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Govt to start gathering public opinion next week for LRT long-term expansion

Tony Wong

The government announced yesterday that it will start gathering public opinion on Friday next week concerning its plan to expand the city's Light Rapid Transit (LRT) network in the long term.

The Public Works Bureau (DSOP), the public entity tasked with organising and overseeing public construction projects, made the announcement in a statement yesterday.

The upcoming opinion collection period will run until February 28, during which, the statement said, the government will hold various sessions for members of the general public as well as those for representatives from different segments and sectors of civil society.

According to the statement, details of the LRT long-term expansion plan, officially known as Strategic Study for the Development of the Macau Light Rapid Transit, will be uploaded onto a dedicated website on Friday next week when the public opinion collection process starts.

The dedicated website can be accessed at: <https://www.dsop.gov.mo/public/event/lrt2026/> where the plan's details will be available in Chinese and Portuguese.

According to the statement, residents can submit their opinions and suggestions by filling in the opinion form on the dedicated website. Alternatively, the statement said, they can also choose to provide their opinions and suggestions by mail, fax, email or phone,



This file photo taken last year shows an LRT train leaving Jockey Club Station in Taipa. – Photo: Tony Wong

details of which will be released next Friday.

The statement said that enquiries about the plan can be made by calling the bureau during office hours on 2871 3726 after the commencement of the opinion collection period.

Basic details of the government's Strategic Study for the Development of the Macau Light Rapid Transit were revealed by Secretary for Transport and Public Works

Raymond Tam Vai Man during a Q&A session about his portfolio's 2026 policy guidelines in the Legislative Assembly's (AL) hemicycle early last month.

Proposed LRT South Line

According to the basic details revealed by Tam last month, the LRT long-term expansion plan proposes to build an LRT

South Line, running from the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge's (HZMB) Macau checkpoint to the future ES5 station in the Zone A land reclamation area (a station of the ongoing LRT East Line project), from where it would run to the peninsula's Nam Van Lake and Sai Van districts via Nape before finally arriving in Barra.

Continued on p.2



This video screenshot shows the "Tianma-1000" unmanned transport aircraft after its maiden flight on Sunday. Developed by Xi'an ASN Technology Group Co. Ltd. under China North Industries Group Corporation, the "Tianma-1000" integrates logistics transport, emergency rescue, and material delivery into a single platform. It is China's first unmanned aircraft capable of adapting to high-altitude complex terrain, achieving ultra-short takeoff and landing, and swiftly switching between cargo transport and airdrop modes, according to its developer. – Xinhua

Former Fed chairs, US officials decry criminal probe against Fed chair Powell

NEW YORK – Three former US Federal Reserve chairs and 10 other former top economic officials from the US federal government yesterday criticized federal prosecutors' criminal investigation targeting Fed Chair Jerome Powell.

The criminal inquiry into Powell is an unprecedented attempt to use prosecutorial attacks to undermine the Fed's independence, said a joint statement signed by former Fed chairs Ben Bernanke, Alan Greenspan and Janet Yellen.

"The Federal Reserve's independence and the public's perception of that independence are critical for economic performance, including achieving the goals Congress has set for the Federal Reserve of stable prices,

maximum employment, and moderate long-term interest rates," the statement said.

The statement warned of "highly negative consequences for inflation" and the functioning of their economies more broadly, and stressed the importance of the rule of law.

Signatories of the statement include former treasury secretaries and former chairs of the Council of Economic Advisers, as well as Kenneth Rogoff, former chief economist of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

On Sunday, Powell said federal prosecutors are investigating him over the Fed's multi-billion-US-dollar project to renovate its headquarters. "I will continue to do the job the Senate confirmed me to do." – Xinhua

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Xi urges advancing Party self-governance with higher standards, more concrete measures

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, yesterday called for advancing full and rigorous Party self-governance with higher standards and more concrete measures.

Story on p. 7

Hamas to hold leadership elections in coming months: sources

Hamas is preparing to hold internal elections to rebuild its leadership following Israel's killing of several of the group's top figures during the war in Gaza, sources in the movement said yesterday.

Story on p. 10

ECOWAS, Guina-Bissau junta discuss release of detainees, transition

African leaders representing regional bloc ECOWAS held talks on Saturday with Guinea-Bissau's junta government on the release of detainees and the transition to constitutional rule, sources said.

Story on p. 12

Police nab 2 loan sharks for filching chips from 'chip-pool' gambler

Ada Lei

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested two loan sharks from the Chinese mainland on Sunday for stealing HK\$80,000 in chips while collecting HK\$320,000 as "interest" from a gambler, PJ spokesman Leng Kam Lon said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Leng identified the suspects as a 29-year-old male surnamed Yu and a 40-year-old male surnamed Tao. Both claimed to be jobless.

According to Leng, a male gambler was approached by a man, who was still as large at the time of the press conference, in a casino in Cotai on Saturday. The man introduced the gambler to Yu. The two then met in a hotel guestroom to discuss a deal where they were to pool gaming chips to place bets on the gaming table. The gambler agreed to Yu's purported "chip-pooling" deal that they each bet chips worth HK\$300,000 in total. The deal's terms also included 20 percent of the betting money as "interest" on each winning bet. If the gambler's capital was lost entirely, no repayment would be required.

Leng noted that after settling the terms, Yu took the gambler to meet Tao, who provided HK\$300,000 in chips to the victim. By that evening, the gambler had gambled away his own capital and Yu retrieved his HK\$300,000. Tao then offered to provide HK\$500,000 in chips under the same "chip-pooling" betting conditions. The gambler agreed and continued gambling. Early Sunday morning, the gambler discovered that Tao was repeatedly filching some of their chips from the gaming table while collecting "interest". An argument ensued, alerting casino security, who intercepted Yu and Tao before reporting the case to the police.

Leng added that Tao had taken a total of HK\$320,000 from the gambler as "interest". Reviewing the casino's CCTV surveillance footage, the police discovered that Tao had taken the opportunity to remove chips worth HK\$80,000 from the table on at least 13 occasions while collecting "interest". Leng said that Yu was tasked with negotiating the lending terms with the gambler, while Tao handled providing the chips and removing some from the gaming table while betting.

The police seized HK\$65,000 in cash and HK\$20,000 in chips from Tao, along with the gambler's remaining HK\$890,000 in chips and the "stolen" chips worth HK\$80,000.

The duo have been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing charges of usury and theft. ■

* "Chip pooling" refers to a method used in various contexts, particularly in finance and gaming. It usually means consolidating or sharing a group of chips or resources among participants for joint use or as part of a larger strategy. – Poe



This undated handout photo provided by the Judiciary Police (PJ) yesterday shows HK\$65,000 in cash, HK\$100,000 in chips and three smartphones seized from the two usury and theft suspects, along with HK\$890,000 in chips confiscated from the "chip-pool" gambler.

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Macau POST

Macau Weather

TEMPERATURE FALLING SLIGHTLY.
COLD AND DRY.
MAINLY FINE.
HAZE DURING THE DAY.
FORCE 2 TO 3 NORTH TO NORTHEASTERLY WINDS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 35% AND 80%.

12°C~22°C

Source: SMG

Gongbei Customs seizes 227 bogus goods, incl Labubu and Wakuku dolls



This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs yesterday shows 227 bogus Labubu and Wakuku dolls seized by its officers at Qingmao Port (checkpoint) on New Year's Eve.

Armindo Neves

Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers seized 227 infringement goods at Qingmao Port on New Year's Eve.

The pedestrian border checkpoint is one of the most popular between Macau and Zhuhai.

According to the statement, on New Year's Eve morning, customs officers at Qingmao Port, during the inspection of Macau-bound travellers' luggage, noticed anomalies in a large package carried by a border crosser and intercepted it. Upon opening the package for inspection, the officers discovered 110 Labubu* dolls, 100 doll keyrings, and 17 Wakuku** doll keyrings, totalling 227 items.

The statement said that customs officers suspected that the goods were "very probably" counterfeit. Subsequently, the traveller involved admitted in writing that all the items were purchased through an online shopping platform and were indeed infringement products, i.e., products violating intellectual property rights, such as copyright, trademark, or patent rights. The case has been transferred to the relevant authorities

in the Chinese mainland for further handling.

In the statement, Gongbei Customs reminded the public that, according to the Customs Law of the People's Republic of China, importers, exporters, and their agents must accurately declare the intellectual property (IP) status of goods to customs and submit relevant certification documents. Goods that infringe intellectual property rights protected by [mainland] Chinese laws and regulations will be confiscated and may incur fines; if a crime has been committed, criminal liability will be pursued. ■

*Labubu is a troll-like character created by artist Kasing Lung from Hong Kong. POP MART is a Chinese toy and lifestyle retailer that popularised blind box collectibles and massively boosted Labubu's fame through its bestselling toy series. – DeepSeek

**Wakuku is a plush toy and blind box character series, featuring "wild child" vibe. It's frequently compared to (and seen as a competitor/alternative to) Pop Mart's Labubu. It's created by the brand Letsvan and heavily promoted/sold through Miniso stores (a major retailer for these trendy blind box toys), as well as various online shops. - Grok

Govt to start gathering public opinion next week for LRT long-term expansion

Continued from p.1

According to Tam, the South Line would travel near Plot A9 in Nam Van Lake district, i.e., the still undeveloped plot on the waterfront between AIA Tower and the Nam Van Peninsula residential building.

