

Trump says US close to a deal to end Ukraine war

WASHINGTON – US President Donald Trump said yesterday that Washington was “very close” to striking a deal with Ukraine and Russia to end their nearly four-year war.

“We’re going to get there,” Trump said at a pre-Thanksgiving event at the White House. “So I think we’re getting very close to a deal.” (More on page 11) – AFP



UK slaps sugar tax on milkshakes in battle against child obesity

LONDON – The UK government yesterday extended a sugar tax to include milkshakes as part of the fight against obesity and tooth decay in children.

The levy will affect pre-packaged milkshakes, ready-to-go coffees and sweetened yoghurt drinks, but not ones made in cafés and restaurants, it said.

The announcement by the Labour government of Prime Minister Keir Starmer follows a call by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2023 for countries to increase their taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages.

Health Minister Wes Streeting told lawmakers “obesity robs children of the best possible start in life, hits the poorest hardest, sets them up for a lifetime of health problems”.

He said it cost the state-funded National Health Service “billions” of pounds each year.

Latest official figures suggest that one in 10 children in England is obese when they go to primary school at the age of four or five.

The figure rises to 22 percent by the time they reach the age of 10 or 11, according to the National Child Measurement Programme.

Under the new measures, milk-based drinks will no longer be exempt from the existing sugar tax and it will apply to more drinks.

To avoid the tax, sugary drinks will have to contain less than 4.5 grams of sugar per 100 millilitres, instead of five grams at present.

Drinks containing 4.5-7.9 grams will incur a levy of 19.4 pence (25 US cents) per litre, rising to 25 pence above eight grams.

Campaigners welcomed a “positive step”, but they had hoped to see a reduction to four grams and said the measures did not go far enough. – AFP

Lawmakers pass outline of 2026 budget bill, govt expects 5.3 billion pataca surplus

Tony Wong

The Legislative Assembly (AL) yesterday unanimously passed the outline of the government’s 2026 budget bill, which expects a budget surplus of 5.31 billion patacas next year.

Introducing the outline of the 2026 budget bill during yesterday’s plenary session, Secretary for Economy and Finance Anton Tai Kin Ip said that the government expects its revenues to reach 118.80 billion patacas next year, while its expenditure next year is expected to amount to 113.48 billion patacas.

After yesterday’s passage of its outline, the 2026 budget bill will be passed to one of the legislature’s standing committees for an article-by-article review, after which it will be resubmitted to another plenary session for its second and final debate and article-by-article vote, which must be carried out before the end of next month.

The government’s 2026 budget must be promulgated in the Official Gazette (BO) by the end of this year for its implementation from the first day of next year.

Tai said during yesterday’s plenary session that Macau continues to see a year-on-year increase in the number of visitors so far this year, contributing to a steady growth in the city’s economy.

According to official statistics, Macau’s gross domestic product (GDP) increased 4.2 percent in the first three quarters of this year in real terms.

Tai said that the government expects Macau’s tourism and gaming sectors to continue growing next year. However, he said, Macau can be expected to continue to be subject to uncertainty in the external environment next year.

After comprehensively assessing various factors, Tai said, the local government has adopted a relatively cautious forecast for Macau’s gross gaming revenue (GGR) in 2026, expecting next year’s GGR to reach 236 billion



Secretary for Economy and Finance Anton Tai Kin Ip addresses yesterday’s plenary session in the Legislative Assembly’s (AL) hemicycle. – Photo: GCS

patacas (a monthly average of 19.67 billion patacas), which he pointed out is a sum that constitutes the main source of budgeted government revenues proposed by the 2026 budget bill.

Because of the expected GGR of 236 billion patacas next year, according to the 2026 budget bill, the government’s 2026 direct gaming tax revenue is expected to amount to 82.6 billion patacas, i.e., 35 percent of the six gaming concessionaires’ GGR.

Macau’s gaming operators pay 35 percent of their gross gaming receipts as direct tax to the government, apart from another five percent as levies for a wide range of public causes.

The government’s 2025 budget bill presented in 2024 initially expected Macau’s GGR in 2025 to reach 240 billion

patacas (a monthly average of 20 billion patacas). However, the government submitted a 2025 budget amendment bill earlier this year, lowering its estimation of this year’s GGR to 228 billion patacas (a monthly average of 19 billion patacas).

According to official statistics, Macau’s GGR in the first 10 months of this year amounted to 205.427 billion patacas, equivalent to a monthly average of 20.54 billion patacas, representing an 8.0 year-on-year increase compared to the same period of last year.

According to the Financial Services Bureau (DSF), the government’s gaming taxes receipts of 77.47 billion patacas accounted for 83.3 percent of the government’s total receipts of 93.05 billion patacas in the first 10 months of this year. ■

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Xi meets Tonga’s king, urging better alignment of development strategies

President Xi Jinping met with visiting King Tupou VI of the Kingdom of Tonga in Beijing yesterday, saying that China is willing to enhance the alignment of development strategies with Tonga. – Story on p. 7

Popemobile transformed into Gaza mobile children’s clinic

The popemobile used by the late pope Francis on his 2014 visit to Bethlehem re-emerged yesterday as a mobile children’s clinic to be deployed in Gaza. – Story on p. 10

Venezuela says US terrorist designation a ‘ridiculous lie’

Venezuela has rejected the US terrorist designation of an alleged drug cartel on its territory as a “ridiculous lie” aimed at paving the way for an “illegitimate” military intervention. – Story on p. 12

UM hosts seminar on consolidation of rule of law

Khalel Vallo

The University of Macau (UM) has recently hosted a seminar on the consolidation of the rule of law and the challenges posed by digitalisation, titled “The Consolidation of the Rule of Law and the Challenges of Digitalisation”, which brought together scholars from Macau, Angola, and Mozambique, according to a statement from the public university on Monday.

UM’s Faculty of Law (FLL), together with the Faculty of Law of Agostinho Neto University (UAN) in Angola and the Faculty of Law of Eduardo Mondlane University (UEM) in Mozambique, jointly conducted the seminar on October 15 to promote multicultural and trans jurisdictional exchange, the statement said.

According to the statement, the event gathered scholars, experts, faculty members, and students to



This handout photo provided by the University of Macau (UM) yesterday shows scholars, experts, and faculty members posing for a group photo at ‘The Consolidation of the Rule of Law and the Challenges of Digitalisation’ seminar on October 15. The public university released a statement on Monday about the one-day seminar.

discuss how digital transformation is reshaping the rule of law.

The opening ceremony was presided over by UM Vice Rector Rui Martins, with remarks from Tong Io Cheng, dean of the Faculty of Law, the statement noted, adding that José Octávio Serra Van-Dúnem,

director of the Centre for Legal, Economic and Social Studies at UAN, and Eduardo Chiziane, dean of the Faculty of Law at UEM, also attended.

Six thematic sessions examined issues linking law, digitalisation, and artificial intelligence (AI) in Macau

and Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs), the statement said.

Topics included the ongoing dialogue between law and rights in Angola; sources of Angolan criminal law; the justice model in Angola and the validity of evidence obtained through facial reconstruction from

genetic profiles; Mozambique’s AI policy; digital transformation of administrative governance; AI-mediated family dispute resolution; protection of traditional cultural expressions against generative AI; smart contracts; the role of community courts; digitalisation and climate justice; legal control of algorithmic systems; digital assets; taxation in the digital age; the rule of law in the digital era; and developments in the legal profession as large language models evolve, according to the statement.

The closing session featured remarks by Manuel Trigo, director of the UM Centre for Law Studies, along with Van-Dúnem and Chiziane, the statement said, adding that the seminar aimed to strengthen academic exchanges among participants from Macau, Angola, and Mozambique and laid the groundwork for future cooperation in law and technology. ■

Police arrest mainlander for theft by finding

Ada Lei

The Public Security Police (PSP) apprehended a man from the Chinese mainland on Saturday for theft by finding, PSP spokesman Wong Chi Weng said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Wong identified the suspect as a male in his forties surnamed Yang who claimed to be jobless.

According to Wong, the Public Security Police (PSP) received a report on November 17 from a citizen who said that she had lost her electronic watch while packing her belongings in front of the Barrier Gate checkpoint on November 16. The following morning, the owner used a mobile application to track the watch’s location and discovered that it had been moving around various locations. Suspecting that someone had stolen it, she immediately reported the case to the police.

Through their citywide CCTV surveillance footage, the police identified Yang as the suspect and apprehended him on Saturday in the northern district. Under questioning, Yang admitted to stealing the watch out of greed and claimed that he had given it to a female friend. Wong said that his friend claimed to have been unaware of how the watch

was obtained and has thereafter returned it to the police.

Wong added that Yang was sharing an illegal inn in the northern district with another mainland man, with bedspacers paying HK\$150 per day or HK\$700 per month. The Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) later confirmed that the residential flat provided illegal accommodation and therefore sealed it off, pending the outcome of an investigation.

Yang has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing a charge of theft by finding. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday shows a PSP officer escorting the theft-by-finding suspect into a police station.

Forum promotes Macau as global collaboration platform for RISC-V industry

Armindo Neves

The Macau section of the two-day “2025 RISC-V Industry Development Conference and RDSA International Summit”, including the “Global Cooperation Special Forum”, which was only held locally, was held at The Parisian resort in Cotai yesterday.

The first day of the event took place in Zhuhai on Monday, when the event’s opening ceremony and Main Forum were held.

The forum was hosted by RISC-V ECOSYSTEM & INDUSTRY COMMITTEE, RDSA INDUSTRY ALLIANCE, RISC-V Open-Source Ecosystem Development Centre in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and the MACAU INSTITUTE OF INDUSTRIAL TECHNOLOGY.

The theme of the conference was “Accelerating Standardisation, Facilitating Connection”.

According to a statement by the organisers, the local forum adopted a dual-city collaboration model, spanning two consecutive days with sessions held in both Zhuhai and Macau. It aimed to promote international cooperation and facilitate city-level strategic agreements. During the forum, an unveiling ceremony was launched for the RISC-V Open-Source Ecosystem Development Centre’s DSA Development Laboratory.

Opportunities and Strategies for RISC-V in the AI Era

Alibaba DAMO Academy Chief Scientist and Zhihe Computing CEO Meng Jianyi explained what RISC-V* is at the forum.

According to Meng, RISC-V is an open-source instruction set architecture (ISA) natively designed for the AI era. Unlike traditional closed architectures, its high scalability enables flexible adaptation to various AI algorithms



Economic & Technological Development Bureau (DSED) Director Yau Yun Wah addresses yesterday’s forum at the Parisian.

and hardware implementations—from general-purpose CPUs and dedicated accelerators to in-memory computing, Meng said.

Meng pointed out that by advancing multiple technical pathways and actively building an open-source software ecosystem and industry standards, RISC-V could overcome computational and energy efficiency bottlenecks in the rapidly evolving AI market, positioning itself as a foundational pillar for future computing.

Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED) Director Yau Yun Wah said in his speech that the open, modular, and highly scalable architecture of RISC-V is reshaping the global semiconductor ecosystem.

He emphasised that Macau is actively integrating itself into the national development strategy and will fully leverage its advantages as an international platform to participate in the construction of global RISC-V standards.

He also said that Macau aims to promote the integration of industry, academia, and research, contributing to the development of



China Electronics Standardisation Association (CESA) Chairman Zhang Hongtu addresses yesterday’s forum.

an open and collaborative global RISC-V ecosystem.

Zhang Hongtu, chairman of the China Electronics Standardisation Association (CESA), highlighted three key points in his address, upholding open sharing of technology and knowledge to preserve the open-source nature of RISC-V; strengthening RISC-V standards and global collaboration to establish a fair and transparent international standards framework; deepening market-orientated application alignment, expanding into critical fields such as AI and smart manufacturing.

He emphasised that Macau, as a bridge between China and the rest of the world, can play a unique pivotal role in fostering international cooperation. ■

* RISC-V stands for “Reduced Instruction Set Computing – Five”. It’s an open-source hardware instruction set architecture (ISA) based on the principles of reduced instruction set computing (RISC). RISC-V is designed to be simple, efficient, and extensible, making it suitable for a wide range of computing applications, from embedded systems to high-performance computing. – Poe

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MACAU POST

Macau Weather

TEMPERATURE FALLING SLIGHTLY. VERY DRY.

FINE. FORCE 3 TO 4 NORTHERLY WINDS, OCCASIONALLY FORCE 5 WITH GUSTS.

RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 25% AND 65%.



15°C~24°C

Source: SMG

Loan shark falsely accuses gambler of rape: police

Ada Lei

A woman from the Chinese mainland was arrested on Sunday for usury and falsely accusing a man of rape, PJ spokesman Ho Wai Lok said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Ho identified the suspect as a 33-year-old female surnamed Shen who claimed to be jobless.

According to Ho, the police received a report on Sunday afternoon from Shen, who claimed that she had been raped by a man from the Chinese mainland in a hotel guestroom in

Cotai. However, the police later discovered that the information provided by Shen was inconsistent with the details of the case, and a medical examination also confirmed that there were no obvious signs of injuries caused by resisting sexual intercourse.

Ho noted that Shen had met the man on Thursday in a casino, where she “helped” him to gamble but ended up losing HK\$40,000 (41,300 patacas) in cash. Between Thursday and Saturday, Shen offered to lend the victim HK\$100,000 in chips, pledging that if he managed to recover his losses, he would only need to repay HK\$20,000 of the HK\$40,000 he had lost beforehand. However, the victim ended up gambling away all the borrowed chips. Shen then went to the victim’s hotel guestroom to negotiate the repayment terms, during which they engaged in sexual activity, Ho said.

Ho added that the victim signed an IOU for HK\$130,000, which included HK\$100,000 as the principal, HK\$20,000 as “repayment”, and HK\$10,000 as “interest”. On Sunday, after failing to contact the victim, Shen falsely reported to the police that she had been raped.

Shen has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing charges of making a false report and usury. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Ho Wai Lok looks on during yesterday’s regular press conference.

— Photo: Ada Lei

Tai Peng’s electrical appliance shops closing down after 56 years, selling goods 50 pct off

Armindo Neves

Fifty-six-year-old Tai Peng Electronics & Appliances announced in an advertisement yesterday that all its shops will cease operations by the end of this year.

A “50 percent off” sign has been posted on the shops’ storefronts, indicating that all items are now being sold at half price. A staff member confirmed over the phone to the *Post* that all four outlets will close for good once its inventory is sold.

According to an article published by Chinese-language *Macao Daily News* yesterday, the director of Tai Peng Electronics & Appliances, surnamed Ho, told the newspaper in an interview this week that the 80-year-old owner of the company decided to retire and shut down the business. Ho also said that the owners’ retirement was a personal decision and had little to do with the business environment. “I’ve been in this industry for too long and want to take a break to go look around for fun”, Ho quoted his boss as saying.

According to “Macao Oral History Books Shop Recalling Past: Oral History Macau”, edited by Lin Faqin and published in 2019, Tai Peng Electronics & Appliances opened its first shop, on Rua das Estalagens (草堆街), in 1969. At its inception, the shop was divided



Watched over by the police, shoppers queue on the pavement opposite Tai Peng Electronics & Appliances flagship shop on Rua das Estalagens yesterday afternoon.

