Hong Kong Maintains Zero-Tolerance Policy as COVID-19 Cases Surge

Numerous Bills Across US Propose Limiting LGBT Rights for Minors

Catherine Anderson
Staff Writer

On March 8, Florida legislators passed a bill that would ban discussion of sexual orientation and gender expression in elementary school classrooms. According to The Associated Press, Governor Ron DeSantis is expected to sign the bill into law. If he does so, the legislature will go into effect on July 1, per ABC News. While the bill is officially titled “The Parental Rights in Education” bill, LGBT activists are calling it the “Don’t Say Gay” bill, as, according to ABC News, they fear “it could act as a checkpoint on the lessons on LGBTQ+ expression, history and discussions about LGBTQ identities.” This bill is far from the only legislation of its kind, as numerous bills targeting the rights of LGBTQ+ minors have been proposed nationwide in recent months. In fact, according to NBC News, in January and February alone, over 170 Anti-LGBTQ+ bills have been filed, with at least 69 of those targeting schools. The bill in Florida is just one example of the laws specifically targeting transgender and nonbinary youth that have been recently introduced. According to NPR, in 2021 alone, over 40 bills targeting transgender and nonbinary youth were proposed in Texas. Additionally, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton re-launched an opinion likening gender-affirming surgery for transgender youth to child abuse. NPR continues that Governor Greg Abbott also released a letter urging “professional[s], including teachers and doctors, to report parents who give their children gender-affirming care.” The effects of these bills go beyond the limitation of conversations in schools or the regulation of sports teams; they take a severe toll on the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth. NBC News tells the story of 16-year-old Spencer Lytton from Tennessee, who stated that he lives with nearly constant anxiety about whether he will be attacked for his identity. He went as far as to say that he faces difficulty going to the bathroom, for fear of what or who “might be in there.” Lytton’s struggle is not unique.

The Trevor Project, an organization dedicated to preventing suicide among LGBTQ+ youth, saw more than 10,800 crisis calls and texts in the eight months following the enactment of a law in Texas that barred transgender youth from playing on the sports teams that aligned with their gender expression. NPR reports. Over a third of these messages came from transgender and nonbinary youth. It is important to note that while advocates for such laws claim it even the playing field for athletes, according to Axios, many states without those laws have not seen examples of transgender athletes having an unfair advantage in women’s sports. Even prior to the most recent laws, the Trevor Project reported that there was a 150 percent increase in crisis contacts from LGBTQ youth in Texas between 2020 and 2021, according to NPR. While there is no single cause for this phenomenon, NPR writes that research has found that LGBT youth are dealing with increased stress, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts due to the laws being introduced in their states. In fact, according to Axios, the Trevor Project found that 52 percent of transgender and nonbinary youth have considered suicide. This data goes to show that while the bill in Florida may be officially called “Parental Rights in Education” bill and frames itself as a means to protect parents and their students, it may be doing more harm than good.

Low vaccination rates in older populations pose a problem for nursing homes. Courtesy of Aram Data-on (Unsplash)

