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John Robbins 281-965-6390
Jun Gai 281-498-4310

Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

Southern Daily News is published by Southern News Group Daily

Monday, January 03 2022|

Analysis: New Xinjiang chief expected to maintain policies, boost economic focus

SHANGHAI, Dec 29 (Reuters) - China's change of leadership in Xinjiang could indicate greater emphasis on economic development in the region, experts said, although its security crackdown targeting minority Muslims is unlikely to see a significant change in direction.

On Saturday, the official Xinhua news agency reported that Chen Quanguo, whose heavy handed security campaign in the western region drew international sanctions, had been replaced after five years.

Chen, 66 and a member of China's Politburo, a top policy-making body, was succeeded as Xinjiang Communist Party secretary by Ma Xingrui, who was governor of Guangdong. Analysts said Ma's stewardship of Guangdong, China's largest provincial economy, may point to why he was chosen.

"I suspect one rationale behind this appointment is to signal 'normalcy' in Xinjiang, though it will not be normal there, and to stress 'economic development' of the region," said James Millward, professor of history at Georgetown University.

The United States has labelled China's treatment of ethnic Uyghurs and other Muslims in Xinjiang as genocide. The United States and a few other countries plan a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics in February over the issue.

U.N. experts and researchers have estimated that more than a million ethnic Uyghurs have been detained in internment centres since 2016. China rejects all accusations of abuse and says its policies in Xinjiang are necessary to eradicate extremism. In late 2019, Beijing said all those who had been in what it called "vocational training centres" had "graduated".

Last week, U.S. President Joe Biden signed into law legislation banning imports from Xinjiang over concerns about forced labour, provoking further Chinese condemnation. [read more](#)

Asked by Reuters if the change in leadership in Xinjiang was made in response to international pressure or if it signals a change in policy for the region, China's foreign ministry said, "this matter is a normal personnel change in China."



MISSION COMPLETED?

Chen was seen to have "completed his mission" in Xinjiang, said Wu Qiang, a Beijing political analyst and former Tsinghua University lecturer who was among analysts who believe Chen could be rewarded for his work there with a promotion in the wider reshuffle ahead of next year's Communist Party Congress.

"I don't think his political career ends here," Wu said.

Chen had previously been party chief in Tibet, another restive border region, where he honed some of the tactics used in Xinjiang.

Xinhua said Chen will move to another role but did not give details.

"I believe that Xinjiang's policies will indeed experience some adjustments, for example, stressing development and starting to pay as much attention to development as stability," Wu said.

This year, for example, China stepped up promotion of Xinjiang as a destination for domestic tourists. [read more](#)

Experts said that while Ma, an aerospace engineer and former industry executive, may have been chosen for his economic credentials, the move does not indicate a change in direction: Chen had implemented the measures in Xinjiang, but China's broader approach was spearheaded by President Xi Jinping.

In a speech on Saturday, Ma, 62, said that he would "persist in taking social stability and long-term stability as the general goal of Xinjiang's work," according to

Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) Party Secretary Chen Quanguo attends a group discussion session on the second day of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China October 19, 2017. REUTERS/Tyrone Siu/ File Photo

his tenure.

"We must modernise supply chains," Ma said, according to a Xinjiang Daily report.

"We must deepen reform of 'decentralization and management of services', promote tax and fee reduction, create a good market-oriented, rule-of-law, and international business environment."

Guangdong Governor Ma Xingrui speaks during the opening ceremony of the Hong Kong Section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link, in Hong Kong, China September 22, 2018. Picture taken September 22, 2018. REUTERS/ Tyrone Siu



state media, indicating continuity with Chen.

During a visit to the Xinjiang International Grand bazaar in the provincial capital Urumqi on Monday, Ma said "high quality" economic growth would be a focus of

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WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

12/26/2021



Wea H. Lee
Wealee@scdaily.com

Chairman of International District Houston Texas
Publisher Southern Daily Wea H. Lee

Southern News Group Chairman / CEO
Chairman of International Trade & Culture Center
Republic of Guiana Honorary consul at Houston Texas

We Establish Three Covid-19 Testing Centers



As people are worrying more now about the Covid-19 pandemic, President Biden has urged all people to get vaccinated and go get tested as soon as possible.

