



S&P GLOBAL RATINGS EXPECTS MACAU'S 2022 END CASINO REVENUES WILL AT MOST REACH USD10.08 BILLION

P5

LAWMAKERS CALL ON GREATER SUPPORT MEASURES FOR SMES

P4

SHINZO ABE, POWERFUL FORMER JAPAN PM, LEAVES DIVIDED LEGACY

P7



AP PHOTO



North Korea appeared to have conducted artillery firing drills yesterday, South Korea said, days after the United States deployed sophisticated fighter jets to South Korea for joint training. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement that it detected multiple trajectories presumed to be North Korean artillery yesterday afternoon. It said South Korea's military maintained a firm readiness in close coordination with the United States.

AP PHOTO



Indonesia A foot-and-mouth disease outbreak has disrupted ritual slaughter of animals to mark Eid al-Adha as millions of Muslims across Indonesia were celebrating one of the biggest holidays in the Islamic calendar yesterday. Eid al-Adha, known as the "Feast of Sacrifice," is a revered observance that coincides with the final rites of the annual hajj in Saudi Arabia. It's a joyous occasion for which food is a hallmark where devout Muslims buy and slaughter animals and share two-thirds of the meat with the poor.

AP PHOTO

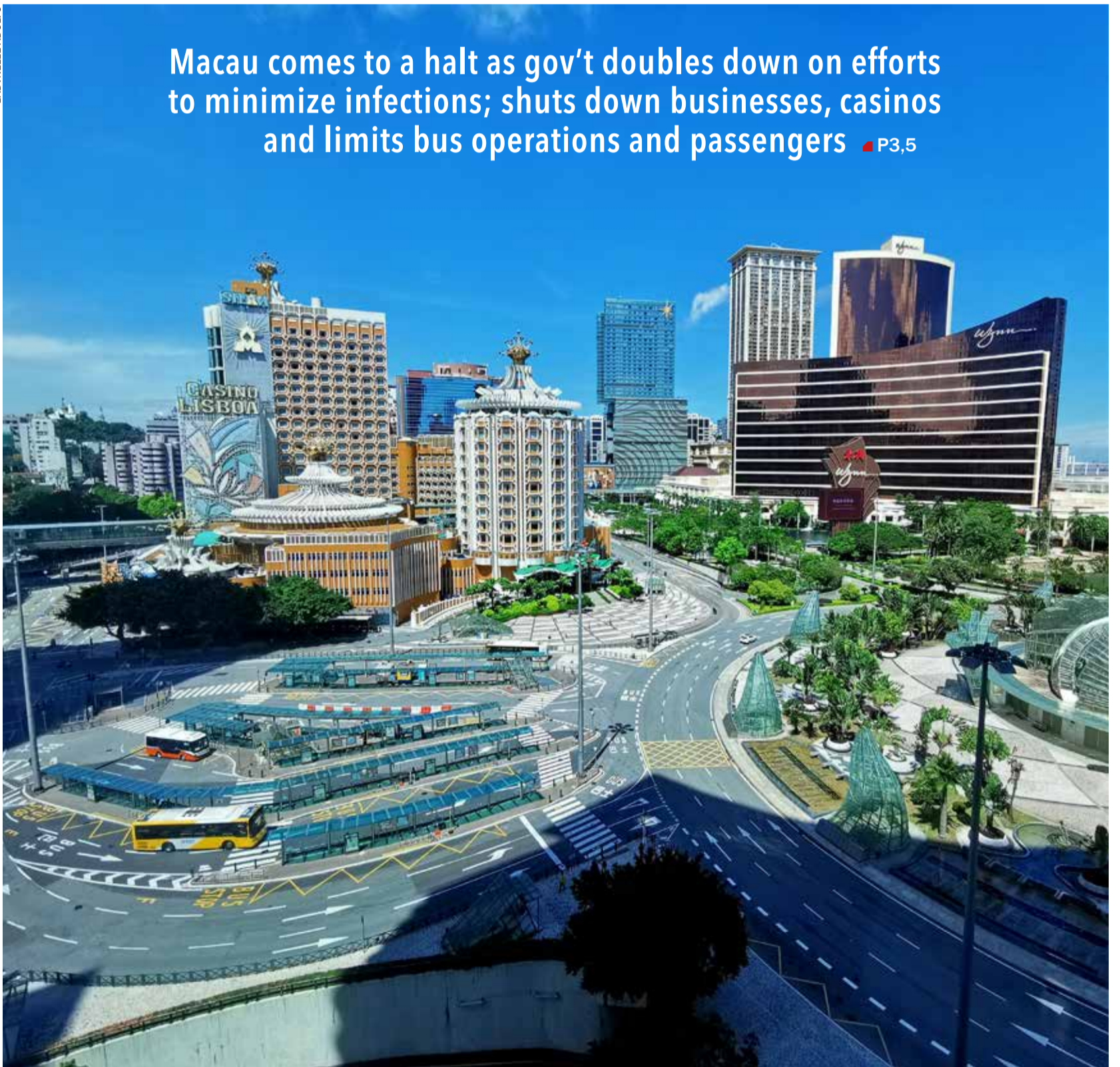


US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will pay a brief condolence visit to Japan this week following the assassination of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the State Department said yesterday. Blinken will travel to Tokyo today to pay his respects to the former leader and meet with senior Japanese officials before returning to Washington from an Asian tour that he is now wrapping up. *More on p7*

More on backpage

CITY AT A STANDSTILL

LADYNELLE ADOLFO



DOG WALKING CONSIDERED A CRIME THIS WEEK

P2

DELAY OF SPECIAL BUS PERMITS EXPECTED TO CAUSE HAVOC TODAY

P3

Walking dogs banned for a week, considered a crime

RENATO MARQUES

TAKING your dogs out for a walk and performing the pets' excretory necessities is, for a week commencing today, banned by the local authorities who consider the activity unnecessary, the representative of the Public Security Police Force (PSP), Lei Tak Fai, clarified yesterday.

During the daily press briefing of the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center, Lei explained that taking the pets out of the house for walks, which may include the animals' basic needs, is not considered essential and so is now banned under the new regulation that came into force at midnight today.

"Taking dogs out for walks does not constitute a matter of urgency or an essential activity as is clearly explained in the decree," Lei said.

Under this decree, those who are found to be out of their homes for reasons other than to perform one of the activities considered essential for people's subsistence will incur criminal liability that may result in penalties of up to two years of imprisonment or 240 days of fine.

As Lei also explained, people are only authorized to leave their homes to visit markets, supermarkets, or restaurants to supply themselves with food



products and other daily essentials, as well as to go to work in the instance they are included in the list of services that are authorized to continue to operate or to care for the elderly or vulnerable family members.

The same official requested

absolute collaboration from the population on the matter, reminding those that can go out temporarily that they must wear, at all times, a KN95 or an N95 standard or superior facemask.

Lei said that many police officers will patrol the city during

the week to ensure that the rules are being strictly followed and that no non-essential activities are taking place.

"The PSP will continue to enforce the law and will investigate, including by questioning all those who are outside for any

but an approved reason. Those who do not abide by the rules may face a criminal liability that can amount to, for example, the payment of a fine up to 240 days," Lei said, explaining further, "for instance, those who continue to go running or jogging, or the people who play chess in the parks, or those who walk the streets for no particular reason, none of these types of activities are allowed."

