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**BY THE YEAR END, FIVE VENDING MACHINES WILL BE SET UP IN GUANGZHOU TO SELL GOODS FROM MACAU**

**WARY, WEARY WORLD SLAMS DOORS SHUT IN FACE OF NEW VARIANT**

**THAI MAJOR FAST FOOD CHAIN LAUNCHED ITS ‘CRAZY HAPPY PIZZA’ TOPPED WITH A CANNABIS LEAF. IT’S LEGAL, BUT WON’T GET YOU HIGH**



**New Zealand** The emergence of the omicron variant hasn't changed New Zealand's plans to ease restrictions in Auckland and move the nation into a new, more open phase of its pandemic response, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said yesterday. Bars, restaurants and gyms in Auckland can reopen from late Thursday, ending a coronavirus lockdown that began in August. Around the country, a new "traffic light" system will bring an end to lockdowns but people will need to be fully vaccinated in order to guarantee participation in anything from getting a haircut to watching a concert.



**Japan** announced yesterday it will suspend entry of all foreign visitors from around the world as a new coronavirus variant spreads. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said the measure will take effect today. The decision means Japan will restore border controls that it eased earlier this month for short-term business visitors, foreign students and workers. Over the weekend, Japan tightened entry restrictions for people arriving from Southern Africa.

**Spain** has imposed a 10-day mandatory quarantine for visitors coming from seven southern African countries, where omicron, a new coronavirus variant, was first identified. Spain's move comes as more and more countries are imposing travel restrictions, even though much remains unknown about omicron. The mandatory isolation affects travelers from South Africa, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe who arrive in Spain directly or with stopovers in other countries.

More on backpage

# SUNCITY SCANDAL

## CHAU IN PREVENTIVE CUSTODY



**HK, MAINLAND CLOSER TO QUARANTINE-FREE TRAVEL TO MACAU BENEFIT**



**POLICY ADDRESS MORE 'EYES IN THE SKY' COMING SOON: WONG**



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

### OVER 5,500 STRANDED TNRS REEMPLOYED DUE TO 'CHINA VISA' POLICY

More than 5,500 non-resident workers (TNR) who had become stranded in Macau after losing their jobs due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have been able to be reemployed due to the "China Visa" policy measure. Secretary Wong Sio Chak said at the AL yesterday. The measure allows stranded foreign workers who are fully vaccinated with Sinopharm Covid-19 vaccines to apply for a tourist visa for the mainland where they can enter and stay for a short period. This then means they can comply with the new rule that mandates workers must be outside Macau borders to apply and enter Macau only with the work permit already approved in order to manage TNR quotas.

### RESTRICTIONS ON SOUTHERN AFRICAN VISITORS

Macau has imposed last week restrictions for visitors coming from eight southern African countries, where omicron, a new coronavirus variant, was first identified. Individuals that stayed in those countries over the last 21 days cannot fly to Macau. The countries are, South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique or Malawi. Macau's move comes as more and more countries are imposing travel restrictions, even though much remains unknown about omicron.

### RENATO MARQUES

**S**UNCITY Group CEO Alvin Chau has been detained and put in preventive custody by the judge that is overseeing the case.

Chau was transferred to Coloane Prison after a long interrogation by the Public Prosecutions Office (MP). The judge in charge of the accusation and further investigation on the case decided that he will await trial while under arrest.

Chau is suspected of leading a criminal organization dedicated to illicit gambling exploitation and money laundering, the Judiciary Police (PJ) announced on Sunday after the CEO of the VIP Gaming promoter was detained for interrogation on Saturday.

According to the PJ report, the case involves a total of 11 people who were all handed over to the MP.

Chau and another man are accused of leading the organization, while the nine other suspects are alleged participants in this organization.

The case involves accusations of establishing gambling platforms and conducting criminal activities related to online investment methods.

Preventive custody is the more severe of the measures authorized for suspects waiting for trial and is applicable in cases where the suspect is facing a sentence of over three years of imprisonment and where there are fears that, if the suspect remains free, they might attempt to

MDT ARCHIVE



### MP CONFIRMS

## ALVIN CHAU HELD IN PREVENTIVE CUSTODY

escape trial, damage or taint relevant evidence or interfere somehow in the investigation of the case.

Preventive custody is also applied when the suspect is caught on the run or is waiting to be transferred to another jurisdiction.

### CASE PROMPTS INQUIRY TO SECURITY CHIEF

Although he did not specifically mention names or the specific case involving the CEO of Suncity Group, Alvin Chau, lawmaker Ip Sio Kai questioned the relation of the

National Security law and the capacity of mainland authorities to intervene in certain cases.

Ip specifically referred to Article 303 of the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China that reads, "Whoever, for the purpose of reaping profits, assembles a crowd to engage in gambling, opens a gambling house, or makes an occupation of gambling is to be sentenced to not more than three years of fixed-term imprisonment, criminal detention, or control, in addition to a fine."

Ip wanted to know how this article could be applied in Macau or to Macau residents involved in activities related to the gaming industry.

Without providing a detailed answer, Wong said only that the jurisdiction of the mainland on this matter "can only be exercised in cases where these crimes are committed in the mainland and not in Macau," hinting that if local residents are accused of such activities in the mainland, the central government can exercise this jurisdiction.

## HK, Mainland closer to quarantine-free travel to Macau benefit



**H**ONG Kong authorities yesterday said they made "good progress" in a meeting exploring the resumption of quarantine-free travel with their counterparts in mainland China, Asia Gaming Brief reported.

According to a government announcement, the meeting was hosted by the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council Deputy Director, Huang Liuquan.

During the meeting, Huang affirmed Hong

Kong's efforts in strengthening its anti-pandemic measures in parallel with the measures imposed by the central government.

Mainland representatives also affirmed that Hong Kong had "fostered a favorable environment for resumption of quarantine-free travel," and they deemed that Hong Kong has "basically achieved the conditions of resumption of quarantine-free travel."

Earlier in November, the South China Morning Post reported that China would

be opening its borders to travelers from Hong Kong from the first week of December, citing unnamed sources from mainland China.

Hong Kong authorities said their next focus is preparing for the resumption of quarantine-free travel, including the roll-out of the "Hong Kong Health Code," the operation of border control points, and the introduction of measures to identify high-risk persons.

Lee yesterday said the

last detail will be announced when a final decision is reached.

The full reopening of the border between Hong Kong and mainland China is seen as a key step ahead of a potential opening with Macau, as secretary Lei Wai Nong hinted last week at the Legislative Assembly.

Hong Kong has historically accounted for around 20% of Macau's gross gambling revenue and allowing quarantine-free travel would be a major boost to economic recovery. **MDT**

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RENATO MARQUES

**I**N 2022, the government is looking to continue expanding the street surveillance system, nicknamed "Eyes in the Sky." Planned for 2022 is the implementation of the fifth phase and the study for the commencement of the sixth phase which is scheduled for 2023. These details were announced by Secretary for Security, Wong Sio Chak, in the presentation of the Security sector's main policies for 2022.

At the Legislative Assembly (AL) debate of the policies for next year, Wong noted that, according to the global plan of "intelligent city, safe city" developed by the government which aims to increase the capacity of the forecasting, alertness and response to security risks through strengthening the capacity and effectiveness of modern policing, the government will, in 2022, "continue to evaluate and improve on the construction of the 'Eyes in the Sky' through the installation of cameras in certain areas to improve the effectiveness." Wong added that the planned activities surrounding the "Eyes in the Sky" take into account the "implementation of the future urban master plan 2020-2040."

