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**OPINION PIECE FROM PEOPLE'S DAILY: 72% OF MACAU'S POPULATION SUPPORTS LOCKDOWN, STATES CITY'S APPROACH HAS NOT BEEN SATISFACTORY**

**GOV'T TO ADJUST HOURS OF SOME TESTING STATIONS IN TODAY'S ROUND**

**ANOTHER CASINO LIFER WILL STEP DOWN FROM WYNN MACAU AMID OPERATOR'S EXECUTIVE RESHUFFLE AHEAD OF LICENSE BIDDING**



**Russia** Jailed American basketball star Brittney Griner returned to a Russian court yesterday to face her trial on drug charges as a senior Russian diplomat warned that U.S. criticism of how Russia's handling the case wouldn't help her release prospects. Griner's trial began last week amid a growing chorus of calls for Washington to do more to secure her freedom nearly five months after her arrest. The athlete was detained in February at Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport after vape canisters with cannabis oil allegedly were found in her luggage.



**Ukraine** Foreign analysts say Russia may be temporarily easing its offensive in Ukraine as the Russian military attempts to reassemble its forces for a renewed assault. On Wednesday, Russian forces made no claimed or assessed territorial gains in Ukraine "for the first time in 133 days of war," according to the Institute for the Study of War. The think tank based in Washington suggested that Moscow may be taking an "operational pause," but that it does not entail "the complete cessation of active hostilities."

**German** lawmakers yesterday approved a major package of reforms aimed at boosting the production of renewable power, as Chancellor Olaf Scholz warned that the country has for too long relied on energy supplies from Russia. The government unveiled its 600-page "Easter package" in April, less than two months after Russia's invasion of Ukraine escalated the simmering energy crisis between Moscow and western European neighbors, many of which were buyers of Russian fossil fuels. The government aims to end the purchase of Russian coal and oil this year, and of natural gas by 2024.

More on [backpage](#)

# NOT SHUTTING DOWN

FLORA TANG



Gov't repeatedly denies lockdown rumor, says it has different criteria for determining whether a location should be cordoned off

P2

'THEM'S THE BREAKS'

## BORIS JOHNSON RESIGNS AS UK PRIME MINISTER

AP PHOTO



P8

PEOPLE'S DAILY

# CCP OFFICIAL MEDIA CLAIMS 72% SUPPORT LOCKDOWN IN MACAU

RENATO MARQUES

SOME 72% of Macau's population supports more restrictive measures to contain the Covid-19 outbreak, the People's Daily — the largest newspaper group in China and the newspaper of record of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) — reported on Tuesday (July 5).

In an opinion piece expressing dissatisfaction with the measures taken by the local government to contain the outbreak, the newspaper cites an online survey from an undisclosed source stating that the majority of local people support the implementation of national policies for the containment of outbreaks, namely the full lockdown of cities or metropolitan areas seen in several mainland provinces.

"Macau had made plans, conducted drills, and mobilized resources in advance. So what seems to be the problem? A poll released online on the evening of July 4 revealed some clues: under the question of 'which pandemic prevention method do you support the most', 72% of the surveyed people chose 'the citywide full confinement measure' [lockdown], which gathered a far higher result than the other options," the People's Daily wrote.

The piece continues, "a similar feeling is expressed in the daily press conference [of the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordi-



English website of the People's Daily

nation Center], at which reporters repeatedly ask whether authorities are considering imposing a citywide lockdown. There is a common feeling from everyone that the current pandemic prevention measures are not strict enough, applied [in a timely fashion] and coherent, and this raises many concerns."

Although noting that the strain affecting Macau is not known in China and so presents some new challenges, the article heavily criticizes the decisions made by the local government, saying that "Macau's approach has not been satisfactory."

"Take the outbreak of a cluster in the Four Seasons mall as an

example. The place should have been disinfected, closed and controlled as soon as the first infected person appeared, and detailed tracking should have been carried out to stop the chain of infection, but it seems that [such work] stopped only after finding the link between the infected person and the source," the piece read.

"Even when the reporters asked why the mall was not closed, the officials in charge said they thought it was unnecessary. As a result, more people were infected in that place in the following days until the mall was ordered to close."

Giving another example of how the policies of local government have failed, the same article no-

ted that the number of new cases found in the community is constantly higher than those in the control areas, "indicating that the transmission in the community continues to be frequent and has not been interrupted."

The opinion article also criticized health authorities for failing to prevent a cluster of the virus within the public hospital. This affected several healthcare professionals and other workers from the hospital. Additional infections occurred in a home for the elderly, said to have caused the death of two people.

Praising the decision to combine a series of mass testing for the whole population with self-ad-

ministered rapid antigen testing at home, the article urged government officials to face the problems more precisely, "not taking any chances, not avoiding difficulties, and with a 'firm hand' so the victory against the virus can be achieved in the shortest possible time."

Questioned on the possibility of lockdowns, health authorities have expressed on several occasions that they have no intention, for the time being, of enforcing a general lockdown in the city. The city of Shanghai has been cited as an example where the results of a lockdown were said to be "disastrous" and caused damage that will take a long time to recover from.

At the same time, online rumors continue to spread that a lockdown is imminent and preparations are being made to impose one in the coming days.

Questioned on the topic during yesterday's press conference from the health authorities, the representative of the Public Security Police Force, Lei Tak Fai, urged the population to stop spreading false rumors and fake news online, as the broadcasting or spreading of such rumors during a time of an immediate state of prevention is considered a crime.

Lei also called on the population to not rush to supermarkets to stock up on groceries and other necessities, as there is no plan to enforce a lockdown and the supply of products remains stable.

Earlier, the Civil Protection Operations Centre also issued a statement clarifying that the rumor of an imminent lockdown is a "false rumor on the Internet," calling on citizens not to trust such information.

COVID-19 OUTBREAK

# Gov't has different criteria for locking down different venues

ANTHONY LAM

A public health official admitted yesterday that there exists different criteria for determining whether a location should be locked down when positive cases are detected there.

In past weeks, the government has changed its criteria several times for designating a location as

a red or yellow zone.

In practice, however, some have found the reality slightly different from the criteria announced. For example, the Grand Lisboa Hotel was completely shut off after 13 cases were detected there, but the shopping mall at the Four Seasons Hotel in Cotai was only given similar treatment after the venue-specific

tally passed 40.

The operating suspension of the Four Seasons coincided with journalists slamming the government for not using the same rules for all venues. The lockdown took place about five hours after an official explained that suspending the venue was not necessary because the shops involved had been closed.

Elsewhere, a supermarket was allowed to reopen after brief sanitization following some of its workers having tested positive for SARS-CoV-2.

These different responses have caused some confusion among the public.

Questioned on the matter yesterday, public health doctor Leong Iek Hou of the Health Bureau

(SSM) declared that whether a location is essential to the neighborhood or community is one criterion used when determining whether it should be put under lockdown.

She said that if a location is essential to the neighborhood or community, the health agency will consider allowing it to reopen or operate after a certain standard of clean-

ing and sanitization has been met. A team of temporary workers must also be available because the existing employees will be under quarantine.

"We also consider a location's risk to the community if it remains open," Leong added.

The key to managing infections found in workplaces, she said, is to confine all people inside.

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MASS TESTING

# Gov't to adjust hours of some testing stations for the sixth round

ANTHONY LAM

**E**IGHTEEN SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test (NAT) stations will not be open during the early morning hours in the upcoming round of citywide testing, an official announced yesterday.

Luís Gomes from the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ), which has taken charge of several rounds of citywide testing, made the announcement at yesterday's regular health press conference.

The official announced that seven "caring" stations (for people with special needs) and 11 regular stations will close at 1 a.m. tomorrow, which is the second day of the two-day NAT drive, before reopening several hours later, at 6 a.m. or 7 a.m.