The same official also expressed hopes that the police will not need to use any of the punishments provided in the law but, instead, will achieve the goal of the executive order which is to reduce the number of people circulating in the community as much as possible to reduce the risk of spread of the Covid-19 virus.

"We hope we can rely on the understanding and acceptance of everyone," Lei said.

This news was not well received by local citizens who immediately took to social media to express their disapproval, many of whom stating that they will not abide by the rule as they must bring their pets out at least once or twice a day.

Others, in jest, recommended dog owners acquire uniforms from local companies that provide door-to-door food delivery services so they will be exempt from fulfilling the confinement requirements.

On Saturday, when the measure was firstly announced, the Secretary for Administration and Justice, Andre Cheong, had already affirmed that physical and sports activities, as well as all leisure activities, including just sitting outside, were not considered by the government as essential for the well-being of the society.

Essential workers to undergo daily NAT

THE director of the Health Bureau (SSM), Alvis Lo announced that those workers who are considered essential under the executive order from the Chief Executive and are allowed to continue to operate during this week, but will have to undergo daily testing using Rapid Antigen Tests (RAT)

as well as nucleic acid tests (NAT).

"From July 11 to July 18, members of those professions who need to continue to perform work will need to do daily RAT as well as daily NAT," Lo said during a press briefing of the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre.

"This includes not only those from the three key groups (cleaning, security, and condo workers) but also those who work in restaurants, food, and beverages establishments, hotels and also drivers and people doing deliveries."

Last week, three key groups such as the clea-

ning, security, and condo workers were required to undergo NAT everyday.

The director of SSM explained that those tests should not be a pre-requisite to be able to work but, instead, employers should allow these workers to do the NATs during their work time and as part of their work duties. **RM**

RENATO MARQUES



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COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Gov't orders closure of non-essential firms this week

LYNZY VALLES

THE government has ordered all industries and commercial companies and venues in Macau to suspend operation from July 11 until July 18.

In a press conference Friday, authorities clarified that the closure excludes those three categories of activity deemed essential to the community and to the day-to-day lives of the members of the public.

The three general categories of activity exempted from suspension are companies providing basic public services such as suppliers of water, electricity, and natural gas; telecommunication services; public transport; and waste collection.

Also in this category are commercial services necessary to the functioning of the community, namely hotel and associated accommodation; cleaning services; property management; and companies and entities responsible for wholesaling or transporting day-to-day produce and goods.

Wet markets, supermarkets, restaurants, food and beverage establishments, pharmacies, and healthcare services will remain open.



Also, companies and venues that have received approval to continue operations from their respective supervising authorities will remain open.

The Executive Order No. 115/2022, signed by the Chief Executive, was put in place to deter the spread of Covid-19.

STAY AT HOME

The Executive Order mandates individuals to stay at home, unless their outings are necessary, such as for "work in busi-

nesses exempted from closure, for grocery shopping, or in event of emergency."

When outside, members of the public must wear a face mask. Adults must wear a KN95 face mask or face mask above such standard; minors may wear any form of protective face mask.

The SAR government is appealing for further concerted effort from the community, "with a view to reducing to the lowest possible level non-es-

sential movement in the community."

"These joint efforts would help realise the "dynamic zero-Covid-19" epidemic-control goal, and to enable resumption at the earliest opportunity of normal community life," the government stated.

Latest data from the government shows that the city has recorded a total of 1,467 Covid-19 cases since June 18.

Four rounds of mass testing are being held this week.

CE EXTENDS CONDOLENCES ON DEATH OF JAPAN'S ABE

Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng extended deep condolences to the sudden and unfortunate passing of Japan's former prime minister Shinzo Abe. Ho did so on behalf of the MSAR government, and in a personal capacity, and extended his condolences to Abe's family, according to a statement issued by the Government Information Bureau. "Macau and Japan had made good progress in cooperation in areas such as tourism and culture when Abe was Japan's prime minister. Macau will continue to play its role in the country's effort to work closely with Japan to promote Sino-Japanese relations," the statement read.

VEHICLES ALLOWED IN PUBLIC CARPARKS UNTIL JULY 31

In response to public parking needs, private vehicles will be temporarily permitted to park in public car parks for more than eight consecutive days until July 31. Amid the current closure of industrial and commercial non-essential services, vehicle owners can continue to park without additional application. Vehicles parked in excess of the eight-day limit stipulated in the Public Parking Service Regulations will not be locked and prosecuted, but the parking fee must be paid when leaving the venue. The Transport Bureau calls on the public to cooperate with the SAR's epidemic prevention work.

BANKS TO CLOSE THIS WEEK

Banks remain temporarily closed this week but will continue to provide necessary services to maintain social operations. The services include handling the cross-border settlement business, and purchasing medical supplies and livelihood security materials and other related financial services. Online banking, mobile banking, automated teller machine (ATM) and other self-service channels will operate as normal. Due dates of local settlement, loan, credit card repayment, and time deposit will be postponed to the next working day after reopening.

COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Special permits to ride buses delayed

RENATO MARQUES

THE special permits to be issued by the Transport Bureau (DSAT) that will allow those who need to commute to work this week by riding buses are delayed. The delay will likely cause havoc today.

At the press briefing of the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Center, yesterday, the director of the DSAT, Kelvin Lam Hin San admitted that the bureau had not (at the time of the briefing) issued any of these special permits, a situation that can create challenges for those who need to commute to work today, especially during the early hours of the day.

"We have not issued any cards yet as we are still collecting data from the different departments and



companies on this matter," Lam said in response to a media inquiry on the topic.

Nonetheless, the same official reaffirmed the need to possess a special permit issued by the bureau to board the buses starting from midnight July 11.

Several citizens, namely

those in the hotel industry, have expressed concerns over the issue stating that they need to continue to work but no permits are being distributed. These citizens worry that they need to bear the costs of commuting by taxi, at least for today, so they do not fail

with their work duties.

A local resident, working in a hotel unit in the Cotai area, told the Times that the company has not distributed any permits yesterday and so, the workers will likely have to take taxis to work this morning as they will not be allowed to

board public buses.

The same resident said that some co-workers have raised this issue to the company yesterday but, as the company has reduced the number of shuttle buses operating, the only solution would be for the workers to take the company's shuttle bus that operates about six hours earlier than the time they start work.

The public is blaming the government for a rushed decision made over the weekend, when the public departments are closed and unreachable, calling on the authorities to enforce an exception for today so companies can process requests and supply their staff members with the necessary permits.

30 special public bus services will operate from July 11 to 18 amid the suspension of industrial and commercial services. The special public bus services include 24 daytime and six late-night bus services.

LAWMAKERS EXPRESS SUPPORT FOR GOV'T ASSISTANCE, YET CALLS ON GREATER MEASURES FOR SMES

STAFF REPORTER

SEVERAL lawmakers have expressed support for the recent government announcement of a MOP10 billion subsidy plan targeting SMEs and residents in need amid the current economic situation caused by the pandemic.

A series of nine measures including cash handouts, tax refunds and tax exemptions have been announced by the government in response to pressures that residents and businesses are facing.

However, lawmakers have called on the government to put more assistance measures in place for small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Lawmaker Lei Leong Wong noted that SMEs employ 40% of workers in Macau, which he considers an "important part of the employment and economic market."

"The government needs to strengthen support for the operation of SMEs, safeguarding the employment of those who work for SMEs," he said.

The lawmaker hopes that the government will consider the assistance measures carefully and promote more targeted employment and economic support to solve the operational problems of SMEs.

Lawmaker Song Pek Kei suggested that the government could regulate food delivery platforms.

