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COVID-19: HEALTH AUTHORITIES MULL SHORTENING QUARANTINE DURATION FOR SOME DESTINATIONS

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RUSSIAN FORCES SEIZE KEY UKRAINIAN PORT, WAR REFUGEES TOP ONE MILLION

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AP PHOTO



Australia Around 500,000 people in Sydney and its surrounding areas had by yesterday been told to evacuate or prepare to flee floodwaters as torrential rain lashed an extraordinarily long stretch of the Australian east coast. Rivers were rising in Australia's most populous city, home to 5 million, with New South Wales' State Emergency Services Minister Steph Cooke warning of "treacherous weather conditions" over the next 24 hours.

AP PHOTO



Cambodia's foreign minister Prak Sokhonn later this month will make his first trip to Myanmar in his capacity as the special envoy of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, his office said yesterday. The regional grouping, usually referred to as ASEAN, is seeking to contribute to the peacemaking process in Myanmar, which has been wracked by violent unrest since the army ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February last year.

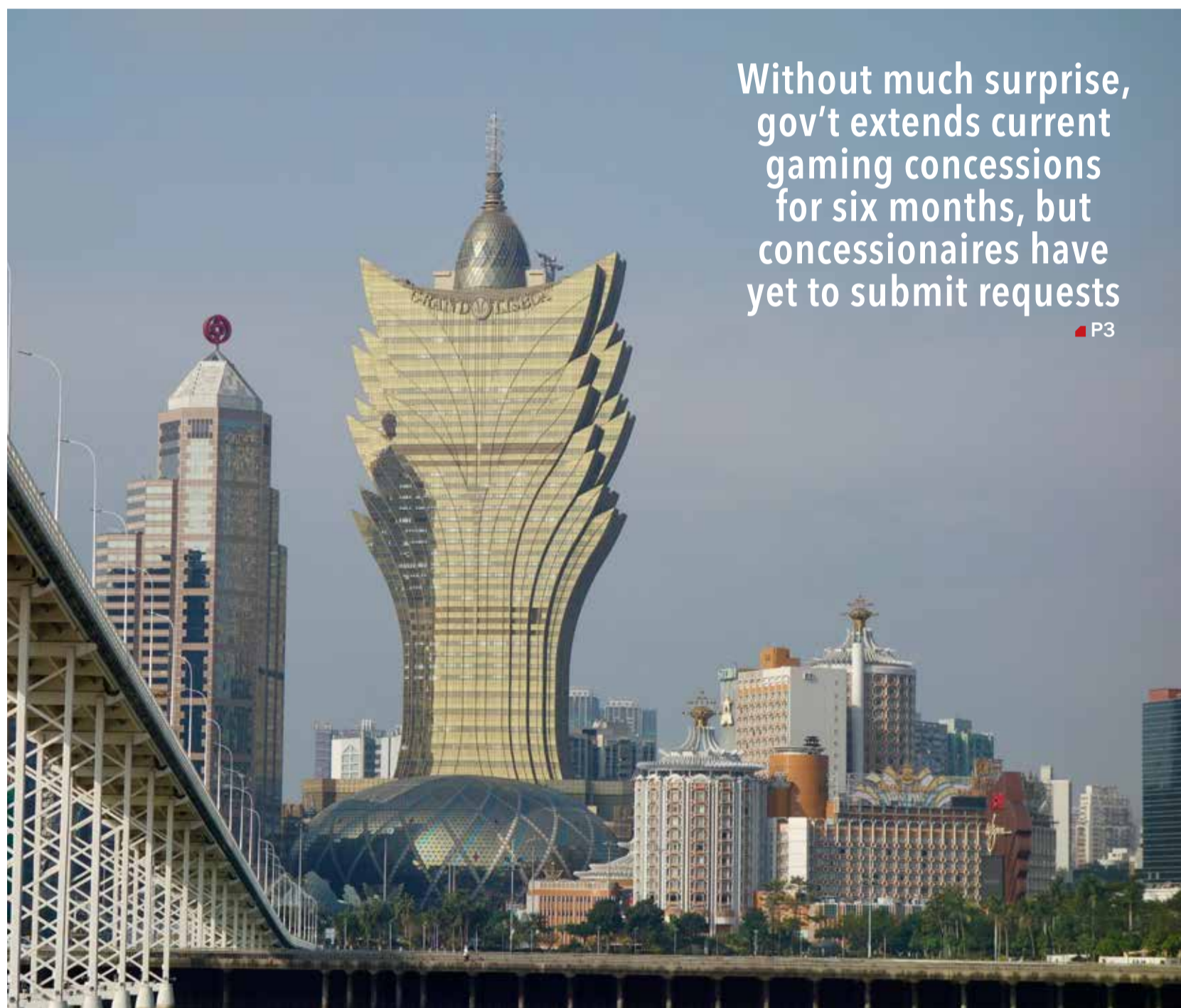
AP PHOTO



South Korea Two leading conservatives in South Korea's presidential race unified behind one of them yesterday in a last-minute political deal that could boost their chances of victory in next week's election. In a hastily arranged joint news conference, Ahn Cheol-soo, who ran a distant third in recent opinion surveys, said he would withdraw to support Yoon Suk Yeol, the more popular conservative contender who remains in a tight race with ruling liberal party candidate Lee Jae-myung.

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BIG-SIX MONTHS



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'SATELLITE CASINO' STILL CORE OF DEBATE AT PARLIAMENT

ANTHONY LAM

THE Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly (AL) yesterday had their meeting on the amendment bill to the gambling law with government officials present to answer lawmakers' questions for the first time.

Similar to the AL plenary debuting the amendment and the first two committee meetings without government officials present, yesterday's meeting revolved around the concept of "satellite casinos."

A concept absent from the existing law and yet a present reality, "satellite casinos" are those establishments that are not owned, but are only operated by, a license holder. A real example is the casino at the Macau Fisherman's Wharf, which is owned by the Macau Legend Development Ltd. but operated by the SJM Resorts, S.A.

At the post-meeting press



conference, Chan Chak Mo, president of the committee, cited the government as saying that the sub-division is not the only way to resolve the problem of the satellite casino.

Citing the government's reply, Chan said that if, for example, the area of a satellite casino is one-tenth of that of the entire real property and can be proven by construction diagrams, the subdivision will be able to be registered.

The government also told the committee that it has conducted a site check on satellite casinos, so that it can differentiate between sections identified as satellite casinos and those that are not. Results should be available by the end of the year.

Chan also said the government is concerned with employment issues in such establishments. The government said concessionaires are

responsible for their workers in satellite casinos. Those that are not hired by concessionaires will be handled according to the Labor Relations Law.

Chan also disclosed that the committee has received seven opinions, of which three were from concessionaires with the remainder being from citizens, lawyers and academics.

Eleven non-committee members sat in at the meeting yesterday.



GOV'T CONFIRMS PUI CHING APPLICATION RECEIVED FOR NEW CAMPUS

Pui Ching Middle School have filed an application with the government for a new campus, Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture, Elsie Ao Ieong, confirmed yesterday.

Ao Ieong was asked about the matter on the sidelines of the plenary meeting of the Cultural Development Advisory Committee.

Ao Ieong confirmed that the government had received an application from Pui Ching to operate an international school but noted no approval has been granted so far, as first reported by the Times on Wednesday.

Adding to that, she confirmed that educational entities, including Pui Ching, do from time to time make submissions to the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ). "We will [consider] the need, as well as the resource and space available, to decide whether their [submissions] will be [accepted]," the Secretary explained.

"We are [considering] their [submissions] and hope to make an announcement as soon as possible," Ao Ieong added.

In a response to an enquiry by the Times on Wednesday, the DSEDJ confirmed that the land plot in question had been planned for social facilities, "which will include the building of campus facilities, whose construction is underway," the bureau noted.

Echoing the Secretary's comments yesterday, the bureau stressed that it has "for a long period received applications from various entities for land or facilities for education purposes, which included those from educational entities requesting to operate [a] campus on Lot 12a," it disclosed in the reply.

The bureau also stressed that it would analyze each application based on a variety of factors. The results of such analyses will be announced when available. **AL**

IFTM hosts Career Day with 67 organizations

LYNZY VALLES

THE Macao Institute for Tourism Studies (IFTM) hosted 67 organisations (including 11 from Guangdong and Shanghai) from various sectors for its 2022 Career Day yesterday in a bid to provide employment opportunities and information on the latest developments in the tourism sector.

Targeted at students graduating from IFTM, the Career Day aimed to provide a direct communication platform between students and employers, allowing students to learn more about the current job market and maximize their chances of a successful job application.

