

## Stolen Bruce Lee statue 'returns' to Bosnian town

SARAJEVO – A restored statue honouring late martial arts legend Bruce Lee (李小龍) was returned to its rightful place yesterday in a Bosnian town, more than a year after it was stolen, local media reported.

The life-size bronze statue of the kung-fu cinema icon in a defensive position holding nun chuck kung-fu sticks was originally unveiled in a park in Mostar in 2005. It has been vandalised several times since.

Lee was chosen as a hero that all ethnic groups could relate to in a town that remains deeply divided after fierce fighting between Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Muslims during the country's 1990s war.

The statue disappeared from the park in March 2024 but was found a few days later cut into several pieces for sale as scrap metal.

Police soon found the perpetrator who had ripped the statue from its pedestal and he received a 10-month jail sentence earlier this year.

The theft sparked public outrage in the southern town where the statue became an attraction.

Yesterday, the town's tourist board head Elvira Cemalovic stressed the importance of the statue for Mostar residents as a symbol of "justice and peace", N1 regional broadcaster reported. – AFP



Undated file photo of the statue of Bruce Lee in a park in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina – Photo courtesy of Sarajevo Times

# Sam vows to overcome all reform challenges by fully implementing Xi's instructions

Tony Wong

Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai yesterday pledged his government's commitment to overcome all challenges expected to arise during its ongoing governance reform campaign, through the full implementation of President Xi Jinping's instructions for Macau.

Sam also said that his government has decided that investments made in Hengqin by Macau's gaming operators can also be regarded as part of the total amounts of non-gaming investments that they have promised to make to Macau.

Sam also underlined yesterday that his government will resolutely ensure the implementation of the spirit of President Xi Jinping's important instructions concerning the fire disaster in Hong Kong's Tai Po District last month, including strengthening its fire-prevention inspections of key venues and facilities.

Sam made the remarks during a press briefing yesterday afternoon summarising his first annual duty visit to Beijing where he briefed Xi on Tuesday about Macau's latest political, economic and social development, his government's work and achievements this year, and his government's policy guidelines for next year.

The press briefing was held at a pressroom in the local airport in Taipa yesterday afternoon upon Sam's return to Macau. He travelled to the nation's capital on Monday for his three-day visit.

This was Sam's first annual duty visit to Beijing to deliver his work report to Xi since he took office as the MSAR's chief executive on December 20 last year.

Sam underlined that Xi fully recognises the MSAR's government work while making important instructions and new requirements for Macau, pledging that his government will plan the next phase of key tasks in compliance with Xi's important remarks and instructions.



Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai addresses yesterday's media briefing at a pressroom in Macau International Airport in Taipa. – Photo: Rui Pastorin

## Sam's work report covering 6 aspects

Sam said that his work report delivered to Xi covered six major aspects.

**First**, Sam underlined his government's commitment to earnestly respecting and safeguarding the central authorities' overall jurisdiction over the MSAR. He said that the local government has treated the safeguarding of the nation's sovereignty, security, and development interests as the highest principle in implementing the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, while strengthening its communication with the central authorities concerning the MSAR's major policies, major decisions and important matters and complying with the central authorities' respective instructions and guidance.

**Second**, Sam said, his government has always regarded the safeguarding of national security as the primary principle of its governance. The local government has faithfully fulfilled the main responsibility for safeguarding national security, and enhanced political sensitivity, ensuring that no problems arise in the field of national security, he said.

Sam noted that the MSAR government has formulated and implemented various tasks aiming to strengthen its safeguarding of national security, including its preparation for drafting new legislation regulating the organisational structure and operation of the MSAR's Committee for Safeguarding National Security.

Continued on p.5

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The Macau Post Daily

## Airbus delivers 800<sup>th</sup> China-assembled A320 family aircraft

European aircraft manufacturer Airbus yesterday delivered its 800<sup>th</sup> A320 family aircraft assembled at its A320 Family Final Assembly Line Asia (FALA) in north China's Tianjin Municipality.

– Story on p. 6

## Hydrogen plays part in global warming: study

Hydrogen has long been touted as a possible solution to the climate crisis, but it could also be a small part of the problem, a study warned yesterday.

– Story on p. 11

## Sheinbaum calls on UN to prevent 'bloodshed' in Venezuela

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum urged the United Nations yesterday to "prevent any bloodshed" in Venezuela, as US President Donald Trump piled pressure on the South American country.

– Story on p. 12



## Police nab gambler for robbing currency exchange dealer of HK\$500,000

Ada Lei

The Judiciary Police (PJ) apprehended a man from the Chinese mainland for robbing a middle-aged woman of HK\$500,000 in cash and chips in an illegal currency exchange deal, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Ho Wai Lok said during a special press conference yesterday.

Ho identified the suspect as a 38-year-old male surnamed Bi who claimed to be jobless. The victim is a non-resident worker (NRW) from the Chinese mainland moonlighting as an illegal currency exchange dealer in Macau.

According to Ho, the Judiciary Police (PJ) received a referral on Monday evening from the Public Security Police (PSP) about the woman who had been robbed by Bi in a hotel guestroom in Taipa.

Ho noted that the victim was contacted by Bi on Monday afternoon, who asked to exchange HK\$500,000 for gambling purposes and arranged to meet in a hotel guestroom in Taipa. The victim arrived at the room carrying HK\$500,000, which included HK\$100,000 in cash and four chips valued at HK\$100,000 each. Bi first demanded that she hand over the funds. Then, under the pretext of needing her assistance with a newly purchased phone, Bi asked her to sit on the edge of the bed. Suddenly, Bi grabbed her neck and forced her down onto the bed, causing her phone to fall to the floor. He then repeatedly threatened to hurt her, telling her to surrender her cash right away, and not to resist.

Ho added that Bi used plastic ties to bind her hands and ankles, stuffed a wad of paper in her mouth, and sealed her mouth, eyes, and head with tape to prevent her from calling for help or seeing anything. Finally, Bi tied her to a chair in the room with a bathrobe belt and fled with the stolen cash and chips, along with the victim's smartphone.

Ho said that the victim managed to tear the tape off her face and the plastic ties from her ankles, escaping to the hotel lobby to seek help from the staff before reporting the case to the police. The victim sustained injuries, with signs of binding and bruising on her hands and ankles, as well as abrasions on her neck and face.

The police identified Bi as the suspect and apprehended him later that night in a casino in Taipa. The police recovered HK\$30,000 in chips from Bi.

Ho mentioned that Bi had come up with the idea of committing the robbery after gambling away all his money and had prepared the tape and plastic ties for binding beforehand. Under questioning, Bi claimed that he had transferred part of the stolen money to his mainland bank account and gambled away all the remaining money, apart from the HK\$30,000 seized by the police.

Bi was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, facing a robbery charge.

Ho added that the police would launch a separate investigation into the victim's engagement in illegal currency exchange activities. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the hooded robbery suspect from the Chinese mainland to a PJ van outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday.

— Photo: Ada Lei

## Programme aims to boost transformation & upgrading of catering sector: CPTTM chief



Macau Productivity and Technology Transfer Centre (CPTTM) Director-General Victoria Alexa Kuan Chan (second from right), United Association of Food and Beverage Merchants of Macau (UAFBMM) Chairman Lei U Weng (second from left), Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED) Technology Department Chief Iong Nin Fai (left) and CPTTM Senior Manager Terence Liem (林濤) look on during yesterday's press conference at the CPTTM Creative Fashion and Image Department (CFI) on Rua dos Pescadores (漁翁街).

— Photo: Armindo Neves

Armindo Neves

The public Macau Productivity and Technology Transfer Centre (CPTTM) co-hosted a press conference with the United Association of Food and Beverage Merchants of Macau (UAFBMM) yesterday about their "Macau Catering Industry Smart Upgrade Programme", and CPTTM Director-General Victoria Alexa Kuan Chan said in a speech that the programme aims to enhance the transformation and upgrading of the local catering industry.

The press conference was held at CPTTM's Creative Fashion and Image Department (CFI) on Rua dos Pescadores (漁翁街).

The press conference was also attended by Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED) Technology Department Chief Iong Nin Fai, UAFBMM Chairman Lei U Weng, and CPTTM Senior Manager Terence Liem (林濤).

According to Kuan, CPTTM and the association have previously collaborated in providing digital

upgrade services to nearly 600 catering enterprises in the "Macau Catering Industry Smart Upgrade Pilot Programme". Benefiting businesses have seen significant improvements in order fulfilment time and service quality, Kuan said.

Kuan also said that the programme will further assist Macau's catering industry in introducing intelligent equipment and promote the comprehensive upgrade of standardised management and services.

Iong said that the bureau maintains continuous communication with the catering industry to gather feedback and suggestions. By considering the current state of the industry and developments in technological applications, according to Iong, the bureau will optimise existing support measures and services in a timely manner to ensure that they align closely with the actual circumstances and needs of enterprises, aiming to assist small and medium-sized businesses in addressing operational challenges.

Lei also said that in order to continue promoting the high-quality development of the catering industry, the programme will persist in jointly advancing the industry toward intelligent development. This measure aims to enhance food production efficiency and quality, thereby further strengthening the overall competitiveness of the sector, Lei said.

According to CPTTM Manager Thomas Mak Seng Hin, who gave a power-point introduction to the programme, the application period for the programme runs from January 5 to 23. The target beneficiaries are at least 70 local Macau catering establishments with no more than 100 employees and holding valid catering licences – including those with applications in progress, he said.

Mak also said that the subsidy covers 80 percent of the total cost of eligible equipment, with a maximum subsidy of 50,000 patacas, which includes expenses for purchase, installation, transportation, and the first year of maintenance. ■

## Young mainlander loses 1.2 million yuan in 'fake police' scam: police

Ada Lei

A young woman from the Chinese mainland has fallen victim to a "fake police" scam, resulting in a total loss of 1.2 million yuan (1.3 million patacas), Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Ho Wai Lok said during a regular press conference yesterday.

According to Ho, the Judiciary Police (PJ) received a notification from the Chinese Mainland Anti-Fraud Centre on Friday about a possible victim of a "fake police" scam. The police immediately contacted the victim that same day in Cotai.

Ho noted that the woman had received a call on September 19 from someone impersonating a judicial officer from the Chinese mainland, demanding that she transfer funds into a designated account under the guise of a "bail review". Believing the scam to be genuine, she followed the instructions and transferred a total

of 1.2 million yuan in four separate transactions to a designated Hong Kong bank account.

### Young local loses 27,850 patacas in 'fake police' scam

Meanwhile, Ho also added that a young local man has also fallen victim to a "fake police" scam, losing a total of 27,850 patacas. The victim received a call on Tuesday from someone claiming to be a police officer from the Chinese mainland. The caller claimed that the victim was involved in a telecom fraud case and requested communication via FaceTime. During the call, the fraudster convinced the victim to share his screen while entering the password for his bank account under the pretext of a "funds review." The victim later discovered that 27,850 patacas had been transferred from his account. Realising he had been scammed, he reported the case to

the police later that day.

At the time of yesterday's press conference, no arrests had been made in either case. ■



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

— Photo: Ada Lei

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MACAU POST

### Macau Weather

**FINE, BECOMING CLOUDY.  
LIGHT RAIN LATER.  
FORCE 3 TO 4 EAST TO  
NORTHEASTERLY WINDS.  
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL  
RANGE BETWEEN 45% AND 95%.**



17°C~24°C

Source: SMG



# MSO chief commends local team's NSOG efforts

Armando Neves

Macau's clinched no fewer than 144 medals in the eight-day 9<sup>th</sup> National Special Olympic Games (NSOG) which were held in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau, and ended on Monday.

The *Post* interviewed Macau Special Olympics (MSO) National Director Hetzer Siu Yu Hong yesterday.

During the interview at JW Marriot Hotel Macau in Cotai's Galaxy Macau resort, Siu expressed great pride in the NSOG athletes' performances.

Siu highlighted that the Games involved many parents who proactively attended the competitions to watch and witness their children compete, a phenomenon he found both heartening and touching.

Siu also said he hopes that this enthusiasm will continue, as it is boosting the confidence of athletes with special needs and fostering greater public care and understanding for persons with disabilities, thereby further advancing social inclusion.

Siu also said that the local team's outstanding performance was primarily due to Macau's role as one of the Games' co-organisers. This provided certain advantages in event selection and athlete scheduling, allowing for more thorough pre-competition preparations, he acknowledged.

Siu pointed out that, in recent years,

thanks to local government support and the systematic development through training squads, Macau has increased the number of athletes with disabilities available for competition, contributing to the rise in medal counts. He also said that, compared to some regions in the Chinese mainland that may have fewer foundational training teams, Macau benefits from greater consistency and continuity in its training programmes for athletes with disabilities.

## MSO's hotel job training aims to enhance job competitiveness of intellectually disabled

Meanwhile, the Macau Special Olympics' job training programme for those with intellectual disabilities, in collaboration with the government's Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) and JW Marriott Hotel Macau, aims to enable participants to acquire employment competitiveness, with the graduation ceremony of this year's programme held yesterday.

The training programme was launched in 2021, which marked its fourth year, and since its initial development, the training programme has seen 20 participants graduate. It offers positions in linen rooms and public cleaning departments for persons with disabilities, enabling them to gain work experience equivalent to those of other staff members.



Macau Special Olympic (MSO) National Director Hetzer Siu Yu Hong poses after yesterday's graduation ceremony at JW Marriott Hotel Macau, Galaxy Macau, in Cotai. – Photo: Armando Neves

In addition to supporting the intellectually disabled in participating in sports, the Macau Special Olympics also provides them with various other types of social services including occupational rehabilitation, as well as providing support for those with special education needs.

Yesterday's graduation ceremony, held in the hotel's conference room, was attended by Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) Deputy

Director Chan Tze Wai, JW Marriott Hotel Macau Operations Director Chan Weng Hei and Human Resources Director Cheang Chia Yu, Macau Special Olympic (MSO) National Director Hetzer Siu Yu Hong, Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) Social Solidarity Department Acting Head Sou Chi Kuan, and MSO Vocational Rehabilitation Department Manager Kan Wa Heng.

According to Siu, this time, the four interns demonstrated during their 10-week paid internship, significant improvements in skills, communication, and stress resilience. They earned recognition from their respective departments, laying a solid foundation for their entry into the workforce, he said.

