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Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre

**A 63-YEAR-OLD TAXI DRIVER WAS FINALLY DETAINED BY THE POLICE AFTER SEVERAL REPORTS FROM CITIZENS FINDING INJURED AND DEAD PIGEONS AND OTHER ANIMALS STUCK IN METAL TRAPS**

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**MGTO COMMITTED TO DEVELOPING ELECTRONIC PLATFORMS TO PROMOTE THE INDUSTRY**

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**CHINA BATTLES MULTIPLE OUTBREAKS, DRIVEN BY STEALTH OMICRON**

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**Indonesia** Strong, shallow underwater earthquakes shook western Indonesia and the Philippine capital region at dawn yesterday, but no serious damage was reported and no tsunami warnings were issued. In Indonesia, a magnitude-6.7 quake that was 16 kilometers deep struck about 169 kilometers west of Pariaman, a town in West Sumatra province, the U.S. Geological Survey said. The Indonesian Meteorology and Geophysics Agency said the quake was felt in many parts of the province but there was no danger of a tsunami.

ALEXIS GERARD

# PHILIPPINES REINSTATES VISA-FREE FOR MACAU

P3



AP PHOTO

**Philippines** Duterte's government yesterday summoned the Chinese ambassador to protest what it said was the "illegal incursion" of a Chinese navy ship into the country's waters, officials said. The Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila said a reconnaissance ship of China's People's Liberation Army crossed into the Sulu Sea and cruised off the western Palawan and nearby Mindoro provinces from Jan. 29 to Feb. 1 without permission and in violation of Philippine sovereignty.

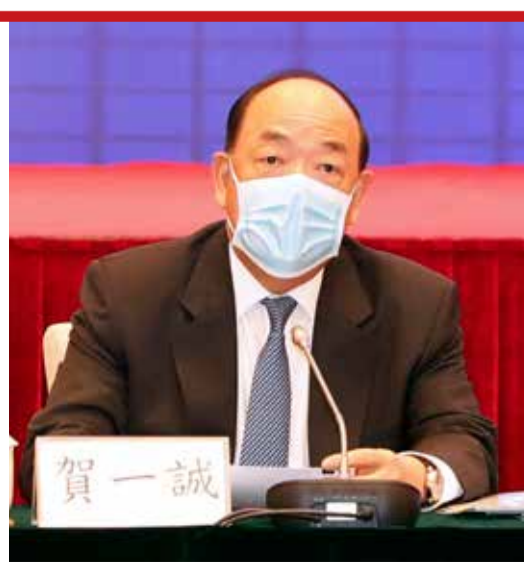


AP PHOTO

**France** lifted most Covid-19 restrictions yesterday, abolishing the need to wear face masks in most settings and allowing people who aren't vaccinated back into restaurants, sports arenas and other venues. The move had been announced earlier this month by the French government based on assessments of the improving situation in hospitals and following weeks of a steady decline in infections. It comes less than a month before the first round of the presidential election scheduled on April 10.



**HO SAYS ECONOMY STILL 'UNSETTLED'**



P3

**CASINO SHARES TUMBLE 13% AMID TIGHTENED RESTRICTIONS**

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# LONG BEFORE SHOTS WERE FIRED, A LINGUISTIC POWER STRUGGLE WAS PLAYING OUT IN UKRAINE

PHILLIP M. CARTER, FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

**W**HAT does the Russian invasion of Ukraine have to do with language?

If you ask Russian leader Vladimir Putin, Ukrainian governmental policies promoting the use of the Ukrainian language are evidence of the “genocide” of ethnic Russians in the Russian-speaking east, and thus provide part of the rationale for invasion.

Propaganda like that aside, something else links war to language: power.

Long before shots were fired, a power struggle has played out in the region around language – specifically, whether or not Ukrainian is a language. Neither professional linguists nor Ukrainians have any problem thinking of Ukrainian as a separate language – it’s probably about as different from Russian as Spanish is from Portuguese. Yet Russian nationalists long sought to classify it as a dialect of Russian.

## RUSSIA'S STATUS AS A POWER LANGUAGE

It turns out that classifying a given language variety as “a language” is less clear than you might think, and popular understandings of “language” versus “dialect” are usually based more on political criteria than linguistic ones. As sociolinguist Max Weinreich succinctly put it, “a language is a dialect with an army and a navy.”

Russian, the language of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, is one of the world’s handful of power languages. Alongside languages such as Mandarin, Spanish and English, Russian is deeply intertwined with global politics, business and pop culture.

Of Russian’s 260 million speakers, roughly 40% – 103 million – speak it as a second language, a sign that people see value in learning it. It’s a lingua franca across Central Asia and the Caucasus, and is widely spoken in the Baltics. In Ukraine – Russia’s largest European neighbor – Russian is used by about one-third of the population, which is around 13 million people. “Number of speakers” isn’t the defining feature of a power language, however

AP PHOTO



– Bengali, for example, has 265 million speakers – more than Russian – but for the most part people aren’t clamoring to learn it.

Russian, on the other hand, is unique among the Slavic languages in that it is taught in the most prestigious universities across Europe, Asia and the United States. With all those speakers, all that clout, and all that cultural production, Russian’s status as a power language looks as natural as beets in borscht.

But it’s not.

Power languages derive their status not from anything inherent to the linguistic system, but instead from the historical arrangements of power that give their speakers – and culture – perceived status and value.

Russian picked up speakers – and knocked out other languages – through its remarkable history of expansionism: The Muscovites, inhabitants of the Grand Duchy of Moscow that predated the Russian Empire, moved to the east and the north, taking over Kazan and Siberia during the 16th century. By the end of the 19th century, the Russians had conquered Central Asia, all the way to the border of China. Following World War II, the Soviet Union extended its sphere

of influence into Eastern Europe.

Ukraine became a part of the Soviet Union in 1922. In 1991, it gained its independence, when the Soviet Union broke apart.

Although nobody knows for certain, it appears Putin is seeking to make all or portions of Ukraine once again part of Russia.

## TWO TWIGS ON THE SAME LINGUISTIC BRANCH

So if Russian is a “power language,” what is Ukrainian?

If you ask some Russian nationalists, Ukrainian isn’t a language at all. In 1863, Russian Minister of the Interior Pyotr Valuev declared that “a separate Ukrainian language (‘Little Russian’) has never existed, does not exist, and shall not exist.” Per another quote – attributed to Tsar Nicholas II – “There is no Ukrainian language, just illiterate peasants speaking Little Russian.”

But as a matter of linguistic history, Ukrainian and Russian emerged as distinct languages from a common source language spoken around A.D. 500 that linguists refer to as “proto-Slavic.”

The Slavic languages share more than grammatical and phonological linguistic similarities. They also have a common ho-

meland, and that homeland was, most likely, western Ukraine.

For reasons that linguists, archaeologists and other scholars still debate, speakers of proto-Slavic fanned out from their homeland, moving northward, westward and southward.

As they moved, proto-Slavic gradually gave rise to the language varieties that would eventually become the contemporary Slavic languages, which include Polish, Serbian, Russian and Ukrainian. By the 9th century, some Slavs who stayed close to home linked with the Rus – a group who were either Slavs themselves or assimilated Scandinavians – and created the first noteworthy East Slavic federation known as Kyivan Rus, situated, as the name suggests, in Kyiv. Kyivan Rus can be thought of as the predecessor to the modern Ukrainian, Belorussian and Russian nations.

