

# Govt proposes Zone C & area next to Macau Tower for int'l tourism & cultural zone



The artist's rendition released by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) yesterday shows the planned Macau International Centre for Performing Arts on the west side of the Zone C land reclamation area.



This aerial photo taken earlier this year and released by the bureau yesterday shows Zone C.



## Tony Wong

The local government is gathering opinions from members of the public about its plan to set up an international integrated tourism and cultural zone, including its proposed locations for the zone's three major cultural facilities.

The government is proposing to build one of the three cultural facilities in an area next to Macau Tower and the other two facilities on the Zone C land reclamation area off Taipa's Ocean Gardens residential estate.

The zone is one of the four future large-scale projects aiming to inject new impetus into Macau's long-term development laid out by Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai's 2025 Policy Address, which he delivered in April this year.

The four projects comprise the Macau

International Integrated Tourism and Cultural Zone, the Macau Science and Technology Research and Development Industrial Park, the Macau International Aviation Hub for the Pearl River West Bank, and the Macau-Hengqin International University City.

Sam said in his 2025 Policy Address that the international integrated tourism and cultural zone will feature "iconic and high-standard" cultural facilities with international influence, including three major cultural facilities, namely the Macau National Museum of Culture, the Macau International Centre for Performing Arts, and the International Museum of Contemporary Art.

Sam also said at that time that the government was studying the possibility of

creating its international integrated tourism and cultural zone by developing waterfront areas in southern peninsula and northern Taipa.

The government started its process yesterday to gather opinions from members of the public until December 26 about its proposal for the Macau International Integrated Tourism and Cultural Zone. The zone's planning and its ongoing public opinion collection process are implemented by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC). The full version of the zone's concept plan, available in Chinese and Portuguese, was uploaded onto the dedicated website for the zone's planning ([www.icm.gov.mo/rd/BIITCM](http://www.icm.gov.mo/rd/BIITCM)) yesterday.

The government has scheduled seven sessions for gathering opinions from attendees

about its plan for the zone and answering their questions, comprising two sessions for members of the general public and five sessions for representatives from different segments and sectors of civil society.

The first session was held yesterday at the Services Platform Complex for Commercial and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (aka Forum Macao Complex), attended by legislators, members of the local government's top advisory Executive Council, Macau deputies to the National People's Congress (NPC), and Macau members of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).

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## Shanghai hosts 1,060 regional headquarters of multinationals

SHANGHAI — Shanghai, the Chinese mainland's financial hub and a popular foreign investment destination, hosted 1,060 regional headquarters of multinational companies and 631 foreign-invested research and development (R&D) centers as of September this year, latest data from the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Commerce showed.

Zhu Min, the commission's director, told a conference on Wednesday that the functional capabilities of these regional headquarters — spanning investment decision-making, R&D innovation,

financial management, procurement and distribution, and supply chain management — have been continuously enhanced.

They form a sophisticated network of global resource allocation and play a vital role in strengthening Shanghai's urban competencies and international influence, Zhu said.

More than half of the foreign-invested R&D centers in Shanghai are concentrated in key industrial chains such as biomedicine, information technology, and automotive components, facilitating the aggregation of

global sci-tech resources and fostering scientific, technological, and industrial development, he added.

In the first nine months of this year, Shanghai saw 4,764 newly established foreign-invested enterprises, a year-on-year increase of 5.5 percent. To date, the metropolis has attracted over US\$370 billion in cumulative foreign investment and hosts nearly 80,000 foreign-invested firms.

Foreign firms contribute about one-fourth of Shanghai's GDP and one-third of its tax revenue, according to the commission.

— Xinhua



A robot of China's Unitree Robotics interacts with attendees at the Web Summit in the Portuguese capital Lisbon on Wednesday. Unitree Robotics is headquartered in Hangzhou. — Xinhua

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## Japan must retract its Taiwan-related remarks, or to bear all consequences: FM spokesperson

Japan must immediately correct its wrongdoing and retract unjustified remarks related to China's Taiwan region, otherwise, all the consequences arising therefrom must be borne by the Japanese side, foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said yesterday. — Story on p. 7

## Families of last deceased Gaza hostages long for closure

More than two years after Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel, Elad Or is still seeking closure as he awaits the return of his brother's remains from Gaza. — Story on p. 10

## Brazilian tribal chief ready to give Lula a 'talking-to'

A renowned Brazilian tribal chief was among indigenous activists on the sidelines of UN climate talks when he said on Wednesday he was prepared to give the president a "talking-to" if he ignored concerns over oil exploration near the mouth of the Amazon River.

— Story on p. 12



## Woman fatally stabbed in argument: police

Ida Cheong

The Judiciary Police (PJ) announced in a statement that their Reporting and Emergency Operations Centre received a report at around 3:58 p.m. yesterday that two women were involved in a serious stabbing incident in a hotel room in Taipa, both of whom were rushed to an unspecified hospital for emergency treatment, but one of them could not be saved.

According to the statement, PJ officers immediately arrived at both the crime scene and the hospital to investigate, adding that a preliminary investigation revealed

that the two women were having an argument in the hotel room at the time of the incident. The deceased woman was stabbed by the other woman; the latter was also injured during the altercation.

The statement noted that the injured woman is suspected of causing death by stabbing, but as she requires hospitalisation, she is being held by PJ officers at the hospital until her discharge, after which a dedicated PJ department will conduct a further investigation.

The Judiciary Police will release further information as the investigation progresses, the statement said. ■

## Judiciary Police rescue local male from Cambodian scam den

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) have rescued a young local man from a Cambodian scam den with the help of the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) in Beijing and Interpol in Lyon, the PJ's Anti-Fraud Coordination Centre Head Cheong Un Hong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

According to Cheong, the victim saw an overseas job advertisement on social media in September, purporting to offer a US\$7,000 (56,000 patacas) monthly salary for "internet-related" work. Believing the claim to be genuine, the man applied via the contact details provided. Subsequently, the scam den employer arranged for him to travel via multiple stopovers to Cambodia, where he was compelled to participate in telecommunications network fraud activities, Cheong said.

According to Cheong, the victim's family discovered his disappearance in October and reported the matter to the Judiciary Police on October 12.

Launching an investigation into his disappearance, the Judiciary Police promptly coordinated rescue efforts through the MPS in Beijing and Interpol in France, finally securing the victim's safe return to Macau on Tuesday, Cheong said.

According to Cheong, upon the victim's return, he was in a stable



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Kim Fong looks on during yesterday's regular press conference.

— Photo: Armindo Neves

emotional state but told the police that he had not been received any money from the scam den operator during his time in Cambodia.

Cheong said that the Judiciary Police, thanks to cooperation with local and overseas law enforcement agencies, have been able to stop nine potential victims from travelling to Southeast Asian scam dens this year. The Judiciary Police urged the public not to trust online recruitment advertisements promising lucrative remuneration without requiring any particular skills, particularly for job opportunities in Southeast Asia. ■

## Police nab local man for taking drugs, possessing drug paraphernalia

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) on Tuesday nabbed a local man for taking drugs – and possibly also selling them, as well as the possession of drug paraphernalia, PJ spokesman Cheong Kim Fong said during the regular press conference, yesterday.

Cheong identified the suspect as a 21-year-old local sales assistant surnamed Fong.

According to PJ investigative data and intelligence, Fong made multiple trips to the mainland to purchase cannabis there and smuggle the drug to Macau. The Judiciary Police summoned Fong to their headquarters on Tuesday for questioning.

According to Cheong, Fong admitted to developing a drug addiction during his travels early this year, having made multiple trips to the Chinese mainland since May to purchase cannabis, aka weed or marijuana, which he smuggled to his flat in Macau for, he claimed, personal use only. However, Cheong said, Fong was



This undated photo provided by the Judiciary Police yesterday shows evidence seized from Fong's flat in the northern district.

suspected to also have sold some of the drugs.

He made his most recent purchase of cannabis early this month for around 6,000 patacas, Cheong said, adding that PJ officers discovered 44.08 grams of cannabis and related paraphernalia in his flat in the northern district,

with an estimated street value of around 44,000 patacas, Cheong said, adding that Fong tested positive for cannabis.

Fong was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) recently, facing charges of drug-trafficking, drug-taking and possession of drug paraphernalia. ■

## Police arrest local man for blackmail, injuring ex-girlfriend

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police arrested a local man for blackmail and causing bodily harm to his ex-girlfriend overnight between Tuesday and Wednesday, PJ spokesman Cheong Kim Fong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Cheong identified the suspect as a 34-year-old engineer surnamed Chan.

According to Cheong, the Judiciary Police received a report on Wednesday from a female who claimed to have been assaulted and blackmailed by her 34-year-old ex-boyfriend surnamed Chan.

Cheong said that an investigation showed that they had been in a relationship since 2021 and were cohabiting in a flat the northern district. On Tuesday night, according to Cheong, after the victim proposed ending the relationship, Chan became agitated, striking the victim across the face and pushing her to the ground, resulting in a knee injury.

According to Cheong, Chan grabbed the victim's mobile phone and demanded 70,000 patacas for his alleged expenditure during

their relationship, threatening to keep her phone. He also threatened that he would not allow her to leave the flat if she failed to come up with the cash. Under duress, the victim first transferred 10,000 patacas through an app to the suspect and later gave another 10,000 patacas to him that she withdrew from an ATM downstairs, Cheong said.

The suspect then told the victim to come up with the remaining 50,000 patacas as soon as possible.

After Chan had released the victim, according to Cheong, she reported the incident to the police after telling her family about the blackmail on Wednesday morning. At noon the same day, PJ officers arrested Chan in the flat and seized 10,000 patacas and two smartphones from him.

Chan was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) on Wednesday, facing charges of blackmail and causing bodily harm. ■



This undated photo provided by Judiciary Police yesterday shows 10,000 patacas in cash and two smartphones seized from Chan in the northern district.

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## Racers share their first impressions & challenges at 72<sup>nd</sup> MGP

Interview by Khalel Vallo

As the 72<sup>nd</sup> Macau Grand Prix (MGP) continues on the Guia Circuit through Sunday, international racers shared their first impressions and challenges with the *Post*, highlighting the circuit's intensity, technical difficulty, and thrill that define one of the world's most iconic urban street races.

For Argentina's Gino Trappa, who competes in the Macau Formula 4 Race – FIA F4 World Cup, the event marks his debut on the 6.2-kilometre circuit. "It's very challenging, for sure, but also I think it's very enjoyable, because this is such an opportunity that I

can take a lot of advantage of and learn a lot," he said. He described the track as unlike anything he has experienced before.

According to Trappa, maintaining control near the walls is one of his greatest tests, adding that "you can be suddenly very, very close, and you lose your weekend, you know?"

Meanwhile, Belgian racer Alessio Picariello, competing in the Macau GT Cup – FIA GT World Cup, returned for his fourth appearance in Macau. "For me, it's the best racing track in the world. It's one of the most unique events, and it's also the GT World Cup, so it's always a pure pleasure to come back here," he

told the *Post*. Picariello added that while competition has intensified over the years, the circuit remains as demanding as ever. "Competition is getting stronger and stronger, it is nice to see more and more different manufacturers, but the track stays the same, as difficult, as challenging as always," Picariello said.

He also highlighted the Mandarin Oriental Bend as a particular test of focus. "Mandarin is really nice, but also very scary. It's easy to lose focus, brake five metres too late, and then be in the wall – and your weekend could be over."

For French driver Alexander Munoz, who is also competing in the F4 race, his first experience on the Guia Circuit was "eye-opening," pointing out that "the track is really difficult. When you're driving, you're at the limits. Compared to normal tracks, where you have a lot of runoff areas, you have to be really precise here," he said. He also said that the main challenge during the race is "perfection under pressure". "Just put all together and do not do mistakes. It's going to be harder than the normal track to put the perfect lap," he said. ■



Belgian racer Alessio Picariello in a Porsche 911 GT3 R (992) takes part in the Macau GT Cup – FIA GT World Cup practice race on the Guia Circuit yesterday.

– Photo: Rui Pastorin

## UK's Freddie Slater takes provisional pole position in FIA FR World Cup



The UK's Freddie Slater competes during yesterday's qualifying session for the Macau Grand Prix FIA FR World Cup.

– Photo: Rui Pastorin

Rui Pastorin

The UK's Freddie Slater of SJM Theodore Prema Racing finished yesterday's first qualifying session for the Macau Grand Prix FIA FR World Cup with the fastest lap at 2m15.708, taking the provisional pole position.

This year marks the 17-year-old's third time to compete in Macau.

In second place was France's Shanghai-born Enzo Deligny of R-Ace GP followed by Spain's Mari Boya from KCMG ENYA PINNACLE MOTORSPORT, respectively finishing yesterday's qualifying race at 2:16.016 and 2:16.029.

Yesterday's qualifying races saw three red flags. In the final 10 minutes, Slater delivered a lap of 2m16.132 seconds before a red flag was brought out for Japan's Hiyo Yamakoshi, who crashed at the Lisboa Bend.

In the restart, Deligny improved upon Slater's time to 2m16.016 seconds just before a second red flag came out for Trident's Reza Seewooruthun from Britain, who had crashed.