According to previous announcements, each round of testing this week was set to last for 33 hours. In the first two rounds this week, all stations opened at 9 a.m. on the first day and closed at 6 p.m. the next day.

Following yesterday's announcement, all caring stations will open at 6 a.m. today and close at 1 a.m. tomorrow. They will then reopen at 6 a.m. and operate until 6 p.m. tomorrow.

Additionally, 11 regular stations will open at 9 a.m. today and close at 1 a.m. tomorrow. They will then reopen at 7 a.m. and close at 6 p.m. tomorrow.



ANTHONY LAM

The 11 stations are located at: Ilha Verde Activity Centre, Patane Activity Centre, Macao Polytechnic University, Macao Cultural Centre, Carmel Auditorium, University of Macao, the Jiangmen Communal Society Activity Centre, Son Wo Medical Center, Navy Yard 1 & 2, Sheng Kung Hui Taipa Service Centre and Hou Kong Primary School.

Gomes emphasized that the service hours of other regular stations will remain unchanged: from 9 a.m. today to 6 p.m. tomorrow.

The official did not explain why these adjustments to operating hours of certain stations have been made.

Grand Lisboa Palace Resort,

Grand Hyatt listed as quarantine

Two more quarantine hotels will commence operations today, namely the east wing of the Grand Lisboa Palace Resort, with 470 rooms, and Tower B1 of the Grand Hyatt Macau, with 300 rooms.

Claims that the city would soon enter lockdown went viral on social media yesterday. At the press conference, Cheong Kin Ian, the representative from the Unitary Police Service (SPU), clarified that "for the time being, there is no plan to implement [these] measures."

In addition to urging members of the public to not heed such claims, he also reminded people that the city has sufficient stock of

essential supplies. People should not panic-buy because that will lead to crowds at retailers.

He also denied suggestions

that a grid-style lockdown will be imposed when the infection figures reach a predetermined level, adding that, once a decision is made, it will be announced to the public.

His comments, however, did not satisfy members of the public. Social media users criticized the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center for swinging between different measures and policies.

For example, at a press conference, a health official challenged the need to cordon off the Four Seasons shopping mall, but the first floor was shut down by the government just five hours after the press conference.

Social media users commented that abrupt announcements like these are disturbing because it does not provide the public any time to prepare.

## 31 TEST TUBES WITH POSITIVE RESULTS FROM MASS NAT, CASES REACH 1,215

AS of 3 p.m. yesterday, the citywide SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid testing (NAT) has yielded 31 test tubes with positive results. At the time, 626,680 samples had been collected, 485,355 of which yielded negative results. On Wednesday, the city detected 128 new infections. Of these, 41 were detected in quarantine and

81 in the community. The total number of cases have hit 1,215, according to figures released yesterday. The community cases comprised 36 close contacts, 38 from citywide testing or key group NATs and 13 from other groups, such as patients seeking medical treatment who were identified incidentally.

# Public doctors hold different views to Portuguese epidemiologist on NAT

ANTHONY LAM

**D**OCTORS at the Health Bureau (SSM) yesterday conveyed contrasting opinions to a Portuguese epidemiologist whose interview was published yesterday in a local Portuguese newspaper.

At yesterday's daily health press briefing, a Portuguese journalist cited a report from today's Portuguese paper, *Hoje Macau*, in which a Portuguese epidemiologist criticized the way that quarantine and nucleic acid testing (NAT) has been used in Macau with the aim of

controlling the spread of the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2.

According to the Portuguese newspaper: "Manuel Carmo Gomes, epidemiologist and one of the key faces of Covid-19 analysis in Portugal, claimed that carrying out confinement and frequent mass tests do not work with the Omicron variant."

The epidemiologist suggests that mass SARS-CoV-2 NATs should be used as a tool to diagnose suspicious cases with symptoms, rather than for screening as Macau is doing. He also commented

that keeping positive cases in confinement for longer than seven days did not make sense to him.

Macau is quarantining all positive cases, regardless of whether they are symptomatic.

Gomes warned the local Portuguese paper that stopping the spread of the virus is impossible. Even if there is a period of zero new cases, infections will sweep through once again once measures are relaxed.

The panel of officials was questioned as to whether they would consider the epidemiologist's comments.

A&E doctor Lei Wai Seng, medical director at the public hospital, said that nucleic acid testing is currently the most accurate way to confirm whether a person has contracted SARS-CoV-2. The test is used to identify those who are ill with Covid-19.

"We see that many Omicron cases are simply asymptomatic, but they are still infectious," the medical doctor said, explaining that this "means that the virus can be transmitted to other people."

Lei emphasized that the citywide NAT is used as a mechanism to pick out

those who have contracted the virus but showed no symptoms, "so that the chain of infection can be cut."

In order to achieve dynamic zero-Covid, the A&E doctor added, such chains of infection must be eliminated in the community. "Only then can our outbreak be considered under control," Lei concluded.

The medical doctor also appealed for the protection of fragile groups as another reason to justify the need for mass NAT.

He said that vulnerable groups, such as those with chronic diseases or who are immunocompromised, will have a higher chance of developing severe symptoms if they contract the virus. "Therefore, most of our strategies have

a focus on protecting vulnerable groups of people."

The medical doctor was also asked why some positive cases were not released from confinement even if they had cycle threshold (CT) values above 35. The CT value is used to determine whether a case is considered positive or negative.

In answer to this question, the medical doctor cited a national guideline that the yielding of CT values above 35 in two consecutive NATs facilitates a positive case's return to the community. "We don't need a negative result," Lei said.

He added that, with this guideline, the health agency will not "frequently" conduct NAT on a positive case in the early phase of infection.

PROPERTY

# REALTOR FINDS CORE OF SHOP SALES RELOCATED TO LIVELIHOOD DISTRICTS

ANTHONY LAM

**P**ROPERTY transactions involving shops in main streets or roads in traditional residential districts have gained in the first half of the year, an executive at a regional realtor said.

In contrast, the focus areas for retail property of pre-Covid times, such as ZAPE and Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro, more commonly known as Sun Ma Lo, have decreased in activity.

Lei Siu Seng, district director of industrial and commercial properties at Centaline Macau, disclosed that the first half of the year saw property transactions involving shops mainly in Areia Preta, Avenida de Horte e Costa and Rua da Barca, among other traditional residential districts.

Transactions mainly involved properties that had a price tag below HKD20 million per property and HKD10,000 per square foot.

Another district that gained in activity for property transactions was Taipa.

The realtor pointed out that during pre-Covid times, Taipa had not been a popular district in terms of retail property transactions. He recalled that by Covid times,



on average, Taipa only recorded about five transactions each year.

However, in the past half-year, there were more than 10 transactions, with two such sales involving price tags higher than HKD100 million each. Lei noted

that these two transactions were closed by the shops' tenants, adding that most of the other transactions in Macau were facilitated by users as well.

The reason behind this, the realtor explained, is that these

shops are located in prime or more preferable areas in Taipa, which encouraged able tenants to purchase the properties for better security in the future.

Meanwhile, he pointed out that in the first half of the year,

there were zero property transactions in casino areas in ZAPE and only two in Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro.

Looking to the future, the realtor expects retail property transactions will be supported by users and tenants in the second half of the year. Nonetheless, he is not very confident about a rising trend in prices even if the current outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 infections ease.

Official data from the government shows that the first quarter of the year saw 78 retail property transactions. Centaline expects the second quarter to be only about 60. Judging by the estimate, the number of transactions has fallen by 30% year-on-year and the amount by 20%, summing to about HKD1.44 billion.

In the residential property market, the current outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 infections has put transactions on hold. Lo Chon Meng, district director for prime residences, estimates there would be about 1,600 transactions of residential properties in the first six months of this year, 50% fewer year-on-year. Price-per-square-foot retains a declining inclination among all residential property offers, he added.

The numbers of property transactions of office and industrial premises in the first six months are estimated to falls 34% and 40% year-on-year, respectively. Both markets will not see strong bounces in the coming six months, Centaline estimates.

