

35-pataca hourly minimum wage to start on Jan 1

Tony Wong

Macau's statutory minimum wage will increase from the current 34 patacas an hour to 35 patacas per hour from January 1 next year, representing an increase of 2.94 percent, after the Legislative Assembly (AL) yesterday passed a government-initiated bill amending the city's overall minimum wage law.

The implementation of Macau's overall minimum wage system started on November 1, 2020. Since then, all employees in the private sector, except domestic helpers and those with disabilities, had been covered by a statutory minimum wage of 32 patacas an hour – or 256 patacas a day, or 1,536 patacas a week, or 6,656 patacas a month, before the amount was raised to the current 34 patacas an hour – or 272 patacas a day, or 1,632 patacas a week, or 7,072 patacas a month – on January 1 last year, an increase of 6.25 percent.

The amendment bill's outline was passed during a plenary session of the legislature last month, after which the bill was reviewed by its 1st Standing Committee, before it was resubmitted to yesterday's plenary session, which Secretary for Economy and Finance Anton Tai

Kin Ip attended, when it was voted on article-by-article in its second and final reading.

According to the amended overall minimum wage law, Macau's statutory minimum wage will be increased to 35 patacas an hour, or 280 patacas a day, or 1,680 patacas a week, or 7,280 patacas a month from January 1 next year.

Consequently, the upcoming one-pataca rise will be the second increase in the statutory minimum wage since the implementation of the overall minimum wage system.

The city's overall minimum wage law requires the government to review the amount of the statutory minimum wage every two years.

The government completed its first review of the minimum wage amount in 2023, assessing the implementation between November 1, 2020 and October 31, 2022. Later that year, the government submitted a minimum wage amendment bill proposing to raise the hourly amount by two patacas to 34 patacas an hour to the Legislative Assembly, which passed the bill in its final reading in December 2023. The current minimum wage of 34 patacas an hour has been in force



Secretary for Economy and Finance Anton Tai Kin Ip addresses yesterday's plenary session in the Legislative Assembly's (AL) hemicycle. – Photo: GCS

since January 1 last year.

The government completed its second review of the minimum wage amount earlier this year, assessing the implementation between November 1, 2022 and October 31, 2024, after which it submitted another minimum wage amendment

bill proposing a one-pataca increase in the hourly minimum wage to the legislature, i.e., the one passed in its final reading yesterday and will take legal effect on January 1 next year.

The government has indicated that the upcoming minimum wage increase is estimated to benefit 18,200



workers, most of them employed in the property management and cleaning service sectors.

'Flexibility' provisions

During yesterday's plenary session, Tai noted that most government entities, in their respective agreements with outsourced cleaning service companies, have listed "flexibility" provisions allowing the respective companies to adjust the prices of their services in line with any possible increases in the city's statutory minimum wage during their contractual period.

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Assange files complaint against Nobel Foundation over Machado win

STOCKHOLM – WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has filed a criminal complaint in Sweden against the Nobel Foundation after Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado won the Peace Prize.

This year's prize represented a "gross misappropriation" of funds and the "facilitation of war crimes" under Swedish law, according to the complaint posted by WikiLeaks on social media.

The Nobel Committee awarded Machado the prize for promoting "democratic rights" and for her struggle to achieve a "just and peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy".

Assange cited Machado's backing of US President Donald Trump's months-

long campaign against Venezuela's leftist President Nicolás Maduro.

He said Machado's win violated the 1895 will of Alfred Nobel – the award's founder – which stated the prize must go to the person who has done the "most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses".

The US-Venezuela spat has seen the massive deployment of US naval and air forces in waters off Latin America, and dozens of small boats allegedly running drugs have been bombed in the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean, killing almost 100 people so far.

Assange has also called for the freezing of the 11 million kroner (US\$1.18 million) in prize money promised to Machado.

According to WikiLeaks, there is "real risk" that the funds have been or will be "diverted from their charitable purpose to facilitate aggression, crimes against humanity, and war crimes".

While the Peace Prize is awarded by a Norwegian selection committee in Oslo, Assange argued the Stockholm-based foundation must assume financial responsibility.

Swedish police confirmed to AFP that they received the complaint. It was also submitted to the Swedish Economic Crime Authority, which said it did not have the

jurisdiction to handle it.

Assange has accused 30 officials linked to the Nobel Foundation of turning "an instrument of peace into an instrument of war".

AFP has contacted the Nobel Foundation for comment.

Assange was freed from Britain's Belmarsh Prison in 2024 under a plea bargain after years of incarceration for publishing hundreds of thousands of confidential US government documents.

He was arrested after spending seven years in Ecuador's London embassy to avoid extradition to Sweden, where he faced accusations of sexual assault that were eventually dropped. – AFP

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Japan govt sued over 'unconstitutional' climate inaction

Hundreds of people across Japan sued the central government yesterday, seeking damages for "unconstitutional" inaction on climate change in the country's first such litigation.

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Thailand strikes building in Cambodia's border casino hub

Thailand yesterday bombed a building in a Cambodian casino town and major crossing between the two nations, as foreign powers pressured them to halt reignited border clashes.

– Story on p. 15

Brussels farmer protest turns ugly as EU-Mercosur deal teeters

Protesters lit fires and hurled potatoes at riot police who responded with teargas and water cannon in Brussels yesterday, as tensions boiled over at a farmers' demonstration against the EU's planned trade deal with South American bloc Mercosur.

– Story on p. 16

PSP launch traffic accident blackspot online map

Armindo Neves

The Public Security Police (PSP) launched yesterday a trilingual – Chinese, English and Portuguese – traffic accident blackspot online map.

According to a PSP statement on Wednesday, in order to further enhance public awareness of travel safety, the Public Security Police and the Macau Public Security Forces Affairs Bureau (DSFSM) jointly developed the map, adding that the map’s data has been provided by the Mapping and Land Registry Bureau (DSCC).

The Public Security Police Force includes the traffic police.

The map integrates traffic accident data and locations with particularly high frequencies of accidents, aiming to easily enable the public to access traffic accident information, thereby raising awareness of travel safety, the statement said.

The statement said that clicking on the corresponding circles on the map reveals locations within a 50-metre radius where more than 10 traffic accidents have occurred, differentiated by colour.

For instance, a black circle indicates that fatal accidents were involved within the respective area, while the orange circle indicate the most frequent occurrence of accidents within the respective area.

Details include the causes of

accidents, the number of incidents, the quantity of vehicles involved and casualty figures, among other information, the statement said, added that the data is updated quarterly.

The map released yesterday shows that Avenida Dr. Rodrigo Rodrigues was Macau’s most accident-prone road, totalling 258 accidents between January and September. Friendship Bridge (Ponte da Amizade) came in second, with 258 accidents, while the so-called Cotai Strip came in third, with 191 accidents.

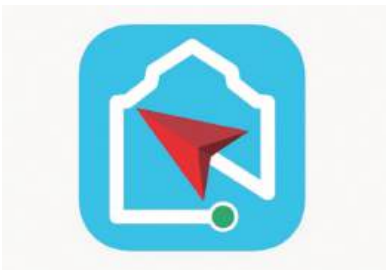
In the first 10 months of this year, the traffic police recorded 12,363 traffic accidents, four of them fatal, compared to 12,976 traffic accidents with two fatalities in the same period of last year, according to official police statistics.

Based on the official data, the daily average reached 40.66 traffic accidents in the first 10 months of this year.

Members of the public may visit the PSP official website <https://www.fsm.gov.mo/psp/advmap/Description.aspx> or download the PSP’s app e-Ploce to access the information.

‘Macao Smart Go’ new version now available

Meanwhile, the Transport Bureau (DSAT) announced in a



Logo of the “Macao Smart Go”

statement yesterday that its “Macao Smart Go” app has got its 2.2.0 version upgrade.

According to the statement, in order to enable residents and tourist to access comprehensive traffic information and use diversified travel services more conveniently, the bureau has updated its “Macao Smart Go” app, introducing new features including Light Rapid Transit (LRT) travel and traffic condition alerts.

The statement also said that the updated version of the app has been uploaded to Apple iOS, Google Play and Huawei app stores and is



This handout image provided by the Public Security Police (PSP) on Wednesday shows differently coloured traffic accident blackspots on their new online map.

available for free download to the public.

The updated version, according to the statement, introduces and optimises multiple travel-related features, including LRT travel options and LRT train arrival information, alerts for congested road sections, notifications for

electronic enforcement systems, and access to car parks usage statistics.

The statement also said that the walking route query page now includes an option to avoid stairs, allowing users to select pedestrian routes based on their needs, further enhancing the application experience. ■

3 vacant plots to be temporary public car parks from this month



This undated handout photo provided by the Transport Bureau (DSAT) and Public Works Bureau (DSOP) yesterday shows the car park next to the Maritime Training School in Barra being converted into a managed public car park with gated access.

Ida Cheong

Three plots of land have been repurposed into temporary outdoor public car parks, and are slated to open progressively from this month to alleviate parking demand in their respective areas, including plots located on Rua da Cordoaria in Coloane (the former Flying Eagle Training Base), the original site of Julieta Nobre de Carvalho Building (嘉翠麗大廈) in Toi San, and next to the Maritime Training School in Barra, according to a statement released by the Transport Bureau (DSAT) and Public Works Bureau (DSOP) yesterday.

The statement noted that the Transportation Bureau and Public Works Bureau have adopted a dual-track approach of “planned utilisation + temporary use” to transform several plots of land into temporary public facilities that benefit residents’ livelihoods.

The statement added that three temporary outdoor public car parks are expected to provide a

total of 194 vehicle parking spaces and 140 motorcycle parking spaces, and some of the spaces will also be equipped with electric vehicle charging piles.

The statement pointed out that the selection of these three locations specifically addresses long-standing community parking challenges, such as Coloane, which, as a popular tourist destination and historic residential area, faces a shortage of parking spaces, particularly during holidays and weekends.

Meanwhile, Toi San district, with its dense population, experiences tight parking supply, the statement said, thus the original site of the demolished second block of Julieta Nobre de Carvalho Building has been repurposed into a temporary outdoor public car park, and part of the space will be used to add a bus bay* and adjust the local bus route layout, the statement said, adding that this not only supplements parking resources

but also contributes to the overall improvement of the area’s transportation environment.

Moreover, the car park next to the Maritime Training School in Barra previously faced issues with metered parking spaces being occupied for extended periods, the statement said. It pointed out that by converting it into a managed public car park with gated access, the utilisation rate and turnover of the parking spaces are expected to improve.

