

# HK in mourning as Tai Po fire death toll climbs to 146

HONG KONG – Crowds of mourners gathered yesterday across Hong Kong including many near the apartment blocks that were engulfed in flames earlier this week, killing at least 146 people in the city's deadliest fire in decades.

Police as well as Hong Kong's anti-corruption watchdog have launched investigations into the blaze at Wang Fuk Court.

The first Sunday since the deadly inferno saw scores of mourners flock to a small park next to the charred residential estate, which has become a focal point for grief over what was the world's deadliest residential building fire since 1980.

The queue of people, many dressed in dark colours and holding flowers, stretched approximately two kilometres in the Tai Po neighbourhood, so that some mourners had to wait hours to pay their respects.

Police said yesterday that the death toll had risen to 146, up from 128 recorded the day before, as officers of the Disaster Victim Identification Unit broadened their search in the estate and recovered additional bodies.

"As of 4 p.m. the latest death toll stands at 146. We cannot rule out the possibility of further fatalities," Chief Superintendent Tsang Shuk-



Mourners yesterday leave flowers for the victims outside the Wang Fuk Court in the aftermath of Wednesday's deadly inferno in Hong Kong's Tai Po District. – AFP

yin of the police's casualty enquiry unit told a news conference.

The 18 additional bodies were found in flats, staircases, hallways and rooftops, police said, adding that the wrecked building interiors complicated the search.

Hong Kong officials have set up an interdepartmental task force to

look into the cause of the blaze.

The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) has arrested 11 people in connection to the fire, three of whom were also arrested by police for manslaughter.

Hong Kong media have widely reported, citing unnamed sources, that police have made one arrest for

alleged sedition in relation to the fire.

Police told the media on Saturday that it "will take actions according to actual circumstances and in accordance with the law".

The national security authorities said on Saturday they staunchly supported the Hong Kong government in punishing acts by anti-China

forces that "use disaster as pretext to cause chaos in Hong Kong".

Police said 54 of the 146 recovered bodies were yet to be identified. Officers were still trying to reach some 40 people who were reported to be missing.

Fourteen people injured in the fire remained hospitalised in critical condition yesterday, with another four in serious condition.

The Housing Department said it had surveyed six of the estate's eight apartment blocks and found "no immediate danger" to their overall structure.

Outside of the Tai Po neighbourhood, other parts of Hong Kong also saw events to mourn the fire victims, attended by many migrant domestic workers who have Sundays off.

Prayer events in the central business district and in Victoria Park drew more than 100 attendees each.

At least seven Indonesian nationals and one Philippine migrant worker had died in the fire, their respective consulates said separately on Saturday.

Hong Kong's Buildings Department has ordered temporary suspension of works on 30 private building projects across the city.

Hong Kong's three-day official mourning ends tonight.

– AFP, MPD

## HK police confirm safety of 159 residents previously reported missing after Tai Po blaze

HONG KONG – The Hong Kong police said yesterday its casualty enquiry unit has confirmed the safety of 159 residents previously reported missing after a major fire broke out in a residential complex on Wednesday.

Speaking at a press briefing, Tsang Shuk-yin, officer in charge of the casualty enquiry unit of the Hong Kong Police Force, said

that as of 4 p.m. yesterday, the death toll from the fire had risen to 146, with 79 people injured.

Presently, 100 cases have been classified as untraceable, due to reasons such as fragmented information, the individuals not residing in Wang Fuk Court, or informants lacking the missing persons' addresses, she said.

– Xinhua, MPD



Farmers water flowers at a floriculture base in Luancheng District of Shijiazhuang City, capital of Hebei Province, yesterday. Some 200,000 flower plants of various kinds bloom at the base currently, which will be supplied to the market after selection by the farmers. – Xinhua

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### Pope urges Lebanese to stay in their country despite difficulties

Pope Leo XIV yesterday called on the Lebanese people to embrace reconciliation and to remain in their divided, crisis-hit country, which has seen waves of emigration.

– Story on p. 10

### Trump officials host crucial Ukraine talks in Florida

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio kicked off high stakes talks with a Ukrainian delegation in Florida yesterday, as the United States pushes to end Russia's war against its neighbour.

– Story on p. 11

### Guinea-Bissau junta forms govt as ousted president lands in Brazzaville

Guinea-Bissau's junta formed a government on Saturday days after taking power in a coup, as ousted president Umaro Sissoco Embaló arrived in the Republic of Congo's capital Brazzaville.

– Story on p. 12



# Tai Po inferno sparks solidarity and triggers call for fire safety drive



Wednesday's deadly inferno in Hong Kong's Tai Po District has sparked a wave of empathy and solidarity, triggering a nationwide call for fire safety improvements.

I began editing Thursday's edition in our newsroom in the afternoon while watching the catastrophe live on TVB News Channel with some of my team members. Initially, we thought it was "just" another blaze affecting a few flats in one of the many high-rise residential buildings in Hong Kong. Of course, quicker than we would ever have thought, the blaze swiftly worsened into an inferno before our disbelieving eyes.

Our empathy for the probably huge number of victims was eerily perceptible in the newsroom. We remarked that a calamity like the one we were witnessing live on TV could have occurred in Macau or virtually anywhere in the world. Touch wood, our city has so far been spared such a deadly blaze. Britain's Grenfell Tower fire, a catastrophic and deadly inferno that occurred in London in 2017, is burned into my memory. In the early 1980s, when I was still working in Hong Kong, I remember media colleagues telling me about the Shek Kip Mei shanty town fire that, on December 25 (of all days) in 1953 (the year I was born), left 53,000 squatters homeless and ultimately launched the then British-ruled Chinese territory's multi-storey public housing programme.

In 1979, a huge fire gutted Macau's Lam Mau squatter area, leaving 3,000 people homeless. Ultimately, the catastrophe accelerated the local government's public housing construction. In 1989, a squatter area in Ilha Verde district killed two and rendered around 200 people homeless.

I believe that these kinds of incidents reaffirm the age-old phrase that something bad can ultimately result in something good, reflecting the common belief that negative experiences can lead to

positive outcomes. For instance, bad experiences can motivate us to make significant changes in our lives, leading to improvements that may not have occurred otherwise.

Of course, we could certainly do without disasters, but the harsh reality is that they happen more often than we would hope. That's why we need to learn from catastrophic events, particularly deadly ones, as quickly as possible to reduce their occurrence. However, we must always accept the reality that achieving absolute safety is merely a goal that is, in itself, unachievable in the world we live in. Adhering to realism as the foundation of reasonable thinking, only by learning from mistakes can we hope for future achievements. I hope that, before long, AI will be able to help us prevent and mitigate more catastrophes than our all-too-human brains have managed so far.

Most probably, the conflagration that killed at least 146 people in Tai Po was not a freak accident but was directly caused by human error—workers reportedly used highly flammable Styrofoam in conjunction with bamboo poles and construction mesh while renovating the external walls of eight residential towers located closely to each other.

Within just a few hours after the disaster, President Xi Jinping extended his condolences over the deadly fire, expressing sympathy to the bereaved families of the victims and those affected by the disaster. He also urged all-out efforts to extinguish the fire and minimise casualties and losses.

Later that fateful day, Macau Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai also conveyed his condolences to the families of the victims of the blaze, expressing his profound sorrow and grief. The local government later announced a 30-million-pataca donation to Hong Kong's fire relief effort.

Sam's message of condolences to Hong Kong took into consideration the historically fraternal bond between China's two Special Administrative Regions. Both cities, which returned to Chinese administration in 1997 and 1999 respectively, are part of the Greater Bay Area (GBA).

Thousands of Macau people live and work in Hong Kong – and vice versa. Some 70 percent of Macau's exports are shipped on Hong Kong and Hongkongers account for nearly one-quarter of Macau's visitor arrivals.

Moreover, much to my satisfaction, Sam urged all public entities during a meeting with his top officials at Government Headquarters on Friday to plan, organise, and implement citywide tasks of screening, identifying, and minimising major safety risks in various aspects of civil society, and to put the respective measures in place in the wake of the Tai Po inferno.

A timely meeting indeed!

I have lived for over four decades in both low-rise walk-ups and residential towers, in both Hong Kong and in Macau. No doubt, as the world's most densely populated territory—around 20,000 per km<sup>2</sup>—the risk of a fire affecting any of us is VERY REAL. I ought to add that, compared to three or four decades ago, the risk has been considerably reduced thanks to a range of measures, such as a better-equipped and organised fire service and improved public awareness of the need for fire safety—starting in one's own home, such as not leaving household appliances running when going out, even for a brief interval.

As a realist, I am also convinced that scaring people a little is possibly the most effective way to keep their fire risk awareness up and running.

According to Friday's local government statement, the ongoing public safety risk prevention and control efforts include extensive and frequent cross-departmental inspections of construction sites and

building renovation projects with bamboo scaffolding across the city.

Besides, the State Council Work Safety Committee in Beijing has issued a circular requesting inspections of the country's high-rise buildings to identify and remove major fire hazards, the Ministry of Emergency Management announced on Saturday.

That's the Central People's Government's prompt and speedy response to the Tai Po inferno.

Apart from declaring three days of mourning on Saturday, the Hong Kong government has pledged free housing to the survivors of the inferno until they are able to rebuild their homes. As of yesterday, 1,500 people had taken up the offer. Reportedly, about 1,900 households have been affected by the blaze.

Once again, the catastrophe has shown Hong Kong people's great empathy for their fellow residents and their willingness to help those in need, such as by donating a large amount of daily necessities, including clothing and food. Pets made homeless by the fire are being taken care of by volunteers.

Scores of mourners went to Tai Po yesterday to express their grief, sorrow, and solidarity. Many were in tears while praying for the victims. Hong Kong media reported yesterday that the line of mourners extended for about 2 km.

Moreover, apart from the Hong Kong government setting up a HK\$300 million fund to support the fire victims, private enterprises have donated over HK\$800 million.

Regrettably, some political activists pursuing ulterior motives are said to be keen to take advantage of the population's understandable distress over the fire's death toll and

destruction by trying to turn it into agitation against the Hong Kong and central governments, similar to the ill-fated "Umbrella Movement" of 2014.

This would betray people's genuine empathy for the victims and solidarity with their bereaved families. Let's hope the agitation will die in the bud.

Furthermore, despicable fraudsters are reported to have "diversified" their vile business by attempting to cheat those affected by the fire. They deserve to end up behind bars for as many years as the law allows.

No doubt, the cause of the fire needs to be thoroughly investigated, and those found responsible need to be punished according to the law. As is often the case, there are likely multiple causes for the disaster.

Fire safety regulations and precautions need to be upgraded as swiftly and effectively as possible. Anything bad that happens must teach us a lesson on how to avoid something like that happening to us again. That way, we can make good come from bad—a valid idea, in my view, expressed by the Chinese philosopher Laozi in his *Tao Te Ching* (published in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE) and the 14<sup>th</sup>-century Italian writer Giovanni Boccaccio in his *Il Decameron*.

Last but not least, we should all remember and honour the fireman who died while fighting the blaze and the several domestic helpers from Indonesia and the Philippines who perished in the fire, one of them saving a baby from certain death. I hope their families will be commensurately compensated, as will all others affected in one way or another by the inferno

—Harald Brüning

## Temperature in winter to be normal to high, rainfall to be normal to low: SMG

Ida Cheong

The Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) said in a statement on Friday that Macau's average temperature this winter, which means during the months of December to February, is forecast to be normal to above-normal, while accumulated precipitation for the season is expected to be normal to below-normal.

The statement said that this year's winter weather would be affected by the northern cold high-pressure area, pointing out that when a cold high-pressure system moves southward and forms a frontal boundary, the subsequent passage of the frontal boundary will bring cold and dry weather to Macau under the influence of the winter monsoon.

According to the observatory, the sea surface temperature in



This image provided by the Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) on Friday shows its weather forecast for this winter.

the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean continues to drop, leading to "La Niña"\* status. Comprehensive weather forecast data shows that "La Niña" status will be maintained throughout winter, the statement said. ■

\* *La Niña* (Spanish for "The Girl") is a climate pattern that is characterised by the cooling of ocean surface temperatures in the central and eastern Pacific Ocean.  
—Poe

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### Macau Weather

**MAINLY CLOUDY.  
A FEW LIGHT RAIN PATCHES.  
FORCE 2 TO 4 EAST TO  
NORTHEASTERLY WINDS.  
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL  
RANGE BETWEEN 60% AND 90%.**



**19°C~24°C**

Source: SMG



# 'Barra Slow Festival' aims to rediscover Macau's unique urban rhythm: organiser

Armando Neves

The three-day "Barra Slow Festival" concluded last night, and Macau Central and Southern Districts Industrial and Commercial Federation Chairman Lei Cheok Kuan stressed at Friday's opening ceremony that the event was focused on rediscovering Macau's unique urban rhythm.

According to a statement released during the opening ceremony, based on the concept of "Chill Out, Live Loud", the festival integrated contemporary popular cultural aspects with the aim of creating a curated holiday leisure experience.

The festival was held at the No.1 and No.2 Navy Yard and Outdoor Plaza in Barra ("Harbour Entrance")



Macau Central and Southern Districts Industrial and Commercial Federation Chairman Lei Cheok Kuan speaks to reporters at No.1 Navy Yard in Barra district on Friday.

— Photos: Armando Neves



Coffee aficionados flock to the Barra Slow Festival on Friday, its opening day, in the Outdoor Plaza in Barra.



Koloro Coffee owner Yudai and his partner pose at his booth on Friday.

district, organised by the federation.

