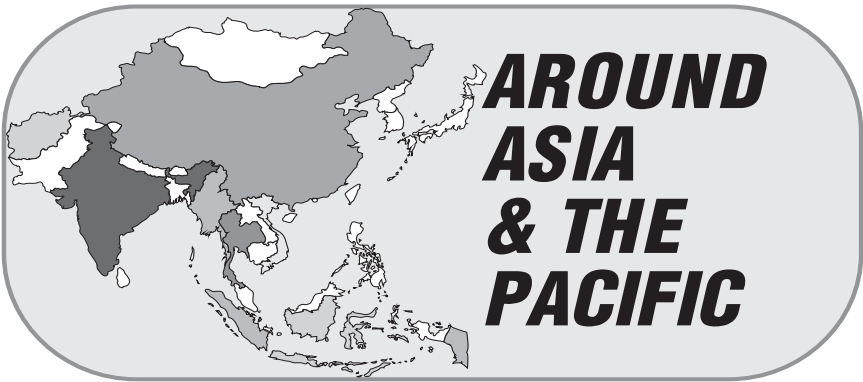




China’s Geely, Baidu announce electric car ventures

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese automaker Geely says it will form an electric car venture with tech giant Baidu, adding to a flurry of corporate tie-ups in the industry to share soaring technology development costs. Geely Holding Group, which also has separate electric car brands, said the venture with Baidu.com Inc. would focus on intelligent and connected vehicles. It gave no details of investment or when products might be released. Global and Chinese automakers have launched partnerships to share the multibillion-dollar costs of developing electric vehicles for China under government pressure to meet sales quotas. China is the world’s biggest market for the technology, accounting for about half of global sales. The ruling Communist Party spent billions of dollars on subsidies in an attempt to take an early lead in the industry. It is shifting the burden to manufacturers by requiring them to earn credits from selling electric vehicles or face penalties that have yet to be announced. Privately held Geely, best known abroad as the owner of Sweden’s Volvo Cars, is one of China’s biggest independent automakers. Its brands include Geely, Lynk & Co., Geometry, and Polestar, all of which sell electric vehicles. Geely is the biggest shareholder in Malaysia’s Proton and Britain’s Lotus. Baidu operates China’s most popular internet search engine. It is regarded as one of the world’s leading developers of automated driving technology.

India donates first 500,000 doses of vaccine to Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Sri Lanka’s president welcomed the first 500,000 doses of a COVID-19 vaccine from India, which donated the shots to eight countries in the region. The Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine was manufactured by the Serum Institute of India. Sri Lanka said 150,000 health workers and 115,000 selected military and police troops will be the first to be inoculated at six hospitals in Colombo and its suburbs. One of the hospitals is reserved for COVID-19 patients while the others have separate wards for coronavirus. The Health Ministry plans to expand the vaccination campaign to 4,000 hospitals and health centers in other parts of the country. India’s donation covers 250,000 people and Sri Lanka is making efforts to obtain more vaccines, either through donation or by purchasing them. The country has ordered 2 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNtech vaccine and is planning to order 3 million more from India. It also expects some from the U.N. COVAX Facility to be able to vaccine 20% of the population.

Travellers returning to New Zealand face stricter rules

New Zealand (AP) — Travellers returning to New Zealand will face stricter rules at quarantine hotels as health authorities investigate how up to three people were infected while they were staying at Auckland’s Pullman Hotel. The people were released before testing positive and were potentially contagious, but testing has shown no evidence the virus has spread in the community. New Zealand has managed to control community transmission of the virus. COVID-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins said that as an interim measure, travellers would need to stay in their hotel rooms for the final days of their 14-day mandatory quarantine, and would also face stricter controls around leaving their rooms at other times. Health authorities believe the three people caught the virus from another returning traveller at the hotel.

Partygoers fined for flouting COVID-19 rules on Thai island

BANGKOK, Thailand (AP) — More than a hundred participants at a party in a bar on a popular Thai island, including 89 foreigners, received suspended jail terms and fines for breaking national coronavirus restrictions. Police arrested 109 partygoers in a raid on the Three Sixty Bar on Koh Phangan in southern Thailand. The foreigners are from more than 10 countries, including the U.S., U.K., Russia, Switzerland, and Denmark. The island in Surat Thani province is a popular destination for young backpacking travellers and is known for its all-night, full-moon beach parties. However, Thailand barred virtually all tourists from entering the country in April 2020 because of coronavirus. Police said they tracked plans for the party on social media, where the bar promoted the event to celebrate its fifth anniversary. The court conducted the trial over a video link. The judge sentenced each defendant to one month in jail, which was suspended if they have good behavior for a year. He also fined them 4,000 baht (\$130) each. The Thai organizer and two Thai bartenders were given fines of 10,000 baht (\$330) and two years in jail, also suspended for a year. Until recently, Thailand appeared to have the disease under control, with very few cases of local transmission. But a new outbreak has led to cases in many provinces, forcing a reimposition of some restrictions.

