

800 new taxis to hit the road next year: Tam

Tony Wong

Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man said yesterday that 800 new taxis are scheduled to gradually hit the road next year, raising the total number of taxis in the city to over 2,000.

The policy secretary also said that the government was planning to propose amendments to the current taxi law with the aim of enabling the establishment of a system for licensing private cars to provide online ride-hailing services.

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

According to the latest data on the Transport Bureau's (DSAT) website, at the end of the third quarter, there were 1,573 taxis in service in the city, comprising 1,273 "common" taxis and 300 "special" taxis.

Common taxis – as opposed to special radio taxis – are colloquially known as "black taxis" ("hak dik" in Cantonese), as the colour of the common taxis is black.

Currently, the city's common taxis are either operated by licenced individuals or companies.

The government granted two concessions for the city's radio taxi services, which were granted to the same company, Macau Radio Taxi Services Limited, at two different times. The first concession, with 100 radio taxis (blue), commenced on April 1, 2017 and expired on September 30 this year, while



Taxis are driven along Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro, the city's main thoroughfare, yesterday. – Photo: Tony Wong

the second concession, with 200 radio taxis (red), began on December 1, 2019 and is now scheduled to end on May 31, 2028.

The company's radio taxis are officially known as "special taxis".

The "blue" taxis, unlike their "red"

counterparts, had a calling fee of five patacas.

Consequently, since October 1, the company has operated only 200 "special taxis".

The company's taxis, i.e., the red ones currently in operation, are not



Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man addresses yesterday's Q&A session about his portfolio's 2026 policy guidelines in the Legislative Assembly's (AL) hemicycle. – Photo: GCS

allowed to pick up those hailing a cab in the street. To use the company's ride-hailing service, prospective passengers can phone its call centre or use its own mobile ride-hailing app.

Continued on p.6



Officers from the Disaster Victim Identification Unit (DVIU) of the Hong Kong Police Force search for bodies yesterday after Wednesday's deadly fire at the Wang Fuk Court residential estate in Hong Kong's Tai Po District. The police said yesterday that they have made a total of 13 arrests over Hong Kong's deadliest blaze in decades after it killed 151 people last week, a toll that the police warned could further rise. – AFP

Tai Po fire deaths hit 151 as more burned bodies found

HONG Kong – The death toll from the deadly blaze at Tai Po's Wang Fuk Court has risen to 151 as officers discovered more bodies in their search, with some found burned beyond recognition, the Hong Kong government announced yesterday afternoon.

The force began its search at the last two of the seven fire-ravaged buildings – Wang Sun House and Wang Cheong House – yesterday.

New Territories North regional commander Lam Man-han said the structures of the two blocks were not "entirely safe", but officers were racing against time to enter units that were secure.

Eight bodies were discovered at the flats, corridors and stairwells of Wang Cheong House,

Lam said, with three of them previously found by emergency personnel.

"Wang Cheong House was the first building to catch fire, and it took a longer time for the blaze to be put out. The conditions there were extremely bad. It was a scene of devastation. Some of the bodies were incomplete, or even burned to ashes," she said.

More than 30 people were still unaccounted for, according to chief superintendent Tsang Shuk-yin.

"As some of the bodies had been burned to ashes, we do not rule out the possibility of not being able to recover all missing persons," said Tsang, who appeared emotional.

– RTHK, MPD

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China urges Japan to retract erroneous remarks, stop fobbing off

China urges the Japanese side to learn the lessons of history, simply retract the erroneous remarks as it should and take practical steps to honor its political commitments to China, foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said yesterday.

– Story on p. 7

WHO backs GLP-1 treatments to tackle obesity epidemic

A range of blockbuster weight-loss and diabetes drugs could help shift the trajectory of the global obesity epidemic, which affects over one billion people worldwide, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said yesterday.

– Story on p. 11

Trump-backed candidate holds narrow lead in race for Honduras presidency

A conservative candidate backed by US President Donald Trump narrowly leads a right-wing rival in Honduras's presidential election, according to partial results from the electoral commission released yesterday.

– Story on p. 12

Macau's convention & exhibition industry gains global recognition: IPIM

Khalel Vallo

The Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) said in a Friday statement that Macau's convention and exhibition sector is gaining strong international recognition, as industry professionals met here last week to analyse global MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) trends and enhance competitiveness.

According to IPIM, its training course and Meet@Macao exchange event was held on Thursday at the Complex of the Commerce and Trade Cooperation Platform for China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Forum Macao Complex) in Sai Van. IPIM pointed out in the statement that over 50 representatives from the MICE sector and higher institutions joined the session, where a convention and exhibition consultant representing IPIM gave insights into the topic headlined "Future trends in MICE for 2026 and beyond."

In his speech, IPIM President Che Weng Keong said that Macau's convention and exhibition sector "has received multiple international awards in 2025," noting the rise in both quantity and diversity of events, the statement said, adding that the training programme aimed to deepen cooperation between local operators, international organisations and Macau's conference ambassadors, supporting long-term industry development.

The training was led by Patrick Delaney and Pádraic Gilligan, co-founders of consulting company Sool Nua, based in southern Ireland, and Gráinne Ní Ghiollagáin, managing partner of Sool Nua, who discussed emerging technologies, evolving client expectations, and global economic and cultural shifts shaping events in 2026, the statement said.

After the session, several "Macau Conference Ambassadors" exchanged views with consultants



This handout photo provided by the Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) on Friday shows IPIM President Che Weng Keong addressing Thursday's training course and Meet@Macao exchange event at the Complex of the Commerce and Trade Cooperation Platform for China and Portuguese-speaking Countries in Sai Van.

and local operators, the statement said, noting that participants highlighted how new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI)

can reshape event experiences and improve operational efficiency. According to the statement, the participants were encouraged to

make use of the revised Conference and Exhibition Stimulation Programme to bid for more international conventions, the statement added.

Earlier last month, Alan Ho Hoi Meng, president of the Macao Association of Convention, Exhibition & Tourism Sectors, was named an "Outstanding Leader in Conventions" at the AFECA 2025 Annual Meeting, becoming one of the first inductees into the "AFECA Hall of Leaders", the statement said, adding that the recognition marked the sector's first international individual accolade.

IPIM said in the statement that it will continue promoting professional development through 22 training courses this year, including internationally recognised programmes and local certification sessions, as part of its effort to strengthen talent cultivation and support the growth of Macau's convention and exhibition industry. ■

Police nab local man for drunk driving

Ada Lei

The Public Security Police (PSP) apprehended a local man on Wednesday for drunk driving, with his blood alcohol concentration standing at 2.05 grams per litre, PSP spokeswoman Kong Chi Ian said during a



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

regular press conference yesterday.

Driving with a blood alcohol concentration of 1.2 grams or above per litre is considered drunk driving, according to the Road Traffic Law.

Kong identified the suspect as a male surnamed Lei who is in his fifties and works as a senior supervisor in a casino.

According to Kong, the Public Security Police (PSP) received a report on Wednesday at around 11 p.m. from a citizen about a traffic accident in Avenida Son On (信安馬路) in Taipa. The citizen said that while working at the bus depot on Avenida Son On (信安馬路), he heard a collision outside, and upon checking, he discovered that a car had crashed into the rear of a bus parked on the roadside.

Upon arrival, police officers found Lei reeking of alcohol, and a breathalyser test confirmed his blood alcohol concentration at 2.05 grams per litre, indicating a drunk-driving offence. Under questioning, Lei admitted to drinking alcoholic beverages in Taipa before driving.

Lei has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing a charge for drunk driving. ■

Govt launches online prize-giving quizzes to raise water & pet awareness



This handout image provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) shows its online prize-giving quiz launched yesterday and ending next Wednesday.

Armindo Neve

The Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA) launched a four-month-long online prize game yesterday.

According to a statement by the bureau, in order to encourage residents to appreciate the importance of water and raise awareness of water conservation, the bureau decided to launch an online prize-giving quiz, called "Ensure the Safety of Water".

The statement said that the initiative aims to educate the public on water supply safety and the application of reclaimed water in an engaging and accessible manner.

Reclaimed water is wastewater that has been treated to remove impurities and made suitable for reuse.

According to the statement, the activity will be conducted in four phases until March 27 next year, with each phase lasting around one month.

After each phase, the statement said, 100 winners will be drawn,



This handout image provided by the Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA) yesterday shows its online prize-giving quiz launched yesterday and ending on March 27 next year.

each receiving a 100-pataca supermarket voucher. Additionally, a grand prize draw will select 20 winners, each to be awarded a 1,000-pataca supermarket voucher, according to the statement.

More details are available on the bureau's WeChat official account.

IAM runs 10 days long online prize game

Meanwhile, the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) also launched an online prize-giving quiz yesterday.

According to the statement, in order to enhance public awareness of the "Animal Protection Law", the "Law on Veterinary Clinical Care and Commercial Activity of Animals", and general pet care knowledge, the bureau has launched the Christmas edition of its "Pet Preparatory Class" online prize-giving quiz, slated to end next Wednesday.

The statement said that residents can visit the website

<https://iam-petgames.ad-on.mo> or scan the activity QR code to access the game. By completing the quiz, answering its questions correctly, and providing a local contact phone number, participants become eligible for a lucky draw, the statement said.

Prizes, according to the statement, are tiered based on the cumulative number of badges earned, with multiple prize categories available. Prizes include 40 items in total, such as 5,000-pataca supermarket shopping vouchers, gaming consoles, wet and dry vacuum cleaners, multi-function air-fryer, insulated electric kettles and shopping vouchers for other kinds of shops, the statement said.

The winner list will be announced in the middle or by the end of this month on the IAM Animal Inspection and Control Division's website <https://www.iam.gov.mo/canil>, and winners will be notified via SMS regarding prize collection, the statement said. ■

Published since Aug 2004

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- Printed by Tipografia Welfare Lda., 82-86 Rua dos Pescadores
- Wire services – AFP, Xinhua
- Chatbots: Poe, DeepSeek



Macau Weather

**MAINLY CLOUDY.
A FEW RAIN PATCHES.
MIST AT FIRST.
FORCE 2 TO 4 EAST TO
NORTHEASTERLY WINDS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL
RANGE BETWEEN
65% AND 98%.**



19°C~24°C

Source: SMG

MGM strives to inspire youth at Fortune Brainstorm Design Workshop

Khalel Vallo

Integrated resort operator MGM hosted the “Fortune Brainstorm Design Workshop” at its eponymous theatre in Cotai yesterday, bringing together nearly 500 guests, comprising young people, scholars and industry guests for a programme on how technology can support cultural preservation, ahead of today’s main forum.

Yesterday’s event at MGM COTAI was themed “Cultural Preservation with Technology”, as a prelude to the Fortune Brainstorm Design forum, the workshop welcomed students and young professionals from local universities and youth associations, alongside MGM Golden Lion Team members.

According to an MGM statement yesterday, the session formed part of the company’s effort to support cross-disciplinary exchange and strengthen Macau’s “MICE+” strategy. The statement added that Macau’s position as a bridge between Eastern and Western cultures set the backdrop for the event, which sought to encourage young participants to explore how design thinking, innovation and heritage can intersect.

The workshop opened with a keynote speech by Catarina Lio (廖穎琦), MGM’s senior vice president of Brand Marketing, followed by case studies drawn from MACAU 2049, the integrated resort’s residency show combining advanced technology with elements of Chinese cultural heritage.

Scenes such as “Drumming · Shadows” and “Khoomei · Ethereal” were presented to demonstrate how robotics, airflow and projection technology can animate cultural traditions on stage.

Meanwhile, foreign speakers – Martin Voelkle, partner at Bjarke Ingels Group, Andrew Lazarow, studio leader at LAB @ Rockwell Group, Ismael Merchan, architect at Populous and Monika Bielskyte, futurist in residence at Nike and founder of Protopia Futures – gave examples of their work and joined a Q&A session aimed at sparking exchanges between local youth and global designers.

The Fortune Brainstorm Design forum continues today at Fantasy Box at MGM MACAU, themed “Future Tense: Prototyping Tomorrow”, where 40 foreign leaders will discuss how design can address global challenges and support Macau’s diversified development. ■



MACAU 2049, MGM’s residency show, presents “Drumming · Shadows” (top) and “Khoomei · Ethereal”, combining advanced technology with elements of Chinese cultural heritage at its eponymous theatre yesterday in Cotai.

– Photos: Khalel Vallo

Macau casino takings rise 14.4 pct last month

Staff Reporter

Macau’s casinos generated gross gaming revenue (GGR) of 21,088 billion patacas last month, a year-on-year increase of 15.9 percent, the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) announced yesterday.

Month-on-month, however, GGR was down by 12.4 percent.

October’s GGR of 24.08 billion patacas was Macau’s best since pre-COVID-19 October 2019, when it amounted to 26.4 billion patacas.

Gaming industry executives say that November is usually a “slow” month in terms of casino takings.

Macau’s gaming industry was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic for three consecutive years, from January 2020 to December 2022.

In the first 11 months of the year, GGR increased by 8.6 percent year-on-year to 226.5 billion patacas.

Macau’s government-concessioned gaming industry is operated by six rival integrated resort (IR) operators: Sands, Galaxy, SJM, Melco, Wynn, and MGM. Under their concession agreements with the government, the IR operators are required to strengthen their non-gaming attractions and support the promotion of Macau’s cultural heritage and old-quarter renewal projects. The operators pay 35 percent of their GGR as direct gaming tax to the government, in addition to a further 5.0 percent



Vehicular and pedestrian traffic move in front of Casino Lisboa yesterday afternoon.

– Photo: Carl Leong

in levies for funding various public causes.

However, the gaming law, amended in 2022, allows the government to reduce these additional levies (officially termed “contributions”) for various reasons, such as when operators expand their foreign client markets or face unforeseen adverse developments affecting their business operations.

In the first three quarters of the year, according to the latest available official gaming statistics, baccarat generated 85 percent of local casinos’ GGR across their 16 games of chance. Roulette, Europe’s classic game of chance, generated a mere 0.5 percent.

At the end of the third quarter, Macau’s 28 casinos operated 6,000

gaming tables and 12,000 slot machines, according to official statistics.

In 2021, Macau had 42 casinos, a record in Macau’s licensed gaming history going back to 1849. Due to the government’s decision some three years ago to clamp down on so-called satellite casinos run by third parties in cooperation with gaming concessionaires, the number of casinos has decreased, set to fall to two dozen at the end of the year.

During the ongoing consolidation process, the closed satellite casinos’ gaming tables and slot machines, as well as their local employees, have been moved to the casinos directly run by gaming concessionaires. The process is scheduled to be concluded at the end of this month. ■

‘Kai Fong Car’ service restarts next year: UGAMM chief

Armindo Neves

The Macau General Union of Neighbourhood Associations (UGAMM) hosted a ceremony yesterday in which public bus operator Transmac donated three Kai Fong Car-Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles* (WAV) to the union.

