

# Beware of 'helping fire victims' donation scams: PJ

Armando Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) urged the public in a statement yesterday to beware of fake "helping fire victims" donation scams.

According to the statement, the Judiciary Police have recently received reports from local business associations that individuals claiming to represent a Hong Kong charity have been visiting local shops to solicit donations, claiming that the funds raised will be used to assist residents affected by last Wednesday's inferno in Hong Kong's Tai Po District. Given that neighbouring regions have already reported a number of fraudulent cases exploiting disaster relief fundraising for the victims, the Judiciary Police said that they decided to urge people in Macau to remain highly vigilant and guard against such scams the statement said.

Hong Kong Police Force Commissioner Chow Yat-ming told reporters in Hong Kong that, as of 4 p.m. yesterday, the death toll from the massive blaze had risen to 159, with 31 individuals still missing. Chao also said that preliminary

identification procedures have been completed for 140 of victims, aged between 1 and 97 years.

The Judiciary Police emphasised in the statement that if the public wishes to donate to assist the Tai Po fire victims, they should use the official donation accounts published by the Hong Kong government or choose legitimate, reputable charitable organisations with a proven record of public fundraising.

Before donating, the statement pointed out, it is advisable to verify the respective organisations through their official website, or go through officially recognised public fundraising platforms, as well as certified online channels, to ensure that the funds are used appropriately.

The statement also said that if members of the public receive unsolicited fundraising calls or messages, they should remain calm and first verify the information through the official contact channels of the relevant organisations.

The Judiciary Police also said that members of the public should not readily provide personal information

or proceed with any transfers, if in doubt about the authenticity of the fundraising activity.

Those noticing any suspicious circumstances can access the PJ "Anti-Fraud Programme" to check scam risk indicators and report suspicious information. Alternatively, they may call the anti-fraud enquiry hotline on 8800 7777 or the emergency report line on 993 for assistance, the statement said.

The Judiciary Police, according to the statement, also urged the public to maintain a strong sense of fraud prevention while engaging in public welfare and caring for society. It is essential to properly protect personal property and information, and not give scammers any opportunity to exploit goodwill, the Judiciary Police said.

The *Post* published on Monday an editorial about the deadly fire disaster, headlined "Tai Po inferno sparks solidarity and triggers call for fire safety drive" – <https://www.macaupostdaily.com/news/26776>.

(Story about fire safety concerns on p.3)



This handout image provided by the Judiciary Police (PJ) yesterday urges the public to remain wary of individuals soliciting donations under the guise of "helping fire victims".

## HK govt orders removal of all mesh netting by Saturday



A resident arranges paper cranes created to pay respects to the victims of last Wednesday's deadly Wang Fuk Court fire, in Tai Po yesterday. The inferno's death toll reached 159 yesterday, with 140 victims identified. – Photo courtesy of China Daily/Adam Lam

HONG KONG – The Hong Kong government has ordered the removal of all mesh netting on buildings undergoing major renovations across Hong Kong by Saturday, citing public safety and people's concerns in the wake of last Wednesday's deadly Wang Fuk Court fire in Tai Po District.

Speaking to reporters in a briefing, Development Secretary Bernadette Linn Hon Ho said the protective netting of more than 200 private buildings, along with more than 10 public housing and government premises, will have to be removed, and that contractors have to bear the costs.

The minister said officials will look to issue a new set of rules by next week, allowing only netting that passed safety tests to be installed.

Linn said this doesn't mean that existing netting has issues, but

stressed that anyone found to have put up substandard netting would be punished.

She said officials from various departments have taken samples from more than 300 buildings in recent days.

"For example, Buildings Department officers took samples from each of the private buildings in a stringent manner. Staff collected thousands of bamboo scaffolding samples from the lower, middle and higher floors, including the very high floors," Linn said.

"They're gradually taken to designated laboratories for tests, and if we find any non-compliance, we'll pursue the matter until the very end."

The development chief said if contractors have problems taking down the netting, they need to inform officials for them to determine if the reasons given are valid.

The government said earlier this week that seven of the mesh-netting samples taken from Wang Fuk Court were found not to be flame-retardant.

Meanwhile, authorities said at least two renovation projects are suspected to have used forged documents claiming that the netting passed mainland safety tests.

Security minister Chris Tang Ping-keung said anti-crime officers were investigating two projects, involving Fung Wah Estate in Chai Wan and Fortress Garden in Fortress Hill.

He said certification of the netting used pointed to the materials having passed tests on the mainland, but officers found that mainland authorities either didn't issue the test reports or that the phone numbers provided don't exist. – RTHK, MPD (Related story on p.7)

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### Macron arrives in Beijing for state visit

At the invitation of President Xi Jinping, French President Emmanuel Macron arrived in Beijing yesterday for a state visit to China through tomorrow.

– Story on p. 8

### Family of Colombian killed in boat strike takes US to rights body

The family of a Colombian man killed in a US military strike on his boat in the Caribbean has lodged a complaint against the United States with a Washington-based rights panel.

– Story on p. 11

### Ex-king's memoirs hits bookstores in Spain

Former King Juan Carlos's memoirs went on sale in Spain yesterday, with the publication's warm words for the country's late autocrat Generalissimo Francisco Franco stirring debate over the former monarch's legacy.

– Story on p. 12



## Commentary

# Deepening Reform to Promote Diversified Development

**Frederico Ma Chi Ngai,  
Chairman of the Board  
of Directors of the Macao  
Chamber of Commerce**

Recently, Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai delivered his second Policy Address during his term at the Legislative Assembly, with the theme “Deepen Reform Firmly, Enhance Efficiency, and Jointly Address Challenges to Promote Diversification”. The address reviewed and summarized the work carried out in seven aspects over the past year since he took office, and put forward nine overall directions and policy priorities for the coming year, including safeguarding national security, deepening public administrative reform, promoting appropriate economic diversification, and accelerating the construction of the Macao-Zhuhai Integrated Development Zone. He called on all sectors to “discuss and resolve issue together” to jointly manage Macao’s affairs well. Among these priorities, two key tasks—consolidating the momentum of economic recovery and making efforts to promote appropriate economic diversification, as well as deepening public administrative reform and improving the governance efficiency of the Special Administrative Region—are not only the core themes of this Policy Address, but also the top two of the “Four Proposals” put forward by President Xi Jinping at the inauguration ceremony of the sixth-term SAR Government, highlighting their strategic importance.

Appropriate economic diversification is a “must-answer question” for the development of the SAR, and almost every Policy Address focuses on elaborating on it. The Policy Address for the coming year clearly states that efforts will be

made in strengthening policy support, increasing capital investment, and optimizing the business environment to foster new industries with international competitiveness and promote the implementation and effectiveness of the “1+4” target task for appropriate economic diversification. Breaking down the task in detail: the “1” refers to conducting a review during the two-year implementation period of the new gaming contracts, urging concessionaires to fulfill their non-gaming investment commitments, deepening the integration of the “tourism +” industry, and actively expanding the international source market for tourists; the “4” focuses on achieving greater breakthroughs in four emerging industries, with many highlights.

In the field of high-tech industries, the Address outlines specific plans for the establishment of government industrial funds and guidance funds. These funds will be initiated under government leadership, with joint investment from the government and social capital, and entrusted to professional teams for management. This model is similar to the operation mechanism of mother funds used by provinces and cities on the Chinese mainland to support the development of high-tech industries: after balancing the government’s leading role and economic benefits, the funds will be operated by fund management companies in accordance with market-oriented principles, with both parties sharing investment risks. Compared with the previous model of government funds relying on “approval for subsidies”, the operational efficiency will be significantly improved.

In the field of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and big health industry, the SAR Government will accelerate the legislation



Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Macao Chamber of Commerce Frederico Ma Chi Ngai addresses the 18<sup>th</sup> World Chinese Entrepreneurs Convention in Macao last month. — MPDG

of the “Law on the Activities of Private Health Care Institutions”, introduce the new day hospital license with lower investment thresholds, actively develop advanced therapies including cell therapy, and lay out industries such as medical aesthetics and health management in line with the development direction of “tourism + medical care”. In the field of modern finance, continuous efforts will be made to advance the legislation of the “Securities Law” and the research and development of the “Digital Pataca”. In the field of culture, tourism, sports and exhibitions, a funding program for the development of Macao’s IPs will be launched. This series of measures will form a synergy and continuously inject impetus into the appropriate economic diversification.

To achieve improved quality and accelerated progress in appropriate economic diversification, it is inseparable from the support of public administrative reform,

especially the advancement of the “decentralization, regulation and services” reform which is closely related to the optimization of the business environment. For example, the draft of the “Law on the Activities of Catering and Beverage and Related Premises”, currently under review by the Legislative Assembly, will significantly optimize the industry access process through measures such as simplifying the classification of premises, establishing a new registration system for catering premises with an area of no more than 120 square meters, relatively simple decoration works and controllable risks, and relaxing project restrictions in the World Heritage buffer zones and temporary buffer zones. At the same time, the draft of the “Advertising Law” also proposes to optimize and relax the procedures for publishing various commercial advertisements, further stimulating market vitality.

The Policy Address clearly

states that in the coming year, the government will continue to review and revise various administrative licensing management systems, streamline unnecessary approval conditions and procedures in economic activities, and release the potential for economic and social development. The “General System for the Establishment and Organizational Structure of Public Departments and Entities”, adopted last month, has laid a legal foundation for administrative system reform. Under the framework of this regulation, the SAR Government will continue to advance the reorganization and centralized management of departmental functions, and launch a series of institutional reorganization, merger and streamlining work in the coming year to comprehensively improve governance efficiency.

In addition, the direction for amending the “Code of Civil Procedure” (one of Macao’s five major codes), as well as the “Code of Administrative Procedure” and the “Code of Administrative Litigation”, has been initially formulated, and it is expected that relevant consultations will be launched in 2026. Although these amendment works involve a large system and a wide range of areas, and some provisions urgently need to be updated due to their age, they are difficult tasks that must be overcome for Macao to move towards the construction of a modern legal system, and are also an indispensable institutional cornerstone for promoting the diversified development of the economy. Only by laying a solid foundation through the construction of the rule of law can we provide a stable guarantee for reform and development, and promote the steady and long-term high-quality development of Macao’s economy and society.

## Bib collection for GEG Macao Int’l Marathon opens

**Kristina Vallesteros**

Bib collection for the 2025 Galaxy Entertainment Macao International Marathon began yesterday, according to a Tuesday statement from the Sports Bureau (ID).

The race is scheduled for Sunday, December 7, and is organised by the Sports Bureau, Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG), and the General Association of Athletics of Macau.

Participants can collect their number bibs and information documents at Broadway Macau in Cotai from 12 p.m. to 9 p.m. until tomorrow, and from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. on Saturday. Collection requires a registration receipt and identification document.

The statement noted that those unable to collect their bib in person may authorise someone else to do

so. The authorised person must present their own ID, the signed registration receipt, and a copy of the participant’s identification.

This year’s event will feature 12,000 participants from 49 countries and regions, the statement said. Invited athletes include past champions such as Ethiopia’s

Fikadu Debele and Russia’s Alexandra Morozova, alongside runners from Portuguese-speaking regions and other countries.

The popular “Most Creative Costume Award” will also return. Participants may upload a photo of their costume via the Macao International Marathon mobile app to

enter. Prizes will be provided by GEG.

The Sports Bureau reminded all participants to review event regulations, familiarise themselves with the route, and prepare according to their physical condition. Further details are available on the official marathon website <http://www.macaomarathon.com/>. ■

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MACAU POST

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17°C~22°C

Source: SMG



This poster provided by the Sports Bureau (ID) promotes the 2025 Galaxy Entertainment Macao International Marathon set to take place this Sunday.

[www.macaomarathon.com](http://www.macaomarathon.com)



## Drone ban announced for major games events

Kristina Vallesteros

A temporary ban on drones will be enforced near the Macao East Asian Games Dome in Cotai to ensure the smooth running of events for “The 12<sup>th</sup> National Games for Persons with Disabilities and the 9<sup>th</sup> Special Olympics of the People’s Republic of China (Macau)”, according to a statement yesterday by the Civil Aviation Authority (AACM).

The prohibition will be in effect from Monday through December 15 within a 50-metre radius of the dome.

The statement further noted that several other locations are also designated as no-fly zones for the same period. These include the Macao Taipa Ferry Terminal, the Macao Bridge, Wynn Palace, Pousada Marina Infante, the England Marina Club Hotel, and the Marina Phantom Apartment Hotel.

Operating a drone in these areas without prior written permission from the AACM is prohibited. The regulator warned that offenders will face fines ranging from 2,000 to 20,000 patacas. ■



This image provided by the Civil Aviation Authority (AACM) yesterday shows the temporary ban on drones set to be enforced from December 8 to 15.

## Central District councillors discuss fire safety in residential buildings

Armindo Neves

The government-appointed Central District Community Service Consultative Council held its regular monthly meeting yesterday, where councillors raised concerns about fire safety in residential buildings.

The first part of the meeting was open to the media, during which committee members raised various issues in their speeches. The meeting then proceeded behind closed doors. It included Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) Students Comprehensive Development Division Chief Lei Im Kei and Bairro do Hipódromo Activities Centre Chief Loi Mei Tim who introduced the bureau’s “Dynamic School Programme”.

The two-and-a-half hour meeting was held at the Patane Activity Centre on Avenida de Demétrio Cinatti (爹美刁施拿地大馬路).

In the first part of the meeting, councillors Lam Wai Hou and Leong Kim Kio voiced concern over fire safety in residential buildings.

Lam said that last week’s inferno in Hong Kong’s Tai Po District has triggered serious concern from all sectors in Macau. Lam suggested that with over 5,000 ageing buildings in Macau that are over 30 years old – many of which are located in the city centre – the authorities should enhance inspections of fire safety facilities in older buildings and regularly organise community fire drills to improve residents’ emergency response and evacuation efficiency.

Leong also said that the government



Central District Community Service Consultative Council Deputy Convenor Chang Ka Wa (right) and fellow councillor Yp Weng Keong pose during yesterday’s press briefing after the government-appointed council’s closed-door meeting at the Patane Activity Centre on Avenida de Demétrio Cinatti.