Lei said that the festival brought together 135 booths, featuring diverse content such as a coffee market, an art and design exhibition, thematic lectures, and workshops. The festival gathered participants from Macau, other cities in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) and from outside Macau, namely China's Taiwan region and over a dozen foreign countries, including Japan, South Korea, Thailand, the UK and the US, Lei said.

Through the integration of community resources and cross-district collaboration, according to Lei, the festival aimed to rediscover Macau's unique urban rhythm, promote its cultural heritage and economic innovation, striving to create new community experiences that blend creativity with the aesthetics of slow living.

Kyosuke Hikage, founder of

Japan's Hikage Coffee, told the *Post* on Friday that the brand's core philosophy is to integrate the poetic essence of Japan's "four seasons" and "seasonal words" into its roasting process.

Each coffee corresponds to a specific seasonal flavour and narrative, creating a unique Japanese aesthetic experience, Hikage said. The brand also explores various fermentation techniques and adjusts flavours every day, based on customer feedback, he said.

The founder of Japan's Coffee Session, who preferred not to be named, told the *Post* on Friday that she gained deep exposure to Thai coffee-growing regions while studying in Thailand and now focuses on importing and roasting high-quality Thai single-origin specialty coffees. She said that she hopes to introduce Macau consumers to the clean, elegant, and herbally-nuanced

profile that defines Thai coffee.

On Friday, the founder of 3345MACAU, who identified herself as Olivia, told the *Post*, that her brand is a vinyl-record-themed café specialising in creative specialty coffee. She also said that her brand focuses on woody flavour profiles and presents two popular options for autumn and winter, such as a woody-scented "autumn" coffee centred around the aroma of geranium and sandalwood, and a creative "winter" beverage inspired by Irish coffee, combining whiskey, cinnamon, and hazelnut low-temperature slow-cooked spirits, showcasing rich layers of both cold and hot flavour transitions.

The founders of Japan's Days Coffee Roasters, Daisuke and Shirai, told the *Post* that their brand specialises in sourcing specialty coffee beans processed with innovative methods. They

also said on Friday that for the festival, they are proudly featuring a selection of distinctive products, including the very beans used in their award-winning competition of International Roasting.

"Through exceptional flavours and a dedication to masterful roasting, we aim to offer Macau consumers a coffee experience that breaks new ground," they said.

"Coffee flavours are as diverse and vibrant as colours," said Yudai, the founder of Koloro Coffee, on Friday. He told the *Post* that his brand was based in the countryside of Japan. He said that his brand aimed to use the opportunity of taking part in the festival to gauge Macau consumers' response to their coffee and "test the waters" in overseas markets. He also said he hopes to share the distinct taste of Nagano's specialty coffee with a broader international audience. ■

## Startups competition aims to foster China/PSC innovation

Ida Cheong

The fifth "929 Challenge" startups competition's grand final was held yesterday, aiming to foster innovation and cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs), as well as connect and inspire the next generation of entrepreneurs.

This year's competition set a new record involving over 1,600 participants of more than 400 teams and start-ups from nine countries. It provided total prize money of 300,000 patacas, along with opportunities to attract investments from Chinese mainland and PSC investors.

The competition's final was held at the Complex of Commerce and Trade Cooperation Platform for China and Portuguese-speaking Countries in Nam Van, aka Forum Macao Complex. Eight startup teams and eight university student teams from Brazil, the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, Mozambique and Portugal, as well as local teams reached the final.

Competition Judge Derek Chui Tin Yau told reporters on the sidelines of the event that the overall quality of the participating projects was more outstanding compared to previous years, with higher

maturity and broader industry coverage, such as biomedical fields (including medical devices and other subsectors) and clean technology, while SaaS\*-related projects, which were popular in previous years, have decreased, aligning with recent trends.

Chu added that the competition attracted investment teams from Macau and the Greater Bay Area (GBA), marking a significant accomplishment. Chou also said he hoped that the startups could

achieve meaningful exchanges through the platform and express willingness to return to Macau.

The startups competition was organised by the Permanent Secretariat of the Forum for Economic and Trade Co-operation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Macao).

The forum's Deputy Secretary General António Lei Chi Wai said in a speech that the competition provided a great platform to benefit startups and universities to explore markets,

test concepts, forge connections, and open doors that would otherwise be far more difficult to access.

According to a statement released by the organiser yesterday, among the about 400 project applications, PSCs became the most active group of participation, accounting for about 65 percent, with 170 startups from African Portuguese-speaking countries and Timor-Leste (East Timor) competing, marking a 73 percent increase compared to last year.

The world's nine PSCs consist of

Angola, Brazil, Cabo Verde (Cape Verde), Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, São Tomé and Príncipe and Timor-Leste, with a total population of nearly 300 million inhabitants. ■

\*SaaS (Software as a Service) is a method of software delivery and licensing where users access software applications over the internet (typically through a web browser) on a subscription basis, rather than buying and installing it on their own computers. —DeepSeek



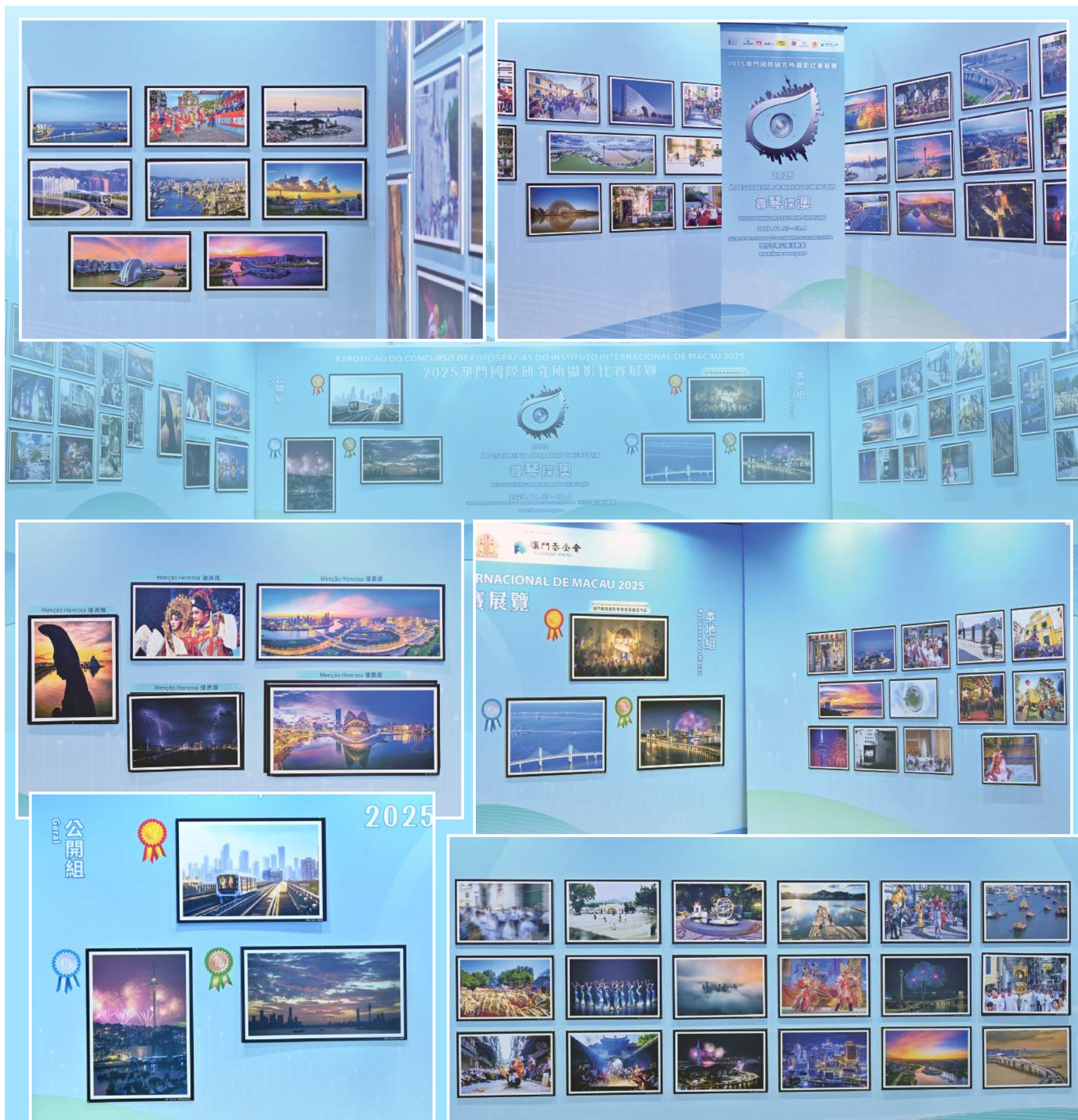
"929 Challenge" startups competition judge Derek Chui Tin Yau poses during an interview with reporters on the sidelines of yesterday's competition final at the Complex of Commerce and Trade Co-operation Platform for China and Portuguese-speaking Countries in Nam Van.



The forum's Deputy Secretary General António Lei Chi Wai (first row, fifth from left), fifth "929 Challenge" startups competition judge Derek Chui Tin Yau (second row, fifth from left) and other attendees pose for a group photo during yesterday's competition final at the Complex of the Commerce and Trade Co-operation Platform for China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (PSCs) in Nam Van.

— Photos: Ida Cheong





# Shutterbugs show Macau & Hengqin through their lenses

Rui Pastorin

Glimpses of life and places in Macau and Hengqin are being showcased through a variety of photos displayed at the Activity Room of Flower City Park (花城公園) in Taipa.

The indoor exhibition “Discovering Macau and Hengqin” kicked off on Thursday and features images from a recently held photography competition of the same name that gathered works taken between September 2024 and September 2025. It is hosted by the International Institute of Macau (IIM) and sponsored by the Macao Foundation.

Entering the venue, members of the public will find a wide selection of images, among which are lively events held in Macau and its culture, quiet moments of life, and creative shots of infrastructure, just to name a few. It sees visitors ranging from curious onlookers, photographers and photo enthusiasts to the many children enjoying their time in the park.

Displayed among all the works are the top three winning photographs in both the Macau Residents category and the Open category of the IIM-launched competition, along with five works that garnered honourable mentions.

The contest, according to an IIM statement on Thursday,

drew many participants from Macau and elsewhere, drawing over 200 entries. The competition’s aim, the statement said, is to foster understanding of Macau’s rich historical and cultural heritage, particularly among the youth, as well as encourage residents in the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin as well as Macau to discover the natural and cultural charm of Hengqin.

Members of the public may view the photographs until next Tuesday, December 9. Admission is free. Flower City Park, according to the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) website, is open daily from 6 a.m. to midnight, with one able to view the works during that time.

-Photos taken yesterday by Rui Pastorin



## IAM launches registration for eco-friendly burial intention

**Khalel Vallo**

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) launches a free “registration of intention of an environmentally friendly burial” service today, allowing residents to record their preferred end-of-life arrangements in advance, according to a statement by the bureau on Friday.

The bureau said that it aims to further promote eco-friendly burial options, adding that tree burial has been available since 2015, as well as garden burial since 2023, with over 600 applications received so far.

The statement noted that public acceptance of the alternative burials continues to rise, adding that the new registration mechanism aims to help residents clearly indicate their wishes before passing away.

Residents can visit IAM service locations in person to register, the statement said. After the procedure, the bureau will keep the registrant’s information and issue a registration card.

When the registrant’s family members apply for a death certificate or proceed to the bureau for burial arrangements, the staff will provide the recorded intention to assist them in following the departed’s preference, the statement noted.

Environmentally friendly burial allows ashes to be placed in memorial gardens, where they naturally decompose and return to the earth, the statement said, adding that this fulfils the wish of “returning to the roots” while allowing descendants to remember their loved ones in a peaceful natural environment.

The bureau encourages residents to plan ahead by registering their burial intention and making their preference explicit, the statement said, adding that enquiries can be made on 8294 2651 or the IAM website <https://www.iam.gov.mo/>. ■



**This poster provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau on Friday promotes its “registration of intention of environmentally friendly burial” service, starting today.**

## Macau receives 12.1 million hotel guests in Jan-Oct

**Staff Reporter**

Macau’s hotels received 12.1 million guests in the first 10 months of this year, a year-on-year increase of 0.4 percent, the Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC) has announced.

According to a DSEC statement on Friday, hotels’ average guestroom occupancy rate reached 89.3 percent in the ten-month period, up by 3.6 percentage points. The average length of stay for hotel guests remained at 1.7 nights.

In October, Macau’s 147 hotels recorded 1.2 million guests, a year-on-year growth of 3.0 percent. The number of available guestrooms rose by 3.4 percent year-on-year to 45,000.

Guests from the Chinese mainland (885,000; up by 1.6 percent) and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (140,000; down by 1.9 percent) accounted for 73.0 percent and 11.5 percent of the total number of hotel guests, respectively. Foreign guests increased by 20.8 percent year-on-year to 118,000, including 34,000 from South Korea, the local hotel sector’s main foreign guest segment.

According to a previous DSEC statement, in the first 10 months of this year, Macau’s number of visitor arrivals rose by 14.1 percent year-on-year to 33.1 million. Same-day visitors (19.38 million) and overnight visitors (13.76 million) grew by 24.1 percent and 2.4 percent, respectively. ■



**This photo taken on Friday shows a large inflatable Santa Claus displayed on the rooftop of Macau’s legendary Central Hotel on Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro. The 11-storey, 114-room hotel, opened in 1928 and reopened after renovation last year, features a rooftop promenade providing a view of Macau’s UNESCO World Heritage-listed historic city centre, including the Ruins of St Paul’s. – Photo: HB**

## Gongbei Customs seizes 374 endangered terrapins

**Armindo Neves**

Zhuhai’s Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers seized 374 endangered terrapins at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) on November 7.

