

Macau's 1st robot-assisted knee surgery carried out at Union Hospital

Ida Cheong

The Macau Union Hospital (CMM-PUMCH) in Cotai has recently introduced and utilised the world's most advanced orthopaedic Stryker-Mako SmartRobotics™ system, and performed Macau's first Mako robot-assisted knee replacement surgery on an elderly woman suffering from severe knee flexion and varus deformity**, which had limited her mobility, marking a new phase in Macau's orthopaedic smart medical technology, according to a CMM-PUMCH statement yesterday.

The hospital is officially known as Islands Healthcare Complex – Macao Medical Centre of Peking Union Medical College Hospital (PUMCH). It is operated by PUMCH in collaboration with the local government. It is informally known as “islands hospital” due to its location in Cotai.

The statement noted that the female patient recovered well after surgery and was able to walk with the assistance of a mobility aid as early as the day after the operation, adding that the case demonstrated how robotic-assisted surgery, through data analysis and intelligent planning, improved surgical precision and controllability,

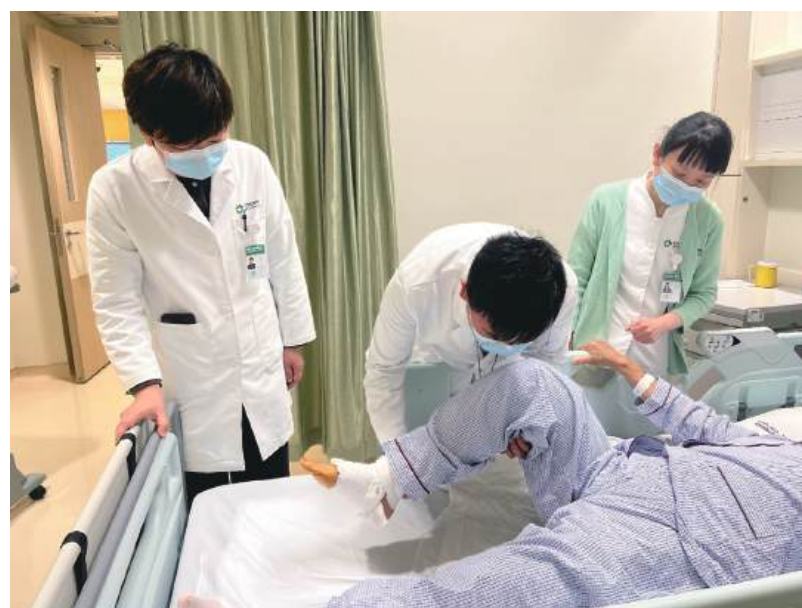


This undated handout photo provided by the Islands Healthcare Complex – Macao Medical Centre of Peking Union Medical College Hospital (PUMCH) yesterday shows Macau's first Mako robotic-assisted knee replacement surgery procedure.

optimised patient prognosis, and accelerates the recovery process

The statement said that the surgery employed the world's first Mako orthopaedic robotic system capable of performing “three surgical procedures with one machine”. Prior to the operation, the medical team conducted 3D modelling through CT scans to generate a personalised bone model, allowing for precise surgical planning.

During the procedure, the robotic system provided real-time feedback and sub-millimetre accuracy in bone resection, equipped with sense of touch feedback technology to effectively protect critical nerves and blood vessels, thereby significantly enhancing surgical safety, the statement said, adding that additionally, the technology can avoid opening the femoral medullary cavity*** as required



This undated handout photo provided by the Islands Healthcare Complex – Macao Medical Centre of Peking Union Medical College Hospital (PUMCH) yesterday shows its medical teams providing post-surgery care to the patient.

in traditional surgery, substantially reducing the risk of bleeding and the need for blood transfusion. ■

* Stryker Mako, officially branded as Mako SmartRobotics™, is a computer-assisted, robotic-arm surgical system used for precision joint replacement surgery. Stryker Corporation is headquartered in Kalamazoo, Michigan, US. -DeepSeek

** In orthopaedic and anatomical terms, a varus deformity

is a condition where a segment of a bone or a joint is angulated toward the midline of the body. -DeepSeek

*** The femoral medullary cavity (also called the marrow cavity) is the central, hollow, cylindrical space within the diaphysis (shaft) of the femur (the thigh bone). It is lined by a thin membrane called the endosteum and is primarily filled with bone marrow. -DeepSeek

US forces killed 55 Venezuelan, Cuban military personnel in Maduro raid: tolls



A sign opposing US military intervention in Venezuela hangs on an overpass above North Capitol Street near the US Capitol yesterday in Washington, DC. – AFP (More on p.12)

Javier Tovar

CARACAS – US forces killed 55 Venezuelan and Cuban military personnel during their stunning raid to capture Nicolás Maduro, tolls published by Caracas and Havana showed yesterday.

In the first confirmation of its losses, Venezuela's military said 23 of its service members died in Saturday's attacks by the United States, which led to the ouster of Maduro as the country's leader. Caracas has yet to give an official figure for civilian casualties.

Cuba, which had already announced that 32 members of its armed forces and interior ministry security personnel assigned to duties in Caracas were killed

in the raids, also listed its dead.

They ranged in age from 26 to 67 and included two colonels and one lieutenant colonel.

Many of the dead Cubans are believed to have been members of Maduro's security detail, which was largely wiped out in the attacks, according to Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino López.

The assault began with bombing raids on military targets and culminated with US special forces swooping in by helicopter to seize Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores from a compound.

They were later taken to New York, where they appeared in court on Monday and pleaded not guilty to drug

trafficking and other charges.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum yesterday called on the United States to ensure Maduro receives a “fair trial.”

Meanwhile, opposition leader Mara Corina Machado, who has been given no role by Washington in the post-Maduro transition, said in a Fox News interview that she would “turn Venezuela into the energy hub of the Americas” and “bring millions of Venezuelans that have been forced to flee our country back home.”

She also offered to give her Nobel prize – an award Trump has long publicly coveted – to the US president.

Machado said, however, that she had not spoken to Trump since October 10. – AFP

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100 million trips through HZMB signal rising connectivity in Greater Bay Area

The Zhuhai land port of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge has handled over 100 million inbound and outbound passenger trips since the mega project opened to traffic in October 2018.

– Story on p. 6

7 killed in clashes between Syria govt, Kurdish forces in Aleppo

Clashes between government personnel and Kurdish-led forces in the north Syrian city of Aleppo killed at least seven people yesterday, mostly civilians, with both sides trading blame over who started the fighting.

– Story on p. 10

EV sales rebound in Germany as Chinese brands make inroads

Electric vehicle sales rebounded strongly in Germany in 2025, official data showed yesterday, with Chinese manufacturers making inroads from a low base in the EU's largest economy despite tariffs.

– Story on p. 11

NBA China Games 2026 to bring Mavericks, Rockets to Macau

Khalel Vallo

The National Basketball Association (NBA) China announced in a statement yesterday that the United States’ Dallas Mavericks and the Houston Rockets will play two NBA China Games 2026 preseason matches in Cotai this coming October, following the success of last year’s event.

According to the statement, the NBA China Games 2026 will see the Mavericks and Rockets face off on October 9 and 11 at the Venetian Arena in The Venetian Macao integrated resort.

Beyond the two games, the programme will include the NBA House, NBA Fan Day, youth basketball clinics, and a Community Impact Week jointly hosted by NBA Cares and Sands Cares, aiming to focus on health, wellness and sustainability, the statement said.

NBA Deputy Commissioner and Chief Operating Officer Mark Tatum was quoted in the statement as saying that “the games in Macau earlier this season showed how much passion and enthusiasm there

is for the NBA among fans in China and across Asia.” He added that the league looked forward to once again engaging fans and the local community through the games and related activities.

Sands China President and Chief Executive Officer Grant Chum Kwan Lock said in the statement that they were “confident and ready to welcome the teams, players, legends and fans from around the world to Macau for another amazing NBA week”.

Meanwhile, Dallas Mavericks Governor and Las Vegas Sands President and Chief Operating Officer Patrick Dumont was quoted in the statement as saying that “it is a tremendous honour for Sands to host the games at The Venetian Arena next fall.”

Dumont and Tatum attended last year’s NBA event.

According to the statement, details on ticket sales and related fan and community events will be announced later, adding that the games will be broadcast to fans in more than 200 countries and territories worldwide. ■



This poster provided by National Basketball Association (NBA) China yesterday promotes the NBA China Games 2026, featuring Dallas Mavericks and Houston Rockets, slated to be held at The Venetian Arena in Cotai this coming October.

Police nab local, Vietnamese for fake job

Ada Lei

The Public Security Police (PJ) arrested a local man and a woman from Vietnam on Monday for their involvement in fake employment, PSP spokesman Wong Wai Chon said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Wong identified the suspects as a local clerk in his forties, surnamed Fu, and a Vietnamese woman in her forties, surnamed Nguyen.

According to Wong, the police uncovered the fraudulent employment situation while processing a blue card renewal application for a non-resident worker (NRW), in which Nguyen was allegedly colluding with Fu to fabricate their employment connection.

Wong noted that during a review of the renewal application, the police discovered that Nguyen could not explain

her job. Additionally, her immigration records indicated multiple departures from Macau, raising suspicions of fraudulent employment.

The police summoned Nguyen and Fu to a police station on Sunday. Under questioning, both admitted that Nguyen had never actually worked as a domestic helper in Fu’s household. Nguyen told the police that she wanted to remain in Macau to hunt for jobs and had asked her friend Fu to “employ” her in 2022 in order to obtain a blue card (as work permits are colloquially known). Fu claimed that he had only agreed to help a friend and did not receive any financial benefit from the arrangement.

The duo have been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), each facing a charge for their involvement in arranging fake employment. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday shows PSP officers escorting the fake-employment suspects to a police station.

Police nab mainlander for cheating gambler out of HK\$60,000 in chips

Ada Lei

A man from the Chinese mainland was arrested on Sunday for defrauding a gambler out of HK\$60,000 (61,700 patacas) in gambling chips, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Siu Keong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Cheong identified the suspect as a 24-year-old male surnamed Li, who said he is a construction worker.

According to Cheong, the police received a report on Sunday from a middle-aged mainland man who said that he had been cheated by Li in a virtual currency purchase scam. The victim intended to use his gambling winnings to buy virtual currency and contacted Li, whom he had met earlier at a casino. Li claimed to have the means to acquire the currency at a lower price. They



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Siu Keong looks on during yesterday’s regular press conference. – Photo: Ada Lei

agreed to meet at a casino in Zape, where they struck a deal to purchase 8,108 units of a specific

virtual currency for HK\$60,000.

Cheong noted that Li showed the victim a screenshot of a purported virtual currency transaction. The victim believed it to be genuine and handed over HK\$60,000 in chips. Upon double checking, the victim discovered that he had not received any transaction records. When Li attempted to flee the scene, the victim pursued him, drawing the attention of casino security guards who intercepted Li.

The police seized HK\$60,000 in chips and a smartphone from Li. Cheong added that the victim had not received the promised virtual currency and that the screenshot shown by Li was, in fact, a modified counterfeit image.

Li has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing charges of fraud and computer forgery. ■

Cold weather prompts ‘yellow’ cold weather alert: SMG

Kristina Vallesteros

The current temperature drop in Macau has triggered the “yellow” cold weather alert and the opening of the city’s cold shelter in Ilha Verde district.

The Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) said in a statement yesterday that it has issued a “yellow” cold weather warning, which means that it expects chilly weather to continue for the next few days, with the temperature dropping to 12 degrees Celsius or below. The public are advised to wear more clothing to keep warm, the bureau said.

With the drop in temperature expected to continue, the observatory has issued several general reminders

for the public. It recommended, among other things, dressing appropriately in warm layers and being mindful of the large temperature difference between day and night, particularly during colder mornings and evenings, the bureau said.

Moreover, members of the public using heaters are reminded to do so carefully and to maintain indoor ventilation. Those in need of assistance are advised to consult social welfare services.

Meanwhile, in response to the cold temperature, the government’s cold shelter opened its doors during the night three times from New Year’s Day to Saturday last week, according to a reply from the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) to the

Post. During that period, 15 people used the overnight service.

Users of the cold shelter are provided with hot tea and cup noodles free of charges. ■



This image downloaded from the local observatory’s website last night shows the “yellow” cold weather alert.

Published since Aug 2004

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Source: SMG

Bosses & staff must adapt, govt must optimise business environment: Lei

Interview by Armindo Neves

In response to the sharp decline in foot traffic around commercial areas following the recent closure of Macau's 11 satellite casinos, Macau Central and Southern Districts Industrial and Commercial Federation Chairman Lei Cheok Kuan told the *Post* that the trend of "Northbound Travel for Macau Vehicles", shifts in consumption patterns, and the phasing out of the satellite casinos are "irreversible".

"Businesses must proactively seek change and improve their products and services to survive amid these transformations", Lei said.

Lei made the remarks in a phone interview yesterday.

Lei said that consumer behaviour has evolved, with Generation Z tourists seeking immersive experiences and no longer distinguishing between "tourist areas" and "local living areas." Businesses cannot rely solely on foot traffic to survive and must consider the uniqueness of their products, Lei said, pointing out that within the same neighbourhood, some shops enjoy long queues while others struggle for business – the



Macau Central and Southern Districts Industrial and Commercial Federation Chairman-cum-Cherry (Group) Jeweller & Goldsmith Company Limited owner Lei Cheok Kuan poses in his jewellery shop on Rua de S. Paulo in the city centre yesterday.

– Photo: Armindo Neves

key lies in product competitiveness.

Regarding the government, Lei acknowledged its efforts in promoting the economy but emphasised that policies needed to be more grounded and the business environment further optimised. Lei cited the example of eateries and bars officially required to close their outdoor seating by 9 p.m., which, he

said, was hindering the development of the nighttime economy.

Lei also pointed out that merely setting up "da kat" (the Chinese term for photo op places) spots is insufficient. In Lei's view, the government should complement these with dynamic activities and street business format planning to avoid homogenisation across

entire streets – such as the current oversaturation of pharmacies – and provide online promotion support to help businesses upgrade.

Lei also said that while businesses must continuously optimise their products and operational strategies, the government should provide more flexible and detailed support in planning, facilities, and policy implementation. Together, they could create an appealing consumption environment, Lei said.

3-year transition to closing satellite casinos a signal for pragmatic responses from employers and employees

Regarding the impact of satellite casinos closures on surrounding businesses, Lei pointed out that the businesses had around three years to adapt to the changes – from the passage of the new "gaming law" in 2022 to the complete shutdown of satellite casinos at the end of last month – indicating that this was not a "one-size-fits-all" approach by the government. He emphasised that both employers and employees must make practical adjustments and actively respond to the structural changes in the market.