Siu highlighted the programme's notable outcomes: the public employment rate for participants in the first three sessions exceeded 50 percent, with some directly hired by hotels and others successfully entering industries such as cleaning and catering. This demonstrates that individuals with special needs can secure positions based on their performance, he said.

Siu also said he hopes that the programme can evolve from a one-time initiative into a permanent project, consistently providing employment pathways for people of diverse abilities. He also encouraged more enterprises to join, aiming to achieve the dual benefit of social inclusion and talent development. ■

## Macau's first Int'l Forum on Mutual Learning Among Civilisations concludes

Khalel Vallo

The 2025 International Forum on Mutual Learning Among Civilisations concluded at the Galaxy International Convention Centre in Cotai yesterday, with Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) President Deland Leong Wai Man highlighting Macau's ongoing role as a bridge for dialogue between Chinese and Western civilisations.

Addressing the closing ceremony, Leong thanked guests, scholars and supporting institutions, including the Ministry of Education, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and the Chinese Academy of History for contributing to the successful organisation of the two-day, inaugural forum.

Leong said in her speech that the forum, themed "Mutual Learning Among Civilisations and Inheritance and Development," featured keynote speeches, two parallel sub-forums and six academic salons, covering topics such as civilisational coexistence, cultural heritage protection, the practice of "One Country, Two Systems" and intercivilisational exchange.

She noted that the discussions during the forum demonstrated that Eastern and Western values may differ but remain capable of dialogue and mutual learning. "The key to civilisational dialogue lies in recognising differences and seeking common ground, rather than pursuing homogenisation," she said, adding that respect for development paths shaped by each society's history and culture was essential.

Leong also pointed out that Chinese civilisation's long-standing values of "harmony without uniformity" and "peaceful coexistence among nations" offer useful reference frameworks for cross-cultural understanding.

"Hosting the forum in Macau was particularly meaningful," she said, adding that 2025 also marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Historic Centre of Macau's inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Leong added that Macau's mission in promoting civilisational dialogue "will continue unabated," inviting scholars and visitors to return to the city to carry forward ongoing exchanges as Macau aims to strengthen its role as a window for mutual learning between civilisations. ■



Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) President Deland Leong Wai Man addresses yesterday afternoon's closing ceremony of the "2025 International Forum on Mutual Learning Among Civilisations" at the Galaxy International Convention Centre in Cotai. – Photo: Khalel Vallo

## Macao Orchestra to resonate with 'Fado Queen Mariza' at New Year's Eve

Khalel Vallo

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) announced in a statement yesterday that the Macao Orchestra will welcome the New Year with a concert featuring Portuguese fado\* singer Mariza dos Reis Nunes, known professionally as Mariza, to be held on December 31 at the Macau Cultural Centre's (CCM) Grand Auditorium in Nape.

The Macao Orchestra New Year Concert 2026, titled, translated from Portuguese, "Mariza, the Fado Queen and the Macao Orchestra", will take place at 8 p.m. and see the international singer share the stage with the local orchestra in a live performance, according to the statement.

The concert is part of the Macao Orchestra 2025–26 Concert Season, co-organised by the bureau and several integrated resort operators including Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) and Melco Resorts & Entertainment, the statement said.

The statement noted that Mariza will interpret a selection of iconic fado songs, striving to bring her "captivating voice" to an evening designed as an artistic celebration that transcends genres and borders.

Mariza is, according to the statement, widely regarded as one of the most influential voices in contemporary fado. Known for blending traditional fado with elements of soul, jazz and gospel, she has performed at major venues worldwide.

Since her debut in 1999, Mariza, born in Mozambique in December 1973, has released numerous albums and sold more than one million copies globally, the statement noted, adding that she has been named BBC Radio 3's Best European Artist (World Music) three times, while her albums *Terra* and *Mundo* received Latin Grammy Award nominations, achievements that have "further cemented her superstar status".

Mariza celebrated her birthday on Tuesday.

In Macau, she will present both classic and contemporary repertoire, incorporating musical influences from Cape Verdean morna\*\*, rhythm and blues, as well as sounds from Brazil, Mozambique and Spain, aiming to offer "a richly diverse fado feast", the statement noted.

According to the statement, the concert will run for approximately one hour and 30 minutes without an interval.

Tickets are now available through the Macau Ticketing Network ([www.macaoticket.com](http://www.macaoticket.com)), priced at 180, 250, 300, and 400 patacas. ■

*\*Fado is a traditional Portuguese music genre characterised by mournful tunes and lyrics, often conveying a profound sense of longing, destiny, and melancholy. It typically features a solo singer accompanied by the Portuguese guitar. – DeepSeek*

*\*\* Morna is far more than just a musical genre for Cabo Verde; it's the soulful, poetic, and profound emotional expression of the Cape Verdean people and their diaspora. Musically, morna is a slow, melancholic genre in a minor key, typically characterized by a lamenting, lyrical melody. – DeepSeek*



This poster provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) yesterday promotes the upcoming "Mariza, the Fado Queen and the Macao Orchestra" concert, slated to be held on New Year's Eve at Macau Cultural Centre's (CCM) Grand Auditorium in Nape.





**Gonçalo Lobo Pinheiro poses in front of two of the 20 photos exhibited at the Rui Cunha Foundation (FRC) gallery during Tuesday's opening ceremony and book launch.**  
— Photos: Rui Pastorin

## Gonçalo Lobo Pinheiro explores Macau's past and present in new book, exhibition

*Interview by Rui Pastorin*

By popular demand, a second volume of “O que foi, não volta a ser...” (“What Once Was, Will Never Be Again...”) came to fruition and was launched on Tuesday, continuing award winning Portuguese photojournalist and documentary photographer Gonçalo Lobo Pinheiro's project that sees an encounter between Macau's past and present.

Lisbon-born Lobo Pinheiro, who has been based in Macau for over 15 years, launched the first volume of his book in 2022, he told the *Post* during Tuesday's launch ceremony. A collector of a variety old photos, Lobo Pinheiro's collection includes images of old Macau.

While Lobo Pinheiro said the concept of taking photos in the style of what he is presenting is not a novel concept, he said that what differentiates both that project and the newly-released second edition is its context - Macau. “I saw my photos and said ‘why not?’” he said of the book's first volume. And it proved popular.

“In the beginning, I only wanted to do one book”, he added, but with many asking for a second edition and experiencing “a good kind of pressure” for a new volume, he said: “Now after three years, I'm here again to launch the second edition with more images of Macau that weren't in the first book”, with 40 images showcased in nearly 80 pages.

As with the first volume, each photo was taken while carefully measuring contact point while identifying places to precisely achieve the resulting blend of the past and present found across the images. While there were photos of places and settings that proved easy to take, there were also those that proved difficult to capture given how much the city has changed over the years, with some old photos even depicting places that no longer exist today.

Another hurdle came in the form of even acquiring the old photos. Aside from those in his own collection, old pictures of Macau, either in sepia or black and white, were obtained online, through auctions, from private owners, local shops, and even in Portugal, along with some that were lent to him, taking over a year to put together. But the challenge is part of what kept him going, giving him the vigour to do the work.

By the end of it all, he says he was glad to have the project in two volumes, both of which are “complementary to each other”, with the previous book being more related to heritage and monuments while more people are featured this time around. With that, the project is brought to its conclusion. “It is finished and I think I am very happy with the final result”.

The author hopes for his book to be “a document for future generations,” wanting to bring together pictures of a city that has changed a lot over the years and is still continuing to do so. At the same time, he wanted to provide a book that could serve as a comparison for both the past and present, as well as something for people who lived through old Macau to look back on, bringing back memories and some nostalgia. “If my photos create these kinds of emotions in people, I think I will be very happy with that”.

### Supporting victims of the Tai Po inferno

Lobo Pinheiro's projects have mainly gone towards helping non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other people most of the time. “I like to help people”, he said, with this particular book being no exception.

In the middle of its creation, a tragic incident took place in Hong Kong that made waves even outside of the region: the Wang Fuk Court inferno in Tai Po District that resulted in 160 deaths.

Contacting the Hong Kong branch of ‘Habitat for Humanity’, the total profit from the book sales along with the pictures sold from an ongoing exhibition the Rui Cunha Foundation (FRC) gallery, which features 20 out of the book's 40 images, will be donated to them.

“For every single book or photo sold, the total amount is for them”, Lobo Pinheiro concluded.

Copies of the second volume of “O que foi, não volta a ser...” are priced at 250 patacas and can be bought from Lobo Pinheiro's website on through [www.goncalolobopinheiro.com](http://www.goncalolobopinheiro.com) as well as some bookshops.

*\*This story is a continuation of an article released yesterday, December 17, titled “2<sup>nd</sup> volume of ‘What Once Was, Will Never Be Again...’ launches in Macau” (<https://www.macaupostdaily.com/news/26930>)*



# Sam vows to overcome all reform challenges by fully implementing Xi's instructions

*Continued from p.1*

The chief executive also pointed out that the local police “lawfully arrested a former legislator” earlier this year for allegedly endangering national security.

Sam did not identify the former lawmaker yesterday. The Judiciary Police (PJ) announced in a statement on July 31 that they had arrested a 68-year-old local man surnamed Au for allegedly violating the local Law on Safeguarding National Security. The PJ statement merely identified the local male suspect by his age and surname. At that time, public broadcaster TDM identified the suspect as former lawmaker Au Kam San.

Sam also underlined Macau’s full implementation of the “patriots governing Macau” principle, where the local government completed the oath-taking earlier this year for all serving and newly recruited public servants, while establishing a regular communication and exchange mechanism between the local government and leaders of major patriotic organisations with the aim of consolidating the foundations of grassroots governance.

Sam said that while ensuring the principle of the MSAR’s executive-led governance, his government has also innovated its mechanism for communication and coordination between the executive, legislative, and judicial organs in order to achieve positive interaction and efficient collaboration.

Sam underlined his government’s commitment to resolutely implementing the spirit of Xi’s important instructions regarding the fire disaster in Hong Kong, i.e., the deadly inferno in Hong Kong’s Tai Po District on November 26, including strengthening its inspections and risk screening and minimisation for fire and other hazards in key venues and facilities.

**Third**, Sam underlined his government’s commitment to accelerating the development of the Guangdong-Macau In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin and advancing Macau’s appropriate economic diversification.

Sam said that his government has accurately grasped the strategic positioning of “Macau + Hengqin” and strengthened policy support and funding for Hengqin’s development. Moreover, Sam said, his government is preparing the establishment of a government industrial fund and a guidance fund aiming to advance Macau’s appropriate economic diversification.

In addition, Sam said, his government has formally stipulated that investments made in Hengqin by Macau’s gaming operators can also be regarded as part of the total amounts of non-gaming investments that they have promised to make in Macau.

**Fourth**, Sam stressed his government’s efforts to ensure the lawful, healthy, and orderly development of Macau’s gaming



Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai listens to a reporter's question during yesterday afternoon's press briefing.

– Photo: GCS

industry. He noted that all “satellite casinos” will be closed for good by 31 December this year as scheduled in line with the law, adding that the local government has ensured that the gaming industry maintains a healthy structure and appropriate scale, while also ensuring that the gaming concessionaires will further develop foreign visitor sources and fulfil their non-gaming investment commitments.

**Fifth**, Sam underlined his government’s commitment to strengthening Macau’s domestic and international connectivity and fully leveraging the city’s role as a unique platform, pointing out that Macau has initiated the organisation of the Global Artificial Intelligence

Machines and Electronics Expo (AIE) and the International Forum on Mutual Learning among Civilisations, while resuming the organisation of the Macau International Mazu Cultural and Tourism Festival.

**Sixth**, Sam stressed his government’s efforts to firmly safeguard the city’s livelihood safety net, pointing out that the local government has reformed its annual wealth-sharing programme and launched a childcare allowance, while ensuring the effective implementation of various other measures improving residents’ well-being.

Sam said that his government has optimised its public housing policies, vigorously promoted and protected

residents’ employment, improved the city’s social security and healthcare systems, and strengthened care and support for vulnerable groups, while also supporting young local people in pursuing better personal development through their integration into nation’s overall development.

## 5 further improvement pledges

During yesterday’s press briefing, Sam also pledged that his government will advance its governance in five major aspects.

**First**, Sam said that his government will proactively align with the nation’s 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan and seize development opportunities with the aim of enabling Macau to achieve better development.

**Second**, Sam said that his government will continuously enhance governance effectiveness while upholding and improving the MSAR’s executive-led system.

**Third**, Sam pledged that his government will solidly advance Macau’s appropriate economic diversification.

**Fourth**, Sam said that his government will accelerate the development of the Guangdong-Macau In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

**Fifth**, Sam said that Macau will better integrate into and serving the nation’s overall development while building a higher-level platform for opening up. ■

## CEM shareholders contribute another 30 million patacas towards upgrading communal electrics in old buildings

*Rui Pastorin*

Power utility CEM said in a statement yesterday that following its well-received “Safety Upgrade Subsidy Programme for Communal Electrical Installations in Low-rise Ageing Buildings” launched at the end of 2020, CEM shareholders will again contribute 30 million patacas in 2026 to “subsidise the safety upgrade of communal electrical installations in old buildings”.

The statement said that the focus will be on improving “high risk” electrical installations such as main switchboards.

Priority will be given to buildings in low-lying, flood-affected areas, while buildings over 30 years old in other locations may also apply, according to the statement. Eligible old buildings will have up to 80 percent of the costs covered, reducing the financial burden on residents. The statement said that owners will only need to pay a fixed cost as low as 1,000 patacas per household.

The statement said that CEM Executive Committee Chairman Bernie Leong Wa Kun recently inspected buildings in the Inner Harbour district where electrical



This undated photo provided by CEM yesterday shows representatives of Macau’s monopoly power utility inspecting the communal electrics in a residential building in a flood-prone, low-lying neighbourhood.

installations were flooded during Typhoon Ragasa. He noted that ageing communal electrical installations in some of Macau’s old buildings occasionally lead to tripping and power outages, adding that inspected buildings showed “varying degrees of safety hazards”. The statement said that the power utility plans to send letters urging property owners of buildings

requiring urgent maintenance and upgrades to join the programme.

Moreover, to raise public awareness on electrical safety, CEM has hosted nearly 30 seminars with the Fire Services Bureau (CB), attracting over 2,200 citizens and industry professionals, while weekly safety reminders are also posted on the power utility’s Facebook page, according to the statement. ■

## PJ call on citizens to beware of phishing SMSs posing as WhatsApp

Statement by Judiciary Police

The Judiciary Police (PJ) have recently discovered that scammers are once again sending out phishing SMSs impersonating the messaging app WhatsApp.

