

# Reclaimed water to take up 5-10 pct of Macau's water consumption: DSAMA

Ida Cheong

Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA) officials said yesterday that following the completion of Phase I of the Coloane Reclaimed Water Station, slated to begin supplying designated areas next year, their medium-term goal is to build another reclaimed water\* station on an artificial island and to complete Phase II of the Coloane Reclaimed Water Station so that reclaimed water usage will then account for 5.0 percent of Macau's total water consumption, while their long-term goal is that reclaimed water usage will amount to 10 percent of the city's water consumption.

The officials made the remarks during a meeting with members of the Taipa and Coloane Community Service Consultative Council at the Seac Pai Van public housing estate (石排灣社區綜合大樓) in Coloane yesterday.

Briefing reporters after yesterday's closed-door meeting, Leong Chon Kit, a deputy convenor of the government-appointed council, noted that the reclaimed water fees will be slightly lower, compared with the tap water fees as a reference, but that



Taipa and Coloane Community Service Consultative Council Deputy Convenor Leong Chon Kit (right) and fellow member Leong Meng Ian pose during yesterday's press briefing after the government-appointed council's closed-door meeting at the Seac Pai Van Community Complex in Coloane. – Photo: Ida Cheong

the reclaimed water will have the same tariff classification as tap water (domestic, general non-domestic, and special use), adding that a tiered fee system will not be implemented, and the reclaimed water charges will be

linked to the current first-tier usage fee for tap water. The payment method will be identical to that for tap water, allowing for a seamless switch without additional procedures, the statement said.

Leong also said that the implementation of the future reclaimed water system will focus on neighbourhoods with existing dual-pipe systems and new development zones, including the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Artificial Island, and Macau New Urban Zones A to E.

Leong added that following the completion of Phase I of the Coloane Reclaimed Water Station in the first quarter of next year, the reclaimed water supply will be directed to the University of Macau (UM) and the residential buildings in the Seac Pai Van public housing estate, including Koi Ng Bldg (居雅大廈), Lok Kuan Bldg (樂群樓) and others. On Son Bldg (安順大廈) will be temporarily excluded due to the lack of a dual-pipe system, Leong said. ■

\* Reclaimed water refers to wastewater that has been treated and processed to remove impurities, making it suitable for various uses, such as irrigation and industrial purposes. This process helps conserve water resources by reusing water that would otherwise be discarded. It's often used in agriculture, landscape irrigation, and sometimes for non-potable purposes in urban settings such as flushing toilets.

## 10 foreign domestic helpers killed, 3 injured in HK Tai Po blaze

HONGKONG—Secretary for Labor and Welfare of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government Chris Sun Yuk-han said yesterday that 10 foreign domestic helpers were killed and three others were injured in a major residential fire that broke out last Wednesday in Tai Po District.

Sun told a press briefing that each of the foreign domestic helpers who died in the fire will receive about HK\$800,000 in compensation, including statutory compensation and one-off assistance. Those injured will receive a one-off financial assistance of either

HK\$50,000 or HK\$100,000. Foreign domestic workers who survived the fire will receive HK\$20,000 as condolence money.

At the same press briefing, Secretary for Migrant Workers of the Philippines Hans Leo J. Caddac expressed his gratitude to the HKSAR government for the assistance provided, including financial aid, temporary shelter, and psychological counseling, to the foreign domestic helpers.

As of yesterday afternoon, the fire has claimed 156 lives, with around 30 people still unaccounted for, authorities said.

—Xinhua

## Public donations to Tai Po fire victims hit HK\$2 billion

HONG KONG — Public donations to a government fund for victims of the Wang Fuk Court fire in Tai Po District last Wednesday have reached HK\$2 billion.

Along with the government's initial HK\$300m injection, the total pot is now up to HK\$2.3 billion to help affected residents rebuild their lives and homes.

Financial support for immediate relief is also well under way.

More than 1,900 eligible households have each received an emergency cash subsidy of HK\$10,000, whereas applications by 104 families for a HK\$50,000 living allowance have been processed.

More than 2,600 affected residents have been rehoused in transitional housing, estates run by the Housing Society, hotels or youth hostels.

More than 860 registrations have been made on the government online platform [www.taipodonation.hk](http://www.taipodonation.hk) to donate essential items like food, clothing, bedding and electrical appliances.

Meanwhile, police have taken two more people into custody on suspicion of manslaughter, bringing the total number of arrests to 15.

The latest suspects, aged 59 and 66, are the external wall repair sub-contractors of the project.

Meanwhile, Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu said yesterday that he will not tolerate any attempt to exploit the Tai Po fire and undermine society's commitment to recovery.

His warning came a day after Secretary for Security Chris Tang Ping-keung said that some individuals had tried to undermine

national security by spreading fake news and inciting dissatisfaction with the government.

Lee was asked about reports that three people had been arrested for sedition.

"I will not tolerate any crimes, particularly crimes that exploit the tragedy that we are facing now. Everybody in Hong Kong society is uniting to help those who suffer to continue their living and face up to the future," he said.

"To anybody who dares to sabotage this attempt — this commitment of society — we will do anything we can to ensure that justice will be done."

He said law enforcement agencies will take action against crimes in accordance with the law.

—RTHK, MPD

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### Japan's letter to UN chief 'full of erroneous views, hypocritical lies': FM spokesperson

Japan's recent letter to UN Secretary-General António Guterres is full of erroneous views and hypocritical lies, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said yesterday.

—Story on p. 7

### Israel says received presumed remains of one of last Gaza hostages

Israeli police said yesterday they had received the presumed remains of one of the last two deceased hostages in the Gaza Strip, which will be identified at the country's forensic institute.

—Story on p. 10

### Electoral commission in coup-struck Guinea-Bissau says vote tally destroyed

Guinea-Bissau's electoral commission said yesterday that armed men had destroyed most of the vote count from the country's election, and it would be unable to publish results.

—Story on p. 12



## 2-day 'Thailand Cultural Festival' starts Saturday

Armando Neves

The Association of Thais in Macau announced in a press conference yesterday that it will host a 2-day event in Rua de Abreu Nunes (荷蘭園二馬路), colloquially known as "Thai Street", named "Thailand Cultural Festival", starting this Saturday.

The press conference was held at the Hotel Beverly Plaza in Zape.

According to the association's president, Orawon Santisubpoon, the event's objective is to offer intangible spiritual comfort to the Thai community in Macau while also promoting multicultural heritage. As the event has been successfully held for 20 years, the Thai-style carnival aims to revitalise the old city district through a model of activation spreading from a point source to a surrounding area and contribute to boosting Macau's economy, she said.

According to the association's chairman, Chan Dat Ca, the annual activity has become a signature event around the Avenida do Conselheiro Ferreira de Almeida neighbourhood and a key highlight of its December calendar. As the Thai-Chinese community and Macau are now inseparable, under Macau's multicultural policy, the association

has consistently worked to maintain cultural exchanges between the two regions and provide support for Thai-Chinese residents in their daily lives in Macau, Chan said.

Chan also said that the event also aims to stimulate Macau's economy by attracting more visitors. This year's event will be held between Saturday and Sunday, featuring a Thai food street, "lady boy" cabaret performances, traditional Thai massage, stage programmes, and performances by Macau singers, all designed to inject energy and vitality into the area, he said.

According to a statement by the association, the event has received financial support from the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO). The statement also that this year's event will emphasise environmental measures, such as using eco-friendly utensils and reducing single-use plastic items. All those participating in the event are kindly requested to follow on-site arrangements, the statement said.

According the Statistics and Census Bureau, 26,299 Thai nationals visited Macau in the first 10 months of this year, Macau's third-largest foreign visitor segment after South Koreans and Filipinos. ■

## One more truckload of waste removed from Chi Lam Village well



This photo taken on Monday shows the ancient well in Chi Lam Vai that still undergoing its second cleanup.



Cleaners load construction waste dredged from the well onto a lorry in front of Chi Lam Village on Monday. – Photos courtesy of Na Tcha Temple Association Vice-President Tang Kam Chun

Armando Neves

Around one month since the second phase of the Chi Lam Vai ancient well cleanup project started, Tang Kam Chun, a Chi Lam Village resident and vice-president of the Na Tcha Temple Association, told the *Post* yesterday that there is still a significant amount of construction debris in the well.

Pátio do Espinho (茨林園 – Chi Lam Vai in Cantonese) is a 400-year-old, formerly walled village that lies just a street away from the UNESCO World Heritage-protected Na Tcha Temple, one of Macau's two temples dedicated to the divinity known in Putonghua as Nezha. It is also close to the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ruins of St Paul's.

The two-month long Chi Lam Vai ancient well cleanup project's second phase commenced on November 4.

On November 4, the *Post* interviewed Tang about the ancient well. Tang said that the well required restoration because 40 years ago workers from a nearby construction site illegally dumped a huge amount of construction waste in it.

Tang also told the *Post* on November 18 that dozens of lorryloads of construction waste had been removed already.

On December 12, 2022, the day the well was reopened, a Japanese expert specialising in ancient wells was present for an inspection and noted that its structure resembles that of ancient wells in Japan, Tang said.

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) has since then assembled a team of experts to conduct an in-depth study of the well's structure, confirming that its history dates back approximately 400 years and is closely linked to the development

of the village, Tang said.

Tang pointed out that during the first phase of the cleanup in 2023, over one hundred lorryloads of construction waste were removed from it.

A part of "Fist of Fury" (精武門), the legendary 1972 film featuring San Francisco-born Hong Kong martial artist, actor and filmmaker Bruce Lee (李小龍; 1940-1973), was shot in Chi Lam Vai.

Chi Lam Village includes a café and souvenir shop dedicated to Na Tcha run by Tang, as well as a Thai restaurant. Both are popular with local and tourists alike.

Chi Lam villagers have told the *Post* that they are planning to convert the cleaned-up well into a "post-worthy spot – known in Putonghua as 打卡地 (daka di) – for local and tourists, considering its location connected with Na Tcha and Bruce Lee. ■

**泰國文化節 2025**  
Thailand Cultural Festival 2025

**日期 Date:** 2025年12月6至7日  
2025-12-06 to 2025-12-07

**地點 Location:** 澳門荷蘭園二馬路  
Avenida do Conselheiro Ferreira de Almeida

**時間 Time:** 14:00-22:00

**開幕式 Opening Ceremony:** 2025年12月6日 19:15  
2025-12-06 19:15

**派米活動 Blessing Rice Distribution:** 2025年12月6日 14:00-17:00  
2025-12-06 14:00-17:00

**活動內容 Activity Details:**

- 泰國傳統民族舞 Thai Traditional Folk Dance
- 泰國著名歌舞表演 Thai Famous Performance
- 泰國美食街 Thai Food Street
- 泰國高僧親臨會場 Thai Buddhist Monks Paying
- 泰國按摩 Thai Massage
- 泰國名廚主理泰國菜 Thai Chef's Thai Cuisine
- 泰國名師主理泰國甜品 Thai Chef's Thai Desserts
- 泰國名師主理泰國飲品 Thai Chef's Thai Drinks
- 泰國名師主理泰國甜點 Thai Chef's Thai Sweets
- 泰國名師主理泰國鹹點 Thai Chef's Thai Savories
- 泰國名師主理泰國麵包 Thai Chef's Thai Breads
- 泰國名師主理泰國餅乾 Thai Chef's Thai Biscuits
- 泰國名師主理泰國糖果 Thai Chef's Thai Candies
- 泰國名師主理泰國巧克力 Thai Chef's Thai Chocolates
- 泰國名師主理泰國冰淇淋 Thai Chef's Thai Ice Creams
- 泰國名師主理泰國果汁 Thai Chef's Thai Juices
- 泰國名師主理泰國汽水 Thai Chef's Thai Soft Drinks
- 泰國名師主理泰國啤酒 Thai Chef's Thai Beers
- 泰國名師主理泰國葡萄酒 Thai Chef's Thai Wines
- 泰國名師主理泰國烈酒 Thai Chef's Thai Spirits
- 泰國名師主理泰國茶 Thai Chef's Thai Teas
- 泰國名師主理泰國咖啡 Thai Chef's Thai Coffees
- 泰國名師主理泰國奶茶 Thai Chef's Thai Milk Teas
- 泰國名師主理泰國甜品 Thai Chef's Thai Desserts
- 泰國名師主理泰國鹹點 Thai Chef's Thai Savories
- 泰國名師主理泰國麵包 Thai Chef's Thai Breads
- 泰國名師主理泰國餅乾 Thai Chef's Thai Biscuits
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- 泰國名師主理泰國啤酒 Thai Chef's Thai Beers
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- 泰國名師主理泰國烈酒 Thai Chef's Thai Spirits
- 泰國名師主理泰國茶 Thai Chef's Thai Teas
- 泰國名師主理泰國咖啡 Thai Chef's Thai Coffees
- 泰國名師主理泰國奶茶 Thai Chef's Thai Milk Teas

This poster provided by the Association of Thais in Macao yesterday promotes its carnival to be held in Rua de Abreu Nunes on Saturday and Sunday.

## IAM reminds public to stay alert to fire risks in countryside

Khalel Vallo

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) urged the public in a statement yesterday to stay alert to hill-fire risks as Macau enters the cool and dry autumn–winter season, noting that falling humidity has made countryside areas increasingly vulnerable to fires.

IAM said in the statement that the shift to dry northerly and northeasterly winds in the autumn and winter typically lowers humidity, potentially turning fallen leaves and wilted branches into highly flammable fuel, stressing that once ignited, hill fires spread rapidly and are difficult to control, posing threats to ecosystems as well as lives and property.

In the statement, the bureau reminded residents that, when hiking, they must not light fires or cook outside designated barbecue areas. It also warned against smoking or discarding cigarette ends in the countryside.

The statement said that anyone who notices signs of a hill fire should immediately leave the

**防止山火 愛護山林**  
PROTEJA AS ÁRVORES, PREVINA OS INCÊNDIOS  
Prevent hill fires, protect hill forests

如需求助，請致電：緊急求助熱線 999  
Corpo de Bombeiros  
Corps of Fire Services  
2857 2222

This poster provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) yesterday promotes its hill-fire precautions to ensure public safety when visiting the countryside.

area and report the incident to the emergency services. In addition, the bureau also urged hikers to plan their routes carefully, monitor weather changes and adjust or cancel their outings if necessary.

