

Govt issues health alert over Nestlé infant formula toxin scare

Armando Neves

The Pharmaceutical Supervision and Administration Bureau (ISAF) and the Macau Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) issued a joint health alert yesterday afternoon about certain Nestlé-Wyeth Nutrition infant formula products that are suspected to contain *Bacillus cereus*.

Bacillus cereus is a species of bacteria known for its ability to cause foodborne illnesses, such as diarrhoea and abdominal cramps.

According to the statement, the two bureaus have been informed that several batches of Nestlé NAN and Wyeth Nutrition infant formula products are suspected of being contaminated with *Bacillus cereus* and, consequently, are being recalled from the local market.

Both bureaus are highly concerned about the incident and have taken immediate action, the statement said. The joint alert came after Hong Kong's Centre for Food Safety, which is a part of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), had urged the public on Tuesday not to consume certain batches of powered infant and young children formula produced by Nestlé.

According to Tuesday's FEHD statement, "Bacillus cereus is commonly found in the environment. Unhygienic conditions in food processing and storage may give rise to its growth. Cereulide is a heat-stable toxin produced in food by some strains of *Bacillus cereus*. Consuming food contaminated with excessive *Bacillus cereus* or its heat-stable toxins may cause gastrointestinal upsets such as vomiting and diarrhoea.

The two local bureaus yesterday issued food alerts to the local food industry, according to their joint statement, demanding the removal and recall of the affected batches, as well as halting the sale of the related products.



A woman talks to sales staff at a Western pharmacy on Rua dos Mercadores in the city centre last night. — Photo: Armando Neves

Inspectors have been dispatched to conduct market inspections, and major importers have been contacted, the statement said. After verification, some of the affected products have, indeed, been imported by suppliers in Macau. Both bureaus will continue to monitor the situation closely to prevent the circulation of the implicated products in the market, the statement said.

The problematic infant formula products in this incident involve multiple items under the Nestlé NAN and Wyeth Nutrition brands, both owned by Swiss multinational food and drink processing conglomerate Nestlé. Specific details can be found via the provided webpage link:

<https://www.gcs.gov.mo/news/detail/zh-hant/N26AGNh18Jjsessionid=08AA45EB329812D8F12BE26CF2F9BD03.app11>

The *Post* interviewed several people in charge of Western pharmacies yesterday in Fai Chi Kei district about the issue.

The person in charge of Farmácia Pou Kin said that the store had previously stocked four of the affected products, though they accounted for only a small proportion of inventory. She acknowledged that some of the problematic batches had already been sold. The store is currently processing returns for customers as notified by the distributor, but the procedure for handling its own remaining stock was still unclear, she said.

A person in charge of another pharmacy, surnamed Wong, said that the company had already returned the problematic infant formula products to the distributor to ensure it is no longer circulated. So far, no customers have requested returns, but his company's policy allows for refunds. He emphasised that the stock of affected products was minimal and had no impact on his business.

A person in charge of another pharmacy, surnamed Un, said that after internal checks, none of the formula batches in the store were listed in the officially announced affected batches. Therefore, the store was not impacted by the incident, and no customers have requested returns thus far, Un said.

Meanwhile, according to international newswire reports, Nestlé has issued a global recall of some of its baby formula products over concerns they contain a toxin which can cause food poisoning.

The batches were sold across the world, Nestlé said, and they potentially contain cereulide, which can trigger nausea and vomiting when consumed.

The company said there had been no confirmed reports of illness associated with the products, but was recalling them "out of an abundance of caution".

"The safety and wellbeing of babies is our absolute priority," Nestlé was quoted as saying by the news agency reports. "We sincerely apologise for any concern or inconvenience caused to parents, caregivers, and customers."

It stressed that all other Nestlé products and batches of the same products that have not been recalled are safe to consume.

Nestlé promised refunds for customers and said the problem was caused by an ingredient provided by one of its suppliers. ■

US strikes smashed maths centre, medical warehouse, Venezuela says

CARACAS – US military strikes on Venezuela that resulted in the ouster of leader Nicolás Maduro damaged civilian buildings including science labs and a medicine warehouse, the government in Caracas said yesterday.

The early-morning weekend attack on Caracas and locations in three other states killed at least one civilian and 56 Venezuelan and Cuban soldiers, according to a variety of sources.

Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez had spoken of civilian casualties, but has yet

to provide a detailed rundown, while AFP spoke to the family of a 78-year-old woman who died after a strike on her apartment building in the port city of La Guaira.

Science and Technology Minister Gabriela Jiménez shared footage yesterday on social media showing a destroyed building she said had housed the mathematics centre of the Venezuelan Institute for Scientific Research (IVIC) on the outskirts of Caracas.

"Two missiles struck the area directly,"

she wrote on Telegram and shared images of crumbled walls, twisted steel and fragments of what the post claimed was an AGM-154 American glide bomb.

"The attack was total: these areas housed servers and equipment essential to our computer networks that were completely devastated," Jiménez added.

Four other IVIC buildings housing centres for the study of physics, chemistry, ecology and nuclear technology, were

damaged, the minister added, lambasting "an unprecedented act of imperial aggression."

The governor of La Guaira state said the strikes also destroyed a medicine warehouse there.

"Tons of medicine burned to ash, tons of food," Alejandro Teran said in a video on social media, without providing evidence that the destroyed goods were indeed medical supplies. (*More about Venezuela crisis on p.12*) — AFP

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The Macau Post Daily

Chinese mainland names 2 die-hard 'Taiwan independence' secessionists

The Chinese mainland yesterday added two individuals to its list of die-hard "Taiwan independence" secessionists, bringing the total number on this list to 14, a spokesperson said.

— Story on p. 7

Hamas says search resumes for last Israeli hostage body in Gaza

Hamas officials told AFP that search operations for the remains of the last Israeli hostage held in Gaza resumed yesterday after a two-week pause due to bad weather.

— Story on p. 10

US seizes Russia-flagged oil tanker chased to North Atlantic

The US yesterday seized a Russian-flagged oil tanker in the North Atlantic after pursuing it from off the coast of Venezuela, in an operation set to ratchet up tensions with Moscow.

— Story on p. 12

Health Bureau warns of hypothermia as mercury drops

Khalel Vallo

According to a statement by the Health Bureau (SSM), the city is set to suffer a significant drop in temperature over the next few days, prompting health authorities to urge residents to take extra precautions, particularly to protect elderly people and those with chronic illnesses from hypothermia.

According to the statement, the Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) noted that a “yellow” cold weather alert has been issued, with the temperature expected to fall to 9 degrees Celsius today and tomorrow.

The bureau urged residents to stay warm and stay alert to health risks associated with prolonged cold exposure, the statement said, stressing that older people, individuals with chronic diseases, their caregivers and care institutions should adopt appropriate preventive measures.



Hypothermia alert poster courtesy of Austin Emergency Management

Recommendations include wearing suitable warm clothing that does not restrict blood circulation, keeping homes warm and well ventilated, and using heaters safely, the statement noted.

Moreover, residents are also advised to consume warm, high-

calorie and easily digestible foods, drink enough water, avoid excessive alcohol intake, and maintain light physical activity to help sustain their body temperature, said the statement.

Special caution was advised for people with reduced thermal sensation, such as diabetics, who should avoid using hot water bottles or electric blankets, the statement added.

According to the statement, the bureau urged families, friends and neighbours to pay closer attention to elderly people living alone and to offer them assistance when needed, and residents were also advised to monitor weather updates closely via the local observatory’s 24-hour hotline 1311.

In the case of suspected hypothermia, the public should seek immediate medical help or call emergency services on 999 or 2857 2222. ■

Police bust 2 illegal currency exchange dealers

Ada Lei

The Judiciary Police (PJ) and the Public Security police (PSP) separately arrested two men from the Chinese mainland on Tuesday for engaging in illegal currency exchange activities, PJ spokesman Cheong Siu Keong and PSP spokesman Wong Wai Chon said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Cheong identified one of suspects as a 40-year-old male surnamed Yuan who claimed to be jobless. Wong identified the other suspect as a male in his fifties surnamed Lin, who also claimed to be unemployed.

According to Cheong, PJ officers on patrol in a casino in the city centre on Tuesday saw Yuan engaging in an illegal exchange deal with a male gambler. Cheong noted that Yuan and the gambler agreed to exchange 300 yuan for HK\$300 in chips.

Cheong said that after the transaction was completed, the gambler immediately entered the casino to gamble. The police intercepted both and seized a smartphone and HK\$28,500 in chips from Yuan.

Under questioning, Yuan admitted to having engaged in

illegal exchange activities in Macau since last month, claiming to have earned a total of HK\$7,000.

Meanwhile, Wong announced that PSP officers on patrol along Rua do Terminal Marítimo (海港街) on Tuesday saw a man handing over cash outside a casino to Lin, who was preparing to make a money transfer using his mobile phone. Upon seeing the police officers, Lin immediately put away his phone and attempted to leave. Suspecting illegal currency exchange activities, the officers immediately intercepted the duo. The police seized HK\$19,400 in cash from Lin.

Under questioning, Lin denied any involvement in the crime. Meanwhile, the man who attempted to exchange currency with Lin claimed that he had intended to exchange HK\$6,000 in cash for 5,400 yuan to cover his daily expenses. However, Lin left before the transfer could be completed, and the man immediately retrieved the HK\$6,000.

Both Yuan and Lin have been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), each facing an illegal currency exchange charge. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Judiciary Police (PJ) yesterday shows a smartphone and HK\$28,500 in chips seized from one of the two illegal currency exchange suspects.



This undated handout photo provided by the Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday shows a PSP officer escorting one of the two illegal currency exchange suspects into a police station.

3 flu clusters detected, Health Bureau urges vigilance

Khalel Vallo

The Health Bureau (SSM) announced in a statement yesterday that it detected three cases of influenza clusters on Tuesday, involving three local schools, with all patients showing mild symptoms and no severe complications reported.

According to the bureau, the first case was identified in Class P1 “Zhong” of Colégio de Santa Rosa de Lima (Chinese Section), where seven female students were infected.

The second case occurred in Class P2D of the Talent School Affiliated to Hou Kong Secondary

School (Escola de Talentos Anexa à Escola Secundária Hou Kong) in Taipa, involving 10 students – six males and four females, the statement said.

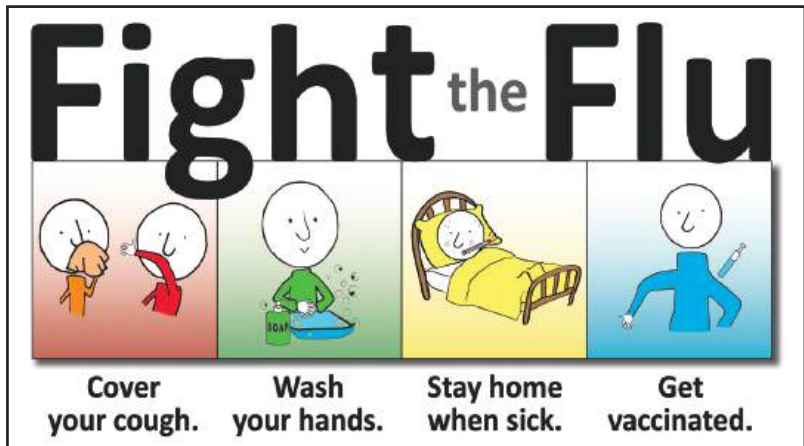
The third case was detected in Class S6A of Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School (Macau), with five students infected, consisting three males and two females, the statement added.

Symptoms began appearing last week, mainly upper respiratory tract infections such as fever, cough and runny nose, the statement noted, adding that some patients sought medical treatment, and all cases were assessed as clinically mild.

According to the statement, rapid tests showed that six patients tested positive for Influenza A, while two tested positive for Influenza B.

The statement underlined that the affected schools have implemented health control measures, including enhanced cleaning and disinfection, improved indoor ventilation and strict isolation of infected students.

In order to reduce the spread of influenza and other respiratory infections, the Health Bureau called on residents to receive seasonal flu and COVID-19 vaccinations, maintain good personal hygiene, ensure adequate rest and balanced diets, avoid crowded places, wear masks when experiencing flu symptoms, and seek medical attention promptly if symptoms worsen, the statement said. ■



Flu warning poster courtesy of Minnesota Department of Health

Police bust local woman for trafficking & using drugs

Ada Lei

A local woman was arrested on Tuesday for trafficking and using drugs, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Siu Keong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Cheong identified the suspect as a 43-year-old female surnamed Ho who claimed to be jobless.

According to Cheong, based on a tip-off, the Judiciary Police (PJ) identified Ho as a suspect smuggling drugs from Hong Kong to Macau on multiple occasions for her personal use and for sale. The police apprehended Ho early Tuesday morning when she was entering Macau through the Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal.

The police seized a packet of heroin weighing 0.83 grams, with an estimated street value of about 1,000 patacas. They also confiscated syringes and various drug packaging tools from Ho. Cheong said that the police later seized more drug paraphernalia at Ho’s flat in Coloane. Cheong noted that Ho tested positive for heroin and has a history of drug use.

Ho has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing charges of drug use, drug trafficking and possession of drug paraphernalia. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Judiciary Police (PJ) yesterday shows a packet of heroin, syringes, drug packaging tools and drug paraphernalia seized from the suspect.

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RANGE BETWEEN
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Source: SMG

Central district councillors discuss outdoor seating, ex-prisoners' rehabilitation

Armindo Neves

The government-appointed Central District Community Service Consultative Council held its first regular monthly meeting of the year yesterday, where, among other things, concerns about restaurants' outdoor seating arrangements and ex-prisoners' rehabilitation were raised.

The first part of the meeting was open to the media, during which councillors raised various issues one by one. The meeting then proceeded behind closed doors.