Offering a brief evaluation of the system, the Secretary recalled that the "Eyes in the Sky" have proven to be effective in solving a high number – over a third – of criminal cases. As a result, its expansion will help authorities to deal with more and different types of criminal activity, thus keeping both residents and tourists safe.

On the topic, lawmaker Ron Lam placed a dampener on the Secretary's euphoria about the development of technology-based tools as well as legal tools to allow police authorities to investigate alleged criminal activities more deeply.

Lam called on the government to establish in Macau an independently overseen mechanism to manage and decide on phone-tapping and communications interception, similar to the one existing in the neighboring region of Hong Kong. Lam also called for the creation of an independent entity to oversee the use of the "Eyes in the Sky" system.

In his reply, Wong noted that the establishment of such entities does not make sense in Macau as the interception of communications in Macau is ruled on exclusively by judiciary authorities and requires the authorization of a judge, a system that is different from that in Hong Kong.

"The premises are different. Our legal regime is different from the Hong Kong one.



POLICY ADDRESS | SECURITY

## More 'Eyes in the Sky' coming soon

In Hong Kong, two systems allow interception [of communications], but in Macau, only a judge can authorize that, so we cannot compare," Wong said, adding that the street surveillance system is currently operated according to the law.

"We only do what the law allows. The system has strict regulation and it also needs to follow the Personal Data Protection Act as well as video surveillance law," Wong said, adding that everything the police do and every installation of a new camera must first pass by the Office for Personal Data Protection (GPDP).

"Even when we want to install cameras in our police stations and judiciary police branches, we need GPDP authorization," Wong remarked.

Still on applications for technology in policing, the Secretary noted that the government wants to enforce coastal surveillance and patrol using drones to conserve limited resources, particularly the manpower of the Customs Bureau.

Earlier, lawmaker Ip Sio Kai had called on the government to more strictly enforce rules on the interception of communications and on cooperation with the banking sector, primarily to prevent the international transfer of funds in cases of scam. This type of crime has grown exponentially over the past two years.

Wong revealed that the go-

vernment intends to expand the alert system for suspect transactions with the banking sector to try to minimize the losses caused by various scams.

Questioned by the lawmakers as to whether the authorities know why these types of scams continue to target many people in Macau, Wong said that, according to a study, most of

the scams related to "online dating" due to people having "solitude issues," while the cases of people scammed in fake investment schemes occur due to greed.

### NATIONAL SECURITY TOPS CONCERNS OF LAWMAKERS

**Q**UESTIONS related to the revision of the laws related to national security topped the concerns of several lawmakers during yesterday's Legislative Assembly (AL) plenary session.

At the AL for lawmakers to debate the Policy Address for 2022 (LAG22), the Secretary for Security, Wong Sio Chak, heard many calls for action from lawmakers claiming that national security should be the government's main priority. Several lawmakers urged the government to quickly move forward with the revisions and amendments to local laws related to China's National Security Laws and regulations.

Almost half of the lawmakers mentioned the issue; some even made their interven-

tions on the LAG22 exclusively on the urgent need to have new laws to "better protect the country."

In one of the many interventions on the subject, lawmaker Si Ka Lon referred to the neighboring region of Hong Kong, saying, "in Hong Kong, the enforcement of better rules regarding national security has contributed to perfecting the 'one country, two systems' rule and we should learn from this." The lawmaker added, "the law from 2009 [currently in force] only defines seven crimes and there are many more threats currently, namely those that defy the principle of 'Macau governed by patriots.'"

In reply to many of the questions and calls for the establishment of more exhibition halls and educational

activities to impart the importance of national security to younger generations, the Secretary said, "we have prioritized work on education on national security. This is why we have been cooperating with schools on this work: so we can have a younger generation more aware of this." He added, "much of our work is done under the principle of the education of our youngsters with a patriotic sense and a feeling of responsibility and respect for the nation. We have to do this from an early age for the reinforcement of their national consciousness."

Si was happy with the response but also added that, in addition to a national consciousness, the government and schooling system should also impart "the ideology," and such a

process involves many related topics such as cybersecurity and internet safety.

Replying to other lawmakers' inquiries and comments on the subject, including lawmaker Ip Sio Kai, who called for a sense of urgency on the matter, Wong said, "we are already developing these works [of legal production]. We reviewed this law back in 2019 and now we need to identify the elements of violence to proceed with this battle. There are three types of threats to the security of sovereignty. The new law will include a total of 16 types [of crimes]. We will reinforce also the tasks mentioned."

The Secretary later added, "we are having close cooperation with the State for the production of this law. The prosperity of Macau cannot be achieved at the expense of our country. This needs to be done together with our country." **RM**



# E-KIOSKS SELLING MACAU GOODS SEE PHASED ROLL-OUT IN GUANGZHOU

ANTHONY LAM

BY the end of this year, five vending machines will be set up in Guangzhou, the provincial capital of Guangdong province, to sell goods from Macau, Kevin Ho, president of the Industry and Commerce Association of Macau, said yesterday.

The association held a forum at the MGM Macau yesterday alongside a contract-signing ceremony for the vending machine collaboration.

Located in a facility established for the purpose of incubating Macau enterprises in the Huangpu District of Guangzhou, the vending machines seek to meet the consumption habits of mainland residents and can process mobile payment transactions.

They will offer 150 types of Macau goods in three major categories: Macau specialty souvenirs, Macau creative products and, in order to highlight Macau's position as the bridge between China and Lusophone countries, Lusophone coffee products. A total of 17 local small and medium sized enterprises are involved in the project, providing goods to be sold in the vending machines.

The vending machine placement project, according to Ho, is a collaboration with MGM which aims to explore new hori-



zons and expand operating spaces for local small and medium sized enterprises to consequentially achieve economic diversification in Macau.

He said that, during the realization of the project, the association managed to resolve challenges in importing goods from Macau to mainland China

faced by 10 of the participating enterprises.

As to why Guangzhou has been chosen as the starting point of this project, Ho explained this was because the territory is a national-level central city and a core city in the Greater Bay Area's innovative initiative.

It also has a strong base in scientific innovation and other aspects, he added. The city, meanwhile, also has a strong foundation that has been supporting various trades. More importantly, Guangzhou and Macau have many similarities to the point of being nearly identical across culture, language,

and lifestyle norms.

The two cities also have established collaboration experience. The association hopes to provide greater future opportunities to local enterprises.

At the event yesterday, Ho recalled that 2021 marks the third year of the Association's collaboration with the gambling concessionaire on the series of projects titled "Join hands to develop the Greater Bay Area."

In the past three years, 10 large-scale events have been held with apparently satisfactory results.

Kenneth Feng, president, chief strategic and financial officer of MGM, reiterated in a statement that the company holds a different type of event each year in an attempt to nurture local small and medium sized enterprises and promote Macau goods as a brand.

Feng noted his belief that this year's project of making sales through vending machines will help local enterprises to enter the mainland market at a low cost and risk, with added convenience and flexibility.

The project will benefit residents in Guangzhou too, as they will be within close reach of Macau goods and culture. Feng added that MGM will continue its cooperation with the association to bring more local businesses to the mainland.

ANTHONY LAM

AS the city's International Marathon will see its 40th edition this year, a carnival will be held alongside the event scheduled for this coming Sunday.

