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Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre

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RESIDENTS CURRENTLY STUDYING FULL-TIME AT SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES ABROAD WILL BE GRANTED A 50% DISCOUNT ON COVID TESTS

GAMING: SANDS CHINA LOSS WIDENS, LVS BETS ON SINGAPORE'S OPEN BORDERS

RUSSIAN OFFENSIVE IN EAST GATHERING MOMENTUM



Hong Kong's veteran actor Kenneth Tsang has died while in a Covid-19 quarantine hotel in the southern Chinese city, local media reported. Tsang was best known internationally for his action roles in the 2002 James Bond film "Die Another Day," John Woo's "The Killer" in 1989, "Rush Hour 2" in 2001 starring Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker, and 1998's "The Replacement Killers" alongside Chow Yun-Fat and Mira Sorvino. Tsang had been undergoing seven days of quarantine after returning from Singapore on Monday and was found collapsed on the floor of his hotel room by staff on Wednesday. [More on p7](#)

South Korea An army captain and a businessman have been arrested and indicted for allegedly stealing military secrets under the direction of a North Korean spy who lured them with cryptocurrency, Seoul officials said yesterday. Both have been formally charged with violating South Korea's anti-Pyongyang national security law, though authorities haven't established the whereabouts of the North Korean spy, police and prosecutors said.

Philippines An old, quake-damaged bridge collapsed under heavy vehicular traffic in a central Philippine town, killing at least four people who were trapped in about a dozen vehicles that plummeted into the river, officials said yesterday. An Austrian visitor was among the dead, and at least 23 others including his wife were injured in the collapse of the bridge in the coastal town of Loay in Bohol province, police and provincial officials said.

More on backpage



COVID-19
GOV'T SPENT MOP120 MILLION ON QUARANTINE NATS



COVID-19

GOV'T HINTS AT MOP120 MILLION BEING SPENT ON QUARANTINE NATs TO DATE

RENATO MARQUES

THE local government is estimated to have spent around 120 million patacas on nucleic acid tests (NAT) alone, undertaken by those in Macau quarantine since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the coordinator of the local Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Leong Iek Hou, hinted yesterday in response to a media inquiry during the regular weekly briefing from the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center.

When questioned as to how much the government expected to save with a new measure requiring people undergoing quarantine to pay for their NATs, coming into force from May 8, Leong said, without advancing a concrete figure, "the price for the government is the same as for the public, so each NAT done in quarantine hotels that are not paid by the people must be paid by the government." She added, "according to our figures, over 60,000 people have already undergone quarantine periods in Macau and although not all of them have done the same number of tests, we can use this number [eight per person] as a reference and we easily reach a rough calculation of how much the government has already spent."

Such a calculation results in a sum of over 120 million patacas as, according to the latest data, 62,795 people have undergone

RENATO MARQUES



quarantine in Macau up until April 27.

Leong reaffirmed that the purpose of this measure is to save public resources.

She also noted that there is a significant difference between the NATs performed in the community and those performed on people undergoing quarantine. The samples in quarantine are collected door-to-door and also tested separately one-by-one, factors that significantly increase the cost of the test.

The center had explained earlier this week in a statement that, since such expenses result from "travel abroad by the individuals concerned, to make good use of the public purse, payment must be made by the users of the services themselves."

Leong also noted that there are risks involved in the procedures followed in the quarantine hotels.

"If there is a positive case, all sta-

ff need to be isolated and quarantined. All this has been taken into account by the service suppliers. The price of the service has been submitted in public tenders and different suppliers have presented similar prices," she added.

DEFINING NUMBER OF NATs

When questioned by the Times as to why a similar number of NATs need to be undertaken during the current, shorter quarantine periods, when compared with previous occasions, when the quarantine period was longer, Leong explained that the number of isolation days is not a decisive factor in the number of NATs to be performed.

"It does not have a direct relation with the number of days in medical observation. It has mostly to do with the area where the person comes from and the risk in that area. For people coming from higher-risk areas,

we do more tests than to others coming from lower-risk areas," Leong said. She added, "From most areas of the mainland we do

five tests, for others, we do eight. Additionally, the frequency of the testing is related to the need to have as early as possible detection of an infection. If we do more tests, we can spot an infection at an early stage."

Leong also noted that, currently, even in cases where people need to undergo eight NATs, the frequency is the same as for those who need to do five: one test per day.

"Even in the cases of eight tests, these are concentrated mostly on the first seven days of quarantine, and less on the end. This is done according to scientific data and aims to reduce the risk of infection and outbreak," she further explained.

THREE OUT OF FOUR APPLICATIONS APPROVED UNDER DOMESTIC HELPERS' SCHEME

A total of four applications have been received under the new scheme that allows the entry to Macau of people from the Philippines to perform domestic work, the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center informed yesterday.

Of the four applications received, three have been approved and one has been rejected, Dr. Leong Iek Hou said, noting that the application was refused due to an issue concerning a previous work visa in Macau.

For the time being, the government does not know when these people will travel to Macau but the officials

have said to be coordinating efforts to allocate quarantine rooms for them in the Treasure Hotel - the only quarantine hotel that can receive people coming from foreign countries.

On the same topic, a representative from the Labour Affairs Bureau, Lai Ka Lai, has clarified during the press briefing that employers are not obliged to pay salaries to the foreign workers during the quarantine period.

Lai noted that as it has been previously explained, all workers undergoing quarantine are under a justified leave situation and no salary is due during that period.

March hotel occupancy down 41% from last year

THE number of hotel guests in March has fallen 41.3% year-on-year to 365,000. Mainland guests (269,000) have fallen by 50.2%, while local guests (70,000) have increased 23.6%.

In the first quarter of 2022, the average occupancy rate of guest rooms at hotels decreased by 4.2 percentage points year-on-year to 40.7%.

The number of guests was down 5.6% year-on-year

to 1,372,000, while the average length of stay increased by 0.2 nights to 1.9 nights.

In March, the number of visitors joining local tours fell by 51.6% year-on-year to 1,700. A total of 2,800 Macau residents purchased outbound services through travel agencies, representing a year-on-year decline of 81.4%.

In the first quarter of 2022, the number of visitors joining local tours surged by 92.6% year-on-year to

11,000, while the number of Macau residents purchasing outbound services through travel agencies dropped by 55.8% to 11,000.

Last month, visitor arrivals to Macau totaled 526,912, down 19.6% compared to the previous month. The figure also represents a decrease of 30.2% when compared to the same time last year.

70.2% of tourists came from the neighboring city of Zhuhai. LV



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COVID-19

Half-price coronavirus tests in quarantine for students abroad

RENATO MARQUES

LOCAL residents currently studying full-time at schools and universities abroad will be granted a 50% discount on the nucleic acid tests (NAT) to be undertaken during the quarantine period on their return to Macau, the coordinator of the local Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Leong Iek Hou, announced yesterday during the regular weekly briefing from the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center.

