



THE CONSUMER RIGHTS PROTECTION LAW SHOULD BE USED TO STABILIZE PRICES OF COMMERCIAL FUELS IN THE CITY: NEW MACAU P2

GOV'T CONFIRMS TRAFFIC LIGHT AT GALAXY NEW JUNCTION P5

BIDEN, XI PHONE CALL ENDS IN STALEMATE FOR UKRAINE P6



AP PHOTO



South Korea's incoming president Yoon Suk-yeol (pictured) said yesterday he will abandon the mountainside presidential palace of Blue House and establish his office at the Defense Ministry compound in central Seoul to better communicate with the public. The plan drew an immediate backlash from critics of the relocation plan, who warned that a hasty movement of top government offices would undermine South Korea's national security, require excessive spending and violate property rights of residents in the new presidential office area.

# CHINA, HK WEIGH EXIT FROM ZERO-COVID

P7

AP PHOTO



North Korea fired suspected artillery pieces into the sea yesterday, South Korea's military said, days after the North's latest missile launch ended in failure amid the country's recent burst of weapons testing activity. There is speculation that North Korea could soon try to launch its developmental longest-range ballistic missile to bolster its weapons arsenal and dial up pressure on the United States to wrest concessions amid stalled diplomacy.



AP PHOTO



Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said his country will invest \$42 billion in India over the next five years in a deal that is expected to boost bilateral trade. Kishida met his counterpart, Narendra Modi, in New Delhi during his maiden visit to India since assuming office. The two leaders held talks ranging from economy to security cooperation.

## EVENTS CANCELED OVER THE WEEKEND DUE TO COVID-19 SCARE

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## FIVE TO EIGHT TYPHOONS THIS YEAR

P3

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ANTHONY LAM

# NEW MACAU REQUESTS GOV'T INTERVENTION IN SOARING FUEL PRICES

ANTHONY LAM

**T**HE Consumer Rights Protection Law should be used to stabilize prices of commercial fuels in Macau, Sulu Sou, vice director-general

of the New Macau Association (ANM) said.

Sou pointed out that the price for 98-octane unleaded vehicle petrol in Macau has risen 14 months in a row, between October 2020 and

November 2021. The cumulative increment rate has reached 23%.

In November last year, a 2% fall was recorded, followed by rises reoccurring until March this year. As of press time,

according to the Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED), local prices for vehicle fuels ranged between MOP13.09 and MOP13.90 for a liter of regular 98-octane unleaded petrol.

"The government seems to be the witness of a price hike only" doing nothing, he said.

Unlike in many other places, where prices of fuel can fluctuate a lot at different stations or under different brands, vehicle petrol in Macau is sold at almost the same price even under different brands.

Referring to the law, Sou pointed out that Article 20 stipulates the Consumer Council can investigate suspicious price fluctuations or unreasonable price hikes. The result of investigation should then be used as grounds for future policymaking.

In fact, when the law was being discussed in the parliament, Sou, a former lawmaker, joined with his then colleagues to request the government use the law to sort out the supply chain of fuels in Macau and calculate the price weight of each step in the supply chain.

He stressed that this request is not made to target a single industry, but to use the law to respond to problems in the long-term.



# IAM calls on halt to unsafe pickles consumption

**T**HE Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) calls on consumers who have purchased unsafe pickles from the mainland and are in possession of the affected products to stop consuming them immediately.

"IAM is highly concerned about the poor hygiene of some mainland pickled products, including instant noodle products containing the above-mentioned pickled vegetable ingredient packets, which are available for sale in Macau," the authority said.

The three potentially affected instant noodle products, which originated from mainland China, are Master Kong Old altar pickled beef instant noodle (cup) (net weight: 122g), Master Kong Old altar pickled beef instant noodle (bag) (net weight: 117g for five-pack) and Unif Instant Noodles, Beef with pickled Flavor Instant Noodles (net weight: 125g).

IAM said they have issued a food alert to the local food trade, requesting them to immediately suspend the sale of the products and remove them from the shelves, and to inform the bureau when doing so.

In addition, IAM has also sent staff to inspect the marketplace and is continuing to follow up on the incident. As a precautionary measure, consumers who have purchased and are in possession of the affected products are advised to stop consuming them immediately to ensure safety.

CCTV recently reported that Hunan's Chaiqi Vegetable Industry, which processes Master Kong Old altar for instant noodle enterprises, was found to be operating under unhygienic conditions, with some workers wearing slippers and bare feet and stepping on the pickles, while some even smoked while working and threw their cigarette butts directly into the pickles. JW

# HEALTH AUTHORITIES CLARIFY HOW TO REGISTER JABS RECEIVED ABROAD

RENATO MARQUES

**R**ESIDENTS who have been inoculated with Covid-19 vaccines outside Macau can register the inoculations into their health codes by presenting their vaccine certificates at one of the vaccination posts or healthcare centers, Dr Leong Iek Hou, coordinator at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, clarified in a reply to an inquiry from the Times.

Leong said that people in this situation may directly bring their original Covid-19 vaccination record issued by the authorities of the place of vaccination together

with their identification document to a healthcare center or one of the community vaccination posts.

According to the Health Bureau's (SSM) specific webpage for information on Covid-19 vaccination in Macau, "for other vaccination stations including the Conde de São Januário Hospital Center, Macau Forum, KiangWu Hospital, the University Hospital, Workers' Medical Clinics, among others, such requests can be made at the registration counter without prior booking."

After receiving the documents, the SSM will verify the authenticity of

the vaccination record provided and the record will be then registered into the local Covid-19 vaccination record system.

After this procedure, the vaccination history will be displayed in the Macao Health Code as per those vaccinated locally.

However, the SSM notes that local health authorities will not issue a vaccination certificate or a printed vaccination record to people not vaccinated locally. If residents need or wish to keep the original document, it should be requested of the medical authorities of the place where the vaccine was given.



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# Events canceled over the weekend due to Covid-19 scare

RENATO MARQUES

A series of cultural, leisure, and major sporting events planned to take place over the weekend suffered last-minute cancellations. Organizers justified the hasty decision with the need to “comply with [Covid-19] epidemic prevention and control policies by the Macau SAR Government.”

The Macao Orchestra and Macao Chinese Orchestra concerts, the 2022 Sands China Macao International 10K run, and the activities of the Macao Green Week were just some of the most highlighted activities that underwent last-minute cancellations, in some cases, just hours before the event was due to start.

Although none of the entities involved in the organization of the events clearly explained the reason behind the cancellation, a Covid-19 scare related to cases found across the border in the neighboring cities of Zhuhai and Zhongshan seems to be the most plausible cause, according to people contacted by the Times.

According to information provided by the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center, there are at least five people in



Macau who have been considered as close contacts of people infected with Covid-19 in the village of Nanping in Zhuhai. One of them is a nursing assistant staff member at the Kiang Wu Hospital.

Although all the close contacts' preliminary tests returned negative, the government decided to cancel all public activities in Macau over the weekend due to a potential Covid-19 outbreak, even though the same authorities had previously announced

that the risk of infection was low or very low.

The Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) also announced on Saturday the suspension of classes for cross-border teachers and students living in the designated areas of Zhuhai and Zhongshan that are currently in lockdown.

The measure applies to teachers, students, and school staff from all education levels who have been in the mentioned areas wi-

thin the past 14 days.

A date for the resumption of their in-person classes was said to be announced in due course, in line with the epidemic situation.

The DSEDJ also urged cross-border teachers and students to strictly follow the “Point-to-Point” principle in the commute between home and school, calling on them to “avoid going out on weekends and during the holidays as much as possible.”

The cancellation of the 2022 Sands China Macao International 10K run alone involves the refund of registration fees and other procedures to a total of 10,000 participants who had registered for the event from February 12. Participants were also called to do nucleic acid tests, at their expense, to be eligible to participate in the event.