The statement added that these optimised layouts are projected to meet the demand for parking and stopping spaces in the relevant areas, enhancing travel convenience for residents and visitors alike. ■

*A bus bay is a specific design of bus stop where the pavement and kerb are indented, creating a dedicated area that allows a bus to pull completely out of the flow of traffic to pick up and drop off passengers. - DeepSeek



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MAINLY CLOUDY.
A FEW RAIN PATCHES.
FORCE 3 TO 4 EAST TO NORTHEASTERLY WINDS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 70% AND 98%.

18°C~22°C

Source: SMG



Congratulations on the 26th anniversary of the establishment of Macau SAR



In celebration of the 26th anniversary of Macau's return to the motherland, Wynn draws inspiration from the Peace Dove, the inaugural national gift designed by renowned Chinese traditional artisan Master Chang Shana as we share our best wishes for enduring prosperity and harmony. This masterpiece is now residing in Wynn's art collection.



'Health+' Accelerator Programme gains expert backing at first committee meeting: UM

Khalel Vallo

The University of Macau's (UM) Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE) held its first expert committee meeting on Tuesday to review and advise on the newly launched 'Health+' Accelerator Programme, an initiative aimed at advancing innovation and technology transfer in the Big Health sector, according to a UM statement on Wednesday.

According to the statement, the meeting focused on the direction and development of the 'Health+' Accelerator Programme, which is funded by the Macau Science and Technology Development Fund (FDCT).

The statement noted that committee members spoke highly of the programme's positioning and early progress, while offering suggestions on future strategies and the translation of research outcomes into practical applications.

Chaired by Elaine Leung Lai Han, head of CIE and professor at the UM Faculty of Health Sciences, the meeting featured opening remarks from Ip Kuai Lam, member of the Administrative Committee of FDCT; Claudia Xu Jian, vice rector of UM; and David Ai, chairman of the expert committee, the statement said.



This handout photo provided by the University of Macau (UM) on Wednesday shows its first expert committee meeting on the newly launched 'Health+' Accelerator Programme at the public university in Hengqin on Tuesday.

According to the statement, Leung outlined CIE's recent work and highlighted that the 'Health+' Accelerator Programme is Macau's first accelerator dedicated specifically to the Big Health sector.

The programme aimed to "systematically advance the transformation of high-quality Big Health research achievements in Macau and Hengqin" by supporting proof-of-concept development and improving market alignment, the statement quoted Leung as saying, as it sought to help projects overcome the so-called "Valley of Death" between laboratory research and commercialisation, while building platforms that connect start-ups with resources and investment.

Committee members engaged

in in-depth discussions on the accelerator's future development, providing strategic recommendations to strengthen its implementation and ensure sustainable growth, the statement added.

The expert committee, according to the statement, comprised representatives from industry, academia, research, healthcare and investment sectors, reflecting a cross-disciplinary approach to fostering innovation in the Big Health field.

The 'Health+' Accelerator Programme laid a solid foundation for promoting the commercialisation of health-related research, striving to reinforce UM's role in driving innovation and supporting the development of Macau's Big Health industry. ■

UM hosts first GBA Immunity & Disease Summit

Khalel Vallo

The University of Macau (UM) announced in a Wednesday statement that it hosted its first Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Immunity and Disease Summit last month, bringing together leading experts from across the region to explore new frontiers in immunology and human health.

Held under the theme "Immunity and Human Health: New Frontiers", the summit provided a high-level platform for academic exchange on basic immunology research, the prevention and control of immune-related diseases, as well as immunotherapy and health promotion, the statement said.

According to the statement, the event gathered scholars, researchers and industry representatives from the Greater Bay Area, fostering cross-institutional dialogue and collaboration.

The summit was jointly organised by the Molecular Immunology Division of the Chinese Society of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (CSBMB), the public university's Institute of Chinese Medical Sciences (ICMS), and the School of Medicine at Jinan University in

Guangzhou, the statement said.

Chen Dong, academican of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) and a leading immunologist, delivered a keynote speech in which he spoke about the latest international breakthroughs and future trends in immunology, the statement noted.

The statement added that participants also engaged in in-depth discussions on topics including immunity assessment, immune regulation mechanisms, cell therapy, and immune health management.

Speaking at the summit, Deng Chuxia, dean of the UM Faculty of Health Sciences, said the theme "reflects the forefront of scientific research" and offers "significant value for fundamental studies" while remaining closely aligned with global public health challenges and the future development of precision medicine, the statement noted.

He added that research into the immunomodulatory mechanisms of Chinese medicine is a key focus of ICMS, and that the summit has injected fresh momentum into strengthening Macau's academic capacity in immunology and Chinese medicine. ■



This handout photo provided by the University of Macau (UM) on Wednesday shows Faculty of Health Sciences Dean Deng Chuxia addressing the first Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Immunity and Disease Summit last month on its campus in Hengqin.

MUST seminar discusses low-altitude economy standardisation

Ida Cheong

The "2025 International Symposium on Standardisation-Enabled Innovation in Artificial Intelligence and the Low-Altitude Economy" was held yesterday, with the aim of driving the standardisation of the low altitude economy (LAE)* into a new phase characterised by institutionalisation, platformisation, and internationalisation, according to a statement by the organisers.

The one-day seminar took place at the private Macau University

of Science and Technology (MUST) in Taipa. It focused on the innovative development of the low altitude economy industry and the empowerment of international standards, the statement pointed out, adding that around 100 experts and scholars from government departments, universities, enterprises, research institutions, and others attended.

MUST Vice-Chancellor Joseph Lee Hun Wei said in a speech he expected the seminar to further strengthen Macau's voice in the formulation of international low-altitude standards and contribute to collaborative innovation in the industry in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

Lee added that the Chinese mainland has been a leader in the low altitude economy development in recent years, an emerging sector tapping into the underutilised airspace below 1,000 metres, with general aviation in its cornerstone, and encompassing a wide range of areas, including low altitude flights, aviation tourism, and regional passenger transportation.

In recent years, the Chinese mainland has introduced a series of supportive policies and strategic plans related to unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), smart manufacturing, and the digital economy, laying a solid foundation

for the rapid development of industries associated with low-altitude applications, Lee added.

Lee also said the purpose of the seminar, themed "International Standards as an Enabler", was to highlight that standards serve as the cornerstone for technology promotion and industrial collaboration, facilitate mutual recognition of related products, enhance regulatory efficiency, reduce market access barriers, and scale integration of artificial intelligence and the low-altitude economy across various fields and regions.

Lee noted that MUST remains committed to addressing national strategic needs and deepening research in the interdisciplinary field of low altitude economy and artificial intelligence (AI).

Apart from MUST, the seminar was co-organised by the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Standard Innovation Alliance and the Macau Association for Low-Altitude Airspace Economy. ■

* The Low-Altitude Economy (LAE) refers to the comprehensive economic ecosystem centred around activities, services, and industries conducted in the airspace near the ground. It's primarily driven by advances in electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) aircraft, drones (UAVs), and Advanced Air Mobility (AAM). - DeepSeek



Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) Vice-Chancellor Joseph Lee Hun Wei addresses yesterday's "2025 International Symposium on Standardisation-Enabled Innovation in Artificial Intelligence and the Low-Altitude Economy" on the MUST campus in Taipa.

- Photo: Ida Cheong

Local youngster falls victim to online naked chat blackmail: PJ

Armindo Neves

A local youth fell victim to blackmail after chatting in the nude with a "female netizen", PJ spokesman Leng Kam Lon said during a regular press conference yesterday.

According to Leng, a male reported to the Judiciary Police on Wednesday night that after meeting a woman on a social platform, he was induced into engaging in a nude chat. Subsequently, the woman blackmailed him for money, resulting in a total loss of around 19,350 yuan (22,030 patacas), Leng said.

On Wednesday morning, according to Leng, the victim was contacted by a woman on a social platform. They then switched to the Telegram app to continue their conversation. The woman provided a link, which the victim clicked, leading to the download of a software application and the login to an account, Leng said. Afterwards, Leng said that the victim was induced into engaging in nude chat for around one minute. After the call ended, the woman immediately sent the victim's explicit images and demanded a payment of 5,000 yuan,



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Leng Kam Lon looks on during yesterday's regular press conference at the PJ headquarters in Zape.

- Photo: Armindo Neves

threatening to release the photos publicly if the payment was not made, Leng said.

After the victim complied and transferred the money, according to Leng, the woman continued to demand further payments under various pretexts. The victim later made two additional transfers totalling 14,350 yuan to two mainland bank accounts, Leng said.

When the woman persisted in demanding more money, Leng said, the victim was unable to continue paying up and finally decided to report the case to the Judiciary Police. ■

MSAR Establishment Day, Winter Solstice & Christmas public holidays

Due to it being the Macau SAR Establishment Day, Winter Solstice (冬至) and Christmas public holidays from tomorrow until Friday, *The Macau Post Daily's* team will be taking Sunday to Friday off and return to work on Sunday December 28 so the print edition of your favourite newspaper will be on the newsstands

again on the morning of Monday December 29.

However, our website <https://www.macaupostdaily.com/> will provide updates on important local and national news.

We wish all our readers, advertisers, distributors and contributors a restful break, a meaningful celebration of Macau SAR

Establishment Day, joyful Winter Solstice and Merry Christmas.

Banks will be closed on Monday December 22 and Wednesday December 24 to Friday December 26, reopening on Monday December 29.

The *Macau Post Daily's* office will be closed next week.



'Sands China Asian Youth Elite Fencing League – Macao' returns

Rui Pastorin

The Sands China Asian Youth Elite Fencing League – Macao competition will take place at The Venetian Macao's Cotai Expo from December 26 to 28, featuring new categories and 1,200 youth fencers from around the world, according to a joint statement by co-organisers Sands China in conjunction with Asia Sports Development Ltd.

This year's free-admission event will feature new categories including individual events for the U6 age group and team events for the U8 and U12 age groups, the statement noted, while athletes will include those from the Chinese mainland, Macau, Hong Kong and China's Taiwan region, as well as Australia, Canada, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, the UK and the US.

The Asian Youth Elite Fencing League aims to "develop the league into an Asian youth fencing ranking circuit, advancing sports development among young people in



This undated handout photo provided by Sands China yesterday shows youths taking part in last year's "Sands China Asian Youth Elite Fencing League" at The Venetian Macao's Cotai Expo.

the Greater Bay Area while promoting the heritage of fencing", the statement said. The competition will be held on FIE (International Fencing Federation)-certified international-standard pistes (the designated playing strip

for a fencing match), with FIE referees while video refereeing systems will be used in the elimination rounds.

