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FAMILIES OF SENIORS IN NURSING HOMES SLAMMED THE HEALTH BUREAU FOR THEIR LACK OF COMMUNICATION BEFORE ADMINISTERING COVID-19 VACCINES

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FORMER MACAU REP IN BEIJING SENTENCED TO 30 MONTHS' JAIL

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ZELENSKY REJECTS RUSSIAN DEMAND FOR SURRENDER IN MARIUPOL

▲ P8



AP PHOTO



Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited Cambodia for talks with the country's longtime leader, Hun Sen, this weekend to deepen relations and promote calls for the rule of law in one of the Southeast Asia's closest partners of both China and Japan. Kishida and Hun Sen in a joint statement condemned Russia's aggression in Ukraine and called for "an immediate stop of the use of force and the withdrawal of the military forces from the territory of Ukraine." They stressed "neither threat nor use of all kind of weapons of mass destruction can ever be accepted in any occasion."

New Zealand Samoa has reported scores of new Covid-19 cases each day since detecting its first case of community transmission last week. The South Pacific island nation of 200,000 people has been in lockdown since Saturday as it deals with its first outbreak of the pandemic. The outbreak was discovered when a woman who was about to travel tested positive for the virus last week and indicates the virus likely had been spreading undetected for days or even weeks.

AP PHOTO



Yemen's Houthi rebels unleashed one of their most intense barrages of drone and missile strikes on Saudi Arabia's critical energy facilities yesterday, sparking a fire at one site and temporarily cutting oil production at another. The attacks did not cause casualties but struck sites belonging to one of the world's most important energy companies and damaged civilian vehicles and homes.

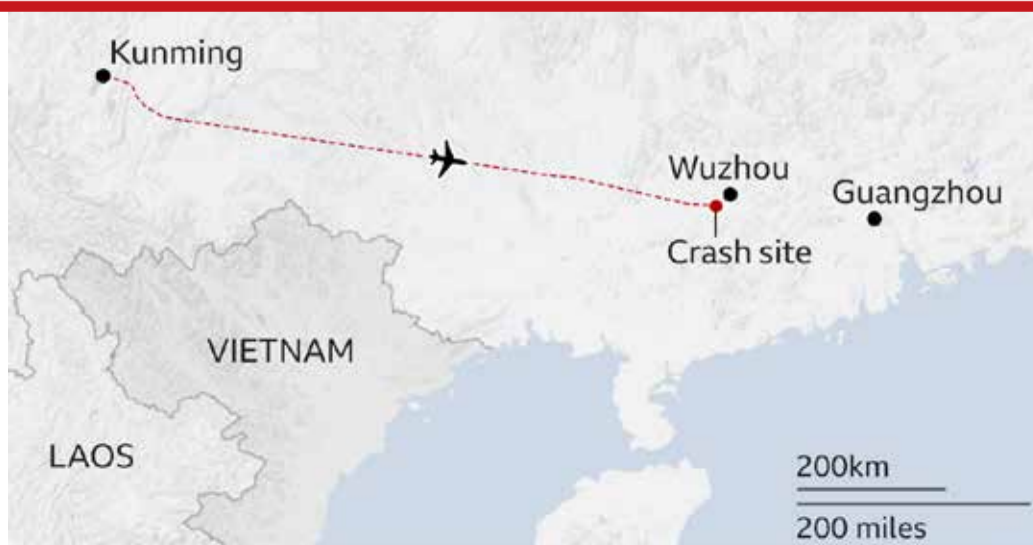
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ZERO DOT SOMETHING

HK, Macau alleviate Covid restrictions following signals from Beijing that zero-tolerance policy could gradually be abandoned ▲ P2-3



CHINESE AIRLINER CARRYING 132 CRASHES IN GUANGXI HILLS



COVID-19

GOV'T SHORTENS QUARANTINE FOR DISCHARGED PATIENTS, TIGHTENS RESTRICTIONS ON DINING RECEPTIONS

ANTHONY LAM

A nucleic acid test for SARS-CoV-2 has been made mandatory for banquets and receptions with 200 or more attendees, the government announced yesterday, after reducing recovery quarantine from 21 to seven days.

Prior to this, the NAT requirement for banquets and receptions organized by government bodies or associations was limited to those attended by over 400 people.

Private events, such as weddings, baby showers, birthday or retirement banquets or receptions, do not have a NAT requirement for all attendees. The mandate only applies to hosts who plan to propose formal toasts at their events.

The government emphasized that venue or service providers of these events have a responsibility to remind their customers about this requirement.

Meanwhile, the organizers are responsible for ensuring social distancing, minimizing the dura-

tion of events, collecting contact details of attendees and retaining seating plans for 28 days for further contact tracing.

Toasting should be minimized or conducted while wearing a mask. Organizers and the government should be notified if any attendee tests positive for SARS-CoV-2 after events. The government also recommends the use of serving utensils to reduce the risk of transmission.

Despite the government tightening restrictions on banquets and receptions, it has announced that, following the latest edition of the Covid-19 handbook issued by the National Health Commission of China, the duration of recovery quarantine on those discharged from the hospital after treatment on SARS-CoV-2 will be shortened from 21 to seven days.

Nonetheless, the government stressed that those required to undertake quarantine-upon-arrival will emerge from quarantine no earlier than the original end-date, calculated from the date of arrival.

MDT ARCHIVE



Recovered patients will no longer be quarantined at the Public Health Clinical Centre in Coloane, a venue with medical-level ventilation and facilities. Instead, they will stay in quarantine hotels.

After this quarantine, recovered patients should manage their

health at home or in a designated hotel for seven days.

The criteria for recovery have also been updated. Relapsed patients will need three negative NATs, at 24-hour intervals, to be classed as recovered. New patients will follow this same proto-

col, but the negative results must come at least 10 days after their first positive results.

A specialist panel will determine if a patient is considered recovered if the patient does not test negative three weeks after their first positive result.

COVID-19

CT VALUE: HOW LOW IS TOO HIGH?

RENATO MARQUES

FROM the discovery of Covid-19, there has been a battle among scientists and public health specialists over how to test people for the virus, and the standards that should be used to classify test results as positive, negative or inconclusive.

Since then, several debates have been ongoing over the issue of the cycle threshold (CT) value.

Standard tests identify Covid-19 infection by isolating and amplifying viral RNA using a procedure known as the polymerase chain reaction, which relies on multiple cycles of amplification to produce a detectable amount of RNA. The CT value is the number of cycles needed to spot the virus, when the PCR machine stops running.

It is commonly agreed among

experts in this field that if the virus is not detected after 37 to 40 cycles, the test result is negative.

On the other hand, a test that registers a positive result after 12 cycles, is a clear and definite result, as the sample contains more than 10 million times as much viral genetic material as a sample with a CT value of 35.

Classification over the lower limits of the CT is more complex, when samples can test positive with very different amounts of virus present. In this kind of situation, some of them may fall in the gap between what is agreed to be a positive, as opposed to a week negative.

The matter is addressed in a discussion published by the Yale School of Medicine by Marie L. Landry, a director of the Clinical Virology Laboratory of Yale New

Haven Hospital.

In the discussion following an article published in the New York Times, Landry discussed the matter from a hospital laboratory perspective.

In the NYT story, it was said that samples with a CT value higher than 33 in which the virus does not grow in culture are "likely not to be contagious."

For this reason, the authors argued that to standardize a positive test result at a CT of higher than 35 would be "too sensitive," and could result in many false-positive results, particularly for people already recovered from the virus.

