



SHORT SIGHTED: MEDICAL SURVEY HAS DISCOVERED OVER 85% OF RESPONDENTS DO NOT HAVE REGULAR EYE CHECKS

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AP PHOTO



Australian police are investigating the extremist views of three people who shot and killed two officers and a neighbor at a rural property before they were killed hours later by police in a gunfight. Investigators will look at the possible extremist links of the killers after a series of posts under the name of Gareth Train, one of the killers identified in the wake of Monday's deadly shootout, were found on conspiracy theory forums, Queensland police said.

AP PHOTO



Fijians voted yesterday in an election that pitted two former military coup leaders against each other at a time the nation is trying to recover from a severe economic downturn. Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama (pictured) is seeking to extend his 16-year hold on power. He first seized the top job by force in 2006 and later refashioned himself as a democratic leader by introducing a new constitution and winning elections in 2014 and again in 2018.

AP PHOTO



Ukraine Russian drone strikes damaged five buildings in the capital, Kyiv, yesterday even as Ukrainian air defenses thwarted many more, authorities said. No casualties were reported. The attacks underline how Ukraine's biggest city remains vulnerable to the regular Russian attacks that have devastated infrastructure and other population centers, mostly in the country's east and south in recent weeks.

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MOTHERS' DESPAIR

Migrant mothers in dilemma over Macau's alleged ultimatum visas on their toddlers P5



XINHUA

XINHUA

COVID-19 CASES MOUNT BY HUNDREDS, GOV'T EXPECTS PEAK IN THREE WEEKS



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COVID-19

GOV'T EXPECTS CASES TO PEAK IN THREE WEEKS

LYNZY VALLES

THE government is expecting the pandemic to peak in the third or fourth week following the easing of restrictions, despite the rising number of cases.

Yesterday, cases tallied 411, the highest daily tally, reaching 1,325 cases since Nov. 28.

In TDM's Macau Forum, Health Bureau director Alvis Lo said he believes the current number of infections in Macau is still relatively stable, and estimated that the peak of the pandemic will be in the third or fourth week after the relaxation of the pandemic prevention and control measures, adding that there is now enough time for all sectors to prepare.

He also said the current goal



RENATO MARQUES

is not to have zero cases, contrary to the adherence to zero-Covid policy.

Yesterday, Macau entered the second phase of the transitional period of pandemic

prevention and control, which allows asymptomatic cases to isolate from home.

Lo said the real number of infections is "underestimated" as those currently being tested are key groups and cross-border travelers.

Meanwhile, Lo also told TDM that there are no restrictions on the departure of infected people from Macau, that is, those with a red code will not be prevented from boarding flights abroad.

On Tuesday, the city recorded the death of an 80-year-old woman, unvaccinated, and with a history of chronic illnesses that included hypertension, diabetes, coronary and heart disease.

The resident died at Alto de Coloane Public Health Center, and is a victim of complications caused by Covid, authorities say.

COVID-19

CLASSES TO BE SUSPENDED ONLY WHEN POSITIVES REACH FOUR CASES

STAFF REPORTER

CLASSES will be suspended where four or more positive Covid-19 cases arise in the class in a day, the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) has announced.

This comes as the city entered the second phase of the transition period yesterday. With the transition, the city appears to be coexisting with Covid.

When the number of new confirmed cases of students in the class reaches four or more in a day (school day), face-to-face teaching of that class will be suspended for five days from that day. If there are less than four confirmed cases, the rest of the students can have class as usual, except for the positive cases.

Students suspended from school due to the measure in the first phase (Dec. 12 and Dec. 13) should conduct rapid antigen tests or undergo nucleic acid tests for two consecutive days from the



LYNZY VALLES

class suspension date.

They can resume schooling after obtaining a negative result. Parents may choose not to let their children return to school, depending on their children's situation. Schools should exercise discretion in dealing with the absence of the students concerned, the bureau advised.

Confirmed cases of teaching and non-teaching staff are not considered a con-

dition for the suspension of classes they teach or serve.

If the household member of a student is a confirmed case, the student should conduct self-health management in accordance with the guidelines on close contacts issued by the health department and should not return to school for the time being, during which time the health code of the student will be converted to a yellow code.

INVENTOR OF CHINA'S MILLIONAIRE LISTS RETURN TO MACAU WITH BUSINESS DELEGATES

RUPERT Hoogewerf, inventor of China's many millionaire rankings, has returned to Macau with over 50 delegates to explore entrepreneurship opportunities, the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) has announced.

More commonly known by his Chinese name Hu Run, Hoogewerf has established a collection of businesses such as a business magazine titled the Hurun Report and the numerous topic-based rankings.

He last visited Macau in April 2021, the IPIM noted.

After a brief exchange of intelligence, the delegation visited the Pavilion of China-Portuguese-speaking Countries Commercial and Trade Service Platform and the Macao Ideas Pavilion to gather some understanding of China-Lusophone cooperation, Lusophone countries and local pro-



ducts.

Members in the delegation are involved in Big Health, modern finance, high and innovative technologies, commerce, culture and sports, etc., fitting the government's intention to develop the city toward the four major industries.

The members, in addition, considered Macau's free port and independent tariff zone positions as advantages. Positioned

as the bridge between China and Lusophone countries and geographically close to resources in the Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, Macau will enjoy a great potential for enticing investments in the future, the delegates commented.

The IPIM said it would provide assistance for non-local entrepreneurs attempting to start businesses in Macau. **AL**

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Vong Hin Fai succeeds Neto Valente at AAM

RENATO MARQUES

LAWYER, lawmaker, and Macau delegate to the National People's Congress, Vong Hin Fai has been elected the new president of the Macau Lawyers Association (AAM), replacing Jorge Neto Valente who had served 24 years in the post.

In a single-list election late Tuesday evening, Vong was elected as the new president of the AAM's board of directors with 293 of the 321 votes.

As previously reported by the Times, Vong's candidacy also included the names of Oriana Pun, who was elected the new AAM secretary general, and Leonel Alves, who was elected the general assembly's new president.

The new AAM board of directors includes Álvaro Rodrigues, Chao Sio Ngan, Susana de Souza So, Chau Seng Chon and Chang San Chi, among others.

Ending an over 20



Vong Hin Fai, AAM president-elect

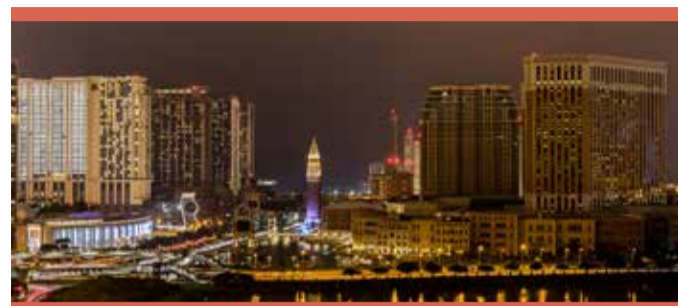
years stint at the helm of the AAM, Neto Valente refused to evaluate his work saying that was a task for others. He expressed a hope the new board of directors would be able to unite the lawyers' professional class. He said no one can perform such a task alone. To do a good job, the new president needs to find support not

only from board members but from all the association's members, he said.

