

# Macau logs record-breaking 40.06 million visitors in 2025: police

Tony Wong

Macau's number of visitor arrivals last year broke the 40-million benchmark for the first time, the Public Security Police (PSP) announced yesterday.

A PSP statement released on its WeChat account last night said that Macau recorded 40.06 million visitor arrivals in 2025, the highest annual number on record, representing a 1.66 percent increase from the previous record of 39.406 million set in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last year's number of visitor arrivals rose 14.7 percent from the 34.93 million recorded in 2024.

In 2025, according to the statement, mainland Chinese accounted for 72.4 percent of all visitor arrivals, while Hongkongers accounted for 18.2 percent and Taiwanese for 2.5 percent. Foreign nationals accounted for the remaining 6.9 percent.

The PSP data on visitor arrivals in 2025 announced yesterday are set to be slightly adjusted by Macau's official statistics agency, Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC), which is scheduled to announce Macau's 2025 number of visitor arrivals and their composition on January 23.

## Macau logs record-breaking 235 million border crossings in 2025

Moreover, the PSP statement also announced that Macau recorded 235 million entries and exits at its border checkpoints in 2025, up 9.8 percent year on year, also the highest annual number on record.



Tourists visit the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ruins of St. Paul's landmark late last month.

— Photo: Tony Wong

According to previous PSP announcements, Macau's total number of entries and exits in 2024 stood at around 210 million. In pre-pandemic 2019, some 190 million entries and exits were recorded at Macau's border checkpoints.

The entry and exit (border crossings) figures recorded by the Public Security Police, which run Macau's immigration service, comprise local residents, visitors, non-resident workers (NRWs), non-local

students enrolled in Macau, and all others with a special permit to stay in Macau.

In 2025, according to last night's PSP statement, local residents accounted for 36.4 percent of the total number of border crossings at all checkpoints, while visitors accounted for 33.9 percent, non-resident workers and their family members for 26.2 percent, and non-local students enrolled in Macau for 3.2 percent.

According to the statement, the Barrier Gate checkpoint recorded 124 million entries and exits

last year, representing 52.7 percent of the total number of border crossings at all checkpoints, while the Qingmao checkpoint, the Hengqin checkpoint, and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge's (HZMB) Macau checkpoint recorded 36.36 million, 30.35 million, and 27.96 million entries and exits, accounting for 15.4 percent, 12.9 percent and 11.8 percent of the total respectively.

The statement also said that in addition to the highest annual number of entries and exits at all checkpoints on record, the city's 2025 border-crossing figures also broke different types of records.

On May 2, 2025, the statement said, Macau recorded 837,000 entries and exits at its border checkpoints, then setting a record in terms of the daily number. However, the statement said, the record was broken again on New Year's Day last week, when 866,000 entries and exits were recorded.

Also on May 2, 2025, the statement said, the Hengqin checkpoint recorded 128,000 entries and exits, then setting a record in terms of the daily number. However, the statement said, the record was also broken again on Thursday last week, when 147,000 entries and exits were recorded.

On February 1, 2025, the statement said, the HZMB Macau checkpoint recorded 142,000 entries and exits, its highest daily number on record.

Meanwhile, a PSP statement on Friday said that Macau recorded 188,000 visitor arrivals on Thursday, the highest number ever recorded on a New Year's Day. ■

## Macau casino receipts rise 9.1 pct to 247.4 billion patacas in 2025, highest since pre-pandemic 2019

Staff Reporter

Macau's casinos generated gross gaming revenue (GGR) of 247.4 billion patacas last month, a year-on-year increase of 9.1 percent, the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) announced on New Year's Day.

2025's GGR was the highest since pre-pandemic 2019, amounting to 292.4 billion patacas; that is to say, last year's GGR was still 45 billion patacas short of the figure for the year before the COVID-19 pandemic began to impact Macau's casino takings.

The gaming sector's annual GGR record of 360.7 billion patacas was achieved in 2013. Between 2020 and 2022, casinos' GGR was significantly affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the local economy.

Meanwhile, last month's GGR grew by 14.8 percent year-on-year to 20.88 billion patacas. Month-on-month, however, GGR was down by 0.95 percent.

Macau's government-concessed gaming industry is operated by six rival integrated resort (IR) operators: Sands, Galaxy, SJM, Melco, Wynn, and MGM.

In the first three quarters of the year, according to the latest available official gaming statistics, baccarat generated 85 percent of local casinos' GGR across their 16 games of chance. Roulette, Europe's classic game of chance, generated a mere 0.5 percent of GGR.

At the end of the third quarter, Macau's then still 28 casinos operated 6,000 gaming tables and 12,000 slot machines, according to official statistics.

In 2021, Macau had 42 casinos, a record number in its history of licensed casinos,

which began in 1849. Due to the government's decision some three years ago to clamp down on so-called satellite casinos run by third parties in cooperation with gaming concessionaires, the number of casinos decreased to 20 at the end of last month.

During the gaming industry's three-year consolidation process, which formally ended at the end of last year, the closed satellite casinos' gaming tables and slot machines, as well as their local employees, were moved to the casinos directly run by gaming concessionaires. ■

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The Macau Post Daily

### China always opposes imposing one country's will on another: Wang Yi

China always opposes the use or threat of force, as well as any imposition of one country's will on another, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday when speaking of the situation in Venezuela.

— Story on p. 8

### Denmark irritated by wife of Trump aide posting pic of US-flagged Greenland

Denmark yesterday made its displeasure known after the wife of President Donald Trump's most influential aide posted a social media picture of Greenland painted in the colours of the US flag.

— Story on p. 11

### Maduro in NY jail as Trump says US to 'run' Venezuela

Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro was in a New York jail yesterday after a shock US snatch-and-grab raid to remove him from power and assert Washington's control over the oil-rich South American nation.

— Story on p. 12

# Xi's spot-on New Year call: time to better integrate Macau into national development



President Xi Jinping mentioned Macau – and Hong Kong for that matter – twice in his 2026 New Year address.

Xi pointed out in his message broadcast nationwide on New Year's Eve that “not long ago, I attended the opening ceremony of the National Games, and I was glad to see Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau coming together in unity and acting in unison”.

I may add that Macau won a record three gold and two bronze medals, all in karate events, at the National Games in November. Moreover, it garnered a record 146 medals at the 12<sup>th</sup> National Games for Persons with Disabilities and the 9<sup>th</sup> National Special Olympic Games last month. Not only Macau but the whole country can justifiably take great pride in the astonishing medal haul by our athletes – whatever their physical and intellectual condition.

Xi also stressed that “we should unwaveringly implement the policy of ‘One Country, Two Systems’, and support Hong Kong and Macau in better integrating into the overall development of our country and maintaining long-term prosperity and stability”.

His call for supporting Macau and also Hong Kong in better integrating into the nation's overall development is of utmost importance, and it is also very timely appeal.

Xi's speeches, which I have been editing for publication in our newspaper for over a decade, including his New Year addresses, are very well written and, I may add, professionally translated into English and, I have been told, into other foreign languages.

That's why all of us in Macau should always pay close attention to Xi's speeches – and, therefore, our newspaper customarily publishes their full-text versions in print and/or on our website (depending on their length).

The concept of “integration” – the harmonious combination

of parts into a functional whole – is a profound theme in starkly different cultures all over the world. Integration within the ambit of political and socio-economic development, i.e., the process of bringing together various political, social, and economic elements within a society to create a cohesive and functioning whole, is a *sine qua non* to ensure human progress.

“The whole is greater than the sum of its parts,” Greek polymath Aristotle said wisely some 2,300 years ago. In other words, when parts are truly integrated, they create emergent properties, synergies, and value that the separate parts do not possess.

That's how we ought to consider the obvious benefits of “better integration” between Macau and the rest of the nation.

In Confucianism, a similar concept is expressed through the idea of “harmony”, which stresses the importance of working together and achieving balance, suggesting that a well-functioning society or family is greater than the individual contributions of its members.

In Taoism, “effortless action” reflects the idea that a harmonious whole emerges when individuals act in accordance with the natural flow of life, again leading to outcomes that transcend individual efforts.

Both schools of thought highlight the significance of unity and interconnectedness, resonating with the idea that “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

China's economic miracle, which started with Deng Xiaoping's famed “reform and opening up” drive in 1978, is, in my view, the gradually accomplished integration of Marxist theory with market-orientated policies, an approach that, thanks to Xi in particular, has produced the world's most successful poverty reduction programme that has benefitted about 800 million Chinese – a mind-boggling figure – and, ultimately, it has created one of humanity's most thriving economies.

I was able to confirm the great poverty alleviation and economic development success during my annual Winter Solstice/Christmas holidays when I travelled by

high-speed train from Zhuhai to Shanghai and back late last month. The 9½ hour, comfortable train ride enabled me to admire the well-developed countryside – including neatly cultivated fields and ponds as well as farmers' nicely designed houses. I did a similar cross-country train ride in the mid-1980s between Hong Kong and Beijing. At that time, the reform drive was still in its initial state so that the countryside looked rather different to what it is now.

As a student of Political Economy in Munich in the early 1970s I learnt what nowadays seems to be a truism, namely that railways have been facilitators of industrial growth and socio-economic progress since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. That's why it's all the more surprising that there are still countries that continue to neglect the modernisation, even the sheer development, of their railway networks, such as India and the United States.

While in Shanghai, I also noticed how well mass transport and the metropolis' old quarters have been upgraded and spruced up. Macau, as the public transport woes during the New Year holiday last week have regrettably shown us once again, could learn a lot on both development fronts from cities in the Chinese mainland (such as, for instance, Hangzhou, which I visited also last year).

On New Year's Eve I was ashamed seeing bus after bus passing through our city's main thoroughfare, Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro, with passengers – mostly but not only tourists – crammed in like sardines – and this in a city so eager to present itself as a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure – a goal set by the Central People's Government after all. Macau's record 40.06 million visitor arrivals last year should have deserved better integrated public transport services.

That's why Macau needs Beijing's enduring support, as Xi rightly pointed out, to be able to “better integrate” into the overall development of the country. Indubitably, Macau requires the Chinese mainland's continued development support.

Let's be realistically ambitious: Macau needs to further speed up the development of its still rudimentary mass-transport system – the government-owned Light Rapid Transport (LRT). The government should also look at the feasibility of licensing a DiDi-like ride-hailing system. While it is socio-economically understandable to protect the interests of local taxi owners and drivers, but as one of the world's most visited tourist destinations, burying one's head in the sand as far as ride-hailing

services are concerned – which are common virtually in all other tourist destinations in Asia and elsewhere – would be impudent.

I spent New Year's Eve and New Year's Day in the Guangdong-Macau In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin – a pleasant experience on the public transport, hotel accommodation and, last but not least, gastronomic front. Why Hengqin's progress is clearly noticeable (I visited the island infrequently back in the 1980s when it was little more than a short-trip destination for Macau people to savour freshly harvested oysters), it is obvious that the cross-boundary project is a long-term effort.

I hope that the zone will be in full swing by 2049 when the People's Republic of China (PRC) will celebrate the centenary of its founding by the Communist Party of China (CPC). In that year, according to the central authorities' vision, both national rejuvenation – the realisation of a prosperous, strong, and culturally advanced nation that plays a leading role on the world stage – and comprehensive national strength – the alignment of economic, political, cultural, and military dimensions for global influence – will have been achieved.

And what about Macau in 2049? Well, I am sure that the central authorities will find a solution that will be commensurate with the city's special past and presence. Of course, contrary to what I have been hearing from commentators for years, in that year the Macau SAR Basic Law will not “expire” for the simple reason that is a national law underpinned by Article 31 of the Constitution of the PRC: “The state may establish special administrative regions when necessary. The systems instituted in special administrative regions shall, in light of specific circumstances, be prescribed by laws enacted by the National People's Congress.”

What, I believe, will happen is that while the Basic Law will merely be amended, namely its Article 5 stating, since its promulgation in 1993 by late president Jiang Zemin that “the socialist system and policies shall not be practised in the Macau Special Administrative Region, and the previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years”.

Post-2049, Article 5 could simply be reformulated by stating that the capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged “for the time being” or “for the present”. Besides, Xi and the nation's previous leaders have repeatedly reassured Macau citizens – and their counterparts in Hong Kong for that matter – that they can be at ease about their post-2049 future (post-2047 in the case of Hong Kong).

Perhaps, and I am thinking allowed, Macau's amended Basic Law at that time could also include specific articles on the Macau-Hengqin and Macau-Greater Bay (GBA) integration systems at that time. Both are interconnected anyway.

As a long-time Macau resident, I am confident that our city's special identity and centuries-old East-meets-West “personality” are strong enough to be capable of playing a meaningful role beyond 2049, irrespective of the development stage that the ongoing GBA integration will have reached at that time.

Incidentally, as someone from a country that between 1949 and 1990 was divided into two hostile entities, I hope that by 2049 China will be reunified so that Taiwan will cease to be an anti-China pawn of foreign powers.

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai reacted to Xi's speech by saying in a statement on New Year's Day that the president's remarks on Macau “conveyed his care and concern” for our city and that the local government deeply appreciates the president's concern for Macau, “always remembering this and putting it into action”.

Sam also pledged that his government will continue to focus on the local economy's appropriate diversification and that it will further improve people's livelihoods, “actively align with the national 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, and scientifically formulate and implement [Macau's] 3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan.”

Macau's other principal officials also released statements in support of Xi's speech, pledging to heed his directives and advice.

The chief executive, who on December 20 completed the first of his five-year term at the helm of the MSAR, promised to the consolidation of a “law-based, vibrant, cultural, and blissful Macau.”

Sam can take heart in the praise he received on New Year's Eve from the central authorities in charge of Hong Kong and Macau affairs that both SARs in the past year “lived up to expectations and achieved outstanding results” and, thereby, are capable of “seizing opportunities to set sail again”.

I would like to use this opportunity to wish all our readers a prosperous 2026 and Year of the Horse. Let's hope it's a horse that is galloping quickly but safely towards further development, stability, security and contentment for all of us in Macau – the nation's cherished “pearl in the hand”, as the central authorities' frontman for Hong Kong and Macau affairs, Xia Baolong, has described our beloved city.

– Harald Brüning

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## Macau Weather

**DRY.**  
**MAINLY FINE.**  
**FORCE 3 TO 4 NORTH TO**  
**NORTHEASTERLY WINDS,**  
**BECOMING FORCE 5 WITH GUSTS.**  
**RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL**  
**RANGE BETWEEN**  
**40% AND 85%.**



**13°C~21°C**

Source: SMG

# IC launches 'Historic Centre of Macao Route'

**Khalel Vallo**

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) announced in a statement on Friday that it launched the "Historic Centre of Macao Route" on its Cultural Heritage of Macao website, aiming to invite residents and tourists to explore the city's world heritage through a curated cultural walking route.

According to the statement, the new route centres on the Historic Centre of Macao, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and links 22 historic buildings and eight plazas, including landmarks such as the A-Ma Temple and the Ruins of St. Paul's.

Designed to follow the area's undulating terrain and winding alleys, the route allows visitors to experience Macao's architectural heritage, historical development and distinctive urban landscape, aiming to highlight the city's long-standing convergence of Chinese and Western cultures, the statement said.

The route is accessible via the thematic website ([www.culturalheritage.mo/en/plans](http://www.culturalheritage.mo/en/plans)), which presents content through text and images, complemented by audio-visual guided tours and interactive maps, the statement said, adding that these features support both online exploration and on-site visits, offering users a more immersive understanding of Macao's cultural heritage.