The authors proposed that a more reasonable cut-off would be CT 30-35 or even CT <30.

In consideration of the criteria previously proposed, Landry's conclusions led to a different inter-

pretation. The director proposed an additional set of standards to be used to assist interpretation: Low Positive: positive tests with a CT 30-34.9; Very Low Positive: sample positive with a Ct >35-39.9; and Borderline Positive: positive sample with a CT >40-44.9.

Landry also noted that "high sensitivity tests are essential for acutely ill hospitalized patients as virus titers in the upper airway may be low (CT>30 or CT >35). However, recovering patients [who are] now non-infectious, may also have a very low positive PCR result."

The virologist also added that in community testing, "not reporting positive results with CT >30 would be a disservice to these patients," as the quality of the sample might suffer some changes due to transportation and time between collection and testing, among other factors.

In a more revealing conclusion, Landry concluded that "reporting CT values alone can be misleading, especially since CT values can vary significantly between various tests and labs."

DIFFERENT STANDARDS, DIFFERENT POLICIES

In the international community there is a general consensus that a CT value of ≥ 35 indicates a positive result in community testing. Dr. Landry noted, however, that situations where patients are already hospitalized and/or being treated in isolation might prompt health authorities to decide to slightly reduce the CT value (never below 30), classifying some test results as "negative or very low positive" even if the CT value falls in the gap commonly considered positive.

In August last year, the health authorities of the neighboring region of Hong Kong announced a recommendation on the criteria for releasing confirmed Covid-19 patients from isolation.

This medical criterion esta-

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COVID-19

Hong Kong to lift flight bans, cut quarantine for arrivals

HONG Kong's leader yesterday said that the city would lift flight bans on countries including Britain and the U.S., as well as reduce quarantine time for travelers arriving in the city as coronavirus infections in its latest outbreak plateau.

The city's chief executive Carrie Lam announced during a press conference yesterday that a ban on flights from nine countries — Australia, Canada, France, India, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Britain and the U.S. — would be lifted from April 1. A flight ban on most these countries has been in place since January, as authorities sought to stem the outbreak of the highly transmissible omicron variant in Hong Kong.

Travelers entering the city can also quarantine for as little as seven days in quarantine hotels — down from 14 days — if they test negative for the virus on the sixth and seventh days of their quarantine. Such travelers must also be fully vaccinated and test negative

AP PHOTO



for the coronavirus before entering the city.

Lam also said that plans for a citywide mass-testing exercise, which was first announced in February, would be suspended.

"The experts are of the opinion that it's not appropriate for us to

devote finite resources to the universal mass-testing," said Lam. "The SAR government will continue to monitor the situation. When the conditions are right, we will consider whether we will be implementing the compulsory universal testing."

The changes announced signal a shift in Hong Kong's handling of the coronavirus pandemic, as authorities sought to provide a direction for Hong Kong businesses and its residents after two years of aligning with mainland China's "zero COVID" policy.

Lam said that the changes come as part of an interim review of the city's measures, and that various stakeholders in the city will be consulted for any longer-term roadmaps when it comes to public health and economic development.

"We have to listen more carefully to the experts, both locally and from the mainland," said Lam.

"For any longer-term public health strategy, we will have to take into account both factors that is maintaining Hong Kong's accessibility to the mainland, and also ensuring her continued connectivity with the outside world."

Yesterday, Lam also announced that social distancing measures will stay in place, although they will be lifted in stages from April 21 if infections do not surge, Lam said. A ban on dining in after 6 p.m. will be lifted, and public gatherings will be capped at four people, up from two.

Other businesses that were ordered to shutter temporarily, such as gyms and massage parlors, will also be allowed to reopen.

Hong Kong reported 14,145 infections on Sunday, the lowest in over three weeks. At the peak of its outbreak, the city reported over 50,000 cases daily, and has reported over 1 million infections and nearly 5,700 deaths since the current outbreak began at the end of last year. **MDT/AP**



publishes that to be released from isolation, symptomatic patients must show an improvement in their clinical condition including the absence of fever, in addition to fulfilling one of two other criteria.

Firstly, the patient should have passed 10 days since the onset of illness. Also, two clinical specimens of the same type taken at least 24 hours apart should test negative for nucleic acid by PCR; or three clinical specimens of the same type taken at least 24 hours apart should have PCR test results with a consistent CT value of 33 or above.

For patients not developing any Covid-19 symptoms, only the PCR result criteria must be met, following the same standard of CT value ≥ 33 .

This decision from the HK authorities was said to be based on prevailing scientific understanding

of Covid-19, and was made by recommendation of the Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases and the Scientific Committee on Emerging & Zoonotic Diseases under the Center for Health Protection, joined by the Chief Executive's expert advisory panel.

THE MACAU EVIDENCE-BASED STUDY

In Macau, according to a study published by the Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine, the criteria in use establish that a positive result was defined for a CT value less than or equal to 35, while a negative test result is registered if the CT value is more than 38. Results falling in between these two figures, defined as a CT value of 36 to 38, "require confirmation by re-testing and are reported as inconclusive."

Last week, the National Heal-

th Commission of the PRC issued new standards for diagnosis, treatment, and isolation of patients with Covid-19.

The ninth version of these regulations outlines isolation management and treatment venues according to the condition of the disease, stating that mild infections do not need to be admitted to hospital. There is also a relaxation of the standards for release from isolation and discharge from hospital.

The new criteria for lifting isolation and discharge includes two consecutive nucleic acid tests with a sampling interval of over 24 hours for ORF1ab and N genes in which the CT value is equal to or higher than 35; a fluorescence quantitative PCR test with a value above 40 or two fluorescence quantitative PCR test with a value equal or above 35.

In addition, the new rules also enforce changes on the previous 14 days health management in isolation after discharge, to a seven day home health monitoring after hospitalization.

Commenting on the new rules to Chinese media sources, Zhang Wenhong, Director of Department of Infectious Diseases, Huashan Hospital of Fudan University, said that mild cases of infection will no longer require treatment in hospital since "the proportion of mild cases progressing to severe cases is very low."

Zhang added, "Our positive nucleic acid criteria have been synchronized with the international standards from [previously] stricter criteria, and the criteria for hospitalization time [in isolation] has also been reduced. This means that more patients can be discharged early, which will greatly ease the pressure on our medical resources."

Chen Zhengming, professor of epidemiology at Oxford University, told Reuters news agency that the coming weeks have great importance in determining whether the policies can effectively curb the growth of infections and achieve the zero-infections goal.

"Regardless of the [economic] cost, the old method is very effective in preventing the epidemic, which is the biggest political task [at the moment in China]," Chen said, adding, "If [abrupt] changes are made [to these measures], the public may misunderstand it as [the government] giving up."

SHOULD THE CT VALUE BE DISPLAYED?

Another heated discussion is around whether the CT value should be displayed and presented to the patient when a test result is positive.

Advocates of this idea point to new research indicating that CT values could help doctors to flag patients at high risk for serious di-

sease, Michael Mina, a physician and epidemiologist at Harvard University's T.H. Chan School of Public Health said, in a report published by Science, an academic journal from the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Mina said that recent findings also suggest the displaying of the CT value numbers next to the test result could help officials determine who is infectious and should therefore be isolated and have their contacts traced.

"CT value is an imperfect measure. But whether to add it to test results is one of the most pressing questions out there," Mina added.