The closed-door meeting was attended by Correctional Services Bureau (DSC) Social Assistance, Education and Training Division Acting Chief Mak Kam Sim, and Coloane Prison Director Lam Kam Sau who briefed the council on the operations of the city's correctional facility and its counselling programme for rehabilitated former prisoners.

The nearly three-hour meeting was held at the Patane Activity Centre on Avenida de Demétrio Cinatti (爹美刁施拿地大馬路).

In the first part of the meeting, councillor Tam Chan Lam expressed concern regarding the operational

development of restaurants' outdoor seating arrangements in Zape.

Tam suggested that flexible or moderately extended operating hours be permitted by the government during public holidays to provide more visitor experience opportunities. Additionally, a "demerit point system" could be considered for environmental hygiene, where outdoor seating restaurateurs piling up the maximum demerit points allowed would be barred from applying for outdoor seating permits within a specified period, Tam said.

Meanwhile, councillor Mok Chio Kuan expressed concern regarding support for rehabilitated ex-prisoners, hoping to strengthen vocational training and other initiatives for them. Mok pointed out that the current job market is highly competitive, and former prisoners trying to reintegrate into civil society often can only secure temporary, low-income positions with limited career development opportunities. Mok recommended strengthening skill training to better align with industry demands, thereby enhancing the employability and competitiveness of reintegrated former prisoners.



Central District Community Service Consultative Council Deputy Convenor Pui Seng In (right) and fellow councillor Wong Sok Kuan pose during yesterday's press briefing after the government-appointed council's closed-door meeting at the Patane Activity Centre on Avenida de Demétrio Cinatti. — Photo: Armindo Neves

Councillor Chan Hio Teng said that the government could establish an "Employment Support Centre" for reintegrated ex-prisoners to provide comprehensive services such as career planning and interview coaching, as well as ongoing employment assistance. Chan also said that the authorities should collaborate with community organisations to set up social enterprises. By integrating vocational training, social support, and business operations models,

diverse job opportunities could be created, Chan said.

During the post-meeting press briefing, the council's deputy convenor Pui Seng In and councillor Wong Sok Kuan cited a DSC statement released to the councillors during meeting about the city's new prison, located on Estrada da Barragem de Ka Ho in Coloane, which commenced operations in October 2024. Covering a total area of approximately 42,000 square metres, the facility has

a maximum capacity for 2,704 inmates. It incorporates an intelligent management system and provides enhanced spaces for education, vocational training, and recreational activities. Beyond hardware upgrades, the bureau continues to provide support to inmates, including psychological counselling, family assistance, education, and vocational skills training, while also organising community engagement activities. Tailored workshops, such as art therapy and sexual offence prevention programmes, are conducted to address the needs of different inmate groups, both quoted the DSC statement as saying.

In terms of assisting reintegration into society, the employment programme for ex-prisoners implemented by the bureau has involved 461 participants since 2012, with 260 successfully securing employment, both said during the press briefing. In 2025, 37 ex-prisoners participated in the programme, and 15 were hired by social enterprises, resulting in an employment rate of approximately 40 percent. According to the latest statistics by the bureau, the recidivism rate among individuals released from prison has fallen to 5.6 percent, down from 12.4 percent in 2018. ■

UM holds health science talks for over 800 high school students



This undated and unlocated handout photo provided by the University of Macau (UM) shows students during one of the recent health science talks.

Rui Pastorin

The public University of Macau's (UM) Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) recently held a series of health science talks that drew over 800 secondary school students who listened to a variety of topics.

Held in conjunction with secondary schools, the talks were held during the first half of the 2025/2026 academic year, according to a statement from the university yesterday.

The statement said that the talks tackled a variety of topics, aiming to "enhance young people's scientific literacy and spark their interest in health sciences".

Among the talks were "Do Your Genes Determine Everything about You?" by FHS Associate Professor Wong Koon Ho and "Understanding Epidemiology through the COVID-19 Pandemic"

by UM Macao Fellow Che Weng Ian. The talks were part of Yuet Wah College's "Science Month activities" and featured over 700 Form 3 to Form 5 students, the statement said.

There were also over 100 Form 4 and Form 5 students from Macau Baptist College. Other talks included "Application of Artificial Intelligence in Medicine and Future Prospects" by FHS Associate Professor Poon Chuen Wai, as well as "Research Techniques and Methods for the Modernisation of Traditional Chinese Medicine" by FHS Professor Leung Lai Han.

The talks, the statement said, saw students engaging in discussions and Q&A sessions, noting that in all, the activities were geared towards helping "foster scientific thinking and encourage academic exploration among young people in Macau". ■



澳門理工大學
Universidade Politécnica de Macau
Macao Polytechnic University

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Time	14:00 - 18:00
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Open Day
Website

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Bachelor Degree Programmes	from now until 2026.01.16
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Online Application
mpu.mo/admission

Exhibition presents learning outcomes across art disciplines

Rui Pastorin

The latest exhibition at the Pavilion of Exhibitions and Artistic Shows for Young People in Praça do Tap Siac (塔石廣場) presents a raft of art works created using different mediums, showcasing what students from a recent art education programme had learnt during workshops.

Titled “360° Comprehensive View”– Visual Arts Student Works Exhibition, the free-admission showcase is organised by the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) and kicked off late last month, running through January 18.

Entering the venue, members of the public will see a variety of works showcasing students’ creativity. These range from jewellery created through metalworking, colourful welded glass art to shape items including a camera and framed art pieces, and even characters and animals made through wood carving. In all, the exhibits featured showcase the learning outcomes of participants in wood carving, metalworking, glass art, leather craft, fabric arts, and animation.

According to a statement by the bureau, the programme that the participants took part in is called “Art Education Snowball Programme” (藝術教育雪球計劃) and was launched in 2006. The statement said that it aims to “promote arts education and deepen the understanding of art among students and youth in Macau”, as well as inspire the “artistic potential of young students”.

The statement added that the programme was this year organised by the Macao Society for Education in Art (MSEA), or “澳門藝術教育學會” in Chinese. Participants joined six workshops held from August through November, with instructors guiding them throughout their artistic creations.

Members of the public wanting to view the works may do so from Tuesday to Sunday from noon to 8 p.m. throughout the remainder of its run. It is closed on Mondays.



Photos taken yesterday by Rui Pastorin

Govt restructuring won't result in staff layoffs & affect public servants' salaries: Wong

Tony Wong

Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak underlined yesterday that the government's ongoing campaign to reorganise and streamline its structure will neither result in any staff layoffs, nor will it affect public servants' salaries and various other benefits, stressing the government's commitment to complying with this "fundamental" principle when pushing ahead with its ongoing structural revamp.

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

Wong said that the government has drawn up its plan for its restructuring of public entities to be carried out until 2028, adding that the Public Administration and Civil Service Bureau (SAFP) has started its discussions with the affected public entities on the matter one after another, while the government will also pass some of the public entities' restructuring plans to the Commission of Audit (CA) for review, evaluation and feedback.

Meanwhile, Wong also acknowledged that some public servants with a relatively high salary in the government have a small workload and merely pass time in the office until the end of the workday, adding that the government is working on resolving the issue by using various possible means and channels.

Wong rules out visitors' marriage registration in Macau

Meanwhile, during yesterday's plenary session, Wong ruled out the possibility of launching a measure

to allow visitors to complete their marriage registration in Macau.

Wong noted that according to the Civil Registration Code, for a marriage to be registered in Macau, at least one of the intending spouses must have his or her habitual residence here, i.e., be a local resident or a non-resident worker (NRW), while the other intending spouse is not subject to restrictions regarding his or her habitual residence. In other words, Wong said, if both intending spouses reside outside Macau, it is not possible for them to legally register to marry here.

Wong noted that according to Macau's legal system, individuals who marry in Macau must choose their own marital property systems, i.e., a set of rules governing how the couple's assets and debts are owned, managed, and divided during marriage and upon divorce. Wong said that if Macau would remove the current statutory requirement for at least one of the intending spouses to have his or her habitual residence here, it could raise legal issues regarding the distribution and ownership of property if the couple later disposes of assets outside Macau.

Govt to amend 5 codes

Meanwhile, Wong also underlined during yesterday's plenary session that the government is working on, or studying the feasibility of, drafting amendments to five major codes, namely Administrative Procedures Code, Civil Litigation Code, Administrative Litigation Code, Penal Code, and Penal Litigation Code.

Wong said that among the five codes, amending the Administrative Procedures Code is the government's



Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak addresses yesterday's plenary session in the Legislative Assembly's (AL) hemicycle. — Photo: GCS

top priority as this code concerns its ongoing campaign to streamline government operations and enhance public administration efficiency.

Wong said that the government plans to submit a bill amending the Administrative Procedures Code to the legislature within this year for debate and vote.

Wong said that the government has completed its basic studies on the feasibility of amending the Civil Litigation Code and the Administrative Litigation Code, while its studies on possible amendments to the Penal Code and the Penal Litigation Code are expected to be completed within this year.

Wong also noted that the Penal Code addresses traditional crimes in general, adding that it would not be suitable to integrate Macau's specific criminal laws into the Penal Code. He said that incorporating the specific criminal offences listed by other laws into the Penal Code would result in a need for frequent amendments to the Penal Code, thereby harming its stability. ■

Govt to launch monthly rental of Cotai open-air performance venue: O Lam

Tony Wong

Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam said yesterday that the government will roll out a monthly rental for those in the arts performance sector to use its Macau Open-Air Performance Venue in Cotai, with the aim of providing more flexible arrangements for them to use the facility, a change from the current practice in which the fees for using the venue are charged on a daily basis.

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

O said that the new measure will start "in the near future", adding that the new measure would help companies or organisations hosting large-scale shows control or reduce their cost.

The Macau Open-Air



Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam addresses yesterday's plenary session in the legislature's hemicycle. — Photo: GCS

Performance Venue, set up on a large plot in south-east Cotai covering 94,000 square metres, is located east of the Lisboeta Macau resort and south of the Grand Lisboa Palace Resort Macau complex.

Moreover, O said, the government will also modify the facility so that the site could be used as 3x3 basketball courts and other sports facilities when no performances are being hosted there, adding that the sports facilities will be open to the public. She underlined that this measure aims to enhance the flexibility and effectiveness of the venue's use.

O also said that the government expects to launch a public tender at around the middle of this year for the private sector's operation of the open-air performance venue, adding that the government aims to choose and commission the winning bidder at the end of this year, which will start operating the facility next year.

The open-air venue can accommodate up to 50,000 spectators. ■

'MEET YOU THERE' exhibition on at Amagao Gallery

Kristina Vallesteros

A collaborative art exhibition featuring works by local architect Alexandre Marreiros and Indonesian artist Nyoman Suarnata is now on display at Amagao Gallery in Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau in Nape, according to a statement from the hotel operator.

The exhibition, titled "Meet You There", is a joint presentation by Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau and Amagao Gallery, which is managed by Galeria 57. As the final exhibition of 2025, this showcase marks a conclusion to the gallery's 2025 programme, the statement noted.

Entering the gallery, art lovers will find a mixture of works by Marreiros and Nyoma. According to the statement, the exhibition is not based on a physical location but a "conceptual territory" created through artistic dialogue. The statement noted that the artists use layered compositions and symbols to explore social, environmental, and personal themes.

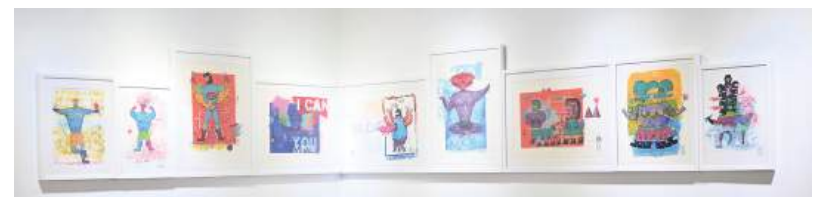
The show is curated by Raúl Caldeira together with Managing Partners of Amagao Gallery Victor Marreiros and Lina Ramadas.

In the statement, artist Alexandre Marreiros describes the exhibition as "a call to presence" and an invitation to engage with generative art. Curator Raúl Caldeira added that the show tackles global concerns in a playful and colourful manner.

General Manager of Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau and Area Vice President, Macau and Hengqin of Artyzen Hospitality Group Rutger Verschuren was quoted by the statement as saying: "Through the works of Alexandre and Nyoman, we see how stories, concerns, and hopes can be expressed visually and understood in many ways. 'MEET YOU THERE' encourages all of us to pause, to reflect, and to consider what our own role in the world around us is or can be. It is a meaningful way to conclude the year and a wonderful reminder of why creativity matters."

The exhibition will run through February 1. One can view the works on display at the free-admission gallery from Tuesday to Sunday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. during its run.

One can find the gallery in the hotel lobby of Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau. Moreover, selected artworks are available for purchase. ■



Photos of the "Meet You There" exhibition at Amagao Gallery in Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau in Nape taken yesterday by Rui Pastorin.

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Institutions bullish on Chinese assets as A-shares gain ground into 2026

Analysis

BEIJING – China's equity market kicked off 2026 with strong momentum, reinforcing growing confidence among domestic and international institutions, with technology-related sectors broadly regarded as the primary growth driver.

Yesterday, China's A-share market hit fresh records, with the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index up 0.05 percent to 4,085.77 points, marking its highest level in over a decade. The index also logged its 14th consecutive daily gain, surpassing the previous record set in early 1992.

The upbeat start followed a robust performance in 2025, when the Shanghai Composite Index soared 18.4 percent, its best annual performance since 2020. Throughout last year, AI breakthroughs, policy measures to curb excessive competition and steady earnings growth have bolstered market sentiment, laying a solid foundation for further gains in 2026.

Looking ahead, optimism toward Chinese assets is gaining broad traction among domestic and international institutions, driven largely by confidence in the technology sector.

BULLISH PROSPECTS

A key pillar of optimism lies in the stable economic growth and improvements in corporate earnings. Since late 2025, multiple international organizations, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, have raised their forecasts for China's 2026 economic growth, citing the country's long-term growth potential.

