

Tai vows to promote modern finance's role in driving economic growth

Tony Wong

Secretary for Economy and Finance Anton Tai Kin Ip pledged yesterday that the Macau government will further promote the role of modern finance as an engine of economic growth in Macau's effort to achieve its appropriate economic diversification.

Tai made the remarks while delivering a speech at the opening ceremony of the 4th Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Finance Forum 2025 held at the Wynn Palace integrated resort in Cotai yesterday.

The one-day forum was jointly organised by the Renmin University of China's (RUC) National Academy of Financial Research, the university's China Capital Market Research Institute, and the Macau Association of Banks (ABM).

In his speech, Tai underlined that over the past five years, under the central government's leadership and support, the local government has fully seized the opportunities brought about by the nation's development, consolidated and enhanced Macau's competitive advantages, and announced its 1+4 appropriate economic



Dignitaries and other guests cut the ribbon during yesterday's opening ceremony, such as Secretary for Economy and Finance Anton Tai Kin Ip (centre), Liu Decheng (seventh from left), director of the Economic Affairs Department of the Central People's Government Liaison Office in Macau, Kou Hoi In (seventh from right), the sole Macau member of the elite Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), Macau Chamber of Commerce (ACM) Chairman Chui Sai Cheong (sixth from left), and Wu Xiaoqiu (sixth from right), who chairs the forum.

— Photo: GCS

diversification plan, formally listing modern finance as one of Macau's nascent industries.

Consolidating, diversifying via 1+4

The local government's 1+4 model aims to consolidate and diversify the development of the city's tourism and leisure industry,

i.e., the "1" element, while putting special emphasis on promoting the development of four new key industries, i.e., the "4" elements, namely 1) big health mainly driven by traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), 2) modern finance, 3) high-tech, and 4) MICE and commerce as well as culture and sport.

Moreover, Tai said, the Macau

government has placed special emphasis on the development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, while vigorously participating in the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), integrating Macau's development into the nation's overall development, promoting

the in-depth cooperation zone's development with high standards, and advancing the integrated development between Macau and Hengqin.

The policy secretary said that all these have laid a solid foundation for the coordinated regional development of the financial sector.

Continued on p.6



Tourists pose in front of "Mr. Snowman" at the Sun Island scenic spot in Harbin, northeastern Heilongjiang Province, yesterday. "Mr. Snowman," an iconic snow sculpture landscape of the 38th Sun Island International Snow Sculpture Art Expo with a height of 23.8 meters and made with 5,000 cubic meters of snow, was officially unveiled at the Sun Island scenic spot yesterday. — Xinhua

Charity raffle offers Picasso portrait for 100 euros a ticket

PARIS — An international charity raffle to raise funds for research into Alzheimer's disease is set to hand one lucky winner an original Picasso painting worth over one million euros, organisers said yesterday.

A total of 120,000 tickets will be sold online at 100 euros each, with the ceremony to award the painting set to be livestreamed from auction house Christie's in Paris on April 14.

Tickets are on sale at www.1picasso100euros.com with the sale backed by Picasso's family and foundation.

The painting is a portrait of Dora Maar, one of Picasso's muses, produced by the artist in 1941 and titled "Tête de femme" ("Woman's head").

Proceeds will be donated to the Alzheimer's Research Foundation.

Two other similar raffles of Picasso paintings took place in 2013 and 2020 by the same organisers, led by French journalist Peri Cochin.

A 25-year-old American from Pennsylvania won the first, while an accountant from Ventimiglia in northwest Italy claimed the second after being given a ticket as a Christmas present by her son. — AFP

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China to continue opening up its mega-market to world: Li Qiang

China will continue opening up its mega-market to the world, sharing development opportunities with other countries, Premier Li Qiang said in Beijing yesterday.

— Story on p. 7

Zelensky says will send US revised plan to end Ukraine war

President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday said he planned to send the United States revised proposals "in the near future" on ending the Ukraine conflict, after meeting with European allies to strategise on their next steps

— Story on p. 11

Honduran presidential candidate decries vote 'theft' in race against Trump-backed rival

TEGUCIGALPA — Honduran right-wing presidential candidate Salvador Nasralla made allegations of electoral corruption on Monday after a stalled ballot count in the November 30 general election

— Story on p. 12

Macao Polytechnic University hosts IEEE TALE 2025



This handout photo provided by the Macao Polytechnic University (MPU) yesterday shows Rector Marcus Im Sio Kei addressing the four-day “IEEE TALE 2025” conference at the public university in Zape on Thursday.

Khalel Vallo

The public Macao Polytechnic University (MPU) announced in a statement yesterday that it hosted the four-day IEEE TALE 2025 conference from Thursday to Sunday, bringing together international scholars and industry experts to discuss innovation in educational technology and the integration of STEAM learning.

IEEE TALE stands for “Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers”, while TALE stands for “Teaching, Assessment, and Learning for Engineering”.

This year’s theme, “Educational Technology and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) Integration for Educational Innovation,” focused on how digital transformation is reshaping teaching and learning models worldwide, the statement noted.

Jointly organised by the university, the IEEE Education Society and IEEE Region 10, and supported by the Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED), the flagship Asia-Pacific event gathered hundreds of participants from higher education, vocational sectors, healthcare and business, the statement said.

Addressing the opening ceremony, MPU Rector Marcus Im Sio Kei underlined that Macau continues to strengthen connections between education and emerging technologies. The statement quoted Im as saying that the conference “aligned perfectly” with the university’s objective of

nurturing innovation-driven talent. Im also pledged that the university would further expand international collaboration to support Macau’s participation in national education and innovation strategies.

DSED Director Yau Yun Wah emphasised Macau’s openness and support for the innovation and technology industries, the statement noted. Yau said, according to the statement, he hoped that the event would deepen cooperation between local and international institutions, particularly in exploring new models of technology-enabled education.

Meanwhile, IEEE Region 10 representative Lei Chi Un, a local scholar and former TALE Best Paper Award recipient, highlighted the importance of hosting the event in Macau and encouraged attendees to use the four-day programme to advance engineering education and learning technologies, the statement said.

According to the statement, the conference featured keynote presentations, parallel discussions and exhibitions showcasing research advancements in areas including education-technology reform, generative AI in learning, digital-assessment innovation, and STEAM-education practices.

The statement concluded that it would continue leveraging its strengths in educational-technology research and STEAM development to deepen international cooperation and enhance Macau’s academic influence across the Asia-Pacific region. ■

Gongbei Customs seizes 285,000 cigarettes

Armindo Neves

Zhuhai’s Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that it seized 285,000 cigarettes at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) on November 29.

According to the statement, on that day, customs officers at the delta bridge conducted a routine X-ray scan inspection on a batch of goods declared as “a shipment of cross-border e-commerce items,” which was being transferred under a customs transit procedure. The inspection discovered an anomaly in the X-ray images. Upon physical inspection, customs officers discovered a large quantity of undeclared cigarettes concealed inside two white electrical cabinets. After a full count, a total of 1,425 cartons containing 285,000 cigarettes of the Manchester brand were seized.

Gongbei Customs reminded the public that in line with the Chinese



This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai Gongbei Customs yesterday shows the Manchester cigarettes seized by its officers at HZMB Zhuhai Port (checkpoint) on November 29.

mainland’s Tobacco Monopoly Law the state has implemented a monopoly management system for the production, sale, import, and export of tobacco products, operating under a tobacco monopoly

licence system. The export of cigarettes requires approval from the administrative department under the State Council in charge of tobacco monopoly and the acquisition of a tobacco monopoly licence. ■

3 local women lose HK\$6.26 million in investment scams: police

Ada Lei

Three local women have separately fallen victim to investment scams, resulting in a total loss of HK\$6.26 million (6.45 million patacas), Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Leng Kam Lon said during a regular press conference yesterday.

According to Leng, a local elderly woman was added to an investment group via WhatsApp by a stranger in October. Within the group, members purportedly spoke about their investment experiences, and a person claiming to be a “customer services manager” convinced her to invest in Hong Kong stocks on a specific platform. Following the scammer’s instructions, she transferred a total of HK\$3.23 million in 17 transactions to various Hong Kong bank accounts. On Friday, the scammer

requested more funds, citing “poor stock performance,” and encouraged her to borrow money from a finance company. Realising she had been deceived, she reported the case to the police on Saturday.

Leng added that another elderly woman received a WhatsApp message on August 20 from someone claiming to be a “well-known stock commentator in Hong Kong,” who offered assistance with investment profits. The victim transferred a total of HK\$1.264 million into three bank accounts provided by the scammer who later sent multiple false screenshots appearing to show “investment profits.” Suspecting she had been scammed, she reported the case to the police on Sunday.

In the third case, Leng said, a

middle-aged local woman saw a stock investment advertisement on Facebook on September 3 and was invited to join a WhatsApp group. Within the group, an individual claiming to be an “investment assistant” instructed her to download specific investment software that purportedly used AI technology to select stocks, promising easy profits. She then deposited HK\$1.77 million into her software account, which later showed profits exceeding HK\$4 million. However, when she sought to withdraw her funds, the scammer demanded a 10 percent “management fee.” After she refused to pay, she was blocked, and her account became inaccessible. Realising she had been scammed, she reported the case to the police on Monday. ■

Police nab 2 gamblers for cheating illegal exchange dealer out of 400,000 yuan

Ada Lei

A male and female gambler from the Chinese mainland were apprehended yesterday for defrauding a female illegal currency exchange dealer out of 400,000 yuan (453,000 patacas), Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Leng Kam Lon said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Leng identified the suspect as a 38-year-old male surnamed Wang and a 31-year-old female surnamed Fu; both claimed to be jobless.

According to Leng, the victim was introduced to Wang and Fu through an acquaintance and met them on Sunday to discuss an illegal currency exchange deal, in which they agreed to exchange HK\$500,000 in cash for 458,500 yuan.

Leng noted that Wang and Fu met the victim again at a casino in Cotai on Monday for the illegal transaction. Fu first showed the victim her Alipay account balance, which appeared to have sufficient

funds for the transaction, thereby gaining the victim’s trust. The victim then handed over HK\$500,000 in cash to Wang. Shortly thereafter, the victim discovered that only 58,500 yuan had been received in her mobile account. Fu then falsely claimed that the account had reached the daily transaction limit and used various excuses to delay the transfer. Suspecting she had been scammed, the victim reported the case to the police early yesterday morning.

The police intercepted Fu and the victim at the scene and later apprehended Wang in the casino, where he had already gambled away all the money fraudulently obtained from the victim. The police seized two mobile phones from the two suspects.

Leng added that the Alipay account shown by Fu to the victim was actually a blocked account incapable of conducting any transactions, and the displayed balance was merely a ruse to deceive the victim.



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Leng Kam Lon looks on during yesterday’s regular press conference.

– Photo: Ada Lei

The duo have been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), each facing a fraud charge.

Leng said that the police would initiate a separate investigation into the victim’s involvement in illegal currency exchange activities. ■

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Macau Weather

MAINLY CLOUDY.
LIGHT RAIN AT FIRST.
FORCE 2 TO 3 EAST TO
NORTHEASTERLY WINDS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL
RANGE BETWEEN 60% AND 90%.



19°C~23°C

Source: SMG

Macau records year's 6th case of Legionnaires' disease

Ida Cheong

The Health Bureau (SSM) received a report yesterday from the public Conde de S. Januário Hospital Centre (CHCSJ) that a 75-year-old local male has been diagnosed with Legionnaires' disease (aka Legionellosis), marking the sixth case reported in Macau this year, according to an SSM statement yesterday.

The statement pointed out that the patient resides long-term in the Chinese mainland and has a history of multiple chronic illnesses, who visited the public Conde de S. Januário Hospital Centre on November 21 due to physical discomfort.

On Thursday, he developed symptoms including high fever, cough, and shortness of breath, the statement added.

According to yesterday's laboratory tests, his urine sample was positive for Legionella pneumophila, leading to a diagnosis of Legionnaires' disease.

As of yesterday's statement, the patient was in a generally stable condition and remained hospitalised for treatment.

The statement pointed out that Legionellosis, with an incubation period of between two and 10 days, is an infectious disease caused by Legionella bacteria thriving in warm water between 20 and 45 degrees Celsius and in warm and moist places, such as artificial water systems including massage pools, fountains, and household respiratory medical equipment.

The statement underlined that males, senior citizens, smokers, drinkers and those with weakened immune systems, especially those with chronic medical conditions, such as cancer, diabetes, chronic lung or kidney disease, and patients receiving steroids or other immunosuppressive drugs are at increased risk of catching the disease. ■

UTM Hengqin new campus to open postgraduate programmes next year

Ida Cheong

Macau University of Tourism (UTM) Rector Fanny Vong Chuk Kwan told reporters on the sidelines of yesterday's awards ceremony that while the university's new campus at Macao-Hengqin International Education (University) Town is slated to be completed in 2030, its transition operations will start in the next academic year, with its primary focus on postgraduate education, marking the initiation of a transition phase for the project.

