



**THE CITY REGISTERED ITS THIRD OMICRON CASE AND THE TWO CLOSE CONTACTS OF THE 27-YEAR-OLD RESIDENT HAVE TESTED POSITIVE FOLLOWING RETESTING**

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**COVID-19 CASE 74 ACCUSED OF BREACHING INFECTIOUS DISEASES ACT**

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**FOLLOWING UNCERTAINTIES AMID THE PANDEMIC CRISIS, JP MORGAN WINDS UP FORECASTING FOR 2022 REBOUND**

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AP PHOTO



**South Korea's** military apologized yesterday for causing public concern about its security readiness, days after it failed to stop a suspected North Korean defector who crossed the heavily fortified border to return to the North. The Joint Chiefs of Staff said South Korean surveillance cameras detected the person scaling a barbed-wire fence at the border on Saturday, triggering alarms and prompting a team of six soldiers to move to the area.

**North Korea** fired a ballistic missile into the sea yesterday, the U.S. military said, its first weapons launch in about two months and a signal it isn't interested in rejoining denuclearization talks anytime soon and would rather focus on boosting its weapons arsenal. The launch came after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to further strengthen his military capability — without disclosing any new policies toward the United States or South Korea — at a high-profile ruling party conference last week. *More on p7*

AP PHOTO



**Kazakhstan** Demonstrators angered by rising fuel prices stormed the mayor's office in Kazakhstan's largest city yesterday and attempted to break into the presidential residence, according to local news reports, as intensifying protests led the Central Asian country's government to resign. Many of the demonstrators who converged on the mayoral office in Almaty carried clubs and shields, and flames were seen coming from the building, according to the reports.

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# ANOTHER LOCKDOWN



**Macau and Hong Kong are banning incoming flights from regions outside mainland China for two weeks in an attempt to stem an emerging omicron outbreak**

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**CEBU PACIFIC TO RESUME MACAU-MANILA FLIGHTS NEXT MONTH**

P2



AP PHOTO



Passengers look out from the Spectrum of the Seas cruise ship docked at Kai Tak cruise terminal in Hong Kong yesterday

That includes about 2,500 passengers who were being held yesterday on a cruise ship in Hong Kong for coronavirus tests, after health authorities said nine passengers were linked to an omicron cluster and ordered the ship to turn back.

Authorities forced the Royal Caribbean's Spectrum of the Seas ship, which departed Sunday on a "cruise to nowhere," to return a day early yesterday, according to a government statement.

The ship returned to Hong Kong yesterday morning and passengers were held onboard for most of the day while they awaited testing.

One passenger, Claudy Wong, said Royal Caribbean had tried its best to follow pandemic regulations.

"The pandemic has gone on for so long, actually passengers like us who board the cruise are already prepared for such situations to happen," Wong said.

Royal Caribbean said in a statement that the nine guests were immediately isolated and all tested negative, and that the company was working closely with authorities to comply with epidemic prevention policies and regulations.

It said guests who were on the affected ship would receive a 25% refund on their cruise fare. The ship's next sailing on Thursday was also canceled because the crew must undergo testing, and those guests will receive a full refund.

The city has reported a total of 12,690 confirmed coronavirus infections as of Tuesday, including 213 deaths. **MDT/AP**

COVID-19

# MACAU, HONG KONG BAN FLIGHTS, IMPOSE OTHER RESTRICTIONS

**T**HE Macau government has announced a two-week ban on flights from regions outside the mainland China from January 9 to January 23, the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre announced in a statement last night.

The move is to deter the spread of Covid-19 variants, following new omicron cases recently recorded.

Yesterday, Hong Kong authorities also announced a two-week ban on flights from the United States

and seven other countries and held 2,500 passengers on a cruise ship for coronavirus testing yesterday as the city attempted to stem an emerging omicron outbreak.

The two-week ban on passenger flights from Australia, Canada, France, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Britain and the United States will take effect Sunday and continue until Jan. 21.

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam also announced that restaurant dining will be forbidden after 6 p.m. for two weeks starting Friday.

Game arcades, bars and beauty salons must also close during that period.

"We have to contain the pandemic to ensure that there will not be a major outbreak in the community again," Lam said at a news conference, adding that the city is "on the verge" of another surge.

The measures came as new omicron clusters have emerged over the past week, many linked to several Cathay Pacific crew members who broke isolation rules and dined at restaurants and bars in

the city before testing positive.

Hong Kong has reported 114 omicron variant cases as of Tuesday, with most being imported. On Tuesday, it reported its first untraceable case in nearly three months, which authorities said was likely caused by the omicron variant.

Hong Kong officials have moved swiftly to block the spread of the variant, locking down residential buildings where people have tested positive and mass-testing thousands of people.

LYNZY VALLES

**L**OW-COST carrier Cebu Pacific Air will resume direct weekly flights between Macau and Manila, kicking off on February 5.

Yesterday, the Philippines-based carrier announced its "new flights" from Macau, Jakarta, and Saigon in February, from which passengers connect on in the Philippines.

A one-way ticket costs around MOP900 and flights are scheduled every Saturday.

This comes after a nearly two-year-long travel halt to Macau, as the SAR border

## Cebu Pacific to resume Manila-Macau flight

has remained closed since March 2020.

The new flight is the second scheduled international flight using Macau International Airport since Scoot resumed its Singapore route in April 2021. A significant number of residents have used Scoot flights to leave and re-enter Macau from/to regions outside mainland China.

Border measures remain in effect for non-resident workers and tourists.

The flight will hence only cater to Filipinos who

wish to return home, and Macau ID card holders stranded in the Philippines.

The Philippine Consulate General in Macau has already repatriated a total of 5,152 people across 26 flights to date since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020.

The existence of this new flight implies that stranded Filipinos in the SAR do not need to wait for a repatriation flight to be brought back home.

As part of the health

authorities' requirements, passengers coming from extremely high-risk cities – including the Philippines – are required to present certificates for three nucleic acid tests conducted within five days of the intended departure date.

Each test must be conducted at least 24 hours apart.

These passengers will also have to undergo 28 days of quarantine – which could be extended to 35 days if they test positive under serologic testing.



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A MACAU TIMES PUBLICATIONS LTD PUBLICATION

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#### LETTER FROM AN UNKNOWN WOMAN

# Soloist lives out human personas through art

ANTHONY LAM

**T**HE soloist in the recent performances of Letter from an Unknown Woman, Huang Xiangli, celebrates the humanity that animates all forms of art.

Letter from an Unknown Woman is an intense, confessional work adapted from the well-known Austrian novella by Stefan Zweig. Conceived by one of China's most influential theatre directors, Meng Jinghui, the show at the Macao Cultural Centre's Grand

Auditorium highlights an actress praised across the nation for her ingenious monologue skills.

"When I first started doing the show, I [did not feel] much strong emotion in the role," she said. She recalled that, over her performances, she gradually found stronger feelings from the role.

"At the end of several shows, I felt an emotion that I previously hadn't," she said. "And these new emotions would quickly be used in my next shows."

Huang hinted that, as she performs the role more and more, her

understanding of the role grows. It seems that both it and she develop in a parallel fashion.

"My understanding of the role gradually expanded [along with] the number of performances, including my ability to feel and my imagination did so," she explained. "It will further enrich and open up the role itself."

The performer remains, however, flesh and blood, which means that there can be times that she cannot perform because of illness or exhaustion.

Having led nearly 1,000 shows

of the namesake drama, Huang said that the most challenging part of the journey was to stay healthy along the way. "I didn't dare to get sick," she said, because she could not be suddenly replaced due to an illness.

There were times that she was so worn out she wanted to suspend the show, but she always kept going. She considered this to be down to not just her professionalism, but as a way to feel stronger as she overcame her physical hurdles.

With the astonishing number of shows completed, Huang admits that sometimes she has felt disoriented and wearied before shows, and sometimes about the show. "However, I reckoned that I had to overcome these emotions because I'm a professional actress."

Huang has been doing monologue dramas since 2013.

The show started in small theaters with 300 to 600 seats. Later on, it was upgraded to larger theaters with capacities of more than 1,000. Huang said that performing to a larger audience once would have consumed more of her energy. She admitted that sometimes she felt a greater strain before she even stepped on the stage.

Nonetheless, she managed to transform this pressure into momentum.

Another thing that she finds interesting about the show is how she yearns for the audience's reactions afterwards.