The messages falsely claim that the recipient’s account has been reported and urge users to log in via a link included in the message before a certain deadline, or risk being blocked by the system. When users click the link, they are redirected to a counterfeit website that closely resembles the official WhatsApp site, where they are prompted to enter their mobile number. A code, consisting of an 8-digit string, will then be displayed, instructing users to enter it into their WhatsApp app; in reality, if users comply, their accounts will be logged into by the scammers elsewhere. Once the scammers successfully steal a citizen’s WhatsApp login credentials, they will use it to defraud the victim’s friends and family or for other illicit purposes.

### The Judiciary Police Fraud Coordination Centre advises:

WhatsApp will never request users to click on “any link” regarding account suspension issues via SMS or app messages.

It is essential to verify the authentic WhatsApp official account, which displays the feature of a “blue tick” in the app.

If friends or family request money through any messaging app, immediately verify the request through another method.

If in doubt, use the PJ’s “Anti-Fraud Programme” to check risk levels or report information, or call the PJ anti-fraud hotline at 88007777 and the reporting hotline at 993 for assistance.

N.B. Statement by the Judiciary Police released through the Macau Government Information Bureau yesterday. Translation arranged by The Macau Post Daily.



# Airbus delivers 800<sup>th</sup> China-assembled A320 family aircraft



This photo provided by Airbus yesterday shows the aircraft manufacturer delivering its 800<sup>th</sup> A320 family aircraft assembled at its A320 Family Final Assembly Line Asia (FALA) in Tianjin Municipality. — AFP

TIANJIN — European aircraft manufacturer Airbus yesterday delivered its 800<sup>th</sup> A320 family aircraft assembled at its A320 Family Final Assembly Line Asia (FALA) in north China's Tianjin Municipality.

The aircraft, an A321neo, featuring 12 business class seats and 186 economy class seats in a two-class cabin layout, was handed over to Air China.

Inaugurated in 2008, the Tianjin FALA — the first Airbus production line established outside Europe — is currently producing Airbus A319, A320 and A321 aircraft. It has been operating for 17 years, making the facility a symbol of successful Sino-European cooperation.

Since delivering its first Airbus A320 aircraft in 2009, FALA marked the delivery of its 500<sup>th</sup> and 700<sup>th</sup> A320 family aircraft in October 2020 and July 2024, respectively.

"It demonstrates Airbus' ongoing pledge to deepen strategic partnerships in China, reinforcing our 40 years of commitment to the country," said George Xu, Airbus executive vice president and Airbus China CEO.

On Oct. 22 this year, Airbus inaugurated its latest final assembly line for A320 family aircraft in Tianjin, the second of its kind in both China and Asia as a whole.

To date, Airbus' A320

production network has expanded to 10 final assembly lines — four in Germany, two in France, two in the United States and two in China — with the assembly capacity in Tianjin set to contribute 20 percent of the company's total globally.

The popular single-aisle A320 Family has seen over 19,000 orders from over 300 customers in global markets. Xu said that Airbus teams in China remain committed to supporting the global A320 Family ramp-up plan, aiming to assemble 75 aircraft per month by 2027.

According to data from the Civil Aviation Administration of China, the number of people who have taken at least one flight in China has reached 470 million, an increase of 160 million since 2019, making it the country with the largest flying population in the world.

Xu noted that Airbus' growth in China reflects its expanding market share, with the country now serving as its largest single-country market for commercial aircraft.

According to the company, about one-third of the Airbus aircraft currently in service in the Chinese fleet are produced at its final assembly line in Tianjin.

In 2024, around 25 percent of aircraft assembled in China were delivered to airlines outside

the Chinese mainland, Xu said, adding that China's stable aviation ecosystem allows Airbus to serve the global market from within the country, supporting the global aviation industry.

This robust growth is underpinned by a deep industrial partnership. Approximately 200 Chinese suppliers now support Airbus' commercial aircraft production efforts, covering the entire industrial chain from raw materials to system assembly, which ensures that every Airbus civil aircraft incorporates components manufactured in China.

The company forecasts that China's annual air passenger volume will surge by 5.3 percent on average over the next 20 years, outpacing the global average of 3.6 percent. To cope with the demand, by 2042, more than 9,000 out of 40,000 new aircraft needed globally will be delivered to China.

"China's aviation market holds immense potential, and our strengthened industrial footprint here underscores our strong commitment to this market. Airbus is dedicated to continuing our partnership with China, working hand in hand to contribute to the positive relations between China and the European Union," said Airbus CEO Guillaume Faury. — Xinhua

## China's development should be welcomed, not feared: Sachs

BELGRADE — The global economy is not a zero-sum game, and China's rise should be viewed as an opportunity rather than a threat, said prominent US economist Jeffrey Sachs on Tuesday.

Instead, countries around the world should pursue shared prosperity and sustainable development through regional cooperation, Sachs said in Belgrade at a discussion.

Sachs, also director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University, noted that traditional zero-sum thinking stems from social Darwinist ideas that became widespread in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

"The idea that life is inevitably a struggle, that it is 'either them or us,' is simply not true," he said.

Modern economic well-being is not determined by competition over scarce resources, he said. "Economic well-being comes from technology, skills and effective governance."

On China's development model, Sachs said that China's experience offers important lessons for global governance, noting that through systematic planning over five- and ten-year horizons, the Chinese government has laid out detailed strategies for key sectors, industries and

technologies, enabling the country to become a global leader in many emerging fields.

This success, he said, demonstrates how long-term planning and sustained investment can drive economic growth without coming at the expense of other countries.

China's development should not be viewed as a threat, Sachs said, adding that the rhetoric portraying China as an enemy is often promoted by people who have never visited the country.

"My advice to the U.S. Congress is simple: Get a passport, go see the world and look at how things really are," he said.

Looking ahead, Sachs argued that the world should move toward cooperation rather than confrontation. "What I envision is a world of regional cooperation, where regions integrate internally while remaining open to one another," he said.

In his view, the world could consist of interconnected regions, each achieving prosperity and security through coordination and collaboration. This approach, he said, is far more sustainable than models based on geopolitical rivalry or unilateral dominance, and more beneficial for the development of all parties. — Xinhua



US economist Jeffrey Sachs speaks during a colloquium in Belgrade, Serbia, on Tuesday. The global economy is not a zero-sum game, and China's rise should be viewed as an opportunity rather than a threat, Sachs said. — Xinhua

## Digital consumption accounts for nearly half of household spending in H1: report

BEIJING — In the first half of 2025, digital consumption reached 9.37 trillion yuan in China, accounting for 46.5 percent of total household consumer spending, according to a report on digital consumption for 2025.

According to the report released by the China Internet Network Information Center, China had more than 958 million digital consumers by June, accounting for 85.3 percent of all internet users.

Online consumption is no longer confined to the young or urban. Generation Z accounts for 27.2 percent of digital consumers, while people aged 60 and above make up 12.2 percent. Rural users, at 26

percent, now participate in online subsidy programs at rates comparable to their urban counterparts.

What people buy online is also evolving. Smart products have shifted from novelty to mainstream, with nearly four in 10 internet users purchasing smart home appliances, digital devices or wearables in the first half of 2025. Meanwhile, "trendy toys," ranging from blind boxes to IP-themed merchandise, have emerged as a niche but fast-growing segment, reflecting the rise of emotion-driven consumption.

Digital travel, transport and cultural services generated over one trillion yuan in spending, as did

food delivery. Spending on digital public services, including online healthcare, education and home services, exceeded 500 billion yuan.

By mid-2025, users of on-demand home services, which extended to include pet care and elderly care, surpassed 223 million, according to the report.

The report noted that artificial intelligence (AI) is poised to become a key driver of China's next phase of digital consumption, reshaping both supply and the consumer experience.

The report is based on the results of a telephone sampling survey of 30,000 residents across 31 provincial-level regions. — Xinhua

## Box office revenue for musicals exceeds 1.8 bln yuan in 2025

BEIJING — China witnessed a box office revenue of musical performances totaling nearly 1.81 billion yuan in 2025, up 7.55 percent year on year, said an annual report on China's musical market.

According to 2025 Musical Theatre Market Report released Tuesday in Beijing, 19,700 musical performances were staged in 2025 in China, a year-on-year growth of 15.04 percent. An audience of nearly 8.19 million attended the theater to enjoy musical performances, up 10.41 percent year on year, the report said.

According to the report, original musicals introduced to the Chinese musical market accounted for over

half of the box office revenue, with musical classic "The Phantom of the Opera," the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary concert of "Les Misérables," and French rock-opera musical "Le Rouge et le Noir" topping the annual box office chart of introduced original musicals.

In 2025, the proportion of female audiences in the musical market reached 75.5 percent, marking a slight decrease compared to 2024. Correspondingly, the proportion of male audiences increased slightly and is expected to rise with more Chinese musicals themed on home and country and science fiction, which typically tend to appeal to male audiences. — Xinhua



## Chinese, Chilean FM's exchange congratulations on 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of bilateral ties

BEIJING – Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Monday exchanged congratulatory messages with Foreign Affairs Minister of Chile Alberto van Klaveren Stork on the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, said that under the strategic leadership of the two heads of state, relations between China and Chile have strived forward and continuously made new developments and achievements.

Wang expressed his willingness to work with van Klaveren Stork to strengthen exchanges and cooperation

between the two foreign ministries, enhance exchanges and multilateral collaboration in various fields, so as to advance the China-Chile comprehensive strategic partnership to continuously reach new heights.

For his part, van Klaveren Stork said that the Chilean side sincerely values the efforts made by both countries to uphold inclusive and effective multilateralism and to build an open, fair and non-protectionist international trading system.

Chile will continue to commit itself to building a modern, balanced and forward-looking comprehensive strategic partnership with China, the Chilean foreign minister noted.

– Xinhua



*Tourists pose at the Harbin Ice-Snow World in Harbin, capital of the northeastern province of Heilongjiang, yesterday. The Harbin Ice-Snow World, world's largest ice and snow theme park, officially opened for the season yesterday, unveiling its most spectacular edition yet, featuring landmark attractions, thoughtful services and magnificent ice sculptures across a record 1.2 million square meters of park area.*

– Xinhua

## Spokesperson reiterates resolute opposition to foreign interference in Taiwan question

BEIJING – A Chinese mainland spokesperson yesterday reiterated resolute opposition to foreign interference in Taiwan question.

Zhu Fenglian, a spokesperson for the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office, made the statement in response to Taiwan leader Lai Ching-te's planned purchase of weaponry from the United States.

"We have the strong will, confidence, resolve and capability to crush any secessionist attempt seeking 'Taiwan independence'," she said, adding that China's reunification is unstoppable.

In response to another question about the new US national security strategy document, which states that the United States does not support any unilateral changes to the status quo in the Taiwan Strait, Zhu noted that the real status quo in the Taiwan

Strait is that there is only one China in the world and both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to the one and the same China.

The spokesperson urged the US side to handle Taiwan question with caution, warning against allowing a small number of "Taiwan independence" separatists to drag China and the United States into a dangerous situation of conflict and confrontation.

While commenting on Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's recent Taiwan-related remarks, Zhu asked the Japanese side to earnestly reflect on and correct its mistakes and retract erroneous remarks, warning the Japanese side not to underestimate China's strong will and capabilities to safeguard its national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

– Xinhua

## China reaffirms sovereignty over Xianbin Jiao, denounces Philippines' false accusations

BEIJING – China yesterday condemned the Philippines' "thief crying stop thief" behavior after Manila organized vessels to illegally intrude into the lagoon of China's Xianbin Jiao in the South China Sea.

Jiang Bin, a spokesperson for the Ministry of National Defense, made the remarks in response to Philippines' false accusations about Chinese maritime law enforcement actions against Philippine personnel near Xianbin Jiao.

"China has indisputable sovereignty over the Nansha Qundao and its adjacent waters, including Xianbin Jiao. This is fully grounded in both history and law," emphasized the spokesperson.

Jiang said that the Philippines deliberately organized and dispatched a large number of vessels to intrude into the lagoon of Xianbin Jiao illegally. Personnel on the

Philippine vessels even brandished knives to threaten Chinese coast guard officers conducting lawful operations, an act that was "utterly egregious in nature".

"The measures taken by the Chinese side were necessary actions to safeguard its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests," the spokesperson emphasized. "They were reasonable, lawful, professional, and restrained."

"Confronted with the facts, certain individuals in the Philippines are telling barefaced lies, resorting to sophistry to deny their own infringing and provocative acts, and even making false accusations against China. This is a complete reversal of right and wrong, and a case of the thief crying 'stop thief'," Jiang said.

The spokesperson noted that for some time, the Philippines has

frequently created incidents at sea, repeatedly staged self-orchestrated farces, and persistently made unwarranted accusations against China in a deliberate attempt to smear China's image, muddy the waters in the South China Sea, and undermine regional stability.

"We solemnly warn the Philippines: staging incidents, playing the victim, and hyping propaganda will not alter the nature of the Philippines' illegal infringement and provocations, will not mislead the international community, and will not shake China's resolve to safeguard its rights in accordance with the law," Jiang stressed.

"China will continue to take resolute and effective measures in response to all acts of infringement and provocation," the spokesperson concluded.

– Xinhua

## Somalia marks 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations with China

MOGADISHU – Somalia and China on Tuesday marked the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their diplomatic relations, vowing to elevate their mutual cooperation and pursue more productive and shared interests.

Addressing the event held in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, Somali Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre said, "We gathered to celebrate a truly historic milestone, 65 years of diplomatic relations between Somalia and China. This is an important anniversary, a testament to enduring friendship between our two peoples, a friendship built on mutual respect, sovereignty and shared understanding."

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1960, Somalia and China have pursued together

through changing times, through moments for progress and moments of challenges, through regional and global transformations, Abdi said.

He noted that over decades, China has remained a trusted partner of Somalia, a partner that respects Somalia's independence, supports national priorities and a partner that believes in the country's future.

"Our cooperation has been practical and impactful, it has supported infrastructure development, it has strengthened health, education, public services and capacity building and it has responded to humanitarian needs during difficult moments," Abdi added.

Chinese Ambassador to Somalia Wang Yu said that the establishment of diplomatic relations between

Somalia and China on Dec. 14, 1960, opened a new chapter in the history of friendly exchanges between the two nations.