Vong made her remarks during yesterday's graduation ceremony for the "Cultural Heritage Specialist Guide Training and Certification Programme" on the UTM campus in the Macau Peninsula's Mong Ha district.

Vong pointed out that more than 10 postgraduate programmes will be launched on the future campus, requiring both students and faculty to commute between the Macau campus and the campus in the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone for classes during the transition period, adding that the new campus involves a multi-phase construction plan in the in-depth cooperation zone. The initial phase will offer teaching facilities for up to 4,000 students.

Meanwhile, science and engineering-related programmes are planned to be introduced that integrate technological aspects, such as hospitality management and tourism, Vong said, adding that student dormitories and comprehensive support facilities will be set up as well, aligning with mainland operational standards to provide complete academic and living support for students and staff.

Moreover, UTM's new campus will gradually expand its courses and enrolment capacity in the coming years, Vong said, adding that student numbers have seen consistent growth in recent years. She underlined that the project is forecast to have significant room for student recruitment expansion in the future. The students will not be specifically



Macau University of Tourism (UTM) Rector Fanny Vong Chuk Kwan poses during yesterday's awards ceremony for the "Cultural Heritage Specialist Guide Training and Certification Programme" at Macao University of Tourism campus in Mong Ha district. – Photo: Ida Cheong

divided into the new campus and the existing one, as the two-campus will be available for them in line with their educational needs, Vong said.

136 get UNESCO World Heritage cert

Vong said in a speech during yesterday's graduation ceremony that, as of this year, 136 trainees had obtained the qualification of UNESCO World Heritage Professional Interpreters (Macau) through the UTM "Cultural Heritage Specialist Guide Training and Certification Programme".

Vong added that the programme innovatively integrated interpretation skills with the concept of cultural heritage conservation and has been recognised by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee as a model project for promoting sustainable community development. ■

Tourists, shops have mixed reactions to 'Laahn Gwai Lau' light show

Armindo Neves

The Macau Historical Districts Developments Promotion Association is hosting a three-month long light show called "2025 Luminescent Night at Travessa do Armazém Velho" ("Alley of the Old Warehouse").

The show started in the old neighbourhood on Saturday. It will take place every day from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.

The event is a part of the "Light up Macao" festival organised by the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO).

Cheang Ka Hang, president of the association told reporters on Saturday that the event has been held in conjunction with the "Light up Macao" festival for several years. Cheang pointed out that, based on past Christmas holiday periods, Laahn Gwai Lau can expect 200,000 to 300,000 visitors during the three-month event, potentially boosting the takings of the area's businesses by about 20 to 30 percent. If the event continues to succeed in attracting visitors, Cheang said his association will apply to MGTO to extend the duration of the light installations.

Yesterday, the *Post* interviewed several tourists and employees to find out what they think of the nightly spectacle.

Vincent from Hong Kong was visiting Macau for the fifth time, but this was his first visit to Laahn Gwai Lau. He found the neighbourhood's atmosphere to be a blend of old and new, displaying a "distinctive historic charm". He said that the ambience improves when the lights are on at night, though he was not sure if he would pay another visit to the area just because of the luminous spectacle.

Lu Jue from Beijing was visiting Macau and the light show for the first time. He said he liked the event's atmosphere and environment, describing the



Pedestrians walk past shops on Rua dos Ervanários ("Road of the Herbalists") in the UNESCO-listed Historic Centre of Macau's "Laahn Gwai Lau" neighbourhood yesterday. – Photo: Armindo Neves

overall experience as "comfortable", adding that he was planning to return at the same time next year. He also said that his initial impression of Macau was favourable, though he had not yet formed a firm opinion about the city.

Bakery worker "Xiao Xi" said he believed that the organisers' expectation of using the event to increase foot traffic in the district by 20 to 30 percent was unlikely to be achieved. He pointed out that the lighting decorations only seemed to attract some tourists for their popular "da kat" (photo ops, also known as "check-in") activity but did not directly translate into increased in-store customer traffic. The real driver of foot traffic was the popular "shopping voucher" campaign and other tangible incentives launched concurrently, he said.

Coffee shop owner "Ming" criticised the organisers for a lack of pre-event communication with the area's business owners. He also said that the temporary installations, loud music, and large-scale setups disrupted normal shop operations. He also slammed the poor design quality of the event, with complaints about inappropriate colour schemes and cheap-looking materials failing to align with Macau's desired image as a first-tier city, even drawing negative comments from tourists, he said. ■



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NATIONAL OPERA 'MARCH OF THE VOLUNTEERS' TO MAKE LOCAL DEBUT AT MACAU'S RETURN TO THE MOTHERLAND ANNIVERSARY

Interview by William Chan

The original national opera "March of the Volunteers" (義勇軍進行曲) is set to be performed for the first time locally at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) Grand Auditorium on December 20, the day marking the 26th anniversary of Macau's return to the motherland, local producer Ken Sou Io Kuong has told the Post in a recent online interview.

The performance is a joint production by the Shanghai Opera House and the Xuhui District Culture and Tourism Bureau, and serves to commemorate two major historical milestones: The 80th Anniversary of the Victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War, and the 90th anniversary of the creation of the "March of the Volunteers," the national anthem of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The decision to stage the opera on December 20, which coincides with the anniversary of Macau's return to the motherland, is a deliberate choice to maximise the event's historical and cultural impact, according to Sou. "It is a wonderful opportunity for the broader public in Macau to gain a deeper understanding of the genesis and the details behind the creation of our national anthem, the 'March of the Volunteers.'"

Sou acknowledged that while the song is universally known and sung, the compelling story behind its creation – and the reason it was ultimately chosen as the national anthem – remains largely unknown to many. He expressed a strong desire to use the significant juncture of Macau's return to the motherland to share this powerful narrative with the community.

Sou underlined that the production is a testament to cross-regional artistic collaboration. "The Shanghai Opera House has demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to the Macau engagement, bringing a massive contingent of nearly 120 people." He noted that the Shanghai troupe was "regardless of cost" putting all their effort into introducing this work to Macau citizens. Furthermore, the opera will feature the active participation of local artistic talent, with Macau dancers and actors joining the Shanghai troupe, highlighting the blend of mainland expertise and local contribution.

Local musicians as well as organisers such as Sou himself played a crucial role in bringing the production to fruition. Sou explained that a fortunate coincidence led them to connect with the Shanghai Opera House and learn about their opera centred on the national anthem—a song that, as a Chinese person, "one must learn." The core motivation was to use the opera format to move beyond mere recognition and singing of the song, enabling citizens to truly grasp its historical context.

Beyond the artistic and commemorative goals, the event carries a profound educational mission. Sou stressed that a key objective is to strengthen the understanding of Chinese history, particularly the history of the founding of the People's Republic of China, among local citizens in general, the young generation in particular.

He views the project as a platform to project a vital message to the world. "Even though 80 years have passed since the victory of the War of Resistance, the Chinese spirit of self-improvement and unceasing struggle has never changed," Sou underlined. He identified this spirit as the core value and national characteristic of the Chinese nation. This enduring trait, he argued, is relevant across all eras, from the turbulent times of war to the complexities of the present-day international landscape.

Sou concluded the interview by emphasising the contemporary relevance of the opera's message – in the current global context, while China does not actively provoke conflict, it also maintains a stance of non-compromise, rooted in the core principle of self-reliance. He hopes the opera will inspire audiences to learn and internalise this spirit of "self-improvement."

The performance will be held on December 20 at 3 p.m. and 8 p.m. with various discounts available. To purchase, visit: <http://www.macauticket.com/>

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These undated photos showcase scenes from previous performances of the national opera "March of the Volunteers". – Photos provided by Ken Sou



USJ hosts first China-PSCs holistic health conference



This handout photo provided by the University of Saint Joseph (USJ) yesterday shows hosts, participants and guests posing during the "1st China and Portuguese Speaking Countries (PSCs) Conference on Holistic Health" at the private Catholic university's Don Bosco Auditorium on its Ilha Verde campus last Friday.

Khalel Vallo

The University of Saint Joseph (USJ) held its "1st China and Portuguese Speaking Countries Conference on Holistic Health" last Friday, bringing together scholars from a number of countries and regions to discuss emerging developments and cross-border cooperation in the health and wellness sector, according to a statement provided by USJ yesterday.

The conference, held at the private Catholic university's Don Bosco Auditorium, was co-organised by the USJ-Kong Hon Academy for Cellular Nutrition and Health, the USJ Faculty of Health Sciences, and the USJ Macao Observatory for Social Development, the statement said.

The event aimed to establish an international academic exchange

platform at a time when the global health industry is rapidly expanding and the local government continues to promote the integrated health sector as part of its "China-Portuguese-speaking Countries (PSCs) Platform" strategy, the statement noted.

Experts and scholars from Shanghai and Timor-Leste (East-Timor) were invited to discuss China-PSCs cooperation in health and wellness, giving insights into emerging technologies, collaborative opportunities, and challenges within areas such as public health policy, healthcare professional training, elderly care, and cellular nutrition, according to the statement.

During their opening remarks, Dr Kong Hon and Prof. Jacky Ho Chong Kin, co-deans of the USJ-Kong Hon Academy for Cellular

Nutrition and Health, said in the statement that the invitation of Timor-Leste experts reflected the "deep historical ties and shared culture" of Macau and Timor-Leste.

Both Macau and Timor-Leste were temporarily ruled by Portugal – until 1999 and 1975 respectively.

The statement concluded that the conference aimed to strengthen Macau's role as a bridge between China and the world's PSCs, while contributing to the city's ongoing goals of economic diversification and sustainable development.

There are nine countries where Portuguese has the status of an official language – Angola, Brazil, Cabo Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, São Tomé and Príncipe and Timor-Leste, with about 300 million inhabitants. ■

GEG hosts 'Made in Macau' market at Galaxy Macau's back-of-house area

Rui Pastorin

Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG), with the support of the Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM), has recently partnered with the Macao Young Entrepreneur Incubation Centre (MYEIC) to organise the two-day "Made in Macau" Market at Galaxy Macau's back-of-house area, drawing "enthusiastic participation".

According to a recent statement from the integrated resort operator, the event provided a platform for 10 local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups to directly present their products to GEG staff, bringing direct additional revenue to exhibitors.

The statement said that the event, for which booth fees were waived while various forms of support was also provided, further highlighted the market appeal of locally made products and was curated and carried out by the winning team from the previous "Made in Macau" Event Organiser Competition. The contest was won by "Axon Space Interior Design" Engineering Co. Ltd., which garnered a curation contract worth 200,000 patacas.

During his speech at the event's opening ceremony, GEG Senior Vice President of Procurement and Warehousing Peter Chow (趙啓偉) said: "Through this platform, we aim to encourage young entrepreneurs to unleash their creativity and strengthen their professional skills during the planning and execution process. At the same time, we hope to create more business opportunities for SMEs and foster their sustainable development."

MYEIC Director Andy Ng (吳聰) said that the collaboration opens the channel for local SMEs and start-ups to connect and "enhances the visibility of locally made products, reflecting GEG's commitment to its 'Large Businesses Leading Small Businesses' collaboration model and ongoing support for local enterprises and Macau's economic diversification."

The statement added that GEG plans to host a Coffee Expo at the Galaxy International Convention Centre (GICC) in January, with details to be announced soon. A logo and name design contest has been launched for the expo, with the winning entry to be featured across all promotional materials. ■



This photo provided by Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) shows the "Made in Macau" Market taking place at the back-of-house area of Galaxy Macau in Cotai recently.

Sands China celebrates local SME supplier support programme's 10th anniversary

Rui Pastorin

Integrated resort operator Sands China celebrated the 10th Anniversary of its "Local Small, Medium and Micro Suppliers Support Programme" yesterday at The Londoner Macao in Cotai, during which 40 long-term business partners were awarded with certificates while the "2025 Sands Supplier Excellence Awards" also saw seven winners recognised.

The ceremony also saw the unveiling of the 10th anniversary booklet featuring the programme's success stories.

The programme was co-launched with the Macao Chamber of Commerce in 2015 and targets small and micro suppliers, "Made in Macau" companies and Macau young entrepreneurs, seeking to support the local government's small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) policies while enhancing Sands China's dedication to the development of local businesses.

During his speech, Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director of Sands China Grant Chum Kwan Lock pointed out that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of Macau's economy and account for more than 90 percent of local enterprises. Chum also highlighted that Sands China's cumulative procurement has reached 119.4 billion patacas, of which local procurement accounts for 83 percent, while the integrated resort operator has partnered with 4,700 local enterprises.

"Behind these figures are countless stories of collaboration and shared endeavour with local businesses", Chum said, with yesterday's event being a way for the company to express their respect and appreciation.