The director, Meng Jinghui, is one of the most influential and celebrated Chinese theatre directors. His incisive wit and critical style earned him an outstanding place in the contemporary drama scene, bringing vitality to theatre in China and elsewhere.

In this show, Huang convincingly creates an incisive portrait, bringing to life a woman trapped in a cascade of raptures and agonies.

#### UM TO HOLD OPEN DAY ON JAN 16

The University of Macau (UM) will hold its UM Open Day 2022 on January 16, hosting activities including admission consultations and key laboratory tours for potential students. The opening ceremony will be held at 11:00 a.m. in the Multifunctional Hall of the UM Guest House. The Open Day will end at 5:00 p.m. Throughout, various faculties, residential colleges, and laboratories will be open to visitors, along with the university library and Sports Complex. In addition, sports, fun experiments, exhibition booths, science talks, creative workshops, and performances will be held.

#### SLIGHT DECREASE IN RESIDENT DEPOSITS

Resident deposits dropped 0.2% from the preceding month to MOP671.3 billion, while non-resident deposits fell 1.0% to MOP380.6 billion in November, according to data from the Monetary Authority of Macao. Conversely, public sector deposits with the banking sector rose 0.4% to MOP263.2 billion. As a result, total deposits in the banking sector decreased 0.3% from the month prior to MOP1,315.1 billion. At end-November, the loan-to-deposit ratio for the resident sector rose from 60.2% at end-October to 60.3%. The ratio for both the resident and non-resident sectors increased from 99.8% to 100.5%.

#### RECRUITMENT FOR HENGQIN STAFF ONGOING

The Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) has co-organized a job recruitment fair between Hengqin and Macau, proffering 400 jobs. In collaboration with the Livelihood Affairs Bureau and Economic Development Services Bureau, the recruitment covers areas of activity such as electronic technology, information technology, biopharmaceuticals, marketing, and financial auditing, among others. To date, 69 Macau residents have applied. In a statement, the DSAL called on residents interested in accessing these new employment opportunities in the cooperation zone to submit their resumes through the DSAL website before January 22.

#### COVID-19

# Third omicron variant case recorded, close contacts test positive

**T**HE imported case of asymptomatic infection announced on January 3 is associated with the Omicron variant, according to health authorities.

As the person concerned has not shown any symptoms as yet, they remain classified as an imported case of asymptomatic infection.

The case concerns a 27-year-old resident who had been administered two doses of the mRNA

vaccine in April and May 2021. On December 31, she underwent nucleic acid testing in the UK, and received a negative result.

On January 2, she took flight SQ305 from the United Kingdom to Singapore (seat No. 42C), and the following day took flight TR904 from Singapore to Macau (seat No. 27A).

Upon entering Macau, she was subject to a nasopharyngeal swab test, the result of which was positive.

The Public Health Laboratory sequenced the virus genome. Results obtained on January 5 revealed that this patient is infected with the Omicron variant.

Meanwhile, the two close contacts of the 27-year-old resident have tested positive following retesting, the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre announced last night.

The first close contact is a 32-year-old woman who

is a family member. She received two doses of mRNA vaccine in June and July 2021.

Her initial nucleic acid test result was negative. On January 2, the woman took flight SQ305 from London to Singapore (seat 42A), and on January 3 took flight TR904 (seat 27C) from Singapore to Macau.

The second close contact is a 47-year-old male who was a passenger in the first three rows of Singapore-to-Macau flight TR904,

who was also vaccinated in June and July 2021.

On January 1, the passenger boarded flight SQ037 from Los Angeles to Singapore (seat 32E), and on January 3, he took flight TR904 (seat 25A) into Macau.

The two received a nasopharyngeal swab test upon entry into the SAR, with both testing negative for the virus.

As the two were listed as close contacts, medical observation was arranged at the Public Health Clinical Center in Coloane.

Following their negative nucleic acid test results on Tuesday, both tested positive yesterday.

Viral genome sequence test results have yet to be announced. LV

# Covid-19 case 74 accused of breaching Infectious diseases act

RENATO MARQUES

A 40-year-old man from Vietnam classified as Covid-19 infection case number 74 in September last year has been now accused of breaching the provisions of Law 2/2004 - Prevention, Control, and Treatment of Infectious Diseases, the Judiciary Police (PJ) reports.

According to a PJ spokesperson speaking at the joint press conference of the police forces, the man has been put under PJ custody yesterday afternoon to be questioned due to a complaint filed by the Health Bureau (SSM). He had recently been released from his extended treatment on December 31.

According to PJ, the SSM states that, while the man was receiving treatment, they found that he had lied about his infection. Specifically, he had claimed not to know of or have been in contact with the people classified as cases 72, 73, and 75.

The SSM has discovered that in reality the suspect knew and was a friend and co-worker of the other three people in a renovation work where he had been illegally hired as a part-time worker.

The suspect admitted to the PJ that he had provided false testimony to the health authorities, fearing that the owner of the laundry company where he was legally employed would find out about his side job and fire him.

The SSM claims that, due to his false statements, the man delayed the discovery of further cases in the community, which could have resulted in an even larger outbreak with severe societal consequences.

The case was passed on to the Public Prosecutions Office on January 2, with the accusation of breaching several law provisions.

The law states - in line one of Article 17 - Special Duties - that people infected, suspected to be infected, or at risk of contracting an infectious disease must convey all known information about their health status, places they have been, and any contacts made with other people.

GABE PIERCE



CRIME

# DRIVER SUSPECTED OF CRASHING CAR, FLEEING SCENE WHILE UNDER ALCOHOL INFLUENCE

RENATO MARQUES

A 35-year-old man from Hong Kong - working in Macau as a designer - is suspected of crashing his car while under the influence of alcohol. The suspect fled the scene of the accident, the Public Security Police Force (PSP) stated yesterday during the regular joint police forces press conference.

According to the PSP's report, the police were informed around 3 a.m. on December 31 that a car had crashed into road barriers located at Estrada Flor de Lotus in Cotai.

After the accident, the driver is said to have reversed his car and driven away to dodge culpability.

The authorities noted 32 water-filled barriers were damaged, along with three signs and 10 reflective traffic cones on site.

An hour into their search, officers found the car parked at the Rua Marginal da Concordia just a few hundred meters from the crash site. The front end of the car was damaged, and there were traces of paint and debris indicating its contact with the plastic barriers and traffic cones.

The police searched the car for proof of ownership, and found that the owner was a woman addressed to a neighboring condominium.

Upon questioning, the woman said that she had not driven the car that day,

and claimed that her husband had been driving.

While questioning the husband, the police noticed an intense alcohol smell from him. They performed a breathalyzer test, which revealed that the man had a blood-alcohol concentration of 1.34grams per liter - almost three times the legal maximum of 0.5g/L when driving.

The suspect admitted to the police of being involved in the crash. He said that the accident occurred because he fell asleep while driving home, and claimed that he had not consumed any alcohol at that time.

He also said that he did not believe he had to notify the authorities, as he did not regard the crash as sig-

nificant. He observed that it did not involve any other vehicles or people, and there was only minor damage to the car itself.

He also justified the breathalyzer test result by stating that he had consumed three cans of beer immediately after arriving home, and immediately before the police's questioning.

The PSP says that, nevertheless, there was enough evidence to demonstrate that his excuses were not credible.

The police have passed on the case to the Public Prosecution Office, where the man is to be accused of driving under the influence of alcohol, causing an accident, and fleeing the scene.

# CURRENCY EXCHANGE SCAM RETURNS ON LARGE SCALE

A significant number of Ascams related to illegal currency exchange have been reported in the past few days, the PJ has announced.

These crimes, which were a feature of previous years, seem to have resurged in the final days of 2021 and the onset of 2022, with five ca-

ses reported over the past weekend.

All the cases involved the same modus operandi. The suspects would approach victims in casinos to exchange RMB into HKD for personal gambling. The victims would transfer sums in RMB via a QR code into an account

in the mainland, and the suspects (six in total) would hand them a bundle of HKD bank notes. Only a few from the top and bottom of each bundle were real, and the rest of the bundle were forged.

The PJ has detained six suspects and apprehended over 180 forged banknotes

with an exchange value of between HKD50,000 and HKD200,000.