"That year Somalia became independent and China was among the first few countries to recognize it; meanwhile, Somalia was the first country in East Africa to establish diplomatic ties with China," Wang said.

He said China appreciates Somalia's consistent adherence to the one-China principle and will continuously and firmly support Somalia's efforts in safeguarding its national sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity.

The China-Somalia friendship is a demonstration of mutual beneficial cooperation and common development, he added.

– Xinhua

## Chinese special envoy to travel to Cambodia, Thailand for shuttle diplomacy

BEIJING – Chinese Foreign Ministry's Special Envoy for Asian Affairs will again make a shuttle-diplomacy trip to Cambodia and Thailand today in an effort to bridge the two sides to rebuild peace at

an early date, a foreign ministry spokesperson said last night.

As a close neighbor and friend of Cambodia and Thailand, China closely follows the ongoing border conflict between the two countries and

has shuttled between the two sides to promote peace, the spokesperson said.

"Through its own way, China has been working actively for de-escalation," the spokesperson added.

– Xinhua

## Wang Yi holds phone talks with Venezuelan counterpart

BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi yesterday held a phone call with Venezuelan Foreign Affairs Minister Yvan Gil at the latter's request.

During the phone conversation, Gil briefed Wang on the current situation in Venezuela, stressing that the Venezuelan government and people will firmly defend the country's sovereignty and

independence, resolutely safeguard their legitimate rights, and not accept threats from any hegemonic forces.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, said that China and Venezuela are strategic partners, and mutual trust and support are the tradition of China-Venezuela relations.

China opposes all unilateral

bullying and supports all countries in defending their sovereignty and national dignity, Wang said.

Venezuela has the right to independently develop mutually beneficial cooperation with other countries, and it is believed that the international community understands and supports Venezuela's position of safeguarding its legitimate rights and interests.

– Xinhua



## Alleged Bondi shooter charged with 59 offenses

SYDNEY — The surviving alleged perpetrator of the fatal mass shooting at Sydney's Bondi Beach had been charged with 59 offenses, Australian police said yesterday.

The police force in the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW) yesterday afternoon charged 24-year-old Naveed Akram with 59 offenses, including 15 counts of murder and one count of committing a terrorist act, following the attack that targeted an event celebrating the first day of the Jewish festival of Hanukkah.

Akram remained in hospital under police guard yesterday after waking from a coma on Tuesday.

A second alleged gunman, identified as Akram's 50-year-old father Sajid, was fatally shot by police at the scene of Sunday night's attack.

As well as the murder and terrorism offenses, Naveed Akram had been charged with one count each of discharging a firearm with an intent to cause grievous bodily harm, publicly displaying a prohibited terrorist symbol and placing an explosive in or near a building with intent to cause harm, and 40 counts



**Mourners watch a live feed of the funeral of rabbi Eli Schlanger, who was killed in the December 14 Bondi beach shooting attack, outside the Chabad of Bondi Synagogue in Sydney yesterday. Australia held the first funeral yesterday for victims of the Bondi Beach mass shooting, as large crowds gathered to grieve a rabbi slain in the attack. Sajid Akram and his son Naveed opened fire on a Jewish festival at the famed surf beach on December 14 evening, killing 15 people and wounding dozens more. — AFP**

of wounding with intent to murder.

Authorities on Tuesday said that the attack was motivated by Islamic State ideology and confirmed that two Islamic State flags and improvised explosive devices were found in a vehicle belonging to Naveed Akram.

There were 16 confirmed deaths following the attack, including Sajid

Akram, with victims ranging in age from 10 to 87 years old. Forty-one people, including four children, were taken to hospital after the attack.

As of yesterday afternoon, 20 injured people were still receiving care in Sydney hospitals, five of whom were in critical or critical but stable conditions. — Xinhua

## S Korean leader says livestreamed briefings may be better than Netflix

SEOUL — South Korea's leader has said that new livestreamed briefings in which he has dressed down officials might be "more entertaining than Netflix" as he seeks to boost transparency in contrast to his more autocratic predecessor.

Regular presidential policy briefings were long held behind closed doors, but Seoul has begun streaming them online as part of a push for more "direct democracy".

The move is a stark departure from the previous conservative government under disgraced former president Yoon Suk Yeol, who introduced daily

doorstep media briefings but scrapped them after just six months when they became too combative.

Yoon was ousted in April and is now in prison following a brief but disastrous imposition of martial law.

Lee, who was elected in June, quipped during a session this week that some viewers may find the livestreamed briefings "more entertaining than Netflix".

Some of the exchanges caused public amusement when they showed Lee scolding officials over their answers.

In one, Lee told a cabinet meeting: "If you don't know

something, say you don't know".

"Trying to get out of a difficult situation by submitting false or distorted reports is the real problem," he said.

Lee said yesterday that South Koreans were "the most democratically minded people in the entire world".

"That's why we should disclose as much information as possible," he said.

However, the new arrangements have drawn some backlash, with one conservative newspaper describing the public tongue-lashing as akin to workplace "gapjil" — a Korean term for abusive or authoritarian behaviour by those in positions of power. — AFP

## Myanmar junta seeks to prosecute hundreds for election 'disruption'

YANGON — Myanmar's junta said yesterday it was seeking to prosecute more than 200 people for "disruption" of upcoming military-run elections, wielding new legislation rights monitors say aims to crush dissent.

The junta is touting phased elections starting December 28 as a step towards reconciliation in Myanmar, which has been consumed by civil war since the military snatched power in a 2021 coup.

Opposition factions are set to block the polls in areas of the country they control, and prominent international monitors have dismissed the ballots as a pretext for continuing military rule.

The junta introduced legislation in July to shield the election from "obstruction, disruption and destruction", with clauses forbidding criticism or protest against the vote, and outlining severe punishments.

"A total of 229 people" are being pursued for prosecution under the law "for attempting to sabotage election processes", junta home affairs minister Tun Tun Naung said yesterday, according to state media.

Some of the cases involve fugitive activists and rebels operating beyond the junta's reach,

making it unlikely that all of the suspects are currently in custody.

Convictions under the July laws in Myanmar's opaque courts can result in up to a decade in prison, and authorities have made arrests for as little as posting a "heart" emoji on Facebook posts criticising the polls.

The legislation also outlaws damaging ballot papers and polling stations — as well as intimidating or harming voters, candidates and election workers, with a maximum punishment of 20 years in prison.

### 'Sham' election

The United Nations' human rights monitor for Myanmar, Tom Andrews, has previously called the election a "sham", citing free speech curbs as one of many obstructions to a free and fair vote.

The military government announced last week that it was seeking to arrest 10 activists who staged an anti-election demonstration, tossing political pamphlets in the air in Mandalay city.

A man was jailed in September for seven years with hard labour for a Facebook post questioning the poll, while three artistes were

arrested the following month for allegedly undermining the vote.

Those three — a director, an actor and a comedian — were detained "for making false and misleading criticism on social media" of other artistes who produced a pro-election film, state media said.

At least one has been prosecuted for "cursing, threatening and punching" an election organiser.

Those imprisoned under the law will join more than 22,000 people jailed by the junta on political grounds, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

Among them is Aung San Suu Kyi — the Nobel Peace Prize-winning democratic figurehead deposed in 2021.

Her party won the last election in a landslide vote overturned by the military, which made unsubstantiated allegations of voter fraud and afterwards dissolved her party.

While attempting to quash dissent against the election in its territory, the junta has also been waging an offensive to capture more ground before phased polling begins.

Results are expected around the end of January 2026. — AFP

## Philippines says no evidence of 'terrorist training' after Bondi gunmen's visit

MANILA — The Philippines said yesterday there was no evidence that the country was being used for terrorist training, a day after it was revealed the men behind Australia's Bondi Beach mass shooting had spent November on a southern island known for Islamist insurgencies.

"[President Ferdinand Marcos] strongly rejects the sweeping statement and the misleading characterisation of the Philippines as the ISIS training hotspot," presidential spokeswoman Claire Castro said at a press briefing.

"No evidence has been presented to support claims that the country was used for terrorist training," she added, reading from a National Security Council statement.

"There is no validated report or confirmation that individuals involved in the Bondi Beach incident received any form of training in the Philippines."

On Tuesday, the country's immigration office confirmed that Sajid Akram and his son Naveed, who killed 15 people and wounded dozens of others at a Hanukkah celebration on Sydney's Bondi Beach, entered the country on November 1 headed for the southern province of Davao.

The island of Mindanao, where Davao is located, has a long history of Islamist insurgencies against central government rule.

Australian authorities are investigating whether the two men met with extremists during the trip.

The Philippine military, however, said yesterday that armed Muslim groups still operating on Mindanao had been largely degraded in the years since the siege of Marawi.

The five-month battle for the city that pitted government forces against pro-Islamic State Maute and Abu Sayyaf militants claimed more than 1,000 lives and displaced hundreds of thousands of people.

"We have not recorded any major terrorist operations or training activities... since the beginning of 2024," Philippine military spokeswoman Colonel Francel Padilla said at a morning press briefing.

"They are fragmented, and they have no leadership," she added of the insurgent groups.

Colonel Xerxes Trinidad told reporters the father-and-son duo's November trip to the Philippines would not have provided adequate time for significant training.

"Training cannot be acquired in just 30 days ... especially if you are to undergo marksmanship [training]," he said.

But Rommel Banlaoi, a Manila-based security analyst, told AFP that while many insurgent groups were "on the run", they were far from eradicated.

"There are still many active training camps in [central] Mindanao. Those did not disappear," he told AFP, adding even weakened insurgent movements maintained connections "locally and globally online". — AFP

## Thailand, Cambodia agree to ASEAN observer team as part of de-escalation efforts

KUALA LUMPUR — Thailand and Cambodia have agreed to the deployment of an ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) observer team as efforts to de-escalate their conflict continue, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said yesterday.

Malaysia's engagement would continue across multiple channels, including communications between leaders, foreign ministers and the respective chiefs of armed forces, and a meeting between ASEAN

foreign ministers scheduled for Monday in Kuala Lumpur, Anwar said, according to a Bernama report.

He said that Thailand and Cambodia have agreed to attend the meeting on Monday, a Malaysia- and ASEAN-initiated effort aimed at easing tensions and preventing further escalation along the Thailand-Cambodia border.

"We are appealing to them to immediately stop these frontline offensives and, if possible, immediate ceasefire," he said. — Xinhua



**A man cooks fried rice for evacuees at his makeshift shelter after losing his house in a flash flood in Aceh Tamiang, northern Sumatra, Indonesia on Tuesday. — AFP**





A woman holds her child's hand as they walk past goats wearing warm clothing on a winter morning in New Delhi, India yesterday. — AFP

## Bhutan pledges US\$1 billion cryptocurrency for 'mindfulness' city

THIMPHU—Bhutan said yesterday it will invest US\$1 billion from national cryptocurrency reserves to develop a "Mindfulness City", which it hopes will become an economic hub for the tiny Himalayan nation.

Buddhist-majority Bhutan, squeezed between giants India and China, champions a policy of prioritising "Gross National Happiness" over growth.

But that has not helped the government deal with widespread unemployment, forcing thousands of young people to leave the country.

As part of broader efforts to reverse that trend by soliciting foreign investment, the landlocked kingdom in 2023 announced much-hyped plans for its "Gelephu Mindfulness City" (GMC), a special economic zone close to the Indian border.

Carbon-negative Bhutan has also aggressively promoted hydropower projects, earning substantial revenue by exporting electricity to energy-hungry India.

At the same time it has utilised the cheap power for its own drive to mine cryptocurrency, especially bitcoin.

"I must ensure that every Bhutanese is a custodian, stakeholder, and beneficiary of GMC," King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck announced yesterday in a speech to mark the country's national day.

"To support this policy, I am announcing today the allocation of up to 10,000 BTC (bitcoin), valued at approximately US\$1 billion. This commitment is for our people, our youth, and our nation."

The king in 2023 said Gelephu will be a "Mindfulness City, encompassing conscious and sustainable businesses, inspired by Buddhist spiritual heritage".

Bhutan's GDP per capita is around US\$3,718, according to the World Bank.

Its state-run Druk Holding and Investments (DHI) invested US\$539 million — nearly a fifth of the total GDP — to establish cryptocurrency operations in 2021-2022, according to the World Bank.

It has since developed sizeable crypto holdings, although the exact value is not public. — AFP



Male Rohingya refugees gather in front of a relief distribution point in Balukhali refugee camp in Ukhiya in Bangladesh's southeastern district of Cox's Bazar yesterday. — AFP

## Nepal gifts 2 elephants to Qatar

KATHMANDU — Nepal yesterday gifted two elephants to Qatar, as the pair were flown on a chartered flight from Gautam Buddha International Airport in Nepal's Lumbini province, a government official said.

"The Qatar government had sent the chartered flight to ferry them," said

Abinash Thapa Magar, the information officer at Chitwan National Park, where the male and female elephants were born and raised.

The two elephants were accompanied by a veterinary technician and two mahouts, who will spend a month teaching the local caretaker how to handle them, said Magar. — Xinhua

## Nepal may limit number of climbers amid garbage problem in mountains

KATHMANDU — Nepal may limit the number of climbers and regulate the timing of expeditions, taking into account the carrying capacity of mountains, the short favorable weather window for climbing, and potential congestion.

Under the five-year Action Plan to Keep Mountains Clean (2025-2029) unveiled on Tuesday, the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation has introduced

a number of measures to address the growing waste problem in the mountains, including limiting the number of climbers.

The government will prepare legal and policy provisions to determine and regulate the number of climbers and the timing of expeditions, according to the action plan.

Nepal's Supreme Court last year ordered the government to

issue climbing permits only after specifying the number of climbers. The directive came amid traffic jams on summit ridges and the accumulation of rubbish. For teams assigned to open routes to the summit (rope/route fixing), a condition will be stipulated requiring that all materials used for this work be mandatorily brought back after the completion of the climbing season. — Xinhua

## Thailand holds conference on global partnership against online scams

BANGKOK — The International Conference on the Global Partnership against Online Scams commenced here yesterday, aiming to forge a more coordinated response and strengthen cooperation in combating transnational crimes.

The conference, co-hosted by Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), convened ministerial-level delegates and senior officials from 60 countries, along with representatives from international organizations, civil society, and academia, to align approaches and move from discussion into action.

