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Sam unveils tiered childcare allowance, higher birth bonus



Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai gestures while addressing yesterday evening's post-policy address press conference at Government Headquarters.
– Photo: Tony Wong

Tony Wong

In his 2027 Policy Address presented yesterday, Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai announced that the government's childcare allowance will be upgraded to a tiered scheme, according to which the annual allowance will remain unchanged at 18,000 patacas for the first child, rise to 27,000 patacas for the second child, and reach 36,000 patacas for the third and each subsequent child.

Moreover, the government will also increase its birth allowance to 8,000 patacas from the current 6,500 patacas, up 23 per cent.

Sam delivered his third policy address to the Legislative Assembly (AL) yesterday afternoon. His 2027 Policy Address, presented during a plenary session in the legislature's hemicycle, lasted one and a half hours.

The government launched its childcare allowance in 2025. Under the scheme's current version, parents are entitled to receive an annual allowance of 18,000 patacas for each newborn child for three years. For parents to benefit from the allowance, the children must be permanent local residents.

According to Sam's 2027 Policy Address delivered yesterday, the government will introduce a tiered system for its childcare allowance next year. Under the new system, parents will be entitled to receive an annual allowance of 18,000 patacas for their first newborn child for three years – unchanged from the current annual amount.

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Xi urges breaking new ground in high-quality GBA development



President Xi Jinping, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, visits an artificial island of the Shenzhen-Zhongshan Link, a sea-crossing project connecting the cities of Shenzhen, Zhongshan and Guangzhou, yesterday. Xi paid an inspection visit to Zhongshan yesterday. – Xinhua

ZHONGSHAN – President Xi Jinping yesterday urged efforts to thoroughly study and implement the guiding principles of the fifth plenary session of the 20th Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, and to strive to break new ground in the high-quality development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

Xi, also general secretary of the CPC Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks during an inspection tour in Zhongshan City, Guangdong Province.

Stressing fully and faithfully implementing the decisions and arrangements made at the plenary session and leveraging new progress in persevering with full and rigorous Party self-governance, Xi urged a better job in advancing integrated development along the Pearl River Estuary.

Visiting an artificial island of the Shenzhen-Zhongshan Link, a sea-crossing project connecting the cities of Shenzhen, Zhongshan and Guangzhou, Xi demanded efforts to further enhance the management and operation of this mega transport project to better serve the development of the Greater Bay Area.

At an industrial park in Zhongshan, Xi learned about local efforts to absorb industrial transfers, transform and upgrade traditional industries, and develop emerging industries.

Building the Greater Bay Area is a major strategic plan made by the CPC Central Committee, Xi said, calling on cities along the Pearl River Estuary including Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Dongguan and Zhongshan to play a pioneering role.

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Shenzhen summit marks first face-to-face meeting among Chinese, Russian, US heads of state in history: FM spokesperson

BEIJING – The meeting of the Chinese, Russian and US heads of state in Shenzhen will be the first face-to-face meeting in history involving the top leaders of the three countries, Chineseforeign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said in Beijing yesterday.

President Xi Jinping will hold a China-Russia-US summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Donald Trump in Shenzhen on Thursday, according to the ministry.

Mao said the heads of state will have an in-depth exchange of views on maintaining world peace and promoting strategic stability in major country relations, which is of groundbreaking significance.

Noting that China, Russia and the United States are all founding members of the UN and permanent members of the UN Security Council, Mao said the three countries have fought together to achieve the victory of the World Anti-Fascist War.

Under current circumstances, the three countries shoulder the important responsibility of cooperating to address global challenges and promote world peace and stability, said Mao.

Strengthening communication, managing and controlling differences, and stabilizing relations among China, Russia and the United States serve the interests of the three countries, meet the expectations of the international community, and are conducive to stabilizing the world situation and promoting dialogue and cooperation, she said.

– Xinhua

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11 perish in Phuket fire: police

A fire raged through a four-storey shophouse on Thailand's resort island of Phuket early yesterday, killing 11 people and injuring 16, police said.

– Story on p. 15

Africa should trade more with itself: Botswana president

Botswana's President Duma Boko yesterday urged fellow African countries to make the continent more resilient to global economic shocks by trading more with each other.

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Cape Verde's President Neves re-elected: provisional results

Cape Verde's President José Maria Neves easily won re-election on Sunday, according to provisional results from the country's electoral commission.

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Xi urges breaking new ground in high-quality GBA development

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Xi expressed the hope that Zhongshan would seize the opportunities, take reform and innovation as the fundamental driving force, improve regional cooperation mechanisms, foster a sound business environment, and vigorously promote the deep integration of technological innovation and industrial innovation.

Speaking to representatives of small and medium-sized enterprises and sci-tech personnel, Xi encouraged them to make greater contributions to the development of Guangdong and the Greater Bay Area and China's greater self-reliance and strength in science and technology.

Xi also visited the Museum of Dr. Sun Yat-sen and laid a floral basket before his bronze statue. This year marks the 160th anniversary of Dr. Sun's birth.

On the new journey, it is necessary to emulate, inherit and promote his invaluable spirit, and inspire all Chinese people at home and abroad to unite and strive to build a great country and advance national rejuvenation through Chinese modernization, Xi said.

During the inspection tour, Xi also stressed the need to continuously steer the economy toward innovation-driven and high-quality development, ensure that major targets and tasks for the year are fulfilled, and get the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) off to a good start.

– *Xinhua*

**The straight-line distance between Macao and Zhongshan is about 40 kilometres. – DeepSeek*



President Xi Jinping (center), also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, speaks to representatives of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and sci-tech personnel at an industrial park in Zhongshan yesterday, during a one-day inspection visit to the city some 40 km north of Macao. – Xinhua

Macao targets growth, economic diversification in 2027

China's Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) will seek to maintain economic growth in 2027 and accelerate economic diversification amid downward pressure, Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai said yesterday.

Delivering his annual policy address to the Legislative Assembly, Sam outlined plans to attract investment, develop financial services and expand international tourism while maintaining support for residents.

The report identified rising social welfare spending and an excessive reliance on a single sector for fiscal revenue as an unsustainable combination. Macao's economy grew 2.9 percent year on year in real terms in the first three quarters of 2026, according to preliminary figures cited in the report.

To support diversification, the government plans to launch an investment guidance fund, appoint professional fund managers and invest in projects that serve Macao's long-term development. It will seek to attract more projects to Macao and the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

Financial sector measures include advancing securities legislation, attracting more domestic and overseas companies to issue bonds in Macao, and developing links between the digital pataca and the digital yuan.

In tourism, the government will target markets including Europe, India and the Middle East, offering incentives for flights, hotels and cross-border transport to attract international visitors on multi-destination trips.

The government will also continue its cash-sharing scheme, tax relief and household utility subsidies, and expand free childcare services and support for families.

– *Xinhua*

Sam unveils tiered childcare allowance, higher birth bonus

Continued from p.1

During the three-year period, parents will be entitled to receive an annual allowance of 27,000 patacas for their second newborn child, while they will be entitled to receive an annual allowance of 36,000 patacas for the third child and each subsequent child.

The government raised its birth allowance from 5,418 patacas to 6,500 patacas in 2025 – an increase of 20 percent. The allowance remains unchanged at 6,500 patacas this year. Sam's 2027 Policy Address delivered yesterday announced that the birth allowance will be increased to 8,000 patacas next year – an increase of 23 per cent.

The birth allowance is a one-off payment. Both parents are entitled to receive the birth allowance individually.

During a post-policy address press conference at Government Headquarters yesterday evening, Sam was asked about the effectiveness of the government's initiative to boost Macau's declining birth rate. He underlined that declining birth rates have become a shared global issue, pointing out that across economically developed countries and regions in East Asia – including Japan and China's Taiwan region – birth rates are all low, with birth numbers in the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, and Macau all showing a downward trend.

Citing official statistics, Sam noted that 2,037 babies were born in Macau during the first three quarters of this year, a year-on-year decline of 93, or 4.4 percent.

Hong Kong reported 29,700 births over the past 12 months between mid-2025 and mid-2026, while the Chinese mainland recorded 7.92 million births last year, all sitting at the lowest levels on record, Sam noted.

Sam pointed out that general living conditions nowadays are better than they were 20 to 30 years ago – including in Macau – adding that he believed the declining birth rates affecting quite a few countries and regions worldwide were due to changing attitudes towards childbearing among the younger generation. Sam said he hoped that sociologists and anthropologists would jointly engage in more in-depth research to find out the causes of the younger generation's changing attitudes towards childbearing.

Sam noted that between 2014 and 2016, Macau's housing prices were higher than nowadays while residents' median monthly incomes were lower than now, yet the birth rate at that time was even higher than now.

The press conference, which lasted about one hour and 15 minutes, was held after Sam delivered his policy address in the legislature's hemicycle.

Meanwhile, according to the 2027 Policy Address, the annual cash handouts will remain unchanged at 10,000 patacas for each eligible permanent local resident and 6,000 patacas for each eligible non-permanent local resident.

The government's annual subsidy for senior citizens will remain unchanged at 10,000 patacas next year. The annual subsidy is issued to permanent local residents aged at least 65 once a year by the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS).

Furthermore, according to the 2027 Policy Address, the government will again inject 7,000 patacas into the Central Provident Fund accounts of eligible permanent residents next year.

Masterplan for nation security education

Meanwhile, Sam underlined during yesterday's press conference that the local government will continue to deepen national security education next year to strengthen national identity and awareness of safeguarding national security across all segments of Macau's civil society. He said that the local government will draw up and implement a master plan for Macau's national security education, covering the period between 2027 and 2032.

Sam also underlined the government's commitment to enhancing its support for the operation and development of local small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – by strengthening the implementation of its various ongoing initiatives and rolling out new measures.

Citing official statistics, Sam also noted that Macau recorded 32 million visitor arrivals during the first three quarters of this year, a year-on-year increase of eight percent, adding that the government expected a record 41 million to 42 million visitor arrivals for the whole of this year.

Macau recorded 40.069 million visitor arrivals in 2025, the highest annual number on record. ■



Journalists listen to Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai during yesterday evening's press conference at Government Headquarters in Nam Van about his 2027 Policy Address. – Photo: Tony Wong

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Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY PERIODS.
FORCE 3 TO 4 EAST TO SOUTHEASTERLY WINDS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 65% AND 95%.

22ºC~28ºC

Source: SMG

UM Symphony Orchestra to host Xmas concert Saturday

Interview by William Chan

The University of Macau Symphony Orchestra (UMSO) will hold its Christmas concert, "The Most Wonderful Time of the Year", on campus this Saturday.

Everyone is invited to join the UMSO, under the baton of conductor Ng Sa, alongside the UM Choir as special guest, for a festive holiday showcase. Attendees can immerse themselves in the world of Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* and sing along to Christmas classics such as *Silent Night* and *Joy to the World*.

Conductor Ng Sa told the *Post* in a recent online interview: "In my early teens, I experienced an American Christmas for the very first time. Christmas had always been part of my life, but seeing it celebrated firsthand opened my eyes to its deepest meaning: forgiveness, love, peace, and the joy of giving. Christmas is a season of love and care."

"The music, the decorations, the warm hugs, the falling snow, and the cosy jumpers all seemed to say the same thing: we should care for one another," Ng added. "That experience stayed with me, and it is why I have named this concert 'The Most Wonderful Time of the Year'. I hope it brings a little of the joy and warmth I have carried in my heart all these years, and may music bring us together."

The concert will take place this Saturday at 8:00 p.m. in the N2 University Hall, and admission is free. For enquiries, call 8822 9906 or email sao.services@um.edu.mo. ■

Govt to lower public charging fees for EVs

Armindo Neves

The Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) announced in a statement yesterday that public charging fees in kilowatt-hours* (kWh) for electric vehicles (EVs) will be reduced on the first day of next year.

According to the statement, in order to support the nation's efforts to achieve its "Dual Carbon Goals" (carbon peaking and carbon neutrality) and to effectively align with and implement the national 15th Five-Year Plan and Macau's third five-year plan, the local government - in accordance with its policy agenda and the "Macau Electric Vehicle Promotion Plan" - has decided to reduce kWh public charging fees by around 10 per cent, following a second fee reduction in early 2026. The government will also introduce a new supercharging fee tier, with the new rates taking effect on January 1, 2027, the statement said.

According to the government's kWh fee tier list, slow charging will be decreased from 1.28 patacas to 1.15 patacas between 8:00 p.m. to 9:00 a.m., and between 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. will be lowered from 1.94 patacas to 1.75 patacas; medium charging will be reduced 24/7 from 2.68 patacas to 2.40 patacas; fast charging will be decreased 24/7 from 3.10 patacas to 2.80 patacas; the newly introduced supercharging will cost 3.10 patacas.

The adjustment to public charging fees, in addition to cutting electricity charges for slow, medium, and fast charging by about 10 per cent, adds a new supercharging tier to coincide with the launch of super-fast charging stations in the first quarter of next year, the statement said. This aims to further enhance the convenience of driving electric vehicles, it noted, adding that efforts will also be made in the future to introduce even faster charging technologies to Macau in response to public demand for rapid charging.



This undated handout photo provided by the Public Works Bureau (DSOP) in July shows the supercharging station located on Rua da Patinagem (溜冰路) in Cotai.

The statement added that the government will continue to roll out a series of measures under the "Macau Electric Vehicle Promotion Plan" to improve the city's charging and battery-swapping network, further promoting the adoption of electric vehicles and advancing the low-carbon transformation of land transport.

According to a previous *Post* report, DSPA Director Ip Kuong Lam told reporters on June 8 that construction and equipment installation for Macau's first EV supercharging station, located on Rua da Patinagem (溜冰路) in Cotai, had been completed, with gradual trial operations to follow after commissioning. ■

**A kilowatt-hour (kWh) is a unit of energy, not power, i.e., power multiplied by time. It measures the total amount of electricity consumed or produced over a period of time. – Gemini*













USJ design students showcase sustainable solutions to Macau's urban challenges

Khalel Vallo

Final-year students from the University of Saint Joseph (USJ) present design projects addressing Macau's urban challenges, including limited space, an ageing population and heritage preservation, in an exhibition running until November 23 at CREATIVE MACAU in Nape.

Titled "Design for the City – Applied Research Projects by USJ Bachelor of Design Students", the exhibition features capstone projects developed by graduating students as part of the university's Design Capstone Project*, according to the exhibition's information message board.

Taking Macau as their case study, the students identified local needs and challenges through observation, interviews and fieldwork before developing design proposals and working prototypes intended to improve residents' quality of life, the message said.

The projects are divided into four sections: Urban Equipment, Furniture, Product and Branding. They address issues such as the scarcity of urban space, the needs of an ageing population, younger residents' awareness of local heritage, and environmental pressures associated with the city's subtropical climate and tourism-driven economy, the message noted.

The exhibition showcases a range of responses, from street furniture and products to visual identities and service concepts. The prototypes were developed in collaboration with industry partners and the university's fabrication and robotic laboratories.

According to the message, sustainability is a central consideration across the projects, with several explicitly linked to the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.

The exhibition aims to demonstrate how design can serve as a practical tool for addressing urban issues and improving everyday life, while encouraging greater public awareness of how Macau's urban environment functions and how it could be improved, the statement underlined.

Running through November 23, the exhibits are on display in the gallery on the ground floor of the Macao Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape with free admission between Monday and Saturday, from 2:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

**According to the USJ website, the Design Capstone Project is a full-year project that completes the students' journey on the Bachelor of Design and is a catalyst for their endeavours after graduation. Students will look for their design assets and interests to develop an integrated project that summarises the best of their design knowledge and skills, and allows them to build up their identity and position as designers.*

***The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a universal set of 17 interconnected global objectives adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They provide a shared blueprint to end poverty, protect the environment, reduce inequality, and promote peace and prosperity by the year 2030. - Gemini*

Photos taken at the CREATIVE MACAU gallery in Nape last Wednesday by Khalel Vallo.









Gongbei Customs seizes 600,000 cigarettes hidden in furniture shipment at HZMB

Sherwin Hng

Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers seized 600,000 cigarettes concealed in a shipment of goods declared as furniture at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge's (HZMB) Zhuhai Port (customs and immigration checkpoint) on October 26.

According to the statement, at around noon that day, officers at the HZMB Zhuhai Port's outbound cargo inspection area conducted an X-ray inspection of a lorry carrying goods declared for export under a customs transit procedure from another region. They noticed abnormalities in the images of certain parts of the vehicle.

After identifying the suspicious areas, officers opened the cargo for a further inspection and discovered cigarettes concealed inside several wooden crates labelled as "whole-house customised furniture".*

A total of 3,000 cartons of "BOHEM" cigarettes from South Korea, amounting to 600,000 cigarettes, were seized during the inspection.