There will also be free-admission extended activities scheduled including the "Sands Cares Presents: Community Sharing

by Champion Fencers – Lei Sheng & Deng Xiaohao" on December 27 featuring the two gold medallists, and the "ASD Elite Karate League" from December 26-28. There will also be 60 food and sports booths set up, the statement noted.

Moreover, the "2025 Sands China Future Champions Fencing Camp" will be hosted from December 21 through Christmas, with those featured to train young fencers aged 9-20 being five-time Olympic gold medal winning coaches Stefano Cerioni and Giovanni Bortolaso in foil, Paris Olympics silver medallist Yoon Jisu, London Olympics gold medallist Oh Eun Seok, and Dong-Eui University Fencing Team Head Coach Han Won Lee.

One can find more details on <https://www.venetianmacao.com/entertainment/asian-youth-elite-fencing-league-macao-2025.html>

The league event launched in Hong Kong in 2023 and in Macau in 2024. The Macau debut saw over 3,200 spectators, according to the statement. ■

35-pataca hourly minimum wage to start on Jan 1

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Tai pledged that the government will require all respective public entities hiring companies to provide cleaning services on their premises to add such flexibility provisions in their agreements signed with the companies, with the aim of enabling the companies to better adapt to a minimum wage hike.

Lawmakers' remarks

After the bill was voted on during yesterday's plenary session, lawmaker-cum-unionist Lam Lon Wai urged the government to strengthen its promotional campaigns concerning the upcoming minimum wage increase, particularly targeting the property management and cleaning service sectors.

Lam also urged the government to streamline its administrative procedures for reviewing the minimum wage amount in the future.

Lam made his remarks also representing his fellow legislators-cum-unionists Ella Lei Cheng I, Leong Sun Iok and Leong Pou U.

Also speaking after the bill was voted on, lawmaker-cum-banker Ip Sio Kai said that the business sector understands the government's decision to propose the one-pataca increase in the hourly minimum wage after striking a balance between improved protection of low-income workers' rights and benefits and the potential impact of a minimum wage hike on local small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Ip also urged the government, when studying the feasibility of rolling out any measures to increase employees' welfare protection in the future, to also fully consider the ability of local SMEs to adapt to such measures.

Ip made his remarks also representing his

three fellow indirectly-elected legislators representing the city's business sector, José Chui Sai Peng, Si Ka Lon and Kevin Ho King Lun.

Lawmakers pass 2026 budget bill

Meanwhile, yesterday's plenary session also passed the government's 2026 budget bill, which expects a budget surplus of 5.31 billion patacas next year.

According to its 2026 budget bill, the outline of which was passed by the legislature last month, the government expects its revenues to reach 118.80 billion patacas next year, while its expenditure is expected to amount to 113.48 billion patacas.

Moreover, according to its 2026 budget bill, the government will roll out a waiver of real-estate stamp duty for the first six million patacas of a residential unit's value for local residents purchasing a home, a 100 percent increase in the threshold of the waiver from the current three million patacas.

Currently, there is a waiver of real-estate stamp duty for the first three million patacas of a residential unit's value for permanent local residents purchasing a residential property for the first time. This means that if a first-time residential property buyer purchases a home for up to three million patacas, they do not have to pay the real-estate stamp duty. For properties exceeding this value, the stamp duty will apply to the amount over three million patacas.

When the 2026 budget bill was reviewed by the legislature's 2nd Standing Committee, government officials indicated that thanks to the 100 percent increase in the threshold of the waiver, a residential property buyer purchasing a home for six million patacas or more next year will be exempted from a stamp duty of 120,000 patacas. ■

**Congratulations on
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Harriet Wong's 'Revisit' touches audiences, garners more awards

Interview by Rui Pastorin

In 2024, local filmmaker Harriet Wong Teng Teng's first feature length film "Revisit" was released to encouraging reactions from audiences of different backgrounds, having since garnered a number of nominations and awards.

Made on a modest budget with a tight-knit crew, the family drama explores "universal family dynamics and the beauty of intergenerational relationships", Wong, who directed the film, said during a recent interview with the *Post*. The story sees Olivia ("Oli"), a local freelancer working in Beijing, who returns to Macau upon learning that her grandma is very ill, coming back to take care of her, reconnecting as well as rekindling their relationship in the process.

The film has been nominated for the "Best Directorial Debut Award" at the 38th China Golden Rooster Awards and received accolades such as "Best New Director Award" at the Main Competition of the 1st Asian Art Film Awards and "Most Expected Film of the Year of HK, Macau, Taiwan regions" of the 37th China Golden Rooster Awards.

But among the independent feature film's most recent recognitions are winning the "Best New Director" during the "21st Chinese American Film Festival" last month in Los Angeles, while in August during the "34th Woods Hole Film Festival" in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, it took home "Best Performance Award" for Hongkonger Cherry Ngan Cheuk Ling's delivery as "Oli". And the honours didn't stop there as first-time actress, 84-year-old Cheung Wai Hing, who played



This undated and unlocated photo shows local filmmaker Wong posing. – Photo: Harriet Wong

the role of Grandma in the movie, had earlier been nominated as "Best Actress" at a film festival in London, added Wong.

Highlighting the two recent recognitions, Wong said that it was beyond what they had expected. She described garnering the "Best Performance Award" at the 34th Annual Woods Hole Film Festival, where screenings of independent films and seminars take place while gathering filmmakers to exchange ideas, as marking a rewarding moment for her as the film's director. During its screening there, she also pointed out that audiences were able to relate to Oli despite being an Asian character, while finding connection in the real and grounded performance, even evoking



This image provided by "Revisit" director Harriet Wong Teng Teng shows a still from the movie.

memories and a story of a similar experience among them. "They said they can all feel Oli, that they can all relate to Oli. That was the most rewarding moment".

Winning "Best New Director" during the 21st Chinese American Film Festival had also proved to be a surprise given how many other Chinese movies were competing, underlining just how special it felt. In both cases, she said she was glad to show her film, whether in its entirety or through trailers, to audiences on the other side of the world.

Moreover, the film has been screened in the Chinese mainland during roadshows. Having this experience as a low-budget and independent film was gratifying, more so with

the dialogue created among audiences and feedback received from them, highlighting these as "the most rewarding present for a filmmaker".

"What I treasure is the dialogue...It's like we are building dialogue, not only within those 90 minutes, but maybe it's a dialogue that never stops", Wong continued.

While the movie has also been shown in Macau, there has yet to be a public screening. "But I'm planning to make it happen", Wong said, hoping to show the film at local cinemas, as well as in Hong Kong and other places in the coming year. ■

This article is the first of a two-part story, with a follow-up slated for page 4.

ProjectPlayaround calls for artists for interdisciplinary tech-art workshops

William Chan

The Macao New Media Arts Association, with sponsorship from the Macau Cultural Development Fund, has announced the launch of ProjectPlayaround Macau, an initiative calling for artists to participate in a series of interdisciplinary workshops focused on the integration of technological art and performing arts.

ProjectPlayaround has a history of promoting technology, art, and interdisciplinary practices, with its first workshop established in Taiwan in 2007. The Macau edition, which is a collaboration with local art company Dimension Plus, aims to introduce international perspectives and technical resources to local artists, fostering a forward-looking and sustainable ecosystem for interdisciplinary creation in the region.

The registration form, sent to the *Post* by the association's representative, noted that the programme aims to foster interactions and exchanges among artists from various fields, laying the groundwork for subsequent creative presentations in the summer of 2026. The association invites talents from various sectors, particularly those in performing arts, stage technology, music composition, sound design, visual and installation arts, media design, and interdisciplinary arts.

The event is structured around a six-day workshop to be held next month and February,

following a "3+3" model, facilitated by two international artists. The design of the entire programme focuses on understanding and practicing the fusion of technological art and performing arts, equipping participants with the basics of practical application for future interdisciplinary collaborations.

The first three-day session, the TouchDesigner Performing Arts Workshop hosted by Crystal Jow from the United States, will concentrate on the widely-used TouchDesigner software, covering fundamentals, body and sound interactivity,

and generative visuals. The session will conclude with a performance titled "Playtime."

The second three-day workshop, Electromagnetic Imaginations led by renowned Japanese sound artist Ei Wada, will explore creating music and performances using household appliances, transforming electrical devices and barcodes into sound. The workshop will be conducted in Japanese with Cantonese simultaneous interpretation and will include a small Free Jam session.

Following the workshops, participants will form teams and embark on a four-month creative period, guided by the project's artistic director Keith Lam from Hong Kong. This process will culminate in six public performance works to be exhibited and performed in July and August next year.

The quota for the workshops is limited to 20 participants on a first-come, first-served basis. While a tuition fee is fully waived, a deposit is required to secure a place.

For registration, visit: forms.gle/arTh5AwZYtozh6ZA ■



This poster recently provided by the organisers promotes the call for artists.

'China surplus anxiety' mirrors West's 'rationality deficit'

Commentary

BEIJING – In recent weeks, some Western media headlines have fixated on China's goods trade surplus, often portraying it in stark terms and as a threat to industries in the West. This narrative strips international trade of its economic context, weaponizing a single metric into a story of Chinese economic aggression.

Yet, this framing reveals less about China's trade practices and more about a growing anxiety within the West – anxiety over its own economic vitality and a palpable reluctance to adapt to a global system it once championed. Such deliberate distortion of normal trade into a systemic threat betrays a fundamental misreading of global dynamics, underpinned by a growing "rationality deficit."

What is presented as concern over "imbalance" is, in reality, a distraction from deeper structural weaknesses in the West. Rather than confront the roots of their own economic challenges, some Western commentators have turned China's surplus into a scapegoat.

First, the "record surplus" is a selective and misleading metric on trade dynamics. It glaringly omits trade in services, where China runs a deficit exceeding US\$100 billion in the first 10 months of this year – despite Western policies such as higher visa barriers for Chinese students that choked their own education exports to China.

It also disregards the fact that sweeping Western restrictions on high-tech exports to China constitute a self-imposed constraint on their own goods trade. In both cases, the West is constraining its own competitive advantages and then blaming China for the

resultant trade picture.

Moreover, trade is an exchange across time, not just across borders. When China exports goods, it often reinvests the proceeds by purchasing foreign bonds and equities, providing loans, and building factories overseas. Today's surplus may well finance tomorrow's imports or investments.

Second, the so-called "Chinese surplus" is, in essence, a "global surplus." A product "made in China" is frequently the embodiment of global collaboration, integrating design, core components, and technologies from the United States, Europe, Asia and beyond. China's surplus reflects multinational firms' collective choice for efficiency, reliability, and integrated manufacturing ecosystems.

According to customs data, exports and imports by foreign-invested enterprises accounted for 29.3 percent of China's total foreign trade in the first 11 months of 2025, while processing trade, which is closely linked to the global division of labor, accounted for 18.8 percent. China's surplus not only benefits its own economy, but also drives production, innovation, and employment elsewhere.