Other recommended preparations include carrying a sufficient amount of drinking water and other essential items, as well as a smartphone and a first-aid kit, the

statement said. Moreover, it called on the public not to discard rubbish while out and about to help protect the natural environment.

The bureau also said in the statement that vigilance and responsible behaviour are essential for preventing hill fires during the current dry season, urging residents to act cautiously to safeguard Macau's countryside. ■

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### Macau Weather

**TEMPERATURE FALLING. MAINLY CLOUDY. A FEW RAIN PATCHES AT FIRST. FORCE 4 TO 5 NORTH TO NORTHEASTERLY WINDS WITH GUSTS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 50% AND 95%.**



17°C~22°C

Source: SMG



## ‘Winter Flower Show’ to display 30,000 flowers

**Khalel Vallo**

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) said in a statement yesterday that this year’s Winter Flower Show will feature around 30,000 pots of purple flowers in Avenida da Praia in Taipa from December 19 to January 4.

Themed “Fields of Purple Blossoms,” the show will highlight “sail-off”, “expedition” and “integration,” drawing inspiration from Macau’s historical links with Portugal, the statement said, adding that the design aims to lead visitors on “an epic integration journey,” using plants such as lavender, *Salvia superba*, Chinese larkspur, and lupins.

The statement noted that the purple palette is meant to create a sensory experience that reflects the coexistence of Chinese and Western cultures; and in order to complement the floral displays, the bureau has arranged exhibitions and activities including “Flower Show Planting

for Kids,” an image-and-text showcase about the featured flowers, and a series of themed workshops on December 20, 21, 24, and 25.

Registration for the workshops opened on Monday through the Macao One Account app and at IAM service centres.

The bureau said in the statement that registration is on a first-come, first-served basis and may close once all places are filled. The statement added that the organiser also reserves the right to cancel or postpone activities if there are insufficient participants or poor weather, and urges participants to keep their receipts for any rearrangements.

The bureau encouraged locals and tourists alike to check schedule details and workshop availability on the IAM website ([www.iam.gov.mo](http://www.iam.gov.mo)) or the Macao Nature website (<https://nature.iam.gov.mo>), or to call 2833 7676 or 2888 0087 for enquiries. ■



*This artist's rendition provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) yesterday promotes the upcoming Winter Flower Show 2025 in Avenida da Praia in Taipa.*

## Macau Reading Festival to feature 20 activities



*These two undated handout photos provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) yesterday in connection with the upcoming Macau Book Festival show a “Yoga with Pet” session (left) and a stall of local creative products.*

**Ida Cheong**

The “2025 Macau Reading Festival” will be held from Friday to Sunday at the Taipa Houses in Taipa, featuring 20 reading activities and workshops, including the “Book Traveller” shared reading sessions and the parent-child “Portable Specimen Case x Biodiversity in Nature” workshops, according to a statement released by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) yesterday.

The three-day event, themed “A Reading Holiday”, features an outdoor library, an arts and culture book fair, a sky cinema\*, a coffee and creative market, cultural performances, and game stalls, apart from incorporating aspects of the 15<sup>th</sup> National Games and the 12<sup>th</sup> National Games for Persons with Disabilities (NGD), with the aim of creating a comprehensive cultural

experience that combines reading, art, and leisure, the statement said.

Several themed zones will be on site, such as a raft of cultural performances, aiming to provide an immersive natural reading experience for visitors seeking a tranquil literary escape, the statement said, adding that the Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province, Shenzhen Library, and others will set up on-site booths to enhance public understanding of the Greater Bay Area’s (GBA) library resources.

The statement added that the stage performance segment will showcase a variety of artistic forms, including Bossa Nova, Portuguese-style busking, shadow puppet story theatre, providing residents with a multi-sensory, therapeutic artistic experience. The “Sky Cinema” will

screen film adaptations of literary works in the evenings starting at 8 p.m., such as the Hong Kong classic movie “Rouge” starring Leslie Cheung Kwok Wing (張國榮).

Additionally, 25 stalls of local creative products and coffee will be set up on site, providing stationery, handcrafted goods and others, as well as “Zone-Out Playground,” “Chill Zone” game booths, festival-themed installations, and photo spots with the National Games’ mascots “Xiyangyang” (“Joyful”) and “Lerongrong” (“Happy Harmony”).

A grand lucky draw will also be held, with participants standing a chance to win prizes such as e-readers and keyring digital cameras, the statement added.

For more information, please visit the festival’s website at [www.library.gov.mo/macareadingfestival](http://www.library.gov.mo/macareadingfestival). ■

## Macao International Integrated Tourism and Culture Zone

### – Collection of Opinions



#### Public Consultation Sessions

2025-12-06 ※	Saturday	15:00 - 17:00	Macao Cultural Center - Conference Room
2025-12-14	Sunday	15:00 - 17:00	Macao Cultural Center - Conference Room

In the aforementioned sessions, simultaneous interpretation in Portuguese will be provided.

※ This session will also be accompanied by sign language interpretation.

#### Submission of Opinions

Postal Address	— Cultural Affairs Bureau Building, Tap Siac Square, Macao
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**13/11/2025**

**26/12/2025**



澳門特別行政區政府文化局

INSTITUTO CULTURAL do Governo da Região Administrativa Especial de Macau





## 180 works showcased at The Parisian Macao for Macau Artist Society exhibition

**Rui Pastorin**

A total of 180 artworks by members of the Macau Artist Society\* (MAS) are presenting their works at The Parisian Macao in Cotai, showcasing their creativity, variety of styles and artforms across six venues until March 27.

Gallerygoers visiting the ongoing “The Exhibition of Artworks of The Members of Macau Artist Society 2025” at the integrated resort will be able to find works ranging from oils, acrylics and calligraphy to installations and mixed media. All these exhibits are displayed in Shops 3303, 3305a, 3305b, 3305c, 3306, and 3320.

The venues are located on Level 3 of Shoppes at Parisian, each providing a different setting and atmosphere for members of the public to explore as they move from one venue to the other.

The participating 180 artists each tackle various themes shown in the many pieces on display using their art styles

and preferred medium. The artworks include everything from creative portraits and work featuring Macau’s architecture and characteristics to dream-like pieces.

Altogether, they are presenting the diversity and vitality of Macau’s art scene, noted an event emcee during Monday’s opening ceremony for the over four-month long exhibition. Moreover, the participating artists reflect Macau’s “unique artistic ecology born from the fusion of Chinese and Western cultures”, according to a statement provided at the event.

The annual showcase also continues its core objective, which, MAS President Lok Hei said during his speech on Monday, is the aim to create a professional platform for member artists to showcase their creative achievements, while allowing everyone to explore Macau’s rich artistic landscape, fostering dialogue and exchange between the arts and the community.

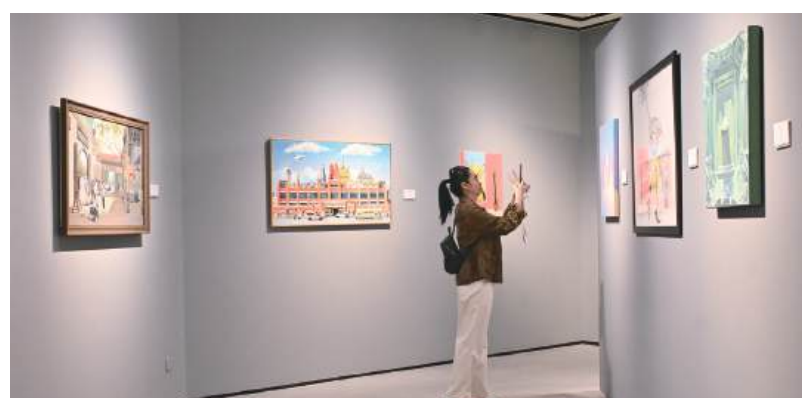
With this in mind, members of the public are therefore invited to experience the “diverse charms of Macau’s art and witness the wonderful presentation of this annual artistic event”, noted the exhibition statement provided on Monday.

The Macao Cultural Development Fund-sponsored exhibition is organised by MAS, with integrated resort operator Sands China being the venue sponsor. This year marks the first time that MAS’s annual showcase of its members’ works is held at The Parisian Macao.

Members of the public may admire the exhibits daily from noon through 7 p.m. throughout its run.

*\*The Macau Artist Society, according to their website, was founded in 1956 and has consistently promoted patriotism, local artistic development, and aesthetic education over its sixty-plus years of history. It has become one of the largest and oldest art organisations in Macau.*

*-Photos taken on Monday by Rui Pastorin*





# Macau Int'l Short Film Festival hits record-high submissions



The 16<sup>th</sup> Macau International Short Film Festival's Director Menn Chow (周萬生; left) and Festival President Paulo Canelas de Castro (third from left), along with Grand Jury members Cosmo Wong (right) and Julia Patey, look on as Grand Jury member João Francisco Pinto delivers his remarks during yesterday's press conference at Teatro Capitol.

— Photo: Rui Pastorin

## Interview by Rui Pastorin

The Macau International Short Film Festival marks its 16<sup>th</sup> edition this year, this time receiving over 6,350 film submissions from 123 countries and regions, a ground-breaking figure in the festival's near-two decade run.

Kicking off yesterday at Teatro Capitol, a total of 122 selected entries from the submissions will be screened until next Wednesday, ranging from documentaries to fiction. A total of 15 cash prizes encompassing the festival's SHORTS (for short films) and VOLUME (for music videos) competitions are up for grabs, with the film garnering the "SHORTS Best Film of the Festival" award set to win 16,000 patacas.

## Over 6,000 submissions from across the globe

Answering questions from the *Post* during an interview with

English-speaking media after a press conference at the cinema yesterday, Festival President Paulo Canelas de Castro highlighted the joy brought to the organisation as they see the whole world represented through submissions by "123 countries and jurisdictions", which in a sense represent all cultures and continents. There is also "heavy representation" from Macau, the Greater Bay Area (GBA), and elsewhere in China both in terms of figures and mounting quality.

With that regard, among the more than 6,000 submissions, nearly a quarter of the total record are from Macau and elsewhere in the GBA and the Chinese mainland, said Canelas de Castro — more than last year.

Canelas de Castro also pointed out that they were glad to see the festival enter its 16<sup>th</sup> edition, indicating that they are fulfilling the mission that they've had from the start: promoting local talent and industry, which had been initially "very fragile". The event's success over the years, marked by a growing number of films and record-breaking achievements this year, demonstrates that there is a clear demand for it and that it is fulfilling its intended purpose, he underlined. It also continues to promote local talents as well as enables them to "have a growing interaction with the outside world".

Moreover, a growth in the number of submissions from Macau, the GBA and elsewhere in the Chinese mainland not only shows that they are delivering what is expected of them, but more importantly, serves as a "very powerful sign" that, particularly in Macau, there is a local industry that is responding to the challenge showcasing their talent and creativity

globally by delivering increasingly higher quality entries. "This is a message that was very emphatically passed by all the members of the jury, and we are very happy for that", Canelas de Castro said.

Canelas de Castro added that it was unanimously agreed among the jury that this year's festival hits a "very high mark" in terms of the quality of the movies represented across the festival's four categories, noting: "We are happy to indeed hit, I would say, a very high moment in the history of this festival".

As the festival continues, Canelas de Castro concluded his remarks to the *Post* by saying why Macau is the most appropriate place to host it.

"Cinema is a universal language, and in a sense, it also promotes understanding between different cultures and different people, a dialogue between cultures and people. And in that sense, I believe that Macau is also the most appropriate place for this to take place because as we know historically, Macau is a place where East meets West, where different cultures enter into dialogue. And this is evidenced also in this particular context of the film industry, where we speak the universal language.

"It goes about creativity, it goes about emotions, it goes about narratives, it goes about experiences, but, of course, translating and evidencing the different cultural backgrounds, Macau could not be better in that for hosting this festival".

The festival at Teatro Capitol on Rua de Pedro Nolasco da Silva (伯多祿局長街), runs through next Wednesday, with the schedule and list of films available on: <https://www.macauinternationalshortfilmfestival.com/screening-schedule/>. ■

## Fortuna Casino in Zape to shut for good next week: govt

### Tony Wong

Fortuna Casino in Zape, one of the city's remaining three "satellite casinos", will close for good after midnight on Tuesday next week, the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) announced in a statement yesterday.

The government announced in June that in compliance with the three-year transition period stipulated by the new legislation amending the gaming law, all of the city's then 11 satellite casinos decided to close for good by December 31 this year. Grandview Casino in Taipa, which closed in late July, was the first of them to cease operations.

After Grand Dragon Casino, also in Taipa, closed in September, two satellite casinos in the peninsula, namely Emperor Palace Casino in Nam Van district and Waldo Casino in Zape, ceased operations in late October.

Afterwards, three other satellite casinos closed down permanently at different times last month, namely Legend Palace Casino located in the Macau Fisherman's Wharf entertainment complex in Nape, Casa Real Casino in Zape, and Ponte 16 Casino located in the Ponte 16 hotel resort in the Inner Harbour district.

Kam Pek Paradise Casino in Zape ceased operations on Monday night.

Consequently, Fortuna Casino will be the ninth to cease operations. After its scheduled closure next week, there will still be two satellite casinos in Macau, namely

Landmark Casino located in New Orient Landmark Hotel in Zape, and Le Royal Arc Casino located in L'Arc Hotel in Nape.

While Kam Pek Paradise Casino was housed on the podium levels of an office building (San Kin Yip Commercial Centre on Avenida da Amizade), the other 10 satellite casinos were or are all located in hotels.

The so-called satellite casinos in Macau are formally owned by gaming concessionaires but are actually run and managed by third parties as they are housed on premises that are not owned by the respective gaming concessionaires.

After the three-year transition period, which is scheduled to end on December 31 this year, all satellite casinos must close, unless the respective gaming concessionaire chooses to hire a "management company" to operate the casino. However, such a management company is only allowed to receive a management fee from the respective gaming concessionaire, no longer being permitted to share in the casino's revenues.

The three respective gaming concessionaires, SJM, Galaxy, and Melco, decided in June to terminate the operations of all 11 satellite casinos before the expiration of the transition period based on their respective commercial decisions, meaning that none of the three gaming concessionaires decided to continue operating these casinos through the hiring of management companies after December 31 this year.