During the event, participating organisations from Macau and the mainland (including the Greater Bay Area) exhibited more than 1,300 job vacancies for students graduating from IFTM.



According to the Career Placement Survey for 2020/2021 graduates, which was conducted in November 2021, the overall response rate of Masters graduates was 100%.

Masters graduate respondents who had full-time employment accounted for 83.3% and their monthly median salary was MOP19,000. For Bachelor's graduates, the overall response rate was 74.9%. Of these Bachelor's graduates, 13.2% pursued higher levels of education after graduating from IFTM, 64.2% obtained

employment, and 5.5% were working and studying simultaneously.

58.7% were employed in the tourism and hospitality sector, while the services sector accounted for 14.5%.

The monthly median salary of local graduate respondents in full-time employment was MOP14,600. 84% of the employed Bachelor's graduate respondents were hired within three months of graduation and 27.5% of them secured their job prior to graduation.

Back in September, a survey

from the Macao New Chinese Youth Association highlighted that nearly 33% of local youths interviewed believed that they did not have sufficient opportunities to achieve upward mobility, 10% more than in 2019. Only about 37% of young people interviewed believed their careers had advanced in the past five years, while 50% considered that they had not advanced. Further analysis showed that the latter group were more likely to experience economic regression during the pandemic.

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Gov't extends gaming concessions to Dec. 31, experts not surprised

LYNZY VALLES
& ANTHONY LAM

THE government is planning to extend current gaming concessions until the end of 2022 to accommodate the progress of the relevant law amendment, Secretary for Economy and Finance Lei Wai Nong said yesterday.

Lei made the remarks while speaking to the press after attending a parliamentary committee meeting held to discuss the amendment bill to the gaming law, which has already been passed by the Legislative Assembly on first reading. "In terms of time [sensitivity], there is a need to, pursuant to the current law, extend the concessions [for a period]," the Secretary said. "We have already notified all concessionaires [to apply for the extension.]"

Lei hinted that no application has been received as of yesterday. He added that, upon receiving the applications, the government will commence with their processing. For the time being, the government plans to extend the current licenses to December 31, 2022, if any application is received and approved.

Meanwhile, the six-month extension of gaming licenses came as no surprise to gaming operators, given the limited time remaining before the concessionaires expire on June 26.

As the amended bill is still being discussed by the Second Standing Committee, gaming experts late last year already forecasted that the licenses would be extended, with Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng previously saying that he would not rule out the possibility of extension.

Speaking to the Times, Ben Lee, managing partner of IGamiX Management & Consulting, said that while the extension came as no surprise, there are still several issues that need to be fleshed out.

"I expect more details when the finalized terms are issued in the RFP or earlier. For example, satellite casinos and the requirement of ownership. Non-gaming investment, what's required? National security, what does it mean?" Lee questioned.

The long-awaited draft amendment came out in early January. However, there were several amendments that came off as ambiguous, such as the ownership of satellite casinos and the requirement for the administration of each gaming operator.



With these unclear rules, Lee had previously dubbed the amendment draft as "over-promised and under-delivered," as the announced amendments fell short of the hype built up over the past months, causing analysts to take a pessimistic view and forecast for the future of the gaming sector.

The sector's gaming stocks also recorded downturns, with a swift wipe of USD18 billion registered on the first day of the announcement that an amendment would be made.

Lawmaker Chan Chak Mo, who heads the committee, has suggested the law may be approved before the expiry of the concessions.

Lawyer Sérgio de Almeida Correia told the Times that the extension is "perfectly legal and legitimate," citing Number 3 of Article 13 of Macau's gaming law.

This also implies that casino operators will have another six months to earn revenue or increase losses, which for Correia, "doesn't mean much given the current situation."

According to the lawyer, the deadline is more than enough, as the law was already approved in general on January 24 and is now only before the Second Standing Committee for discussion and subsequent approval of the specifics.

"The government can already start preparing the tender program and present it as soon as the law is approved – that is, five or seven days later after final approval and publication in the Official Gazette," said Correia.

Difficulties and uncertainties linger due to Macau's zero-Covid strategy, causing fear among investors

He recalled that, in the previous tender, which was much more complicated than the current one, and indeed the first international tender, all processes were completed in four months.

"So, I think the time frame is reasonable. Potential bidders can start preparing their proposals right now," he advised.

However, difficulties and uncertainties linger due to Macau's zero-Covid strategy, causing fear among investors on what the return for them will be once they invest in the sector. A hurdle will be whether good proposals will be presented to investors, given the fact that the city is practicing zero tolerance of Covid-19, while still aiming to boost vaccination rates.

"Nobody is going to make millionaire proposals with the borders closed. [There are] thousands of cases in Hong Kong, and the Secretary for Security has said

that the situation will continue: foreigners will not be allowed to enter Macau. Without anyone knowing when life will return to normal so that people can restart traveling and circulating like in the rest of the world," said Correia.

Brokerage JP Morgan has said that it will not attempt to forecast the city's gaming recovery for this year amid the Covid-19 crisis and the subsequent economic fallout and strict border measures implemented. The analysts at the firm admitted that they are less confident in their numbers than they were a year ago.

Macau's USD3 billion VIP sector was also dealt a huge blow by the shutdown of junket operators servicing high-rollers, which may also affect the city's recovery phase this year.

SANDS, GALAXY SUPPORT GOV'T PLAN TO TEMPORARILY EXTEND CASINO LICENSES

Two out of six gambling concessionaires have responded to an inquiry by the Times, stating that they are supportive of the government's plan to extend casino licenses for a restricted period of time.

To the Times, both Sands China Ltd. (SCL) and Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) expressed their support in statements.

In SCL's statement, the company noted that "[SCL] welcomes the Macau SAR government's announcement [yesterday] of the six-month extension of the current gaming concessions and sub-concessions to December 31, 2022."

Meanwhile, the GEG said in its statement

that "[GEG] welcomes this decision and fully supports all related work."

As the government said individual applications are required, the two concessionaires were also asked if and when they would file their applications.

In response to this, SCL said it "will be submitting an extension application accordingly," while GEG said it "will prepare for the extension and the tendering process for gaming concessions."

The other four concessionaires were also asked about the matter, but no reply was received by press time. **AL**

HONG KONG RETURNEE CLASSIFIED AS ASYMPTOMATIC CASE

A Macau resident from Hong Kong who arrived from Macau via the Golden Bus has tested positive for Covid-19 and is classified as an imported case of asymptomatic infection after entering Macau yesterday. The woman had been administered with two doses of the Inactivated Sinopharm vaccine in June and July 2021. She was in possession of a negative nucleic acid test (NAT) result. The NAT certificate had been issued within 24 hours of the sampling date. Upon entering Macau yesterday morning, and following another test, she tested positive and was transferred to the Public Health Clinical Center in Coloane. So far, 82 confirmed cases of Covid-19, while 38 cases of asymptomatic infection have been registered in Macau.

OVER 780 TO BE RETESTED FOR COVID-19

Around 780 people who were identified as having contact with the positive Covid-19 case diagnosed in Tanzhou will be retested for Covid-19. These people passed through the Portas do Cerco Border Post several times, between February 25 and 27 in the departure and arrival sites, including 10 people who were in front of the diagnosed case, in the same line, and 20 people who were behind the case. For this reason, authorities are requiring the close contacts to undergo five nucleic acid tests on March 2, 3, 5, 8 and 13. If the NAT is not performed within the stipulated period, the relevant individual's health code will turn yellow.

FNAC APPROVES NINE LOCAL ARTISTIC PROJECTS

Nine project applications from Macau's artistic institutions and artists have been approved by the National Fund for the Arts of China (FNAC). Among the Macau projects included in the FNAC, funding will be granted to one of each project, respectively, for large-scale theater plays and the creation of artistic works, for small-scale plays and programs, and for the creation of artistic works. FNAC opened applications (general projects) for both Hong Kong and Macau, inviting artistic institutions and artists to apply for the project funding. This is the first time Macau has been granted approval.



COVID-19

VACCINATION AMONG ELDERLY RESIDENTS RISING, INTEREST AMONG CHILDREN ALSO GROWING

RENATO MARQUES

THE vaccination rate among the senior population in Macau has recently been growing, health authorities stated yesterday during the regular press briefing from the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center.

According to the figures released by Dr. Leong Iek Hou, coordinator at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, vaccination rates among the older age groups have been growing, with a higher significance in the last two groups, which include citizens aged 70 and above.