RENATO MARQUES



"Some SMEs feel hopeless," reported Song, noting that food delivery platforms take commissions of 20% to 40% from order prices.

If this continues, Song said, the sector will see a significant reduction in operations as many operators "will definitely close their businesses after six months."

Lawmaker Ella Lei from the Macao Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM), emphasized the struggle of the restaurant industry, which is facing difficulties as most restaurants need to pay expensive rents, causing immense pressure on operators.

For nearly three weeks now, all restaurants have been prohibited from providing dine-in service.

Restaurant owners previously interviewed by the Times have said that the business climate for restaurants has deteriorated.

Staff in the sector, apart from those at integrated resorts, have also expressed concern as they have been asked to take unpaid leave until the situation improves – but there is no light at the end of the tunnel given the surging daily Covid-19 case numbers.

"Affected by a new outbreak, it is likely that unemployment numbers will continue to rise," said Lei.

One measure in the stimulus package is new cash handouts of MOP15,000, which will be given to all resident taxpayers who have reported income subject to tax of between 6,000 and 480,000 patacas over a cumulative period of two years (2020 and 2021).

The latest data from the Statistics and Census Service shows the number of unemployed people from March to May standing at 12,800, and the number underemployed at 12,700 people.

Lei hopes the government can expand this assistance measure to benefit more residents, especially those who have been unem-

ployed for a long time, as well as those who are suspended from work or on leave without pay.

She also called on the government to strengthen support for vulnerable groups.

Meanwhile, lawmaker Leong Sun Lok said that he has received several requests for help from people who are unemployed or furloughed due to the closure of businesses.

During the pandemic, all casinos have attempted to cushion their financial blow by subjecting employees to leave without pay, salary reductions or internal job transfers.

The government has allegedly requested that casino operators reduce on-duty staff by 90%, a further blow for the already-vulnerable sector and its employees, which is already in crisis.

Fewer than ten gaming tables are still running amid the current outbreak.

Synergy of Macao president Ron Lam expressed hopes that the threshold for assistance measures can be lowered. He stressed that the pandemic affects many people, and multiple groups may be affected: not just low-income people, but also middle-income people.

The statement echoed Lei's sentiment as she noted that, although the government has stated that the assistance measures cover nearly 80% of employees, "the unemployed may not be supported by the assistance measures."

Lam added that some residents with jobs in the insurance sector are neither employees nor freelancers, and therefore have been ineligible to receive support from the assistance measures in the previous rounds.

VOX POP

Residents consider halting the city 'not ideal'

STAFF REPORTER

SEVERAL residents have divided opinions regarding the ban on people leaving their homes unless essential.

The government has announced that from July 11 to 18, all industrial and commercial sites are temporarily closed, but companies or places that are necessary to maintain society operation and residents' health will not be affected.

The government emphasized that this is not a lockdown, but rather a measure to keep society safe by minimizing the flow of people.

Some residents who

were interviewed by the Times expressed their different opinions on the policies yesterday.

"I believe that the policies can effectively control the rising number of positive cases," said Wong Heng Wa, a local realtor.

Wong has confidence in the government's policies. He said that under the policies of prohibiting leaving the home, the Covid-19 outbreak will improve.

On the other hand, some residents, including a 58-year-old construction worker, have expressed opposing opinions about the policies.

For Tang Man Heng, the policy is not helping the

current outbreak, noting that the current imposition of a "semi-lockdown" is "not ideal."

"The number of positive cases is still rising because the government did not prohibit residents from leaving the home earlier," said Tang.

Tang said that during the pandemic last year, the government quickly announced that all residents were not allowed to go outside, so the pandemic was effectively controlled in a short period of time, and the number of positive cases stopped rising.

He expressed that the government needed to do the same in this outbreak, but now the virus has

spread in the community and the government's policies are not effective.

"I'm scared to go to work now, even the head of the company called and asked why I didn't go to work," Tang said.

Another resident echoed similar sentiments, saying, "The current government's policies are not good enough."

Surnamed Hoi, the 26-year-old former employee of a clothing store, mourns the job she lost due to the pandemic and now relies on her personal savings. Moreover, she described the policies prohibiting people from going outside as making the public's life more difficult.

Hoi hopes the government can consider the views of the residents when dealing with the pandemic.

FLORA TANG



City to shut casinos for a week amidst Covid-19 outbreak

LYNZY VALLES

MACAU will close all its casinos for a week starting today – the second closure the government has ordered since the first outbreak in February 2020, which led to a 15-day shutdown.

The seven-day suspension is to curb the spread of the coronavirus. Macau has largely restricted people to their homes as it tries to stop the Covid-19 outbreak that has infected more than 1,400 people in the past three weeks.

All businesses have been ordered to shut except for supermarkets and others providing essential services. Residents must stay home unless they need to go out, such as for food, shopping or to work in a sector deemed essential.

Data from the Gaming Inspec-



tion and Coordination Bureau showed that Macau's gaming revenue last month has fallen 62.1% compared to June 2021, and a decline 25.9% compared to

May 2022.

For the first six months of 2022, Macau's gaming revenue is USD3.26 billion, down 46.4% from the first six months of 2021.

As cited in a report issued by The Nevada Independent, Macquarie Securities gaming analyst Chad Beynon said that the pandemic will continue to be a factor

in Macau's gaming revenue declines until November.

November is predicted to be when a Chinese government event is planned and some of the health and safety restrictions might be lifted.

"We remain cautious in the near term, as the Macau recovery has seen several fits and starts and remains highly sensitive to Covid outbreaks," Beynon said.

The SAR has been imposing a zero-Covid strategy by locking down buildings where positive cases have been detected and by conducting repeat rounds of mass testing to find and isolate infected individuals.

Macau's gaming revenues are expected to reach "near-zero" levels, gaming analysts have suggested. They have also predicted that all gaming operators will record a negative EBITDA in the second quarter of this year, with no operator escaping the economic fallout of the pandemic.

Macau's all-time gaming revenue record was USD45 billion in 2013.

The gaming revenues recorded in 2020 and 2021 are the lowest single-year back-to-back totals since 2006 and 2007.



GAMING

S&P Global is pessimistic about city's 2022 GGR

ANTHONY LAM

INTERNATIONAL economic rating institution S&P Global Ratings expects that Macau's 2022 end gross gambling revenue (GGR) will at most reach USD10.08 billion, several media report.

In addition to the pessimistic forecast, according to gambling industry media GGRAsia, the institution has placed several local casino operators,

namely Wynn Resorts Ltd., Sands China Ltd. and Melco Resorts and Entertainment Ltd. under negative credit watch.

S&P Global Ratings cited in a report published last week the city's recent outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 and the subsequent strict control measures as a core reason for the poor forecast. Moreover, similar to what Macau Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng has said, Macau's disea-

se control measures are mostly mirroring those imposed in mainland China, meaning that such measures will also discourage mainland tourists and gamblers from visiting Macau.

Moreover, despite the government's attempt to retain consumption by providing grants from public funds to individual citizens for them to spend, the report remarked that "shrinking disposable

income and weakening consumer sentiment, which surfaced in late 2021, may also hinder the recovery."

At the time the S&P Global Ratings were published, the government had not yet announced the de-facto lockdown of the city to commence in the coming week. The city's SARS-CoV-2 infections tally is still on the rise as of press time.

According to the institution at its most optimistic, the city will see about MOP88 billion in GGR at the end of this year. This amount is only about 20% to 30% of the city's pre-Covid GGR level, S&P Global pointed out.