Details on the refund of registration fees were said to be announced soon.

Ticket reimbursement was also announced by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) for the concerts of the two local orchestras with details to be announced at a later stage.

## TWO MORE ASYMPTOMATIC CASES FOUND

THE Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center has reported, on Saturday, the finding of two more Covid-19 asymptomatic cases in two people who arrived in Macau from Hong Kong. The first case relates to a local female resident who arrived in Macau via Hong Kong from

Ireland, and the second one is a male resident of Hong Kong. In both cases, the infected people had been fully vaccinated with mRNA vaccines in November and December last year. Both individuals have been directed to the Public Health Clinical Center in Coloane for treatment in isolation.

# Five to eight tropical cyclones may affect Macau this year

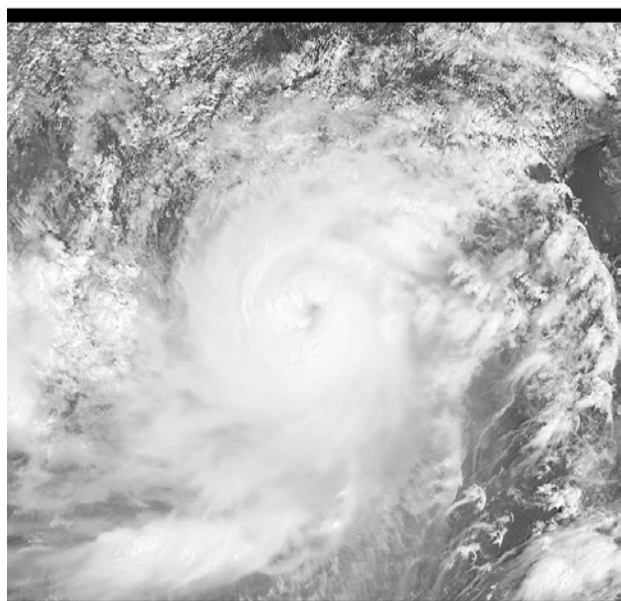
JING WU

BETWEEN five to eight tropical cyclones may affect Macau this year, the Macau Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) estimated.

The first tropical cyclone could arrive in Macau in the first half of June or even before that period, “which means it may be a little earlier than the climatic average,” the SMG informed.

The SMG held a special press conference for World Meteorological Day on Friday to introduce the meteorological services, work to be carried out this year and the tropical storm and rainfall forecast for this year.

This year's World Meteorological Day theme is Early Warning and Early Action, “which highlights the importance of hydro-



-meteorological information to assist in disaster prevention and mitigation, however, situations affecting Macau are not exceptions,” the authority stressed.

The number of tropical cyclones will be from normal to relatively high and

some of them may reach the severe typhoon or super typhoon levels, the SMG forecast.

The total rainfall during the wet season, April to September, is predicted to be normal to relatively high, but heavy storms may also occur. “The tem-

perature will be normal to relatively high,” the bureau added.

A total of three tropical storms impacted the MSAR last year, with an average of almost 423mm – the highest maximum precipitation average recorded in Macau. A total of 570.8 mm was recorded in October 2021.

“The SMG will improve the dissemination of severe weather warning information in a number of different and continuous ways this year,” the bureau noted.

Moreover, the SMG will also obtain ISO certification for severe weather warning services and improve the quality of services; at the same time, it will install more monitoring stations, import a central lightning information processing system and implement a “nowcasting” system in order to provide more comprehensive and objective information for surveillance, analysis and forecasting of severe weather and the atmospheric environment.

# 3,800 APPLICANTS FOR THE FOUR HIGHER EDUCATION JOINT EXAMINATION

MACAU has a total of 3,800 applicants for the Joint Admission Examination for Macau Four Higher Education Institutions in 2022, according to the education bureau.

“This year, there are 3,800 applicants for the joint entrance examination, which is similar to the number of candidates last year, and all examination centers have been functioning well over the past few days,” the Head of the Department for Coordination of Higher Education Institutions, Teng Sio Hong said to the press.

He also noted that based upon previous years, almost half the students stay in Macau for further studies, while more students choose to study in the Mainland, followed by Taiwan and Hong Kong, among others.

In addition, he added

that there were sufficient places available for local students.

Teng also said that in response to the changes in the Covid-19 epidemic situation in Zhuhai and Zhongshan, the four universities had made corresponding backup plans, including reserving some additional examination rooms so that individual students could arrange to take examinations in separate spaces provided that the requirements of epidemic prevention and border-crossing measures were met.

However, the authorities expressed that they had not received any Covid-related requests for assistance or feedback from candidates.

The four-day Joint Admission Examination for Macau Four Higher Education Institutions ended yesterday. JW

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# DSAT confirms future traffic light at Galaxy new junction

**T**HE Transport Bureau (DSAT) assures on its website that traffic lights will be installed at a new junction leading towards Galaxy Macau.

The junction in question is located at the back of the Venetian Macao's CotaiExpo complex. There is an opening so that in the future, traffic can cross three lanes going in the opposite direction to enter the new Galaxy International Convention Center at the Galaxy Macau.

On March 10, the Times reported that a new junction had been built to allow future southbound traffic to cross three northbound lanes to enter the new Galaxy Macau development.

DSAT was emailed one day before publication for the reason it approved the establishment of this junction when a roundabout is about 300 meters from the new junction, as well as whether it has plans to improve the junction to ensure better safety.

The bureau only addressed the second question, omitting the question on the necessity of the junction, on its website post.

This is not the only new junction built. There is also a new junction along Avenida de Cotai, on the south side of the Galaxy Macau site. It is a similar case, as a roundabout for tra-



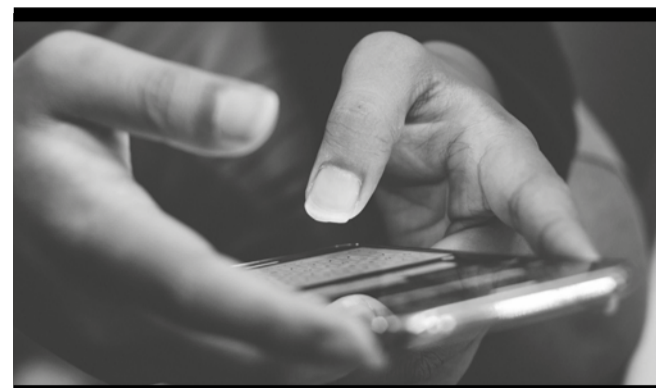
ffic to turn and enter Galaxy Macau is not far away.

Critics have suggested that there is an abundance of traffic lights in Macau, halting traffic that could have run smoothly into intermittent sections which appears to cause traffic jams.

At about 1 p.m., June 20, 2015, a 57-year-old local motor cyclist was

driving along Avenida Marginal Flor de Lotus, when he crashed into a seven-seater vehicle that was moving out from a road opening and crossing three lanes at a relatively low speed. The seven-seater was traveling towards the entrance of the Broadway Macau parking lot.

The crash took the life of the motor cyclist. **AL**



## 95% OF MACAU'S HOUSEHOLDS BROWSE INTERNET

**FIGURES** released by the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) indicate that the number of households using the internet in Macau has grown 2.7% in 2021 when compared year-on-year with the previous year, now reaching 94.6% of total households.

According to the same survey, of those, some 98% use mobile networks to access the internet (+4.6% year-on-year).

Meanwhile, home broadband access to the internet has registered a growth of 1% to a total of 90.1% of households when compared to 2020.

The number of internet users totaled 570,000 with an internet penetration rate rising by 1% to 88.5%.

The younger generations, unsurprisingly, lead the share of the population with a higher internet penetration

rate of 99.5% in the population aged between 15 and 24 years.