The figures released show that the group of those aged between 60 and 69 years old has now reached a vaccination rate of 67.9%, while the group of those aged 70 to 79 years old has hiked to 51.1%, and those aged 80 or more now have a vaccination rate of 22.3%.

Lower vaccination rates continue to be observed in younger children (3 to 11 years old) for whom the vaccination rate only stands at 15.9%.

The changes observed in the past week, with more people getting vaccinated, also prompted the general vaccination rate of Macau to rise to 78%, Leong remarked.

A similar change might also soon occur in regards to the vaccination rate of children as, according to Luís Gomes, a representative from the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ), the recent outbreak in the town of Tanzhou,

Zhongshan has contributed to a rise in the interest of children and parents in vaccination.

"Due to the recent outbreak, we have received information that around 20,000 students (mostly from primary education) wish to get vaccinated and, from these, 12,000 have already scheduled the inoculation," Gomes said. Further to this, Gomes added that, due to this rapid growth in interest, the DSEDJ has established a special vaccination post solely dedicated to students.

This special post will be in operation this Saturday and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the Forum Macau vaccination post.

Also on this topic, Choi Sio Un, a representative from the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS), noted the significant contribution of the 24 local elderly homes to the vaccination rates of senior citizens.

According to Choi, the vaccination rate in homes for the elderly has risen by 6% in just one week to the current rate of 41%.

"A total of 41% of all senior citizens in homes are now vaccinated. This is a good increase if we compare with last week when the figure was just 35%. This means we registered a growth of 6% in just one week which is for us a very good result and a source of satisfaction," Choi said, while revealing that the final goal of IAS is to reach a 90% vaccination rate among all the staff and residents of the homes.

"There are still more than 1,000 unvaccinated residents

in homes, and from these, only eight of them have been considered unfit for vaccination by the medical teams. In general, we can say that all seniors are fit for vaccination, especially those with chronic diseases. These are, in fact, a priority," Choi clarified, as he stated that a misconception among the population was that people with chronic diseases were unsuitable for vaccination, and that this misconception has contributed to the reluctance of many people.

Adding to this discussion, Leong explained, "All people can be vaccinated, except those allergic to vaccine components. All others are eligible. What we said before was that some people should not rush in to vaccinate if they were [at the peak of] a disease or if they were [experiencing] fever, etc. But once these conditions recede, they become fit for vaccination."

NAT REQUIRED FOR VISITORS OF UNVACCINATED ELDERLY

To both further promote the vaccination rate among senior citizens and to protect them from a potential infection, the IAS, as of yesterday, is restricting visits to unvaccinated elderly residents who have been institutionalized only to relatives or friends that present a negative nucleic acid test (NAT) performed in the 48 hours prior the visit.

Choi explained this new measure is introduced in view of the vulnerability of this population and the severe consequences they may experience in case they get infected.

"If they get infected, they have a high mortality rate. IAS appeals to them and to their families to take the vaccine as soon as possible," he said.

For those vaccinated residents, visitors continue to need to present a valid NAT with a negative result valid for seven days.

EXTRA DAY OF LEAVE FOR WORKERS WHO ACCOMPANY OLDER PARENTS FOR VACCINE

CIVIL servants who accompany family members over 65 years of age are now eligible for one day of leave, according to a statement released by the Public Administration and Civil Service Bureau. This comes amid the government's call to the public to have children and the elderly vaccinated, as well as for those who have been inoculated with two Covid vaccines to receive a booster shot. According to the new directive, civil servants are also entitled to one day of

leave if they accompany their spouse's family members over 65 years of age. Last week, the government announced that public service workers who accompany their children who are under the age of 18 may be justifiably absent from the service for one day. Meanwhile, almost all the gaming operators are offering up to three days of special paid leave for team members who accompany their children under 18 years of age and elderly parents who need to be accompanied to get vaccinated.

COVID-19

Health Bureau mulls shortening quarantine duration

RENATO MARQUES

LOCAL health authorities are considering lowering the number of days of mandatory quarantine for people arriving from some foreign countries and regions, Dr. Leong Iek Hou, coordinator at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said yesterday in a reply to a media inquiry.

Questioned once again on the current disparities in the quarantine length applied to people arriving from abroad (21 days) when compared to those arriving from the neighboring region of Hong Kong (14 days plus seven days of health self-management), Leong said that the measures regarding quarantine



RENATO MARQUES

are dynamic and undergo constant changes as the Covid-19 pandemic progresses.

The official said that the authorities are considering reducing some of the time of quarantine under medical observation upon arrival in Macau according to

the pandemic situation of the source region, hinting that some of the countries and regions currently targeted with a 21 day quarantine period might also move into the 14 days plus seven days of health self-management category, as happens to those returning from

Hong Kong.

"Before, people returning from Hong Kong had to undergo only 14 days. Now, due to the severity of the situation in the region, we added seven more days of strict health self-management. The reason we have the 21 days quarantine for foreign countries and regions is that the situation of the pandemic is also very serious in those places. But we are considering, according to the changes in those places, reducing some of those from 21 days to 14 plus seven," she said.

Leong also noted that, in the past, returnees from Hong Kong would have to undergo only four nucleic acid tests (NAT) during the 14 days. Now they must be tested daily during the quarantine time and also do four extra NATs during the seven days of self-management.

Nonetheless, she also admitted during the same press briefing, and in reply to another media inquiry, that the average incubation time for infection with the Omicron variant of Covid-19 is "from three to five days," she said, adding, "rarely is [it] above that and only in very extreme and rare cases [has it] passed over 14 days."

CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION CASES RISE 13% IN 2021

POLICE opened files of 11,376 criminal investigation cases throughout 2021, up 13.1% from the previous year, according to the Office of the Secretary for Security under the SAR government.

A total of 255 cases of violent crimes of kidnapping, murder, or serious assault were registered in the region in 2021, a rise of 4.9% over 2020, the office said yesterday, concluding that the public security situation for 2021 remained stable in general.

Meanwhile, police intercepted 372 people entering Macau illegally during the past year, a drop of 39.1% from 2020.

Statistics showed that 1,307 cases of fraud were reported in 2021, up 29.8% from a year earlier, including 524 fraud cases related to the internet, accounting for 40.1% of the total. Around 800 cases of computer crimes were

registered in 2021, 50.7% higher than in 2020.

The local police also cooperated with their mainland counterparts to successfully bust a group involved in cross-border usury crimes, arresting over 40 members in a joint operation in December 2021.

The office said due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of traditional criminal cases with physical contact had shown a downward trend from 2019 to 2021, whereas online crimes climbed rapidly for the past two years.

The office vowed to continue stepping up the prevention and crackdown of illegal criminal behaviors and adjusting police force deployment and law enforcement strategies promptly to guarantee the social prosperity and stability of the city. **MDT/XINHUA**

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NPC

CHINA'S SLOWING ECONOMY IN SPOTLIGHT AS LEGISLATURE MEETS

JOE MCDONALD, BEIJING

CHINA'S ruling Communist Party is temporarily turning away from its longer-term ambitions to focus on pulling the economy out of a slump as the country heads into the annual meeting of its ceremonial legislature.

The National People's Congress, usually used to showcase big initiatives, is overshadowed this year by a "policy pivot" begun in December by President Xi Jinping's government to revive anemic consumer spending and housing sales.

Beijing is easing off multi-year campaigns to cut surging debt that Chinese leaders worry is dangerously high, rein in carbon emissions and narrow the gap between a wealthy elite and China's poor majority.

"They probably need to be put on the back burner for this year, while actively prioritizing stabilization goals," said Helen Qiao, the chief China economist for Bank of America.

The NPC session, which opens Saturday, takes place against a backdrop of Russia's attack on Ukraine, which has pushed up oil prices and added to uncertainty over a global recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

China's economic growth slid to 4% over a year earlier in the final three months of 2021, down from 18.3% in the first quarter, after a crackdown on borrowing



in the real estate industry set off a plunge in construction, a major employer.

Manufacturing was hurt by power shortages, weak export demand and anti-disease controls that cut off access to major cities. Share prices of e-commerce and other internet companies plunged after Beijing tightened control over the industry.

In response, ruling party leaders in December promised tax cuts for entrepreneurs who generate jobs and wealth. Banks were ordered to lend more.

"The defining theme for 2022 could be a race between slowdown and stimulus," Larry Hu and Xinyu Ji of Macquarie Group said in a report. However, they said, "stimulus is so costly that they don't want to overdo it."

Forecasters expect Premier Li

Keqiang, the No. 2 leader and top economic official, to announce an annual growth target as low as 5%. It would be the lowest target in decades and well below last year's 8% annual growth.

