



# MacauDaily 澳門每日時報® Times

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“ THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN’ ”

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**THE ANNUAL MACAU FILMS AND VIDEOS PANORAMA IS CALLING FOR ENTRIES FROM NOW UNTIL JANUARY 20 NEXT YEAR**

P5

**GAMING: JUNKETS TO GUARANTEE GOV'T WITH MOP1.5M IN LEGAL OVERHAUL**

P4

**CHINA TO RESUME ISSUING PASSPORTS, VISAS AS VIRUS CURBS EASE**

P6



AP PHOTO



**Japanese** Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announced that Japan will tighten border controls for COVID-19 by requiring tests for all visitors from China starting tomorrow as a temporary emergency measure against the surging infections there. The announcement comes days after the World Health Organization said it was very concerned about rising reports of severe cases across China after the country largely abandoned its “zero-COVID” policy.

**Ethiopian** Airlines has resumed scheduled flights to Tigray’s capital, Mekele, as the result of a peace agreement signed between the federal government and Tigray officials in November. The resumption of flights yesterday came a day after a federal government delegation led by the speaker of Ethiopia’s parliament visited Mekele paving the way for more engagement between the two sides that have fought a deadly war for two years in which hundreds of thousands of people have died.

AP PHOTO



**Brazil** Jair Bolsonaro (pictured) told supporters that the future could only bring him three possibilities: arrest, death or a second term as Brazil’s president. None of those outcomes came to pass. And his Oct. 30 loss to Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva set off two months of relative silence for the self-styled standard-bearer of the Brazilian conservative movement. Bolsonaro’s oft-cited motto is “God, Family, Country,” and as president he handed more power to the armed forces and loosened gun restrictions.

PAULO COUTINHO / MDT



**Macau is the most popular city among travel destinations, according to Ctrip study**

P3

**EMPLOYMENT INTEGRATED RESORTS LOOKING FOR STAFF VIA MANILA AGENCY**

P5



**COVID-19 PANDEMIC PEAK REACHED, HEALTH BUREAU SAYS**

P2

**FSS EXTENDS CONTRIBUTION DEADLINE TO FEB. 28**

The Social Security Fund (FSS) will extend the payment deadline to Feb. 28, 2023, and waive any fines and interest accruing in respect of late payments. The move comes as the city is seeing a peak of Covid-19 cases as measures have been gradually easing. The payments include contributions of long-term employees for the fourth quarter of 2022, the employment fee for non-resident workers and the contributions of casual workers for December. For efficiency, the FSS has called on residents to go online to check and apply for the various social security services.

**PREMIER LI MEETS WITH HO IAT SENG**

Last week, Premier Li Keqiang met Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng, who was visiting Beijing to report on the SAR government's work and the current situation in Macau. Vice Premier Han Zheng also attended the event. During the meeting, Li said the central government fully acknowledges the work by Ho and the SAR government to stabilize the economy, secure employment, and ensure people's livelihoods over the past year. Li said that the central government would continue to fully, faithfully, and resolutely implement the "One country, two systems" policy, which is administered in Macau with a high degree of autonomy. Efforts will be made to improve the region's systems and mechanisms for enforcing the Constitution and the Basic Law, he added.

**WEATHER BUREAU RAISES COLD WEATHER ALERT**

The Meteorological and Geophysics Bureau (SMG) warned that temperatures will drop to 11 degrees Celsius today, adding that the weather will be cold for the next few days. According to its forecast, it will be 10 degrees Celsius tomorrow as the winter monsoon is affecting the city's weather. The yellow cold weather alert was issued by the bureau. Meanwhile, air quality levels are expected to be poor tonight and tomorrow.

**COVID-19**

**PANDEMIC PEAK REACHED: SSM**

LYNZY VALLES

**M**ACAU has reached the peak of the current wave of the pandemic, as residents have grappled with the rapid spread of Covid.

Although, following Beijing, asymptomatic cases are no longer reported as they have become impossible to track, many businesses closed for several days due to employee shortages.

In the city center, nearly all shops have closed by 8 p.m. and many food and beverage outlets have remained closed, while 24-hour supermarkets have been operating on limited hours.

Since the outbreak started, about 40% of the medical staff at the private Kiang Wu Hospital have been infected by the virus.

Macau has seen a rapid increase in new infections, raising concerns that its health system could be overwhelmed. There have also been complaints over the lack of antipyretics to reduce fever in local pharmacies.

In a TDM's radio show, Dr



Cheng Tam Fei, acting director of the public hospital's Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department, has said that the city has already reached the peak of the pandemic, echoing the sentiments from Health Bureau (SSM) director Alvis Lo that forecasted the outbreak to peak by the beginning of January following the easing of restrictions, despite the rising number of cases.

"In general, we have a lot of cases. We are already at the peak of the pandemic. We have an enormous number of cases," Cheng said.

China announced a major easing of its rigid "zero-Covid" restrictions two weeks ago, and Macau followed suit.

Meanwhile, the high infection rate has placed extra pressure on the already-stressed medical services during the cold winter.

In line with this, the 24-hour outpatient ward at the government hospital has been temporarily converted into an observation ward for the A&E Department, the SSM has announced.

Although many of those who are newly infected are staying home, it is still difficult to obtain a clear picture of the virus' spread. The new reporting rules could make that even harder.

However, last week, Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng said that there would be no backtracking on plans to reopen the city as the easing of restrictions was aimed at allowing normal life to resume.

In Hong Kong, the government will scrap some of its Covid-19 restrictions, including PCR tests for inbound travelers and vaccination requirements to enter certain venues, the city's leader said yesterday.

Hong Kong is preparing for the January reopening of its borders with China, which had previously imposed harsh restrictions and snap lockdowns to stamp out the virus.

**OBITUARY**

**Radio Macau journalist Sacco dies at 62**

**V**ETERAN journalist José Pedro Sacco, 62, died suddenly early yesterday, TDM reported.

According to family sources heard by the Times, Sacco felt unwell Monday evening and sought treatment at Kiang Wu Hospital. There, after hours of waiting, he was seen and medicated by a doctor. His health condition improved while at the hospital emergency ward, and he was sent back home at 1:30 a.m. Tuesday.

According to his daughter Catarina, as his health deteriorated badly on Tuesday, the family called an ambulance to take him to

the government hospital. But he suddenly lost conscience and died at 1:30 a.m. yesterday on his way to Conde de São Januário hospital, despite the reanimation efforts of the medical staff.

José Pedro Sacco started his career at TDM on April 16, 1984. He was a news editor and broadcaster at Radio Macau until his death.

Sacco, who suffered from mild asthma, contracted Covid-19 last Saturday, which may have caused his death, according to the family.

Sacco is survived by his daughter Catarina, his son Pedro and his



wife Carol.

The Macau Portuguese and English Press Association issued a statement yesterday expressing its sorrow at the death of journalist José Pedro Sacco.

"To his family, friends and colleagues, AIPIM sends its deepest condolences," the statement reads. PC

**GOV'T DOCTOR: RAPID REINFECTION RISK FOR WEAKER IMMUNE SYSTEMS**

ANTHONY LAM

**A** government doctor has advised that people with weaker immune systems may be more easily reinfected by SARS-CoV-2 within six months of their initial infection.

The comments were made by Dr Cheng Tam Fei, acting director of the public hospital's Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department, as a guest on a morning radio show by public broadcaster Radio Macau's Chinese channel.

