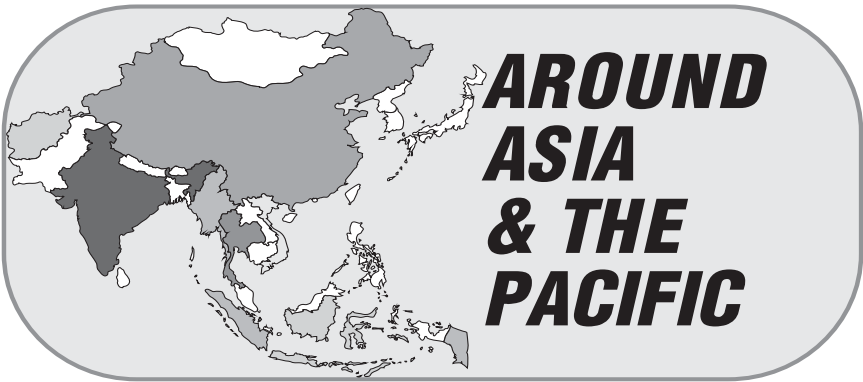




China’s Mars rover soldiers on after completing program

BEIJING (AP) — China’s Zhurong Mars rover is soldiering on after completing its initial program to explore the red planet and search for frozen water that could provide clues as to whether it once supported life. The China National Space Administration (CNSA) said on its website that Zhurong completed its 90-day program on August 15 and was in excellent technical condition and fully charged. It said it would continue to explore the area known as Utopia Planitia where it landed on May 14. Zhurong has been consistently sending back photos and data via the Tianwen-1 orbiter that crosses over it once a day. After the United States, China is the second country to land and sustainably operate a spacecraft on Mars, where days are 40 minutes longer than on Earth. At six feet in height, Zhurong is significantly smaller than the American Perseverance rover, which is exploring the planet with a tiny helicopter. NASA expects its rover to collect its first sample for return to Earth as early as 2031. Concurrently, China is assembling its permanent space station, with three astronauts now aboard the Tianhe, or Heavenly Harmony, core that was put into orbit on April 29. Two of the astronauts recently completed their second space walk. All three are due to return to Earth during September and be replaced by a new crew. China earlier launched two smaller experimental space stations. It has been excluded from the International Space Station largely at the insistence of the United States, which is wary of the Chinese space program’s secrecy and close military links. Congressional approval is also required for any cooperation between NASA and the CNSA. China also recently brought back lunar samples, the first by any country’s space program since the 1970s, and has landed a probe and rover on the moon’s less explored far side. China first put an astronaut into orbit in 2003, becoming just the third country to do so.

Malaysia’s new PM strikes conciliatory tone in first address

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — Malaysia’s new Prime Minister, Ismail Sabri Yaakob, struck a conciliatory tone in his first national address, saying he would embrace the opposition in an effort to tackle the runaway pandemic and revive a slumping economy. A day after being sworn in, Ismail said the political battles that led to a change of government twice since 2018 elections had been detrimental to the country and distressed the public. “Let us move forward. Let us stem this grab for political power,” he said, urging all lawmakers to find common ground and work together to help the nation recover. The new prime minister, 61, said he would invite the opposition to be part of the National Recovery Council and the committee combatting COVID-19. “Political stability must be swiftly achieved through unity, and this includes cross-party cooperation,” he said.

Cargo ship splits in two after running aground in Japan

TOKYO (AP) — A cargo ship broke into two pieces after running aground in a northern Japanese port with oil spilling into the sea, Japan’s coast guard said. All 21 Chinese and Filipino crew members were safely rescued by the coast guard, said the ship’s Japanese operator, NYK Line. The 39,910-ton wood-chip carrier *Crimson Polaris* went aground in mid-August while sailing inside Hachinohe Port. It managed to free itself from the seabed, but suffered a crack which widened and eventually caused the vessel to split into two, the coast guard said. The amount of oil leaked is under investigation, NYK Line said in a statement.

Indonesia set to free Chicago woman who helped kill mom

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — A Chicago woman convicted of assisting her then-boyfriend in her mother’s murder and stuffing the body in a suitcase on Indonesia’s tourist island of Bali in 2014 will be released from prison in October after serving six years of a 10-year sentence, her Indonesian lawyer and a government official said. Heather Mack, who was 18 when she was arrested a day after the discovery of Sheila von Wiese-Mack’s body in the trunk of a taxi parked near the St. Regis Bali Resort, will be deported to the United States the day of her release, said Rika Aprianti, a spokesperson for the corrections department at the Justice and Human Rights Ministry. Aprianti declined to give the date of Mack’s release. Mack and her then-boyfriend, Tommy Schaefer, then 21, were convicted in 2015. Schaefer received an 18-year sentence. Mack’s Indonesian attorney, Yulius Benyamin Seran, said the early release from prison is in part the result of a six-month remission of sentence awarded to her by the Indonesian government during the country’s Independence Day celebration in August, he said. “Heather Mack has significantly changed in prison,” Seran said. “She (got) involved in activities arranged by correctional officers, she was entitled to the sentence reduction, and will be a free [person] again in October.”