Moreover, Chum highlighted that they introduced the F.I.T programme in 2017 under the support programme, being "the industry's first one-stop support programme combining funding,



Guests and representatives pose with Sands China's long-term business partners yesterday at The Londoner Macao in Cotai. – Photos Rui Pastorin



Guests and representatives pose with the prize recipients included in the 2025 Sands Supplier Excellence Awards.

promotion and training". He added that the F.I.T programme's Sands Procurement Academy has held 18 sessions with participation from over 660 local enterprises.

F.I.T. provides financial support, invitational matching, and training and development, according to the marketing – interactive website yesterday.

Macao Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors President Frederico Ma Chi Ngai said in his speech that the past decade has had fruitful achievements, highlighting that last year's total procurement

reached 15.2 billion patacas, with local procurement accounting for 84 percent and SMEs contributing over one third of the total.

He added: "Through a series of innovative support measures, including large-scale exhibition platforms, professional training, and technical guidance, we have built a comprehensive support system to help SMEs enhance their capabilities. Together, we have faced market changes and challenges side by side, forming a cooperative ecosystem of complementary strengths and mutual benefit". ■

Tai vows to promote modern finance's role in driving economic growth

Continued from p.1

Guidance by President Xi

Tai also pointed out that President Xi Jinping paid an inspection visit to Guangdong Province last month and delivered an important speech that charted the direction for further deepening cooperation between Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau.

Tai underlined that since the new-term government took office in December last year, it has been fully advancing Macau's appropriate economic diversification, including accelerating the growth of the city's modern financial sector, with a strong emphasis on the bond market, wealth management, and fintech, aiming to leverage Macau's unique advantages to build a platform for high-level opening up that connects with the world and serves the country's "dual circulation" new development pattern.

The central government's dual circulation strategy emphasises both domestic and international markets, but with a primary focus on strengthening the large internal (domestic) market (internal circulation) to drive growth, while

maintaining international trade (external circulation) as a vital, but secondary, component, aiming for greater self-reliance and resilience against global disruptions by fostering domestic consumption, innovation, and supply chain security.

Bonds, securities, wealth management, fintech

Concerning the development of Macau's bond market, Tai said, the Macau government is gradually optimising its central securities depository (CSD) system and deepening its linkage with its Hong Kong counterpart.

Moreover, Tai said, the local government is drafting a securities bill, aiming to accelerate the creation of a bond market that serves as a bridge to the Chinese mainland and creates connections with the international market, in order to better meet the financing and investment needs brought about by the GBA and the in-depth cooperation zone's development.

Regarding wealth management, Tai noted, a new law regulating investment funds will take effect next month, further optimising the



Secretary for Economy and Finance Anton Tai Kin Ip addresses yesterday's opening ceremony of the 4th Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Finance Forum at Wynn Palace in Cotai. — Photo courtesy of TDM

legal foundations and development environment for Macau's fund industry. The Macau government will also continue to deepen its cooperation mechanisms with the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong such as the "Cross-boundary Wealth Management Connect" scheme, promoting the integration of the three regions' wealth management markets, Tai said.

In the area of fintech, Tai said, the Macau government completed

the upgrade of its real-time settlement system earlier this year, which covers the GBA's three legal tenders, comprising yuan, Hong Kong dollar, and pataca, further improving efficiency in fund transfers and risk management.

Tai also said that the Macau government has signed a memorandum of understanding with the People's Bank of China to jointly promote the interconnection between the Chinese mainland and Macau's fast payment systems.

Tai also underlined Macau's participation in cooperation between the GBA's three regions – Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau – in the joint testing of cross-border fintech pilot projects.

Sandbox tests for e-MOP

Tai also stressed that the local government is steadily advancing its digital pataca development project, officially known as e-MOP, having completed the construction of its core system. The government is currently carrying out small-scale transaction tests in a "sandbox" environment, aiming for the continuous improvements in the system, he said.

Industrial fund, guidance fund

Furthermore, Tai also underlined that with the aim of promoting the development of Macau's technological innovation industry and improving the city's system and mechanism for supporting technological innovation, the Macau government is working on the establishment of a government industrial fund and a guidance fund.

Tai said that the government has set up a working group tasked with planning and preparing the establishment of the two funds.

Tai also noted that next year will be the beginning of the nation's 15th Five Year Plan (2026-30) and Macau's third five-year socioeconomic development plan (2026-30), adding that the local government will further promote the role of modern finance as an engine of economic growth in its ongoing campaign to appropriately diversify the city's economy, while also assuming a greater role in promoting the development of the GBA and the in-depth cooperation zone. ■

Stronger Europe-China capital connections require trust, sustained dialogue: German industry leader

Interview

FRANKFURT AM MAIN – Sustained dialogue and cross-sector collaboration between Europe and China are necessary for a vision of capital connectivity, Thomas Richter, CEO of the German Investment Funds Association (BVI), has noted.

Interest from both sides in accessing each other's financial markets "continues to grow steadily," as evidenced by the strong turnout of around 200 participants in the recent "Sino-European Finance Summit" in Frankfurt, Richter added in recent interview with Xinhua.

By initiating this summit, BVI, which co-chaired the summit with Bank of China, has provided a platform to "facilitate future business relationships in both directions," Richter said, underscoring Germany's role as Europe's largest fund market and China's rapidly expanding asset management sector.

As a bridge between different markets, BVI positions itself as a "trusted facilitator" between the German and Chinese asset management sectors.

The memorandum of understanding, inked between BVI and the Asset Management Association of China (AMAC) on the sidelines of the summit

sets the stage for high-level exchanges, including mutual visits, joint industry conferences, and regulatory knowledge-sharing, according to BVI, which represents the interests of the country's fund industry at both national and international level.

"It's about building bridges, it's about building trust, it's about getting to know each other," Richter said of the agreement's spirit, calling the summit a key starting point for an ongoing dialogue and a meaningful framework for mutual exchange.

Looking ahead, Richter envisions stronger capital connectivity between Europe and China over the next five years through continuous engagement.

"A successful capital connectivity over the coming years will mean regular, high-level exchanges and thematic conferences that keep the momentum alive," he said.

Rather than one-off events, Richter stressed the need for a continuous dialogue that deepens mutual understanding and "opens doors for collaboration." He hopes that the Sino-European Finance Summit will become a recurring fixture: "This is the first of its kind, and I consider it a big success if we will have more conferences like this, the next one hopefully in China."

In the near term, concrete cooperation

is already taking shape. Richter sees cross-border fund investments and distribution as the areas with the strongest immediate momentum for China-Europe collaboration.

As a tangible step, BVI, in cooperation with Bank of China, has published a guideline titled "Investment in China". The publication aims to help European asset managers understand regulatory procedures and navigate the Chinese market, including steps for establishing fund companies locally.

"Our role is to set up a platform for discussion and to be active on regulatory issues," he said, noting that BVI works not only on European Union legislation but also engages internationally. "That is why we are trying to link with China and create a dialogue on regulatory things with our Chinese colleagues."

"Building trust through practical collaboration is key to creating a strong foundation beyond government frameworks," Richter noted that he expects deeper engagement in joint innovation projects, particularly in digitalization.

With mutual interest growing and dialogue deepening, Europe and China are well-positioned to build a resilient framework for long-term capital connectivity, according to the industry leader.

School of the Nations' Kindergarten Public Information Day draws over 450 attendees

Rui Pastorin

The School of the Nations (SON) held its "Kindergarten Public Information Day" on Saturday, with the event attended by over 450 parents and prospective students, according to a statement from the school yesterday.

The statement noted that attendees took part in activities and guided campus tours. A key feature of the event was also a presentation of the kindergarten's curriculum framework, which focuses on the four main domains of character development, language, science, and mathematics, and is designed to "holistically support young children's growth in moral, social, and intellectual capacities", the statement said.

SON Principal Vivek Nair highlighted during his opening remarks the school's dedication to nurturing core qualities in students – such as honesty, kindness, fairness, and selflessness – while fostering an understanding of hope, true joy, and the interconnectedness of the human family. This foundation aims to inspire students' intrinsic motivation for learning and to guide them towards a life of purpose and service to society, Nair noted. ■



This photo provided by the School of the Nations yesterday shows attendees engaging in activities during the Kindergarten Public Information Day.



Andrew Leung Kwan-yuen (front), president of the seventh-term Legislative Council (LegCo) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), speaks at a press briefing in Hong Kong yesterday. Members of the eighth-term LegCo of the HKSAR are expected to work with the HKSAR government to inject more vitality into Hong Kong's development, Leung said.

— Xinhua

China to continue opening up its mega-market to world: Li Qiang

BEIJING – China will continue opening up its mega-market to the world, sharing development opportunities with other countries, and enhancing dialogue and communication to properly addressing economic and trade frictions and achieve win-win outcomes, Premier Li Qiang said in Beijing yesterday.

Li made the remarks during separate meetings with President of the World Bank Ajay Banga, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Kristalina Georgieva, and Secretary-General of the UN Conference on Trade and Development Rebeca Grynspan, all of whom are in China to attend the annual “1+10” Dialogue with major international economic organizations.

He said that global trade and investment trends have weakened in recent years due to intensified geopolitical turmoil and increasing international economic and trade restrictions, while the risks of fragmentation in industrial and supply chains have risen, dragging down global economic growth.

In this context, China’s economy has remained steady, consistently contributing certainty and stability to the world economy, within its capacity, Li said. During the 15th Five-Year Plan period, China’s economy is expected to continue improving, he added.

China will insist on expanding domestic demand, enhancing the internal momentum and reliability of the domestic economic cycle, and promoting the healthy interaction of consumption, investment, supply and demand, he said.

He noted that China will pursue intelligent, green, integrated development to advance the construction of a modern industrial system, strengthen industrial cooperation with more countries, and continuously improve the quality and efficiency of global industrial and supply chains.

The government will implement more proactive macroeconomic policies, address



Premier Li Qiang (centre) poses on the sidelines of the annual “1+10” Dialogue with heads of major international economic organizations at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing yesterday. The heads of major international economic organizations present at the dialogue were President of the New Development Bank Dilma Rousseff, President of the World Bank Ajay Banga, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund Kristalina Georgieva, Director-General of the World Trade Organization Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Secretary-General of the UN Conference on Trade and Development Rebeca Grynspan, Director-General of the International Labour Organization Gilbert F. Houngbo, General Manager of the Bank for International Settlements Pablo Hernandez de Cos, Chair of the Financial Stability Board Andrew Bailey, President of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank Jin Lique, and Deputy Secretary-General of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development Frantisek Ruzicka.

– Xinhua

market concerns, and better leverage fiscal and monetary policies to keep economic growth within a reasonable range, he said.

Li noted that China is a firm supporter of the international system with the UN at its core, and backs the work of various international economic organizations. China is willing to work with all parties to implement the four major global initiatives, uphold true multilateralism, and promote an equal, orderly multipolar world, as well as a universally beneficial, inclusive economic globalization.

China seeks to maintain a strong cooperative relationship with the World Bank, and to enhance cooperation in areas such as knowledge-sharing, pension systems and renminbi-denominated

loans, Li said. China will also continue providing robust support for the operations of the IMF Shanghai Center, actively promote the reform of IMF quotas, and deepen cooperation to assist low-income countries’ development.

China is willing to strengthen communication and coordination with the UN Conference on Trade and Development, focusing on expanding cooperation on green minerals, the digital economy, artificial intelligence and low-carbon transition, the premier said.

Banga, Georgieva and Grynspan said that China has achieved remarkable development in recent years and played a significant role in promoting global economic growth, and that China’s 15th Five-Year Plan is expected

to provide valuable certainty and strong momentum for the world economy.

They said that all parties have great appreciation for China’s long-standing support of development in the Global South, expressing their willingness to strengthen policy communication with China, and to deepen cooperation on artificial intelligence, green development, and trade and investment. They also noted their willingness to uphold multilateralism, safeguard the authority of multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, reform and improve the global governance system, and unite in promoting the facilitation of trade, investment and open, inclusive development.

– Xinhua, MPD

China, US should lengthen list of cooperation, shorten list of problems: He Lifeng

BEIJING – Vice Premier He Lifeng emphasized yesterday that China and the United States should continuously lengthen the list of cooperation and shorten the list of problems between the two sides.

He, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks during a meeting with Craig Allen, Senior Counselor at the Cohen Group, in Beijing.

Since the beginning of this year, the heads of state of China and the United States have held multiple phone conversations and successfully met in Busan, Republic of Korea, reaching important common understandings, said He.

He emphasized that both sides should maintain the momentum of cooperation under the strategic guidance of the two heads of state.

As China is about to embark on its 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030), the country will keep expanding high-standard opening up. He welcomed more US enterprises to invest and operate in China, to promote the stable, sound and sustainable development of China-US economic and trade relations.