Under ordinary circumstances, the odds of being infected by the same virus within the three-to-six-month period after recovery should be low. However, Cheng could not rule out the possibility of relap-

se during this period for those with weaker immune systems.

Cheng said that, after recovery, people may gradually resume exercising, but should stay mindful of their health and any signals from their bodies, and stop exercising should their condition deteriorate.

Cheng also defended the Health Bureau's decision to not include cough syrup and related medications in the anti-Covid-19 pack. He said that cough medications can be harmful to some people, and that such medications may be inappropriate for those with non-productive coughs. Those who need it may visit the Covid-19 community outpatient clinic for consultation.

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# Ctrip: Macau most popular among travel destinations

ANTHONY LAM

A tourism portal in China has recorded 10 times more searches year-on-year after Covid measures were loosened, with Macau topping the list of intended destinations.

Half an hour after Beijing relaxed Covid-19 restrictions on mainland China, Ctrip, the mainland version of travel portal Trip.com, received a skyrocketing number of queries regarding traveling outside the mainland.

The number of searches for air tickets to non-mainland destinations and hotels also reached a three-year peak, as revealed by a report by local media outlet Macao Daily News.

The tourism portal identified searches related to travel destinations that were popular among mainland tourists before the Covid-19 pandemic. In the order of popularity, the top ten most popular destinations were



Macau, Hong Kong, Japan, Thailand, South Korea, the US, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and the UK.

The report added that although the actual number of

mainland residents who could conduct cross-border travel remained small, spending per head rose compared with pre-Covid times. Increases of 64% in air ticket sales and 40% in high-

-end hotel accommodation have been recorded.

Despite the promising results, Professor Samuel Tong Kai Chung, president of the Macau Institute of Management, does

not expect a quick rebound in the tourism industry in the coming year, according to another report by the Macao Daily News.

While Tong foresees economic recovery next year, it will take time for the workforce to recover in various industries. Confidence to travel will also take time to recover.

Following Beijing loosening its Covid-19 restrictions and the subsequent relaxation of measures in Macau, Tong commented that market confidence has started to improve. The confirmation of the six casino licenses will also bring confidence to investors.

Tong stated that travel for business and to visit friends and family was likely to resume the fastest, with leisure travel resuming later.

Travel will resume in younger generations first, with older adults to follow.

Based on these observations, Tong does not expect the local tourism market to see an immediate rebound, but rather, will gradually resume pre-Covid levels in 2024.

Moreover, Tong highlighted that various industries – in particular the tourism industry – will need time to get back on track in terms of resources and the workforce.

AD

Academic Year 2023/2024

## Central Registration for Children Entering Kindergarten for the First Time



**Aims:** To optimise schools' enrolment mechanism, simplify the procedures that parents complete for their children entering kindergarten for the first time and enable parents to confirm which school to enrol their children in as early as possible.  
**Eligibility:** Macao residents aged 3 by 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2023, who will enrol in infant education in Macao for the first time.

### Timeline (Year 2023)

Enrolment information	Starting from 1 <sup>st</sup> January onwards, parents can consult the enrolment information on the DSEDJ website or school website.
Central Registration	Parents register on the DSEDJ website or at the DSEDJ counters Between 5 <sup>th</sup> and 16 <sup>th</sup> January.
Schools release the interview date and time	Between 17 <sup>th</sup> and 20 <sup>th</sup> February
School admission interviews	Between 1 <sup>st</sup> and 28 <sup>th</sup> March
Release of the admission list and the period for online confirmation	Release of the admission lists on the DSEDJ website and by schools 11 <sup>th</sup> April Parents can check the admission list and confirm one school to enrol their children on the DSEDJ website Between 11 <sup>th</sup> and 13 <sup>th</sup> April
Schools release the admission list of waitlisted students	From 14 <sup>th</sup> April onwards
Parents process enrolment/school transfer procedures in person	From 15 <sup>th</sup> April onwards (According to the period informed by schools) Admitted students must finish the registration procedure on or before 18 <sup>th</sup> April.
Enrolment at other schools	If a child has not yet been admitted to any school by 19 <sup>th</sup> April, or parents want to enrol their child in another school, parents can visit the DSEDJ website to check the status of K1 places available at different schools, and go to the schools that still accept enrolment for enquiries and registration.

### Gentle Reminder:

- To enrol in Macao schools, non-Macao residents must possess a stay or residence permit for over 90 days issued by the authorised entity of the Macao SAR. Parents must process the registration at any of the DSEDJ counters.
- Schools set no limit to the number of registrants and interviews. There is also no priority for early registration in the Central Registration system. Therefore, parents do not need to rush to be the first to register.
- Parents only need to bring the identification document(s)/ first-time enrolment QR code of their children to the school to process enrolment or school transfer procedure according to the requirement of the schools.
- The DSEDJ will provide "Service of consultation and arrangement of school places" to parents who are in need.

For enquiries: 8397 2309  
For details, please browse DSEDJ website: [www.dsedj.gov.mo](http://www.dsedj.gov.mo)



### ECOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT IN GBA HAS 'STEADILY IMPROVED'

The Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) released a series of reports Tuesday stating the ecological environment in the three urban clusters of Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei, Yangtze River Delta and Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area has steadily improved. Atmospheric and water quality has improved significantly, resource and energy efficiency has increased, while pollutant emissions have dropped. The reports also show that the total amount of freshwater in China's lakes and reservoirs has increased significantly.

### FAST CHANNELS TO SARs RESUME OPERATIONS

Fast channels at ports adjacent to Hong Kong and Macau will return normal operations, as China optimizes immigration administration policies and measures from Jan. 8, in compliance with the country's downgraded Covid-19 response. The National Immigration Administration issued a notice Tuesday, saying the optimized policies and measures include the resumption of accepting and approving Chinese citizens' applications for ordinary passports for the purposes of tourism and visiting friends abroad, starting from Jan. 8. The notice also listed several facilitation measures that will continue to be implemented, including green passages at airports for key cargo flights, fast channels at land ports, and immigration inspection stations for vehicles carrying key supplies.

### GAMING

# JUNKETS TO GUARANTEE GOV'T WITH MOP1.5M IN LEGAL OVERHAUL

LYNZY VALLES

**G**AMING promoters, more commonly known as junket operators, will be required to pay MOP1.5 million to have their licenses renewed from January 1. The day marks the gaming sector's entry into a new year, following the largest gaming law overhaul.

According to a dispatch issued yesterday, those who are acquiring a new license will also be required to pay the same amount.

In the dispatch, the Secretary for Economy and Finance has stipulated that the deposits to be provided by junkets, junket collaborators, and gaming management companies will be set at MOP1.5 million, MOP500,000 and MOP1.5 million respectively.

Junket operators are



companies that lure high rollers to gamble in the city, and have accounted for some 75% of Macau's roughly USD3 billion in annual VIP gaming revenue before the gaming crackdown and

the pandemic.

Junkets have historically provided a service that is part upscale travel agent and part money changer for big spenders in Macau.

The deposits of these

companies serve as a guarantee that they comply with their legal obligations and will pay any fines that may arise because of their activities.

Earlier this month, the law governing gaming activities in casinos, also known as the 'junkets law,' passed unanimously at the Legislative Assembly (AL).

The bill establishes new requirements stipulating that gaming promoters may only work with one gaming concessionaire at a time. Even so, this contract requires approval by the local government, among other requirements.