The suspects have told the PJ they were hired to conduct these schemes in Macau by an unknown person in Zhuhai. They confessed to receiving a wage of RMB600 per day. **RM**

RENATO MARQUES



GAMING

# JP Morgan winds up forecasting for 2022 rebound

LYNZY VALLES

**F**OLLOWING uncertainties amid the Covid-19 crisis and the subsequent economic fallout and strict border measures implemented, brokerage JP Morgan has said that it will not attempt to forecast the city's gaming recovery for 2022.

In a report, the brokerage reiterated that the degree of recovery of the gross gaming revenue (GGR) from casinos is dependent on the "pace and level of travel normalization around the region," citing a report issued by GGRAsia.

The analysts admitted that they are less confident in their numbers than they were a year ago, noting that the investment bank had modelled mass and VIP GGR would recover to 75% and 35% of 2019's in 2021, respectively. These estimates were "more conservative" than investor consensus at that time.

"The wild card will be any travel restrictions from China or a



Covid-19 outbreak in Macau," analyst Vitaly Umansky stated.

Back in June, JP Morgan analysts expressed their disappointment with "stricter-than-expected" border measures and

the initially proposed cross-city travel plan between Hong Kong and Macau. They noted: "we couldn't help but be somewhat disappointed by the seemingly limited scale (at least initially) of the

travel bubble plan, as well as the slower-than-expected timing of the launch."

They therefore scaled down its GGR prognosis for the third and fourth quarters of 2021 to 43%

and 58% of pre-pandemic levels respectively, down from the earlier prediction of 50% and 66%.

In 2021, there was a 44% year-on-year increase of GGR compared with 2020, figures released by the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) show.

The year closed with a total GGR of MOP86.86 billion, 43.7% higher than the MOP60.44 billion recorded in 2020.

Nonetheless, the positive result obtained at the close of 2021 remains far behind the pre-pandemic GGR of 2019 – less than a third of the MOP292.46 billion in GGR recorded that year.

December closed with a monthly GGR of MOP7.96 billion, attributable to reductions in VIP spending "on the back of the Sun-city closure and other junkets' business slowing down," according to Sanford Bernstein.

Back in September, following the announcement of amendments to be made to the gaming law, JP Morgan noted that city's gaming sector would stay "un-investable" until clarity was given regarding the forthcoming concessions. In a note by analysts DS Kim, Amanda Cheng, and Livy Lyu, JP Morgan states that investors should remain cautious, as clarity on this matter is "unlikely [to come] in the next six months."

## Retiring DSSOPT head wants to travel after leaving office

**A**LONG with spending more time with her family, Chan Pou Ha, the retiring director of the Land, Public Works and Transport Bureau (DSSOPT), said yesterday that she wants to spend more time travelling in her retirement.

Chan will retire on January 14.

Having served at the bureau for many years, Chan ascended to deputy director in 2009, serving until 2015. She was promoted to head of the bureau in January 2020.

In her review of the past two years, she said that, alongside her daily responsibilities, she took part in reviewing the laws and regulations related to her fields, and the internal structure of the bureau.

She said that she has committed the same dedication to each position she has held.

The official gave thanks to her colleagues for their support, and to her superintendent, the Secretary for Public Works and Transport.

Regarding the Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) report on alleged scheme involving the bureau, Chan declined



Chan Pou Ha

to comment on the activities of other people. She also declined to comment on her predecessor's corruption case, which is now in judicial procedure.

Despite this, the retiring director stressed that the team at the DSSOPT valued the opinions of the CCAC.

Yesterday, the Urban Planning Committee held its first plenary of 2022. Among the 14 draft plans, the proposed projects on Patio da Eterna

Felicidade and Rua da Tercena are required by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) to maintain the front façade and characteristics of the roofs.

Full retention of the roof may not be possible, due to fire safety equipment and other facilities, said the IC.

The DSSOPT and IC will work together on the Pátio do Espinho project to ensure the pipeline network will not impact the structure of the building. **AL**

## PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE SEEKING CONCISE TAXATION CODE STIPULATIONS

**V**ONG Hin Fai, president of the parliamentary committee studying the Taxation Code, has said that committee members hope to see concise stipulations for more effective laws in future.

Emphasizing the necessity of a modern local tax system, Vong said that laws being concise is important to ensure that residents and investors can understand their tax responsibilities readily.

He disclosed that, in previous meetings, members have expressed their interest in straightforward, concise stipulations.

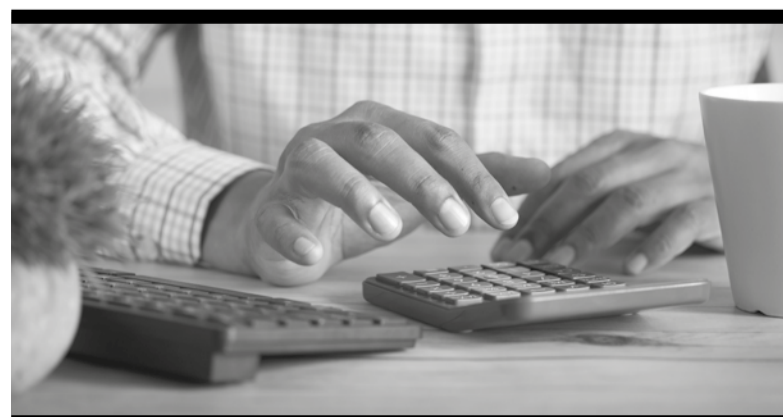
The committee held the sixth session of plenary yesterday to discuss the bill. Vong explained to the press that more time will be needed for this bill compared to others, owing to its size and te-

chnical complexity.

During yesterday's session, the committee discussed Articles 99 to 126 of the bill, which has 293 topics in total. During the discussion, they talked over the settlement within the tax procedure, review and assessment of taxation basis, settlement behavior, and collection.

The bill proposes that the conditions and requirements of the prior agreement on transfer pricing, and regulations on their implementation, be designated by an Executive Order, which does not exist currently due to the absence of any such stipulation.

The committee also invited the government to further outline the pricing of internal transactions within an international corporation. **AL**





COVID-19

# CHINA REPORTS MAJOR DROP IN VIRUS CASES IN XI'AN

HUIZHONG WU

CHINA yesterday reported a major drop in COVID-19 infections in

the northern city of Xi'an, which has been under a tight lockdown, in most districts the city, for the past two weeks that has sharply

disrupted the lives of its 13 million residents.

The National Health Commission announced just 35 new cases in Xi'an,

home to the famed Terracotta Warriors statues along with major industries, down from 95 the day before.

That marks a steady decline since daily new cases topped 100, prompting officials to retain and in some cases tighten restrictions on people leaving their homes.

Xi'an has reported more than 1,600 cases but no deaths in its latest surge. That's a small number compared to outbreaks in other countries, a sign that China's "zero tolerance" strategy of quarantining every case, mass testing and trying to block new infections from abroad has helped it contain major outbreaks.

The lockdowns, however, are far more stringent than anything seen in the West, and have exacted a tremendous toll on the economy and disrupted the lives of millions of people.

News of people in Xi'an seeking urgent medical care who have been turned away at hospitals for not having current COVID-19 test results have spread online.

They included a pregnant woman who felt pains in her stomach on New Year's Day but was not allowed into a hospital, ac-

ording to a post by the woman's niece that was shared widely on social media.

The woman waited outside the hospital on a pink plastic stool until she started bleeding. She was finally let into the hospital after medical workers saw the blood, but the fetus was already dead, the post said.

The AP was not able to independently verify the video. The woman's niece did not respond to messages left on her social media accounts.

Authorities told Phoenix News that they are investigating the case.

Another city, Yuzhou in Henan province, was also placed under lockdown over the weekend after the discovery of three asymptomatic cases.

Only emergency vehicles are allowed on the roads, classes have been suspended and businesses catering to the public have closed for all but essential needs in the city of 1.17 million.

The province of Henan reported two new asymptomatic cases on Wednesday, although it wasn't clear if they were in Yuzhou. Several other cities in the province have ordered mass testing, shut public venues and restricted or suspended intercity travel, despite only small numbers of cases being detected.

With the Beijing Olympics beginning Feb. 4, China is doubling down on measures to prevent any new outbreak that could affect the proceedings.

People are being told to travel in and out of Beijing

and the capital on Tuesday, including the main media center.

"Staging major international sporting events such as the Winter Olympics will be an opportunity to enhance the influence of Chinese culture, the reach of news reporting and the nation's soft power," Xi was quoted as saying by the official Xinhua News Agency.