Earnings expectations have also improved. CITIC Securities projected listed companies' net profits to further improve in 2026, with full-year growth of around 4.8 percent.

Valuation levels provide an additional buffer. Despite last year's strong performance, A-share valuations remain at a significant discount to global peers, reinforcing their appeal to long-term investors.

Solid fundamentals and valuation advantages are expected to draw more global capital into Chinese equities. Huatai Securities estimated that since 2025, global exchange-traded funds investing in Chinese assets have recorded net inflows of about US\$83.1 billion, mainly into onshore products.

Foreign financial institutions have echoed

this optimism. Goldman Sachs has forecasted further gains for Chinese equities in 2026, projecting the MSCI China Index could rise around 20 percent, as AI investment and policy support are expected to translate into corporate profit growth.

In the Asian emerging markets, J.P. Morgan and Citi Private Bank have continued to hold overweight positions on China. Fidelity International also noted in its 2026 global asset outlook that multiple indicators suggest China may be entering a broader market upswing.

TECH ON TOP

Amid this broadly positive outlook, institutions largely agree that technology – particularly AI – will remain the market's dominant theme in 2026.

CITIC Securities expected a new wave of systematic gains in the tech sector, with focus areas including semiconductors, computing power and AI applications. It also pointed to upgrades in traditional industries and the global expansion of Chinese companies as additional investment priorities.

UBS Global Wealth Management's Chief

Investment Office, in its "Year Ahead 2026" report, highlighted China's technology sector as "a top global opportunity," noting that AI-driven innovation and rising investment are fueling strong growth, with earnings expected to rise significantly in 2026.

It noted that advanced manufacturing and tech self-reliance are emerging as key growth drivers for China's stock market in 2026, with rising R&D investment in the technology sector helping increase the digital economy's share of GDP.

Reflecting this momentum, the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology projects that China's core AI industry will surpass 1.2 trillion yuan in 2025, while the broader digital economy could exceed 70 trillion yuan by 2030.

Yang Delong, chief economist at First Seafront Fund, said the market's key drivers for 2026 – policy support and ongoing tech innovation in China – remain unchanged. As the market matures, increased off-exchange capital is expected to lift multiple sectors, moving beyond gains concentrated in tech, he added.

– Xinhua



Representatives attend the main dialogue session of the "Global Mayors Dialogue in Harbin" in Harbin, the capital city of Heilongjiang Province, yesterday. – Xinhua

Key breakthrough achieved in data simulation for Xuntian Space Telescope

BEIJING – China has made progress in scientific data simulation for the Chinese Space Station Telescope (CSST), also known as the Xuntian Space Telescope, marking a crucial step in preparing for the country's flagship space astronomy facility.

A collaborative Chinese research team built an end-to-end observation simulation suite for both the telescope's main optical system and various observation terminals.

The suite achieved high-quality, pixel-level simulation of observation data, which will be used for the comprehensive evaluation of the telescope's overall performance.

The research was published online yesterday in a special issue of the journal *Research in Astronomy and Astrophysics*, and is expected to lay the foundation for high-yield original scientific output after the telescope is launched.

The CSST is a major space astronomy facility planned as part of China's manned space program. Equipped with a 2-meter-aperture primary mirror, the telescope features a large field of view, high image quality and wide waveband coverage.

It is expected to facilitate major scientific discoveries across various astrophysical fields, including cosmology, the study of galaxies, the Milky Way, stars and planets, according to the

National Astronomical Observatories under the Chinese Academy of Sciences (NAOC), which led the study.

Scientific simulation is an indispensable procedure prior to the launch. It acts as a "digital rehearsal" for the mission, generating mock data to validate the process flow and optimize observation strategies before the launch.

"The work provides clear expectations for the CSST's capabilities in the direct imaging of exoplanets, offering technical guarantees for scientific output in this frontier field," said Ji Jianghui, a researcher at the Purple Mountain Observatory.

Li Cheng, a professor at the Department of Astronomy at Tsinghua University, noted that the papers systematically demonstrated the instrument performance and simulated data of the telescope's modules.

"This offers reliable data support for the development of data processing systems, scientific pre-research, and post-launch scientific operations," Li added.

The CSST is an important component of China's space station. After launch, it will fly independently in the same orbit as the space station and can dock with the station for supply, maintenance and upgrades.

– Xinhua

Govt revises regulations to enable affordable funeral service

BEIJING – The central government has revised a set of regulations on funeral and interment services, with the aim of regulating service management across the entire chain and helping the public access affordable and eco-friendly services.

The revised regulations, which Premier Li Qiang signed a State Council decree to promulgate, will take effect on March 30.

The document, containing eight chapters and 73 articles, underscores the public welfare nature of funeral and interment services and upholds principles of public benefit, frugality, civility and ecological conservation.

It highlights improved services, reform in funeral practices, and promotion of land-saving and eco-friendly burials.

The document clarifies the scope of basic public funeral services, stipulating that eligible services will be gradually included in the national basic public service system with dynamic adjustments. It also establishes a funding mechanism aligned with public demand for basic funeral services.

To curb excessive charges, the revised regulations introduce a service price list system, prohibiting fees outside the approved list, and require regulators to strengthen price monitoring and supervision while detailing price-related violations.

It further enhances full-chain oversight across services from issuing death certificates, funerals, burial and memorial activities, and calls for coordinated law enforcement.

The Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Civil Affairs said in a press release that the revisions are designed to tackle new challenges in the sector.

The statement noted that the revised regulations increase government investment, expand essential facility supply, reduce the financial burden on families, improve convenience-oriented services, and promote civilized, low-carbon and environmentally friendly practices in funeral and memorial activities.

– Xinhua

Wang Yi to visit four African nations, attend ceremony at AU headquarters

BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi will visit Ethiopia, Somalia, Tanzania and Lesotho upon invitation from January 7 to 12, the foreign ministry announced yesterday.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, will attend the launching ceremony of the China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges at the African Union (AU) headquarters, according to the announcement.

The year 2026 marks the 70th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between China and Africa. Wang's visit to the four African nations and his attendance at the launching ceremony of the China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges serve to continue the

fine tradition of China's foreign minister choosing Africa for the first overseas visit each year over the past 36 years, Mao Ning, a spokesperson for the ministry, said at a press briefing on Wednesday.

Ethiopia, Somalia, Tanzania and Lesotho are all China's strategic partners, and the purpose of Wang's visit is to deepen political mutual trust with all parties, she said.

The visit is also aimed at promoting the implementation of the outcomes of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, strengthening mutual learning between China and Africa as two major civilizations, and injecting new impetus into building an all-weather China-Africa community with a shared future for the new era, Mao said. – Xinhua

Chinese mainland names 2 die-hard 'Taiwan independence' secessionists

BEIJING – The Chinese mainland yesterday added two individuals to its list of die-hard “Taiwan independence” secessionists, bringing the total number on this list to 14, a spokesperson said.

Liu Shih-fang and Cheng Ying-yao were identified as the two individuals added, Chen Binhua, a spokesperson for the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office, told a press conference in Beijing.

Both Liu and Cheng serve as officials in Taiwan’s Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Liu heads Taiwan’s internal affairs body, while Cheng oversees education.

“Taiwan independence” secessionists are lawbreakers and criminals bent on splitting the country and sabotaging the development of cross-strait relations. They are

traitors to the Chinese nation who harm the interests of their fellow Chinese people, Chen said.

“We will take all necessary measures to punish them in accordance with the law and hold them accountable for life,” Chen stressed.

Chen also noted that the list of accomplices of “Taiwan independence” secessionists currently features 12 individuals.

Liu blatantly propagates “Taiwan independence” rhetoric, suppresses Taiwan residents who support or participate in cross-strait exchanges, persecutes mainland spouses living in Taiwan, and creates obstacles to cross-strait interactions, blocking cross-strait people-to-people communication channels, said the spokesperson.

Cheng brazenly peddles

provocative rhetoric advocating “Taiwan independence” and has organized the compilation of “Taiwan independence” teaching materials, poisoning the minds of young people in Taiwan and hindering educational exchanges and cooperation across the Strait, Chen noted.

Both Liu and Cheng hold entrenched “Taiwan independence” views, have made provocative statements and carried out despicable acts of seeking “Taiwan independence,” said the spokesperson.

In accordance with relevant laws and regulations, the mainland has decided to place Liu and Cheng on the list and to implement sanctions. Measures include banning Liu, Cheng, and their family members from entering the mainland as well as Hong Kong and Macao special

administrative regions, and restricting their affiliated organizations from cooperating with mainland entities or individuals, according to Chen.

He added that the sanctions also prevent any of their related companies or financial backers from seeking profits in the mainland. All other necessary punitive measures will be taken, and the two will be held legally accountable for life.

Chen encouraged compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait to continue providing information on any illegal activities involving Liu and Cheng.

Chen stressed that punishing a very small number of die-hard “Taiwan independence” secessionists in accordance with the law is aimed at safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial

integrity, as well as protecting the interests and welfare of Taiwan compatriots, and is not directed at the broader population of the island.

He urged Taiwan people to recognize the harmful intentions and dangerous agenda of the die-hard secessionists, and to consciously distance themselves from Liu, Cheng and others.

He called on Taiwan compatriots to firmly oppose separatist activities, support cross-strait exchanges and cooperation, promote integration, and work together to protect the shared homeland of the Chinese nation.

Chen warned that any “Taiwan independence” separatists who deliberately challenge the law, no matter where they are, will face legal punishment and be held legally accountable for life. – Xinhua

Irish Taoiseach says willing to deepen cooperation with China, enhance coordination in multilateral affairs

BEIJING – Taoiseach of Ireland Micheal Martin, currently on an official visit to China, expressed his willingness to deepen cooperation with China in economy, trade, green energy and sci-tech innovation, and to enhance coordination in multilateral affairs, during a joint interview with Chinese media in Beijing on Monday.

This visit marks the first by an Irish Taoiseach in 14 years and Martin’s first since taking office. He spoke highly of the achievements in bilateral relations in recent years and emphasized the crucial role of high-level dialogue.

“I first came here 20 years ago as enterprise minister and the trading volumes between our two countries have increased exponentially. So our relationship on the trading side has grown very strongly,” Martin said.

Looking ahead, Martin pointed to emerging areas such as the digital economy and the green transition. “We will be embarking on a major investment in offshore renewable energy,” he said, highlighting Ireland’s plan to leverage its abundant wind resources, which he said would present new opportunities for Chinese enterprises.

Martin highlighted Ireland’s unique position as the only English-speaking country in the Eurozone and the European Union, which provides strong access to the vast European consumer market. He welcomed more Chinese investment in sectors like financial services, infrastructure, and biomedicine, and expressed the hope for Irish companies to further explore the Chinese market.

The Chinese market is very important to Ireland, particularly in Ireland’s competitive sectors such as agri-food, dairy and life sciences, where cooperation can be strengthened, he added.

Martin also spoke of the thriving people-to-people exchanges between

the two countries. Irish performances like Riverdance, traditional music by bands like the Chieftains, and pop songs by Westlife, the Irish pop band, have gained great popularity in China. Growing literary connections and easier direct flights are helping bring the two peoples even closer together. In education, he mentioned that many successful partnerships have been set up between universities in both countries.

On global challenges, Martin stressed that dialogue is key to building strong political relations and properly managing differences, adding that disputes should be resolved peacefully. “Both China and Ireland are multilateralists at their core. We are strong participatory members of the United Nations (UN) and we work hard to fulfill our obligations to the international community,” he said.

Regarding the multilateral trading system, Martin called for strengthening the authority of the UN and supporting its reform agenda, as well as acknowledged the role of the WTO in resolving trade disputes. “We are against tariffs. We think tariffs are ultimately damaging to the world economy,” he noted.

As Ireland prepares to hold the rotating EU presidency in the second half of the year, Martin highlighted that while EU member states maintain bilateral ties with China, Ireland itself enjoys a robust economic partnership and a rich history of cultural engagements with the country. “We believe a strong bilateral relationship is entirely complementary to a strong EU-China relationship,” he stated.

“I think that illustrates the potential of the future when there’s mutual respect, we can share knowledge and capacities to get a better and larger outcome,” Martin said, expressing confidence in the potential for future cooperation between Ireland and China. – Xinhua

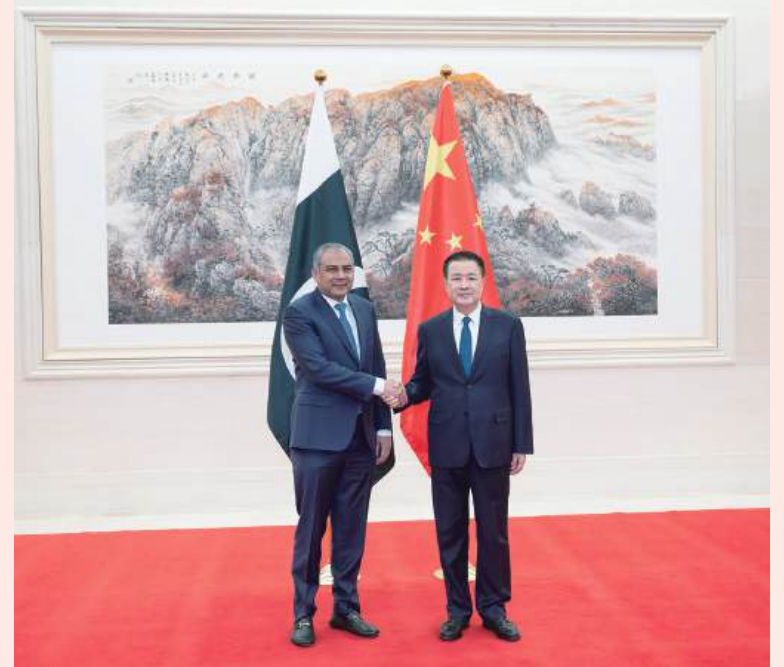
China’s police chief meets with Pakistan’s minister for interior, narcotics control

BEIJING – State Councilor and Minister of Public Security Wang Xiaohong met yesterday with Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi, Pakistan’s Minister for Interior and Narcotics Control.

