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**COURTS: FORMER JUNKET WORKER 'NOT 100% SURE' ABOUT TAK CHUN CONDUCTING SIDE BETTING**

P4

**AL FINALLY PASS URBAN RENEWAL AND STUDY CENTERS LAWS**

P3

**WC2022: STUNNING MOROCCO TO FACE TITLE HOLDER FRANCE**

P11



**Indonesia** Senior diplomats from the United States, South Korea and Japan agreed yesterday to boost efforts to curb North Korea's illicit cyber activities and other methods to finance its nuclear program and evade international sanctions. Meeting in Jakarta, the three envoys in charge of North Korea's nuclear program also agreed to strengthen their trilateral security cooperation in the face of North Korea's advancing nuclear and missile arsenals.



**Hong Kong** The national security trial of publisher Jimmy Lai was further postponed yesterday to next September as the city awaits Beijing's ruling that could effectively block him from hiring a British defense lawyer. Lai, who was arrested in August 2020 during a crackdown on the city's pro-democracy movement, is fighting charges of endangering national security. The 75-year-old founder of the now-defunct newspaper Apple Daily faces up to life in prison if convicted.

## ANTÓNIO TRINDADE 'WE ARE BASICALLY A FOREIGNER GOING TO CHINA'

P5

**In an interview with Macau Daily Times, António Trindade says the Macau role as platform is still 'not very well developed' hindering the export of high-value local products and technology to China**



**Belgian** police conducted more raids at European Parliament offices as the legislature's president pledged to launch an internal investigation into corruption allegations and the bloc's top official called for the creation of an EU-wide independent ethics body. Prosecutors investigating alleged influence peddling by a Gulf country at the European Parliament charged four people over the weekend with corruption, participation in a criminal group and money laundering. Vice President Eva Kaili of Greece was relieved of her duties.

More on backpage



**COVID-19**  
**GOV'T PUTS PURCHASE LIMITS ON RATS, ANTIPYRETICS**

P2

**COVID-19**  
**LAWMAKERS CALL ON GOV'T TO DEFINE CLEARLY THE NEW RULES**

P3

### MAINLAND TOURISTS TO RECEIVE UP TO MOP400 AS PART OF SUBSIDY PLAN

A subsidy plan has been launched for local travel agencies to attract travelers to the city amid the downturn in visitor numbers in the third quarter this year. The local government plans to offer as much as MOP400 per tourist to local travel agencies that organize tours from the provinces of Guangdong, Zhejiang, Jiangsu and Fujian as well as Shanghai, and for tourists who check in at hotels in Macau. Travel agencies are eligible for payments until December 23. The local tourism bureau has strengthened cooperation with airlines, e-commerce platforms, and online travel agencies in recent years through a series of promotions to boost tourism.

### IC LAUNCHES MORE VR TOURS

The local government has introduced online virtual reality tours for five more heritage sites, including the Ruins of St. Paul's, the Old City Walls (Section at Calçada de S. Francisco Xavier), the Lou Kau Mansion, the Na Tcha Temple (next to the Ruins of St. Paul's), and the Cultural Affairs Bureau's Na Tcha Exhibition Room. The virtual tours for the five heritage sites are now available to the public. The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) has been promoting the digitalized display of cultural heritage and enriching online tourism resources in Macau. Last year, IC presented the pilot project for online virtual tours of the Guia Fortress and the Mandarin's House.



### COVID-19

# GOV'T PUTS PURCHASE LIMITS ON RATs, ANTIPYRETICS

ANTHONY LAM

**T**HE Pharmaceutical Administration Bureau (ISAF) is implementing purchase limits on SARS-CoV-2 rapid antigen test (RAT) kits and antipyretics through local chemist shops.

The news was announced on local public broadcaster Radio Macau's morning phone-in show Macau Forum, following calls from audience members recounting difficulties in obtaining access to the test kits.

The ISAF said that it has issued guidelines on limits-per-purchase applicable to local chemists. Each person is only permitted to purchase a maximum of five single sets of RAT kits and a box of antipyretics on each visit.

The bureau suggested members of the public obtain substitute medications with the same effect, rather than sticking to a single brand of medicine.

Members of the public have complained that antipyretics, such as paracetamol, and RAT kits have

become notably hard to source over the past couple of weeks. In the evening before the government announced its centralized sale of RAT kits, it came to the knowledge of the Times that local chemists were waiting to see if stocks would arrive "in the following week."

Measures will be tightened on visitors to the public hospital and community health centers. Negative RAT results obtained within two hours must be presented through the health code platform to gain access to the healthcare facilities, and

KN95 masks must be worn in these facilities.

Meanwhile, the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) will launch a Covid-19 patient support hotline at 9am today. The hotline will be in operation with 60 lines, 24 hours per day, seven days per week. Calls will be taken by civil servants and nursing students from the Macao Polytechnic University. Queries may be referred to other departments for follow-up, while each call will be restricted to five minutes.

Eight SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test (NAT) stations were transformed to community Covid-19 clinics: Riviera Macau Bus Terminus, Pearl of the Orient Leisure Area, Macao Medical and Health Federation Polyclinic at ZAPE, Areia Preta Youth Activities Center, Macau Medical and Health Federation at Ilha Verde Building, Macau Stadium Roundabout, Sam Ka Village and the former Canidrome.

The Riviera Macau Bus Terminus clinic, however, will be relocated to the Navy Yard near A-Ma Temple, the Health Bureau announced yesterday.

### GOV'T TO START GIVING OUT COVID-19 PACKS

The government will start distributing Covid-19 packs to the general public from today until Sunday at 35 NAT stations. Bookings must be made through the mass NAT system and collections made with ID cards.

# Digital medical certificate to be issued to Covid-19 patients

**T**o avoid overwhelming medical services, digital medical certificates will be issued to Covid-19 patients, the Health Bureau (SSM) announced yesterday in a copy of the new guidelines.

While explaining the decision, the SSM reiterated in a statement that it "expects a significant number of Covid-19 positive [results] within a short period of time amid the city entering the transitional period of disease prevention and control."

To obtain the certificate, a person who tests positive will first be required to undergo evaluations on the

SSM evaluation platform. A message will then be sent to the positive cases with a link to download the certificate.

The certificate will allow up to five days of sick leave.

On the sixth day, should a patient still be testing positive, another certificate supplying two additional days of sick leaves will be generated.

A QR code will be included on the certificate for verification purposes.

Following the seven days of Covid-19 leave, a declarant will not be able to obtain another such certificate within the following 90 days. Medical facilities should be

approached, should further medical needs arise.

The SSM appeals to all private entities to consider the digital certificate as valid as a physical certificate.

As reported by Chinese Internet portal Sina - citing media outlet People's Daily - Academician Li Lanjuan of the Chinese Academy of Engineering emphasized that asymptomatic positive cases should not be considered patients. She also appealed to the public to not fear these people.

On Sunday, the city recorded 382 positive cases, the highest daily tally so far. **AL**



# Lawmakers call on gov't to define clearly the new Covid-19 rules

RENATO MARQUES

**S**EVERAL lawmakers have called on the government to establish clear rules for the current phase of easing Covid-19 restrictions.

The requests were made on Monday at the Legislative Assembly before the agenda, with many lawmakers addressing the topic via spoken inquiries.

Lawmaker Ella Lei urged the government to clarify what would happen should workers from all sectors need to be placed under home quarantine – a measure that will become effective from today.

“I hope the government can provide clear and specific guidelines. Many residents are concerned about the home quarantine rules. Are there new rules regarding leaving home for necessities and attending public services? Will people be able to go shopping?” she asked.

