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" THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN' "



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GALAXY ENTERTAINMENT GROUP'S EARNINGS IN FIRST QUARTER WAS HKD575 MILLION, DOWN 33% YEAR-ON-YEAR AND DOWN 45% FROM PREVIOUS QUARTER

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Hong Kong Cardinal Joseph Zen, the 90-year-old Catholic cleric, was freed on bail Wednesday night following his arrest alongside other former trustees of the 612 Humanitarian Support Fund, which provides assistance to people arrested during 2019 anti-government protests. The former Hong Kong archbishop has not yet commented on his arrest.

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China A passenger jet veered off the runway during takeoff and caught fire yesterday, sending black smoke billowing into the air and injuring more than 30 people. The Tibet Airlines flight with 122 people on board was departing from the southwestern city of Chongqing for a flight to Nyingchi in China's Tibet region. The Airbus A319-115 jet had 113 passengers and nine flight crew on board, all of whom were evacuated.



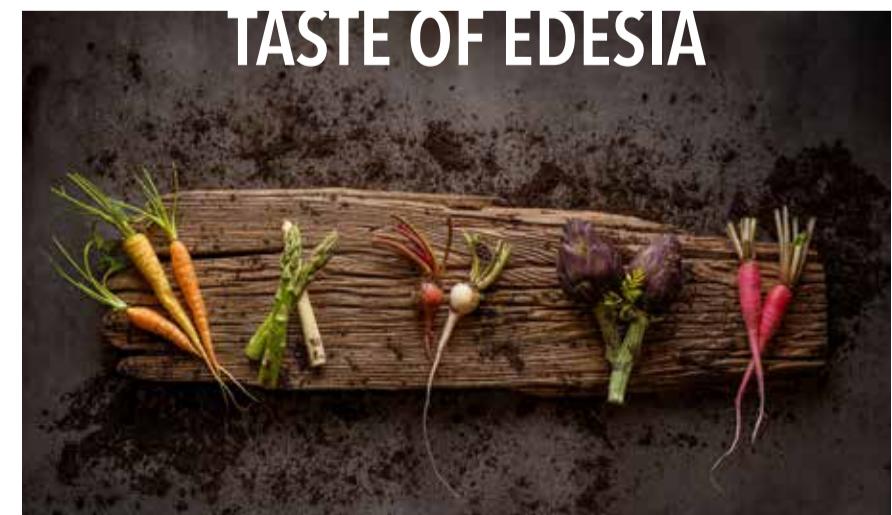
China A Chinese ambassador says China's engagement with South Pacific island countries poses no threat to Australia, responding to fears that Beijing will establish a military foothold in the Solomon Islands. China's envoy to Australia, Xiao Qian, attempted to reassure his host nation in a newspaper opinion piece published yesterday as reports emerged of a planned trip by a high-level Chinese delegation to the Solomons following the completion of a bilateral security pact.

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# MIRROR WIBBOL

Macau looking and waiting for Asian neighbors' experience before reducing quarantine period; stats tell only 1.7% of infections detected after ten days in hotel quarantine ▶ P2

VILELA PUBLISHES PAPER IN NEVADA JOURNAL  
**UNCLEAR CASINO REVERSION PROVISIONS 'PROBLEMATIC'**



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# MACAU WAITING FOR NEIGHBORS' EXPERIENCE BEFORE REDUCING QUARANTINE PERIOD

RENATO MARQUES

LOCAL health authorities are waiting to see the outcome of lowered restrictions in neighboring regions before deciding on similar measures in Macau, as stats prove over 90% of cases detected in hotel quarantine happen in first seven days.

"We know that some neighboring regions have reduced their quarantine periods and we are observing their results of the implementation of the measure in these places," Dr. Leong Iek Hou, coordinator at the local Center for Disease Control and Prevention said yesterday during the regular weekly briefing on Covid-19 in Macau.

She added, "We are evaluating constantly to see if it is possible to require fewer days of medical observation because we also want to reduce the inconvenience for people."

Leong's comments came in response to questions from the media on the need to continue the 14-day quarantine requirement. The questions followed the prior release of statistical data showing that, in the overwhelming majority of cases, imported infections with the virus are detected immediately on arrival or in the first few days of the medical observation period.

AP PHOTO



According to statistics cited by Leong, 75% of all cases detected in Macau since the start of the pandemic were found within the first three days, a figure that grows to 91.8% for cases detected in the first seven days.

Despite admitting that early detection is more common in cases of the Omicron variant, Leong explained that there are different variants active worldwide and that health authorities need to be prepared for all of them and not only the most recently detected strain.

"We need to keep our quaran-

tine requirements [as] the current 14 days because there are other variants besides the Omicron, and different variants have different incubation periods. There are cases [where] we only detected the virus on the tenth day," Leong said, although she could not state the precise number of these cases or when the last occurrence was.

General statistics show that only 1.7% of all infections were detected after the tenth day.

The same official noted that authorities are constantly evaluating the results and data to adjust restriction measures.

## FEWER RESTRICTIONS ON ARRIVALS FROM HONG KONG

From May 16, arrivals in Macau from Hong Kong will be subject to slightly fewer restrictions than currently in place, health authorities have announced.

Although the quarantine pe-

riod remains at 14 days, during the following seven day period of health self-management, people in this category will have their movements less restricted, as their health code will immediately turn green, Leong said.

This means that, after the 14-day quarantine period, people arriving from Hong Kong can immediately go to work, attend school, use public transportation and enter all venues across Macau. The only conditions are three nucleic acid tests (NAT), to be taken on the second, fourth, and sixth days, and a prohibition on travel to the mainland during this period.

If the NAT requirement is not met, their health code will immediately turn yellow as happens for all arrivals in Macau from other locations.

Leong justified this easing of restrictions for the neighboring region by pointing to the slowdown in the number of cases reported in the last few days, which is seemingly enough of a guarantee for local authorities.

Quarantine days	Infections detected (%)
First 3 days	75%
4th to 7th day	16.8%
8th to 10th day	6.4%
11th to 14th day	1.7%

**COVID-19**

# Foreign teachers' special entry scheme not extended to families

RENATO MARQUES

THE special entry scheme established by the government last month to allow foreign teachers entry into Macau to meet the needs of local schools does not include any family members, health authorities clarified yesterday.

Questioned as to whether teachers may bring their families, Dr. Leong Iek Hou, coordinator at

the local Center for Disease Control and Prevention said that "in principle, they cannot. We are only accepting them because they are being considered essential workers." She later added that, as the scheme operates on the basis of case-by-case evaluations, there might be cases in which an exemption could be granted, hinting that this might apply to a teacher with children in their custody who

cannot be left behind.

Leong emphasized that the government has requested that the Education and Youth Development Bureau undertake strict evaluations to ensure that any teachers approved for entry are truly necessary.

The exemption scheme includes teachers, higher-level school administrators and students.

Leong advised that, as of yesterday, local authorities

had received a total of nine applications, of which seven were from teachers and two were from students wishing to study in local universities.

All cases are still under consideration, and none have yet been approved. Providing an update on the number of foreign domestic workers from the Philippines who have applied to enter Macau, Leong said that authorities have received a total of 12 applications,



of which eight have been approved and four have been rejected.

She explained that there are several reasons why

applications might be rejected, including not meeting requirements such as the provision of vaccination records.

