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## AMCM 'optimises' bond repurchase business, launches yuan swap

**Tony Wong**

The Macau Monetary Authority (AMCM) – the special administrative region's financial regulator – says that it has "optimised" Macau's bond repurchase business\*, including the launch of a specialised yuan swap facility.

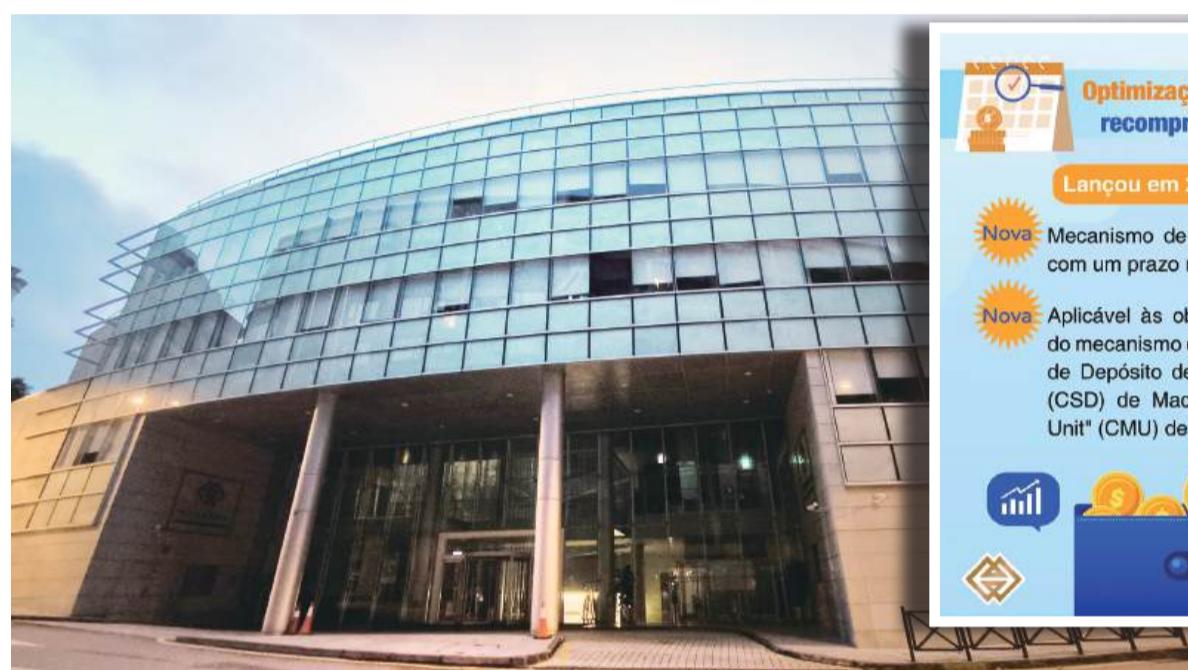
The optimised bond repurchase measures started on Friday.

An AMCM statement on Friday said that based on the recent expansion of the bilateral currency swap\*\* agreement between the People's Bank of China (PBOC) and AMCM to 50 billion yuan or 57 billion patacas, AMCM has launched an "optimised" bond repurchase and a specialised yuan swap facility, with the aim of fully leveraging the central government's policy support for Macau and promoting the local financial sector's effective use of the city's currency swap mechanism and fund management tools, thereby optimising their liquidity management.

AMCM signed a yuan-pataca swap agreement with PBOC – the nation's central bank – in December 2019, with a scale of 30 billion yuan or 34 billion patacas and a validity of three years, after which the agreement was renewed in December 2022, with the scale and validity unchanged.

In December last year, PBOC renewed the agreement with AMCM, upgrading it to a standing arrangement with indefinite validity and expanding the swap facility to 50 billion yuan or 57 billion patacas.

Friday's statement noted that AMCM



This file photo taken last year shows the AMCM headquarters on Guia Hill. – Photo: Tony Wong

launched Macau's bond repurchase business in early 2023, allowing the provision of liquidity in patacas and yuan to local banks, with eligible bonds used as the subject of repurchase.

The statement said that with the aim of supporting the development of the local money market and bond market, AMCM decided to launch yuan funding facilities with a relatively longer tenor for its bond repurchase business.

According to the statement, the optimised bond repurchase measures launched on Friday also include one allowing local banks to use eligible bonds transacted under the direct linkage between the Macau's Central Securities Depository (CSD) and Hong Kong's Central Moneymarkets Unit (CMU) to conduct repurchase operations, further enhancing the synergistic effects of the collaborative development between the two cities' bond markets.

*This poster provided by the Macau Monetary Authority (AMCM) explains its "optimised" bond repurchase.*

Moreover, the statement said, with the aim of diversifying the channels for local banks to obtain yuan funds, AMCM has also launched a specialised yuan swap facility denominated in HK dollars or US dollars, which, the statement said, can enhance liquidity in Macau's offshore yuan market and promote the stable development of yuan-related businesses in the local financial market.

*Continued on p.5*



## Maduro pleads not guilty in US court

**Ben Turner, Andrea Tosta and Patrick Fort**

NEW YORK – Deposed Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro pleaded not guilty to charges of narco-terrorism in a New York court yesterday, two days after being snatched by US forces in a stunning raid on his home in Caracas.

Maduro, 63, told a federal judge in Manhattan that he had been "kidnapped" from Venezuela and said "I'm innocent, I'm not guilty," US media reported.

"I'm still the president of my country," he was quoted as saying.

Maduro's wife Cilia Flores likewise pleaded not guilty.

The pair were abducted by US

commandos in the early hours of Saturday (local time) in an assault backed by warplanes and a heavy naval deployment.

In a series of shock announcements over the weekend, President Donald Trump declared that the United States is now running Venezuela with an eye to rebuilding and controlling its huge but decrepit oil industry.

Amid international alarm, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told an emergency UN Security Council meeting that there should be "respect for the principles of sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity."

Maduro became president in 2013, taking

over from his equally hardline socialist predecessor Hugo Chávez.

The end to a quarter century of leftist rule leaves Venezuela's approximately 30 million inhabitants facing uncertainty.

Yesterday, deputies in the Venezuelan parliament shouted "let's go Nico!" in support for the ousted leader.

For now, though, the Trump administration is indicating it wants continuity with the remainder of Maduro's entourage – provided they submit to US demands.

Interim president Delcy Rodríguez, who was Maduro's vice president, dropped an initially defiant posture on Sunday, saying

she was ready for "cooperation."

Trump has made clear there is no appetite for helping opposition candidates previously seen as the rightful winners of allegedly rigged elections to take power.

Venezuela has the world's largest proven oil reserves. However, the oil is difficult and expensive to produce and after years of international sanctions and mismanagement, the infrastructure is in poor shape.

On Sunday, Trump said communist Cuba was "ready to fall" and he repeated that Greenland, which is part of US ally Denmark, should be controlled by the United States. (More on pages 5, 6, 10 & 11)

*— AFP*

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**The Macau Post Daily**

### Xi meets Irish Taoiseach Martin

China is willing to strengthen strategic communication with Ireland, deepen political mutual trust and expand pragmatic cooperation to benefit the peoples of both countries, President Xi Jinping said yesterday.

*— Story on p. 6*

### Xi holds talks with ROK President Lee

President Xi Jinping held talks with President of the Republic of Korea (ROK) Lee Jae Myung in Beijing yesterday.

*— Story on p. 7*

### Tea leaf spill causes deadly multi-vehicle crash in Japan

Tea leaves spilled from a truck caused a multi-vehicle collision in Japan that killed one person and injured three others, local media reported.

*— Story on p. 8*

# Govt launches free nursery scheme for kids from vulnerable families

**Khalel Vallo**

The Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) announced yesterday that it has launched a scheme for families facing financial hardships to apply to use free day-care services for their children provided by government-subsidised privately-run nurseries, with the application process to start next Monday.

The bureau announced the scheme, officially known as "Free Nursery for Children from Vulnerable Families", in a statement yesterday.

The scheme will cover more than 30 privately-run nurseries the operations of which are subsidised by the government, according to the statement.

Only children who are local residents and aged under three are eligible for the scheme.

According to the statement, families meeting any of the five following criteria will be eligible to apply for the free day-care services for their children, namely 1) single-parent families; 2) families with at least one member with disabilities; 3) families with at least one member with a chronic illness; 4) grandparent-grandchild families (families with the children living only with their grandparents); and



*This poster provided by the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) yesterday promotes the recently launched "Free Nursery Scheme for Children from Families in Vulnerable Situations" with the registration process starting next Monday.*

5) families receiving IAS regular subsidies issued to financially disadvantaged households.

In addition to meeting any of these five criteria, applicants' eligibility is also subject to a household income threshold.

According to the statement, the total monthly income of the applicants' households must not exceed the prescribed limits, which vary according to household size, ranging from 19,975 patacas for a two-member household to 50,675 patacas for households with eight or more members.

Eligible families wishing to apply for the free services must fill in application forms on the IAS website between 9 a.m. next Monday and 6 p.m. on January 22.

After completing the application forms on the website, the statement said, the applicants must print and sign the form and submit it together with the copies of the required supporting documents to the bureau's headquarters, or one of its service centres across the city by 6 p.m. on January 23 at the latest.

The statement said that when the applicants submit their applications at one of the venues, they must also present the original documents for verification.

Details of the scheme and application requirements are available on the IAS website ([www.ias.gov.mo](http://www.ias.gov.mo)). Enquiries can be made by contacting the bureau's Children and Youth Service Division on 8399 7783 during office hours. ■

## Police nab 3 mainlanders for usury

**Ada Lei**

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested a woman and two men from the Chinese mainland on Saturday for usury, PJ spokesman Cheong Siu Keong said during a special press conference yesterday.



*Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the three hooded casino loan-sharking suspects to a PJ van outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday.*

*— Photo: Ada Lei*

Cheong identified the suspects as a 41-year-old male surnamed Cao, a 48-year-old male surnamed Yu and a 35-year-old female surnamed Cheng, all of whom claimed to be jobless.

According to Cheong, the police received a report of high-interest loan activities at a casino in Cotai on Saturday morning. Upon their arrival, the police caught the trio red-handed. They seized two smartphones and HK\$220,000 in chips from Yu, two smartphones, HK\$47,500 in cash, and HK\$29,000 in chips from Cheng, and one smartphone and HK\$400 in cash from Cao.

Cheong noted that a male gambler had previously met Cheng online through a social media platform during his visit to Macau on December 28. They agreed to "invest" together in gambling in a hotel guestroom in Cotai, contributing equally. Although no written agreement was signed, they agreed that Yu would be responsible for

placing bets and would take 20 percent of the respective betting amounts as "interest" for each winning round.

Cheong added that the victim and Yu each contributed HK\$700,000, totalling HK\$1.4 million for gambling on four occasions between December 30 and January 3. Yu placed the bets and extracted "interest", with the victim paying about HK\$400,000 in "interest", Cheong said.

The trio were transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, each facing a usury charge. ■

## Police bust fraud gang, seizing 128 bogus chips



*Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the four hooded fraud suspects to a PJ van outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday.*

*— Photo: Ada Lei*

**Ada Lei**

The Judiciary Police (PJ) apprehended a fraud gang on Saturday, arresting four men from the Chinese mainland for using counterfeit chips to defraud three gamblers out of HK\$210,000, PJ spokesman Cheong Siu Keong said during a special press conference yesterday.

Cheong identified the suspects as a 35-year-old male surnamed Lin, a 22-year-old male surnamed Jiang, a 35-year-old male surnamed Zhu, and a 35-year-old male surnamed Zhou, all of whom claimed to be jobless.

According to Cheong, the police received a report from a casino in Cotai on Saturday about a suspected fraud case. Lin used counterfeit chips while exchanging seven chips worth HK\$10,000 each with a male gambler. An argument ensued, which alerted casino security personnel. Meanwhile, the police received two additional reports from two other casinos in Cotai about two male gamblers attempting to exchange eight and 10 chips, respectively, each worth HK\$10,000, which were also found to be counterfeit. The police intercepted Jiang and Zhu separately at the casinos.

Cheong noted that Lin, Jiang, and Zhu were acting under the

direction of the same gang, which included their accomplice, Zhou. The police later apprehended Zhou at the Barrier Gate checkpoint that evening as he was attempting to leave Macau en route to the Chinese mainland.

Cheong mentioned that the gang had been operating for no less than two months, consisting of at least six members. The four suspects were recruited by higher-level members in the Chinese mainland in late November 2025.

They all entered Macau on Saturday via the Barrier Gate checkpoint as instructed, having been informed of where to acquire counterfeit chips, before proceeding to the three casinos to defraud gamblers.

The police seized a total of 107 counterfeit chips from the four suspects, along with 21 chips recovered from the three victims. Cheong said that the counterfeit chips closely resembled genuine chips in both appearance and weight, making them difficult to distinguish. He added that these chips were from the same batch as those uncovered in a similar fraud case in January 2025.

The four suspects were transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, facing charges of fraud and their involvement in a criminal syndicate. ■

## Gongbei Customs seizes 140,800 cigarettes

**Armindo Neves**

Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers seized 140,800 cigarettes at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) on December 22.

According to the statement, on that day, customs officers at the mega-bridge's Zhuhai Port (checkpoint) outbound cargo inspection area noticed an anomaly when checking the X-ray images of a lorry.

Upon inspection, officers discovered 704 cartons of Double Happiness brand cigarettes, totalling 140,800 cigarettes, concealed in eight specially designed containers labelled as "sofa bases".

Gongbei Customs reminded the public that in line with the Chinese mainland's Tobacco Monopoly

Law the state has implemented a monopoly management system for the production, sale, import, and export of tobacco products, operating under a tobacco monopoly licence system. The



*This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs shows two customs officers checking the cigarettes they seized at the HZMB Zhuhai Port on December 22.*

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**Macau Weather**

**TEMPERATURE FALLING.  
COLD AND DRY.  
FINE.  
FORCE 4 TO 5 NORTHERLY  
WINDS, OCCASIONALLY FORCE  
6 WITH GUSTS.  
RELATIVE HUMIDITY  
WILL RANGE  
BETWEEN 40%  
AND 75%.**



**10°C~17°C**

Source: SMG

## Weather to be dry & cold later this week: SMG

Armindo Neves

The Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) forecast on its website yesterday that the weather later this week will be dry and cold.

According to the observatory, a winter monsoon was expected to reach the Guangdong coast as early as last night, bringing temperatures in Macau back down to cold weather levels. The lowest temperatures in the latter half of this week are forecast to drop to around 10 degrees Celsius, with the possibility of further decreases, the weather station said. However, the observatory also said that due to abundant sunshine during the day, the diurnal temperature variation will be quite significant, resulting in typical "dry cold" conditions.

As this winter monsoon will be accompanied by a rather dry continental airflow, the weather station also predicted that the weather will become extremely arid under its influence, with relative humidity dropping below 40 percent.

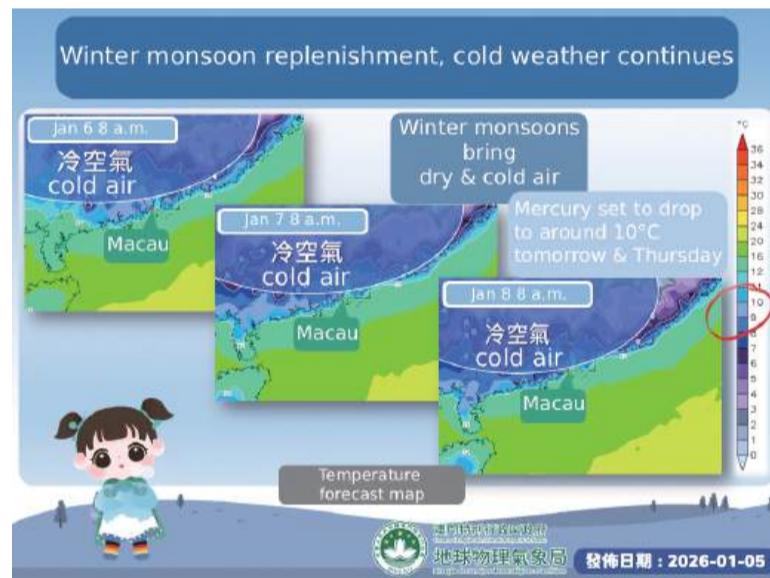
The observatory urged the public to keep warm and stay hydrated, while also heightening fire safety awareness to eliminate potential fire hazards.

