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AP PHOTO



North Korea fired about 130 artillery rounds yesterday into the water near its western and eastern sea borders with South Korea, the latest military action contributing to worsening relations between the neighbors. North Korea's military said the firings were a warning against ongoing South Korean artillery exercises near the inland border town of Cheorwon and blamed the South for worsening tensions.

AP PHOTO



Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida yesterday set a new target for military spending over the next five years to 43 trillion yen, or 1.5 times the current level, as the country seeks defense buildup including the use of preemptive strike. Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada said Kishida told him and Finance Minister Shunichi Suzuki to work on a budget plan to increase Japan's 2023-2027 military spending by more than 50% from 27.5 trillion yen.

AP PHOTO



New Zealand is launching a wide-ranging inquiry into whether it made the right decisions in battling COVID-19 and how it can better prepare for future pandemics. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said yesterday the coronavirus had posed the greatest threat to the nation's health and economy since World War II. She said now was an appropriate time to examine the government's response with the highest level of independent inquiry.

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Unemployment, causes, and consequences

RENATO MARQUES

THE unemployment rate among local residents, its causes, and consequences were highlighted yesterday at the Legislative Assembly (AL).

Dedicated to hearing the government's replies to lawmakers on several topics, the session opened with several inquiries about unemployment and its consequences on society.

Ella Lei, Nick Lei, and José Pereira Coutinho were three lawmakers raising questions. They wanted to hear from the government officials which measures and policies the government will take to solve the problems for residents who lost their jobs recently to obtain reemployment, as well as preventing similar events in the future.

Ella Lei criticized the measures so far enforced, noting there are still 14,700 people unemployed. For the lawmaker representing the workers' sector, the government must review and change its policies, as the solution of having job matching sessions and others organized under the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) are not working.

She noted such measures only account for 20% of reemployment.

Ella Lei said "unemployment is related to structural problems," adding, it cannot be solved with "patch solutions."

She also noted that although the number of locals looking for a job continues to expand, major companies, including the gaming concessionaires, "continue to hire a large number of non-resident workers (TNR)" as well as engaging in the activity of "fictional hiring."

On the same topic, Nick Lei also called for action from the government, which is accused of having many slogans but few practical measures to achieve the goals stated in those slogans.

In response, the director of DSAL, Wong Chi Hong, was unable to provide a clear response on the intentions of the government, listing only some of the activities done by DSAL and stating that the entity is "paying attention to the job market in what concerns the offer and demand."

For the short-term measures,

COURTESY GONCALO LOBO PINHEIRO



Nick Lei

MDT ARCHIVE



José Pereira Coutinho

Wong was only able to say the DSAL plans to extend training to different areas and industries and that there is also a new internship program directed to youngsters on the mainland.

LAWMAKERS NOT IMPRESSED

The response did not impress the lawmakers who called on the DSAL to inspect and solve the structural problems such as "fictional hiring and fake job ads," Ella Lei said.

"I don't see the government doing any inspection or having any measures to improve on this matter," she added.

Lei responded to some figures on job matching from Wong, noting that recently over 1,000 TNR cooks and over 300 TNR maintenance workers have been hired by the big companies in Macau. She called on DSAL to draft a clear plan to train locals for these jobs soon, replacing the TNR who were hired because it was alleged there were no locals with the necessary qualifications.

In the reply to Nick Lei who had also addressed the problem

of the number of TNR in public works developments, the Deputy Director of the Public Works Bureau, Luis Madeira de Carvalho said the hiring of locals to public developments cannot be subjected to a quota system as each development requires workers with specific skills and knowledge.

He said between 2021 and October this year, there were around 11,000 workers in different public works developments, noting that only 22% of these were locals (2,500 workers).

Responding again to Ella Lei, Wong blamed local workers for the lack of success of the reemployment efforts from the government, stating that only around 50% of them accept interviews for new jobs organized by the DSAL.

He also accused workers of being fastidious in their choice of a job. "Some workers also want to choose the job post and are not willing to take the job posts that are available."

Wong also remarked that in the cases when the workers are reemployed via DSAL interven-

tion if they get immediately fired "we always follow up on these cases. When this happens both the worker and employer must reflect this to DSAL," he said.

On the same topic and as the debate broadened to other lawmakers, Ron Lam said the solution for the problem, namely of the construction workers, is dependent on certification of the workers' skills. Lam wants the government to use a certification system to catalog the skills of these workers so there is no doubt of their capacities and they can be easily reemployed when needed.

Like the other lawmakers, Lam accused the government of having already spent over 2.8 billion patacas for professional training that "seems to have had no positive results."

Admitting there is no certification, DSAL reaffirmed that this fact "does not jeopardize our work."

UNEMPLOYMENT RELATED TO SUICIDE RATE

In a separate but related inquiry on the same topic, the

lawmaker Pereira Coutinho related the problem of employment with the growth of the suicide in Macau.

The lawmaker said that difficulties with jobs, repayment of debts and mortgages, and other problems have a direct effect on suicide, criminality, and domestic violence.

The lawmaker criticized the high number of TNR still working in Macau in sectors such as finance, banking, insurance, education, real estate, and luxury goods retailing, among others.

The lawmaker said people are getting desperate because "the quality of life has been dropping."

In response, a representative from the Health Bureau said the government has been following the mechanism of the World Health Organization (WHO) regarding suicide prevention.

According to the same official, eight healthcare centers across the city and islands are providing mental services that "already can fulfill the needs of all residents."

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DIRECTOR & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF_Paulo Coutinho paulocoutinho@macaudailytimes.com
ASSISTANT EDITOR_Lynzy Valles
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS_Leanda Lee, Severo Portela, Sheyla Zandonai

NEWSROOM AND CONTRIBUTORS_Alex Torráo, Albano Martins, Annabel Jackson, Anthony Lam, Emilie Tran, Grace Yu, Irene Sam, Ivo Carneiro de Sousa, Jacky I.F. Cheong, Jenny Lao-Phillips, João Palla Martins, Jorge Costa Oliveira, Joseph Cheung, Juliet Risdon, Linda Kennedy, Paulo Cordeiro de Sousa, Renato Marques, Richard Whitfield, Sérgio de Almeida Correia, Viviana Seguí DESIGNER_Miguel Bandeira | ASSOCIATE CONTRIBUTORS_JML Property, MdME Lawyers, PokerStars, Ruan Du Toit Bester | NEWS AGENCIES_Associated Press, MacauHub, MacauNews, Xinhua SECRETARY_Yang Dongxiao amy@macaudailytimes.com

SEND NEWSWORTHY INFORMATION AND PRESS RELEASES TO: NEWSROOM@MACAUDAILYTIMES.COM WEBSITE: WWW.MACAUDAILYTIMES.COM.MO

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ADMINISTRATOR & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Kowie Geldenhuys kowie@macaudailytimes.com
OFFICE MANAGER_Juliana Cheang juliana@macaudailytimes.com
ADDRESS_Av. da Praia Grande, 599, Edif. Comercial Rodrigues, 12 Floor C, MACAU SAR Telephones: +853 287 160 81/2 Fax: +853 287 160 84
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in debate at AL



Ella Lei

Pereira Coutinho said residents are capable of taking these jobs in finance, education, and shopkeeper jobs, among others, removing any reasonable justification for the hiring of TNR for these positions.

In the reply, a representative

of the DSAL noted that from the 40,000 TNR who have left Macau since 2019 and until the third quarter (Q3) this year, 46.2% were in jobs related to the gaming sector while another 7.8% were in finance-related jobs. The same official also noted the number of

TNR in the real estate sector had also dropped 10.3% in the same period.