The LRT East Line is scheduled to open in 2029.

The plan, according to Tam, proposes to build an LRT West Line, connecting the Qingmao pedestrian border checkpoint in Ilha Verde with Fai Chi Kei, from where it would run along the Inner Harbour to Barra at the peninsula's south-western tip.

Proposed Taipa North Line

Tam said last month that the plan also proposes building a Taipa North Line, running from the future ES6 station in the Zone E1 land reclamation area (a station of the ongoing LRT East Line project) to the future Zone D land reclamation area (reclamation scheduled to be completed in November 2029), to the current Zone C land reclamation area (reclaimed but not yet developed), and to the current Ocean Station located near the Ocean Gardens residential estate.

Proposed line to Coloane Village

According to Tam, the plan also proposes building a spur line of the current Seac Pai Van Line, connecting Coloane's sprawling Seac Pai Van public housing estate and Coloane Village.

Tam also said last month that the proposed Seac Pai Van Spur Line could be expected to get off the ground earlier than all other proposed lines as it is the least difficult one.

Macau's LRT system currently comprises the Taipa Line, Seac Pai Van Line, and Hengqin Line in operation. The Taipa Line serves Taipa and Cotai with

its extended section connecting to the peninsula's Barra through the lower enclosed deck of the Macau-Taipa Sai Van Bridge.

The Seac Pai Van Line connects the Taipa Line's Cotai section with the Seac Pai Van public housing estate, while the Hengqin Line connects the Taipa Line's Cotai section with the Macau-side zone of the Hengqin joint checkpoint.

Currently, the only ongoing LRT project is the East Line project connecting the Barrier Gate checkpoint at the peninsula's northern tip and the Taipa Ferry Terminal via the Zone A and Zone E1 land reclamation areas. The East Line will cross the sea between Zone A and Zone E1 through an undersea tunnel.

The government is currently preparing a project to extend the LRT East Line to the Qingmao pedestrian border checkpoint from the Barrier Gate.

The ongoing LRT East Line project, without the projected extension to the Qingmao checkpoint, is scheduled to be completed in 2028, which the government is aiming to open in 2029.

Yesterday's DSOP statement also said that in addition to the Taipa Line and its extended section to Barra, the Seac Pai Van Line, and the Hengqin Line currently in operation, as well as the East Line currently under construction, the government is committed to exploring the expansion of the LRT services to areas not yet covered, such as the western area of the Macau peninsula, the central and southern area of the peninsula, the northern area of Taipa island, and some areas of Coloane island.

Consequently, the statement said, the government has drafted its LRT long-term expansion plan for the public to provide opinions, which the government will assess and reference in order to refine its plan. ■

Macao Chinese Orchestra to stage 'Dawn Breaks' concert

Khalel Vallo

According to a Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) statement yesterday, the Macao Chinese Orchestra has announced that it will present the concert "Dawn Breaks" this Friday at the Macau Cultural Centre's (CCM) Small Auditorium in Nape, opening its 2025-26 Concert Season with a programme blending new and classic Chinese music.

Scheduled to start at 7:45 p.m., the concert is themed around "the break of day that symbolises hope and renewal", the statement noted.

Under the baton of resident conductor Liao Yuan-Yu, the orchestra will be joined by bamboo flautist Hou Guangyu, who will perform the flute concerto "Bamboo Reverie" with the orchestra, the statement said, adding that it will portray the many forms of bamboo through layered flute melodies, aiming to create an artistic realm that shifts between reality and illusion.

Meanwhile, ruan* section principal Lin Jie will also perform "Ode to the Sun", striving to highlight both the warmth and brilliance of sunlight while conveying joy and encouragement,

according to the bureau.

Other featured pieces include "Formation Break: Contempo", which will reinterpret traditional melodies through contemporary musical language; "Aspirations", which aims to symbolise a bright future; and the orchestra's commissioned work "Macau Impressions", which will depict the city's cultural landscape through music, the statement added.

Supported by the Bank of China (BOC) Macau Branch, the concert will last about 90 minutes with one interval, the statement said.

Tickets, priced at 200 patacas and 150 patacas, are currently on sale via the Macau Ticketing Network (<https://www.macauticket.com>), with discounts available under the "Discover New Chinese Music" package. ■

**The ruan (阮) is a traditional Chinese string instrument that belongs to the lute family. It typically has a circular body, a long neck, and four strings, which are usually made of nylon or silk. The instrument is played with a plectrum and is known for its rich, warm tone and expressiveness. – Poe*

破曉
Romper da Aurora
Dawn Breaks

票價 / Bilhetes / Tickets
MOP 200 / 150



This poster provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) yesterday promotes the Macao Chinese Orchestra's concert "Dawn Breaks" slated to be held this Friday at the Macau Cultural Centre's (CCM) Small Auditorium in Nape.

Northern district consumption carnival chief expects over 750 businesses to join



Industry and Commerce Association of Macau Northern District (AICZNM) Chairman Raymond Wong Kin Chong addresses yesterday's opening ceremony in Iao Hon Market Park.

– Photos: Armindo Neves



Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSEDT) Director Yau Yun Wah addresses yesterday's opening ceremony in Iao Hon Market Park.

Armindo Neves

The Industry and Commerce Association of Macau Northern District (AICZNM) yesterday hosted the launch ceremony of its consumption carnival, expecting over 750 merchants to take part.

AICZNM Chairman Raymond Wong Kin Chong said in his speech at the ceremony he expects the six-week event to involve over 750 businesses in the northern district.

The carnival, which began yesterday and is scheduled to conclude on February 20, aims to stimulate spending through "appealing prizes", Wong said. He called for the consumer spending event's public support to boost the district's economy and promote consumer spending there.

The ceremony was held in Iao Hon Market Park.

Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSEDT) Director Yau Yun Wah said in his speech he expects the carnival to attract consumers using e-vouchers, merchant discounts, and lucky draws. With the Chinese

New Year (CNY) approaching, Yau noted, the event aims to leverage the "festive atmosphere of renewal", combined with substantial discounts and rewards, to draw more tourists and residents alike to splash out in the northern district. Yau also said that the event seeks to enhance the community's vibrancy and strengthen the development of the local economy.

Consumers may use the Bank of China (Macau) mobile banking app "BOCPAY" from Monday to Friday every week during the carnival to spend at least 100 patacas at participating businesses. All the e-vouchers will be issued by the local branch of Bank of China. Consumers can access the carnival's event page to win e-vouchers three times during the weekly five-day period and receive one entry into a lucky draw per week. The e-vouchers have denominations ranging from 10 to 50 patacas. They are valid for 14 days and can be spent any day during the carnival.

Residents seem to hold

mixed views about the event and acknowledged that the programme encourages spending but gave various suggestions for optimising its design.

Sio U, her nickname, a local housewife, told the *Post* on the sidelines of the launch ceremony she believes that the requirement of a single transaction of at least 100 patacas to qualify for winning e-vouchers is "a little bit too high" and suggested lowering the threshold to facilitate more spread-out spending during CNY shopping.

Kuen, her nickname, a casino staff-cum-grandmother, told the *Post* she believes that having extended the e-voucher validity period to 14 days offers greater flexibility, "preventing waste due to [consumers'] forgetfulness". She also noted that even small discounts can help save on expenses during holiday preparations.

The Chinese New Year this time falls on February 17, when the Year of the Horse begins. It is a public holiday in Macau on February 17 to 19. ■

Econ-tech bureau, Huawei launch AI training course to boost operational capacity of local tech firms

Khalel Vallo

The Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSEDT) and Huawei Services Company (Hong Kong) Ltd – Macau Branch launched a three-day artificial intelligence (AI) training course in Hengqin yesterday, aimed at strengthening the operational capabilities of certified technology enterprises in Macau, according to a statement by the bureau.

The "Practical Training Course in Artificial Intelligence (AI) with Huawei Certification under the Macau Technology Enterprises AI Transformation Digital Capacity Building Programme", jointly organised by the bureau and Huawei, is being held at the Service Centre for Economy and Trade between China and Portuguese/Spanish-speaking Countries (CECPS) of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, the statement noted.

Addressing the opening ceremony,

DSEDT Director Yau Yun Wah underlined that artificial intelligence (AI) has become a key driver of global industrial upgrading, the statement said. He expressed hope that the programme will nurture more AI-skilled talent in Macau, enabling local technology companies to seize opportunities brought by AI empowerment, integrate new quality productive forces into product development, process optimisation and service innovation, and promote deeper integration between technological and industrial innovation.

The three-day course will provide professional AI training for staff from certified technology enterprises, covering core AI technologies, business applications and sector-specific use cases, the statement noted.

According to the bureau, a total of 30 participants from 16 certified technology companies have enrolled in the programme.

On the same occasion, the "Hengqin



This handout photo provided by the Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSEDT) yesterday shows guests and participants posing for a group photo during yesterday's opening ceremony of the "Practical Training Course in Artificial Intelligence (AI) with Huawei Certification under the Macau Technology Enterprises AI Transformation Digital Capacity Building Programme" in Hengqin.