Wang said that China stands ready to work with Pakistan to thoroughly implement the important consensus of the two countries’ leaders, strengthen exchanges at all levels, and crack down on terrorism as well as on telecommunications and online fraud.

He added that China is willing to work with Pakistan to deepen cooperation in personnel, projects, institution security and law enforcement capacity building, so as to jointly tackle risks and challenges of all kinds, uphold the two countries’ national security and social stability, and contribute to building an even closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era.

Naqvi said Pakistan is ready to deepen law enforcement



State Councilor and Minister of Public Security Wang Xiaohong (right) shakes hands with Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi, Pakistan’s Minister for Interior and Narcotics Control, in Beijing yesterday.

– Xinhua

and security cooperation with China, and will take further measures to protect the safety of

Chinese personnel, projects and institutions in Pakistan.

– Xinhua

MOC launches anti-dumping probe into imported Japanese dichlorosilane

BEIJING – The Ministry of Commerce (MOC) announced yesterday that it has initiated an anti-dumping investigation into imports of dichlorosilane originating from Japan.

The probe was launched in response to an application submitted by a Chinese company operating in electronic materials on behalf of the domestic dichlorosilane industry, the ministry said in a statement.

In response to a media query, a spokesperson for the ministry said the preliminary evidence filed by the applicant indicates that from 2022 to 2024, the volume of dichlorosilane imports from

Japan showed an overall upward trend, while prices registered a cumulative decline of 31 percent. The preliminary evidence shows that these dumped imports have caused damages to the domestic industry, said the spokesperson.

Dichlorosilane is primarily used in the production of various types of chips.

Upon receiving the application, the investigating authority reviewed it in accordance with relevant Chinese laws and regulations and in compliance with the rules of the World Trade Organization, according to the ministry.

The review concluded that the application meets the

requirements for initiating an anti-dumping investigation, and a decision was made to proceed with the investigation, it said.

The anti-dumping probe will look at dichlorosilane imported from Japan between July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2025. It will also investigate any damage done to the Chinese dichlorosilane industry between Jan. 1, 2022 and June 30, 2025.

The investigating authority will carry out the probe in accordance with the law, ensure the rights of all interested parties, and render an objective and impartial ruling based on the findings, said the spokesperson. – Xinhua

Indonesia touts 'victory' in achieving rice self-sufficiency

KARAWANG — President Prabowo Subianto said yesterday that Indonesia's rice production met all domestic demand, hailing a landmark achievement for food security — one of his key campaign promises.

In a speech to farmers in Karawang, east of the capital Jakarta, Prabowo celebrated an "important victory" in achieving rice self-sufficiency within just over a year since he entered office in October 2024.

"No nation is truly free if food is not available to its people. A nation cannot be independent if its food supply depends on other countries," he said.

Indonesia last achieved rice self-sufficiency in 2008, and before that in the mid-1980s.

Rice is a staple food in the Southeast Asian nation of 286 million people.

According to the National Food Agency, a government body

aimed at advancing food security, Indonesia produced 34.71 million tonnes of rice in 2025, exceeding annual consumption needs of 31.19 million tonnes.

"Today is a happy day for me," said Prabowo, who at the start of his administration set a four-year target for rice self-sufficiency.

It was achieved years ahead of schedule, with the government citing increased subsidies for farmers and streamlined regulations.

"If many critics sneer and say we can't achieve food self-sufficiency, today we prove that we are food self-sufficient," Prabowo said.

According to Statistics Indonesia, Southeast Asia's largest economy used to import rice from major exporters Vietnam, Thailand and India.

But according to the government, Indonesia did not import any rice at all in 2025.

On the campaign trail, Prabowo put food security and agricultural

self-sufficiency at the forefront.

After assuming the presidency he launched a free meal initiative aimed at tackling child malnutrition, which he said provided nutritious food to 55 million people.

But critics have argued that Prabowo's flagship programme took away financial resources from other important initiatives, and pointed to more than 10,000 cases of food poisoning linked to the free meal scheme. — AFP

Ex-governor sent over 1,000 inappropriate texts, Japan probe finds

TOKYO — A former governor in Japan accused of sexual harassment allegedly sent more than 1,000 inappropriate text messages to staff, according to an investigation seen by AFP yesterday.

Tatsuji Sugimoto, 63, resigned last month, part way into his second term as governor of Fukui prefecture in central Japan after allegations of serial sexual harassment emerged from a whistleblower system.

In emails with some 6,000 officials and face-to-face interviews with 14 of them, lawyers found that "the number of text messages that corroborate sexual harassment is more than 1,000", the report said.

They included messages like "I

won't say anything about a physical relationship" and "Do you like sexual things?", the report added.

There were also several cases of alleged physical contact such as touching a thigh or buttocks, it said, although Sugimoto denied this to the lawyers.

"It appears that Mr Sugimoto engaged in so-called groping, and it cannot be ruled out that his conduct may constitute the criminal offence of non-consensual indecent acts," the report said.

Even after apologising to victims, Sugimoto in some cases resumed sending messages, which "may also constitute an illegal act" that violates the so-called anti-stalking act, it said.

"Even taking into account Mr Sugimoto's expression of his remorse and apologies toward the victim... and that he resigned from the governorship, we must still conclude that Mr Sugimoto bears grave responsibility," the report said.

Japan ranked at 118th among 148 nations in the World Economic Forum's gender gap index in 2025.

The global #MeToo movement failed to gain much ground in Japan although there have been a handful of high-profile cases in recent years.

These include Shiori Ito, whose Oscar-nominated documentary "Black Box Diaries" about her alleged rape by a TV reporter finally began screening in Japan last month. — AFP



Japan's ambassador to France Hideo Suzuki arrives at the Elysee Palace in Paris, on Tuesday, prior to the Coalition of the Willing summit on security guarantees for Ukraine. The summit of the group of Ukraine supporters dubbed the "Coalition of the Willing" is the latest of several meetings planned for the new year as diplomatic efforts to end Europe's deadliest conflict since World War II have gained pace in recent weeks.

— AFP

Surgery 'not good option' for 100-year-old ex-PM Mahathir: son

Isabelle Leong

KUALALUMPUR — Malaysia's 100-year-old former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad will not undergo surgery for a hip fracture sustained from a fall at home due to his age, his son said yesterday.

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

He was taken conscious by ambulance to the National Heart Institute in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday after the fall at his home, his aide Sufi Yusoff told AFP.

Doctors confirmed a fracture to his right hip and the former premier was expected to stay in the hospital "for the next few weeks for treatment and observation", according to Sufi.

The patriarch's son Mukhriz yesterday said Mahathir fell inside the house after his daily brisk walking exercise.

"Especially considering his age, which has now reached 100... therefore, surgery is not a good option," Mukhriz said in a video posted on his political party's WhatsApp group chat.

"As such, we have been advised by hospital specialists for him to undergo a standard rehabilitation process, which will take some time.

"The goal, of course, is for him to return to his usual state of health and to be able to continue carrying out his duties as he has done all this while," he added.

Mukhriz also thanked those who conveyed their well wishes as well as prayers, and appealed for privacy.

"I plead with everyone to give Tun Mahathir the space to rest and to fully recover and heal," he said.

On Tuesday, Mahathir's daughter Marina was quoted by national news agency Bernama as saying that her father's injury was "serious but not dangerous".

In a text message to AFP, she added: "Dad's okay, but hip fractures are always a pain regardless of how old you are. At 100, any fall, any fracture is bad... so it will take time to heal."

The political veteran has previously undergone bypass surgeries for heart problems.

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

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

Vietnam arrests 35 in US\$350 million fraud sweep

HANOI — Police in Vietnam said they broke up a major online gambling and fraud ring, arresting 35 people accused of scamming victims out of US\$350 million.

The arrests took place on December 31 across five northern municipalities including the capital Hanoi, according to police in Hung Yen province.

The "suspects were using advanced technology for fraud and online gambling", police said in a statement Tuesday.

The gang had used social media to advertise goods for sale, but failed to deliver them and deleted their profiles once victims had transferred funds.

The stolen money was then transferred to online gambling accounts to avoid detection by authorities.

Police confiscated five cars and 42 mobile phones during the operation and froze 125 accounts at 16 banks.

In mid-December, police from northern Lang Son province arrested 22 Vietnamese suspects in Cambodia on similar fraud charges in a joint operation between the two countries.

There were 3,000 victims in that case, scammed out of US\$285 million.

Since 2020, Vietnamese victims have lost US\$1.5 billion in more than 24,000 online fraud cases, police said late last year.

Across Southeast Asia, criminal gangs have used casinos, hotels and fortified compounds as bases to carry out sophisticated cybercams, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.

Cambodia hosts dozens of scam centres with tens of thousands of people perpetrating online scams — some willingly and others trafficked — in a multibillion-dollar illicit industry. — AFP

Magnitude 6.4 quake strikes off southern Philippines, no tsunami alert: USGS

MANILA — A 6.4-magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of the southern Philippines yesterday, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) said, but there was no tsunami warning or immediate reports of damage.

The quake, first reported as a magnitude 6.7, hit at a depth of 58.5 kilometres about 27 kilometres east of the town of Santiago on the island of Mindanao, according to the USGS.

Nash Paragas, a rescuer in the eastern province of Davao Oriental, told AFP there were no immediate reports of casualties or damage.

"There was shaking. I saw some of the cars moving, but I think it was only for a short time, around five seconds," he said.

Eastern Mindanao was rocked by a pair of earthquakes of 7.4 and 6.7 magnitude in October that killed at least eight people.

These followed a magnitude 6.9 quake days earlier that killed 76 people and destroyed or damaged 72,000 houses in Cebu province in central Philippines, according to government figures.

Earthquakes are a near-daily occurrence in the Philippines, which is situated on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", an arc of intense seismic activity stretching from Japan through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin. — AFP



A woman and her baby use a rope to cross a river in the aftermath of flash floods that destroyed adjacent villages in Ketol, Indonesia's Aceh highland province on Tuesday.

— AFP

Wild elephant kills 6 in India's Jharkhand, taking death toll to 15 in week

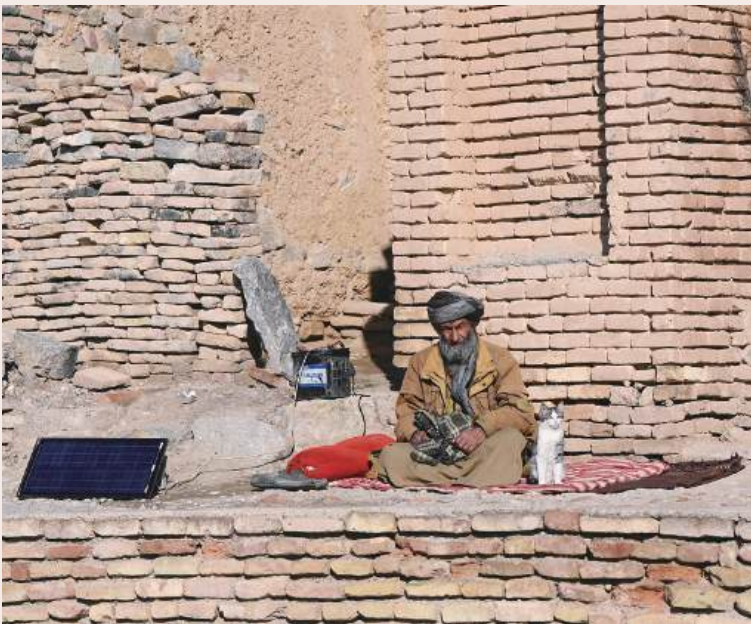
NEW DELHI – At least six people, including four members of a family, were trampled to death by a wild elephant in two separate attacks in the eastern Indian state of Jharkhand, officials said yesterday.

The attacks took place late on Tuesday in Sowan village of Goilkera block in West Singhbhum district. The victims were sleeping inside their houses when the elephant barged in, smashed through the walls and trampled the people inside.

Four people injured in the attacks are undergoing treatment in the hospital.

Local news outlet *The Avenue Mail* said that with the latest tragedy, the death toll from elephant attacks in Chaibasa region has climbed to 15 within just a week.

Wildlife experts say mass urbanization, denudation of forests, encroachment of forestland, vanishing of buffer zones in the forests, etc., are some of the reasons that push wild animals into residential areas. – *Xinhua*



An Afghan man sits with a cat, at a graveyard on the outskirts of Herat province yesterday. – AFP

Heatwave sweeps S Australia, triggering bushfire alerts

MELBOURNE – An intense heatwave swept southern Australia yesterday, with temperatures in multiple locations soaring above 40 degrees Celsius.

In central Melbourne, the mercury rose to 42 degrees Celsius yesterday afternoon, making it the hottest day since January 2020.

People flocked to the beaches to seek a touch of coolness while Ambulance Victoria said they had experienced a 12-percent increase in workload yesterday.

Ambulance Victoria reminded the public to keep hydrated, avoid going out during the hottest part of the day, and use air conditioning and fans if necessary.

Meanwhile, residents of Bungil, Granya and Thologolong, small towns over 280 km northeast of Melbourne, have been ordered to evacuate or take shelter due to the threat posed by nearby bushfires.

An alert issued through the VicEmergency service said that a fire to the east of the three towns is out of control and could impact properties.

“Leaving immediately is the safest option, before conditions become too dangerous. Emergency services may not be able to help you if you decide to stay,” the warning said.

Chris Hardman from Forest

Fire Management Victoria said at a press conference yesterday afternoon that over 300 firefighters and around 12 aircraft were working to contain the fire, which has burned through about 1,000 hectares of land.