Also responding to some opinions and questions added by lawmakers Chan Hou Seng and Ron Lam, the same SSM official said that, due to the pandemic

and the restrictions imposed, it is more complex to find cases of people needing help regarding suicide risk.

“Due to the pandemic, listening to people in need is difficult. They are in lockdown or quarantine or closed home and these factors have some influence on their mental state, including the youngsters. This causes many hidden cases of potential suicide,” he said, adding, “All these reasons are connected and can result in mental illness that then can result in the growth of the number of suicide cases. We will try to find these cases so we can provide support,” the acting director of the psychiatry department of the public hospital, Kwok Wai Tak, said.

Kwok also said Macau lacks professionals in this field, not only psychiatrists but also psychologists and other advisors. He said the problem could be soon aggravated due to the retirement of some of those working in this field currently.

“Some of these professionals are already quite old and soon are close to retirement. I have had the opportunity to address this problem already with the director of SSM. I hope I can bring you good news soon.”

Questioned on the time it takes for a person to be able to find an appointment with one of the counselors and other mental health professionals, Kwok said he hopes it would not take more than “4 to 8 weeks to get an appointment.”

He also said he hopes religious institutions in Macau can help with this matter by being included in the teams that support to the community.

PBOC AND AMCM RENEW CURRENCY SWAP

The People's Bank of China and the Monetary Authority of Macau have renewed their bilateral currency swap agreement for another three years. Under the arrangement, the PBOC and the AMCM can exchange local currencies with each other of up to 30 billion yuan (\$4.3 billion) or MOP34 billion, the PBOC said in a statement yesterday. The renewed agreement is aimed at maintaining financial stability and supporting economic and financial development of the Chinese mainland and Macau, the statement said.

BROAD MONEY SUPPLY REBOUNDS IN OCTOBER

Macau's broad money supply rebounded by 0.2% month-on-month to MOP681.0 billion (\$85.2 billion) in October, the special administrative region's (SAR) monetary watchdog said yesterday. According to official statistics, currency in circulation and demand deposits dropped 0.6% and 1.7%, respectively. M1 thus decreased by 1.3% from one month earlier. On the other hand, quasi-monetary liabilities increased 0.4%. The sum of these two items, broad money supply or M2, rebounded by 0.2% to MOP681.0 billion. On an annual basis, M1 and M2 fell 8.4% and 1.7%, respectively.

Gov't runs subsidized RAT sales at MOP20/5 kits

AMID the government starting to charge people for SARS-CoV-2 rapid antigen test (RAT) kits, it is simultaneously instigating a scheme like its mask sale scheme.

Since the early phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, the government has operated a mask sale scheme to ensure supply to eligible people in Macau. RAT kits have been given to citywide mass SARS-CoV-2 nucleic acid test (NAT) goers.

Yesterday, the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture announced in a dispatch that from today, each RAT kit provided by the government will be priced at MOP4.

Later yesterday afternoon, the Novel Coronavirus Response and Coordination Centre an-

nounced the kick-off of the government-operated RAT kit sale scheme, which will start today and end on Jan. 4.

The Centre did not disclose if the plan will be extended.

Those eligible include Macau ID holders, non-local working pass holders and non-local students at local higher-education institutions.

For the duration of the scheme, an eligible buyer will be entitled to purchase five RAT kits at a time. There will be no further discount, meaning each purchase will be priced at MOP20.

The kits can be bought at 55 commissioned chemist shops across the city and five service points operated under the Macau Women's Federation. **AL**

ANTHONY LAM



POLICE ANNOUNCE ALLEGED MONEY LAUNDERING OF ABOUT MOP140M

ANTHONY LAM

A woman has been apprehended on allegations over smuggling and money laundering to the value of around MOP140 million, the Judiciary Police (PJ) announced yesterday.

Apart from the woman, 11 other people were also detained for investigations in the case but were not accused of any violations.

The funds were discovered in a variety of forms, the police disclosed, such as casino chips and cash.

The police said the case was uncovered via intelligence and subsequent constant investigations. Relevant information was delivered to the police late last year.

According to the police, the suspect was accused of smuggling the expensive Chinese liquor Moutai and laundering the profits supposedly generated from these activities.

The 48-year-old suspect surnamed Kam is from Macau, and is reportedly a businesswoman.

Attention was drawn towards the suspect when she tried to cash



casino chips of denomination HKD1 million at two casinos in Macau and Taipa between August and October this year. The value of the chips totaled HKD140 million.

Some of these chips were successfully cashed, while others were not, the police added.

Investigations have also led the

police to believe the suspect had smuggled Moutai liquor on requests of her customers with the support of her own liquor shop. The way in which the liquor was smuggled out of Macau was by parallel trading activities at the Border Gate checkpoint, the police revealed.

At the end of November, the police searched her residence in Taipa, her liquor shop in the NAPE district, her storage in the Northern district and several of her cars. Cash in the pataca, Hong Kong Dollar, Singaporean Dollar and US Dollar, of value equivalent to about MOP20 million, was seized.

Meanwhile, 84 cash chips valued at HKD84 million, about 20,000 bottles of Moutai liquor and some documents were also seized. Each bottle of the liquor is valued at about MOP2,000.

Despite the woman denying the accusation, the police were not convinced by her explanation of the source of the funds. The police said they were told the funds were reportedly investments into the woman's business from some mainland resident.

After cross-referencing, the police discovered the mainland resident had not entered Macau once in the past few years.

The police, on the other hand, are believed to have discovered links to smuggling of the expensive Chinese liquor and subsequent money laundering. Hence, relevant charges were pressed against

the woman.

In another case, a long-lasting business alliance soured because of several dishonored checks.

The male suspect, surnamed Ao and aged 38 years, was manager at an IT company. The victim, whose particulars were undisclosed, is the manager at another IT company.

In May this year, the victim prepaid MOP3.2 million to the suspect as the latter's share of profits from winning a tender for a project at a local university.

On Sep. 20, Ao's company received the first instalment of money from the university, about MOP1.16 million. He then delivered a check of this value to the victim as repayment for the prepayment.

Ao was notified by the victim about the dishonored check, before he issued two other checks to the victim, respectively valued at MOP110 and MOP1.115 million.

Once again, both checks were dishonored.

The two unfortunate experiences prompted the victim to report the case to the police. After preliminary investigations, the police intercepted the suspect on Dec. 2.

During questioning, the victim admitted to the deliberate issuance of dishonored checks and said the first instalment funds had been used to settle his company bills.

AD

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COURTS

TESTIMONIES CONFIRM TAK CHUN INVOLVED IN SIDE BETTING

ANTHONY LAM

As court sessions for illegal gambling allegations against Tak Chun Group unveiled yesterday morning, testimonies pointed to the group's operations of side betting.

The original boss of the now defunct company, Levo Chan, was the only one of the nine defendants who was present at the inaugural court hearing. He is also the only defendant being held in custody. Despite the situation, the presiding judge, Justice Lam Peng Fai, allowed the progression of the session.

Chan was reported to have remained silent throughout the session, except for occasionally answering some questions related to his personal situation.

Asking about personal particulars is a regular practice at the commencement of local court hearings.

Chan was reported to have made MOP300,000 of income each month before his arrest. He needed to support six family members, namely his father, his spouse and four children.



Levo Chan, ex-boss of Tak Chun

As revealed during yesterday's session, Chan was accused of running side betting in his company's VIP casinos. These casinos were located within properties of the six gambling concessionaires.

He reportedly tempted gamblers to conduct side betting with higher payouts or commissions. Betting in the absence of the gamblers, also referred to as

proxy betting, was also said to be conducted at Tak Chun VIP casinos.