In addition to the newly launched route, the website continues to feature the "Macao Maritime Silk Road Historic Sites Route" and the "Route of Historic Buildings with Educational Role in East-West Cultural Exchange".

The statement concluded that it will continue to explore Macao's historical resources and roll out additional themed routes in phases, striving to enrich the website's content and encouraging the public to further engage with the city's history and culture. ■

# Health Bureau offers free non-invasive prenatal testing

**Interview by Ida Cheong**

Free non-invasive prenatal testing (NIPT) services were extended on New Year's Day to pregnant women of all ages who are Macao residents, aiming to safeguard the health of both mothers and foetuses, and further promote optimal birth and child-rearing, according to a statement released by the Health Bureau (SSM) yesterday.

The statement noted that after an obstetric examination and assessment by a doctor, eligible pregnant women meeting the corresponding gestational age (11-13 weeks plus 6 days) can receive one free NIPT service through the local prenatal care network, i.e., designated health centres, the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre, or the private Kiang Wu Hospital, which allows pregnant women to receive continuous and consistent prenatal care at their routine healthcare facility.

Non-Invasive Prenatal Testing (NIPT) is a non-invasive chromosomal screening, the statement noted, adding that it only requires a blood sample from the pregnant woman to isolate foetal DNA, enabling accurate detection of whether the foetus has chromosomal abnormalities such as Down syndrome, Edwards syndrome\*, or Patau syndrome\*\*. Compared to traditional amniocentesis, this testing service offers advantages of high accuracy, safety, and no risk of miscarriage.



Lawmaker Wong Kit Cheng poses during yesterday's Post interview at her office on Rua da Barca. - Photo: Ida Cheong

Legislator Grace Wong Kit Cheng, a nurse by profession, told the *Post* yesterday that the coverage of the free NIPT service has been expanded from originally only pregnant women aged 35 and above to include all age groups, which, she said, was a positive step for optimal birth and child-rearing, adding that before NIPT screening inclusion in the free healthcare service, many expectant mothers paid for the test, and the SSM inclusion of it in free medical services alleviates the financial burden for families with pregnant women under 35.

the addition of a child-rearing allowance last year, and creating a dual layer of financial support to reduce child-rearing costs.

Meanwhile, maternity leave has been extended from 56 days to 70 days, with the government covering the salary for the additional 14 days, Wong said, adding that she suggested extending maternity leave to 90 (referencing Macao's public servant standard) or 98 days (WHO recommendations), and extending paternity leave from five days to two weeks, in order to better support parental duties and protect the rights of working women.

Wong is a member of the Women's General Association of Macau (widely known as Fu Luen, the short form of its name in Cantonese). ■

\* Edwards syndrome, also known as Trisomy 18, is a severe chromosomal disorder caused by the presence of an extra copy of chromosome 18. This additional genetic material leads to severe developmental delays and life-threatening medical complications. -DeepSeek

\*\* Patau syndrome, also known as Trisomy 13, is a severe genetic disorder caused by the presence of an extra copy of chromosome 13. This extra genetic material disrupts normal development, resulting in multiple, life-threatening medical conditions and severe intellectual disability. -DeepSeek

## 2025 birth rate drops 22.3 pct

Wong noted that, as of yesterday the Statistics and Census Service (DSEC) had not yet confirmed the 2025 birth rate data. However, according to data provided by relevant authorities, the estimated total number of births for last year is around 2,800, compared to 3,607 local newborns in 2024, representing a year-on-year decrease of 22.3 percent, indicating an accelerated period of declining birth rates, Wong added.

Wong pointed out that the government has been gradually strengthening support across financial assistance, maternity leave rights, and assisted reproduction policies, including increasing its birth allowance since 2017,



This screenshot downloaded from the local Cultural Heritage website yesterday shows the newly launched "Historic Centre of Macao Route" alongside the "Macao Maritime Silk Road Historic Sites Route" and the "Route of Historic Buildings with Educational Role in East-West Cultural Exchange".

# Application for catering equipment subsidy starts today

**Ida Cheong**

The "Macao Catering Industry Smart Upgrade Programme" opens for applications today, aiming to support small and medium-sized (SME) local restaurants and other eateries in their transformation and upgrading through the adoption of smart or

automated equipment, according to a joint statement released by the Economic and Technological Development Bureau and the public Macau Productivity and Technology Transfer Centre (CPTTM) yesterday.

The application period starts today through January 23. An eligible enterprise must have no more than 100 employees and operate a dine-in establishment that holds a valid catering licence or has a catering licence application being processed, the statement said.

The statement noted that successful applicants will receive a grant for purchasing smart or automated equipment. The subsidy covers up to 80 percent of the eligible purchase costs, with a maximum grant of 50,000 patacas, including the cost of the equipment itself, transportation, installation, and first-year maintenance services.

The statement added that interested enterprises are advised to first contact accredited suppliers to understand the equipment details. After confirming their needs, they can submit their application through the online system, adding that following the application deadline, the implementing body will conduct a random draw to determine the processing order of all eligible applications.

Additionally, catering businesses that applied for the earlier "Catering Industry Smart Upgrade Pilot Programme" that were deemed eligible but did not receive funding, will automatically be entered into this new draw and are not required to re-apply, the statement said.

The list of enterprises selected through the draw will be announced on the CPTTM website next month. For more details regarding the scheme, please visit (<https://www.cpttm.org.mo/smartkitchen/>) ■

**澳門餐飲業 智能升級計劃**

資助內容: 資助餐飲企業購置智能化或自動化的餐飲設備, 包括食材準備設備、烹飪設備、清潔設備、飲品調製設備及配餐設備等

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This handout poster provided by the Economic and Technological Development Bureau and public Macau Productivity and Technology Transfer Centre (CPTTM) yesterday shows details of the "Macao Catering Industry Smart Upgrade Programme" starting today.

**MACAU ANGLICAN COLLEGE**

**PARENTS' INFORMATION MEETING FOR ENROLING NEW K1 PUPILS FOR SEPTEMBER 2026**

**MACAU ANGLICAN COLLEGE**  
 AV. PADRE TOMAS PEREIRA, NO. 109-117, TAIPA, MACAU  
 THIRD FLOOR, SCHOOL HALL  
 ON  
 TUESDAY, JANUARY 06<sup>th</sup> 2026, 7 P.M.

- \* Four K1 classes commence in September 2026.
- \* 104 places will be offered to new K1 pupils aged 3.
- \* English and Putonghua are the main languages of instruction.
- \* Creative teaching styles; child-centred learning; multi-cultural inclusive education environment.
- \* DSEDJ Central Registration: January 6 to 16, 2026.
- \* MAC Application Documents Submission Days: February 10 to 12, 2026.
- \* Interview Days: March 7, 9 to 13, 2026.

# Macau Int'l Airport passenger traffic dips 1.6 pct in 2025

Staff Reporter

Macau International Airport (MIA) recorded 7.52 million passengers last year, a year-on-year decrease of 1.6 percent, its operator announced in a statement on New Year's Day.

"In 2025, due to the surrounding economic environment and some uncertain factors, passenger traffic fell short of expectations during the first half of the year and the summer holiday period, resulting in an overall decrease of 1.6 percent in annual passenger traffic compared to the previous year," Macau International Airport Co. Ltd. (CAM) said in the statement, adding that "there has been a 26

percent growth in the number of international routes and a 7 percent increase in international passenger traffic compared to last year."

Without elaborating, CAM also said that "cargo volume achieved a year-on-year growth of 1.08 percent."

According to the statement, passenger traffic showed a steady increase in the fourth quarter of last year. CAM underlined the importance of last year's newly added or resumed routes to Jinan, Cebu, Haiphong, Ho Chi Minh City, and Vladivostok.

CAM underlined that the airport is currently connecting Macau to 47 destinations

in the Chinese mainland, China's Taiwan region, Southeast and Northeast Asia.

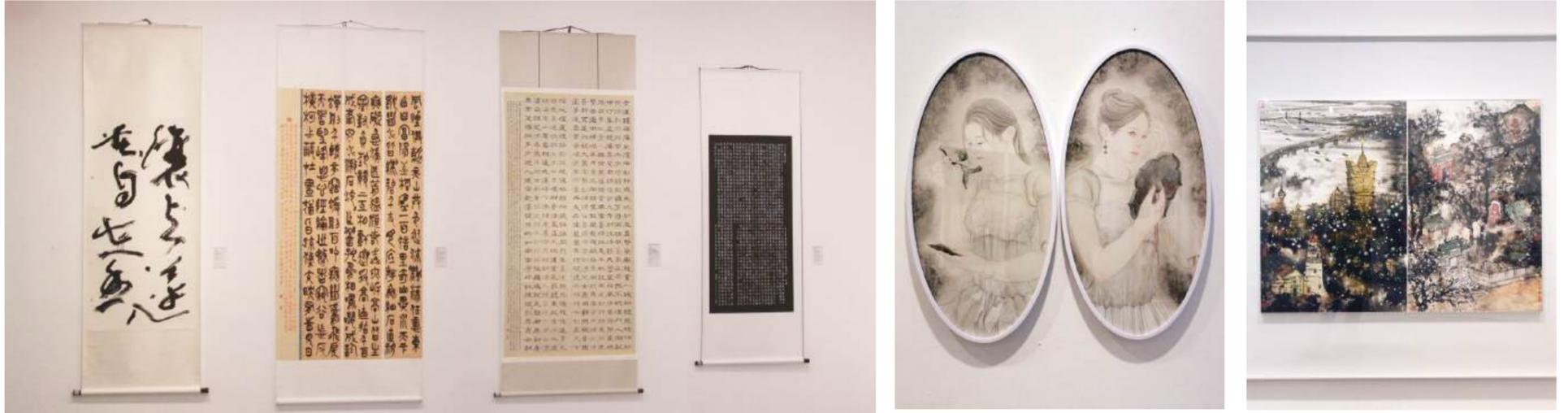
CAM also said that it was "actively engaging with multiple domestic and international airlines to discuss the launch of further routes, including potential cooperation with Middle Eastern airlines on routes to the Middle East."

Currently, the statement pointed out, "passengers have multiple options to reach destinations in the Middle East, Europe, and [North] America from Macau, with layover times of approximately two to three hours via hubs in Chengdu, Chongqing, or Taiwan."

In terms of passenger services, the

statement said, CAM "plans to introduce the 'Check' N Fly' hotel check-in and baggage drop-off service before the Lunar New Year in 2026. This initiative aims to provide a seamless travel experience by enabling passengers to drop off luggage upon leaving the hotel and proceed directly to boarding upon arrival at the airport, offering more convenient and attentive travel services."

The single-runway airport started operating on December 8, 1995, when Macau was still under temporary Portuguese administration. The local government is the majority-control owner of CAM. ■



## 'Annual Exhibition of Macao Visual Arts 2025' showcases Chinese painting & calligraphy

Khalel Vallo

The "Annual Exhibition of Macao Visual Arts 2025 – Chinese Painting and Calligraphy Category", organised by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), is presenting award-winning and selected works by local artists at its Tap Seac Gallery in Praça do Tap Siac, aiming to highlight the vitality of traditional Chinese arts in Macau.

This year's exhibition received 161 pieces/sets of artworks submitted by 161 local artists, spanning traditional Chinese painting, calligraphy, seal carving and experimental ink art. From these entries, 61 pieces/sets were selected for display, offering a comprehensive overview of the artistic skills, styles and creative directions of local practitioners of Chinese painting and calligraphy.

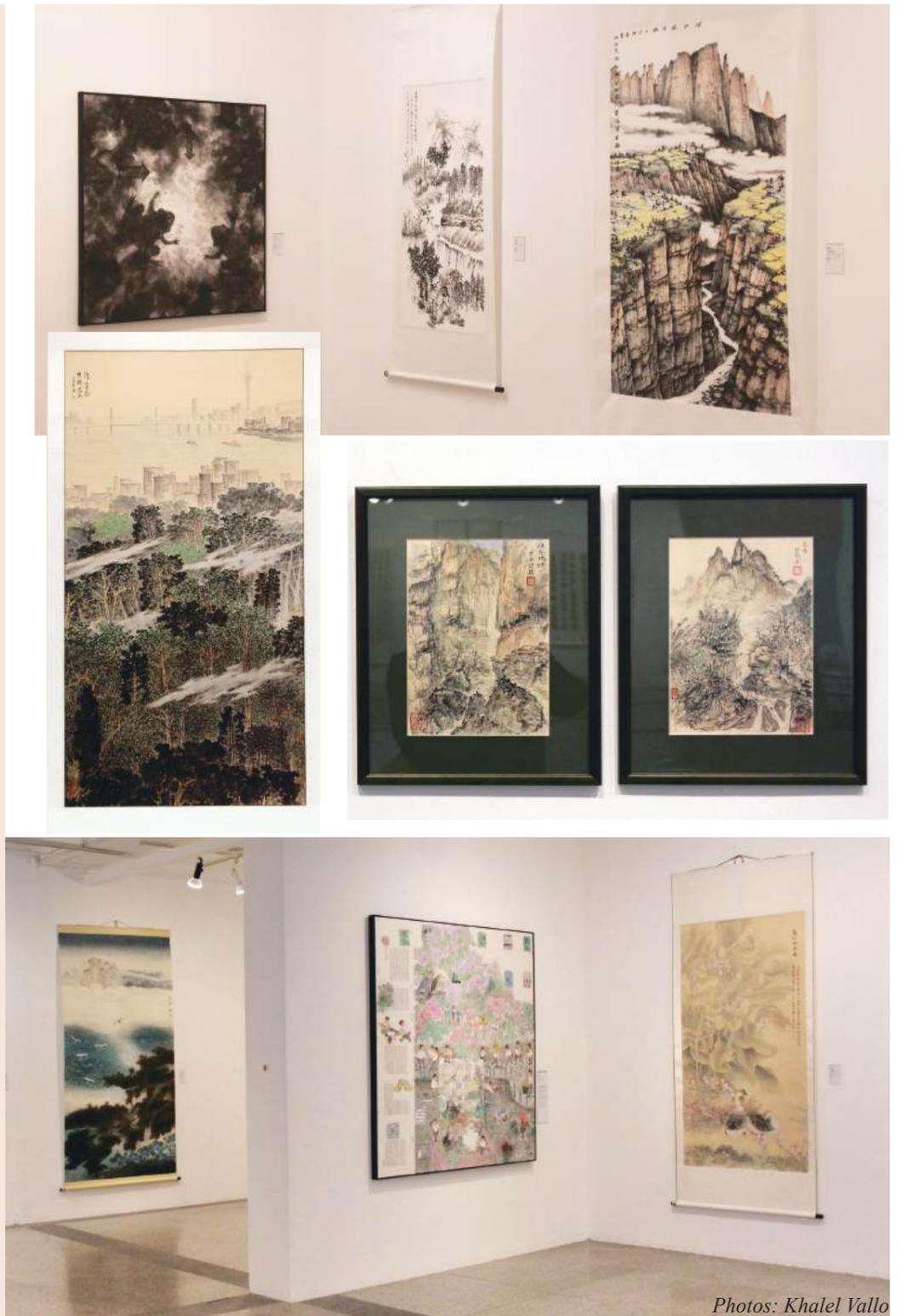
According to a statement by the bureau last month, the exhibition aims to demonstrate how local artists continue to reinterpret Chinese artistic traditions while injecting new creative energy into the field. In addition to the exhibition, guided tours in Cantonese and Putonghua were held last month at designated times, allowing the public to gain deeper insights into the featured works and artistic techniques.