The opening ceremony of the carnival was held yesterday at the Broadway Macau. The venue's owner, Galaxy Macau, is the title sponsor for this year's competition as it has been for the 17 preceding editions.

Held at the Broadway Macau's food boulevard, the carnival is seamlessly blended with existing food and game stalls at the venue. These existing food and game stalls, as well as street-side happenings and performances, will operate across the duration of the carnival.

Street-side magic shows will also be held intermittently.

The carnival presents many special highlights, in-

## 40th marathon to be boosted with carnival

cluding free game booths, marathon-themed photo corners, captivating performances, special delicacies, exquisite handicrafts and a yoga experience.

The carnival also includes lucky draws, which include a total of 40 accommodation rewards at Galaxy Hotel. To foster an inclusive and harmonious community, the carnival also features 10 local social services organizations operating stalls to further raise their profile within the community.

In the meantime, local small and medium sized enterprises are also invited to operate stalls in the carnival so that they can garner more business opportunities amid the economic downturn brought on by the current pandemic.

The carnival is open from now until December 4.

A "History of Macao International Marathon" exhibition is also open on the mezzanine floor of Broadway Macau, aiming to provide a review of the sporting event's development.

### ATHLETES WARM UP FOR THE MARATHON

At the opening ceremony yesterday, local runner Hoi Long, who had just won a gold medal in the National Special Olympic Games, expressed her confidence in the prospect of winning a gold in the local athlete category in this coming marathon.

Last year, she also topped the local group.

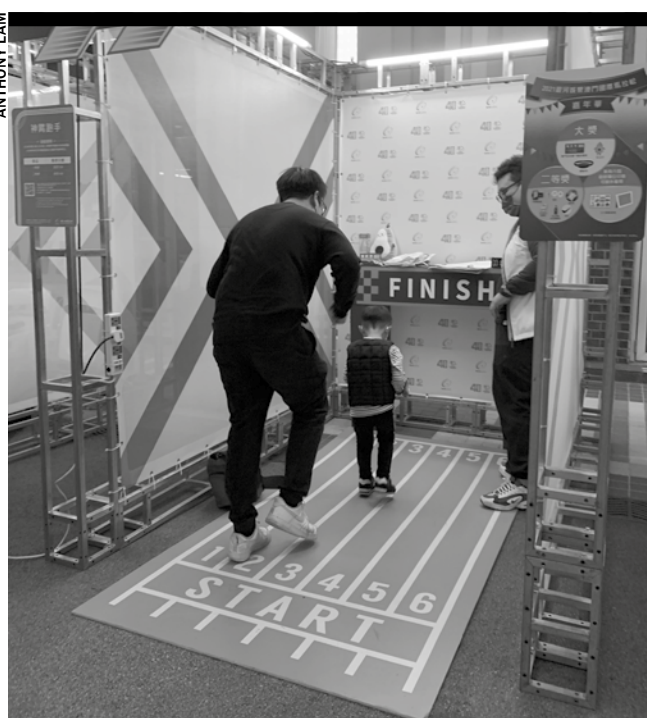
A veteran runner, Hoi holds a master's degree in education from the Beijing Sport University despite being audially-challenged since she was five mon-

ths old. She is fluent in oral Mandarin, Cantonese and English, as well as Cantonese sign language and lip reading in her three spoken languages.

She encouraged local residents to pick up running as long as they are physically able to. She said that she eats, drinks and works in the same way as everybody else, proving that diet has no place in making her a fast runner.

This year, Galaxy has also set up a special "GEG Macau Cup" for local athletes competing in the marathon and half marathon so as to encourage them to strive for further breakthroughs.

Each champion from the two groups will receive a night's stay at the Banyan Tree including breakfast, and catering and shopping vouchers which can be redee-



med at the Galaxy Macau. The male and female groups have respective quotas.

In addition, the company continues to sponsor the

popular "Most Creative Costume Award" and supports the "Fab 40" online special activity series hosted by the organizers.



GOLDEN HORSE AWARDS

# Macau-born filmmaker Clara Law wins best director

**F**ILMMAKER Clara Law clinched best director at the 58th Golden Horse Awards last weekend, finally winning a trophy after being nominated for a Golden Horse award for a seventh time, the Central News Agency reported.

The jury praised Law for using a "poetic" way to examine history and reality in her alternate film "Drifting Petals," and said the film showcased her talent and her vision.

"Drifting Petals" follows a filmmaker and a piano student across their past and future in Hong Kong and Macau after they first meet in Australia. Their stories merge as they each search for something that is disappearing from the cities they love.

Law, a Macau-born, HK-raised director, who now lives in Australia, did not attend the ceremony on Saturday, but asked Lin Lai, one of the actresses in the film, to accept the award on her behalf.

Lai said that Law is known as being the director with the most wretched luck, as she has been nominated numerous times without ever winning.

"It felt like people were telling



A scene from the film "Drifting Petals"

me, you aren't good enough, and you need to try harder again," Lin quoted Law as saying.

The director wanted to thank everyone who worked on the film, and every single friend who offered her help throughout the process.

"Most especially, she wants to thank Eddie Fong, the person who cooks alongside her in the kitchen every day," Li said, referring to

Law's long-term writing- producing partner and husband.

Four years in the making, the film was funded, written, shot, and post-produced entirely by Law and Fong.

Law, 64, had previously received six nominations at the Golden Horse Awards - four for best director and two for best original screenplay - for the films "Like a Dream," "Floating Life," "Autumn

Moon," and "Farewell, China."

This year, the Hong Kong film "Drifting," which is based on a 2012 court case involving homeless people in the working neighborhood of Sham Shui Po, received 12 nominations including for Best Director, Best Leading Actor and Best Cinematography.

Two Taiwanese movies, titled "The Soul," "The Falls" and "Till We Meet Again" received

11 nominations each.

"The Falls" won Best Original Screenplay, while "Drifting" won Best Adapted Screenplay.

"Revolution of Our Times," a documentary about the Hong Kong political unrest in 2019 by Hong Kong director Kiwi Chow, won Best Documentary Feature.

The film was a controversial topic in Hong Kong and Chow was accused of flouting coronavirus rules after authorities raided a private screening of the documentary in Hong Kong. Under Hong Kong laws, private gatherings are not limited by coronavirus restrictions.

Chow has since sold the copyright of the documentary to a European distributor and disposed of all his footage, in light of risks from a sweeping national security law implemented in the city following the political unrest.

The 58th Golden Horse Awards ceremony was held at the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall in Taipei on Saturday. The annual awards, established in 1962, are considered among the most prestigious and time-honored film awards in the world of Chinese-language cinema. **MDT/AGENCIES**

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VIRUS ORIGINS

# FAUCI FIRES BACK AT CRUZ OVER COVID CLAIMS ABOUT CHINESE LAB

**DR. ANTHONY** Fauci, the government's top infectious diseases expert, blasted Sen. Ted Cruz for suggesting that Fauci be investigated for statements he made about COVID-19 and said the criticism by the Texas Republican was an attack on science.

"I should be prosecuted? What happened on Jan. 6, senator?" Fauci, who is President Joe Biden's chief medical adviser, said in an interview that aired Sunday on CBS' "Face the Nation." It was a reference to the violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol by supporters of then-President Donald Trump that was stoked as Cruz helped lead GOP objections to Congress' certifying the 2020 election results.

"I'm just going to do my job and I'm going to be saving lives, and they're going to be lying," Fauci said.