A separate warning for the towns of Longwood, Longwood East, Ruffy, Tarcombe and Upton Hill, around 120 km north of Melbourne, said that a bushfire in Longwood is moving southeast and that it is too late to safely leave the area.

Residents in the area have been advised to immediately take shelter in a room that has two exits and close all exterior doors, windows and vents.

“You must take shelter before the fire arrives. The extreme heat is likely to kill you well before the flames reach you,” the warning said.

Jason Heffernan from the Country Fire Authority said yesterday that authorities expect fire conditions to be at the “upper end of extreme” across Victoria tomorrow when temperatures are again forecast to reach 40 degrees Celsius.

It will be the worst heatwave since the disastrous Black Summer bushfire season in 2019-20 when an estimated 1 billion animals were killed and 33 people directly died of the fires. – *Xinhua*

Landmines destroy limbs and lives on Bangladesh-Myanmar border

Sheikh Sabiha Alam

BANDARBAN – In the dense hill forests along Bangladesh's border with war-torn Myanmar, villagers are losing limbs to landmines, casualties of a conflict not of their making.

Ali Hossain, 40, was collecting firewood in early 2025 when a blast shattered his life.

“I went into the jungle with fellow villagers. Suddenly, there was an explosion, and my leg was blown off,” he told AFP. “I screamed at the top of my voice.”

Neighbours rushed to stem the spurting blood.

“They picked me up, gathered my severed leg and took me to hospital,” he said.

In Ashartoli, a small settlement in Bandarban district – the village name translates as “haven of hope” – the weapons of a foreign war have turned forests, farms and footpaths deadly.

Bangladesh's 271-kilometre eastern border with Myanmar cuts through forests, much of it unmarked, as well as rivers.

It is crossed daily by villagers, as their families have done for generations, for collecting firewood or smalltime trading.

Surgeons chopped Hossain's leg off above the knee.

“My wife had to carry me on her back,” he said, gesturing towards the steep hillside around his home, as he recalled the months after the blast.

A year later, Hossain walks with an artificial leg and a crutch, but he cannot return to his job on a rubber plantation.

Needing 300 taka (US\$2.50) a day for medicine, his two young sons now take on the dangerous task of collecting firewood after school.

‘My whole life’

Similar stories echo across the border region.

“My father and forefathers collected wood from the jungle,” said Mohammad Abu Taleb, 47. “I learnt no other trade.”

He crossed unwittingly into Myanmar.

“I stepped on a pile of dry leaves, and there was an explosion,”



This photograph taken on December 19, 2025 shows Ali Hossain, who lost his leg to a landmine while collecting firewood, leaning on a crutch as he walks home at the Bangladesh-Myanmar frontier village of Naikhongchhari in Bandarban district. – AFP

he said, leaning on a crutch. “It took away my whole life.”

His 10-year-old son has since dropped out of school to help support the family.

Taleb said trips to repair his artificial leg and attend medical checkups cost around US\$80 – an impossible burden for a family struggling to survive.

Nurul Amin, 23, lost his leg while attempting to bring a cow across the border, a memory blurred by pain.

“They carried me on their shoulders to the hospital,” he recalls, saying he was more worried that his monthly income had now fallen to around US\$25 to US\$30.

“That’s not enough for a family,” he said. “I have no other way to survive.”

‘Cruelty’

Myanmar is the world's most dangerous country for landmine casualties, according to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which has detailed the “massive” and growing use of the weapons, banned by many countries.

It recorded more than 2,000 casualties in Myanmar in 2024, the latest full statistics available – double the total reported the year before.

“The use of mines appeared to significantly increase in 2024-2025,” it said in its Landmine Monitor report, highlighting “an increase in the number of mine

victims, particularly near the border” with Bangladesh.

Bangladesh accuses Myanmar's military and rival armed forces of planting the mines.

Arakan Army fighters – one of the many factions challenging the junta's rule – control swathes of jungle across the border with Myanmar.

More than a million Rohingya refugees who fled Myanmar also live in Bangladesh's border regions – caught between the warring military and separatist groups.

Bangladesh police say that at least 28 people were injured by landmines in 2025.

In November, a Bangladesh border guard was killed when a landmine tore off both his legs.

“This cruelty cannot be legitimised,” said Lieutenant Colonel Kafil Uddin Kayes, a local Border Guard Bangladesh commander.

Bangladesh's border force has put up warning signs and red flags, and conducts regular mine-sweeping operations.

But villagers say warnings offer little protection when survival depends on entering forests seeded with explosives, leaving communities in Bangladesh to pay the price of war.

“The population is increasing, and people are moving closer to the border, as we have farmlands there,” said 42-year-old farmer Dudu Mia.

“Planting landmines cannot be the solution. It can't go on like this.” – *AFP*

Australia's Antarctic deep drill cuts 1st ice core, eyes million-year climate record

MELBOURNE – The Australian Antarctic Division's custom-built drill has collected its first deep ice core, marking a major step toward recovering a 1-million-year-old climate record.

The ice core drill extracted a nearly 1-meter core at a depth of 151 meters at Dome C North, about 1,200 km inland from the Casey research station, one of Australia's three research outposts in Antarctica, a statement of the Australian Antarctic Program said yesterday.

The milestone follows seven years of development of the 8.4-meter-long drill, designed to drill ice more than 3,000

meters deep and operate in temperatures below minus 55 degrees Celsius and under extreme pressure, it said.

The operation is part of Australia's Million Year Ice Core (MYIC) project, which aims to extract ice all the way to the Antarctic bedrock, 3,000 meters below.

The ice will contain trapped gases and chemicals providing a continuous record of Earth's past climate, extending well beyond the current 1.2-million-year ice core climate record, scientists said.

MYIC science lead Joel Pedro said the full-length ice core could help explain a major shift in ice

age cycles and improve climate predictions.

“An ice core record of over one million years can help us answer why that shift in the climate state occurred, and that will provide really important information to test models and better predict climate in the future,” Pedro said.

Field teams have been working since late November to set up the remote site, including installing a 4-tonne winch to handle the deep drill.

Drilling will continue until late January before the onset of colder conditions halts work, according to the MYIC project team. – *Xinhua*

UN accuses Israel of West Bank 'apartheid'

Nina Larson

GENEVA – The United Nations yesterday said decades-long discrimination and segregation of Palestinians by Israel in the West Bank were intensifying, and called on the country to end its “apartheid system”.

In a new report, slammed by Israel, the UN rights office said “systematic discrimination” against Palestinians across the occupied Palestinian territories had “drastically deteriorated” in recent years.

“There is a systematic asphyxiation of the rights of Palestinians in the West Bank,” UN rights chief Volker Türk said in a statement.

“Whether accessing water, school, rushing to hospital, visiting family or friends, or harvesting olives – every aspect of life for Palestinians in the West Bank is controlled and curtailed by Israel’s discriminatory laws, policies and practices,” he added.

“This is a particularly severe form of racial discrimination and segregation, that resembles the kind of apartheid system we have seen before.”

A number of independent experts affiliated with the UN have described the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories as “apartheid” but this marks the first time a UN rights chief has applied the term.

Israel’s diplomatic mission to the UN in Geneva slammed the report’s “absurd and distorted accusations of racial discrimination” against Israel, charging it exemplified the UN rights office’s “inherently politically driven fixation ... on vilifying Israel”.

Mounting settler violence

The report said the Israeli authorities “treat Israeli settlers and Palestinians residing in the West Bank under two distinct bodies of law and policies, resulting in unequal treatment on a range of critical issues”.

“Palestinians continue to be subjected to large-scale confiscation of land and deprivation of access to resources,” it added.

This had led to “dispossessing them of their lands and homes, alongside other forms of systemic discrimination, including criminal prosecution in military courts during which their due process and fair trial rights are systematically violated”.

Türk demanded yesterday that Israel “repeal all laws, policies and practices that perpetuate systemic discrimination against Palestinians based on race, religion or ethnic origin”.

The discrimination was compounded by continuing and escalating settler violence, in many cases “with the acquiescence, support and participation of Israel’s security forces”, the rights office said.

More than 500,000 Israelis currently live in settlements in the West Bank, occupied since 1967 and home to around three million Palestinians.

Violence has risen in recent years, surging especially since Hamas’s October 7, 2023 attack, which triggered the Gaza war.

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

According to official Israeli figures, at least 44 Israelis, both

soldiers and civilians, have been killed in Palestinian attacks or Israeli military operations in the same period.

‘Almost complete impunity’

Since the Gaza war began, Israeli authorities had also “further expanded the use of unlawful force, arbitrary detention and torture”, the report said.

Increased “repression of civil society and undue restrictions on media freedoms [and] severe movement restrictions” had also characterised “an unprecedented deterioration of the human rights situation” in the West Bank, it said.

There had also been rapid expansions of settlements, considered illegal under international law, even as unlawful killings of Palestinians were taking place “with almost complete impunity”, the report warned.

Of the more than 1,500 killings of Palestinians that took place between the start of 2017 and September 30 last year, Israeli authorities had opened just 112 investigations, resulting in only one conviction, it pointed out.

The report said it had found “reasonable grounds to believe that this separation, segregation, and subordination is intended to be permanent... to maintain oppression and domination of Palestinians”.

This, it stressed, amounts to a violation of an international anti-racism convention, “which prohibits racial segregation and apartheid”.

The UN rights office yesterday urged Israel to end its “unlawful presence in the occupied Palestinian territory, including by dismantling all settlements and evacuating all settlers, and to respect the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination”. – AFP



Altar boys carry candles as Christian worshippers attend a Christmas service at the Greek Orthodox Church of Saint Porphyrius in the Old City of Gaza City yesterday. – AFP

Hamas says search resumes for last Israeli hostage body in Gaza

GAZA CITY, Palestinian Territories – Hamas officials told AFP that search operations for the remains of the last Israeli hostage held in Gaza resumed yesterday after a two-week pause due to bad weather.

Israel has previously said it is awaiting the return of Ran Gvili’s body before beginning talks on the second phase of the fragile ceasefire agreement with Hamas which came into effect in October.

A Hamas official told AFP yesterday that the Palestinian Islamist movement’s armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, “accompanied by Red Cross teams, are resuming today search operations for the body of the last Israeli captive in the Zeitun neighbourhood in southeastern Gaza City.”

Another official said that search operations had been suspended over the past two weeks due to stormy weather and heavy rain, which had prevented excavators and other machinery from reaching Zeitun.

“The search operations resumed today, and we hope to recover the body to close the exchange file,” the official added, urging pressure on Israel to complete the first stage of the ceasefire agreement and open

the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt.

Of the 251 people seized during Hamas’s October 7, 2023 attack on Israel that triggered the Gaza war, only the body of Gvili remains in the Palestinian territory.

Gvili, a non-commissioned officer in the Israeli police’s elite Yassam unit, was killed in action on the day of the attack and his body was taken to Gaza.

The Israeli group representing the families of hostages held in Gaza said in a statement that it welcomed “the pressure that led to the operational decision to resume search efforts” for Gvili’s body.

“After a difficult month of uncertainty and feeling helpless, we are deeply relieved that search teams have returned to the field,” Gvili’s parents were quoted as saying in the statement from the Hostages and Missing Families Forum.

“It’s time for Hamas to understand there are no free passes. The Rafah crossing should not reopen until our Rani comes home,” they added.

“We call on the mediators to use all their leverage to get this deal done and end our suffering. Rani, we’re waiting for you. We won’t rest until you’re back.” – AFP

‘Dire’ financial crisis forces UNRWA to fire 571 Gazan staff

GENEVA – The UN’s beleaguered agency for Palestinian refugees said yesterday that a “dire” financial crisis had this week forced it to fire hundreds of Gazan staff who had left the territory.

“On Tuesday, 571 local UNRWA staff, outside Gaza, were informed that they were being separated from the agency with immediate effect,” a spokesperson told AFP in an email.

For more than seven decades, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees has provided aid and assistance to Palestinian refugees across Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria.

But the agency has seen the voluntary contributions it relies on dwindle as it has become the focus of increasingly harsh Israeli criticism and attacks, causing what the spokesperson called an “unprecedented financial crisis”.

While the work UNRWA was mandated to do cost around US\$880 million in 2025, the agency received

only around US\$570 million in contributions, the spokesperson said.

“As things stand, we expect a substantial shortfall in 2026,” they added.

All of the staff affected by this week’s announcement had originally worked in the Gaza Strip, but had managed to leave early in the war sparked by Hamas’s deadly attacks inside Israel on October 7, 2023.

‘Intense defamation’

Most had been unable to carry out their duties remotely since leaving Gaza, but had remained on UNRWA’s payroll until last March, when they were placed on exceptional unpaid leave, the spokesperson said.

“The affected staff have been without pay for over 10 months, and it is impossible to foresee when or if they could resume their duties due to circumstances entirely beyond UNRWA’s control,” the spokesperson said.

“Recognising that UNRWA’s financial situation remains dire, the

agency took a decision which at least allows them to access financial resources rapidly, including separation indemnities.”

The spokesperson stressed that UNRWA, which has seen more than 300 of its employees killed in Gaza since the start of the war, still had around 12,000 staff working inside the Palestinian territory.

Israel has barred UNRWA from operating on its soil, accusing the agency of providing cover for Hamas militants, and claiming that some of the agency’s employees took part in the October 7 attack.

A series of investigations found some “neutrality-related issues” at UNRWA, but stressed that Israel had not provided conclusive evidence for its headline allegation.