According to an information board message displayed at the exhibition, IC President Deland Leong Wau Man said that art "is a mirror of life, reflecting the pulse of the times and the microcosm of society", noting that each work embodies the respective creator's observation and interpretation of the contemporary world.

The message said that the bureau has long organised visual arts exhibitions to provide a platform for local artists and emerging talents, thereby promoting Macau's cultural and artistic development, adding that the awarded and selected works demonstrate "solid traditional foundations and masterful techniques", while also showing a balance between structured brushwork and expressive use of ink.

According to the message, the exhibition also highlighted the presence of young artists, who "honour tradition while boldly innovating", injecting new vitality into Macau's Chinese painting and calligraphy scene and contributing to the promotion of excellent traditional Chinese culture.

The "Annual Exhibition of Macao Visual Arts 2025 – Chinese Painting and Calligraphy Category" is on at the Tap Seac Gallery until this Thursday. With free admission, the exhibition is open daily from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., including public holidays.



Photos: Khalel Vallo

# New Year address by Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai

*Dear fellow residents, friends,*

As the old year gives way to the new, a new chapter of brilliance unfolds. The resounding chimes of 2026 are ready to ring. At this wonderful moment as we bid farewell to the old and welcome the new, on behalf of the Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR), I would like to extend my heartfelt festive greetings to all fellow residents, as well as friends at home and abroad who support and attach great importance to the development of Macao.

The year 2025 has been a year of mega events, grand occasions and joyous episodes for our motherland. In the outgoing year, new and solid steps have been taken on the path of Chinese modernisation. A military parade was successfully held on September 3, the 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan was concluded with great success and the grand blueprint for the country's future development in the upcoming five years has been mapped out in the 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan. The people of Macao are immensely proud of the great achievements made by our motherland.

The development of the SAR in 2025 has been exceptional. With the strong leadership of the central authorities and the staunch support of the motherland, the great importance attached by the central authorities' agencies in Macao and the patriotic organisations of Macao, as well as the generous support from all sectors across Macao, we stayed united to thoroughly follow President Xi's spirit delivered in his important speeches, resolutely uphold national sovereignty, security and development interests, proactively grasp all development opportunities, overcome various difficulties and challenges, and facilitate comprehensive development of various projects of the SAR.

In 2025, the eighth Legislative Assembly election was successfully completed, the oath-taking procedures for all civil servants were concluded, the "patriots governing Macao" principle was fully implemented and a series of events commemorating the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War was successfully held. The successful completion of the 15<sup>th</sup> National Games was a vivid demonstration of the successful integrated development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. A

special point to note, in particular, was that each and every one of us worked shoulder to shoulder to successfully combat the challenges posed by super typhoon Ragasa to safeguard the safety and property of the general public.

In 2025, we accelerated administration reform, established coordination and liaison mechanisms, integrated and reorganised various departments, promoted e-governance and continuously improved administrative efficiency. We focused on promoting economic recovery and appropriate economic diversification, strengthening policy support and increasing investment efforts, initiating preliminary work for the establishment of the government-led industrial and guidance funds in a progressive manner. We bolstered the healthy and orderly development of the gaming industry and closed down "satellite casinos" in accordance with the law. New progress in the construction of the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin has been made. Robust growth was seen in the development of the "four new industries" and the number of Macao-funded businesses and enterprises, as well as Macao residents living and working in the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin has significantly increased. The integration and connectivity between Macao and Hengqin has been further strengthened. By implementing targeted policies to help the ones in need and concentrating on the provision of eldercare and childcare services, better efforts and resources have been made and gathered in order to provide better employment opportunities and services for education, healthcare, welfare, eldercare, childcare and housing for the betterment of people's livelihoods. By increasing the amounts for pensions, old age and disability allowances and launching the Childcare Subsidy Scheme, people's basic living needs have been secured. Meanwhile, by leveraging Macao's strengths, we strengthened our internal coordination and external connectivity and exerted efforts to enhance Macao's global influence and competitiveness.

In 2025, we stayed committed to forging resilience through challenges, consolidating strength through perseverance, staying united through solidarity and breaking new ground through dedication. We have composed a new chapter for the development of the SAR, leaving footprints as we braved forward and



Undated photo of Macau SAR Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai provided by the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) on New Year's Day.

embarked on a new journey to the future.

The year 2026 marks the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan of our country and the Third Five-Year Plan of Macao. We will proactively align with the development strategies of the [national] 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan and scientifically draw up and implement the [local] Third Five-Year Plan, grasping all development opportunities in order to yield better achievements for the SAR. We will stay committed to upholding the defence of national security, consolidate the foundation of patriotism for our country and Macao and maintain overall social harmony and stability. We will resolutely uphold and perfect the principle of the executive-led system, continue to deepen public administration reform and enhance governance efficiency. We are determined to solidify the promotion of appropriate economic diversification, effectively implement the strategic planning of economic diversification, expedite the establishment of the government-led industrial and guidance funds, progressively advance the construction of the four major projects and accelerate quality development of the "1+4" diversified industries. We will implement the development plan with the strategic positioning of "Macao+Hengqin", focus on the "three benchmarks" requirements, expedite the construction of the Cooperation Zone with the objective to

realise integrated development of Macao and Hengqin. We will deliver practical results to the general public, support young people to embark on a path to success and excellence, ensure residents' rights to employment, eldercare, medical and education services. We will stay committed to strengthening Macao's disaster prevention and mitigation system, improving public security and safety capacity and building a safe and livable Macao. We will continue to leverage our role as "One Centre, One Platform and One Base" and "One High Ground", proactively participate in and contribute to the construction of the "Belt and Road" and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, seek better achievements in the pursuit of high-level opening-up to the outside world and better integrate into and contribute to national development.

Recently, I paid a duty visit to Beijing. President Xi Jinping and the central authorities attach great importance to the development of the Macao SAR. They have offered important guidelines and raised new requirements. We will not fail the hopes and responsibilities entrusted upon us by President Xi Jinping and the central authorities. We will forge ahead with determination, advance with courage and fortitude, and break new ground for a new landscape of the quality development of the "One Country, Two Systems" cause.

*Fellow residents, friends,*

As the ray of hope of the new year illuminates Macao, this blessed land of the lotus, we are ready to march forward with solid steps to embark on a new journey. Let us join hands, stay united, forge ahead with determination and compose a brilliant new chapter by branding the city as law-based Macao, vibrant Macao, cultural Macao, blissful Macao.

I wish our great country prosperity and harmony!

May Macao be blessed with stability and vibrancy!

May everyone be blessed with joy and happiness!

End Item

*N.B. English translation of full text of MSAR Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai's 2026 New Year's address provided by the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS). Minor edits by The Macau Post Daily.*

## PJ launch 'Threads' account to fight crime

*Armando Neves*

The Judiciary Police (PJ) announced in a statement on Friday that they have launched a Threads\* account to promote their ongoing fight against crime.

According to the statement, in order to continuously expand the reach of crime prevention publicity and align with the habits of contemporary youth who primarily obtain information through the internet and from social platforms, the Judiciary Police officially launched their "Threads" official account, "pjmacao", on Friday.

The statement said that information will be disseminated in a concise, easy-to-understand, and visual format, accurately delivering updates on Macau's public security conditions and crime prevention-related content. By leveraging user comments and shares, the reach of this kind of information among the public, particularly the youth demographic, will be expanded, the statement said.

The statement noted that the initiative will provide the Judiciary Police with a new channel for interacting with young people. Through the platform, according to the statement, opinions and suggestions from the youth demographic can be collected, enabling continuous optimisation of policing efforts and crime prevention



This handout image provided by the Judiciary Police (PJ) on Friday shows the QR code of their Threads account.

strategies to align more closely with young people's preferences. This approach not only helps achieve comprehensive coverage of crime prevention information but also effectively enhances awareness of crime prevention among local youth, the statement said.

Since 2015, according to the statement, the Judiciary Police have actively developed diversified communication

channels, combining online and offline methods to promote crime prevention education. The Judiciary Police have progressively established multiple official social media accounts, including the "nam.pjmacao" and "PJadvise" Facebook pages, an official YouTube channel, and official accounts on Instagram, WeChat, Video Channel, Weibo, Douyin, Toutiao, and Xiaohongshu, totalling 10 platforms, the statement said.

According to the statement, through posts, short videos, and other formats on social media platforms, these efforts have strengthened public attention to crime prevention information, significantly contributing to the promotion of police-community cooperation and the dissemination of crime prevention messages.

Members of the public need only search for "pjmacao" on "Threads" to follow the official account and browse the latest police updates and engaging short videos. ■

*\*Threads is a text-based social media platform developed by Meta Platforms (the company behind Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp). Launched on July 5, 2023, it serves as a direct competitor to X (formerly Twitter), focusing on short-form public conversations, like microblogging. – Grok*

# Align with the nation's '15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan' to strive for innovation & create new chapter in Macao's development: Sam

**Staff Reporter**

Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai noted in a statement on New Year's Day that in his 2026 New Year's address to the nation, President Xi Jinping emphasised the firm commitment to implementing the "One Country, Two Systems" policy, supporting Hong Kong and Macao in better integrating into the national development framework, and maintaining long-term prosperity and stability. The president's words conveyed his care and concern for us, providing immense warmth to the residents of Macao and significantly boosting the confidence of local society in the future. The MSAR government will further steadfastly and accurately implement the "One Country, Two Systems" policy, actively align with the national "15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan," and effectively develop and implement the MSAR's "3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan," ensuring that we do not disappoint President Xi and the Central People's Government's expectations and support.

On New Year's Day, the Hong Kong and Macao Work Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council released an article titled "Living Up to Expectations and Achieving Outstanding Results—Seizing Opportunities to Set Sail Again," highly praising the development of Hong Kong

and Macao over the past year, noting that the development of these regions has always been close to President Xi's heart. Under the leadership and guidance of President Xi, the Hong Kong and Macao SARs have lived up to expectations and progressed in unity.

Sam underlined that the MSAR Government deeply appreciates President Xi's concern for Macao, always remembering this and putting it into action. Over the past year, we united various sectors of society to comprehensively, accurately, and steadfastly implement the "One Country, Two Systems" policy, firmly safeguarding the nation's sovereignty, security, and development interests. We fully realised the principle of "Patriots Governing Macao," successfully formed the 8<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly, and completed the legal oath-taking for all current and newly appointed civil servants. We have consistently focused on the appropriate diversification of the economy, witnessing a significant rise in inbound visitors in 2025, surpassing the historical record set in 2019, indicating a robust recovery in the tourism industry. We pragmatically accelerated the construction of the Hengqin Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone, achieving substantial growth in the "Four New" industries in Hengqin, Macao-owned enterprises, and residents living and working in the cooperation zone. At the same time, we focused on improving people's wellbeing,

optimising governance efficiency, and comprehensively promoting the development of various undertakings in the MSAR.

Sam further stated that during his duty visit to Beijing last month, President Xi provided important directives and set new requirements for the MSAR to excel in its work. President Xi's concern for Macao is all-encompassing; he also expressed particular satisfaction with the successful hosting of the National Games by Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macao in his New Year's address, reflecting the country's profound affection and steadfast support for Macao as "the pearl in the palm of the motherland."

Sam emphasised that as we enter 2026, President Xi's expectations provide us with fundamental guidelines and confidence to pragmatically advance Macao's current and future development. The MSAR government will pursue reform decisively, take responsibility, unite society, seize opportunities, promote appropriate economic diversification, improve people's livelihoods, actively align with the national "15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan," and scientifically formulate and implement Macao's "3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan," striving to create a new chapter in Macao's development and contribute "Macao's strength" to serving the national development agenda. ■

*N.B. Translation arranged and edited by The Macau Post Daily.*

## Macau's legislative, judicial organs, top officials, chief prosecutor react to Xi's New Year's address

**Tony Wong**

In addition to Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai, the heads of the special administrative region's legislative and judicial organs, as well as the special administrative region's nine principal officials and the chief public prosecutor have reacted in separate statements to President Xi Jinping's 2026 New Year's address that he delivered on New Year's Eve.

Their statements were also made in reply to an article titled "Living Up to Expectations and Achieving Outstanding Results, Seizing Opportunities to Set Sail Again" released by the Hong Kong and Macao Work Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council on New Year's Day.

Legislative Assembly (AL) President André Cheong Weng Chon pledged the local legislature's commitment to safeguarding the nation's sovereignty, security and development interests, while broadly listening to public opinion and enhancing its work capabilities and abilities to serve residents.

Cheong said that the local legislature will take the initiative to uphold Macau's constitutional order and executive-led system while strengthening communication with the local government in order to improve legislative efficiency.

Cheong said that the legislature will strengthen its legislative and oversight work primarily in aspects such as safeguarding national security, improving residents' well-being, optimising the city's business environment, promoting Macau's appropriate economic diversification, advancing public administration reforms, and enhancing the alignment of rules between Macau and Hengqin.

Court of Final Appeal (TUI) President Song Man Lei said that Macau's courts will firmly grasp the core essence of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle when exercising their duties with the aim of providing a stronger judicial guarantee for Macau's better integration into the nation's overall development and for maintaining the city's long-term prosperity and stability.

On the one hand, Song said, the local courts will adhere to the people-centred approach and provide strong rule-of-law support for Macau to appropriately diversify its economy.

On the other hand, Song said, the courts will earnestly fulfil their constitutional responsibility to safeguard national security, lawfully punish all types of activities and conduct endangering national security, and resolutely

uphold the authority of the nation's Constitution and the MSAR Basic Law.

In their respective remarks, Macau's nine principal officials and the chief public prosecutor all made their respective commitments to align with the nation's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan.

Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak pledged his commitment to advancing public administration reform, streamlining government structure, and improving public administration efficiency.

Secretary for Economy and Finance Anton Tai Kin Ip pledged his commitment to advancing the city's appropriate economic diversification, fostering the deep integration between technological achievements and industries, and enhancing the integrated development between Macau and Hengqin.

Secretary for Security Chan Tsz King said that the local government will build a strong defence line for safeguarding national security and improve its various contingency plans for effectively prevent and combat activities that endanger national security.

Chan said that the government will continue to improve its disaster prevention measures.

Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam said that the government will optimise the allocation of education resources and enhance healthcare and elderly care services.

Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man said that the government will further improve its housing and transport polices and enhance urban revitalisation of the city's old quarters.

Commissioner Against Corruption Ao Ieong Seong said that the anti-graft body will study possible amendments to the law on preventing and combating bribery in private entities.

Commissioner of Audit Elsie Ao Ieong U said that her commission will continue to ensure the government's effective use of public resources and that their use meets Macau's overall interests.

Unitary Police Service (SPU) Commissioner Leong Man Cheong and Macau Customs Service Director-General Adriano Marques Ho pledged commitments to continuing to improve law enforcement efficiency.

Prosecutor General Tong Hio Fong said that Macau will strengthen the alignment of rules with Hengqin, while the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) will deepen the application of smart technologies in its work. ■

## Gongbei Customs seizes 1.56 grams of meth at HZMB

**Armindo Neves**

Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers seized 1.56 grams of methamphetamine (commonly known as "ice") at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB).

According to the statement, on that day, at around 12 p.m., customs officers at the mega-bridge's Zhuhai Port (checkpoint) passenger clearance hall noticed a man behaving strangely and immediately intercepted him for inspection.