This left only five minutes for drivers to have one last shot at a

fast lap. During this short window, Deligny made a mistake and couldn't improve his time. His second attempt was ended after a final red flag came out after Kiyoshi Umegaki crashed into the barriers at Dona Maria Bend. Before then, Slater had found space on the track and produced a best effort of 2m15.708, securing provisional pole position.

Speaking with English-speaking media after the post-race conference, Slater said he aims to win this year's race. With that, he added that there is still work to be done ahead of the remaining qualifying races and Sunday's final. "We've had a good day so far, but there's still a long way to go. We're practising qualifying again tomorrow [today], so that's full reset for everybody. We've got to try and keep our heads down and find a little bit more pace, and see what we can do in the races after tomorrow [today]".

The second qualifying race is scheduled to take place today at 2:30 p.m. ■

–Additional reporting by the Macau Grand Prix Organising Committee (MGPOC)

## Vanthoor uninjured after high-speed crash in GT World Cup practice

Khalel Vallo

Belgian driver Laurens Vanthoor escaped injury after crashing into a barrier during the first practice session of the FIA GT World Cup at the 72<sup>nd</sup> Macau Grand Prix (MGP) yesterday noon.

The session was red-flagged shortly after the incident, which occurred as Vanthoor lost control while exiting the Mandarin Oriental Bend. Earlier, he had recorded the fastest lap time of 2 minutes 16.451 seconds before the crash.

FIA stands for Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile, whose sport division is the world's governing body for many international motorsport championships and discipline.

Speaking to the *Post*, Vanthoor said he had pushed slightly beyond his usual line when the accident happened. "I just tried to push a bit



Belgian driver Laurens Vanthoor poses during yesterday's first-day races of the 72<sup>nd</sup> Macau Grand Prix (MGP).

– Photo: Rui Pastorin

more and I made a small different line which had a big consequence because there were more bumps than on my normal line, and I eventually lost the grip, and this is

unfortunate," he said.

The driver said he realised the situation was getting out of hand almost instantly. "Obviously it's high-speed corners, so there's not much time to react," he said, reassuring the public that he was unharmed. Looking ahead, Vanthoor said the focus now was on recovery and preparation for qualifying for the next rounds. "The plan is for the team to try and repair the car as soon as possible, which I think they will be able to. If we have the same car, I think we should be quite good. I'm confident that we can play up front."

The second GT World Cup practice session took place later yesterday afternoon, but which Vanthoor was unable to take part in. Despite the setback, Vanthoor and his team expressed optimism about returning to the track for qualifying. ■

## Govt proposes Zone C & area next to Macau Tower for int'l tourism & cultural zone

Continued from p.1

According to the zone's concept plan released yesterday, the government is proposing to construct the Macau National Museum of Culture on the waterfront area east of Macau Tower. The museum is planned to have a gross construction area of between 80,000 and 100,000 square metres.

The government is proposing to build the Macau International Centre for Performing Arts, with a gross construction area of between 55,000 and 65,000 square metres,

on the west side of the Zone C land reclamation area off Taipa's Ocean Gardens residential estate, while it is suggesting that the International Museum of Contemporary Art, with a gross construction area of between 35,000 and 45,000 square metres, be constructed on the east side of Zone C.

The Zone C land reclamation project was completed in late 2022. The 0.32-square-kilometre man-made island is currently still undeveloped.

Yesterday's session was chaired by Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam, with

officials from several public entities attending, such as IC President Deland Leong Wai Man.

O noted that the local government commissioned China Tourism Academy (CTA), a research institute directly under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MCT), earlier this year to carry out a research study about the development of the Macau International Integrated Tourism and Cultural Zone.

O said that the zone's concept plan released yesterday is the result of the CTA research achievements. ■



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## 72<sup>nd</sup> Macau Grand Prix kicks off with red flags, crashes & excitement



-Photos: Rui Pastorin



# 72<sup>nd</sup> MGP kicks off, spectators voice mixed, but mostly positive views

*Vox pop by Armindo Neves, Rui Pastorin and Khalel Vallo*

The four-day 72<sup>nd</sup> Macau Grand Prix (MGP) kicked off yesterday, drawing spectators of all ages from young students experiencing the motorsport event for the first time to those who have been coming to watch the races every year.

Post reporters gathered a wide range of opinions around the Grand Prix Building and Grand Stand yesterday, with some expressing excitement about what lies ahead, while others were not so positive about the event.

According to the organisers, 15,000 spectators watched yesterday's races.

Davie, a spectator from the Philippines, is attending the races for the third time. As a fan, he is particularly looking forward to tomorrow's Macau Motorcycle Grand Prix and hopes the day remains dry to avoid a repeat of last year's rain-induced cancellation. Davie said he doesn't support any particular racing car team and simply enjoys the atmosphere of the event.

StarMac Entertainment & Production Ltd CEO Rio Lou Kit Long said that he is optimistic about this year's Grand Prix, noting that the current favourable weather conditions should prevent the event from being disrupted by heavy rain, unlike in previous years. Lou said he believed the better weather would allow drivers to perform at their best.

Lou added that he was mainly interested in the Macau Motorcycle Grand Prix and Greater Bay Area GT Cup. He also voiced encouragement at seeing young local drivers competing, finding it inspiring as it reflects the ongoing cultivation and succession of motorsport talent in Macau.

Iao, an experienced photography enthusiast from Hong Kong, said he was more focused on the Macau GT Cup, which he believes



Spectators at the Grand Stand watch the first-day of the 72<sup>nd</sup> Macau Grand Prix (MGP) yesterday afternoon.



— Photos: Rui Pastorin

offers greater speed and is visually more impressive than this year's Formula 4 races. He also commented on the practice session for the Macau Motorcycle Grand Prix, pointing out that they started too early, making it inconvenient for spectators travelling from Hong Kong.

Yesterday's motorbike practice session started at 7:45 a.m.

## Positive reactions from the Grand Stand

Among the long-time fans loyally following the racing event is 53-year-old Vitaly. Living in the mainland, he travels to Macau for the Grand Prix and has done so for the past 10 years, being particularly a big fan of the motorcycle races where he even has friends competing.

To Vitaly, November feels like Christmas and New Year combined. "It's like a festival of motorsport, a celebration of racing. I think it's a great experience and I really appreciate the fact that I can come every year".

Speaking about last year's motorcycle races, Vitaly recalled that despite being plagued by the inclement weather, he remembered feeling excited despite sitting

mostly in the rain from 7 a.m. till the evening, and looked back fondly on visiting the paddocks and the racers that time. This year, he said, the track temperature seemed to be fine, while the cool and not so sunny weather was particularly perfect for the Motorcycle Grand Prix, hoping for the safety of the racers.

Joel, a local Filipino, shares the same enthusiasm for the annual racing event. While he does not follow any race in particular, the 43-year-old comes to watch the races in the flesh every year to enjoy the environment and experience, particularly due to his fondness for cars. Looking back at his viewing experience last year, he said he enjoyed it, although he was quick to comment on the slippery track and bad weather then. This year, given yesterday's weather, he remains optimistic for the next few days, being excited about Sunday's finals.

Four first-time spectators, all of them local students aged 12, commented in unison that they enjoyed watching the practice races. They described the races they watched as "cool and competitive", with one of them saying that he would like to watch the FR races taking place today if he had the

chance. As first-time spectators, they all felt grateful for having had the opportunity to see the race up close.

Another first-time spectator is a 25-year-old tourist named Katerina from Russia, who described her experience with a single word: "Wow!". Enjoying the event, she said she will be watching the races over the next three days, and she might even come back to watch next year.

## Mixed reactions

Hin, a spectator who is attending for the fourth time said that he is primarily focused on the Macau Guia Race and the Macau GT Cup as he has friends competing in both. Hin said he believed the organisers' handling of last year's event, which was marred by cancellations due to the rain and unclear rankings, needed improvement. In his view, the red flag should not be deployed so readily to interrupt the races.

Another spectator, Rocky, expressed disappointment at this year's Macau Formula 4 Race, feeling the racers don't match the level of past editions. For him, yesterday's standout highlight was the participation of Chinese-born Italian driver Ye Yifei. Regarding

the frequent red flags during practice sessions, he interpreted them positively—as a sign that drivers were pushing their cars to the limit due to the good weather, which ultimately results in higher speeds and makes for a more exciting spectacle.

Elain, a 14-year-old local student, finds the Grand Prix appealing but noted that the road closures severely disrupt Macau's already congested traffic even more. She personally prefers the Formula 4 race and Macau Roadsport Challenge and is optimistic that this year's improved weather will allow for a full schedule of events.

José, a seasoned spectator from Portugal, is drawn back by the event's unique street circuit and "electrifying" atmosphere. However, he expressed disappointment at the recent replacement of the iconic Formula 3 category with Formula 4, believing this change is misaligned with the circuit's high-risk nature. His most cherished memory is the personal connection forged in the paddocks, witnessing the rise of legends like Ayrton Senna and Sebastian Vettel, which to him remains the event's irreplaceable charm. ■

## Zam Zam Restaurant makes debut at Macau food-fest

*Kristina Vallesteros*

Regency Art Hotel's "Zam Zam Restaurant" is participating in the "Macau Food Festival" in Sai Van for the first time this year, according to a statement from Lisboeta Macau yesterday.

The festival opens today and will run through the end of November.

The debut supports the city's status as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy and Macau's development as a Muslim-friendly travel destination, the statement said.

Currently the only Halal-certified Middle Eastern restaurant within a hotel in Macau, Zam Zam Restaurant will present a variety of signature specialities from the Middle East and South East Asia during the 17-day

festival. The statement noted that the menu includes dishes such as Shish Kebab, Chicken Biryani, and Hummus (a creamy dip made from mashed chickpeas blended with tahini (sesame paste), lemon juice, and garlic), each showcasing the rich and diverse essence of halal cuisine.

The statement also highlighted remarks from General Manager of Regency Art Hotel Willie Tay: "Promoting halal dining culture allows us to cater to the needs of a diverse range of guests while fostering cultural exchange and strengthening Macau's international reputation." He added that the participation "reflects our hotel's commitment to corporate social responsibility and our ongoing support for the diversification of Macau's

tourism development."

The restaurant's booth (No. B15) is designed with a blend of classic Middle Eastern elements and modern elegance, the statement said, adding combined with traditional halal cooking techniques, it offers visitors an immersive Arabian culinary experience.

The statement also noted that the flagship restaurant, located within the Regency Art Hotel in Taipa, accommodates 120 guests and features a menu of Halal cuisine from the Middle East and South East Asia, including nomadic and Bedouin recipes. ■

\* The term "Zamzam" holds profound religious and historical significance in Arabic, primarily referring to the famous well in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. — DeepSeek



This undated handout photo provided by Lisboeta Macau yesterday shows the "Zam Zam Restaurant" booth (No.B15) that is set to participate in the annual Macau Food Festival starting today. The culinary festival ends on November 30.



# Grand Prix's first day sees hundreds queuing for souvenirs



Hundreds of consumers queue to purchase the Cinnamoroll limited-edition product on the first day of the 72<sup>nd</sup> Grand Prix. – Photos: Ida Cheong

Ida Cheong

The four-day 72<sup>nd</sup> Macau Grand Prix (MGP) kicked off yesterday, which attracted hundreds of residents queuing to purchase limited-edition products.

Fion Lam, an MGP souvenir buyer, told the *Post* yesterday that this was the first time she had specifically come to a Grand Prix-related event just to buy three Cinnamoroll\* model cars for her daughter, which cost 600 patacas, and she had never purchased products on-site at the Grand Prix before.

Lam said that the overall arrangements by the organisers were quite good. However, she suggested the organisers should inform the public in advance that they have set up two separate queues, adding that the number of people queuing was more than she expected. She started

queuing at 10:15 a.m., but was told that some people started as early as 3 or 4 a.m.

Meanwhile, William Li Kam Lon, a souvenir buyer, said it was a different experience compared to last year, noting that this is the third time he was attending the Grand Prix. Li said that he came to queue for the limited-edition products at 9:30 a.m. The queue this time was longer than before, and he suspected it might be related to some people reselling the products, adding that the opening of several new booths this year has helped reduce the crowd, but he still had to queue for about half an hour.

YOKOHAMA Business Development and Marketing Officer Wong Ngai Meng told the *Post* that his company has participated in the Macau Grand Prix for decades, adding that the first day's business



YOKOHAMA Business Development and Marketing Officer Wong Ngai Meng poses before the *Post* interview on the first day of the 72<sup>nd</sup> Macau Grand Prix (MGP).

volume was similar to last year's. However, Wong said, his company launched new products like T-shirts and windbreakers this year, and their booth location is better than last year's, so he anticipated an increase in business.

Wong noted that the notification time for the stall's arrangements from the organisers was quite tight. He suggested the organisers should provide earlier notices in the future. He said he expected good weather this time and more exciting races. ■

*\*Cinnamoroll is an adorable white puppy character from the Japanese company Sanrio, best known for creating Hello Kitty. His key characteristics are his fluffy white appearance, long ears that allow him to fly, and a tail that curls like a cinnamon roll. – DeepSeek*

# MGM promotes responsible gaming with themed carnivals

Kristina Vallesteros

Integrated resort operator MGM has reaffirmed its long-standing commitment to corporate social responsibility through two large-scale community events focused on responsible gaming and financial literacy, according to a yesterday statement from the company.