The ceremony was held at the UGAMM (widely known as Kai Fong, its short name in Cantonese) headquarters in Toi San district.

According to Kai Fong President Chan Ka Leong, the “Kai Fong Car” service, launched in 2015, has operated around 50,000 passenger trips over the past decade. Its primary function is to assist disadvantaged groups and individuals with mobility challenges in travelling to and from medical facilities, Chan said, adding that the service was suspended for about a year due to resource constraints.

Chan also said that the relaunch aims to address residents’ travel needs, contribute to building a barrier-free community, and enhance the quality of life. Eligible Kai Fong members can call the service hotline on 2822 2633 to make a reservation at least three days in advance, Chan said, adding that the service will be restarted on January 1.

Chan told reporters that the service, after being suspended for nearly a year, has resumed in collaboration with Transmac. He estimated that it will serve around 10 to 12 Kai Fong members daily, or around 300 to 400 people monthly, with an annual target of 5,000 to 6,000 passenger trips.

Chan also said that the service is primarily intended to assist disadvantaged residents, especially wheelchair users, with essential travel

such as hospital follow-up appointments. Future expansion of the service will depend on operational results and available conditions, he said.

According to the statement, which was released during the ceremony, the “Kai Fong Car” service is sponsored by Transmac, which covers the donation of three service vehicle, provision of drivers, and daily operational expenses. The service will operate daily from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., the statement said. ■

* *Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle (WAV) is a motor vehicle that has been specifically modified or designed to allow a person who remains seated in their wheelchair or mobility scooter to travel as a passenger or driver. The primary goal is to enable direct wheelchair entry and securement, eliminating the need for the occupant to transfer into a standard vehicle seat.* – DeepSeek



UGAMM President Chan Ka Leong speaks to reporters at the UGAMM headquarters yesterday.



Macau General Union of Neighbourhood Associations (UGAMM) Chairwoman Ng Siu Lai (back, left) and Transmac Chairman Alfred Liu Hei Wan (back, second from left) look on during a demonstration of how to use a “Kai Fong Car” at the UGAMM headquarters in Toi San district yesterday.

– Photos: Armindo Neves



'Macau Jazz Week' returns with a fusion of music & literature

Interview by William Chan

After a six-year hiatus, the "Macau Jazz Week" is set for its grand return next week from December 9 to 12, themed "Culture, Literature, and Music," aiming to integrate the cultural depth of jazz into the lives of Macau's citizens.

In an exclusive interview with the *Post*, organiser Mars Lei Siu Hong talked about the upcoming event.

The Significance of the Revival and Curatorial Highlights

Lei first emphasised the significance of the festival's return, noting that it is the only jazz music festival in Macau and its first revival since 2019. He said: "This time, we specifically combine music and literature, hoping to further highlight the cultural aspect of jazz and attract a wider audience."

The curatorial highlight is the deep exploration of jazz's cultural dimension. Both headliners, Tay Cher Siang from Malaysia and YuYing Hsu from Taiwan, have strong connections to culture and literature, and they will be bringing their respective trios to Macau.

Tay Cher Siang's "Haruki Murakami Project" integrates literary recitation with music, while YuYing Hsu's solo albums reflect a deep cultural resonance. Lei believes this approach will attract a broader range of culture lovers, achieving the goal of "further integrating jazz into the life of Macau".

Haruki Murakami is a globally acclaimed Japanese author known for his surreal and melancholic narratives. His works, such as *Norwegian Wood* and *Kafka on the Shore*, have earned him numerous awards and a massive international following. Lei noted that the association has also invited Malaysian jazz vocalist Junji Delfino and Chinese-Malaysian writer Li Zi Shu to participate by reading Murakami's works in Mandarin.

The encounter of Haruki Murakami & jazz

Tay Cher Siang's "Hear the Wind Sing" project, which merges Murakami's literature, Malaysian music, and Mandarin recitation, is a major focus.

Lei explained the choice: "Haruki Murakami's works have been translated into multiple languages, giving him extraordinary influence. More specifically, he is also a renowned music lover, frequently referencing jazz anecdotes and masterpieces in his writings." Lei added that Tay Cher Siang is also a literary enthusiast and a fan of Murakami. The project was staged in Malaysia before the pandemic, and Lei had long hoped to bring it to Macau.

Lei firmly believes this cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary collaboration holds

special significance for promoting jazz: "I believe this special performance can attract a wider range of cultural enthusiasts to experience jazz, forging connections with more diverse communities." He sees literature as a vital bridge, providing an entry point into the world of jazz for those unfamiliar with the genre.

The Malaysian experience: creativity born from market mechanism

Lei said one of my earliest jazz mentors, taught me the basics. Before I left to study in Malaysia, he introduced me to the music of Tay Cher Siang and his band WYC—whom I finally heard live in a Malaysian bar in 2022.

Discussing his experience with Malaysian musicians, Lei noted the cultural similarities between Macau and Malaysia: "Macau is a place where Chinese and Western cultures coexist, similar to the multicultural environment in Malaysia. As a niche interest, it is not easy for jazz performers and promoters to survive in either location."

However, the promotion mechanisms differ significantly, Lei admitted. "The biggest difference is that music promotion activities in Malaysia rely almost entirely on market mechanisms, with little government funding. In this regard, Macau is more fortunate." Nevertheless, he believes this market pressure has spurred boundless creativity among Malaysian musicians: "Because of the difficulty, they have cultivated many different creative ideas and themes to attract audiences, just like this project." He emphasised that the unique themes generated by Malaysian musicians under market pressure are valuable lessons for Macau on attracting a broader audience through innovative content.

Exchange & education: the thoughtful design of the talks

Free talks by the two headliners will be arranged before their concerts. Lei explained the design philosophy: "Both headliners this time happen to be pianists, and both have a large body of original compositions and albums. Macau Jazz Week not only focuses on high-quality performances but also hopes to achieve the goal of exchange through various activities."

The talks focus on the artists' mental journeys and creative processes, rather than just technical discussions. Lei said: "The talks mainly aim to understand their mental journeys and creative thinking—how they develop their personal characteristics and the core concept of each album based on the foundation of music." This approach allows the audience to gain a deeper understanding of the ideas and culture behind the music, effectively warming up the audience for the subsequent concerts.

For more information, readers can also refer to a previous report by the *Post* at <https://macaupostdaily.com/news/26646>. Lei underlined that the performing venues have been changed to the Sifang Music and Arts Association and Bookand on Rua de Inácio Baptista. For details of each gig, visit: <https://forms.gle/CajMcULVGyJKV1NK9>



This undated file photo shows Chinese writer Li Zi Shu posing.

This undated photo shows Taiwanese pianist YuYing Hsu posing. – Photo: Enol Chen



This undated photo shows the Malaysian trio WVC, featuring Tay Cher Siang on piano, AJ Popshuvit on bass, and Adriel Wong on drums. – All photos provided by Mars Lei

'Cozinha Aida' is back in action

Interview by Rui Pastorin

Over a year since closing its doors, Macanese* restaurant Cozinha Aida's bright orange sign in the courtyard off Avenida de Sidónio Pais is again lit up as it makes its long-awaited return, with owner and manager Manuel António de Jesus continuing his commitment to keeping his mother's, Macanese doyen and celebrity chef Aida de Jesus**, cooking and legacy alive.

Though only providing takeaways for now, it is still full steam ahead for de Jesus, known as Jito among friends, and his staff as they again start serving favourites like minchi, feijoada, chicken curry and tacho, which is now available daily, all the while keeping the dishes authentic to his mother's recipes.

The restaurant closed on February 27 last year upon changes required by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) and the Fire Services Bureau (CB) that would have made keeping the business challenging.

Since its closure, loyal customers have been missing the restaurant and its dishes, de Jesus told the *Post* during an interview at



Cozinha Aida owner and manager Manuel António de Jesus poses in front of the business's logo featuring Macanese doyen and celebrity chef Aida de Jesus (aka Dona Aida) at the takeaway area. – Photo: Rui Pastorin

the restaurant yesterday, constantly pushing him to reopen. However, he couldn't find another place. But as fate would have it, the business that took over the restaurant's premises gave the space back to de Jesus, giving Cozinha Aida ("Aida's Kitchen") its restart.

Now with the restaurant's return, de Jesus underlined that "everything is new" from the layout to its kitchen, which is now tucked

indoors and "all electric" instead of gas, ensuring that everything is operating according to the law.

However, the work to bring the restaurant back to its full capacity continues after having to clean up after the previous owners, with redecoration of the dining area and renovation still ongoing in the VIP room. More staff are also needed before its patrons can again dine at the restaurant. But regardless, Jito

said, he is excited and happy to have Cozinha Aida up and running again. "It's not easy because this time, it's only me doing everything. And I thought I could make it [happen], and I did. I really did."

And while there were those who opposed the idea of him reopening given his age as well as being already busy with his restaurant Miramar in Coloane and an advertising company, de Jesus, 78, said he still wants to keep it going to continue providing authentic and typical Macanese food in Macau, where there are some that offer it without keeping its original taste and even presentation. "Macanese food is actually homemade food", he said, noting that keeping the food the way it is meant to be is part of what kept people coming back, while another aspect is the ingredients they use, keeping it all natural. "I'm preserving what my mother used to cook".

As he continues to keep the business running, de Jesus also reiterated that even from the beginning, it was never about making money, saying that he hadn't always made a profit from the time he first ran the restaurant. But what

matters most is that he preserved his mother's recipes.

As the sign outside the restaurant has got some people asking for more details about its reopening, de Jesus said more information is set to be announced on Facebook. In the meantime, for those missing Cozinha Aida's food, de Jesus said: "They are all welcome back", along with others wanting to try Macanese cuisine. ■

**Customarily, the term "Macanese" denotes Macau's community of mixed Portuguese and Asian descent, including their culture and cuisine, as well as their diaspora. Macanese cookery is a fusion cuisine dating back centuries featuring Portuguese, Chinese, Malay, Indian and other Asian ingredients and recipes. - MPD*

***The "Godmother of Macanese Cuisine", Aida de Jesus was also known as Dona Aida to her friends and admirers. A month after Dona Aida passed away in March 2021 at the age of 105, Jito opened the restaurant on Avenida de Sidónio Pais (士多鳥拜斯大馬路) in her honour, continuing to serve authentic Macanese food using her original recipes. - MPD*

Police nab loan shark for cheating gambler out of HK\$670,000

Ada Lei

A man from the Chinese mainland was apprehended on Saturday for usury and defrauding a middle-aged male gambler out of HK\$670,000 (687,000 patacas), Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Chao Teng Hin said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Chao identified the suspect as a 43-year-old male surnamed Zhu who works as a surveyor.

According to Chao, the police received a report on April 22, 2019 from the victim, who was approached by Zhu on the afternoon of April 14, 2019 in the VIP room of a casino in Cotai. Zhu offered to lend the victim HK\$1 million in chips under the following conditions: the victim would need to deposit an additional HK\$1 million in cash; during the gambling period, Zhu would exchange chips for the victim in order to earn a "commission"; if the victim won, he would need to

repay HK\$1 million at once; if the victim lost, he would need to repay HK\$1 million within a month.

Chao noted that after agreeing to the terms, the gambler continued gambling in the VIP room until the early hours of April 15. During this time, the victim won a total of HK\$3.16 million. The victim then returned HK\$1 million to Zhu and wished to exchange the remaining chips worth HK\$2.16 million into cash. Zhu claimed that HK\$20,000 needed to be deducted for prior hotel and dining expenses. After the victim agreed, Zhu falsely claimed that the VIP room did not have enough cash on hand and could only exchange HK\$1.47 million at that moment, with the remaining HK\$670,000 being available for withdrawal the following day. Believing Zhu, the victim handed over all his chips.

Chao added that the victim attempted to withdraw cash from the VIP room the following day, but was unsuccessful. Suspecting he had been scammed, he reported a total loss of HK\$670,000 to the police on April 22, 2019.

Chao said that Zhu had withdrawn all the victim's money and left Macau that day. The police identified Zhu as the suspect and apprehended him on Saturday when he was re-entering Macau through the Barrier Gate checkpoint.

Under questioning, Zhu refused to cooperate. The police seized three mobile phones from Zhu.

Zhu has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing charges of fraud and usury. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Chao Teng Hin looks on during yesterday's regular press conference. – Photo: Ada Lei

Macau Artist Society exhibition kicks off at The Parisian Macao



Guests and some of the many participating artists showcasing their work at "The Exhibition of Artworks of the Members of Macau Artist Society 2025" hosted by The Parisian Macao pose for a group photo during last night's opening ceremony. – Photos: Rui Pastorin

Rui Pastorin

An exhibition showcasing the works of members of the Macau Artist Society (MAS) kicked off last night at The Parisian Macao in Cotai, marking the first time that the annual event is being hosted at the integrated resort

Yesterday's opening ceremony for "The Exhibition of Artworks of The Members of Macau Artist Society 2025" was packed with artists and gallerygoers, along with officiating guests and representatives, that explored the various artworks displayed across the six venues located on Level 3 of Shoppes at Parisian. In total, there are 180 artworks of various mediums on display ranging from different styles of painting to installations.

During his speech, Macau Artist Society President Lok Hei remarked that they were proud to present the exhibition in 2025, a significant year with Macau honoured as a Culture City of East Asia 2025 and while it also marks the 20th anniversary of the inscription of the Historic

Centre of Macau on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

The annual showcase aims to build a professional platform for member artists to "showcase their creative achievements while also opening a window for the public and arts enthusiasts to gain a deeper understanding of Macau's diversified and vibrant artistic landscape, thereby fostering dialogue and exchange between

arts and the community", Lok, said last night.

It is an event that has seen the growth and evolution of "local creative energy" and contributed to the flourishing of fine arts in Macau, Lok also said.

The free-admission exhibition, which runs through March 27, is open from noon through 7 p.m. daily. Stay tuned for more pictures and details in an upcoming page 4. ■



Gallerygoers explore one of the six venues showcasing the 180 artworks.

800 new taxis to hit the road next year: Tam

Continued from p.1

In addition to being allowed to pick up passengers while travelling around the city, common taxis are also legally allowed to provide a radio taxi or online ride-hailing service. For instance, more and more common taxis have joined the online ride-hailing platform run by mainland web-mapping giant Amap since its launch in Macau earlier this year. Prospective passengers can use its taxi ride-hailing service through either the Amap mapping app or the MPay app (the mobile payment app run by Macau Pass).

According to the current law regulating the city's taxi sector, which took effect in June 2019, only companies are allowed to bid for a licence to operate common taxis. Before the current taxi law came into force, common taxi-vehicle licences were granted to individuals.

Following a public tender process, the government granted 10 company licences last year to operate common taxis, valid for eight years, with each company to operate 50 vehicles. The 500 new common taxis have gradually come into service since late last year. Many of the 500 new common taxis were to replace the numerous taxi-vehicle licences having expired one after another over the past few years. This tender was the first one launched since the current taxi law took effect in 2019.