The same lawmaker also expressed concern over the absence



Ella Lei (left) and Leong Sun lok

of specific rules applicable to workers who became infected or were classified as a close contact.

“The government must issue clear guidelines as soon as possible so that employers know how to act regarding the absence of the infected worker from his workplace and work distri-

bution [in such an event]. This is particularly important for establishments and positions where operation must be ensured [at all times]. I hope that companies will adopt accommodating measures with the agreement between both parties – employee and employer – to protect the rights and interests of employees as well as maintain the operation of the companies and minimize disputes,” Lei remarked.

Echoing the concerns, Leong Sun lok expressed worries about workers' rights under the new pandemic rules.

Leong wants the government to clarify “the situations in which workers can go to work and which pandemic prevention requirements must be followed in such cases to reduce labor disputes,” he said.

He added, “Currently, workers can only be compensated for accidents at work if they

provide proof that they have been infected during working hours. [This means that] even if they have been suspended [from work], isolated or included in red or yellow control areas due to a case in the workplace, their income may not be guaranteed. I am concerned about the guarantees of the right to work and the impact on workers' income.”

The same lawmaker also expressed that the workplace absences due to Covid-19 should also be covered where employees are infected as well as when they need to handle infections of family members.

Leong said that with the expected increase in the number of infections, is it likely that some workers will be subjected to work overload due to a lack of manpower. He wants companies to account for this eventuality and for the government to provide oversight.

## MA IO FONG INQUIRIES ON THE CENTRAL LIBRARY PROJECT

Lawmaker Ma Io Fong has asked the government about the status of the new Central Library project, given the policy address for 2023 which referred to Macau as a “Reading City.” The lawmaker noted that the new library is to be built on the land plot of the former Hotel Estoril, “a building with important historical value for urban development and located in a core area for Macau.” Consequently, according to the lawmaker, it is necessary that the development pays attention to the surroundings and links the new building to the historical district. Ma also noted that besides books and other related services, the government needs to take care in the recruitment professionals from this field, as having competent librarians is important for libraries to meet the needs and expectations of the public.

## NICK LEI CALLS ON GOV'T TO RESPECT THE PRINCIPLE OF HEARING THE PEOPLE

Lawmaker Nick Lei urged the government to respect the principle of listening to the people as the main principle of governance. Lei's inquiry was related to the recent case involving the “tire park” in Taipa, a project that was recently abandoned by the government before construction began. The lawmaker noted that the government received a total of 462 opinions from residents on the project that aims to replace the “tire park,” the large majority of which are against the construction of housing buildings in that area. These opinions have called on the government to keep the initial project or find a new one with a similar purpose. In Lei's opinion, the government is disregarding these opinions and insisting on the construction of more housing buildings in an area already very densely populated, putting economic interests on top of the livelihood of citizens, which is a bad premise.

## SI KA LON: ACCELERATE COVID RESPONSE AIMING FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

**ADDRESSING** the topic of the new Covid-19 prevention and control measures and with a particular focus on the new 10 principles issued by the central government, lawmaker Si Ka Lon urged the local government to “keep up with the pace of national development, take the initiative to respond to changes and change mindsets.” He also said, “In addition to

improving prevention policies, it is necessary to speed up the preparation of plans for the next phase of economic recovery to attract more tourists, adopt more proactive policies to attract business and investment – especially from abroad – and further accelerate the incubation and development of emerging industries to prepare for the recovery of Macau's economy.”

# AL finally pass urban renewal and study centers laws

RENATO MARQUES

**T**HE Legislative Assembly (AL) passed the urban renewal regime and the law on the private education and pedagogical support center (study centers) in the final reading on Monday evening.

Both laws were passed unanimously by the lawmakers without many remarks.

On the urban renewal regime, some lawmakers have nonetheless expressed concerns regarding the proposed mandatory review of this law, due to take place once every five years.

It was suggested instead that the law be evaluated and raised for review by a newly established department, should there be significant content to update or a good reason that justify amendment, rather than at fixed intervals.

On the topic, the Secretary for Administration and Justice, André Cheong, said that the government believes there is no need to establish another department to follow up on this matter. He pointed out the building reconstruction process is a complex matter that involves many legal procedures and different

government departments. As such, any building reconstruction process is expected to take at least two to three years.

He hopes that in the upcoming law review time (in five years), there will be some practical cases of building reconstruction and other projects under the urban renewal regime that will serve as a reference point to prompt updates and improve the law.

The study center law was also passed on its final reading without significant remarks.

In the presentation of the final version to the ple-

nary, the president of the First Standing Committee of the AL, Ella Lei, noted that the second version of the law, presented by the government on December 2, features several improvements as requested by the committee following analysis of the initial version of the bill. She concluded that this final version was satisfactory.

The new law will enter into force on May 1, 2023, as requested by the government, as there is still a need to create and adjust several administrative regulations affected by this work due to the Covid-19 pandemic.



COURTS

# FORMER WORKER 'NOT 100% SURE' ABOUT TAK CHUN CONDUCTING SIDE BETTING

ANTHONY LAM

**D**ESPITE admitting to having seen messages about side bets in company chat groups, a former Tak Chun Group worker confessed that he was not completely certain about side betting practices at the now-closed company, local media reports.

The former employee, who testified in court as a witness, confirmed that he is aware of the existence of a chat group comprising over 50 people. Messages within it apparently touched on side bets, according to local newspaper Macao Daily News.

In response to a question by the presiding judge, Justice Lam Peng Fai, about whether the witness considered Tak Chun to have operated side betting with customers, the witness answered in the affirmative.

He further testified that special formulae were used to process particular games, which was the grounds on which he thought his former employer was operating

RENATO MARQUES



side betting. Special notes were used to indicate such revenues, the witness added.

However, when questioned by the lawyer representing Tak Chun's former boss, Levo Chan, on whether he was completely certain that Tak Chun accepted side bets, the witness admitted that he was not.

According to the witness, members of the marketing team would be asked to start working once the alleged side bets have started and stop working when the bets have stopped.

Funds were then transferred between the accounts of the cus-

tomers and Tak Chun. The witness added that transfers did not require approval from any side, only an acknowledgement by the account owner.

It was also revealed that the Central Cage of Tak Chun had the responsibility to approve a Marker - the term used in the VIP casino industry to refer to loans issued to customers - retrieve an outstanding Marker, and remind customers of interest accumulations.

At this stage, Chan's lawyer reminded the witness that he may be subject to prosecution due to his testimony. The lawyer also reminded the witness that he had

the right to decline further testimony.

Prosecutor-coordination Lai U Hou was dissatisfied with this reminder and suggested that the lawyer was interfering with the judicial process. Justice Lam suspended the debate and suggested the witness clarify with the court before giving any testimony that might cause him further legal trouble.

At the end of the witness' testimony, Chan requested to speak in defence of himself. The request was deferred by Justice Lam, who said the testimonies did not concern Chan, while emphasizing Chan's presumption of innocence. Local media outlet All About Macau reported that Chan had eventually broken his silence, unlike in the first hearing, during which he kept quiet.

Chan refuted the exhibits presented to the court by the Public Prosecutions Office (MP).

He emphasized that he had not seen the supposed teaching documents with Tak Chun's logo on them, presented by the MP. He

even denied that he had seen his employees compiling them.

The contents of the documents, such as starred figures, contain industry jargon and are not exclusive to Tak Chun.

To the question as to why he did not call the police, he said side betting between major gamblers and individual intermediaries is an open secret. He hinted that usually no clear record is kept. He also considered it impossible for his employees to spot such practices when the surveillance and security departments at casinos similarly could not detect them.