CLIMATE CHANGE

# Air quality in PRD region worsened in 2021, indicators show

RENATO MARQUES

**A**IR quality in the group of cities comprising the Pearl River Delta (PRD) region have been mixed during 2021, with some indicators showing improvements while others worsened, the annual report of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau PRD Regional Air Quality Monitoring Network shows.

According to the 2021 report, all but one pollutant in the analysis showed worse results compared to the previous year. The only exception from the group of six major pollutants in the analysis was carbon monoxide (CO) which showed an average yearly concentration of 0.600 mg/m<sup>3</sup>, 0.011 mg/m<sup>3</sup> fewer when compared to 2020 and making 2021 the best result recorded since 2015, the first year in which the pollutant was measured.



The other five major pollutants including sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), ozone (O<sub>3</sub>), respirable suspended particulates (PM<sub>10</sub>) and fine suspended particulates (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) all recorded year-on-year increases in 2021.

Although the 2021 results show a general worsening of air quality in the region, and consequently in

Macau, analysis from over the last 15 years since the monitoring network was first implemented, shows a significant improvement in three of the pollutants: SO<sub>2</sub> (-83.7%), NO<sub>2</sub> (-40.5%) and PM<sub>10</sub> (-44.8%).

Outside of this improvement, ozone concentrations have been growing almost yearly for the past 15 years, with the 2021 figure

the second-highest concentration ever recorded (59µg/m<sup>3</sup>, a 34.1% increase). The highest concentra-

tion of this pollutant was recorded in 2019, with a figure of 60µg/m<sup>3</sup>.

According to the report, the annual ozone average in 2021 shows that the photochemical smog problem in the region has not been addressed, but in fact has been worsening.

The report does not point to any solutions or suggest any measures to address the issue, noting only that "Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau governments will continue to implement emission reduction measures to further improve the air quality in the region and tackle the photochemical pollution

problem."

Ozone is not directly emitted by polluters, instead it is formed by the photochemical reaction of oxygen, nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>), and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in the air under sunlight. It is one of the main components of photochemical smog. Ozone can irritate the eyes, nose and throat and, at high levels, it can increase susceptibility to respiratory diseases and aggravate pre-existing respiratory conditions such as asthma. The precursors of ozone (NO<sub>x</sub> and VOCs) mainly originate from pollution sources in urban areas.

## AIR QUALITY IN 2020, 2021

Year	SO <sub>2</sub> µg/m <sup>3</sup>	NO <sub>2</sub> µg/m <sup>3</sup>	O <sub>3</sub> µg/m <sup>3</sup>	PM <sub>10</sub> µg/m <sup>3</sup>	PM <sub>2.5</sub> µg/m <sup>3</sup>
2020	6	24	56	34	20
2021	7	25	59	37	21

# Wynn COO resigns, operator said to seek new management ahead of license bid

LYNZY VALLES

**A**NOTHER casino lifer is set to step down at Wynn Macau Ltd., according to an announcement that came a day after the operator revealed the intended departure of current chief executive officer (CEO) Ian Michael Coughlan next year.

Casino veteran Ciarán Carruthers is slated to leave his position as chief operating officer (COO) of the Wynn Macau property September 30.

Carruthers will be taking over as the new CEO of Crown Resorts, after serving in several leadership roles in the city's integrated resorts over 20 years. He has worked in the gaming industry since 1991.

Prior to his Wynn position, the gaming veteran was the senior vice president and director of the Venetian and Plaza Operations of Venetian Macau and held positions as president of Asia Pacific Gaming and COO of StarWorld at Galaxy Entertainment Group Limited.

Wynn Macau is on the hunt for a new chief marketing officer position, seeking candidates with

a deep understanding of Chinese culture and markets, a source familiar with the matter told media outlet Bloomberg.

According to the report, the hiring process began as early as six months ago with candidates hailing from different regions. However, the current outbreak and strict border restrictions have slowed down the interview process.

The move comes as the gaming operator seeks to create a new senior management team amid the upcoming tender process for gaming concessions.

A deepened connection with the mainland is vital as casinos are set to formulate plans that help boost the tourism market and customer base – both of which are from the mainland.

When CEO Ian Michael Coughlan steps down in 2023, current vice chairman and COO Linda Chen will take over as president. Chen has close ties with the mainland, sitting on the Nanjing political advisory board.

Commenting on whether this promotion is a political move that comes ahead of the license bidding that will commence ear-

AP PHOTO



ly next year after current concessions expire December 31, Ben Lee, managing partner of IGamiX Management & Consulting, said that a "possible interpretation is that Wynn believes that changing their top echelon to Chinese executives may improve their chances of securing a new concession."

Both MGM China and Sands China have already made similar moves, with Hubert Wang appointed as president and COO of MGM in 2020, and Wilfred Wong remaining president of the latter since 2015.

However, the gaming expert sees the departure of Wynn's top

executives as "part of the wider picture of an exodus of expats from Macau."

"With no clear end in sight to the prevailing current economic conditions, many businesses are forced to restructure their costs towards survival mode," he told the Times.

## GAMING

# Experts: Tender process and new awardees expected even before year-end

LYNZY VALLES

**T**HE gaming tender regulations released earlier this week hint that the awarding of new concessionaires will complete before the current gaming licenses expire on December 31.

Ben Lee, managing partner of IGamiX Management & Consulting, commented that "the fact that the authorities have rigidly adhered to the announced timeline indicates that we can likely expect the tendering process and new awardees will be completed by the end of this year."

This statement echoes the expectations of analysts at JP Morgan Securities – that the gaming public tender could commence



by mid-July.

The comparison given by the analysts, as cited in a report issued by GGRAsia, was with the 2001 situation, when the public tender for concessionaires opened seven days after the announcement of the

regulations.

According to the note, the public tender closed 42 days after the announcement of the regulations. Transposing that to today's timeline, the brokerage firm suggested that the tender application process

will conclude by mid to late August, with provisional winners possibly announced in "in late October [or] early November."

The brokerage firm noted that it still believes that "the six incumbent operators will be the next winners of concession [rights]."

The embattled sector is again in crisis as the city battles its biggest Covid-19 outbreak yet, with three rounds of mass testing this week.

Several analysts have been expecting the sector to have "near-zero" revenue, and all six operators to record a negative EBITDA in the face of the upheaval.

GGR in the second quarter was MOP8.5 million, which is a "meagre 12% of the pre-Covid level."

Gaming expert Lee has noted that Macau could record its worst GGR this year – something that the sector did not predict as it hoped to undergo a summer recovery following revenue plunges in April due to outbreaks in neighboring cities.

## SCI-TECH INNOVATION SYSTEM APPEARING IN ALIGN WITH OVERALL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

STAFF REPORTER

**M**ORE than 10,000 sci-tech companies have registered in Hengqin to shape a sci-tech innovation industry ecosystem in the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

Already supporting Guangdong-Macao cooperation are 20 national and provincial sci-tech innovation platforms including incubators and new-type R&D institutions.

The sci-tech R&D and high-end manufacturing industries that have taken root in Hengqin and cooperated with Macao are in fields of scientific research, talents, and marketing. Their boosting of the moderate diversification of Macau's

economy is just what is called for in the Overall Development Plan for Construction of the zone.

Along those lines, Hengqin's Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) Science & Technology Industrial Park of Cooperation Between Guangdong & Macao is now home to 224 medical and health enterprises and 4,000 technology enterprises.

Together with in-house R&D headquarters buildings, a service center for enterprises, as well as GMP pilot and production platforms that meet certification standards of the Chinese mainland and European Union, the industrial park has become a massive industrial cluster of traditional TCM sci-tech innovation and industry-academic-research cooperation.