In the first six months of this year, the city has only garnered about MOP26 billion in GGR, lowest in the past 16 years.

Looking into the year ahead, S&P Global Ratings estimates the city will regain about 50% to 70% of the mass-market synergy from pre-Covid time. It added that the city should not be too optimistic about VIP markets.

The city cannot attract foreign visitors as they are currently banned from entering, although its government has promised incentives or benefits to future casino operators to lure foreign visitors.

87-YEAR-OLD WOMAN FALLS FROM HEIGHT

THE city saw another alleged suicide of an octogenarian in the traditional residential district of Fai Chi Kei yesterday morning, the Judiciary Police (PJ) announced.

First reported to the Fire Services Bureau (CB), the case was discovered by a cleaner who worked at the residential estate on Rua Norte do Patane. The cleaner found the body of the deceased on the third-floor podium of the estate at about 9:30 a.m.

According to the police, the woman, aged 87 years, had fallen from height in the estate. She was pronounced dead on site.

Investigations revealed that the deceased had lived by herself in an apartment in the estate. In recent years, the deceased had expressed signs of unhappiness and depression.

At about 8 a.m. yesterday, the deceased called her fa-

amily and told them that she felt mentally disturbed as she heard neighbors gossiping about her.

She then took the elevator up the building and jumped from a window in the stairwell.

Police found no suicide note on the site.

A preliminary post-mortem examination found no signs of criminality. Wounds were consistent with falling from height. Further post-mortem examinations will confirm the cause of death, the police added.

The Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) encourages residents to be aware of their psychological and emotional state as well as that of their relatives' and friends'. For support, residents can call Caritas' Life Hope hotline (28525777) or IAS' counseling hotline (28261126). AL



Residential area in Rua Norte do Patane

HUIZHONG WU, TAIPEI

COVID-19

Beijing appears to retract vaccine mandate after pushback

THE Chinese capital Beijing appears to have backed off a plan to launch a vaccine mandate for entry into certain public spaces after pushback from residents.

While not explicitly saying it had dropped the plan, a city official was quoted in state media late Thursday saying that people could enter venues with a negative virus test result and a temperature check, as has been the norm. They also said vaccinations would continue on the principle of "informed, voluntary consent."

An unidentified official in the pandemic control office said residents of the city could enter any sort of public venue with a negative PCR test done in the last 72 hours and a temperature check, according to a short question and answer post from the official Beijing Daily, the main paper of the city government, published late Thursday night.

The city announced last week that starting this week, people had to show proof of COVID-19

vaccination before they can enter some public spaces including gyms, museums and libraries. It drew intense discussion as city residents worried how the sudden policy announcement would disrupt their lives.

A phone call to the Beijing government's press office to confirm the policy change did not go through. The phone had been set to "do not disturb" mode according to a recorded message.

Online and offline, some criticized the policy, worrying that it would force those who weren't vaccinated to get the shots, or lose out on access to many public spaces. The announcement was trending Thursday on the Chinese social networking service Weibo.



The government is concerned about the remaining numbers of unvaccinated people, especially those over age 60 who are vulnerable. In April, the Beijing government announced that over 80% of people over 60 had gotten a vaccine, some 3.4 million people. **MDT/AP**

US TELLS CHINA ITS SUPPORT FOR RUSSIA COMPLICATES RELATIONS

MATTHEW LEE, NUSA DUA

CHINA'S support for Russia's war in Ukraine is complicating U.S.-Chinese relations at a time when they are already beset by rifts and enmity over numerous other issues, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken told his Chinese counterpart on Saturday.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi blamed the U.S. for the downturn in relations and said that American policy has been derailed by what he called a misperception of China as a threat.

"Many people believe that the United States is suffering from a China-phobia," he said, according to a Chinese statement. "If such threat-expansion is allowed to grow, U.S. policy toward China will be a dead end with no way out."

In five hours of talks in their first-

face meeting since October, Blinken said he expressed deep concern about China's stance on Russia's actions in Ukraine and did not believe Beijing's protestations that it is neutral in the conflict.

The talks had been arranged in a new effort to try to rein in or at least manage rampant hostility that has come to define recent relations between Washington and Beijing.

"We are concerned about the PRC's alignment with Russia," Blinken told reporters after the meeting in the Indonesian resort of Bali. He said it is difficult to be "neutral" in a conflict in which there is a clear aggressor but that even it were possible, "I don't believe China is acting in a way that is neutral."

The Chinese statement said the two sides had an in-depth exchange of views on Ukraine but provided no details. **MDT/AP**



CRIME

CHINA EX-VICE PUBLIC SECURITY MINISTER ON TRIAL FOR GRAFT

A former Chinese vice minister of public security went on trial Friday, accused of collecting 646 million yuan (\$96.3 million) in bribes over nearly two decades.

Sun Lijun faces accusations of selling government positions, manipulating stock prices and illegally possessing firearms, in one of the most high-profile corruption trials in years.

Sun, who is also accused of abandoning his post amid the COVID-19 outbreak, has pleaded guilty, state broadcaster CCTV said in a report on the trial, which is being held at the Intermediate Court in the northeastern city of Changchun.

Sun was shown standing in the dock in a blue windbreaker, with uniformed police officers on either side of him.

It was not immediately clear when a verdict would be rendered. China's courts have a conviction rate of more than 99%. With prosecutors describing Sun's crimes as "especially serious in nature," he is likely facing a lengthy prison sentence.

President and head of the ruling Communist Party Xi Jinping has waged a decade-long campaign against corruption that has ensnared



numerous serving and retired high-ranking officials in what some see as politically motivated prosecutions.

In an announcement last year on Sun's expulsion from the party, he was accused of having displayed "extremely inflated political ambition and very poor political integrity," issuing groundless criticisms of the Party's policies and spreading political rumors.

Sun also engaged in "superstitious activities" and led a "decadent lifestyle," the party's disciplinary body said.

Sun is also named in a lawsuit brought by the U.S. Justice Department against Las Vegas casino mogul Steve Wynn

last month to compel Wynn to register as a foreign agent because of lobbying work it says he performed at the behest of the Chinese government.

The lawsuit says the lobbying effort was done on behalf of senior Chinese government officials, including Sun, who sought Wynn's help in trying to get a Chinese national's visa application denied, according to the complaint.

Beijing was seeking the return of the man, who had been charged with corruption in China and was seeking political asylum in America. The effort was ultimately unsuccessful. **MDT/AP**

Japan votes in key election in shadow of Abe assassination

MARI YAMAGUCHI, TOKYO

JAPANESE voted yesterday in the shadow of the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe that brought heightened security as party leaders avoided mingling with crowds and delivered messages of upholding democracy and free speech during campaigning the day before.

Exit polls for the election for the parliament's upper house showed Abe's governing party certain to win a major victory, possibly propelled by what is seen as a wave of sympathy votes in a country still reeling from the shock of Friday's brazen shooting.

Also yesterday, police in western Japan sent the alleged assassin to a local prosecutors' office for further investigation. A top regional police official acknowledged possible security lapses that allowed the attacker to get so close and fire a bullet at the still-influential former Japanese leader.

Exit polls by NHK public broadcaster and other media showed the governing Liberal Democratic Party was certain to secure a single majority of 125 seats, or half of the upper house, the less powerful of the two chambers. It's a major boost for Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who stands to rule without interruption until a scheduled election in 2025.