Some Republicans, including Cruz and Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., have accused Fauci of lying to Congress when he denied in May that the National Institutes of Health funded "gain of function" research — the practice of enhancing a virus in a lab to study its potential impact in the real world — at a virology lab in Wuhan, China. Cruz has urged

Attorney General Merrick Garland to appoint a special prosecutor to investigate Fauci's statements.

Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, called the GOP criticism nonsense.

"Anybody who's looking at this carefully realizes that there's a distinct anti-science flavor to this," he said.

Cruz and Paul say an October letter from NIH to Congress contradicts Fauci. But no clear evidence or scientific consensus exists that "gain of function" research was funded by NIH, and there is no link of U.S.-funded research to the emergence of COVID-19. NIH has repeatedly maintained that its funding did not go to such research involving boosting the infectivity and lethality of a pathogen.

When asked in the CBS interview whether Republicans might be raising the claims to make him a scapegoat and deflect criticism of Trump, Fauci said, "of course, you have to be asleep not to figure that one out." **MDT/AP**



Dr Anthony Fauci (right)

TAIWAN

# Baltic lawmakers meet Tsai to step up cooperation, Beijing protests

**LAWMAKERS** from all three Baltic states met with Taiwanese leader Tsai Ing-wen yesterday in a sign of further cooperation between European Union nations and Taiwan.

It is the first joint visit to Taiwan by members of parliament from Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, Tsai said.

She welcomed the lawmakers, who are attending the 2021 Open Parliament Forum, hosted by Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

China claims Taiwan is its own territory and rejects any attempts by the self-ruled island to participate in international forums or establish diplomatic relations with other countries that would give it international recognition.

Tsai noted the values and experiences that Taiwan has in common with the three countries.

"Taiwan and the Baltic nations share similar experiences of breaking free of authoritarian rule and fighting for freedom. The democracy we enjoy today was hard earned," Tsai said. "This is something we all understand most profoundly."

Matas Maldeikis, head of the Lithuanian delegation, said he hopes to see even stronger ties with Taiwan.

"We are here to express our soli-



arity with you. We hope the soon-to-be-open Lithuanian trade office in Taiwan will help to expand the partnership between Taiwan and Lithuania and contribute to a closer relationship with Taiwan and the whole European bloc," he said.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the visit by the Baltic lawmakers yesterday, with spokesman Wang Wenbin issuing a warning.

"We urge the parties concerned to be cautious with their words and acts and to stop sending

wrong signals to the Taiwan independence force," the spokesman said.

Earlier in November, Taiwan opened a de facto embassy in Lithuania under the name of Taiwanese Representative Office. Lithuania also plans to open a representative office in Taiwan.

In response, China reduced its level of diplomatic relations with Lithuania to below ambassador level and also recalled its ambassador. Earlier, China expelled the Lithuanian ambassador from Beijing. **MDT/AP**

# TAIWAN SENDS JETS AFTER 27 CHINESE PLANES ENTER BUFFER ZONE

**TAIWAN** said 27 Chinese aircraft entered its air defense buffer zone over the weekend, the latest in a long series of incursions as part of Beijing's pressure on the self-ruled island.

The Defense Ministry said Taiwan scrambled combat aircraft to "warn" the Chinese planes to leave. It also deployed missile systems to monitor them.

Sunday's incursion included 18 fighter jets and five H-6 bombers, as well as a Y-20 aerial refueling aircraft, according to Taiwan's Defense Ministry.

The Chinese aircraft flew into Taiwan's air defense identification zone near the southern part of the island and out into the Pacific Ocean before returning to China, according to a map by Taiwan authorities.

Over the past year, the frequency of Chinese incursions has increased, with about 150 aircraft over a period of four days.

China's air force mission toward Taiwan came as Chinese President Xi Jinping met with officers at a military conference, where he called for military talent cultivation to support and strengthen the armed forces, according to state-owned news agency Xinhua. Xi said that talent is imperative in achieving victory in military competition and gaining the upper hand in future wars, according to Xinhua.

China claims democratically ruled Taiwan as its own territory, to be brought under its control by force if necessary. It refuses to recognize the island's government and has increasingly sought to isolate the independence-leaning administration of Tsai Ing-wen.

Taiwan and China split during a civil war in 1949, and Beijing opposes Taiwan's involvement in international organizations. **MDT/AP**



## SHEIKH SAALIQ BELAGAVI

**A**RBAZ Mullah's love story began, as romances often do, when he first laid eyes on the woman of his dreams, Shweta Kumbhar.

Over nearly three years, their courtship in many ways resembled that of any other couple and they made each other promises to get married. But those secret vows would never be fulfilled.

The romance so angered relatives of Kumbhar, a Hindu, that they allegedly hired members of a hard-line Hindu nationalist group to kill 24-year-old Mullah, who was Muslim.

They did exactly that, according to police. On Sept. 28, his bloodied and dismembered body was found on a stretch of railroad tracks.

While interfaith unions between Hindus and Muslims are rare in India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's governing Bharatiya Janata Party, or BJP, and other Hindu nationalists have decried what they call "love jihad." The discredited conspiracy theory holds that supposedly predatory Muslim men deceive women to coerce them into changing their religion, with the aim of establishing domination in the majority-Hindu nation.

The "love jihad" issue has pitted the BJP against secular activists who warn it undermines constitutional guarantees of religious freedom and puts Muslims in the crosshairs of Hindu nationalists, emboldened by a prime minister who has mostly stayed mum about rising attacks on Muslims since he was first elected in 2014.

"This conspiracy theory demonizes the Muslim as the other and creates victimhood and fears in the Hindus that India is going to be converted into a Muslim country," said Mohan Rao, a retired professor of social sciences at New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University who has researched interfaith marriage.

Gopal Krishna Agarwal, a BJP spokesman, said the party has no objection in principle to interfaith marriages, which are legal, but suggested that concerns about "love jihad" are valid.

"To lure somebody through financial means, or some coercion, or some sort of motive to convert, that is not acceptable," Agarwal said.

India's National Investigation Agency and some court rulings have rejected the "love jihad" theory as baseless. Census data show the country's religious mix has been stable since 1951, and India remains predominantly Hindu with Muslims making up about 14% of its nearly 1.4 billion people.

Nonetheless, rights groups say violence against interfaith couples has increased in recent



Muslim women walk past a board displaying the name of the Hindu nationalist group Sri Ram Sena Hindustan in a residential neighborhood in Belagavi

## INDIA

# Interfaith love a risk amid Hindu nationalist surge

years, perpetrated by hard-line Hindu nationalists out to stop such relationships. Hundreds of Muslim men have been assaulted, and many couples have been forced to go into hiding. Some have been killed.

It was against that backdrop of fear that Mullah and Kumbhar began dating in late 2018 in the city of Belagavi in the southern state of Karnataka.

Mullah's mother, Nazima Shaikh, was worried. She was all too familiar with the frequent news stories about interfaith couples being targeted in Karnataka, which is governed by Modi's party.

"I was unsettled because I knew how it could end," Shaikh said on a recent afternoon at her modest home.

She tried to persuade Mullah to end the relationship, but he refused.

Meanwhile Kumbhar's family was aghast. Shaikh said she appealed to them to give the relationship their blessing but was told that "they will kill or get killed but won't let their daughter marry my son."

Soon, Mullah began receiving threatening calls. First they came from Kumbhar's family, then from members of the hard-line Hindu nationalist group

Sri Ram Sena Hindustan, or Lord Ram's Army in India. They demanded money and for Mullah to break up with Kumbhar.