With the aim of increasing the number of common taxis in the city in a shorter time, the government decided in September this year to grant two more company licences to operate common taxis without launching a public tender, enabling 100 new taxis to hit the roads.

During yesterday's Q&A session, Tam noted that there are currently over 1,400 taxis, comprising common and special taxis, in operation in the city. He said that 100 new common taxis are scheduled to come into service "in the near future", adding that the government will also launch a public tender for the granting of new company licences to operate common taxis, involving 700 new vehicles expected to gradually come into service next year.

Tam noted that the number of taxis in the city will then increase by 800 in total to over 2,000.

Moreover, Tam said, the future 700 new common taxis will also include a number of wheelchair-accessible taxis, raising the number of such taxis from the current 7 to 28.

Macau's current seven wheelchair-accessible taxis are all operated by Macau Radio Taxi Services Limited.

Legislation on online ride-hailing services

Meanwhile, Tam also said that the government is planning

to propose amendments to the current taxi law with the aim of "creating favourable conditions" for the establishment of a system for licensing private cars to provide online ride-hailing services.

Tam said that the government will launch a public consultation about the proposed amendments. After the consultation process, he said, the government will start drafting the legislation.

Amendments to laws proposed by the government must be passed by the legislature to take effect.

LRT network's expansion

Meanwhile, Tam also revealed during yesterday's Q&A session that the government has completed drafting a plan to expand the city's Light Rapid Transit (LRT) network in the long term, adding that the government will launch a public consultation on the matter in the near future, when the plan's full version will be released.

Tam yesterday revealed basic details of the plan, according to which the government proposes to build an LRT South Line, running from the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge's (HZMB) Macau checkpoint to the future ES5 station in the Zone A land reclamation area (a station of the ongoing LRT East Line project), from where it would run to the peninsula's Nam Van and Sai Van districts via Nape before

finally arriving at Barra.

The LRT East Line is scheduled to open in 2029.

According to the plan, Tam said, the government proposes to build an LRT West Line, connecting the Qingmao pedestrian border checkpoint in Ilha Verde with Fai Chi Kei, from where it would run along the Inner Harbour to Barra at the peninsula's south-western tip.

Basic details of the proposed South Line and West Line were first revealed by Tam to lawmakers earlier this year.

Tam revealed yesterday that the plan also proposes building a Taipa North Line, running from the future ES6 station in the Zone E1 land reclamation area (a station of the ongoing LRT East Line project) to the future Zone D land reclamation area (reclamation scheduled to be completed in November 2029), to the current Zone C land reclamation area (reclaimed but not yet developed), and to the current Ocean Station located near the Ocean Gardens residential estate.

According to Tam, the plan also proposes building a spur line on the current Seac Pai Van Line, connecting Coloane's sprawling Seac Pai Van public housing estate and Coloane Village.

Tam also said that the proposed Seac Pai Van Spur Line can be expected to get off the ground earlier than all other proposed lines

as it is the least difficult one. He said that the proposed Seac Pai Van Spur Line, which will serve Coloane Village, will benefit residents living there as well as Macau's tourism a great deal.

Tam also said that as the future East Line and South Line will be underground lines, they can remain operational during the hoisting of the No.8 typhoon signal.

Meanwhile, Tam also said that the government aims for the ticket gates at LRT stations to be able to accept mobile payment apps in the third quarter of next year.

Currently, LRT passengers can merely swipe their stored-value LRT card or Macau Pass card at the ticket gates.

Study on peninsula-Taipa tunnel

Meanwhile, Tam also said that the government will relaunch a study on the feasibility of building the fifth sea-crossing link between the peninsula and Taipa.

Tam said that with the launch of the Zone D land reclamation project, this time the government was planning for the fifth link to connect the peninsula's Nape and Zone D off Taipa's northern coast.

Tam underlined that the fifth link can be expected to relieve the traffic pressure in Nape.

He said that the fifth link would be a tunnel. ■

China's first youth-centered AIDS film tackles stigma head-on, promotes awareness

BEIJING – When two brothers long separated by time and circumstance were finally reunited, they uncovered a family secret that had been buried for years: their mother had died of AIDS and the elder of the two brothers had been born with the virus, but the younger, born after the introduction of preventive measures, had grown up healthy.

The older brother, who had once been given just three years to live, defied expectations and now lives a life many believed was impossible for someone with HIV, having even made his way to university. He is currently supported by the AIDS Prevention Education Project for Chinese Youth (APEPCY), a non-profit organization launched in 2006, through which volunteers deliver free medicine to him regularly.

The brothers' personal story is at the core of "Love Youth," a film that breaks decades of silence and brings youth-oriented HIV education and sexual health awareness boldly to the big screen, aiming to change the public perception and foster a better understanding of the disease.

China reported its first case of AIDS in 1985. As of December 2025, about 1.4 million people are living with HIV in China, with young people accounting for a rising proportion of cases.

Premiering nationwide just ahead of this year's World AIDS Day yesterday, the film tells how China has been supporting young



Vice Premier Liu Guozhong (center), also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, inspects HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment work during a visit to Beijing Youan Hospital in Beijing, yesterday, marking the 38th World AIDS Day. — Xinhua

people living with HIV through national public welfare programs like APEPCY.

The theme of this year's World AIDS Day in China calls for united societal efforts to prevent HIV, urging innovation in preventive measures and public awareness.

The film itself marks a pioneering effort in China's AIDS awareness campaign, with its entire cast and crew volunteering their time without pay.

Among the many projects supported by APEPCY is the Linfen Red Ribbon School in north China's Shanxi Province – the only institution in China dedicated to children living with HIV.

The film draws inspiration from a real-life story that played out in the school.

Reflecting on a time when AIDS loomed like a terrifying specter and was barely spoken of, Wang Xia, the school's principal, said that "The mere mention of the word 'AIDS' made people recoil."

"But today, with medical breakthroughs and a society that has become more understanding and accepting, China has made a remarkable jump forward," Wang observed.

The overall prevalence of AIDS is kept at a low level in China, with transmission through blood transfusion largely curbed, and

mother-to-child and drug-injection transmission effectively controlled, according to the National Disease Control and Prevention Administration.

Over the past two decades, the school has cared for 127 HIV-positive children from 14 provinces across the country.

Today, 65 of its former students are employed, and some have even started families of their own. Through advances in the prevention of mother-to-child transmission, the young mothers have had healthy children, ending the generational cycle of HIV.

Guo Xiaoping, the school's founder, called its success a "miracle."

"Over all these years, not a single child has died," he said. "Now, the only difference between these children and others is that they take one more pill every day."

Guo, now 62, retired as the school's principal in 2023 but continues to serve as guardian to every child under his care.

"I dream of the day when this school no longer has to exist," Guo said. "When every child with HIV can attend a regular school, and the next generation is born free of the virus, I'll know I've done all I can, and I will finally be able to retire in peace."

The film's closing words echo Guo's motto: "To protect our own children, we must also protect all children."

In 2004, China initiated support policies for people living with HIV/AIDS, as well as their

families, including the provision of medications and living assistance. Orphans of deceased AIDS patients also receive free education under these policies.

According to the National Disease Control and Prevention Administration, over 95 percent of people diagnosed with HIV in China are currently receiving antiretroviral therapy, and over 95 percent of those on treatment have reached viral load suppression.

Han Mengjie, chief expert in AIDS prevention at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, noted that with no effective, available HIV vaccine, education remains the "social vaccine" in the battle against the virus.

Zhang Yinjun, the film's chief production planner, explained that the real challenge in HIV education for young people today isn't that the topic is untouched, but the deep, structural silence surrounding it.

"Sexual health and HIV prevention have long been overlooked in families, schools and society, and people tend not to talk about these things directly," Zhang said.

She noted that this avoidance makes it more difficult to share vital knowledge effectively, thus young people are less likely to fully develop the understanding and habits they need to protect themselves.

"Ending AIDS isn't just about medicine and testing; it's about creating a culture of understanding, acceptance and love," Zhang added. — Xinhua

China urges Japan to retract erroneous remarks, stop fobbing off

BEIJING – China urges the Japanese side to learn the lessons of history, do soul-searching, take seriously what it has heard from the Chinese side, simply retract the erroneous remarks as it should and take practical steps to honor its political commitments to China, foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said yesterday.

“On issues of principle, an evasive attitude will not get the Japanese side anywhere,” Lin said at a regular news briefing.

Lin said the Japanese side keeps hiding and fudging its position on the Taiwan question. Whenever asked, the Japanese side simply would not mention the Cairo Declaration, the Potsdam Proclamation and the Japanese Instrument of Surrender – all of which made clear that Taiwan be restored to China, nor the four political documents that

serve as the political foundation of China-Japan relations, nor the political commitment made by the Japanese government to the one-China principle, he said.

Lin said all the Japanese side has done is dodging the issue by claiming that its position “remains unchanged,” adding that not even once has the Japanese side fully articulated what exactly that position is.

He said perhaps what the Japanese side would not clarify is not just its position on the Taiwan question. December 1 marks the 82nd anniversary of the Cairo Declaration. This document, together with a series of other international legal instruments, stipulate China’s sovereignty over Taiwan, and are vital outcomes of the World Anti-Fascist War and an integral part of the postwar international order.

“Japan has an obligation under international

law to observe those documents, which is the prerequisite for Japan to be readmitted to the international community after the war. But the Japanese side does not even mention a word about those instruments with full effect under international law, and instead keeps quoting a document that excludes China and some other Asian countries who suffered the most from Japanese aggression and colonialism,” he said.

“That is a clear sign of oblivion to the tragic memory of Japan’s militarist aggression, a serious disregard for the history of the World Anti-Fascist War, and a blatant challenge to the UN’s authority and the postwar international order,” he said.

Lin said the Japanese side has in recent years been revamping the security and defense policies, beefing up the defense budget year after year and seeking to revise its three non-

nuclear principles, and some forces in Japan have been trying hard to break free from the Pacifist Constitution and Japan’s legal obligations as a defeated country in WWII.

“They never truly learned the lessons from history, never truly did any soul-searching about Japan’s war atrocities or looked at them squarely, and never truly sought to prevent the revival of militarism in Japan. They hope that by whitewashing and not mentioning the true history, they could somehow make the world forget and release Japan from its obligations, but the world will not be deceived,” Lin said.

“The course of history must not be reversed, and the bottom line of peace must not be crossed. Japan prevaricated to downplay the situation while continuing down the wrong path. China would absolutely not accept that,” the spokesperson said.

– Xinhua

Chinese satellite reveals mysterious cosmic ‘fireworks’

BEIJING – In the course of almost two years after China’s astronomical satellite named Einstein Probe (EP) was launched, it has managed to capture many extraordinary transient events in the universe that flicker like fireworks, thereby helping expand human understanding of extreme physical phenomena in the cosmos.

“Since its launch in January 2024, EP has fundamentally transformed our view of the dynamic X-ray universe. This pioneering mission, led by the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), is now delivering a steady stream of discoveries – uncovering rare and explosive cosmic events that were once too brief and faint for other telescopes to catch,” Yuan Weimin, principal investigator of the EP mission and a researcher at the National Astronomical Observatories of the CAS (NAOC), said recently.

The EP mission is one of a series of space science missions under the leadership of the CAS. It is also an international collaboration mission with contributions from the European Space Agency, the Max Planck Institute for Extraterrestrial Physics in Germany, and the French space agency CNES.

The probe is equipped with two complementary X-ray telescopes. Its Wide-field X-ray Telescope (WXT) utilizes novel lobster-eye optics to monitor one-tenth of the entire sky in a single shot, thus providing unprecedented sensitivity to faint, transient events. For detailed follow-up, the Follow-up X-ray Telescope (FXT) offers a larger effective area and superior angular resolution to pinpoint and study discoveries.

“The probe can capture fleeting flashes, monitor processes with a duration from seconds to days and years, and detect faint signals hidden in the dark. These findings establish EP as a key player at the forefront of international research in time-domain high-energy astrophysical observations,” said Yuan.

SLOW EVOLVING COSMIC FIREWORK

EP discovered a new X-ray transient, EP241021a, persisting for at least 40 days, like a slowed-down cosmic firework, which was accompanied by a relativistic jet. Relevant study has been published in the *Astrophysical Journal Letters*.

Such a prolonged and luminous eruption is extremely rare. Astronomers speculate it could be the signature of a star being torn apart by an uncommon intermediate-mass black hole or an unusual type of explosion resulting from the core-collapse of a massive star.

“This discovery offers new insights into catastrophic explosion and the launching of a relativistic jet,” said Shu Xinwen, a professor at Anhui Normal University in east China, who leads the study.

“It also provides potentially valuable clues for studying the enigmatic class of intermediate-mass black holes,” Shu added.

ILLUMINATING THE MILKY WAY

In September 2024, the probe captured an exceptionally faint X-ray burst, dubbed EP240904a, within the Milky Way. Its observational characteristics, including its X-ray “heartbeat” and spectral evolution, as well as its radio and infrared properties – identified it as a new black hole candidate. The outburst was about 100 times dimmer than typical black hole eruptions, explaining why it had remained hidden in previous observations. Relevant study has been published in the *Astrophysical Journal Letters*.

“The discovery of EP240904a opens a new window for unveiling the hidden population of black holes in the Milky Way,” said Cheng Huaqing from the NAOC, who is the first author of the study.

“With the EP, we now have the key capability to uncover these ‘silent’ black holes systematically,” said Tao Lian, a researcher from the Institute of High Energy Physics of the CAS and corresponding author of the study.

RARE X-RAY FLASH

The mission’s autonomous capabilities were spotlighted with the discovery of EP240801a. The probe detected this transient and immediately triggered its onboard FXT instrument for follow-up observations.

A joint analysis involving NASA’s Fermi satellite revealed the event to be an extremely “soft” X-ray flash – a rare type of explosion in which low-energy X-rays dominate radiation.

Scientists classify X-rays as “soft” or “hard” based on the energy level of their X-ray photons. Soft X-rays have lower photon energy, while hard X-rays have higher energy.

Its extreme properties provide new clues regarding the diversity of gamma-ray bursts and stellar core-collapse events.

“This event showcases EP’s core capabilities – as it completed the full process from discovery to tracking the X-ray evolution and locating the position of the transient source autonomously,” said Xu Dong, a researcher from the NAOC. “This performance marks it as a brilliant and efficient cosmic monitoring platform.” – Xinhua



This photo shows a robot displayed at the Third Overseas Chinese Talent Conference for Development in Fuzhou, capital of Fujian Province, yesterday. Under the theme of “Uniting Overseas Chinese Talent, Forging a New Era of Innovation,” the Third Overseas Chinese Talent Conference for Development kicked off yesterday.

– Xinhua

Shenzhou-20 spaceship to make uncrewed return to Earth: spokesperson

BEIJING – After a potential space debris impact, the Shenzhou-20 spaceship, currently docked with China’s space station, will make an uncrewed return to Earth, according to Ji Qiming, a project spokesperson with the country’s manned space program.

