

Youth survey shows half didn't attend a single performance in 12 months

Armando Neves

The Macao New Chinese Youth Association (MNCYA) hosted a press conference yesterday about the findings of its survey titled "Macao Performing Arts Industry Survey" which shows, among other things, that around 50.2 percent of local youths did not attend a single performance in 12 months.

The study was conducted in May, surveying 789 local residents aged 18 to 44. The press conference was held at the Macao Daily News Building.

According to the findings, among those who attended at least one performance, 74.3 percent attended large-scale concerts, while the proportions for other types of performances such as stage plays and music festivals are significantly lower. The primary factor influencing ticket purchase decisions is "interest in the performer" (51.1 percent), with only 13.8 percent of the respondents prioritising the ticket price as their main consideration, the findings show.

The findings also reveal that social media is the primary channel for young people to obtain information

about performances (58.2 percent), followed by recommendations from friends and family (23.3 percent).

In terms of spending capacity, nearly one-fifth (19.8 percent) reported spending an average of 1,000 to 1,499 patacas per ticket. Performances effectively drive secondary consumption, with only 30.5 percent saying they made no additional purchases beyond buying their tickets. Transportation and eating-out are the most common forms of performance-related extra spending.

The findings also reveal that 58.4 percent of local youths believe that it is relatively difficult to purchase tickets directly from the organisers for popular performances in Macau.

Half of the respondents said that they attended performances outside Macau in the past 12 months, with Hong Kong (27.4 percent) and the Chinese mainland (20.0 percent) the primary destinations. However, nearly half (49.4 percent) still prefer to watch performances in Macau.

Regarding the government's development goal of positioning Macau as a "City of Performing

Arts," 64.2 percent expressed their "support" for the initiative, according to the findings.

4 policy recommendations

Base on the findings, the association representatives presented during the press conference four policy recommendations: strengthening the positioning of Macau as a "performance-friendly city"; optimising both software and hardware facilities at outdoor performance areas; unlocking public spaces to nurture young talent; and implementing a "large-scale performance certification system" for boosting community economic development.

MNCYA President Leong Chon Kit told reporters on the sidelines of the press conference that his association is urging the government to optimise venue leasing procedures and, among other possible measures, to eliminate market operational barriers; transform outdoor performance areas into high-frequency cultural hotspots by hosting events during non-peak periods; and, as a long-term plan, to develop and set up more small to medium-sized performance venues. ■



Macao New Chinese Youth Association (MNCYA) President Leong Chon Kit speaks to reporters at the Macao Daily News Building about the survey's findings yesterday. — Photo: Armando Neves

Trump hints at land strike as Venezuela pressure mounts

WASHINGTON, DC — A throwaway remark last week by President Donald Trump has raised questions about whether US forces may have carried their first land strike against drug cartels in Venezuela.

Trump said the US knocked out a "big facility" for producing trafficking boats, as he was discussing his pressure campaign against Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in an interview broadcast on Friday.

"They have a big plant or a big facility where they send, you know, where the ships come from," Trump

said in an interview with billionaire supporter John Catsimatidis on the WABC radio station in New York.

"Two nights ago we knocked that out. So we hit them very hard."

Trump did not say where the facility was located or give any other details. US forces have carried out numerous strikes in both the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean since September, killing more than 100 people.

The Pentagon referred questions about Trump's remarks to the White House. The White House did not respond to requests for comment from AFP.

There has been no official comment from the Venezuelan government.

Trump has been saying for weeks that the United States will "soon" start carrying out land strikes targeting drug cartels in Latin America, but there have been no confirmed attacks to date.

The Trump administration has been ramping up pressure on Maduro, accusing the Venezuelan leader of running a drug cartel himself and imposing an oil tanker blockade.

Maduro has accused Washington of attempting regime change. — AFP

UN chief says 'get serious' in grim New Year message

UNITED NATIONS, New York — The United Nations urged global leaders yesterday to focus on people and the planet in a New Year's message depicting the world in chaos.

"As we enter the new year, the world stands at a crossroads. Chaos and uncertainty surround us. Division. Violence. Climate breakdown. And systemic violations of international law," UN Secretary-General António Guterres said in a video message.

In 2026, as war rages in Ukraine and elsewhere, world leaders must work to ease human suffering and fight climate change, he added.

"I call on leaders everywhere: Get serious. Choose people and planet over pain," said Guterres,

criticizing the global imbalance between military spending and financing for the poorest countries.

Military spending is up nearly 10 percent this year to US\$2.7 trillion, which is 13 times total world spending on development aid and equivalent to the entire gross domestic product of Africa, he pointed out.

Wars are raging at levels unseen since World War II, he added.

"In this New Year, let's resolve to get our priorities straight. A safer world begins by investing more in fighting poverty and less in fighting wars. Peace must prevail," said Guterres, who will be serving his last year as secretary general. — AFP

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The Macau Post Daily

PLA conducts drills around Taiwan to deter separatist forces, external interference

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Eastern Theater Command yesterday launched large-scale joint military drills around Taiwan Island under the codename "Justice Mission 2025."

— Story on p. 7

Man accused of fatally stabbing 9 in Suriname kills himself

A father suspected of stabbing four of his own children to death in a rampage that claimed nine lives in Suriname's capital killed himself in jail, police said yesterday.

— Story on p. 10

Portugal delivers over 32 million COVID-19 jabs over 5 years: DGS

Portugal has administered more than 32 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines since launching its first vaccination campaign five years ago, according to data released on Saturday by the Directorate-General for Health (DGS).

— Story on p. 12

Septuagenarian in serious condition with flu A: SSM

Armindo Neves

The Health Bureau (SSM) announced in a statement yesterday night that a 76-year-old local man was in serious condition with influenza A.

According to the statement, the patient has a history of chronic illness and developed a cough with sputum on December 21. He sought medical attention at a healthcare facility, but the symptoms persisted, the statement said.

Last Saturday, the statement said that the patient experienced fever and dyspnoea (breathing discomfort), leading him to

seek medical attention at the emergency department of the public Conde de São Januario Hospital Centre (CHCSJ).

According to the statement, the patient was diagnosed with influenza A complicated by pneumonia and acute respiratory failure, subsequently requiring hospitalisation and ventilator support. On Sunday, his condition deteriorated, necessitating transfer to the government’s Intensive Care Unit (ICU), the statement said.

The patient’s condition last night was serious, the statement said, added that the patient had not received the current

seasonal influenza vaccine.

According to the statement, the influenza virus activity in Macau remains high, with the overall situation still at an elevated epidemic level. The Health Bureau urged the public to strengthen preventive measures. Those who have not yet received the influenza vaccine, particularly pregnant women, young children, the elderly, and individuals with chronic illnesses—who are more susceptible to severe complications or mortality upon infection—are advised to get vaccinated as soon as possible, the statement said. ■

Police bust prostitution ring, arresting trio for pimping & procuring minors

Ada Lei

The Judiciary police (PJ) busted a prostitution ring on Friday, arresting a man and two women from northern Jilin Province for pimping and procuring minors for commercial sex, PJ spokesman Lei Chi Hou said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Lei identified the suspects as a 57-year-old female surnamed Liu, her 29-year-old daughter surnamed Li, and Li’s 20-year-old male second cousin surnamed Ma. All three claimed to be jobless. The victims are two girls, aged between 16 and 18, and a middle-aged woman, all from Jilin.

According to Lei, the Judiciary Police (PJ) received a referral on Friday from the Public Security Police (PSP) about a suspected “human trafficking” case. The middle-aged victim reported to the police that she had been hired by the prostitution ring comprising four members, including Liu, Li, Ma, and Li’s husband, who was still at large at the time of the press conference, to engage in prostitution in a hotel in Zape in mid-December. The ring rented the hotel guestroom for her for the purpose of engaging in prostitution there, also finding clients and providing condoms. Lei said that her clients paid about 1,000 patacas each time.

Lei noted that the middle-aged victim thought that the profit-sharing agreement was unreasonable and decided to leave the ring, attempting to run her business independently at the same location. However, she was stopped by the ring and assaulted by Li’s husband, sustaining injuries. She reported the case to the police early Friday morning. She also told the police about two minors who were also subjected to the ring’s prostitution arrangements in the same hotel. The police apprehended the trio separately at the hotel on Friday morning, and intercepted the two minors.

Lei added that the police discovered that the ring recruited women from Jilin to come to Macau to engage in prostitution. They arranged for the two minors to fly from Jilin to Macau in early and mid-December, respectively, with the ring covering the flight expenses. After each commercial sex transaction, the ring deducted 300 patacas from each transaction, which usually cost the client around 1,000 patacas. The minors were also forced to pay the airfares. The three victims provided sexual services to at least 30 male clients, resulting in an income of 30,000 patacas, while the ring’s illicit profit amounted to 19,000 patacas, Lei said.

The trio have been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing charges of controlling prostitutes, procuring minors for commercial sexual purposes, and their involvement in a criminal syndicate. ■

Prostitute falsely accuses client of rape, victim probed for invasion of privacy: police

Ada Lei

A woman from Hong Kong has been arrested for falsely accusing a man of rape, PJ spokesman Lei Chi Hou said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Lei identified the suspect as a 20-year-old female surnamed Huang who claimed to be jobless. The victim is a 35-year-old mainland man surnamed Zhan who works in a cardboard-recycling operation.

According to Lei, Huang met Zhan in early December in Macau. They engaged in commercial sex at a hotel in Zape, for which Zhan paid the woman 4,000 patacas. On Wednesday evening, Zhan arranged to meet Huang in a hotel guestroom in the northern district for commercial sex again, agreeing to discuss payment afterwards. They left the room together, with Zhan accompanying Huang to a taxi. However, Zhan continually delayed payment and never paid Huang.

Lei noted that after Huang did not receive any money from Zhan for her services, she reported the case to the Public Security Police (PSP) on Friday, falsely claiming that she had been violently raped and secretly photographed by Zhan.

Lei added that Zhan was intercepted while leaving Macau through the Barrier Gate checkpoint on Friday afternoon. Under questioning, Zhan admitted that he had not paid for the sex but denied causing any harm to Huang. Lei said that medical examinations found



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Lei Chi Hou looks on during yesterday's regular press conference.

– Photo: Ada Lei

no signs of physical resistance on Huang, confirming that she had falsely reported the rape due to the non-payment issue.

However, the police discovered nude photos of Huang changing clothes on Zhan’s phone, indicating illicit filming. The Judiciary Police (PJ) have launched a separate investigation into Zhan for invasion of privacy, according to Lei.

Huang has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing a charge of making a false report. ■

41st Books and the City issue explores how ‘Art Heals Life’

Rui Pastorin

The 41st issue of the trilingual Books and the City magazine is out now, this time taking on the theme “Art Heals Life”.

With 3,000 free copies available, the latest issue focuses on topics such as art therapy, spiritual healing and positive energy, while “art therapists” also discuss how art can heal emotions and foster self-exploration, according to a statement by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) yesterday.

Highlights in the new issue include the “Library Handbook” introducing community activities organised by the bureau’s Public Library such as “Library e-Learning”, which assists seniors in navigating the digital world, and the “Healthy Living Workshops” activity that teaches methods for physical and mental well-being, the statement said. Readers are also introduced to the process from book acquisition and book shelving*, among others.

The “Author’s Say” section, meanwhile, features an interview with Zhang Weimin as he discusses his Chinese translation work, The Book of Disquiet (O Livro do Desassossego), the statement said, providing an “in-depth interpretation of the literary world created by the poet Fernando Pessoa using his alternate selves”.

This issue also introduces the Public Library’s “Healing Reading List” and “Healing Reading Corner”, while the section “New Launch” showcases “therapeutic books” and 10 trilingual book reviews.

One can find the free copies at the bureau’s branch libraries, higher education institutions, the Tap Seac Gallery, several bookshops, and cultural and art facilities across the city, while the online version is on www.library.gov.mo ■



This image provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) shows the cover of the 41st issue of the trilingual “Books and the City”.

*Book shelving refers to the system or process of arranging and storing books on shelves. It can encompass both the physical furniture used (like bookshelves or bookcases) and the organisational methods applied to categorise books based on various criteria. – Poe



This undated handout photo provided by the Judiciary Police (PJ) yesterday shows Hong Kong and yuan banknotes, along with three smartphones seized from the prostitution ring.

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Macau POST

Macau Weather

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Source: SMG

Countdown concerts set to usher in 2025 in Macau & Taipa

Khalel Vallo

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) announced in a statement yesterday that it will stage two free countdown events tomorrow night in Sai Van Lake Plaza and the Taipa Houses, aiming to bring residents and tourists together to welcome 2026 with live music and multicultural performances.

The “2025 Macau Countdown Concert” will run tomorrow from 10 p.m. through 12:10 a.m. on New Year’s Day in Sai Van Lake Plaza, the statement said.

The statement noted that Hong Kong artistes, singer Panther Chan Lei and rock band Dear Jane, will headline the event, slated to perform their signature songs and appearing together on stage during the countdown.

Local musicians will also take part, including Soler, Filipe Tou (杜俊璋), KC Ao Ieong, and winifai (林靜葦), aiming to present a wide range of musical styles, the statement said. The stage design

will incorporate electronic screens, lighting and visual effects, with each performance session structured in a narrative format to convey good wishes for the coming year.

However, the statement added that no fireworks display will be included during the countdown.

The concert is jointly organised by the bureau and integrated resort operators MGM, Wynn Resorts Macau, Sands China Ltd, Melco Resorts & Entertainment, SJM Resorts, S.A. and Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG), with the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO), the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IC) and TDM as co-organisers.

Meanwhile, the “2025 Taipa Countdown Show” will take place at the Taipa Houses, from 9 p.m. to 12:15 a.m. focusing on multicultural integration. Hong Kong singer Karen Tong Po Yu will close the show, alongside performances by local groups FIDA, Tuna Macaense, Bossa Eva and João Gomes & Band, the statement noted.