– Photo: Armindo Neves

should promote fire prevention knowledge and provide evacuation advice through multiple online and offline channels. Leong also proposed that building management staff should register residents with special rescue needs to facilitate assistance during emergencies.

In the post-meeting press briefing, the council’s deputy convenor Chang Ka Wa cited a DSEDJ statement, which was released to the councillors during meeting, as saying that the bureau has launched its “Dynamic School Programme” aimed at promoting the physical and mental health of students. Chang also said that the programme includes six key measures such as ensuring that students engage,

on average, in 40 minutes of physical activity per day, creating physical fitness achievement tasks, establishing individual physical fitness reports, funding schools to purchase sports equipment and intelligent sports systems, supporting inter-school competitions, and complementing these with health education and teacher training.

According to fellow councillor Yp Weng Keong, for the 2025/26 academic year, the bureau’s goal is to extend the programme to 65 schools, fund over 1,400 facility enhancements, and increase participation in academic sporting events to over 10,000 students, with the objective of fostering a sustainable culture of physical activity on campus. ■

2025 | 12.5 17:00-22:00  
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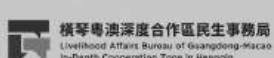
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# General Ye Ting's Former Residence reopens after exhibition upgrade

**Khalel Vallo**

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) said in a statement yesterday that it has reopened the upgraded permanent exhibition at General Ye Ting's Former Residence after unveiling a bronze statue of the general and presenting new displays that aim to strengthen patriotic education and highlight the general's historical contributions.

The bureau held a reopening ceremony yesterday at the eponymous residence, the statement said, adding that officiating guests included Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam, representatives from the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government, scholars from Guangdong and Macau, and several descendants of the general, as well as senior officials from the bureau.

In the presence of Secretary O and the Director of the Publicity and Culture Department of the Liaison Office Wan Sucheng, IC President Deland Leong Wai Man accepted a piece of calligraphy written by Yip Ying, the general's grandson, the statement added, as the artwork will be displayed at the mansion.

According to the statement, the newly unveiled statue depicts the general in uniform,



This handout photo provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) yesterday shows Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam (third from right), IC President Deland Leong Wai Man (second from right), and Liaison Office Publicity and Culture Department Director Wan Sucheng (third from left), alongside General Ye Ting's descendants, posing for a group photo at yesterday's ceremony marking the reopening of General Ye Ting's Former Residence at 76 Rua do Almirante Costa Cabral.

standing resolutely with his gaze fixed forward to reflect his revolutionary conviction that "an

army may be deprived of its commander, but a man can never be bereft of his aspiration".

The upgraded exhibition expands on the previous permanent display, presenting major periods of the general's life, including his childhood, military career, victories in the Northern Expedition, his self-effacing years in Macau, and the ideals reflected in "Song of the Prisoner",\* the statement added.

Scenes of his family life in the residence are also reproduced to highlight his deep connection with Macau. The venue will join the Xian Xinghai Memorial Museum and Zheng Guanying Memorial Museum in commemorating the patriotic spirit in modern Chinese history, the statement said.

General Ye Ting's Former Residence is open daily at 76 Rua do Almirante Costa Cabral from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., including public holidays, and is closed on Wednesdays, with free admission and with guided tours in Cantonese offered every Sunday at 12:30 p.m. ■

\* "Song of the Prisoner" is a poem written by Ye Ting in prison, reflecting his unwavering conviction during his detainment by the Kuomintang (KMT) government. It is one of the most famous revolutionary poems in modern Chinese history. Written in 1942, a powerful declaration of his unwavering ideals. – DeepSeek

## 'Renowned in Business' highlights century of Macau's merchant heritage

**Khalel Vallo**

The Archives of Macao opened its "Renowned in Business – Macao Merchants in Historical Archives" exhibition on Monday, presenting documents that illustrate the development of Macau's commercial sector over the past century.

Built on trade and sustained by maritime exchange, Macau has long relied on the business acumen of its merchant communities, according to an information board at the exhibition's entrance. The message notes that the exhibition traces this evolution from the Ming and Qing dynasties, when Portuguese traders dominated maritime commerce in the region in conjunction with merchant groups in Fujian and Guangdong provinces.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Macau's temporary Portuguese administration declared the city a free port and adopted a raft of business monopolies. All this, the message said laid the foundations for the rise of Macau's Chinese merchant class.

Successive waves of regional instability pushed Chinese merchants to seek refuge in Macau, where they became critical contributors to the city's capital, markets and labour force, the message said. By expanding across industry,

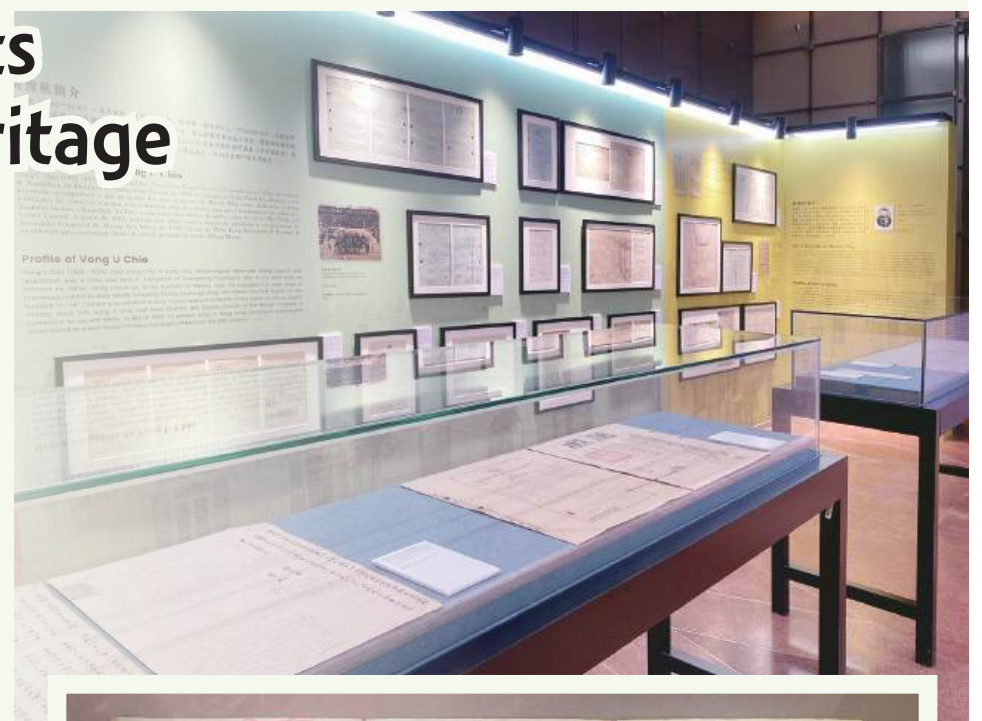
finance and multiple commercial sectors, they gradually became the principal players in Macau's business landscape. At the same time, foreign merchants – many arriving from Hong Kong – introduced new operating models and technical knowledge.

The result was a diverse business community centred on Chinese businesspeople but enriched by wider regional participation, the message added.

According to the message, the Archives of Macao curated materials document these developments, selecting records linked to key business figures who helped shape the city's modern commercial identity.

The documents on display reveal how merchant networks navigated political change, economic reform and cross-cultural encounters, shedding a light on the broader story of Macau's development over the recent century.

"Renowned in Business – Macao Merchants in Historical Archives" will run until April 26 next year. The exhibition is open daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., including public holidays, but closed on Mondays. With free admission, history buffs may view the exhibition at the Archives of Macao at 91-93, Avenida do Conselheiro Ferreira de Almeida. ■



Photos by Khalel Vallo



# Police nab Malaysian for trafficking 6.279 kg of cannabis buds worth 6.27 million patacas

Ada Lei

The Judiciary Police (PJ) apprehend a man from Malaysia on Tuesday for trafficking 6,279 grams of cannabis buds valued at 6.27 million patacas, PJ spokesman Chao Teng Hin said during a special press conference yesterday.

Chao identified the suspect as an 18-year-old male surnamed Goh who claimed to be jobless.

According to Chao, the Judiciary Police (PJ) identified a drug trafficking group through intelligence and cross-border risk management procedures. The group was preparing to send a member, referred to in Cantonese as an “airplane pig”, i.e., a person hired to smuggle drugs as an air passenger, to transport drugs from Thailand via the Philippines to Macau, with further plans to distribute them in Hong Kong and neighbouring regions.

The police apprehended Goh on Tuesday as he entered Macau through the airport after collecting a suitcase containing cannabis buds, and preparing to depart in a car arranged by the gang. The police seized 12 packets of cannabis buds vacuum-sealed in silver foil from his suitcase, weighing a total of 6,279 grams, with an estimated street value of 6.27 million patacas.

Chao noted that Goh was recruited by a drug trafficking group in Malaysia. He first



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the hooded drug-trafficking suspect from Malaysia to a PJ van outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday. – Photo: Ada Lei

travelled to Thailand to collect the suitcase containing the cannabis buds before flying to the Philippines and finally arriving in Macau, where he planned to transfer the drugs to Hong Kong immediately. Chao added that the driver of the car intended to transport Goh was initially ruled out as a potential accomplice. The police later confirmed that the seized drugs were indeed cannabis.

Under questioning, Goh admitted to trafficking the cannabis buds, claiming that he was promised a “remuneration” of 10,000 Malaysian

ringgit (19,300 patacas).

Goh was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, facing a drug-trafficking charge.

Chao said that to combat the increasing issue of cross-border drug trafficking, the Judiciary Police (PJ) will enhance collaboration and intelligence collection with global and regional law enforcement agencies. He reaffirmed their zero-tolerance policy towards drug-related crimes and commitment to strengthening intelligence exchanges to address various forms of cross-border trafficking. ■

## Police nab mainland robbery duo

Ada Lei

A duo from the Chinese mainland were separately arrested on Monday and last Thursday in Guigang and Macau respectively for robbing a middle-aged local man of HK\$280,000 (288,000 patacas) in cash, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Chao Teng Hin said during a special press conference yesterday.

Chao identified the suspects as a 31-year-old male surnamed Huang who claimed to be jobless, and a 33-year-old male surnamed Wu.

According to Chao, the victim met Huang in October and purchased USDT\* virtual currency from him in cash. Last Tuesday, Huang proposed to buy 34,726 USDT from the victim for HK\$270,000. After the victim agreed, he met Huang alone in a hotel lobby in Taipa that evening.

Chao noted that they entered a hotel guestroom for

the deal. In the room, Huang first handed HK\$270,000 in cash to the victim, who then transferred a total of 34,726 USDT in two transactions to Huang’s specified electronic wallet via his phone. However, after the transfer was completed, Huang claimed that he had not received the virtual currency and called Wu to come to the room.

Chao added that the victim attempted to leave and call the police when he saw Wu coming in, at which point Huang attacked him from behind, restraining him by the neck, while Wu joined in to physically assault the victim, pinning him down. During the struggle, Wu forcibly took the HK\$270,000 as well as HK\$10,000 in cash from the victim before fleeing the scene. The victim eventually managed to prevent Huang from escaping and reported a total loss of HK\$280,000 to the police.

Chao said that the victim sustained multiple injuries to his hands and feet. The police apprehended Huang at the scene. However, Wu managed to escape to the Chinese mainland where the police arrested him on Monday in Guigang City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

Huang has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing a robbery charge.

Chao added that the successful resolution of this case demonstrates the efficiency and smoothness of police cooperation between Macau and the mainland, highlighting the determination and capability of both police forces to combat cross-border crime. The Judiciary Police (PJ) will continue to strengthen cooperation with law enforcement agencies worldwide and rigorously tackle all forms of criminal activity, Chao said. ■

\*USDT, or Tether, is a type of cryptocurrency known as a stablecoin. It is pegged to the value of the US dollar, meaning that one USDT is typically intended to be worth US\$1. – Poe



This undated handout photo provided by the Judiciary Police (PJ) yesterday shows evidence related to the robbery case.

## MGM MACAU TENNIS MASTERS confirms teams

Rui Pastorin

The full team line-up has been confirmed for the two-day MGM MACAU TENNIS MASTERS, with World No. 14 Alejandro Davidovich Fokina also confirmed to join the upcoming event.

Set to take place from December 27 to 28, the teams will be led by two female tennis legends: China’s Li Na and Conchita Martínez from Spain. According to a statement yesterday from integrated resort operator MGM that confirmed the line-up and Fokina’s presence, Team Li Na will comprise players Jack Draper, Jerry Shang Juncheng and Alexandra Eala, while Team Conchita Martínez features Fokina, Jakub Menšík, and Mirra Andreeva.

Tournament Director and MARI Group Senior Vice President of Tennis Events Luíz Carvalho was quoted by the statement as saying: “We’re delighted to complete this year’s exceptional line-up with Alejandro Davidovich Fokina”

He added: “We’re also proud to have Wu Yibing – fresh from winning gold at China’s National Games [co-hosted by Macau] – joining us as our alternate player.”

Starting at 2 p.m. on both days with the Captains Challenge, day one will have two men’s singles matches and a mixed doubles, while day two features a women’s singles and two men’s singles.

Aside from the tournament, the statement said that the two-day event will also feature other activities such as interactive fan engagements, autograph sessions, and lucky draws.

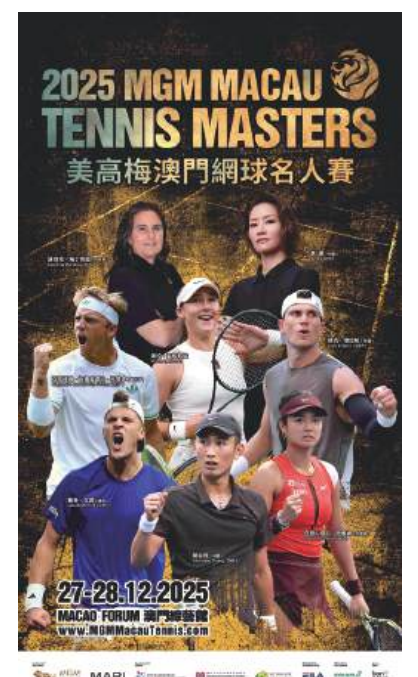
There will also be an “intergenerational dialogue” scheduled for December 27 featuring tennis

legends Li and Martínez, along with rising stars Andreeva and Eala. It will be hosted by Hong Kong Olympian Robyn Lamsam, the statement noted, and will take place at 11 a.m. at The Fantasy Box in MGM MACAU.