Chan also denied that he had instructed his former employees to destroy evidence. He said he did order them to destroy certain company property when Tak Chun ceased operations, but this was done out of fear that business competitors might gain access to them.

He emphasized that if this act had been done out of fear of prosecution, he would have done it as soon as Alvin Chau got arrested.

AD

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ANTONIO TRINDADE

# 'High-value services' expected as gaming sector faces new era

LYNZY VALLES

**L**OCAL companies are expected to continually develop the offerings of high-value services and products, as Macau is set to enter a new era next month where it aims to boost non-gaming offerings, according to Antonio Trindade, president of CESL Asia, Investments & Services Ltd (CESL Asia).

Following the awarding of six gaming concessions to incumbent operators, a dilemma remains: how can local companies provide products that are in line with what the government is calling for?

Late last month, Secretary for Economy and Finance, Lei Wai Nong, said that there is a need to change the image of Macau as a gambling destination, implying that the next 10 years will be critical to attracting visitors other than those interested in gaming.

The goal is to "provide higher value services" to meet this aim, according to Trindade.

Speaking to the Times, the executive of the technology group,



remarked, "Macau is a base of know-how, and we need to attract investors [...] to transform the gaming industry [to diversify the economy]."

However, the lack of easy access to technology and services needed to promote local high-quality products and services to China is hin-

dering achievement of this aim, notwithstanding the SAR's intended role as a Sino-Lusophone platform.

"The platform [to promote Portuguese companies] is still not very well developed. We are basically a foreigner going to China," Trindade said.

"We cannot export our [products] to China. We cannot [export pro-

ducts] so awarded and well created," he added.

The executive was referring to the company's big data and AI services that could assist with realizing China's goal of attaining the peak of carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality before 2060.

Just last week, Chinese Vice Premier Han Zheng highlighted efforts to accelerate the green and low-carbon energy transition and the construction of a clean, safe, and efficient energy system.

Han added that China stands ready to work with other countries to strengthen international cooperation on energy and climate change governance and promote global sustainable development.

However, the collaboration may fail to include Portuguese companies in the city despite the integration of the SAR in the Greater Bay Area.

"We have been producing big data for 30 years and working on our own tools in operating environmental and energy infrastructure,"

said Trindade.

Meanwhile, earlier this year, Monte do Pasto Group, company owned by CESL Asia completed the acquisition of Herdade das Gregas de Cima, a 455-hectare property in Alentejo.

The group now has a total of 4,200 hectares for the development of its sustainable livestock and agriculture business.

"We are looking at potential areas where we could better serve the Chinese economy. We picked up agricultural food and sustainable food to [be able to] contribute to China - even if it is to transfer the know-how and technology," said the executive.

"We are expecting to do the same thing for the economic diversification of Macau," he added.

Earlier this year, the group began selling sustainable beef produced in the Alentejo in Hong Kong. It is now eyeing extending these products to China - hopefully with easier access to the market.

"That is what we wanted to show at the Macao International Environmental Co-operation Forum & Exhibition [MIECF] recently - to tell our fellow [traders] in China that we have high-quality products and services that could further benefit them," he added.

Since the MIECF's inception, CELSAsia has been an active exhibitor, expressing its commitment to the Macau's sustainability matters.

AD

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# CHINA STUDENTS RETURN HOME AMID COVID TRAVEL SPREAD FEARS

**S**OME Chinese universities say they will allow students to finish the semester from home in hopes of reducing the potential of a bigger COVID-19 outbreak during the January Lunar New Year travel rush.

It wasn't clear how many schools were taking part, but universities in Shanghai and nearby cities said students would be given the option of either returning home early or staying on campus and undergoing testing every 48 hours. The Lunar New Year, which falls on Jan. 22 this year, is traditionally China's busiest travel season.

Universities have been the scene of frequent lockdowns over the past three years, occasionally leading to clashes between the authorities and students confined to campus or even their dorm rooms.

Yesterday's announcements came as China begins relaxing its strict "zero-COVID" policy, allowing people with mild symptoms to stay home rather than be sent to a quarantine center, among other changes that followed widespread protests.

Starting from yesterday, China has stopped tracking some travel, potentially reducing the likelihood people will be forced into quarantine for visiting COVID-19 hot spots. Despite that, China's international borders remain largely shut and there has been no word on when restrictions on inbound travelers and Chinese wishing to go overseas will be eased.

The move follows the government's dramatic announcement last week that it was ending many of the strictest measures,



following three years during which it enforced some of the world's tightest virus restrictions.

Last month in Beijing and several other cities, protests over the restrictions grew into calls for leader Xi Jinping and the Communist Party to step down — a level of public dissent not seen in decades.

While met with relief, the relaxation has also sparked concerns about a new wave of infections potentially overwhelming health care resources in some areas.

With so many people staying home, Beijing's downtown streets were eerily quiet yesterday. Small lines formed outside fever clinics — the number of which has been recently increased from 94 to 303 — and at pharmacies, where cold and flu medications have become harder to find.

Many residents of mainland

China have taken to ordering medication from pharmacies in Hong Kong, which has already relaxed many restrictions.

The government of the semi-autonomous southern city took a further step yesterday, saying it would remove restrictions for arriving travelers that currently prevent them from dining in restaurants or going to bars for the first three days.

It would also scrap the use of its contact-tracing app, although vaccine requirements to enter venues like restaurants will remain in place. Those going from Hong Kong to mainland China and Macau will no longer have to take a PCR test at border checkpoints, although they still face several days in quarantine on the mainland side. The new measures take effect today.

Hong Kong will gradually reduce PCR testing, including the compulsory screening notices issued to residential buildings, and more rapid test kits will be given out in the community, according to the city's health minister.

The easing of control measures on the mainland means a sharp drop in obligatory testing from which daily infections numbers are compiled, but cases appear to be rising rapidly, with many testing themselves at home and staying away from hospitals.

China reported 7,451 new infections on Monday, bringing the nation's total to 372,763 — more than double the level on Oct. 1. It has recorded 5,235 deaths — compared to 1.1 million in the United States.

China's government-supplied figures have not been indepen-

dently verified and questions have been raised about whether the ruling Communist Party has sought to minimize numbers of cases and deaths.

The U.S. consulates in the northeastern Chinese city of Shenyang and the central city of Wuhan will offer only emergency services from yesterday "in response to increased number of COVID-19 cases," the State Department said.

"Mission China makes every effort to ensure full consular services are available to U.S. citizens living in the PRC, but further disruptions are possible," an e-mailed message said, using the initials for China's official name, the People's Republic of China.

Xi's government is still officially committed to stopping virus transmission, the last major country to try. But the latest moves suggest the party will tolerate more cases without quarantines or shutting down travel or businesses as it winds down its "zero-COVID" strategy.

Amid the unpredictable messaging from Beijing, experts warn there still is a chance the ruling party might reverse course and reimpose restrictions if a large-scale outbreak ensues.

The change in policy comes after protests erupted Nov. 25 after 10 people died in a fire in the northwestern city of Urumqi. Many questioned whether COVID-19 restrictions impeded rescue efforts. Authorities denied the claims spread online, but demonstrators gave voice to longstanding frustration in cities such as Shanghai that have endured severe lockdowns.

The party responded with a massive show of force and an unknown number of people were arrested at the protests or in the days following. **MDT/AP**

## HONG KONG

# Lee to press China anthem request with Google

ZEN SOO, HONG KONG

**H**ONG Kong's leader said yesterday he will push Google to display China's national anthem as the top result in searches for the city's anthem instead of a protest song.