Digital and Intelligent Transformation from the In-Depth Cooperation Zone International Talent Training Base" was officially inaugurated, with representatives attending the launch, the statement added. ■

Ox Warehouse presents 3 solo exhibitions by invited artists

Rui Pastorin

Three concurrent solo exhibitions by three invited artists are being simultaneously presented by Ox Warehouse, showcasing styles and creativity across different sections until February 8.

Located at the Former Municipal Cattle Stable at the junction of Avenida do Coronel Mesquita (美副將大馬路) and Avenida do Almirante Lacerda (罅些喇提督大馬路), each section presents a distinct set of artworks, atmospheres and subjects that the respective artists are tackling, with the resulting works created during Ox Warehouse's residency programmes.

In the exhibition "Seak Kam Tong: Yuan Zeqiang", Yuan looks at the stories behind stones, along with the narratives and diverse cultures that they hold in the city. "This shared material seemingly reflects the collisions and fusion of diverse cultures in Macau. The ubiquity of stone in the city's daily life is strikingly vivid", noted Yuan in a statement displayed at the venue, adding that he felt "compelled to explore the deeper significance of the stone", with the exhibition featuring installations, video and pieces created using staples among the artworks.

The statement also elaborated that "Seak Kam Tong" comes from the ancient traditions of stone worship, embodying auspicious symbolism associated with warding off misfortune and evil.

"Seak" is the Cantonese word for "stone".

"Standing Wave Manifold: Fan Xian", meanwhile, sees the cross-media artist search for stillness within the motion of Macau's ever-shifting landscape. A statement provided by Ox Warehouse noted that Fan explores how institutions, landscapes and "feng shui" (Chinese geomancy) shape daily life.

The exhibition uses videos, installations, and gelatine silver prints to blend landscapes, sounds, and events from various times, as noted in the statement, inviting visitors to explore these shifting landscapes and moments. The statement added that by focusing on the still parts between images, viewers can catch glimpses of a city constantly evolving.

Lastly, "Land and Sea: David Fank" features two installations, namely "Land" and "Sea", which are displayed in sections featuring the colours blue and green to create a map. It pulls from the artist's experiences travelling between cities in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) and places such as Beijing to generate Fank's map through representative objects and photography, according to the gallery statement. It also presents an outsider's perspective.

Members of the public may view the works at the free-admission exhibition daily from 10 a.m. through 7 p.m.

Photos of the three distinct sections of the concurrent exhibitions at the Former Cattle Stable taken yesterday by Rui Pastorin.

Macau World Heritage documentary premieres online

Ida Cheong

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), in collaboration with China Media Group (CMG), has produced the World Heritage documentary "Macau: An Open-Air Museum", aiming to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the inscription of the "Historic Centre of Macau" on the UNESCO World Heritage List, according to an IC statement yesterday.

The statement noted that the documentary premiered nationwide on CCTV-9 Documentary Channel on December 19 and is now available on the dedicated page of CCTV.com, as well as the YouTube platform for global audiences.

The statement added that the documentary centres on personal stories, offering diverse perspectives from residents, young students, intangible cultural heritage

inheritors, historians, restoration experts, Macanese artists, cultural heritage architects, and conservation professionals closely connected to Macau's UNESCO-listed Historic Centre. The documentary, according to the statement, "vividly and authentically" portrays the journey of safeguarding and transmitting Macau's World Heritage.

The documentary not only revisits the challenging journey of the World Heritage inscription two decades ago but also highlights the rich and innovative practical experience accumulated by Macau in cultural heritage conservation, revitalisation, and transmission since the successful inscription, the statement said.

UNESCO recognised Macau's Historic Centre as a World Heritage site on July 15, 2005. *The Macau*



This handout undated poster provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) yesterday promotes the documentary titled "Macau: An Open-Air Museum" about its UNESCO-listed World Heritage status.

Post Daily published a special edition the next day about the inscription, headlined "We got it!" on its front page.

Meanwhile, the documentary

this heritage profoundly integrates into and influences the daily lives and spiritual world of contemporary Macau residents, according to the statement.

Macau: An Open-Air Museum is now available on the [CCTV.com](http://tv.cctv.com/2025/12/17/V1DAD9yMpuDXBtz7eWW7XOKF251217.shtml) dedicated page: tv.cctv.com/2025/12/17/V1DAD9yMpuDXBtz7eWW7XOKF251217.shtml and the YouTube platform [youtu.be/rvGGdnRecc?si=XWCyiZJ18tONuvp](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWCyiZJ18tONuvp).

For more information on the city's cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage, please visit the Macau Cultural Heritage website: www.culturalheritage.mo. ■

*Customarily, the term "Macanese" refers to Macau's community of mixed Portuguese and Asian descent, as well as their diaspora, accounting for less than 2.0 percent of the population. —MPD

Sands China announces discretionary bonus, salary rise

Rui Pastorin

Integrated resort operator Sands China announced in a statement yesterday that it will be paying a discretionary bonus equal to a month's salary to eligible full-time staff on February 6, while a salary increase is also set to be effective from March 1, benefitting 99 percent of the company's nearly 28,000 employees.

According to the statement, the discretionary bonus will be paid to non-management staff who have been with the company for one year or more. Meanwhile, management staff will receive the discretionary bonus based on "individual performance, the company's Management Incentive Plan, and financial results".

The statement added that prorated bonuses will be paid to staff who have worked with the company for less than a year if they joined the company before October 1, 2025 and are still employed on the bonus pay out date.

Moreover, on the salary increase, the statement said that eligible full-time employees earning up to 16,000 patacas monthly will receive a raise of 500 patacas, resulting in an increase between 3.1 and 4.0 percent. Those earning monthly salaries above 16,000 patacas will receive a 2.0 per cent pay rise.

Sands China Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director Grant Chum Kwan Lock was

quoted in the statement as saying that 2025 was a "remarkable year" for Sands China, highlighting achievements including receiving total visitation beyond 1.1 billion, delivering around 600 events across MICE, entertainment, sport, and arts and culture, and recent accolades.

"These accomplishments reflect the professionalism and dedication of our team members. In recognition of their efforts over the past year, we are pleased to announce a discretionary bonus and a salary increase. On behalf of our board of directors and senior management, I sincerely thank every team member for their contributions".

Sands China is the final integrated resort operator to announce its discretionary bonus. Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG), Melco Resorts & Entertainment, Wynn Macau, Limited and MGM had previously announced* their discretionary bonus for staff, while SJM Resorts confirmed their announcement to the *Post* via email yesterday.

The SJM reply noted that their "Special Discretionary Bonus" equivalent to a month's salary will be distributed to eligible employees on January 30 "in appreciation of the team's contributions and commitment over the past year". ■

*The article about previous announcements can be found on: [https://www.macaupostdaily.com/news/27098](http://www.macaupostdaily.com/news/27098).



Image courtesy of Labour Law Advisor

Sight programme benefits over 2,100 eye patients

Ida Cheong

Charity Fund of the Readers of Macao Daily News Chairperson Tina Ho Teng Iat said in a speech during yesterday's contract renewal ceremony that her charity fund has collaborated with the Kiang Wu Charitable Association to launch the "Sight Restoration Programme" since 1995, benefiting a total of 2,133 ophthalmology patient within 31 years, with 2,711 eye surgeries performed.

The renewal ceremony (2026-2028) for the "Sight Restoration Programme" was held at the private Kiang Wu Hospital Dr Henry Y.T. Fok Specialist Medical Centre.

Ho said that over 31 years, the programme which began as a single procedure for cataracts*, has now expanded to cover over 10 types of surgeries, including glaucoma surgery, vitreoretinal microsurgery for retinal detachment** and retinal microsurgery, intraocular drug injection surgery for macular degeneration, and laser treatment for diseases, and subsidises eye disease patients with financial difficulties to receive diagnosis and treatment at the Ophthalmology Department of Kiang Wu Hospital.

Ho pointed out that to date, the Charity Fund of the Macao Daily Readers has allocated over 25.6 million patacas in donations for this project.

The medical subsidiary programme aims to provide timely



Charity Fund of the Readers of Macao Daily News Chairperson Ho Teng Iat addresses yesterday's contract renewal ceremony for the "Sight Restoration Programme" at the Kiang Wu Hospital Dr Henry Y.T. Fok Specialist Medical Centre.
— Photos: Ida Cheong

care for eye disease patients with financial difficulties who require urgent treatment, enabling them to regain self-sufficiency or return to work after recovery, Ho said, adding that, in order to ensure the proper use of funds, each application undergoes verification and approval by the foundation's staff.

Kiang Wu Charitable Association President Lau Veng Seng said in a speech that the programme has also optimised the funding mechanism by setting a maximum total subsidy per patient and establishing guidelines for the

number of specific treatments, such as those for macular degeneration, in order to ensure that every donation benefits more people in need.

Due to advancements in medical technology and inflation, medical costs have increased in recent years so that the foundation's annual allocation for the project has been raised from 1.5 to 1.8 million patacas, according to the Kiang Wu Charitable Association.