## RESISTING RUSSIAN

Since language has become so key to national identity, it’s no wonder that reframing Ukrainian as a dialect of Russian is integral to Putin’s discursive campaign, just as it was for Tsar Nicholas II 200 years ago. Part of holding power, it turns out, is the ability to frame the

discourse, and the title of Putin’s essay, “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” which he published in July 2021, leaves little doubt as to his position. If all things Ukrainian – including the language – are simply derivatives of all things Russian, the invasion looks less like an act of aggression and more like reintegration.

Ukrainians, of course, bristle with this characterization, not because there is no Russian being spoken in Ukraine – Volodymyr Zelenskyy is himself a Russian speaker – but because for many, Ukrainian identity involves bilingualism. Many Ukrainians speak both Ukrainian and Russian and even mix them in a form people call “surzhyk” – the Eastern Slavic version of “Spanglish.”

In Ukrainian public life, fears over the primacy of Russian or Ukrainian have led to conflict before. In 2020 there were heated debates and protests over a bill that would have repealed a stipulation requiring that 80% of schooling occur in Ukrainian. There was a brawl in 2012 in the Ukrainian Parliament over a bill that would have made Russian an official language, alongside Ukrainian, in parts of the country.

More recently, reports show that in eastern Ukraine, some Russian-speaking Ukrainians are abandoning Russian to avoid using “the language of the occupier.”

Of course, speakers all over the world give up their mother tongues in favor of languages they perceive to be more valuable all the time, but usually this happens gradually, and in the direction of power languages. Except under circumstances of extreme duress – an outside invader or forced submission by a dominant group – it’s somewhat unusual for speakers to abandon their mother tongue overnight.

In El Salvador, speakers of Lenca and Cacapoera did this in the 1930s to avoid being killed by Spanish-speaking Salvadoran troops. But in Ukraine, some speakers aren’t adopting the language of the invader; they’re giving it up.

Putin’s attack will almost certainly accelerate that trend. While Russian’s status as a power language probably will not be affected, it may start to shed speakers. And with all the attention on Ukraine, perhaps the world will come to appreciate it as the Slavic homeland where people seem to prefer to speak Ukrainian – not Russian. **MDT/THE CONVERSATION**

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A MACAU TIMES PUBLICATIONS LTD PUBLICATION

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For subscription and general issues:

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# MGTO committed to developing electronic platforms to promote the industry

ANTHONY LAM

**T**HE Macao Government Tourism Office is committed to developing various electronic platforms to promote the city and its tourism industry, which is why the office organized the recent drone show that took place during Lunar New Year, according to the bureau's director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes.

The Macau University of Science and Technology has recently invited Senna Fernandes to present her insights on the local tourism industry, the university announced in a statement.

The event, organized by the university's Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management, saw an attendance of over 200 people, including teachers and students.

Senna Fernandes spoke about the different measures taken by the MGTO in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, including taking advantage of smart tourism trends to cater to future development.

Moreover, she said that a num-



ber of activities, including the Light Festival, float parade and fireworks display, are designed to attract local residents and tourists, so as to stimulate the revival of the city's tourism industry and promote the local economy, she added.

Senna Fernandes also presen-

ted the most important of the MGTO's five key tasks this year: the "Tourism +" cross-boundary integration project. It will include "Tourism + Convention and Exhibition" and "Tourism + Culture and Creativity," "Tourism + E-commerce," as well as "Tourism

+ Sports," among other initiatives. With the help of combined effects, the city's tourism industry will be more competitive, she said.

Senna Fernandes also introduced the structure of MGTO and the roles of its various departments in detail, before presenting

various data, such as the number of visitors to Macau and hotel occupancy rate, to analyze the general situation of the city's tourism industry before and after the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on the tourism industry.

Dean of the faculty, Professor Ben K. Goh, thanked the director of the MGTO for her continuous support of the university. This has taken the form of enriching students' professional knowledge and industry experience through various professional courses, master lectures and cooking workshops.

He spoke of his hope that these activities will enable students to meet with experts and learn from them, so as to broaden their horizons. He also expressed his desire that this seminar would stimulate reflection on the development of Macau's tourism industry after the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, he hopes to strengthen cooperation between government departments, the industry and academia through this type of event, so as to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the city.

## Philippines reinstates visa-free travel from Hong Kong, Macau

LYNZY VALLES

**T**HE Philippine government has waived visas for travelers from Hong Kong and Macau who enter the country as temporary visitors for up to 14 days.

The Bureau of Immigration's Commissioner Jaime Morente said the relaxed policy is included in the latest resolution passed last Friday by the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases.

Morente said the resolution revived a Philippine foreign service circular that was in effect prior to the Covid-19 pandemic wherein nationals of Hong Kong-SAR and Macau-SAR were allowed entry into the country for 14 days visa-free. Pre-pandemic, in 2019, the BI saw the arrival of more than 5,000 Hong Kong nationals, and more than 3,000 Macau nationals.



In the same resolution, the IATF-EID ruled that nationals from Israel and Brazil may now again enter the Philippines visa-free for an initial stay of 59 days.

This privilege was extended to citizens of the two countries in accordance with a reciprocal arrangement wherein Filipinos are also allowed entry into Israel and Brazil

for 59 days without a visa.

Back in February, the Philippines reopened to international travelers for the first time in almost two years, aiming to boost the economy that was hit hard by the pandemic.

Tourists from 157 countries are permitted to enter the country with no visa required, as long as they are fully vaccinated and can present a ne-

gative nucleic acid test.

As the spread of Covid-19 continues to slow, the government is operating under a new normal. It has reopened its entertainment venues at 100% capacity, and some schools have already been allowed to hold in-person classes at 100% capacity in areas under the least restrictive alert level 1.

## CE SAYS ECONOMY STILL 'UNSETTLED'

**A**LTHOUGH Macau's economy is seeing a trend toward gradual recovery, uncertainty still exists in the outlook, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng said at the Economic Development Committee plenary yesterday.

He highlighted the government's implementation of economy-stabilizing policies, which were effective in steadying the economy and avoiding deep troughs. However, he advised that people from all walks of life should be vigilant during the upcoming uncertainties.

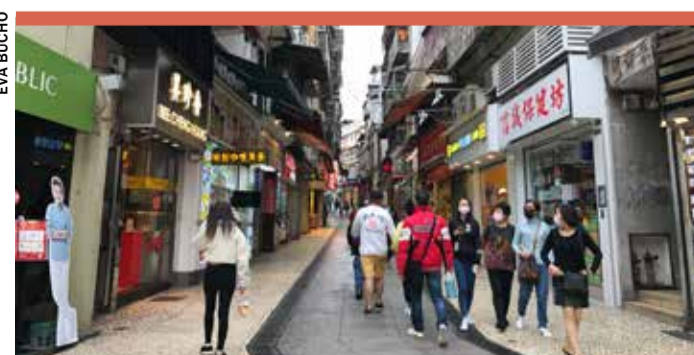
Ho reminded the plenary that this year is key to Macau's seizing the opportunities from the country's development. The government will unify and lead the people to implement in an orderly fashion the goals, missions and measures set

forth in the "Second Five-year Plan," on the foundation of effectively managing the Covid-19 pandemic.

Another key point is that the city should actively and pragmatically push forward the construction of the cooperation zone in Hengqin, so that the city's economy can be adequately diversified and become sustainable.

Traditional Chinese Medicine is also a key factor in fostering Big Health, modern financial services, high and new technologies, and convention and exhibition, the head of the government added. He also mentioned the amendment to the gaming law as key to Macau's future.