As for the older generations, the internet penetration rate for senior citizens aged 65 or above is now 65.3%, having registered an increase of over 9% in just one year.

In addition, it has been reported that 68.3% of the population aged between 3 and 14 years use the internet frequently.

A total of 95.5% of internet users in Macau use the internet daily, recording a median of around three hours per day spent online, a percentage that remains stable from the previous year.

Most users use the internet for communication (95.4%) and online entertainment (81.9%) while use for internet banking (60.7%) has grown 10% in just one year. **RM**



## Lawmaker Ron Lam calls for on-site tree conservation

**T**HE Land, Public Works and Transport Bureau (DSSOPT) might have exceeded its authority in forcing the relocation of 10 old trees in northern Taipa, lawmaker

Ron Lam expressed in his latest written inquiry.

In the same inquiry, he also urged the government to retain the trees in their current location.

Last week, the Urban

Planning Committee held its plenary for this month. The planning on a road in northern Taipa where the 10 trees are located was discussed. During the discussion, a

representative from the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) emphasized the difficulty in keeping the trees alive while relocating them.

However, the DSSOPT representative insisted that they can and should be relocated because the road is of major public interest.

Lam pointed out that according to the Cultural Heritage Protection Law, which codifies the protection of mature trees, relocating old trees is within the authority of IAM. The existence of major public interest, an exception listed in the law, should be determined by IAM.

As such, it is not within the DSSOPT's authority in deciding on the public interest factor.

The lawmaker has called on the government to better protect mature trees by retaining these 10 trees as there are specific laws to protect local trees. **AL**

## GROUP ASKS GOV'T TO CONFIRM URBAN RENEWAL COMPANY AS SOLE LEADER IN PROJECTS

**DESIGNATING** the government-owned Macau Urban Renewal Limited (MUR) as the executing organization will be beneficial to urban renewal projects, the Macao Community Development Initiative (MCDI) suggested in a recent letter of opinion.

Represented by its managers, such as former lawmaker Au Kam San, the MCDI called on the government to identify the MUR as the sole executor in Article 3 of the draft of the Urban Renewal Legal System Act, now being analyzed and discussed at the 2nd Standing Committee.

In so doing, the MUR will become the sole leading entity to commence and execu-

te urban renewal projects.

In addition, the group explained that any urban renewal project has a significant budget, which is usually the main reason behind a project not moving forward. With the MUR taking the lead, projects can commence more readily.

More importantly, the group pointed out, giving the MUR a clear leading role in urban renewal projects will realize the goal behind establishing the company, which is to improve and bring cohesion to the local living environment. It can also take in broader considerations in urban renewal projects by not only improving individual buildings, but their neighborhoods as well. **AL**

**OPINION**

**China Daily**  
Editorial, China Daily

**COUNTRIES OBLIGED TO CREATE SPACE FOR PEACE**

It was not another conversation in the ongoing flurry of video diplomacy against the backdrop of rising global challenges. It was an attempt to find a way to stabilize the volatile situation in Ukraine and address other pressing global issues.

No wonder the conversation between President Xi Jinping and his US counterpart Joe Biden, via video link, on Friday — the first since November — drew widespread international attention. Indeed, the international community saw the talks as an opportunity for the two sides to not only address this urgent issue but also improve Sino-US relations.

That the talks between the two presidents were proposed by the US side suggests the US has realized that, without the cooperation of China, it cannot close the Pandora's box it has opened in Ukraine to fulfill its narrow goals.

But China will never allow the US to take advantage of the Ukraine crisis to smear, threaten or coerce it to do the US' bidding or succumb to US hegemony.

Beijing agreeing to the US' proposal shows China, as a major country, is fully aware of its responsibilities of promoting global peace and stability. But China will respond in kind if the US administration takes measures that threaten the rights and interests of China or its enterprises and individuals.

Xi used Friday's talks to urge the US side to persuade Ukraine and Russia to end the conflict through peaceful talks, stressing that all stakeholders should display political courage and create space for peace.

Although the two leaders agreed in November to improve bilateral ties, the US side has done far less than necessary to follow through on Biden's pledge that the US is not seeking a new Cold War, not seeking to change China's political system, not seeking to target the revitalization of its alliances against China, not supporting "Taiwan independence", and has no intention to engage in a conflict with China.

If the US really wants to work with China for the betterment of the world, the administration should abide by the principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation which Xi has been reiterating since their first conversation as heads of state in February 2021.

As for the Ukraine crisis, the international community should try to defuse the situation, facilitate peace talks and restore peace.

The US on its part should stand on the right side of history and stop adding fuel to the fire and fanning the flames of confrontation.

**STALEMATE**

**XI URGED US, RUSSIA TO NEGOTIATE, BIDEN ASKED CHINA NOT TO 'HELP RUSSIAN INVASION'**

**F**ACE to face by video, President Joe Biden laid out to Chinese President Xi Jinping on Friday the stiff consequences the Chinese would face from the U.S. if they provide military or economic assistance for Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

There was no indication he got any assurance in return.

In fact, Xi blamed the U.S. for the crisis and insisted with a Chinese proverb that the next move was up to Biden:

"He who tied the bell to the tiger must take it off," Xi said, according to a Chinese government readout.

More formally after the nearly two-hour conversation, China's Foreign Ministry deplored "conflict and confrontation" as "not in anyone's interest," but assigned no blame to Russia and said nothing of next steps.

At the White House, press secretary Jen Psaki said, "China has to make a decision for themselves, about where they want to stand and how they want the history books to look at them and view their actions."

She declined to detail possible consequences Biden specified to the Chinese president if his country provides support for the Russian invasion.

But a senior administration official who briefed reporters following the leaders' call said that Biden pointed to the economic isolation that Russia has faced — including economy-battering sanctions and major Western corporations suspending operations — as he sought to underscore the costs that China might suffer.

Xi urged the U.S. and Russia, which have had limited engagement since the Feb. 24 invasion, to negotiate. He noted China's donations of humanitarian aid for Ukraine, while accusing the U.S. of provoking Russia and fueling the conflict by shipping arms to the embattled country. He also renewed China's criticism of sanctions imposed on Russia over the invasion, according to State media. As in the past, Xi did not use the terms war or invasion to describe Russia's



In this image provided by the White House, U.S. President Joe Biden meets virtually from the Situation Room with President Xi Jinping

actions.

Ahead of the call, Psaki noted Beijing's "rhetorical support" of Putin and an "absence of denunciation" of Russia's invasion.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying pushed back, calling the U.S. administration "overbearing" for suggesting China risks falling on the wrong side of history.

The two leaders also discussed the longer-simmering U.S.-China dispute over Taiwan.

Chinese media quoted Xi as saying China-U.S. relations had yet to "emerge from the dilemma created by the previous U.S. administration, but instead encountered more and more challenges," singling out Taiwan as one area in particular.

"If the Taiwan issue is not handled properly, it will have an undermining impact on the relationship between the two countries," Xi reportedly told Biden.

Planning for the leaders' discussion had been in the works since Biden and Xi held a virtual summit in November, but differences between Washington and Beijing over Russian President Vladimir Putin's prosecution of his three-week-old war against Ukraine were at the center of Friday's conversation.

In the days after Putin deployed Russian forces in Ukraine, Xi's government tried to distance itself from

Russia's offensive but avoided the criticism many other nations have leveled at Moscow. At other moments, Beijing's actions have been provocative including amplifying unverified Russian claims that Ukraine ran chemical and biological weapons labs with U.S. support.

Earlier this week, the U.S. informed Asian and European allies that American intelligence had determined that China had signaled to Russia that it would be willing to provide both military support for the campaign in Ukraine and financial backing to help stave off the impact of severe sanctions imposed by the West.