Lau pointed out that the renewal of the agreement marks a new phase of collaboration between the two sides, adding that the Charity Fund of the Macao Daily Readers will allocate 1.8 million patacas annually, complemented by support from the Kiang Wu Charitable Association. Lau also said that Kiang Wu Hospital will provide advanced ophthalmic technology to continue offering surgeries and treatments to eligible residents. ■

* Cataract is defined as the clouding or opacification of the natural lens of the eye, which lies behind the iris and the pupil. — DeepSeek

** Vitreoretinal microsurgery for retinal detachment is a specialised, high-precision surgical procedure performed by a vitreoretinal surgeon to repair a detached retina — a serious condition where the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye (the retina) separates from its underlying supportive layer. — DeepSeek



Charity Fund of the Readers of Macao Daily News Chairperson Ho Teng Iat (sixth from right, standing), Kiang Wu Charitable Association President Lau Veng Seng (sixth from left, standing) and other attendees pose for a group photo during yesterday's contract renewal ceremony for the "Sight Restoration Programme" at the Kiang Wu Hospital Dr Henry Y.T. Fok Specialist Medical Centre.

Govt launches programme aiming to provide 'easy access to health resources'

Tony Wong

The government launched a new community programme yesterday aiming to enable residents to gain "easy" access to its "health resources", with the objective of encouraging more residents to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

The programme is jointly carried out by the Health Bureau (SSM), the Sports Bureau (ID), and the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), with the aim of leveraging the synergy effect created by the three public entities' respective services provided to residents.

Specifically, the programme launched yesterday is the government's first-ever initiative to integrate three elements of "health information, scientific exercise, and cultural nourishment", provided by the three bureaus respectively, into a single community setting.

A launch ceremony of the programme was held at the sitting-out area outside the Lok Yeung Fa Yuen residential estate in Fai Chi Kei yesterday.

The ceremony was officiated by Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam, Huang Huagai, deputy secretary-general of the Central People's Government Liaison Office in



Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam (centre) is briefed yesterday about the operation of a Health Fuel Station at the Lok Yeung Fa Yuen sitting-out area, where a health worker was taking a resident's blood pressure while another resident was working on a Chinese ink wash painting.

— Photo: Tony Wong

Macau, SSM Director Alvis Lo Iek Long, IC President Deland Leong Wai Man, and ID Acting President See Lei Si Leng.

Huang also heads the Liaison Office's Social Work Department.

The ceremony was also attended by about 100 other officials as well as representatives from various segments of civil society.

The new programme launched yesterday is the operation of "Health Fuel Stations" set up at eight locations across the city, including the Lok Yeung Fa Yuen sitting-out area. ■

The eight stations are now operated between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m., and between 4:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. from Mondays to Fridays.

At each of the eight stations, the three bureaus will respectively deploy their staff there, with the Health Bureau to provide residents with free blood pressure tests, health information and assessments, while the Cultural Affairs Bureau will provide residents with guidance and information on cultural activities, and the Sports Bureau will provide personalised scientific exercise guidance. ■

Commercial recoverable spacecraft completes test flight in China

JIUQUAN — A Chinese spacecraft designed for space tourism yesterday completed its suborbital flight test mission in northwest China.

Using a parachute-recovery system, the recoverable payload capsule landed safely and was retrieved at the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center.

The flight test demonstrated the re-entry deceleration and completed the verification of recoverable payload module, and showcased the precision landing-control technology for the spacecraft's sub-stage, paving the way for the development of future space tourism activities, according to its developer, commercial Chinese aerospace enterprise CAS Space.

Designated Lihong-1 Y1, the

spacecraft can reach altitudes of approximately 120 kilometers. It has low launch costs, a high level of flexibility, and the capability to recover experimental payloads.

For payloads, it can provide a highly stable and multi-functional experimental environment lasting more than 300 seconds, the company said.

It also noted that the spacecraft was carrying Chinese rose seed samples.

The flower seeds spent 300 seconds in space, where they were exposed to cosmic radiation that can induce gene mutations, said Shi Xiaoning, chief designer and project commander of Lihong-1. Once the samples are returned to Earth, scientists will cultivate them to develop new, high-quality rose varieties and establish an

aerospace rose germplasm bank.

The spacecraft will be developed for multiple reuses. Its deputy chief designer, Wang Yingcheng, said that extensive tests are now underway to add crew-life-support and high-reliability escape technologies, which will boost low-cost suborbital scientific experiment capabilities and commercial space tourism capabilities.

In addition to the rose seeds, onboard payloads also included microgravity laser additive manufacturing equipment developed by the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of Mechanics. CAS Space noted that the device provided initial proof that a rocket platform can be used to support space manufacturing.

— Xinhua

Chinese automaker launches new Hongqi electric model in Israel

JERUSALEM — Chinese automaker FAW Group yesterday launched a new electric car model of its luxury brand Hongqi ("Red Flag") in Israel, Hongqi's official importer and dealership Samelet said.

The Hongqi E-HS5 is available

in Israel in three versions, equipped with either a 62-kWh or 85-kWh battery. It offers a range of 426-550 km and accelerates from 0 to 100 km/h in 4.0 to 7.3 seconds.

Having entered the Israeli market in 2022, Hongqi now expands its EV lineup with this

latest model, joining three other electric vehicles. In the past year, the brand sold 841 EVs in Israel.

Chinese automakers dominated Israel's electric car market in 2025, accounting for 79.2 percent of its total sales.

— Xinhua, MPD

Macau's Zhu Yuling, world's No. 5, wins Women's Singles at WTT Champions Doha

Rui Pastorin

Macau's Zhu Yuling has won the Women's Singles title against the Chinese mainland's Chen Xintong during the WTT (World Table Tennis) Champions Doha 2026, which was held at the Lusail Sports Arena from January 7 through 11.

The announcement was made in a statement on the WTT website yesterday and the day prior, with the competition being the first event of the WTT season. A total prize fund of US\$500,000 (4.015 million patacas) was up for grabs.

The scores were 5-11, 13-11, 3-11, 11-7, 11-8 and 13-11. The statement noted that through the win, Zhu, 31, is now World No.5, and marks the first time since 2019 that Zhu has returned to the Top 5.

Zhu, who was born in Mianyang, Sichuan, returned after a four-year break due to illness and enrolling in a doctoral programme,

representing Macau at the WTT Champions event in September 2024. The statement also pointed out Zhu's success, noting that she celebrated 500 total weeks in the World Top 20 last week. The statement also noted that Zhu was a former World No.1, which she achieved in November 2017.

Meanwhile, the winner of the competition's Men's Singles title was Lin Yun-Ju from Chinese Taipei, the statement said, with the 24-year-old rising to World No. 9 and returning to the Top 10.

"The completion of WTT Champions Doha 2026, the first event of the WTT season, has had a significant impact on the ITTF World Table Tennis Rankings, with players who delivered outstanding performances being rewarded with notable improvements in their standings", according to the statement. ■



This photo downloaded from the WTT website last night shows Zhu Yuling celebrating.

Police nab overstayer for stealing HK\$237,000 in chips from gaming table

Ada Lei

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested a male overstayer from the Chinese mainland on Thursday for stealing chips worth HK\$237,000 from a gaming table, PJ spokesman Leng Kam Lon said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Leng identified the suspect as a 42-year-old male surnamed Wang who claimed to be jobless.

According to Leng, a female gambler had placed HK\$237,000 in gaming chips on a gaming table at a casino in Cotai on Thursday evening before stepping away to watch others gambling.

Upon her return a short time later, she noticed Wang walking briskly away and discovered the chips were missing from the table. After failing to stop him, the victim immediately alerted casino security, who pursued and intercepted Wang. During the chase, Wang discarded the stolen chips in a flowerpot within the casino. Security personnel eventually apprehended him and reported the case to the police.

The police later recovered all of the stolen chips. Leng added that Wang had overstayed his legal permission to remain in Macau by three days and had been frequenting the casino and its surrounding area during that period.

Wang has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing a theft charge. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Judiciary Police (PJ) yesterday shows the stolen chips.

China, EU agree on price undertaking guidance for Chinese electric vehicles: MOC

BEIJING – China and the European Union have agreed on the necessity of providing general guidance on price undertakings for Chinese companies exporting battery electric vehicle (BEV) passenger cars to the EU, the Ministry of Commerce (MOC) said yesterday.

The move aims to address relevant concerns in a way that is more practical, targeted and consistent with WTO rules, the ministry said in a statement.

It noted that in the spirit of mutual respect, the two sides have conducted multiple rounds of consultation in order to implement the consensus of the China-EU Summit and properly resolve the EU's anti-subsidy case concerning Chinese BEVs.

To that end, the European Commission yesterday issued guidance on the submission of price undertaking offers, covering various aspects that should be addressed in any such offer, including the minimum import price, sales channels, cross-compensation, and future investments in the EU.

Each price undertaking offer is subject to the same legal criteria, and the commission will conduct each assessment in an objective and fair manner, following the principle of non-discrimination and in accordance with WTO rules, the commission said.

The progress fully reflects the spirit of the dialogue and the outcomes of the consultations between China and the EU, showing that the two sides have the ability and willingness to

resolve differences properly – through dialogue and consultation, under the framework of WTO rules – and to maintain the stability of automotive industrial and supply chains in China, the EU, and throughout the world, the commerce ministry said.

