

## NY mayor-elect Mamdani still views Trump as fascist

NEW YORK – New York's incoming leftist mayor Zohran Mamdani said yesterday he still believes US President Donald Trump is a fascist, even after the two had a warm meeting at the White House.

"That's something that I've said in the past, I say it today," the mayor-elect said on NBC news.

The self-described Democratic Socialist on Friday met the Republican leader, setting aside months of mutual recriminations and promising to cooperate on the city's future.

Trump, who had previously suggested the Ugandan-born New Yorker should be deported, even came to his rescue as the two addressed reporters at the White House on Friday.

When a journalist asked Mamdani if he continued to view Trump as a fascist, the president stepped in.

"That's OK. You can just say it. That's easier," Trump told Mamdani. "It's easier than explaining it. I don't mind."

In his NBC interview yesterday, Mamdani elaborated:

"I appreciated about the conversation that I had with the president was that we were not shy about the places of disagreement, about the politics that has brought us to this moment," he said.

He added: "I found in the meeting that I had with the president a productive one and a meeting that came back again and again to the central themes of the campaign that we ran: the cost of housing, cost of child care, the cost of groceries, the cost of utilities."

After threatening to cut federal funding to the United States' biggest city and sending in the National Guard, Trump at the White House praised Mamdani's historic election win, said he could do a "great job."

"We're going to be helping him to make everybody's dream come true: having a strong and very safe New York," Trump said.

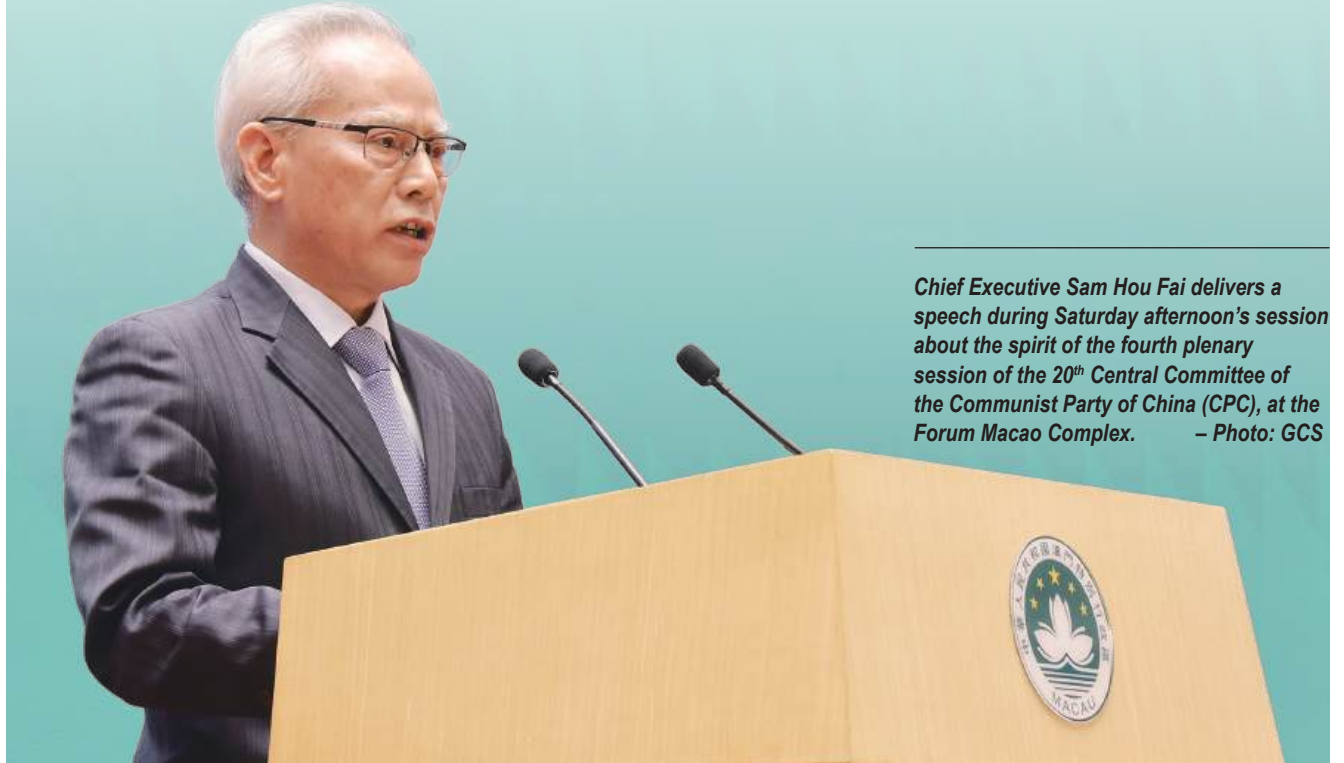
– AFP



Premier Li Qiang shakes hands with South African Deputy President Paul Mashatile in Johannesburg, South Africa, yesterday. (Story on p.7)

– Xinhua

## Sam vows Macau will make greater contributions to nation's modernisation



Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai delivers a speech during Saturday afternoon's session about the spirit of the fourth plenary session of the 20<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), at the Forum Macao Complex. – Photo: GCS

Tony Wong

During a session held in Macau on Saturday about the spirit of the fourth plenary session of the 20<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai pledged that Macau will make greater contributions to the central authorities' ongoing efforts to build a great country and advance national rejuvenation on all fronts through Chinese modernisation.

At the invitation of the MSAR government, a delegation from the central authorities visited Macau on Saturday where its two members briefed representatives from various segments of Macau's civil society about the spirit of the fourth plenary session of the 20<sup>th</sup> CPC Central Committee.

The delegation's two members were Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) President Hou Jianguo, and Zhu Weidong, a deputy director of the Office of the Central Commission for Financial and Economic Affairs. Zhu is also the deputy director of the Office of the Central Rural Work Leading Group.

The MSAR government held

two sessions on Saturday, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon, where Hou and Zhu briefed the respective participants about the fourth plenary session's spirit.

The local government invited the media to cover Saturday afternoon's session, while the session in the morning was held behind closed doors.

The session in the afternoon was also broadcast live by public broadcaster TDM.

Saturday's two sessions were held at the Services Platform Complex for Commercial and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (aka Forum Macao Complex) in Sai Van.

According to a statement from the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) on Saturday, the session in the morning was attended by Sam, Central People's Government Liaison Office in the MSAR Director Zheng Xincong, MSAR principal officials, members of the MSAR government's top advisory Executive Council, local legislators, judges, prosecutors, directors (or presidents) and deputy directors (or vice-presidents) of bureaus and other bureau-level

public entities, and department chiefs of the public entities.

Sam and Zheng attended both sessions on Saturday.

In addition to Sam and Zheng, the session in the afternoon, which was open to the media, was also attended by Edmund Ho Hau Wah, Macau's first chief executive and now a vice-chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Sam's predecessor Ho Iat Seng, local deputies to the National People's Congress (NPC), Macau members of the CPPCC National Committee, as well as representatives from various segments of Macau's civil society.

Both sessions on Saturday, according to GCS, were each attended by about 600 participants.

The fourth plenary session of the 20<sup>th</sup> CPC Central Committee, which was held in Beijing from October 20 to 23, adopted the Recommendations of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China for Formulating the 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development.

Continued on page 5

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The Macau Post Daily

## Li urges China, Germany to strengthen dialogue, address concerns

Premier Li Qiang said yesterday that the governments of China and Germany should make joint efforts to strengthen dialogue and communication, and properly handle their respective concerns.

– Story on p. 7

## Washington seeking to 'iron out' Trump proposal details with Ukrainians in Geneva

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio met Ukrainian officials in Geneva yesterday, seeking to "iron out" details of Washington's plan to end the war, as Kyiv hailed "reinvigorated diplomacy".

– Story on p. 11

## Coup-prone Guinea-Bissau votes to elect new president, parliament

Voters in coup-prone Guinea-Bissau cast their ballots yesterday to pick a new president, hoping to turn the page on endemic political turmoil despite the main opposition party being barred from the race.

– Story on p. 12



# Flu tops alert level, Health Bureau calls for jabs

**Khalel Vallo**

Macau's influenza virus rate remains above the alert threshold, with the Health Bureau (SSM) calling on residents, especially high-risk groups, to strengthen flu prevention and get vaccinated as soon as possible.

According to an SSM statement on Friday, five collective infection cases resembling influenza have been detected in Macau. The statement noted that flu cases have stayed relatively high since mid-October, with a marked increase in adult cases.

Weekly consultations for influenza-like illnesses diagnosed at the bureau's Adult Emergency Service rose from 241 to 297

between November 9 and 15, representing a 20 percent increase, the statement said, adding that paediatric emergency consultations dropped by roughly 7 percent, from 615 to 573.

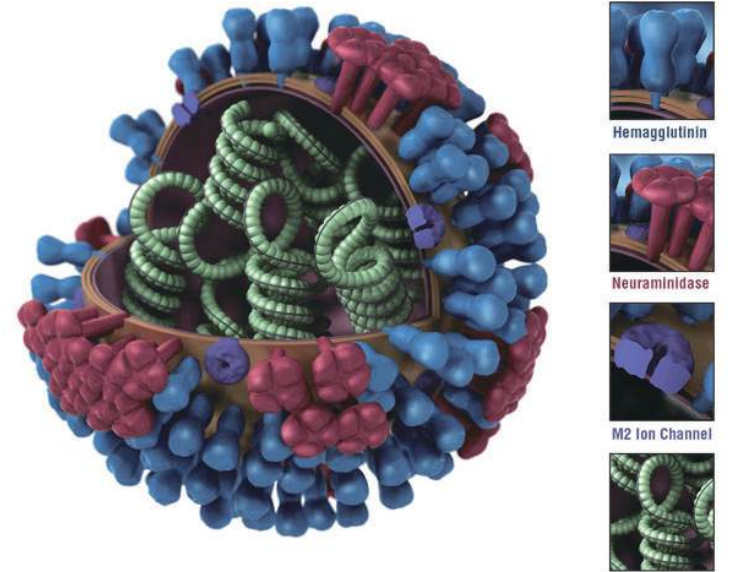
According to the bureau, laboratory data shows that influenza positivity rates continue to fluctuate but remain active overall. After falling from 28.9 percent in mid-October to 11.6 percent last week, the rate almost doubled to 22.7 percent, surpassing the alert level of 13.1 percent.

Influenza A (H3) accounted for 91.4 percent of the cases, the statement noted, adding that the bureau also reported an uptick in collective infection cases.

Numbers climbed from 15 over the previous two-week period to 19 last week, mostly in primary and secondary schools, with no severe cases recorded, the statement pointed out.

Since mid-September, Macau has registered one severe influenza case involving a 79-year-old male who required ventilatory support. The patient has since recovered and been discharged. He had not been vaccinated against influenza.

With influenza circulation remaining high, the Health Bureau urges residents – particularly pregnant women, children and people with chronic illnesses – to get vaccinated promptly to reduce the risk of severe complications. ■



This photo downloaded yesterday shows the influenza (A) virus. – Photo courtesy of the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

## Gongbei Customs seizes 248 Disney dolls

**Armindo Neves**

Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in a statement on

Saturday that its officers seized 248 Disney dolls at Gongbei Port (checkpoint) from a woman arriving

from Macau last Tuesday.

According to the statement, customs officers at the checkpoints Passenger Inspection Hall noticed a female mainlander whose two suitcases showed some abnormalities during a routine X-ray scan.

Upon inspection, customs officers discovered a large quantity of Disney soft toys in the luggage, totalling 248 items. The Zhuhai-bound smuggler said that the purpose of carrying the dolls was to resell them for a profit.

In the statement, Gongbei Customs reminded the public that according to relevant regulations, evading customs supervision by hiding and taking goods subject to customs duties into the mainland constitutes smuggling. If the circumstances are severe enough to constitute a crime, criminal liability will be pursued.

The statement did not clarify whether the Disney soft toys were counterfeit or genuine merchandise.

## Macau Customs seizes frozen cooked pork tripe worth 35,000 patacas

Meanwhile, Macau Customs Service officers raided a parallel-trading den in the peninsula's northern district on Thursday where they seized 1.2 tonnes of frozen cooked pork tripe (急凍熟豬肚) worth around 35,000 patacas in total.

According to a statement on Thursday night, customs officers caught a 25-year-old local woman who ran the business and hired parallel traders to smuggle frozen cooked pork tripe from Macau to the mainland.

The woman will be fined in compliance with the relevant provisions listed in the External Trade Law, the statement said.

Moreover, the statement added, the woman violated the Food Safety Law as the supposedly frozen cooked pork tripe was stored merely at room temperature, adding that the Customs Service has meanwhile transferred the case to the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) for follow-up action. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs shows 248 Disney soft toys seized by its officers at Gongbei Port (checkpoint) last Tuesday.



This undated handout photo released by the Macau Customs Service on Thursday shows the seized frozen cooked pork tripe.

## 3 schools, kindergarten set up no-smoking zones around entrances

**Ida Cheong**

Following a comprehensive assessment by the Health Bureau (SSM) and the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM), three schools and a childcare centre have been selected for the implementation of no-smoking zones from today, according to a SSM statement yesterday.

The statement pointed out that Escola Luso-Chinesa da Taipa (氹仔中葡學校), Macau Kung Luen Vocational & Technical Middle School, Escola Estrela do Mar (Primary School Section) (澳門海星中學-附屬小學), and the Kindergarten of Crèche Diocesana Helen Liang – Centro Familiar (澳門教區梁文燕托兒所), start today to enforce no-smoking zones around their entrances.

The statement noted that, from now on, smoking is prohibited within 10 metres of both sides of the schools' main entrances. White boundary lines and no-smoking signs have been painted on the ground to demarcate the smoking areas from no-smoking zones, and high visible statutory no-smoking signs have also been posted outside the entrances to remind individuals entering the restricted zones, the statement said.

The statement added that the demarcation model is identical to the one currently used for no-smoking areas at bus stops. Individuals caught violating the smoking ban will be subject to a fine of 1,500 patacas.

After evaluating the effectiveness of these four pilot sites, the Health Bureau will progressively extend the no-smoking measures to other schools and childcare centres across Macau, aiming to better protect the health of minors and foster a smoke-free, healthy living environment, the statement said.

In the statement, the Health Bureau once again urged smokers to quit for the sake of their own health and that of their families. Individuals intending to quit smoking can seek referrals through Health Centres or public Conde de S. Januário Hospital Centre (CHCSJ), make appointments via "Macao One Account" app, or call 2848 1238 during office hours.

For further details, please visit the "Macao Tobacco Control Information Website" (<https://www.ssm.gov.mo/apps1/smokefree/ch.aspx#clg3504>) or dial 2855 6789. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Health Bureau (SSM) yesterday shows the no-smoking zone established around the Escola Luso-Chinesa da Taipa's (氹仔中葡學校) entrance.