For his part, Allen conveyed his willingness to serve as a bridge for further enhancing US-China economic and trade cooperation. – Xinhua

Chinese economy poised to seize future opportunities and tackle challenges ahead

China Daily Editorial

As the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) approaches its conclusion, China has effectively navigated different challenges, enhanced its economic strength, and improved its innovation capability, laying a solid foundation for the next stage of development.

Thanks to the government’s proactive and targeted macro policies, the main goals for economic and social development during the past five years are expected to be successfully accomplished, with the latest indicators reinforcing the trend of steady progress. In the first three quarters, China’s GDP expanded by 5.2 percent year-on-year, one of the fastest rates among major economies; employment and prices remained stable; while the balance of payments has stayed balanced.

China’s foreign trade, a barometer of its economic vitality, offers further proof of this steady momentum. In the first 11 months of this year, the total value of the country’s goods imports and exports reached 41.21 trillion yuan, an increase of 3.6 percent year-on-year, maintaining the trend of positive growth for 10 consecutive months. These data highlight the resilience of China’s economic trajectory and explain why it remains an anchor of global trade.

Newly released tax data reinforces the picture of the country’s strengthening economic fundamentals. From January to

November, national tax and fee revenues surpassed 29 trillion yuan, supported by consumption, exports and advances in sci-tech innovation. Export tax rebates grew 6.8 percent in the same period, underscoring the competitiveness of Chinese enterprises in the global marketplace.

Also reflected in the tax invoice data is China’s innovation-driven transformation. Tax invoice data show that in the first 11 months, sales revenues in high-tech industries nationwide increased 14.7 percent year-on-year, and corporate purchases of digital technologies grew 10.2 percent.

The country’s green transition is continuing apace, with sales revenues from wind and solar power generation up 16.8 percent and 35.7 percent year-on-year respectively in the 11-month period. These trends not only reflect China’s steady progress toward its dual-carbon goals but also strengthen the foundations for its high-quality development.

Adding an important new dimension to China’s integration with the global economy, the International Monetary Fund launched a new center for the Asia-Pacific region in Shanghai on Monday. A hub for research, dialogue and cooperation, the center will enhance macroeconomic policy coordination, deepen China-IMF collaboration and contribute to global financial stability. IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva noted that the opening

of the center reinforces China’s growing contribution to global economic governance.

As Premier Li Qiang underscored when holding the “1+10” Dialogue with heads of major international economic organizations in Beijing yesterday, China will continue to open its door wider to the outside world, and welcomes more foreign companies to explore the Chinese market.

Looking ahead to 2026, the central authorities have set clear priorities for concrete actions aimed at ensuring both qualitative improvement and reasonable quantitative growth: applying the new development philosophy; accelerating the creation of the new development pattern; implementing more proactive fiscal policy and moderately loose monetary policy; expanding domestic demand; improving supply; developing new quality productive forces; deepening the construction of a unified national market; and effectively preventing and defusing risks in key areas. These practices are all conducive to China consolidating the economy’s positive momentum by leveraging its strengths.

With guidance from the central leadership, steady fundamentals and a clear road map for the future, the Chinese economy is well-positioned to make a good start to the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) period, promising new opportunities for not only China but also the world.

– Courtesy of China Daily

Cambodia-Thailand clashes spread on border as toll rises

Suy SE with Montira Rungjirajit-tranon Bangkok

SREI SNAM – Fighting between Thailand and Cambodia spread to new parts of their contested border yesterday, forcing a mass exodus of civilians from the disputed frontier as a Trump-brokered truce was derailed by deadly new hostilities.

At least 10 soldiers and civilians have been killed on both sides in the latest spate of fighting, officials say, while more than 140,000 civilians have fled the areas near where jets, tanks and drones are waging battle.

Thailand and Cambodia dispute the colonial-era demarcation of their 800-kilometre frontier, where competing claims by both sides to historic temples can spill over into armed conflict.

This week's clashes are the deadliest since five days of fighting in July that killed dozens before a shaky truce was agreed – in large part owing to intervention by US President Donald Trump.

Both sides blame each other for sparking the renewed clashes which had yesterday expanded to five provinces of both Thailand and Cambodia, according to an AFP tally of official accounts.

Cambodia's influential former leader Hun Sen said his country retaliated against Thailand, after Phnom Penh initially denied firing back

for two days as Thailand announced air strikes and tank barrages.

"When is this going to stop?" pleaded Thai farmer, 56-year-old Samlee Tahan, who has stayed behind at her rural home in the border province of Surin to guard her livestock.

"I want this to end already," she lamented. "It has been prolonged for the second time."

The Thai army said three soldiers have been killed and 29 wounded since Monday, while Cambodia's defence ministry said seven of its civilians have been killed and about 20 wounded.

Fourth time fleeing

This summer's truce was announced after Trump's highly-publicised intervention, as well as more low-key efforts by China and Malaysia – current chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Trump flew to Kuala Lumpur in October to proudly oversee the signing of a follow-on deal to wind down troop deployments, welcome ceasefire monitors and expedite demining efforts.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet said he nominated Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize, while Trump touted the armistice as one of eight conflicts he has "ended" in his first eight months back in power.

Thailand last month paused the pact's implementation – accusing Cambodia of laying fresh mines in



Residents gather outside a temple after they evacuated following clashes along the Cambodia-Thailand border, in Siem Reap province yesterday. – AFP

disputed areas – but this week's violence marks the most major backslide yet.

Fighting has forced Cambodian civilian Poan Hay, 55, to again flee shelling and fighter jets howling above her border home in Oddar Meanchey province.

"It is my fourth time fleeing," she told AFP from a pagoda shelter 70 kilometres back from the border.

"I don't know when I can return." "I want the international community to help Cambodia and tell Thai soldiers to stop."

More than 21,000 people have been displaced from three Cambodian border provinces, Phnom Penh says, while Bangkok says more than 125,000 civilian evacuees are camping

out in 500 makeshift shelters.

Shots in the dark

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Monday urged both sides "to exercise restraint and avoid further escalation" and "recommit to the ceasefire".

But Phnom Penh accused Thai forces of overnight shelling killing two people travelling on a national road and launching dawn attacks – including near the flashpoint temple of Preah Vihear.

"Now we fight in order to defend ourselves again," Cambodia's former premier Hun Sen said on Facebook.

A grenade attack around the ornate sandstone UNESCO world

heritage Preah Vihear killed one Thai soldier yesterday, a Thai army statement said, while indirect fire killed another in Surin province.

Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul told reporters his country's military would remain resolute.

"Thailand must stand firmly behind those who protect our sovereignty. We cannot stop now," he said.

Thai navy spokesperson Parat Rattanachaiphan said at a press conference that troops had detected Cambodian soldiers, settlements and several weapon bases in a disputed coastal area of Trat province.

Parat accused Cambodia of deploying drones to provoke Thai forces and said early yesterday they "launched a military operation to drive them out".

In Thailand's Surin province, food shop worker Sutida Pusa told AFP on Monday that her young and elderly relatives were moved to an evacuation centre, while others stayed behind to guard their property.

She has commuted back and forth between temporary shelter and her house – located less than 20 kilometres from the border – to care for family in both places.

For now "the sounds of fighting aren't as loud" as clashes earlier this year, said the 30-year-old.

But, she warned: "We never trust the situation." – AFP

Major Japan quake injures 30, damages roads

Hiroshi Hiyama

SAPPORO – A big quake off Japan injured at least 30 people, authorities said yesterday, damaging roads and knocking out power for thousands in freezing temperatures.

The Japan Meteorological Agency said the magnitude 7.5 quake at 11:15 p.m. [local time] on Monday – downgraded from its first reading of 7.6 – raised the chances of similar or larger tremors in the coming days.

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said 30 people were injured in the quake off the coast of the northern Aomori region, which triggered tsunami waves up to 70 centimetres.

Daiki Shimohata, 33, a civil servant in Hashikami on Honshu island, told AFP that he and his family rushed outside their home.

"The tremor was something that we've never experienced. It lasted maybe for about 20 seconds," Shimohata said by phone.

"We were holding our children – a two-year-old girl and a one-year-old boy – in our arms. The shaking reminded me of the disaster [in 2011]," he said.

One person was seriously hurt in the main northern island of Hokkaido, according to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency.

Footage showed people in a supermarket clinging to a table with items having fallen off shelves, as well as crevasses in roads and at least one car in a hole.

Elsewhere broken glass from windows was scattered on roads and pavements.

Initially there were reports of several fires but government spokesman Minoru Kihara said yesterday there



A vehicle rests on the edge of a collapsed road in Tohoku town in Aomori Prefecture yesterday, following a 7.5 magnitude earthquake off northern Japan. – AFP

was one confirmed blaze at a house.

On the main northern island of Hokkaido, an AFP reporter said the ground shook violently for around 30 seconds as smartphone alarms alerted residents.

In the city of Hachinohe the quake reached upper six on Japan's seven-level Shindo scale of shakiness, the point at which it's impossible to move without crawling.

With temperatures around freezing point, around 2,700 homes were without power but by yesterday morning electricity had been restored to most areas, according to utility providers.

At first the JMA warned of tsunamis up to three metres, which could have caused major damage.

Around 28,000 people were initially advised after the quake to evacuate, emergency services said, and media reports said some makeshift shelters were full.

In the end the biggest waves recorded measured up to 70 centimetres and after several hours the tsunami warnings were lifted.

Shinkansen bullet-train service was suspended in some areas while engineers checked for any damage to the tracks.

No abnormalities were detected at the Higashidori or Onagawa nuclear power plants, operator Tohoku Electric Power said.

The JMA warned people to be cautious of further quakes of a similar intensity for about a week.

"Additionally, there is a possibility of even stronger earthquakes occurring, so please stay alert," it said.

Geologists Kyle Bradley and Judith A. Hubbard said that there was no way to tell whether a strong earthquake will be followed by a similarly strong, or even stronger, one.

"Instead, we must rely on historical statistics, which tell us that very few large earthquakes are soon followed by even larger events," they said in their *Earthquake Insights* newsletter.

"It does happen, just not very often." that such a "megaquake" and subsequent tsunami could cause as many as 298,000 deaths and damages of up to US\$2 trillion. – AFP

Building fire kills 22 in Jakarta: police

Satya Adhi and Dessy Sagita

JAKARTA – A fire tore through a seven-storey office building in Indonesia's capital yesterday, killing at least 22 people, police said.

Police said a drone battery that exploded on the ground floor had likely ignited the fire, which spread to the upper levels of the building in central Jakarta before being put out.

"However, the exact cause is still under investigation by the forensic laboratory team," said Susatyo Purnomo Condro, the Central Jakarta police chief, telling reporters the force was "committed to thoroughly investigating this fire incident".

A witness told AFP that the fire broke out at lunchtime, and was already large by the time firefighters reached the scene.

"The door was closed. When the firefighters broke in, the fire was already big and very red," said Nurhayati, 53, who like many Indonesians only has one name.

Updating an initial toll of 17 killed, Susatyo said there were 22 victims including 15 women.

One of them was pregnant, he said.

The Jakarta Fire Department said at least 100 firefighters and 29 fire engines were deployed to extinguish the blaze in Kemayoran, a busy area of the city centre.

A local police commander was injured while assisting the evacuation of the building, Susatyo said.

The police chief said firefighters were now focused on cooling the building and clearing thick smoke from several floors.

"We will search the place again once it is cleared," he said.

The police chief said most of the victims did not seem to suffer burns and most likely died of asphyxiation.

AFP footage showed the charred facade of the building, used by an agricultural drone services company, with some windows shattered.

Firefighters used large fans to cool down the site.

Curious onlookers watched the aftermath from afar as firefighters and police officers carried out a body bag from the burnt building.

Susatyo said police were "questioning all witnesses, including the business owner and the building owner".

The investigation will look into "whether the cause of the fire is linked to negligence or if there are other responsible parties", he added.

Deadly fires are not uncommon in Indonesia. In 2023, at least 12 people were killed in the country's east after an explosion at a nickel-processing plant. – AFP

Pakistani Taliban kill 6 soldiers in checkpoint attack

PESHAWAR — Pakistani Taliban militants stormed a security checkpoint in Pakistan's northwestern border area with Afghanistan, killing six soldiers and wounding four others, a government official said yesterday.

Pakistan has faced a surge in militant attacks along its border regions since the Taliban authorities retook control in Kabul in 2021.

It accuses Afghanistan of harbouring the insurgents, a claim the Taliban government denies.

Late Monday, more than a dozen armed men attacked the checkpoint, leading to a heavy exchange of fire in Kurram, a tribal district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

"Six security personnel were martyred and four were injured, while two militants were also killed in the fighting," the government official posted in Kurram, who was not authorised to speak to the

media, told AFP on the condition of anonymity.

The Pakistani Taliban group, or Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), has long been active in the region, and claimed responsibility for the attack.

Pakistan accuses the Taliban authorities in Afghanistan of sheltering TTP militants and allowing them to launch cross-border attacks from there - a charge Kabul denies.