The White House says China has been sending mixed messages. There were initial signs that Chinese state-owned banks were pulling back from financing Russian activities, according to a senior Biden administration official who insisted on anonymity to discuss internal analyses. But there have also been public comments by Chinese officials who expressed support for Russia being a strategic partner.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan and senior Chinese foreign policy adviser Yang Jiechi met in Rome this week for an intense, seven-hour talk about the Russian invasion and other issues.

Xi and Putin met in early February, weeks before the invasion, with the Russian leader traveling to Beijing

for the start of the Winter Olympics. The two leaders issued a 5,000-word statement declaring limitless "friendship."

Beijing's leaders would like to be supportive of Russia, but they also recognize how badly the Russian military action is going as an overmatched Ukrainian military has put up stiff resistance, according to a Western official familiar with current intelligence assessments.

The official, who was not authorized to comment and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said Beijing is weighing the potential "reputational blowback" of being associated with the Russian camp. The Chinese response to Russia's request for help is still being formulated, the official said.

Though seen as siding with Russia, China has also reached out to Ukraine, with its ambassador to the country on Monday quoted as saying: "China is a friendly country for the Ukrainian people. As an ambassador, I can responsibly say that China will forever be a good force for Ukraine, both economically and politically."

"We have seen how great the unity of the Ukrainian people is, and that means its strength," Fan Xianrong was quoted by Ukraine's state news service Ukrinform as telling regional authorities in the western city of Lviv, where the Chinese Embassy has relocated to. **MDT/AP**

# China weighs exit from 'zero Covid' and the risks involved

DAKE KANG  
& HUIZHONG WU, BEIJING

**E**VEN as authorities lock down cities in China's worst outbreak in two years, they are looking for an exit from what has been a successful but onerous COVID-19 prevention strategy.

A study, interviews with Chinese public health staff and recent public messaging by government-affiliated experts indicate that China is exploring ways of slowly easing its zero-tolerance approach — with the emphasis on slowly.

The latest sign came last week in an essay published by Zhang Wenhong, an infectious disease specialist who is part of Shanghai's COVID-19 response team and known as China's "Dr. Fauci" — after U.S. government expert Anthony Fauci — for his public health messaging during the pandemic.

Zhang wrote in the Chinese business news outlet Caixin that the public needs to know the virus is becoming less deadly if people are vaccinated and their health isn't already compromised. "Dispelling the terror toward it is a step we must take," the essay said.

"We should carve a very clear path and not spend all our time debating whether we should continue zero COVID or coexist (with the virus)," Zhang wrote.

Change does not appear imminent, with more than 15,000 new cases this month in multiple outbreaks across the country, as well as an even larger one that has shaken Hong Kong. For now, the government is sticking with the tried-and-true policy of lockdowns, repeated mass testing of millions of people and a two-week or more quarantine for overseas arrivals.

When it does come, any change will all but certainly be gradual and cautious. Opening up carries risks, because the country's success in protecting people from COVID-19 means many don't have antibodies to fight the virus from previous infection. Moreover, China is using only domestically developed vaccines that are less effective than Pfizer's and other widely used ones.

Chinese officials are paying close attention, though, as other countries relax mask mandates and other restrictions, and investigating just when and how to make the tricky transition.

On Thursday, Chinese President Xi Jinping acknowledged the toll of the stringent measures, saying China should seek "maximum effect" with "minimum

AP PHOTO



Community workers outside a locked down neighborhood, in Beijing

cost" in controlling the virus, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

A first step could be allowing more international flights — which have been sharply curbed since the pandemic — and reducing the quarantine for arriving passengers to one week from as many as 21 days in cities such as Beijing.

A weekly bulletin of news and research from China's Center for Disease Control published a paper last week outlining potential ways to ease the zero-COVID policy.

The paper suggests reducing the mandatory quarantine for incoming travelers to seven days, saying it would still screen out most cases as the virus can be detected more quickly now, and that China's health system is robust enough to handle any that slip through the cracks.

The authors make clear that

eliminating all measures such as quarantines for all arrivals is not on the table. Their models show that a total easing of restrictions could lead to over 10 million cases in southeastern Guangdong province alone, though that's based on the delta variant, and not the more transmissible omicron that has become predominant.

A government researcher, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly, said that the evidence points to a "suppression strategy" as the next transition point. That means a seven-day quarantine, for example, rather than an unrestricted opening up.

Public health experts caution that the discussion of easing "zero COVID" has been sporadic and preliminary, and that no timeline has been set.

"It's a concept paper, not really a detailed plan," said Ben Cowling,

an epidemiologist at the University of Hong Kong. He added he had yet to hear of any coordinated government movement toward easing restrictions, "just single experts from time to time raising the idea."

Huang at the Council on Foreign Relations said he had heard of discussions about "pivoting away" from zero COVID several months ago, but that the recent wave in Hong Kong has led policymakers to wait until "the dust settles."

More than 5,000 people have died in Hong Kong this year in an outbreak that has overflowed hospitals and morgues and shuttered many stores and restaurants.

In mainland China, authorities have shut down travel out of and within the hardest-hit province, Jilin in the northeast. More than 1,800 cases were reported in Jilin on Friday, out of 2,388 nationwide.

## HONG KONG

### LAM CABINET WILL REVIEW COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS AS CASES DECLINE

**H**ONG Kong's leader said yesterday that the government would consider lifting strict social distancing measures as new COVID-19 infections in the city continued trending downward.

"I wouldn't promise now that there's room for adjustment," Chief Executive Carrie Lam said. "But following a review, we have a duty to account for the findings in this review and the direction we will take."

Hong Kong is in the middle of a massive outbreak, recording over 1 million total cases in the city of 7.4 million. The city has been hit hard, with mortuaries full as they try to cope with a high number of deaths. Hong Kong has so far refrained from a strict city-wide lockdown like those that China regularly imposes to control the spread of the virus.

But new infections in the city have been declining. In early March, Hong Kong reported more than 50,000 new infections in one day. On Saturday, it recorded 16,583 new cases.

"Having gone through the peak that you have seen here ... I think a responsible government should regularly and vigorously review these measures, to see whether there is room for adjustment," Lam said.

Lam said she would present the findings today.

A vast majority of Hong Kong's COVID-19 deaths have been among those not fully vaccinated, with many in the elderly population. The city has reported 5,437 deaths as of Saturday's data, which have far outstripped the death toll in China at 4,638.

Hong Kong, although a part of China, is a special administrative region and counts its death toll separately.

Lam warned that the city could still see a resurgence in infections.

"The COVID situation is still severe although we have hit the peak apparently and there's a downward trend," said Lam. "However, from sewage surveillance, we can

de. Restrictions were partially eased, however, in Shenzhen.

Since omicron spreads quickly, "we need to take earlier, faster, stricter and more concrete measures," Chinese disease control official Lei Zhenglong told state television on Monday.

Many Chinese express support for zero COVID and pride that the government has managed to control a virus that has killed millions elsewhere, particularly in the West. China's official death toll stands at 4,636, the vast majority during the initial outbreak in early 2020.

But after two years of sporadic lockdowns, there are signs that some are tiring of the disruptions they bring.

"It's affected me," said Li Jing, a tea seller in Beijing. "If I work from home, I won't make as much money as if I go to my workplace."

Chinese officials worry about relatively low vaccination rates among the elderly, though they have not released recent figures. The elderly have accounted for the vast majority of the deaths in Hong Kong, and many of them were not fully vaccinated.

One major reason China is "not confident" enough to lift zero COVID is because of the lower efficacy of its vaccines, a Chinese public health official said, declining to be named to speak candidly on a sensitive topic. The official added that authorities are monitoring what happens in Hong Kong for any lessons for the mainland.