— Photo: Maria Cheang Ut Meng

into two main sections: a retail department and a repair department. Operating with a modest team of just two or three employees, the business sourced most of its initial inventory from secondhand goods stores.

According to the book, quoting its founder Henry Chen (陳裕鏗), the key to Tai Peng’s ability to operate in Macau for over half a century lay in its core principle: “Ensuring customers shop with confidence and use our products with joy.” The company placed exceptional emphasis on after-sales service, implementing clear policies: if a customer was unsatisfied with a purchase within three days of the transaction, Tai Peng would provide a full refund. Additionally, if any product malfunctioned within seven days of purchase, the store would replace it with an identical item.

The book also quoted Chen as saying that competition in the home appliance industry was extremely fierce. He emphasised that the company had always stayed ahead of the curve by continuously updating its product offerings and introducing the latest models, which had been key to its sustained development over the years.

However, according to the book, Chen had a pessimistic view regarding the future development of his company. He said that the primary reasons included the scarcity of skilled appliance repair technicians, a lack of new employees into the industry, and a severe shortage of frontline sales staff.

Watched over by the police, scores of shoppers queued up for hours in front of the four shops yesterday, when the 50 percent discount sales began. ■

TDM hosts ‘Integrated News Production and Transmission’ forum

Khalel Vallo

Public broadcaster TDM hosted a forum called “Integrated News Production and Transmission” at its Macau Forum studio in Zape yesterday, bringing together media representatives from Macau and Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs) to discuss industry development, cross-cultural communication, and the shift towards digitalisation.

The forum was moderated by TDM Portuguese News and

Programmes Director Gilberto Lopes. Representatives from the PSCs’ public broadcasters – João Nuno Nogueira from Portugal’s RTP, Amândio Caweie Cafuanda from Angola’s TPA, Adulai Demba Baldé from Guinea-Bissau’s TGB, and Horácio Afonso Fátima Babo from Timor-Leste’s RTTL, as well as Grace Lao (劉婧), controller of TDM’s Chinese News and Information Programmes Division, joined the discussion on stage, which centred

on how PSCs adapt to emerging formats in integrated media.

In her opening remarks, TDM Chairperson Lorman Lo Song Man said that “Macau is a bridge that links China with Portuguese-speaking countries,” adding that the broadcaster has worked in the media field for 41 years and has actively contributed to cultural exchange.

Lo said that integrated media development has become an inevitable trend under global digitalisation. She highlighted the need to maintain accuracy while adopting new tools, and said the one-day forum allowed participants to explore news planning, content creation and technology use. “Media is a messenger of civilisation,” she added, saying that TDM aims to deepen cooperation through integrated media and expand cultural ties.

The forum’s objective was to strengthen exchanges between Macau and Portuguese-speaking broadcasters, laying the groundwork for broader collaboration in integrated media as the sector continues to adapt to digital transformation, according to a TDM statement yesterday. ■



TDM Chairperson Lorman Lo Song Man addresses yesterday’s “Integrated News Production and Transmission” forum at the Macau Forum’s TDM Studio in Zape.

— Photo: Khalel Vallo

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)

Exploring the world of clay with Macau's ANWA CLAY

Interview by Rui Pastorin

Artists use a variety of mediums to bring their ideas and concepts to life. For “ANWA CLAY”, that medium is clay, using it to create works and award-winning claymations* (clay animation) featuring their distinct style.

What's their story?

The four-person group was founded over three years ago on June 4, 2022 by chairman, main clay artist and claymation producer Lucy Sao Wa lao and her daughter Angela En-Yu Lao, who is the claymation director, clay artist and sales director. The name “ANWA” stems from a mix of the two local artists' names, that being “AN” from “Angela” and “WA” for “Sao Wa”, or “Wa” as friends and family call her.

Most clay works are crafted by lao and painted by Lao, both self-described animation and anime fans who use their passion and own respective specialties to create works with a “unique cartoon style” featuring various types of cartoons and their own abstract styles, Lao told the *Post* during a recent online interview.

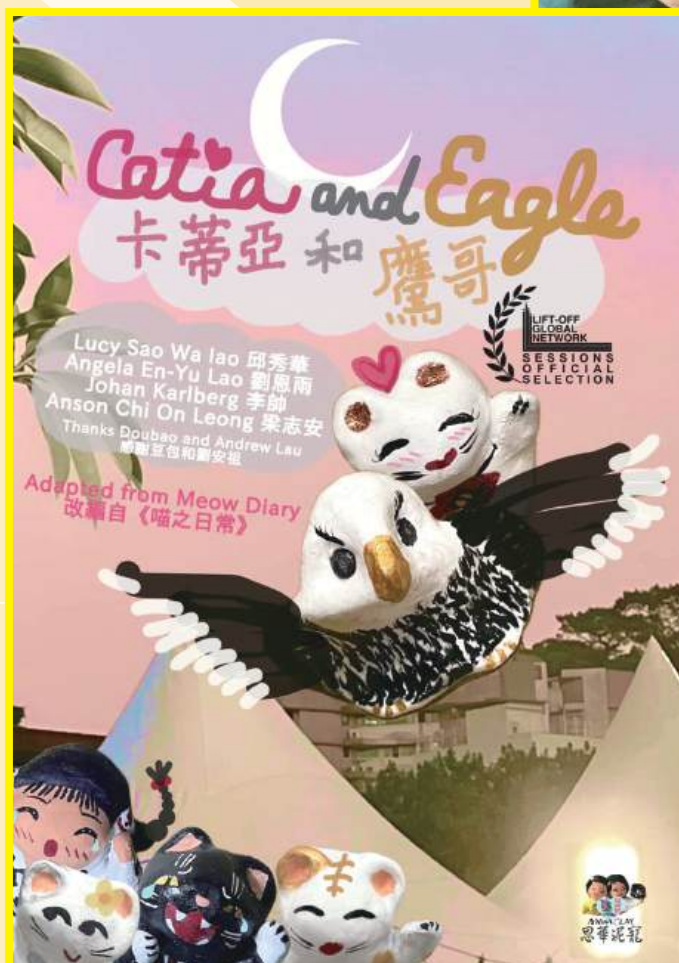
The team normally tackles projects about pets and children-themed works mainly comprising pets and their owners, zodiac figures, Macau scenery and miniatures. Their claymations, as well as their books, meanwhile, are “based on true stories between pets and owners, pets' love stories and some educational stories for children”.

Telling their story, their original purpose is to allow people who don't have pets to experience taking pictures with them in clay form, while giving pet owners the option of a custom clay portrait of their beloved animals, with the creation of clay pets and animation going back to before ANNWAY CLAY launched.

Lao had founded a licensed art and education company “Angels Sky” in Macau, which was originally a studio in 2007. “I was still a teen when it started. I ran my own learning centre, teaching kids art and English for a dozen years”, said Lao.

They attempted their first clay pet-related sale in 2019 under Angels Sky, proving popular with people ordering clay versions of their pets. They continued down this path, including the idea of creating clay versions of people's pets that have passed away to keep memories alive, said Lao. “A friend was unsure about my idea”, Lao noted, as this type of customer might prove “too rare”. But they caught on and the first order under ANWA CLAY was made for a clay hedgehog, with the customer loving the result.

Now, three years since its founding, more than a thousand works have been made. “Within this short time, we created 1,500 clay works, took part in 36 markets and sold 1,374 works, including clay pets, clay dolls, claymations and clay-themed books”, according to Lao. Customers are from around the world, among which are, by ascending order of purchases, from the Chinese mainland, the UK, Macau, Hong Kong, Malaysia, the US, the Philippines, China's Taiwan region, Thailand, Nepal and Poland, Lao said. “People love our products! Many fans collect dozens of our works! A fan collected a hundred pieces!”.



Behind the claymation

On the claymation front, a continuous and active endeavour, they use clay dolls, with the technique combining stop-motion, 2D, screen capture and, more recently, AI.

At the helm is Lao's mother, who is also a former lecturer at the Macao Polytechnic University (MPU, formerly the Macao Polytechnic Institute) and the Macao University of Tourism (UTM, previously the Macao Institute for Tourism Studies), helping with voice acting, music composing and art directing. Lao, meanwhile, does voice acting, editing and music composing.

The team also comprises two other members, namely Claymation Voice Actor and Online Promoter Johan Karlberg, who, according to Lao, has been working in China for a long time as an actor and has participated in CCTV shows. Music artist and claymation editor Anson Chi On Leong rounds out the team, having performed for a dozen years.

The works produced have altogether received 20 awards. Among the prizes that they won this year are for their claymation “My Dream, Your Dream” at the 5th Reels International Film Festival, receiving best Children's Film Special Jury Winner; and the Honourable Mention Award for the claymation “Never Fall in Love” at the Slamdance Film Festival, which is noted on its website as being a qualifying film festival for the Oscars and the BAFTA awards. In the same festival last year, the latter claymation was also part of the Official Selection, being among the other recognitions received that year.

Beyond that, Lao said that there are 160 more Angels Sky awards mainly in the animated film category.



Angela En-Yu Lao (front) poses with her mother Lucy Sao Wa lao (centre) and ANWA CLAY members Johan Karlberg (right) and Anson Chi On Leong. - Photos recently taken and provided by Lao



The future

Looking ahead, Lao says that they hope to keep going and have several plans, first among which is to create Cantonese claymations aiming to promote the importance and understanding of Cantonese culture. A confirmed project set to start filming is a claymation titled “The Turtledove that Looks For Green Beans” (尋找綠豆的斑鳩) which, at its core, teaches kids that we can find happiness right where we are, without needing to move away. They have also published their first music book, “Animal Songs”, a piano note collection, and a series of music claymation videos they hope to make a series out of.

On top of that, they are hoping to join craft markets overseas. But right at home in Macau, the group will again be joining the Tap Siac Craft Market in Autumn for its second week that runs from tomorrow through Sunday, continuing to share their creations.

**Claymation is a stop-motion animation technique where figures made out of clay are photographed one frame at a time to create the illusion of movement. The term is derived from “clay” and “animation.” It's commonly associated with animated films or shorts created using this method. – Poe*

Macau to host Saturday torch relay for MSO & NGD Games



Pun Weng Kun, who heads the preparatory office for the upcoming 12th National Games for Persons with Disabilities (NGD) and 9th Special Olympics Macau (MSO), poses with a torch during yesterday's press conference about Saturday's torch relay for the NGD and MSO, at the Athletes Training and Development Centre in Cotai.
— Photo: Ida Cheong

Ida Cheong

The torch relay ceremony for the 12th National Games for Persons with Disabilities (NGD) and 9th Special Olympics Macau (MSO) will commence at 9 a.m. on Saturday in Shenzhen. Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Macau will subsequently hold their respective ceremonies at 9:30 a.m., launching simultaneous torch relays.

In Macau, the relay will take place on the peninsula, covering a route of about 2.6 kilometres, Pun Weng Kun, who heads the preparatory office for the upcoming Games, announced during a special press conference yesterday.

The press conference about the torch relay for the 12th National Games for Persons with Disabilities and 9th Special Olympics Macau was held at the Athletes Training

and Development Centre in Cotai yesterday.

Pun said in a speech that the torch relay route in Macau integrates the concepts of “cultural integration” and “integration of persons with and without disabilities”, adding that the torch relay will start at Government Headquarters in Nam Van, followed by the relay travelling along Avenida de D. João IV (約翰四世大馬路), Rua do Campo (水坑尾街), Avenida do Infante D. Henrique (殷皇子大馬路), Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro (新馬路), and five other streets, ending in Largo do Senado, the city's main square and a UNESCO World Heritage site. The entire route is designed to be accessible and barrier-free, which is expected to be completed within two hours, Pun said.

Pun noted that a total of 50 torchbearers will participate, with

eight selected by the organising committee of the Games and 42 from various local sectors, including local athletes participating in both Games, representatives from disability service organisations, public figures, and others. The diverse participation aims to reflect the spirit of inclusivity, unity, and shared dreams among all people, Pun said.

The 12th National Games for Persons with Disabilities and the 9th Special Olympics Macau will be held from December 8 to 15 across Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau. The Macau segment will host the two badminton events for both games.

In order to ensure the smooth operation of the torch relay, a rehearsal will be conducted starting at 9 p.m. on Thursday, Pun said, during this time, relevant road sections will be subject to phased

and zonal traffic control measures. He urged the public to take note, and to plan their travel routes in advance, as well as follow the instructions of police officers and staff on site.

Pun told reporters after yesterday's press conference that around 1,500 volunteers will participate, whose work will align with similar duties of the previous National Games' volunteers, covering reception and competition assistance, among other things, striving to provide professional services.

Pun added that the list of torchbearers will be officially released on Thursday, comprising representatives of athletes of the upcoming Games, Macau social service organisations and others, who will not include any of the torchbearers of the recent National Games. ■

Mocha slot-machine parlour at Hotel Royal to close Dec 28

Tony Wong

The Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) announced in a statement yesterday that Melco will close its Mocha Royal slot-machine parlour for good after midnight on December 28.

The slot-machine parlour located in Hotel Royal is one of Melco's four current Mocha slot-machine parlours that are not housed on its own premises.

Melco announced in June that it decided to terminate the operations of three of its then six Mocha slot-machine parlours not housed on its own premises, namely Kuong Fat, Grand Dragon, and Royal, by December 31 this year.

The slot-machine parlour located in the Kuong Fat Commercial Centre office building in Zape closed for good in September, while the parlour located in Grand Dragon Hotel in Taipa ceased operations on Monday night this week.

Currently, a Mocha slot-machine parlour is housed on Melco's own premises, namely in the Altira Macau casino-hotel in Taipa.

Concerning the other three Mocha slot-machine parlours not housed on Melco's own premises, namely Golden Dragon, Sintra, and Inner Harbour, Melco decided to continue operating them after December 31 this year through the hiring of management companies, according to its announcements in June.

The first two of the three Mocha

slot-machine parlours are located in Golden Dragon Hotel in Zape and Hotel Sintra in Nam Van district respectively. The Inner Harbour slot-machine parlour is housed in the former Hotel Cantão (“Hotel Canton”).

“Canton” is the old name for Guangzhou.

According to the gaming law's newly amended version, all casinos and slot-machine parlours must be housed in premises that are owned by their respective gaming concessionaires.

After the three-year transition period stipulated by the new legislation amending the gaming law, which is scheduled to end on December 31 this year, all slot-machine parlours not housed on premises owned by the respective gaming concessionaires must close, unless the concessionaires choose to hire “management companies” to operate the parlours.

Yesterday's DICJ statement announced that Melco's Mocha Royal slot-machine parlour will cease operations after 11:59 p.m. on December 28, i.e., just a few days before the expiration of the three-year transition period.

According to the DICJ statement, there are currently 64 employees working at the Mocha Royal slot-machine parlour.