The border between the two countries has been closed since the clashes in October, though Pakistan said last week it would allow UN aid supplies to pass to Afghanistan soon.

The attack comes days after an exchange of gunfire and shelling between Afghan and Pakistani forces at a major border crossing that killed four civilians and one soldier, according to Afghanistan.

Each side accused the other of starting the fighting. — AFP

Anguished Sri Lankans queue for care after deadly cyclone

Amal Jayasinghe

CHILAW — Long before dawn, people were already queueing for medical aid yesterday at an emergency camp in Sri Lanka's coastal town of Chilaw, hit hard by a deadly cyclone and floods.

Carpenter Prasantha Perera, 60, was waiting to have a splinter of wood removed from his left foot, so that he can finally begin the arduous task of cleaning up.

The disaster caused by Cyclone Ditwah — the island's worst this century — has affected more than two million people, or nearly 10 percent of the population.

At least 638 people were killed.

Perera was the first patient of the day to leave the disaster medical camp, run by Japanese aid workers to support Chilaw's flood-hit state hospital.

"I couldn't get into the camp yesterday, so I turned up today (yesterday) at 4 a.m. [local time] to be first in line," he said, bowing to thank the Japanese medics.

Dozens of men, women and children were standing in the orderly queue, already so long some were told to return the next day.

"My house went under five feet (1.5 metres) of water," Perera told AFP, as he limped home clutching medicines to prevent infection.

"I couldn't start cleaning up because of this splinter, but now I can begin."

Aid workers were treating a long list of ailments, but could only see around 150 patients a day.

"I will come very early tomorrow (today) to get medicine for eczema," Eva Kumari, 51, told AFP after being turned away when the facility hit its daily capacity.

The Sri Lankan government had asked Japan to send its outpatient disaster medical unit to Chilaw, about 70 kilometres north of the capital Colombo, after the town's main hospital was flooded.

The hospital's deputy director, Dinesh Koggalage, said it had only just resumed admitting patients — nearly two weeks since the cyclone hit.

Disease threat

Demand for the Japanese team remains high, said Professor Taketo Kurozumi, head of disaster medical management at Tokyo's Teikyo University.

"Numbers are increasing," he told AFP between seeing patients, with common problems including skin issues, respiratory problems and mosquito-borne diseases, such as dengue fever and chikungunya.

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake has said Cyclone Ditwah was the most challenging natural disaster in recent history and appealed for international aid for the daunting recovery effort.

The 31-member medical aid team, deployed by the Japan International Cooperation Agency, arrived just days after the cyclone had left Sri Lanka.

They set up a clinic in white tents, equipped with their own medical kits and power generators, and with the support of a team of 16 translators.

All medics greet patients by bowing their heads and with hands clasped in a traditional Sri Lankan greeting.

Queue management is handled by a Japanese volunteer monk, who has been living on the island for 15 years, and speaks Sri Lanka's Sinhala language.

Kazuyuki Takahashi, also known by his Buddhist name Saranankara Himi, oversees the process.

The queue moves slowly as doctors listen to patient histories and spend more time on each one than Sri Lanka's overstretched health system can generally afford, even in the best of times. — AFP

'For him': Australian mum channels grief into social media limits

Laura Chung

SYDNEY — Mia Bannister's skin is inked with a eulogy to her teenage son Ollie, whose suicide after a battle with anorexia and online bullying pushed her to fight for world-first laws in Australia to get children off social media.

Today, Australia imposed a world-first measure to ban under-16s from social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Reddit and TikTok.

Companies risk hefty fines of up to Aus\$49.5 million (US\$33 million) if they fail to keep children off their platforms.

Were that legislation in place a year ago, Mia said, Ollie might still be alive.

"He was my best friend," she told AFP as she looked at the black inked outline of a mother holding a red cracked heart.

"He was my world."

Ollie was bullied online and apps like TikTok, Snapchat and YouTube showed him a stream of content that fuelled his eating disorder.

She vividly remembers his mop of red curls, his quick wit and the spark in his eyes that grew duller as he got sicker.

When Ollie first got sick, he turned to social media.

But Mia said she had no idea the impact that it could have.

"I was a single parent, working full time, trying to keep a roof over our heads, not really understanding either what platforms he's on and how they work," she said.

Mia places the blame on the social media giants.

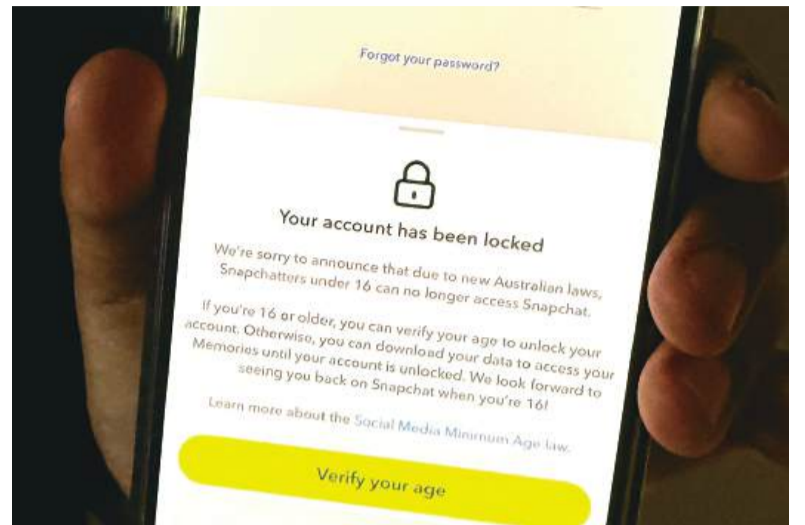
"It is their platforms and the unfiltered, unchecked content."

When parents hand their child a phone, she said, "we hand them the greatest weapon we could hand them."

Blanket ban

About 97 percent of teens surveyed by Mission Australia said they used social media daily, with nearly half spending three or more hours online.

Those who used social media less than three hours reported better well-being and social connection, found the poll of more than 10,000 people aged between 15 and 19.



A 13-year-old boy displays a message on his mobile phone from social media platform Snapchat after his account was locked for age verification in Sydney yesterday.

— AFP

The Australian government hopes its law will change the way children spend their time online, not kick them off the net altogether.

But major questions remain on how it will be enforced — including how platforms will verify users' ages.

Tech companies have been critical of the plans, describing them as too vague.

So far, 10 platforms will not be banned — including Discord, Pinterest, Roblox, LEGO Play and WhatsApp — but Australian authorities have reserved the right to force all platforms to comply.

But some experts fear the legislation will exclude young people from opportunities and hinder the development of digital literacy skills.

"I don't think that this is the right approach to online safety," Catherine Page Jeffery, University of Sydney Media and Communications lecturer, told AFP.

"We know blanket bans don't often work."

Children may seek out unsafe online spaces instead, she warned.

"Rather than banning young people, I would prefer to see greater safety obligations placed on platforms — and we are beginning to see more of this," she said.

"A lot of these platforms, and even the internet more broadly, have not been built for children."

Valuable skills

For many young people, social media can be key to forming their

identity and developing valuable skills.

Ava Chanel Jones, 12, uses Instagram to document her cheering, dancing, modelling and brand promotions — a hobby that started during the pandemic with the help of her mother, Zoe.

Her following has ballooned to more than 11,400 people, enough for a monthly income from Meta, free products from brands and to even launch her own clothing line.

Ava uses the platform to communicate with friends but not with people she does not know — those messages go into a hidden folder monitored by her mum.

"I'm her parent — it's my responsibility to protect her the best that I can when she's on social media," Zoe said.

"I am proud of her," she said.

"I think it's giving her skills."

Australia's eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant is adamant that the age restrictions are a "really potent solution" in stopping online harm, but admits there is no quick fix.

Grieving mum Mia misses her son every day.

She channels her pain into sharing Ollie's story through her charity, which raises awareness about eating disorders in boys and how the social media legislation will work.

"I do it for him, and I do it for all the other children out there: the lost children and the ones that we're all going to save," she said. — AFP

S Korea's Lee begins move back to historic Blue House

SEOUL — South Korea's president and his team have started moving back into Seoul's historic Blue House, which his predecessor abandoned for being too "imperial", an official said yesterday.

The Blue House, known as Cheong Wa Dae in Korean, is named for the approximately 150,000 hand-painted blue tiles that adorn its roof and has long been synonymous with the South Korean presidency.

Once occupied by representatives of former colonial power Japan, the site housed South Korea's leaders for seven decades.

But now-disgraced former

president Yoon Suk Yeol chose not to use it as his home and office, opening it to the public and moving instead into a separate residence.

Yoon was ousted in April following a disastrous but brief imposition of martial law, with South Korean voters electing President Lee Jae Myung in a snap election a few months later.

Lee had vowed to move both the presidential office and residence back to the Blue House if elected.

That process began on Monday and will be wrapped up by Christmas, his office told AFP.

But the president's official

move into his new residence will take a little longer due to security concerns, local media has reported.

The Blue House has long been the subject of public fascination fuelled in part by the misfortunes that have befallen past inhabitants — including assassinations, impeachments and imprisonments.

Yoon's relocation may have been in part an effort to escape such a fate, which some blame on the site's apparent bad fortune.

But his move did little to save him — Yoon is now behind bars and standing criminal trial on insurrection charges. — AFP

2 Miss France contestants expelled over 'offensive remarks'

PARIS – Two women who competed for the Miss France crown at the weekend have been removed from the organisation after a video emerged of them insulting fellow beauty queens, organisers announced yesterday.

Miss Provence and Miss Aquitaine, representing areas in the south and southwest of France, saw their titles withdrawn by their regional committees after they were caught calling their rivals for the national award “fat bitches”.

A video filmed by Miss Aquitaine Ainhoa Lahitete backstage at Saturday's televised event was posted online on Sunday, fracturing the image of an organisation that seeks to promote the idea of sisterhood between contestants.

Lahitete can be seen talking into her phone criticising the choice of the 12 semi-finalists, leading Miss Provence Julie Zitouni to interject and call them “fat bitches”.

Lahitete adds: “Not all, but a lot of them.”

“These offensive remarks and this behaviour run completely contrary to the values that our committees strive to uphold,” the regional committees of Provence and Aquitaine said in a joint statement.

“The role of a regional Miss is to be an ambassador for her region, a figure of seriousness, respect, and responsibility,” their statement added, saying that their

decision had the support of the Miss France organisation.

“We wish to highlight that Julie and Ainhoa have issued public apologies, as well as to the concerned candidates, and we acknowledge this,” said Lydia Podossenoff and Eric Laurens, regional delegates for the Provence Cote d’Azur and Aquitaine regions.

In their statement, they also strongly condemned the “wave of cyberviolence and harassment that Julie and Ainhoa have been subjected to since the video was released.”

Lahitete wrote on Instagram that her video was meant to remain private but she had “approved of unacceptable remarks by another Miss”.

Zitouni posted that her remarks were “clumsy and absolutely do not reflect what I think of the other candidates”, adding that her choice of words was intended as slang rather than as an insult.

Her words – “grosses putes” – translate literally as large or fat prostitutes.

Miss Tahiti, Hinaupoko Deveze, 23, was crowned Miss France 2026 on Saturday among 30 contenders for the title.

Elsewhere in France, first lady Brigitte Macron was also facing criticism on Monday after a private video showed her calling feminist activists who had disrupted a theatre production in Paris “stupid bitches.” – AFP

Kidnapped Nigerian schoolchildren to reunite with parents

ABUJA – Around 100 schoolchildren kidnapped from a Catholic school last month in one of Nigeria's largest mass abductions were to reunite with their parents yesterday, a spokesman for the school owners said.

More than two weeks after their capture by armed gangs, the government in Abuja secured their release and handed them to the local government in Minna, the capital of the north-central Niger state on Monday.

Yesterday, they were taken on a day-long trip to their remote village in Papiri under security escort.

“This morning the children were escorted to Kontagora,” about three hours away from Papiri, a spokesman for the church association that owns the school, Daniel Atori told AFP.

“They will be taken to Papiri where they will be reunited with the families.”

The school attack came as the country buckled under a wave of mass abductions reminiscent of the infamous 2014 Boko Haram kidnapping of schoolgirls in Chibok.

In late November, the Christian Association of Nigeria

(CAN) said 315 students and staff were kidnapped from St Mary's co-educational boarding school in north-central Niger state.

Authorities have not announced any arrests or revealed how the children – aged mostly between 10 and 17 years – were released.

It is unclear how many are still held by the attackers.

As some 50 escaped immediately afterwards, around 165 are thought to remain in captivity following Monday's release.

But a statement on Monday from President Bola Tinubu put the figure at 115.

An official of an international charity expressed regret that the released children were quickly taken back to their village before receiving mental and psychological support.