Cultural programmes will include music and dance by Victor Kumar with the Bollywood Dreams Group, the Art Group of the Bisdak Association of Macao*, the Myanmar Art Dance Team and the Vietnamese Traditional Dance Group of Macao, as well as a magic performance by Jason Fong.

According to the bureau, from

8:30 p.m. to 11:30 p.m., cultural booths will showcase traditional costumes, provide tourist information and snacks from Macau’s Indian, Myanmar, Philippine and Vietnamese communities, striving to highlight Macau’s multicultural lifestyle.

Admission to both countdown events is free. The bureau reminded the public that security checks

will be in place and there are no storage facilities on site, and road closures and traffic arrangements will be announced separately. ■

*Bisdak is a term commonly used in the Philippines, particularly in the Visayas region, to refer to individuals who are of Bisaya descent or speak the Bisaya language. – Poe



These posters provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) yesterday promote the upcoming “2025 Taipa Countdown Show” (left) and the “2025 Macau Countdown Concert” to be held at Taipa Houses and Sai Van Lake Plaza tomorrow night, respectively.

Mercury set to plummet after New Year’s Day: SMG



This image provided by the Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) yesterday shows the expected temperature between tomorrow, New Year’s Eve, and Saturday.

Armando Neves

The Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) forecast on its website yesterday that the temperature will plummet after New Year’s Day.

According to the weather station, with a northeast monsoon easing, the temperature has gradually risen in recent days. Abundant sunshine during the daytime has contributed overall to a generally warmer feeling, the observatory said.

The weather station also said that a broad band of cloud was expected to affect the coastal areas of South China tomorrow, New Year’s Eve. In Macau, cloud cover is anticipated to increase on both New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day, with cool temperatures in the mornings and evenings, according to the statement.

According to the observatory, a winter monsoon is expected to affect Macau late this week. The temperature will drop again, the local meteorologists forecast,

accompanied by stronger northerly winds.

By the weekend, the observatory said, the temperature is forecast to fall below 12 degrees Celsius, resulting in cold weather.

The weather station urged the public to monitor weather changes and dress appropriately to stay warm.

Individuals in need of temporary refuge from cold weather conditions may use the city’s cold shelter provided by the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) and operated by Macau Caritas. The shelter will open when the temperature drops to 14 degrees Celsius or below.

The cold shelter, which operates between 6 p.m. and 8 a.m., is located at 34 Rua Leste da Ilha Verde, Edifício do Bairro da Ilda Verde (青洲東街34號青洲坊大廈E1的避寒中心).

For more information, one can visit the websites of the local observatory and the Social Welfare Bureau. ■

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Explore Macau's street vendors' history at IAM exhibition



Rui Pastorin

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) is hosting an exhibition in the gallery at its headquarters opposite the city's main square, Largo do Senado, allowing both locals and tourists to explore as well as appreciate Macau's once bustling street vendor scene.

Organised in conjunction with the Mutual Aid Association of Macau Vendors, the free-admission trilingual exhibition is titled "Macao Nostalgia - 'Imprints on Street Corners' Historical Exhibition of Hawkers".

The exhibition, the first large-scale themed exhibition focused on the history of Macau's street vendors, kicked off earlier this month and will continue its run until March 1.

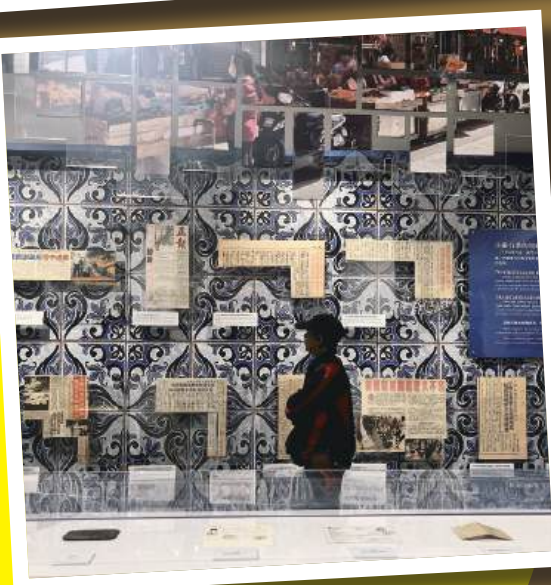
With guided tours available, gallerygoers can view featured exhibits comprising related items and memorabilia such as old street vendor licences and various tools of the trade, curated photographs and video interviews, alongside informative texts throughout the venue. One can also explore areas replicating how vendor stalls were set up in the past.

In all, the exhibition is divided into three eras that show the gradual development of the sector from the 1940s through the 1950s, altogether presenting the livelihoods of local vendors along with the city's social transformations and economic growth. These sections are titled "The Rise of Hawkers, A Mixed Landscape", "The Heyday of Hawkers, Surviving in the Cracks", and "The Regulation of Hawkers, Restructuring Order".

A statement displayed at the venue notes that the city's street vendor sector has a long history, as documented in the "Map of Macao City" published back in 1607. Vendors have played a key role in meeting community needs over centuries, providing jobs, boosting tourism, invigorating the urban economy, and promoting local culture, the statement said, adding that with consistent government support for improvement and standardisation, along with the vendors' determination, the sector has adapted to changes and continues to contribute to Macau's economic growth.

Through the exhibits, a "unique portrait of Macau's street-corner culture beginning in the 1940s is unfolded", the statement points out.

The exhibition is open daily, and one can visit it from 9 a.m. through 9 p.m. More details can be accessed on <https://www.iam.gov.mo/e/news/detail/175542e4-b648-4a71-bec9-0deacb4026b8>



Gallerygoers yesterday afternoon view the exhibits on display at the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) gallery on the city's main thoroughfare, Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro. -Photos: Rui Pastorin

3 Mocha slot-machine parlours to continue operating through hiring of 'management companies'

Tony Wong

The government announced yesterday that it has green-lighted gaming concessionaire Melco's application to continue operating three Mocha slot-machine parlours not housed on its own premises, namely Golden Dragon, Sintra, and Inner Harbour, after tomorrow, New Year's Eve, through the hiring of management companies.

The Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) made the announcement in a statement yesterday.

Melco announced in June that it decided to terminate the operations of three of its then six Mocha slot-machine parlours not housed on its own premises, namely Kuong Fat, Grand Dragon, and Royal, by December 31 this year.

The slot-machine parlour located in the Kuong Fat Commercial Centre office building in Zape closed for good in September, while the parlour located in Grand Dragon Hotel in Taipa ceased operations last month.

The slot-machine parlour located in Hotel Royal closed for good on Sunday night.

Currently, a Mocha slot-machine parlour is housed on Melco's own premises, namely in the Altira Macau casino-hotel in Taipa.

Concerning the other three Mocha slot-machine parlours not housed on Melco's own premises, namely Golden Dragon, Sintra, and Inner Harbour, Melco decided in June to continue operating them after December 31 this year through the hiring of management companies.

The first two of the three Mocha slot-machine parlours are located in Golden Dragon Hotel in Zape and Hotel Sintra in Nam Van district respectively. The Inner Harbour slot-machine parlour is housed in the former Hotel Cantão ("Hotel Canton").

"Canton" is the old name for Guangzhou.

According to the gaming law's newly amended version, all casinos and slot-machine parlours must be housed on premises that are owned by their respective gaming concessionaires.

After the statutory three-year transition period stipulated by the new legislation amending the gaming law, which is scheduled to end on December 31 this year, all slot-machine parlours not housed on premises owned by the respective gaming concessionaires must close, unless the concessionaires choose to hire "management companies" to operate the parlours. ■



A woman enters the Mocha slot-machine parlour in Hotel Sintra in Nam Van district yesterday. — Photo: Tony Wong

7th Encounter in Macao Arts & Cultural Festival concludes



This undated handout photo provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) yesterday shows the 2025 Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) Lusofonia Festival held outside the Taipa Houses cultural heritage complex in late October.

Khalel Vallo

The 7th "Encounter in Macao – Arts and Cultural Festival between China and the Portuguese-speaking Countries", organised by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), concluded on Sunday, showcasing the city's role as a platform for cultural exchange between East and West through a diverse programme of performances, exhibitions and community activities held from October through this month.

Held concurrently with the Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) Lusofonia Festival*, this year's edition featured more than 80 programmes and outreach activities across seven series, involving over 780 artists and performers from Macau and abroad, the statement said.

Activities took place at UNESCO-listed World Heritage sites, community spaces and professional theatres, attracting more than 61,000 participants.

The 2025 GEG Lusofonia Festival, co-organised by the bureau and GEG, returned to the Taipa Houses for two consecutive

weekends, with a focus on Angolan culture. Performances and booths by groups from 10 Portuguese-speaking countries and regions, alongside 40 local PSCs' arts troupes, highlighted music, dance, cuisine and traditional games.

The statement added that community outreach continued through the "GEG Traditional Music and Dance Performance in the Community", featuring 14 performances across local districts and at Galaxy Macau in Cotai.

Participating groups included art troupes from Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique Timor-Leste, (East Timor) and India's Goa, Daman and Diu, the statement said.

Meanwhile, the Chinese and Portuguese Picture Book Fair, themed "The Fairy Tale World", ran for 10 days at Carmo Hall in Taipa, showcasing more than 800 titles and hosting workshops, performances and family activities, the statement noted.

Meanwhile, the "7th China and Portuguese-speaking Countries Film

Festival" presented nearly 30 films across multiple venues, accompanied by screenings, seminars and workshops, the statement added.

Other highlights included the Vanessa da Mata Concert with the Macao Chinese Orchestra and the "Spiritual Narrative – 2025 Annual Arts Exhibition between China and the Portuguese-speaking Countries", which continues at the Taipa Houses until March 1 next year.

Vanessa da Mata is a Latin Grammy Award-winning Brazilian singer, songwriter, and novelist. ■

* Lusofonia refers to the cultural and linguistic community of Portuguese-speaking countries and regions around the world. The term encompasses countries where Portuguese is the official language, as well as communities where Portuguese is spoken. Luso is an adjective that refers to anything related to Portugal or the Portuguese language. It is derived from the Latin term "Lusitania," which was the name of a province in ancient Rome that roughly corresponds to modern-day Portugal. — Poe

Responsible role in mediating regional conflict

China Daily Editorial

After weeks of fighting along their contested border that has killed more than 100 people and displaced over half a million in both countries, Thailand and Cambodia finally signed a ceasefire agreement on Saturday, just prior to their top diplomats commencing two days of peace talks brokered by China in Yuxi, Yunnan province, on Sunday.

As Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who was hosting his Thai and Cambodian counterparts in the southwestern city, noted, the ceasefire is an important step toward restoring peace, and accords with the shared expectations of countries in the region.

Both Cambodia and Thailand have expressed appreciation and gratitude for China's positive role in mediating the dispute, which is emblematic of its efforts to foster regional peace and stability.

By facilitating dialogue between Cambodia and Thailand

and supporting peace initiatives, China has not only helped avert a potential humanitarian disaster, but also reinforced its position as a responsible player in Southeast Asia.

By hosting the talks in Yuxi and offering humanitarian aid to those affected by the conflict, China has positioned itself as an impartial arbiter committed to peace. The ceasefire brokered under Chinese auspices is a testament to Beijing's ability to wield influence without resorting to coercion or military might – a stark contrast to the approach of some Western countries to conflict resolution, which often involves sanctions or military intervention.

At the heart of China's diplomatic success have been its impartiality and ability to engage both Thailand and Cambodia on equal terms, conducting multiple rounds of shuttle diplomacy. As a friend and close neighbor of both countries, China has consistently upheld the principle of standing

together through thick and thin, and its mediation efforts to end the current conflict reflect this.

They have also been a practical demonstration of the Global Security Initiative that China has put forward, which encourages conflicting parties to build trust, settle disputes and promote security through dialogue and calls for support for all efforts conducive to the peaceful settlement of conflicts and crises.

As a news release of the China-Cambodia-Thailand meeting published yesterday indicates, China's mediation efforts have been complementary to those of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and Beijing has made it clear that it supports ASEAN in playing its due role in resolving the crisis and stands ready to provide assistance to the ASEAN observation mission that will monitor the ceasefire. By aligning its initiatives with ASEAN's objectives, China has effectively

bolstered the regional body's capacity to manage conflicts within its domain. This not only enhances ASEAN's credibility, but also demonstrates that China is a partner willing to support multilateral peacekeeping frameworks.

Of course, the historical grievances, border demarcation and nationalist sentiments make the peace process complex. China fully understands this, and it is prepared to engage in sustained mediation. The talks between Thailand and Cambodia in Yunnan are just the first step, and the key to achieving lasting peace between them lies in the commitment of both parties to peace and their ability and willingness to resist interference from external forces that seek to sow seeds of instability and conflict out of their own geopolitical interests.

Southeast Asia is a region of immense economic and geopolitical significance, and stability here is crucial for the success of China's

Belt and Road Initiative. By ensuring peace between Thailand and Cambodia, China is maintaining the smooth flow of trade across the region, thus safeguarding regional prosperity.

China's mediation efforts not only align with its long-held principles of noninterference and peaceful coexistence, but also reflect its endeavor to craft a truer perspective of its role in regional geopolitics – one in which China is recognized as a stabilizing force.

As China continues to navigate the complexities of regional geopolitics, its diplomacy that has helped end the Thailand-Cambodia conflict offers valuable experiences for the international community to resolve disputes through dialogue and negotiation. In this challenging era, China's diplomatic practices bolster confidence in the building of a community with a shared future for humanity. (More on page 8)

— Courtesy of China Daily

Tai vows stronger guarantees for overseas Chinese to invest in Macau

Tony Wong

Secretary for Economy and Finance Anton Tai Kin Ip pledged yesterday that the local government will continue to optimise Macau's business environment with the aim of providing stronger guarantees for overseas Chinese entrepreneurs to invest and develop businesses in the city.