In another dispatch, the Secretary for Economy and Finance ruled that gaming promoters' commissions cannot exceed the limit of 1.25% of the net amount of the conversion of gambling chips (net rolling), whatever the calculation basis for converting the gambling chips.

For the purposes of determining this amount, any advantages or gifts offered or provided in the SAR or abroad, directly or indirectly, are considered commissions and calculated accordingly.

AD

COMEÇO AUSPICIOSO  
Tradições do Festival da Primavera na Cidade Proibida

17/12 2022  
5/3 2023

AUSPICIOUS BEGINNING  
Spring Festival Traditions in the Forbidden City

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EMPLOYMENT

# Integrated resorts looking for staff via Manila agency

LYNZY VALLES

**A** recruitment agency in the Philippines has posted new job alerts for positions in the city's integrated resorts, signaling renewed need for staff in the sector following layoffs caused by the pandemic since 2020.

On a social media post, Ikon Solutions Asia, Inc. featured job postings for bartenders, bell attendants, room attendants and welcome ambassadors for the five-star casino resorts in Macau.

Salaries for the bartenders and bell attendants are USD1,375 and USD1,250 with positions to fill at Galaxy Macau, according to the post.

The recruitment agency has advertised that it has partnered with all the six operators and deployed over 15,000 Filipino workers to Macau.

Thousands of non-resident workers have not had their contracts renewed within Macau's big six, due to the tourism drought caused by the pandemic restrictions, as well as the furlough of many local residents.

The lay-offs of many residents also came amid pressure from the government, which reiterated its promise to prioritize the employment of local



residents over migrant workers.

Among other requirements, applicants must have at least one year of relevant experience in branded hotels, with a minimum height requirement for male bell attendants.

In a separate post, the agency noted it was looking for assistant concierge service supervisors, chefs, lifeguards, and kitchen helpers, among others.

Earlier this year, a gaming consultant forecasted that staff shortages would affect the casino industry once the economy returned to normal and recommended that operators have a clear plan for reemploying staff.

Andrew Klebanow, co-founder and senior partner of C3 Gaming, said that Las Vegas has experienced staff shortages following casino closures during the

peak of the pandemic.

In a previous online seminar of the French Chamber of Commerce (FMCC) titled "The Road to Macau Tourism Recovery," the gaming consultant said that not only were there staff shortages in the hospitality industry, but across all sectors of the economy.

"You need to plan for this. What is it going to take to get these employees back and get them back in a hurry when business kicks in? Because you will find yourself not getting the hotel rooms done on time, and failing to get people into the restaurants," Klebanow said.

Macau has gradually opened its borders, dropping its adherence to the zero-Covid policy that saw border closures from March 2020 to deter the spread of the coronavirus. The SAR has opened its borders two

and a half years later but only to 41 countries.

The long-awaited reopening did not include Indonesia, Philippines and Myanmar, the sources of most migrant workers in the region.

Last month, the government reduced requirements for non-resident workers, stating that from Nov. 13, those returning to Macau with a "Residence Authorization" or blue card, and those who have been granted a "Special Authorization to Stay" for family members of professional non-resident workers or non-resident students will not need to acquire an entry permit from the Health Bureau (SSM) for an entry permit.

Meanwhile, the Times sought a comment from the Manila-based recruitment agency but no reply was given by press time.

# Film association calls for competition entries

**T**he annual Macau Films and Videos Panorama (MFVP) is calling for entries from now until Jan. 20.

The event is organized by the Audio-Visual Cut Association and subsidized by the government's Cultural Development Fund. Local film makers can enter the contest and subsequently be showcased.



The MFVP is calling for local filmmakers to submit feature length films and short films from all genres, produced between January

2021 and December 2022. Shortlisted works will partake in the "Made in Macau" screening.

In addition to having their films

screened publicly and being invited to participate in a post-screening symposium, filmmakers may also win a Grand Jury Prize,

selected by a jury of industry veterans from the region. The winner will be awarded a trophy and a cash prize of MOP10,000.

A special "Audience Choice Award" will be established, with the winner receiving a trophy and a MOP 5,000 prize.

Shortlisted films will be screened in March 2023.

According to the organizing body, the event is held to promote local films and to discover more potential Macau video works and talents. **AL**

ADVERTORIAL

# GREAT TIMES

## Majestic Affair at MGM's Imperial Court

Nestled in MGM MACAU's VIP Lobby, which resembles a garden with colossal emerald walls and gold-leaf ceiling to mimic the golden sunlight, Imperial Court greets its guests with a feast for the eyes – stunning floral arrangement, art installations, and auspicious clouds patterned carpet. In the center of the dining room stands a marble column of a masterfully carved dragon, which symbolizes power and good fortune, both are attributes fit for the majestic crowd. Inspired by its name, the interior design recreates a dining experience that fuses millennia-old culinary treasure that is elevated with contemporary twists to tempt modern-day gourmands.



Surrounding the grand dining room are six private dining rooms made for all occasions. Each private dining room adopts a color theme that is reflected through a Liuli centerpiece, showpieces and graceful carpets. Spaces are partitioned with hidden floor-to-ceiling dividers, creating the perfect intimate space for guests to discover the true gems of Lingnan delights.

As an indispensable part of the dining table, the double boiled "Braised Abalone and Shredded Chicken with Saffron Chicken Broth" would be a great staple to start the meal. It unleashes all the premium ingredients' essences, including fresh South African abalone, pork knuckle, chicken and king oyster mushroom, double-boiled for 7 hours to stimulate the palate with nourishing spoonful, one after another. For enquiries and reservations, please visit [www.mgm.mo](http://www.mgm.mo) or call (853) 8802 2361.



THE END OF ZERO

# CHINA TO RESUME ISSUING PASSPORTS, VISAS AS VIRUS CURBS EASE

JOE MCDONALD, BEIJING

CHINA says it will resume issuing passports for tourism in another big step away from anti-virus controls that isolated the country for almost three years, setting up a potential flood of Chinese going abroad for next month's Lunar New Year holiday.

The announcement this week adds to abrupt changes that are rolling back some of the world's strictest anti-virus controls as President Xi Jinping's government tries to reverse an economic slump. Rules that confined millions of people to their homes kept China's infection rate low but fueled public frustration and crushed economic growth.

The latest decision could send free-spending Chinese tourists to revenue-starved destinations in Asia and Europe for Lunar New Year, which begins Jan. 22 and usually is the country's busiest travel season. But it also presents a danger they might spread COVID-19 as infections surge in China.

Japan, India, South Korea and Taiwan have responded to the wave of infections by requiring virus tests for visitors from China.

China stopped issuing visas to foreigners and passports to its own people at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020.

The National Immigration Administration of China said it will start taking applications Jan. 8 for passports for tourists to go abroad.

The agency said it will take applications to extend, renew or



reissue visas but gave no indication when they might be issued to first-time applicants.

China will "gradually resume" admitting foreign visitors, the agency said. It gave no indication when tourist travel from abroad might resume.

The changes will "create better conditions for orderly cross-border travel" and "bring more benefits to global economic development," said a foreign ministry spokesman, Wang Wenbin.

China will "work with all countries" to "restore safety and stability to global industrial and supply chains and promote world economic recovery,"

Wang said.

Health experts and economists expect the ruling Communist Party to keep limits on travel into China until at least mid-2023 while it carries out a campaign to vaccinate millions of elderly people. Experts say that is necessary to prevent a public health crisis.