Gongbei Customs reminded the public that, under the Chinese mainland's Tobacco Monopoly Law, the export of cigarettes requires approval from the administrative department under the State Council responsible for tobacco monopoly and a tobacco monopoly licence. ■

** Whole-house customised furniture (often translated from the Chinese industry term 全屋定制) refers to a comprehensive interior design and manufacturing service in which a single company designs, builds, and installs tailored cabinetry, storage, and built-in furniture for an entire home, rather than the homeowner buying separate, off-the-shelf pieces. – Gemini*



This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs yesterday shows 600,000 cigarettes seized by its officers at the HZMB's Zhuhai checkpoint on October 26.

Police nab mainlander for false report after gambling away HK$400,000

Sherwin Hng

The Judiciary Police (PJ) has arrested a woman from the Chinese mainland for making a false report, PJ spokesman Lei Chi Hou said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Lei identified the suspect as a 29-year-old woman surnamed Li, who told police that she's unemployed.

According to Lei, Li entered Macau on Wednesday with HK$400,000 she had borrowed from relatives and friends in the mainland. She originally intended to engage in illegal currency exchange, commonly known as "money changing", but after arriving in Macau, she used the money to play the tables.

She eventually lost more than HK$320,000, leaving her with casino chips worth HK$73,300.

Lei said due to being unable to repay the borrowed money and afraid of having to explain the losses to her relatives and friends, Li decided to file a false police report in the hope of obtaining a report receipt as an excuse.

On Saturday afternoon, she went to the PJ headquarters and claimed that HK$400,000 had been stolen from a residential flat in the northern district where a friend lived.

After receiving the report, PJ officers went to the flat to investigate but found no signs of forced entry or damage to its doors, windows, or locks. Officers also noticed inconsistencies in Li's statements.

After further questioning, Li admitted that she had filed the false report to cover up her gambling losses, Lei said.

According to Lei, investigation indicated that Li was suspected of fabricating a crime and intending to engage in illegal currency exchange for gambling purposes.

The case was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) for follow-up. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Lei Chi Hou looks on during yesterday's regular press conference. – Photo: Sherwin Hng

Oxfam TowerRun draws over 500 participants for charity challenge at Macau Tower

Khalel Vallo

More than 500 runners and volunteers took part in the 13th Oxfam TowerRun on Sunday, running up 1,298 steps at the Macau Tower Convention and Entertainment Centre to raise funds for poverty alleviation programmes supporting left-behind children in the Chinese mainland, according to a statement by Oxfam that day.

Held under the theme "You Fund I Run", the annual charity sporting event coincided with the 50th anniversary of Oxfam Hong Kong and brought together participants from Macau, the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong and other regions, the statement said.

The event featured several categories, including the Full Tower Race, Half Tower Race, Four-Person Relay Race and Leaders Challenge, allowing participants of different ages and athletic abilities to support the cause through sport, the statement noted.

According to the statement, Oxfam Hong Kong Director General Henry Tang Chi Fai said that the event carried special significance in the organisation's anniversary year, thanking runners, volunteers, partners and donors for their continued support. "Every step taken by our participants is not only a challenge of physical endurance and determination, but also a gesture of care and support for children in need," he said.



This handout photo provided by Oxfam on Sunday shows Team Meng Kei members, winners of the Four-Person Relay Race, posing for a group photo with their trophy after the 13th Oxfam TowerRun at the Macau Tower Convention and Entertainment Centre in Sai Van that day.

Tang added that funds raised would support Oxfam's poverty alleviation and development programmes, including initiatives to improve the education and psychosocial well-being of left-behind children in the mainland, the statement underlined.

In the Elite Full Tower Race, Xue Jiandong won the men's title in seven minutes and 17 seconds, while Zhou Qinglan claimed the women's championship in eight minutes and 49 seconds, the statement said, adding that Team Meng Kei won the Four-Person Relay Race in six minutes and 17 seconds.

In the Open Individual Race, Gurung Pritam won the men's Full Tower category in eight minutes and five seconds, while Timothy Ho Chun Ting took the men's Half Tower title in three minutes and 45 seconds, the statement noted. Meanwhile, Lam Cho Yu won the women's Full Tower category in 10 minutes and one second, while Leong Fong U claimed the women's Half Tower title in five minutes and 39 seconds, the statement said. ■

Wines of Portugal tasting showcases over 200 labels from 24 producers

Khalel Vallo

More than 200 Portuguese wine labels from 24 producers were showcased at the "Wines of Portugal Grand Tasting Macau 2026" at MGM COTAI yesterday, bringing together trade professionals, media representatives and wine enthusiasts to explore business opportunities and the country's wine varieties, according to a statement by ViniPortugal.

The statement said that the one-day event attracted more than 100 participants for an evening of wine tasting, education and commercial networking.

The grand tasting aimed to connect Portuguese wine producers with regional buyers, including local importers, distributors and hospitality professionals, the statement noted, adding that it provided opportunities for direct discussions between winery representatives and potential business partners on distribution channels and longer-term cooperation.

Following the trade session, the event opened to the public, allowing local wine enthusiasts to meet producers and sample wines from Portugal's different wine regions, the statement said, adding that before the tasting, trade professionals and media representatives attended a masterclass led by Wines of Portugal educator Sofia Salvador.



This handout photo provided by ViniPortugal shows wine stands promoting "Wines of Portugal Grand Tasting Macau 2026" at MGM COTAI yesterday.

The guided session introduced participants to Portugal's wine regions, indigenous grape varieties and characteristic winemaking styles, providing further insight into the country's wine industry, the statement underlined.

The purpose of the event was to highlight opportunities for Portuguese wine producers to strengthen their presence in Macau and establish connections with buyers across the Greater Bay Area (GBA), while giving local consumers a closer look at Portugal's diverse wine offerings, the statement said. ■

Health Bureau expands no-smoking zones to 21 more schools, crèches

Armindo Neves

The Health Bureau (SSM) announced in a statement on Friday that it has designated no-smoking zones at the entrances of a further 21 schools and childcare centres.

According to the statement, under Macau's Tobacco Prevention and Control Law, the Bureau designated the entrances of 16 schools and nurseries as smoke-free locations with effect from November 24 last year. Following an agreement between the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ), the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS), and the relevant educational institutions, the Public Works Bureau (DSOP) marked white boundary lines and no-smoking symbols on the ground on both sides of the entrances of a further 14 schools and seven crèches on Friday to distinguish smoke-free from non-smoke-free areas.

The statement noted that a total of 37 schools and nurseries across Macau (25 schools and 12 nurseries) have now had their entrances designated as smoke-free locations. Statutory no-smoking signs have also been posted in prominent positions outside the entrances of the institutions concerned to remind those entering the areas. Anyone caught smoking within a smoke-free zone is liable to a fine of 1,500 patacas.

Two parents were interviewed yesterday near Pui Va Middle School of Macau. One of them, surnamed Ma, said that although he had not seen anyone smoking nearby, he believed the new measure was beneficial for children's health and hoped that more schools would establish smoke-free zones. He added that while he does not smoke himself and does not particularly mind others doing so, he agreed that smoking is harmful to children.

The other parent, surnamed Chan, said she had previously seen people smoking nearby and considered it a bad example for children, adding that some elderly people ignore advice not to smoke. She also admitted she was unaware that the white line on the ground marked the boundary of the smoke-free zone, criticising the inadequate signage and insufficient publicity. She suggested putting up larger signs in prominent places so that parents and passers-by are aware of the restriction. In her view, smoke-free zones help protect children's health, and public awareness campaigns should be strengthened to clearly separate healthy from unhealthy environments and safeguard the next generation. ■



Student and his mother walk along a no-smoking zone at the entrance to Pui Va Middle School yesterday.
– Photo: Armindo Neves

Tripartite summit significant for stability of major-country relations and world peace

China Daily Editorial

The meeting of the Chinese, Russian and United States heads of state in Shenzhen on Thursday will be the first face-to-face meeting among the top leaders of the three countries in history.

That the heads of state of the three countries will sit together for dialogue is important in a world that increasingly suffers from a zero-sum game mentality.

As Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said when asked to answer a related query at a news conference yesterday, the heads of state will have an in-depth exchange of views on maintaining world peace and promoting strategic stability in major-country relations.

The summit – which will take place on the sidelines of the 33rd Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Economic Leaders' Meeting, set for tomorrow and Thursday in Shenzhen under the theme "Building an Asia-Pacific Community to Prosper Together" – represents a meaningful opportunity for the three leaders to strengthen exchanges to bring more certainty to a volatile world.

As founding members of the United Nations and permanent members of the UN Security Council, China, Russia and the US once fought together to achieve the victory in the World Anti-Fascist War. In the face of profound changes unseen in a century, the three nations bear a common responsibility to cooperate in addressing global challenges and fostering world peace and stability.

Under the current circumstances, strengthening communication, managing differences and stabilizing relations among China, Russia and the US serves the interests of all three countries and aligns with the expectations of the international community. It also contributes to stabilizing the global situation and promoting dialogue and cooperation, as Mao said.

Face-to-face dialogue between the heads of state of the three major countries can help foster understanding on the three sides' respective core concerns and red lines, preventing strategic miscalculation. It can also encourage other nations to properly manage regional and international hotspot issues.

That the three countries remain steadfast in safeguarding the postwar international order would send a clear warning to some countries and politicians seeking to hype up so-called "great-power rivalry" to challenge the postwar order.

Thus, the summit will provide a chance for the three countries to reaffirm that coordination among major countries is the right path to stability, and that attempts to divide the world into opposing camps risk undermining world peace and prosperity.

Additionally, supply-chain stability, regional conflict management, and progress on food and energy security, climate action and public health all hinge on whether major countries can build mutual trust through dialogue and cooperation so that they can work together to take the lead in fulfilling their global responsibilities for the common good of humanity.

Artificial intelligence adds another layer of complexity: rules for technologies that cross borders will be ineffective if their principal developers refuse to engage with one another.

History shows that the strategic vision, political wisdom and ability to mobilize resources across the board possessed by the top leaders of major countries mean that their in-person meetings often carry profound and far-reaching significance. Face-to-face dialogue among them can offer strategic guidance for subsequent working-level exchanges, helping translate consensus into concrete actions and outcomes.

Even on difficult issues where comprehensive settlements are out of reach, such direct interactions between the top leaders of major countries can help clarify intentions, establish crisis-management channels and allow space for reciprocal accommodations. Should the Shenzhen summit produce even a modest step back from danger in resolving difficult issues, its significance should not be underestimated.

Major countries have an obligation to provide answers to the questions posed by history, the era and the people. By laying the groundwork for the tripartite summit, China is showing its readiness to shoulder its responsibilities and advance engagement vital to world peace, stability and common development.

The world needs major countries ready to meet China halfway in that direction. The Shenzhen summit offers a chance to prove this is possible.

– Courtesy of China Daily

What you shouldn't miss about 2026 APEC 'China Year'

Analysis

SHENZHEN – As Shenzhen prepares to host the 33rd Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting from November 18 to 19, the 2026 APEC "China Year" is nearing its culmination. Here are some key facts you shouldn't miss about it.

1. WHAT IS THE APEC "CHINA YEAR"?

APEC is the highest-level economic cooperation mechanism that enjoys the broadest scope and the most significant influence in the Asia-Pacific region.

In 2026, China serves as the APEC host and is hosting a series of APEC meetings. Having previously hosted the APEC Economic Leaders' Meetings in 2001 and 2014, China is taking on the role for the third time this year.

2. WHAT IS THE THEME?

"Building an Asia-Pacific Community to Prosper Together."

3. PRIORITY AREAS

Openness – Fostering an open economy, opposing protectionism, and promoting trade and investment liberalization and facilitation.

Innovation – Upholding an innovation-driven development model, advancing new quality productive forces, and creating new growth drivers for APEC cooperation.

Cooperation – Leveraging the comparative strengths of APEC economies, enhancing policy synergy and experience exchanges to achieve mutual benefit.

4. EVENTS HELD SO FAR

Working together with other APEC member economies, China has successfully hosted more than 300 APEC meetings and events this year, drawing a cumulative attendance of over 10,000 participants.

These include a series of senior officials' meetings and related events, 10 ministerial meetings covering women, trade, tourism, forestry, food security, small and medium-sized enterprises, energy, human resources development, transport and finance, as well as high-level events during the APEC Digital Week.

5. EARLY HARVEST OUTCOMES

– Members have reaffirmed their support for the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) and endorsed the APEC roadmap on services.

– Focusing on digital and AI-powered economic growth, members have mapped out the APEC vision for digital and AI cooperation.

– Women's economic empowerment has been promoted. Efforts to enhance women's digital literacy and support their entrepreneurship and employment have made positive progress.

– Centering on the development of smart tourism, members have planned measures to facilitate travel in the era of AI.

– With a focus on ecological conservation, members have defined pathways for forest governance and cooperation in forest product trade.

– Addressing regional food security needs, members have formulated guiding principles to enhance the resilience of food systems.

6. CULMINATION

– The 2026 APEC Economic Leaders' Week is currently underway in Shenzhen.

– Events include the final Senior Officials' Meeting of APEC China 2026, the APEC Business Advisory Council meeting and the APEC CEO Summit.

– The APEC CEO Summit 2026 will be held from November 17 to 18.

– The 33rd APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting will be held from Nov. 18 to 19.

7. KEY EXPECTED OUTCOMES

– Adoption of an APEC leaders' declaration, the most important outcome of the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting.

– More practical outcomes in key areas such as trade, connectivity, the digital economy and AI.

– Launch of a Shenzhen initiative at the APEC CEO Summit 2026, marking the first time in the summit's 30-year history that an outcome document will be issued in the form of an initiative.

8. CHINA'S CONTRIBUTIONS AS THREE-TIME HOST

– 2001, Shanghai

APEC leaders adopted the Shanghai Accord, marking a fresh start for Asia-Pacific cooperation in the new century.

– 2014, Beijing

APEC leaders adopted the Beijing Agenda, calling for a future-oriented Asia-Pacific partnership and making the historic decision to translate the FTAAP from a vision to reality.

– 2026, Shenzhen

China will champion the vision of building an Asia-Pacific community and leverage the APEC leaders' declaration to chart a roadmap toward this goal and establish a framework for collective action among member economies.

China looks forward to building further consensus among all parties and injecting robust impetus into prosperity and growth in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. *(More on APEC on pages 7, 13, 14 & 16)* *– Xinhua*

China's APEC moment: Xi's vision for an open, inclusive Asia-Pacific

Analysis

SHENZHEN – For decades, the Asia-Pacific has been one of the most important engines of global economic growth. Yet as globalization faces mounting headwinds, the region is confronting a fundamental question: can openness and cooperation, the very source of its success, continue to power its future?

Against this backdrop, leaders of APEC member economies will gather in Shenzhen, a city at the forefront of China's opening up, to chart a course for the region's future.

President Xi Jinping will chair the 33rd APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting, scheduled for Nov. 18-19. He has consistently championed deeper regional economic integration, greater openness and connectivity as part of his broader vision of building an Asia-Pacific community.

"We should stay true to APEC's founding mission to promote economic growth and improve people's lives, and champion open development where everyone shares opportunities and emerges a winner," Xi said at last year's APEC meeting in the Republic of Korea (ROK).

IDEAS SHAPING A CLOSER COMMUNITY

Founded in 1989, APEC now brings together 21 member economies, including China, Russia and the United States. China joined in 1991. The forum has helped expand trade and investment and strengthen economic ties across the Asia-Pacific.

Together, these economies account for nearly 40 percent of the world's population, more than 60 percent of global GDP and nearly half of world trade. Over the past three decades, per capita income across the region has more than quadrupled, while more than one billion people have been lifted out of poverty.

Behind this progress has been a sustained commitment to regional cooperation. Since 2013, Xi has put forward ideas and proposals through the APEC platform on how economies with diverse interests and development priorities can work together and shape the region's future.

At the 2013 APEC CEO Summit in Bali, Indonesia, Xi called for a strong sense of community of common destiny in the Asia-Pacific, advocating common development, open development, innovation-driven development and interconnected growth. "The Asia-Pacific economies are interdependent on each other, with shared interests and common destiny. The success or failure of one may ultimately lead to success or failure of all," he said.

The idea was further developed in the years that followed. In 2014, when China hosted APEC in Beijing, Xi advocated an Asia-Pacific partnership featuring mutual trust, inclusiveness, cooperation and win-win results.

That year, members launched the process toward a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) and endorsed the APEC Connectivity Blueprint, giving fresh impetus to regional economic integration.