The comments by John Lee, Hong Kong's chief executive, followed several big sporting events — including a rugby tournament in South Korea and powerlifting event in Dubai — where the pro-democracy protest song "Glory to Hong Kong" was played as the city's anthem instead of the Chinese national anthem, "March of the Volunteers."



HK Chief Executive John Lee

"There are ways to do it, it's a matter of whether a company acts responsibly and respect the importan-

ce of (a) national anthem in the global context," Lee said in a briefing. He said he would continue to press

Google to make that change.

Google did not immediately respond to requests for

comment.

Lee's comments come a day after the city's security chief Chris Tang said a request for Google to replace the "Glory to Hong Kong" protest anthem with China's national anthem as the top search result had been refused.

According to Tang, Google had said that such results were generated by an algorithm and did not involve human input.

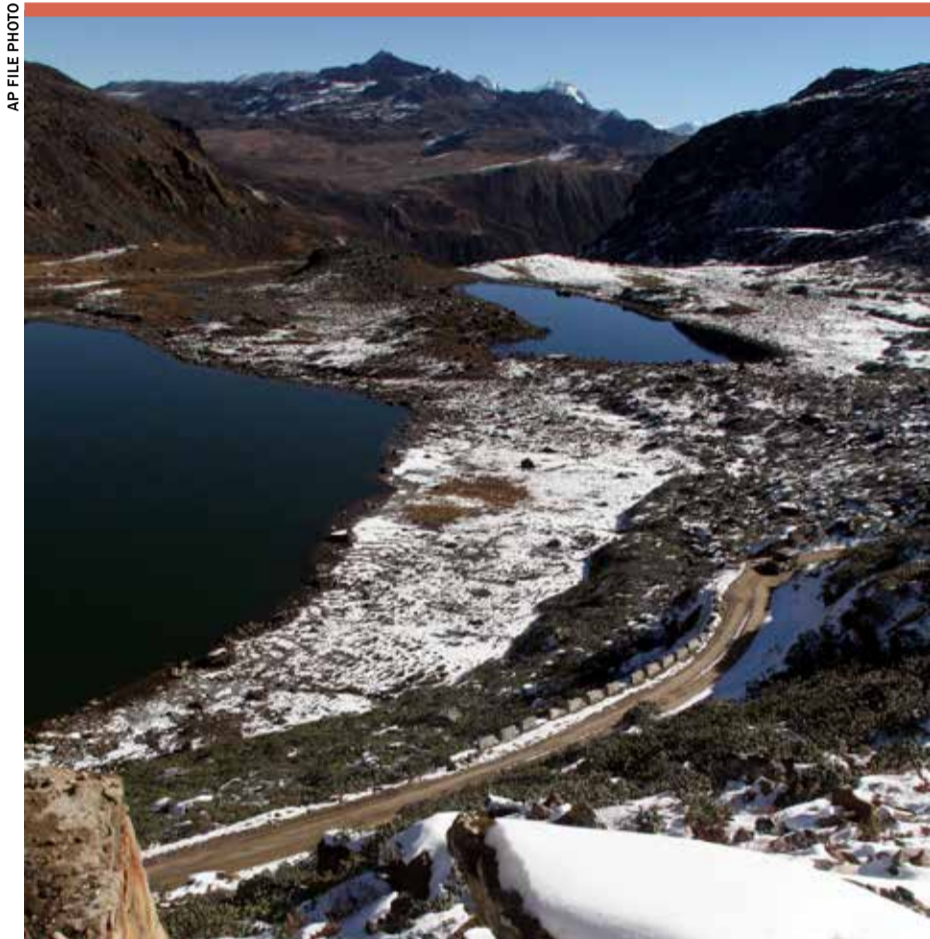
"Glory to Hong Kong" became popular during months of anti-government protests in 2019. It is widely considered as banned now after a national security law was enacted, cracking down

on political dissent.

Authorities have said that the phrase "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times" — a popular protest slogan that is part of the song's lyrics — was considered separatist and subversive under the national security law.

Hong Kong is a former British colony and semi-autonomous region of China, with its own customs territory and legal system. Chinese leaders pledged to respect its civil liberties and way of life for at least a half-century after the city was handed over to Beijing's control in 1997. But the communist-ruled mainland has expanded its influence over the territory in the past several years, jailing pro-democracy activists and taking a harsh stance toward protests. **MDT/AP**

# Indian, Chinese troops clash at border in fresh faceoff



AP FILE PHOTO

A view of the road on the way to the Line of Actual Control, at the India-China Border in Tawang

SHEIKH SAALIQA  
NEW DELHI

**S**OLDIERS from India and China clashed last week along their disputed border, India's defense minister said yesterday, in the latest violence along the contested frontier since June 2020, when troops from both countries engaged in a deadly brawl.

Rajnath Singh, who addressed lawmakers in Parliament, said the Friday's encounter along the Tawang sector of eastern Arunachal Pradesh state started when Chinese troops "encroached into Indian territory" and "unilaterally tried to change the status quo" along the disputed border near the Yangtze River area.

Singh said no Indian soldiers were seriously hurt and troops from both sides withdrew from the area soon afterward. A statement from the Indian army on Monday said

troops from both sides suffered minor injuries.

He said that local military commanders met Sunday to discuss the dispute and the Indian government spoke to China through diplomatic channels.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenin gave no details on the incident at a daily briefing but said China hopes India will join it in carrying through agreements between the sides and "together safeguard peace and tranquility in the region along the China-India border."

"As far as we understand, the present situation on the China-India border is peaceful and stable overall," Wang said.

For decades, India and China have fiercely contested the Line of Actual Control, a loose demarcation that separates Chinese and Indian held territories from Ladakh in the west to India's eastern state

of Arunachal Pradesh, which China claims in its entirety. India and China fought a war over the border in 1962.

In recent years, soldiers from both sides have patrolled areas along the disputed border. Opposing soldiers often come into contact and the two Asian giants have accused each other of sending troops into the other's territory.

In June 2020, a clash in the Karakoram mountains in the Galwan Valley in Ladakh sparked tensions after soldiers fought with stones, fists and clubs. At least 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers died. The countries both stationed tens of thousands of troops backed by artillery, tanks and fighter jets along their de facto border.

After multiple meetings between military commanders, some Indian and Chinese soldiers have pulled back from a key friction point in Ladakh, but tensions between the two Asian giants remain.

In November, Indian army chief Manoj Pande said there had been "no significant reduction" in Chinese troop strength in Ladakh. He said the border situation was "stable but unpredictable." **MDT/AP**

## AFGHANISTAN

# Islamic State group claims attack on hotel in Kabul

**T**HE militant Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for a coordinated attack on a hotel in Afghanistan's capital that left three assailants dead and at least two of the hotel guests injured as they tried to escape by jumping out from a window.

The attack on the Kabul Lognan Hotel on Monday afternoon sent plumes of smoke rising from the 10-story structure building in the heart of Kabul, according to images posted on social media. Residents reported explosions and gunfire.

Taliban forces rushed to the area and blocked all roads leading to the site in the central Shar-e Naw neighborhood. Khalid Zadran, the Taliban-appointed spokesman for the Kabul police chief, said the attack lasted several hours, followed by a clean-up operation.

Hours later, the regional affiliate of the Islamic State group — a key rival of the Taliban since they seized



Smoke rises from a hotel building after an explosion and gunfire in the city of Kabul, Monday

power in Afghanistan over a year ago — claimed responsibility for the attack.

In a statement carried by one of the militant Telegram channels used by IS, the group said two of its members targeted the hotel because it is frequented by diplomats and owned by "communist China."

The statement further claimed IS attackers detonated two bags with explosives that were left in the hotel earlier, including one in the main hall, and set fire to a part of the hotel. The militant group offered no proof for its claims.