In the wake of Abe's assassination, yesterday's election had a new meaning, with all political leaders emphasizing the importance of free speech and their pledge not to back down on violence against democracy.



Security was also heightened. On the final day of campaigning Saturday, party leaders avoided fist-bumps — a COVID-19 alternative to handshakes — or other close-proximity friendly gestures they used to enjoy with the public.

Mourners visited the LDP headquarters to lay flowers and pray for Abe as party officials prepared for vote counting inside.

"We absolutely refuse to let violence shut out free speech," Kishida said in his final rally in the northern city of Niigata on Saturday. "We must demonstrate that our democracy and election will not back down on violence."

Abe was shot in Nara on Friday and airlifted to a hospital but died of blood loss. Police arrested a former member of Japan's navy at the scene and confiscated a homemade gun. Several others were later found at his apartment.

The suspect, Tetsuya Yamagami, told investigators he acted because of Abe's rumored con-

nection to an organization that he resented, police said, but had no problem with the former leader's political views. The man had developed hatred toward a religious group that his mother was obsessed about and that bankrupted a family business, according to media reports, including some that identified the group as the Unification Church.

Abe's body, in a black hearse accompanied by his wife, Akie, returned to his home in Tokyo's upscale Shibuya, where many mourners, including Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and top party officials, paid tribute. His wake and funeral are expected in coming days.

Nara prefectural police chief Tomoaki Onizuka on Saturday said that Abe's assassination was the "greatest regret" in his 27-year career. He said problems with security were undeniable, that he took the shooting seriously and will review the security procedures.

Japan is known for its strict gun

laws. With a population of 125 million, it had only 21 gun-related criminal cases in 2020, according to the latest government crime paper. Experts say, however, some recent attacks involved use of consumer items such as gasoline, suggesting increased risks for ordinary people to be embroiled in mass attacks.

In the wake of Abe's assassination, yesterday's election had a new meaning, with all political leaders emphasizing [...] their pledge not to back down on violence against democracy

Even after stepping down as prime minister in 2020, Abe was highly influential in the LDP and headed its largest faction. His absence could change the power balance in the governing party that has almost uninterrupted ruled postwar Japan since its 1955 foundation, experts say.

"This could be a turning point" for the LDP over its divisive policies on gender equality, same-sex marriages and other issues that Abe-backed ultra-conservatives with paternalistic family values had resisted, said Mitsuru Fukuda, a crisis management professor at Nihon University.

Japan's current diplomatic and security stance is unlikely to be swayed because fundamental changes had already been made by Abe. His ultra-nationalist views and pragmatic policies made him a divisive figure to many, including in the Koreas and China.

Abe stepped down two years ago blaming a recurrence of the ulcerative colitis he'd had since he was a teenager. He said he regretted leaving many of his goals unfinished, including the issue of Japanese abducted years ago by North Korea, a territorial dispute with Russia, and a revision of Japan's war-renouncing constitution that many conservatives consider a humiliation, because of poor public support.

Abe was groomed to follow in the footsteps of his grandfather, former Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi. His political rhetoric often focused on making Japan a "normal" and "beautiful" nation with a stronger military through

security alliance with the United States and bigger role in international affairs.

He became Japan's youngest prime minister in 2006, at age 52. But his overly nationalistic first stint abruptly ended a year later, also because of his health, prompting six years of annual leadership change.

He returned to office in 2012, vowing to revitalize the nation and get its economy out of its deflationary doldrums with his "Abenomics" formula, which combines fiscal stimulus, monetary easing and structural reforms. He won six national elections and built a rock-solid grip on power. **MDT/AP**

OBITUARY

Shinzo Abe, powerful former Japan PM, leaves divided legacy

FOSTER KLUG
& MARI YAMAGUCHI

SHINZO Abe was a political blueblood groomed for power. Japan's longest serving prime minister, he was also perhaps the most polarizing, complex politician in recent Japanese history.

Abe, who was assassinated Friday, angered both liberals at home and World War II victims in Asia with his hawkish push to revamp the military and his revisionist view that Japan was given an unfair verdict by history for its brutal past.

At the same time, he re-

vitalized Japan's economy, led efforts for the nation to take a stronger role in Asia and served as a rare beacon of political stability before stepping down two years ago for health reasons.

"He's the most towering political figure in Japan over the past couple of decades," said Dave Leheny, a political scientist at Waseda University. "He wanted Japan to be respected on the global stage in the way that he felt was deserved. [...] He also wanted Japan to not have to keep apologizing for World War II."

Abe was a darling of conservatives but reviled by

many liberals in Japan. And no policy was more divisive than his cherished, ultimately unsuccessful dream to revise Japan's war-renouncing constitution. His ultra-nationalism also angered the Koreas and China, both wartime victims of Japan.

That push for constitutional revision stemmed from his personal history.

He also was a driving force for Japanese conservatives' efforts to whitewash wartime atrocities and push for an end of apologies over atrocities.

Supporters point to his efforts to raise Japan's profile on the international

stage, and his proposal for a new order of like-minded democracies as a counter to China's rise, something Washington and others soon endorsed.

Abe was also a big influence on current Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's policies, pushing for the bolstering of military capability, including a preemptive-strike capability.

Abe stepped down as prime minister in 2020 because he said the ulcerative colitis he'd had since he was a teenager resurfaced.

Abe, who died after being shot during a campaign speech, was 67. **MDT/AP**





BRITISH PARLIAMENT

For EU, Johnson exit won't change much; damage already done

RAF CASERT & SAMUEL
PETREQUIN, BRUSSELS

FROM his days stoking anti-European Union sentiment with exaggerated newspaper stories, to his populist campaign leading Britain out of the bloc and reneging on the post-Brexit trade deal he signed, outgoing U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has been the bane of Brussels for all so many years.

Such was his impact on breaking the bonds between Britain and the EU that after Johnson was forced to announce Thursday that he would step down, the news brought little public jubilation in EU circles. Instead, there was just the numb acceptance of the inevitable and resignation that things will never be the same.

"I will not miss him," French finance minister Bruno Le Maire said, highlighting an open disdain unseen since the Europeans welcomed the U.S. election loss of Donald Trump in 2020. And while trans-Atlantic relations picked up quickly since the arrival of President Joe Biden, don't expect anything similar with a new British leader, politicians and experts said.

"Even with a new prime minister, I believe there will likely be few changes in the British government's position" on the main Brexit issues causing current divisions, said David McAllister, the leading EU legislator dealing with the United

Kingdom.

Guy Verhofstadt, who was the top EU parliamentarian during the whole Brexit divorce proceedings, said Johnson's impact was such there is little to no chance another Conservative prime minister could steer a fundamentally different course.

"No one is under any illusion that Johnson's departure from Downing Street solves any of the underlying problems in the U.K.-EU relationship," Verhofstadt wrote in an opinion piece for The Guardian. "The damage done by the outgoing prime minister, through the project that he instrumentalized to achieve power, lives on."

The United Kingdom was always a halfhearted EU member since joining the bloc in 1973. When Johnson joined the Brussels press corps some three decades ago, he often enthralled his home readership with stories that had two fundamental elements: they put the EU in the darkest of lights, and they had little connection to reality.

As a Conservative politician, he threw his weight in the 2016 referendum on the U.K.'s EU membership behind arguments to leave the bloc. Johnson used his breezy manner and jokey style to sell the benefits of withdrawing from the EU, sometimes disregarding the facts. He was key to the Brexit campaign's victory in the cliff-edge 2016 Brexit referendum vote.