Third, and most ironically, the West is now attacking the very rules it architected. International trade occurs fundamentally because both sides benefit – a principle embodied in the theory of comparative advantage. This theory, which rationalizes global division of labor based on relative strengths, provided the key economic rationale that propelled Britain, the United States, and Germany into manufacturing powerhouses and chronic surplus countries during their industrial ascent.

Today, however, when China rises on specialization and global cooperation, its surplus is portrayed as a threat. This inconsistency reveals not a problem with trade theory, but a crisis of confidence in the West.

Perhaps the more pertinent question is why the West exhibits such deep anxiety. Beneath the surface, the West's discomfort stems from an unwillingness to confront its own economic problems. For decades, it outsourced manufacturing, prioritized short-term financial returns, and neglected industrial renewal. It is easier to cry "foul play" than to confront the hard truths.

China does not seek a trade surplus. In fact, recent key policy meetings have emphasized boosting domestic demand as the top priority for growth.

This strategic pivot is underpinned by sustained, concrete efforts to expand imports to achieve a more balanced trade. For instance,

as the world's first national-level exhibition dedicated to imports, the China International Import Expo has established itself as a global public good with cumulative intended deals exceeding 580 billion dollars over its eight sessions, showcasing the vast potential of China's market.

As the world's second-largest economy shifts toward greater consumption, it presents a growing market opportunity – one that Western businesses could seize, if their governments choose cooperation over restriction.

Ultimately, the clamor over China's surplus is a deafening distraction from the imperative of introspection. The West's pressing challenge lies not in its trade ledger, but in a deficit in rationality – in mustering the courage to confront uncomfortable truths, embrace a forward-looking vision, and marshal the political will essential to revitalize its own economic foundations.

– Xinhua

China issues guidelines to crack down on tobacco-related illegal activities

BEIJING – China will take a series of targeted measures to address tobacco-related illegal activities, continuously improve the order of its tobacco market, and safeguard its national interests and consumer rights, according to a set of guidelines unveiled yesterday.

The guidelines, issued by the General Office of the State Council, call for rigorous action against counterfeit Chinese tobacco brands overseas and firm measures to intercept illicit tobacco products entering or transiting through China.

Efforts should be made to prevent the spread or relocation of counterfeit tobacco production, aiming to crack down on the illegal storage, transportation and delivery of tobacco-related products, according to the guidelines.

Illegal online tobacco sales must be eliminated, and the unauthorized production and sale of such products is prohibited, it said.

The guidelines also call for strengthened support mechanisms to combat tobacco-related illegal activities.

– Xinhua



A teacher instructs children to make paper-cutting window decorations at a kindergarten in Taizhou City, Jiangsu Province, yesterday. People all over the country held diverse events yesterday to mark the Winter Solstice, which will fall on December 21 this year. Winter Solstice, the shortest day of the year, denotes the beginning of deep winter and a break from farming in traditional agricultural society in Chinese culture. Northern China has maintained the tradition of eating dumplings on this day, while people in southern China eat tangyuan (glutinous rice balls). – Xinhua

Beijing urges US to immediately stop arming China's Taiwan region

BEIJING – The State Council Taiwan Affairs Office yesterday urged the United States to stop arming China's Taiwan region immediately.

Chen Binhua, spokesperson for the office, made the remarks when commenting on the US latest announcement of a package of arms sales to China's Taiwan region worth up to US\$11 billion.

Highlighting that the Taiwan question is at the core of China's core interests and the red line in China-US relations that must not be crossed, Chen said that the US announcement of the massive arms sale to Taiwan constitutes a flagrant interference in China's internal affairs.

The action has violated the one-China principle and provisions of the three China-US joint communiqués, severely undermining China's sovereignty and security interests and sending a grave wrong signal to secessionists in Taiwan.

Chen urged the US side to stop condoning

and supporting secessionists seeking "Taiwan independence" and adhere to the one-China principle and the three China-US joint communiqués.

Chen noted that the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) authorities' persistent attempts to look for US support for their separatist agenda and seek "Taiwan independence" by force at the cost of turning Taiwan into a "powder keg" and taking people in Taiwan as their "cannon fodder," will only bring catastrophe to Taiwan compatriots. Such acts fully exposed their vicious role as "peace-breakers" and "warmongers."

Chen called on all people in Taiwan to recognize the DPP authorities' vicious nature. He also warned the DPP authorities that China's national reunification is unstoppable, and if any "Taiwan independence" separatist forces dare to cross the red line, they will surely be met with a decisive countermeasure.

– Xinhua



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China strongly opposes European Commission's intensive investigations into Chinese firms

BEIJING – China strongly opposes the European Commission's recent intensive investigations into several Chinese enterprises under the Foreign Subsidies Regulation (FSR), commerce ministry spokesperson He Yadong said at a press briefing yesterday.

These include in-depth investigations into CRRC Corporation and Nucotech, alongside a raid on a Chinese digital platform. He noted that such actions are egregious, demonstrating clear discriminatory and targeted intent.

China urges the European Union (EU) to immediately cease its unreasonable suppression of foreign-invested firms, including those from China, exercise prudence in using FSR tools, and maintain a fair, just and predictable business environment, he said.

China is closely monitoring the situation and will utilize necessary measures to resolutely safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese enterprises, he added.

The FSR investigations severely affected Chinese enterprises' investment and operation in Europe, he said, adding that in January, the ministry has announced that the FSR investigations have constituted trade and investment barriers following a probe.

The ministry pointed out that the EU's investigations involved insufficient evidence for filing a case, excessive law enforcement, a reversal of the burden of proof, and a lack of procedural transparency.

Recently, these issues have not only been unresolved but have also intensified. In particular, the definition of "foreign subsidies" is overly broad and ambiguous, far exceeding the reasonable scope of international rules and common practices, the spokesperson said.

This has not only severely affected the normal operations of Chinese enterprises in Europe but has also introduced uncertainty into China-EU bilateral economic and trade cooperation, the spokesperson added. – Xinhua



Fairgoers look at a China-made snow groomer at the 9th Jilin International Ice and Snow Tourism Industry Exposition in Changchun, capital of Jilin Province, yesterday. The 9th edition of the expo, with an exhibition area of over 60,000 square meters, kicked off yesterday. It showcases the vitality and prospects of Jilin's ice and snow-related business through immersive experiences in thematic pavilions. – Xinhua

China to continuously help rebuild peace between Cambodia, Thailand: Wang Yi

BEIJING – China will continue to play a constructive role in promoting the rebuilding of peace between Cambodia and Thailand, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks in phone talks with Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn and Thai Foreign Minister Sihasak Phuangketkeow, respectively.

Both the Cambodian and Thai sides briefed Wang on the latest developments regarding the conflict along the Cambodia-Thailand border and expressed their willingness to de-escalate tensions and cease fire.

Wang said that as a friend and close neighbor of both Cambodia and Thailand, China does not want to see the two countries engage in military conflict and is deeply saddened by the civilian casualties caused by the clashes.

The intensity of this round of conflict has far exceeded previous ones, and its continuation is detrimental to both sides and undermines the unity of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said Wang, noting that the

top priority is to make a decisive move, cease fire as soon as possible, prevent further losses and rebuild mutual trust.

Wang said that China has upheld an impartial and fair approach in handling the border dispute between Cambodia and Thailand, actively encouraging peace talks and supporting ASEAN's mediation efforts.

He stressed that the Chinese Foreign Ministry's special envoy for Asian affairs has started a shuttle-diplomacy trip to Cambodia and Thailand.

He expressed the hope that both Cambodia and Thailand would take effective measures to ensure the safety of Chinese projects and personnel, and stay vigilant against attempts by certain parties to spread false information and smear China's friendly relations with the two countries.

Sokhonn and Sihasak highly appreciated China's objective and balanced position in mediating and promoting dialogue, welcoming the Chinese special envoy's shuttle mediation. They also expressed the hope that China would play a more important role in helping de-escalate tensions and restore peace. (More on page 15) – Xinhua

World's longest expressway tunnel to open to traffic in Xinjiang by year-end

URUMQI – The Tianshan Shengli Tunnel, the world's longest expressway tunnel, will be open to traffic by the end of this year, enabling a new shortcut linking southern and northern parts of northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.

Speaking at a press conference held by the Information Office of the Xinjiang regional government yesterday, Guo Sheng, deputy director of the transport department said the Urumqi-Yuli Expressway that traverses the Tianshan Mountains via the tunnel is expected

to alleviate a traffic bottleneck that has long hindered the coordinated development of Xinjiang's northern and southern areas.

The 22.13-kilometer tunnel will reduce the time it takes to drive across the middle section of the Tianshan Mountains from several hours to about 20 minutes.

Once operational, the travel time from the regional capital of Urumqi, north of the Tianshan Mountains, to Korla, south of the Tianshan Mountains, will be shortened from seven hours to about three hours. – Xinhua

China warns about Japan's intended military buildup

BEIJING – A foreign ministry spokesperson in Beijing yesterday urged attention to whether Japan is intentionally stirring up trouble and making close-in provocations to justify its own military buildup and missions overseas.

Spokesperson Guo Jiakun made the remarks in response to a query about a land lease deal reportedly signed by Japan's Defense Ministry for deploying a mobile surveillance radar unit on the easternmost island of Okinawa to monitor the activities of Chinese aircraft carriers and airplanes in waters between Okinawa's main island and the Miyako Island.

"It needs to be stressed that countries enjoy freedom of navigation and overflight in relevant waters and airspace in accordance with the international law," Guo said at a daily press briefing.

He pointed out that due to Japanese

militarists' history of aggression and other reasons, Japan's moves in military and security areas have been closely watched by its Asian neighbors and the international community.

The Japanese side kept strengthening targeted military deployment near China's Taiwan region and even claimed it will deploy mid-range missiles. "This time, it went even further by deploying radar unit and troops to secretly monitor its neighbor," Guo said.

"Given the erroneous and dangerous remarks made by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi on Taiwan, we must question: Is the Japanese side making trouble and provocations at one's doorstep to find a pretext for its military buildup and missions overseas? Is the Japanese side once again going down the wrong path of militarism to a dead end laid out by the right-wing forces? We urge the Japanese side to learn from history," Guo added. – Xinhua

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Alleged Bondi shooters holed up in hotel for most of Philippines visit

Ferdinandh Cabrera

DAVAO – The father-and-son duo alleged to have gunned down 15 people on Australia's Bondi Beach holed themselves up in a Philippines hotel for weeks and left a tip on their way out, staff told AFP yesterday.