The weather station hoisted the "yellow" cold weather alert yesterday at 5 p.m.

Individuals in need of temporary refuge from cold weather conditions may use the city's cold shelter provided by the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) and operated by Macau Caritas. The shelter will open when the weather station hoists the yellow or orange cold weather alert, or when the temperature drops to 14 degrees Celsius or below.

The cold shelter, which operates between 6 p.m. and 8 a.m., is located at 34 Rua Leste da Ilha Verde, Edificio do Bairro da Ilha Verde (青洲東街34號青洲坊大廈E1的避寒中心). Hot cup noodles and tea are available free of charge for users of the shelter.

For more information, one can visit the websites of the local observatory and the Social Welfare Bureau. ■



This handout image provided by the Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) yesterday forecasts that the temperature will drop to 10 degrees Celsius due to a winter monsoon. ■

## Labour Affairs Bureau, Sands China launch women job reintegration plan

Khalel Vallo

The Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) and integrated resorts operator Sands China Ltd have launched a six-month job reintegration plan to support women returning to the workforce, with online applications opening today, according to a statement by the bureau yesterday.

Titled "Sands China Women Job Reintegration Plan", it aims to target local women who left the labour market for family or personal reasons, aiming to help them gradually rebuild professional skills and confidence, the statement said.

The plan strives to combine group support, vocational training, on-the-job practice and flexible working arrangements to ease participants back into

professional life, the statement said, adding that the plan offers 29 job vacancies across 16 positions, mainly in administration, customer service and sales, plus integrated resort operations.

Roles include human resources specialist coordinator, strategic analysis staff, Cotai Travel consultant, housekeeping dispatcher, uniform supervisor and security control room staff, among others, the statement noted.

According to the bureau, the plan has a duration of six months. During the programme period, Sands will provide ongoing support, including mentorship and assistance in building professional networks, the statement said, adding that participants will also receive a string of enhancement training courses focusing on com-

## Concerns grow among businesses near closed satellite casinos

Interview by Armindo Neves

Since the city's last satellite casino closed last Tuesday night, the Landmark Casino in Zape, the area's most severely impacted stakeholders are the surrounding businesses, as many of their customers were gamblers.

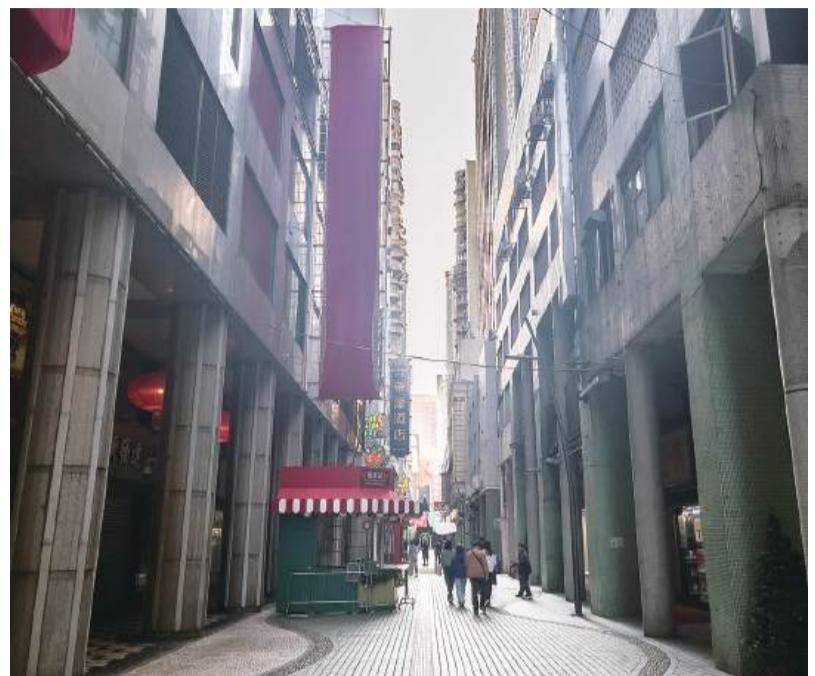
On June 9 last year, the government announced that all 11 remaining satellite casinos in Macau would close for good by December 31, 2025 and that the respective gaming concessionaires that formally owned the satellite casinos in conjunction with third-party operators would be required to continue employing all their current local employees working there after the closures.

On June 17, Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSEDT) Director Yau Yun Wah told reporters that there were about 160 businesses in Zape, most of which then relied on satellite casino customers. He noted that at that they were already facing "transition challenges". While the government has repeatedly pledged to stimulate Zape's economic vitality through events and also to support the area's businesses' transformation, Yau emphasised that market forces would ultimately determine commercial outcomes.

The Post yesterday interviewed a number of business owners and their employees in the area.

"Zape" is the Portuguese acronym for Outer Harbour Land Reclamation Zone.

A salesman surnamed Lei who works for a western pharmacy, said that the satellite casinos not only provided livelihoods for thousands of employees but also brought a steady flow of patrons to surrounding businesses, creating a unique community ecosystem. He criticised the government's strategy to close over a dozen



Pedestrians walk in a car-free street in Zape yesterday next to the now-defunct Landmark Casino which closed at the end last month. — Photo: Armindo Neves

satellite casinos within just a single year, describing the measure as "overhasty", which had led to the decline of the surrounding commercial areas, large-scale unemployment, and insufficient time for market adjustment. Lei said he believed that the government should have pursued a "differentiated" approach instead, based on operational conditions, and by phasing out the satellite casinos step by step.

Angelia, a saleswoman who works for a luxury goods shop, said that since the closure of the surrounding satellite casinos, the shop's customer flow has plummeted by at least 80 percent, with some days seeing no customers at all. She said that, previously, the area's clientele primarily consisted of gamblers and tourists brought in by the casinos. After their closure, even hotel accommodation options were affected, she said, leaving the entire street deserted. Angelia also said that government-installed

holiday decorations, such as Christmas trees, and a food market, had done little to attract visitors, drawing only a handful of local residents "da kat" (the Chinese term for photo op places) and failing to attract tourists who would actually spend money there.

Yan, her nickname, who owns a snack shop, said that since the closure of the satellite casinos, both foot traffic and revenue for her shop have dropped by approximately half, placing significant operational pressure on her business. Yan said she believed that the government's "one-size-fits-all" decision to shut down the satellite casinos proved to be too abrupt, directly cutting off the customer base and making it increasingly difficult for surrounding small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to survive. At this point, Yan said, she can only wait and observe the situation for a while. If the business situation does not improve, she would consider closing her shop for good. ■

### MACAU ANGLICAN COLLEGE



#### PARENTS' INFORMATION MEETING FOR ENROLLING

#### NEW K1 PUPILS FOR SEPTEMBER 2026

#### MACAU ANGLICAN COLLEGE

AV. PADRE TOMAS PEREIRA, NO. 109-117, TAIPA, MACAU  
THIRD FLOOR, SCHOOL HALL  
ON

TUESDAY, JANUARY 06<sup>th</sup> 2026, 7 P.M.

- \* Four K1 classes commence in September 2026.
- \* 104 places will be offered to new K1 pupils aged 3.
- \* English and Putonghua are the main languages of instruction.
- \* Creative teaching styles; child-centred learning; multi-cultural inclusive education environment.
- \* DSEDT Central Registration: January 6 to 16, 2026.
- \* MAC Application Documents Submission Days: February 10 to 12, 2026.
- \* Interview Days: March 7, 9 to 13, 2026.



## Explore the Chinese Zodiac in stamps at Communications Museum exhibition

**Rui Pastorin**

Stamp lovers and other members of the public may view a temporary exhibition featuring the 11 animals and one mythical creature of the Chinese zodiac set up at the Communications Museum\* on Estrada de D. Maria II (澳門馬交石炮台馬路七號).

Organised by the museum, the free admission exhibition is titled "Chinese Zodiac in Postage Stamps" Temporary Exhibition and, according to museum staff yesterday, is on for around a year. Museumgoers will find the featured exhibits, along with their descriptions in Chinese, displayed across the museum's ground floor, where related interactive exhibits are also showcased for visitors.

The 12 signs of the Chinese zodiac comprise the Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon (a mythical creature, unlike the others), Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog and Pig, with a statement on the museum website noting that while the zodiac composition may vary by place, they are vital to many cultures. This is particularly significant in China, the statement highlighted, with each of the twelve signs linked to rich legends that create a symbolic philosophy in folk culture.

Around 80 countries and regions annually issue special zodiac-themed stamps during the Spring Festival to convey blessings for the Lunar New Year, the website statement noted, with the museum's exhibits featuring some of them. "This exhibition showcases the 12 Chinese zodiac stamps issued by various regions, inviting everyone to explore the rich cultural significance of the zodiac", as noted on the museum's website.

Moreover, aside from the displays on the ground floor, exhibitiongoers may continue their visit upwards to the first and second floors, where various other displays, including interactive ones, can be found. Among them are a philately section and an exhibition titled "Chinese Scientists on Postage Stamps" on the first floor, along with those themed after communications, including broadcasting and telecommunications, on the museum's second floor.

Museumgoers may visit the exhibition daily, including on public holidays, from 9 a.m. through 5:30 p.m. More detailed descriptions on the zodiac signs and the museum's various other exhibits can also be found by visiting [www.cmm.gov.mo](http://www.cmm.gov.mo).

The museum was inaugurated on March 1, 2006 and is part of the Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT).



Exhibits of the Chinese Zodiac in Postage Stamps temporary exhibition on the Ground Floor of the Communications Museum taken yesterday by Rui Pastorin.

## AMCM 'optimises' bond repurchase business, launches yuan swap

Continued from p.1

AMCM also pledged in the statement that it will continue to conduct money market operations through various financial instruments with the aim of maintaining the stability of Macau's monetary and financial system and advancing the high-quality development of the city's modern financial sector. ■

\* A bond repurchase is fundamentally a short-term collateralised loan, not a permanent sale of securities. In this transaction, one party, typically a dealer or hedge fund needing cash, sells bonds to another party, like a money market fund, with an agreement to repurchase them at a specified future date and price. The difference between the initial sale price and the higher repurchase price effectively constitutes the interest on the loan. This mechanism provides crucial short-term liquidity to

financial markets, allowing institutions to fund their positions while enabling cash-rich entities to earn a return on secure, collateralised investments. Consequently, the repurchase market is a vital pillar of the global financial system, serving as a key tool for central banks in implementing monetary policy and for market participants in managing daily liquidity. — DeepSeek

\*\* A currency swap is a financial agreement between two parties to exchange principal and interest payments in different currencies over a set period. It allows entities, like corporations or governments, to obtain other currency financing at more favourable rates and to hedge against exchange rate risk. This tool is crucial for managing cross-boundary debt obligations and supporting cross-border investment and trade. — DeepSeek

## US invasion an act of imperialist aggression

China Daily Editorial

The international community is deeply shocked by the United States' blatant use of force against Venezuela, including large-scale airstrikes on the country and the forcible seizure of its president and his wife. Its actions should be condemned as they constitute a naked act of armed aggression against a sovereign state and flagrantly violate international law and the basic norms governing international relations, as well as the purposes and principles of the UN Charter.

By any definition, the US military operation amounts to an invasion. It dangerously escalates the so-called "Monroe Doctrine" from a 19<sup>th</sup>-century, isolationist-era concept into a 21<sup>st</sup>-century doctrine of force and coercion. This sets an alarming precedent for Latin America and the Caribbean, posing a direct threat to the sovereignty and security of countries across the region and shaking the foundations of the international order established after World War II.

Washington's justification of it being a "counter narcotics" action is neither credible nor legitimate. No such pretext can justify the bombing of a sovereign country or the abduction of its head of state. If such reasoning were to be accepted, it would effectively grant powerful nations a license to intervene militarily wherever they see fit, under a pretext given by themselves, hollowing out international law and replacing it with the law of the jungle.

The true motivation behind the US' aggression was laid bare by the US administration, which triumphantly announced that Nicolas Maduro and his wife had been "captured and flown out of the country" and that the US would "run" Venezuela on a "temporary basis" to "get the oil flowing". These remarks tore away the already thin veil of moral pretense, exposing the operation for what it was: a resource-grabbing power play. Any veneer of pursuing justice or stability was blasted away in a blatant demonstration of lawless hypocrisy. The pattern is disturbingly reminiscent of the Iraq War — another chapter in Washington's long record of seizing other countries' resources under false pretenses.

Washington's claim of "strategic retrenchment" thus rings hollow. For other countries in the Americas, this is not retrenchment but imperialist expansion — an aggressive reassertion of arrogant conceit. Venezuela is unlikely to be the last victim if this logic is allowed to prevail. The military action also aims to intimidate regional countries and deter them from deepening cooperation with other partners in the fields

that the US is trying to dominate.

The news conference held by US officials shortly after the operation only underscored this intent. The brazen boasting about "Operation Absolute Resolve", including lurid details of how US special forces seized the Venezuelan president from his bedroom, was designed to instill fear rather than convey transparency. It revealed the extent to which the US is prepared to turn its military superiority into an instrument for imposing its will on others.

From fabricated charges to military strikes and regime change, the operation follows a familiar and deeply troubling script — one that reflects the logic of state piracy. Sovereign governments are first delegitimized, then destroyed by force, after which foreign capital moves in to carve up natural resources. This behavior drags the world back toward a barbaric colonial era of plunder, in open defiance of international law.

Such egregious conduct has not gone unchallenged even within the US. Some observers bluntly stated that the US has become a bully of the world. No wonder even some in the US political circle said they never again wanted to hear US leaders preach about a so-called "rules-based" international order.

International reaction has been equally blunt. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed grave concern over Washington's disregard for international law. Russia said it was "extremely alarmed" by the act of armed aggression. The European Union called for respect for international law and the UN Charter "in all circumstances". These voices reflect a shared global anxiety that when might replaces law, no nation is safe.

History has repeatedly shown that while wars may be easy to start, they are far harder to end. Although Washington boasts of the supposed efficiency and low cost of its operation, the true price will be paid over time by the entire region — and ultimately by the US itself. Power politics may yield short-term gains, but they cannot bring lasting peace or stability.

China has urged the US to ensure the personal safety of Maduro and his wife, immediately release them, cease attempts to subvert the Venezuelan government, and resolve differences through dialogue and negotiation. What the world is witnessing is not a "rules-based" order, but colonial pillaging. Upholding sovereignty, equality and noninterference is not optional. It is the foundation of global stability — and it must be defended. (Related news on p.10)

— Courtesy of China Daily

## Govt mulls extending applications' eligibility for 'home swap' and temporary housing

Tony Wong

Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man said yesterday that the government is studying the feasibility of extending applicants' eligibility for its "home swap" housing towers and temporary housing towers on Plot P in Areia Preta district.

Tam made remarks while chairing a regular meeting of the Urban Renewal Council yesterday.

The meeting was held behind closed doors. The council released Tam's remarks in a statement yesterday.

The government-appointed council is tasked with advising the government on its urban renewal policies.

Construction of the six home swap housing towers and the eight temporary housing towers on Plot P was completed last year.

The flats in the six home swap housing towers are earmarked for eligible Pearl Horizon pre-sale buyers to purchase, while the flats in the eight temporary housing towers are earmarked for property owners affected by urban renewal projects to rent temporarily during the redevelopment of their former homes.