Meanwhile, Melco underlined in a statement yesterday that all local employees working at the Royal slot-machine parlour will be transferred to other Melco gaming premises. ■



This photo taken in the lobby of Hotel Royal yesterday shows the entrance to the Mocha slot-machine parlour.
— Photo: Tony Wong

Sands China, UTM ink deal, marks launch of 2-year Western culinary programme

Rui Pastorin

An memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed between integrated resort operator Sands China and the Macao University of Tourism (UTM) yesterday at The Londoner Macao, marking the launch of the two-year Sands China Western Culinary Elite Programme.

The programme, which includes eight-week training at École Ducasse in France, will cover academic theory, professional certification, and hands-on training at integrated resorts over their 24-month course.

After finishing the programme, which uses a “hire and train” model, participants will be offered Cook I positions at Sands China.

Sands China Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director Grant Chum Kwan Lock said: “UTM is our long-serving partner, and we are delighted to sign an MOU with them to launch the Sands China Western Culinary Elite Programme, with the aim of combining our respective strengths in industry resources and academic expertise.

“By supporting young local culinary talents' studies at France's internationally renowned École Ducasse, we hope they can enhance their skills and broaden their international perspectives, thereby enriching Macau's talent pool”, Chum added.

UTM Rector Fanny Vong Chuk Kwan said that “through this new partnership, our graduates will gain hands-on training at integrated resorts, while overseas study will broaden their cross-cultural horizons, further supporting the long-term growth of Macau's tourism sector.”

The Innovative Hospitality Management Symposium was held after the signing, bringing together experts and scholars, Sands China management and industry representatives, to tackle hospitality and the latest technology, using AI and robotics in the hospitality industry, and the latest innovations for meeting



UTM Rector Fanny Vong Chuk Kwan (left) and Sands China Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director Grant Chum Kwan Lock pose for a photo after signing the MOU at The Londoner Macao yesterday.
— Photos: Rui Pastorin



A panel discussion of the Innovative Hospitality Management Symposium takes place at The Londoner Macao yesterday.

the UN Sustainable Development Goals in three panel discussions.

UTM records close to 1,000 student enrolments this year

Meanwhile, Vong told media on the sidelines of yesterday's event that the university has recorded close to 1,000 student enrolments this year, a record high.

Vong added that the university will continue to prioritise the admission of local students. Moreover, regarding the recent

employment situation of UTM graduates, Vong mentioned that more than 70 percent of graduates enter service-related industries.

She also commented on a significant plan currently underway in participating in the construction of an international education university city in the Guangdong-Macau In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin. It is preparing courses and faculty resources while continuing to recruit distinguished teachers to support its growing enrolment and courses. ■

Eco-zone series activities open for registration: DSPS

Participants to visit rare black-faced spoonbills

Ida Cheong

The Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) yesterday opened its registration drive for next month's Cotai Ecological (ECO) Protection Zone* series of activities, and places are limited and available on a first-come, first-served basis, according to a DSPA statement on Monday.

According to the statement, Public Visiting Days and parent-child "Nature Classroom" workshops will be held next month, while wetland bird-watching activities will take place from next month to next April.

The statement noted that Public Visiting Days will be held on December 6-13, with sessions starting at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.; a total of 120 spots are available. During the two-hour visits, guides will lead participants into the partially accessible Eco Zone 1 and the generally open Eco Zone 2 to observe the plants and birds there.

Meanwhile, parent-child "Nature

Classroom" workshops will be held simultaneously at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. on December 6; and each session will accommodate 12 groups (each group consisting of one child and one accompanying adult), the statement said, adding that instructors will explain ecological data and guide participants in creating personalised plaster wind chimes**, and set locally sourced plants in plaster and paint them with colours during the activity.

As the migratory bird season begins, the first group of black-faced spoonbills*** returned to the Cotai Ecological Protection Zone for winter last month, the statement said, adding that the season will last until April. Wetland bird-watching sessions will be held monthly, starting from December 13 at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., with 50 spots available each time, until April. Instructors will lead participants along bird-watching routes and to observation points, providing telescopes and



This undated handout photo provided by the Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) yesterday shows a flock of black-faced spoonbills that have returned to the Cotai Ecological Protection Zone for winter.

professional commentary during activities, the statement said.

The statement pointed out that the Environmental Protection Bureau will notify registered participants of updates via SMS on the eve of the activity. Additionally, the public can download the DSPA mobile app

to access information about local flora and fauna, in order to advance the visiting experience, adding that participants are encouraged to support environmental protection by taking their own water bottles to refill at water stations.

Anyone interested can enquire

and register on the DSPA hotline 2876 2626 or website (<https://www.dspa.gov.mo/ecozonevisit.aspx>). ■

*The Cotai Ecological Zones are located near the Macau-Hengqin Lotus Flower Bridge, covering an area of about 55 hectares and consisting of Ecological Zone 1 and Ecological Zone 2. Ecological Zone 1 is a brackish marsh wetland and a limited-access managed area, while Zone 2 is an open-access managed area featuring a coastal mudflat mangrove wetland. — MPD

** Plaster wind chimes are a type of decorative and acoustic outdoor or indoor ornament where the primary chime elements (the tubes or shapes that produce sound) are made from plaster. — DeepSeek

*** Black-faced spoonbills are large, distinctive wading birds and one of the rarest spoonbills in the world. They are easily identified by their spoon-shaped bill and black face. — DeepSeek

VW says it can now make cars entirely in China

FRANKFURT, Germany — Volkswagen (VW) can now develop cars from start to finish in China, the German automotive giant said yesterday, as it plots a fightback in the world's largest market.

The company's new test laboratories in Hefei meant Chinese customers could now buy VW vehicles made entirely in the country, Volkswagen said — the first time in company history that new vehicles could be fully developed outside of Germany.

The new research centre in Hefei is Volkswagen's only one dedicated exclusively to electric cars, the company said, and it would also play a role in exports from China to South East Asia and the Middle East.

"We are taking our development capabilities in China for China to the next level," Volkswagen China boss Ralf Brandstätter said.

"We are strengthening our ability to respond quickly to local needs and to shape technologies directly where they will be used."

German carmakers have come under intense pressure from local competitors in China in recent years, with worldwide sales and profits suffering amid their slump in China.

Chinese carmakers last year held almost a 60 percent share of their domestic market, according to consultancy Jato Dynamics, up from 35 percent in 2019, and German rivals have responded by moving work over to China in a

bid to learn from locals and better cater for Chinese customers.

Speaking at the Munich car show in September, Volkswagen CEO Oliver Blume told reporters that producing a majority of cars in Germany before exporting them all over the world "doesn't work anymore".

"Therefore, we decided with a clear China strategy, in China for China," he said. "This is our new strategy."

Some aspects of model development can be done in China at half the cost of what it would take in Europe, Volkswagen said, and the new facilities in Hefei meant vehicle development times could be cut by up to 30 percent compared to Volkswagen's current Chinese development cycle. — AFP

New horned toad species discovered in Guangdong

GUANGZHOU — Chinese researchers have identified a new species of horned toad, the Boulengerophrys yangchunensis, in Guangdong Province. Their findings were published in the international taxonomic journal *Herpetozoa* on Monday.

The small-bodied amphibian is characterized by heels that meet when its hindlimbs are folded, a sharpened snout in dorsal view, and a single nuptial pad with dense nuptial spines on the dorsal bases of the first and second digits in breeding adult males. It inhabits flowing montane streams, on the nearby forest floor and in leaf litter on the Ehuangzhang Provincial Nature Reserve, which is located in Yangchun City. Male calls

were observed from leaves 10 to 30 centimeters above the ground.

According to lead researcher Lin Shishi from the Guangdong Polytechnic of Environmental Protection Engineering, the species' name is derived from its discovery site. Lin emphasized that the find is reflective of refined, targeted species surveys and conservation efforts, noting that the discovery underscores the role of protected areas in preserving biodiversity.

The study was conducted by the Guangdong Wildlife Monitoring Rescue and Conservation Center, the Guangdong Polytechnic of Environmental Protection Engineering, and the Guangdong Yangchun Ehuangzhang Provincial Nature Reserve. — Xinhua

Tokyo only digging deeper hole for itself by trying to justify its untenable stance

China Daily Editorial

The latest move by the Japanese government shows that it has not done any serious soul-searching about why the remarks on China's Taiwan region by Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi have been strongly condemned and opposed by China.

In response to a letter that China's permanent representative to the United Nations, Fu Cong, sent to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Friday, criticizing Takaichi's remarks as interference in China's internal affairs and calling for her retraction of the remarks, Japan's Ambassador to the United Nations Kazuyuki Yamazaki submitted a letter of "rebuttal" to the UN chief on Monday.

That's absurd.

Takaichi's erroneous and dangerous remarks on the Taiwan question clearly reveal the dangerous toxicity of Japan's historical revisionism and resurgent militarism. As Fu rightly said in his letter, referring to Takaichi's remarks, this

is "the first time Japan has expressed ambitions to intervene militarily in the Taiwan question", and "the first time Japan has issued a threat of force against China".

Her remarks constitute a grave violation of international law and the basic norms governing international relations, seriously undermine the postwar international order, and represent an open provocation to the more than 1.4 billion Chinese people and to the peoples of other Asian countries that were once victimized by Japanese aggression.

More importantly, Takaichi's remarks on Taiwan are only part of her scheme to rid Japan of the postwar institutional restrictions prohibiting the country from seeking remilitarization. Despite this, in his response to Fu's letter, Yamazaki resorted to playing with diplomatic parlance in a bid to cover up the provocative and interventionist nature of Takaichi's remarks, whitewashing her push for Japan's remilitarization as "self-defensive".

Although the Takaichi government is forgetful about history, the wounds inflicted by Japan upon its neighboring countries, especially China, have never fully healed and they are not subject to such selective amnesia.

For a long time, the Chinese nation has adopted a return-good-for-evil approach to deal with relations with Japan in the hope that it will change its ways. Beijing has consistently urged Tokyo to draw the right lessons from history. But the Takaichi government's performance since it took office last month shows clearly that China has been casting pearls before swine.

If, as Yamazaki alleged, "Japan's position on Taiwan has not changed", the Takaichi government is obliged to explain exactly what its position on the Chinese island is. How come an internal affair of China's can be a "survival-threatening situation" for Japan that suffices to prompt armed intervention?

Takaichi has long maintained

improper contacts with "Taiwan independence" separatists. There are justifiable grounds for questioning whether Japan is now proactively encouraging and emboldening such forces under her leadership. By trying to portray the Taiwan Strait situation as a "contingency for Japan", Takaichi is using the Taiwan question as a pretext for Japan's remilitarization.

Instead of proving the Takaichi government's innocence, Yamazaki's letter to the UN chief further testifies to the malign nature of Takaichi's remarks.

That Takaichi's remarks were provocative and dangerous cannot be denied. The historical record and the four political documents between China and Japan that laid the political foundation for their relations give Japan no room in which to maneuver.

Given what she said, as Fu noted in his remarks at the UN General Assembly's plenary meeting on Security Council reform last week, "how can we trust Japan's

professed commitment to peaceful development? How can the international community trust Japan to uphold fairness and justice? How can we trust Japan to shoulder the responsibility of maintaining international peace and security?"

How the Taiwan question is resolved is a matter for the Chinese people and brooks no foreign interference. If Japan dares to attempt an armed intervention in the cross-Strait situation, it would be an act of aggression. China would respond by exercising its right of self-defense under the UN Charter and international law to resolutely defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Rather than compounding its wrongs by trying to disguise its intentions with word games, Tokyo should strictly honor the commitments it has made on the Taiwan question, immediately cease its provocations and retract Takaichi's erroneous and dangerous remarks.

— Courtesy of China Daily

Xi meets Tonga's king, urging better alignment of development strategies

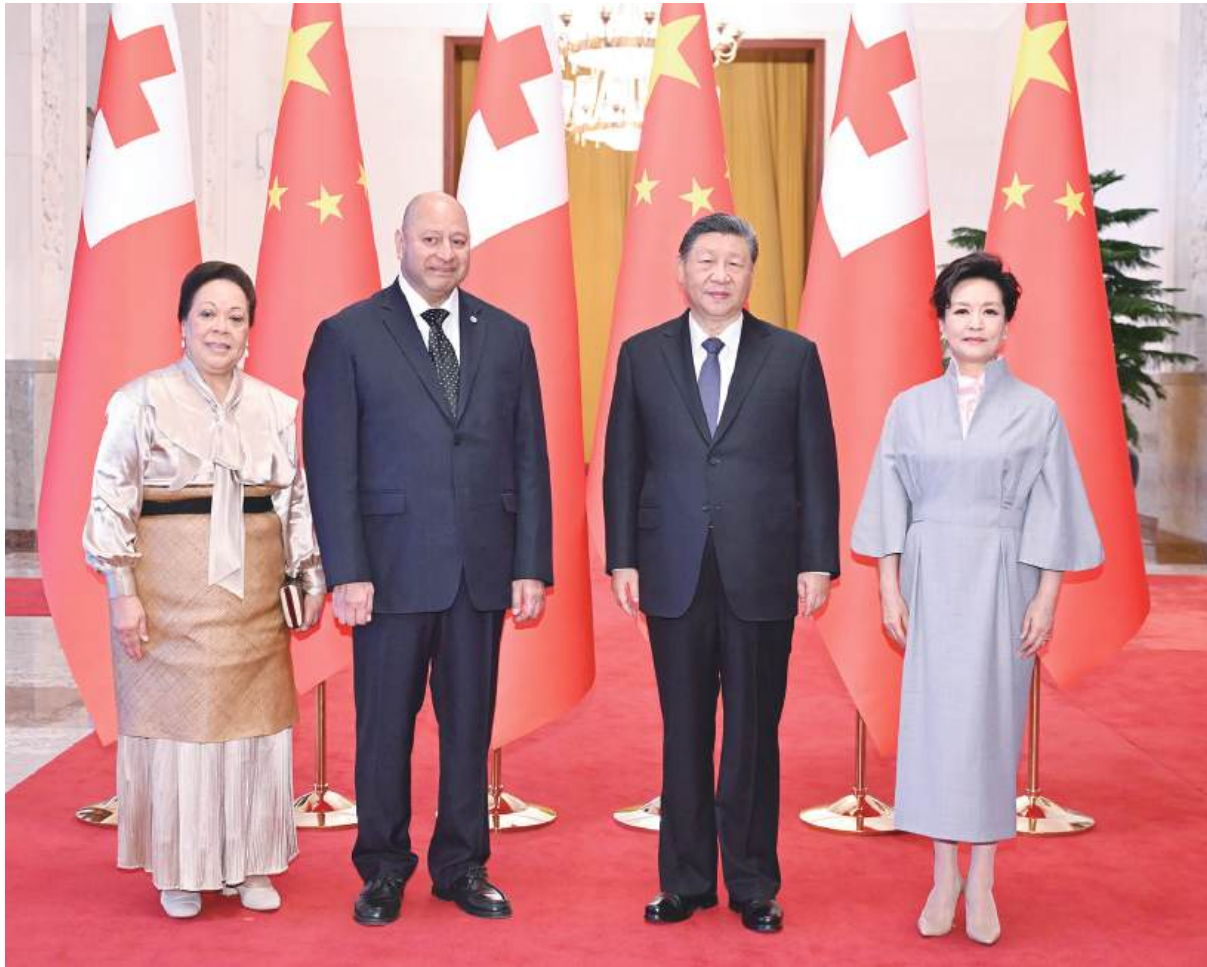
BEIJING – President Xi Jinping met with visiting King Tupou VI of the Kingdom of Tonga in Beijing yesterday, saying that China is willing to enhance the alignment of development strategies with Tonga.