The discount measure comes following the announcement earlier this week that, from May 8, those undergoing quarantine in Macau will need to pay 250 patacas for each NAT obtained during quarantine. The measure imposes a total testing cost of 1,250 patacas (for five tests) for those arriving from several regions



of the mainland and 2,000 patacas (for eight tests) for those arriving from abroad or from Hong Kong or Taiwan.

According to Leong, the discounted NAT price for students is not a government measure but a contribution from the pri-

ate companies that perform the NAT sampling and testing. The companies have decided to reduce costs for these students under their corporate social responsibility schemes.

To access the scheme, the students need to submit an

application that will be certified by the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) to ensure they are eligible for the discount. If approved, they will pay only 1,000 patacas for the eight tests required during the medical observation period.

"The discount is done by the entity, not by the government. As far as we know there are no restrictions on the number of students that can enjoy this discount as long as they are eligible and their situation has been verified by the DSEDJ. But we reaffirm that this applies to full-time students that are residing abroad for that purpose only and does not apply to people traveling abroad for any other reasons," Leong said.

More information on how students can apply for the certification required to access the discount will be published at a later date.

IAM TO COLLECT USED FURNITURE AT 60 LOCATIONS

To make it easier for residents to dispose of large items of unwanted furniture, the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) will designate 60 temporary collection points for this type of waste in different areas of Macau. The collection points will operate from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. on May 1 to 7. 50 of the sites are located in the Macau Peninsula, six in Taipa and four in Coloane. The IAM appeals to residents to dispose of waste at the designated times and places, so as not to jeopardize the safety of pedestrians and vehicles.

GOV'T OFFERS FREE LRT THREE-DAY PASSES TO FLY-IN AIR MACAU TOURISTS

The government is pulling out all the stops to attract tourists from mainland China, offering free Light Rapid Transit (LRT) three-day passes to tourists flying into Macau on Air Macau flights. The destination shown on a boarding pass must have MFM printed, indicating an incoming passenger. The LRT pass will allow holders to make unlimited trips on the transportation system in the three days following its activation. It can be redeemed at the Tourist Enquiry Center and the Air Macau Ticketing Counter at the Macau International Airport.

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**SPORTS DAY
IN HAC SA ON
LABOR DAY**

A sports day will be held at Hac Sa Beach Park from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. this Sunday, the Labor Day public holiday. Recreational and sporting activities will be arranged, including sand-stacking competitions, water sports, beach ball experiences, beach games and sports. The sand-stacking competition is available on a first-come, first-served basis, with registration on-site and a quota of 16. Interested parties should visit the Sports Bureau's website for details and arrive at the venue by 2 p.m. on the day.

**GOV'T SWIMMING
SEASON TO START
THIS SUNDAY**

The government's swimming season will commence May 1, with rescue personnel and hazard signals available from that date. The government is reminding beachgoers to be mindful of enacted hazard signals to decide whether they should get into the water. If an incident, accident or emergency arises, beachgoers can approach any lifeguard or paramedic for assistance. The government stresses that no open fires, camping or vehicles of any type are permitted on local beaches. The swimming season will officially end on October 31.

**TWO OF FIVE NEW
CYCLONE NAMES
PROVIDED BY
MACAU**

Two of the five new names for tropical cyclones developing on the northwest Pacific and South China Sea have been provided by Macau. The two names are Penha and Peilou. The former is the name of the hill forming part of the backdrop of the Sai Van and Nam Van Lakes, while the latter is a transcription of the Chinese name of the famous black-faced spoonbills which regularly winter in Macau. They replace Lin Fa and Vong Fong, names which were both suspended due to significant destruction caused by namesake cyclones. The other three names are Narra, from the Philippines; Gaenari from South Korea and Bang-lang from Vietnam. The former two are names of types of bush and the latter is a type of tree.

SAUTEDÉ'S CASE

TOP COURT JUDGE POINTS TO 'INTOLERANCE TO THE SIMPLE EXERCISE OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS'

JUSTICE José Maria Dias Azedo has issued a voting declaration highlighting his disagreement in a judgment, made by a panel of three judges, against former University of Saint Joseph (USJ) academic Éric Sautedé.

In the context of the verdict issued collectively, Justice Azedo outlined his argument in the voting declaration.

In a document the Times has obtained containing the declaration, the judge questioned the grounds on which the higher education institution had dismissed the academic.

He pointed out that, over the years of his service at the university, the political scientist was promoted to higher positions several times, indicating that the institution must have been happy with his work.

"[If] the aforementioned proven factuality even demonstrates a favorable and meritorious evolution of the professional and academic performance of the present appellant [who was promoted] from assistant professor to coordinating professor, [...] it is clear that the termination of his employment contract for 'reasons' that were found to constitute a sudden disagreement and mere intolerance in relation to the simple exercise of fundamental rights expressly consecrated, to which each and every person is entitled (in their private life), without any



RENATO MARQUES

(at least) evidence of any collision with, disrespect for or deviation from (objectively) the 'Statutes' which regulate the defendant's institutional activity," Azedo declared in the document.

USJ lawyer Filipe Regênciia Figueiredo, providing comment to local Portuguese newspaper Hoje Macau on the verdict, considered the TUI decision to be fair, and remarked that, at last, the case was finally over.

When asked to comment on the judgment against him, Sautedé told the Times, "Although, as this was my last try, I have to make

do with that. Given the circumstances, the very fact that there was a dissenting voice within the panel of judges clearly indicates that I had grounds to sue the university."

The academic continued: "Clearly, the law as it exists in Macau does not effectively protect [those] who shoulder the responsibilities of free speech, be they academics or journalists. It also shows that Macau might be a signatory of international covenants and conventions, but these are pointless if they are not transcribed in local laws."

He hopes it will be regarded as

jurisprudence in future cases.

In January last year, the Court of First Instance (TJB) reached a verdict rejecting all claims filed by Sautedé, who accused the institution of unfairly dismissing him.

Sautedé was dismissed from USJ in June 2014, allegedly due to Sautedé's political comments and values, which were not in line with USJ's principle of staying uninvolved in political debates.

In 2014, Sautedé filed a lawsuit against USJ, hoping to be awarded a total of MOP1.3 million in compensation for his unfair dismissal. MOP800,000 of this was to be for material damages and the remainder for damage to his reputation.

In an earlier court hearing, Peter Stilwell, the former USJ rector, stated that Sautedé was dismissed by USJ without just cause due to his political remarks.

USJ regarded his dismissal – even without just cause – to be legal and legitimate. However, Sautedé refuted the claim by arguing that the dismissal was illegal, as it violated the right to freedom of expression and academic freedom, as well as the principle of equality and non-discrimination stipulated in the Basic Law.

The TJB confirmed that Sautedé's dismissal did not violate his academic freedom and freedom of speech, as the USJ rector did not bar him from making political comments at the time. **STAFF REPORTER**

Lawmaker calls on gov't to control commodity prices as new subsidy round introduced

ANTHONY LAM

THE Consumer Rights Protection Law should be used to guard against profiteering or price speculation on daily commodities as the government introduces a new round of consumption stimulus, a lawmaker has said.