In 2020, APEC members adopted the Putrajaya Vision 2040, setting a goal of building an open, dynamic, resilient and peaceful Asia-Pacific community. Xi described the vision as a new starting point for the next phase of regional cooperation, calling for a community with a shared future built on openness and inclusiveness, innovation-driven growth, greater connectivity and mutually beneficial cooperation.

At the 2025 meeting in Gyeongju, the Republic of Korea, Xi put forward five proposals on safeguarding the multilateral trading system, fostering an open regional economy, keeping industrial and supply chains stable and smooth, advancing digital and green trade, and promoting universally beneficial and inclusive development. Together, the proposals gave concrete shape to the idea of an Asia-Pacific community.

As China hosts APEC this year, its vision for Asia-Pacific cooperation remains rooted in Xi's concept of a community with a shared future for humanity, with shared prosperity as a common goal.

OPENNESS, INNOVATION, COOPERATION

China identified openness, innovation and cooperation as the priorities for its APEC chairmanship, seeking to inject fresh momentum into Asia-Pacific development.

Openness has long been central to APEC's pursuit of regional growth and prosperity. As Xi noted in Gyeongju last year, APEC was founded in response to economic globalization, with the goal of promoting trade and investment liberalization and facilitation and supporting economic growth and prosperity.

Over the years, openness has lowered barriers to trade and investment, deepening economic integration across the region through a growing network of trade arrangements and cooperation mechanisms.

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is now fully in force among its members, with tariffs on more than 90 percent of goods traded among them eventually set to be eliminated. China is also working to align with high-standard international economic and trade rules, including those embodied in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement. Last year, China and ASEAN signed the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area 3.0 Upgrade Protocol.

Greater openness has gone hand in hand with stronger connectivity, with railways, ports and other infrastructure helping deepen economic links and improve trade routes across the region. The Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway, the China-Laos Railway and Peru's Chancay Port are among the projects driving this closer connectivity.

Innovation is opening up new sources of growth. As Xi said at the APEC CEO Summit in Vietnam in 2017, "To avoid the risk of the global economy entering a 'new mediocre,' we must sustain growth through innovation."

Areas such as digitalization and green transformation are creating new opportunities for the Asia-Pacific to overcome traditional growth constraints and tap new areas of cooperation.

APEC economies have embraced the digital transformation, with internet penetration rising from 52 percent to nearly 90 percent over the past 12 years. The region's green transition is also gaining momentum. Electric vehicles accounted for 25.5 percent of total motor vehicle sales in APEC economies in 2024, up from 7.4 percent in 2018. About 22 million EVs were sold across the region in 2024.

The benefits of innovation can also be seen in concrete projects across the region. Chinese enterprises are supporting the development of new-energy vehicle industries in Thailand, green technologies are helping transform urban transport in Chile, and Juncao technology has helped farmers in Fiji increase their incomes. Such cooperation demonstrates how technology and innovation can be turned into practical solutions for sustainable development.

Innovation creates new opportunities, while cooperation helps build community. The theme for APEC 2026, "Building an Asia-Pacific Community to Prosper Together," reflects China's longstanding commitment to pursuing win-win outcomes with its Asia-Pacific partners.

China has translated this vision into concrete action. It has granted zero-tariff treatment covering 100 percent of tariff lines to all least developed countries that have diplomatic relations with China.

"True development is development for all," Xi said in San Francisco in 2023. He urged members to "develop greater synergy in our development strategies and work together to resolve the global development deficit," highlighting cooperation as a pathway to more inclusive growth and a stronger sense of community across the region.

FUTURE OF ASIA-PACIFIC

China's APEC chairmanship has brought extensive engagement across the region, with more than 300 meetings and events held this year. These have included senior officials' meetings, ministerial meetings covering areas from trade and tourism to energy, transportation and finance, as well as high-level events under APEC Digital Weeks.

The focus now shifts to Shenzhen, where leaders of APEC economies will consider priorities for the next phase of regional cooperation.

The meeting comes at a time when protectionism and geopolitical tensions are testing regional economic ties, while advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and other technologies are creating new opportunities for growth.

Advancing regional economic integration will remain a central priority at the Shenzhen meeting. Twenty years after the FTAAP vision was put forward, leaders are expected to consider ways to advance the vision, including through closer coordination among existing trade agreements such as the RCEP and CPTPP. They are also expected to look at strengthening regional connectivity, building on the APEC Connectivity Blueprint for 2015-2025.

AI will be another major focus, as APEC economies seek to turn rapid advances in digital and intelligent technologies into new sources of growth. Discussions are likely to cover how to harness these technologies for growth while building broader common ground on their development and governance.

China has advanced that agenda during its chairmanship. At the APEC Digital and AI Ministerial Meeting in Chengdu, Sichuan, in July, open-source development was highlighted at the APEC ministerial level for the first time, alongside recognition of the importance of intellectual property protection.

China has also advanced practical cooperation through new regional platforms. It has announced plans for a center for APEC cooperation on cross-border data flows in Qianhai, Shenzhen, and launched initiatives to establish an Asia-Pacific cooperation center for AI empowerment of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Guangzhou and an Asia-Pacific SME Cooperation Zone in Shenzhen.

As China advances its modernization drive, it will continue to deepen reform and expand high-standard opening up, creating new opportunities for the Asia-Pacific and the wider world.

As Xi put it at the APEC CEO Summit in Lima in 2024, "China's development is inseparable from the Asia-Pacific, and it will in turn further benefit the region."

– Xinhua



A media worker tries out an AI photo booth at the media center of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting in Shenzhen yesterday. At the media center, application scenarios of emerging industries such as artificial intelligence and robotics are being showcased to the media, demonstrating China's scientific and technological innovation achievements.

– Xinhua

The Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region

(TRANSLATED VERSION)

Highlights of 2027 Policy Address

UNITING TO DELIVER THE DEVELOPMENT BLUEPRINT; COLLABORATING TO BUILD A BETTER FUTURE

Implement the development blueprint, promote appropriate diversification

Continuously improve public wellbeing, enhance governance efficiency

Strengthen development resilience, and maintain social stability

In 2027, the Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region ("MSAR") will unite all sectors of society to fully implement the spirit of the Fifth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the central authorities' strategic decisions. We will strengthen our sense of mission, deepen reform and innovation, and comprehensively advance the implementation of the "Third Five-Year Plan". By placing public wellbeing at the core, we will enhance the level of precision governance, stimulate the development vitality of the society, and boost the momentum for high-quality development. Furthermore, we will accelerate the development of appropriate economic diversification and the construction of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, better integrate into and serve the overall development of the nation, and advance the implementation of the "One country, two systems" principle with Macao characteristics to open up a new horizon of high-quality development.

Strengthen capacity to address internal and external risks and challenges, and advance the sustainable development of the MSAR

- **Strengthen the institutional mechanisms and enforcement capacities for safeguarding national security**
- **Build a higher-level safe city to safeguard high-quality development**
- **Strive to promote and strengthen the forces for loving the country and loving Macao**
- **Uphold and perfect executive-led administration and comprehensively advance public administration reform**
  - Fully leverage the institutional advantages of executive-led administration.
  - Launch the second phase of work to improve organisational functions and structures.
  - Continuously strengthen departmental performance management.
  - Optimise staffing control and optimise government human resources.
  - Strengthen the development of the civil service talent pipeline.
  - Advance the comprehensive upgrade of major e-government platforms.
  - Reinforce oversight in anti-corruption and government auditing efforts.



- **Accelerate the refinement of the MSAR legal system**
  - Strengthen overall planning and coordination for major legislative projects.
  - Accelerate the amendment of major codes of law.
  - Deepen inter-regional and international legal cooperation.
- **Continuously enhance precision governance at primary level**
  - Better leverage the synergistic role of organisations and associations in community governance.
  - Optimise responsiveness and efficiency in handling public comments and suggestions.



Enhance the competitiveness of diversified industries and build a vibrant MSAR

- **Foster a new framework for the development of diversified industries**
  - Advance the development of "One Centre".
  - Promote the development of the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and Big Health industry.
  - Actively cultivate the development of featured finance industry.
  - Develop high-technology industries suited to Macao.
  - Promote the high-quality development of the MICE, trade, and commerce industry.
  - Promote the sustainable development of cultural and sports industries.
  - Support the upgrading of traditional industries.



- **Optimise business environment and support enterprise development**
  - Implement supportive measures for enterprises.
  - Generate the momentum of community economic development.
  - Create a competitive business environment.
  - Support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to enhance their competitiveness.
- **Advance the construction of the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin to promote Macao's appropriate economic diversification**
  - Promote and improve the "Four-shared" mechanism (joint discussion, joint construction, joint administration and shared benefits).
  - Make effective use of legislative resources to promote "soft" institutional connectivity.
  - Advance flagship projects to strengthen "hard" infrastructure connectivity.
  - Leverage diversified advantages to empower industrial synergy.
  - Optimise public services to foster closer ties between peoples.



- **Build an international hub for high-caliber talent**
  - Amend the legal regime for talent recruitment.
  - Deepen regional and international talent cooperation.
  - Closely align the structure of academic disciplines with industry demands.
  - Focus efforts on nurturing talent specialised in Chinese and Portuguese languages, culture, science and technology, and medical sciences.
  - Accelerate the cultivation of local talent with practical skills.

The Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region

(TRANSLATED VERSION)

Highlights of 2027 Policy Address

Prioritise public wellbeing to build a MSAR where residents can live and work in peace and contentment

- **Review and optimise employment support measures**
- **Improve the two-tier social security system**
- **Accelerate urban renewal and the construction of urban infrastructure**
  - Formulate a planning framework for priority areas of urban renewal.
  - Carry out inspections and repairs for old buildings
  - Designate target streets and districts to implement beautification pilot projects.
  - Revitalise undeveloped state-owned plots of land.
- **Deliver continuous support to vulnerable communities**
- **Proactively address the challenges of declining birthrate and population aging**
- **Enhance the overall level of medical and health services**
- **Optimise housing policies and improve residential amenities**
- **Leverage technology to empower development and consolidate the foundation of education**
- **Provide comprehensive support for the growth and advancement of young people**
- **Enhance Macao's cultural soft power**
- **Promote the coordinated development of public participation and competitive sports**
- **Proactively advance environmental protection works**
- **Strengthen precision urban management**
- **Accelerate the building of a beautiful city**



Leverage the advantages of domestic links and external connectivity to better integrate into and serve the overall development of the country

- **Participate in the development of the high-quality development of the Great Bay Area and jointly advance the "Belt and Road" Initiative.**
- **Intensify cooperation with provinces and cities of the Chinese mainland.**
- **Promote the high-quality construction of the platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries.**
- **Expedite the construction of "One Base".**



2027 Major Welfare Measures

All Macao residents

Non-mandatory individual accounts of the Central Provident Fund

- Start-up fund of 10,000 patacas (eligible residents).
- Additional fund injection of 7,000 patacas (eligible residents).

Wealth Partaking Scheme

- 10,000 patacas (eligible permanent residents).
- 6,000 patacas (eligible non-permanent residents).

Healthcare voucher (Healthcare subsidy scheme)

700 patacas per person (permanent residents).

Allowance scheme for Macao residents to gain access to basic medical insurance in Chinese mainland new adjustment

Provide allowances of up to 1,000 patacas to eligible Macao residents for joining personal medical insurance schemes in Chinese mainland. The coverage of the scheme will be extended to all provinces, autonomous regions and direct-administered municipalities in Chinese mainland.

Birth allowance new adjustment

Increase to 8,000 patacas ◆ (both parents may apply at the same time).

Marriage allowance

4,000 patacas (both spouses may apply at the same time).

Unemployment allowance

210 patacas per day (eligible residents).

Sickness allowance

- 180 patacas per day for non-hospitalisation allowance (eligible residents).
- 240 patacas per day for hospitalisation allowance (eligible residents).

Funeral allowance

5,200 patacas (eligible residents).

Continuing Education Programme (2026-2029)

Maximum 6,000 patacas (per eligible resident).

Electricity bill subsidy for residential units

200 patacas per month (each residential unit).

On-going water tariff subsidy

Water tariff subsidy for residential and general non-residential users. (Tiered subsidies to encourage water conservation.)

Bus fare concessions

Fare concessions for people holding top-up cards, student cards, senior cards, disability cards approved by the Transport Bureau, or people using electronic payments approved by the Transport Bureau.

Real estate tax (all real estates)

Deduction of first 3,500 patacas of tax (Macao residents).

Waiver of real estate stamp duty

First six million patacas of a residential unit's value. (Eligible residents purchasing residential property for the first time.)

Incentive for the increase of supply in the real estate rental market

Reduction of the property tax rate for leased properties to eight percent; property tax rate for non-leased properties remains at six percent.

The elderly

Old age allowance

10,000 patacas per year.

Pension

3,900 patacas per month (13-month disbursements per year).

Incentive for employment for senior citizens

The basic allowance for personal income tax is 198,000 patacas for elderly employees over 65 years of age

Rental price for Government elderly housing units new adjustment

The discount will increase from 20 percent to 25 percent

New measures:

- Establish a new support and services centre for elderly carers.
- Establish a new outreach service team for elderly community.
- Launch a home adaptation subsidy scheme for the elderly. Elderly living alone or elderly couples may receive a maximum of 3,000 patacas during the scheme period for the purchases of essential home safety and protective age-friendly equipment.

Disadvantaged families

Minimum subsistence index

4,350 patacas per one-person household.

Financial assistance

- Continue disbursing 13 months of financial assistance per year.
- Disburse an additional month of financial assistance to eligible families (financial assistance amounting from 4,350 patacas for one-person household per month to 20,270 patacas for eight-person household per month).

Special subsidy for three categories of disadvantaged families

- Learning activity subsidies: 400 patacas to 900 patacas per month.
- Medical subsidies: 1,200 patacas to 1,440 patacas per month.
- Subsidies for the disabled: 900 patacas to 1,200 patacas per month.

Social Inclusion Scheme – Special living allowance

Two disbursements of special allowance per year. Each disbursement ranging from 2,900 patacas for one-person households, to 11,200 patacas for eight-person households. The income ceiling of the eligible households is 1.8 times the minimum subsistence index (single-parent households, the disabled and patients with chronic illness).

Short-term Food Assistance Programme

For a maximum of 10 weeks. The income ceiling of the eligible households is 1.8 times the minimum subsistence index.

Public housing tenants

Tenants whose income does not exceed the income ceiling are eligible for a rent waiver of up to 2,000 patacas per month.

Positive Life Programme

If a benefit recipient is re-employed, when assessing the household income of the family receiving financial assistance, the household is entitled to an income exemption of up to 6,530 patacas per month, for up to 18 months.

Community Employment Assistance Scheme

Participants of this scheme will receive a monthly subsidy of up to 2,000 patacas, subject to individual work situations.

The Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region

(TRANSLATED VERSION)

Highlights of 2027 Policy Address

Childbearing families

Childcare allowance scheme new adjustment

Disburse an allowance of 18,000 patacas per year to toddlers aged 3 or below (Macao permanent residents).

Introduce tiered measures:

18,000 patacas per year for the first newborn.

27,000 patacas per year for the second newborn.

36,000 patacas per year for the third newborn.

Increased support for families with toddlers in nurseries new adjustment

- Expand free coverage (exemption of basic monthly fee):
  - Families with three or more toddlers in nurseries.
  - Means-test exemption for specific families. (Families of inclusive and special education studies are benefit recipients.)
- Subsidy for two-year-old toddlers in nurseries:
  - 500 patacas per month for families with one toddler.
  - 800 patacas per month for families with two toddlers.

People with disabilities

Disability subsidy

- 10,000 patacas per year (ordinary).
- 20,000 patacas per year (special).

Disability pension

3,900 patacas per month (13-month disbursements per year).

Employers hiring people with disabilities

A tax deduction of up to 5,000 patacas on profit tax or personal income tax per employee with disabilities.

Income subsidy scheme for employees with disabilities

Subsidised to minimum wage level.

Employment incentives

The personal income tax allowance for eligible employees with disabilities is 198,000 patacas.

Carers allowance new adjustment

2,400 patacas per month.

Expand the scope of benefit recipients: individuals assessed with severe or profound mental disability (dementia) and whose loss of self-care ability (ADL) reaches a moderate level or above.

Scheme to support people with disabilities to purchase assistive devices and special household equipment

People with disabilities who meet the described financial criteria will be subsidised with an accumulative maximum of 30,000 patacas to purchase assistive devices and special household equipment during the scheme period.