Following a suspected debris strike on Shenzhou-20’s viewport, the three astronauts originally scheduled to return to Earth aboard the spacecraft were redirected to Shenzhou-21, which brought them home safely on November 14.

China launched the Shenzhou-22 on November 25 to provide a new return vehicle for the orbiting crew – completing the first emergency launch in the history of its manned space program.

During a subsequent spacewalk, the Shenzhou-21 crew, who are now undertaking a six-month orbital stay, may be tasked with inspecting the cracked viewport. They may also perform protective work on it using specialized devices delivered by the Shenzhou-22 launch – a procedure still being validated in ground tests, said Ji in a recent CCTV interview.

A day prior to their planned return on November 5, the Shenzhou-20 crew spotted an anomaly on the viewport’s edge – a triangular, paint-like mark. They photographed it from multiple angles and under different lights, while the station’s robotic arm cameras were employed to take supplemental external pictures.

The flaw was later identified as “penetrating cracks,” said Jia Shijin, chief designer of the crewed spaceship system from China Academy of Space Technology. “The space debris responsible is preliminarily judged to be less than a millimeter in size, but struck with extremely high speed.”

After this initial investigation, ground teams conducted extensive simulations and tests – and commissioned two research institutions to perform wind tunnel tests for independent verification, Jia revealed.

In a worst-case scenario, the cracks could spread, causing the outer pane to detach – with this leading to the failure of the inner pressure-sealing glass, resulting in cabin depressurization and the ingress of high-speed gases, Jia explained.

Guided by the principle of astronaut safety first, China opted for the historic alternative return and emergency launch procedures.

Ji said that Shenzhou-20’s unmanned return mission will generate meaningful real-world experimental data for subsequent missions.

Four mice traveled to space aboard Shenzhou-21 spaceship. They were initially scheduled for a 5-to-7-day experiment on orbit, but instead stayed for about two weeks before returning with the Shenzhou-20 crew, according to Wu Dawei from the China Astronaut Research and Training Center. All mice returned in healthy condition, Wu said.

– Xinhua

Thailand extradites Vietnamese activist: lawyer

BANGKOK – A Vietnamese activist who was granted refugee status by the UN has been extradited by Thailand to Vietnam where he faces a decade in prison, his lawyer said yesterday.

A Thai appeal court ruled last week to allow the extradition of Y Quynh Bdap, who had lived in exile in Thailand since 2018.

A Vietnamese court sentenced him in absentia in January 2024 for terrorism offences.

Bdap was convicted for remotely orchestrating 2023 attacks in which

gunmen on motorbikes opened fire on two police posts in Vietnam's Central Highlands, killing nine people in a rare act of violence against the communist authorities. He has denied the allegations.

"Thai immigration said Bdap was handed over to Vietnamese officials without giving further details. We have no news about his fate," his lawyer Nadthasiri Bergman told AFP.

The handover happened on Friday, she said.

A spokesman for the Thai

immigration department could not be immediately reached yesterday.

The Thai corrections department said in a statement on Friday that it had coordinated with Thai police to transfer Y Quynh Bdap back to Vietnam.

Bdap was granted refugee status by the United Nations but he had been detained in a Bangkok prison since December when he was jailed for staying in the country without proper travel documents.

UN-affiliated experts warned last year that Bdap would be at risk

of "torture or other ill-treatment or punishment" if sent back to Vietnam.

Sunai Phasuk, an adviser at Human Rights Watch, wrote on X that Bdap was extradited "despite concerns from the UN, human rights groups, Thailand's National Human Rights Commission, and western governments that he will face unjust prosecution, including 10 years prison term".

Vietnamese police have said Bdap is the founder of Montagnards Stand for Justice and accused him of directing people there to carry

out the 2023 attacks.

The group advocates for freedom of religion for Vietnam's hill tribes and ethnic minority groups, which have been branded "terrorists" by the authorities.

Montagnards – the collective name for various tribes in the Central Highlands – sided with the US-backed south during Vietnam's decades-long war.

Some have called for more autonomy, while others abroad advocate independence for the region.

– AFP

Singapore to toughen ban on smartphones in schools

SINGAPORE – Singapore will impose a stricter ban on smartphones and smartwatches in secondary schools starting January, its education ministry said, part of a global push to combat digital distractions.

Current guidelines in the city-state – one of the world's most digitally connected populations – bar secondary school students from using their devices in the classroom.

This will be broadened to include non-lesson time, with students required to keep phones

in designated storage areas such as lockers or school bags during school hours.

The goal is "to create a school environment that prioritises students' learning and enhances their engagement, fostering healthier habits on screen use and better well-being", the ministry said Sunday.

"Screen use among students has been shown to displace important activities such as sleep, physical activity and social interactions with friends and family."

Schools may allow smartphone use by exception "where necessary",

the ministry said in a statement.

A growing number of countries are taking similar action, with 40 percent of education systems now banning smartphones in school, according to UNESCO.

Next week Australia will go a step further with a world-first ban on social media for under-16s.

On its website UNESCO highlighted some particularly stringent school bans, such as a requirement in China's Zhengzhou "that parents provide written consent that a phone was really needed for pedagogical reasons".

– AFP



A photo taken on November 18 shows Zoe Jones with her 12-year-old influencer daughter Ava in Melbourne. From December 10, under-16s in Australia will be banned from social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Reddit and TikTok. Ava Chanel Jones, 12, uses Instagram to document her cheering, dancing, modelling and brand promotions – a hobby that started during the pandemic with the help of her mother, Zoe. Her following has ballooned to more than 11,400 people, enough for a monthly income from Meta, free products from brands and to even launch her own clothing line.

– AFP

Asia floods death toll tops 1,100 as troops aid survivors

Rezan Soleh in Padang with Amal Jayasinghe in Colombo

PADANG – The toll in deadly flooding and landslides across parts of Asia climbed past 1,100 yesterday as hardest-hit Sri Lanka and Indonesia deployed military personnel to help survivors.

Separate weather systems brought torrential, extended rainfall to the entire island of Sri Lanka and large parts of Indonesia's Sumatra, southern Thailand and northern Malaysia last week.

Much of the region is currently in its monsoon season but climate change is producing more extreme rain events and turbocharging storms.

The relentless rains left residents clinging to rooftops awaiting rescue by boat or helicopter, and cut entire villages off from assistance.

Arriving in North Sumatra yesterday, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto said "the worst has passed, hopefully".

The government's "priority now is how to immediately send the necessary aid", with particular focus on several cut-off areas, he added.

Prabowo is under increasing pressure to declare a national emergency in response to flooding and landslides that have killed at least 593 people, with nearly 470 still missing.

Unlike his Sri Lankan counterpart, Prabowo has also avoided publicly calling for international assistance.

The toll is the deadliest in a natural disaster in Indonesia since a massive 2018 earthquake and subsequent tsunami killed more than 2,000 people in Sulawesi.

The government has sent three warships carrying aid and

two hospital ships to some of the worst-hit areas, where many roads remain impassable.

In North Aceh, 28-year-old Misbahul Munir described walking through water that reached his neck to get back to his parents.

"Everything in the house was destroyed because it was submerged," he told AFP.

"I have only the clothes I am wearing," he said in tears.

"In other places, there were a lot of people who died. We are grateful that we are healthy."

'Everything went under'

In Sri Lanka, the government called for international aid and used military helicopters to reach people stranded by flooding and landslides triggered by Cyclone Ditwah.

At least 355 people have been killed, Sri Lankan officials said yesterday, with another 366 still missing.

Floodwaters in the capital Colombo peaked overnight.

Now that the rain has stopped, there were hopes that waters would begin receding. Some shops and offices have reopened.

The floodwaters came as a surprise to some around Colombo.

"Every year we experience minor floods, but this is something else," delivery driver Dinusha Sanjaya, 37, told AFP.

"It is not just the amount of water, but how quickly everything went under."

Officials said the extent of the damage in the worst-affected central region was only just being revealed as relief workers cleared roads blocked by fallen trees and mudslides.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, who declared a state of emergency to deal with the disaster, called the flooding the "largest and most challenging natural disaster in our history."

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

Anger in Thailand

By Sunday afternoon, rain had subsided across Sri Lanka but low-lying areas of the capital were flooded and authorities were bracing for a major relief operation.

Military helicopters have been deployed to airlift stranded residents and to deliver food. One crashed just north of Colombo on Sunday, killing the pilot.

The annual monsoon season often brings heavy rain, triggering landslides and flash floods.

But the flooding that hit Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia was also exacerbated by a rare tropical storm that dumped heavy rain on Sumatra island in particular.

The waves of rain caused flooding that killed at least 176 people in southern Thailand, authorities said yesterday, one of the deadliest flood incidents in the country in a decade.

The government has rolled out relief measures, but there has been growing public criticism of the flood response, and two local officials have been suspended over their alleged failures.

Across the border in Malaysia, where heavy rains also inundated large stretches of land in Perlis state, two people were killed.

– AFP

4 charged in Australia over 'satanic' child abuse material

SYDNEY – Australian police said yesterday they had charged four men in Sydney in relation to "satanic" child sex abuse material circulating online.

Detectives were probing an "international satanic child abuse material ring", when they identified the suspects in Sydney, New South Wales state police said.

They are accused of possessing, distributing, and facilitating child abuse material through a website that was administered internationally.

Police arrested the four men on Thursday, including a 26-year-old man accused of playing a leading role in the group, they said in a statement.

The man was charged with 14 offences including using a carriage service to make available and access child abuse material.

The other three men, aged 39, 42, and 46, were arrested in a block of flats and charged with a string of offences related to child abuse material.

"Due to the nature of the material that they were sharing and the conversations that we became aware of, we were concerned about any children that these people might come in contact with as a result of that," Sex Crimes Squad Detective Superintendent Jayne Doherty told a news conference.

Police seized several electronic devices, allegedly finding thousands of "deplorable" abuse videos on children between 5 and 12 years old, as well as bestiality.

"The sharing of child abuse material, unfortunately, is increasing," Doherty said.

"We will work together to make sure a child is identified, and they can be rescued as soon as possible."

Police said they had not yet verified where the material originated from nor identified any children from the videos.

All four men were refused bail while awaiting their next court appearance.

– AFP



Papuan students take part in a protest calling for the independence of Papua province in Surabaya, Indonesia yesterday, to coincide with the anniversary of the Free Papua Movement.

– AFP

S Korean religious leader on trial on graft charges

Kang Jin-kyu

SEOUL – The leader of one of South Korea's largest cult-like churches stood trial yesterday accused of bribing the country's former first lady with gifts including a designer handbag and a diamond necklace.

The arrest of leader Han Hak-ja in September rocked the Unification Church, which claims to have 10 million followers worldwide and controls a sprawling business empire.

The 82-year-old defendant, known to her followers as "holy mother", also faces graft charges over cash payments to a lawmaker linked to disgraced president Yoon Suk Yeol.

Yesterday, Han's defence team denied that she had bribed former first lady Kim Keon Hee or that lawmaker, insisting the gifts were arranged by a former church official acting independently and without her knowledge, Seoul's Yonhap news agency reported.

Prosecutors rejected the claim, saying Han's alleged offence was "extremely egregious".

They said church members had donated to the organisation despite their financial hardship, only for the funds to be used for "bail payments and illicit political ties", according to Yonhap.

In August, Han told her followers in a video message: "I have never ordered any unlawful political request or monetary transaction."

Han took over leadership of the Unification Church after the death of her husband Moon Sun-myung, who founded the assembly in 1954 after he was rejected by mainstream Protestant churches.

Moon claimed to be the second coming of Jesus Christ and the church has a rigid, hierarchical culture and its followers are sometimes derisively referred to as "Moonies".

'Only begotten daughter'

Han, who has 14 children with Moon, is referred to by followers as God's "only begotten daughter" and the "holy mother".

The church rose to global prominence in the 1970s and 80s, becoming known for mass weddings often held in stadiums.

Over the decades, it amassed a business empire that spans construction, food, education and the media, including the ownership of *Washington Times* and Sunmoon University.

But it also came under repeated scrutiny over how it obtained financial donations from members and its links to politicians.

Japan this year took legal action to order the Japanese chapter of the Unification Church dissolved, after the gunman who killed former prime minister Shinzo Abe was believed to have targeted him over grudges against the church.

In Seoul, Han will have to answer allegations that she gave luxury goods worth around 82 million won (US\$56,000) to Yoon's wife Kim, herself under arrest over charges of bribery and stock-market manipulation.

Han is also suspected of having conspired to pay 100 million won to a People's Party MP in 2022 in a bid to seek favour with Yoon, who went on to win the presidency that year.

A separate trial will open on December 9 with Han facing charges that she violated the political parties act.

Prosecutors believe she had directed more than 2,000 church members to sign up for Yoon's People Power Party ahead of a party convention to influence its outcome.

Han was briefly released in November to undergo eye surgery but has returned to pre-trial custody. She is seeking bail.

"We explained to the court that the charges against Han differ from the facts, and fully detailed the health difficulties she faces due to her age and medical conditions," the Unification Church told AFP in a statement.

"Proper treatment and recovery are essential for uncovering the truth," it added. – AFP

Seoul mayor indicted over alleged illegal polling payments

SEOUL – South Korean prosecutors indicted the mayor of Seoul yesterday for allegedly violating political funding laws.

Oh Se-hoon of the conservative People Power Party is serving his fourth term as mayor of South Korea's capital and has long been tipped as a future presidential candidate.

Prosecutors accuse him of arranging for a supporter to cover the cost of opinion polling ahead of the 2021 by-election.

They said the 64-year-old mayor had a businessman pay 33 million won (US\$22,400) over five occasions to fund polls, in breach of the Political Funds Act.

The indictment was launched by a team of lawyers investigating alleged corruption linked to jailed former first lady Kim Keon Hee.

Oh has denied any wrongdoing, dismissing the indictment as a "political scheme".

"This is a far-fetched case without a shred of direct evidence and will only end in acquittal," Oh said in a statement.

"I will stand firm alongside the people of Seoul," he added.

First elected Seoul mayor in 2006, Oh returned to office in 2021 following the death by suicide of successor Park Won-soon.

He has consistently topped recent opinion surveys for next year's local elections – a race seen as a potential springboard for a presidential bid if he secures another term.

Under South Korea's election laws, a conviction carrying a fine of one million won or more would strip him of eligibility to run next year. – AFP

Japanese oysters dying 'en masse', likely due to warmer sea: officials

TOKYO – Oysters in Japan are dying en masse in parts of the country's top production area, likely due to warmer sea temperatures, officials said yesterday.

In some coastal areas surrounding the Seto Inland Sea in western Japan – an area that accounts for more than three quarters of Japan's farmed oyster production – around 90 percent of cultivated oysters are dead.

"I've never experienced this in my whole career," Tatsuya Morio, who has farmed oysters for more than 20 years, told AFP.