According to the statement, on that day, at 5 p.m., customs officers at the cross-delta bridge Zhuhai Port (checkpoint) inbound passenger vehicle lane noticed an anomaly in the inspection images of a Guangdong-Hong Kong dual-plate vehicle.

Upon inspection, customs officers found that 374 live terrapins were hidden in 11 transparent mesh bags within the spare wheel compartment of the vehicle’s boot.

Upon examination, the 374 terrapins were identified as Kinosternon scorpioides, also known as scorpion mud turtle, red-cheeked mud turtle and red-headed mud turtle, which is listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Gongbei Customs stressed that, according to CITES, the Wildlife Protection Law of the People’s Republic of China, and the Regulations of the Import and Export of Endangered Wild Animals and Plants, it is illegal to carry endangered species or their products across the border without proper certificates, adding that serious violations may constitute a crime and carry criminal liability.

### Customs seizes 187 ornamental fish & 12 pet crabs

Meanwhile Zhuhai’s Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers seized 187 ornamental fish and 12 pet crabs at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao (HZMB) on October 15.

According to the statement, on that day, at around 3 p.m., customs



**This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai Gongbei Customs yesterday shows 374 terrapins seized by its officers at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) on November 7.**



**This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai Gongbei Customs yesterday shows ornamental fish and pet crabs in individual plastic bags, seized by its officers at the HZMB on October 15.**

officers at the HZMB Zhuhai Port (checkpoint) inbound passenger vehicle lane noticed an anomaly in the inspection images of a Guangdong-Hong Kong dual-plate vehicle.

Upon inspection, customs officers discovered a large quantity of transparent plastic bags filled with water in the vehicle’s boot. Each bag was secured at the opening with a rubber band and contained either a live ornamental fish or a live pet crab, exhibiting a variety of colours. Upon counting, the total seized amounted to 187 live ornamental

fish and 12 live pet crabs.

According to the appraisal conducted by the Gongbei Customs Technology Centre, the batch of ornamental fish and pet crabs included 18 species, such as the Red Sea Sailfin Tang (Zebrasoma xanthurum), Power Claw Crab, and Emerald Crab.

Gongbei Customs reminded the public that bringing live animals and plants into the country without approval is strictly prohibited. Those who violate these regulations will be held legally accountable by Customs authorities. ■

## Aviation regulator instructs Air Macau to implement Airbus software update

**Khalel Vallo**

The Civil Aviation Authority (AACM) announced in a Saturday statement that it had instructed Air Macau to implement a precautionary software update required by Airbus for its A320 aircraft.

According to the statement, Airbus notified the local aviation regulator on Friday of the need of a precautionary software update. The AACM immediately told Air Macau to assess the issue and follow the required procedures.

Air Macau, according to the statement, acted promptly on upgrading the necessary software updates to the relevant aircraft and made “appropriate re-scheduling arrangements to affected flights,” the statement said, adding that the measures aimed to minimise inconvenience to passengers.

According to an Air Macau



**This undated handout photo provided by the Civil Aviation Authority (AACM) on Saturday shows a pair of Air Macau aircraft parked at the local airport.**

statement on Saturday night, in response to the notification regarding the software upgrade for Airbus A320 aircraft, the software upgrade for the 12 affected planes had been completed by 8:30 p.m. on

that day, and flight operations have returned to normal.

AACM said in its statement that it will continue to monitor the matter to ensure the operational safety of local flight services. ■



# Govt to set up top-level leadership group for patriotic education: O Lam

Tony Wong

Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam has said that the local government will advance the high-quality development of its patriotic education campaigns in three major aspects, including the setting-up of a top-level leadership group for strengthening its patriotic education among young local people.

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

O underlined that the foundation of patriotic education in Macau has been solid for a long time. From the arduous and glorious struggles in modern Chinese history to the remarkable achievements in the new era, she said, the government believes that local students in general have gained a comprehensive understanding and deep appreciation.

At this new starting point, O said, the local government will now advance the high-quality development of its patriotic education campaigns for young local people in three major aspects.

First, O said, the local government aims to enable local students to gain a greater understanding of national stories and inspire their confidence and resonance.

O said that the government will tell Macau's stories to students well, namely Macau's development achievements, urban developments, and improvements in residents' well-being since its return to the motherland thanks to the implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, such as the extended implementation of the government's free education system and the inscription of the Historic Centre of Macau as an UNESCO World Heritage Site.

In terms of telling the nation's stories well, O said, the local government will revise the officially published history textbook for schoolchildren by adding the nation's latest major policies and initiatives such as the 20<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the Guangdong-Hong Kong-



Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam addresses Friday's Q&A session about her portfolio's 2026 policy guidelines in the Legislative Assembly's (AL) hemicycle. — Photo: GCS

Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), and the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

Second, O said, the local government will innovate its scenario-based patriotic education and enhance local students' practical experience.

O said that the local government will create a "walking classroom" for the students by leveraging Macau and the mainland's rich patriotic education resources. In addition to continuing to organise students' visits to Macau's youth patriotic education base located in Nape, O said, the local government will also organise students' visits to newly established patriotic education bases for young Hong Kong and Macau people in the mainland.

Moreover, O said, the local government's patriotic education campaigns will include elements of the nation's celebrations, commemorations, and traditional festivals more often, adding that in addition to National Day and May Fourth Youth Day, the patriotic education will also more often integrate elements of the Dragon Boat Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival, as well as the nation's beliefs and customs and local traditional folk festivals such as A-Ma and Drunken Dragon Festival.

Third, O said, the local government will strengthen its empowerment of private schools and community associations to get involved in its patriotic education campaigns, with the aim of creating a more diversified and coordinated patriotic education system.

In terms of top-level institutional design, O said, the local government will set up the Leadership Group for Youth Patriotic Education consisting of different public entities with the aim of further advancing its patriotic education campaigns.

O said that the government will strengthen its patriotic education training of school teachers and roll out measures to encourage community associations to devise and launch innovative activities promoting patriotic education.

## 'Tea-break' sessions to gather public opinion, São Lázaro district's revitalisation

Meanwhile, O also said that the government is planning to host "tea-break" sessions in different neighbourhoods regularly next year where bureau directors under her portfolio will directly engage in exchange and communication with residents to gather their opinions and answer their questions.

O said that the government was planning to host the sessions once every one to three months.

Meanwhile, O said that the government was planning to revitalise the district surrounding São Lázaro Church with the aim of creating an integrated cultural and creative zone there.

Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) President Deland Leong Wai Man noted during the Q&A session that São Lázaro District features the most extensive ensemble of extant old Western-style building complexes in Macau.

Meanwhile, Health Bureau (SSM) Director Alvis Lo Iek Long said during the session that the government would study the feasibility of setting up no-smoking zones in more outdoor public areas with dense pedestrian flows.

Lo also underlined that the government aims for the public Macao Union Hospital in Cotai to be able to shoulder 25 percent of the medical services provided by the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre in 2027, an increase from the current 10 percent. ■

# Govt proposes to set up 2 tech industrial parks



The two artist's renditions released by the government last week shows the two planned industrial parks on the Wai Long plot (top) and Zone E1.

Tony Wong

The government is proposing to set up two industrial parks, located separately from each other, for its planned Macau Science and Technology Research and Development Industrial Park project, namely the plot at the bottom of Big Taipa Hill, near the airport, previously earmarked for a sandwich-class housing project, and a plot on the Zone E1 land reclamation area off Taipa's Pac On district.

The planned Industrial Park is one of the local government's four future large-scale projects aiming to inject new impetus into Macau's long-term development, comprising the Macau International Integrated Tourism and Cultural Zone, the Macau Science and Technology Research and Development Industrial Park, the Macau International Aviation Hub for the Pearl River West Bank, and the Macau-Hengqin International University City.

The government started its process on Thursday last week to gather opinions from members of the public until December 26 about its proposal for the planned Macau Science and Technology Research and Development Industrial Park. The Industrial Park's planning and its ongoing public opinion collection process are being carried out by the Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED). The full version of the Industrial Park's plan, available in Chinese and Portuguese, can be downloaded from the dedicated website for the Industrial Park's planning ([https://www.dsed.gov.mo/zh\\_MO/web/public/pg\\_stipe](https://www.dsed.gov.mo/zh_MO/web/public/pg_stipe)). The government has scheduled

six sessions to gather opinions from attendees about its plan for the Industrial Park and answer their questions, comprising two sessions for members of the general public and four sessions for representatives from different segments and sectors of civil society.

The two sessions for the general public will be held on Wednesday this week and December 14 at the Services Platform Complex for Commercial and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (aka Forum Macao Complex).

The first two sessions for different segments and sectors of civil society were held on Thursday last week.

According to the plan released on Thursday, the first proposed park, located on Avenida Wai Long in Taipa, covers 83,000 square metres, while the second proposed park, on Zone E1, covers 177,000 square metres.

Zone E1, located between Friendship Bridge and Macau Bridge, is still largely undeveloped.

According to the plan, the government is proposing that buildings and other facilities to be constructed in the park on the Wai Long plot will have a gross construction area of 150,000 square metres in total, while those to be constructed in the park on Zone E1 will have a total gross construction area of 500,000 square metres.

The buildings to be constructed in the park on Zone E1, according to the plan, will include a complex used for research and development purposes with a gross construction area of 300,000 square metres. ■



The Macau European Chamber of Commerce (MECC) celebrated its 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the Macau Tower Ballroom in Sai Van on Friday. The reception was attended by Secretary for Economy and Finance Tai Kin Ip (seventh from right), Head of the EU Office to Hong Kong & Macao Harvey Rouse (fifth from right), Consul General of Portugal in Macau and Hong Kong Alexandre Leitão (seventh from left), MECC President of the Board of Directors Echo Chan Keng Hong (second from left). — Photo: Lesley Wells





The poster displayed on the façade of a Western pharmacy on Rua dos Mercadores promotes the government's 3-month "National Games Cohesion - Community Consumption Grand Prix" reward programme, which started on September 1 and ended yesterday. – Photo: Armindo Neves

## China's high-quality growth creates new opportunities for Portuguese-speaking countries: chamber head

### Interview

LISBON – China's transition towards high-quality development not only reflects its internal economic upgrading but also creates "a new platform of global cooperation," offering shared opportunities for Portuguese-speaking countries, a chamber head has said.

In a recent interview with Xinhua, Bernardo Mendia, secretary-general of the Portugal-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said China's stable economic growth in the third quarter shows that the world's second-largest economy "is consolidating its transformation while navigating successfully through a complex global environment."

"A stable China means a stable trading environment for us all. It is a reliable partner and a major engine for global growth," he said.

"China is clearly moving from quantity to quality, from being the 'world's factory' to becoming an innovation-driven, sustainable and consumption-based economy," he said, adding that the shift "means more sophisticated cooperation, better technology transfers and more predictable trade."

Mendia said Portugal sees China's transformation "not as a threat, but as a door open to mutually advantageous cooperation."

"Portugal, with its diplomatic tradition, global reach and strategic location, can benefit from this transformation if it acts proactively and with foresight," he said.

According to Mendia, China's focus on high-quality development has yielded visible results in renewable energy, new-energy vehicles, advanced manufacturing and digital services.

"China's ability to innovate and make green technology affordable is changing the rules of the game," enabling developing countries to decarbonize their economies, he said.

China's intensive investment in R&D, digitalization and automation is making production better and smarter, he said. Such transformation is not only reshaping China's own economy but also redefining its global partnerships, creating new fields of synergy for Portugal and other Lusophone countries, he added.

"Portugal and China are highly complementary partners in energy, agriculture and services," Mendia said.

He pointed to China's clean energy technology and industrial capacity, alongside Portugal and Brazil's renewable resources, as a foundation for joint solar and wind projects. He also cited China's advances in precision agriculture and biotech as key to boosting productivity in Brazil and Mozambique.

He said China's domestic rebalancing, such as a growing middle class and increased travel spending, will also create opportunities for tourism and service sectors. Portugal, with its language advantage, serves as a gateway for Chinese companies that want to expand into the EU, Africa and Latin America, he added.

In October, at the fourth plenary session of the 20<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, participants deliberated over and adopted the Recommendations of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China for Formulating the 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development.

Mendia underlined the importance for Portuguese decision-makers to understand China's policy direction.

Seizing new opportunities arising from China's long-term vision "is not just an academic exercise, but a strategic necessity," he said.

– Xinhua

## Christmas Creative Market takes place at Albergue SCM

### Rui Pastorin

With the holidays fast approaching, the "Christmas Creative Market" brought the Christmas spirit early with a free admission event at Albergue SCM\* yesterday.

The annual one-day event, which ran from 11 a.m. through 5 p.m., was organised by Amigos do Pátio do Espinho de Macau\*\* (APEM, 澳門茨林園之友聯誼會) in conjunction with the Associação de Confraternização dos Amigos de Sam Pa Mun de Macau\*\*\* (澳門三巴門之友聯誼會).

Featuring several booths presenting a variety of products ranging from handmade crafts, books and toys to snacks and drinks, fairgoers browsed and shopped, while Christmas-themed workshops were also on offer for families. Christmas-themed decorations, meanwhile, covered much of the venue.

Aside from the products sold, the event featured both musical and dance performances throughout the day for fairgoers and passers-by.

In all, an event poster noted that there were 21 participating entities. A statement on the event organiser's Instagram page stated that proceeds from the market will be used to buy daily supplies and donate them to elderly homes, orphanages, animal groups and seniors living alone, and vegetarian meal deliveries to the elderly. ■

\*Albergue is Portuguese for "hospice". SCM stands for Santa Casa da Misericórdia ("Holy House of Mercy"), Macau's oldest charitable organisation.