Kumbhar's parents also sought to stop her from seeing him, so the couple began meeting clandestinely in faraway towns and in fields in the countryside, according to friends.

When the threats intensified, Mullah reluctantly agreed to end the relationship after being told it would mean he would no longer be bothered. But the couple continued to correspond in secret — and her family was incensed when they found out. It wasn't long before he was summoned to meet again with the members of Sri Ram Sena Hindustan.

Investigators say that at the meeting, Sri Ram Sena Hindustan members bludgeoned Mullah with clubs and decapitated him using a knife. They then allegedly placed his body on the railroad tracks to try to make it look like he died when a train ran over him.

Ten people were soon arrested, though formal charges have yet to be brought. They include Kumbhar's parents, who according to senior investigator Laxman Nimbargi have confessed to paying the killers.

The Associated Press was unable to speak with Kumbhar. After a brief time in police custody, she is now staying with relatives who declined to make her available or even say where she is.

Sri Ram Sena Hindustan denied that its members killed Mullah and said the group was being targeted for "working for the benefit of Hindus."

Its leader, Ramakant Konduskar, who calls himself a foot soldier in the battle to save Hinduism, said he is not against any religion but people should marry within their own. He considers "love jihad" a threat to society.

Some jurisdictions governed by Modi's party have now begun trying to codify that sentiment into law.

Last year lawmakers in Uttar Pradesh passed India's first "love jihad" law, requiring couples from different religions to provide two months' notice to an official before getting married.

Under the law it's up to the official to determine whether a conversion came about through compulsion, a crime punishable by up to 10 years in prison. Because authorities can make couples' names public during the process, hard-liners have sometimes intervened to pressure

women's families to bring charges of forced conversion.

So far nearly 100 people have been arrested under the law, though only a few have been convicted. Three other states governed by the BJP have introduced similar measures.

Critics say the bills violate the constitutional right to privacy. They also view the laws as deeply patriarchal.

"Women are not assets," said Renu Mishra, a lawyer and women's rights activist in Uttar Pradesh.

Some liberal activists, most of them Hindus, have formed social and legal aid groups for interfaith couples and celebrate their stories on social media.

But in Belagavi, a relatively small city, such resources and support are lacking. Karnataka state has recently seen a rise in anti-Muslim attacks, exacerbating fears among the community.

In that environment, Mullah felt he had nowhere to turn, according to those close to him.

"My son made a terrible mistake of loving a Hindu woman," Shaikh said.

She paused, searching for the right words, before continuing, "Is this what you get for loving someone?" MDT/AP





AP PHOTO

COVID-19

# Wary, weary world slams doors shut in face of new variant

**N**ATIONS around the world sought yesterday to keep the new omicron variant at bay with travel bans and further restrictions, even as it remains unclear what it means for the COVID-19 pandemic.

Japan announced it would suspend entry of all foreign visitors, while new cases of the variant identified days ago by researchers in South Africa appeared as far apart as Hong Kong, Australia and Portugal. Portuguese authorities were investigating whether some of the infections there could be among the first reported cases of local transmission of the variant outside of southern Africa.

The stream of new cases showed the near impossibility of keeping the genie in the bottle in a globalized world of travel and open borders.

Yet, many tried to do just that, even against the urging of the World Health Organization, which noted that border closures often have limited effect but can wreak havoc on lives and livelihoods. Some argued that such restrictions still could provide valuable time to analyze the new variant. Little is known about it, including whether

it is more contagious, more likely to cause serious illness or more able to evade the protection of vaccines.

While the initial global response to COVID-19 was criticized as slow and haphazard, the reaction to the new variant came quickly.

"This time the world showed it is learning," said EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, singling out South African President Cyril Ramaphosa for praise. "South Africa's analytic work and transparency and sharing its results was indispensable in allowing a swift global response. It no doubt saved many lives," she said.

The WHO has also praised South Africa and Botswana for quickly alerting the world to the presence of the new variant — and many have warned they should not be punished for their speed, especially since it may never be known when or where the new version first cropped up.

But that did not hold von der Leyen back from pushing the 27-nation European Union toward imposing an immediate ban on flights from seven southern African nations — similar to measures many countries have taken.

Cases had already been reported in Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands, before Portuguese authorities identified 13 cases of omicron among team members of the Belemenses professional soccer club. Authorities reported that one member recently traveled to South Africa. Its game against Benfica over the weekend had been abandoned at half time for lack of players.

Quarantining also became an issue when Dutch military police had to arrest a husband and wife who left a hotel where they were being held after testing positive and boarded a plane bound for Spain.

"Quarantine is not obligatory, but we assume people will act responsibly," spokeswoman Petra Faber said.

Taking no chances, Japan, which has yet to detect any omicron cases, reimposed border controls that it eased earlier this month for short-term business visitors, foreign students and workers.

"We are taking the step as an emergency precaution to prevent a worst-case scenario in Japan," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said of the measure that begins Tuesday. Japan has kept its border closed to foreign tourists from all

nations.

Israel decided to bar entry to foreigners, and Morocco said it would suspend all incoming flights for two weeks starting yesterday.

Despite the global worry, scientists cautioned that it's still unclear whether omicron is more alarming than other versions of a virus that has killed more than 5 million people. And in some parts of the world, authorities were moving in the opposite direction.

In Malaysia, officials went ahead with the partial reopening of a bridge connecting it to the city-state of Singapore. And New Zealand announced it will continue plans to reopen internally after months of shutdown, though it is also restricting travel from nine southern African nations.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said she didn't anticipate any further restrictions, and bars, restaurants and gyms in Auckland can reopen from late Thursday, ending a coronavirus lockdown that began in August.

"We've come through the past two years of COVID in better shape than nearly anywhere in the world," Ardern said, pointing to low death rates, a growing economy and high vaccination rates.

Dr. Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health in the United States, meanwhile, said no data as yet suggest the new variant causes more serious illness than previous COVID-19 variants.

Collins echoed several experts in saying the news should make everyone redouble their efforts to use the tools the world already has, including vaccinations, booster shots and measures such as mask-wearing.

The U.S. is banning travel from South Africa and seven other southern African countries starting yesterday. "It's going to give us a period of time to enhance our preparedness," the United States' top infectious diseases expert, Dr. Anthony Fauci, said of the ban on ABC's "This Week."

Fauci says it will take approximately two more weeks to have more definitive information on the transmissibility, severity and other characteristics of omicron, according to a statement from the White House. **MDT/AP**

## this day in history

### 1994 BLAZING LINER ABANDONED OFF EAST AFRICA



Almost 1,000 people have been forced to abandon a luxury cruise ship in the Indian Ocean after it caught fire.

The Achille Lauro - which made headlines in 1985 when it was hijacked by Palestinian guerrillas - was sailing 50 miles off the Somali coast when the fire started in one of the cabins.

Two people died and eight were injured during the transfer of passengers from life rafts to a waiting tanker, according to Coastguard officials.

Starlauro, the ship's Naples-based owners, said it had not established the cause of the blaze but confirmed it did not suspect foul play.

Crew battled with the flames for almost seven hours as passengers - many of whom had paid £2,500 for the trip - gathered on deck.

The captain gave the order to abandon ship at 0500 local time (0200 GMT) after the fire began to burn out of control.