Upon examination, they discovered a transparent plastic bag containing suspicious white crystals and another bag of red powder inside a cigarette packet in his trouser pocket. The bags weighed 1.56 grams and 0.17 grams, respectively, according to the statement, which added that analyses by a professional institution confirmed that the substances tested positive for methamphetamine and caffeine.

The statement pointed out that direct ingestion of methamphetamine stimulates the



*This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs yesterday shows meth and caffeine seized by its officers at the HZMB Zhuhai Port recently.*

central nervous system in the brain, leading to an extremely high risk of addiction. It may trigger mental disorders, organ failure, and induce violent behaviour.

Gongbei Customs reminded the public that, according to various laws and regulations such as the "Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China" and the "Anti-Drug Law of the People's Republic

of China," drugs refer to opium, heroin, methamphetamine (ice), morphine, cannabis, cocaine, and other narcotic and psychotropic substances controlled by the state that can lead to addiction. Smuggling or transporting drugs, regardless of the quantity, is subject to criminal liability and will be penalised accordingly, the statement warned. ■

## UTM aims for 1,300 students in 2026/27, highlights AI & technology integration

Rui Pastorin

The public Macao University of Tourism Studies (UTM) is aiming to expand its student intake for the 2026-2027 academic year, with the expected number in total enrolment being around 1,300 students, Rector Fanny Vong Chuk Kwan told reporters on the sidelines of the tertiary education institution's Open Day on its Taipa Campus on Avenida Padre Tomás Pereira (徐日昇寅公馬路) yesterday.

Vong told reporters that the expected figure was much more than UTM's total student intake of 952 the previous academic year.

Vong also highlighted that UTM is hoping to "infuse more technology and smartness" into its programmes in the coming academic year to provide students with the skills needed to navigate emerging challenges and issues in the tourism industry, which is increasingly affected by technology.

"Whether we are creating new programmes or revamping old programmes, we are aware that we need students to be well-versed in not only the traditional tourism and hospitality world, but also how to apply AI or apply different smart technologies into their real-life

work setting in the future in this industry", Vong said, adding that it will be launching a new MBA (Master of Business Administration) programme and the Bachelor of Science in Management and Data Science.

Vong said that the new MBA will help students focus on the tourism sector and apply new management and AI enhanced management skills in the tourism industry.

The Data Science and Management Course, meanwhile, is particularly important, hoping to equip students with tools to analyse the trends and new issues in the fast-changing tourism industry. "We see a lot of contactless operations. We see a lot of other technology being implemented in the hotel setting, the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) area and tourism operations. But we want students to have an understanding of how they should, as a part of this industry growth, manage skills and tools as well as not forget how to maintain human warmth and touch throughout this process."

Meanwhile, regarding the new campus at Macao-Hengqin International Education (University) Town, which is slated for completion



Macao University of Tourism (UTM) Rector Fanny Vong Chuk Kwan speaks with reporters on the sidelines of yesterday's 2026 Open Day on the UTM Taipa Campus. - Photos: Rui Pastorin

in 2030, Vong told the *Post*: "The first phase is to have a temporary teaching facility in Dezhi Plaza. This is being smoothly done on the way", while renovation and some touch-up work are "being done as we speak".

Vong added: "For the universities ourselves, we have already arranged or prepared programmes to be delivered there", having arranged some 30 faculty members to be in charge of programmes to be delivered in Hengqin.

Moreover, recruitment of students is still ongoing, Vong said, noting: "In the recruitment announcement we have already specified that some of these programmes will be delivered in both campuses [Macao and Hengqin]... We are preparing the parents and students to understand this new move. We are also preparing our own faculty [members] to deliver programmes over there", Vong concluded.

Yesterday's Open Day featured a variety of activities, including games, workshops and discussion sessions, along with booths providing programme and admission information for prospective students and other members of the public. ■



Students and other members of the public explore some of the booths set up on the UTM Taipa Campus.

## CTT's 'Annual Album 2025' available from today

Rui Pastorin

The "Annual Album 2025" will be available for purchase starting today, with the collection featuring 14 sets of stamps and 10 souvenir sheets issued last year.

Priced at 560 patacas, the Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) said in a statement on Friday that Macau's philatelic products are showcased in the album's loose-leaf pages featuring coloured stamp images and technical data, the statement noted.

Regarding the design of the album, the statement highlighted that it contains various symbols depicting a range of topics, such as Macau's philatelic heritage and local stamps being "as delightful as flowers blooming in the spring".

The album, according to the



This photo provided by the Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) on Friday shows its "Annual Album 2025".

statement, can be bought at the Philatelic Shop of the General Post Office (GPO) in the city's main square, Largo do Senado, in the city centre, the Communications Museum on Estrada de D. Maria II, (澳門馬交石炮台馬路七號) and at the Rua do

Campo (水坑尾街) Post Office.

The statement added that stamp collectors also have the option to buy an empty Annual Album, with its pages printed with the design of the philatelic products. It is priced at 180 patacas. ■

## Macau weather 'marked by extreme phenomena' in 2025: observatory

Staff Reporter

Macau's weather in 2025 stood out as a year marked by extreme phenomena, setting several records, the Macau Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) said in a report on New Year's Eve.

In the report summarising Macau's weather last year, the observatory pointed out that "global temperature anomalies continued to persist in 2025," adding that, according to a report published by the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), last year may have been the second or third hottest on record. The period from 2015 to 2025 is set to be the 11 hottest years recorded to date.

"With global warming, extreme weather events are occurring more frequently around the world. In Macau, 2025 stood out as a year marked by extreme phenomena, setting several records," the observatory said.

In its report, the observatory analysed last year's "extreme weather conditions" in Macau as follows:

### Tropical Storms

In 2025, Macau was affected by 14 tropical storms, breaking the previous record of 12 tropical storms recorded in 1974, thus making it the year with the highest number of tropical storms since 1968. During the passage of Typhoon "Wipha" and Super Typhoon "Ragasa", the Tropical Storm Signal No. 10 was issued twice in the same year for the first time. At the same time, the Signal No. 10 resulting from "Ragasa" was in effect for a record-breaking duration of 10 hours and 30 minutes, being a Signal No. 10 Typhoon that passed 90 km from Macau.

Moreover, throughout the year, a total of four tropical storms led to the issuance of Tropical Storm Signal No. 8, including Typhoon "Wipha", Severe Tropical Cyclone "Tapah", Super Typhoon "Ragasa", and Typhoon "Matmo". Last year equalled 1993, 2008, and 2022 for the highest number of issuances of Signal No. 8.

During the impact of Typhoon "Ragasa", significant flooding occurred due to "storm surge" conditions, with the tide reaching 4.67 metres, causing severe widespread flooding in Macau. In some areas of the Inner Harbour neighbourhood, the maximum flood height reached 1.51 metres, the fourth highest on record since 1967.

### Heavy Rain

Although the total precipitation in 2025 was normal, extreme

rainfall events occurred frequently. The heavy rain signal was issued 37 times throughout the year. The "Black" signal was issued twice, and the "Red" signal was issued four times. This marked the second year with the highest number of heavy rain signal issuances since the current heavy rain signal system came into force (the first was in 2021). During the period when the Black Heavy Rain Signal was in effect on August 14, a maximum hourly rainfall of 110.0 millimetres was recorded at the Ka-Ho Meteorological Station, causing severe flooding in the Cotai area. The water level monitoring station on Caminho das Hortas in Taipa recorded a maximum flood level of 0.92 metres.

### Hot Weather

The overall temperature in Macau showed a warming trend in 2025. The annual average temperature was 23.2 degrees Celsius, 0.4 degrees Celsius higher than the climatic averages, likely making it the fifth hottest year since 1952. The total number of hot days throughout the year was 37, exceeding the climatic average of 31.3 days by 5.7 days. On the other hand, the number of warm nights was 11, which is similar to the climatic average of 11.5 nights. During the year, only 27 cold days were recorded, representing a decrease of 12.1 days compared to the climatic average of 39.1 days. The increase in the number of hot days in Macau contrasts sharply with the decrease in cold days, reflecting that, in the context of global warming, high-temperature events in Macau will become increasingly frequent.

### Overview

In 2025, the maximum recorded temperature on July 5 was 35.3 degrees Celsius, while the minimum recorded temperature on January 27 was 9.4 degrees Celsius.

The total annual precipitation was 1,891.0 millimetres, considered normal. The number of rainy days recorded was 139 days, while the maximum daily precipitation recorded on August 14 was 265.4 millimetres.

The total annual sunshine duration was 2,551.4 hours (106 days and 41 minutes), which is relatively high, while the total annual evaporation was 861.3 millimetres, considered normal. ■

*N.B. Translation from Portuguese arranged and edited by The Macau Post Daily, including various addenda. The translation, however, is a shortened version of the original text.*

# President Xi's 2026 New Year message

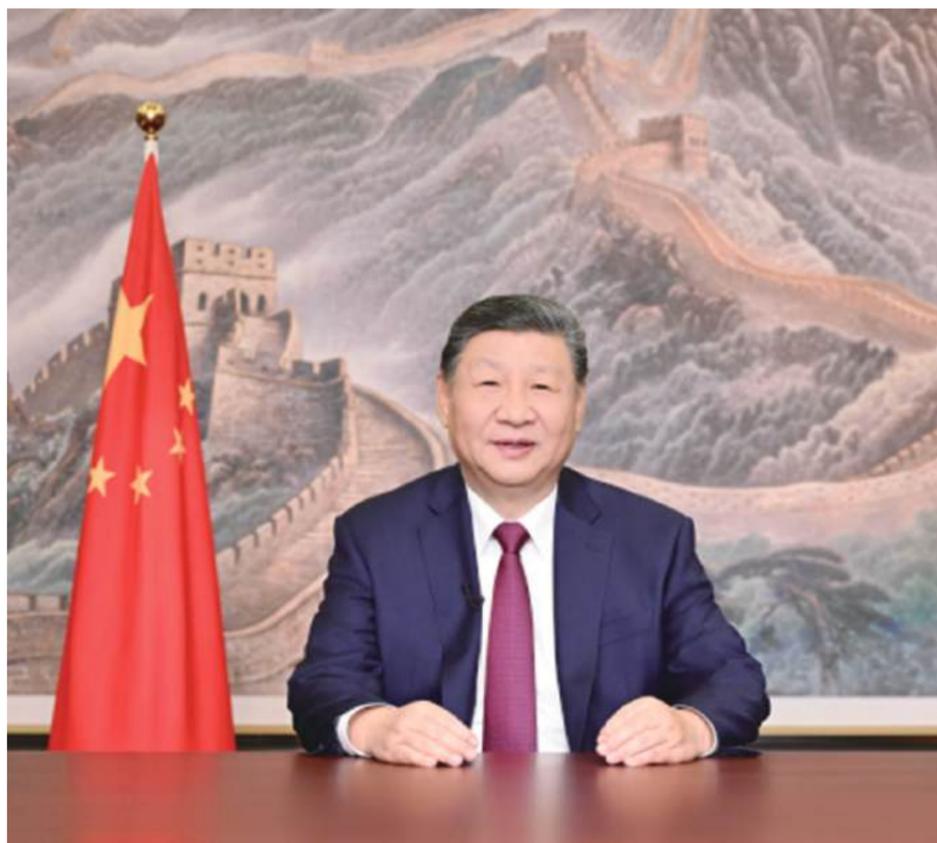
On New Year's Eve, Chinese President Xi Jinping delivered his 2026 New Year message through China Media Group and the internet. The following is the full text of the message:

Greetings to all! Year after year, life opens a fresh chapter. As the new year begins, I extend my best wishes to you from Beijing!

The year 2025 marks the completion of China's 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan for economic and social development. Over the past five years, we have pressed ahead with enterprise and fortitude, and overcome many difficulties and challenges. We met the targets in the Plan and made solid advances on the new journey of Chinese modernization. Our economic output has crossed thresholds one after another, and it is expected to reach RMB 140 trillion yuan this year. Our economic strength, scientific and technological abilities, defense capabilities, and composite national strength all reached new heights. Clear waters and lush mountains have become a salient feature of our landscape. Our people enjoy a growing sense of gain, happiness and security. The past five years have been a truly remarkable journey, and our accomplishments have not come easily. Your unwavering hard work has made our nation thrive and prosper. I salute you all for your exceptional diligence and invaluable contributions.

This year is full of indelible memories. We solemnly commemorated the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War, and established the Taiwan Recovery Day. These grand national events were majestic and powerful, and the glory of victory will shine through the pages of history. They are inspiring all the sons and daughters of the Chinese nation to remember history, honor fallen heroes, cherish peace, and create a better future. They are rallying a mighty force for the great rejuvenation of our nation.

We sought to energize high-quality development through innovation. We integrated science and technology deeply with industries, and made a stream of new innovations. Many large AI models have been competing in a race to the top, and breakthroughs have been achieved in the research and development of our own chips. All this has turned China into one of the economies with the fastest growing innovation capabilities. The Tianwen-2 probe began its star-chasing journey to explore asteroids and comets. Construction of the hydropower project at the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River started. China's first aircraft carrier equipped with an electromagnetic



President Xi Jinping delivers his 2026 New Year message in Beijing on December 31, 2026.

— Xinhua

catapult system was officially commissioned. Humanoid robots did kung fu kicks, and drones performed spectacular light shows. Inventions and innovations have boosted new quality productive forces and added colorful dimensions to our lives.

We endeavored to nurture our spiritual home with cultural development. There was a surging public interest in cultural relics, museums, and intangible cultural heritage. A new Chinese cultural site was added to the World Heritage List. Cultural IPs such as Wukong and Nezha became global hits. The younger generation came to deem classic Chinese culture as the finest form of aesthetic expression. The cultural and tourism sectors thrived. The "super league" football games in our cities and villages attracted numerous fans. Ice and snow sports ignited people's passion for the winter season. Tradition is now embracing modernity, and the Chinese culture is shining in even greater splendor.

We joined hands to build a better life and enjoyed it together. I attended celebrations in Xizang and Xinjiang. From the snow-covered plateau to both sides of the Tianshan Mountains, people of various ethnic groups are united as one, like seeds of a pomegranate sticking together. With white khata and passionate singing and dancing,

they expressed their love of the motherland and the happiness they enjoy. No issue of the people is too small; we care for every leaf and tend every branch in the garden of people's well-being. Over the past year, the rights and interests of the workforce in new forms of employment have been better protected, facilities have been upgraded to bring more convenience to the elderly, and each family with childcare needs has received a subsidy of RMB 300 yuan per month. When the happy hum of daily life fills every home, the big family of our nation will go from strength to strength.

We continued to embrace the world with open arms. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit in Tianjin and the Global Leaders' Meeting on Women were very successful; and island-wide special customs operations were launched in the Hainan Free Trade Port. To better address climate change, China announced new Nationally Determined Contributions. After announcing the three global initiatives on development, security, and civilization, I put forward the Global Governance Initiative to promote a more just and equitable global governance system. The world today is undergoing both changes and turbulence, and some regions are still engulfed in war. China always stands on the right side of history,

and is ready to work with all countries to advance world peace and development and build a community with a shared future for humanity.

Not long ago, I attended the opening ceremony of the National Games, and I was glad to see Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao coming together in unity and acting in unison. We should unwaveringly implement the policy of One Country, Two Systems, and support Hong Kong and Macao in better integrating into the overall development of our country and maintaining long-term prosperity and stability. We Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait share a bond of blood and kinship. The reunification of our motherland, a trend of the times, is unstoppable!