There were conflicting

reports as to the casualty numbers.

Taliban officials said three assailants were killed; IS claim said only two of its members took part in the attack, identifying them by name and posting their photographs.

According to Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban government spokesman, two foreign residents were injured when they jumped out of windows to escape the fighting.

But the Emergency Hospital in Kabul said in a tweet it received 21 casualties, including the bodies of three people. **MDT/AP**

**AD**

A large advertisement for the Boa Vida resort. The main image shows a tropical pool area with a woman and a child walking near the water. The text "Enjoy the Good Life Boa Vida Starts Here" is overlaid on the image. At the bottom, there is a dark blue banner with the text "Discover Now", a QR code, the phone number "T +853 2856 7888", and the website "Terms & conditions apply". The logo for "ARTYZEN GRAND LAPA MACAU 澳門雅辰酒店" is in the bottom right corner.

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DIPLOMACY

# China casts long shadow over US-Africa Leaders Summit

AAMER MADHANI & LOLITA C. BALDOR, WASHINGTON

**W**ITH dozens of African leaders descending on Washington this week, the Biden administration is offering a not-so-subtle pitch in its economic competition with China on the continent: The U.S. offers a better option to African partners.

Ahead of the start of the three-day U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit, Deputy Commerce Secretary Don Graves acknowledged that the U.S. has fallen behind as China has surged past American foreign direct investment in Africa but argued that the U.S. remains the "partner of choice" in Africa.

"We took our eye off the ball so to speak, and U.S. investors and companies are having to play catch up," Graves said at an event hosted by the news outlet Semafor. He added, "We're bringing the best technologies and innovations, the highest standards.... The U.S. helps to build capacity in our partner countries as opposed to exploiting those countries."

Heads of states from 49 African nations and the African Union have been invited to take part in the summit that has been billed as an opportunity for President Joe Biden's administration to re-engage the continent's leaders.

The continent, whose leaders often feel they've been given short shrift by leading economies, remains crucial to global powers because of its rapidly growing population, significant natural resources, and a sizable voting bloc in the United Nations. Africa remains of great strategic importance as the U.S. recalibrates its foreign policy with greater focus on China — what the Biden administration sees as the United States' most significant economic and military adversary.

Even before the summit officially began, the White House announced Biden's support for the African Union becoming a permanent member of the Group of 20 nations and that it had appointed Johnnie Carson, a well-regarded veteran diplomat, to serve as point person for implementing initiatives that come out of the summit.

White House national se-



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken speaks during U.S. Africa leaders Summit at Department of State in Washington

curity adviser Jake Sullivan yesterday [Macau time] also said that the administration would commit to spending \$55 billion in Africa over the next three years on "a wide range of sectors to tackle the core challenges of our time."

"If you compare what the United States is committing over the next three years to what any other country is committing, I think we stack up extremely favorably," Sullivan said.

And while the administration has tried to minimize concerns about China's deepening presence on the continent as a driving force at this week's talks, Beijing's shadow over the biggest international gathering in Washington since the start of the pandemic nearly three years ago looms large.

Without direct mention of China, Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo yesterday sounded the alarm about petering private investment in middle- and low-income countries, particularly in Africa. The infrastructure finance gap, or money needed for essential projects like lighting homes and businesses, responding to the COVID pandemic and to making communities resilient against extreme weather, sits at \$68 billion to \$108 billion per year, Adeyemo said.

At the same time, Adeyemo lamented that huge amounts of private capital among the wealthy nations around the globe remains untapped.

"There is a clear disconnect between the large amount of

available private sector capital and the urgent need to fund critical infrastructure projects in Africa and elsewhere. The question for us is: how do we connect this massive supply of savings with high-quality infrastructure projects in Africa?" Adeyemo said at the U.S. Trade and Development Agency.

Trade between the U.S. and sub-Saharan Africa was \$44.9 billion last year, a 22% increase from 2019. But foreign direct investment into the region fell by 5.3% to \$30.31 billion in 2021. Trade between Africa and China last year surged to \$254 billion last year, up about 35% as Chinese exports increased on the continent.

The Biden administration, as it addresses criticism that Africa has remained an afterthought in U.S. foreign policy, has taken veiled jabs at China.

During his visit to Nigeria last year, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that "too often, international infrastructure deals are opaque, coercive" and "burden countries with unmanageable debt." The language — while tough — may have been more restrained than the Trump administration's rhetoric; Vice President Mike Pence at the time accused Beijing of "debt diplomacy" in Africa and elsewhere.

China's ambassador to the U.S., Qin Gang, pushed back against the Chinese debt trap notion and made the case that China has long been "sincere" in approaching Africa as the vibrant emerging market of the future.

"We are not interested in the views of any other countries on China's role in Africa," Qin said at the Semafor forum.

Asked whether Biden administration officials would directly approach U.S. concerns about Chinese involvement in Africa during this week's meetings, officials bristled.

"It's not going to be about China," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre added. "It's going to be about Africa."

But the Pentagon has acknowledged that China's increasing efforts to set up military bases in Africa and forge stronger economic ties across the continent fuel U.S. security concerns that will limit how much the America's military can work with countries that have growing ties to Beijing.

Officials said in the run-up to the meetings that while Africa can't and won't tell African countries to turn away from China, the administration is making it clear that allowing Chinese bases on their soil and using Chinese telecom systems could hurt U.S. military relations with them.

"We have a particular type of security and military and defense relationship ... with African partners, and that could be jeopardized if they were to have Chinese basing in their region just because of the type of exercises, the type of work, the type of collaboration and training that we do with them," Chidi Blyden, the deputy assistant defense secretary for African affairs, told reporters last week. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1995 BOSNIA PEACE ACCORD ENDS THREE-YEAR WAR



Leaders of Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia have signed the Dayton Accord in Paris to end three-and-a-half years of war in the Balkans.

Under the deal Bosnia is preserved as a single state but it is divided into two parts.

It will be made up of a Muslim-Croat federation representing 51% of the country's territory and a Serb republic holding the remaining 49%.

Sarajevo will become a unified city with Serbs giving up some suburbs which they currently control.

The so-called "safe-enclave" of Gorazde will remain under Muslim control but it will be linked by a land corridor to Sarajevo.

The three leaders signed the deal surrounded by European heads of state in a Parisian palace before 50 world leaders and international organisation chiefs.

Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic said the country had been an outcast for too long.

He said: "As to the implementation of the peace agreement and the role of the international peace force, the key of the success of its mission is even-handedness, just as partiality is the key of failure."

Croatia's Franjo Tudjman spoke of his aim for closer ties between his people and the European Union.

And Bosnia's Alija Izetbegovic, referring to his dream of a multi-ethnic Bosnia said he felt he was "drinking a bitter but useful medicine".

The deal was driven by President Clinton's team and Nato will move into to protect the area - with overriding power - as a temporary measure.

The success of maintaining the deal will determine aid for the war-torn country where at least 200,000 people have died in the bloodiest conflict seen in Europe since World War II.

Several million people have been left homeless - some the result of so-called ethnic cleansing operations. Many other refugees fled the country rather than get caught up in the fighting.

The American president told the summit that it was up to the three leaders and their people to ensure peace.

"No one outside can guarantee that Muslims, Croats and Serbs in Bosnia can come together and stay together as free citizens in a united country sharing a common destiny," President Clinton said.

"Only the Bosnian people can do that."

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

Despite the Dayton Summit which formally ended the conflict, tensions remain between the three Balkan neighbours.

But things improved when the political landscape of the region changed.