Neto Valente said it was a positive that during his term there were different voices and opinions in the association. Nonetheless, he said it is most important to keep the association free of individual political views to maintain

stability.

In a recent interview with TDM on the sidelines of an event where the University of Saint Joseph conferred an honorary doctorate on him, he said it was important to avoid major conflicts because these can cause some to become disengaged which is contrary to the purposes of the AAM.



GAMING OPS TO INK CONTRACTS ON FRESH LICENSES

THE six gaming operators will sign contracts with the government at the Government Headquarters for the new 10-year licenses, according to media reports.

Late last month, the government announced incumbent operators will retain their concessions and will be awarded a 10-year license, ending major uncertainties for concessionaires who have long been bleeding cash.

The decision had been long awaited with several rounds of deliberation, which also concluded the overhaul of the city's gaming laws wherein the government now has more control over casino operations.

The operators are MGM Grand Paradise Limited, Galaxy Casino Company Limited, Venetian Macau Limited,

Melco Resorts (Macau) Limited, Wynn Resorts (Macau) Limited and SJM Resorts, Limited.

The government has not disclosed how each company scored nor the committee's evaluating criteria, yet it is expected the gaming operators' executives will be present to disclose their investment plans when the government holds a press conference.

Last month, it was alleged gaming bidders had pledged MOP100 billion in non-gaming investments, despite the sector bleeding cash with no certainty on recovery.

The six operators had met the SAR government's requirements in ensuring local employment, boosting foreign tourist source markets and developing non-gaming projects. **LV**



NEW DEPUTY HEAD AT LIAISON OFFICE VISITS LOCAL COURTS

HUANG Liuquan, deputy director at Beijing's liaison office in Macau, recently led a delegation on a ceremonial visit to the local courts amid his assumption of office.

The delegation also consisted of Li Xuefei, director, and Wang Heng, deputy director, of the legal department, as well as Gao Zhen, division head at the department.

The ceremonial visit and subsequent meeting occurred at the Court of Final Appeal (TUI) building, which is also the office of the head of the court, Justice Sam Hou Fai.

The liaison office delegation was met by Justice

Sam, Justice Song Man Lei of the TUI, Justice Tong Hio Fong, head of the Court of Second Instance (TSI), Justice Io Weng San, head of the Court of First Instance (TJB), and Chan Iok Lin, chief of office of the TUI president.

The judges described the city's judicial reform activities, its judicial administrative system, the appointment and management of judges, and the operation of the court's three tiers.

After complimenting the diligence of the three courts and their compliance with One Country Two Systems, Huang said he had garnered a clearer knowledge on the local courts. **AL**



RENATO MARQUES

LRT fare discounts to finish at the year-end

RENATO MARQUES

FARE discounts promoted by the Light Rapid Transit (LRT) Company in April to incentivize LRT use, will finish at the end of this year, the LRT has said.

From January 1, 2023,

LRT fares will return to the original distance-based pricing.

The regular fare for "up to three stations" will cost 6 patacas, while the "four to six stations" will return to 8 patacas. The longer distance fare, "seven to 10 stations" will cost as

much as 10 patacas.

The 50% fare discount will continue to apply to those with the special LRT Pass, Macau Pass card, or ticket with a special discount.

The students' special discount price will continue and will cost, 1.50, 2,

and 2.50 patacas depending on distance traveled.

Travel is free for children below 1 meter tall, for those with a Senior Macau Pass card and all those with disabilities.

Last month, the LRT recorded a daily average of about 2,250 passengers, the second highest average this year which was only surpassed in October with a 2,600 daily average.

The LRT resumed operations on April 3 after a six month cessation of service due to major maintenance work that included changes to all power cables in the Taipa Line, the only line in operation so far.

According to recent information from the Secretary for Transport and Public Works, Raimundo do Rosário, 2023 will see the conclusion of the connection of the Taipa Line to the Peninsula through the Sai Van Bridge, with the consequent opening to the public of the Barra transport hub.

SURVEY FINDS ONLY 15% LOCALS SEEK REGULAR EYE CHECKS

ANTHONY LAM

A recent survey has discovered over 85% of respondents do not have regular eye checks.

The survey was jointly conducted by international sight-saving charity organization Orbis International's office in Macau and the private Kiang Wu Hospital. Valid responses from 1,059 people were collected between Oct. 13 and Nov. 15.

The survey found 63% of the respondents were in the 30-49 years old age group, 19% were in the 18-29 years old age group and 15% were in the 50 years old and above age group.

It aimed to find out about the current situation of the community, their level of understanding about eye floaters, their reactions when encountering specific eye conditions, and the habits of using and protecting their eyes for the use of the private hospital's eye department.

Besides the finding on the lack of regular eye checks, the



survey also discovered more than 30% of respondents believe there is no need to seek medical advice when eye floaters appear.

The lack of regular eye checks will delay people's unders-

tanding of their own eye health, which in turn will delay the commencement of treatment when required.

Orbis International has been working to help prevent eye diseases.

The survey showed respondents would ignore the existence of sudden symptoms such as floaters and did not consider seeking medical assistance critical or necessary, Orbis added.

Approximately 83% of res-

pondents have eye floaters and 69% misunderstood the condition as disease.

Ophthalmologist Fong Sao Nok at the private hospital said eye floaters are actually normal occurrences, generally caused by the degeneration of the vitreous in the eye during the actions of shrinks and liquefies. When light enters the eye, impurities in the vitreous will be projected on the retina, forming the dark shadows referred to as "floaters."

The survey also discovered over 85% of people with significant short-sightedness have floaters. Fong explained the close relationship between floaters and high myopia. He said people with high myopia should be more vigilant about their eyes' changing conditions and new symptoms which could potentially be an indication of an underlying eye disease requiring attention.

Fong said it is vital for the community to become better acquainted with the different symptoms, including eye floaters, which in most cases would not directly lead to a vision crisis, but could, in some cases, be a harbinger of more serious eye conditions that can affect one's vision.

AD

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Migrant mothers in dilemma over city's alleged ultimatum visas on their toddlers

LYNZY VALLES

A group of non-resident mothers who have given birth in the region because border restrictions prevented them from flying home are in despair because their toddlers are on special visas and they have allegedly been given an ultimatum to send them home.

Restrictions prevented many migrant workers in the region from flying home.

With the quarantine and the previous requirement for passes from the Health Bureau (SSM) to return to Macau, going home has not been an option for many unskilled workers who have less annual leave and pay.

It was only in November that the government reduced requirements for non-resident workers returning to the SAR amid its adherence to Beijing's zero-Covid policy.

Previously, only those with



permits from the SSM could return to the city, which mainly benefited certain professional employees and domestic helpers.

But with such restrictions, many migrant workers opted to give birth in Macau despite the expense and fearing for their jobs.

Windy Inez, a 32-year-old mother told the Times she and other mothers are now struggling to "plead to the immigra-

tion department to have their visas extended" - at least until January as airfares are more expensive during the Christmas season.

"I received advice on Dec. 5 that my baby should be sent home," she told the Times.

"They gave her 14 days and I was informed that that would be the last visa they would give her. If ever it needs to be extended, I need to provide a plane ticket," Inez added.