In his opening remarks, Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow called for closer cooperation and swifter action to rescue and protect victims, clearly distinguish between victims and perpetrators, investigate and prosecute criminal networks, and prevent new victims from slipping into these traps.

Delphine Schantz, UNODC Representative for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, said the meeting took place against the backdrop of a complex, constantly evolving, and globalized organized crime threat, underscoring it as a reflection of Thailand's commitment to

international cooperation against organized crime.

The conference included discussions focused on elevating transnational investigations, disrupting the financial channels of criminal networks, and keeping pace with the advanced technologies utilized by these syndicates.

The two-day event is expected to adopt a joint statement today, demonstrating shared political will to build a sustainable global partnership against cyber-enabled fraud, outlining the outcomes of thematic discussions, and establishing a framework for future collaboration. — Xinhua

## Ancient cures and AI: WHO seeks evidence for traditional medicine

NEW DELHI — The World Health Organisation opened a major conference on traditional medicine today, arguing that new technologies, including artificial intelligence, can bring scientific scrutiny to centuries-old healing practices.

The meeting in New Delhi will examine how governments can regulate traditional medicine while using emerging scientific tools to validate safe and effective treatments.

The UN body hopes this push will help make ancestral practices more compatible with modern healthcare systems.

"Traditional medicine is not a thing of the past," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a video released ahead of the three-day conference.

"There is a growing demand for traditional medicine across countries, communities, and cultures."

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his own message, said the summit would "intensify efforts to harness" the potential of traditional medicine.

Modi is a longtime advocate of yoga and traditional health practices and has backed the WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine, launched in 2022 in his home state of Gujarat.

Shyama Kuruvilla, the head of the centre, said reliance on traditional remedies was "a global reality", noting that 40-90 percent of populations in 90 percent of WHO member states used them.

"With half the world's population lacking access to essential health services, traditional medicine is often the closest — or only care — available for many people," she told AFP in New Delhi.

### 'Evidence-informed'

The UN agency defines traditional medicines as the accumulated knowledge, skills and practices used over time to maintain health and prevent, diagnose and treat physical and mental illness.

But many lack proven scientific value, while conservationists warn that demand for certain products drives trafficking in endangered wildlife, including tigers, rhinos and pangolins.

"WHO's role, therefore, is to help countries ensure that, as with any other medicine, traditional medicine is safe, evidence-informed, and equitably integrated in systems," Kuruvilla added.

Kuruvilla, who studied at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and taught global health policy at Boston University, said that "40 percent or more of biomedical Western medicine, pharmaceuticals, derive from natural products".

She cited aspirin drawing on formulations using willow tree bark, contraceptive pills developed from yam plant roots and child cancer treatments based on Madagascar's rosy periwinkle flower.

The WHO also lists the development of the anti-malaria

treatment artemisinin as drawing on ancient Chinese medicine texts.

### 'Frontier science'

"It's a huge, huge opportunity — and industry has realised this," Kuruvilla said.

Rapid technological advancements, including artificial intelligence, had pushed research to a "transformative moment", to apply scientific rigour to traditional remedies.

The WHO will also launch what it calls the world's largest digital repository of research on the subject — a library of 1.6 million scientific records intended to strengthen evidence and improve knowledge-sharing.

Dr Sylvie Briand, WHO's chief scientist, said AI can assist in analysing drug interactions.

"Artificial intelligence, for instance, can screen millions of compounds, helping us understand the complex structure of herbal products and extract relevant constituents to maximise benefit and minimise adverse effects," she told reporters ahead of the conference.

Briand said advanced imaging technologies, including brain scans, were shedding light on how practices such as meditation and acupuncture affect the body.

Kuruvilla said she was excited by the possibilities.

"It is the frontier science that's allowing us to make this bridge... connecting the past and the future", she said. — AFP



# Warner Bros rejects Paramount bid, sticks with Netflix

NEW YORK – Warner Bros. Discovery yesterday rejected a hostile takeover bid by Paramount launched last week to trump plans by streaming giant Netflix to acquire the Hollywood giant and owner of CNN.

In a statement, Warner Bros said the terms of the Netflix merger were better, while the Paramount offer “once again fails to address key concerns that we have consistently communicated... throughout our extensive engagement and review of their six previous proposals.”

“We are confident that our merger with Netflix represents superior, more certain value for our shareholders,” it said.

Netflix shocked the industry on December 5 by announcing it had sealed an agreement to buy the film and television studio and HBO Max streaming business for nearly US\$83 billion, the entertainment industry’s biggest consolidation deal this decade.

Three days later, Paramount – whose CEO is David Ellison, the son of Larry Ellison, an ally of President Donald Trump – launched an all-cash tender offer valuing the

entertainment giant at US\$108.4 billion.

But Warner Bros yesterday described the Paramount offer as risky, saying it was backed up by “an unknown and opaque revocable trust” and involved “no Ellison family commitment of any kind,” among other factors.

Warner Bros. Discovery also stressed the dependence of the Paramount offer on foreign investors – US\$24 billion of the financing is from Middle East sovereign wealth funds – which would require further regulatory scrutiny.

“Our deal structure is clean and certain, with committed debt financing from leading institutions,” Netflix co-CEOs Ted Sarandos and Greg Peters, wrote in a letter to Warner Bros shareholders, according to Business Insider.

“There are no contingencies, no foreign sovereign wealth funds, and no stock collateral or personal loans,” they added.

Trump has repeatedly weighed in on the bidding war, saying Netflix’s deal “could be a problem” as it would leave Netflix with a huge



Netflix CEO Ted Sarandos poses during the avant-premiere of TV series “Emily in Paris” season 5, at the Grand Rex, in Paris on Monday. – AFP

market share of the film and TV industry.

He later said that he wanted to ensure CNN gets new ownership as part of the Warner Bros. Discovery sale, targeting the outlet he has long blasted for airing news coverage that he repeatedly refers to as “fake news.”

## ‘Strong rationale’

The president’s powerful son-in-law Jared Kushner, was

initially a minor investor in the latest Paramount bid through his Middle East-backed private equity company, but backed out of the deal on Tuesday.

“We continue to believe there is a strong strategic rationale for Paramount’s offer,” the company, Affinity Partners, said in a statement to AFP.

Unlike Netflix’s offer, Paramount’s latest bid included the

buyout of cable channels such as CNN, TNT, TBS and Discovery – which would be added to its group of TV assets like CBS, MTV and Comedy Central.

As Netflix emerged as the likely winning bidder for Warner Bros – the studio behind “Casablanca,” the “Harry Potter” movies and “Friends” – Hollywood’s elite launched an aggressive campaign against the acquisition.

The streaming giant is viewed as a pariah in some Hollywood circles, largely due to its reluctance to release content in cinemas and its disruption of traditional industry practices.

In an interview in Tuesday in Paris, Netflix co-chief executive Sarandos said it would continue to distribute Warner Bros films in cinemas if its takeover bid for the storied studio is successful.

“We’re going to continue to operate Warner Bros. studios independently and release the movies traditionally in cinema,” he said, while admitting his past comments on theatrical distribution “now confuse people.” – AFP

## Louvre disrupted as staff vote to extend strike for second day

Adam Plowright and Lucas Croset

PARIS – Staff at the Louvre Museum voted to extend their strike for a second day yesterday to demand better working conditions and maintenance at the Paris landmark, with management able to open only a limited number of rooms to the public.

The labour dispute at the world’s most-visited museum has added to the woes of the institution and its under-fire director Laurence des Cars, two months after a spectacular robbery.

After being closed by strike action on Monday – and for a weekly day off on Tuesday – hundreds of visitors queued up yesterday morning hoping to see the Louvre’s treasures.

As trade union activists blocked the main entrance and staff voted in favour of continuing their strike, patience wore thin, with some members of the crowd booing and whistling.

“It’s our right, and we are defending their rights too because they will be able to visit a museum in better conditions,” General Confederation of Labour (CGT) representative Christian Galanini told reporters when asked about the frustrations.

At around midday, management announced that they would open up some of the museum’s 400 rooms, notably those containing its best-known works, such as the Mona Lisa or the Venus de Milo.

The strike comes as des Cars and her predecessors face intense scrutiny over the running of the institution after an embarrassing daylight robbery in October that saw thieves make off with jewels worth US\$102 million.

Investigations since have revealed that multiple security audits over the last decade had revealed vulnerabilities at the building, while CCTV and security equipment has been found to be sub-standard.

Former director Jean-Luc Martinez defended his approach to security during a hearing at the Senate on Tuesday, while des Cars was questioned again yesterday.



A notice informs members of the public of the closure of the Louvre Museum as members of the French CGT union protest outside the entrance as museum workers voted to go on strike against increasingly deteriorating working conditions and the declining visitor experience at the world-famous museum, in Paris on Monday. – AFP

## ‘French cultural experience’

As well as the robbery, two other recent incidents have highlighted maintenance problems inside the building which chief architect François Chatillon has described as “not in a good state”.

A water leak in November damaged hundreds of books and manuscripts in the Egyptian department, while management had to shut a gallery housing ancient Greek ceramics in October because ceiling beams above it risk giving way.

“With the theft, then the damage, the floor giving way, the libraries being flooded – everyone can see it, but we already knew. We weren’t listened to,” SUD union leader Elise Muller told reporters on Wednesday.

Unions are also contesting a massive renovation and building plan for the museum announced in January by President

Emmanuel Macron, which is expected to cost 700 million to 800 million euros (up to US\$940 million).

Many tourists waiting to enter yesterday were torn between their personal frustration and sympathies for a protest movement.

“It’s frustrating, right, because we’ve come all the way from Canada, and we’ve come early, you try to make sure that you’re doing everything correct,” said 41-year-old Jesse Henry, a mechanic visiting the French capital with his wife and children.

“But I also understand that it’s a demonstration.”

Others could see a bright side in witnessing first-hand why the French are so famed for their strikes.

“It’s a very unexpected French cultural experience,” joked Jodie Bell, 51, from Australia. – AFP

## Merz says EU must use frozen Russian assets to pressure Putin

BERLIN – German Chancellor Friedrich Merz yesterday said an EU plan to use frozen Russian assets to fund Ukraine’s defence was essential to increase pressure on President Vladimir Putin.

“It is about aid for Ukraine, but it is also about sending a clear signal to Russia that we will use the assets that are available here to help end this war as quickly as possible,” Merz told parliament ahead of a key EU summit.

The European Union has laid out a plan to use the frozen assets to harness 90 billion euros (US\$105 billion) for a loan to help Ukraine repel Moscow’s forces, with the money to be paid back by any eventual Russian reparations to Ukraine.

But while the plan has the strong backing of many member states, including Germany, it has drawn opposition from others, including Belgium – home to international deposit organisation Euroclear, which holds most of the assets – whose leaders fear Russian reprisals.

Merz said on the eve of the summit that “it is not enough for us to dry up the sources of income for the Russian war machine with further sanctions”.

“It is not enough for us in Europe to continue our financial support for Ukraine as before. It is not enough for us to throw all our political weight behind peace negotiations.

“We must do all of this, and we are undoubtedly doing so, but it is clear that the pressure on Putin must be increased even further in order to persuade him to engage in serious negotiations.”

Merz also said he was “aware of the concerns of the Belgian government” and that Germany was “consulting with our partners in order to address them”.

“We do not want to take this step in order to prolong the war,” he added. “We want to take it in order to end the war as quickly as possible.” – AFP



# Hydrogen plays part in global warming: study

PARIS — Hydrogen has long been touted as a possible solution to the climate crisis, but it could also be a small part of the problem, a study warned yesterday.

Advocates of hydrogen hope it can be produced and used on a large scale in transport and heavy industries in the future, providing a clean alternative to fossil fuels as it only emits water vapours.

But the research published in the journal *Nature* found that hydrogen has played a part in rising temperatures by helping methane, a potent greenhouse gas, stay longer

in the atmosphere.

Emissions of hydrogen rose between 1990 and 2020, contributing a fraction of a degree – or 0.02C – to the nearly 1.5C increase in average temperatures since the pre-industrial period, the research found.

“We need a deeper understanding of the global hydrogen cycle and its links to global warming to support a climate-safe and sustainable hydrogen economy,” said Stanford University scientist Rob Jackson, the paper’s senior author.

The study, by an international consortium of scientists known as

the Global Carbon Project, found that the increase in hydrogen emissions is mostly due to human activity.

Its rise is linked to the increase in methane emitted by fossil fuels, livestock and landfills, the researchers said.

The two molecules are intertwined: methane produces hydrogen when it breaks down in the atmosphere.

While hydrogen itself is not a pollutant, it indirectly contributes to warming by absorbing natural detergents that destroy methane, a potent greenhouse gas that has a shorter lifespan than carbon dioxide.

“More hydrogen means fewer detergents in the atmosphere, causing methane to persist longer and, therefore, warm the climate longer,” said the study’s lead author, Zutao Ouyang, an assistant professor of ecosystem modelling at Auburn University in Alabama.

Its interactions with natural detergents also affect cloud formation and produce greenhouse gases such as ozone and stratospheric water vapour.

Other sources of hydrogen in the atmosphere since 1990 include leaks from industrial hydrogen

production.

Hydrogen can be manufactured by passing an electric current through water to split it between hydrogen and oxygen, a process called electrolysis.

Today, however, most hydrogen is produced from natural gas or coal in energy-intensive processes that emit large amounts of carbon dioxide.

The goal is to produce “green” hydrogen at scale using renewable energy instead, but the process is expensive and the sector has faced considerable hurdles. — AFP

## Doctors in England go on strike for 14<sup>th</sup> time



**Veteran leftist British politician Jeremy Corbyn (centre, right) greets strikers on a picket line during the first day of a five-day resident doctors' strike outside St Thomas' Hospital in central London yesterday. Doctors in England voted on Monday to go ahead with a five-day strike starting this week in the busy Christmas season as a "super flu" outbreak sweeps the country.** — AFP

LONDON — Doctors in England walked out for the 14<sup>th</sup> time in less than three years yesterday in a dispute with the government over pay and jobs.

The five-day stoppage by resident doctors — those below consultant level — comes as negotiations reached a deadlock over the medics’ demand for a 26 percent pay rise to compensate for what they say is a real-time loss of earnings due to inflation.

Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer has branded the industrial action “irresponsible” at a time when the state-funded National Health Service (NHS) is struggling to handle a “super flu” outbreak.