Panamanian registered tanker Hawaiian King was the first of a dozen ships which answered the Achille Lauro's dawn SOS call and rescued most of the passengers.

As night fell, most of the survivors were recovering on the tanker, which had been supplied with extra food by the US Navy cruiser Gettysburg.

It is expected they will now be taken to the Kenyan port, Mombasa, or the Seychelles, which would have been the liner's next port of call.

Dimitrios Skapinakis - captain of another tanker involved in the rescue operation - told reporters he thought the ailing 24,000 ton ship would sink within the next 12 hours.

"The Achille Lauro is listing by at least 40 degrees and you can still see smoke and flames - the passenger decks on the stern side are burning and flames are licking halfway up the vessel," he said.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

The Achille Lauro was launched as the Willem Ruys in 1947, but new owners changed its name in 1964. The ship was beset with ill-fortune for the rest of its life. It suffered serious damage from fires in 1965 and 1972. Three years later it collided with livestock carrier Yousset, which sank. In December 1981 three passengers were killed during an evacuation after a blaze broke out in the bar. The most notorious incident occurred in October 1985 when a Palestinian group hijacked the liner and murdered an American passenger. The ship finally sank two days after the 1994 fire as a salvage vessel towed it to Kenya.



MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

**YOUR STARS**

**ARIES**  
**Mar. 21-Apr. 19**  
 The illuminating sun reaches out to realistic Saturn, offering you the opportunity to ground down long-term plans and ambitions by stretching yourself beyond your comfort zone.

**TAURUS**  
**Apr. 20-May. 20**  
 Allow yourself to embody the dream you're envisioning for yourself, Taurus. Your ruling planet, magnetic Venus, finds itself swept up in a supportive connection with blissed-out Neptune today.

**GEMINI**  
**May. 21-Jun. 21**  
 The clarifying sun reaches a pact with realistic Saturn, offering you the chance to steadily make long-lasting, future-oriented plans in partnerships and collaborations.

**CANCER**  
**Jun. 22-Jul. 22**  
 It's an ideal day to pair up on projects or to discuss future plans. Elsewhere, lover Venus' meeting with idealistic Neptune instills the day with foggy, romantic fantasies.

**LEO**  
**Jul. 23-Aug. 22**  
 You look to the illuminating sun for cosmic cues. Tuesday's skies find the sun reaching out to form a grounded alignment with realistic Saturn, helping you take on a serious, future-oriented demeanor.

**VIRGO**  
**Aug. 23-Sep. 22**  
 Magnetic Venus spends the day in a tryst with reality-bending Neptune, imbuing your romantic life and creative aspirations with a dose of ethereal magic.

**LIBRA**  
**Sep. 23-Oct. 22**  
 As a Libra, you answer to the enchanting planet of love, Venus. Tuesday's skies find Venus shipped out to sea, as she forms a supportive alignment with illusory Neptune.

**SCORPIO**  
**Oct. 23-Nov. 21**  
 Today's skies offer up a peculiar mix of reality and fantasy, Scorpio. The illuminating sun forms a grounded connection with capable Saturn, helping you steadily embrace future plans on the home and family front.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
**Nov. 22-Dec. 21**  
 Simultaneously, the illuminating sun's meet-up with grounded Saturn provides you with realistic thinking and a future-oriented mindset that translates well into productive conversations.

**CAPRICORN**  
**Dec. 22-Jan. 19**  
 The arrival of the new moon solar eclipse hammers home this concept, as it encourages you to acknowledge, revisit, and release any self-created blockages that seem to stand in your path time and time again.

**AQUARIUS**  
**Jan. 20-Feb. 18**  
 The month ahead is likely to bring radical changes or new opportunities to these networks and alterations or advancements to the landscape of your aspirations.

**PISCES**  
**Feb. 19-Mar. 20**  
 It's an ideal day to sign contracts pertaining to your reputation, title, and ambitions. Elsewhere, heartfelt Venus elopes with spacey Neptune, delivering a romantic dash of magic in the air.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

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F&B

# THAI CHAIN'S CANNABIS PIZZA: TRENDY BUT WON'T GET YOU HIGH

CHALIDA  
EKVITTHAYAVECHNUKUL,  
BANGKOK

ONE of Thailand's major fast food chains has been promoting its "Crazy Happy Pizza" this month, an under-the-radar product topped with a cannabis leaf. It's legal but won't get you high.

Veterans of the backpacker trail, familiar with the legendary pizza parlors of neighboring Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh that offer powerful marijuana as an optional condiment, might feel downright cheated.

"Of course, they cannot get high," Panusak Suensatboon, general manager of The Pizza Company, said in an interview this week. "It's just a marketing campaign, and you can taste the cannabis and then if you have enough, you maybe get a bit sleepy."

The Crazy Happy Pizza is a mashup of toppings evoking the flavors of Thailand's famous Tom Yum Gai soup along with a deep-fried cannabis leaf on top. Cannabis is also infused into the cheese crust and there's chopped cannabis in the dipping sauce. A 9-inch pie costs 499 baht (about \$15). Customers preferring a do-it-yourself variety can choose their own toppings, with a 100 baht (\$3) surcharge for two or three cannabis leaves.

The cannabis plant has been used for two major purposes: as hemp for making rope and clo-



thing, and as an intoxicating drug, known as pot, ganja and dagga.

In recent years, a kind of middle-ground product has emerged: cannabidiol, or CBD, a chemical found in cannabis that can be processed into what is touted as a cure-all medicine. CBD can be separated out from tetrahydrocannabinol -- THC -- the chemical in cannabis that produces marijuana's high.

CBD has legitimized products made with cannabis, drawing on the mystique of marijuana without flouting the law or raising

major health questions. It's become a boom industry, especially in the United States.

Recreational marijuana is still illegal in Thailand, and can earn you a fine and time in jail, even though drug laws have been liberalized in the past few years. Cannabis is regulated for medicinal use, and individuals are allowed to grow a small number of plants for their own consumption.

Thailand last December became the first country in Southeast Asia to remove specific parts and extracts of cannabis from its con-

trolled narcotics list, and in February this year allowed them to be used in foods and beverages. The amount of THC in the CBD product must not exceed 0.2% of its total weight, virtually eliminating the possibility of getting high.

Cannabis products even before being decriminalized had become a cottage industry in Thailand, but their adoption by The Pizza Company -- operated by Minor Food Group, a subsidiary of the Stock Exchange of Thailand-listed Minor International -- boosts them into the commercial big-time.

Crazy Happy Pizza has been available at all of The Pizza Company's branches in Thailand, but sales have been lackluster, according to Panusak. It has faced several handicaps -- it cannot legally be advertised or sold to anyone under the age of 12. He estimates that when the company ends its sales promotion on Tuesday, it will have to throw away about a fifth of the cannabis leaves it acquired.

"I don't think the market is ready for cannabis products yet. We knew this since the beginning," said Panusak. "We only wanted to be the first mover to launch something new and innovative in the market." He cited durian pizza, incorporating the exotic and pricey tropical Asian fruit known for its pungent smell, as another example of his company's innovations.

"We try to get some new ingredients, anything that is in trend, and we use it and we want people to talk about it," he said.

Associate professor Wilert Puriwat, dean of Bangkok's Chulalongkorn Business School, believes that using cannabis for marketing can be effective in an initial stage, but business owners need strategies to make it work in the long run.

"In general, people who try it will not expect to get high," he said. "They just want to keep themselves trendy and take photos to post on their social media to show they have tried something that was once illegal."