Tuesday’s decision was “extremely difficult and [came] as a result of an extremely challenging financial outlook, as well as intense defamation campaigns to undermine UNRWA and deter its donors”, the spokesperson said. – AFP



Members of the Lebanese army stand in front of a car targeted by an Israeli airstrike on the road of the southern town of Jouaiya yesterday. Israeli strikes on south Lebanon killed two people on Tuesday, as Israel said it targeted Hezbollah operatives, a day before a new meeting of the committee monitoring a year-long ceasefire. – AFP

Frenchwoman accused of libel over Nazi ‘collaborator’ family novel

Alexandre Marchand

PARIS, France – A historian of the Nazi occupation of France was being sued yesterday by her own relatives for alleged libel after she promoted her first novel as inspired by her family’s history.

Cécile Desprairies, 68, says her debut novel “The Propagandist” – published in English last year – is inspired by her own childhood, but family members have accused her of lying and want the title removed from bookstores.

“It’s a fact: I grew up in a collaborationist family. They all were – to varying degrees,” Desprairies said after the book came out in French in 2023.

She was not present in court yesterday, but a lawyer represented her.

In the novel, the narrator’s family all have different names to those of the author’s real-life relatives, but the plaintiffs – the author’s brother and another relative – say they are clearly identifiable.

In a legal complaint against Desprairies and her publisher seen by AFP, they accuse her of libel against her mother, great-uncle and half-brother of her grandmother.

Both deny the charges.

The narrator’s mother – who is described as a “fervent collaborator” and propagandist during the Nazi occupation of part of France from 1940 to 1944 – was inspired by the writer’s own mother, they argue.

The same goes for the great-uncle and half-brother of her grandmother, and the plaintiffs. They filed their complaint as direct descendants of the alleged victims, less than three months after the book’s publication in French.

“The author’s resentment toward the targeted individuals

permeates the entire work, which is conceived as a genuine act of family vengeance,” they said.

The plaintiffs argue the writer acted in “utter bad faith” and there is an “absence of evidence” for the alleged collaboration of their relatives with the Nazis.

‘Rot-riddled family romance’

The book received rave reviews when it came out in English last year.

The *Financial Times* called the novel “a harrowing but elegantly constructed rot-riddled family romance”, while the *New Yorker* described it as “a deeply personal act of expiation”.

Desprairies has argued that since she wrote a novel and not a historical essay, some fiction is allowed.

“Most of the protagonists I was able to draw inspiration from were dead, so there’s a liberation of speech,” she told French television in 2023.

She added that “fiction was the only way to account for an era, for its relationship to the past and to history”.

She says she found a Nazi propaganda poster in the attic of the family home, and sent a scanned copy to the judiciary, according to the complaint.

But the plaintiffs said the poster bears the same tear marks as one conserved at a Paris library, a copy of which can be downloaded.

She has also sent the judiciary a photograph of three people she said included her mother on a mountain in winter, arguing it showed “clear attachment to the sports values advocated by the Reich”.

Desprairies has a new novel published by another publisher, titled “La Fille du Doute” (“The Daughter of Doubt”) coming out in French next week. – AFP

Trump says doubts ‘NATO would be there for us’ if needed

WASHINGTON – US President Donald Trump, whose renewed threats to seize Greenland from NATO member Denmark have rattled the transatlantic alliance, said yesterday he doubted allies would “be there for us if we really needed them.”

“We will always be there for NATO, even if they won’t be there for us,” he wrote on his Truth Social platform, a day after the White House said it was not ruling out military intervention to acquire Greenland.

In his post, Trump repeated his frequent assertion that many members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation had failed to meet military spending commitments until he intervened.

“The USA was, foolishly, paying for them! I, respectfully, got them to 5% GDP, AND THEY PAY, immediately,” he wrote.

But the US leader added that the NATO member countries are “all my friends.”

Trump, who has cast himself as a global peacemaker, also touched on a personal grievance.

“I single-handedly ENDED 8 WARS, and Norway, a NATO Member, foolishly chose not to give me the Noble Peace Prize,” he said, misspelling the name of the prestigious award that instead went to Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado.

Trump concluded by saying that Russia and China have “zero fear of NATO” without the United States as part of the alliance.

“The only Nation that China and Russia fear and respect is the DJT REBUILT U.S.A.” he said, referring to himself by his initials.

Trump’s designs on the mineral-rich, self-governing Danish territory of Greenland has set off alarm bells among European NATO members, who see such a move as an existential threat to the alliance. – AFP

US seizes Russia-flagged oil tanker chased to North Atlantic



The oil tanker *Marinera*, formerly known as *Bella 1* photographed at sea in the Singapore Strait on March 18, 2025. The United States military yesterday announced the seizure of the Russian-flagged oil tanker in the North Atlantic for sanctions violations, bringing an end to a multi-week pursuit by American forces. The seizure of the ship, which evaded being boarded near Venezuela, was a joint operation between the Department of Homeland Security and US military personnel, the US European Command, which is responsible for the region, said in a post on X. – AFP

WASHINGTON – The United States yesterday seized a Russian-flagged oil tanker in the North Atlantic after pursuing it from off the coast of Venezuela, in an operation set to ratchet up tensions with Moscow.

US officials say the tanker is part of a so-called shadow fleet that carries oil for countries such as Venezuela, Russia and Iran in violation of US sanctions.

The ship had thwarted an earlier attempt to board it last month near Venezuela, where a US raid on Saturday toppled the country’s authoritarian president, Nicolás Maduro.

“The vessel was seized in the North Atlantic pursuant to a warrant issued by a US federal court,” US European Command, which oversees American forces in the region, said in a statement on X.

After the operation, Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth posted that the US blockade on Venezuelan oil was in full effect “anywhere in the world.”

Shortly after confirming the successful North Atlantic seizure, the US military announced a second sanctioned tanker ship had

been seized in the Caribbean Sea.

US special forces at the weekend snatched Maduro and his wife from Caracas and flew them to New York to face trial on drug charges.

Since then, Trump has said that the United States will “run” Venezuela and US companies will control its critical oil industry.

The North Atlantic operation came despite Russia sending a submarine to escort the empty tanker, saying the vessel was sailing under the Russian flag and was far from the US coast.

“For reasons unclear to us, the Russian vessel is receiving heightened attention from the US and NATO militaries – attention that is clearly disproportionate to its peaceful status,” Russia’s foreign ministry said, prior to the seizure.

Venezuelan oil

The vessel, formerly known as the *Bella-1*, switched its registration to Russia, changed its name to the *Marinera* and the tanker’s crew reportedly painted a Russian flag on the tanker.

The tanker had been en route to the South American country but

was not carrying cargo before it evaded the US blockade. It has been under US sanctions since 2024 over alleged ties to Iran and Hezbollah.

Trump said on Tuesday that Venezuela will hand over tens of millions of barrels of oil to the United States after Maduro was seized.

Trump said 30-50 million barrels of “high-quality, sanctioned” Venezuelan crude will be shipped to US ports, with the revenue – perhaps more than US\$2 billion at current market prices – placed under his personal control.

It was not clear whether Venezuela’s new ruler – interim president Delcy Rodríguez – had agreed to hand over the oil, how the plan would work, or what its legal basis would be.

Rodríguez – a long-time member of Maduro’s inner circle as vice president and energy minister – has vowed cooperation with the United States amid fears that Trump could pursue wider regime change.

Trump has said Washington is now “in charge” of the South American nation and has vowed a new doctrine of US dominance in the western hemisphere. – AFP, MPD

US should topple Chechen leader after Maduro: Zelensky

KYIV, Ukraine – The United States should pressure Russia by “carrying out some sort of operation” to remove Chechen head Ramzan Kadyrov from power, just like it did with Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said yesterday.

In comments to journalists, Zelensky said the operation to remove Maduro showed that Washington had the power to influence Moscow if it really wished, arguing that deposing Kadyrov would make Russian President Vladimir Putin “think twice” about his ongoing offensive on Ukraine.

US special forces snatched Maduro and his wife from Caracas on Saturday, shocking

Washington’s allies and drawing condemnation from Venezuela’s partner Moscow.

Kadyrov, the leader of Russia’s Muslim-majority region of Chechnya since 2007, is one of Putin’s most vocal supporters and sent thousands of soldiers to fight in Ukraine.

“They need to put pressure on Russia. They have the tools, they know how. And when they really want to, they can find them,” Zelensky said of the United States.

“Here’s an example with Maduro. They carried out an operation... Everyone can see the result, the whole world can see. They did it promptly. Let them carry out some sort of operation with, what’s his name – Kadyrov,” Zelensky said.

Hours after the US operation to capture Maduro, Zelensky had joked that Putin himself should also be targeted.

“If you can do that with dictators, then the United States knows what to do next,” he said at a press conference in Kyiv over the weekend, laughing and smiling.

Ukraine, which has been battling a Russian military offensive for almost four years, has long claimed its partners, including the United States, have not put enough pressure on the Kremlin to end the war.

Kadyrov, who has ruled Chechnya with an iron fist for almost two decades, has consistently advocated for Moscow to use the most extreme options in Ukraine – even floating the idea of a nuclear strike. – AFP

Venezuela's new leader says 'no foreign power' running country

Javier Tovar and Danny Kemp

CARACAS – Venezuela's interim leader Delcy Rodríguez insisted on Tuesday no foreign power was governing her country, even as US President Donald Trump announced Caracas will be swiftly turning over millions of barrels of oil to the United States.

Rodríguez, who was vice president under toppled leader Nicolás Maduro, has given mixed signals about how much she is prepared to cooperate with Trump, at times sounding conciliatory, at others defiant.

Speaking three days after US special forces snatched Maduro and his wife in a stunning raid in Caracas, Rodríguez said: "The government of Venezuela is in charge in our country, and no-one else."

"There is no foreign agent governing Venezuela."

Trump insists Washington is now "in charge" of the Caribbean country but has said he is prepared to work with Rodríguez – provided she submits to his demand for access to Venezuela's vast oil reserves.

The US leader was startlingly direct about his intent regarding the South American country's reserves, announcing on his Truth Social platform on Tuesday that Rodríguez "will be turning over between 30 and 50 MILLION Barrels of High Quality, Sanctioned Oil" to the United States.

"This oil will be sold at its market price, and that money will be controlled by me" as president, Trump said, adding that he has tasked Energy Secretary Chris Wright with "immediately" executing the plan.

No surrender

Rodríguez has offered an olive branch but also appeared anxious to keep on her side the hardliners who control the security forces and paramilitaries, which have patrolled the streets since Maduro's capture.

"We are a people that does not surrender, we are a people that does not give up," she declared, paying tribute to the "martyrs" of the US attacks.



Venezuela's interim president Delcy Rodríguez looks on her swearing-in ceremony at the National Assembly in Caracas on Monday. Venezuela's parliament swore in Rodríguez as interim president on Monday, two days after US forces kidnapped her predecessor Nicolás Maduro to face trial in New York. Members of the new National Assembly offered their full backing to Rodríguez – who had been Maduro's vice president – and re-elected her brother Jorge Rodríguez as speaker of the parliament.

– AFP

She said the country is holding seven days of mourning for those killed.

In its first confirmation of losses, Venezuela's military on Tuesday published a list of 23 troops, including five generals, killed in the US strikes.

Top ally Havana separately issued a list of 32 dead Cuban military personnel, many of whom were members of Maduro's security detail.

Venezuela has not yet confirmed the number of civilian casualties in the operation in which US forces grabbed Maduro and Flores and took them to the United States to face trial.

Attorney General Tarek William Saab spoke on Tuesday of "dozens" of civilian and military dead, without giving a breakdown.

'Trump, murderer'

Thousands of supporters of the presidential couple, including powerful Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello, marched through Caracas demanding their release.

Maduro and Flores appeared in court Monday in New York, where they pleaded not guilty to drug trafficking and other charges.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum has called on the United

States to ensure they receive a fair trial.

Interim president's challenges

Rodríguez has sought to project unity with Cabello and Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino López, two hardliners seen as the main powerbrokers in the Maduro administration.

Opposition leader María Corina Machado, sidelined by Washington in the post-Maduro transition, warned in a Fox News interview that Rodríguez was not to be trusted.

"Delcy Rodríguez as you know is one of the main architects of torture, persecution, corruption, narco-trafficking," she said.

Trump has warned that Rodríguez will pay "a very big price, probably bigger than Maduro" if she does not comply with Washington's agenda.

A retired general who held high-ranking positions in the military predicted that Rodríguez would throw open Venezuela to US oil and mining companies and perhaps resume diplomatic ties, broken off by Maduro in 2019.

Trump told Republican lawmakers on Tuesday that Maduro was a "violent guy" who "killed millions of people" and claimed that Rodríguez's administration was "closing up a torture chamber" in Caracas.

– AFP

Relief mixed with fear as Venezuelans cross into Colombia

Paula Bustamante

VILLA DEL ROSARIO, Colombia – At a bridge leading to neighbouring Colombia, Venezuelans who live and work abroad exit their home country in a steady trickle, full of anxiety for those they left behind after a festive season visit was blighted by a US military strike.

While many celebrate the toppling of leftist leader Nicolas Maduro by US forces, they are also anxious about what comes next, with US President Donald Trump claiming to be in charge of the country which on Monday swore in a Maduro supporter as interim leader.

Evelyn Cardenas, a 57-year-old Venezuelan architect who has lived in Chile for nine years, was among dozens gathered to cross on foot at the Simón Bolívar International Bridge, dragging a large suitcase on wheels and followed by her husband.

As soon as she crossed over into Colombia, she let out a sigh of relief.

"All Venezuelans are happy, but we can't express it openly," she told AFP.

"I can say it now because I crossed the bridge."

Trump has promised the same fate as Maduro's, or worse, for acting president Delcy Rodríguez if she does not follow Washington's bidding.

For many, the threat of further American intervention mixes with fear that the remaining "Chavista" administration will inflict retribution on anyone seen to be supporting Maduro's ouster.

Cardenas, who is from the Venezuelan city of San Cristobal, had returned home to celebrate Christmas and the New Year with her family.

She was still there when Caracas woke up to a rash of early-morning explosions on Saturday that killed 55 Venezuelan and Cuban soldiers, according to those countries' governments.