Australian authorities are investigating whether Sajid Akram and his son Naveed trained with extremists last month during a trip to the southern Mindanao region where there is a long history of Islamist insurgencies.

The Philippines says there is no

evidence to suggest that the country was being used to coach terrorists.

The men entered the Philippines on November 1, with Davao listed as their final destination, immigration officials confirmed this week.

They checked into room 315 of the GV Hotel the same day, paying 930 pesos (about US\$16) per night for the small room with two single beds.

The men typically only left their room for an hour or so each day and largely kept to themselves, night desk manager Angelica Ytang, 20, told AFP.

"They weren't approachable like other foreigners. Other foreigners usually chat with me, but they didn't," she said, adding her only interactions were with Naveed, while the father "always looked down" and avoided eye contact.

The pair never discussed the purpose of their stay and would typically leave the hotel in the morning but "didn't stay out long... the longest we observed was about one hour", Ytang said.

One outing included a hunt for durian, a spiky, pungent fruit that is a Southeast Asian delicacy.

"They asked me, 'Where can we buy durian?'" Ytang said, adding the search had been unsuccessful.

Ytang said she had never seen the men meet with anyone or take a vehicle.

"They just walked around. That's all they did."

Staff recognised their faces instantly in news reports about the Sydney massacre, she said.

Two other hotel employees confirmed their stay.

Ram Ligod, the janitor who cleaned their room, told AFP

Naveed had worn his hair long while he was at the hotel.

A regional police spokeswoman said Davao police would release a statement yesterday, without providing further details.

Ytang said the Akrams had left a tip on their departure.

"I said, 'Sir, you forgot your deposit'. The son took it, then the father said to give it to me," Ytang said.

"[Naveed] said, 'That's yours.' They were kind. I still can't believe they were like that."

– AFP

Japan govt sued over 'unconstitutional' climate inaction



Plaintiffs and their lawyers walk along the pavement in front of the Tokyo District Court to appeal that they have filed a lawsuit against the government seeking damages for the government's failure to take action on climate change in Tokyo yesterday. Hundreds of people across Japan sued the central government yesterday seeking damages for "unconstitutional" inaction on climate change, the country's first such litigation.

– AFP

Tomohiro Osaki

TOKYO – Hundreds of people across Japan sued the central government yesterday, seeking damages for "unconstitutional" inaction on climate change in the country's first such litigation.

The landmark lawsuit criticises Japan's "grossly inadequate" fight against the climate crisis, saying it jeopardises the health and livelihoods of the approximately 450 plaintiffs.

"We just submitted our complaint and evidence to the court and our lawsuit has been officially accepted," lead lawyer Akihiro Shima told AFP.

Plaintiff Kiichi Akiyama, a construction worker, said that relentless heat forced his team to work slower, causing "huge losses" to his business.

There have also been cases where "people collapse out in the field, or have dropped dead after they return home", the 57-year-old said.

In the past, five climate-related lawsuits have been filed with Japanese courts, including against coal-fired power plants, said Kyoto University assistant professor Masako Ichihara.

But Ichihara – as well as lawyers working on the suit – say this is the first compensation claim against the state over climate change.

"The defendant's climate change measures are grossly inadequate, and as a result, the plaintiffs' rights to a peaceful life and to the enjoyment of a stable climate are being violated," said the complaint summary, which was obtained by AFP ahead of the filing.

This year, Japan sweltered through its hottest summer since records began in 1898, and the plaintiffs argue such heatwaves cause economic losses, ruin crops and put many at risk of crippling heatstroke.

Akiyama, who frequently works outside in the searing heat, said it now takes his team triple the estimated time to finish their projects.

"I can barely dig with a shovel for 10 minutes without sitting down to rest," he added.

"We wouldn't be in this terrible situation if the government had taken more initiative in implementing policies."

Burning hot playgrounds

Similar legal moves are underway globally, including in South Korea where young environmental activists won the first such case in Asia.

Last year, a South Korean court ruled that much of the country's climate goals were unconstitutional. In Germany, climate targets were also ruled insufficient and unconstitutional in 2021.

The suit in Japan is seeking damages of 1,000 yen (US\$6.5) per plaintiff.

Lead lawyer Shima said plaintiffs wanted to focus on "the issue of the country's responsibility" rather than on money.

Japan's case is bolder than previous lawsuits in the country in that it seeks to directly hold the state accountable for climate inaction, academic Ichihara said.

Chances of a legal win are slim,

she explained, but "if the purpose ... is to raise public awareness, then it may succeed" because of its "very relatable" messaging.

Another plaintiff, who only gave her surname, Saito, was spurred into action by concerns over her six-year-old son.

She said recent record temperatures were robbing him of opportunities to play outdoors, with public pools sometimes declared off-limits due to heatstroke alerts.

"Not just in pools, but playing outside generally is becoming difficult in summer. The playground equipment is burning hot and that scares me," Saito told AFP.

Japan's top government spokesman Minoru Kihara declined to comment directly on the lawsuit, but said the country had approved "ambitious" emissions reduction targets that were compatible with the Paris Agreement's 1.5C goal.

Japan's nationally determined contributions aspire to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 60 percent by 2035 and 73 percent by 2040 compared with 2013 levels.

But yesterday's lawsuit criticises these latest targets, saying they "fall significantly short" of the global reduction aims outlined by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). They are also not legally binding, the complaint summary said.

"This legislative omission is unmistakably unconstitutional."

– AFP

Sri Lanka arrests 3 men for burning elephant alive

COLOMBO – Sri Lankan police arrested three men yesterday on charges of cruelty to animals after a viral video showed them setting a wild elephant on fire.

Police said the suspects, aged between 42 and 50, were taken into custody in the north-central district of Anuradhapura, about 200 kilometres north of Colombo.

They were placed on remand until December 24 pending further investigations into the incident, which sparked widespread revulsion after the footage was shared on social media.

Wildlife officials said the animal had first been shot and wounded before being set alight, and that veterinary surgeons' attempts to save its life failed.

Elephants are considered sacred in Sri Lanka and are protected by law, but farmers and residents in remote villages sometimes attack wild elephants that destroy crops.

Elephants are protected under Sri Lankan law and poachers can face the death penalty for killing one. However, the country has not carried out an execution since 1976 and the death penalty is automatically commuted to life imprisonment.

Escalating human-elephant conflict has claimed around 400 elephant and 200 human lives annually over the past five years.

Sri Lanka has an estimated 7,000 wild elephants, regarded as a national treasure in part because of their importance in Buddhist culture.

– AFP

Historic Afghan cinema torn down for a mall

KABUL – A renowned Kabul cinema that for decades attracted the city's film fans is being demolished to make way for a shopping mall, AFP journalists saw yesterday.

Built in the 1960s, the Ariana was pillaged and destroyed in Afghanistan's civil war of 1992-1996, before a French-led restoration effort that saw it reopen in 2004.

But with the return in 2021 of Taliban authorities and their ban of films, music and other entertainment under their strict interpretation of Islamic law, the cinema was given over to the occasional propaganda film before being shut for good.

Yesterday, a bulldozer smashed walls amid piles of rubble at the site.

A banner stated that a "standard modern market is going to be built".

"It shattered my heart, the news of the demolition of the Ariana Cinema. We had a lot of

good memories from the cinema," a 65-year-old Kabul resident, who declined to give her name for security reasons, told AFP.

In the 1970s it used to screen "Indian, Iranian movies in the early years; later on, they also started to screen Russian, English, French, and European movies as well", the woman said.

"They used to screen revolutionary movies, movies that showed the struggle of the people, and people used to watch them with a lot of passion."

The restoration work in 2004 was overseen by the French architects Frederic Namur and Jean-Marc Lalo, and financed by an association led by French director Claude Lelouch, who won the Palme d'Or top prize at Cannes in 1966 for "A Man and a Woman".

Another Kabul movie house, Park Cinema, has already been demolished, also to be replaced by a mall.

– AFP

Thailand strikes building in Cambodia's border casino hub

PHNOM PENH – Thailand yesterday bombed a building in a Cambodian casino town and major crossing between the two nations, as foreign powers pressured them to halt reignited border clashes.

Thai fighter jets dropped three bombs in an area of Poipet city, a bustling casino hub popular with Thai gamblers, the Cambodian interior ministry said in a statement.

The attack damaged a warehouse and other property, leaving two civilians with minor injuries, it said.

Thai air force spokesman Jackkrit Thammavichai told reporters the strike destroyed a “logistics centre” used to store rockets.

“These are facilities that have been used for military purposes,” he said.

The renewed fighting between the Southeast Asian neighbours this month has killed at least 21 people in Thailand and 18 in Cambodia, while displacing more than 800,000, officials said.

The conflict stems from a territorial dispute over the colonial-era demarcation of their 800-kilometre border and a smattering of ancient temple ruins situated on the frontier.

Each side has blamed the other for instigating the fresh fighting and traded accusations of attacks on civilians.

UN human rights chief Volker Turk called in a statement yesterday for an immediate ceasefire.

“Ensuring the safety of civilians and enabling their safe return home is vital,” Turk said.

Thailand said Tuesday that between 5,000 and 6,000 Thai nationals remained stranded in Poipet after Cambodia closed its land border

crossings with its neighbour.

Cambodia's interior ministry said the border closures were a “necessary measure” to reduce risks to civilians amid the ongoing combat, adding that air travel remained an option for those seeking to leave.

China deploys special envoy

Five days of fighting between Cambodia and Thailand in July killed dozens of people before a truce was brokered by the United States, China and Malaysia, and then broken within months.

US President Donald Trump, who has repeatedly intervened in the long-standing conflict this year, claimed last week that the two countries had agreed to a new ceasefire.

But Bangkok denied any truce had been agreed, and fighting with artillery, tanks, drones and jets has continued daily since a border skirmish this month sparked the latest round of conflict.

Beijing said it was sending its special envoy for Asian affairs to Cambodia and Thailand yesterday for a “shuttle-diplomacy trip”, to help bridge the gaps and “rebuild peace”.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held separate phone calls with his Thai and Cambodian counterparts, urging a “ceasefire as soon as possible”, according to a ministry statement.

“The intensity of this round of clashes has far exceeded previous incidents,” he said, adding that both sides should “ensure the safety of Chinese projects and personnel” in their countries.

Foreign ministers from ASEAN regional bloc nations are due to meet on Monday in

Malaysia for emergency talks aimed at finding a diplomatic solution.

“Our duty is to present the facts but more important is to press upon them that it is imperative for them to secure peace,” Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim told journalists late Wednesday.