Both the home swap housing and temporary housing projects on Plot P are developed by the government-owned Macau Urban Renewal Limited (MUR).

The large Plot P was initially earmarked for the development of a private residential project, Pearl Horizon (海一居), but its developer failed to complete the work before the plot's provisional land concession expired in late 2015, after which the government annulled the concession in early 2016. The government decided in 2018 to construct home swap flats on part of the plot earmarked for eligible Pearl Horizon pre-sale buyers to purchase.

Plot P, located near the peninsula's north-eastern coast, initially covered 68,000 square metres in total, when its provisional land concession was granted for the Pearl Horizon residential project.

In March 2021, the government granted Macau Urban Renewal Limited the land concession of an area of 47,682 square metres on Plot P for the development of its

home swap housing and temporary housing projects.

The 47,682-square-metre area has been developed for the home swap housing estate comprising six 50-storey towers and three temporary housing estates comprising a total of eight towers.

The eight temporary housing towers comprise two 37-storey towers, two 41-storey towers and four 50-storey towers.

The home swap housing estate is known as Pearl Metropolitan (明珠都汇), while the eight temporary housing towers are known as Ut Koi Building and Lok Koi Building.

According to yesterday's statement by the council, Tam said in the meeting that the government is studying the feasibility of extending applicants' eligibility for the home swap housing towers and temporary housing towers completed on Plot P, with the aim of enabling "a more reasonable use of its current housing resources".

While the six Pearl Metropolitan home swap housing towers comprise 2,064 flats in total, the eight temporary housing towers comprise 2,803 units in total.

The government has still not launched an application process for those affected by urban renewal projects to rent a flat in the temporary housing towers on Plot P.

According to MUR's previous announcements, 1,932 Pearl Horizon pre-sale buyers were eligible to apply to buy a flat in the Pearl Metropolitan home swap housing towers, 1,880 of whom had chosen their flats as of the end of 2024.

Last month, the government designated a deadline, January 30, 2026, for Pearl Metropolitan home buyers to make their payment. Those failing to make the payment before the deadline will be disqualified from buying a flat there.

While most of the home swap housing flats on Plot P have been designated to Pearl Horizon pre-sale buyers as special circumstances, government-built home swap flats in general, according to the law regulating home-swap housing, are earmarked for property owners affected by urban renewal projects to buy. ■

## CTT exhibit wins gold at int'l philately contest

Rui Pastorin

An exhibit by the Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) has won a gold medal during the recent international "20<sup>th</sup> International Competition Class for Issuing Postal Authorities of UPU Member Countries and Territories".

The contest was organised by the Universal Postal Union (UPU) and the International Federation of Philately (FIP) and, according to AI chatbot Poe, typically aims to promote creativity and enhance the quality of postal services, particularly in the design and issuance of stamps and other postal materials.

The award, according to a statement on Friday by the bureau that announced the win, was the Gold Medal of Group B (countries issuing between 30 and 69 postage stamps per year), highlighting that it was for its "outstanding performance in utility, design integrity and technical quality".

Regarding the winning exhibit, the CTT statement said that the content features CTT-issued stamp products from between 2022

to 2024 and is divided into three categories: International Focus, Chinese Culture, and Local Characteristics.

The statement said that they highlight both Macau's cultural heritage and celebrates CTT's 140<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

In all, the recent win marks a "high recognition of the design and technical quality of Macau stamps", the bureau said in the statement. ■



This image provided by the Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) on Friday shows parts of its award-winning exhibit.

## Xi meets Irish Taoiseach Martin

BEIJING – China is willing to strengthen strategic communication with Ireland, deepen political mutual trust and expand pragmatic cooperation to benefit the peoples of both countries and add momentum to China-EU relations, President Xi Jinping said yesterday.

Xi made the remarks when meeting with Taoiseach of Ireland Micheal Martin in Beijing. The Irish prime minister is on a five-day official visit to China until Thursday.

Both China and Ireland cherish peace, embrace openness and inclusiveness, and strive for self-reliance and progress, Xi said, adding that the Chinese and Irish people won national independence and liberation through struggles and are advancing toward modernization through sustained efforts of successive generations.

Since the establishment of the China-Ireland strategic partnership for mutually beneficial cooperation in 2012, bilateral trade volume has quadrupled, with a balanced development in mutual investment, he noted.

Xi said the two countries should maintain friendly exchanges at multiple levels and across diverse fields, continuously enhance communication and mutual understanding, accommodate each

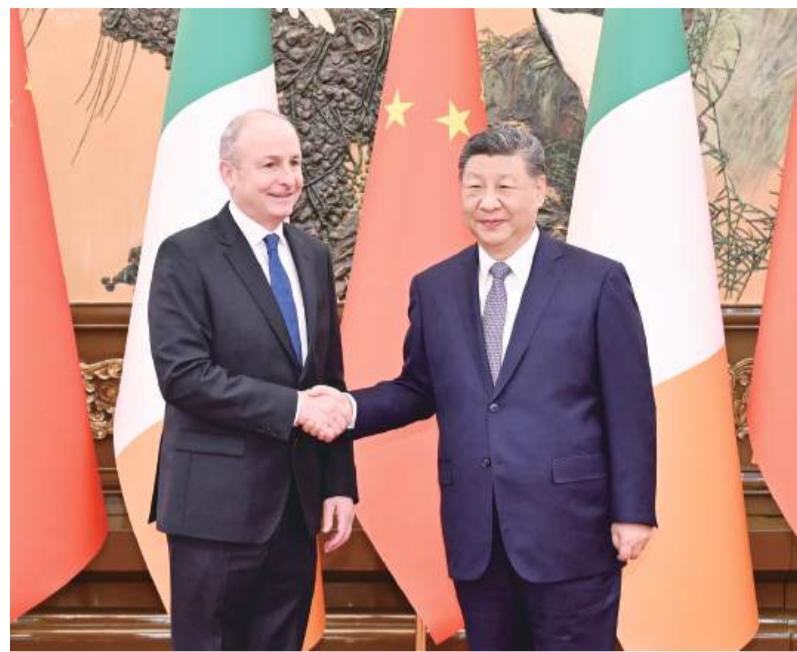
other's core interests and major concerns, consolidate political mutual trust, and solidify the political foundation of bilateral relations.

Over the next five years, China will continue to promote high-quality development and expand high-standard opening up. Xi said China is willing to strengthen economic and trade cooperation with Ireland, align development strategies in fields such as artificial intelligence, digital economy, and medicine and healthcare, promote two-way investment, leverage each other's strengths, share opportunities and pursue common development.

The two sides should enhance cooperation in education, culture and tourism to foster greater people-to-people affinity, and China welcomes more Irish youth to come to China for study and exchanges, Xi said.

In a world beset with changes and chaos, unilateral and bullying acts are severely undermining the international order, Xi said. All countries should respect the development paths chosen by the peoples of other nations, and abide by international law as well as the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, he said, stressing that major countries should particularly take the lead in doing so.

As China and Ireland support



President Xi Jinping (right) shakes hands with Taoiseach of Ireland Micheal Martin at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday.

– Xinhua

multilateralism and advocate international fairness and justice, the two countries should strengthen coordination and cooperation in international affairs, and jointly maintain the authority of the United Nations and make the global governance system more just and equitable, he said.

Xi said China and the EU should bear the long-term picture in mind, uphold the positioning of partnership, and view and handle differences objectively and

rationally to work for win-win cooperation.

As Ireland will hold the rotating EU presidency in the second half of this year, China hopes Ireland will play a constructive role in promoting the healthy and stable development of China-EU relations, the Chinese president said.

Highlighting a profound and long-lasting friendship between the two countries, the Irish prime minister said Xi's successful visit to Ireland in 2012 had laid a solid

foundation for the development of the Ireland-China strategic partnership for mutually beneficial cooperation in recent years.

Martin said Ireland firmly adheres to the one-China policy, and is committed to developing the strategic partnership for mutually beneficial cooperation.

Ireland is willing to deepen cooperation with China in trade, investment, science and technology, biomedicine, renewable energy, artificial intelligence, education and other fields, he said.

Martin commended China's indispensable and important role in international affairs and its positive contributions to upholding the authority of the UN and promoting world peace.

He said that any international dispute should be settled in conformity with international law, and Ireland is willing to maintain close communication and coordination with China, safeguard international law, uphold free and open trade, and promote world prosperity and stability.

Noting that the stable development of EU-China relations is of great significance, Martin said the Irish side is willing to play a constructive role in promoting the healthy development of EU-China relations.

– Xinhua

## Steady Sino-Irish ties serve common interests

### China Daily Editorial

In his meeting with Micheal Martin, Taoiseach of Ireland, yesterday, President Xi Jinping said that China is willing to strengthen strategic communication with Ireland, deepen political mutual trust and expand pragmatic cooperation to benefit the peoples of both countries and add momentum to China-EU relations.

It has been 14 years since a Taoiseach of Ireland last visited China. Given that there are differences within the European Union on relations with China, and some countries in the EU have been vacillating between seeking economic cooperation with China or “de-risking”, Martin's visit to China is of particular importance not only for the development of relations between China and Ireland but also for relations between China and the EU.

Late last year Martin made remarks in an interview to the effect that Europeans should do more to understand the Chinese psyche and approach, as well as its longer term perspective and strategic thinking. That shows his pragmatism in approaching China-related issues, which is also reflected in his visit to China.

In his meeting with Xi, Martin said that Ireland adheres to the one-China policy, and is committed to strengthening and developing the mutually beneficial strategic partnership it has forged with China. He also noted that Ireland is willing to deepen cooperation with China in some important sectors such

as trade, investment, science and technology, biomedicine, renewable energy, artificial intelligence, education and other fields.

Xi's words were relevant for all the EU members as he said that all countries should respect the development paths chosen by the peoples of other nations, and abide by international law as well as the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

This is pertinent for some EU countries which need to understand China better and view its development objectively. China has never initiated a war in modern times and has never interfered in the internal affairs of any country. Respect for different development paths and never politicizing trade and economic issues constitute the foundation of China's approach to developing healthy and stable relations with other countries and economies.

Both China and Ireland support multilateralism and advocate international fairness and justice, Xi said, while urging the two sides to strengthen coordination and cooperation in international affairs, and jointly maintain the authority of the United Nations and make the global governance system more just and equitable.

Trade between China and Ireland reached US\$23.42 billion in 2024, with China becoming the fourth-largest trading partner of Ireland.

Martin's visit to China is conducive to promoting political trust between the two countries, and further expanding the space

for cooperation in a wide range of areas, injecting more certainty into bilateral ties.

Looking to the future of ties, Xi said that China and Ireland should enhance cooperation in education, culture and tourism to foster greater people-to-people affinity, and China welcomes more Irish youth to come to China for study and exchanges.

The smooth development of economic cooperation and trade ties between China and Ireland and their relations are of reference value to some EU countries, which should heed how Ireland gets along with China despite their differences.

As Xi said, China and the EU should bear the long-term picture in mind, uphold the positioning of the partnership, and view and handle differences objectively and rationally to work for win-win cooperation.

Ireland will hold the rotating EU presidency in the second half of this year, and Xi told Martin that China hopes Ireland will play a constructive role in promoting the healthy and stable development of China-EU relations.

Indeed, there is no reason for the EU and China not to develop healthy bilateral relations on the basis of economic and trade cooperation as both economies are complementary to each other. The EU should develop an objective view of China, respect the country's core interests and strengthen the foundation of mutual trust to contribute to the steady development of China-EU relations.

– Courtesy of China Daily

## China pledges to build high-quality platform for business cooperation with ROK

BEIJING – The China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) is committed to building a high-quality platform and providing comprehensive services for business cooperation between China and the Republic of Korea (ROK), Ren Hongbin, chairman of the CCPIT, said yesterday.

Ren made the remarks at a China-ROK business forum in Beijing that was organized by the CCPIT and the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI). Approximately 400 representatives of the governments and business communities in both countries participated in the event.

China has remained the ROK's largest trade partner for 21 consecutive years.

The fact that hundreds of business representatives have gathered here at the very beginning of 2026, despite their demanding schedules, speaks volumes about the high expectations the business community holds for economic cooperation between the two countries, said KCCI and SK Group Chairman Chey Tae-won.

China and the ROK should leverage their complementary strengths through industrial innovation and stable supply

chains, and work together to explore new opportunities beyond their respective markets, according to Chinese entrepreneurs at the forum.

Broadly, they noted that while strengthening long-standing areas of collaboration, both countries should tap the potential of emerging fields such as the artificial intelligence, biopharmaceuticals and green industries.

The flow of people between nations forms the basis of exchange and cooperation. Following the mutual implementation of visa facilitation between China and the ROK, travel trends among young people have gained clear momentum.

Cultural tours in Seoul and Korean-style beauty experiences have become popular among Chinese youth, while flying to Shanghai after work on Friday has emerged as a new trend among their peers from the ROK.

The CCPIT is willing to propel the sound, steady development of bilateral economic relations between China and the ROK, deliver greater benefits to the two countries and their peoples, and open up new prospects for win-win cooperation, Ren said.

– Xinhua

# Xi holds talks with ROK President Lee

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping held talks with President of the Republic of Korea (ROK) Lee Jae Myung in Beijing yesterday.

Xi said he and President Lee have met twice and conducted reciprocal visits, reflecting the importance both sides attach to China-ROK relations. As both friends and neighbors, China and the ROK should increase exchanges and maintain frequent communication.

China has consistently placed relations with the ROK high on its regional diplomatic agenda and maintained continuity and stability in its policy toward the ROK, Xi said, adding that China is willing to work with the ROK to firmly uphold the direction of friendly cooperation, adhere to the principle of mutual benefit and win-win outcomes, promote bilateral strategic partnership along a healthy path, effectively enhance the well-being of both peoples, and contribute positively to regional and global peace and development.

Xi stressed that China and the ROK have long adhered to the principles of valuing peace above all else and advocating harmony without conformity, which have transcended differences in social systems and ideologies to help each other succeed and achieve common development.

Xi called on both sides to continue this fine tradition, enhance mutual trust, respect each other's development paths, accommodate each other's core

interests and major concerns, and resolve differences properly through dialogue and consultation.

Xi said the fourth plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China reviewed and adopted the recommendations for formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan, outlining a blueprint for China's development over the next five years and offering broad opportunities for countries worldwide.

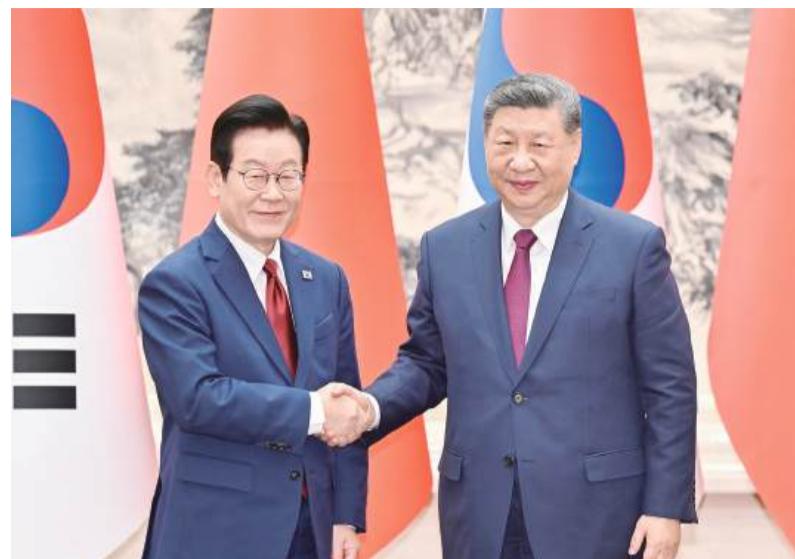
China and the ROK share close economic ties with industrial and supply chains deeply interwoven, and the bilateral cooperation is mutually beneficial, Xi said.