We also have started to set up three test center locations in our community including in front of the Southern News Group building and another on Bellaire Blvd. and at the Katy Asian Mall.

In the last few days, all fifty states have been captured by the new Omicron variant. The White House once again has asked all international travelers coming into the United States to have a negative test certificate within 24 hours. All people on planes, buses and trains must wear masks.

At the present time, we still

have fifty million people who have not been vaccinated. They refuse to be vaccinated for various reasons which the new virus continues to take advantage of.

We call on everyone to act immediately to be sure to get tested before you get together with your friends and families for the holidays.



Yesterday I was with leaders from the Houston Chinese Civic Center and we donated a lot of toys to be sent to Kentucky through Mattress Max. He was so moved to be able to be a part of these helping hands.

We hope all of our Chinese and Asian community friends will be joining us to help the many people who need help.



Southern DAILY Make Today Different



A healthcare worker tests a child for the coronavirus at a drive-through testing site as the Omicron variant continues to spread through the country in Houston, Texas. REUTERS/Callaghan O'Hare

Editor's Choice



A child cleans melted candle wax from an apartment-style grave at Manila South Cemetery a day before the nationwide cemetery closure during All Saints' Day in Manila, Philippines. REUTERS/Eloisa Lopez



New York City Fire Department union members, municipal workers and others demonstrate during a protest against the city's COVID vaccine mandates on Manhattan's Upper East Side in New York City. REUTERS/Mike Segar



A woman stands behind a car with shattered glass near the scene of a shooting at the Boise Towne Square shopping mall in Boise, Idaho. REUTERS/Shannon Stapleton



Fishermen throw a bottle of beer during the traditional carp haul near the town of Blatna, Czech Republic. REUTERS/David W Cerny



Supporters of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange protest outside the Royal Courts of Justice in London, Britain. REUTERS/Henry Nicholls

Omicron Covid Variant In At Least 17 States — Cases Are Likely To Rise, CDC Chief Says Omicron Now in 17 U.S. States

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

**Key Points**

At least 15 states have detected the omicron coronavirus variant. That number of cases is expected to rise, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky told ABC News on Sunday.

At least 17 states have detected the omicron coronavirus variant and that number is expected to rise, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky told ABC News on Sunday. "We know we have several dozen cases and we're following them closely. And we are every day hearing about more and more probable cases so that number is likely to rise," Walensky said on "This Week."

The variant, first discovered in South Africa, has several mutations to the spike protein that allows the virus to enter the body, and some of those mutations could lead to increased antibody resistance and transmissibility. Scientists are still collecting data on the virus and the effectiveness of current Covid-19 vaccines.

Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, testifies during the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee hearing titled Next Steps:

The Road Ahead for the COVID-19 Response, in Dirksen Building on Thursday, November 4, 2021. (Photo/Tom Williams/CQ-Roll Call, Inc. / Getty Images)

After being detected in several other countries, the U.S. reported its first omicron case on Dec. 1. While some patients had recently traveled to southern Africa, others had no travel history. That suggests that community transmission is underway. In an effort to prevent the virus from seeding itself in the U.S., officials had at first restricted travel for non-U.S. citizens from South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia,

Lesotho, Eswatini, Mozambique and Malawi. Dr. Anthony Fauci, the top U.S. infectious disease official, said Sunday on CNN's "State of the Union" that he hopes that ban can be lifted in a "reasonable period of time."

Still, the vast majority of cases in the U.S. are still caused by the delta variant.

"We have about 90 to 100,000 cases a day right now in the United States, and 99.9% of them are the delta variant," Walensky said. (CNBC.com)

Related**Fauci Says Early Reports Encouraging About Omicron Variant****Dr. Anthony Fauci**

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, speaks during the daily briefing at the White House in Washington, Wednesday, Dec. 1, 2021. U.S. health officials said Sunday, Dec. 5 that while the omicron variant of the coronavirus is rapidly spreading throughout the country, early indications suggest it may be less dangerous than delta, which continues to drive a surge of hospitalizations.

President Joe Biden's chief medical adviser, Dr. Anthony Fauci, told CNN's "State of the Union" that scientists need more information before drawing conclusion's about omicron's severity. (AP Photo/Susan Walsh, File)

U.S. health officials said Sunday that while the omicron variant of the coronavirus is rapidly spreading throughout the country, early indications suggest it may be less dangerous than delta, which continues to drive a surge of hospitalizations.