Companies and investors will watch how large a budget deficit the ruling party will allow.

"A lot of people were asking me recently if we can see a significant step up in the pace and intensity of policy easing during or after the NPC," Qiao said.

However, it might be too early to expect more changes while Chinese leaders wait to see how the economy performed in January and February, Qiao said. She said they want to avoid resorting to their traditional tool of encouraging spending on real estate, which might push up politically sensitive housing costs and

debt.

"While many people are saying, maybe there is something big coming out, I am a nonbeliever," she said.

The meeting of the NPC's 3,000-plus delegates does little lawmaking. The high-profile event is used to announce broad goals for the economy, social welfare and other issues. Companies and the public wait months to learn details of policy changes.

Over the past two years, however, Li has tried to reassure the public by using the NPC to announce measures that put more money in consumers' pockets.

This year's NPC was cut to one week from the traditional two and takes place under strict anti-disease controls. News conferences will be held by video link. Few big gatherings are scheduled.

China was the first major economy to rebound from the pandemic in 2019, allowing Xi's government to shift its focus back to structural changes aimed at nurturing self-sustaining growth based on consumer spending instead of trade and investment.

Meanwhile, Beijing launched anti-monopoly and information security crackdowns on e-commerce and other internet companies. It pushed them to divert money from their core businesses into initiatives like rural job creation and developing processor chips and other technology to reduce reliance on U.S. and other foreign suppliers.

The crackdown on debt that Chinese leaders worry is dangerously high has pushed some smaller real estate developers into bankruptcy. One of the biggest, Evergrande Group, is struggling to avoid defaulting on 2 trillion yuan (\$310 billion) owed to banks and bondholders. Uneasy apartment buyers have put off purchases, fueling a downward industry spiral.

After the growth slump, "the basic policy tone this year has turned to stability," said He Fan, a professor at Shanghai Jiaotong University's Antai College of Economics and Management.

The "policy pivot" suggests the peak of efforts to control internet companies and real estate debt "are behind us," Hu and Ji said in a report.

Forecasters expect debt to creep back up as banks lend more and Beijing pumps money into the economy through higher spending on public works.

"Without infrastructure investment, it is difficult to stabilize the economy," said He. **MDT/AP**

Beijing denies asking Russia not to invade until post-Olympics

CHINA yesterday denounced a report that it asked Russia to delay invading Ukraine until after the Beijing Winter Olympics as "fake news" and a "very despicable" attempt to divert attention and shift blame over the conflict.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin also repeated China's accusations that Washington provoked the war by not ruling out NATO membership for Ukraine.

"We hope the culprit of the crisis would reflect on their role in the Ukraine crisis, take up their responsibilities, and take practical actions to ease the situation and solve the problem instead of blaming others," Wang told reporters at a daily briefing.

"The New York Times



President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin talk to each other during their meeting in Beijing, Feb. 4

report is purely fake news, and such behaviors of diverting attentions and shifting blames are very despicable," Wang said.

The Times article cited a "Western intelligence re-

port" considered credible by officials.

Russian President Vladimir Putin met with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in Beijing on Feb. 4, hours before the Games' opening

ceremony. Following that, the sides issued a joint statement in which they declared "friendship between the two states has no limits, there are no 'forbidden' areas of cooperation."

In that statement, China also endorsed Russia's opposition to further NATO expansion and demand that it "respect the sovereignty, security and interests of other countries." Russia, for its part, reaffirmed its support for China's claim over Taiwan, the self-governing island Beijing threatens to annex by force if necessary.

The Times said it wasn't clear whether the communication about an invasion took place between Xi and Putin or at a lower level, but that the intelligence report indicated that "senior

Chinese officials had some level of direct knowledge about Russia's war plans or intentions before the invasion started last week."

China is the only major government that hasn't criticized Moscow's attack on Ukraine and has also ruled out joining the United States and European governments in imposing financial sanctions on Russia.

Instead, Beijing has endorsed the Russian argument that Moscow's security was threatened by NATO's eastern expansion.

China abstained in Wednesday's U.N. General Assembly emergency session vote to demand an immediate halt to Moscow's attack on Ukraine and the withdrawal of all Russian troops.

"Regrettably, the draft resolution submitted to the

General Assembly emergency special session for vote had not undergone full consultations with the whole membership, nor does it take into consideration the history and the complexity of the current crisis," Wang said.

"It did not highlight the importance of the principle of indivisible security or the urgency of promoting political settlement and stepping up diplomatic efforts," he said. "These are not in line with China's consistent position. Therefore, we had no choice but to abstain in the voting."

Russia had launched an attack on Georgia during the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games, angering some in the Chinese leadership and among the public. **MDT/AP**

PUTIN'S WAR

Russians besiege Ukrainian ports, war refugees top one million

JIM HEINTZ, KYIV

RUSSIAN forces captured the strategic Ukrainian port of Kherson and besieged another yesterday in a bid to cut the country off from the sea, as the two sides headed into another round of talks aimed at ending the fighting that has sent more than one million people fleeing over Ukraine's borders.

The tally the U.N. refugee agency released to The Associated Press was reached Wednesday and amounts to more than 2% of Ukraine's population being forced out of the country in seven days. The mass evacuation could be seen in Kharkiv, a city of about 1.5 million people where residents desperate to escape falling shells and bombs crowded the city's train station and pressed onto trains, not always knowing where they were headed.

With a column of tanks and other vehicles apparently stalled for days outside the capital of Kyiv, fighting continued on multiple fronts across Ukraine. A second round of talks aimed at ending the fighting was expected today [Macau time] in neighboring Belarus — though the two sides appeared to have little common ground.

"We are ready to conduct talks, but we will continue the operation because we won't allow Ukraine to preserve a military infrastructure that threatens Russia," Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said, adding that it would let Ukrainians to choose what government they should have.

Lavrov said that the West has continuously armed Ukraine, trained its troops and built up bases there to turn Ukraine into a bulwark against Russia — repeating Russian claims that it has used to justify its operation in Ukraine.

The U.S. and its allies have insisted that NATO is a defensive alliance that doesn't pose a threat to Russia. And the West fears Russia's invasion is meant to overthrow Ukraine's government and install a friendly government.

Russian forces continued their pressure. Britain's Defense Ministry said Mariupol, a large city on the Azov Sea, was encircled by Russian forces. The status of another vital port, Kherson, a Black Sea shipbuilding city of 280,000, remained unclear.

Russia's forces claimed to have taken complete control of Kherson, which would be the biggest



A view from the window of a Russian military helicopter as it flies over an undisclosed location in Ukraine

city to fall in the invasion thus far. Britain's Defense Ministry said that was possible, though not yet verified. The mayor said there were no Ukrainian forces in the city — but he said the Ukrainian flag was still flying over it.

Overnight, Associated Press reporters in Kyiv heard at least one explosion before videos started circulating of apparent strikes on the capital.

Russia's Defense Ministry said it had knocked out a reserve broadcasting center in the Lysa Hora district, about 7 kilometers (4 miles) south of the government headquarters. It said unspecified precision weapons were used, and that there were no casualties or damage to residential buildings.

A statement from the general staff of Ukraine's armed forces didn't address the strikes, saying only that Russian forces were "regrouping" and "trying to reach the northern outskirts" of the city.

"The advance on Kyiv has been rather not very organized and now they're more or less stuck," military analyst Pavel Felgenhauer told the AP in Moscow.

At least 227 civilians have been killed and another 525 wounded since the invasion began, according to the latest figures from the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights. Earlier, Ukraine said more than 2,000 civilians have died, a figure that could not be independently verified.

The U.N. office uses strict methodology and counts only confirmed casualties, and admits its figures are a vast undercount.

Still, the tally eclipses the entire civilian casualty count from the fighting in 2014 in eastern Ukraine

between pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian forces — which left 136 dead and 577 injured.

Lavrov voiced regret for civilian casualties, insisting that the military is only using precision weapons against military targets, despite abundant evidence of shelling of homes, schools and hospitals. However, he tacitly acknowledged that some Russian strikes could have killed civilians, saying that "any military action is fraught with casualties, and not just among the military but also civilians."

In his latest defiant videotaped address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on Ukrainians to keep up the resistance. He vowed that the invaders would have "not one quiet moment" and described Russian soldiers as "confused children who have been used."

Moscow's isolation deepened when most of the world lined up against it at the United Nations to demand it withdraw from Ukraine. The prosecutor for the International Criminal Court opened an investigation into possible war crimes. And in a stunning reversal, the International Paralympic Committee banned Russian and Belarusian athletes from the Winter Paralympic Games.

