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Premier League lauds anti-piracy efforts   
The legal counsel for English football's elite tier hails the Thai authorities' support in tackling unauthorised content

Mr Plumb says the Premier League is seeing more positivity when it comes to protecting broadcast rights in Southeast Asia.   
  
The English Premier League is reporting an upswing in anti-piracy efforts in Thailand, with the organisation praising the country's law enforcement for taking the crime seriously."We have seen a real momentum shift and there's a lot of reasons for that, but I feel the shift has come from the pirates to rights owners and broadcasters. We are seeing more positivity when it comes to protecting broadcast rights in this part of the world," said Kevin Plumb, Premier League chief of legal counsel.  
"I believe Thailand has one of the most active law enforcement agencies that we work with on a global level. We've also worked with DSI [Department of Special Investigation] and TrueVisions in Thailand. We can show tangible success."  
One example is a landmark case in May 2017 that resulted in the highest damage compensation ever paid in Thailand for copyright infringement. The investigations, which began in Hong Kong, led to a raid of Expat.tv and its affiliated websites that stream Premier League content to various countries in Southeast Asia illegally, including Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam and Malaysia.  
The two owners of the site were ordered to pay damages totalling 15 million baht, in addition to forfeiting 7 million in funds seized, while being sentenced to a 3.5-year suspended prison term.  
  
Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah showing off his footwork.  
  
"That case shows Thailand has a very engaged law enforcement agency that helped us. It also shows there is a clear law and a judiciary that stands behind that law and is prepared to give out severe sentences for any breaches. Those things make a difference," said Mr Plumb.  
"We have also worked on certain websites in Thailand."  
SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION  
The 15-year Premier League veteran executive said piracy in Thailand is primarily web-based.  
As a result, the league has worked with the DSI on many successful raids of piracy rings.  
He praised the Thai authorities for their efforts, as working on anti-piracy cases is often complex and time-consuming.  
"It's really complicated because it spins out to the suppliers and other avenues. It's quite easy for law enforcement to just say 'that's too hard', but in Thailand it's the opposite of that. They prepare to see it through," said Mr Plumb.  
"It takes a long time and is resource-intensive, but that has been one of the most pleasing things we've seen as far as Thailand is concerned."  
The Premier League's goals are to deliver quality and risk-free content to viewers while working with all parties to reduce piracy to a manageable level.  
"We are genuinely grateful and delighted to have such passionate fans in Thailand. We know football is the leading sport here and the Premier League is one of the most popular competitions. We don't take that for granted," he said.  
  
The league recently extended its partnership with TrueVisions for three more years, beginning with 2022/23 through to 2024/2025.  
  
"We know a vast majority of fans in Thailand watch through TrueVisions or in the way that is intended. But we also know some don't, and for those who don't, I think it's important to make them aware of the risks of engaging with pirated content."  
That's why the league launched the "Boot Out Piracy" campaign to raise awareness and provide information about illegal streaming.  
REAL COST OF PIRACY  
Mr Plumb gave an example to illustrate the problems facing those who seek out pirated content.  
"If people are getting up in the middle of the night to watch Liverpool against Manchester United, I'd imagine they wouldn't particularly want to set their alarm to watch a match and have their screen go down after five minutes, or have ads popping up all over the place," he said.  
"They should be watching through TrueVisions to see premium quality."  
The league wants to protect genuine fans and allow them to watch uninterrupted Premier League matches, said Mr Plumb.  
He said while people think they may not be paying any money to stream content illegally, they could be paying for it in another way.  
"Pirates are not generally known for being generous to their consumer base. They are doing it for a reason, and that might be to sell pop-up ads that routinely have content you wouldn't want your family to see. They will routinely have malware and ransomware as well," said Mr Plumb.  
As for working with the private sector, the Premier League recently extended its partnership with TrueVisions for three more years beginning with season 2022/2023 through until 2024/2025.  
"It's exciting for us and for TrueVisions to bring a reliable service to football fans. One reason broadcasters continue to invest and buy exclusive rights is because we are showing them that piracy can be reduced to a manageable level."

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FTI wary of wage increase   
Group is concerned about SME impact

A man pulls a cart carrying goods in Pak Klong Talat, Bangkok. The current daily minimum wage sits at 336 baht. (Photo: Pawat Laopaisarntaksin)   
  
The Federation of Thai Industries is opposing a proposal to increase the daily minimum wage to 492 baht, fearing that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) will be severely impacted.The FTI was commenting on an open letter submitted to the government ahead of Labour Day on May 1 by the Thai Labour Solidarity Committee and the State Enterprises Workers' Relations Confederation, which called for the wage hike.  
The domestic economy has not fully recovered from the impact of the pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war is adding more pressure this year, said Kriengkrai Thiennukul, chairman of the FTI.  
"We understand everyone is affected by a higher cost of living and workers want higher pay from their companies to deal with the greater financial burden," he said.  
However, now is not the right time to increase the daily minimum wage as this may hinder the Thai economy and curb its growth, said Mr Kriengkrai.  
The federation is particularly worried about the impact on SMEs, as they cannot deal with higher costs.  
If these businesses, currently struggling with the impact of Covid-19, have to increase wages, many of them may be forced to shut down, he said.  
Mr Kriengkrai said the government could increase the minimum wage gradually when the global economy recovers significantly and Thai businesses, notably those in the tourism sector, get stronger.  
The two labour advocacy groups said the last minimum wage increases were in January 2020, when it rose to a range of 313 baht to 336 baht.  
The tripartite national wage committee is expected to finalise a proposal calling for an increase in minimum daily wages as soon as August, but it is unlikely to approve a proposed flat-rate wage of 492 baht a day, according to media reports.  
Permanent labour secretary Boonchob Suttamanaswong said last week the committee, which comprises labour, business and government representatives, has begun reviewing minimum wages and is expected to reach a decision in August or September.

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Chadchart cruising towards victory in Bangkok governor race: polls

Bangkok governor runner Chadchart Sittipunt talks to children during a campaign in Lak Si district of the capital on Sunday. (Photo: @chadchart\_trip Twitter account)   
  
Former Pheu Thai heavyweight Chadchart Sittipunt still has an outsized lead in the race for Bangkok governor, followed far behind by Pol Gen Aswin Kwanmuang, also an independent, according to two new opinion polls.The survey by the National Institute of Development Administration, or Nida Poll, was conducted on April 27-29 by telephone interviews with 1,357 eligible voters. The other survey  the Suan Dusit Poll, was conducted online by Suan Dusit Rajabhat University between April 12-18 on 2,522 people eligible to vote in the May 22 elections of the Bangkok governor and City councillors.  
Asked whom they would vote for as Bangkok governor, the respondents' replies in the two polls were close, with some minor differences.Nida Poll:  
  
44.58% of the respondents would cast their vote for Mr Chadchart;  
11.27% for Pol Gen Aswin;  
8.99% for Suchatvee Suwansawat of the Democrat Party;  
6.93% for Wiroj Lakkhanaadisorn of the Move Forward Party;  
3.17% for  Sakoltee Phattiyakul, an independent;  
2.51% for Sita Divari of the Thai Sang Thai Party;  
2.28% for Rossana Tositrakul, an independent;  
0.96% combined for independent runners Thita Manitkul, Veerachai Laoruangwattana; Vacharee Wannasri, Prayoon Krongyos and Prapat Banchongsiricharoen.  
  
Of the rest, 11.42% were still undecided; 5.75% would tick the "no vote" box; and 2.14% would not go to the poll.Suan Dusit Poll:  
  
39.94% were for Mr Chadchart;  
14.16% for Pol Gen Aswin;  
13.37% for Mr Suchatvee;  
10.00% for Mr Wiroj;  
4.01% for Mr Sita;  
3.09% for Mr Sakoltee;  
1.94% for Ms Rossana; and  
1.47% combined for other candidates.  
  
A futher 12.02% of respondents were still undecided.  
A record number of 31 candidates applied to run for the post of Bangkok governor. One of them was disqualified.