Public health experts say nations can live with the virus, as long as the elderly and those with pre-existing conditions are protected.

"It's not the same virus as two years ago in Wuhan and elsewhere," said Jin Dong-yan, a virologist at the University of Hong Kong. "That's the main message that we need to pass on." **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



see there can be a possibility of rebound."

In the mainland, health authorities reported two COVID-19 deaths on Saturday, the first since January 2021, as the country battles its worst outbreak in two years driven by a surge in the highly transmissible omicron variant. **MDT/AP**

PUTIN'S WAR

# Russian leader appears at big rally as troops press attack in Ukraine

CARA ANNA

**R**USSIAN President Vladimir Putin appeared at a huge flag-waving rally at a packed Moscow stadium over the weekend and lavished praise on his troops fighting in Ukraine, three weeks into the invasion that has led to heavier-than-expected Russian losses on the battlefield and increasingly authoritarian rule at home.

Meanwhile, the leader of Russia's delegation in diplomatic talks with Ukraine said the sides have narrowed their differences. The Ukrainian side said its position remained unchanged.

The invasion has touched off a burst of antiwar protests inside Russia, and the Moscow rally was surrounded by suspicions it was a Kremlin-manufactured display of patriotism. Several Telegram channels critical of the Kremlin reported that students and employees of state institutions in a number of regions were ordered by their superiors to attend rallies and concerts marking the eighth anniversary of Moscow's annexation of Crimea, which was seized from Ukraine. Those reports could not be independently verified.

Elsewhere, Russian troops continued to rain lethal fire on Ukrainian cities, including the capital, Kyiv, and pounded an aircraft repair installation on the outskirts of Lviv, close to the Polish border. Ukrainian officials said Saturday (Macau time) that the besieged southern port city of Mariupol lost its access to the Azov Sea, and Russian forces were still trying to storm the city. It was unclear whether they had seized it.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russian forces are blockading the largest cities to create a "humanitarian catastrophe" with the goal of persuading Ukrainians to cooperate. He said the Russians are preventing supplies from reaching surrounded cities in central and southeastern Ukraine.

"This is a totally deliberate tactic," Zelenskyy said in his nighttime video address



Russian President Vladimir Putin delivers his speech at the concert marking the eighth anniversary of the referendum on Crimea and Sevastopol, in Moscow

to the nation, which was recorded outside in Kyiv, with the presidential office behind him.

In a rare public appearance by Putin since the start of the war, he praised Russian troops: "Shoulder to shoulder, they help and support each other," he said. "We have not had unity like this for a long time," he added to cheers from the crowd.

Moscow police said more than 200,000 people were in and around the Luzhniki stadium. The event included patriotic songs, including a performance of "Made in the U.S.S.R.," with the opening lines "Ukraine and Crimea, Belarus and Moldova, it's all my country."

Seeking to portray the war as just, Putin paraphrased the Bible to say of Russia's troops: "There is no greater love than giving up one's soul for one's friends."

Taking to the stage where a sign read "For a world without Nazism," he railed against his foes in Ukraine with a baseless claim that they are "neo-Nazis." Putin continued to insist his actions were necessary to prevent "genocide" — an idea flatly rejected by leaders around the globe.

Video feeds of the event cut out at times but showed a loudly cheering crowd that broke into chants of "Russia!"

Putin's appearance marked a change from his relative isolation of recent weeks, when he has been shown meeting with world leaders and his staff either at extraordinarily long tables or via videoconference.

In the wake of the invasion, the Kremlin has clamped down harder on dissent and the flow of information, arresting thousands of antiwar protesters, banning sites such as Facebook and Twitter, and instituting tough prison sentences for what is deemed to be false reporting on the war, which Moscow refers to as a "special military operation."

The OVD-Info rights group that monitors political arrests reported that at least seven independent journalists had been detained ahead of or while covering the anniversary events in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

High above the conflict, three Russian cosmonauts arrived Friday at the International Space Station wearing bright yellow flight suits with blue accents matching the colors of the Ukrainian flag. Video of one of the cosmonauts taken as the capsule prepared to dock with the space station showed him wearing a blue flight suit. It was unclear what, if any, message the yellow uniforms were intended to send.

When cosmonaut Oleg Artemyev was asked about the yellow suits, he said every crew chooses its own suits, and they had a lot of yellow material they needed to use "so that's why we had to wear yellow."

Since the war started, many people have used the Ukrainian flag and its colors to show solidarity with the country.

Back in Moscow, Putin stood on stage in a white turtleneck and a blue down

jacket and spoke for about five minutes. Some people, including presenters at the event, wore T-shirts or jackets with a "Z" — a symbol seen on Russian tanks and other military vehicles in Ukraine and embraced by supporters of the war.

Putin's quoting of the Bible and an 18th-century Russian admiral reflected his increasing focus in recent years on history and religion as binding forces in Russia's post-Soviet society. His branding of his enemies as Nazis evoked what many Russians consider their country's finest hour, the defense of the motherland from Germany during World War II.

The rally came as Vladimir Medinsky, who led Russian negotiators in several rounds of talks with Ukraine, said that the sides have moved closer to agreement on the issue of Ukraine dropping its bid to join NATO and adopting a neutral status.

"That is the issue where the parties have made their positions maximally close," Medinsky said in remarks carried by Russian media. He added that the sides are now "halfway" on issues regarding the demilitarization of Ukraine.

Mikhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Zelenskyy, characterized the Russian assessment as intended "to provoke tension in the media." He tweeted: "Our positions are unchanged. Ceasefire, withdrawal of troops & strong security guarantees with concrete formulas."

Zelenskyy again appealed to Putin to hold talks with him directly. "It's time to meet, time to speak," he said. "I want to be heard by everyone, especially in Moscow."

In other developments, U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping spoke for nearly two hours in a bid by the U.S. to deter Beijing from providing military or economic assistance for Russia's invasion.

Earlier, one person was reported killed in the missile attack near Lviv. Satellite photos showed the strike destroyed a repair hangar and appeared to damage two other buildings. Ukraine said it had shot down two of six missiles in the volley, which came from the Black Sea.

The early morning attack was the closest strike yet to the center of Lviv, which has become a crossroads for people fleeing from other parts of Ukraine and for others entering to deliver aid or join the fight. The war has swelled the city's population by some 200,000. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1963: TRAIN DRIVES ITSELF



The first automatic train on the London underground could be hurtling into stations in three weeks, the government has revealed.

The trains, which operate without a driver, are currently undergoing a series of trials commissioned by the Ministry of Transport before passengers are allowed on board.

But the public has the chance to glimpse the trains today, which have cost £60,000 to test, as they are demonstrated in South Ealing, west London, by the London Transport Board.

If these final tests are successful the trains could be fully operational over a section of the district line from 8 April.

The trains work by picking up signals from coded electrical impulses from the rails which give them the intelligence to start, accelerate, coast or slow down automatically.

An operator will still be on-duty aboard the train in the motorman's cabin to survey opening and closing doors and to take charge of the train if any of the electrics fail during a journey.

Safety is maintained through a signalling system, also run on impulses from the rails, designed to halt the train if it overruns.

This system eliminates the need for fixed visual signals although some may be retained for emergency.

There are three routes which will first run the new system including the test train route operating as part of the normal service between Stamford Brook and Ravenscourt Park in west London, from 8 April, subject to Ministry of Transport approval.

From next year a fully operational route will be run between Hainault and Woodford on the Central Line along with automatic trains on the new Victoria line when it opens in 1968.

London Transport has revealed it may take between 20 to 30 years before automatic trains are introduced throughout the whole of the network.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

Automatic trains were first tested on the London underground in 1962 between Stamford Brook and Ravenscourt Park after years of planning.

The Victoria Line became the first underground line in the world to be fully equipped for automatic train operation after it was opened in stages between 1968 and 1971.