He stressed that the development of the city relies on people from all walks of life. AL









GAMING

# Casino shares tumble amid tightened restrictions for Guangdong arrivals

LYNZY VALLES

**G**AMING operators in the city saw their shares plunge up to 13% yesterday following the tightened quarantine requirements for some travelers from the mainland, amid the new surge of Covid-19 cases in China.

Health authorities have announced that travelers who visited Zhongshan and Shenzhen cities, and areas of Guangzhou, Yangjiang and Dongguan will now be required to quarantine for seven to 14 days upon arrival.

Leading the plunge in casino shares was Wynn Macau who recorded a loss of 13% to HKD5.12, followed by SJM Holdings, whose share price fell 12.3% to HKD3.2, and Sands China, recording a plunge of 12% to HKD15.6.

By the time trading closed in the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, Melco International dropped 11% to HKD5.9, while MGM China recorded a 4.9% drop to some HKD4.50, and Galaxy Entertainment Group lost 5% to HKD39.

Vitaly Umansky, managing director and senior analyst of global gambling at AllianceBernstein,



said that there has been a significant reduction in travel within China in recent weeks, and that the number of visitors from China could fall further as Beijing advises citizens against traveling, as cited in a Dow Jones report.

If Macau were to suffer a significant Covid-19 outbreak, the worst-case scenario could include border closures, which would weigh on casino operators that have already been hurt by two years of reduced visitation, he added.

On Sunday officials locked

down the southern city of Shenzhen, which has 17.5 million people, and is a major tech and finance hub bordering Hong Kong. Everyone in Shenzhen will undergo three rounds of testing after 60 new cases were reported Sunday.

Back in September, casino stocks plunged as much as a total of USD18 billion in market value following reports of possible tightened regulations in the gaming industry, as the local government kicked off the public consultation. The decrease amounted to a total of over HKD147 billion when

combined.

However, following the announcement of amendments to the city's gaming law in January, casino shares recorded a surge of up to nearly 17%.

Although Macau's gaming market still remains volatile due to Covid-19 restrictions and the unwinding of the VIP market, analysts believed that the surge of stocks during January is a "positive outcome and meaningfully reduces Macau license risk and license term risk for Macau operators."

## Manpower needs and wages down at the end of 2021

RENATO MARQUES

**A**T the end of 2021, the demand for manpower in almost all economic sectors decreased. Wages also continued to drop in the last quarter of the year, results from a survey by

the Statistics and Census Service show.

According to the release, nearly all the surveyed sectors registered drops in demand for manpower with the only exception being Public Sewage & Refuse Disposal Activities where there was an

increase of 1.7% year-on-year compared with the last quarter of 2020.

Despite the increase in this sector the average earnings of full-time employees in December registered a fall of 3.6% year-on-year to MOP18,020.

The Transport, Storage & Communications sector was the only other sector where the manpower needs did not drop, maintaining the level seen a year earlier. As in the Public Sewage & Refuse Disposal Activities, however, the average earnings of those employed by this sector dropped by 2% year-on-year to MOP21,390.

In Wholesale & Retail Trade the decrease in manpower was 1.7%

y-o-y, while the earnings of these workers in December were down 3.5% compared to June 2021, but up by 3.9% y-o-y to an average of MOP13,980.

From the sectors surveyed, Security Activities registered the most significant drop y-o-y, decreasing by 3.6%. Nonetheless, the average earnings of employees in this sector were the only ones registering an increase (by 2.2%) to MOP13,580.

## CPU MEMBER CHALLENGES GOV'T PROCEDURE ON EXPROPRIATION

RENATO MARQUES

**L**AWYER and Urban Planning Committee (CPU) member, Álvaro Rodrigues, has expressed disagreement with the procedures of the government regarding the expropriation of a land parcel that the government wants to use as public green space and leisure area.

The topic was sparked last week at a meeting of

the CPU during the discussion of the Urban Conditions Plan (PCU) of a land parcel located at the back of Camões Garden in an area known as Escada do Caracol.

In response to the information that the land parcel's PCU would be issued with the classification that it would be used as public space, Rodrigues asked, "This is a private land [parcel]; how

can we say it will be used for public space?"

In response, an official from the Land, Public Works and Transport Bureau (DSSOPT) said that it was intended for such land parcels to enter the public domain first and then be used as public space.

Rodrigues disagreed with the procedure and claimed that if there is an intention from the gover-

ment to expropriate the parcel, the authorities should communicate that fact to the landowners and negotiate with them the payment of proper compensation for the expropriation, and that only once that has taken place should a PCU be issued with the conditions of the parcel being used for public space.

"I can tell you that this land parcel is priva-

te and that, according to the land register, it was [most recently] acquired by a company in 2013 that paid some 21 million patacas for it," he said, adding, "I don't think there is any legal issue in the government wanting to expropriate the parcel, but I do think there is a problem with this procedure. We are approving a PCU that implicates the change of the land wi-

thout hearing from the owner or informing him in advance about the government's intention? This does not sound right to me. This PCU is [under] discussion here [at the CPU meeting] because the owner requested the PCU so he could know what he could use the parcel for, but now we are issuing one [PCU] that will be completely useless for him," he remarked.

### FAIR DIGITAL FINANCE IS THE THEME FOR WORLD CONSUMER RIGHTS DAY 2022

Consumers International announced the theme for this year's World Consumer Rights Day as Fair Digital Finance, and calls for access to safe and fair financial service for all consumers around the world. The consumer organization has defined fair digital finance as products and services that are inclusive, safe, data protected and private. This means that all consumers, including the most vulnerable, must be provided access to manage their finances, and that they must be protected from scams, fraud, and phishing, and must have their data safeguarded.

### APPROVED RESIDENTIAL MORTGAGE LOANS SURGE 40%

In January 2022, new residential mortgage loans (RMLs) approved by Macau banks advanced by 40.4% month-to-month to MOP3.50 billion. Of which, new RMLs to residents, representing 99.3% of the total, grew by 41.5% to MOP3.48 billion, according to data from the Monetary Authority of Macao. On the other hand, the non-resident component fell by 34.6% to MOP24.5 million. New commercial real estate loans (CRELs), meanwhile, dropped by 70.6% month-to-month to MOP3.23 billion. The monthly average of new CRELs approved between November 2021 and January 2022 was MOP9.0 billion, up by 5.0% as compared with the previous period (October to December 2021).





COVID-19

# CHINA BATTLES MULTIPLE OUTBREAKS, DRIVEN BY STEALTH OMICRON

CHINESE authorities reported 1,337 locally transmitted cases of COVID-19 across dozens of mainland cities yesterday as the fast-spreading variant commonly known as “stealth omicron” fuels China’s biggest outbreak in two years.

The vast majority of the new cases — 895 — were in far northeastern Jilin province, where the COVID-19 task force effectively banned movement throughout the province. People can leave the province or travel from one city to another only with permission from the police, according to the government notice.

The surge is infecting people in cities ranging from Shenzhen to Qingdao on the coast, to Xingtai in the north and the numbers have crept steadily higher since early March. While the mainland’s numbers are small relative to numbers reported in Europe or in the U.S., or even the city of Hong Kong, which had reported 32,000 cases Sunday, they are the highest since the first big outbreak of COVID-19 in the central city of Wuhan in early 2020.

China has seen very few infections since its strict Wuhan lockdown as the government held fast to its zero-tolerance strategy,

which is focused on stopping transmission of the coronavirus as fast as possible, by relying on strict lockdowns and mandatory quarantines for anyone who has come into contact with a positive case.