Alija Izetbegovic stepped down in 2001, Slobodan Milosevic was put on trial at The Hague a year later for atrocities in the Balkans over a 10 year period and Franjo Tudjman died in 1999.

The countries' new government leaders are described as moderate.

They met for the first time since their predecessors signed the peace accords in 2002.

Many problems of the war persist - most importantly the fate of around 1.5m refugees and displaced persons.

An EU peacekeeping force replaced NATO in December 2004.

Official statistics released in 2005 revealed the number of dead in the Bosnian war was lower than first thought. An interim report said the death toll was probably nearer 100,000 than 200,000.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>ARIES</b><br/>Mar. 21-Apr. 19<br/>Your communication skills are at an all-time high. You are best to concentrate on work. Abrupt action will cause difficulties with relatives.</p>  | <p><b>TAURUS</b><br/>Apr. 20-May. 20<br/>Travel for pleasure will be enticing. Go on business trips if at all possible. Find out all the facts before you jump to conclusions.</p>   |
| <p><b>GEMINI</b><br/>May. 21-Jun. 21<br/>Investments that deal with property will be lucrative; however, upsets with family members may be likely. It's a good time to make changes to your living quarters that will give you more space.</p> | <p><b>CANCER</b><br/>Jun. 22-Jul. 22<br/>Look for something entertaining to do. You've got that competitive edge. Don't push your luck with authority. Put your efforts into your work or money making ventures rather than your emotional life.</p> |
| <p><b>LEO</b><br/>Jul. 23-Aug. 22<br/>Do yourself a favor and leave your plastic at home. New methods and innovative technology will make your job far easier than you anticipated.</p>  | <p><b>VIRGO</b><br/>Aug. 23-Sep. 22<br/>Today will be rather hectic on the domestic scene. Don't jump into investments too quickly. It's a great day to attend social functions.</p>   |
| <p><b>LIBRA</b><br/>Sep. 23-Oct. 22<br/>Spend time getting to know each other. Disharmony will result in a lowered vitality. Stress may result in minor illness. Channel your efforts into achieving your goals.</p>                           | <p><b>SCORPIO</b><br/>Oct. 23-Nov. 21<br/>Family members may want you at home, when your heart is telling you to spend time with someone you recently met. Try not to say the wrong thing at the wrong time.</p>                                     |
| <p><b>SAGITTARIUS</b><br/>Nov. 22-Dec. 21<br/>Your attitude could be up and down like a yo-yo. Don't hesitate to talk to your partner about rekindling your relationship. Delve a little deeper if you really want to know the score.</p>      | <p><b>CAPRICORN</b><br/>Dec. 22-Jan. 19<br/>This is a great day to mingle with people you would like to impress. Mingle with individuals who are established and can give you some serious insight into business and future trends.</p>              |
| <p><b>AQUARIUS</b><br/>Jan. 20-Feb. 18<br/>Do things because you want to, not because someone else thinks you should. Don't exhaust yourself or minor health problems will set in.</p>   | <p><b>PISCES</b><br/>Feb. 19-Mar. 20<br/>Travel will stimulate your need to experience exciting new things. You will be able to get good advice if you listen to close friends or relatives you respect.</p>   |

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

| EASY  |   |     |       |       | EASY+ |       |     |   |     |   |
|-------|---|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|---|-----|---|
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| 7     | 8 |     | 4 5 9 |       | 7     |       | 3   |   | 9   |   |
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| 8      |     | 5 |   |     |      |     | 5   |  | 3   |
| 4 3    |     |   | 8 |     | 9    |     |     |  |     |

**WEATHER**

|              | MIN | MAX | CONDITION |
|--------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| <b>CHINA</b> |     |     |           |
| Beijing      | -6  | -3  | fine      |
| Changchun    | -16 | -7  | fine      |
| Chengdu      | 7   | 10  | overcast  |
| Chongqing    | 10  | 12  | overcast  |
| Fuzhou       | 11  | 15  | overcast  |
| Guangzhou    | 9   | 17  | cloudy    |
| Guiyang      | 3   | 8   | overcast  |
| Haikou       | 14  | 18  | cloudy    |
| Hangzhou     | 2   | 10  | fine      |
| Harbin       | -15 | -7  | snow      |
| Hefei        | -2  | 11  | fine      |
| Nanjing      | 0   | 10  | fine      |
| Shanghai     | 3   | 11  | fine      |
| Taipei       | 15  | 16  | rain      |
| Wuhan        | -2  | 13  | fine      |
| Hong Kong    | 11  | 12  | showers   |
| <b>WORLD</b> |     |     |           |
| Moscow       | -8  | -4  | snow      |
| Frankfurt    | -4  | -1  | snow      |
| Paris        | -1  | 1   | snow      |
| London       | -3  | 3   | overcast  |
| New York     | -1  | 4   | fine      |

**CROSSWORDS**

**ACROSS** 1- Run into; 5- Foreign Legion cap; 9- Chemical used on trees; 13- Model; 15- Presently; 16- Venus de \_\_\_; 17- Freight; 18- "My fault!"; 19- Swenson of "Benson"; 20- Latin I verb; 21- Honeycomb unit; 23- Mediterranean arm; 25- Cosmonaut Gagarin; 26- Chant; 27- Craftsperson; 30- A collection of articles; 31- Adjust to zero; 32- Enticing; 37- Opaque gemstone; 38- New York's \_\_\_ Island; 40- Uniform; 41- Verbal wit; 43- Pueblo Indian village; 44- Court cry; 45- Ballroom dance; 47- \_\_\_ corpus; 50- Omnium-gatherum; 51- From an Aegean island; 52- Orsk's river; 53- Levi's rival; 56- Hanging to one side; 57- Deodorant brand; 59- Dripping; 61- Able was \_\_\_; 62- Greek goddess of strife; 63- \_\_\_ Grows in Brooklyn; 64- Historic Scott; 65- Repose; 66- Lip;

**DOWN** 1- Flaky mineral; 2- Dutch cheese; 3- Architect Saarinen; 4- Playground game; 5- Fine white clay; 6- Hydroxyl compound; 7- Explosive sound; 8- Madly; 9- Compadre; 10- Fabric woven from flax yarns; 11- Aquarium buildup; 12- Horse of mixed color; 14- Grasshopper; 22- Notable time; 24- Famous last words; 25- Give up; 26- Capri, for one; 27- Get one's ducks in \_\_\_; 28- Bank takeback; 29- Nicholas II was the last Russian one; 32- \_\_\_ questions?; 33- Verso's opposite; 34- Actor Novello; 35- Verne captain; 36- Little biter; 38- Antiseptic agent; 39- Cereal grain; 42- This can be guilty or not guilty; 43- Armpit; 45- Land covered with trees; 46- Pay stub?; 47- More healthy; 48- Love, Italian-style; 49- Two-footer; 51- Stated; 52- "Trinity" author; 53- Pasternak heroine; 54- Supplements, with "out"; 55- Organs used for sight; 58- Suffix with fail; 60- Aliens, briefly;

**Yesterday's solution**

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | D | A | M | G | I | R | T | H | N | A | I | R |   |
| N | O | R | A | A | L | I | B | I | A | I | R | E |   |
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| B | R | A | I | N | E | M | A | S | S | E |   |   |   |
| C | O | W | L | E | A | V | E |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| C | E | L | E | R | I | A | C | N | A | A | G | P |   |
| A | L | A | A | L | P | H | A | S | T | O | R | K |   |
| R | O | B | S | T | S | A | T | S | T | E | C | O | L |
| P | E | E | S | F | A | R | E | D | O | N | E |   |   |
| E | L | I | O | T | M | A | R | R | I | A | G | E |   |
| A | N | G | R | I | N | S | A | A | R |   |   |   |   |
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| T | R | E | E | L | E | O | N | E | S | A | I | N |   |
| E | C | R | V | E | C | L | A | T | E | N | N | A |   |
| T | H | O | R | H | E | L | E | E | S | E | E | P |   |

**USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

|  |                                 |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Emergency calls 999                            | Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283     |
| Fire department 28 572 222                     | Water Supply - Report 2822 0088 |
| PJ (Open line) 993                             | Telephone - Report 1000         |
| PJ (Picket) 28 557 775                         | Electricity - Report 28 339 922 |
| PSP 28 573 333                                 | Macau Daily Times 28 716 081    |
| 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                              |                                 |



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|--|--|--|

ENERGY

# EUROPE SHIFTS FOCUS TO AVOIDING SHORTAGE NEXT YEAR

COURTNEY BONNELL

**T**HE heads of the International Energy Agency and European Union's executive branch said yesterday [Macau time] that the 27-nation bloc is expected to weather an energy crisis this winter but needs to speed renewables to the market and take other steps to avoid a potential shortage next year in natural gas needed for heating, electricity and factories.

Even after Russia cut most natural gas to Europe amid the war in Ukraine, EU countries largely were able to fill gas storage for the winter heating season by tapping new supplies, saving energy and benefiting from mild weather and low demand from China amid COVID-19 lockdowns.

But those reasons could evaporate next year, making it critical that the EU focus on ramping up energy efficiency efforts, easing the way for renewables and continuing to conserve energy, IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol said in a joint news conference with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.



AP PHOTO

"This winter, it looks like we are off the hook," Birol said, despite "some economic and social bruises." However, he added that "the crisis is not over and next year may well be ... much more difficult than this year."

The IEA says the EU faces a possible natural gas shortfall of up to 30 billion cubic meters, citing the potential of losing the rest of Russian pipeline supply and a tight market for liquefied natural gas, or LNG, that comes by ship if Chinese

demand rebounds.

Plus, "nobody can guarantee that next year's temperature is as mild as this year," Birol said.

Though the EU has been able to "withstand the blackmail" from Russia and taken actions to lower

prices and build up supply, von der Leyen said "more is needed." Ahead of an EU energy ministers meeting Tuesday and European Council gathering Thursday, she urged the bloc to make joint purchases a reality, saying "every day of delay comes with a price tag."

Von der Leyen also hoped for a "political agreement" in the coming days on a stalled gas price cap that is meant to ease the pain of high energy costs. Countries from Poland to Spain are demanding cheaper gas to ease household bills, while Germany and the Netherlands fear a loss of supply if European nations can't buy above a certain threshold.

"The issue is to find the right balance that we cut off the price spikes and manipulation and speculation," she said. "And on the other hand, that we do not cut off supply coming to the European markets."

Von der Leyen also called for an acceleration of renewables and increased investment in the energy transition from both the national and EU level. She said the commission will propose boosting the EU's framework for investing in clean technology.

"We have come quite a long way, but we know that we are not done with our work until families and businesses in the European Union have access to energy that is affordable, that is secure, and that is clean," she said. **MDT/AP**

AD



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AP PHOTO



**MATCH OF THE DAY**

# Moroccan 'dream' faces biggest test against Mbappé's France

STEVE DOUGLAS, DOHA

Thursday, 03:00  
France v Morocco  
H 1.58, D 4.1, A 8

ODDSCHECKER.COM

**M**OROCCO'S improbable, history-making run at the World Cup is about to get its ultimate test.

Africa's first World Cup semifinalist is playing defending champion France and its star striker Kylian Mbappé, the leader of a new wave of soccer superstars coming out of an era dominated by Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo.

Today's match [Thursday, 03:00] has cultural and political connotations — Morocco was under French rule from 1912-1956 — and the outcome is far from the foregone conclusion many would presume by looking at the names of the players and the rankings of the teams.

Morocco has exceeded all expectations in Qatar

by beating second-ranked Belgium in the group stage and then eliminating European powerhouses Spain and Portugal in the knockout phase to reach the semifinals.

No African or Arab nation has ever gotten this far.

It is one of the biggest stories in the World Cup's 92-year history and Morocco is not done yet.

"I was asked if we can win the World Cup and I said, 'Why not? We can dream, it doesn't cost you anything to have dreams,'" said Walid Regragui, Morocco's French-born coach. "European countries are used to winning the World Cup and we have played top sides, we have not had an easy run. Anyone playing us is going to be afraid of us now."

Even France?

The defending champions have just passed their own big test by coming through a tough quarterfinal match against England, on a rare occasion when Mbappé

was kept quiet.

No player has scored more than his five goals and it won't be easy for Mbappé to add to that tally against Morocco, which has yet to concede a goal to an opposition player at this World Cup — or indeed in its nine games since Regragui was hired in August. The only goal allowed was an own-goal by its defender, Nayef Aguerd, against Canada in the group stage.

Morocco might have some injuries now — Aguerd and fellow center back Romain Saiss could be missing Wednesday — but Regragui's game plan relies on team shape and discipline more than any specific individual.

France faces an extremely difficult task breaking down Morocco at Al Bayt Stadium, where French President Emmanuel Macron is set to be in attendance along with tens of thousands of green-and-red-clad Morocco fans. It will feel like a home game for Morocco's players, which mi-

ght level things up even more.

France starts as the big favorite, though, because of its star quality and experience. In Mbappé and Antoine Griezmann, a forward who has reinvented himself as a midfield playmaker at the World Cup, the team has two of the World Cup's leading players while Olivier Giroud's winner against England took him to four goals — the same as Messi.

They have attacking threats from everywhere and that intangible quality of just knowing how to get the job done. France center back Raphael Varane said there will be no danger of complacency among his teammates in a gam against the world's No. 22-ranked team.

"We have enough experience in the team to not fall into that trap," he said. "We know Morocco isn't here by chance. It is up to us, as experienced players, to make sure we are all prepared for another battle." MDT/AP

**ADVERTORIAL**

## GREAT TIMES

World Cup Final Party Night with Local Football Teams at MGM

December 18 marks the 15th anniversary of MGM having been established in Macau. This special date also coincides with FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Final, making it extra special to commemorate.

While Macau and the world celebrate and put spotlight on the sport of football in an international level, it is also a time for us to celebrate Macau's own football clubs! MGM has invited Macau's First Division Football Teams to join us at the **World Cup Final Party Night at The Spectacle, MGM COTAI**, to witness the most anticipated game of World Cup over live broadcast on 25 LED screens with fans and friends, making a linkage of our city to the world on this special night.

MGM has also created a special showcase of the football jerseys of Macau's nine football teams from the First Division: **MUST C.P.K., Monte Carlo, Benfica Macau, Ching Fung, L.H. Ka I FC, Lun Lok, C.F.B. Macau, Sporting Macau and Casa de Portugal**. Macau's MVP and winners of the 2022 Macau First Division Football Star Election will also be on site to cheer on the night with the town!

Cheer on for your favorite teams with your friends over gourmet snack platter (MOP 188\* per platter) from Grill 58, a fine complement to beers, wine and spirits that are perfect for enjoying the night of excitement!

**Date**  
December 18, 2022 (Sun)

**Time**  
22:00 - late

**Venue**  
Bar 58 at Grill 58, MGM COTAI

**Reservations**  
(853) 8806 2318 or hotelreservations@mgm.mo



**OPINION**

**China Daily**  
 Editorial, China Daily

**HICCUPS OF OPTIMIZED CONTROL MEASURES TREATABLE**

**Prompting** sighs of relief from residents, who have long endured frequent testing and the anxious wait for a green health code, the adjustment of the COVID-19 pandemic prevention and control measures in the country earlier this month was regarded as a thoughtful optimization of the public health policy.