The session will be themed “Professional Passion and Life Beyond the Court” where the athletes can “share their untold personal stories, reflect on the evolution of tennis, and explore women’s influence in sports”, according to the statement.

Tickets prices range from 230 patacas to 580 patacas for VIP seats. Two-day passes start from 360 patacas up to 1,000 patacas for VIP seating.

More information is available on [MGMMacauTennis.com](http://MGMMacauTennis.com). ■



This poster provided by integrated resort operator MGM yesterday promotes the 2025 MGM Macau Tennis Masters, slated for December 27-28.



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ADMISSIONS ARE OPEN AT ALL LEVELS (Except F6)  
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- 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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# UTM, Swiss Education Group ink deal, establish joint centre in Hengqin

Rui Pastorin

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signing ceremony took place yesterday in the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin on the establishment of the “Macao University of Tourism – César Ritz Colleges Switzerland Centre for Innovative Talent Development”.

The MoU, which also includes collaboration at the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, was signed by UTM Rector Fanny Vong Chuk Kwan and Swiss Education Group (SEG) Chief Executive Officer Leo Wang (王魯).

A UTM statement yesterday noted that the centre, abbreviated as UTM-CRCS Centre for Innovative Talent Development, is an independent academic unit newly established within the UTM organisational structure. It is led and managed by the public university, with SEG providing “global recruitment, academic support, exchange opportunities for faculty and students, as well as a credit recognition mechanism”.

It builds on existing cooperation and “will further expand collaboration with SEG-affiliated institutions, jointly nurturing international talent, with plans to extend some programmes to the Cooperation Zone”, according to the statement.

The centre will also offer overseas exchange opportunities for faculty and students from both institutions,



**This photo provided by the Macao University of Tourism (UTM) yesterday shows Rector Fanny Vong Chuk Kwan (seated, left) and Swiss Education Group (SEG) Chief Executive Officer Leo Wang (王魯) posing with representatives who witnessed the MoU signing yesterday in the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.**

conduct research projects to promote industry development, among others, the statement said.

Vong said in her speech yesterday that the partnership will create more diverse and high-quality pathways for students to pursue further studies and help cultivate high-end talent with an international perspective and professional expertise for both Macau and the nation.

Vong also mentioned that the public university is aligning with the local government’s development plan for the “Macao-Hengqin International Education (University) Town” and is steadily advancing the extension of its educational operations in

the Cooperation Zone, with the collaboration being a key step.

César Ritz Colleges Switzerland Dean Jorge Aranz noted in his speech that the establishment of the joint centre will serve as a dynamic platform to bring together students, faculty, and industry leaders to foster creativity and drive progress in hospitality and tourism. Guided by César Ritz Colleges innovation philosophy of “Rethink. Refine. Realise.”, the centre will leverage the strengths of both institutions to explore new educational and industry solutions that meet the evolving needs of the global market. ■

## New exhibition on Macau’s street vendor history to open tomorrow

Rui Pastorin

Members of the public keen on knowing more about the history of Macau’s street vendors have a chance to do so starting tomorrow at a dedicated exhibition set up at the IAM (Municipal Affairs Bureau) Gallery in the city centre.

Set to be inaugurated at 6 p.m., the exhibition will be open through March 1 and features memorabilia related to the history of street vendor development in Macau ranging from photographs, vintage vendor licences and tools in addition to texts, video interviews, and photo-taking spots in the style of vintage stalls, with guided tours also available.

The exhibition, poised to be the first large-scale themed exhibition in Macau focused on the history of street vendors, is entitled “The Macao Nostalgia: ‘Imprints on Street Corners’

Historical Exhibition of Hawkers”, according to an IAM statement on Tuesday. The statement said that the exhibition is divided into three parts presenting the gradual development of the sector from the flourishing 1940s and 1950s to its regulated management.

Changes in the street vending sector mirror the socio-cultural landscape, highlighting social life, cultural shifts, consumption patterns, and the complexities of societal changes and economic growth, the statement said, with the exhibition hoping to give members of the public a deeper understanding.

The exhibition, organised in conjunction with the Mutual Aid Association of Macau Vendors will be open from 9 a.m. through 9 p.m. daily from tomorrow onwards. For more details, one can visit [www.iam.gov.mo](http://www.iam.gov.mo). ■



**This photo provided by the Macau Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) earlier this week shows the exhibition “The Macao Nostalgia: Imprints on Street Corners”, which kicks off tomorrow.**

## IAM reports 3 dog carcasses to police

Tony Wong

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) said in a statement last night that it has received reports from a number of residents since Saturday last week regarding the discovery of three dog carcasses at three locations in Coloane, adding that it has reported the case to the police for further investigation.

Since receiving the reports, the statement underlined, the bureau has been paying close attention to the incident and has sent personnel to the scenes for follow-up. After conducting autopsies on the three dog carcasses, the statement said,

systemic haemorrhagic lesions were identified in all of them.

Regarding concerns raised about the potential risk of cats and dogs accidentally ingesting rodent bait, the statement stressed that the rodent bait used by IAM contains a bittering agent specifically designed for rodents, which lack a vomiting reflex.

The statement noted that for animals with a vomiting system, including cats and dogs, accidental ingestion of the rodent bait will trigger a vomiting response, making it difficult for them to swallow the rodent bait. Consequently, the statement underlined, there is an “extremely

low” probability for cats and dogs to be poisoned by the IAM rodent bait due to accidental consumption.

Moreover, the statement said, the dosage of rodent bait placed by IAM personnel every time is specifically set for rodents’ small size.

The statement also said that in addition to placing locked rodent bait boxes at fixed locations on public streets across the city, IAM is also implementing area-specific rodent control measures based on the locations of identified rodent burrows, such as placing bait in relatively hidden locations to minimise the risk to non-target animals and the public. ■

## Motorcyclist dies in crash with another motorbike on Sai Van Bridge: police

Staff Reporter

A local female motorcycle rider died in hospital on Tuesday night after a crash with another motorbike on the Sai Van Bridge on Sunday night, the Public Security Police (PSP) said in a statement yesterday.

Each direction of Sai Van Bridge has three vehicular lanes, one of which is designated for motorcycles only.

According to yesterday’s PSP statement, the police received a report at 7:41 p.m. on Sunday about the crash, when the two motorcycles were travelling on

the motorcycle-only lane from the peninsula to Taipa.

Upon arrival at the scene, the statement said, firefighters and paramedics found the female rider unconscious, after which she was rushed to hospital for emergency treatment where she was pronounced dead at 7:37 p.m. on Tuesday after emergency treatment to save her life had failed. The statement did not identify the hospital.

The PSP statement did not elaborate on the other motorcycle rider involved in the collision, merely identifying him or her also as a local resident.

Yesterday’s statement underlined

that the police are still investigating the exact cause of the accident.

The police are asking witnesses to the accident to call its Traffic Department on 2837 4214.

A statement about the crash by the Fire Services Bureau (CB) on Sunday night identified the female rider as a 41-year-old local woman.

According to the CB statement, the other motorbike rider involved in the accident is a 38-year-old local man, who was in a stable condition after sustaining a head injury.

Both were taken to the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre, the statement said. ■

## 2025 Macau Int’l Kart Grand Prix starts today

Rui Pastorin

The 2025 Macau International Kart Grand Prix will start its nine-day run today at the Coloane Karting Track, with around 330 drivers from 28 countries and regions competing, the Sports Bureau (ID) said in a statement yesterday.

The karting event, free-admission for members of the public, is split into two weeks, running first from today through Sunday, and again from next Wednesday through next Sunday.

The races in the first week comprise the 2025 ROK Cup Asia Final (MINI ROK, ROK Junior, ROK Senior, ROK Expert) and the AAMC Karting Championship (KZ Round 8, AAMC Cup, Sands Cup). In the second week, the IAME Asia

Final (Cadet, Junior, Senior, Master) will be held.

Racers are competing from the Chinese mainland, Macau, Hong Kong and Chinese Taipei; Andorra, Australia, Canada, Czechia, France, Finland, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Spain, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the UK, and US.

The karting event is organised by the bureau, the Automobile General Association Macao-China (AAMC), OTK Kart Asia and IAME Asia. It is sponsored by integrated resort operator Sands China.

One can find more details on the bureau’s website and social media platforms. ■



**Karters compete in a previous race at the Coloane Karting track.**

– Photo: Sports Bureau (ID)



## Japan will pay a heavy economic price if it pursues Takaichi's militant agenda

*China Daily Editorial*

The consequences of the diplomatic tensions between China and Japan unilaterally sparked by Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's erroneous and dangerous remarks on the Taiwan question on November 7 pose real challenges for Japan's economic outlook.

The overtly militaristic stance she expressed, which is in defiance of the postwar constraints on Japan's militarization, not only runs against the trend of the times and jeopardizes regional stability, but also threatens to exacerbate Japan's economic difficulties.

By stating that Japan could intervene militarily in the Taiwan Strait, Takaichi indicated a significant departure from the Japanese government's long-held policy toward the Chinese island.

Her provocative remarks have understandably drawn sharp rebukes from China and triggered a wave of economic consequences that have fueled concerns for Japan's fragile economy, as China is Japan's largest trading partner.

Amid the frictions caused by Takaichi's remarks, a growing number of Chinese citizens have dropped plans to visit Japan and seafood imports have also been suspended, moves that could cost Japan billions of dollars in lost revenues. Before the diplomatic row, Chinese tourists constituted a significant portion of Japan's tourism industry, contributing billions of dollars annually. A decline in the number of Chinese visitors would be a heavy blow for Japan's tourism sector, which is a key pillar of its economy.

The economic repercussions of Takaichi's policies are compounded by Japan's existing challenges, which have already been aggravated by the United States' tariff hikes. Inflation has accelerated in the country in recent months, reaching 3 percent in October, yet wages have stagnated for decades.

Moreover, Takaichi's plan to maintain low interest rates as a means to spur economic growth is likely to backfire. While cheap credit may provide a temporary boost, it also risks devaluing the yen, which has already fallen by 9 percent against the dollar in the past six months, and further amplifies inflationary pressures. All this would erode household purchasing power.

Takaichi's ambitious defense spending plans, aimed at countering what Tokyo describes as China's increasing military buildup, also threaten to inflate Japan's already enormous national debt. The supplementary budget approved by Japan's Cabinet last month will boost defense spending to 2 percent of GDP two years ahead of schedule. This comes after Japan already increased

defense spending by 21 percent year-on-year to reach US\$55.3 billion in 2024.

With government bonds yielding higher interest rates, Japan faces escalating interest payments that could strain public finances and divert resources from essential social services. The International Monetary Fund's projection of Japan's deficit rising to 4.4 percent of GDP by 2030 underscores the unsustainable nature of Takaichi's economic strategy.

Japan's intractable economic woes mean that Takaichi is seeking to consolidate her position at home by trumpeting nationalism and security issues. Meanwhile, prolonged economic stagnation, deflationary pressures, and social anxiety have provided fertile ground for the spread of right-wing rhetoric. This is a vicious circle that will only do more harm to the Japanese economy.

On the diplomatic front, Takaichi's hard-line right-wing stance risks isolating Japan from its Asian neighbors, who are already concerned at Japan's attempts to abandon its pacifist Constitution and remilitarize. Her bluntly jettisoning the nuanced diplomacy required to manage the complex regional dynamics has added greater urgency to the ringing of alarm bells.

Thus during a meeting between Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Moscow on Tuesday, they affirmed that the two countries will coordinate and cooperate to resolutely curb the provocative acts of Japan's far-right forces that undermine regional peace and stability.

In pursuing a right-wing agenda, Takaichi appears to be prioritizing short-term political gains over long-term national interests, but the economic and diplomatic costs are likely to weigh heavily on the Japanese economy.

It is foreseeable that the shortsighted policies of the Takaichi government, if they remain unchanged, will further exacerbate geopolitical tensions, undermine China-Japan economic relations, and erode foreign investors' confidence. This will also amplify the fragility of Japan's financial markets, creating a hard-to-break negative spiral that will further harm Japan's economic resilience.

Rather than retracting her erroneous and dangerous remarks and correcting her mistakes as Beijing clearly and solemnly demands, Takaichi is still resorting to word play to seek space for her militant agenda.

The Takaichi government should reconsider the wisdom of its course. Failure to do so will leave Japan economically vulnerable and increasingly isolated in an interconnected world.

— Courtesy of China Daily

## AMap launches accessible navigation for wheelchair users in Macau



Local officials and AMap senior representative such as Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam (centre), Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) President Wilson Hon Wai (third from right), Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes (third from left), and AMap Vice President Li Yanxia (fourth from right) symbolically launch the map's accessible navigation in Macau during yesterday's ceremony. — Photos: Tony Wong

*Tony Wong*

The accessible navigation for wheelchair users on the mapping app run by mainland web-mapping giant AMap is now also available in Macau after the new function's launch here yesterday.

AMap is known as Gaode (高德 – “High Virtue”) in Chinese. In addition to the Chinese mainland, the map can also be used in various other countries and regions, including Macau.

AMap launched its English version early this year, targeting foreigners visiting the Chinese mainland.

Despite being a more simplified version compared to its Chinese version, AMap's English version is also equipped with navigation function for users in general, but so far not including accessible navigation.

Before yesterday, AMap's accessible navigation was only available in Chinese mainland cities. Macau has now, according to the company's announcements yesterday, become the 70<sup>th</sup> Chinese city where accessible navigation is available.

While AMap's accessible navigation in various Chinese mainland cities is available for those with different types of disabilities such as physical (wheelchair users), visual, and hearing impairment, the accessible navigation available in Macau is so far only for wheelchair users.

The web-mapping giant, in



Zhang Man, product manager of AMap, presents details of the map's accessible navigation for wheelchair users in Macau during yesterday's press conference at the Macau Science Centre (MSC) in Nape, with a sign language interpreter working.

collaboration with the Macau Social Welfare Bureau (IAS), announced the launch of its accessible navigation in Macau during a press conference at the Macau Science Centre (MSC) in Nape yesterday evening.