During the pandemic, Chinese with family emergencies or work travel deemed important could obtain passports, but some students and businesspeople with visas to go to foreign countries were blocked by border guards from leaving. The handful of foreign businesspeople and others who were allowed

into China were quarantined for up to one week.

Before the pandemic, China was the biggest source of foreign tourists for most of its Asian neighbors and an important market for Europe and the United States.

The government has dropped or eased most quarantine, testing and other restrictions within China, joining the United States, Japan and other governments in trying to live with the virus instead of stamping out transmission.

Japan and India have begun requiring virus tests for travelers from China. South Korea tests all visitors with elevated tempera-

tures. South Korea says anyone who tests positive will be quarantined at home or in a hotel for a week.

South Korean officials said possible additional measures for arrivals from China will be announced Friday.

U.S. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity to relate internal discussions, said Washington is considering taking similar steps.

Taiwan yesterday announced visitors from China will be tested starting Jan. 1.

On Monday, the Chinese government said it would scrap quarantine requirements for travelers arriving from abroad, also effective Jan. 8. Foreign companies welcomed the change as an important step to revive slumping business activity.

Business groups have warned global companies were shifting investment away from China because foreign executives were blocked from visiting.

The American Chamber of Commerce in China says more than 70% of companies that responded to a poll this month expect the impact of the latest wave of outbreaks to last no more than three months, ending in early 2023.

The government has stopped reporting nationwide case numbers but announcements by some cities indicate at least tens and possibly hundreds of millions of people might have been infected since the surge began in early October.

Experts have forecast 1 million to 2 million deaths in China through the end of 2023.

Also Monday, the government downgraded the official seriousness of COVID-19 and removed it from a list of illnesses that require quarantine. It said authorities would stop tracking close contacts and designating areas as being at high or low risk of infection. **MDT/AP**

HONG KONG

# SAR scraps vaccine pass, Covid-19 tests for travelers

HONG KONG will scrap some of its COVID-19 restrictions, including PCR tests for inbound travelers and vaccination requirements to enter certain venues, the city's leader said yesterday.

For most of the pandemic, Hong Kong has aligned itself with China's "zero-COVID" strategy, requiring stringent COVID-19 tests and isolation for close contacts of infected cases as well as for incoming travelers.

But the mainland has relaxed measures in recent weeks, and Hong Kong is preparing for the January reopening of its border with China, which had previously imposed harsh restrictions and snap lockdowns to stamp out the virus.

"Our society as a whole has built an extensive and high-level barrier of immunity (to COVID-19)," said Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee at a news conference. Over 80% of the city has at least

three doses of COVID-19 vaccine.

Close contacts of those who test positive for COVID-19 will also no longer need to isolate in Hong Kong, he said, and there will no longer be a limit on the number of diners per table at restaurants. The relaxed measures will take effect from today.

Masks, however, will still need to be worn in public unless residents are exercising, as doing away with masks may lead to a surge in respi-

ratory diseases like influenza just as Hong Kong faces a seasonal surge of flu cases, said Secretary of Health Lo Chung-mau at the news conference.

In September, Hong Kong did away with quarantine requirements for arriving travelers as it sought to boost tourism after over two years of entry restrictions.

Starting Jan. 8, China will no longer require inbound travelers to quarantine, authorities said earlier this week. **MDT/AP**



HYUNG-JIN KIM, SEOUL

**NORTH KOREA**

**N**ORTH Korean leader Kim Jong Un presented new plans to further bolster his military power next year at a meeting of top political officials, state media reported yesterday, in an indication he'll continue his provocative run of weapons displays.

Kim's statement came as animosities with rival South Korea rose sharply this week with the South accusing the North of flying drones across the border for the first time in five years. This year, North Korea already performed a record number of missile tests in what experts call an attempt to modernize its arsenal and increase its leverage in future dealings with the United States.

During the Tuesday session at the ongoing plenary meeting of the ruling Workers' Party, Kim analyzed new security challenges in international politics and on the Korean Peninsula and clarified principles and directions to take in external relations and fights against enemies to protect national interests and sovereignty, according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

Kim "set forth new key goals for bolstering the self-reliant defense capability to be pushed ahead in 2023 under the multilaterally changing situation," KCNA said, without elaborating.

Some observers say the new goals could be related to Kim's drive to expand his nuclear arsenal and acquire high-tech

# Kim lays out key goals to boost military power



weapons systems such as multi-warhead missiles, a more agile long-range weapon, a spy satellite and advanced drones. They say Kim would eventually aim to use his boosted nuclear power to force his rivals to accept the North as a legitimate nuclear state, a status he thinks is essential in getting international sanctions lifted.

On Monday, South Korea's military fired warning shots and

launched fighter jets and helicopters, after detecting what it called five North Korean drones that violated the South's airspace. South Korea also flew three drones across the border in response, Defense Minister Lee Jong-Sup told lawmakers yesterday.

The military apologized for failing to shoot down the drones and President Yoon Suk Yeol called for stronger air defenses and high-tech stealth drones to bet-

ter monitor North Korea.

In a meeting with his advisers, Yoon said South Korea must resolutely retaliate against any provocation by North Korea, saying that will be the most powerful means to deter the North. Yoon also said South Korea must not be intimidated by North Korea's nuclear weapons, according to his spokesperson, Kim Eun-hye.

Some experts say the North Korean drone flights might have

been designed to test South Korean and U.S. readiness and nullify a previous inter-Korean agreement to reduce tensions at front-line areas. They say North Korea likely assessed its drones as a cheap yet effective method to cause security jitters and a domestic divide in South Korea.

Yoon, a conservative who took office in May, said Tuesday that South Korea has had little anti-drone training since 2017, a year when his liberal predecessor Moon Jae-in was inaugurated. In an apparent effort to blame the allegedly lax air defenses on Moon's engagement policy toward North Korea, Yoon said, "I think our people must have seen well how dangerous a policy relying on the North's good faith and (peace) agreements would be."

Moon's liberal opposition Democratic Party accused the president of trying to shift blame.

Under a five-year arms buildup plan announced yesterday, South Korea's Defense Ministry said it'll push to bolster its so-called three-axis system — preemptive strike, missile defense and retaliatory attack capabilities — to cope with North Korean nuclear threats. To do so, it said it'll procure more stealth fighter jets and submarines capable of firing ballistic missiles, operate additional interceptor missiles and radars, and develop more powerful, precision-guided weapons.

It said South Korea will also procure diverse types of drones to strengthen its surveillance capacities. **MDT/AP**

**PHILIPPINES**

## Rain, flooding cause at least 25 deaths, damage

**T**HE death toll from heavy rains and floods that devastated parts of the Philippines over the Christmas weekend has risen to 25, with 26 others still missing, the national disaster response agency said yesterday.

Nearly 400,000 people were affected, with over 81,000 still in shelters and nine others injured, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council said.

Sixteen of the 25 deaths were reported in Northern Mindanao region in the south, while 12 of the 26 missing are from the eastern Bicol region, the council added.

A shear line — the point where warm and



An elderly is being carried by coast guard personnel wading through floodwaters in Plaridel, Misamis Occidental province

cold air meet — triggered rains in parts of eastern, central and southern Philippines, the state weather bureau PAGASA said.