Shoichi Yokouchi, an official in the Hiroshima area, which borders the Seto Inland Sea, said he suspected "high water temperatures, together with other factors, are the culprit of oysters dying en masse".

This year average water temperatures along Hiroshima's coast from July to October – an important period for oyster cultivation – were 1.5-1.9C higher than the 1991-2020 average, according to prefecture data.

Sea temperatures are rising globally due to climate change.

"If higher temperatures remain for a few weeks, that weakens oysters and makes them more susceptible to viruses and bacteria," said Yokouchi, head of the marine products division.

The mortality rate of harvested oysters is typically 30-50 percent.

But interviews conducted by the fisheries agency in mid-November revealed rates of 60-90 percent in the central-eastern part of Hiroshima Prefecture, and normal to slightly elevated rates in the rest of western part, the ministry of agriculture, forestry and fisheries (MAFF) said last week.

"Little rain in July this year, in addition to high water temperatures, led to a rise in salt concentration, damaging oysters," said Shinichiro Toi, an official in charge of marine product technology research.

A MAFF official told AFP: "We are investigating the cause of the oyster deaths together with local governments".

Farmer Morio told local broadcaster Hiroshima Home Television that even oysters thought to be more resilient to higher temperatures had been hit.

In nearby Hyogo prefecture, oyster farmer Daiki Takeuchi said those that had survived "had grown poorly".

They are "about half the size of the average," the 33-year-old told AFP. "It's difficult to sell them to be honest."

Meanwhile, oysters off the Sanriku coast in northern Japan, which account for about 17 percent of the country's farmed oyster production, do not seem to be affected, the MAFF said.

The rate of ocean warming has more than doubled since 1993, according to the UN's IPCC climate expert panel.

Average sea surface temperatures reached new records in 2023 and 2024.

Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Vietnam and Thailand are among the main importers of Japanese oysters. – AFP



People take a selfie in front of a *Tabebuia rosea* tree in a park in Bengaluru, India yesterday.

– AFP

Bangladesh court sentences former PM's sister, UK lawmaker

Sheikh Sabiha Alam

DHAKA – A Bangladesh court sentenced Sheikh Rehana, sister of former premier Sheikh Hasina, to seven years in prison yesterday for corruption in a case involving the grabbing of lucrative plots in the capital.

Rehana's daughter Tulip Siddiq, who is a British lawmaker, was handed a two-year sentence in the same case, said Khan Mainul Hasan, prosecutor for the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

Hasina, who was given the death penalty for crimes against humanity last month, and 14 other government officials were condemned to five years of imprisonment.

The 78-year-old former premier has sought refuge in India since her ouster last year following a student-led uprising, but Rehana's whereabouts remain unknown.

Siddiq, who resigned as British anti-corruption minister in January

after being named in graft probes in Bangladesh, called the trial "flawed and farcical from the beginning to the end".

Hasan said the commission had details of Siddiq's correspondence with Salahuddin Ahmed, the principal secretary to the then prime minister, exposing her role in the case.

"Tulip insisted that her aunt Sheikh Hasina allocate plots for her mother and siblings, as she herself took three – one for her and two for her children," Hasan said.

"She called him (Ahmed), communicated via some encrypted apps, and even met him while she was in Dhaka."

Judge Rabiul Alam quoted verses from the Quran as he read out the judgement.

"The court has full authority to try any Bangladeshi, whether the person is in the country or abroad," he said.

Hasina decried the latest verdict in a statement to AFP yesterday.

"No country is free from corruption. But corruption needs to be investigated in a way that is not itself corrupt. The ACC has failed that test today," she said.

The interim government in Bangladesh would formally notify British authorities about Siddiq's verdict, prosecutors said.

Siddiq, 43, said she refused to be "distracted by the dirty politics of Bangladesh".

"The outcome of this kangaroo court is as predictable as it is unjustified," she said in a statement.

"I hope this so-called 'verdict' will be treated with the contempt it deserves."

Bangladesh has been in political turmoil since the end of Hasina's rule, and violence has marred campaigning for elections slated for February 2026.

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

Pope urges Lebanon's religious leaders to fight intolerance

Clement Melki and Layal Abou Rahal

BEIRUT, Lebanon – Pope Leo XIV and leaders from Lebanon's religious communities met in a show of unity yesterday, with the pontiff urging them to combat intolerance on day two of his visit.

Lebanese have joyfully welcomed the American pontiff, turning out in their thousands to his public appearances and lining streets where his motorcade has passed, waving Vatican flags and sometimes ululating or throwing rice in celebration despite intermittent rain.

"You are called to be builders of peace: to confront intolerance, overcome violence, and banish exclusion, illuminating the path toward justice," Pope Leo told 16 leaders from Lebanon's 18 officially recognised religious denominations.

"In an age when coexistence can seem like a distant dream, the people of Lebanon, while embracing different religions, stand as a powerful reminder that fear, distrust and prejudice do not have the final word, and that unity, reconciliation, and peace are possible," he added.

The event in a marquee in Beirut's Martyrs' Square near several mosques and churches included a reading from the Koran and remarks by leaders from Orthodox churches and the Sunni, Shiite, Druze and Alawite communities, who also emphasised the importance of coexistence.

While long hailed as a model of tolerance, Lebanon was devastated by a 1975-1990 civil war along sectarian lines and is still plagued by deep rifts.

Leo arrived from Turkey on Sunday on his inaugural visit abroad as pontiff and brought a message of hope, particularly to young people in Lebanon whose faith in their crisis-hit country has dwindled.

'Never without hope'

"For the world, we ask for peace. We especially implore it for Lebanon and for the entire Levant," Leo said earlier yesterday from a monastery in Annaya hosting the tomb of Saint Charbel, who enjoys



Pope Leo XIV waves to a crowd of young people upon his arrival at the Maronite Patriarchate in Bkerke, north of the capital Beirut, yesterday. – AFP

broad popularity in Lebanon beyond the Christian community.

The pontiff then visited Harissa, where a giant statue of Our Lady of Lebanon overlooks the Mediterranean from a plunging hilltop. The site also draws visitors of all faiths.

A packed gathering of bishops, other religious figures and pastoral workers in Harissa's towering basilica erupted into cheers and applause as the pontiff entered, shaking hands with people including priests and nuns, some of whom kissed his hand.

Prayer "gives us the strength to continue to hope and work, even when surrounded by the sound of weapons and when the very necessities of daily life become a challenge", the pontiff told the event after hearing testimonies from participants.

"It is necessary, even among the rubble of a world that has its own painful failures", to offer young people "concrete and viable prospects for rebirth and future growth," he added.

Many Lebanese, particularly young people, left the country after a crushing economic crisis, widely blamed on official corruption and mismanagement, began in 2019.

Fears have grown in the country of a renewed war between Israel and Hezbollah despite a ceasefire in November 2024 that sought to end more than a year of hostilities.

Israel has intensified strikes on Lebanon in recent weeks despite the truce, while the cash-strapped Lebanese government is under

heavy US pressure to disarm the Iran-backed militants.

Youth meeting

Tony Elias, 43, a priest from the village of Rmeish along Lebanon's border with Israel, said that "we have lived through nearly two and a half years of war, but have never been without hope."

Leo "has come to confirm that what we have gone through has not been in vain, and we believe that he brings a real message of peace – a living peace", he told AFP.

The pope also met young people at the patriarchate of Lebanon's Maronite church in Bkerke, outside the capital.

More than 10,000 people aged 16 to 35 have registered to attend, according to organisers, including more than 500 from abroad.

"Everyone goes to Rome to see the pope, but he has come to us," said housewife Therese Daraouni, 61, who had waited along the roadside to see Leo.

"This is the greatest blessing, and the greatest grace and hope for Lebanon. I hope people unite for the sake of Lebanon and its people," she told AFP.

Yasmine Chidiac, who was hoping to catch sight of Leo, said the trip "has brought a smile back to our faces".

Authorities have proclaimed yesterday and today official holidays, and ramped-up security measures include road closures and a ban on drone photography. – AFP

Israel to deploy 'Iron Beam' laser defence by end 2025

JERUSALEM – Israel's defence ministry announced yesterday the completion of a laser air defence system known as "Iron Beam", which will be deployed by the end of December.

"The Iron Beam laser system is expected to fundamentally change the rules of engagement on the battlefield," Daniel Gold, head of defence ministry research and development, told a defence summit in Tel Aviv.

"With development complete and a comprehensive testing programme that has validated the system's capabilities," he added, promising to deliver "initial operational capability" by the end of the year.

The announcement comes as Israeli military steps up its strikes against the militant group Hezbollah and its infrastructure, despite a ceasefire that began just over a year ago.

Contacted by AFP, the defence ministry refused to provide more details on what exactly would happen on that date.

The announcement marks a major milestone in a project more than a decade old, developed jointly with the state-owned arms company Rafael and Israeli private defence group Elbit.

The laser system seeks to enhance Israel's interception of drones and other projectiles, and will supplement other aerial defence capacities such as the more well-known Iron Dome.

Iron Dome offers short-range protection against missiles and rockets. The David's Sling system and successive generations of Arrow missiles are Israeli-American technology built to bring down ballistic missiles.

During the 12-day war launched by Israel against Iran in June, the country's missile defence system failed to intercept all the projectiles fired by Tehran toward Israeli territory.

Israel has since acknowledged being hit by more than 50 missiles during the war with Iran, resulting in 28 deaths.

The new system is "a ground-based high-power laser air defence system designed to counter aerial threats", Rafael said.

The company added that the system has the "unique advantage of rapidly neutralising threats using laser technology at negligible cost".

– AFP



Palestinian Hamas militants arrive to secure the area as Egyptian workers, accompanied by members of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), search for the last two remaining bodies of hostages – an Israeli soldier and a Thai national – from under the rubble of the Jabalia refugee camp, in the northern of Gaza Strip, yesterday. The Gaza war was sparked by Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel, resulting in the deaths of 1,221 people and the taking 251 hostage. Israel's retaliatory assault on Gaza has killed over 70,000 people, according to figures from the health ministry that the UN considers reliable. – AFP

Trump warns Israel not to 'interfere' in Syria

WASHINGTON – US President Donald Trump warned Israel yesterday against destabilising Syria and its new leadership, days after a deadly operation by Israeli forces in the south of the country.

"It is very important that Israel maintain a strong and true dialogue with Syria, and that nothing takes place that will interfere with Syria's evolution into a prosperous State," Trump said on his Truth Social platform.

Trump said he was "very satisfied" with Syria's performance under former Islamist rebel President Ahmed al-Sharaa, who made a historic visit to the White House in November.

Trump has been pushing for a security pact between Israel and Syria since Sharaa's Islamist coalition overthrew longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad a year ago.

But tensions have risen over hundreds of strikes by Israel on Syria. In the deadliest so far, Israeli forces killed 13 people on Friday in an operation in southern Syria, saying they targeted an Islamist group.

Trump said Sharaa "is working diligently to make sure good things happen, and that both Syria and Israel will have a long and prosperous relationship together."

He added that the United States was "doing everything within our power to make sure the Government of Syria continues to do what was intended" to rebuild the war-torn country.

Good relations between Syria and Israel would add to his efforts for a wider Middle East peace following the fragile Gaza ceasefire in October, added Trump. – AFP

10 Palestinians injured in clashes with Israeli settlers: Red Crescent

JERUSALEM – The Palestinian Red Crescent said that 10 Palestinians were injured on Saturday in clashes with Israeli settlers near Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank.

"Ten injuries during settler attacks in the Khala'il al-Luz area south of Bethlehem, including one injury from live ammunition, and nine injuries from beatings," the rescue service said in a statement on Saturday.

The Israeli army said in a joint statement with the police that its forces "were dispatched to the outskirts of Bethlehem, following a report of a violent confrontation between Israeli civilians and Palestinians".

The clashes involved "stone hurling between Palestinians and Israelis at the scene, as well as gunfire in the area toward the Palestinians," the statement said.

To halt the clashes, Israeli forces employed "crowd dispersal methods" and declared a "closed military zone in the area", the military said.

"Several Israeli civilians were injured but refused medical treatment," the statement added.

Violence in the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967, has soared since Palestinian militant group Hamas's October 2023 attack on Israel triggered the Gaza war.

It has not ceased despite the fragile truce between Israel and Hamas coming into effect last month.

Israeli troops or settlers have killed more than 1,000 Palestinians, many of them militants, but also scores of civilians, in the West Bank since the start of the Gaza war, according to an AFP tally based on Palestinian health ministry figures.

At least 44 Israelis, including both soldiers and civilians, have been killed in Palestinian attacks or Israeli military operations, according to official Israeli figures.

– AFP

WHO backs GLP-1 treatments to tackle obesity epidemic

Nina Larson

GENEVA—A range of blockbuster weight-loss and diabetes drugs could help shift the trajectory of the global obesity epidemic, which affects over one billion people worldwide, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said yesterday.

A new generation of appetite-suppressing drugs called GLP-1 agonists – which includes blockbuster brands Ozempic and Mounjaro – has become massively popular in recent years.

Yesterday, the United Nations health agency issued its first guidelines on how such drugs could be used as a key tool for treating obesity in adults as a chronic, relapsing disease.

More than 3.7 million people died from illnesses related to being overweight or obese in 2022, according to WHO figures – more than top infectious killers malaria, tuberculosis and HIV combined.

The number of people living with obesity will double by 2030 unless decisive action is taken to stem the rise, the agency estimates.

“Obesity is one of the most serious public challenges of our time,” WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters from the agency’s Geneva headquarters.

“These new medicines are a powerful clinical tool, offering hope to millions.”

Not ‘a magic bullet’

The new guidelines call for GLP-1 therapies to be used by adults, excluding pregnant women, “for the long-term treatment of obesity”, which it defines as a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30 or higher.

WHO stressed that while the efficacy of the therapies in treating obesity was “evident”, it was issuing “conditional recommendations” for use since more data was needed on efficacy and safety over longer periods.

The agency also emphasised that the medication alone would not reverse the trend in obesity, which it recognised as a complex, chronic disease and a major driver of non-communicable diseases, including cardiovascular disease, type-2 diabetes and some types of cancer.

The new guidelines suggest the therapies could be coupled with “intensive behavioural interventions”, promoting healthy diet and physical activity, amid indications such shifts may enhance treatment outcomes.

The WHO also insisted on the importance of “creating healthier environments through robust population-level policies to promote health and prevent obesity”.

It also urged targeted screening of high-risk individuals and ensuring access to lifelong, person-centred care.

“You can’t see these drugs as a magic bullet,” Jeremy Farrar, WHO assistant director-general in charge of health promotion, disease prevention and care, told AFP.

“But they’re clearly going to become a very important part of an integrated approach to obesity,” he said.

If countries get the combination right, “the impact on bringing down levels of the people who are obese, and the impact particularly on diabetes... on cardiovascular and others, is going to be profound”.