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**WHAT IS GAMING AREA?**

# Vilela says doubts remain on casino reversion in bill amendment

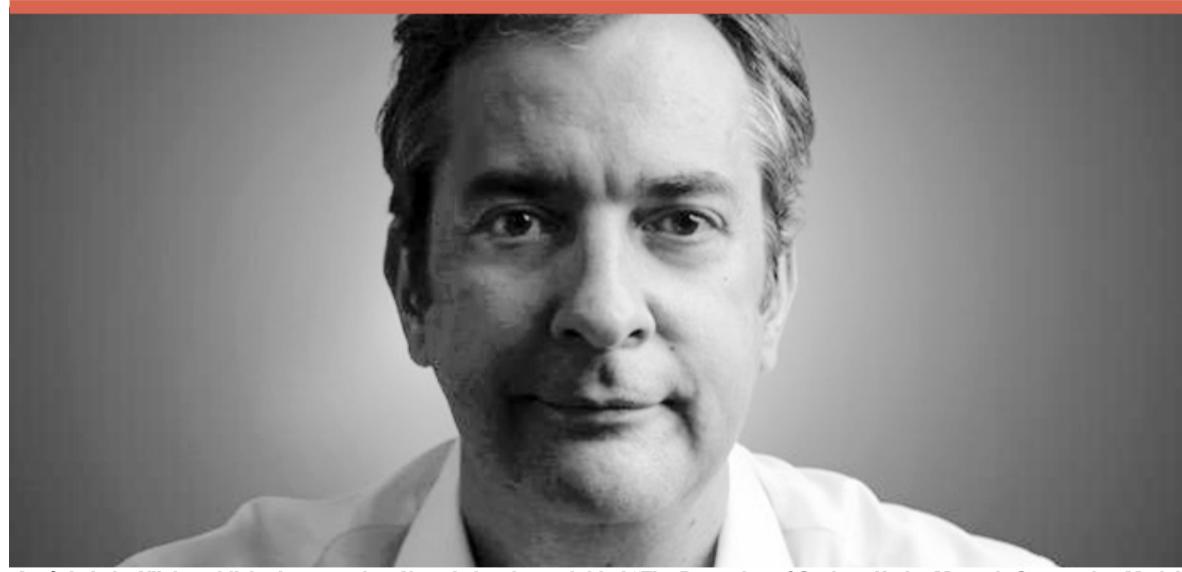
LYNZY VALLES

THE UNLV Gaming Law Journal has this week published a study by a Macau-based gaming lawyer tackling the issue of casino reversion once concessions or sub-concessions expire.

In the paper, titled "The Reversion of Casinos Under Macau's Concession Model," gaming expert António Lobo Vilela emphasizes Macau law's stipulation that the "reversion-transfer" of casinos to the government occurs upon the expiration of licenses.

This reversion gives the government the power to gain possession of certain assets.

The paper further analyzes the Macau law's concept of reversion and the definition of casino, which are central to the implementation of the reversion mechanism for casinos, gaming equipment, miscellaneous items, and other "assets or rights which must revert under a contractual clause"



António Lobo Vilela published a paper in a Nevada law journal titled "The Reversion of Casinos Under Macau's Concession Model"

to Macau authorities.

As cited in the study, the reversion of casinos is not new for Macau's gaming industry, despite the 1961 Gaming Law stating that only the works of exclusive public utility developed by the concessionaire pursuant to contractual obligations will revert to

the state.

This law, however, specifically exempted the "model casino and a luxury hotel" that was to be built before December 31, 1964, with characteristics that were fixed in the notice or call for tender.

Meanwhile, in the draft of the bill amending the local ga-

ming law, the government had already stated what is considered a "casino" for the purpose of reversion. It includes not only the gaming floor, but other areas where operational activities are conducted.

"This includes, for instance, the cages, the places where you

count the money, the areas where you store gaming chips," Vilela explained.

"[The draft law] stated 'other logistic services,' but we don't really know what that [covers]," he added, noting the criterion that is necessary for the operation of games of chance to continue without operational interruption.

This implies that reversion will also occur for other casino-related property. This includes canteens within integrated resorts and laundry services, as gaming staff use the areas together with non-gaming employees.

Surveillance rooms will also revert, as integrated resorts have designed the rooms to monitor activities as a whole, not just within the casino floor area.

Further, the author of the Macau Gaming Law Book has opined that the "lack of registration or registration under strata title makes the reversion rest over an aliquot part of the property and the land itself."

As cited in the study, the Land, Public Works and Transport Bureau (DSSOPT) has stated publicly that "the reversion of the respective properties is clearly defined, and DSSOPT will strictly comply with the concession contract for each unit of land."

The full paper, published in UNLV Gaming Law, will be available on our website.

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# GOV'T AUDITOR SUSPECTS OF RENTAL FRAUD IN CULTURAL FUND LEASE

ANTHONY LAM

**T**WO shareholders of a business incubator had rented the same property twice during the same period in allegations of rental fraud recently uncovered by the Commission of Audit (CA).

In the latest value-for-money audit report on the use of funds by the Cultural Industry Fund (FIC), the CA discovered a suspected rental manipulation and profiteering practice.

According to the CA, a company rented a property in Macau for the price of MOP4.3 per square foot. It then leased out two floors of the property to a brand incubator and marketing entity subsidized by the FIC for the price of MOP10.34 to MOP11.62 per square foot.

After reviewing business re-

gistration records, the CA determined that the two shareholders of the incubator in fact owned 48.15% of shares of the landlord company as well. They were also part of the management of the company.

As such, the CA accused the FIC of "having never handled any related party transactions that saw conflicts of interest."

Of 15 samples with relatively higher support values, nine projects were found to be flagrant examples of related party transactions, involving a total of more than MOP23 million. In five of the projects, totaling over MOP6 million in expenses, the FIC proceeded to recognize the expenses without verifying whether there were related party transactions.

The FIC had required beneficiary companies to declare any

related party transactions in periodic execution reports and final reports.

However, since the aforementioned requirement was waived in July 2017, the auditors of the beneficiary companies' accounts are no longer obliged to examine related party transactions, while the problems revealed in the audit reports of the accounts usually referred to situations that have already occurred, and most of the financed projects did not reach the minimum amount required for the delivery of these reports.

Regarding the legality of expenses, it was found that until June 2020, 12 of the 16 projects that involved subletting did not have approval from relevant property owners. According to local laws, subletting can only take place with the consent of the majority landlords. The CA uncovered FIC spending of over MOP15 million on illegal subletting.

In overall remarks on the FIC's practices, the CA pointed out that there were obvious flaws in its subsidization and supervision mechanisms, but the FIC's management did not rectify them in a timely manner. The lack of records of the execution of relevant mechanisms is also a failing of the FIC's management, the CA added.

## TOURISM TAX SCOPE TO REMAIN UNCHANGED UNDER NEW LAW

**T**HE amended version of the Tourism Tax Regulations will not have its scope of authority altered, a parliamentary committee was assured yesterday.

The Third Standing Committee of the parliament met with government officials on the matter for the first time yesterday.

After the meeting, President Vong Hin Fai of the committee confirmed that the committee was given this assurance. Goods or services sold in hotels or similar establishments (such as fine dining restaurants) are subject to the tax regardless of the mode of cooperation between the owner and the operator. Goods or services sold at health clubs (fitness studios), steam baths, massage parlors and karaoke establishments are taxed.

Citing government officials, Vong said that operators will be taxed if their shopping mall is located in a hotel, but will not be subject to the tax if the mall is not. He remin-

ded the public that although the Tourism Tax is currently suspended in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, it will return afterwards.

The committee also reminded the government to clarify the distinction between in-hotel and out-of-hotel shopping malls.

The bill proposes that the taxable price be the price at which the goods and services are provided, even if all or part of the price is waived, for example via a discount offered. Citing the officials, Vong said that hotels or restaurants must report the price list of goods or services provided to the competent authority, and they will be taxed according to the reported price.

The tax will amount to 5% of the actual price or effective price, which is the same level currently in effect. If the price is lower than that indicated in the price list, the tax is still levied according to the price list, so as to avoid operators evading tax through price reductions. AL

AD

## LAWMAKER CALLS FOR DETAILS ON OUTBREAK PLANS FOR THE VULNERABLE

**W**HILE the government has assured the public that it is prepared for a possible mass outbreak of Covid-19, a lawmaker has requested that the government provide more detail about how members of vulnerable groups will be isolated.

Lawmaker Leong Hong Sai, deputy executive director of the Collective Wisdom Policy Center, has advised the government to provide more detailed information on the arrangements that will be in place for isolating patients who are vulnerable.

For example, he said, contingency plans should detail who will take care of children if single parents fall ill. "Can they stay with their ill parents at the makeshift hospital in this case?" Leong asked.

Moreover, he questioned whether the government will have enough staff to help visually impaired patients in the temporary hospital, as this will be a completely unfamiliar environment for them.



"Basically, will there be sufficient accessible facilities in the makeshift hospital?" he asked.

Furthermore, the government should also work with associations to run workshops on the use of rapid antigen tests to "better prepare people for the procedure of [conducting] the antigen tests by themselves," he explained.

