its worst effects.

China persists, but may find the strategy increasingly difficult since the omicron variant is more contagious than previous versions of the virus and is better at evading vaccines. That challenge comes just as China is welcoming thou-

sands of people from abroad for the Olympics, which start Feb. 4.

"I think it truly is a critical juncture for China. Can it stave off omicron?" said Dali Yang, a Chinese politics expert at the University of Chicago.

China reported 124 domestically transmitted cases on Thursday, including 76 in Henan province and 41 in Tianjin.

Authorities have reported a total of 104,379 cases since the pandemic began and 4,636 deaths, a figure that hasn't changed in months. During the Tokyo Olympics in July, Japan saw a widespread outbreak driven by the delta variant, but the measures at the Olympics themselves were mostly effective in stopping transmission, said Kenji Shibuya, research director at the Tokyo Foundation for Policy Research and a public health expert.

The rules in Beijing will be even stricter than Tokyo's. The Games are being conducted under a "closed loop" system that is meant to prevent all contact between the outside world and athletes, journalists, staff and officials at the Olympics.

Those inside the Games bubble will travel between hotels and competition venues in special vehicles.



Associated Press

Anyone who leaves the sealed environment will be required to quarantine for three weeks.

Police even went so far as to warn anyone involved in a collision with an Olympics vehicle to avoid contact with people on board and wait for a special team to handle the situation.

Such measures should be able to prevent the spread of the virus within the bubble, said Kei Saito, a virologist at the University of Tokyo.

But outside, it could be a different story.

"Omicron is three to four times more transmissible than delta," said Saito. "I think it's almost impossible to control the spread of omicron."

Furthermore, the lack of widespread outbreaks means the Chinese popu-

lation is protected only by vaccines and not by antibodies produced by previous infections, said Dr. Vineeta Bal, an Indian immunologist.

The domestically made vaccines China is using are also generally considered less effective than those widely used in other countries, such as the Pfizer or Moderna shots.

Despite these challenges, China has shown no signs of giving up on its efforts to stop the spread of the virus in its tracks.

Tianjin conducted mass testing for a second time Wednesday. The government asked people to wait at home until they receive a negative result, and communities in Beijing asked their residents to report if they've visited the nearby port city in recent weeks. □

Brighton vs. rival Palace, Dortmund faces Freiburg



Associated Press

By The Associated Press undefined

A look at what's happening in European soccer on Friday:

GERMANY

Borussia Dortmund breathed some life back into the title race last week by closing the gap to Bayern Munich to six points. Now Marco Rose's second-

place team needs to follow up with another win at home against a Freiburg team that is no pushover because it too is fighting for a Champions League place. History is on Dortmund's side, with Freiburg's only win at Dortmund's stadium coming in 2001. Freiburg is fourth as it pushes to qualify for the Champions League for what would be the first time.

ENGLAND

Near each other in the standings, if not so close on the map, Brighton and Crystal Palace renew their rivalry to open the 22nd round of games in the Premier League. Four points separate the teams who

are hovering around mid-table and look to be well clear of relegation trouble this season. The clubs, however, are separated by 46 miles (74 kilometers), which doesn't make it a typical local rivalry by English soccer standards. Palace is the nearest big club to Brighton, a city on the south coast, and their rivalry appears to only have sprouted since the 1970s as they rose together up the leagues. Palace, which is in 12th place and below Brighton, is without Jordan Ayew and Cheikhou Kouyaté as they are at the African Cup of Nations. Brighton midfielder Yves Bissouma is also there.

FRANCE

With Amine Gouri in this kind of form, Nice can sustain a push for a top-two finish and hope to qualify outright for the Champions League next season. Gouri will be looking to add to his nine goals and five assists when second-place Nice hosts mid-table Nantes. The only headache for Nice coach Christophe Galtier is who to pair the 21-year-old Gouri with up front. He must choose between Denmark striker Kasper Dolberg or off-season signing Andy Delort, who has made a strong impression since joining from Montpellier and netted some useful late goals. He has eight goals so far while Dolberg has five. □