The "Family Financial Budgeting Competition and Responsible Gaming Carnival" and the "Responsible Gaming Carnival and Orienteering Race" drew over 5,000 participants, the statement said.

The first event was organised by MGM and the Macau Federation of Trade Unions (FAOM aka Gung Luen). It featured a parent-child financial budgeting competition, interactive game booths, and DIY workshops. The statement noted that the event was designed to strengthen family communication and promote financial literacy, encouraging families to explore budgeting practices together in a lively and educational setting.

Furthermore, the "Responsible Gaming Carnival and Orienteering Race" was co-organised with the Macao New Chinese Youth Association. This initiative combined a community orienteering challenge with game booths and stage performances. The statement said that participants navigated educational checkpoints themed on financial literacy and responsible entertainment concepts.

These efforts are part of a broader campaign, according to the statement. Since 2023, the company has joined forces with a wide range of community partners to roll out responsible gaming and financial literacy programmes, reaching nearly 60,000 individuals, or nearly 9 percent of the population.

The statement said that MGM will continue to deepen cross-sector collaboration to promote responsible gaming and financial education in schools and communities, aiming to contribute to Macau's development as a better and healthier city. ■



This undated handout photo provided by MGM yesterday shows guests and representatives posing for a group photo during the recent "Family Financial Budgeting Competition and Responsible Gaming Carnival".

# Table tennis star Zhu finds bonds at National Games

Li Chunyu, Yue Ranran and Guo Yuqi

With sweat streaming down, Macao's table tennis icon Zhu Yuling answered questions from media with smiles after reaching the women's singles last eight at the 15<sup>th</sup> National Games on Wednesday.

She rallied past Beijing's Li Yake 12-14, 7-11, 14-12, 11-8, 13-11, 11-9 at Macao's Galaxy Arena.

"Other players might feel that I have home-court advantage, but actually, we are all competing at home," said Zhu, who now represents "Macao, China" in international tournaments.

A former China, i.e., Chinese mainland representative, Zhu topped the world rankings in 2017, but retired in 2021 due to illness.

Three years after her retirement, Zhu came back with no ranking, but currently sits seventh and claimed the World Table Tennis United States Smash title in July.

"Many people asked me why I had decided to represent Macao. In fact, I fight for my country. If I topped the podium, we would hear China's national anthem played," Zhu explained.



Zhu Yuling of Macao celebrates scoring during the women's table tennis singles quarterfinal against Chen Xingtong of Liaoning at the 15<sup>th</sup> National Games in Macao, yesterday. – Xinhua

She met many old friends this time. "We grew up together and knew each other very well. When they said this is my home court, I would emphasize it's ours."

At the shared home court, Zhu enjoyed helping others as a host and introduced local food, such as egg tarts, to them.

It marks Zhu's fifth National

Games, probably the most special one. "Co-hosted by Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, the Games reflects the joint efforts of the organizers. This is absolutely a creative endeavor, and I feel honored to be a part of it," she remarked.

As the Games gathers top paddlers across China, Macao's team has deemed it a valuable opportunity for local players' development through high-level matches.

The leading figure of the team, Zhu conveyed her hopes to young talents in Macao. "Not just participating, but competing. I noticed a 10-year-old child in our team. I plan to train alongside her afterwards."

In these years, Zhu was deeply touched by the mass base of table tennis and the great atmosphere around Macao, the same as other places in China.

"Table tennis is our national sport, and also an approach to connect all Chinese people together," Zhu said. "The Games is beyond the court, demonstrating enthusiasm and solidarity."

Zhu won the game 4-2.

– Xinhua, MPD

# Worker sustains fatal chest injury, tripping at flat

Ida Cheong

The Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) announced in a statement yesterday that it expressed concern over the fatal accident involving a non-resident worker (NRW) who tripped and fell while working at a residential unit in Taipa yesterday.

The statement did not reveal the victim's nationality.

The statement noted that the worker was rushed to the public Conde de Sao Januário Hospital Centre (CHCSJ) for emergency treatment which failed to save him.

The statement said the Labour Affairs Bureau expressed its condolences to the family of the deceased and will provide full assistance in handling compensation matters related to the work-related injury, along with appropriate support and help.

Following the accident, the

Labour Affairs Bureau immediately dispatched officials to the scene to investigate, the statement said, adding that preliminary investigations show that the deceased tripped while inspecting a manhole in the basement of the building, resulting in a chest injury from impact with a hard object.

The exact cause of the accident is still under investigation, the statement said.

The Labour Affairs Bureau will continue to promote workplace safety messages to the industry through various channels and means, urging employers to establish work safety protocols and strictly enforce them among their staff.

For relevant work safety guidelines and booklets, please visit: [https://www.dsal.gov.mo/dsso/zh\\_tw/standard/download\\_printed\\_matter\\_booklet.html](https://www.dsal.gov.mo/dsso/zh_tw/standard/download_printed_matter_booklet.html). ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) yesterday shows a DSAL official investigating the scene of the fatal accident in the basement of a residential building in Taipa.



# Japan must retract its Taiwan-related remarks, or to bear all consequences: FM spokesperson

BEIJING — Japan must immediately correct its wrongdoing and retract unjustified remarks related to China's Taiwan region, otherwise, all the consequences arising therefrom must be borne by the Japanese side, foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said yesterday.

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi recently said that the Chinese mainland's "use of force on Taiwan" could constitute a "survival-threatening situation" for Japan. She refused to retract her remark that implies the possibility of armed intervention in the Taiwan Strait.

"That constitutes a blatant interference in China's internal affairs, a challenge to China's core interests, and infringement on

China's sovereignty. China firmly opposes and will by no means tolerate such remarks," Lin said at a regular press briefing.

"The attempt by the leader of Japan to wade into cross-strait affairs is a serious affront to international justice, a blatant provocation to the post-WWII international order, and a great blow to China-Japan relations," he said.

"If Japan should dare to meddle in the cross-strait situation, it would be an act of aggression and definitely meet a firm response from China," he said. "We will firmly exercise our right to self-defense under the UN Charter and international law and defend China's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

The Chinese spokesperson warned the Japanese side against playing with fire on the Taiwan question. "Those who play with fire will perish by it!" Lin said.

Lin noted that despite China's serious démarches and protests, Takaichi still refused to change course and take back what she had said.

The wrongful remarks grossly violate the one-China principle, the guiding principles set forth in the four China-Japan political documents, and the basic norms of international relations, he added.

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War. It is also

the 80th anniversary of Taiwan's restoration to China.

"Japan committed innumerable crimes during its colonial rule in Taiwan. Over the last century, Japanese militarists have waged aggression more than once under the pretext of 'survival-threatening situation.' For example, Japan brazenly created the September 18th Incident under the pretext of exercising the right of self-defense," Lin said, adding that Japan's aggression against China inflicted untold suffering on the people of China, the rest of Asia, and the wider world.

"What's Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi up to by reviving the phrase 'survival-threatening situation'? Is Japan going to repeat its past

mistakes of militarism? Does Japan try to once again make enemy with the Chinese and other Asian people? Does Japan attempt to subvert the post-WWII international order?" Asked the spokesperson.

Stressing that Taiwan belongs to China, Lin said how to resolve the Taiwan question and realize national reunification is a matter for the Chinese people to decide and brooks no interference by any external force.

"Our message to Japan is clear: Japan must fully repent for its war crimes, immediately stop its wrong and provocative statements and moves that interfere in China's internal affairs, and stop playing with fire on the Taiwan question," he said. — Xinhua

## Global South media, think tanks pool wisdom to improve global governance

### Analysis

JOHANNESBURG — The Global South Media and Think Tank Forum China-Africa Partnership Conference opened here yesterday to explore ways to strengthen global governance and deepen China-Africa cooperation.

The two-day event, co-hosted by Xinhua News Agency, the African Union (AU) and South Africa's Independent Media, among other partners, gathered more than 200 representatives from over 160 media outlets, think tanks, government organizations and other institutions from China and 41 African countries, as well as the AU.

It focuses on how collaboration between media and think tanks can contribute to shaping a fairer and more inclusive global governance under the theme "Reforming Global Governance: New Roles and Visions for China-Africa Cooperation."

### STRENGTHENING CHINA-AFRICA SYNERGY

Against the backdrop of profound changes unseen in a century, the awakening of the Global South and its growing cooperation have become an indispensable part of the international landscape, with China-Africa cooperation at the core.

In 2015, 2018 and 2021, China successively announced at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) the implementation of the 10 cooperation plans, eight major initiatives and nine programs, drawing a blueprint for China-Africa cooperation.

Quoting an African proverb, "If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together," Lyu Yansong, editor-in-chief of Xinhua News Agency, called on media and think tanks to take the conference as an opportunity to build consensus, strengthen solidarity and collaboration, and jointly create a better future in his keynote speech at the opening ceremony.

Addressing the event, Chinese Ambassador to South Africa Wu Peng shared three keywords on China-

Africa cooperation — partnership, practicality and prospects.

"China is ready to work with African countries to implement the outcomes of the FOCAC Beijing Summit, further expand win-win cooperation across all fields, and speed up the common modernization of China and Africa," said Wu.

Noting that the relationship between Africa and China has evolved over decades of solidarity, mutual respect and shared aspirations for development, Leslie Richer, the AU director of information and communication, said that Africa will work with China and other Global South partners to make its voice heard more strongly, while promoting more balanced narratives through closer media and think tank cooperation.

The event featured the launch of the Global South joint communication partnership network "United in Heart, Path and Action — 2026 China-Africa Partnership Empowerment Action Plan," with the aim of better supporting the shared development of China and Africa.

Applauding the development of the Africa-China relationship, Jonathan Titus-Williams, deputy minister of planning and economic development of Sierra Leone, said that the partnership has long been characterized by solidarity and shared purpose grounded in mutual respect, equality, and a collective aspiration for a just and peaceful world.

As the permanent host of the China-Africa Economic and Trade Expo, China's Hunan province has made great efforts in recent years to promote cooperation in various fields such as agriculture, green energy and industrial chains with African partners.

Recognizing the expo as an important initiative under the FOCAC's major action plans, Shen Yumou, head of the Hunan provincial commerce department, said that Hunan has been aiming to enhance China-Africa cooperation, focusing on building six major centers for trade in non-resource products, cross-border e-commerce,



This photo taken yesterday shows a scene at the Global South Media and Think Tank Forum China-Africa Partnership Conference in Johannesburg, South Africa. — AFP

industrial development, financial cooperation, logistics and trade promotion, to serve as a strategic hub for China-Africa economic ties.

### PROMOTING INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE

At the conference, the Xinhua Institute, a think tank affiliated with Xinhua News Agency, released a report titled "Jointly Building a New Model of Global Leadership — Work Together in Pursuit of a More Just and Rational Global Governance System."

The report argues that the world faces a global leadership deficit, reflected in the failure of peace, imbalance in development and discord among civilizations. It calls for a "new model of global leadership," one that does not emanate from any single country, bloc or international organization, but rather represents a multilateral form of leadership—a synergy forged by the international community in active response to global challenges.

Noting the Global Governance Initiative (GGI) put forward by China at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Tianjin Summit in September, Lyu said, "Let us put the initiative into practice and jointly shape a just and equitable international order."

He emphasized that media and think tanks from China and Africa should comprehensively expound on the Global South's solutions for advancing the reform of the global governance system, and demonstrate the Global South's strength reflected in the solidarity and cooperation of developing countries.

The remarks by Xinhua's editor-in-chief resonated strongly with the participants.

"Tunisia and many African countries are key partners in the Global Governance Initiative and support China's aspiration for a fairer and more equitable world order," said Najeh Missaoui, chairman and CEO of the Tunis Africa News Agency.

Stressing the media's role in advancing shared governance, Missaoui noted that the media is no longer just a tool for delivering news or sharing information; it has become a powerful force of cultural influence — shaping public opinion, contributing to decision-making, and nurturing dialogue and mutual understanding among peoples.

Similarly, Ismaila Ceesay, minister for information of The Gambia, said that it is believed that the future of global governance must be inclusive, multipolar and reflective of the rich diversity of human experience.

"China's support in fostering training, technology transfer and infrastructure development across Africa's media landscape is a valuable contribution toward this goal," he added.

### FORGING SHARED FUTURE

The highlights of China-Africa cooperation represent the Chinese vision of building a community with a shared future for humanity.

Since the establishment of FOCAC 25 years ago, China and Africa have cooperated on building or upgrading nearly 100,000 km of roads and more than 10,000 km of

railways across Africa. Over the past three years, Chinese enterprises have created more than 1.1 million jobs on the African continent. The results of China-Africa cooperation are visible and palpable, and have truly benefited the people of both sides.

Iqbal Surve, chairman of South Africa's Independent Media, hailed the Africa-China partnership as a beacon of what genuine cooperation can achieve, one grounded in mutual respect, shared goals, and a commitment to building a fairer, more inclusive world order.

"Together, we can build a world that is more balanced, more just, and more humane — a world where every voice counts and every nation thrives," he added.

From Madagascar's hybrid rice to agricultural poverty reduction demonstration villages in Sao Tome and Principe, from Ethiopia's Eastern Industrial Zone to the China-Egypt TEDA Suez Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone, and from Mauritania's China-Africa Green Technology Park to the geothermal power plant of Sosian Energy in Kenya, the Chinese solutions are boosting the continent's modernization drive.