Noting that China and Tonga are true friends who have weathered storms and braved hardships together, Xi said that since the establishment of diplomatic ties, the two countries have been unwaveringly supportive of each other's core interests and major concerns. The pragmatic cooperation has yielded fruitful results, and the China-Tonga comprehensive strategic partnership has been steadily deepened, thus setting an example of friendly cooperation between countries with different social systems and varying sizes, said Xi.

"No matter how the international situation changes, China has always been a trustworthy and good partner of Tonga and has always supported Tonga in safeguarding its national independence and sovereignty," Xi said.

Xi said China is willing to expand cooperation with Tonga on trade and investment, agriculture and fisheries, infrastructure, clean energy, medical and health care, tourism, and climate change response. China will also deepen exchanges in education, sports, youth, media, and subnational cooperation, and continue to provide assistance for Tonga's economic and social development within the framework of South-South cooperation.

Personnel from various sectors of Tonga are welcome to visit China



President Xi Jinping (second from right) and his wife Peng Liyuan (right) pose for a group photo with King Tupou VI (second from left) of the Kingdom of Tonga and his wife Queen Nanasipau'u in Beijing yesterday. Xi met with the Tongan monarch, who is on a state visit to China, at the Great Hall of the People yesterday. – Xinhua

and further engage in exchanges of experience on state governance and development to gain a more thorough understanding of China, Xi added.

Noting the fourth plenary session of the 20th Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee has outlined the top-level design and strategic blueprint for China's

economic and social development of the next five years, Xi said China will focus on high quality development, deepen reforms across the board, expand high-level opening up, and share development opportunities with other countries in the world.

China also stands ready to work

with Tonga to implement the four major global initiatives, create a better life for the people of both countries, build a China-Pacific Island countries community with a shared future, and promote the building of a community with a shared future for humanity, Xi said.

While expressing gratitude

for China's long-term, selfless assistance in Tonga's economic and social development, King Tupou VI said Tonga attaches great importance to developing ties with China. The country firmly adheres to the one-China principle, opposes "Taiwan independence" in any form, and unequivocally supports the Chinese government's efforts for national reunification, he added.

King Tupou VI said Tonga is ready to expand cooperation with China in the fields of economy, trade, agriculture, clean energy, education, medical care, and environmental protection, among others. He added that the country is willing to learn from the CPC regarding the experience in state governance.

Tonga supports the four major global initiatives put forward by President Xi, King Tupou VI said, adding that the country is ready to enhance communication and coordination with China and jointly respond to climate change and other global challenges.

After the meeting, the two heads of state witnessed the signing of several cooperation documents in the fields of economy, trade, medical care, education and development, among others.

Prior to the meeting, Xi and his wife, Peng Liyuan, held a welcoming ceremony for King Tupou VI and Queen Nanasipau'u at the Northern Hall of the Great Hall of the People.

Xi and Peng hosted a welcoming banquet for the King and Queen in the afternoon. – Xinhua

China sends Shenzhou-22 to orbit, completing first emergency launch in its manned space program

JIUQUAN – China yesterday launched the Shenzhou-22 spaceship to provide a return vessel for the three Shenzhou-21 astronauts in orbit. This momentous occasion marked the accomplishment of the first emergency launch mission in the country's manned space program.

The spaceship, atop a Long March-2F Y22 carrier rocket, blasted off from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwest China at 12:11 p.m., according to the China Manned Space Agency (CMSA).

About 10 minutes after the launch, the spaceship separated from the rocket and entered its designated orbit. The CMSA declared the launch mission a complete success.

After entering the orbit, the spaceship made a fast, autonomous rendezvous and docking with the front port of the space station's core module Tianhe at 3:50 p.m., the agency said.

The spaceship, flying without a crew aboard, carried a cargo of space food, medical supplies, fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as devices for fixing the cracked window on the Shenzhou-20 spaceship.

The launch of the new spaceship followed the return of the three Shenzhou-20 astronauts back to Earth on Nov. 14 by the Shenzhou-21 spacecraft.

The return mission, initially scheduled for Nov. 5 by the Shenzhou-20 spaceship, was delayed due to a suspected debris impact on the Shenzhou-20 return capsule's viewport window.

The Long March-2F Y22 rocket and the Shenzhou-22 spaceship – already on standby at the launch site upon the contingency – were swiftly prepared for launch.

After the initiation of the contingency plan, all teams involved in the project demonstrated a composed and methodical approach.

Within 20 days, all participating research and testing units collaborated and completed a series of critical tasks, including risk assessment, solution analysis and decision-making, personnel and material deployment, crew return aboard a replacement vessel, as well as an emergency launch, offering a world-class example of managing an in-orbit emergency, the CMSA said.

The success of this mission fully demonstrated the strengths of China's new system for mobilizing resources nationwide, it noted.

To save time, the launch site streamlined procedures, said Liu Feng, an expert from the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC), noting that there were three unchanged aspects for the rocket system in this emergency mission.

The life-and-safety-first principle, the rocket's fundamental technical specifications and the overall flight plan remained unchanged, Liu said.

Since the Shenzhou-12 mission, China's manned spaceflight has adopted a "rolling backup" model, with one combination of the spaceship and rocket for launch and another combination designated as backup for each mission. This ensures that a backup combination of launch vehicle and spaceship is always on standby, ready to be rapidly deployed for an emergency space station rescue mission.

"As the first ship of the new batch, Shenzhou-22 incorporates upgrades



The Shenzhou-22 spaceship, atop a Long March-2F Y22 rocket, blasts off from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center yesterday. About 10 minutes after the launch, the spaceship separated from the rocket and entered its designated orbit. The China Manned Space Agency declared the launch mission a complete success. – Xinhua

covering its instrumentation system, payload installation space, and electronic components," said Diao Weihe, an expert from the CASC.

The newly launched spaceship will later serve as a return vehicle for the Shenzhou-21 astronauts in orbit. They were launched aboard

the Shenzhou-21 spacecraft on Oct. 31, and are expected to return to Earth after completing a six-month mission.

They are now in good condition, and are performing their in-orbit duties as planned, the CMSA said.

– Xinhua

Malaysian scientists recruit bed bugs as crime scene sleuths

Isabelle Leong

PENANG — Under glaring laboratory lights, a research assistant extends his forearm and carefully inverts a mesh-topped container onto his skin to allow a wriggling mass of bed bugs to feed on his blood, all in the name of science.

Long-loathed as itchy household pests, the blood-sucking insects have revealed a darker, more intriguing potential as Malaysian scientists have discovered they can be turned into unlikely crime-busting allies.

A team from the Science University of Malaysia (USM) in northern Penang has found that tropical bed bugs can retain DNA from human prey for up to 45 days after snacking on an unwary victim.

This makes the tiny critters, who love to lurk in headboard cracks, mattress seams and pillow covers, ideal evidence resources when it comes to pinpointing suspects at crime scenes.

From a speck of blood, police investigators may one day be able to piece together the full profile of an offender, if the critters are present at a crime scene.

Analysing the insects could reveal gender, eye colour, hair and skin colour, entomologist Abdul Hafiz Ab Majid told AFP.

“We call bed bugs the ‘musuh dalam selimut’ (Malay for “the enemy in the blanket”),” Hafiz said, adding that “they can also be spies” to help solve crimes.

DNA profiling

In a laboratory tucked deep inside USM’s School of Biological Sciences, Hafiz and postdoctoral researcher Lim Li have spent nearly half a decade studying tropical bed bugs.

The bloodsuckers, scientific name *Cimex hemipterus*, are the most common species found in Malaysia and the tropics.

The bugs are reared in containers under a laboratory bench, each wrapped in black plastic to mimic conditions the insects thrive in.

“We place folded pieces of paper inside the small containers so the bed bugs have something to climb on,” Hafiz said.

With the lab’s temperature kept at a constant 23C to 24C, the insects



This photo taken on October 8, shows a researcher displaying a rash after allowing bed bugs to feed on his arm as part of a scientific study at a laboratory of the Science University of Malaysia (USM) in George Town, on Penang island. — AFP

suck up 1.5 to 5.3 microlitres of blood at each feeding, an “amount less than a droplet”, Hafiz explained.

Researchers found DNA extracted from bed bugs that had fed on human blood could recover basic “phenotypic profiling”, a person’s observable traits, as well as gender for up to 45 days.

Using so-called STR (Short Tandem Repeat) and SNP (Single Nucleotide Polymorphism) markers, specific DNA sequences extracted from the blood, researchers can determine the gender, eye, hair and skin colour of potential suspects, long after they have fled the scene.

The USM study called “Human profiling from STR and SNP analysis of tropical bed bug, *Cimex hemipterus*”, was published in *Nature’s Scientific Reports* two years ago.

It was the first documented forensic use involving tropical bed bugs.

‘Perfect’ forensic tool

Unlike mosquitoes and flies, bed bugs cannot fly, and once they have fed, “become engorged and can’t move around that much”, Hafiz said, adding that they can only move within 20 feet (six metres) of where they’ve fed.

“That’s what makes them unique. We can say they are perfect to use as a forensic tool compared to

mosquitoes that... fly away,” Hafiz added.

The bugs are particularly useful at crime scenes, where fluids have been wiped away to destroy evidence, as the critters are often well-hidden.

Back in the lab, researcher Lim did not hesitate to demonstrate a feeding session, even joking that she had been a “willing victim” for science.

“I let them feed on my blood when I wanted to test how long [it would take] the human DNA to degrade,” she said.

Lim insisted that the inconspicuous bugs are “misunderstood creatures” and do not spread diseases — even though their bite leaves an itchy rash that can last for weeks.

“Maybe we can try educating people because the bed bugs are not actually vectors. So even if you get bitten, they can’t transmit diseases to you,” she said.

While the researchers imagined a future where tiny bed bugs at crime scenes could lead investigators to murder suspects, Hafiz said the insects weren’t a magic fix.

Bed bugs have their limits — especially when it comes to cracking cold cases, said Hafiz.

“It only gives investigators a time frame of 45 days to use bed bugs as evidence — and only if they are available at the crime scene,” he said. — AFP

Jakarta bans cat and dog meat

JAKARTA — Indonesia’s capital Jakarta has banned the selling and consumption of dog, cat and bat meat to prevent rabies transmission, the city’s governor announced yesterday, in a win for animal rights advocates.

“I have signed the regulation... which prohibits the sale of rabies-transmitting animals for food purposes,” Jakarta Governor Pramono Anung said in a statement on social media, a month after promising to do so.

The regulation, which Pramono said he signed on Monday, provides a six-month grace period before it is enforced, according to a document seen by AFP.

Violators could face sanctions, ranging from written warnings to revoking business licences.

The governor said the ban applies to “live animals, meat, or other products, either raw or processed”, and prohibits any “activities related to... rabies-transmitting animals intended for food purposes”.

Indonesia is one of a handful of countries that permit the sale of dog and cat meat, but a campaign against the practice has gained ground, with some cities imposing local bans on the trade in recent years.

Animal rights activists hailed the Jakarta ban as a step in the right direction.

“This policy aligns with the mandate of the constitution to protect all Indonesian people and to become a just and civilised nation,” advocacy group Dog Meat Free Indonesia said in a statement.

Several dozen Indonesians die of rabies every year, according to the World Health Organisation. Indonesia’s health ministry reported 25 deaths between January and March 2025.

While dogs are widely viewed as unclean and are rarely kept as pets in Muslim-majority Indonesia, their meat remains a delicacy among some groups.

A cheap source of protein, dog meat is eaten in several other Asian countries. — AFP

Thailand floods kill 13, leaving people stranded

BANGKOK — Residents of southern Thailand waded through waist-deep floods yesterday, with a main tourist town left inundated by days of heavy rain, stranding people in homes and hotels, and killing at least 13 in the region.

The government declared a state of emergency in southern Songkhla province yesterday, as the meteorological department forecast more rain and possible flash floods this week.

Torrential rains since late last week inundated the tourist hub of Hat Yai and the southern region, killing 13 people in four flood-hit provinces, the department of disaster prevention and mitigation said.

Local television footage in recent days has showed rescuers in Hat Yai evacuating people via boats, jet skis and military trucks amid high floodwaters.

Some have used inflatable children’s swimming pools to float their kids to safety.

“I was stranded for four days,” a woman wearing a rain poncho and holding her baby under an umbrella in the city told local TV station TNN on Monday.

“I decided to leave because I have an infant and I am afraid more water will come,” she said.

The woman, her child and her bedridden mother were evacuated by boat, she added.

More than 1,200 people have been evacuated from their homes in Songkhla since Thursday, the province’s public relations department said.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul told reporters yesterday that more boats and trucks would be deployed to aid in evacuations.

Thailand regularly records heavy rainfall from June to September, but experts say human-induced climate change has intensified extreme weather, making conditions increasingly unpredictable. — AFP

Philippines sees continued drop in working kids

MANILA — The number of working children in the Philippines fell to an estimated 861,000 in 2024, continuing a steady annual decline in recent years, according to data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) released yesterday.

Working children aged 5 to 17 now account for 2.7 percent of the total child population in 2024, down from 3.5 percent in 2023 and 4.7 percent in 2022.

Boys continued to make up

the majority of young workers, accounting for 61.8 percent, or 532,000, of those employed in 2024. Girls comprised 329,000, or 38.2 percent.

Children aged 15 to 17 accounted for the largest share of the workforce, making up 74.5 percent of all working minors in 2024, up from 72.5 percent in 2023 and 59.7 percent in 2022.

The services sector has consistently employed the highest

percentage of working children aged 5 to 17 years over the past three years.

The PSA also reported a continued decline in child labor, defined as hazardous work or employment exceeding legal working hours for minors.

The number of children engaged in child labor fell sharply to 509,000 in 2024 from 678,000 in 2023 and 828,000 in 2022.

— Xinhua

Registered marriages in Philippines drop in 2024

MANILA — Registered marriages in the Philippines fell in 2024, official data showed yesterday.

A total of 371,825 unions were recorded nationwide last year, down 10.2 percent compared with the previous year.

The country’s crude marriage rate, or the number of marriages in a given year per 1,000 people in

the total population, also declined.

February remained the most popular month for weddings, followed by June and December.

Couples aged 25 to 29 continued to account for the largest share of marriages. Marriages involving adolescent girls were four times higher than those involving teenage boys.

— Xinhua

ASEAN must unlock potential to rise as global center of technology: Malaysian Deputy PM

KUALA LUMPUR – The huge potential of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) must be unlocked for the region to rise as a global center of innovation, technology and sustainable progress, Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Fadillah Yusof said yesterday.

The region and ASEAN stand at the intersection of shifting global dynamics, rapid technological advancement and evolving economic landscapes, making unity, resilience and shared

innovation essential for realizing its aspirations, Fadillah said in his keynote address at the inaugural ASEAN Technology Cooperation and Development Summit 2025.