Felgenhauer said with the Russian economy already suffering, there could be a "serious internal political crisis" if Russian President Vladimir Putin does not find a way to end the war quickly.

"There's no real money to run to fight this war," he said, adding that if Putin and the military "are unable to wrap up this campaign very swiftly and victoriously,

they're in a pickle."

Several parts of the country were under pressure.

Ukraine's military said Russian forces "did not achieve the main goal of capturing Mariupol" in its statement, which did not mention the another important port, Kherson, whose status was unclear.

Putin's forces claimed to have taken complete control of Kherson, and U.K. Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said yesterday that it was "possible — it's not verified yet — that Russia is in control" there.

A senior U.S. defense official earlier disputed the Russians controlled the city.

"Our view is that Kherson is very much a contested city," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Zelenskyy's office told the AP that it could not comment on the situation in Kherson while the fighting was still going on.

The mayor of Kherson, Igor Kolykhaev, said Russian soldiers were in the city and came to the city administration building. He said he asked them not to shoot civilians and to allow crews to gather up the bodies from the streets.

"We don't have any Ukrainian forces in the city, only civilians and people here who want to LIVE," he said in a statement later posted on Facebook.

The mayor said Kherson would maintain a strict 8 p.m.-to-6 a.m. curfew and restrict traffic into the city to food and medicine deliveries. The city will also require pedestrians to walk in groups no larger than two, obey commands to stop and not to

"provoke the troops."

"The flag flying over us is Ukrainian," he wrote. "And for it to stay that way, these demands must be observed."

Mariupol Mayor Vadym Boychenko said the attacks there had been relentless.

"We cannot even take the wounded from the streets, from houses and apartments today, since the shelling does not stop," he was quoted by the Interfax news agency as saying.

Russia reported its military casualties for the first time in the war, saying nearly 500 of its troops have been killed and almost 1,600 wounded. Ukraine did not disclose its own military losses.

Ukraine's military general staff said in a Facebook post that Russia's forces had suffered some 9,000 casualties in the fighting. It did not clarify if that figure included both killed and wounded soldiers.

In a video address to the nation yesterday, Zelenskyy praised his country's resistance.

"We are a people who in a week have destroyed the plans of the enemy," he said. "They will have no peace here. They will have no food. They will have here not one quiet moment."

He said the fighting is taking a toll on the morale of Russian soldiers, who "go into grocery stores and try to find something to eat."

"These are not warriors of a superpower," he said. "These are confused children who have been used."

Meanwhile, the senior U.S. defense official said an immense Russian column of hundreds of tanks and other vehicles appeared to be stalled roughly 25 kilometers (16 miles) from Kyiv and had made no real progress in the last couple of days.

The convoy, which earlier in the week had seemed poised to launch an assault on the capital, has been plagued with fuel and food shortages, the official said.

On the far edges of Kyiv, volunteers well into their 60s manned a checkpoint to try to block the Russian advance.

"In my old age, I had to take up arms," said Andrey Goncharuk, 68. He said the fighters needed more weapons, but "we'll kill the enemy and take their weapons."

Around Ukraine, others crowded into train stations, carrying children wrapped in blankets and dragging wheeled suitcases into new lives as refugees.

In an email, U.N. refugee agency spokesperson Joung-ah Ghedini-Williams told the AP that the refugee count surpassed 1 million as of midnight in central Europe, based on figures collected by national authorities.

Shabia Mantoo, another spokesperson for the agency, said that "at this rate" the exodus from Ukraine could make it the source of "the biggest refugee crisis this century." MDT/AP

Kyiv shrines, memorials with powerful symbolic value at risk

PETER SMITH, KYIV

KYIV, bracing for a potentially catastrophic Russian attack, is the spiritual heart of Ukraine.

Among the sites at risk in the Ukrainian capital are the nation's most sacred Orthodox shrines, dating back nearly 1,000 years to the dawn of Christianity in the region.

The sites, along with other landmark shrines in Kyiv, are religiously significant to both Ukrainian Orthodox and Russian Orthodox. They also stand as powerful symbols in the quarrel over whether the two groups are parts of a single people — as Russian President Vladimir Putin has claimed — or are distinct but related Slavic nations.

The landmarks include the golden domed St. Sophia's Cathedral and the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, a sprawling underground and above-ground complex also known as the Monastery of the Caves. Others include the multi-towered St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery and St. Andrew's Church.

On Tuesday, Ukrainian officials said Russian forces damaged another monument — Ukraine's main Holocaust memorial, Babi Yar — prompting international condemnation.

"What will be next if even Babi Yar (is hit)" asked Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy yesterday [Macau time]. "What other 'military' objects, 'NATO bases' are threatening Russia? St. Sophia's Cathedral, Lavra, Andrew's Church?"

There is no indication the Russians intentionally targeted Babi Yar. Nor is there any confirmation that the Russians plan to target any of the sacred sites in Kyiv. But civilian buildings have already been hit in other cities, and Kyiv's major shrines sit in elevated locations that could leave them especially vulnerable.

Case in point: The Assumption Cathedral in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, was damaged in the recent attacks, reportedly with stained-glass windows broken and other decorations damaged. The cathedral, which is under the Moscow-affiliated Orthodox church, was Kharkiv's tallest building until sometime in the 21st century.

The risk is even greater in Kyiv. "We're talking about a very

AP PHOTO



The Monastery of the Caves, also known as Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, one of the holiest sites of Eastern Orthodox Christians in Kyiv

old city," said Jacob Lassin, a postdoctoral research scholar at the Arizona State University's Melikian Center for Russian, Eurasian, and East European Studies. "The center part is densely packed. Even if you're trying to hit one thing, you could easily hit something else."

The symbolic value of the shrines is powerful even to people who don't share the religious faith they commemorate.

"The idea that the main symbol that stood in your city for 1,000 years could be at risk or could be destroyed is very frightening," Lassin said.

The symbols matter not only to the Ukrainian people but to Putin, too. He justified the invasion with baseless claims he was countering "neo-Nazism" in Ukraine — this in a country with a Jewish president.

Babi Yar, a ravine in Kyiv, is where more than 33,000 Jews were killed within 48 hours in 1941 when the city was under Nazi occupation. The killing was carried out by SS troops along with local collaborators. It was one of the largest mass killings at a single location during World War II, according to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

It is "at once an accursed and a sacred place," American Jewish Committee CEO David Harris said. Just last year, Zelenskyy took part in the inaugural ceremony of a memorial there.

Whether Kyiv's Orthodox shrines come under direct at-

tack or receive collateral damage, such an action would be a "total refutation" of another of Putin's claims — to be defending Orthodox Ukrainians loyal to Moscow's patriarch, Lassin said.

"It would literally be destroying the main seat of Russian Orthodoxy according to his own rhetoric," Lassin said.

The shrines' oldest parts date back to the medieval Kievan Rus kingdom, soon after its adoption of Christianity under Prince Vladimir in the 10th century. Putin has claimed the kingdom is the common ancestor of today's Russia and Ukraine. Ukrainians counter that theirs is a distinct nation now under fratricidal attack from its Slavic neighbor.

The cathedral and nearby monastic complex represent "a masterpiece of human creative genius in both its architectural conception and its remarkable decoration," says a summary by UNESCO, which lists them as World Heritage Sites.

The cathedral, built under Prince Yaroslav the Wise in the 11th century, was modeled after the Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, the spiritual and architectural heart of medieval Orthodoxy. The Kyiv cathedral includes mosaics and frescoes as old as 1,000 years, and it was a model for later churches in the region, according to UNESCO.

"The huge pantheon of Christian saints depicted in the cathedral has an unrivaled

multiplicity among Byzantine monuments of that time," UNESCO says.

The Monastery of the Caves, including underground monastic cells, tombs of saints and above-ground churches built across nearly nine centuries, was hugely influential in spreading Orthodox Christianity, according to UNESCO.

Both complexes were endangered and at times damaged by centuries of warfare.

St. Sophia's, sacred both to Ukraine's two main rival Orthodox churches and to Catholics, is currently a museum and isn't normally used for religious services.

Two of the landmarks are associated with opposing sides in the schism within Ukrainian Orthodoxy.

The monastic complex is overseen by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which is affiliated with the Orthodox patriarch of Moscow, though it has broad autonomy. St. Michael's is the base for the more nationalist Orthodox Church of Ukraine. But the Ukrainian leaders of both Orthodox groups have harshly criticized the Russian invasion.