The law took effect on New Year's Day this year.

Speaking to local Chinese media outlet Macao Daily News, Lawmaker Si Ka Lon pointed out that Article 20 of the law empowers the Consumer Council of Macao to collect necessary information, which must be current, objective and complete, for the purposes



of investigating the setting of prices when the prices of goods or services are

subject to sharp fluctuations or unjustifiably high. The Composite Con-

sumer Price Index for March is 103.39, a rise of 1.07% year-on-year. The increase was spurred mainly by higher domestic helper salaries, as well as more expensive dining out, gasoline, electricity and air ticket prices.

Worse, according to Si, is the rising commodity prices seen amid the annual cash handout's release in April. The lawmaker cited residents' fears that the upcoming consumption stimulus would further push prices up.

He added that the government had met with the wholesale and retail industries, before and during the last rounds of

consumption stimulus, to try to prevent profiteering and price speculation.

With residents recently expressing fears over price speculation and profiteering, Si hopes the government can take action to prepare in advance against such activities.

The government should also, in Si's opinion, further analyze the effects of its efforts in combating price speculation, unreasonable price hikes and profiteering by what he referred to as "illicit business operators." The enforcement mechanisms for such activities should also be communicated to the public.

Sands China loss widens, LVS bets on Singapore's open borders

LYNZY VALLES

SANDS China has reported a downturn in revenue, with a USD336 million net loss recorded in the first quarter for this year, a greater fall than the USD213 million loss recorded in Q1 last year.

The net loss figure recorded for the first three months of this year is also greater than last quarter's USD245 million loss.

Commenting on the financial report, Las Vegas Sands chairman and CEO Rob Goldstein said that the gaming operator remains confident in the recovery of travel and tourism spending across the company's markets.

"Demand for our offerings from customers who have been able to visit remains robust, but pandemic-related travel restrictions in both Macau and Singapore continue to limit visitation and hinder our current financial performance," he said.

The downturn comes as new Covid-19 cases have emerged in neighboring regions, resulting in tightened border restrictions.

Sands China's revenue for the first quarter stood at just USD547 million, a steep fall from the USD771 million figure for the same period last year, and less than the USD643 million re-



venue posted in the fourth quarter of last year.

"Our results continue to reflect the pandemic's impact: the travel restrictions, suppressed visitation [have affected] our financial results in both Macau and Singapore this quarter," said Goldstein.

Las Vegas Sands generated a positive EBITDA figure for the quarter in Singapore and for the company as a whole, with Singapore opening its borders to vaccinated travelers.

In Macau, current quarter

results were severely affected by the tightened travel restrictions in China, but "customer demand and spend in Macau have proven resilient at the premium mass level from both a gaming and retail perspective in periods when the restrictions have been relaxed," said the gaming chief.

In an earnings call with analysts, Goldstein expressed the group's confidence that it will return to positive cash flow in both Macau and Singapore in the future as restrictions ease and travel and tourism recover.

Macau's borders have been closed to foreign arrivals since March 2020, with only travelers from mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong allowed – part of Macau's adoption of the zero-Covid strategy imposed in Beijing.

For now, Las Vegas Sands considers Singapore to be the "best product that we have in the market today."

"Macau essentially is not available. I think we compete very well anyway in Singapore, but it's unique now," said Goldstein.

GAMING

Lawmakers question division of authority over junket contracts

ANTHONY LAM

MEMBERS of the Second Standing Committee of parliament have questioned the authority governing junket contracts being divided between two different officials, committee president Chan Chak Mo said yesterday.

While considering the draft legislation of the Casino Gaming Operation and Business System bill, colloquially known as the junket operation bill or junkets bill, members of the committee could not understand the junkets bill's proposals to empower the Secretary for Economy and Finance to approve junket operation contracts and the director of the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) to approve the alteration or amendment of such contracts.

Yesterday, while representing the committee, Chan told the press that although procedurally the DICJ director may consult their superintendent, the secretary, prior to the approval of alterations or amendments, the proposal does not designate the secretary as the approving entity. This has raised questions among committee members, who agreed that the secretary should have authority over important matters.

Earlier, Chan disclosed that the committee wanted to cross-reference the junkets bill with the gaming law amendment bill, as it considers them to be closely connected. As of yesterday, however, the committee had not received the second draft of the latter bill.

The committee found discrepancies yesterday between some of the junkets bill's proposals and relevant proposals in the gaming law amendment bill, such as the linkage of a junket operator and a gambling concessionaire, as well as junkets only being able to earn money from commissions. It will thus request that the government make adjustments to remedy these discrepancies.

The level of commissions and calculation methodology will be determined by the Secretary for Economy and Finance. Chan thinks that raising the level of commissions is certain to benefit junket operators, but will increase the burden on gambling concessionaires if the tax rate is not lowered.

It is also proposed that junkets be banned from accepting monetary deposits from any party, but Chan pointed out that the parliament's legal consultants had found discordance between this and the proposals in the gaming law amendment bill.

CHARITY

ART AUCTION TO RAISE FUNDS FOR CAPOEIRA MASTER'S CANCER TREATMENT

THE Albergue SCM will host an art auction tomorrow to raise funds for a capoeira master who is in need of chemotherapy following a cancer diagnosis.

Organized by the Circulo dos Amigos da Cultura de Macau, the art association will commemorate its 38th anniversary by collecting 38 artworks for the auction.

In a press conference yesterday, Albergue announced that the goal is to raise at least MOP100,000 – far less than the total base price of the artworks.

The auction will be held tomorrow from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. at Albergue SCM.

The price of each piece ranges from MOP1,360 to MOP30,000, and the collected funds will be given to the Brazilian capoeira master known as Master Eddy Murphy. Currently, his hospital bill totals over a million patacas.

Murphy, who has been teaching capoeira since 2009, has been diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a bone marrow cancer.

As Murphy is not a Macau resident, he is not eligible for medical subsidies.

According to the Macau4Eddy campaign, he has just finished two months of more aggressive treatments to try to eradicate the cancer, which has led to a 90% reduction in the size of the tumor. To achieve complete remission of the cancer, he is now preparing to undergo a transplant procedure which will help healthy cell tissue grow back, replacing the damaged bone marrow.

A musical event fundraiser was also held recently, with local musicians invited to perform and attendees purchasing tickets for MOP300 each. LV



Artworks to be auctioned off at Albergue SCM

COVID-19

BEIJING ORDERS SCHOOLS CLOSED IN TIGHTENING OF VIRUS RULES

BEIJING is closing all city schools in a further tightening of COVID-19 restrictions, as China's capital seeks to prevent a wider outbreak.

The city of 21 million has already ordered three rounds of mass testing this week, with the third coming Friday.

Yesterday, the city's Education Bureau ordered all schools to end classes from Friday and said it hadn't determined when they would resume.