Outbreak concerns added to controversies that have dogged the Olympics over China's human rights record, with the U.S. and close allies announcing a diplomatic boycott. Xi is seeking to be appointed to a third five-year term as leader this year and is eager to avoid any development that could tarnish his reputation.

China has vaccinated nearly 85% of its population, according to Our World in Data. The shots have helped reduce the severity of disease, although Chinese vaccines are considered less effective than those used elsewhere.

Some residents of Xi'an have been complaining of food shortages, prompting officials to defend their measures and pledge to ensure adequate supplies. Some residents are receiving free food packages, while others are still scrambling to find where they can purchase groceries online.

Officials haven't given a specific date for the lifting of the lockdown.

The deputy director of the city's Center for Disease Control, Chen Zhijun, said it would come after there

are no new transmissions among the general population and the only new cases are close contacts of those infected who have already been quarantined.

At least two district Communist Party officials in Xi'an have been sacked for failing to control the outbreak, and a third, the head of the city's big data management bureau, Liu Jun, has been suspended, Xinhua reported yesterday.

That came after the city's health code system that monitors movements and vaccinations crashed on Dec. 20 due to high traffic as case numbers were rising, Xinhua said.

China has reported a total of 102,932 cases nationwide, with its death toll remaining steady at 4,636. **MDT/AP**

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## China has vaccinated nearly 85% of its population, according to Our World in Data

only if they absolutely need to and hotels have largely stopped taking new reservations. Athletes, officials and journalists are entering an "anti-pandemic" bubble as soon as they arrive and will remain within it until the Feb. 4-20 Winter Games are over.

No fans from outside China will be permitted and most spectators are expected to come from schools, government offices and the military rather than the general public.

Underscoring the importance of the event, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Olympic sites arou-

# North Korea fires ballistic missile, first test in two months

HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

**N**ORTH Korea fired a ballistic missile into the sea yesterday, the U.S. military said, its first such launch in about two months and a signal it isn't interested in rejoining denuclearization talks anytime soon and would rather focus on boosting its weapons arsenal.

The launch came after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to further strengthen his military capability — without disclosing any new policies toward the United States or South Korea — at a high-profile ruling party conference last week.

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said the ballistic missile launch “highlights the destabilizing impact of (North Korea’s) illicit weapons program” but didn’t pose an immediate threat to U.S. territory or its allies. It said in a statement that the U.S. commitment to the defense of its allies, South Korea and Japan, remains “ironclad.”

South Korea’s military said a suspected ballistic missile fired from North Korea’s mountainous northern Jagang province flew toward its eastern waters. Defense Minister Suh Wook said the launch is seen as part of North Korea’s military buildup, but that South Korea is analyzing whether it had any political intention.

In an emergency video confe-



A TV screen showing a news program reporting about North Korea's missile with file footage at a train station in Seoul

rence, members of South Korea’s presidential national security team expressed concerns about the launch and said resuming talks with North Korea is important to resolve tensions, according to the presidential Blue House.

The Japanese Defense Ministry also detected the North Korean launch. “We find it truly regrettable that North Korea has continued to fire missiles since last year,” Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told reporters.

China, North Korea’s most important ally, maintained an even-handed response to the launch, with Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin calling for dialogue and saying “all parties concerned should keep in mind the big picture (and) be cautious with

their words and actions.”

Last fall, North Korea carried out a spate of weapons tests in what experts called an attempt to apply more pressure on its rivals to accept it as a nuclear power in hopes of winning relief from economic sanctions. The tests included a submarine-launched ballistic missile and a developmental hypersonic missile. Since artillery firing drills in early November, North Korea had halted testing activities until yesterday’s launch.

The Biden administration has repeatedly said it is open to resuming nuclear diplomacy with North Korea “anywhere and at any time” without preconditions. North Korea has so far rebuffed such overtures, saying U.S. hostility remains unchanged.

He said North Korea would likely move forward with its military buildup.

Japanese media cited Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi as saying the missile was presumed to have landed outside Japan’s exclusive economic zone. U.N. Security Council resolutions ban any ballistic activities by North Korea, but the council typically doesn’t impose new sanctions for short-range missile launches.

During last week’s plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the ruling Workers’ Party, Kim repeated his vow to boost his country’s military capacity and ordered the production of more powerful, sophisticated weapons systems. State media reports on the meeting said North Korea set forth “tactical directions” for external relations, including with South Korea, but didn’t elaborate. The reports made no mention of the United States.

Kim marked 10 years in power last month. Since assuming control after his father and longtime ruler Kim Jong Il’s death in December 2011, Kim Jong Un has established absolute power at home and staged an unusually large number of weapons tests as part of efforts to build nuclear-tipped missiles capable of reaching the American mainland.

During Kim’s rule, North Korea has conducted 62 rounds of ballistic missile tests, compared with nine rounds during his grandfather and state founder Kim Il Sung’s 46-year rule, and 22 rounds during Kim Jong Il’s 17-year rule, according to South Korean and U.S. figures. Four of North Korea’s six nuclear tests and its three intercontinental ballistic missile launches all occurred under Kim Jong Un’s rule. **MDT/AP**

## INDONESIA

# Prosecutors seek life for Bali bombing suspect

**I**NDONESIAN prosecutors yesterday demanded a life sentence for a top terror suspect who eluded capture for 18 years and accused him of masterminding a series of deadly attacks in the world’s most populous Muslim nation.

Aris Sumarsono, 58, whose real name is Arif Sunarso but is better known as Zulkarnaen, sat impassively as the prosecution announced the sentencing demand before a panel of three judges in East Jakarta District Court in a session that was held remotely due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Police and prosecutors say Zulkarnaen is the former military commander of Jemaah Islamiyah, a



Suspected militant Arif Sunarso appears on a video screen via remote video link during his trial hearing in Jakarta

Southeast Asian militant group with ties to al-Qaida. The group is widely blamed for attacks including the 2002 bombings on the Indonesian resort island of Bali that killed 202 people, mostly foreign tourists, as well as attacks in the Phil-

ippines. Zulkarnaen had eluded capture for 18 years after being named a suspect in the October 2002 suicide bombings of Paddy’s Pub and the Sari Club in Bali. He was arrested last year in Lampung, a province on

the southern tip of Sumatra. Police were tipped off to his hideout after interrogating several suspected militants arrested in earlier raids.

Zulkarnaen argued that he was a leader of the network’s military wing but was not involved in the operation of the Bali bombings, as he was focused on organizing his squad for sectarian conflicts in Ambon and Poso and in the southern Philippines.

During his trial, which began in September, other convicted militants in the 2002 Bali bombings, including Umar Patek and Ali Imron, who were sentenced to 20 years and life in jail, respectively, supported

Zulkarnaen’s claim, saying he knew about the plot but did not play a role in its operation.

The sentencing demand was initially scheduled for Nov. 24 but was postponed several times.

State prosecutor Agus Tri told the court that Zulkarnaen’s acts had resulted in deaths and injuries and that there was no reason for leniency.

“The defendant was involved in the Bali bombings plan,” he told the court. “He also instructed his group’s special forces led by him to save Jemaah Islamiyah’s assets, including weapons and explosives.”

Police previously said Zulkarnaen masterminded

church attacks that occurred simultaneously in many Indonesian regions on Christmas and New Year’s Eve in 2000 that killed more than 20 people. He was also the mastermind of a bomb attack on the official residence of the Philippine ambassador in Jakarta in 2000 that killed two people, and the architect of sectarian conflict in Ambon and Poso from 1998 to 2000.

Zulkarnaen, a biologist who was among the first Indonesian militants to go to Afghanistan in the 1980s for training, was an instructor at a military academy there for seven years, Indonesian police said.

Since May 2005, Zulkarnaen has been listed on an al-Qaida sanctions list by the U.N. Security Council for being associated with Osama bin Laden or the Taliban. **MDT/AP**

ISRAEL

# Omicron drives records, zigzag policy, fourth shots

LAURIE KELLMAN,  
TEL AVIV

**I**SRAEL opened to tourists for the first time in nearly two years. After just a month, it slammed shut. Now the omicron variant has set a widely-expected record for new infections in the country, which will once again crack open on Sunday — but only to travelers from certain nations.