Delivering a speech during yesterday's press conference, IAS President Wilson Hon Wai said that with the coordination of the China Disabled Persons' Federation, the Macau government has launched cooperation with AMap to extend its accessible navigation to Macau.

The press conference also included a ceremony marking the function's launch in Macau.

Yesterday's ceremony was also attended by Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam.

Zhang Man, product manager of AMap, presented details of the map's accessible navigation for wheelchair users available in Macau during yesterday's ceremony.

According to Zhang, the map's accessible navigation in Macau covers 20 sports facilities, including the Macau East Asian Games Dome, Light Rapid Transit (LRT) stations, public bus routes, five border checkpoints (the airport, the Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal, the Inner Harbour Ferry Terminal, the Qingmao checkpoint, and the Barrier Gate checkpoint), as well as various hotels and shopping malls.

AMap, established in 2002, became a subsidiary of mainland e-commerce giant Alibaba in 2014. ■

## Post-fire attempts to destabilise HK will be punished: authorities

HONG KONG – The anti-China forces attempting to exploit the deadly fire in the residential complex Wang Fuk Court in Tai Po District last Wednesday to disrupt Hong Kong will be brought to justice, the Office for Safeguarding National Security of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) said yesterday.

When help, support and donations from home and abroad poured into the HKSAR, the anti-China forces were exploiting the tragedy and fanning antagonism in cold blood, said a

spokesperson for the office, adding that these acts trampled on social morality and inflicted more pain on those affected by the fire.

Instead of helping, these rioters maliciously attacked and thwarted rescue and disaster-relief efforts, seeking to efface the HKSAR government's hard work, said the spokesperson.

The spokesperson warned the rioters that any words or actions aiming to destabilize Hong Kong will be punished in accordance with the law.

Also yesterday, the HKSAR

government denounced anti-China media outlets and anti-China forces for making unfounded and smearing remarks about the HKSAR government's relief work on and investigations into the Wang Fuk Court fire.

“We will not condone any person who attempts to sabotage or interfere with the rescue work. Wherever they are, the HKSAR government will make every effort in pursuing them in accordance with the law and make sure that justice is done,” said a spokesperson for the HKSAR government. — Xinhua



## Macron arrives in Beijing for state visit

BEIJING – At the invitation of President Xi Jinping, French President Emmanuel Macron arrived in Beijing yesterday for a state visit to China through tomorrow.

It is Macron's fourth state visit to China and a reciprocal visit to Xi's historic state visit to France last year that marked the 60th anniversary of China-France diplomatic relations.

During the visit this week, Xi will hold talks with Macron to jointly guide the development of China-France relations under the new circumstances. The two presidents will also have in-depth exchanges of views on major international and regional hotspot issues.

China is ready to work with France to take this visit as an opportunity to champion the spirit that guided the establishment of China-France diplomatic ties, strengthen strategic communication, deepen pragmatic cooperation, and



Foreign Minister Wang Yi (centre, right) welcomes French President Emmanuel Macron (centre) and his wife Brigitte Macron (centre, left) upon their arrival at the Capital International Airport in Beijing yesterday. – AFP

work for closer coordination in multilateral affairs, said a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson.

Together, the two sides can make new progress in their comprehensive strategic

partnership, promote the sound and steady development of China-EU relations, and contribute more to multilateralism and a peaceful, stable and prosperous world, the spokesperson added. – Xinhua

## Wang Yi meets with French counterpart

BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot in Beijing yesterday.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, mentioned French President Emmanuel Macron's current, fourth state visit to China. Every meeting between the two heads of state is not only a major event in China-France relations but also attracts close attention from the international community, he said.

In the face of the current intricate global challenges, it is necessary for China and France to enhance communication and cooperation and shoulder their common responsibility as major countries and permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, Wang said, noting that it is believed that through the joint efforts of both sides, this visit will further enhance strategic mutual trust, deepen strategic cooperation, and inject new impetus into the development of the China-France comprehensive strategic partnership.

Wang expounded on the nature and serious dangers of the erroneous remarks on Taiwan made by the current Japanese leader, articulating

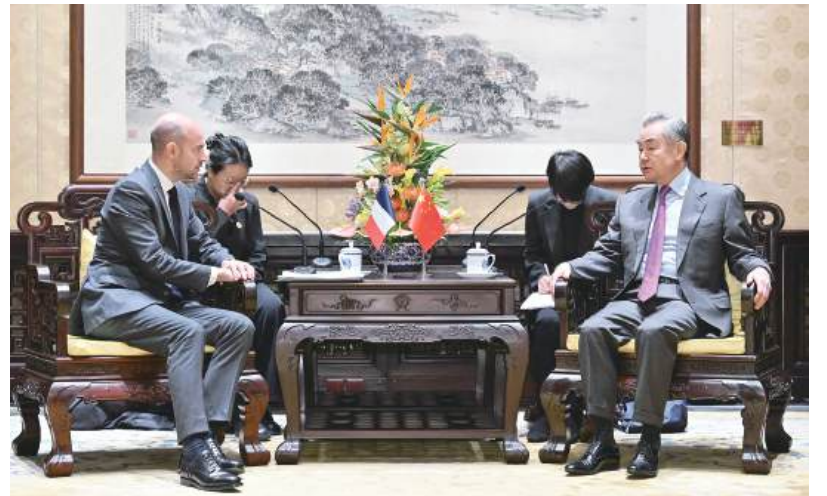
China's principle and stance. He emphasized that as victorious nations of World War II, China and France should jointly safeguard the hard-won outcomes of World War II paid for with blood, and resolutely oppose any attempt by Japan to exploit the Taiwan question to stir up trouble and repeat the mistakes of history.

"China hopes and believes that France will continue to understand and support its legitimate position," Wang added.

Barrot said President Macron attaches great importance to relations with China, noting that as permanent members of the UN Security Council, France and China have a responsibility to jointly uphold world peace in a constructive manner.

The French side firmly adheres to the one-China policy and looks forward to further strengthening the friendship and cooperation between the two peoples through President Macron's visit, Barrot added.

He thanked the Chinese side for its active efforts in facilitating the visit and expressed confidence that it will yield fruitful outcomes, noting that France is committed to promoting an independent and autonomous European Union and is willing to actively advance the development of EU-China relations. – Xinhua



Foreign Minister Wang Yi (right), also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, meets with French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

## 'Taiwan independence' separatist moves doomed to fail: FM spokesperson

BEIJING – Foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said yesterday that the one-China principle is the political foundation and fundamental prerequisite of China-Honduras relations, the growth of the bilateral ties is in the fundamental and long-term interests of both countries and peoples, and that "Taiwan independence" separatist moves are doomed to fail.

Lin's remarks at a regular press briefing came after an official from Taiwan attempted to make contact with two presidential candidates in Honduras.

Lin said that over the past two years and more since the two countries established diplomatic

ties, the relationship has grown rapidly with fruitful cooperation in various fields.

He pointed out that China-built agricultural technique schools were completed, procurement agreements on over 10,000 tonnes of whiteleg shrimps were signed by Chinese and Honduran companies, and tobacco from Honduras entered the Chinese market.

In 2024, China's imports of Honduran coffee increased by 14 times year on year, Lin said, adding that China also offered Honduras coffee greenhouses and plantation toolkits, and provided multiple batches of humanitarian supplies when Honduras was hit by hurricane, flooding and other disasters.

Lin went on to say that cooperation in human resource training, government scholarship, tourism and other fields gives a strong boost to the capacity building in long-term development of Honduras.

"These achievements fully demonstrate that the relationship has delivered tangibly to the Honduran people and serves the fundamental and long-term interests of the two countries and two peoples," said Lin.

"Taiwan independence" separatist activities go in the opposite direction of where the arc of history bends. It is doomed to fail," noted the spokesperson. – Xinhua

## China sees significant drop in carbon emission growth rate

BEIJING – China's man-made carbon emissions rose 0.6 percent in 2024, a significantly slower pace than the previous year and below the global average growth rate, the country's meteorological authority said yesterday, indicating that efforts to meet the country's climate commitments are gaining momentum.

The data was released as part of the China Greenhouse Gas Bulletin (2024) by the China Meteorological Administration (CMA). The 0.6 percent domestic increase compares favorably to the global growth rate of 0.8 percent for the same period.

Zeng Qin, director of the CMA's science and technology department, said the data indicate that China's active implementation of carbon reduction pledges is achieving practical results.

According to the bulletin, the average concentration of carbon

dioxide at the Waliguan Baseline Observatory in northwest China's Qinghai Province – one of the World Meteorological Organization's (WMO) Global Atmosphere Watch sites – reached 424.9 parts per million (ppm) in 2024.

This represented a year-on-year increase of 3.5 ppm, matching the global average rise.

Meanwhile, several regional atmospheric background stations, including those at Shangdianzi, Longfengshan and Shangri-La, recorded annual carbon dioxide concentration increases lower than the global average, the CMA reported.

The Chinese report comes shortly after the WMO's October global bulletin, which warned that concentrations of the three main greenhouse gases – carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide – continued to rise in 2024. The

WMO noted a global average carbon dioxide concentration of 423.9 ppm, marking the largest annual increase since modern records began in 1957.

The record global surge is primarily attributed to continued fossil fuel emissions, the weakening of land and ocean carbon sinks due to extreme heat, and increased emissions from global wildfires.

This marks the 14th consecutive year China has released its greenhouse gas monitoring data. The CMA said it has established a national observation network comprising one global baseline observatory, 18 regional stations, and over 120 observation sites.

Looking ahead, the administration pledged to further optimize its monitoring network and strengthen high-precision analysis to provide technological support for the country's response to climate change. – Xinhua

## China, South Africa agree to deepen cultural, people-to-people exchanges

BEIJING – The 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the China-South Africa high-level people-to-people exchange mechanism was held in Beijing yesterday, with both sides agreeing to deepen cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

Shen Yiqin, Chinese State Councilor and the Chinese chairperson of the mechanism, co-hosted the meeting with Gayton McKenzie, South Africa's Minister of Sports, Arts and Culture, who is also the South African chairperson of the mechanism.

Shen said that following the third meeting in 2023, the two sides have effectively implemented the important consensus reached between the two heads of state, and made steady progress in advancing cooperation projects in fields such

as education, culture, science and technology, and sports.

China is willing to work with South Africa to further broaden and deepen people-to-people and cultural exchanges, enhance the quality of cooperation, and make new contributions to advancing the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries in the new era, consolidating public support for the enduring friendship between both countries, Shen added.

McKenzie spoke highly of the positive progress in South Africa-China relations and people-to-people exchanges, expressing the willingness to continuously enrich the substance of exchanges and tap into the potential for cooperation to benefit the people of both countries. – Xinhua



## 2 soldiers killed in clash with rebels in central Philippines

MANILA – Two soldiers were killed in a clash with members of the left-wing New People's Army (NPA) rebels in Samar province in the central Philippines early yesterday morning, the Philippine military said.

Lieutenant General Antonio Nafarrete, commanding general of the Philippine Army, said the encounter happened at around 1 a.m. local time yesterday in a village in San Jose De Buan, a municipality in the province.

The NPA has waged a decades-long insurgency since 1969, seeking to overthrow the government.

The group continues to operate mainly in rural areas across Luzon, the Visayas, and Mindanao, though security officials say its ranks have sharply declined in recent years.

According to the military, the NPA's current strength is estimated at around 1,000 fighters – far below its peak of roughly 25,000 in the mid-1980s.

– Xinhua

## Philippines fires over 9,000 rogue police in internal cleansing drive

MANILA – The Philippine National Police (PNP) has dismissed more than 9,000 rogue personnel for misconduct, criminal activities, and drug-related offenses as part of its nearly 10-year-long intensified internal cleansing program aimed at restoring public trust and enforcing accountability within the force.

Data from the PNP Directorate for Personnel and Records Management released late Tuesday showed that from July 2016 to November 26, 2025, a total of 32,698 police personnel were found guilty of various administrative offenses.

Of these, 9,027 were dismissed from the service, underscoring the PNP's "zero-tolerance stance

against officers who violate the law or betray public confidence."

The PNP also reported that 1,037 of those dismissed were linked to illegal drug cases or tested positive for drug use, highlighting the organization's sustained crackdown on "rogue cops" and its internal campaign against narcotics.

Other penalties imposed included salary forfeiture for 1,221 personnel, reprimands for 4,355, restrictions for 528, and the removal of certain privileges for 531 officers.

The PNP vowed to continue strictly enforcing its disciplinary measures to further strengthen internal cleansing efforts and institutional discipline. – Xinhua

## Myanmar junta says arrested man for anti-election Facebook chat

YANGON – Myanmar's military said yesterday it arrested a man who sent anti-election messages in a private Facebook chat, wielding laws that rights groups say curb personal liberties to crush dissent.

The junta snatched power in a 2021 coup which plunged Myanmar into a many-sided civil war, but it promises that polls starting in late December will move the country towards peace and democracy.

Deposed lawmakers excluded from the vote, human rights monitors and guerilla rebels opposing the junta have dismissed the election as a charade to disguise continuing military rule.

Ahead of the poll the military government introduced broad new legislation including clauses punishing protesting or criticising the election with up to a decade in prison.

A junta statement said 58-year-old Khaing Soe from Bogoyoke village near Yangon was arrested under the law on Friday.

He "was exposed and arrested for writing texts on Messenger using his 'Khaing Soe' Facebook Account with the intent to frustrate election processes and mislead the public", it said.

The statement provided few details about the alleged offence, including how authorities may

have accessed his messages on the private Facebook Messenger app.

"Action is being taken to ensure he receives an effective penalty," it said.

Two other men were also arrested – one for a Facebook post and one for vandalising an election billboard – while 11 other cases were opened against groups or individuals, the statement added.

The junta has opened more than 100 cases under the election disruption law, according to an AFP tally.

However, some are targeting rebel fighters operating beyond the military's reach.

UN rights office spokesman Jeremy Laurence warned last week that "the military has stepped up mass electronic surveillance to identify dissidents" ahead of the widely criticised election.