“We are appealing to them to immediately stop this frontline offensive and if possible, an immediate ceasefire,” Anwar said at his official residence in Putrajaya, adding that he

was “cautiously optimistic” about the talks.

European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said in a statement that she had spoken with the foreign ministers of Cambodia and Thailand on Wednesday, offering the bloc's support for ceasefire monitoring with satellite imagery.

“The conflict between Thailand and Cambodia must not be allowed to spiral further. That's why the ceasefire needs to be immediately restored,” Kallas said. – AFP



Former Nepali Prime Minister and newly elected leader of the Communist Party of Nepal - Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), KP Sharma Oli (left) receives flowers during the party's 11th general convention in Kathmandu yesterday. Members of ousted Nepali prime minister KP Sharma Oli's political party voted for him to retain leadership of the organisation yesterday, meaning he will oversee its preparations for national elections next year.

– AFP

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Brussels farmer protest turns ugly as EU-Mercosur deal teeters

Jeremy Audouard and Umberto Bacchi

BRUSSELS – Protesters lit fires and hurled potatoes at riot police who responded with teargas and water cannon in Brussels yesterday, as tensions boiled over at a farmer demonstration against the EU’s planned trade deal with South American bloc Mercosur.

About 1,000 honking tractors rolled into the Belgian capital to heap pressure on an EU leaders’ summit where the deal’s fate hung in the balance.

“We’re here to say no to Mercosur,” Belgian dairy farmer Maxime Mabilie told AFP, accusing European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen of seeking to “force the deal through”.

At least 7,000 farmers staged a mostly peaceful march through the capital’s European quarter, where the Mercosur deal loomed large over an EU summit focused on funding Ukraine’s war effort.

But rowdy scenes erupted outside the European Parliament, where protesters set off fireworks and hurled tubers, bottles and other objects at the police who responded with tear gas.

Police charged several times to clear the area. Some minor scuffles ensued and at least a handful of people were arrested, an AFP reporter saw.

Tractors blocked roads leading

to the parliament building with some at times driving up to police lines in a confrontational manner.

A wooden coffin emblazoned with the word “agriculture” was placed on a nearby statue, and AFP witnessed acts of vandalism on the sidelines of the protest.

Key power Germany, as well as Spain and the Nordic countries, strongly support the Mercosur pact, eager to boost exports as Europe grapples with Chinese competition and a tariff-happy administration in the White House.

But farmers, particularly in France, worry the Mercosur deal will see them undercut by a flow of cheaper goods from agricultural giant Brazil and its neighbours.

“It’s going to be the end of some farming sectors,” said Olivier Hardouin, 41, who had come from France to protest, accusing Brussels of having betrayed the industry.

Plans by the commission chief to fly to Brazil this weekend to sign the agreement were thrown in jeopardy on Wednesday after Italy joined fellow heavyweight France in seeking a delay.

Clout to shoot down deal

The EU-Mercosur pact would create the world’s biggest free-trade area and help the EU to export more vehicles, machinery, wines and spirits to Latin America at a time of global trade tensions.



Farmers stand next to tractors and a fire near the European Parliament at the Place du Luxembourg, during a farmers’ protest to denounce the reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and trade agreements such as the Mercosur, in Brussels, yesterday, organised by Copa-Cogeca, the main association representing farmers and agricultural cooperatives in the EU.

– AFP

But farmers say it would also facilitate the entry into Europe of beef, sugar, rice, honey and soybeans produced by their less-regulated South American counterparts.

“It’s not fair,” said Luis, a 24-year-old cattle farmer from Belgium’s French-speaking south who did not want to give his full name, pulling his sweater above his nose against the tear gas hanging in the air.

“They are going to export cheap meat that is going to lower our prices,” he said – saying that South American farmers used cheap

feed as well as hormones banned in principle under the deal but in practice hard to detect.

Paris and Rome have been calling for more robust safeguard clauses, tighter import controls and more stringent standards for Mercosur producers.

President Emmanuel Macron warned yesterday that France would not support the deal without stronger safeguards for its farmers.

“We consider that we are not there yet, and the deal cannot be signed” as it stands, Macron told

reporters, vowing France would oppose any “attempt to force this through”.

Von der Leyen, who met yesterday with a farmers’ delegation to hear their concerns, said she still hoped for an accord.

“It is of enormous importance that we get the green light for Mercosur and that we can complete the signatures,” she said.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz echoed her message, saying: “If the European Union wants to remain credible in global trade policy, then decisions must be made now.”

But with Paris, Italy, Hungary and Poland in opposition, the deal’s critics would now have enough clout within the European Council to shoot down the deal, were it to be put to a vote.

The last-mile upset in European ranks drew a stern rebuke on Wednesday from Brazil’s President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who told his EU partners the time to close the deal was now or never.

Farmers are also incensed at EU plans to overhaul the 27-nation bloc’s huge farming subsidies, fearing less money will flow their way.

“They make a lot of promises but we’d like to see action, not words and we’re really starting to get fed up with it,” said Romain Yanet, a 20-year-old French farmer.

– AFP

Lula open to mediate between US, Venezuela to ‘avoid armed conflict’



Brazil’s President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva speaks during a breakfast with accredited journalists at the Presidential Palace in Brasília yesterday.

– AFP

BRASÍLIA – Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva said yesterday he was willing to mediate between the United States and Venezuela to “avoid armed conflict.”

Lula, one of Latin America’s most influential leaders, told reporters that Brazil was “very worried” about the mounting crisis between Venezuela and the United States.

The 80-year-old leftist said he had told US President Donald Trump that “things wouldn’t be resolved by shooting, that it was better to sit down around a table to find a solution.”

He said he had offered Brazil’s

help to both leaders to “avoid an armed conflict here in Latin America” and may speak to Trump again before Christmas to reinforce this offer “so that we can have a diplomatic agreement and not a fratricidal war.”

“I am at the disposal of both Venezuela and the US to contribute to a peaceful solution on our continent.”

Trump’s administration accuses Venezuela’s Nicolás Maduro of leading a drug trafficking cartel.

Washington has carried out deadly strikes on alleged drug-trafficking boats, seized an oil tanker and slapped sanctions on Maduro’s relatives.

Trump has also overseen a major military deployment off the coast of Venezuela, and this week declared a blockade of “sanctioned oil vessels” to and from Caracas.

Maduro claims the US seeks regime change instead of its stated goal of stopping drug trafficking.

Lula said he was concerned about what was behind the US campaign.

“It can’t just be about overthrowing Maduro. What are the other interests that we don’t yet know about?” he said, adding he did not know if it was about Venezuela’s oil, or critical minerals, or rare earths.

“Nobody ever says concretely why this war is necessary.”

– AFP

US, Qatar, Turkey, Egypt to hold Gaza talks in Miami

WASHINGTON, DC – US President Donald Trump’s special envoy Steve Witkoff will hold talks with senior officials from Qatar, Egypt and Turkey in Miami today on the next phase of the Gaza ceasefire deal, a White House official told AFP.

Under the second stage, Israel is supposed to withdraw from its positions in Gaza, an interim authority is to govern the Palestinian territory instead of Hamas, and an international stabilization force is to be deployed.

But progress has so far been slow in moving to the following phase of October’s agreement between Israel and Hamas, which was brokered by Washington and its regional allies.

Turkey said Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan would attend the talks. Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman al-Thani and Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty would also be there, the Axios news outlet reported.

“Turkey will continue to fight determinedly on every front to ensure that what is happening in Gaza is not forgotten, that justice is served,” Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in a

speech on Wednesday.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to meet Trump at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida on December 29, Axios said, as the US president pushes for a longer-term deal.

Trump said in a televised address to the nation on Wednesday that the Gaza truce had brought peace to the Middle East “for the first time in 3,000 years.”

But the ceasefire remains fragile with both sides alleging violations, and mediators fearing that Israel and Hamas alike are playing for time.

Israel said it had struck and killed the head of weapons production in Hamas’s military wing in the Gaza Strip last weekend, a move that reportedly sparked Trump to warn of jeopardising the truce.

Witkoff and Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner played a key role in the shuttle diplomacy that led to the deal to end the Gaza war, which was sparked by Hamas’s October 2023 attack on Israel.

The US pair are also involved in talks to end Russia’s military operation in Ukraine, and will meet Russian officials in Miami over the weekend.

– AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -1°C~10°C	Manila 23°C~30°C	New York -1°C~14°C	Lisbon 9°C~15°C
Shanghai 10°C~22°C	Bangkok 21°C~34°C	London 4°C~11°C	Rio de Janeiro 21°C~25°C
Hong Kong 17°C~23°C	Tokyo 3°C~11°C	Frankfurt 5°C~10°C	Luanda 23°C~28°C
Taipei 18°C~25°C	Singapore 23°C~31°C	Vancouver 4°C~6°C	Maputo 21°C~28°C
Guangzhou 15°C~25°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~31°C	Paris 5°C~11°C	Dili 23°C~30°C
Nanjing 6°C~22°C	Jakarta 23°C~31°C	Moscow -1°C~1°C	São Tomé 26°C~29°C
Guilin 11°C~24°C	Seoul 5°C~10°C	Las Vegas 7°C~20°C	Praia 20°C~25°C
Xi'an 3°C~14°C	Sydney 22°C~34°C	Monte Carlo 12°C~14°C	Bissau 18°C~32°C

Macao-Brazil Educational Cooperation Continues to Promote Internationalisation of Local Higher Education and Talent Exchange with Portuguese-Speaking Countries

Advancing the Internationalisation of Higher Education and Deepening Cooperation with Portuguese-Speaking Countries

Strategically positioned by the state as a commercial and trade cooperation service platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries (PSC), Macao carries the important mission to help create a mutually beneficial, win-win situation and facilitate common development between China and PSCs in multiple fields such as economy and trade, scientific research, education and culture, which clearly reflects Macao's distinctive position of enjoying staunch support from the motherland and being closely connected with the outside world.

Higher education institutions in Macao have long maintained close ties with their counterparts in PSCs. According to Kong Chi Meng, director of the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) and secretary-general of the Talent Development Committee, with the nation's robust coordination and planning, efforts have been made to take forward the integration of education, technology and talent, while higher education in Macao is progressing towards high-quality development and internationalisation. The DSEDJ will continue to intensify and broaden cooperation in scientific research and education with PSCs, build a brand of higher education for Macao, and actively push forward with joint training programmes in partnership with PSC universities, with the goal of expanding Macao's international circle of friends, strengthening international and regional educational ties, and attracting more outstanding global talent from a variety of places to Macao, thereby building Macao into an important bridgehead for China's high-standard opening-up and a vital window for exchange and mutual learning between Chinese and Western civilisations.