The pay demand comes on top of a 28.9 percent increase already secured over three years after previous strikes.

Laura Harmer, who was picketing outside St Thomas’ Hospital in London, told AFP “the government is definitely trying to demonise junior doctors”.

“They’re calling us things like ‘moaning minnies’, ‘juvenile delinquents’. I think they really want to push the blame onto us, when in reality we’re working in these conditions that aren’t

acceptable for the pay that we’re getting.”

Doctor Shivam Sharma, 25, said the National Health Service needed more doctors.

“We know that we’re about 40,000 doctors short compared to the EU average. And that means doctors are having to do the job of multiple doctors,” he said outside St Thomas’ Hospital.

But health minister Wes Streeting said that in the current economic government it was impossible to meet the demands of the British Medical Association (BMA), which represents the doctors.

“There are such a wide range of pressures on the public purse at the moment, on everything from the defence of the nation to crumbling public infrastructure,” he said.

“That is the context in which I’ve asked resident doctors ... to understand that as a government we’re going as hard and as fast as we can to improve pay, terms and conditions and quality of services.”

Streeting has already agreed to the doctors’ union’s demand that UK-trained medics get priority for training posts over candidates from overseas. — AFP

## FBI widens net in hunt for Brown University shooter

Gregory Walton

NEW YORK — FBI experts continued yesterday to comb through the vicinity of a weekend mass shooting that killed two students at the elite Brown University, as the hunt for the gunman dragged into a fourth day.

Images posted by the bureau on social media showed laboratory specialists and evidence response teams conducting a forensic search on the snow-covered grounds outside the Providence, Rhode Island campus.

The shooting happened on Saturday, when a man with a rifle burst into a campus building where exams were underway and opened fire, before fleeing.

Providence officials screened a new video timeline at a briefing on Tuesday which appeared to show the person of interest walking through residential areas in the town.

“There’s enhanced video footage so we are asking the public to see the body movements, the body posture... that may help you identify this individual,” the town’s police chief colonel, Oscar Perez, said on Tuesday.

Perez renewed his appeal for members of the public with homes and vehicles equipped with cameras to supply footage to the police.

Two-hundred actionable tips

had been received by investigators, he added.

Authorities initially detained a man in connection with the shooting, but they later released him, saying he was unconnected.

The FBI, which is offering a US\$ 50,000 reward for the suspect’s capture, said he should be considered “armed and dangerous” and described him as “approximately 5 foot 8 inches [1.73 metre] with a stocky build.”

On Tuesday, Brown University called on its students who may have been in the area of the shooting Saturday to arrange for a police interview.

Later in the day, it also issued a statement, denouncing “accusations, speculation and conspiracies” voiced on social media against one of its students.

“If this individual’s name had any relevance to the current investigation, they would be actively looking for this individual and providing information publicly,” the school said.

### Tributes to victims

The two students killed were Ella Cook, vice president of Brown’s Republican Party association, and Mukhammad Aziz Umurzokov, originally from Uzbekistan, who had hoped to become a neurosurgeon.

“Ella, who came to Brown from Mountain Brook, Alabama, was a passionate and intellectually curious member of our community who was interested in French and Francophone studies,” Brown president Christina H. Paxson said.

“Mukhammad... was known for being driven, conscientious and disciplined, particularly as he pursued his deep ambition to make a positive impact in the world by becoming a neurosurgeon.”

The attack is the latest incident of mass shooting in the United States, where attempts to restrict access to firearms face political deadlock.

There have been more than 300 mass shootings in the United States so far this year, according to the Gun Violence Archive, which defines a mass shooting as four or more people shot.

During a Christmas event on Sunday at the White House, US President Donald Trump spoke briefly about the shooting, saying “things can happen” and wishing the injured to “get well fast.”

Brown, which has around 11,000 students, issued an emergency alert on Saturday following reports of a shooting near its engineering and physics departments. Two exams had been scheduled at the time. — AFP

## UK police to arrest those chanting ‘globalise the intifada’

LONDON — People chanting pro-Palestinian calls to “globalise the intifada” will be arrested, UK police warned yesterday, saying the “context had changed” in the wake of the Bondi Beach massacre.

“We know communities are concerned about placards and chants such as ‘globalise the intifada’,” the London Metropolitan and Greater Manchester police forces said in a statement.

“Violent acts have taken place, the context has changed — words have meaning and consequence. We will act decisively and make arrests.”

Two gunmen killed 15 people on Sunday when they fired into crowds at a Hanukkah festival on Sydney’s Bondi Beach.

One, Sajid Akram, was shot and killed by police. His son Naveed, 24, was charged in hospital yesterday with more than 50 counts, including

terrorism and 15 murders.

The Bondi Beach attack came some two months after a gunman of Syrian origin attacked a synagogue in the English city of Manchester. Two people died along with the gunman in the October 2 attack on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, Yom Kippur.

UK police have already stepped up security around the country’s synagogues, Jewish schools and community hubs.

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar urged Canberra to act against a “surge” in antisemitism after Sunday’s attack.

In a post on X, Saar said since the October 7, 2023 attack and the subsequent war in Gaza “there has been a surge in antisemitism in Australia, including violent incitement against Israel and Jews”.

He referred to slogans heard at

pro-Palestinian protests, such as “Globalise the Intifada”, “From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will be Free”, and “Death to the IDF,” the Israel Defence Forces.

While Britain’s prosecutors have said the phrases do not meet the threshold for prosecutions, “in the escalating threat context, we will recalibrate to be more assertive,” Met Commissioner Mark Rowley and the Manchester Chief Constable Stephen Watson said in their joint statement.

The intifada (“uprising”) refers to Palestinian uprisings against Israel. The first raged from 1987 to 1993, while the second flared between 2000 and 2005.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, whose wife is Jewish, denounced the weekend gun rampage in Australia as “sickening”, saying it was “an antisemitic terrorist attack against Jewish families”. — AFP



# Sheinbaum calls on UN to prevent ‘bloodshed’ in Venezuela

MEXICO CITY – Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum urged the United Nations yesterday to “prevent any bloodshed” in Venezuela, as US President Donald Trump piled pressure on the South American country.

“The United Nations has been conspicuously absent. It must assume its role to prevent any bloodshed and to always seek the peaceful resolution of conflicts,” the left-wing president told a press

conference the morning after Washington announced a blockade of “sanctioned oil tankers” entering or leaving Venezuela.

The United States has for months been building a major military deployment in the Caribbean with the stated goal of combatting Latin American drug trafficking.

Caracas views the operation as a campaign to push out leftist strongman Nicolás Maduro – whom Washington and other governments

view as an illegitimate president – and to “steal” Venezuelan oil.

Sheinbaum said that regardless of “opinions” about the leadership of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, Mexico’s position is to reject “foreign interference.”

“We call for dialogue and peace to be used in any international dispute, and not intervention. That is our position by conviction and by our Constitution,” she added.

Chile’s hard-right president-elect

José Antonio Kast on Tuesday said that he would back efforts to end Maduro’s “dictatorship,” expanding Trump’s support base in the region at a time when he is considering strikes on Venezuelan territory.

The US Embassy in Quito announced yesterday that US Air Force personnel were in Ecuador’s Pacific port city of Manta for “a temporary operation with the Ecuadorian Air Force.” It did not specify how many people or

equipment had been deployed.

Strikes on three alleged drug-trafficking vessels in the eastern Pacific Ocean killed eight people on Monday, according to the US military, the latest in a controversial campaign that has killed dozens of people.

Since early September, the US military has targeted alleged drug-smuggling boats in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean, destroying at least 26 small vessels and killing at least 95 people. – *AFP*

## EU move to ease combustion-engine ban ‘historic mistake’: Sánchez

MADRID–The European Union’s decision to walk back a 2035 ban on new petrol and diesel cars is a “historic mistake”, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said yesterday.

“What was approved yesterday [Tuesday] constitutes a historic mistake for Europe, because competitiveness is ensured by sustainability, not by loosening our commitments,” he said during a climate conference in Madrid.

The combustion-engine ban was hailed as a major win in the

fight against climate change when adopted in 2023.

Spain, France and the Nordic countries warned that ditching the commitment risked slowing the shift to electric vehicles, undermining the EU’s green agenda and deterring investments in electrification.

But carmakers and their backers have lobbied hard over the past year for Brussels to relax the ban, in the face of fierce competition from China and a slower-than-expected shift to electric vehicles.

Under proposals decried by environmental groups, carmakers will now have to cut exhaust emissions from new vehicles by 90 percent from 2021 levels – down from an envisaged 100 percent – with the remainder “compensated” in various ways.

Spain is Europe’s second-largest car producer after Germany.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz has hailed the EU’s new proposals, saying “more openness to technology and greater flexibility are the right steps”. – *AFP*

## 4 Colombian policemen killed in attacks by cocaine-trafficking guerrillas

CALI, Colombia – At least four policemen died in two separate attacks on Tuesday by suspected left-wing guerrillas in southwest Colombia, where various armed groups are fighting for control of the cocaine trade, authorities said.

In the first attack, which authorities blamed on the National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group – the largest in the Americas – two police officers were killed by a bomb while patrolling by motorbike in the city of Cali.

Two more officers died in a village in neighbouring Cauca department after rebels attacked a police station for hours with explosives, grenades and rifle fire, governor Octavio Guzmán said.

Videos shared on social media showed several buildings on the main street of the village reduced to rubble.

Defence Minister Pedro Sánchez said the attack was carried out by

dissident members of the defunct Marxist rebel army FARC, who oppose a 2016 peace deal with the state.

Their deaths brought the number of police officers and soldiers killed by armed groups to around 150 in the conflict-torn South American country this year.

The ELN had on Sunday imposed a three-day curfew on communities in areas under its control in response to what it called the “threats of intervention” against Colombia by President Donald Trump.

The US leader said earlier this month that any country that produces cocaine and sells it to the United States was “subject to attack.”

Colombia is the world’s largest exporter of the drug, and the United States its biggest consumer.

On Tuesday, Washington said it was designating Colombia’s largest drug-trafficking gang, the Clan del

Golfo, as terrorists, even as the group engages in talks with Petro’s government.

The ELN has taken part in failed peace negotiations with Colombia’s last five governments.

On Sunday, President Gustavo Petro ordered the Colombian security forces to attack the group, which vies with FARC dissidents for territory and control of lucrative coca plantations and trafficking routes.

Historically strong relations between Bogotá and Washington have soured under Petro – Colombia’s first-ever leftist leader – since Trump’s return to office in January.

A fierce critic of Trump’s administration, Petro has been hit by sanctions, accused of drug trafficking, and seen his country removed from a list of US allies in the fight against drug trafficking. – *AFP*

## Venezuela says oil exports continue normally despite Trump ‘blockade’

CARACAS – Venezuela struck a defiant note yesterday, insisting that crude oil exports were not impacted by US President Donald Trump’s announcement of a blockade.

“Export operations for crude and byproducts continue normally. Oil tankers linked to PDVSA operations continue to sail,” state oil company Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) said in a statement.

Trump said on Tuesday that he was imposing “a total and complete blockade of all sanctioned oil tankers going into and out of Venezuela.”

Referring to the heavy US

military presence in the Caribbean – including the world’s largest aircraft carrier – Trump warned “Venezuela is completely surrounded by the largest Armada ever assembled in the History of South America.”

Venezuela’s battered economy relies heavily on petroleum exports.

But the country’s military, which supports embattled hard-left President Nicolas Maduro, said it was “not intimidated.”

PDVSA said that “none of these aggressions have succeeded in denting the operational capacity or the determination of the workforce.” – *AFP*

## Mexico slams US for classifying fentanyl as ‘weapon of mass destruction’

MEXICO CITY – Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said on Tuesday that the fight against fentanyl should focus on root causes of the crisis, as she criticised a new US classification of the deadly drug as a “weapon of mass destruction.”

President Donald Trump said on Monday he was placing fentanyl in the same category as nuclear and chemical weapons as he ramps up his campaign against drug cartels in Latin America.

“I have raised this with President Trump – the causes of drug use must be addressed, not just this approach of now classifying one of the drugs as a lethal weapon of mass destruction,” Sheinbaum told reporters.

The fentanyl classification ties in with the Trump administration’s

campaign against alleged “narco-terrorists,” which has included a military campaign targeting alleged drug-smuggling boats.

The vessels are thought to be transporting cocaine rather than far-deadlier fentanyl, which is primarily smuggled into the United States from Mexico rather than by boat from Colombia or Venezuela.

The US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention reported an estimated 80,000 overdose deaths in the country in 2024, with some 48,000 of those due to synthetic opioids such as fentanyl.

The executive order said “illicit fentanyl is closer to a chemical weapon than a narcotic,” and that its manufacture and distribution threatens US national security. – *AFP*

## Portugal charges wife of ousted Guinea-Bissau leader in graft case

LISBON – Portuguese authorities charged the wife of Guinea-Bissau’s ousted president as part of an investigation into suspected smuggling and money laundering, judicial police said on Tuesday.

Dinisia Reis Embaló, the wife of Umaro Sissoco Embaló, arrived in Lisbon on the same flight from Guinea-Bissau as another passenger who was arrested by Portuguese authorities on Sunday following an anonymous tip-off.

The latter passenger, who was transporting nearly five million euros (US\$5.9 million) in cash, was suspected of smuggling and

money laundering, police said in a statement.

Dinisia Reis Embaló’s charge was “linked” to that investigation, a judicial police spokesperson told AFP without giving further details.

The flight carrying both individuals had originally been classified as military and had been due to continue to the southern Portuguese city of Beja.

However, “subsequently it was verified that the nature of the flight and its destination were different”, police previously said.

Portuguese media have reported that the first suspect was a man close to Guinea-Bissau’s overthrown

president Embaló, who fled after the military ousted him in a November 26 coup.

Public broadcaster RTP identified him as businessman Tito Gomes Fernandes.

The coup in Guinea-Bissau is the latest in a string of takeover attempts in the small west African nation since its independence from Portugal in 1974.

Portuguese Foreign Minister Paulo Rangel said on Tuesday he was in touch with the authorities in Guinea-Bissau in an attempt to forge a “return to constitutional order”. – *AFP*



A homeless person lies on the ground next to a shop window of El Corte Inglés department store displaying a Christmas tree, in the runup to next week's Christmas, in Seville on Tuesday. – *AFP*



# Football shorts

## Veteran Suarez signs new Inter Miami contract

MIAMI – Former Uruguay striker Luis Suarez has signed a contract with Inter Miami for the upcoming season, the Major League Soccer side said yesterday.