Yet disdain never ran deeper than earlier this year when he started moves toward unilaterally rewriting parts of the post-Brexit deal he signed with the 27-nation bloc. The agreement set up a special system in Northern Ireland, which is part of the U.K., so trade with the Republic of Ireland — an EU member — could go on without setting up a physical border.

"I was there face to face with him. Line for line, comma for comma, and he doesn't want to respect it," EU chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier reminisced Friday, still showing bafflement at Johnson's tactics.

"The reputational damage has been huge to a country and society which has long been proud of its deep culture of 'My word is my bond' without even a written contract, let alone an international treaty," said Michael Emerson of the Center for European Policy Studies.

The bill to unilaterally break the agreement on trade in Northern Ireland is still in the House of Commons, and some lingering hope is left that London might step back from the brink.

"They have this law in the Parliament, so they are doing steps in that direction. But they have not crossed the line," said Jan Lipavský, the foreign minister of Czechia, which holds the EU presidency and is more widely known in English as the Czech Republic.

Yet a quick glance at the

likely contenders to take over doesn't inspire hope for any fundamental change since it includes several Conservatives who have spent years steeping in Johnson's confrontational Brexit strategies.

"If you look at possible successors, there is no one who will fundamentally break with the Brexit line," said Rem Korteweg of the Clingendael Institute in The Hague, Netherlands. "The Conservative Party has a dominant Brexit core that you will have to convince to become prime minister."

Although the first years of Brexit have yielded anything but the bounty Johnson promised, any possible quest to return the U.K. to the EU is also as good as out of the question, with the main opposition Labour Party now centering to make the best of the Brexit situation instead.

Not that the EU would even want to welcome back the country with open arms.

With Ukraine, inflation-splurred economic issues and migration problems, "their plate is full," Korteweg said. "They are really not waiting for talks with the British, who will be looking for exceptions and exemptions anyway," he said.

Barnier, who led the EU in Brexit talks for years, doesn't see it happening either.

"It is not an issue at hand," Barnier said on Sud Radio. "Very frankly, what we need is a state of mind where the British government respects the treaties it negotiated." MDT/AP

this day in history

2000 BRITAIN PIONEERS HIV VACCINE



The World Aids Conference in South Africa has announced trials for a new HIV vaccine will begin in Britain.

Liberal Democrat MP Evan Harris (pictured) will be one of 18 healthy volunteers who will take part in the first toxicity tests.

The MP for Oxford West, Dr Harris, 35, said: "I hope to be a small part of a process that will deliver something that will save Africa from further devastation."

The vaccine has been developed by researchers at Oxford and Nairobi Universities who studied prostitutes in Kenya and found a group who resisted the disease in spite of daily exposure to it.

If the tests in Oxford are successful, trials will go to Nairobi in October under the supervision of Professor Job Bwayo and his team.

Professor of immunology at Oxford University Andrew McMichael said: "Our chances of developing a vaccine are better than 50-50. But the earliest we could expect a vaccine to be ready would be in seven to 10 years."

There are currently 34 million people in the world suffering from HIV and 70% of them are in Africa.

This is the first time a vaccine has been based on the HIV strain in Africa. It uses DNA and a wild animal virus similar to that used to combat smallpox.

The Oxford-Nairobi project is one of 11 similar groups around the world funded by the International Aids Vaccine Initiative (Iavi). It has received £14m from the British Government.

Iavi estimates that three times more than the £200m currently spent on research programmes is needed to find a vaccine within ten years.

Vaccination should provide a much cheaper and more effective means of tackling the pandemic, especially for the Third World which cannot afford HIV drugs and is barred from developing generic variations.

According to Iavi only 2% of the \$20m spent annually on Aids around the world is for vaccine development.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The trials began in Oxford in August 2000. In April 2002 the Oxford-Nairobi project trials were extended to a further 120 volunteers in Oxford and London. In July 2002 US pharmaceutical company VaxGen announced that it might develop a vaccine within five years and began the final phase of human testing. By 2001, 15,000 people were being infected with HIV every day around the World. By 2005 1.3 million people had access to Anti-Retroviral Treatment or ART - although still short of the 3 million target set for 2005, the figure has increased rapidly in recent years. In 2006 an estimated 38.6 million people around the world are living with Aids.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

<p>ARIES Mar. 21-Apr. 19 Consider a trial separation if you and your mate just can't come to terms. You can expect insincere gestures of friendliness today. Get busy putting your place in order.</p>	<p>TAURUS Apr. 20-May. 20 Don't expect new acquaintances to be completely honest about themselves. Be innovative. Misunderstandings at work could easily lead to your demise.</p>
<p>GEMINI May. 21-Jun. 21 Use your charm, but don't be phony. Try to have patience and refrain from being judgmental. Sudden changes regarding your circle of friends could prove interesting and stimulating.</p>	<p>CANCER Jun. 22-Jul. 22 You can make excellent purchases today. Don't make any drastic changes or begin new projects today. You can expect to have problems with your mate if you've been spending too much time away from home.</p>
<p>LEO Jul. 23-Aug. 22 You can make extra cash by moonlighting. Don't blow situations out of proportion. Take advantage of moneymaking ventures.</p>	<p>VIRGO Aug. 23-Sep. 22 Although it does look promising, be careful not to overextend yourself or you will lose in the long run. Remember; talk to them, not at them.</p>
<p>LIBRA Sep. 23-Oct. 22 Opportunities will develop through those you encounter while attending organizational events. You may want to get involved in some kind of creative group.</p>	<p>SCORPIO Oct. 23-Nov. 21 Travel for business or pleasure. You can make money, but try not to let it slip through your fingers. Your flair for dramatic appeal will unleash itself at social functions.</p>
<p>SAGITTARIUS Nov. 22-Dec. 21 Your need to put great detail into everything you do may cause you to miss the overall picture. Don't be too quick to let friends and relatives know what you're up to.</p>	<p>CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 19 Short trips may be tiring but rewarding. Let go of the past in order to progress. Do not get involved with individuals who are already committed to others.</p>
<p>AQUARIUS Jan. 20-Feb. 18 Strengthen your position among your peers. Limitations will set in if you haven't followed the rules. Someone may not be thinking of your best interests.</p>	<p>PISCES Feb. 19-Mar. 20 Avoid overloading your plate. Try to keep an open mind. Sudden trips will take you by surprise. You like to stay busy and now is your chance to do just that.</p>

The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



SUDOKU

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

WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	20	29	cloudy
Changchun	20	30	cloudy
Chengdu	26	35	thunderstorms
Chongqing	32	40	cloudy
Fuzhou	27	39	cloudy
Guangzhou	26	35	cloudy
Guiyang	22	29	cloudy
Haikou	26	32	thunderstorms
Hangzhou	29	38	cloudy
Harbin	19	30	showers
Hefei	27	38	cloudy
Nanjing	29	38	cloudy
Shanghai	30	38	rain
Taipei	26	31	cloudy
Wuhan	29	36	fine
Hong Kong	26	29	cloudy
WORLD			
Moscow	19	31	overcast
Frankfurt	12	26	cloudy
Paris	18	31	clear
London	19	31	overcast
New York	22	29	clear