Among the 11 satellite casinos,

Waldo Casino was formally owned by Galaxy, while Grand Dragon Casino was owned by Melco, with the other nine by SJM.

Unlike its other satellite casinos, SJM has signed an agreement to acquire the ownership of L'Arc Hotel in order to convert Le Royal Arc Casino into a "directly-operated" casino after its scheduled closure as a satellite casino. After the acquisition gets off the ground, Le Royal Arc Casino will continue operating, but no longer as a third-party managed business but as a casino directly operated by SJM.

Yesterday's DICJ statement announced that after business negotiations, Fortuna Casino's third-party operator and SJM decided to terminate the operations of the casino, located in Hotel Fortuna in Zape, after 11:59 p.m. on Tuesday next week, i.e., it will cease operations from Wednesday next week.

The statement pledged that the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau, in collaboration with the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL), will ensure that SJM fulfils its promise to ensure the employment of those working at Fortuna Casino after its closure.

According to the statement, there are currently 553 employees working at Fortuna Casino.

Meanwhile, SJM noted in a statement yesterday that all gaming tables and slot machines currently operating at Fortuna Casino will be redeployed to other SJM casinos.

The statement also pledged that SJM will provide all local employees working at Fortuna Casino with gaming positions at other SJM casinos, while local employees working at this casino who are employed by its third-party operator "will be invited to apply for related vacancies" offered by SJM where they will be given employment priority.

In 2021, Macau reached its historical peak of 42 casinos. At the end of this month, it will stand at 20 run by the six rival gaming concessionaires. ■



A woman crosses the road outside Fortuna Casino in Zape last week.

— Photo: Tony Wong



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## ADMISSIONS FOR 2026/2027

### 2026/2027 年度招收新生

**ADMISSIONS ARE OPEN AT ALL LEVELS (Except F6)**  
 歡迎報讀本校各個年級 (中六除外)

- K1: Please follow the DSEDJ announcements
- K1: 請留意教育及青年發展局公告
- Other levels: Registration from 1 Mar 2026
- 其他年級: 由2026年3月1日起
- Application forms are available at the School or you may apply via the school online application system on the website
- 報名表可從本校索取或使用學校網站上系統報名。



**Kindergarten Public Information Day 幼稚園課程資訊日**

6 Dec 2025, Saturday, 09:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

2025年12月6日(星期六), 09:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

**Public Information Day - All Levels 全校所有年級課程資訊日**

10 Jan 2026, Saturday, 09:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

2026年1月10日(星期六), 09:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

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## Police arrest local woman for theft by finding

Ada Lei

The Public Security Police (PSP) apprehended an elderly local woman on Sunday for theft by finding, PSP spokesman Lei Chan Hong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Lei identified the suspect as a female in her sixties surnamed Chan who works as an administrator.

According to Lei, the Public Security Police (PSP) received a report on November 26 from a female non-resident worker (NRW) who said that she had lost her wallet in Rua Central da Areia Preta (黑沙環中街) while going to work on November 25. The following morning, the victim

discovered that her wallet, containing 30,500 patacas and HK\$100 in cash, had gone missing. Suspecting that someone had stolen it, she immediately reported a total loss of 30,500 patacas and HK\$100 to the police.

Through their citywide CCTV surveillance footage, the police identified Chan as the suspect and apprehended her on Sunday in Rua Central da Areia Preta (黑沙環中街). Under questioning, Chan admitted to stealing the wallet. The police later recovered the wallet and the cash from her flat.

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



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

## Police nab local man for drunk driving

Ada Lei

The Public Security Police (PSP) apprehended a local man on Saturday for drunk driving, with his blood alcohol concentration standing at 1.73 grams per litre, PSP spokesman Lei Chan Hong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Lei identified the suspect as a male surnamed Un who is in his thirties and works as a barista.

According to Lei, the Public Security Police (PSP) received a report from Un early Saturday morning about a traffic accident in

Rua de Francisco Xavier Pereira (俾利喇街). Lei noted that a breathalyser test confirmed Un's blood alcohol concentration at 1.73 grams per litre, indicating a drunk-driving offence.

Through their citywide CCTV surveillance footage, the police confirmed that Un was driving along Avenida do Ouvidor Arriaga (雅廉訪大馬路) at the junction with Avenida do Conselheiro Ferreira de Almeida (荷蘭園大馬路), when he made a wrong turn and drove against the flow of traffic. Un reversed to correct his direction but then collided with a

car parked in a metred space when turning from Estrada do Repouso (鏡湖馬路) towards Rua de Francisco Xavier Pereira (俾利喇街).

Under questioning, Un admitted to drinking alcoholic beverages in a restaurant on Rua do Marechal Gomes da Costa (高士德街) before driving. The police contacted the owner of the damaged car, and the total cost of the damage is still to be determined.

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

## Blowing 'hot and cold' won't benefit the UK

China Daily Editorial

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer's Monday speech on China, delivered to business leaders in London's financial district, attempted to chart what he called a "serious approach" towards Beijing – one that rejects both the "golden age" rhetoric of a decade ago and the confrontational "ice age" posture adopted by his predecessors. Yet his assertion that China poses a "national security threat" to the United Kingdom immediately casts doubt on whether his government truly intends to stabilize and advance the trajectory of China-UK relations.

The Chinese embassy in the UK responded unequivocally. As the embassy's spokesperson said, China firmly opposes the British government's spreading of the so-called "China threat theory" and its unfounded accusations, as well as its interference in the country's internal affairs. China has one of the strongest records on peace and security among major countries and its development, rather than being a "threat" to any country, creates opportunities for shared progress.

Starmer's remarks risk undermining the stabilizing momentum that has begun to shape bilateral ties since the Labour government took office. It is imperative that the UK side abandon its two-faced stand: sending positive signals on cooperation on the one hand, while casting aspersions on the other.

In this respect, Starmer's rhetoric

on Hong Kong is particularly misguided. Hong Kong affairs are purely China's internal affairs. The UK has neither the right nor the qualification to make irresponsible remarks or to interfere in the affairs of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Persistently dragging Hong Kong into China-UK discussions only creates unnecessary friction and violates the basic norms governing international relations.

What the UK needs now is not suspicion or ideological posturing, but confidence-building measures and pragmatic cooperation with China. In fact, since Starmer took office, bilateral interaction has made new progress, with strengthened dialogue and expanded cooperation in trade, investment, green development, finance and people-to-people exchanges.

A stable China-UK relationship serves both nations' interests. China is currently promoting high-standard opening-up, deepening reforms and creating new engines for sustainable growth – including the digital economy, new energy, modern services and financial sector. All these endeavors can benefit the UK.

Yet such cooperation cannot flourish in an atmosphere clouded by political accusations. Starmer asserts that the UK "will not trade security for economic access", but it should be equally clear that hyping up a slanted and baseless "security narrative" is not a substitute for serious policymaking.

Moreover, China and the UK – both permanent members of the

United Nations Security Council – share responsibilities far beyond bilateral ties. In a world confronted by conflict, climate change, sluggish growth and governance deficits, major countries must work together to uphold the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, support multilateralism and contribute to global stability. China's positions on peace-building, development cooperation and global governance have been consistent and constructive. The UK should approach China's development with rationality and pragmatism, and refrain from allowing domestic political calculations to distort its foreign policy.

Starmer rightly noted that the UK's China policy has "blown hot and cold" for too long. An effective way to break this UK-propelled cycle is for his government to anchor its approach in the consensus reached by the leaders of both countries, adhere to mutual respect and noninterference, and reciprocate China's sincerity in seeking steady, healthy and mutually beneficial relations. The UK should view China as a partner rather than a threat, and focus on areas where both sides have broad common interests and shared global responsibilities.

Only through consistency, rationality and goodwill can China-UK relations move forward along the right path, benefiting not only the two peoples but also contributing positively to a world in need of stability and cooperation.

– Courtesy of China Daily

## Chinese universities set to launch embodied intelligence majors to fill talent gap

BEIJING – Many universities across China are preparing to offer embodied intelligence as a major, exemplified by humanoid robots, to address a talent shortage in this red-hot, fast-growing industry.

Most of these universities already have strong technology and engineering credentials, such as Beihang University in Beijing, renowned for its expertise in aeronautical and astronautical research, and the Hangzhou-based Zhejiang University, where the founders of DeepSeek and many other AI startups pursued their studies.

The latest university to join this trend is Shanghai Jiao Tong University, which recently released a public notice indicating the addition of an undergraduate major in embodied intelligence, revealing that the program will be offered by its School of AI.

According to this university, the academic lead of this major will be Lu Cewu. He is also the co-founder of Noematrix, a Shanghai-based embodied intelligence company that managed to secure more funds from investors during a funding round led by tech giant Alibaba Group in October.

Lu's dual role reflects the integration of industry, academia and research within the new program. The university said it is aiming to establish a collaborative platform, enhance strategic partnerships between the campus and leading embodied intelligence companies, and jointly develop a network of industry-linked practicum centers.

Employment orientation is another distinct feature. For instance, the Embodied Intelligence program at the Beijing Institute of Technology plans to enroll 120 undergraduates. Among them, 70 are expected to pursue further education and 50 to enter the workplace, including state-owned space technology groups, automobile manufacturers and renowned private companies like Huawei and Tencent.

From humanoid dancers to care-giving robots, embodied intelligence is a term that has gradually captured public interest in China. It highlights how intelligent systems can become more capable and responsive by being closely connected to a physical body – learning and adapting through real interactions with the environment.

In 1973, the world's first humanoid robot, WABOT-1, was developed at Waseda University in Tokyo. Since then, factories, universities and research institutions have been engaged in the development and utilization of humanoid robots.

Notably, the recent surge in university Embodied intelligence programs in China has been driven by both strong policy support and vast market potential.

China has identified embodied intelligence as a key future industry. This year's government work report called for development of embodied AI. Also, together with quantum technology, biomanufacturing, hydrogen and fusion energy, brain-computer interfaces and 6G mobile communications, embodied intelligence has been designated one of the country's new engines of economic growth for the next five years.

The market scale of China's embodied intelligence industry is expected to reach 400 billion yuan in 2030 and exceed 1 trillion yuan in 2035, according to a report from the Development Research Center of the State Council.

However, behind the wave of embodied intelligence programs lies a thriving industry currently starved of talent.

A recent report focused on talent supply and demand conducted by Liepin's Big Data Research Institute, indicated that the average annual salary for recruitment in the field of embodied intelligence is 333,400 yuan – much higher than the 290,900 yuan in the rest of the AI sector.

Xi'an Jiaotong University in northwest China's Shaanxi Province has found that companies including ByteDance, JD.com, Huawei and BYD have all announced job offers related to embodied intelligence or humanoid robots. The monthly salary for embodied intelligence algorithm engineers ranges from 25,000 to 90,000 yuan.

As of the end of September 2025, the cumulative financing amount for humanoid robots globally this year had surpassed 32.8 billion yuan, featuring a total of more than 140 financing events, and 120 of these were in the Chinese market -- accounting for over 80 percent of the global total, as revealed by data from the Humanoid Robot Scene Application Alliance.

The Beijing Institute of Technology estimates that there is a talent shortage of roughly one million in this industry.

Shanghai Jiaotong University said current curricula fail to meet the talent requirements which the embodied intelligence industry demands. Programs remain fragmented across scattered disciplines, engineering and practical training are weak, labs and platforms are outdated – and courses are detached from real-world scenarios.

There is an urgent need to fill the gap by launching a new major that can break down disciplinary barriers and integrate AI, mechanical engineering, computer science and technology into one systematic curriculum, the university said. – Xinhua



# Japan's letter to UN chief 'full of erroneous views, hypocritical lies': FM spokesperson

BEIJING – Japan's recent letter to UN Secretary-General António Guterres is full of erroneous views and hypocritical lies, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said yesterday.

Lin told a regular news briefing that Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's erroneous remarks on Taiwan openly challenge the victorious outcomes of World War II and the post-war international order, and constitute a serious violation of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. China's letter to the UN Secretary-General setting out its solemn position was entirely justified and necessary.

He said the letter by the Japanese side is full of erroneous views and lies. The Japanese side mentioned in the letter the so-called "consistent position" on the Taiwan question. But as to what exactly this "consistent position"

is, the Japanese side has continued to evade the question and has yet to give China a direct answer.

"We ask the Japanese side once again: Can the Japanese government provide the international community with a complete and accurate explanation of its 'consistent position' on the Taiwan question as laid down in the four political documents between the two countries?" Lin said.

He said the Japanese side claims that Japan adheres to a "passive defense strategy, which is exclusively defense-oriented," and asserts that Takaichi's remarks were grounded in this position. Taiwan is Chinese territory. How to resolve the Taiwan question is a matter for the Chinese ourselves and brooks no external interference. Yet Takaichi linked Japan's "survival-threatening situation" with a "Taiwan contingency," implying the use of force against China.

"Is this what the Japanese side's 'passive defense strategy, which is exclusively defense-oriented,' means?" Lin said.

Lin said in Article 2(4) of Chapter I, the Charter of the United Nations stipulates that "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force."

"As a sitting leader of a defeated country in WWII, Takaichi threatened a victorious country with the use of force in case of a 'survival-threatening situation.' How could the Japanese side have the audacity to claim that it 'has always respected and adhered to international law, including the UN Charter'?" he said.

The Japanese side also insinuates accusations regarding the defense development and "coercive measures" of other countries. This is nothing but blame-shifting, he added.

In fact, since Japan's defeat, right-wing forces within Japan have never ceased attempts to whitewash its history of aggression. Japan has increased its defense budget for 13 consecutive years, removed the ban on exercising the right to collective self-defense, relaxed restrictions on arms exports more than once, developed the capability to strike enemy bases, attempted to alter the "three non-nuclear principles," further hollowed out the provisions on Japan clearly stipulated in the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Proclamation, and gone back on its commitments made on the constitution, he said.

Lin said it is the Japanese side, not others, that has been "engaged in the prolonged expansion of military capabilities", taking "coercive measures" and attempting "unilateral changes to the status quo despite opposition from neighboring

countries," adding that given all these reasons, the Permanent Mission of China to the UN once again sent a letter to the UN Secretary-General and reiterated the Chinese side's stern position.

Noting that this year marks the 80th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War, he said China firmly opposes the Japanese side reversing the course of history, challenging the postwar international order, and honoring the militarists.