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MACAU POST

### Macau Weather

**DRY.**  
**FINE APART FROM CLOUDY PERIODS.**  
**FORCE 3 NORTH TO NORTHEASTERLY WINDS, BECOMING FORCE 4 TO 5 WITH GUSTS.**  
**RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 35% AND 75%.**



**18°C~27°C**

Source: SMG



## MSO & NGD Games aim to raise public awareness

Ida Cheong

Special Olympics Macau (MSO) Chief Executive Officer Hetzer Siu Yu Hong told reporters on the sidelines of the “15-Day Countdown to the Opening of the 12<sup>th</sup> National Games for Persons with Disabilities (NGD) and the 9<sup>th</sup> National Special Olympics Games Ceremony” at NOVA Mall in Taipa that the Games will provide opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate in sports, while also raising public awareness that persons with disabilities have the right and the ability to engage in athletic activities, showcasing the significance of sport for persons with disabilities, highlighting their perseverance and diverse capabilities.

The 12<sup>th</sup> National Games for Persons with Disabilities and the 9<sup>th</sup> National Special Olympics Games will be held on December 8-15 in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau. Macau is hosting two badminton events.

Siu added that Macau’s NGD and MSO athletes began preparations nearly a year ago,



Chief Executive Officer of the Special Olympics Macau (MSO) Hetzer Siu Yu Hong addresses yesterday’s “15-Day Countdown to the Opening of the National Games for Persons with Disabilities (NGD) and the 9<sup>th</sup> National Special Olympics Games (NSOG) Ceremony” at NOVA Mall in Taipa.

— Photo: Ida Cheong

completing selections and finalising the team roster, adding that they are currently in the final training cycle and will enter a rest phase next week, focusing fully on preparing for the competition.

Siu noted that the integration of the National Games and the National Games for Persons with Disabilities follows the model used for the Olympic and Paralympic Games linkage, aiming to leverage the impact of the National Games in the Greater Bay Area to enhance public national identity, while also guiding everyone to pay attention to the Games for Persons with Disabilities and root for persons with disabilities.

Siu said in a speech at yesterday’s countdown ceremony that the hosting of the national sports competition in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau fully demonstrates the nation’s high regard for the integrated development of the Greater Bay Area (GBA), adding that the National Games for Persons with Disabilities and the National Special Olympics Games will promote the development of sport for persons with disabilities within the GBA, increase societal attention towards persons with disabilities, and foster social inclusion.

Siu said he hopes that all sectors of society will appreciate the perseverance, courage, and abilities demonstrated by athletes with disabilities, and work together to create a positive, inclusive, and harmonious social atmosphere.

The two-day “2025 Greater Bay Area Rendezvous: Understanding the Special Olympics & Fitness Promotion Day”, which ended yesterday at NOVA Mall in Taipa, attracted about 3,000 participants, including yesterday’s countdown ceremony, which marked 15 days until the opening of 12<sup>th</sup> National Games for Persons with Disabilities and the 9<sup>th</sup> National Special Olympics Games. ■

## Tap water consumption dips 2 to 3.5 pct this year: Macao Water chief

Armindo Neves

Macao Water Supply Company Limited Executive Director Nacky Kuan Sio Peng told reporters on Saturday that Macau’s tap water consumption so far this year has decreased by between 2.0 percent to 3.5 percent compared to the same period last year.

Kuan pointed out that the decrease in tap water consumption can be attributed to several factors. While tap water consumption in Cotai has increased due to a rise in visitor numbers, some small businesses in the Macau Peninsula have ceased operations, leading to a reduction in tap water there.

Moreover, Kuan also said that even though the number of visitors has grown, their average length of stay has shortened, which has also contributed to the overall decline in tap water demand.

### Macao Water hosts 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Open Day

Macao Water, officially known as Macao Water Supply Company Limited, celebrated its “90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with an Open Day at its Ilha Verde Water Treatment Plant.

The event was supported by the Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA).

According to Kuan, this year marks the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of Macao Water. She said that the company started with a small water treatment plant in 1935, which has gradually expanded to four large-scale, modern water treatment plants, with a current tap water supply capacity of 520,000 cubic metres per day, which was sufficient to meet Macau’s future development needs.

Kuan added that her company continues to enhance its online services and provides subsidies for the maintenance of tap water supply



Macao Water Executive Director Nacky Kuan Sio Peng speaks to reporters at the water treatment plant in Ilha Verde on Saturday. — Photos: Armindo Neves



Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA) Director Susana Wong Soi Man speaks to reporters at the water treatment plant on Saturday.

facilities in low-rise buildings, so far having assisted 600 buildings in completing facility improvements.

Kuan emphasised that through initiatives such as open days for school visits and social media campaigns to promote tap water supply knowledge, the company aims to help the public understand the value of water resources.

The one-day event also included an award ceremony for its drawing contest “Water • Colour” and “2025 Macau Special Olympics (MSO) Swimming Competition”.

### HK-Macau ferry trips fall by 50 pct to 60 pct compared to 2019: marine chief

Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA) Director Susana Wong Soi Man told reporters on Saturday that the number of sea ferry trips between Hong Kong and Macau has decreased by 50 percent to 60 percent compared to 2019.

Wong said that the decline in ferry passenger traffic was due to the opening of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge (HZMB), which has become the preferred

choice for most passengers travelling between Hong Kong and Macau. Wong also said that although overnight ferry services have been discontinued, the current schedule – with departures every half hour – continues to meet the demand for point-to-point travel between the two special administrative regions (SARs).

Regarding new ferry routes, Wong said that the Zhongshan route has already been launched, while passenger numbers on the Shenzhen route remain stable.

This year, according to Wong, the Wanzai-Macau ferry route has seen steady growth, with a 20 to 30 percent increase compared to 2023 and last year. This growth is primarily driven by the rising number of daily commuters living and working in Wanzai and Zhuhai, while an increase of tourists travelling on the route has been less noticeable, Wong said.

The Wanzai-Macau ferry trip takes about four minutes. An undiscounted return ticket costs 48 patacas. Macau and Zhuhai residents enjoy a 30 percent discount. ■

## Four Seasons Hotel Macao unveils holiday offerings

Rui Pastorin

Four Seasons Hotel Macao has recently unveiled its holiday offerings and experiences for its “Season of Splendor”.

The five-star hotel said in a statement on Thursday that among these are the showcase of a 7.6-metre Christmas tree in its lobby that takes inspiration from the artistry of Parisian Jewellery Maison Chaumet.

The statement added that Xiao Ting restaurant, which offers Chinese and Western specialties along



This undated handout photo provided by Four Seasons Hotel Macao on Thursday shows a log cake, one of the Christmas holiday cakes featured.

with premium tea, will showcase its Imperial Bee Afternoon Tea where “the precision of Parisian craftsmanship finds its edible expression” and features an infusion of seven honey varieties.

Meanwhile, “The Study” bar showcases a “journey through curated tastings of The Macallan’s finest expressions” through “The Whisky Edition”, which will feature bartender’s inspired cocktails.

Guests can also celebrate the new year during “A Symphony of Luxury: Four Seasons Countdown” featuring The Macallan’s whiskys and Dom Pérignon’s “exquisite bubbles”, along with choices between the intimate Countdown Champagne Package or a VIP lounge celebration

Various holiday cakes like the classic Italian Panettone, French Saint Honoré, and traditional Log Cake are also on offer, the statement said. Guests can also enjoy French buffets at Belcancão and limited-time ramen specialties at Ohte.

Lastly, at The Spa, the statement said that that the diamond facial with air bubble technology, complemented by a 30-minute back massage, are presented, while Christmas Spa Hampers are also on offer.

One can find more details on <https://www.fourseasons.com/macau/seasonal/>. ■

## ISLAMIC ASSOCIATION OF MACAU

### DISCLAIMER

Our Association has of late received queries from various organizations and individuals concerning an entity under the name of “Macau Islamic Cultural Exchange Promotion Association” and it’s Director named “Hu Hui Li, Fatima” as to her connections with our Association and if she is a member or director of the Association.

In this respect to allay any misunderstandings within the community and to clarify the matter we wish to emphasize that Islamic Association of Macau is the sole owner and administrator of the Macau Mosque and Cemetery located at No. 4 Ramal dos Mouros and that the “Macau Islamic Cultural Exchange Promotion Association” and it’s director “Hu Hui Li, Fatima” is in no way connected or associated with our Association.

As such Ms. Hu Hui Li, Fatima can in no way represent the interests of the Islamic Association of Macau or to express comments and or remarks to that effect.



ISLAMIC ASSOCIATION OF MACAU  
(澳門伊斯蘭會)



**ABOUT The Young Post**

The Macau Post Daily's The Young Post will be published every Monday to present and discuss topical issues that may interest not only the younger but also all the other generations.



## Tap Siac Craft Market in Autumn draws fairgoers to shop, play, learn & eat

**Rui Pastorin**

Macau has, to say the least, been busy with events from the recently concluded 15<sup>th</sup> National Games and the 72<sup>nd</sup> Macau Grand Prix (MGP) to the ongoing and ever-packed 25<sup>th</sup> Macau Food Festival. And now, with the onset of cooler weather, has come another event to draw Macau's crowds: the annual Tap Siac Craft Market in Autumn, which opened on Thursday.

Running for a total of eight days broken up into two consecutive weeks, the craft market, which has been annually held in the spring and the autumn since 2008, features a variety of items for fairgoers in Praça do Tap Siac. And by 4:30 p.m. yesterday, it had drawn a sizable crowd. From young children to seniors to families and people visiting the market with their beloved pets, the fairgoers were made up of different age groups and backgrounds that came together to explore the market, at times shoulder to shoulder.

Booth operators from Macau and elsewhere were absorbed in their work as they sold or introduced products to passers-by, with everything from a variety of artworks and clothing to daily items and jewellery for sale. Outside of the busy booths were those steadily engaged in handicraft workshops at a designated area, gathering a raft of participants including parents and their children.

Just opposite the workshops were queues made up of the young and the young at heart as they eagerly anticipated their turn at a table tennis-themed game area, which had the lively sounds of laughter from children and even parents as they went about playing. Those who wanted to slow down also had the choice of watching performances at the designated area by the steps of the Glass House overlooking the square, where sessions among the 47 music performances by acts from Macau, the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong are being held during the two-week event.

And to add to the shopping, workshops and music, several stalls are offering snacks featuring local staples and other fare, along with beverages, all serving as energy boosters to explore the market further.

With all the activities going on in the square, the event is another place to be in the continuously busy and ever lively Macau.

The craft market will be returning for its second week from November 27 through 30, being open from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. on Thursday and Friday, and from 3 p.m. to 10 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday during the period. One can find more information on the workshops and musical performances by visiting [www.craft-market.gov.mo](http://www.craft-market.gov.mo), the "Macao Craft Market" Facebook page and the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) website on [www.icm.gov.mo](http://www.icm.gov.mo).



*Photos taken yesterday by Rui Pastorin*



# Sam vows Macau will make greater contributions to nation's modernisation



Central People's Government Liaison Office Director Zheng Xincong delivers a speech during Saturday afternoon's session at the Forum Macao Complex.  
— Photos: GCS



Zhu Weidong, a deputy director of the Office of the Central Commission for Financial and Economic Affairs (left), and Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) President Hou Jianguo, address Saturday's session at the Forum Macao Complex.



## Continued from p.1

During Saturday afternoon's 2.5-hour session, Sam made an opening speech. After Hou and Zhu presented the spirit of the fourth plenary session of the 20<sup>th</sup> CPC Central Committee and answered questions from several attendees, Sam made another speech to conclude the session.

In his opening speech, Sam said that the implementation of the nation's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan (2026-30) will provide broader space and greater development opportunities for Macau's appropriate economic diversification and improvements in residents' well-being.

Sam underlined that the MSAR government and all segments of Macau's civil society must earnestly study and deeply understand the guiding ideology, main objectives, and major strategies for the nation's economic and social development during its 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan period, and further strengthen their sense of responsibility, urgency, initiative, and proactiveness in seizing national development opportunities.

Sam pledged the local government's commitment to unwaveringly implementing the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, resolutely ensuring the implementation of the central authorities' strategic deployments concerning Macau, and aligning Macau's development with national development strategies.

Sam underlined that the local government will draw up and ensure the sound implementation of Macau's third five-year socioeconomic development plan (2026-30) while continuing to enhance law-based governance effectiveness, advance the city's appropriate economic diversification, and strengthen economic, trade, scientific, technological, cultural, and people-to-people cooperation with the Chinese mainland.

Sam pledged the local government's commitment to strengthening Macau's role as "One Centre, One Platform, One Base" and making greater contributions to the nation's overall development and Chinese modernisation.

The Macau government's "One Centre, One Platform, One Base" concept refers to Macau developing itself into a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure, a commercial and trade cooperation service platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, and an exchange and cooperation base with Chinese culture as its mainstream and co-existence of different cultures.

Sam underlined that studying, publicising, and implementing the spirit of the fourth plenary session of the 20<sup>th</sup> CPC Central Committee well is a major political task for the MSAR at present and for some time to come.

## Sam shares five insights

In his concluding speech at the end of Saturday afternoon's session, Sam presented five insights for Macau to study and implement the fourth plenary session's spirit well. Sam said that his five insights were based on the MSAR government's ongoing commitment to ensuring the implementation of the spirit of President Xi Jinping's various important speeches made during his inspection visit to Macau in December last year as well as based on the MSAR government's latest development deployments.

**First**, Sam said, the local government will resolutely safeguard the nation's sovereignty, security and development interests, comprehensively, accurately and unwaveringly implement the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, and translate learning achievements into tangible results that drive progress in various areas of Macau's development.

**Second**, Sam said, the local government will continue to strengthen its coordination mechanisms with local patriotic community associations in order to consolidate the foundations of its grassroots governance.

Sam said that Macau's patriotic community associations should also improve their governance and better serve as bridges of communication between the government and residents.

**Third**, Sam pledged that the local government will accelerate progress to

achieve new milestones in its economic diversification efforts and in the integrated development between Macau and Hengqin.

Sam also underlined the local government's commitment to its people-centred approach, safeguarding the city's basic livelihood safety net, promoting social fairness, and ensuring that the fruits of development benefit all Macau residents more broadly and equitably.

**Fourth**, Sam said, the local government will leverage Macau's distinctive strengths – backed by the motherland and connected to the world – with the aim of making greater contributions to the high-quality development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) and the nation's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Sam also underlined that the local government will ensure Macau's role as the "precise connector" between China and Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries.

**Fifth**, Sam pledged the local government's commitment to aligning Macau's development with the nation's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan and ensuring the sound implementation of Macau's third five-year socioeconomic development plan.