It was not just the drivers who had technological replacements but a range of workers from ticket sellers to train time announcers.


In 1983 the dot matrix train destination indicator was introduced on platforms allowing passengers to see at a glance a selection of trains.


And in 1987 new self-service ticket machines were introduced throughout the network - cutting back queuing times at kiosks.

In 2003 Transport for London introduced smart-cards for commuters in the capital. The new Oyster cards are contactless - meaning they do not need to be inserted into a machine and can simply be placed on top of a reader.



**YOUR STARS**

**ARIES**  **Mar. 21-Apr. 19**  
 Beware of colleagues who don't have your best interests in mind. Your lover may disappoint you in such a way that estrangement will follow.


**TAURUS**  **Apr. 20-May. 20**  
 Colleagues may try to undermine you. Your lack of attention may have been a factor. Acknowledge your lover's needs.


**GEMINI**  **May. 21-Jun. 21**  
 Don't count on others to cover up for your shortcomings. Don't let others put unreasonable demands on you. Don't draw too much attention to yourself at work.


**CANCER**  **Jun. 22-Jul. 22**  
 Feeling under the weather may be a result of overindulgence. Generosity will put you in the poorhouse. Take advantage of moneymaking ventures.


**LEO**  **Jul. 23-Aug. 22**  
 It might be time to shake a leg and do a personal makeover. Opportunities for new romantic encounters will unfold through the social events you attend.


**VIRGO**  **Aug. 23-Sep. 22**  
 Your concern with older family members and those less fortunate than yourself will only add to your attractiveness. Focus your efforts on your work.


**LIBRA**  **Sep. 23-Oct. 22**  
 Changes regarding your career direction will payoff handsomely. Refrain from using the highway as a racetrack. Hidden matters are likely to surface.

**SCORPIO**  **Oct. 23-Nov. 21**  
 Your lover will be annoyed with your participation. You may be emotionally unstable if you let someone you care about get away with verbal abuse.

**SAGITTARIUS**  **Nov. 22-Dec. 21**  
 Difficulties with female members of your family may result in estrangements. You may find that your generosity has been taken for granted.

**CAPRICORN**  **Dec. 22-Jan. 19**  
 Your pursuits may end up being fruitless. Your involvement with children will be most rewarding. You can persuade even the toughest opponents to think your way.

**AQUARIUS**  **Jan. 20-Feb. 18**  
 You may be out of sorts if you have been extravagant or have let children or friends take advantage of you financially. Unexpected visitors will be a welcome surprise.

**PISCES**  **Feb. 19-Mar. 20**  
 The talk you have may be eye-opening with regard to your present situation. Coworkers may not be giving you all the pertinent information. Your lack of attention may have been a factor.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sanson**



**SUDOKU**

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

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

**WEATHER**

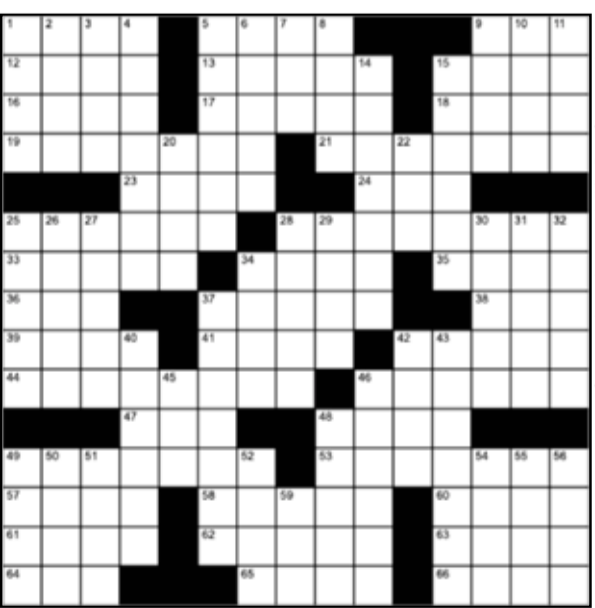
	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	1	12	cloudy
Changchun	-5	3	cloudy
Chengdu	12	17	overcast
Chongqing	15	17	overcast
Fuzhou	16	25	cloudy
Guangzhou	22	29	thunderstorms
Guiyang	12	15	showers
Haikou	24	32	cloudy
Hangzhou	6	10	rain
Harbin	-6	3	cloudy
Hefei	4	7	rain
Nanjing	4	8	rain
Shanghai	7	10	rain
Taipei	20	23	cloudy
Wuhan	5	7	rain
Hong Kong	21	24	overcast

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	-2	8	overcast
Frankfurt	1	16	clear
Paris	6	18	overcast
London	7	17	overcast
New York	8	17	clear

**CROSSWORDS**

ACROSS 1- Coffee, slangily; 5- Rent-\_\_\_; 9- Bruce \_\_\_ was a famous kung-fu movie star; 12- K-6; 13- Gate fastener; 15- Household; 16- When said three times, a 1970 war movie; 17- China's Zhou \_\_\_; 18- Blue dye source; 19- Arctic; 21- Bondage; 23- Must've been something \_\_\_; 24- Bleaching agent; 25- Perfumes; 28- Delay; 33- Supermodel Cheryl; 34- \_\_\_ contender; 35- London gallery; 36- Competitor of Tide and Cheer; 37- Toss out; 38- Oysters \_\_\_ season; 39- Untruths, tells falsehoods; 41- Small batteries; 42- Portents; 44- Terran; 46- Dirty mark; 47- Alley-\_\_\_; 48- School orgs.; 49- Pleasing; 53- Most strange; 57- Monogram ltr; 58- Sidestep, circumvent; 60- Manitoba Indigenous People; 61- Soft shoes; 62- Splendid; 63- "So be it"; 64- Biblical beast boat; 65- Flat-fish; 66- Hog fat;

DOWN 1- Fast aircrafts; 2- Baseball family name; 3- Action word; 4- Astonishing; 5- Warns; 6- Boat often made of birchbark, canvas, or fiberglass; 7- City in GA; 8- Some TVs; 9- Unaccompanied; 10- Chieftain, usually in Africa; 11- Hard to hold; 14- Summit of an earthy mound; 15- They do not possess; 20- Diner sign; 22- Answer to a sea captain; 25- Old; 26- Eyelashes; 27- Conger catcher; 28- Navigation acronym; 29- Melodramatic cry; 30- Having auricular protuberances; 31- Sharp pain; 32- Have a feeling about; 34- Final Four org.; 37- One's first needlework piece?; 40- Summer ermines; 42- "A Jug of Wine..." poet; 43- "Rent." e.g.; 45- Fireplace shelf; 46- Addison's collaborator; 48- Bicycle part; 49- Capital city of Peru; 50- Are you \_\_\_ out?; 51- Strike with foot; 52- Nights before; 54- Writer Bombeck; 55- Psychic; 56- Shepherd; 59- Of old;



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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GAMING