The weather disturbance disrupted Christmas celebration in affected provinces, with photos from the southern

province of Misamis Occidental showing rescuers carrying an elderly woman on a plastic chair as they waded through a flooded street. Some residents in the province were seen hanging on to floaters as coast guard rescuers pulled them across chest-deep flood

using a rope.

The disaster management council said 1,196 houses were damaged by the floods, while sections of 123 roads and 12 bridges were affected. Some areas remain without power or water supply.

While the effect of the shear line has weakened, a new low pressure area may bring moderate to heavy rains within the next 24 hours to the same areas affected by the Christmas weekend floods. The weather bureau said Wednesday that flooding and landslides are likely, especially in areas with significant prior rainfall.

Each year about 20 typhoons and storms batter the Philippines, one of the world's most disaster-prone countries. The archipelago is located on the "Ring of Fire" along the Pacific Ocean's rim, where many volcanic eruptions and earthquakes occur. **MDT/AP**

**THAILAND**

## IRISH TOURIST DIES IN FALL FROM MOVING TRAIN

**A**n Irish national taking a tour in western Thailand died Tuesday after falling out of a moving train, police said.

The man was identified as 45-year-old Patrick Ward, whose Irish passport said he was born in New Zealand. His current place of residence was not immediately known, but he entered Thailand on Monday on a tourist visa.

Police said Ward traveled Tuesday by rail with a tour group from the capital, Bangkok, to Kanchanaburi town, where the bridge over the River Kwai, made famous in the movie about the railway constructed by forced labor under Japanese WWII occupation, is located. After a brief stop, the group proceeded to Sai Yok

waterfall, another popular tourist destination.

Police Maj. Kiatisak Kerdchok of the Sai Yok police said that according to witnesses, when the train slowed down at a scenic spot, Ward opened a door in the carriage and fell 7-8 meters (yards) down a slope.

He did not confirm reports in Thai media that Ward was trying to take a selfie when the accident occurred just before noon.

Police found Ward's body at the scene with wounds but none that suggested foul play.

Kiatisak said a full autopsy would be conducted Wednesday in Bangkok, and fellow members of the tour group questioned. **MDT/AP**

PUTIN'S WAR

# Ukraine aims to develop air-to-air combat drones: minister

HANNA ARHIROVA, KYIV

**U**KRAINE has bought some 1,400 drones, mostly for reconnaissance, and plans to develop combat models that can attack the exploding drones Russia has used during its invasion of the country, according to the Ukrainian government minister in charge of technology.

In an interview this week with The Associated Press, Minister of Digital Transformation Mykhailo Fedorov described Russia's war in Ukraine as the first major war of the internet age. He credited drones and satellite internet systems like Elon Musk's Starlink with having transformed the conflict.

Ukraine has purchased drones like the Fly Eye, a small unmanned aerial vehicle used for intelligence, battlefield surveillance and reconnaissance.

"And the next stage, now that we are more or less equipped with reconnaissance drones, is strike drones," Fedorov said. "These are both exploding drones and drones that fly up to three to 10 kilometers and hit targets."

He predicted "more missions with strike drones" in the future, but would not elaborate. "We are talking there about drones, UAVs, UAVs that we are developing in Ukraine. Well, anyway, it will be the next step in the development of technologies," he said.

Russian authorities have alleged several Ukrainian drone strikes on its military bases in recent weeks, including one on Monday in which they said Russian forces shot down a drone approaching the Engels airbase located more than 600 kilometers from the Ukrainian border.

Russia's military said debris killed three service members but no aircraft were damaged. The base houses Tu-95 and Tu-160 nuclear-capable strategic bombers that have been involved in launching strikes on Ukraine.

Ukrainian authorities have never formally acknowledged carrying out such drone strikes, but they have made cryptic allusions to



Mykhailo Fedorov, Ukrainian minister of digital transformation, poses for a photo illuminated by a lamp in the shape of a Ukrainian trident, a national symbol

how Russia might expect retaliation for its war in Ukraine, including within Russian territory.

Ukraine is carrying out research and development on drones that could fight and down other drones, Fedorov said. Russia has used Iranian-made Shahed drones for its airstrikes in Ukrainian territory in recent weeks, in addition to rocket, cruise missile and artillery attacks.

"I can say already that the situation regarding drones will change drastically in February or March," he said.

Fedorov sat for an interview in his bright and modern office. Located inside a staid ministry building, the room contained a vinyl record player, history books stacked on shelves and a treadmill.

The minister highlighted the importance of mobile communications for both civilian and military purposes during the war and said the most challenging places to maintain service have been in the Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Odesa and Kyiv regions in the center and east of the country.

He said there are times when fewer than half of mobile phone towers are functioning in the capital, Kyiv, because Russian airstrikes have destroyed or damaged

the infrastructure that power them.

Ukraine has some 30,000 mobile-phone towers, and the government is now trying to link them to generators so they can keep working when airstrikes damage the power grid.

The only alternative, for now, is satellite systems like Starlink, which Ukrainians may rely on more if blackouts start lasting longer.

"We should understand that in this case, the Starlinks and the towers, connected to the generators, will be the basic internet infrastructure," Fedorov said.

Many cities and towns are facing power cuts lasting up to 10 hours. Fedorov said Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed a decree that instructs mobile phone companies to ensure they can provide signals without electricity for at least three days.

Meanwhile, with support from its European Union partners, his ministry is working to bring 10,000 more Starlink stations to Ukraine, with internet service made available to the public through hundreds of "Points of Invincibility" that offer warm drinks, heated spaces, electricity and shelter for people displaced by fighting or power outages.

Roughly 24,000 Starlink

stations already are in operation in Ukraine. Musk's company, SpaceX, began providing them during the early days of the war after Fedorov tweeted a request to the billionaire.

"I just stood there on my knees, begging them to start working in Ukraine, and promised that we would make a world record," he recalled.

Fedorov compared SpaceX's donation of the satellite terminals to the U.S.-supplied multiple rocket launchers in terms of significance for Ukraine's ability to mount a defense to Russia's invasion.

"Thousands of lives were saved," he said.

As well as the civilian applications, Starlink has helped front-line reconnaissance drone operators target artillery strikes on Russian assets and positions. Fedorov said his team is now dedicating 70% of its time to military technologies. The ministry was created only three years ago.

Providing the army with drones is among its main tasks.

"We need to do more than what is expected of us, and progress does not wait," Fedorov said, scoffing at Russian skill in the domain of drones. "I don't believe in their technological potential at all." MDT/AP

## this day in history

### 1975 NEW LAWS TO END BATTLE OF THE SEXES



Radical new legislation introducing a woman's right to equal pay and status in the workplace and in society have come into force in the UK.

The Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Acts will prevent women being paid less than their male counterparts. The Acts are being introduced to coincide with the end of the International Women's Year.

Sex discrimination by employers, unless they employ five or fewer people, is now illegal as is any form of bias by landlords, finance companies, schools and restaurants.

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) has been set up, and under the Act it has a duty to promote equality of the sexes.

Job advertisements will now have to be sexless and it will no longer be possible to offer a position exclusively for males or females.

In every day language there will be many changes for example, such as "firemen" becoming "fire fighters".

The impact of the Acts is far-reaching and affects the media and education.

The EOC has begun issuing guidelines to discourage advertisers showing women in stereotypical roles of domesticity or in submissive work.

But with no means of enforcing this there have been criticisms the organisation is toothless, although many advertisers have taken heed and plan to be more representative.