It was said that between April 2014 and June 2020, a total rolling chip turnover reaching the value of MOP34.9 billion was generated. It has subsequently led to illegal income of MOP1.5 billion and equivalent to MOP570 million or more of tax lost from the govern-

ment's financial perspective.

Chan was also accused of operating electronic or phone betting, as well as money laundering, among other charges that were brought against him.

The trial rolled out on the prosecution's side, with the court hearing a witness's testimony and reading the written testimonies of seven other witnesses. The absent

witnesses were said to be former clients or customers of the former company.

The witness who was present yesterday worked as a floor manager at a VIP casino operated by Tak Chun. She testified that she knew from her first day working at the company about Tak Chun's operation of side betting.

She also said that records were taken when a side bet was placed and special symbols were used for various indications.

Justice Lam read out the testimonies from the absent witnesses. Some of these witnesses admitted to conducting side betting or phone betting at Tak Chun's casinos. Pay-outs were credited into their accounts with the casinos. It was said that problems would be solved immediately, and Chan was notified each time a side bet session was opened.

According to some media outlets, a small debate started at yesterday's hearing on the eligibility of certain new exhibits added shortly before yesterday's session.

Prosecutor-coordinator Lai U Hou argued that the exhibits were extracted from computer systems seized from Tak Chun. Justice Lam, meanwhile, expected yesterday's session would not involve the concerned exhibits and cited time constraints to justify his decision to move on with the session.

AD

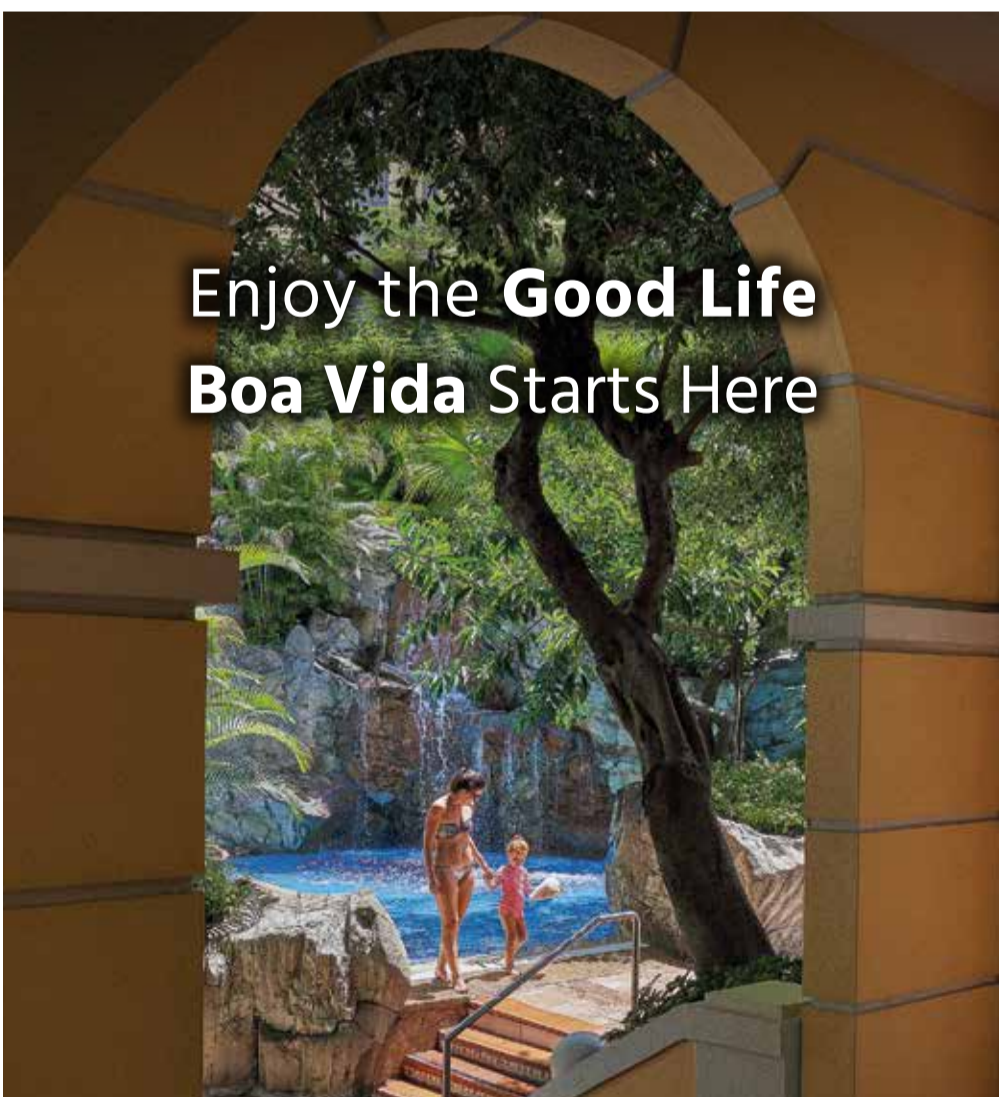


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PANDEMIC

CHINA EASES CONTROLS, GIVES NO SIGN WHEN ZERO-COVID ENDS

JOE MCDONALD, BEIJING

CHINA is easing some of the world's most stringent anti-virus controls and authorities say new variants are weaker. But they have yet to say when they might end a "zero-COVID" strategy that confines millions of people to their homes and set off anti-government protests.

Yesterday, commuters in Beijing and at least 16 other cities were allowed to board buses and subways without a virus test in the previous 48 hours for the first time in months. Industrial centers including Guangzhou near Hong Kong have reopened markets and businesses and lifted most curbs on movement while keeping restrictions on neighborhoods with infections.

The government announced plans last week to vaccinate millions of people in their 70s and 80s, a condition for ending "zero-COVID" restrictions that keep most visitors out of China and have disrupted manu-



AP PHOTO

facturing and global trade.

That spurred hopes for a quick end to "zero COVID." But health experts and economists warn it will be mid-2023 and possibly 2024 before vaccination rates are

high enough and hospitals are prepared to handle a possible rash of infections.

"China is not ready for a fast reopening yet," Morgan Stanley economists said in a report yesterday. "We ex-

pect lingering containment measures. ... Restrictions could still tighten dynamically in lower-tier cities should hospitalizations surge."

The changes follow protests demanding an end to "zero COVID" but are in line with Communist Party promises earlier to reduce disruption by easing quarantine and other restrictions. The changes have been highly publicized in a possible effort to mollify public anger, but there is no indication whether any might have been made in response to protests in Shanghai and other cities.

China is the only major country still trying to stamp out transmission while the United States and others relax restrictions and try to live with the virus that has killed at least 6.6 million people and infected almost 650 million.

The protests began Nov. 25 after at least 10 people died in a fire in an apartment building in Urumqi in the northwest. Authorities denied suggestions firefighters or victims were blocked by locked doors or other anti-virus controls. But the disaster became a focus for public frustration.

Ahead of the protests, the Communist Party promised to make "zero COVID" less costly and disruptive but said it was sticking to the overall containment strategy.

The party earlier annou-

nced updates to the strategy to make it more focused. Authorities began suspending access to buildings or neighborhoods with an infection instead of whole cities. But a spike in cases starting in October prompted areas across China to close schools and confine families to cramped apartments for weeks at a time.

Authorities say they are "further optimizing" controls and warn the country needs to stay alert.

China faces "new situations and tasks" due to the "weakening of the pathogenicity" of the latest omicron variant, a deputy premier in charge of the anti-virus campaign, Sun Chunlan, said last week. She said China has "effective diagnosis and treatment" and has vaccinated more than 90% of its people.