"This is conducive not only to ensuring the healthy development of China-EU economic and trade relations, but also to safeguarding the rules-based international trade order," the ministry added.

The China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Machinery and Electronic Products has noted that the proper resolution of the EU's anti-subsidy case against Chinese electric vehicles (EVs) is a shared expectation among industry players across the EV value chain, in both China and the EU.

The move will enhance the security and stability of related industrial and supply chains, safeguard overall China-EU economic and trade cooperation, and uphold the rules-based international trade order, the chamber said.

The China Chamber of Commerce to the European Union has said it welcomes the progress China and the EU have made in resolving the EV case through dialogue, noting that this will boost market confidence, improve the investment environment for Chinese EV firms in Europe, and support deepened China-EU cooperation in technological innovation and green transition.

– Xinhua

One-China principle is political foundation of China-Africa relations: FM

BEIJING – The one-China principle is a universal consensus of the international community and a basic norm governing international relations, as well as the political foundation of China-Africa relations, a foreign ministry spokesperson said yesterday.

Spokesperson Mao Ning made the remarks at a regular press briefing when asked to comment on the remarks by the Taiwan authorities about the one-China principle as stated in the joint press release of the 9th China-African Union (AU) Strategic Dialogue.

She said that the joint press release fully and accurately reflects the consistent, unambiguous position held by the African side regarding the Taiwan question.

She quoted AU Commission Chairperson Mahmoud Ali Youssouf as saying in a recent

interview that "we will be on board with China on the issue of one-China principle forever."

The Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2024 adopted the Beijing Declaration, Mao noted. Participating African countries and the AU Commission reaffirmed their firm support for the one-China principle, stressing that there is only one China in the world, Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory, and the Government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government of China, and backed China's efforts to achieve national reunification, Mao added.

"We urge the Taiwan authorities to face up to reality and stop their self-humiliating and shoddy political stunt," Mao said.

– Xinhua

Xi urges advancing Party self-governance with higher standards, more concrete measures

BEIJING – Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, yesterday called for advancing full and rigorous Party self-governance with higher standards and more concrete measures.

Xi, also the nation's president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks while addressing the fifth plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) in Beijing.

Xi urged efforts to confine power to an institutional cage in a more well-conceived and effective manner, and press ahead with the anti-corruption fight with a clearer understanding and stronger resolve, thus providing a strong guarantee for achieving the goals and tasks of the 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-2030).

Xi pointed out that in 2025, the CPC Central Committee had intensified efforts to improve Party conduct, uphold integrity and combat corruption, achieving notable results. Xi said efforts were made to maintain a tough stance against corruption and eradicate the breeding grounds and conditions for corruption.

Xi emphasized that implementing the major decisions and plans of the CPC Central Committee is a fundamental requirement for upholding its authority and its centralized, unified leadership.

Party organizations at all levels and Party members and officials should implement the decisions and plans of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th CPC Central Committee with concrete actions, he said.

Xi noted that confining power to an institutional cage is an important task in exercising full and rigorous Party self-governance.

He stressed that all are equal before the law and regulations, that compliance with them admits no privilege, and that enforcement of the law and regulations allows no exception.

Xi underscored that the fight against corruption is a major struggle that the Party cannot afford to lose, and must never lose.

He said that the current anti-corruption situation remains grave and complex, and that the task of eliminating the soil and conditions breeding corruption remains arduous. Xi added that it is essential to maintain a firm stance to leave corrupt officials with no place to hide.

Stressing the need to stay attuned to new trends and features of corruption, Xi urged efforts to innovate methods and approaches, promptly detect and accurately identify corrupt practices, and effectively address all forms of corruption, so as to continuously enhance the penetrating power of anti-corruption efforts.

He also urged strengthening coordination among all forms of oversight to advance integrated governance through whole-process collaboration, and called for sustained efforts to forge a loyal, upright and responsible disciplinary inspection and supervision force that dares to and is good at fighting against corruption.

Members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee Li Qiang, Zhao Leji, Wang Huning, Cai Qi and Ding Xuexiang attended the meeting.

Li Xi, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and secretary of the CCDI, presided over the meeting. On Monday afternoon, on behalf of the standing committee of the CCDI, Li also delivered a work report.

– Xinhua

Chinese, Sri Lankan FMs meet on ties

COLOMBO – Foreign Minister Wang Yi yesterday made a stopover in Sri Lanka on his way back from a trip to Africa and held a friendly meeting with Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, said China has extended a helping hand to Sri Lanka at the earliest opportunity to cope with the devastating cyclone, and believes the Sri Lankan people will overcome the disaster and rebuild their homes at an early date.

Wang said China is willing to enhance exchanges of governance experience with Sri Lanka, expand practical cooperation in various fields, facilitate people-to-people exchanges, further deepen the strategic cooperative partnership based on sincere mutual assistance and everlasting friendship between the two countries, and jointly build a China-Sri Lanka community with a shared future.

Wang said that in the face of an increasingly complex and volatile international situation, China will firmly safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of developing countries, especially small and medium-sized countries, uphold the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and international law, and work with like-minded countries to oppose the resurgence of the "law of the jungle," resist all forms of power politics and bullying, and defend



Foreign Minister Wang Yi (left), also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, shakes hands with Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath in Sri Lanka yesterday. Wang yesterday made a stopover in Sri Lanka on his way back from a trip to Africa and held a friendly meeting with Herath.

– Xinhua

multilateralism and international fairness and justice.

Wang noted that China appreciates Sri Lanka's long-standing adherence to the one-China principle and is willing to continue supporting Sri Lanka in pursuing a development path suited to its national conditions. He added that the two sides can strengthen regional cooperation oriented toward South Asia and jointly promote a more just and equitable global governance system.

Herath thanked China for its valuable assistance following the cyclone disaster. He said Sri Lanka regards China as one of its most reliable strategic partners,

and is willing to maintain close high-level exchanges with China, deepen cooperation in infrastructure, maritime affairs, tourism, and cultural exchanges, and continuously enhance the Sri Lanka-China strategic cooperative partnership.

He reaffirmed Sri Lanka's adherence to the one-China principle, expressed firm support for China's efforts to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and said Sri Lanka is willing to strengthen communication and coordination with China in multilateral affairs to jointly safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of developing countries.

– AFP

Rohingya 'targeted for destruction' by Myanmar, ICJ hears

Richard Carter with Sheikh Sabiha Alam in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

THE HAGUE — Myanmar deliberately targeted the Rohingya minority with "horrific violence" in a bid to destroy the community, Gambia's justice minister told the International Court of Justice (ICJ) yesterday at the start of a genocide hearing.

"It is not about esoteric issues of international law. It is about real people, real stories and a real group of human beings. The Rohingya of Myanmar. They have been targeted for destruction," Dawda Jallow told ICJ judges.

The Gambia brought the case accusing Myanmar of breaching the 1948 Genocide Convention during a crackdown in 2017.

Legal experts are watching closely as it could give clues for how the court will handle similar accusations against Israel over its military campaign in Gaza, in a case brought to the ICJ by South Africa.

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims fled violence by the Myanmar army and Buddhist militias, escaping to neighbouring Bangladesh and bringing harrowing accounts of mass rape, arson and murder.

They were subjected to "the most horrific violence and destruction one could imagine", said Jallow.

Paul Reichler, a lawyer representing The Gambia, laid out searing allegations from witnesses, including gang rapes, sexual mutilation, and infants being burned alive.

Today, 1.17 million Rohingya live crammed into dilapidated camps spread over 8,000 acres in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh.

From there, mother-of-two Janifa Begum, 37, told AFP: "I want to see whether the suffering we endured is reflected during the hearing."

"We want justice and peace," she said.

A final decision could take months or even years, and while the ICJ has no means of enforcing its decisions, a ruling in favour of The Gambia would heap more political pressure on Myanmar.

"We did not bring this case lightly," said Jallow.

"We brought this case after reviewing credible reports of the



Dawda Jallow (right), Minister of Justice of the Republic of Gambia waits for the start of the first hearing at the International Court of Justice in which Myanmar is accused of committing genocide against the country's Muslim minority, the Rohingya, in The Hague, Netherlands yesterday.

— AFP

most brutal and vicious violations imaginable inflicted upon a vulnerable group that had been dehumanised and persecuted for many years," added the minister.

'Senseless killings'

The Gambia, a Muslim-majority country in west Africa, brought the case in 2019 to the ICJ, which rules in disputes between states.

Under the Genocide Convention, any country can file a case at the ICJ against any other it believes is in breach of the treaty.

In a landmark moment at the Peace Palace courthouse in The Hague, Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi appeared herself in 2019 to defend her country.

She dismissed Banjul's argument as a "misleading and incomplete factual picture" of what she said was an "internal armed conflict".

Myanmar has always maintained the crackdown by its armed forces, known as the Tatmadaw, was justified to root out Rohingya insurgents after a series of attacks left a dozen security personnel dead.

Suu Kyi will not be revisiting the Peace Palace. She has been detained since a 2021 coup, on charges rights groups say were politically motivated.