Another area that Leong feels requires special attention is the provision of crucial resources, such as food. He fears that if logistics workers contract the virus and fall ill, the delivery of supplies

may not be possible.

Accordingly, the lawmaker has recommended that the government clarify its contingency plans for logistics issues. Stress tests and accurate budgeting must be run so as to ensure plans are feasible.

On Wednesday, Hon Wai, President of the Social Welfare Bureau, announced that, on compassionate grounds, vulnerable people and their caregivers may stay together at the makeshift hospital even if only one of the two has been diagnosed with the coronavirus. AL

**GAMING**

# Galaxy EBITDA down to HKD575m in Q1

LYNZY VALLES

**G**ALAXY Entertainment Group's (GEG) adjusted EBITDA in the first quarter was HKD575 million, down 33% year-on-year and down 45% from the previous quarter, according to an earnings report released by the gaming operator yesterday.

The group posted net revenue of HKD4.1 billion in the first quarter of this year, down 20% year-on-year and 14% quarter-on-quarter.

"The decrease in adjusted EBITDA is a result of recent outbreaks of Covid-19 in greater China. This resulted in [a] tightening [of the] visitation policy to preserve public health and safety which, unfortunately,

adversely impacted visitation to Macau and, in turn, revenue and profitability," the group's chairman Lui Che Woo said in the statement.

Although the group experienced a modest uptick in patronage over the May Labor Day Holiday, GEG acknowledged that it remains well below pre-pandemic levels. The group, however, believes that

this bodes well for the future recovery of Macau, as it signals pent-up demand for leisure, tourism and travel.

Galaxy Macau saw Q1 net revenue of HKD3.1 billion, down 10% year-on-year and down 4% from the previous quarter, while StarWorld posted net revenue of HKD424 million, down 58% year-on-year and 37% quarter-on-quarter.

Broadway Macau, on the other hand, recorded an up-tick of 7% year-on-year, with revenue of HKD16 million, an increase of 14% from the previous quarter.

The group's total GGR on a management basis in Q1, 2022 was HKD3.4 billion, down 29% year-on-year and 13% quarter-on-quarter. Mass GGR was HKD2.7 billion, down 7% year-on-year and 12% from the previous quarter.

Currently, the group is focused on the development of its Phase 4, which is already under way, following the completion of Phase 3.

"We see the premium market evolving, with this segment preferring higher quality and more spacious rooms. Cotai Phase 4 is an integrated resort for the next generation, which will complete our ecosystem in Cotai," the group said.

**CRIME**

## FORMER VIP ROOM STAFFERS CAUGHT EXCHANGING FAKE CHIP

**T**WO former employees of a casino VIP room that ceased operations have been detained by the Judiciary Police (PJ) after attempting to exchange a forged gaming chip for cash at a cashier of a casino in Cotai, a PJ spokesperson informed.

The case occurred on May 5 around 4 a.m. when the first suspect, a 40-year-old male resident approached the casino cashier trying to exchange the gaming token with a facial value of HKD100,000 for cash.

The fake chip was immediately spotted by the cage staff that call the PJ.

At the time, a second suspect, a 32-year-old man that drove the first man to the casino fled the scene but the PJ detained him at a takeaway drinks store where he is now working the following day.

To the PJ the first suspect said that he did not know that the chip was false, claiming to have found it lost in the street.

The second suspect told the PJ a very different story, saying that the first suspected had lured him to help to exchange the chip, offering him a reward of HKD10,000.

The PJ later found out that the two men were friends and that they were former staff members at a casino VIP room, a reason that led them to believe that they had plenty of knowledge to understand that the chip was a forgery. The PJ also believes that they were acting together to attempt to defraud the casino of HKD100,000. RM

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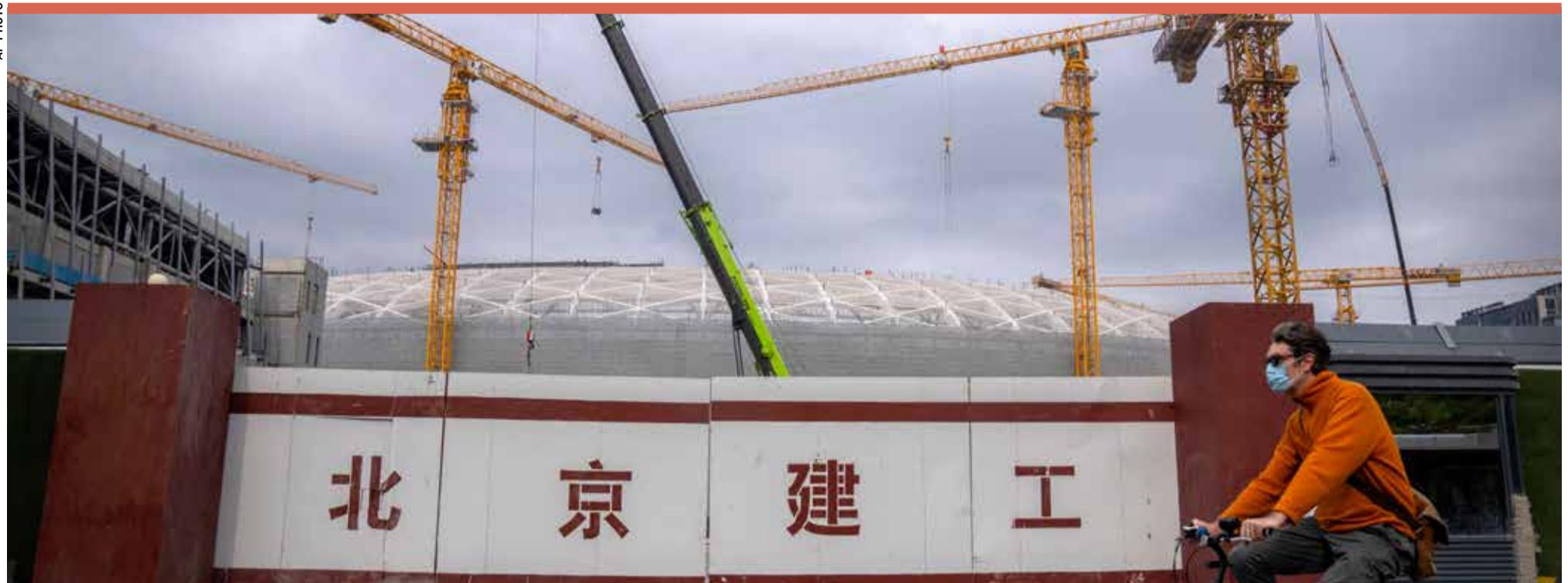


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**ANALYSIS**

# CHINA FIGHTS ECONOMIC SLUMP, STICKS TO COSTLY 'ZERO COVID'

JOE MCDONALD, BEIJING

**C**HINA'S leaders are struggling to reverse an economic slump without giving up anti-virus tactics that shut down Shanghai and other cities, adding to challenges for President Xi Jinping.

The ruling Communist Party has declared its "zero-COVID" goal of preventing all infections takes priority over the economy. It is a decision with global implications and comes despite warnings by experts including the head of the World Health Organization that the goal might be unattainable.

"We don't think it is sustainable," the WHO director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said Tuesday.

China kept infection numbers low until early this year with a strategy that shut down cities, but entailed soaring costs. Beijing has switched to "dynamic clearing" that seals buildings or neighborhoods if infections are found. But with thousands of new cases of the highly infectious omicron variant reported every day, that keeps most of Shanghai's 25 million people at home. Big parts of Beijing and other cities with tens of millions of people also are closed.

That is disrupting manufacturing and hampering the global flow of goods from smartphones to iron ore, increasing inflation risks in the United States and Europe. Consumer spending is weak, chilling Chinese demand for imports.

The ruling party is promising tax refunds and other aid to struggling entrepreneurs that Beijing counts on to create jobs and wealth. Premier Li Keqiang, the

No. 2 leader, warned last week the employment situation is "complex and grim."

On Wednesday, Li called during a Cabinet meeting for officials to focus spending and credit policies on preventing job losses, state TV and the official Xinhua News Agency reported. They gave no details of possible new initiatives.