Schools

Free education basic subsidy (2026/2027 school year)

- kindergarten education
  1,095,700 patacas per class
- primary education
  1,193,900 patacas per class
- junior secondary education
  1,438,700 patacas per class
- senior secondary education
  1,631,800 patacas per class

Free education supplementary subsidy (2026/2027 school year)

- kindergarten education
  77,500 patacas to 232,500 patacas per class
- primary education
  88,300 patacas to 264,900 patacas per class
- secondary education
  90,300 patacas to 361,200 patacas per class

Tuition fee subsidy (2026/2027 school year)

- kindergarten education
  21,350 patacas per person
- primary education
  23,560 patacas per person
- secondary education
  25,940 patacas per person

Recurrent education subsidy (2026/2027 school year)

- primary education
  926,600 patacas per class
- junior secondary education
  1,106,000 patacas per class
- senior secondary education
  1,246,900 patacas per class

"Optimisation of Class/Teacher and Student/Teacher Ratios Subsidy Scheme", a special project of the Education Fund under the "School Development Plan" (schools not providing free education) (2026/2027 school year)

- kindergarten education
  77,500 patacas to 232,500 patacas per class
- formal primary education
  88,300 patacas to 264,900 patacas per class
- formal secondary education
  90,300 patacas to 361,200 patacas per class
- recurrent primary education
  88,300 patacas to 264,900 patacas per class
- recurrent secondary education
  90,300 patacas to 270,900 patacas per class

Students

Textbook allowance for non-tertiary education

- secondary education
  3,550 patacas per school year
- primary education
  3,000 patacas per school year
- kindergarten education
  2,400 patacas per school year

Tuition fee subsidies, meal allowance and stationery allowance for students from families with financial difficulties

Tuition fee subsidies:

- senior secondary education
  Maximum 9,000 patacas per school year
- junior secondary education
  Maximum 6,000 patacas per school year
- kindergarten and primary education
  Maximum 4,000 patacas per school year

Meal allowance:

- kindergarten, primary and secondary education
  3,950 patacas per school year

Stationery allowance:

- secondary education
  3,350 patacas per school year
- kindergarten and primary education
  2,600 patacas per school year

Tuition fee subsidies and stationery allowance for Macao students studying in Guangdong province

Tuition fee subsidies:

- primary, junior secondary, full-time senior secondary and full-time mid-level vocational education at senior secondary education stage
  Maximum 6,000 patacas
- pre-school education Maximum 8,000 patacas

Stationery allowance:

- junior secondary, full-time senior secondary and full-time mid-level vocational education at senior secondary education stage
  1,700 patacas per school year
- primary education 1,450 patacas per school year
- pre-school education 1,150 patacas per school year

Stationery allowance for tertiary students

3,300 patacas (eligible residents).

Internship programme for Macao tertiary students in Chinese mainland

Each student will receive a subsidy of 5,000 patacas after completion of internship.

Teaching staff

Professional development allowance for teaching staff

From 3,100 patacas to 11,790 patacas for school year 2026/2027 (eligible teaching staff)

Direct allowance

From 3,100 patacas to 6,550 patacas for school year 2026/2027 (eligible teaching staff)

Employees

Personal income tax deduction and tax rebate

30 percent reduction in personal income tax, with the basic allowance for personal income tax at 144,000 patacas for general employees; 60 percent rebate of personal income tax payable by each Macao resident for the year 2024, subject to a ceiling of 14,000 patacas.

Greater Bay Area Youth Employment Scheme

Support young people to seek employment in the Greater Bay Area (GBA). Tertiary graduates (aged 35 or below) employed in the nine GBA cities or the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin will be offered a monthly subsidy of 5,000 patacas for up to 18 months.

Business owners and related persons

Tax concessions

- Profit tax allowance will remain at 600,000 patacas.
- Waivers of all business taxes, hawker licence fees, wet market stall rents, inspection and quarantine fees for live food, stamp duty on life or non-life insurance, and bank service charges, and stamp duty for auctions.
- Waivers of signboard taxes for businesses and exemption from tourism tax for restaurants.
- Waivers of stamp duty on eligible entrance passes and tickets for performances, exhibitions and entertainment programmes.
- Waiver of profit tax on dividends and investment income from local bonds issued in Macao; and exemption of stamp duty for issuing, transaction or compensable transfer of such bonds.
- Profit tax waiver for Macao businesses for income or profits received in Portuguese-speaking countries.
- Enterprises can enjoy extra reduction in profit tax for eligible research and development expenditure.
- Qualified corporate treasury centres (CTC) set up in Macao will be eligible to enjoy a preferential tax rate of five percent for profits tax.
- Qualified fund management companies set up in Macao, specific fund investment businesses and fund investment profits will be eligible to enjoy relevant tax benefits.

Maternity leave remuneration subsidy scheme new adjustment

Eligible employers who have legally paid maternity leave remuneration to local employees for childbirth or other related circumstances may apply for a subsidy equivalent to a maximum of 20 days of the employee's basic remuneration.



Major Policies on Various Areas

(TRANSLATED VERSION)

Administration and Justice

The administration and justice domain will focus on "enhancing the capacity and efficacy of law-based governance" as its core task. In accordance with the Chief Executive's directives and requirements, as well as the MSAR Government's overall policy deployment, the sector will continuously coordinate and deepen public administration reform. On the basis of upholding and improving executive-led administration, it will strengthen positive interaction between the executive and the legislature. Adhering to the "people-centred" philosophy, it will elevate the quality of public administration and municipal services. It will also steadily advance the alignment of rules and mechanisms in the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, thereby boosting Macao's development through its proactive integration into and service toward the overall development of the nation.

Planning and implementation

- Enhance governance efficiency and advance the modernisation of the legal system.
- Deepen the alignment of rules and mechanisms, and improve municipal infrastructure.

Executive-led administration

- Uphold high-level coordination and leadership, and strengthen cooperation between the executive and the legislature.
- Create channels for government-public interaction, and solidify the foundation of primary-level governance.

Public administration reform

- Continue to promote the restructuring of functions and organisational frameworks, and reform systems to optimise human resources.
- Attach great importance to the development of talent pipelines, and care for the physical and mental wellbeing of personnel.



Through the continuous innovation of public administration, the legal system, and municipal services, we are committed to benefiting residents, facilitating businesses, promoting integration, and optimising governance.

Legal system development

- Deepen the legislative coordination mechanism, and orderly advance the amendment of legal codes.
- Strengthen inter-regional legal connectivity, and elevate capacities in judicial practice.

Municipal services

- Improve the urban environment to create a liveable city for the benefits of residents, and expand spaces for community activities.
- Revitalise wet markets through custom-tailored approaches, and monitor food safety scientifically.

Macao-Hengqin integration

- Facilitate the integrated development of Macao and Hengqin, and expand cross-boundary e-government services.
- Build a high-quality living environment in Macao and Hengqin, and collaboratively participate in the development of Hengqin.

Promote technology-driven administrative streamlining

- Upgrade electronic public service platforms to empower efficiency, benefit residents, and facilitate businesses.
- Advance electronic governance infrastructure, and expand visa-free travel for greater convenience.

Community synergy

- Broaden legal outreach and publicity network, and actively promote civic education.
- Build a broad social consensus, and foster a favourable atmosphere for a law-based society.

Economy and Finance

Closely aligning with the strategic deployment of the nation's "15th Five-Year Plan", we will adopt innovative thinking, refined approaches, and greater determination to solidly advance the implementation of the goals and tasks outlined in Macao's "Third Five-Year Plan" to deliver concrete results. We remain dedicated to fostering a new paradigm of diversified industrial development, striving to optimise the business environment, earnestly safeguarding employment rights and interests of our residents, advancing the high-quality development of the Cooperation Zone, and more proactively integrating into and serving the overall development of the nation.

Fully align with the nation's "15th Five-Year Plan" and advance the implementation of Macao's "Third Five-Year Plan"

Build a new paradigm of diversified industrial development and enhance the economic resilience of the MSAR

- Create a competitive business environment, and improve the effectiveness of investment promotion.
- Leverage the strengths of the integrated tourism and leisure industry, and strengthen external publicity and promotion.
- Bolster scientific research and innovation competency in TCM, and facilitate international market expansion.
- Actively cultivate new business models in modern finance, and improve the digital currency ecosystem.
- Foster an optimal development environment for the technology industry, and support the upgrading of traditional industries.
- Promote the quality-driven development of the MICE, trade, and commerce industry, and leverage its industrial spillover effects.
- Continuously improve and release statistical indicators, and constantly optimise statistical work.

Support the collaborative development of residents and enterprises, and share the fruits of economic growth

- Provide fiscal guarantees for social development, and ensure public financial sustainability.
- Support SMEs in enhancing their competitiveness, and promote the economic growth of local communities.
- Review and optimise employment support measures, and support residents' career advancement.
- Enhance the capacity to guarantee daily necessities to maintain social stability, and protect consumer rights and interests according to law.

Fully advance the integrated development of Macao and Hengqin, and collaboratively implement phase-specific goals

- Expedite the implementation of new layouts for key projects, and promote the synergistic development of Macao and Hengqin.
- Advance the high-quality integration of Macao-Hengqin industries, and enhance the industrial agglomeration effects.
- Implement the new model of joint Macao-Hengqin investment promotion, and support the development of Macao-funded enterprises.
- Deliver high-standard public welfare and security services, and foster an environment favourable for living and working.



Closely align with the new positioning of "Macao+Hengqin" and promote the integrated development of Macao and Hengqin.

- Upgrade the infrastructure standards of the Cooperation Zone, and bring greater convenience to residents' lives and mobility.
- Further facilitate the alignment of rules and mechanisms, and enhance the efficiency of authorities.

Integrate into and serve the overall development of the nation, and align with the national development strategies

- Proactively participate in the development of the Greater Bay Area, and deepen cooperation with the Chinese mainland.
- Enrich the connotation of Macao's platform between China and Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries, and broaden the international cooperation network.

Public Security

The year 2027 is a critical year for the full implementation of Macao's "Third Five-Year Plan". The security domain will unswervingly implement the "holistic approach to national security" and adhere to the coordinated balancing of development and security. We will adopt bottom-line thinking to prevent and defuse risks, and leverage technological empowerment to drive the transformation of public safety governance. All personnel in the public security sector will resolutely shoulder the political responsibility of safeguarding national security and social stability, thereby anchoring and safeguarding the long-term peace and stability of the MSAR.

Take the holistic approach to national security as the cornerstone, and build a strong line of proactive defence

- Advance the formulation of the *Overall Plan for National Security Education for All (2027–2032)*.
- Complete the supporting legislation for the legal frameworks against money laundering and terrorism.
- Advocate the updating of the cyber security law and related technical specifications, and carry out "clean internet" operations.
- Continuously advance the orderly operation of the risk monitoring and early warning indicator system for safeguarding national security.
- Complete the fourth round of risk assessment on money laundering and terrorist financing.

Take urban resilience as the core, and promote the coordinated synergy in civil defence emergency response

- Comprehensively review the effectiveness of the *Ten-Year Plan for Disaster Prevention and Mitigation of the Macao Special Administrative Region (2019–2028)*.
- Revise the *Civil Protection Master Plan* and various specialised emergency response contingency plans.
- Participate in the "Liancheng-2027" joint emergency rescue drill.
- Launch a pilot scheme for the "Fire Safety Network" specialised collaboration programme.

Take technological empowerment as the orientation, and comprehensively elevate law enforcement efficiency

- Complete the construction works of the "Sky Eye" surveillance system (phase six) and Zone A of the New Urban Zone.
- Advance smart customs clearance and maritime surveillance, and make good use of unmanned vehicles and equipment for law enforcement.
- Upgrade anti-fraud mobile applications and diversely optimise anti-fraud technologies.
- Construct an artificial intelligence-assisted digital forensics system.



The security sector will fortify an all-encompassing security shield to safeguard the high-quality development of the MSAR.

Take Macao-Hengqin integration as the positioning, and build a regional connectivity and integration ecosystem

- Implement the construction of the modern smart port at the University of Macau's Hengqin Port subsidiary channel.
- Advance the smart upgrading of the Hengqin Port vehicular lanes through "face+iris" contactless recognition.
- Support and complement the construction of the Macau International Airport's Hengqin upstream cargo terminal and the inspection area.
- Facilitate the use of "single-ID clearance" via automated channels at the three major joint-inspection ports.

Take institutional development as the benchmark, and forge a clean, professional, and modern Police Force

- Comprehensively popularise Chinese-style military drill and foot drill.
- Perfect internal and external supervisory mechanisms and integrity building.
- Accelerate personnel recruitment to fill staff vacancies.
- Advance the restructuring of functions and frameworks at the Academy of Public Security Forces.

Take social integration as the goal, and refine the building of an inclusive support network with diversified resources

- Launch convenient public services on "Macao One Account" and "Business and Associations Platform".
- Expand the target beneficiaries of the "Video Visitation for Inmates" service.
- Strengthen the dissemination of safety information on civil defence and public security to foreign communities.
- Enhance support for vulnerable groups and upgrade barrier-free amenities at ports.

Major Policies on Various Areas

(TRANSLATED VERSION)

Social Affairs and Culture

Resolutely implementing the requirements of the nation's "15th Five-Year Plan" and Macao's "Third Five-Year Plan", we will focus on enhancing the wellbeing of residents, maintaining a long-term commitment to the development of healthcare, culture, and sports, as well as the integrated development of education, technology, and talent, and bring people's livelihood and related services to new heights.

Effectively implement the "Third Five-Year Plan"

- Advance the phase two development of the Macao-Hengqin International Education (University) Town, and the construction of the phase one exhibition hall of the Macao National Museum of Culture.
- Promote the integrated development of Macao and Hengqin across various sectors, including healthcare, education, social work, social welfares, culture, and sports.
- Successfully host the International Forum on Mutual Learning Among Civilizations, expand the influence of "One Base", and more effectively integrate into and serve the overall development of the nation.

Proactively enhance social livelihoods and wellbeing

- Optimise childcare allowances and birth subsidies, expand free nursery services, and proactively respond to the declining birth rate.
- Launch a home adaptation subsidy scheme for the elderly, reinforce carer support services, expand the eligibility scope for carer allowances, and strengthen support for cross-boundary elderly care.
- Launch the fourth phase of the "Social Enterprise Subsidy Scheme", and perfect the double-tier social security system.

Comprehensively promote the integrated development of education, technology, and talent

- Popularise smart education, launch an international vision guidance programme for youth, and establish "Youth Innovation Stations" to build a supportive environment for the happy and healthy growth of young people.
- Establish a Macao higher education alliance for technological innovation and development to unleash the potential of technological advancement.
- Amend the legal framework for talent acquisition, and solidly advance the development of a premier talent hub.



Launch operations of the first phase of the Macao-Hengqin International Education (University) Town.

Vigorously elevate the standard of healthcare services

- Implement the "Health First" strategy, and build a healthy Macao.
- Enhance capabilities in treating complex, critical, and specialised medical cases, and optimise the healthcare experience for residents.
- Establish a breast cancer screening centre, and intensify cancer screening efforts.

Collaboratively promote the integrated development of culture and sports

- Launch an intangible cultural heritage festival, promote heritage trails, and initiate the construction of the "Digital Museum of Macao" to showcase Macao's profound cultural heritage.
- Develop new forms of popular literature and art, nurture more artistic and cultural talent, and cultivate cultural vitality for Macao.
- Coordinate and host cultural festivals as well as cultural and sports mega events to elevate the influence of Macao's cultural and sports intellectual properties (IPs).

Transport and Public Works

The transport and public works domain will closely align with the nation's "15th Five-Year Plan" and Macao's "Third Five-Year Plan". Adhering to a citizen-centric approach, we will accelerate the promotion of urban renewal, strive to build a liveable city, and proactively integrate into and serve the overall development of the nation.

Accelerate the urban renewal plan

- Accelerate the promotion of urban renewal, and construct a comprehensive planning system.
- Strengthen maintenance and repair support to improve the residential environment.
- Pilot neighborhood beautification schemes to revive the cultural charm of historic areas.
- Advance urban planning and optimise spatial layout for development.


Make every effort to advance the construction works of the LRT East Line.

Build a liveable and harmonious city

- Activate land resources, and improve public facilities.
- Expedite the allocation of public housing, and optimise residential support facilities.
- Accelerate the circulation of economic housing to meet housing demands.
- Optimise public spaces, and improve the quality of life.
- Construct government facilities to safeguard public services.
- Implement scientific approaches to urban development, and elevate governance efficiency.