Myanmar has historically been ruled by the military, but enjoyed a decade-long democratic thaw starting in 2010 that saw Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi become an elected figurehead.

She was toppled and has been sequestered in jail since the February 2021 putsch.

Her party has been dissolved and will not appear on ballots when voting begins on December 28 in a phased election expected to last around one month. – AFP

## 'I feel like crying': Indonesians confront flood destruction

**Marchio Gorbiano and Taris Iman**

TUKKA – Indonesian farmer Merliana Siregar is all out of hope, seeing what is left of her flood-ravaged home as she returned yesterday.

A small sign is still there, offering a simple sentiment: "My house is small, not a billionaire's palace. But it is here to offer us peace and joy. Amen."

But for Merliana and her husband, the mud-strewn remains of their household in flood-hit Tukka village now offer little of either.

The pair managed a terrifying escape last week as floodwaters that have killed more than 800 people threatened to envelope them and their child.

Back to see what could be salvaged, the 58-year-old rice farmer waded through the muddy brown slick covering every floor of her home and extending up the white-washed walls.

"Everything was destroyed," she told AFP.

"How do I feel seeing my home, the one I've lived in for so long, destroyed like this? I feel like crying," she said, surveying the damage.

"We have so much debt. But now, there's nothing left to hope for. Everything is destroyed. We don't know what we'll eat tomorrow."

Only those items high up on the walls – two framed paintings of Jesus and photos of the couple's daughters – were left unscathed by the floodwaters that rushed into their home.

"In my entire life, there had never been a flash flood this high here. But the rain kept pouring," said Merliana.

The family initially moved to a raised platform behind their house as the waters continued to rise, but ran out of food.

A neighbour helped guide them and relatives through the floodwaters to higher ground, but



**Villagers wash their clothes in a puddle after their village was hit by a flash flood at Tukka village, Central Tapanuli, North Sumatra province, Indonesia yesterday. Officials in Indonesia and Sri Lanka battled yesterday to reach survivors of deadly flooding in remote, cut-off regions as the toll in the disaster that hit four countries topped 1,300. In Indonesia, there is growing frustration among survivors of catastrophic flooding and landslides over the pace of the rescue effort and aid delivery.**

– AFP

they were out in the open, still struggling to survive.

"We wanted to evacuate, but the water was too strong. We had no choice but to stay there. I was freezing, and so was everyone else. The children kept crying," Merliana recalled.

The family are now staying with friends and relying on limited government aid.

Merliana's husband Edo Sitompul said he was worried about the future.

"If there is no assistance to repair this house, to fix this road, this road access, this river access, we are left in uncertainty," he said.

"We hope the government will repair everything quickly."

### 'Trauma'

Nearby, Lestari Manurung waded through the waters that have still not entirely receded from the village's thoroughfares.

Left homeless by the floods,

she was looking for a way to reach relatives in the city of Medan.

Floodwaters carried a barrage of logs that battered her home, she said.

Like many others across the flood-hit region, she said she was astonished by how quickly the water had arrived.

"I was sad because it is all gone. It's like a dream, how could the waters could rise this fast. [I couldn't] save my things," she added, saying she was left with a feeling of "trauma".

The 45-year-old fruit seller managed to find shelter at an evacuation centre, but said there was limited food.

"We were sick of eating instant noodles, but better than not eating, dying of hunger," she said.

"Hopefully there will be help for us victims," she added.

"The important thing is a house. Just a simple house, so we can return." – AFP

## Opium poppy farming hits 10-year high in war-torn Myanmar

YANGON – Myanmar's opium poppy cultivation has hit a decade-record level, the United Nations warned yesterday, with early indications its heroin output is now being trafficked to Western markets.

War-ravaged Myanmar is a hive of black market activity ranging from illegal mining to internet scamming and the manufacture of illicit drugs like methamphetamine and heroin.

The nation has long ranked among the world's top opium poppy producers, claiming the top spot after a 2022 Taliban government crackdown crushed the trade in Afghanistan.

Analysts say illicit activities are key income sources funding the civil war which has racked Myanmar since the military snatched power in a 2021 coup.

This year, opium poppies were farmed on more than 53,000

hectares of Myanmar's soil, a UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report said, recording the largest territory since 2015.

The agency's yearly Myanmar Opium Survey said after the Afghanistan crackdown "there are emerging signs that heroin trafficked from Southeast Asia reaches markets traditionally not supplied from the region".

It cited a cumulative 60-kilogram haul of suspected Myanmar-origin heroin seized from airline passengers travelling from Thailand to the European Union in 2024 and early 2025.

While the scale is "not yet significant, the changed environment could encourage more cultivation and production of opium in Myanmar", it said.

Opium poppies were farmed extensively across Myanmar well

before the civil war consumed the country.

But monitors say the conflict has supercharged black markets – with a weak central government, industrial infrastructure destroyed by fighting, and soaring poverty spiking desperation.

Myanmar's junta has waged offensives this year ahead of an election slated to start on December 28 – a vote dismissed by many observers as a ploy to disguise continuing military rule.

The UNODC report said while instability drives farmers towards tending opium poppy, "intensifying conflict and insecurity make it more difficult for them to care for their fields".

While opium poppy farms had expanded in size by 17 percent from 2024, it noted that this year's yield was largely static at around 1,000 tonnes. – AFP



# Thailand lifts ban on afternoon alcohol sales

Montira Rungjirajittranon with Sally Jensen

BANGKOK – Thailand yesterday relaxed decades-old alcohol sales restrictions, allowing consumers to buy wine, beer and spirits during previously prohibited afternoon hours in a six-month trial.

The predominantly Buddhist country still maintains strict alcohol laws, limiting sales to specific hours and banning them on religious holidays.

Liquor stores, bars and other purveyors were previously banned from selling alcohol from 2-5 p.m., but the eased rules permit sales from 11 a.m. to midnight during the trial while a committee studies its impacts.

Officials last month reviewed the long-standing 2-5 p.m. sales ban, a rule originally introduced to prevent government employees from drinking alcohol during work hours and often puzzling foreign visitors.

“In the past, there were concerns that government employees would sneak out to drink, but it’s a different time now,” deputy prime minister Sophon Saram told reporters last month.

Health Minister Pattana Promphat said the move was “appropriate to the present situation”, according to a statement in the Royal Gazette published on Tuesday.

Despite its reputation as a tourism and nightlife hub, Thailand’s alcohol laws remained rooted in Buddhist teachings that view imbibing as a moral transgression.

The country has some of the highest alcohol consumption rates in Asia, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), with locals



A sign shows a change in alcohol purchasing times at a convenience store in Bangkok, as a trial period begins to relax the current laws, yesterday. – AFP

typically reaching for the ubiquitous Chang, Singha and Leo beers.

Thailand ranked 16<sup>th</sup> out of nearly 200 countries for the most road traffic deaths per capita in 2021, WHO data shows.

Nearly 33,000 people were killed in drunk driving incidents in the country from 2019 to 2023, according to public health ministry figures.

## ‘Good for tourists’

In central Bangkok yesterday afternoon, several businesses told AFP journalists they had yet to notice a shift on the first day of the relaxed sales rules.

“There haven’t been many people because customers still don’t know about the new law,” said a shop assistant at Gourmet Wine Cellar who declined to give their name.

Shoppers at a 7-Eleven opted for soda over alcoholic beverages, despite signs posted on refrigerator

doors noting the extended sales hours.

At a nearly empty beer garden where a few customers were ordering pints, a server told AFP that she had heard of the rule change on TikTok.

But, she said, “There’s almost no change because we usually don’t get any customers during this time.”

Apple, a Thai marathon-runner, told AFP the loosened restrictions were “good for tourists”.

“Tourists like to drink a lot. But for Thai people, maybe not, as we don’t normally drink at that time anyway,” she said.

Matthew, a 23-year-old British traveller, said he hadn’t heard about the long-time sales ban or it being lifted.

“Sounds like it would be terrible for the economy. So many tourists come here. Why would they do that? Religious reasons?”

– AFP

# Same-sex marriage campaigners take fight to Japan top court

TOKYO – Marriage equality campaigners urged Japan’s top court yesterday to rule the country’s failure to recognise same-sex unions “unconstitutional”, following a recent setback at the Tokyo High Court.

The Tokyo court ruled last week that Japan’s refusal to acknowledge same-sex marriages does not violate the constitution, in a shock to the LGBTQ community.

More than a dozen couples have filed claims across Japan, seeking damages from the state for preventing them from getting married.

In five of the six lawsuits, high courts ruled the same-sex marriage ban was “unconstitutional”.

The ruling in Tokyo was the first loss in a high court for those seeking equal marriage rights, and they have filed an appeal with the Supreme Court.

Yesterday, plaintiffs from the northern island of Hokkaido to the southern region of Kumamoto gathered with their lawyers to file a letter to the top court.

“I’m truly shocked by the high court ruling,” Shinya Yamagata, one of the plaintiffs, told reporters.

“I never imagined that the judiciary would discriminate against us and would wound our hearts so deeply,” he said.

“What we seek is simply the ordinary right to marry,” another plaintiff Haru Ono said.

Ono, who raised three children together with her partner, said she

“faced various hardships” including hospital visits that only one parent was able to join.

The letter requested that the Supreme Court “exercise its authority and responsibility as a bastion of human rights and deliver a clear ruling of unconstitutionality”.

It asked the court to consider the lives of people who dreamed of marrying but were “consistently excluded from the legal marriage system”.

Japan is the only G7 nation that does not recognise same-sex unions.

However, in Asia, only Taiwan, Thailand and Nepal allow same-sex marriage.

Opinion polls show growing support for LGBTQ-friendly laws in Japan but the conservative ruling party espouses traditional family values and new prime minister Sanae Takaichi is opposed to same-sex unions.

Dozens of major municipalities, including Tokyo, now offer partnership certificates that allow same-sex couples to be treated as married in certain areas such as housing, medicine and welfare.

Many big Japanese businesses also offer the same family benefits to LGBTQ and heterosexual employees.

Japan’s 1947 constitution says marriage requires “the mutual consent of both sexes” but it also states that all people “are equal under the law”.

– AFP

# Thailand seizes US\$300 million in assets linked to cyberscam networks

BANGKOK – Thailand has seized more than US\$300 million in assets tied to criminal networks running multibillion-dollar scam centres in Southeast Asia, Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said yesterday.

The announcement comes after authorities across Asia, Europe and the United States targeted Cambodia’s Prince Holding Group and its global business network with asset seizures and freezes worth billions of dollars.

In October, US authorities indicted Prince’s Chinese-born founder Chen Zhi, accusing him of presiding over forced labour camps in Cambodia where trafficked workers conduct online scams.

Anutin told reporters yesterday that alleged scammers targeted with asset seizures valued at more than US\$300 million were “among the big ones”, including Chen, a Cambodian senator and two Thai nationals.

“All those responsible must be brought to justice under the law,” the prime minister said.

Thailand’s Anti-Money Laundering Office said on Tuesday it had seized around 100 items belonging to Prince’s Chen worth 373 million baht (US\$11.7 million), including land, cash, luxury goods and jewellery.

Authorities said they had also confiscated assets worth nearly US\$15 million from Kok An, a

Cambodian senator, businessman and ally of former Cambodian leader Hun Sen.

Approximately US\$290 million in assets were seized from two Thais with suspected links to scam operations.

Anutin did not say when the seizures occurred.

Cyber-scam operations have mushroomed across Southeast Asia, often operating from unassuming office blocks or warehouses where con artists target internet users living all over the globe.

Some scam workers go willingly to the cyberfraud hubs, while others are trafficked and held in prison-like conditions.

Britain has also frozen business and London property assets worth more than US\$130 million and linked to Chen’s network, while Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong each swooped in with seizures as high as US\$350 million.

The US Justice Department in October called Prince Group “one of Asia’s largest transnational criminal organisations”, and seized around US\$15 billion worth of bitcoin that US authorities alleged were criminal proceeds from the company’s networks.

Prince this month denied that it or Chen had committed any crimes.

– AFP

# YouTube says Australia social media ban makes children ‘less safe’

SYDNEY – YouTube yesterday attacked Australia’s looming social media ban for under-16s, denouncing the world-first laws as “rushed” and saying they will make children less safe online.

Australia will from December 10 ban users under the age of 16 from a raft of the world’s most popular social media platforms and websites, including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube.

“This law will not fulfil its promise to make kids safer online, and will, in fact, make Australian kids less safe on YouTube,” the company’s public policy manager Rachel Lord said in a statement.

“We’ve heard from parents and educators who share these concerns.”

Video streaming giant YouTube, one of the most-visited websites globally, was originally slated to escape the ban so children could watch educational videos.

But the Australian government changed tack in July, saying young users needed to be shielded from “predatory algorithms”.

YouTube said all Australian

users under 16 would be automatically signed out on December 10, using the ages linked to their Google accounts.

Underage users could still visit the website without an account, but would lose access to many of YouTube’s features – including “wellbeing settings” and “safety filters”.

Lord said the “rushed regulation misunderstands our platform and the way young Australians use it”.

“At YouTube, we believe in protecting kids in the digital world, not from the digital world.”

## ‘Outright weird’

YouTube said it would archive accounts so they could be reactivated when users turned 16.

“We will not delete or remove any of their existing content or data, and it will be waiting for them when they come back.”

Australian communications minister Anika Wells said YouTube’s criticism was “outright weird”.

“If YouTube is reminding us all that it is not safe and there’s

content not appropriate for age-restricted users on their website, that’s a problem that YouTube needs to fix,” she said.

There is keen interest in whether Australia’s sweeping restrictions can work as regulators around the globe wrestle with the potential dangers of social media.

The Australian government concedes the ban will be far from perfect at the outset, and some underage users will fall through the cracks as issues are ironed out.

But platforms face fines of Aus\$49.5 million (US\$32 million) if they fail to take “reasonable steps” to comply from next week.

Meta, Facebook’s parent company, has already started deactivating accounts based on information such as the age given when they were created.

An internet rights group last week launched a legal challenge to halt the ban.

The Digital Freedom Project said it had challenged the laws in Australia’s High Court, arguing they were an “unfair” assault on freedom of speech.