Despite promises of aid, forecasters say economic growth in the current quarter will fall as low as 1.8% over a year ago from an anemic 4.8% in the last quarter. Growth for the full year is forecast as low as 3.8%, below the ruling party's official 5.5% target and less than half of 2021's 8.1% expansion.

The Chinese government is willing to make some sacrifices on the economy in the short term to trade for long-term growth," said Nomura economist Ting Lu. However, he said, "achieving 'zero COVID' is quite challenging, because omicron is more infectious."

A foreign ministry spokesman on Wednesday defended China's approach as realistic.

China's strategy is "not to pursue zero infection but to control the epidemic situation in the shortest time at the lowest social cost," said Zhao Lijian. "The vast majority of people in most areas in China live and work normally."

Complaints about food shortages and other hardships and videos posted online showing people in Shanghai and other areas arguing with police have been deleted by censors.

Public frustration and economic losses add to complications

for Xi ahead of a ruling party congress in October or November at which he is expected to try to break with tradition and award himself a third five-year term as leader.

Xi, the most dominant Chinese leader since at least the 1980s, still is expected to secure another term. But experts say rivals might gain leverage to trim his powers: "Supporters of market-style economic reforms also want to roll back policies that favor state industry and tighter control of the private sector, China's economic engine."

and Jilin in the northeast and Guangzhou and Shenzhen in the south.

In the central city of Zhengzhou, the Xiao Nan Guo restaurant closed May 4 but still is paying its workforce of 100, according to an employee, Wang Huiqin. She said business was down about 40% before restaurants in the city of 13 million people were told to stop providing dine-in service.

"If the situation lasts for a few weeks, the company can handle it," said Wang. "If it lasts longer, there will be problems because the costs will be too much."

In Shanghai, most businesses have been closed since late March at an estimated cost of tens of billions of dollars a month in lost activity.

Cargo volume at the Port of Shanghai, the world's busiest, is down 30%. Economists say foreign customers are looking for non-Chinese suppliers that might be more likely to deliver but charge more.

"This will add further to stagflation risk this year" in Western economies, said Tommy Wu of Oxford Economics, referring to a scenario of rising prices and falling economic activity.

Export growth in April sank to 3.7% over a year earlier from March's 15.7%. Imports crept up 0.7%, in line with the previous month's growth below 1%.

China was the only major economy to grow in 2020 after Beijing shut factories, shops and offices nationwide to fight the virus. The ruling party declared victory after a few months and reopened the economy.

Last year, Xi's government shifted back to long-range plans that include trying to reduce excessive real estate debt. That triggered a plunge in construction and housing sales in mid-2021.

In a sign of the intensity of economic pain, Beijing faces appeals from foreign companies that usually avoid questioning official policy for fear of retaliation.

The American Chamber of Commerce in China says its members want a "more optimal balance" between disease prevention and business.

More than half of 121 companies that responded to an April 29-May 5 survey have delayed or reduced investment, according to the chamber.

"Members don't see any light at the end of the tunnel," said the chamber chairman, Colm Rafferty, in a statement.

At a May 5 meeting, party leaders appeared to reject such appeals and the "living with the virus" stance adopted by other governments.

Relaxing virus-control measures will lead to "large-scale infections, serious illness and deaths" and "seriously affect" the economy, they said in a statement. To shut down debate, it said "all sectors of society" should "unify their thoughts and actions" with party leaders.

Instead of giving up their growth target to pursue "zero-COVID," party leaders "want both," said Larry Hu and Xinyu Ji of Macquarie Group in a report.

"Zero-COVID at the cost of surging unemployment is a hard sell for China's top leaders, especially in such a year of significant political importance," they wrote.

This week, the industry ministry told local governments to help entrepreneurs pay rent, utilities and other expenses. It warned the "production situation isn't optimistic."

"We urgently need to take further effective measures," a ministry statement said. **MDT/AP**

**Premier Li Keqiang, the No. 2 leader, warned last week the employment situation is 'complex and grim'**

Wrangling over the cost of anti-virus strategies gives "an opening to his factional opponents" with "deeper ties to business sectors," said Diana Choyleva of Enodo Economics in a report. "They are more attuned than Xi and his supporters to the impact of zero-Covid on the economy and on middle-class citizens."

In a sign private industry is weakening, 4.4 million companies closed last year while only 1.3 million new enterprises opened, down from 13.8 million in 2019, according to Choyleva.

COVID restrictions have closed factories or suspended access to manufacturing centers for autos, electronics and other industries including Changchun

AP PHOTO



In this image made from video broadcasted by North Korea's KRT, Kim Jong Un wears a face mask on state television during a meeting acknowledging the country's first case of Covid-19

## COVID-19

# North Korea confirms first outbreak, Kim orders lockdown

KIM TONG-HYUNG  
& HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

**N**ORTH Korea imposed a nationwide lockdown yesterday to control its first acknowledged COVID-19 outbreak after holding for more than two years to a widely doubted claim of a perfect record keeping out the virus that has spread to nearly every place in the world.

The outbreak forced leader Kim Jong Un to wear a mask in public, likely for the first time since the start of the pandemic, but the scale of transmissions inside North Korea wasn't immediately known. A failure to slow infections could have serious consequences because the country has a poor health care system and its 26 million people are believed to be mostly unvaccinated. Some experts say North Korea, by its rare admission of an outbreak, may be seeking outside aid.

However, hours after North Korea confirmed the outbreak, South Korea's military said it detected the North had fired three suspected ballistic missiles toward the sea. It was its 16th round of missile launches this year, in brinkmanship aimed at forcing the United States to accept North Korea as a nuclear power and negotiate sanctions relief and other concessions from a position of strength.

The official Korean Central News Agency said tests of virus samples collected Sunday from an unspecified number of people with fevers in the capital, Pyongyang, confirmed they were in-

fected with the omicron variant.

In response, Kim called at a ruling party Politburo meeting for a thorough lockdown of cities and counties and said workplaces should be isolated by units to block the virus from spreading. He urged health workers to step up disinfection efforts at workplaces and homes and mobilize reserve medical supplies.

Kim said it was crucial to control transmissions and eliminate the infection source as fast as possible, while also easing inconveniences to the public caused by the virus controls. He insisted the country will overcome the outbreak because its government and people are "united as one."

Despite the elevated virus response, Kim ordered officials to push ahead with scheduled construction, agricultural development and other state projects while bolstering the country's defense posture to avoid any security vacuum.

North Korea's state TV showed Kim and other senior officials wearing masks as they entered a meeting room, although Kim removed his mask to speak into a set of microphones. Still photos distributed by KNCA showed Kim unmasked and sitting at the head of a table where all other officials remained masked.

South Korea's Unification Ministry, which handles inter-Korean affairs, couldn't immediately confirm whether it was the first time state media showed Kim wearing a mask since the start of the pandemic. Kim has previously spoken to huge crowds without a mask as he praised the coun-

try's earlier pandemic response, and his decision to be seen with a mask could be aimed at raising public vigilance.

North Korea, which has maintained strict anti-virus controls at its borders for more than two years, didn't provide further details about its new lockdown. But an Associated Press photographer on the South Korean side of the border saw dozens of people working in fields or walking on footpaths at a North Korean border town — an indication the lockdown doesn't require people to stay home, or it exempts farm work.

The measures described in state media and Kim's declaration that economic goals should still be met could indicate that North Korea is focusing more on restricting travel and supplies between regions, analyst Cheong Seong-Chang at South Korea's Sejong Institute said.

North Korea's government has shunned vaccines offered by the U.N.-backed COVAX distribution program, possibly because they have international monitoring requirements.

Seoul's Unification Ministry said South Korea is willing to provide medical assistance and other help to North Korea based on humanitarian considerations. Relations between the Koreas have deteriorated since 2019 amid a stalemate in nuclear negotiations and the North's increasingly provocative weapons tests.

In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said Beijing is offering North Korea help in dealing with the

outbreak. North Korea has reportedly rejected previous Chinese offers of domestically developed vaccines.

Kim Sin-gon, a professor at Seoul's Korea University College of Medicine, said North Korea is likely signaling its willingness to receive outside vaccines, but wants many more doses than offered by COVAX to inoculate its entire population multiple times. He said North Korea would also want COVID-19 medicines and medical equipment shipments that are banned by U.N. sanctions.