“They wouldn't even wait for the results of the laboratory tests conducted on the children to come out to determine which among them need urgent medical assistance,” said the official, who asked not to be named.

The state government had said on Monday that the children would undergo medical tests before reuniting with their parents. – AFP

Zelensky says will send US revised plan to end Ukraine war

ROME – President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday said he planned to send the United States revised proposals “in the near future” on ending the war in Ukraine, after meeting with European allies to strategise on their next steps.

US President Donald Trump is pressuring Kyiv to accept a deal put forward by Washington, the initial version of which was criticised by Ukraine's allies as overly favourable to Russia.

Writing on X after meetings with European allies this week, Zelensky said the “Ukrainian and European components are now more developed, and we are ready to present them to our partners in the US”.

“In the near future, we will be ready to send the refined documents to the United States,” he said. On Monday, he had said the proposals could be sent to Washington as early as yesterday.

Trump, who earlier accused Zelensky of not reading the latest US proposals, said Russia had the “upper hand” in the conflict, in an interview with *Politico* published yesterday.

He also accused Kyiv of “using war” to avoid elections, which have been postponed under the imposition of martial law since Russia invaded its neighbour.

“You know, they talk about a democracy, but it gets to a point where it's not a democracy anymore,” Trump said.

Without martial law, a Ukrainian presidential election would have been due in March 2024.

‘No legal right’

Zelensky on Monday held talks with European leaders in London and Brussels. Yesterday, he met with Pope Leo XIV and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

Washington's proposals involved Ukraine surrendering land that Russia has not yet captured – the entire Donbas region – in return for security promises that fall short



Pope Leo XIV (right) shakes hands with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky at the Vatican's Castel Gandolfo papal residence yesterday. – AFP

of Kyiv's aspirations to join NATO.

Zelensky on Monday said Washington's 28-point plan had been reduced to 20 points after US-Ukraine talks at the weekend.

He pointed to the land issue and international security guarantees as two of the main sticking points.

“Do we envision ceding territories? We have no legal right to do so, under Ukrainian law, our constitution and international law. And we don't have any moral right either,” Zelensky said.

“The key is to know what our partners will be ready to do in the event of new aggression by Russia. At the moment, we have not received any answer to this question,” he said.

During a televised event yesterday, Russian President Vladimir Putin called Ukraine's eastern Donbas region Russia's “historical territory”.

“This territory is important; it is our historical territory, absolutely,” he said.

Trump criticises Europe

Trump has blown hot and cold on Ukraine since returning to office in January, initially chastising Zelensky for not being grateful for US support.

But he was also frustrated

that efforts to persuade Putin to end the war had failed to produce results, and he recently slapped new sanctions on Russian oil firms.

European allies have expressed solidarity with Ukraine.

In the *Politico* interview, Trump criticised Europe's role, saying: “They talk but they don't produce.”

Meloni, who positions herself as a bridge between Trump and Europe, has been a staunch supporter of Ukraine since Russia's military offensive, although one of her coalition allies, Matteo Salvini's League party, is more sceptical of aid for Kyiv.

Italy has sent weapons to Ukraine, but only for use inside the country. Meloni has also ruled out sending troops in a possible monitoring force proposed by Britain and France.

The Italian government last week postponed a decision on renewing military aid to Ukraine, with the current authorisation due to end on December 31. Salvini has reportedly questioned whether it is necessary in light of current talks.

However, Meloni at the time insisted that “as long as there's a war, we'll do what we can, as we've always done to help Ukraine defend itself”.

– AFP

US slaps sanctions on network recruiting for Sudan civil war

WASHINGTON, DC – The US Treasury Department imposed sanctions yesterday on a network it said was recruiting Colombians to fight in Sudan's civil war.

The move comes as fighting has intensified in the brutal conflict between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) ongoing since 2023.

Last month, Sudan's army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan called on US President Donald Trump to end the country's war, although attempts to broker peace have repeatedly failed over the course of the conflict that has killed tens of thousands.

Yesterday, the US Treasury said it was slapping sanctions on four individuals and four entities.

These target a transnational network that “recruits former Colombian military personnel and trains soldiers, including children,” to fight for the RSF, the department said.

“The RSF has shown again and again that it is willing to target civilians – including infants and young children,” said US Treasury Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence John Hurley.

“Its brutality has deepened the conflict and destabilized the region, creating the conditions for terrorist groups to grow,” he added in a statement.

The individuals targeted this time include Álvaro Andrés Quijano Becerra, a retired Colombian military officer based in the United

Arab Emirates (UAE), said to play “a central role in recruiting and deploying former Colombian military personnel to Sudan.”

Also impacted were the employment agency he co-founded and his wife, who has been involved in its management.

The latest sanctions also took aim at other groups and their managers.

“The civil war in Sudan risks destabilising the region and making the country a safe haven for those who threaten the United States,” the US Treasury said.

In January, the US State Department said it determined that members of the RSF had committed genocide. – AFP

Honduran presidential candidate decries vote ‘theft’ in race against Trump-backed rival

TEGUCIGALPA – Honduran right-wing presidential candidate Salvador Nasralla made allegations of electoral corruption on Monday after a stalled ballot count in the November 30 general election.

The accusations come after the ruling left-wing Libre (“Free”) party called for the vote to be annulled and accused US President Donald Trump of election interference.

The ballot count had stalled over the weekend at 88.6 percent since Friday, but resumed on Monday with nearly 99 percent of ballots counted.

Trump-backed Nasry Asfura, a 67-year-old businessman and member of the right-wing National Party, has 40.53 percent of the votes, compared to 39.16 percent for Nasralla, a 72-year-old television presenter from the Liberal Party, the National Electoral Council (CNE) said.

“This is theft,” Nasralla wrote on Monday in a post on X.

Both are well ahead of the Libre party’s Rixi Moncada, who was polling third.

The CNE’s president, Ana Paola Hall posted on X that “after carrying out the technical actions [accompanied by external auditing], the data is now being updated.”

Calls for annulment

Thousands of voting records with “inconsistencies” also still need to be reviewed, election officials said.

Nasralla claimed “the corrupt ones are the ones holding up the



Salvador Nasralla, presidential candidate for the opposition Liberal Party, speaks to supporters in Tegucigalpa on December 5, 2025. – AFP

counting process.”

On Sunday, the Libre party demanded “the total annulment” of the elections and called for protests and strikes, while urging officials not to cooperate with the government transition.

The ruling party announced that it would also hold an “Extraordinary Assembly of National Dignity” on Saturday. The incumbent president, Xiomara Castro, has not commented on her party’s announcements.

The CNE has until December 30 to declare a winner, according to Honduran law.

In the final days before the election, Trump pardoned former Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernández, who was in office from 2014 to 2022 and had been serving a

prison sentence in the United States on a drug-trafficking conviction.

In 2023 Honduras issued an international arrest warrant against Hernández and on Monday the chief public prosecutor asked Interpol to act on it, accusing Hernández of money laundering and fraud.

Trump also declared his clear support for Asfura in the final stretch of the campaign, declaring him a “friend of freedom” and accused Nasralla of merely “pretending to be an anti-communist.”

The Libre party had criticised Trump’s actions ahead of the vote.

“We condemn the interference and coercion of the President of the United States, Donald Trump, in the elections in Honduras,” the party said in a post on X. – AFP

Mexican president confident of deal with US on water row

MEXICO CITY – Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said yesterday she was confident of reaching an agreement with US President Donald Trump in a water-sharing dispute, after he threatened new sanctions.

“I am convinced that, as has happened other times, we are going to reach an agreement that benefits the United States and Mexico,” Sheinbaum told a news conference a day after Trump’s threat.

Trump on Monday accused Mexico of violating a 1944 treaty under which the United States shares water from the Colorado River in exchange for flows from the Rio Grande, which forms part of the border between the two countries.

Trump said Mexico owed 800,000 acre-feet* of water to the United States and demanded it release a quarter of this amount by December 31 or be hit with a new five percent tariff.

Sheinbaum said Mexican officials would meet this week with US counterparts to discuss the dispute.

Mexico has acknowledged it is behind in its water deliveries to the US over the past five years,

citing drought conditions in 2022 and 2023.

Sheinbaum said it would be physically impossible to deliver the amount of water Trump wants so quickly because the pumping equipment could not handle it.

“We have the best will to deliver the amount of water that is owed from previous years,” she said yesterday.

The move to boost water supplies for Texas farmers came as Trump announced a US\$12 billion aid package for the US agriculture industry, rocked by fallout from his trade and tariff policies.

Trump in April had previously threatened Mexico with economic repercussions over the water dispute, prompting Mexico at the time to immediately send water.

Mexican goods currently face a 25 percent tariff unless they fall under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), a free trade deal struck during Trump’s first term and which Washington is aiming to renegotiate next year. – AFP

*1 acre-foot is approximately equal to 1,233.5 cubic metres. – Poe

Lula orders road map to cut fossil-fuel use in Brazil

BRASÍLIA – Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva ordered his cabinet on Monday to craft a road map to reduce dependence on fossil fuels, a promise the country made as host of UN climate talks last month.

Lula tried to broker a global deal on a road map to phase out oil, gas and coal at the COP30 talks, but was stymied by opposition from producers such as Saudi Arabia, Iran and Russia.

Brazil, itself a major oil producer, nevertheless committed to presenting a plan to end its use of fossil fuels, and called on other countries to do the same.

In a decree, Lula gave his finance, environment and mining ministries 60 days to draw up guidelines on a “gradual reduction

in dependence on fossil fuels in the country.”

The idea is to use Brazil’s oil revenues to pay for a fund that will finance the transition to clean energies.

Lula, who ran for office as a champion of the environment, has faced criticism for backing state-run oil company Petrobras’s exploratory drilling at the mouth of the Amazon River.

But his government won praise for the proposal on a global deal with deadlines to stop burning the fossil fuels heating the planet.

The plan won the backing of a coalition of countries including France, the Marshall Islands and Spain, several of which are due to hold a conference in Colombia in April 2026 on ending fossil-fuel use. – AFP



The Vatican’s Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin (left) meets displaced persons at a shelter in Naminawe, 30 km southwest of Pemba, a port city in northern Mozambique, yesterday. Cardinal Parolin is in Mozambique to mark the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the Southern African nation. Northern Mozambique has been battered by a bloody jihadist insurgency since late 2017. The group often referred to as “Al-Shabaab” by locals and authorities – despite no known link to the Somali jihadist group – seeks to impose Sharia law in Cabo Delgado, a neglected outpost that has become fertile ground for radical islamism. – AFP

Venezuela’s ‘joropo’ dance declared UNESCO treasure

CARACAS – Venezuela’s “joropo” – a genre blending music, song and fast-paced partner dancing – was named yesterday as a UNESCO intangible cultural treasure.

It has indigenous, African and European roots and originated in plains along the border between Venezuela and Colombia.

Joropo is performed to the sound of instruments including a harp, maracas and violin as lady dancers swirl and male partners stomp their feet in rapid succession to the rhythm of the music.

The women wear colourful dresses and men don suits and wide brim hats.

The designation was announced by UNESCO at a meeting in New Delhi in which the UN cultural organisation is examining dozens of candidates to be declared world intangible cultural assets.

Venezuelans welcomed what they called good news as they endure a tense military standoff with the United States.

US warships are stationed off the coast and regularly attacking what Washington says are boats

smuggling drugs from Venezuela.

President Nicolás Maduro says the real goal of the US operation, which has raised fears of an outright US attack on Venezuela, is to oust him and his leftist regime.

“We deserve this happiness, given the madness we are living,” said Caracas resident César Marcano.

“I am happy that our culture is being recognised and I hope the Venezuelan people give it the importance that it deserves.”

Joropo was declared a Venezuelan national cultural asset in 2014. – AFP



A police officer asks for identification from a cosplayer dressed up as comic character Superman recording a video outside La Moneda Presidential Palace in Santiago de Chile yesterday. – AFP

Football shorts

Lukaku returns to Napoli team training after long injury layoff

ROME — Romelu Lukaku returned to team training with Napoli yesterday after months out injured, as the Italian champions prepare to face Benfica in Lisbon.

The Belgium striker has not played a single competitive match for Napoli this season after suffering a thigh injury in a summer friendly.

He told reporters at the training session “see you soon” as he trotted out onto the pitch, but he is unlikely to face Benfica in the Champions League today.

In Serie A, Napoli are level on points with leaders AC Milan, but have had a rougher ride in the Champions League and are just one point above the elimination zone. — AFP

Messi wins second consecutive MLS MVP award

MIAMI — Lionel Messi won his second consecutive Major League Soccer Most Valuable Player award yesterday after sparking Inter Miami to the MLS title and leading the league in goals.

Messi became the first player to win back-to-back MLS MVP awards and only the second MLS player to capture a two MVP awards after Preki in 1997 and 2003.

The 38-year-old forward, who led Argentina to the 2022 World Cup crown, scored 29 goals in the regular season and set up 19 others to claim the MLS Golden Boot.

