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Taiwan ups Chinese visitor curbs, to stop mask exports

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TAIPEI (Reuters) - Taiwan on Monday tightened curbs on Chinese visitors to the island amid the coronavirus outbreak and said it will make sure people are not breaking a temporary ban on exporting face masks.

Taiwan, which has close economic and cultural links with China even though political ties are strained, has reported five cases of the coronavirus and has already stopped most Chinese visitors from coming.

More than 80 people have died, all in China.

The government has now extended restrictions on people from China coming to Taiwan to include those who live outside of China and want to come to Taiwan for tourism, though said this does not include Hong Kong and Macau passport holders.

Taiwan has stepped up inspections at airports, asking arrivals to fill out health declaration forms, and has formed a task force to ensure the island can properly deal with the virus.

Last week Taiwan's government announced a one-month ban on the export of specialist masks designed to be used for medical personnel, saying it had to look after the needs of its own people first.

Some pharmacies in Taiwan have reported shortages of face masks since the island reported its first case a week ago, and the government says it is working to ensure supplies.

Taiwan's customs administration said on Monday people could take masks out with them if they were for personal use, but added that it would make inspections if needed.

"Customs will judge the reasonable number for personal use according to the circumstances of the number of accompanying people, the number of travel days, and

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the tourist area,” it said in a statement.

The inspections appear aimed at stopping travelers from Taiwan, whether Taiwanese citizens or others, from taking the masks to China for resale, as China is facing tight supplies due to the rapid rise in coronavirus case numbers.

Taiwan’s official Central News Agency said that over the Lunar New Year period that means each person can only take out five boxes.

Taiwan returns to work on Thursday after the week-long holiday.

Reporting by Ben Blanchard; Editing by Chizu Nomiyama and Alex Richardson

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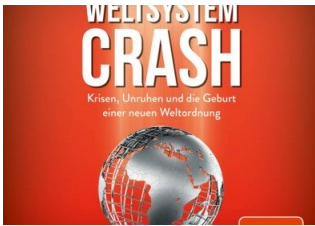
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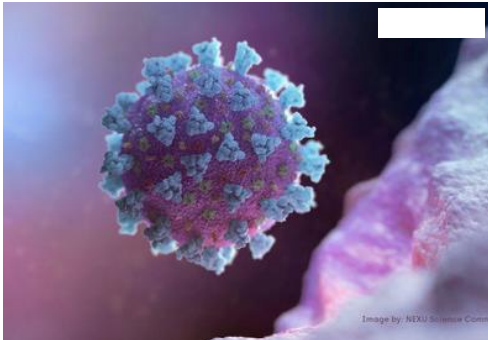


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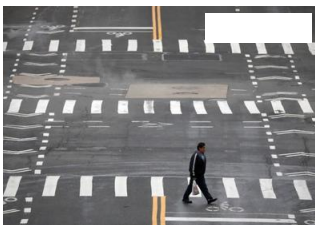
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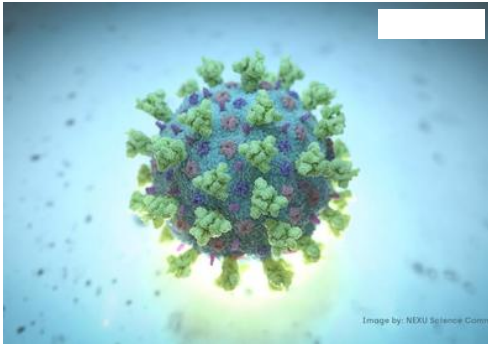
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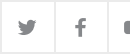
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