After receiving the advice, the migrant worker, who works as a domestic helper, asked her employer to book her a flight back home. Her employer refused because tickets are expensive.

"My friends have informed me that in their case, when they asked for an extension of visas, the immigration department required that the plane ticket should be no less than five days counting from the last visa," she claimed.

Her situation seems easier than for those working in companies because certain requirements must be met at the Philippine Consulate before returning home.

To return to Macau from the Philippines, an overseas worker must be a member of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) and must hold an Overseas Employment Certificate (OEC) issued by the Philippine Overseas Labor Office, and have medical insu-

rance. To have these, contracts must be presented and there are documents requiring the employer's signature.

"It has been stressful for us, especially for those working in companies as they have very limited days of leave. It's very stressful because if our babies fail to obtain a visa, even our working permits will be cancelled," the migrant worker said.

Although there have long been plans to return their children home, the city's quarantine measures have been restricting them as they would need to spend a minimum of MOP3,000 for quarantine, as well as MOP1,250 for five NATs during the stay at the hotel.

Such amounts appear to be difficult for many migrant workers to pay because their earnings do not match the city's standard of living.

The Times has contacted the immigration department of the Public Security Police yet no reply was given by press time.

AD

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COVID-19

CHINA REDUCES CASE NUMBER REPORTING AS VIRUS SURGES

DAKE KANG, BEIJING

CHINA'S National Health Commission scaled down its daily COVID-19 report starting yesterday in response to a sharp decline in PCR testing since the government eased antivirus measures after daily cases hit record highs.

A notice on the commission's website said it stopped publishing daily figures on numbers of COVID-19 cases where no symptoms are detected since it was "impossible to accurately grasp the actual number of asymptomatic infected persons," which have generally accounted for the vast majority of new infections. The only numbers they're reporting are confirmed cases detected in public testing facilities.

This poses a key challenge for China as it relaxes its strict "zero-COVID" policy. With mass-PCR testing no longer obligatory and people with mild symptoms allowed to recuperate at home rather than in one of the field hospitals that became notorious for overcrowding and poor hygiene, it has grown more difficult to gauge the true number of cases.

Beijing's streets have grown eerily quiet, with lines forming outside fever clinics — the number of which has been increased from 94 to 303 — and at pharmacies, where cold and flu medications are harder to find.

Though authorities said they were sourcing millions of CO-



VID-19 antigen rapid test kits for Beijing pharmacies, they remained difficult to obtain.

A Beijing resident surnamed Zhu said they developed a sore throat and a fever, but wasn't able to confirm whether they had the coronavirus because of a lack of antigen test kits.

Despite a push to boost vaccinations among the elderly, two centers set up in Beijing to administer shots were empty Tuesday except for medical personnel. Despite fears of a major outbreak, there was little evidence of a surge in patient numbers.

At the China-Japan Friendship Hospital's fever clinic in Beijing, a dozen people waited for nucleic acid test results. Nurses in full-body white protective gear checked in patients one by one.

A few kilometers south, at

Chaoyang Hospital, about a dozen people waited in a line of blue tents, deflecting winds amid sub-zero temperatures. One person in the queue took out a bottle of disinfectant and sprayed it around her as she waited.

Across the street at Gaoji Baikang Pharmacy, around a dozen people waited in line for cough medication and Chinese herbal remedies. A sign at the front told waiting customers: "Avoid panic and hoarding, we are doing all we can to stock up to fulfill your medicinal needs." A man coming out had bought two packages of Lianhua Qingwen, a Chinese herbal remedy, saying that each customer was restricted from buying any more than that.

Inquiries to health hotlines have increased six-fold, according to state media.

Without asymptomatic cases being counted, China reported just 2,249 confirmed infections yesterday, bringing the nation's total to 369,918 — more than double the level on Oct. 1. It has recorded 5,235 deaths — compared with 1.1 million in the United States.

China's government-supplied figures have not been independently verified and questions have been raised about whether the Communist Party has sought to minimize numbers of cases and deaths.

Since Tuesday, the U.S. consulates in the northeastern Chinese city of Shenyang and the central city of Wuhan have been offering only emergency services "in response to increased number of COVID-19 cases," the State Department said.

President Xi Jinping's government is still officially committed to stopping virus transmission. But the latest moves suggest the party will tolerate more cases without quarantines or shutting down travel or businesses as it winds down its "zero-COVID" strategy.

Despite relaxed rules, restaurants were mostly closed or empty in the capital. Many businesses are having difficulty finding enough staff who haven't gotten infected. Sanlitun, one of Beijing's most popular shopping districts, was deserted despite having its anti-COVID-19 fences taken down in recent days.

Hospitals have also reportedly been struggling to remain staffed, while packages were piling up at distribution points because of a shortage of China's ubiquitous motorized tricycle delivery drivers.

Some Chinese universities say they will allow students to finish the semester from home in hopes of reducing the potential for a bigger COVID-19 outbreak during the January Lunar New Year travel rush.

Starting Tuesday, China also stopped tracking some travel, potentially reducing the likelihood people will be forced into quarantine for visiting COVID-19 hot spots. Despite that, China's international borders remain largely shut and there has been no word on when restrictions will be eased on inbound travelers and Chinese wanting to go overseas.

The move follows the government's dramatic announcement last week that it was ending many of the strictest measures, following three years during which it enforced some of the world's tightest virus restrictions. **MDT/AP**

TERRORISM

Beijing citizens to leave Afghanistan after Kabul attack

CHINA advised its citizens in Afghanistan to leave the country "as soon as possible," following a coordinated attack by Islamic State militants the previous day on a Chinese-owned hotel in the heart of Kabul.

The Chinese advisory appeared to be a setback for Afghanistan's Taliban rulers who seek foreign investments in hopes of halting the downward spiral of the Afghan economy since their takeover of the country more than a year ago.

The militant Islamic State group — a key rival of the Taliban — claimed responsibility for the attack Monday afternoon on Kabul Longan Hotel, which left three assailants dead



A hotel building sits charred after an attack in Kabul

and at least two hotel guests injured as they tried to escape by jumping out of a window.

Plumes of smoke rose from the 10-story building in the central Shar-e Naw

neighborhood, according to images posted on social media as the attack unfolded. Residents reported explosions and gunfire.

Taliban forces rushed to the area and blocked all

roads leading to the site. Khalid Zadran, the Taliban-appointed spokesman for the Kabul police chief, said the attack lasted several hours, followed by a clean-up operation.

Late Tuesday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin called the attack "egregious in nature" and said China was "deeply shocked."

Beijing demanded a "thorough investigation" and urged the Taliban government "to take resolute and strong measures to ensure the safety of Chinese citizens, institutions and projects in Afghanistan," Wang said.

The Chinese Embassy in Kabul sent its team to the site to help with the rescue,

treatment and accommodations for the victims of the attack, Wang added.

"In view of the current security situation in Afghanistan, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs once again advised Chinese citizens and institutions in Afghanistan to evacuate from Afghanistan as soon as possible," Wang said.

The Taliban swept across the country in August 2021, seizing power as U.S. and NATO forces were in the last weeks of their final withdrawal from Afghanistan after 20 years of war.