Myanmar's junta spokesman could not be reached for comment by AFP yesterday.

'Physical destruction'

In 2020, the ICJ said Myanmar must take "all measures within its power" to halt any acts prohibited in

the 1948 UN Genocide Convention.

These acts included "killing members of the group" and "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part".

The United States officially declared that the violence amounted to genocide in 2022, three years after a UN team said Myanmar harboured "genocidal intent" towards the Rohingya.

The ICJ hearings wrap up on January 29.

"When the court considers... all of the evidence taken together, the only reasonable conclusion to reach is that a genocidal intent permeated and informed Myanmar's myriad of state-led actions against the Rohingya," said Philippe Sands, arguing for The Gambia.

The ICJ is not the only court looking into possible genocide against the Rohingya — other cases are underway at the International Criminal Court and in Argentina under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

Outside the court, Tun Khin, president of the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK, told AFP: "We have been waiting for justice for many years."

"What's happening to the Rohingya is genocide, intentionally destroying our community. And we want to get justice. And when justice is done, we want to go back to our homeland with all our rights. And we want compensation," he added.

— AFP

Myanmar pro-military party wins Suu Kyi's seat in junta-run poll: party official

YANGON — Myanmar's main pro-military party won the parliamentary seat of detained democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi in elections run under the junta's rule, a party official told AFP yesterday.

A senior official from the Union Solidarity and Development Party speaking anonymously because they were not authorised to disclose results said they "won in Kawhmu"

- Suu Kyi's former seat in Yangon region.

"We won 15 lower house seats out of 16 places in Yangon region," they added, after Kawhmu and dozens of other constituencies voted on Sunday in the second stage of a three-phase election.

The military deposed and detained Suu Kyi in a 2021 coup, claiming she secured a landslide election win over pro-military

parties the previous year by means of massive voter fraud.

The final phase of the month-long vote is scheduled for January 25, with the junta saying the election will return power to the people.

But with Suu Kyi still held in seclusion and her hugely popular party dissolved, democracy advocates say the vote has been rigged by a crackdown on dissent and a ballot stacked with military allies. — AFP

Death toll in central Philippine dumpsite collapse rises to 8

MANILA — The death toll from a dumpsite collapse in the central Philippine city of Cebu has climbed to eight as search and rescue operations continued yesterday for 28 people still missing, a city official said.

Cebu City Councillor Dave Tumulak said in a radio interview that while 12 people were rescued after the facility collapsed last Thursday afternoon, 28 individuals, including engineers and site workers, remain unaccounted for four days.

Tumulak said realistic hopes of finding survivors have begun to fade as rescue and retrieval efforts are slowed by serious safety concerns and hazardous environmental conditions at the site.

Rescue teams are carefully removing debris using acetylene torches, backhoes, and a 50-tonne crane, while managing the dangers posed by unstable trash mounds that continue to emit methane and carbon gases.

Local officials warned that cutting metal with acetylene torches in an environment saturated with methane is extremely dangerous due to the high risk of fire and explosion, as both gases are highly flammable and can easily ignite.

The collapse has forced the city to suspend dumping operations at the facility, raising concerns about the growing volume of daily garbage, Tumulak added.

— Xinhua

'Genius' chimpanzee Ai dies in Japan at 49

TOKYO — Ai, a "genius" chimpanzee who could recognise more than 100 Chinese characters and the English alphabet, has died aged 49, Japanese researchers said.

Ai, which means love in Japanese, took part in studies on perception, learning and memory that advanced our understanding of primate intelligence, the Centre for the Evolutionary Origins of Human Behaviour at Kyoto University said in a statement.

She died Friday from multiple organ failure and ailments related to old age, the school said.

Aside from mastering Chinese characters and the alphabet, Ai could also identify the Arabic numerals from zero to nine and 11 colours, primatologist Tetsuro Matsuzawa said in 2014.

In one study, Ai was presented with a computer screen displaying the Chinese character for pink, along with a pink square and an alternative purple square. The chimpanzee correctly chose the pink square, Matsuzawa said.

When shown an apple, Ai picked out a rectangle, a circle and a dot on the computer screen to draw a "virtual apple", he said.

Her high ability made her the subject of a number of scholarly papers and media programmes, including studies published in the journal *Nature*, and earned her the nickname "genius" in popular media.

The chimpanzee from west Africa arrived at the university in 1977, and in 2000, gave birth to a son Ayumu, whose abilities drew attention to studies of parent-child knowledge transfer, Japan's Kyodo News said.

Ai's studies helped to establish "an experimental framework for understanding the chimpanzee mind, providing a crucial foundation for considering the evolution of the human mind," the Centre said.

"Ai was highly curious and actively participated in these studies, revealing various aspects of the chimpanzee mind for the first time." — AFP



Indonesia's former education minister Nadiem Makarim (centre) attends his trial at the Corruption Court in Jakarta yesterday. Makarim, who is also a co-founder of ride-hailing app Gojek, is on trial for his involvement in a US\$124 million corruption scandal linked to a government procurement project for school laptops during his tenure as education minister.

— AFP

N Korea says 'shameless' US making mockery of UN

SEOUL—North Korea condemned yesterday what it called “shameless” moves by the United States that it said undermined the United Nations and accused Washington of a “hideous criminal act”.

Pyongyang’s mission to the United Nations in New York blasted reported plans for a briefing on its alleged violations of sanctions, in a statement carried by the state-run Korean Central News Agency.

Instead, it said, “what should be questioned and openly discussed in the UN as the most important pending issue is the hideous criminal act of the US”.

“The US despises the existence of the UN itself,” Pyongyang said.

Pyongyang’s envoys did not specify the act in question, but the statement comes just over a week after the United States’ capture of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

That operation represents a

nightmare scenario for North Korea’s leadership, which has long feared a so-called “decapitation strike” of that kind and accused Washington of seeking to remove it from power.

Washington’s “irrationality and malpractice of abusing the UN arena to satisfy its geopolitical self-interest should never be allowed”, North Korea’s mission said.

It also accused Washington of “shameless illegal and immoral acts” and “trying to make a mockery of the UN arena for unilateral and selfish purposes”.

President Donald Trump last week announced the United States would leave a number of United Nations organisations it identified as “contrary to the interests of the United States”.

North Korea is under a slew of United Nations Security Council sanctions over its nuclear and missile programme. —AFP



A cremator of the Dom community walks past the funeral pyres burning at the Manikarnika Ghat on the banks of the river Ganges in Varanasi, India yesterday. —AFP

Nepal's unemployed youth scramble for election jobs

Anup Ojha

KATHMANDU — Tens of thousands of young Nepalis have applied for temporary jobs policing upcoming elections, the first polls since a youth-led uprising spotlighted the Himalayan nation’s economic woes.

Nepal estimated it suffered losses of about US\$586 million and that nearly 15,000 people lost their jobs after protests toppled the government in September.

The youth-led demonstrations, initially triggered by anger over a brief government ban on social media, were fuelled by deeper frustration over corruption and economic hardship.

After a police crackdown killed young protesters, the riots spread and parliament was set ablaze, prompting the government’s collapse. At least 77 people were killed.

More than 27,000 people applied for the temporary police jobs on Friday and Saturday, the first two days of applications, Nepal police spokesman Abinay Kafle said.

Sarika Karki, 20, said she was crossing her fingers to “earn some pocket money”.

“I am also Gen-Z, but I do not have a job,” she told AFP in the capital Kathmandu on Sunday.

“I hope the election will go well, and I am able to help in my own way as a temporary police officer”. —AFP

Nepal plans to fill 149,090 police posts ahead of the March polls, with each recruit paid roughly US\$280 for 40 days of service — a princely sum where per capita gross national income in 2025 was US\$1,404, according to a UN monitoring report.

More than 839,000 Nepalis left the country of 30 million to work abroad last year, according to government data.

82 percent of the country’s workforce is in informal employment, the World Bank says.

The temporary officers will be tasked with managing queues at polling stations, carrying ballot boxes and other logistical duties.

“Sunday was a public holiday but so many people, most [of them] youths, were queueing outside police stations with great excitement,” police spokesman Kafle told AFP.

There were queues across all 77 districts to fill the application form yesterday, he said.

Many of the young applicants would be participating in their first election as temporary police officers.

“I used to work in a hotel as a cook, but I am jobless now,” Nischal Poudel, 30, told AFP from an application queue in Kathmandu.

“Only God knows if I will be selected, but now that I’ve applied and I am sure something good will happen”. —AFP

Bangladesh's political crossroads: an election guide

DHAKA — Bangladesh has been in political turmoil since a student-led revolt overthrew former prime minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024, ending her 15-year autocratic rule.

The Muslim-majority nation of 170 million people will hold its first elections since the uprising on February 12.

Here are the key players in a vote that European Union election observers say will be the “biggest democratic process of 2026, anywhere”.

Interim government

Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, 85, returned from exile in August 2024 at the behest of protesters to lead a caretaker government as “chief advisor”. He will step down after the polls.

Yunus said he inherited a “completely broken” political system, and championed a reform charter he argues is vital to prevent a return to authoritarian rule.