The government of Shanghai, the country's financial capital, announced visitors to most sites will require only a negative virus test in the past week, instead of the previous two days. Schools, hospitals and bars still will require a test within the past 48 hours.

Despite the changes, Beijing and other cities are telling some residents to stay home or enforcing other restrictions on neighborhoods with infections.

Travelers at the Chinese capital's train stations and three airports are required

to show a negative virus test within the previous 48 hours. Elsewhere, Guangzhou and other cities said areas deemed at high-risk for infection still face additional curbs.

A negative virus test within the past 72 hours still is required to enter public buildings in vast metropolis of Chongqing in the southwest, a hotspot in the latest infection spike. Dining in restaurants in some parts of Beijing still is prohibited.

A newspaper reported last week that some Beijing residents who have mild or asymptomatic COVID-19 cases would be allowed for the first time to isolate themselves at home instead of going to one of China's sprawling quarantine centers. The government has yet to confirm that.

Forecasters say the struggling economy, already under pressure from weak demand for Chinese exports and a government crackdown on debt in the real estate industry, might be contracting this quarter.

Regulators have responded by freeing up more money for lending and are trying to encourage private investment in infrastructure projects. They have eased some financial controls on real estate developers to reverse a slump in one of China's biggest industries.

"Policymakers are focusing their efforts on spurring growth," Eurasia Group analysts said in a report. "However, even if China's transition away from a strict zero-COVID policy is more decisive and accelerated, meeting public health milestones like increasing elderly vaccination will take months."

Yesterday, the government reported 30,014 new cases, including 25,696 without symptoms. That was down from last week's daily peak above 40,000 but still close to record daily highs for China.

Xi's government has held up "zero COVID" as proof of the superiority of China's system compared with the United States and Western countries. China's official death toll stands at 5,235 since the start of the pandemic versus a U.S. count of 1.1 million.

China also has suffered a possible rise in fatalities among people with cancer, heart disease and other conditions who struggled to get care while hospitals focused on treating virus cases. Data on those deaths haven't been reported. **MDT/AP**

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MGM Facilitates Made-in-Macau Brand to Tap the Greater Bay Area Market

Endeavors to foster the diverse development of local SMEs, MGM established a partnership with Industry and Commerce Association of Macau (ICAMO) and initiated a series of events to support local SMEs to seek opportunities and expanding their businesses to the Greater Bay Area (GBA) since 2019. Entering the fourth year, both organizers extended the reach to Guangzhou and hosted the “Work Hand-in-hand to Explore the Future of Greater Bay Area” Agreement Signing Ceremony and Guangzhou-Macau Business Matching”. In view of helping local SMEs in tapping the mainland market, the event connected a Macau brand with a major chain supermarket in Guangzhou to broaden the sales channels for “Made in Macau” products.



This year's event highlighted the collaboration between Macau Coffee Company Limited, a “Made in Macau” brand, and Shengjia Supermarket, a major Guangzhou supermarket chain with over 70 branches. With MGM's facilitation, the collaboration was established and made Macau Coffee's product from Portuguese-speaking country East Timor available for sale across Guangzhou. Since 2020, MGM became the first integrated resort operator in Macau to purchase East Timor specialty coffee from Macau Coffee, former Charlestrong Café Companhia Limitada. Over the three years of partnership, MGM has supported Macau Coffee in upgrading its business and assisted them in attaining the Macau Product Quality Certification (M-Mark).



Kenneth Feng, President, Chief Strategic & Financial Officer of MGM, said, “MGM has been devoting its undivided support to stimulate the growth of local SMEs and promoting Macau brands with ICAMO – through business matchings, vending machine program, and this year's M-Mark product launch in GBA market. MGM's collaboration with Macau Coffee is not only a great testimony of the Company's SME support endeavors, but it also crowns an assuring reputation for ‘Made in Macau’ products, which is great asset for brands to expand their business to both local and the GBA market.”



Last year, MGM and ICAMO rolled out the “Enjoy & Rewards from Macau” Vending Machine Program in Guangzhou – a collaborative scheme which serves as a cost-effective and convenient gateway for 17 local SMEs to reach out to Mainland consumers. In view of enhancing the Program, the vending machines will be relocated to one of the most visited malls in Guangzhou, which will further increase exposures for these “Made in Macau” products.

MGM
Avenida Dr. Sun Yat Sen, NAPE, Macau
T 853 8802 2888 F 853 8802 3333
E sustainability@mgm-macau.com
W http://www.mgm.mo/



Jaishankar and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, pose for a photograph during their meeting in New Delhi, yesterday

ENERGY

India signals it will continue to buy oil from Russia

SHEIKH SAALIQ, NEW DELHI

INDIA will prioritize its own energy needs and continue to buy oil from Russia, its foreign minister signaled yesterday, as Western governments press Moscow with a price cap to squeeze its earnings from oil exports.

Minister of External Affairs Sushrahmanyam Jaishankar made the comments after holding talks with his visiting German counterpart, Annalena Baerbock, in which they discussed bilateral relations and Russia's war in Ukraine. Jaishankar said it isn't right for European countries to prioritize their energy needs but “ask India to do something else.”

“Europe will make the choices it will make. It is their right,” he told reporters.

India has so far not committed to the \$60-per-barrel price cap on Russian oil set by the Group of Seven major industrialized countries and European Union that is expected to come into effect yesterday. The move is an attempt by Western governments to limit fossil fuel earnings that support Moscow's budget, its military and its invasion of Ukraine, while also avoiding a possible sharp price spike if Russia's oil is suddenly taken off the global market.

Jaishankar did not make any direct reference to the price cap but said the European Union was importing more fossil fuel from Russia than India. Indian officials have defended buying

oil from Russia, saying the lower price benefits India.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, India has steadily increased its purchases of discounted Russian oil. Indian imports of Russian oil hit a record high in October, with Russia becoming India's top oil supplier in terms of barrels per day, the Press Trust of India news agency said, quoting data from energy tracker Vortexa.

India and Russia have close relations and New Delhi has not supported Western sanctions on Moscow, even though it has repeatedly urged an “immediate cessation of violence” in Ukraine. India, also a major market for Russian-made weapons, has so far abstained from U.N. resolutions critical of Moscow's war.

Jaishankar and Baerbock, who is in India on a two-day visit, also discussed a diversification of trade between the two countries, global consequences of the Russian war on Ukraine and cooperation in the energy transition away from fossil fuels.

The two countries also signed a migration and mobility partnership which will make it easier for people to study, do research and work in each other's country.

Germany is India's largest trading partner in Europe and more than 1,700 German companies are operating in India. German investments in India are mainly in transportation, electrical equipment, construction, trading and automobiles. **MDT/AP**

AP PHOTO



GULF

WC fans find booze at hotels, Qatar's one liquor store

JON GAMBRELL, DOHA

IN a dusty neighborhood on the outskirts of Qatar's capital, guards stand duty at a gated compound ringed with razor wire, carefully checking passports and permits before allowing anyone inside. But this isn't a prison or a high-security area associated with the ongoing World Cup.

It's the liquor store.

Rigid limits on alcohol are a fact of life in this conservative Muslim nation on the Arabian Peninsula, which follows the same strict Wahhabi interpretation of Islam as its neighbor Saudi Arabia. Soccer fans coming to Qatar for the World Cup got a taste of that just before the tournament as authorities cancelled beer sales at stadiums.

Yet corks continue to be popped in luxury boxes at games. Fans are filling pints from beer towers at dozens of hotel bars, lounges and nightclubs with liquor licenses. Sales of \$14 Budweisers at Doha's FIFA Fan Zone continue unabated.

"Not to say that you need alcohol to fuel your life, but it's a good time," said Ed Ball, an American who created an online map for imbibers in Doha to find bars. "The idea being passed around that you can't drink in Qatar is wrong. There are places."