Special repatriation flight takes Australians home from Bali

DENPASAR, Indonesia (AP) — More than a hundred Australian citizens left the Indonesian tourist island of Bali in mid-August aboard a special repatriation flight organized by the Australian government. Many Australians have been stranded on Bali because flights connecting Indonesia to Australia have been limited since the spread of COVID-19 in Indonesia. The Qantas flight was assigned for Australian citizen repatriation which took it to Darwin, said airport public relations manager Taufan Yudhistira. The plane flew empty from Sydney to Denpasar, Bali’s capital, and took off for Darwin with 186 people on board, including infants and crew, Yudhistira said.



**TEPID TOURISM.** A Kashmiri boatman rows his boat carrying Indian tourists at a market in the interior of Dal Lake in Srinagar, India-controlled Kashmir, on August 2, 2021. From the Great Wall to the picturesque Kashmir valley, Asia’s tourist destinations are looking to domestic visitors to get them through the COVID-19 pandemic’s second year. (AP Photo/Mukhtar Khan)

Asian tourism sees ups, downs in second year of pandemic

By The Associated Press

From the Great Wall to the picturesque Kashmir valley, Asia’s tourist destinations are looking to domestic visitors to get them through the COVID-19 pandemic’s second year.

With international travel heavily restricted, foreign tourists can’t enter many countries and locals can’t get out. In the metropolis of Hong Kong, glamping and staycations have replaced trips abroad for at least some of its 7.4 million residents.

Across the Asia-Pacific region, international tourist arrivals were down 95% in the first five months of the year, compared to the same period before the pandemic in 2019, according to the U.N. World Tourism Organization.

New variants of the virus loom — a constant threat to any recovery in even domestic tourism. Warnings of a possible third wave in India worry Imraan Ali, whose houseboat on Kashmir’s Dal Lake is his only source of income.

“Since we are expecting a good influx of tourists, we don’t want that to be affected,” he said.

India cautious as outbreak recedes

Tourists are returning to the valleys and mountains in India-controlled Kashmir, as infections in the Himalayan region and nationwide come down after a deadly second wave earlier this year.

The “shikaras,” or traditional Kashmiri houseboats, are back on the calm waters of Dal Lake as Indians travel at home. India is reporting about 30,000 new coronavirus cases a day, down from a peak of 400,000 in May but still enough for many countries to restrict travellers from India.

Nihaarika Rishabh said she and her husband were relieved to finally get away from their home in the city of Agra for their honeymoon, after their wedding was postponed during the second wave. The vacation in Kashmir has helped calm their nerves after months of the pandemic, she said.

Ali, the houseboat owner, is happy that the number of visitors has gone up. “We have been suffering from [the] past two years,” he said. “Our livelihood depends on tourism.”

But mountainous areas like Kashmir have seen an uptick in infections as the number of visitors rises, fuelling worries about a third wave.

Bangkok’s bustle goes quiet

Erawan Shrine in the center of Bangkok once bustled with foreign tourists and locals making offerings day and night. Today, it is eerily quiet. Only a handful of people buy incense or flowers from the vendors who set up stalls outside.

“We are still here because we don’t know what else to do,” said one, Ruedewan Thapjul.

As Thailand battles a punishing COVID-19 surge with nearly 20,000 new cases every day, people who depend on tourism struggle in what was one of the most-visited cities in the world, with 20 million visitors in the year before the pandemic.

Suthipong Pheunphiphop, the president of the Thai Travel Agents Association, urged the government to commit to its plan to reopen the country to foreign tourists in October.

Currently, the streets are all but empty in Bangkok’s Siam Square shopping district.

Passavee Kraidejudompaisarn, the third-generation owner of a popular noodle shop, wiped away tears as she talked about her fears

Continued on page 4

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Asian Currency Exchange Rates

Units per U.S. dollar as of 9/03

|                   |        |
|-------------------|--------|
| Bangladesh Taka   | 84.98  |
| Cambodian Riel    | 4076.7 |
| China Renminbi    | 6.4472 |
| Fijian Dollar     | 2.0412 |
| Hong Kong Dollar  | 7.7706 |
| Indian Rupee      | 72.982 |
| Indonesian Rupiah | 14147  |
| Iranian Rial      | 42025  |
| Japanese Yen      | 109.65 |
| Laos New Kip      | 9570.2 |
| Malaysian Ringgit | 4.144  |
| Nepal Rupee       | 117.34 |
| Pakistani Rupee   | 166.5  |
| Papua N.G. Kina   | 3.509  |
| Philippine Peso   | 49.894 |
| Russian Ruble     | 72.7   |
| Saudi Riyal       | 3.7499 |
| Singapore Dollar  | 1.3413 |
| South Korean Won  | 1155.2 |
| Sri Lankan Rupee  | 200.45 |
| Taiwan Dollar     | 27.605 |
| Thai Baht         | 32.45  |
| Vietnam Dong      | 22768  |