“With a population of more than 680 million, a vibrant digital economy and a forward-looking young generation, ASEAN holds tremendous potential to rise as a global center of innovation, technology and sustainable progress,” he said.

“It is this spirit of collective progress, of unity, of shared

responsibility, and of regional purpose that strengthens ASEAN’s journey towards a technologically empowered, resilient and sustainable future,” he said.

Fadillah, who is also minister of energy transition and water transformation, urged Malaysian agencies and industry players to enhance strategic research funding to catalyze world-class scientific and technological breakthroughs that will accelerate the adoption and commercialization of frontier

technologies, as well as attract global researchers, scientific institutions and high-impact talent into Malaysia and the wider ASEAN region.

“Malaysia stands ready to serve as a gateway, a testbed, a launchpad, and a thriving hub for global innovators to scale transformative solutions for the region... Malaysia firmly believes that science, technology and innovation must be placed at the heart of ASEAN’s long-term regional strategy,” he said.

The two-day summit, which

runs from yesterday to today, is held in conjunction with Malaysia’s ASEAN Chairmanship, welcoming delegates from member states and international partners, including China, Canada and the Middle East.

With the theme “Uniting Innovation, Connecting the Future,” the summit places the strategic role of technology in driving economic growth, cybersecurity, future mobility, smart cities, advanced healthcare, green innovation and frontier industries. – Xinhua



Shopkeepers carry goods past digital cashless payment QR (quick response) codes displayed at a market in Islamabad, Pakistan yesterday. – AFP

Pakistan denies deadly strikes after Afghanistan vows retaliation

JIGE MUGHALGAI – Afghanistan’s Taliban government vowed yesterday to “respond appropriately” to deadly overnight air strikes it blamed on Pakistan, a claim Islamabad denied, as tensions spiked a day after a suicide bombing in a Pakistani city.

An air raid on Khost province “martyred” nine children and a woman, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid posted on X, blaming Pakistani forces and saying the target was “the house of a local civilian resident”.

Residents of the targeted area near the Pakistan frontier searched through the rubble of a collapsed house and prepared graves for victims, an AFP correspondent saw.

“Our request from the government of Pakistan is this: do not bomb ordinary people,” said Sajidulrahman, a resident of the Jige Mughalgai area. “Civilians have done nothing wrong.”

Mustaghfir Gurbuz, a spokesman for the governor of Khost, said the strikes were carried out by aircraft that included drones.

The nearby border regions of Kunar and Paktika were also hit, wounding at least four people, government spokesman Mujahid said.

“The Islamic Emirate strongly condemns this violation and reiterates that defending its airspace, territory, and people is its legitimate right, and it will respond appropriately at the right time,” Mujahid said in a separate statement.

Pakistan denied carrying out any attack. According to state broadcaster

PTV, military spokesman Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said: “Pakistan has not attacked Afghanistan.”

“Whenever we conduct a strike, it is announced openly and properly,” he said. “Pakistan never attacks civilian populations. The allegations of the interim Afghan government are baseless.”

The bombardment came after a suicide attack on Monday killed three officers and wounded 11 others at the headquarters of Pakistan’s paramilitary Federal Constabulary force in Peshawar.

No group has claimed responsibility, but state broadcaster PTV reported the attackers were Afghan nationals.

President Asif Zardari blamed the “foreign-backed Fitna al-Khawarij” – Islamabad’s term for the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militant group it accuses of operating from Afghan soil.

Another suicide blast this month killed 12 people outside a court in the Pakistani capital. It was claimed by a faction of the Pakistani Taliban, which shares the same ideology as the Afghan Taliban.

Islamabad has said the militant cell behind the capital attack was “guided at every step by the... high command based in Afghanistan”.

Truce under strain

Pakistan’s Information Minister Attaullah Tarar told reporters yesterday there was “clear-cut evidence” linking the Afghan Taliban

to the Islamabad bombing.

He aired an alleged video confession from one of four suspects in custody and said: “Afghanistan is fully involved... and their soil is also involved. The people being sheltered there are also involved.”

Relations between Islamabad and Kabul have been fraught since the Taliban swept back to power in Kabul in 2021, and worsened after border clashes in October killed around 70 people on both sides.

That fighting ended with a ceasefire brokered by Qatar and Turkey, but several rounds of talks in Doha and Istanbul failed to produce a lasting deal.

Security issues have proved a sticking point, especially Pakistan’s demand that Kabul curb TTP fighters.

Islamabad accuses the Taliban of sheltering militants behind a surge in attacks, particularly the TTP, which has waged a bloody campaign against Pakistan for years.

Kabul denies the charge and counters that Pakistan harbours groups hostile to Afghanistan and does not respect its sovereignty.

The border between the neighbours has remained closed for more than six weeks since the October clashes, freezing bilateral trade.

The Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry has warned that thousands of containers remain stuck at the border, each incurring US\$150-US\$200 in daily charges, calling the economic burden “unbearable”. – AFP

Singapore tells Apple, Google to clamp down on govt spoofing

SINGAPORE – Singapore police have ordered Apple and Google to prevent scams impersonating government agencies on their messaging platforms, the city-state’s home affairs ministry said yesterday.

Part of efforts to protect the public from rising scams, the tech giants must block or filter accounts and group chats that mimic Singapore government agency identities on Apple’s iMessage and Google Messages by the end of November, the ministry said in a statement.

It added that Apple and Google “have indicated that they will comply” with the order, which also demands changes to how profile names of unknown senders are displayed.

Government agencies have been using the “gov.sg” message ID to help recipients verify legitimate communication, but scammers have been using it, too, exploiting the lack of some safeguards on

messaging platforms.

The home affairs ministry said there was “a need to put in place measures to deter the abuse of iMessage and Google Messages by scammers”.

If the companies fail to comply, they could face fines of up to S\$1million Singapore dollars (US\$768,000).

Google said it was “collaborating with the government to implement pre-emptive measures to help prevent the spoofing of government agencies’ names” on its messaging platform.

“We share Singapore’s goal of keeping Singaporeans safe online,” Google told AFP in a statement.

Apple could not immediately be reached for comment.

On Facebook, Singapore police had already ordered parent company Meta to clamp down on a growing number of scammers pretending to be government officials. – AFP



Local labourers ride a bike along a road in Ahmedabad, India yesterday. – AFP

Japan launches DOGE-inspired office to cut budget waste

TOKYO – Japan launched its own version of the US government’s infamous cost-cutting Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) yesterday in a bid to ease concerns over a US\$135-billion stimulus package.

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi pledged last week huge government spending to boost the economy, insisting it was fiscally responsible despite fears it would worsen the country’s colossal debt burden.

“Given the times we live in, fiscal sustainability is paramount... it is vital that the public can see we are consistently working towards it,” Japanese Finance Minister Satsuki Katayama told a press briefing.

Unveiling the initiative she said was referred to as Japan’s DOGE,

the minister said that “there is high public interest in reducing waste.”

Headed by Elon Musk, DOGE in the United States sent teams of tech experts to systematically dismantle and disrupt the nation’s more than two million-strong civil service.

The Japanese team, however, will be made up of around 30 working government officials and will not aim to overhaul government organisations, Katayama said.

The Office in Charge of Reviewing Special Tax Measures and Subsidies, as it is formally known, would review programmes with low policy impact, she added.

The initiative is part of a month-old coalition agreement between Takaichi’s ruling Liberal

Democratic Party and their junior partner, the Japan Innovation Party.

The office is expected to become fully functional next year, with its impact reflected in the budget for the fiscal year starting from April 2027, according to Katayama.

Takaichi has defended the ¥21.3-trillion stimulus package that her government approved last week as it looks to kickstart growth in the world’s number-four economy, ease the pain of inflation for households and restore the ruling party’s flagging popularity.

However, expectations that the new premier would embark on a big-spending spree have pushed yields on Japanese government bonds to record highs this week and put pressure on the yen. – AFP

Popemobile transformed into Gaza mobile children's clinic

Robin Millard

BETHLEHEM, Palestinian Territories – The popemobile used by the late pope Francis on his 2014 visit to Bethlehem re-emerged yesterday as a mobile children's clinic to be deployed in Gaza.

The vehicle is still unmistakable as a popemobile: pristine white inside and out, and with the familiar raised canopy.

But instead of transporting the leader of the world's 1.4 billion Roman Catholics, the re-branded "Vehicle of Hope" is now set to serve in the war-battered Gaza Strip, in accordance with the late pope's wishes.

It was unveiled in Bethlehem in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, around the corner from the Church of the Nativity and Manger Square, where preparations are well underway for Christmas.

"The Vehicle of Hope is ready for its new mission," Cardinal Anders Arborelius, the Bishop of Stockholm, told a press conference, after blessing the vehicle.

"We want every child we reach to feel seen, heard and protected. The rights and well-being of the child come first.

"This vehicle stands as a testament: the world has not forgotten the children of Gaza.

"This is not just a vehicle: it's a message of compassion, dignity and hope."

Staffed by medics, the popemobile is intended for performing triage and is equipped for examination, diagnosis and treatment,



Father Ibrahim Faltas, a Catholic Egyptian priest of the Franciscan Order (left), and Swedish Cardinal Anders Arborelius, the bishop of Stockholm, inspect the "Vehicle of Hope", the Popemobile used by pope Francis during his 2014 visit to Bethlehem, which has been repurposed by the Catholic humanitarian organisation Caritas into a mobile children's clinic to be deployed in the Gaza Strip, in Bethlehem in the Israeli-occupied West Bank yesterday. The Gaza war was sparked by Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel, which resulted in the deaths of 1,221 people. Israel's retaliatory assault on Gaza has killed at over 69,500 Palestinians, according to figures from the Gaza health ministry that the UN considers reliable. – AFP

including vaccines, stitches and tests for infections.

The clinic should be able to perform up to 200 consultations a day. The children will sit in the pontiff's chair while being attended to.

crowds gathered in Manger Square.

A gift from Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas, the converted Mitsubishi was later given to Franciscan friars.

Pope Francis died on April 21 aged 88, and his final wish for Gaza's children was that the popemobile should become a mobile health unit, the official Vatican News portal said in May.

The vehicle was transformed by Caritas, the Catholic humanitarian aid organisation. Costing US\$15,000, it has been repurposed and spruced up by Palestinian mechanics. The open sides have been screened off.

"The children of Gaza were very close to the heart of pope Francis," said Peter Brune, secretary general of the Caritas Sweden branch.

"They will sit on the seat of the pope, and be treated like the most valuable person on Earth."

However, there is no date yet as to when it might receive Israeli authorisation to enter Gaza, where a fragile truce between Israel and Hamas came into effect on October 10 after two years of war that devastated healthcare in the Palestinian territory.

"As with all humanitarian assistance, we urgently need access to Gaza," Caritas secretary general Alistair Dutton told AFP.

"We're working through the official channels to get this in as quickly as possible." – AFP

Gazans despair as Israeli forces mark withdrawal line

GAZA CITY – When Ibrahim Farahat awoke to discover a large yellow concrete block on his doorstep in Gaza City, he suddenly found himself right on the perilous demarcation line marking the withdrawal of Israeli troops.

Several residents of the Shujaiya neighbourhood, east of Gaza City, told AFP that they had found such blocks around their homes – which they believed had been placed by Israeli forces overnight between Thursday and Friday.

"They placed the yellow block in front of our house. It was previously near the Al-Aqsa pharmacy," about a kilometre away, Farahat told AFP.

"Things were fine – it was far from us," he added.

"Now gunfire is reaching our house".

Under the US-brokered ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, Israeli troops have withdrawn to positions behind the so-called Yellow Line, though still in control of more than half the territory.

Since the fragile ceasefire came into effect on October 10, there have been multiple deadly incidents involving Israeli forces firing on people approaching or crossing the Yellow Line.

A number of Shujaiya's residents have now decided to leave the neighbourhood, yet another displacement for many since the start of the war more than two years ago.

Among them was Fadi Shafiq Hararah, who described to AFP how the large yellow blocks had been installed in his neighbourhood.

"[The Israeli army] were equipped with robots, and there was a tank present. They also had a crane," he said.

"We're packing our belongings to leave. But where are we supposed to go?"

Akram Jaradah said this was his 16th displacement since October 7, 2023, when Hamas's deadly attack on Israel triggered the war in Gaza.

"I've been displaced 16 times – from one street to another, from one city to another, from the north to the south," he told AFP.

"This Yellow Line means the [Israeli] army will constantly be present in the area, posing a danger to us," he added.

When contacted by AFP, the Israeli military said it was simply marking the Yellow Line.

"It was not expanding it in any way," it added.

'Escalating violations'

The Wall Street Journal published an investigation on Friday suggesting that Israel had sent reinforcements and installed water points along the yellow line.

The Israeli military told AFP that it could not comment on these allegations.

Under the truce agreement between Israel and Hamas, which was negotiated through mediators including the United States, Israeli troops are supposed to eventually withdraw further than the Yellow Line, in step with the progress of the peace process in the Gaza Strip.

On Monday, Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said Israel "continues daily its campaign of shifting the yellow line inside the Strip westward".

"This is a blatant breach of the agreement," he added.

In a statement published on Saturday, Hamas accused Israel of "escalating violations" of the ceasefire, citing the yellow line's "daily westward advance, accompanied by the mass displacement of our people, in addition to airstrikes and artillery shelling of areas in the eastern Gaza Strip".

The Islamist movement said that this had "led to changes in the occupation army's withdrawal lines, contradicting the agreed-upon maps."

The Israeli military has frequently issued statements saying it has killed militants who have crossed the Yellow Line and posed a threat to troops, also denouncing truce violations.

Since last Wednesday, Hamas and Israel have been accusing each other of violating the ceasefire. – AFP

Pope's 'final wish'

In May 2014, Francis visited Amman, Bethlehem and Jerusalem, on his second international visit as pontiff. The popemobile was used as he toured Bethlehem, greeting the



Gazans carry wood while walking in floodwaters at a makeshift camp housing displaced Palestinians following heavy rain in Gaza City yesterday. The Gaza Strip has been largely reduced to rubble after two years of fighting. – AFP

Israel says Islamic Jihad's delay of hostage body handover a ceasefire 'violation'

JERUSALEM – Israel yesterday said a delay by Palestinian militant group Islamic Jihad in handing over a hostage body it said it had found in Gaza was a "violation" of the fragile ceasefire.

The armed wing of Islamic Jihad said it had located on Monday the body of a hostage during search operations in the central Gaza Strip.

A source in Islamic Jihad, who requested anonymity, confirmed the body belonged to one of the last three hostages held by militants in the territory.

"In light of the Islamic Jihad's announcement regarding the location of findings related to a deceased hostage, Israel views with severity the delay in their immediate transfer," the office of Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement.

"This constitutes a further violation of the agreement. Israel demands the immediate return of the three deceased hostages still being held in the Gaza Strip," it added.

At the start of the US-brokered ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, which came into effect on October 10, militants were holding 20 living hostages and 28 bodies of deceased captives.