Improve the urban transport system

- Strengthen coordination and alignment, and improve transport planning.
- Accelerate Light Rapid Transit (LRT) construction to meet commuting and travel demands.
- Perfect the road network layout to enhance the convenience of public commuting.
- Optimise public bus services, and elevate service quality.
- Improve parking services, and improve communting experience.
- Advance the development of maritime and air transport, and integrate into national development.

Build a low-carbon green city

- Advance environmental protection planning, and drive low-carbon growth.
- Implement comprehensive pollution prevention and control to build a green city.
- Promote waste reduction to help develop a waste-free city.
- Improve sewage treatment, and promote the use of recycled water.
- Strengthen sea area management, and protect marine resources.

Strengthen urban safety and resilience

- Reinforce energy reliability, and improve supply systems.
- Accelerate water supply infrastructure development, and deepen smart water management.
- Implement the new Telecommunications Law to empower digital development.
- Refine meteorological forecasting to strengthen disaster response readiness.
- Improve flood control systems to build a resilient city.
- Execute emergency response contingency plans to safeguard infrastructure safety.

Integrate into and serve the development of the nation

Commission Against Corruption

In 2027, the Commission Against Corruption will grasp the profound connotation of the nation's anti-corruption policies. From a global perspective, the Commission will continue to adopt innovative ideas and measures to ensure the core spirits of the nation's "15th Five-Year Plan" and the MSAR's "Third Five-Year Plan" are successfully delivered at the operational level, and strive to consolidate Macao's foundation of integrity.

Build platforms and cultivate new virtues

- Advance the notification and prevention work of the "Integrity Management Plan – Progression and Innovation".
- Foster a culture of integrity and strengthen personnel training within the public sector by leveraging the role of "Integrity Coordinators".

Crack down on corruption and enhance coordinated investigations

- Strictly investigate all forms of disciplinary infractions and illegal acts that hinder economic and social development, and strengthen cross-boundary cooperation in combating corruption.
- Explore new anti-corruption pathways, reinforce proactive investigation and precise forecasting work mechanisms, and advance the anti-corruption frontline.

Optimise governance, plug loopholes, and consolidate the foundation

- Carry out research and reviews to improve departmental operations, and deploy personnel for on-site inspections to enhance supervisory effectiveness.
- Research on a new "retrospective review" model to monitor the effectiveness of departments in implementing measures for improvement.

Implement diversified education to build deep-rooted social awareness

- Continuously create conditions for youth development, and build a structured growth ladder for integrity-minded youth.
- Utilise community networks to promote a culture of integrity, expand public-private dual-track training, and advance family-based integrity education.

Leverage digital-intelligence synergy to advance innovative promotion of integrity

- Integrate investigative resources, optimise case management, and make good use of technology to enhance anti-corruption effectiveness.
- Launch tech-driven integrity promotion activities or projects to unleash the efficacy of digital intelligence in enhancing anti-corruption efforts.

Collaborative partnerships to expand horizons

- Strengthen regional interaction, advance cross-boundary cooperation, and broaden international cooperation channels, while drawing on external experiences to deepen local anti-corruption development.
- Promote the establishment of a long-term training mechanism with the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong to cultivate an anti-corruption team equipped with national patriotism, an international vision, and local practical capabilities.

Commission of Audit

The Commission of Audit focuses on the major deployments for the MSAR's better integration into and service toward the overall development of the nation. It will center upon the critical juncture where the MSAR's "Third Five-Year Plan" connects with the commencement of the nation's "15th Five-Year Plan", dynamically grasping the developmental direction of the overall situation and major livelihood issues. The Commission will actively empower public administration reform and deepen connectivity and synergy with other supervisory mechanisms, striving to leverage robust and effective audit supervision to jointly push forward the high-quality and sustainable economic and social development of Macao.

Improve quality and efficiency, and plug loopholes

- Further promote governance at source and break away from the traditional "ex-post rectification" mindset. By means of early intervention, proactively identify potential risks in public management, issue risk alerts, and conduct rectification tracking, while collaborating with other supervisory mechanisms to drive the continuous improvement of the management and operations of public departments and institutions.

Move beyond financial accounts and exercise macro-level oversight

- By moving beyond the traditional approach of tracing errors and omissions in public financial accounts, audit resources will now be strategically directed toward high-risk areas and projects. Particular attention will be paid to institutional barriers, mechanism deficiencies, and management loopholes, thereby assisting in evaluating the real risks behind financial data, issuing risk alerts, and offering recommendations for improvement.

Implement dynamic tracking to address symptoms and root causes

- Take "targeted rectification" as the core to enhance the effectiveness of audit supervision, preventing unfavourable outcomes such as formalism, perfunctory rectification, and the resurgence of issues. Consistently conduct "retrospective reviews" on past audit findings to ensure that rectification measures are fully implemented.

Foster audit empowerment and strengthen collaborative reform

- Coordinate with the deployments of the Public Administration Reform Leadership Group to systematically provide audit opinions on the restructuring plans of various departments. Leveraging the opportunity of departmental restructuring, comprehensively review the rationality of staffing allocations from a cost-benefit perspective, driving the enhancement of departmental operational efficiency and the effectiveness of resource utilisation.

Can APEC reinvent free trade for a fragmented world?

Analysis by Michael G. Wang, CGTN anchor

Twenty years after APEC embraced the vision of a region-wide free trade area, China's third APEC host year offers an opportunity to inject fresh momentum to turn a longstanding ambition into practical progress.

At a time when protectionism is rising and trade has become an increasingly contentious political issue, an unexpected consensus has emerged in the Asia-Pacific.

In May, trade ministers from all 21 APEC economies, meeting in the Chinese city of Suzhou, reaffirmed their commitment to advancing regional economic integration, including the long-term vision of a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP).

That commitment is particularly noteworthy given the profound changes in the global trading environment. Tariffs have returned to the forefront of economic policy. Governments are scrutinizing supply chains, while concerns over economic security, industrial competitiveness and technological leadership increasingly shape trade decisions.

Yet the region remains an indispensable engine of global commerce. APEC's 21 member economies account for approximately 40% of the world's population, nearly half of global trade, and more than 60% of global GDP.

Despite their differences, these economies continue to recognize the value of deeper integration. The question going forward is what consensus on deeper integration can achieve.

Twenty years of ambition

The FTAAP vision can be traced back to 2004, when the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) proposed exploring the creation of a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific, citing its potential to deliver significant economic benefits across the region. Two years later, APEC leaders formally recognized FTAAP as a long-term prospect for regional economic integration. The economic rationale was compelling: connecting some of the world's largest consumer markets, manufacturing centers and trading economies through a more coherent set of rules.

The region has already made considerable progress in lowering trade barriers. According to APEC, average tariffs across its member economies fell from approximately 17% when the forum was established in 1989 to 5.1% in 2024. While this decline reflects a combination of unilateral reforms, regional agreements and multilateral trade liberalization, it illustrates how dramatically the region's trading environment has changed over the past three decades.

The scale of the region's economic interdependence is striking. Calculations based on StatsAPEC data show that the value of goods exported between APEC's 21 economies nearly quadrupled from approximately US$2 trillion in 2001 to US$7.6 trillion in 2021, the latest year with complete figures for all 21 economies in the dataset. That was nearly twice the value of merchandise exports between the European Union's 27 member states in the same year.

The proportion of APEC merchandise exports destined for fellow members remained remarkably stable at around 70% over those two decades, despite successive global economic shocks and growing geopolitical tensions.

By comparison, 61.1% of EU merchandise exports went to fellow member states in 2021, according to European Commission figures. The Asia-Pacific is already deeply interconnected, even without the EU's single market institutions. The next opportunity lies not simply in expanding trade, but in making its vast network of commercial relationships more efficient, accessible and resilient.

Economic research has reinforced the case for further integration. A study reviewed by the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC) estimated that a region-wide FTAAP could generate economic gains for APEC members ranging from US$724 billion to more than US$1 trillion, depending on the scope and depth of liberalization.

Although these estimates reflect modeled scenarios rather than realized outcomes, and were developed before some of today's geopolitical and economic disruptions, their underlying message remains relevant: a more comprehensive and inclusive free trade area could expand economic opportunities across the region, generating benefits beyond those achievable through smaller, fragmented trade arrangements. These gains would come from lower trade costs, more predictable market access and greater opportunities for specialization, which together can increase productivity, encourage investment and expand consumer choice.

The challenge is that the political conditions for realizing these gains have become considerably more complicated.

The Asia-Pacific encompasses economies with different development priorities, regulatory traditions and approaches to industrial policy. Even among economies broadly supportive of trade, disagreements persist over a range of issues. This helps explain why FTAAP has remained an aspiration rather than a negotiated agreement.

Yet China's 2026 APEC host year offers an opportunity to rethink what progress toward regional integration might look like.

A shared destination, different pathways

The consensus reached among APEC trade ministers in Suzhou reaffirmed a shared long-term vision while laying the groundwork for further progress toward FTAAP.

At a time of growing economic fragmentation, sustaining cooperation toward that goal is itself valuable. But preserving an ambition is only the beginning. The next challenge is to identify practical areas where economies can advance together despite their differences.

China has made this challenge a central focus of its 2026 APEC host year.

Building on the Suzhou consensus, China proposed preparing a standalone FTAAP statement for the upcoming Economic Leaders' Meeting in Shenzhen, emphasizing flexible and pragmatic cooperation and strengthening economies' capacity to participate in high-standard trade arrangements.



Undated file photo of CGTN anchor Michael G. Wang – Photo courtesy of CGTN

The approach recognizes that regional integration does not depend on securing a single grand bargain.

The Asia-Pacific already has an extensive network of trade agreements, including the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). These arrangements have different memberships and rules, but they also offer foundations upon which further integration can be built.

Rather than treating existing agreements as competing destinations, APEC can encourage greater understanding of their similarities and differences, identify opportunities for regulatory compatibility, and help economies develop the capabilities needed to participate more fully in regional commerce.

China's own economic priorities could reinforce this regional agenda. Its 15th Five-Year Plan framework calls for a notable increase in household consumption as a share of GDP, while a dedicated consumption plan targets around 60 trillion yuan (approximately US$9 trillion at current exchange rates) in annual retail sales by 2030.

A more consumption-driven Chinese economy could create additional opportunities for exporters across the Asia-Pacific, from agricultural producers to manufacturers of consumer goods. In this sense, China's efforts to strengthen domestic demand and APEC's pursuit of deeper regional integration could be mutually reinforcing.

The hidden costs of fragmentation

For businesses, the obstacles to international trade do not begin and end with tariffs.

Consider a small manufacturer seeking to sell products across several Asia-Pacific markets. Even where tariffs are low, the company may face different certification requirements, customs procedures, documentation standards and regulatory obligations in each destination.

Large multinational corporations can employ specialists to navigate such complexity. Smaller businesses often cannot. These administrative and regulatory costs can become barriers to market entry, limiting competition and preventing businesses from taking full advantage of existing trade agreements. The APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) has identified precisely this problem. In its 2026 recommendations, the council advocates a two-track approach to FTAAP: encouraging greater convergence among regional trade agreements over time while pursuing immediate improvements in the business environment. Its proposals include interoperable electronic trade documents, greater transparency around non-tariff measures, regulatory cooperation and support for smaller businesses seeking to diversify their export markets.

One particularly revealing estimate concerns agricultural trade. Research cited by ABAC suggests that the tariff-equivalent costs of non-tariff measures affecting food trade across APEC exceed US$130 billion annually, roughly four times the costs imposed by tariffs on the same products.

Not all these measures are unnecessary. Food safety and consumer protection are legitimate public objectives. But the scale of the estimated costs illustrates why better regulatory design, transparency and cooperation can be economically consequential.

Encouragingly, China's 2026 APEC host year has already produced several concrete steps in this direction.

The Suzhou Statement reaffirmed support for paperless trade, including the cross-border recognition of electronic bills of lading and invoices. Ministers also welcomed a new APEC Roadmap for Innovative, Competitive and Resilient Services, aimed at reducing barriers to services trade and improving regulatory predictability.

Importantly, the roadmap goes beyond general aspirations. It establishes a work program covering services regulation, digital transactions, professional mobility and other priorities, with an implementation plan to be developed within 12 months and a formal progress review scheduled for 2029. By August, APEC officials had begun work on translating the roadmap into practical measures.

Making free trade relevant again

There is also a broader political challenge. For decades, the benefits of trade liberalization were frequently communicated through aggregate measures of economic growth, trade volumes and investment flows.

Those indicators matter, but they do not tell the whole story.

The Asia-Pacific's economic integration has coincided with remarkable progress in development and poverty reduction. Yet the gains from globalization have not been distributed evenly, while concerns over job security, wages and economic opportunity have contributed to a growing backlash against free trade.

Policymakers cannot rebuild public confidence in trade simply by promising higher GDP.

They must demonstrate how greater openness can translate into tangible improvements in people's lives. That means helping smaller businesses access foreign markets, supporting workers as industries evolve, investing in skills and ensuring that communities have the capacity to adapt to economic change.

It also means recognizing that resilience and openness are not necessarily competing objectives. A business able to serve multiple overseas markets may be less vulnerable to a downturn in any single destination. Greater regulatory compatibility can make it easier for firms to adjust their operations without abandoning international commerce.

Deeper regional integration, therefore, has the potential not only to make economies more efficient, but also to make them more adaptable to an increasingly uncertain world.

From consensus to credibility

China's emphasis on pragmatic cooperation for APEC 2026 offers a constructive foundation. The next step should be to translate that approach into identifiable priorities, supported by voluntary initiatives, implementation milestones and regular assessments of progress.

A successful FTAAP agenda does not need to begin with an ambitious timetable for a comprehensive agreement. It could begin with participating economies making electronic trade documents easier to recognize across borders, improving transparency around regulatory requirements, and expanding practical assistance for smaller exporters.

Such measures would not resolve every disagreement over trade policy. Nor would they eliminate the need for difficult negotiations in the future. But they could demonstrate that economic cooperation remains capable of producing results even when broader political consensus remains elusive for now.

A comprehensive free trade agreement for APEC may remain a long-term aspiration. But the economic benefits of closer integration need not be.

– Courtesy of CGTN

Editor's Note: China Global Television Network (CGTN) is one of three branches of China Media Group and the international division of China Central Television (CCTV). Headquartered in Beijing, CGTN broadcasts news in multiple languages. Michael G. Wang (王冠) is a financial journalist, television anchor, and business commentator for CGTN. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from the University of Cambridge. Based at CGTN's headquarters in Beijing, Wang is a principal anchor for Global Business, the network's flagship international business and market analysis program, as well as BizTalk. – Gemini/MPD

GBA opens new space for APEC innovation, science cooperation

Analysis

SHENZHEN –Thanks to a startup incubator located less than one kilometer from the Nansha North high-speed rail station in Guangzhou, entrepreneurs here can travel to Hong Kong in under 50 minutes and to the country's tech hub Shenzhen in about 20 minutes.

This incubator, aiming to attract global talent, is part of the local government's efforts to spur entrepreneurship across the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), an increasingly significant global innovation hub.

The GBA's gross domestic product exceeded 15 trillion yuan (US$2.23 trillion) in 2025. Meanwhile, the World Intellectual Property Organization's (WIPO) Global Innovation Index has once again ranked the Shenzhen-Hong Kong-Guangzhou innovation cluster first among the world's top 100 innovation clusters in 2026.

With the 33rd Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting set to take place this week in Shenzhen, the GBA is expected to further open new space for international technology entrepreneurship and scientific research.

Guangzhou launched an innovation and entrepreneurship partnership program for Asia-Pacific youth in late September. At a dialogue on youth entrepreneurship, Mariia Rumiantseva, founder and CEO of medical tech startup Guangzhou Mekla Health Technology Co., Ltd., said she chose to start her business in Guangzhou's Nansha District because of its supportive policies and vibrant innovation ecosystem.

Rumiantseva and her team have developed an AI-powered home health management app for cancer patients. The company is now using Nansha as a base to reach international markets and explore partnerships with overseas universities and researchers.

At the TroubleMaker makerspace in Shenzhen's Futian District, foreign resident entrepreneurs are increasingly developing advanced hardware such as AI wearables, VR and AR devices, and precision sensors.

The platform has brought together innovators from most APEC economies, said Deng Jiefang, marketing supervisor of the hardware innovation center BlackArc, where the TroubleMaker platform operates.

"Unlike large companies that export standardized products in bulk, overseas makers on the TroubleMaker platform place small, frequent orders and iterate quickly," Deng said. Their work centers on testing samples, customized trial production and refining new products to meet the distinct niche demands of their home countries.

Entrepreneurs from Southeast Asia are the most active group stationed here to prototype and refine products, while innovators from Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia, New Zealand and North America regularly pay a visit for technical collaboration, Deng added.