It also wasn't clear whether schools would be able to offer classes online or allow students facing crucial exams to return to class.

Beijing announced 50 new cases yesterday, two of them asymptomatic, bringing its total in the latest wave of infections to around 150.

Students make up more than 30% of total cases, with clusters linked to six schools and two kindergartens in Chaoyang.

Residents of two housing compounds in Beijing's Chaoyang district were ordered to stay inside and some clinics and businesses shut down.

Beijing has moved more swiftly than many Chinese cities to impose restrictions while case numbers remain low and the scale of the outbreak is still manageable.

AP PHOTO



The goal is to avoid the sort of sweeping measures imposed on Shanghai, where the highly transmissible omicron variant has torn through the city of 25 million. Restrictions confining many Shanghai residents to their homes are now in their fourth week and all schools have been online since last month.

The strict measures have spurred anger and frustration over shortages of food and basic supplies, the inability of hospitals to deal with other health emergencies and poor conditions at centralized quarantine sites where anyone who tests positive — or even has contact with a positive case —

is required to be sent.

The National Health Commission yesterday reported 11,285 new cases across mainland China, most of them asymptomatic and the vast majority in Shanghai, where an additional 47 deaths were reported.

Shanghai city authorities said Wednesday they will analyze the results of new rounds of testing to determine which neighborhoods can safely expand freedom of movement for residents.

Shanghai is seeking to achieve "societal zero COVID" whereby new cases are found only in people who are already under surveillan-

ce, such as in centralized quarantine, or among those considered to be close contacts. That would indicate chains of transmission in the open community have been severed, reducing the risk of new clusters forming from previously undetected sources.

While China's overall vaccination rate stands at around 90%, just 62% of people over 60 have been vaccinated in Shanghai, the country's largest and wealthiest city. Health workers have been visiting elderly residents at home to administer vaccines in a bid to boost that figure, the city's Health Commission said.

The pandemic and stringent lockdown measures have taken a toll on the economy, especially in Shanghai, which is home to the world's busiest port and China's main stock market, along with a large international business community.

A full month's shutdown of the city will subtract 2% from China's annual economic growth, according to an analysis from ING bank earlier this month. Lockdowns could also affect spring planting, driving up food prices, while transport has also been badly hit.

Baiyun Airport, in the southern manufacturing hub of Guangzhou, saw 80% of flights canceled yesterday after "abnormal results" were found while testing airport staff, according to online state media source The Paper.

Travel, particularly between provinces and cities, is expected to fall during next week's May Day holiday. China's international borders have largely remained closed since the COVID-19 outbreak was first discovered in the central city of Wuhan.

Despite Beijing's promises to reduce the human and economic cost of its strict "zero-COVID" strategy, leaders from President Xi Jinping down have ruled out joining the United States and other governments that are dropping restrictions and trying to live with the virus.

All but 13 of China's 100 biggest cities by economic output were under some form of restrictions earlier this month, according to Gavekal Dragonomics, a research firm. **MDT/AP**

COVID-19

Taiwan faces largest outbreak yet

HUIZHONG WU, TAIPEI

TAIWAN, which had been living mostly free of COVID-19, is now facing its worst outbreak since the beginning of the pandemic with over 11,000 new cases reported Thursday.

Cases have been on the upswing since late March. In April, the island's central authorities announced that they would no longer maintain a "zero-COVID" policy like the Chinese government's in which they would centrally quarantine positive cases.

Instead, the government is asking people to quarantine at home if they test positive, unless they show moderate to severe symptoms.

Chen Shih-chung, the island's health minister, announced yesterday they had found 11,353 new ca-

AP PHOTO



ses, along with two deaths. During the daily press briefing held by the Central Epidemic Command Center, he said 99.7% of the cases in the current outbreak either had no symptoms or had mild symptoms.

Chin Siz-rong, a 24-year-old travel agent in Taipei, isn't planning to take any extra precautions because he already got a booster

COVID-19 vaccine and is used to wearing a mask. He said he switched to takeout when he eats out alone, but still will go to restaurants with friends.

"I already got three shots, and now everyone is saying its severity is like a cold. So I'm not too afraid for myself," said Chin.

Most of Taiwan's 858 COVID-19 deaths came from

summer 2021. Until this month, it had been the island's one major outbreak in the pandemic.

Taiwan has been relatively lucky throughout the pandemic, but also has maintained strict border controls with a two-week quarantine on arrival required for all visitors.

Domestically, mask wearing is universal both

outdoors and indoors. Masks are legally required on public transportation and in places like shops and theaters.

In the past few weeks, as cases have ratcheted up, people scrambled to buy up rapid tests with stores selling out in just a few hours. Convenience stores across Taipei were unsure where their next delivery would come from.

Difficulty buying rapid tests is likely due in part to the government's thought throughout the pandemic that there are few benefits to mass testing. The health minister last year said that public funds and medical resources could better be used elsewhere.

That changed with last year's outbreak.

The central government this month said it would work with Taiwanese companies who manufacture tests to ensure that everyone would have access. A system was rolled out Thursday that limits each person to buying one pack

of five tests per trip. Each purchase must be linked to an individual's national ID to ensure that there is no stockpiling.

Experts are worried about the 5 million people who have not been fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

Those who did not complete a full vaccination course are four times more likely to get moderate or severe symptoms compared to those those who have gotten a booster, said Ho Mei-Shang, a vaccine expert in Taiwan who has also worked for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, according to Central News Agency.

Most vulnerable in Taiwan's outbreak this time are children and the elderly. The vaccination rate among people over 75 is 72.5%. However, only 59.1% in the same age group received a booster.

Wang Zi-yu, 78, said she overcame her hesitation and got three doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. **MDT/AP**

China grants first driverless taxi permits to Baidu, Pony.ai

CHINA has granted Chinese internet services company Baidu and a rival autonomous car company, Pony.ai, permits to provide driverless ride-hailing services to the public in Beijing, a significant regulatory step in the country's pursuit of driverless technology.

The permits given to Baidu and Pony.ai allow them to offer rides without a safety driver behind the wheel to take over in cases of an emergency. The new permits still require a safety supervisor to be seated in the front passenger seat.

Baidu said 10 such autonomous cars began offering rides to passengers within a 60-square-kilometer area in suburban Beijing from yesterday.

Baidu already operates an autonomous fleet of taxis in Beijing under its Apollo Go ride-hailing services, but they must have a safety driver behind the wheel.

China has ambitions to



lead autonomous driving technology globally but lags the U.S. in introducing such services. Alphabet's Waymo began offering driverless taxi services in Phoenix, Arizona in 2020.

In 2020, Beijing set a goal for 70% of cars sold in 2030 to have Level 2 and Level 3 self-driving technology. Level 2 is partial driving automation, which means the

vehicle can control steering and speed. Level 3 automation means that the car can detect what's going on around it and drive itself.

Baidu, best known for its search engine and online advertising services, has in recent years invested heavily in autonomous driving and artificial intelligence technology, including automated personal assistants

and AI chips.