## Zheng urges support for 3<sup>rd</sup> 5-Year Plan's design, realisation

Also delivering an opening speech during Saturday afternoon's session, Liaison Office Director Zheng Xincong acknowledged that all participants of the session are patriots and important forces for Macau's development, urging them to take the lead in studying and publicising the fourth plenary session's spirit while continuing to create a positive atmosphere for various segments of civil society to advance Macau's high-quality development through the implementation of the fourth plenary session's spirit.

Zheng also urged the participants to support the local government's upcoming work to devise and implement its third five-year socioeconomic development plan while making greater contributions to fostering Macau's long-term prosperity and stability.

## Hou, Zhu offer explanations, advice to Macau

During Saturday afternoon's session, Deputy Director of the Office of the Central Commission for Financial and Economic Affairs Zhu Weidong pointed out that the fourth plenary session has drawn up a blueprint for the nation's development over the next five years and represents, at a new historical starting point, another general mobilisation and comprehensive deployment to advance Chinese modernisation. The 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan period is a critical stage for laying a solid foundation for the whole country to basically achieve socialist modernisation, Zhu noted.

Zhu stressed the need to deeply understand the guiding principles and main goals for the nation's economic and social development during the 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan period, grasp the rich meaning and clear direction of the fourth plenary session's call to promote the long-term prosperity and stability in Hong Kong and Macau, and ensure the proper alignment between Macau's third five-year socioeconomic development plan and the nation's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan.

During Saturday afternoon's session, CAS President Hou Jianguo said that according to its 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, the nation will strengthen original innovation and make breakthroughs in core technologies in key fields, promoting deep integration of scientific and technological innovation with industrial innovation, adding that these initiatives can combine Macau's strengths with those of GBA cities, accelerate the efficient transformation and utilisation of major scientific and technological achievements, and foster new quality productive forces.

Hou also suggested that Macau fully leverage its role as a business service platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries while making good use of its advantages as a free port and separate customs territory in order to help mainland enterprises "go global". ■

# Govt to run single feedback gathering platform, back by AI: Wong

## Tony Wong

Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak said on Friday that the government has completed establishing the basic framework for a single and simple platform for residents to raise opinions and complaints related to all government entities, adding that the new public feedback gathering platform will be operated through the applications of big data models as well as artificial intelligence (AI) technologies that convert voice into text, with the aim of enabling the government to assess and respond to residents' opinions and complaints more efficiently.

Wong made the remarks during a one-day Q&A session on Friday in the Legislative Assembly's (AL) hemicycle about his portfolio's policy guidelines for next year.

The government indicated early this year its plan to set up a single and simple platform for residents to raise opinions and complaints related to all government entities as the current public feedback systems run by different public entities, the government acknowledged at that time, did not function well in responding to opinions and complaints from residents.

During Friday's Q&A session, Wong noted that the local government

has designed the modus operandi of the new platform after referencing the design of the mainland's government service hotline 12345.

Wong said that the government has completed setting up the basic framework for the new platform, adding that various types of preparatory tasks are underway before the operation of the platform can get off the ground.

Meanwhile, Wong also said that the government will consult the public about its proposed new legislation to regulate the setting-up and operations of the city's community associations.

Wong acknowledged the various irregularities in the operations of

community associations in the city over the years as there is no specific public entity formally tasked with supervising their operations.

Wong said that the current law regulating community associations was enacted in 1999, i.e., shortly before the establishment of the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) on December 20, 1999, adding that there were only some 1,700 community associations in Macau in 1999, while the number has increased to about 12,300 now.

Based on the figures mentioned by Wong, the number of community associations has risen by 623.5 percent since 1999. ■



Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak addresses Friday's Q&A session about his portfolio's 2026 policy guidelines in the Legislative Assembly's (AL) hemicycle.  
— Photo: GCS



# MPU-Bell Centre Forum explores AI in English teaching

**Khalel Vallo**

The Macao Polytechnic University (MPU)-Bell Centre of English held its third Creative English Language Teaching (ELT) Forum on Thursday, bringing together scholars from various universities to discuss how artificial intelligence (AI) can enhance English teaching and learning in Macau, according to a statement from the public university that day.

The forum focused on how AI can support high-quality English education, with Huang Chu-ren from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) joining as commentator, the statement said, which underlined that he's ranked among the top 2 percent of global scientists in the AI field by Stanford/Elsevier in 2024.

Key speakers included Kathleen Ahrens from PolyU in Hong Kong and Simon Mark Harrison from City University of Hong Kong (CityUHK), along with Director of the MPU-Bell Centre, David Sansom, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) trainers Áine Ní Bhroin and Mark Rodehorst, the statement said.

According to the statement, Ahrens showed how AI generates dialogues from authentic texts and transforms literature into a "reader's theatre" to boost student engagement, pointing out that she also reminds teachers that AI output



*This handout photo provided by the Macao Polytechnic University (MPU) last week shows Hong Kong Polytechnic University's (PolyU) Kathleen Ahrens addressing Thursday's Creative English Language Teaching (ELT) Forum in Zape.*

is merely "raw materials" requiring human verification and that ethical use must be ensured.

Meanwhile, Harrison introduced AI-guided oral feedback tools such as Moodie.ai, while cautioning that rule systems used by AI may contain biases, the statement noted.

Huang noted that AI does not truly "think", highlighting that human communication involves joint interpretation that AI has yet to achieve, though he recognised significant progress in models such as "Qwen", the statement said.

The forum gathered principals and representatives from more than 10 local primary and secondary schools, along with MPU teaching staff, the statement noted, adding that nearly a hundred participants engaged with the speakers.

MPU-Bell Centre of English said in the statement that it will continue to advance innovative English teaching and aims to expand international English examination certifications, supporting talent development for Macau's evolving technological landscape. ■

## Global South consensus drives global governance reform

**Commentary**

JOHANNESBURG — By convening on African soil for the first time, the 20<sup>th</sup> Group of 20 (G20) Summit sends an unmistakable signal: the Global South is no longer content with being a passive rule-taker. It is stepping forward as a collective force to improve global governance and drive development.

Accounting for around 85 percent of global GDP and two-thirds of the world's population, the G20 remains a primary platform for global governance. This year's G20 South Africa Summit's Leaders' Declaration underscores that multilateral cooperation is essential to tackling global challenges, and it calls for stronger support for developing countries to advance inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Such calls come at a time when unilateralism, protectionism and geopolitical tensions are reshaping the international landscape, global economic recovery is fragile, development gaps continue to widen, and institutions meant to safeguard multilateral cooperation, including the United Nations, are under strain. These pressures have laid bare a deepening governance deficit that the Global South is increasingly unwilling to accept as the status quo.

In the meantime, the rise of emerging markets and developing countries has sharpened awareness across the Global South that the existing global governance system neither fully reflects their interests nor adequately represents their voice.

Against this backdrop, the two-day summit, themed "Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability," takes on heightened significance. Global South countries made clear their expectation that all parties should uphold multilateralism, bridge the North-South development divide, and work toward a more inclusive and equitable global development framework — one capable of bringing greater stability to an uncertain world.

China's actions reflect this broader shift. As an important member of the G20 and the largest developing country in the world, China, in September, proposed the Global Governance Initiative, which rests on five core principles: upholding sovereign equality, adhering to the international rule of law, practicing multilateralism, advocating a people-centered approach, and prioritizing concrete actions. The initiative has received widespread recognition, with many highlighting China's constructive role in providing global public

goods and advancing fairer global governance.

China-Africa cooperation illustrates how Global South partnerships can translate shared priorities into tangible development gains. Grounded in the development realities of African countries, this cooperation has strengthened their capacity-building efforts and drawn greater attention to Africa's long-neglected development agenda. It has also helped amplify the collective influence of the Global South in global governance reform.

Meanwhile, China and Africa have worked together to advance the building of a fairer and more equitable international order and to voice the aspirations of Global South countries on the world stage, enabling the Global South to play an increasingly important role in the ongoing transformation of global governance.

Global governance is at a new historic turning point, and the need for multilateral cooperation and shared development has never been greater. As major forces of the Global South, China, Africa, and other developing countries should continue working together, uphold fairness and justice, and advance practical cooperation to help steer global governance toward a more just and equitable system. — *Xinhua*



### "One World Family" Global Summit & Festival Launches in Hong Kong & Macao in 2026, Building a Sustainable Future for Families

Families are the foundation of society, yet today they face unprecedented challenges. In response, Europe-based non-profit 1SIGN Foundation will host the inaugural "One World Family" Global Summit and Music Festival in Hong Kong and Macao in 2026. The event aims to unite global leaders, experts, and artists to promote family values, children's rights, and a sustainable social future.

"Families shape who we are and form the core of societal stability. We hope this event will remind the world of the importance of family and children," said Lubomír Haltmar, Founder of 1SIGN Foundation.

### Three Strategic Meetings Focus on Youth Mental and Digital Well-being

In November 2025, the Foundation held three strategic meetings in Hong Kong with internationally recognized scientist, artist, and philanthropist Professor Dominic Man Kit Lam. Discussions addressed the pressures faced by children and adolescents worldwide, especially in Europe, including anxiety, depression, social isolation, digital addiction, and academic stress. Professor Lam described this as the "silent suffering of being overlooked" and emphasized the urgent need for family and educational systems that support psychological well-being, promote digital health, and foster intergenerational understanding.



*Caption: Foundation Founder Lubomír Haltmar (right) in deep discussion with Professor Dominic Lam (left) on the vision and development of "One World, One Family"*

### Global Launch of "Sustainable Family Letters" English Edition in 2026 to Build Cultural Cornerstone for Family Sustainability

During the meetings, Professor Lam introduced his new work, "Sustainable Family Letters", which explores family responsibility, resilience, and humanity's shared future. A special English edition will be launched globally at the 2026 Summit and Festival, serving as a cultural cornerstone for advancing family sustainability.

### Science × Arts × Philanthropy: The Cross-Disciplinary Contributions of Professor Dominic Man Kit Lam

Professor Lam has notable achievements across multiple disciplines. He founded the ORBIT international blindness prevention program and invented Dispersion Imaging Art, with works exhibited at the Louvre Museum in Paris. His work bridges biomedical science, innovative education, and crosscultural arts, illustrating the power of interdisciplinary collaboration.

### Two-Day Event Format: Global Summit and Music festival

The inaugural "One World Family" event spans two days, combining a daytime summit and an evening music festival. The summit will gather experts in family development, social governance, education, and philanthropy to discuss youth mental health, intergenerational communication, and demographic trends. The music festival will feature international artists, using the universal language of music to convey family harmony and social inclusion.

### Laying the Groundwork for Long-Term Collaboration, Creating a Family Support Network

These strategic meetings have established a foundation for lasting collaboration between the Foundation and Professor Lam's initiatives. Plans include launching joint projects during the 2026 Summit, developing an International Family Protection Alliance, creating resource-sharing platforms, conducting transnational pilot projects, and building digital interactive systems to strengthen global family support and child rights protection.

For more information about the organization, visit <https://1sign.org/>



## Li urges G20 to strive for broader global cooperation for development

JOHANNESBURG – Premier Li Qiang appealed for efforts of the Group of 20 (G20) to strive for broader global cooperation to jointly cope with challenges and promote development.

Li made the remarks when attending the second and third sessions of the 20<sup>th</sup> G20 Summit scheduled in Johannesburg for Saturday and yesterday.

As multiple challenges such as climate change, energy and food crises are overlapping, the international community needs to unite to pool strength and solve problems through collaboration, Li said.

First, Li called on all parties to strengthen ecology and environmental protection cooperation, and enhance development resilience.

He called on G20 economies to abide by the science-based spirit and uphold the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities in dealing with issues concerning climate change and ecology.

With regard to cooperation in such fields, all parties should demonstrate responsibility and act promptly, he said.

China is willing to step up cooperation with all parties within the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and accelerate the implementation of the outcomes of the 30<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP30) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, said the Chinese premier.

Secondly, Li urged efforts to strengthen cooperation on green energy and advance a just transition.

He called for promoting global cooperation in the green industry, keeping industrial and supply chains stable and unimpeded, and facilitating the free flow and application of related technologies and products.

China stands ready to continue to do its utmost to support the energy transition of various countries, he added.

Thirdly, he said cooperation on food security should be enhanced to ensure stable supplies.

Li called for optimizing global food circulation and supply, fostering partnerships on major commodities, developing an open, stable and sustainable global food market, and strengthening supply for countries facing food shortages.

At the same time, the premier called on the G20 to enhance cooperation in agricultural science and technology, so as to boost food production capacity.

China is ready to work with all parties to advance the implementation of the International Cooperation Initiative on Global Food Security

and make new contributions to the fight against hunger and poverty, he said.

The new round of scientific and technological revolution and industrial transformation is accelerating, bringing unprecedented development opportunities to the world, but it may also create new inequalities and development gaps, Li said.

The G20 should encourage all parties to adhere to openness, win-win cooperation and shared opportunities, and strive to enhance the well-being of people worldwide, Li added.

The first is to promote the widespread application and effective governance of artificial intelligence (AI), Li said, calling on the G20 to actively promote research and development cooperation and result sharing, bridge the intelligence gap and improve governance rules.

China encourages more countries to join the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization and the action plan of international cooperation in open science, and to promote the healthy and orderly development of AI in a beneficial, safe and fair way, Li said.

The second is to promote mutually beneficial cooperation and peaceful utilization of critical minerals.

China supports the UN Secretary-General's Panel on Critical Energy Transition Minerals in playing a constructive role and calls for full implementation of the G20 Critical Minerals Framework, said Li, urging efforts to promote a more balanced distribution of benefits in production and supply chains, so as to better safeguard the interests of developing countries.

Meanwhile, Li urged a prudent approach to potential military and other applications to prevent security risks. He added that China encourages the active participation of all parties in the International Economic and Trade Cooperation Initiative on Green Mining and Minerals.

The third is to strengthen development empowerment and livelihood support for the Global South, Li said.