The back-and-forth has created whiplash for many Israelis. Even in the relatively small, wealthy Mideast nation - an early global leader against the coronavirus pandemic - the omicron variant is outpacing the government's ability to make and execute clear pandemic public policy. What once was a straightforward regimen of vaccines, testing, contact tracing and distancing for the nation of 9.4 million has splintered into a zigzag of rules that seem to change every few days.

The confusion here, on everything from tourism to testing, quarantines, masks and school policy, offers a glimpse of the pandemic puzzle facing governments worldwide as the omicron variant burns through the population. Someday, the World Health Organization will declare the pandemic over. But in the meantime, leaders are weighing how much illness, isolation and death people are willing to risk.

In Israel as elsewhere, what's clear is that the ultra-contagious omicron variant has pushed the fight against COVID-19 into a messier phase of rules governed by a key assumption: Large portions of the public will contract the omicron version, which is more contagious but appears to cause less severe illness and death, especially among vaccinated people. But vaccinated people are catching the variant too, driving a surge fed in part by gatherings over the winter holidays.

Yesterday, the government reported a record for the pandemic in Israel, with 11,978 new infections a day earlier. That beats the previous high of 11,345 infec-



Artists perform for people that line up for PCR and rapid antigen Covid-19 tests in Tel Aviv

tions in a single day set on Sept. 2 during the delta variant wave.

"There is no control of the omicron wave," said Sharon Alroy-Preis, the Health Ministry's top public health official on Israel's Channel 13 this week.

"Probably no one is protected from infection," said Jonathan Halevy, president of Shaare Zedek Medical Center in Jerusalem on Tuesday.

The new goal is to protect society's most vulnerable people without another national lockdown — the red line Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and the country's 7-month-old government are laboring to avoid.

"It's a different ballgame altogether," Bennett said during a press conference Sunday as he warned that the number of daily infections is expected to soar to new records in the coming weeks.

"We must keep our eye on the ball if we want to continue engaging and working with an open country as much as possible," he added.

In everyday life, that's meant a morass of confusion as Bennett and the coalition government he leads struggle to agree on rules and communicate their decisions to the public.

"Education Ministry Leaves Principals to Contend With COVID-19 Chaos Alone," blared a headline in the Haaretz daily Tuesday. A lack of national guidance, the story said, is forcing some school principals to decide on their own whe-

ther to hold classes in person, remotely or some combination.

Bennett at the press conference argued the government was staying agile in the face of the more challenging variant. This included a government decision, after some back-and-forth, to give a fourth vaccination to the immunocompromised and people at least age 60. Israel is believed to be the first country in the world to offer segments of its population a second booster shot.

On Tuesday, Bennett announced that a preliminary study at Sheba Medical Center found the fourth jab produced a five-fold increase in antibodies in the blood. Israel also is on the cusp of making available drugs that could help people in at-risk groups avoid severe infections.

"Most ministries are working together now better than they were under the old government," led by divisive former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, said Dr. Nadav Davidovich, who heads Ben-Gurion University's school of public health and sits on the national advisory committee on coronavirus.

So the government's decision, for example, to shutter Israel's borders in late November bought time to raise the country's vaccination rates, which rose toward the middle and end of the month. It also allowed hospitals to prepare for a likely wave of illness.

The vaccinated population has been steadily on

the rise, but is limited in part by ultra-Orthodox Jews and some Arabs who have been slow to roll up their sleeves. About 63% of people in Israel have been vaccinated twice, while around 46% have received three jabs.

Our World in Data ranks Israel 17th in the world for vaccination rates, behind other wealthy nations like the United Arab Emirates and the United States — and just ahead of archrival Iran. Back in June, Israel was No. 1 on the list.

But it's been clear for days that a new wave has arrived. Government data showed new infections in Israel spiking to 10,815 on Monday, some 7,000 more than a week earlier. Severe illnesses have stayed mostly constant for several months and daily deaths from coronavirus have not exceeded two since Dec. 13, government records show.

Still, the process remains messy and confusing given the variant's fast-moving spread.

Yesterday in the shadow of the record-setting spike of infections, there was more change. Israel's health minister announced that the demand for testing was slowing the results and recommended more at-home rapid testing to ease the burden.

Quarantines that two weeks ago were required of anyone who might have been exposed to the virus are being scaled back in order to prevent the economy from grinding to a halt. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1977: EMI FIRES SEX PISTOLS



The music publisher EMI has ended its contract with the Sex Pistols punk rock group because of their notorious behaviour in public.

In a statement, the company said: "EMI feels it is unable to promote this group's records in view of the adverse publicity generated over the past two months."

The move follows the group's appearance on ITV's Today programme six weeks ago in which they used strong language.

Reports that they had sworn at Heathrow Airport staff and spat at each other while waiting to board a plane for the Netherlands yesterday proved to be the final straw.

EMI broke the news to Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren by telephone this morning. But he denied the contract had been ended by mutual agreement.

In Amsterdam preparing for a series of concerts and recordings, he told the BBC: "That's rubbish. I haven't signed a single paper - as far as I'm concerned, we're still on EMI."

The four-man band - Johnny Rotten, Steve Jones, Paul Cook and Sid Vicious - had only served three months of the two-year contract, worth £40,000, and release one single - Anarchy in the UK.

EMI has also come under pressure to drop the group from the Conservative MP for Christchurch and Lynton, Robert Adley.

Last night, he wrote to the managing director, Sir John Read, saying: "Surely a group of your size and reputation could forgo the doubtful privilege of sponsoring trash like the Sex Pistols."

Asked whether he would sign up another punk rock group, Sir John told the BBC: "Certainly. I am told there is a demand for this style of music and provided we can have groups that don't attract the adverse publicity this group has had, we'll certainly want to be in it."

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

In March 1977 the Sex Pistols signed up with A&M Records but were sacked soon afterwards.

By June they had joined Virgin and sold 150,000 copies of God Save the Queen in just one day. The single officially reached number two - despite a BBC Radio One ban and several high street chains refusing to stock it. It caused a national outrage in the year of the Queen's Jubilee.

On 12 October 1978 Sid Vicious was charged with murdering his girlfriend, Nancy Spungen. That same year the group disbanded.

Sid Vicious died of a drug overdose on 2 February 1979 while out on bail.

Virgin Records continued to release Sex Pistols music, including one compilation appropriately called Flogging a Dead Horse.

Then in 1986 former Sex Pistols won substantial damages against their ex-manager Malcolm McLaren.

Ten years later in 1996, the band reformed for their final worldwide tour - and live album Filthy Lucre - that lasted six months.

The band reformed again in 2002 and re-released God Save the Queen in response to the Queen's Golden Jubilee celebrations. They came together again in August 2003 for a short USA tour.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**



**ARIES**

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Take a break; you can finally mend any disputes on the home front. You can meet new friends who will let you know just how valuable you are. You may have to explain your actions to your family.



**TAURUS**

Apr. 20-May. 20

Don't let your jealousy be the reason for a decaying relationship. You may find yourself in the limelight for the wrong reasons. You will tend to overeat today.



**GEMINI**

May. 21-Jun. 21

Short trips may be tiring but rewarding. Opportunities to pamper yourself may unfold. An older member of your family may have left you with a pressing situation.



**CANCER**

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Your charisma will no doubt attract a lot of attention. Financial limitations are likely if you take risks. Be careful; you may upset someone you live with if you don't consult with them.



**LEO**

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Loved ones may be annoyed if they feel restricted. Social events will lead to a strong and stable relationship. You can change your living arrangements.



**VIRGO**

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Do not expect too much from others. Keep your ears open, especially to those who care about you. Sudden changes regarding your domestic scene are probable.



**LIBRA**

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Changes regarding family members will set you off. Try to curb overindulgence today. Younger relatives may seek your advice.



**SCORPIO**

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

You need to take some time out to decide what you want to do. You can make alterations to your appearance that everyone will admire.



**SAGITTARIUS**

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

You'll find it easy to talk about your feeling today. Don't hesitate to find out what your mate's intentions are. Your ability to be practical in business will help.



**CAPRICORN**

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

Try not to be too emotional with those around you. Plans to make physical improvements may lead to psychological changes, too. Travel should be on your agenda.



**AQUARIUS**

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

Your ability to deal with others will help you in getting the support you need. Use your creative abilities to come up with new ideas and directions.