Catherine Anderson

Amidst the easing of pandemic restrictions around the globe, Hong Kong is facing a devastating surge in COVID-19 cases, reports The Guardian. Hong Kong, following in the footsteps of mainland China, has maintained a zero-tolerance COVID-19 restriction policy over the course of the pandemic. This approach proved to be largely effective up until the recent emergence of the Omicron variant. Statistics provided by Reuters exhibit the exponential rise in cases across the region, documenting an average of 19,844 new infections daily, with the highest daily average thus far reported on March 3. The rampant spread of the Omicron variant throughout the territory can be largely attributed to its urban layout. Hong Kong is one of the most densely populated areas in the world, with 7.4 million individuals residing in the metropolis. This makes executing quarantine restrictions difficult, Al Jazeera explains, as the majority of Hong Kong residents live in densely populated apartment complexes. The rapid surge has left many hospitals and other public health facilities overwhelmed and understaffed. According to The Guardian, construction workers from mainland China are being recruited to build isolation units in the hopes of alleviating some of the pressure medical facilities are facing. Subsequently, Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam announced that dispensable infrastructure will be temporarily converted into isolation housing. In a similar vein, health care workers from the mainland are also mobilizing to aid Hong Kong, continues Al Jazeera. One factor that has expedited the proliferation of COVID-19 cases is the refusal of many Chinese citizens, predominantly the elderly, to get the vaccine. This has proved to be one of the most contentious issues throughout the pandemic, with a myriad of self-acclaimed “anti-vaxxers” enthralling the media worldwide. Skeptics around the globe have called into question the efficacy and overall safety of newly developed COVID-19 vaccines. The New York Times reports that many of the deaths due to the virus in Hong Kong that were recorded in the month of February were individuals who were over 70 and unvaccinated. In interviews with several unvaccinated elderly citizens, it was revealed that much of their reluctance is facilitated by a general distrust of the government as well as vaccine misinformation. To improve inoculation rates among the population, Hong Kong’s government policy was changed to require proof of vaccination for admittance to many public places, such as grocery stores and shopping malls. The rise of COVID-19 cases in tandem with the low vaccination rate of the elderly poses a particular threat to nursing homes throughout the region. Similarly to the plight of hospitals, retirement homes are encountering a devastating lack of resources, inhibiting the proper care and isolation of their residents. Many of the preventative measures taken by these care centers, including the complete prohibition of visitors, have failed to protect senior citizens from the Omicron variant, continuing The New York Times. Public health and care facilities are not the only institutions threatened by the spike in cases; Hong Kong’s stringent policy has also had a detrimental impact on the economy. The Associated Press asserts that the adopted zero-tolerance approach, which involves the imposition of heavy border restrictions, has eliminated one of the area’s vital sources of economic growth; tourism. Another article from The New York Times explains that the importance of international trade to Hong Kong’s economy, likewise diminished by Chinese virus regulations. Private businesses have suffered the consequences of these tight restrictions, many of which have been entirely decimated by the government’s response to the pandemic.

As of now, it is unclear how Hong Kong will proceed, considering the adverse effects of their “zero-tolerance” policy which are reaped by Chinese citizens. As the pandemic persists, it becomes more and more unclear whether a zero-tolerance policy is a pragmatic solution.

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Join the Team!
Somalia Elections Delayed Again, Drawing Western Warnings

Christopher Foran
Staff Writer

The world reacts to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine

Andrea Hebel
International News Editor

Australia Fully Reopens Borders After Two Years of COVID-19 Closure

Seven Russian Banks Banned from SWIFT

Jarrett Dang
Editor-in-Chief

Seven Russian banks banned from SWIFT could have “unnecessary consequences” that could hurt the Russian economy, the State Department’s top economic official, says. Kevin Warne, a deputy assistant secretary at the Treasury Department, said on Thursday, March 24, that “the key risk from imposing SWIFT sanctions is that the sanctions could create unnecessary consequences that could hurt the Russian economy,”...
**Killer of Noor Muqaddam Sentenced in Pakistan**

- **Andrea Gonzalez** Staff Writer

On February 21, 2022, Pakistan's Constitutional Court ruled to restore the death sentence for Noor Muqaddam. This decision comes after the Supreme Court had previously overturned the death sentence in 2021, citing that the trial was conducted in violation of due process rights. The Court’s decision was met with international condemnation and sparked protests in Pakistan, highlighting the country’s justice system’s inconsistencies.

**Deborah Ali Staff Writer**

Pakistan’s high court has confirmed the death sentence for Noor Muqaddam, a Pakistani woman who was convicted of murdering her estranged husband. The case has been closely watched by human rights groups and international organizations, as it highlights the challenges women face in securing justice in Pakistan.

Noor Muqaddam, a 25-year-old woman, was arrested in April 2021 in Lahore after allegedly killing her estranged husband, Ali Haider, in a fit of rage. She claimed that Ali had beaten her and her family on the night of their wedding. The case, which has garnered international attention, has sparked debates about domestic violence and the rights of women in Pakistan.

In 2021, the Lahore High Court overturned the death sentence, citing procedural violations during the trial. However, the Supreme Court had no option but to order a new trial, as it has no authority to release Muqaddam or commute the sentence.

