



China's BYD, Japan's Hino announce electric truck venture

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese electric car brand BYD Auto and Japanese truck maker Hino Motors say they are jointly setting up a company to develop battery-powered trucks and busses. The venture is one of a series of tie-ups between Chinese and foreign automakers to share the multibillion-dollar costs of electric development. Beijing has spent heavily to promote the technology but is winding down subsidies. BYD Auto Industry Co., a unit of battery producer BYD Ltd., and Hino Motors Ltd. said each would supply 50% of the investment for the company, due to be launched next year, but gave no other financial details. Vehicles will be sold under the Hino brand starting in the first half of the 2020s, the companies said. They said details of vehicle sizes and where they would be sold still were being decided.

Cathay Pacific to cut 8,500 jobs, shutter regional airline

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong airline Cathay Pacific Airways says it intends to cut 8,500 jobs and shut a regional airline as it grapples with the plunge in air travel due to the pandemic. About 5,300 employees based in Hong Kong and another 600 elsewhere will likely lose their jobs, and 2,600 unfilled positions will be cut. The cuts are about 24% of the company's workforce, Cathay Pacific said in a statement. "The global pandemic continues to have a devastating impact on aviation and the hard truth is we must fundamentally restructure the group to survive," Cathay Pacific CEO Augustus Tang said in a statement. The company said it would also shut down Cathay Dragon, its regional airline unit. It will seek regulatory approval for most of the routes to be operated by Cathay Pacific and its budget airlines subsidiary HK Express. The restructuring is aimed at reducing Cathay Pacific's cash burn to 500 million Hong Kong dollars (\$64.5 million) a month, from about 1.5 billion Hong Kong dollars (\$193.5 million) to 2 billion Hong Kong (\$258 million) dollars a month currently, the company said. The plan will cost about 2.2 billion Hong Kong dollars (\$283.8 million), it said. Executive pay cuts will continue throughout 2021 and there will be no pay increments for 2021 nor bonuses for this year for all Hong Kong employees, Cathay Pacific said. Ground staff will be offered a voluntary leave plan in the first half of next year. In a news conference, Cathay Pacific Airways chairman Patrick Healy estimated that passenger levels will only return to pre-pandemic levels in 2024.

Chinese drugmaker setting up vaccine production lines

BEIJING (AP) — A state-owned Chinese drugmaker is setting up production lines to supply 1 billion doses of two possible coronavirus vaccines that are being tested on 50,000 people in 10 countries, the company chairman said. Testing by SinoPharm Group is "in the last kilometer of a long march," chairman Liu Jingzhen said at a news conference. He gave no indication when results are expected. China's fledgling drug industry is part of a global race to produce a vaccine and has four candidates in the final stages of testing. Health experts say, however, that even if China succeeds, stringent certification rules in the United States, Europe, and Japan might mean its vaccine can be distributed only in other developing countries. SinoPharm is testing two vaccines in countries including Egypt, Argentina, Jordan, and Peru, Liu said. Both are inactivated, meaning they use a non-infectious version of the coronavirus. According to Liu, production lines for vaccines are being set up in Beijing and Wuhan, the city in central China where the outbreak began in December. "The production capacity will reach 1 billion doses next year, ensuring sufficient safety," Liu said. Chinese-developed vaccines have been tested on 60,000 people with "only slight adverse effects," said Tian Baoguo, an official of the Ministry of Science and Technology. Thousands of people in China including healthcare workers and others deemed to be at risk have been given the experimental vaccines. Three city governments have announced plans to inoculate members of the public who need it.