Only a strong Communist Party of China can make our country strong. We launched the study and education program on fully implementing the central Party leadership's eight-point decision on improving Party and government conduct. We exercised strict governance of the Party through credible measures, and promoted the Party's self-revolution to fight corruption and advance healthy governance. As a result, the conduct of our Party and government steadily improved. We must stay true to our original aspiration and founding mission, and pursue our goal with perseverance and dedication. We should continue to give a good answer to the question on how to maintain long-term governance put forth in a cave dwelling in Yan'an and prove ourselves worthy of the people's expectation in the new era.

The year 2026 marks the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan. A successful venture should start with a good plan and with clear goals set. We should focus on our goals and tasks, boost confidence, and build momentum to press ahead. We should take solid steps to promote high-quality development, further deepen reform and opening up across the board, deliver prosperity for all, and write a new chapter in the story of China's miracle.

The dream lofty, the journey long—bold strides will get us there. Let us charge ahead like horses with courage, vitality, and energy, fight for our dreams and our happiness, and turn our great vision into beautiful realities.

The sun of the new year will soon rise. May our great motherland stand in magnificence! May the fields across the country deliver good harvest! May our nation bathe in the glory of the morning! May you all enjoy life to the fullest, and achieve every success! May all your dreams come true!

— Xinhua

## China always opposes imposing one country's will on another: Wang Yi

BEIJING — China always opposes the use or threat of force, as well as any imposition of one country's will on another, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday when speaking of the situation in Venezuela.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks when holding the 7<sup>th</sup> Round of the China-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue with Pakistani Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar in Beijing.

Wang said the current international situation is more volatile and intertwined, with unilateral bullying becoming increasingly severe.

The sudden change of situation in

Venezuela has drawn high attention from the international community, Wang said.

"We never believe that any country can play the role of world policeman, nor do we agree that any country can claim itself to be an international judge," Wang said, adding that the sovereignty and security of all countries should be fully protected by international law.

China is willing to work with the international community, including Pakistan, to firmly uphold the UN Charter, maintain the bottom line of international morality, adhere to the equality of all countries' sovereignty, and jointly safeguard world peace and development and promote the building of a community with a shared future for humanity, Wang said.

On China-Pakistan relations, Wang said China hopes this visit will kick off the commemoration of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Noting that China-Pakistan all-weather strategic cooperative partnership has become a crucial stabilizing factor in the regional and even global landscape, Wang said China is willing to work with Pakistan to implement the consensus reached between the leaders of the two countries in the new year, and advance the building of a China-Pakistan community with a shared future.

Dar has conveyed cordial greetings from the leaders of Pakistan to the Chinese leaders, and extended congratulations on the CPC's adoption of the recommendations for

formulating the 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan.

Dar said Pakistan was willing to work with China to carry forward the traditional friendship, enhance strategic alignment of their development plans, deepen practical cooperation, and advance the continuous growth of the Pakistan-China all-weather strategic cooperative partnership.

Pakistan reaffirms its adherence to the one-China principle and will continue to firmly support China on all issues concerning its core interests, added Dar.

Both sides agreed to unite the Global South to safeguard common interests, uphold the UN Charter, and oppose bullying acts that violate the sovereignty of other countries.

— Xinhua

## Myanmar junta frees hundreds of prisoners in annual amnesty



Relatives wait for prisoners to be released during an annual amnesty to mark Myanmar's independence day outside Insein prison in Yangon yesterday. — AFP

YANGON — Hundreds of prisoners walked free in Myanmar yesterday after the junta announced annual independence day pardons, just a week after the start of an election that international monitors have denounced as sham.

The military grabbed power in a 2021 coup that triggered civil war, pitting pro-democracy rebels against junta forces, with thousands of activists since arrested.

A dozen buses full of released prisoners exited Yangon's Insein prison yesterday morning, with some waving to crowds of well-wishers, AFP journalists saw.

Family members outside the prison held up signs with the names of their jailed loved ones, unsure if they would be among those freed.

One man said he was hoping to see his father, who was jailed for "doing politics".

"His sentence is about to end. I hope he will be released as soon as possible," said the man, who declined to be named due to security concerns.

In total, junta chief Min Aung Hlaing pardoned 6,134 imprisoned Myanmar nationals, the National Defence and Security Council said, adding 52 foreign prisoners would also be released and deported.

The yearly prisoner amnesty that the junta said was "on humanitarian and compassionate grounds" was announced as the country marks 78 years of independence from British colonial rule.

Several freed men and women embraced relatives in tears outside Insein, which is notorious for alleged brutal rights abuses.

Some who spoke to AFP said they had been arrested for drugs, theft and other non-political crimes.

"I am very happy to reunite with my family," said 35-year-old Yazar Tun, as he held one of his three children outside Insein.

He said he served around eight months of a year-long sentence for loitering.

Prominent model and former doctor Nang Mwe San was also among those released, an AFP journalist saw.

She was arrested in 2022 on a charge of "harming culture and

dignity" for posting allegedly explicit videos online.

### Decisive lead

Myanmar's junta opened voting in a phased month-long election a week ago, with its leaders pledging the poll would bring on democracy and national reconciliation.

However, rights advocates and Western diplomats have condemned it as a sham and a rebranding of martial rule.

The pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) has a decisive lead in the first phase, winning 90 percent of the lower house seats announced so far, according to official results published in state media on Saturday and yesterday.

Many analysts describe the USDP as a civilian proxy of the military.

Two more phases of voting are scheduled for January 11 and 25.

The massively popular but dissolved National League for Democracy (NLD) of democratic figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi did not appear on ballots, and she has been jailed since the coup.

The military overturned the results of the last poll in 2020 after the NLD defeated the USDP by a landslide.

The military and USDP then alleged massive voter fraud, claims that international monitors say were unfounded.

The junta has said turnout in the first phase last month exceeded 50 percent of eligible voters, below the 2020 participation rate of around 70 percent.

Myanmar frequently grants amnesty to thousands of prisoners to commemorate holidays or Buddhist festivals.

The junta announced the release of more than 9,000 prisoners to mark independence day in 2024, and nearly 6,000 for the same occasion last year.

A key aide to Suu Kyi was among hundreds of prisoners freed in a pre-election amnesty in November.

The junta said that month it was dropping sentences for more than 3,000 prisoners, after they were prosecuted under post-coup legislation restricting free speech.

— AFP

## N Korea fires ballistic missiles in first test of 2026

Kang Jin-kyu

SEOUL — North Korea fired multiple ballistic missiles off its east coast yesterday, Seoul's military said, a day after a major US military operation against Pyongyang's socialist ally Venezuela.

The first launch of the year came just hours before South Korea's leader headed to China for a summit that is expected to feature ties with the North.

Seoul's defence ministry said it had detected "several projectiles, presumed to be ballistic missiles" fired from near the North Korean capital Pyongyang around 7:50 a.m. [local time].

The missiles flew approximately 900 kilometres, the military said, adding that South Korea and ally the United States were "closely analysing the specifications" while "maintaining a full readiness posture".

The launch follows the US operation that snatched Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro out of his country - a nightmare scenario for North Korea's leadership, which has long feared a so-called "decapitation strike" of that kind and accused Washington of seeking to remove it from power.

One analyst said Saturday's operation in Venezuela likely played a role in the decision to carry out the launch.

Seoul's Office of National Security convened an emergency meeting following the launch, which a presidency statement said "constitutes a provocative act in violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions".

Japan's defence ministry also said it had detected a possible ballistic missile, noting that two

projectiles reached an altitude of 50 kilometres and flew distances of 900 and 950 kilometres respectively.

"North Korea's nuclear and missile development threatens the peace and stability of our country and the international society, and is absolutely intolerable," Japan's Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi told reporters.

Pyongyang last launched a ballistic missile in November, when it staged a test after US President Donald Trump approved South Korea's plan to build a nuclear-powered submarine.

In a statement shared by Pyongyang's state media yesterday, the North Korean foreign ministry condemned the US attack on Venezuela as a "serious encroachment of sovereignty".

"The incident is another example that clearly confirms once again the rogue and brutal nature of the US," it said.

Pyongyang has for decades argued it needs its nuclear and missile programmes as a deterrent against alleged regime change efforts by Washington. The United States has offered Pyongyang repeated assurances that it has no such plans.

"They likely fear that if the United States so chooses, it could launch a precision strike at any moment, threatening the regime's survival," said Hong Min, an analyst at the Seoul-based Korea Institute for National Unification.

"The underlying message is likely that attacking North Korea would not be as easy as a strike on Venezuela," he said.

A former senior North Korean diplomat who defected in 2023

said Pyongyang should learn from the US operation.

It came after Maduro "squandered a valuable opportunity through bluster", Lee Il-kyu, Pyongyang's former political counsellor in Cuba, wrote on social media.

### 'Expansion'

The test also came as South Korean President Lee Jae Myung was expected in Beijing for talks with his counterpart Xi Jinping, whose government is a key economic backer of North Korea.

Lee hopes to possibly harness China's clout over North Korea to support his bid to improve ties with Pyongyang.

North Korea has stepped up missile testing significantly in recent years.

Analysts say this drive is aimed at improving precision strike capabilities, challenging the United States as well as South Korea, and testing weapons before potentially exporting them to Russia.

Pyongyang is also set to hold a landmark congress of its ruling party in the coming weeks, its first in five years.

Economic policy, as well as defence and military planning, are likely to be high on the agenda.

Ahead of that conclave, leader Kim Jong Un ordered the "expansion" and modernisation of the country's missile production.

State media reported yesterday that Kim had visited a facility involved in making tactical guided weapons.

He ordered them to expand current production capacity by 250 percent, the state-run Korean Central News Agency said. — AFP

## Philippines records 1,113 road crashes during holidays

MANILA — The Philippine Department of Health (DOH) has said it recorded 1,113 road crash cases during the holiday season from December 21, 2025, to January 2, 2026, an increase of 82 percent compared with the same

period in 2024-2025.

In a statement released on Saturday, the DOH said young people were disproportionately affected, with 508 cases involving individuals aged 15 to 29 years old.

The DOH also noted widespread

non-compliance with basic safety measures. A total of 965 victims were found not using safety accessories, such as helmets or seatbelts.

Of the seven fatalities, four were aged between 16 and 26 years old, it added. — Xinhua

## Indonesian rescuers find Spanish tourist's body after boat sinks

JAKARTA — Rescuers retrieved yesterday the body of a Spanish man who had been missing since a tourist boat sank in rough seas off eastern Indonesia more than a week ago, an official said.

Fathur Rahman, head of the local search and rescue agency, said a body was found floating in waters near Rinca island, around 2 kilometres from site of the accident on December 26.

Following an identification process, authorities have confirmed the victim's identity, 44-year-old

Fernando Martin Carreras, added Fathur.

Carreras was the coach of the reserve women's team of the Spanish club Valencia, according to an earlier statement from Real Madrid.

The man's wife and one of their daughters were among seven people rescued after the vessel went down in the Padar Island Strait, near the popular destination of Labuan Bajo.

Authorities found the body of another daughter last Monday, leaving two people still missing — both boys from the same family.

Rescuers continue their search, aided by divers and sonar systems, Fathur said.

Local police have launched an investigation into the sinking, state news agency Antara reported on Thursday, with a police spokesman saying legal action would be taken if authorities can find evidence of negligence.

Maritime accidents occur regularly in Indonesia, a Southeast Asian archipelago of around 17,000 islands, often due to lax safety standards or bad weather. — AFP

## Stuck in Afghanistan, Pakistanis want border to finally reopen

Aminullah Samsoor

SPIN BOLDAK – Nearly three months since border clashes prompted the closure of land crossings between Pakistan and Afghanistan, university students, merchants and families are left hanging with no way of getting back.

“We miss our parents and relatives,” said Shah Faisal, 25, who studies medicine in an Afghan university and was hoping to visit his family back in Pakistan during the winter break.

But the border has been shut since October 12, leaving many like him with no viable option of making it home.

Flights are prohibitively expensive, and smuggling routes come at too great a risk.

A student representative said there were around 500 to 600 Pakistanis at universities in one Afghan province alone, Nangarhar, who were looking for a way back.

Shah Fahad Amjad, 22, who attends medical school in the provincial capital Jalalabad, called on “both countries to open the road” and let students visit their families.

As the border closure drags on, some are also concerned about their visa status or financial situation.

The crisis has caused problems “for us, who are students in Afghanistan, but also for Afghans who are students in Pakistan”, said 23-year-old Barkat Ullah Wazir, who studies in Jalalabad.

The colonial-era border between the South Asian neighbours stretches more than 2,600 kilometres across mountainous terrain.

Known as the Durand Line, it is normally a conduit between the Pakistanis and Afghans who live near it and share deep cultural, economic and even family ties.

It also divides Pashtun communities who live on either side - the ethnic group from which the Taliban, which returned to



This photograph taken on December 29, 2025 shows Shah Faisal, a Pakistani national studying at an Afghan university, using his laptop at his residence in Jalalabad, Afghanistan.

– AFP

power in Kabul in 2021, draws much of its support.

### ‘We are displaced’

The border has remained largely closed since the October clashes that killed more than 70 people, with the exception of Afghan refugees and migrants Pakistan has expelled.

Islamabad accused Kabul of harbouring militant groups that launch attacks on Pakistani soil, allegations that the Afghan Taliban denies.

Mediation efforts have failed to produce a lasting agreement, and both sides have warned fighting could still resume.

Pakistani shopkeeper Ehsanullah Himmat, 21, had travelled to the southern Afghan city of Kandahar with his family to attend a relative’s wedding, but “now we cannot go back to our home”, he said.

“Fighting broke out, the road was closed,” he told AFP, turning the planned two-day trip into a lengthy ordeal with no end in sight.

“We cannot go via smuggling routes, and other routes exist but they are very long and cost a lot of money” that the family cannot afford, he said.

Now “it is cold, it’s winter, and we are displaced with our children”, Himmat said.

Relatives in Afghanistan have hosted the family, but he said he felt a sense of “embarrassment” for overstaying their welcome.

### ‘Standstill’

Pakistan’s foreign ministry said on Thursday that nearly 1,200 people had approached its embassy in Kabul requesting assistance to return home, including 549 students.

Just over 300 people had flown back by the end of December, according to the ministry.

Neither government has given any clear signal about when or under what conditions the border could reopen.

At the Spin Boldak crossing point, the road leading into Pakistan is blocked.

Truck driver Khan Muhammad, 39, has been there for weeks on end, unable to work or return to his city of Quetta, about 100 kilometres from the border.

“In these two-and-a-half months I haven’t loaded even a single kilo of cargo. Work has come to a standstill,” he said.

“All our livelihoods depend on this gate,” he said, hoping the border would reopen soon.

When it does, “everyone will be able to return to their homes”, he said.

– AFP

## Pakistani PM underscores equal opportunities for visually impaired

ISLAMABAD – Pakistan’s Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif yesterday highlighted the government’s commitment to the rights of visually impaired persons and called for greater inclusion.

In a message on World Braille Day, the prime minister praised the global impact of Louis Braille’s system, which has expanded access to education and information for millions.

Sharif acknowledged the contributions of visually impaired Pakistanis across various fields, citing Saima Saleem, an officer at

Pakistan’s mission to the UN, as an example of overcoming challenges with excellence.

He highlighted Pakistan’s efforts in providing accessible published works for those with visual or print disabilities.