In addition to the bars, there's the liquor store whe-

re non-Muslim residents and visitors can shop after applying for a government-issued license. Located next to an Indian school in Doha's dusty Abu Hamour neighborhood, it is run by the Qatar Distribution Co., a state-owned enterprise under the umbrella of Qatar Airways, which holds exclusive rights to distribute alcohol and pork in the country.

The store — currently the only one selling liquor in Qatar — operates on an appointment system, harkening back to the strict coronavirus regulations that governed this country prior to just before the World Cup.

On a recent visit, guards twice checked an Associated Press reporter's identifications and appointments. Razor wire tops the compound's high walls, which bar the public from a peek inside. Signs warn that any abuse aimed at the guards can result in an alcohol license being revoked. Empty silver-colored beer kegs are piled up in the parking lot.

At the end of a chlorine-scented walkway, customers reach the entrance to the store. Inside, the shelves and stands are stocked with bottles of wine largely running from \$12.50 up to \$45. A liter of Absolut vodka goes for \$42, while a liter of Jack Daniels whiskey sets a shopper back \$70. A 24-pack of standard Budweiser cans costs

nearly \$52.

A small section of the store offers frozen pork pepperoni pizzas, slabs of bacon, Spam and cans of pork and beans.

Customers filled their carts or carried bottles and cans in their hands, checking against shopping lists or texting family members to double check what was needed. Several wore FIFA passes for the tournament around their necks.

Outside the shop, a 31-year-old British woman who works as a school teacher in Qatar, filled the trunk of her car. She declined to offer her name, given the connotations drinking can carry in Qatari society, but dismissed criticism surrounding drinking and the tournament.

"It's really not that big of a deal," she said of the licensing system in Qatar. "It's like going to the supermarket — for alcohol."

She added that she thought the restrictions on sales for the matches also made sense. "I'm British. I know what it's like to be around drunk people all the time."

Across the wider Persian Gulf, alcohol remains banned in Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the sheikhdom of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates. Drinking alcohol is considered haram, or forbidden, in Islam. Imams point to a verse in the Quran calling wine "the work of Satan."

But the region as a whole

has a long history with alcohol, itself an Arabic word. The 8th century poet Abu Nawas even was known for his "khamriyyat," or "wine poems."

Both alcohol and pork face a 100% import duty. Qatar says it uses the tax revenue to improve health care, infrastructure, education and other public services.

Visitors are not allowed to bring alcohol into the country. Many hotels are dry and prohibit guests from bringing alcohol to their rooms.

Even with those restrictions, Qatar sold 23.2 million liters of alcoholic drinks in 2021, according to data from Euromonitor International. Though dwarfed by the United Arab Emirates' 115 million liters sold in the same period, Qatar's numbers show a 14.6% growth as the pandemic waned.

Meanwhile, Ball's online map of bars in Qatar has been viewed over 875,000 times. An accompanying Twitter account shows him downing two pints of beer in 10 seconds.

"For me, drinking is just like eating. It just goes along with the culture," Ball told the AP after returning home to Seattle, where he works for Boeing Co. "I know it's not part of Qatar ... but it's also part of the World Cup. One of the biggest sponsors is Budweiser so it just goes to show you it kind of goes hand in hand." **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1978 SPAIN SET TO VOTE FOR DEMOCRACY



Spaniards have been turning out in force today to cast a vote for democracy and end almost 40 years of dictatorial rule.

The majority of the 25 million Spaniards eligible to vote are expected to endorse a new constitution in the historic referendum.

It would strip the monarchy of much of its current powers, many of which were handed down by the late dictator General Franco, who died in 1975.

King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia support the move and were among the first to cast their vote in a village school near Madrid.

Prime Minister Adolfo Suarez, leader of the Union of the Democratic Centre UCD, a moderate centre-right coalition, has drafted the new democratic constitution.

It could eventually put him out of a job if new elections are held as a result.

Last June saw Spain's first elections to the Cortes (parliament) since 1936 and in which Mr Suarez won 34% of the votes.

Tens of thousands of children, not able to vote, still had reason to celebrate as they have had the day off with schools converted into polling stations.

But there was still an air of tension in the country after a recent spell of murders and bombings, attributed to Basque separatists in the northern Basque region.

Riot police and soldiers are on high alert, guarding polling stations and communication centres.

The fear of violence is reported to have led an estimated 250,000 Spaniards to cast a postal vote.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The new constitution was overwhelmingly supported by voters with newspapers the following morning congratulating Spaniards with headlines such as "Good morning, democracy". It established Spain as a parliamentary monarchy.

Spain continued to shake off the Franco years which had left the country alienated internationally. It invested heavily to win European support and became a member of the EC, now the EU, in 1986.

This required it to open its economy, modernise its industrial base and improve infrastructure.

The country has been dogged by separatist violence in a long-running campaign by the Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA), founded in 1959 and dedicated to promoting Basque independence.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
 Mar. 21-Apr. 19
 Your emotions are soaring and if you don't get your way, look out world. The great outdoors will allow you to teach youngsters some of the things you learned when growing up.

TAURUS
 Apr. 20-May. 20
 Empty promises and a lack of cash may put a damper on your plans. There might be one who is quite willing to take the credit for your work. Focus on your domestic scene.

GEMINI
 May. 21-Jun. 21
 Your sensitive nature will allow others to read you well. You must try to lay your cards on the table. Talk to your mate and tell them how you feel.

CANCER
 Jun. 22-Jul. 22
 You will be accident prone if you aren't careful today. Make plans to do something special with the one you love. Your colorful conversation may attract new mates.

LEO
 Jul. 23-Aug. 22
 You probably aren't getting straight answers to your questions. You should avoid getting involved in the personal problems of colleagues.

VIRGO
 Aug. 23-Sep. 22
 Unreliable people will be negative about your ideas. Try to be patient and understanding. Get domestic chores out of the way early.

LIBRA
 Sep. 23-Oct. 22
 You are best to be accommodating for the time being. Sudden romantic infatuations won't be lasting. Don't play on your partner's emotions.

SCORPIO
 Oct. 23-Nov. 21
 A passionate party for two might be just the remedy. You have been going through a period of change that no doubt caused problems with your loved ones.

SAGITTARIUS
 Nov. 22-Dec. 21
 Try to do things with children that will enable you to bond closer to them. Your ideas may be good, but they aren't necessarily right for everyone.

CAPRICORN
 Dec. 22-Jan. 19
 Make changes that will heighten your appeal. Travel and educational pursuits may help alleviate the stress you have been feeling.

AQUARIUS
 Jan. 20-Feb. 18
 Difficulties with female members of your family may result in estrangement's. This is not the time to lend or borrow money or possessions.

PISCES
 Feb. 19-Mar. 20
 A little volleyball or other outdoor sports should be on your agenda. Involvement in financial schemes will be followed by losses.