Link post: https://www.bangkokpost.com/world/2302490/man-city-liverpool-turn-attention-back-to-premier-league-shootout[Link!](https://www.bangkokpost.com/world/2302490/man-city-liverpool-turn-attention-back-to-premier-league-shootout)

Man City, Liverpool turn attention back to Premier League shootout

Manchester City hold a one-point Premier League lead over Liverpool with five games to play   
  
LONDON - Manchester City and Liverpool must quickly turn their focus from Champions League glory to the battle for the Premier League title, with no room for error in tricky away trips on Saturday.City, who hold a one-point advantage at the top of the table with five games remaining, travel to Leeds, who are also in need of the points to guarantee survival.Liverpool can go top for a few hours at least if they win at Newcastle, but the Magpies have won their last six home games to storm into the top half of the table since beginning to splash the cash of the Saudi sovereign wealth fund in January.The Premier League's top two remain on course to end their season with another showdown in the Champions League final after seeing off Spanish opposition in contrasting fashion in midweek.City should have put Real Madrid out of sight in a thrilling 4-3 win over the 13-time European champions, while Goliath got the better of David as Liverpool beat Villarreal 2-0.Champions League considerations could play a major role in the team selection of both title contenders.Jurgen Klopp gave Liverpool fans even more cause for celebration by extending his contract at Anfield for a further two years to 2026 on Thursday.However, the German is far from happy at the scheduling of a lunchtime kick-off just three days after a Champions League semi-final."It's brutal but it's fine. It's the best situation you can have," said Klopp."Just go for the next one and try to play the best football you can."City boss Pep Guardiola has a tough balancing act in selecting his side for what is expected to be an energy-sapping visit to Elland Road before their blockbuster return leg at the Santiago Bernabeu.- 'Best in the world' -Leeds are unbeaten in five games, but are just five points clear of the relegation zone ahead of a tough run-in, with Arsenal and Chelsea to come after the visit of City."I think it is the ultimate test," said Leeds manager Jesse Marsch. "I'm very honest when I say that I think they are the best team in the world."Everton have a game in hand to cut the gap on Leeds down to two points, but the Toffees' 68-year stay in the top flight is at serious risk.Frank Lampard could do with a favour from his old club as Chelsea visit Goodison Park on Sunday.By the time they kick off, Lampard's men could find themselves five points adrift of safety should Burnley continue their upturn in form since sacking Sean Dyche.The Clarets have taken seven points from a possible nine under caretaker boss Mike Jackson and will be confident of another huge win when they travel to Watford.The Hornets have lost 10 consecutive home games and their return to the Championship would be virtually confirmed by another defeat.A Burnley victory would also mathematically relegate Norwich, should they lose at Aston Villa.The battle to join City, Liverpool and Chelsea in next season's Champions League looks like a shootout between north London rivals Arsenal and Tottenham.Arsenal have a two-point advantage and both sides will be confident of victory this weekend against opposition with European semi-finals on their mind.The Gunners travel to West Ham, who trail Eintracht Frankfurt 2-1 after the first leg of their Europa League semi-final.Tottenham host Leicester, who have it all to play for next week in the last four of their Europa Conference League tie after a 1-1 draw with Roma in Thursday's first leg.Fixtures (all times GMT)SaturdayNewcastle v Liverpool (1130), Southampton v Crystal Palace, Aston Villa v Norwich, Wolves v Brighton, Watford v Burnley (all 1400), Leeds v Manchester City (1630)SundayEverton v Chelsea, Tottenham v Leicester (both 1300), West Ham v Arsenal (1530)MondayManchester United v Brentford (1900)

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Japan, Vietnam affirm respect for sovereignty amid Ukraine war

Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (L) pose for photos with Vietnam's National Assembly Chairperson Vuong Dinh Hue during a meeting at the National Assembly in Hanoi on Sunday. (AFP photo)   
  
Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and his Vietnamese counterpart Pham Minh Chinh on Sunday affirmed respect for the sovereignty of states and warned against the use of weapons of mass destruction as the war in Ukraine continues.Kishida and Chinh did not single out Russia's military aggression in Ukraine in a joint press conference after their meeting in Hanoi, apparently taking into account Vietnam's traditional ties with Russia since the Soviet era.  
"We confirmed that countries must abide by the principle of respecting the independence and the sovereignty of states," Kishida said. "In any region, changing the status quo by force is intolerable."  
The two leaders agreed on the importance of an immediate cease-fire in Ukraine and the provision of humanitarian aid, Kishida said, as he hailed Chinh's pledge to offer $500,000 in humanitarian aid to Ukraine through international organisations.  
It marked Vietnam's first offering of humanitarian assistance to Ukraine.  
Kishida also said the two leaders affirmed they "strongly oppose threats and uses of weapons of mass destruction and attacks on civilians."  
Last week, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned of the possibility of "lightning-fast" retaliatory strikes if a third country intervenes in military operations in Ukraine and poses threats to Russia.  
Putin said Russia possesses weapons others do not have and that his country will "use them if needed."  
"There are many countries that have not taken the same steps as the Group of Seven nations in relations with Russia," Kishida told reporters, in reference to the seven advanced democracies of Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States.  
"It is important to gain their (countries other than the G-7) understanding and cooperation as much as possible," Kishida said. "I appreciate Vietnam announcing humanitarian aid to Ukraine for the first time as a positive first step."  
In the run-up to the meeting, the focus was on whether Japan and Vietnam could agree to work together over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.  
Tokyo is stepping up sanctions on Moscow in coordination with other G-7 nations, but Hanoi abstained in a UN vote in March on a resolution condemning Russia's attack on its neighbour.  
With Japan taking a tough line on Russia with other G-7 countries, Kishida is seeking to push forward collaboration with the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, most of which -- including Vietnam -- have so far stood aloof from actions against Moscow.  
Speaking at the press conference, Chinh said the two sides discussed global issues including the situations in Ukraine and in the South China Sea.  
"We are committed to strengthening ties for maintaining peace and stability in the region," he said.  
Kishida also said the two agreed to strongly oppose attempts to change the status quo in the South China Sea at a time when the region faces an increasingly assertive China.  
He called Vietnam an "important partner" in realizing Japan's vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific.  
The premiers also agreed on enhancing cooperation in Vietnam's maritime security and on Japan's Self-Defense Forces helping the Southeast Asian country strengthen cybersecurity skills.  
Before heading to his eight-day tour covering Southeast Asia and Europe starting Friday, Kishida said the trip is aimed at building peace.  
Kishida was in Hanoi on the second leg of his five-nation trip that will also take him to Thailand, Italy and Britain. He arrived in the Vietnamese capital from Indonesia on Saturday.  
Kishida and Chinh last held a meeting when the Vietnamese prime minister was invited to Japan in November after Kishida became prime minister the previous month.

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"We are genuinely grateful and delighted to have such passionate fans in Thailand. We know football is the leading sport here and the Premier League is one of the most popular competitions. We don't take that for granted," he said.  
  
The league recently extended its partnership with TrueVisions for three more years, beginning with 2022/23 through to 2024/2025.  
  
"We know a vast majority of fans in Thailand watch through TrueVisions or in the way that is intended. But we also know some don't, and for those who don't, I think it's important to make them aware of the risks of engaging with pirated content."  
That's why the league launched the "Boot Out Piracy" campaign to raise awareness and provide information about illegal streaming.  
REAL COST OF PIRACY  
Mr Plumb gave an example to illustrate the problems facing those who seek out pirated content.  
"If people are getting up in the middle of the night to watch Liverpool against Manchester United, I'd imagine they wouldn't particularly want to set their alarm to watch a match and have their screen go down after five minutes, or have ads popping up all over the place," he said.  
"They should be watching through TrueVisions to see premium quality."  
The league wants to protect genuine fans and allow them to watch uninterrupted Premier League matches, said Mr Plumb.  
He said while people think they may not be paying any money to stream content illegally, they could be paying for it in another way.  
"Pirates are not generally known for being generous to their consumer base. They are doing it for a reason, and that might be to sell pop-up ads that routinely have content you wouldn't want your family to see. They will routinely have malware and ransomware as well," said Mr Plumb.  
As for working with the private sector, the Premier League recently extended its partnership with TrueVisions for three more years beginning with season 2022/2023 through until 2024/2025.  
"It's exciting for us and for TrueVisions to bring a reliable service to football fans. One reason broadcasters continue to invest and buy exclusive rights is because we are showing them that piracy can be reduced to a manageable level."

Link post: https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/2303418/gulf-nets-4-hr-awards[Link!](https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/2303418/gulf-nets-4-hr-awards)

Gulf nets 4 HR awards

Gulf Energy Development won 4 awards from World HRD Congress 2022.   
  
Gulf Energy Development Plc received four awards from the World HRD Congress, an independent organisation recognising achievements in human resource management, at three separate events.The events were the Global HR Excellence Awards, HR Tech Conference & Awards and Employee Engagement Leadership Awards.  
The achievements reflect Gulf's strong organisational management and excellence in human resource (HR) management.  
The four HR awards comprise the Award for Career Fairs, the Best Learning & Development Strategy award, Best Employee Engagement in B2B Sector and the Best Use of Technology in HR.  
According to Gulf, the company strives to continuously develop its HR to always be prepared during this era of transformation, focusing on developing new skills and enhancing existing skills, as well as changing the way in which employees work through the acquisition of new knowledge and skills.  
The company uses technology to enhance employees' knowledge and abilities so they are ready for future challenges and are able to keep up with the growth of the organisation.  
Moreover, social responsibility is endorsed for all employees in order to develop the organisation and society in the long run, said Gulf.