He said the two countries should further align their development strategies, strengthen policy coordination, expand the pie of common interests, and achieve more cooperation results in emerging fields such as artificial intelligence, green industries, and the silver economy.

Xi also called on both sides to increase personnel exchanges and promote interactions in areas such as youth, media, sports, think tanks and local governments.

China and the ROK shoulder important responsibilities in maintaining regional peace and promoting global development, and share a wide range of common interests, Xi said, noting that the two countries should firmly stand on the right side of history and make right strategic choices.

More than 80 years ago, the two



President Xi Jinping and President of the Republic of Korea (ROK) Lee Jae Myung shake hands on the sidelines of the signing of a raft of cooperation documents after their talks in Beijing yesterday. Xi held talks with Lee, who is on a state visit to China, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday.

– Xinhua

peoples made tremendous national sacrifices and won the victory against Japanese militarism, Xi said, adding that China and the ROK should join hands to safeguard the fruits of the victory in World War II and protect peace and stability in Northeast Asia.

As beneficiaries of economic globalization, China and the ROK must work together to oppose protectionism and practice true multilateralism, contributing to the advancement of an equal, orderly multipolar world and a universally beneficial, inclusive economic globalization, Xi said.

For his part, Lee said the ROK and China are close neighbors with long-standing relations, noting that

the two countries fought together against Japanese militarist aggression, and that the ROK side is grateful for China's efforts in preserving the historical sites of the Korean independence movement in China.

The two nations have built close cooperative ties and achieved fruitful results since they established diplomatic relations, Lee said, adding that the ROK attaches great importance to its relations with China. It hopes to use the first head-of-state diplomatic meeting of the year as an opportunity to consolidate the momentum of the comprehensive recovery and development of bilateral relations, seek common

ground while reserving differences, deepen the ROK-China strategic cooperative partnership, and open a new chapter of bilateral relations.

He emphasized that the ROK respects China's core interests and major concerns, and adheres to the one-China principle.

Bilateral economic and trade cooperation has played a positive role in the economic and social development of both countries, Lee said, noting that the ROK looks forward to seizing the opportunities brought by China's 15th Five-Year Plan to achieve more results in practical cooperation with China.

He said the two countries should promote people-to-people exchanges, and enhance mutual understanding and trust. The ROK is willing to strengthen its multilateral coordination with China and contribute to global prosperity and development, and wishes China every success in hosting this year's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Economic Leaders' Meeting.

After their talks, Xi and Lee witnessed the signing of 15 cooperation documents in fields including scientific and technological innovation, ecological environment, transportation, and economic and trade cooperation.

Prior to the talks, Xi and his wife, Peng Liyuan, held a welcome ceremony for Lee and his wife, Kim Hea Kyung, in the Great Hall of the People.

– Xinhua

## Xi, Lee hold talks on China-ROK ties, int'l affairs

### Analysis

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping held talks with President of the Republic of Korea (ROK) Lee Jae Myung in Beijing yesterday, with both sides agreeing to enhance bilateral strategic partnership, promote practical cooperation, and strengthen multilateral coordination.

It is Lee's first visit to China since he took office, and the two heads of state have met twice and conducted reciprocal visits, reflecting the importance both sides attach to China-ROK relations.

### ENHANCING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

China has consistently placed relations with the ROK high on its regional diplomatic agenda and maintained continuity and stability in its policy toward the ROK, Xi said, adding that China is willing to work with the ROK to firmly uphold the direction of friendly cooperation, adhere to the principle of mutual benefit and win-win outcomes, promote bilateral strategic partnership along a healthy path, effectively enhance the well-being of both peoples, and contribute positively to regional and global peace and development.

Xi called on both sides to enhance mutual trust, respect each other's development paths, accommodate each other's core interests and major concerns, and resolve differences properly through dialogue and consultation.



President Xi Jinping (second from right) and his wife Peng Liyuan (right) pose for a photo with President of the Republic of Korea (ROK) Lee Jae Myung (second from left) and his wife Kim Hea Kyung in Beijing yesterday.

– Xinhua

foster better bilateral ties, and greatly contributing to deepening political mutual trust and promoting economic and trade cooperation.

In the future, both sides need to accommodate each other's major concerns including the Taiwan question, and maintain a stable cooperative relationship as important trading partners, Dong said.

### ACHIEVING MORE COOPERATION RESULTS

China and the ROK share close economic ties with industrial and supply chains deeply interwoven, and the bilateral cooperation is mutually beneficial, Xi said.

He said the two countries should further align their development strategies, strengthen policy

coordination, expand the pie of common interests, and achieve more cooperation results in emerging fields such as artificial intelligence, green industries, and the silver economy.

– Xinhua

Bilateral economic and trade cooperation has played a positive role in the economic and social development of both countries, Lee said, noting that the ROK looks forward to seizing the opportunities brought by China's 15th Five-Year Plan to achieve more results in practical cooperation with China.

After their talks, Xi and Lee witnessed the signing of 15 cooperation documents in fields including scientific and technological innovation, ecological environment, transportation, and economic and trade cooperation.

Yang Xiyu, a researcher from the China Institute of International Studies, said that since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the ROK, bilateral economic and trade cooperation has always been the stabilizer and propeller of the development of bilateral relations.

He said China and the ROK should leverage their long-standing traditional advantages, and strengthen cooperation with a focus on economy, trade, and technology.

### BEARING RESPONSIBILITIES IN PEACE, DEVELOPMENT

China and the ROK shoulder

important responsibilities in maintaining regional peace and promoting global development, and share a wide range of common interests, Xi said, noting that the two countries should firmly stand on the right side of history and make the right strategic choices.

More than 80 years ago, the two peoples made tremendous national sacrifices and won the victory against Japanese militarism, he said, adding that the two countries should join hands to safeguard the fruits of the victory in World War II and protect peace and stability in Northeast Asia.

As beneficiaries of economic globalization, China and the ROK must work together to oppose protectionism and practice true multilateralism, contributing to the advancement of an equal, orderly multipolar world and a universally beneficial, inclusive economic globalization, Xi said.

Lee said the ROK is willing to strengthen its multilateral coordination with China and contribute to global prosperity and development, and wishes China every success in hosting this year's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Economic Leaders' Meeting.

Dong said amid the recent resurgence of Japanese militarism, China and the ROK should share a common position to maintain regional peace, and the two sides need to jointly address protectionism and defend free trade.

– Xinhua

# Anwar to introduce 10-year term limit for prime minister

KUALA LUMPUR – Malaysia's Anwar Ibrahim said yesterday he would introduce legislation this year to limit the prime minister's term to a maximum 10 years, fulfilling one of his campaign promises.

Speaking to ministers and civil servants after a cabinet meeting, Anwar cautioned against clinging to power and reminded them that "everyone has a term limit" without exception.

"We will table a bill to limit the term of the prime minister, not exceeding 10 years or two full terms," Anwar said in a special New Year's announcement.

After serving the term, "it is better for us to hand it over to the next generation", he added.

There is currently no term limit and former prime minister Mahathir

Mohamad was in power for 22 years during his first tenure until he stepped down in 2003.

Mahathir then came out of retirement to lead a disparate opposition coalition that ousted the graft-tainted government of then prime minister Najib Razak in the 2018 elections.

He became world's oldest serving prime minister when he was sworn in again as Malaysia's leader at age 92 that year.

Anwar did not say when the term limits bill would be filed. Parliament will hold its first session of the year this month.

Anwar's Pakatan Harapan (Alliance of Hope) coalition pledged in its 2022 election manifesto to limit the prime minister's tenure to two terms.

Separately, Anwar announced

the government would also introduce a freedom of information bill in parliament, along with legislation to set up the office of an ombudsman to strengthen the fight against corruption.

"The ombudsman ... allows the people to raise any issues because without exception, from the prime minister downwards, everyone must be accountable and open to be questioned," Anwar said.

Last month, Malaysia's High Court sentenced ex-premier Najib to 15 more years in jail after convicting him of abuse of power and money laundering in the 1MDB sovereign wealth fund graft scandal.

The additional years will run after Najib, 72, serves a current six-year jail term in a case related to the now defunct 1MDB. – AFP

## N Korea tests hypersonic missiles, says nuclear forces ready for war

SEOUL – North Korean leader Kim Jong Un oversaw the firing of "cutting-edge" hypersonic missiles to ready Pyongyang's nuclear forces for war, state media reported yesterday, saying "geopolitical crisis" made the test even more urgent in a clear nod to this weekend's US attack on Venezuela.

Seoul and Tokyo said Sunday they had detected the launch from near Pyongyang of two ballistic missiles – the country's first test of the year just hours before South Korean leader Lee Jae Myung headed to Beijing for a summit.

Lee has said he hopes to use his visit to harness China's clout over North Korea to improve Seoul's ties with Pyongyang.

Yesterday, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) quoted Kim as saying the test showed "the readiness of the DPRK's nuclear forces", referring to North Korea by its official name.

"Important achievements have been recently made in putting our nuclear forces on a practical basis and preparing them for an actual war," Kim was quoted as saying by KCNA.

Pyongyang's activity, he said, was "aimed at gradually putting the nuclear war deterrent on a high-developed basis".

Photos shared by state media showed Kim puffing on a cigarette accompanied by top officials as a missile soars into the early morning sky.

"Why it is necessary is exemplified by the recent geopolitical crisis and complicated international events," Kim was quoted as saying, a clear reference to Washington's weekend capture of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

The operation represents a nightmare scenario for North Korea's leadership, which has long feared a so-called "decapitation strike" of that kind and accused Washington of seeking to remove it from power.

Pyongyang condemned it Sunday as a "serious encroachment of sovereignty" that "clearly confirms once again the rogue and brutal nature of the US".

### War deterrent

Pyongyang has for decades justified its nuclear and missile programmes as a deterrent against

alleged regime change efforts by Washington.

Sunday's launch "can be interpreted as a message signalling that Pyongyang possesses a war deterrent and nuclear capabilities, unlike Venezuela," Hong Min, an analyst at the Seoul-based Korea Institute for National Unification, told AFP.

He pointed to state media reports Sunday that Kim had visited a facility involved in making tactical guided weapons.

This, he said, "demonstrated a capability to launch more precise strikes than existing multiple rocket launchers from various platforms, including air and ground".

North Korea's new weapon system using hypersonic missiles was first tested in October.

Hypersonic missiles travel at more than five times the speed of sound and can manoeuvre mid-flight, making them harder to track and intercept.

They have been deployed to deadly effect last year on cities in Ukraine by Russia, with whom North Korea has deepened ties in recent years, and by Iran against Israel. – AFP

## Myanmar pro-military party wins first phase of junta-run election: official results

YANGON – Myanmar's dominant pro-military party won the first phase of junta-run elections, the last released official results showed yesterday, with the USDP taking nearly 90 percent of lower house seats.

The military staged a 2021 coup that ousted the democratic government of Aung San Suu Kyi, but is overseeing a month-long phased election it pledges will return power to the people.

Western diplomats and democracy advocates dismiss the poll as a ploy to rebrand military rule, citing Suu Kyi's jailing, her party's dissolution, a crackdown on dissenters and a ballot stacked with military allies.

The pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won 89 of 102 lower house seats included in the first phase, according to an

AFP tally of official results released from Friday to yesterday.

The USDP win equates to more than 87 percent of lower house seats included in the first phase of voting on December 28 – the remainder mostly won by a smattering of parties representing ethnic minorities.

Many analysts and democracy watchdogs describe the USDP as a proxy of the military, citing the large numbers of retired officers serving in senior positions.

Overall results are due after the vote's third and final phase scheduled for January 25.

Regardless of the vote, a quarter of lower house seats and key cabinet positions will be reserved for members of the armed forces under the terms of the country's military

drafted constitution.

The USDP was trounced by Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party in the last elections in 2020 before the military overturned the vote, alleging widespread fraud and staging a coup.

Suu Kyi, 80, remains jailed incommunicado and the NLD is not appearing on ballots.

The military coup sparked a civil war as pro-democracy protesters formed guerrilla units to fight alongside ethnic minority armed groups which have long resisted central rule.

Rebel factions have pledged to block the vote from the enclaves they control, and the junta has admitted the vote cannot be held nationwide, but is waging offensives in a bid to claw back ground. – AFP

## Philippines arrests ex-general who called for president's ouster

MANILA – A former Philippine air force general accused of encouraging the military to abandon President Ferdinand Marcos was arrested on a charge of sedition yesterday at Manila's international airport.

Romeo Poquiz, who had publicly called for the armed forces to "withdraw their support" from Marcos amid a burgeoning corruption scandal, was detained by Philippine national police after returning from a holiday in Thailand, interior department secretary Jonvic Remulla told AFP.

"He was arrested for the charge of sedition in connection [with] his recent statements. He was arrested upon arrival from Bangkok this morning," Remulla said in a text message.

Speaking at a news conference, acting police chief Jose Nartatez said Poquiz had been detained on the basis of a December 5 warrant.

The 67-year-old ex-general confirmed his arrest in a post on Facebook.

"I was arrested by the [Philippine National Police Criminal Investigation and Detection Group] at the Airport Terminal ... Long live the Filipino!" Poquiz said, adding he was being taken to Manila's Camp Crame police headquarters.

The ex-general's lawyer, Ferdinand Topacio, told AFP he had not yet been allowed to meet with his client.

He added that calls for the military to withdraw its support

for Marcos had not been "direct incitements to sedition but rather ... a discussion of a possible outcomes of graft and corruption".

"This just shows that the government is denouncing those who speak about wrongdoing instead of those who are stealing the people's money," Topacio said.

Philippine military chief General Romeo Brawner said in October that the nation's "battle staff" had rebuffed retired officers led by Poquiz who aired their grievances with Marcos, saying they were told the military was "solid" in its support of the constitution.

Brawner also said that retired officers had reached out to younger officers seeking a "coup d'état, a military junta" to "reset" Philippine society without disclosing their names.

The alleged push for military intervention came as Manila was gearing up for September 21 anti-corruption protests sparked by bogus flood-control projects believed to have cost taxpayers billions of dollars.

Marcos, who made the widespread fraud the centrepiece of a July national address, has since seen friend and foe alike implicated in the scandal, with some political opponents suggesting he was a key beneficiary of the corruption.

Speaking at the signing of a new national budget yesterday, Marcos made no mention of the arrest. – AFP

## Tea leaf spill causes deadly multi-vehicle crash in Japan

TOKYO – Tea leaves spilt from a truck caused a multi-vehicle collision in Japan that killed one person and injured three others, local media reported.

The leaves, scattered along a roughly 500-metre stretch of a road in Tochigi prefecture, caused more than 10 vehicles to skid and crash on Sunday, the Mainichi Shimbun and other media reported, citing local police.

Four people aged from their 50s to 70s were taken to hospital and one man aged 78 was later

confirmed dead, the Mainichi said.

The man who died had been driving a small commercial vehicle, which is believed to have skidded and mounted the median strip.

After he got out of the vehicle, he was reportedly struck by a truck.

The truck carrying the tea leaves had no roof, and police are investigating the accident, reports said.

Local police declined to comment when contacted by AFP. – AFP



People wait to use a rope ferry to cross the Peusangan River following flash floods that destroyed adjacent villages in Bireuen district, Indonesia's Aceh province yesterday. – AFP

## Cambodia re-proposes to Thailand meeting on border demarcation

PHNOM PENH – Cambodia yesterday re-proposed to Thailand to convene a special meeting on border demarcation in the second or third week of January in Cambodia's Siem Reap province, said a press release from Cambodia's State Secretariat of Border Affairs.

The Cambodian side has once again requested the Thai side, through a Note Verbale dated January 5, 2026, to convene a special meeting of the Cambodia-Thailand Joint Boundary Commission in the second or third week of January 2026 in Siem Reap province, it said.