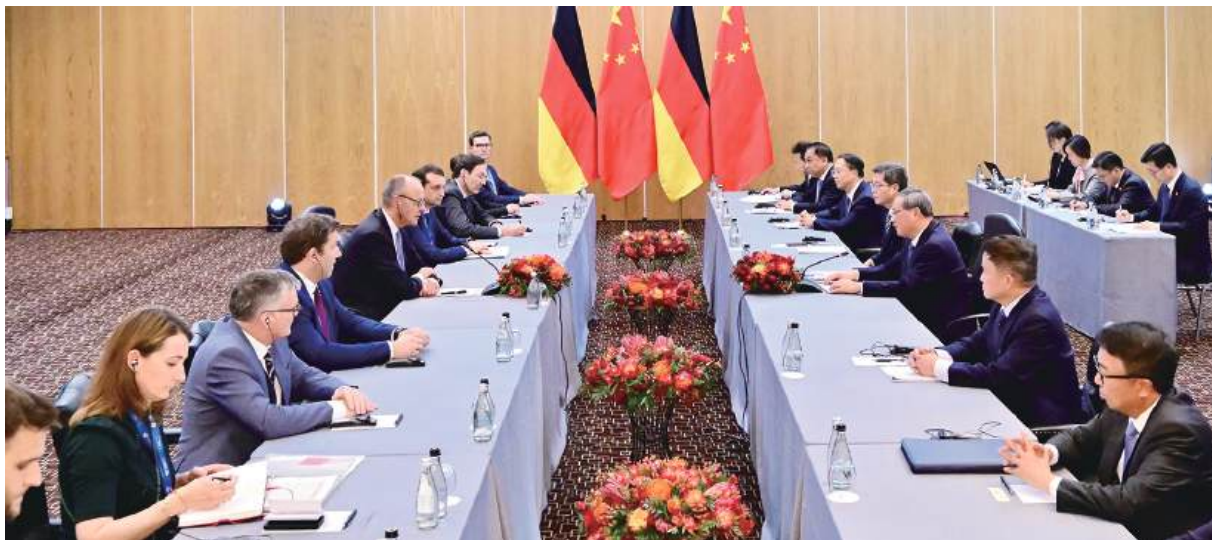
He urged efforts to support capacity-building assistance in Africa and other developing countries, create more job opportunities, and advance the development of women and youth.

The premier added that China stands ready to work with all parties to implement the G20 Nelson Mandela Bay Target, enabling more young people to benefit from economic globalization.

The summit adopted the G20 South Africa Summit: Leaders' Declaration.

— Xinhua

## Li urges China, Germany to strengthen dialogue, address concerns



Premier Li Qiang (third from right) meets with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz (fourth from left) in Johannesburg, South Africa, yesterday.

— Xinhua

JOHANNESBURG – Premier Li Qiang said yesterday that the governments of China and Germany should make joint efforts to strengthen dialogue and communication, and properly handle their respective concerns.

Li made the remarks when meeting with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz in Johannesburg on the sidelines of the 20<sup>th</sup> Group of 20 (G20) Summit.

Noting that China and Germany are each other's important economic and trade partners, Li said that since the establishment of diplomatic ties 53 years ago, China and Germany have continuously strengthened dialogue and cooperation, which effectively promoted both sides' common development.

Noting that in May, President Xi Jinping had a phone call with Merz, charting the course for further deepening bilateral relations, Li said mutual respect is the principle guiding China-Germany relations, and win-win cooperation is their defining feature.

Developing a stable, sustainable and high-quality all-round strategic

partnership is in line with the fundamental interests of the two peoples, he said.

China is willing to enhance strategic communication with Germany, adhere to respecting each other's core interests and major concerns, and cement the political foundation for the development of the bilateral relations, Li said.

Li said he also expects the two sides to expand pragmatic cooperation in all fields, and continuously enrich the content of China-Germany relations.

It is hoped that the German side will practice a rational and pragmatic China policy, Li said, expressing expectations for Germany's efforts to overcome obstacles and pressure when promoting bilateral ties, and focus on common interests and consolidate the foundation of cooperation.

China is willing to work with Germany to seize development opportunities and exploit innovative cooperation with an open attitude, said the Chinese premier, envisaging cooperation progress in emerging fields such as new

energy, intelligent manufacturing, biomedicine, hydrogen energy technology and intelligent driving, in order to promote industrial transformation and upgrades, and activate new cooperation impetus.

Noting that this year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the European Union (EU), Li said he expects Germany to help the EU to view China-EU ties from a longer-term perspective, with a broader vision and a more open mindset.

Li said he also hopes to see Germany's efforts to promote the EU to uphold the positioning as a partner of China, enhance dialogue and cooperation between the two sides, and jointly advance the common development and prosperity.

China stands ready to work with Germany to enhance communication and coordination in mechanisms such as the United Nations and the G20, promote the improvement of global governance, safeguard multilateralism and free trade, and be a constructive and certain force for promoting peace and development, Li said.

— Xinhua

## China pledges to deepen cooperation with South Africa: Li

JOHANNESBURG – China stands ready to work with South Africa to firmly support each other and deepen mutually beneficial cooperation, Premier Li Qiang said yesterday.

Li made the remarks when meeting with South African Deputy President Paul Mashatile on the sidelines of the 20<sup>th</sup> Group of 20 (G20) Summit held in Johannesburg on Saturday and yesterday.

China and South Africa are good friends and brothers enjoying a deep friendship, Li said.

In September last year, President Xi Jinping met with his South African counterpart, Cyril Ramaphosa, in Beijing and reached important consensus on advancing bilateral ties, Li pointed out.

China stands ready to work with South Africa to follow the strategic guidance of the two heads of state, further enhance mutual political trust, firmly support each

other, deepen mutually beneficial cooperation, and deliver more outcomes of their all-round strategic cooperative partnership in the new era.

Li noted that China is ready to step up alignment with South Africa, and help more quality and competitive South African products enter the Chinese market by negotiating and signing an agreement on economic partnership for shared development and advancing in South Africa the early implementation of China's zero-tariff treatment for 100 percent tariff lines for African countries having diplomatic relations with China.

China supports more competitive Chinese companies in investing in South Africa and enhancing cooperation in such areas as new energy, automobiles, healthcare, digital economy and infrastructure, with a view to broadening and upgrading bilateral cooperation to

better serve the modernization of both countries, Li said.

He expressed the hope that South Africa will better protect the lawful rights and interests of Chinese enterprises and the safety of their personnel.

China-South Africa cooperation has long played a leading and demonstrative role in China-Africa cooperation, Li said, pledging that China is ready to strengthen communication with South Africa within frameworks including the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), promote the implementation of the outcomes of the FOCAC Beijing Summit, and jointly create a bright future of development and prosperity for China and Africa.

Li called on the two sides to step up multilateral coordination and work with the wider Global South countries to promote a more just and equitable international order.

— Xinhua



# Vietnam flooding kills at least 90

HANOI – Heavy rain, severe flooding and landslides in Vietnam have killed at least 90 people in the last week, authorities said yesterday, leaving others stranded on rooftops and mountain roadways blocked.

Relentless rain has lashed south-central Vietnam since late October and popular holiday destinations have been hit by several rounds of flooding, with economic losses estimated in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

Whole sections of coastal Nha Trang city were inundated last week, while deadly landslides struck highland passes around the Da Lat tourist hub.

In the hard-hit mountainous province of Dak Lak, 61-year-old farmer Mach Van Si said the floodwaters left him and his wife stranded on their sheet-metal rooftop for two nights.

“Our neighbourhood was completely destroyed. Nothing was left. Everything was covered in mud,” he told AFP yesterday.

By the time they climbed a ladder to their roof, Si said he was no longer scared.

“I just thought we were going to die because there was no way out,” he said.

More than 60 deaths, of the 90 recorded since November 16, were in Dak Lak, where tens of thousands of homes were inundated, the environment ministry said in a statement.

## ‘Big soggy mess’

At the Tuy Hoa market in the province, the floodwaters have receded but Vo Huu Du, 40, said some of the hats, bags and shoes she sells were still soaked or lying in mud.



This photo taken on Thursday shows people wading through floodwaters in Nha Trang in Vietnam's coastal province of Khanh Hoa. – AFP

“My goods look like one big soggy mess,” she told AFP. “I don’t even know where to start.”

She and other vendors once considered five centimetres off the ground a safe level to raise their merchandise to avoid flood damage – but no more.

“All these years, the highest water level back in 1993 only reached our ankles,” said Du. “But now the water has come in over one metre high.”

“All the vendors are devastated, not just me,” she added.

Ceramics seller Nguyen Van Thoai, 60, gestured to piles of damaged goods to be cleared from paths between vendor stalls, calling it “a real loss”.

“I don’t even know where to put all this market stock,” he said. “We might need to clean it for a month and still won’t be done.”

More than 80,000 hectares of rice and other crops across Dak Lak and four other provinces were damaged in the last week, with over 3.2 million livestock or poultry killed or washed away by floodwaters.

Authorities have used helicopters

to airdrop aid to communities cut off by flooding and landslides, with the government deploying tens of thousands of personnel to deliver clothing, water-purification tablets, instant noodles and other supplies to affected areas, state outlet Tuoi Tre News said.

Several locations on national highways remained blocked yesterday due to flooding or landslides, according to the environment ministry, and some railway sections were still suspended.

The ministry estimated economic losses of US\$343 million across five provinces due to the floods.

Natural disasters have left 279 people dead or missing in Vietnam and caused more than US\$2 billion in damage between January and October, according to the national statistics office.

The Southeast Asian nation is prone to heavy rain between June and September, but scientists have identified a pattern of human-driven climate change making extreme weather more frequent and destructive. – AFP

# Myanmar junta says nearly 1,600 foreigners arrested in scam hub raids

YANGON – Myanmar’s military said yesterday it arrested nearly 1,600 foreign nationals in five days in a highly publicised crackdown on a notorious internet scam hub on the Thai border.

Sprawling fraud factories have mushroomed in war-torn Myanmar’s border regions, housing scammers who target internet users with romance and business cons worth tens of billions of dollars annually.

Myanmar’s junta has long been accused of looking the other way as the illicit industry grows, but has trumpeted a crackdown since February after being lobbied by key military backer China, experts say.

Additional raids beginning last month were part of a smokescreen, according to some monitors, choreographed to vent pressure from Beijing without too badly denting profits that enrich the junta’s militia allies.

In its latest publicised tally, the junta said “1,590 foreign nationals who entered Myanmar illegally were arrested” from November 18 to 22 in raids on gambling and fraud hub Shwe Kokko, according to state media *The Global New Light of Myanmar*.

“Moreover, authorities seized 2,893 computers, 21,750 mobile phones, 101 Starlink satellite receivers, 21 Routers and a large number of industrial materials used in the online fraud and gambling

activities,” the newspaper said.

After an AFP investigation last month revealed receivers from the Starlink satellite internet service had been installed en masse at scam compounds, the Elon Musk-owned company said it had disabled more than 2,500 Starlink devices in the vicinity of suspected Myanmar scam centres.

*The Global New Light of Myanmar* said 223 people accused of perpetrating online fraud and gambling at Shwe Kokko were detained on Saturday alone, including 100 Chinese nationals.

Video published by local media showed a steamroller crushing hundreds of computer monitors lined up in rows next to piles of already smashed mobile phones at the Shwe Kokko compound on Saturday.

Scam hubs, staffed by thousands of willing workers as well as people trafficked from abroad, have proliferated in Myanmar’s loosely governed borderlands since a 2021 coup sparked a civil war in the country.

While China is a key military backer of the junta, analysts say Beijing is increasingly irate at the rampant scams targeting and enlisting its citizens.

Scam victims in Southeast and East Asia alone were conned out of up to US\$37 billion in 2023, according to a UN report, which said global losses were likely “much larger”. – AFP

# Nigeria arrests 20 Filipino sailors in drug bust

LAGOS – Nigeria’s drug enforcement agency on Friday said it had arrested 20 Filipino sailors caught ferrying at least 20 kilogrammes of cocaine from Brazil to Lagos’s main port.

Nigeria has long been considered a trafficking and production hub for drugs bound for Europe and other African countries.

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) said it intercepted the shipment of top-grade cocaine last Sunday on board a Panama-registered vessel.

The cocaine was buried under its cargo, NDLEA said in a statement. It did not state the type of cargo but

said the vessel normally transports coal between Brazil and Colombia.

The all-Filipino crew was taken into custody for investigation.

Earlier this month the agency said it was working with the US and British anti-drug agencies to investigate a cartel behind the importation of 1,000 kilograms of cocaine discovered in a container at a Lagos port.

President Donald Trump recently increased the presence of US forces in the Caribbean region to tackle what he says are drug traffickers based in Latin American countries including Venezuela and Mexico. – AFP

# Philippines launches its largest crayfish nursery for major role in global aquaculture

MANILA – The Philippines has fired the opening shot in its bid to become a major player in global aquaculture with the inauguration of the country’s largest crayfish nursery, the Department of Agriculture said on Friday.

The new facility will mass-produce Australian Redclaw crayfish (*Cherax quadricarinatus*),

a high-value species prized for its rapid growth, resilience, and strong export demand. Officials said the initiative supports the government’s food security agenda while creating sustainable livelihoods in rural areas.

Philippine Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. at the launch on Wednesday said crayfish

farming “opens new doors for our fisherfolk – ringing in more income, more livelihood, and more food on our tables.”

The facility also features water-recycling technology that cuts wastewater discharge and reduces freshwater use, addressing common sustainability concerns in aquaculture. – Xinhua

# Singapore deports Australian man over Ariana Grande incident

SINGAPORE – Singapore deported yesterday an Australian man at the end of a nine-day jail term for rushing film star Ariana Grande during the Asian premier of “Wicked: For Good”, local media reported.

The man, Johnson Wen, was sent back to Australia “and has been barred from re-entering Singapore”, the city-state’s immigration authority said in a statement quoted by broadcaster CNA.

On the opening night of the much-hyped “Wicked” sequel on November 13, Wen jumped a barricade and put his arm around Grande.

He was arrested hours later and subsequently charged with “being a public nuisance”. Last week, a court

sentenced Wen to nine days in jail.

Video clips, which have gone viral online, show Wen wrapping his arm around the shocked star before jumping up and down and smilingly waving to the crowd.

Grande’s co-star Cynthia Erivo then rushes to her defence and the man is grabbed by security guards and dumped back over the barricade.

Singapore District Judge Christopher Goh, who issued the jail sentence, called the Australian “attention seeking”.

Wen, who is alleged to have disrupted other global sports events and concerts, “showed a pattern of behaviour” which suggested that he

will do it again, the judge had said before last week’s ruling.

The jail term was far below the maximum penalty afforded by law: three months in jail, a fine of \$1,500, or both.

Wen has told the court he was “wrong” to think his actions would bear no consequences and promised not to repeat the act.

The incident did not stop the premiere from going ahead, with the cast huddling around Grande before continuing down the yellow carpet.

Grande, 32, began her career as a teen on Broadway before embarking on a hugely successful pop career. – AFP



Residents salvage belongings from a house destroyed by a pyroclastic flow from Mount Semeru in Supiturang village, Lumajang, East Java, Indonesia on Friday. Hundreds of Indonesians stayed in temporary shelters on Thursday after a volcano on the main island of Java erupted, damaging houses and a school, with around 190 people evacuated from its slopes, authorities said. – AFP





A man holding a dog takes part in a protest in Chennai yesterday, after India's Supreme Court ordered states and union territories to remove stray dogs from educational institutions, hospitals, bus stands, and railway stations and relocate them to designated shelters after sterilization and vaccination. — AFP

## Aftershocks rock Bangladesh as quake death toll rises to 10

DHAKA - Two minor tremors hit Bangladesh on Saturday, a day after a powerful earthquake struck outside the capital Dhaka and killed at least 10 people.