Hamas has since released all the living hostages and returned the remains of 25 dead hostages, in line with the ceasefire terms.

In exchange, Israel has released nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners in its custody and returned the bodies of hundreds of dead Palestinians. – AFP

US upbeat on drive to end Ukraine war, says more talks needed

WASHINGTON – US officials were upbeat yesterday about the drive to end the war in Ukraine but acknowledged that sticking points remained over a US plan to halt the nearly four-year conflict.

The United States is pushing Ukraine to accept proposals which Kyiv says concede too much to Moscow.

Talks between US Army Secretary Dan Driscoll and Russia delegates on the US plan were progressing, his spokesman said.

“Late Monday and throughout Tuesday, Secretary Driscoll and team have been in discussions with the Russian delegation to achieve a lasting peace in Ukraine,” said Lieutenant Colonel Jeff Tolbert, Driscoll’s spokesman. “The talks are going well and we remain optimistic.”

The White House said that remaining issues in talks to end

Russia’s war against Ukraine would require more negotiation.

“The United States has made tremendous progress towards a peace deal,” press secretary Karoline Leavitt posted on X.

“There are a few delicate but not insurmountable details that must be sorted out and will require further talks between Ukraine, Russia, and the United States.”

Driscoll was meeting with a Russian delegation in Abu Dhabi yesterday, US and British media reported, days after talks with Ukraine in Geneva aimed at ending the conflict.

Driscoll met the Russian delegation on Monday with talks that were due to continue yesterday, ABC News and the *Financial Times* reported, citing a US official.

Several US media outlets reported yesterday that a US official has said Ukraine accepted a peace deal.



US Secretary of the Army Dan Driscoll (centre) speaks with US officials after closed-door talks with a Ukrainian delegation on a US plan to end the war in Ukraine, at the US Mission in Geneva, on Sunday. Talks between Driscoll and Russian delegates in Abu Dhabi on the US plan are “going well,” his spokesman said yesterday. – AFP

The latest talks were previously undisclosed, and follow meetings held in Switzerland between US and Ukrainian officials aimed at resolving the war with Russia. The *Financial Times* said

the head of Ukrainian military intelligence, Kyrylo Budanov, would be present at the talks, without detailing the Russian officials.

“Driscoll has been involved with this peace process pretty hot and heavy in the past few days,” a US official told the *Financial Times*, without being named.

“Obviously, Ukraine knows what’s going on, they knew where he was coming” after Geneva, he added, according to the newspaper.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov neither confirmed nor denied the meetings.

The US plan, originally made up of 28 points, would see Ukraine effectively cede its eastern Donetsk and Lugansk regions to Russia and slash the size of its military – demands that Kyiv has described as unacceptable.

– AFP

EU gives Germany free pass over defence spending

STRASBOURG, France – Germany will escape EU punishment for breaking the bloc’s budget rules because of a defence spending exemption, the European Commission said yesterday.

Germany’s public deficit is expected to be above three percent in 2025, but it will not be punished because it is “fully explained by the increase in defence spending”, the EU executive said.

Under the budget rules, a state’s debt must not go higher than 60 percent of national output, with a public deficit of no more than three percent.

But earlier this year, Brussels allowed states to splash out up to 1.5 percent of national output on defence for four years without fear.

Germany was among 16 states including Denmark and Poland to seek exemptions.

Berlin usually calls for budgetary discipline in the European Union but with Europe alleging greater threats from Russia and fears of the 27-nation bloc falling further behind China and the United States, it has itself pivoted on spending.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz this year relaxed strict debt rules and unleashed a spending blitz on infrastructure and defence

in a bid to revive the eurozone’s traditional powerhouse after two years of recession.

Now the commission said it expects Germany’s deficit – the shortfall between government revenue and spending – to reach 3.1 percent this year.

While Berlin was set to escape censure, Brussels said it will formally propose opening an excessive deficit procedure for Finland because its deficit is also higher than the rules allow, and it is only “partly explained by the increase in defence spending”.

The EU has already opened similar procedures against Austria, Belgium, France, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

Such action kickstarts a process forcing a country to negotiate a plan with Brussels to get their debt or deficit levels back on track.

Meanwhile, France is respecting the commitments it made to Brussels to reduce its high public deficit, the commission said, although it added its “assessment is surrounded by considerable uncertainty”.

France is under pressure to pass a spending bill by the end of the year to rein in its deficit and soaring debt, but efforts have been hampered by a political deadlock. – AFP, MPD

France arrests 4 more suspects over Louvre heist: prosecutor

PARIS – French authorities yesterday arrested four more people in the probe into last month’s spectacular daylight theft of imperial jewels from the Louvre museum, the top Paris prosecutor said.

“They are two men aged 38 and 39, and two women aged 31 and 40, all from the Paris region,” Laure Beccau said, following earlier charges against four others over the heist.

On October 19, a four-person gang raided the Louvre, the world’s most-visited art museum, in broad daylight, taking just seven minutes to steal jewellery worth an estimated US\$102 million before fleeing on scooters.

The thieves parked a moving truck with a ladder below the museum’s Apollo Gallery housing the French crown jewels, ascended in a bucket, broke a window and used angle grinders to cut into glass display booths containing the treasures.

The four already charged over

the theft include three men and a woman.

One of those men, a 37-year-old, was in a couple with the woman and they have children, Beccau said earlier this month.

The couple were arrested after their DNA was found in the basket lift used during the robbery.

The man’s criminal record contained 11 previous convictions, most of them for theft, she said.

The first two men arrested earlier were also known to the police for having committed thefts. Both lived in the northeastern Paris suburb of Aubervilliers.

The thieves dropped a diamond- and emerald-studded crown that once belonged to Empress Eugénie, the wife of Napoléon III, as they escaped.

But they made off with eight other items of jewellery including an emerald-and-diamond necklace that Napoléon I gave his second wife, Empress Marie-Louise.

The loot has still not been found.

The audacious heist made headlines worldwide and spotlighted museum security in France, which has seen a series of break-ins at cultural institutions.

France’s highest audit institution earlier in November said in a cutting report that the Louvre had prioritised rendering the museum more attractive, including by acquiring more artworks, at the expense of security.

The museum’s director has pledged more police and security cameras, acknowledging failings that led to the theft in an appearance before lawmakers.

Adding to its current woes, the Louvre last week announced the temporary closure of one of its galleries due to safety concerns over a ceiling.

The incident underlined the dilapidated state of some of the structures, as well as the challenges of welcoming millions of people every year in a historic building that mostly dates back to the Renaissance era. – AFP

US consumer confidence slumps to lowest in seven months

WASHINGTON – US consumer confidence declined sharply this month, reaching its lowest level since April as consumers grew gloomier about business and job market conditions – while also fretting about the outlook ahead.

The survey data released yesterday reflects American households’ concerns with stubbornly high costs of living as the labour market cools.

The Conference Board’s consumer confidence index dropped to 88.7 in November, down from October’s 95.5 reading and below analyst expectations.

“All five components of the overall index flagged or remained weak,” said The Conference Board’s chief economist Dana Peterson.

Consumers were “less sanguine” about their current situations, she added, and “notably more pessimistic about business conditions six months from now.”

“Mid-2026 expectations for labour market conditions remained decidedly negative, and expectations for increased household incomes shrunk dramatically,” Peterson said.

The issues that consumers cited in write-in responses covered inflation, tariffs and trade, as well

as politics, the report said.

While President Donald Trump has imposed wave after wave of tariffs this year, higher import costs take time to flow through to consumers.

There were increased mentions of the federal government shutdown, which lasted 43 days and ended only in mid-November, Tuesday’s report added.

The Conference Board said that consumers’ plans for buying big ticket items in the next half year declined in November, while they also pulled back on expected spending on services for this period. – AFP



Britain’s Prince William, Prince of Wales poses for a selfie with well-wishers during a visit to the beach at Colwyn Bay, Wales, yesterday. – AFP

Venezuela says US terrorist designation a ‘ridiculous lie’

CARACAS – Venezuela on Monday rejected the US terrorist designation of an alleged drug cartel on its territory as a “ridiculous lie” aimed at paving the way for an “illegitimate” military intervention.

A major US military build-up near Venezuela has led to speculation that President Donald Trump is planning to try to topple Venezuela’s Socialist leader Nicolás Maduro.

Washington accuses Maduro of heading an alleged Venezuelan drug cartel, “Cartel de los Soles” (“Cartel of the Suns”), which the United States on Monday designated a foreign terrorist organisation (FTO).

Venezuela’s foreign ministry on Monday rejected what it called “the new and ridiculous lie from Secretary of State Marco Rubio” which it said aimed “to justify an illegitimate and illegal intervention against Venezuela.”

Yesterday, the top US military officer, Dan Caine, visited the small Caribbean nation of Trinidad and Tobago, a US ally situated a few kilometres from Venezuela that recently hosted US troops for training exercises.

The US embassy said that the visit by the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff would focus on “countering illicit trafficking and transnational criminal organisations.”

The visit is part of a months-long campaign of maximum pressure on Maduro.

Maduro appeared at two public events on Monday without mentioning the designation, instead reiterating that Venezuela will remain triumphant.

“Whatever they do, wherever they do it, however they do it, they will not be able to defeat Venezuela. We are invincible,”



Venezuela’s Minister of Interior Relations, Justice and Peace, Diosdado Cabello, speaks during a press conference of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) in Caracas on Monday. Venezuela on Monday called the US designation of the alleged “Cartel of the Suns” as a terrorist organisation – which Washington links to Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro – a “ridiculous lie”. – AFP

Maduro said during his weekly television program.

The US has deployed the world’s largest aircraft carrier and other military forces to waters near Venezuela as part of a stated campaign to dismantle Latin American drug trafficking routes.

The Trump administration claims that the Cartel of the Suns is a drug trafficking syndicate run by Maduro and has issued a US\$50 million reward for the president’s capture.

But Venezuela and countries that support it insist no such organisation even exists.

Several Venezuela experts say what Washington calls the Cartel of the Suns refers to the corruption of senior officials by criminal gangs.

Flights cancelled

US forces have killed at least 83 people in strikes on boats accused of ferrying drugs from Latin America towards the United States since September, according to an AFP tally of publicly released figures.

No evidence has been made public that drugs were on board, and experts say the strikes are likely illegal even if the targets were proven to be drug traffickers.

The terrorism designation will give Washington legal cover for more pressure on the Venezuelan authorities.

The Trump administration has been vague about how far it is willing to go in Venezuela, but the huge military build-up and regular killings of people in small boats have rattled nerves – and prompted concerns in Washington that the US military may be breaking the law.

On Saturday, six airlines announced they were cancelling flights to Venezuela due to safety concerns.

The US Federal Aviation Administration on Friday urged civilian aircraft in Venezuelan airspace to “exercise caution” due to the “worsening security situation and heightened military activity in or around Venezuela.” – AFP

Bolivia’s drug czar says US DEA to soon return

LA PAZ – Bolivia’s drug czar, Ernesto Justiniano, told AFP last week that the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), expelled in 2008, will soon be present again in the South American country.

The US agency will return “very soon, because there is a political commitment, and that is the most important thing,” Justiniano said in an interview on Friday, calling cocaine production in Bolivia out of control.

Justiniano is part of the new administration of President Rodrigo Paz, a pro-business conservative who took office on November 8.

His government is aiming for a sharp political, economic, social and diplomatic shift away from policies implemented under leftist

presidents Evo Morales (2006-2019) and Luis Arce (2020-2025).

“International cooperation is fundamental,” Justiniano said in an interview with AFP. He called on neighbouring countries and Europe to help Bolivia.

“We will no longer be an isolated country, a country that is self-absorbed and acts solely out of political necessity.”

The eradication of coca leaves, the raw material for cocaine production, and the fight against drug cartels are central tasks the new government has set for itself.

According to United Nations data, Bolivia is the world’s third-largest producer of coca and cocaine, after Colombia and Peru. – AFP

Spanish govt proposes replacement for convicted top prosecutor

MADRID – Spain’s leftist government yesterday proposed a veteran prosecutor specialising in gender violence to replace the outgoing chief public prosecutor, convicted of leaking confidential legal information against the conservative opposition.

The forced resignation of Álvaro García Ortiz after last week’s conviction by the Supreme Court increased the pressure stemming from several legal affairs that have embarrassed the government, which appointed him in 2022 and consistently defended his innocence.

The government is now seeking to replace him with Teresa Peramato, a senior Supreme Court prosecutor with 35 years’ experience who played a leading role in a landmark 2004 gender violence law.

Peramato “is an absolutely suitable person to take on the challenges” facing the public prosecutor’s office and brings “a feminist commitment”, Justice Minister Félix Bolanos told a press conference announcing the proposal.

Her nomination must pass an examination by the judiciary’s governing body and an appearance

before parliament’s justice committee prior to her formal appointment by King Felipe VI.

The secretary general of the conservative opposition People’s Party (PP), Miguel Tellado, said Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez was using state institutions “to defend his government and personal circle from legal cases”.

The PP would treat Peramato’s appointment “with utmost caution”, Tellado told reporters in Madrid.

García Ortiz, the first serving chief public prosecutor to stand trial in Spanish history, formally tendered his resignation on Monday but will continue until a successor is appointed.

The Supreme Court is yet to publish the detailed reasoning for its ruling, which bans García Ortiz from his post for two years.

García Ortiz had always maintained his innocence, saying in his resignation letter that he “loyally served the institution to which I am honoured to belong”.

His conviction comes as corruption investigations into Sánchez’s wife, brother and former close allies dog the minority coalition. – AFP

Brazil court votes to uphold Bolsonaro jailing after ‘attempt to flee’

BRASÍLIA – Brazil’s Supreme Court on Monday voted to uphold the imprisonment of former president Jair Bolsonaro, who was detained over the weekend for tampering with his ankle monitor using a soldering iron.

Bolsonaro was taken into custody on Saturday from his home, where he had been under house arrest after a judge declared him a flight risk as he appeals a 27-year sentence for plotting a failed coup.

The far-right ex-president was convicted in September over a scheme to stop President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva from taking office after the 2022 elections, which included an alleged assassination plot against the leftist leader.

Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes ruled on Monday that Bolsonaro had “wilfully and

consciously violated the electronic monitoring equipment.”

The three other justices in the court’s first chamber also voted to uphold Bolsonaro’s detention, which became official when the virtual session ended at 8:00 p.m. (local time) on Monday.

Moraes reiterated that there had been “very serious indications of a possible attempt to flee” during a planned vigil organised by Bolsonaro’s son outside his home.

The judge pointed to the location of the nearby US embassy, and Bolsonaro’s close relationship with US President Donald Trump, suggesting he may have tried to escape to seek political asylum.

During a hearing on Sunday in Brasília, Bolsonaro stated he “experienced a certain paranoia between Friday and Saturday due to medication,” according to a

Supreme Court document obtained by AFP.

He also asserted “that he had no intention of fleeing and that there was no breakage of the bracelet’s strap.”

In a video made public by the court on Saturday, Bolsonaro gave a different version of events: he said 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.

His lawyers asked the court to reconsider the measure and return Bolsonaro to “humanitarian house arrest” due to his “state of mental confusion,” attributed to medications he is taking.