The company said in a statement that it has accumulated over 27 million kilometers of road testing over the last nine years with no traffic accidents.

Baidu's Apollo Go autonomous taxi services operate in nine cities across China, including Shanghai, Shenzhen and Guangzhou. **MDT/AP**



HONG KONG

Actor Kenneth Tsang dies in quarantine hotel

VETERAN Hong Kong actor Kenneth Tsang has died while in a COVID-19 quarantine hotel in the southern Chinese city, local media reported.

Tsang was best known

internationally for his action roles in the 2002 James Bond film "Die Another Day," John Woo's "The Killer" in 1989, "Rush Hour 2" in 2001 starring Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker,

and 1998's "The Replacement Killers" alongside Chow Yun-Fat and Mira Sorvino.

Tsang had been undergoing seven days of quarantine after returning

from Singapore on Monday and was found collapsed on the floor of his hotel room by staff on Wednesday, according to the South China Morning Post and other media.

The South China Morning Post said Tsang was 87 but other sources gave his age as 86.

No cause of death was given and the paper said he had tested negative for the virus and had no underlying medical conditions.

In all, Tsang had some 237 acting credits, mainly in Hong Kong film and television productions, and especially in detective and martial arts movies, according to his IMDb page.

Born in Shanghai, Tsang began acting after obtaining an architecture degree at the University of California, Berkeley, making his debut in 1955. In 1969 alone, he was credited in more than 20 movies and continued working up to the time of his death.

Tsang was married three times and had a son with his first wife, Lan Di, and a daughter with his second wife, Barbara Tang. **MDT/AP**

ADVERTORIAL

GREAT TIMES

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PUTIN'S WAR

Russian offensive in east gathering momentum as Guterres surveys destruction

INNA VARENYTSIA & DAVID KEYTON, IRPIN

RUSSIA'S offensive in eastern Ukraine gathered momentum yesterday as the United Nations' chief surveyed the destruction in towns outside Kyiv that experienced some of the worst horrors of the first onslaught of the war.

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres condemned the atrocities visited on towns like Bucha where evidence of mass killings of civilians was found after Russia's retreated from the area in the face of stiffer than expected Ukrainian resistance.

Forced to regroup after failing to take the capital, Russia switched its focus to the vital eastern industrial heartland, where fighting is now picking up pace. Ukraine's military said several areas in the Donbas have come under intense fire in the past day, and satellite images showed new damage from bombardments on the last known pocket of Ukrainian resistance in Mariupol.

Ukrainian authorities warned that civilians who remain in the southeastern port city face dangerously unsanitary conditions, with water and sewer systems not working and bodies decomposing under rubble.

"Wherever there is a war, the highest price is paid by civilians," said Guterres as he visited the bombed out Kyiv suburb of Irpin.

He sought to drive home the devastation, saying he imagined his own family having to flee from bombs falling on their home, and he reiterated how important it was that the war crimes alleged in Bucha and elsewhere be investigated.

"But when we talk about war crimes, we cannot forget that the worst of crime is war itself," he added.

The revelation of mass killings around Kyiv helped to galvanize support for Ukraine in the West, which has slapped sanctions on Russia and sent arms to Ukraine. Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov vowed his country would join others in providing military assistance as he toured another scene of atrocities outside Kyiv,



Borodyanka.

"We cannot be indifferent. We cannot say that this is a Ukrainian problem, we cannot say some people are dying but we are not interested in that," he said.

Bulgaria, under a new liberal government that took office last fall, has cut many of its old ties to Moscow and supported punitive measures against the Kremlin. It has also hosted Western fighter jets at a new NATO outpost on Bulgaria's Black Sea coast.

The visit by the Bulgarian leader comes a day after Russia suddenly cut off natural gas to his country and fellow NATO member Poland, in what was seen as a bid to punish and divide the West over its support for Ukraine ahead of the potentially pivotal battle in the eastern industrial region of the Donbas.

As Russia presses that offensive, civilians again bear the brunt.

"It's not just scary. It's when your stomach contracts from pain," Tatiana Pirogova, a resident of the northeastern city of Kharkiv, said. "When they shoot during the day, it's still OK, but when the evening comes, I can't describe how scary it is."

The General Staff of Ukraine's military said Russian forces were "exerting intense fire" in several places in the Donbas. It said that over the past 24 hours, the Ukrainian forces have repelled six attacks in the region.

The most intensive action was around Donetsk and close to Kharkiv, which lies outside

the Donbas but is seen as key to Russia's apparent bid to encircle Ukrainian troops there.

Luhansk governor Serhiy Haidai said the Russian army also heavily shelled residential areas in his region, also in the Donbas, saying that four civilians died in the past day and four more were wounded.

Satellite photos analyzed by The Associated Press also showed evidence of intense Russian fire on Mariupol in recent days. The images show how concentrated attacks have greatly damaged a central facility at the Azovstal steelworks, the last redoubt of Ukrainian fighters in the key battleground city.

An estimated 1,000 civilians are sheltering along with about 2,000 Ukrainian fighters in the steelworks, a massive Soviet-era complex with a warren of underground facilities built to withstand airstrikes.

Hundreds of thousands of Mariupol's residents have fled, but the city council said that the 100,000 who remain behind face a "deadly danger," at risk of catching diseases like cholera and dysentery because of deeply unsanitary conditions in the city that has largely been reduced to rubble by Russia's siege.

"Deadly epidemics may break out in the city due to the lack of centralized water supply and sewers, the decomposition of thousands of corpses under the rubble, a catastrophic shortage of drinking water and food," the council said on the messaging app Telegram.

Russia, meanwhile, said a city under its control in the

south came under fire.

Ukraine has urged its allies to send even more military equipment so it can continue its fight.

NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said yesterday that "up to date, NATO allies have pledged and provided at least 8 billion U.S. dollars in military support to Ukraine. And we see the importance of further stepping up our support to Ukraine."

While Russia's initial blitz was stunted — and it suffered the humiliating loss of a massive warship — Britain's Defense Ministry said the Russian navy still has the ability to strike coastal targets in Ukraine.

In an intelligence briefing posted yesterday, the ministry says that about 20 Russia naval vessels, including submarines, are currently operating the Black Sea zone.

But the ministry says Russia isn't able to replace the guided-missile cruiser Moskva, which sank earlier this month in the Black Sea, because the Bosphorus Strait remains closed to all non-Turkish warships. Russia also lost the landing ship Saratov, which was destroyed by explosions and fire on March 24.

In addition to its maneuvers on the battlefield, Moscow has also piled on the pressure by leveraging its crucial energy exports.

European leaders blasted the decision to cut off Poland and Bulgaria as "blackmail," saying the move and the Kremlin's warning that it might cease shipments to other countries is a failed attempt to divide the West over its support for Ukraine.

Gazprom said it shut off the two countries because they refused to pay in rubles, as President Vladimir Putin has demanded of "unfriendly" nations.