Tai made the remarks while delivering a speech at the opening ceremony of the 3rd Conference on Overseas Chinese Supporting High-Quality Development of the Belt and Road Initiative held at Macau Tower yesterday.

The one-day conference was jointly organised by the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese and the Macau Association of Returned Overseas Chinese.

Yesterday's opening ceremony was attended by dignitaries such as Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai, Edmund Ho Hau Wah, Macau's first chief executive and now a vice-chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Central People's Government Liaison Office in the MSAR Director Zheng Xincong, and Foreign Ministry Commissioner in the MSAR Liu Xianfa.

In his speech, Tai noted that throughout history, entrepreneurs and leaders of Chinese communities all over the world have not only been a valuable force in promoting global economic development and supporting the development of the nation's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), but have also served as a crucial link connecting China with the rest of the world and fostering global trade, investment, and cultural exchanges.

Since the nation's launch of its BRI, Tai said, powerful impetus has been injected into improving the living conditions and economic development of countries and regions participating in the BRI, with the breadth, depth, and level of cooperation in multiple areas continuously enhancing.

Tai also noted the nation's commitment, made in the fourth



Secretary for Economy and Finance Anton Tai Kin Ip addresses yesterday's opening ceremony of the 3rd Conference on Overseas Chinese Supporting High-Quality Development of the Belt and Road Initiative. — Photo courtesy of TDM

plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) held in October, to promoting high-standard opening up, taking the initiative to open China wider, promoting the innovative development of trade, creating greater space for two-way investment cooperation, and pursuing high-quality Belt and Road (B&R) cooperation. The policy secretary said that all these have provided Macau with a clear direction for further promoting international cooperation and driving industrial development in the future.

Tai noted that as an important node of the BRI, Macau possesses a unique history of over 400 years of cultural exchange between China and the West, underlining the MSAR government's long-standing commitment to serving the nation's needs by leveraging Macau's strengths and contributing to the development of the BRI.

Tai said that the hosting of the conference's third edition, which brought together nearly 1,000 guests, including leaders and youth from Chinese communities in 80 countries and regions and representatives from various segments of Macau's civil society, has not only vividly illustrated the successful implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle in Macau,



Liu Cigui, who heads the CPPCC National Committee's Committee on Liaison with Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and Overseas Chinese, delivers a speech during yesterday's opening ceremony of the conference at Macau Tower. — Photo: Tony Wong

but has also provided important support for Macau in integrating into and serving the nation's overall development.

Tai stressed the MSAR government's commitment to strengthening Macau's role as "One Centre, One Platform, One Base", while developing the city into a high ground for gathering international high-end talent, sparing no effort in promoting the Macau-Hengqin integrated development, and vigorously implementing measures to advance Macau's appropriate economic diversification.

The Macau government's "One Centre, One Platform, One Base" concept refers to Macau developing itself into a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure, a commercial and trade cooperation service platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, and an exchange and cooperation base with Chinese culture as its mainstream and co-existence of different cultures.

Tai also underlined Macau's commitment to performing a better role as a "precise liaison" between China and Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries, while assisting mainland Chinese companies to expand their businesses in the international market and attracting international investors to establish a presence in Macau and Hengqin.

The policy secretary noted that next year marks the beginning of the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan, pledging that Macau will continue to leverage its strengths, while optimising its business environment in order to provide stronger guarantees and more solid safeguards for entrepreneurs and leaders of overseas Chinese communities to invest and develop businesses in Macau, and supporting a deeper integration between the resources of overseas Chinese communities and various industries in Macau such as finance, technology, and cultural tourism.

Moreover, Tai underlined that Macau will continue to consolidate its economic and trade cooperation platform serving ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries and Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries, while leveraging the bridging role of overseas Chinese communities to promote mutual exchanges and learning between Chinese and other civilisations, telling China's stories well, and conveying Macau's voice, with the aim of accelerating the high-quality development of the BRI.

CPPCC senior official raises 3 expectations for overseas Chinese

Also delivering a speech during yesterday's opening ceremony,

Liu Cigui, who heads the CPPCC National Committee's Committee on Liaison with Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and Overseas Chinese, raised three expectations for overseas Chinese.

First, Liu said, overseas Chinese should seize development opportunities and be a practitioner in the high-quality development of the BRI.

Liu urges overseas Chinese to fully combine their fund, technology and management advantages with the resources and market potential of BRI countries, with the aim of making contributions to China advancing practical cooperation with BRI countries in various fields such as trade, investment, technological innovation, and cultural exchanges.

Second, Liu said, overseas Chinese should foster people-to-people connectivity and be a promoter in deepening mutual exchanges and learning among civilisations.

Liu urged overseas Chinese to share more stories of China's commitment to peaceful development and win-win cooperation, spread the concepts of peace, inclusive spirit, and development wisdom embedded in Chinese culture, and showcase more of the unique charm and contemporary value of Chinese civilisation, with the aim of promoting the shared development and joint progress of different civilisations through mutual respect.

Third, Liu said, overseas Chinese should leverage their unique strengths and be a participant of Macau's prosperity and stability.

Liu urged overseas Chinese to make good use of the institutional advantages brought about by the implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle in Macau in order to expand all-round exchanges and interactions with Macau and vigorously participate in the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) and the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin. ■



Dignitaries and other guests cut the ribbon during yesterday's opening ceremony, such as Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai (centre), Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) National Committee Vice Chairman Edmund Ho Hau Wah (to the left of Sam), Central People's Government Liaison Office Director Zheng Xincong (to the right of Sam), and Foreign Ministry Commissioner Liu Xianfa (to the right of Zheng). — Photo: GCS



Children make paper-cut decorations in a kindergarten in Dingxi City, Gansu Province, yesterday. Various activities are held across the nation to celebrate the upcoming new year. — Xinhua

The clear message behind the PLA's latest drills around Taiwan

Commentary

BEIJING — The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) yesterday launched a series of drills code-named "Justice Mission 2025" around Taiwan Island, dispatching troops from its ground, air, naval and rocket forces to deter "Taiwan independence" separatist forces and external interference.

This sends an unequivocal message that Beijing at all times stands ready to crush any secession plot aiming to split Taiwan from the motherland. Each escalation in provocation will be met with stronger countermeasures. The PLA is ready to fight at any moment, and is certain to prevail if and when it does fight.

For years, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) authorities in Taiwan have obstinately attempted to seek US support for their separatist agenda, recklessly turning Taiwan into a "powder keg."

This only serves to expose their true colors as a troublemaker and warmonger. Such actions will only bring disasters to Taiwan.

By currying favor with the United States through obsequious loyalty gestures and promoting arms purchases, the DPP is binding the entire island of Taiwan to its catastrophic secessionist chariot, disregarding public opinion.

Recently, the United States announced a package of arms sales to Taiwan totaling US\$11 billion. And the island's leader, Lai Ching-te, has planned to continue spending massively on purchases of US arms in the coming eight years. These facts have exposed the collusion between the US and the DPP to harm the interests of the people in Taiwan.

Mounting public fury is now translating into concrete action. A motion for Lai's impeachment

has been approved by Taiwan's local legislature, and over eight million people have signed online petitions in support.

People in Taiwan want peace. They want exchange and cooperation with their fellow Chinese on the other side of the Strait. They are unwilling to act as a pawn for external powers attempting to contain China.

Since coming to power, the DPP has squandered the hard-earned money of Taiwan taxpayers on a futile endeavor, crowding out essential services such as education, health care and social welfare while lavishing resources on US arms purchases.

From 2020 to 2022, Taiwan was the United States' largest weapons buyer. By 2024, Taiwan's military budget had nearly doubled from eight years earlier. Taiwan's military spending for 2026 is budgeted at 3.32 percent of its regional GDP, a record high since 2009.

By squandering the island's public wealth and colluding with external forces to drain its resources, the DPP authorities are imposing a long-term burden on people's livelihoods and jeopardizing the development prospects of Taiwan.

The DPP's fanciful attempts to pursue "Taiwan independence" by relying on US support will only heighten tensions in the Taiwan Strait and push the island's residents toward the brink of conflicts.

US arms sales to Taiwan offer no protective shield for the island; they serve merely as a cash machine for US arms dealers.

The PLA's drills are a clear reminder for the DPP that the trend of national reunification is unstoppable, and that the will of the people cannot be defied.

— Xinhua

PLA conducts drills around Taiwan to deter 'Taiwan independence' separatist forces, external interference

NANJING/BEIJING — The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Eastern Theater Command yesterday launched large-scale joint military drills around Taiwan Island under the codename "Justice Mission 2025."

The exercises involve Army, Navy, Air Force, and Rocket Force units operating in the Taiwan Strait and waters to the north, southwest, southeast, and east of the island, said Shi Yi, spokesperson for the PLA Eastern Theater Command.

It is a stern warning against "Taiwan independence" separatist activities and external interference, Shi said, adding that the drills are a legitimate and necessary action to safeguard China's sovereignty and national unity.

The drills will focus on subjects of sea-air combat readiness patrol, joint seizure of comprehensive superiority, blockade on key ports and areas, as well as all-dimensional deterrence outside the island chain, according to Shi.

APPROACHING TAIWAN FROM MULTIPLE DIRECTIONS

Yesterday, with vessels and aircraft approaching Taiwan Island in proximity from different directions, troops of multiple services engaged in joint assaults to test their joint operations capabilities.

In the waters and airspace in the middle areas of the Taiwan Strait, the theater command employed fighters, bombers, and unmanned aerial vehicles in coordination with long-range rocket fires to conduct drills focused on striking mobile ground targets.

To the east of Taiwan Island, destroyers, frigates, fighters, and bombers carried out drills on the assault of maritime targets, seizure of regional air superiority, as well as submarine hunting and anti-submarine operations. The theater command also dispatched bomber task forces to conduct far-seas combat readiness patrols in this area, focusing on long-distance raids and joint precision strikes.

Meanwhile, in the waters and airspace to the north and southwest of the island, destroyers, frigates, fighters, bombers, and unmanned aerial vehicles were employed — again in coordination with long-range rocket fires — to conduct live-fire training. These exercises covered hunting and neutralizing targets in both waters and airspace, simulated strikes on ground targets, and live firing against maritime targets.

The operations tested relevant forces' multiple capabilities, such as those of rapid maneuvers, executing systemic blockade and control, precision strikes on key targets, precise target hunting and neutralization, seizure of dominance



The Type 054A guided missile frigate Huaibei participates in the "Justice Mission 2025" joint military drills organized by the PLA Eastern Theater Command in waters around the island of Taiwan yesterday. — Photo: VCG via Global Times

and air superiority, and the troops' integrated coordination.

The PLA Eastern Theater Command also issued a notice and a sketch map outlining the areas for its joint military drills, stating that from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. today, live firing activities will be organized in the designated waters and airspace.

The PLA will never hesitate in striking against "Taiwan independence" and promoting reunification. It will continue to conduct operations countering separatism and foreign interference, resolutely safeguarding China's sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity, said Zhang Xiaogang, spokesperson of China's Ministry of National Defense.

CLOSER, TIGHTER SURROUNDING TAIWAN

"Justice Mission 2025" is PLA's latest large-scale military exercise around Taiwan following the "Strait Thunder-2025A" in early April. In 2024, the PLA conducted two military drills around Taiwan, codenamed "Joint Sword-2024A" and "Joint Sword-2024B," respectively.

"Justice Mission 2025" is highly specific in its intent — to punish "Taiwan independence" and deter US interference," Meng Xiangqing, a professor of the National Defense University, said in media interviews.

From "Joint Sword" to "Strait Thunder" and now "Justice Mission," the PLA has demonstrated its growing hard-power capabilities, he added.

Meng said the troop encirclement of Taiwan Island is becoming "closer and tighter," reflecting new operational features such as comprehensive coverage, the elimination of blind spots, and integrated blockade-and-strike capabilities.

Zhang Chi, another National Defense University professor, said that the drills are more clearly targeted — specifically at the primary corridor through which external forces might provide support to the DPP authorities — demonstrating the PLA's firm resolve and robust capability to sever that channel and deter foreign interference.

Regarding the Eastern Theater Command's explicit mention of "live-fire shooting," Meng said that it demonstrated the PLA's ability to fight and win at any time. "In plain terms: we can strike whenever we choose, however we choose. We're ready to fight upon arrival, capable of victory, and certain of success."

TARGET 'TAIWAN INDEPENDENCE,' WARN EXTERNAL INTERFERENCE

The PLA drills are specifically targeted at "Taiwan independence" separatist activities and external interference, said Chen Binhua, a spokesperson for the State Council's Taiwan Affairs Office.

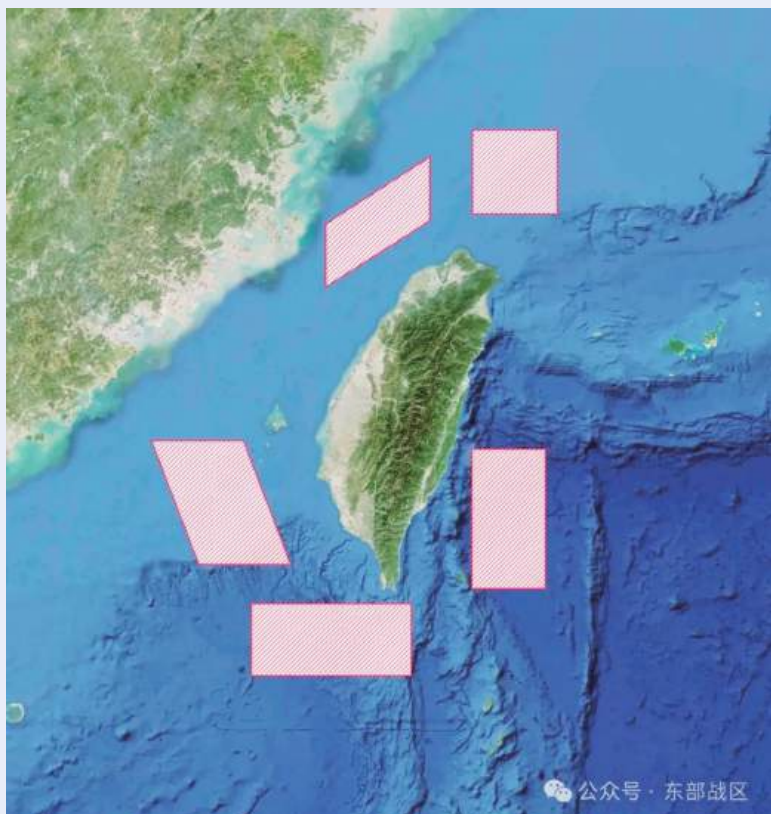
Chen said the drills aim to curb collusion between "Taiwan independence" forces and external elements that endanger peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, and fundamentally safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Mainland scholars believed that the drills fully demonstrate China's firm resolve, unwavering will, and strong capability to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and represent a legitimate and necessary step to uphold peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and advance the cause of national reunification.