Marta Gaglia, a virologist at Tufts University, also agrees on the imperfection of the value saying, "The same sample can give different CT values on different testing machines, and different swabs from the same person can give different results. The CT value isn't an absolute scale," she says with Mina adding that such factors make many clinicians wary.

"Clinicians are cautious by nature. They say, 'If we can't rely on it, it's not reliable,'" Mina added.

Nonetheless, both are among a large group of experts who say that knowing whether CT values are high or low can be highly informative and result in a powerful tool in decision-making.



NEW GALLERY AT ARTYZEN GRAND LAPA

AMAGAO GALLERY PRESENTS COLOR LUSOFONIA ART EXHIBITION FEATURING 300 WORKS

JING WU

THE latest art gallery in Macau, Amagao Gallery, opened its doors at Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau last week with the theme "Color Lusofonia."

"Color Lusofonia" is an exhibition featuring varied range of works of some 50 artists from Portuguese-speaking countries. It displays artworks selected from a gallery collection of over 300 works, bringing well-known, young and emerging artists as well as Macau-based artists together.

The organizer said the gallery is a new addition to the bespoke experiences the hotel has to offer as an artistic and cultural enclave.

In addition, the facilitator also said that the theme is a celebration of a Sino-Portuguese artistic and creative exchange, bridging China and the Lusophone world.

The Area Vice President, Macau Operations for Artyzen Hospitality Group, Rutger Verschuren explained at the opening that the hotel's partnership with Amagao Gallery continues to uphold the brand's mission of sharing art, culture, and the

inspirational wisdom that lies within.

"As a bridge between East and West and a platform for Sino-Portuguese culture, the creation of the Amagao Gallery and the artworks it showcases will not only lead to the future development of the art interface but will also provide a deeper understanding of the rich history of the Portuguese-speaking countries."

"Our aim is to give visibility and market to the immense variety and creativity of the Lusofonia visual arts. But it is also our intention to keep the door open for other artists and designers, namely from China and especially Macau," said the Managing Partners of Amagao Gallery, José I. Duarte, Lina Ramadas and Victor Hugo Marreiros in a statement.

After 'Color Lusofonia,' which runs until May 22, three more exhibitions will be held in June, October, and December this year at the gallery located near the hotel lobby. The hotel will also host food and music-related events, as well as workshops and interest classes, allowing for a more meaningful exploration of the arts and their enjoyment.



Former Macau representative in Beijing sentenced to 30 months' jail

RENATO MARQUES

THE former director of the Macau Special Administrative Region (SAR) office in Beijing, Kang Wei, was sentenced yesterday by the Court of the First Instance (TJB) to 30 months' imprisonment after having been found guilty of embezzlement charges, All About Macau has reported.

Kang was found guilty on five counts of misappropriating government funds during her tenure from 2015 to 2017.

Due to the relatively small amounts involved, and because the defendant was a first-time offender, the sentence was suspen-

ded for a period of three years.

The case came to light after complaints received by the Commission Against Corruption in 2018 stating that the director of the MSAR Office was suspected of committing several illegal acts during her tenure.

Kang always denied the accusations, protesting her innocence in the case.

One of the allegations which the TJB considers to be proven, is that Kang was unlawfully receiving a housing allowance for a non-existent rental home. In actuality, she lived in her office premises, where she installed several amenities and appliances on own initiative.

She was also found guilty of abusing office resources, such as using her official car and driver to carry relatives and friends to make scenic tours in Beijing and using public funds to cover accommodation and food and beverage expenses on holiday trips and at private events.

Although the loss to the public purse was only a couple of thousand patacas, the judge noted that the consequences of her actions are more serious than just the monetary loss. The judge asserted that her behavior harmed the image of integrity of the MSAR government and its official representation in the capital city.



MUST NAMES, LAUNCHES MACAU'S FIRST SCIENTIFIC SATELLITE

MACAU'S first science satellite is named "Macau Student Science Satellite I", Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) announced.

MUST reported that the project commenced in November 2020, when the university signed agreements with three organizations for the project of commissioning the city's first scientific satellite.

The university emphasized that the project is expected to inject new life into the development of the Greater Bay Area. It would also stimulate interest in science among local youth and improve scientific literacy for Macau secondary school students.

With support from the Macau government and participation of most secondary schools in Macau, the project has been well received and has made a significant impact on the city.

The satellite is being designed by lo-

cal youth representatives. MUST stressed that the main goal of the project is to instruct young people in Macau in the country's aeronautical technology. The program will also facilitate the implementation of the One Country Two Systems principle.

It is important to generate interest in science among the young population in Macau, the higher education institution said.

The satellite has further led to the establishment of the Data Center for Science and Application of Macau Satellites at MUST.

The data center will be responsible for data analyses related to the MUST I and the Macau Student Science Satellite I. The MUST I is another of MUST's satellites.

The ceremony for the opening of the data center was held at MUST over the weekend. **AL**

FAMILIES SLAM SSM FOR LACK OF COMMUNICATION IN VACCINATING SENIORS

SOME families of seniors in homes for the elderly slammed the Health Bureau for their lack of communication before administering Covid-19 vaccines to residents, local media reports.

A report by local Chinese media outlet All About Macau revealed that some families with members living in homes for seniors were dissatisfied with the SSM vaccinating their family members.

The families told the media that the SSM did not ask permission before vaccinating the elderly residents. In addition, there was insufficient time allowed for discussion between family members and the seniors in residence.

According to the report, one relative received a call from the facility hosting their senior family member on March 19, saying that the SSM had sent vaccination teams that same day to the facility. The complainant was told by the facility operator



that on March 20, the SSM would vaccinate residents who were willing to undertake the procedure.

However, the relative stressed that in previous outreach vaccination operations, the SSM requested the agreement of families beforehand.

The complainant found this practice "very inappropriate" because the senior residents may not fully understand the possible adverse effects of the vaccines, and more-

over, each senior may have specific health conditions.

"Not allowing us to discuss [the vaccinations] in advance is a lack of respect both for us and the vaccine recipients," the report cited the complainant as saying.

In response to the enquiry by the Chinese media, the SSM stated that families would be notified and their consent obtained prior to vaccination, only for incapacitated residents in homes for the elderly. **AL**

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BRI

CHINA MULLS PACKAGE TO EASE SRI LANKA'S ECONOMIC CRISIS

BHARATHA MALLAWARACHI, COLOMBO

AP PHOTO



Chinese ambassador to Sri Lanka Qi Zhenhong

CHINA'S ambassador to Sri Lanka said yesterday it is considering a request for \$2.5 billion in assistance to help the island nation through a debt and foreign currency crisis.

Qi Zhenhong told reporters that Beijing is studying the Sri Lankan government's appeal for a \$1 billion loan and \$1.5 billion credit line.

Sri Lanka needs to make nearly \$7 billion in payments on foreign loans this year, but Qi was non-committal about a request to restructure China's loans to Sri Lanka.

"Our ultimate goal is to solve the problem, but there may be different ways to do so," he said.

Sri Lanka's foreign reserves are dwindling at a time when it faces huge debt obligations. The country's struggle to pay for imports has caused shortages of medicine, fuel, milk powder, cooking gas and other essentials, with people waiting in long queues to get fuel.

Residents are enduring dai-

ly power cuts due to a shortage of fuel to operate the generating plants and dry weather has sa-

pped hydropower capacity.

The Central Bank allowed the local currency to free float earlier

this month, causing a sharp increase in prices.