"We still can't quite believe it," said Cardenas, who plans to travel

by bus and plane back to Santiago.

She was hopeful of "something positive" in the long term, and that Venezuela will finally "emerge from the darkness" of economic collapse and political repression.

In the meantime, she'd rather be somewhere else.

'In shock'

Walter Monsalve, a 55-year-old teacher who works on both sides of the border that Colombia reinforced with soldiers and armoured vehicles, said he was "in shock."

"It should never have happened like this, whatever the reason," he said, likening the US attack to "someone barging into your house."

Like him, many neighbours and family members were fearful of what will come next, said Monsalve.

"I don't know what the UN is there for – there are these international bodies that don't stop these situations," he lamented.

Several Venezuelans, many of whom frequently cross into the town of Cucuta to shop at lower prices on the Colombian side of the border, declined to express an opinion.

One said only: "Things are weird over there" on the Venezuelan side.

Kayleig Jimenez, a 16-year-old student, said she hoped for the return of relatives and friends once things settle down.

"We are now Veneyork," she laughed, in reference to Trump's comments that the United States "is going to run" her country.

Some eight million Venezuelans are estimated to have left the South American nation in recent years, the majority of whom live in Colombia.

The bridge crossing also bustled with journalists who had come from all over the world to cover the biggest international news event so far this year.

After several days of waiting among a tangle of microphones, cables and cameras on tripods, many were starting to lose hope of being granted access to Venezuela, which is demanding visas even for Venezuelan-born journalists. – AFP

AI, outdated visuals fuel misinformation after Maduro capture

Anuj Chopra

WASHINGTON – From AI deepfakes to recycled, outdated images, a surge of visual misinformation has inundated social media platforms after US forces seized Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro in a stunning raid on his Caracas home on Saturday.

Collectively racking up millions of views, the fake or misleading posts underscore a new digital reality in which hyper-realistic misinformation competes for attention with – and often drowns out – authentic images and videos following major news events.

Soon after Maduro's capture,

AFP's fact-checkers uncovered posts on platforms such as X and Facebook purporting to show the first image of the Venezuelan in US custody, flanked by American forces near an aircraft.

But the image – which made Maduro appear younger – was AI generated, with Google's artificial intelligence tool Gemini detecting a SynthID, an invisible watermark meant to identify AI content.

Social media users also shared an image claiming to show an American soldier posing with Maduro, who has a bag over his head.

But the image was from 2003 and shows the US capture of Iraqi

leader Saddam Hussein, press reports from the time show.

The disinformation watchdog NewsGuard said it identified seven fabricated, misrepresented images and videos related to the US operation in Venezuela, which collectively garnered more than 14 million views in under two days on the Elon Musk-owned platform X alone.

The trend highlights how a combination of AI slop –mass-produced content created by cheap AI tools that turn simple text prompts into hyper-realistic visuals – and misrepresented visuals circulating on social media feeds is blurring the line between fiction and reality.

"While many of these visuals do not drastically distort the facts on the ground, the use of AI and dramatic, out-of-context video represents another tactic in the misinformers' arsenal," said Chiara Vercellone, a senior analyst at NewsGuard.

"And one that is harder for fact checkers to expose because the visuals often approximate reality."

US President Donald Trump himself amplified misinformation after the US operation, sharing on his Truth Social network a viral video claiming to show Venezuelans celebrating and running in their underwear in the streets following Maduro's capture.

But AFP's factcheckers found that the video, first posted on TikTok last month, showed college students participating in the "UCLA undie run," a quarterly tradition at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Competing with authentic news on social media was a flood of humorous AI-generated clips, with one showing Maduro and Trump dancing in the Oval Office and another depicting the ousted Venezuelan president posing alongside prisoners clad in orange jumpsuits.

Maduro appeared in a New York court on Monday, where he pleaded not guilty to drug trafficking and "narco-terrorism." – AFP

Arsenal must win trophies to leave 'legacy' – Arteta



LONDON – Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said the Premier League leaders must win trophies if they were to be remembered like the “Invincibles” side that last won the title for the Gunners in 2004.

Arsene Wenger’s side romped to the title 22 years ago without losing a single league game.

Arsenal head into today’s clash at home to reigning champions Liverpool with a six-point lead at the top of the table, although Manchester City and Aston Villa can cut that gap after yesterday’s game.

Arteta’s men, runners-up for the past three seasons, have two more points and four more goals than

Wenger’s ‘Invincibles’ managed after 20 games.

But the Spaniard said those stats matter little unless Arsenal go on to win the league.

“No because ‘the Invincibles’ won a lot,” Arteta told his pre-match press conference on whether his side can be considered better than Arsenal’s last title winners.

“They won consistently, and they created a history and a legacy, and we have to do that.”

The lone major piece of silverware won by Arsenal in six years under Arteta remains the 2020 FA Cup.

“There are a lot of stats, but in the last two or three years we have managed more points and more goals than ever before. But at the

end, we have to translate that to major trophies,” he added.

“Probably doing what we are doing now would have been enough [in 2004], but now it’s not, and we have to make the margins even bigger.”

Arsenal lost 1-0 to Liverpool at Anfield back in August in what was billed as an early showdown between title rivals.

The defending champions head to the Emirates 14 points off the top after a difficult second season for Arne Slot, but Arteta insisted the Reds remain “a superb side”.

‘You need support’

The Gunners remain without sidelined defenders Riccardo Calafiori and Cristhian Mosquera but are

“monitoring the load” on Kai Havertz as the Germany forward intensifies his training while continuing to recover from a long-term leg injury.

Arteta, meanwhile, said he was “sad” to see rival boss Ruben Amorim sacked by Manchester United on Monday after just 14 months in charge at Old Trafford.

The Portuguese coach’s exit followed growing tensions with senior United officials, including director of football Jason Wilcox, over recent days.

United co-owner Jim Ratcliffe had previously suggested Amorim would be given at least three years in charge, citing Arsenal’s patience with Arteta as an example to follow.

Appointed in 2019, Arteta

endured a rocky start to his time in charge of Arsenal.

But they are now a commanding 17 points ahead of sixth-placed United, who won just 25 of 63 games in all competitions under Amorim.

“I can only talk about what I have experienced and it’s always sad to see a colleague losing his job, obviously,” said Arteta. “We know where we are and I think you need support from the ownership, from your staff, from players.”

“At the end of the day, you need to win a lot of football matches if you want to stay in the job, and that’s the reality and the nature of our job.”

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

– AFP/MPD

Strasbourg offer too good to turn down, says O’Neil



STRASBOURG – Gary O’Neil replaced Liam Rosenior as Strasbourg coach yesterday declaring that he had received other offers in the year he had been out of work but “none of them felt quite like this”.

Former Bournemouth and Wolves boss O’Neil heads to France after Rosenior left the modest Ligue 1 outfit on Tuesday for Premier League side Chelsea.

The 42-year-old Englishman, whose playing career included long spells at Portsmouth and Middlesbrough and was capped at England under-21 level, said the approach from Strasbourg had pressed all the right buttons.

“I’ve been out for 12 months now, since I left Wolves,” O’Neil told reporters.

“I’ve had the opportunity to go into other places, Premier League, places around the world, other places in England.

“And none of them felt quite like this.

“That was what really gave me the draw to come to Strasbourg,” he added.

O’Neil takes over with the Alsations, who won their sole French title in 1979, in seventh place in Ligue 1 but without a win in the league since November 9.

They are top of the Conference League table, having beaten the likes of Crystal Palace and Aberdeen.

“I’m impressed by the progress that has been made in recent years,” O’Neil said.

“I also come after Liam Rosenior, who has done a very good job here.

“From these foundations, it’s an opportunity for me that is fantastic, with a very high-quality team.

“I arrive at a football club that is only going in one direction, upwards, towards progression,” he added.

During his time in the Premier League O’Neil guided Bournemouth to top-flight safety

and took over at Wolves after Julen Lopetegui’s chaotic departure.

He left Molineux in December 2024 with the club in 19th place, having won just twice that season.

O’Neil’s first game in charge of Strasbourg will be Saturday’s French Cup last 32 game at fourth-tier Avranches.

‘It wasn’t on the table’

“I am very happy to welcome Gary O’Neil,” Strasbourg president Marc Keller said.

“He is a demanding and recognised coach, with a modern approach to football that is fully part of the continuity of our sports project,” he added.

Rosenior’s move to Chelsea has been shrouded in controversy with the Blues and Strasbourg owned by the same consortium, BlueCo, who bought the three-time French Cup winners in June, 2023.

Strasbourg fans called for Keller to leave his role due to Rosenior’s departure which followed the equally unpopular announcement club captain Emmanuel Emegha would head to Stamford Bridge next season.

Rosenior guided Strasbourg to seventh in the table last term, a marked improvement on his predecessor Patrick Vieira under whom they had finished 13th.

Strasbourg’s last piece of silverware was lifting the fourth of their League Cup trophies in 2019.

“It wasn’t the plan, it was wanted by no one, but once it happens it’s our job, we have to adapt, with always the same ambition, to go higher,” said Keller referring to Rosenior’s departure.

“When you’re confronted with a coach that has the chance to go to the Premier League, at good clubs, if it’s Chelsea or elsewhere, it has to be on the table.

“If every time I had faced an obstacle or a difficulty, I would give up and tell myself, I’m going to stop, I wouldn’t be here in front of you today,” he added. – AFP



Inter Miami’s Argentine forward Lionel Messi arrives for the Major League Soccer (MLS) Eastern Conference final against New York City FC at Chase Stadium in Fort Lauderdale, Florida on November 29, 2025. Messi said he would like to own a club when he retires, in an interview published by an Argentine streaming channel on Tuesday, in which he also gave details about his family life, his personality, and even his drinking preferences. – AFP

Football shorts

Atletico back struggling Alvarez ahead of Real Super Cup semi



JEDDAH – Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone and captain Koke backed striker Julian Alvarez yesterday despite a poor run of form ahead of the Spanish Super cup semi-final derby clash against Real Madrid.

Argentina international Alvarez, a key player for the Rojiblancos, has scored just twice in his last 10 games across all competitions.

Atletico take on city rivals Real in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia today, bidding for a place in Sunday’s final.

“The big players all demand a lot from themselves, obviously we don’t have to demand a lot only from Julian but from all of us, to achieve the objectives that we want,” Koke told a news conference.

“Big players like Julian appear when you need them most, tomorrow is an important day.”

Koke recalled Alvarez’s superb display in the 5-2 win over Real in September, in which the forward netted twice.

“I hope he has the luck, like he did in the previous game at the Metropolitano, where he had an incredible game,” continued Koke.

“I’m certain that when we need him most, he will be at 100 percent.”

Alvarez joined Atletico in August 2024 from Manchester City, for an initial 75 million euros (US\$88 million).

The 25-year-old has netted 11 times in 24 matches this season, seven of those in La Liga, where Atletico are fourth, seven points behind second-place Real.

Simeone said earlier this season that Alvarez was the team’s most important player and called on the striker to remind everyone of his quality.

“Julian has showed the player that he is (but) sometimes words aren’t enough, only deeds will do, and we hope tomorrow he has a great game,” added Simeone.

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

– AFP/MPD

Carrick and Solskjaer set for Man Utd talks after Amorim exit - reports



LONDON – Michael Carrick and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer could each hold fresh talks with Manchester United as the club seek to appoint an interim head coach after the sacking of Ruben Amorim, according to British media reports.

The two former United players are believed to have held a first round of informal discussions with sporting director Jason Wilcox on Tuesday, ahead of United’s Premier League match at Burnley.

Another former United star Darren Fletcher, who is in charge of the Under-18 side, has been named interim head coach and will be in charge for the game.

It is now being suggested both Carrick and Solskjaer could feature in a new backroom team at Old Trafford after Amorim was dismissed on Monday following a reported row with Wilcox last Friday.

If Solskjaer is named as Amorim’s successor it would represent a return to the United hotseat.

The former United and Norway forward initially took charge on an interim basis in December 2018 after the dismissal of Jose Mourinho, before he was appointed full-time the following March.

Solskjaer, however, was sacked in November 2021, with ex-England midfielder Carrick placed in temporary charge.

United head into the Burnley match sixth in the Premier League, with eight wins from their 20 English top-flight matches so far this season.

– AFP

Giro d'Italia champion Yates announces shock retirement

Cycling

PARIS – Two-time Grand Tour winner Simon Yates announced yesterday that he was retiring from professional cycling, just seven months after winning the Giro d'Italia.

The news comes after Yates enjoyed probably the best season of his career, following up his stunning Giro success with a stage victory at July's Tour de France.

"This may come as a surprise to many, but it is not a decision I have made lightly," Yates said in a statement released by his team, Visma-Lease a Bike.

"I have been thinking about it for a long time, and it now feels like the right moment to step away from the sport."

Yates, 33, shared more than a decade in the peloton with his twin brother Adam, initially together at the Jayco-AlUla team.

He sprang to prominence with a seventh-placed finish at the 2016 Paris-Nice race aged 23 but subsequently tested positive for a banned substance and copped a four-month suspension after his team doctor took responsibility for failing to apply for a therapeutic use exemption.

Months later he secured his first Grand Tour stage win at the Vuelta, where he finished an impressive sixth.

His most dramatic and turbulent season came in 2018 when Yates was dominating the Giro - winning three stages and holding the race leader's pink jersey - before cracking spectacularly on the



Team Visma - Lease a bike team's British rider Simon Yates celebrates on the podium after winning the 10th stage of the 112th Tour de France cycling race, 165.3 km between Ennezat and Le Mont-Dore Puy de Sancy, in central France, on July 14, 2025. – AFP

imposing Colle delle Finestre climb on the third-from-last stage.

Compatriot Chris Froome stormed to victory as Yates's hopes evaporated.