The Supreme Court already denied one appeal of Bolsonaro’s sentence. – AFP



European Council President Antonio Costa (front, right) looks on as Angola’s President João Laureço addresses the plenary during the second and last day of the Africa Union-European Union Summit in Luanda yesterday. – AFP

Inter's big game credentials in doubt ahead of Atletico clash



Terry Daley

MILAN - Inter Milan head into today's match at Atletico Madrid still reeling from a derby defeat to AC Milan and with doubts about their ability to handle big games under new coach Cristian Chivu.

Four wins out of four have given Inter a great chance of direct qualification for the last 16 of the Champions League but the trip to Spain is the first true test of their European credentials.

Inter's 100 percent record comes thanks to wins over Ajax, Slavia Prague, Union Saint-Gilloise and Kazakh minnows Kairat Almaty, but a much trickier run of fixtures awaits over the rest of the league phase.

After Atleti, Inter host Liverpool and Premier League leaders Arsenal before travelling to Borussia Dortmund in their final fixture.

Last season 16 points was enough to

secure a top-eight finish, meaning Inter will likely need to collect four points from those fixtures in order to avoid the play-offs.

But their record in high-profile matches under Chivu is worrying, with Sunday's defeat to Milan the latest in a key fixture.

Inter have also lost to Serie A title rivals Napoli and Juventus this season, with Chivu's new team already suffering four defeats in Italy's top flight.

"I see my players give their all in training and I can't point the finger, nor do I want to make any excuses. We are in this together and everyone is responsible, for the good and for the bad," said Chivu on Sunday.

Defeat to Milan was particularly galling as Inter twice struck the woodwork, while the normally reliable Hakan Calhanoglu fluffed his lines from the penalty spot.

"We all could have done better, we could have scored earlier, or dealt with the moments

of the match better. Now we have to get back on our feet," added Chivu.

Novice Chivu

Romanian Chivu, who won the treble with Inter under Jose Mourinho in 2010, was given one of the biggest jobs in European football just a handful of matches into his senior coaching career.

The 45-year-old saved Parma from relegation after replacing Fabio Pecchia in February, and although Inter's performances have belied his novice status he is yet to convince on the biggest stage.

Making Inter's task more difficult is the absence of key wing-back Denzel Dumfries, who along with Federico Dimarco on the left flank provide crucial width to attacks, as well as goal threat.

Dumfries has scored in two of Inter's Champions League fixtures but an ankle injury will keep the Dutch international out of action until next month.

That is a problem as Dumfries' usual substitute Matteo Darmian is still unavailable with a calf knock and Carlos Augusto, who deputises for Dimarco, did little on the opposite side of the pitch.

Atletico have been beaten by both Liverpool and Arsenal in the Champions League but are on a run of five straight wins in all competitions and are just four points behind La Liga leaders Real Madrid.

Juan Musso started in goal for Atletico in their 1-0 win at Getafe with usual number one Jan Oblak injured during international duty with Slovenia.

The Argentinian had virtually nothing to do on Sunday but Oblak's absence, and a knee injury keeping out Spain defender Robin Le Normand, could leave an opening for Inter to close in on the last 16.

The game will be played at 4 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time. — AFP/MPD



Arsenal hope for Odegaard return in Bayern showdown

LONDON — Mikel Arteta said Arsenal captain Martin Odegaard is in contention to return from injury for today's Champions League clash with Bayern Munich.

Odegaard has been out of action since October with a knee injury, but he is back in training ahead of Bayern's visit to the Emirates Stadium.

The Norway midfielder's presence in the starting line-up would be a significant boost for Arsenal as they look to make it five successive wins in the Champions League this season.

"He was very close for the previous game so we are hopeful that tomorrow (today) he can be in the squad," Arteta told reporters yesterday.

Arsenal and Bayern began this week as the top two in the Champions League table, with the Gunners hoping to step up their bid to reach the last 16 by defeating the German champions.

Arteta's side head into the eagerly-anticipated match basking in Sunday's 4-1 demolition of their north London rivals Tottenham in the Premier League.

"We have to make sure that we carry that energy tomorrow (today) again to the stadium, to each individual and play with the same dominance, aggression, and efficiency against a top side," Arteta said.

"This is the kind of game in the competition that we want to face and we've been very consistent."

Chasing a first English title since 2004, Arsenal are six points clear of second-placed Chelsea, who host the leaders on Sunday.

But before that summit meeting, Arteta knows Bayern pose a major threat to his team's 15-game unbeaten run in all competitions.

"Tomorrow is a great test for us to see where we are," he said.

"Every opponent brings different challenges. Obviously they are in a great moment.

"The level of consistency they show in results, performances, in every metric that they have is very, very impressive. We know that.

"But as well it's a massive opportunity for us to show what we are capable of."

Arsenal are yet to concede a goal in the Champions League this season, but full-back Jurrien Timber is well aware they face a huge task in stopping Bayern striker Harry Kane.

The England captain has scored 15 goals in 21 appearances against the Gunners, including one for Bayern at the Emirates in the first leg of their quarter-final in 2024.

Timber is relishing the challenge of shackling Kane on the former Tottenham star's return to north London.

"I think he's an amazing striker. Everyone knows that," the Dutchman said.

"He has so many qualities. He's been doing it for such a long time already and now at Bayern Munich, he's one of the best players in the world.

"So it's going to be a nice challenge for us as a team, and as defenders, to stop him tomorrow (today)."

The game will be played at 4 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time. — AFP/MPD

Liverpool's Dutch manager Arne Slot smiles during a press conference at Anfield in Liverpool, north-west England, yesterday, on the eve of their UEFA Champions League league phase football match against PSV Eindhoven. Slot admitted he feels "guilty" over Liverpool's "ridiculous" slump ahead of today's Champions League tie against PSV Eindhoven. Slot's side suffered an eighth defeat in their last 11 matches on Saturday when Nottingham Forest won 3-0 at Anfield in the Premier League.

The Reds were expected to dominate this term after following last season's Premier League title triumph with a summer spending spree on new signings.

Instead they have repeatedly been exposed defensively, while their midfield and forward play has been well below the standards set last seasons.

With Liverpool languishing 12th in the Premier League - the first time in more than a decade they have been in the bottom half of the table - it is likely that the Champions League represents a better chance of silverware.

— AFP



Real Madrid's Courtois, Huijsen out for Olympiacos Champions League trip

MADRID — Real Madrid duo Thibaut Courtois and Dean Huijsen will miss the Champions League trip to face Olympiacos today.

Belgian stopper Courtois "has been diagnosed with viral gastroenteritis" said Madrid in a statement yesterday ahead of the match in Athens.

Andriy Lunin is set to fill in for the record 15-time champions, who are seventh in the league phase table.

Huijsen was not included in the squad list for the game published by Madrid on Monday, with Spanish media reporting he suffered a minor muscular issue in the 2-2 La Liga draw at Elche on Sunday.

It leaves Madrid with just one fit natural centre-back available in Raul Asencio, as Eder Militao and Antonio Rudiger are sidelined as well.

However, defensive midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni returned to the squad after a leg injury and he has often featured at the heart of defence when required to in the past.

Madrid have failed to win any of their last three games across all competitions, including a 1-0 defeat by Liverpool in their previous Champions League match.

The game will be played at 4 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time. — AFP/MPD

Dembele could return for PSG against Spurs after latest injury lay-off

PARIS — Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele could make his latest comeback in an injury-stunted season when Paris Saint-

Germain face Tottenham Hotspur in the Champions League today.

"We will see tomorrow (today), but if he has no problems then he will be in the squad," coach Luis Enrique told reporters on the eve of the game in the French capital.

Dembele, 28, recently won the Ballon d'Or for his outstanding performances last season but he has started just five games so far for PSG in this campaign due to various fitness issues.

His last appearance was in the reigning European champions' 2-1 home loss to Bayern Munich three weeks ago, when he lasted only 25 minutes before coming off with a calf problem.

"Every time a player comes back from injury it is hard to know how to handle that and with Ousmane we will need to be even more careful than normal, although we do want him back," Luis Enrique added.

PSG, who won their first three outings in Europe's elite club competition this season before losing to Bayern, are already without star duo Desire Doue and African footballer of the year Achraf Hakimi for the meeting with Spurs.

The Parisians sit fifth in the 36-team standings with nine points, while Spurs are a point behind them in 10th - the top eight at the end of the league phase advance directly to the last 16, with the next 16 sides in the ranking going into a play-off round.

It will be the second meeting of the clubs this season - they also faced off in the UEFA Super Cup in the Italian city of Udine in August, when PSG came from two goals down to draw 2-2 before triumphing on penalties.

The game will be played at 4 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time. — AFP/MPD



Melbourne City's Andrew Nabbout (left) shoots on goal as Johor's Eddy Israilov slides in during the AFC Champions League match between Melbourne City and Malaysia's Johor Darul Ta'Zim in Melbourne yesterday. Melbourne won the game 2-0. — AFP

India, Pakistan to face off in group stage of T20 World Cup: ICC



MUMBAI — Bitter rivals India and Pakistan have been clubbed together in the same group and will play each other on February 15 in Colombo in the T20 World Cup, cricket's world body announced yesterday.

Defending champions India and Pakistan have been placed in Group A in the 20-team competition being co-hosted by Sri Lanka, according to the schedule released by the International Cricket Council in Mumbai.

It will be the first time the two teams play each other since their three heated contests at the 2025 Asia Cup in the UAE, where they skipped the customary handshake at the toss and post-match greetings.

The Asia Cup was the first time they had met since a deadly border conflict between the nuclear-armed neighbours in May.

The T20 World Cup will see Pakistan playing all their matches in Sri Lanka, part of a compromise deal that allows both India and Pakistan to play at neutral venues in multi-nation tournaments.

Matches in the tournament will be held from February 7 across five venues in India and three in Sri Lanka.

Cricket-made India, the world's most populous nation, is the

epicentre of the T20 game through its lucrative Indian Premier League (IPL), boasting top global stars.

The tournament will use the same format as 2024 - 20 teams in four groups, ahead of a Super Eights phase, with the top two finishers from each group making it to the playoffs.

The final will be played on March 8 either in Ahmedabad or Colombo, depending on whether Pakistan go all the way.

Newcomers Italy

India enter the sport's 10th edition of the showcase T20 tournament as reigning champions, having beaten South Africa by seven runs in 2024 in Barbados.

Indian fans are dreaming of seeing their men's team win a second time at home, after they clinched the 50-over World Cup in Mumbai in 2011.

India's women celebrated a watershed moment this month, when the team won their first World Cup crown, beating South Africa in the final at Mumbai.

Indian broadcaster JioHotstar said the viewing figures of the final on their app matched that of the men's T20 World Cup 2024 summit clash, a "staggering 185 million users", according to the ICC.

"It is wonderful to welcome the ICC Men's T20 World Cup back to the subcontinent so soon after a groundbreaking Women's Cricket World Cup," ICC chairman Jay Shah said.

"The passion for cricket in this region is unmatched, and fans have been waiting eagerly for another global spectacle."

Alongside hosts India and Sri Lanka, top finishers from the 2024 edition taking part are Australia, England, South Africa, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, United States and West Indies.

From Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe have qualified. From Europe, Ireland, the Netherlands and - for the first time - Italy are also playing.

Also included are Nepal, Oman and United Arab Emirates.

Ahmedabad, in the western state of Gujarat, is home to a 130,000-seater arena which is the world's biggest cricket stadium, named after Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The city is in prime position to host the 2030 Commonwealth Games, with a final announcement today.

India has its eyes on a bigger prize, having submitted a formal letter of intent last year to the International Olympic Committee to host the 2036 Summer Olympics. — AFP



South Africa's Tristan Stubbs plays a shot during the fourth day of the second Test cricket match against India at the Barsapara Cricket Stadium in Guwahati, India yesterday. South Africa had India tottering at 27-2 after setting the hosts a mammoth target of 549 in the second Test yesterday, moving to the brink of a first series win in the country for 25 years. South Africa declared on 260-5 in the final session on day four in Guwahati after Stubbs made 94. World Test champions South Africa lead the two-match series 1-0 and even a draw would seal their first series victory in India since 2000. — AFP

Sport in brief

Kyrgios to play Kooyong Classic in Australian Open sign Tennis

MELBOURNE — Nick Kyrgios signed up for the Kooyong Classic yesterday in a signal that the injury-wracked star is planning a competitive comeback at the Australian Open.

The mercurial Australian has not played on the ATP Tour since March and barely at all in three years after a series of career-threatening knee and wrist surgeries.

But the 30-year-old showman has added the three-day Kooyong Classic in Melbourne on January 13-15 to his schedule, a traditional hardcourt warm-up event for the Australian Open starting three days later.

World No.8 Lorenzo Musetti, the 11th-ranked Alexander Bublik and newly crowned Italian Davis Cup heroes Flavio Cobolli and Matteo Berrettini will also play.

Kyrgios has several other exhibition events lined up beforehand, including the 2025 World Tennis League in India in December and a hyped "Battle of the Sexes" showdown in Dubai against women's world No.1 Aryna Sabalenka.

Earlier this month, former Wimbledon finalist Kyrgios told reporters his long-term knee injury had suddenly improved, sparking hopes of a "miracle" comeback.

"It's not swelling. It's not feeling bad after a session," he said.

"I don't know whether to call it a miracle or anything, but my knee feels like it's gotten younger by a couple of years." — AFP

Kyrgios, who has slid to 666 in the world, would need a wildcard to play the Australian Open, but would almost certainly get one given his huge draw power. — AFP

Gymnastics great Whitlock ends retirement in quest for 2028 Olympics

LONDON — British gymnastics great Max Whitlock said Monday he plans to end his retirement in a bid to qualify for the 2028 Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

Whitlock, whose three Olympic gold medals - two on the pommel horse and one on the floor - make him Britain's most successful gymnast, appeared to have ended his celebrated career following the 2024 Paris Games.

But a failure to add his medal tally in France left Whitlock feeling unfulfilled.

"I was sitting in a station with my family in a cafe for a little bit [soon after Paris] and I said to them, 'I'm not done, I can't finish it like that'," Whitlock told *The Times*.

"It was the raw emotion of getting back to the UK and just feeling like I can't end it like that. Something just didn't feel right."

Whitlock, who will be 35 by the time of the next Olympics, is bidding to return to a GB gymnastics team boasting the likes of reigning floor world champion Jake Jarman, nine years his junior.

But he added: "Unfinished is the exact word. My career's just not complete. I thought, 'It's the right time for me to retire but it's not the right way'." — AFP

Lang, Trujillo Diaz win 2025 IOC Coaches Lifetime Achievement Awards



LAUSANNE — The International Olympic Committee (IOC) on Monday honored Chinese volleyball coach Lang Ping and Cuban wrestling coach Raul de Jesus Trujillo Diaz with the IOC Coaches Lifetime Achievement Awards.

The pair received the awards from IOC President Kirsty Coventry and Sergii Bubka, chair of the IOC Athletes' Entourage Commission.