China has economic and mining interests in the country though those familiar with past talks between the Taliban and Chinese officials say Beijing wants

Taliban commitments to prevent China's Uyghur radicals from setting up operations in Afghanistan.

Chinese firms, with strong government backing, have tentatively sought to pursue opportunities in exploiting Afghanistan's vast, undeveloped resource deposits, especially the Mes Aynak mine that is believed to hold the world's largest copper deposit.

In October, Taliban-appointed government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid highlighted China as a key part of Afghanistan's economic development. China has also revealed its aspirations to play a leading role in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of U.S. forces. **MDT/AP**

AP FILE PHOTO



Protesters march against strict anti-virus measures in Beijing, Nov. 27

COVID-19

Police detain four in Guangzhou after protests

POLICE in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou have detained at least four people for more than a week after they attended protests against COVID-19 restrictions in late November, according to activists, family members and friends of the detained.

While many who attended protests in cities across China last month were released after being held for 24 hours — the legal limit on detention before police must file charges — the four Guangzhou residents as of yesterday have been held for a week and a half.

The detentions came a week after a burst of nationwide protests in the last weekend in November where people demanded freedom from China's strict pandemic restrictions across several cities in a rare display of direct defiance against the central government. Protesters took to the streets despite great personal risk, knowing that surveillance cameras were pervasive and their social media would be

tracked by police.

Now, what the protesters feared — that police would arrest them after the initial wave of action had passed — is happening in Guangzhou.

Among the detained is 25-year-old Yang Zijing, who was at home with a roommate when police burst in on Dec. 4, said Yang's mother, Gao Xiusheng.

Yang, along with three other protesters in police custody, had all attended demonstrations against the government's stringent COVID-19 policies in Guangzhou, according to one activist who declined to be named out of fear of retribution. Family members of the other three protesters declined to discuss their cases.

Yang is being held in criminal detention on suspicion of "picking quarrels and stirring up trouble" — a vague charge that is often used in political cases. According to a copy of the notice viewed by AP, Yang was being held under criminal detention.

Guangzhou police did

not immediately respond to a faxed request for comment.

Though Yang's mother found a lawyer, police refused to let the lawyer meet with Yang citing pandemic safety, Gao said.

"I said I wanted to take a jacket to my child. The temperatures in Guangzhou have fallen. They wouldn't let me bring it," said Yang's mother, who worries Yang is being held at a police station instead of a pre-trial detention center, where she thinks there would be a bed and blanket.

On the night of Nov. 27, hundreds of people gathered at Haizhu Plaza in the city, following protests in Urumqi and in Shanghai the days before. They were angered by the deaths of at least 10 people in an apartment building fire in Urumqi in China's northwest that many believed was worsened due to COVID-19 prevention measures.

People came after posts on social media called for a protest at a bridge in Guangzhou, one protester said, but because

police were already there blocking the bridge, many wound up at the plaza just opposite.

One person brought sheets of white paper and handed them out, a form of silent protest against state censorship that had come to symbolize the nationwide movement against COVID-19 restrictions that had materialized that weekend.

While there were many police officers at the scene and they cleared the crowd fairly quickly, the protesters said no one was detained that night to their knowledge.

A week later, police started rounding people up. Many people were apprehended on Dec. 4, and after being detained for a little more than 24 hours were released, protesters said, echoing the experiences of protesters in Shanghai and Beijing.

The four people, however, remain in police custody. Three of them were taken by police on Dec. 4 for participating in the Nov. 27 protest. Another was taken on Dec. 3 for participating in a separate demonstration. **MDT/AP**

ADVERTORIAL

GREAT TIMES

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Christmas is around the corner! Plan extravagant gourmet feasts and savor the tantalizing moments with your friends and family at the year-end celebrations! Celebrate the Yuletide season with lavish festive meals at MGM. With endless gourmet feasts featuring five-star delicacies, your year-end celebration will no longer be dull! Get your Christmas dinner reservations in early!



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The festive season is all about hearty meals with enjoyable company. What are you waiting for? Scroll through our festive dining guide for the best picks now! For enquiries and reservations, please visit www.mgm.mo or call (853) 8802 3888.

AP PHOTO



U.S. President Joe Biden speaks during a bill signing ceremony for the Respect for Marriage Act on the South Lawn of the White House in Washington

USA

Biden signs gay marriage law, calls it 'a blow against hate'

CHRIS MEGERIAN,
WASHINGTON

A celebratory crowd of thousands bundled up on a chilly afternoon to watch President Joe Biden sign gay marriage legislation into law, a joyful ceremony that was tempered by the backdrop of an ongoing conservative backlash over gender issues.

"This law and the love it defends strike a blow against hate in all its forms," Biden said on the South Lawn of the White House. "And that's why this law matters to every single American."

Singers Sam Smith and Cyndi Lauper performed. Vice President Kamala Harris recalled officiating at a lesbian wedding in San Francisco. And the White House played a recording of Biden's television interview from a decade ago, when he caused a political furor by unexpectedly disclosing his support for gay marriage. Biden was vice president at the time, and President Barack Obama had not yet endorsed the idea.

"I got in trouble," Biden joked of that moment. Three days later, Obama himself publicly endorsed gay marriage.

Lawmakers from both parties attended yesterday's [Macau time] ceremony, reflecting the growing acceptance of same-sex unions, once among the country's most contentious issues.

Senate Majority Leader

Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., wore the same purple tie to the ceremony that he wore to his daughter Alison's wedding. She and her wife are expecting their first child in the spring.

"Thanks to the millions out there who spent years pushing for change, and thanks to the dogged work of my colleagues, my grandchild will get to live in a world that respects and honors their mothers' marriage," he said.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told the crowd that "inside maneuvering only takes us so far," and she thanked activists adding impetus with "your impatience, your persistence and your patriotism."

Despite the excitement, there was concern about the nationwide proliferation of conservative policies on gender issues at the state level.

Biden criticized the "callous, cynical laws introduced in the states targeting transgender children, terrifying families and criminalizing doctors who give children the care they need."

"Racism, antisemitism, homophobia, transphobia, they're all connected," Biden said. "But the antidote to hate is love."

Among the attendees were the owner of Club Q, a gay nightclub in Colorado where five people were killed in a shooting last month, and two survivors of the attack. The suspect has been charged with hate crimes.

"It's not lost on me that

our struggle for freedom hasn't been achieved," said Kelley Robinson, president of the Human Rights Campaign. "But this is a huge step forward, and we have to celebrate the victories we achieve and use that to fuel the future of the fight."

Robinson attended the ceremony with her wife and 1-year-old child.

"Our kids are watching this moment," she said. "It's very special to have them here and show them that we're on the right side of history."

The new law is intended to safeguard gay marriages if the U.S. Supreme Court ever reverses Obergefell v. Hodges, its 2015 decision legalizing same-sex unions nationwide. The new law also protects interracial marriages. In 1967, the Supreme Court in Loving v. Virginia struck down laws in 16 states barring interracial marriage.

The signing marks the culmination of a monthslong bipartisan effort sparked by the Supreme Court's decision in June to overturn Roe v. Wade, the 1973 ruling that made abortion available across the country.

In a concurring opinion in the case that overturned Roe, Justice Clarence Thomas suggested revisiting other decisions, including the legalization of gay marriage, generating fear that more rights could be imperiled by the court's conservative majority. Thomas did not reference interracial marriage with the

other cases he said should be reconsidered.