Erastus Mwencha, former deputy chairperson of the AU Commission, praised China as one of the countries that really speak and advocate for the Global South, noting that Africa's Ubuntu philosophy, which means "I am because we are" holds that no one should be left behind, and reflects values that align closely with China's vision and advocacy.

Noting the importance of an action-led global governance model to address the practical concerns of sustainable peace and development, Peter Kagwanja, president and chief executive of the Africa Policy Institute, said that Africa and China should partner in the proposed Global Governance Initiative as the surest pathway to a reformed and inclusive global governance system.

"It is key to realize the noble dream of a community with a shared future for humanity in a multipolar order," he added. — Xinhua



# Juan Ponce Enrile, architect of Philippines martial law, dies at 101

MANILA — Juan Ponce Enrile, a shrewd political operator who helped usher in the darkest repression of the late Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos's rule, died yesterday at the age of 101, his daughter said.

Enrile, who was being treated for pneumonia, died at home at 4:21 p.m. [local time] "surrounded by our family", Katrina Ponce Enrile said on her Facebook page, adding there would be a public viewing.

Known as the architect of the brutal martial law used to crush opposition to Marcos's rule, Harvard-educated Enrile was a long-time top adviser to the authoritarian leader.

Enrile later turned on Marcos and was instrumental in sparking the popular 1986 uprising that led to the president's ouster less than three years after the murder of opposition leader Benigno Aquino.

Enrile switched sides again and helped the Marcos family in their remarkable political comeback after they returned from exile.

After Ferdinand Marcos Jr, the late dictator's son, won the 2022 presidential election, he named Enrile his chief legal counsel.

"We say goodbye to one of the most enduring and respected public servants our country has ever known," Marcos said in a statement, adding Enrile "dedicated his life to serving the Filipino people, helping guide the country through some of its most challenging and defining moments".

Bonifacio Ilagan, head of a group of former dissidents thrown into prison during martial rule, said in a statement the group has "no tears to shed" for a man who "will forever be remembered neither as a patriot nor a statesman, but as one of the chief architects and defenders of tyranny, repression, and corruption in the country".

Enrile never spent a day behind bars for his role in the Marcos dictatorship.

## 'A good beginning sours'

According to his memoir, Enrile was a widow's son by a prominent married lawyer. He was born Juanito Furagganan on February 14, 1924.

The boy later took his father's name and became a respected attorney himself, as well as a close confidant of Marcos who would win the presidency in 1965.

Before becoming defence minister, Enrile held other key posts, including customs chief and justice minister.

Marcos's order implementing martial law in 1972 cited various acts of terror around the country, including an alleged communist guerrilla assassination attempt on Enrile.

Many years later, Enrile gave differing statements on that key event, saying at one point the claimed ambush was made up, and then writing in his memoir that it had actually happened.

Under martial law, Enrile was



*This file photo taken on October 10, 2015 shows former first lady of the Philippines Imelda Marcos waving to supporters alongside former president Joseph Estrada (left) and senate minority leader Juan Ponce Enrile (right) prior to an announcement by Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on his vice-presidential bid at a political rally in Manila. — AFP*

the second-most-powerful man in the country, deciding who could be jailed or freed.

Amnesty International estimates Marcos's security forces either killed, tortured, sexually abused, mutilated or arbitrarily detained tens of thousands of opponents.

More than 11,000 victims have been officially recognised and compensated.

Enrile never apologised for his role in the dictatorship and even defended martial law.

"It was operating well at least from 1972 all the way to 1975, but somehow along the way, just like everything that we do in this

country, a good beginning sours," he told journalists in 2006.

## 'People Power'

By the 1980s, Marcos was ailing, and it was becoming clear that his wife Imelda and her allies were not planning to keep Enrile in the future leadership.

In response, Enrile organised a cabal of disgruntled young military officers into the Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM).

The 1983 murder of Aquino by soldiers loyal to Marcos and massive cheating in the 1986 polls caused widespread unrest, further weakening Marcos's position.

The RAM sought to exploit the situation with a plot to overthrow the Marcos government, but their plan was discovered before it could be launched.

Facing arrest, Enrile and his allies holed up at Manila's military headquarters and appealed to the public to protect them from an imminent government attack.

Millions of people poured onto the streets, triggering the "People Power" revolt that toppled Marcos, installed Aquino's widow Corason as president, and restored democracy.

Aquino appointed Enrile as her defence minister, but he stayed in her cabinet for only a short time.

He was briefly arrested in 1990, 2001, and 2014, the first two times for alleged involvement in coup plots and the last over the embezzlement of public funds.

Enrile enjoyed a decades-long career as a lawmaker, including as Senate president from 2008 to 2013.

In 2014, he was arrested with two other senators for allegedly receiving bribes as part of a massive corruption scandal.

Citing Enrile's "fragile health", the Supreme Court granted him bail in 2015, allowing him to spend his twilight days at home.

A special graft court dismissed the plunder, or massive corruption, charges against Enrile last year, and last month acquitted him of the remaining graft cases against him.

— AFP

## Philippines vows arrests over bogus flood control projects

MANILA — The Philippines' president vowed yesterday that those behind bogus flood control projects will be arrested before Christmas, days after deadly back-to-back typhoons left swathes of the country underwater.

Scores of construction firm owners, government officials and lawmakers — including President Ferdinand Marcos' cousin Congressman — have been accused of pocketing funds for substandard or so-called ghost infrastructure projects.

The Department of Finance has estimated the Philippine economy

lost up to 118.5 billion pesos (around US\$2 billion) from 2023 to 2025 due to corruption in flood control projects.

Criminal cases against most of the people implicated were nearly completed, Marcos told reporters.

"We don't file cases for optics. We file cases to put people in jail," he said.

"They won't have a merry Christmas... happy days are over."

Marcos put the issue of ghost infrastructure projects centre stage in his July national address, and public anger over the issue has since mounted.

Asked if his cousin Martin Romualdez will also face charges, Marcos said "not as yet", citing a lack of evidence, but adding that "no one is exempted in this investigation".

The Philippines is still reeling from the devastation caused by then Super Typhoon Fung-wong that made landfall in the country on Sunday evening, flooding hundreds of villages and killing at least 27 people.

Fung-wong came just days after Typhoon Kalmaegi hit the central part of the archipelago nation and killed at least 232 people. — AFP

## Nepal boosts anti-poaching patrols after jailbreaks

KATHMANDU — Nepal has intensified anti-poaching operations to protect its prized tigers, elephants and rhinos after dozens of convicted poachers escaped prison during an anti-government uprising in September, conservation officers said on Wednesday.

"This is a matter of concern for all conservationists," Bed Kumar Dhakal, deputy director general at the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, told AFP.

"It is an added threat to our conservation efforts, so we have directed all the national parks to increase regular patrolling."

More than 50 poachers and wildlife traffickers escaped prison among a mass jailbreak of 14,500 detainees countrywide.

Many returned or have been recaptured, but police are still hunting for more than 5,000 fugitives.

That includes at least 18 convicted poachers, according to officials from Chitwan, the country's flagship park and a UNESCO World Heritage site.

"Our national park has beefed up regular patrols and strengthened community-based anti-poaching units," Avinash Thapa Magar, Chitwan National Park spokesman, told AFP.

Dhakal said officers are gathering nationwide data on escaped prisoners sentenced for wildlife crimes.

Nepal has been widely praised for its conservation success, which has helped bring several endangered species — including tigers and Asian one-horned rhinoceroses — back from the brink of local extinction.

Its efforts have helped triple its tiger population to 355 since 2010, and increase one-horned rhinoceros numbers from about 100 in the 1960s to 752 in 2021.

Youth-led protests that rallied under the loose umbrella title of "Gen Z", referring to those aged under 28, erupted on September 8 after a government ban on social media.

The movement was more broadly fuelled by economic hardship and growing anger over corruption.

Protests then morphed into nationwide fury, culminating in the collapse of the government as crowds torched parliament and the Supreme Court. At least 76 people were killed in two days of violence.

Within days of the government's collapse, 73-year-old former chief justice Sushila Karki was appointed interim prime minister, to lead the Himalayan nation to elections on March 5, 2026. — AFP

## Japan's PM Takaichi says she sleeps only 2-4 hours a night

TOKYO — Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said yesterday she only sleeps for between two and four hours every night, while she also faces criticism for encouraging people to overwork.

The revelation about how little she sleeps came after Takaichi raised eyebrows last week by arranging a 3 a.m. staff meeting in her office to prepare for a parliamentary session.

"I sleep about two hours now, four hours at the longest. I feel it's bad for my skin," she told a legislative committee, where she had been asked about the importance of reducing Japan's notoriously long work hours.

Japan has long struggled to

strike a healthy work-life balance, with many workers facing heavy pressure at the office.

It even has a word — "karoshi" — for people who die from overwork.

Takaichi was also asked to explain her government's discussions about possibly extending the upper limit on overtime work in order to encourage economic growth.

She defended the discussion, saying that workers and employers have different needs. Some people choose to work two jobs to make ends meet, she said, while businesses impose strict limits on overtime.

Takaichi stressed that any change would ensure that workers' health would be protected.

"Indeed, if we can create a

situation where people can properly balance childcare and caregiving responsibilities according to their wishes, and also being able to work, enjoy leisure time, and relax — that would be ideal," she said.

Takaichi came to power last month as Japan's first woman prime minister.

She pledged after her election as the head of the Liberal Democratic Party to "discard the term 'work-life balance' for myself. I will work, work, work, and work".

She has since kept a busy calendar, attending regional meetings as well as holding bilateral talks with US President Donald Trump, Chinese President Xi Jinping and South Korean President Lee Jae-myung. — AFP



## Bangladesh to hold referendum on democratic reforms on election day

**Sheikh Sabiha Alam**

DHAKA – Bangladesh will hold a referendum on a landmark democratic reform charter on the same day as its parliamentary election scheduled for February 2026, interim leader Muhammad Yunus said yesterday.

Yunus, the 85-year-old Nobel Peace Prize laureate, said he had inherited a “completely broken down” political system after taking over following an uprising last year.

The interim leader of the South Asian nation of 170 million people has argued that the reform charter, which he has championed as the cornerstone of his legacy, is vital to prevent a return to authoritarian rule.

“We have decided... that the referendum will be held on the same day as the next parliamentary elections,” Yunus said in a national address.

“This will not hinder the goal of reform in any way. The elections will be more festive and affordable.”

Tensions are high as parties gear up for the polls.

The chief prosecutor in the crimes against humanity trial of fugitive former prime minister Sheikh Hasina said earlier yesterday judges will issue the hugely anticipated verdict on November 17.

Hasina, 78, has defied court orders to return from India to attend her trial on charges of ordering a deadly crackdown in a failed attempt to suppress the student-led uprising that led to her removal.

“We hope the court will exercise its prudence and wisdom, that the thirst for justice will be fulfilled, and that this verdict will mark an end to crimes against humanity,” chief prosecutor Tajul Islam told reporters.

Hasina has denied all the charges and called her trial a “jurisprudential joke”.

### ‘Standing tall’

The reform document, dubbed the “July Charter” after the uprising

that toppled Hasina, has sparked intense arguments between parties jostling for power ahead of the polls.

The reform plan will strengthen checks and balances between the executive, judicial and legislative branches, proposes a two-term limit for prime ministers and expanded presidential powers.

It also aims to enshrine the recognition of Bangladesh as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation.

Voters will be asked to give opinions on key issues in one question, divided into four parts.

“If the majority vote in the referendum is ‘yes’, a Constitutional Reform Council will be formed,” Yunus said, adding its job would be to amend the constitution in parliament.

“We, the living, should not tarnish the glory of the unity that the countrymen built by standing tall in the face of death against fascism”, he said.

Yunus has said repeatedly the polls, the first since the mass uprising overthrew Hasina’s autocratic government, will be held in early February.

The Election Commission is expected to confirm the exact date in December.

The referendum announcement created frustration among some who wanted the reforms enshrined in law before fresh elections.

“Muhammad Yunus has failed to fulfil the desire of the people,” said Mia Golam Parwar, a senior leader from Jamaat-E-Islami, the largest Islamist political party.

“The crisis may deepen.”

Hasina’s outlawed Awami League party had called for a nationwide “lockdown” yesterday and there was a heavy deployment of security forces around the court, with armoured vehicles manning checkpoints.

A string of crude bombs has been set off across Dhaka this month, mainly petrol bombs hurled at everything from buildings linked to the government of Yunus to buses and Christian sites. – AFP



**Bangladeshi political activists protest in front of the Awami League party headquarters in Dhaka yesterday. Bangladeshi judges will issue the hugely anticipated verdict in the crimes against humanity trial of fugitive former prime minister Sheikh Hasina on Monday, the chief prosecutor said yesterday. Hasina, 78, has defied court orders to return from India to attend her trial on charges of ordering a deadly crackdown in a failed attempt to suppress a student-led uprising that saw her removal. – AFP**

## Pakistan grants lifetime immunity to president, current army chief

**Zain Zaman Janjua**

ISLAMABAD – Pakistan’s parliament approved a sweeping constitutional amendment yesterday granting lifetime immunity to the president as well as the current army chief, a move critics warned would erode democratic checks and judicial independence.