The Born Loser by Chip Sansom



SUDOKU

EASY					EASY+				
1 8		2		5 3	8 4		3		1
6	1 4		2	9	1		6	4	
4		8 6					4		3
	3	1	9	7	7		9		1
8		2		4	5	1 6	3	9	2
7	4	6	3		2		5		6
	6 4			3	1		2		
5	9	7	1	4		9	8		7
4 7	5			9 2		3	9		8 5

MEDIUM					HARD				
		2 8		6	5		2		
			4	1	6				7
9		1		7					4
	9 5						8 1		
3	4			5 7				5 3	
			7 6		7				2
3		5		2			6 4		
2		8			1				3
4		3 2			4	7			

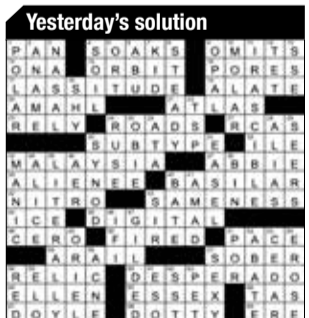
WEATHER

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-8	4	fine
Changchun	-16	-7	fine
Chengdu	5	10	overcast
Chongqing	7	13	cloudy
Fuzhou	14	16	rain
Guangzhou	12	17	cloudy
Guiyang	2	9	overcast
Haikou	16	20	cloudy
Hangzhou	6	8	rain
Harbin	-19	-9	fine
Hefei	2	8	cloudy
Nanjing	3	8	overcast
Shanghai	7	10	rain
Taipei	17	19	rain
Wuhan	2	8	overcast
Hong Kong	14	18	overcast
WORLD			
Moscow	-11	-1	overcast
Frankfurt	-1	4	cloudy
Paris	1	6	cloudy
London	1	7	overcast
New York	13	13	rain

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- Swiftness; 6- Pop; 10- High-pitched; 13- Painter Rousseau; 14- Expel gas or odor; 15- Affirm solemnly; 16- Smells; 17- Greek temple; 18- Gentlewoman; 19- Currency unit in Western Samoa; 20- Serious in intention; 22- Current; 24- Cochine, for one; 28- Retard in movement; 31- Bellowing; 32- Desert bloomers; 34- Done, to Donne; 36- Brown-bag stuff; 37- Part of UNLV; 38- Kelp; 41- Hydrocarbon suffix; 42- Actor Omar; 44- Equivalent wd.; 45- Sumptuous meal; 47- Sports stadium; 49- Hose; 51- Party animal; 53- Indo-Europeans; 56- Execute; 59- Function; 61- Peru's capital; 64- Mozart's "___ kleine Nachtmusik"; 65- Bucolic; 66- Monogram ltr.; 67- Stated; 68- Beast of Borden; 69- Rugrat; 70- Director Preminger; 71- Designer Geoffrey;

DOWN 1- Ammo; 2- Foot-operated lever; 3- ___ Gay; 4- Unpredictable; 5- Bad-mouth; 6- House in D.C.; 7- "A Jug of Wine..." poet; 8- "My Heart Will Go On" singer; 9- Clueless; 10- Actress Gardner; 11- Spearheaded; 12- Stab; 15- Hitching posts?; 20- Spots; 21- Health haven; 23- CPR experts; 25- Unconscious states; 26- Visit habitually; 27- Art Deco artist; 29- Fluffy; 30- Shoe width; 32- Island in the Bay of Naples; 33- Colorado resort; 35- Social crusader's wish; 37- Jump; 39- Author Rand; 40- Gainsay; 43- Be short with; 46- Generally; 48- Dug in; 50- Texas border city; 52- You ___ right!; 54- Scandinavian; 55- Killed; 57- Decree; 58- Put a lid ___; 60- Gen. Robert ___; 61- On; 62- Daughter of Cadmus; 63- Cambridge sch.; 65- Graycoat;



USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Emergency calls 999	Taxi 28 939 939 / 2828 3283
Fire department 28 572 222	Water Supply - Report 2822 0088
PJ (Open line) 993	Telephone - Report 1000
PJ (Picket) 28 557 775	Electricity - Report 28 339 922
PSP 28 573 333	Macau Daily Times 28 716 081
Customs 28 559 944	
S. J. Hospital 28 313 731	
Kiang Wu Hospital 28 371 333	
Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) 28326 300	
IAM 28 387 333	
Tourism 28 333 000	
Airport 59 888 88	



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IN OTHER SPORTS...

US COLLEGE HOOPS GAME CLASHES WITH WC FEVER IN LONDON

KEN MAGUIRE, LONDON

KENTUCKY and Michigan finally played their London game, but organizers aren't exactly running a fast break to get back to the British capital.

The Basketball Hall of Fame London Showcase was delayed because of the coronavirus, and Sunday's game tipped off an hour before England played Senegal for a spot in the World Cup quarterfinals.

"Two years ago, we were supposed to be here — and now the World Cup. We've certainly had our hurdles," said John Doleva, president and CEO of the Basketball Hall of Fame.

The Wildcats beat Michigan 73-69 in the marquee game at O2 Arena before 8,242 fans as part of a doubleheader that featured Marist against Maine earlier.

That's less than half the sold-out crowds of the regular-season NBA games held at the O2 between 2011 and 2019 — and the NBA has since switched its annual Europe game to Paris.

Doleva said 10,000 would have been a "tremendous success" and that the eight-thousand range is still a victory considering most English sports fans were watching their team's 3-0 win over Senegal in Qatar.

A return to London is possible, he said, but they're looking at other European cities, too, and probably not for next season.

"It could be London, it could be Paris," Doleva said.

Both coaches praised the cultural experiences for the players, who did some sightseeing and stopped by soccer club Chelsea's stadium, Stamford Bridge, for a tour.

Michigan coach Juwan Howard thought the World Cup match hurt attendance, though.

"I'm sure a lot of folks were at home or in pubs watching the football match," he said. "Overall, it would have been great if we had could have had more fans (here)."

Maine guard Gedi Juozapaitis did his part — the London native had family and friends watching from the stands.

"This was the first time they've seen me play live since I left (for the U.S.)," the senior said.

Kentucky and Michigan each received \$500,000 for the game but had to pay their own expenses, Doleva confirmed. **MDT/AP**

MATCH OF THE DAY

RONALDO LOOKS TO SHINE AGAINST SWITZERLAND

STEVE DOUGLAS, DOHA

KYLIAN Mbappé is the top scorer. Lionel Messi has been thrilling fans with his goals and dribbles. So what about Cristiano Ronaldo, one of the other superstars at the World Cup?

OK, he's broken a tournament record by becoming the first player to score a goal at five World Cups, but since converting that penalty in Portugal's opening game, Ronaldo has had a rather quiet time of it.

Maybe he's about to burst into life in the knockout stage — and erase a blemish in his glittering career: None of Ronaldo's eight World Cup goals have come in the knockout stage.

The five-time world player of the year heads into the round of 16 in likely his final World Cup facing Switzerland, which hasn't advanced beyond this stage since 1954.

Don't be fooled, though: This is the same Switzerland that eliminated France in the last 16 at the European Championship last year and has become one of its continent's most consistent teams.

Portugal might need Ronal-



do to start delivering. And the player himself will surely want to put himself back in the spotlight, having seen Messi — his great rival — perform so well for Argentina in its win over Australia in the last 16 and Mbappé — the man who is fast establishing himself as the sport's new superstar — already rack up five goals for France on its path to the quarterfinals.

Still oozing self-confidence at the age of 37, Ronaldo continues to back himself to perform at

the highest level, yet his last two performances in the group stage were underwhelming. His only goal so far has come from the penalty spot in Portugal's opening victory over Ghana.

Portugal won its first two group games to advance and little should be read into the loss to South Korea, given coach Fernando Santos rotated heavily — even if Ronaldo started for the third straight game.

He'll be playing for the fourth time in 13 days and that's qui-

te the workload these days for Ronaldo, whose game time has been managed for the past year and a half at Manchester United.

The other Ronaldo subplot is that he is still trying to convince potential suitors he is worth investing in when the World Cup is over, now he is a free agent after leaving United in contentious circumstances.

Scoring goals in the World Cup knockout stage would go a long way to securing himself one last big move.

Portugal will welcome back its leading players rested against South Korea, like Bruno Fernandes, Bernardo Silva and Ruben Dias. Joao Felix should also return up front to play alongside Ronaldo, whose tally of international goals stands at 118.