Lawmakers crafted a compromise that was intended to assuage conservative concerns about religious liberty, such as ensuring churches could still refuse to perform gay marriages.

In addition, states would not be required to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples if the court overturns its 2015 ruling. But they will be required to recognize marriages conducted elsewhere in the country.

A majority of Republicans in Congress still voted against the legislation. However, enough supported it to sidestep a filibuster in the Senate and ensure its passage.

The ceremony marks another chapter in Biden's legacy on gay rights, which includes his surprise endorsement of marriage equality in 2012.

"What this is all about is a simple proposition: Who do you love?" Biden said then on NBC's "Meet the Press." "Who do you love and will you be loyal to the person you love? And that is what people are finding out is what all marriages at their root are about."

A Gallup poll showed only 27% of U.S. adults supported same-sex unions in 1996, when President Bill Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act, which said the federal government would only recognize heterosexual marriages. Biden voted for the legislation. **MDT/AP**

this day in history

1982 SPAIN OPENS BORDER WITH THE ROCK

The gates isolating the people of Gibraltar from Spain have been opened to pedestrians after 13 years.

Spain's new socialist government opened the frontier for "humanitarian reasons" at one minute after midnight this morning.



A Spanish police official in plain clothes unceremoniously unlocked the gates for both sides.

Carmen Ward, 35, married to a British worker in Gibraltar - known as the Rock - was the first Gibraltarian to come through on foot.

She said: "This is a humanitarian step and it ought to have been taken long ago."

A crowd of several thousand sightseers in festive spirit gathered to celebrate the momentous occasion as students performed an impromptu live music session.

There were several hundred Gibraltarian well wishers on the other side.

Despite the good will gesture by the Spanish authorities the frontier has opened under tight restrictions which include a ban on any British or foreign tourists crossing.

Only Spanish citizens or inhabitants of Gibraltar are allowed across.

Cars and commercial goods remain banned.

The government of Gibraltar has reacted angrily to the restrictions but its plans to retaliate by closing the gates at night were overruled by the British Government.

The opening ends a period of isolation begun by General Franco in 1969 during the siege of Gibraltar.

The 25,000 inhabitants have been divided from Spain ever since.

The historic event has been delayed twice already due to the elections in Spain earlier this year.

Before that Spain's backing for Argentina during the Falklands war caused the opening to be postponed.

Today's opening has been met with caution by inhabitants of the Rock who remain suspicious of Spain's plans for sovereignty.

The gates were opened briefly ahead of the official opening two nights ago as part of a Spanish "seasonal gesture of good will" to allow through to Spain a group of Portuguese seamen rescued after their ship sank off Gibraltar.

Courtesy BBC News

IN CONTEXT

The gates were officially opened to everyone in 1985. Inhabitants of Gibraltar said Spain had relaxed its laws on the frontier to gain support for its bid to enter the European Community which it achieved in 1986. The bitter battle over the sovereignty of the Rock continues. It is relentlessly contested by the majority of the 30,000 inhabitants of the Rock who wish to remain British. In 2002, talks between Britain and Spain continued with new vigour but an announcement the countries could share sovereignty was met with angry protests on the streets of Gibraltar. A referendum was held on 7 November that year in which an overwhelming majority of Gibraltarians - 98.97% - voted not to share British sovereignty with Spain. But both the Spanish and British governments have said the result has no legal weight. The British and Spanish Foreign Secretaries met in December 2004 with a view to opening a new dialogue on the Rock's future.

MACAU'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

YOUR STARS

ARIES
Mar. 21-Apr. 19
You will find that social activities will be enjoyable and will promote new connections. Your mate may not be too sure about your intentions. You are best to concentrate on work.

TAURUS
Apr. 20-May. 20
Don't second guess yourself, just go to it. You may want to take a look at courses offered at a local institute. Clear up domestic chores that have remained undone for some time.

GEMINI
May. 21-Jun. 21
Don't prejudge. You may get drawn into a personal situation that will not be to your liking. Stick to your work and avoid emotional confrontations.

CANCER
Jun. 22-Jul. 22
You can expect sorrow to evolve from the information you discover. Your ideas will be well received. Get out and enjoy some entertainment.

LEO
Jul. 23-Aug. 22
You can accomplish the most if you travel for business purposes. Your mind is on moneymaking ventures. Try to visit friends or relatives you don't get to see often.

VIRGO
Aug. 23-Sep. 22
Work quietly at your own goals and forget about situations that you can do little about. You may find that family members may not be too easy to get along with.

LIBRA
Sep. 23-Oct. 22
Make sure that new mates live up to your high standards. Romance will develop if you get involved in social events that deal with children.

SCORPIO
Oct. 23-Nov. 21
You may be confused regarding your love life. Organize all the responsibilities that have to be attended to and make sure everyone knows what to do.

SAGITTARIUS
Nov. 22-Dec. 21
You should be trying to clear up legal contracts that have been pending. Travel will promote new romantic connections. Financial gains can be made.

CAPRICORN
Dec. 22-Jan. 19
Don't make promises that you can't possibly keep. Channel your energy into passionate interludes with your lover. Make changes that will heighten your appeal.

AQUARIUS
Jan. 20-Feb. 18
Unpleasant situations concerning family members will be unnerving. You will want to take off and have some recreation. You will be in the doghouse if you are being.

PISCES
Feb. 19-Mar. 20
You could meet an interesting individual you'll want to get to know better. Take a close look at any contracts you've signed in order to be sure exactly where you stand.

The Born Loser by Chip Sanson



SUDOKU

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

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

WEATHER

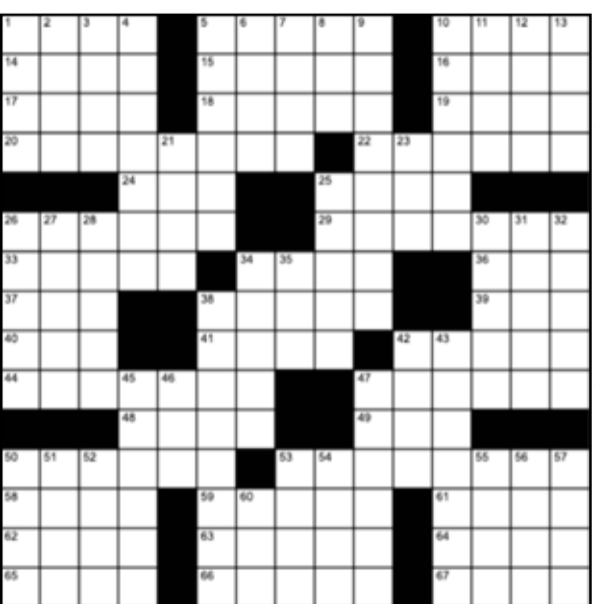
	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
CHINA			
Beijing	-10	0	cloudy
Changchun	-18	-12	cloudy
Chengdu	7	10	cloudy
Chongqing	8	11	overcast
Fuzhou	11	14	rain
Guangzhou	10	14	overcast
Guiyang	3	7	overcast
Haikou	14	19	cloudy
Hangzhou	2	7	fine
Harbin	-21	-15	fine
Hefei	-3	7	fine
Nanjing	-2	5	cloudy
Shanghai	3	7	fine
Taipei	14	15	rain
Wuhan	-1	11	fine
Hong Kong	17	18	showers
WORLD			
Moscow	-7	-6	snow
Frankfurt	-6	-1	overcast
Paris	-3	2	overcast
London	-4	2	fine
New York	6	6	rain