Wang Yingjin, director of the cross-Strait relations research center of the Renmin University of China, said that by colluding with US politicians who profit from arms sales, Taiwan leader Lai Ching-te laid bare his political opportunism, while pushing the island to the brink of danger and seriously aggravating tensions across the Strait.

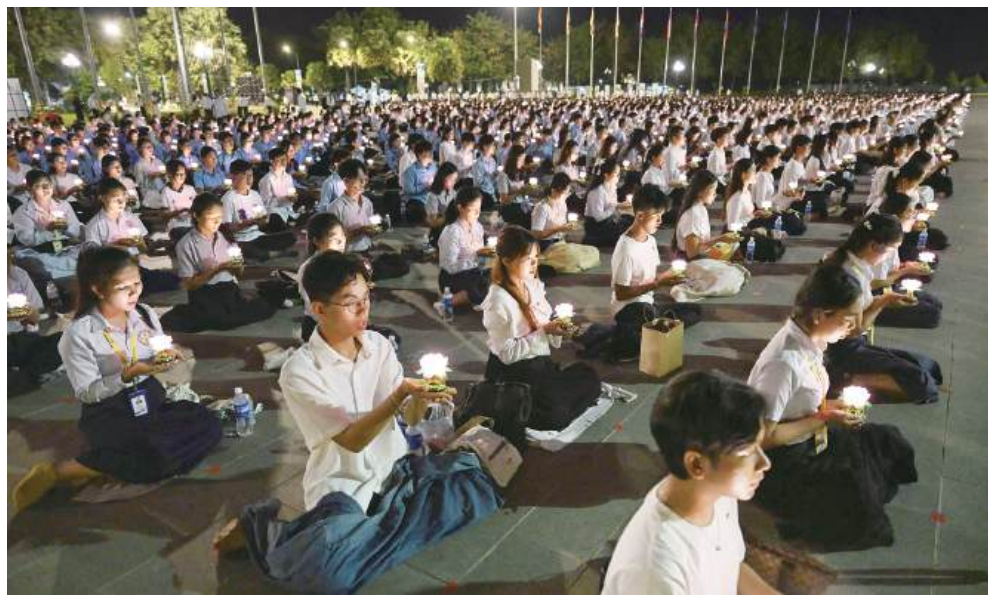
Chen Guiqing, a research fellow at the Institute of Taiwan Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that the drills demonstrated a forceful measure to resolutely punish "Taiwan independence" separatist activities and deter external interference, and a necessary move to make China's position clear and draw firm red lines.

— Xinhua



Sketch map of the Taiwan drill areas released by the PLA Eastern Theater Command yesterday. Photo: WeChat account of PLA Eastern Theater Command via Global Times

Thai army accuses Cambodia of violating truce with over 250 drones



Participants hold electric candles as they participate in a prayer for peace at Win-Win memorial in Phnom Penh yesterday, after Thailand and Cambodia agreed to an "immediate" ceasefire on Saturday following renewed border clashes that killed dozens of people and displaced more than a million this month. — AFP

BANGKOK – Thailand's army accused Cambodia yesterday of violating a newly signed ceasefire agreement, reached after weeks of deadly border clashes, by flying more than 250 drones over its territory.

The Southeast Asian neighbours agreed to the "immediate" ceasefire on Saturday, pledging to end renewed border clashes that killed dozens of people and displaced more than a million this month.

But the fresh allegation from Bangkok and its threat to reconsider releasing Cambodian soldiers held by Thailand left a sustained truce in doubt, even as their foreign ministers wrapped up two days of talks hosted by China.

The Thai army said yesterday "more than 250 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) were detected flying from the Cambodian side, intruding into Thailand's sovereign territory" on Sunday night, according to a statement.

"Such actions constitute provocation and a violation of measures aimed at reducing tensions, which are inconsistent with the Joint Statement agreed" during a bilateral border committee meeting on Saturday, it said.

The reignited fighting this month spread to nearly every border province on both sides, shattering an earlier truce for which US President Donald Trump took credit.

Under the truce pact signed on Saturday, Cambodia and Thailand agreed to cease fire, freeze troop movements and cooperate on demining efforts and combatting cybercrime.

They also agreed to allow civilians living in border areas to

return home as soon as possible, while Thailand was to return 18 Cambodian soldiers captured in July within 72 hours, if the ceasefire held.

'Small issue'

Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn described the drone incident as "a small issue related to flying drones seen by both sides along the border line".

He said on Cambodian state television yesterday that the two sides had discussed the issue and agreed to investigate and "resolve it immediately".

Thai army spokesman Winthai Suvarree said in a statement the drone activity reflected "provocative actions" and a "hostile stance toward Thailand", which could affect the security of military personnel and civilians in border areas.

Thailand's army "may need to reconsider its decision regarding the release of 18 Cambodian soldiers, depending on the situation and the behaviour observed", it said.

Several family members of soldiers held by Thailand for six months had little faith they would be released, even before Bangkok raised fresh doubts.

Heng Socheat, the wife of a soldier, told AFP yesterday she worried the Thai military might renege on its pledge.

"Until my husband arrives home, then I will believe them," she said.

Prayers for peace

Five days of border clashes in July killed dozens of people before a truce was brokered by the United States, China and Malaysia, the chair of the ASEAN regional bloc.

Trump witnessed the signing of a follow-on declaration between Thailand and Cambodia in October but it was broken within months, with each side blaming the other for instigating the fresh fighting.

The conflict stems from a territorial dispute over the colonial-era demarcation of the 800-kilometre Thai-Cambodian border, where both sides claim centuries-old temple ruins.

While the two nations agreed on Saturday to stop fighting, they still need to resolve the demarcation of their border.

Cambodia, Thailand and China issued a statement at the end of talks in China's Yunnan province yesterday, saying they had discussed "working step by step through mutual efforts to resume normal exchanges, rebuild political mutual trust, improve Cambodia-Thailand bilateral relations, and safeguard regional stability".

Cambodia also said yesterday it had called on Thailand to join another bilateral meeting in Cambodia in early January "to discuss and continue survey and demarcation work" at the border.

More than a hundred Buddhist monks and hundreds of others dressed in white shirts met at a war monument on the outskirts of the Cambodian capital yesterday evening to pray for peace with their neighbour.

Mok Sim, 73, said she joined the gathering to show the world that Cambodians wanted peace.

"We also pray that our soldiers will be released soon, but we don't know the mind of the Thai army," she said. "We hope they will be back home soon." — AFP

Filipinos master disaster readiness, one roll of the dice at a time

Pam Castro

MANILA – In a library in the Philippines, a dice rattles on the surface of a board before coming to a stop, putting one of its players straight into the path of a powerful typhoon.

The teenagers huddled around the table leap into action, shouting instructions and acting out the correct strategies for just one of the potential catastrophes laid out in the board game called Master of Disaster.

With fewer than half of Filipinos estimated to have undertaken disaster drills or to own a first-aid kit, the game aims to boost lagging preparedness in a country ranked the most disaster-prone on earth for four years running.

"[It] features disasters we've been experiencing in real life for the past few months and years," 17-year-old Ansherina Agasen told AFP, noting that flooding routinely upends life in her hometown of Valenzuela, north of Manila.

Sitting in the arc of intense seismic activity called the "Pacific Ring of Fire", the Philippines endures daily earthquakes and is hit by an average of 20 typhoons each year.

In November, back-to-back typhoons drove flooding that killed nearly 300 people in the archipelago nation, while a 6.9-magnitude quake in late September toppled buildings and killed 79 people around the city of Cebu.

"We realised that a lot of loss of lives and destruction of property could have been avoided if people knew about basic concepts related to disaster preparedness," Francis Macatulad, one of the game's developers, told AFP of its inception.

The Asia Society for Social Improvement and Sustainable Transformation (ASSIST), where Macatulad heads business development, first dreamt up the game in 2013, after Super Typhoon Haiyan ravaged the central Philippines and left thousands dead.

Launched six years later, Master of Disaster has been updated this year to address more events exacerbated by human-driven climate change, such as landslides, drought and heatwaves.

More than 10,000 editions of the game, aimed at players as young as nine years old, have been distributed across the archipelago nation.

"The youth are very essential in creating this disaster resiliency mindset," Macatulad said.

'Keeps on getting worse'

While the Philippines has introduced disaster readiness training into its K-12 curriculum, Master of Disaster is providing a jolt of innovation, Bianca Canlas of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) told AFP.

"It's important that it's tactile, something that can be touched and can be seen by the eyes of the youth so they can have engagement with each other," she said of the game.

Players roll a dice to move their pawns across the board, with each landing spot corresponding to cards containing questions or instructions to act out disaster-specific responses.

When a player is unable to fulfil a task, another can "save" them and receive a "hero token" – tallied at the end to determine a winner.

At least 27,500 deaths and economic losses of US\$35 billion have been attributed to extreme weather events in the past two decades, according to the 2026 Climate Risk Index.

"It just keeps on getting worse," Canlas said, noting the lives lost in recent months.

The government is now determining if it will throw its weight behind the distribution of the game, with the sessions in Valenzuela City serving as a pilot to assess whether players find it engaging and informative.

While conceding the evidence was so far anecdotal, ASSIST's Macatulad said he believed the game was bringing a "significant" improvement in its players' disaster preparedness knowledge.

"Disaster is not picky. It affects from north to south. So, we would like to expand this further," Macatulad said, adding that poor communities "most vulnerable to the effects of climate change" were the priority.

"Disasters can happen to anyone," Agasen, the teen, told AFP as the game broke up.

"As a young person, I can share the knowledge I've gained... with my classmates at school, with people at home, and those I'll meet in the future." — AFP



This photo taken on December 9, shows a participant placing response cards to a game that states "Tropical Depression Signal No. 4" (left) as they play Master of Disaster, a board game about disaster preparedness, at a library in Valenzuela, Metro Manila. — AFP

Indonesian nursing home fire kills 16: official

JAKARTA – A fire at a nursing home on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi killed more than a dozen people, with three others injured, a local official said yesterday.

Firefighters received the report of the blaze at 8:31 p.m. [local time] Sunday at a nursing home in the North Sulawesi provincial capital Manado, said the city's fire and rescue agency chief Jimmy Rotinsulu.

"There were 16 deaths; three [people] had burn injuries," he told AFP.

Many bodies of the victims were found inside their rooms, Jimmy said, adding that many of the elderly residents were likely resting in their rooms in the evening when the fire broke out.

Authorities managed to evacuate 12 people – all unhurt – and transfer them to a local hospital, he said.

Footage aired by local broadcaster Metro TV showed the fire engulfing the nursing home, while locals helped to evacuate an

elderly person.

Deadly fires are not uncommon in Indonesia, a Southeast Asian archipelago of more than 17,000 islands.

A fire tore through a seven-storey office building in Indonesia's capital Jakarta this month, killing at least 22 people.

In 2023, at least 12 people were killed in the country's east after an explosion at a nickel-processing plant.

— AFP

N Korea tests cruise missiles in show of 'combat readiness'

Hieun Shin

SEOUL – North Korea test-fired two strategic long-range cruise missiles, state media reported yesterday, hailing the exercise as a show of “combat readiness” against foreign threats.

Leader Kim Jong Un oversaw the drill – staged Sunday over the Yellow Sea to the west of the Korean peninsula – and called for “unlimited and sustained” development of his nuclear weapons forces, the state-run Korean Central News Agency said.

The goal of the exercise was to review the “counter-offensive response posture and combat capability of long-range missile sub-units,” KCNA said.

The missiles flew for more than two hours, state media said, sharing photos of the missiles being fired and hitting a target.

Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the missiles were fired Sunday at 8:00 a.m. [local time] from the Sunan area near the capital Pyongyang.

Kim vowed Pyongyang “would as ever devote all their efforts to the unlimited and sustained development of the state nuclear combat force”, KCNA said.

North Korea last staged a ballistic missile test in early November, around a week after US President Donald Trump – on a tour of the region – expressed interest in meeting with Kim.

Pyongyang did not respond to the offer.

At that time, Trump had just approved South Korean plans to build a nuclear-powered submarine.

Last week Pyongyang showed off a nuclear submarine of its own.

Photos published by KCNA showed Kim walking alongside a purportedly 8,700-tonne submarine at an indoor assembly site, surrounded by officials and his daughter Kim Ju Ae.

Pyongyang viewed Seoul developing nuclear subs as “an offensive act severely violating its security and maritime sovereignty”, Kim said, according to KCNA.

North Korean state media last week also published a defence ministry statement condemning the docking of the US Navy's nuclear-powered attack submarine USS Greenville in South Korea's Busan.

The cruise missile launch drill was aimed at countering these moves, said Yang Moo-jin, former president of the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul.

“The arrow-type cruise missiles, with a range of around 2,000 kilometres, are capable of striking not only the entire Korean peninsula but also rear bases of US forces stationed in Japan,” Yang told AFP.