The government has indicated it will continue to stick to its strict strategy of stopping transmission for the time being.

On Sunday, officials locked down the southern city of Shenzhen which has 17.5 million people and is a major tech and finance hub that neighbors Hong Kong.

Yesterday, Zhang Wenhong, a

prominent infectious disease expert at a hospital affiliated with Shanghai’s Fudan University noted in an essay for China’s business outlet Caixin, that the numbers for the mainland were still in the beginning stages of an “exponential rise.” Shanghai confirmed 41 new cases yesterday.

The city has recorded 713 cases in March, of which 632 are asymptomatic cases. China counts positive and asymptomatic cases separately in its national numbers.

Signs of normal life in Shanghai are abating, as schools switched to remote learning and office buildings closed. Shanghai has

primarily relied on locking down single buildings instead of the whole city.

Yimeng Li, a 28-year-old Shanghai resident, said she’s on high alert because of the possibility of suddenly being quarantined. Some of her colleagues have been absent because they’ve been required to quarantine at home.

“Every day when I go to work, I worry that if our office building will suddenly be locked down then I won’t be able to get home, so I have bought a sleeping bag and stored some fast food in the office in advance, just in case,” Li said.

In Beijing, which reported six cases, multiple residential and commercial buildings were sealed off over the weekend.

City residents said they were willing to follow the zero-tolerance policies despite any personal impact.

“I think only when the epidemic is totally wiped out can we ease up,” said Tong Xin, 38, a shop owner in the Silk Market in Beijing.

Much of the current outbreak is being driven the variant commonly known as “stealth omicron,” or the B.A.2 lineage of the omicron variant, Zhang noted. Early research suggests it spreads faster than the original omicron, which itself spread faster than the original virus and other variants.

“But if our country opens up quickly now, it will cause a large number of infections in people in a short period of time,” Zhang wrote. “No matter how low the death rate is, it will still cause a run on medical resources and a short term shock to social life, causing irreparable harm to families and society.” MDT/AP

# US official: Russia seeking military aid from China

A U.S. official said Russia asked China for military equipment to use in its invasion of Ukraine, a request that heightened tensions about the ongoing war ahead of meeting in Rome between top aides for the U.S. and Chinese governments.

In advance of the talks, White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan bluntly warned China to avoid helping Russia evade punishment from global sanctions that have hammered the Russian economy. “We will not allow that to go forward,” he said.

The prospect of China offering Russia financial help is one of several concerns for President Joe Biden. A U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss sen-

sitive matters, said that in recent days, Russia had requested support from China, including military equipment, to press forward in its ongoing war with Ukraine. The official did not provide details on the scope of the request. The request was first reported by the Financial Times and The Washington Post.

The Biden administration is also accusing China of spreading Russian disinformation that could be a pretext for Russian President Vladimir Putin’s forces to attack Ukraine with chemical or biological weapons.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has put China in a delicate spot with two of its biggest trading partners: the U.S. and European Union. China needs ac-

cess to those markets, yet it also has shown support for Moscow, joining with Russia in declaring a friendship with “no limits.”

In his talks with senior Chinese foreign policy adviser Yang Jiechi, Sullivan will indeed be looking for limits in what Beijing will do for Moscow.

“I’m not going to sit here publicly and brandish threats,” he told CNN in a round of Sunday news show interviews. “But what I will tell you is we are communicating directly and privately to Beijing that there absolutely will be consequences” if China helps Russia “backfill” its losses from the sanctions.

“We will not allow that to go forward and allow there to be a lifeline to Russia from these economic

sanctions from any country anywhere in the world,” he said.

In brief comments on the talks, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian did not mention Ukraine, saying that the “key issue of this meeting is to implement the important consensus reached by the Chinese and U.S. heads of state in their virtual summit in November last year.”

“They will exchange views on China-U.S. relations and international and regional issues of common concern,” Zhao said in comments posted on the ministry’s website late Sunday.

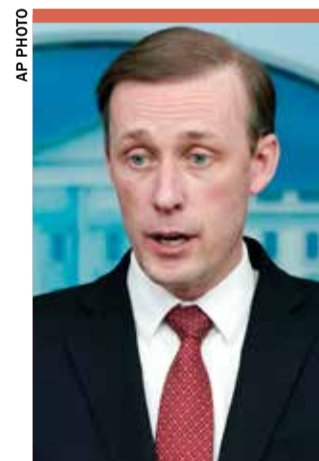
The White House said the talks will focus on the direct impact of Russia’s war against Ukraine on re-

gional and global security.

Biden administration officials say Beijing is spreading false Russian claims that Ukraine was running chemical and biological weapons labs with U.S. support. They say China is effectively providing cover if Russia moves ahead with a biological or chemical weapons attack on Ukrainians.

When Russia starts accusing other countries of preparing to launch biological or chemical attacks, Sullivan told NBC’s “Meet the Press,” “it’s a good tell that they may be on the cusp of doing it themselves.”

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby, on ABC’s “This Week,” said “we haven’t seen anything that indicates some sort of imminent chemical or biological at-



White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan

tack right now, but we’re watching this very, very closely.”

The striking U.S. accusations about Russian disinformation and Chinese complicity came after Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova alleged with no evidence that the U.S. was financing Ukrainian chemical and biological weapons labs in Ukraine. MDT/AP



ANALYSIS

# India unsure of Russian arms to meet China, Pakistan threats

ASHOK SHARMA, NEW DELHI

**I**NDIA is exploring ways to avoid a major disruption in its supply of Russian-made weaponry amid U.S. sanctions following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tightrope walk could become more difficult due to a continuing border standoff with China.

Experts say up to 60% of Indian defense equipment comes from Russia, and New Delhi finds itself in a bind at a time when it is facing a two-year-old standoff with China in eastern Ladakh over a territorial dispute, with tens of thousands of soldiers within shooting distance. Twenty Indian soldiers and four Chinese soldiers died in a clash in 2020.

"The nightmare scenario for India would be if the U.S. comes to the conclusion that it confronts a greater threat from Russia and that this justifies a strategic accommodation with China. In blunt terms, concede Chinese dominance in Asia while safeguarding its European flank," Shyam Saran, India's former foreign secretary, wrote in a recent blog post.

Would China, drawing lessons from Ukraine, be an aggressor in disputed eastern Ladakh?

"It is very possible they might do it," said Jitendra Nath Misra, a retired diplomat and distinguished fellow in the Jindal School of International Affairs.

President Joe Biden has spoken about unresolved differences with India after the country abstained from voting on United Nations resolutions against Russian aggression in Ukraine. Modi has so far avoided voting against Russia or criticizing Putin for invading Ukraine.

In the early 1990s, about 70% of Indian army weapons, 80% of

AP PHOTO



Putin (left) and Modi greet each other before a meeting in New Delhi, last December

its air force systems and 85% of its navy platforms were of Soviet origin. India is now reducing its dependency on Russian arms and diversifying its defense procurements, buying more from countries like the United States, Israel, France and Italy.

From 2016-20, Russia accounted for nearly 49% of India's defense imports while French and Israeli shares were 18% and 13%, respectively, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

India not only depends on Russian weaponry, but it also relies hugely on Moscow for military upgrades and modernization as it moves toward self-reliance in its defense sector, said Lt. Gen. D.S. Hooda, a former Indian military commander.

"Russia is the only country that leased a nuclear submarine to India. Will any other country lease India a nuclear submarine?" Hooda asked.