Revellers, including lots of kids, visit the one-day Christmas Creative Market at Albergue SCM yesterday. – Photos: Rui Pastorin

\*\*The association's name is directly translated as "Friends of Macau's Pátio do Espinho". The patio near one of Macau's two Na Tcha temples refers to Macau's previously walled 400-year-old

village known as Chi Lam Vai (茨林園) in Cantonese.

\*\*\*In English, the association's name is directly translated as "Association of Fellowship of Friends of Sam Pa Mun of Macau".

## From quantity to quality – China's trillion-yuan auto plan

BEIJING – China is steering its massive auto sector toward a future defined by precision alignment, targeting intelligent connected vehicles (ICVs) as a primary engine to generate 1 trillion yuan in consumption by 2027.

Under a new plan to boost domestic demand, China has identified ICVs as one of three priority sectors – each expected to reach the trillion-yuan scale – destined for rapid expansion.

The plan explicitly calls for the enhanced adaptability of supply and demand to unleash consumption potential, urging manufacturers to move beyond sheer volume to products that match evolving consumer needs precisely.

To unlock this potential, the roadmap calls for supply-demand adaptation: creating some 100 signature products and innovative enterprises, rolling out pilot scenarios for new technologies, and expanding new energy vehicle sales to rural markets.

Vice Minister of Industry and Information Technology Xie Yuansheng framed the pivot as a transition from quantity to quality – a shift from simply producing more

to producing better – to ensure a high-quality supply meets diverse consumer needs.

The policy push comes as the market crosses a historic threshold. New energy vehicles accounted for 51.6 percent of all new car sales in October 2025, constituting the majority of sales for the first time. This surge tracks with production, which skyrocketed from roughly 1.4 million units in 2020 to over 13 million in 2024.

As the market matures, consumer preferences are becoming increasingly diversified. Families are driving demand for spacious, multi-purpose vehicles, while younger buyers now view cars as mobile living spaces defined by voice interaction and smart cockpits. Simultaneously, a booming outdoor segment is fueling sales of electric off-road vehicles, some of which are capable of climbing steep slopes or offer a combined range of 1,000 kilometers.

This diversification is underpinned by a mature supply chain and falling costs. Official data shows over 60 percent of new passenger vehicles sold now feature Level 2 driver assistance systems. Ownership

economics have also improved, with battery cell costs dropping by 30 percent and charging speeds more than tripling in recent years.

Domestic manufacturers are already executing this precision strategy. Leapmotor is targeting the personalized youth market with its Lafa5, a compact electric coupe priced at the 100,000-yuan level. Zeekr is focusing on safety by integrating artificial intelligence algorithms and dozens of sensors into its 9X model, while Nio continues to expand its energy services network with over 8,400 battery-swap and charging stations globally.

To fully unlock the sector's potential, authorities are looking beyond new car sales. The Ministry of Commerce has pledged efforts to expand the used car market and aftermarket services, including rentals and RV camping.

"The path forward relies on deepening the industrial application of intelligent connected technologies," said Fu Bingfeng, executive vice president and secretary-general of the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers. "Using innovative supply to unlock broader market potential is key." – Xinhua



# Thousands protest in Philippines against flood control fraud

Pam Castro

MANILA - Thousands marched in the Philippine capital yesterday, demanding jail time for scores of officials, lawmakers and construction firm owners accused of pocketing billions of taxpayer dollars in a sweeping corruption scandal.

Rage over so-called ghost flood-control projects has been mounting for months in the archipelago country of 116 million, where entire towns have been buried in floodwaters driven by powerful typhoons in recent months.

President Ferdinand Marcos has seen friend and foe alike, including a congressman cousin, swept up in the scandal since he made the widespread fraud the centrepiece of a July national address.

Yesterday, marchers faced with barbed wire-wrapped barricades blocking their route to the presidential palace chanted "Police! Protectors of the corrupt!" as riot police pounded



Protesters carrying an effigy of Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos march towards Malacañang palace during an anti-corruption rally in Manila yesterday. – AFP

on their shields in response.

The protesters, who had gathered earlier at Manila's Luneta Park, carried a large effigy that merged Marcos and his chief political rival, Vice President Sara Duterte, into a

two-headed crocodile representing corruption.

About 10 kilometres away, another group of demonstrators called for corrupt officials to be "put in jail now" as they marched along

the thoroughfare known as EDSA, site of the People Power Movement that helped oust Marcos's father from power in 1986.

According to official crowd-size estimates, fewer than 10,000 people took to the streets, while more than 17,000 police officers were deployed.

The first arrests in connection with the scandal - eight members of the country's Department of Public Works and Highways - were announced just days ago, with the government promising that "big fish are coming soon".

Mervin Toquero of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines told AFP he was dissatisfied.

"It's impossible that that corruption happened without the knowledge of the higher officials," the 54-year-old said at Luneta. "[They] must be accountable too."

"There [are] people who died because of the corruption that

is happening," 20-year-old drag performer Jessie Wanaluvmi J told AFP before her scheduled performance.

Azon Tobiano, 68, who took her granddaughter with her, said she had travelled to the park after seeing a call to action on social media.

"I really hope that justice will be served. I hope the president will be resolute to put in jail those accountable, whether it's his relatives or senators," she said.

The Philippines has a long history of scandals involving public funds, in which high-ranking politicians found guilty of corruption have typically escaped serious jail time.

At the EDSA gathering, 23-year-old Cuitlauzina Cerbito told AFP the issues were "systemic".

"In order to change these things, it can't be one person doing actions. It has to be all of us together," she said. – AFP

## Tropical storm Koto kills at least 3 in Vietnam

HANOI – Tropical storm Koto killed three people and left another missing as it approached Vietnam, authorities said yesterday, as strong winds and high seas buffeted vessels off the country's flood-hit central coast.

Heavy rains have lashed Vietnam's middle belt in recent weeks, flooding historic sites and popular holiday destinations and causing hundreds of millions of dollars in damage.

Authorities ordered boats to shore and diverted dozens of flights as Koto whipped up huge waves and dangerous winds, state media reported.

Two vessels sank in the rough seas, a fishing boat in Khanh

Hoa province and a smaller raft in Lam Dong, according to the environment ministry. It said a total of three people were killed and authorities were still searching for a fourth.

Koto was more than 300 kilometres offshore yesterday morning, having been downgraded from a typhoon to a tropical storm.

Vietnam's weather bureau said it was moving slowly and expected to weaken further before colliding with the coast next week.

It forecast rains of up to 150 millimetres tomorrow and Wednesday from Hue to Khanh Hoa – regions that have only just

recovered from historic floods.

Vietnam is in one of the most active tropical cyclone regions on Earth and is typically affected by 10 typhoons or storms a year, but Koto is the 15<sup>th</sup> of 2025.

Natural disasters have left more than 400 people dead or missing this year in Vietnam and caused more than US\$3 billion in damage, according to the national statistics office.

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

– AFP

## Indonesia, Thailand race to find missing as flooding toll tops 600

PADANG – Indonesian and Thai authorities raced yesterday to clear debris and find hundreds of missing people as the death toll from devastating floods and landslides across Southeast Asia topped 600.

Heavy monsoon rain overwhelmed swaths of Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia this week, leaving thousands of people stranded without shelter or critical supplies.

At least two areas of Indonesia's worst-affected Sumatra island were still unreachable yesterday, and authorities said they had deployed two warships from Jakarta to deliver aid.

Central Tapanuli and Sibolga city "require full attention due to being isolated", National Disaster agency head Suharyanto said in a statement, adding that the ships were expected in Sibolga today.

The death toll in Indonesia rose to 442, while 402 were still missing, according to a tally published yesterday by the disaster authority.

It said at least 646 people had been injured.

In Sungai Nyalo village, about 100 kilometres from West Sumatra's capital Padang, floodwaters had mostly receded yesterday, leaving homes, vehicles and crops coated in thick grey mud.

Authorities had not yet begun clearing roads, residents told AFP, and no outside assistance had arrived.

"Most villagers chose to stay; they didn't want to leave their houses behind," said Idris, 55, who, like many Indonesians, goes by one name.

Across the island towards the north coast, an endangered Sumatran elephant lay buried in thick mud and debris near damaged buildings in Meureudu town.

### Public criticism

In Thailand, where at least 162 people were killed in one of the worst floods in a decade, authorities continued to deliver aid and clear the damage.

Relief measures rolled out by the Thai government include compensation of up to two million baht (US\$62,000) for households that lost family members.

However, there has been growing public criticism of Thailand's flood response, and two local officials have been suspended over their alleged failures.

Two people were killed in Malaysia after floods left stretches of northern Perlis state underwater.

The annual monsoon season, typically between June and September, often brings heavy rain, triggering landslides and flash floods.

A tropical storm has exacerbated conditions, and the tolls in Indonesia and Thailand rank among the highest in floods in those countries in recent years.

Climate change has affected storm patterns, including the duration and intensity of the season, leading to heavier rainfall, flash flooding and stronger wind gusts.

– AFP

## ICC rejects release for Duterte

THE HAGUE – The International Criminal Court on Friday rejected a request by former Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte to be released from detention ahead of his trial on crimes against humanity during his war on drugs.

Presiding judge Luz del Carmen Ibanez Carranza told a hearing that lawyers for the 80-year-old had not laid out strong enough precautions to warrant a temporary release from custody in The Hague, where the court is based.

Duterte's lawyers, appealing against an earlier refusal, had called for a "humanitarian" parole because of the state of his health.

The judge said "the conditions for release proposed were not sufficient to mitigate the risks it found in relation to Mr Duterte's interim release".

The court also "rejected the defence's argument that Mr Duterte should be released for humanitarian reasons".

Duterte, who was president from 2016 to 2022, was detained in Manila on March 11 and taken to the ICC prison at Scheveningen, near The Hague. He appeared very weak, barely speaking, when he made his first court appearance by video.

The charges against Duterte have been made over the campaign against drug traffickers and consumers during

his presidency that rights groups say left thousands dead.

The court is still to give a ruling on whether Duterte is fit to stand trial. A ruling in October rejected claims by his defence that the ICC was not competent to judge Duterte on three charges of crimes against humanity.

One charge concerns 19 murders committed between 2013 and 2016, when Duterte was mayor of Davao City. A second relates to 14 killings of alleged drug bosses in 2016 and 2017, when he was president. The third covers 43 killings of suspected low-level drug users or dealers.

The Philippines government "respects" the court ruling, a spokeswoman for President Ferdinand Marcos told reporters in Manila. Duterte's daughter Sara Duterte is a vice president.

Rights activists welcomed the latest legal blow to Duterte.

The families of some of those who died in Duterte's campaign watched the hearing by video at a Manila university campus. They erupted in cheers and applause when the decision was announced.

"We really prayed for [Duterte] not to be granted an interim release," Dahlia Cuartero, whose late son Jesus would have turned 33 on Saturday, told AFP. "This is the best birthday gift for him," she said. – AFP



Relatives of the victims of extrajudicial killings react after they watch the live streaming of the hearing on the appeal ruling on the provisional release of former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, who is accused of crimes against humanity, in Quezon City, Metro Manila on Friday. – AFP



## Kim vows 'strategic assets' for air force

SEOUL — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un announced the country's air force will be equipped with "new strategic military assets", state media said yesterday.

Kim made the announcement at an event marking the 80th anniversary of the North Korean air force on Friday, accompanied by his daughter Ju Ae, who is understood to be his recognised successor.

"The Air Force will be given new strategic military assets and entrusted with a new important duty," he said in a speech without elaborating, according to state news agency KCNA.

"The Air Force should resolutely repulse and control all sorts of espionage acts and possible military provocations of the enemies," he added.

State media photos showed Kim and his daughter watching what appeared to be jets

performing manoeuvres in the sky.

Pyongyang has not responded to offers by South Korea for talks aimed at avoiding accidental military clashes along the two countries' shared border.

Seoul proposed this month that the two sides hold military talks to discuss the so-called Military Demarcation Line, citing repeated incursions by North Korean troops.

Last Monday, South Korean President Lee Jae Myung said Pyongyang had taken "extreme actions" by installing triple layers of barbed-wire fences along the border.

"We have now reached a situation where we do not know when an accidental clash may occur," Lee warned.

"All lines of connection have been cut. They are refusing all dialogue and contact. It is a very dangerous state," he said. — AFP

## Death toll from Sri Lanka floods, landslides rises to 334: disaster agency

**Amal Jayasinghe**

COLOMBO — The death toll from floods and landslides triggered by Cyclone Ditwah rose sharply to 334 yesterday, Sri Lanka's disaster agency said with many more still missing.

It is the worst natural disaster to hit the island in two decades, and officials said the extent of damage in the worst-affected central region was only just being revealed as relief workers cleared roads blocked by fallen trees and mudslides.

The Disaster Management Centre (DMC) said the death toll had risen to 334, up from 212 earlier yesterday, with nearly 400 missing and more than 1.3 million people across the island affected by the record rain.

The losses and damage are the worst since the devastating 2004 Asian tsunami that killed around 31,000 people and left more than a million homeless.

Rain had subsided across Sri Lanka but low-lying areas of the capital were flooded yesterday and authorities were bracing for a major relief operation.

A Bell 112 helicopter carrying food for patients stranded at a hospital just north of Colombo crashed into a river yesterday evening. An Air Force spokesman told AFP all five crew members were rescued and taken to a nearby hospital.