A 3.3-magnitude jolt was recorded in Narshingdi district, east of Dhaka, in the morning, followed by a 4.3-magnitude quake that struck the capital around 6 p.m. [local time], according to the Bangladesh Meteorological Department.

Dhaka resident Tasnuba Sharmin Sharna, 32, said her children started screaming as the furniture in their apartment began shaking.

"We are praying to God for mercy," Sharna told AFP.

Friday's deadly earthquake was felt in Dhaka and neighbouring districts, causing widespread destruction.

Updating earlier tolls from the 5.5-magnitude quake, disaster management official Ishtiaque Ahmed told AFP that "the number of casualties has reached 10, while a few hundreds were injured".

There were no immediate reports of casualties on Saturday, but the aftershocks — which are common after major earthquakes — have added to fears of an even greater disaster.

"I don't feel safe yet, as there was another jolt this morning... Maybe

we are next," said Shahnaj Parvin, 44, who lives near the epicentre of Friday's earthquake and told AFP she had never experienced such a tremor.

Cracks have developed in dozens of houses in her area, she said.

"I was hanging my children's clothes on the washing line when the tremor struck," added Parvin.

"I held onto a mahogany tree, and when I returned home, I found my glassware broken."

The government has activated Bangladesh's emergency operation centre to assess the scale of the damage and to coordinate relief and rescue operations.

Rubayet Kabir of the Meteorological Department's Earthquake Observation and Research Centre said Bangladesh's geography makes the country of 170 million people prone to quakes.

"That's why we experience earthquakes quite frequently, though they are not as strong as the one" on Friday, he told AFP.

"Some small tremors are expected after any major earthquake," Kabir said.

"There has been no massive earthquake in the last 100 years or more, but Bangladesh has been vulnerable for quite some time." — AFP

## Pakistan's top anti-graft body vows to provide conducive environment to attract foreign investments

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan's National Accountability Bureau (NAB), the country's top anti-corruption institution, said on Saturday it is committed to helping the government to foster a transparent and conducive environment to attract foreign investments.

An NAB spokesperson said in a statement that NAB has been accelerating reforms, improving oversight, and strengthening internal accountability as part of the government's wider efforts to attract foreign investments, especially under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

"NAB has undergone far-reaching reforms since 2023 to redefine its mandate and improve

its credibility," said the statement, adding that the NAB has been ensuring efficient oversight of major corruption cases while reducing bureaucratic paralysis, improving investor confidence, and safeguarding legitimate business activities.

NAB had strengthened the legal framework and improved administrative mechanisms to promote rule of law and create a predictable environment necessary for foreign investment, it added.

NAB has also established Accountability Facilitation Centers to support investors and business persons seeking clarity on procedural matters, according to the statement. — Xinhua

## Northern Australia cleans up after cyclone

SYDNEY — Residents of Australia's Northern Territory were clearing streets yesterday after a damaging tropical cyclone that brought intense winds overnight, tearing up trees and traffic lights and cutting power.

Tropical Cyclone Fina loomed off the coast of the Northern Territory for several days before rapidly strengthening to a Category 3 storm.

It swept on Saturday night between the busy city of Darwin and the sparsely populated Tiwi Islands — an archipelago about 80 kilometres off the coast — where wind gusts reached 110 kilometres per hour.

The "very destructive core" of the cyclone has moved away from the Northern Territory, but heavy rain and winds persisted yesterday,

Bureau of Meteorology forecaster Angus Hines said.

Northern Territory Chief Minister Lia Finocchiaro said about 19,000 homes and businesses had lost power in the past 24 hours and efforts were being restore it.

She said there was significant debris, including trees and powerlines, and warned people to take care as they moved around.

"In true territory spirit, neighbours are coming out with chainsaws and everyone's chipping in," she said yesterday.

"This cyclone saw a territory that was united and prepared for what was to come, and as a result we've seen largely minimal impact and no injuries."

Footage showed sheets of rain pouring from roofs during the peak

of the cyclone, while huge trees toppled into backyards and roads.

A section of roof at the Royal Darwin Hospital collapsed, leaving bricks and debris littering a corridor floor.

The Darwin Airport, which was forced to shut on Saturday, reopened yesterday.

Fina is now moving offshore toward Western Australia, and forecasts say it may intensify to a Category 4 storm.

But weather authorities said yesterday it was unlikely the cyclone would make landfall and would gradually break apart in the coming days.

Researchers have repeatedly warned that climate change amplifies the risk of natural disasters such as bushfires, floods and cyclones. — AFP



Afghans watch from a terrain as horse riders compete in the traditional Central Asian sport 'Buzkashi' (goat grabbing) in a field in the Argo district of Badakhshan province yesterday. — AFP

## Over 800,000 new voters register for Nepal post-uprising polls

KATHMANDU — Hundreds of thousands of new voters have registered to cast their ballot in Nepal's first polls since a mass uprising in September ousted the government, election officials said yesterday.

Election Commission spokesman Narayan Prasad Bhattarai told AFP there was "a total of 837,094 registered names" of first-time voters.

Bhattarai said that by Friday, 123 established parties had registered to take part in the March 5 parliamentary polls, while another 40 new slates await further verification to be allowed to run.

Interest in participating in the elections has surged, especially among young people who see it as a critical test of whether the demands of protesters who took to the streets against economic hardships

and government corruption can translate into meaningful change.

Dikshya Poudel, a 19-year-old student, said the uprising had encouraged her to register her name last week.

"I am excited to cast my vote for the first time in the upcoming election. I will be voting for a new changemaker," she told AFP.

The protests were initially triggered by a brief ban on social media but quickly morphed into a nationwide anti-corruption movement.

At least 76 people were killed during the demonstrations, and parliament, courts and government offices were torched.

Four-time prime minister KP Sharma Oli, 73, was ousted, with former chief justice Sushila Karki, also 73, replacing him in an interim

capacity until elections.

Years of economic stagnation and entrenched corruption had primed the Himalayan nation of 30 million people for upheaval.

"I dream of seeing new faces in politics who can create jobs, eradicate poverty, and make Nepal a better place to live so that youths like me won't have to go abroad," Poudel said.

The unrest has further weakened Nepal's already fragile economy, with the World Bank warning in October that "heightened political and economic uncertainty are expected to cause growth to decline" to 2.1 percent.

The institution estimates a "staggering" 82 percent of Nepal's workforce is in informal employment, with GDP per capita at US\$1,447 in 2024. — AFP

## Japan's flu cases hit warning level at fastest pace in 10 years

TOKYO — The average number of influenza patients reported at designated medical institutions across Japan has hit warning levels at the fastest pace in 10 years, according to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare.

During the week from November 10 to 16, 145,526 flu patients were

reported across roughly 3,000 institutions, averaging 37.73 people per facility and surpassing the warning level of 30, the ministry said.

The figure meant the warning level was reached five weeks earlier than last season.

The warning level was surpassed in 24 of Japan's 47 prefectures.

Miyagi prefecture in northeastern Japan had the highest figure, averaging 80.02 cases per clinic, followed by Saitama prefecture with 70.01.

Influenza outbreaks typically occur in winter and the end of spring in Japan.

— Xinhua



# G20 grapples with splintering world order

Analysis by Marc Burleigh

JOHANNESBURG — G20 leaders gathered yesterday in South Africa hailed multilateralism — even as they struggled to adapt to a changing world order beset by go-it-alone US policies, wars and deepening geopolitical rivalries.

The final day of their weekend summit — boycotted by the United States — kicked off with a searching discussion on how the G20 can survive in a fragmenting world.

“We are not experiencing a transition, but a rupture,” acknowledged Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney to journalists just before the summit session.

“Too many countries are retreating into geopolitical blocs or the battlegrounds of protectionism,” he said, but added: “In every rupture resides the responsibility to build — nostalgia is not a strategy.”

Dozens of leaders from key economies around the world — including the EU, China, India, Japan, Turkey, Brazil and Australia — attended the summit, the first to be held in Africa.

US President Donald Trump’s government snubbed the event, saying South Africa’s priorities — including cooperation on trade and climate — ran counter to its policies.

The United States is retreating from multilateral forums as it stokes trade volatility with sweeping tariffs and reverses commitments to fight global warming.

Trump’s officials have also alleged a “white genocide” in South Africa.

## ‘Fragmentation’

In a joint G20 statement issued on Saturday, the leaders present said they were meeting “against the backdrop of rising geopolitical and geo-economic competition and instability, heightened conflicts and wars, deepening inequality, increasing global economic uncertainty and fragmentation”.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa admitted “challenges”, but said: “The G20 underscores the value of the relevance of multilateralism.”



(From left to right) Australia’s Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Brazil’s President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, South Africa’s President Cyril Ramaphosa and President of Angola and Chairperson of the African Union João Lourenço stand together as they pose during the G20 Leaders’ Summit plenary session at the Nasrec Expo Centre in Johannesburg, South Africa, on Saturday. — AFP

The leaders’ declaration was issued despite Washington objecting to the summit making any statement in the name of the G20.

The UK-based Oxfam charity said “South Africa has set an example to the world in ensuring the G20 stood firm and collectively agreed on a leader’s declaration — defending multilateralism — despite powerful opposition”.

Nevertheless, French President Emmanuel Macron on Saturday said that “the G20 may be coming to the end of a cycle”.

It needs to refocus its priorities on strategic economic issues going forward, he said, noting “difficulties” in the G20 finding common approaches to armed conflicts around the world.

That somewhat reflected a US intention to limit G20 discussions to just macroeconomic topics as it takes on hosting duties next year — when Trump plans to hold the summit at a Florida golf club he owns.

## ‘Lifeline’ to multilateralism

The G20 — comprising 19 nations plus the European Union and the African Union — was founded in the wake of the 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis as a forum to boost global economic and financial stability.

Over time, its discussions have broadened to also cover climate change, sustainable development, global health and conflicts.

While those areas have economic implications, they are also political — often resulting in impasses or omissions in drafting summit declarations.

Divisions have only widened over the Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza.

Carney — whose country this year holds the G7 presidency, to be taken up by France next year — also said that “the centre of gravity in the global economy is shifting”, implying that the G20 needed to take greater note of emerging economies and the global South.

William Gumede, a management professor at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa who advises governments, including Turkey’s, noted that several countries not part of the G20 were invited to the summit, including African ones.

“Bringing emerging powers and developing countries was like creating a whole new world into the G20 and that actually helped to neutralise the Trump absence,” he told AFP.

“This summit has actually thrown a lifeline to multilateralism, breathing new life into it,” he said.

— AFP

## Brazil ‘very concerned’ about US naval build-up near Venezuela

JOHANNESBURG — Brazil is “very concerned” about a US military build-up near Venezuela, fearing a conflict, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva said yesterday, adding he intended to speak with US counterpart Donald Trump about it.

“I am very concerned about the military apparatus that the United States has placed in the Caribbean Sea. I am very concerned, and I intend to discuss this with President Trump because it worries me,” Lula told reporters in Johannesburg after attending a G20 summit.

“I think there is no reason to have a war now,” he said. “Let us not

repeat the mistake that happened in the war between Russia and Ukraine. That is to say, once a shot is fired, it is hard to predict how it will end.”

The United States has sent an aircraft carrier strike group, other navy warships as well as stealth aircraft to the region near Venezuela. On Friday it warned civilian aircraft in Venezuelan airspace to “exercise caution”.

US forces have conducted strikes on more than 20 vessels in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific since September, killing more than 80 people. US officials allege they were drug-runners, but provided no evidence.

Washington accuses Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro of leading a “terrorist” drug cartel, and Trump has not ruled out sending in US soldiers.

Lula, pointing out that Brazil shares a border with Venezuela, said: “It is important that we try to find a solution before it [a potential conflict] starts.”

Trump did not attend the G20 summit in South Africa, boycotting it on the grounds that its priorities — which include boosting cooperation on global trade and on climate change — ran counter to US policies.

— AFP

## Boos, blowups & last-minute pause as a chaotic COP30 ends

Analysis by Issam Ahmed

BELÉM — Jabs about greedy children, boos for the Vatican, and proceedings suspended for more than an hour: the COP30 finale unfolded with the same chaotic energy that defined the summit, exposing the rifts that came close to derailing a deal.

André Corrêa do Lago, the dapper Brazilian diplomat who presided over the two-week affair in Belém, northern Brazil, opened the final plenary on Saturday afternoon (local time), nearly a full day behind schedule, after nations worked through the night to find a text they could all live with.

Beary-eyed delegates took their seats, eager to see the marathon talks finally come to an end.

The summit in this rough-around-the-edges Amazonian city had already been interrupted twice by indigenous protesters last week — once when they breached the compound and clashed with security, another time when they blocked delegates from entering — before a fierce blaze on Thursday triggered a panicked evacuation.

A round of cheers broke out when Corrêa do Lago brought down his gavel and announced the adoption of the “Mutirão” text — a Portuguese word of indigenous origin meaning “collective efforts” that was also the summit’s slogan.

Early in the session, a representative from the Holy See earned loud boos from NGOs after taking the mic to read out the Vatican’s definition of gender along strict biological lines — a side story at this COP after several governments, from Iran to Argentina, sought to clarify their positions in the gender and climate action plan.

But the drama did not end there.

After a COP\* defined by a bitter struggle between dozens of nations including the European Union pushing for a “roadmap” to transition away from fossil fuels, and oil producers and emerging economies firmly resisting it, the session saw an unusual procedural clash.

Daniela Durán of Colombia declared that her country had raised a point of order in a side text that was gavelled through anyway, and was now formally objecting.

Rather than brush her aside, Corrêa do Lago suspended

the plenary, in an uncommon move that signalled Brazil’s determination to show it was handling concerns seriously.

Observers suggested the pause likely reflected Colombia’s deep frustration: the country had been at the forefront of efforts to include a “roadmap,” and was displeased with how the talks concluded.

Diplomats huddled as the suspension dragged on for more than an hour before the plenary finally resumed.

“I have not slept, and probably this has not helped, as well as my advanced age,” said Corrêa do Lago, in his mid-sixties, apologising as he blamed an honest mistake for missing Colombia’s point of order.

Still, Russia — often aligned with Brazil in international forums — chose to voice its displeasure, objecting to the objections.

“Refrain from behaving like children who want to get your hands on all the sweets!” scolded Russia’s Sergei Kononuchenko, speaking in Spanish as he accused Colombia and others of trying to “stuff the sweets down your throat until you make yourself sick,” prompting a sharp rebuke from Argentina.