The prime minister urged schools, civil society, media and the private sector to promote Braille literacy and accessible facilities.

He reaffirmed that the government is committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens to contribute to the country’s development.

– Xinhua

## Brunei postal services marks milestone with PosBru soft launch

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN – Brunei’s postal services marked a significant milestone with the soft launch of its corporatized entity, PosBru Sdn Bhd, on Saturday, signaling a new chapter in the transformation of the national postal sector.

The soft launch represents an early phase in PosBru’s transition toward becoming a more robust, commercially sustainable, and digitally enabled national postal operator for Brunei.

The corporatization initiative is aimed at strengthening operational

efficiency while positioning the postal service to adapt to changing market dynamics and customer expectations.

Brunei’s Deputy Minister of Finance and Economy Pengiran Hajah Zety Sufina, who serves as chairperson of PosBru Sdn Bhd, highlighted the company’s commitment to enhancing service efficiency and driving innovation within the postal sector. She said the transformation is intended to better meet the evolving needs of the public and the business community.

– Xinhua

## Nepal’s ex-PM gives statement to protest crackdown inquiry

KATHMANDU – Nepal’s former prime minister KP Sharma Oli gave a statement yesterday to a government commission investigating the deadly crackdown on a youth-led uprising that toppled his government in September.

Oli had previously said he would not appear before the commission, accusing it of lacking a “constitutional basis”.

“He has given a statement,” commission spokesperson Bigyan Raj Sharma told AFP, adding that it happened when officials reached Oli’s residence to deliver a summons for questioning.

It is unclear if further questioning will be conducted.

Seventy-seven people were killed during the unrest last year, triggered by a brief government ban on social media and building on public frustration after years of economic stagnation and allegations of entrenched political corruption.

On September 9, protests spread nationwide on their second day, and parliament and offices were set ablaze, prompting the government’s collapse.

The four-time prime minister

quit office shortly after angry protesters set fire to his house and hundreds of other buildings.

Oli, 73, wrote in his resignation letter that he hoped stepping down would help “towards a political solution and resolution of the problems”.

He has since been re-elected as leader of his Communist Party of Nepal – Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), meaning he will oversee its preparations for upcoming polls.

Nepal will hold elections on March 5, with a caretaker administration led by former chief justice Sushila Karki running the country until then.

One of the interim prime minister’s first acts was to establish the commission to investigate the violence.

Soon after, authorities imposed a travel ban on Oli and several other former top officials.

The commission has already recorded statements from key security leaders, including former home minister Ramesh Lekhak, army chief Ashok Raj Sigdel, and the former head of police, Chandra Kuber Khapung.

– AFP

## Sri Lanka launches investigation over English syllabus’ gay website link

COLOMBO – Sri Lanka launched a criminal investigation on Friday after a government syllabus for 11 and 12-year-olds directed pupils to a gay chat website to improve their language skills.

The Education Ministry lodged a formal complaint with police and launched an internal inquiry to establish how the blunder took place.

“We suspect sabotage,” Education Ministry Secretary Nalaka Kaluwewe told AFP.

“We are in the process of implementing educational reforms, and this could be an attempt to stall them.”

The Grade Six English syllabus suggested pupils could find a penal to improve their language

skills via buddy.net – an online chat website titled the “Bad Boys Club”, which invites users to “show your kinky side”.

Homosexual activity is illegal in Sri Lanka, and the penalty for same-sex relations is up to 10 years in prison – although there have been very few prosecutions in recent years.

Red-faced authorities ordered the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission to block access to the site on local internet providers.

Kaluwewe said the 165-page English syllabus had been vetted by three separate teams, including English professors, but none had detected the error.

Officials said the page

containing the referral to the chat site had been removed from 400,000 copies of the syllabus before being sent to schools in time for the start of the next term today.

There were also several spelling mistakes in the document, which its authors have admitted was prepared with the help of artificial intelligence platforms.

Efforts to decriminalise homosexuality have met with strong opposition from Sri Lanka’s conservative Buddhist and Catholic clergy.

The head of the National Institute of Education, which is responsible for the syllabus, Manjula Vithanapathirana, has stepped down pending the investigations.

– AFP

## Denmark irritated by wife of Trump aide posting pic of US-flagged Greenland

COPENHAGEN – Denmark yesterday made its displeasure known after the wife of President Donald Trump's most influential aide posted a social media picture of Greenland painted in the colours of the US flag.

Katie Miller – wife of Trump's deputy chief of staff Stephen Miller – put the contentiously altered image of the Danish autonomous territory on her X feed on Saturday, after the US military operation against Venezuela.

Her post had a single word above it: "SOON".

Denmark's ambassador to the US, Jesper Moeller Soerensen, reacted yesterday with his own post saying: "We expect full respect for the territorial integrity" of Denmark, above a link to Katie Miller's image.

Trump has repeatedly made clear that he wants Greenland to become an annexed part of the United States.

Moves edging towards that goal by his government – including his appointment of an envoy to the Danish territory – have drawn the ire of both Copenhagen and the European Union.

Stephen Miller is widely seen as the architect of much of Trump's policies, guiding the president on his hardline immigration policies and domestic agenda.

America's European allies were rattled by Trump sending in his military on Saturday to attack Caracas and grab Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro, who is now being held by US authorities in New York.

Trump has said the United States will now "run" Venezuela indefinitely and tap its huge oil reserves.

In Greenland's case, Trump has claimed that making the Danish territory part of the United States would serve US national security interests, given its strategic location on the Arctic. Greenland is also rich in key critical minerals used in high-tech sectors.

Denmark's ambassador gave a pointed "friendly reminder" in response to Katie Miller's post that his country – a NATO member – has "significantly boosted its Arctic security efforts" and worked together with the US on that.

"We are close allies and should continue to work together as such," Soerensen wrote.

Katie Miller was deputy press secretary under Trump at the Department of Homeland Security during his first term.

She later worked as communications director for then vice president Mike Pence and also acted as his press secretary. – AFP

## Crans-Montana's ski tourism continues, in shadow of Swiss tragedy



A mourner lays a bouquet at a makeshift memorial near the Constellation bar yesterday in Crans-Montana in honour of the victims of the deadly blaze that ripped through the venue in the luxury Alpine ski resort on New Year's Eve. Authorities investigating the New Year's blaze in the Swiss resort of Crans-Montana have identified 24 of the 40 people killed, including 11 minors and six foreign nationals, Swiss police said yesterday. Also 119 were injured during the fire, most of them seriously, according to the latest toll. – AFP

### Robin Millard

CRANS-MONTANA, Switzerland – Painfully aware of the fire tragedy in Crans-Montana, ski tourists said at the weekend they had opted to stay in the Alpine Swiss resort whose tourism-dependent community remains open for business as it mourns the many victims.

The shellshocked town has toned down the party vibe out of respect for the victims of Thursday's blaze at Le Constellation bar, with concerts cancelled and music and DJs muted.

But it insists the resort needs to keep going.

Skiers heading to and from the slopes voiced sympathy for victims of the horrific bar inferno that killed 40 and injured 119 others out celebrating the New Year.

Some have visited the scene of the tragedy, while others have purposefully stayed away.

"If everyone cancelled their holidays it would be terrible: it wouldn't help the community here" at all after the "shocking" tragedy, said one 39-year-old Australian tourist, visiting from London on a four-night stay.

"It would be a double whammy for the town," which relies on tourism.

### 'Heartbreaking'

Isabelle Herstine, 58, a Swiss woman who now lives in the United States, said she had been coming to Crans-Montana since her youth – and intended to keep visiting a place she loves.

"I also went to these bars when I was young," she said.

"Why stop coming? It's an accident, it's tragic, but ... this can happen anywhere; it's happened in other places around the world.

"It will not stop me from coming here, that's for sure."

Sofiane, 31, from Toronto, was visiting Crans-Montana for the first time, during a trip to Europe, and arrived the day after the tragedy.

His group considered cancelling, but said it would have been difficult to do so, having already paid up for the week.

Seeing that life in Crans-Montana was carrying on, they felt it was OK to stay.

Sofiane said the scene of the disaster was "heartbreaking, because you can see clearly victims there."

But they also saw people trying to continue on with their lives, "and we said, you know what, if people here are still open to that, we shouldn't stop" either.

### Finding the right tone

Bruno Huggler, Crans-Montana Tourism's chief executive, told AFP the upscale resort would try to strike the right tone in the busy winter weeks ahead.

The town is muting the party vibe out of respect for the victims of Thursday's blaze at Le Constellation bar, where many young people had gathered to see in the New Year.

Huggler said concerts had been cancelled, and the resort had stopped the music and DJs in bars at the bottom of the slopes, but had

kept the venues open to give people somewhere to connect.

"Especially in such hard times, the personal contact exchange is so important. So, give them a place, but it must not be with a party. So, slower, and respectful for all these victims."

He said many tourists had decided to stay on, and he had no information indicating that people were cancelling bookings.

"Everybody is really touched by this, but on the other side we have a resort which is fully open, which is fully accessible, and needs to go on," he said.

He said it was important to find "the right tone and not to forget that it's not only a tourism resort... it's a community that lives here".

Locking down the resort "would not help anybody either", but he said the tourism industry would "be respectful in this: how we keep on going, and how we will manage the coming month".

While some parts of the town might look as if things are carrying on as normal, near Le Constellation, "you dive into the very deep sadness of what happened".

One first-time visitor from the Dominican Republic, who did not want to give his name, said he arrived on Thursday night, after the disaster, but could not face seeing the scene of the tragedy.

"Someone said it was eerie. We haven't been to it. We're staying away from there, for sure – deliberately. You don't want to see it." – AFP

## Berlin police suspect far-left group of attack on power cables

BERLIN – Police in Berlin said yesterday they suspected a far-left group of being behind an arson attack that has left tens of thousands of homes in the German capital without power.

Early on Saturday morning (local time) several high-voltage power cables were spotted in flames on a bridge near a power plant in the southwest of the city.

The blaze was quickly put out, but about 45,500 households and 2,200 businesses were left without electricity.

A police spokesman told AFP that a claim of responsibility posted online from the left-wing extremist Vulkangruppe ("Volcano Group") was "plausible", while adding that "investigations are continuing".

The statement from the Volcano Group posted online said that the power station in Berlin's Lichterfelde district had been "successfully sabotaged" but said that "the fossil fuel economy was the target of the action, not power cuts".

Berlin's Mayor Kai Wegner condemned the attack, saying in a statement on X that "suspected left-wing extremists knowingly put lives at risk, especially those of patients in hospitals, as well as the elderly, children and families".

City authorities said that

most of the hospitals and clinics affected by the outage had been reconnected yesterday.

However, the affected schools are likely to remain closed for now.

Franziska Giffey, the economy minister in Berlin's state government, told German media that "several incendiary devices" had caused the damage to the cables.

She said that as of yesterday morning power had been restored to around 10,000 homes.

However, Stromnetz Berlin, which runs the city's electricity network, said that it would take until Thursday to reconnect all customers, with freezing temperatures slowing the repair work to the cables.

The Volcano Group has previously said it was behind an act of sabotage at a Tesla factory in which power lines supplying the site were set on fire.

The German capital also suffered a major power outage affecting tens of thousands of residents in September after a blaze hit electricity pylons.

Police also suspected arson in that case, and an unnamed anarchist group claimed responsibility online for starting the blaze.

Germany has been on high alert for sabotage activities directed at its infrastructure, including from foreign powers. – AFP

## Portugal sees homicide levels reach 7-year high in 2025

LISBON – Portugal recorded at least 108 intentional homicides in the past year, the highest number since 2018, when 110 were recorded, Portuguese newspaper *Jornal de Notícias* reported on Friday, citing Annual Internal Security Report data (RASI).

The 108<sup>th</sup> case occurred less than

two hours before the end of 2025. It was a result of a family dispute at Leirosa beach, Figueira da Foz, approximately 195 km north of Lisbon, according to the RASI, a document analyzing the country's internal security situation.

The rise in homicides comes amid broader discussions about

public security resources and law enforcement capacity in Portugal.

Although the 2025 increase represents a concerning trend for authorities monitoring public safety indicators, Portugal maintains relatively low homicide rates compared to global averages.

– Xinhua

# Maduro in NY jail as Trump says US to 'run' Venezuela

NEW YORK – Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro was in a New York jail yesterday after a shock US snatch-and-grab raid to remove him from power and assert Washington's control over the oil-rich South American nation.

The US military carried out air strikes on Venezuela's capital Caracas early on Saturday (local time). Commandos captured Maduro and his wife, who were flown to New York City where they face drug-trafficking and weapons charges.

Handcuffed and in sandals, Maduro was escorted by federal agents through a Manhattan US Drug Enforcement Administration facility, a video posted by the White House on social media showed.

"Good night, happy New Year," the 63-year-old leftist was heard saying in English.

Maduro had led Venezuela with an iron fist for more than a decade through a series of elections alleged by the opposition to have been rigged. He came to power after the death of his charismatic mentor, former president Hugo Chávez.

As news of his seizure rippled out, exiled Venezuelans waved flags and celebrated in plazas from Madrid to Santiago. About eight million Venezuelans have fled the grinding poverty of their homeland. There was muted joy too in Caracas.

"I felt the explosions lift me out of bed. In that instant I thought: 'My God, the day has come,' and I cried," María Eugenia Escobar, a 58-year-old resident told AFP.



This screengrab taken from the X account of Rapid Response 47, the official White House rapid response account, shows Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro (centre) escorted by DEA agents inside the headquarters of the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in lower Manhattan, New York, on Saturday. – AFP

But the streets in the Venezuelan capital remained quiet and many residents were apprehensive about what is to come.

Trump said he was "designating people" from his cabinet to take control, but gave no further details.

The Republican leader appeared to reject the possibility of the country's opposition taking power, instead saying he could work with Maduro's Vice President Delcy Rodríguez.

Rodríguez poured cold water on that prospect, demanding Maduro's release and vowing to "defend" the country.

Late Saturday, Venezuela's Supreme Court ordered Rodríguez to assume presidential powers "in an acting capacity".

But Trump indicated US involvement is likely for the long haul, adding to the confusion over how the country would be run.

"We're going to stay until such time as the proper transition can take place," he said.

## Massive crude reserves

Trump's interest in tapping into Venezuela's massive crude reserves also became clearer.

"We're going to have our very large United States oil companies... go in, spend billions of US dollars, fix the badly broken infrastructure," he said.

"We'll be selling large amounts of oil."

Venezuela produces just under a million barrels of crude a day, according to the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and sells most of it on the black market at steep discounts.

Trump claims Caracas is using oil money to finance "drug terrorism, human trafficking, murder and kidnapping".

Venezuelan territory contains about 17 percent of the world's oil reserves, the International Energy Agency (IEA) reported in 2023, but is far from being a leading global producer after years of alleged mismanagement.

## Blackout and bombing

Venezuelans had been bracing for attacks as US forces spent months massing off the coast.

Caracas residents woke to explosions and the sound of military helicopters around 2 a.m. (local time) on Saturday. Air strikes hit a major military base and an airbase, among other sites, for nearly an hour.

The top US military officer, General Dan Caine, said 150 aircraft took part in the operation, supporting troops who choppered in to seize Maduro with the help of months of intelligence into his daily habits – down to "what he ate" and what pets he kept.

Maduro and his wife "gave up" without a struggle and there was "no loss of US life," he said.

Venezuelan authorities have yet to release casualty figures. But Trump told the *New York Post* that "many" Cubans in Maduro's security detail were killed.

