



Japan accelerates vaccination rollout before Olympics

TOKYO — Japan mobilized military doctors and nurses to give shots to elderly people in Tokyo and Osaka on May 24 as the government desperately accelerated its vaccination rollout to curb coronavirus infections just two months before hosting the Olympics. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga is determined to hold the Olympics in Tokyo after a one-year delay and has made an ambitious pledge to finish vaccinating the country's 36 million elderly people by the end of July, despite skepticism it's possible. Worries about public safety while many Japanese remain unvaccinated have prompted growing protests and calls for cancelling the Olympics, set to start on July 23. Suga's government has repeatedly expanded the area and duration of a virus state of emergency since late April and has made its virus-fighting measures stricter. But with COVID-19 cases still persistently high, Suga says vaccines are key to getting the infections under control. At the two mass inoculation centers staffed by Japan's Self-Defense Forces, the aim is to inoculate up to 10,000 people per day in Tokyo and another 5,000 per day in Osaka for the next three months. People inoculated at the centers last month were the first in Japan to receive doses from Moderna Inc., one of two foreign-developed vaccines now approved in Japan. Previously Japan had used only Pfizer Inc. Japan began vaccinating healthcare workers in mid-February while sticking to a standard requirement of clinical testing inside Japan — a decision many experts said was statistically meaningless and only caused delay. Vaccinations for the next group — the elderly, who are more likely to suffer serious COVID-19 effects — started in mid-April but was slowed by bureaucratic bumbling including reservation procedures, unclear distribution plans, and a shortage of medical staff to give shots.

China issues total ban on synthetic cannabinoids

BEIJING (AP) — China last month said it will add all synthetic cannabinoids to its list of banned drugs, in what it described as a first in the world, to curb their manufacturing, trafficking, and abuse. It is the second time Chinese authorities have imposed a class-wide ban on a substance, after all fentanyl-related drugs were controlled in 2019. Synthetic cannabinoids are human-made chemicals that act on the same brain receptors as the main active ingredient in marijuana. However, they can be toxic and cause "serious side effects that are very different from those of marijuana," according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The United States says China is a key source of synthetic drugs which are then shipped to users in the U.S. Chinese officials said 18 other new psychoactive substances will also be banned. The changes take effect July 1. Authorities said 1,047 types of new psychoactive substances had appeared as of the end of 2020, of which about 450 were found in the last five years. Between 2018 and 2020, about 300 cases of what is locally known as "Natasha" synthetic cannabinoids were uncovered in Xinjiang, while more than 300 fluroroketamine cases were found in the southern region of Guangxi, officials said. Last year, Shandong narcotics authorities uncovered the large-scale manufacturing and trafficking of synthetic cannabinoids involving 13 provinces and more than 40 cities, officials said. They said 790 pounds of synthetic cannabinoids were seized. The ban did not specify penalties, but China regularly executes people found guilty in drug cases.

People dying from tainted rice wine despite crackdown

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — Twelve more people have died in Cambodia from drinking cheap adulterated rice wine, a perennial problem especially in rural areas, officials said. The Health Ministry said the victims died in two additional deadly incidents after a drinking session at a May 10 funeral in Kandal province took the lives of 12 other people. A court in Kandal has charged 13 people — two producers and 11 vendors — in connection with that incident. They are accused of violating a law against misleading representation leading to death or disability, which is punishable by two to five years imprisonment. Two people in a nearby village who had not attended the funeral also died from drinking tainted wine and 10 others died in a village in the southern province of Kampot, the ministry said in a statement. Fifty-six others were sickened but are recovering. After tests from Kampot showed the deaths were caused by toxic wine, officials went to the affected village and barred further production and consumption of the product. Rice wine is typically made in small batches in homes in the countryside and is popular at events such as weddings, funerals, and village festivals. Alcohol is sometimes added to boost the drink's potency, but if it is not distilled properly it can contain toxic levels of methanol, which can cause blindness or death. Tests showed that the victims did not have COVID-19, which has surged recently in Cambodia, it said.