"We once again urge the Japanese side to earnestly do soul-searching, rectify its wrongdoings, fulfill its obligations as a defeated country, take practical steps to honor its commitments to China and the international community, and stop reneging on its words again," Lin said.

— Xinhua

## Average life expectancy in China hits 79 years

BEIJING – China's average life expectancy reached 79 years in 2024, according to a report released yesterday by the National Health Commission.

China's 2024 health statistics bulletin highlighted continued improvements in both maternal and child health, with maternal deaths falling to 14.3 per 100,000 and infant deaths dropping to 4 per 1,000.

China's healthcare resources continued to grow steadily. By the end of 2024, the country had 1,093,551 medical and health institutions – an increase of 22,766 from the previous year. The number of health professionals reached 13.02

million – 531,000 more than in 2023.

The report also revealed that China's medical institutions had handled 10.15 billion patient visits in 2024, an increase of 600 million from the previous year, reflecting both expanded service capacity and improved efficiency.

Progress, notably, was made in controlling medical costs. The average hospital inpatient stay cost 9,870 yuan in 2024, down 4.3 percent from 2023 at current prices and 4.5 percent after adjusting for inflation. Outpatient visits averaged 361 yuan last year, falling 0.2 percent at current prices and 0.4 percent in real terms.

— Xinhua

## Chinese team uses AI to create wide-angle 3D display not requiring glasses

SHANGHAI – Imagine watching a car race on your computer screen where the vehicles leap out into your room, staying highly visible even as you shift from side to side in front of your desk, and all without 3D glasses or special headsets.

This immersive experience is now closer to reality via new display technology developed by Chinese researchers.

The system, called EyeReal, uses artificial intelligence (AI) to create glasses-free 3D visuals on desktop-sized screens, overcoming a decades-long challenge in consumer electronics, according to a paper published recently in the journal Nature.

This display achieves a 100-degree field of view with full HD resolution – allowing viewers to naturally move around while

maintaining clear 3D effects that previous technologies could only achieve in much smaller displays or with limited viewing angles.

Researchers from Shanghai AI Laboratory and Fudan University, also located in east China's Shanghai, have employed an AI-powered approach that tracks eye movement and dynamically optimizes the image using a simple stack of three standard LCD panels, making it potentially suitable for future consumer applications.

The display achieves a high resolution of 1,920 plus 1,080 with a refresh rate exceeding 50 frames per second – delivering smooth and natural visuals, the study noted.

"Our device could potentially enable applications in educational tools, 3D design and virtual reality," the researchers said.

— Xinhua



Fairgoers look at a model of the manned submersible Shenhai Yongshi ("Deep Sea Warrior") at the Marintec China 2025 exhibition at Shanghai New International Expo Center in Shanghai yesterday. Attracting over 2,200 enterprises from 16 countries and regions, the event kicked off yesterday and will conclude on Friday.

— Xinhua

## Xinjiang hosts regional forum to boost Central Asia links, trade

URUMQI – The Tianshan Forum for Central Asia Economic Cooperation opened yesterday in Urumqi, capital of China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, drawing over 300 government officials and representatives from financial institutions, think tanks and the private sector to discuss promoting trade and investment across the region.

The two-day forum, themed "Unlocking Connectivity and Investment in Central Asia," brought together Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) member countries. Discussions focused on trade, transport, energy and digital connectivity in the region.

In his opening remarks, Finance Minister Lan Fo'an said that CAREC cooperation has made significant progress and should

expand in scale and depth to benefit people in the member countries.

"The Tianshan forum will serve as a bridge linking policymakers, the private sector, development partners and the research community to offer solutions to our shared challenges," said Charymuhammet Shallyyev, director of the CAREC Institute, which organized the event. He noted that since the 2015 launch of its physical base in Urumqi, the institute has conducted over 180 research studies and empowered more than 2,000 government officials of CAREC member countries through 150 training programs.

Pakistan's Federal Minister for Planning, Development & Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal noted that the current global landscape is undergoing profound

transformation, with Central Asia and South Asia emerging as core engines driving global economic growth. He highlighted successful Pakistan-China projects and called for deeper cooperation on industry, people-to-people exchange, and agriculture and technology.

The forum also saw the launch of a Central Asia fiscal cooperation research center, established by the CAREC Institute and Xinjiang's regional department of finance.

Central Asia is a crucial hub at the heart of Eurasia. Trade between China and Central Asia has surged since the first China-Central Asia Summit in May 2023, totaling US\$94.8 billion in 2024. Bordering multiple Central Asian countries, Xinjiang is strengthening its role as a core hub along the Belt and Road (B&R).

— Xinhua



# How deforestation turbocharged Indonesia's deadly floods

*Marchio Gorbiano and Dessy Sagita*

JAKARTA — The deadly flooding that has killed hundreds in Indonesia was largely the result of monsoon rains and a rare tropical storm. But something else may have played a role: deforestation.

Environmentalists, experts and even Indonesia's government have pointed to the role forest loss played in flash flooding and landslides that washed torrents of mud into villages and stranded residents on roofs.

Forests help absorb rainfall and stabilise the ground held by their roots, and their absence makes areas more prone to flash flooding and landslides.

Indonesia is regularly among the countries in the world with the largest annual forest loss.

Mining, plantations and fires have caused the clearance of large tracts of the country's lush rainforest over recent decades.

In 2024, over 240,000 hectares of primary forest was lost, and that was less than the year before, according to analysis by conservation start-up The TreeMap's Nusantara Atlas project.

"Forests upstream act as a protective barrier, a bit like a sponge," explained David Gaveau, founder of The TreeMap.

"The canopy captures some of the rain before it reaches the ground. The roots also help stabilise the soil. When the forest is cleared upstream, rainwater runs off rapidly into rivers creating flash floods."

## 'Prevent deforestation'

Environmentalists have long urged the government to better protect the country's forests, which are a key carbon sink, absorbing planet-warming carbon dioxide.

Indonesia's forests are also home to enormous biodiversity and some of the world's most threatened species, including orangutans.

And in the wake of the flooding, even



*A villagers affected by flash floods walk amongst piles of logs at Tukka village, Central Tapanuli, North Sumatra province, Indonesia yesterday. The death toll from floods and landslides that have struck Indonesia's Sumatra island since last week has risen to 712, the National Disaster Management Agency said yesterday. — AFP*

the country's president urged action.

"We must truly prevent deforestation and forest destruction," President Prabowo Subianto said Friday as the scale of the disaster began to emerge.

"Protecting our forests is crucial."

The floods carried not only collapsed hillsides and torrents of mud, but also timber that fuelled speculation about the link between deforestation and the disaster.

On one beach in Padang, AFP saw workers dressed in orange using chainsaws to break up massive logs strewn along the sand.

The forestry ministry is reportedly investigating claims of illegal logging in affected areas, and Forestry Minister Raja Juli Antoni called the disaster a chance to "evaluate our policies".

"The pendulum between the economy and ecology seems to have swung too far towards the economy and needs to be pulled back to the centre," he said over the weekend.

That is a message environmentalists in Indonesia have long delivered.

In one of the worst-affected areas, Batang Toru, "there are seven companies operating along the upstream region," said Uli Arta Siagian, forest and plantation campaign manager for conservation group Walhi.

"There is a gold mine that has already cleared around 300 hectares of forest cover... the Batang Toru

Hydropower Plant has caused the loss of 350 hectares of forest," she told AFP.

Large tracts of forest have also been converted into palm oil plantations.

"All of this contributes to increasing our vulnerability."

## Protection and restoration

Sumatra, where the flood damage was concentrated, is particularly vulnerable because its river basins are relatively small, explained Kiki Taufik, head of Greenpeace Indonesia's forest campaign.

"The massive change in forest cover is the main factor in the occurrence of flash floods," he told AFP, accusing the government of "recklessly and carelessly" granting permits for mines and plantations.

Deforestation rates in Sumatra are among the highest in Indonesia, according to Herry Purnomo, country director at the Centre for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry (CIFOR-ICRAF).

Losing forest also raises flooding risks because soil washes into rivers, raising the riverbed and reducing the capacity of waterways to absorb sudden torrential downpours, he said.

Two things are needed, added Herry, a professor at IPB University in Bogor: "Prevent deforestation, avoid it, and also carry out restoration." — AFP

# Flood-hit Asia regions saw highest November rains since 2012: AFP analysis

PARIS — Some flood-hit regions of Southeast Asia experienced their heaviest November rains since 2012, according to an AFP analysis, as climate change intensifies seasonal weather patterns.

Large areas of Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Myanmar, as well as parts of Cambodia and Laos, recorded rainfall totals not seen in the month of November for more than a decade, according to monthly US data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Almost all of Sri Lanka also experienced record rainfall.

Heavy rains are common during the monsoon season, but tropical storms, made more frequent and intense by climate change, have seen some areas experience monthly rainfall levels up to one metre above the November 1991-2020 average.

Cyclone Ditwah brought

torrential rains to Sri Lanka in recent days, triggering floods and landslides that buried entire villages.

A total of 410 people have died and 336 are missing, according to a report released by the Sri Lankan Disaster Management Agency yesterday, while 1.5 million residents have been affected.

Meanwhile, an exceptional storm raged across the Bay of Bengal, causing at least 176 deaths in southern Thailand and two in northern Malaysia.

The death toll in Indonesia rose to 712 yesterday, with more than 500 people missing and 1.1 million people evacuated, mostly in Aceh province in northern Sumatra and around Padang in western Sumatra.

Environmentalists, experts, and even the Indonesian government have highlighted the role of deforestation in causing flash floods and landslides in a country that had already lost at least 38 people in severe weather events earlier last month on the island of Java.

In southeastern Thailand, November rainfall totals exceeded 1.5 meters in some areas, according to data combining station readings, satellite observations, and weather models.

In Vietnam, floods in mid-November killed at least 90 people in a single week, mainly in the mountainous province of Dak Lak [central Vietnam].

This region broke its overall record for November rainfall in 2025, as did the border areas of Laos and Cambodia.

Typhoon Kalmaegi also hit Vietnam earlier this month, killing at least five people after leaving more than 230 dead in the Philippines.

The Philippines was hit by Typhoon Fung-wong the following week, which left some 30 dead in the northern part of the archipelago, where rainfall records were also broken. — AFP

# Houthis to release survivors of Red Sea sinking: Philippines

MANILA — Nine Filipino crew members of a cargo ship sunk by Yemen's Houthis are set to be released by the Iran-backed group, Philippine authorities said yesterday.

The men were survivors of the Liberian-flagged Eternity C, one of two commercial vessels sunk within days of each other in the Red Sea in July.

The Houthis released a video of the attack on the ship at the time, saying they had "rescued" an unspecified number of the crew and taken them to a safe location.

The Philippines' foreign ministry said it had received word from Oman that the "nine Filipino seafarers of the ill-fated M/V Eternity C, held hostage by the Houthis in the Red Sea, will be released".

The statement, which credited the efforts of the Omani government, said the men would first be transferred from

Yemen's rebel-held capital of Sanaa to Oman before returning home.

A foreign affairs spokesman declined to provide a timeline for the release or say if it was bound by any conditions.

The July sinkings of the Eternity C and Magic Seas broke a months-long lull in Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping, which began after the start of the Gaza war in October 2023.

The attacks, which the Houthis say target Israel-linked shipping in solidarity with the Palestinians, have prompted many firms to avoid a route that normally carries about 12 percent of global trade.

Filipino sailors make up as much as 30 percent of the world's commercial shipping force. The nearly US\$7 billion they sent home in 2023 accounted for about a fifth of remittances sent to the archipelago nation. — AFP

# S Korean leader calls for penalties over e-commerce data leak

SEOUL — South Korea's president ordered yesterday swift action to penalise those responsible for a major data leak at e-commerce giant Coupang affecting more than 33 million customers.

It was "astonishing that the company failed to recognise the breach for five months", President Lee Jae Myung said, adding that the "scale of the damage is massive".

Coupang is South Korea's most popular online shopping platform, serving millions of customers with lightning-fast deliveries of products from groceries to gadgets.

Seoul has said the leak took place through overseas servers from June 24 to November 8.

But Coupang only became aware of it last month, according to police and local media, who said the company had issued a complaint in November against the alleged culprit — a former employee and a Chinese national.

Yesterday, Lee ordered the government to "strengthen fines and make punitive damages a reality", calling for "substantive and effective countermeasures".

"The cause of the accident must be quickly identified and [those responsible] must be held strictly accountable," he said.

Police said Monday they were tracing computer IP addresses and looking into possible international

collaboration as part of their investigation.

They warned the leak could "threaten the daily lives and safety of every single citizen".

Coupang has told customers that their names, email addresses, phone numbers, shipping addresses and some order histories had been exposed in the leak.

But the company said their payment details and login credentials had not been affected.

The case follows a major breach at South Korea's largest mobile carrier SK Telecom, which was fined about 134 billion won (US\$91 million) in August after a cyberattack exposed data on nearly 27 million users.

South Korea is among the world's most wired countries, but has also been a target of hacking by arch-rival North Korea.

Police announced last year that North Korean hackers were behind the theft of sensitive data from a South Korean court computer network — including individuals' financial records — over a two-year period.

Last month Yonhap News Agency reported that South Korean authorities suspected a North Korean hacking group may be behind the recent cyberattack on cryptocurrency exchange Upbit, which led to the unauthorised withdrawal of 44.5 billion won in digital assets. — AFP



*A volunteer for independent candidate Sandar Min, former parliament member of the National League for Democracy (NLD) party, walks through a market during campaigning ahead of Myanmar's general election in Yangon yesterday. — AFP*



## Japanese PM quotes manga in investment drive

TOKYO — Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi told a Saudi-organised economic forum to “shut your mouths” but she wasn’t being rude; it was a line from a well-known manga comic.

“I understand that Japanese manga and anime are extremely popular in Saudi Arabia. Titles like ‘Captain Tsubasa’, ‘One Piece’, and ‘Demon Slayer’ come to mind,” Takaichi told the event on Monday.

“But today, I’d like to borrow a famous line from ‘Attack on Titan’ to conclude my speech. ‘Just shut your mouths. And invest everything in me!’,” she said.

Takaichi was speaking at the FII PRIORITY Asia 2025 conference, a spinoff of the annual

Future Investment Initiative (FII) in Saudi Arabia that is dubbed “Davos in the Desert”.