– AFP

S Korea's ex-first lady accused of taking over US\$200,000 in bribes

SEOUL – South Korea's former first lady was alleged by prosecutors yesterday to have accepted lavish bribes totalling over US\$200,000, including fine art, jewellery and a handbag, as well as meddling in state affairs.

Kim Keon Hee, the wife of disgraced ex-president Yoon Suk Yeol, was arrested in August and is under investigation for alleged stock manipulation and receiving gifts from the cult-like Unification Church.

She has also been accused of meddling in parliamentary elections.

In an announcement concluding their investigation, prosecutor Min Joong-ki said South Korea's institutions were “severely undermined by abuses of power” by Kim.

Kim allegedly “illegally intervened in state affairs behind the scenes, beyond the public's view,” said prosecutor Kim Hyung-geun.

They alleged that bribes from businesses and politicians received by Kim totalled up to 377.25 million won (US\$263,000).

Investigators alleged Kim had received two Chanel bags and a Graff necklace from the leader of



South Korea's former first lady Kim Keon Hee, wife of impeached former president Yoon Suk Yeol, arrives at a court to attend a hearing to review her arrest warrant requested by special prosecutors at the Seoul Central District Court in Seoul on August 12. – AFP

the Unification Church.

She also allegedly received luxury jewellery, a painting by famed South Korean minimalist painter Lee Ufan, a Dior handbag and a wristwatch.

Former president Yoon denied that he was aware of these transactions when pressed by investigators, “a claim that many

find difficult to accept”, said the prosecutor Kim Hyung-geun.

Prosecutors demanded a 15-year prison term for the former first lady in early December, saying she had “stood above the law” and colluded with the Unification Church to undermine the “constitutionally mandated separation of religion and state”.

They also asked the court to fine her two billion won (US\$1.4 million).

The former first lady has denied all the charges.

In her final testimony, she said the allegations were “deeply unjust”.

“Yet when I consider my role and the responsibilities entrusted to me, it seems clear that I have made many mistakes,” she said.

Ex-president Yoon declared martial law last December in a short-lived bid to suspend civilian rule that plunged South Korea into political turmoil.

He was removed from office then arrested this year on insurrection charges, which he denies, the first time that a South Korean former president and his wife had both been detained.

A Seoul court is set to sentence Kim on January 28.

– AFP

Afghan farmers taking heavy hit from opium poppy ban: UN

KABUL – Farmers in northern Afghanistan have yet to make up for lost income since the Taliban government banned poppy production for opium three years ago, the United Nations said yesterday.

The ban has slashed poppy production overall to just 10,200 hectares this year, “one of the lowest levels ever recorded” in Afghanistan, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said.

However, it also resulted in a shift from traditional growing areas in the south to northern provinces further from the control of the Taliban authorities.

In Badakhshan on the border with Tajikistan, surveyed in the agency's most recent report, poppy production has jumped since the Taliban returned to power in 2021.

In that province and in nearby Kunduz and Balkh, “on average, 85

percent of families... reported either no replacement or only partial replacement of their poppy income” after abandoning production, the report found.

Many farmers are instead growing wheat and other cereals, but in 2023 “the average per-hectare income from wheat was just US\$770, whereas opium poppy yielded around US\$10,000 per hectare”.

“This income loss goes far beyond households, weakening rural purchasing power, reducing local economic activity, and increasing communities' overall vulnerability to poverty and food insecurity,” said Oliver Stolpe, the UNODC's regional representative.

The agency urged more efforts to encourage growing of high-value crops such as saffron, nuts, herbs and fruit such as apricots and grapes, which are better suited to the arid and high-altitude landscapes.

Poppy revenues had long been a major source of Afghanistan's economic output before the Taliban returned to power in 2021.

Output of opium, the core ingredient in heroin, was estimated at 296 tonnes this year, the agency had reported last month, a 32 percent drop from the year before.

Farmers' income from opium sales fell by nearly half, to US\$134 million this year from US\$260 million in 2024.

The government's deputy ministry on counter-narcotics welcomed what it called an “important reflection of the realities and genuine challenges of farmers”.

In a response included in the UN findings, it said the authorities would pursue policies aimed at “sustainable rural development and reducing dependency on narcotics crop cultivation”.

– AFP



Customers purchase fukubukuro, grab bags containing various items and sold for a discount as part of a new year tradition, in Tokyo's Ueno shopping district yesterday. – AFP

Myanmar's pro-military party claims huge lead in junta-run poll

YANGON – Myanmar's dominant pro-military party claimed an overwhelming victory in the first phase of the elections, a senior party official told AFP, after democracy watchdogs warned the junta-run poll would entrench military rule.

The armed forces snatched power in a 2021 coup, but on Sunday opened voting in a phased month-long election they pledge will return power to the people.

“We won 82 lower house seats in townships which have finished counting, out of the total of 102,” a senior member of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) told AFP.

The figure implies that the party – which many analysts describe as a civilian proxy of the military – took more than 80 percent of the lower house seats that were put to the vote on Sunday.

It won all eight townships in the capital Naypyidaw, the official added, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to disclose the results.

At the last poll in 2020, the USDP was trounced by Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), which was dissolved after the coup and did not appear on Sunday's ballots.

The Nobel laureate has been in

detention since the putsch, which triggered a civil war.

Campaigners, Western diplomats and the United Nations' rights chief have condemned the vote – citing a stark crackdown on dissent and a candidate list stacked with military allies.

“It makes sense that the USDP would dominate,” said Morgan Michaels, a research fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies think tank.

“The election is not credible,” he told AFP. “They rig it ahead of time by banning different parties, making sure that certain people don't turn up to vote, or they do turn up to vote under threat of coercion to vote a certain way.”

Official results have yet to be posted by Myanmar's Union Election Commission and two more phases are scheduled for January 11 and 25.

“My view on the election is clear: I don't trust it at all,” Yangon resident Min Khant said yesterday.

“We have been living under a dictatorship,” said the 28-year-old. “Even if they do hold elections, I don't think anything good will come of them because they always lie.”

After voting on Sunday, military chief Min Aung Hlaing – who has ruled by diktat for the past five years – said the armed forces could be trusted to hand back power to a civilian-led government.

“We guarantee it to be a free and fair election,” he told reporters in Naypyidaw. “It's organised by the military, we can't let our name be tarnished.”

The coup triggered a civil war as pro-democracy activists formed guerrilla units, fighting alongside ethnic minority armies which have long resisted central rule.

Sunday's election was scheduled to take place in 102 of the country's 330 townships – the most of the three phases of voting.

But amid the war, the military has acknowledged that elections cannot happen in almost one in five lower house constituencies.

– AFP

Man accused of fatally stabbing 9 in Suriname kills himself

PARAMARIBO, Suriname – A father suspected of stabbing four of his own children to death in a rampage that claimed nine lives in Suriname's capital killed himself in jail, police said yesterday.

The 43-year-old attacker identified only by the initials D.A. hanged himself in a police station cell in the small country on South America's northern coast, police said in a statement.

The man appeared to be suffering from mental health issues and four of his children – aged five to 15 – were killed in the attack overnight Saturday into Sunday in and around his home, police chief Melvin Pinas said.

Among those also killed was reportedly their grandparents and another child.

The suspect had an argument with his wife over the phone before stabbing one of the victims, his 11-year-old daughter, 44 times in the kitchen of their home, local media reported.

The man was shot in the legs during his arrest and hospitalised, then transferred to a police cell Sunday evening, the police said.

He was found dead yesterday morning (local time).

Two other people were hospitalised with stab wounds.

Justice and Police Minister Harish Monorath told the local radio station

ABC that after the man was moved from the hospital to the jail cell, he was being monitored closely.

"There was a moment when no one was present and he hanged himself," the minister said, adding that he expected to get more information on how the man was able to kill himself while in custody.

Monorath also gave more details of the attack itself.

"As far as we know it began at the home. Two children managed to get out," and call their grandmother across the street, Monorath said.

"The grandmother and grandfather came to help, with deadly consequences for them," the minister said.

The man killed people in another house and while heading for yet another he was stopped and arrested by police.

President Jennifer Geerlings-Simons addressed the killings on her Facebook page.

"At a time when family and friends should stand together and support one another, we are faced with the harsh reality that there is another side to the world," she wrote.

"A father who takes the lives of his own children and, in the process, kills his neighbours as well. I wish all those in mourning much strength, courage, and comfort in this unimaginably difficult time."

– AFP

Hamas armed wing refuses to surrender arms as Trump to meet Netanyahu

GAZA CITY – Hamas's armed wing reiterated yesterday that it would not surrender its weapons, a key issue expected to feature in talks later in the day between US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

In a video statement, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades also confirmed the death of their longtime spokesperson, months after Israel announced he had been killed in an air strike in Gaza on August 30.

"Our people are defending themselves and will not give up their weapons as long as the occupation remains," said the group's new spokesman, who has adopted the nom de guerre of his predecessor, Abu Obeida.

The statement came just hours before Trump and Netanyahu were scheduled to meet in Florida.

Israeli government spokeswoman Shosh Bedrosian said Netanyahu would discuss the second phase of the Gaza truce deal, which includes ensuring that "Hamas is disarmed, Gaza is demilitarised".

Rejecting that demand, the new Abu Obeida instead called for Israel to be disarmed of its weapons.

"We call on all concerned parties to work toward disarming the lethal weapons of the occupation, which have been and continue to be used in the extermination of our people," he said.

In the same statement, he confirmed the death of his predecessor, and also announced the deaths of four other Hamas commanders in Israeli attacks during the war.

– AFP

New year, new mayor for New York City



New York City Mayoral candidate Zohran Mamdani (right) celebrates alongside his wife Rama Duwaji during an election night event at the Brooklyn Paramount Theater in Brooklyn, New York on November 4. Mamdani is set to become the US city's first Muslim mayor, and the youthful optimism of his Democratic Socialist platform will be put to the test as he takes office on New Year's Day, with high expectations. – AFP

Raphaëlle Peltier

NEW YORK – New York mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani is set to become the US city's first Muslim mayor, and the youthful optimism of his Democratic Socialist platform will be put to the test as he takes office on New Year's Day with high expectations.

Festive swearing in

At the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve, New York Attorney General Letitia James – friend to Mamdani, foe to President Donald Trump – will swear in the new mayor in a private ceremony at a subway stop called Old City Hall Station.

The underground venue reflects his "commitment to the working people who keep our city running every day," his office said.

At midday, left-wing stalwart Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders will preside over a much larger swearing-in ceremony open to the public outside City Hall.

At a neighbourhood celebration, festivities will echo "one of his core messages... that this is a great city, and we like living here," said Lincoln Mitchell, a Columbia University political science professor.

Policy agenda

The mayor-elect, an avowed socialist, campaigned on addressing the prohibitive cost of living in the metropolis of 8.5 million.

One of his key proposals is freezing rent on more than a million apartments, but it's unclear if the city board that handles rent control – packed with appointees of outgoing Mayor Eric Adams – will be supportive.

Details of Mamdani's other campaign promises – the construction of 200,000 units of affordable housing, universal access to childcare, publicly owned supermarkets and free buses – have yet to be spelled out.

But Mamdani has one ace in his pocket: an excellent relationship with New York Governor Kathy Hochul, who approves measures like the tax hikes he seeks.

Once an election is over, "symbolism only goes so far with voters. Results begin to matter a whole lot more," New York University lecturer John Kane said.

Opposition to Trump

Despite expectations to the contrary, the late November Oval Office meeting between Trump and Mamdani was cordial and calm.

Mamdani "wisely sought a point of common ground with Trump: wanting to make New York City a better place to live," Kane said.

Trump can "be surprisingly gregarious toward those that he perceives to have little leverage over," Kane added.

But federal immigration officers are increasingly active in New York, which could become a flashpoint.

Reassuring the public

At 34, Mamdani is one of New York's youngest mayors and his political résumé is short – he's held office once previously, as a local representative in the State Assembly.

To compensate, he is surrounding himself with seasoned aides, recruited from past mayor's offices and former president Joe Biden's administration.

Mamdani has also already opened dialogue with business leaders, some of whom predicted a massive exodus of wealthy New Yorkers if he won. Real estate sector leaders debunked those claims in recent weeks.

As a defender of Palestinian rights, the mayor – Muslim and of Indian origin – will also have to reassure the Jewish community of his inclusive leadership style.

Recently, one of his hires resigned after it was revealed she had posted antisemitic tweets years ago.

'Cultural figure'

"The mayor of New York is always a cultural figure," Mitchell said.

Mamdani has already reflected some of his generation's cultural tastes with his brief forays into rap music, improv classes in Manhattan, and wearing what *The New York Times* called "the quintessential entry-level suit for a 30-something striving to be taken seriously."

New Yorkers have also noted his enthusiastic support of his wife, Syrian-born artist Rama Duwaji, with approval.

Her Instagram account has gained more than a million followers since November, according to Social Blade statistics.

And on the cover of *The Cut*, New York magazine's revered fashion and culture publication, she recently marked her own path – the hallmark of every young generation of city dwellers striving to make it there.

"At the end of the day, I'm not a politician. I'm here to be a support system for Z and to use the role in the best way that I can as an artist," she said.

– AFP

Tehran shopkeepers shut stores over economic woes

TEHRAN – Some shopkeepers in Tehran shut their stores for the second day in a row yesterday in protest against economic hardships and sharp swings in Iran's embattled currency, media reports said.

The rial has hit new lows on the unofficial market, with the US dollar trading at around 1.42 million rials on Sunday – compared to 820,000 rials a year ago – and the euro nearing 1.7 million rials, according to price monitoring websites.

The rates eased somewhat yesterday, with the US dollar at around 1.39 million rials, and the euro at about 1.64 million rials.

A journalist from the pro-labour news agency ILNA reported “demonstrations” at several bazaars in the centre of the capital yesterday, the newswire said.

It said protesters “are demanding immediate government intervention to rein in exchange-rate fluctuations and set out a clear economic strategy”.