India hailed the deal as “meaningful,” while Europe, aside from a technical objection, largely stayed silent, underscoring how far the West had been knocked onto the back foot.

British energy secretary Ed Miliband cut an isolated figure, telling AFP during the enforced break that a climate agreement only implicitly referencing oil, coal and gas was still “important in the context of the US leaving Paris,” even as he conceded “it’s not everything we would have wanted.”

Infrastructure woes had plagued the summit from the start — leaking ceilings, broken air conditioners, toilets running out of water and more.

In a fitting coda, a torrential downpour in the final session — “the wonderful noise of an Amazon rain,” in Corrêa do Lago’s words — left parts of the carpet soaked.

— AFP  
\*Conference of the Parties: Refers to meetings of parties to international agreements, such as those related to climate change under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. — Poe



COP30 President André Corrêa do Lago hugs Brazil’s Environment Minister Marina Silva after her speech at the COP30 UN Climate Change Conference in Belém, Pará State, northern Brazil on Saturday. — AFP



## Netanyahu vows to keep striking Hamas and Hezbollah

JERUSALEM – Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insisted yesterday that Israel would do “everything necessary” to stop Hezbollah from regrouping in Lebanon and Hamas from doing the same in Gaza.

Over the past week Israel has hit multiple targets in neighbouring Lebanon, with the Israeli military saying on Saturday it had struck Hezbollah launchers and military sites.

Gaza’s civil defence agency said 21 people were killed and dozens more wounded in multiple Israeli air strikes on Saturday, as Hamas and Israel again traded allegations of violating the fragile ceasefire in place since October 10.

“We are continuing to strike terrorism on several fronts,” Netanyahu said as he opened a cabinet meeting.

“This weekend, the IDF [Israel Defence Forces] struck in Lebanon, and we will continue to do everything necessary to prevent Hezbollah from re-establishing its threat capability against us.

“This is also what we are doing in the Gaza Strip. Since the ceasefire, Hamas has not stopped violating it, and we are acting accordingly.”

Saturday was one of the deadliest days since the US-brokered truce between Israel and Hamas came into effect, after two years of war.

The Israeli military said an “armed terrorist” had crossed the so-called yellow line – the boundary within the Gaza Strip that Israeli forces have withdrawn behind – and fired at Israeli soldiers.

In response, the military then “began striking terror targets in the Gaza Strip”, it said.

Netanyahu claimed yesterday that Hamas had made “several attempts” to infiltrate beyond the yellow line to “try to harm our soldiers”.

“We have thwarted this with great force and also retaliated and exacted a very heavy price. That includes many terrorists we eliminated,” he added.

Netanyahu said it was an “absolute lie” that Israel needed outside approval before taking action.

“We decide independently of any factor, and that is how it should be. Israel is responsible for its own security,” he said.

The Israeli military and the Shin Bet domestic security agency claimed that Saturday’s strikes on Gaza “eliminated the head of supply and equipment in Hamas’s production headquarters”.

Alaa Haddadeh “operated to transfer weapons from Hamas’s headquarters to battalion and field commanders”, a joint statement said.

– AFP

## 50 children kidnapped from Nigerian Catholic school escape captivity

**Susan Njanji**

LAGOS – Fifty of the more than 300 children snatched by gunmen from a Catholic school in Nigeria have escaped their captors, a Christian group said yesterday.

Gunmen on Friday raided St Mary’s co-education school in Niger state, taking 303 children and 12 teachers in one of the largest mass kidnappings in Nigeria.

The abduction came days after gunmen stormed a secondary school in neighbouring Kebbi state, abducting 25 girls.

“We have received some good news as 50 pupils escaped and have reunited with their parents,” said the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in a statement, adding they escaped between Friday and Saturday.

The number of boys and girls – aged between eight and 18 years – kidnapped from St Mary’s is almost half of the school’s student population of 629.

The Nigerian government has yet to comment on the number of students and teachers abducted.

“As much as we receive the return of these 50 children that escaped with some sigh of relief, I urge you all to continue in your prayers for the rescue and safe return of the remaining victims,” CAN chairman in Niger State, Reverend Bulus Dauwa Yohanna, said in the statement.

Mounting security fears in Africa’s most populous nation have sparked a wave of school closures across the country.

Since Islamist militants kidnapped nearly 300 schoolgirls from Chibok town more than a decade ago, Nigeria has struggled with a spate of mass kidnappings, mostly carried out by criminal gangs looking for ransom payments.

Gunmen often attack remote boarding schools where they know a lack of security presence will make for soft targets. Most victims are released after negotiations.

### ‘Deep sorrow’

Pope Leo XIV yesterday made “a heartfelt appeal for the immediate release of the hostages”.

He expressed his “deep sorrow, especially for the many young boys and girls kidnapped and for their anguished families,” at the end of the Angelus prayer.

The two abduction operations and an attack on a church in the west of the country, in which two people were killed and dozens abducted, came as US President Donald Trump threatened military action over what he called the persecution of Christians by radical Islamists in Nigeria.

When asked about the recent attacks and kidnappings on Fox News Radio, Trump said “what’s happening in Nigeria is a disgrace”.

Nigeria is also dealing with a deadly Islamist insurgency in the northeast of the country, where the violence has killed more than 40,000 people and displaced around two million since it erupted in 2019.

– AFP

## Washington seeking to ‘iron out’ Trump proposal details with Ukrainians in Geneva

**Nina Larson and Agnes Pedrero**

GENEVA – US Secretary of State Marco Rubio met Ukrainian officials in Geneva yesterday, seeking to “iron out” details of Washington’s plan to end the war, as Kyiv hailed “reinvigorated diplomacy”.

US President Donald Trump has given Ukraine until Thursday to approve his controversial plan to end the nearly four-year conflict, but Kyiv is seeking changes to a draft that accepts a range of Russia’s demands.

Before the Ukrainian delegation met with the Americans yesterday, President Volodymyr Zelensky hailed that “diplomacy has been reinvigorated”, voicing hope “the conversation can be constructive”.

“The bloodshed must be stopped,” he said on X, insisting: “We all need a positive outcome”.

In Geneva, Ukraine’s top negotiator Andriy Yermak said his delegation had met with high-level officials from Britain, France and Germany before heading into the meeting with Rubio.

The 28-point plan would require Ukraine to cede territory, cut its army and pledge never to join NATO. Trump told reporters on Saturday it was not his final offer and he hoped to stop the fighting “one way or the other”.

“Today we hope to iron out the final details of the peace agreement,” a US official told AFP yesterday, asking not to be named.

### Recognise European ‘centrality’

The US plan was drafted without input from Ukraine’s European allies, leaving them scrambling to come up with a counter-offer to strengthen Kyiv’s position.

“Ukraine must have the freedom and sovereign right to choose its own destiny. They have chosen a European destiny,” EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said in a statement, stressing that the “centrality” of the European Union’s role must be “fully reflected” in any peace plan.

Ukraine’s European allies



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio (fourth from left) and US special envoy Steve Witkoff (third from left) face the Ukrainian delegation during discussions on a US plan to end the war in Ukraine at the US Mission in Geneva, yesterday. – AFP

gathered at the G20 summit in South Africa stressed that the US plan requires “additional work”.

“We are clear on the principle that borders must not be changed by force. We are also concerned by the proposed limitations on Ukraine’s armed forces, which would leave Ukraine vulnerable to future attack,” the leaders of key European countries, Canada and Japan said in a joint statement.

Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre meanwhile warned of “major flaws” in the US plan.

“One of them is to get Europe at the table and, not least, get Ukraine at the table,” he told AFP in South Africa.

Britain’s Prime Minister Keir Starmer said the senior officials were meeting in Geneva “to take things further forward”, stressing the importance of solid “security guarantees” for Ukraine under any settlement.

French President Emmanuel Macron meanwhile told a news conference at the G20 that the plan contained points that had to be more broadly discussed as they concerned European allies, such as Ukraine’s NATO ties and Russian frozen assets held in the EU.

He said the 30 countries in the “coalition of the willing” supporting Kyiv will hold a video call tomorrow following the Geneva talks.

European Union countries were also planning to meet to discuss the Ukraine situation on the sidelines

of a meeting with African leaders in Angola today.

### ‘Wish list’

The Kremlin has welcomed the Trump plan, but there were no plans for Russian officials to join yesterday’s talks, according to the US official.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has meanwhile said the blueprint could “lay the foundation” for a final peace settlement, but threatened more land seizures if Ukraine walked away from negotiations.

Ahead of yesterday’s talks, Washington insisted the Trump proposal was official US policy, denying claims by a group of US senators that Rubio told them the document was a Russian “wish list”.

Rubio himself insisted on social media on Saturday that “the peace proposal was authored by the US”.

“It is offered as a strong framework for ongoing negotiations. It is based on input from the Russian side. But it is also based on previous and ongoing input from Ukraine.”

Zelensky said in an address to the nation on Friday that Ukraine faces one of the most challenging moments in its history, adding that he would propose “alternatives” to Trump’s plan.

“The pressure on Ukraine is one of the hardest. Ukraine may face a very difficult choice: either the loss of dignity or the risk of losing a key partner,” Zelensky said, referring to a possible break with Washington. – AFP

## Trump blasts Ukraine for ‘zero gratitude’ to US as talks start

WASHINGTON – US President Donald Trump yesterday accused Ukraine again of lacking “gratitude” for Washington’s support against Russia’s military offensive, as top US and Ukrainian representatives met in Geneva for talks on a proposal to halt the war.

“UKRAINE ‘LEADERSHIP’ HAS EXPRESSED ZERO GRATITUDE FOR OUR EFFORTS,” Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform, while also re-airing frustration at the war’s “HUMAN CATASTROPHE” and attacking his predecessor Joe Biden.

Trump’s blast at Ukraine and the

US allies reflected the Republican’s annoyance over the war, which began when Russia launched its “special military operation” of Ukraine in 2022, seizing and swaths of territory.

Trump claimed in his presidential campaign last year that he would broker a peace within 24 hours.

However, his sporadic diplomatic efforts have made little ground and he faces criticism from within his own party for a new 28-point plan being discussed in Geneva that would deliver several of Russia’s key war aims.

While Trump has previously said he is disappointed in Putin, he

rarely criticizes the Kremlin leader directly or condemns the invasion, instead pressuring Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

In yesterday’s social media post, he criticised European countries that he said continued to buy oil from Russia and called Biden “crooked Joe” for giving Ukraine weapons “free, free, free.”

The only mention of Putin in the lengthy post was to claim that the Russian president thought “Now is my chance!” to launch his offensive in Ukraine only because “Sleepy Joe” Biden was in office.

– AFP, MPD



# Coup-prone Guinea-Bissau votes to elect new president, parliament

BISSAU – Voters in coup-prone Guinea-Bissau cast their ballots yesterday to pick a new president, hoping to turn the page on endemic political turmoil despite the main opposition party being barred from the race.

Around 860,000 voters chose between 12 presidential candidates, with stability a major issue given the multiple political crises that have rocked the west African nation since independence from Portugal in 1974, after an over decade-long war of liberation, including four coups and numerous attempted coups.

At the top of the list of demands for many is improved living conditions, including better health care, education and infrastructure.

Guinea-Bissau's population of some 2.2 million is also calling for more jobs and reforms to combat poverty, corruption, and drug trafficking.

With nearly 40 percent of the population living in extreme poverty, Guinea-Bissau is among the world's poorest countries.

It is also a hub for drug trafficking between Latin America



Voters queue at the Nema 1 polling station in Gabú yesterday during Guinea-Bissau's presidential and parliamentary elections. – AFP

and Europe, a trade fuelled by the country's long history of political instability.

Polling stations opened at 7:00 a.m. and were scheduled to close at 5:00 p.m. First results are expected no later than Thursday.

Alamar Bidinthe, 40, said he was voting for "change" and "stability".

Mayo Sá, a 53-year-old construction worker, added: "I have

been voting since I was young but there has been no change in the country. I hope this time that won't be the case".

Incumbent President Umaro Sissoco Embaló, 53, is favoured to win in the first round. If he succeeds, he will become the first head of state to serve two consecutive terms since the introduction of the multiparty system in 1994.

His main opponent is opposition

candidate Fernando Dias, who has received the support of the opposition African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), which was barred from the election.

The vote marks the first time in Guinea-Bissau's history that PAIGC, which led the former Portuguese colony to independence in 1974 and was the country's longstanding single party, will be absent from the ballot.

The party and its leader Domingos Simões Pereira, who only recently returned from exile, were disqualified from running after the Supreme Court ruled their legislative and presidential applications had been submitted after the deadline.

## 'Manipulation'

Pereira and Embaló are arch political rivals: The last presidential election in 2019 was marked by a four-month post-election crisis as both men claimed victory.

Yesterday's elections will also saw voters choose all 102 members of parliament.

In 2023, Embaló dissolved the

legislature – which was dominated by the opposition – and has since ruled by decree.

The opposition says PAIGC's exclusion from the presidential and parliamentary elections amounts to "manipulation" and maintains that Embaló's term expired on February 27, five years to the day after his inauguration.

Despite the tumult, the three-week campaigning period unfolded with a festive atmosphere and concluded on Friday without any major incidents or violence.

Lúcia Bird, an expert at the Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime, said that "in Guinea-Bissau, problems usually arise after elections".

She said she fears that, as in 2019, allegations of irregularities will occur after the vote.

More than 6,780 security forces, including from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Stabilisation Force, have been deployed for the vote and the post-election period.

Guinea-Bissau's air space, as well as land and sea borders, were closed all day yesterday. – AFP, MPD

# Bolsonaro detained for trying to break ankle bracelet

BRASÍLIA – Brazil's former president Jair Bolsonaro – under house arrest while he appeals a conviction for a foiled coup attempt – was taken into custody on Saturday after the Supreme Court deemed him a high flight risk.

The court said the far-right firebrand – who was sentenced to 27 years in prison over an alleged scheme to stop leftist Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva from taking office after the 2022 elections – had attempted to disable his ankle monitor in order to flee.

Supreme Court judge Alexandre de Moraes said Bolsonaro's detention was a preventive measure as final appeals play out.

In a video made public by the court, Bolsonaro admitted that he had used a soldering iron on the monitoring bracelet out of "curiosity." The video showed the

device badly damaged and burned, but still on his ankle.

The 70-year-old Bolsonaro, who governed Brazil from 2019 to 2022, was placed under house arrest in August and has been confined to an upscale condominium in the capital Brasília.

Moraes said in his ruling that a planned vigil outside the condominium called by the former leader's eldest son Flávio Bolsonaro on Saturday could have caused turmoil that would have created "an environment conducive to his escape."

Flávio had urged Bolsonaro supporters to "fight for your country."

The judge said the attempted disabling of the ankle monitor occurred early Saturday as part of a plan to "ensure the success of his escape, facilitated by the confusion

caused by the demonstration called by his son."