The Inner London Education Authority is already considering the replacement of "sexist" reading material which uphold stereotypes, for example a woman in the kitchen and a man at work.

These are currently not barred by the Acts but in a booklet sent to 13,000 head teachers, managers and governors of schools the authority recommends "myths and taboos" should be tackled.

Advisory panels of teachers are also considering lobbying authorities to make mathematics compulsory up to the fifth year in a move designed to help girls.

But the most poorly-paid women are unlikely to gain a lot from the new legislation the Low Pay Unit said in a report yesterday.

Despite the gradual introduction of equal pay until its final implementation today women's earnings have risen to only 55.5% of men's earnings from 51.1% in 1972.

Courtesy BBC News

## IN CONTEXT

The Sex Discrimination Act is applicable to men, women, and children of any age and also prohibits discrimination against someone who is or is not married.

The Act came as a culture shock to many in a society where some venues still barred women. Some employers attempted to circumvent the Equal Pay Act by changing women's job descriptions or employing women for roles in which there was no male equivalent position. But they faced fierce resistance from the authorities.

Many commentators said the combined Acts were too radical to introduce at once and public attitudes would need to change before they were readily implemented and this would take time. Twenty five years after its implementation a survey showed the Acts had helped close the pay difference in the gender gap from 40% less than male counterparts, to 20%.



**YOUR STARS**

**ARIES**  
Mar. 21-Apr. 19  
You will learn easily if you put forth an effort. Emotional up and downs have caused doubts in your personal life. Try looking into new ways to make extra money.

**TAURUS**  
Apr. 20-May. 20  
Hassles with close friends or family will put a damper on your day and result in isolation and loneliness. Keep calm. Someone around you is bouncing off the walls.

**GEMINI**  
May. 21-Jun. 21  
You won't have much time for your mate today. Your stubbornness coupled with your mate's jealousy don't make for a favorable time. Your relationship is undergoing some changes.

**CANCER**  
Jun. 22-Jul. 22  
Equilibrium in your romantic life is likely if you treat your partner well. Your anger may be impossible to contain if you get into debates with family members.

**LEO**  
Jul. 23-Aug. 22  
Double check your work and be sure that your boss is in a good mood before you do your presentation. You will have to control the way you feel. You may be sensitive concerning friends and their situations.

**VIRGO**  
Aug. 23-Sep. 22  
Be sure to use your charm and diplomacy when dealing with potential new clients. You will be in the mood for competition, and your ability to lead a group will bring you popularity.

**LIBRA**  
Sep. 23-Oct. 22  
Don't make a move; your confusion has caused this dilemma and you are best to back away and reassess the situation. You can expect changes at your work place.

**SCORPIO**  
Oct. 23-Nov. 21  
You may find acquaintances being deceptive. If you have treated them equitably, you might be able to count on their loyalty. Be cautious while traveling to foreign countries.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Nov. 22-Dec. 21  
Don't allow your lover to take advantage of your good nature. Don't let the moods of those you live with get you down. Elders may get you going today.

**CAPRICORN**  
Dec. 22-Jan. 19  
Unexpected changes in friendships could occur. Catch up on overdue paperwork. Put your time and energy into home improvement.

**AQUARIUS**  
Jan. 20-Feb. 18  
You can make money if you're willing to push your ideas on those in a position to support your efforts. Your communication skills may win you points.

**PISCES**  
Feb. 19-Mar. 20  
Talk to an older family member you have helped in the past. Travel is evident, but be cautious while in transit. Educational pursuits should help you develop your hobbies.

**The Born Loser by Chip Sansom**



**SUDOKU**

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

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

**WEATHER**

	MIN	MAX	CONDITION
<b>CHINA</b>			
Beijing	-8	3	fine
Changchun	-21	-11	fine
Chengdu	4	9	cloudy
Chongqing	6	10	overcast
Fuzhou	11	14	overcast
Guangzhou	9	17	overcast
Guiyang	-1	1	overcast
Haikou	15	19	cloudy
Hangzhou	3	6	rain
Harbin	-22	-11	fine
Hefei	-3	7	overcast
Nanjing	0	8	cloudy
Shanghai	5	8	cloudy
Taipei	15	16	rain
Wuhan	-1	9	cloudy
Hong Kong	13	20	overcast
<b>WORLD</b>			
Moscow	-5	-3	snow
Frankfurt	4	11	showers
Paris	6	11	overcast
London	6	9	overcast
New York	2	8	overcast

**CROSSWORDS**

ACROSS 1- Joins; 6- CPR experts; 10- Possesses; 13- Really bother; 14- Still life subject; 15- Soft shoes; 16- Very hard mineral; 17- Bibliography abbr.; 18- Poker stake; 19- Show to a table; 20- Knotty; 22- Strikes; 24- Takes by theft; 28- Enough; 31- Old French expression meaning "goodbye"; 32- Part of Hispaniola; 34- Diamond authority; 36- Sign; 37- Embrace; 38- Confide; 41- Unit of energy; 42- One of the Baldwins; 44- One of the Gershwins; 45- Some locks; 47- Capital on the Red River; 49- One of the Furies; 51- Sagacious; 53- Intones; 56- Flair; 59- Jets or Sharks; 61- Word that can precede hygiene, tradition and agreement; 64- Switch back?; 65- Lute of India; 66- White House staffer; 67- House rodents; 68- Honshu port; 69- Rock's \_\_\_ Fighters; 70- Tibetan oxen; 71- Cut into small pieces;

DOWN 1- Goes out with; 2- Chair designer Charles; 3- Starters; 4- Cocktail; 5- Porcine pad; 6- Nevertheless; 7- First name in spydom; 8- Nicholas II was the last Russian one; 9- Vends; 10- Sweetie; 11- Do one's part?; 12- Wind dir; 15- Got by; 20- Third sign of the zodiac; 21- JFK posting; 23- Carry; 25- Actress Anouk; 26- Ogles; 27- Had the mic, say; 29- Bucolic; 30- Flightless bird; 32- Hawaiian dances; 33- Representative; 35- Human mind; 37- Gag reflex?; 39- Musical syllable; 40- See yal; 43- Pair; 46- Not so short; 48- Give \_\_\_ rest; 50- Resounds; 52- Antagonist; 54- Golden Horde member; 55- Reptile; 57- Type of song, to be sung solo; 58- Rooster; 60- Diploma holder; 61- Bumbler; 62- \_\_\_ Grande; 63- Flurry; 65- Distress call;

**Thursday's solution**

FORM	ALOHA	QI	ST
ALIA	LABEL	ERNE	
IPOL	WING	MOAN	
RETAIN	SAVINGS		
POE	SS	FEON	
ARLES	SSS	OIETS	
SAAR	ATTACK	TOE	
HISTORIO	GRAPHER		
ESS	VIRAGO	SORT	
NAOMI	STY	BASRA	
MISLEAG	PROMISE		
ACTA	LOTS	AINLY	
REED	ODIST	STAR	
ESPY	NOLTE	TOME	