The 2022 law, officially known as "Legal Framework for the Operations of Casino Games of Chance," allows the government to grant up to six gaming concessions.

The now-defunct "satellite casinos" were run by third parties in conjunction with three of the six concessionaires, respectively.

Lei said that the government

has been working to improve the business environment, but, he stressed, policy formulation needs to adopt a longer-term perspective and regional planning approach, allowing businesses to see real prospects for development.

He also emphasised that while safeguarding their rights and interests, citizens should consider the overall economic development of the community, avoiding excessive assertion of rights that could hinder policy implementation and the economic vitality of their respective neighbourhoods.

Regarding the employment market, he pointed out that while the local unemployment rate remains low, some unemployed individuals may exhibit a tendency of "aiming high but lacking practical skills."

According to the Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC), Macau's overall unemployment rate in September-November stood at 1.7 percent, while the unemployment rate for local residents amounted to 2.3 percent.

For example, Lei said, his jewellery shop once recruited a salesman through the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) who turned out to have a passive attitude towards his job, highlighting the need for both employers and job seekers to be more realistic. He emphasised that if the business environment continues to shrink, employment opportunities will further decline. All sectors should collectively consider how to balance rights and duties to promote overall social development, Lei said. ■

Taipa Municipal Market's new zone attracts 7,500 visitors daily: IAM



Consumers visit the new zone of the Taipa Municipal Market last month. – Photo: Tony Wong

Ida Cheong

Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) officials said at a closed-door meeting yesterday that the Taipa Municipal Market's "Gastronomy + Culture and Creativity Zone", which was officially inaugurated on December 16, now attracts about 7,500 visitors daily exploring and spending in the zone, representing a 4.6-fold increase in footfall compared to before the renovation.

The officials made the remarks during a closed-door meeting with members of the Taipa and Coloane Community Service Consultative Council at the Seac Pai Van Community Complex (石排灣社區綜合大樓) in Coloane yesterday.

Briefing reporters after yesterday's closed-door meeting, Leong Chon Kit, deputy convenor of the government-appointed

council, noted that nearly three weeks after the zone's opening, operations have been running smoothly, with bustling visitor traffic particularly on holidays.

Leong said that the zone is located on the first floor and the rooftop terrace of the market, adding that the first floor comprises 19 stalls offering traditional snacks, international cuisine, also cultural and creative products, along with an indoor dining area, offering traditional snacks, Chinese pastries as well as cultural and creative products. Besides, a coffee and tea stall with an outdoor dining space is housed on the rooftop, offering western-style light meals.

Leong added that the ground floor still has traditional, fresh food and general merchandise

stalls, pointing out that the market has been enhanced with improved facilities, an upgraded exterior, optimised stall layouts, and the addition of Portuguese-inspired design aspects and signage, creating a "fresh new image".

Meanwhile, fellow council member Leung Sio Kei pointed out that 20 stalls in the zone were allocated through a public tender, which received 437 applications. Successful bidders, all selected based on five criteria including operational strategy and experience, are middle-aged and young locals, and most stall owners have partnered with local cultural and creative brands to introduce innovative products and enhance the consumer experience. All 20 stalls are currently operating, Leong said. ■

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Photos recently provided by Harriet Wong Teng Teng



Exploring 'Revisit': From concept to award-winning film

Interview by Rui Pastorin

When local filmmaker Harriet Wong Teng Teng was in her first year at university, she promised herself that she would make a film with her grandma in mind. While time would pass and she went on to pursue her career in the film industry, she did not forget about that promise, directing her first feature-length film "Revisit" that explores universal family dynamics and the beauty of intergenerational relationships.

With the Cultural Development Fund providing a grant and having also received cash support from the China Film Directors Guild, the film was released in 2024 and has since won various awards* and nominations at home and overseas. Its story is a personal one for Wong, she told the *Post* in a recent interview, with the work starting while gathering up old memories.

Right before the onset of the 2019 COVID-19 pandemic, Wong was able to gather up and reflect on memories made with her grandma, later working with a scriptwriter to structure a movie before pitching for funding in Macau and Beijing. "I built it [the film and its story] up based on my own feelings and my own experiences and my own struggles", she said.

Taking around four years to make and shot between the two places, the resulting family drama follows Olivia ("Oli"), a freelancer pursuing her career in Beijing who, upon receiving a call, returns to Macau to care for her ill grandmother. "No one is ready to take care of Grandma because everyone is busy", she said, with their time together allowing them to reconnect and strengthen their bond.

Hong Kong singer, actress and model Cherry Ngan Cheuk Ling plays the role of Oli, bringing the character to life using her acting experience to go beyond what

was in the script and help find the momentum or relationship with Grandma, played by the then 81-year-old amateur actress Cheung Wai Hing in her debut role, according to Wong. Together, the actresses brought impactful performances presented on the screen.

Describing the film further, she noted: "It's a family drama, but it also wants to discover a bit of happiness" within Oli traversing her life and career and grandma dealing with age and ailments. "Both of them try to reconnect during the time they are together. And in the end, it's a warm and, I can say, touching movie" that has resonated with many.

While happy with its overall reception, Wong said making the film did not come without its challenges, and the biggest one for her had to do with coping with the death of her grandma. It was a difficult moment, one that she had always feared and could never have prepared for. However, creating the movie helped her heal and continue to work towards acceptance, with the end result also giving Wong what she described as an "eternal presence", adding: "I'm such a lucky person because I do think that most of us didn't have this process of making a movie for someone you love".

Another challenge came when Wong had to work on the film while she was pregnant, but it was also a time that she tapped into strength that she didn't know she had. "The power of life is so big that you know that within yourself, you can be okay, that you can be really powerful".

When the film came to its completion, Wong, who has been involved in the film industry for nearly 11 years, pointed out how empowering it felt, being an amazing feeling while also entering a huge world that she had never thought of before. And while the resulting film is a personal one, it is also universal for being true to the situations of others. She highlighted this through audience reactions and comments she received during screenings, with some proving emotional among audiences of different ages and backgrounds, relating to the story or even bringing back their own grandma's warmth and presence through the screen, finding them again through cinema.

Looking ahead, Wong said that she and her team may kick off a feature film and two short movies this year, but she still looks back at "Revisit" and the work she and her tight-knit crew put in to it. She particularly highlighted that after making that movie, she found her position and the content of future projects that she hopes to explore. "I have more confidence in searching for that content because I can really relate to the genre of family", taking this topic further.

*The film has won various awards and nominations since its release, with more details in a previous interview article dated December 19, 2025 and titled "Macau filmmaker Harriet Wong's 'Revisit' touches audiences, garners more awards" (<https://www.macaupostdaily.com/news/26957>)

Consumer Council hosts online lucky draw again

Armando Neves

The Macau Consumer Council (CCM) announced in a statement yesterday that, as last year, it will organise an online lucky draw rewards programme again this year, with the aim of enhancing consumers' awareness of their rights.

According to the statement, through the online lucky draw, titled "Points exchange programme for rewards", participants can earn and accumulate points for the rewards through daily check-ins, sharing with friends, watching short videos, and other ways, and those who follow the programme's official WeChat account can receive up to 20 points per quarter.

The statement said that the accumulated points, once again, can be exchanged for gifts from the council or used to enter the final lucky draw with 50 points per entry. Prizes include tablets, photography equipment, smartwatches, and other products, the statement said.

For details such as the programme's terms, rules, and the points required for gift redemption,

people can scan the QR code of the rewards programme to access all the information needed to join the programme, the statement said.

During the previous rewards programme launched in June, which ran for two quarters, the statement noted, the number of participants exceeded 460,000 registrations.

As last year, the ongoing programme aims to encourage both residents and tourists to access information on consumer rights and protection, the statement said.

Through various ways such as learning games, it seeks to strengthen consumers' awareness of their rights and promote the latest developments concerning the Consumer Council and its "Certified Shop" Scheme.

The year-long lucky draw rewards scheme began on New Year's Day last week and will conclude on New Year's Eve at the end of this year, according to the statement, which underlined that the rewards scheme is divided into four phases, one per quarter, with 100 winners drawn in each phase. ■



This handout provided by the Macau Consumer Council (CCM) yesterday shows the online lucky draws rewards' entry QR code.

UM to mark 45th anniversary with Open Day

Khalel Vallo

The University of Macau (UM) announced in a statement on Monday that it will celebrate its 45th anniversary in conjunction with its Open Day this upcoming Sunday, titled "UM Anniversary Open Day", inviting the public to explore the public university's latest developments, academic strengths, and campus culture.

According to the statement, the opening ceremony will be held at 11 a.m. at the university's Lakeside Theatre, followed by the Open Day, which will run until 5 p.m.

As the first higher education institution in Macau to extend its teaching and research activities into the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, UM will open three locations to the public: the main campus, the Zhuhai UM Science & Technology Research Institute in Hengqin and, for the first time, its Transitional Research and Education Site in Yuxin Tower in Zhuhai, the statement added.

Around 250 activities will take place across the main campus,

including admission talks, academic lectures, research showcases, guided tours and interactive games, the statement noted.

Meanwhile, the university's faculties, research institutes, and residential colleges will organise workshops, science experiments and cultural performances, while quiz games and lucky draws will offer prizes such as headphones and e-readers, said the statement.

Selected activities will also be livestreamed for those unable to attend in person, the statement noted. Moreover, the statement added that restaurants and shops on campus will offer special discounts, and visitors can reach the UM campus by public transport, taxi or private car.

According to the statement, the Open Day aims to provide a comprehensive picture of its teaching, research and community engagement as it marks 45 years of development.

More information is available on the UM Open Day website via <https://openday.um.edu.mo/openday-2026>. ■

Tam vows 'ultimate' aim to license private cars to provide ride-hailing services



A taxi is driven past Taipa Market last month.

— Photo: Tony Wong

Tony Wong

Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man underlined yesterday that the government plans to establish a system aiming to better regulate online taxi ride-hailing services in the city first before "ultimately" pushing ahead with licensing private cars to provide online ride-hailing services.

Tam made the remarks when replying to oral interpellations by lawmakers during a plenary session in the legislature's hemicycle.

The city's taxis currently comprise "common" taxis and "special" taxis.

Common taxis are colloquially known as "black taxis" ("hak dik" in Cantonese) as their colour is black. They are either operated by licensed individuals or companies.

The city's special taxis are operated by Macau Radio Taxi Services Limited. Its taxis can only provide phone and online ride-hailing services, and are not allowed to pick up those hailing a cab in the street.

In addition to being allowed to pick up passengers while travelling around the city, common taxis are also legally allowed to provide a radio taxi or online ride-hailing service. For instance, more and more common taxis have joined the online ride-hailing platform run by mainland web-mapping giant Amap since its launch in Macau last year. Prospective passengers can use its taxi ride-hailing service through either the Amap mapping app or the MPay app (the mobile payment app run by Macau Pass).

During yesterday's plenary session, Tam said that the government is studying the drafting of legislation formally regulating online ride-hailing services provided by taxis and

the operations of online ride-hailing platforms, with the aim of better protecting the rights and interests of passengers and drivers alike.

Tam said that the government aims to propose amendments to the city's current law regulating the city's taxi sector later this year, with the aim of enabling the formal establishment of online taxi ride-hailing platforms.

Tam underlined that the government's ultimate aim is to license private cars to provide online ride-hailing services. However, the policy secretary said, the government will only adopt a step-by-step approach on the matter considering that Macau is a small city where many streets and roads are narrow.

Consequently, Tam said, the government has decided to adopt a more cautious approach where it plans to establish a system to better regulate online taxi ride-hailing services in the city first, only after which it will ultimately push ahead with licensing private cars to provide online ride-hailing services "if everything is smooth".

Govt to set up Macau's first EV super-fast charging station in Cotai

Meanwhile, Tam said during yesterday's plenary session that the government will set up an e-vehicle (EV) charging station equipped with super-fast charging piles on an unused plot on Rua da Patinagem (溜冰路) in Cotai, expected to come into use at around the middle of this year.

According to Tam, the super-fast charging station will comprise four piles for cars and three piles for heavy vehicles.

Rua da Patinagem is a road in



Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man addresses yesterday's plenary session in the Legislative Assembly's (AL) hemicycle.

— Photo: GCS

east Cotai, running past the Wynn Palace resort, the Grand Lisboa Palace Resort Macau complex, the Lisboa Macau resort, and the Macau East Asian Games Dome.

The EV facility equipped with super-fast charging piles will be the first of its kind in the city. Tam said that the new facility will be operated on a pilot basis, pledging that if its operation is well received by civil society, the government will look for other locations in the city deemed suitable for the setting-up of super-fast charging stations.

The policy secretary noted that the super-fast charging piles will enable a car to have a range of 300 to 400 kilometres with just 10 minutes of charging.

Tam also said that the government has chosen the location for the city's first-ever EV super-fast charging station as there is a substation of the city's power utility CEM nearby, in which case, he noted, the upcoming setting-up of this EV charging station will not require a "large-scale" roadwork project.

Meanwhile, Tam said also during yesterday's plenary session that the government will start gathering public opinion at the end of this month concerning its plan to expand the city's Light Rapid Transit (LRT) network in the long term.

Construction of the first of several social rental housing estates in the Zone A land reclamation area is scheduled to be completed by the end of this year. Tam said during yesterday's plenary session that the government aims to start in the second half of this year to arrange for applicants on its social-housing waiting list to move into the newly completed social housing flats in Zone A. ■

H853 Vintage Market to take place this weekend with over 15 booths

Rui Pastorin

The H853 Vintage Market is set to take place this weekend in the mall area of the H853 Fun Factory at Lisboa Macau in Cotai, featuring over 15 booths.

Slated to be held from 12 noon through 6 p.m., the two-day free-entry market at the Macau-themed tourist destination will feature pre-loved* vintage clothing along with second-hand bags, cameras, vinyl records, classic toys and books,

according to a recent statement on the Lisboa Macau website.

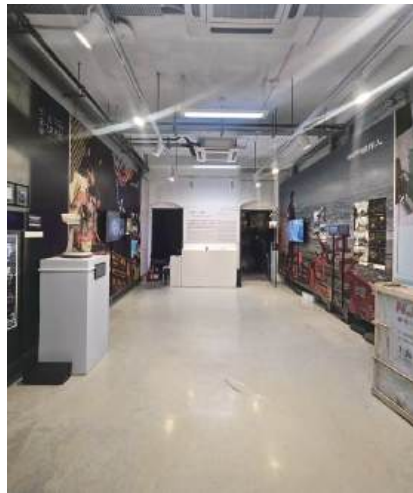
Moreover, a featured activity in the upcoming fair is the "blind-book exchange", noting that marketgoers can bring a wrapped book to exchange for another mystery book, the statement noted. In all, the event is set to present a "treasure hunt like no other", according to the Lisboa Macau Facebook page.