European countries have balked at Russia's demand for rubles. Moscow has since proposed a system that it says satisfies its demand — but that the Europeans say means they are still paying in either euros or dollars.

"Europe (and) Germany will make payments in euros and others may pay in dollars, and not in rubles," Germany's Economy Minister Robert Habeck said yesterday. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1978 AFGHAN COUP REBELS CLAIM VICTORY



The new rulers of Afghanistan have announced that almost the whole of the leadership of the ousted regime is dead.

Two days ago, they declared President Mohammed Daoud, 68, had been killed — along with his brother Mohammed Na'im — for refusing to pledge allegiance to the new left-wing government.

This was followed by a bloodbath in the capital, Kabul, with reports of streets littered with bodies.

Kabul Radio broadcast the announcement saying the vice president, defence minister, interior minister and commander of the air force had all been killed in fighting.

General Abdul Kader, a former vice-commander of the air force, stated over the radio that a "military revolutionary council" had taken control.

Police loyal to the former president have been rounded up and students wearing red scarves have been seen directing traffic in the streets.

Travellers to the area say a massive purge of Daoud supporters is underway with people being rounded up and shot all over the country.

The coup was led by young officers in the army and air force, most of whom were trained in the Soviet Union. Sources in Kabul believe it was engineered and supported by Moscow to preserve its influence in the area.

The late President Daoud had ruled Afghanistan since 1973 when he ousted his brother-in-law King Zahir Shah, with the help of Soviet-trained officers.

But gradually he removed these men from positions of power and declared himself to be aligned to neither East nor West — yet still collected aid from both.

The present uprising was sparked off two weeks ago by the murder of Mir Akbar Parcham, leader of the Parcham Party backed by Moscow.

Daoud ordered the arrest of other leading figures of the Parcham Party in an anti-Communist campaign that led to this week's bloody coup.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

Noor Mohammed Taraki emerged as Afghanistan's new president. He brought in Marxist reforms and aligned the country more closely with the USSR.

In September 1979, Taraki was ousted and his hardline deputy Hafizullah Amin took power. The Soviet Union then sent in troops on the advice of the KGB, Amin was executed, and the Soviet-supported Babrak Karmal became president. After a long and devastating war with guerrilla opposition forces — the mujahideen — the last of the Soviet troops left Afghanistan in 1989.

In 1992 an alliance of guerrilla factions took Kabul with Burhanuddin Rabbani as its interim president. The Taliban declared themselves rulers of Afghanistan in September 1996 and imposed a puritanical form of Islamic law in the two thirds of the country they controlled.

They were ousted in late 2001 with the help of US and British air strikes after refusing to hand over Osama Bin Laden. In April 2002 the former king Zahir Shah returned but said he would make no claim to the throne.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19
Risks will not be profitable. Don't let coworkers get wind of your ideas or they might try to take credit for your hard work. You may be uncertain about your coworkers.

TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20
You may be frustrated by the way situations are being handled in your personal life. You might find that delays will cause setbacks and upset.

GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21
You may not be happy if members of your family are not pulling their weight. You should be looking at ways to spoil yourself. The distance may make you both appreciate each other more.

CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22
You need to concentrate on solving existing problems. Make amends if you can. Travel and educational pursuits may help alleviate the stress you have been feeling.

LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22
You can meet friends who will let you know how valuable you are. Put financial speculation with family members or friends on the back burner for now. Emotionally you won't see things accurately.

VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Go after your goals. Difficulties with females you live with could cause emotional stress. You will enjoy travel and getting together with peers.

LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22
You have been going through a period of change that has caused problems for you with your loved ones. Such over indulgence due to emotional upset will be your downfall.

SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21
Sit tight. Things aren't as bad as they appear. You may find travel to be most rewarding. You would be wise to socialize with as many people as possible.

SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21
Ask others to help, or you may feel that a burden is weighing you down. Concern yourself with legal matters and formulating contracts rather than finalizing your objectives.

CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Put your efforts into job advancement. Make a point of working on yourself. Situations you can't change should be forgotten for the present.

AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Be cautious not to get involved in office chatter that will cause problems for others. Difficulties at an emotional level may be likely. Someone you work with may be trying to make you look bad.

PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20
Opportunities to learn important information will surface through discussions with peers or seminars you attend. An older member of your family may have left you with a pressing situation.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

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

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

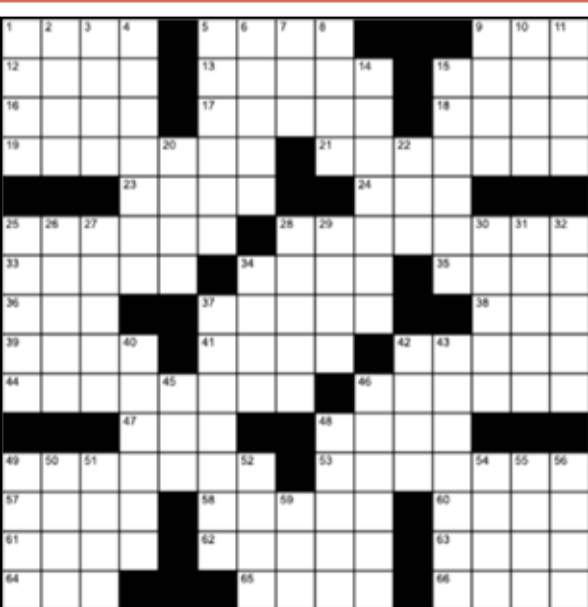
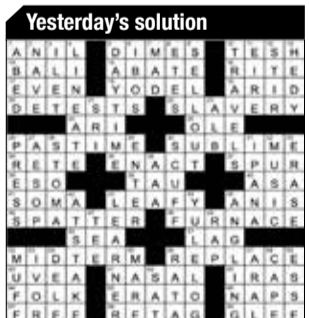
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	7	21	cloudy
Changchun	2	19	cloudy
Chengdu	15	24	rain
Chongqing	17	27	cloudy
Fuzhou	19	29	rain
Guangzhou	25	31	thunderstorms
Guiyang	14	20	showers
Haikou	25	34	cloudy
Hangzhou	13	17	rain
Harbin	-1	18	cloudy
Hefei	9	18	cloudy
Nanjing	10	19	cloudy
Shanghai	13	18	overcast
Taipei	23	28	rain
Wuhan	10	21	overcast
Hong Kong	25	29	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	1	11	overcast
Frankfurt	8	20	overcast
Paris	8	19	showers
London	4	13	overcast
New York	6	17	clear