# METHOD TO THEIR MADNESS AS FANS BET ON COLLEGE HOOPS TOURNAMENT

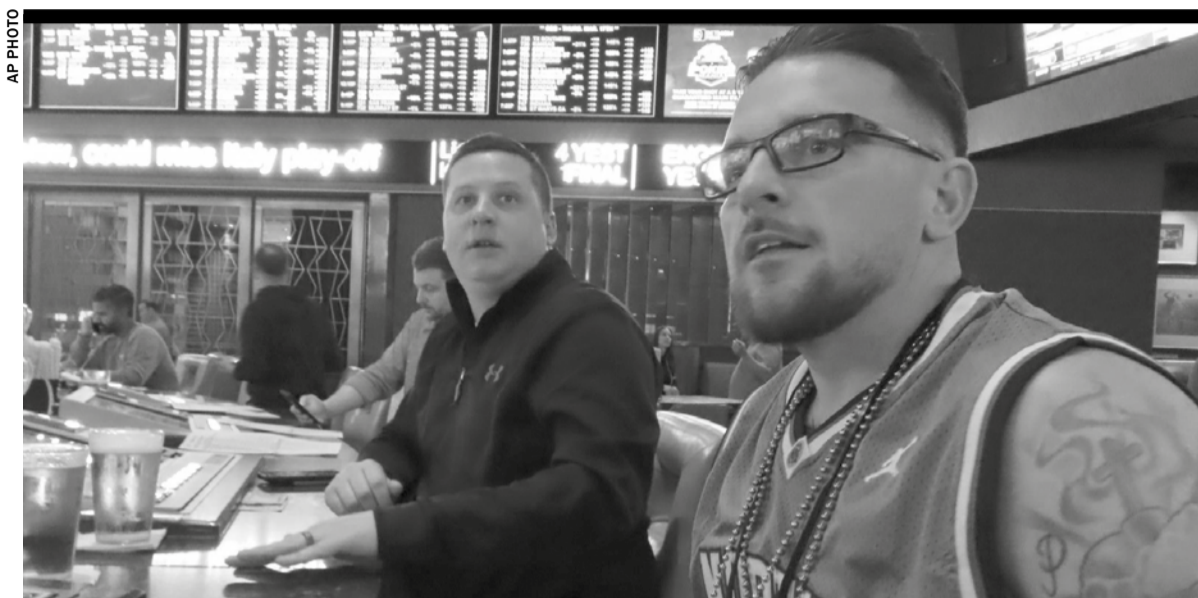
WAYNE PARRY,  
ATLANTIC CITY (N.J.)

**J**OHN Raymond made a plan and was sticking to it after arriving at Atlantic City's Borgata casino to bet on the March Madness college basketball tournament Thursday.

"I'm going to drink as much as I can, win as much money as I can, watch every single game, eat some good food and hang with my friends," the Wilmington, Delaware man said. "I'm going to chase that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, and if for some reason it doesn't work out today, I'm going to do it all again tomorrow."

That sort of exuberance was playing out in casinos, bars, living rooms and distracted offices across the country Thursday as the annual championship tournament got under way. It was also St. Patrick's Day.

The gambling industry's national trade group, the American Gaming Association, predicts 45 million Americans will bet on the tournament, legally or otherwise. "This is just such a fun day,"



Mike Cassidy (left) and John Raymond at the Borgata casino in Atlantic City

said Mike Cassidy, also of Wilmington, Delaware. "It's one of the best days of the year."

It's also one of the busiest for casinos and sports books that take action on the tournament, particularly this year as COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted in most places.

"It's nice to be back at full strength," said Tom Gable, the Borgata's director of race and

sportsbook. "Last year's March Madness was the first mass gathering we did since COVID began, but we were still social distancing. This year seems like we're back to normal. We were getting calls in December from people wanting to reserve spots to watch the tournament."

The AGA predicted that \$3.1 billion will be wagered on this year's tournament, a figure that

includes legal bets as well as those placed with illegal bookies or offshore web sites. It said it expects that more than 17% of American adults will place at least one bet on the tournament.

Among them were Mike McMahon of Long Island, New York who, like many people across the country, picked Gonzaga to win it all.

"This is Gonzaga's year," he

said. "I picked them in almost all my brackets, 12 of them."

He also thinks Tennessee, Kentucky and Kansas will make the Final Four.

Raymond also picked Gonzaga to win the championship, defeating Arizona in the final. He noted, with some disappointment, that a larger group of friends was supposed to be there with him Thursday, "but their wives wouldn't let them."

His friend Cassidy, perhaps swayed by the fact that it was St. Patrick's Day, picked Notre Dame to win the title.

"The Irish will run the table," said Cassidy, who has a leprechaun tattoo. "They've been out of the tournament for years, and they're hot now. It's March, baby! Anything can happen."

The national gambling group predicts that 36.5 million Americans will bet by filling out brackets predicting the results of every game through the final.

Currently, 30 states plus Washington, D.C., offer legal sports betting, and there are 29 million more American adults who live in states that have adopted legal sports betting since last year's March Madness tournament.

Bettors in the AGA survey named Gonzaga (17%) as their favorite to win the tournament, followed by Duke (12%), and Kentucky (11%). **MDT/AP**

AD

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**Breast Surgery** : Dr. Leong Iat Lun

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RUGBY

# Brumbies, Chiefs impress in Super Rugby Pacific

**T**HE ACT Brumbies and Hamilton-based Chiefs have emerged clearly as the best teams in Australia and New Zealand after the weekend's fifth round of Super Rugby Pacific.

The Brumbies are the only unbeaten team in the tournament after a showdown Friday with the previously unbeaten Reds in which they avenged their loss to the Brisbane-based team in last year's final of Super Rugby Australia.

The Chiefs stitched together a patchwork team after losing 17 players including six All Blacks to illness or injury and were still able to beat Moana Pasifika 59-12 in the only match played in New Zealand in round five.

The Christchurch-based Crusaders, Dunedin-based Highlanders and Auckland-based Blues all are contending with outbreaks of COVID-19 among their squads and weren't able to train or assemble competitive teams for weekend matches.

Only the Chiefs stepped up and, digging deep into their playing resources to come up with barely 23 players to take on Moana Pasifika in a previously postponed match.

Their win left them with three wins and a loss after four games and placed them fifth on the overall table and second in New Zealand behind the Crusaders. But the Chiefs' win over the Crusaders last weekend marks them as the better team and their display of youthful talent on Saturday was a further indication they are the strongest team in the New Zealand section.

"As a coach you sell the dream to the players around we've had a bit of disruption but we've got to rise above that and we back our squad," head coach Cameron McMillan said. "We wholeheartedly believe that.

"But we definitely had some challenges and right up until about Thursday the game could quite easily have been canceled or given to another team.

"We were really committed to wanting to play because we felt like we had the numbers. We were comfortable we had enough depth in the critical positions, except halfback where we rolled the dice a little bit."

The Chiefs now face the Crusaders for a second time next weekend, still with uncertainty over the availability of players but with strengthened confidence that it will cope.

"We're not naïve enough to think we're past our Covid challenge," McMillan said. "It pays not to get too far ahead of yourself and you just roll up on Monday, see who's available and work from there."

The Brumbies were determined to exact some revenge after their injury-time loss to the Reds in last year's domestic final. They were outscored two tries to one by the Reds on Friday but held onto the lead throughout the second half, sealing their winning margin with a penalty to replacement



scrumhalf Ryan Lonergan in the 66th minute.

The Reds had opportunities to snatch the win away, notably when captain Fraser McReight chased his own kick towards the Brumbies goalline and was thwarted when the ball hit the post. McReight might have been held back early in the kick-chase but the referee signaled play on.

"I know everyone else would be thinking 'oh God, here we go again,'" Brumbies coach Dan McKellar aid. "I wasn't thinking

about that. If we had have lost, we would have beaten ourselves, that's what I was thinking."