If Kyiv's landmarks are damaged or destroyed, "could it potentially damage morale? Yes," Lassin said. "Could it potentially galvanize people to be more united? Absolutely. ... What I can say is the Ukrainian people are extremely resilient and are fighting back through all of this." MDT/AP

this day in history

1975 COMIC GENIUS
CHAPLIN IS KNIGHTED



Silent film legend Charlie Chaplin has become Sir Charles after a ceremony at Buckingham Palace.

The star of such films as *The Kid* and *The Great Dictator* was knighted in the New Year's Honours List.

The ceremony took place just miles from the south London district where he spent much of his childhood.

Sir Charles was accompanied to Buckingham Palace by his fourth wife, Oona, and the two youngest of his nine children.

The slapstick legend, famed for his acrobatic routines, received his knighthood, from a wheelchair.

It was a reflection of just how late in life — at the age of 85 — his honour had finally come.

As he was pushed into the hall where the ceremony was taking place the band struck up his signature tune, the theme from his 1951 film, *Limelight*.

He sat stiffly as the Queen tapped him on each shoulder and stooped to hang the KBE insignia around his neck.

The two then chatted briefly before Sir Charles was wheeled to the front of the hall to watch the rest of the ceremony.

Speaking to reporters afterwards Sir Charles said he had been "dumbfounded" by the occasion.

He said the Queen had thanked him for what he had done and that his films had helped her a great deal.

Sir Charles' knighthood follows years of calls for him to be honoured.

In the 1940s and 1950s he was accused of "communist sympathies" and vilified in his adopted home of the United States.

In 1952 his US visa was cancelled forcing Chaplin to relocate to Switzerland.

Three years ago, in what was seen as an act of contrition, he was awarded a special Oscar by the US' Academy of Motion Pictures.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Charlie Chaplin died in 1977. In 2002 confidential Foreign Office papers from 1956 released by Britain's Public Record Office revealed the comic's knighthood had been delayed because of his perceived "communist" sympathies. Worries about his morals had also played their part — he was twice married to 16-year-olds and once lost a paternity suit. Charlie Chaplin's body was stolen from his grave and was missing for 11 weeks until recovered in May 1978. Two men were convicted of the theft and trying to extort money from the Chaplin family.

YOUR STARS



ARIES

Mar. 21-Apr. 19

Tie up your personal papers or push to have legal settlements completed. Try to enlist the help of those you trust in order to fulfill the demands being made of you.



TAURUS

Apr. 20-May. 20

If you join intellectual or cultural groups, you should meet individuals who stimulate you. Be careful not to lead someone on if you truly have no interest.



GEMINI

May. 21-Jun. 21

Be sure to sidestep those who are eccentric or unpredictable. You will enjoy socializing and unusual forms of entertainment. You can win if you're open and up front with your boss.



CANCER

Jun. 22-Jul. 22

Health problems may prevail if you don't take care of them immediately. Try to stay calm and do the best you can. Take a look at the possibilities of starting a small part time business.



LEO

Jul. 23-Aug. 22

Secret love affairs may be enticing; however, you must be prepared for the restraints that will follow. Your social activity should be conducive to finding love.



VIRGO

Aug. 23-Sep. 22

Try to be considerate in your personal obligations. You'll have great insight. Any contributions you make to organizations will enhance your reputation and bring you offers.



LIBRA

Sep. 23-Oct. 22

Losses are likely if you have left your financial affairs in other people's hands. Outbursts of passion may cause arguments with your mate. Don't be afraid to speak in defense of others.



SCORPIO

Oct. 23-Nov. 21

Your ideas may be a little ahead of their time; don't push them, instead just continue working on development. Minor accidents could occur if you don't take precautions.



SAGITTARIUS

Nov. 22-Dec. 21

Time to deal with institutional environments, government agencies, and matters of a private nature today. Deception is probable if you don't use discrimination.



CAPRICORN

Dec. 22-Jan. 19

You are best to stick to yourself today. You should be setting up interviews or sending out your resume today. Plan events like camping or white water rafting.



AQUARIUS

Jan. 20-Feb. 18

You can make a serious attempt at quitting those bad habits that you've picked up over the years. Money can be made if you are willing to take a chance. Changes in your home will be positive.



PISCES

Feb. 19-Mar. 20

Don't go overboard; start small and work toward building it up slowly. Don't let your mate bully you into thinking that you owe them your time and your life.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY

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

EASY+

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

MEDIUM

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

HARD

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

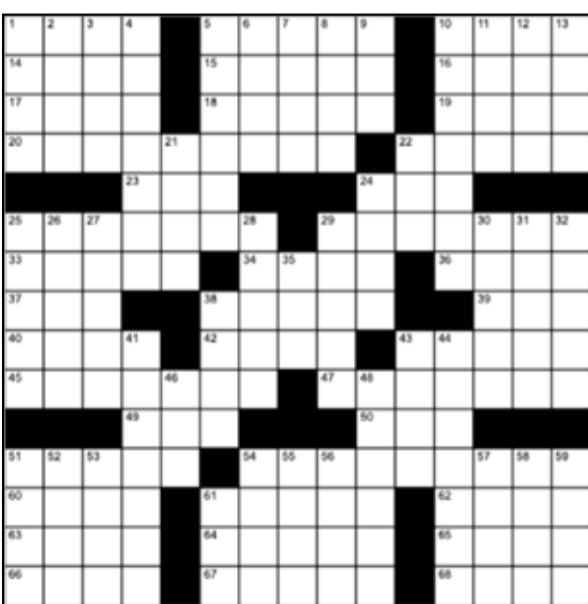
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	0	13	fine
Changchun	-3	5	cloudy
Chengdu	10	19	cloudy
Chongqing	10	18	cloudy
Fuzhou	15	26	fine
Guangzhou	17	26	cloudy
Guiyang	7	14	overcast
Haikou	19	28	cloudy
Hangzhou	11	20	rain
Harbin	-9	2	rain
Hefei	8	21	fine
Nanjing	12	23	cloudy
Shanghai	10	18	rain
Taipei	18	21	cloudy
Wuhan	8	23	fine
Hong Kong	10	18	rain
WORLD			
Moscow	-3	1	cloudy
Frankfurt	-3	9	overcast
Paris	1	13	overcast
London	5	10	rain
New York	-1	5	clear

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Roe source; 5- Vends; 10- Ninny; 14- Baseball team; 15- Frog sound; 16- Drop ___ (moon); 17- Scraps; 18- World-weariness; 19- Arab League member; 20- Yielding readily to opposition; 22- Slap; 23- Part of TNT; 24- Russian fighter; 25- Devocalize; 29- Stronghold; 33- Gathers; 34- Mountain lake; 36- Cougar; 37- High mountain, as found in central Europe; 38- Gesture of indifference; 39- German article; 40- Lowly worker; 42- Kind; 43- Pretty girl; 45- Unpredictable; 47- Locks; 49- Snitch; 50- WWII female enlistee; 51- Pipsqueak; 54- Vegetable; 60- Whit; 61- Follow, as advice; 62- Actress Gilpin; 63- Defeat decisively; 64- Let go; 65- Islamic ruler; 66- Singer Adams; 67- Outer coat of a seed; 68- "___ quam videri" (North Carolina's motto);

DOWN 1- Chilly powder?; 2- Charter; 3- Architectural pier; 4- Writing space; 5- Attractive route; 6- Bald eagle's relative; 7- Single; 8- Extol; 9- Go downhill fast; 10- Improvised; 11- "The Joy of Cooking" author Rombauer; 12- Haunted house sound; 13- Hoodlum; 21- Actor Kristofferson; 22- Canine command; 24- Chinese dynasty; 25- Hang with cloth; 26- Conger catcher; 27- Visible exhalation; 28- Body of values; 29- Container for oil or vinegar; 30- Affairs of honor; 31- "South Pacific" hero; 32- Ways to the pins; 35- Rainbow shape; 38- Agitated state; 41- Give an account; 43- Tolerate; 44- One on the run; 46- Faucet; 48- "Hotel ___"; 51- Air-filled rubber hoop, become fatigued; 52- Timber; 53- Sewing case; 54- Area of 4840 square yards; 55- Canonized Fr. women; 56- Ovid, e.g.; 57- Precious stones; 58- "Trinity" author; 59- Foal's father; 61- Pm.;



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



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SALE RENT

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The Art of Giving

Lurdes de Sousa *



IS 2022 THE YEAR OF CRYPTO-PHILANTHROPY?

THE future is here.

In March 2021, Mike Winkelmann (also known as Beeple) sold an NFT of his digital art for \$69 million at Christie's – the first purely digital artwork to be offered at the auction house. The same artist followed that up by auctioning a piece called 'Ocean Front' as part of the Carbon Drop initiative, raising \$6 million for the Open Earth Foundation to combat climate change. This is the pure use of blockchain-powered art in making the world a better place.