At a celebration in Santiago, Venezuelan Yasmery Gallardo, 61, said she planned to return home soon from Chile where she had lived for the past eight years, telling AFP that Maduro's capture was "tremendous for us".

In Miami, revellers cheered Trump as they embraced and waved the Venezuelan flag.

For others in Florida, the uncertainty that surrounded the future of their home country sapped their euphoria.

"I don't trust Trump but I am very grateful," said Eleazar Morrison, a 47-year-old Venezuelan.

Countries such as China, Russia, and Iran, which have longstanding ties with Maduro's government, were quick to condemn the operation, but their alarm was also shared by Washington's allies including France and the EU.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said he was "deeply concerned that the rules of international law have not been respected".

At Venezuela's request, the UN Security Council will meet today to discuss the crisis, the Somali presidency of the Council told AFP.

– AFP, MPD

## Chinese EVs gain momentum in Portugal, led by BYD

LISBON – Chinese electric vehicle manufacturers are gaining increasing traction in Portugal, with BYD emerging as one of the fastest-growing brands as the country's automotive market undergoes a profound shift toward electrification.

According to figures released recently by the Portuguese Automobile Association (ACAP), BYD led Portugal's electric vehicle market in November with 645 units registered, representing a year-on-year increase of 119.4 percent. The result placed the Chinese automaker ahead of all competitors for the month and highlighted its growing presence in a market that is becoming more competitive and diversified.

From January to November, BYD recorded a total of 4,477 registrations of its electric vehicles, an increase of 90.5 percent compared with the same period last year, reflecting strong demand for its expanding range of fully electric and plug-in hybrid models.

Tesla, by contrast, registered 425 units in November, marking a sharp year-on-year decline of 46.9 percent, as intensified competition, pricing volatility and the rapid entry of Chinese brands reshaped consumer choices.

Industry observers note that the rise of Chinese electric vehicles is closely linked to the strategies of Portugal's major automotive distributors. Grupo Salvador Caetano, one of the country's largest dealership groups and a key representative of several Chinese EV

brands, sees the trend as structural rather than cyclical.

A senior executive at the group said Chinese manufacturers no longer compete solely on price but increasingly on technology, design and value. He added that consistent vehicle availability, competitive ownership costs and rapid model updates have made brands such as BYD particularly appealing to Portuguese consumers.

Consumer sentiment appears to be shifting accordingly. João Vieira, a Lisbon-based owner of a BYD Dolphin, said he chose the vehicle after comparing it with several European and American models. While price was an important factor, he pointed to the car's equipment level, warranty and driving range as decisive elements. "It felt like the most balanced option for everyday use," he said.

Ana Fernandes, who drives a BYD Seal in Setúbal, southern Lisbon metropolitan area, highlighted the driving experience and technology. She described the car as smooth, quiet and intuitive, adding that it represented a clear upgrade from her previous petrol vehicle.

Beyond BYD, other emerging brands are also strengthening their presence in Portugal's electric vehicle market. Leapmotor registered 55 units in November and 210 in the year to date. Xpeng recorded 46 units in November and 785 registrations from January to November, reflecting annual growth

of more than 1,500 percent. Polestar registered 40 units in November, bringing its year-to-date total to 484, up 85.4 percent.

Bernardo Menda, secretary general of the Portugal-China Chamber of Commerce, said that the strong performance of Chinese EV brands like BYD demonstrates not only their technological competitiveness but also their growing role in shaping sustainable mobility in Portugal, bringing more choice, innovation, and affordability to the market, which benefits both consumers and the broader transition to electric transportation.

ACAP data further show that fully electric vehicles accounted for 22.9 percent of all new car registrations in the first 11 months of the year, approaching the share of petrol vehicles at 25 percent and far surpassing diesel models at 5.7 percent. The figures underscore the pace of Portugal's transition toward electric mobility.

Although Tesla remains ahead in cumulative registrations in Portugal for the year, analysts say the narrowing gap with fast-growing Chinese brands signals a deeper market transformation. Consumers are increasingly comparing vehicles from different origins on equal terms, and Chinese electric vehicles are moving from being perceived as alternatives to becoming central players in shaping Portugal's evolving automotive landscape. – Xinhua

## Spanish protesters slam 'imperialist aggression' in Venezuela

MADRID – Around a thousand people gathered outside the US embassy in Madrid yesterday to blast "imperialist aggression" after US special forces seized Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in a military operation.

The demonstrators held up numerous banners, including one showing US President Donald Trump greedily swallowing a can of oil in the colours of the Venezuelan flag.

Another proclaimed "Trump aggressor", while one banner read "No to imperialist aggression against Venezuela".

Several protesters carried flags of the far-left Podemos party, or Spain's communists, while others held aloft Venezuelan colours.

Spain's Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, whose country gave shelter to Venezuela's opposition candidate in the 2024 presidential election, Edmundo González Urrutia, on Saturday slammed what he termed "an intervention which violates international law" which could threaten regional stability.

Sánchez called for a transitional period which would be "just and with dialogue".

The Venezuelan opposition maintains that Urrutia defeated Maduro in the 2024 poll.

Sánchez, whose government relies on the backing of far-left coalition partner Sumar, yesterday doubled down on his criticism of the US operation in a letter to Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) members, where he criticised "the recent violation of international law in Venezuela, an act that we condemn in the strongest terms".

Several hundred people also demonstrated in Amsterdam outside the US consulate on Sunday, holding up placards with slogans such as "Yankee go home", "Stop killing for oil" or "Stop Trumps Fossil Army", according to the ANP news agency. – AFP

## Gonzalo Garcia hits treble as Real Madrid thrash Betis without Mbappe



MADRID—Gonzalo Garcia bagged a hat-trick for Real Madrid as they beat Real Betis 5-1 yesterday to stay on La Liga leaders Barcelona's tail.

Spanish striker Garcia, filling in for the injured Kylian Mbappe, opened the scoring after 20 minutes and then volleyed home a superb second early in the second half to give Madrid a commanding lead.

Raul Asencio further extended Xabi Alonso's side's advantage before Cucho Hernandez pulled one back for Manuel Pellegrini's visitors.

Madrid youth academy product Garcia completed his hat-trick after 82 minutes with a clever flicked finish to delight fans at the Santiago Bernabeu, with Fran Garcia notching a late fifth.

Madrid, second, cut Barca's lead back down to four points after the champions edged Espanyol 2-0 in a Catalan derby on Saturday.

It eased the pressure on Alonso, who scraped through to 2026 at the helm despite reports he was on the verge of being sacked after a run of inconsistent form.

With top goalscorer Mbappe sidelined with a knee sprain, Alonso turned to 21-year-old forward Garcia to replace him, as he did during the Club World Cup last summer.

Garcia's opportunities have been limited this season despite acquitting himself well in the United States and he proved himself again.

"These were three very special goals, my first hat-trick here at the Bernabeu, my first goals this season as well," he told reporters, before admitting he still faces a fight for minutes.

"In front of me I obviously have the best players in the world, like Mbappe, Rodrygo (Goes), (Jude) Bellingham, Vinicius," he continued.

"I just focus on myself, which means working day by day and

taking the opportunities the coach gives me, like today, and I hope I can deliver and help my teammates every minute I get."

### Academy talents strike

Madrid started strongly and took a deserved lead through Garcia's looping header from Rodrygo's free-kick.

Betis battled back into the game and were the more dangerous team in the remainder of the first half, although they could not test Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois.

Madrid extended their lead early in the second half after an excellent finish from Garcia, who controlled Fede Valverde's long ball on his chest and volleyed home from the edge of the box.

Asencio, who also came from Madrid's youth academy, nodded home Rodrygo's corner for Madrid's third before the hour mark in one of the more convincing performances under Alonso.

With the points secured Madrid relaxed and Betis created some danger, with Giovanni Lo Celso and Rodrigo Riquelme hitting the woodwork and Hernandez rounding Courtois before drilling home.

Garcia restored Madrid's three-goal advantage with a lovely flick from Arda Guler's cross, drawing applause from the watching Mbappe.

With virtually the final kick of the game defender Fran Garcia, who played with Madrid at youth level before moving to Rayo Vallecano, fired home Valverde's cross to round off an emphatic victory.

"It was a tough game for us, one to forget and we have to turn the page as quickly as possible," said Betis midfielder Marc Roca.

Real Madrid next face rivals Atletico in the Spanish Super Cup semi-finals in Saudi Arabia on Thursday.

—AFP

## Liverpool denied by late drama at Fulham, Man Utd held by Leeds



Fulham's Welsh midfielder Harry Wilson (right) scores the opening goal to take the lead 1-0 during the English Premier League match against Liverpool at Craven Cottage in London yesterday. —AFP

Kieran Canning



LONDON — Harrison Reed struck a stunning equaliser for Fulham to salvage a 2-2 draw against Liverpool as both sides scored in stoppage time, while Manchester United were held 1-1 at Leeds yesterday.

Liverpool looked set to consolidate their place in the Premier League's top four when they came from behind to lead at Craven Cottage.

Harry Wilson opened the scoring against his former club to give Fulham a deserved half-time lead.

Liverpool improved markedly after the break to extend their unbeaten run to nine games.

Florian Wirtz levelled before Cody Gakpo steered home Jeremie Frimpong's cross in the 94th minute.

However, the visitors' celebrations were cut short when Reed took aim from outside the box and blasted into the top corner for his first goal in three years.

A point keeps Liverpool three points ahead of fifth-placed United in the battle for a place in next

season's Champions League.

The Red Devils were headed to a rare defeat at Elland Road as the sides rekindled their historic rivalry after Leeds' two-year absence from the Premier League.

Brenden Aaronson's strike early in the second half sparked wild scenes of jubilation among the home fans, but Matheus Cunha quickly levelled to ensure United did not fall to a first defeat against Leeds in 16 years.

United have consistently wasted opportunities to move into the top four in recent weeks and Ruben Amorim hinted he will not remain at Old Trafford beyond the end of his contract in 18 months' time.

"I came here to be the manager, not to be the coach," said Amorim.

"In every department - the scouting department, the sporting director - (they) need to do their job. I will do mine for 18 months and then we move on."

Tottenham did little to ease the pressure on Thomas Frank in a 1-1 draw at home to Sunderland.

Ben Davies put Spurs in front,

but they were unable to hold out for just a second home league win since the opening weekend of the season.

Brian Brobbey's equalised 10 minutes from time for Sunderland to extend their unbeaten run to five games despite being depleted by the absence of six players at the Africa Cup of Nations.

Spurs slip to 13th, three points behind eighth-placed Sunderland.

Igor Thiago's hat-trick fired Brentford up to seventh with a 4-2 win at Everton.

Only Erling Haaland has scored more goals in the Premier League this season than the Brazilian, who took his tally to 14 at the Hill Dickinson Stadium.

Nathan Collins was also on target for the Bees, who climb to within four points of the top four.

Newcastle are also back in the running for a place in next season's Champions League after a 2-0 win over Crystal Palace.

Second half goals from Bruno Guimaraes and Malick Thiaw lifted the Magpies up to ninth and within five points of Liverpool. —AFP

## Marseille crash to Ligue 1 defeat against Nantes



MARSEILLE — Marseille kickstarted the year by crashing to a 2-0 home defeat to lowly Nantes in Ligue 1 as Roberto De Zerbi's team finished with just nine men on the pitch.

Red cards either side of half-time for Arthur Vermeeren and Bilal Nadir, coupled with a Fabien Centonze strike and a late Remy Cabella penalty, condemned Marseille to a fifth defeat of the campaign as they remain eight points behind surprise league leaders Lens.

Crucially, the loss was also a missed opportunity for third-placed Marseille to open up a gap with the chasing pack for the final automatic Champions League qualification spot as they failed to capitalise on fourth-placed Lille's 2-0 defeat to

Rennes on Saturday.

Just a third victory of the season for Nantes, Ahmed Kantari's team have provisionally climbed out of the relegation zone at the expense of Auxerre, who played later.

"It gives us a boost," Nantes coach Kantari said.

"There's the satisfaction of taking three points. We're in a race for points, so it feels good.

"When we win, we feel lighter and more confident."

Marseille handed Nantes the numerical advantage on 26 minutes as midfielder Vermeeren was dismissed for an overexuberant challenge on Anthony Lopes as he tried to charge down the goalkeeper's clearance.

The visitors then took the lead five minutes later as Centonze pounced on weak parry by Geronimo Rulli to

open the scoring from close range.

De Zerbi responded immediately by sending centre-midfielder Nadir on in the place of forward Igor Paixao.

The decision did not pay off as the 22-year-old was himself dismissed after collecting a pair of yellow cards in the space of two minutes early in the second half.

Despite being down to nine, Marseille pushed in search of a leveller at the Velodrome as Nantes continued to make chances at the other end.

A clumsy Benjamin Pavard challenge on Matthijs Ablade in the Marseille box presented Nantes with the perfect chance to secure the three points, which Cabella duly did from 12 yards with just two minutes remaining on the clock. —AFP



Real Madrid's Spanish forward Gonzalo Garcia celebrates scoring his second goal during the Spanish League match against Real Betis at Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid yesterday. —AFP

## 'An enormous triumph,' amputee Baumel wins Dakar Rally first stage

**YANBU** – Frenchman Mathieu Baumel hailed an “enormous triumph” as just a year after having his leg amputated he won the opening stage of the Dakar Rally alongside Belgian driver Guillaume De Mevius yesterday.

Navigator Baumel was back at the race just 11 months after his right lower leg was amputated after being run over while helping someone who had broken down on the road in France.

Last January it had looked as if life behind the wheel was in the past for the successful co-driver and navigator.

“Just being here is an enormous triumph,” said the 49-year-old, who got into his car yesterday carrying his prosthetic limb.

Driving a mini the pair won the perilous 305km first stage at Yanbu, Saudi Arabia.

Baumel had previously won the Dakar Rally four times as co-pilot to Nasser Al-Attiyah, most recently back-to-back titles in 2022 and 2023.

Yesterday, Qatari Al-Attiyah in a Dacia was 40 seconds down in second with Czech Martin Prokop of Ford third at 1min 30sec.

De Mevius, sitting top of the heap at the finish line, admitted he was surprised.



**Hoto Rally Czech Republic's rider Martin Michek competes in the Stage 1 of the 48<sup>th</sup> edition of the Dakar Rally 2026, between Yanbu and Yanbu, Saudi Arabia, yesterday.** – AFP

“It wasn't particularly the objective to win today, but we said to ourselves with Mathieu (Baumel) that we wanted to at least win one on the Dakar stages,” he said after a stoney and dusty ride.

Al-Attiyah had mixed feelings saying he “could have lost it all” on the challenging route and lamented that he had been ahead of the day's winner for most of the stage.

French driver Sebastien Loeb came 10<sup>th</sup> in his Dacia losing three minutes with a puncture after also leading the field.

Reigning Dakar champion Yazeed Al-Rajhi was the big loser

of the day as the Saudi was slapped with a 16-minute penalty due to a missed crossing point.

In the motorcycle category, Spain's Edgar Canet, already winner of the prologue, benefited after Botswana's Ross Branch received a six-minute penalty for speeding in a restricted zone. Canet leads Australia's Daniel Sanders by just over a minute.

Today, the competitors will tackle a first big day of racing, heading towards Al Ula after more than 500km, 400 of which are individually timed.