The re-proposed meeting aims to discuss the survey and demarcation works, as well as address the issue that Thai military forces have been conducting activities violating Cambodia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, the press release said.

The re-proposed meeting was made after the Thai side postponed Cambodia's earlier request for the meeting in the first week of January 2026 in Siem Reap province, citing the reasons of waiting for internal procedures and the ongoing presence of landmines in border areas.

– Xinhua



Activists and supporters of the Frontline Socialist Party hold placards and shout slogans during a protest against the US's attack on Venezuela, outside the US Embassy in Colombo, Sri Lanka yesterday. Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro was in a New York jail on Saturday, hours after American special forces seized and flew him out of his country – which Donald Trump said would come under effective US control.

– AFP

## India's top court denies bail to Muslim student activist

NEW DELHI – India's Supreme Court denied bail yesterday for former student leader Umar Khalid, who has been detained for more than five years on charges of conspiracy to trigger deadly riots.

Khalid, 38, was arrested in September 2020 under a sweeping anti-terrorism law and has remained in custody since, aside from brief releases to attend family weddings.

His case has become a touchstone for critics who say India's more than 200 million Muslims face discriminatory treatment in the Hindu-majority nation.

Khalid was detained after February 2020 sectarian riots in Delhi when 53 people were killed – mostly Muslims, but also several Hindus.

The Supreme Court in New Delhi dismissed his appeal for bail, saying that "prolonged incarceration" was not grounds to grant him release.

It also denied bail on the same grounds to another student activist, Sharjeel Imam.

But it approved bail for five others in the same case.

Khalid, a former student at Delhi's prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru University, was charged with rioting with a deadly weapon, as well as

attempted murder, sedition and causing enmity between different groups.

He denies all charges.

Police also accused Khalid of delivering "provocative speeches" ahead of the riots.

In 2022, he published an open letter saying that "we can be kept in jail for years, without those framing us needing to prove anything".

His partner, Banojyotsna Lahiri, has said that Khalid "became the victim of the injustice that he always fought against".

Amnesty International and six other rights groups issued a statement in September calling for the release of Khalid.

"Khalid's prolonged persecution exemplifies the derailment of justice in India, as it makes a mockery of international human rights principles," Amnesty said in a statement to mark Khalid's fifth year in prison.

Khalid's arrest came months after protests against India's contentious Citizen Amendment Act (CAA).

The 2019 law makes it easier for persecuted religious minorities from three neighbouring countries to obtain citizenship, but not if they are Muslim.

– AFP

## 'I can't walk anymore': Afghans freeze to death on route to Iran

**Mohsen Karimi**

GHUNJAN – Habibullah set off from his home in western Afghanistan determined to find work in Iran, only for the 15-year-old to freeze to death while walking across the mountainous frontier.

"He was forced to go, to bring food for the family," his mother, Mah Jan, told AFP at her mud home in Ghunjan village.

"We have no food to eat, we have no clothes to wear. The house in which I live has no electricity, no water. I have no proper window, nothing to burn for heating," she added, clutching a photo of her son.

Habibullah was one of at least 18 migrants who died last month while trying to cross illegally into Iran from Afghanistan's Herat province, according to officials, when temperatures were around -3C.

With earthquakes and drought compounding a daily struggle to survive in Afghanistan, around half the population will need humanitarian assistance this year, according to the United Nations.

"There was no other way left for me. I thought, let him go to make our life better," said Mah Jan, 50, who requested the family's surname not be published for privacy reasons.

Habibullah's stepbrother, Gul Ahmad, said the teenager had tried shoe polishing but only earned up to 15 afghanis (23 US cents) per day.

"He was ready to be a shepherd for 2,000 afghanis (US\$30 a month), to work in a shop, but he found nothing. So, he was forced to leave. He told his mother, 'Let's trust in God, I'm going to Iran,'" said Gul Ahmad, 56.

### 'Very dangerous'

Habibullah was among 15 bodies returned from Iran, an Afghan border source told AFP on condition of anonymity.

A further three migrants who died were recovered on the Afghan

side of the frontier, an army official said.

Over just a matter of days last month, around 1,600 Afghan migrants "who were at risk of perishing due to the weather" were rescued in the mountains, according to Iranian border guard commander Majid Shoja, quoted by the ILNA news agency.

They are drawn to Iran due to greater job opportunities and a common language, but legal routes are limited.

Afghanistan's deputy minister for labour and social affairs, Abdul Manan Omari, said Sunday it was "necessary to do more" to facilitate work permits for migrants.

Iran and Pakistan have combined sent back five million Afghans since September 2023, increasing the country's population by 10 percent, according to the International Organisation for Migration.

The agency's deputy head in Afghanistan, Mutya Izora Maskun, said that many in the country report "the economy, job insecurity, food insecurity, constrained access to services" force them to leave.

They do so even if that means going through "illegal crossing points that are very dangerous due to the cold and the risks of human trafficking", she told AFP.

The Taliban government has taken "serious steps to fight the smugglers", interior ministry spokesman Abdul Mateen Qani told AFP.

But attempts to reach Iran have not stopped.

### 'Destitute'

In the last week of December, "347 people who were trying to illegally cross the border into Iran were identified and arrested", a military unit in western Afghanistan said in a statement on Saturday.

Abdul Majeed Haidari, whose one-year-old son suffers from a heart problem, tried his luck in mid-December.



This photograph taken on December 26, 2025 shows an Afghan woman, Mah Jan, holding a picture of her deceased son, Habibullah, at her house in Ghunjan village of Ghorian district in Herat province.

– AFP

Working at a brick oven, the 25-year-old could no longer afford to pay for his son's medication and family expenses.

"We left because we were so destitute," his stepbrother Yunus, who accompanied him, told AFP.

"We set out in the rain. In such weather, the radars and cameras of the border guards do not work properly. But the smuggler got lost," he said.

They failed to light a fire for warmth and, as snow fell, Yunus recounted his stepbrother's words: "I can't walk anymore."

"Some told us to leave him so as not to endanger the other 19 people in the group," said Yunus, who requested his full name not be used.

After carrying him for two more hours, "his eyes stopped closing, his body grew heavier," Yunus recalled, before an Iranian family drove past and took them to hospital.

"They gave him electric shocks, but they said he was already dead," said Yunus, who has since returned to his village.

– AFP

## Bangladesh says at least 287 killed during Hasina-era abductions

DHAKA – A Bangladesh commission investigating disappearances during the rule of ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina said yesterday at least 287 people were assumed to have been killed.

The commission said some corpses were believed to have been dumped in rivers, including the Buriganga in the capital, Dhaka, or buried in mass graves.

The government-appointed commission, formed after Hasina was toppled by a mass uprising in August 2024, said it had investigated 1,569 cases of abductions, with 287 of the victims presumed dead.

"We have identified a number of unmarked graves in several places where the bodies were presumably buried," Nur Khan Liton, a

commission member, told AFP.

"The commission has recommended that Bangladesh seek cooperation from forensic experts to identify the bodies and collect and preserve DNA samples from family members."

In its final report, submitted to the government on Sunday, the commission said that security forces had acted under the command of Hasina and her top officials.

The report said many of those abducted had belonged to the country's largest Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami, or the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), both in opposition to Hasina.

In a separate investigation, police in December began exhuming a mass grave in Dhaka.

The grave included at least

eight victims of the uprising against Hasina, bodies all found with bullet wounds, according to Criminal Investigation Department (CID) chief Md Sibgat Ullah.

The United Nations says up to 1,400 people were killed in crackdowns as Hasina attempted to cling to power.

She was sentenced to death in absentia in November for crimes against humanity.

"We are grateful for finally being able to know where our brother is buried," said Mohamed Nabil, whose 28-year-old sibling Sohel Rana was identified as one of the dead in the grave in Dhaka.

"But we demand a swift trial for the police officials who shot at the people during the uprising."

– AFP

# Maduro arrives for first US court appearance after capture

By Raphael Hermano, Andrea Tosta and Patrick Fort

NEW YORK — Deposed Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro arrived at a New York court yesterday, just days after being seized in Caracas in a shock US military operation that paved the path for Washington's plans to control the oil-rich country.

Maduro, 63, faces narcotics charges along with his wife, Cilia Flores. The pair were forcibly taken out of Caracas in a US assault on Saturday, in which commandos swooped in on helicopters, backed by fighter jets and naval forces, to capture them.

Yesterday morning (local time), Maduro was escorted by heavily armed law enforcement officers to a courthouse in New York, having been transported by helicopter and armoured car.

All eyes are on Venezuela's response to the swiftly moving events, and on Sunday, interim leader Delcy Rodríguez stepped back from her initial defiance by offering to work with Trump.

"We extend an invitation to the US government to work together on an agenda for cooperation," the former vice president said.

Some 2,000 Maduro supporters, including rifle-wielding men on motorcycles, rallied on Sunday in Caracas, with crowds shouting and waving Venezuelan flags.

The Venezuelan military, loyal to Maduro, announced it recognised Rodríguez and urged calm.

No Venezuela death toll has been announced, but Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino López said a "large part" of Maduro's security team was killed "in cold blood," as well as military personnel and civilians.



Demonstrators gather in support of ousted Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro outside the Daniel Patrick Moynihan United States Courthouse as Maduro awaits his arraignment hearing on yesterday in New York.

— AFP

Trump said on Sunday that the United States was "in charge" of the South American nation, while US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said that discussions of Venezuela holding elections following Maduro's ouster were "premature."

## Need access to oil'

When asked what he needs from interim leader Rodríguez, Trump said: "We need total access. We need access to the oil and other things in their country that allow us to rebuild their country."

Venezuela has the world's largest proven oil reserves, and more Venezuelan crude in the market could exacerbate oversupply concerns and add to recent pressure on prices.

But analysts say that alongside other major questions about the South American country's future, substantially lifting its oil production will not be easy, quick or cheap.

Oil dipped as investors weighed the impact.

The Trump administration says it retains economic leverage by blockading oil tankers from Venezuela. Trump has also threatened additional military attacks.

While there are no known US forces left inside Venezuela, a huge naval presence, including an aircraft carrier, remains off the coast.

Leading opposition figure Edmundo González Urrutia said that while the US intervention was "important," without the release of political prisoners and acknowledgement that he won the 2024 election, it was simply "not enough."

Details of the US operation were still emerging yesterday, with Havana saying 32 Cubans were killed in the attack and Trump adding that Cuba itself was ready to fall after Maduro's capture.

"I don't think we need any action. It looks like it's going down," Trump said.



Supporters of regime change in Venezuela chant and gesture outside the Daniel Patrick Moynihan United States Courthouse as ousted Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro awaits his arraignment hearing yesterday in New York.

— AFP

The UN Security Council held an emergency session yesterday at Venezuela's request.

## Maduro allies remain

The White House indicated Sunday that it does not want regime change, only Maduro's removal and a pliant new government — even if it is filled with his former associates.

Anointed by his mentor Hugo Chávez before the latter's 2013 death, Maduro kept a tight grip on power until his capture by US forces on Saturday.

He ruled alongside Flores and three other powerful figures: Rodríguez, now Venezuela's interim leader, her brother Jorge, and their rival, hardline Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello.

"It's like a club of five," a diplomatic source in Caracas told AFP under the condition of anonymity.

The US position leaves the Venezuelan opposition, which the Trump administration says was

robbed of victory by Maduro, out in the cold.

China, Russia and Iran, which have longstanding ties with Maduro's government, were quick to condemn the operation. Some US allies, including the EU, expressed alarm.

China called for Maduro to be "immediately released" in a condemnation of the US operation, which its foreign ministry said was a "clear violation of international law."

Iran said yesterday that its relations with close ally Venezuela remained unchanged and called for Maduro's release.

Colombian President Gustavo Petro, whose country neighbours Venezuela, called the US action an "assault on the sovereignty" of Latin America, which would lead to a humanitarian crisis.

Petro rejected threats on Sunday of military action in Colombia made by Trump, who also accused the South American leader of drug trafficking.

— AFP

## UN chief urges respect for states' political independence in Venezuela SC meeting

UNITED NATIONS, New York — UN Secretary-General António Guterres yesterday called for respect for the political independence of states after the United States seized Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro and said it was in charge of the country.

Guterres urged "respect for the principles of sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of states," according to remarks read

on his behalf by Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo during a UN Security Council (SC) meeting on Venezuela.

"I am deeply concerned about the possible intensification [of] instability in the country, the potential impact on the region, and the precedent it may set for how relations between and among states are conducted," the UN chief's remarks said.

Venezuela called for the meeting and Colombia relayed the request to the Security Council, of which it has been a member since January 1.

After months of threats and pressure tactics, US forces on Saturday bombed Venezuela and toppled Maduro in a massive operation that brought an end to 12 years of rule by the left-wing leader, who had a US\$50 million US bounty on his head. — AFP

## Macron clarifies comments on US operation against Maduro

PARIS — French President Emmanuel Macron yesterday said he "neither supported nor approved" the US military operation to grab Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro, a government spokesman said.

His comment clarified an initial public reaction Macron made that Venezuelans "can only rejoice" at Maduro's overthrow.

That first reaction drew criticism from several political figures in France, some of whom saw the French president as kowtowing to US President Donald Trump.

It also contrasted with a reaction

from French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot who on Saturday condemned the US operation — saying it undermined international law, while stressing that no solution to Venezuela's crisis can be imposed from the outside.

Yesterday, government spokeswoman Maud Bregeon reported Macron as telling cabinet ministers: "We defend international law and the freedom of peoples. The method employed is neither supported nor approved."

She said Macron added that, for Venezuela, "if there is to be a transition, then the 2024 winner must obviously play a central role in it".

That was in reference to Venezuelan presidential candidate Edmundo González Urrutia, who was widely considered the rightful victor of a 2024 presidential election.

Maduro, however, was proclaimed the winner, sparking deadly riots that were brutally repressed.

Maduro's vice president, Delcy Rodríguez, has taken over Venezuela's government as interim leader, and said she wants to discuss "cooperation" with Washington. The country's military has said it recognises her authority.

Trump says the US is now "in charge" of Venezuela. — AFP

## US oil majors soar on Wall St after Maduro abduction

NEW YORK — US oil giants surged on Wall Street early yesterday (local time) after the United States abducted Venezuela's leader as markets opened a post-holiday season trading stretch ahead of key employment data.

Both Chevron and ConocoPhillips rose more than four percent in opening trading, while ExxonMobil rose 2.1 percent.

The gains helped lift major indices, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average up 1.1 percent at 48,903.76.

The broad-based S&P 500 climbed 0.6 percent to 6,895.94, while the tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index also advanced 0.6 percent to 23,381.70.

The rally in US oil shares stood in contrast to crude prices, which did not move significantly. Analysts say increased oil volumes from Venezuela due to US investments promised by President Donald Trump would likely take years to show up in the market.

Trump said that in the wake of the military attack on Venezuela and arrest of its president Nicolás Maduro that US companies will "go in, spend billions of [US] dollars, fix the badly broken infrastructure."

The weekend's dramatic events did not significantly affect financial markets, where traders remain fixated on economic data and Federal Reserve policy statements.

"Typically, Wall Street does not really respond much to military confrontations, especially on such a small scale as this that will not likely result in an impact to the global economy," said Sam Stovall of CFRA Research.

"People are sort of tiptoeing back into equities and waiting to see what will happen with the Federal Reserve, as well as corporate profits," said Stovall.

Besides this week's jobs data for December, markets are looking to fourth-quarter reporting season in the coming weeks.

— AFP

# 'That's enough': Greenland PM urges Trump to drop annex threats

**Etienne Fontaine**

COPENHAGEN, Denmark – US President Donald Trump's call for Greenland to become part of the United States drew international condemnation yesterday, with the autonomous Danish territory's prime minister warning: "That's enough now."