Messi, who signed a three-year contract extension with Miami in October, also became only the second player to lead the league in regular-season goals and assists, joining Toronto's Sebastian Giovinco in 2015.

Messi also netted six goals and assisted on nine others in this year's MLS playoffs, which concluded last weekend with Inter Miami beating Vancouver 3-1 for its first MLS Cup title, Messi delivering two key assists in the triumph to claim MLS Cup MVP honours.

It's the latest award in a trophy haul for the South American maestro

that includes a record eight Ballon d'Or titles, three FIFA Men's Best Player awards and two FIFA World Cup Golden Balls.

Messi has also captured three UEFA Men's Player of the Year awards, six European Golden Shoes, six La Liga Best Player awards and has been named Argentina's Footballer of the Year 15 times. — AFP

Jesus added to Arsenal's Champions League squad

LONDON — Gabriel Jesus has been added to Arsenal's Champions League squad as the Brazil striker steps up his long-awaited return from injury.

Jesus has not played for Arsenal since January after suffering a knee injury during an FA Cup tie against Manchester United.

The 28-year-old is back in training and has been an unused substitute for the Gunners' recent matches against Chelsea and Brentford.

With Arsenal's teenage winger Max Dowman picking up an ankle injury in an under-21 match last weekend, Jesus has been elevated to the Champions League squad in time for today's clash with Club Brugge in Belgium.

“Gabriel Jesus has replaced Max Dowman on our UEFA A list with immediate effect. Therefore, Gabby is eligible to play in our match against Club Brugge in Belgium on Wednesday night,” a statement on Arsenal's website said.

Jesus's return is a boost to Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta after injuries to Viktor Gyokeres and Kai Havertz forced him to use Spain midfielder Mikel Merino as his central striker.

Arsenal are top of the Premier League despite last weekend's loss to Aston Villa and are also in pole position in the Champions League group phase after five successive wins in the tournament.

Having been removed from the Champions League squad, Dowman will not be eligible to play for Arsenal in UEFA competitions until February 6.

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

— AFP/MPD

Woltemade's 'British humour' helped him fit in at Newcastle – Howe



BERLIN — Newcastle manager Eddie Howe said Nick Woltemade's British sense of humour helped him adapt to life in England, ahead of today's Champions League clash in the striker's native Germany against Bayer Leverkusen.

Howe yesterday called the 1.98-metre-tall striker “a funny guy - and I meant that in the nicest sense”.

“I think he has British humour,” Howe added. “He came in with a very good way of approaching a transfer. He came in, felt at home, made people laugh.

“He has gone in wholeheartedly to the Newcastle way of life and what the team and the city requires when you play for this football club. “He's done brilliantly.”

Newcastle have won three of five matches in the Champions League this season and sit one point, but six places, ahead of Leverkusen in a congested middle of the table.

Woltemade has seven goals in 19 games since he moved to Newcastle from Stuttgart in the summer for a £69 million (US\$92 million) fee and is emerging as a cult figure on Tyneside.

The 23-year-old said he brushed off criticisms of his transfer fee, including from Bayern Munich powerbroker Karl-Heinz Rummenigge who said Stuttgart had “found an idiot who paid the money” in September.

“I don't care. I don't read it,” Woltemade said yesterday, adding: “I focus on myself and at the end I am not deciding what someone is paying for me.

“I am happy Newcastle has paid this for me because I am really happy in Newcastle.”

Leverkusen coach Kasper Hjulmand said the “very dangerous” Woltemade was “technically better than he looks”, adding “you don't have many players with that size who also have the technical abilities that he has”.

Leverkusen and England centre-back Jarell Quansah said his side would pay extra attention to the “unorthodox” Woltemade.

The former Liverpool defender, who made his England debut in November, faced Woltemade when the latter played for Germany at the U21 Euros in June.

Quansah yesterday compared Woltemade to two-metre-tall ex-England forward Peter Crouch.

“He's unorthodox, sort of like Peter Crouch, a traditional sort of taller striker, good at holding up the ball and good in the box - but you feel he's got a lot more to his game than that,” Quansah said.

“He's a really good player and someone we need to look out for.”

Woltemade revealed he was nicknamed “Crouchy” as a teenager but admitted: “If I'm honest, I was born in 2002 so I don't remember him playing so much.”

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

— AFP/MPD



Benfica's coach Jose Mourinho attends a training session at Benfica Campus, training centre, in Seixal, on the outskirts of Lisbon yesterday, on the eve of the UEFA Champions League match against SSC Napoli. The game will be played at 4 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time.

— AFP



Salah trains in Liverpool as Saudis plan winter transfer move

LIVERPOOL — Mohamed Salah reported for Liverpool training yesterday as doubts grow about the star's future at the Premier League champions with Saudi clubs intent on making a move for the striker in the winter transfer window.

The 33-year-old Egypt forward was left out of Liverpool's squad for their Champions League tie at Inter Milan yesterday following his extraordinary public criticism of Reds manager Arne Slot after he was left on the bench for the third consecutive game.

Salah said after the 3-3 draw with Leeds on Sunday that he felt like he had been “thrown under the bus” by Liverpool and no longer had a relationship with Slot, sparking reports that Liverpool's third-highest goalscorer in history could be on his way out of Anfield in January despite signing a lucrative new contract in April.

He posted a picture of himself training alone in Liverpool's weights room yesterday.

Salah's outburst has piqued interest in Saudi Arabia with a source at the kingdom's

Public Investment Fund (PIF) telling AFP it will do “whatever it can” to buy him.

“We follow Salah's position thoroughly and believe there can be a move either by loan or buying his contract,” the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Asked at a pre-match press conference in Milan on Monday whether Salah, who has scored 250 times for Liverpool since signing from Roma in 2017, had played his last game for the Reds, Slot replied: “I have no clue.”

“He has every right to feel what he feels, but he doesn't have the right to share it with the media,” Slot added.

The Saudi source told AFP there were “no direct negotiations or talks with the club at the moment but there will be a move at the right moment”.

The PIF source said the Gulf monarchy wanted to sign the Egyptian winger in January to join stars such as Cristiano Ronaldo in the Saudi Pro League.

PIF holds a 75 percent share in Al-Hilal, Al-Nassr, Al-Ahli and Al-Ittihad, but the

source said it was not alone in wanting the Arab world's biggest football star.

“There is a competition inside the Saudi league who will bring Salah,” the source said, adding that the Al Qadsiah club backed by Saudi Arabia's state-owned oil and gas company Aramco was also keen.

Ronaldo plays for Al-Nassr, Salah's former Liverpool team-mate Darwin Nunez is at Al-Hilal, another former Premier League player of the season N'Golo Kante is at Al-Ittihad, but Salah is the biggest star from an Arab country along with Paris Saint-Germain's Moroccan defender Achraf Hakimi.

Salah, who was not even used as a substitute at Elland Road, is set to depart for the Africa Cup of Nations after next weekend's home Premier League match against Brighton.

He said he was “very, very disappointed” to have again been named among the substitutes at Leeds, adding: “I got a lot of promises in the summer and so far I am on the bench for three games so I can't say they keep the promise.

“I said many times before that, I had a good relationship with the manager and all of a sudden we don't have any relationship.

‘Massive impact on Saudi League’

“I don't know why but it seems to me, how I see it, that someone doesn't want me in the club.”

Salah made his explosive comments in the midst of a dismal season for both him and Liverpool.

He has played a key role in Liverpool's two Premier League titles and one Champions League triumph during his iconic spell on Merseyside.

But he has been a shadow of his former self during Liverpool's struggles this season - the title-holders are 10th in the Premier League - with just four goals in 13 top-flight appearances.

“All players have their ups and downs. Salah is just 33 and has a lot to do here,” insisted the PIF source.

“Salah is a beloved footballer around the globe and will have a massive impact on the Saudi League both on and off the pitch.” — AFP

Red Bull part ways with influential advisor Marko

F1

PARIS — Red Bull confirmed yesterday the departure of influential advisor Helmut Marko who oversaw the progression of serial world champions Sebastian Vettel and Max Verstappen.

The 82-year-old Austrian has been front and centre of Red Bull's remarkable run in F1 since their arrival on the grid back in 2005, helping them to six constructors' championships and eight drivers' titles.

The 1971 winner of the Le Mans 24 Hours for Porsche is a close ally of Verstappen, who missed out on a fifth successive title by only two points to McLaren's Lando Norris in Abu Dhabi on Sunday.

Marko was responsible for Red Bull's young driver programme, and was behind Vettel's four titles, along with Verstappen's emergence as one of the all-time greats.

His departure comes months after Red Bull sacked team principal Christian Horner, who like Marko was at the team for its launch two decades ago.

Horner's successor, Laurent Mekies, commented: "It is very sad news that Helmut is leaving us.

"He has been such an integral part of our team and of Red Bull's entire motor racing programme for more than two decades.

"This is therefore the end of a remarkably successful chapter. His departure will leave a void, and we will truly miss him."

Marko reflected on his "extraordinary and extremely successful journey" with Red Bull.

"Narrowly missing out on the world Championship this season has moved me deeply and made it clear to me that now is the right moment for me personally to end this very long, intense, and

successful chapter," he added.

"I wish the entire team continued success and am convinced that they will be fighting for both world championship titles again next year."

Red Bull's CEO of corporate projects and investments Oliver Mintzlaff said the decision to leave had been Marko's.

"Helmut approached me with the wish to end his role as motorsport advisor at the end of the year.

"I deeply regret his decision, as he has been an influential figure for more than two decades, and his departure marks the end of an extraordinary era," he said.

Mintzlaff singled out Marko's ability to spot talent via the team's junior programme.

"Names like Sebastian Vettel and Max Verstappen stand for the many drivers who were discovered, supported, and guided to the very top under his leadership.



Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen speaks with director of the Red Bull Formula One teams Helmut Marko (right) during second practice session, ahead of the Italian Formula One Grand Prix at Autodromo Nazionale Monza circuit, in Monza on August 30, 2024. —AFP

"His passion, his courage to make clear decisions, and his ability to spot potential will remain unforgettable," he added. —AFP

All Blacks face France in first Test at new Christchurch stadium

Rugby

WELLINGTON — The All Blacks will play France in July in the first rugby Test at their new permanent rugby stadium in Christchurch, more than 15 years after a deadly earthquake in the city forced the demolition of Lancaster Park.

New Zealand welcome France on July 4 in the 12-team Nations Championship at the state-of-the-art 30,000-seat Te Kaha Stadium, also known as the One New Zealand Stadium.

A magnitude 6.2 earthquake in February 2011 killed 185 people, toppled buildings and paralysed New Zealand's second largest

city with the main rugby stadium damaged beyond repair.

Super Rugby's Canterbury Crusaders moved to a temporary home at a small rugby league stadium, but its size meant the All Blacks have played only five times in the city since the earthquake, the last time in 2022 against Argentina.

"For the All Blacks to play at the new One New Zealand Stadium 15 years after the earthquakes will be a special moment for the team and a significant occasion for rugby," All Blacks chief executive Mark Robinson said.

New Zealand head coach Scott Robertson, who played for and coached the Crusaders, said: "It

will be an historic occasion for Christchurch."

New Zealand also announced Nations Championship home fixtures against Italy, in Wellington on July 11, and Ireland, in Auckland on July 18.

"Hosting France, Italy and Ireland in consecutive weeks will be new for our players and it creates three unique match experiences for fans in Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland as we kick off the Nations Championship era," said Robinson.

The All Blacks will play their home Bledisloe Cup Test against Australia at Eden Park, Auckland, on October 10 with the return in Sydney a week later. —AFP



Nick Kyrgios of Australia returns a shot playing with Naomi Osaka of Japan against Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus and Tommy Paul of the United States in a mixed doubles match during the Garden Cup at Madison Square Garden on Monday in New York City. —AFP

Pandya blitz helps India thrash South Africa in T20 opener

CUTTACK — Hardik Pandya struck an unbeaten 59 and took a key wicket as India thrashed South Africa by 101 runs in the first T20 international yesterday.

Pandya's 28-ball blitz, laced with six fours and four sixes, powered reigning world champions India to 175-6 after being invited to bat first in Cuttack.

The Indian bowlers then combined to skittle South Africa for their lowest T20 total of 74 in 12.3 overs to take a 1-0 lead in the five-match series as part of their build-up for the T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka in February-March.

India's Test and ODI captain Shubman Gill returned from injury for the match, but had a disappointing outing after he started with a boundary off Lungi Ngidi but got out next ball when he spooned a catch to mid-off.

Wickets kept tumbling as T20 skipper Suryakumar Yadav fell for 12 and swashbuckling opener Abhishek Sharma soon followed him for 17 as India slipped to 78-4.

But all-rounder Pandya made an instant impact at the crease on his

international return after suffering a quadriceps injury in September.