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- String tie; 5- Bay; 9- Paris possessive; 12- Baseball family name; 13- Due (to); 15- Warm up; 16- Tidy, without fault; 17- ___ evil...; 18- Charisma, atmosphere; 19- Censure; 21- Subsiding; 23- Graph line; 24- Fur scarf; 25- Faultfinder; 28- Disorderly; 33- Bowling alley button; 34- Commedia dell'___; 35- Nice notion; 36- Former measure of length; 37- Finely ground meal of grain; 38- Mama's boy; 39- Wet septet; 41- Royal Indian; 42- Correct; 44- Enticing; 46- Undeveloped seeds; 47- Gerund suffix; 48- Citrus coolers; 49- Recurring every fourth day; 53- Confident; 57- Prod; 58- Trials; 60- Italian wine city; 61- Wife of Osiris; 62- Group character; 63- Stink; 64- Give one star, say; 65- Poet Teasdale; 66- Matron;

DOWN 1- Judge's seat; 2- Muffin topper; 3- It may be floated; 4- Make obsolete; 5- Vast; 6- 1936 Olympics star; 7- Contend; 8- Sicilian resort; 9- Feng ___; 10- Acquire through work; 11- Booty; 14- Male turkey; 15- Thick woven straw mat; 20- Leave; 22- "You've got mail" co.; 25- Summit; 26- Noted Civil War biography; 27- Religion of the Muslims; 28- Tine; 29- Sewing case; 30- Ford flop; 31- Sierra ___; 32- Advances; 34- Lawyer Dershowitz; 37- Warship; 40- Steeples; 42- At any time; 43- Condiment; 45- Explosive stuff; 46- Potemkin setting; 48- Bogie, e.g.; 49- Witty remark; 50- Bear up there; 51- Not "fer"; 52- Takes home; 54- On or towards the Mediterranean, for example; 55- Bit of gossip; 56- Greek goddess of victory; 59- Doo-wop syllable;



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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DRIVE IN

LIAM NEESON KILLS DOWN 'MEMORY' LANE

JAKE COYLE,
MDT/AP FILM WRITER

MEMORY" is an interesting title for the latest Liam Neeson thriller. Do you remember the last Liam Neeson thriller? Or the one before that? Who was it that got took in that one? It began getting hard to tell these films from one another years ago, and yet they've kept coming. "Key & Peele" only seems more prophetic for making the actor's name plural. "Liam Neesons" is right. He contains, and kills, multitudes.

"Memory," which opens in theaters Friday, doesn't much alter the formula but makes for a brutal and bleak variation on the Liam Neeson theme. It casts a broader, more interwoven noir tapestry set around the Texas borderlands, with an ensemble cast including Guy Pearce, Monica Bellucci, and Ray Stevenson. If you come to "Memory" hoping Neeson is going to growl one-liners like "Commit THAT to memory!" or "If memory serves me correctly, you're toast!" — you may be surprised to find a movie less interested in such action-star heroics than it is something murkier and more cynical.

Does that make it good? Well,



Scot Williams (left) and Liam Neeson in a scene from "Memory"

I wouldn't go that far. The filmmaking, by Martin Campbell, the British director of thrillers both glossy ("Casino Royale") and gritty ("Edge of Darkness"), lacks the texture and sense of place that could have made "Memory" (much of which was shot in Bulgaria) something more than a throwaway. But the performers — Neeson and particularly Pearce — don't phone anything in.

Neeson plays an El Paso, Texas,

assassin named Alex Lewis who tilts more toward bad guy territory than most of the actor's protagonists. Of course, though, Alex has a moral compass that won't tolerate certain things. He smashes one guy's head against the bar for his rude behavior toward a prostitute. And he won't kill kids. When Alex refuses to kill a 13-year-old girl (Mia Sanchez), a crime syndicate seeking to cover up a child trafficking ring comes after him. At the

same time, Alex is beginning to experience early onset Alzheimer's. That, curiously, only seldom affects his mission to protect the girl and bring down the syndicate, but it does make Alex even bolder; his life is fading away, anyway.

At the same time, the FBI agent Vincent Serra (Pearce) is trying to bring down the ring and is watching over the very same teenage girl, but his higher-ups keep pushing him toward other cases.

Pearce's very presence in a memory-loss thriller is a nod to "Memento." In one scene, when Neeson writes clues on his forearm to help himself remember, you half expect Pearce to grab the pen and give him a few pointers. There's much that's familiar in "Memory," a remake of the 2003 Belgian thriller "Memory of a Killer."

Alex and Vincent form a loose partnership as two men trying to carry out one act of justice in a place without it.

Pearce, sweaty and grungy, steadies "Memory"; it's his film as much as Neeson's. But if anything, they seem like actors who ought to be in something better than this, an often slipshod movie populated largely by stock and half-formed characters — like Bellucci's somewhat ridiculous millionaire, an El Paso mogul pulling strings to cover for her son. There's just enough here to imagine a better, more memorable iteration of "Memory."

"Memory," an Open Road release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for violence, some bloody images and language throughout. Running time: 114 minutes. ★★☆☆

AD

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TASTE OF EDESIA

Fit for a connoisseur

IRENE SAM, MDT

THIS month, **St. Regis Macao's The Manor** is launching monthly wine dinners known as The Connoisseur's Table. French wine connoisseurs will be thrilled in May with the **Rhômantic Bistronomy Wine Dinner**, celebrating the 13th edition of French GourMay. Karen Gaignon from East Meets West Fine Wines will be introducing a varied range of premium wines from Paul Jaboulet Aîné Winery which pairs with the dishes by Executive Sous Chef Michele Dell'Aquila.

The festival features Côtes du Rhône and Côtes du Rhône Villages wines to illustrate gastronomy and the excellence of French regional products. **Paul Jaboulet Aîné** has been a part of the Rhône Valley wine industry for two centuries, beginning with a small plot of land on the hills of Hermitage, before

expanding throughout the region. Today, it encompasses more than 100 hectares of vineyards making wines from the northern and southern Rhône, including Hermitage, Crozes-Hermitage, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Condrieu and Cornas.

Six-course wine dinner at The Manor showcases remium wines from Paul Jaboulet Aîné winery starting with **Paul Jaboulet Aîné Parallèle 45 Blanc**, one of the most recognizable Côtes du Rhone white wines, which is hand-picked and fermented at low temperature. With the fragrance of white flowers and APRICOTS, it is well-balanced on the palate. Another highlight is the Paul Jaboulet Aîné Les Jumelles. A single variety red wine aged for 12 months in French oak barrels, which imparts fresh floral notes and black olives on the nose, velvety richness with earthy notes on the palate, an ideal match with beef and mushrooms. Lastly, guest can taste the

renowned sweet fortified wine of the region, Paul Jaboulet Aîné le Chant Des Griolles, a Muscat Beunes de Venise infused with aromas of exotic fruits, revealing a rich and dense balance of its uniquely sweet flavor profile.

Each wine was meticulously selected to pair with the menu crafted by Executive Sous Chef Michele Dell'Aquila. Prepare to be captivated with gourmet delights such as **Noix De Saint Jacques** paired with one of the Louis XIV favorites, the finest asparagus from Loire valley, Frederic Poupard asparagus. For main course, **Charolais beef le Pithivier** is topped with Rougié foie gras and mushrooms encased in a buttery homemade puff pastry to accentuate the unique flavors of each ingredient. And for the perfect finale, also a renowned favourite of Louis XIV, is the **Chocolaterie de L'Opéra de Olivier de Loisy** with white chocolate mousse, red berries and vanilla.