Washington's military intervention in Venezuela has reignited fears about Greenland, the mineral-rich Arctic territory which Trump has repeatedly said he wants to annex.

"We need Greenland from the standpoint of national security, and Denmark is not going to be able to do it," he told reporters aboard Air Force One on Sunday.

The island has untapped rare earth minerals and could be a vital player as the polar ice melts and new shipping routes emerge.

Greenland is also on the shortest route for missiles between Russia and the United States, and Washington already has a military base there.

"We'll worry about Greenland in about two months," continued Trump. "Let's talk about Greenland in 20 days."

Greenland Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen took to social media to tell the US leader: "That's enough now. No more pressure. No more insinuations. No more

fantasies of annexation."

"We are open to dialogue," he said. "But this must happen through the proper channels and with respect for international law."

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen also said over the weekend the United States should stop threatening its NATO ally, and yesterday several European countries and the EU rushed to the support of Copenhagen.

Trump rattled European leaders by attacking Caracas and seizing Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro, who is now being detained in New York.

Trump has said the United States will "run" Venezuela indefinitely and tap its huge oil reserves.

The US leader has been similarly ramping up pressure on Greenland for months, saying in December that Russian and Chinese ships were "all over" the territory's coast.

The foreign ministry in Beijing hit back yesterday, urging Washington to "stop using the so-called China threat as an excuse to seek personal gain".

Aaja Chemnitz, an MP who represents Greenland in the Danish parliament, accused Trump of "spreading lies about Chinese and Russian warships".



*This aerial view shows snow-covered buildings in Nuuk, the capital and largest city of Greenland, on March 7, 2025. Any US attack on a NATO ally would be the end of "everything", Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen warned yesterday, after US President Donald Trump repeated his desire to annex Greenland. "If the United States decides to militarily attack another NATO country, then everything would stop – that includes NATO and therefore post-World War II security," Frederiksen told Danish television network TV2.*

– AFP

compare this to Venezuela."

## Disrespectful'

The controversy drew a slew of supporting statements from around Europe, with EU foreign policy spokesperson Anita Hipper telling reporters the bloc was committed to defending the territorial integrity of its members.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said "only Greenland and the Kingdom of Denmark" could decide

the territory's future – sentiments reflected in statements from the leaders of Finland, Sweden and Norway.

France's foreign ministry spokesman Pascal Confavreux told local TV that "borders cannot be changed by force" and added that his country felt "solidarity" with Denmark.

The latest flare-up came after a weekend of high tension sparked on Saturday by former Trump aide Katie Miller, who posted online an image of Greenland in the colours of the US flag with the caption "SOON".

Nielsen labelled the post "disrespectful" and Frederiksen on Sunday called on Washington to stop "threatening its historical ally" and called US claims on Greenland "absurd".

Katie Miller is the wife of Trump adviser Stephen Miller, who is widely seen as the architect of many of Trump's policies, guiding the president's hard-line immigration policies and domestic agenda.

In response to Katie Miller's post, Denmark's ambassador to Washington, Jesper Moeller Soerensen, said his country was already working with Washington to boost security in the Arctic.

"We are close allies and should continue to work together as such," Soerensen wrote.

– AFP

## French 'hypnotherapist' accused of raping 14 women goes on trial

AIX-EN-PROVENCE, France – A French dance teacher and self-proclaimed "hypnotherapist" went on trial yesterday accused of drugging and sexually abusing women while filming the assaults.

The case follows a high-profile trial that shocked France in 2024, in which Dominique Pelicot admitted to drugging his wife for almost a decade and inviting dozens of men to rape her while she was unconscious.

Cyril Zattara, 47, appeared in court behind closed doors in the southern city of Aix-en-Provence, charged with raping 14 women over 10 years, as well as allegedly filming around 20 women without their knowledge.

Zattara, who has been in detention for five years, has admitted to 10 of the rape charges.

The case began in 2019 when a 24-year-old filed a complaint after a hypnosis session with the self-taught hypnotherapist. The woman said she woke up after drinking part of a glass of wine and recalled vomiting and being raped by the defendant.

His DNA was found under the young woman's fingernails and in her underwear.

The defendant would allegedly slip sleeping pills into the victims' drinks before sexually assaulting them, often targeting women with whom he was friendly or in intimate

relationships, according to the investigation.

When the victims woke up, dazed and sometimes undressed, Zattara would attribute their condition to hypnosis or blame it on alcohol, according to the investigation.

But blood and hair tests showed that the victims had ingested tranquilisers.

Investigators also found photos and videos on Zattara's computer that showed the alleged victims in a lethargic state during sexual intercourse.

Judge Roger Arata ordered the trial to be held behind closed doors at the request of a lawyer for one of the civil parties. Other victims argued the trial be open to the public.

The same judge ruled in favour of Gisele Pelicot's decision to waive her anonymity and allow the public into the courtroom during the trial to raise awareness about sexual violence.

She famously said that it was time for the perpetrators – and not the victims – to be ashamed. Dominique Pelicot was jailed for 20 years.

But outside the court in Zattara's case, the mother of one of the civil parties, who wished to remain anonymous, said she understood the decision to hold a closed trial.

"They say shame has shifted to the other side, but that's not always true," she said.

– AFP

## Eyeing its own security, Europe muted as Trump ousts Maduro

**Max Delany**

BRUSSELS, Belgium – European leaders have given a low-key response to US President Donald Trump's military intervention in Venezuela as they seek to avoid riling him on other critical issues – from Ukraine to Greenland.

After US troops captured Nicolás Maduro in a jaw-dropping blitz on Caracas, leaders across the Atlantic largely refused to condemn a move seen by critics as trampling on Venezuela's sovereignty.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz called the operation legally "complex", and British premier Keir Starmer said it was a "fast-moving situation".

All stressed the need to uphold "international law" – but no one was shedding tears for the toppling of Maduro, an ally of Russia who the EU viewed as illegitimate after disputed elections in 2024.

"These events create the opportunity for a democratic transition in Venezuela," EU spokeswoman Paula Pinho said yesterday, sidestepping commenting on Trump's insistence Washington will now run Venezuela.

Spanish Premier Pedro Sánchez – whose country has deep ties to Latin America – sounded a rare harsh note by saying the intervention "violates international law".

But that was as far as anyone was willing to go as Europe frets about keeping Trump onside in fraught negotiations over Ukraine.

"We have our problems elsewhere and like it or not, realistically we need the US involvement," one EU diplomat told AFP, talking as others on condition of anonymity.

"Having a tough statement to defend Maduro is not in our collective interest."

The intervention in Venezuela comes as Europe has desperately been trying to mould Trump's efforts to end Russia's war in Ukraine.

Kyiv's backers are hoping Trump will give solid security guarantees to Ukraine as he pressures the country to give up territory for a deal.

European leaders are set to hold a summit in Paris today to try to firm up the plans and could meet with Trump later this month.

"No US, no security guarantees," said one EU official.

## Greenland fears

While European diplomats concede they don't have much sway over Washington's push to dominate Latin America, far more worrying would be if an emboldened Trump goes after another prize: Greenland.

As he basked in the successful operation to capture Maduro the mercurial leader repeated his desire to take control of the autonomous territory of EU and NATO member Denmark.

"We need Greenland from the standpoint of national security, and Denmark is not going to be able to do it," Trump told journalists.

That came despite Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen calling on Washington to stop "threatening" its territory.

The EU and Britain insisted they stood by Denmark and Greenland.

But even on this issue Europe appeared keen to avoid a confrontation.

"We must appease Trump, not poke the beast," said another EU diplomat. "There's nothing we can do, and Trump knows it."

While few expect Trump to repeat the aggressive tactics in Greenland, analysts said the US powerplay in Venezuela already boded ill for Europe's efforts to cling to a rules-based world order.

"One of the by-products of action of this kind is a legitimising effect on the ability of great powers to reshape things in ways they want in their neighbourhood," said Ian Lesser of the German Marshall Fund think tank.

Meanwhile experts from the European Council on Foreign Relations insisted that Europe would eventually face a decision on standing up to Trump.

"Europeans face a choice: accommodate or resist Washington's ambitions. Either path carries costs," the think tank said.

"The question is not whether Europe can avoid friction with the US, but whether it is willing to defend its own interests when the challenge comes from its most powerful ally."

– AFP

# The United States' history of intervening in Latin America

PARIS, France – The United States, which on Saturday attacked Venezuela and abducted its president, has a long history of military interventions and support for dictatorships in Latin America.

On multiple occasions the late Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez and his successor Nicolás Maduro – who is now in US hands – accused Washington of backing coup attempts.

Here are the main US interventions in Latin America since the Cold War.

## - 1954: Guatemala -

On June 27, 1954, Colonel Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán, president of Guatemala, was driven from power by mercenaries trained and financed by Washington, after a land reform that threatened the interests of the powerful US company United Fruit Corporation (later Chiquita Brands).

In 2003, the United States officially acknowledged the CIA's role in this coup, in the name of fighting communism.

## - 1961: Cuba -

From April 15 to 19, 1961, 1,400 anti-Castro militants trained and financed by the CIA attempted to land at the Bay of Pigs, 250 kilometres from Havana, but failed to overthrow Fidel Castro's communist regime.

The fighting killed more than a hundred on each side.

## - 1965: Dominican Republic -

In 1965, citing a "communist threat", the United States sent Marines and paratroopers to Santo Domingo to crush an uprising in

support of Juan Bosch, a leftist president ousted by generals in 1963.

## - 1970s: support for dictatorships -

Washington backed several military dictatorships, seen as a bulwark against left-wing armed movements in a world divided by Cold War rivalries.

It actively assisted Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet during the September 11, 1973 coup against leftist president Salvador Allende.

US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger supported the Argentine junta in 1976, encouraging it to quickly end its "dirty war", according to US documents declassified in 2003.

At least 10,000 Argentine dissidents disappeared.

In the 1970s and 1980s, six dictatorships (Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Brazil) joined forces to eliminate left-wing opponents under "Operation Condor", with tacit US support.

## - 1980s: wars in Central America -

In 1979, the Sandinista rebellion overthrew dictator Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua. US president Ronald Reagan, concerned about Managua's alignment with Cuba and the USSR, secretly authorised the CIA to provide US\$20 million in aid to the Contras (the Nicaraguan counterrevolutionaries), partly funded by the illegal sale of arms to Iran.

The Nicaraguan civil war, which ended in April 1990, claimed 50,000 lives.

Reagan also sent military advisers to El Salvador to crush the rebellion of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN, far left) in a civil war (1980-1992) that resulted in 72,000 deaths.

## - 1983: Grenada -

On October 25, 1983, US Marines and Rangers intervened on the island of Grenada after prime minister Maurice Bishop was assassinated by a far-left junta and as Cubans were expanding the airport, presumably to accommodate military aircraft.

At the request of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), Reagan launched Operation "Urgent Fury" with the stated goal of protecting a thousand US citizens.

The operation, widely deplored by the UN General Assembly, ended on November 3, with more than a hundred dead.

## - 1989: Panama -

In 1989, after a contested election, president George H. W. Bush ordered a military intervention in Panama, resulting in the surrender of general Manuel Noriega, a former collaborator of US intelligence, who was wanted by US justice.

Some 27,000 GIs took part in Operation "Just Cause", which officially left 500 dead.

NGOs put the toll significantly higher, in the thousands.

Noriega would spend more than two decades in prison in the United States for drug trafficking before serving additional sentences in France and then Panama. –AFP

# EU hopes to sign Mercosur/Mercosul trade deal soon

## Adrien De Calan

BRUSSELS – The European Union yesterday said it hoped to sign a long-delayed trade deal with South American bloc Mercosur/Mercosul\* "soon", pointing to progress towards approval by the bloc's member states.

Diplomats have said the EU aims for signing the pact on January 12 after hopes to ink the agreement in December were dashed by France and Italy joining forces to demand a delay.

European Commission chief spokeswoman Paula Pinho did not confirm the new January date but insisted the EU was on the "right track" for approval.

"There have been discussions, work, and progress over the past two weeks," she told a press conference in Brussels.

In a push to get the deal over the line, EU agriculture ministers will discuss the agreement tomorrow during an extraordinary meeting in Brussels.

European diplomats said that could be a prelude to a vote on Friday by member states, paving the way for an official signing.

More than 25 years in the making, the accord would create

the world's biggest free-trade area, boosting trade between the 27-nation EU and the bloc comprising Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, and Uruguay.

But plans to seal the deal at a Mercosur/Mercosul gathering in Brazil on December 20 ran into a late roadblock as heavyweights Italy and France demanded a postponement over concerns for the farming sector.

## France suspending imports

Germany and Spain are strongly in favour of the agreement, believing it will provide a welcome boost to their industries, hampered by Chinese competition and tariffs in the United States.

The deal would help the EU export more vehicles, machinery, wines and spirits to Latin America at a time of global trade tensions.

In return, it would facilitate the entry into Europe of South American meat, sugar, rice, honey and soybeans. –AFP

This has alarmed many European farmers who fear they will be undercut by a flow of cheaper goods from agricultural giant Brazil and its neighbours.

Rome and Paris have called for

tougher safeguard clauses, tighter import controls and more stringent standards on Mercosur/Mercosul producers to protect their farmers.

The French government also on Sunday announced plans to suspend imports of foodstuffs containing substances banned in Europe.

This would include avocados, mangoes, guavas, citrus fruits, grapes, apples, melons, cherries, strawberries, and potatoes "from South America or elsewhere" according to French Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu.

The plans will, however, need approval from Brussels.

The EU executive is "already working on establishing that the most hazardous pesticides, which are banned in the EU for health or environmental reasons, are not allowed back to the EU through imported products", commission spokeswoman Eva Hrncirova said yesterday. –AFP

*\*Mercosur is the official acronym in Spanish of the Southern Common Market. Mercosul is the acronym used in Portuguese.*

*Both acronyms are used interchangeably depending on the language context. –Poe*

# Colombian president ready to 'take up arms' in face of Trump threats

BOGOTÁ – Colombian President Gustavo Petro said yesterday he was ready to "take up arms" in the face of threats from US counterpart Donald Trump, who over the weekend seized the leader of neighbouring Venezuela in a military strike.

Petro, a former guerrilla who for months been the target of insults and threats from Trump, said on X: "I swore not to touch a weapon again... but for the homeland I will take up arms again."

Trump said over the weekend that Petro should "watch his ass" and described Colombia's first-ever leftist leader as "a sick man who likes making cocaine and selling it to the United States."

Petro, whose M-19 urban guerrilla group disarmed under a 1989 peace agreement, has traded barbs with Trump ever since the Republican's return to the White House in January.

Petro has been a vocal critic of the US military deployment in the Caribbean, which began with blowing up of alleged drug boats, before expanding to seizure of Venezuelan oil tankers, then

Saturday's raid on Caracas to seize president Nicolás Maduro.

Trump accused the Colombian leader, without providing evidence, of being involved in drug trafficking and hit him and his family with financial sanctions.

Washington also removed Colombia from a list of countries certified as allies in the US war on drugs.

In a long message on X, Petro insisted that his anti-narcotics policy is sufficiently robust, but stressed there were limits to how aggressive the military can be.

"If you bomb even one of these groups without sufficient intelligence, you will kill many children. If you bomb peasants, thousands will turn into guerrillas in the mountains. And if you detain the president, whom a good part of my people love and respect, you will unleash the popular jaguar," he wrote.

The Trump administration is close to the right-wing opposition in Colombia, which has high hopes of winning legislative and presidential elections this year. –AFP

# Americas 'do not belong' to any power: Mexican president

MEXICO CITY – The Americas "do not belong" to any power, Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum said yesterday after US counterpart Donald Trump invoked Washington's "dominance" of the hemisphere after seizing Venezuela's leader in a military raid.