Takaichi, who took office in October, is under pressure to attract investment to boost the world’s fourth-largest economy, which contracted in the third quarter.

The two-day conference in Tokyo also included SoftBank founder Masayoshi Son, who said he wept about the recent sale of the firm’s shares in US chip titan Nvidia, Bloomberg News reported.

“I don’t want to sell a single share. I just had more need for money to invest in OpenAI” and other projects, Son said. “I was crying to sell Nvidia shares.”

— AFP



Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party supporters protest to demand the release of their jailed leader and Pakistan’s former prime minister Imran Khan, in Islamabad, Pakistan yesterday.

— AFP

## India, Pakistan trade barbs over aid to cyclone-hit Sri Lanka

NEW DELHI — Pakistan accused bitter rival India yesterday of blocking an air delivery of humanitarian aid to cyclone-hit Sri Lanka, a claim which New Delhi dismissed as “anti-India misinformation”.

Flash floods and deadly landslides across Sri Lanka have killed at least 410 people, with President Anura Kumara Dissanayake declaring a state of emergency and calling for international support — which both India and Pakistan have already begun providing.

But a request from Islamabad to let an aircraft carrying aid fly over India on its way to Sri Lanka — a much shorter route, instead of circumventing the subcontinent — has turned into a diplomatic spat.

India and Pakistan have both extended an airspace ban on the other country’s airlines earlier this year, after the worst violence in decades between the nuclear-armed rivals.

Officials in New Delhi said on Monday that authorities had granted clearance to the Pakistani aid aircraft within hours of the request being made.

Islamabad’s foreign ministry said yesterday that “the special aircraft carrying Pakistan’s humanitarian assistance to Sri Lanka continues to face delay for over 60 hours now, awaiting flight clearance from India.”

The problem, according to the Pakistani foreign ministry, was that India gave only a “time-bound” clearance with no assurances that the plane would be able to return along the same route, making the flight “operationally impractical”.

A spokesman for India’s foreign ministry, Randhir Jaiswal, rejected “the ridiculous statement” from Pakistan, calling it “yet another attempt of spreading anti-India misinformation”.

“India remains committed to assisting the people of Sri Lanka in these challenging times through all available means,” Jaiswal said in a statement.

The neighbouring countries have imposed their respective airspace bans after a deadly attack in April on Indian tourists in Kashmir, which sparked a four-day military conflict, killing dozens of people.

— AFP

## Cyclone turns Sri Lanka’s tea mountains into death valley

NUWARA ELIYA — In the mist-draped mountains of Sri Lanka’s tea country, rescuers were still plucking bodies from the reddish-brown mud yesterday after last week’s cyclone, the island’s worst natural disaster in decades.

At least 465 people were killed, according to disaster officials, with another 366 missing.

Sri Lanka’s Air Force has been combing the landslide-struck landscape, surveying the damage and ferrying food and other essential supplies to marooned residents.

Though the rain has stopped, recovery has just begun.

As the first journalist for foreign media to join a relief mission over the tea-growing region, AFP photographer Ishara Kodikara saw a swathe of the country destroyed after slips of soil flattened everything in their paths, including roads and the vehicles that were on them.

The roof of some houses peeked through the mud, while the rest of the buildings were swallowed by the torrents of soil unleashed by Cyclone Ditwah.

Jagged tears in the mountainsides revealed churned-up expanses of earth, with a few patches of the lush vegetation still clinging nearby in stark contrast. There was no sign of human life in the wrecked landscape.

In the central Welimada area, now inaccessible to heavy vehicles, rescue workers pulled 11 bodies from the mud on Monday and appealed for help to search for dozens more.

In some places, entire slopes have been sheared away, leaving



An aerial view shows a washed-out road following a landslide in Nuwara Eliya, 100 kilometres east of Colombo, Sri Lanka yesterday.

— AFP

ochre wounds slicing through the dense plantation greenery.

### Swallowed by landslides

The full extent of the damage to tea plantations, factories and tea pickers is not yet clear, but local media reported the industry has been hard hit.

What were once thick, unbroken canopies of tea are now wide channels of mud and debris.

The main roadway has been swallowed by landslides, buried under heaps of mud, rock and uprooted vegetation. Only a few stray pieces of tarmac remain, suggesting where the road once was.

The authorities say they have given top priority to reopening road access to the region, which is still supplied by air.

Helicopters from neighbouring India and Pakistan have also been deployed to evacuate tourists and the sick.

On the relief mission AFP attended yesterday, the VVIP Bell-412 aircraft had its seats removed to make room for food and other essential supplies.

It ferried water and dry rations to stranded residents of Nuwara Eliya, in the heart of the tea country and 100 kilometres east of Colombo.

Rescuers expect the death toll to rise as they regain access to areas that had been cut off from electricity and telephones for days.

The disaster is already the deadliest since the Boxing Day earthquake and tsunami of 2004, which devastated Sri Lanka’s coastline.

This time, the entire country has been affected either by landslides or floods.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake has declared a state of emergency, and appealed for international assistance.

— AFP

## Afghan Taliban authorities publicly execute man for murder

KHOST — A man convicted of murder was publicly executed at a stadium in eastern Afghanistan, witnesses told AFP yesterday, a punishment a UN rights monitor called “inhumane”.

The man is the 12<sup>th</sup> person publicly executed since the Taliban returned to power in 2021, according to an AFP tally.

The man, identified as Mangal, was executed in front of a crowd in Khost, the Supreme Court said in a statement.

Witnesses told AFP the man was shot three times by a relative of the victim, in a scene witnessed by thousands of people.

He had been sentenced to “retaliatory punishment” for killing a man after his case was “examined very precisely and repeatedly”, the court said.

“The families of the victims were offered amnesty and peace, but they refused,” it said.

These executions could “prove to be positive” because “no one will dare to kill anyone in the future”,

said Mujib Rahman Rahmani, a Khost resident at the stadium.

Authorities had urged people to attend the execution in official notices shared widely on Monday.

They said he was one of several attackers who opened fire on a house in January 2025, killing 10 people, including three women.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, said yesterday before the public execution that such acts were “inhumane, cruel, and an unusual punishment, contrary to international law.”

“They must stop,” he wrote on social media.

### International outcry

Public executions were common during the Taliban’s first rule from 1996 to 2001, with most of them carried out in sports stadiums.

The previous execution — the 11th according to AFP’s tally — took place in October, when a man was put to death in Badghis in front of thousands of spectators, including

Taliban officials.

Before that, four men were put to death in three different provinces on the same day in April.

Taliban authorities also continue to employ corporal punishment, mainly flogging, for offences including theft, adultery and alcohol consumption.

All execution orders are signed by the Taliban’s reclusive supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada, who lives in the movement’s heartland of Kandahar.

Law and order are central to the Taliban’s ideology, which emerged from the chaos of a civil war following the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989.

Rights groups such as Amnesty International have also denounced the Taliban government’s use of corporal and capital punishment.

In its annual report published in April, Amnesty said Afghanistan was among the countries where death sentences were imposed after trials that “did not meet international fair trial standards”.

— AFP



# Israel says received presumed remains of one of last Gaza hostages

Michael Blum

JERUSALEM – Israeli police said yesterday they had received the presumed remains of one of the last two deceased hostages in the Gaza Strip, which will be identified at the country's forensic institute.

Under the first phase of the fragile US-brokered ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, militants were due to return all 48 hostages they held captive, 20 of whom were still alive.

All but the bodies of two hostages – Israeli Ran Gvili and Thai national Sudthisak Rinthalak – have since been handed over, but Israel has accused the Palestinian militants of dragging their feet on returning remains.

Hamas has said the process of retrieving the bodies has been slow because the bodies have been under

the vast piles of rubble left by two years of devastating war.

Israeli police escorted what they described as “the coffin of the fallen hostage to the National Centre of Forensic Medicine” in a brief statement.

An AFP livestream later showed the convoy carrying the remains arriving at the forensic institute in Tel Aviv.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said earlier that Israel had received the “findings” through the Red Cross inside the Gaza Strip.

It did not specify whether what was discovered were the remains of either Gvili or Rinthalak, but said authorities were in “continuous contact” with their families.

Hamas had not confirmed by yesterday late afternoon (local time) that it had handed the remains of a

hostage over to Israel as it had done so previously.

## ‘Number of bodies found’

Militants took 251 people hostage during Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel, which resulted in the deaths of 1,221 people.

Israel's retaliatory assault on Gaza has killed at least 70,112 people, according to figures from the territory's health ministry that the UN considers reliable.

The ministry says since the ceasefire came into effect, 356 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire. Israel's military has reported three soldiers killed during the same period.

A Hamas official told AFP a team from the group's armed wing and that of Islamic Jihad – accompanied by the Red Cross – had been conducting search operations

for several days in multiple areas, particularly in Jabalia and Beit Lahia in the north of the territory.

“A number of bodies were found under the rubble and are being examined,” the official said, adding that search operations were ongoing and there was “no confirmation that any of these bodies found belong to an Israeli prisoner”.

“The mediators were informed that if the two bodies are found, they will be handed over immediately to the Israeli side through the established mechanism,” the official added, without giving further details.

## Second phase

The ceasefire which came into effect on October 10 remains fragile, with Israel and Hamas accusing each other of violating the terms, while the Gaza Strip remains

in a deep humanitarian crisis.

Under the first phase of the deal, Palestinian militants have handed over the last 20 living hostages, and so far the remains of 26 out of 28 deceased ones.

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

Qatar, which alongside the United States and Egypt secured the long-elusive truce, said yesterday it hoped Israel and Hamas could be brought to a new phase of negotiations for a peace deal.

“We think that we should be pushing the parties to stage two very, very soon,” Qatar foreign ministry spokesman Majed al-Ansari said.

The spokesman added that the return of the remains should not be a hindrance to reaching phase two.

– AFP



Palestinians gather on the rubble of a building destroyed by the Israeli military as they watch and celebrate the mass wedding of 54 couples dubbed the “The Dress of Joy”, organised by the Al-Fares Al-Shahm Foundation, in Khan Yunis, southern Gaza Strip, yesterday. ‘The Dress of Joy’, is a project helping 54 grooms in the Gaza Strip to get married, an initiative coinciding with the United Arab Emirates’ (UAE) 54<sup>th</sup> National Day.

– AFP

## Pope plans trip to Africa, starting with Algeria

ABOARD THE PAPAL PLANE – Wrapping up his first international trip as pontiff, Pope Leo XIV said yesterday he would like to visit Algeria in 2026 as part of a voyage to Africa, which could be his next overseas destination.

“I hope to make a trip to Africa, which could be my next trip,” the US pope said during a press conference aboard the papal plane during his return from a six-day visit to Turkey and Lebanon.

“Personally, I hope to go to Algeria to visit the places from the life of Saint Augustine,” he said, in reference to the fifth-century saint from the North African country.

Leo, who was elected in May, belongs to the Augustinian order, which was founded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and has nearly 3,000 members in around 50 countries.

Such a visit would allow the head of the Catholic Church to “continue the discourse of dialogue and bridge-building between the Christian and the Muslim worlds”, he said.

“The figure of Saint Augustine plays an important role as a bridge because in Algeria he is highly respected as a son of the nation,” the 70-year-old pontiff said.

A trip to Africa could also include visits to Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea, a Vatican source told AFP.

Leo, leader of the world's 1.4 billion Catholics, also said he would “very much” like to visit “Latin America, Argentina, Uruguay”, as well as Peru, where he spent more than 20 years working as a missionary.

– AFP

## UK govt lawyers defend Palestine Action ban at court challenge

LONDON – Lawyers for the UK government yesterday defended a contentious ban under anti-terror laws of activist group Palestine Action, as three days of hearings challenging the move concluded.

The government's legal team argued the decision to criminalise the direct action organisation, announced in July, was proportionate following an “escalation” in its activities.

The move makes being a member of the group or supporting it a serious criminal offence punishable by up to 14 years in prison.

That has resulted in at least 2,300 arrests of demonstrators, according to protest organisers Defend Our Juries, and sparked concerns over free speech and civil liberties.

United Nations human rights chief Volker Türk, the Council of Europe rights watchdog and a

number of NGOs have criticised the ban and the “excessive limits” on the right to protest.

Palestine Action co-founder Huda Ammori challenged the ban at the High Court in London, and hearings in front of a three-judge panel got under way last Wednesday.

Giving evidence yesterday, Stephen Kosmin, a lawyer representing the Home Office (interior ministry), defended “the proportionality of the policy”, saying it was needed “in order to protect the public” and “maintain national security”.

The government outlawed the group days after activists, protesting the war in Gaza, broke into an air force base in southern England and caused an estimated £7 million (US\$9.3 million) of damage to two aircraft.

Ministers have been criticised for taking too broad a view of the definition

of what constitutes “terrorism”.

But in written court submissions, the ministry argued that actions “can constitute terrorism if it involves serious damage to property even if it does not involve violence against any person or endanger life”.

“Proscribed organisations are deprived of the oxygen of publicity as well as financial support,” the statements noted.

Meanwhile, interior ministry lawyer Natasha Barnes argued the ban “has not prevented people from protesting in favour of the Palestinian people or against Israel's action in Gaza”.

Part of the discussions regarding Palestine Action's activities took place behind closed doors, with the judges imposing some restrictions on journalists reporting on the case.

A decision will be handed down at an unspecified future date. – AFP



A Palestinian youth who was released from an Israeli prison under as a Gaza ceasefire and hostage exchange deal sits on a bed in a medical centre in Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday. The ceasefire which came into effect on October 10 remains fragile, with Israel and Hamas accusing each other of violating the terms, while the Gaza Strip remains in a deep humanitarian crisis.

– AFP



## German economy in 'deepest crisis' of post-war era: industry group

Sam Reeves and Louis Van Boxel-Woolf

FRANKFURT AM MAIN — Germany's economy is suffering its "deepest crisis" since the aftermath of World War II, an industry group warned yesterday, calling on Chancellor Friedrich Merz's government to take urgent action to spark a revival.

Europe's biggest economy "is in free fall, but the federal government is not responding decisively enough," said Peter Leibinger, president of the Federation of German Industries (BDI).

Germany is facing a perfect storm: high energy costs burdening manufacturers, weak demand for its exports in key markets, the emergence of China as an industrial rival and the US tariff onslaught.