For charities who have been struggling with a drain in fundraising sources during Covid-19, and at a moment when society needs it the most, digital fundraising could be a creative and innovative source of revenue.

New NFT platforms are surging as the new expression of crypto-philanthropy. The principle is simple: every sale on the platform allocates a minimum percentage to a social impact organization, as chosen by the NFT creator.

When Tim Berners-Lee, a British scientist, invented the World Wide Web (WWW) in 1989, while working at CERN, the future looked quite distant. Today, the internet is increasingly our default context. Today, one's job, wealth, relationship and sense of self are often mediated through our digital contexts rather than our physical ones.

The same goes with our altruistic sense. Today, charities have use digital fundraising for philanthropy, making it easy for donors to give. All forms of digital giving are available, from using virtual fundraising campaigns to crowdfunding or peer-to-peer fundraising platforms, website donation buttons and so on... and have become familiar to our sense of sharing. But this may all be in the past as some analyst say that crypto-philanthropy is expected to see a boom in 2022.

It is probably too early to weigh the influence of this new buzz in the 'Art of Giving' but some trends are already noticeable. Cryptocurrency donations are growing and fast gaining in popularity, especially in the global south, where they are becoming part of alternative economies in countries with poor traditional banking systems. East African countries such as Kenya and Rwanda were the biggest beneficiaries of cryptocurrency donations from GiveDirectly, a platform to give cash directly to people living in poverty, in 2021, and Malawi is expected to be a major recipient in 2022.

When the WWW was created in 1989, nobody would have guessed that an art NFT could be sold, thirty years later, at a traditional auction house for a record price...

Watch the trend; the future is here. For philanthropy, as well.

*President, Associação Internacional de Filantropia (Macau)
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Macau Daily Times is the official media partner of the Associação Internacional de Filantropia (Macau).

AP PHOTO



Zoe Kravitz (left) and Robert Pattinson in a scene from "The Batman"

DRIVE IN

GLOOMY NIGHTS FOR THE DARK KNIGHT IN 'THE BATMAN'

JAKE COYLE,
MDT/AP FILM WRITER

BATMAN, never a day person, is plunged into perpetual night in Matt Reeves' nocturnal, nihilist, neo-noir take on the Caped Crusader.

Reeves' three-hour-long "The Batman" includes plenty of action, character introductions, gadgets and other various superhero accoutrement. But it is no extravaganza. This "Batman" is a morose mood piece, soaked in shadow and rage, that has stripped the comic's archetypes down to abstracted silhouettes and grubbily human characters. If Jim Carrey's Riddler were to wander into this movie, he would fit in about as well as Bugs Bunny in "Taxi Driver."

Scorsese's movie, with Travis Bickle sneering at societal collapse, was a prominent influence on Todd Phillips' muddled "Joker," but it may be more so for "The Batman," which likewise rests on the precarious psychology of its DC protagonist. Robert Pattinson's is a young Batman, relatively new to the gig and suffering mightily from the nightly battles with Gotham's most depraved. A feeling of helplessness consumes him, and a sense that he can never stem the tide.

"It's a big city," he says in the movie's opening. "I can't be everywhere."

Reeves, the "Planet of the Apes" filmmaker, starts "The Batman" with numerous such gravely voiced intonations — "They think I'm hiding in the shadows, but I AM the shadows" — in a stunning, operatic montage set to Nirvana's "Something in the Way." It's an electric fusion of imagery and sound, and the movie's most fully realized section. This "Batman" is a dirge.

The issue, though, is that "The Batman," having found its tone and immersive atmosphere, wallows in it. There is surprisingly little suspense because the film struggles to find more than one note (powerful though it is) to strike. Even Pattinson's Bruce Wayne is just as downbeat and grave as his Batman. Like a Paul Schrader character, he has abandoned nearly all social engagement, instead tortuously writing a diary to document the horrors he witnesses nightly. Pretty much since Adam West put on the cape and cowl, Batman has steadily grown darker. But Pattinson's despondent Dark Knight takes the cake.

The comic blueprint is "Batman: Year One," Frank Miller and David Mazzucchelli's 1987 four-issue series in which Wayne turns vigilante. That step — a citizen taking up violence in the name of justice — is much the subject of "The Batman." And while Reeves' film is seldom overtly topical, it's clearly colored by predominant social justice issues. Today, vigilantism is most associated with cases like George Zimmerman, Kyle Rittenhouse and the fatal shooting of Ahmaud Arbery. "The Batman," mobbed with crooked cops and culminating in a terrorist plot of masked "fringe-types," reflects much of our grim current reality. In the course of the film, Batman's doubts about who gets to mete out justice only grow.

OK, but does Batman, like, kick some butt, too? What about the Batmobile? It's not all just a seedy slog through the Gotham sewer, is it? Well, almost. "The Batman" is structured as a detective story. There's a delightful scene where he, in costume, stalks a crime scene he's been

sneaked into by detective Gordon (a fabulous, melancholy Jeffrey Wright). It's a framework — a Batman of questionable vision and even more dubious self-awareness hunting clues — that makes "The Batman" a distinctive work separate from previous movie iterations of the character.

But as Reeves and co-writer Peter Craig weave in the antagonists of this Gotham underworld — a serial killer named Edward Nashton a.k.a. the Riddler (Paul Dano, leaning into serial-killer tropes), the crime lord Carmine Falcone (a suavely villainous John Turturro) and a mid-level mobster Penguin (Colin Farrell, unrecognizable) — "The Batman" wears other influences, like David Fincher's "Seven," more obviously.

"The Batman" is darkly dour stuff — potent but erratic. It's as though the filmmakers, working in the very long shadow of "The Dark Knight," have opted not to rival the moody majesty of Christopher Nolan's genre-redefining 2008 film but instead to simply go "harder" — blacker, more cynical, a total eclipse. That may make "The Batman" properly suited to its times but it also makes it, ultimately, feel like a somewhat hollow if often grippingly pitch-black exercise in an imagined arms race of severity. "The Dark Knight" had a visceral splash in Heath Ledger's Joker that "The Batman" sorely misses. Someone, somewhere here should be asking why so serious.

"The Batman," a Warner Bros. release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America for "strong violent and disturbing content, drug content, strong language, and some suggestive material." Running time: 175 minutes. ★★★★★

BOOK IT

Birdsong offers three powerful portraits of womanhood

DESTINY O. Birdsong's "Nobody's Magic" tells three separate stories, each centering on a Black albino woman living in Shreveport, Louisiana.

First, we meet 20-year-old Suzette, who has remained sheltered after a traumatic childhood incident. Suzette aches to break free of her overprotective father and become the independent adult she knows she can be. In her quest to do so, she finds romance in unexpected places and learns adulthood comes with some very big choices.

Then there's Maple, whose mother and best friend in the world was murdered in a drive-by shooting. As police ask questions and Maple's grandmother sugar coats the life her mother led, Maple fights desperately to stop the true memory of her mother from being tarnished.

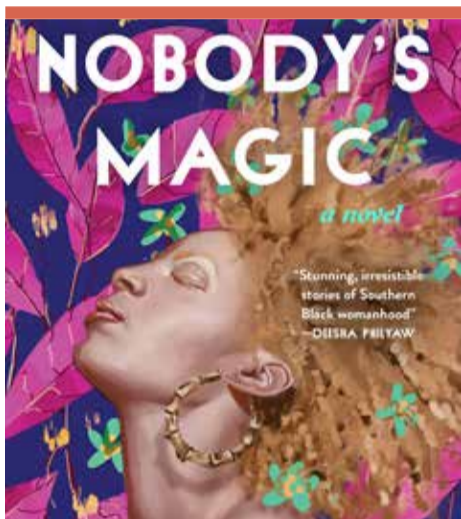
And finally, there's Agnes,

who is trying to figure out the type of love she deserves, and in the process, becomes embroiled in a scandal.

The three women's stories do not intersect per se, but together, they paint a powerful portrait of womanhood and the beautiful mess that comes along with it.

Through these beautifully flawed women, "Nobody's Magic" becomes a celebration of sexuality, friendship, family and love.

It is no surprise that Birdsong is a poet. The prose are careful and deliberate, and every moment is filled with meaning. It's a stunning read, with each woman wholly unique in her complexity and desires. At the same time, they are all connected by



"Nobody's Magic" by Destiny O. Birdsong (Grand Central Publishing)

their shared difference and all that has come along with it. Even more, they are connected by their unending determination to find themselves and their refusal to let anybody hold them back.