Trump described the weekend US military operation against leftist Nicolás Maduro as an update of the Monroe Doctrine: the 1823 declaration by fifth US president James Monroe that Latin America was closed to other powers, which at the time meant Europe.

US military forces early Saturday launched strikes on the Venezuelan capital Caracas and seized Maduro and his wife, flying them to New York to stand trial on drug trafficking charges.

Since then, Trump has also made threats against other leftist governments in the region, including Cuba, Colombia and Mexico, the last of which he warned specifically to do more to crack down on drug trafficking. –AFP



Portugal's independent presidential candidate Henrique Gouveia e Melo (centre) greets a chestnut vendor as he takes part in a street campaign rally in Lisbon on Sunday, ahead of Portugal's January 18 presidential elections by universal suffrage. –AFP

## Little-known Rosenior set for surprise chance at Chelsea

**Barnaby Chesterman**

 PARIS – Liam Rosenior is a little-known English coach who looks certain to be thrust into a fierce spotlight as Chelsea's new manager.

If Rosenior becomes the latest coach on the Chelsea carousel to replace the departed Enzo Maresca, he will have benefited from the Blues' owners' multi-club model to earn promotion from Ligue 1's Strasbourg to the upper echelons of the Premier League.

While he may never have coached in the Premier League, he comes with a glowing reference from former Manchester United and England great Wayne Rooney.

After a short spell in charge of Brighton's under-23s, Rosenior, 41, began his senior coaching career in 2019 at Derby County, first under Philip Cocu and then as assistant to Rooney.

"He's taken chances, and hopefully that pays off because I think Liam is as good a coach as I've ever worked with," Rooney said on his BBC podcast.

"He was incredible in his coaching ability," added Rooney, highlighting Rosenior's attention to detail.

Rosenior briefly replaced Rooney on an interim basis in 2022 and later that year took over as manager of Hull City in the Championship.

After just over 18 months in charge, he was sacked and in July 2024 was appointed by Strasbourg, the French club who are owned by Chelsea's parent company BlueCo.

That link appears to be the main reason the west Londoners are considering Rosenior, given his relative dearth of top-flight experience. Strasbourg are currently seventh in Ligue 1.

But according to Rooney, "he's done his apprenticeship... so he'll have no doubts in his mind that he's capable of doing that job."

He would become only the fourth English manager in the current Premier League.

In an interview with AFP last year, Rosenior spelled out his coaching philosophy.

"For me, regardless of style of play, tactics, systems, how fit your team is, I think football is played by people," he said.

"People have emotions and are complex. They have good days and bad. My job is actually to get the best out of people."

### Role model dad

Rosenior, a right back in his playing days, certainly has football in his blood.

His father Leroy was a striker for Fulham, Queens Park Rangers, West Ham and Bristol City and, although born in London, he represented the Sierra Leone national team due to family links.

Liam followed in his father's footsteps, playing for both Bristol City and Fulham during a long career split mostly between the Premier League and Championship.

Leroy also went into management and Liam twice played under his dad, firstly in the Bristol City youth ranks and then in the old Third Division during a brief loan spell at Torquay United when he was 19.

"I'm grateful to my dad for giving me that chance. I learnt more in three months there than anywhere else," Liam told *The Independent* in 2006.

Perhaps surprisingly, though, Leroy was not a pushy parent and always let Liam choose his own path.

"Dad is the main influence in my career, not because he was always telling me what to do, but through his presence and that he had done it before," Liam told *The Independent*. "Kids have role models; my dad was mine."

Like his father, he represented England at under-21 level, although he never made the switch to Sierra Leone at senior level.

Incidentally, his brother Darren played amateur rugby union for Rosslyn Park.

Liam found silverware hard to come by as a player, but did score the clinching second goal for Bristol City in their Football League Trophy success in 2003.

In 2014, he was part of the Hull City team that took an early 2-0 lead over Arsenal in the FA Cup final, only to lose 3-2 after extra time.

If he is appointed soon, one of his first tasks as Chelsea manager would be trying to get the Blues past Arsenal in a two-legged League Cup semi-final, with the first leg on January 14. – AFP

**Strasbourg's British head coach Liam Rosenior reacts during the French L1 match against Stade Rennais FC, on November 2, 2025. Rosenior met with Chelsea's sporting directors yesterday ahead of his appointment as head coach, according to British media reports.** – AFP

## Amorim sacked by Man Utd after 14-month reign

**John Weaver**



LONDON – Ruben Amorim was sacked by Manchester United yesterday, bringing a dramatic end to his turbulent 14-month spell as manager of the struggling Premier League giants.

The dismissal of the Portuguese follows growing tensions with Old Trafford bosses, including director of football Jason Wilcox, over recent days.

The club, sixth in the Premier League table after a 1-1 draw at Leeds on Sunday, issued a statement saying Amorim had "departed his role as head coach of Manchester United", thanking him for his service.

"The club's leadership has reluctantly made the decision that it is the right time to make a change," United said in their statement.

"This will give the team the best opportunity of the highest possible Premier League finish."

Current under-18s coach Darren Fletcher, a former United midfielder and technical director between 2021 and 2024, will take charge of the team against struggling Burnley tomorrow.

The BBC said the club were planning to appoint a caretaker boss for the rest of the season.

Names in the frame for the full-time job include Enzo Maresca, who left Chelsea last week, Crystal Palace boss Oliver Glazner and former England manager Gareth Southgate.

### Rising tensions

Amorim had hinted at deep frustrations on Friday, suggesting he was not being fully backed in the transfer market.

And he made a string of eye-catching comments after Sunday's draw at Elland Road, where he stressed he was United's manager rather than "just the coach".

The Portuguese told the scouting department and Wilcox "to do their job" during a blockbuster end to a post-match press conference that raised major doubts over his future.

And he repeatedly suggested to the



Manchester United's Portuguese head coach Ruben Amorim gestures on the touchline during the English Premier League match against Tottenham Hotspur at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London, on November 8, 2025. – AFP

media that he would leave when his contract expired in 18 months' time.

But reports yesterday said United's decision to axe their manager was due to the lack of progress rather than a power struggle.

The dismissal is a dismal end for Amorim, who won just 25 of his 63 games at United in all competitions during the shortest reign for a permanent manager since David Moyes was sacked just eight months into his tenure in 2014.

He had the worst win ratio (32 percent), the worst goals-conceded-per-game ratio (1.53) and the lowest clean-sheet ratio (15 percent) of any United boss in the Premier League.

Amorim arrived at Old Trafford to replace Erik ten Hag in November 2024 as one of the most sought-after coaches in world football following a successful stint at Sporting Lisbon, where he won two league titles.

But he was powerless to stop United's slide to a 15th-place finish in the Premier League - their worst campaign for 51 years - at one stage describing his team as "maybe the worst" in the history of the club.

Amorim had the chance to end the 2024/25 campaign on a high in

Bilbao but United lost the Europa League final against Tottenham and missed out on European football this season as a result.

The club backed their manager in the summer transfer window, spending more than £200 million (US\$269 million) on new signings including Bryan Mbeumo, Benjamin Sesko and Matheus Cunha.

But they have again flattered to deceive, winning just eight of their 20 league games so far and falling 17 points behind leaders Arsenal.

Amorim has been hit by injuries and a number of players are on Africa Cup of Nations duty but he has been criticised for sticking rigidly to his preferred 3-4-3 formation despite evidence it was not the best fit for his players.

His exit leaves the club searching for their seventh permanent manager since the retirement of Alex Ferguson, who left as a Premier League champion in 2013.

Since then, apart from the occasional cup success, the 20-time English champions have been also-rans, overshadowed by bitter rivals Manchester City and Liverpool.

– AFP

**LIGUE 1**

## Real teenager Endrick targets Brazil return from Lyon loan

DÉCINES-CHARPIEU – Brazilian starlet Endrick said yesterday that he hoped his loan switch to Lyon would help spark a return to the national side, in time for the World Cup.

The 19-year-old played just 99 minutes of football for Real Madrid during the first half of this season as he failed to convince the Merengues' new coach Xabi Alonso to show him the kind of faith he enjoyed last season under Carlo Ancelotti.

He played 11 times for Brazil in 2024, the year he moved to Spain from Palmeiras in his homeland,

but featured only once in the yellow jersey in 2025.

"My aim is to help Lyon, to play and to win," Endrick told reporters ahead of his likely debut for the Ligue 1 side against Lille in the French Cup this weekend.

"When you're Brazilian, everyone dreams of playing for the national team."

"I haven't been picked recently, but I will do everything to get back in."

Endrick's arrival sparked excitement amongst the Lyon faithful not seen since the arrivals of his compatriot Sonny Anderson in 1999, or French playmaker Yoann Gourcuff in 2010.

"He has immense talent and potential. He's quick and he's able to get in behind and to finish off chances with his goal sense," said Lyon's technical director Matthieu Louis-Jean.

Lyon claimed a 3-1 win at Monaco on Saturday that kept them fifth in the table and just two points off the top four and potential Champions League qualification.

"We are convinced that Endrick is the element that we lack and he will give the team power for the second half of the season," added general manager Michael Gerlinger.

– AFP



# Head hits back for Australia after Root's majestic 160

**Martin Parry**

SYDNEY – An imperious Joe Root hit a magnificent 160 to drive England to 384 in the fifth and final Ashes Test yesterday before Travis Head let rip to haul Australia back into the contest with a rapid-fire unbeaten 91.

Root's superb innings, his 41<sup>st</sup> ton to match Ricky Ponting, was only ended courtesy of a brilliant caught-and-bowled by Michael Neser, who finished with 4-60.

Australia were left to negotiate the final session of day two at a sold-out Sydney Cricket Ground, which they did for the loss of Jake Weatherald (21) and Marnus Labuschagne (48).

By stumps the hosts – who have already won the series – had raced to 166-2 with nightwatchman Neser on one alongside Head.

"I think it's set interestingly," Root told TNT Sports.

He added: "Most important for us is not panicking, not dwelling too much on what happened here.

"It's how we respond tomorrow [this] morning and maximise that chance first up."

Weatherald, who needed a big score to stave off the critics, again failed to live up to expectations since making his debut at the first Test in Perth.

He was dropped twice in the space of three balls, by Root then Ben Duckett, before Ben Stokes trapped him lbw.

But Head, who like Root has slammed two centuries this series, was in the zone.

He clattered three boundaries off the second over from Matthew Potts, in the side for the injured Gus Atkinson, and there was no let-up, blitzing a quickfire 50 off 55 balls.

Labuschagne was also in good touch, stroking seven boundaries before thick-edging Stokes to Jacob Bethell at gully.

Labuschagne and Stokes had clashed between overs, with the England captain aiming an expletive at the batsman.

The hosts lead the series 3-1 and have already retained the Ashes, with England desperate for another win after victory at the previous Test in Melbourne.

"Fresh start tomorrow [today]," said Neser.



*Australia's Travis Head plays a shot for four runs on day two of the fifth Ashes cricket Test against England at the SCG in Sydney yesterday.*

– AFP

"But the wicket seems to be quickening up just a little bit, so we're going to be mindful of that tomorrow."

## Root joins Ponting

England resumed at 211-3 but lost Harry Brook (84), Stokes (0) and Jamie Smith (46) before lunch.

Will Jacks (27), Brydon Carse (1) and Josh Tongue (0), along with Root, departed in the second session.

The day belonged to Root, who started on 72 and reached an almost chanceless century off 146 balls to reaffirm his status as an all-time great.

The 35-year-old had begun the series under pressure after failing to make a hundred in Australia over three previous Ashes tours.

He snapped the drought with an unbeaten 138 in the day-night Test at Brisbane and his exploits in Sydney drew him level third with Australia's Ponting on the all-time century-makers' list, with 41.

Only India's Sachin Tendulkar (51) and South Africa's Jacques Kallis (45) have scored more Test centuries.

Root and Brook came together with England in trouble at 57-3 on Sunday, with both eyeing big centuries on an ideal batting deck.

But Brook only lasted five balls yesterday, adding six to his overnight 78 before dabbing at a Scott Boland delivery and edging into the safe hands of Steve Smith at slip.

It ended a 169-run partnership, not just England's best of the series but the biggest by either team, surpassing Head and Alex Carey's 162 in Adelaide.

Stokes only survived 11 balls before getting the faintest of edges off Mitchell Starc to Carey.

Jamie Smith lived dangerously and was fortunate to survive after chipping Cameron Green to Labuschagne at cover on 22. He began walking off but replays showed Green overstepped and it was a no-ball.

He added another 24 before medium-pacer Labuschagne bagged him in his first over.

The run rate slowed significantly after lunch when the new ball was taken, but Root persisted, passing 150 for a 17<sup>th</sup> time, just one behind the legendary Don Bradman and three short of Tendulkar.

He and Jacks put on 52 for the seventh wicket until Jacks sent a leading edge to Green in the gully off Neser. Root was ninth man out and Tongue followed without any addition to the score.

– AFP

## Real Madrid to play Israeli basketball team without fans

### Basketball

MADRID – Real Madrid yesterday announced they would play a EuroLeague basketball game against Maccabi Rapyd Tel Aviv behind closed doors over security concerns, the latest disruption to Spanish sport linked to Israeli participation.

More than 250 organisations have demanded Thursday's match at Madrid's Movistar Arena be

suspended over Israel's war in Gaza, organising a rally outside the venue on the day.

"Following a meeting of the State Commission against Violence, Racism, Xenophobia, and Intolerance in Sport, which declared the game high-risk, Real Madrid is complying with the recommendation made by the National Police," the club said in a statement.

In the past year, protests against Israeli competitors over

Gaza have rocked sporting events in Spain, where pro-Palestinian sentiment is strong.

The most notable example was the Vuelta cycling grand tour, which cancelled the finale in Madrid and shortened other stages as demonstrators burst onto the course.

Other EuroLeague games have also been moved behind closed doors, including a fixture between Barcelona and Maccabi Rapyd Tel Aviv today.

– AFP

## Gauff shocked as US reach United Cup quarters, Hurkacz stuns Zverev

### Tennis

PERTH – World number four Coco Gauff suffered her first-ever defeat at the United Cup yesterday when she was stunned by Spain's Jessica Bouzas Maneiro 6-1, 6-7 (3/7), 6-0 in a blow to her Australian Open preparations.

But after Taylor Fritz won to level the tie for the United States, Gauff made amends with Christian Harrison in the mixed doubles, beating Ivonne Cavalle-Reimers and Inigo Cervantes 7-6 (7/5), 6-0 to seal a quarter-final spot.

Gauff had won all six of her previous United Cup singles matches for the USA and had a 3-0 record in mixed doubles. It was the first win over a top-five player for Bouzas Maneiro.

"I know Coco and she's a fighter," the 42<sup>nd</sup>-ranked Bouzas Maneiro said in Perth. "She's there all the time in the match, so I knew that I had to be there. Even if you are 3-0 or 4-0 up, you have to be ready."

World number four Fritz, who is battling a knee problem, needed more than three hours to beat Jaume Munar 7-6 (7/4), 3-6, 7-6 (8/6).

"I was getting exhausted late in the second set, I had to unload five or six shots just to win a single point," said Fritz, who saved a match point in the third set tiebreak.

"I started feeling my knee towards the end but it didn't get any worse. It was not bad enough to stop me from playing through."

In Sydney, Germany's world number three Alexander Zverev was also on the end of a shock United Cup result, beaten 6-3, 6-4 by Poland's Hubert Hurkacz, who had not played since June because of knee surgery.

"It's been a while since I've been competing. Seven months I've been going through difficult times with the team and it was very challenging," Hurkacz said.

"We went through a long period of time not competing and not knowing when we would be able to be back on court again."

"I was just trying to cherish and enjoy every moment here on the court today."

### Swiatek fights back

Former world number six Hurkacz has tumbled to 83rd in the rankings but faced just one break point in his 83-minute victory.