Price fluctuations are paralysing the sales of some imported goods, with both sellers and buyers preferring to postpone transactions until the outlook becomes clearer, AFP correspondents noted.

“Continuing to do business under these conditions has become impossible,” ILNA quoted protesters as saying.

State news agency IRNA reported: “Many shopkeepers preferred to suspend sales in order to prevent potential losses.”

It added that some protesters yesterday “chanted slogans”.



Shopkeepers and traders walk over a bridge during a protest against the economic conditions and Iran's embattled currency, in Tehran yesterday. – AFP

The conservative-aligned Fars news agency released images showing a crowd of demonstrators occupying a major thoroughfare in central Tehran, known for its many shops.

Another photograph appears to show tear gas being used to disperse protesters.

“Minor physical clashes were reported... between some protesters and the security forces,” Fars said, warning that such gatherings could lead to instability.

Judicial warning

On Sunday, the ISNA news agency said a

group of shopkeepers and mobile phone vendors at a main shopping centre in the city “protested against sharp fluctuations in the exchange rate and the damage caused to the mobile phone market” by briefly shutting up shop.

Iranian Chief Justice Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei called yesterday for “the swift punishment of those responsible for currency fluctuations”, the justice ministry's Mizan news agency reported.

The government has also announced the replacement of the central bank governor.

“By decision of the president, Abdolnasser

Hemmati will be appointed governor of the Central Bank,” presidency communications official Mehdi Tabatabaei posted on X.

Hemmati is a former economy and finance minister who was dismissed by parliament in March because of the sharp depreciation of the rial.

On Sunday, President Masoud Pezeshkian delivered the budget for the next Persian year to parliament, vowing to fight inflation and the high cost of living.

Notably, the budget provides for a 20 percent increase in wages, a rate that is nonetheless well below that of inflation.

In December inflation stood at 52 percent year-on-year, according to official statistics. But this figure still falls far short of many price increases, especially for basic necessities.

Iran's economy, already battered by decades of Western sanctions, was further strained after the United Nations in late September reinstated international sanctions linked to the country's nuclear programme that were lifted 10 years ago.

Western powers and Israel accuse Iran of seeking to acquire nuclear weapons, a charge Tehran denies.

Negotiations with the United States on the issue are at a standstill, and uncertainty stemming from 12 days of war in June against Israel is also affecting the economic outlook.

Pezeshkian in an interview published on Saturday accused the United States, Israel and Europeans of waging “total war” against Iran.

– AFP

Mozambique end 39-year wait for first AFCON victory

AGADIR – Mozambique ended a 39-year wait for a first Africa Cup of Nations victory by defeating Gabon 3-2 in a Group F thriller in Agadir on Sunday.

The Mambas began the match having drawn four and lost 12 since making the first of six appearances at the tournament in 1986.

Goals from Faisal Bangal, Geny Catamo and Diogo Calila won a seesaw struggle for the Mozambicans, who led 2-1 at half-time in the Moroccan coastal city.

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Alex Moussounda netted for Gabon, who twice halved two-goal deficits before suffering a second straight loss after falling to Cameroon.

Defending champions Ivory Coast and Cameroon, drew 1-1 in Marrakesh on Sunday and have four points each to Mozambique's, in third, three points. Winless Gabon is last in the standings with no points.

Catamo had the first clearcut chance, but was let down by poor control, allowing the ball to run too far in front of him and goalkeeper Loyce Mbaba dashed forward to gain possession.

Mozambique - 24 places below Gabon in the world rankings - were more adventurous and deservedly took the lead on 37 minutes through Bangal, a striker with an Italian fourth division club.

Bangal rose unchallenged from a corner and his header bounced off the ground into the left corner of the net with Mbaba helpless.

Mozambique increased their lead just five minutes later after Bruno

Ecuele Manga pulled the shirt of Elias 'Domingues' Pelembe in a clash of the rival captains.

Catamo calmly placed the penalty into the left corner as Mbaba dived in the opposite direction.

The Mambas almost scored again soon after with Witiness 'Witi' Quembo bending a shot from outside the box that struck the woodwork.

Gabon pulled one goal back five minutes into first-half added time through their best known footballer, 36-year-old Marseille striker Aubameyang.

The 2015 African player of the year was perfectly positioned to tap the ball into the net after Mozambique goalkeeper Ernan Siluane failed to grasp a Didier Ndong shot.

Portugal-based right-back Calila scored the third Mozambique goal on 52 minutes, venturing forward to nod a Witi cross paste Mbaba.

Aubameyang had a scoring chance soon after, but headed wide from point-blank range in a let-off for the Mozambicans.

Domingues, a 42-year-old and second oldest footballer to play at an AFCON, was substituted midway through the second half by a more defensive midfielder, Manuel Kambala.

Siluane saved superbly from Aubameyang and Ndong, but a subsequent corner led to a goalmouth melee that ended with Moussounda slamming the ball into the net on 76 minutes to set up a tense finish.

Mozambique next play Cameroon tomorrow in Marrakesh (3 a.m. on New Year's Day Macau time).

– AFP/MPD

US pledges US\$2 billion for UN aid, with 'adapt, shrink or die' warning

Nina Larson

GENEVA – Washington yesterday pledged an initial US\$2 billion for United Nations humanitarian aid in 2026 – far less than it has provided in recent years – warning individual UN agencies to “adapt, shrink or die”.

With its pledge, announced at the US mission in Geneva alongside the United Nations' aid chief Tom Fletcher, the United States is pursuing a dramatic overhaul of how it funds UN humanitarian work.

Instead of handing funds to individual agencies, the United States will funnel its contributions through the UN aid agency OCHA, headed by Fletcher, which earlier this year launched a so-called Humanitarian Reset to improve efficiency and accountability.

The US funds will then be distributed to more than a dozen selected countries, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar and Sudan.

“It is an initial anchor commitment,” Jeremy Lewin, the senior US official for foreign assistance, humanitarian affairs and religious freedom, told reporters.

“There are other countries that we will add, as we continue to get more funding into this mechanism.”

He challenged other countries to match or beat US funding for UN aid.

“This new model will better share the burden of UN

humanitarian work with other developed countries and will require the UN to cut bloat, remove duplication, and commit to powerful new impact, accountability and oversight mechanisms,” US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on X.

According to UN data, the United States remained the top humanitarian aid donor in the world in 2025, but that amount fell significantly to US\$2.7 billion, down from around US\$11 billion in 2023 and 2024, and from over US\$14 billion in 2022.

Other key donor countries have also been tightening their belts, triggering major upheaval in the global aid sector.

“Individual UN agencies will need to adapt, shrink, or die,” a State Department statement said.

Hard priority choices

Fletcher, who is British, said the US pledge was an “extraordinary” commitment.

“The US has long been the world's humanitarian superpower,” he said in a statement.

“Hundreds of millions of people are alive today because of American generosity – and many millions more will survive in 2026 because of this landmark investment in humanity.”

Fletcher said reform of the humanitarian system was in the pipeline, and US taxpayers would be able to see how their money was delivering life-saving impacts.

“The US is also placing a significant and encouraging vote of trust and confidence in the Humanitarian Reset, through which we are making humanitarian action faster, smarter and closer to the people on the front lines of emergencies,” he said.

“We're cutting red tape, eliminating duplication and prioritising hard.”

When Fletcher launched the UN's annual Global Humanitarian Appeal for 2026 earlier this month, he requested US\$23 billion to provide assistance to 87 million of the world's neediest people, with a heavy focus on dire conflicts like those in Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, Haiti and Myanmar.

The amount and number of people covered by the appeal has been dramatically reduced over recent years, as the UN strives to adapt to a new reality after President Donald Trump slashed US foreign aid spending.

The United Nations has stressed that the smaller appeal does not mean needs have shrunk.

It estimates that some 240 million people – in conflict zones, suffering from epidemics, or victims of natural disasters and climate change – are in need of emergency aid.

In 2025, the UN's appeal for more than US\$45 billion was only funded to the US\$12 billion mark, the lowest in a decade.

That only allowed it to help 98 million people, 25 million fewer than the year before. – AFP

Portugal delivers over 32 million COVID-19 jabs over 5 years: DGS data

LISBON – Portugal has administered more than 32 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines since launching its first vaccination campaign five years ago, according to data released on Saturday by the Directorate-General for Health (DGS).

According to Portugal’s newswire Lusa, Portuguese Public Health Society President and

former Director-General of Health Francisco George described the figure as “extremely positive,” stressing that it is “fundamental to continue vaccinating.”

George said vaccination prevented around 12,000 deaths in its first two years, citing data presented in September 2023 by Infarmed, the Portuguese National Authority of Medicines and Health Products.

He added that the continued use of the vaccines was unsurprising, noting that they have been adapted to changes in circulating virus variants.

Meanwhile, Portugal last week launched its influenza and COVID-19 vaccination campaign, aiming to immunize 2.5 million people against influenza and 1.5 million against COVID-19, the DGS announced. – Xinhua

Over 3,000 migrants died in 2025 trying to reach Spain: aid group

MADRID – More than 3,000 migrants died while trying to reach Spain this year, a report released by a Spanish migration rights group said yesterday, a sharp decline from 2024 as the number of attempted crossings fell.

Caminando Fronteras (“Walking Borders”) said most of the 3,090 deaths recorded until December 15 took place on the Atlantic migration route from Africa to Spain’s Canary Islands, considered one of the world’s most dangerous.

While there has been a “significant” decrease in migrant arrivals in the Canaries, “a new, more distant and more dangerous”

route to the archipelago has emerged with departures from Guinea, it said.

The group compiles its figures from families of migrants and official statistics of those rescued. It included 437 children and 192 women among the dead.

Caminando Fronteras also noted there had been a rise in the number of boats leaving from Algeria, mainly to the holiday islands of Ibiza and Formentera in the Mediterranean.

Traditionally used by Algerians, the route is seeing a surge of migrants from Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan in 2025, the group said.

The number of deaths on this route had doubled this year to 1,037 when compared to 2024, it added.

At least 10,457 migrants died or disappeared while trying to reach Spain by sea in 2024, according to Caminando Fronteras, the highest number recorded since it began tracking data in 2007.

Spain’s interior ministry says 35,935 migrants reached Spain until December 15 this year, a 40-percent decrease from the same period last year.

Nearly half of them came through the Atlantic migration route from the coast of West Africa to the Canary Islands. – AFP



A woman takes part in the celebration of Holy Innocents’ Day in Caucaagua, Miranda state, Venezuela, on Sunday. – AFP

Argentine Congress passes Milei’s budget

BUENOS AIRES – Argentina’s national legislature approved President Javier Milei’s proposed budget on Friday, a first since the libertarian rose to power two years ago.

The Senate voted 46 in favour, 25 against, with one abstention after the lower Chamber of Deputies greenlit the budget.

Milei’s ruling party saw gains in both chambers after legislative elections in October, allowing him to seek a series of major reforms in the second half of his term.

After operating for two years using the budget passed in 2023, Milei’s

new spending bill aims to achieve zero deficit largely through spending cuts.

“We are not going to spend more than we make, we are going to get our accounts in order,” said Senator Ezequiel Ataúche, a member of Milei’s ruling party.

One of Milei’s other proposed reforms, involving the country’s labour laws, drew thousands of protesters to the streets of Buenos Aires last week, causing the measure to be tabled until February.

“Buckle your seatbelts because there are going to be a lot more reforms,” Milei said recently. – AFP

13 dead in Mexico train derailment

MEXICO CITY – A train carrying 250 people derailed partially on Sunday in Mexico, killing 13 people and injuring 98, officials said.

The train’s locomotive left the tracks during a trip in southern Oaxaca state, said the Mexican navy, which operates this particular rail line.

The navy had initially reported 20 people injured, but hours later announced in a statement that “98 were injured... and unfortunately, 13 people lost their lives.”

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said she had directed the secretary of the navy and other senior personnel to travel to the area and

assist the families of those affected.

The country’s Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office said it was opening an investigation to determine the cause of the accident. The train runs between the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean and carries both passengers and freight.

The line was inaugurated in 2023 as a major infrastructure project under then-president Andrés Manuel López Obrador to develop southeast Mexico.

On December 20, a train on the same route collided with a cargo truck attempting to cross the tracks, although that incident did not result in any deaths. – AFP

Spain’s opposition says open to working with far-right Vox if elected

MADRID – Spain’s conservative opposition leader said yesterday he would be open to striking occasional deals with the far-right Vox party to secure parliamentary support for key legislation if he becomes prime minister.

Much of Europe’s political mainstream has over recent decades maintained a “cordon sanitaire”, a policy of avoiding parliamentary cooperation or coalition agreements with far-right parties.

But the head of Spain’s conservative People’s Party (PP), Alberto Núñez Feijóo, said that if his party failed to win an outright majority at the next general election, he would “seek agreements for

Spain’s governability”, including with Vox.

His comments came after the PP won a snap regional election in the rural western region of Extremadura earlier this month but fell short of an absolute majority, leaving it dependent on Vox to govern.

“Vox is the third party in Extremadura, it has consolidated its position, and it has good national polling. We will see what its position is in the general election,” Feijóo said.

“In any case, our cordon sanitaire is Bildu,” he said, referring to the Basque nationalist party linked historically to the political wing of the now-disbanded armed separatist group ETA.

“It will not be Vox, nor Vox voters,” he added.

Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez’s minority coalition government relies on a string of smaller parties including Bildu to pass legislation.

Spain’s next general election is scheduled for 2027. Sánchez, in office since 2018, has repeatedly rejected the conservative opposition’s calls to resign and call an early general election over graft scandals affecting his party and inner circle.

Most polls suggest the PP would win a general election but lack an absolute majority and would need Vox to govern. – AFP

Revellers dressed in mock military garb take part in the traditional “Els Enfarinats” flour and eggs battle in the southeastern Spanish town of Ibi on Sunday. In this 200-year-old winter festival, the participants – known as Els Enfarinats (“those covered in flour”) – dress in military apparel and stage a mock coup d’état as they battle using flour, eggs and firecrackers outside the town hall as part of the celebrations of the Day of the Innocents, a traditional day in Spain for pulling pranks. – AFP

Death toll from Spain’s flooding rises to three

MADRID – Search teams yesterday recovered the bodies of two men who went missing after torrential rains caused flooding in southern Spain, officials said, bringing the death toll to three.