Link post: https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/2298398/ukraine-russia-wars-nuclear-end-game[Link!](https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/2298398/ukraine-russia-wars-nuclear-end-game)

Ukraine-Russia war's nuclear end-game

Last Sunday Vladimir Soloviev, the anchor of Russia's most popular current affairs show, Sunday Evening, was delivering his usual all-is-going-splendidly take on the war in Ukraine when he suddenly went off-piste. The United Kingdom, he suggested, is planning to use nukes against the Russian forces in Ukraine.How did he know that? Well, Britain has been accusing Russia of committing a genocide in Ukraine, and since that can't be true -- Russians never behave badly, even in wartime -- the evil Brits must be creating a pretext for launching a nuclear strike.  
"It's the perfect option," Soloviev explained. The Americans don't want to do it themselves, because they might be hit in retaliation by Russian nukes. It's the British who will be ordered to use their tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine, and suffer the Russian retaliation if necessary.  
Maybe it's just the standard propaganda nonsense. After all, it would sound perfectly plausible to anybody who gets all their information from Russian mass media. But Vladimir Putin's regime has the weird but deeply ingrained habit, whenever it is preparing to commit some dastardly deed, of accusing the other side of doing it, or planning to do it, first.  
It's like a boxer who always telegraphs his punches: it doesn't make any practical sense, but maybe it makes sense psychologically. At any rate, it definitely got my attention, and I'll bet it did the same in strategic circles in a number of Western capitals.  
Soloviev is an opinionated motor-mouth, but he is a genuine celebrity, all over Russian TV and as close to Mr Putin as anybody in the media gets. He has several shows on the state-owned Rossiya-1 channel, Russia's biggest, and last Sunday's show was graced by the presence of Margarita Simonyan, Mr Putin's favourite propagandist.  
Maybe it was just idle speculation to fill talk-show time, or maybe it was an attempt to discredit the many reports of crimes committed by Russian troops in Ukraine -- but maybe it was an opening bid to justify and normalise the eventual use of Russian tactical nuclear weapons against Ukrainian forces.  
I am inclined to give more weight to the former two possibilities, simply because forward planning has not been the hallmark of Russian military behaviour in this war. But here's what the people charged with contingency planning would be telling Mr Putin right now if there is anybody home in the strategic foresight department of the Russian armed forces.  
The big Russian offensive starting this week in eastern Ukraine could capture enough territory for Mr Putin to freeze the situation and declare a victory, but it would take many weeks and involve further huge casualties. And it might not succeed, even after all that.  
In fact, there is an equal or bigger chance that the Russian offensive will stumble to a halt, or even that the Russian army will lose heart and melt away (like it did against the Japanese in 1905, against the Germans in 1917, and against the Poles in 1920).  
To admit defeat against a much smaller opponent like Ukraine after deliberately starting the war would put the Putin regime at mortal risk, so what are the Great Leader's best remaining options? There is only one, actually. Escalate.  
This is what Mr Putin always does when he's in trouble, and the only escalation that could change the course of events at that point would be nuclear. Just tiny nukes, of course: this would be a bluff to squeeze some concessions out of the Ukrainians and hold Nato at bay, not a decision to commit national suicide (including personal extinction for Mr Putin).  
Russia does have some very tiny "tactical" nukes -- 1 kilotonne or less. Nobody else bothers to make them that small, but then nobody else's army still reflexively sees nuclear arms, regardless of formal deterrence doctrines, as just a bigger kind of artillery.  
Use one in an airburst over a small Ukrainian town or even a Ukrainian military position, and you'll kill just a few thousand people, including even the fallout victims. And maybe -- just maybe -- that will frighten the Ukrainians and Nato into giving Mr Putin a face-saving partial victory.  
So if it comes to that -- I'm not predicting that it will, but it could -- what should Nato do? The answer, almost certainly, is: Do nothing nuclear.  
Condemn the Russian first use of nuclear weapons, of course, and watch the entire world join the chorus. Ukraine should continue military operations as if it didn't happen, except that at this point it could ask Nato forces again to provide air support within its borders and Nato should agree. And everybody hope for the best.  
What's the alternative? Get into a tit-for-tat tactical nuclear war on Ukrainian soil? Nuke Moscow? Don't be stupid.

Link post: https://www.bangkokpost.com/life/social-and-lifestyle/2295330/tradition-forward[Link!](https://www.bangkokpost.com/life/social-and-lifestyle/2295330/tradition-forward)

Tradition forward  
Ruen Noppagao offers a 100% Thai experience

(Photos: Ruen Noppagao)   
  
"Noppagao", a word that is special in Thai as it includes "gao" or "nine", which is regarded as the luckiest of all lucky numbers. At the same time, "noppagao" represents nine gems, each associated with a unique benefit or blessing. These precious stones feature in the insignia of the Kingdom's highest order, established by King Rama IV more than a century and a half ago.In keeping with this heritage, Ruen Noppagao's menu celebrates the culinary arts of Thai tradition. Cooked according to past generations, using their methods of preparation handed down through the ages, the restaurant on Sathon 6 only uses locally-sourced ingredients, alongside organic products from their farm in Sukhothai.  
  
Chef manager Kanin Sinpan.  
  
Ruen Noppagao's chef manager Kanin Sinpan, who is devoted to the study of Thai cooking, showcases classic and luxurious recipes once exclusive to noble families, as well as signature dishes from the four principal regions of the country. "I graduated from the apprenticeship programme of the Mandarin Oriental Hotel," he says, "and entered as many competitions as I could. I won lots of awards but they were all for my Thai cooking. That's when I realised that my focus had to be Thai cuisine and I set out to learn everything about it." Following the teachings of Khopkeaw Najpinit, chef Kanin learnt that nothing in a dish should be dominant. "If we serve green curry, for example, we offer salted fish as an accompaniment to balance it out."  
Apart from royal and aristocratic fare, the menu at Ruen Noppagao will include a wide array of signature dishes from the four principal regions of Thailand, with ingredients determined by recipes handed down from generation to generation. Under Chef Kanin's supervision, the cooking techniques will be equally true to tradition. What's more, only the best local produce is to be used, along with a choice of organic ingredients, and a selection of complete organic dishes from their associated farm in Sukhothai. "Even the drinks and the food presentation are going to be authentically Thai," promises Kanin. Call 02-116-3317 or visit ruennoppagaorestaurant.com.

Link post: https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/2296322/will-chinas-common-prosperity-survive-putins-war-[Link!](https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/2296322/will-chinas-common-prosperity-survive-putins-war-)

Will China's 'common prosperity' survive Putin's war?