One can find more details by visiting Lisboa Macau's social

media pages and the official website on <https://www.lisboetamacau.com/>. ■

* "Pre-loved" is a term used to describe items that have been previously owned or used but are still in good condition. It is often used in the context of secondhand clothing, furniture, and accessories, conveying a sense of affection or value for the item despite its previous ownership. The term aims to promote sustainability and the idea that used goods can be cherished and valuable. — Poe

Exhibition offers look at Macau's film production design



Photos of "Behind the Scenes, Beyond the Frame: Exhibition of Production Design on Macao Film" taken at Cinematheque•Passion by Kristina Vallesteros yesterday.

Kristina Vallesteros

An exhibition showcasing the work of film production designers is now open to the public.

Titled "Behind the Scenes, Beyond the Frame: Exhibition of Production Design on Macao Film" and located at Cinematheque•Passion, the display focuses on three local films: "Our Seventeen", "Kissing the Ground You Walked On", and "I Want to Be a Plastic Chair".

A visit to the exhibition reveals a compact, single-room layout dedicated to the three featured films. Each section displays exhibits such as behind-

the-scenes photographs, samples of materials used in set construction, and comparisons of set designs before and after completion. Small screens feature video interviews with the production designers and other collaborators, while informational text on the walls provides background on each designer and lists other films they have worked on.

According to the statement from the event organisers, the exhibition reveals the creative process behind filmmaking through the perspectives of art directors, set designers, and costume designers. It features exclusive interviews, design sketches, notes, and actual props

and costumes from the five featured designers: Chantelle Cheang (鄭敏靜), Paula Lo Pou I (羅寶宜), Celeste Chau da Luz (李晞晴), Monyma Wong (黃芷珺), and Nancy Io (姚露欣).

The statement pointed out that the designers, who come from diverse backgrounds, have contributed a distinct artistic style to Macau's nascent film industry through their creative methods.

The exhibition is open daily from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. It is closed on Mondays. Admission is free. The arthouse cinema is located at 9-13 Travessa da Paixão (戀愛巷9-13號) near the Ruins of St Paul's. ■

100 million trips through HZMB signal rising connectivity in Greater Bay Area

GUANGZHOU – The Zhuhai land port* of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge has handled over 100 million inbound and outbound passenger trips as of yesterday since the mega project opened to traffic in October 2018 – a milestone that mirrors the advancement of regional connectivity and integration.

"Traveling between Guangdong and Hong Kong used to involve multiple transfers and be time-consuming. Now I can drive directly to my Hong Kong clients' offices. Doing business has become easier," said Chen Zhaochang, a Guangdong resident who runs a vehicle parts trade business between the two regions.

The 55-kilometer bridge links the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the Macao Special Administrative Region and the city of Zhuhai. As the world's longest bridge-and-tunnel sea crossing, it has drastically reduced travel times between Hong Kong and Zhuhai, and between Hong Kong and Macao, from three hours to about 45 minutes.

According to the bridge's Zhuhai border inspection station in Guangdong Province, it took over five years to reach the 50-millionth passenger crossing, and just one year and eight months to reach another 50 millionth trip.

Residents of Hong Kong or Macao have made over 58.73 million trips passing through the Zhuhai land port of the bridge, accounting for 58.7 percent of total passenger flows. In 2025, the port recorded 18 million



This drone photo taken yesterday shows vehicles on the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge.

– Photo: Xinhua

crossings by residents of the two special administrative regions, a nearly 300 percent jump from 2019. The figures demonstrate the bridge's increasing popularity and convenience of tourism, business, study and family visit trips.

Hong Kong resident Ho Chi-hong and his wife have bought a house and settled in Guangdong's city of Zhongshan. "We are satisfied with the dining, shopping, accommodation and medical care here. My family and friends in Hong Kong also drive to visit us. My living radius has expanded," he said.

Amid a wave of "China Travel" and benefiting from the country's 240-hour visa-free transit policy, an increasing number of international travelers have also chosen the Zhuhai land port as their entry and exit

checkpoint, as it is directly linked to Hong Kong International Airport. In 2025, the land port recorded 569,000 foreign passenger trips – a year-on-year increase of 28.7 percent.

The growing number of passenger trips on the bridge is an epitome of the deepening economic and social integration of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

With less than 1 percent of China's total land area and 6 percent of the national population, GBA's GDP expanded to 14.79 trillion yuan in 2024, contributing one-ninth of the country's economic output and surpassing that of the New York Bay Area and the San Francisco Bay Area.

– Xinhua

*Another term for land-border checkpoint. – MPD

Chinese tech innovations shine at CES media event in Las Vegas

Analysis by Wen Tsui

LAS VEGAS – As technology companies showcased breakthrough products at an official media preview event on Sunday ahead of the Consumer Electronics Show (CES), innovations from China are emerging as notable game changers in areas ranging from artificial intelligence (AI) to robotics.

The annual special promotion event, CES Unveiled, held two days before the world's largest and most influential technology trade show, offered a preview of key trends shaping the sectors of consumer health, human capability and home automation.

Among the exhibitors, Ascentiz, a robotics startup founded by Chinese mountaineer Feng Sha and robotics researcher Wang Tian, introduced what it described as the world's first modular exoskeleton system designed for everyday consumers.

Traditional exoskeletons are typically developed for industrial or medical use and often cost over US\$10,000. Ascentiz aims to make the technology more accessible, with products priced between US\$1,500 and US\$3,400. The system targets athletes, outdoor enthusiasts and elderly users, while also helping aging workers extend their careers.

The technology should "dissolve into the experience, leaving only the enhanced human," said Feng. "We have indeed broken through the traditional medical and industrial boundaries of exoskeletons, defining them as 'human capability enhancement equipment.' We target everyday consumers who love life and value efficiency and experience, making enhancement technology part of daily life, not just a rehabilitation or labor tool," Feng told Xinhua.

Another Chinese exhibitor, Kling AI, demonstrated artificial intelligence tools for video creation and editing. Launched in China just 18 months ago, the platform has generated over 600 million videos and reported annual revenues exceeding US\$100 million.

The company said its tools are already used by professional filmmakers and television producers, while its latest model is designed to be accessible to users without technical expertise. Video edits can be made through simple text commands such as "change daytime to dusk" or "remove bystanders."

By significantly reducing cost and production time, Kling AI offers an alternative to traditional professional video production, which has long been considered expensive and time-consuming. The technology is enabling small companies, marketing teams and content creators to produce works previously limited to large studios with substantial budgets.

Jon Erwin, creator and co-showrunner of Amazon Prime Video's drama series "House of David," credits Kling AI as one of the key tools that enabled his indie studio to achieve production ambitions previously constrained by budget and timeline.

In an interview in October 2025, Erwin explained that using AI "allowed us to tell the story in a budget and time frame that we could afford," adding that the technology enables filmmakers to dream in real time and collaborate on materials much more quickly.

Chinese robot vacuum manufacturer Narwal also unveiled its Flow 2 model at the event. Equipped with dual cameras, the device can identify valuable household items such as jewelry and wallets to prevent accidental damage.

Powered by AI, the vacuum is scheduled to launch in April. The company said the technology could make robot vacuums more reliable and accelerate adoption across homes in Asia, Europe and North America.

In addition to Chinese innovations, several companies from other countries also drew attention. Withings, a French health technology firm, unveiled a smart scale called Body Scan 2, which measures over 60 health indicators in just 90 seconds, aiming to bring hospital-level measurement into home bathrooms.

US-based Tombot, founded in 2017, presented "Jennie," a robotic Labrador puppy designed to provide emotional support for elderly people with dementia and related conditions. The development took nine years, resulting in lifelike movements, realistic fur and facial expressions, and AI-driven responses that vary to prevent boredom.

Canadian health technology company NuraLogix demonstrated a smart mirror that analyzes facial video in 30 seconds. The device estimates 100 health insights from facial data, including heart age, vascular stiffness and metabolic health, the company said.

The mirror offers a unified health assessment at home and represents a new category of preventive health tools, competing with scales and wearable devices while providing faster and more comprehensive analysis.

– Xinhua

Cooperation should be the defining feature of China-EU ties: Wang Yi

BEIJING — Cooperation should be the defining feature of China-EU relations, with partnership being their proper positioning, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks in a phone conversation with Finnish Foreign Minister Elina Valtonen.

Noting that China and Finland jointly celebrated the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations over the past year, Wang said that bilateral ties have achieved new development, and cooperation across various fields has yielded fresh outcomes.

This fully demonstrates the traditional friendship, mutual benefit and forward-looking nature of China-Finland relations, Wang said, adding that the stable growth of China-Finland relations, which have transcended

differences in social systems and weathered shifting international dynamics, is rooted in the unwavering mutual commitment of both sides to mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit.

Noting that this year is the inaugural year of the 15th Five-Year Plan, Wang said that China will continue to pursue high-level opening up, adding that China stands ready to strengthen alignment of development strategies with Finland and deepen cooperation in such fields as energy transition, circular economy, artificial intelligence, green development, and elderly care services.

China will also join hands with Finland in upholding free trade, supporting economic globalization, and achieving shared development and prosperity.

Wang expressed hope that Finland, as an important member state of the EU, will play a positive role in promoting the EU to adopt a rational and

objective view of China, resolve differences through dialogue and consultation, actively advance the strategic alignment between the Belt and Road Initiative and the EU's Global Gateway Initiative, restart the ratification of the China-EU agreement on investment, and actively explore the negotiation and signing of a China-EU free trade agreement.

He further expounded China's position on the Taiwan question and pointed out the regressive moves taken by Japan's current leader, expressing the hope that Finland would understand China's legitimate stance.

Valtonen conveyed Finnish President Alexander Stubb's cordial greetings to President Xi Jinping, noting that Finland-China relations have maintained stable development for a long time.

Finland adheres to the one-China policy and looks forward to closer high-level exchanges with China and deepening cooperation in various fields, said Valtonen, adding that Finland supports free trade and upholds the principle of mutual benefit.

The two sides share extensive common interests and broad prospects for cooperation in areas such as green energy and scientific and technological innovation, said Valtonen.

Noting that Europe and China are important partners in climate, energy, and other fields, she said that it is essential to maintain a constructive relationship between the two sides, and Finland is willing to play an active role in this regard.

The two sides also exchanged views on the current situation and prospects regarding the Ukraine crisis.

— Xinhua



Premier Li Qiang (right) shakes hands with Taoiseach of Ireland Micheal Martin, who is on an official visit to China, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday.

— Xinhua

Premier Li holds talks with Taoiseach of Ireland

BEIJING — Premier Li Qiang held talks with Taoiseach of Ireland Micheal Martin in Beijing yesterday, stating that China is willing to work with Ireland to push bilateral relations to a new level and achieve a higher level of mutual benefit and win-win results.

Noting the strong economic complementarity between China and Ireland, Li called on both sides to enhance the alignment of development strategies and explore the potential for cooperation in various fields.

China is willing to work with Ireland to expand and improve bilateral trade, Li said, adding that China welcomes Irish enterprises to make good use of platforms such as the China International Import Expo and the China International Fair for Trade in Services to further promote their products.

He also called on both sides to seize future development

opportunities, deepen cooperation in areas such as green energy, digital economy, artificial intelligence, information technology and life sciences, and further facilitate personnel exchanges.

China stands ready to enhance communication and collaboration with Ireland in multilateral mechanisms such as the United Nations, to jointly safeguard multilateralism and free trade, Li added.

As Ireland will hold the rotating EU presidency in the second half of this year, China hopes Ireland will play a positive role in promoting China-EU cooperation, said the premier.

Martin, currently on an official visit to China, said that Ireland is firmly committed to further deepening the mutually beneficial strategic partnership between the two countries and is willing to enhance exchanges at all levels with China.

He expressed Ireland's

willingness to promote cooperation with China in trade, investment, science and technology, healthcare, agriculture, green economy, artificial intelligence and other fields, and strengthen cultural and people-to-people exchanges in education, localities and other areas.

The Irish side welcomes more Chinese enterprises to invest in Ireland, he added.

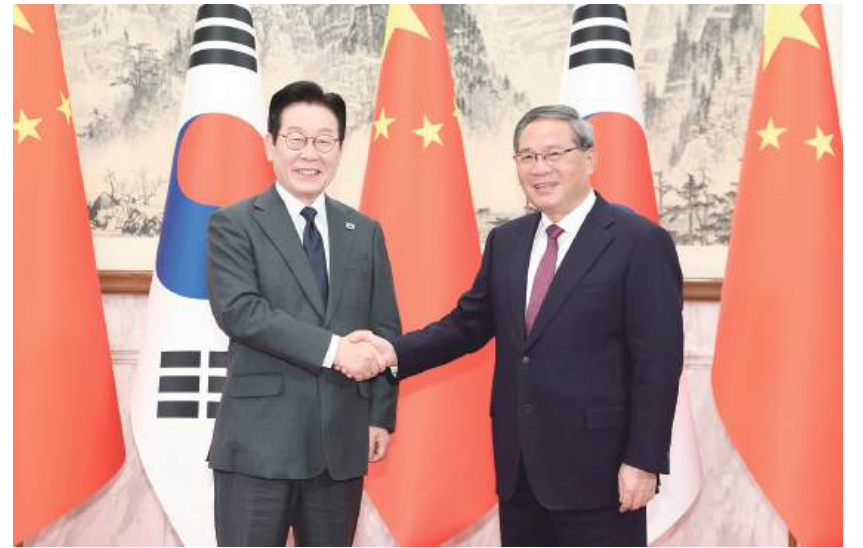
Ireland values the important role China plays in international affairs, and is willing to enhance multilateral coordination with China, to oppose unilateralism and protectionism and jointly safeguard world peace, stability, development and prosperity, said Martin.

The Irish side is willing to play a constructive role in promoting dialogue and cooperation between the EU and China, he added.

Prior to the talks, Li held a welcome ceremony for Martin in the Great Hall of the People.

— Xinhua

Premier Li meets with ROK president



Premier Li Qiang (right) shakes hands with President of the Republic of Korea (ROK) Lee Jae Myung, who is on a state visit to China, at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing yesterday.