"I was serving quite well. I was finding nice spots, so that's definitely a nice feeling to really have good rhythm on the serve," Hurkacz said.

"Just so pleased with the performance and just also so much fun to see the fans again."

Iga Swiatek closed out the tie for Poland defeating Eva Lys in a 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 fightback.

Earlier the Czech Republic knocked out Norway with a 3-0 win in Sydney.

Greece swept to an unassailable 2-0 lead over Britain as Stefanos Tsitsipas beat Billy Harris 4-6, 6-1, 7-6 (7/4) and Maria Sakkari beat Emma Raducanu for the first time, stopped the 2021 US Open champion 6-3, 3-6, 6-1.

"I got fed up with losing tight matches like this," two-time Grand Slam finalist Tsitsipas said of his victory. "I used all of my power to make sure it did not happen again."

"I've not played such a high-quality match in a long time."

The Australian Open starts on January 18.

– AFP

## Dakar bike champion Sanders wins 2<sup>nd</sup> stage to take lead



ALULA – Australia's defending Dakar Rally motorbike champion Daniel Sanders moved into the overall lead after winning yesterday's second stage in Saudi Arabia.

The 31-year-old covered the 518km route from Yanbu to Al Ula in 4hrs 13mins 37 seconds to cross the line 1min 35s clear of KTM teammate Edgar Canet, who lost time with a couple of minor crashes.

American Ricky Brabec, the 2024 winner, completed the day's podium for Honda.

With this 10<sup>th</sup> stage win in motor-sport's toughest challenge, Sanders climbed to the top of the bike standings by half a minute from Canet, winner of the prologue and opening stage, with Brabec 2min 18s back in third.

"The navigation was really tricky in some places but we fixed a couple of mistakes quickly and didn't lose too much time," said Sanders, who has been competing in the Dakar since 2021.

The rider, who lists bee-keeping as one of his hobbies and is known as 'Chucky', added: "I caught Edgar after around one hundred

kilometres. It was so hard to catch him and pass him before."

"After that, there was some really tricky stuff and he (Canet) just sat behind and watched, followed and learnt."

Canet was thankful to complete an eventful stage unharmed.

"Well, the stage is completed," said the 20-year-old Spaniard.

"The truth is that it has been a long stage, 400 km opening the track for the first time."

"I had a few crashes, as you can see, but hey, these things happen. There are some rocks that you can't see when you're looking at the roadbook," he added.

In the car category, American Seth Quintero beat his South African Toyota Gazoo Racing teammate Henk Lategan by 1:42 with Saudi's reigning champion Yazeed Al Rajhi in third.

Qatar's five-time Dakar winner Nasser Al-Attiyah heads the standings driving for Dacia by just seven seconds from Quintero after coming in eighth in the stage.

Today's third stage is a 422km special starting and ending in Al Ula.

– AFP

# Chalamet boosts Oscar bid with Critics Choice Awards win

Andrew Marsal

LOS ANGELES — Timothee Chalamet's Oscars campaign earned a major boost on Sunday as he scooped the best actor prize for "Marty Supreme" at the Critics Choice Awards, the first major gala of this year's Hollywood awards season.

He defeated rival Leonardo DiCaprio, whose raucous political thriller "One Battle After Another" took the night's top prize for best picture, as well as best director and best adapted screenplay for Paul Thomas Anderson.

In "Marty Supreme," Chalamet plays a 1950s table tennis champion consumed by grand ambitions.

Loosely based on a true story, and benefiting from the Franco-American actor's unique viral campaign, the film directed by Josh Safdie ("Uncut Gems") has become an unlikely global hit.

"Josh, you made a story about a flawed man with a relatable dream," said Chalamet.

"And you didn't preach to the audience about what's right and wrong, and I think we should all be telling stories like that, so thank you for this dream."

The movie is loosely based on the life of table tennis star Marty Reisman, a man driven by the belief that he can achieve fame and fortune through a sport little

known in the United States.

Chalamet — the "Dune" superstar and two-time Oscar nominee who recently portrayed Bob Dylan in "A Complete Unknown" — rigorously trained in table tennis for the role.

The 30-year-old has in the past made no secret of his ambitions to win multiple Academy Awards, and will now be the frontrunner for the ceremony on March 15.

## Oscars momentum

The awards bestowed by North America's largest critics' group could give movie campaigns much-needed extra momentum as Oscars voting nears.

This year, it took the coveted first weekend of awards season usually occupied by the Golden Globes, which will take place in Beverly Hills this weekend.

Jessie Buckley won best actress for her tragic role as the wife of William Shakespeare in period drama "Hamnet."

Jacob Elordi won best supporting actor for his portrayal of the Monster in "Frankenstein," which also won three technical awards, while Amy Madigan won supporting actress for a villainous turn in horror flick "Weapons."

Netflix's global mega-hit musical "KPop Demon Hunters" won best animated feature and best song.

"Sinners," a period horror film also seen as a major contender for many of this season's top prizes, had to settle for best original screenplay, young actor, score, and casting and ensemble.

Among the television prizes, hospital saga "The Pitt" won best drama, Hollywood satire "The Studio" won best comedy, and teen murder drama "Adolescence" won best limited series.

Best talk show winner Jimmy Kimmel joked about his spat with US President Donald Trump last year, which saw the late-night host briefly taken off the air.

"Thank you, Mr President, for all the many ridiculous things you do each and every day," said Kimmel.

"A FIFA Peace Prize would have been better but this is nice too," Kimmel joked.

In the show's opening monologue, host Chelsea Handler paid tribute to the late Rob Reiner, "the nicest guy in Hollywood."

The beloved "When Harry Met Sally" director and his wife Michele were found stabbed to death in their Los Angeles home last month.

"Anyone who ever spent time with Rob Reiner knows that the minute that you met him, he felt like an old friend," she said, to emotional applause from the gathered A-listers and critics. — AFP



Timothée Chalamet poses with the Spotlight Award for "Marty Supreme" in the press room during the 37th Annual Palm Springs International Film Festival Film Awards at the Palm Springs Convention Center on Saturday in Palm Springs, California. — AFP

## S Korean actor Ahn Sung-ki dies at 74



This picture taken on October 6, 2021 shows South Korean actor Ahn Sung-ki posing on the red carpet during the opening ceremony of the 26th Busan International Film Festival in Busan. — AFP

SEOUL — Veteran South Korean actor Ahn Sung-ki, who appeared in more than 170 films over nearly seven decades, died yesterday, local media reported. He was 74.

Ahn, who had been battling blood cancer, died surrounded by his family, Yonhap news agency said.

He had been receiving treatment in an intensive care unit (ICU) after choking on food last week, the report said.

Debuting at the age of five in 1957, Ahn was revered by moviegoers and colleagues alike for his prolific career and scandal-free life — a rarity in the entertainment industry.

His life tracked the rise of South Korean cinema from humble beginnings to global prominence culminating in the Oscar success of "Parasite".

His 2003 blockbuster "Silmido", based on the true story of a secret special forces unit comprised of former inmates tasked with a mission to assassinate the North Korean leader, became the first South Korean film to surpass 10 million admissions.

Ahn is survived by his wife and two sons. — AFP

## Trump-hosted Kennedy Centre awards gala ratings plummet

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump joked about quitting as US president if his hosting of the annual Kennedy Centre awards went well.

But viewership ratings for this year's annual ceremony plummeted to a record low amid controversy over his takeover of the premier Washington arts complex, to which Trump's name was added this month.

The 2025 awards broadcast on CBS averaged 3.01 million viewers, according to a report from Nielsen Live + Same Day Panel + Big Data, cited by industry journals *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter*.

The figure was down 25 percent from 2024's figure of 4.1 million viewers, which was itself a record low and down from 2023's 4.5 million.

Former reality TV star Trump was the first US president to host the awards gala, which this year honoured "Rocky" actor Sylvester Stallone, "Phantom of the Opera" star Michael Crawford, disco legend Gloria Gaynor, rock band KISS and country legend George Strait.

Since returning to office in January, the 79-year-old Republican has launched a forceful takeover of the centre, branding it too "woke" and installing himself as chairman of a hand-picked board.

Shortly before the December 23 broadcast of the awards ceremony, which was taped on December 7, Trump took to his Truth Social network to say he was hosting it at the request of "just about everybody."

"Tell me what you think of my 'Master of Ceremony' abilities. If really good, would you like me to leave the Presidency in order to make 'hosting' a full time job?" he posted.

The centre was renamed the Trump-Kennedy Centre earlier this month in a vote by the board that sparked outrage from family members of the late John F. Kennedy.

A number of artists including a prominent jazz group and a dance company have since cancelled shows at the centre to protest the new name.

Richard Grenell, the Trump-appointed president of the arts centre, denounced the performers cancelling shows and said they "were booked by the previous far left leadership."

"Boycotting the Arts to show you support the Arts is a form of derangement syndrome," he wrote on X last week.

According to US media reports, ticket sales have declined since the new board of directors took over.

— AFP



The Tonies Toniebox 2 children's screen-free interactive game and music box is displayed during CES Unveiled ahead of the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada, on Sunday. — AFP

## World Weather

| CHINA                 | ASIA-PACIFIC              | WORLD                   | LUSOPHONE                   |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Beijing<br>-4°C~7°C   | Manila<br>22°C~30°C       | New York<br>3°C~5°C     | Lisbon<br>7°C~12°C          |
| Shanghai<br>-2°C~10°C | Bangkok<br>20°C~33°C      | London<br>2°C~4°C       | Rio de Janeiro<br>21°C~26°C |
| Hong Kong<br>9°C~17°C | Tokyo<br>0°C~10°C         | Frankfurt<br>-5°C~1°C   | Luanda<br>23°C~29°C         |
| Taipei<br>9°C~16°C    | Singapore<br>24°C~31°C    | Vancouver<br>3°C~8°C    | Maputo<br>21°C~33°C         |
| Guangzhou<br>5°C~17°C | Kuala Lumpur<br>23°C~33°C | Paris<br>-2°C~2°C       | Dili<br>24°C~31°C           |
| Nanjing<br>-4°C~8°C   | Jakarta<br>24°C~32°C      | Moscow<br>-7°C~7°C      | São Tomé<br>26°C~30°C       |
| Guilin<br>2°C~14°C    | Seoul<br>-1°C~4°C         | Las Vegas<br>5°C~15°C   | Praia<br>18°C~26°C          |
| Xi'an<br>-3°C~7°C     | Sydney<br>18°C~28°C       | Monte Carlo<br>4°C~11°C | Bissau<br>21°C~32°C         |



### 1. Oh, that feels good!

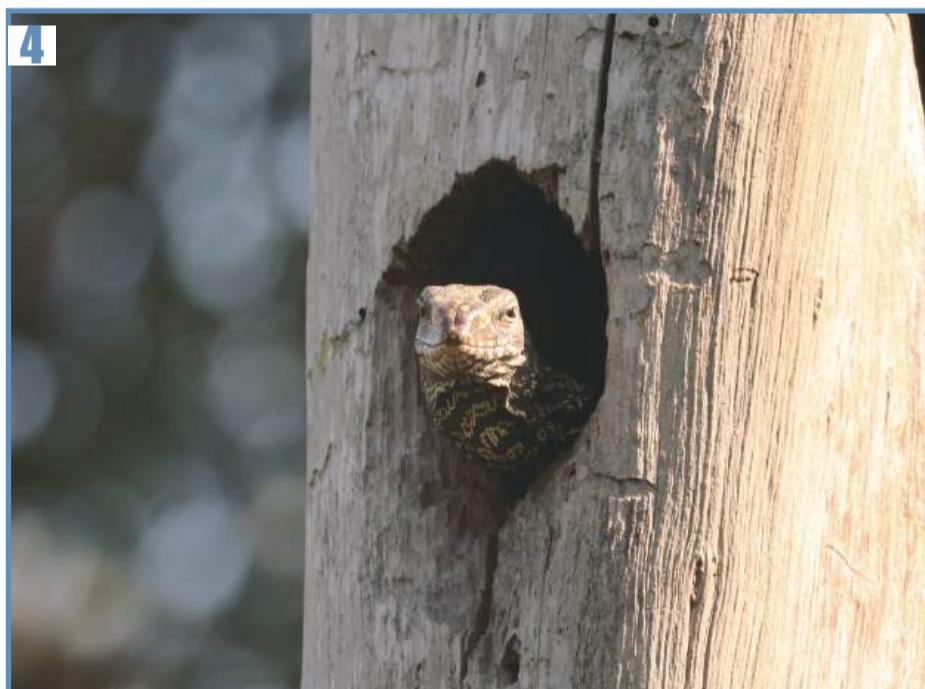
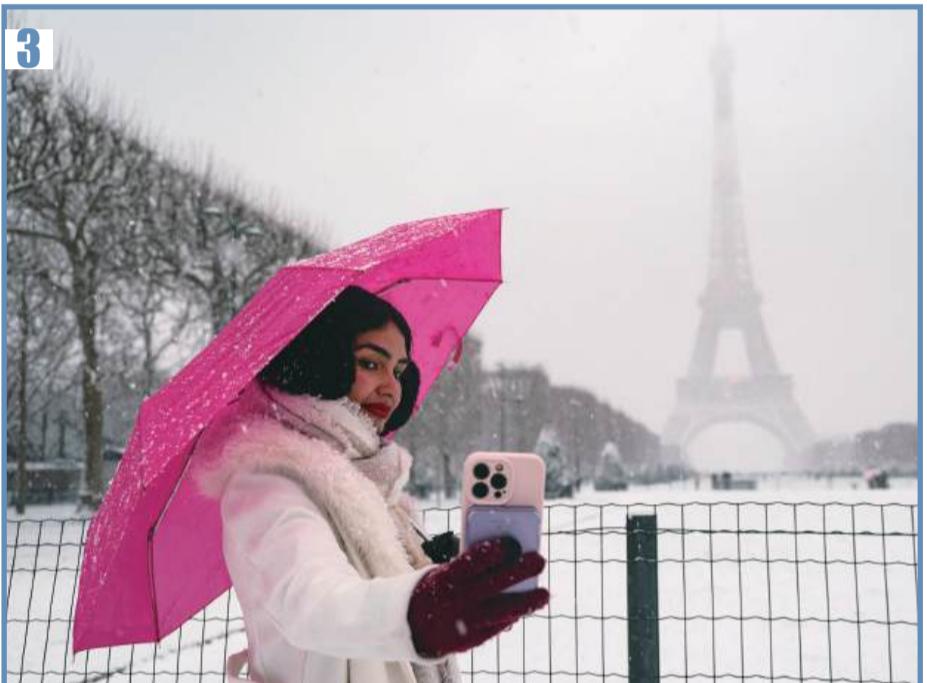
Waterbucks play with a Christmas tree in their enclosure at the Zoologischer Garten zoo in Berlin yesterday. Traditionally, some animals at the Berlin zoo in January are given leftover trees that were not sold before the Christmas holidays as a new year treat. – AFP

### 2. Carry my load

An Afghan man carries a bundle of firewood along a road in the Koshkak area of Balkh province, Afghanistan yesterday. – AFP

### 3. Under my umbrella

A woman takes a selfie on the snow-blanketed Champs-de-Mars near the Eiffel Tower in Paris yesterday. – AFP



### 4. Peek-a-boo

A monitor lizard rests in a tree in Thailand's Kaeng Krachan National Park on Sunday. – AFP

### 5. No rides today!

People view an ice sculpture depicting a reindeer pulling a sleigh in Rovaniemi, Finland, on Friday. Rovaniemi, a city located on the Arctic Circle, is renowned worldwide for aurora watching, winter sports, and reindeer sleigh rides. It is also well known internationally as the "home of Santa Claus," attracting large numbers of visitors from around the globe. – Xinhua

### 6. Unhappy bride

Couples dance during a mass wedding ceremony in Amritsar, India yesterday. – AFP