Foreigners arrested on Bali for alleged drug possession

DENPASAR, Indonesia (AP) — A British hotel owner and an Italian tourist were arrested for alleged possession of narcotics on Indonesia's resort island of Bali, according to police. The two men, dressed in orange, were shown to journalists at a news conference. Kenneth Daniel Kutsch, a British man who has a hotel business on neighboring Lombok island, and his Indonesian partner, Ni Ketut Dewi Seniwati, were arrested in the parking lot of a restaurant in Bali in May after residents reported narcotic transactions in the area, police said. Badung police chief Roby Septiadi said officers seized 7.9 ounces of marijuana from Kutsch and his partner. "We are still deepening the investigation. But judging from the evidence, it could lead to him being a dealer," Septiadi said at the news conference. Indonesia has extremely strict drug laws, and convicted dealers are sometimes executed by firing squad. More than 150 people are currently on death row, mostly for drug crimes. About one-third are foreigners.



ADMIRABLE ASCENT. Chinese climber Zhang Hong, 44, who became the first blind Asian to scale Mount Everest, sat for an interview with The Associated Press at a hotel in Kathmandu, Nepal, on May 31, 2021. Zhang says he aims to climb the highest peaks on all seven continents and then travel to the North and South Poles. (AP Photos/Bikram Rai)

Chinese climber becomes first blind Asian to scale Everest

By Binaj Gurubacharya
The Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal — A Chinese climber who became the first blind Asian to scale Mount Everest says he aims to climb the highest peaks on all seven continents and then travel to the North and South Poles.

Zhang Hong, 44, is also the third blind climber internationally to reach the world's highest peak.

Following his guides and Sherpas, he reached the summit on May 24 and returned safely to Kathmandu.

He said he was inspired by a blind American climber, Eric Weihenmayer, who scaled Everest in 2001. A climber from Austria was the second blind person to reach the peak.

"Personally I plan to try the 'grand slam' in the next few years — the seven summits around the world on seven continents and the North and South Poles," Zhang said.

"Today I sit here and think about Eric (Weihenmayer), who inspired me to have such a dream and work all the way, and eventually I achieved it," he said. "So, I would think there are so many other visually impaired people

around the world and also in Asia, and I hope what I did can be an inspiration for them."

Zhang became blind at age 21 due to glaucoma. He has been working as a masseur at a hospital in Tibet, where he lives with his wife.

He trained for five years before climbing Everest, carrying bags packed with 66 pounds of weight up the staircase of the hospital where he works. He also climbed several smaller peaks in China.

On the Everest climb, it was difficult navigating the slippery trails and moving around blocks of ice because of high winds on the mountain.

Hundreds of people attempted to climb Everest from the Nepal side in May after the government opened the mountain to foreign climbers this year. The northern side of the mountain in China is closed because of concerns about COVID-19.

Zhang said all of his team was vaccinated before the expedition and had a separate camp on the mountain to distance themselves from other climbers. Nepalese authorities have denied any coronavirus outbreak on Everest, but a prominent guide said there were more than 100 cases on the mountain.

China reports human case of H10N3 bird flu, a possible first

BEIJING (AP) — A man in eastern China has contracted what might be the world's first human case of the H10N3 strain of bird flu, but the risk of large-scale spread is low, the government says.

The 41-year-old man in Jiangsu province, northwest of Shanghai, was hospitalized April 28 and is in stable condition, the National Health Commission said on its website.

No human case of H10N3 has been reported

elsewhere, the commission said.

"This infection is an accidental cross-species transmission," the statement said. "The risk of large-scale transmission is low."

The news comes amid heightened awareness of the threat of emerging diseases as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to claim lives around the world.

But unlike with coronaviruses, there are

Continued on page 4

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Laos New Kip	9435.3
Malaysian Ringgit	4.126
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