Omicron spreads much more easily than earlier variants of the coronavirus, and its fatality and hospitalization rates are high among unvaccinated older people or those with existing health problems. That means the outbreak could cause "a serious situation" because North Korea lacks medical equipment and medicine to treat virus patients and many of its people are not well-nourished, Kim Sin-gon said.

Ahn Kyung-su, head of DPRKHEALTH.ORG, a website focusing on health issues in North Korea, said North Korea's admission of the outbreak is likely designed to press its people harder to guard against the virus as China, which shares a long, porous border with the North, has placed many of its cities under lockdown over virus concerns.

North Korea will also likely stress lockdowns, although the experience of China's "zero-COVID" policy suggests that approach doesn't work against the fast-moving omicron variant, said

Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Seoul's Ewha Womans University.

"For Pyongyang to publicly admit omicron cases, the public health situation must be serious," Easley said. "This does not mean North Korea is suddenly going to be open to humanitarian assistance and take a more conciliatory line toward Washington and Seoul. But the Kim regime's domestic audience may be less interested in nuclear or missile tests when the urgent threat involves coronavirus rather than a foreign military."

North Korea's previous coronavirus-free claim had been disputed by many foreign experts. But South Korean officials have said North Korea had likely avoided a huge outbreak, in part because it instituted strict virus controls almost from the start of the pandemic.

Early in 2020 — before the coronavirus spread around the world — North Korea took severe steps to keep out the virus and described them as a matter of "national existence." It all but halted cross-border traffic and trade for two years, and is even believed to have ordered troops to shoot on sight any trespassers who crossed its borders.

The extreme border closures further shocked an economy already damaged by decades of mismanagement and U.S.-led sanctions over its nuclear weapons and missile program, pushing Kim to perhaps the toughest moment of his rule since he took power in 2011.

North Korea had been one of the last places in the world without an acknowledged COVID-19 case after the virus first detected in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019 spread to every continent including Antarctica. Turkmenistan, a similarly secretive and authoritarian nation in Central Asia, has reported no cases to the World Health Organization, though its claim also is widely doubted by outside experts.

In recent months, some Pacific island nations that kept the virus out by their geographic isolation have recorded outbreaks. Only tiny Tuvalu, with a population around 12,000, has escaped the virus so far, while a few other nations — Nauru, Micronesia and Marshall Islands — have stopped cases at their borders and avoided community outbreaks.

North Korea's outbreak comes as China — its close ally and trading partner — battles its biggest outbreak of the pandemic.

In January, North Korea tentatively reopened railroad freight traffic between its border town of Sinuiju and China's Dandong for the first time in two years, but China halted the trade last month due to an outbreak in Liaoning province, which borders North Korea. MDT/AP

## PUTIN'S WAR

# Finland moves toward joining NATO amid Russian threats

OLEKSANDR STASHEVSKYI,  
KYIV

**F**INLAND'S leaders yesterday came out in favor of applying to join NATO, and Sweden could do the same within days, in a historic realignment on the continent 2 1/2 months after Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine sent a shiver of fear through Moscow's neighbors.

The Kremlin reacted by warning it will be forced to take retaliatory "military-technical" steps.

On the ground, meanwhile, Russian forces pounded areas in Ukraine's east, including the last pocket of resistance in Mariupol, as part its offensive to take the vital industrial Donbas region, while Ukraine recaptured some towns and villages in the country's northeast.

Finland's president and prime minister announced that the Nordic country should apply right away for membership in NATO, the military defense pact founded in part to counter the Soviet Union.

"You (Russia) caused this. Look in the mirror," Finnish President Sauli Niinisto said this week.

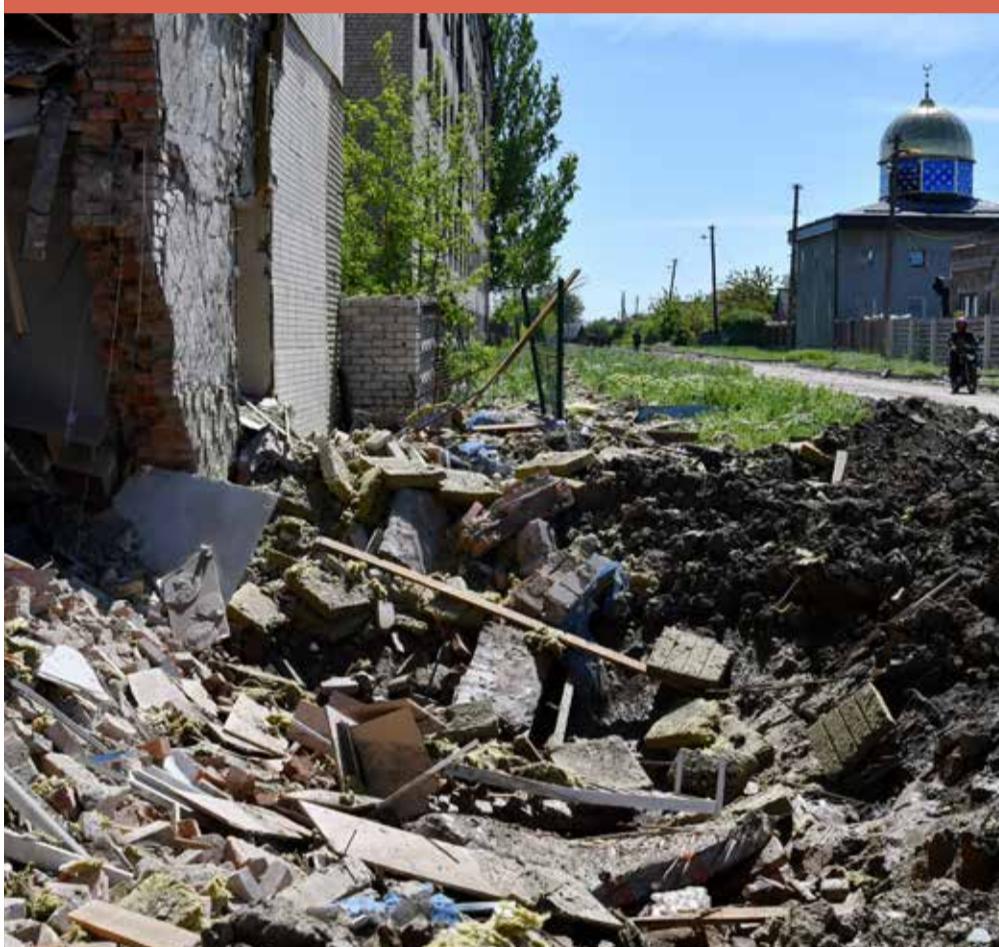
While the country's Parliament still has to weigh in, the announcement means Finland is all but certain to apply — and gain admission — though the process could take months to complete. Sweden, likewise, is considering applying.

That would represent a major change in Europe's security landscape: Sweden has avoided military alliances for more than 200 years, while Finland adopted neutrality after its defeat by the Soviets in World War II.

Public opinion in both nations shifted dramatically in favor of NATO membership after the invasion, which stirred fears in countries along Russia's flank that they could be next.

Such an expansion of the alliance would leave Russia surrounded by NATO countries in the Baltic Sea and the Arctic and would amount to a stin-

AP PHOTO



ging setback for Putin, who had hoped to divide and roll back NATO in Europe but is instead seeing the exact opposite happen.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has said the alliance would welcome Finland and Sweden with open arms.

Russia's Foreign Ministry warned that Moscow "will be forced to take retaliatory steps of military-technical and other characteristics in order to counter the emerging threats to its national security."

NATO's funneling of weapons and other military support to Ukraine already has been critical to Kyiv's surprising success in stymieing the invasion, and the Kremlin warned anew in ominous terms yesterday that the aid could lead to direct conflict between NATO and Russia.

"There is always a risk of such conflict turning into a full-scale nuclear war, a scenario that will be catastrophic for all," said Dmitry Medvedev, deputy head of Russia's Security Council.

## ON THE BATTLEFIELD

While Russia's advance in the Donbas has been slow, Ukraine's military noted that Moscow has

achieved "partial success." Western officials said Russia has gained ground and taken some villages.