— Xinhua

BEIJING — Premier Li Qiang met with President of the Republic of Korea (ROK) Lee Jae Myung in Beijing yesterday.

Noting the bilateral relations have taken on a new look under the strategic guidance of the two heads of state, Li said that China has always placed its relations with the ROK at an important position in its neighborhood diplomacy. He also noted that the country is willing to work with the ROK to uphold good-neighborliness and friendship, enhance strategic communication, consolidate political mutual trust, seek common ground while reserving differences, and promote the continuous development of bilateral relations along the right track and better benefit the two peoples.

Li pointed out that China and the ROK are important economic and trade partners to each other, and over the past 30-plus years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, China and the ROK have achieved fruitful cooperation results and effectively promoted common development.

Noting that the two countries have close economic ties and deeply interwoven industrial and supply chains, Li said the two sides should abandon the zero-sum mindset and provide more certainty for each other's development through strengthened cooperation.

China is willing to promote cooperation with the ROK in emerging fields such as high-end manufacturing, artificial intelligence and new energy, deepen industrial integration and synergy, and jointly cultivate new drivers of development, Li said. He also said China welcomes enterprises from the ROK to expand their investment in China and expressed the hope that the ROK side will offer greater convenience for Chinese enterprises to invest in the ROK.

China and the ROK should work together to uphold multilateralism and free trade, and safeguard international fairness and justice, to contribute to the promotion of peace, stability and development in the region and the wider world, Li added.

For his part, Lee said that the ROK attaches great importance to its relations with China, and is willing to respect each other's core interests, enhance bilateral dialogue and exchanges, and deepen mutually beneficial cooperation in various fields such as economy and trade.

The ROK side actively encourages its enterprises to expand cooperation with China and welcomes Chinese enterprises to invest and start businesses in the ROK. The ROK is willing to enhance multilateral communication and coordination with China, jointly safeguard free trade, and promote regional and international peace and stability, said Lee.

— Xinhua

China to expand institutional opening-up of forex market in 2026

BEIJING — The State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE) has announced that it will expand high-level institutional opening-up and deepen facilitation reforms in the foreign exchange sector this year, according to the administration's annual work conference on Monday and yesterday.

In 2026, further measures will be taken to streamline trade-related foreign exchange procedures, expand pilot programs for high-level openness in cross-border trade in an orderly manner, broaden the application scenarios of cross-border financial services platforms, and enhance support for new forms of trade,

including cross-border e-commerce.

The administration will also support financial institutions to develop user-friendly hedging products and enhance the service levels of forex market infrastructure.

It will roll out policies governing outbound lending and domestic foreign currency loan management, and implement its integrated cross-border fund management policy for multinational companies nationwide in both local and foreign currencies.

Efforts will also be made to reinforce foreign exchange regulation and ensure it is adaptable to a higher level of openness, the conference said.

— Xinhua

Thailand says Cambodia violated truce with cross-border 'accident'

Montira Rungjirajitranon with Suy Se in Phnom Penh

BANGKOK – Thailand accused Cambodia of violating a 10-day-old truce yesterday, saying cross-border mortar fire wounded a soldier, while Phnom Penh said a “pile of garbage” exploded, injuring two of its own troops.

Bangkok’s foreign ministry said Thai forces “did not retaliate”, opting instead to contact the Cambodian side to verify what happened, adding that Phnom Penh “claimed it was an accident”.

The Thai ministry also urged Cambodia to “prevent such incidents from recurring” and issue an apology, according to a statement.

A decades-old border dispute between the Southeast Asian nations erupted into military clashes several times last year, with fighting in December killing dozens of people and displacing around one million on both sides.

The two countries agreed to a fragile truce on December 27, ending three weeks of clashes.

Cambodia “violated the ceasefire” yesterday morning, the Thai army said in a statement, accusing Cambodian forces of firing mortar rounds into Thailand’s Ubon Ratchathani province.

One Thai soldier was hospitalised due to non-life-threatening shrapnel wounds to his right arm, the army said.

The Thai army said in a separate statement that the Cambodian side had contacted a Thai military unit and claimed “there was no intention to fire into Thai territory”.

“The incident was caused by an operational error by Cambodian personnel,” it added.

Thailand’s military also said it warned Cambodian forces that if a similar incident occurred, Thai forces may need to retaliate.

Cambodia’s defence ministry spokeswoman Maly Socheata said two Cambodian soldiers were injured, one severely, yesterday morning when “an explosion occurred from a pile of garbage”.

The incident happened while Cambodian forces were performing “organisation and orderliness” duties in Cambodia’s Preah Vihear province, which sits opposite Thailand’s Ubon Ratchathani, she said in a statement.

The two injured soldiers were hospitalised.

Maly Socheata did not mention the strike alleged by Thailand, but said both nations’ border coordination teams had consulted on the incident involving the Cambodian soldiers and addressed the matter.

The explosion occurred in a frontier region known as the Emerald Triangle, where the borders of both countries and Laos meet, she said.

In May, a Cambodian soldier was killed in a firefight with Thai troops in the area, reigniting the border conflict.

‘An accident’

Thailand’s Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said his government had lodged a protest with Phnom Penh, stating “the truce was violated”.

“At the military-to-military level, we have been told the incident was an accident, but we are seeking clarification on how responsibility will be taken,” Anutin told reporters in Bangkok.

He added that Thailand had the “capability to respond” to Cambodia,

which is vastly outgunned by its neighbour.

The nations’ long-standing conflict stems from a dispute over the colonial-era demarcation of their 800-kilometre border, where both sides claim territory and centuries-old temple ruins.

Under the December truce, Cambodia and Thailand pledged to cease fire, freeze troop movements and cooperate on demining efforts along their border.

The United States, China and Malaysia had brokered a truce to end the fighting between Cambodia and Thailand in July, but that ceasefire was short-lived.

Disputed border

On Saturday, one week after the December truce went into effect, Cambodia called on Thailand to pull out its forces from several border areas Phnom Penh claims as its own.

The Thai military has rejected claims it had used force to seize Cambodia territory, insisting its forces were present in areas that had always belonged to Thailand.

While the two nations agreed late last month to stop fighting, they still need to resolve the demarcation of their disputed border.

Cambodia’s defence ministry said in a statement yesterday that Phnom Penh had proposed a bilateral border committee meeting with Thai counterparts to be held in Cambodia’s Siem Reap province this month.

Bangkok has said previously that meetings to discuss border surveying and demarcation may need to be held by Thailand’s next government, following elections scheduled for February 8. – AFP



A woman walks past festive decorations at a shopping mall in Bangkok, yesterday. Thailand’s business sentiment weakened in December 2025 as confidence in the manufacturing sector faded amid continued improvements in the non-manufacturing sector, data from the central bank showed on Monday. – Xinhua

Indonesia rescuers find sunken tourist boat along with body

MAUMERE – Indonesian rescuers found yesterday a tourist boat that sank in rough seas nearly two weeks ago, and recovered the body of one of two missing Spanish victims, an official said.

Seven of those on board when the boat went down in eastern Indonesia on December 26 were rescued alive, while four others – a Spanish man and three of his children – were declared missing.

The search mission had already recovered the bodies of the man, 44-year-old football coach Fernando Martin Carreras, and his daughter.

Fathur Rahman, head of the local search and rescue agency, said the shipwreck was found yesterday about 14 kilometres from the site of the accident in the Padar Island Strait, near the popular tourist destination of Labuan Bajo.

“The third victim was retrieved after we were informed by a fisherman that he had discovered a body and the hull of the boat,” Fathur said at a press conference.

The body was taken to hospital for identification, he added.

Carreras’s wife and one of their daughters were among those who were rescued alive when the boat sank.

The search for the last missing victim, a boy from the same family, would continue today, the rescue official said.

The search has included “sweeping nearby islands, deploying sonar and carrying out dives”, and will now expand to cover a larger area, added Fathur.

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



This picture taken on Sunday and released by North Korea’s official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) via KNS yesterday shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (centre) planting a tree at the construction site of the Memorial Museum of Combat Feats at the Overseas Military Operations in Pyongyang. – AFP

Philippines raises Mayon Volcano alert to Level 3 amid dome collapse activity

MANILA – Philippine state volcanologists yesterday raised the alert level of Mayon Volcano in Albay province on Luzon island to Alert Level 3, citing the “onset of dome collapse pyroclastic density current,” the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said.

“This means that Mayon is exhibiting a magmatic eruption of a summit lava dome, with increased chances of lava flows and hazardous pyroclastic density currents (PDCs), affecting the upper to middle slopes of

the volcano and of potential explosive activity within days or weeks,” the institute said in its advisory.

The institute noted that repeated collapses of the unstable summit dome of Mayon Volcano have generated an increasing number and volume of rockfall events, adding that a total of 346 rockfall events and four volcanic earthquakes were recorded since last Thursday, compared to 599 rockfall events from November to December 2025.

The institute has recommended evacuating the six-km radius

permanent danger zone due to the risk of PDCs, lava flows, rockfalls, and other volcanic hazards.

Authorities urged residents in areas surrounding Mayon to remain vigilant and to follow guidance from local government units and disaster risk reduction officials, as conditions could rapidly escalate.

“Increased vigilance against pyroclastic density currents, lahars, and sediment-laden streamflows along channels draining the edifice is also advised,” the institute said. – Xinhua

Indonesian flood kills 16, displaces hundreds

JAKARTA – Torrential rains battered Indonesia’s Siau island, causing a flash flood that killed at least 16 people, with another three missing, authorities said yesterday.

An overflowing river flooded four towns on the small island north of Sulawesi on Monday, the national disaster mitigation agency said in a statement.

“Sixteen people have been reported dead due to the flash flood,” agency spokesman Abdul Muhari said, adding that teams were searching for the three missing.

He said 22 people were injured and nearly 700 villagers displaced.

“The flash flood was triggered by heavy-intensity rain that had drenched the area since the early hours, causing the river’s water flow to surge suddenly,” Abdul said.

Images shared by the search and rescue agency showed big rocks and uprooted trees that were swept away.

The flood cut off access to some roads and damaged dozens of homes as well as public buildings and infrastructure, the spokesman said.

Floods are common in Indonesia during the rainy season, which typically lasts between October and March.

Tropical storms and intense monsoon rains pummelled parts of South and Southeast Asia late last year, triggering deadly landslides and floods from the rainforests of Indonesia’s Sumatra to highland plantations in Sri Lanka.

Indonesian authorities say at least 1,178 people were killed in Sumatra, and more than 240,000 displaced.

While the annual monsoon season often brings heavy rain to Indonesia, the Sumatra deluge in November was among the worst disasters to strike the island since a magnitude-9.1 earthquake triggered a massive tsunami in 2004. – AFP

Japan nuclear plant operator may have underestimated quake risks

TOKYO—A Japanese nuclear plant operator said it may have presented data underestimating earthquake risks to regulators, as Japan moves to revive nuclear power nearly 15 years after the Fukushima disaster.

Chubu Electric Power's Hamaoka plant—located in an area of central Japan at risk of a potential “megaquake”—is undergoing regulatory safety checks, with the aim of restarting two reactors.

But the company's president said late Monday that the estimated maximum seismic ground motion that the plant could experience during a quake “may have been underestimated”.

“This incident could seriously affect the [safety] review process and undermine the trust of local communities and other stakeholders in our nuclear business, and potentially shake its very foundation,” he told reporters during an emergency press conference.

Japan pulled the plug on nuclear power after a colossal earthquake and tsunami sent three reactors at the Fukushima atomic plant into meltdown in 2011.

However, the resource-poor nation now wants to revive atomic energy to reduce its heavy dependence on fossil fuels, achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and meet growing energy needs from artificial intelligence.

The world's biggest nuclear plant, Kashiwazaki-Kariwa, is expected to restart operations later this month, pending final approval from the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA).

The estimate of maximum seismic ground motion is important for the earthquake-resistant design of nuclear plants.

In September 2023 the NRA approved Chubu Electric's estimate of 1,200 gal, a unit of acceleration used to measure the intensity of quakes.

But in February last year the NRA received information from a whistleblower that the utility “may have used data different to what was presented” to the nuclear watchdog, NRA official Keiichi Watanabe told AFP yesterday.

Since then, the watchdog has been conducting its own probe, he said.

The NRA suspended its safety review process for the Hamaoka plant in late December, and the issue “will be discussed in meetings open to the

public”, the first of which will be held on today, he said.

The Hamaoka plant is located in Omaezaki, Shizuoka prefecture, near a seismic fault line where a massive Pacific earthquake is expected to occur in the coming years or decades.

In 2024, the Japan Meteorological Agency issued its first special advisory for a possible “megaquake” in the area, known as the Nankai Trough, before lifting it a week later.

The government has said a quake in the 800-kilometre undersea trench and subsequent tsunami could kill as many as 298,000 people and cause up to US\$2 trillion in damages.

Chubu Electric said it had set up a panel of lawyers to look into the matter.

Strong quake hits western Japan, no tsunami warning

Meanwhile, a strong 6.2-magnitude earthquake shook western Japan yesterday but no tsunami warning was issued and no major damage was reported.

The tremor was recorded at 10:18 a.m. [local time] in Shimane prefecture at a shallow depth, the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) said.

The US Geological Survey recorded a slightly lower 5.8 magnitude reading which it then lowered to 5.7.

The quake measured upper-five on Japan's Shindo scale of shakiness in the western city of Yasugi.

At that level, heavy furniture may fall and drivers can have trouble steering.

The JMA said that the same region was hit soon afterwards by smaller quakes with magnitudes of 4.5, 5.1, 3.8 and 5.4, also with no tsunami alerts.

No abnormalities were detected at the Shimane nuclear plant as of 10:45 a.m., broadcaster NHK said, citing utility company Chugoku Electric.

Parts of the Shinkansen bullet train network were suspended due to a power blackout, operator JR West said. It was unclear if this was related to the quakes.

The military said it was conducting an aerial damage assessment and had established a disaster response liaison office.

“The government is collecting information on damage... People in the regions that were hit by strong shakes please continue to be careful about more quakes of the same strength,” Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said. — AFP

Mahathir's hip injury 'serious but not dangerous': daughter

KUALA LUMPUR — Malaysia's 100-year-old former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad is being treated for a hip fracture after falling yesterday, with his daughter saying the injury was serious but “not dangerous”.

The political veteran has suffered health problems in recent years and was previously hospitalised for fatigue after a picnic celebration for his centenary in July.

He was taken conscious by ambulance to the hospital earlier yesterday after he fell at his home, aide Sufi Yusoff told AFP.