– AFP

## Tyson Fury comes out of retirement again

### Boxing

**LONDON** – Former world heavyweight champion Tyson Fury announced yesterday he will return to boxing in 2026.

Fury has not fought since losing to Oleksandr Usyk in a bout for three of the four major world titles in December 2024.

But the 37-year-old British star posted on Instagram yesterday: “2026 is that year. Return of the mac.”

“Been away for a while but I'm back now, 37 years old and still punching. Nothing better to do than punch men in the face and get paid for it.”

Fury also said he was retiring from the sport after beating Dillian Whyte in April 2022, only to return later in the year.

Fury's history of retirement followed by U-turns meant few believed his most recent claim to end a career that had brought 34 wins in 37 contests.

He was incensed at the judges' decisions in a pair of defeats by Usyk, the only boxer to beat Fury, who said in last year's retirement message: “I'm going to end with this: Dick Turpin wore a mask.”

The self-styled “Gypsy King” fuelled speculation of another comeback over the festive period by

posting several clips on his social media feeds of himself in training.

Despite insisting he had bowed out of the sport, Fury has been repeatedly linked with a long-awaited all-British bout against Anthony Joshua, another former two-time world heavyweight champion.

The pair agreed to a fight in August 2021 when they held all the major world titles between them, but that was scuppered when Fury was ordered to take on Deontay Wilder for a third time by an arbitration hearing.

Plans were in the pipeline for Joshua and Fury to have tune-ups in the early part of this year before finally facing off against each other, either in late summer or towards the back end of 2026.

However, the car crash in Nigeria last Monday which left Joshua injured and led to the deaths of two close friends and team members has likely put boxing on the back burner for the 36-year-old.

If Joshua is unavailable, Fury could seek a trilogy fight against WBC, WBA and IBF titlist Usyk or a contest with WBO champion Fabio Wardley.

A win over either would see Fury join Muhammad Ali as a three-time world heavyweight champion.

– AFP

## Osaka wins after Raducanu pullout, Swiss book United Cup quarter-finals

### Tennis

**PERTH** – Four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka got her 2026 season off to a winning start for Japan in the United Cup, after Great Britain's Emma Raducanu pulled out of their singles clash with a foot injury.

But despite Osaka's win, GB took the match 2-1 with a deciding mixed doubles victory in the clash yesterday.

Switzerland came through the deciding mixed doubles against Italy, with a 7-5, 4-6, 10-7 win by Belinda Bencic and Jakub Paul over Sara Errani and Andrea Vavassori, enough to see the team through 2-1 into the quarter-finals.

“There was great emotion from the team. We were into it with our hearts and it showed,” Bencic said.

Against Britain, Osaka was too strong for 276<sup>th</sup>-ranked reserve Katie Swan, winning 7-6 (7/4), 6-1 as Raducanu watched from the sidelines.

“I'm proud of how I fought,” Osaka said. “I'd never played here, it was tough.”

GB captain Tim Henman said Raducanu, the 2021 US Open champion, could appear later in the event.

“She struggled with her foot at the end of last year. She's been practicing in London and is very close. Tomorrow [today] (against Greece) is a bit up in the air.”

Billy Harris, standing in for the injured Jack Draper, began with a 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 defeat of Shintaro Mochizuki. Great Britain sealed the match when Neal Skupski and Olivia

Nicholls defeated Yasutaka Uchiyama and Nao Hibino 7-5, 4-6, 10-7.

Swiss veteran Stan Wawrinka, 40 and playing his final season, matched it with 23-year-old Italian Flavio Cobolli until a double-fault on match point proved to be the downfall of the three-time Grand Slam winner.

Wawrinka, playing his second three-hour match in as many days, lost 6-4, 6-7 (2/7), 7-6 (7/4).

Bencic spoiled the 30<sup>th</sup> birthday of Jasmine Paolini 6-4, 6-3. “I had to convince my mind after losing to her at the end of 2025,” the winner said.

“It was about mentality out there but I knew I could do it.”

In Sydney, Alexander Zverev clinched victory for Germany against the Netherlands as the world number three demolished Tallon Griekspoor 7-5, 6-0.

Eva Lys beat Suzan Lamens 6-2, 6-2 and Germany also took the doubles for a 3-0 sweep.

Playing his first match of 2026, Zverev dropped just seven points in a commanding second set.

“The first set, it was tough to get rhythm,” said Zverev.

“Once I got the chances, I did well and I'm very happy with the win.”

Canada beat China, with Victoria Mboko defeating Zhu Lin 2-6, 6-2, 6-0 and Felix Auger-Aliassime overcoming Zhang Zhizhen 6-4, 6-4.

The 18-nation mixed-team event in Perth and Sydney is a warm-up for the Australian Open which begins on January 18.

– AFP



## Aggressive Brook learning when to be patient at the crease

**SYDNEY** – Flamboyant England star Harry Brook admitted yesterday he was learning to be more patient, with a frustrating Ashes tour teaching him when he needs to curb his all-out aggressive approach.

The destructive 26-year-old has become one of the world's most exciting players across all formats with his attacking batting.

But the gung-ho approach has not worked well in Australia, with his unbeaten 78 in the fifth and final Test yesterday his highest score so far.

Brook, who has blasted 10 Test centuries, said he toned down his natural instincts in Sydney.

“I've just got to be a little bit more patient and take my ones

here and there. And thankfully, I did that today,” he said after propelling England to 211-3 at stumps on day one.

“I did that in a couple of the other innings as well. So that's something I've got to think about going forward and put that into my game.

“And absorb the pressure. Whether that's taking my ones instead of trying to hit boundaries, then so be it.”

While Brook slammed six fours and a six in his innings, he also took 35 singles in a 154-run stand with veteran Joe Root who was unbeaten on 72.

Their methodical approach was in stark contrast to the ultra-aggressive “Bazball” style of

cricket England have pioneered over the past few years.

“It's been a frustrating series I've had,” Brook added.

“I've been in double figures every innings, bar one, and that's what I've done so well in my career, I've managed to go on and get big scores.

“It just hasn't happened this series ... it's all part of the learning curve.

“It's not an easy place to come and tour. The surfaces do change every game and throughout the game.

“So, it's been a good trip to be a part of, and obviously we've ended up on the wrong side of it, but hopefully there'll be plenty more times to come over here.”

– AFP



**Australian batsman Damien Martyn acknowledges the applause after scoring 50 against Sri Lanka during their one-day cricket match in Melbourne on January 13, 2026. Australian Test great Martyn has woken from an induced coma following meningitis, with ex-teammate Adam Gilchrist yesterday calling it “a miracle”. The 54-year-old Martyn, who played 67 Tests between 1992 and 2006 and 208 one-day internationals, fell seriously ill late December 2025 and was rushed to hospital.** – AFP

# Trump joins criticism of Clooney's French passport

**Djilali Belaid, Estelle Emonet and Tiphaine Le Liboux**

PARIS – US President Donald Trump piled on criticism last week of a decision to grant Hollywood superstar George Clooney a French passport after a junior government official in Paris labelled the move a “double standard”.

An official decree seen by AFP last Monday showed that 64-year-old Oscar winner Clooney, his wife Amal Alamuddin Clooney and their two children had become French citizens.

Trump, whose administration has backed anti-immigration parties in Europe, said that Paris was welcome to the “Ocean’s Eleven” star, a long-term Democratic supporter, fundraiser and a vocal critic of the president.

“Good News! George and Amal Clooney, two of the worst political prognosticators of all time, have officially become citizens of France which is, sadly, in the midst of a major crime problem because of their absolutely horrendous handling of immigration,” Trump said on his Truth Social network.

The news of Clooney and his family becoming French comes ahead of language requirements for citizenship being toughened for everyone else under new immigration rules from January 1.

A junior member of President Emmanuel Macron’s government had also criticised the decision to award passports despite Clooney speaking poor French.

“Personally, I understand the feeling of some French people of a double standard,” Marie-Pierre

Védrenne, a junior interior minister, told the France Info radio station.

“We need to be careful about the message we’re sending.”

Her boss, Interior Minister Laurent Nunez, and the foreign ministry, however, defended the decision.

The civil code states that “French nationality may be conferred by naturalisation, upon the proposal of the minister of foreign affairs, to any French-speaking foreigner who applies for it and who contributes through their distinguished service to France’s influence and the prosperity of its international economic relations.”

But Clooney has admitted that his French remains poor despite hundreds of lessons.

Under new immigration rules which took effect on New Year’s Day, applicants will need a certificate showing they have a level of French that could get them into a French university. They will also have to pass a civic knowledge test.

Clooney has a property in southern France and said he has hailed French privacy laws that keep his family largely protected from international media intrusion.

“I love the French culture, your language, even if I’m still bad at it after 400 days of courses,” the actor told RTL radio – in English – in December.

His wife, an international human rights lawyer and dual UK-Lebanese national, speaks fluent French.

### ‘Meets the conditions’

Clooney bought the Domaine du Canadel, a former wine estate, near

the Provence town of Brignoles, in 2021. He said it is where his family is “happiest”.

Nunez, the interior minister, said he was “very happy” with the actor and his family becoming French, saying the country was lucky to have them.

The French foreign ministry said the passport allocation for the Clooneys “meets the conditions set by law” for naturalisation.

The family “followed a rigorous procedure including security investigations, regulatory naturalisation interviews at the prefecture, and the payment of tax stamps,” the ministry added.

It highlighted the Clooneys had a French home and they “contribute through their distinguished service to France’s international influence and cultural prestige” through the actor’s role in the film industry.

This “can only contribute to maintaining and promoting France’s position in this essential economic sector”, it said.

Amal Clooney is “a renowned lawyer” who “regularly collaborates with academic institutions and international organisations based in France”, the ministry added.

Around 48,800 people acquired French nationality by decree in 2024, according to interior ministry figures.

Clooney is not alone in wanting a French passport.

Hollywood director Jim Jarmusch announced on Friday that he was also applying, telling French radio that he wanted “a place to where I can escape the United States”. – AFP



The Explore Louisiana “Gulf to Gumbo” float moves down the parade route in the rain during the 137th Rose Parade on New Year’s Day in Pasadena, California, on New Year’s Day. The parade features floral floats, marching bands and equestrian units to ring in the New Year along the 8.8 km route along Colorado Blvd in Pasadena. – AFP

## Third ‘Avatar’ film passes the US\$1 billion mark worldwide

LOS ANGELES – “Avatar: Fire and Ash” has surpassed the US\$1 billion mark at the global box office, as it kept the top spot in North American cinemas with another US\$40 million in ticket sales, industry estimates showed yesterday.

The third instalment in director James Cameron’s blockbuster series has now earned US\$306 million in the United States and Canada, and another US\$777 million abroad, putting the total at US\$1.08 billion, Exhibitor Relations reported.

“Fire and Ash” 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.

It is the fourth Cameron film to pass the US\$1 billion mark, with the first two “Avatar” films and “Titanic.”

In second place in North America was “Zootopia 2,” Disney’s feel-good animated film and an Oscar contender, at US\$19 million. Its global total now stands at nearly US\$1.6 billion.

Coming in third at US\$14.9 million was Lionsgate’s “The Housemaid,” a film version of Freida McFadden’s best-selling novel about a young woman (Sydney Sweeney) who is hired by a wealthy couple (Amanda Seyfried and Brandon Sklenar) with dark secrets.

“Marty Supreme,” A24’s period sports drama starring Timothee Chalamet, finished in fourth place with US\$12.6 million.

“Anaconda,” the new meta comedy action flick starring Paul Rudd and Jack Black as friends trying to reboot the original 1997 horror film, finished in fifth place with US\$10 million. – AFP



Members of the “Odille” Hunting Society carry a taxidermied leopard in the streets ahead of the annual New Year’s Hunting Festival in Banjul on New Year’s Day. Deeply rooted in tradition, the festival has become a cherished New Year celebration in The Gambia, marked by music, dancing, and vibrant masquerades. Held in the capital city, Banjul, the event features a friendly yet fierce competition among hunting societies Ekun Baba, Odille, and the recently joined Gun Shot Hunting Society as they showcase striking animal head displays, masks, and elaborate costumes. – AFP

## BTS to release album in March before world tour

SEOUL – K-pop megastars BTS will release a new album in March ahead of a world tour, the group announced on New Year’s Day.

South Korea’s biggest musical act has been on self-described hiatus since 2022 as its members undertook national military service required of all men under the age of 30.

All seven members were discharged last year, and the group announced a comeback for the spring of 2026.

They confirmed on Thursday that they would release an album on March 20 before heading on tour.

The exact date was revealed in handwritten letters sent to paid members of the official BTS fan group, and later confirmed by their label Big Hit Music.

“I have been waiting more earnestly than anyone else,” group leader RM wrote in the letter.

No further details about the album or tour were given.

The album will be BTS’s first since the anthology “Proof” which became South Korea’s bestselling record of 2022.

Before their military service, BTS generated more than 5.5

trillion won (US\$3.8 billion) in South Korea per year, according to the government-backed Korea Culture and Tourism Institute.

The figure is equivalent to roughly 0.2 percent of the country’s total GDP.

BTS has expanded beyond their home nation to become a global musical phenomenon in recent years.

They hold the record as the most-streamed group on Spotify, and became the first K-pop act to top both the Billboard 200 and the Billboard Artist 100 charts in the United States. – AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -7°C~5°C	Manila 22°C~29°C	New York 0°C~3°C	Lisbon 6°C~11°C
Shanghai -1°C~10°C	Bangkok 20°C~33°C	London -5°C~2°C	Rio de Janeiro 21°C~25°C
Hong Kong 10°C~21°C	Tokyo 1°C~11°C	Frankfurt -4°C~0°C	Luanda 22°C~28°C
Taipei 12°C~20°C	Singapore 24°C~32°C	Vancouver 5°C~7°C	Maputo 20°C~27°C
Guangzhou 7°C~20°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~33°C	Paris -5°C~2°C	Dili 23°C~32°C
Nanjing -3°C~9°C	Jakarta 24°C~31°C	Moscow -8°C~4°C	São Tomé 26°C~30°C
Guilin 5°C~12°C	Seoul -8°C~2°C	Las Vegas 5°C~17°C	Praia 18°C~26°C
Xi’an -5°C~6°C	Sydney 19°C~27°C	Monte Carlo 7°C~11°C	Bissau 20°C~34°C



### Wolf in Moon's clothing

A red deer stands as the Wolf Supermoon sets, in Richmond Park, south west London early in the morning of Saturday. — AFP



### Explore the souk

This photograph shows a shop displaying straw bags in the old market in Marrakesh's Jemaa el-Fna Square on Thursday, during the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) football tournament. — AFP

### Pearlies

People prepare to take part in the annual New Year's Day parade as they gather ahead of the start in Green Park in central London on Thursday. — AFP



### Mātangi

An artiste poses for a photograph before performing at the 'Veedhi Virudhu Vizha' festival, showcasing traditional Indian art forms, in Chennai, India yesterday. — AFP



### Spinning on a stick

The Kumpo performs its ritual in front of the crowd at sunset during a festival in the village of Abene, in Casamance, Senegal on New Year's Eve. — AFP

### Bringing in the New Year with a bang!

A combination of photographs created on Thursday shows fireworks displays to celebrate the New Year, just after midnight on January 1, 2026 in cities around the world: (from top left to bottom right) Sydney, Seoul, Putrajaya [Malaysia], Manila, Taiwan, Bangkok, Washington, Rio de Janeiro, Berlin, Hanoi, Cairo [Egypt], Dubai, London, Abidjan [Ivory Coast] and Paris. — AFP