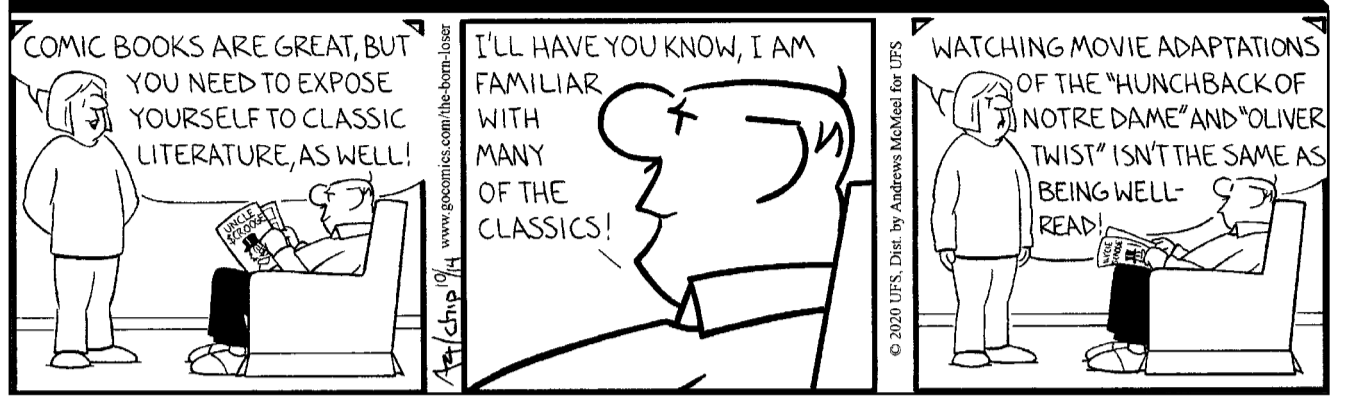


**PISCES**

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Try not to get backed into corners. You won't be able to keep a secret. Communications with loved ones may be strained. Don't let coworkers interfere with your objectives.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

**EASY**

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | 6 |   | 9 | 7 |   |
|   | 6 |   | 8 | 3 | 4 |
| 2 | 4 | 9 |   |   | 5 |
| 5 | 1 | 8 | 6 |   |   |
|   | 6 | 7 | 9 | 5 | 2 |
|   |   | 2 | 7 | 3 | 1 |
| 4 |   |   | 9 | 7 | 2 |
| 6 |   | 7 | 1 | 3 |   |
| 9 | 3 |   | 8 | 5 |   |

**EASY+**

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | 7 | 8 |   |   | 2 |
|   |   | 5 | 1 | 7 |   |
|   | 5 | 3 |   | 9 | 8 |
| 2 | 6 | 1 |   |   |   |
|   | 3 |   | 9 |   | 5 |
|   |   |   | 8 | 2 | 7 |
| 8 | 7 |   | 3 | 4 |   |
|   |   | 9 | 4 | 1 |   |
| 3 |   |   | 6 |   | 2 |

**MEDIUM**

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 |   | 5 |   |   | 9 |
|   | 2 |   | 6 | 5 |   |
|   | 7 |   | 8 |   |   |
|   |   |   | 1 | 8 | 6 |
|   | 1 |   |   | 4 |   |
| 3 | 7 |   | 6 |   |   |
|   |   | 2 |   | 7 |   |
|   | 3 | 4 |   | 6 |   |
| 2 |   |   | 6 |   | 9 |

**HARD**

|   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|   |   | 1 | 4 |   |   |
| 2 |   |   | 3 |   |   |
| 1 | 4 |   |   |   | 2 |
|   |   | 3 |   |   |   |
| 6 |   |   |   |   | 5 |
|   |   | 2 |   | 7 | 3 |
| 4 |   |   |   | 1 |   |
| 8 | 5 |   |   |   |   |

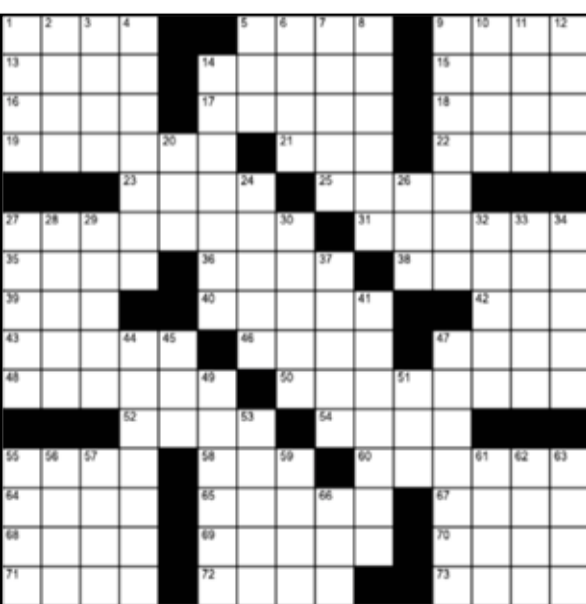
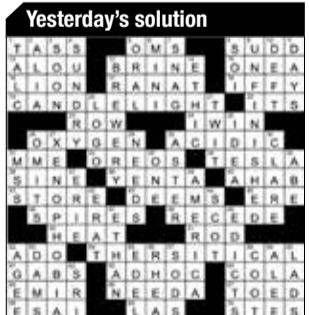
**WEATHER**

|              | MIN | MAX | CONDITION |
|--------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| <b>CHINA</b> |     |     |           |
| Beijing      | -6  | 5   | fine      |
| Harbin       | -18 | -10 | fine      |
| Tianjin      | 5   | 7   | rain      |
| Urumqi       | 6   | 10  | overcast  |
| Xi'an        | 9   | 11  | rain      |
| Lhasa        | -4  | 1   | fine      |
| Chengdu      | 11  | 15  | overcast  |
| Chongqing    | 13  | 23  | cloudy    |
| Kunming      | 9   | 12  | rain      |
| Nanjing      | 5   | 7   | rain      |
| Shanghai     | 17  | 23  | cloudy    |
| Wuhan        | 6   | 9   | overcast  |
| Hangzhou     | -23 | -12 | fine      |
| Taipei       | 1   | 7   | overcast  |
| Guangzhou    | 13  | 22  | cloudy    |
| Hong Kong    | 17  | 22  | overcast  |
| <b>WORLD</b> |     |     |           |
| Moscow       | -3  | 1   | snow      |
| Frankfurt    | -1  | 6   | overcast  |
| Paris        | 3   | 6   | overcast  |
| London       | 3   | 7   | rain      |
| New York     | -1  | -3  | overcast  |

**CROSSWORDS**

ACROSS 1- Quantity of paper; 5- Small fastener; 9- Caspian Sea feeder; 13- Earthen pot; 14- Rubberneck; 15- Actress Foch; 16- Put \_\_\_ on it!; 17- Clear; 18- Pulls in; 19- Eye membrane; 21- Lac contents; 22- Some are pale; 23- Splinter group; 25- Worthless person; 27- Raw; 31- Establishes; 35- Continue; 36- "The First Wives Club" members; 38- Utopian; 39- Actor Herbert; 40- Gives a 9.8, say; 42- Become an ex-parrot?; 43- Grenoble's river; 46- Lab fluids; 47- Ground; 48- Bristly; 50- Defensive mounds; 52- Top; 54- Wall St. debuts; 55- Thrash; 58- \_\_\_ Aviv; 60- Chief; 64- Holy moly!; 65- In readiness; 67- Movable barrier; 68- Cupid; 69- Like some bears and icecaps; 70- Kernels; 71- Repudiate; 72- Ladies of Sp.; 73- Assist, often in a criminal act;

DOWN 1- Laugh loudly; 2- Vogue rival; 3- Settled down; 4- 4th president of the U.S.; 5- Heat meas.; 6- Speed contest; 7- Met highlights; 8- Infer; 9- Unacknowledged; 10- Monetary unit of Cambodia; 11- Poker pot starter; 12- Miss; 14- Shirker; 20- Classical starter; 24- State not to "mess with"; 26- Mentalist Geller; 27- Citrus hybrids; 28- Share; 29- Celestial body; 30- Inhibit; 32- Cupressus; 33- Spoil; 34- Snow conveyances; 37- Turkish palace; 41- One's first needlework piece?; 44- Heist; 45- Wind dir.; 47- Garfield's snack; 49- Bars legally; 51- "The Bells" poet; 53- Choir member; 55- Couple; 56- Hoarfrost; 57- On top of; 59- Country singer McCann; 61- Paint unskillfully; 62- Kitchen addition; 63- Take a breather; 66- \_\_\_ in Charlie;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

**USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

- Emergency calls 999
- Fire department 28 572 222
- PJ (Open line) 993
- PJ (Picket) 28 557 775
- PSP 28 573 333
- Customs 28 559 944
- S. J. Hospital 28 313 731
- Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333
- Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300
- IAM 28 387 333
- Tourism 28 333 000
- Airport 59 888 88
- Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
- Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
- Telephone - Report 1000
- Electricity - Report 28 339 922
- Macau Daily Times 28 716 081



**FOR SALE**

Wa Bao HKD 7,650,000  
Ref: 2106 6003

**FOR SALE**

Manhattan HKD 15,750,000  
Ref: 2005 6001

**Rain Dance Property**  
"We dance until it's SOLD!"

Hellene Gardens HKD 7,680,000  
Ref: 2109 6001



EVERGRANDE

# CHINESE DEVELOPER ASKING BONDHOLDERS TO POSTPONE REPAYMENT

A troubled Chinese real estate developer with \$310 billion of debt is asking investors in one of its bonds to postpone when they will be repaid.

