



Joselito Adame, a Mexican bullfighter, performing at La Plaza México in Mexico City last Sunday. Bullfights have resumed after two years of legal challenges.

CHINA BUILDS UP NUCLEAR ARSENAL

Xi’s Fear and Ambition Shape His Strategy

By CHRIS BUCKLEY

TAIPEI, Taiwan — Nineteen days after taking power as China’s leader, Xi Jinping convened the generals overseeing the country’s nuclear missiles and issued a blunt demand. China had to be ready for possible confrontation with a formidable adversary, he said, signaling that he wanted a more potent nuclear capability to counter the threat.

Their force, he told the generals, was a “pillar of our status as a great power.” They must, Mr. Xi said, advance “strategic plans for responding under the most complicated and difficult conditions to military intervention by a powerful enemy,” according to an official internal summary of his speech in December 2012 to China’s nuclear and conventional missile arm, then called the Second Artillery Corps, which was verified by The New York Times.

Publicly, Mr. Xi’s remarks on nuclear matters have been sparse and formulaic. But his comments behind closed doors, revealed in the speech, show that anxiety and ambition have driven his transformative buildup of China’s nuclear weapons arsenal in the past decade.

From those early days, Mr. Xi signaled that a robust nuclear force was needed to mark China’s ascent as a great power. He also reflected fears that China’s relatively modest nuclear weaponry

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After 500 Years, Mexican Bullfighting Faces a Mortal Challenge

By JAMES WAGNER

MEXICO CITY — At 4:30 p.m., the near-capacity crowd of 42,000 people at La Plaza México started restlessly whistling. They had waited since May 15, 2022 — a period of 624 days of legal challenges — for bulls to return to the world’s largest bullfighting arena, only to face another delay because of the hundreds of protesters outside.

When the parade of the after-

noon’s three matadors and their bullfighting entourage finally emerged to salute the fans, the arena in Mexico City erupted. Then, at 4:58 p.m., the first bull charged out and raced around the ring.

Over the next two and a half hours last Sunday, fans cheered and jeered, shouted “olé,” smoked cigars, ate grilled meats and chips, drank beer and mezcal, and watched five bulls die with swords plunged into their spines.

Ethical and Legal Battle Over Animal Rights

“To see it here, the ‘olé’ and how the plaza rumbles, it’s indescribable,” said Erik Reyes, 30, a Mexico City resident who was in the stands.

Bullfighting, spread by Spain throughout its colonies in Latin America in the 1500s, has been at

the center of a major legal fight over its return to the largest bullfighting city in the world. That battle has come to symbolize a larger war between tradition and evolving views on animal cruelty.

The legal whiplash continued on Wednesday, when a judge temporarily suspended bullfighting at La Plaza México — only days after it had resumed. La Plaza México officials challenged the decision

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As Views Shift on Substance Use, So Does the Meaning of ‘Sober’

By ERNESTO LONDOÑO

Mike Reed, a musician and Uber driver in Arizona, said he quit drinking alcohol more than a decade ago when his roommates got so fed up with his unruly behavior that they threatened to kick him out.

Sobriety became such a core part of Mr. Reed’s identity that he launched an online dating website called “Single & Sober,” but in 2020, Mr. Reed, a Navy veteran, said he found himself struggling as his sister, who had Down syndrome, was dying of cancer.

Mr. Reed, 43, began smoking marijuana. More recently, he went to a clinic for infusions of ketamine, and tried tiny doses of psychoactive mushrooms. Mr. Reed said those substances improved his mood — and he still regards himself as sober, because he remains alcohol free.

Notions of what constitutes sobriety and problematic substance use have grown more flexible in recent years as younger Ameri-

cans have shunned alcohol in increasing numbers while embracing cannabis and psychedelics — a phenomenon that alarms some addiction experts.

Not long ago, sobriety was broadly understood to mean abstaining from all intoxicating substances, and the term was often associated with people who had overcome severe forms of addiction. These days, it is used more expansively, including by people who have quit drinking alcohol but consume what they deem moderate amounts of other substances, including marijuana and mushrooms.

“Just because someone has a drinking problem doesn’t mean they have a problem with every single thing,” Mr. Reed said.