"Ideas, technologies and market needs from across the Asia-Pacific are constantly converging in Shenzhen," he said, while also noting that with the Greater Bay Area's well-developed manufacturing, research, testing and support services, ideas can be swiftly turned into products and solutions.

"After further refinement, those products and solutions return to Asia-Pacific markets, creating a cycle of innovation," Deng said.

OPEN SCIENCE COMMUNITY

In the Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area issued in 2019, China set a strategic goal to build the area into an international center for scientific and technological innovation.

From mapping human proteins to sharing access to major research facilities, the GBA is building new connections for international scientific cooperation.

The area is hosting the China-led π-HuB Project to chart the vast diversity of human proteins and decode how bodies truly function. The project is the next grand endeavor in life sciences after the mapping of the human genome, and the π-HuB consortium has grown into a nearly 100-member international joint force.

In early November, Central People's Government ministries and departments announced 40 measures to further support the region's innovation development, including plans for a world-class cluster of major scientific facilities.

The GBA has 10 such facilities in operation or under construction. Among them, the China Spallation Neutron Source, dubbed a "super microscope" to probe the structure of the microscopic world, has hosted 112 experiments by overseas users since opening in 2018.

At a meeting there this month, researchers from the United States, Japan and other APEC economies exchanged ideas on shared challenges in operating major facilities.

"What we have here is not just a major scientific facility, but also a community," said Wang Sheng, director of the China Spallation Neutron Source Science Center.

The GBA's innovation clusters have shown "remarkable" dynamism across multiple fields, said WIPO Chief Economist Carsten Fink, adding that the area's inventions and international outlook help drive technological progress around the world. *– Xinhua*

APEC Shenzhen meeting to inject fresh momentum into Asia-Pacific cooperation

Commentary

SHENZHEN – Asia-Pacific cooperation now stands at a crossroads amid mounting economic uncertainty and rising protectionism. The upcoming 33rd Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting offers a timely opportunity to reaffirm the region's commitment to openness and cooperation, and inject much-needed certainty and fresh momentum into regional and global growth.

The November 18-19 meeting in Shenzhen is expected to lay the main pillars of an Asia-Pacific community, coordinate different pathways toward the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific, make new arrangements to boost regional connectivity, and advance digital, smart and green transformation for the region to prosper together.

Against the backdrop of a sluggish global economy, there could be no better occasion than the Shenzhen meeting to send a resounding message of championing free trade, deepening regional economic integration, opposing protectionism and "decoupling," and enhancing the resilience of industrial and supply chains.

Interactions among leaders of APEC economies are also expected to help enhance mutual trust and build consensus – a positive signal for global peace and development.

The 2026 APEC "China Year" has seen more than 300 meetings and activities held across Chinese cities, laying a solid foundation for fruitful outcomes during the Shenzhen meeting.

The meeting is expected to adopt an APEC leaders' declaration, with practical outcomes in key areas such as trade, connectivity, the digital economy and artificial intelligence (AI).

Business leaders from across the region and beyond will also gather in Shenzhen for the APEC CEO Summit, where cooperation in AI, the digital economy and green development will be high on the agenda and is expected to create new drivers of growth for the Asia-Pacific economy.

The prosperity of the Asia-Pacific over the past few decades has been built on open cooperation and industrial complementarity, rather than bloc confrontation and economic fragmentation. This is the underlying logic behind the region's remarkable growth and its role as a major engine of the world economy.

Over the years, China has played a leading role in advancing Asia-Pacific cooperation, offering ideas and solutions to promote common development. Meanwhile, China-proposed international public goods, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, have remarkably boosted economic and trade cooperation in the region.

China will remain committed to promoting high-standard opening up, and continuously provide new opportunities for shared growth via its modernization drive. Its super-large market, booming AI, digital economy, green technologies and wider opening up will unlock new potential of cooperation in the region.

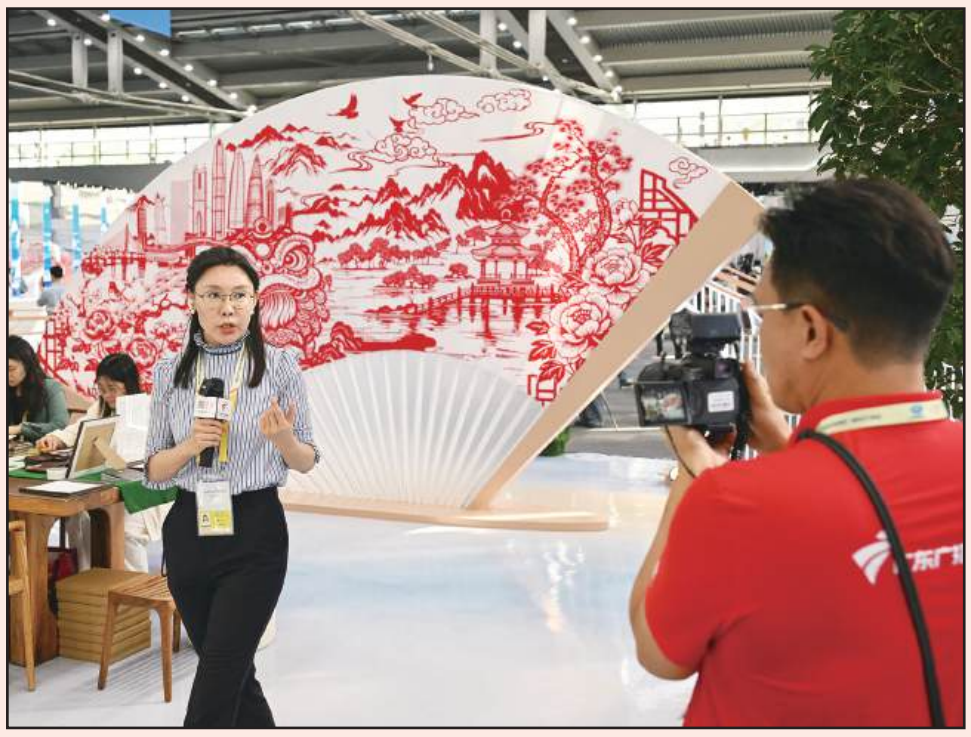
APEC serves as both an incubator of ideas and a platform for building consensus and advancing cooperation. In today's complex and volatile world, the value of its flexible, pragmatic and results-oriented approach is clearer than ever.

China's leader has urged staying true to APEC's founding mission to promote economic growth and improve people's lives, and championing open development where everyone shares opportunities and emerges a winner.

As leaders of APEC member economies gather in Shenzhen, a coastal city at the forefront of China's opening up and innovation drive, they have an opportunity to demonstrate that openness, inclusiveness and mutually beneficial cooperation remain the foundations of regional prosperity.

The Shenzhen meeting is set to help build an Asia-Pacific community to prosper together, and chart an open, innovative and cooperative future for the Asia-Pacific and the wider world.

– Xinhua



A journalist delivers an on-camera report at the media center for the 2026 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Week in Shenzhen yesterday. A cultural exchange area at the media center for the APEC Economic Leaders' Week in Shenzhen offers journalists activities such as tea tasting and traditional craft experiences, showcasing China's intangible cultural heritage. – Xinhua

China, other APEC economies reach nearly 50 practical economic, trade outcomes this year

SHENZHEN – China and other Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) economies have reached nearly 50 practical outcomes in the economic and trade field this year, the Ministry of Commerce (MOC) said yesterday.

Since the beginning of this year, the ministry has worked with relevant departments to promote cooperation on advancing regional economic integration, supporting the work of the World Trade Organization (WTO), deepening digital and intelligent cooperation, and developing the green economy, Li Chenggang, China international trade representative and vice minister of commerce, told a press conference.

Among the economic and trade outcomes, 25 come from areas including trade digitalization, artificial intelligence (AI) and cross-border e-commerce, according to Chen Chao, an official with the Ministry of Commerce.

They cover areas including platform building, practical cooperation, and AI-powered trade, Chen said.

"With the rapid development of the digital economy and AI, all parties are paying close attention to economic and trade cooperation in these fields," Chen said.

The 33rd APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting will be held in Shenzhen on Nov. 18 and 19. This year's gathering, under the theme "Building an Asia-Pacific Community to Prosper Together," will focus on three priority areas identified by China – openness, innovation, and cooperation. *– Xinhua*

Thai court denies ex-PM Thaksin's attempt to stop asset freeze

BANGKOK – A Thai court denied an attempt yesterday by former leader Thaksin Shinawatra to pause the seizure of his assets over a disputed tax bill of more than US$500 million.

The Supreme Court ordered the ex-prime minister – one of Thailand's richest people – last November to pay back taxes over the 2006 sale of shares in his telecoms firm.

Thaksin then sought a temporary injunction against the Revenue Department to stop it from seizing his assets to pay the bill, which the tax court said was around 17.5 billion baht (around US$515 million).

The request was dismissed, according to a court statement yesterday. A mediation between Thaksin and the Revenue Department before the tax court is set for December.

Thaksin, 77, argued in court last month that he had already settled the bill for the tax-free sale of Shin Corp to Singapore's Temasek Holdings.

The 2006 deal, which netted the Shinawatra family a US$1.9 billion windfall, sparked protests and became a lightning rod for opposition to Thaksin's government.

He was ousted in a coup later that year and went into exile for more than a decade, during which time he was convicted of corruption.

Thaksin was arrested when he returned in 2023 but sent to hospital and then freed. He finally saw the inside of a jail last year, serving eight months before his release in May.

The Shinawatra clan has for two decades been a key foe of Thailand's pro-military, pro-royalty elite, who view their populist brand of politics as a threat to the traditional social order.

However, the political dynasty has faced a series of setbacks, including the court-ordered removal of Thaksin's daughter, Paetongtarn, as prime minister in August 2025 over an ethics breach.

Their Pheu Thai party also had its worst election result in February, slipping to third place, but was still included in the ruling coalition of conservative Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul. *– AFP*

11 dead in Phuket fire: police

BANGKOK – A fire raged through a four-storey shophouse on Thailand's resort island of Phuket early yesterday, killing 11 people and injuring 16, police said.

The blaze began around 3:30 a.m. [local time] at a commercial building housing a restaurant and rented accommodation, a police officer from Phuket's Patong community told AFP.

"Firefighters took two hours to get the fire under control and found 11 people dead", including Thais and Myanmar nationals, he said.

The cause of the fire was under investigation, said the officer, who declined to be named because he was not authorised to speak to media.

Sixteen people were treated in hospital for smoke inhalation and injuries from broken glass, he added.



This frame grab from video footage taken and released yesterday by Thai PBS via AFPTV shows responders at the scene of a fire at a commercial building housing a restaurant and rented accommodations, in Phuket. – AFP

Thailand's approach to health and safety regulations – particularly in bars and nightclubs – has long raised concerns.

In July, a crowded Bangkok bar was engulfed in flames and smoke, killing around 40 people after an electrical short circuit triggered the blaze, authorities said.

A fire tore through the capital's Santika club during New Year celebrations in 2009, killing 67 people and injuring more than 200. *– AFP*

Indonesia apologises to Malaysia, Singapore over wildfire haze

JAKARTA – Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto has apologised to Malaysia and Singapore over a toxic haze caused by rampant wildfires in his country that polluted the skies of Indonesia's neighbours.

The months-long blazes on Borneo, Sumatra and Papua islands razed vast tracts of land and produced air pollution that sickened hundreds of thousands at home and drifted across borders to Malaysia and Singapore.

Prabowo told a summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Manila on Sunday that the transboundary haze was "not our fault" and insisted that "we have done our best."

However, "on behalf of the Indonesian government, Indonesian people, we apologise if we have created suffering for the people of Singapore and Malaysia," Prabowo told leaders of ASEAN member states, according to a video of the plenary session released by the presidential secretariat.

Wildfires have burned through 2.88 million hectares so far in 2026, according to the Nusantara Atlas deforestation monitor, an area 18 times the size of London.

Indonesia experiences fires every dry season, but this year's blazes have been particularly severe.

Researchers said last week that a strong El Niño weather phenomenon, climate change, deforestation and peatland drainage for mining and plantations have supercharged this year's Indonesian fire season.

Prabowo said Indonesian authorities have revoked 17 land concessions from corporations in connection with the blazes and 26 others are under investigation.

He added that Indonesia had deployed 71,000 people to tackle the blazes, noting the country lost 16 firefighters and two helicopters in firefighting missions. *– AFP*



Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. (left) and first lady Louise Araneta-Marcos react as they welcome guests ahead of the Gala Dinner during the 49th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit in Manila yesterday. – AFP

UN chief backs engagement with Myanmar but 'violence needs to stop'

MANILA – UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed support yesterday for fresh diplomatic efforts to engage with Myanmar's post-coup government, but said that "violence needs to stop".

Guterres made the remarks in Manila, where leaders from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) agreed Sunday to pursue a "calibrated engagement" with the war-torn country.

Myanmar has been excluded from high-level ASEAN meetings since a military junta seized power in a coup in 2021, but the regional bloc is seeking a path towards normalising diplomatic relations.

"We have never opposed the idea that it is always necessary to engage with whoever is involved in a conflict," Guterres told a press conference on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit.

While "engagement is not appeasement", Guterres said the "intolerable violations of human rights in Myanmar" must end.

"Violence needs to stop, humanitarian access needs to be granted, and all those arbitrarily detained must be immediately released," Guterres said.

"And these are the conditions that could allow for what everybody should will (to happen), which is that Myanmar will find a way to move... to a true democratic situation."

Thailand has been leading efforts to normalise relations with Myanmar since coup leader Min Aung Hlaing was installed as civilian president this year following elections dismissed by monitors as a charade.

Bangkok has called for a "calibrated engagement" in an effort to implement ASEAN's long-languishing five-point plan to end the war between the military and a coalition of pro-democracy rebels and ethnic minority armed groups.

ASEAN leaders adopted that language on Sunday in calling for the pursuit of "a calibrated engagement with Myanmar through a phased and progress-based approach", according to the joint statement.

Guterres's remarks came as the UN's International Court of Justice prepares to rule on whether Myanmar committed genocide against its marginalised Muslim Rohingya minority. *– AFP*

Sri Lanka gets FBI help to crack down on online scammers

COLOMBO – The FBI will help Sri Lankan law enforcement detect cyber scammers who have shifted illicit operations to the island following a crackdown in Southeast Asian countries, the US embassy said yesterday.

Police say scam networks have increasingly moved operations to Sri Lanka – an attractive destination owing to its relaxed visa regime and reliable, high-speed internet.

"FBI personnel will work with Sri Lankan law enforcement partners on investigative techniques, digital forensics and case development" in a bid to disrupt transnational criminal networks operating out of the South Asian nation, the US embassy in Colombo said in a statement.

An FBI team will spend a week in Sri Lanka this month training local investigators and helping to identify victims, trace criminal activity and build stronger cases against those responsible for online scams, the embassy added.

Fraud compounds, where scammers lure internet users into fake romantic relationships, cryptocurrency investments and betting platforms, have flourished across Southeast Asia.

Initially targeting largely Chinese speakers, the criminal groups behind the compounds have expanded their operations into multiple languages.

Those conducting the scams are sometimes willing con artists, while others are trafficked foreign nationals forced to work.

Officials say the networks operating in Sri Lanka target victims across Asia, including in India, Vietnam and the Philippines, but there are growing concerns that Sri Lankans could be next.

Since the start of the year, Sri Lankan police have arrested more than 1,100 foreigners, mainly from China, Vietnam and India, for alleged involvement in cybercrime.

Sri Lanka has also sought help from China, which pledged closer cooperation on combatting cybercrime.

Beijing's embassy in Colombo said in March that activity in Sri Lanka had risen following enforcement actions in Cambodia, Myanmar and the United Arab Emirates. *– AFP*

Trump says may meet with Kim in China

WASHINGTON, DC – US President Donald Trump said yesterday he could meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in China, in a surprise announcement as he left the White House at the start of a trip to Asia.

"We may meet with Kim Jong Un also, so that'll be good," Trump told reporters, adding that President Xi Jinping might invite Kim when leaders gather in Shenzhen for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit.

"He may come, I don't know. That's up to president Xi," said Trump, who is due to hold a historic trilateral meeting with Xi and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Shenzhen.

Trump had said in August that he expected to meet later this year with Kim, hoping to revive the bond he claims to have forged with the leader of nuclear-armed North Korea in his first term.

Trump met three times with Kim – in Singapore in June 2018, then in Hanoi in February 2019 and at the Demilitarised Zone in North Korea in June 2019.