COVID-19

# BEIJING MANDATES VACCINES TO ENTER SOME PUBLIC SPACES

HUIZHONG WU, TAIPEI

**T**HE Chinese capital has issued a mandate requiring people to show proof of COVID-19 vaccination before they can enter some public spaces including gyms, museums and libraries, drawing concern from city residents over the sudden policy announcement and its impact on their daily lives.

The health app that shows a person's latest PCR test results has been updated to make it easier to also access their vaccination status, according to Li Ang, a spokesperson for Beijing's municipal health commission.

The list of public places requiring vaccination does not include restaurants and offices. The mandate will go into effect on Monday, with exceptions available only to those who cannot be vaccinated for health reasons.

"In the normalization of COVID-19 pandemic controls, getting vaccinated is still the most effective measure at controlling the spread of COVID-19," Li said in an



announcement on Wednesday.

More than 23 million people in Beijing have been vaccinated, Li said, which if accurate would cover the city's entire population and more.

The Beijing government did

not immediately respond to a faxed request for comment on the new measures.

Li said that more than 3.6 million people over 60 years old have been vaccinated. He did not say if they received two shots or three.

Meanwhile, many countries around the world still require proof of vaccination for arrivals. However, vaccine mandates in daily life have been largely rolled back internationally as countries seek to live with the virus.

In Beijing and other cities across China, many government facilities already require people to show proof of vaccination before entry.

Online, the announcement drew some anger and pointed questions. Social media users questioned how to obtain a certificate showing one was unsuitable for vaccination, whether the unvaccinated could ride the subway and other logistics of the new requirement.

Chen Yumei, a 48-year-old Beijing resident, said she hasn't been vaccinated yet because she suffered from hives that doctors had said made her unsuitable.

"A lot of doctors told me I couldn't, but who's going to give me the certification for an exception? No one dares to give you this certification," she said.

"Something like this is too unreasonable," Chen said. "We've already been cooperating with the PCR tests, no matter how hot it is or how long the line is."

Another Beijing resident, Leo Zhang, said he was confused whether the new policy meant he needed to get a booster or if two doses were enough. He is planning to get a booster shot as a result.

"At least for me, it doesn't have a big impact, it's just getting a booster," said Zhang, who regularly visits the gym. **MDT/AP**

HONG KONG

# GOV'T LIFTS FLIGHT BAN CITING 'LITTLE EFFECT' ON COVID

ZEN SOO, HONG KONG

**H**ONG Kong announced yesterday it is shelving a COVID-19 measure that has resulted in dozens of canceled flights in recent months and thwarted travel plans for thousands.

Starting yesterday, the city will no longer ban arriving airline flights just because they'd brought in passengers infected with COVID-19, the government announced.

"The new measure is a decision made by the government after careful review of relevant data and taking into account the current peak period for international students returning to Hong Kong," a government spokesperson said.

Previously, a five-day flight route ban was imposed on airlines if at least five passengers or 5% of travelers — whichever is higher — tested positive for the coronavirus on arrival. That caused about 100 flight cancellations since the beginning of the year.

The announcement noted that most imported CO-



VID-19 infections could be detected by the coronavirus tests at the airport and in hotels.

The flight suspension rule had "little effect" on preventing imported infections and the risk of those cases causing infection in the community are "relatively minimal," the government said.

Travelers had griped that the regulation's last-minute flight cancellations also affected quarantine hotel bookings. Those impacted often had to postpone their rescheduled trips for weeks because hotels tend to be booked out months ahead.

Despite lifting the flight bans, travelers arriving in Hong Kong will still need to test negative for the coronavirus before arriving in the city, serve a mandatory quarantine period of seven days in a designated hotel in Hong Kong, and undergo a series of rapid tests and nucleic acid tests for the coronavirus over a two-week period.

Hong Kong leader John Lee and health authorities have said they are exploring options to keep Hong Kong open to international travelers, including a possible reduction of mandatory quarantine periods. **MDT/AP**

# CHINA LASHES OUT AT US, BRITISH INTELLIGENCE SERVICES

**T**HE United States is "the biggest threat to world peace, stability and development," China said yesterday, continuing its sharp rhetoric in response to U.S. accusations of Chinese spying and threats to the international order.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian's comments came a day after the head of the FBI and the leader of Britain's domestic intelligence agency raised fresh alarms about the Chinese government, warning business leaders that Beijing is determined to steal their technology for competitive gain.

The heightened tone comes ahead of a meeting tomorrow between U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Group of 20 leading rich and developing nations' ministers summit in Bali, Indonesia.



"The relevant U.S. politician has been playing up the so-called China threat to smear and attack China," Zhao told reporters at a daily briefing when asked about FBI Director Christopher Wray's comments reaffirming longstanding concerns in denouncing economic espionage and hacking operations by China as well as the Chinese government's efforts to stifle dissent abroad.

"Facts have fully proven that the U.S. is the biggest threat to world peace, stability and de-

velopment," Zhao said. "We urge this U.S. official to have the right perspective, see China's developments in an objective and reasonable manner and stop spreading lies and stop making irresponsible remarks."

Meanwhile, Wray noted, "We consistently see that it's the Chinese government that poses the biggest long-term threat to our economic and national security, and by 'our,' I mean both of our nations, along with our allies in Europe and elsewhere." **MDT/AP**



G-20

# Russia's war in Ukraine to overshadow talks in Bali

NINIEK KARMINI, JAKARTA

**F**OREIGN ministers from the Group of 20 leading rich and developing nations are gathering in Indonesia's resort island of Bali for talks bound to be dominated by the conflict in Ukraine despite an agenda focused on global cooperation and food and energy security.

The one-day gathering will take place on today on the mostly Hindu "island of the gods" in the majority Muslim archipelago nation.

Underscoring the backdrop of tensions hanging over the meeting, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Russia's top diplomat Sergey Lavrov stopped in various Asian capitals on their way to Bali, drumming up support and fortifying their ties in the region ahead of the talks.

The United States and its allies have sought to punish Russian President Vladimir Putin in as many ways as possible, including by threatening a boycott of the G-20's Bali summit in November unless Putin is removed from the forum.

So as this year's president of

the G-20, Indonesia has been forced into playing a more constructive role on the world stage rather than acting just as an "event organizer." The country has sought to remain neutral in dealing with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and President Joko Widodo has been guarded in his comments.

Widodo was the first Asian leader to visit the warring countries. Ukraine is not a member of G-20, but Widodo has invited Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to the November summit along with Putin, hoping to appease all sides and limit any distractions from the forum's agenda.

Zelenskyy has said he won't attend if the war is continuing then and has opted to follow the discussions by video link. Widodo reportedly told Italian Prime Minister Marion Draghi, on the sidelines of the Group of Seven summit in Germany, that Putin also will not be coming. Moscow has said a decision has not yet been made.

That apparent compromise may be put to the test when the G-20 foreign ministers gather in Bali's heavily-guarded Nusa Dua

tourist haven to lay the groundwork for the 17th summit of the West's economic powerhouses.

Strains between Washington and Beijing are also apparent: On Wednesday, China launched a scathing attack on the U.S. and NATO, just days before U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the Chinese foreign minister are due to meet in Bali.

## A key aim of the talks will be to seek ways to improve food security

Washington "observes international rules only as it sees fit," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian told reporters in Beijing. He said the "so-called rules-based international order is actually a family rule made by a handful of countries to serve the U.S. self-interest."

A senior U.S. official, speaking on condition he not be further identified, said it would be important to focus on the G-20 agenda in Bali, but that it "clearly cannot be business as usual."

What is more important than

a unanimous statement about the Russian invasion of Ukraine is what countries in the G-20 actually do to address the problems the world is facing now, he said.

A key aim of the talks will be to seek ways to improve food security at a time when Russia's invasion of Ukraine has choked global markets, pushing prices of meat, dairy products, cereals, sugar and vegetable oils sharply higher.