– AFP





US Border Patrol agents detain a man on the street yesterday in New Orleans, Louisiana. This came on the first day of the operation in Louisiana, 'Catahoula Crunch', launched by the Department of Homeland Security as a part of the immigration enforcement surge on undocumented immigrants in the United States. — AFP

## Family of Colombian killed in boat strike takes US to rights body

BOGOTÁ — The family of a Colombian man killed in a US military strike on his boat in the Caribbean has lodged a complaint against the United States with a Washington-based rights panel.

The family of 42-year-old Alejandro Carranza Medina, killed on September 15, reject assertions there were drugs on the vessel targeted in Washington's anti-narcotics military campaign, insisting he was a fisherman doing his job on the open sea.

Carranza is one of more than 80 people killed in recent weeks in US strikes in the Caribbean and the eastern Pacific on boats Washington claims, without providing evidence, were ferrying drugs.

Family members and victims' governments insist some of those killed were fishermen, and rights groups say the strikes are illegal even if the targets were in fact drug traffickers.

"We know that Pete Hegseth, US Secretary of Defense, was responsible for ordering the bombing of boats like those of Alejandro Carranza Medina and the murder of all those on such boats," reads the family's complaint seen by AFP yesterday.

It claimed the United States violated several of Carranza's human rights, including his right to life and to due process.

The complaint to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) said Hegseth gave the orders "despite the fact that he did not know the identity of those being targeted for these bombings and extra-judicial killings."

And it said US President Donald Trump "has ratified the conduct of Secretary Hegseth."

Despite a growing outcry, the Pentagon chief said on Tuesday the United States had "only just begun striking narco boats and putting narco-terrorists at the bottom of the ocean."

Pentagon Press Secretary Kingsley Wilson insisted the strikes "are lawful under both US and international law, with all actions in compliance with the law of armed conflict."

The IACHR is a quasi-judicial body of the Organisation of American States (OAS), created to promote and protect human rights in the region.

### A 'good man'

In an interview with AFP in October, Carranza's widow Katherine Hernández said he had been a "good man." He left behind four children.

"He had no ties to drug trafficking, and his daily activity was fishing," Hernández said.

Colombian President Gustavo Petro, who has called the US strikes "extrajudicial executions," has vowed support for the family in its quest for justice.

Trump has deployed the world's biggest aircraft carrier and an array of other military assets to the Caribbean, insisting they are there for counter-narcotics operations.

The administration insists it is effectively at war with alleged "narco-terrorists" and began carrying out strikes in early September.

Regional tensions have flared as a result, with Venezuela's leftist leader Nicolás Maduro accusing Washington of using drug trafficking as a pretext for seeking regime change in Caracas.

Ties between Bogotá and Washington are also at a low point.

Leftist Petro has been a vocal critic of the Trump administration's treatment of migrants and the boat strikes, earning him US sanctions and accusations of being involved in drug trafficking himself.

Trump removed Colombia from a list of allies in the fight against narco trafficking but the country has so far escaped harsher punishment — possibly as Washington awaits the right's likely return to power in 2026 elections. — AFP

## Netanyahu pardon plea seen as bid to ensure survival ahead of 2026 vote

Michael Blum

JERUSALEM — Benjamin Netanyahu's request for a pardon in three ongoing corruption cases is widely seen as his latest bid to ensure his political survival, as the canny premier stares down the prospect of close elections in 2026.

The first sitting Israeli prime minister to stand trial, Netanyahu has been dogged by the allegations for years, and has had to appear in front of a judge weekly for hearings.

He has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing and denounced the cases as a politically motivated plot against him.

He submitted his request on Sunday to President Isaac Herzog, who will now decide whether to take the rare move of pardoning Netanyahu before any conviction.

"The pardon request that Netanyahu's lawyers submitted is not a legal move. It is purely a political move," prominent columnist Nahum Barnea wrote in the Yediot Aharonot daily.

The request starts a negotiation led by Herzog that could see the trials end through a plea bargain agreement, a pardon or a combination of the two, the columnist said.

"If Herzog grants him a deluxe pardon he will be freed from his trial... he will ride that wave all the way to victory in the elections," he wrote on Monday.

"If the negotiations end in failure," he added, "Netanyahu will ride the wave of victimhood all the way to victory in the elections."

### 'Political tool'

Netanyahu, 76, is Israel's longest-serving premier, having spent more than 18 years in the post across three spells since 1996.

The next election must be held no later than November 2026, but could be even earlier if Netanyahu

chooses, or if his hand is forced by the loss of his very fragile majority.

The premier has already made it clear he intends to run again, though he is facing a tricky race.

Polls have shown that if an election were held today, Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party would win, putting him in prime position to form the next government.

But according to a Kan poll conducted the day of his pardon request, the prime minister's parliamentary bloc would win just 52 seats, compared to 58 for the opposition — not counting Arab parties, which are unlikely to join a coalition with either side.

Meanwhile, Netanyahu faces a wall of anger in Israel.

Nearly two-thirds of Israelis want him to acknowledge his responsibility for the security failures that led to Palestinian militant group Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel.

Opinions are mixed on the prospect of offering him clemency, with between 40 and 48 percent of Israelis opposing it, and 35 to 38 percent in favour, according to two surveys published after the request.

For Netanyahu, it is all about securing the next term, said legal expert Dorit Koskas, who said the premier was using the pardon as a "political tool".

He wants to "erase the consequences of his failings so he can continue his political career instead of finally being held accountable", she told AFP.

Political journalist Ari Shavit speculated in Yediot Aharonot that Netanyahu would propose a deal: "a pardon in exchange for a complete halt to the judicial reform" that deeply divided the country in 2023.

Netanyahu's government proposed far-reaching judicial reforms that critics said sought to weaken the

courts, prompting massive protests that were only curtailed after the onset of the Gaza war.

### Trump backing

But Netanyahu has one significant and powerful supporter: US President Donald Trump, who wrote to Herzog last month seeking a pardon for the prime minister.

Netanyahu said in a letter sent alongside the pardon request that an end to his trials would heal the divisions in Israel.

Although the Israeli opposition rejects a pardon without Netanyahu's withdrawal from political life, Herzog said on Monday he would focus only on Israel's "best interests" when he weighs the request.

According to political analyst Myriam Shermer, a pardon for Netanyahu would only reduce divisions if it allowed "a broad centrist coalition to emerge... after years of political deadlock".

Israel's system of proportional representation has often led to coalitions made up of very different parties which frequently results in unstable governments.

To achieve a broad centrist coalition, Shermer said the opposition must end its stigmatisation of Netanyahu, and the prime minister must agree to govern with parties other than his current far-right and ultra-Orthodox allies.

She added Netanyahu would also have to establish a "real commission that will examine the security and political failings" that led to the October 7 attack, which the premier opposes despite wide support across Israel for such a move.

Shermer said Netanyahu should "have no problem putting aside" the judicial reform in exchange for a final term, which the premier hopes will be "crowned with diplomatic successes", including his dream of normalisation with Saudi Arabia. — AFP



A student reads aloud during the start of classes at the Latin Patriarchate School inside the Holy Family Catholic Church compound sheltering displaced Palestinians in Gaza City yesterday. Israel said yesterday that it would open the Rafah crossing from Gaza to Egypt to allow Gazans to exit the Palestinian territory "in the coming days," but Egypt denied such a deal with Israel. — AFP



## Ex-king's memoirs hits bookstores in Spain



A customer looks at the book "Juan Carlos I. Reconciliation", of former Spanish King Juan Carlos's memoirs released in Spain yesterday, in a bookshop in Madrid. – AFP

MADRID – Former King Juan Carlos's memoirs went on sale in Spain yesterday, with the publication's warm words for the country's late autocrat Generalissimo Francisco Franco stirring debate over the former monarch's legacy.

Esther Gil, an employee of the Pasajes bookstore in central Madrid, said the shop had received around 50 pre-orders for the memoirs ahead of the Spanish edition's release.

"This has been one of the most awaited books to come out," she told AFP as she stood by a table where copies of the memoir called "Reconciliation" were on display.

"This is the first time the king has talked about personal stuff, and everyone was really curious about what he'd say. I guess it's partly just curiosity, but also a little bit of morbid fascination, and people love that."

The French-language edition of the 500-page memoir was first released in France last month, and the Spanish edition was the top-selling book on Amazon in Spain yesterday, according to the website.

In his book, the 87-year-old former monarch reflects on well-known moments from Spain's history as well as his extramarital affairs and financial scandals.

Among its most contentious passages are Juan Carlos's warm words for Franco, and ruminations on his role in the country's transition to democracy.

The former king wrote that he had "great respect" for Franco, who brought him to Spain from exile aged 10 to be raised as his successor.

He said the general "could even be somewhat tender and benevolent".

Culture Minister Ernest Urtasun has called this defence of

the late dictator "sickening" while Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said he was "surprised" by some of the content of the memoirs.

Franco separated Juan Carlos from his parents when he was 10 and groomed the boy to be his successor.

He was crowned two days after Franco's death in 1975.

Juan Carlos disappointed Francoists who hoped he would continue the dictator's legacy by quickly implementing reforms that led to democratic elections in 1977.

In an unexpected video released on Monday, Juan Carlos said he wrote the memoirs so that young people "can learn about the recent history of your country without distortions".

Juan Carlos abdicated in favour of his son, King Felipe VI, in 2014, and has lived in self-imposed exile in the United Arab Emirates since 2020. – AFP

## Peruvian presidential hopeful bloodied but safe after gun attack

LIMA – Peruvian presidential hopeful Rafael Belaúnde escaped bloodied but not seriously hurt on Tuesday from an attack by gunmen on his car south of the capital Lima, police said.

Two gunmen on a motorbike fired "eight or nine" shots at the SUV the 50-year-old politician was driving and the candidate returned fire, according to police chief General Oscar Arriola.

Three bullets shattered the front window, police said, leaving Belaúnde with blood stains on his face and shirt from cuts caused by broken glass, widely seen in images on TV and social media.

Belaúnde said the injuries were "scratches sustained after the incident," in the town of Cerro Azul, about 130 kilometers south of the capital Lima.

Using his own weapon, Belaúnde fired "at least 12 shots" at his attackers, Arriola told news outlet Perú 21. No gunshot injuries were reported.

Belaúnde, a former energy minister and grandson of two-term ex-president Fernando Belaúnde, told police he had not received any threats.

### 'A bad start'

Pedro Cateriano, a member of Belaúnde's Libertad Popular ("People's Freedom") party told RPP radio that the attack was "a bad start to the campaign" at a time Peru is gripped by a surge in graft and organised crime, giving rise to protests led by Gen Z demonstrators that have left dozens injured and at least one dead.

Belaúnde faces a group of at least 12 candidates ahead of the general elections on April 12.

He currently ranks near the bottom in opinion polls, which currently favour former Lima mayor Rafael López Aliaga and Keiko Fujimori, daughter of late former president Alberto Fujimori. Both right-wing politicians say they will be tough on organised crime.

"I strongly condemn this criminal act, a reflection of the violence that affects thousands of Peruvians every day. We cannot normalise

these criminal acts, which must be combated with the full force of the law," Keiko Fujimori wrote on X.

In recent years, a wave of extortion has claimed dozens of lives in Peru, particularly of bus drivers – some shot at the wheel if their companies refuse to pay protection money.

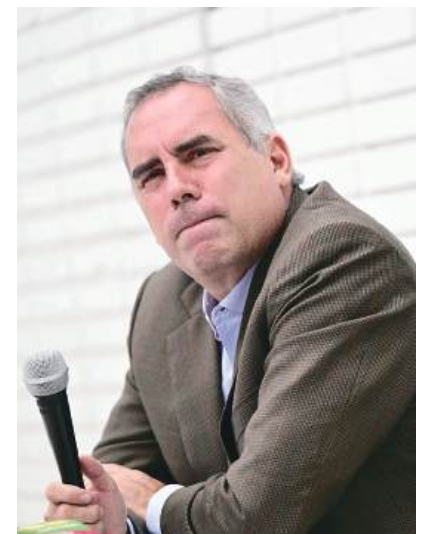
Experts say the practice has taken off amid high levels of post-COVID-19 pandemic poverty and unemployment, political instability following the 2022 ouster of president Pedro Castillo, and the domestic rise of gangs such as Venezuela's Tren de Aragua.

Since the beginning of the year, 56 bus drivers have been killed, according to the public prosecutor's office.

The unrest over crime triggered the impeachment of ex-president Dina Boluarte, who was replaced by interim leader José Jeri – Peru's seventh president since 2017.

Former Interior Minister Gino Costa, a friend of Belaúnde's, called on X for the government to "provide guarantees to presidential candidates and stop electoral violence now."

The next president of Peru will be sworn in on July 2026. – AFP



Peruvian presidential hopeful Rafael Belaúnde of the People's Freedom party looks on during a press conference in Lima yesterday. Belaúnde escaped bloodied but not seriously hurt on Tuesday from an attack by gunmen on his car south of the capital Lima, police said. – AFP

## Lula, Trump vow to boost joint efforts against organised crime: Brazil

BRASÍLIA – Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and his US counterpart Donald Trump agreed in a phone call on Tuesday to intensify cooperation in the fight against organised crime, the Brazilian presidency said.

Lula phoned Trump after the two men in October held their first official meeting, ushering in improved ties after months of growing animosity between Brasília and Washington.

During the 40-minute conversation, Lula said greater co-operation was needed between the two countries to fight organised crime, the presidency said in a statement.

The conversation came amid tensions over US strikes on alleged drug traffickers near the Venezuelan coast, which have killed at least 83 people since early September.

Lula highlighted recent police operations in Brazil aimed at

financially suffocating organised crime that had identified branches of criminal groups operating from abroad.

Trump "expressed complete willingness to work with Brazil" in fighting these organisations, said the statement.

Brazilian authorities have recently carried out several operations against one of the country's largest crime groups, the First Capital Command (PCC).

Investigators revealed that the crime group was laundering huge amounts of money through gas stations that was then moved into digital banks and payment apps.

In Rio de Janeiro, police have stepped up operations against another major criminal faction, Comando Vermelho ("Red Command"), one of which left 122 people dead in October.