Thailand admits foreign tourists for the first time in 7 months

BANGKOK (AP) — Thailand's tourist industry last month took a modest step toward reviving its coronavirus-battered fortunes by welcoming 39 visitors who flew in from Shanghai, the first such arrivals since regular travellers were banned seven months ago. The visitors who arrived at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport are pioneers in a "Special Tourist Visa" program devised by Thai authorities to restore step by step a sector of the economy that welcomed almost 40 million foreign visitors last year and by some estimates accounts for more than 10% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Bringing in tourists from China was a natural choice. Thailand was one of the top overseas destinations for Chinese tourists in 2019, when they accounted for by far the largest number of visitors to Thailand by nationality. Just as crucial is China's ability to keep new coronavirus infections in check, a sharp contrast to most other parts of the globe that send visitors to Thailand. That doesn't mean the visitors can freely traipse around the country. The Special Tourist Visa has stringent requirements. Under the plan, which was first approved by the Thai cabinet in September, foreign tourists who commit to a stay of at least 30 days are issued 90-day visas that can be renewed twice. After arriving, they have to stay in government-approved quarantine at a hotel or hospital for 14 days and show confirmation that they have made arrangements for long-term accommodations. They must also have special insurance policies and undergo pre-departure testing for the virus. Foreign tourists also must download an official coronavirus tracking application for use during their stay. A press release issued by the airport quoted one of its operations managers, Kittipong Kittikachorn, as saying that the airport is ready for tourists.



SYMPHONIC HEALING. Musicians from the Wuhan Philharmonic Orchestra rehearse a day before their concert to open the Beijing Music Festival, China's first classical music festival since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, in Beijing, on October 9, 2020. In an attempt to aid in the psychological and emotional healing process, the concert featured musicians from the global epicenter of Wuhan. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)

China classical music festival features Wuhan musicians

BEIJING (AP) — China held its first classical music festival since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, featuring musicians from the outbreak's initial epicenter in an attempt to aid in the psychological and emotional healing process.

Zou Ye, a composer from Wuhan, the central Chinese city where the virus was first detected late last year, said the concert was part of an effort to work through frustration and helplessness on the way toward love and tolerance and, hopefully, some meaning to what he calls "nature's tremendous revenge."

Musicians from the Wuhan Philharmonic Orchestra presented a choral symphony, "To 2020," dedicated to the victims of COVID-19, co-written by Zou and two partners.

More than 11 million people in Wuhan and its surrounding area underwent a draconian 76-day lockdown at the start of the pandemic. The city accounts for 3,869 of China's 4,634 deaths from the virus and the bulk of its more than 85,000 cases.

The end of the lockdown on April 8 was seen as a key turning point in China's battle against the virus, which has now been contained, with no cases of local transmission reported in more than two months.

The emotional trauma still lingers for many survivors, victims' families, and frontline health workers, and music can offer another medium for exploring such feelings, Zou said.

"All we want to do is to tell the story of this historic event that we experienced and that has changed the world, and how we should face the reality and reflect on ourselves," Zou told The Associated Press. "There is a lot of information in the work — there is frustration, helplessness, eulogization, and hope."

Zou said the festival also seeks to offer a ray of hope to musicians who have suffered economically from the pandemic through a lack of performing opportunities.

"When the musicians of the world are losing jobs, we can start working with orchestras," he said. "This is not easy (and) we are grateful for this."

Amid government efforts to promote its successes in fighting the virus, Zou said the festival's organizers were not "doing this for official propaganda."

"The work was not even asked for by the authorities," he said. "It was totally out of our own intention."

Duterte says he can be held responsible for drug killings

By Jim Gomez
The Associated Press

MANILA, The Philippines — The Philippine president has said he has no problem with being held responsible for the many killings under his anti-drug crackdown, adding that he was ready to face charges that could land him in jail, though not charges of crimes against humanity.

President Rodrigo Duterte's televised remarks were among his clearest acknowledgment of the prospects that he could face a deluge of criminal charges for the bloody campaign he launched after taking office in mid-2016. Nearly 6,000 killings of drug suspects have been reported by police but rights watchdogs suspect the death toll is far larger.

"If there's killing there, I'm saying I'm the one ... you can hold me responsible for

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Cambodian Riel	4092.2
China Renminbi	6.6919
Fijian Dollar	2.1186
Hong Kong Dollar	7.7547
Indian Rupee	74.629
Indonesian Rupiah	14746
Iranian Rial	42025
Japanese Yen	104.67
Laos New Kip	9269.3
Malaysian Ringgit	4.151
Nepal Rupee	119.85
Pakistani Rupee	159.44
Papua N.G. Kina	3.5075
Philippine Peso	48.497
Russian Ruble	79.455
Saudi Riyal	3.7502
Singapore Dollar	1.3654
South Korean Won	1136.1
Sri Lankan Rupee	184.3
Taiwan Dollar	28.574
Thai Baht	31.17
Vietnam Dong	23179