CROSSWORDS

ACROSS 1- ___ Brith; 5- Prince Valiant's wife; 10- Raw materials; 14- Electric fish; 15- Goodwill; 16- Specify; 17- Affirm solemnly; 18- Sports card name; 19- Writer Bombeck; 20- Cookie; 22- Trying experience; 24- Canal zone?; 25- Wide-eyed; 26- Anemic; 29- Kneecap; 33- Evade; 34- Type of gun; 36- Summer Games org.; 37- Perceive; 38- Maze word; 39- Parking place; 40- Credit-tracking corp.; 41- Member of the Conservative Party; 42- Actress Shire; 44- Endless; 47- Military organizations; 48- Mozart's "___ kleine Nachtmusik"; 49- Metal, often used as a container; 50- Declared; 53- Beautiful; 58- Biblical birthright seller; 59- Sheeplike; 61- Paddock papa; 62- Din; 63- Rasping instruments; 64- Hip bones; 65- Org.; 66- Sumptuous meal; 67- No. 2;

DOWN 1- Ray of light; 2- St. Petersburg's river; 3- Novelist Waugh; 4- Begin, e.g.; 5- To meet the expense of; 6- Composer Schifrin; 7- Level; 8- Digit of the foot; 9- Imperious; 10- Jumpy; 11- Hard to find; 12- Austen novel; 13- Authenticating mark; 21- Incursion; 23- Balderdash; 25- Mimicry; 26- Cut partner; 27- Turn aside; 28- Lerner's partner; 30- Actress Palmer; 31- Sarge's superior; 32- Take the role of; 34- Lifted; 35- Sailor; 38- Tie or draw; 42- Math course; 43- Loss of memory; 45- Go back; 46- Never, in Nuremberg; 47- Still; 50- Lab fluids; 51- General ___ chicken; 52- Small batteries; 53- Arizona river; 54- Change for a five; 55- Lubricates; 56- "Trinity" author; 57- Show to a table; 60- Contend;

Yesterday's solution



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com

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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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ARGENTINA ERUPTS IN JOY AFTER TEAM REACHES WORLD CUP FINAL

DANIEL POLITI, BUENOS AIRES

THE streets of Argentina turned into a party yesterday [Macau time] as the national team beat Croatia by a comfortable 3-0 and earned this soccer-crazed South American country a spot in the World Cup final.

Fans poured onto the streets of the capital of Buenos Aires as soon as the match ended, with people waving Argentina flags out of their cars while others jumped and sang in joy amid a sea of wearing the national team's jersey.

Earlier, Buenos Aires had come to a standstill on what was a scorching summer afternoon as fans packed cafes, restaurants and public plazas, where giant screens followed the exploits of the Lionel Messi-led team.

"I'm in complete ecstasy," said Emiliano Adam, 31, who works at an advertising agency and was celebrating in the streets of Buenos Aires while wearing the country's flag as a cape. "This is the first match that didn't make me suffer, the first time I could enjoy a match from beginning to end."

Argentina will now play the last

AP PHOTO



match of the World Cup against either France or Morocco, who are facing off Wednesday.

With that final match still days away, Tuesday turned into a day of joy as thousands of people descended on the capital's iconic Obelisk.

The agonizing start of the tournament for Argentina was followed by a string of victories that have brought some much-needed joy to a country stuck in an economic standstill with one of the world's highest inflation rates, closing in

on almost 100% per year, and where close to four of every 10 people live in poverty.

"We're all super excited, it's been so long since we've lived a happiness like this. It's beautiful, I mean look at this," said Laila Desmery, a 27-year-old actress, as she pointed to people dancing and celebrating on the street. "It's really unexplainable the joy that we're going to be living through in the next few days."

The sky-high hopes for the Ar-

gentina team only increased here after the quarter-final against the Netherlands, an agonizing match that ended in a penalty shootout and led to a collective feeling the team that had shocked the world by losing its opening match against Saudi Arabia had finally found its groove.

"This was the antithesis of the last match, we won easily, with ample advantage and without moments of so much tension and stress," said Valentina González,

31, a social media manager.

Mariano Balestrasse said he was particularly proud of how the national team "has improved significantly every day and in every match you could see an improvement."

In that sense, the shocking loss against Saudi Arabia "helped consolidate the team," the 28-year-old architect said.

"This team connected a lot with the people, you can tell they're very united and they transmit that," said Abe Pérez, a 52-year-old civil servant.

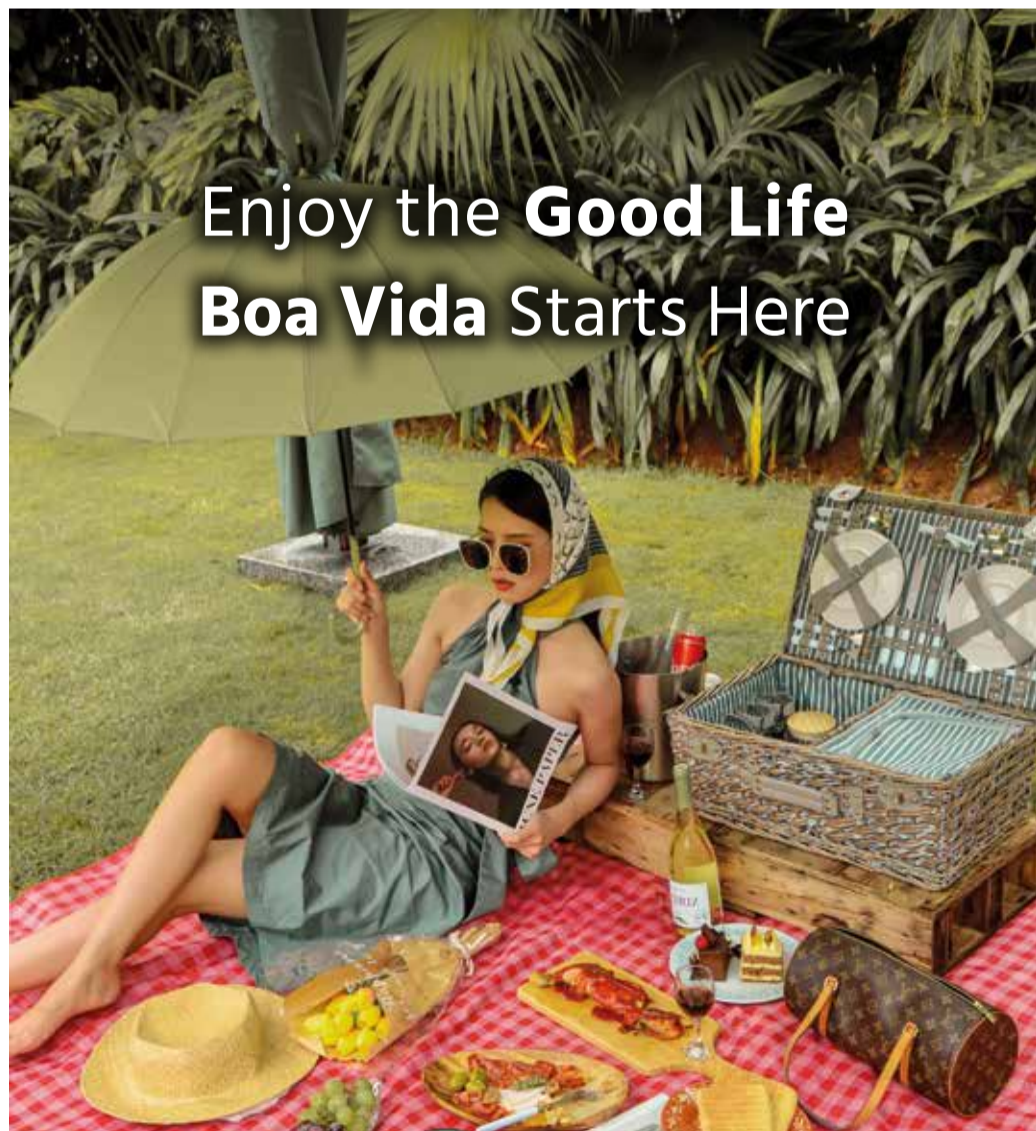
In a traditional café in the Buenos Aires neighborhood of Palermo, those who had been nervously staring at the television screen exploded in jubilation when Messi scored a penalty kick, ending what had been an agonizing goalless 33 minutes.