Explosions were heard yesterday near the town of Bakhmut, an area of the Donbas that has seen heavy fighting. The Ukrainian military said Russian forces were storming two villages there.

Britain's Defense Ministry said Russia's focus on the Donbas has left its remaining troops around the northeastern city of Kharkiv vulnerable to counterattack from Ukrainian forces, which recaptured several towns and villages around the city.

Still, Russian rocket strikes yesterday killed one person and wounded three in a suburb of Kharkiv, the regional governor said. Kharkiv is Ukraine's second-largest city.

Fighting across the east has driven thousands of Ukrainians from their homes. Evacuees wiped away tears as they carried their children and belongings onto buses and vans to flee.

"It is terrible there now. We were leaving under missiles," said Tatiana Kravstova, who left the town of Siversk with her 8-year-old son Artiom on a bus headed for the central city of

Dnipro. "I don't know where they were aiming at, but they were pointing at civilians."

Ukraine also said Russian forces had fired artillery and grenade launchers at Ukrainian troops in the direction of Zaporizhzhia, which has been a refuge for civilians fleeing Mariupol, and attacked in the Chernihiv and Sumy regions to the north.

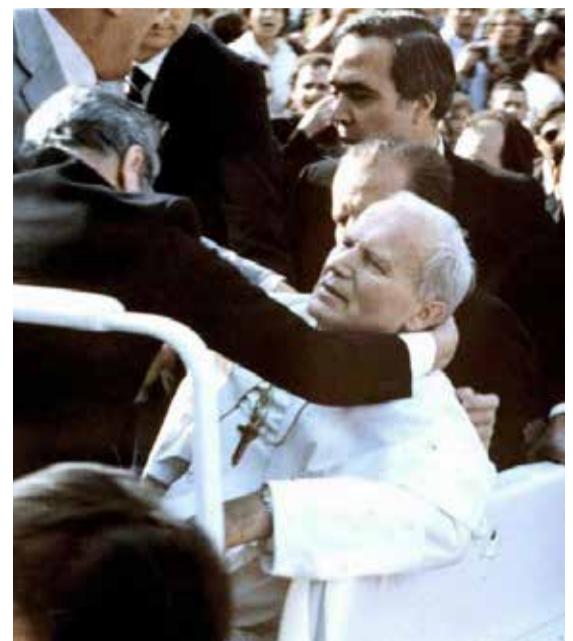
Overnight airstrikes in Chernihiv killed three people, according to local media. The regional governor said the strikes on the town of Novhorod-Siverskyi damaged a boarding school, dormitory and administrative building.

In the southern port of Mariupol, which has largely been reduced to smoking rubble with little food, water or medicine for its inhabitants, Ukraine offered to release Russian prisoners of war in exchange for the safe evacuation of badly wounded fighters trapped inside the Azovstal steel mill, the last redoubt of Ukrainian forces in the ruined city. Russia appeared unlikely to agree to any such swap.

"The occupiers turned Mariupol into a medieval ghetto," Mayor Vadym Boychenko said. MDT/AP

## this day in history

### 1981 THOUSANDS SEE POPE SHOT IN ROME



The Pope has been shot four times as he blessed the crowds in St Peter's Square in Rome.

Surgeons have performed a five-hour operation and say they hope he will make a full recovery.

At about 1715 local time, the Pope was being driven in his Popemobile through a crowd of about 20,000 worshippers when he was hit by four bullets fired from a 9mm pistol some 15 feet away.

Two struck him in the stomach, one in his right arm and the fourth hit his little finger.

Police arrested a 23-year-old man who said he was a Turkish citizen and gave his name as Mehmet Ali Hagca.

He kept repeating: "I couldn't care less about life."

The Turkish press has reported Hagca was jailed for the killing of Turkish newspaper editor Abdi Ipecki in February 1979. But he escaped from prison and left behind a letter vowing to kill the pontiff just before the Pope visited Turkey in 1979.

Many of those who witnessed the shooting in the crowded square burst into tears, or screamed and fell to their knees in disbelief.

The Pope collapsed and was driven at speed into the Vatican complex and from there by ambulance to hospital.

Vatican Radio has appealed to the world to pray for his survival.

The Queen and the Archbishop of Canterbury have expressed their shock and deep sympathy for the Pope and his followers.

Pope John Paul II, formerly Cardinal Karol Wojtyla of Poland, became Pope in 1978. He is the first non-Italian pope in 455 years.

He is also the most widely travelled pontiff in the Vatican's history. Vatican officials have often said in private that they feared for his safety during his frequent contacts with enthusiastic crowds wherever he goes.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

The Pope came out of hospital two weeks later but was re-admitted on 21 June with a lung infection.

He did eventually make a full recovery and went on to visit 50 countries in the first decade of his pontificate.

Mehmet Ali Hagca was sentenced to life imprisonment in July 1981 for the shooting.

The Pope later publicly forgave Agca and even visited him in prison. In June 2000, with the agreement of the Pope himself, Agca was pardoned by the Italian president after serving 19 years.

On his return to Turkey he was re-arrested and forced to serve the rest of his sentence for the killing of a Turkish journalist in 1979. He was released in January 2006.

The Pope died at 2137 (1937 GMT) on Saturday 2 April 2005 after he failed to recover from a throat operation due to breathing problems.

**YOUR STARS****ARIES****Mar. 21-Apr. 19**

Be careful not to get roped into uncertain joint financial deals. Groups you belong to will not only enjoy your company, but they will also share your interests. Don't be disappointed if you don't get your way emotionally.

**TAURUS****Apr. 20-May. 20**

Don't turn down an invitation that could enhance your chances of meeting someone special. They won't get away with it. Your ability to take hold of a situation will surely bring you popularity and leadership.

**GEMINI****May. 21-Jun. 21**

Emotional partnerships may develop through projects you initiate. You can help a close friend find solutions to personal problems. Don't be afraid to start your own small business on the side.

**CANCER****Jun. 22-Jul. 22**

Opportunities for new and exciting relationships will be yours if you get out and join groups. Pleasure trips will be most enjoyable if you take them with that special person in your life.

**LEO****Jul. 23-Aug. 22**

Your ability to come up with good solutions for problems related to work will no doubt help you in getting a promotion. Self-deception about relationships is a problem.

**VIRGO****Aug. 23-Sep. 22**

Eliminate situations that are no longer to your advantage. Pay attention to small but important details. If you haven't already, don't be afraid to start your own small business on the side.

**LIBRA****Sep. 23-Oct. 22**

You may want to take a look at your direction in life. Take time to explain your intentions to loved ones. You need to get out and be an observer.

**SCORPIO****Oct. 23-Nov. 21**

Work quietly at your own goals and forget about situations that you can do little about. Get busy on those home improvement projects that you've been procrastinating about.

**SAGITTARIUS****Nov. 22-Dec. 21**

Changes will not be easy for the youngsters involved. Hassles with close friends or family will put a damper on your day and result in isolation and loneliness.

**CAPRICORN****Dec. 22-Jan. 19**

Do not overexpand if you have your own business. Sit tight. You will be able to borrow money in order to invest. Travel will be good if you are seeking knowledge.

**AQUARIUS****Jan. 20-Feb. 18**

Only offer to do the things you have time for. Luxury items will cost you more than you can truly afford. Acknowledge your lover's needs. You will learn valuable information if you travel today.

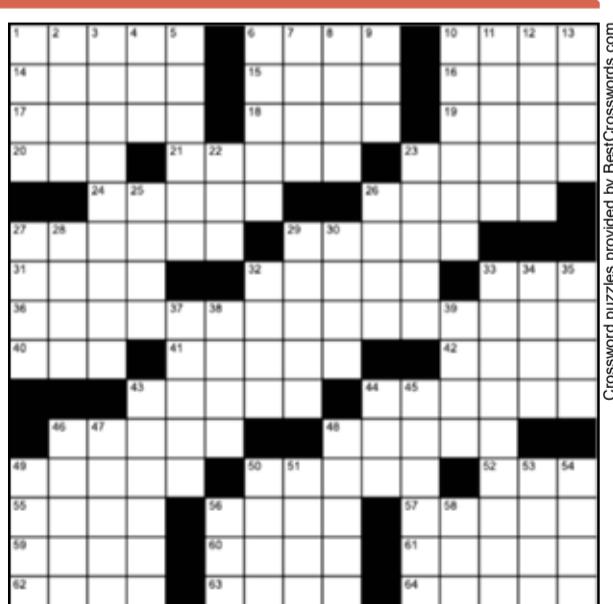
**PISCES****Feb. 19-Mar. 20**

You will impress others with your initiative and ability to accomplish while on short business trips. Your best efforts will come through investments concerning your home.