Bending the trajectory

Francesca Celletti, a WHO senior advisor on obesity, agreed.

“There is a possibility that we can bend this epidemiological trajectory of obesity,” she told AFP.

Beyond the health impacts, the global economic cost of obesity is predicted to hit US\$3 trillion annually by the end of this decade, the WHO said.

“If we don’t somehow shift the curve, the pressure on health systems is actually going to be untenable,” Farrar warned.

The sky-high prices of GLP-1 drugs have raised concerns that they will not be made available in poorer nations where they could save the most lives.

Diabetes patients, for whom the drugs were originally developed, have also experienced shortages.

In September, the WHO added GLP-1s to its list of essential medicines in a bid to shore up access, calling for cheap generic versions to be made available for people in developing countries.

“Our greatest concern is equitable access,” Tedros said.

“Without concerted action, these medicines could contribute to widening the gap between the rich and poor, both between and within countries.”

– AFP

Twice-a-year HIV prevention shots begin in Africa

Hillary Orinde

JOHANNESBURG – South Africa, Eswatini and Zambia yesterday began administering a groundbreaking HIV-prevention injection in the drug’s first public rollouts in Africa, which has the world’s highest HIV burden.

Lenacapavir, which is taken twice a year, has been shown to reduce the risk of HIV transmission by more than 99.9 percent, making it functionally akin to a powerful vaccine.

In South Africa, where one in five adults lives with HIV, a Wits University research unit oversaw the rollout as part of an initiative funded by the international health agency Unitaid, which works on ensuring equitable access to medical innovations.

“The first individuals have begun using lenacapavir for HIV prevention in South Africa... making it among the first real-world use of the six-monthly injectable in low- and middle-income countries,” Unitaid said in a statement.

It did not specify how many people received the first doses of the drug, which cost US\$28,000 per person a year in the United States.

A broader national rollout is expected next year.

Neighbouring Zambia and Eswatini received 1,000 doses last month as part of a US programme and launched the drug at World AIDS Day ceremonies yesterday.

In Eswatini’s Hhukwini constituency, dozens lined up for the shot at a lively public event filled with song and dance.

“Today marks a turning point in our national HIV response,” said Prime Minister Russell Dlamini, adding that the injection “gives us fresh hope and a powerful tool to protect our citizens”.

In Zambia, hundreds marched two kilometres to Chawama township of the capital Lusaka to mark the occasion.

Health Minister Elijah Muchima urged volunteers living with HIV to visit nearby hospitals to get the jab, saying it “brings renewed hope to young people and the vulnerable population”.

Under the US programme, manufacturer Gilead Sciences has agreed to provide

lenacapavir at no profit to two million people in countries with a high HIV burden over three years.

But Washington – at odds with Pretoria over several policy issues – will not provide doses to South Africa despite its participation in clinical trials.

“Obviously, we encourage every country, especially countries like South Africa, that have significant means of their own to fund doses for their own population,” Jeremy Lewin, a senior US State Department official, told reporters late last month.

Saving lives vs profit

Critics say the US deliveries are far below the actual requirement and that the market price is out of reach for most people.

Eastern and southern Africa account for about 52 percent of the 40.8 million people living with HIV worldwide, according to 2024 UNAIDS data.

In Zambia alone, roughly 1.4 million people are living with HIV, with 30,000 new infections each year, according to the health ministry. Eswatini – a tiny kingdom of 1.2 million – has about 220,000 people living with the virus.

UNAIDS executive director Winnie Byanyima criticised the drug’s limited availability, saying drugmakers were neglecting Africa’s needs.

“If you don’t care about those lives, at least you care about the profit! Bring the drug here,” she told AFP.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that gains against HIV are “now at risk” after funding cuts and urged countries to rapidly scale up use of lenacapavir.

“Progress against HIV has largely stalled,” he told journalists.

Generic versions of lenacapavir are expected to be available from 2027 at around US\$40 per year in more than 100 countries, through agreements by Unitaid and the Gates Foundation with Indian pharmaceutical companies.

Pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, has been used for over a decade to prevent HIV but its reliance on a daily pill has limited its impact on global infections.

– AFP



France’s President Emmanuel Macron (right) and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy are about to hug following a joint press conference at the Élysée Palace in Paris yesterday. Ukrainian In his meeting with Macron, Zelenskyy sought to shore up European support as US President expressed optimism of a deal to end the war in Ukraine.

– AFP

Brazilian teen killed after climbing into lion enclosure at zoo

RIO DE JANEIRO – A Brazilian teenager was mauled by a lioness in full view of zoo visitors on Sunday, after scaling a six-meter wall and safety fencing and shimmying down a tree into the enclosure, authorities said.

The municipal government of the coastal city of João Pessoa said a young man – identified by Brazilian media as Gerson de Melo Machado, 19 – had “deliberately invaded the lioness’s enclosure” at the Arruda Câmara Zoobotanical Park.

“In a rapid and surprising manner, he climbed a wall over six meters high, scaled the security bars, accessed one of the trees, and entered the enclosure,” the government said in a statement.

Viral videos of the attack showed the lioness, Leona, lying next to the glass separating her from visitors, who gasp in shock as the teen shimmies down a tree.

The lioness spots him and makes a beeline for the tree, pulling Machado down to the ground. Bushes are seen shaking, and the teen stands up one more time before disappearing from view.

“It got him. It got him,” visitors can be heard saying, with exclamations of “my God!”

The government statement said Machado “died from injuries caused by the animal.”

The zoo said in a statement on Instagram that the incident was “extremely sad” and that it was closed while investigations continue.

Park vet Thiago Nery defended safety standards around the lion enclosure, which he said had over eight metres of protection.

“This incident was completely unforeseeable, outside any scenario within the park’s routine.”

The park said that “euthanasia was never considered” for Leona, who “shows no aggressive behaviour outside the context of the incident.”

The government statement said that initial investigations showed “the man’s actions may have been a possible suicide attempt.”

Child protection counsellor Verônica Oliveira said in a video on Instagram that she had accompanied Machado for eight years as he “went through all the institutional care in this city.”

She said his mother and grandparents suffered from schizophrenia, but state psychiatrists said he merely “had a behavioural problem.”

“He should have been in treatment.”

In other media interviews, Oliveira said Machado had dreamed of being a lion tamer, and once cut through an airport fence and hid in the landing gear of a plane he thought was going to Africa.

“Society, without knowing your story, preferred to throw you into the lion’s den,” she said.

– AFP

Trump-backed candidate holds narrow lead in race for Honduras presidency

Henry Morales and Noe Leiva

TEGUCIGALPA – A conservative candidate backed by US President Donald Trump narrowly leads a right-wing rival in Honduras's presidential election, according to partial results from the electoral commission released yesterday.

Nasry Asfura, 67, had 40 percent of the votes and led Salvador Nasralla by just 0.2 percentage points, with 56 percent of votes counted, according to the National Electoral Council (CNE).

Both candidates were more than 20 percentage points ahead of Rixi Moncada, 60, of ruling leftist Libre ("Free") party, who was trailing heavily, signalling another Latin American nation poised to swing rightward.

The campaign was dominated by Trump's threat to cut aid if his favoured candidate Asfura, who is nicknamed "grandad," were to lose.

The vote count from Sunday's election has progressed slowly, and final results could take days.

Many Hondurans have fled grinding poverty and violence to the United States, including minors fearing forced recruitment by gangs, although this escape route is no longer a viable option under Trump.

In the final days of the race, the US leader threw his weight behind former Tegucigalpa mayor Asfura, whose campaign slogan was "Grandad, at your service!"

That intervention upended a contest that is still too close to call, in a country plagued by drug trafficking and gang activity.

Lawmakers and hundreds of mayors will also be elected in the fiercely polarised nation, which is also one of the most violent in Latin America.

"If he [Asfura] doesn't win, the United States will not be throwing good money after bad," Trump wrote on Friday on his Truth Social platform.

'Not because of Trump'

Trump's comments marked another brazen intervention in



A woman stands in front of a kiosk displaying the front pages of newspapers in the Honduran capital city of Tegucigalpa yesterday, the day after national elections.

– AFP

another country's politics, echoing threats he made in support of Argentine President Javier Milei's party in recent midterms.

Before Sunday's vote, Trump also made the shock announcement that he would pardon former Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernández, of Asfura's National Party.

Hernández is serving a 45-year prison sentence in the United States for cocaine trafficking and other charges.

Some Hondurans have welcomed Trump's intervention, saying they hope it might mean Honduran migrants will be allowed to remain in the United States.

But others have rejected his meddling in the vote.

"I vote for whomever I please, not because of what Trump has said, because the truth is I live off my work, not off politicians," Esmeralda Rodríguez, a 56-year-old fruit seller, told AFP.

Nearly 30,000 Honduran migrants have been deported from the United States since Trump returned to office in January.

The clampdown has dealt a severe blow to the country of 11 million people, where remittances accounted for 27 percent of GDP last year.

After voting in the capital Tegucigalpa, Asfura denied that

the planned pardon would benefit him, saying: "This issue has been circulating for months, and it has nothing to do with the elections."

'Escape poverty'

Presidential hopeful Moncada, who represents outgoing leader Xiomara Castro's ruling Libre party, had portrayed the election as a choice between her and a "coup-plotting oligarchy."

That was a reference to the right's backing of the 2009 military ouster of leftist Manuel Zelaya, Castro's husband.

Preemptive accusations of election fraud, made both by the ruling party and opposition, have sown mistrust in the vote and sparked fears of post-election unrest.

Long a transit point for cocaine exported from Colombia to the United States, Honduras is now also a producer of the drug.

But the candidates barely addressed the fears of Hondurans about drug trafficking, poverty and violence during the campaign.

"I hope the new government will have good lines of communication with Trump, and that he will also support us," said María Velásquez, 58.

"I just want to escape poverty."

– AFP

Trump confirms call with Maduro, Caracas slams US maneuvers

Patrick Fort with Aurelia End aboard Air Force One

CARACAS – US President Donald Trump confirmed on Sunday he had recently spoken with Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro amid soaring tensions between the two countries, while Caracas slammed what it called US preparations for an attack.

The United States is piling the pressure on Venezuela, with a major military buildup in the Caribbean, the designation of an alleged drug cartel run by Maduro as a terrorist organisation, and an ominous warning from Trump that Venezuelan airspace is "closed."

Washington says the aim of the military deployment launched in September is to curb drug trafficking in the region, but Caracas insists regime change is the ultimate goal.

"I wouldn't say it went well or badly. It was a phone call," Trump told reporters on Sunday aboard Air Force One.

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

Republican Senator Markwayne Mullin said on Sunday on CNN's "State of the Union" talk show that the United States has offered Maduro the chance to leave his country for Russia or elsewhere.

The United States accuses Maduro, the political heir to Venezuela's late leftist leader Hugo Chávez, of heading the "Cartel of the Suns" and has issued a US\$50 million reward for his capture.

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

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

The United States also does not recognise Maduro as the legitimate winner of last year's presidential election.

Though Trump has not publicly threatened to use force against Maduro, he said in recent days that efforts to halt Venezuelan drug trafficking "by land" would begin "very soon."

Aid from OPEC?

Venezuela says it has requested assistance from the Organisation of the

Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), of which it is a member, to help "stop this [US] aggression, which is being readied with more and more force."

The request came in a letter from Maduro to the group, read by Vice President Delcy Rodríguez, who is also Venezuela's oil minister, during a virtual meeting of OPEC ministers.

Washington "is trying to seize Venezuela's vast oil reserves, the biggest in the world, by using military force," Maduro wrote in the letter.

Since September, US air strikes have targeted alleged drug-trafficking boats in the Caribbean Sea and the eastern Pacific Ocean, killing at least 83 people.

Trump's administration has offered no concrete evidence to back up the allegations behind its campaign, and numerous experts have questioned the legality of the operations.

US media reported on Friday that in one strike in September, the US military conducted a follow-up strike that killed survivors of an initial attack.

The Washington Post and CNN said Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth had issued a directive to "kill everybody," but Trump said on Sunday that Hegseth had denied giving such an order.

"We'll look into it, but no, I wouldn't have wanted that – not a second strike," Trump told reporters. "Pete said he did not order the death of those two men."

'Extrajudicial executions'

The head of Venezuela's legislature, Jorge Rodríguez, said he met on Sunday with relatives of Venezuelans killed in the strikes.

He would not comment on a possible Trump-Maduro call.

But when asked about the report about the Hegseth order, he said: "If a war had been declared and led to such killings, we would be talking about war crimes."

"Given that no war has been declared, what happened...can only be characterised as murder or extrajudicial executions," he added.

The steady US military buildup has seen the world's largest aircraft carrier deployed to Caribbean waters, while American fighter jets and bombers have repeatedly flown off the Venezuelan coast in recent days.

Six airlines have cancelled services to Venezuela, but on Sunday, the airport in Caracas was functioning as usual.

– AFP

Mexican military kills alleged drug trafficker wanted by US

MEXICO CITY – A man wanted by the US on accusations of trafficking large amounts of fentanyl and cocaine was killed on Sunday by Mexican military personnel during an anti-drug operation, officials said.

Pedro Inzunza Coronel, alias "Pichón," died during the operation in the northwestern state of Sinaloa.

Omar García Harfuch, Mexico's security secretary, confirmed Coronel's death on social media.

"In an operation led by the Secretariat of the Navy... two operators of this criminal cell were detained and upon attacking the naval personnel, Pedro 'N' Pichón lost his life," Harfuch said.

In May, the US Department of Justice charged Coronel, as well as his father, Pedro Inzunza Noriega, with narco-terrorism, drug trafficking and money laundering as leaders from a faction of a now-defunct cartel known as the Beltrán Leyva cartel.

US Ambassador to Mexico Ronald Johnson said in a post on X that Inzunza was accused of multiple crimes, including "murders, kidnappings, torture, and violent debt collection for drug trafficking."

Since returning to power in January, US President Donald Trump has demanded Mexico increase its efforts in the fight against drug trafficking, threatening tariffs on Mexican exports if more is not done.

– AFP



Migrants walk back to Chile after they were not allowed to enter Peru, near de Chacalluta border crossing, about 25 km north of Arica, Chile, on Sunday. Dozens of migrants seeking to leave Chile were stranded at the border with Peru, authorities said on Friday, amid fears sparked by far-right Chilean presidential candidate José Antonio Kast's threat to expel undocumented migrants.

– AFP

Football shorts

Juve's Vlahovic set for long lay-off with groin injury



ROME - Dusan Vlahovic is set to be out of action until well into the new year after Juventus said yesterday that the Serbia striker had suffered a groin injury during the weekend's 2-1 win over Cagliari.

Vlahovic was forced off the field in the first half of Saturday's win in Turin, and Juve said that tests carried out yesterday had revealed "a high-grade injury" to a muscle in his left groin.

"Further medical consultations will be necessary to determine the most appropriate treatment," added the club.

Italian media report that Vlahovic will not be back before February of next year.