The 27th amendment, passed by a two-thirds majority, also consolidates military power under a new Chief of Defence Forces role and establishes a Federal Constitutional Court.

The changes grant army chief Asim Munir, promoted to field marshal after Pakistan’s clash with India in May, command over the army, air force and the navy.

He and other top military brass will enjoy lifelong protections.

Under the amendment, any officer promoted to field marshal, marshal of the air force, or admiral of the fleet will now retain rank and privileges for life, remain in uniform, and enjoy immunity from criminal proceedings.

Such protections were previously only reserved for the head of state.

“This constitutional amendment will increase authoritarianism and whatever little semblance of democracy existed in this country will fade away,” said Osama Malik, an Islamabad-based lawyer.

“It will not only remove civilian oversight from the military’s activities, it will also completely destroy the military hierarchy where all service chiefs were considered equal under the joint chief system,” he told AFP.

Pakistan, a nuclear-armed nation of more than 250 million people, has long struggled to balance civilian authority with the military’s role in politics.

The amendment also shields President Asif Ali Zardari from any criminal prosecution, although



**In this handout photograph taken and released by Pakistan’s Press Information Department (PID) on Wednesday, Pakistan’s Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif (front left) with his brother and former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (front right) attend parliament session on constitutional amendment granting lifetime immunity to the president and current army chief Asim Munir, in Islamabad. – AFP**

that immunity will not apply if he or any other former president later holds another public office.

Zardari has faced multiple graft cases, although proceedings were previously stayed.

He signed the bill into law following the parliamentary vote.

### ‘Deeply undemocratic’

Opposition parties, led by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), tore up copies of the bill in both chambers over the past few days.

The amendment also bars courts from questioning any constitutional change “on any ground whatsoever”.

The bill also creates a Federal Constitutional Court with exclusive jurisdiction over constitutional cases, stripping the Supreme Court of its original powers and transferring pending petitions.

Another clause empowers the president to transfer High Court judges on the recommendation of the Judicial Commission, a change critics say could be used to sideline dissenting judges.

“This is the final nail in the coffin of an independent judiciary and a functioning democracy,” PTI spokesman Sayed Zulfiqar Bukhari told AFP.

PTI secretary general Salman Akram Raja described the amendment as “deeply undemocratic at its core”.

“They have given lifetime immunity from criminal prosecution to the president and created a system that concentrates power in one military office,” he told AFP.

The Senate initially passed the bill on Monday. It was then tweaked and passed by the National Assembly, the lower house, two days later before returning to the upper house for final approval.

“Sixty-four members are in favour of the passage of the bill and four members are against, so the motion is carried,” Senate Chairman Yusuf Raza Gilani said yesterday.

It also cleared the 336-member lower house with the required two-thirds majority. – AFP

## Pakistan blames Afghans for Islamabad suicide attack

ISLAMABAD – Pakistan yesterday blamed Afghan citizens for a suicide bombing in the capital Islamabad this week, and a separate deadly attack near the frontier.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi told a Senate session that the bomber behind Tuesday’s blast outside the district court buildings was from Afghanistan.

“We have traced the Islamabad blast culprits. The suicide bomber was from Afghanistan,” he said, without offering any evidence.

“It will be decided on a government-level what to do,” the minister told reporters when asked how the government would proceed with regards to Afghanistan.

A faction of the Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, the first to hit the capital in nearly three years.

A dozen people were killed and 27 wounded.

Naqvi told reporters on Monday that Afghan nationals also took part in an assault the same day on Cadet College Wana, a military-linked school in northwest Pakistan. The attack left three people dead.

The accusations come amid a sharp deterioration in ties between Islamabad and Kabul, with Pakistan blaming what it says are Afghan-based militants – particularly the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) – for a surge in attacks since the Taliban returned to power in 2021. Kabul denies the charge.

Relations hit a new low last month after the worst cross-border clashes in years killed more than 70 people, including dozens of Afghan civilians, according to the United Nations.

“We have told them (the Afghan government) about our concerns but they still support terrorists,” Naqvi said in remarks broadcast on live television.

Kabul has not commented on the allegations.

Pakistan’s information ministry repeated the claims yesterday, saying the Wana attack was “planned and controlled from Afghanistan” and that all those involved were Afghan citizens.

“The identities of the Afghan terrorists killed in the attack firmly establishes the links of terrorists in their bases in Afghanistan,” it said on X.

The TTP has threatened more attacks unless hardline Islamic law is implemented in Pakistan, a Muslim-majority country. – AFP



# Families of last deceased Gaza hostages long for closure

Michael Blum

TEL AVIV – More than two years after Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel, Elad Or is still seeking closure as he awaits the return of his brother's remains from Gaza.

His brother Dror Or is among the last four hostages confirmed dead whose bodies have yet to be handed over to Israel under a US-brokered ceasefire that took effect on October 10.

"We deserve to bring this chapter to an end," Elad Or told AFP outside his home in Jerusalem.

Dror Or was killed on October 7, 2023 during Hamas's attack, the worst in Israel's history.

Militants took his body to Gaza, and have kept it there ever since.

Under the terms of the truce, Hamas has freed all living 20 hostages in exchange for around 2,000 Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails.

Militants have also returned the remains of 24 of 28 deceased hostages. Four, including Dror Or, remain in Gaza.

## 'It's hard'

For Elad Or, the wait has grown more painful in recent weeks as he watched other families receive their loved ones – dead or alive.

"The deal is working, and it's hard to be among the last when

almost everyone else has already been freed," said Elad Or, 41, who heads a nonprofit youth organisation.

Dror Or, 48, was a cheesemaker from Kibbutz Beeri, the site of one of the deadliest massacres of the October 7 attack.

He was killed along with his wife Yonat, and his body was taken to Gaza to serve as a bargaining chip.

Under the ceasefire deal, each dead Israeli hostage's body is exchanged for the remains of 15 Palestinians.

Two of the couple's three children, 16-year-old Noam and 13-year-old Alma, were also seized during the attack but released in the first truce of the war in November 2023.

Upon their release, they learnt of their mother's death, while their father was still presumed alive at the time.

But in May 2024, the military confirmed his death.

## 'Different ending'

Of the 207 hostages taken alive to Gaza, 41 died or were killed in captivity.

Most of the 166 survivors were freed during the three ceasefires of the war.

Alongside Dror Or, the bodies of Israelis Meni Goddard and Ran Gvili, and Thai worker, Sudthisak Rinthalak, remain in Gaza.



An Israeli woman holding portraits bearing the image of Lt. Hadar Goldin reacts as she waits for the arrival of his body which Hamas returned as part of a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Palestinian factions in Gaza, outside the National Centre for Forensic Medicine in Tel Aviv on Sunday. Goldin, an Israel Defence Forces (IDF) officer killed in Gaza in 2014 and held there by Hamas for more than a decade, was laid to rest on Tuesday in a ceremony attended by tens of thousands, including the IDF chief of staff. – AFP

In recent weeks, funerals for returned hostages have followed one another, some drawing thousands of mourners – among them the ceremony for Colonel Assaf Hamami on November 5 in Tel Aviv.

"I wanted so much for there to be a different ending, a truly happy one, but life has plans of its own," said his widow Saphir Hamami at the military cemetery.

"And this is probably the best

ending I could have dreamt of since October 7."

Among those present to support the family were the parents of Itay Chen, a soldier also killed during the October 7 attack.

Their son's body was also returned earlier this month, and his family was finally able to lay him to rest.

## 'Bring everyone back'

Chen's mother Hagit Chen told

AFP that until all the bodies are back, Israeli authorities should not shift their focus onto any other issue.

"They should bring everyone back," she said.

"Every soldier and every person in this country knows that if something happens to them, the state will be there for them and for their family."

Meanwhile, the process of identifying the remains continues at the National Centre of Forensic Medicine in Tel Aviv.

Chen Kugel, the head of the centre, has identified dozens of hostage bodies.

"Some doctors left their posts during the war because it was too hard," he told AFP.

To cope, the man who identified the majority of Hamas's more than 1,200 victims, said he works to stay focused on the job while he is at work.

"When you're with the body, you don't think about who the person is – you focus" on the autopsy, Kugel said.

"But when you later open the newspaper or turn on the TV and see who that person was – their dreams, their family, what they loved, their plans – then you feel connected to them, and you realise... that they had a life." – AFP

## Israeli troops kill 2 West Bank Palestinians, settlers set mosque ablaze

DAYR ISTIYA, Palestinian Territories – The Israeli military said its troops killed two suspected militants in a town in the occupied West Bank yesterday, while Palestinian officials accused Israeli settlers of setting fire to a mosque in the territory.

Settler violence has surged in recent weeks across the West Bank, drawing international condemnation and even rare criticism from within the Israeli military and government.

"A short while ago, IDF [Israel Defence Forces] soldiers who were operating adjacent to the community of Karmeit Zur, eliminated two terrorists who were on their way to carry out a terror attack," the military said in a statement, without providing details.

Palestinian authorities also did not provide any details.

Meanwhile, the Ramallah-based Palestinian foreign ministry said Israeli settlers set ablaze the Hajja Hamida Mosque near the town of Deir Istiya in the north.

"This blatantly violates the sanctity of places of worship and reflects the deep-rooted racism driving settlers under the protection of the occupying government," the ministry said.

AFP photographs from the scene showed burnt copies of the Koran and walls blackened by smoke. A wall of the mosque was also graffitied.

## 'Red line'

Yesterday's arson attack came a day after Israeli army chief pledged to halt settler violence, following a wave of attacks targeting Palestinians in the West Bank.

"We are aware of the recent violent



Young Palestinians look at the damage in the Hajja Hamida Mosque after it was reportedly set on fire and vandalised by Israeli settlers in the Palestinian village of Deir Istiya, near Salfit in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, yesterday. Violence in the West Bank has soared since the war in Gaza broke out in October 2023. – AFP

incidents in which Israeli civilians attacked Palestinians and Israelis. I strongly condemn them," Lieutenant General Eyal Zamir said in a statement.

"These acts contradict our values, cross a red line and divert the attention of our troops from their mission," he warned.

"We are determined to stop this phenomenon and will act decisively until justice is served."

Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967, where more than 500,000 Israelis now live in settlements.

A minority of these Israelis engage in violence against Palestinians, who complain that Israeli forces usually do not arrest settlers.

All settlements in the West Bank are illegal under international law.

Earlier this month, the UN's Office

for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said that October 2025 was the worst month for settler violence since it began recording in 2006, with at least 264 attacks that caused casualties or property damage.

Almost none of the perpetrators have been held to account by the Israeli authorities.

Violence has surged across the West Bank since the war in Gaza broke out in October 2023.

At least 1,003 Palestinians, including militants, have been killed in the West Bank by Israeli forces or settlers since the war started, according to the Palestinian health ministry.

During the same period, 43 Israelis, including soldiers, have been killed in Palestinian attacks in the West Bank, according to official Israeli figures. – AFP

## Trump advisor says Oct jobs report to skip unemployment rate

WASHINGTON – US President Donald Trump's top economic advisor said yesterday that an official report on how the jobs market fared in October will not include the unemployment rate, as the government shutdown hit data collection.

"We'll get sort of half a jobs report," said Kevin Hassett, director of the White House National Economic Council.

"We will never know what the unemployment rate was in October," he told reporters.

Trump signed a bill on Wednesday to end the shutdown – the longest in US history at 43 days – but the freeze had halted data collection with workers furloughed.

Besides the employment report, the government also paused the publication of figures on consumer inflation, retail sales and others during the stoppage.

Hassett said he expects the September jobs report could be released next week.

But even as payroll numbers for October can be tabulated, he added, one of the surveys – involving the unemployment rate – was not completed.

Hassett also acknowledged affordability issues that Americans are facing, pointing to a loss of purchasing power in recent years.

But he blamed former president Joe Biden for what he said was a US\$3,400 drop in real purchasing power under the past administration.

He argued that this rose by \$1,200 since Trump returned to the presidency in January, but conceded that "Americans, rightly, are frustrated."

"That's something that we're going to fix, and we're going to fix it right away," he said.

The Trump administration has been working to convince Americans of the economy's strength as costs of living emerged as a key voter concern in recent elections in New York City, New Jersey and Virginia.

On Wednesday, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said that consumers should expect an announcement to lower costs of coffee and fruit as households grapple with affordability while recent tariffs also bite. – AFP



# What we know about Ukraine's graft scandal

KYIV, Ukraine – As Russia's "special military operation" nears its fourth winter, Ukraine is being rocked by a major corruption scandal at the heart of its war-battered energy sector.

In just a few days, it has led to the resignation of two ministers and forced President Volodymyr Zelensky to sanction a close ally.

Here is what we know about one of the worst political crises Zelensky has faced since the start of the war in 2022:

## 'Operation Midas'

The scandal broke on Monday, when the Ukrainian Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) conducted some 70 raids to uncover a "high-level criminal organisation" responsible for embezzling US\$100 million in the energy sector.

The operation, dubbed "Midas" – after the king from Greek myths who turned everything he touches into gold – led to several arrests. These included a former advisor to the energy minister and an official from the state nuclear operator Energoatom.

The anti-corruption agency then gradually released a series of videos featuring wiretapped conversations of those implicated in the scheme.