Take Beijing as an example, although it stopped disclosing infection statistics for each district from the weekend, it is estimated that the number of cases appearing each day in the capital, home to around 20 million people, should continue rising. But with the majority of them being mild or asymptomatic cases, mobility is being encouraged.

With the virus rapidly spreading now that the prevention and control measures have been relaxed, it is projected that infections will peak nationwide around March or April. On that basis, it is anticipated that the country will be able to return to its pre-pandemic state in the second half of next year.

However, although people know that the effects of the virus are relatively mild compared to earlier strains, many people still feel extremely anxious thinking it will only be a matter of time before they too become infected. That explains why in many cities, some neighborhoods, streets and commercial zones appear to be still in a lockdown state, even though a green light has been given to encourage population mobility.

There is no doubt that although people used to complain about grassroots departments and officials going too far in applying the virus control measures, people now feel equally distressed that they are in charge of their own health.

With the virus having become less virulent, the decision to relax the prevention and control measures was no doubt prompted by the belief that people would not be unduly worried about becoming infected as the e-commerce channels were operating well and there was a ready supply of anti-fever and anti-inflammatory medicines, and should they need to people could register to see a doctor as easily as they could before the onset of the pandemic and they would only need to temporarily self-isolate at home.

However, things have turned out slightly differently. Fever medicines sold out overnight, and large numbers of couriers and medical workers have stopped working because they swiftly succumbed to infection due to the nature of their work.

Meanwhile, many employers still stick to the 48-hour nucleic acid test requirement even though the numbers of nucleic acid testing centers have been reduced to the lowest level over the past three years in many cities, and the issuance of testing results is often delayed because of the overloaded system.

All these indicate that apart from telling the people to accept the fact that the virus is not what it was, more should and must be done with due urgency to ensure the changed measures are truly optimized so that they can fulfill their purpose. That means ensuring the green light works.

**HONG KONG DROPS COVID CURBS FOR ARRIVALS, SCRAPS HEALTH APP**

Hong Kong SAR Chief Executive John Lee announced yesterday that Hong Kong residents will no longer be required to use "LeaveHomeSafe", an official COVID-19 mobile application, to access public venues from today.

Lee told reporters that the Vaccine Pass will be still needed for entering catering business premises.

Beginning from today, the "amber code" temporarily barring access to certain venues will be scrapped, Lee said, noting that all residents, including inbound travelers, will receive a "red code" only when COVID-19 infection is confirmed. He said the risk of imported cases in Hong Kong is now

lower than the risk of local infections, and the removal of the "amber code" will not increase the risk of infection in the community.

In practical terms, that means the end of the 0+3 home quarantine for inbound travelers.

Although Hong Kong ended two and half years of mandatory hotel quarantine for arrivals in September, visitors have yet to return to the city in large numbers.

Daily arrivals are currently hovering around 20,000 people, most of them Hong Kong residents, compared with about 350,000 in November 2019.

**THE BUZZ**

**CORNERED IN UKRAINE, PUTIN SPIKES ANNUAL NEWS CONFERENCE**

**R**USSIAN President Vladimir Putin will not be holding his annual year-end marathon news conference this month amid the war in Ukraine, a break in the long-held tradition that observers have attributed to the Kremlin's uneasiness about a string of battlefield setbacks.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed yesterday [Macau time] that Putin wouldn't hold the annual news conference for the first time in 10 years. He didn't comment on the reason behind it, but many commentators attributed it to the Russian leader's reluctance to face unpleasant questions about what he calls Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine.

The annual news conference has been used by the Kremlin to polish Putin's image. The tightly stage-managed show televised live lasted for up to 4 1/2 hours and featured Putin talking about a wide range of domestic and foreign policy issues.

Political analyst Abbas Gallyamov said in a video commentary that Putin cancelled the annual news conference because "he has nothing to say from the point of view of strategy."

"The press conference has become a significant fixture in Putin's calendar of public engagement and has frequently been used as an opportunity to demonstrate the supposed integrity of Putin," the U.K. Defense Ministry said in a commentary on Twitter.

"Although questions are almost certainly usually vetted in advance, the cancellation is likely due to increasing concerns about the prevalence of anti-war feeling in Russia," it said. "Kremlin officials are almost certainly extremely sensitive about the possibility that any event attended by Putin could be hijacked by unsanctioned



discussion about the 'special military operation.'

Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, saying that it's aimed to "demilitarize" and "denazify" the country, citing NATO's refusal to offer Russia guarantees that Ukraine wouldn't be invited to join the alliance. Ukraine and much of the world denounced the Russian attack on its neighbor as an unprovoked act of aggression.

Putin and his officials hoped to rout the Ukrainian military in a few days, but a fierce Ukrainian resistance quickly derailed those plans. After a botched attempt to quickly capture the Ukrainian capital, the Russian troops pulled back from areas around Kyiv in March.

In September, Ukraine won back large swaths of land in the northeastern Kharkiv region, and last month it reclaimed control of the strategic southern port city of Kherson.

A mobilization of 300,000 reservists that Putin ordered in September so far has failed to reverse battlefield fortunes for Russia. The mobilization order has prompted hundreds of thousands of Russians to flee abroad

to avoid recruitment, and those who have been called up reported glaring shortages of key equipment and supplies.

In a rare acknowledgment last week that the campaign in Ukraine is taking longer than he anticipated, Putin admitted that wrapping up his "special military operation" could be a "lengthy process." At the same time, he continued to claim that the campaign was going according to plan and will achieve its goals.

The Kremlin has muzzled any criticism of its action in Ukraine from the liberal anti-war camp, shutting critical media outlets and criminalizing the spread of any information that differs from the official view. But it has faced an increasingly vocal criticism from Russian hardliners who have denounced the president as weak and indecisive and called for ramping up strikes on Ukraine.

Amid a string of military setbacks in Ukraine, Putin spiked another annual fixture, a televised call-in show in which he takes questions from the public to nurture his father-of-the-nation image. **MDT/AP**



**United Nations** The U.N. chief warned in a new report that the already dire humanitarian situation in Syria is worsening and if aid deliveries from Turkey to the rebel-held northwest aren't renewed next month millions of Syrians may not survive the winter. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in the report to the U.N. Security Council that cross-border aid to the northwest remains "an indispensable part" of humanitarian operations to reach all people in need.



**France** Dozens of countries and international organizations threw their weight and hundreds of millions of euros behind a fresh and urgent push yesterday to keep Ukraine powered, fed, warm and moving this winter, responding defiantly to sustained Russian aerial bombardments that have plunged millions into the cold and dark by targeting critical infrastructure. The donors conference in Paris quickly racked up pledges of financial and in-kind support to help Ukraine's population survive winter's freezing temperatures and long nights.



**Brazil** Pelé is doing better after having been hospitalized to treat a respiratory infection aggravated by COVID-19, doctors at the Albert Einstein hospital said yesterday [Macau time]. Pelé has been in hospital since Nov. 29 and doctors said they still don't know when he will be discharged. But he is «conscious and has stable vital signs.» Pelé, the only player to win three World Cups, is also undergoing chemotherapy.

**USA** A South Florida woman claiming to be a psychic has been sentenced to federal prison along with her partner for conning a woman out of more than \$3 million. The fraud ran for several years and only ended after the victim could no longer afford to pay for money-cleansing rituals, prosecutors said. Samantha Stevens, a self-professed spiritual consultant, was sentenced to two years and six months in prison in October.