Another helicopter sent from India rescued 24 people yesterday, including a pregnant woman and a man in a wheelchair, marooned in the central town of Kotmale, about 90 kilometres northeast of Colombo.

Pakistan was also sending rescue teams, the Sri Lankan Air Force said, while Japan will also send a team to assess Sri Lanka's immediate needs and has pledged assistance.

The air force said two infants and a 10-year-old child had also



Army personnel ride a military truck as people wade along a flooded road after heavy rainfall in Wellampitiya on the outskirts of Colombo, Sri Lanka yesterday. — AFP

been rescued from a hospital in the northern town of Chilaw, which was submerged on Saturday.

Authorities said flood levels in the capital would take at least a day to recede, while dry weather was also forecast. Cyclone Ditwah moved north towards India on Saturday.

### 'Completely flooded'

Selvi, 46, a resident of the Colombo suburb of Wennawatte, left her flooded home yesterday, carrying four bags of clothes and valuables.

"My house is completely flooded. I don't know where to go, but I hope there is some safe shelter where I can take my family," she told AFP.

Receding water levels in the town of Manampitiya, 250 kilometres northeast of Colombo, revealed massive destruction.

"Manampitiya is a flood-prone town, but I have never seen such a volume of water," said 72-year-old resident S. Sivanandan.

He told the local News Centre portal that businesses and property had been extensively damaged. A

car had flipped upside down in front of his shop, he said.

A woman in central Wellawaya said she heard a loud noise and went outside to see boulders rolling down a mountainside before stopping near her home.

"I saw trees falling and moving with the boulders. We are afraid to go back to our homes," she told reporters after moving to a shelter on safer ground.

### Deadliest in years

The National Blood Transfusion Service said supplies were short even though there have been relatively few injuries.

The National Building Research Organisation, which monitors the stability of hills, said there was a high risk of further landslides because mountain slopes were still saturated with rainwater.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake declared a state of emergency on Saturday to deal with the aftermath of the cyclone and appealed for international aid.

The worst flooding since the turn of the century occurred in June 2003, when 254 people were killed. — AFP



Volunteers light candles during an awareness campaign event organised on the eve of 'World AIDS Day' in Kathmandu, Nepal yesterday. — AFP

## Pakistan rejects UN warning over lifetime immunity for military chief

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan dismissed yesterday a warning by the UN rights chief of potential "far-reaching consequences" for the rule of law in granting the head of the all-powerful military legal immunity.

The foreign ministry said Pakistan was "fully committed to protecting... basic freedoms and the rule of law as enshrined in the constitution", responding to criticism from UN rights chief Volker Turk.

A constitutional amendment approved by parliament earlier this month, shielding Field Marshal Asim Munir and other top officials from prosecution for life, has raised alarm among rights group.

The change also created a new Federal Constitutional Court, stripping the Supreme Court of some of its powers and tightening oversight of judges.

"These changes, taken

together, risk subjugating the judiciary to political interference and executive control," Turk said in a statement on Friday.

He warned of a risk of "far-reaching consequences for the principles of democracy and rule of law which the Pakistani people hold dear".

In its statement yesterday, the foreign ministry in Islamabad called the remarks "baseless" and said "it is regrettable that Pakistan's views and ground realities were not reflected".

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

Widely seen as Pakistan's most powerful institution, the military has governed the country for nearly half its existence via a series of coups since independence in 1947. — AFP

## Court clears S Korean worker of stealing 73-cent snacks

SEOUL — A worker accused of "stealing" snacks worth less than a dollar in South Korea has finally been acquitted after a legal battle lasting nearly two years.

The logistics firm he was working for had filed a claim against him last year for taking a Choco Pie — a popular South Korean snack — and a mini custard worth 1,050 won (US73 cents) from an office fridge last year.

Deeming the offence minor, prosecutors had filed a summary indictment, but the driver insisted he was innocent and requested a formal trial.

A court found him guilty and fined him 50,000 won — around fifty times the value of what he had eaten.

But the worker immediately appealed, and finally won the legal challenge.

"The defendant was acquitted," an official from the Jeonju District Court told AFP Friday.

The company had argued that unlike its staff, subcontracted workers like the accused were not allowed to open the refrigerator without permission.

But the appellate court said in its final ruling that the drivers were in fact told "they could eat snacks in the office, and the security employees ate snacks during night shifts."

With 39 other subcontracted workers offering statements that they also ate snack from the fridge, the appellate court ruled that "it

is difficult to conclude that the defendant had the intent to steal."

The defendant's lawyer told reporters after the ruling the driver "felt deeply ashamed that it led to a trial," as "he was simply hungry in the early morning and ate a Choco Pie."

"There were various ups and downs along the way, but I am very grateful for this outcome, and I believe the defendant feels the same," said the defendant's lawyer.

The case has sparked public outcry in South Korea, with labour unions comparing the worker to Jean Valjean, the protagonist of French classic novel "Les Misérables" jailed for stealing bread to feed his siblings. — AFP



# Pope urges Lebanese to stay in their country despite difficulties

BEIRUT – Pope Leo XIV yesterday called on the Lebanese people to embrace reconciliation and to remain in their divided, crisis-hit country, which has seen waves of emigration.

Arriving from Turkey on his first international trip, the American pope brought a message of peace for the country, while also urging its leaders to put themselves fully “at the service of your people”.

Lebanon has been mired in a years-long economic collapse, and many in the country also fear a return to war after a recent conflict between Israel and the militant group Hezbollah.

“There are times when it is easier to flee, or simply more convenient to move elsewhere. It takes real courage and foresight to stay or return to one’s own country,” Leo told officials, diplomats and civil society representatives in a speech given at Lebanon’s presidential palace.

He also urged Lebanese people, whose nation is plagued by deep sectarian and political divisions, to take up the “path of reconciliation” during his remarks, which were met with applause.

Leo emphasised the need for peace, using the word more than 20 times during the address, without mentioning any specific



Pope Leo XIV (second from left) meets with Lebanon's President Joseph Aoun (third from left), his wife Nehmat Aoun (left) and family members at the presidential palace in Baabda, east of the capital Beirut, yesterday. – AFP

international or regional conflicts, including the war between Hezbollah and Israel.

“Here, as in other parts of the world, uncertainty, violence, poverty and many other threats are leading to an exodus of young people and families seeking a future elsewhere, even though it is very painful to

leave one’s homeland,” Leo said.

Successive crises, including the catastrophic 2020 Beirut port blast, have pushed many young Lebanese to emigrate, including many Christians.

Beirut-based consultancy firm Information International has estimated that 800,000 Lebanese

emigrated between 2012 and 2024, most of them young.

No official figures on emigration are available, but Lebanon’s total population numbers around six million.

## Resilience

Urging reconciliation, Leo noted that “there are personal and

collective wounds that take many years, sometimes entire generations, to heal”.

“If we do not work, for example, to heal memories, to bring together those who have suffered wrongs and injustice, it is difficult to journey towards peace,” he said.

No real reconciliation process was undertaken following Lebanon’s 1975-1990 civil war, and the latest conflict between Israel and Hezbollah has deepened divisions.

The pope also paid tribute to the Lebanese people’s resilience.

“You are a people who do not give up, but in the face of trials, always know how to rise again with courage,” he said, urging the country’s leaders to place themselves “with commitment and dedication at the service of your people”.

Speaking before Leo, Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said that “safeguarding Lebanon” – a unique model of coexistence among different religious communities – “is a duty for humanity”.

“If this model disappears, nowhere else can replace it,” Aoun said.

“Tell the world about us: we will not die, we will not leave, we will not despair, we will not give up.”

– AFP

## Nigeria gang kidnaps 14, including bride & bridesmaids

MINNA, Nigeria – Armed men have kidnapped 13 women and a baby in an overnight raid in northeastern Nigeria, the latest in a string of mass abductions to rock the west African country.

A bride and 10 of her bridesmaids were among those abducted in the night of Saturday to yesterday from the village of Chacho in Sokoto State, a resident told AFP.

In recent weeks, attackers have kidnapped hundreds of people across Nigeria, which has struggled to respond to the threat posed both by jihadist groups and criminal gangs known locally as “bandits”.

The unrest has heaped pressure on the Nigerian government, with President Bola Tinubu declaring a nationwide emergency on Wednesday.

US President Donald Trump has threatened military intervention in Africa’s most populous country over what he calls the killing of Christians by radical Islamists.

“Bandits stormed our village last night and kidnapped 14 persons, including a bride and 10 bridesmaids from a house in Zango neighbourhood,” Aliyu Abdullahi, a resident of Chacho village, told AFP.

In this region of Nigeria, it is traditional for young brides to spend their first night of married life with their bridesmaids in their new home, with the husband only settling in later.

A baby, the baby’s mother and another woman were also taken, Abdullahi added.

Abductions became more widespread in Nigeria after the jihadist group Boko Haram kidnapped 276 teenage girls in Chibok, in the northeast, sparking an international outcry.

Besides radical Islamists, bandit gangs have also sown violence across swathes of northwest and central Nigeria, where they



Deacons pray at the Saint Michael's Cathedral during the Sunday service in Minna yesterday, as the congregation prayed for the safe return of the abducted students of Saint Mary's Catholic School earlier this month. – AFP

carry out kidnappings for ransom, attack villages, kill their inhabitants and burn houses after looting them.

According to Abdullahi, Chacho had already been targeted in October by bandits, who kidnapped 13 people.

“We had to pay ransom to secure the freedom. Now, we are faced with the same situation,” he told AFP over the phone.

A Nigerian intelligence report seen by AFP confirmed the attack.

“Sokoto witnessed a notable uptick in bandit-initiated abductions in November, culminating in the highest number of such attacks in the past year,” the report found.

It suggested deals struck by neighbouring states in the hopes of getting the bandits to agree to stop their activities may be partly responsible for the uptick.

Security experts have often criticised these agreements, arguing they allow gangs to entrench themselves in their hideouts while continuing their raids elsewhere.

“As a result, some bandits may be moving into areas with less military pressure. This shift can lead to more mass kidnappings in places like Sokoto, leading to an increase in mass kidnap-for-ransom attacks,” the report added.

– AFP

## Pope reiterates support for two-state solution for Israel, Palestinians

ABOARD THE PAPAL PLANE – Pope Leo XIV said yesterday that a two-state solution was the only one likely to resolve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

Flying from Istanbul to Beirut during his first foreign trip since his election in May, the pope continued the tradition of his predecessors by speaking to reporters aboard the papal plane.

“The Holy See has publicly backed the proposal for a two-state solution for several years. We all know that Israel still does not accept it, but we consider it the only solution likely to resolve the current conflict,” he said during a brief exchange.

He said he discussed the issue on Thursday in Ankara with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan “who fully supports this proposal”.

“Turkey has an important role to play in this process,” the pontiff added.

The Holy See has recognised the State of Palestine since 2015.

Since his election in May, the pope has expressed his solidarity with the “martyred land” of Gaza and denounced the forced displacement of Palestinians.

Yesterday, he said the Vatican maintained “friendly” relations with Israel and had offered its services as a mediator.

– AFP



## Afghan suspect in Washington shooting likely radicalised in US: security official

WASHINGTON – The Afghan suspect in the shooting of two National Guard members in Washington may have been radicalised after entering the US, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said when questioned about his motive on Sunday talk shows.

Rahmanullah Lakanwal, 29, faces a first-degree murder charge in the November 26 shooting that left a 20-year-old guardsman dead and another critically wounded.

“I will say we believe he was radicalised since he’s been here in this country,” Noem said on NBC’s “Meet the Press.”

“We do believe it was through connections in his home community and state, and we’re going to continue to talk to those who interacted with him, who were his family members, who talk to them,” said Noem during a separate interview on ABC.

Lakanwal entered the United States in 2021 as part of a massive airlift by then-president Joe Biden’s administration during the US military withdrawal and subsequent return to power of Taliban forces.

A resident of the western US state of Washington, Lakanwal

allegedly drove cross-country to carry out the shooting a few blocks from the White House -- an attack that shocked Americans on the eve of the Thanksgiving holiday.

Officials from President Donald Trump’s administration, which reportedly granted Lakanwal US asylum in April 2025, have blamed Biden’s administration for lax vetting during the Afghan airlift.

Noem told ABC’s “This Week” that Lakanwal was “maybe vetted” after entering the United States but said it was “not done well.”

“Crooked Joe Biden, Mayorkas, and so-called ‘Border Czar’ Kamala Harris really screwed our Country by letting anyone and everyone come in totally unchecked and unvetted!” Trump said in a post on his Truth Social platform Sunday.

Officials said that before coming to the United States, Lakanwal had served in a CIA-backed Afghan “partner force” unit fighting the Taliban.

US government officials have since suspended visas for all Afghan nationals and frozen decisions in all asylum cases. – AFP

## OPEC+ reaffirms planned pause on oil output hikes until March

VIENNA – OPEC nations and oil-producing allies reaffirmed yesterday plans to keep current oil output levels unchanged until March, and agreed a mechanism to assess members’ maximum production capacity, without giving any details.

The announcements were made after ministers of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allied nations (OPEC+) held a string of virtual meetings, including the alliance’s biannual ministerial meeting.

The meetings came as uncertainty remained over how oil prices will develop in the near future, with traders looking for indications of progress in ongoing negotiations on resolving the conflict in Ukraine, which could lead to the return of Russian crude to markets.

Citing expected lower seasonal demand, OPEC+ countries said they would stick to a planned pause on oil output hikes “in January, February, and March 2026” following a small production increase in December, according to a statement.

The OPEC+ alliance also said it approved a mechanism to assess members’ maximum production capacity “to be used as reference for the 2027 production baselines”.