Higher education institutions in Macao and Brazil have also deepened collaboration in research and faculty development. Cross-lingual and cross-cultural teaching practices have helped students in both places enhance their language proficiency. For instance, the Federal University of Sergipe (UFS) has offered Portuguese language classes to students from the Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) while MUST has provided Chinese language classes for UFS students, nurturing interdisciplinary pioneers in areas such as education, research and business, thereby contributing to talent development in Macao.

In addition, to promote international scientific collaboration and enhance research and development (R&D) capabilities, multiple universities in Macao have actively launched research projects with their overseas partners, especially in the field of artificial intelligence (AI), a focal point in current global trends. The City University of Macau, for example, plans to work in tandem with a higher education institution and a technology company from Brazil on a piece of research in the fields of AI and social media, focusing on predictive analysis of cross-cultural digital content.

Many international students and exchange participants from different countries and regions are opting to pursue learning in Macao, with the intention of experiencing the distinctive educational climate in Macao and the blend of Chinese and Western cultures.



The University of Macau visited Brazil in 2025 and signed a cooperation agreement with the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro



The City University of Macau signed in 2024 cooperation agreements with Brazilian institutions including the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and the State University of Campinas



The DSEDJ organises the Forum for Rectors of Higher Education Institutions of China and Portuguese-Speaking Countries in collaboration with the Chinese-Portuguese Bilingual Talent Training Alliance

To continue the achievements of Macao's higher education institutions in fostering exchanges with PSCs and partner countries and regions of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the DSEDJ organises visits every year for local higher education institutions to participate in major education fairs hosted in PSCs and BRI partner countries and regions, promoting Macao's higher education. At the events, the DSEDJ and Macao higher education institutions would set up separate booths to brief parents and students in those territories on Macao's positioning as 'One Centre, One Platform and One Base', advantages of Macao's role as a platform for cultural exchange between China and PSCs, an overview of education in Macao and information about featured programmes, attracting considerable attention from parent and student visitors.

In recent years, an increasing number of PSC students have chosen Macao as their destination for further studies, including students and exchange participants from Brazil.

Building a Brand of Higher Education for Macao



Delegation of Macao higher education leaders to Brazil in 2025

The DSEDJ has been actively strengthening international and regional educational cooperation to build a brand of higher education for Macao. Over the years, efforts have been made to expand and consolidate Macao's multi-sectoral education collaboration network with the international community, including regularly organising delegations of members of the higher education sector to PSCs for exchange and participation in education fairs.

In October this year, a delegation of higher education leaders in Macao visited Brazil, where they met with Brazilian universities, a technological innovation park, a technology and innovation centre and other sites in order to discuss topics such as university development, research collaboration and the establishment of the Macao-Hengqin International Education (University) Town. Between higher education institutions in both places, multiple cooperation agreements were signed and intent of cooperation in several initiatives confirmed. The delegation also called on the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Ministry of Education of Brazil, with the object of boosting and continuing to deepen bilateral educational exchange and expanding the reach of promotional efforts in PSCs.

Attracting Global Talent to Macao

The *Legal System for Talent Recruitment*, which came into force in July 2023, enables the Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region to introduce recruitment programmes targeted at three types of talent in an orderly manner, aiming to enhance the city's innovation capacity, competitiveness and international recognition by attracting top-tier talent, with a view to promoting adequate economic diversification.

Inácio Bó, a current associate professor at the University of Macau who relocated from Brazil to Macao under one of the talent recruitment programmes, sees himself as a 'bridge between Macao and Brazil'. He has been leveraging his network in Brazil to broaden exchange and collaboration between local universities and their Brazilian counterparts, hoping to draw more Brazilian friends to Macao for exchanges or settlement. This October, he spearheaded the organisation of the Greater Bay Area Market Design Workshop 2025 in Macao, in which experts and scholars from Brazil, Europe, Asia and other regions were invited to participate. Professor Bó will be conducting joint experimental research with personnel from Brazilian universities in the near future.



Inácio Bó, associate professor at the University of Macau



Alexandre Lobo, vice-rector of the University of Saint Joseph

Higher education institutions in Macao are capitalising on the international teaching and research networks of expatriate experts and scholars based in Macao to build external academic bridges for the internationalisation of local higher education. One of the talent is Alexandre Lobo, vice-rector of the University of Saint Joseph (USJ), who is a scholar from Brazil with footprints at educational institutions worldwide including Angola and the United Kingdom. Professor Lobo founded the Laboratory of Applied

Neurosciences at USJ, concentrating on the development of brain-computer interfaces and smart healthcare solutions. He has also assisted faculty members and students in establishing a number of technology start-ups through the Macau Spin Incubator. Professor Lobo has introduced Brazilian interdisciplinary thinking and Lusophone market experiences into Macao, supporting the city's development into an international R&D hub that facilitates local growth.

Expanding Macao's International Circle of Friends

Despite cultural differences, the Portuguese language continues to act as a bridge linking Macao with PSCs. Karina Colla Rodrigues, a Brazilian student pursuing a bachelor's degree programme in Public Administration at Macao Polytechnic University, said that her cross-cultural learning experience in Macao would be her key to the world, no matter whether she plans to pursue future development in research, entrepreneurship or diplomacy.

'Macao is not only a "city for studying abroad", but also a "city that connects to the world"', she remarked.



Izabella Xavier Pereira, student

Izabella Xavier Pereira, a Brazilian student studying for a degree in Tourism Business Management at the Macao University of Tourism, said that she fell in love with Macao shortly after she set foot in the city because of its blend of tradition and modernity. Izabella appreciates the opportunity to engage with classmates from around the world, which has enriched her tourism studies. She hopes to contribute strength to the sustainable development of both Macao and Brazil.

'Embrace opportunities, make the most of Macao's advantages as "One Platform", explore Asia's cultural diversity, and broaden global horizons,' she encouraged.



Karina Colla Rodrigues, exchange student



How will AFCON affect Premier League sides?

Kieran Canning

MANCHESTER – Premier League sides are preparing for their most intense spell of the season over the festive period, but many squads will be depleted by the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON).

The tournament, hosted by Morocco, runs from December 21 until January 18 meaning clubs could be missing their African stars for six league matches plus the FA Cup third round.

However, the disruption for some could provide an opportunity for others with leaders Arsenal among six clubs without any players departing.

AFP Sports looks at who is participating and what the impact could be on the English top flight.

Who has been called up?

Mohamed Salah is the marquee Premier League name headed for Morocco, but his absence may not hurt Liverpool quite as much as previous versions of the AFCON.

The Egyptian hinted that last weekend's victory over Brighton could have been his last game for the Reds after an explosive outburst targeting manager Arne Slot.

Salah has not started any of Liverpool's last five games, but bridges were mended in time for him to feature for the majority of the Brighton match and receive a hero's reception at Anfield.

The 33-year-old will be joined by Manchester City's Omar Marmoush as seven-time winners Egypt aim to end their wait since

2010 to lift the trophy.

Bryan Mbeumo will spearhead Cameroon's challenge for a sixth title on the back of an impressive start to his Manchester United career.

Crystal Palace and Everton will miss the talents of Senegal duo Ismaila Sarr and Iliman Ndiaye.

However, the highest scoring African in the Premier League this season, Bournemouth's Antoine Semenyo, is not departing as Ghana did not qualify.

Who is most affected?

Sunderland are off to the best start by a promoted team to the Premier League in nearly 20 years, but are set to be the worst hit over the next month.

The Black Cats are set to lose wingers Chemsidine Talbi (Morocco) and Bertrand Traore

(Burkina Faso), full-back Reinildo (Mozambique), Senegal midfielder Habib Diarra and DR Congo pair Arthur Masuaku and Noah Sadiki.

Regis Le Bris' side are unbeaten at the Stadium of Light this season and the impact of a depleted Sunderland could affect the title race as they host second-placed Manchester City on January 1.

Manchester United boss Ruben Amorim also faces major changes to the right side of his attack just as the Red Devils were beginning to flow going forward.

As well as Mbeumo, Amad Diallo will leave as part of the Ivory Coast squad, while defender Noussair Mazraoui will expect to go far in the tournament with hosts and favourites Morocco.

Fulham will also lose three players in Nigerian trio Alex Iwobi, Calvin Bassey and Samuel Chukwueze.

Who is least affected?

Despite the shift to an earlier start of the AFCON, which takes it fully into the Christmas and new year Premier League schedule, the impact on the majority should be minimal.

Six clubs will lose no players: Arsenal, Aston Villa, Bournemouth, Chelsea, Leeds and Newcastle.

Manchester City duo Marmoush and Rayan Ait-Nouri have both just made two Premier League starts all season.

Salah is Liverpool's only departure, while Mali's Yves Bissouma is yet to play for Tottenham under Thomas Frank.

– AFP



This pool photo taken and released yesterday shows Thailand's Queen Suthida (centre) celebrating with her team after winning the gold medal in the mixed keelboat SSL47 sailing event during the 33rd Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games) at the Ocean marina yacht club in Chonburi province. Queen Suthida, the wife of King Maha Vajiralongkorn, competed on a 47-foot (14-metre) sailboat with nine other crew members. – AFP

Sport in brief

Argentina and Spain to meet in Qatar for intercontinental 'Finalissima'

Football

ASUNCION – Spain, the European champions, and Argentina, the Copa America winners, will compete in the "Finalissima" international super final on March 27 in Qatar, the South American and European football confederations announced yesterday.

The match, which will take place less than three months before the kick-off of the 2026 World Cup in the United States, Mexico and Canada, will be a chance to gauge the form of Argentina, the reigning world champions, and Spain, one of the favourites for the North American tournament.

"The Finalissima celebrates football excellence by bringing together the best of European and South American national team football," said UEFA, the European governing body, on its website.

Argentina won the previous edition of the Finalissima, beating Italy 3-0 with goals from Lautaro Martinez, Angel Di Maria and Paulo Dybala in June 2022 at Wembley Stadium.

Spain currently top the FIFA world rankings ahead of Argentina in second.

One of the main attractions of the match will be the meeting between Argentina's Lionel Messi and Spanish prodigy Lamine Yamal - the past and present of Barcelona.

The Lusail Stadium will also bring back fond memories for the Argentinians, as it is the stadium where their captain Messi lifted the World Cup trophy three years ago.

At the upcoming World Cup, Spain are in Group H alongside Uruguay, Saudi Arabia and Cape Verde.

Argentina have been drawn in Group J with Algeria, Austria and Jordan. – AFP

Vuelta to start in Monaco next year, end in Granada

Cycling

MONACO – The 2026 Vuelta a Espana will start with a time-trial in Monaco and finish in Granada, after organisers on Wednesday unveiled what they say will be one of the most difficult routes in the race's history.