Santos must decide whether to play Raphael Guerreiro at left back, and return Joao Cancelo to right back, or leave Cancelo in that position to accommodate Diogo Dalot at right back.

Portugal hasn't got past the last 16 since making the semifinals in 2006 — and that was the only time Ronaldo has advanced beyond the quarterfinals.

As for Switzerland, the danger man is Breel Embolo, who scored twice in the group stage and four times in his last five games for his country.

It is one of two all-European matchups in the last 16 and the winner will play either Spain or Morocco in the quarterfinals. **MDT/AP**

MATCH OF THE DAY

Spain in recovery mode to face Morocco

TALES AZZONI, DOHA

IT'S not how Spain imagined reaching the knockout phase of the World Cup: finishing the group stage with a loss and having to rely on other teams to help it advance.

Spain survived but heads into the round of 16 against Morocco with bruised confidence after losing 2-1 to Japan.

"We have to recover emotionally," Spain coach Luis Enrique said after the match last week. "We will be playing against one of the surprise teams of the World Cup and we will have to be fully prepared. There are only 16 teams left in the tournament and you have to play better. It's going to be very difficult."

Few expected Spain would have such a hard time getting through the group stage in Qatar after opening with a 7-0 thrashing of Costa Rica.



Spain players leave the pitch at the end of the World Cup group E loss against Japan

It had also played well against Germany despite conceding a late equalizer, and a draw against Japan in the final group game would have been enough to send Spain through to the round of 16.

But after going into what Luis Enrique called "collapse mode" in a five-minute span after halftime, Spain was in danger of an embarrassing early exit, which it avoided thanks to Germany's 4-2

win over Costa Rica in the other Group E match.

Players were anxious on the bench knowing that if Costa Rica won the other match, Spain would be eliminated. Luis Enrique said he would "have had a heart attack" had he known that at one point Costa Rica took the lead over Germany, temporarily pushing Spain out of second place in the group.

It was a big scare, and now La Roja is going into

recovery mode ahead of its match against Morocco today [Tuesday, 23:00].

"We have to analyze what happened and fix what we didn't do well," Luis Enrique said. "I need to try to get the players cheered up again."

Spain is trying to win its first major title since the 2012 European Championship. It won its lone World Cup trophy in 2010 in South Africa.

By finishing second in its group, Spain avoided 2018 runner-ups Croatia in the round of 16, and possibly world champion Brazil in quarterfinals and Lionel Messi's Argentina in the semifinals. On its side of the bracket now, Spain has teams like England and defending champion France, which it could meet in the semis.

"It doesn't matter, the opponents keep changing," Luis Enrique said. "We wanted to finish with

a win and in first place. There's nothing to celebrate."

The coach made five changes to his lineup from the 1-1 draw against Germany, bringing in Alejandro Balde, Pau Torres, Nico Williams, César Azpilicueta and Álvaro Morata, who scored in the first half for his third goal in as many matches in Qatar.

Azpilicueta, who was substituted at halftime with a knock on his leg, made the cross for Morata's goal. Balde was to blame for Japan's equalizer after losing possession near the penalty area.

"I considered that these 11 were the best ones for this match, I have trust in all of my players," Luis Enrique said. "But looking at how things turned out afterward, maybe I wouldn't have picked the same 11. But it's easy to say it now." **MDT/AP**

LAST 16

Mbappé is bringing football to a new dimension at finals

ANDREW DAMPF, DOHA

FRANCE 3, POLAND 1

CRISTIANO Ronaldo's precision. Lionel Messi's vision. The speed and power of the original Ronaldo — the one from Brazil.

Kylian Mbappé is elevating his performance to a new dimension at the World Cup.

As Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo play what will likely be their final World Cup, the France and Paris Saint-Germain striker is erasing any questions over who might succeed them as the sport's new superstar.

Mbappé delivered another stellar performance when he scored twice and set up another goal for defending champion France in a 3-1 win over Poland yesterday [Macau time] to reach the quarter-finals of the tournament in Qatar.

"We know about Kylian, of course. He speaks on the soccer field," France coach Didier Deschamps said. "He can change a match in just a moment."

Having already scored four goals when he led his country



to the title four years ago as a 19-year-old phenom, the now 23-year-old Mbappé has five and is the leading scorer in this edition of soccer's biggest event. His nine career World Cup goals make him the first player to score that many before the age of 24, breaking a record previously held by Pelé, who had seven at that point.

It's not just about goals for Mbappé, whose career arc conti-

nues to draw comparisons to Pelé, the Brazilian great who had won two World Cup titles by the time he turned 21.

Mbappé is ready to follow Pelé, Diego Maradona, Cristiano Ronaldo and Messi into the pantheon of soccer greats.

"He hurt us today but I am cheering for him because he is a real star," Poland coach Czesław Michniewicz said through a trans-

lator. "I'm talking about Messi, Ronaldo, (Robert) Lewandowski. If someone is going to take over, I think Mbappé will be the player to be the best one for many years."

Playing on the left wing against

Poland, Mbappé's first hint of magic came with a pass to himself.

In an instant, Mbappé accelerated up to 35 kph as he kicked the ball forward into empty space then burst past Przemysław Frankowski to collect it several meters ahead. While that action didn't result in a goal, it laid the framework for what was to come on a night when Mbappé showed off his full arsenal of weapons.

Moving toward the center of the field, Mbappé then turned playmaker when he threaded a delicate pass through Poland's defense to set up Olivier Giroud's opener.

The two goals came with powerful shots in the second half as Poland's defenders struggled to keep up with Mbappé's pace and physicality.

Poland right back Matty Cash, who had faced Messi and Argentina four days earlier, and who defends against the world's best on a weekly basis with Aston Villa in the Premier League, put Mbappé's level into perspective.

"When you look at his finishing there, he's unbelievable," Cash said. "He's probably the best player I've played against."

Up next for Mbappé is a quarterfinal duel with England on Saturday. **MDT/AP**

SCOREBOARD

Round of 16	France	3	1	Poland
Round of 16	England	3	0	Senegal

LAST 16

England takes Senegal with solid performance

JAMES ROBSON, AL KHOR

ENGLAND 3, SENEGAL

LIKE all great strikers, Harry Kane's timing was perfect.

The England captain got off the mark yesterday [Macau time], scoring his first goal at this year's World Cup in a 3-0 victory over Senegal that set up a must-see match against France in the quarterfinals.

"I was waiting patiently to try to score and thankfully that was today," said Kane, who was the leading scorer at the last World Cup. "I feel good and hopefully this can start a good run for me personally because I know that will help the team as well."

It certainly was a good time for Kane to end his dry spell in Qatar because Kylian Mbappe, the tournament's leading scorer with five goals, is waiting to face England on Saturday at Al



England's Bukayo Saka, right, scores his side's 3rd goal

Bayt Stadium.

With that in mind, England could do with its most prolific striker at his sharpest.

"It is the biggest test that we can face," England coach Gareth Southgate said. "They are world champions, they have an incredible depth of talent, outstanding individual players, very difficult to play against and score goals against. It is a fantastic challenge.

"(Mbappe) is a world class player, has already delivered in big moments in this tournament and in previous tournaments."

Kane scored six goals at the 2018 World Cup in Russia, each one helping England reach the semifinals. But it has been harder this time around, with the captain having to wait until first-half stoppage time against Senegal to finally get one.

When the moment came, he never looked like missing. Head down, he powered a shot past Senegal goalkeeper Edouard Mendy to put England ahead 2-0. Then, arms spread wide,

the relief poured out as he ran away in celebration.