Sushant Singh, a senior fellow at the Center for Policy Research, said: "India's navy has one aircraft carrier. It's Russian. India's bulk of fighter jets and about 90% of its battle tanks are Russian."

In 1987, the Indian navy leased a Chakra-1, a Charlie-class nuclear cruise missile submarine, from the former Soviet Union for training. It later got another Soviet submarine, Chakra-2, in its place. In 2019, India signed a \$3 billion contract to lease an Akula-1-class nuclear-powered attack submarine from Russia for 10 years. It is expected to be delivered by 2025.

India bought its only aircraft carrier, INS Vikramaditya, from the Russia in 2004. The carrier had served during the former Soviet Union and later for the Russian navy. India's first indigenous 40,000-tonne aircraft carrier is undergoing sea trials ahead of its planned induction by next year.

India also has four nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines on the way.

India's air force presently operates more than 410 Soviet and Russian fighters, comprising a mix of imported and license-built platforms. India's inventory of Russian-made military equipment also includes submarines, tanks, helicopters, submarines, frigates and missiles.

Misra said the U.S. hasn't

shown any willingness to provide technology transfers to India.

"I would like to ask our American friends: What kinds of defense technology have you given us? What the U.S. is offering is the F-16 fighter aircraft rebranded as the F-21. The F-16 is obsolete from the Indian point of view. We went for the Mig-21 in the 1960s because the F-104 was denied to India. We are seeing the same kind of thing," he said.

"Under the AUKUS agreement, the U.S. is willing to share the nuclear propulsion technology for submarines with Australia but is not willing to share it with India," he added, referring to the trilateral security pact between the U.S., U.K. and Australia.

Australia in September decided to cancel a multibillion-dollar contract to buy diesel-electric French submarines and said it would instead acquire U.S. nuclear-powered vessels in a new Indo-Pacific defense deal under AUKUS.

During the Donald Trump presidency, the U.S. and India concluded defense deals worth over \$3 billion. Bilateral defense trade increased from near zero in 2008

to \$15 billion in 2019. Major Indian purchases from the United States included long-range maritime patrol aircraft, C-130 transport aircraft, missiles and drones.

As the Ukraine crisis deepens, the challenge for India is how to navigate international sanctions against Russia.

The Russian S-400 missile system deal with Moscow has put India at risk of U.S. sanctions after Washington asked its partners to avoid purchasing Russian military equipment. The S-400 is a sophisticated surface-to-air defense system and is expected to give India strategic deterrence against rivals China and Pakistan.

New Delhi has sought support from Washington and its allies in confronting China, a common ground for the Indo-Pacific security alliance known as "the Quad" that also includes Australia and Japan.

Tracing the history of India's acquisition of Soviet arms, S.C.S. Bangara, a retired navy admiral, said India began looking for arms and ammunition after its war with China in 1962.

The Cold War resulted in the United States cozying up with China. Pakistan as a facilitator held a trump card that could be used to enlist the complete support of the U.S. government in the event of an India-Pakistan conflict, he said.

During India's war with Pakistan in December 1971 that led to the creation of Bangladesh, the U.S. deployed a task force led by the USS Enterprise in the Bay of Bengal in support of Pakistan.

In the mid-1960s, India negotiated a series of acquisition agreements with the Soviet Union that continued for the next 40 years, Bangara said.

"It was not seamless, particularly when the Soviet Union collapsed. The long chain of training facilities along with the supply chain of logistics collapsed when the Union broke into smaller states," he said.

Even as India diversifies its defense acquisitions from the U.S., Israel, France and other countries, it may take 20 years to get over its dependence on Russian supplies and spares, Bangara said. **MDT/AP**

TAIWAN

# Air force Mirage fighter lost, pilot ejects safely

**T**AIWAN'S air force said one of its French-made Mirage 2000 fighter jets appears to have been lost off the island's east coast, but the pilot has been rescued after parachuting to safety.

The air force said Lieutenant Colonel Huang Chung-kai ejected at around 11:30 a.m. yesterday after repor-

ting mechanical trouble.

Huang had taken off about one hour earlier from Taitung Air Base on a routine training mission, the air force said. He was picked up by a rescue helicopter, it said.

Taiwan's air force has suffered from aging equipment and difficulties purchasing replacements amid Chinese

efforts to isolate the island it considers its own territory to be annexed by force if necessary.

It operates 55 Mirage 2000s purchased in the 1990s amid Chinese anger, along with 140 U.S. F-16s and 129 homemade IDF fighters.

Along with the usual problems caused by age,

Taiwan's fighters have suffered additional wear and tear from frequently scrambling to meet Chinese military aircraft that routinely cross into Taiwan's air defense identification zone. Some military observers believe that may be part of a deliberate Chinese strategy to degrade Taiwan's air defenses over time. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO





# War censorship exposes Putin's leaky internet controls

FRANK BAJAK & BARBARA ORTUTAY, BOSTON

**L**ONG before waging war on Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin was working to make Russia's internet a powerful tool of surveillance and social control akin to China's so-called Great Firewall.

So when Western tech companies began cutting ties with Russia following its invasion, Russian investigative journalist Andrei Soldatov was alarmed. He'd spent years exposing Russian censorship and feared that well-intentioned efforts to aid Ukraine would instead help Putin isolate Russians from the free flow of information, aiding the Kremlin's propaganda war.

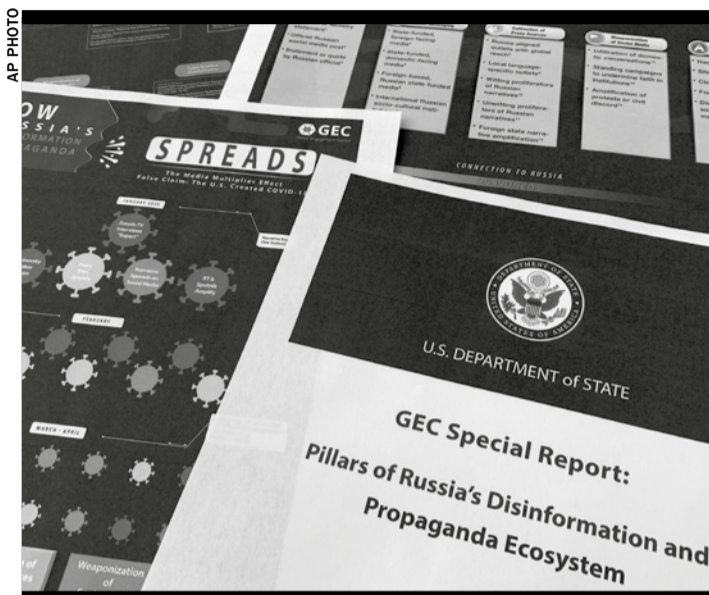
"Look, guys the only space the Russians have to talk about Ukraine, and what is going on in Russia, is Facebook," Soldatov, now exiled in London, wrote on Facebook in the war's first week. "You cannot just, like, kill our access."

Facebook didn't, although the Kremlin soon picked up that baton, throttling both Facebook and Twitter so badly they are effectively unreachable on the Russian internet. Putin has also blocked access to both Western media and independent news sites in the country, and a new law criminalizes spreading information that contradicts the government's line. On Friday, the Kremlin said it would also restrict access to Instagram. By yesterday, the network monitor NetBlocks reported the social network throttled across multiple Russian internet providers.

Yet the Kremlin's latest censorship efforts have revealed serious shortcomings in the government's bigger plans to straightjacket the internet. Any Russian with a modicum of tech smarts can circumvent government efforts to starve Russians of fact.