“It is serious, but it's not dangerous. For his age, everything is relative... he's fine,” his daughter Marina Mahathir was quoted as saying by national news agency Bernama.

“Dad's okay, but hip fractures are always a pain regardless of how old you are,” Marina told AFP.

“At 100, any fall, any fracture is bad... so it will take time to heal,” she added.

In a statement, Sufi said “after medical assessment, it has been confirmed that Tun [Mahathir] suffered a fracture to the right hip”.

The former premier “is expected to be admitted for the next few weeks for treatment and observation”, he added.

He fell while “transiting from one part of the balcony to the living room”, according to the aide.

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and his wife Wan Azizah Wan Ismail prayed for Mahathir's recovery.



This picture taken on June 15, 2025 shows Malaysia's former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and his wife Hasmah Mohamad Ali posing for pictures at an ice cream shop in Shah Alam, on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. — AFP

“Azizah and I pray for Tun's [Mahathir's] well-being and speedy recovery, God willing,” Anwar said in a Facebook post.

Mahathir, Anwar's mentor turned political rival, has previously undergone bypass surgeries for heart problems.

He was prime minister from 1981 until 2003, and again from 2018 to 2020.

He reached the age of 94 during his second stint and was the world's oldest elected leader at the time.

— AFP

Casualties in Afghanistan as residents, gold miners clash: Taliban

Afghanistan—A clash over gold mining in northern Afghanistan has resulted in casualties, a Taliban official told AFP yesterday, after a resident said multiple people were killed in the violence.

“A clash between employees of a contracted company and local residents over the extraction of a gold mine in Chah Ab district of Takhar province has resulted in both human and financial losses,” said Humayoun Afghan, the spokesman for the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum.

“A delegation from the ministry has been sent to Takhar to investigate the incident,” he told AFP.

The ministry official did not detail whether there had been fatalities in Chah Ab, a rural district bordering Tajikistan, nor when the violence erupted.

One resident told AFP of “harassment” by miners from other provinces, with violence breaking out in recent days after “the area that supplied the local people with drinking water was destroyed by the miners”.

“The locals rebelled against them with stones and sticks,” he said Monday, on the condition of anonymity due to security concerns.

The resident told AFP multiple people were killed and the miners had since fled the area.

Officials and medics in Takhar did not respond to requests by AFP to comment on the incident.

Along with gold, Afghanistan mines marble, minerals, gemstones and coal.

Resources, including copper and lithium, buried across Afghanistan's rocky landscape are estimated to be worth a trillion dollars, according to US and UN assessments from 2010 and 2013.

The Taliban government has vowed to restore security to the country and is courting Afghan and foreign investors to exploit its underground wealth and secure a crucial revenue stream as foreign aid funding dries up. — AFP

Bangladesh's minorities fear rising violence ahead of polls

DHAKA — Bangladesh's main organisation representing Buddhist, Hindu and Christian communities voiced concern yesterday about the surge in violence targeting religious minorities ahead of next month's elections in the Muslim-majority country.

The South Asian nation of 170 million people — the vast majority Sunni Muslim — is preparing for its first parliamentary elections since a mass uprising toppled the autocratic government of Sheikh Hasina in 2024. Voting will take place on February 12.

The Council for Hindu, Buddhist and Christian Unity said in a statement that there were at

least 51 incidents targeting its members in December, including 10 murders.

“Minority communities in Bangladesh are extremely terrified by the incidents that have taken place against them and by how they have played out on the ground,” Kajal Debnath, a member of the council, told AFP yesterday.

“This government has been extremely nonchalant [about the violence against minorities],” he added, referring to the interim government under Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus.

The statement released by the group detailed incidents of arson, rape and looting.

It said it feared that the attackers were trying to scare minorities from voting.

“We urge the government and the Election Commission to take steps,” it said.

After years of repression, Islamist groups are now working to gain a foothold in the country's upcoming election.

In recent months, they have organised mass gatherings and campaigns focusing on activities that they deem anti-Muslim.

Sheikh Hasina, 78, sentenced to death in absentia in November for crimes against humanity, remains in hiding in her old ally, India.

— AFP



Indian chess grandmasters Vaishali Rameshbabu (right) and her brother Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa look on during the draw ceremony for the upcoming Tata Steel Chess India tournament in Kolkata, India yesterday. — AFP

7 killed in clashes between Syrian govt, Kurdish forces in Aleppo

DAMASCUS—Clashes between government personnel and Kurdish-led forces in the north Syrian city of Aleppo killed at least seven people yesterday, mostly civilians, with both sides trading blame over who started the fighting.

The implementation of a March deal to merge the Kurds' semi-autonomous administration and military into Syria's new Islamist government has stalled, and tensions occasionally erupt into clashes, particularly in Aleppo, which has two Kurdish-majority neighbourhoods.

Yesterday morning (local time), the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) said in a statement that groups affiliated with the government "targeted the Sheikh Maqsur neighbourhood with a reconnaissance drone", resulting in "the death of one resident".

It later said the toll had risen to three civilians including two women in "indiscriminate artillery and missile shelling carried out by factions of the Damascus government" on the Sheikh Maqsur and Ashrafiyeh districts.

"The shelling is still ongoing, with the use of drones... direct sniper fire and heavy-weapon fire," the SDF statement said.

Aleppo's Kurdish-majority Sheikh Maqsur and Ashrafiyeh neighbourhoods have remained under the control of Kurdish units linked to the SDF, despite Kurdish fighters agreeing to withdraw from the areas in April.

In a statement carried by state news agency SANA, the defence ministry said the SDF targeted "a number of neighbourhoods in Aleppo city adjacent to the districts it controls".

"The ongoing attacks have resulted in three dead and more than 12 wounded among civilians," it said, also reporting one dead in an attack on an army position.

"The SDF is again proving that it does not recognise the March 10 agreement and is trying to undermine it," the statement added.

Stalled talks

The SDF controls large swathes of Syria's oil-rich north and northeast, and with the support of a US-led international coalition, was integral to the territorial defeat of the Islamic State (IS) group in Syria in 2019.

Its integration into the state following the ouster of longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad a year ago has proven complicated, and the original

March agreement was supposed to be implemented by the end of 2025.

The agriculture ministry said two workers at a research centre were among the dead yesterday, while Aleppo provincial authorities said an SDF shell hit the main gate of a hospital in the Bustan al-Basha district.

The SDF also accused factions affiliated with Syria's army of attacking the town of Deir Hafer, around 50 kilometres east of Aleppo, and near the strategic Tishreen Dam to the city's northeast.

The Kurdish-led force affirmed its right to "respond legitimately to these attacks".

On Sunday, SDF chief Mazloum Abdi held further talks with officials in Damascus on integrating the Kurdish-led forces, but state media said no tangible results were achieved.

The Kurds have repeated calls for decentralisation – which Syria's new Islamist authorities have rejected.

Last month in Aleppo, deadly clashes killed five people, in violence that came after Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan of Turkey – a close ally of the new authorities – urged the SDF during a visit to Damascus not to be an obstacle to Syria's stability. – AFP



Palestinians look for their belongings amid the debris of a collapsed house that was previously damaged by an Israeli strike, at the Maghazi refugee camp in the central of Gaza Strip on Monday. The war in Gaza began on October 7, 2023, following an unprecedented attack by Hamas on Israel that resulted in the deaths of 1,221 people, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures. A fragile ceasefire has been in place since October 10, though both sides regularly accuse each other of violations. – AFP

Israel to introduce electronic tagging in West Bank

JERUSALEM—The Israeli army said on Monday it was introducing a new technological system to enforce movement restrictions in the occupied West Bank for both Israelis and Palestinians, in a move Israeli media said aims to rein in surging settler violence.

The decision allows security forces "to install a technological monitoring device on individuals subject to an administrative order restricting their movement within the [West Bank]," the army said in a statement.

The system would allow for monitoring of "violations of these restriction orders accordingly," it added.

The measure was adopted after a request by head of the domestic Shin Bet security agency David Zini in response to rising violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank, Israel's Channel 12 reported.

The monitoring devices used will be electronic bracelets, according to the Israeli broadcaster.

In response to an AFP query, the

army said the measure will be applied to Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Israel has occupied the Palestinian territory since 1967, and now more than 500,000 Israelis live there, along with about three million Palestinian residents.

The army said removing any monitoring device "constitutes an offence, for which criminal proceedings may be initiated".

Honenu, an Israeli legal aid organisation that assists detainees from right-wing settler communities, slammed the decision and said it would appeal.

In a post on X, it quoted one of its lawyers saying it was an "undemocratic move that reminds of the conduct of oppressive regimes".

Administrative restrictive orders bar suspects residing in the West Bank from going to certain areas or communicating with certain people.

A more draconian measure, known as administrative detention, allowed Israeli security forces to detain West Bank suspects, both Israelis and Palestinian, for up to six

months without charges.

Upon taking office in November 2024, Defence Minister Israel Katz abolished the use of that measure against Israelis, but it is still enforced against Palestinians.

Since the start of the war in Gaza following Hamas's attack on Israel in October 2023, violence has also surged in the West Bank.

Despite the delicate truce between Israel and Hamas that came into effect in October, the violence has not ceased.

Israeli troops and settlers have killed more than 1,000 Palestinians in the territory, including many militants as well as dozens of civilians, according to an AFP tally based on figures from the Palestinian health ministry.

Almost none of the perpetrators of dozens of attacks carried out by settlers have been held to account by the Israeli authorities.

According to official Israeli figures, at least 44 Israelis, both soldiers and civilians, have also been killed in Palestinian attacks or Israeli military operations in the same period in the West Bank. – AFP

Somalia calls Israeli FM visit to Somaliland 'incursion'



This handout photograph taken and released by the Somaliland Presidential Office yesterday shows Somaliland's President Abdirahman Abdullahi Mohamed (right) posing with Israel's Foreign Minister Gideon Saar at the Presidential Palace in Hargeisa, both holding a present. Saar arrived in Somaliland yesterday in the first high-profile visit by an Israeli official since the country recognised the breakaway region in the Horn of Africa, the Somaliland presidency said. – AFP

MOGADISHU – The Israeli foreign minister arrived in Somaliland yesterday in a high-profile visit, condemned by Somalia as an "unauthorised incursion", after Israel recognised the breakaway region in the Horn of Africa.

Israel announced last month it was officially recognising Somaliland, a first for the self-proclaimed republic since it declared independence from Somalia in 1991.

Somaliland enjoys a strategic position on the Gulf of Aden and has its own currency, passport and army, but has struggled to win international recognition, amid fears of provoking Somalia and encouraging other separatist movements in Africa.

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar, whose delegation was welcomed at the airport by senior government officials, said recognising Somaliland had been "the moral thing to do".

Somaliland President Abdirahman Abdullahi Mohamed praised Israel's "courageous" decision, and said it would open up great economic and development opportunities.

"It promotes the strategic interest partnership of the two countries," he said in a joint press conference.

Somalia reacted furiously to news of the visit, labelling it an "illegal" and "unauthorised incursion".

In a statement, Somalia's foreign ministry said it "reserves the right to take all appropriate diplomatic and legal measures... to safeguard its sovereignty, national unity, and territorial integrity".

A special meeting of the African Union Peace and Security Council yesterday condemned "in the strongest terms" the recognition by Israel and called for its "immediate revocation".

During the Israeli delegation's short stay, sources said roads were blocked, with civilian movements restricted.

Following Israel's recognition, Islamist militant group Al-Shabaab – which has fought the Somali government for around two decades – said they would fight any attempt by Israel to use Somaliland as a base.

'Threat' to stability

Analysts say the deal with Somaliland could provide Israel with better access to the Red Sea, enabling it to hit Houthi rebels in Yemen.

Somaliland's location alongside one of the world's busiest shipping lanes has made it a key partner for foreign countries.

Israel's recognition was supported by the United States, but criticised by Egypt, Turkey, the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council and the Saudi-based Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. The European Union insisted Somalia's sovereignty should be respected.

Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud called the Israeli decision a "threat" to stability in the already volatile Horn of Africa.

In an interview with Al Jazeera, he said Somaliland had accepted three conditions from Israel: the resettlement of Palestinians, the establishment of a military base on the Gulf of Aden, and joining the Abraham Accords to normalise ties with Israel.

Somaliland's foreign ministry denied the first two conditions.

Somaliland has experienced greater stability than the rest of insurgency-hit Somalia.

It was briefly a recognised state in June 1960 when it gained independence from Britain, but voluntarily united with Italian-administered Somalia days later.

Somaliland's leaders say that union was never formally ratified and became void when the Somali state effectively collapsed in 1991. – AFP

EV sales rebound in Germany as Chinese brands make inroads

Louis Van Boxel-Woolf

FRANKFURT AM MAIN – Electric vehicle sales rebounded strongly in Germany in 2025, official data showed yesterday, with Chinese manufacturers making inroads from a low base in the EU's largest economy despite tariffs.

EV sales rose 43.2 percent last year to 545,142 in total, the KBA federal transport authority said, representing 19.1 percent of all new cars sold.

Chinese EV giant BYD – which last year overtook Elon Musk's Tesla to become the world's largest electric carmaker – saw its German sales rise over 700 percent to more than 23,000 cars, giving it 0.8 percent of the overall auto market.

"International vehicle manufacturers with affordable battery electric vehicles and plug-in hybrids

have contributed disproportionately to growth in these segments," said Imelda Labbe, head of the VDIK foreign carmakers' lobby in Germany.

The European Union in 2024 introduced higher tariffs on Chinese-made electric cars, alleging that they benefitted from unfair subsidies.

That has not stopped sales of Chinese cars rising across the bloc, with the country's carmakers keen to crack foreign markets amid cut-throat competition at home.

Electric troubles

Rising EV sales are also some rare good news for Germany's beleaguered carmakers, which have invested heavily in the technology in recent years, and are seeking to comply with European Union environmental rules.

Though the European Commission in December proposed scrapping a planned 2035 ban on new combustion-engine vehicles, carmakers would still have to cut emissions by 90 percent from 2021 levels under its latest plan, and need to see dramatic sales growth.

The rise in EV sales last year comes after a fall of almost 30 percent in 2024 following the withdrawal of government subsidies, and Germany's electric car market is still smaller than optimists had hoped for.

"We haven't seen a real boom yet," EY analyst Constantin Gall said.

"The hoped-for surge in e-mobility in Germany is proving to be much more protracted and difficult than expected."

After the decline in the market in 2024, the government said in

December it would introduce subsidies again.