Sri Lanka reopens to tourists after 10 months

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Sri Lanka has reopened to foreign tourists after a nearly 10-month pandemic closure that cut deeply into the Indian Ocean island nation’s lucrative travel industry. Full operations also resumed at the island’s two international airports, accommodating the commercial flights. Under new protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19, tourists must be tested for the virus in their country 72 hours prior to their flight, when they arrive at their hotel in Sri Lanka, and again seven days later. They must stay in a “travel bubble” designated in 14 tourism zones without mixing with the local population. About 180 hotels have been earmarked for tourist accommodations. The resumption of tourism follows a pilot project that began December 26 in which 1,500 tourists from Ukraine visited Sri Lanka in such a travel bubble. The government closed the country to tourists last March when an outbreak of the virus surfaced.



RARE RHINO. An endangered Indian rhinoceros cub stands in its enclosure at the zoo in Wroclaw, Poland. The cub, born on January 6, 2021, is the first Indian rhinoceros birth in the zoo’s 155-year history, the zoo said. (Wroclaw Zoo via AP)

Endangered Indian rhinoceros baby is born in zoo in Poland

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — An endangered Indian rhinoceros was born last month in Poland’s Wroclaw Zoo, a hopeful development in efforts to preserve the rare animals.

Born January 6, the female baby is the first Indian rhinoceros birth in the zoo’s 155-year history, the zoo said. Its parents are seven-year-old Maruska and an 11-year-old male, Manas.

“Maruska, a first-time mom, behaves wonderfully,” zoo president Radoslaw Ratajszczak was quoted as saying.

“She looks after her daughter, allows her to nurse, and is very delicate, despite weighing more than 2 tons. For example, when she lies

down, she’s very careful not to crush the little one, and even gently moves her aside.” Ratajszczak said.

The new baby is being cared for away from the public so far.

The Indian rhinoceros was close to extinction but thanks to a protection program launched in the 1970s there are some 3,600 now, including over 170 living in 66 zoos around the world.

The Indian rhinoceros can stand 12 feet, 5 inches tall and weigh up to 3 tons. They live in the wet, grassy areas of northern India. They mainly feed on grass, leaves, and twigs but also on fruit and aquatic vegetation.

China’s big holiday travel season light so far

BEIJING (AP) — Efforts to dissuade Chinese from travelling for Lunar New Year appeared to be working as Beijing’s main train station was largely quiet and estimates of passenger totals were smaller than in past years.

January 28 started the roughly two-week travel rush ahead of the holiday that falls this year on February 12, a time when trains and other transportation are usually packed with migrant workers taking what may be their only chance each year to travel home and see family.

At the Beijing station, only about five of 15 security gates were open and the usual lines at ticket windows and passengers camped on the central plaza were nowhere to be seen. China has in recent years upgraded systems along with building the world’s largest high-speed rail network, but passenger numbers have remained heavy.

Failure to restrict travel before the Lunar New Year travel period last year was blamed

for the spread of the coronavirus, especially since the central city of Wuhan, where the first clusters of the illness were detected, is a key travel hub that was used by millions of passengers.

This year, authorities have offered free refunds on plane tickets and extra pay for workers who stay put to dissuade travel for the holiday.

Travellers must have a negative virus test within seven days of departure, and many local governments are ordering quarantines and other strict measures for travellers.

Officials are predicting Chinese will make 1.7 billion trips during the travel rush. That is down 40% from 2019. From some destinations, the numbers could be much higher, with departures out of Beijing and the southwestern metropolis of Chengdu down by more than 75% over the period, according to estimates from travel associations.

International arrivals are similarly af-

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Asian Currency Exchange Rates	
Units per U.S. dollar as of 1/29	
Bangladesh Taka	84.37
Cambodian Riel	4,063.5
China Renminbi	6.425
Fijian Dollar	2,0064
Hong Kong Dollar	7.7532
Indian Rupee	72.844
Indonesian Rupiah	14009
Iranian Rial	42026
Japanese Yen	104.64
Laos New Kip	9318.0
Malaysian Ringgit	4.04
Nepal Rupee	117.21
Pakistani Rupee	159.6
Papua N.G. Kina	3.55
Philippine Peso	48.046
Russian Ruble	75.582
Saudi Riyal	3.7506
Singapore Dollar	1.328
South Korean Won	1115.2
Sri Lankan Rupee	190.52
Taiwan Dollar	27.983
Thai Baht	29.88
Vietnam Dong	23040