"Messi, Messi, Messi," the crowd started chanting as they moved their arms in a worshipping ovation.

It was only five minutes later, before the crowd had even had a chance to cool down that Julián Álvarez scored an impressive goal, taking the score to 2-0.

By the second half, the crowd was ecstatic and when Álvarez, with an assist from Messi, scored a third goal, the joy overflowed with people jumping on chairs, kissing and hugging. MDT/AP

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GRAHAM DUNBAR, LUSAIL

ARGENTINA 3, CROATIA 0

WITH surging runs and a striker's instinct, Julián Álvarez carried Argentina into another World Cup final.

Lionel Messi and the 22-year-old Álvarez were a pair of 1.70-meter predators in a partnership that put to rest any hopes Croatia had of reaching back-to-back finals.

The younger of the pair rose to the challenge on soccer's biggest stage with a huge performance yesterday [Macau time], earning a penalty kick converted by the 35-year-old Messi before scoring twice to maybe even outshine his teammate — one of the greatest players the game has ever seen — in a 3-0 victory at Lusail Stadium.

Álvarez became the youngest player to score twice in a World Cup semifinal match since a 17-year-old Pele scored a hat trick for Brazil in 1958.

No wonder Messi held Álvarez in a playful headlock after his first goal and hugged him hard after the second.

"The match from Julian was excellent, not only because he scored two goals, but because he helped our midfielders," Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said. "He showcased an excellent game for his age."

A tight-fought first half-hour was entirely turned upside down by Álvarez's runs, barreling at speed into and through challenges in a devastating five-minute spell. When it was over, Croatia's players had been left strewn behind him on the turf, trailing by two goals, with their hopes of another World Cup final in ruins.

SEMIS

Álvarez surges, scores, carries Argentina to final



Argentina's Julian Alvarez scores his side's second goal

Instead, Argentina gave Messi a second chance to play for a World Cup title. He and his teammates lost to Germany in the 2014 final.

Until Álvarez changed the game, Croatia controlled much of the play with its usual neat

passing in and around midfield, leaving Argentina's attack little to work with.

Álvarez was suddenly alert to creating danger when Croatia midfielder Luka Modri got in a tangle and the ball came loose for Enzo

Fernández to loop a high pass over the defense.

Álvarez was quickly clear and bearing down on goalkeeper Domink Livaković, an imposing figure at any time and yet more so rushing from his goal. Although

a deft shot past Livaković did not reach the goal, Álvarez drew a foul from the hard contact to earn the penalty which Messi converted.

Minutes later, Álvarez sparked to life when Argentina cleared a Croatia corner, took the ball in his stride just before halfway and ran directly at the defense. The surging run seemed to surprise Croatia's fullbacks as first Josip Juranović and then Borna Sosa fell backwards while taking wild swipes at the ball as Álvarez ran through them and once more at Livaković.

This time, the Croatia keeper stayed back and Álvarez lashed his shot into the net from close range with a momentum that took him over Livaković's body.

"It was a nice goal," Álvarez said. "I don't usually run with the ball a lot but the situation presented itself."

Álvarez ran toward the corner to celebrate and Messi chased him down, grabbing him a headlock like a playful big brother.

The pair teamed up again in the 69th minute, needing only each other to pass five defenders, mostly because of Messi's intricate dribble to the endline for a pass into Álvarez's path for a simple finish.

Messi joined Kylian Mbappé with a tournament-leading five goals. Mbappé will get a chance for more on Wednesday when France plays Morocco in the other semifinal match.

Álvarez now has four goals — not bad for a player who didn't even make the starting lineup until Argentina's third game in the group stage.

He will surely be by Messi's side again on Sunday [Monday, 03:00] when they return to Lusail Stadium for the final. **MDT/AP**

Messi fans overjoyed in south Asia after Argentina semi win

SOCCKER fan Gazi Jahidul Haque was struggling to hide his concern before the Argentina and Croatia World Cup semifinal at Qatar's Lusail Stadium.

Haque was watching the game in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh.

"This World Cup is not only important for Argentina, but also for Messi," 35-year-old lawyer Haque said before the game, his voice barely audible as thousands behind him thronged to watch the match in front of a giant television screen at the University of Dhaka in the capital's center.

It was midnight Wednesday in Dhaka and by the time the final whistle blew with Argentina beating Croatia 3-0, Haque's worries had long dissipated.

Argentina was in the World Cup final, one win away from capturing the game's greatest prize.

The win meant Haque would get to see Messi — a player widely regarded as one of the game's best — one more time at the World Cup. The celebrations began.

Fans poured onto the streets in Dhaka waving Argentina flags and wearing the team's sky blue and white jersey. Amid blaring trumpets, they chanted Messi's name and hugged each other. Some held motorbike rallies. Others broke into song and dance. A young man rode on a rickshaw, his body painted in Argentinian colors.

Argentina's win was also celebrated in neighboring India, where it is cricket

that is typically worshipped with near-religious fervor.

In Kolkata city, where children are also named after football players from previous generations, Argentina fans marched in streets chanting songs for Messi's team. It's a city where murals of Messi adorn the walls and Argentinian flags peek out of balconies with homes advertising their support.

Argentina has a legion of passionate super fans in Bangladesh and India since the days of Maradona, one of the greatest to play the game and an icon to fans around the world. Already, thousands of them have traveled to Qatar to see Messi and his team play.