"These visits are not only important for Indonesians but also for other developing countries in order to prevent the people of developing and low-income countries from falling into extreme poverty and hunger," Widodo told reporters in Jakarta before his departure to Germany on June 26.

Russia and Ukraine account for a third of the world's wheat exports and Ukraine alone grows enough of the grain to feed 400 million people. But Moscow's blockade means Kyiv can only move 2 million tons a month, 60% less than usual.

Millions of tons of Ukrainian grain are sitting in silos waiting to be shipped through safe corridors in the Black Sea. Ukraine also is one of the world's largest exporters of corn and sunflower oil, but Russia's invasion halted most of that flow. Such disruptions threaten food supplies for many developing countries, especially in Africa.

The crisis is having inflationary ripple effects in Indonesia,

including a shortage of flour that is compelling local companies to raise the politically-sensitive price of instant noodles, a hugely popular Indonesian staple.

Russia has pledged to increase its wheat exports to Indonesia. Last year, those amounted to only 2,955 tons compared with the 3 million tons imported from Ukraine.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi has told reporters it's important to achieve a resumption of grain exports from Ukraine and food and fertilizer exports from Russia to end shortages and reduce prices.

Rising costs of cooking oil prompted Indonesia, beset by student protests over skyrocketing food prices, to temporarily ban exports of palm oil products. Exports of crude palm oil, used in a wide variety of foods, cosmetics and other products, resumed a month later.

Indonesia and neighboring Malaysia are the world's largest exporters of palm oil, accounting for 85% of global production.

Foreign ministers headed to Bali yesterday come from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the U.S., and the European Union.

Blinken is scheduled to meet with Wang, Beijing's top envoy, on Saturday. The meeting will be the latest high-level contact between U.S. and Chinese officials as Washington has questioned China's stance after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The two sides could also discuss a possible lifting of U.S. tariffs on imports from China by President Joe Biden's administration as it strives to counter inflation.

While in Bali, Lavrov is due to hold meetings with his counterparts from other countries, including China, Mexico, South Africa and Brazil on the sidelines of the G-20 foreign ministers. He also plans consultations with invited leaders of international organizations, according to Russia's embassy in Jakarta.

In talks yesterday, Lavrov informed Chinese Foreign Minister Wang about "the course of fulfilling the main tasks of the Russian special military operation," the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a readout of the meeting.

It said the ministers "shared their assessment of the actions taken by the West in the context of the situation in Ukraine."

"Both parties emphasized that it's inadmissible to introduce unlawful unilateral sanctions bypassing the United Nations," the ministry said.

Members of the G-20 account for about 80% of the world's economic output, two-thirds of the world's population and about three-quarters of global trade. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO

# Leave

POLITICS

## Britain's Boris Johnson resigning as PM amid scandal



**P**RIME Minister Boris Johnson announced his resignation yesterday amid a mass revolt by top members of his government, marking an end to three tumultuous years in power in which he brazenly bent and sometimes broke the rules of British politics.

Months of defiance ended almost with a shrug as Johnson stood in 10 Downing Street and conceded that his party wanted him gone.

"Them's the breaks," he said.

The brash, 58-year-old politician who took Britain out of the European Union and steered it through Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine was brought down by one scandal too many — this one involving his appointment of a politician who had been accused of sexual misconduct.

The messiest of prime ministers did not leave cleanly. Johnson stepped down immediately as Conservative Party leader but said he would remain in office as prime minister until the party chooses his successor. But many in the party want him gone before then, and his government has been shredded by scores of resignations.

Among the possible candidates to succeed him: former Health Secretary Sajid Javid, former Treasury chief Rishi Sunak, Foreign Secretary Liz Truss and Defense Secretary Ben Wallace.

Johnson had clung to power for two days, defiantly telling lawmakers

on Wednesday that he had a "colossal mandate" from voters and intended to get on with the business of government.

But he was forced to concede defeat after one of his closest allies, newly appointed Treasury chief Nadhim Zahawi, publicly told him to resign for the good of the country.

"In the last few days, I tried to persuade my colleagues that it would be eccentric to change governments when we're delivering so much and when we have such a vast mandate," Johnson said outside his office. "I regret not to have been successful in those arguments, and of course it's painful not to be able to see through so many ideas and projects myself."

The timetable for choosing a new prime minister will be announced next week, Johnson said.

"It is clearly now the will of the parliamentary Conservative Party that there should be a new leader of that party and therefore a new prime minister," he said.

Zahawi, who was promoted earlier this week as Johnson tried to shore up his Cabinet, said he and a group of colleagues had privately expressed their concerns to the prime minister on Wednesday and he decided to go public after Johnson ignored the advice to resign.

"I am heartbroken that he hasn't listened and that he is now undermining the incredible achievements of this government," Zahawi said

in a letter posted on Twitter. "But the country deserves a government that is not only stable but which acts with integrity."

Yesterday's resignations meant that 50 Cabinet secretaries, ministers and lower-level officials had quit the government over two days, often castigating the prime minister for his lack of integrity.

With more than 20 positions unfilled, the crisis had stalled the business of some parliamentary committees because there were no ministers available to speak on the government's behalf.

It is a humiliating defeat for Johnson, who not only pulled off Brexit but was credited with rolling out one of the world's most successful mass vaccination campaigns to combat Covid-19.

But the perpetually rumpled leader known for greeting critics with bombast and bluster was also dogged by criticism that he acted as if the rules did not apply to him.

He managed to remain in power for almost three years, despite allegations that he was too close to party donors, that he protected supporters from bullying and corruption allegations, and that he misled Parliament about government office parties that broke pandemic lockdown rules. He was fined by police and survived a no-confidence vote in Parliament.

Recent disclosures that Johnson knew about sexual misconduct allegations against a Conservative lawmaker before he promo-

ted him to a senior position in government proved to be one scandal too many.

The crisis began when Chris Pincher resigned as deputy chief whip amid allegations that he had groped two men at a private club. That triggered a series of reports about past allegations leveled against Pincher.

Johnson tried to deflect criticism with shifting explanations about what he knew and when he knew it, but that just highlighted concerns that the prime minister couldn't be trusted.

Javid and Sunak resigned within minutes of each other Tuesday night, triggering a wave of departures among their Cabinet colleagues and lower-level officials.

Javid captured the mood of many lawmakers when he said Johnson's actions threatened to undermine the integrity of the Conservative Party and the British government.

"At some point we have to conclude that enough is enough," he said Wednesday in the House of Commons. "I believe that point is now."

Bernard Jenkin, a senior Conservative Party lawmaker, told the BBC he met with Johnson later in the day and advised him to step down.

"I just said to him, 'Look, it's just when you go now, and it's how you go. You can go with some dignity or you can be forced out like Donald Trump clinging to power and pretending he's won the election when he's lost,'" Jenkin said. **MDT/AP**

### this day in history

#### 1965 RONALD BIGGS ESCAPES FROM JAIL



Ronald Biggs - a member of the gang who carried out the Great Train Robbery in 1963 - has escaped from Wandsworth prison.

Biggs, 35, escaped by scaling a 30ft wall with three other prisoners at 1505 BST today.

A ladder was thrown over the wall from the outside during the prisoners' afternoon exercise session.

The escapees climbed the ladder and lowered themselves into a waiting van. They were driven away from the prison in three cars.

Every police car in London has been notified and all ports and airports have been alerted.

Biggs is the second of the Great Train Robbers to escape from jail - Charles Wilson is still at large after escaping from Winson Green prison in Birmingham in August last year.

Detective Chief Superintendent Richard Lewis, who is investigating the escape, said the break-out was well prepared and "was engineered without a doubt with collusion inside the prison".

He added this did not suggest prison officers had been involved.

A Home Office spokesperson explained what happened. He said: "At 3.05pm one of the four officers on duty in the yard saw a man's head appear above the outside wall.

"The officer immediately rang the alarm bell and at the same time the man on the wall threw over a rope and tubular ladder.