"I don't want to sit here and be like the wet mop because I hate people being negative about the game. What were the good things? The scrum. There were some really good parts to our defense, we're having to do a lot of defending but we're having to do a lot of defending because we can't maintain possession and we're inaccurate and not as clinical in areas of the game as we normally are." MDT/AP

AD

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CHAOS TO COUTURE

18<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 2022

SAVE THE DATE

**OPINION**

**Multipolar World**

Jorge Costa Oliveira



**THE COLLAPSE OF THE RUSSIAN ECONOMY**

Following the invasion (on February 24) of Ukraine by Russia, the EU and the Western world imposed severe sanctions, including financial ones. Transactions with seven of Russia's largest banks were banned; trading Russian bonds on western financial centers was prohibited; the ability to lend to some large Russian companies was restricted; the major Russian banks were blocked from the SWIFT system; and the Russian central bank's foreign exchange reserves were frozen. With this first set of sanctions, Russia was denied access to the international financial world. Banned also was the export of about half of the major technology components that Russia buys from Western suppliers. In addition to Russia's top politicians, other sanctions targeted Russian elites and their companies. The assets of top Russian oligarchs, who until recently escaped sanctions, have been frozen, with their mega-yachts being seized. Given the extraterritorial nature of many of these sanctions, no Western entity will dare to interact with Russian financial institutions in the near future. The reputational risks (and pressure from Western public opinion) have led hundreds of respectable Western companies to declare that they will stop doing business in or with Russia.

On February 28th the Russian economy collapsed. Russians rushed to banks and ATM machines to exchange as much money as they could for hard currency; and burst into stores to buy whatever they could find before prices skyrocketed. The ruble has fallen 70% and economists predict the ruble will continue to fall, approaching an exchange rate of 200 rubles per US dollar by the end of the year (it was about 70 rubles before Putin's war). On March 8, the Russian central bank decided to stop exchanging rubles for foreign currency, making the ruble de facto inconvertible. Most of Russia's foreign exchange reserves (\$630 billion dollars) are frozen. Russian stock exchanges are closed and the value of 31 Russian stocks that are traded in London has fallen 98% (on February 15, Sberbank shares on London's secondary market were at \$14, on March 13 they were at 5 cents). Russia's capital markets are essentially dead. All Russian financial assets have been reclassified to junk status. It is possible that the Russian Federation will soon default on its sovereign debt obligations. It is not unlikely that the inflation rate will reach at least 50%, and that Russian GDP will fall by at least 10% this year.

Putin has not realized that, in the financial realm, the world is not yet multipolar.

The economic catastrophe that Russia has plunged into is clear and likely to get worse. The European and Western world sanctions are still at the beginning and already the Russian economy, banking and finance are collapsing. This collapse, the product of the imposition of an imperialist delusion, will cause social misery among the general Russian population, create social and political instability, and radicalize a doubling down from the Russian leadership. Yet, Putin has only himself to blame for this.

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**EGYPT DISPLAYS RECENTLY DISCOVERED ANCIENT TOMBS IN SAQQARA**

THE BUZZ

Egypt this weekend displayed recently discovered, well-decorated ancient tombs at a Pharaonic necropolis just outside the capital Cairo.

The five tombs were unearthed earlier this month and date back to the Old Kingdom — a period spanning roughly from around 2700 BC to 2200 B.C., as well as to the First Intermediate Period, which lasted for over a century after the Old Kingdom collapsed, according to the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. Mostafa Waziri, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of

Antiquities, said Egyptian archeologists started excavating the site in September. The tombs, he said, were for senior officials including regional rulers and palace supervisors in ancient Egypt.

"All of those five tombs are well-painted, well-decorated. Excavations did not stop. We are planning to continue our excavations. We believe that we can find more tombs in this area," he told reporters at the site.

The tombs were found near the Step Pyramid of Djoser, in the Saqqara Necropolis, 24 kilometers southwest of Cairo.



**UKRAINE WAR IS BACKDROP IN US PUSH FOR HYPERSONIC WEAPONS**

L AGGING behind Russia in developing hypersonic weapons, the U.S. Navy is rushing to field its first, with installation on a warship starting as soon as late next year.

The United States is in a race with Russia and China to develop these weapons, which travel at speeds akin to ballistic missiles but are difficult to shoot down because of their maneuverability.

The Russian military says it already deployed hypersonic missiles, claiming on both Saturday and Sunday to have deployed them against targets in Ukraine marking the weapon's first use in combat. The Pentagon couldn't confirm a hypersonic weapon was used in the attacks.

The American military is accelerating development to catch up.

The U.S. weapon would launch like a ballistic missile and would release a hypersonic glide vehicle that would reach speeds seven to eight times faster than the speed of sound before hitting the target.

In Maine, General Dynamics subsidiary Bath Iron Works has begun engineering and design work on changes necessary to install the weapon system on three Zumwalt-class destroyers.

The work would begin at a yet-to-be-named shipyard sometime in fiscal year that begins in October 2023, the Navy said.

Hypersonic weapons are

defined as anything traveling beyond Mach 5, or five times faster than the speed of sound. That's about 3,800 mph (6,100 kph). Intercontinental ballistic missiles far exceed that threshold but travel in a predictable path, making it possible to intercept them.

The new weapons are maneuverable.

Existing missile defense systems, including the Navy's Aegis system, would have trouble intercepting such objects because maneuverability makes their movement unpredictable and speed leaves little time to react.

Russia says it has ballistic missiles that can deploy hypersonic glide vehicles as well as a hypersonic cruise missile.

The U.S. is "straining just to catch up" because it failed to invest in the new technology, with only a fraction of the 10,000 people who were working on the program in the 1980s, said U.S. Rep. Jim Cooper, a Tennessee Democrat who's chair of a subcommittee that monitors the program.

"If we want to pursue parity, we will need to back this effort with more money, time, and talent than we are now," he said.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine serves as a backdrop as the Pentagon releases its budget proposal that lays out its goals for hypersonics and other weapon systems later this month.

The three stealthy

Zumwalt-class destroyers to be equipped with the new weapons have plenty of space to accommodate them — thanks to a design failure that works to the Navy's advantage in this instance.

The ships were built around a gun system that was supposed to use GPS-guided, rocket-boosted projectiles to pound targets 90 miles away. But those projectiles proved to be too expensive, and the Navy canceled the system, leaving each of the ships with a useless loading system and a pair of 155-mm guns hidden in angular turrets.

The retrofit of all three ships will likely cost more than \$1 billion but will give a new capability to the tech-laden, electric-drive ships that already cost the Navy \$23.5 billion to design and build, said Bryan Clark, a defense analyst at the Hudson Institute.

"The engineering is not that hard. It'll just take time and money to make it happen," Clark said.

The Navy intends to field the weapons on the destroyers in the 2025 fiscal year and on Virginia-class nuclear-powered attack submarines in the 2028 fiscal year, the Navy said.

The destroyers would be based in the Pacific Ocean, where they would be a deterrent to China, should it become emboldened by Russia's attack on Ukraine and consider attacking Taiwan, Clark said. MDT/AP



**Turkmenistan** The son of former president was inaugurated this weekend as the new leader of the authoritarian Central Asian country. Serdar Berdimukhamedov, 40, took the oath of office a week after an election in which the central elections commission said he won 73% of the vote. He had faced eight other nominal contenders, all of whom praised his father, Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, who became president in 2006 and established a pervasive cult of personality.

**German** lawmakers voted last week to abolish most of the country's coronavirus pandemic restrictions despite a surge in infections, with almost 300,000 new daily cases reported. The Bundestag passed an amendment to the pandemic rules in a 364-277 vote with two abstentions. The upper house of parliament, made up of Germany's 16 states, approved the measure.



**Turkey** The president of Turkey, South Korea's prime minister and other officials inaugurated a massive suspension bridge last week over the Dardanelles Strait that connects the European and Asian shores of the key waterway. With a 2,023-meter span between its towers, the "1915 Canakkale Bridge" becomes the world's longest suspension bridge. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said.

**Canada** Worshipers at dawn prayer in a suburb of Toronto tackled and subdued a 24-year-old man who allegedly entered their mosque and attacked people with bear spray on Saturday, according to local police. Peel Regional Police said the man walked into the Dar Al-Tawheed Islamic Centre in Mississauga, Ontario, and allegedly "discharged bear spray towards people in the mosque while brandishing a hatchet just before 7 a.m."