The Lahore High Court had passed the case on to the Supreme Court, which had ordered a fresh trial. The Supreme Court upheld the lower court's decision, leading to the restoration of the death sentence.

Muqaddam’s case is a stark reminder of the challenges women face in securing justice in Pakistan. Despite the ruling, the government has been under pressure to take action against gender-based violence and to ensure that women have access to justice.

The case has also raised questions about the country’s justice system and the rights of women. It is hoped that the government will take this as an opportunity to address the issue of domestic violence and to ensure that women have access to justice in Pakistan.
Kathaleen Natale Staff Writer

On February 24, Russian troops captured the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and its exclusion zone, the 30 kilometer area around the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, reports Reuters. The situation escalated when it was reported by CNN that the heavily armed soldiers were holding power plant staff hostage. On February 26, Reuters reported that both the Ukrainian government and interim Ministry of Foreign Affairs had reported increased radiation levels coming from the plant. The capture of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant was first reported by Ukrainian Prime Minister Denis Shmygal. Radio Free Europe reported on CNN that he stated that they were initially “no victims at the site.”

The uranium Natonal government continues to support the campaign’s message. In a recent news report, the United States announced the terms for a deal that would allow for the return of four Kilos of plutonium to Russia. The침다로 stated that he expected the United States to continue to support the move. The United States has stated that it would support the move, despite the concerns of the international community. The move would be seen as a positive step in the direction of positive relations between the United States and Russia.

On February 25, the U.S. Treasury Department announced sanctions against a network of Houthi financiers. The sanctions were imposed in response to the growing financial support for the Houthi group. The United States has stated that the sanctions are a response to the Houthi group’s continued use of its networks to finance its operations. The sanctions are expected to have a significant impact on the Houthi group’s ability to fund its military operations.

The sanctions were announced by the U.S. Treasury Department. The sanctions target a network of individuals and entities that are subject to U.S. economic and financial sanctions. The sanctions include asset blocking and a travel ban. The sanctions also permit the U.S. Treasury Department to freeze assets and block transactions.

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Following the various restrictions, governments around the world have imposed economic and military sanctions on Russia, with the support of Ukraine and its allies. These sanctions have targeted the Russian energy sector, financial institutions, and high-net-worth individuals, aiming to disrupt the Russian economy and limit its ability to fund its military operations. Additionally, many countries have imposed travel restrictions and visa bans on Russian officials and citizens, further isolating Russia on the world stage. The sanctions have also led to a significant decline in the value of the Russian ruble, with experts predicting a further deterioration in Russia's economic situation in the coming months.

The invasion of Ukraine has had a substantial impact on the global economy, with stock markets and commodity prices experiencing volatility. The sanctions on Russian banks have also led to a tightening of credit conditions, affecting borrowers around the world. Despite initial concerns, many economists have noted a degree of resilience in the global economy, with many countries adapting to the new realities of the post-invasion world. However, the long-term effects of the invasion remain uncertain, with many experts predicting a sustained impact on the global economy in the years to come.

While the immediate effects of the invasion have been felt globally, there are signs of a slow recovery in some sectors. The stock market has started to stabilize, and commodity prices have begun to settle. However, the overall economic impact of the invasion remains to be seen, with many countries still assessing the full extent of the damage. The global community continues to work towards a resolution of the conflict, with diplomatic efforts and international cooperation being key drivers in the future of the region.
The global war on COVID-19, which has unfortunately high-raging in developing nations, has been quite dire, according to the UN. The virus, along with a range of other factors, has led to an estimated 452,201,564 confirmed cases of COVID-19 worldwide, reports Reuters. The World Health Organization (WHO) has estimated that the virus has killed about 9.7 million people globally, and has infected over 200 million.

In the midst of this pandemic, the UN has called for countries to work together to ensure that everyone has access to vaccines. The COVAX initiative, led by the WHO and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), has been instrumental in this effort. As of January 2022, 105 countries have been able to inoculate around 10 percent of their populations with COVID-19 vaccines. However, many developing nations still face significant challenges in accessing vaccines, and the UN has been calling for more equitable distribution of vaccines around the world.