"The four prisoners immediately made for the ladder and climbed over the top. The prison officers tried to stop them, but were stopped by some of the others in the exercise yard.

"The officers went outside and discovered a van with a platform on top parked against the wall and the ladders secured to the top of the van."

Police said a green Ford Zephyr, involved in the escape, had been found abandoned tonight outside Wandsworth Common railway station.

Police also found a loaded shotgun and a set of overalls inside.

An operations room has been set up inside the prison and the area cordoned off. People living near the prison are being interviewed by police.

Scotland Yard has warned members of the public not to approach any of the men as they may be armed and dangerous.

Courtesy BBC News

### IN CONTEXT

Ronnie Biggs was free for nearly 40 years before he returned voluntarily to Britain from Brazil.

He came back to the UK in 2001 aged 71, impoverished and weakened by a series of strokes to receive free medical treatment. He was immediately taken to a top-security prison to serve the remaining 28 years of his sentence.

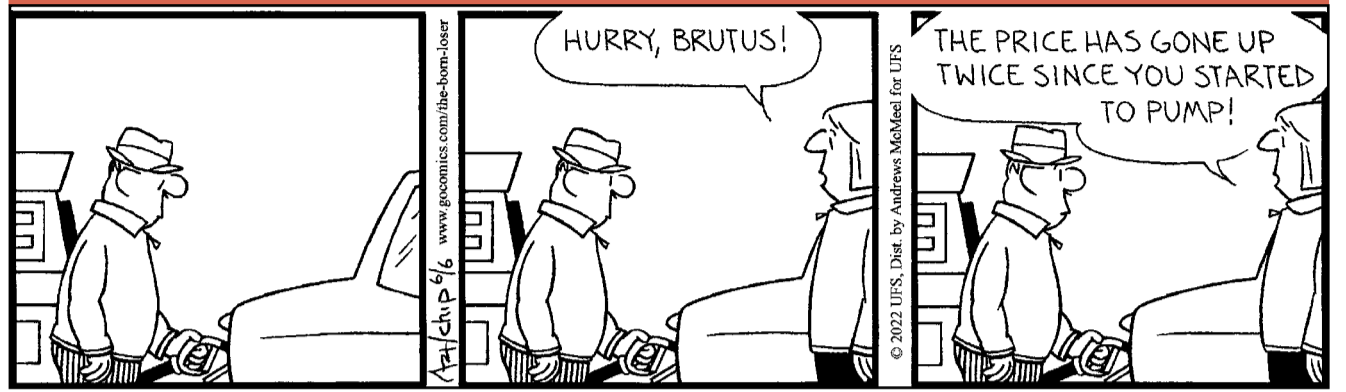
Charlie Wilson was recaptured in Canada in 1968.



**YOUR STARS**

<p><b>ARIES</b> Mar. 21-Apr. 19</p> <p>Get out and experience the spice of life. You should get out and enjoy social events where you are likely to meet new potential mates; however, don't over spend.</p>	<p><b>TAURUS</b> Apr. 20-May. 20</p> <p>Be sure to take advantage of the opportunities that exist. Today is not the day to try to corner people by giving them ultimatums. Money may slip through your fingers.</p>
<p><b>GEMINI</b> May. 21-Jun. 21</p> <p>You may be ill-treated if you have to deal with institutional environments. If they don't like the plan, suggest that they contribute a little. You may find it difficult to communicate.</p>	<p><b>CANCER</b> Jun. 22-Jul. 22</p> <p>You can make money but not through harebrained schemes or gambling. Work quietly at your own goals and forget about situations that you can do little about. Don't divulge secret information.</p>
<p><b>LEO</b> Jul. 23-Aug. 22</p> <p>Try not to attempt to do something unless you are fully intent on following through with the plans. Children will want to help, too.</p>	<p><b>VIRGO</b> Aug. 23-Sep. 22</p> <p>You may find that your quick wit and charm will help you in obtaining allies. Ask a close friend for advice. New friendships will develop through group events.</p>
<p><b>LIBRA</b> Sep. 23-Oct. 22</p> <p>If you have treated them equitably, you might be able to count on their loyalty. You may be fortunate while traveling. Do not sign contracts or get involved in any uncertain financial deals.</p>	<p><b>SCORPIO</b> Oct. 23-Nov. 21</p> <p>Don't be too quick to respond to a plea for help. Look closely at motives and honesty in your personal encounters. You should feel a little more stable about your work position.</p>
<p><b>SAGITTARIUS</b> Nov. 22-Dec. 21</p> <p>Don't bother trying to make someone you live with see your point of view. Comfort is a necessity. Check your motives. Go after your goals and don't be afraid to ask for assistance.</p>	<p><b>CAPRICORN</b> Dec. 22-Jan. 19</p> <p>You can get a promotion if you put in a little extra detail. Offers of joint ventures are likely. However, you must not neglect your family.</p>
<p><b>AQUARIUS</b> Jan. 20-Feb. 18</p> <p>Remember that no one can walk through your door if there's someone standing in the doorway. You need to keep the peace and you will have to bend in order to do so.</p>	<p><b>PISCES</b> Feb. 19-Mar. 20</p> <p>Your ideas will be well received. Call someone you haven't seen in a long time. Spend time by yourself to avoid any conflicts with family members.</p>

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

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**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	24	34	cloudy
Changchun	20	30	thunderstorms
Chengdu	25	37	fine
Chongqing	27	38	fine
Fuzhou	26	37	fine
Guangzhou	26	33	thunderstorms
Guiyang	21	29	thunderstorms
Haikou	26	32	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	28	37	cloudy
Harbin	21	30	showers
Hefei	26	35	rain
Nanjing	27	35	thunderstorms
Shanghai	28	37	cloudy
Taipei	25	31	cloudy
Wuhan	26	35	cloudy
Hong Kong	28	31	cloudy
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	17	26	overcast
Frankfurt	13	26	overcast
Paris	16	28	clear
London	15	28	overcast
New York	22	30	overcast

**CROSSWORDS**

ACROSS 1- Discounted by; 5- Lay down the lawn; 8- Petty quarrel, ejected saliva; 12- Sheltered, nautically; 13- Pertaining to bees; 15- Damage; 16- Painter Mondrian; 17- Oklahoma city; 18- Upper hand; 19- Association; 22- Put on; 23- Meadow; 24- Overgrown with ivy; 26- Takes by theft; 29- Fame; 31- Spring mo.; 32- Fields of comedy; 34- Quality; 36- And \_\_\_ goes; 38- Unit of magnetic induction; 40- "The Morning Watch" author; 41- Hinge; 43- First-rate; 45- Fall mo.; 46- Passenger ships; 48- Like a dog; 50- Pearl Mosque city; 51- Buddhist sect; 52- Actor Linden; 54- At once; 61- Iroquois foe; 63- Start; 64- Comics canine; 65- Takes home; 66- Due (to); 67- Vincent Lopez's theme song; 68- Puts into words; 69- Compass pt.; 70- CPR experts;

DOWN 1- Reindeer herder; 2- "On the Waterfront" director Kazan; 3- Prophet; 4- Colonize; 5- Boot attachment; 6- Lubricates; 7- Morse element; 8- Pronoun for a ship; 9- Prisoner transport; 10- Golden Fleece ship; 11- Revenuers, for short; 13- Piggied out; 14- Born yesterday, so to speak; 20- Tidy, without fault; 21- Liquid measure; 25- Director Ephron; 26- Ruin; 27- Trifle; 28- Paces; 29- Museum piece; 30- One who cries "uncle?"; 31- Nile viper; 33- Leb. neighbor; 35- Hanoi holiday; 37- Chinese secret society; 39- Astonishing; 42- Polo of "Meet the Parents"; 44- Draft classification; 47- Stallone role; 49- Chant; 52- Coop group; 53- Disaster \_\_\_; 55- Sounds like a kitten; 56- Sponsorship; 57- Take a meal; 58- Biblical land; 59- Rhythmic swing; 60- Votes for; 62- Lion tail?;

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BOOK IT

# An Irish hitman juggles murder with parenthood

**PATRICK** Callen, a Dublin, Ireland hitman with a mild case of obsessive-compulsive disorder, stays organized by making lists. On his first day in Keith Bruton's debut novel, the list includes: Buy Food; Sleep With Olivia; Visit Ma; Kill Henry O'Neil.