Spain’s Guardia Civil police said the body of one man was found about three kilometres from where he had been swept away on Sunday by a swollen river near Granada.

Spanish television reported that the 20-year-old was carried away while trying to cross a riverbed on a motorcycle.

The body of another man, whose van was also swept away, was found in the province of Málaga, the mayor of Alhaurín el Grande, Antonio Bermúdez, said.

A second passenger of the van was found dead on Sunday.

The two men, in their early 50s, were “lifelong friends,” Bermúdez said, describing the tragedy as a “sad and dark Christmas for the community.”

The town declared yesterday an official day of mourning and cancelled all public events “because no one in Alhaurín el Grande feels like celebrating anything at this time,” he added.

Spain has been strongly affected by climate change in recent years, experiencing longer heatwaves and more frequent episodes of heavy rain.

Floods in October 2024 killed more than 230 people, mostly in the eastern Valencia region. – AFP

Football shorts

Puel back as Nice manager after Haise exits

LIGUE 1 NICE – Claude Puel was yesterday named the new coach of struggling Ligue 1 club Nice, taking over the reins from Franck Haise.

Puel, who was previously in charge at Nice between 2012-16, “begins today [yesterday] his priority mission of improving the team’s performance”, Nice said in a statement.

Nice thanked Haise and his assistants “for their commitment and the work accomplished in the red and black colours and wishes Claude Puel a good return to the bench”.

Puel spent his entire playing career with neighbouring Monaco before becoming manager of the club.

He then went on to manage Lille, Lyon and Saint-Etienne in Ligue 1, and Southampton and Leicester in England’s Premier League.

Nice currently sit 13th in Ligue 1.

The Mediterranean team beat second-division Saint-Etienne in the French Cup last week to snap a club record nine-game losing streak.

Puel’s naming comes less than 10 days after the return of former manager and club president Jean-Pierre Rivere to replace Fabrice Bocquet as club chief executive officer.

The club is owned by INEOS, the company of the British entrepreneur Jim Ratcliffe, who also has a 25 percent stake in Manchester United.

In November players, staff, and management had a run-in with 200 fans gathered in front of the training centre to express their anger at the Nice squad as it returned from a 3-1 loss at Lorient.

The club returns from their brief winter break with a home match against Strasbourg in Ligue 1 on January 3.

Gael Clichy to coach Mbappe’s club Caen

CAEN - Former Arsenal and Manchester City star Gael Clichy was appointed coach at French third division side Caen yesterday.

The Norman club is owned by Kylian Mbappe, whose takeover was followed by relegation to the third tier of French league football last season.

The 40-year-old Clichy was assistant to Thierry Henry as coach of the French Olympic side at the 2024 Games, but this is his first stint as head coach.

“He will bring high level experience and knowledge of the modern game,” Caen said.

Caen, who have won four of their past 15 games, fired the previous coach Maxime d’Ornano earlier yesterday.

Milicic keeps China women’s national team job despite heavy defeat

SHENZHEN – Australia’s Ante Milicic is to remain head coach of China’s women’s national football team despite an 8-0 loss to England, the Chinese Football Association (CFA) announced on Sunday.

The CFA said in a statement that Milicic, who took over in May 2024, will lead the Steel Roses in training from January 4 to 22 ahead of the Asian Cup in Australia next March.

Former Paris Saint-Germain forward Wang Shuang is among 24 players selected for the training camp. They represent nine clubs across China.

China is drawn in Group B with DPR Korea, Bangladesh and Uzbekistan at the Asian Cup, which runs from March 1 to 21 in Perth, Sydney and the Gold Coast.

Milicic’s squad suffered one of the worst defeats in the team’s history in London on November 29, trailing 5-0 at halftime before then conceding three more goals.

– Xinhua

Ex-Liverpool defender Coates to extend Nacional deal

MONTEVIDEO – Former Liverpool center-back Sebastian Coates is set to extend his contract with Uruguay’s Nacional for another year, the Montevideo club said on Sunday.

Coates’ current deal is due to expire this month but the club made clear its intention for the 35-year-old to continue.

“The captain will carry on for a while yet,” Nacional said in a social media post alongside images of the defender celebrating the club’s 50th league title last month.

Coates has made 59 appearances in all competitions since rejoining his boyhood club in January 2024.

He began his career at Nacional before securing a move to Liverpool in 2011. He later had spells at Sunderland and Sporting Lisbon, and earned 51 caps for Uruguay.

– Xinhua

Maresca says Chelsea must ‘understand why’ they keep squandering leads



LONDON – Enzo Maresca cannot explain why Chelsea keep surrendering leads in the Premier League but accepts it is a problem they must solve if they are to maintain their quest for a top-four finish.

Saturday’s 2-1 defeat by Aston Villa was the third time this season the Blues have lost at Stamford Bridge after being in front.

Ollie Watkins struck twice in the final 30 minutes as Maresca’s men were left regretting several missed chances after Joao Pedro gave them a first half-lead.

In September, Brighton staged a similar comeback with a trio of late goals in a 3-1 win after Trevoh Chalobah had been sent off. The following month Sunderland scored deep in stoppage time as they came from behind in a 2-1 success.

November’s 1-1 draw with Arsenal, in which Chelsea went ahead despite playing with 10 men before conceding an equaliser added to their frustration. The team have dropped 11 points from winning positions at home this season.

Those lost points represent the difference between Chelsea, who are fifth in the table, and second-placed Manchester City.

“It’s just a matter to understand the reason why,” said Chelsea manager Maresca, whose team welcome struggling Bournemouth to west London today. “When something



Chelsea’s English defender Trevoh Chalobah (right) shakes hands with Aston Villa’s English striker Ollie Watkins at the end of the English Premier League match between Chelsea and Aston Villa at Stamford Bridge in London on Saturday. - AFP

continues to happen, it’s not random.

“We need to understand why. No matter if we’re winning, drawing or losing, when we concede a goal we lose a little bit of control.”

Italian boss Maresca, reflecting on the Villa match, said: “For one hour we can take many positive things. Not many teams create so many chances against (Villa). First half they were zero in terms of xG (expected goals), they didn’t create anything.”

“I watched the Arsenal game (when Villa won 2-1 at Villa Park) and the games they have won, and they always create.

“The game doesn’t reflect the 10 points difference between us

and Aston Villa to be honest.”

Chelsea’s habit of dropping points is all the more maddening for the west London club’s supporters because their side have beaten Spanish giants Barcelona 3-0 in the Champions League and Premier League champions Liverpool.

The collapses have stifled talk of a title challenge, with Chelsea 13 points adrift of Premier League leaders and capital rivals Arsenal.

“We need to understand how to manage better when we concede goals,” said Maresca.

The game will be played at 3:30 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time.

– AFP/MPD



Egypt’s forward Ibrahim Adel (left) fights for the ball with Angola’s forward Zito Luvumbo during the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) Group B match between Angola and Egypt at Adrar Stadium in Agadir, Morocco yesterday. The game ended in a nil all draw. – AFP

Man Utd boss Amorim says now is the time to change formation



LONDON - Manchester United manager Ruben Amorim insisted he had to establish a formation at Old Trafford before asking his squad to demonstrate tactical flexibility as succumbing to media pressure would have been “the end” for him.

Amorim departed from a back three with wing-backs for the first time in Friday’s 1-0 win over Newcastle and instead fielded a conventional back four with two holding midfielders.

The Portuguese boss memorably once said not even the Pope could force him to change his system.

But Amorim, with United now just three points adrift of a Champions League place, insisted he was never as obstinate as he appeared.

“When I came here last season, I understood maybe I don’t have the players to play well in that system, but it was the beginning of a process,” he said ahead of today’s match

against relegation-threatened Wolves at Old Trafford.

“We were trying to build an identity. Today is a different moment. We don’t have a lot of players, and we need to adapt, so they understand why we are changing.”

The 40-year-old former Sporting Lisbon boss added: “When you (the media) talk about changing the system all the time, I cannot change because the players will understand I’m changing because of you and I think that is the end for the manager.

“When we are playing well in our system, that is the moment to change.

“We are going to become a better team because when all the players return, we are not going to play with three defenders all the time.”

United only had two wins in eight games prior to beating Newcastle and will be without seven senior players for the

match against bottom-of-the-table Wolves, still without a victory after 18 Premier League fixtures this season.

Club captain Bruno Fernandes will miss the Wolves game, despite telling his manager he wants to return to action following a hamstring injury in a December 21 defeat at Aston Villa.

“Bruno is already saying he needs to train,” said Amorim.

“But there is no chance he is going to play against Wolves. No chance. You can write that.”

However, the 31-year-old playmaker will still have an influence on the game.

“The guy is a leader,” said Amorim. “He cannot be that guy that when he is not playing, he’s not talking and speaking. He’s always speaking. That’s why he’s the captain.”

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

– AFP/MPD

Ex-heavyweight champion Joshua injured in Nigeria highway crash

Boxing

LAGOS — Former world heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua suffered “minor injuries” in a fatal car accident that killed two people yesterday, Nigerian police said.

Pictures circulating online showed a shirtless Joshua — a British national of Nigerian heritage — surrounded by what appeared to be broken window glass on the seats around him.

The circumstances around the wreck are “currently being investigated,” said police in Ogun state, just north of Nigeria’s economic capital Lagos, which throngs with visitors from across the country and diaspora each December.

Joshua “was seated in the rear of the vehicle, sustained minor injuries and [is] receiving medical attention,” the police statement said.

Joshua’s promoter Eddie Hearn told *Daily Mail Sport* he was on a family holiday and “awoke to the news of this incident”.

“We are trying to contact Anthony and in the meantime we don’t want to speculate on how he is but thankfully he appears OK from what I have seen in the images,” he said.

Police said the wreck, in which two people in Joshua’s car were killed, occurred around 11 a.m. [local time], in the town of Makun, along the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway.

Nigeria’s Federal Road Safety Corps said in a statement that the Lexus Joshua was riding in “was



British heavyweight boxer Anthony Joshua smiles during a press conference in London on January 15, 2024, ahead of his fight with French-Cameroonian boxer Francis Ngannou in March.

— AFP

suspected to be travelling beyond the legally prescribed speed limit on the corridor, lost control during an overtaking manoeuvre and crashed into a stationary truck... by the side of the road”.

Witness Adeniyi Orojo told Punch news Joshua was travelling in a two-vehicle convoy, and was seated behind his driver.

“The passenger beside the driver and the person beside Joshua died on the spot,” he said.

The police gave the same toll, saying the two killed were “passengers in the vehicle” who “lost their lives at the scene”.

The names of the victims have not been released but a spokesman for the Ogun state governor said

preliminary reports indicated they were “two male foreign nationals”.

Earlier this month Joshua knocked out YouTuber-turned-boxer Jake Paul in a Netflix-backed bout in Miami.

“Life is much more important than boxing. I am praying for the lost lives, AJ and anyone impacted by today’s unfortunate accident,” Paul said yesterday on X.

The former Olympic champion Joshua has since been linked with a fight against compatriot and fellow former world champion Tyson Fury.

Joshua’s last fight prior to the match with Paul was a fifth round knockout loss to fellow Briton Daniel Dubois in September last year.

— AFP

Sun out, Doo in for WTT Champions Doha

Table tennis

BEIJING — Women’s singles world No. 1 Sun Yingsha of China has withdrawn from the 2026 World Table Tennis (WTT) Champions Doha tournament and will be replaced by Doo Hoi Kem of Hong Kong, the WTT announced yesterday.

Sun withdrew from the women’s singles semifinal against teammate Kuai Man due to discomfort at the WTT Finals earlier this month, and was absent

from the 2025 China Table Tennis Super League Finals which concluded on Sunday.

Sun has remained as the year-end world No. 1 for four consecutive years.

Following Sun’s withdrawal, China’s lineup for the Doha event from January 7 to 11 now features Wang Manyu, Chen Xingtong, Kuai Man, Wang Yidi and Chen Yi in the women’s singles, and Lin Shidong, Liang Jingkun, Xiang Peng and Chen Yuanyu in the men’s singles.

— Xinhua

Wawrinka ‘at peace’ with retirement but no plans to go quietly

Tennis

PERTH — Three-time Grand Slam winner Stan Wawrinka said yesterday he was “at peace” with his decision to make 2026 his last year on tour but insisted there were still goals to meet.

The 40-year-old announced this month that he plans to call it quits, with the United Cup in Perth starting Friday the beginning of the end for the popular Swiss star.

“Of course, I’m still passionate about the game, about the sport I love,” he said.

“What I received from it, the emotion playing in a different country, coming back here with a lot of fans, a lot of support, so I’m going to miss that part, that’s for sure,” he said.

“The last few months, I’ve had time to decide whether it will be my last year or not, and for me, it’s quite clear. I’m happy with the decision, I’m at peace with that.”

Wawrinka won the Australian Open in 2014, the French Open a year later and the US Open in 2016,

at a time when Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic were dominating men’s tennis.

A former world number three, he is now ranked 157 after struggling with injuries but said he would work as hard as ever this season.

“I still want to play some good tennis, I still have goals. Hopefully I can come back in the top 100, finish on a good ranking,” he said.

“I want to play the full year, the big tournaments, the main ones, and let’s see my ranking in the next few months.”

Wawrinka has 16 career ATP titles although the last came in Geneva in 2017.

He won Olympic gold in doubles alongside Federer at Beijing in 2008 and helped deliver a first Davis Cup triumph for Switzerland in 2014.

Wawrinka leads a Swiss team also boasting world number 11 Belinda Bencic at the mixed-teams United Cup where they are grouped with France and Italy.