For instance, the government has so far had only limited success blocking the use of software known as virtual private networks, or VPNs, that allows users to evade content restrictions. The same goes for Putin's attempts to restrict the use of other censorship-evading software.

That puts providers of internet bandwidth and associated services sympathetic to Ukraine's plight in a tough spot. On one side, they face



public pressure to punish the Russian state and economic reasons to limit services at a time when bills might well go unpaid. On the other, they're wary of helping stifle a free flow of information that can counter Kremlin disinformation — for instance, the state's claim that Russia's military is heroically "liberating" Ukraine from fascists.

Amazon Web Services, a major provider of cloud computing services, continues to operate in Russia, although it says it's not taking on any new customers. Both Cloudflare, which helps shield websites from denial-of-service attacks and malware, and Akamai, which boosts site performance by putting internet content closer to its audience, also continue to serve their Russian customers, with exceptions including cutting off state-owned companies and firms under sanctions.

Microsoft, by contrast, hasn't said whether it will halt its cloud services in the country, although it has suspended all new sales of products and services.

U.S.-based Cogent, which provides a major "backbone" for internet traffic, has cut direct connections inside Russia but left open the pipes through subsidiaries of Russian network providers at exchanges physically outside the country. Another major U.S. backbone provider, Lumen, has done the same.

"We have no desire to cut off Russian individuals and think that an open internet is critical to the world," Cogent CEO Dave Schaeffer said in an interview. Direct connections to servers inside Russia, he said, could potentially "be used for offensive cyber efforts by the Russian government."

Schaeffer said the deci-

sion didn't reflect "financial considerations," although he acknowledged that the ruble's sharp drop, which makes imported goods and services more expensive in Russia, could make it difficult to collect customer payments. Meanwhile, he said, Cogent is providing Ukrainian customers free service during the conflict.

Schaeffer said these moves might impair internet video in Russia but will leave plenty of bandwidth for smaller files.

Other major backbone providers in Europe and Asia also continue to serve Russia, a net importer of bandwidth, said Doug Madory, director of internet analysis for the network management firm Kentik. He has noted no appreciable drop in connectivity from outside providers.

Cloudflare continues to operate four data centers in Russia even though Russian authorities ordered government websites to drop foreign-owned hosting providers as of Friday. In a March 7 blog post the company said it had determined "Russia needs more Internet access, not less."

Under a 2019 "sovereign internet" law, Russia is supposed to be able to operate its internet independent of the rest of the world. In practice, that has brought Russia closer to the kind of intensive internet monitoring and control practiced by China and Iran.

Its telecommunications oversight agency, Rozkomnadzor, successfully tested the system at scale a year ago when it throttled access to Twitter. It uses hundreds of so-called middleboxes — router-like devices run and remotely controlled by bureaucrats that can block individual websites and services — installed by law at all internet providers in-

side Russia.

But the system, which also lets the FSB security service spy on Russian citizens, is a relative sieve compared to China's Great Firewall. Andrew Sullivan, president of the nonprofit Internet Society, said there's no evidence it has the ability to successfully disconnect Russia from the wider internet.

"Walling off a country's internet is complicated, culturally, economically and technologically. And it becomes far more complicated with a country like Russia, whose internet, unlike China's, was not originally built out with government control in mind," he said.

"When it comes to censorship, the only ones who can really do it are the Chinese," said Serge Droz, a senior security engineer at Swiss-based Proton Technologies, which offers software for creating VPNs, a principal tool for circumventing state censorship.

ProtonVPN, which Droz says has been inventive in finding ways to circumvent Russian blocking, reports clocking ten times as many daily signups than before the war. VPN services tracked by researchers at Top10VPN.com found Facebook and Twitter downloads surging eight times higher than average. Its research found the Kremlin to have blocked more than 270 news and financial sites since the invasion, including BBC News and Voice of America's Russian-language services.

Russia's elites are believed to be big VPN users. No one expects them to disconnect.

Russian authorities are also having some success blocking the privacy-protecting Tor browser, which like VPNs lets users visit content at special "onion" sites on the so-called dark web, researchers say. Twitter just created a Tor site; other outlets such as The New York Times also have them.

The Kremlin has not, however, blocked the popular Telegram messaging app. It's an important conduit for Ukrainian government ministries and also for Meduza, the Latvia-based independent Russian-language news organization whose website is blocked in Russia. Meduza has 1 million followers on Telegram.

One reason may be that Telegram is also a vital conduit for Kremlin propagandists, analysts say. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1990 OBSERVER JOURNALIST EXECUTED IN IRAQ



Britain has strongly condemned the Iraqi authorities over the execution of The Observer journalist Farzad Bazoft in Baghdad.

Mr Bazoft - who came to live in Britain from Iran in the 1980s - was convicted by the Iraqis of spying four days ago. He was hanged at dawn after a last minute appeal for clemency from the British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, failed.

In the Commons this afternoon, Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd said Britain's ambassador to Iraq was being recalled and all visits to the country have been suspended.

But Mr Hurd stopped short of cutting off diplomatic relations with Iraq. He said it was important to keep dialogue alive with the Iraqis for the sake of the 2,000 Britons living in Iraq, including Mr Bazoft's alleged accomplice, British nurse Daphne Parish.

Mr Bazoft and Mrs Parish were arrested last September after visiting a top secret military installation south of Baghdad.

The Observer journalist was investigating reports of an explosion at the plant, which had reportedly left hundreds dead. He asked Mrs Parish to give him a lift in her car.

He was convicted of spying and sentenced to death by a revolutionary court. Mrs Parish was jailed for 15 years.

The British Consul General in Baghdad, Robin Kealy, was Mr Bazoft's last visitor before his execution.

He said: "He was looking hollow-eyed and subdued, not surprisingly. He passed on a last written message and a number of oral messages to friends and colleagues... He repeated that he had been a journalist going after a scoop."

The Iraqi ambassador in France said British appeals for clemency fell on deaf ears because officials used "threatening terms and blackmail".

Prayers for Mr Bazoft were said today at the offices of The Observer in London. Later staff gathered outside the Iraqi embassy to register their silent protest.

The daughter of Mrs Parish, Michelle de Vries, has supported the government's decision to keep diplomatic channels open. She hopes to be able to secure the early release of her mother.

She said: "It is far too early to know what implications today's events will have on my mother. All I can do is hope and pray she receives the clemency not afforded to poor Mr Bazoft."

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

Mrs Thatcher called the execution of Mr Bazoft "an act of barbarism".

The European Parliament also condemned the execution but stopped short of cutting diplomatic and trade relations. The UN Secretary General expressed his deep regret.

But Britain was not prepared to cut diplomatic ties and trade between Britain and Iraq continued. Many British firms were benefiting from the reconstruction work taking place in Iraq following the war with Iran.

Daphne Parish was released on 16 July 1990.

On 2 August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, starting the Gulf War.







MARKETS

# WORLD SHARES MIXED, HONG KONG INDEX DIVES 5.4%

**W**ORLD shares were mixed yesterday while Hong Kong's Hang Seng index plunged 5% after the neighboring city of Shenzhen was ordered into a shutdown to combat China's worst COVID-19 outbreak in two years.

The spreading virus outbreaks in China are compounding worries over supply chain disruptions both from the pandemic and from the war.

A vital manufacturing and technology hub of 17.5 million people, Shenzhen is home to some of China's most prominent companies, including telecom equipment maker Huawei Technologies Ltd., electric car brand BYD Auto, Ping An Insurance Co. and Tencent Holding, operator of the popular WeChat message service.

