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Spain to receive 350,000 doses of Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine per week

Spain will receive 350,000 doses per week of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine starting on today, Health Minister Salvador Illa said, as infection rates surge in the country. A total of nearly 4.6 million doses will be delivered by mid-March. A first batch containing an unspecified amount will be delivered to the city of Gualajara in central Spain,

where vaccination will begin tomorrow. The vaccine will then be distributed to other regions, on the basis of the share of the population considered vulnerable. "We will have the beginning of the end (of the pandemic) on Dec. 27. But it is going to take a few months to materialise," Illa told a news conference. He estimated that at least 2.3 million people will be in-

oculated with the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, with other vaccines to follow after gaining EU approval. The government has said it aims to vaccinate between 15 million and 20 million people, out of Spain's population of around 47 million, in the first half of 2021. The first people to be vaccinated will be residents and staff at nursing homes, followed by frontline health workers.

A letter of thanks from President

Palma. — President Francina Armengol's Christmas letter to the people of the Balearics expresses her thanks to health workers, to business and to the citizens themselves. The letter comes at a time of "special days" for Christmas but also of a turning-point in the evolution of the pandemic in the Balearics because of the arrival of the vaccine. In calling for health safety measures to be observed to the maximum over Christmas, the president first offers her thanks to health workers, "who have experienced the stress and pain of the global crisis on the front line".



Spain to keep negotiating on Gibraltar border after Brexit deal

Madrid.—Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said Madrid and London would continue to negotiate an agreement on the British territory of Gibraltar on the Iberian Peninsula after the Brexit trade deal clinched with the European Union on Thursday. "I welcome the principle of agreement between the EU and the UK ... Spain and the UK continue their dialogue to reach an agreement on Gibraltar," Sanchez said in a tweet, adding that EU member states would still exam-

ine the Brexit deal in coming days. Spain claims sovereignty over the port at the mouth of the Mediterranean that it ceded to Britain in 1713 after a war. But it has agreed to put the issue of sovereignty to one side to focus on the opportunity to reach a side deal with Britain to avoid having a hard EU border in southern Spain after Brexit. About 15,000 people commute daily from Spain to Gibraltar, which has a population of 32,000.

The port also welcomes some 10 million tourists per year, a sector accounting for about a quarter of its economy. Gibraltar's Chief Minister Fabian Picardo told Spanish state broadcaster TVE on Wednesday the sides were working on a deal to facilitate the daily crossings for workers on both sides of the border, not ruling out a possible agreement that would make Gibraltar part of the Schengen area. *El Pais* newspaper said earlier Spain and Gibraltar were nearing

such an agreement that would mean that from Jan. 1 there would be border controls for British citizens travelling to Gibraltar, but Spaniards and Gibraltarians could freely cross the land border. In a 2002 referendum, 99% of Gibraltarians rejected any idea of Britain sharing sovereignty with Spain. But in 2016, nearly 96% of voters in Gibraltar backed staying in the EU, while in Britain proper the referendum vote was 52%-48% in favour of leaving the bloc.



King Felipe calls for "great national effort" in moving forward: See Inside

Many just want a hug for Christmas this year, Queen says

All many people want for Christmas this year is a simple hug, Britain's Queen Elizabeth said in her annual festive message, saying it would be hard for those who lost loved ones to COVID-19 pandemic or were separated by curbs on social mixing. In her traditional pre-recorded Christmas Day address to the nation, the 94-year-old monarch repeatedly spoke of hope for the future whilst acknowledging millions of Britons would be unable to have their usual family celebrations this year. "Of course for many, this time of year will be tinged with sadness; some mourning the loss of those dear to

them, and others missing friends and family members distanced for safety when all they really want for Christmas is a simple hug or a squeeze of the hand," Elizabeth said. "If you are among them, you are not alone. And let me assure you of my thoughts and prayers." The queen herself has had to eschew her traditional Christmas celebrations, and is spending the festive season quietly at Windsor Castle with her husband Prince Philip, 99. Usually, all the Windsors gather at her home on the Sandringham estate in eastern England, the walk to a nearby church for a Christmas Day service is a staple of the royal calendar.

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