A referendum on the proposed changes will be held on the same day. He says the reforms will strengthen checks and balances between the executive, judicial and legislative branches.

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)

The BNP, led by Tarique Rahman, 60, is widely tipped to win the election, after he returned from 17 years of self-imposed exile in December 2025.

His mother, the BNP’s veteran leader and former prime minister Khaleda Zia, died aged 80, days after his return.

A BNP-led alliance includes both leftist and centrist parties, as well as small Islamist groups.

Islamist-led alliance

Jamaat-e-Islami, the country’s largest and best-organised Islamist party, ideologically aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood, is



Jamaat-e-Islami party leaders and activists wave Bangladesh's national flag during a rally held to call for the introduction of a proportional representation system in the country's forthcoming general election and press other demands at the Suhrawardy Udyan in Dhaka on July 19, 2025. After years of repression, Bangladesh's Islamist groups are mobilising ahead of February 12 elections, determined to gain a foothold in government as they sense their biggest opportunity in decades. At the centre of this formidable push is Jamaat-e-Islami, the country's largest and best-organised Islamist party. —AFP

seeking a return to formal politics after years of bans and crackdowns under Hasina’s 15-year rule.

Jamaat is leading an alliance of more than 10 smaller parties, including the National Citizen Party (NCP), formed by student leaders who spearheaded the uprising.

It also includes the small Liberal Democratic Party, as well as fringe Islamist parties, most of which held only a handful of seats in previous parliaments.

Bangladesh — one of the world’s most populous Muslim-majority countries after Indonesia and Pakistan — is home to diverse strands of Islamic practice, including a significant Sufi community often condemned by hardline Islamists.

Bangladesh also has a small Shia community. Around 10 percent of Bangladeshis are not Muslim — the majority of those are Hindu and the country is also home to a small number of Christians.

Awami League

Hasina, 78, a fugitive in India, was sentenced to death in absentia for crimes against humanity in November.

Her former ruling Awami League, once the country’s most

popular party, has been outlawed.

Loyalists may run as independent candidates, but it is unclear who the party’s once sizable membership will back.

Human Rights Watch condemned the ban as “draconian”, while Hasina has warned that holding elections without her party would be “sowing the seeds” of further division.

Army

In a country with a long history of military coups, the army remains a pivotal force.

It played a decisive factor in Hasina’s downfall, choosing not to intervene against the protests.

The military continues to patrol the streets, maintaining a visible presence alongside the police.

International players

Regional powers have taken a keen interest.

Bangladesh’s relations with India — once Hasina’s strongest ally — have cooled.

Yunus’ first state visit was to China, signalling a strategic shift, while Dhaka has also deepened engagement with Pakistan, India’s arch-rival. —AFP

Meta urges Australia to change teen social media ban

SYDNEY — Tech giant Meta urged Australia yesterday to rethink its world-first social media ban for under-16s, while reporting that it has blocked more than 544,000 accounts under the new law.

Australia has required big platforms including Meta, TikTok and YouTube to stop underage users from holding accounts since the legislation came into force on December 10 last year.

Companies face fines of Aus\$49.5 million (US\$33 million) if they fail to take “reasonable steps” to comply.

Billionaire Mark Zuckerberg’s Meta said it had removed 331,000 underage accounts from Instagram, 173,000 from Facebook, and 40,000 from Threads in the week to December 11.

The company said it was committed to complying with the law.

“That said, we call on the Australian government to engage

with industry constructively to find a better way forward, such as incentivising all of industry to raise the standard in providing safe, privacy-preserving, age appropriate experiences online, instead of blanket bans,” it said in statement.

‘Whack-a-mole’

Meta renewed an earlier call for app stores to be required to verify people’s ages and get parental approval before under-16s can download an app.

This was the only way to avoid a “whack-a-mole” race to stop teens migrating to new apps to avoid the ban, the company said.

The government said it was holding social media companies to account for the harm they cause young Australians.

“Platforms like Meta collect a huge amount of data on their users for commercial purposes. They can and

must use that information to comply with Australian law and ensure people under 16 are not on their platforms,” a government spokesperson said.

Meta said parents and experts were worried about the ban isolating young people from online communities, and driving some to less regulated apps and darker corners of the internet.

Initial impacts of the legislation “suggest it is not meeting its objectives of increasing the safety and well-being of young Australians”, it said.

While raising concern over the lack of an industry standard for determining age online, Meta said its compliance with the Australian law would be a “multilayered process”.

Since the ban, the California-based firm said it had helped found the OpenAge Initiative, a non-profit group that has launched age-verification tools called AgeKeys to be used with participating platforms. —AFP

Hamas to hold leadership elections in coming months: sources

GAZA CITY — Hamas is preparing to hold internal elections to rebuild its leadership following Israel's killing of several of the group's top figures during the war in Gaza, sources in the movement said yesterday.

"Internal preparations are still ongoing in order to hold the elections at the appropriate time in areas where conditions on the ground allow it," a Hamas leader told AFP.

The vote is expected to take place "in the first months of 2026."

Much of the group's top leadership has been decimated during the war, which was sparked by Hamas's unprecedented attack on Israel in October 2023.

The war has also devastated the Gaza Strip, leaving its more than two million residents in dire humanitarian conditions.

The leadership renewal process includes the formation of a new 50-member Shura Council, a consultative body dominated by religious figures.

Its members are selected every four years by Hamas' three branches: the Gaza Strip, the occupied West Bank and the movement's external leadership.

Hamas prisoners in Israeli prisons are also eligible to vote.

During previous elections, held before the war, members across Gaza and the West Bank used to gather at different locations including mosques to choose the Shura Council.

That council is responsible, every four years, for electing the 18-member political bureau and its chief, who serves as Hamas's overall leader.

Another Hamas source close to the process said the timing of the political bureau elections remains uncertain "given the circumstances our people are going through".

After Israel killed former Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran in July 2024, the group chose its then-Gaza chief Yahya Sinwar as his successor.

Israel accused Sinwar of masterminding the October 7 attack.

He too was killed by Israeli forces in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, three months after Haniyeh's assassination.

Hamas then opted for an interim five-member leadership committee based in Qatar, postponing the appointment of a single leader until elections are held and given the risk of being targeted by Israel.

According to sources, two figures have now emerged as

frontrunners to be the head of the political bureau: Khalil al-Hayya and Khaled Meshal.

Hayya, 65, a Gaza native and Hamas's chief negotiator in ceasefire talks, has held senior roles since at least 2006, according to the US-based NGO the Counter-Extremism Project (CEP).

Meshal, who led the Political Bureau from 2004 to 2017, has never lived in Gaza. He was born in the West Bank in 1956.

He joined Hamas in Kuwait and later lived in Jordan, Syria and Qatar. The CEP says he oversaw Hamas's evolution into a political-military hybrid.

He currently heads the movement's diaspora office.

A Hamas member in Gaza said Hayya is a strong contender due to his relations with other Palestinian factions, including rival Fatah, which dominates the Palestinian Authority, as well as his regional standing.

Hayya also enjoys backing from both the Shura Council and Hamas's military wing, the Ezzedine Al-Qassam Brigades.

Another source said other potential candidates include West Bank Hamas leader Zaher Jabarin and Shura Council head Nizar Awadallah.

—AFP



A displaced Palestinian child fills a water container from a hose pipe, as a toddler runs over with empty containers from a family tent shelter, set up with hundreds of other shelters, in Gaza City on Sunday. The majority of Gaza's 2.4 million people have been displaced, often multiple times, by the war that began with Hamas's attack on southern Israel on October 7, 2023. With displaced families living in tented camps, serious concerns have been raised over their precarious living conditions. —AFP

Israel revokes French researcher's travel permit

PARIS — A French historian has been banned from travelling to Israel after he criticised Israeli military operations in the besieged Gaza Strip, he said yesterday.

Vincent Lemire was head of the French Research Centre in Jerusalem from 2019 to August 2023, before Palestinian militant group Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, 2023, triggering an Israeli military response that has ravaged Gaza.

The academic, who specialises in the history of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, has since publicly spoken out about the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza and called for France to sanction Israel over the conflict's mounting death toll. He has also called for the release of Israeli hostages.

He was due to travel to Israel on Sunday with a two-year electronic travel authorisation for the country

(ETA-IL) that he had previously obtained, but four days earlier, he received an email.

"Due to a change in circumstances in your case, the ETA-IL approval... which was granted to you as of 27/02/2025 is revoked," it read, according to a screenshot Lemire sent AFP.

Contacted by AFP, the Israeli authorities did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

"My positions are not new, but I have never boycotted Israel. I have regularly issued invitations to Israeli academics and I have been going to Israel for 25 years, so I am very surprised," Lemire told AFP.

"In terms of academic freedom, it's very problematic," said the researcher, who had planned some 20 meetings and seminars with Israeli and Palestinian researchers and students during his trip.

His ban comes after Israel at the start of the month banned 37 foreign humanitarian organisations from accessing the Gaza Strip after they refused to share lists of their Palestinian employees with government officials.

"As with the 37 NGOs banned from working in Gaza, it feels like we're in a dynamic of settling scores," said Lemire, who is trying to have the ban revoked.