As some drugs come to be viewed as wellness boosters by those who use them, adherence to the full abstinence model favored

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Grieving her husband’s overdose death, Tiffany Fede began using magic mushrooms and her view on full abstinence changed.

‘Curb’ Spun Gold Out of Gripes and Grievances

By JAMES PONIEWOZIK

At the end of his 1999 HBO special, “Larry David: Curb Your Enthusiasm,” David wraps up a stand-up comedy set by telling his audience he has no more material for them. “This is what happens when you run out of nothing,” he says.

The joke refers to the famous

description of “Seinfeld,” the sitcom that David created with Jerry Seinfeld, as “a show about nothing.” It is also a bit of a lie.

For starters, it was always misleading to say that “Seinfeld” was about nothing. Yes, it was militantly anti-message, building small-bore farces around four single, child-free New Yorkers who had an inordinate amount of time to sit in a diner. But its allergy to making statements

was a statement in itself; it made the show emblematic of the sanguine, end-of-history 1990s.

Second, David hadn’t really run out of anything. “Curb Your Enthusiasm,” the comedy of ill manners that emerged from David’s special, began on HBO in 2000. It has run off and on for nearly a quarter-century, and Season 12, beginning on Sunday, will be its last.

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Outcry Over a Cat? The Kremlin Will Allow It.

By ANATOLY KURMANAEV

The tragedy gripped Russia for days. Federal lawmakers convened a special committee and an investigation was launched, as hundreds of volunteers searched for the victim in subzero temperatures, and state news media ran live updates on the fallout.

Eventually, the victim — Twix the cat — was found dead.

A national outcry over the de-

mise of a pet who was mistakenly thrown from a long-distance train by an attendant has highlighted both the limits of and the demand for an emotional outlet in wartime Russia.

A national poll found that about two out of three Russians were familiar with Twix, a very high proportion in a country where people increasingly tune out negative news, like the war in Ukraine, according to Denis Volkov, director

of the country’s largest independent pollster, the Levada Center, which conducted the survey.

A combination of propaganda, a crackdown on dissent and public fatigue with the inconclusive war has turned internet curiosities into a focus of national attention for days, even weeks. Last month, a video of a Russian influencer tossing his 2-month-old baby in a snowbank in an apparent stunt re-

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Indian TV’s One-Man Show
The inauguration of a temple in Ayodhya was both religious ritual and made-for-television spectacle for Prime Minister Narendra Modi. **PAGE 4**

Milestone in Northern Ireland
The new leader in Belfast is a member of Sinn Féin, a party that was once the political arm of the I.R.A. **PAGE 6**

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Greatest Show on Turf II
The San Francisco 49ers come into the Super Bowl with a passing explosiveness that rivals the 1999 Rams. **PAGE 28**



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New York’s Special Election
Mazi Pilip, an Israeli military veteran vying for George Santos’s seat, makes Gaza a campaign cornerstone. **PAGE 21**

They Watched Him Die
Most of those who witnessed the first U.S. execution by nitrogen gas agreed: It didn’t go as Alabama promised. **PAGE 13**

ARTS & LEISURE

Envious of Netflix’s Gay Land
Watching queer coming-of-age movies and TV series has helped heal a heart still stuck in the past, when the world was less welcoming. **PAGE 6**

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Raptor on the Lam
Flaco the Owl fled the Central Park Zoo, and then made the rest of Manhattan his new home. So, just what has he been up to for the past year? **PAGE 1**

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SUNDAY STYLES

Beauty Contestant, Baby in Tow
Two weeks after giving birth to her eighth child, a social media star competed in the Mrs. World pageant. **PAGE 1**

A Bohemian Haven Remade
A timeline shows how the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn transformed into a big-money destination. **PAGE 10**

SUNDAY BUSINESS

He Lost the Lamborghini, Too
Ben Armstrong, better known as BitBoy, was once the most popular cryptocurrency YouTuber in the world. Now his empire, and his marriage, have collapsed. **PAGE 4**

The A.I. Whisperers
Many feared artificial intelligence would kill jobs. But hospitals, insurance companies and others are creating roles to navigate the technology. **PAGE 1**