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- City on the Rhone; 6- Actress Zadora; 9- Somewhat, colloquially; 14- Worker's reward; 15- Slugger Mel; 16- Old newsman; 17- Purity; 19- Dread; 20- Alias letters; 21- Hurt; 22- Like tubers; 23- Enormous; 25- Extremely; 26- Unfold; 29- Actor Auberjonois; 31- Keeper, in football; 32- Boastful person; 36- Jealous wife of myth; 37- Used a shovel; 38- Appoint; 40- Teachings; 43- Contemporary; 45- Dies ___; 46- Quaking trees; 47- Air pollution; 50- Editor's note; 51- Milan's La ___; 52- Caesar's wings; 54- Debate side; 57- Chocolate substitute; 58- Oil; 61- Bay window; 62- Neptune's realm; 63- Lunar valley; 64- Fluff, as bangs; 65- Directional suffix; 66- Dutch painter Jan;

DOWN 1- Met highlight; 2- Social standing; 3- Director Wertmuller; 4- That, in Tijuana; 5- Brief instant; 6- ___ de Leon; 7- Need a scratch; 8- To ___ (perfectly); 9- Bright red color; 10- Ready ___; 11- Strictness; 12- Outer coat of a seed; 13- Bohemian; 18- Specimen of genus Aquila; 23- Hawaiian dances; 24- "Mentalist" Geller; 25- Numero ___; 26- Sound of disgust; 27- Christmas song; 28- Payment for travel; 29- Employ again; 30- Silly Putty container; 33- Bungling; 34- Rescue; 35- Counterfeiter catcher; 37- Kind of fingerprint; 39- They loop the Loop; 41- Fairly large; 42- Galena, e.g.; 43- Provide food; 44- Sweet suffix; 47- Frighten; 48- "West Side Story" song; 49- Healing plants; 50- The devil; 51- Dundee denizen; 52- Semicircular recess; 53- Sly look; 54- Soccer legend; 55- Dominion; 56- Sign; 59- IV sites; 60- Plastered;

Friday's solution

L	E	S	S	O	D	S	P	A	T												
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				A	P	H		T	O	T	T	R	E		T	R	A	I			
				S	O	I	T		T	E	S	L	A		A	G	E	E			
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				S	A	Y	S		S	E		E	M	T	S						

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- Fire department 28 572 222
- PJ (Open line) 993
- PJ (Picket) 28 557 775
- PSP 28 573 333
- Customs 28 559 944
- S. J. Hospital 28 313 731
- Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333
- Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300
- IAM 28 387 333
- Tourism 28 333 000
- Airport 59 888 88
- Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
- Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
- Telephone - Report 1000
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- Macau Daily Times 28 716 081



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FORMULA 1

Verstappen cruises from pole to win Austrian GP sprint

MAX Verstappen was untroubled as he won the sprint race from pole at the Austrian Grand Prix, his effort made easier by Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz Jr. scrapping each other behind him for one meager point.

They almost collided, with tensions appearing to carry over from last week's British GP where Leclerc was unhappy with team decisions and Sainz won.

This week, Leclerc played down talk of divisions within Ferrari following Silverstone where, following a safety car, he was baffled by team principal Mattia Binotto's decision to keep him out for track position rather than switch to faster tires. He was leading in Monaco, too, when Ferrari pitted him for new tires and he ended up fourth.

Leclerc was asked if he and Sainz could work together to catch Verstappen.

"I really hope so" he said bluntly. Later, he added, "I don't know the rules of engagement, we



are not the ones to decide. It will be Mattia."

Sainz insists "the team we will work it out" and they can work in tandem.

"We're both going to make Max's life as difficult as possible in the rest of the championship.

We need to push flat out because he's far ahead," Sainz said. "We need to make sure we're closer at the beginning of a stint and we're closer at the end."

Ferrari was neither on Saturday, with Verstappen in control.

He made a clean start and

coasted over 23 laps of the 4.3-kilometer (2.7-mile) Red Bull Ring packed with orange-clad Dutch fans setting off orange flares and cheering on the Formula One champion.

"It was a decent race," said Verstappen, who has won six of 10 races so far. "Tomorrow will be an interesting battle. The car is good."

Verstappen's second sprint win of the season gave him an additional eight points. Leclerc picked up seven points for second place and Sainz got six for finishing third with the top eight scoring points.

Verstappen improved to 189 points in the overall standings and leads his Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez by 38 points and Leclerc by 44.

George Russell collected five in fourth place. Perez drove superbly from 12th to finish fifth and score four points. Esteban Ocon was sixth for Alpine followed by Kevin Magnussen of Haas and Lewis Hamilton, who scored one point.

Sainz overtook Leclerc at the start, only for Leclerc to quickly

overtake him back and reclaim second place.

The Ferraris brushed each other when Sainz tried to pass on lap six, with Leclerc holding him off. Sainz went for it again on the next lap, going through on the inside but Leclerc dived back on the inside as the tension rose.

"It was good fun, like it should be [...] racing," Sainz said. "Probably overheated a bit the tyres, running behind Charles. I had to back off and finish the race."

Mick Schumacher defended aggressively from Hamilton until the seven-time F1 champion zoomed past him on lap 21.

Two-time world champion Fernando Alonso was eighth on the grid but there was a problem with his Alpine car and he did not start.

Chinese driver Zhou Guanyu's engine cut out on the formation lap and forced the Alfa Romeo driver to start from the pit lane one week after surviving a crash at the British GP.

Four-time F1 champion Sebastian Vettel retired when Aston Martin told him to bring the car to the garage on lap 22. He was then summoned to the stewards for storming out of a drivers' meeting on Friday evening and given a suspended fine of 25,000 euros (\$26,000).

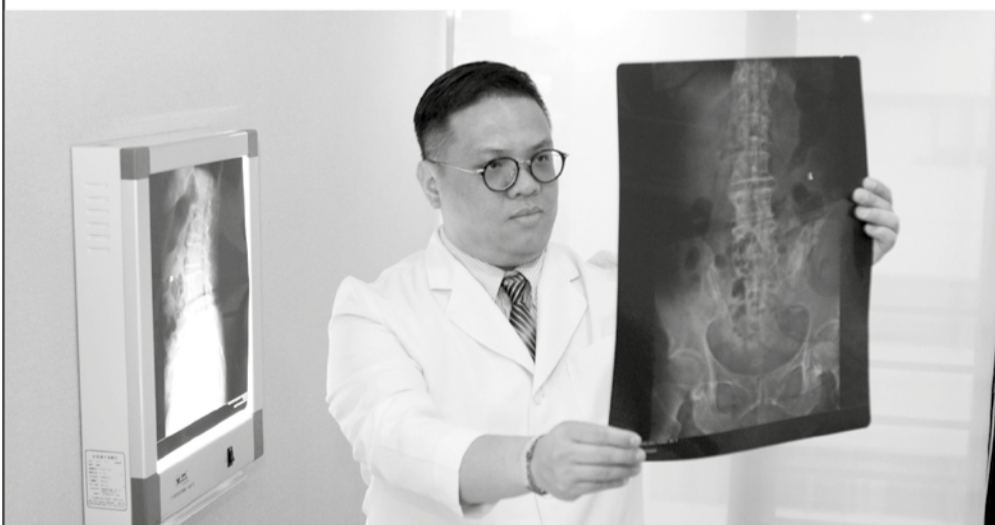
Vettel was "expressing frustration at the meeting" then left before the end. **MDT/AP**

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OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION HONORING COMMITMENTS WOULD BE BEST GUARDRAILS FOR SINO-US RELATIONS

US-China relations are in danger of being further led “astray” due to the problematic perception of China among many in Washington, State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi told United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken during their latest meeting on the sidelines of the G20 foreign ministers’ meeting in Bali, Indonesia.