Sri Lanka's economy depends

heavily on tourism and trade and the pandemic has been disastrous, with the government estimating a loss of \$14 billion over the last two years. The economy is estimated to have contracted by 1.5% in July-September 2021, according to the central bank.

Sri Lanka's foreign reserves are shrinking partly because of construction projects built with Chinese loans that are not making money. China loaned the country money to build a seaport and airport in the southern Hambantota district and a wide network of roads.

Central Bank figures show that current Chinese loans to Sri Lanka total around \$3.38 billion, not including loans to state-owned businesses, which are accounted for separately and thought to be substantial.

Qi said that since the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, China has provided \$2.8b in financial help to Sri Lanka.

"Our aim is to help Sri Lanka to overcome the current difficulties," he said.

Last week, neighboring India extended a \$1 billion credit line to Sri Lanka to be used for importing food, medicines and other essentials from India.

The two Asian giants are vying for influence in the Indian Ocean and consider Sri Lanka strategically important. **MDT/AP**

COVID-19

Shanghai Disneyland closes as virus rises, Shenzhen reopens

SHANGHAI Disneyland closed yesterday as China's most populous city tried to contain its biggest coronavirus flareup in two years, while the southern business center of Shenzhen allowed shops and offices to reopen after a weeklong closure.

Meanwhile, the cities of Changchun and Jilin in the northeast began another round of citywide virus testing following a surge in infections. Jilin tightened anti-disease curbs, ordering its 2 million residents to stay home.

China's case numbers in its latest infection wave are low compared with other major countries, but authorities are enforcing a "zero tolerance" strategy that has suspended access to some major cities.

The government reported 2,027 new cases on Sunday, up from the previous day's 1,737. That included 1,542 infections in Jilin province, where Changchun and Jilin are located.

Shanghai, which has a

population of 24 million, has avoided a citywide shutdown but appealed to the public to stay home. Bus service into the city has been suspended and visitors are required to show a negative virus test.

Disney Co. said Shanghai Disneyland, Disneytown and Wishing Star Park were closed until further notice.

Yesterday, Shanghai reported 24 new cases. The city earlier suspended access to two residential areas and carried out mass testing at dozens of others.

Shanghai residents posted photos on the internet showing empty streets and subways during what usually is a crowded morning rush hour.

The government of Shenzhen, a finance and technology center that abuts Hong Kong, announced businesses and government offices were allowed to reopen yesterday while authorities took steps to try to prevent a resurgence of virus cases. Bus and subway service, which had been

suspended, was restarted.

Last week, the city of 17.5 million shut down all businesses except those that supply food and other necessities and told the public to stay home following a spike in cases.

Shenzhen is home to some of China's biggest companies including telecom equipment maker Huawei, electric car brand BYD Auto and Tencent, operator of the popular WeChat message service.

The shutdowns prompted concern trade might be disrupted if ports near Shanghai and Shenzhen that are among the world's busiest are affected. The Shanghai port moved paperwork functions online but said cargo was moving normally. The smaller port of Lianyungang barred foreign sailors from coming ashore.

The government said last week it was trying to fine-tune anti-disease controls to reduce their economic cost and impact on society.

Tangshan, a steel industry center east of Beijing,



the Chinese capital, imposed controls Sunday that allow only emergency vehicles to move around the city after seven cases were found, state media reported.

Authorities in Beijing were investigating a duck restaurant where four employees contracted the virus. State media said owners of the Yu Le Xuan

restaurant were accused of failing to register the identities of 477 diners as required over five days, making it harder to trace potential contacts. **MDT/AP**

AVIATION

Chinese airliner crashes with 132 aboard in country's south

KEN MORITSUGU, BEIJING

A China Eastern Boeing 737-800 with 132 people on board crashed in southern China yesterday, officials said, in the country's worst air disaster in nearly a decade.

There was no immediate word on survivors.

The Civil Aviation Administration of China said in a statement the crash occurred near the city of Wuzhou in the Guangxi region. The flight was traveling from Kunming in the southwestern province of Yunnan to the industrial center of Guangzhou along the east coast, it added.

Villagers were first to arrive at the forested area where the plane went down, sparking a blaze big enough to be seen on NASA satellite images. Hundreds of rescue workers were swiftly dispatched from Guangxi and neighboring Guangdong province.

The plane was carrying 123 passengers and nine crew members, the CAAC said, correcting earlier reports that 133 people had been



on board.

Chinese President Xi Jinping called for an "all-out effort" by the rescue operation, as well as for an investigation into the crash and to ensure complete civil aviation safety.

State media reported all 737-800s in China Eastern's fleet were ordered grounded, while broadcaster CCTV said the airliner had

set up nine teams to deal with aircraft disposal, accident investigation, family assistance and other pressing matters.

The CAAC and China Eastern both said they had sent officials to the crash site in accordance with emergency measures.

State media said local police first received calls from villagers alerting the crash around 2:30 p.m.

(0630 GMT). Guangxi provincial emergency management department said contact with the plane was lost at 2:15 p.m. (0615 GMT).

Chicago-based Boeing Co. said it was aware of the initial reports of the crash and was "working to gather more information." Boeing stock dropped over 8% in pre-market trading yesterday.

Headquartered in Shanghai, China Eastern is one of China's top three airlines, operating scores of domestic and international routes serving 248 destinations.

China Eastern's flight No. 5735 had been traveling at around 30,000 feet when suddenly, just after 2:20 p.m., the plane entered a deep dive at its cruising altitude speed of 455 knots (842 kph), according to data from flight-tracking website FlightRadar24.com. The data suggests the plane crashed within a minute and a half of whatever went wrong.

The plane stopped transmitting data just southwest of Wuzhou, a city of 3 million in eastern Guangxi.

The aircraft was delivered to the airliner from Boeing in June 2015

and had been flying for more than six years. China Eastern Airlines uses the Boeing 737-800 as one of the main workhorses of its fleet — of its over 600 planes, 109 are Boeing 737-800s.

China Eastern online made its website have a black-and-white homepage after the crash.

The accident quickly became a leading topic on China's Twitter-like Weibo platform, with 1.34 billion views and 690,000 discussions. Many posts expressed condolences to the families of victims, while others questioned the planes' safety.

Boeing began delivering the 737-800 to customers in 1997 and delivered the last of the series to China Eastern in 2020. It made over 5,200 of the narrow-body aircraft, a popular, single-aisle commuter plane.

The twin-engine, single aisle Boeing 737 is one of the world's most popular planes for short and medium-haul flights. China Eastern operates multiple versions of the common aircraft, including the 737-800 and the 737 Max.

The deadliest crash involving a Boeing 737-800 came in January 2020, when Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard accidentally shot down a Ukraine International Airlines flight, killing all 176 people on board.

China's last deadly crash of a civilian jetliner was in August 2010. **MDT/AP**

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PUTIN'S WAR

Ukraine rejects Russian demand for surrender in Mariupol

CARA ANNA, LVIV

UKRAINIAN officials defiantly rejected a Russian demand that their forces in Mariupol lay down arms and raise white flags yesterday in exchange for safe passage out of the besieged strategic port city.

Even as Russia intensified its attempt to pummel Mariupol into surrender, its offensive in other parts of Ukraine has floundered. Western governments and analysts say the broader conflict is grinding into a war of attrition, with Russia continuing to bombard cities.