Trump said he and Kim "fell in love" after exchanging "beautiful letters," but the headline-grabbing summits produced few tangible developments on the nuclear issue and they haven't yet met in Trump's second term.

The US president meanwhile talked up the importance of his trilateral meeting with Xi and Putin in Shenzhen – the first such summit between the leaders of the three countries.



US President Donald Trump talks to reporters while departing the White House yesterday in Washington, DC. Trump is traveling to Manila and then to Shenzhen this week. – AFP

"We have a chance to accomplish a lot," Trump told reporters. "But then in December, as you know, we have the G20 in Miami, so we have a lot of very important meetings."

Beijing said the three leaders would discuss "world peace."

The Kremlin said it was "hard to overestimate" the importance of the summit and added that separate Putin-Trump talks were "being worked out."

Trump did not confirm a separate meeting with Putin.

Trump meanwhile added that he would be making a "major speech" in the Philippines and talk about economics with leaders of the 11-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) before heading to China.

Trump is bringing Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick with him on Air Force One. *– AFP*

Africa should trade more with itself: Botswana president

Abidjan, Ivory Coast

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast – Botswana's President Duma Boko yesterday urged fellow African countries to make the continent more resilient to global economic shocks by trading more with each other.

"It is an indictment of our development models and our ideological leanings, perhaps, that the volumes of intra-Africa trade are as low as they are now," Boko told reporters on a state visit to Ivory Coast.

"It is something that we need to address and address urgently."

The leader of the diamond-producing nation was in Ivory Coast to sign a series of agreements with the west African country, especially in mining.

Pointing to Africa's resource riches, Boko insisted that "there is a need to address these strictures that frustrate trade, open it up, the better for all the countries in the world to thrive, to grow economically and to improve the lives of people".

Boko argued that removing those barriers to trade in Africa would "immunise us a great deal from the exogenous shocks that we suffer... when there is war between Ukraine, Russia, crisis in Iran and other parts".

While the African Continental Free Trade Area officially came into force in 2021, the dream of an Africa where goods and people move freely between countries is still far away.

Botswana's economy is highly dependent on diamond production, contributing to around 30 percent of GDP, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Ivory Coast, a major agricultural producer of cocoa and cashew nuts, has in recent years experienced an extraction boom with the discovery of oil and gas, as well as coltan, gold, and manganese. *– AFP*

Russia says Estonia border closure will backfire

MOSCOW – Russia yesterday denied being behind sabotage attacks that prompted Estonia to close its border with its giant neighbour, implying the decision would backfire on Tallinn.

Estonia announced on Sunday it was closing border checkpoints with its ex-Soviet neighbour after claiming it had thwarted an attempted arson attack by Russia's GRU military intelligence on a drone factory.

"These statements have no basis whatsoever ... no evidence, nothing," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

"They are absolutely unfounded and we cannot take such accusations seriously," he added, referring to what he called "similar accusations" from other European countries.

Several European countries have accused Russia of being behind sabotage attacks since the start of the war in Ukraine, in what many see as a rise of so-called "hybrid warfare."

Estonia said the borders would close on December 1.

"Estonia is building a wall. Many countries, as history demonstrates, have built walls that have brought nothing good to those who erect such walls," Peskov said.

Estonia, a member of the European Union and NATO, summoned Russia's chargé d'affaires on yesterday to "strongly condemn" the attempted arson.

Three crossing points at Narva, Luhamaa and Koidula allow the movement of people and goods between the two countries.

Russia suspended vehicle traffic through Narva in February 2024, although pedestrians were still allowed to pass.

The crossings are among the few remaining overland links between Russia and the European Union still operating since the Ukraine war erupted in February 2022. *– AFP*

EU nations unveil Rwanda deal for migrant return hub

Camille Camdessus and Femke Colborne

VIENNA – Five EU countries including Germany and Denmark yesterday unveiled a deal to establish a migrant deportation centre in Rwanda – the first such facility outside the bloc.

The group, also comprising Austria, Greece and the Netherlands, has been gunning to open a "return-hub" despite rights groups' concerns, after the European Union cleared the way with a recent toughening of migration rules.

"If returning to their home country is not possible, then in the future people without a right of residence will be sent back to a third country such as Rwanda," Austrian Chancellor Christian Stocker said after a meeting of ministers from the five countries in Vienna.

"I am pleased that today we have achieved a truly historic paradigm shift in migration policy," Stocker said yesterday.

Speaking alongside Stocker, Rwandan Interior Minister Vincent Biruta said the plan would offer "a second chance to people who no longer have the right to remain in the partner country".

Ahead of the meeting, European Commission spokesman Markus Lammert welcomed the plans, noting that the EU had been "closely following the preparatory work of the five member states for such a return hub".

'Stop EU-Rwanda deal!'

Around 100 protesters gathered in Vienna yesterday ahead of the meeting, holding placards with slogans such as "Stop EU-Rwanda deal!"

The announcement marks the culmination of an EU push to boost deportations launched in 2024, amid a souring of public opinion on migration.

Migrant arrivals have steadily declined over the past three years, as the bloc struck deals to stem departures with a host of countries in Africa and the Middle East.

But migration has remained a hot-button issue, fuelling far-right electoral gains across the bloc.

Policymakers' focus has now turned to improving the repatriation system, which currently sees less than 30 percent of people who are ordered to leave the bloc returned to their country of origin.

An EU reform granting authorities broader detention powers and allowing for the creation of return hubs was approved earlier this year.

Proponents say such centres – which would serve either as the final destination or as transfer centres for those expelled – could facilitate repatriations and act as a deterrent for would-be irregular migrants.

But critics have questioned their effectiveness, pointing to the hurdles faced by similar projects and likening them to "legal black holes" that could see migrants stranded in limbo with little oversight.

The choice of Rwanda has also caused concern, with US-based Human Rights Watch pointing to its "well-established record of repression of dissent, arbitrary detention, ill-treatment in detention" and support for an armed anti-government group in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

'Welcome centre'

In 2022, Rwanda reached a similar deal with Britain to take irregular migrants before their asylum claims were heard but the accord was later scrapped by London.

It is among a number of African countries to have received migrants from the United States under a similar, contested US immigration scheme championed by President Donald Trump.

Unlike the discarded British plan, the EU's scheme is slated to see rejected asylum-seekers sent to the African nation.

The five EU countries have expressed hope to have a centre up and running next year.

Diplomatic sources say the hub in Rwanda will be initially run as a pilot, hosting about 100 people, with each of the five nations possibly sending around 20 migrants.

It will not be a detention facility, with Kigali inclined to name it a "welcome centre" to underscore the possibility for some migrants to stay and work in the country, a source said.

The United Nations' International Organisation for Migration (IOM) could play an ancillary role.

The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) warned that any potential arrangement "must fully respect EU law". *– AFP*

Spain's Sánchez seeks election boost as Brazil's Lula visits

MADRID – Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva met leftist ally Pedro Sánchez in Madrid yesterday, with his recent election comeback offering encouragement to the Spanish leader ahead of snap elections.

Lula, 81, secured re-election in October after overcoming conservative rival Flávio Bolsonaro, overturning a first-round deficit to win a closely fought run-off.

The result came despite opinion polls in the final days of the campaign pointing to a victory for his rival, the son of Brazil's jailed former far-right president Jair Bolsonaro.

Sánchez has repeatedly cited Lula's victory as evidence that he too can defy the opinion polls, which predict the main conservative People's Party (PP) is on course for a majority in coalition with the far-right Vox party when Spain votes on November 29.

The Socialist, 54, and Lula have developed close ties in recent years and are among the most prominent figures of the international left.

"The two leaders discussed the future of the United Nations and the importance of defending democratic institutions and social cohesion against the threat of the far right," Sánchez's office said in a statement after their meeting.

Lula said on social media that he and Sánchez would "continue working for dialogue, cooperation, the defence of democracy and the building of a fairer, more peaceful world committed to the development of our peoples".

Sánchez, who has forged a reputation for escaping seemingly hopeless situations during his eight-year premiership, has also sought to take heart from the Democrats' landslide victory in the US midterm elections earlier this month.

Sánchez also met Uruguayan President Yamandu Orsi yesterday, another of his allies on the Latin American left, at a time when conservative leaders allied with US President Donald Trump have gained ground across the region.

– AFP



Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez (right) greets Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva at the Moncloa Palace in Madrid yesterday. Lula arrived to hold a working meeting with Sánchez on the final stop of an international tour following his re-election which included the COP31 meeting in Turkey and the ASEAN Summit in Manila, before returning to Brazil. – AFP

Cape Verde's President Neves re-elected: provisional results

Maria da Luz Neves and Lucie Peytermann

PRAIA – Cape Verde's President José Maria Neves easily won re-election on Sunday, according to provisional results from the country's electoral commission.

Neves, who went into the vote as the favourite, received 63.8 percent of the ballots cast in the West African archipelago, which is reputed for its stable democracy.

Among the contenders he faced was the country's first woman candidate, Joana Rosa Amado.

Nearly 420,000 people were eligible to vote in the country's election.

Some 150 observers from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) were on hand to watch voting.

Cape Verde, located in the Atlantic Ocean about 600 kilometres off the coast of Senegal, comprises 10 volcanic islands and is an increasingly popular tourist destination.

It made world headlines this year when its national football team reached the knockout stages in its first World Cup, and when a cruise ship containing people with hantavirus anchored off its shores.

Stability, hospitality

Unlike several of its West African neighbours where presidential elections have been tense in recent years, Cape Verde is known for its political stability and good governance.

It is considered a model of democracy in Africa, with strong economic growth.

The country is known for its "morabeza" ("hospitality" in local Creole), openness and carnivals. It also has its own style of music.

According to the Mo Ibrahim Foundation's 2026 index on global governance, Cape Verde ranks third out of 54 countries in Africa.

Politically, it has a semi-presidential system in which the executive is dominated by the prime minister.

The president does not govern but acts more as an arbiter, working to guarantee unity and uphold the constitution.

The head of state appoints the prime minister based on the results of legislative elections and represents the country abroad.

Neves was first elected president in 2021. From 2001 to 2016 he also served as prime minister and president of the African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde (PAICV). He has also been a mayor and a lawmaker.

Neves has the support of the PAICV, which won legislative elections in May.

"In these times of international uncertainty, it is essential that Cape Verde continues to have a patriotic, experienced president capable of inspiring Cape Verdeans," he said this week during a rally.

In July, the World Bank classified Cape Verde as an upper-middle-income country thanks to economic growth in the tourism sector.

However, the country faces many challenges, including persistent social inequality, geographic isolation and a lack of affordable options for travelling between islands.

Among the population's major concerns are the increased cost of living, fuel prices and youth unemployment. *– AFP*



Cape Verde's President and presidential candidate Jose Maria Neves (centre) greets supporters during a campaign rally in Mindelo, on the island of São Vicente, on October 30. Neves easily won re-election on Sunday, according to provisional results from the country's electoral commission. Neves garnered 63.8 percent of the ballots cast in the West African archipelago, which is reputed for its political stability. – AFP

'Godfather' of Mexico's modern drug trade Felix Gallardo dies at 80

Ulises Ruiz

GUADALAJARA – Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo, the architect of modern Mexican drug trafficking known as "the boss of bosses," who transformed the global cocaine trade and orchestrated the murder of a US agent, died on Sunday at age 80, officials said.

The notorious drug kingpin, a former police officer who played a key role in forging alliances with Colombian traffickers, died in a hospital where he had been transferred from prison two days earlier.

"After remaining under observation with a guarded prognosis, he died on November 15 at the medical facility" after "he suffered multiple organ failure," according to a statement from the security ministry of the state of Jalisco, where he was being held.

Félix Gallardo's health had deteriorated markedly in recent years, with conditions including high blood pressure, diabetes, and deafness.

In 2022, then-president Andrés Manuel López Obrador said he was "in very poor health." A judge granted him house arrest, but technical problems with electronic ankle monitoring prevented his transfer.

One of the founders of the Guadalajara cartel, from which the Sinaloa cartel would later emerge, Félix Gallardo had been incarcerated since 1989 and was serving a 40-year sentence.

He was convicted for the 1985 murder of an undercover US Drug Enforcement Agency officer, Enrique "Kiki" Camarena Salazar, which outraged the United States.

Rise of the cartels

Félix Gallardo was a native of Sinaloa state, where he was born on January 8, 1946, according to public records.

His involvement in crime went virtually hand in hand with his career in the state and federal police.

He even served as a bodyguard to a Sinaloa governor, a role that experts say may have helped him secure the complicity and protection of powerful politicians.

He partnered with another veteran kingpin, Rafael Caro Quintero. Together with other crime bosses, they united gangs trafficking drugs to the United States and formed the Guadalajara cartel.

The cartel was formed around a "hegemonic model" and laid "the roots for nearly all of today's drug trafficking activities," according to InSight Crime, a website specialising in the drug trade.

Félix Gallardo "partnered with Colombian traffickers like Pablo Escobar, and became Escobar's most important Mexico associate," the publication said.

The Guadalajara gang controlled the country's underworld, earning Félix Gallardo the nicknames "El jefe de jefes" and "El Padrino" – which translate to "the boss of bosses" and "the Godfather."

Downfall

Felix Gallardo was convicted for the February 1985 murder of Camarena Salazar, who was kidnapped and tortured.

The agent's death remains an open wound for the United States.

Intense pressure from Washington led to the arrest in 1985 of Caro Quintero, who is now imprisoned in the United States on charges of drug trafficking and the agent's murder.

Félix Gallardo was arrested in April 1989 but continued to control the criminal business from prison, according to experts.

He was serving his sentence at Puente Grande prison in Jalisco state.

The Guadalajara cartel imploded in the 1990s, and its local leaders formed regional cartels, including the Sinaloa cartel, built up by Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán and Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada García, both sentenced to life in prison in the United States.

Félix Gallardo remained in the popular imagination through narcocorridos, or drug ballads, such as "El jefe de jefes," which is banned in public spaces, and Netflix dramas about drug trafficking, with Mexican actor Diego Luna portraying the kingpin. *– AFP*



Picture taken on January 1, 2005 of Félix Gallardo (front, centre), member of the Guadalajara Cartel, at La Palma prison in Almoloya of Juárez, Mexico. Félix Gallardo died on Sunday, at the age of 80, in a hospital to which he had been transferred from prison two days earlier for emergency treatment, Mexican authorities said yesterday. – AFP

UEFA backs France's Diallo to stand against Infantino in FIFA election

PARIS – European football's governing body UEFA has given its "unanimous" backing to French Football Federation chief Philippe Diallo to stand against incumbent Gianni Infantino in March's FIFA presidential election, it said in a statement yesterday.

The body said that Diallo had been "invited...to stand as a candidate in the FIFA presidential election in March 2027" and that European national associations had "unanimously pledged their full support".

The deadline for rival candidates to declare themselves is this tomorrow.

UEFA, which boasts 55 member associations, said Diallo "has accepted the invitation to stand" and that his candidature is set to be confirmed at a meeting of the French federation (FFF) today.

Under its Slovenian president Aleksander Ceferin, UEFA has led the opposition to Infantino since his announcement in late July of a project to sell stakes in the World Cup to private investors.

Infantino quickly abandoned the proposal in the face of widespread uproar, but UEFA has since gone to a court in Florida in an attempt to gather evidence for a potential complaint of "criminal mismanagement" against the FIFA president in Switzerland.

UEFA had been struggling to find a credible candidate to stand against Infantino in the election, which will take place at the FIFA Congress on March 18 next year in the Moroccan capital, Rabat.

CONCACAF chief Victor Montagliani had been mooted as a candidate, but the Canadian later announced his desire to stand for a new term as the head of his confederation, which covers North and Central America and the Caribbean.

The Asian Football Confederation, which consists of 47 member associations, announced last month that it was backing Infantino for re-election.

Diallo said in September that the FFF was withdrawing its backing for Infantino in the election.

"We believe that the trust placed in the FIFA president has been betrayed, and that the way in which the governance of world football is envisaged no longer reflects us," he said at the time.

Diallo, the 63-year-old son of a Senegalese boxing champion, has been president of the FFF since January 2023.

He was initially appointed to the post on an interim basis when previous chief Noel Le Graet was forced to stand down following a series of controversies.

Diallo, from Saint-Nazaire on France's Atlantic coast, was then elected to the role by a large majority in June of that year, before being re-elected in December 2024 for a new four-year term.

Infantino, a former UEFA secretary general, has been in charge of FIFA since 2016.