The Hang Seng index dipped 5.4% but regained some lost ground to close 5% lower at 19,531.66. The exchange's tech index dropped 11%.

The Shanghai Composite in-

dex slipped 2.6% to 3,223.53. The A-share index in Shenzhen's smaller market lost 2.9%.

Authorities have restricted access to Shenzhen by suspending bus service and said everyone in the city will undergo three rounds of testing after 60 new cases were reported Sunday. All businesses except those that supply food, fuel and other necessities were ordered to close or work from home.

Infection numbers in mainland China are low compared with other countries and with Hong Kong, which reported more than 32,000 new cases Sunday. But Beijing's "zero tolerance" strategy has led to lockdowns of entire cities to find and isolate every infected person.

In other Asian markets, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index rose 0.6% to 25,307.85 and the S&P/ASX 200 in Australia gained 1.2% to 7,149.40. South Korea's Kospi lost 0.6% to 2,645.65.

The Ukraine crisis and central bank efforts to fight inflation remain the focus for most markets.

Russia's military forces were keeping up their campaign to capture Ukraine's capital as residents of other besieged cities held out hope that renewed diplomatic talks might open the way for more civilians to evacuate or emergency supplies to reach them.

A fourth round of talks was expected Monday between Ukrainian and Russian officials to discuss getting food, water, medicine and other desperately needed supplies to cities and towns under fire, among other issues, Ukrainian presidential aide Mykhailo Podolyak said.

On Friday, the S&P 500 fell 1.3% and the Dow industrials lost 0.7%. The Nasdaq composite index gave up 2.2% and the Russell 2000 index of smaller companies slipped 1.6%.

World markets have been rocked by dramatic reversals as



A long line of travelers wait to check in for a single flight to Singapore at the International airport in Hong Kong

investors struggle to guess how Russia's invasion of Ukraine will affect prices of oil, wheat and other commodities produced in the region.

That's raising the risk the U.S. economy may struggle under a toxic combination of persistently high inflation and stagnating growth. The Federal Reserve is expected to raise interest rates at its meeting this week as it and other central banks act to stamp out the highest inflation in generations, while trying to avoid causing a recession by raising rates too high or too quickly.

U.S. stocks are about 10% below peaks hit earlier this year, while crude oil prices are more than 40% higher for 2022.

U.S. benchmark crude oil lost \$3.13 to \$106.20 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It surged \$3.31 per barrel on Friday to \$109.33 per barrel.

Brent crude oil, the standard for international pricing, declined \$2.63 to \$110.04 per barrel. The U.S. dollar rose to 117.71 Japanese yen from 117.35 yen. The euro strengthened to \$1.0959 from \$1.0926. **MDT/AP**

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FOOTBALL

# Champions League matchups as Man United hosts Atlético

**T**OP tier teams from major leagues Bayern Munich, Liverpool, Manchester City and Real Madrid already secured their seats for the quarterfinals last week. Who is going to join them in the last 8 of the Champions League?

Here's a look at the last-16 second-leg games being played in the Champions League this week.

Wednesday, 04:00  
Man Utd v Atletico M  
H 2.25, D 3.3, A 3.75

ODDSCHECKER.COM

Winning the Champions League could be Manchester United's only route back into the competition next season. United players were buzzing over Cristiano Ronaldo's first hat trick of his first season back at United in its 3-2 win over Tottenham in the Premier League on Saturday. But collecting only four points from three Premier League games has led to Arsenal moving ahead of United into the fourth Champions League spot. Ronaldo has impressed in Europe with six goals in his six appearances this season. United could see Luke Shaw return from illness for the visit of the Spanish champions. Atlético is carrying momentum from three wins in a row in the Spanish league since the draw against United. Coach Diego Simeone is hoping for the return of midfielder Geoffrey Kondogbia from injury. Former Liverpool striker Luis Suárez hasn't started for Atlético since a 3-0 win at Osasuna in February, when he scored his last goal with the Spanish club.

Wednesday, 04:00  
Ajax v Benfica  
H 1.42, D 5.6, A 7.6

Ajax was one of the surprises of the group stage — joining Liverpool and Bayern Munich as the only teams with six victories from six matches — but it twice re-



linquished leads in a 2-2 draw at Benfica in the first leg of the round of 16 in Portugal. Ajax is in the last 16 for the second time since 2006, though it reached the semifinals the last time it got this far three seasons ago. The Dutch club is led by striker Sébastien Haller, the first player to score in his opening seven Champions League games and the quickest to 11 goals in the competition's history. Ajax has already equaled its most prolific Champions League campaign with 22 goals. Benfica, a two-time European champion looking to reach the quarterfinals for the fifth time, hopes to count on the return of Roman Yaremchuk, Nicolás Otamendi and Gilberto, who were nursing injuries and didn't play in the team's 1-1 draw against Vizela in the Portuguese league on Friday.

Thursday, 04:00  
Juventus v Villarreal  
H 1.97, D 3.6, A 4.5

Juventus, the last Italian team still standing in the Champions League, is desperate to avoid a third successive last-16 elimination. The Bianconeri are hoping that three of its top players return for the match in Turin. Captain Giorgio Chiellini, fellow defen-

der Leonardo Bonucci and forward Paulo Dybala have been out — part of a long injury list that also includes long-term absences for Federico Chiesa and Weston McKennie. "We're facing a strong team but we need to go for it and we can do it, maybe even over 120 minutes," Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri said. If the match goes to penalties, Juventus can count on the recent form of goalkeeper Wojciech Szczęsny, who has saved three straight penalties in Serie A — the first to achieve that feat in four years. Villarreal may be without key players because of injuries, including Raúl Albiol, Étienne Capoue, Gerard Moreno and Juan Foyth.

Thursday, 04:00  
Lille v Chelsea  
H 4.4, D 3.75, A 1.96

So much has changed for Chelsea since the first leg was played before Russia launched a full invasion of Ukraine. Now Chelsea is dealing with the impact of sanctions hitting owner Roman Abramovich and the team having to operate under spending restrictions imposed by the government. New spending on away trips is capped at 20,000 pounds, althou-

gh Chelsea says the trip to Lille was already paid for. Manager Thomas Tuchel said: "I think practi-

cally things have changed more for the guys who for example organized the journey to Lille, because

they had to figure out how we arrive there." Abramovich is having to sell the club he was on the field to celebrate winning the Champions League with last May. Now Chelsea needs to advance to the quarterfinals not just in the pursuit of defending the title but to collect about another \$10 million from UEFA without the owner's cash injections to rely on anymore. Chelsea's qualification for the Champions League for next season at least looks on track through the Premier League, with the team in third place. Lille is the defending French champion and is starting to defend like it did last season. The only time coach Jocelyn Gourvenec's side has conceded a goal in the past six games was against Chelsea. But apart from one heavy win against promoted side Clermont, scoring has proved more problematic. Top scorer Jonathan David is still short of his best form and midfielder Renato Sanches is out after limping off Friday with a thigh injury. **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

China Daily  
Editorial, China Daily

**NATION SET TO SAIL ON CHARTED PATH OF GROWTH**

The National People's Congress plays a unique role in stabilizing the socioeconomic development of the country, which was evident on the concluding day of the fifth session of the 13th NPC on Friday.

Unlike the lawmakers of some so-called democratic countries, where the interests of the rich and the powerful generally come first, the NPC deputies focus on the people's needs and concerns, and a major part of their work is focused on strengthening the legal system to ensure the economy and society run smoothly so people can lead a better, happy life.