Ironically, it was on that very climb in 2025 that Yates gained redemption with his decisive move to claim the Giro title.

He bounced back quickly from his painful setback, claiming his first Grand Tour success at the Vuelta later in 2018.

His best Tour de France finish was fourth place in 2023, just behind his brother.

He finishes his career with three Tour stage victories, six at the Giro and two at the Vuelta, while he

also won the prestigious Tirreno-Adriatico stage race in 2020.

"To my team, Team Visma-Lease a Bike, thank you for your understanding and support of my decision to stop now," said Yates, who still had a year to run on his contract.

"I step away from professional cycling with deep pride and a sense of peace.

"While the victories will always stand out, the harder days and setbacks were just as important.

"They taught me resilience and patience, and made the successes mean even more.

"This chapter has given me more than I ever imagined." – AFP

Reigning champion Al-Rajhi abandons Dakar Rally



PARIS – Title-holder Yazeed Al-Rajhi was forced to pull out of the Dakar Rally due to mechanical problems, organisers said yesterday.

"Hit by technical issues, Yazeed Al-Rajhi has announced he will withdraw from the stage at km 234," organisers said in a brief update.

"The 2025 Dakar winner sees his overall hopes disappear and will not be able to defend his title this year."

The 44-year-old Saudi had already struggled since the race began this week and was languishing down in 19th place early yesterday.

Last year's surprise winner suffered mechanical issues at the worst possible time as yesterday and today form the first marathon

stage, meaning he would not be able to receive mechanical assistance for his Toyota Hilux late yesterday at the end of the 452km special stage.

Billionaire Al-Rahji, who comes from one of Saudi Arabia's richest families, has had a tough time since winning the 2025 Dakar Rally.

In April he crashed badly during a race in Jordan, fracturing several vertebrae, keeping him off course for several months.

Meanwhile, South African Henk Lategan, in a Toyota, claimed the overall lead after winning yesterday's stage in 4hr 47min 08sec.

That was more than seven minutes quicker than Nasser Al-Attiyah, a five-time winner of the Dakar Rally, and Lategan now leads the Qatari by almost four minutes. – AFP



Overdrive Racing's Saudi driver Yazeed al-Rajhi and German co-driver Timo Gottschalk (front) overtake Toyota Gazoo Racing W2RC's South African driver Henk Lategan and South African co-driver Breet Cummings during the Stage 3 of the 48th Dakar Rally, between Al-Ula and Al-Ula in Saudi Arabia, yesterday. – AFP

Gauff drags US into United Cup semis as Swiatek also wins

Tennis

PERTH – Coco Gauff pulled off double duty to drag defending champions the United States into the United Cup semi-finals yesterday while world number two Iga Swiatek did her bit for Poland.

Fourth-ranked Gauff, who suffered a surprise defeat last time out, put the United States on their way in their quarter-final against Greece with a 6-3, 6-2 win over former world number three Maria Sakkari in Perth.

Stefanos Tsitsipas brought Greece level by defeating struggling Taylor Fritz 6-4, 7-5.

In the deciding mixed doubles, Gauff teamed up with Christian Harrison to battle past Tsitsipas and Sakkari 4-6, 6-4, 10-8.

The 21-year-old Gauff struggled with her serve as she suffered her first-ever defeat at the United Cup on Monday when she was stunned by Spain's Jessica Bouzas Maneiro.

"Definitely a much better match today," Gauff said after making light work of Sakkari.

"Last match, I just tried to

erase it. That's the beauty of this tournament.

"So definitely happy to give my team the lead today."

Six-time Grand Slam champion Swiatek beat 97th-ranked Suzan Lamens 6-3, 6-2 in the tie against the Netherlands in Sydney.

Hubert Hurkacz, on his way back after being out for seven months following knee surgery, defeated Tallon Griekspoor 6-3, 7-6 (7/4) as Poland sealed their last-eight spot.

Poland will play hosts Australia, with the winner facing the United States for a place in Sunday's final.

In Perth, Switzerland's Belinda Bencic beat Argentina's Solana Sierra 6-2, 6-2 but a 7-5, 6-4 loss by Stan Wawrinka to Sebastian Baez sent the tie into a mixed doubles decider.

The Swiss finished off the win with Bencic and Jakub Paul clinching the winning point over Maria Lourdes Carle and Guido Andreozzi 6-3, 6-3.

The mixed-team United Cup features 18 teams and serves as a build-up towards the Australian Open, which starts on January 18.

– AFP



England's brilliant Bethell savours 'very special' maiden century

Martin Parry

SYDNEY – England's Jacob Bethell called it "very special" after cracking a flawless maiden century during the fifth Ashes Test against Australia yesterday in front of his family.

The 22-year-old powered to his hundred in style off 162 balls in Sydney, raising his bat towards his emotional family in the stands.

He was unbeaten on 142 at stumps, steering England to 302-8 in their second innings and a 119-run lead on day four.

Remarkably, it was not just a maiden Test ton but the only one he has scored in red-ball cricket, with his previous best 96 against New Zealand.

"It's pretty special, it's not really sunk in yet. I haven't really had time to kind of reflect on it," Bethell said.

"But to do that and have the family there was very special.

"My dad was a cricketer so he knows how it feels to be out there batting, but I don't think that stops him from getting any less nervous."

Over the past 50 years only Alastair Cook, David Gower and Ollie Pope were younger when they scored their first Test century for England.

Bethell made his Test bow against New Zealand in Christchurch in late 2024, crunching half-centuries in each of the three Tests during the series after incumbent number three Pope slid down the order to keep wicket.

His progress was then hampered by injury and Pope hitting form back at three.

But Bethell was recalled for the fourth Test in Melbourne to replace Pope, scoring a gritty 40 in difficult batting conditions with the number three position now his to lose.

Asked if finally getting a first-class hundred was a weight off his shoulders, the confident Bethell replied: "Not really, to be honest, it was always coming.

"But it's nice to get over the milestone. It will give me a lot of confidence to keep doing it."

With England having already

lost the series and looking to reset after the Ashes, Bethell was quickly hailed as a player for the future.

"This was a coming of age," former England captain Cook said on TNT Sports.

"Bethell affirmed what we already knew about his talent. He delivered on the big stage on a tough wicket, with the game on the line.

"I think it was right that he had to wait for his chance but he has taken his chance and shown the future of England cricket batting after Joe Root."

Another former England captain, Michael Vaughan, echoed Cook's sentiments.

"Seeing how Jacob Bethell has played - his technique is incredible. To play at this level for long periods of time, you have to have that," he said.

"He has played the ball straight, right under his eyeline.

"Jacob Bethell has played in a way that Test match cricket has been played for many generations.

"It was a masterclass in technique and composure." – AFP

Brigitte Bardot buried in Saint-Tropez as cause of death revealed



Attendees, including French activist Jean-Baptiste Redde, also known as Voltuan, holding a placard reading “Animals thank Brigitte Bardot” stand next to wreaths of flowers around Bardot’s grave at the marine cemetery, following yesterday’s funeral ceremony of late French actress Brigitte Bardot, with a view of the Mediterranean Sea in the background in Saint-Tropez, southeastern France. – AFP



A dog sits among wreaths of flowers and photographs of late French actress Brigitte Bardot placed around her grave at the marine cemetery, following the funeral ceremony at Notre-Dame de l’Assomption church, in Saint-Tropez, southeastern France, yesterday. – AFP



Pall-bearers carry the unusual wicker coffin outside Notre-Dame de l’Assomption church, at the end of the funeral ceremony for late French actress Brigitte Bardot, in Saint-Tropez, southeastern France, yesterday. – AFP



French artist Michelle Boesnach holds one of her paintings depicting late French actress Brigitte Bardot as she gathers with mourners and fans to watch on a screen the live broadcast of the funeral ceremony taking place at Notre-Dame de l’Assomption church in Saint-Tropez, southeastern France, yesterday. – AFP

Fanny Carrier, Jean-Francois Guyot and Adam Plowright

SAINT-TROPEZ, France – Well-wishers lined the streets in Brigitte Bardot’s hometown of Saint-Tropez yesterday for the funeral of the French screen icon as her husband revealed she had died from cancer.

A day of commemorations began with a traditional Catholic service at the Notre-Dame de l’Assomption church where her unusual wicker coffin was received by her long-estranged son.

A hearse then carried the reclusive star of the late 1950s and 60s to her family’s Mediterranean seaside grave for a private ceremony attended by family and close friends.

Hundreds of people, many with their pets, watched proceedings on a giant screen at the yacht-filled Saint-Tropez port, which the blonde star helped transform into a world-famous playground for the rich.

“What I remember most is what she did for animals, she had a real sensitivity. A small streak of racism too, but it wasn’t malicious – she wasn’t just that,” Sandrine, a school assistant who had travelled several hours to attend, told AFP.

The 60-year-old from the Pyrenees mountains said she had expected a larger public turn-out, suggesting some had stayed away because of criticism and media coverage of her political views and convictions for inciting racial hatred.

‘No frills’ event

Bardot’s best-known associations – to the heyday of the New Wave French film industry, animal rights campaigning, and far-right politics – were all represented at Friday’s church service.

The son of late film star Jean-Paul Belmondo attended, as did far-right figurehead Marine Le Pen, and a host of animal rights campaigners whose work Bardot helped publicise through her own foundation.

Paul Watson, the Canadian founder of the Sea Shepherd charity, a “brother in arms” in the fight against whaling and seal slaughter, was among the 400 invitees for what organisers had promised would be a “no frills” event.

“Brigitte was my friend for 50 years,” he told AFP, adding that he had attended “to recognise her incredible contribution to protecting animals around the world”.

He and others filed into the church past a photo of a smiling Bardot with one of her dogs, while an iconic image of her cuddling a baby seal was placed near the pulpit and on the front of the service booklet.

A public commemoration in a park will rounded out the day of tributes and remembrance for a woman considered both a symbol of Saint-Tropez as well as the sexual revolution of the 1960s.

Cancer battle

On the eve of the commemorations, Bardot’s fourth husband, former far-right political advisor Bernard d’Ormale, revealed the cause of her death.

Bardot had undergone two operations for an unspecified cancer before the disease “took her”, d’Ormale told *Paris Match* magazine in an interview about their life together.

She had insisted on returning home to die at her beloved villa known as “la Madrague”, despite being in physical discomfort.

D’Ormale was seated on the front row yesterday alongside Bardot’s only child, Nicolas-Jacques Charrier, who attended with his children and grandchildren.

Charrier, 65, was brought up by his father, film director Jacques Charrier, and lives in Oslo.

Bardot had compared pregnancy to carrying a “tumour that fed on me” and called parenthood a “misery”, living most of her life with no contact with her son.

They drew closer in the final years of her life and he sobbed at the start of yesterday’s service.



Brigitte Bardot’s son Nicolas-Jacques Charrier arrives at Notre-Dame de l’Assomption church, for the funeral ceremony for his mother, in Saint-Tropez, southeastern France, yesterday. – AFP

Divisive

The lack of a state commemoration for Bardot, one of the country’s best-known celebrities, as well as the mixed public reaction to her death reflect her divisive character and much-debated legacy.

Most observers agree that she was a cinema legend who came to embody the swinging 60s in France and a form of female emancipation through her acting and daring, unconventional persona.

But after she was convicted five times for racist hate speech, particularly about Muslims, left-wing figures have offered only muted tributes – and sometimes none at all.

President Emmanuel Macron’s office offered to organise a national homage similar to one staged for fellow New Wave hero Belmondo in 2021, but the idea was snubbed by Bardot’s family.

He did not attend yesterday but sent a wreath.

Bardot was buried at a seaside cemetery in Saint-Tropez alongside her parents and grandparents despite previously saying she wanted to avoid creating a public site of commemoration.

In her typically outspoken style, she said she worried about a “crowd of idiots” trampling on the tombs of her ancestors. – AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -6°C~5°C	Manila 23°C~29°C	New York 3°C~9°C	Lisbon 13°C~15°C
Shanghai -2°C~10°C	Bangkok 17°C~30°C	London 3°C~6°C	Rio de Janeiro 22°C~31°C
Hong Kong 9°C~18°C	Tokyo -1°C~11°C	Frankfurt 1°C~2°C	Luanda 23°C~28°C
Taipei 8°C~16°C	Singapore 24°C~29°C	Vancouver 4°C~6°C	Maputo 19°C~30°C
Guangzhou 4°C~18°C	Kuala Lumpur 22°C~32°C	Paris 5°C~9°C	Dili 23°C~28°C
Nanjing -3°C~9°C	Jakarta 23°C~32°C	Moscow -11°C~6°C	São Tomé 25°C~30°C
Guilin 2°C~17°C	Seoul -7°C~1°C	Las Vegas 1°C~13°C	Praia 18°C~25°C
Xi'an -2°C~7°C	Sydney 19°C~33°C	Monte Carlo 8°C~11°C	Bissau 20°C~33°C



For kite fighting?

A man prepares coloured kite strings ahead of Lohri, the spring festival in Amritsar, India on Tuesday. – AFP

Vertical take off

Mitsuki Ono of Team Japan jumps during training prior to the Aspen Buttermilk Women's Snowboard Halfpipe Qualifiers during the Toyota US Grand Prix 2026 at Aspen Snowmass Ski Resort yesterday in Aspen, Colorado.

– AFP



Regrets come later!

A dog plays in the snow in Budapest, Hungary yesterday. – Xinhua



BFG's bike

People visit the exhibition area of Segway during the 2026 Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, on Tuesday. The 2026 CES, the world's premier technology event, opened here Tuesday. The annual show has attracted thousands of exhibitors from more than 155 countries and regions, according to the organizer the US Consumer Technology Association.

– Xinhua

Not the right weather

This photograph shows a snow-covered mimosa plant in Paris, yesterday.

– AFP



Jack Frost's art

A window with frost is pictured at London Zoo in London, on Tuesday. – AFP