Some motorists will be able to benefit from 5,000 euros (US\$5,855) for the purchase of new EVs or hybrids so long as their components are largely made in Germany.

But industry figures say that better charging infrastructure and cheaper power would be needed to really boost EVs and warned that the planned subsidy would have limited impact.

"The state subsidies will only be available to households on low and middle incomes," Gall said. "But it is high-earners who tend to buy new electric cars."

Tricky times

Weak sales at home have compounded the challenges facing Germany's car industry.

It was already contending with the costs of investing in EVs and cratering sales in key market China even before US President Donald Trump last year slapped tariffs on cars and auto parts.

Volkswagen, Europe's largest carmaker, is in the process of cutting 35,000 jobs in Germany by 2030 under a deal reached with trade unions in a bid to slash costs.

Overall car sales in Germany rose just 1.4 percent last year to about 2.9 million vehicles, the KBA said – roughly 750,000 fewer than were sold in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic and Germany's economy sank into stagnation.

"The weak economy, increasing job insecurity and the multitude of political, social and economic crises are taking their toll," Gall said.

– AFP

Last 'holy door' at St Peter's closes to end Catholic jubilee year



Pope Leo XIV closes the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica on the Feast of the Epiphany, marking the official end of the Jubilee Year 2025, at the Vatican, yesterday. – AFP

VATICAN CITY – Pope Leo XIV closed the final "Holy Door" in St Peter's Basilica in Rome yesterday, the day of Epiphany, signalling the end of the 2025 Jubilee year that drew millions of pilgrims to the city.

The ceremony to close the basilica's ornate bronze doors, followed by Mass, was the final stage of a Catholic holy year inaugurated by Leo's predecessor, Francis, in December 2024.

From outside the vast basilica, the first US pope, dressed in ivory and gold ceremonial robes and mitre, knelt to pray before the doors, before closing them solemnly.

"With a grateful heart, we prepare to close this holy door, supported by a multitude of faithful, sure that the good shepherd always has the door of his heart open to welcome us every time we feel tired and oppressed," said Leo, 70.

Preceded by white-clad cardinals, he then proceeded to the altar to preside over a mass attended by faithful and dignitaries, including Italian President Sergio Mattarella.

The year of celebrations is a period of reflection and penance for the world's more than 1.4 billion Catholics.

It drew more than 33 million pilgrims to Rome from 185 countries, Vatican officials said on Monday.

Francis, who died in April at age 88, opened the holy year on December 24, 2024, knocking on the same doors before they were opened.

During jubilee years, which are organised by the Church every 25 years, pilgrims who pass through holy doors benefit from a "plenary indulgence", a type of forgiveness for their sins.

Italian tour guide Gabriella Calciolari, who walked through the doors on Monday afternoon, told AFP the experience was "beautiful".

"It's very moving, especially passing through the Holy Door. Not to mention the whole journey from Via della Conciliazione [leading to St Peter's] with the cross, arriving at Peter's tomb, praying," she said.

This jubilee was a rare two-pope one – the last time a pope died during a "Holy Year" was in 1700.

The Christian feast day of Epiphany commemorates the visit of the Magi, or three wise men, to the baby Jesus. In Christian faith, it celebrates his manifestation as the son of God.

– AFP

US Fed governor Miran says rates should fall over 1 percentage point in 2026

WASHINGTON – US Federal Reserve Governor Stephen Miran said yesterday he saw the need for a significant drop in interest rates in 2026, advocating for a larger decline than the central bank has so far signalled.

"The unemployment rate has been very gradually and slowly creeping up," Miran said in an interview with Fox Business, arguing that despite some policymakers' worries about inflation, underlying levels are close to the Fed's long-term two-percent target.

"I think we've got to cut more than 100 basis points (1 percentage point) this year," he added.

Miran was appointed by President Donald Trump last year for a term lasting until late January, as the US leader publicly excoriated the Fed for not cutting rates more rapidly.

Since taking office in September, Miran has dissented in all three of the Fed's policy meetings to push for larger rate reductions than his peers on the rate-setting committee.

The Fed voted to lower the benchmark lending rate by a quarter percentage point at each of these gatherings, bringing rates to a range between 3.50 percent and 3.75 percent. Miran voted for a bigger half-percentage-point cut at each instance.

The central bank is widely expected to hold rates steady at its next gathering in late January, however, as it digests a slate of delayed economic data after a government shutdown last year.

Miran argued yesterday that "policy is clearly restrictive and holding the economy back."

While officials have been lowering rates to shore up the world's biggest economy as the

employment market weakens, some see the need to hold back on reductions to rein in inflation.

Chicago Fed President Austan Goolsbee, who joined Kansas City Fed President Jeffrey Schmid in pushing to keep rates unchanged in December, warned last month that progress in cooling price hikes had stalled as firms and households grapple with Trump's new tariffs.

While inflation from Trump's sweeping tariff hikes could be one-off, Goolsbee cautioned that higher prices may still prove more long-lasting than expected.

The Fed has a dual mandate of balancing maximum employment and price stability as it mulls the path of interest rates.

Miran added yesterday that he did not put himself forward for the Fed Chair job, with current chief Jerome Powell's term ending in May.

– AFP

UK urges Musk's X to act over 'appalling' sexual deepfakes

LONDON – The UK government yesterday called on Elon Musk's social network X to take urgent action over its AI tool Grok being used to create fake sexually explicit images of children.

"What we have been seeing online in recent days has been absolutely appalling, and unacceptable in decent society," Technology Secretary Liz Kendall said in a statement.

"X needs to deal with this urgently," she added.

Grok is facing a growing international backlash for allowing users to generate sexualised deepfakes of women and minors through its so-called spicy mode setting.

The European Commission announced on Monday that it was "very seriously" reviewing complaints about the tool.

The UK's media watchdog Ofcom also said it was looking into X and xAI, which created Grok.

Kendall said Ofcom "has my full backing to take any enforcement action it deems necessary".

Under Britain's Online Safety Act which came into force in July, websites, social media and video-sharing platforms hosting potentially harmful content have been required to implement strict age verification through tools such as facial imagery or credit card checks.

It is also illegal for media and such sites to create or share non-consensual intimate images or child sexual abuse material, including sexual deepfakes created with AI.

The act allows for fines of 10 percent of a company's global revenues or £18 million (US\$24 million), whichever is greater, for failing to comply with the rules.

The UK government has also said it will ban so-called "nudification" tools that allow users to strip clothes from those in photographs.

Grok on Friday said it had identified flaws in the AI tool which it described as "lapses in safeguards" and was working "urgently" to fix them.

– AFP

Where’s next? Trump eyes new targets after Venezuela

Danny Kemp

WASHINGTON, United States – An emboldened US President Donald Trump has hinted that he has other countries in his sights after toppling Venezuela’s Nicolás Maduro, leaving the world asking: where’s next?

Trump took aim at Colombia, Cuba, Greenland, Mexico and Iran in the space of a single half-hour exchange with reporters on Sunday aboard Air Force One.

Trump, who openly campaigned for last year’s Nobel peace prize and has scorned interventionism, now says he is enforcing Washington’s right to do what it pleases in his backyard.

Greenland

In the days since the Venezuela operation, Trump has doubled down on his desire to annex Greenland from Denmark.

“Trump has given us a long list of potential future conquests – but the most likely target of his administration will be Greenland,” Asli Aydintasbas, fellow at the Centre on the United States and Europe at Brookings, told AFP.

Trump insists Washington needs the mineral-rich, semi-autonomous territory for national security reasons, arguing Denmark is unable to “protect” Greenland from Russia and China.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen has responded by warning that any move to take Greenland by force could mean the end of the US-led NATO military alliance itself.

But Washington could instead increase diplomatic pressure on its already nervy European allies, for example by insisting on a referendum in Greenland.

Colombia

Colombia has been the target of Trump’s most hardline threats. The US leader warned leftist President Gustavo Petro to “watch his ass” and said military action “sounds good to me.”

Trump accuses Petro of being in league with drug traffickers – just as he did with Maduro in the run-up to his capture.

Petro, who has traded barbs with Trump for months over the US pressure campaign against neighbouring Venezuela, responded on Monday he was ready to “take up arms” in the face of Trump’s threats.

But Colombia could pose an altogether different challenge, with many armed groups left over from its civil war. Instead, Trump may be relying on Venezuela to tell other Latin American leaders to bend the knee.

“Basically, he is saying ‘I can bully the country into submission,’



Mexico’s President Claudia Sheinbaum speaks during her daily morning press conference after US intervention in Venezuela, at the National Palace in Mexico City on Monday. The Americas “do not belong” to any power, Sheinbaum said during the conference after US counterpart Donald Trump invoked Washington’s “dominance” of the hemisphere after seizing Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in a military raid on Saturday. – AFP

and saying that US hegemony must be accepted if they want to maintain their sovereignty,” Aydintasbas said.

Cuba

Trump claimed Sunday that Cuba – an enduring US foe and ally of Venezuela – was “ready to fall.”

The communist-run island a few dozen miles from Florida has long been in the sights of US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the son of Cuban immigrants. Havana said 32 Cuban bodyguards were killed in the operation to seize Maduro.

But Trump said he believed military action against Cuba would not be necessary, predicting that the sanctions-hit nation could not survive the loss of heavily subsidised Venezuelan oil.

Mexico

Trump on Sunday told Mexico it had to “get their act together,” following months of pressure over drugs and trade on the United States’ southern neighbour.

He said President Claudia Sheinbaum – whom he met in Washington in December at the draw

for the 2026 World Cup, to be held jointly in the United States, Canada and Mexico – was a “terrific person.”

But he said he was pushing her to let him send US troops to tackle drug cartels in Mexico, an offer he said she had previously rebuffed.

Sheinbaum pushed back on Monday against US claims of dominance over the region, saying the Americas “do not belong” to any power.

Iran

Iran – like Venezuela a major oil producer – faced US strikes against its nuclear programme in June and is now under renewed pressure from Trump for clamping down on protests.

Trump warned on Sunday that Tehran would “get hit very hard” if more demonstrators were killed.

Republican Senator Lindsey Graham posted a photo of Trump holding a black hat with the logo “Make Iran Great Again” as they travelled on Air Force One.

Aydintasbas, however, warned against Trump getting “too trigger happy.”

“Right now he seems to be enjoying the moment of imperial presidency, she said. “But if things start going south either in Venezuela or the Middle East, we’re going to see President Trump very quickly lose interest in this role.” – AFP

Toppling of Maduro stirs fear in Cubans

Rigoberto Díaz

HAVANA – Cubans weary from years of economic crisis, shortages of basic supplies and regular power blackouts, fear the US attack on Venezuela, a leftist ideological ally and its main oil supplier, will see life get even tougher.

After American forces seized Venezuela’s leader Nicolás Maduro in an early-morning raid on Saturday, US President Donald Trump over the weekend issued threats to other leftist leaders in the region and said he thought Cuba was “ready to fall.”

He played down the need for US military action on the island, saying it would be hard for Havana to “hold out” without Venezuelan oil, and “it looks like it’s going down.”

“2026 is going to be tough, very tough,” Axel Alfonso, a 53-year-old working as a driver for a state enterprise, told AFP in the capital Havana on Monday.

“If Venezuela is the main supplier, at least of oil, it’s going to get a bit complicated,” said Alfonso who, like the vast majority of Cubans, has lived his whole life under a bruising US trade embargo in place since 1962.

The communist-run island has seen 13 US administrations come and go, some more punishing than others.

“We’ve been fighting for 60 years, and we have to keep going,” Alfonso said.

‘Uncertainty’

Located 145 kilometres from

the coast of Florida, Cuba’s last major economic test followed the implosion in 1991 of the Soviet Union, a major trade partner and source of credit.

It survived by opening up to tourism and foreign investment.

Since 2000, Havana has increasingly relied on Venezuelan oil under a deal struck with Maduro’s predecessor Hugo Chávez, in exchange for Cuban doctors, teachers, and sports coaches.

In the last quarter of 2025, Venezuela sent Cuba an average of 30,000 – 35,000 barrels a day, “which represents 50 percent of the island’s oil deficit,” Jorge Piñón, an energy expert and researcher at the University of Texas, told AFP.

The number was much higher 10 years ago, slashed by the global oil price crash that sent Venezuela’s own economy into turmoil.

For the past six years, Cuba has been mired in an ever-deepening crisis caused by a toxic combination of tighter US sanctions, poor domestic management of the economy and the collapse of tourism due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

GDP has fallen by 11 percent in five years and the government faces a severe shortage of currency to pay for basic social services: electricity, healthcare and supplying subsidised food and other basic goods that many Cubans have learned to rely on.

Economic hardship was a trigger for the unprecedented anti-

government demonstrations of July 11, 2021, when thousands of Cubans took to the streets shouting “We are hungry” and “Freedom!”

Since then, ever more frequent and longer power cuts and shortages of food and medicine have deepened discontent and led to sporadic, smaller protests, quickly contained by the government.

Now, many fear that the loss of Venezuelan oil will make matters even worse.

“We’re living in a moment of uncertainty,” attorney Daira Pérez, 30, told AFP.

No bailout

Piñón said it was “not clear whether shipments of Venezuelan oil to Cuba will continue,” especially in the context of the recent US seizure of oil tankers in the Caribbean.

And he highlighted that “Cuba doesn’t have the resources to buy that volume on international markets, nor a political partner to bail it out.”

Despite concerns for the future, long-suffering Cubans put on a brave face.

“He [Trump] keeps making tough threats,” said Havana resident Roberto Brown, 80, who was a young man during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis that brought the world to the brink of nuclear war.

“We already told him once: we’re 90 miles away, and a long-range missile from over there reaches here, but the one from here reaches there too,” said Brown. – AFP

US operation in Venezuela undermined int’l law: UN

Nina Larson

GENEVA – US air strikes on Venezuela and the seizing of the country’s leader on the weekend clearly “undermined a fundamental principle of international law”, the United Nations said yesterday.

“States must not threaten or use force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state,” Ravina Shamdasani, spokeswoman for the UN rights office, told reporters in Geneva.

“And this is what we are seeing,” she said, calling on the international community to “come together with one voice... to make clear that this is an action that in contravention of the international law that was set up by member states”.

US commandos backed by warplanes, the navy and air strikes, forcibly seized Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores in the early hours of Saturday.

Maduro appeared in court in New York on Monday to deny drug trafficking and other charges brought by Washington, insisting he had been kidnapped and remained Venezuela’s president.

He became president in 2013 after taking over from his populist mentor Hugo Chávez.