Last month, as Russian forces shelled Ukrainian cities and Covid-19 infections soared, Communist Party of China (CPC) leaders gathered for their most important annual political meetings: the National People's Congress and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.While the weighty documents and lengthy speeches hardly mentioned the pandemic, and did not mention Russia's war at all, China -- and its already troubled economy -- is undoubtedly being rocked by both.  
For much of the last year, the CPC's "common prosperity" campaign has dominated government rhetoric. President Xi Jinping has frequently described common prosperity as "an essential requirement of socialism". But important questions remain, and many observers expected some answers at the Party sessions.  
That did not happen. Instead, China's leaders made only brief and patchy references to "prosperity" and "prosperity for all". In the face of internal and external instability, they seem to be recalibrating their priorities.  
To be sure, economic headwinds are nothing new. While the annual Central Economic Work Conference last December presented an upbeat forecast for China's economy in 2022, it also highlighted risks stemming from contracting demand, supply shocks and weakening market expectations.  
The main goal for the year, policymakers concluded, should be "stability". Specifically, stability would require policymakers to limit contagion from the weakening property sector and resist the temptation to over-stimulate the economy.  
In the past three months, however, the challenge has become far more formidable. Rising Covid infections have led to a spate of lockdowns, threatening to exact a heavy toll on already-sluggish consumption and service industries. Meanwhile, Russia's war on Ukraine has driven up energy, commodity and food prices, which will cause inflation to accelerate and hit Chinese exports as global demand weakens.  
In this context, meeting the government's 5.5% target for GDP growth this year will probably be impossible, though leaders may massage the numbers to claim success. Even 2.5% or 3% growth will be difficult to achieve. To boost growth and avert a significant rise in unemployment, a plan is afoot to reduce taxes and fees on small firms, and to increase transfers to local governments. But more action to stimulate the economy should be expected.  
So, the common prosperity campaign has been sidelined for now. Nonetheless, it is likely to remain a totem for Xi, as he pursues his goal of making China a "great modern socialist country" with an advanced economy by the time the People's Republic celebrates its centennial in 2049.  
Success, in the Party's view, requires addressing the adverse consequences of 40 years of single-minded emphasis on economic growth, which have left large economic and sectoral imbalances, as well as yawning income inequality and deep regional disparities.  
If ignored, the CPC fears, these problems could endanger social and political stability. But rather than addressing them as a Western democracy might -- with social-welfare policies -- China's government is mounting a political campaign to mobilise people behind policies intended to expand the economic pie and produce a fairer distribution of income.  
A remarkable feature of the common prosperity campaign has been the tightening of state control over private firms, and the stipulation of a more orderly "expansion of capital". This has taken the form of political interference and increasingly intrusive regulations, along with investigations involving, for example, antitrust, data privacy and security.  
Technology, data and finance platforms have been the primary targets. But the education, healthcare and housing sectors, as well as any companies operating in the gig economy, are also in the government's crosshairs. In housing, state enterprises are now re-entering the market for the first time in 40 years, in order to purchase the assets of overextended developers.  
In an effort to align the private sector's interests with those of the Party, and under the threat of regulatory interference, leading firms like Alibaba and Tencent are making billions of dollars in donations to Party programmes, in what can be described only as coerced corporate philanthropy.  
By asserting the political control it craves, the CPC risks destroying the incentives for the innovation and productivity that China needs.  
Despite the advantages enjoyed by state enterprises, private firms have been the more powerful engine of economic development. As Vice Premier Liu He noted last year, the private sector accounts for more than 50% of taxes, 60% of GDP, 70% of innovation, 80% of urban employment, and 90% of new jobs and companies.  
Common prosperity denies the market-oriented policies that have enabled China's rise and marks the formal end of the era of reform and opening up launched by Deng Xiaoping.  
But at a time when Covid border controls and perceived complicity in Russian aggression are already threatening to exacerbate China's isolation, the common prosperity campaign is at risk of being undermined at home and overtaken by events abroad.  
George Magnus, a research associate at the University of Oxford's China Centre and SOAS University of London, is the author of Red Flags: Why Xi's China Is in Jeopardy (Yale University Press, 2018). ©Project Syndicate, 2022, www.project-syndicate.org

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Gaming platforms FlickPlay, The Sandbox take steps towards metaverse

Photo: Reuters   
  
Gaming companies FlickPlay and The Sandbox announced a new partnership last week that will allow players to use a blockchain asset on both platforms, representing a key step in the building of the metaverse.The idea of the metaverse involves people moving freely between virtual worlds on different platforms and taking their virtual clothing and other belongings with them, a concept called interoperability.  
Such an idea is many years away and will require collaboration between companies and metaverse developers, including Facebook owner Meta Platforms, Microsoft and Epic Games.  
FlickPlay is an app where players can unlock digital collectibles by using an interactive map of their actual surroundings, and then use their phone's camera to overlay the collectibles onto the real world and interact with the objects to make videos and other content. On Monday, the app announced its first collection of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) called Flicky, which will feature designs of an anthropomorphic chameleon wearing different clothes.  
A portion of people who acquire a Flicky will be able to use the NFT as their avatar on The Sandbox, a web and mobile game where players can build a three-dimensional virtual world.  
Initially, Flicky owners will unlock a version of the chameleon to use on The Sandbox, but soon they will be able to use the exact version of the digital asset that is stored on the blockchain in both games, said Pierina Merino, founder and chief executive of FlickPlay, adding that the company is working with The Sandbox to reach interoperability by the end of the year.  
The integration is notable because it may be the first to bridge an NFT in the virtual world with usage linked to the physical world, said Sebastien Borget, co-founder of The Sandbox.  
The partnership with FlickPlay will help "create a more immersive experience that extends into the metaverse and The Sandbox", he said.

Link post: https://www.bangkokpost.com/tech/2298274/elon-musk-wants-free-speech-on-twitter-after-spending-years-silencing-critics[Link!](https://www.bangkokpost.com/tech/2298274/elon-musk-wants-free-speech-on-twitter-after-spending-years-silencing-critics)

Musk spends years silencing critics, wants free speech on Twitter

Elon Musk's Twitter account is seen on a smartphone in front of the Twitter logo on April 15, 2022. (Photo: Reuters)   
  
If Elon Musk can take over Twitter Inc, his biggest promise is to transform it into a platform for free speech with few restrictions — something he calls “essential to a functioning democracy.” But Musk, who is famously sensitive to criticism, has a mixed record on championing the cause.The 50-year-old billionaire has donated over US$6 million to the American Civil Liberties Union in the last five years, making him one of its most substantial donors, and he’s discussed free speech on numerous occasions with the organisation’s executive director. But in his tweets, public remarks and policies at the businesses he runs, Musk shows little tolerance for speech that’s unflattering to him or his companies or reflects employee criticism of the workplace.  
At Tesla Inc and SpaceX, Musk has a long track record of silencing or punishing anyone who goes public with criticism of a project or practice. Workers must sign nondisclosure agreements and arbitration clauses that prevent them from taking their employer to court.  
  
Related: Twitter, analysts wary of Musk takeover bid  
  
Meanwhile, Musk uses his Twitter account, where he has more than 80 million followers and a fan base he can ignite, to publicly mock others, from a local health official during the early days of the pandemic to Parag Agrawal, Twitter’s current chief executive officer.  
Musk defined the goal for Twitter at a TED event last week: “A good sign as to whether there is free speech is: Is someone you do not like allowed to say something you don’t like? If that is the case, then we have free speech.”  
But those who have said things Musk did not like have seen their reputations publicly trashed. Vernon Unsworth, a British caver who helped rescue 12 boys trapped in Thailand, called Musk’s efforts to help a “PR stunt” in 2018. Musk retaliated by calling him a “pedo guy.” Then he paid $50,000 to a dubious private investigator to dig into Unsworth’s background in the United Kingdom and Thailand. He also attempted to depose a reporter, Ryan Mac, who was covering Unsworth’s defamation lawsuit against Musk.  
That same year, Musk went after Martin Tripp, a worker at Tesla’s battery plant in Nevada. Tripp saw himself as an idealist trying to improve the company’s operations; Musk viewed him as a dangerous foe who engaged in sabotage and shared data with the press and “unknown third parties.”  
Tesla’s PR department spread false rumours that Tripp was possibly homicidal and had threatened to “shoot the place up,” even though authorities had already determined that Tripp posed no immediate threat and wasn’t armed.   
Another employee was fired six days after he posted a YouTube video of his Tesla Model 3 running into a traffic pylon while using “FSD Beta,” an early version of software that Tesla has rolled out to roughly 100,000 people.  
And then there is the case of Jack Sweeney, a Florida teenager who tracks private jets. A few months ago, Musk reached out to him and offered $5,000 to shut down the “Elon’s Jet” account, Sweeney said. Musk viewed it as a security risk. Sweeney asked for $50,000, which Musk refused. The billionaire then blocked some of the social media accounts connected to Sweeney.  
If Musk were in charge of Twitter policy, he said he believes that people should be blocked only as a last resort, according to his comments at TED. If it is a gray area, his preference would be to leave the content up, he said.   
It is difficult to get clarity on the statements Musk makes on Twitter, in part because he largely disbanded Tesla’s communications team in the United States and rarely responds to inquiries from the financial press. Several journalists who cover Musk’s companies have been blocked by him on Twitter. Musk did not respond to a request for comment via email.    
Musk called himself a “free speech absolutist” in March when he tweeted that Starlink — SpaceX’s satellite-based internet service that is now operating in Ukraine — wouldn’t block Russian state-run news sources, which were cut off by some social media platforms at the time.  
“He and I have spoken on free speech issues on numerous occasions, and I know that he is quite passionate about defending free speech,” Anthony Romero, executive director of the ACLU, said in an email. Romero attended the TED conference in Vancouver last week, and he and Musk exchanged messages right after Musk’s on-stage conversation. “I believe Elon to be a true civil libertarian.”  
But Musk has already cited some instances where he believes content on Twitter should be blocked. At TED, he said Twitter should continue to take down content on a geographic basis, as the company “is bound by the laws of the country that it operates in.” In Germany, for instance, it’s against the law to deny the Holocaust happened, so Twitter hides those tweets in that country.   
Musk also said he would like to ban cryptocurrency scammers on the site. The billionaire’s persona — and his popularity with crypto investors — has been used to trick people in the past.  
“A social media platform’s policies are good if the most extreme 10% on left and right are equally unhappy,” Musk tweeted Tuesday, presenting a stance like past statements by Meta Platforms Inc CEO Mark Zuckerberg.  
The risk is discouraging some people from using a platform because it feels unsafe or prone to abuse.  
Musk is focused on “the idea that free speech means not taking down anything,” said Emma Llansó, director of the Center for Democracy and Technology’s Free Expression Project. But if people stop speaking out of fear of bullying or harassment, “that can actually really end up excluding large groups of people and communities from participation in online discourse.”  
  