In the capital, Kyiv, a shopping center in the densely populated Podil district near the city center was a smoldering, flattened ruin yesterday after being hit the day before by shelling that killed eight people, according to emergency officials. The force of the explosion shattered every window in a neighboring high-rise. Artillery boomed in the distance as firefighters picked their way through the destruction.

Ukrainian authorities also said Russia shelled a chemical plant in northeastern Ukraine, sending toxic ammonia leaking into the air, and hit a military training base in the west with cruise missiles.

The encircled southern city of Mariupol on the Sea of Azov has seen some of the worst horrors of the war, under Russian pounding for more than three weeks, in a brutal assault that Ukrainian and Western officials have called a war crime.

Strikes hit an art school sheltering some 400 people only hours before Russia's offer to open corridors out of the city in return for the capitulation of its defenders, according to Ukrainian officials.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said it was not clear how many casualties there were.

"They are under the rubble, and we don't know how many of them have survived," he said in a video address, vowing that Ukraine would "shoot down the pilot who dropped that bomb."

Russian Col. Gen. Mikhail Mizintsev had offered two corridors — one heading east toward Russia and the other west to other parts of Ukraine — in return for Mariupol's surrender. He did not say what Russia planned if the offer was rejected.



The destruction caused after shelling of a shopping center, in Kyiv

The Russian Ministry of Defense said authorities in Mariupol could face a military tribunal if they sided with what it described as "bandits," the Russian state news agency RIA Novosti reported.

Ukrainian officials rejected the proposal even before Russia's deadline of 5 a.m. Moscow time (0200GMT) for a response came and went.

"There can be no talk of any surrender, laying down of arms," Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Irina Vereshchuk told the news outlet Ukrainian Pravda. "We have already informed the Russian side about this."

Mariupol Mayor Piotr Andryushchenko also quickly dismissed the offer, saying in a Facebook post he didn't need to wait until the morning deadline to respond and cursing at the Russians, according to the news agency Interfax Ukraine.

The strike on the art school was the second time in less than a week that officials reported an attack on a public building where Mariupol residents had taken shelter. On Wednesday, a bomb hit a theater where more than 1,000 people were believed to be sheltering. At least 130 people were reported rescued Friday, but there has been no update since then.

Mariupol officials said at least 2,300 people have died in the siege, with some buried in mass graves.

City officials and aid groups say Russian bombardment has cut off Mariupol's electricity, water and food supplies and severed its communications with the outside world, plunging the remaining residents into a

chaotic fight for survival.

"What's happening in Mariupol is a massive war crime," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said yesterday.

Multiple attempts to evacuate residents from Mariupol and other Ukrainian cities have failed or only partly succeeded, with bombardments continuing as civilians tried to flee.

Some who were able to escape Mariupol tearfully hugged relatives as they arrived by train Sunday in Lviv in western Ukraine.

"Battles took place over every street. Every house became a target," said Olga Nikitina, who was embraced by her brother as she got off the train. "Gunfire blew out the windows. The apartment was below freezing."

Mariupol is a key Russian target because its fall would allow Russian forces in southern and eastern Ukraine to unite. But Western military analysts say that even if the city is taken, the troops battling a block at a time for control there may be too depleted to help secure Russian breakthroughs on other fronts.

More than three weeks into the invasion, the two sides now seem to be trying to wear each other down, experts say, with bogged-down Russian forces launching long-range missiles at cities and military bases as Ukrainian forces carry out hit-and-run attacks and seek to sever Russian supply lines.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Ukrainian resistance means Russian President Vladimir Putin's "forces on the ground are essentially stalled."

"It's had the effect of him moving his forces into a woodchipper," Austin told CBS on Sunday.

Talks between Russia and Ukraine have continued by video conference but failed to bridge the chasm between the two sides, with Russia demanding Ukraine disarm and Ukraine saying Russian forces must withdraw from the whole country.

Zelenskyy has said he would be prepared to meet Putin in person, but Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that more progress must be made first. He said that "so far significant movement has not been achieved" in the talks.

U.S. President Joe Biden was expected to talk today with the leaders of France, Germany, Italy and Britain to discuss the war, before heading later in the week to Brussels and then Poland for in-person talks.

In Ukraine's major cities, hundreds of men, women and children have been killed in Russian attacks.

Ukraine's prosecutor general said a Russian shell struck a chemical plant outside the eastern city of Sumy just yesterday, causing a leak in a 50-ton tank of ammonia that took hours to contain.

Russian military spokesman Igor Konashenkov claimed the leak was a "planned provocation" by Ukrainian forces to falsely accuse Russia of a chemical attack.

Konashenkov also said an overnight cruise missile strike hit a military training center in the Rivne region of western Ukraine. He said 80 foreign and Ukrainian troops were killed, though the figure could not be independently confirmed. Vitaliy Koval, the head of the Rivne regional military administration, confirmed a twin Russian missile strike on a training center there but offered no details about injuries or deaths.

Russian troops have been shelling Kyiv for a fourth week now and are trying to surround the capital, which had nearly 3 million people before the war. Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko announced a curfew in the capital from Monday evening to 7 a.m. local time Wednesday, telling residents to stay at home or in shelters.

The Ukrainian prosecutor general's office says at least 115 children have been killed and 148 injured. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1956 KING CONVICTED FOR BUS BOYCOTT



Civil rights leader, the Reverend Martin Luther King, has been convicted of organising an illegal boycott by black passengers of buses in the US state of Alabama.

Mr King, 27, was fined \$500 (£178) and ordered to pay an equal amount in costs.

However, his lawyers immediately gave notice of their intention to appeal and the fine was converted into a prison sentence of 386 days, suspended until the appeal hearing.

The 17-week-old boycott in the town of Montgomery was sparked by the arrest of a black woman, Rosa Parks, who refused to give up her seat for a white passenger on 1 December last year.

The town's segregation laws stipulate separate areas on buses for blacks and whites and require blacks to give up their seats for whites if necessary.

Black travellers have long complained of being called racist names by bus drivers and being forced to stand even if seats were vacant in the whites-only section.

Mrs Parks, 42, was not the first to be arrested for refusing to give up her seat but she was a well-known and respected figure in Montgomery's black community.

Four days after her arrest an almost universal boycott of the town's buses by black passengers began which has seriously diminished the companies' revenues.

Mr King was found guilty under an archaic law dating from 1921 designed to break trade union action.

The law carries a maximum penalty of \$1,000 and six months in prison.

But Judge Eugene Carter said he had been lenient with Mr King because he had advocated non-violence.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The bus boycott lasted a total of 382 days. It ended in December 1956 after bus companies throughout Alabama were forced to comply with a US Supreme Court ruling that segregation on public transport was illegal.

Martin Luther King organised non-violent campaigns for equal rights throughout the 1950s and 1960s and was jailed many times.

In August 1963 he made his famous "I have a dream" speech at a march in Washington which attracted more than 250,000 demonstrators.

The following year he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

He survived several attempts on his life but was assassinated in April 1968.

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Accommodate others but not before you do your own thing. Do the proper safety checks before you go out. Do not let others exhaust you financially. Your lover may feel rejected.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
Rewards for past good deeds will highlight your day. Travel should be on your agenda. You can easily wrap up overdue personal legal matters that have caused problems for you.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
You may want to get a little extra rest. You are prone to infections and fevers. Look into alternatives that would better suit both your needs.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
You are best to concentrate on your professional endeavors. Don't jump the gun; you may find yourself getting angry at the wrong person. Take a trip or just spend some quality time with your mate.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
Accomplishment is yours if you direct yourself accordingly. Acceptance is the key. Your stubborn nature will backfire if you give your mate an ultimatum.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Invite friends over. It might be best not to spend your money on luxuries today. Residential changes, renovations, or moves are likely to disrupt your routine.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Competitive games will be your forte. Don't let situations get out of control. Any difficulties with peers could be unnerving. Find a quiet spot where you can work diligently and stay out of the way.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
You can gain valuable cultural knowledge through dealing with foreigners. Try to stay calm and do the best you can. Don't use emotional blackmail on someone you love.