Moraes gave Bolsonaro's attorneys 24 hours to explain the incident.

"I don't know what's going on inside the Federal Police now. If something happens to my father, Alexandre de Moraes, if my father dies in there, it's your fault," Flávio said in a live video broadcast.

He told reporters ahead of the vigil that his father could have burned the ankle monitor as an "act of desperation" or out of "shame" for having to wear it in front of visiting relatives.

Moraes highlighted the proximity of Bolsonaro's home to the US embassy, raising the risk of him seeking political asylum.

Bolsonaro, a former army captain, is an ally of US President Donald Trump, who has called the trial a "witch hunt" and imposed punitive tariffs and sanctions against Brazil over it.

Trump said on Saturday of Bolsonaro's latest situation: "That's too bad."

## Celebrations and anger

Bolsonaro has been taken to a Federal Police complex in Brasília where prisoners undergo medical examinations before being sent to jail, according to a source close to the case.

Another source sent a video to AFP showing the small room where Bolsonaro will be held for now, with a television, air conditioning, and a mini-fridge.

A group of women gathered outside the police headquarters



Supporters of former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro pray during a vigil for his health and freedom in Brasília on Saturday. – AFP

and uncorked a bottle of sparkling wine to celebrate Bolsonaro's imprisonment.

Ana Denise Sousa, 47, a high school philosophy teacher, told AFP she was overjoyed.

"The biggest scoundrel, the worst guy...who screwed everyone over, who [attempted] a coup, who never felt pity for anyone – and now he's going to pay," she said.

Supporters also arrived at the scene, draped in Brazil's green and yellow flag.

"This is all political persecution," said Alessandro Gonçalves de Almeida, a 53-year-old rideshare driver.

## Time running out

Bolsonaro's legal woes have left Brazil's large conservative electorate without a champion heading into 2026 presidential

elections, in which Lula, 80, has said he will seek a fourth term.

His defence team said they would appeal the detention which "could put his life at risk" due to his frail health.

Bolsonaro suffers ongoing consequences of a stab wound to the abdomen during a 2018 campaign trail attack and has required several follow-up surgeries.

During his presidency, Bolsonaro was praised for his handling of the economy but slammed for overseeing record Amazon deforestation and dismissing COVID-19 as a "little flu."

He was convicted in September of leading a criminal organisation that conspired to ensure his "authoritarian hold on power." The plot allegedly involved a plan to assassinate Lula, his vice president Geraldo Alckmin, and Moraes. – AFP



Protesters celebrate in the streets following the detention of former president Jair Bolsonaro (2019–2023) in Rio de Janeiro on Saturday. – AFP





Sabina Mbuga (centre) of Tanzania competes during the Group C match against Portugal at the FIFA Futsal Women's World Cup 2025 in Pasig City, the Philippines, yesterday. Portugal won the game 10-0. – Xinhua

## Roma take top spot in Serie A ahead of Milan derby

CREMONA – Roma moved top of Serie A yesterday after winning 3-1 at Cremonese and taking a two-point lead over Napoli ahead of the Milan derby.

Matias Soule, Evan Ferguson and Wesley scored the goals which gave Roma three points in Cremona and continued their strong start to life under Gian Piero Gasperini.

Inter Milan will return to the summit on goal difference if they beat local rivals AC Milan in the weekend's headline fixture last night.

Roma had only scored 12 times in their previous 11 league fixtures but were clinical in front of goal at the Stadio Giovanni Zini.

"I said yesterday that it's only right to dream in these positions, even though in the end dreams rarely come true," said Gasperini.

"We're trying to keep the dream going for a little while longer."

Soule fizzed in Roma's opener in the 17<sup>th</sup> minute shortly after Cremonese forward Federico Bonazzoli had forced a fine save from Mile Sivlar.

What had been a tight match was then decided by two quick strikes from Brighton loanee Ferguson, who scored his first club goal in over a year, and Wesley.

Ferguson calmly stroked home in the 64<sup>th</sup> minute after the ball rattled around the Cremonese area, and moments later Brazilian full-

back Wesley finished off a lightning counter-attack by dinking a brilliant finish over Emil Audero.

In the middle of all that Roma centre-back Gianluca Mancini was spared from conceding a penalty near half-time after a VAR check chalked off his penalisation for handball.

Gasperini, who was livid with the initial awarding of a penalty against Mancini, was sent off for more dissent shortly before Ferguson doubled Roma's lead.

That means Gasperini will miss Roma's huge clash with champions Napoli in Rome next weekend.

Gasperini was seen going berserk with joy in the stands after Ferguson broke a club goal duck which stretched back to October last year.

The 21-year-old was only fit for the bench and with Paulo Dybala and Ukraine striker Artem Dovbyk both sidelined with injury the Ireland international's goal is great news for Roma.

"I'm happy for Ferguson as he'd been waiting a long time for that goal but it was really important for us because he doubled our lead... When he scored we knew that we could win," added Gasperini.

Francesco Folino netted a consolation goal in stoppage time for promoted Cremonese, who sit 12<sup>th</sup> after their fourth defeat of the season. – AFP

## Real Madrid plan to find external investment in ownership shake-up



MADRID – Real Madrid president Florentino Perez said yesterday he plans to allow outside investors to buy a stake in the club for the first time, in order to "preserve and increase the value" of the Spanish giants.

The arrival of a minority shareholder, who would hold "five percent or a maximum of 10 percent" of the club, would represent a significant change in the economic structure of Real Madrid.

Record 15-time European champions, Real Madrid have remained member-owned throughout their 123-year history, like their rivals Barcelona.

Perez's proposal is set to be put to a vote at an extraordinary

assembly, reported to be planned for early 2026.

"We want our historic structure to withstand the challenges of the future, and now more than ever, we need our 100,000 members to actively be the guardians of our heritage," Perez said at the club's general assembly yesterday.

The Real Madrid president said members would retain "absolute control" over the club's decisions.

Earlier in November global sports investment company Apollo Sports Capital struck a deal to become Atletico Madrid's majority shareholder.

Perez, who made numerous attacks on Spanish refereeing, UEFA, La Liga, and Barcelona while speaking at the event,

secured approval with a large majority for a record budget for the 2025/26 season, estimated at over 1.2 billion euros (US\$1.38 billion).

He also reiterated that the Super League project is, in his view, "essential" for the survival of European football, expressing satisfaction over the "end of UEFA's monopoly", after a Madrid court ruled the European football governing body had abused its dominant position by blocking the breakaway league.

La Liga president Javier Tebas, who has been openly at odds with Perez for several years, criticised the "messianic, sectarian, supremacist" tone of the Madrid chief, in a post on X.

– AFP

## Eze treble fuels Arsenal's derby rout of Spurs

Steven Griffiths



LONDON – Arsenal midfielder Eberechi Eze showed Tottenham what they missed out on with a brilliant hat-trick in a 4-1 north London derby demolition that bolstered the Premier League leaders' title charge yesterday.

Mikel Arteta's side were too strong for timid Tottenham as Leandro Trossard and Eze netted in the first half at the Emirates Stadium.

Eze, who spurned Tottenham's advances to join Arsenal in the close season, struck again in the second half.

Richarlison's incredible long-range goal reduced the deficit, but it was no consolation as Eze completed his superb treble to fire the Gunners six points clear at the top.

It was only the fourth north London derby hat-trick after Ted Drake, Terry Dyson and Alan Sunderland.

Arsenal's 10-match winning streak was ended by Sunderland's late equaliser in a 2-2 draw before the international break.

But Eze's best performance since his £60 million (US\$78 million) move from Crystal Palace erased that bitter taste as Tottenham were put to the sword at the Emirates yet again.

The Gunners - unbeaten in the last seven north London derbies - have lost just once in 33 home meetings with their bitter rivals from the other end of the Seven Sisters Road.

Arsenal's biggest win over Tottenham since 2012 was the perfect start to a crucial period featuring a visit from Bayern Munich in the Champions League on Wednesday before a trip to second-placed Chelsea next weekend.

Arsenal's unbeaten run in all competitions has reached 15 games, ensuring they took advantage of Manchester City's 2-1 defeat at Newcastle on Saturday.

With City spluttering and champions Liverpool in turmoil, Arsenal have a golden opportunity to end their wait for a first English title since 2004.

Tottenham arrived with the Premier League's best away record, but the limp end of their five-game unbeaten run on the road raised fresh questions about boss Thomas Frank's negative philosophy.

The absence of injured Arsenal centre-back Gabriel Magalhaes had been highlighted as a potential weakness for Tottenham to exploit.

Yet Tottenham rarely got close enough to the Arsenal penalty area to test that theory.

Frank urged Tottenham to embrace the "controlled chaos" of a "madhouse" derby.

But the Dane has struggled to win over Tottenham supporters with his conservative style and his decision to use five defenders backfired to such an extent that the only chaos was in his overwhelmed rearguard.

### Eze makes his point

Tottenham were determined to take the sting out of the game, wasting time at throw-ins and goal-kicks.

But Arteta's men, superior in their passing and movement, deservedly took the lead in the 36<sup>th</sup> minute.

Mikel Merino was again deployed as a makeshift striker in the absence of the injured Viktor Gyokeres, but the Spain midfielder dropped deep into more familiar terrain to set up Trossard's goal.

Caressing a sublime pass over the Tottenham rearguard, Merino picked out Trossard, who was played onside by the dozing Kevin Danso.

Trossard smartly twisted and turned to find space for shot that deflected past Guglielmo Vicario from 10 yards.

If Tottenham had their way in the summer, Eze would be turning

out for them, but Arsenal hijacked the deal with Palace to sign the England star at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour.

Frank had joked: "Who's Eze?" when asked this week about the failed move.

Eze had the perfect riposte in the 41<sup>st</sup> minute as he took Declan Rice's pass in stride and weaved through to drill a fine low finish past Vicario.

Frank sent on Xavi Simons for Danso at the interval, but the introduction of the forward Tottenham signed instead of Eze made no difference.

Eze struck again just 35 seconds after half-time, punishing Tottenham's flat-footed defence with a predatory finish from just inside the area.

Richarlison briefly silenced the crowing Arsenal fans when he lobbed David Raya with a majestic effort from 35 yards in the 55<sup>th</sup> minute.

But that was Tottenham's first shot of the game and Eze, picked out by Trossard's pass, put a fitting seal on his masterclass with a blistering strike from 12 yards in the 76<sup>th</sup> minute.

### Rogers double defeats Leeds, lifts Villa into top 4

In the earlier game Morgan Rogers produced two excellent finishes to inspire an Aston Villa comeback to beat Leeds 2-1 at Elland Road yesterday and move into the Premier League's top four.

Rogers has often been preferred this season by England manager Thomas Tuchel over Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham, but had struck just once this season prior to his second-half double.

After failing to win any of their first five games of the season, Villa have now won six of their last seven in the Premier League to climb into the Champions League places.

Defeat leaves Leeds inside the relegation zone and they were left to rue not building on a fast start.

– AFP



Both teams' players observe a minute's silence for the victims of male violence against women before the Spanish league match between Getafe CF and Club Atletico de Madrid at Coliseum Alfonso Perez Stadium in Getafe yesterday. – AFP



# Scotland thrash Tonga in Autumn Nations finale

## Rugby

EDINBURGH – Scotland rounded off their Autumn Nations Series campaign with a 56-0 hammering of Tonga at Murrayfield yesterday.

But this eight-try rout is unlikely to ease the pressure on coach Gregor Townsend after successive November defeats by New Zealand and Argentina where Scotland twice squandered promising positions late on.

Scotland captain Sione Tuipulotu was the only player to keep his place in the starting team as Townsend made 14 changes following last week's 33-24 loss at home to Argentina - a match where the Scots led 21-0 heading into the final quarter.

"I thought at times the Tongan side made it really difficult for us," Tuipulotu told the BBC following the end of a November campaign that Scotland started with an 85-0 hammering of rugby minnows the United States.

"They were racing up out of the lines but I thought the work we did in the first 40 minutes paid dividends.

"We wanted to make sure the last 20 was the strongest part of the game."

The Australia-born centre added: "We knew this week wouldn't solve all our problems and the scoreline won't solve anything but the most important thing week is that we stuck together.

"This is the hardest week I've ever had as a Scotland player and no one is hurting more than the players."

Scotland were 21-0 up at half-time against Tonga thanks to tries from Jamie Ritchie, George Turner and Max Williamson.

But there was no repeat of the Dark Blues' collapse against the Pumas, with recalled wing Duhan van der Merwe regaining the outright record as Scotland's leading try-scorer - he was level with Darcy Graham - when he went over for his 35<sup>th</sup> Test touchdown just before the hour mark.

Replacement hooker Ewan Ashman added a fifth try 15 minutes from the finish before fellow substitute George Horne crossed twice.

There was still time for Horne to add his second try and Scotland's eighth shortly before the final whistle in a match where Tonga's cause was not helped by four yellow cards. – AFP



Scotland's number 8 Magnus Bradbury (left) is tackled by Tonga's full-back William Havili (right) during the Autumn Nations Series international rugby union match between Scotland and Tonga at Murrayfield in Edinburgh yesterday.

– AFP

## First blind women's T20 cricket World Cup boosts sport

### Cricket

Amal Jayasinghe

COLOMBO - Blind women from India won the world's first T20 cricket championship in Sri Lanka yesterday, following a tournament seen as pushing the limits of the visually impaired.

The Indian women beat Nepal by seven wickets in the final of the inaugural series, which also involved Australia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the United States.

Adeline Roe, 18, from South Australia said she was thrilled to be part of her nation's first blind cricket team and to have the opportunity to travel and meet fellow sportswomen.

"It's amazing that we've got a blind women's World Cup... It's been a wonderful step forward for all women's blind cricket," Roe told AFP during the final between India and Nepal in Colombo.

"I think this is just showing how good it is for women to participate," she said.

India captain T.C. Deepika won more sporting admiration when she led her team to shake hands with the Pakistan players after winning a league match last week.

Tensions off and on the field have been high since a deadly military clash between the nuclear-armed neighbours in May.

India's men refused to shake hands with their Pakistani opponents at the Asia Cup in September and since then neither side has shown signs of making up.

India's blind players were expected to mirror the conduct of their sighted teams, but both sides warmly greeted each other, a friendship that was seen throughout the tournament.

### 'Really empowering'

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya, who presented the trophy to India, thanked all players for helping raise the profile of the visually impaired.

"This World Cup is more than just a competition. It is a collective statement about access, equity, and the growing

participation of women in sport," she said.

"Inclusion must remain central to how we design our national and regional sporting futures, and these kinds of events truly make it possible for us to show that inclusivity in sport."

The tournament is based on the shortest form of cricket, but unlike able-bodied players, who are expected to have sharp eyesight, blind cricketers must play it by ear.