Evergrande Group will conduct a three-day online vote starting Friday for holders of the 4.5 billion yuan (\$700 million) bond, according to an announcement made through the Shenzhen Stock Exchange in southern China.

Evergrande, the global real estate industry's most indebted competitor, said the bond is due to mature in January 2023. It gave no indication

how long investors would be asked to postpone repayment.

The company's struggle to avoid defaults while it tries to comply with tighter official limits on borrowing by China's real estate industry has prompted fears of a financial crisis. Chinese regulators have tried to reassure investors the impact of any possible default can be contained.

Evergrande says it has 2.3 trillion yuan (\$350 billion) in assets and 2 trillion yuan (\$310 billion in debt), but it is struggling to sell real estate and other assets fast enough to keep up payments to bondholders and other creditors.

Beijing appears to be trying to avoid bailing out Evergrande to avoid sending the companies as the ruling Communist Party tries to force them to reduce their debt loads.

Beijing tightened restrictions on developers last year in a campaign to rein in surging corporate debt that is seen as a threat to economic stability. The ruling party has made reducing financial risk a priority since 2018.

Smaller developers have gone bankrupt or defaulted on hundreds of millions of dollars in bonds. **MDT/AP**

INVESTMENT

# SOUTHAMPTON BOUGHT BY FIRM FRONTED BY SERBIAN MEDIA GIANT

SOUTHAMPTON has been bought by a company fronted by the founder of eastern European telecommunications giant United Group, the English Premier League club said this week.

Dragan Solak's Sport Republic purchased the 80% stake held by Chinese businessman Gao Jisheng, who has been majority shareholder at the south-coast club since 2017.

No financial details were disclosed by Southampton, which is 14th in the 20-team league and has been in England's top division since 2012.

Sport Republic is a London-based investment firm in the sports and entertainment industry whose ambition "is to build a portfolio of high-influence stakes in football clubs and other sporting assets across the world," according to chairman Henrik Kraft.

For Southampton chief executive Martin Semmens, it was "the right partner to take the club forward."

"Southampton has so many of the qualities we have been looking for in a major sports organization," said Solak, the lead investor in Sport Republic. "It has a great management team, excellent talent development, talented teams playing attractive

football and a dedicated fan base.

"We are delighted to be able to complete this acquisition as a first step towards execution of our investment strategy. Southampton will be a cornerstone of the organization we plan to build."

Solak keeps a low profile, rarely appearing in public because he is portrayed in his native Serbia as an enemy of the state by the country's right-wing populist government. That is because his media group controls some outlets which are critical of the government.

He was chief executive and then chairman of United Group, and still acts as an advisor to the board after a majority stake in the company was acquired by an outside investor in 2019.

Sport Republic was founded by Rasmus Ankersen, who recently stepped down as co-director of football at Premier League team Brentford, and Kraft.

"We will be an active and engaged owner, but we will not be starting any revolutions," Kraft said. "Whilst Southampton is Sport Republic's first acquisition, we expect more investments to follow over the coming years." **MDT/AP**



## CORPORATE BITS

### The Ritz-Carlton launches festive CNY offers



Spring into the Year of the Tiger at The Ritz-Carlton, Macau, where a range of dining offerings at Lai Heen, The Ritz-Carlton Café, and The Ritz-Carlton Bar & Lounge will bring the vigor and vitality of

the tiger to a time of family reunion.

Lai Heen's Chinese New Year lunch menu will feature their Lucky Trio of Dumplings, and fried glutinous rice with air-dried sausage, conpoy

and taro. Savor an authentic taste of Chinese New Year with the Rice Pudding Treasure Box, available for takeaway from now until January 31. The treasure gift box includes a traditional glutinous rice pudding and a turnip cake, handcrafted with the finest ingredients using a traditional recipe.

From January 31 to February 9, the Ritz-Carlton Café will feature the festive Chinese New Year Prix Fixe, offering guests the gift of choice with options of three to five courses.

Ritz-Carlton Spa, Macau also offers Restorative Bamboo Massage, available from now until February 28.

### Sands China holds financial management activity



More than 1,400 families recently participated in a Parent-Child Financial Management Challenge – "Responsible Gaming x Virtual Learning" organised by Sands China Ltd. as part of the company's ongoing su-

pport of the Macau government's "Lost Control, Lose Family" responsible gaming campaign.

The challenge, held in November and December, aimed to foster a "strong and healthy habit of smart

financial management and expenditure tracking in children," as outlined in a statement issued by the gaming operator.

Sands China distributed activity kits to the participants, which included Sands China team members, members of the public who signed up through local non-profit organisations, and students from local schools. Each kit consisted of a piggy bank, a savings journal, and a QR code to access three instructional videos to guide them through the challenge. The challenge spanned 30 days and was completed by the children with the help of their parents.

FIGURE SKATING

# Alysa Liu eyes third US figure skating title, first Olympic spot

**A**LYSA Liu already has won a pair of U.S. figure skating championships, breaking Tara Lipinski's record for the youngest winner at age 13 and then defending her title with an incredible free skate the following year in North Carolina.

No wonder the sprightly skater from Northern California isn't feeling much pressure at nationals this week.

"I think I've basically blocked out, like, everybody's expectations of me," said Liu, now 16. "I don't know how I did it. But last year I really changed my point of view. And I don't really feel that much pressure. I'm not really nervous, either.

"Actually," she said, "this feels better than all the other nationals I went to."

Which is a good thing.

There's more at stake than ever before.

Liu wasn't old enough to qualify for the 2018 Pyeongchang Games, so this week represents her first chance to earn a spot on the U.S. Olympic team. And while

AP PHOTO



she has yet to perform to her own lofty standards or expectations this season, Liu still represents the best chance for an American woman to knock the heavily favored Russian team from one of the podium steps at the Beijing Games next month.

Liu's season-best score of 219.24 points at the Lombardia Trophy, a competition a level

down from Grand Prix events, would be the fifth best of any potential competitors in China. And while the gap to Russian record-setter Kamila Valieva is about as wide as the Pacific Ocean, the gap to a spot on the medals stand certainly is within reach.

All of which makes it counterintuitive that Liu feels so free at this year's national championships,

which begin Thursday night at Bridgestone Arena and continue through the weekend.

"I feel the best going into this because I've started to care less about, like, the expectations," Liu said. "So it feels good not to have that pressure, and now skating is more fun. I'm skating with friends, and that makes it better. Just not caring what other people say be-

cause I feel like some people — I just feel like I stopped hearing what other people are saying because I realize how silly they sound. Honestly, I don't even know. I just matured."

There has been plenty of buzz around Liu since her 2019 national championship in Detroit.

In a flash, Liu was anointed America's next golden child, with a uniquely American backstory: the daughter of a Chinese immigrant-turned-attorney whose fandom for Michelle Kwan helped to guide the oldest of his five children — all conceived through an anonymous egg donor and surrogate mother — to the rink at the age of 5.

The spotlight shone hot and harsh. Every move that Liu made was analyzed and dissected, even as she soared to a pair of junior Grand Prix victories during the 2019-20 season that stamped her as an Olympian-in-waiting.