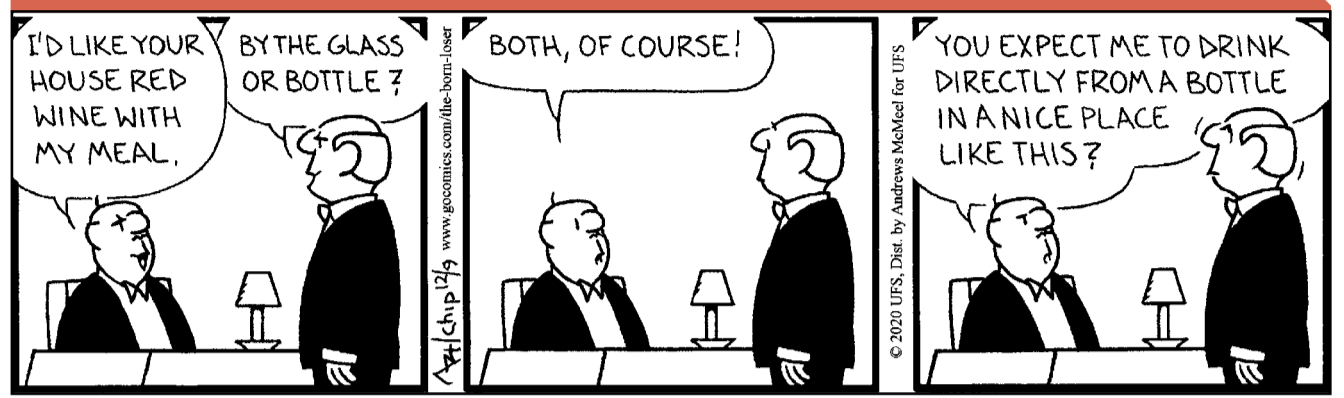
SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Be careful what you say. Try to curb your bad habits. You need to clear up some important personal documents before the end of the year. may find that relationships are not going as well as you'd like.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Be careful that you aren't saddled with the responsibilities of others. Family outings or a quiet stroll through the park will lead to stimulating conversation and a closer bond.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Limitations at work might set you back. Invest wisely. Your personal life could have you tied up in knots. Anger might lead to carelessness and minor injuries.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Exercise your talents and present your ideas to groups you think you can contribute to. Your fight for those less fortunate is not likely to end in sweet victory.

The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



SUDOKU

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

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

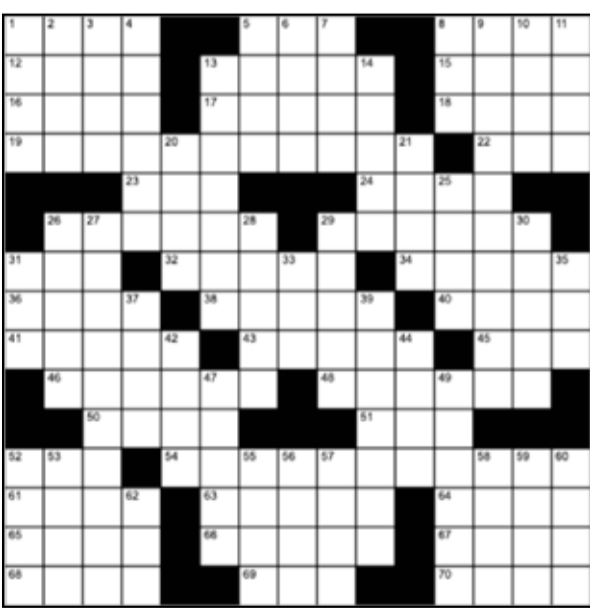
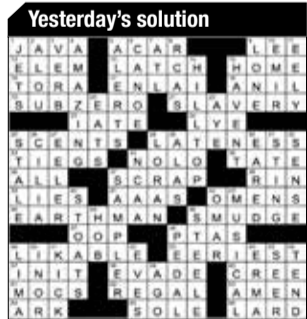
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	1	12	cloudy
Changchun	-5	3	cloudy
Chengdu	12	16	overcast
Chongqing	15	18	overcast
Fuzhou	17	25	cloudy
Guangzhou	22	28	thunderstorms
Guiyang	12	21	showers
Haikou	23	33	cloudy
Hangzhou	7	10	rain
Harbin	-9	4	fine
Hefei	5	7	rain
Nanjing	5	7	rain
Shanghai	7	8	rain
Taipei	20	23	cloudy
Wuhan	5	7	rain
Hong Hong	17	24	rain
WORLD			
Moscow	-3	8	clear
Frankfurt	1	17	clear
Paris	5	18	clear
London	5	19	clear
New York	4	15	overcast

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Prego competitor; 5- CIO's partner; 8- Hairless; 12- Arab League member; 13- Lost a lap; 15- Exceeded the limit; 16- Gola of Israel; 17- One of Chekhov's "Three Sisters"; 18- Capital city of Western Samoa; 19- Outward feature; 22- Narrow beam of light; 23- Penguin's septentrional counterpart; 24- Architect Saarinen; 26- Delicate morsel of food; 29- Book of the Bible; 31- Watched the kids; 32- Pry; 34- Speed contests; 36- Graceful horse; 38- Suggest; 40- Old Iranian ruler; 41- Hue; 43- Adjust to zero; 45- Clean air org.; 46- Musical ineptitude; 48- Emphasis; 50- All over again; 51- Animation unit; 52- Freight weight; 54- Dizzy; 61- Comics canine; 63- France's longest river; 64- Andean country; 65- Exude slowly; 66- Clear; 67- Travel on water; 68- Very, in Versailles; 69- Ring result; 70- Pulitzer-winning biographer Leon;

DOWN 1- Capital of Italy; 2- U.S. trading place; 3- Canter, e.g.; 4- Like much spam; 5- Gillette brand; 6- Thwart; 7- Burt's ex; 8- Youth org.; 9- Draws near; 10- Sci-fi princess; 11- June 6, 1944; 13- Submerging; 14- Palm fruits; 20- Applies friction to; 21- Planetary revolution; 25- Narrow inlets; 26- Fortune-telling cards; 27- Make Roman or Sardinian; 28- ___ is human.; 29- Bridge declaration; 30- Piles; 31- Animal pouch; 33- Suffix with Capri; 35- Doo-wop syllable; 37- City on the Rhine; 39- Slightly crazy; 42- Winder for holding flexible material; 44- Family portrait?; 47- Where there's ___; 49- Slip by; 52- Bender; 53- Scent; 55- Joint problem; 56- Rub; 57- Dixie Chicks, e.g.; 58- With "eye," unerring aim; 59- Ashtabula's lake; 60- Blunt; 62- Some MIT grads;



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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MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

FILM

'THE BATMAN,' STILL NO. 1, CROSSES \$300 MILLION

The "Batman" is still going strong three weeks into its theatrical run, with a tight grip on the top spot at the box office.