Patrick, who navigates Dublin's streets on his 1950s Modello Oro bicycle, was pedaling home from the market when he stopped off to deal with O'Neil, a drug runner and junkie who owed his supplier more than he could pay. Worried that someone might "nick" his bag of lemons, Patrick slipped it off the handlebars and took it with him to do the hit. From then on, he was known as The Lemon Man.

The details of the O'Neil hit precisely convey Patrick's attitude about his chosen profession.

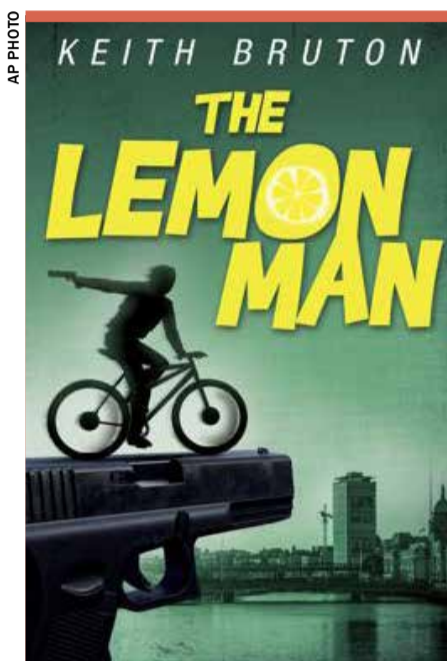
"I reach back into my shorts and pull out the gun, shooting little Henry O'Neil dead center in the forehead, bulls-eye. He falls back into the chair with a

bullet in his head. I touch my top lip with the top of my tongue. My moustache is getting long... I scratch my head with the silencer. It's warm."

But just when you're sure that Patrick is a psychopath, he discovers an infant in O'Neil's filthy drug den, can't bear to leave it there, and takes it with him.

Suddenly, the antihero of "The Lemon Man" is struggling to change diapers and trying to figure out what toddlers eat. But he's also got a job to do. There are people who need killing and others willing to pay to have it done. So he finds himself taking the baby along on the job or leaving him in the care of his equally flummoxed girlfriend, Olivia, whose work as a prostitute doesn't bother Patrick in the least.

Caring for an infant while working as a hired killer is not



"The Lemon Man" by Keith Bruton (Brash Books via AP)

a good mix, and the inevitable complications soon threaten to get Patrick and Olivia killed. The result is a fast-paced crime novel that is both hilarious and harboiled, its main character both ruthless and oddly sympathetic. **BRUCE DESILVA, MDT/AP**

tTUNES

# IMAGINE DRAGONS OFFER LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

**I**F you were hiding under your bed after listening to the last album by Imagine Dragons, it's time to come out. The second volume of "Mercury" is upbeat, often Caribbean-spiced and throbbing. It's the sound of a band getting its arena groove back.

"Act 1" in 2021 was all plucky strings, seething beats and grand electronic synths as lead singer, songwriter and lyricist Dan Reynolds poured heartache, tragedy and his struggles with sobriety into a raw, confessional and searing album. The cover depicted a man falling.

The cover of "Act 2" could be of a man jumping, and that seems to fit many of the close to 20 new tracks, which are wistful, confessional and owning weakness, but there is light at the end of the tunnel. Take the eclectic, slightly deranged "I'm Happy," a title that could never appear on "Act. 1," with Reynolds singing "Even when I might fall down/I know my luck come back around."

Not all the songs succeed, as one might suspect from such a stuffed album. There's an uncooked quality to "Crushed,"



"Mercury — Act 2," Imagine Dragons (Interscope)

"Ferris Wheel," and "Take It Easy," and a naïve quality to "Tied" and "Continual," while the regretful ballads "I Wish" and "They Don't Know You Like I Do" might better off serve as therapy for Reynolds.

But don't sleep on "Sirens" and "I Don't Like Myself," two mid-tempo, expertly crafted tunes that take the band in different directions. And on "Higher Ground," the band is really cooking, with lyrics that could sum the entire second album up: "What a life/I live until I die/Won't fail unless I try/Bleeding, keep on breathing." **MARK KENNEDY, MDT/AP**

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DRIVE IN

# 'Thor: Love and Thunder' is pure bonkers filmmaking

MARK KENNEDY,  
AP ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

**T**HE last full Thor movie was the overstuffed 2017 "Thor: Ragnarok," with the God of Thunder dealing with dueling brother and sister issues, the imminent destruction of his planet, a boozy sidekick, a huge dog, pal Hulk having a panic attack and the death of his father.

It was Taika Waititi filmmaking at its most intense, with slo-mo sauntering, stupid antlered headdresses, slicing swords and laser cannons, capes and undead soldiers, a hair-cropped Thor, a typically unbalanced Jeff Goldblum character, a prophecy, alien spacecrafts and lots of Led Zeppelin.

If you thought that was bananas filmmaking, its sequel is the whole fruit basket.

"Thor: Love and Thunder" — a rare Marvel fourth installment for one character — has

giant bleating goats, a horrible Zeus, children in cages, space dolphins, Jodie Foster jokes, teddy bears with laser eyes, an Old Spice commercial parody, Natalie Portman headbutting a villain, blue aliens and lots of Guns N' Roses.

Waititi is back as the co-writer, director and the voice for the stony Korg, with Chris Hemsworth as our space Viking, a man who really needs to get more credit for taking Thor over the years from glum to hysterical. His ability to pronounce superhero things dramatically and then become a goofball is endlessly endearing. Also back are Tessa Thompson as Valkyrie and Jaimie Alexander's Sif.

One problematic character back is Jane Foster, Thor's ex whom he still pines for eight years after they broke up and she skipped the third film. But now Foster — played by Portman — has his old magical hammer, Mjolnir, and has beco-

me a superhero of her own, the Mighty Thor.

Thor, of course, has moved on — not with his romantic feelings, but with his favored weaponry. He wields the enchanted axe Stormbreaker now. He has no eyes for Mjolnir — or does he? "We good? I know it's a little weird having my ex-weapon around," he asks his axe in a deliciously loony scene, basically reflecting a love triangle between a Norse god and two metal armaments.

Our villain this time is superb: Christian Bale plays the deliciously named Gorr the God Butcher. A once-pious man who prayed in vain to the deities, he has now decided to wipe them out after having a personal setback. Bale is so creepy and so committed that you can feel his hatred melt your popcorn. "The gods will use you but they will not help you," he snarls.

Another punch of the bizarre comes from Russell Crowe, who



Natalie Portman (left) and Chris Hemsworth in a scene from "Thor: Love and Thunder."

plays Zeus as a vainglorious tyrant with a Roman outfit (a riff off "Gladiator"?) and an atrocious Mediterranean accent. He is surrounded by lackeys — some called Zeusettes — and frustrates Thor, even stripping him of his clothes, to the delight of many in the audience. "You know what they say: Never meet your heroes," says the Viking.

The whipsaw from death and suffering to idiocy is staggering, with Jennifer Kaytin Robinson credited alongside Waititi for a script that seems like it was pasted together after gerbils ripped up a bag of words. You go

from a hospital room on Earth dealing with a terminal illness to Thor dressed as a hot dog to a shadow realm in low gravity where the film goes completely black and white. There is very little logic and the connections between scenes are tenuous, giving the film a feeling of not building to anything clear.