People holding mobile phones are silhouetted against a backdrop projected with the Twitter logo. (File photo: Reuters)  
  
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MK Real Estate pivots to healthcare, warehouses

Mr Vorasit Pokachaiyapat, chief executive officer of MK Real Estate Development Plc.   
  
SET-listed developer MK Real Estate Development Plc is playing down its residential development as it sees industrial property and the healthcare business as offering brighter prospects.Vorasit Pokachaiyapat, chief executive of MK, said the company will maintain its residential development business at 2 billion baht per year, the same amount of annual revenue it recorded over the past five years.  
"This amount [2 billion baht] with a margin of 30% is steady," he said. "At this level, we cannot be one of the leaders in the housing business as that position comes with criteria requiring more than 100 projects worth many more billions."  
He said the company would evaluate the housing market this year and make a decision on this business by the end of 2022.  
M.K. did not launch any new housing projects last year and would have none in 2022, either.  
It currently has three existing projects with remaining units for sale worth a combined 5 billion baht, which would be sufficient for the next two years.  
"We need to be cautious of the housing business," said Mr Vorasit. "It may be risky if we buy a new plot of land to develop a new project after one of our projects is sold out."  
This year M.K. plans to invest 3 billion baht, of which over 2 billion baht will be earmarked to an additional warehouse area of 470,000 square metres at Bangkok Free Trade Zone, a warehouse-for-rent business under its subsidiary Prospect Development Co. This project is expected to take three years to complete.  
The company currently manages 400,000 sq m of rental warehouse space and factories, totalling six projects in three locations. It aims to reach a total of one million sq m in the next three years.  
Meanwhile, a 1-billion-baht budget would be prepared for housing business and healthcare ventures.  
M.K. shifted to health and wellness business in 2020, launching wellness and medical retreat project RAKxa in Bang Kachao under a 50:50 joint venture between RX Wellness - one of its subsidiaries - and VitalLife Alliance, a subsidiary of Bumrungrad International Hospital.  
"EBITDA [earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation] from non-real estate business last year accounted for 36% and will rise to 70% in the next few years, higher than our earlier goal of 50% due to the growing trend in the healthcare industry globally and e-commerce expansion in Thailand," Mr Vorasit added.

Link post: https://www.bangkokpost.com/property/2296654/bangkok-housing-developers-sentiment-dips-in-q1[Link!](https://www.bangkokpost.com/property/2296654/bangkok-housing-developers-sentiment-dips-in-q1)

Bangkok housing developers' sentiment dips in Q1   
Russia-Ukraine war causes prices to soar

Sentiment among housing developers in Greater Bangkok dropped in the first quarter this year as they were worried about soaring costs of construction materials impacted by the Russia-Ukraine war.Vichai Viratkapan, acting director-general of the Real Estate Information Center (REIC), said the sentiment index of housing developers on the current situation was 47.1 in the first quarter of 2022, down from 52 in the fourth quarter last year.  
"Their sentiment just improved in the fourth quarter of 2021 from below the median of 50 which was seen in 10 consecutive quarters from the second quarter of 2019 to the third quarter of 2021," he said. "An index below 50 means they are not confident."  
The main reason for the lower confidence was the Russia-Ukraine conflict which had a strong impact on the price of fuel and many construction materials, particularly steel which saw a year-on-year rise of 35% in prices, he said.  
Other problems that worried developers in the first quarter this year included a shortage of workers in the construction sector, higher inflation and an increase in interest rates.  
According to REIC, the sentiment index for development costs was the lowest at 32 in the first quarter of 2022, down from 39.6 in the fourth quarter last year. It was followed by new project launches at 45.1, down from 55, and revenue at 45.4, down from 53.3.  
Among six issues, which also included sales, investment and employment (besides development costs, new project launches and revenue), the only one which saw a rising index was employment at 53.6, up from 53.4.  
  
Overall listed developers had much higher confidence than non-listed firms at 51.1 and 41.1, respectively, despite both dropping from 56.3 and 45.5, respectively, in the fourth quarter of 2021.  
However, listed developers' confidence regarding development costs was the only issue which was lower than non-listed developers at 31.7 and 32.6, down from 40.3 and 38.5, respectively.  
The expectations index for both listed and non-listed developers, which reflects sentiment for the next six months, was 56.5 in the first quarter this year, down from 62 in the fourth quarter last year.  
All of the six issues saw a drop in the expectations index. Like the current situation index, the lowest was development costs at 24.3, down from 26.5. Others were above 50.  
The highest expectations index was sales at 68.2, followed by investment at 65.7. However, that of listed firms was investment at 73.3 while that of non-listed firms was sales at 63.  
While the quarter-on-quarter drop in the indices in the first quarter this year was mainly from supply, the quarter-on-quarter rise in the fourth quarter last year was entirely from demand.  
Mr Vichai said positive factors boosting residential demand in the fourth quarter of 2021 included relaxed loan-to-value limits, the country's reopening and the extension of the property incentive for another year.

Link post: https://www.bangkokpost.com/property/2287266/nawarat-readies-2-new-projects-worth-b1-86bn[Link!](https://www.bangkokpost.com/property/2287266/nawarat-readies-2-new-projects-worth-b1-86bn)

Nawarat readies 2 new projects worth B1.86bn

Mr Pasan said Nawarat Patanakarn will launch two new residential projects this year.   
  
SET-listed contractor Nawarat Patanakarn plans to launch two new residential projects worth a combined 1.86 billion baht this year after freezing new launches since 2020.Pasan Swasdiburi, senior vice-president of the new business and strategic planning department, said the new projects will be located near existing ones that were nearly sold out or had a good sales rate.  
One of the projects will be single detached houses worth 1 billion baht in Rangsit Khlong 3 area, which is close to its single detached house project that had a sales rate of 97%.  
"The new project will be our fourth in this location," he said. "Rangsit Khlong 3 is a large residential area with a fast growing population as it has facilities, educational institutions, hospitals and shopping malls."  
Mr Pasan said the company was a pioneer in this location, after launching the first project over 10 years ago.  
Most big brands have launched several low-rise projects in this location because its potential is promising, he said.  
Another project the company plans to launch will be Aspen Condo Phase D worth 860 million baht on Sukhumvit Soi 105 (Soi Lasalle), following three previous phases which had a sales rate of 99%, 95% and 47%.  
"We will launch this new phase in the fourth quarter of this year or early next year, depending on the market situation," said Mr Pasan. "Mortgage lending rejection remains an issue."  
Nawarat Patanakarn develops residential projects under a subsidiary, Mana Patanakarn Co.  
It had no new projects since 2020 as the residential market slowed down from the lending curbs in 2019, followed by the pandemic which affected demand from 2020.  
The contractor expects to generate 600 million baht in revenue from residential development by the end of 2022, compared with 689 million baht last year which rose from 400 million baht in 2020.  
Last year, Nawarat Patanakarn recorded a total revenue of 11.2 billion baht, up 13% from 2021.  
Revenue from construction grew by 28% to 9.88 billion baht. However, it had a net loss of 747 million baht, up from a net loss of 244 million baht in 2020.  
"The construction sector will continue growing, driven by government spending," said Visut Suwanwitwaj, a vice-president.  
He said private sector construction will recover after the pandemic subsides, while the Russia-Ukraine conflict may cause higher expenses, particularly fuel and construction materials costs.  
However, the impact on the company would be minimal as the majority of its jobs were from the government.