NABU said the graft scheme had forced Energoatom contractors to routinely pay 10 to 15 percent kickbacks on contracts, to avoid facing payment delays or losing their supplier status.

The suspects, said NABU, had created a parallel power structure inside the state enterprise overseeing Ukraine's nuclear power plants, which supply half of the country's energy.

The money was then laundered through a myriad of shell firms, most of them abroad.

## Zelensky under pressure

The biggest shock came with the



*This handout photograph taken and released by Ukrainian Presidential Press-service yesterday shows Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (centre) posing for a selfie with a soldier during his visit to the 65th Separate Motorised Brigade in the Zaporizhzhia region.* – AFP

accusation that an alleged close friend and a former business associate of Zelensky, Timur Mindich, had masterminded the scheme.

He co-owns the production company Kvartal 95, founded by Zelensky when he was a star comedian before entering politics and becoming president in 2019.

According to NABU, Mindich "controlled" the laundering of embezzled money and its distribution.

The 46-year-old is also suspected of influencing senior government officials, including former Defence Minister Rustem Umerov, now Secretary of the Security Council.

Timur Mindich reportedly fled the country shortly before the probe became public.

A source close to Zelensky told AFP he was furious and appalled by the allegations, and fully supported the investigation.

Amid growing criticism, Zelensky pledged transparency, demanding Justice Minister German Galushchenko and Energy Minister Svitlana Grynchuk step down on Wednesday. Both ministers resigned shortly after.

Galushchenko, who previously served as energy minister, is accused of having received "personal benefits" in the scheme.

Former deputy prime minister, Oleksiy Chernyshov, is also under investigation.

Grynchuk, Galushchenko's former deputy who replaced him this year, is not directly implicated at this stage. But Ukrainian media

have described her as his close associate. Neither she nor Galushchenko has been formally charged.

The scandal has not yet triggered a strong reaction from the EU, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz has called on Zelensky to take "energetic steps" to counter corruption. Germany is Ukraine's top European donor.

Eradicating graft is one of the top requirements for Ukraine's application for EU membership.

## Endemic corruption

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine has been repeatedly plagued by corruption scandals.

In September 2023, Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov resigned over purchases of overpriced uniforms and food for the army.

In April, two defence ministry officials and the director of a defence plant and his deputy were arrested on suspicion of supplying tens of thousands of faulty shells to the army.

And corruption is so deeply rooted in the military recruitment system that in 2023 Zelensky resorted to dismissing all the heads of regional draft offices.

Nevertheless, relations between the presidency and anti-corruption agencies and activists remain strained.

This summer, Zelensky tried to strip independence from the two anti-corruption agencies, NABU and the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO), created a decade ago.

After first mass wartime protests and a backlash from the EU allies, he was forced to backtrack.

Ukraine ranks 105th out of 180 countries in Transparency International's 2024 corruption index, having moved up from the 142nd place 10 years ago.

– AFP

## Disney shares tumble as film flops hit revenue

WASHINGTON – The Walt Disney Company tanked yesterday after the entertainment giant reported fourth-quarter revenue that missed expectations, with a slate of movie releases that failed to energise audiences.

The entertainment giant's US\$22.5 billion revenue for the quarter ended September 27 was roughly flat compared to the same period last year, sending shares down as much as 10 percent on Wall Street.

Despite the hit to revenue, Disney delivered strong profits in the quarter, driven by record theme park performance and continued growth in its streaming services.

Net income surged to US\$1.3 billion from US\$460 million a year earlier.

But analysts were rattled by the entertainment segment, where operating income fell US\$376 million to US\$691 million, weighed down by unfavourable comparisons to last year's blockbuster releases "Inside Out 2" and "Deadpool & Wolverine."

This quarter's slate included "The Fantastic Four: First Steps," "The Roses" and "Freakier Friday," which failed to replicate the box office success of the prior year's hits.

"Obviously not every film works...We've been around long enough to understand that," Disney CEO Bob Iger told analysts.

Nevertheless, the CEO said he was "very optimistic" about the 2026 fiscal year,

with several big-budget feature films in the pipeline, including "Zootopia 2," "Avatar: Fire and Ash," "Toy Story 5" and a live-action version of "Moana."

Disney's direct-to-consumer business provided a bright spot, with operating income rising US\$99 million to US\$352 million.

Six years after launching the Disney+ video-on-demand service, which suffered billions in losses during its early years, the group has turned it into a significant source of profit.

In the fourth quarter, Disney saw operating profit from streaming accelerate by 39 percent, partly thanks to price increases that customers seem willing to stomach. The company now boasts 196 million Disney+ and Hulu subscriptions combined.

Disney+ alone reached 132 million subscribers, up 3.8 million from the previous quarter, while international Disney+ subscribers grew four percent.

Disney's theme parks segment posted record results, with operating income of US\$1.9 billion for the quarter, up US\$219 million year-over-year. Full-year operating income for the parks division reached a record US\$10 billion.

International parks showed particularly strong growth, with operating income rising 25 percent to US\$375 million, while domestic parks generated US\$920 million, up nine percent.

– AFP

## Oklahoma Death Row inmate granted last-minute clemency

WASHINGTON – An Oklahoma man who was to be executed by lethal injection for a 2002 murder was granted clemency at the last minute yesterday by the state governor.

Tremane Wood, 46, had been scheduled to be put to death at 10 a.m. Central Time at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester for the murder of Ronnie Wipf, 19, during a robbery.

The Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board recommended clemency for Wood by a 3-2 vote on November 5 and Republican Governor Kevin Stitt granted it just minutes before the execution was to be carried out.

"After a thorough review of the facts and prayerful consideration, I have chosen to accept the Pardon and Parole Board's recommendation to commute Tremane Wood's sentence to life without parole," Stitt said in a statement.

"This action reflects the same punishment his brother received for their murder of an innocent young man and ensures a severe punishment that keeps a violent offender off the streets forever."

Wood's elder brother Jake, who died by suicide in prison in 2019, confessed to being the one who stabbed Wipf to death.

There have been 41 executions in the United States this year, the most since 2012, when 43 inmates were put to death.

An execution by lethal injection was scheduled to be carried out later yesterday at a state prison in Florida.

Bryan Jennings, 66, a former Marine, was to be put to death at 6 p.m. Eastern Time for the 1979 rape and murder of six-year-old Rebecca Kunash.

An execution is also to be carried out today in South Carolina, where Stephen Bryant, 44, is to be executed by firing squad, also at 6 p.m. Eastern Time.

Bryant pleaded guilty to killing three people in 2004, writing the message "catch me if u can" in the blood of one of his victims.

South Carolina has carried out two previous executions by firing squad this year.

Florida has carried out the most executions this year with 15. There have been five each in Alabama and Texas.

Thirty-four of this year's executions have been carried out by lethal injection, two by firing squad and five by nitrogen hypoxia, which involves pumping nitrogen gas into a face mask, causing the prisoner to suffocate.

The use of nitrogen gas as a method of capital punishment has been denounced by United Nations experts as cruel and inhumane.

The death penalty has been abolished in 23 of the 50 US states, while three others – California, Oregon and Pennsylvania – have moratoriums in place.

President Donald Trump is a proponent of capital punishment and, on his first day in office, called for an expansion of its use "for the vilest crimes."

– AFP



## Brazilian tribal chief ready to give Lula a ‘talking-to’



**Brazilian indigenous leader and environmentalist Chief Raoni holds a sign reading “Climate emergency. We are the answer” during a protest boat trip on the sidelines of the COP30 UN Climate Change Conference in Belém, Pará State, northern Brazil, on Wednesday. Over 150 boats with members of indigenous communities and social organisations sailed the Guama River as part of a symbolic crossing during the COP30, according to the organisers. – AFP**

**Carlos Fabal and Anna Pelegri**

**BELÉM** – A renowned Brazilian tribal chief was among indigenous activists on the sidelines of UN climate talks when he said on Wednesday he was prepared to give the president a “talking-to” if he ignored concerns over oil exploration near the mouth of the Amazon River.

President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva openly backed the controversial drilling project which began in October when oil giant Petrobras secured a licence after a years-long battle.

Raoni Metuktire, the nonagenarian leader of the Kayapo people who rose to fame in the 1980s campaigning against deforestation with British musician Sting, is attending COP30 talks in the Amazon city of Belém.

“I support President Lula, but he must listen to us...He must respect us,” Raoni told journalists after taking part in the opening of the People’s Summit – a parallel event to COP30 which aims to give voice to those often not heard in high-level climate negotiations.

“I will make an appointment with him, and, if necessary, I will give him a talking-to so that he listens to me,” said Raoni –

instantly recognisable for the large wooden plate in his lower lip.

His comments were translated into Portuguese from his Kayapo language.

The indigenous leader also highlighted government plans for the Ferrogrão railway – a nearly 1,000-kilometer project to transport grain across Brazil, including through the Amazon – and ongoing deforestation.

“If these bad actions continue, we will have problems,” Raoni said.

A major march for climate is scheduled for tomorrow in Belém, where indigenous people and civil society organisations are expected to demand climate justice and the protection of indigenous territories.

### Protests

UN officials said two security workers were injured when a protest march on Tuesday resulted in clashes, but indigenous leaders defended their actions.

“No one committed any acts of banditry – it was to draw attention,” Dona Neves Arara Vermelha, a member of the Arapiuns ethnic group from the COP30 host state of Pará, said at the press conference.

The Arapiuns grievances include a land demarcation process

they deem too slow and insufficient forest protections to counter the encroaching interests of the powerful agribusiness sector.

“We still hope to have a discussion with President Lula, with the leaders...to sit at the negotiation table. They refuse to listen to what we are saying here,” added Aracelia Arapiun, another indigenous woman.

Amazon deforestation has steadily declined since Lula’s return to power, after having increased sharply under the presidency of his far-right predecessor Jair Bolsonaro.

Raoni was one of the figures who symbolically presented Lula with the presidential sash during his inauguration for a third term in 2023.

Lula has repeatedly stated his belief that the world is not ready to move away from fossil fuels, and that expanding oil production in Brazil – the world’s eighth largest producer – will help finance the energy transition.

However, at a leaders’ summit last week ahead of COP30, he warned that “Earth can no longer sustain the development model based on the intensive use of fossil fuels.” – AFP

## Colombia does about-face on ending intel exchange with US

**BOGOTÁ** – Colombia said yesterday it would continue sharing intelligence with the United States, claiming reports to the contrary were the result of a “misinterpretation”.

On Tuesday, President Gustavo Petro had said on X that “an order has been given at all levels of the public security force’s intelligence services to suspend communications and other dealings with US security agencies.”

His announcement came amid a diplomatic crisis over American strikes on alleged drug-smuggling boats, and elicited shock reactions from opposition politicians as well as Colombian ex-military and intelligence bosses.

Yesterday, Interior Minister Armando Benedetti insisted “there has been a misinterpretation by the Colombian press and some high government officials.”

On X, he said “President Petro has never said that the American control agencies FBI, DEA, HSI will stop working in Colombia alongside our intelligence agencies.”

Speaking to AFP, several former

security officials expressed shock and anger at Petro’s message Tuesday, calling it “absurd.”

They raised fears that Petro’s order could not only hinder drug interdiction but also Colombia’s fight against domestic armed groups.

Petro’s announcement followed a months-long, personal spat between him and US President Donald Trump.

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

Petro, for his part, has gone out of his way to criticise Trump’s bombings in the Caribbean and Pacific that have sunk 20 boats and killed at least 76 people.

In his announcement this week, Petro said the ban “will remain in force as long as the missile attacks on boats continue.”

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



**This handout picture released by the Venezuelan Presidency shows Venezuela’s President Nicolas Maduro holding a decree after signing it in Caracas on Tuesday. Maduro signed the decree to defend the country against possible US military intervention, through the “legal” creation of the “Comandos de Defensa Integral” (“Comprehensive Defence Commando”). – AFP**

## Spanish police smash ring smuggling migrant minors to France

**MADRID** – Spanish police have dismantled a criminal network that trafficked migrant minors from the Canary Islands to France, arresting 11 people, authorities said yesterday.

The investigation began after 14 minors went missing from youth care centres on the islands of Lanzarote and Gran Canaria, Spain’s National Police said in a statement.

In May 2025, officers stopped a Mauritanian man at Lanzarote airport as he attempted to board a flight to Madrid with what appeared to be three minors.

Police arrested the man and

one of the alleged minors, who was actually of legal age, after discovering the minors were under the ward of a youth care centre on the island.

An investigation then uncovered a “well-organised network” with logistics in Morocco, contacts in the Ivory Coast for falsified documents, and facilities in Spain to temporarily house minors before the were taken to France.

Two homes in Lanzarote were searched, and authorities seized documents, electronic devices and cash.

Nine suspects were arrested in

total in Lanzarote, and one each in Madrid and Gran Canaria.

Police yesterday were still searching for the missing minors.

They face charges including document forgery, child abduction, involvement in a criminal organisation and child pornography.

Spain is one of three main entry points for irregular migrants into Europe, alongside Italy and Greece.

The Canary Islands, off northwest Africa, are a key gateway, with nearly 47,000 migrants arriving last year – a record for the second consecutive year – though arrivals are down this year. – AFP

## Flood kills 2 in storm-hit Portugal

**LISBON** – A couple in their 80s were found dead yesterday after heavy overnight rains flooded their home in an area south of Lisbon reeling from Storm Claudia, Portuguese rescuers said.