Four medium-mountain stages and six mountain stages have been scheduled for a total elevation gain of 58,156 metres, far more than both next year's Tour de France or Giro d'Italia.

The second stage will also start from Monaco before heading into France and Andorra and then into Spain.

"This will be one of the most demanding editions in history," said race director Javier Guillen, who is hoping the route will attract a strong field.

Tadej Pogacar has not competed in the Vuelta since coming third on his debut in 2019 but organisers are confident he will eventually return to the race.

"We are hoping for him... But we know he'll come someday because it's the only grand tour he hasn't won," said Guillen.

The queen stage is scheduled for the penultimate day, with a gruelling climb to reach the summit of the Collado del Aguacil after an 8.3-km ascent.

There will be few opportunities for the sprinters, although time-trial specialists will be able to target the opening stage and the 18th stage to Jerez de la Frontera.

Last year's Vuelta, won by two-time Tour de France champion Jonas Vingegaard, was heavily affected by pro-Palestinian protests, with some stages shortened.

"Circumstances from last year and this year for 2026 are totally different so we are not expecting anything in that regard," said Guillen.

The Israel-Premier Tech team is being rebranded as NSN Cycling next year following a takeover by a group including former Barcelona and Spain football star Andres Iniesta. – AFP

WADA names India worst doping offender for 3rd straight year



NEW DELHI

India tops the rankings of global sports drug cheats for a third straight year, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) said, marking a dubious hat-trick for the country.

India's National Anti Doping Agency (NADA) collected 7,113 urine and blood samples out of which 260 tested positive in 2024, the international watchdog said in its annual report published late Tuesday.

The findings are a major blow to India, which is preparing to host the 2030 Commonwealth Games - an event seen as a stepping stone for the country's ambition of hosting the 2036 Olympics.

Athletics (76) had the highest number of doping cases last year followed by weightlifting (43) and wrestling (29).

In July, under-23 wrestling champion and Paris Olympics quarter-finalist Reetika Hooda tested positive and was provisionally suspended.

At India's University Games earlier this month, there were reports of just one athlete showing up for some track and field events after others fled because of the presence of anti-doping officials.

India, the world's most populous country with 1.4 billion people, was also ranked number one doping offender in 2022 and 2023.

French athletes accounted for the next highest number on the list in 2024 with 91 positive cases, while Italy were third with 85.

Russia and the United States come next at 76 cases each followed by Germany (54) and China (43).

NADA defended their fight against doping after the report.

"In recent years, India has witnessed a significant strengthening of its anti-doping framework," it said in a statement Wednesday.

"To tackle the menace of doping in sports, NADA India has not only increased the number of tests but also increased the emphasis on education and awareness."

NADA added that up to December 16, the number of tests conducted this year had been 7,068 with 110 positive cases.

The WADA report comes months after the International Olympic Committee (IOC) raised concerns about rampant use of performance-enhancing drugs in India and urged the country to set its house in order.

The Indian Olympic Association in August formed a new anti-doping panel after the IOC flagged India's poor record.

The government also passed a new national anti-doping bill to enhance enforcement, expand testing facilities and "ensure the highest standards of integrity" in sports. – AFP



France's Team United FC (right) and Russia's team RFSO Lokomotiv compete in the digital part of the match between United FC and RFSO Lokomotiv at the Phygital games of the future Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates yesterday. – AFP

Rob Reiner's son appears in court over parents' murder

Huw Griffith

LOS ANGELES – The son of Hollywood director Rob Reiner made his first appearance in court on Wednesday, charged with stabbing his parents to death in their Los Angeles home.

In a very brief hearing thronged by media, Nick Reiner did not enter a plea to two counts of first-degree murder over a crime that has shocked the entertainment world.

The 32-year-old, who has a troubled history of addiction, is next expected to appear in court on January 7 for a formal arraignment.

Lawyer Alan Jackson told reporters the case needed to be treated with “restraint and with dignity.”

“This is a devastating tragedy that has befallen the Reiner family,” he said.

“There are very, very complex and serious issues that are associated with this case. These need to be thoroughly but very carefully dealt with and examined and looked at and analysed.”

Jackson has so far refused to say who hired him.

If convicted, Reiner could face life in prison without parole or the death penalty, although California does not routinely carry out capital punishment.

Reiner was arrested on Sunday after the bodies of his 78-year-old filmmaker father and mother, photographer Michele Singer Reiner, 70, were discovered at their home in the upmarket Brentwood neighborhood 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.



Defence attorney Alan Jackson (centre) speaks to the press outside Los Angeles Superior Court on Wednesday in Los Angeles, California, where the arraignment of Nick Reiner, son of the late film director Rob Reiner, on double murder charges was adjourned to January 7, 2026. 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. – AFP

Timeline

On Wednesday, a picture began to emerge of the timeline of a weekend that has left Hollywood in shock.

According to US media reports, Nick Reiner, who lived in a guest property at his parents' home, had attended a glitzy Hollywood party hosted by comedian Conan O'Brien on Saturday, where some attendees spoke of his behaving erratically.

The New York Times, citing a source close to the family, said the couple had been due to dine with former president Barack Obama and his wife Michelle on Sunday evening, and had seemingly booked a massage appointment for that day.

The paper said a therapist who arrived at the house had been unable to get an answer, so had

contacted the couple's daughter, Romy Reiner.

When she arrived with a friend, she discovered her father's body, and emergency services were called. Paramedics told her that her mother's body was also at the property.

Entertainment outlet TMZ reported that Nick Reiner had checked in to a Santa Monica hotel early Sunday morning.

At a press conference on Tuesday, investigators declined to say what time they believed the couple had died.

Police arrested Reiner several kilometres away from the scene of the crime late on Sunday evening.

'Devastating'

In a statement on Wednesday, Jake and Romy Reiner said the death of their parents was “horrific and devastating.”

“Words cannot even begin to describe the unimaginable pain we are experiencing every moment of the day,” the statement said.

“The horrific and devastating loss of our parents, Rob and Michele Reiner, is something that no one should ever experience. They weren't just our parents; they were our best friends.

“We now ask for respect and privacy, for speculation to be tempered with compassion and humanity, and for our parents to be remembered for the incredible lives they lived and the love they gave.”

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.

– AFP

Oscars to stream exclusively on YouTube from 2029

Andrew Marszal

LOS ANGELES – The Oscars will be shown only on YouTube from 2029, the Academy said on Wednesday, in a radical gambit for a movie industry that remains wary of streaming platforms even as viewing habits shift online.

The new five-year deal means Hollywood's most prestigious awards ceremony will be viewable exclusively online for the first time, ending a decades-long relationship with US broadcaster ABC.

The decision will allow the Academy Awards to reach “the largest worldwide audience possible – which will be beneficial for our Academy members and the film community,” said Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences CEO Bill Kramer and President Lynette Howell Taylor in a statement.

The annual Oscars, which celebrate the year's top achievements in film and draw the world's biggest A-list stars, are regularly watched by around 20 million Americans, and millions more globally.

ABC's latest contract to broadcast the show had been due to end in 2028, with the 100th Academy Awards. The Disney-owned channel will continue to air the Oscars up until then.

But the new deal with Google-owned YouTube represents a bold new direction for the show at a time when audiences increasingly watch all types of content online.

Streamers owned by Silicon Valley firms have lured top talent away from traditional Hollywood studios with massive contracts – despite filmmakers' concerns that they rarely show movies on the big screen in cinemas for extended runs.

Streamers have also gradually gained wider acceptance at the Academy Awards, where Apple won best picture for “CODA” in 2022.

The SAG Awards, another important Hollywood awards gala which recently

rebranded as The Actors Awards, have already moved to Netflix.

YouTube accounts for the biggest share of television viewing time in the United States of any streaming platform, dwarfing even Netflix.

“This collaboration will leverage YouTube's vast reach and infuse the Oscars and other Academy programming with innovative opportunities for engagement while honouring our legacy,” said the Academy statement.

Financial terms of the new Oscars deal were not disclosed.

Industry website Deadline said “the amount that YouTube was willing to pay didn't make sense for Disney,” citing anonymous insiders.

'Proud home'

An ABC Entertainment spokesperson told AFP: “ABC has been the proud home to The Oscars for more than half a century.

“We look forward to the next three telecasts, including the show's centennial celebration in 2028, and wish the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences continued success.”

Like Hollywood more broadly, the Oscars have endured a challenging time in recent years, as younger generations' viewing habits shift.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Oscars ratings sank as low as 10.4 million.

The most recent Oscars were viewed by 19.69 million people – the highest in five years – as the ceremony was shown live simultaneously on Disney's streamer Hulu along with ABC.

But the Hulu stream suffered technical glitches that left some viewers unable to see the final prizes.

The Academy Awards telecast regularly topped 40 million just over a decade ago.

– AFP

Congratulations on the
26th Anniversary
of the Establishment of the
Macao SAR



賀定一
崔世昌

澳門中華總商會
澳門土木工程實驗室
澳門街坊會聯合總會
適意物業管理服務有限公司
澳門生產力暨科技轉移中心



Beary good mum

This handout photo released by Polar Bears International on Wednesday, shows a wild female polar bear and her two cubs, one of whom she adopted, in Hudson Bay in Churchill, Manitoba, Canada, on November 11. Researchers in northern Canada have observed a rare case of polar bear adoption, capturing video footage of a wild female bear caring for a cub that was not her own. “Cub adoption is relatively rare in polar bears. We’ve documented 13 cases in our study population over the last 45 years,” said Evan Richardson, a scientist with Canada’s ministry for environment and climate change.

— AFP



Top deck view

A double-decker bus travels along Oxford Street decorated with lights in London, on Wednesday.

— Xinhua

Presents for everyone

Brazilian diver Felipe Luna, dressed as Santa Claus, leaves presents under a Christmas tree surrounded by Guarajubas or horse-eye jacks (Caranx latius), during a show at the Marine Aquarium of Rio de Janeiro (AquaRio) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil yesterday.

— AFP



Tree people

A visitor looks at handmade toys on display at the “Ladya” exhibition and fair of Russian folk arts and crafts in Moscow, Russia, on Wednesday.

— Xinhua



Whatever the weather

A cross-country skier makes their way across the snow as the sun shines near Ramsau am Dachstein, Austria yesterday.

— AFP



Traditional meets futuristic

Indonesian students installed a 6.3-metre-high Christmas tree created by AI-generative with Papuan cultural motifs and decorated with 28 Tifa musical instruments, four Asmat tribal shields, spears, traditional woven bags called Noken, beads, and sculptures at the Petra university in Surabaya, Indonesia yesterday.

— AFP