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Chadchart cruising towards victory in Bangkok governor race: polls

Bangkok governor runner Chadchart Sittipunt talks to children during a campaign in Lak Si district of the capital on Sunday. (Photo: @chadchart\_trip Twitter account)   
  
Former Pheu Thai heavyweight Chadchart Sittipunt still has an outsized lead in the race for Bangkok governor, followed far behind by Pol Gen Aswin Kwanmuang, also an independent, according to two new opinion polls.The survey by the National Institute of Development Administration, or Nida Poll, was conducted on April 27-29 by telephone interviews with 1,357 eligible voters. The other survey  the Suan Dusit Poll, was conducted online by Suan Dusit Rajabhat University between April 12-18 on 2,522 people eligible to vote in the May 22 elections of the Bangkok governor and City councillors.  
Asked whom they would vote for as Bangkok governor, the respondents' replies in the two polls were close, with some minor differences.Nida Poll:  
  
44.58% of the respondents would cast their vote for Mr Chadchart;  
11.27% for Pol Gen Aswin;  
8.99% for Suchatvee Suwansawat of the Democrat Party;  
6.93% for Wiroj Lakkhanaadisorn of the Move Forward Party;  
3.17% for  Sakoltee Phattiyakul, an independent;  
2.51% for Sita Divari of the Thai Sang Thai Party;  
2.28% for Rossana Tositrakul, an independent;  
0.96% combined for independent runners Thita Manitkul, Veerachai Laoruangwattana; Vacharee Wannasri, Prayoon Krongyos and Prapat Banchongsiricharoen.  
  
Of the rest, 11.42% were still undecided; 5.75% would tick the "no vote" box; and 2.14% would not go to the poll.Suan Dusit Poll:  
  
39.94% were for Mr Chadchart;  
14.16% for Pol Gen Aswin;  
13.37% for Mr Suchatvee;  
10.00% for Mr Wiroj;  
4.01% for Mr Sita;  
3.09% for Mr Sakoltee;  
1.94% for Ms Rossana; and  
1.47% combined for other candidates.  
  
A futher 12.02% of respondents were still undecided.  
A record number of 31 candidates applied to run for the post of Bangkok governor. One of them was disqualified.

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Move Forward leader eyes 100 parliament seats

MFP leader Pita Limjaroenrat will be nominated as the party's prime minister candidate in the next election.   
  
Opposition Move Forward Party (MFP) leader Pita Limjaroenrat on Saturday told members that he expects to win 100 seats in parliament at the next election, which would see the progressives able to appoint their choice of prime minister in the ensuing House vote.The ambitious goal came during Mr Pita's keynote address at the party's annual meeting in Puey Ungphakorn Centenary Hall and Park at Thammasat University's Rangsit campus.  
"We're confident we will get more than 100 members of parliament," said Mr Pita.  
That was an estimate based on the number of seats won by their previous incarnation, the Future Forward Party, and recent forecasts as to the intentions of voters.  
"The party is working harder than ever before and basing its decisions on information compiled to give it an edge in the battle," he said, adding the party has had a lot more time to prepare this time, having only recently been established ahead of the 2019 vote.  
Candidates at the poll will represent a diverse cross section of society, including members of the LGBTQ community and ethnic groups, he said.  
They are both experienced politicians and new faces who will help Thailand move from top-down administration to a fully decentralised state, he said.  
The MFP plans to field candidates in all 400 constituencies, said Chaithawat Tulathon, secretary-general of the party.  
"And of course, Mr Pita will be the party's only prime ministerial candidate," he said, adding the party has begun assembling its state-of-the-art election war room.

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Kishida to visit Southeast Asia, to discuss response to Russia-Ukraine war   
Thailand and Japan to strengthen cooperation in security

Japan’s Prime Minister Fumio Kishida attends a press conference in Tokyo on Wednesday, addressing some political and social issues. (Photo: AFP)   
  
Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will visit five nations in Southeast Asia and Europe over the Golden Week holidays for talks with their leaders, seeking to confirm cooperation with the countries in the face of Russia's war in Ukraine, the government said Thursday.During his eight-day trip from Friday, Kishida is expected to discuss with the leaders of Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Italy and Britain the response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine as well as strengthening cooperation to advance a "free and open Indo-Pacific" as China continues its maritime expansion in the region.  
"We will confirm cooperation in responding to regional and global issues, including the situations in Ukraine, the East and South China seas, North Korea and Myanmar," said Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno in announcing the trip at a regular press conference.  
In Indonesia, Kishida's first stop and host of this year's Group of 20 summit in November, the prime minister is expected to meet with President Joko Widodo.  
In Vietnam, Kishida is scheduled to hold talks with Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh and President Nguyen Xuan Phuc before heading for Thailand, this year's host of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum summit, where Kishida is scheduled to meet with Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha.  
  
Related: Japan vows to expand Thai expenditure  
  
Kishida and Gen Prayut are expected to exchange views on the international situation and witness the signing of a memorandum of understanding and agreements, according to the Thai government.  
Thailand and Japan, marking the 135th anniversary of diplomatic ties this year, are seeking to sign an agreement on the transfer of defence equipment and technology to strengthen cooperation in the security field, a source familiar with the matter said. Tokyo has already signed similar agreements with Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines.  
  
Then foreign minister Fumio Kishida, left, met with Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha at Government House, Bangkok, on May 2, 2016. (File photo: Government House)  
  
In Europe, Kishida is expected to discuss with Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson how to respond to Russia's continued aggression in Ukraine and support people who have fled the war-torn country.  
While the Covid-19 pandemic has prevented in-person meetings, Kishida, who took office in October, has been increasing face-to-face diplomacy after Russia invaded Ukraine in late February.  
The Japanese prime minister visited India and Cambodia in late March, quickly followed by a trip to Belgium, where he and other leaders of the Group of Seven (G-7) vowed to keep a close watch on any attempts to help Russia evade sanctions, in a possible warning to countries such as China that may seek to aid Moscow.  
  
Nine-year-old Karolina, left, carries her seven-month-old sister at the entrance of the bunker of a closed glass factory in Lysychansk, eastern Ukraine, on Thursday, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. (Photo: AFP)

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Finnish, Swedish security services warn of Russian meddling over expected NATO bids

People hold a giant Ukrainian flag as they take part in an ecumenical prayer moment in support of Ukraine amid Russia's invasion and for peace in the world, on Easter Monday at the Senate Square by the stairs of the Helsinki Cathedral in Helsinki, Finland, April 18, 2022. (Reuters file photo)   
  
HELSINKI: Finland and Sweden must prepare for increased Russian spy operations, cyber attacks and attempts to influence lawmakers as they consider joining NATO after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, the Nordic nations' intelligence chiefs said on Wednesday.Russia's invasion, which it calls a "special operation", has forced Sweden and Finland to reassess their longstanding military neutrality, and they are expected to announce in May whether they will join the US-led NATO alliance.  
Swedes and Finns, especially decision-makers, should be more vigilant than before in spotting attempts by Russia to influence policy and perceptions, the head of Finland's security service told a joint news conference with his Swedish and Norwegian counterparts.  
"Russia's possibilities for human intelligence operations are currently limited because the willingness of Finns to cooperate with Russian diplomats is at a low level," Antti Pelttari said.  
Sweden's security service has already been preparing for several years for possible Russian threats targeting the country's economy and political decision-making, intelligence chief Charlotte von Essen said.  
"Russia may think they now have a limited timeframe to influence the Swedish decision on whether to join NATO," she said, adding that Russian attempts to influence that move could take many forms and happen simultaneously.  
The three Nordic intelligence chiefs said they would work closely together in the area of security. Norway is a longstanding NATO member.  
Russia has long cast NATO enlargement as a direct threat to its own national security and has cited Ukraine's long-term ambition to join the alliance as a reason for its military actions against that country.  
Russia, with which Finland shares a 1,300km (810 mile) border, has said it will deploy nuclear weapons and hypersonic missiles in its Baltic enclave of Kaliningrad if Finland and Sweden decide to join NATO.

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Fears of Ukraine war expanding after Moldova blasts

A Ukrainian soldier sits on a Armoured personnel carrier driving on a road near Sloviansk, eastern Ukraine.   
  