While the exact circumstances of their deaths are still unknown, Portuguese media reported that the couple were apparently unable to move quickly enough to avoid being trapped by the rapid rise in the water level.

“Two people lost their lives after their home was flooded” in Seixal, in the Setúbal region, a spokesman for the National Civil Protection Authority told AFP, without

providing further details.

Setúbal was one of the areas hardest hit by Storm Claudia, which has swept both mainland Portugal and the island of Madeira with heavy rain and strong winds since Wednesday.

The civil protection agency recorded nearly 1,000 incidents, mostly floods and fallen trees, which in some cases have blocked roads or damaged vehicles.

Up to 20,000 homes and other electricity consumers were left without power at dawn yesterday (local time), according to the electricity distributor E-REDES.

– AFP



## Football shorts

### Captain Kimmich to miss Germany's World Cup qualifier with Luxembourg

BERLIN – Germany captain Joshua Kimmich has been ruled out of today's World Cup qualifying trip to Luxembourg, becoming the latest player added to coach Julian Nagelsmann's bulging injury list.

The German FA (DFB) issued a statement yesterday saying that the Bayern Munich midfielder had "suffered an injury to his right ankle" and was ruled out of Friday's trip to Luxembourg.

The 30-year-old is likely to return for Monday's home clash with Slovakia.

Kimmich joins centre-back Nico Schlotterbeck and midfielder Nadiem Amiri on the injured list in Nagelsmann's squad for the matches, while forward Karim Adeyemi misses Friday's clash through suspension.

The Germans are already without Kai Havertz, Jamal Musiala, Marc-Andre ter Stegen, Antonio Rudiger, Nicolas Fuellkrug and Tim Kleindienst.

Germany are level on points in their World Cup qualifying group with second-placed Slovakia but ahead on goal difference, with only the first-placed team guaranteed to qualify for next year's finals in North America.

– AFP

### Turkish football federation suspends 25 first division players over betting

ISTANBUL – Twenty-five first division players were among 102 suspended by the Turkish football federation (TFF) yesterday for betting on matches.

The suspensions ranged from 45 days to 12 months, according to the TFF, which had on Monday summoned 1,024 players before its disciplinary committee on charges of betting on matches.

Two players from defending three-time Turkish champions Galatasaray were among the 102 sanctioned – Turkey international Eren Elmali, who copped a 45-day ban, and Metehan Baltaci, suspended for nine months.

Elmali, 25, admitted that he had bet almost five years ago when he

was playing in the fourth division.

Konyaspor's Senegalese winger Alassane Ndao, the sole foreigner implicated, was suspended for 12 months, the TFF said.

Amedspor, a club currently sat third in the second division, announced yesterday that it had cancelled the contracts of five of its players sanctioned by the federation.

The TFF did not specify whether some of the 102 suspended players had bet on matches in which they played.

The players' suspensions follow those of 149 referees in October for also having placed bets on matches.

– AFP

### Mancini takes over as coach of Qatar's Al-Sadd

DOHA – Qatari club Al-Sadd yesterday announced that they had hired former Manchester City and Italy boss Roberto Mancini as their new coach.

"Roberto Mancini has signed as Al-Sadd's coach for 2.5 seasons," the club posted on social media, alongside photos of Mancini, with pen in hand and also holding a club shirt with his name on the back.

"Benvenuto Signor Mancini," posted the club, which gave no financial details about the deal, using the Italian word for "welcome".

The 60-year-old, a former striker, has led Inter Milan and Manchester City to domestic league titles and guided Italy to the Euro 2020 crown – played in 2021 – during his career.

His last coaching position was in charge of the Saudi Arabian national team from August 2023 until October 2024.

At Al-Sadd, Mancini replaced Portuguese coach Felix Sanchez, who led the club to a record 18<sup>th</sup> Qatari league title and also a domestic cup triumph last season, but was fired in October.

After nine rounds of matches, Al-Sadd are sixth in the 12-team Qatar Stars League, eight points behind leaders Al Gharafa.

They are 10<sup>th</sup> in the 12-team Asian Champions League Elite western group, five points off of eighth, the last qualifying place for the knock-out rounds.

– AFP

## Bayern stun Arsenal, Man Utd sink PSG in Women's Champions League



Manchester United's Swedish midfielder Fridolina Rolfo (second left) scores the team's second goal during the UEFA Women's Champions League football match against Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) at Old Trafford in Manchester on Wednesday. – AFP



PARIS – Bayern Munich overturned a two-goal deficit to stun holders Arsenal 3-2 in the Women's Champions League on Wednesday, as Manchester United downed Paris Saint-Germain on a memorable night at Old Trafford.

Emily Fox's early header and Mariona Caldentey's 23<sup>rd</sup>-minute shot from the edge of the box appeared to have put Arsenal in total control in Munich.

But Bayern dug deep in the second half to execute an astonishing turnaround.

Alara began the fightback in the 67<sup>th</sup> minute, with substitute Pernille Harder's superb strike drawing the Germans level, before Glodis Viggosdottir snatched the winner, prodding home Klara Buehl's low cross with four minutes left.

"To be honest, this is a winning team with a winning mentality," Bayern coach Jose Barcala told Disney+.

"We always believe we can win the game even when we are 2-0 down. We stay together, we find solutions together, and until the referee blows the whistle, we stay

going and keep believing," he added.

"It's not good enough. We don't want to concede three goals in one half in the Champions League" remarked Arsenal boss Renee Slegers.

This was Arsenal's second defeat out of three, and it left the London side in the play-off zone for a place in the quarter-finals in the new format league phase.

The 18-team table is led by three-time winners Barcelona, who swept aside Belgian European debutants OH Leuven 3-0.

Alexia Putellas opened the scoring for the hosts with a penalty in first-half injury time.

An own-goal from Kim Everaerts extended Barca's lead after the break with Irene Paredes completing a good night's work to make it three from three and lift the Spaniards top of the standings on goal difference from Lyon.

Later Manchester United ensured their first ever European fixture at Old Trafford rather than their regular home at the 12,000-capacity Leigh Sports Village ground was one to remember with a 2-1 defeat of Paris Saint-Germain.

The game marked former United goalkeeper Mary Earps' first return to her old club since moving to France.

Melvine Malard's curling strike foiled Earps on United's first shot on goal after the half hour mark, only for Olda Carmona, author of Spain's World Cup winner against England, to level in first half injury time.

After an excellent build-up involving Jess Park, Anna Sandberg crossed for Fridolina Rolfo to head in the decider on 58 minutes, to make it three from three in United's debut Champions League campaign.

It lifted them into third on goal difference and on course for direct qualification to the quarter-finals while PSG remain pointless.

"It was crazy. A moment like this is like a lifetime opportunity. It was incredible. The support from the fans and the way we played today showed real character" said midfielder Park.

Elsewhere Juventus beat Atletico Madrid 2-1, and Benfica held Twente to a 1-1 draw.

– AFP

## England set for Etihad start to Euro 2028 tournament campaign



LONDON – England will play their first match of Euro 2028 at Manchester City's Etihad Stadium if they qualify directly, with fellow co-hosts the Republic of Ireland, Scotland and Wales set to play all their group games at home, it was announced during Wednesday's tournament launch in London.

The launch, which included an unveiling of the match schedule, saw some speakers struggle to be heard as a small but noisy pro-Palestine protest took place directly outside the event, with demonstrators chanting against Israel's continued membership of UEFA, the governing body of European football.

Organisers announced England would open their campaign at the Etihad before playing their final two group games at London's Wembley Stadium if they qualify directly.

England would play at Newcastle's St

James' Park if they won Group B, before returning to Wembley for the rest of the tournament, with the national stadium set to stage one quarter-final, both semi-finals and the final, which will be held on July 9.

The final was confirmed as a 5 p.m. local time kick-off – three hours earlier than the Euro 2020 final at Wembley which became infamous for the chaotic scenes outside the stadium as ticketless supporters tried to force entry.

If England, who have not won a major men's international football tournament since beating the then West Germany in the 1966 World Cup final at Wembley, finish second in the group they will travel head to Everton's Hill Dickinson Stadium for the last 16, before going on to the Principality Stadium.

Wales are set to open the tournament at the Cardiff venue on June 9.

Nine stadiums in eight cities will stage the tournament, with Villa Park

and the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium the other Premier League venues involved.

England and Wales could meet in a Wembley quarter-final if both teams win their groups.

The four hosts will enter qualification, but there will be two places reserved for any that fail to either win their group or finish as one of the eight best runners-up.

Debbie Hewit, the chair of both England's Football Association and UK and Ireland 2028 Ltd, promised the "best-ever" Euro, with UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin saying: "The host nations, where the game first took shape, are eager to welcome millions of fans into legendary stadiums, providing the right stage for a festival of emotions, vividly encapsulated in the design we presented today."

An independent assessment estimated the tournament will generate £3.6 billion (US\$4.7 billion) in socio-economic benefit between 2028 and 2031. – AFP



Former football players England's Michael Owen (from left to right), Scotland's John Collins, Ireland's Shay Given and Wales international Ashley Williams attend the launch event for the UEFA EURO 2028 football tournament, at Below The Lights in central London on Wednesday. The UEFA Euro 2028 tournament is set to be jointly hosted by the United Kingdom and Ireland. – AFP



# Australia turn to O'Connor in search of Ireland inspiration

## Rugby

Julian Guyer

LONDON — James O'Connor has been summoned to revive Australia's faltering Autumn Nations Series campaign, with the veteran fly-half given the task of steering the Wallabies to a much-needed win over Ireland in Dublin tomorrow.

Australia have lost five of their last six Tests, including defeats by England and Italy in their two most recent encounters.

But Wallaby boss Joe Schmidt, up against former side Ireland for the final time as Australia coach, now hopes the 35-year-old O'Connor, who orchestrated a superb win over world champions South Africa at Ellis Park in August, can turn the tide at Lansdowne Road.

O'Connor and Len Ikitau, recalled at centre, both missed the 25-7 loss to England at Twickenham

on November 1 and the 26-19 defeat by Italy in Udine last weekend.

The pair were absent from the Twickenham clash as their English clubs were not obliged to release them for a match taking place outside World Rugby's designated international window.

O'Connor, one of five fly-halves selected by Australia this year, replaces Carter Gordon, who suffered quad tightness against Italy.

Tane Edmed, replaced by Gordon after his own poor performance against England, is again on the bench.

Ikitau, meanwhile, resumes his centre partnership with Joseph Aukuso-Suaalii for the 12<sup>th</sup> time in the Wallabies' last 16 Tests.

Schmidt, looking to rejuvenate the Wallabies' attack as they seek to nail down a top-six ranking spot which in the upcoming draw for the 2027 Rugby World Cup in Australia, has selected 21-year-old Max

Jorgensen at full-back and wing Filipo Daugunu to join Harry Potter in the back three.

Experienced prop Allan Alaalatoa returns to the starting 15, joining hooker Matt Faessler and Angus Bell in the front row.

In a further change to the pack, Tom Hooper moves to lock with Rob Valetini starting at blindside flanker in a back row featuring Fraser McReight and skipper Harry Wilson.

"It's been a tough schedule but we've tried to embrace that this week and tried to freshen up at the same time," said Schmidt after announcing his side yesterday.

"It's another opportunity this Saturday to really challenge ourselves against one of the top teams in the world."

The game will be played at 4:10 a.m. Sunday Macau time.

— AFP/MPD



Pakistan's Cricket Board Chairman Mohsin Naqvi (centre right) gestures while speaking with Sri Lanka's players at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi, Pakistan yesterday, on the eve of the second one-day international (ODI) cricket match between Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka's cricket board said yesterday that its players will remain in Pakistan to complete a one-day international series and a subsequent T20 tri-series, with all games to be played in Rawalpindi. At least eight players had asked to leave over security fears after Tuesday's suicide bombing in Islamabad that killed 12 people and wounded 27.

Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) said the decision to stay for next week's tri-series, which also includes Zimbabwe, was taken after "close consultations" with hosts Pakistan who had given security assurances.

Sri Lanka Cricket had threatened disciplinary action against any players who tried to leave Pakistan.

— AFP

## Sport in brief

### De Minaur knocks out Fritz to keep ATP Finals hopes alive

Tennis

TURIN — Alex de Minaur kept alive his chances of reaching the last four of the ATP Finals yesterday after beating Taylor Fritz in straight sets 7-6 (7/3), 6-3 in Turin.

Australia's De Minaur had to win in straight sets in order to have any chance of making it out of the Jimmy Connors Group, and he now needed Carlos Alcaraz to beat Lorenzo Musetti later yesterday in order to book his place in the semi-finals.

Should Alcaraz beat local hero Musetti, as he is widely expected to, seventh seed De Minaur will take second place in the group.

Hard court specialist De Minaur won his 43rd match of the season on the surface, the most on the men's tour, and was too much for Fritz once he prevailed in the first set tie-break.

Defeat for Fritz in one hour and 35 minutes ended the American's participation in this year's edition of the prestigious end-of-season tournament.

Alcaraz is now guaranteed a spot in the semi-finals but still needs to beat Musetti to both secure first place in the group and claim the year-end number one ranking for the second time.