Robert Pattinson's debut as the Dark Knight earned an additional \$36.8 million over the weekend, according to studio estimates yesterday [Macau time]. It also slid past the \$300 million mark ahead of projections.

The Warner Bros. film is the highest grossing movie of 2022 and the second highest since the beginning of the pandemic (first place goes to "Spider-Man: No Way Home").

"The Batman," directed by Matt Reeves, also picked up \$49.1 million internationally this weekend, bringing its global total to \$598.1 million. The only place "The Batman" seems to be stumbling is in China where it earned \$12.1 million in its first weekend. But about 43% of cinemas in China are closed due to the pandemic and "The Batman" still did slightly better than "Uncharted" which also opened there this weekend to \$10.3 million.

"The Batman" cost an estimated \$200 million to make, not counting the many millions spent on marketing. But it is al-

AP PHOTO



ready a win for Warner Bros., which took a hit at the box office in 2021 because all of its films were released simultaneously in theaters and on HBO Max.

It also helps that marketplace competition has been slim. The biggest competitor this weekend was the anime "Jujutsu Kaisen 0," which was released by Crunchyroll and Funimation,

and took in an estimated \$17.7 million in its first weekend in North America, where it was playing on 2,748 screens. The Japanese film is based on a best-selling manga and available to watch dubbed or with subtitles.

"Fans made this movie a big hit this weekend," said Paul Dergarabedian, the senior media analyst for Comscore. "It shows

how passionate fans of anime are and how beautiful these films are when presented on the big screen."


The horror film "X" also debuted this weekend on 2,865 screens and is projected to gross around \$4.4 million. Directed by Ti West and distributed by A24, "X" is about a group of people who are terrorized while shooting a pornographic film.

Focus Features launched the crime drama "The Outfit," starring Mark Rylance in 1,324 locations. It made an estimated \$1.5 million. And outside of the top 10, Vertical Entertainment and Roadside Attractions had "Alice," the Sundance breakout about an enslaved woman who gets transported to 1973, which made \$176,120 from 170 locations. **MDT/AP**



BOX OFFICE

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. "The Batman," \$36.8 million. | 6. "Spider-Man: No Way Home," \$3.2m. |
| 2. "Jujutsu Kaisen 0," \$17.7 million. | 7. "Death on the Nile," \$1.7 million. |
| 3. "Uncharted," \$8 million. | 8. "The Outfit," \$1.5 million. |
| 4. "X," \$4.4 million. | 9. "The Kashmir Files," \$1.5 million. |
| 5. "Dog," \$4.1 million. | 10. "Sing 2," \$1.5 million. |


NOTE: Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore.




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RUGBY ACADEMY

The Lusofonia touch

DONALD SHAW, MDT

THE first local Lusofonia touch rugby championship took place at TIS field, Taipa last Saturday. Eight teams entered the tournament, weather conditions were close to ideal and a good crowd was attracted to support and encourage the teams.

Group 1 saw the Cape Verde Blue Sharks, Portugal Wolves, Angola Palancas and Moçambique Panthers drawn together. Portugal Wolves got off to a good start with a 3-1 win over Cape Verde Blue Sharks. Moçambique Panthers and Angola Palancas shared a hard fought 0-0 draw. The Palancas then stepped up a gear to beat the Blue Sharks 1-0, while the Wolves continued their strong start by defeating Panthers 3-1. This setup a winner takes all game between Wolves and Angola Palancas, with the Portugal Wolves emerging victorious by 3-2 to take their place in the Cup final. Moçambique Panthers and the Blue Sharks drew their final group match 1-1.

Group 2 was composed of the Brasil Buccaneers, Goa Kingfishers, Timor-Leste Titans and local favourites Macau Marauders. An entertaining and hard fought set of games ensued with Macau putting down an early marker, winning 4-0 against Timor-Leste Titans. Goa Kingfishers and Brasil Buccaneers drew 0-0. The Buccaneers then turned on the style to win 4-0 against Titans while high flying Macau Marauders were held 2-2 by Goa Kingfishers. The Buccaneers and Marauders then faced each other to decide which team would play Portugal Wolves in the Cup final. The Macau team squeezed through winning 2-1 while the Kin-



gfishers beat the Titans 2-0 to secure 2nd place in the group. The event was staged to introduce new players to touch rugby and add a new tournament to the Macau rugby calendar. There was also an objective to raise funds for Mestre Eddy Murphy as he seeks to overcome serious illness.

The Shield final saw newcomers Cabo Verde Blue Sharks beat Timor-Leste Titans 4-1 while Brasil Buccaneers won the Bowl after drawing 1-1 with Moçambique Panthers, the match then decided by a sprint-off. In the Plate final Angola

Palancas edged past Goa Kingfishers 1-0.

The Cup final between Macau Marauders and Portugal Wolves was keenly anticipated and the match did not disappoint. An intense, fast and skilful game ensued with Macau taking an early lead with two scores before the Wolves hit back to make it 2-1 at half-time. An intercept try secured the match for Marauders, 3-1.

A very entertaining day's rugby and it is hoped that this competition will become a regular feature in the local rugby calendar.



AP PHOTO

FOOTBALL

Inseparable: EPL rivals City, Liverpool to meet in cup semis

STEVE DOUGLAS

MANCHESTER City and Liverpool just can't be kept apart this season.

Engaged in yet another tight tussle for the Premier League title, the two rivals from northwest England must now squeeze an FA Cup semifinal meeting into their busy end-of-season schedules.

Both won away matches in the quarterfinals Sunday — City outlasted Southampton 4-1 and Liverpool edged past second-tier Nottingham Forest 1-0 — and were paired in the draw for the last four.

It means the top two teams in the country will clash in the league at City's Etihad Stadium on April 10 — City currently leads Liverpool by one point in a fascinating title race — and then in the FA Cup semifinals at Wembley Stadium on the weekend of April 16-17.

In and around those games are a pair of Champions League quarterfinal legs for each of them, with City taking on Spanish champion Atletico Madrid and Liverpool facing Benfica.

It could be a make-or-break period of the season, with squad strength and player rotation proving key.

The other FA Cup semifinal match will be a London derby between Chelsea and Crystal Palace, which thrashed Everton 4-0 on Sunday to reach the last four for the first time since 2016.

City is in the semifinals for a fourth straight season but only after a flurry of second-half

goals against Southampton, which again caused problems for Pep Guardiola's team, having already drawn twice in the league.

Frustration was building for City at 1-1 when the visitors won a penalty that was converted in the 62nd minute by Kevin De Bruyne, before goals by substitutes Phil Foden and Riyad Mahrez in the space of four minutes from the 75th added gloss to the scoreline at St. Mary's Stadium.

City defender Aymeric Laporte's own-goal had canceled out Raheem Sterling's opener in the first half.

City has lost in the semifinals in the past two seasons, to Arsenal then Chelsea.

Liverpool's improbable bid for a quadruple of trophies remains on course thanks to Diogo Jota's 78th-minute winner against Forest.

Forest had beaten the previous two winners of the competition — Arsenal and Leicester — in earlier rounds and gave Liverpool a big scare at the City Ground.

Forest left 97 seats vacant for the game to honor the Liverpool fans who died as a result of a crush at Hillsborough Stadium in the FA Cup semifinals in April 1989, when the two sides last met in the competition.