It has suffered two years of recession and is forecast to eke out only meagre growth in 2025.

The conservative Merz, who took power in May, has pledged to revive the eurozone's traditional powerhouse, including through a public spending blitz on defence and infrastructure.

But industry leaders are increasingly voicing frustration that the efforts are moving too slowly and are insufficient to tackle a host of deep-rooted problems, from chronic labour shortages to heavy bureaucratic burdens.

"The economy is experiencing its deepest crisis since the founding of the federal republic, yet the federal government is not responding with sufficient determination," said Leibinger.

"Germany now needs an economic policy turnaround with clear priorities for competitiveness and growth," he added.

### Heavy regulation, little innovation

Brian Fürderer, head and founder of German high-tech surgical equipment maker Microqore Medical, agreed with the BDI's assessment, saying the economy was being held back by overregulation and a lack of innovation.

"In Germany, entrepreneurship as such no longer really exists," he told AFP.

"The car manufacturers are no longer leaders... And I think that's where the first problem starts, that the spirit of innovation is no longer encouraged or desired."

In its latest report released yesterday, the BDI — an umbrella association for many industry federations — forecast that German factory output will fall two percent in 2025, which would mark its fourth consecutive year of contraction.

Heavy industry, from car-making to producing factory equipment and steel, remains crucial to the German economy. The country is home to more than 100,000 manufacturing firms of varying sizes, employing over eight million people, according to the BDI.

But there has been a steady drumbeat of layoff announcements in recent times, particularly in the crisis-stricken auto sector, including carmaker Volkswagen and parts supplier Bosch.

Merz has defended his government's actions, saying it will take time to get the economy back on track and pointing to reforms that have been enacted, including on lowering corporate income tax and reducing industry power costs.

There is some light on the horizon. The economy is expected to start picking up speed next year, driven by the spending ramp-up, with the government forecasting 1.3 percent growth.

Some hope that the thousands of jobs being axed in the auto and other industrial sectors could be replaced by new roles in defence companies, which are hiring rapidly as European countries rearm to face the growing Russian threat.

But Hans Christoph Atzpodien, head of the BDSV defence industry association, warned that the sector's growth could only partially offset the losses at carmakers.

"Of course, the quantities involved and the ways of working are different," he told a press conference Tuesday, at an event organised by the economy and defence ministries.

"There are opportunities but it helps to be cautious about them."

— AFP

## White House confirms admiral ordered 2<sup>nd</sup> strike on alleged drug boat

W.G. Dunlop

WASHINGTON — A US admiral acting under the authority of Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth ordered a second strike that targeted survivors of an initial attack on an alleged drug smuggling boat, the White House said on Monday.

The legality of the Trump administration's deadly strikes against suspected drug traffickers in the Caribbean and Pacific has been questioned, and reports of the follow-up attack on survivors triggered further accusations of a possible war crime.

Venezuela's leftist leader Nicolás Maduro has accused Washington of using drug trafficking as a pretext for "imposing regime change" in Caracas and rejected a "slave's peace" for the region, amid mounting fears of US military action.

A total of 11 people were killed in the two strikes in early September, the first in a months-long military campaign that has so far left more than 80 dead.

Trump's administration insists it is effectively at war with alleged "narco-terrorists," and the White House said Admiral Frank Bradley, who currently leads US Special Operations Command, had acted legally and properly in ordering a second strike.

Bradley "worked well within his authority and the law directing the engagement to ensure the boat was destroyed and the threat to the United States of America was eliminated," White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt told journalists.

Hegseth "authorised Admiral Bradley to conduct these kinetic strikes," she said.

With pressure on the Pentagon chief, Hegseth appeared to stress the decision was Bradley's.

"I stand by him and the combat decisions he has made — on the September 2 mission and all others since," he posted on Monday evening (local time) on X, calling Bradley "an American hero."



US President Donald Trump (centre), alongside Secretary of State Marco Rubio (L) and Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth, chairs a cabinet meeting in the Cabinet Room of the White House in Washington, DC, yesterday. — AFP

Some military personnel under the condition of anonymity told The Washington Post that this is "protect Pete bulls---."

Another military official told the publication that Leavitt's statement "left it up to interpretation" who was responsible for the second strike and implored the White House to provide more clarity.

"We will eventually find out what really happened," promised Republican Roger Wicker, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who has opened an investigation into the matter.

Democrats also pounced on the issue, with Senator Chris Murphy accusing Hegseth of "passing the buck."

"Both Republicans and Democrats are coming to the conclusion that this was an illegal, wildly immoral act, and he is shifting the blame," Murphy told broadcaster CNN.

Congressman Mike Turner, a Republican on the House Armed Services Committee, said lawmakers have yet to be briefed on the "double-tap" strike.

"People have been very concerned about how these strikes have been operated," Turner said on the same news broadcast.

US media reported last week that an initial September 2 strike left two people alive who were killed

in a subsequent attack to fulfill Hegseth's orders, but Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell insisted that "this entire narrative was false."

Subsequent strikes that left survivors were followed by search-and-rescue efforts that recovered two people in one case and failed to find another later in October.

### 'Over the line'

The military action on September 2 would appear to run afoul of the Pentagon's own Law of War Manual, which states: "For example, orders to fire upon the shipwrecked would be clearly illegal."

Democratic Senators Jacky Rosen and Chris Van Hollen have said the September 2 strikes may be a war crime, while Senator Mark Kelly called on Monday for Congress to investigate.

"I'm concerned that if there were, in fact, as reported, survivors clinging to a damaged vessel, that that could be over a line," the former fighter pilot and astronaut told reporters.

Kelly was one of six lawmakers who released a video last month saying "illegal orders" can be refused — a move that infuriated Trump and sparked a Pentagon probe into the "potentially unlawful comments" by the retired US Navy officer. (More on p.12) — AFP

## Amazon unveils new AI chip in battle against Nvidia

SAN FRANCISCO — Amazon Web Services launched its in-house-built Trainium3 AI chip yesterday, marking a significant push to compete with Nvidia in the lucrative market for artificial intelligence (AI) computing power.

The move intensifies competition in the AI chip market, where Nvidia currently dominates with an estimated 80- to 90-percent market share for products used in training large language models that power the likes of ChatGPT.

Google last week caused tremors in the industry when it was reported that Facebook-parent Meta would employ Google AI chips in data

centres, signalling new competition for Nvidia, currently the world's most valuable company and a bellwether for the AI investment frenzy.

This followed the release of Google's latest AI model last month that was trained using the company's own in-house chips, not Nvidia's.

AWS, which will make the technology available to its cloud computing clients, said its new chip is lower cost than rivals and delivers over four times the computing performance of its predecessor while using 40 percent less energy.

"Trainium3 offers the industry's best price performance for large scale AI training and inference,"

AWS CEO Matt Garman said at a launch event in Las Vegas.

Inference is the execution phase of AI, where the model stops scouring the internet for training and starts performing tasks in real-world scenarios.

Energy consumption is one of the major concerns about the AI revolution, with major tech companies having to scale back or pause their net-zero emissions commitments as they race to keep up on the technology.

AWS said its chip can reduce the cost of training and operating AI models by up to 50 percent compared with systems that use equivalent graphics processing

units, or GPUs, mainly from Nvidia.

"Training cutting-edge models now requires infrastructure investments that only a handful of organizations can afford," AWS said, positioning Trainium3 as a way to democratize access to high-powered AI computing.

AWS said several companies are already using the technology, including Anthropic, maker of the Claude AI assistant and a competitor to ChatGPT-maker OpenAI.

AWS also announced it is already developing Trainium4, expected to deliver at least three times the performance of Trainium3 for standard AI workloads.

The next-generation chip will support Nvidia's technology, allowing it to work alongside that company's servers and hardware.

Amazon's in-house chip development reflects a broader trend among cloud providers seeking to reduce dependence on external suppliers while offering customers more cost-effective alternatives for AI workloads.

Nvidia puzzled industry observers last week when it responded to Google's successes in an unusual post on X, saying the company was "delighted" by the competition before adding that Nvidia "is a generation ahead of the industry." — AFP



# Honduran ex-president pardoned by Trump released from US jail



Former Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernández (centre) is escorted by police officers at the Honduran National Directorate of Special Forces before his extradition to the US to face drug-trafficking related charges, in Tegucigalpa, on April 21, 2022. Hernández was released from a West Virginia prison on Monday and was "once again a free man," his wife announced on social media. – AFP

Sebastian Smith

WASHINGTON – A former Honduran president convicted of helping to smuggle 400 tons of cocaine into the United States has left prison after being pardoned by President Donald Trump, his wife said yesterday.

Juan Orlando Hernández was released from a West Virginia prison on Monday and was "once again a free man," his wife announced on social media. The US Bureau of Prisons website showed the release of a man matching Hernández's name and age.

Trump's controversial pardon came as the US president is simultaneously ordering the bombing of boats in the Caribbean that are allegedly carrying drugs. He is also heavily backing a candidate from Hernández's party in Honduras's tense, ongoing presidential election vote count.

Hernández's pardon came as a surprise, given Trump has made an ostensible war against Latin American drug trafficking a centrepiece in his turbulent second term.

Major US military forces are deployed in the southern Caribbean to pressure Venezuela's leader Nicolás Maduro, whom the Trump administration has designated as part of a drug cartel.

US forces are regularly blowing up small boats alleged to be carrying

drugs, despite international experts saying the strikes are likely illegal.

Trump is also deeply involved in the Honduran election, where authorities say the result remains too close to call after a preliminary vote count.

Trump is backing right-wing candidate Nasry Asfura, who currently leads by just 515 votes. Trump warned on Tuesday there would be "hell to pay" if Honduras tries "to change the results."

Rixi Moncada, the ruling party candidate in Sunday's election who is trailing far behind her right-wing rivals, accused Trump of "interventionist" meddling.

## 'Doesn't make any sense'

Hernández, who is from the same party as Asfura, led the Central American nation from 2014 to 2022.

He was accused by US prosecutors of facilitating the import of around 400 tons of cocaine into the United States. He was extradited just weeks after leaving office, convicted and sentenced to 45 years in prison.

Trump said last week that Hernández "has been, according to many people that I greatly respect, treated very harshly and unfairly."

Hernández's wife Ana García de Hernández posted on social media that the release on Monday "was a

day we will never forget."

"After almost four years of pain, waiting, and difficult trials, my husband Juan Orlando Hernández is once again a free man, thanks to the presidential pardon granted by President Donald Trump."

The pardon came under fire from US lawmakers.

"Trump is illegally blowing up boats in the Caribbean – supposedly to stop drugs coming into the US. Yet he pardons the former president of Honduras who was convicted of sending cocaine to the US," Senator Ed Markey posted on X.

"It doesn't make any sense. Whatever Trump is doing in Venezuela, it's not about drugs."

Senator Bill Cassidy, from Trump's Republican Party, also slammed Trump's move.

"Why would we pardon this guy and then go after Maduro for running drugs into the United States?" he asked on X.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt on Monday defended Trump, depicting Hernández as the victim of prosecutorial overreach under former president Joe Biden.

"He was opposed to the values of the previous administration and they charged him because he was president of Honduras," Leavitt said.

– AFP

# Electoral commission in coup-struck Guinea-Bissau says vote tally destroyed

BISSAU – Guinea-Bissau's electoral commission said yesterday that armed men had destroyed most of the vote count from the country's election, and it would be unable to publish results.

The military took control of the Portuguese-speaking nation last Wednesday – a day before the provisional results of national elections were due to be announced.

"Today, we are unable to conclude the electoral process," the deputy executive secretary of the country's National Electoral Commission (CNE), Idrissa Djaló, told journalists.

Reading a statement to reporters, Djaló said all of the tally sheets were destroyed except for those from Bissau.

On Monday, members of the CNE met with representatives from the West African regional bloc ECOWAS, who asked whether the body could release the results.

"We answered them no," Djaló told reporters, describing how in the morning before the coup, "armed men wearing balaclavas burst into the tabulation room".

According to Djaló, the men held the CNE president and five Supreme Court judges who were present, and additionally threatened 45 agents.

"They seized their phones and computers and destroyed all the tally sheets. We only have the tally sheets from Bissau," Djaló said.

"The main server was destroyed. The tally sheets from Oio and Cacheu, which were being transferred, were intercepted and confiscated by other men. All the equipment was destroyed," he said.

CNE president Mpabi Cabi, who was detained for five days, made his first public appearance alongside Djaló.

The true motives for the coup in Guinea-Bissau remain unclear, with speculation in some quarters that it was carried out with the blessing of President Umaro Sissoco Embaló, who has since taken refuge in the Republic of Congo following his ouster.

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

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

– AFP

# Spain's minority govt seeks to win back Catalan separatists

MADRID – Spain's minority leftist government yesterday approved measures aimed at winning back Catalan separatists whose withdrawal of support threatened its survival.

Junts per Catalunya, led by exiled separatist figurehead Carles Puigdemont, proved decisive when its votes allowed Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez to serve another term after inconclusive 2023 elections produced a hung parliament.

After backing the Socialist-led coalition on a case-by-case basis, the pro-business party withdrew its support in October, accusing the government of breaking its pledges.

Acknowledging the break represented a "political crisis", Sánchez told public television he "accepted responsibility for those failures to follow through" but stressed his "desire to fulfil" the promises.

Cabinet would approve reforms affecting local government spending and the digitalisation of company accounts, which Sánchez said Junts per Catalunya "had already proposed to us months ago".

A key sticking point is an amnesty law for those prosecuted in the northeastern Catalonia region's failed 2017 secession bid, Spain's worst political crisis in decades.

Although MPs approved the law last year, it does not apply to Puigdemont because he faces embezzlement charges that do not come under its scope, preventing his return to Spain from exile in Belgium.

Sánchez said he hoped Puigdemont, who led Catalonia's regional government during the secession crisis, could "return soon" and remained open to meeting him in the future.

The crisis with Junts per Catalunya compounds difficulties linked to separate corruption investigations into Sánchez's wife, brother and former Socialist heavyweights that have dogged the government.

One of the Socialist suspects, former transport minister José Luis Ábalos, implied in an interview with El Mundo daily that Sánchez's wife Begoña Gómez irregularly intervened in the bailout of airline Air Europa during the COVID19 pandemic.