President Joe Biden's chief medical adviser, Dr. Anthony Fauci, told CNN's "State of the Union" that scientists need more information before drawing conclusions about omicron's severity. Reports from South Africa, where it emerged and is becoming the dominant strain, suggest that hospitalization rates have not increased alarmingly.

"Thus far, it does not look like there's a great degree of severity to it," Fauci said. "But we have really got to be careful before we make any determinations that it is less severe or it really doesn't cause any severe illness, comparable to delta."

Fauci said the Biden administration is considering lifting travel restrictions against noncitizens entering the United States from several African countries. They were imposed as the omicron variant exploded in the region, but U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has blasted such measures as "travel apartheid."

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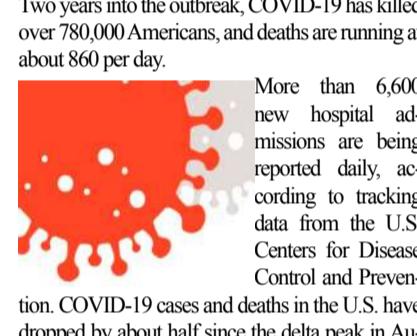
"Hopefully we'll be able to lift that ban in a quite reasonable period of time," Fauci said. "We all feel very badly about the hardship that has been put on not only on South Africa but the other African countries."

Omicron had been detected in about a third of U.S. states by Sunday, including in the Northeast, the South, the Great Plains and the West Coast. Wisconsin, Missouri and Louisiana were among the latest states to confirm cases. But delta remains the dominant variant, making up more than 99% of cases and driving a surge of hospitalizations in the north. National Guard teams have been sent to help overwhelmed hospitals in western New York, and Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker issued an emergency order requiring any hospitals facing limited patient capacity to reduce scheduled procedures that are not urgent.

U.S. officials continued urging people to get vaccinated and to receive booster shots, as well as take precautions such as wearing masks when among strangers indoors, saying anything that helps protect against delta will also help protect against other variants. Even if omicron proves less dangerous than delta, it remains problematic, World Health Organization epidemiologist Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove told CBS' "Face The Nation."

"Even if we have a large number of cases that are mild, some of those individuals will need hospitalizations," she said. "They will need to go into ICU and some people will die. ... We don't want to see that happen on top of an already difficult situation with delta circulating globally."

Two years into the outbreak, COVID-19 has killed over 780,000 Americans, and deaths are running at about 860 per day.



More than 6,600 new hospital admissions are being reported daily, according to tracking data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

COVID-19 cases and deaths in the U.S. have dropped by about half since the delta peak in August and September, but at more than 86,000 new infections per day, the numbers are still high, especially heading into the holidays, when people travel and gather with family. (Courtesy apnews.com)

Businesses Brace For Omicron

The omicron variant poses a new threat to businesses that were already struggling to recover from the economic damage done by previous strains of the virus. Gyms, concert venues, restaurants, airlines and other industries that have been battered by the pandemic are bracing for another COVID-19 wave that could curb demand and prompt renewed government restrictions.

Several states have detected cases of the omicron variant, which health experts say could be more contagious than the delta variant. Shortly after scientists in South Africa discovered the omicron variant, the country's COVID-19 cases spiked dramatically.

Thanks to the prevalence of vaccines, U.S. officials don't foresee a return to the early days of the pandemic, when entire sectors of the economy were forced to shut down. But experts still worry that many businesses that barely overcame the delta variant might not survive another outbreak.



"We're all on our toes right now, thinking, 'Oh God, what's going to happen next,'" said Brett Ewer, head of government affairs at CrossFit. "The uncertainty really does not help, especially when so many gym owners are almost entirely bled out." Fitness facilities have taken a huge hit from customers staying home and COVID-19 restrictions that limit capacity or require masks. If omicron spreads rapidly, the wave would likely roll into January and February, when gyms typically get a substantial revenue bump from short-lived New Year's resolutions.

"This is going to be a critical time and if there is a new variant spreading around and there are new restrictions, that's going to affect any chance that a small gym owner might have to try to stay viable," Ewer said.