The two criminal groups

control cocaine trafficking in Brazil, with a reach spreading across Latin America and, in the case of the PCC, to Europe.

Lula and Trump also discussed trade tariffs.

After a flurry of negotiations, Washington last month removed a punitive 40-percent tariff placed on some Brazilian goods, including meat, coffee and fruit.

Trump imposed the additional tariff in response to the trial of his ally, far-right former president Jair Bolsonaro, who is serving a 27-year sentence for plotting a coup.

Lula said the removal of the tariff was "very positive" but pointed out that other products are still impacted and needed to be discussed.

"Brazil wants to move quickly in these negotiations," Lula told Trump, according to the statement.

The two presidents agreed to speak again soon. – AFP

## Zara owner Inditex posts higher profits

MADRID – Zara owner Inditex, the world's largest fashion retailer, posted yesterday higher profits for the first nine months of its fiscal year despite stiffer competition from low-cost clothing outlets like Shein and Primark.

The Spanish group, which owns other top brands including Massimo Dutti, Pull & Bear and Bershka, posted a net profit of 4.6 billion euros (US\$5.3 billion) between February 1 and October 31.

Inditex pointed to "satisfactory" sales in stores and online, which rose 2.7 percent to reach 28.2 billion euros for the profit rise.

Inditex CEO Oscar Garcia Maceiras told a news conference sales had a "solid start" to the fourth quarter,

rising 10.6 percent in November over the same time last year.

With fast-growing budget fashion retailer Shein taking share at the cheaper end of the market, Inditex's main brand Zara has moved to attract more discerning shoppers and offered more expensive clothing.

Inditex is also improving its logistics to deliver online orders faster than rivals and investing in larger, more modern stores while it shuts smaller shops.

Inditex said it had made "important relocations and refurbishments" at its locations in Osaka, Maastricht and Barcelona.

The company said a major new distribution hub in Zaragoza in northeastern Spain was now operational. – AFP



## Football shorts

### Sevilla hit with partial stadium closure after derby incidents

SEVILLE — Sevilla were issued a three-match partial stadium closure yesterday after some of their supporters threw objects onto the pitch during a 2-0 derby defeat by Real Betis on Sunday.

The match was suspended for 15 minutes after home fans at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan tossed objects including plastic bottles and lighters at players in the final stages of the La Liga clash.

The Spanish football federation's disciplinary committee fined Sevilla 45,000 euros (US\$52,000) and imposed the three-game closure for what they deemed "very serious violations" of the disciplinary code.

The three Sevilla home matches affected in La Liga are against Real Oviedo, Levante and Celta Vigo.

Sevilla are 13<sup>th</sup>, four points above the relegation zone after the defeat by their city rivals. — AFP

### Barca's Olmo out for month after shoulder dislocation

BARCELONA — Barcelona midfielder Dani Olmo faces a month on the sidelines after dislocating his shoulder, the club said yesterday.

"Olmo suffered a dislocation in his left shoulder during yesterday's match against Atletico Madrid," said Barca in a statement.

"Following the tests carried out, a conservative treatment has been

chosen. The approximate recovery time is one month."

Spain international Olmo suffered the injury falling as he scored in the 3-1 La Liga win over Atletico on Tuesday which took Barca four points clear at the top of the table.

The 27-year-old has suffered various injury problems since joining the Catalan giants in 2024 from RB Leipzig.

Olmo joins Fermin Lopez, Gavi and Marc-Andre ter Stegen on the sidelines, ahead of a key Champions League match against Eintracht Frankfurt next week. — AFP

### Bundesliga strugglers Mainz sack coach Henriksen

BERLIN — Bundesliga club Mainz yesterday sacked coach Bo Henriksen, with the side stranded at the bottom of the table after just one win this season.

The 50-year-old Dane took over Mainz in February 2024 with the club nine points from safety and beat the odds to keep them in the top flight, losing just two of their final 13 games.

Henriksen took Mainz to sixth in the table, the equal best placing in their history, securing them a Conference League spot.

In the top flight since 2009-10, Mainz have been a proving ground for top coaches. Former Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp and current England boss Thomas Tuchel started out at Mainz, while Bayer Leverkusen manager Kasper Hjulmand began his Bundesliga career with them. — AFP

## Football world braces for 2026 World Cup draw with Trump presiding



Andy Scott

WASHINGTON — The draw for the 2026 World Cup — the biggest edition of football's global showpiece ever held — takes place in Washington tomorrow with US President Donald Trump expected to feature prominently in proceedings.

The expanded 48-team tournament — up from the 32-nation field that competed at the 2022 Qatar World Cup — will be played across the United States, Mexico and Canada from June 11 to July 19 next year.

Trump's attendance at the Kennedy Center ceremony underscores his rapport with FIFA chief Gianni Infantino, who has made several visits to the White House and even joined Trump at international summits in the years since the joint North American bid was awarded the tournament in 2018.

Infantino's close relationship with Trump is widely expected to see the US leader be named as the first recipient of a new FIFA Peace Prize, which will be awarded at the draw.

Trump has made the World Cup a centrepiece event of both his second presidency and the 250<sup>th</sup>

anniversary of US independence next year.

But he has not hesitated to bring domestic politics into the event, threatening to move World Cup matches from Democratic-run cities if he deems conditions to be "unsafe".

### First-time qualifiers

The pretenders to the title which a Lionel Messi-inspired Argentina won for the third time in 2022 in Qatar will be drawn into 12 groups.

The top seeds are Argentina, the host nations USA, Mexico and Canada, record five-time winners Brazil, two-time champions France, four-time winners Germany as well as Spain, England, Portugal, Netherlands and Belgium.

The evergreen Cristiano Ronaldo, who will be 41 when the tournament kicks off, has said his sixth World Cup finals with Portugal will be his last and he would relish crowning his long career with a first global title for his country.

The enlarged cast list also means an opportunity for a handful of first-time qualifiers, including Cape Verde, Jordan and the tiny Caribbean nation of Curacao.

With six of the field still to be decided in playoffs, the favourites will want to avoid Italy, who won the World Cup as recently as 2006 but have not qualified since 2014.

Despite an error-strewn qualification campaign, the Italians can still reach the finals by winning two sudden-death games.

The opening match will be held at the Azteca Stadium in Mexico City, which also hosted the 1970 and 1986 finals, before the tournament unfolds over nearly six weeks, culminating in the final at the MetLife Stadium in New Jersey.

Because of the complexity, teams will only learn the full details of their match venues and kickoff times on Saturday, a day after the draw.

Supporters' groups have warned fans could face eye-watering sums for tickets for the most attractive games due to FIFA's decision to use dynamic ticket pricing.

Prices on popular secondary market websites in the United States such as Stubhub and Seatgeek have already skyrocketed, with prices for the July 19 World Cup final in New Jersey starting at around US\$7,000. — AFP

## Germany to host 2029 women's Euros



Borussia Dortmund's German CEO and UEFA Vice-President Hans-Joachim Watzke (second left), German Football Association (DFB) president Bernd Neuendorf (third left), Vice-President (Equality and diversity) of the German Football Association (DFB) Celia Sasic (centre), Germany's football player Giulia Gwinn (centre right) and Germany's coach Christian Wueck (fourth right) pose after Germany was elected to host the UEFA Women's EURO 2029 football tournament during an announcement ceremony at the UEFA headquarters, the House of European Football, in Nyon, Switzerland yesterday. — AFP



NYON — European football's governing body UEFA yesterday announced that Germany will host the women's 2029 European Championship, where England will be the two-time defending champions.

Germany, the record eight-time winners of the Euros, beat off competition from Poland and a joint Sweden-Denmark bid, and will host the tournament for the third time, just five years after doing so for the men's Euros.

It is a measure of compensation for Germany, who missed out on hosting the 2027 women's World Cup when FIFA picked Brazil instead.

"Incredible! A dream come true. After 2001, we are once again hosting a Women's EURO in Germany," German football

federation (DFB) vice president for women's and girls' football Heike Ullrich said.

In its bid, Germany had vowed to help women's football realise its "enormous potential".

The eight host stadiums include Munich's 70,000-capacity Allianz Arena, Dortmund's 66,000-capacity Westfalenstadion and five more stadiums with between 45,000 and 54,000 capacities.

Germany believes it will be able to sell more than a million tickets to the 31 matches - compared to 657,291 for this year's tournament in Switzerland.

"We are totally convinced that the tournament in Germany will attract more than a million fans," DFB president Bernd Neuendorf said, adding he felt sure the

tournament would generate a profit "for the first time".

Germany highlighted its central European position and strong public transport links in its bid.

Sustainability has become a key issue in bidding processes for major events, given the damaging environmental impact of such tournaments.

Switzerland boasted that 86 per cent of ticket holders for its tournament used either public transport, bicycles or walked to reach their venues.

"Hosting such an important tournament is an honour, but it also comes with a great responsibility," Neuendorf added.

"After the wonderful UEFA Women's EURO 2025 in Switzerland, we want to set new standards." — AFP

## FIFA gives clubs an extra week before releasing AFCON stars



PARIS — Star players such as Mohamed Salah, Bryan Mbeumo and Achraf Hakimi will be able to play for their clubs for an extra week until December 15 before joining their national teams at the Africa Cup of Nations, FIFA said yesterday.

Top European clubs such as Salah's Liverpool, Mbeumo's Manchester United and Hakimi's Paris Saint-Germain face losing key players for up to five weeks for the 24-nation tournament in Morocco from December 21 to January 18.

But they had feared it could be even longer until FIFA amended its rules to soften the blow for clubs by delaying the release date by a week.

The decision came after "fruitful consultations led by FIFA with key stakeholders and thanks to the spirit of solidarity demonstrated by CAF to reduce the impact on various parties," FIFA said in a statement, referring to the tournament organisers, the Confederation of African Football.

"It was also decided to encourage member associations participating in the 2025 AFCON and clubs releasing players... to engage in good faith bilateral discussions in order to find appropriate individual solutions," FIFA added.

Before FIFA's ruling, players had been required to show up for international duty by December 8, meaning that English Premier League clubs

could have been without vital players for up to seven or even eight league matches during a particularly busy part of the season.

The competition falls at an awkward moment for the likes of high-flying Sunderland and rock-bottom Wolverhampton Wanderers who could be without up to seven and five players respectively.

Liverpool will be without Egypt forward Salah, Manchester City will have to do without his international team-mate Omar Marmoush and Algeria's left-back Rayan Ait-Nouri, while United will lose Cameroon's Mbeumo, Ivory Coast winger Amad Diallo and Morocco full-back Noussair Mazraoui.

On the other hand, league leaders Arsenal, Chelsea and Leeds will be unaffected.

French and European champions PSG will lose Hakimi, the reigning African player of the year, but other European giants such as Real Madrid, Barcelona, AC Milan and Juventus will not see any players involved.

Bayern Munich's Senegal forward Nicolas Jackson, on loan from Chelsea, will be at the tournament but will not miss many Bundesliga games as the league will be on its winter break from December 22 to January 8.

Morocco, Egypt, Algeria and Senegal are amongst the tournament favourites. — AFP





# Principal reaction to 2027 Rugby World Cup draw

PARIS – The 2027 Rugby World Cup draw was held yesterday in Sydney with the hosts Australia drawn in the same pool as arch-rivals New Zealand.

AFP Sport highlights the pick of the reaction from the coaches and team captains around the world:

## Pool A – (New Zealand, Australia, Chile, Hong Kong)

**Joe Schmidt (Australia)**

“It would immediately excite players, all the fans,” said the 60-year-old New Zealander about the All Blacks potentially playing the Wallabies in the tournament opener.

“I think it would be a great way to kick it off. It’s a trans-Tasman battle, which I think both teams are going to love having,” added Schmidt, who steps down in mid-2026.

## Pool B – (South Africa, Italy, Georgia, Romania)

**Rassie Erasmus (South Africa)**

“We are pleased with the pool we have been drawn in, but this is a World Cup, and every team will go out there with great passion and do their utmost to represent their nations with pride.

“There have been surprises in the tournament before, so we’ll need to be up mentally and physically for every match,” said the 53-year-

old, mindful of when Japan upset the Springboks in a 2015 pool match in Brighton.

## Pool C – (Argentina, Fiji, Spain, Canada)

**Pablo Bouza (Spain)**

“I didn’t want to play against Argentina because they’re at a very high level, and besides, I played there and worked with the team for almost eight years. I know some of the staff and I have friends there.”

## Pool D – (Ireland, Scotland, Uruguay, Portugal)

**Andy Farrell (Ireland)**

“I suppose you’re always looking at which side of the draw you could come out, but if you don’t look after your own side of things first and foremost then things could slightly happen a little bit differently,” said the 50-year-old, reacting to what appears to be a more favourable draw than they had in 2023.

“But all in all, I was super excited actually, it got the old hairs on the skin standing up, definitely, so that’s the way it should be.”

**Gregor Townsend (Scotland)**

“Obviously Ireland are a team that has beaten us pretty regularly the last few years, so we’ll have to be better to beat them,” said the 52-year-old, whose side has been beaten in the pool stage by the Irish in the past two

Rugby World Cups.

“We have two occasions, one in Dublin, one at Murrayfield before the World Cup. The goal every year is to try and beat Ireland but it’s even more important now. It’ll be more difficult in the World Cup if we haven’t managed to beat Ireland in the next two seasons.”

## Pool E (France, Japan, USA, Samoa)

**Fabien Galthie (France)**

“It is a very manageable pool. It is the ideal draw to allow us to build momentum,” said the 56-year-old, who captained the French side that lost to eventual champions England in the 2003 semi-finals in Australia.

Things could get harder for France in the knock-outs, with a potential semi-final against either New Zealand or South Africa - who knocked them out on home soil in the quarters two years ago.

“To confront South Africa would be formidable, colossal, an immense challenge.

“Our ambition is to be crowned world champions. It will be very difficult as France has never achieved that, and our ambition is to do just that.”

**Eddie Jones (Japan)**

“We want to be the team of the World Cup. We want to be the team that everyone wants to watch, and to do that a best four finish would

be absolutely fantastic,” said the 65-year-old Australian, who guided Australia and England to the 2003 and 2019 finals respectively.