The United States and European Union allege that Maduro stayed in power by rigging elections – most recently in 2024 – and imprisoning opponents, while overseeing rampant corruption.

Shamdasani said the UN rights office had spent years reporting on the “continued deterioration” in Venezuela.

‘Unacceptable’

But she dismissed US justifications for its actions, saying accountability for rights violations “cannot be achieved by unilateral military intervention in violation of international law”.

“Using human rights arguments as a justification for this kind of military intervention is unacceptable,” she said, adding that she feared the US intervention “will only make the situation worse”.

Shamdasani pointed out that a state of emergency declared by Venezuelan authorities on Saturday allows property seizures, restricts free movement and suspends the right to protest among other measures.

“Far from being a victory for human rights, this military intervention... damages the architecture of international security, making every country less safe,” she said.

The rights office has been monitoring from Panama since its international staff were expelled from Venezuela in early 2024.

The UN humanitarian agency OCHA said nearly eight million people in Venezuela – a quarter of the population – needed humanitarian assistance even before the US operation.

The UN refugee agency UNHCR said they had yet to see signs of mass displacement since Saturday.

UNHCR spokeswoman Eujin Byun said the agency was closely monitoring the situation, adding that UN agencies were ready to “support emergency relief efforts and to protect displaced people in need as required”. – AFP

Football shorts

Como sweep past Pisa to go 4th in Serie A

ROME – Como swept aside struggling Pisa 3-0 to move fourth in Serie A yesterday boosting their hopes of Champions League football next season.

Cesc Fabregas's side notched up a third consecutive victory in the league thanks to three second half goals in Tuscany.

Maximo Perrone put the northerners ahead after 68 minutes with Anastasios Douvikas adding two more on 76 minutes and a late penalty after 96 minutes of play.

Como's French goalkeeper Jean Butez, one of the revelations of the season in Italy, saved a penalty six minutes from time.

The Lombardy club, owned by Indonesian billionaires the Hartono brothers, now have 33 points, the same as fifth-placed Juventus and Roma in sixth, who play at Sassuolo and Lecce respectively later yesterday.

But Como, back in the top flight since 2024 after a 21-year absence, have a game in hand against AC Milan, which they will play on March 15.

Newly-promoted Pisa, who have won only once in 19 matches, remain bottom of the table with 12 points the same as Fiorentina and Verona.

– AFP

Newcastle's Howe rules himself out of Man Utd job

LONDON – Eddie Howe said yesterday that he is "100percent" committed to Newcastle as he dismissed speculation linking him with the vacant Manchester United manager's job.

Ruben Amorim was sacked on Monday after 14 months in charge at Old Trafford after an explosive post-match interview following his team's 1-1 draw at Leeds.

Newcastle boss Howe has been touted as a possible permanent replacement for the Portuguese boss.

He was also linked to the Chelsea job after the departure last week of Enzo Maresca, who has since been replaced by Strasbourg boss Liam Rosenior.

The 48-year-old Howe was asked by reporters yesterday whether anything could tempt him away from St James' Park.

"No, not at this current time," he said on the eve of his team's home match against Leeds.

"The most important thing for me is happiness in the role, happiness

in the job, the relationships I have with the people around me. Now, that's not always been consistently good and things can change at any football club.

"But, at the moment, I am very happy."

Howe is in his fifth season at St James' Park and last year led Newcastle to a first major trophy in 56 years.

They are currently ninth in the Premier League, just five points off a Champions League place.

"I'm 100 percent here, working as hard as I can, head down, ignoring all the stuff that you guys (the press) write, good or bad, because it's irrelevant," said Howe.

"It's about today's work and trying to prepare the team as well as we can for Leeds, so that will never change from my perspective, my commitment to my work and my job."

– AFP

Dias sidelined with Gvardiol as Man City face defensive crisis

LONDON – Manchester City will be without Ruben Dias for up to six weeks and fellow defender Josko Gvardiol for "a long time", manager Pep Guardiola said yesterday.

The club announced on Monday that centre-back Gvardiol was facing a lengthy lay-off with a tibial fracture to his right leg that he suffered in Sunday's 1-1 draw with Chelsea.

Speaking to reporters yesterday, on the eve of City's home game against Brighton, Guardiola confirmed the depth of the crisis in central defence, with John Stones also sidelined.

Guardiola said Dias had injured his hamstring and would be out of action for "between four and six weeks" while he did not put a timescale on Gvardiol's return.

Referring to Stones, Guardiola said: "[He is not] ready for the next games. Of course, he's an important player for us for a long time and he was injured for a long time last season. This season looks the same.

"He's trying a lot and trying everything, but he's not fit."

Guardiola, whose team are second in the Premier League, six points behind leaders Arsenal, said he was confident they could cope with the absences.

"With the spirit that we have, always we can cope," he said.

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

– AFP / MPD

Man Utd speculation 'wasted time,' says Palace boss Glasner

LONDON – Crystal Palace boss Oliver Glasner yesterday batted away questions over the managerial vacancy at Manchester United, saying cryptically he is "not allowed to bet".

The Austrian is among the bookies' favourites to replace Ruben Amorim, who was sacked on Monday after 14 months at Old Trafford.

Glasner, 51, has impressed since arriving at Palace in 2024, leading them to their first major trophy by winning the FA Cup last season.

The Palace boss, who is out of contract at the end of the season, said last month that talks over a potential new deal at Selhurst Park were on hold.

Speaking on the eve of his side's home game against high-flying Aston Villa, he was evasive when asked about the United job.

"I'm not allowed to bet," he said. "My contract has one paragraph [that says] I'm not allowed to bet. I don't look at it."

Glasner was asked whether it would be wise to back him to be United's next manager.

"I also can't give insider information because also I would be breaking my contract," he said with a smile.

"I'm Crystal Palace manager. It just makes no sense and it's wasted time for you to ask me any more questions so I don't talk about any other club."

Glasner said the length of managers' contracts had limited meaning.

"You can win trophies and six months later you aren't the manager there anymore so I think if you see the length of a contract it doesn't mean anything about the future," he said.

"Even if I sign a new contract you could ask me every day, 'What's the future?'"

"Ruben Amorim said he had 18 months left in his press conference and he's not the manager anymore.

"There's one situation that keeps you in your job when you're a manager - this is being successful."

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

– AFP / MPD



O'Neill not sure he has 'energy' for long Celtic stay

LONDON - Returning Celtic manager Martin O'Neill says he does not know if he will "have the energy" to stay on past the end of the season.

The 73-year-old is back at the Glasgow club for a third time following the departure of Frenchman Wilfried Nancy, who was dismissed following six defeats in his eight games in charge.

O'Neill took charge on an interim basis after Brendan Rodgers' exit in October, winning seven out of eight matches.

Nancy took charge early last month but his reign quickly turned sour.

Former Aston Villa and

Ireland boss O'Neill will again be at the helm until the end of the season but he is unsure about a longer-term stay.

"I can't see that for a start and I genuinely can't. I don't know whether I would have the energy and all that type of stuff," O'Neill said on Talksport when asked if he would feel like staying on should the campaign finish on a positive note.

"I will just put everything into it now for these next couple of months and the same applies to me - if I don't win football matches I'll be straight under pressure and that starts here at the weekend."

When O'Neill finished his interim spell, Celtic were level on

points with Scottish Premiership leaders Hearts with a game in hand and nine points ahead of Rangers.

But they are now six points behind Hearts with the same number of matches played and would be three off Rangers in third if the Light Blues beat Aberdeen at Ibrox yesterday.

"It will be very, very difficult - we are behind," O'Neill said on Celtic's title hopes.

"Rangers have caught up now as well too and so it will be difficult, but it's a challenge for us."

O'Neill previously managed Celtic on a full-time basis from 2000 to 2005, winning three Scottish Premiership titles. – AFP



Repeating Super Cup success will give Barca 'energy': Flick

JEDDAH – Barcelona coach Hansi Flick said retaining the Spanish Super Cup this week would be a boost for his team's other ambitions this season.

The record 15-time champions face Athletic Bilbao today in a semi-final clash at the King Abdullah Sports City stadium in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Barca won the competition last season as the first part of a domestic treble, the first triumph of Flick's reign, followed up by triumphs in La Liga and the Copa del Rey.

"This tournament is a little bit different [to the equivalent competition] in Germany, but I like it," said former Bayern Munich coach Flick.

"For us to win the Super Cup [last season] gave us a lot of energy for the rest of the season and this is also what we want this year."

Even though significant questions remain around their defending, Barcelona are favourites to win the Super Cup and lead La Liga after nine consecutive top flight victories.

Despite being outplayed by neighbours Espanyol in a tense derby clash on Saturday, late goals

and a sensational performance from stopper Joan Garcia helped the Catalans claim a 2-0 victory.

Flick insisted his team had to perform better at the back if they are to succeed in the sixth edition of the tournament held in Saudi Arabia.

"It will not be an easy match [if] we make the same mistakes as on Saturday, it will not be easy, so we have to work on our things," continued Flick.

"We have to play much better in the defence, we have to play connected as one team, and this is what I missed on Saturday, so we have to make things much better."

Cancelo incoming

Central defender Ronald Araujo could return to action this week after an extended mental health break.

The Uruguayan was granted leave for around a month following a red card in Barcelona's 3-0 Champions League defeat by Chelsea in November.

"We will see this training [session] today [yesterday] and I will also want to speak with him, so we have not decided how to do it tomorrow," said Flick.

"I think it takes time, so if he feels ready for tomorrow [today] maybe we will change something, but at the moment it's not our plan to do this."

Flick confirmed Barcelona are close to signing Joao Cancelo from Al-Hilal on loan until the end of the season, but the deal has not been completed.

"With Joao maybe he can give us more options also as full-back, both sides in the offence, good quality, but [as far as] I know, it's not done," said Flick.

Cancelo spent the 2023-24 season on loan at Barcelona from Manchester City.

Athletic, eighth in La Liga, last won the Super Cup in 2021, beating Barcelona in the final, and have lifted the trophy on three occasions.

Only the Catalans and Real Madrid, on 13 triumphs, have a better record. Tomorrow Xabi Alonso's Real Madrid face city rivals Atletico Madrid in the other Super Cup semi-final.

The games will be played at 3 a.m. tomorrow morning and Friday morning Macau time respectively. – AFP / MPD



Democratic Republic (DR) of Congo's fan plays a steel drum and cheers during the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) round of 16 match against Algeria at the Prince Moulay El Hassan stadium in Rabat, Morocco yesterday. DR Congo lost the game 1-0 in extra time. – AFP

'Demon' drags hosts Australia into United Cup quarters

Tennis

SYDNEY – World number six Alex de Minaur beat up-and-coming Jakub Mensik and then won in doubles to drag hosts Australia into the quarter-finals of the United Cup yesterday and thrill an energised Sydney crowd.

Also progressing into the last eight of the season-opening 18-team ATP-WTA event were Belgium and the Czech Republic, but Italy bowed out.

Hopes are high at home that De Minaur, fondly known as "Demon", can go deep at the Australian Open starting this month and he served warning with a 6-4, 6-1 win over the 18th ranked Mensik.

That drew Australia level in the tie against the Czech Republic and De Minaur then paired up with Storm Hunter as they won the mixed doubles rubber in straight sets to progress.

The Czechs went through despite the 2-1 loss.

"I didn't start the year the way I wanted to," said De Minaur, who fell to Casper Ruud in his first group match.

"But something I've done really well in my career is bouncing back, so I'm happy I bounced back today."



Australia's Alex de Minaur (right) and Storm Hunter react after a point against Czech Republic's Dalibor Svrčina and Miriam Skoch during their mixed doubles match at the United Cup tennis tournament in Ken Rosewall Arena in Sydney yesterday. – AFP

In Perth, world number three Jasmine Paolini defeated France's Leolia Jeanjean 6-2, 6-3 for an opening win of the season, finally sealing the deal on her sixth match point.

But it was not enough as Italy joined France in exiting the competition.

Paolini, a two-time Grand Slam finalist, said: "First matches are always tricky."

"I'm happy how I felt on court today. We could not win the group this year but we did our best and fought to the last ball."

Today's ties include quarter-finals between holders the United States and Greece, and Switzerland and Argentina, both in Perth.

World number two Iga Swiatek is in action in Sydney as Poland face the Netherlands. – AFP



IOC confident of Winter Olympics preparation despite delays

ROME – One month out from the start of the Winter Olympic Games in Italy, the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) executive director Christophe Dubi told AFP yesterday that he was confident everything would be prepared on time, despite serious concerns.

Delays have hampered the preparation of some of the Milan-Cortina Olympic event sites, such as those used for ice hockey, snowboarding and freestyle skiing.

"We're at the stage where everything is coming together, with just a month to go to the opening ceremony," Dubi told AFP in a written response to questions.

"The preparation is moving

from the planning phase to the full operational implementation across all clusters.

"Recent test events – speed skating, ice hockey, and last weekend the biathlon at Val di Fiemme – confirmed the readiness and provided us with valuable final information."

"All these things strengthen our confidence," he added.

The Santagiulia Arena in Milan, which will host the final stages of the ice hockey tournament, will be opened this week, a month behind schedule.

Next month's Games will mark a return of NHL stars to the Olympics for the first time in 12 years.

"The infrastructure for the ice

hockey, I am talking about the dressing room, the practice area, the field of play, that's going to be ready," International Ice Hockey Federation president Luc Tardif said on Monday.

"We are going to have a fantastic tournament," he added.

The snowboard and freestyle competitions will be held in Livigno, near the Swiss border, where artificial snow needs to be produced to build the jumps, obstacles and mogul runs that will feature on the course.

That was delayed by several days due to a technical problem but the 2026 Games CEO Andre Varnier assured AFP on Monday that the snow production was progressing as forecast. – AFP

Head, Smith centuries put Australia in charge of 5th Ashes Test

Martin Parry



SYDNEY – Run-machine Travis Head hit a swashbuckling 163 and Steve Smith a composed unbeaten 129 as Australia built a 134-run lead over England to seize control on day three of the fifth and final Ashes Test yesterday.

It was destructive opener Head's third ton of the series, to go with the phenomenal match-winning 123 he made in Perth and 170 at Adelaide.

The fidgety Smith was equally impressive, with his 37th Test hundred driving the hosts to 518-7 by stumps at a packed Sydney Cricket Ground in reply to England's 384 after they began the day on 166-2.

Beau Webster was alongside him on 42 at the close.

The hosts lead the series 3-1 and have already retained the Ashes, with England desperate for another win after victory at the previous Test in Melbourne.

Head brought up three figures off just 105 balls and seemed destined to score 200.