— AFP



ICC rates MCG pitch ‘unsatisfactory’ after two-day Test

MELBOURNE — The Melbourne Cricket Ground’s seam-friendly pitch for the fourth Ashes Test was rated “unsatisfactory” yesterday by the International Cricket Council after it ended inside two days.

Under the world governing body’s four-tier rating system “unsatisfactory” is the second lowest, characterising a pitch “favouring the bowlers too much”.

It broke the venue’s streak of “very good” ratings for the past three Boxing Day Tests and earned it one demerit point.

“The MCG pitch was too much in favour of the bowlers,” said match referee Jeff Crowe.

“With 20 wickets falling on the first day, 16 on the second day and no batter even reaching a half-century, the pitch was ‘unsatisfactory’ as per the guidelines and the venue gets one demerit point.”

England beat Australia by four wickets in the final session of day two, with no batsman scoring more than 46 across the four innings.

The first Test in Perth also ended in two days, but that pitch was rated “very good” by the ICC.

MCG curator Matt Page and his

team left 10 millimetres of grass on the wicket, providing the seamers with movement and bounce and making batting treacherous.

The carnage left Cricket Australia facing Aus\$10 million (US\$6.7 million) in revenue shortfall, with tickets for day three and four needing to be refunded.

“We were disappointed for the fans holding tickets for days three and four, and also the millions of fans excited to watch the action in Australia and around the world, that the pitch did not provide the MCG’s customary balance between bat and ball,” said Cricket Australia’s chief of cricket James Allsopp.

“We appreciate the outstanding work the MCG staff have done over recent years producing excellent Test match pitches,” he added.

Before the ICC decision was handed down, Australia coach Andrew McDonald came to the defence of Page and warned against authorities meddling in pitch preparation.

McDonald said Page had done an “outstanding” job over the years and the batsmen should also shoulder some of the blame for not scoring enough runs.

“The perspective that I always use is we have bad Test matches as well — this Test we weren’t at our best and sometimes these things can happen.

“We support him in what he’s done and are really proud of the evolution of the MCG.

“He’s found a nice balance for a long period of time.”

Cricket Australia are set to undertake their own end-of-season review of the management of Test wickets.

Chief executive Todd Greenberg has suggested a more interventionist approach might be needed, with shorter Tests “bad for business”.

But McDonald said he was not in favour of any interference, with curators in Australia traditionally independent when preparing pitches, both from captains and Cricket Australia.

“I don’t want to get to a situation ... where we are asking for specific surfaces and tailor-made,” McDonald said.

“I don’t think Australia will ever go there, and I don’t think they’ve ever been there, to my knowledge.”

Australia lead the series 3-1 with the fifth and final Test in Sydney starting Sunday.

— AFP



England’s Gus Atkinson (left) celebrates the wicket of Australia’s Scott Boland during the second day of the fourth Ashes cricket Test match between Australia and England at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) in Melbourne, Australia on Saturday. England pace spearhead Atkinson was yesterday ruled out of the fifth and final Ashes Test against Australia with a hamstring injury, their third fast bowler to head home early during the series. The Surrey right-armers hobbled off early on day two of the fourth Test in Melbourne clutching his left leg and took no further part.

— AFP

Media on Bardot: France’s biggest ‘sex symbol’ or ‘crazy cat lady’

PARIS, France – International and French media yesterday paid tribute to Brigitte Bardot following her death at the age of 91, with some highlighting her reputation as “the biggest sex symbol of French cinema” and others her role as a “controversial activist”.

Images of the screen diva were splashed across media outlets around the globe following the announcement of her death on Sunday. Many also analysed her role as a catalyst for changes in France.

Bardot’s libertine attitude in her breakthrough 1956 movie “And God Created Woman” outraged censors at the time. And the French Catholic daily *La Croix* said she had a “career without much success” that she cut short to devote herself to animals.

The liberal *Libération* newspaper said, however, that Bardot had a “meteoric career”.

“She was probably the last of that handful of new and free figures in which France liked to recognise itself at the turn of the 60s,” noted *Libération*, which called her the “greatest sex symbol of French cinema”.

French cocktail

The conservative *Le Figaro* said “this blonde whirlwind burst onto the screens” in a France still suffering from post-World War II fallout. “She shook things up, danced the mambo on the tables of Saint-Tropez,” it added, recalling

her iconic scene in “And God Created Woman”.

International media highlighted the screen sensation and the controversy after Bardot gave up acting to defend animal rights, as well as become a far-right supporter. Bardot was convicted five times for comments that allegedly incited racial hatred.

“She was a French cocktail of kittenish charm and continental sensuality,” said Britain’s BBC.

Italy’s *La Repubblica* newspaper called her “a diva rebel” who “chose liberty until the very end”.

In Spain, *El País* called Bardot a “controversial activist”.

“In her own way, she hid nothing. Neither the wrinkles, nor her increasingly radical character or her ideological convictions, which she evoked with crude euphemisms,” it said.

The New York Times said that Bardot “redefined mid-20th century movie sex symbolism”, highlighting her “unapologetic carnal appetite” on screen.

But, it added, “At best, Ms Bardot was considered eccentric in her later years, prompting observations that this former sex kitten, as she was often called, had turned into a ‘crazy cat lady’.”

Germany’s *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* said it would be better to “forget, even if it may be difficult, the political Bardot of recent years for the duration of this obituary” and “remember THE Bardot” instead.

French actress Brigitte Bardot smiles next to the bust of Marianne, the symbol of the French Republic, for which Bardot served as a model, in Paris, on May 11, 1993. – AFP

Bardot: from defending sheep to flirting with the far right

Laure Fillon

PARIS, France – Film legend Brigitte Bardot in her later decades raised eyebrows calling far-right leader Marine Le Pen a modern “Joan of Arc”, but she always maintained she was merely doing what was best for animals.

Bardot, who died on Sunday aged 91, argued she was unfairly labelled as a supporter of the anti-immigration far right after she made explosive remarks in the late 1990s about Muslims slaughtering sheep.

“I never asked anyone to be racist and I don’t think I fuel any racial hatred,” she wrote in her 2018 book “Larmes de Combat”, translated into English under the title “Tears of Battle”.

But the Paris-born star of around 50 films, who walked away from cinema to defend animal rights, was repeatedly convicted for hate speech – mostly against members of the Islamic faith after migration from France’s former colonies.

And she actively backed far-right presidential contender Marine Le Pen when she ran in 2012 and 2017.

“I wish for her to save France. She’s the Joan of Arc of the 21st century,” she told *Paris Match* in 2014, referring to the legendary teenager who repelled the English in the Hundred Years War in the 15th century.

“She’s the only woman... who has balls,” she later added of Le Pen, who also vied for president in 2022.

‘We’ll be slaughtered too’

Le Pen may be barred from a fourth run for the Élysée in 2027 due to a graft conviction, but her National Rally party feels its best chance ever to win the presidency in the upcoming polls, with Emmanuel Macron stepping down after two consecutive terms.

Le Pen on Sunday mourned Bardot, calling her “incredibly French: free, untameable, whole”, while her lieutenant Jordan Bardella – who could run instead of Le Pen – described her as an “ardent patriot”,



French actress Brigitte Bardot is pictured on the set of the film “Don Juan 73”, directed by her former husband Roger Vadim, in Stockholm on August 4, 1972. – AFP

adding French people had lost “the Marianne they so loved”.

France’s republic is traditionally represented by a female figure called Marianne, and Bardot in the 1960s posed for such a statue by artist Alain Aslan.

Macron also alluded to “the face that became Marianne” in his tribute to a woman he called a “legend” of the 20th century.

But he made no mention of her comments leading to convictions for hate speech.

In 1997, Bardot argued against the ritual killing of sheep for the celebration of Eid al-Adha, saying the practice would “stain the soil of France”.

“They’re slitting the throats of women and children, our monks, our civil servants, our tourists, and our sheep. One day we’ll be slaughtered too,” she wrote, appearing to conflate violent Islamists with ordinary Muslims, and warning against “a Muslim France with a North African Marianne”.

In 1996, Islamist insurgents killed French monks in France’s former colony Algeria during the civil war.

Bardot declared herself “against the Islamisation of France” in a 2003 book, arguing “our ancestors, our grandfathers, our fathers have for centuries given their lives to push out successive invaders”.

But in 2018 the former actor told *Le Monde* newspaper her concerns surrounding Eid al-Adha had been misunderstood, and she was “simply requesting the animals be stunned” to avoid suffering.

‘Wild hopes’ in the far right

In her final book, “Mon BBce-daïre” (“My BB Alphabet”), she said right-wing politicians were “the only urgent remedy to France’s agony”.

The animal activist, who has criticised the #Metoo movement, also made derogatory comments about gay and transgender people.

Her fourth husband, Bernard d’Ormale, was an advisor of late French far-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, whose daughter Marine took over the party.

In 1996, Bardot described Jean-Marie Le Pen as a “charming” man also worried about the “terrifying rise of immigration”.

He later invoked Bardot to argue Muslim women should not be allowed to wear burkinis in public.

“French beaches are those of Bardot and Vadim,” he said, in an apparent reference to Roger Vadim’s 1956 film “And God created Woman”, featuring the actor dancing with her skirt slit up to her waist.

Often a guest at the Élysée presidential palace, Bardot said French presidents – including Macron – did not do enough to protect animal rights.

“I had wild hopes when the National Front [now called the National Rally] put forward concrete proposals to reduce animal suffering,” she told *Le Monde*.

But she claimed she also reached out to hard-left leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon, “congratulating him for being a vegetarian”, and said that if a communist took up her proposals, she would vote for them.



French actress Brigitte Bardot smiles next to the bust of Marianne, the symbol of the French Republic, for which Bardot served as a model, in Paris, on May 11, 1993. – AFP

3rd ‘Avatar’ film stays atop N American box office rankings

LOS ANGELES – “Avatar: Fire and Ash” retained the top spot at the North American box office after it debuted the week before, reeling in US\$64 million during the weekend after Christmas, industry estimates showed on Sunday.

The third instalment in director James Cameron’s blockbuster series stars Zoe Saldana as Na’vi warrior Neytiri and Sam Worthington as ex-Marine Jake Sully, who must battle a new foe threatening their family’s life on the planet Pandora.

The film grossed US\$217.6 million at the box office worldwide during this past weekend, according to estimates.

“Zootopia 2,” Disney’s feel-good animated film and an Oscar

contender, rose to number 2 from 5 in the rankings, bringing in US\$20 million, according to weekend estimates.

“Marty Supreme,” a period sports drama starring Timothee Chalamet, soared to third place in the rankings from the number 10 spot the previous week, bringing in US\$17.5 million, weekend estimates showed.

“This is an excellent opening for a sports drama,” according to David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research.

“Critics’ reviews are sensational, with an excellent audience score (a B+ CinemaScore). The film is going to get a lift from holiday moviegoing this week – all of the releases are

going to benefit now,” he said.

Dropping one notch to fourth place was “The Housemaid,” a thriller from Lionsgate films starring Sydney Sweeney and Amanda Seyfried, which earned US\$15.4 million, according to estimates.

“Anaconda,” the new comedy action movie starring Paul Rudd and Jack Black, placed fifth in the rankings after making its debut. Distributed by Sony, the film brought in US\$14.5 million, according to estimates.

“This is a solid opening for a horror remake. The three-day figure is roughly average for the genre, and it’s a bit better start than the previous ‘Anaconda’ opening in 2004,” Gross said.

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -9°C~5°C	Manila 22°C~31°C	New York -2°C~2°C	Lisbon 5°C~13°C
Shanghai 5°C~15°C	Bangkok 21°C~34°C	London 0°C~7°C	Rio de Janeiro 23°C~30°C
Hong Kong 15°C~22°C	Tokyo 1°C~14°C	Frankfurt -6°C~4°C	Luanda 22°C~28°C
Taipei 17°C~22°C	Singapore 23°C~31°C	Vancouver 5°C~9°C	Maputo 19°C~29°C
Guangzhou 12°C~25°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~32°C	Paris -3°C~5°C	Dili 24°C~30°C
Nanjing 3°C~15°C	Jakarta 23°C~31°C	Moscow -8°C~5°C	São Tomé 25°C~30°C
Guilin 12°C~22°C	Seoul -8°C~3°C	Las Vegas 5°C~16°C	Praia 19°C~27°C
Xi'an 2°C~10°C	Sydney 15°C~26°C	Monte Carlo 6°C~14°C	Bissau 17°C~34°C

1. Not far from home

People sit in the shade of a tent near camper vehicles with a backdrop of the Dubai skyline including Burj Khalifah, the world's tallest structure, on January 31. — AFP

2. Powerful painting

Visitors view horse paintings at an exhibition in Tianjin, yesterday. Various activities are held across China to celebrate the upcoming new year. — Xinhua

3. Lasting work

This photograph taken on December 14 shows a fresco painting featuring Buddha on the wall of a rock-cut hall at the Ajanta Caves in Maharashtra, India. The Ajanta Caves are about 30 Buddhist cave monuments and temples that date from around the 2nd century BCE to around 480 CE, cut into the dark basalt rock of the Deccan Traps, the remnants of an immense volcanic event some 65 million years ago. The paintings and sculptures at the site are considered masterpieces of Buddhist religious art, according to UNESCO, which gave the caves World Heritage Site status in 1983. — AFP

4. Lying Sun

This photograph taken yesterday shows the sunrise over the Mediterranean Sea, with the temperature about 6°C. — AFP

5. Welcome everybody!

Giant panda Fu Wa is pictured at the Mianyang base of China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda (CCRCGP) in Mianyang City, Sichuan Province, yesterday. The Mianyang base of CCRCGP started its trial operation to receive public visitors yesterday. — Xinhua

1



6. Did it pass?

People stand in rain soaked confetti in Times Square during New Year's Eve rehearsals as part of the Planet Fitness testing the air worthiness of confetti in New York yesterday. — AFP

2



3



4



5



6