If Musetti beats Alcaraz and joins Jannik Sinner in the next round it will be the first time two Italians have reached the semis in the history of the tournament.

— AFP

### S Africa announces plan to bid for Olympic Games

JOHANNESBURG — South Africa plans to bid for the 2036 or 2040 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the government said yesterday, aiming to bring one of the world's biggest sporting events to Africa for the first time.

The country was the first on the continent to host the football World Cup in 2010.

"South Africa initiates its intention to bid for the 2036 and 2040 Olympic Games," minister in the presidency Khumbudzo Ntshavheni said in a press briefing.

She said Pretoria had entered into "continuous dialogue with the International Olympic Committee", headed since June by Zimbabwean Kirsty Coventry.

It is as a "preliminary and exploratory engagement that is critical to advance South Africa's intention to bid for the hosting rights of the Olympic and Paralympic Games," Ntshavheni said, without specifying the potential host city.

Cape Town had bid to host the

2004 Games, which ultimately went to Athens in a 1997 vote.

Ntshavheni said South Africa wouldn't require significant investment to improve its already available infrastructure.

"Even if we are offered the games tomorrow, cabinet is confident that we should be able to host them with our facilities," she said.

In a visit to South Africa in October 2024, former IOC president Thomas Bach had said the country had "the stability, the infrastructure and vision to stage an Olympics".

Senegal's Dakar will next year be the first city on the continent to host the Youth Olympics, from October 31 to November 14, 2026.

The next Summer Olympics will be held in Los Angeles in 2028, and the 2032 Games have been awarded to Brisbane, Australia.

In October, Munich voters approved a plan for a bid to host the Summer Olympics in 2036, 2040 or 2044. The German city last hosted the Games in 1972.

South Africa has been putting its weight behind international sporting events, and has bid to host a Formula One Grand Prix at its historic Kyalami track near Johannesburg from 2027.

Africa's most industrialised economy is also the main organiser of the 2027 men's Cricket World Cup.

— AFP

## Coe describes LA28 Olympic athletics schedule as combination of innovation and tradition



BERLIN — World Athletics President Sebastian Coe has described the athletics schedule for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games as "a schedule that both innovates and honors tradition."

During an online roundtable Wednesday, Coe confirmed that the repechage system trialed in Paris 2024 will be retained and refined. He also announced that medal winners in Los Angeles will receive prize money.

The detailed schedule for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympic Games was officially released on Wednesday, with athletics events moved forward in the calendar, which means medals will be awarded on the very first day of competition.

Explaining the change, Coe said it reflects collaboration between World Athletics, LA28, Olympic Broadcasting Services, IOC and NBC. "The athletics program will start with a bang, with women's sprints on Day One and men's sprints on Day Two to sustain global interest after the opening ceremony," he noted.

"It is a schedule that both innovates and honors tradition, with the men's marathon on the final day. Looking back at LA84, athletes can aspire to emulate Olympic legends and aim for the maximum number of potential doubles," he added.

British sprinter Dina Asher-Smith

welcomed the decision, saying it will be an honor for the women's 100m to open the LA Games and celebrate 100 years of women's Olympic track and field. "I can't wait to set the tone for a thrilling and spectacular Games," she added.

According to Coe, insights from recent World Championships showed that audiences prefer rhythm and pace - fewer gaps, more finals.

"In LA, 17 of the 20 sessions will feature medal events. We're focusing on evening finals to create energy and excitement, similar to Tokyo's successful format. It keeps the audience engaged both in-stadium and on TV, especially given LA's time difference from Europe.

While the revamped schedule introduces innovation, it also preserves key Olympic traditions. The men's marathon will continue to be held on the final day, finishing inside the stadium, though the exact route is yet to be confirmed. The walking events may conclude elsewhere.

On the repechage system first used at the Paris Olympics, Coe said it will continue in an improved form.

"We'll continue but with adjustments. It provided more content and gave athletes a second chance to qualify, which audiences liked. It wasn't universally loved, but there is enough support to refine and improve it rather than drop it," he added.

— Xinhua



## Winter Olympic Federations reject adding Summer sports to Winter Games

GENEVA — The Winter Olympic Federations (WOF) said Wednesday they oppose adding non-Olympic disciplines from Summer International Federations to the Winter Olympic Games, while supporting innovation within snow and ice sports.

"The Winter Olympic Federations believe that the future of the Olympic Winter Games is not better served by piecemeal proposals, such as the inclusion of Summer IFs' non-Olympic disciplines," read a statement.

They argued that such proposals would "dilute the brand,

heritage, and identity" of the Winter Games, which they described as "a celebration of sports practiced on snow and ice, with distinct culture, athletes, and fields of play."

WOF President Ivo Ferriani said innovation should come from evolving existing winter sports to attract wider audiences, citing the inclusion of ski mountaineering as "a successful example" of authentic development.

Members of the Winter Olympic Federations include the International Biathlon Union, International Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation, International Ice Hockey Federation, International

Luge Federation, International Skating Union, International Ski and Snowboard Federation, and World Curling Federation.

The group said it supports International Olympic Committee President Kirsty Coventry's "Fit for the Future" review process and is committed to modernizing the Games while keeping their unique winter identity.

"The Winter Olympic Federations are fully committed to innovation, universality, and strengthening the special and clearly differentiated appeal of the Olympic Winter Games," the statement said.

— Xinhua



# YouTube superstar MrBeast opens pop-up park in Saudi Arabia

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia – MrBeast, the world's most followed YouTuber with over 450 million subscribers, opened a temporary amusement park in Riyadh yesterday, the latest celebrity drawn to Saudi Arabia as it aspires to become a major entertainment hub.

"Beast Land", open from November 13 to December 27, features several obstacle course-like challenges similar to those that appear in his popular videos where contestants compete for massive pay days.

MrBeast's park will be part of Riyadh Season, a major annual festival launched to promote the capital city as a tourist hub, as Saudi Arabia seeks to attract high-profile celebrities to diversify its oil-reliant economy.

"The majority of our audience is outside of North America and we have a large concentration of people who watch our videos in the Middle East," he told AFP in the Saudi capital Riyadh.

"A lot of times when we do stuff, we do it in the West or in other places and I just really wanted to do something fun for our fans who live around here," he added.

The influencer had earlier posted a video from the gates of the new park in Riyadh, shaped like a blue tiger's head with flashing lightning bolts for eyes, reminiscent of his logo, with neon lights beaming on the attractions.

"This thing is the craziest thing that I've ever done, I can't wait for you guys to experience this," he said in the clip.

With more followers across his social media platforms than there are people in the United States, the 27-year-old influencer, whose real name is Jimmy Donaldson – has built a digital empire over the years thanks to his prodigious output of content often featuring contests and challenges.

With more than 75 percent of Saudis under 35 years of age, the kingdom is the perfect playground for influencers like MrBeast, whose content is mostly watched by children and young people.

Smartphone market penetration in the kingdom stand at over 98 percent, while internet penetration stands at nearly 98 percent, both well above the global average, according to PwC.

Saudis rank "among the most avid media consumers in the world" according to the consultancy.

In 2023, Time magazine named MrBeast one of the world's most influential people.

That same year, Forbes put his net worth at around half a billion US dollars.

Saudi Arabia has been building multiple leisure and entertainment attractions, including Qiddiya near Riyadh, billed as an "entertainment city" of theme parks and a motorsports racetrack.

– AFP



US YouTuber James Stephen "Jimmy" Donaldson, commonly known by MrBeast, smiles during an interview with AFP at the "Beast Land" temporary amusement park in Riyadh's Boulevard City entertainment complex on Wednesday.

– AFP

## Nintendo releases new 'Super Mario' movie trailer

TOKYO – "Super Mario" fans got a first look on Wednesday at the sequel to the megahit movie based on Nintendo's top video game franchise that turned 40 this year.

US star Brie Larson joins Chris Pratt, Anya Taylor-Joy and Jack Black in the voice cast of "The Super Mario Galaxy Movie", a CGI animation\* set for release in April 2026.

It follows the huge success of "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" – the second-highest-grossing film of 2023 behind "Barbie".

The official trailer for the sequel shows the chirpy red-capped Italian plumber cavorting with his friends and nemeses in a colourful intergalactic universe.

It was viewed nearly three million times on YouTube in just over 12 hours.

While many fans expressed excitement for the movie on social media, others complained about the casting or other points.

"I'm excited for the masterpiece of a song that Jack Black is going to compose for this movie," Andres Bent Solano wrote on Facebook.

Another fan, Jordany Fleury, said it "would've been better had the bros had their Italian accents", referring to Mario and his brother Luigi's American voices.

In September, Japan's Nintendo marked four decades since the release of the first "Super Mario Bros." game with its platforms, pipes and scowling enemies.

The 2023 "Super Mario" movie raked in more than US\$1.3 billion at the box office, part of a video game adaptation craze that

has also brought hits for the likes "A Minecraft Movie" and "Sonic the Hedgehog".

Nintendo is also planning a live-action film based on the "Legend of Zelda" franchise, due for release in May 2027.

\* CGI Animation (Computer-Generated Imagery Animation) is the process of creating moving images using digital computer software. Unlike traditional animation, which is hand-drawn or stop-motion, CGI animation creates a virtual 3D space where artists build, manipulate, and animate digital models to produce the final film, show, or sequence.

In essence, it is the art of making digital objects and characters move and come to life entirely within a computer. – DeepSeek

## NewJeans ends feud with record label ADOR

SEOUL – All members of the K-pop group NewJeans have resumed working with their record label, the company and their lawyers said yesterday, after accusations of mistreatment and a year-long dispute that stalled their careers.

The move came after a court ruled last month that the group's five members must honour their contracts with record label ADOR, whose parent company HYBE is also behind K-pop sensation BTS.

NewJeans made headlines in November 2024 when they announced their decision to leave ADOR, prompting the company to request an injunction barring them from any commercial activities. That request was granted in March.

"Hello, this is Minji, Hanni, and Danielle. After careful and

thorough discussions, we have decided to return to ADOR," three of the members said in a statement provided to AFP by their attorneys.

The statement came after ADOR announced on Wednesday that the other members, Haerin and Hyein, had also agreed to work with the label.

"The two members have decided to respect the court's latest ruling and adhere to their exclusive contract with the label," ADOR said in a statement, adding that it was "committed to providing its full support".

NewJeans is among HYBE's most successful acts since making its debut in 2022.

The heated contractual dispute erupted last year following allegations that HYBE had forced out the band's star producer, Min Hee-jin, from her

role as ADOR's CEO.

NewJeans' members later issued an ultimatum demanding Min's reinstatement, which HYBE rejected.

The members then took their grievances public, accusing the label of intentionally sabotaging their careers.

Band member Hanni alleged last year that the group had faced mistreatment, including "deliberate miscommunications and manipulation" while working with ADOR.

But the Seoul Central District Court rejected last month NewJeans' claims that the allegations had caused an "irreparable breakdown of trust" with ADOR.

Shares of HYBE jumped around 4.5 percent on yesterday after the announcement.

– AFP

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Beijing 1°C~14°C	Manila 24°C~31°C	New York 2°C~11°C	Lisbon 15°C~18°C
Shanghai 8°C~19°C	Bangkok 21°C~32°C	London 11°C~13°C	Rio de Janeiro 20°C~25°C
Hong Kong 19°C~24°C	Tokyo 9°C~18°C	Frankfurt 10°C~15°C	Luanda 23°C~27°C
Taipei 19°C~24°C	Singapore 24°C~32°C	Vancouver 7°C~10°C	Maputo 16°C~25°C
Guangzhou 15°C~24°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~33°C	Paris 10°C~18°C	Dili 24°C~29°C
Nanjing 5°C~19°C	Jakarta 23°C~32°C	Moscow 7°C~7°C	São Tomé 25°C~30°C
Guilin 11°C~23°C	Seoul 1°C~14°C	Las Vegas 13°C~22°C	Praia 23°C~30°C
Xi'an 6°C~14°C	Sydney 17°C~24°C	Monte Carlo 15°C~20°C	Bissau 22°C~34°C





**1.** Team Shanghai performs during the team technical artistic swimming at the 15<sup>th</sup> National Games in Jiangmen, Guangdong Province, yesterday. — Xinhua



**2.** Sun Yingsha of Hebei hits a return during the women's table tennis singles quarterfinals against Liu Fei of Liaoning at the 15<sup>th</sup> National Games in Macao, yesterday. — Xinhua



**3.** Yuan Shaotong (left) of Shandong competes against Sun Tengyu of Jiangsu in the men's +90kg mixed team judo semifinal between Shandong and Jiangsu at the 15<sup>th</sup> National Games in Zhaoqing, Guangdong Province, yesterday. — Xinhua

**4.** Mascots are seen during the U18 women's basketball final between Shandong and Jiangsu at the 15<sup>th</sup> National Games in Zhongshan, Guangdong Province, yesterday. — Xinhua

**5.** Ou Yushan of Guangdong reacts after the artistic gymnastics women's team final at the 15<sup>th</sup> National Games in Zhaoqing, Guangdong Province, yesterday. — Xinhua

**6.** Chai Bowen of Shanghai University of Sport reacts during the first round of men's team/individual of golf game at the 15<sup>th</sup> National Games in Hong Kong, yesterday. — Xinhua