The UN has also called for stronger international solidarity and cooperation in the fight against COVID-19. In particular, the UN has urged wealthier countries to share their vaccines with poorer nations, and has called for increased funding for vaccine production and distribution. The UN has also called for increased investment in health systems in developing nations, to ensure that they are better prepared to respond to future pandemics.

Despite these challenges, there have been some positive developments. For example, the successful development and deployment of vaccines has given hope to many people around the world. Additionally, the global community has come together to support each other in this crisis, and there have been increasing calls for greater international solidarity and cooperation.

However, there are still significant challenges to overcome. The pandemic has highlighted the need for more equitable access to vaccines, and for greater investment in health systems in developing nations. The UN has called for increased efforts to address these challenges, and to ensure that no one is left behind in the fight against COVID-19.
Dr. Margarita Balmaceda Discusses the Russian Invasion of Ukraine and Its Energy Implications

Thomas Johnson
Staff Writer

On March 4, Dr. Margarita Balmaceda was hosted by the Diplomacy Alumni Association of Seton Hall University’s School of Diplomacy and International Relations to provide more understanding of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The event began with Dr. Balmaceda’s explanation of how the situation had escalated to war. She spoke about the dissolution of the Soviet Union and how when it split into fifteen republics, only one was recognized as the legal successor to the Soviet Union. The other republics were asked to give up their nuclear weapons in return for guarantees which were not fully recognized. This led other countries, specifically the Russian Federation, to take advantage of their weakness.

Ukraine also had a serious issue with corrupt leaders and with its ties to Russia. In 2013, Ukraine was set to improve relationships with the European Union, with former President Viktor Yanukovych insistent on making a deal despite concerns of provoking Russia, says Reuters. However, just three months later, Yanukovych struck a deal with Russian President Vladimir Putin, with $15 billion invested into the Ukrainian government. Then, the Revolution of Dignity occurred, which Russia used to claim that Russian speakers were in danger and invaded the Russian Spring, eastern and southern Russian-speaking regions of Ukraine, according to Al Jazeera. The Russian Spring was engineered by Putin and the corrupt Ukrainian President, giving Russia control of parts of Ukraine since 2014. These parts were then controlled by Putin’s puppets, described by Dr. Balmaceda as “mafioso terroristic regimes.” Russia then forced Ukraine into the Minsk Agreements, which would have allowed the Russian-controlled states back into the Ukrainian Parliament. Ukraine has not followed the Minsk Agreements, which, if they were followed, would have allowed the Russian-controlled territories into the Ukrainian parliament with veto powers. According to Dr. Balmaceda, these territories would have exercised their power as wedges against progress away from Russia. This is a process that Russia has done numerous times in the past to maintain some form of control over former Soviet territories. Regarding energy, Dr. Balmaceda’s specialty, Russia has supplied Ukraine with energy since 2013 and continued to do so through the uprisings in 2014. Russia has also worked to discredit it Ukraine in the energy market and maintain its superiority. Russia became known for its reliability, discouraging European nations from looking elsewhere and creating Ukrainian invisibility. Germany has also contributed to creating Ukrainian invisibility, preferring Russia and previously the Soviet Union to be reliable sources of energy. This is why Dr. Balmaceda found it so encouraging that European countries were canceling certain projects such as Nord Stream 2 and the import of Russian energy. Dr. Balmaceda also believes that Putin is caught up in his own lies and beliefs in a world of Russian greatness and becoming a victim of his own propaganda, isolated from his advisors. He no longer lives in reality, but rather lives in a world of Russian superiority and control. His advisors no longer have any true input, but rather seem to be afraid of Putin. She also noted that Putin is using mercenary forces to attempt to fight the war on the cheap and not risk as many Russian lives;

she then suggested that the United States should also step up either sending in significantly more military aid or following Russia’s actions and hiring private military contractors to support Ukraine.

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Dr. Margarita Balmaceda gives her knowledge on the War in Ukraine. Courtesy of Seton Hall University

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