– AFP



Belgium's forward Romelu Lukaku gestures during warm up ahead of the UEFA Nations League Group A1 football match against France at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis, north of Paris, on October 5. Belgium forward Romelu Lukaku announced yesterday he was retiring from international football after scoring 94 goals in 135 games for his country. "These 16 years I gave all I had for the national team. It was a nice ride and I enjoyed every single moment," the 33-year-old said on Instagram. – AFP

China's coach targets winning momentum ahead of football friendly against Bahrain

Football

ZHAOQING – China men's national team will look to maintain its winning momentum in the international football friendly against Bahrain, head coach Shao Jiayi said at the pre-match press conference here yesterday.

After defeats to New Zealand, Palestine and Tajikistan, China ended a losing streak with a 2-0 victory over Malaysia last Saturday. The team will now take on Bahrain today, whom China defeated twice by 1-0 in the Asian qualifiers for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

"The players gave everything in the last match, and I was very satisfied with their performance. Although we have only two days to recover, I believe our players will be ready both physically and mentally and deliver an even better performance tomorrow [today]," Shao said.

"Every match is important for us, and we need to try our best and maintain the winning momentum," he added.

The 46-year-old coach acknowledged that many players were carrying minor injuries following the end of the domestic league season, but stressed that the coaching staff would prioritize their health.

Shao also praised Bahrain head coach Felix Sanchez's tactical approach, saying he had gained valuable insights from studying Bahrain's recent performances.

Zhang Yuning, who scored a late winner against Bahrain in an away World Cup qualifier during the previous campaign, described the Gulf side as a difficult opponent.

"Both our home and away matches against Bahrain in the previous qualifying campaign were extremely tough. We scored late to win away, while a late penalty secured the victory at home," Zhang said.

"Tomorrow's match carries the same importance for us as a World Cup qualifier. We will give everything, compete fiercely with our opponents and do our best to win."

Sanchez said he believes it would be a very difficult match for the away team. "The Chinese team started the game in a very offensive way, pressing very high, so we expect a quite similar way to play. We are going to play our game and try to take advantage of our strengths."

The game will be played at 8:00 p.m. this evening Macau time.

– Xinhua/MPD

Sport in brief

Alcaraz sweeps aside Tiafoe in ATP Finals demonstration of force

Tennis

TURIN – Carlos Alcaraz looked in ominous form yesterday as he began his bid to win the ATP Finals for the first time by cruising past Frances Tiafoe in straight sets, 6-2, 6-2.

World number three Alcaraz took just over an hour to deal with American Tiafoe and show why he is the favourite to win the whole thing in Turin, where he was the beaten finalist last year.

Since returning in August from a wrist injury that kept him off the tour for four months Alcaraz has won three of the five tournaments he has entered, most recently the Paris Masters.

Tiafoe had a nightmare debut match at the season-ending tournament, the 28-year-old having no answer to Alcaraz's speed and power.

Only briefly in the second set did he look like challenging his opponent, a seven-time Grand Slam winner, when at 3-2 down he wasted three opportunities to break back.

Alcaraz, 25, can book his place in the semi-finals tomorrow by beating Italian Flavio Cobolli, who in the absence of former world number one Jannik Sinner is the crowd favourite.

Cobolli faced Daniil Medvedev, Finals champion in 2020, at 3:00 a.m. this morning Macau time.

– AFP/MPD

Barca's Cubarsi a doubt to face Villarreal

BARCELONA – Barcelona said yesterday defender Pau Cubarsi suffered a hip problem in Spain's Nations League defeat by England, making him a doubt for Sunday's La Liga match against Villarreal.

The 19-year-old centre-back was taken off at half-time on Sunday as Spain fell to a first competitive defeat since 2023.

"Cubarsi is suffering from tightness in his hip flexor... his recovery will determine whether he is available for the match against Villarreal," said Barcelona in a statement.

The Spanish champions said Dutch midfielder Frenkie de Jong had also suffered a muscle strain but will be fit to face Villarreal at Camp Nou.

Hansi Flick's Barcelona lead La Liga by three points from Real Madrid.

– AFP

Spaniard Lecuona to replace injured Bagnaia for Ducati at Portugal MotoGP

MotoGP

PARIS – Iker Lecuona will stand in for Francesco Bagnaia at the Portugal MotoGP this weekend as the Italian remains sidelined with a foot fracture, Ducati said yesterday.

"The doors of the Ducati Lenovo Team open to welcome Iker Lecuona, who will step in for Pecco Bagnaia," said the Italian team in a statement.

The 26-year-old, who normally rides with Ducati's satellite team Gresini, will ride as a teammate for reigning world champion Marc Marquez, who can retain his title in Portimao on the penultimate race weekend of the season.

Two-time world champion Bagnaia crashed out of the sprint race in Qatar just over a week ago having been sent flying off his bike by Fermin Aldeguer and has been forced to have surgery on his right foot.

Bagnaia is expected to be fit to take part in the final race of the season in Valencia later this month.

The 29-year-old sits ninth in the riders' standings in his final season with Ducati, before switching to Aprilia in the close season to partner countryman Marco Bezzecchi.

– AFP

'Couldn't get worse': Klopp calls for change in FIFA leadership

Football

BERLIN – Germany coach Jurgen Klopp called on Sunday for an end to Gianni Infantino's time as FIFA president, saying he "did not think things could get worse after Sepp Blatter."

Speaking in Berlin ahead of yesterday's Nations League clash with the Netherlands, Klopp said the next candidate for football's global governing body should have the game's interests at heart.

"I've been following football for many years. There are people who are much more knowledgeable about this than I am. But I think most people now agree a change would make a lot of sense," Klopp said.

"I didn't think things could get worse after Sepp Blatter, but someone has managed to do just that."

President of FIFA from 1998, Blatter resigned in disgrace in 2015 amid corruption allegations.

Charges were brought against Blatter who was eventually cleared in two trials, but was banned from football by FIFA's ethics committee.

Klopp added: "Regarding Gianni Infantino, surely the next person to come along can do a better job."

Swiss Infantino succeeded Blatter as FIFA president in 2016.

He has come under heavy criticism for a series of decisions and proposals, including his plan to sell off part of the commercial rights of the World Cup and creating and then awarding the inaugural FIFA Peace Prize to US President Donald Trump.

"There are people who truly care about the future of football - people who aren't driven by financial interests," said Klopp.

"If someone like that were to step up - if someone like that were to become president - I think that would be a significant improvement.

"There are surely people who care deeply about the future of football and have no financial interests in it."

The next election for FIFA president takes place in March 2027. Only former Swiss footballer Ramon Vega and Japan's Kozo Tashima have announced their intention to run against Infantino on Sunday night.

– AFP/MPD

C-dramas, stars draw foreign fans to 'China's Hollywood'

Isabel Kua

HENGDIAN, Zhejiang – For more than 20 days, rain or shine, Thai fan Thammarawee Lin joined other overseas admirers outside a hotel in Hengdian, a town in China's eastern province of Zhejiang, phones trained on the entrance for actor Zhang Linghe to emerge.

Chinese heartthrob Zhang, known for his towering height and boyish features, has rocketed to international fame with his recent hit series "Pursuit of Jade", part of a growing wave of Chinese dramas, or C-dramas, capturing the hearts of overseas watchers like Lin.

The booming popularity of C-dramas is also fuelling a new kind of tourism industry in Hengdian, as businesses cash in on foreign fans travelling to "China's Hollywood", hoping for a glimpse of their favourite celebrities.

Pressed against barricades decorated with his posters, Zhang's fans reserved their spots outside the hotel a day in advance with colourful stools to ensure the best view.

The hotel sits near Hengdian's massive film set complex, a sprawl of replica historical Chinese palaces, old Hong Kong streets and temples that serve as the stage for many period dramas and movies.

Industry insiders have taken to leaking – or selling – filming schedules and locations on social media, sending fans thronging to places like the hotel where Zhang was getting his hair and make-up done.

Lin admitted she had spent "too much" money –about 5,000 yuan – on flights from Bangkok and a hotel room in Hengdian to see Zhang.

"If we didn't truly love him, there's no way we'd be doing this," the 46-year-old freelance translator told AFP, clutching photocards and badges featuring the actor.

"The sun might come out in a bit, but we'll still be waiting for him."



Chinese actor Zhang Linghe wears a mask walking past his fans outside a hotel in Hengdian, in Zhejiang Province, last month. – AFP



A fan poses for a photo last month with a life-size cardboard cutout of Zhang Linghe outside a hotel in Hengdian. – AFP

Fan-based tourism

Businesses in Hengdian have jumped on the growing C-drama popularity by offering services tailored to foreign fans chasing celebrities.

Li, the founder of one such business, told AFP his services include providing fans with itineraries to spot their favourite stars, arranging private transportation and wake-up calls to keep customers on schedule.

He also takes fans hiking up a mountain from where they can spot Zhang filming his new period drama.

"We'll hand them a camera with a heavy telephoto lens so they can experience what it's like to shoot from high up," he told AFP.

Li said his customers come from countries including South Korea, Singapore and Malaysia.

While the popularity of South Korean dramas (K-dramas) has soared overseas from the late 1990s, experts told AFP that C-dramas are rapidly catching up.

"The Early Spring", a Chinese contemporary romance series, debuted at number two on Netflix's Global Non-English TV list in August, while Zhang's historical drama "Pursuit of Jade" hit number six the week it debuted in March.

In Singapore, where "Pursuit of Jade" was Netflix's top-ranked drama for a week in April, ministers have jumped on its popularity to reference the show in speeches and made TikTok videos with its soundtrack.

C-drama wave?

While K-dramas currently have a more established "global profile", having helped drive the so-called "Hallyu", or Korean cultural wave, C-dramas are "certainly reaching more international viewers, particularly in Asia", said Pan Wang from Australia's University of New South Wales.

It will, however, take some time for C-dramas to "reach to the scale of the K-dramas", Wang told AFP.

"China has its own advantages, including a large production industry, a very wide range of genres and a substantial potential audience, and also government support for international distribution," Wang said.

But obstacles including "strict censorship" in China "may limit the stories that could be told", she added.

Malaysian student Adelise Lee has seen Zhang about 25 times but still decided to visit Hengdian for the fourth time to see him once more.

Lee, who is studying in China's central province of Hubei, has spotted around 10 Chinese stars this trip, rushing from one film set to the next and dining at celebrity-owned restaurants in the town.

She was once fixated on K-dramas but said she now finds their plots too predictable and "similar" compared to C-dramas.

"A lot of people are saying they are getting bored of [K-dramas]," Lee said.

C-drama genres have greater variety, she added, and can feature more assertive female protagonists, or fantasy stories based on Chinese folklore.

Thai fan Lin held up two phones towards the hotel door, telling AFP she was livestreaming Zhang's exit for people back home.

As Zhang finally emerged wearing a black leather jacket with his hair styled in a traditional bun, his ecstatic fans erupted in support.

"We missed you Zhang Linghe!" the fans shouted, as the actor was whisked into a waiting car.

"We are rooting for you!"

– AFP

'Ebenezer' with Johnny Depp scores big as holidays near

WASHINGTON, DC – "Ebenezer" starring Johnny Depp in the latest iteration of "A Christmas Carol" scrounged its way to the top of North American box offices, taking in US$19 million in sales in its debut weekend, an industry monitor said.

Depp, of course, plays Ebenezer Scrooge – a miserly old man who is visited by ghosts and discovers the true meaning of Christmas – in the latest of dozens of live-action and animated adaptations of Charles Dickens' classic 1843 novella. This one comes from Paramount.

"This is a solid opening for a Christmas-themed movie. These are big pictures and the weekend figure is roughly average for the type," veteran industry analyst David A. Gross wrote.

"Critics' reviews are lukewarm, but the audience score is excellent," he added.

Holding on to second place was "The Cat in the Hat." The beloved Dr Seuss feline brought in another US$11.4 million in its second weekend in cinemas in the latest instalment distributed by Warner Bros.

Dropping two rungs to third place was Japan's "Godzilla Minus Zero", which brought in another US$8.3 million.

Set in 1949 as postwar Japan looks to rebuild, the film sees a new threat emerge: a giant three-headed dragon-like monster called King Ghidorah.

Enter Godzilla – believed defeated in the 2023 "Godzilla Minus One," but radioactively regenerated – who takes on the beast with at least some human assistance.

Directed by Takashi Yamazaki, "Godzilla Minus Zero" is produced by Japan's Toho and distributed in North America by GKIDS.

Remaining in fourth was Sony's "Ramayana," earning about US$5.5 million on its opening weekend, according to estimates.

Gross noted that it was one of only five Indian wide releases in the US over the last three decades.

And holding fast in fifth place was A24's "You Can See Everything," a biopic that follows convicted fraudster Elizabeth Holmes in the month before she began an 11-year prison sentence.

The film brought in about US$5.5 million over the weekend, bringing its five-week total to an estimated US$89.8 million. *– AFP*

Gérard Depardieu drops appeal for sexual assault conviction

PARIS – French screen icon Gérard Depardieu yesterday formally dropped his appeal against a conviction for sexually assaulting two women during the filming of a movie in 2021.

A court last year handed the 77-year-old an 18-month suspended sentence and ordered him to register as a sex offender, marking a spectacular fall from grace for an actor who dominated French cinema for half a century.

Depardieu, who has acted in more than 200 films and television series, is the highest-profile figure caught up in France's response to the #MeToo movement.

The trial related to charges of sexual assault during the filming in 2021 of "Les Volets Verts" ("The Green Shutters") by director Jean Becker.

Depardieu's withdrawal was lodged at the start of the appeal trial yesterday, bringing it to an end and rendering the original judgment final.

"Justice has spoken. I was found guilty. I hear it and I accept this conviction," Depardieu said in a statement sent to AFP shortly before the hearing began.

At the start of the hearing, the prosecutor and the civil parties also withdrew their appeals.

"For a long time on film sets, I hid behind provocation and ribald humour," Depardieu said, acknowledging that his remarks and "some of my gestures" were not "without consequences."

He offered his "deep and sincere apologies" to those who "may have suffered as a result."

The actor said he had never intended to hurt the women he encountered, but added that he had "come to understand that intention changes nothing about the harm caused."

"Court proceedings damage us," added the actor.

The plaintiffs were a set dresser and an assistant director.

Depardieu has denied the allegations.

In another case, a French investigating judge in 2025 ordered Depardieu to stand trial on charges of raping actor Charlotte Arnould in 2018.

He has denied those charges and is appealing. *– AFP*

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 2°C~9°C	Manila 26°C~33°C	New York 8°C~13°C	Lisbon 18°C~20°C
Shanghai 12°C~18°C	Bangkok 27°C~32°C	London 8°C~12°C	Rio de Janeiro 21°C~26°C
Hong Kong 21°C~27°C	Tokyo 10°C~13°C	Frankfurt 10°C~15°C	Luanda 25°C~34°C
Taipei 18°C~25°C	Singapore 26°C~31°C	Vancouver 3°C~11°C	Maputo 19°C~27°C
Guangzhou 23°C~28°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~31°C	Paris 11°C~16°C	Dili 24°C~33°C
Nanjing 9°C~15°C	Jakarta 26°C~34°C	Moscow -2°C~2°C	São Tomé 24°C~32°C
Guilin 15°C~22°C	Seoul 7°C~13°C	Las Vegas 14°C~21°C	Praia 24°C~31°C
Xi'an 5°C~11°C	Sydney 16°C~23°C	Monte Carlo 12°C~19°C	Bissau 24°C~32°C



Being adaptable

Shepherd Tim Gackstatter leads a flock of around 600 sheep through the main market square in Nuremberg, southern Germany, on Sunday, as they move from summer pastures to winter grazing grounds.
The flock has taken this route through the Old Town since 2019, as urban development and a motorway limit alternative routes. *– AFP*



King's guard!

"Hachiko" attends the Remembrance Sunday ceremony at the Cenotaph on Whitehall in central London on November 8. *– AFP*



No bah! Humbug!

Hannah Hudson poses for a photograph as she admires a Christmas display in a room of Castle Howard stately home, entitled 'A Dickens of a Christmas', on Thursday near Malton, northern England.
Castle Howard's Christmas installations are inspired by Charles Dickens' novels and were created by designer Charlotte Lloyd Webber and are open to the public from last Thursday until January 3, 2027. *–– AFP*



Happy fruit

Customers wait at a juice stall displaying lemons and pomegranates decorated with handwritten messages and smiley faces near Jaffa Gate, one of the main entrances to Jerusalem's Old City, on Thursday. *– AFP*



Dancing in the street

Moulin Rouge dancers and the French Republican Guard Orchestra perform during the Winter Time Christmas illumination ceremony at Faubourg Saint-Honore in Paris on Sunday. *– AFP*



Violent waves

A surfer catches a wave in Huntington Beach, California, on Sunday. *– AFP*