Due to the rampant Sinophobia in Washington, the Joe Biden administration has been saying one thing and doing another when it comes to China as it tries to keep relations from veering into confrontation while appeasing those in Congress who want it to adopt a harder line.

US officials had said before the talks that the meeting was aimed at keeping the difficult US-China relationship stable and preventing it from veering inadvertently into conflict.

The fundamental guardrails to prevent that are the US administration upholding the assurances that Biden has given that the US does not seek a new Cold War with China; it does not aim to change China’s system; the revitalization of its alliances is not targeted at China; it does not seek to change the status quo across the Taiwan Straits.

The lists that the Chinese foreign minister presented his US counterpart and the vision of sound interaction between China and the US in the Asia-Pacific region that he expounded on should help clarify the behavioral problems the US needs to rectify.

Along with Wang’s reiteration that the three joint communiqués between the two countries serve as the cornerstone for stable bilateral relations, the Biden administration has a clear blueprint to follow to build a less volatile relationship.

Since both sides agreed that the meeting was “substantive and constructive”, it is to be hoped that it has been conducive to enhancing mutual understanding and has paved the way for the mooted first face-to-face meeting between the leaders of the two countries. That highly anticipated meeting would surely serve as a badly needed counterweight against the forces threatening to drag the two countries into a dangerous conflict.

To some, the most meaningful part of the Wang-Blinken talks may have been the repeated shared commitment to conducting cooperation.

Its real significance, however, is more immediate and practical as it lies in the two sides’ display of commitment to keeping channels of communication open. These are essential to manage the risk factors in bilateral relations.

The troubles in China-US relations have their roots in the two countries’ divergent world outlooks. The two sides need to maintain their high-level communication to prevent mutual mistrust from transforming that divergence into an “iron curtain” between them. Or worse increasing the friction between their views since that will eventually produce a spark.

RUSSIAN ROCKET ATTACK KILLS 15 IN UKRAINE; OTHERS TRAPPED

THE BUZZ

Dozens of Ukrainian emergency workers labored Sunday to pull people out of the rubble after a Russian rocket attack smashed into apartment buildings in eastern Ukraine. The strike killed at least 15 people and scores were thought to be still trapped a day later.

The strike late Saturday evening hit apartment blocks in a residential quarter of the town of Chasiv Yar, inhabited mostly by people who work in nearby factories.

Ukraine’s Emergency Services said Sunday they have rescued

five people from the rubble so far and have made contact with three others still trapped alive beneath the ruins.

Cranes and excavators worked alongside the rescue teams to clear away the ruins of one building, its sides completely shorn off by the impact of the strike. The rescuers kept on working in the rain despite the dangerous conditions.

The thud of artillery on the nearby front line resonated just a few miles away, making some workers flinch and others run for cover when it got too close.

SRI LANKA

OPPOSITION MEETS TO INSTALL NEW GOV’T AMID TURMOIL

KRISHAN FRANCIS, COLOMBO

SRI Lanka’s opposition political parties met yesterday to agree on a new government a day after the country’s president and prime minister offered to resign in the most dramatic day of months-long political turmoil, with protesters storming both leaders’ homes and setting fire to one of the buildings in a rage over the economic crisis.

Protesters remained in President Gotabaya Rajapaksa’s home, his seaside office and the prime minister’s residence, saying they will stay until they officially resign. The president’s whereabouts are still unknown, but a statement from his office said he ordered officials to start immediate distribution of a cooking gas consignment to the public, suggesting that he was still at work.

Soldiers were deployed around the city and Chief of Defense Staff Shavendra Silva called for public support to maintain law and order. But troops simply watched from afar as crowds of people splashed in the garden pool, lounged on beds and used their cellphone cameras to capture the moment in Rajapaksa’s sprawling residence.

Yesterday, occupants of the prime minister’s official residence cooked in an outdoor kitchen, played carrom — a popular tabletop game — and slept on big sofas.

Ranjith Madduma Bandara, a top official in main opposition party United People’s Force, said that separate discussions were held with other parties and lawmakers who broke away from Rajapaksa’s ruling coalition and more meetings are planned. He did not say when an agreement might be reached, even though it was expected to be finalized



Protesters shout slogans as they stay and play cards in prime minister’s official residence a day after it was stormed in Colombo, Sri Lanka, yesterday

yesterday.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said he will leave office once a new government is in place, and hours later the speaker of Parliament said Rajapaksa would step down Wednesday. Pressure on both men had grown as the economic meltdown set off acute shortages of essential items, leaving people struggling to obtain food, fuel and other necessities.

If both president and prime minister resign, Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena will take over as temporary president, according to the constitution.

Rajapaksa appointed Wickremesinghe as prime minister in May in an effort to solve the shortages and start economic recovery.

Wickremesinghe had been part of crucial talks with the International Monetary Fund for a bailout program and with the World Food Program to prepare for a predicted food crisis. The government must submit a plan on debt sustainability to the IMF in August before reaching an agreement.

Analysts say it is doubtful any new leader could do more than Wickremesinghe. His government’s efforts showed promise, with much-needed ferti-

lizer being distributed to farmers for next season’s cultivation and cooking gas orders arriving in the country Sunday.

“This kind of unrest could create confusion among international organizations like the IMF and the World Bank,” political analyst Ranga Kalansooriya said, adding that a new administration should agree on a common program for economic recovery.

He said while Wickremesinghe was working in the right direction, his administration’s weakness was not implementing a long-term plan to go with its focus on solving day-to-day problems.

It is unlikely that an all-party government will agree on IMF-backed economic reforms without some parties losing their political support.

Wickremesinghe said Saturday that it was not proper for him to leave without a government in place.

“Today in this country we have a fuel crisis, a food shortage, we have the head of the World Food Program coming here and we have several matters to discuss with the IMF,” Wickremesinghe said. “Therefore, if this government leaves there should be another government.” **MDT/AP**



India Emergency workers rescued thousands of pilgrims after flash floods triggered by sudden rains swept through their makeshift camps during an annual Hindu pilgrimage to an icy Himalayan cave in Indian-controlled Kashmir. At least 16 people have died and dozens were injured. Authorities suspended the pilgrimage for two days as rains continued to lash the region. Teams of rescuers from India’s military, paramilitary and police as well as disaster management officials combed through the slippery mountain tracks and used thermal imaging devices, sniffer dogs and through-the-wall radars to locate dozens of missing.

Iran announced yesterday that it has begun enriching uranium up to 20% using sophisticated centrifuges at its underground Fordo nuclear plant, state TV reported, an escalation that comes amid a standoff with the West over its tattered atomic deal. That Tehran is enriching uranium up to 20% purity — a technical step from weapons-grade levels of 90% — with a new set of its most advanced centrifuges at a facility deep inside a mountain deals yet another blow to the already slim chances of reviving the accord.



France Hundred of firefighters backed by water-dropping planes battled a large forest fire Friday in southeastern France that has forced the evacuation of nearby villages. Thirteen firefighters have been injured in Bordezac — the village where the fire started. Overall, 18 firefighters have been injured amid several forest fires that have burned for days in the region, according to France Info.

Portugal’s government on Friday declared an eight-day state of alert due to a heightened risk of wildfires, as the drought-stricken country prepares for a heat wave packing temperatures as high as 43 degrees Celsius. The torrid weather brings with it “a significant worsening of the wildfire risk” through July 15, a joint statement from five government departments said.