While Forest can now focus on its quest to return to the Premier League for the first time since 1999, Liverpool is still fighting for trophies on three fronts — having already captured the League Cup. **MDT/AP**

OPINION

China Daily
Editorial, China Daily

ANTI-PANDEMIC WORK MUST PUT PEOPLE FIRST

The latest flare-up of novel coronavirus infections on the Chinese mainland, driven by the more transmissible Omicron variant, shows no signs of easing, with 1,947 locally transmitted cases reported by the National Health Commission on Monday. Which means people will continue to be subjected to strict prevention and control measures, including mass nucleic acid testing and targeted lockdowns.

Yet in implementing these anti-pandemic measures, some local public health officials, for fear of being held responsible for any severe resurgence of the virus, have tended to discard the scientific anti-pandemic protocol drawn up by the central authorities and instead doubled down on the already quite tight restrictive measures. In the face of the public health crisis, they have given higher priorities to their own interests than those of the people.

They are doing so despite so much having been learned about the disease as well as the way to handle it as the country enters the third year of its fight against the virus. Actually, only two deaths associated with the virus have been reported over the past more than one year, and both fatalities occurred in elderly patients with underlying diseases.

Thus the abuse of prevention and control measures by some in the name of ensuring the common good is just lazy governance. Such a practice has led to tragedies in some places. A 4-year-old girl died of acute laryngitis recently in Changchun, Jilin province, while waiting for her nucleic acid test result. This happened even after the central government called for timely treatment of all patients requiring urgent care following a similar incident in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, where a pregnant woman was refused admission to hospital in January because her nucleic acid test result had expired, leading to her having a miscarriage.

Such thoughtless application of the pandemic prevention and control measures do a disservice to the national anti-pandemic efforts.

By going to the extreme in epidemic control work, some officials have obviously turned a deaf ear to the central leadership's call to achieve the best results in epidemic control with "minimum costs" to economic activities and people's livelihoods and well-being.

As the country continues its fight against the virus, local officials must bear in mind that all anti-pandemic work must be people-oriented. They must stick to the science-based differentiated and targeted prevention and control approach when trying to contain local resurgences rather than imposing indiscriminate lockdowns and other restrictions on people.

Failure to do so risks undoing all the good that has been achieved so far in the anti-pandemic work.

Indonesia will lift all quarantine requirements for overseas visitors entering the country, its tourism minister said yesterday, two years after it imposed border restrictions due to COVID-19.

Tourism and Economy Minister Sandiaga Uno told reporters that foreign tourists will still be required to have a negative PCR test before entering the country. Quarantine requirements will be lifted from Tuesday, he added.

Indonesia had already implemented a two-week trial of quarantine-free travel in Bali, Batam and Bintan islands, where co-

ronavirus numbers have been falling.

The government is hoping the easing of travel restrictions will boost the number of foreign tourist this year to over 3 million.

This month, Indonesia also lifted the negative COVID-19 test result as a requirement for domestic flights.

Indonesia reported yesterday 4,699 new coronavirus infections and 154 deaths in the last 24-hour period. Case numbers have dropped by more than 90% from their peak in mid-February.



AP PHOTO

SAUDI ARABIA SAYS IT'S NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR HIGH OIL PRICES

ISABEL DEBRE, DUBAI

Saudi Arabia said yesterday that it "won't bear any responsibility" for a shortage in global oil supplies after a fierce barrage of attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels affected production in the kingdom, the world's largest oil exporter.

The unusually stark warning marked a departure from the giant oil producer's typically cautious statements, as Saudi officials remain aware that even their smallest comments can swing the price of oil and rattle global markets.

The salvo of rebel attacks on Saudi Arabia's oil facilities marked a serious escalation in the war, which erupted in 2014 when the Iran-backed Houthis seized the capital, Sanaa, and much of the country's north. Saudi Arabia and its allies responded with a devastating air campaign to dislodge the Houthis and restore the internationally recognized government. Seven years later, the conflict has turned into a bloody stalemate and spawned the worst humanitarian disaster in the world.

The state-run Saudi Press Agency quoted the Saudi Foreign Ministry as saying that the kingdom "declares that it will not bear any responsibility for any shortage in oil supplies to global markets in

light of the attacks on its oil facilities."

The announcement comes as the kingdom remains in lockstep with OPEC and other oil-producing countries in a deal limiting production increases. Gulf Arab oil producers have so far resisted pressure from the Biden administration to pump more crude to help bring down oil prices that have soared amid Russia's war on Ukraine.

Already, gasoline prices have hit record highs around the world. Gas prices in the U.S. topped \$4.25 yesterday, according to auto club AAA, just below the historic record of \$4.33 reached earlier this month.

"The international community must assume its responsibility to preserve energy supplies," the Saudi statement added, in order to deter attacks that jeopardize "the kingdom's production capability and its ability to fulfill its commitments."

The international oil benchmark Brent crude hovered over \$112 a barrel in trading yesterday, up more than 4% for the preceding session. The price remained below a peak of nearly \$140 hit earlier this month, but still some \$15 a barrel more than before the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

On Sunday, Yemen's Iran-backed rebels lau-

nched one of their most intense series of attacks targeting the kingdom's oil and natural gas production, sparking a fire at a petroleum distribution center in the port of Jiddah, the country's second-largest city, and disrupting production at a petrochemicals complex in Yanbu on the Red Sea coast.

The overall extent of damage at the installations remained unclear. The Saudi Energy Ministry acknowledged a temporary drop in oil output at the 400,000-barrel-a-day Yanbu site, without elaborating.

The government condemned the attacks as a threat to the security of global oil supplies "in these extremely sensitive circumstances." Even before Russian tanks rolled into Ukraine, global energy supplies were struggling to keep pace with surging post-pandemic demand. The West's punitive sanctions on Moscow, among the world's largest oil producers and exporters, unleashed more turmoil on the market.

The relentless wave of Houthi strikes began before dawn on Sunday and sporadically pounded sites throughout the kingdom's south and west for hours, with the roar and thump of missile interceptors rattling residents in Jiddah until just before midnight.

MDT/AP

Greece Three factory workers have been reported missing following a powerful explosion at a commercial dynamite factory in northern Greece, while one worker was hospitalized with light injuries, authorities said yesterday. Fire service rescuers were called to the site in a remote area 30 kilometers outside Grevena. Residents of the town heard the explosion, said regional governor Giorgos Kasapidis.

Egypt's Central Bank raised its key interest rate yesterday for the first time since 2017, citing inflationary pressures triggered by the coronavirus pandemic and Russia's war in Ukraine, which hiked oil prices to new records. The move saw the Egyptian pound slip, trading 17.5 to the dollar — from an average of 15.6 pounds for \$1 — after the bank's decision. That is likely to have a heavy toll on poor and middle-class Egyptians.



AP PHOTO

France Three weeks before the presidential election, far-left leader Jean-Luc Melenchon (pictured) rallied tens of thousands of supporters yesterday on the streets of Paris for his biggest campaign event to date — one in which he framed himself as the anti-Emmanuel Macron candidate. Polling in third or fourth place in the presidential vote, Melenchon aimed to unite left-leaning supporters after the brutal stumbles of the French Socialists in recent years.



AP PHOTO

Belgium A car slammed at high speed into Carnival revelers in a small town in southern Belgium yesterday, killing six people and leaving 10 more with life-threatening injuries, authorities said, adding many others were lightly injured. The prosecutor's office, which gave the death toll, also said two local people in their thirties were arrested at the scene in Strépy-Bracquegnies, 50 kilometers south of Brussels. Prosecutors said, in the early stages of their investigation, there were no elements to suspect a terror motive.