Sánchez, who has always defended his wife's innocence, told a separate interview with RAC1 radio yesterday that he would never accept "threats" or "blackmail" from individuals or the right-wing opposition, which demands his resignation and early elections.

– AFP

# 300,000 displaced in northern Mozambique: UN

GENEVA – The UN said yesterday it was "gravely concerned" at the number of civilians fleeing violence in northern Mozambique, where it says around 300,000 people have been displaced in recent months.

A jihadist insurgency in the Cabo Delgado province has caused the deaths of over 6,200, according to the Global conflict monitoring group ACLED. Violence has also spilled into the neighbouring Nampula province.

Yesterday, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) said violence had pushed almost 100,000 people to flee the region over the

past two weeks alone.

And in the last three months, "a minimum of 287,000" people have fled, according to UNHCR representative Xavier Creach.

"I would say this figure is only the people who have been registered," he told reporters in Geneva, adding that "many more" individual cases have gone unrecorded.

"I think we can talk approximately of a minimum of 300,000 displaced over there since July," he said.

Since then, the agency has observed "intensifying attacks on villages and the rapid spillover of

the conflict into previously safe districts", making the provision of humanitarian aid more difficult.

Creach described "very challenging needs" in the region and a "largely insufficient response".

"Humanitarian actors collectively... cannot sustain the response without additional support and resources," UNHCR said in a statement, calling for "urgent international support".

Since the current conflict erupted in 2017, more than 1.3 million people in Mozambique have been displaced, according to the agency.

– AFP



## Football shorts

### 7 footballers in Malaysia eligibility scandal 'victims': union

**FIFPro** KUALA LUMPUR – Global footballers' union

FIFPro says that seven players embroiled in a Malaysian national team eligibility scandal are themselves victims and their 12-month bans "grossly disproportionate".

Malaysia's federation, FAM, has appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport after FIFA banned the players and fined FAM US\$440,000 in September for submitting false documents that said the foreign-born players had Malaysian ancestry.

FIFA launched an investigation after receiving a complaint following Malaysia's 4-0 win against Vietnam in June in an Asian Cup qualifier in which two of the seven players scored.

Its investigation showed none of Hector Hevel, Jon Irazabal, Gabriel Palmero, Facundo Garces, Rodrigo Holgado, Imanol Machuca or Joao Brandao Figueiredo had a parent or grandparent born in Malaysia, a requirement for selection to a national team.

FIFPro on Monday gave its full support to the seven and said they were not to blame.

"The sanctions imposed on them - a 12-month ban from all football-related activities - are grossly disproportionate given the particular circumstances of the case," it said in a statement.

"It is clear that the players are, in fact, victims in this matter."

It added: "All steps were handled by institutions outside

their control, yet they now face suspension from their clubs and the serious consequences that follow through no fault of their own."

The FAM has denied any deliberate wrongdoing. – AFP

### Barca's Bonmati out for 5 months after surgery on leg fracture

**Liga F** BARCELONA – Barcelona women's star midfielder Aitana Bonmati will miss five months after undergoing surgery on a leg fracture, her club said yesterday.

The three-time Ballon d'Or winner is set to miss most of the rest of the season because of the injury she suffered on Sunday while training with the Spanish national team.

"The expected recovery time will be around five months," said Barcelona in a statement.

Spain faced Germany early this morning, Macau time, in the women's Nations League final second leg, where they aim to defend the trophy they won in 2024.

Bonmati will leave a big gap to fill for club and country in the months ahead.

Spanish champions Barca lead the league by six points from Real Sociedad, while they are joint top of the Champions League league phase table with French giants Lyon.

If Bonmati recovers on schedule she could return for a potential Champions League final in Oslo on May 23, 2026.

Barcelona have reached the last five Champions League finals, winning three but losing against Arsenal in the most recent. – AFP

## Assault investigation after fan confrontation with Nice football team

**LIGUE 1**

NICE – The Nice public prosecutor yesterday announced the opening of an investigation into aggravated assault after a confrontation between Nice football club and their own supporters.

Nearly 200 Nice ultras gathered outside the team's training centre on Sunday to vent their anger at the players and coaching staff after a 3-1 defeat at Lorient in Ligue 1 earlier in the day.

Two players subsequently lodged complaints with the police. Witnesses said Terem Moffi and Jeremie Boga were on the receiving end of much of the fans' ire, although neither was named by the prosecution.

The players told officers that when they arrived at the training centre on their return from the airport, the team bus was blocked by supporters "in a tense atmosphere", according to the statement made by Nice public prosecutor Damien Martinelli.

They had to get off the bus and walk the short distance to the training centre through the crowd of angry supporters. They said they were "punched, kicked and spat on while being insulted".

Many of the supporters had their faces covered, added the public prosecutor's office.

The investigation into "aggravated assault, participation in a group preparing violence or damage



Nice's French defender Tom Louchet (centre) reacts after missing a goal during the French L1 match against FC Lorient at the Stade du Moustoir in Lorient, western France on Sunday. – AFP

to property, and failure to prevent a crime against physical integrity" has been handed to the criminal police and "numerous interviews" were underway.

According to the prefecture, around 20 police were in place outside the training centre after the club warned that fans were preparing a hostile reception.

The decision was made not to clear the area before the bus arrived so as not to exacerbate the situation.

When the players had to get off the bus, police saw a scuffle and the setting-off of smoke bombs, said the prefecture.

They did not observe any violence or attempted blows, although

some may have gone unnoticed in the confusion.

The French football league (LFP) announced yesterday that it would be joining the players as a plaintiff "in order to fully support their action and help shed light on these tense events".

Ineos – Nice's majority shareholders since 2019 – and club president Fabrice Bocquet did not immediately respond when contacted for comment by AFP.

The club said in a brief statement on Monday it understood "the frustration generated by the string of poor performances" but condemned "in the strongest terms" the "unacceptable" excesses. – AFP

## Mbappe more than his goals: Real Madrid coach Alonso



MADRID – Real Madrid coach Xabi Alonso said yesterday French superstar Kylian Mbappe was vital to the team for more than just his prolific goalscoring.

The striker slammed home four against Olympiacos in the Champions League last week and has 23 goals in 19 games across all competitions this season.

Mbappe has called on Madrid to be united in recent weeks as the Spanish giants struggle for consistency under Alonso.

"He's been very good individually, helping the team a lot," Alonso told a news conference ahead of today's trip to face Athletic Bilbao in La Liga.

"It's not just about goals for Kylian, which in the end is the most

important thing, but he does other hugely fundamental things like leadership, influence, helping his team-mates, and that's so important day to day."

Madrid are a point behind champions Barcelona after a third consecutive top flight draw on Sunday, at Catalan minnows Girona.

Spanish media have speculated Alonso's future as Madrid coach is at stake if the team do not improve.

The Basque coach admitted he has spoken recently to Real Madrid president Florentino Perez about turning the team's form around.

"The conversations are very positive, in a good tone, wanting to improve the results and that's what we've spoken about," said Alonso, who conceded Madrid have been erratic this season.

"I think we've lacked consistency in our game, and we want to play better in the next one," continued the coach.

"We've lost a bit of quality in our play, we've lost a little bit of energy."

Madrid will be without French left-back Ferland Mendy for the visit to Bilbao.

Mendy was "diagnosed with a hamstring injury", said Madrid in a statement yesterday, less than a week after returning from a thigh problem against Olympiacos in the Champions League, for his first appearance of the season.

Spanish media said the new injury would keep Mendy out for around three weeks.

The game will be played at 2 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time.

– AFP/MPD



Bermuda's defender Victoria Davis (left) and Guatemala's forward Ana Martinez fight for the ball during the Women Concacaf W qualifiers at Manuel Felipe Carrera stadium in Guatemala City on Monday. Guatemala won the game 4-1. – AFP



## Vardy's first Serie A double fires Cremonese past high-flying Bologna

MILAN – Jamie Vardy struck his first brace in Serie A on Monday as Cremonese claimed a stunning 3-1 win at Bologna and the veteran forward continued his late-career adventure in Italy.

Former Leicester City and England frontman Vardy rolled back the years with two classic striker's goals either side of half-time as promoted Cremonese, in 11<sup>th</sup> on 17 points, inflicted a first home defeat of the season on their high-flying opponents.

Bologna would have gone a point behind the division's leading

pair AC Milan and Napoli with a win but it was 38-year-old Vardy who took the glory at a wet Stadio Renato Dall'Ara.

"I think we were just missing a bit of rain, this is a typical midweek in the UK," joked Vardy after Cremonese ended a three-match losing streak.

"The most important thing was getting the three points and keeping that progress going, it's another step in the right direction.

"It's all about commitment and wanting what's best for the club. Everyone's on that same page and

everyone's pushing forward to make sure that come the end of the season it will have been a successful year."

Cremonese were already leading through Martin Payero's 31<sup>st</sup> minute effort when Vardy struck five minutes later with a near identical goal.

Vardy was sent clean through by Federico Bonazzoli and he coolly rolled his finish through Federico Ravaglia's legs.

Bologna thought they were back in the game when Riccardo Orsolini confidently scored a penalty deep in stoppage time at the end of the first half.

But Vardy pounced four minutes after half-time, nipping ahead of Ravaglia to meet Tommaso Barbieri's first-time pass and take his goal tally for Cremonese to four in nine matches.

After the match coach Davide Nicola said it was a "privilege" having Vardy in his team.

"Great players are easy to handle, they know what they're supposed to do and they know how to do it," said Nicola.

"They set themselves apart for their qualities as players but also for

their spirit and how they behave.

"That's how he is, he's comfortable with who he is, good humoured... he came here with the mentality of making himself available for the team."

Vardy joined Cremonese in September on a one-year deal with an option for another season should they manage to stay in the top flight.

He has been open about his intention to have a new experience in a football culture he admires with Cremonese, who are backed by local billionaire steel magnate Giovanni Arvedi. – AFP



## Red Bull promote rookie Hadjar to partner Verstappen

F1

PARIS – French rookie Isack Hadjar will step up to the main Red Bull car next season to partner four-time world champion Max Verstappen, the Austrian Formula One team announced yesterday.

Isack, who only turned 21 in September, has enjoyed an impressive first season with Red Bull's junior team Racing Bulls, scoring 10 top-10 finishes, including his first podium when he finished third in the Netherlands.

He replaces Japanese driver Yuki Tsunoda who becomes Red Bull's test and reserve driver.

"After all the hard work I have put in since joining the junior team, it's such a great reward," a grateful Hadjar said in a Red Bull statement.

"I've had many ups and downs throughout my career and they kept believing and pushing me.

"It's an awesome move, to work with the best and learn from Max is something I can't wait for."

Red Bull will be hoping Hadjar can solve the perennial problem of Verstappen's partner.

After releasing Sergio Perez at the end of last season, Red Bull began 2025 with Liam Lawson at the wheel but the New Zealander lasted only two races before being supplanted by Tsunoda.

Since then, however, Tsunoda has scored just 33 points in the



RB's French driver Isack Hadjar arrives to attend the first practice session ahead of the Italian Formula One Grand Prix at the Autodromo Nazionale Monza circuit, in Monza, northern Italy, on September 5. – AFP

world championship compared with Verstappen's 396.

The Japanese driver, who has been with the team since joining the junior programme in 2019, has competed in more than 100 Grand Prix and has yet to make a podium.

He currently sits one place and three points below Lawson in the standings.

"Everyone in the sport would agree it is impossible not to like Yuki, his personality is infectious, and he has become a very special part of the Red Bull family," said team principal Laurent Mekies.

"On behalf of everyone at Red Bull, I thank him for what he has contributed so far and we know he will provide invaluable support to the 2026 projects moving forwards."

Lawson will continue with Racing Bulls in 2026 when he will be partnered by Arvid Lindblad, who turned 18 in August and who is currently with the team's junior programme in Formula 2.

"He (Lindblad) has demonstrated raw speed, maturity and potential, underscoring the team's long-standing commitment to developing elite young talent," Racing Bulls said in a statement.

Lindblad, who was born and brought up in England with a Swedish father and a British-Indian mother, was granted an FIA Super Licence aged 17 and recently tested in the first practice at the Mexico City GP.

Driving Verstappen's car he posted the sixth best time in the session. – AFP

## Sport court allows Russian, Belarusian skiers to qualify for Olympics



Coralie Febvre

LAUSANNE – The Court of Arbitration for Sport yesterday opened the way for Russian and Belarusian skiers to compete in the 2026 Winter Olympics by overturning a ban imposed by the international skiing body.

CAS, the world's top sports court, said in a statement that "Russian and Belarusian athletes who meet the International Olympic Committee AIN (Individual Neutral Athletes) eligibility criteria should be allowed to participate" in qualification events organised by the International Ski and Snowboard Federation (FIS).

Russia welcomed the ruling and pointed to other decisions that could allow Russian bobsleigh and luge athletes to take part in the Winter Games in Milan-Cortina next year.

Sports minister Mikhail Degtyarev noted "it is important that this is the third court decision in favour of Russia in winter Olympic sports".

FIS had announced in October that it was banning athletes from Russia and Belarus from competing in its qualification events for the Olympics.

Competitors in skiing and snowboarding from the two countries have been banned from FIS events since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, but they had hoped to participate under a neutral banner in the Milan-Cortina Games, which run from February 6 to 22.

The International Olympic Committee had announced in September that athletes from Russia and Belarus would be allowed to compete at the Olympics under a neutral banner if they meet strict conditions.

Those include competing under a neutral flag, taking part only in individual events and undergoing checks to prove that they did not actively support the war in Ukraine or have any links with the army.

The same conditions applied to the 2024 Paris Summer Olympics at which 15 Russians and 17 Belarusians competed, winning a combined five medals.

The IOC has also barred them from taking part in the opening ceremony or having their

achievements recognised in the official medals table.

The news is a boost for Russia's cross-country skiers.

During the 2022 Winter Games in Beijing, Russia won almost a third of all cross-country skiing medals – including four out of 12 gold medals.

FIS's move to ban Russians and Belarusians followed in the footsteps of similar attempts by the governing bodies of biathlon and luge, although authorities from the sport of ice skating decided to give athletes from the two nations the chance to qualify.

But in the ruling yesterday, CAS upheld two appeals – one each by the Russian and Belarusian skiing federations – on the grounds that the FIS statutes "protect individuals from discrimination and require the FIS to be politically neutral".