By the end of the year, the pandemic will have forced 25 to 30 percent of fitness facilities to close permanently, according to the Community Gyms Coalition and the Global Health and Fitness Association, which on Thursday urged Congress to provide federal aid to gyms in light of the omicron threat.

"Aid is desperately needed to address the damage already done to these vulnerable businesses and to bolster them," the groups wrote in a letter to congressional leaders.

Another COVID-19 outbreak could also spell trouble for restaurants, which lost customers in droves at the peak of the delta variant wave. Restaurant owners say that they still haven't recovered, and their operations are continually being disrupted by the ongoing supply chain crunch, worker shortages

and rising food prices.

The U.S. has lost more than 90,000 restaurants since the start of the pandemic. Restaurant groups are pushing Congress to authorize more federal aid after its \$28.6 billion rescue fund quickly ran out of money, with two-thirds of restaurants that applied for aid ultimately missing out.

"Until Congress moves to replenish the Restaurant Revitalization Fund, every new variant that could impact how consumers use restaurants threatens to push thousands closer to closing permanently," said Sean Kennedy, executive vice president of public affairs at the National Restaurant Association.

The delta-driven outbreak this summer also flattened demand for concerts and other in-person events. Venue operators, who successfully lobbied Congress for a \$16 billion grant program that they say saved around 90 percent of the industry from going under, are gearing up for another wave. Upticks in cases prompt more customers to skip shows they previously booked, depriving operators of crucial income from the sale of food, drinks and merchandise.

"As humans, most of us crave certainty. In a pandemic, we don't get that. We have to expect that things will change and we have to recognize that we have to adapt based on what's new," said Audrey Fix Schaefer, vice president of the board of directors at the National Independent Venue Association, which launched during the pandemic.



President Biden said Thursday that he plans to fight a winter COVID-19 wave with vaccines, booster shots and testing, not "shutdowns or lockdowns," signaling that the federal government won't require businesses to close their doors in the event of another outbreak. The Biden administration this week, however, did enact tighter testing requirements on international travelers entering the country. That's after it banned international travel from eight southern African nations located near the first detected omicron outbreak.

The U.S. Travel Association said that it hopes the new testing restrictions will be temporary, while Airlines for America, an airline industry trade group, said it supports the Biden administration's framework for international travel. (Courtesy the hill.com)

What Does Omicron's Fast Spread Mean For The U.S. – And The World?

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Omicron variant detected around world

"The World Health Organization classifies omicron as a 'variant of concern' due to the number of mutations that might help it spread or evade antibodies from prior infection or vaccination. The variant was first identified in South Africa and has also been detected across Europe and Asia."



Omicron spurred a rapid rise in positive coronavirus tests in South Africa. Compared with three previous coronavirus variants, the newly identified omicron variant is sparking a faster surge in the percentage of positive tests in South Africa. Classified as a "variant of concern" by the World Health Organization on Nov. 26, omicron has now been reported in more than 30 countries — and at least 19 states in the U.S.

The first country to really get hit by omicron was South Africa. Before the new variant took off last month, coronavirus cases there were low — only several hundred per day in mid-November. But by early December, the tally of daily infections had shot up to more than 4,500 — and genomic sequencing shows that omicron is to blame. What's more, the variant quickly swept through all regions of South Africa — and has now shown up in about 60 additional countries. Omicron hasn't yet triggered a global wave, but many scientists who are tracking its rapid spread believe it's only a matter of time.

The reason for their concern? Omicron is starting to gain traction in countries where the pandemic looks very different from South Africa — places where the highly transmissible delta variant is currently dominant and where vaccination levels are relatively high.

Worrisome signs from Europe

The clearest signs of trouble come from how quickly omicron is growing in Europe and the U.K., says Matt Ferrari, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Dynamics and a professor of biology at Penn State University. "Everybody in my industry is hopeful that we're being alarmist, but more than at any other point in the course of the whole pandemic, we know how bad it could be," he says.

A man is vaccinated against COVID-19 at a clinic in Johannesburg, South Africa. The omicron variant appears to be driving a surge in South Africa. New studies suggest that vaccines might not be as effective

as they once were.

against COVID-19 testing van parked in a city street.

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