Seeing its team getting massive support from the



Indian fans of Argentina cheer for their team's victory as they watch in Kolkata

south Asian country, Argentina's soccer federation earlier this month praised Bangladeshis on social

media. "Thank you for supporting our team. You are as crazy as we are!" the fe-

deration said in a Twitter post with photos showing Bangladeshi fans wearing Argentina's jersey. **MDT/AP**

OPINION

China Daily
 Editorial, China Daily

RURAL AREAS NEED TO BE PREPARED FOR INFECTION SURGE

The upcoming Spring Festival travel rush is causing additional concern that with the optimizing of the prevention and control measures the rapid spread of the novel coronavirus may wreak havoc in rural areas.

Since the latest strain of the virus has proved to be less virulent than previous ones, new optimized measures were introduced, including ending mass nucleic acid testing and allowing people with no or mild symptoms to home quarantine. But the variant is highly transmissible and cases have begun to soar in the big metropolises.

Big cities though are more capable of coping with the surge in cases than the rural areas, where medical resources have traditionally been inadequate as a result of historical development gaps and where most residents are the more vulnerable elderly.

The National Health Commission's plan to upgrade the COVID-19 response in the countryside is a sensible approach to prioritize the most vulnerable — seniors with underlying conditions — and emphasize timely medical services for those facing the highest risks in rural regions.

After all, as numerous cases have shown, infections are generally less threatening in younger demographic groups. It is thus possible to concentrate the limited rural resources on the needy.

The plan calls for the mobilization of available medical resources and the support of one-on-one partnerships between hospitals at different levels.

But its implementation requires coordination. Considering we are only weeks away from the Lunar New Year's Eve, which marks the traditional peak of the Spring Festival travel rush, time is running out to prepare. The relevant authorities must make every effort possible to make sure available resources go to where they are most needed. It is therefore a sensible choice to put the emphasis on the full mobilization of existing resources — accelerating capacity-building for county-level integrated medical care regimes and giving full play to grassroots clinics as the first line of defense in the upcoming battles.

The "hardware" aspects of the NHC program, such as increasing the number of beds in intensive care units and forming one-on-one partnerships, may be easier to accomplish in such a short time. It is the "software" ones, such as personnel training, that may be more difficult. Therefore, in addition to making the utmost endeavors for rural medical preparedness, it may be equally important to remind the general public, from holiday travelers to all rural residents, of the best ways of avoiding infection.

Since we may soon face what is widely anticipated to be the largest wave of seasonal migration following three years of strict pandemic control, it is especially important for individual citizens to take good care of themselves.

Telling rural residents in particular how to protect themselves in risk situations won't take much time. But it may make a big difference.

US MILITARY CREATES SPACE UNIT IN S.KOREA AMID NORTH THREATS

THE BUZZ

The U.S. military formally launched a space force unit in South Korea yesterday, a move that will likely enable Washington to better monitor its rivals North Korea, China and Russia.

The activation of the U.S. Space Forces Korea at Osan Air Base near Seoul came after North Korea test-fired a barrage of nuclear-capable ballistic missiles designed to strike the U.S. mainland and its allies South Korea and Japan in recent months.

"Just 48 miles north of us exists an existential threat; a threat

that we must be prepared to deter, defend against, and — if required — defeat," Lt. Col. Joshua McCullion, chief of the new space unit, said during the activation ceremony at Osan. He apparently referred to North Korea, whose heavily fortified border with South Korea is just an hour's drive from Seoul, the South's capital.

The unit belongs to the U.S. Space Force, which was launched in December 2019 under then-President Donald Trump as the first new U.S. military service in more than 70 years.



U.S. Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm announces the major scientific breakthrough in fusion research that was made at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California

FUSION BREAKTHROUGH IS A MILESTONE FOR CLIMATE, CLEAN ENERGY

SCIENTISTS announced yesterday [Macau time] that they have for the first time produced more energy in a fusion reaction than was used to ignite it — a major breakthrough in the decades-long quest to harness the process that powers the sun.

Researchers at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California achieved the result last week, the Energy Department said. Known as a net energy gain, the goal has been elusive because fusion happens at such high temperatures and pressures that it is incredibly difficult to control.

The breakthrough will pave the way for advancements in national defense and the future of clean power, Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm and other officials said.

"Ignition allows us to replicate for the first time certain conditions that are found only in the stars and the sun," Granholm told a news conference in Washington. "This milestone moves us one significant step closer" to having zero-carbon fusion energy "powering our society."

Fusion ignition is "one of the most impressive scientific feats of the 21st century," Granholm said, adding that the breakthrough

"will go down in the history books."

Appearing with Granholm, White House science adviser Arati Prabhakar called the fusion ignition achieved Dec. 5 "a tremendous example of what perseverance really can achieve" and "an engineering marvel beyond belief."

Proponents of fusion hope it could one day displace fossil fuels and other traditional energy sources. Producing carbon-free energy that powers homes and businesses from fusion is still decades away. But researchers said the announcement marked a significant leap forward.

"It's almost like it's a starting gun going off," said professor Dennis Whyte, director of the Plasma Science and Fusion Center at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a leader in fusion research. "We should be pushing towards making fusion energy systems available to tackle climate change and energy security."

Kim Budil, director of the Livermore Lab, said there are "very significant hurdles" to commercial use of fusion technology, but advances in recent years mean the technology is likely to be widely used in "a few decades" rather than 50 or 60 years as previously expected.

Fusion works by pressing hydrogen atoms into each other with such force that they combine into helium, releasing enormous amounts of energy and heat. Unlike other nuclear reactions, it doesn't create radioactive waste.

Billions of dollars and decades of work have gone into fusion research that has produced exhilarating results — for fractions of a second. Previously, researchers at the National Ignition Facility, the division of Lawrence Livermore where the success took place, used 192 lasers and temperatures multiple times hotter than the center of the sun to create an extremely brief fusion reaction.

The lasers focused an enormous amount of heat on a miniature spherical capsule, said Marvin Adams, deputy administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration, an Energy Department agency. The result was a superheated plasma environment where a reaction generated about 1.5 times more energy than was contained in the light used to produce it.

Riccardo Betti, a professor at the University of Rochester and expert in laser fusion, said there's a long road ahead before the net energy gain leads to sustainable electricity. MDT/AP



US-Ukraine The U.S. is poised to approve sending a Patriot missile battery to Ukraine, finally agreeing to an urgent request from Ukrainian leaders desperate for more robust weapons to shoot down incoming Russian missiles. The approval is likely to come later this week and could be announced as early as today, said three officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the decision is not final and has not been made public. Two of the officials said the Patriot will come from Pentagon stocks and be moved from another country overseas.



USA The U.S. government charged Samuel Bankman-Fried, the founder and former CEO of cryptocurrency exchange FTX, with a host of financial crimes, alleging he intentionally deceived customers and investors to enrich himself and others, while playing a central role in the company's multibillion-dollar collapse. Federal prosecutors said Bankman-Fried devised "a scheme and artifice to defraud" FTX's customers and investors beginning in 2019, the year it was founded. He illegally diverted their money to cover expenses, debts and risky trades at the crypto hedge fund he started in 2017.



UK inflation remained close to a 40-year high in November, piling pressure on employers to boost wages as the nation faces a wave of strikes and economists expect the Bank of England to approve a ninth consecutive interest rate increase today. While annual consumer price inflation dipped to 10.7% in November from 11.1% the previous month, inflation remains at levels last seen in the 1970s and early 1980s, the Office for National Statistics said.