A white plastic ball, the size of a tennis ball, is packed with ball bearings that rattle as it rolls.

The bowler must ask the striker if he or she is ready and then yell "play" as the jingling ball is delivered underarm with at least one bounce.

As in a regular cricket match, each side has 11 players, but at least four must be totally blind who are classified as "B1". Players are required to wear blindfolds for fairness.

Fielders clap to indicate their positions on the field.

Others are partially sighted, classified by how far they can see - two metres for B2 players, six for B3.

Each team can have up to eight totally blind players. Any run scored by a B1 player counts as two.

For completely blind US player Meghan Whalen, 38, the challenge is also to explain to friends and family back home about her new sport.

She learnt about cricket by accident in April after attending a conference for the blind.

"They were there doing a cricket demo and we got a chance to practise bowling and batting, and it was just really empowering and exciting," Whalen told AFP.

It was an opportunity to push, to be challenged, and to see what she was capable of, she said.

"It was just really empowering to know that I could be an asset to a team and help build other people up, and for the visually impaired community as a whole." – AFP

## Verstappen wins big in Vegas with McLarens disqualified

### F1

LAS VEGAS - Formula One world champion Max Verstappen produced a masterful drive to win the Las Vegas Grand Prix on Saturday and his title hopes were boosted further with the McLarens of championship leader Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri both being disqualified.

Norris finished the race in second with Piastri fourth but the skid blocks on both cars were found after the race to be less than the minimum depth.

The disqualifications mean that with two race weekends remaining in Qatar and Abu Dhabi, four-time defending champion Verstappen is now level on points with Piastri in the title race, just 24 points behind Norris.

His chances of a fifth successive title, however, will depend on another spectacular slip-up from Norris or his McLaren team.

"It's frustrating to lose so many points," said Norris in a McLaren statement.

"As a team, we're always pushing to find as much performance as we can, and we clearly didn't get that balance right today.

"Nothing I can do will change that now, instead full focus switches to Qatar."

McLaren's team principal Andrea Stella said the problem had been caused by "unexpected, high levels of porpoising" which had led to "excessive contact" with the ground.

"We apologise to Lando and Oscar for the loss of points today, at a critical time in their championship campaigns after two strong performances from them all weekend," said Stella.

With a maximum of 58 points available in the final two grands prix, Norris just needs to score two more points than each of his rivals next weekend in Qatar, which includes a sprint, to secure his first title.

### 'Comfortable'

Verstappen dominated in Vegas from the moment he pounced on a slip by pole-sitter Norris on the first turn of Sin City's street circuit to grab the lead.

Thereafter he controlled the race to claim the 69<sup>th</sup> Grand Prix win of his career, finishing more than 20 seconds clear.

The Dutchman said Red Bull's tyre strategy had laid the foundation for the win.

"Normally the race is always a tough one for us. We are not normally that great on tyres but today it seemed like we were more in control and I could push a little bit more," he said.

"We had a lot more pace and I could stay out a little bit longer and split the race in half and that definitely helped a lot.

"The car was working pretty well, much more to my liking and at the end it was quite a decent lap. Every lap I was just feeling comfortable and not taking too much out of the tyre."

Mercedes' George Russell finished third on the track but was upgraded to second with his teammate Kimi Antonelli, who finished in fifth, moving up to third.

After the drama of Friday's qualifying, when heavy rain made for a treacherous surface that Verstappen likened to driving on ice, Saturday's 50-lap race under the glittering lights of Las Vegas got under way in cool, dry conditions.

Norris, who had arrived in Vegas fresh from back-to-back wins in Mexico and Sao Paulo, attempted an aggressive move to block Verstappen right from the start.

The move backfired and Norris ran off the track and allowed Verstappen to grab first place. Norris dropped back to third after he was passed by Russell into second.

Piastri, who began in fifth place on the grid, was also ruing a challenging start which saw him bump wheels with RB's Liam Lawson.

The Australian had been desperately looking to make up ground in Vegas after surrendering a 34-point advantage in the drivers championship since his victory at the Dutch Grand Prix in August.

The McLarens are not the first team to fall foul of the rules on skid blocks which are intended to prevent the cars from running too low and gaining extra speed.

Russell was disqualified after winning in Belgium last season for the same technical infringement while Lewis Hamilton has been penalised twice.

In 2023, when he was still at Mercedes, Hamilton was disqualified from the US Grand Prix along with Ferrari's Charles Leclerc.

And this season, with new team Ferrari, it happened again after the Chinese Grand Prix in March. – AFP



# Tomorrowland bets on Chinese electronic dance music fans

Rebecca Bailey

SHANGHAI – “Are you ready Shanghai?!” screamed the DJ, his glowing booth nestled at the heart of a huge intricate structure of pulsating colour and sound.

Thousands roared back “yes!” as Tomorrowland\*, one of the world’s biggest dance music festivals, made its China debut this past weekend.

The move is a vote of confidence in the country’s small but lively electronic dance music (EDM) scene – and in its earning potential, despite slack consumer demand elsewhere in the economy.

Renowned for its star-studded line-ups and spectacular stagecraft, Tomorrowland’s home edition in Belgium’s Boom is a bucket list item for many hardcore ravers.

“For me, Tomorrowland is a dream,” said Chinese EDM fan Mark, wearing sunglasses and a bright yellow arrow headress.

EDM was “relatively niche” in China, he said, but that could change.

“Over the course of the last 10 years it’s really flourished, and now I feel like everyone around me – including my parents – have all started to learn about EDM,” he said.

Tomorrowland is betting on enthusiasm growing among a young urban middle class looking to “premium-ise” their partying, said Cameron Sunkel of specialist outlet EDM.com.

“China, in my eyes, is where the demand curve is steepest for this type of experience,” he said, comparing it to mature European and American markets where “production costs are climbing” for only incremental growth.

A spokeswoman for Tomorrowland told AFP they believed “strongly in China’s long-term opportunities”.

She compared it to Brazil, where Tomorrowland has hosted festivals since 2015.

“[It] was also a niche market when we first arrived, yet today we see a fast-growing community and incredible local talent emerging,” she said.

## Feel-good economy

“The Magic of Tomorrowland” was the festival’s first event indoors.

On Saturday, many entering the main building gasped at the sight of the castle-like stage dominating one side of the cavernous hall, set against a 374-square-metre video wall.



Dancers perform during the first indoor showcase of electronic music festival ‘The Magic of Tomorrowland’ at the Hero Dome in Shanghai on Saturday. – AFP

At the second smaller stage, dancers shrieked as confetti cannons fired simultaneously with a bass drop, glitter falling like shimmering rain.

Slow domestic demand is vexing the Chinese mainland’s authorities, but young people in particular appear willing to splurge on “emotional consumption” – things that make them feel good.

In 2024, ticket revenues from large- and medium-sized concerts and festivals grew by 66.5 percent to almost US\$4.2 billion, an annual industry report showed.

Tomorrowland is not alone in eyeing up the potential – major festivals including Ultra and Creamfields have also held China editions.

Momentum was lost during the COVID-19 pandemic though.

“Ten years ago in Shanghai, there were a lot of EDM bars, but actually nowadays there’s not that many,” Grace, a 29-year-old Chinese influencer in hot-pink flares told AFP.

“So for a big [brand] like this to come to China, I’m obviously very excited.”

The 10,000-capacity Shanghai event is tiny compared to the Belgian one, which saw 400,000 people over two weekends this year.

In China, Tomorrowland has partnered with entertainment companies Hero Esports and INS Land, and was supported by local authorities keen to burnish the city’s international hub credentials.

The purpose-built main stage building was completed in just five months, including over a thousand moving lights, 118 speakers and dozens of laser, smoke and bubble machines.

The aim is to present “a fairy tale, an entire experience”, said

the event marketing chief, Hero Esports’ Jay Lu.

EDM.com’s Sunkel said the indoor event was “a way for Tomorrowland to test how their universe lands in China, how it’s received under tightly managed conditions”.

There was a visible security presence, and the last act – global star Dimitri Vegas joined by Chinese rapper Masiwei – finished at 10 p.m.

Some Europeans said they were bemused to find the bar payment



Revellers attend the first indoor showcase of electronic music festival ‘The Magic of Tomorrowland’ at the Hero Dome in Shanghai on Saturday. – AFP

system only allowed each person two alcoholic drinks for the event.

None of the organisers would divulge the costs involved in the event, nor exactly how long the partnership was set to last.

“We’re excited for a long-term partnership so that we can educate the Chinese community on what EDM is... [and] just increase the bar for this whole industry,” the event’s CEO, Hero Esports’ Clinton Lau, told AFP.

Asked whether this year would make a profit, Lau smiled.

“Every time you build something so grand... it takes time for the market to mature,” he said.

“So we’re starting here.” – AFP

\* Tomorrowland, launched in 2005, is an iconic electronic dance music festival held annually in Belgium, known for its spectacular stage designs, immersive themes, and a lineup of top DJs from around the world. – Poe

## Fan Bingbing wins Taiwan top film award

TAIPEI – Qingdao-born superstar Fan Bingbing (范冰冰) won best actress at Taiwan’s prestigious Golden Horse Awards on Saturday, earning accolades for an uncharacteristic farmer role as she eyes a rebound after a tax evasion scandal wrecked her career.

Fan was the biggest name from the Chinese mainland at this year’s Golden Horse, dubbed the Chinese-language Oscars, but she was absent from the ceremony, instead giving an acceptance speech over the phone.

In the Malaysian film “Mother Bhumi”, the 44-year-old icon delivered what some critics hailed as a breakthrough performance with her portrayal of a widowed farmer and ritual healer, a far cry from her usual glamorous roles.

“When the director was discussing the role with me, he asked me ‘Are you willing to let me destroy your face?’ I remember answering without hesitation ‘Fan Bingbing is ready to go all the way’,” she told the awards ceremony in Taipei, where Malaysian-Chinese director Chong Keat Aun (張吉安) collected the statuette on her behalf.

Fan was one of China’s highest paid actresses and starred in the X-Men and Iron Man franchises before she was caught up in a crackdown on tax evasion in 2018. Her career in the Chinese mainland has been on ice since.

“For me, the role was not just a physical transformation, but also a profound resonance of souls between me and the character... The character also guided my growth, allowing me to more deeply appreciate the resilient strength inherent in women,” Fan said in her acceptance speech.

“As a Chinese filmmaker, I look forward to achieving more breakthroughs in the future and using my work to convey greater values and deeper meanings that can be seen.”

The director, who had earlier hinted Fan may attend the event, admitted he had no idea where she was.

Collecting another award, for the best original song in a movie, Chong thanked “Fan Bingbing who couldn’t be here today. Where are you?”

“This song was written for you,” Chong said of the winning track that he wrote the lyrics for.

“We all believe you can start over. This song is for you.”

Directors and A-Listers from the Chinese mainland have largely shunned the Golden Horse



Theatrical release poster for Malaysian film “Mother Bhumi” starring the Chinese mainland’s Fan Bingbing. – Image courtesy of IMDb

Awards since a Taiwanese director voiced support for the island’s independence in an acceptance speech in 2018, although last year saw a record number of entries from the Chinese mainland.

Best film on Saturday went to Taiwanese production “A Foggy Tale” about the island’s political situation decades ago.

Hong Konger Jun Li (李駿碩) bagged the best director award for his same-sex drama “Queerpanorama”, which had its world premiere at the Berlin Film Festival.

Taiwanese star Chang Chen (張震) took his second best leading actor title for playing an immigrant delivery man in New York in “Lucky Lu”, directed by Korean-Canadian Lloyd Kee Choi, who was awarded best new director.

– AFP, MPD

## World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -3°C~11°C	Manila 25°C~32°C	New York 5°C~12°C	Lisbon 11°C~18°C
Shanghai 7°C~21°C	Bangkok 23°C~32°C	London 4°C~8°C	Rio de Janeiro 20°C~25°C
Hong Kong 17°C~25°C	Tokyo 7°C~17°C	Frankfurt 1°C~5°C	Luanda 23°C~28°C
Taipei 19°C~28°C	Singapore 24°C~32°C	Vancouver 4°C~8°C	Maputo 19°C~28°C
Guangzhou 15°C~25°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~30°C	Paris 4°C~9°C	Dili 23°C~33°C
Nanjing 3°C~20°C	Jakarta 22°C~34°C	Moscow -1°C~7°C	São Tomé 25°C~29°C
Guilin 10°C~23°C	Seoul 6°C~17°C	Las Vegas 6°C~18°C	Praia 23°C~28°C
Xi'an -3°C~11°C	Sydney 17°C~24°C	Monte Carlo 9°C~14°C	Bissau 21°C~34°C





### Blue for you

An artiste poses in his costumes before taking part in a wayang orang performance, at the Cak Durasim Art Building in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia on Saturday. Wayang orang, also known as wayang wong or "human puppet" is a traditional Javanese and Balinese dance theatrical performance where human actors play the roles of puppets to tell stories from Hindu epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata. — AFP

### Better be good!

A reveller dressed as traditional folkloric figure "Krampus", rides a motorcycle as they take part in the traditional parade during the "Night of Hell" in Lana, northern Italy, on Saturday. An old tradition that takes place in the Alps of Tirol northern Italy, the traditional Krampus creature (half-goat, half-demon figure) punishes people who misbehaved during Christmas season. — AFP



### Lost and found

This photograph shows traditional Turkish patterns painted on tile in Iznik on October 31. For over 300 years, the closely-guarded secret of the Ottoman Empire's luminous, vibrant tilework was lost, but its rediscovery has given new life to a key part of Turkey's cultural heritage. Known for their intricate designs and lustrous colours, Iznik tiles are widely seen as the pinnacle of Ottoman artwork, their trademark designs adorning some of Turkey's most iconic monuments like Istanbul's Blue Mosque or the sultans' royal residence, Topkapi Palace. — AFP



### BFG's home

Visitors pose for photos with Robert Therrien's large-scale artwork titled "Under the Table", during the exhibition "Robert Therrien: This is a Story" at The Broad in Los Angeles, California, on Thursday. Towering stacks of oversized saucers and furniture fit for giants are some of the treasures on display in the new exhibition of Therrien's work, the largest ever museum exhibition of the late artist's oeuvre, offering visitors the chance to explore both the intimate sketches and the large-scale work of one of Los Angeles' most celebrated artists. — AFP



### Too shy, shy!

This photo taken yesterday shows a koala sleeping in a tree at Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary in Brisbane, Australia. Established in 1927, Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary houses more than 100 koalas and approximately 70 other native Australian species. — Xinhua

### Can you see the real me?

A staff member dressed in a panda costume feeds a giant panda at the Wolong area of the Giant Panda National Park in Sichuan Province, on June 24, 2024. — Xinhua