KYIV (UKRAINE) - Concerns that the Ukraine war could escalate into a wider conflict grew on Tuesday as Kyiv accused Moscow of trying to create unrest in a Russian-backed separatist region of Moldova.The United Nations and United States warned of rising tensions in the Transnistria region of Moldova, as UN chief Antonio Guterres met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow and pleaded for peace.  
Russian forces have been in Transnistria for decades after the predominantly Russian-speaking region seceded from the former Soviet republic.  
Blasts this week targeting the state security ministry, a radio tower and military unit came after a Russian commander claimed Russian speakers in Moldova were being oppressed.  
The claim triggered alarm that Moldova could be Russia's next target as Moscow used the same "false flag" argument after launching its bloody invasion of Ukraine on February 24.  
"Russia wants to destabilise the Transnistrian region," Mykhaylo Podolyak, a Ukraine presidential aide wrote on Twitter.  
"If Ukraine falls, tomorrow Russian troops will be at Chisinau's gates," he said, referring to Moldova's capital.  
Guterres "is following with concern reports of new security incidents in the Transnistrian region of Moldova," a UN spokesman said.  
The United States echoed similar concerns, stopping short of backing Kyiv's contention that Russia was responsible.  
"We fully support Moldova's territorial integrity and sovereignty," State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters.  
- Arms flow into Ukraine -  
Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky has been lobbying for heavier firepower to push back the Russian advance now focused on the eastern region of Donbas.  
Western allies are wary of being drawn into an outright war with Russia, but Washington pledged Tuesday at a summit to move "heaven and earth" to enable Ukraine to emerge victorious.  
"Ukraine clearly believes that it can win and so does everyone here," US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told 40 allies gathered at the Ramstein Air Base in Germany.  
With arms flowing into Ukraine, Germany announced Tuesday it would send anti-aircraft tanks -- a sharp U-turn dropping its much-criticized cautious stance.  
"I can say one thing: the Ukrainian army will have something to fight with," Dmytro Kuleba, Ukraine's foreign minister, said in a briefing on Facebook.  
"We have entered a completely new phase.... But this is just the beginning. Much more will come to us."  
The Ukrainian defence ministry reported in its latest update that fighting was raging across the east with shelling of Kharkiv city and Russian troops launching an offensive on the town of Barvinkove near Izium.  
- 'I made a wish' -  
"I miss my kickboxing training and dance classes," nine-year-old Alina, who has slept in an underground car park in Kharkiv through a barrage of Russian rockets since the war began over two months ago, told AFP.  
"Victory would make me very happy. The war won't end straight away, but it will in a few weeks, I made a wish."  
At the entrance to Barvinkove, not far from the Russian lines, six Ukrainian soldiers were ready at any moment to dive into their trench, which they dig every day with a shovel.  
"Otherwise, we're dead," said Vasyl, 51, who serves with his 22-year-old son Denys.  
Ukraine officials said there was fighting all along frontlines in the Donetsk region, and that resistance in the Azovstal factory in the besieged port city of Mariupol was still holding out.  
Fierce Ukrainian fighting in recent weeks has beaten back Russian troops from around the capital Kyiv and from the Chernobyl nuclear zone.  
But Zelensky said Tuesday that Russian troops' conduct at Chernobyl showed that "no one in the world can feel safe."  
Russia treated the toxic site "like a normal battleground, territory where they didn't even try to care about nuclear safety," he said during a press conference with UN atomic watchdog chief Rafael Grossi.  
Ukraine's best-known singer Sviatoslav Vakarchuk made a morale-boosting visit to the eastern front, where a military press officer admitted the situation was difficult.  
"It's far from rosy," Iryna Rybakova, of the 93rd brigade, told AFP. "Of course, we were prepared for this war, especially the professional army, but for those who've been recruited, it's more complicated."  
Guterres, at his talks with Putin, called for Moscow and Kyiv to work together with the UN to set up aid and evacuation corridors to help civilians escape.  
After "very frank talks" with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Guterres said that "Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a violation of its territorial integrity and against the Charter of the United Nations."  
The UN chief's spokesman said Putin had agreed in principle to the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross being involved in evacuating civilians from Mariupol.  
Despite the bloodshed, Putin -- who shocked the world by sending troops into Ukraine -- told Guterres that he believed peace negotiations could succeed.  
"We still hope that we will be able to reach agreements on the diplomatic track," Putin said.  
Sitting across from the UN chief at a long table at the Kremlin, Putin said efforts at talks had been derailed by claims of atrocities committed by Russian forces.  
- Civilians flee -  
Russia said it had carried out high-precision missile strikes against 32 Ukrainian military targets including four ammunition depots on Tuesday. It also launched airstrikes against 33 targets and 100 artillery and rocket strikes.  
In the south, two Russian missiles struck the industrial city of Zaporizhzhia, which has welcomed many civilians fleeing Mariupol, regional authorities said.  
Russian forces are expected to soon advance on the city, giving them the potential to seize Ukraine's largest nuclear power plant.  
Strikes on Tuesday killed at least nine civilians in the south and east, Ukrainian officials said.  
The UN's refugee agency said it now expects more than eight million Ukrainians to eventually flee their country, with nearly 5.3 million already out, and that $1.85 billion would be needed to host them in neighbouring countries, mainly Poland.  
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The Ukrainian defence ministry reported in its latest update that fighting was raging across the east with shelling of Kharkiv city and Russian troops launching an offensive on the town of Barvinkove near Izium.  
- 'I made a wish' -  
"I miss my kickboxing training and dance classes," nine-year-old Alina, who has slept in an underground car park in Kharkiv through a barrage of Russian rockets since the war began over two months ago, told AFP.  
"Victory would make me very happy. The war won't end straight away, but it will in a few weeks, I made a wish."  
At the entrance to Barvinkove, not far from the Russian lines, six Ukrainian soldiers were ready at any moment to dive into their trench, which they dig every day with a shovel.  
"Otherwise, we're dead," said Vasyl, 51, who serves with his 22-year-old son Denys.  
Ukraine officials said there was fighting all along frontlines in the Donetsk region, and that resistance in the Azovstal factory in the besieged port city of Mariupol was still holding out.  
Fierce Ukrainian fighting in recent weeks has beaten back Russian troops from around the capital Kyiv and from the Chernobyl nuclear zone.  
But Zelensky said Tuesday that Russian troops' conduct at Chernobyl showed that "no one in the world can feel safe."  
Russia treated the toxic site "like a normal battleground, territory where they didn't even try to care about nuclear safety," he said during a press conference with UN atomic watchdog chief Rafael Grossi.  
Ukraine's best-known singer Sviatoslav Vakarchuk made a morale-boosting visit to the eastern front, where a military press officer admitted the situation was difficult.  
"It's far from rosy," Iryna Rybakova, of the 93rd brigade, told AFP. "Of course, we were prepared for this war, especially the professional army, but for those who've been recruited, it's more complicated."  
Guterres, at his talks with Putin, called for Moscow and Kyiv to work together with the UN to set up aid and evacuation corridors to help civilians escape.  
After "very frank talks" with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Guterres said that "Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a violation of its territorial integrity and against the Charter of the United Nations."  
The UN chief's spokesman said Putin had agreed in principle to the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross being involved in evacuating civilians from Mariupol.  
Despite the bloodshed, Putin -- who shocked the world by sending troops into Ukraine -- told Guterres that he believed peace negotiations could succeed.  
"We still hope that we will be able to reach agreements on the diplomatic track," Putin said.  
Sitting across from the UN chief at a long table at the Kremlin, Putin said efforts at talks had been derailed by claims of atrocities committed by Russian forces.  
- Civilians flee -  
Russia said it had carried out high-precision missile strikes against 32 Ukrainian military targets including four ammunition depots on Tuesday. It also launched airstrikes against 33 targets and 100 artillery and rocket strikes.  
In the south, two Russian missiles struck the industrial city of Zaporizhzhia, which has welcomed many civilians fleeing Mariupol, regional authorities said.  
Russian forces are expected to soon advance on the city, giving them the potential to seize Ukraine's largest nuclear power plant.  
Strikes on Tuesday killed at least nine civilians in the south and east, Ukrainian officials said.  
The UN's refugee agency said it now expects more than eight million Ukrainians to eventually flee their country, with nearly 5.3 million already out, and that $1.85 billion would be needed to host them in neighbouring countries, mainly Poland.  
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Summer storm warning for upper Thailand, Bangkok

An official talks to the owner of the damaged house in Phitsanulok province on Friday, after a storm and gusty wind brought her house down on Thursday night. (Photo: Chinnawat Singha)   
  
Thunderstorms with gusty wind and hail are forecast for the North, the Northeast, the Central Plains including Bangkok, and the East from today to Monday.The Meteorological Department warned on Friday that the southerly and southeasterly winds prevailing over upper Thailand will strengthen until Monday, while a moderate high-pressure system from China will extend to the North and the Northeast from Sunday to Monday.   
With these conditions, outbreaks of thunderstorms with gusty wind and hail are expected in the North, the Northeast, the Central Plains, including Bangkok and its vicinity, and the East, according to the agency's weather report.  
People are advised to stay away from large trees, billboards and unsecured structures during this period.  
On Friday, affected areas include 11 provinces in the North, all provinces in the Northeast, 15 provinces in the Central Plains, including Bangkok, and all provinces in the East.  
On Saturday and Sunday, 12 provinces in the North, the entire Northeast, 15 provinces in the Central Plains, including Bangkok, and all eastern provinces will be affected.  
On Monday, 12 provinces in the North, eight provinces in the Northeast, 11 provinces in the Central Plains, including Bangkok, and all provinces in the East will be hit.  
On Thursday night, storms and hail pounded Khon Kaen, Phitsanulok and Nakhon Ratchasima, damaging many houses.  
In Khon Kaen, Peerapong Muenpong, head of the provincial disaster prevention and mitigation office, said on Friday that storms and hail damaged more than 200 houses in Waeng Yai, Ban Phai, Nong Rua and Nong Song Hong districts.  
Officials were surveying damage in other areas, he added.  
In Phitsanulok, more than 50 houses in four tambons in Muang districts were damaged with roofs blown away when storms and heavy rain hit the areas on Thursday night.   
Local leaders and provincial disaster prevention and mitigation office officials on Friday morning surveyed damage in the affected areas.    
In some areas, storms brought down some power poles and big trees.  
In Nakhon Ratchasima, storms and gusty winds lashed out some areas in Bua Yai, Phimai and Kaeng Sanam Nang districts on Thursday evening.  
Local authorities were surveying damage to houses and other structures in the affected areas.  
  