According to Kpler analyst Homayoun Falakshahi, some members have argued that “current allocations no longer reflect investment levels, geology,

or technical potential” of their oil production.

“The group only managed to agree on a mechanism to assess production capacities next year, a clear indication of unresolved tensions,” Jorge Leon of Rystad Energy told AFP.

Since April, eight key OPEC+ members have boosted production in an effort to regain market share amid strong competition from producers outside the group, such as the United States, Canada and Guyana.

But early November they agreed to a pause in further hikes amid fears of a supply glut.

Geopolitical uncertainties including ongoing negotiations on Russia’s war in Ukraine have also put pressure on oil prices as well as producers.

“Russia and Ukraine are locked in delicate peace negotiations that could reshape the oil markets, while tensions between the US and Venezuela have escalated sharply,” said Leon.

An easing of tensions in the war between Russia and Ukraine would reduce the geopolitical risk premium that is driving up crude prices, while a deadlock in the negotiations would shift the focus of producers back to US sanctions against Russian oil giants Lukoil and Rosneft.

The next OPEC+ ministerial meeting is set for June 7, 2026. – AFP

## Trump officials host crucial Ukraine talks in Florida



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio (left) speaks during a meeting with Ukrainian officials headed by Rustem Umerov (second from right) in Hallandale Beach, Florida yesterday. – AFP

HALLANDALE BEACH, Florida – US Secretary of State Marco Rubio kicked off high stakes talks with a Ukrainian delegation in Florida yesterday, as the United States pushes to end Russia’s war against its neighbour.

The talks come as Kyiv faces mounting military and political pressure, and they precede a visit next week to Moscow by President Donald Trump’s envoy Steve Witkoff, who is expected to discuss Ukraine diplomacy.

“This is not just about peace deals. It’s about creating a pathway forward that leaves Ukraine sovereign, independent and prosperous,” Rubio said at the start of the negotiations.

Witkoff and Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner were also attending the meeting in Hallandale Beach, north of Miami.

The Ukrainian delegation was being led by security council secretary Rustem Umerov.

“We are discussing about the future of Ukraine, about the security of Ukraine, about no repetition of aggression of Ukraine, about prosperity of Ukraine, about how to rebuild Ukraine,” Umerov said as the talks kicked off.

The US talks come amid turbulence for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and his government – a blockbuster corruption probe forced him to sack his chief of staff and top negotiator, Andriy Yermak, on Friday.

In a separate post on the

platform X, Umerov said he was in “constant contact” with Zelensky as the meeting progressed.

“We have clear directives and priorities: safeguarding Ukrainian interests, ensuring substantive dialogue, and advancing on the basis of the progress achieved in Geneva,” Umerov wrote on X.

“We are working to secure real peace for Ukraine and reliable, long-term security guarantees. The delegation will report to the President of Ukraine following the conclusion of today’s meetings.”

### Flurry of diplomacy

Washington has put forward a plan to end the nearly four-year conflict, and is seeking to finalise it with Moscow and Kyiv’s approval.

An initial 28-point proposal – drafted without input from Ukraine’s European allies – would have seen Kyiv withdraw from its eastern Donetsk region and the United States de facto recognise the Donetsk, Crimea and Lugansk regions as Russian.

The United States pared back the original draft following criticism from Kyiv and Europe, but the current contents remain unclear.

After the Florida negotiations, French President Emmanuel Macron is set to host Zelensky for talks in Paris today.

Separately this week, Rubio is set to skip a meeting of NATO foreign ministers despite allies’ concerns about the US plan for Ukraine. However, Witkoff is expected in Moscow to

discuss Ukraine diplomacy.

The flurry of diplomacy comes as the war shows no sign of easing.

### Russian oil terminal hit

Ahead of the Florida talks, Russia’s forces targeted Ukraine’s capital and the region for two nights in a row as they advance on the front line.

A drone attack in the outskirts of Kyiv killed one person and wounded 11 on Saturday night, the regional governor said.

Hours earlier, a Ukrainian security source said Kyiv was responsible for attacks on two oil tankers in the Black Sea that it believed were covertly transporting sanctioned Russian oil.

One of Russia’s largest oil terminals halted operations on Saturday following an attack by sea drones.

The Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC), a group that includes US oil majors Chevron and ExxonMobil and which owns the terminal, called the strike a “terrorist attack”.

Ukraine, which did not comment on the incident, regularly targets Russian energy facilities in a bid to sap the country’s war chest as the conflict grinds through its fourth year.

The CPC pipeline, which begins in Kazakhstan and ends at the terminal, is a major conduit for Kazakh oil and one of the world’s largest by volume, handling around one percent of global supplies.

– AFP

## Long-lost Rubens ‘masterpiece’ sells for US\$3.4 million

VERSAILLES, France – A long-lost painting by 17<sup>th</sup>-century Flemish master Peter Paul Rubens sold at auction in France yesterday for 2.94 million euros (US\$3.41 million) – well beyond its asking price.

The work, of Jesus Christ on the cross and painted in 1613, was unearthed by auctioneer Jean-Pierre Osenat in a Paris mansion last year.

Osenat, whose auction house sold the painting for 2.94 million euros against an expected 1-2 million euros, found the painting as he was preparing the property to be sold.

He told AFP earlier this year the picture was “a masterpiece” which

was painted by Rubens when he was “at the height of his talent”.

The auction house said in its promotional material that very little was known of the painting – only that a peer of Rubens had made an engraving of it.

Later historians described this engraving and, despite having never seen the painting, catalogued its existence.

It was bought by 19<sup>th</sup>-century French academic painter William-Adolphe Bouguereau and passed down through his family, according to the auction house.

The painting was authenticated

by German art historian Nils Buttner, known for his research on the master of the Flemish Baroque, Osenat said.

Its provenance was certified through methods including X-ray imaging and pigment analysis, he added.

“It’s the very beginning of Baroque painting, depicting a crucified Christ, isolated, luminous and standing out vividly against a dark and threatening sky,” he said.

Although Rubens produced many works for the Church, the painting, measuring 105.5 by 72.5 centimetres, was likely to have been created for a private collector. – AFP



# Guinea-Bissau junta forms govt as ousted president lands in Brazzaville



Newly elected members of the Guinea Bissau transitional government stand under the portrait of late Bissau-Guinean president Manuel Serifo Nhamadjo during a swearing-in ceremony at the Presidential Palace in Bissau on Saturday.

– AFP

BISSAU – Guinea-Bissau’s junta formed a government on Saturday days after taking power in a coup, as ousted president Umaro Sissoco Embaló arrived in the Republic of Congo’s capital Brazzaville.

The military took control of the Portuguese-speaking nation on Wednesday – a day before the provisional results of national elections were due to be announced – and Embaló had initially left for neighbouring Senegal.

On Saturday the junta tapped 28 people, including five army officers and four women, to lead the drug-trafficking hotspot.

Elsewhere in the capital Bissau, the west African country’s leading opposition party said its headquarters had been “invaded” by a “heavily armed militia”, while clashes broke out between young people and police in the suburbs.

The true motives for the coup in Guinea-Bissau remain unclear, with speculation in some quarters that it was carried out with Embaló’s blessing.

Those suspicions intensified when the junta named General Horta N’Tam, considered a close ally of the president, to head a transitional administration set to last a year.

After invoking a plot by drug barons to sow chaos in Guinea-Bissau to justify Wednesday’s coup, N’Tam urged the new government on Saturday to “fight against corruption and drug trafficking”.

The opposition and some experts however have suggested

that Embaló, in power since 2020, orchestrated the takeover to halt the electoral process.

## Flight of the president

After being briefly arrested on Wednesday, Embaló left the country for Senegal on a flight chartered by the Senegalese government.

On Saturday, according to sources in the Congolese government who spoke to AFP, Embaló landed in the capital of the Republic of Congo, a country he has visited many times.

“Embaló arrived in Brazzaville late in the morning on a private jet,” a source close to the Congolese government said on condition of anonymity.

A presidency source said Embaló, who had claimed victory in the election, intended to remain in the country, which is also known as Congo-Brazzaville.

Embaló, 53, is rumoured to be close to Congolese President Denis Sassou Nguesso.

Back in Guinea-Bissau, the powerful opposition African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), said its headquarters had been “illegally invaded by heavily armed militia groups” in Bissau.

According to a PAIGC statement, the fighters “proceeded to expel all the people who were there, break down office doors and seriously violate the integrity of the facilities”.

Elsewhere in the capital on Saturday, minor clashes broke out between young people and law enforcement officers in a suburb not

far from the headquarters of Fernando Dias, who ran against Embaló.

Dias claimed in comments to AFP on Thursday that he had won the election in the first round, accusing Embaló of having orchestrated the coup.

He has since gone into hiding inside the country.

## ‘Narco-state’

Some political researchers say a high-level turf war to control illegal drug smuggling networks may have also played a part in Guinea-Bissau’s instability.

Crippling poverty, chaotic administration and political tumult have made Guinea-Bissau a fertile ground for corruption and drug smuggling.

It is a key transit point for Latin American cocaine destined for Europe to the point that some analysts have dubbed it a “narco-state”.

Some observers suspect senior politicians and military brass of being involved in the illicit hard drugs trade.

Sandwiched between Senegal and Guinea, Guinea-Bissau had already undergone four coups and a host of attempted takeovers since its independence from Portugal in 1974, after an over decadelong war of liberation.

Among the world’s poorest countries, it has now joined the likes of Burkina Faso, Mali, Madagascar, Niger and Sudan on the list of states suspended from the African Union (AU) following coups.

– AFP

# Trump ramps up Venezuela threats, warns airspace ‘closed’

PALM BEACH, United States – US President Donald Trump sharply escalated his threats against Venezuela on Saturday with an ominous warning that the country’s airspace should be considered “closed,” raising fears of imminent military action.

Caracas, which views a large US military buildup in the Caribbean as a pressure campaign to oust President Nicolás Maduro, slammed Trump’s warning as a “colonialist threat.”

“To all Airlines, Pilots, Drug Dealers, and Human Traffickers,” Trump wrote on social media, “please consider THE AIRSPACE ABOVE AND SURROUNDING VENEZUELA TO BE CLOSED IN ITS ENTIRETY.”

He did not elaborate, but after months of deadly US strikes on alleged drug-running boats, speculation is mounting that Washington may launch some sort of military operation on Venezuelan soil.

Trump’s warning comes days after US aviation regulators told airlines to use increased caution near Venezuela over the mounting tensions, prompting multiple major carriers to suspend flights.

Maduro’s government then issued a ban on the airlines for “joining the actions of state terrorism promoted by the United States government.”

A statement by the Venezuelan foreign ministry called the US president’s latest remarks a “new extravagant, illegal, and unjustified aggression against the people of Venezuela.”

It warned that the airspace disruptions would also mean a halt to repatriation flights of Venezuelan migrants from the United States, a key Trump administration initiative.

Venezuela’s military on Saturday also conducted exercises along coastal areas, with video broadcast on state TV showing antiaircraft weapons and other artillery being maneuvered.

## ‘By land’

Though Trump has not publicly threatened to use force to remove Maduro, he said this week that efforts to halt Venezuelan drug trafficking “by land” would begin “very soon.”

Maduro’s re-election last year was widely rejected by the international community as fraudulent, while Washington also claims the leftist leader heads an alleged terrorist-designated drug cartel.

A steady buildup of US naval and air assets in the region has seen the world’s largest aircraft carrier move to the Caribbean, while American fighter jets and bombers have repeatedly flown off the Venezuelan coast in recent days.

US media reported that, despite the bellicose posturing, Trump and Maduro spoke last week.

The New York Times reported on Friday that Trump and Maduro had discussed a possible meeting, while The Wall Street Journal on Saturday said the conversation also included conditions of amnesty if Maduro were to step down.

Amid fears that Trump may launch a major operation in Venezuela, members of US Congress – both Democrats and the president’s own Republican Party – have expressed anger that he has not sought legislative approval.

“President Trump’s reckless actions towards Venezuela are pushing America closer and closer to another costly foreign war,” top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer said Sunday on X.

“Under our Constitution, Congress has the sole power to declare war,” he added.

Republican Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene, until recently a close Trump ally, said similarly: “Reminder, Congress has the sole power to declare war.”

## Congress

However, Republican Senator Lindsey Graham cheered on Trump, writing on X that the president’s “strong commitment to end this madness in Venezuela will save countless American lives.”

Suggesting Maduro should flee, he said: “I hear Turkey and Iran are lovely this time of year...”

Trump is also facing congressional pressure over recent media reports that the US military launched a second missile at survivors of a strike on an alleged drug boat in September.

Leaders of both the House and Senate Armed Services Committees have released separate statements saying they would be investigating the strike, which legal experts say could amount to a war crime.

With Republicans in control of both chambers of Congress, the Trump administration has so far largely escaped probing of its controversial anti-trafficking campaign.

Since the operation began in September, at least 83 people have been killed in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean.

Washington has yet to release evidence that the vessels it targeted were used to smuggle drugs or posed a threat to the United States, and experts say the strikes amount to extrajudicial killings even if they target known traffickers.

– AFP

# Spanish opposition rally urges PM Sánchez to resign

MADRID – Brandishing slogans such as “enough is enough!” and “not another day!” Spain’s conservative opposition People’s Party (PP) rallied in Madrid yesterday to demand Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez resign.

The rally came days after Sánchez’s government suffered two setbacks in quick succession: the conviction of Spain’s Sánchez-backed chief public prosecutor over a judicial secrecy violation, and the pre-trial detention of the premier’s former right-hand man and minister, José Luis Ábalos, in a corruption case.