"Thor: Love and Thunder," a Walt Disney Studios release that opens in theaters on July 8, is rated PG-13 for "intense sci-fi violence, action, language, partial nudity and some suggestive material." Running time: 119 minutes. ★★★★★



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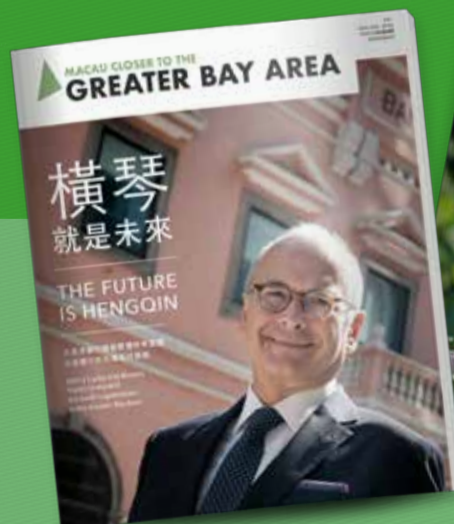
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**OPINION**

**China Daily**  
 Editorial, China Daily

**UK HAS CHANCE TO RESTORE SHINE OF 'GOLDEN AGE'**

With the loss of support within his government and party, United Kingdom Prime Minister Boris Johnson was left with no option but to resign on Thursday. This brings his tumultuous, scandal-plagued, just shy of three years in office to an ignominious end. It remains to be seen who will succeed him, but it is to be hoped the new leader will pursue a rational China policy that has not been molded by Washington.

By enthusiastically jumping onto the United States' anti-China bandwagon, the Johnson government ruined the mutual respect and good momentum of productive economic and trade cooperation that had been hailed as the beginning of a "golden age" for Sino-UK relations.

The new leader of the UK can draw the lessons from that.

The damage done to Sino-UK relations, because of the UK government's meddling in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Xinjiang affairs, and its forming of AUKUS with Australia and the US, among other things, has been substantial.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of ambassadorial-level diplomatic relations between the two countries. The general strengthening of cooperation between the two sides, despite the occasional setbacks, have brought tangible benefits to the two peoples and beyond.

China is the UK's largest trading partner in Asia and its largest source of imports. In 2021, bilateral trade between China and the UK reached \$112.6 billion, up 22 percent year-on-year. More than 500 Chinese companies have set up shop in the UK. Bilateral economic and trade cooperation shows a trend of diversification particularly in the UK's competitive fields of transportation, energy, chemical industry, machinery manufacturing, information and biological engineering.

Brexit should have represented a chance for the UK and China to further tap the complementarity potential of their economies and carry on the good momentum of their economic and trade cooperation. But the Johnson administration's joining with the US to decouple China from the world market put paid to any such hopes.

Johnson's successor will, hopefully, be aware that the way the Johnson administration treated relations with China has not served the UK's interests.

China remains willing to develop healthy relations with the UK on the basis of mutual respect and due consideration for its core interests.

The UK side should take the opportunity of Johnson's resignation to balance the gains and losses of persisting with his administration's approach toward China. Taking concrete actions to put the relations back onto the right track will make the past three years merely a temporary blip in the "golden age" of their relations.

A senior official at the European Union medicines agency said yesterday that many nations in the bloc are seeing a new wave of COVID-19, driven by highly-transmissible mutations of the omicron variant.

The European Medicines Agency's Marco Cavaleri told an online briefing that the BA.4 and BA.5 mutations are expected to become dominant across the continent, "likely replacing all other variants by the end of July."

He said that while there is no evidence the variants make people

more sick than earlier strains of the virus, "the increase in transmission among older age groups is starting to translate into severe disease."

In April, the EMA advised people aged 80 and above to get a second vaccine booster. Cavaleri said that second booster doses are now being advised for people in the EU aged from 60-79 years and "medically vulnerable persons of any age."

"As this new wave is unfolding over the EU, it is essential to maintain protection of vulnerable groups and avoid any postponement of vaccination," he said.



**EMPLOYMENT**

**US JOBLESS CLAIMS RISE TO 235K, MOST IN NEARLY SIX MONTHS**

MATT OTT, WASHINGTON

**M**ore Americans applied for unemployment benefits last week and while layoffs remain low, it was the fifth consecutive week that claims topped the 230,000 mark and the most in almost six months.

Applications for jobless aid for the week ending July 2 rose to 235,000, up 4,000 from the previous week and the most since mid-January, the Labor Department reported Thursday. First-time applications generally track with the number of layoffs. Until early June, claims hadn't eclipsed 220,000 since January and have often been below 200,000 this year.

The four-week average for claims, which evens out some of the week-to-week volatility, inched up by 750 from the previous week, to 232,500.

The total number of Americans collecting jobless benefits for the week ending June 25 rose by 51,000 from the previous week, to 1,375,000. That figure has hovered near 50-year lows for months.

On Wednesday, the La-

bor Department reported that U.S. employers advertised fewer jobs in May amid signs that the economy is weakening, though the overall demand for workers remained strong.

Employers posted 11.3 million job openings at the end of May, down from nearly 11.7 million in April. Job openings reached 11.9 million in March, the highest level on records dating back more than 20 years. There are nearly two job openings for every unemployed person.

The figures reflect the unusual nature of the post-pandemic economy: Inflation is hammering household budgets, forcing consumers to pull back on spending, and growth is weakening, heightening fears the economy could fall into recession. Yet companies are still scrambling to add workers. Demand has been particularly strong in travel- and entertainment-related services.

The Labor Department releases its May jobs report on Friday and analysts expect that employers filled more than 276,000 jobs. Though not an unhealthy number, it would be the

lowest monthly figure in more than a year.

Some highly-visible companies have announced layoffs recently.

The CEO of electric car maker Tesla, Elon Musk, acknowledged that the company was cutting about 10% of its salaried workforce, or 3.5% of its total headcount.

Netflix laid off 150 employees in May and another 300 in June after the streaming entertainment giant reported losing subscribers for the first time in more than a decade.

Online automotive retailer Carvana is letting about 2,500 workers go, roughly 12% of its workforce.

Online real estate broker Redfin, under pressure from a housing market that's cooled due to higher interest rates, is laying off 8% of its workers. Another real estate company, Compass, is shedding 450 employees. MDT/AP

Crypto trading platform Coinbase Global is cutting about 1,100 jobs, about 18% of its global workforce, in the wake of collapsing cryptocurrency prices. MDT/AP

Turkey has sent letters to Sweden and Finland renewing its request for the extradition of people it considers terror suspects, the Turkish justice minister said Wednesday. Turkey last week lifted its deal-breaking objections to Sweden and Finland's NATO accession. But Ankara has warned that it could still block the process if the two Nordic countries fail to meet its demand to extradite people suspected of links to outlawed Kurdish groups, or to the network of an exiled cleric accused over a failed coup in 2016.



EU's parliament yesterday overwhelmingly condemned the end of constitutional protections for abortion in the United States and called for such safeguards to be enshrined in the EU's fundamental rights charter. In a 324-155 vote with 38 abstentions, European Parliament lawmakers adopted a resolution that crystallized the anger seen in many of the EU's 27 member countries since the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its ruling on June 24.



UK A British Royal Navy vessel seized a sophisticated shipment of Iranian missiles in the Gulf of Oman earlier this year, officials said yesterday, pointing to the interdiction as proof of Tehran's support for Yemen's Houthis rebels in the embattled country. The British government statement was striking in that it provided some of the strongest findings to date that Tehran is arming the Houthis against the Saudi-led military coalition with advanced weapons smuggled through the Persian Gulf.

Portugal is bracing for a heat wave, with temperatures in some areas forecast to climb as high as 43 C this weekend just as a severe drought grips the country. The Civil Protection Agency, a Portuguese government body that coordinates official responses to emergencies, said yesterday it is placing crews on high alert because of the risk of wildfires. About a third of the country faces an extreme risk of forest fires, authorities say.