### 'Historic' judo move

The ruling also frees up Russian and Belarusian athletes to try to qualify for the Paralympics.

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) in September lifted its partial suspension on Russian and Belarusian athletes, meaning that they would be able to compete at the Milan-Cortina Paralympic Games from March 6 to 15 under their own flags.

However, the IPC said that no athletes from either country were likely to qualify.

Sporting powerhouse Russia has been deprived of its colours in the Olympic arena since 2016, initially due to the state-orchestrated doping scandal and later over the invasion of Ukraine.

Its ally Belarus was sanctioned in 2022 for providing its territory to facilitate Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Russia has been effectively shut out from international sporting competitions, including football, since it invaded Ukraine but some sport's governing bodies have recently relaxed their constraints.

Last week, Russia's judo federation hailed "a historic decision" by the sport's global governing body the IJF to allow their judoka to compete under their national flag, a move which Ukraine's judo federation described as being contrary to "peace, justice, and responsibility". – AFP



## IOC president calls for end to 'finger-pointing' in doping fight

SEOUL – International Olympic Committee president Kirsty Coventry and her World Anti-Doping Agency counterpart yesterday called for unity in the fight against performance-enhancing drugs following a fracture with the United States.

"Too often we've seen energy spent on division, finger-pointing and competing agendas," Coventry told WADA's World Conference on Doping in Sport, being held this week in the South Korean city of Busan.

"It has been difficult to watch this divide within our community."

Her comments came nearly 18 months after an internal investigation cleared WADA of pro-China bias.

The agency was rocked by a scandal involving 23 Chinese swimmers who were cleared of intentionally doping

after testing positive for a banned heart drug in 2021.

Chinese investigators absolved the swimmers – some of whom went on to win Olympic gold in Tokyo that year – of wrongdoing, saying that the athletes had been exposed to the drug via a contaminated hotel kitchen.

WADA opted not to independently investigate the matter, sparking criticism, especially from the United States and its anti-doping organisation, USADA.

Following WADA's decision, the US government withdrew US\$3.6 million in funding, resulting in the removal of US representatives from the body's executive committee.

"There is only one fight that we should be fighting – and that is the fight against doping," Coventry told

the gathering in Busan.

"But instead, at times, we have been turning on each other. The only people who benefit from this disunity are the drugs cheaters."

Taking a similar line, WADA president Witold Banka did not reference any one country by name but said that "some voices have chosen confrontation over cooperation, speaking as if their nations or institutions stand above others, as if only they acted with integrity".

He added: "To those who behave as though they come from 'better' systems, expecting the world to follow their personal crusades, we say respectfully but firmly: no.

"Anti-doping does not belong to one nation or one personality."

– AFP

## Australia opener Khawaja out of 2<sup>nd</sup> Ashes Test with injury



BRISBANE – Australia opening batsman Usman Khawaja was yesterday ruled out of the second Ashes Test against England with the back injury he suffered during the Perth opener.

The veteran had back spasms and failed to open in the first Test victory.

He was replaced for the second innings by Travis Head, who blasted

a match-winning century.

It leaves Khawaja's international future in doubt. He turns 39 later this month and has been under pressure after a lean run of form with the bat.

"Khawaja will remain with the team to continue his rehabilitation. He has not been replaced in the squad," said Cricket Australia ahead of tomorrow's day-night encounter at Brisbane's Gabba.

Khawaja batted for 30 minutes in

the practice nets yesterday evening but the left-hander appeared to be in discomfort.

Head will be favourite to be deployed as makeshift opener in Khawaja's absence.

He opens in white-ball cricket and said he would be happy to face the Test new ball again after his whirlwind 123 off 83 balls at Perth took Australia to an eight-wicket victory.

If Head does move up, seaming all-rounder Beau Webster is likely to come in at number six, with Cameron Green occupying Head's usual fifth slot in the batting order.

Paceman Scott Boland had sympathy for Khawaja.

"It's hard because he's put in a lot of work since the last game just trying to get his body right but he hasn't come up, unfortunately," Boland told reporters.

"I thought he looked pretty good in the nets, but he must have thought in himself that he wasn't ready to go."

England-born Josh Inglis is another in the mix to come in, and Boland said: "I think the best thing about our team over the last few years is when someone has come out, either due to form or an injury, someone's always stood up and done their job." – AFP



# Trio of casinos cleared to open in NY City

NEW YORK – A state board voted on Monday to authorise casino licences to three New York City projects, the last major obstacle to bringing gambling to the metropolis.

Representatives of New York state’s Gaming Facility Location Board pointed to the economic boost from the sites, two of which are in the borough of Queens and one in the Bronx.

All three proposed Manhattan sites were eliminated at an earlier phase of the process due to local opposition centred on worries about traffic, gambling addiction and other social ills.

New York Governor Kathy

Hochul, who has welcomed casinos in the city as a source of economic growth, praised the board.

“The three projects approved today promise to unlock billions [of US dollars] in funding for the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) and create tens of thousands of jobs,” she said on Monday, referring to the agency which runs New York’s subway and bus system.

“It is critical that they keep those promises.”

But casino opponents erupted in opposition when board Chair Vicki Been announced their approval at Monday’s public meeting, shouting “Shame on You!” repeatedly before being escorted out.

The move clears the way for the final approval of licences before the state’s year-end deadline.

The projects include a proposed US\$3.3 billion expansion of the Resorts World gaming site, located alongside a horseracing track and near John F. Kennedy International Airport.

The facility, a property of Malaysian company Genting Group, currently has some slot machines and table games.

The second Queens casino would be about 13 kilometres north, adjacent to Citi Field, home to the New York Mets baseball team.

Billionaire Mets owner Steve Cohen plans to develop a US\$5.3

billion casino, entertainment and hotel complex, dubbed Metropolitan Park, at the site.

The facility would also be within walking distance of the National Tennis Centre, where the US Open is played.

The third approved site is Bally’s in the Bronx, a project that will be tied in with an 18-hole golf course designed by champion Jack Nicklaus. Bally’s purchased the course from the Trump Organisation in 2024.

Greg Reimers, a member of the board, cited the expected economic benefits, including state tax revenues and job creation.

“The downstate market is

among the strongest in the nation, supported by population density, income levels and tourism,” said Reimers who also pointed to a lift from domestic and international tourists.

Reimers said the projects would net US\$1.5 billion in licensing fees plus billions more in annual taxes, local taxes and other feed-on effects like hotel occupancy taxes.

However, some economic studies have raised questions about whether initial economic boosts from casinos can be sustained, with tax payments declining over time, or being offset by a loss of activity in nearby neighbourhoods.

– AFP

## US Supreme Court hears major online music piracy case

WASHINGTON, DC – The US Supreme Court heard arguments on Monday on whether internet service providers should be held liable for the online pirating of copyrighted music by their users.

Cox Communications, a major broadband Internet Service Provider (ISP), is asking the court to throw out a jury verdict awarding US\$1 billion in damages to Sony Music Entertainment and other record labels.

Cox was accused in the high-stakes 2019 case of failing to take action against customers accused of illegally downloading copyrighted music.

Joshua Rosenkranz, an attorney representing Cox, warned of “cataclysmic” consequences if the court did not limit the company’s copyright liability.

The only way for an ISP to avoid liability is to “cut off the internet, not just for the accused infringer, but for anyone else who happens to use the same connection,” Rosenkranz said.

“That could be entire towns, universities or hospitals, turning internet providers into internet police,” he said.

A majority of the nine justices appeared sympathetic to the argument that many innocent subscribers could be punished for the actions of a few.

At the same time, several

questioned whether Cox should entirely escape liability.

Cox, even when it is aware of copyright infringement by particular users, has apparently been “doing nothing,” said Justice Sonia Sotomayor.

“Why aren’t you contributing to that infringement?” Sotomayor asked.

Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson also expressed skepticism of Cox’s position.

“What concerns me a bit is you’re encouraging us to adopt a common law rule that would essentially eliminate liability,” Jackson said.

Rosenkranz objected to the claims that the company was doing nothing to crack down on habitual copyright offenders.

Cox sends out hundreds of warnings to subscribers each day and has suspended tens of thousands of accounts accused of copyright infringement, he said.

Paul Clement, representing Sony and the other music labels, said Cox is not doing enough to tackle the problem and cannot escape liability.

“Liability for copyright infringement is not limited to direct infringers, but extends to those who induce, cause or materially contribute to the infringement of others,” Clement said.

The Supreme Court is expected to issue a ruling in the case before the end of its term next June. – AFP

## French pastry chefs auction chocolate sculptures

PARIS – Chocolate artworks by some of France’s most famous pastry chefs sold at auction on Monday for more than 100,000 euros in a charity event that had bidders smacking their lips.

The Paris auction, organised by the pastry chef Pierre Herme, featured such whimsical creations as a chocolate clock, a bouquet of white chocolate roses and a monumental piece made of 495 chocolate eggs – plus one of ritzy Daum crystal.

The event raised 108,100 euros (US\$125,500) for a charity that helps children hospitalised with leukaemia, according to auction house Artcurial.

It called the auction the first of its kind worldwide.

“This is truly a first,” auctioneer Arnaud Oliveux told AFP.

The auction featured works by 25 celebrated pastry chefs, including Herme, Patrick Roger, Cyril Lignac, and Nina Metayer.

Many of the chefs paired their creations with one-of-a-kind experiences.

Herme’s chocolate and crystal egg masterpiece, for example, came with a private lesson from the chef

on making macarons, while a two-metre sculpture by Roger came with a tasting session with the master “chocolatier”.

The auction house did not release the selling price for individual items.

The pieces are all edible,

though the chefs created them to be displayed, said Herme.

“When you set your eyes on them, you don’t feel like touching them because they’re so visually magnificent,” said Oliveux, calling top-level pastry creation “a kind of culinary art”.

– AFP



This photograph taken on Friday in Paris shows an artwork of chocolate pastry made by France’s pastry chef Cyril Lignac displayed three days ahead of an auction of 25 chefs’ pastries for the benefit of the BAB Charity association, which works for the well-being and development of children with leukaemia who are hospitalised at the Armand Trousseau Hospital in Paris.

– AFP

## Netflix makes cash offer to buy Warner Bros Discovery: report

WASHINGTON – Streaming giant Netflix has made a mostly cash offer to buy TV and film group Warner Bros Discovery as the storied yet debt-laden Hollywood studio presses on with a sale that could remake the US media landscape, a report said on Monday.

According to Bloomberg, Netflix joined Paramount Skydance and Comcast, the owner of NBCUniversal, in a second round of an auction that was being negotiated throughout the US Thanksgiving holiday.

The parent company of HBO, CNN and the Warner Bros film studio officially put itself up for sale in October after receiving multiple unsolicited offers, setting aside a planned split into two separate entities – one focused on streaming

and studios, the other on traditional cable networks.

Warner Bros Discovery was originally targeted by Paramount – recently acquired by the billionaire tech family of Oracle founder Larry Ellison, one of the world’s richest men.

His son David Ellison, a movie producer, is the Paramount CEO and had made three consecutive offers for the entertainment group before Warner Bros Discovery CEO David Zaslav launched the official sale process.

Netflix, the world’s largest streaming service with over 280 million subscribers globally, is working on a bridge loan totalling tens of billions of US dollars to finance its potential acquisition, according to sources cited by Bloomberg.

The deal would bulk up Netflix’s already considerable content production capabilities and secure premium assets like HBO and Warner Bros studios.

It would also likely face close scrutiny by antitrust authorities in the United States and potentially in other major markets.

Top Hollywood players have voiced their preference to see Warner Bros not end up in the hands of Netflix, citing concerns that the streaming company largely seeks to limit theatrical releases of its film productions.

“Titanic” director James Cameron told podcast “The Town” recently that a takeover of Warner Bros by Netflix would be “a disaster.”

– AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -7°C~3°C	Manila 24°C~32°C	New York 1°C~6°C	Lisbon 12°C~16°C
Shanghai -1°C~12°C	Bangkok 23°C~35°C	London 7°C~11°C	Rio de Janeiro 21°C~27°C
Hong Kong 17°C~21°C	Tokyo 3°C~15°C	Frankfurt 0°C~5°C	Luanda 24°C~28°C
Taipei 15°C~20°C	Singapore 23°C~32°C	Vancouver 5°C~7°C	Maputo 20°C~26°C
Guangzhou 13°C~20°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~32°C	Paris 3°C~9°C	Dili 21°C~32°C
Nanjing -3°C~9°C	Jakarta 23°C~32°C	Moscow 0°C~3°C	São Tomé 25°C~27°C
Guilin 11°C~17°C	Seoul -10°C~2°C	Las Vegas 3°C~16°C	Praia 21°C~27°C
Xi'an 0°C~9°C	Sydney 16°C~26°C	Monte Carlo 10°C~13°C	Bissau 21°C~30°C





## 1 Amber pangolin

A vendor shows an animal made of amber in the shop of the Kaliningrad Amber Combine in central Moscow on October 21. The Kaliningrad Amber Combine produces 90 percent of the world's amber. — AFP

## 2 Community effort

People walk past a Christmas light display depicting a chiva bus in Medellin, Colombia on Thursday. Medellin turned on the Christmas lights featuring eight million light bulbs, 600 kilometres of light tubing, and 25,000 figures woven by 150 artisans, many of whom are heads of household. — AFP

## 3 Repurposed Bentley

Tourists ride a jet car boat across the Arabian Sea off the Juhu Beach in Mumbai, India yesterday. — AFP

## 4 Human Christmas tree

Indian Army cadets perform 'Mallakhamba' during the Agniveer combat spectacle at the Artillery Centre in Hyderabad yesterday. — AFP

## 5 In excess

The Desert Rose, a 31.86-carat fancy vivid orangy-pink pear-shaped diamond, the largest of its kind ever graded, carrying an estimate of US\$5-7 million, is on display as part of the auction series during the Sotheby's "Abu Dhabi Collectors Week" in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates yesterday. — AFP



## 6 I want my Mum!!

A recently born white lion is pictured at Las Delicias Zoo in Maracay, Aragua state, Venezuela on Monday. The Zoo recently announced the birth of two white Timbavati lions (*Panthera leo melanochaita*), a subspecies considered endangered and whose global population barely exceeds a hundred. — AFP