**CROSSWORD**

**ACROSS** 1- Barbecue leftovers?; 6- To \_\_\_ (perfectly); 10- Soprano Gluck; 14- Fastening device; 15- Cushions; 16- Cat's nail; 17- Actress Anouk; 18- Word that can precede hygiene, tradition and agreement.; 19- Spelunking site; 20- Tachometer abbr.; 21- PC storage medium; 23- Melodies; 24- Prufrock's creator; 26- North American buffalo; 27- Sway; 29- Singly; 31- Kofi \_\_\_ Annan; 32- Absurd; 33- Regret; 36- Make a trade?; 40- Dundee denial; 41- Off-track; 42- Devil's doing; 43- Entertainer; 44- Evaluate; 46- It's a plus; 48- Scoff; 49- Halts; 50- Change a song; 52- Dallas sch.; 55- Peace Nobelist Wiesel; 56- Java neighbor; 57- Dostoyevsky novel, with "The"; 59- Bath powder; 60- Clenched hand; 61- Cassette half; 62- Helper; Abbr.; 63- Away from the wind; 64- Effectiveness;

**DOWN** 1- Rent-\_\_\_; 2- Faux pas; 3- Deformity of the foot; 4- Compass pt.; 5- Coin; 6- To the left, at sea; 7- Poi source; 8- Dutch cheese; 9- Alien's subj.; 10- Allegie; 11- Grassy plain; 12- Connoisseur; 13- Amazes; 22- Spanish title; 23- Fungal infection of the skin or nails; 25- Fall falter; 26- Beethoven's birthplace; 27- \_\_\_ Crunch; 28- Gillette brand; 29- Biscotti flavoring; 30- Neighbor of Cambodia; 32- Wife of Osiris; 33- Bank of a waterway; 34- Israeli weapons; 35- Electric fish; 37- Chair designer Charles; 38- Brown-bag stuff; 39- \_\_\_-majesté; 43- Facet; 44- Singer DiFranco; 45- Man-hater, e.g.; 46- Geographical reference; 47- Defiles; 48- Strike hard; 49- Bristle; 50- Complain; 51- Additional; 53- Champagne name; 54- Mormon state of western USA; 56- Arts deg.; 58- Vegas roller;



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

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## DRIVE IN

# THE PERILS OF PERFECTIONISM IN FINLAND'S 'HATCHING'

LINDSEY BAHR,  
MDT/AP FILM WRITER

If "Petite Maman" left you feeling a little too good about mothers, daughters and empathy, Finland may just have the antidote in Hanna Bergholm's "Hatching," a chilling critique of perfectionism wrapped up in a gruesome body horror.

At the center of it all is a 12-year-old girl named Tinja (Siiri Solalinna). On the surface, she's the picture of a certain kind of Nordic ideal, with long, blonde, stick-straight hair framing her angular features, not unlike a very young Gwyneth Paltrow. When she's not in her leotard and tights for gymnastics, she's usually in a modest, white lacy dress. She even has an angelic voice and demeanor to match. Her life is oppressively lovely.

What Tinja doesn't quite understand, however, is that it's entirely a construction of her perfectionist mother (Sophia Heikkilä), who runs a popular blog called "Lovely Everyday Life." Anyone who's ever followed an "influen-

AP PHOTO



Siiri Solalinna in a scene from 'Hatching'

cer" on Instagram knows the type. It's all frolicking and flower crowns and smiles and pastels mixed with just enough transparency about real human emotion (fear, anxiety, etc) to be "relatable." But of course that's all manufactured, too. Authenticity is the goal, not the natural outcome.

Tinja worships her mother and is eager to please, even as she pushes her to unhealthy and

bloody extremes to ensure that she's the best in the upcoming gymnastics tournament. She has literal bruises and cuts on her hand, but it's the internal ones that are the most insidious and at the heart of where the body horror/creature feature aspect of the film comes in. This might be the time to mention that "Hatching" will likely be triggering for anyone who has ever had disorder

dered eating.

And though one could argue that any film about eating disorders is a body horror, "Hatching" takes it to inventive extremes when Tinja comes across an unusual egg and decides to take care of the creature (designed by Gustav Hoegen) that hatches from it. Think "E.T." meets "Black Swan" and you'll start to understand the strange, grotesque jour-

ney of the film.

The creature starts out very alien and bird-like, something that would have easily fit in an '80s family fantasy like "The Neverending Story" or "Labyrinth." But it, too, will undergo an unsettling transformation that's best experienced rather than described. It's not a friendly presence, either, but Tinja feels both shame for its existence and a responsibility to nurture it. "I hatched it," she says over and over.

The story might not be the most subtle creation, but it does an incredible job at poking holes in the gnawing fear of all perfectionists, especially girls on the verge of puberty, that the pretty veneer is hiding something ugly, or worse. But repression has ugly consequences, too. Even some much-needed empathy and perspective from her mother's boyfriend (Reino Nordin) comes too late for poor Tinja.

"Hatching" is an assured and promising debut for Bergholm with a jaw-dropping ending that may just cement it as a cult classic in the making.

"Hatching," an IFC Films, has not been rated by the Motion Picture Association of America, but it's intense and grotesque imagery and themes are likely more suited to a mature audience. Running time: 86 minutes. ★★★★

AD

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**TASTE OF EDESIA**

# Celebrate sustainability

IRENE SAM, MDT

**F**EATURING the finest sustainably sourced ingredients and wines, **The Manor** launches its latest sustainable dining initiative - an all new six-course menu. Utilising seasonal ingredients, **Chef Michele Dell'Aquila** continues to source for sustainable food producers.

"Our aim is to utilise seasonal ingredients to design a menu that not only tantalises the taste buds, but is also environmentally friendly", Chef Michele explains. Persisting with his philosophy of protecting the environment and supporting social responsibility, Chef Michele insists on the superior integrity of primary sustainable producers worldwide.

Signature dishes include Baby Artichokes from El Tamiso with kombu marinated Hokkaido langoustine, fava beans and herbs from Marius Auda in France. These organic artichokes are from the sunny Padua in Italy and are grown without any pesticides, utilising everything natural while the herbs are from Marius Auda, a company that specialises in traditional gardening since the 60s in France.

A true definition of haute cuisine, Kyoto Snow Crab breeds naturally in low-temperature and nutrient-rich waters inherent to the Sea of Japan yielding a soft, sweet and delicate flesh. Accompanying this delicacy is the Asparagus from Jérôme and Aspa, two producers who follow inimitable production techniques in France that are sustainable and environmentally friendly.

Made with organic flour from Moulin Paul Dupuis, Tategamo-

ri Ark Farm's Egg Ravioli is filled with free-range farming eggs from Japan, Reblochon cheese by Les Frères Marchand, spinach, spring onion and green peas from Eric Roy, Périgord black truffle from Bellorr.

Dover Sole from Prodemar originates from a Spanish company that follows rigorous quality and environmental procedures to ensure its operations are certified environmentally sustainable, served with baby celeriac from Eric Roy, razor clams and vermouth sauce. Vegetables from Eric Roy assures high quality products by managing the soil, understanding the climate and monitoring rotations on generally very short-cycle crops.

'Yukimuro' Snow-Aged A4 Wagyu utilises a 200-year-old technique employed in the wintry region of Niigata, Japan - a traditional snow-covered room to preserve and age produce naturally. This method helps save a lot of energy and the undisturbed process also helps produce higher quality meat with great texture and taste. This delicacy is dressed with black truffle sauce and Suntory's Hakushu 12-year old whisky. Suntory's brand promise is 'to create harmony with people and nature', striving to preserve the environment and ensuring a healthy ecosystem.