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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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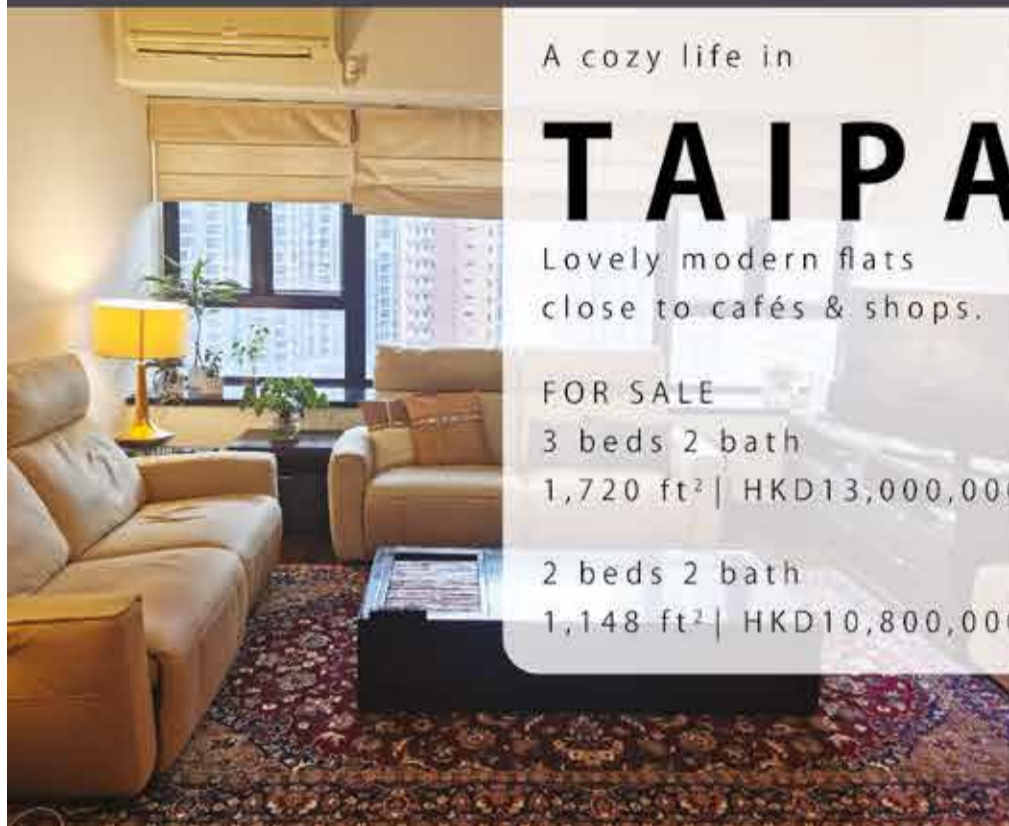
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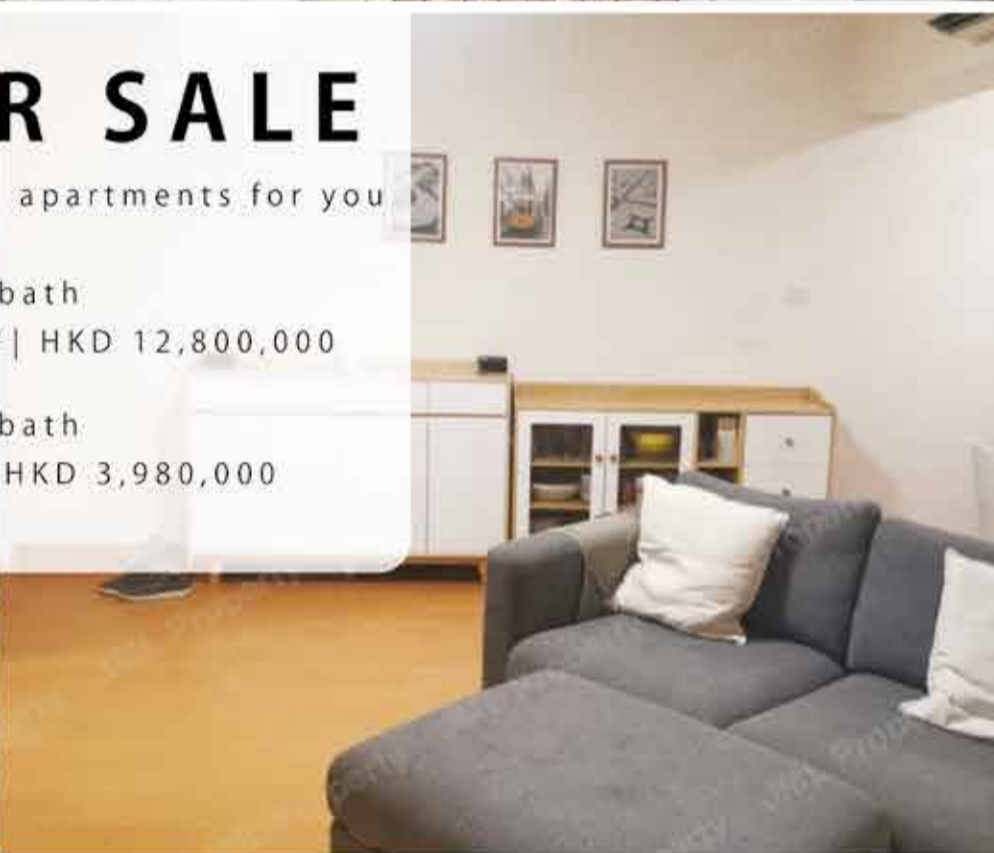
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**FOOTBALL**

# Man United beats Forest, but Ten Hag wants a new striker

JAMES ROBSON,  
MANCHESTER

**MAN U 3, NOTTINGHAM 0**

**A**S Erik ten Hag confirmed Manchester United's ongoing search for a new striker, his existing ones made up for Cristiano Ronaldo's departure in a 3-0 win against Nottingham Forest yesterday [Macau time].

Marcus Rashford and Anthony Martial struck first-half goals in the game at Old Trafford as United moved to within a point of fourth-place Tottenham.

However, if United's manager is to guide his team to a top-four finish in his first season at the club, he is likely to need more firepower to cover the exit of Ronaldo, who had his contract terminated last month.

Substitute Fred completed the scoring in the 87th minute



Manchester United's head coach Erik ten Hag applauds to fans after the English Premier League soccer match between Manchester United and Nottingham Forest at Old Trafford

— but Ten Hag was frustrated by a host of missed opportunities.

"We have to score more goals," he said. "We created so many chances and it takes us just before the end to score the third goal. We need to take this moment earlier."

Rashford struck his 10th goal of the season and Martial scored his fifth in only five starts to highlight their potential as a partnership.

But Ronaldo's exit following his explosive interview with Piers Morgan has left Ten Hag with limited options in attack.

United was linked with a move for Netherlands international Cody Gakpo, who was one of the standout performers at the World Cup. However, PSV Eindhoven announced it had agreed to sell the forward to United's top-four rival Liverpool.

"I don't talk about individual cases. We are looking for offensive players, we are looking for a striker," Ten Hag said. "It would be good because of all the games coming, we are playing every third day and it is tough. I think we are always in the market, but it has to match the sporting criteria, but also the financial criteria.

"We do what we can to bring in any player we can."

United's attempts to bring in a top quality forward in January could be hindered by the potential sale of the club after owners, the Glazers, confirmed their willingness to consider giving up control.

It is possible Ten Hag could have to explore a loan move to help bolster his forward line.

"For the progress of the team we need to be more clinical, our players can score, you can see that," he said. "Martial is a goalscorer, Rashford is a goalscorer, Bruno (Fernandes) will score goals. We have a lot of players who can score goals but we have got to be ruthless."

Rashford's form is one source of encouragement. He has now doubled his total of five goals from last season.