“To do that we’re going to have to play above ourselves, and we understand that’s going to take an extraordinary effort, but there’s no reason why we can’t do it.

## Pool F (England, Wales, Tonga, Zimbabwe)

**Maro Itoje (England)**

“It wasn’t the best day from an England point of view but hopefully this time round it’ll be a little different,” said the 31-year-old captain referring to the 2015 pool defeat to Wales that eliminated hosts England from the tournament.

“Our ambition is to do very well and win this tournament. That’s our objective, but to do that we know we have to make sure we get our preparation right, and the next two years leading to the World Cup is massive.”

**Steve Tandy (Wales)**

“There were lots of tough experiences this autumn but a lot of positive ones as well,” said the 45-year-old about a team that was hammered 73-0 by South Africa at the weekend, suffering a 12<sup>th</sup> defeat in their last 14 Tests.

“We will remain really positive with this group because I do believe in them. Most of it is about spending time and staying connected so we can grow our game as we go.” – AFP

## China sweep Croatia to maintain winning run at ITTF Mixed Team World Cup

### Table tennis

CHENGDU – China overwhelmed Croatia 8-0 for its fourth straight win at the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) Mixed Team World Cup yesterday.

Mixed doubles Olympic champions Wang Chuqin and Sun Yingsha helped China to a 3-0 lead by dispatching Ivor Ban and Hana Arapovic 11-6, 11-5, 11-5.

“As the tournament progresses, our opponents will be stronger. Each individual match will be important to the final result, hopefully we can stay together and go all out in every match for the win,” commented Sun.

Kuai Man added another three points for the defending champions with an 11-2, 11-5, 11-5 victory over Ivana Malobabic.

“Their arrangements of players were a little

different from what we had expected. Facing a chopper, I made adjustments accordingly before the match, and just showed my level today,” said Kuai.

Lin Shidong secured China’s one-sided win after getting past Tomislav Pucar 14-12, 11-4.

“As my teammates had already built a 6-0 lead in games, I felt steady and sure when entering the play, and was given more space to give full play to myself,” Lin noted.

South Korea edged France 8-7 in a full-distance battle. With the score tied at 6-6 after four matches, Kim Na-yeong and Choi Hyojoo came back from one game down to upset France’s Yuan Jianan and Prithika Pavade 8-11, 11-3, 11-9 in the women’s doubles decider.

Also yesterday, Japan outplayed Hong Kong, China 8-2, and Germany beat Sweden 8-5. Japan and Germany also went unbeaten after four rounds.

– Xinhua



This photograph shows the ski jump stadium in Courchevel, which is set to host the ski jumping competitions at the 2030 Winter Olympics, in Courchevel La Praz, central-eastern France on Tuesday.

– AFP

## Serena Williams denies she plans tennis return despite registering for drug tests

### Tennis

LONDON – Serena Williams insisted Tuesday she had no plans to make a return to tennis after her registration with the sport’s drug-testing body sparked reports of a dramatic comeback.

The 23-time Grand Slam singles champion has not competed since a third-round loss at the 2022 US Open left her one short of the all-time record of 24 Grand Slam singles titles, held by Margaret Court in the women’s game and Novak Djokovic in men’s tennis.

“It is correct that she is back on the Registered Testing Pool list,” Adrian Bassett, a spokesman for the International Tennis Integrity Agency, the sport’s drug-testing body told AFP in London on Tuesday in response to media reports the 44-year-old American had registered.

“At this stage we have no other information.”

But Williams denied she was planning a return to competitive tennis by posting later Tuesday on X: “Omg (Oh My God) yall (you all) I’m NOT coming back. This wildfire is crazy”.

Following her three-set defeat by Australia’s Ajla

Tomljanovic at Flushing Meadows three years ago, Williams said she did not want to use the word “retiring” but instead explained she was “evolving” away from tennis.

Players who decide to return to testing need to provide information about their time and locations when they are available to give samples.

They also need to complete testing for six months before they are allowed to return to competition.

Williams’s older sister, Venus, - seven times major singles champion - returned to tennis in July at the age of 45 after almost two years away from the Women’s Tennis Association tour.

When Venus, a seven-time major singles champion, came back at the DC Open, she spoke about wishing Serena would join her on tour again. The sisters won 14 Grand Slam doubles titles as a pair and three Olympic gold medals as well.

“I keep saying to my team: The only thing that would make this better is if she was here,” said Venus at the time. “Like, we always did everything together, so of course I miss her.

“But if she comes back, I’m sure she’ll let y’all know.”

– AFP



India’s Rohit Sharma (left) congratulates South Africa’s Corbin Bosch for his team’s win at the end of the second one-day international (ODI) cricket match between India and South Africa at the Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh International Cricket Stadium in Raipur, India yesterday. Opener Aiden Markram hit a sparkling century to help South Africa chase down 359 for a series-levelling win over India in the second one-day international yesterday. Virat Kohli’s second successive century went in vain after South Africa achieved the target with four balls and four wickets to spare in Raipur.

– AFP



# Fabergé’s rare Winter Egg fetches record US\$30 million at auction



“The Winter Egg” by Fabergé, which was commissioned by Russian emperor Nicholas II as an Easter gift to his mother in 1913, is displayed during a media preview by auction house Christie’s in London last Thursday. – AFP



“The Winter Egg” by Fabergé, opened to reveal its beautiful “surprise” inside, is displayed during a media preview by auction house Christie’s in London last Thursday. – AFP

Alexandra Del Peral and Joe Jackson

LONDON – Fabergé’s The Winter Egg, considered one of his most beautiful creations, sold for nearly £23 million (US\$30 million) at auction on Tuesday in London, smashing the sales record for the legendary jeweller of Imperial Russia.

It is the third time the delicate bejewelled egg, which went under the hammer at Christie’s auction house, has set an auction record for a work by Carl Fabergé.

An as-yet unnamed buyer stumped up £22.9 million for the dazzling piece created more than a century ago, amid strong interest among international collectors, according to the London auctioneers.

It had put a pre-sale estimate price of more than £20 million on “the exquisite” crystal egg, commissioned by Russia’s Tsar Nicholas II for his mother in 1913.

“Today’s result sets a new world auction record for a work by Fabergé, reaffirming the enduring significance of this masterpiece,” Christie’s Margo Oganessian said in a statement minutes after the hammer came down.

She added that the sale celebrated “the rarity and brilliance of what is widely regarded as one of Fabergé’s finest creations, both technically and artistically”.

The previous sales record for a Fabergé egg – the Rothschild Egg, which was not made for the Russian imperial family – had stood at nearly £9 million since it was sold in 2007 to a Russian collector.

Fabergé, the master jeweller whose creations bedazzled Russia, created 50 Imperial Easter Eggs for the then-ruling Romanov family over a 31-year period, making them incredibly rare and valuable, Oganessian told AFP ahead of the auction.

They were commissioned as Easter gifts in a tradition started by Tsar Alexander III in the 1880s.

His heir Nicholas II had an annual standing order for two Easter Eggs to be made for his mother and his wife, until the fall of the Romanovs in the 1917 Russian Revolution.

Today, only 43 of the Imperial Easter Eggs remain, with seven missing.

The imperial eggs have enjoyed renewed interest on the art market in recent decades, mainly among wealthy Russians keen to acquire a piece of their country’s history.

## ‘One of the rarest’

Carved from delicate rock crystal, the Winter Egg is an icy-looking orb studded with around 4,500 rose-cut diamonds, and stands at only 14 centimetres tall.

Beyond its opulence, it is the “technique and craftsmanship” that

makes it exceptional, according to Oganessian.

“The Winter Egg is truly one of the rarest items that you can find,” she explained. “It’s really hard to comprehend how Fabergé created it.”

The egg and its base are sculpted from crystal featuring diamond-encrusted platinum snowflakes.

Inside, it contains a delicious secret: a bouquet of flowers made of white quartz anemones held by gold wire stems, gathered in a platinum basket.

Like many other Romanov possessions, the egg bears witness to Russian history. It was transferred from Saint Petersburg to Moscow in 1920 after the revolution.

As with many other Imperial Eggs, it was sold by the Soviet government to generate foreign currency and was acquired by London jeweller Wartski between 1929 and 1933, according to Christie’s.

The Winter Egg was subsequently part of several British collections but was considered lost from 1975, the auction house said in an essay attached to the sale lot online.

“For 20 years, experts and specialists lost sight of it until 1994, when it was rediscovered and brought to Christie’s for sale in Geneva,” said Oganessian.

Eight years later, in 2002, it was sold again for a record US\$9.6 million in New York. – AFP

## Princess Catherine to hail ‘power of hope’ in Christmas carol address

LONDON – Britain’s Princess Catherine will hail the power of “togetherness” during “uncertain” times in a letter to guests at her Christmas carol service, Kensington Palace said on Tuesday.

“At a time when life can sometimes feel fragmented or uncertain, the Christmas season invites us to remember the power of reaching out to one another with generosity of heart, understanding and hope,” the princess wrote in a letter released ahead of the annual carol service on Friday.

It will be the fifth time she hosts the “Together at Christmas” service at London’s Westminster Abbey.

“This carol service offers a moment of collective togetherness,

a chance to celebrate the spirit of community and service, and to honour the visible and invisible bonds that unite us all,” added Kate, as the wife of heir-to-the-throne Prince William is popularly known.

The 43-year-old future queen announced she was cancer-free in September 2024, months after revealing she was undergoing chemotherapy for an undisclosed cancer in March that year.

During last year’s Christmas service, one of her first public appearances after completing her cancer treatment, the princess reflected on the role of “love” in “the most difficult times” in her letter to guests.

This year, her letter will focus

on the importance of “simple acts of care”, and how Christmas “reminds us how deeply our lives are woven together”.

“At its heart, Christmas speaks of love taking form in the simplest, most human ways. Not in sentimental or grand gestures, but gentle ones,” she writes.

“Our words, our choices, and even the ways we look out for one another – they ripple outward, touching lives we may never see.”

Catherine has addressed similar themes of forging connections and acts of kindness in recent engagements involving charities she supports, including working with children and families.

– AFP

## Sabrina Carpenter condemns ‘evil’ use of her music in White House video

NEW YORK - US pop singer Sabrina Carpenter on Tuesday disavowed the use of one of her songs in a video shared by the White House on social media, describing the clip depicting immigration enforcement raids as “evil and disgusting.”

The video, posted on Monday, features Carpenter’s 2024 song “Juno” accompanying footage of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents in action, tackling people and clipping handcuffs onto detainees.

“This video is evil and disgusting. Do not ever involve

me or my music to benefit your inhumane agenda,” Carpenter wrote in response to the White House post.

White House spokeswoman Abigail Jackson retorted: “Here’s a Short ‘n Sweet message for Sabrina Carpenter: we won’t apologise for deporting dangerous criminal illegal murderers, rapists, and paedophiles from our country. Anyone who would defend these sick monsters must be stupid, or is it slow?”

Several other artists have protested President Donald Trump and his team’s use of their music.

US singer and guitarist Kenny Loggins recently demanded the removal of a video posted by the president that used his hit “Danger Zone” from the movie “Top Gun.”

The video used AI-generated images of Trump as a fighter pilot dropping excrement on political opponents.

In 2024, Céline Dion condemned the use of one of her songs, “My Heart Will Go On,” in a campaign video, and Beyoncé reacted similarly over use of her song “Freedom” the same year. – AFP



US actress, model and TV personality Jenny McCarthy poses upon arrival for the premiere of Universal Pictures’ “Five Nights at Freddy’s 2” at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, California on Tuesday. McCarthy, 53, began her career in 1993 as a nude model for Playboy magazine and was later named their Playmate of the Year. “Five Nights at Freddy’s 2” is an American supernatural horror film based on the video game series “Five Nights at Freddy’s”. It is the sequel to the 2023 film adaptation. – AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -6°C~7°C	Manila 22°C~31°C	New York -5°C~5°C	Lisbon 12°C~17°C
Shanghai 4°C~12°C	Bangkok 24°C~33°C	London 0°C~9°C	Rio de Janeiro 20°C~25°C
Hong Kong 15°C~21°C	Tokyo 1°C~11°C	Frankfurt 1°C~4°C	Luanda 24°C~28°C
Taipei 16°C~21°C	Singapore 23°C~31°C	Vancouver 6°C~8°C	Maputo 17°C~26°C
Guangzhou 14°C~22°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~31°C	Paris 1°C~8°C	Dili 22°C~32°C
Nanjing 2°C~12°C	Jakarta 23°C~31°C	Moscow -1°C~3°C	São Tomé 25°C~28°C
Guilin 11°C~17°C	Seoul -6°C~3°C	Las Vegas 3°C~14°C	Praia 22°C~27°C
Xi'an -3°C~11°C	Sydney 18°C~30°C	Monte Carlo 8°C~13°C	Bissau 19°C~32°C





**1 Yurt glamping**  
A drone photo taken yesterday shows yurts on the snow-covered Chenbarhu Banner Grassland in Hulun Buir, north China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. - Xinhua

**2 Precious cargo**  
A man wades through neck-deep floodwaters with a rescued cat in a styrofoam box in Kuala Simpang village in Aceh Tamiang, North Sumatra, Indonesia on Sunday. - AFP

**3 Season's fashion accessory!**  
A demonstrator wearing a mask takes part in a protest demanding the government take action to reduce air pollution in New Delhi, India yesterday. - AFP

**4 Street legal - race track ready!**  
Visitors look at a Radical RXC car at the Essen Motor Show in Essen, western Germany yesterday. The Essen Motor Show, featuring the areas of performance & racing, tuning & lifestyle, motorsport and classic cars, takes place from November 29 to December 7, 2025. - AFP

**5 Bright and beautiful**  
Colombian dancers perform during the International Cultural Folk Festival in Amritsar, India yesterday. - AFP

**6 Blinded by the light!**  
This handout document obtained yesterday from NASA shows an image simulating how lights from satellites contaminate images of the universe taken by space telescopes. Light from the half a million satellites that humanity is planning to launch into Earth's orbit in the coming years could contaminate almost all the images taken by space telescopes, NASA astronomers warned yesterday. Scientists have already been sounding the alarm about how light pollution from increasingly massive satellites threaten the future of dark skies seen from the ground. - AFP

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