“Spain has had enough of those who think they’re above everyone else,” said PP leader Alberto Núñez Feijóo, urging early parliamentary elections.

Sánchez is additionally grappling with ongoing legal cases involving, among others, his wife and brother, in separate files.

Madrid’s PP mayor José Luis Martínez-Almeida and former PP Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy also addressed the rally, which drew some 40,000 people according to the Madrid prefecture.

“The situation [in Spain] has

become untenable,” complained one attendee Daniel Noguera, an 18-year-old student, pointing to “prices which go up constantly” while adding that finding a place to live was becoming ever harder.

Sánchez, in office since 2018, has repeatedly apologised publicly for the legal issues surrounding him but has vowed not to stand down before the end of the current parliamentary term in 2027.

He has denounced attacks orchestrated by the right and the far right which he says are aimed at weakening him.

– AFP



# Set-piece theft pays off for Man Utd: Amorim

## Isak agrees first Liverpool league goal a 'long time coming'



LONDON — Ruben Amorim said stealing set-piece routines played a key role in Manchester United's fightback to win 2-1 at Crystal Palace yesterday.

Amorim has spent much of this United reign under fire and the pressure was mounting again after a limp 1-0 home defeat against 10-man Everton last Monday.

When Jean-Philippe Mateta broke the deadlock for Palace in the 36<sup>th</sup>-minute with a retaken penalty, Amorim was on the rocks again.

But Joshua Zirkzee levelled nine minutes into second half after he seized on Bruno Fernandes' free-kick.

United captain Fernandes then teed up Mason Mount to drill home the winner after 63 minutes from a quickly-taken free kick.

It was another away match with a set-piece goal for United following efforts from corners at Nottingham Forest and Tottenham earlier in November.

Amorim said United had spent time finding ways to use the set-piece routines that have become so popular in the Premier

League this season.

"We have more time to work and we work a lot and we are learning," he said.

"We learn a lot in England. You are used to do that with set-pieces, but when you come to the Premier League, you learn a lot about how other the teams do it.

"And we are stealing a lot of things to score goals."

Amorim warned his players that fatigue would set in for Palace after Thursday's trip to France to face Strasbourg in Conference League.

United took advantage with their second half escape act.

"I said to the players we need to be more alive and you could feel that. If you are more alive, you are in more places, near the ball more often and everyone did that, but we also need to understand that the opponent is tired," he said.

"If you see the last plays of the game, they were struggling so much to take the ball out of the box and you could feel it in the way they move that they were getting tired for the second half and we talked about that.

"I had the feeling that if we scored one

goal, this would change completely."

Zirkzee's first league goal in 25 matches was a welcome boost for the much-maligned Dutch striker, who lashed home from an almost impossible angle.

"He was really important but again was not just the goal," Amorim said.

"Even the runs behind, in the first half he struggled on the duels and won some duels in the second half.

"We improve a lot because of the quality of Josh in the second half and that's important for him to understand that it is not just the goal."

### Liverpool win at last

Alexander Isak was glad to score his first Premier League goal for Liverpool as the English champions stopped the rot with a welcome 2-0 win away to West Ham yesterday.

"We knew it was going to be difficult to get back to winning ways after our recent form," Isak told Sky Sports. "Happy that we won and happy to be on the scoresheet as well."

Isak had failed to score in five previous top-flight appearances since making a British

record £125 million (US\$165 million) move from top-flight rivals Newcastle in September.

"I'm aware that it has been a long time coming and I have been trying to get back to my best form," he said.

The 26-year-old Sweden forward ended his barren spell at the London Stadium with only his second goal in 11 games in all competitions for the Reds, following his maiden strike in a League Cup win against second-tier Southampton.

"I'm still on the way but I am happy to get that goal," he said. "The best feeling today is that we win the game and that is the best way to get a good spirit in the group.

"But of course I am a striker, so scoring goals will always help me. We have to use this win in a good way but also be humble. We have to stay focused and keep working hard to keep this momentum."

Cody Gakpo bagged Liverpool's second in stoppage time to wrap up their first win in four games in all competitions.

In the late game Chelsea and Arsenal ended in a one all draw.

— AFP

## UK unveils record-breaking bid for 2035 Women's World Cup



LONDON — UK football chiefs on Friday unveiled details of their unopposed joint bid to host the Women's World Cup in 2035, with 22 proposed stadiums listed in the official submission.

The bid team said the 48-nation finals would be the biggest single-sport event ever staged in the UK.

It would be the first World Cup played on British soil since the men's finals in 1966, which were solely hosted by England.

"With 63 million people living within two hours of a proposed venue, it would be the most accessible tournament ever," the bid team said in a statement.

Sixteen of the stadiums on the shortlist are in England - including Manchester United's proposed new 100,000-seater arena - with three in Wales, two in Scotland and one in Northern Ireland, across 15 cities.

The final number of stadiums is expected to be whittled down to around 16.

A measure of the size of the event is that at the Qatar men's World Cup in 2022 just eight stadiums were used.

FIFA confirmed later on Friday that the UK bid would be formally ratified at next year's congress in Vancouver.

The April gathering of football's global governing body is also set to approve the joint candidature of the United States, Mexico, Costa Rica and Jamaica to stage the 2031 women's World Cup.

"Hosting the FIFA Women's World Cup would be a huge privilege for our four home nations," the chief executives of the UK football associations said on Friday.

"If we are successful, the 2035 tournament will be the biggest single-sport event held on UK soil with 4.5 million tickets available for fans.

"We are proud of the growth that we've driven in recent years across the women's and girls' game, but there is still so much more growth to come, and this event will play a key role in helping us deliver that."

Manchester United's existing Old Trafford stadium has been included but the bid team intend to put the club's proposed new ground forward for consideration by FIFA once plans are confirmed.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer said that the bid showed the UK's passion for football.

"The [England] Lionesses' success has inspired girls across our country, and we'll build on that momentum by welcoming millions of football fans from around the world to a tournament that will benefit communities and businesses in host cities up and down the UK," he said.

England's women's team have won the past two European Championships and reached the final of the 2023 World Cup.

From 2031, the Women's World Cup will be contested between 48 teams, up from 32.

The next Women's World Cup will take place in Brazil in 2027.

— AFP



Spanish referee Cesar Soto Grado orders the match suspension after spectators threw bottles on the pitch during the Spanish league match between Sevilla FC and Real Betis at Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan Stadium in Seville yesterday. Real Betis won the game 2-0.

— AFP



## Martinez double at Pisa keeps Inter on heels of Serie A leaders AC Milan

PISA — Lautaro Martinez fired Inter Milan to within a point of the Serie A summit with both goals in yesterday's 2-0 win at promoted Pisa, ahead of Napoli's clash at Scudetto rivals Roma.

Argentina striker Martinez smashed home Pio Esposito's low cross in the 69<sup>th</sup> minute and then ensured Inter would stay on the heels of local rivals AC Milan when he tapped in from close range with seven minutes remaining.

A last-gasp loss to Atletico Madrid midweek and derby defeat last weekend had Inter reeling and although yesterday's three points will be welcome the overall performance

was not encouraging.

"I'm happy because we won and that's what we wanted after two defeats... I work for the team, myself and my family, I leave the talk to others," said Martinez to DAZN.

"I hope it continues, I've still got plenty of time on my contract, I'm happy here and the fans love me... the team comes before everything else."

Martinez's goals took him to 10 in all competitions and saved Inter's blushes, as Cristian Chivu's side were sluggish at the Arena Garibaldi which is a stone's throw from Pisa's world-famous leaning tower.

Pisa, who sit in the bottom three after just one win from their 13 league

fixtures, had the better of the chances before Martinez's perfectly hit first-time strike broke the deadlock.

The small gap separating Inter from top spot could be extended as second-placed Roma hosted the champions in yesterday's headline fixture.

Level on 27 points with Inter, Gian Piero Gasperini's Roma will reclaim top spot with a win over injury-hit Napoli at the Stadio Olimpico.

Atalanta coach Raffaele Palladino faced his old team Fiorentina in yesterday's other game, following a thumping victory at Eintracht Frankfurt in the Champions League.

— AFP



# Kohli stars as India beat South Africa in first ODI

## Cricket

RANCHI – Star batsman Virat Kohli hit a record-extending 52<sup>nd</sup> one-day century to set up India's 17-run win over a spirited South Africa in the first match yesterday.

Kohli's 135 came off 120 balls and he shared a second-wicket partnership of 136 with fellow stalwart Rohit Sharma to set India on course for 349-8 in the eastern city of Ranchi.

Corbin Bosch made a valiant 67 off 51 balls as South Africa fought until almost the end. Entering the 50th over, the visitors needed 18 for victory with one wicket left. Bosch fell on the second ball and the South Africa were 332 all out.

Matthew Breetzke, who made 72,

and Marco Jansen, with 70, put on a fighting stand of 97 for the sixth wicket to revived the chase after South Africa slipped to 11-3 and then 77-4.

Left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav stood out with figures of 4-68 in the high-scoring contest. His double strike to remove Jansen and Breetzke in the space of three balls was the turning point for India who took 1-0 lead in the three-match series.

The 37-year-old Kohli remained the hero with his 83<sup>rd</sup> ton across the three international formats after he raised his hundred with a boundary off Jansen and lifted his bat to a raucous home crowd.

An Indian fan breached security and raced to the pitch to touch Kohli's feet before he was dragged away.

Kohli has the most ODI

hundreds, with Indian great Sachin Tendulkar second with 49.

The Indian cricket star tops the list of hundreds in a single format with Tendulkar's count in Tests being 51.

Kohli and 38-year-old Rohit, who made 57, only play the 50-over format after they retired from T20 and Test cricket.

Their presence boosted India, led by KL Rahul in the absence of the injured Shubman Gill, after a 2-0 Test whitewash against South Africa.

Rohit lost fellow opener Yashasvi Jaiswal early for 18 but Kohli walked in to a huge roar from a 38,000-strong capacity crowd.

The pair steadied the innings and then took on the bowlers before Rohit was trapped lbw by Jansen.

Rohit hit three sixes in his 51-ball knock. That took him to 352 sixes in this format, overtaking Pakistan batter Shahid Afridi's record of 351.

Kohli switched gears soon after reaching his first hundred since February. He hit off-spinner Prenelan Subrayen for two fours and two sixes in a 21-run 39<sup>th</sup> over.

He finally fell to Nandre Burger, caught by Ryan Rickelton, after hitting 11 fours and seven sixes.

Rahul kept up the attack with 60

off 56 balls, while Ravindra Jadeja made 32 off 20.

The next match is on Wednesday in Raipur.

– AFP



A pitch invader and fan of India's Virat Kohli (centre) greets him during the first one-day international (ODI) cricket match against South Africa at the JSCA International Stadium in Ranchi, India yesterday.

– AFP

## First title for Russian judoka since neutral status lifted

### Judo

ABU DHABI – Ayub Bliev became the first Russian judoka in more than two years to win a title under his national flag when he triumphed at the Abu Dhabi Grand Slam tournament on Friday.

Bliev, 28, wearing a bib with RUS on it not the AIN (Authorised Neutral Athletes) they previously bore, beat Mongolia's Ariunbold Enkhtaivan in the -60kg final and received his gold medal with his national flag being raised and the Russian anthem played.

Bliev and his compatriots had their neutral athlete status lifted by the International Judo Federation (IJF) on Thursday which had been in place since Russia invaded Ukraine in February, 2022.

Belarus, widely perceived as allies of Russia, had had their neutral status lifted in June.

The decision came despite the war still raging in Ukraine, with Russian President Vladimir Putin saying on Thursday the conflict would only end if Kyiv withdraws from its territory claimed by Moscow.

Ukraine's judo federation slammed the decision and accused the IJF of a "blatant violation" of International Olympic Committee recommendations.

"Ukraine pays with the lives of its citizens every day. Among the victims are athletes, coaches, volunteers, and children," the federation said in a statement on its website.

It said the decision "contradicts the principles of peace, justice, and responsibility, and undermines trust in international sports institutions".

The full reinstatement was greeted with delight in Russia, where Putin is a judo black belt.

He was also an ambassador and honorary president of the IJF until those roles were suspended as a result of the invasion.

"Judo is one of Russia's favourite sports, around half a million citizens regularly participate in it," Mikhail Degtyarev, Russia's Minister of Sport said in a statement published on Telegram.

"It is important to our country, judo is a presidential sport."

### 'The last bridge'

Russia has been effectively shut out from international sporting competitions since it invaded Ukraine, initially banning them outright though the IJF took till September 2022 to do so.

When the IOC recommended in 2023 that Russians and Belarusians could compete as neutral athletes - without their national flag or anthem being played - the IJF was one of the first to let them back in leading to a boycott of that year's world championships by the Ukrainians.

Some, like World Athletics, have maintained a blanket ban on Russians competing.

Judo is not the first sports federation to relax the constraints around Russians.

The International Boxing Association (IBA), who at the time were responsible for boxing at the Olympics and run by Russian Umar Kremlev, had allowed boxers from Russia to compete under their national flag and the anthem to be played at competitions they organised.

The IJF said that judokas were not responsible for their government's actions - though the IOC placed strict conditions on Russians appearing at the Paris Olympic Games in 2024, barring any athletes who had made supportive statements surrounding the conflict.

"Sport is the last bridge that unites people and nations in very difficult conflict situations and environments," said the IJF.

"Athletes have no responsibility for the decisions of governments or other national institutions, and it is our duty to protect the sport and our athletes."

The Ukrainian federation hit back, saying: "Bridges are built where there is peace. Russia has brought only war to the world."