His most prolific campaign came in 2019-20 when he hit 22 goals for United.

Martial has failed to live up to the expectations he arrived with since signing from Monaco in 2015, with fitness issues hampering his progress.

Ten Hag will have to hope both players can maintain their fitness and form in the second half of the campaign if United is to secure a Champions League finish.

Chelsea is also hoping to break into the top four and ended a three-game losing streak by beating Bournemouth 2-0.

Chelsea had lost four of its previous five games in all competitions before the World Cup and had been winless in its previous five Premier League games. **MDT/AP**

AD

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OPINION

China Daily  
 Editorial, China Daily

NEW STAGE FOR CONTROL OF COVID-19

Starting from Jan 8 next year, COVID-19 will be managed as a Category B infectious disease rather than as Category A, the National Health Commission said in a statement issued on late Monday. This is indeed an important adjustment following the loosening of the tight prevention and control measures.

It was responsible of the Chinese government to classify COVID-19 as a Category B infectious disease like HIV, viral hepatitis and H7N9 bird flu, in January 2020, after it was confirmed it could spread between humans. And it was also responsible of the government to manage it under Category A disease protocols, like bubonic plague and cholera, as there was still a lot to learn about the virus and its pathogenicity was strong and so was the fatality rate for those infected.

Category A protocols gave local governments the power to place the infected and their contacts under quarantine and lockdown areas where there was a cluster of infections. There is no denying that the tight control and prevention measures such as the checking of nucleic acid test results for those entering public venues and the closed management of neighborhoods effectively protected the majority of residents from being infected, and therefore lowered the fatality rate of the disease by a considerable margin.

However, it is impossible for such management measures to last given the toll they were taking on the economy and social activities, and there was no reason to continue these measures when the Omicron variant of the virus has strong transmissibility but weak pathogenicity and a much lower fatality rate.

But what local authorities should be reminded of is the fact that this shift of policy does not mean reduced responsibility on their part for the management of the epidemic, but rather a change of focus.

They will have to do an even better job in ensuring there is an adequate supply of medical services and materials and enough care for vulnerable groups such as the elderly. Relevant departments still need to monitor the mutation of the virus and keep the public informed about the developments of the epidemic.

The shift of policy means a long-anticipated green light has been given to normalize cross-border exchanges of people and production factors. That will greatly expand the space for the recovery of the economy by presenting foreign businesses with the opportunities of one of the largest consumer markets that has effectively remained untapped for three years, as well as domestic export enterprises with a wider access to the foreign market. Tourism, education and cultural exchanges will also receive a shot in the arm, reviving related sectors.

China has met the right conditions for downgrading the management of COVID-19 and putting an end to measures such as large-scale lockdowns and movement restrictions. The virus hasn't been eradicated but its control is now under the aegis of the medical system. It is time to move forward.

A 97-year-old woman is appealing her conviction in Germany of being an accessory to more than 10,000 murders when she was a secretary to the commander of the Nazis' Stutthof concentration camp during World War II.

In a Dec. 20 verdict, the Itzehoe state court gave Irmgard Furchner a two-year suspended sentence for being an accessory to murder in 10,505 cases and an accessory to attempted murder in five cases. The court said yesterday that both the defense and a lawyer for a co-plaintiff filed appeals to the Federal Court of Justice.

It wasn't immediately clear when the federal court will consider

the case.

Furchner was accused of being part of the apparatus that helped the camp near Danzig, now the Polish city of Gdansk, function between June 1943 and April 1945.

The case relied on a German legal precedent established over the last decade that allows anyone who helped Nazi death camps and concentration camps function to be prosecuted as an accessory to the murders committed there, even without evidence of participation in a specific killing.

Defense lawyers had sought Furchner's acquittal.

AP PHOTO



Pope Francis (left) embraces Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, at the Vatican in June 2017

VATICAN SAYS HEALTH OF RETIRED POPE BENEDICT XVI 'WORSENING'

FRANCES D'EMILIO, VATICAN CITY

THE health of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI has worsened due to his age, and doctors are constantly monitoring the 95-year-old's condition, the Vatican said yesterday.

Vatican spokesperson Matteo Bruni said Pope Francis, who asked the faithful earlier to pray for Benedict, went to visit his predecessor in the monastery on Vatican grounds where the retired pontiff has lived since retiring in February 2013.

"Regarding the health conditions of the emeritus pope, for whom Pope Francis asked for prayers at the end of his general audience this morning, I can confirm that in the last hours, a worsening due to advanced age has happened," Bruni said in a written statement.

"The situation at the moment remains under control, constantly monitored by doctors," according to the statement.

At the end of his custo-

mary yesterday audience with the public in a Vatican auditorium, Francis departed from his prepared remarks to say that Benedict is "very sick" and asked the faithful to pray for the retired pontiff.

Francis didn't elaborate on the condition of Benedict.

"I'd like to ask all of you for a special prayer for Emeritus Pope Benedict, who, in silence, is sustaining the church," Francis said in remarks near the end of an hour-long audience. "I remind you that he is very sick," Francis said.

"Let's ask the Lord to comfort him and sustain him in this testimony of love to the church to the very end," Francis said.

After the hour-long audience, "Pope Francis went to the Mater Ecclesiae monastery to visit Benedict XVI. Let us all unite with him in prayer for the emeritus pope," Bruni said.

Benedict, who was the first pontiff to resign in 600 years, has become increasingly frail in re-

cent years as he dedicated his post-papacy life to prayer and meditation.

When Benedict turned 95 in April, his longtime secretary, Archbishop Georg Gaenswein, said the retired pontiff was in good spirits, adding that "naturally he is physically relatively weak and fragile, but rather lucid."

Francis called on Benedict at the monastery four months ago. The occasion was Francis' latest ceremony elevating churchmen to cardinal rank, and the new "princes of the church" accompanied him for the brief greeting.

The Vatican released a photo at the time that showed a very thin-looking Benedict clasping a hand of Francis as they current and past pontiff smiled at each other.

In his first years of retirement, Benedict attended a couple of cardinal-elevating ceremonies in St. Peter's Basilica. But in recent years, he wasn't strong enough to attend the long service. MDT/AP

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El Salvador Nine months into a state of emergency declared by President Nayib Bukele (pictured) to fight street gangs, El Salvador has seen more than 1,000 documented human rights abuses and about 90 deaths of prisoners in custody. And Bukele's popularity ratings have soared. For decades, El Salvador's main street gangs, Barrio 18 and the MS-13, have extorted money from nearly everyone and taken violent revenge against those who don't pay.

AP PHOTO



Mexico's president appealed to the country's citizens not to accept holiday handouts and gifts from drug gangs, after videos posted online showed garish pickup trucks handing out loads of gifts while bystanders described the drivers as members of the Jalisco drug cartel. President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (pictured) confirmed that some drug gangs were looking to resume such giveaways — often seen years ago — to gain the support of the local population.

AP PHOTO



US Virgin Islands President Joe Biden traveled to a place very familiar to him — the U.S. Virgin Islands — to enjoy some downtime and warmer weather and to ring in a new year with family. The president and first lady Jill Biden, flew from Washington yesterday [Macau time] to St. Croix, one of three islands that make up the U.S. territory in the Caribbean. St. John and St. Thomas are the other two islands. The Bidens were joined by their daughter Ashley and her husband, Howard Krein, as well as grandchildren Natalie and Hunter, whose father was the president's late son, Beau.