"As a striker scoring goals is what you do and it's one of the best feelings you can have in football," Kane said. "The ball just sat up nicely and the connection was perfect. I had one just before that I should have done better with so it was nice to see that one go in."

It was Kane's 52nd goal for England, moving him within one of Wayne Rooney's national record. He also overtook Gary Lineker as his country's leading scorer in major tournaments with 11 goals.

"You could see the lift that gave him in the second half," Southgate said. "For any striker, when you ha-

ven't scored, it is there in the back of your mind and you get that lift of confidence when it comes.

"There is nobody I would rather have in that moment bearing down on goal, a really clinical finish."

England's great strength at this year's World Cup has been the amount of different goal threats it has, and another emerged on Sunday when Jordan Henderson gave his team the lead. Bukayo Saka completed the scoring with his third of the tournament.

Marcus Rashford, who has also scored three goals in Qatar, didn't even make the starting lineup.

"The great thing for us is the goals have been spread," Southgate said. "We've not been dependent upon him (Kane). It's great that we are showing another side to our attacking play." **MDT/AP**

TODAY'S MATCHES

	Date	Time	Home	Away	ODDS
Tue	Dec 6	23:00	Morocco	Spain	H 6.8, D 3.9, A 1.63
Wed	Dec 7	3:00	Portugal	Switzerland	H 1.96, D 3.45, A 4.7

OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

PEOPLE-FIRST SHOULD BE GUIDE FOR ANY ADJUSTMENT OF COVID POLICY

“We are much closer to being able to say that the emergency phase of the pandemic is over – but we’re not there yet.”

That’s the core message the World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus conveyed to the world in a media briefing on Friday. Rather than being outdated, the virus control measures China carries out is a responsible answer to the call of the times, if not the urgent needs to protect people’s lives and health.

More than 8,500 people around the world lost their lives last week because of COVID-19. The majority of these were reported outside of China where it is believed that so-called herd immunity has already been achieved. That should serve as a timely reminder to those questioning the necessity of the strict COVID-19 pandemic prevention and control policy of the Chinese mainland.

Although there are calls for the policy to be lifted, it is not the right time for the most populous country to lift its control on the virus, given that seasonal flus and other respiratory illnesses that are common in winter will mean a sharp rise in novel coronavirus infections that will likely be accompanied by a rise in the number of deaths attributable to COVID-19, which would undo what the nation has achieved over the past more than three years.

Saturday marked one year since the WHO announced a new variant of concern in the COVID-19 pandemic: the Omicron variant, which has proved to be significantly more transmissible than its predecessor, Delta, and continues to cause significant mortality due to the intensity of transmission, as the WHO chief said.

The number of weekly deaths reported to the WHO has declined slightly over the past five weeks, but more than 2.5 million people were infected by the virus last week, according to reports the WHO has received. At present, there are more than 500 sublineages of the Omicron strain circulating. They are all highly transmissible. But more important, these sublineages of Omicron all have mutations that enable them to escape built-up immunity more easily.

Surveillance, testing, sequencing and vaccination remain the most effective way to prevent significant mortality. That’s exactly what China has been trying to do, despite the pandemic fatigue that has understandably set in among some.

What China needs is to urge local governments to adjust their virus control measures according to the actual conditions in their jurisdictions. The people-first principle should be the defining guidance of the prevention and control work. For instance, people’s livelihoods must be guaranteed, any urgent need for medical care must be met promptly and people’s psychological well-being should be kept an eye on.

Now as the country moves to the next stage of epidemic prevention and control, strengthening the immunization of the whole population, especially the elderly, along with increasing the handling capacities of the country’s intensive care units, rather than the collective quarantine sites as home quarantine is sufficient for most light and asymptomatic cases, represent a top priority.

More than 12 people were slain and numerous homes set on fire in a community near Haiti’s capital as gangs fight to control more territory, a mayor told The Associated Press on yesterday.

The incident occurred in the small town of Cabaret northwest of Port-au-Prince at nearly midnight, Mayor Joseph Jeanson Guillaume said.

The community recently appointed local residents to serve as guards given a spike in violence across Haiti, but they were overpowered by gangs with machine guns, he said.

“There was nothing they were able to do to defend themselves,”

Guillaume said. “This is a terrible incident.”

Pictures and videos shared on social media show the bodies of mutilated victims strewn outside their homes and fires burning through the night, consuming more than 20 houses.

Guillaume called on Haiti’s National Police to bring those responsible to justice and to strengthen the presence and resources of officers in Cabaret, which he said has become “a lawless zone.”

He also urged town residents to show solidarity and take in those fleeing their homes to avoid being killed by “merciless gangs” and “be with them during these difficult times.”



Bob McGrath (right) looks at the Cookie Monster as they accept the Lifetime Achievement Award for “Sesame Street” at the Daytime Emmy Awards in August 2009, in Los Angeles

BOB MCGRATH, ‘SESAME STREET’ LEGEND, DIES AT 90

BOB McGrath, an actor, musician and children’s author widely known for his portrayal of one of the first regular characters on the children’s show “Sesame Street” has died at the age of 90.

McGrath’s passing was confirmed by his family who posted on his Facebook page on Sunday: “The McGrath family has some sad news to share. Our father Bob McGrath, passed away today. He died peacefully at home, surrounded by his family.”

Sesame Workshop tweeted Sunday evening that it

“mourns the passing of Bob McGrath, a beloved member of the Sesame Street family for over 50 years.”

McGrath was a founding cast member of “Sesame Street” when the show premiered in 1969, playing a friendly neighbor Bob Johnson. He made his final appearance on the show in 2017, marking an almost five-decade-long figure in the “Sesame Street” world.

The actor grew up in Illinois and studied music at the University of Michigan and Manhattan School of Music. He also was a singer in the 60s series “Sing

Along With Mitch” and launched a successful singing career overseas in Japan.

“A revered performer worldwide, Bob’s rich tenor filled airwaves and concert halls from Las Vegas to Saskatchewan to Tokyo many times over,” Sesame Workshop said. “We will be forever grateful for his many years of passionate creative contributions to Sesame Street and honored that he shared so much of his life with us.”

He is survived by his wife, Ann Logan Sperry, and their five children. **MDT/AP**



Germany Oil prices rose yesterday as the first strong measures to limit Russia’s oil profits over the war in Ukraine took effect, bringing with them uncertainty about how much crude could be lost to the global economy through the new sanctions or Russian retaliation. Starting Monday are a European Union embargo on most Russian oil and a price cap of \$60 per barrel on Russian exports to other countries imposed by the Group of Seven democracies and the EU.



Russia Explosions rocked two air bases in Russia yesterday, Russian media reported. One of the explosions reportedly happened at a base that houses nuclear-capable strategic bombers that have been involved in launching strikes against Ukraine. Neither Ukrainian nor Russian authorities immediately commented on the possible cause of the blasts. Russian state RIA Novosti news agency said three servicemen were killed and six others injured, and a plane was damaged.



South Africa At least nine people died and eight others were missing in South Africa after a flash flood swept away members of a church congregation along the Jukskei River in Johannesburg, rescue officials said. The dead and missing were all part of the congregation, which was conducting religious rituals along the river on Saturday, officials said. Rescue workers reported finding the bodies of two victims that day and another seven bodies when the search and recovery mission resumed Sunday morning.

THE DECISIVE MOMENT

AP Photo/Kin Cheung



Piece of work. A member of staff holds the moulded “mandarin duck and lotus pond” dish in Chinese Yuan dynasty, from the collection of the late Sir Joseph Hotung, on display during a media preview of Sotheby’s auction, in London, yesterday. The piece, valued at 700,000-1,000,000 pounds and will go on auction on Dec. 7 and 8.