As such, a considerable part of the motions and proposals they put forward during the NPC's annual session over the past week echoed the people's requirements such as improving pre-school education, increasing nursing services for the aged and cracking down on human trafficking.

And to meet these needs, it is essential that the country maintain healthy economic growth, which is targeted at around 5.5 percent this year.

Despite the Ukraine crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, not to forget climate change, rising global inequity and unilateralism, increasing global uncertainties and slowing global growth, China has maintained steady growth, mainly because it has followed its own development path and the people have faith in the central leadership's decisions.

Keeping these factors in mind, the nearly 3,000 deputies to the NPC submitted 487 motions, among which 474 were related to legislation or law revisions, at the NPC session.

They also put forward more than 8,000 suggestions covering almost all walks of life, from promoting innovation and developing high-standard farmland to boosting the digital economy and enhancing law-based governance, all with the aim of improving people's livelihoods.

Since the deputies closely follow the major decisions and plans of the central government, and analyze people's feedback on every decision the authorities make, they can suggest measures needed to improve the legal system in a way that can cover all aspects of a fast developing country and help meet the needs of the people.

As Premier Li Keqiang said at the news conference after the conclusion of the NPC annual session on Friday morning, all the measures China takes are aimed at overcoming the long-term challenges as well as addressing the immediate problems with the economy.

And as the modernization of China is a long-term process, the country will continue to use development to resolve the problems emerging in the process of development while always putting people's interests first.

Among other things, therefore, the central leadership will focus on maintaining steady growth in order to improve people's livelihoods. Which shows China is determined to sail on its charted course in spite of the strong headwinds.

TALKS TO RESUME AS RUSSIA PRESSURES UKRAINIAN CAPITAL KYIV

THE BUZZ

Russia's military forces kept up their punishing campaign to capture Ukraine's capital with fighting and artillery fire in Kyiv's suburbs yesterday after an airstrike on a military base near the Polish border brought the war dangerously close to NATO's doorstep.

A new round of talks between Russian and Ukrainian officials raised hopes that progress would be made in evacuating civilians from besieged Ukrainian cities and getting emergency supplies to areas without enough food, water and medicine.

Air raid alerts sounded in cities and towns all around the coun-

try overnight, from near the Russian border in the east to the Carpathian Mountains in the west, as fighting continued on the outskirts of Kyiv. Ukrainian officials said Russian forces shelled several suburbs of the capital, a major political and strategic target for an invasion in its 19th day.

Ukrainian authorities said two people died and seven were injured after Russian forces struck an airplane factory in Kyiv, sparking a large fire. The Antonov factory is Ukraine's largest aircraft manufacturing plant and is best known for producing many of the world's biggest cargo planes.

'THE POWER OF THE DOG' WINS BEST PICTURE AT UK'S BAFTAS

JILL LAWLESS, LONDON

SCI-FI epic "Dune" won five prizes and brooding Western "The Power of the Dog" was named best picture as the British Academy Film Awards returned yesterday [Macau time] with a live, black-tie ceremony after a pandemic-curtailed event in 2021.

New Zealand filmmaker Jane Campion was named best director for "The Power of the Dog," becoming only the third woman to win the prize in the awards' seven-decade history.

Lead acting trophies went to Hollywood star Will Smith and British performer Joanna Scanlan, as an event that has worked to overcome a historic lack of diversity recognized a wide range of talents — including its first deaf acting winner in Troy Kotsur for "CODA."

Last year's awards ceremony was largely conducted online, with only the hosts and presenters appearing in person. This year's return to collective celebration at London's Royal Albert Hall took place in the shadow of Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine.

British film academy chairman Krishnendu Majumdar opened the show, hosted by Australian actor-comedian Rebel Wilson, with a message of support for Ukraine.

"We stand in solidarity with those who are bravely fighting for their country and we share their hope for a return to peace," he said.

After that came the glitz, with 85-year-old diva Shirley Bassey and a live orchestra performing "Diamonds Are Forever" to mark the 60th anniversary of the James Bond films, Britain's most successful movie export.

"Bond is turning 60, and his girlfriends are turning 25," joked host Wil-



Ariana DeBose holds her Supporting Actress award for her role in the film 'West Side Story'

son, who toned down her usual bawdy material for the ceremony's early-evening TV broadcast on the BBC.

Denis Villeneuve's "Dune," a space epic set on a desert planet, took five trophies from its 11 nominations: visual effects, production design, sound, Greig Fraser's cinematography and Hans Zimmer's score.

"The Power of the Dog," set in 1920s Montana and starring Benedict Cumberbatch as a ranch owner, was nominated in eight categories and won two big ones: best film and best director. Campion is only the third female winner in that category, but the second in two years after Chloe Zhao for "Nomadland" in 2021.

Cumberbatch lost to Smith, who was named best actor for his performance as the father of Serena and Venus Williams in "King Richard."

Scanlan was a surprise best-actress winner, beating contenders including Lady Gaga to win for "After Love," a first feature by Aleem Khan about a woman who makes a life-changing discovery after her husband's death.

"Some stories have surprise endings don't they?" said a disbelieving Scanlan.

Scanlan, best known as

a star of satirical TV political comedy "The Thick of It," said the prize would open doors.

"I hope I get a really exciting, chunky short film and also a Bond audition," she said.

Kenneth Branagh's semi-autobiographical "Belfast," the story of a childhood overshadowed by Northern Ireland's violent "Troubles," was named best British film.

Ariana DeBose was named best supporting actress for her performance as Anita in Steven Spielberg's lavish musical "West Side Story." The supporting actor prize went to Kotsur for "CODA," in which he plays the deaf father of a hearing daughter.

"Have you considered maybe a deaf James Bond?" he asked in his speech, delivered in sign language.

Lashana Lynch, who made a splash as a double-0 agent in Bond thriller "No Time To Die," took the rising star award, the only category chosen by public vote. She thanked "the women of this country who taught me what it is to be in this industry as a dark-skinned woman. I thank you for laying the foundation for people like me."

"No Time to Die" also won the prize for best editing. MDT/AP

Israel is grappling with how to deal with dozens of Jewish Russian oligarchs as Western nations step up sanctions on businesspeople with ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin. A worried Israeli government has formed a high-level committee to see how the country can maintain its status as a haven for any Jew without running afoul of the biting sanctions targeting Putin's inner circle. Several dozen Jewish tycoons from Russia are believed to have taken on Israeli citizenship or residency in recent years.



USA Former President Barack Obama said that he had tested positive for the coronavirus, though he's feeling relatively healthy and his wife, Michelle, tested negative. "I've had a scratchy throat for a couple days, but am feeling fine otherwise," Obama said on Twitter. "Michelle and I are grateful to be vaccinated and boosted."



Ukraine Brent Renaud, an acclaimed filmmaker who traveled to some of the darkest and most dangerous corners of the world for documentaries that transported audiences to little-known places of suffering, died Sunday after Russian forces opened fire on his vehicle in Ukraine. The 50-year-old Little Rock, Arkansas, native was gathering material for a report about refugees when his vehicle was hit at a checkpoint in Irpin, just outside the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv.



Hollywood William Hurt, whose laconic charisma and self-assured subtlety as an actor made him one of the 1980s foremost leading men in movies such as "Broadcast News," "Body Heat" and "The Big Chill," has died. He was 71. Hurt's son, Will, said in a statement that Hurt died Sunday of natural causes. Hurt died peacefully, among family, his son said. Hurt was previously diagnosed with prostate cancer that had spread to the bone in 2018.