MOLLY SPRAYREGEN,
MDT/AP

tTUNES

RICK HOLMSTROM GOES ALL-INSTRUMENTAL ON 'GET IT!'

GUITARIST Rick Holmstrom's new album is an all-instrumental collection of toe-tappers, thigh-slappers and finger-snappers. There's an irresistible backbeat, and the mood is upbeat. Grin and hear it.

Holmstrom, who has worked with Mavis Staples for the past 15 years, draws on antecedents reaching back much farther than that, to the days when the electric guitar was ubiquitous on the pop charts. His playing is a stylish swirl of hipster funk, the blues and garage rock – in fact, most of "Get It!" was recorded in a Los Angeles garage.

Accompanied by drummer Steve Mugalain and bassist Gregory Boaz, Holmstrom tears through 14 tunes, all original, in



"Get It!" by Rick Holmstrom (LuEllie Records)

less than 40 minutes. There's plenty of playful interplay and the rhythm always jumps, whether Holmstrom's band of joy is evoking a prayer meeting, sock hop, beach party or juke joint.

Holmstrom plays a distinctive mix of lead and rhythm guitar, as he does with Staples.

His neck excursions combine dips and scoops, lyrical runs, toggles between registers and shimmering chord clusters. Notes cascade, collide, argue and agree. It's all in good fun, and words would just get in the way.

STEVEN WINE,
MDT/AP

OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

TIGHTROPE WALKING ON TAIWAN QUESTION LEAVES WASHINGTON NO ROOM FOR ERROR

On Feb 28, 1972, during then United States President Richard Nixon's visit to China, the two governments signed in Shanghai the first of three joint communiques that culminated in the normalization of China-US diplomatic relations.

Bilateral ties have had their ups and downs since then, but over the past few years they have seemed to be on a continuous downward spiral. Yet given the fanfare with which that historic moment has been celebrated by China, there can be no doubt that decision-makers in Beijing are convinced of the importance of sustaining constructive engagement with Washington. But as ever, it takes two to tango. Compared with its proclaimed willingness to cooperate wherever possible, Washington is obviously more preoccupied with its perception of the "threat" China constitutes.

On Feb 26, the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Ralph Johnson conducted a transit through the Taiwan Straits. Although the US Navy 7th Fleet claimed it was a "routine" passage, it was broadly understood as a reminder of the US commitment to Taiwan's security and a «warning» to deter any mainland attempt to take advantage of the Ukraine crisis to realize the island's reunification with the motherland by force.

In a more provocative move, since it breaks a longstanding tacit agreement between Washington and Beijing, the Joe Biden administration has sent a delegation of former US defense officials, led by Mike Mullen, former chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, to Taiwan to "reaffirm" that commitment. The five-person delegation arrived on Tuesday for a two-day visit.

On Wednesday, former US secretary of state Mike Pompeo also arrived in Taipei with 11 others, conveying a similar message. While Pompeo may be using his visit as an early launchpad for a shot at the White House, the Biden-sent team reveals the present administration's efforts to both showcase toughness against the mainland and avoid thoroughly destroying the groundwork for any collaboration.

Such tightrope walking always risks failing to do either. "If the United States is trying to threaten and pressure China with this then we need to tell them that in the face of the Great Wall of steel forged by 1.4 billion Chinese people, any military deterrence is but scrap metal," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said in a notably forthright statement.

If the policymakers in Washington truly want to prevent a conflict between the two sides of the Taiwan Straits, instead of keeping alive their vain hope that with US support they will be able to realize their dream, they should work harder to persuade the secessionists on the island to forsake their illusions.

Nixon's visit to China 50 years ago showed that stepping outside the box of conventional thinking was not only possible but also beneficial for the two countries. That is something that Washington needs to find the courage to do again.

A South Korean pharmaceutical company manufacturing Russia's COVID-19 vaccine says it's bracing for business complications as the U.S.-led West escalates sanctions against Russia over the invasion of Ukraine.

Recently expanded U.S. sanctions include targeted measures against the Russian Direct Investment Fund, a sovereign wealth fund run by a close ally of President Vladimir Putin that globally markets the Sputnik vaccines.

Kim Gi-young, an official from Seoul-based GL Rapha, said the sanctions won't directly impede its production of the shots as

the measures aren't aimed at essential medical supplies.

However, the company is concerned about potential problems rising from the financial side as South Korea joins the United States and many European countries in a move to cut off key Russian banks from global payment systems.

"Right now, we are watching how the situation develops," Kim said.

GL Rapha has so far produced 5 million shots of the single-dose Sputnik Light vaccine, but none of them have been used so far as Russia continues to delay rollout plans, Kim said.



Lieu-Gen. Alfredo Rosario, Jr., commander of the Western Mindanao Command, inspects an improvised rocket, part of 45 firearms seized by army troops from Muslim insurgents

PHILIPPINES

SEVEN MILITANTS KILLED, BOMBS SEIZED IN RECENT RAID

PHILIPPINE troops killed at least seven Muslim insurgents aligned with the Islamic State group in a recent offensive in the south and recovered 45 heavy firearms and several bombs and land mines that were to be used in future attacks, military officials said yesterday.

About 60 Muslim militants were in the remote camp near Maguing in Lanao del Sur province when it was attacked Tuesday by fighter jets and army forces, military officials said. It was not immediately clear whether their leader, Abu Zacariah, was among those killed or managed to escape. One soldier was killed and five others were wounded in the fighting, the officials said.

Zacariah has been implicated in past attacks and bombings and is suspected of being the newly designated leader of the Islamic State group in Southeast Asia, said army infantry brigade commander Gen. Jose Maria Cuerdo II, who oversaw Tuesday's offensive.

Two factions of the militant group Daulah Islamiyah, linked to the Islamic State group, appear to

have merged and camped near Maguing in January. At the time, some power transmission towers in the region were bombed in attacks claimed by the Islamic State group, prompting the military to intensify its surveillance and prepare for an offensive, Cuerdo said.

"The troops were ready to attack but they assessed it would be difficult to storm the encampment, which was protected by heavy weapons," Cuerdo told reporters. He said that prompted him to first launch airstrikes against the insurgents.

Air force fighter jets dropped a dozen bombs, then army troops launched a ground attack and overran the camp. The insurgents fled in different directions and were pursued by troops, military officials said.

The military denied reports that the troops encountered guerrillas belonging to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the largest Muslim rebel group which signed a peace pact with the government in 2014 and is now helping govern a Muslim autonomous region in the south.

"We'd like to assure our partners in the MILF that we respect the peace accord," military spokesman Col. Ramon Zagala said. "We are on track and we're only targeting the peace spoilers."

Daulah Islamiyah members were involved in the 2017 siege of Marawi, a southern Islamic city where hundreds of militants waving Islamic State group-style black flags occupied commercial buildings and villages and took hostages. Filipino troops, backed by U.S. and Australian surveillance aircraft, quelled the five-month siege, which left about 1,200 people dead — mostly militants — and destroyed the mosque-studded city's commercial center and outlying residential communities.

The military has been launching offensives against small armed groups allied with the militants who laid siege on Marawi, including the Abu Sayyaf, which has been blacklisted by the U.S. and the Philippines for past bombings, ransom kidnappings and beheadings in the south of the largely Roman Catholic country. MDT/AP



EU A senior European Union official says that in the wake of Ukraine's formal application this week to join the bloc, bids for entry are also expected "imminently" from Moldova and Georgia. The two eastern European countries are already part of EU outreach programs, but a membership request would be a major development in their relations with the 27-nation bloc. Any membership application and consideration is a process that would take many years and involve fundamental political adjustments, ranging from trade, to rule of law measures and anti-corruption commitments.



Spain Hundreds of people tried for a second day to climb over the fences that separate a Spanish city in North Africa from Morocco, authorities said. The Spanish government's delegation in Melilla said 1,200 migrants attempted to scale the six-meter barrier that perimeters the city and that 380 succeeded. On Wednesday an unprecedented 2,500 people tried to enter the city, resulting in 491 crossings, according to local authorities.



Sports Formula One has terminated its contract with the Russian Grand Prix following the country's invasion of Ukraine, saying yesterday that Russia "will not have a race" in the future. F1 already canceled this year's race, which had been scheduled to be held in Sochi on Sept. 25. But following further discussions this week, F1 went a step further and ended a contract which ran until 2025. "Formula 1 can confirm it has terminated its contract with the Russian Grand Prix," F1 said in a statement. "Russia will not have a race in the future."