"It's really special to be here with all of you and to celebrate our two coaches for their incredible commitment and their lifetime of work in serving their athletes to become the best athlete, but also the best humans that they can be," Coventry said.

Bubka noted that the selection panel received a record 152 nominations this year. "Lang Ping and Raul de Jesus Trujillo Diaz have not only served their sports

with great distinction, they have also made a profound impact beyond sport on their respective communities. Both hugely deserve this special honor," he said.

Lang helped China win women's volleyball gold at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics as a player and led China's women's team to Olympic gold as head coach at Rio 2016, becoming the first person in the sport to win the title as both athlete and coach.

She also guided teams to two Olympic silvers, with China at Atlanta 1996 and with the United States at Beijing 2008.

"Coaching is not always glamorous: when things go well, the spotlight is on the team; when things go wrong, it's usually on the coach. But with all of you, every step has been worth it," Lang said.

Lang, now vice president of the Chinese Volleyball Association,

grew emotional as she thanked former teammates, athletes and coaches across China, Italy and the United States. "This recognition belongs to all of them," she said.

Trujillo Diaz coached the national wrestling teams of Cuba and Portugal during five editions of the Olympic Games over a 52-year career.

Under his leadership, Mijain Lopez Nunez won five consecutive Olympic gold medals in men's super-heavyweight wrestling beginning in 2008, becoming the first athlete in any sport to do so in the same event.

"I am very honored to receive this extraordinary recognition," Trujillo Diaz said. "I would like to thank the IOC, all the athletes I have coached over the past 50 years, and United World Wrestling. A big thank-you to someone very special who has always been with me: my family, for their great support." — Xinhua

Former F1 driver Mick Schumacher joins IndyCar

Motor sport

WASHINGTON — Mick Schumacher, son of seven-time Formula One world champion Michael Schumacher, will drive in the full 2026 IndyCar season for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing, the team announced on Monday.

The younger Schumacher, a 26-year-old German racer, made 43 F1 starts in the 2021 and 2022 seasons for Haas with a best finish

of sixth and has driven in the World Endurance Championship for Alpine in 2024 and 2025.

Schumacher, who will drive the number 47 Honda for RLL in a nod to his family, joins American Graham Rahal and 2025 IndyCar Rookie of the Year Louis Foster of Britain in the team lineup for next season after first testing in an IndyCar last month.

"I'm delighted to confirm today that I will be competing in the

IndyCar Series next year," Mick Schumacher said.

"Having both an F1 and an endurance background, and having competed in various racing series over the years, I have insights and knowledge that I'm sure will contribute to a great partnership. RLL prepared me extremely well during testing already, and I am sure that we can build a lot together."

Differences in the US open-wheel series compared to F1

attracted Schumacher.

"I was also immediately excited about the car and the American way of motorsport, which comes across as being more about pure and direct racing, and it is precisely this aspect that I am very much looking forward to," he said.

"And of course, I'm curious about new experiences and always interested in broadening my horizons. For me, a new journey is beginning here and I'm excited for the season to start."

Schumacher will compete in his first oval races, with six ovals on the 17-race IndyCar schedule, including the feature Indianapolis 500 next May 24.

RLL co-owner Bobby Rahal said the team was excited to welcome Schumacher.

"We're thrilled he has chosen to join us and we can't wait to get to work," Rahal said.

The 2026 IndyCar season begins March 1 at St. Petersburg, Florida. — AFP

Ubisoft looks to flank players with generative AI ‘Teammates’

Kilian Fichou

MONTREUIL, France – Video gamers shouting into their microphones for backup from teammates have their calls answered by generative AI-powered players at a Paris lab, where French games giant Ubisoft is testing the technology for future titles.

“Pablo, Sofia, attack that enemy!” one team member in the screen-lined hall calls to computer-controlled allies as he pilots his character through a sci-fi base peopled with armed robots.

Ubisoft began working in late 2022 on integrating generative AI into games, weeks after ChatGPT stunned the world with its credible human-like text responses.

The global heavyweight – responsible for hit series like Assassin’s Creed and Rainbow Six – last year showed off what it called a “Neo NPC”, non-player characters* offering dynamic conversations rather than the usual bouquet of stock responses.

Its new “Teammates” project “will redefine how you interact,” said project chief Xavier Manzanares.

“It allows you to lead a squad of intelligent, proactive NPCs through dynamic combat scenarios where your voice is your greatest tool.”

More than 80 people are pitching in, ranging from game developers and script writers to AI experts.

Forging bonds

The team isn’t working on a new title of their own, but a technology that “we want to provide to as many internal teams as possible,” Manzanares said.

That could one day allow players to hold longer conversations with the contract targets ripped from the pages of history in “Assassin’s Creed”, or the gruff troopers in “Rainbow Six”.

Based on Google’s latest Gemini 3 large language model (LLM), “Teammates” allows users to ask their two allies to hit switches or shoot at enemies.

But the AI players, depicted in-game as humanoid robots, can also hold conversations, offer strategic advice or recount their fictional pasts.

To make sure the artificial buddies offer consistent responses,

they are given a so-called “character sheet” said Ubisoft narrative designer Anaïs Desfachelles – a term familiar to fans of roleplaying games on tabletop or computer.

The guidance on language style, tastes and other attributes means that “when the character improvises, it is still authentic,” she added.

“What we want is for the players to build a relationship with them. The more you are going to know them, the more they are going to open up to you.”

Remi Labory, AI and data chief on the “Teammates” project, says the team aims to “add a new level of depth” so far unseen in games.

The technology allows for the creation of “characters you have a special relationship with, because you’ve gone through certain experiences together.”

‘Mixed feelings’

Ubisoft is far from alone in integrating generative AI tools into its creative process, as many studios see the technology as an opening to aim higher, work faster or cut costs.

Bringing AI aboard is “as big a revolution for our industry as the

shift to 3D,” chief executive Yves Guillemot said last week while presenting Ubisoft’s earnings for the first half of its financial year.

But bosses’ appetite to bring in generative AI has been resisted by some players and developers, who fear that games risk becoming bland and derivative and that creative jobs will be slashed.

And while Guillemot insists the group has “everything [needed] to lead” in AI, Ubisoft is itself cutting jobs around the world as the gaming sector struggles through years-long doldrums.

The company was singled out by players this month after an AI-generated illustration was spotted in its strategy game “Anno 117: Pax Romana”.

The publisher said the AI artwork was a placeholder for a human-crafted piece and has since replaced it.

“Teammates” project narrative chief Virginie Mosser said she had “a mixed feeling” when asked to join the group, fearing that “AI will replace me”.

But she told AFP that her doubts had since been dispelled.

“We believe that there is room for creativity,” Mosser said. “We are not interested in character without personality, without a spark of soul” from human creators behind the AI.

As generative AI spreads through the industry, “things are shifting, it’s complicated,” project lead Manzanares acknowledged – while hoping that “Teammates” can “set an example” of how human creatives can collaborate successfully with AI. – AFP

* An NPC is any character in a video game that is not controlled by a human player. Instead, they are controlled by the game’s artificial intelligence (AI). – DeepSeek

Reggae icon Jimmy Cliff dies at 81

Ivan Shaw and Michael Mathes

KINGSTON, Jamaica – Jimmy Cliff, the iconic reggae star who helped transform the island’s rhythmic music into a global cultural phenomenon, has died, his wife said on Monday. He was 81.

The family announced the death in a post on Cliff’s official Instagram account, saying he “has crossed over due to a seizure followed by pneumonia.”

Over four decades, Cliff wrote and sang songs that fused reggae with his sensibilities for folk, soul, rhythm and blues, ska* and rock music, and addressed issues like politics, poverty, injustice and war protest.

The singer of hits like “You Can Get It If You Really Want,” “Many Rivers to Cross,” and “The Harder They Come,” Cliff is widely seen as reggae’s most influential figure after the late Bob Marley, with whom he collaborated early in Marley’s career.

Cliff built a major following, beginning with the wildly successful 1972 film “The Harder They Come,” which starred the charismatic musician as a rural young man navigating gangs and street life as he sought to break into Jamaica’s music business.

It drew in part from his own experiences growing up in poverty, and introduced him and reggae music to a global audience.

“The essence of my music is struggle,” Cliff said in 1986, according to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, which inducted him in 2010. “What gives it the icing is the hope of love.”

This line from “The Harder They Come” illustrates social justice as a theme of Cliff’s music: “But I’d rather be a free man in my grave, than living as a puppet or a slave.”

Cliff said at his induction ceremony that he actually “grew up listening to rock and roll music, outside of our indigenous music in Jamaica,” and that he drew inspiration from the greats, including Sam Cooke, Ray Charles and Jimi Hendrix.

“Music is about being inspired,” said Cliff, winner of two Grammy Awards for best reggae album – “Cliff Hanger” in 1985, and “Rebirth” in 2012.

‘Original reggae superstar’

In Jamaica on Monday, Cliff was remembered as a national hero.

“There is no way anybody can replace him. That’s a legend we are talking about,” said Roja Burma, who lives in the capital Kingston.

A man named Clinton, who declined to give his last name, said, “He’s a great loss to Jamaica and we’re going to miss him.”

Jimmy Cliff was born in July 1944 as James Chambers in western Jamaica’s Saint James Parish. After showing early promise as a singer, his father took him to Kingston at age 14 to pursue music.

By age 17 he was a local star, and soon moved to Britain, releasing recordings on the Island Records label throughout the late 1960s including “Vietnam.” Bob Dylan reportedly called it the best protest song he had ever heard.

Two decades of broad exposure followed. In addition to “The Harder They Come” film and soundtrack, he sang with the Rolling Stones, The Clash, and Annie Lennox.

He became a star in Latin America and Africa, and headlined international music festivals.

But he never reached the heights of Marley, the king of reggae.

“The first time I recorded an album,” Cliff told French newspaper

Le Monde, “I was paid one shilling. The Wailers [Marley’s band] were luckier than me at Studio One, they were paid £2 a week.”

Cliff enjoyed a new generation of fans when he recorded Johnny Nash’s “I Can See Clearly Now,” which featured in the popular 1993 film “Cool Runnings.”

After Cliff’s death was announced, Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness said the Caribbean nation was pausing to honour “a true cultural giant whose music carried the heart of our nation to the world.”

“His music lifted people through hard times, inspired generations, and helped to shape the global respect that Jamaican culture enjoys today,” Holness added.

The English reggae band UB40 paid tribute on X, expressing sadness at the death of the “music icon and original reggae superstar.”

“He finally crossed over the last river,” they posted. “RIP Jimmy, your music will live forever.” – AFP

*Ska is a music genre that originated in Jamaica in the late 1950s and is the direct precursor to rocksteady and reggae. It is characterized by a walking bass line, accented rhythms on the off-beat, and a strong horn section. – DeepSeek



Jamaican singer Jimmy Cliff performs during the Rototom Sunsplash festival in Benicàssim, Castelló Province, Spain, on August 16, 2014. – AFP

Germany’s Hollywood veteran Udo Kier dies at 81

LOS ANGELES – German actor Udo Kier, whose offbeat charisma made him a cult figure in both arthouse and Hollywood cinema, has died at 81 in California, US magazine Variety reported.

With a career spanning more than half a century, Kier appeared in hundreds of films – often stealing scenes with his unmistakable presence.

Kier first rose to fame in the 1970s with cult portrayals of Frankenstein and Dracula, working alongside Andy Warhol and Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

His pale features and theatrical intensity quickly set him apart in the independent and underground film world.

Kier once claimed to have eaten only salad leaves and drunk water for a week in a bid to rapidly lose 10 pounds (4.5 kg) for the Dracula role, spending time in a wheelchair due to weakness.

He also appeared in several films directed by Danish director Lars von Trier, including “Manderlay”, which tells the fictional story of a 1930s Alabama plantation that still practised slavery, as well as 2013 erotic art film “Nymphomaniac”.

But Kier was equally at home in mainstream cinema, appearing in a string of Hollywood titles including

“Ace Ventura: Pet Detective”, “Armageddon”, and “Blade”, often playing stylish villains, oddballs or otherworldly figures.

Born Udo Kierspe in Cologne in 1944 and rescued from the rubble after an Allied air raid hit the hospital, Kier grew up in the austerity of postwar Germany before moving to London aged 18 to study acting and English.

He shuttled across Europe and the United States over the course of his career before later settling in Los Angeles and then Palm Springs.

Known for his flamboyant personality and love of nightlife, Kier once quipped: “I liked the attention. That’s why I became an actor.”

He died in Palm Springs, reported Variety, quoting Kier’s partner, artist Delbert McBride. No cause of death was given. – AFP



German actor Udo Kier poses during a photocall for the film “Bacurau”, a surreal Weird Western, at the 72nd edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France, on May 16, 2019. – AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -1°C~8°C	Manila 24°C~31°C	New York 5°C~18°C	Lisbon 7°C~16°C
Shanghai 6°C~16°C	Bangkok 19°C~31°C	London 6°C~7°C	Rio de Janeiro 17°C~24°C
Hong Kong 14°C~22°C	Tokyo 5°C~18°C	Frankfurt -1°C~6°C	Luanda 23°C~29°C
Taipei 16°C~23°C	Singapore 24°C~32°C	Vancouver 7°C~10°C	Maputo 20°C~30°C
Guangzhou 11°C~23°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~31°C	Paris 1°C~8°C	Dili 23°C~32°C
Nanjing 5°C~17°C	Jakarta 23°C~34°C	Moscow 1°C~2°C	São Tomé 25°C~29°C
Guilin 8°C~21°C	Seoul 4°C~11°C	Las Vegas 8°C~20°C	Praia 21°C~30°C
Xi'an -1°C~14°C	Sydney 18°C~33°C	Monte Carlo 7°C~15°C	Bissau 19°C~33°C



United by cold

A fox and a hooded crow are pictured at the Tiergarten Park in Berlin, Germany, on Monday. Berlin saw its first snowfall of the winter season on Monday.

— Xinhua



Guard cat

A cat is pictured in Xizhou old town of Dali City, Yunnan Province, on Monday.

Wild things!

Head of the breeding programme Manuel Gaillard holds two Saint Bernard puppies during a press visit ahead of the inauguration of the Barryland museum and parc in Martigny, in the Swiss Alps, on June 26. Those tiny, fluffy dogs walking down the street may look cute, but beware: they probably have some wolf in them. That is the discovery announced by US scientists on Monday, who were surprised to find that nearly two thirds of all dog breeds have a detectable amount of wolf DNA. And it is not genetic leftovers from when dogs originally evolved from wolves around 20,000 years ago, but instead suggests that domesticated dogs and wild wolves have interbred within the last few thousand years.

— AFP



Fir tunnel

A woman uses her mobile phone as she rides an escalator through a tunnel of Christmas decorations at a shopping mall in Bangkok last Thursday.

— AFP



Bringing in the good

Dancers pose for a photograph prior to performing the traditional Gomira Mask Dance as part of the World Heritage Week celebration at the Victoria Memorial in Kolkata, India yesterday.

— AFP



Hello Kitty Christmas

People hold giant balloons shaped like cartoon characters during a Christmas parade in Santiago, Chile on Sunday.

— AFP