Whilst 19 Russians are competing in Abu Dhabi there will be 23 at next week's Tokyo Grand Slam which will also feature seven Ukrainians.

– AFP

## Springboks top the pile as England chase and France await Dupont

### Rugby

#### Luke Phillips

CARDIFF – Two years out from the Rugby World Cup, South Africa's opponents will be wondering how to stop their march to a record-extending fifth title and third in a row after the Springboks capped an impressive 2025 with an Autumn Nations Series clean sweep.

South Africa retained their Rugby Championship crown as they enjoyed an exceptional year under Rassie Erasmus, the coach using some 50 players as he continued to develop strength in depth ahead of the 2027 World Cup in Australia.

World Rugby 15s player of the year Malcolm Marx, fellow nominees Pieter-Steph du Toit and Ox Nche, as well as Thomas du Toit, Sacha Feinberg-Mngomezulu and Cheslin Kolbe, were all named in the 2025 dream team before the Springboks inflicted a crushing record 73-0 home defeat upon Wales in Cardiff on Saturday.

Perhaps the three stand-out games of the Autumn Series were South Africa's victories over Ireland (24-13) and France (32-17), along with England's 33-19 defeat of New Zealand.

South Africa hammered Ireland in the scrum, leading many pundits to question how other sides can even get close to nullifying their forward power.

"Teams like New Zealand, France, England, Argentina, maybe Ireland, who are there or thereabouts, need to work out what they need to win the Webb Ellis Cup," former Springbok coach Jake White wrote in a Rugbypass column.

New Zealand coach Scott Robertson was under the spotlight

after the loss to England, one of three defeats from 13 Tests in his second season in charge of the All Blacks that included a record 43-10 reverse at home to the Springboks.

### NZ 'haven't improved'

"They haven't improved at all in my view but what they probably have done is sort out a few guys who aren't up to it and found a few guys who are," All Blacks great Murray Mexted told New Zealand's DSPN podcast. "But we haven't seen the fruits of their labour yet I think that will come through next year."

England coach Steve Borthwick oversaw an 11-Test winning run that included victories over both the All Blacks and fellow heavyweights France before culminating in a first autumn clean sweep since 2021.

The winning streak completed a remarkable turnaround from a 2024 where England lost seven successive matches against tier-one opposition and they now enter the Six Nations as genuine title contenders.

In comparison, there are real concerns for out-of-form 2027 World Cup hosts Australia, who suffered a first winless European tour since 1958 and a record 10 losses in a year.

Wallabies coach Joe Schmidt had been due to step aside after the Rugby Championship, but agreed to stay on until mid-2026 when Les Kiss will take over.

France ended their turgid November campaign with a lacklustre 48-33 win over the Wallabies after failing to live up to expectations as a swashbuckling side capable of challenging the world's best under coach Fabien Galthie.

Les Bleus will now hope inspirational captain Antoine Dupont

returns for a Six Nations title defence that begins at home to Ireland on February 5.

Scrum-half Dupont has been out since March with a severe knee injury but featured for club side Toulouse in Saturday's 48-24 win over Racing 92.

### Problems for Ireland

Ireland, following defeats by the Springboks and New Zealand, look saddled with the same problems they've had since Johnny Sexton's retirement after the last World Cup, with neither Sam Prendergast or Jack Crowley making the No 10 shirt their own.

Ill-discipline has also been an issue, highlighted by four yellow cards and one 20-minute red card handed out in their defeat by South Africa.

Ireland coach Andy Farrell also faces the task of rejuvenating an ageing squad.

By contrast, Borthwick unearthed several gems in England's unbeaten campaign, notably back-row forward Guy Pepper, prop Joe Heyes and centre Max Ojomoh.

The former England captain also employed a South Africa-style 'Bomb Squad' of replacements loaded with British and Irish Lions forwards, the likes of Ellis Genge, Luke Cowan-Dickie, Will Stuart, Tom Curry and Henry Pollock turning the tide against Australia, Fiji and New Zealand.

"The team's been progressing for a good period of time now," said Borthwick.

"Sometimes you've got to go through some difficult times to go through some tight losses to understand how to actually convert into wins with a young side." – AFP



# ‘End of an era’: MTV pulling plug on global music channels

Akshata Kapoor

LONDON – MTV kick-started a new era of music and pop culture in 1981, when it went on air for the first time, emblematically playing “Video Killed the Radio Star” as its debut music video.

More than four decades later, the channel, now owned by US media giant Paramount Skydance, will wind down its international music broadcasting by the end of the year as it struggles to compete with online streaming and social media.

MTV Music, MTV Hits and its 80s and 90s music shows will be shut down in the UK and other European countries in the coming months, sources at Paramount confirmed to AFP.

These music channels will stop broadcasting at the end of the year in France, Germany, Poland, Australia and Brazil as well, according to various media reports.

It has been declared the “end of an era” by dismayed fans and former MTV video jockeys – the beloved music presenters known as VJs who appeared on millions of screens at the height of the network’s popularity.

However, the conditions that made MTV “revolutionary” simply “don’t exist anymore”, said Kirsty Fairclough, a professor of screen studies at Manchester Metropolitan University.

The rise of digital streaming platforms like YouTube and TikTok has “completely refigured how we engage with music and images”, the researcher on popular culture told AFP.

Viewers or listeners now expect “immediacy” and “interactivity” that sitting in front of the television to watch rolling music videos cannot provide, she added.

James Hyman, who directed and produced MTV Europe’s dance music shows



The new brand logo of MTV since September 9, 2021 – Image courtesy of CillBill – Loyalkaspar/ Wikimedia Commons

in the 1990s, agrees the network thrived before the internet was ubiquitous.

“It was so exciting, because that’s mainly all people had,” Hyman told AFP.

### ‘Experimentation’

Hyman was at the heart of MTV’s Party Zone – which celebrated dance and club culture and played up-and-coming techno, house and trance music – alongside MTV VJ Simone Angel.

Both of them left the network when MTV Europe split up into regional subsidiaries and pivoted from music programming to reality shows in the early 2000s.

“I was heartbroken when it started to split up into different regions. To me that was like the beginning of the end,” Dutch presenter Angel told AFP.

According to British audience researcher Barb, MTV Music reached around 1.3

million UK households in July 2025.

In comparison, Barb figures reported in 2001 showed MTV UK and Ireland’s package of music channels had reached over 10 million homes.

For Angel, MTV’s slow decline in popularity can be traced back to its move away from original, edgy music content key to helping smaller artists break out.

“Initially MTV Europe wasn’t just about making the most amount of money... that sense of experimentation made the channel very exciting,” said the former VJ.

Paramount has taken several cost-cutting measures since its merger with Skydance earlier this year, announcing 1,000 job cuts last month and reviewing its other cable television offerings.

Some MTV music channels will stay on air in the United States, and the flagship MTV HD channel will be available in the

UK, but with a focus on entertainment rather than music.

“The ‘M’ stood for music, and that’s gone,” lamented Hyman, who has carefully stored VHS tapes of the shows he produced for Party Zone.

The tapes whir in Hyman’s VHS player at his home in London, playing clips from the 90s: intimate interviews with The Prodigy and Aphex Twin, funky, experimental music videos, and wild hairstyles.

### ‘Seismic’ influence

The impact of MTV and MTV Europe was “seismic” in its heyday, said Fairclough, bringing both famous and up-and-coming artists into the homes of music fans around the world.

“It definitely marks the end of an era in how music is experienced, both visually and culturally, because MTV really fundamentally reshaped popular music,” she said.

Moments like the premiere of Michael Jackson’s “Thriller” music video and Madonna’s “Like a Virgin” performance at the first MTV Video Music Awards (VMAs) in 1984 shaped the cultural conversation.

“MTV was so powerful it defined youth culture,” said Hyman, recalling its sweeping influence on fashion, film and music in Britain and Europe.

Ever since news broke that the music channels were facing the axe, Hyman and Angel have been urging Paramount to make archive tapes available to the public, insisting that people still want their MTV.

“To me it almost feels like MTV has been on life support for such a long time,” said Angel.

“But now that they’re actually threatening to pull the plug, we have all suddenly realised... this means too much to us.” – AFP

# Oscar-winning UK playwright Tom Stoppard dies aged 88

LONDON – British playwright Tom Stoppard, who won an Oscar for the screenplay of the 1998 film “Shakespeare In Love”, has died at the age of 88, United Agents announced on Saturday.

Stoppard, who first made his name with “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead” – an absurdist tragicomedy about two minor characters from Shakespeare’s “Hamlet” – developed a distinctive style combining serious ideas with comedy.

“We are deeply saddened to announce that our beloved client and friend, Tom Stoppard, has died peacefully at home in Dorset, surrounded by his family,” the talent agency said.

“He will be remembered for his works, for their brilliance and humanity, and for his wit, his irreverence, his generosity of spirit and his profound love of the English language.”

King Charles III and rock royalty Mick Jagger led the tributes on social media.

“Tom Stoppard was my favourite playwright,” the Rolling Stones frontman posted on X.

“He leaves us with a majestic body of intellectual and amusing work. I will always miss him.”

In a statement released by Buckingham Palace, Charles said he and the queen were “deeply saddened” at news of the death of “one of our greatest writers”.

He added: “A dear friend who wore his genius lightly, he could, and did, turn his pen to any subject, challenging, moving and inspiring his audiences, borne from his own personal history.”

### A string of awards

In London, the Olivier Awards announced that West End theatres would dim their lights for two minutes at 7:00 p.m. tomorrow in his memory.

As well as his Oscar, Stoppard won three Oliviers

and five Tonys, among the top awards in the theatre world.

Britain’s National Theatre, which worked closely with Stoppard, staging many of his plays, paid tribute to “his sharp intellect, inventive narrative structures, and a blend of highbrow humour with profound philosophical enquiries”.

London’s Royal Court theatre said his work “probed the deepest human mysteries of truth, time, mortality and frailty while dazzling with wit, laughter and the buoyancy of the human spirit”.

His publisher, Faber Books, paid tribute to “one of the most brilliant and feted playwrights of the last 60 years and one of the great intellects of our time”.

For Stoppard, Shakespeare proved to be a rich seam for him to mine.

“Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead”, the play that first brought him success in theatres on both sides of the Atlantic, won a string of theatre awards.

Then when he adapted it for cinema in 1990, in a version starring Tim Roth, Gary Oldman and Richard Dreyfuss, it picked up the Golden Lion – the top prize – at the Venice Film Festival.

To non-theatre-goers, Stoppard is best remembered for cinema work that included the “Indiana Jones” and “Star Wars” franchises and an Oscar in 1999 for “Shakespeare in Love”.

Born in Czechoslovakia in 1937, he fled his home during the Nazi occupation and found refuge in Britain. After leaving school, Stoppard became a journalist before launching his career as a playwright.

Over a six-decade career, he wrote for the theatre, TV and radio, as well as film, winning multiple awards.

In 1997 he was knighted for his services to literature.

Stoppard was married three times and had four sons, one of whom, Ed Stoppard, is an actor. – AFP



This October 2, 2022 file photo shows Tom Stoppard attending the Opening night of “Leopoldstadt” on Broadway, New York City. – Photo courtesy of Philip Romano/ Wikimedia Commons.

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -6°C~5°C	Manila 23°C~31°C	New York 1°C~7°C	Lisbon 12°C~15°C
Shanghai 8°C~18°C	Bangkok 20°C~32°C	London 8°C~12°C	Rio de Janeiro 22°C~29°C
Hong Kong 19°C~24°C	Tokyo 8°C~20°C	Frankfurt -2°C~5°C	Luanda 24°C~29°C
Taipei 20°C~27°C	Singapore 24°C~32°C	Vancouver 5°C~7°C	Maputo 18°C~27°C
Guangzhou 18°C~27°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~33°C	Paris 4°C~8°C	Dili 23°C~32°C
Nanjing 6°C~17°C	Jakarta 24°C~33°C	Moscow 0°C~3°C	São Tomé 25°C~30°C
Guilin 15°C~25°C	Seoul 0°C~9°C	Las Vegas 3°C~16°C	Praia 22°C~28°C
Xi'an -1°C~11°C	Sydney 14°C~25°C	Monte Carlo 8°C~15°C	Bissau 22°C~33°C





**Happy hippo**  
Tim, a hippopotamus at BioParque do Rio, eats a fruit and vegetable cake during the celebration of his 29<sup>th</sup> birthday at the Quinta da Boa Vista zoo in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Thursday.  
— AFP



**Save our skins!**  
Members of the public make their way past protesters from animal rights group PETA, promoting their “Free the Animals Friday” campaign, outside a luxury brand shop in London on Friday.  
— AFP



**Horsey gossip!**  
Lipizzaner horses are seen in their stables as a care taker checks a rope in the courtyard of the famous 460 years old Spanish Riding School in Vienna, Austria on Friday.  
— AFP



**Bright stars**  
The opening night of ‘The light before Christmas’ by Luxmuralis artist Peter Walker is displayed at Liverpool Cathedral in Liverpool, north west England on Saturday. The light installation is open to the public until December 6. Luxmuralis, with Artistic Director, Walker, is a collaborative team combining artists from different backgrounds and artistic disciplines –creating works across multiple media and presentation formats.  
— AFP



**Purple royal**  
A spectator poses in a classic car exhibited during the Isimi Festival 2025 at the Isimi Wellness and Polo Country Estate in Epe, Lagos State, Nigeria on Saturday.  
— AFP



**Short lived blooms**  
Aerial view of Talipot Palms *Corypha umbraculifera*, blooming for the first time since they were planted about 50 years ago in Aterro do Flamengo park in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Thursday.  
— AFP