The Chocolaterie De L'Opéra sets the mood for a beautiful rest of the evening. Made with 70% Deltora chocolate mousse, almond praline from Valencia and 70% smoked Ma-dong chocolate sauce from France, this chocolatier was the first in the world to dedicate itself to the design and create single-variety couverture chocolate for professionals.



Chef Michele Dell'Aquila (left) and Sommelier David Duan



## OPINION

### China Daily

Editorial, China Daily

## REGIONAL STABILITY THE KEY FOR MARCOS TO TAP OPPORTUNITIES

**Neighbors** facing each other across the sea and partners through thick and thin, China and the Philippines have made joint efforts over recent years to consolidate and enhance their bilateral relations, which has not only brought benefits to the people of both countries, but also contributed to regional peace and stability at large.

Despite the United States' unceasing efforts to drive a wedge between them, the two countries have set a good example in shelving their South China Sea disputes and focusing on common development since incumbent Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte took office in 2016. That provides his successor, Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos, with a clear direction to further strengthen bilateral cooperation.

The congratulatory message President Xi Jinping sent Marcos on Wednesday, immediately after he won the presidential election, indicates the great significance China attaches to bilateral relations.

Son of former Philippine president Ferdinand Emmanuel Edralin Marcos, who had made historic contributions to the founding and development of China-Philippines relations in the 1970s and 1980s, Marcos Jr has every reason to carry forward that legacy.

As President Xi pointed out in his message, both China and the Philippines are at a critical stage of development and their relations enjoy important opportunities and broad prospects. Marcos, who also emphasized that the economy, education and infrastructure construction will be the key areas for his team, is expected to seize the opportunities to maintain the positive momentum of bilateral cooperation, and upgrade the two countries' comprehensive strategic partnership to new heights.

Notably, when US President Joe Biden called Marcos on Wednesday to offer his congratulations, he underscored that he looks forward to strengthening the US-Philippines Alliance. This was a phrase that the US kept repeating to goad the former Benigno Aquino III administration of the Philippines to act as a de facto pawn of Washington in the region. This led to the Aquino III administration sacrificing the Philippines' interests and regional stability for the US' narrow ends.

With his campaign promise of more balanced diplomacy between China and the US, Duterte's winning of the election six years ago showed that Filipinos were fed up of being used as a piece on the US chessboard.

The comparatively stable development of the country despite the great difficulties created by the COVID-19 pandemic since then, should serve to convince Marcos that this is the right choice. There is no sense in him repeating the errors of Aquino, even though the US will do all it can to persuade him to do so.

It is to be hoped that Marcos will not be swayed by any blandishments or coercion on the part of the US and will act on his campaign promise that he would seek "engagement" with China rather than confrontation as that will best serve the interests of his own country and the region.

## VEGAS STRIP RESORT SURPRISES 5,400 WORKERS WITH \$5K BONUSES

Joyous bedlam erupted yesterday (Macau time) at an employee appreciation and awards buffet at The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas when the resort chief executive announced that all 5,400 people who work there will receive a \$5,000 bonus.

"It's amazing!" said Edgar Rives, a cook for nine years in the employee cafeteria, after a round of high-five hand slaps and hugs with dancing co-workers at The Chelsea theater at the Las Vegas Strip property. "It's a big surprise."

The 55-year-old El Salvador immigrant and U.S. citizen said he'll leave it to his wife to decide how to spend the money.

Perhaps half of the resort's workers attended the noontime

midweek event, where executives from Blackstone Real Estate Americas and the Cosmopolitan, including resort President and CEO Bill McBeath, credited them with maintaining "a youthful, exuberant brand" while working through the coronavirus pandemic.

"It's you, every single day, that makes a difference," said Daniel Espino, Cosmopolitan chief people officer.

McBeath noted the resort had donated more than \$9 million to charities during the last seven years.

The Cosmopolitan sits between two other MGM-owned Strip properties: Bellagio and the multi-resort City Center complex.

AP PHOTO



**Sri Lanka** Five-time former Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe will be reappointed in an effort to bring stability to the island nation, engulfed in a political and economic crisis, a party official said. "He is being sworn in as prime minister this evening because a number of members of Parliament have asked him to take over and solve the country's problems," said Vajira Abeywardena, an official of the United National Party, which Wickremesinghe heads.

## TRAVEL IS BACK: DUBAI AIRPORT LOGS BUSIEST QUARTER IN YEARS

ISABEL DEBRE, DUBAI

**DUBAI** International Airport, the world's busiest for international travel, reported yesterday it handled over 13.6 million passengers in the first three months of 2022 — more than double last year's number in a clear sign that a long-awaited travel revival has reached the global aviation hub.

This quarter's passenger count represents the airport's busiest since the virus struck in 2020 and compares to just 5.7 million passengers logged in the same period last year.

In a sign however that long-haul markets have yet to enjoy a full recovery from the pandemic, CEO Paul Griffiths said the airport didn't expect to see transit traffic back to pre-virus levels for another two years at least. Still, flight traffic has improved as nations around the world have loosened COVID-19 travel restrictions such as testing and vaccination rules.

"It's been extremely encouraging," Griffiths told The Associated Press, praising government efforts to keep Dubai's border open, aggressively vaccinate and introduce policies that have attracted an international workforce. "We're now seeing a massive resurgence. ... A whole new

sector of the world's population is starting to look at Dubai as a very credible and attractive place to live and work."

The key east-west transit point, home to Emirates, long the jewel of Dubai's state-linked companies, is expected to handle 58.3 million passengers in 2022.

This year's passenger traffic has so far been driven by the airport's reliable destinations and source markets with large expat populations in Dubai — India, Pakistan and the United Kingdom.

More recently after Russian tanks rolled into Ukraine and the West piled sanctions on the Kremlin, the airport has become one of the few remaining flight corridors out of Russia.

Major American companies have transferred employees from Russia to the United Arab Emirates. The Gulf Arab federation has avoided overt criticism of Russia's war on Ukraine and not enforced sanctions imposed by the West. The UAE also offers three-month multiple-entry visas upon arrival to Russians. Emirates flights between Dubai and Russia have continued.

"Since the tensions in Ukraine and Russia started, Dubai has remained open to people coming from those areas," said Griffiths, saying he couldn't provide a breakdown of passenger

traffic from Russia. "Where others have closed borders, we've remained open."

Griffiths also said that the private jet terminal at Al Maktoum International at Dubai World Central, the Gulf city's second airport, has been "incredibly busy," with a recent 400% spike in traffic. Satellite images show dozens of private jets parked at the terminal.

He declined to elaborate on whether the parked jets had connections to Russia's wealthy trying to leave the country with their assets, saying only:

"We've just allowed everyone to go about their business."

Griffiths sounded optimistic when asked how Dubai's airport was rebounding not only from the pandemic's devastating blow to aviation, but also to travel retail sales.

The Dubai airport's soaring terminals, with water cascades and artificial palm trees, cavernous duty-free stores and luxury boutiques, relies on revenue from retail concessions. As international passenger traffic plunged and Chinese tourists largely vanished, much of that money dried up.

But Griffiths said the tourists who have trickled through the terminals in recent months are big spenders. Demand for luxury goods has remained high in Dubai. MDT/AP

**Greece** is extending a bilateral military agreement with the United States for five years, with officials from the country's center-right government arguing that enhanced alliances within NATO will help stabilize the region rattled by Russia's war in Ukraine and tension in the eastern Mediterranean. The agreement, to be ratified by parliament today, will grant the U.S. military continued access to three bases in mainland Greece together with its long-standing naval presence on the island of Crete. It replaces an annual review of the deal with a five-year rollover period.

**Kosovo** The government formally applied yesterday for membership of the Council of Europe, the continent's top human rights organization. Neighboring Serbia, from which Kosovo seceded after a war in the late 1990s and which doesn't recognize its former province's independence, expressed opposition to the bid. The Council of Europe, or CoE, which has 46 member nations — including Serbia — already has an office in Kosovo to assist with democratic reforms.

**Denmark**'s top prosecuting authority said yesterday that it would seek to have a former defense minister's parliamentary immunity lifted so he could be charged with illegally disclosing "highly classified information." The office of the director of public prosecutions said it would contact Denmark's parliament, the Folketing, regarding the immunity of Claus Hjort Frederiksen. He served as the country's defense minister from November 2016 to June 2019.