A woman stands in her house with no roof in Khon Kaen, after a storm blows it away on Thursday night. Some 200 houses in four districts of this northeastern provinces were damaged. (Photo: Chakrapan Natanri)

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Russia to deploy new ICBMs soon   
Sarmat missiles capable of carrying 10 or more nuclear warheads

An image from a video released on April 20 shows a Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile being test-launched by the Russian military at the Plesetsk cosmodrome in Arkhangelsk region of Russia. (Russian Defence Ministry/Handout via Reuters)   
  
LONDON: Russia said on Saturday that it plans to deploy its newly tested Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), capable of mounting nuclear strikes against the United States, by the autumn of this year.The target stated by Dmitry Rogozin, head of the Roscosmos space agency, is an ambitious one as Russia reported its first test-launch only on Wednesday and Western military experts say more will be needed before the missile can be deployed.  
The Sarmat is capable of carrying 10 or more nuclear warheads and decoys, and of striking targets thousands of kilometres away in the United States or Europe.  
This week’s test, after years of delays due to funding and technical issues, marks a show of strength by Russia at a time when the war in Ukraine has sent tensions with the United States and its allies soaring to their highest levels since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.  
Rogozin said in an interview with state TV that the missiles would be deployed with a unit in the Krasnoyarsk region of Siberia, about 3,000km east of Moscow.  
He said they would be placed at the same sites and in the same silos as the Soviet-era Voyevoda missiles that they are replacing, something that would save “colossal resources and time”.  
The launch of the “super-weapon” was a historic event that would guarantee the security of Russia’s children and grandchildren for the next 30-40 years, Rogozin added.  
Concern about the risk of nuclear war has increased since President Vladimir Putin launched his invasion of Ukraine on Feb 24 with a speech in which he pointedly referred to Moscow’s nuclear forces and warned that any attempt to get in Russia’s way “will lead you to such consequences that you have never encountered in your history”.  
“The prospect of nuclear conflict, once unthinkable, is now back within the realm of possibility,” United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said last month.

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Explainer: How will Twitter's board handle Elon Musk?

Many investors, analysts and investment bankers expect Twitter Inc's board of directors to reject Elon Musk's $43 billion acquisition offer in the coming days as inadequate, but how would the social media company then proceed? - REUTERS2005140

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Working towards a zero-waste world  
Perfect Paper is an example of businesses gearing towards the circular economy by giving second life to used materials

Sarintorn Phansopa, general manager of Perfect Paper. (Photo: Perfect Paper)   
  
When Sarintorn Phansopa's father started his small business collecting used paper almost five decades ago, he didn't realise he would play a big role in making the world a cleaner, greener place."We were tiny at the very beginning," said Sarintorn. "My father started by collecting old paper from places like publishing houses, companies, schools and houses. With just a small pickup truck, my dad did everything himself -- from collecting to sorting used paper."  
From such a small start, today Perfect Paper -- the company founded by Sarintorn's father -- is collecting around 20,000 to 25,000 tonnes of used paper a month, or sometimes up to 40,000 tonnes, from various sources including households, banks, universities and publishing houses. The paper is then sorted and compressed before being distributed to clients who are to use it as raw materials for something else.  
Giving a new life to used materials, Perfect Paper is an example of companies that are an integral part of a circular economy, an economic system of closed loops in which raw materials, components and products lose their value as little as possible. An alternative to a traditional linear economy that spells take, make and waste, a circular economy and businesses like Perfect Paper seek to reduce waste and to recover resources at the end of a product's life cycle.  
Thailand and many countries around the world have in recent years been taking circular economy practices seriously as a means of stepping towards sustainability. Take the European Union (EU), for example. In 2015, the European Commission adopted its first circular economy action plan which included measures to help stimulate Europe's transition towards a circular economy, boost global competitiveness, foster sustainable economic growth and generate new jobs. By 2019, the first circular economy action plan was fully completed.  
  
Last year, the European Commission went so far as to adopt a new circular economy action plan with initiatives along the entire life cycle of products. The plan focuses on how products are designed, promotes circular economy processes, encourages sustainable consumption, and aims to ensure that waste is prevented and the resources used are kept in the EU economy for as long as possible. The new action plan also serves as a prerequisite to the EU's 2050 climate neutrality target and to halt biodiversity loss.  
Leading brands around the world also embrace the circular economy principle. Nike, for example, claims 71% of its footwear is made with materials recycled from its own manufacturing process. Earlier this year, Adidas released its first totally recyclable shoe called Made To Be Remade. With an aim to be a part of a circular economy, the sneakers are made with materials and technology that enable them to be returned to Adidas at the end of their life, after which they will be remade into a new pair of shoes or product. As for H&M, 57% of its clothing materials were recycled or sourced in a sustainable manner as of 2019. The company is targeting 100% by 2030.  
Likewise, businesses in Thailand have jumped onto the bandwagon and headed full gear towards the circular economy. Operating with a "waste paper for recycling" mindset, Perfect Paper believes all sorts of used paper can be recycled and reused as new.  
"Recycling has become more important than ever," said Sarintorn, a second-generation business owner and Perfect Paper's general manager. "Today using stuff made from recycled materials is becoming more popular and acceptable to consumers and the sustainability agenda is becoming a more important matter for large corporations. At Perfect Paper, we play our part by processing used materials and turning it into various types of paper such as tissue paper, printing and writing paper, kraft paper or paper moulding used as packaging materials."  
  
It is said Thailand uses an estimate of 3.9 million tonnes of paper a year -- an equivalent to around 60kg per person on a yearly basis. But with her 20 years of experience working for the family business, Sarintorn has seen a significant change in terms of how people use paper in the country. Printed materials such as newspapers and magazines have migrated to digital platforms. The yellow-pages telephone directory went extinct. However, that doesn't mean paper becomes meaningless.  
"People still use paper but in different forms," she added. "With a huge effort to reduce the use of Styrofoam and plastic for the sake of the environment, brands and product manufacturers have increasingly turned to paper-based packaging materials given paper can be made into various forms and has different levels of durability."  
With three factories currently under its wing, Perfect Paper also joined the Smart Business Transformation programme to look into its own digital transformation. Organised by UOB Thailand and The FinLab, the programme aims to equip Thai small and medium-sized enterprises with relevant know-how and tech solutions to support them in their digital transformation journey. Perfect Paper has adopted tech solutions for its logistics and marketing and expects a 15% cost savings and a twofold rise in revenue.  
"With the company's participation in UOB Thailand's Smart Business Transformation, we strongly believe that the use of digital technology in our business operation will help reduce the gap between systems and cut overlapping tasks. The customised digital solution that we accessed through the programme will enable us to achieve better business response times compared with the ready-made system we were previously using. We also expect greater working efficiency and happiness among our staff."  
From a family business using a mere buy-and-sell approach, now Perfect Paper has the infrastructure necessary for the company's recycling focus to continue sustainably. With human resources, machinery, digital solutions as well as tracking and tracking systems, the company is now able to export recycled paper to other countries as well.  
In terms of future plans, Sarintorn foresees a more sustainable business that will not only focus on short-term profits but also long-term outcomes.  
"Perfect Paper started with a good heart by helping get rid of waste and recycling them as part of the circular economy. So the more the business expands, the more we can give back to the society," Sarintorn said.  
  
  
Building Sustainable Cities is a 13-part series that explores essential elements & insights on how individuals and businesses can take action to forge a cleaner, greener tomorrow in collaboration with UOB Thailand. You can view the whole series here. 