The 32-year-old came out firing as he hit Keshav Maharaj for two sixes and kept up the attack despite losing Axar Patel, who made 23 off 21 balls, and Shivam Dube (11).

Pandya powered India to a position of strength as, along side Jitesh Sharma, he helped India score 30 runs off the last two overs.

In reply, South Africa were hit hard when Arshdeep Singh sent back Quinton de Kock for a second-ball duck in the first over of the chase and in his next dismissed Tristan Stubbs for 14.

Skipper Aiden Markram and Dewald Brevis, who made 22, attempted to hit back with boundaries before Axar cut short the captain's knock on 14.

Pandya had David Miller out for one with his first ball, and when spinner Varun Chakravarthy dismissed Donovan Ferreira, South Africa slumped to 50-5.

South Africa kept losing wickets and Jasprit Bumrah sent back Brevis for his 100th T20 wicket and took one more in the over.

The second match is tomorrow in New Chandigarh. —AFP

Iniesta heralds 'new chapter' for NSN Cycling after Israel-Premier Tech takeover

Cycling

BARCELONA — Former Spain and Barcelona football star Andres Iniesta celebrated a "new chapter" for his NSN Cycling team, formerly Israel-Premier Tech (IPT), at its presentation yesterday.

Iniesta is a co-founder of sports and entertainment agency NSN, which partnered with Swiss global investment platform Stoneweg, took over the team in November.

IPT's presence at the Vuelta a Espana this year was heavily protested by pro-Palestinian supporters, with several stages of the race heavily disrupted.

The team will race under a Swiss licence this season with a "Spanish structure" and signed Eritrean star Biniam Girmay this month to lead their roster.

"Above all I want to enjoy this new chapter, getting inside cycling much more," Iniesta told reporters at the launch in Barcelona.

"I think if cycling shows us

something, it's this great work in a team, that I think is the most important thing, and that will make us all feel proud."

Iniesta, who scored in the 2010 World Cup final to win the competition with Spain, said he used to watch cycling races with his grandfather and has a "very strong link" with the sport.

"[We're] very excited, motivated, looking forward to working hard, improving and on this path, which is starting now, enjoying it and doing good things so that people can enjoy them."

With a slogan of "redesigning the ride", NSN Cycling appears to be a clean break from the team's prior incarnation, although a contract dispute with Derek Gee rumbles on.

The Canadian cyclist ended his deal with IPT before the Vuelta a Espana because of "personal beliefs", amid Israel's offensive in Gaza.

Gee said in October he was facing a damages claim of 30 million euros (US\$35 million) from IPT.

NSN Cycling's general manager Kjell Carlstrom said despite the team's revamp, Gee's contract was still being wrangled over.

"That is still something that is pending so I can't talk about it that much," said Carlstrom.

IPT was owned by Canadian-Israeli billionaire Sylvan Adams, who described himself as an unofficial ambassador for Israel.

Former Finnish cyclist Carlstrom hailed the arrival of Girmay, who in 2024 became the first black African to win the Tour de France's green jersey.

"It's great to have such an impressive rider in the roster, as a leader, and I think he fits very well in our culture," said Carlstrom.

Girmay signed until 2028 from Belgium's Intermarche-Wanty team.

"I'm here to win a bike race, I think this is the team to help me improve," he said.

"I think the best team I can find is NSN Cycling team, so I'm really looking forward to the new season." —AFP

Jimmy Kimmel extends late night contract for a year

LOS ANGELES – Jimmy Kimmel has extended his contract with Disney-owned ABC for a year, sources said on Monday, months after his late-night show was yanked off the air in a confrontation with US President Donald Trump’s administration.

The late-night host will continue to front “Jimmy Kimmel Live!” into the middle of 2027, a source familiar with the matter told AFP.

His contract had been due to expire in May of next year.

The move comes after a spat pitting the White House against Kimmel in the wake of the killing of right-wing activist Charlie Kirk.

Kimmel, who frequently skewers Trump and his inner circle, annoyed conservatives when he said “the MAGA gang” was trying to exploit the college campus murder.

Trump’s Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Brendan Carr appeared to threaten the licenses of ABC affiliates broadcasting the show unless they demanded Kimmel’s removal.

Two companies that own dozens of those affiliates – Nexstar and Sinclair – then announced they would be removing the show from their schedules, prompting Disney to suspend the show nationwide.

But after a huge public and Hollywood backlash, Kimmel was back on the air after a week-long hiatus, delivering a blockbuster monologue in which he slammed government attempts to censor him as “anti-American.”

He has continued to take aim at Trump, mocking him for apparently falling asleep in meetings, and for mispronouncing the names of international leaders with whom he boasts he has brokered peace deals.

Trump, meanwhile, shows no sign of giving up his crusade to get Kimmel cancelled.

At a revamped awards ceremony at the Kennedy Center on Sunday, he called the funnyman “horrible,” as he predicted bumper ratings for the show.

“If I can’t beat out Jimmy Kimmel in terms of talent, then I don’t think I should be president,” he said.

– AFP

UK DJ Tim Westwood pleads not guilty of rape, sexual assault

LONDON – British veteran hip-hop DJ Tim Westwood pleaded not guilty to multiple counts of rape and sexual assault on Monday when he appeared in a London court accused of offences between 1983 and 2016.

Westwood, 68, pleaded not guilty at Southwark Crown Court to four counts of rape, nine of indecent assault, and two of sexual assault against seven women.

UK police in October charged the former BBC radio 1 DJ, who is accused of indecently assaulting a 17-year-old girl in 1983, raping a woman aged 17-18 between 1995 and 1996, and raping a woman in her 20s in 2010, among other allegations.

The court was told that three of the alleged assault offences took place in BBC studios in 1996, UK media reported.

Westwood was granted bail, with a provisional trial date set for January 2027.

He presented a rap show on BBC Radio 1 for nearly 20 years from 1994 to 2013.

The British broadcaster has been rocked by multiple sexual scandals involving its top talent in recent years, including former news anchor Huw Edwards and ex-presenter Jimmy Savile.

Comedian Russell Brand, who presented a show on BBC’s Radio 2 between 2006 and 2008 is currently on facing trial in London accused of sexual offences.

Westwood presented MTV UK’s “Pimp My Ride” from 2005 to 2007 and is often cited as an inspiration for Sacha Baron Cohen’s fictional Ali G character, a middle-class, suburban youth who acts in a way he thinks is typical of black people.

He is the son of a former Anglican bishop from the east of England, and was wounded in a drive-by shooting in London in 1999.

– AFP

Feminists outraged at video of French first lady’s outburst against activists

PARIS – Feminists expressed outrage on Monday after footage circulated of France’s first lady Brigitte Macron using a slur against activists who disrupted the show of an actor-comedian who had once been accused of rape.

The first lady’s team said she had intended to criticise their “radical method” of protest.

Activists on Saturday interrupted the stand-up show of 51-year-old Ary Abittan, wearing masks of the actor bearing the word “rapist” and shouting “Abittan rapist”.

A woman in 2021 accused the actor of rape but in 2023 investigators dropped the case, citing lack of evidence.

Brigitte Macron on Sunday went to see the show with her daughter Tiphaine Auzière, and spoke with Abittan before he went on stage, according to a video published by local media *Public* on Monday.

“I’m scared,” Abittan is heard saying in the clip.

“If there are any stupid bitches we’ll kick them out,” Brigitte Macron is heard to jokingly respond, using a vulgar expression in French.

The feminist group behind Saturday’s action, #NousToutes (literally “All of us”) on social media turned the insult into a hashtag and many posts shared it in a show of support.

Among those using it was actor Judith Godrèche, who has become a feminist icon since accusing two



France’s President Emmanuel Macron (left) and his wife Brigitte Macron (centre) wait for the arrival of Croatia’s Prime Minister Andrej Plenković and his wife Ana Maslač Plenković at the Élysée Palace in Paris on Monday ahead of a dinner banquet. – AFP

directors of sexually abusing her when she was a minor and calling for an end to such behaviour in France’s cultural sector.

“I too am a stupid bitch,” she posted on Instagram.

An activist who took part in the action, and who gave the pseudonym of Gwen to avoid repercussions, said the collective was “profoundly shocked and scandalised” by Brigitte Macron’s language.

“It’s yet another insult to victims and feminist groups,” she said.

The first lady’s team argued her words should be seen as “a critique of the radical method employed by those who disrupted the show”.

“Brigitte Macron does not approve of this radical method,” a member of her team told AFP.

France has been rocked by a series of accusations of rape and sexual assault against well-known cultural figures in recent years.

Screen icon Gérard Depardieu was in May convicted of sexually assaulting two women on a film set in 2021, and is to stand trial charged with raping an actor in 2018. He denies any wrongdoing.

French President Emmanuel Macron in 2023 had expressed admiration for Depardieu, and said at the time the actor was the target of a “manhunt” and he stood behind the presumption of innocence.

– AFP



Colombian singer Shakira (centre), backed by dancers, performs during her “Las mujeres ya no lloran” (“Women no longer cry”) world tour at Vélez Sarsfield Stadium in Buenos Aires on Monday. – AFP

Katy Perry, Justin Trudeau make romance official

MONTREAL – It is not a teenage dream, it’s Instagram official: pop star Katy Perry has posted a photograph of herself cuddling with Canada’s former prime minister, as secure a confirmation as any that the celebrities are dating.

The 41-year-old “California Gurl” slipped the picture, showing the pair cheek to cheek in front of a colourful autumn backdrop, into a series of images on her Instagram account, which boasts 202 million followers.

Her simple caption for the series posted on Saturday – which also includes video clips of the couple trying sushi – reads simply: “tokyo times on tour and more,” and features emojis including flowers and a red heart.

Neither Perry – singer of mega hits like “Hot n Cold,” “Roar” and “I Kissed a Girl” – nor Trudeau have made public comments about their relationship.

But Trudeau, 53, was seen at a Perry concert in July, and celebrity news website TMZ further fuelled rumours when it aired video of the two hand in hand on a night out in Paris in October to celebrate the singer’s birthday.

Trudeau served as prime minister from 2015 to 2025 as leader of the Liberal Party.

On Thursday Trudeau reposted a photograph of the pair posing with Japan’s former premier, Fumio Kishida, and his wife Yuko.

“Great to see you @kishida230. Katy and I were so glad to have the chance to sit down with you and Yuko,” Trudeau wrote.

– AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -5°C~6°C	Manila 24°C~32°C	New York 2°C~7°C	Lisbon 8°C~17°C
Shanghai 9°C~20°C	Bangkok 23°C~33°C	London 6°C~13°C	Rio de Janeiro 25°C~33°C
Hong Kong 18°C~23°C	Tokyo 2°C~14°C	Frankfurt 7°C~11°C	Luanda 23°C~28°C
Taipei 18°C~27°C	Singapore 24°C~32°C	Vancouver 8°C~10°C	Maputo 20°C~27°C
Guangzhou 17°C~24°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~32°C	Paris 5°C~14°C	Dili 24°C~31°C
Nanjing 4°C~19°C	Jakarta 24°C~33°C	Moscow 1°C~1°C	São Tomé 25°C~29°C
Guilin 10°C~24°C	Seoul 4°C~11°C	Las Vegas 9°C~22°C	Praia 20°C~27°C
Xi'an 0°C~16°C	Sydney 20°C~26°C	Monte Carlo 10°C~16°C	Bissau 18°C~34°C



Liu Jiamo of Shandong hits a return during the women's singles WH1 of para badminton against Li Jiaqi of Shandong at China's 12th National Games for Persons with Disabilities and the 9th National Special Olympic Games in Macao, yesterday. — Xinhua



Cheng Yang (left) of Jiangsu and Wang Jianqiang of Shanghai compete during the Men's Sabre Individual category A quarterfinals of Wheelchair Fencing event at China's 12th National Games for Persons with Disabilities and the 9th National Special Olympic Games in Hong Kong yesterday. — Xinhua



Tenzin (right) of Xizang shakes hands with a player of Liaoning after the men's wheelchair basketball match between Liaoning and Xizang at China's 12th National Games for Persons with Disabilities and the 9th National Special Olympic Games in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, yesterday. — Xinhua



Wu Bairong (right)/Zhang Liangzhong of Jiangsu react during the men's doubles age 30+ group A match of Special Olympics table tennis at China's 12th National Games for Persons with Disabilities and the 9th National Special Olympic Games in Hong Kong, yesterday. — Xinhua



Lee Ho Ting (right) of Hong Kong shoots during a Special Olympics football match against Hubei at China's 12th National Games for Persons with Disabilities and the 9th National Special Olympic Games in Jiangmen, Guangdong Province, yesterday. — Xinhua



Fang Chongran (front) of Sichuan competes during the men's individual BC1 round robin match of boccia at China's 12th National Games for Persons with Disabilities and the 9th National Special Olympic Games in Hong Kong, yesterday. — Xinhua