Suarez, who turns 39 in January, joined Lionel Messi’s outfit in 2024 before helping the club to the 2025 MLS Cup and Eastern Conference title.

The former Barcelona, Liverpool and Atletico Madrid attacker won the Champions League, La Liga and the League Cup during his time in Europe. “Suarez signs a new contract after recently concluding the historic 2025 season for what was his second year at the club,” Inter Miami said.

“The striker’s vast experience and leadership were crucial as Inter Miami clinched its third and fourth titles by winning the Eastern Conference Championship and the MLS Cup... while also excelling on the international stage with a historic run to the round of 16 at the revamped 2025 FIFA Club World Cup and reaching the semifinals of the 2025 Concacaf Champions Cup.

“Suarez made a total 50 appearances across all competitions in 2025, scoring 17 goals and dishing out 17 assists for a total 34 goal contributions,” it added. – AFP

## Palace boss Glasner says contract talks on hold due to hectic schedule

LONDON – Crystal Palace boss Oliver Glasner said yesterday that talks over a potential new contract are on hold, with reports suggesting the club are drawing up a list of potential successors.

The Austrian, whose deal expires at the end of the season, continues to be linked with other clubs, including Premier League rivals.

Palace host Finnish champions KuPS in the Conference League today before travelling to Leeds for a top-flight match just 48 hours later and then playing away to Arsenal in the League Cup quarter-finals on Tuesday.

Glasner, 51, said there is currently no time to hold detailed conversations with chairman Steve Parish because of the packed schedule.

He said: “When should I talk about my contract?

“And that’s why we said, ‘OK, let’s push it backwards when we have time’.... We want to do it in a relaxed atmosphere, and right at the moment there is no relaxed atmosphere. That’s why we pushed it back.”

Sky Sports reported that there were growing expectations that Glasner would let his contract run out, with hopes of securing a job elsewhere.

The Austrian led the club to FA Cup glory in May - the first major trophy in their history - in his first full season in charge.

This season Palace are fifth in the Premier League and are well placed to qualify directly for the Conference League round of 16.

Glasner intends to name

completely different teams for the matches against KuPS and Leeds.

The former Eintracht Frankfurt boss said he has only 16 senior players available and will hand opportunities to some of the club’s academy players.

Attacking midfielder Daichi Kamada faces “at least eight to 10 weeks” on the sidelines with a hamstring issue he sustained during Sunday’s 3-0 defeat to Manchester City. – AFP

## Malaysia hit with 3-0 defeats in football forgery scandal

K U A L A L UMPUR – FIFA has penalised Malaysia with three 3-0 defeats for fielding ineligible players, the country’s football authorities said yesterday, the latest punishment in a simmering scandal.

Friendly wins over Palestine and Singapore, and a draw against Cape Verde, all at home this year, have been overturned, Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) said.

FIFA has already suspended seven foreign-born national team players over forged documents that claimed they had Malaysian ancestry.

The FAM, previously fined US\$440,000, has now been hit with a further US\$12,500 punishment.

A FIFA disciplinary committee meeting on Friday ruled that “Malaysia is declared to have lost 3-0 in all three matches”, the FAM said.

FIFA launched an investigation after receiving a complaint following Malaysia’s 4-0 win against Vietnam in June in an Asian Cup qualifier.

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

The FAM has denied any wrongdoing and pledged to appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport. – AFP

# FIFA announces US\$60 World Cup tickets after pricing backlash

PARIS - World Cup organisers unveiled a new cut-price ticket category on Tuesday after a backlash by fans over pricing for the 2026 tournament in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Football’s global governing body FIFA said in a statement that it had created a limited number of “Supporter Entry Tier” fixed at US\$60 for all 104 matches, including the final.

It said the plan was “designed to further support travelling fans following their national teams across the tournament”.

FIFA said that the US\$60 (51 euro) tickets would be reserved for fans of qualified teams and would make up 10 percent of each national federation’s allotment.

Fan group Football Supporters Europe (FSE), which last week called prices “extortionate” and “astronomical”, responded by saying the FIFA was offering too little.

“While we welcome FIFA’s seeming recognition of the damage its original plans were to cause, the revisions do not go far enough,” FSE said in a statement on Tuesday.

Last week, FSE said ticket prices were almost five times higher than in 2022 in Qatar, describing FIFA’s pricing for 2026

as a “monumental betrayal of the tradition of the World Cup”.

“If a supporter were to follow their team from the first match to the final it would cost them a minimum of US\$6,900,” it said at the time, adding that World Cup organisers had promised tickets priced from US\$21 in a bid document released in 2018.

## ‘Appeasement tactic’

On Tuesday, FSE said FIFA’s partial ticketing U-turn exposed flaws in how prices for next year’s tournament had been set.

“For the moment we are looking at the FIFA announcement as nothing more than an appeasement tactic due to the global negative backlash,” FSE said.

“This shows that FIFA’s ticketing policy is not set in stone, was decided in a rush, and without proper consultation - including with FIFA’s own member associations.

“Based on the allocations publicly available, this would mean that at best a few hundred fans per match and team would be lucky enough to take advantage of the 60 US dollar prices, while the vast majority would still have to pay extortionate prices, way higher than at any tournament before.”

The organisation also criticised the failure to make provisions for

supporters with disabilities or their companions.

Britain’s Prime Minister Keir Starmer echoed FSE, stating that FIFA’s cheaper ticket category did not go far enough.

“I welcome FIFA’s announcement of some lower priced supporters tickets,” Starmer wrote on X.

“But as someone who used to save up for England tickets, I encourage FIFA to do more to make tickets more affordable so that the World Cup doesn’t lose touch with the genuine supporters who make the game so special.”

Announcing the US\$60 tickets on Tuesday, FIFA said that national federations “are requested to ensure that these tickets are specifically allocated to loyal fans who are closely connected to their national teams”.

FIFA also said that if fans bought tickets for games in the knockout rounds only to find their team eliminated at an earlier stage, they “will have the administrative fee waived when refunds are processed.”

It added that it was making the announcement “amid extraordinary global demand for tickets” with 20 million requests already submitted.

The draw for tickets of all prices in the first round of sales will take place on Tuesday, January 13.

– AFP



Cardiff City’s English goalkeeper Nathan Trott sees a shot from Chelsea’s Portuguese midfielder Pedro Neto (left) hit the back of the net for Chelsea’s second goal during the English League Cup quarter-final between Cardiff City and Chelsea at Cardiff City Stadium, in Cardiff, south Wales on Tuesday. Chelsea won the game 3-1. – AFP

## FIFA Dembele and Bonmati scoop FIFA Best awards

PARIS – France and Paris Saint-Germain attacker Ousmane Dembele won the men’s FIFA Best award at a ceremony in Qatar on Tuesday, while Barcelona midfield maestro Aitana Bonmati collected the women’s prize.

Dembele, 28, won the Ballon d’Or in September, rewarding an exceptional season with PSG, which included the Ligue 1 club’s first Champions League title.

“I wanted to thank my teammates. Hard work pays off, it’s been a fantastic year for me, both individually and collectively,” said Dembele after the ceremony, which took place on the eve of the Intercontinental Cup final between PSG and Flamengo, also being held in Qatar.

Former Borussia Dortmund and

Barcelona forward Dembele, who was part of the France team that won the World Cup in 2018, scored 35 goals in all competitions as PSG claimed a French league and cup double as well as European glory.

PSG’s Spanish coach Luis Enrique was named best coach of a men’s team, ahead of Barcelona’s Hansi Flick and Liverpool’s Premier League winning manager Arne Slot.

Bonmati, 27, was crowned women’s player of the year for the third time in a row, after also picking up her third consecutive Ballon d’Or in the autumn.

“I am grateful to have the honour,” she said, before thanking her team-mates and coaches, as well as the fans who voted for her.

The personal awards come at the end of a year of ups and downs for

the Spaniard, who won the Spanish domestic league crown lost both the Champions League and European Championship finals last season.

Bonmati was named player of the tournament at the Euros, despite not starting either of Spain’s first two matches as she recovered from a bout of viral meningitis.

She is currently out of action after fracturing her leg in training on the eve of Spain’s successful Nations League final second leg win over Germany.

England manager Sarina Wiegman picked up the award for coaching a women’s side after she won a third consecutive Euros title in the summer.

In the goalkeeping category, Italy’s Gianluigi Donnarumma, who joined Manchester City after

winning the Champions League with PSG, picked up the men’s award, while Chelsea’s Euro 2025 winner Hannah Hampton won the trophy in the women’s category.

Santiago Montiel won the coveted Puskas award for best goal of the year thanks to his overhead kick from outside the penalty area for Independiente against Independiente Rivadavia in an Argentinian top flight match.

Lizbeth Ovalle’s scorpion kick for Tigres against Guadalajara in a Mexican league match won the Marta award.

The winners were chosen by a combined vote of fans, media representatives, captains and national team coaches for their performances between August 11, 2024 and August 2, 2025. – AFP



# Emotional Carey slams ton to give Australia upper hand in 3<sup>rd</sup> Ashes Test

Martin Parry

ADELAIDE – An emotional Alex Carey slammed a controversial 106 on his home ground and Usman Khawaja hit a defiant 82 yesterday to put Australia in the driving seat of the third Ashes Test against England.

Batting after captain Pat Cummins won the toss as temperatures topped 36 Celsius at Adelaide Oval, the hosts were 326-8 at stumps on day one after the shock of Steve Smith being ruled out with illness.

Mitchell Starc was not out 33 and Nathan Lyon yet to score.

“To make a hundred here in front of home fans and family was special,” Carey said, although it was shrouded in controversy over a let-off on 72.

Carey conceded he likely edged a delivery from England quick Josh Tongue that was caught behind by Jamie Smith.

“I thought there was a feather or some sort of noise when it passed the bat,” he said.

“If I was given out I think I would have reviewed it, probably not confidently.”

He was given not out and England failed to have the decision overturned on review with replays showing a noise spike before the ball reached his bat.

The “snicko” technology’s operator, BBG, admitted to reporters after play there had likely been an error with England raising the matter with match referee Jeff Crowe.

“I don’t think we’ve done anything about it so far but after today, maybe that might go a bit further,” said England bowling consultant David Saker.

It overshadowed Carey’s maiden Ashes ton that saw him gesture towards the sky in a nod to his father Gordon, who died from cancer in September.

“I guess you know as well why I was looking to the heavens. I’m trying not to tear up. But, no, it was great,” he said.

A tireless Jofra Archer ended with 3-29 on a tough day for England’s bowlers in the field.

“I thought it was a good performance from our bowlers, the heat took us a bit by surprise,” said Saker.

“The boys toiled away.”



Australian batsman Alex Carey celebrates scoring a century on the first day of the third Ashes cricket Test match against England at the Adelaide Oval in Adelaide yesterday.

– AFP

## Khawaja reprieve

Australia lead the five-Test series 2-0 and will retain the Ashes if they win or draw, after back-to-back eight-wicket thumpings in Perth and Brisbane.

Smith, who has more than 10,000 runs, had been feeling unwell in the lead-up but was on Tuesday named in the side.

He was on the field during the morning warm-up but left 20 minutes before the toss shaking his head.

His absence gave an unexpected reprieve to Khawaja, who had been overlooked as opener in favour of Travis Head and Jake Weatherald.

Khawaja, who missed Brisbane after suffering back spasms in Perth, grabbed his chance in a stoic knock.

He was eventually out just before tea, slog-sweeping to Tongue in the deep off the spin of Will Jacks.

Carey picked up the mantle, first alongside Josh Inglis (32), then Pat Cummins (13), and latterly Starc, who once more showed his prowess with the bat.

Carey hit eight fours and a six in his third Test century, bringing up the milestone in front of family, friends and 56,298 fans – the biggest cricket crowd ever at the venue.

## Archer burst

A blistering first over after lunch from Archer had left Australia reeling at 94-4.

He removed Marnus Labuschagne for 19 with his first ball after the interval.

Two deliveries later Cameron Green was gone, with Brydon Carse collecting catches at midwicket to dismiss both.

Inglis and Cummins fell in the final session to Tongue and Carse respectively.

Players from both teams wore black armbands as a mark of respect to the victims of the Bondi Beach mass shooting.

A moment of silence was held before the game with security tightened and flags flying at half-mast.

At the start, Weatherald raced to 18 but his gung-ho approach cost him against the pace of Archer, who fired down a bouncer and induced a top edge to Smith.

Head followed next over for 10, with Zak Crawley taking a sensational instinctive catch low to his left off Carse.

Khawaja, on five, was fortunate to survive when Harry Brook dropped a sitter at second slip and went on to bring up his 28<sup>th</sup> Test 50 to big cheers.

Carey had another life on 52 when Carse put down a difficult chance in the covers and the 34-year-old made the most of it before falling when he top-edged Jacks to Smith just before the close.

– AFP

# Malaysian martial art coach accused of striking SEA Games judge



BANGKOK – A Malaysian martial art coach has been accused of assaulting a Filipino referee at the Southeast Asian Games, Manila’s Olympic body said yesterday, following protests after a disputed loss.

The latest drama at the regional sport showdown hosted by Thailand unfolded on Monday after a women’s event in pencak silat, a regional martial art, ended in a tie.

Officials gave Thai competitor Chongthima Rueanthong, 22, the win based on a tie-breaker rule, saying Malaysia’s Nor Farah Mazlan, 27, had notched up more fouls, local media reported.

The Malaysian team disputed the ruling, including by chasing after and shouting at SEA Games staff.

“A Filipino judge in the pencak silat event at the 2025 SEA Games was attacked by a Malaysian coach, but is now safe,” according to a statement from Philippine Olympic Committee President Bambol Tolentino.

An aide to Tolentino told AFP a formal protest had been lodged with the SEA Games organising committee.

A SEA Games staffer in Bangkok who spoke on condition of anonymity declined to comment until a “technical investigation is finished”.

“The fight stays on the mats. Egos and frustrations must never translate into violence against anyone – officials, staff, or participants,” Philippine Pencak Silat Association president Princess Kiram wrote in a Facebook post on Tuesday.

“Remember we represent our flag.”

The biennial SEA Games, which run until Saturday, feature thousands of athletes competing in events ranging from football and fencing to skateboarding, sailing and combat sports.