Vlahovic has scored six times for Juve this season: three times in Serie A and three times in the Champions League.

The 25-year-old had reclaimed his spot as starting centre-forward in the last month after Juve tried to offload him in the summer as his contract is set to expire at the end of this season.

Now managed by former Italy coach Luciano Spalletti, Juve are seventh in Italy's top flight, five points behind leading duo AC Milan and Napoli.

— AFP

Barca's Flick happy to have players back for Atletico clash



BARCELONA - Barcelona coach Hansi Flick said he was relieved to have some injured players returning to fitness ahead of today's crunch clash against Atletico Madrid.

Barca moved to the top of La Liga with Saturday's 3-1 defeat of Alaves, although Atletico in fourth are only three points back.

Pedri made his first team return as a second-half substitute on Saturday after more than a month out with a hamstring problem.

He is in line to start against Diego Simeone's rugged outfit, as is midfield partner Frenkie de Jong, who missed the Alaves match for family reasons.

"I'm really happy. The players are coming back, maybe we can increase our level. This is the most important thing," Flick said yesterday, although he confirmed that Uruguayan centre-back Ronald Araujo is out.

The German has come under fire this season for a series of abject displays, not least in the Catalans' highest profile matches - a 3-0 defeat to Chelsea and 2-1 reverses against Real Madrid and Paris Saint-Germain.

Despite being top of the table, Flick admitted that Barca need to improve.

"I know we are not [in] top [form] like last season," he said. "But we have potential. And we have to increase our level."

The game will be played at 4 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time.

— AFP/MPD

Frank pleads for Tottenham unity after Vicario jeers



LONDON - Thomas Frank has tried to build bridges with Tottenham supporters by insisting that the club are "nothing without the fans" ahead of today's trip to Newcastle.

Frank's time at the helm of Spurs suffered a setback with Saturday's 2-1 loss at home to Fulham, where goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario was booed during the game following a hapless error that led to the winning goal.

There were more jeers during a defeat which meant that Spurs' last Premier League win at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium occurred on the opening day of the season, with the north London club having won only three of their last 21 games at home.

After that loss, Frank criticised those supporters whom he said were "not true Tottenham fans".

Frank, speaking ahead of the match away to Newcastle, said: "I completely understand the frustration. If we don't win, there will always be a frustration, so that is normal.

"We are nothing without the fans. No club is anything without the fans. Tottenham Hotspur, we are nothing without our fantastic fans. Nothing. We need each other. There is nothing we want more than making them happy in every way.

"My point was during matches that's where we need each other. After, fair with the booing, but during, that is when I want to create a fortress."

He added: "If any club wants to be successful, you need to create a fortress. If you want to create a fortress, it can only be together. Fans, team."

The game will be played at 4:15 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time.

— AFP/MPD

Spain aim to turn 'suffering' to success in Nations League final second leg



MADRID - World champions Spain were barely recognisable in the first leg of the women's Nations League final as they escaped from Germany with a goalless draw.

Sonia Bermudez's side had had to "suffer" in Kaiserslautern on Friday, but they are hoping to return to their sparkling best for the decisive second leg at the Metropolitano stadium in Madrid today.

Their task will be made harder by the absence of Aitana Bonmati, after she suffered a leg fracture in training on Sunday which will keep her out of the game and potentially for months ahead.

Even with the three-time Ballon d'Or winner they struggled badly last week and needed goalkeeper Cata Coll to frequently come to their rescue, to the extent that Spanish daily *Marca* joked that the stopper would be "banned from entering Germany" in future.

"We knew that it would be complicated here," said Coll after the match. "We competed well and when we had to suffer, we did it together."

They survived unscathed and will have home advantage in the capital, in front of what is set to be a record crowd to watch the national team on home soil at

Atletico Madrid's 70,000 seater stadium.

Around 50,000 tickets have been sold for the clash, with Alexia Putellas, Spain's other Ballon d'Or winner, believing that the fans will play their part.

"We want the Germans to feel the atmosphere at the Metropolitano," said Putellas. Claiming Spain's third international trophy would be a proud moment for the likes of Jenni Hermoso and Laia Aleixandri, former Atletico players.

"I get goosebumps because we are going to be with the whole family and all the people who will come to support us," said Aleixandri.

'Things to adjust'

To defend the Nations League trophy they won last year in the first ever edition of the competition, Spain must step up a gear or two.

Bermudez replaced Montse Tome at the helm after Spain finished as runners up to England at Euro 2025.

A 5-0 aggregate victory over Sweden in the Nations League semi-finals showed promise, but the visit to Germany was a reminder that many teams are snapping at their heels.

That is something Spain's Barcelona stars saw last season as Arsenal caused an upset by beating

them in the Champions League final, following years of domination.

Spain were also uncharacteristically slack, perhaps unable to shake off the comforting thought of the second leg at home to come.

But Germany coach Christian Wueck said that the first leg had proved that "we cannot only compete but even play our own game against a team like Spain", although he admitted his frustration at not securing the victory.

Spain had 56 percent of possession, down from their usual level of control, while they suffocated under close marking from the Germans.

Spain's coach Bermudez said that her team would have to improve in the second leg.

"We didn't play our best match and there are things to adjust," she explained, later adding that the team needed to be more "incisive" and generate more in attack in Madrid.

That fluid, attacking football is what the fans who will flood to the Metropolitano are expecting to see, along with Spain's golden generation lifting another trophy.

The game will be played at 1:30 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time.

— AFP/MPD



Augsburg's German head coach Sandro Wagner reacts at the end of the German first division Bundesliga match against Borussia Dortmund in Augsburg, southern Germany on October 31. Crisis-stricken Bundesliga club FC Augsburg has parted ways with coach Wagner. The 38-year-old had only taken over the position in the summer. After twelve match days, FCA is in 14th place with just ten points.

— AFP

Thai football fans vow SEA Games stadium boycott over ticket rules

Football

BANGKOK - Thai football fans pledged yesterday to skip cheering for their home team from stadium stands during upcoming Southeast Asian Games (SEA) matches over ticket rules requiring registration with ID.

Members of the Ultras Thailand supporters group said they also took issue with national team fans not being seated behind a goal, according to a statement posted on social media.

The group vowed to travel to every match during the SEA Games hosted by Thailand this month - but said they would not set foot inside a stadium until the Sports Authority addressed their complaints.

"Forcing people to register their personal information before entering a stadium is a violation of the basic freedoms of sports spectators," the Ultras Thailand said.

The group voiced concern about the ID requirement putting them at risk of being hacked, calling the condition "not safety, but an injustice".

They also rejected how stadium cheering zones were being managed.

"The arrangement of the away team zone behind the goal provides an advantage to the visiting team and reduces the pressure behind the goal for the Ultras Thailand fans," the statement said.

"We stand side by side with the national team, but we will not surrender to the Sport Authority of Thailand's

management of this football event."

AFP could not immediately reach the Sports Authority or national football association for comment yesterday evening.

Thailand is hosting the regional sports extravaganza from December 9-20, with a preliminary football match between Thailand and East Timor scheduled for tomorrow in the capital, Bangkok.

Organisers said last week they were changing venues for 11 sports, including men's football, because of severe flooding in Thailand's south which has killed more than 170 people.

Neighbour Cambodia also announced its withdrawal from eight sports, citing safety concerns, as a border row with Thailand simmers.

— AFP

Duplantis and McLaughlin-Levrone crowned 'Athletes of the Year'



MONACO – Swedish pole vault star Armand 'Mondo' Duplantis and US track sensation Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone were named athletes of the year by World Athletics in Monaco on Sunday.

Duplantis, 26, set four pole vault records in 2025 as he won world titles both indoors and outdoors.

He was unbeaten in 16 competitions and became the first men's pole vaulter in modern history to go undefeated for two successive years.

Duplantis cleared 6.30 metres at the world championships in Tokyo after successfully retaining his title as he broke the world record for the 14th time in his career.

It is the third time that Duplantis has scooped the overall prize for the world's top athlete. He also won it in 2020 and 2022.

McLaughlin-Levrone ran the second fastest time ever on her way to claiming the world 400m title.

She smashed the championship record and nearly eclipsed a 40-year-old world record set by Marita Koch of the former East Germany.

Already a double Olympic 400m hurdles champion, McLaughlin-Levrone became the first woman since 1985 to break the 48-second barrier in the 400m in Tokyo after fully turning her attention to the flat race. She also won the 4x400m.

Her time of 47.78sec trails only the 47.60sec run by Koch four decades ago, a record that is widely viewed with suspicion because of a state-sponsored doping programme at the time. Koch never failed a drugs test and has always maintained she did nothing wrong.

McLaughlin-Levrone, 26, has not been beaten in either the 400m

or 400m hurdles for two years. She is the first athlete to win world titles in both events.

The American previously won the overall athlete of the year accolade in 2022.

Kenya's Emmanuel Wanyonyi won the men's track award after adding the 800m world title to his Olympic gold, with McLaughlin-Levrone taking the equivalent female award.

Australia's Nicola Olislagers joined Duplantis in being named field athlete of the year after winning high jump titles indoors and outdoors.

Kenyan long-distance runner Sebastian Sawe took the men's out of stadium prize following his wins at the London and Berlin marathons.

Spanish racewalker Maria Perez won the women's equivalent as she defended her world titles in the 20km and 35km walks. – AFP



Kenya's world 800m champion Emmanuel Wanyonyi (left), Kenya's long distance and steeplechase athlete Edmund Serem (third left), Kenya's London Marathon and Berlin Marathon champion Sebastian Sawe (fourth left), President of World Athletics and former British track and field athlete Sebastian Coe (fifth left), Australia's world high jump champion Nicola Olislagers (sixth left), Prince's Albert II of Monaco (centre), Sweden's world pole vault champion Armand Duplantis (fifth right), China's hammer throw athlete Zhang Jiale (fourth right), Spain's world 20km and 35km race walk champion Maria Perez (third right) Botswana's sprinter Letsile Tebogo (second right) and former world record holder and world champion distance runner Great Britain's Paula Radcliffe, pose on stage at the end of the World Athletics Awards 2025 in Monaco, on Sunday. – AFP

China sweeps Egypt, S Korea rallies past Chinese Taipei at ITTF Mixed Team World Cup

Table tennis

CHENGDU – China beat Egypt 8-0, while South Korea came back to defeat Chinese Taipei 8-6 at the 2025 International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) Mixed Team World Cup here yesterday.

Chinese paddlers felt at ease in their second group match, as Kuai Man and Lin Shidong crushed Egypt's Badr Mostafa and Marwa Alhodaby 11-3, 11-3, 11-7 in the mixed doubles, followed by world No.1 Sun Yingsha of China winning over Mariam Alhodaby 11-4, 14-12, 11-4 in the women's singles. Top-ranked Wang Chuqin secured

the victory by seeing off Youssef Abdelaziz of Egypt 11-5, 11-4 in the men's singles.

South Korea had a tough match against Chinese Taipei. Lin Yun-ju and Cheng I-ching of Chinese Taipei won the opening mixed doubles match 12-10, 11-9, 11-9 over South Korea's Kim Na-yeong and Park Gang-hyeon. South Korean paddlers then finished a 2-1 score line in the women's singles, men's singles, and women's doubles, respectively, to tie the overall score 6-6.

In the decisive fifth match, Park and Oh Jun-sung clinched a victory 11-9, 11-9 over Lin and Kao Cheng-jui of Chinese Taipei.

The ITTF Mixed Team World Cup runs Sunday to Sunday, which adopts a different competition format from other team events, beginning with mixed doubles, followed by women's singles and men's singles, and then men's and women's doubles if required, with their order of play determined by the team captain of the lower-ranked team.

Each individual match consists of three games, resulting in either a 3-0 or 2-1 scoreline. Team matches continue until one side secures eight games victories.

In other matches yesterday, Hong Kong cruised past Chile 8-2, while Japan defeated India 8-4. China will face Chile today. – Xinhua

Murray 'disappointed' with results coaching former rival Djokovic

Tennis

LONDON – British tennis great Andy Murray said yesterday he was "disappointed" with Novak Djokovic's results while coaching his former rival.

Murray joined Djokovic's coaching team in November 2024 just three months after the 38-year-old Scot had ended his own playing career at the Paris Olympics.

But the pair were only together for some six months, their alliance covering the 2025 Australian Open and three other tournaments.

"I look back on it and I'm glad that I did it," Murray told The Tennis Podcast. "It's an amazing experience that I've had. It didn't last long, but I put everything into it."

"I was disappointed. Probably didn't get the results I would have liked for him."

"But it was a good opportunity because I felt I wanted to coach at some stage and if I didn't take it I might look back and think, 'It would have been really interesting, I could have learnt a lot', or potentially regretted it," added Murray, who won three Grand Slam singles titles in an era where Djokovic, Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal dominated men's tennis.

Djokovic defeated Carlos Alcaraz to reach the semi-finals at the Australian Open but the 24-time

Grand Slam singles champion was then forced to retire injured in his last-four clash with Alexander Zverev.

The 38-year-old Serb then suffered first-round losses in Qatar and at Indian Wells on his return to action before being beaten in the Miami Open final by Czech teenager Jakub Mensik.

"It was going well initially and it was unfortunate what happened in Australia with the injury, but I watched him play ridiculous tennis in that tournament," said Murray.

"After the injury, it was certainly a difficult few months for him but also I think for the team and all of us."

"I learnt a lot about what coaching is. I was fully invested, tried my hardest to help, and made some good relationships along the way with his team."

Murray, who has four children with his wife Kim, said he was enjoying retirement.

"I was genuinely unsure what it (retirement) was going to be like," he said. "I didn't know if I would enjoy it or miss tennis. How would I fill my days? Before it came I was a bit nervous about it."

"I know it was the right decision to stop when I did. I don't regret when I retired from tennis."

"I love being a dad and being at home with the kids is brilliant."

– AFP

Bulgaria hosts opening trio of 2026 Giro stages

Cycling

ROME – Bulgaria will host the first three stages of next year's Giro d'Italia, which will once again crown its champion in Rome, organisers RCS announced yesterday.

It will be the 16th time that the Giro, which will run from May 9-31, starts in a foreign country and the second time in a row after Albania hosted the opening three stages of this year's Giro, which was won by Britain's Simon Yates.

Since 2010, seven starts have taken place abroad, including in Jerusalem in 2018.

The peloton will begin the 2026 edition of the three-week grand tour by riding along the Black Sea coast between Nessebar and Burgas, RSC said during yesterday's route reveal ceremony in the Italian capital.

Riders will then be faced with three category three climbs in a 220 kilometre run to Veliko Tarnovo, known as the "City of the Tsars", before the 174km stage three between Plovdiv and capital city Sofia, which features one long category two ascent to the Borovets Pass.

From there, the race will return to Italy where, from a punchy fourth stage between Catanzaro and Cosenza in the country's deep south, it will snake its way up to the mountainous regions of the far north where the pink jersey winner will be decided.