AD



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OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

US THE ONE THAT DOESN'T WANT TO TALK

In an interview with Voice of America last week, George Friedman, the US geopolitical forecaster and strategist, said that, "I think the reality that China needs to face is that there is no East or West problem, but China and the United States".

He went on to suggest that the US is willing to have a reasonable discussion with China and find a solution, implying that China was not.

While this gets to the nub of the matter in rightly pointing out the crux of the problem is the failure of the two countries to communicate, he wrongly puts the blame for it on China, claiming that it chooses to present the US as hostile for "internal political reasons". For whatever purpose that is misleading, as it is the US that is portraying China as hostile for internal consumption, and it is the actions of the US that demonstrate its hostility, not the imaginings of China.

His argument does not hold water as it ignores the fact that Beijing has repeatedly sought to initiate dialogue, even going so far as to provide Washington with a "Dummy's Guide on How to Ensure Dialogue Is Fruitful" by giving it two lists — one detailing the mistakes the US is making in its relations with China and how to rectify them, lest the US be in any doubt. The second is a list of its core concerns just in case Washington has too much on its plate and has trouble recalling them. These include the Taiwan question, on which the US has been increasingly trying to push the envelope on its commitment to one China. To such an extent that there is growing speculation that it is trying to lure Beijing into a proxy war.

Indeed, the US has become increasingly brazen in displaying the ill-will it harbors toward China, which has had the nerve to successfully follow its own development path avoiding putting the nation in hock to US designs and politics.

Apart from waging a trade war against China, high-ranking US officials have openly called China the primary rival and a strategic adversary of the US, only stopping short of naming China an enemy.

Washington has also targeted Chinese companies that have grown to be multinationals, especially those in the high-tech sector, and banned them from doing business in the US. But this is only the tip of the iceberg compared with the strategic containment and encirclement the US has instigated against China both on the regional level and on China's wider periphery.

Also, in his summary dismissal of an East-West divide, Friedman conveniently ignores Washington's penchant for rallying its Western allies around its anti-China banner and its action-oriented clique-building with them targeting China, as well as its efforts to decouple China from the global system through a process of exclusion.

Washington is clearly not extending the hand of friendship to Beijing with such moves. Nor has it responded in any meaningful way to Beijing's urging that the channels of communication that were shut down by the previous US administration be reopened.

Dialogue is indeed the key to better China-US relations, but it is Washington, not Beijing, that is unwilling to talk.

Higher U.S. menu prices and easing COVID-19 restrictions elsewhere helped McDonald's offset troubled markets like China and Russia in the first quarter.

Revenue rose 11% to \$5.66 billion in the January-March period, topping Wall Street expectations of \$5.57 billion, according to analysts polled by FactSet.

The Chicago burger giant announced in early March that it would temporarily close 850 stores in Russia. It continues to pay its 62,000 employees in the country. It also closed 108 restaurants in Ukraine in February and is paying its employees

there as well.

McDonald's has said it expects to lose \$50 million per month in sales from the Russian store closures alone.

McDonald's spent \$27 million on salaries, leases and supplier payments in Russia and Ukraine during the quarter. The company also said it has \$100 million worth of inventory it will probably dispose of since its restaurants are closed.

Excluding costs in Russia and Ukraine and other one-time items, McDonald's earned \$2.28 per share for the quarter, well ahead of analyst forecasts of \$2.17 per share.



SURVEY: AMERICANS INCREASINGLY SEE CHINA AS A THREAT

DAVID RISING & KEN MORITSUGU, BEIJING

AMERICANS are increasingly seeing China as a world superpower and a threat, though growing numbers perceive it more as a competitor than an enemy, according to a survey released yesterday.

The Washington-based Pew Research Center said that negative views of China reached a new high, with 82% of Americans having either somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable views of the country, a 6 percentage point increase from last year.

About two-thirds of U.S. adults said that China's influence in the world is getting stronger, and two-thirds also consider China's power and influence a major threat to the United States.

At the same time, the proportion of respondents who saw China as an enemy has dropped since January. Currently, 62% of Americans see China as a competitor and 25% as an enemy, while in Ja-

nuary 54% chose competitor and 35% said enemy — almost exactly the same as the prior year.

The shift may be a temporary one influenced by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Laura Silver, a senior researcher at Pew, said it's likely that the war has changed how people define what is an enemy, as opposed to a competitor.

The proportion of respondents who saw China as an enemy has dropped

The survey of 3,581 people was taken from March 21 to 27, about a month into the Russian invasion. The margin of error was plus or minus 2.3 percentage points.

The opposite shift occurred in the share of Americans who called Russia an enemy. Some 70% of Americans now see Russia as an enemy, up from 41% in January, according to Pew.

"With a clearer sense that what Russia is doing demarcates it as an 'enemy,' there has been

a corresponding shift in thinking China is more of a competitor," Silver said.

With China so far refusing to condemn the invasion of Ukraine, Beijing's partnership with Moscow was identified as the most serious problem for the U.S., with 62% of people polled saying it was.

By contrast, only 35% said the tensions between China and Taiwan were a very serious problem for the U.S. China's human right policies were named a very serious problem by 42%, and 26% said mainland China's Hong Kong policies were a very serious problem for the U.S.

Silver said that changes in news coverage and global events probably affect how Americans view China, noting that human rights was a greater concern last year.

"Negative views of China have been high and growing for much of the last four years but what factors seem most salient has ebbed and flowed," Silver said. **MDT/AP**



NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said yesterday that Finland and Sweden would be embraced with open arms should they decide to join the 30-nation military organization and could become members quite quickly. Stoltenberg's remarks came as public support in Finland and Sweden for NATO membership mounts in response to Russia's war in Ukraine. Media speculation in the two countries suggest the two might apply in mid-May.



Britain announced yesterday that it is postponing until the end of 2023 some checks on imports from the European Union that are required under post-Brexit trade rules, citing economic disruption caused by the war in Ukraine. It's the fourth time the U.K. has delayed checks it agreed to as part of its divorce deal with the EU. The two sides have been bickering since Britain left the 27-nation bloc about the new arrangements, with a set of special rules for Northern Ireland proving a particularly tough sticking point that risks sparking a trade war.

Nigerian lawmakers have taken steps to bar the payment of ransoms to kidnapers at a time when thousands are in captivity, including passengers kidnapped during a train attack in late March near the nation's capital. Nigeria's Senate has passed a bill amending the country's Terrorism Prevention Act to bar the ransom payments. It said the amendment will "prevent terrorist groups from laundering money."

HOLIDAY TIMES
 Macau Daily Times will not be published during the holiday. The Times will be back on the stands on Tuesday May 3. However the MDT website will be updated with breaking news during the recess period. We wish our readers, advertisers and friends the best of times.