The Games are known for the inclusion of non-Olympic sports from the region such as pencak silat, a martial art distinguished by its dance-like movements, and sepak takraw, a form of foot volleyball played with a rattan ball.

Organisers this year were criticised for embarrassing stumbles even before the hours-delayed opening ceremony last week, including failing to play national anthems and displaying incorrect national flags.

Host Thailand leads the overall medal count, followed by Indonesia and Vietnam.

– AFP

# Coe shares ‘frustration’ over marathon record despite Kenyan’s doping ban

Pirate Irwin



PARIS – World Athletics president Sebastian Coe said he shared people’s “frustration” that the women’s marathon world record held by Ruth Chepngetich still stands despite the Kenyan receiving a three-year doping ban in October.

Chepngetich’s achievements and records pre-dating the incriminating sample she gave in March 2025 still stand, including the world record of 2hr 09min 56sec set at the 2024 Chicago marathon.

Coe, reviewing the athletics year with agency reporters this week, said legal constraints prevented the 31-year-old being stripped of her record.

“I’m not a lawyer mercifully but there are some legal challenges, of course, that the burden of proof can only be a positive test and evidence that a doping infringement was taking place at the time that the performance was made,” said the two-time 1500 metres Olympic champion.

“Yes, there are frustrations and I share that view but I am advised on good legal authority.

“It is extremely difficult to do a retrospective assessment if you don’t have the ability to absolutely... demonstrate that that was a performance-enhanced outing.”

Coe, who along with his federation’s decision-making Council, has been Ukraine’s most high-profile supporter among sports governing bodies by imposing a blanket ban on Russian athletes, admitted the battle against doping was never-ending but there “is a recognition amongst athletes – and this is an important recognition – that you know there is no fear or favour”.

High-profile athletes and powerful federations with “the sort of political powers you had in the past, that counts for absolutely nothing now,” said the former British Conservative lawmaker.

“It’s a very, very different landscape. Is it a perfect landscape? No, of course it isn’t.”

“I’ve always made this point that we’re never going to get to the Elysian Fields of this.”

Coe said he and the Athletics Integrity Unit he set up to conduct drug testing in the sport “wake up each day trying to figure out how to be better at this”.

“We’ve got to go beyond just simple compliance or minimum requirements here. We’ve got to reach for the stars... literally.”

## ‘Welcome innovation’

Coe said he took pleasure from a successful world championships in Tokyo in September, with seven of the nine evening sessions sold out and the morning sessions also boasting healthy attendances.

This was in stark contrast to the catastrophe that befell Grand Slam Track, fronted by track legend Michael Johnson. The mini-circuit has filed for bankruptcy after a disastrous first season, leaving athletes fearing they will never receive their prize money.

The all-women event Athlos, financed by Serena Williams’s wealthy husband and Reddit co-founder Alexis Ohanian, appears to have been more of a success after two editions.

Coe said WA and Athlos have a “very good relationship” and are keen to understand the “complexities of what they’re doing” but he refused to address Grand Slam’s fall from grace directly.

However, he said while he welcomed

innovation in track and field, it has to be “underpinned by really solid financial models”.

“We will always welcome innovation and investment in our sport,” Coe said.

“Because that tells me that if you’ve got organisations that do actually want to invest in your sport then you’re doing something right.

“But innovation has to be underpinned.. by really solid financial models. [By] operational execution of the highest level.”

Coe, 69, said that was why World Athletics was leaving nothing to chance with the preparations for the inaugural edition of the Ultimate Championship in Budapest next September.

“We’re now into the third year of preparation,” he said. “They are working absolutely flat out to do everything they possibly can to deliver an Ultimate Championship which... creates something new and exciting for the athletes.

“It has to be suffused in reality. It has to be a financial business plan that is absolutely robust.

“If you don’t get those ingredients right then the only people that really suffer are the athletes.

“That’s not really what I came into the sport to risk.”

– AFP



# Eurovision facing fractious 2026 as unity unravels

Robin Millard

GENEVA — The Eurovision Song Contest heads into its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition next year mired in its biggest-ever political boycott, with five countries staying away over Israel’s participation.

Eurovision organisers announced on Monday that 35 countries would take part in the world’s biggest live televised music event in May – the fewest since entry was expanded in 2004.

The number would have been even lower, but for Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova rejoining the glitzy annual extravaganza.

Once the lights go up in Vienna, Eurovision 2026 may look very much like a regular edition.

However, the boycott will cast a shadow over proceedings – and may remain the biggest talking point.

For William Lee Adams, founder of the independent Eurovision website Wiwibloggs, the atmosphere will be very different, with many die-hard fans sensing bad vibes and sitting this one out.

“This is not going to be the festival of rainbows and kisses as it was in the past,” he told AFP. “There’s great unease colouring everything.”

### ‘Serious crisis’

Eurovision is run by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), the world’s biggest alliance



Screens show the logo of the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) 2026 during a press conference of Austrian national public broadcaster ORF in Vienna on Tuesday. – AFP

of public service media.

While countries have had Eurovision grievances over the years and dipped in and out – sometimes citing the voting system, their chances of winning, the quality of the show, or the standard of their own entries – this time feels different.

Matters came to a head over widespread concerns about the conduct of Israel’s two-year war in Gaza.

There were suspicions too that the televoting system was being manipulated to boost Israel after it comfortably topped the public voting in Basel at Eurovision 2025, with extraordinary sequences of maximum points from other countries.

Some broadcasters also raised

concerns about EBU values and media freedom, with Israel preventing their journalists from accessing Gaza, while targeting and killing Palestinian journalists in the territory.

Public broadcasters in Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain have all announced they are boycotting.

Eurovision “tells us about European politics: it’s a political barometer that reflects the zeitgeist,” Dean Vuletic, the author of “Postwar Europe and the Eurovision Song Contest”, told AFP.

“This is the first time we’ve seen broadcasters grouping in a political boycott over the participation of another country. So it is a serious crisis for the contest,” he said.

### Risk of contagion

The boycott could potentially spread further, if performers themselves decide to pull out.

“They’ve confirmed 35 countries but I’m not yet convinced we will see 35,” Adams said.

“In the past, Eurovision was a great honour for so many artists,” but now, “it might feel like a poisoned chalice to some”.

“Artists ultimately are thinking about their careers – and their calculus will be different.”

Most of the contenders in Portugal’s domestic selection competition have vowed not to attend Eurovision if they win.

“Some of these selections play a big part in national musical life. You will see artists under pressure to take positions,” Catherine Baker of the University of Hull, who has researched the cultural politics of Eurovision, told AFP.

She said contenders would be figuring out how to approach their engagement with Eurovision if selected.

Some would have signed up in expectation that Israel would not be taking part, she added.

### A question of trust

Vuletic said the seven-decade history of Eurovision was one of ongoing adaptation: “Changes to the rules, trying to address emerging

problems... and not being able to anticipate future ones”.

EBU members have adopted measures aimed at improving the voting system, enhancing fraud detection and curbing government-backed promotional campaigns.

How those changes play out at Vienna 2026 will have an impact on the contest’s future – including whether the boycotting broadcasters come back, and if waverers who stayed on board will keep faith.

“What happens over the next 12 months is going to play a big role in restoring trust on the part of those broadcasters,” said Baker. “There is a lot of regret that it’s come to the current situation.”

“If, after the results in 2026, broadcasters are feeling happier that these reforms have actually worked, then you might see some of them potentially returning.”

Ewan Spence, the co-founder and editor of the ESC Insight online platform, said one of the first gauges of the public mood would be when tickets go on sale on January 13.

“I do not think there is a way the EBU can avoid coverage around this issue,” he told AFP.

“Vienna will have all the glitz, the glamour, and the heart in the middle of the Eurovision logo – but many will be asking if the heart of the show is still there.”

– AFP

## Rob Reiner’s son charged with parents’ murder

Huw Griffith

LOS ANGELES – The son of famed Hollywood director Rob Reiner was charged with two counts of first-degree murder over the brutal slaying of his parents, the chief prosecutor of Los Angeles said on Tuesday.

Nick Reiner, 32, who has a history of substance abuse stretching back to his teenage years, could face life in prison without the possibility of parole or the death penalty if convicted over the killings that shocked Hollywood.

In a statement, District Attorney Nathan Hochman’s office said Nick Reiner had been charged “with two counts of murder with the special circumstance allegation of multiple murders.”

“He also faces a special allegation that he personally used a dangerous and deadly weapon, a knife,” it added.

Nick Reiner was expected to be arraigned as soon as he’s able to appear at a Los Angeles courthouse.

Nick Reiner was arrested on Sunday after the bodies of his 78-year-old father and his mother, Michele Singer Reiner, 70, were discovered at their home in the upscale Brentwood neighbourhood of Los Angeles.

Prosecutors said Rob Reiner – who directed huge hits including “When Harry Met Sally” and “A Few Good Men” – and his wife were stabbed to death.

According to US media reports, Nick Reiner had argued with his parents at a glitzy Hollywood party the prior evening.

Entertainment outlet TMZ said the bodies were found on Sunday afternoon by the couple’s daughter.

Rob Reiner, the son of legendary comedian Carl Reiner, started his showbiz career in acting.

He won fame as the oafish son-in-law Michael “Meathead” Stivic on groundbreaking 1970s sitcom “All in the Family,” before transitioning to directing. Even while leading behind the camera, he often appeared in cameo roles in his own films.

As a director, he struck Hollywood gold.

His output included classic films like 1984’s rock music mockumentary “This is Spinal Tap,” fantasy gem “The Princess Bride” from 1987, and seminal coming-of-age movie “Stand By Me.”

“A Few Good Men,” starring Hollywood heavyweights Tom Cruise and Jack Nicholson, earned an Oscar nomination for Best Picture.

### ‘Heartbroken’

Entertainers and politicians paid tribute to the filmmaker following his death.

Actor-director Ben Stiller described Rob Reiner as “a kind caring person who was really really funny,” and someone who “made some of the most formative movies for my generation.” – AFP

## Doctor sentenced for supplying ketamine to ‘Friends’ star Perry

Huw Griffith

LOS ANGELES - The second of two doctors who supplied “Friends” star Matthew Perry with ketamine in the months before he fatally overdosed was sentenced to home confinement by a California court on Tuesday.

Mark Chavez, 55, had admitted one count of conspiracy to supply the drug, which the actor was buying for up to US\$2,000 a vial in the weeks before his 2023 death in the hot tub of his Los Angeles home.

Chavez, who ran a ketamine infusion clinic near San Diego, was ordered to be confined at home for eight months. He must also perform 300 hours of community service.

The disgraced medic wrote a fraudulent prescription to obtain ketamine – an anaesthetic that is also used in depression therapy, but can be misused as a party drug – that he then supplied to fellow doctor Salvador Plasencia.

Plasencia, who mused in text messages to Chavez “I wonder how much this moron will pay,” was jailed this month for two-and-a-half years.

Both men have surrendered their medical licences.

Three other people who have also admitted their part in supplying drugs to the actor will be sentenced over the coming months.

They include Jasveen Sangha, the alleged “Ketamine Queen” who supplied drugs to high-end clients and celebrities, who could be jailed for up to 65 years.

Perry’s live-in personal assistant and another man pleaded guilty in August to charges of conspiracy to distribute ketamine.

### Addiction struggles

The actor’s lengthy struggles with substance addiction were well-documented, but his death at age 54 sent shockwaves through the global legions of “Friends” fans.

A criminal investigation was launched soon after an autopsy discovered he had high levels of ketamine in his system.

Perry had been taking ketamine as part of supervised therapy for depression.

But prosecutors say that before his death he became addicted to the substance, which also has psychedelic properties and is a popular party drug.

First airing between 1994 and 2004, the comedy “Friends” followed the lives of six New Yorkers navigating adulthood, dating and careers.

It drew a massive following and made megastars of previously unknown actors.

Perry’s role as the sarcastic man-child Chandler brought him fabulous wealth, but hid a dark struggle with addiction to painkillers and alcohol.

In 2018, he suffered a drug-related burst colon and underwent multiple surgeries.

In his 2022 memoir “Friends, Lovers and the Big Terrible Thing,” Perry described going through detox dozens of times.

“I have mostly been sober since 2001,” he wrote, “save for about sixty or seventy little mishaps.”

– AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -3°C~3°C	Manila 23°C~30°C	New York 8°C~9°C	Lisbon 12°C~17°C
Shanghai 8°C~16°C	Bangkok 22°C~33°C	London 7°C~13°C	Rio de Janeiro 21°C~24°C
Hong Kong 17°C~23°C	Tokyo 0°C~12°C	Frankfurt 3°C~9°C	Luanda 22°C~28°C
Taipei 17°C~23°C	Singapore 23°C~30°C	Vancouver 3°C~8°C	Maputo 20°C~26°C
Guangzhou 13°C~25°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~30°C	Paris 10°C~14°C	Dili 23°C~29°C
Nanjing 4°C~16°C	Jakarta 23°C~32°C	Moscow 0°C~2°C	São Tomé 26°C~29°C
Guilin 9°C~22°C	Seoul -2°C~7°C	Las Vegas 8°C~21°C	Praia 20°C~26°C
Xi'an 1°C~12°C	Sydney 21°C~31°C	Monte Carlo 10°C~15°C	Bissau 17°C~31°C





1. Nature is beautiful

An aerial drone photo taken on Tuesday shows the winter scenery of Jingfeng Park in Kunshan City, Jiangsu Province. — Xinhua

2. Contemplation

This picture taken on Tuesday shows male giant panda ‘Xiao Xiao’ at Ueno Zoo in Tokyo. Two pandas at a Tokyo zoo will be returned to China in January, the Tokyo government said on Monday, potentially leaving Japan without the beloved animals for the first time in half a century. — AFP

3. In a spin

Anne Hedrich of Germany in action during the Women’s Mountain Snowboard Halfpipe Qualifiers at Copper Mountain yesterday in Copper Mountain, Colorado, US. — AFP



3



4. Hungry Santa

People visit the National Park during the Christmas season in San Jose, Costa Rica, on Monday. — AFP

5. Swallowed whole

A student in costume walks wearing a colorful lantern during the annual Lantern Parade at the University of the Philippines in Quezon City, the Philippines, yesterday. — Xinhua

6. Brighten up your salad

This photograph shows edible flowers displayed at the multinational wholesale chain METRO flagship store during a press visit in Nanterre, west of Paris, yesterday. — AFP