In total, riders will face 50,000 metres of elevation gain over 3,458km of racing, which will end with the now customary procession stage around Rome.

Some 8,700 metres of that elevation gain will be in the decisive 19th and 20th stages of the 21-stage race.

The 19th is this year's Queen Stage and a brutal affair with 5,000 metres of elevation gain over six categorised climbs, including the highest peak of the race at Passo Giau and a summit finish at Alleghe in the heart of the Dolomites at the end of a breathless 151km-long route.

The penultimate stage runs 199km from Gemona del Friuli and puts the riders through two category one climbs to Piancavallo and will be the last opportunity for the pink jersey hopefuls to stake their claim before the parade around Rome.

Next year's women's race will begin on May 30 in Cesenatico on the Adriatic coast and will be held over nine stages, with the race finishing on June 7 in Saluzzo on the other side of the Alps from France.

Local hero Elisa Longo Borghini will defend her title in a race which is one stage longer than the previous two editions, both of which were won by the Italian.

Overall, riders will race 1,153.7km and take on 12,500m of elevation gain, with an interesting fourth stage 12.7km mountain time trial between Belluno and Nevegal being one of the highlights. – AFP

African star Girmay signs with NSN Cycling Team

Cycling

PARIS – Trailblazing Eritrean rider Biniam Girmay will compete for the NSN Cycling Team for the next three seasons, the outfit formerly known as Israel-Premier Tech said yesterday.

Girmay previously rode for four years with Belgian team Interim-Wanty, becoming the first black African to win a stage on a Grand Tour at the 2022 Giro d'Italia.

Last year the 25-year-old created history again by clinching the Tour de France's green jersey awarded to the top sprinter, after three stage wins.

"We are incredibly excited to welcome Biniam to NSN Cycling Team. Not only will 2026 mark a new chapter for the team, but it also represents one for Biniam and I couldn't think of a better time to embark on a new chapter together," said NSN General Manager Kjell Carlstrom.

Girmay welcomed "a new beginning" and the chance to progress with a team whose riders "have improved so much over the last two years". He also cited their commitment to developing the sport in Africa.

"In Eritrea, cycling is our culture - it's in our blood. And as an African

rider, I want to develop African cycling," continued Girmay.

"For me and the team, it's a nice combination - an African rider and a team that wants to develop cycling in Africa."

NSN (for "Never Say Never") is replacing Israel PT which had become the focus of pro-Palestinian protesters at road races this year.

The new team will race under a Swiss licence and be based in Spain, in Barcelona and Girona.

Among the co-founders of NSN is former Barcelona and Spain football star Andres Iniesta. – AFP

‘Dinosaur tartare’ and holograms: Dubai AI chef sparks awe & ire



Oytun Cakir, co-founder of AI-powered restaurant Woohoo, poses for a photo at the dining establishment in Dubai on November 12. — AFP



Turkish chef Serhat Karanfil works in the kitchen of Woohoo on November 12. — AFP



A waiter interacts with customers at Woohoo on November 12. — AFP

Maha Loubaris

DUBAI – A Dubai restaurant has opened that prides itself on having the world’s “first AI chef”, the latest ostentatious dive into new technology in a city obsessed with being on the cutting edge of the future.

The Emirati city has become increasingly known for its growing culinary scene, with thousands of restaurants on offer from luxurious Michelin-starred eateries to greasy spoons serving up bona fide street food from across the Middle East and Asia.

But at Woohoo, the brains behind the menu is not a person but an AI programme – known as chef Aiman – trained on thousands of recipes and decades of culinary research and molecular gastronomy.

Chef Aiman can also optimise menus and balance flavours, according to the establishment.

The real work of preparing and serving the food, however, remains in human hands, for now.

“AI is going to create better dishes than humans maybe in the future,” said the restaurant’s Turkish co-founder Ahmet Oytun Cakir.

While Woohoo’s menu is mostly comprised of international fusion dishes, some AI creations stand out.

This includes a “dinosaur tartare” meant to recreate the taste of extinct reptiles.

The restaurant did not reveal the dinosaur tartare recipe, which was created using DNA mapping.

Priced at roughly 50 euros (US\$58), the dish tastes like a combination of raw meats and is served on a pulsating plate to appear as if it were breathing.

“It was a total surprise. It was so delicious,” said customer Efe Ugunlu.

Along with AI-generated holograms and sci-fi animation, the heart of the neon-lit venue features a giant cylindrical computer – presented as the digital mainframe powering the restaurant’s lights and smoke shows.

‘I don’t believe in it’

Woohoo’s Turkish chef Serhat Karanfil oversees the cooking and the final presentation and admits that he does not always agree with the AI chef’s choices and selections.

“If I taste it, for example, and it is too spicy, I talk to chef Aiman again. After we discuss, we find the right balance,” he said.

Cakir has high hopes that chef Aiman will one day become “the next Gordon Ramsay – but AI”.

Not everyone in Dubai’s vibrant food scene is convinced.

For Michelin-starred chef Mohamad Orfali, “there is no such

thing as an AI chef”.

“I don’t believe in it,” the Syrian Dubai-based chef told AFP.

His Orfali Bros restaurant snatched a Michelin star last year, after Dubai became the first Middle Eastern city to join the prestigious guide in 2022.

Cooking requires “nafas”, or soul, Orfali insisted, using the Arabic term that describes a cook’s personal flair for food and their ability to conjure up exceptional meals.

“Artificial intelligence lacks feelings and memories; in short, it has no nafas... It can’t imbue it into food.”

Dubai ideas

Orfali said he limited the use of AI in his own establishment to administrative tasks like setting the kitchen schedule and providing additional research.

“We use it as a kitchen assistant,

but ultimately, it won’t cook,” he said.

Nonetheless, Woohoo has resonated with customers accustomed to the lavish offerings of Dubai, a tech-forward megalopolis with a proclivity for extravagance where AI has its own minister.

“Everyone is supporting these ideas here in Dubai,” said Cakir.

The restaurant has also created a social media buzz, with an Instagram account dedicated to the AI Chef that features chef Aiman’s avatar in videos sharing tips and recipes.

Dio, a customer who didn’t give her last name, said she visited the restaurant after seeing the craze around it.

“It is such a creative concept, so I thought I must experience it myself,” she said.

“The dishes were extraordinary.” — AFP

‘Rage bait’ wins Oxford’s word of 2025

LONDON – “Rage bait”, the slang term describing online content designed to elicit anger and drive internet traffic, has been crowned 2025 word of the year, Oxford University Press (OUP) announced yesterday.

It said the word – chosen through a combination of public voting, sentiment and analysis of OUP’s “lexical data” – had “captured our emotions” this year.

Casper Grathwohl, president of OUP’s languages division, said the growing use of such words “reveal how digital platforms are reshaping our thinking and behaviour”.

“It feels like the natural progression in an ongoing conversation about what it means to

be human in a tech-driven world – and the extremes of online culture,” he added in a statement.

Oxford defines “rage bait” as “online content deliberately designed to elicit anger or outrage by being frustrating, provocative, or offensive, typically posted” in order to increase web traffic or engagement.

It beat out fellow shortlisted contenders “aura farming” and “biohack”.

The former was described as “the cultivation of an impressive, attractive, or charismatic persona or public image by behaving or presenting oneself in a way intended subtly to convey an air of confidence, coolness, or mystique”.

Meanwhile, biohacking is an at-

tempt “to improve or optimise one’s physical or mental performance, health, longevity, or wellbeing by altering one’s diet, exercise routine, or lifestyle, or by using other means such as drugs, supplements, or technological devices”.

More than 30,000 people worldwide voted over three days for their preferred winner, according to OUP.

Its final choice was also supported by evidence of “real language usage”, after its experts tracked the use of the shortlisted words throughout the year via “a 30-billion-word corpus of global language data”.

It is the fourth consecutive year that the public have played a part in picking Oxford’s word of the year, after an inaugural public vote in 2022 saw “goblin mode” prevail.

In that instance, the public were given the chance to choose the overall winner, opting for the term describing “unapologetically self-indulgent, lazy, slovenly or greedy” behaviour.

In subsequent years, voting has played only a part in the choices, which have included 2023’s “rizz” – a colloquial term defined as “style, charm, or attractiveness” – and last year’s “brain rot”.

Previous words of the year chosen solely by Oxford lexicographers include “vax” (2021), “climate emergency” (2019) and “selfie” (2013). — AFP

Disney’s ‘Zootopia 2’ rules Thanksgiving at N American box office

LOS ANGELES – Disney’s feel-good animated sequel “Zootopia 2” ruled the Thanksgiving box office in North America, taking in US\$156 million over the five-day holiday weekend, industry estimates showed on Sunday.

“Zootopia 2,” the buddy cop comedy featuring a menagerie of talking animals battling stereotypes, is the much-anticipated follow-up to the 2016 hit, which won the Oscar for best animated feature.

Ginnifer Goodwin, Jason Bateman and Idris Elba are all back for round two.

“This is an outstanding opening for an animation follow-up sequel,” said David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research, adding that Disney and Pixar are consistently making more with second episode sequels than with the first film.

“On average, they start 71 percent bigger,” Gross said, also noting the film’s excellent performance in China.

Globally, the film earned a whopping US\$556 million, which The Hollywood Reporter said was the biggest ever worldwide launch for an animated film.

Dropping to second place with US\$93 million was “Wicked: For Good,” Universal’s second chapter in the musical saga of Oz’s most notable witches – the green-skinned, outcast Elphaba (Cynthia Erivo) and popular pink-wearing Glinda (Ariana Grande).

The “Wizard of Oz” retelling is based on the long-running Broadway musical, itself adapted from Gregory Maguire’s 1995 novel.

In third place with US\$10 million at the US and Canadian box office was Lionsgate’s “Now You See Me: Now You Don’t,” the third instalment in the crime heist franchise, Exhibitor Relations reported.

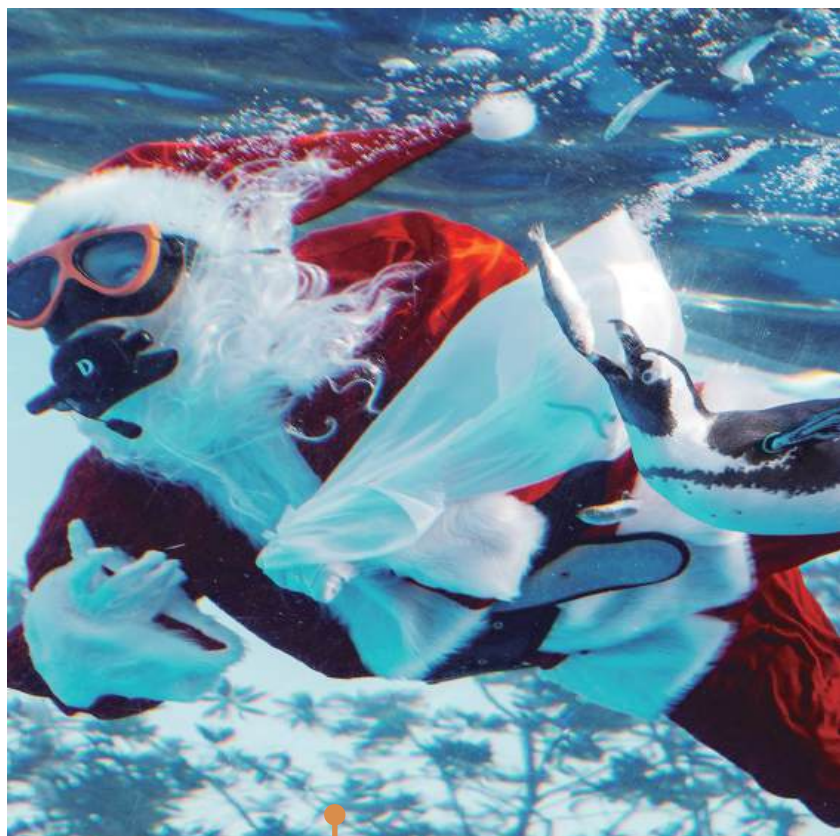
The film reunites Jesse Eisenberg, Isla Fisher, Dave Franco and Woody Harrelson as Robin Hood-style illusionists targeting dangerous criminals.

“Predator: Badlands,” the latest film in the decades-old sci-fi horror franchise, was in fourth place with US\$6.6 million.

And Paramount’s “The Running Man” – a new take on Stephen King’s dystopian novel about a murderous game show starring Glen Powell – ended up in fifth place with US\$5.5 million. — AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -8°C~1°C	Manila 23°C~32°C	New York 1°C~6°C	Lisbon 10°C~15°C
Shanghai 7°C~17°C	Bangkok 22°C~33°C	London 5°C~11°C	Rio de Janeiro 22°C~31°C
Hong Kong 19°C~24°C	Tokyo 7°C~17°C	Frankfurt 1°C~5°C	Luanda 24°C~29°C
Taipei 17°C~26°C	Singapore 23°C~31°C	Vancouver 3°C~9°C	Maputo 20°C~30°C
Guangzhou 17°C~24°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~32°C	Paris 5°C~9°C	Dili 23°C~32°C
Nanjing 3°C~16°C	Jakarta 24°C~32°C	Moscow 0°C~2°C	São Tomé 25°C~29°C
Guilin 12°C~21°C	Seoul -8°C~4°C	Las Vegas 4°C~15°C	Praia 21°C~27°C
Xi'an -4°C~10°C	Sydney 14°C~22°C	Monte Carlo 11°C~15°C	Bissau 22°C~31°C



Stick to you like glue!

A diver dressed in a Santa Claus costume feeds a penguin at Sunshine Aquarium during preparations for the upcoming Christmas special event in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP



Cosmic butterfly

This handout image released by the International Gemini Observatory/ NSF NOIRLab last Wednesday, shows the NGC 6302 nebula captured last month by the Gemini South telescope. — AFP

Proud Mum

A female gorilla called Wefa holds her newborn baby in their enclosure at the Bioparc zoo in Fuengirola, Spain yesterday. A baby western lowland gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*), a species listed as Critically Endangered - was born on Saturday at 2:50 p.m. in the park's outdoor enclosure, under the watchful eyes of visitors. This is the second birth of a baby gorilla in Europe in 2025. — AFP



Christmas is coming

Picture shows Christmas lighting in Larios street in Malaga, Spain on Sunday. — AFP



A word in your ear!

A giant panda cub plays with a yellow rubber duck at Chongqing Zoo in Chongqing, on Sunday. — AFP



How it was!

Workers inspect plates at the Limoges porcelain factory in Limoges, central France in August 1945. Traditional crafts from French Limoges porcelain to Irish Donegal tweed became entitled to EU protected status as of yesterday -- on a par with agricultural products from Champagne to Parma ham -- offering protection for "iconic goods such as Bohemian glass, Limoges porcelain, Solingen knives and Donegal tweed, whose reputation and quality stem from their place of origin", the European Commission said. — AFP