But he came undone in the third over after lunch by the part-time spin of Jacob Bethell, who was bowling for the first time in the series.

In his second over, Bethell trapped the 32-year-old lbw attempting a sweep shot to end a magnificent knock.

Smith treated Bethell with contempt, launching him for a big six on his way to a 13th Ashes century to move past England legend Jack Hobbs. Only Donald Bradman with 19 has more.

Usman Khawaja, in his 88th and last Test after announcing his retirement, fell lbw to Brydon Carse for 17, while Alex Carey made 16 before Josh Tongue enticed an edge.

Nightwatchman Michael Naser made 24 and Cameron Green 37.

Dropped catches

Head resumed on 91 and Naser on one after Jake Weatherald (21)

and Marnus Labuschagne (48) were out on Monday.

Head clattered an early midwicket boundary off Ben Stokes and reached three figures with his 17th four, crunched through the covers from Tongue, windmilling his bat in celebration.

It was his 12th century and first in Sydney to cement his reputation as one of the game's most versatile batsmen.

Head only moved to the top of the order in the second innings of the first Test in Perth due to Khawaja's back injury, but he has made the position his own.

With his hundred secure, he banged three straight fours off Matthew Potts then had a massive let-off on 121 when he pulled Carse and Will Jacks dropped a sitter near the ropes.

Naser ably stuck around for 90 balls to foil England, who wasted their last two reviews on him.

Batting like a top-order batsman, he smacked four boundaries before getting a thin edge to wicketkeeper Jamie Smith off Carse.

Smith, on 12, was dropped at leg slip by Zak Crawley but safely made it to lunch and passed 50 with a drive down the ground.

When Khawaja departed, Carey produced a series of textbook strokes before being dismissed in a similar fashion to his last two Tests.

Unruffled, Smith slammed Stokes to the ropes for four to put Australia in the lead for the first time and, steely-eyed, kept going to yet another stylish century.

All-rounder Green came into the Test under increasing pressure after failing to fire with either bat or ball through the series, with his automatic selection being questioned.

He produced a glorious cover drive and a big six to show flashes of what he can do.

But he then needlessly spooned Carse to Ben Duckett in the deep to throw away his wicket. – AFP

Cycling

PARIS – Cyclist Derek Gee has agreed to join Lidl-Trek until 2028, the German outfit announced yesterday, as his former team said they had resolved their contract dispute with the Canadian.

Gee, 28, said in October that Israel Premier Tech, now known as NSN Cycling Team after a takeover involving former Spain and Barcelona football star Andres Iniesta, were claiming damages of 30 million euros (US\$35 million) after he left them in August.

But NSN posted on X that the two parties had finalised an agreement to "conclude" Gee's

contract with the team.

Gee had said in October that he had quit Israel PT with "just cause" due to his "personal-belief standpoint", with the team then owned by Israeli-Canadian billionaire Sylvan Adams – a self-appointed ambassador to Israel, which has spent more than two years fighting Palestinian armed group Hamas in Gaza.

Gee finished fourth at last year's Giro d'Italia and departed Israel PT in August, just before they were heavily targeted by pro-Palestinian protesters at the Vuelta a Espana.

"From the outside, you can already see that this is an organisation operating very close to the gold standard in our sport,

and that was something that really appealed to me," Gee said in a Lidl-Trek statement.

"The ambition, the structure, and the depth of talent across the team are impressive, and it feels like the right environment for the next phase of my career," he added.

Gee is a major stage race contender, having finished ninth at the Tour de France and third at the Criterium du Dauphine in 2024, and fourth at last year's Tirreno-Adriatico.

In November, Israel PT announced they were changing their name to NSN and would be based in Barcelona, although racing under a Swiss licence.

– AFP



Ford Racing's US driver Mitch Guthrie Jr and his US co-driver Kellon Walch compete in Stage 2 of the 48th Dakar Rally, between Yanbu and Al Ula in Saudi Arabia, on Sunday. Yesterday Guthrie won Stage 3, leading overall after his first ever win of a Dakar Rally stage. – AFP

Thousands attend annual minstrel parade in Cape Town

CAPE TOWN –Thousands lined the streets of Cape Town on Monday for the colourful annual minstrels’ parade, a cornerstone of South African culture rooted in the city’s history of slavery.

Troupes of thousands of minstrels marched and danced in bright, satin costumes, many twirling umbrellas and tossing walking sticks as they were accompanied by brass bands, traditional goema* beats and strumming banjos.

Spectators pitched tents and umbrellas to shield themselves against the scorching heat during the hours-long New Year’s parade, marred this year by disputes over the route, date and claims of commercialisation.

“It is not New Year unless you see the troupes, that is my heritage,” said Vanessa Hendricks, 65, who has been attending the Tweede Nuwe Jaar (“Second New Year”) carnival since she was 16 years old.

The tradition began more than 100 years ago, when enslaved people from Africa and Southeast Asia were given a day off to celebrate the new year.

With some people of European descent, they formed a population still largely known as Cape Coloureds, many of whom cherish the carnival as a celebration of their culture, identity and heritage.



Members of a troupe perform in the annual minstrel parade in Cape Town on Monday. – AFP



Members of a troupe take part in the annual minstrel in Cape Town on Monday. – AFP

“This is a cultural practice that you will not see anywhere else,” said city mayor, Geordin Hill-Lewis, at the start of the parade.

“It is globally unique to Cape Town, deeply entrenched as part of our city’s beloved and beautiful heritage,” he said.

Organisers said around 17 troupes made up of about 20,000 performers were expected at this year’s event, which culminated in a city stadium for an on-stage competition watched by

more than 15,000 spectators.

Goema is a genre of music that originated in Cape Town. It is a blend of various musical influences, including African, Cape Malay, jazz, and rock, often characterised by its lively rhythms and danceable beats. Goema is traditionally associated with the celebrations of the Cape Town Minstrel Carnival, also known in Afrikaans as the “Kaapse Klopse” (Afrikaans for “Cape Minstrels”), where performers don colorful

costumes and engage in vibrant performances. The music typically features instruments such as drums, guitars, and brass, and often incorporates call-and-response vocals. Goema reflects the diverse cultural heritage of South Africa, showcasing the influences of different communities in the region. The term “goema” is believed to have originated from the Cape Malay word “goema,” which refers to a type of drumming or rhythm. – Poe



Messages, pictures and flowers bouquets are displayed at a makeshift memorial in tribute to late French actress Brigitte Bardot, at the entrance of her property “La Madrague”, in Saint-Tropez, southeastern France, on Monday. Bardot’s funeral will take place tomorrow in her hometown of Saint-Tropez. Bardot, a symbol of sexual liberation in the 1950s and 1960s who reinvented herself as an animal rights defender and embraced far-right views, died on December 28, 2025, aged 91. – AFP



Veteran Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan, 83, gestures upon arrival for the “United in Triumph” felicitation event hosted by the Reliance Foundation to honour the country’s national cricket teams in Mumbai on Monday. Bachchan is considered one of the greatest, most accomplished and commercially successful actors in the history of Indian cinema. – AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -8°C~5°C	Manila 22°C~29°C	New York 2°C~10°C	Lisbon 6°C~14°C
Shanghai -1°C~11°C	Bangkok 19°C~31°C	London 2°C~6°C	Rio de Janeiro 23°C~28°C
Hong Kong 9°C~17°C	Tokyo -2°C~7°C	Frankfurt -3°C~0°C	Luanda 23°C~29°C
Taipei 11°C~15°C	Singapore 24°C~31°C	Vancouver 2°C~6°C	Maputo 22°C~34°C
Guangzhou 5°C~17°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~32°C	Paris 0°C~3°C	Dili 24°C~30°C
Nanjing -4°C~10°C	Jakarta 23°C~32°C	Moscow -7°C~4°C	São Tomé 24°C~30°C
Guilin 3°C~16°C	Seoul -9°C~2°C	Las Vegas 3°C~15°C	Praia 18°C~26°C
Xi'an -4°C~9°C	Sydney 19°C~31°C	Monte Carlo 4°C~10°C	Bissau 19°C~31°C

Nigeria’s ‘Kannywood’ tiptoes between censor boards & modernity

Kadiatou Sakho

KANO, Nigeria – Long overshadowed by south Nigeria’s Nollywood, filmmakers in the north of Africa’s cinema powerhouse are pushing boundaries in search of international eyeballs – all while navigating the Muslim-majority region’s social conservatism.

Young creatives – influenced not just by their peers in the wealthier Christian south of the country, but even as far as India – are hoping to expand the audience beyond Nigeria’s borders for the north’s frenetic “Kannywood”* cinema industry, known for churning out some 200 films a month.

With some 80 million speakers of the north’s Hausa language spread across west and central Africa – not to mention the vast Nigerian diaspora around the world – Kannywood’s potential market is huge.

Yet reconciling international expectations with local constraints is no easy task: Islam’s sharia law code runs alongside common law in Kano state, the bustling cultural hub of northern Nigeria, and a government censor board reviews music and film production.

who also serves as the executive secretary of the Kano State film censorship board, told AFP.

Hausa-focused streamers

When AFP visited Ibrahim’s set last year, he was filming season two of “Wata Shida”, a series about a woman confronted with the prospect of a forced marriage.

In order to get out of it, she marries another man, with both of them seeking the convenience of a partnership on paper, rather than real romance – an on-the-nose plotline in a region where women and girls are frequently wedded to their parents’ choice of husband.

“We are not used to seeing someone going out in pursuit of a dream without family consent,” Ibrahim said, noting the importance of films to “question certain important social issues”.

“Wata Shida” actor Adam Garba said he hopes to see the series broadcast on a major streaming platform one day – though for now, it’s available on YouTube only.

Most Nigerian films on major streamers like Netflix and Amazon Prime are from the country’s richer south, where Hausa is a minority language.

Northflix, another Hausa-focused effort, shuttered in 2023 amid slow growth.

Getting people to pay for media is tough in any country. Nigeria – where millions live in poverty, compounded by an economic crisis since 2023 – is no exception.

“When a film is accessible to a hundred people on a platform with poor security, it can quickly be pirated and circulated everywhere,” said Mustapha, the censor board secretary.

Bollywood inspiration

The industry is known for its scrappiness, but the key to international growth is better production equipment, said director Umar Abdulmalik.

With top-notch stories and production, the language barrier won’t be an issue, he predicted, noting how India’s Bollywood has become a media staple in Nigeria, despite many viewers not speaking English or Hindi, “because they are carried away by the characters’ emotions”.

For now, though, there’s one tradition that Kannywood seems set to stick with: doing more with less.

On the set of “Wata Shida”, the heat was rising as the call to prayer rang out from nearby mosques.

After calling cut, director Ibrahim called for another take.

“That’s good, but we can do better,” he said. “Let’s do it again.”

* Kannywood refers to the film industry in Kano, northern Nigeria, primarily producing movies in the Hausa language. It is part of the larger Nigerian film industry, Nollywood, but focuses specifically on the cultural and social aspects of the Hausa-speaking population. Kano is the second largest city in Nigeria after Lagos, with over four million inhabitants. – Poe

“They have more budget, more equipment, they have more sponsors, more investors,” Garba told AFP.

That might be changing.

Freshly launched Arewaflix is a new streaming initiative from Abdurrahman Muhammad Amart, a Nigerian production company CEO.

Arewaflix will be a service “not only for Hausa films, but also for films in other languages from northern Nigeria”, including Nupe and Kanuri, Amart said.

Subtitles are planned in English, French and Arabic.

It’s not the first such attempt:



1



3



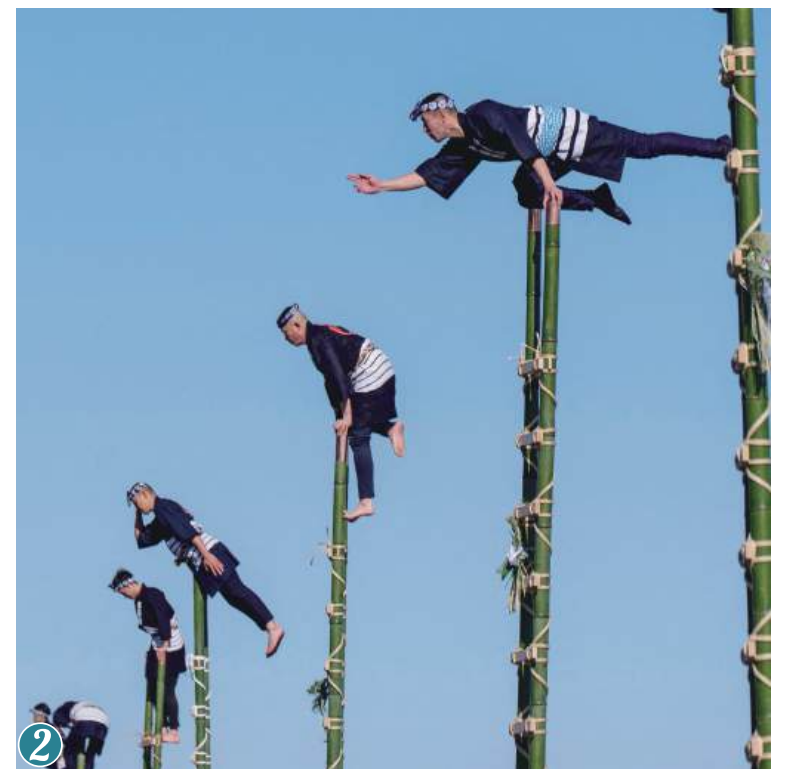
4



5



6



2

1. Cuddling for food!

A heron (right) tries to join in as Jay Firtina, the penguins and flying birds zookeeper, feeds Humboldt penguins during a photocall for the annual stocktake at ZSL London Zoo in central London yesterday.

– AFP

2. Above & beyond

Members of the Edo Firemanship Preservation Association perform acrobatic manoeuvres atop ladders at the Tokyo Fire Department's New Year fire brigades exercise in Tokyo yesterday.

– AFP

3. Following the star

Men dressed as three kings (magi) ride their camels across the Charles Bridges as they take part in a procession on the eve of epiphany, in Prague, the Czech Republic on Sunday.

– AFP

4. Starburst

A member of a troupe reacts as he takes part in the annual parade of Tweede Nuwe Jaar (Second New Year) in Cape Town on Sunday.

– AFP

5. Go away!

Ring-necked parakeets are seen in a park in Brussels, Belgium yesterday.

– AFP

6. Last swing before school!

A child sits on a swing in a park during a snowfall in Namur, Belgium on Sunday.

– AFP