Then came the pandemic. And a growth spurt. And the third American woman ever to complete a triple axel in competition, and the first to land a quad lutz, suddenly began to struggle with elements in her routine that she once took for granted.

She struggled to fourth at last year's nationals and failed to medal in her two Grand Prix assignments this season, finishing fifth at Skate Canada in October and fourth at the NHK Trophy in November. **MDT/AP**

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Stephen Wade, MDT/AP

**LOOK FOR NORWAY TO  
 TOP MEDAL TABLE AGAIN  
 AT WINTER OLYMPICS**

The Winter Olympics open in 30 days, and Norway is expected to head the medal standings for the second straight time, even topping its record haul of 39 medals in 2018 in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

This is the prediction of U.S.-based Gracenote Sports, which released its medal table forecast yesterday with the Beijing Winter Games opening on Feb. 4.

Nielsen-Gracenote supplies statistical analysis to sports league around the world. Its Olympic numbers are based off computer models that analyze the most recent results in major competitions — and smaller ones — in the run-up to Beijing.

Norway is predicted to win 22 gold medals and 45 overall. More than half of Norway's medals are predicted to come in cross country skiing and biathlon.

Second place, if total medals is used for the ranking order, will be the Russian Olympic Committee with 11 gold and 32 overall. The team in Beijing, as in Tokyo, will be known as the ROC, or the Russian Olympic Committee.

The ROC must compete without its national flag or anthem, fallout from a state-backed doping program dating from the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. Many critics say the punishment is negligible since athletes still compete in national colors.

Under the IOC guidelines, the athletes will represent not their country, but the ROC.

Germany is picked to finish third with 12 gold and 25 overall. After this, the next seven countries are closely grouped. They are: United States (7 gold, 22 overall), Canada (6-22), Sweden (7-21), Switzerland (5-21), Netherlands (6-20), Austria (5-18), and France (2-18).

Japan is expected to produce its most overall medals in a Winter Olympics with 17, including four gold medals. Host nation China is predicted to win six gold and 11 overall.

The Beijing Olympics have been shrouded in controversy with the United States and several other countries declining to send any high-ranking political representatives to Beijing.

Simon Gleave, the head of sports analysis for Gracenote, said predictions for Beijing are even more difficult with the pandemic. Athletes have missed competitions because of travel restrictions, particularly last season. And, of course, last-minute entry lists can change if athletes test positive for the coronavirus.

"Hopefully we have the kind of forecast which gets us as close as we usually do," Gleave told The Associated Press.

"We're looking to get the top 10 countries to be as close as possible and preferably in the right sort of order," Gleave added. "But there will be changes to this because it is sports. Sports is unpredictable. We can't get this absolutely bang-on, nor should we expect to."

A big question is what to do about men's ice hockey. The NHL's withdrawal late last year shakes up the strength of many of the teams. Gleave said Gracenote had originally picked Canada to win gold, followed by Finland and the United States.

Gleave said the new projection has Finland winning gold, followed by ROC and bronze for Canada.

Gracenote is expected to update the medal predictions around Jan. 19 and issue a final forecast just days before the Olympics open as entry lists are firmed up.

In a display of unity, the Biden administration and its European allies are beginning a series of meetings aimed at showing Russia that an invasion of Ukraine would be met with a forceful response. Using virtually identical language, the U.S. and its European allies have several times in the past month issued joint and individual messages advising Russian President Vladimir Putin that his country will face "massive consequences" and "severe costs" if he goes ahead with further military intervention in Ukraine. Yet the severity of the response hinges largely on Germany, Europe's biggest economy and a diplomatic heavyweight within the block. Potential actions — be they economic, diplomatic or political — will top the agenda in talks in Washington today [Macau

time] between Secretary of State Antony Blinken and new German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock. The Blinken-Baerbock meeting will follow a telephone call last week between President Joe Biden and Putin, a conversation Sunday between Biden and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and a group discussion yesterday among Biden's national security adviser Jake Sullivan and his counterparts from the five Nordic nations. It will precede a flurry of meetings involving NATO foreign ministers, senior U.S. and Russian officials, the NATO-Russia Council and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe set for next week.



**WITH SALTY LANGUAGE,  
 MACRON BERATES  
 FRANCE'S UNVACCINATED**

JOHN LEICESTER, PARIS

**FRENCH** President Emmanuel Macron has provoked outcries in parliament and protests from election rivals by using a vulgarity to describe his strategy for pressuring vaccine refusers to get coronavirus jabs.

Macron used the French word "emmerder," rooted in the French word for "crap" and meaning to rile or to bug, in an interview published by French newspaper Le Parisien yesterday [Macau time]. The president made the explosive remark as lawmakers are heatedly debating new measures that would allow only the vaccinated to enjoy leisure activities such as eating out.

"The unvaccinated, I really want to bug them. And so we will continue doing so, to the end. That's the strategy," Le Parisien quoted the French leader as saying in a sit-down interview at the presidential Elysee Palace with a panel of its readers.

His use of earthy language more commonly heard at the counters of French cafés further complicated the already difficult passage in parliament of the government's planned new vaccine pass. Lawmakers debated into early morning before their discussions were again suspended, disrupted by the furor over Ma-

cron's remarks.

The vaccine pass will exclude unvaccinated individuals from places such as restaurants, cinemas, theaters, museums and sports arenas. The pass will also be required on inter-regional trains and buses, and on domestic flights.

Opposition lawmakers protested audibly in the National Assembly chamber as Macron's health minister, Olivier Veran, sought to defend the president's choice of words.

Veran said Macron's interview demonstrated his "intention, above all, to protect the population."

Critics accused Macron of behavior unbecoming a president and of targeting the unvaccinated to win support from the 90% of French adults who are fully vaccinated. Opposition lawmaker Sébastien Jumel said Macron "deliberately chose to add hysteria to the debate."

Macron is facing reelection in April.

Far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen, who opposed the vaccine pass proposal, said the president wants "to wage war against a portion of the French."

Another far-right candidate, Eric Zemmour, accused Macron of "cruelty." On the far left, presidential candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon asked: "Is the president in

control of what he says?"

Macron's supporters suggested the president simply expressed out loud what some vaccinated people already think about the non-vaccinated, in a country with bitter divides over the issue.

France reported a record-smashing 271,686 daily virus cases Tuesday as omicron infections race across the country, burdening hospital staff and threatening to disrupt transportation, schools and other services.

Macron's government is straining to avoid a new economically damaging lockdown that could hurt his reelection prospects. Ministers are instead trying to rush the vaccine pass bill through parliament in hopes that it will be enough to keep hospitals from becoming overwhelmed.

More than 20,000 people are hospitalized with COVID-19 in France, a number that has been rising steadily for weeks but not as sharply as the country's infection rates.

COVID-19 patients fill more than 72% of France's intensive care unit ICU beds, and its once-renowned health care system is again showing signs of strain. Most virus patients in ICUs are not vaccinated against the coronavirus, though 77% of the French population has had at least two doses. **MDT/AP**



**Australia** and Japan will sign a treaty today to increase defense and security cooperation in a move that has been hailed as "historic" but which might anger China. Prime ministers Scott Morrison of Australia and Fumio Kishida of Japan will meet in a virtual summit to sign the agreement, which Morrison said "will underpin greater and more complex practical engagement between the Australian Defense Force and the Japanese Self-Defense Forces."

**Lebanon** Unknown perpetrators attacked a group of U.N. peacekeepers in southern Lebanon, vandalizing their vehicles and stealing official items from them, a U.N. official said yesterday. Such scuffles with U.N. peacekeepers are not uncommon in southern Lebanon since the peacekeeping force was expanded following the 2006 war between Israel and the Lebanese militant Hezbollah group.

**Sweden**, which is holding a general election in September, has joined France in creating an agency to combat disinformation. The mission of the Swedish Psychological Defense Agency is to "defend our open and democratic society and free opinions by identifying, analyzing and responding to inappropriate influences and other misleading information directed at Sweden or Swedish interests."

**Niger** police have seized more than 200 kilograms of cocaine from the vehicle of the mayor of a small town in the country's north, the government said. Nearly 200 bricks of cocaine were apprehended in Agadez over the weekend from the official vehicle of the mayor of Fachi, a trading center about 400 kilometers north of Agadez, according to a statement from Niger's Central Office for the Repression of Illicit Drug Trafficking.