He said cannabis has an emotional value that builds on a product's core value. "When people walk into your restaurant, they should come for your food and service, not for cannabis." **MDT/AP**

AUTOMAKERS

# Nissan investing in electric vehicles, battery development

YURI KAGEYAMA, TOKYO

NISSAN said yesterday it is investing 2 trillion yen (\$17.6 billion) over the next five years and developing a cheaper, more powerful battery to boost its electric vehicle lineup.

The Japanese automaker's chief executive, Makoto Uchida, said 15 new electric vehicles will be available by fiscal 2030. Nissan Motor Co. is aiming for a 50% "electrification" of the company's model lineup, under what Uchida called the "Nissan Ambition 2030" long-term plan. Electrified vehicles include hybrids and other kinds of environmentally friendly models other

than just electric vehicles.

The effort is focused mainly on electric vehicles to cut emissions and meet various customers' needs, said Uchida. Nissan also will reduce carbon emissions at its factories, he added.

The company has been struggling to put the scandal of its former Chairman Carlos Ghosn behind it. Ghosn, who led Nissan for two decades, after he was sent to Japan by French alliance partner Renault, was arrested in Tokyo in 2018 on various financial misconduct charges.

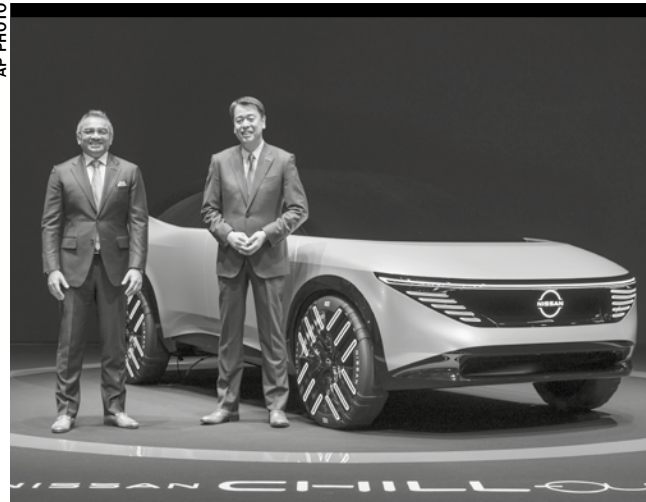
Uchida made no mention of the scandal but referred to "past mistakes" he promised won't be repeated at Nissan.

Nissan's "electrification" rests on developing a new ASSB, or all solid state battery, that it categorized as "a breakthrough" for being cheaper and generating more power than batteries now in use.

That means electric powertrains can be more easily used in trucks, vans and other heavier vehicles because the batteries can be smaller. The ASSB will be in mass production by 2028, according to Nissan.

The costs of electric vehicles will also fall thanks to the battery innovation to levels comparable with regular gasoline cars, Uchida said.

"Nissan has emerged



Chief Executive Makoto Uchida (right) and COO Ashwani Gupta pose with a Nissan Chill-Out concept car

from a crisis and is ready to make a new start," he said.

All top automakers, including Nissan's Japanese rival Toyota Motor Corp.,

are working on electric vehicles, amid growing concern over climate change and sustainability. Global consumers are also

demanding more safety features.

Uchida said Nissan was hiring 3,000 engineers to strengthen its research, including digital technology for vehicles.

Nissan, based in Yokohama, Japan, has suffered recently from the computer chips shortage that's slammed all automakers because of lockdowns and other measures at chip factories to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

The maker of the Infiniti luxury models, Leaf electric vehicle and Z sportscar is projecting a return to profitability for the fiscal year through March 2022 after racking up two straight years of losses. **MDT/AP**



ROB HARRIS, LONDON

FOOTBALL

CHELSEA 1, MAN U 1

**T**HE cautious game plan, with Cristiano Ronaldo dropped to the bench, worked for Manchester United.

Hitting Chelsea on the counterattack, with Jadon Sancho scoring his first Premier League goal, and grabbing a point is the type of damage limitation-mode United is in this season.

Snatching a 1-1 draw on Sunday — after home humiliations to Liverpool and Manchester City in the fading embers of Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's reign — gives Ralf Rangnick a platform to build on.

The German is yet to officially take charge — with a post-Brexit work permit still to be secured — but this could well be Michael Carrick's final act as interim caretaker manager.

The disappointment for United will be not holding onto the lead after Aaron Wan-Bissaka caught the back of Thiago Silva's heel when clearing the ball. Jorginho equalized from a penalty in the 69th minute — a day before the Italian discovers if he has won the Ballon d'Or.

Jorginho had been at fault for the United goal in the 50th minute. Mis-controlling a clearance from United midfielder Bruno Fernandes' hooked long ball allowed Ja-

don Sancho to seize possession. The 21-year-old forward had the space to race through on goal before slipping a shot past goalkeeper Edouard Mendy that crept inside the right post.

Sancho, who joined in July for 85 million euros (then \$100 million), also netted in the Champions League on Tuesday in a win at Villarreal.

Now another positive result — after losing five of its last seven lea-

gue games under Solskjaer — has taken United to within five points of West Ham in the fourth Champions League qualification place.

"It's not enough to draw, but at the moment, the way we are it's a big point," United goalkeeper David de Gea said. "In the last games we were conceding three or four goals, now we conceded one from a penalty and got a clean sheet against Villarreal, so I think we are improving.



Manchester United's Jadon Sancho celebrates with Manchester United's Fred (left) after scoring the match's opening goal

AP PHOTO

# Ready for Rangnick: Sancho helps Man United draw at Chelsea

"But this is two games, we need to show in the games that are coming, like Arsenal — a big game again. Let's keep going, keep focused."

### CHELSEA'S LEAD CUT

Manchester City beat West Ham 2-1 as the defending champions trimmed Chelsea's lead at the top to a single point.

Ilkay Gundogan tapped in City's opener in the 33rd minute from Riyad Mahrez's deflected crossfield ball. Fernandinho's strike in the 90th meant Manuel Lanzini's dipping shot in stoppage time would only be a consolation.

Snow was falling at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester but it was a heavier storm about 30 miles (48 kilometers) north at Turf Moor that forced the postponement of Burnley's home game against Tottenham less than an hour before kickoff.

### EVERTON STRUGGLES

Ahead of the Merseyside derby reunion with former club Liverpool, Rafa Benitez has gone a

seventh match without a win as Everton manager.

Ivan Toney, who played under Benitez at Newcastle but struggled for playing time, scored the goal that gave Brentford a 1-0 win over Everton.

Brentford claimed a first home league win since the opening day of the season against Arsenal in August to move up to 12th. Everton is two places lower in the 20-team standings.

### RANIERI'S MISERABLE RETURN

Five years after so unexpectedly winning the Premier League title with Leicester, Claudio Ranieri's mission now is avoiding relegation with Watford.

Losing 4-2 at Leicester, though, leaves Watford two places above the relegation zone with a four-point cushion. James Maddison scored a goal and provided two assists for Jamie Vardy. Ademola Lookman also netted as Leicester celebrated only a third win in 10 league games to move up to 10th place. MDT/AP

AD

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OPINION

China Daily  
Zeng Aiping, China Daily

CONFERENCE TO BOOST SINO-AFRICAN COOPERATION

The Eighth Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation will be held in Dakar, Senegal, on Monday and Tuesday.

The conference, whose theme is "Deepen China-Africa partnership and Promote Sustainable Development to Build a China-Africa Community with a Shared Future in the New Era", is expected to adopt four documents: the Dakar Action Plan (2022-24), the 2035 Vision for China-Africa Cooperation, the Sino-African Declaration on Climate Change, and the Declaration of the Eighth Ministerial Conference of the FOCAC.

It is also likely to open a new chapter in building a shared community amid the COVID-19 pandemic and fast-changing international situations.

In the 21 years since the establishment of the FOCAC, China and Africa together have made remarkable achievements and strengthened cooperation. And China and African countries should continue to regularly communicate with one another and deepen their strategic friendship to deal with common global challenges.

The past FOCAC conferences introduced feasible measures to boost cooperation on agriculture, industry, education, human resources, healthcare, trade, infrastructure, people-to-people exchanges and security. Apart from benefiting both sides, the measures have also helped African countries solve some major problems including shortage of funds, labor and infrastructure.

Thanks to the FOCAC, China has become one of Africa's most important global partners and boosted African countries' development. China has not only been Africa's largest trading partner for 12 consecutive years, it is also one of the biggest investors in Africa and biggest financier for infrastructure construction.

The FOCAC has also raised African countries' global standing, prompting the rest of the world to pay more attention to the continent, thereby increasing investments in Africa.

Besides, due to their special relationship with China, African countries support China on its core issues including national rejuvenation, making China-Africa partnership a model for win-win cooperation.

A brighter future lies ahead of the FOCAC because China and Africa have vowed to strengthen cooperation in various fields including the production and distribution of vaccines, which will help contain the pandemic on the continent and thus facilitate the recovery of the African economy.

It is also important that China and Africa learn from each other's experience in governance, especially because China can help African countries choose the development path best suited to their respective national conditions so they can enjoy sustained economic growth. And by learning from the success of China's reform and opening-up over the past 40-odd years, the African countries can increase their economic growth.

The FOCAC can also expedite the establishment of free trade zones in Africa and the integration of African countries into an economic bloc. China has helped improve infrastructure connectivity among African countries, and can provide more support to boost their industrial, especially manufacturing, sector, and facilitate regional trade and investment.

Hopefully, the new measures the FOCAC ministerial conference in Dakar is expected to announce will strengthen cooperation between China and Africa in the digital economy and clean energy, boost sustainable development and people-to-people exchanges, and bring them together to fight climate change.

Moreover, the FOCAC will continue to be guided by sincerity and good faith to build a vibrant China-Africa community with a shared future.

UK SET TO EXPAND COVID VACCINE BOOSTERS AMID OMICRON FEARS

THE BUZZ

The independent body advising the British government on the rollout of coronavirus vaccines will likely decide yesterday whether to expand the booster program to younger age groups following the discovery of the new omicron variant.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunization, or JCVI, has been asked by the British government to consider the merits of expanding the booster program to millions more people under the age of 40 and cutting the time period to a third jab. Professor Anthony Harnden, deputy chair of the JCVI, told the

BBC that it was "really important that we get the immunity levels in the population high" in case the omicron variant is more transmissible or protection from the vaccines is reduced.

Over the weekend, health authorities found three cases of the variant in England, which prompted the British government to tighten rules on mask-wearing and testing of arrivals in the country.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Saturday it was necessary to take "targeted and precautionary measures" in England.

AP PHOTO



JOYFUL REUNIONS AS MALAYSIA-SINGAPORE LAND BORDER REOPENS

**M**ALAYSIANS working in Singapore held joyful reunions with their loved ones after returning to their homeland yesterday following the partial reopening of a land border that has been shuttered for nearly two years due to the pandemic.

Buses ferried fully vaccinated passengers across the Causeway Bridge that connects the island of Singapore with the Malaysian peninsula, with strict measures in place including pre-departure and on-arrival COVID-19 tests.

Malaysian Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin tweeted that a COVID-19 case was detected during the screening in southern Johor state, but didn't elaborate. "As we safely reopen our borders, there will be positive cases at points of entry. Risk assessment, isolation and monitoring close contacts will become the norm," he said.

Under the first phase, only 1,440 travelers who must be citizens, permanent residents or long-term pass holders are allowed from each side per day. The Causeway was one of the world's busiest land borders before the pandemic struck. Air travel also reopened yesterday with fewer restrictions, allowing anyone who is fully vaccinated to travel quarantine-free

between the two countries.

"It's already since one year plus, I never meet her and when I see her today, I'm happy, I'm very happy," retiree Siva Ganesan said after greeting his wife, Uma Devi Balakrishnan, at the bus terminal in southern Johor state. His wife works as a cleaner in Singapore and was stranded when borders were shut.

A Malaysian man kissed and hugged his baby whom he met for the first time, while another woman sank tearfully into her father's arms. More than 100,000 Malaysians were believed stuck in the island-state after the border closed in March 2020.

"It's surreal, doesn't feel real at all because it's been a while not coming home," said Malaysian Cheong Weng Yin. "I have been feeling very nervous until I set foot here."

Across the border, Chua Pei Sze and her two daughters, age 10 and 7, were first in line for the first bus heading to Malaysia. "Finally we can get to bring my daughters to see their grandmother in person ... video calls just aren't enough," said the 43-year-old, who works in the shipping industry.

Kavin Raj, 24, said he will surprise his family because they weren't aware that he managed

to get a ticket on the first bus. "First thing, I would say, I will have a very good meal in Malaysia," he said excitedly.

More than 350,000 people crossed the Causeway daily before it was shut, mostly Malaysians working in Singapore due to a favorable exchange rate.

To mark the reopening of their border, Malaysian Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob drove across the Causeway for an official visit and was greeted by his Singapore counterpart Lee Hsien Loong at the checkpoint.

The two leaders said at a news conference that the limits on land border crossings will be progressively relaxed next month to include general travelers and other modes of transportation than buses. A second land link is also expected to be restored soon.

"We are all watching anxiously to see what the omicron variant of the COVID-19 does and how it will behave," Lee said. "Even if the omicron disrupts these plans, our goal will still be to have more open borders ... and I am quite confident that after some time we will be able to make further progress."

Singapore has vaccinated 85% of its population, and Malaysia nearly 80%. **MDT/AP**

**Denmark** A school was shut down after a new coronavirus variant was found in a student. The type of variant is still unknown, and it is being investigated, authorities said. Because of the uncertainty surrounding what variant it is, the Danish Patient Safety Authority urged people to stay home and extensive tests were being made.

**Scottish** First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said there is evidence of local transmission of the new omicron variant of the coronavirus after the country reported its first six cases. She told a news conference that not all the cases in Scotland had links to recent travel, adding that this suggests "there might already be some community transmission of this variant in Scotland." The new cases takes the U.K.'s total to nine after three cases were identified in England over the weekend.

AP PHOTO



**Sweden** Magdalena Andersson, who last week was Sweden's first female prime minister for a few hours before resigning because a budget defeat made a coalition partner quit, was on elected again yesterday as the Nordic nation's head of government. In a 101-173 vote with 75 abstentions, the 349-seat Riksdag elected Andersson, leader of the Social Democrats, as prime minister. She will form a one-party, minority government.

AP PHOTO



**Honduras** Leftist opposition candidate Xiomara Castro held a commanding lead as Hondurans appeared poised to remove the conservative National Party from power after 12 years of continuous rule. Castro declared herself the winner despite orders from the National Electoral Council to political parties to await official results.