Lemire and former Israeli ambassador to France Elie Barnavi in August urged President Emmanuel Macron in French daily newspaper Le Monde to slap sanctions on Israel to avoid having to recognise a "graveyard" as a Palestinian state.

Macron recognised Palestinian statehood in September, before a fragile ceasefire took hold in Gaza the following month.

—AFP

Israeli police issues arrest warrant against former Netanyahu aide

JERUSALEM — Israeli police issued an arrest warrant for a former aide to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday, accusing him of being implicated in two affairs involving the premier's office.

Israel Einhorn, a former campaign adviser to Netanyahu who now lives in Serbia, appeared on a list of people whom the police suspect of involvement in the so-called "Bild affair" and are prevented from communicating with the prime minister's office.

Next to Einhorn's name a line was added saying there is a "pending arrest warrant against him," according to a document submitted to the court.

"We can confirm the warrant," a police spokesman told AFP.

The Bild affair involved the leaking of classified intelligence from the Israeli military to the German tabloid *Bild* in September 2024. Two other Netanyahu aides were arrested and indicted for the leak.

The document aimed to prove that Hamas was not interested in a ceasefire deal, and to support Netanyahu's claim that the hostages captured by Palestinian militants in their October 7, 2023 attack on Israel could only be released through military pressure rather than negotiations.

Einhorn has not returned to Israel since the investigation was opened, but he was questioned by Israeli investigators in Serbia last year.

He is also a suspect in the so-called "Qatargate" scandal, in which he and other close associates

of Netanyahu are suspected of being recruited by Qatar to promote the Gulf country's image in Israel.

Qatar hosts senior Hamas leaders and has played a mediating role between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist movement during the war in Gaza.

It also sent millions of US dollars in cash to Gaza every month between 2018 and October 2023 to pay Hamas's civil servants and for cash handouts to Gazan families.

The news of the warrant came after the police on Sunday detained a current senior aide to Netanyahu suspected of obstructing an investigation, with local media reporting that it was the premier's chief of staff Tzachi Braverman.

Another former Netanyahu aide, Eli Feldstein, recently said during a televised interview that Braverman offered to "shut down" an army investigation into the *Bild* affair.

Feldstein himself is on trial for his alleged involvement in both the *Bild* leak and Qatargate.

In the same interview, Feldstein said Netanyahu was aware of the leak and was in favour of using the document to drum up public support for the war.

Israeli media reported yesterday that Braverman, picked to become Israel's next ambassador to the UK, was barred from leaving the country for 30 days, and from being in contact with the Prime Minister's office for 15 days.

AFP contacted the police and Braverman's lawyer to confirm the bans but did not immediately receive a response.

Anti-Hamas militia says killed senior Gaza police officer

GAZA CITY — An armed group opposed to Hamas and suspected of being backed by Israel said yesterday that it had killed a top police officer from the Palestinian Islamist movement in the southern Gaza Strip.

The group, known as the Popular Forces, got its start in Gaza's southern Rafah governorate, where it was accused of aid looting, though its late leader had presented it as being dedicated to Hamas's overthrow.

The killing came as Hamas seeks to reassert itself across the areas where it still holds sway, though more than half of the territory remains under Israeli military control.

Hamas' interior and national security ministry announced the head of the police investigations department in Khan Yunis in southern Gaza, Mahmoud Ahmed al-Astal, was "assassinated" in the coastal Al-Mawasi area yesterday.

"According to initial investigations, the shooting was carried out from a car occupied by several agents of the Israeli occupation," it said in a statement,

apparently referring to armed groups backed by Israel.

Hamas said security services had opened a probe into the incident.

The Popular Forces claimed responsibility in a video sent to journalists yesterday, with one of the group's leaders, Hossam al-Astal, saying the target had "killed many people".

"We tell you, every member of Hamas, we will come and kill him," he added.

The Popular Forces announced the death of its leader Yasser Abu Shabab in early December.

Abu Shabab had previously said his group was able to move freely in zones under Israeli military control and communicated their operations beforehand.

Israeli authorities acknowledged in June that they had armed Palestinian gangs opposed to Hamas, without directly naming the one led by Abu Shabab.

Despite a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas since October, deadly violence has continued to rock the Gaza Strip as both sides accuse each other of violating the truce.

—AFP

Trump vows to cut off Cuba's oil after toppling Venezuelan ally Maduro

Michael Mathes

WASHINGTON – US President Donald Trump urged Cuba yesterday to “make a deal” soon, pledging to cut off all oil and money flowing to the communist-run island after the toppling of Havana’s key ally, Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro.

The threatening social media post drew an angry retort from Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel, who said “no one” would tell his country what to do.

Washington has imposed economy-crippling sanctions on its island neighbor for decades, but Trump has ramped up the pressure in recent days.

US special forces seized Maduro and his wife this month in a lightning raid that left dozens of the ousted Venezuelan president’s security personnel dead – many of whom were Cuban.

Though Maduro’s allies have become interim leaders, Trump has claimed the United States now actually controls Venezuela, through a US naval blockade of its vital oil sector.

“THERE WILL BE NO MORE OIL OR MONEY GOING TO CUBA - ZERO!” Trump said Sunday morning on his Truth Social platform. “I strongly suggest they make a deal, BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE.”

He said “Cuba lived, for many years, on large amounts of OIL and MONEY from Venezuela. In return, Cuba provided ‘Security Services’ for the last two Venezuelan dictators, BUT NOT ANYMORE!”

“Most of those Cubans are DEAD from last week’s U.S.A. attack, and Venezuela doesn’t need protection anymore from the thugs and extortionists who held them hostage for so many years.”

Trump provided almost no details about what potential deal he referred to, or what such an arrangement would achieve.



A tourist vehicle drives past the US embassy in Havana on Sunday.

– AFP

Asked about it later on Sunday, Trump told reporters traveling with him on Air Force One that he wanted people forced out of Cuba or who “left under duress” to be taken care of.

“Most importantly, right now, we’re going to take care of the people that came from Cuba, that are American citizens, or in our country,” Trump said, without clarifying how this would be achieved under a deal with Havana.

‘Ready to fall’

A week ago, Trump stated that “Cuba is ready to fall,” noting that the island’s economic crisis was worsening and it would be difficult for Havana to “hold out” without receiving heavily subsidized Venezuelan oil.

Earlier on Sunday, the president reposted a message that jokingly suggested US Secretary of State Marco Rubio – a child of Cuban immigrants who concurrently holds the posts of national security advisor, acting head of the US archives, and acting international aid administrator – could also become the president of Cuba.

Trump shared that post with the comment: “Sounds good to me!”

Cuba’s president rebuffed Trump’s threatening language, saying the Caribbean island’s residents were “ready to defend the homeland to the last drop of blood.”

“Cuba is a free, independent and sovereign nation. No one tells us what to do,” Díaz-Canel wrote on X.

Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez also weighed in to stress that Cuba is within its rights to import fuel from any willing exporter, “without interference or subordination to the unilateral coercive measures of the United States.”

‘Talk, talk, talk’

A Cold War-era US trade embargo has cinched Cuba’s economy beginning in 1962, and since 2000 Havana increasingly has relied on Venezuelan oil provided as part of a deal struck with Maduro’s predecessor, the firebrand leftist Hugo Chávez.

On Sunday in the streets of Havana, retiree Mercedes Simon seemed to dismiss the US leader’s latest bluster.

“Trump is not going to touch Cuba,” the 65-year-old told AFP. “All the [US] presidents talk, talk, talk” about Cuba, for decades, “but they don’t act.”

Marcos Sánchez, a 21-year-old working in the restaurant business, said the two countries should find common ground, “without resorting to violence.”

Trump’s provocative language on Cuba comes as the emboldened American leader has hinted he has other countries in his sights after capturing Maduro.

Trump, who had openly sought last year’s Nobel Peace Prize, has recently threatened Colombia, Mexico, Iran and Greenland.

Some Republican US lawmakers on Sunday lauded Trump for his aggressive comments on Cuba, including congressman Mario Díaz-Balart from Florida.

“The tyranny in Cuba will not survive the second term of President Trump,” Diaz-Balart posted in Spanish on X, “and Cuba will finally be free after decades of misery, tragedy, and pain.”

– AFP

Pope receives Venezuelan opposition leader Machado: Vatican

VATICAN CITY – Pope Leo received Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado at the Vatican yesterday, the Holy See said.

There were no details about the audience, with the Vatican publishing Machado’s name in a list of people received by the US pope yesterday morning.

The Vatican did not immediately respond to an AFP request for more information about the meeting.

The papal audience came the same day as Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani announced that two Italians, Alberto Trentini and Mario Burlo, held since November 2024 in Venezuela, had been released and were on their way home.

Machado, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in December, has been sidelined by Washington in the wake of the US intervention in Venezuela that toppled President Nicolás Maduro.

US President Donald Trump said on Thursday he would meet Machado this week after previously saying she did not have the respect or support within Venezuela to lead.

Leo, 70, called for Venezuela’s sovereignty to be protected in a speech to diplomats on Friday.

The Chicago-born pope issued an appeal “to respect the will of the Venezuelan people, and to safeguard the human and civil rights of all” following the suggestion by US President Donald Trump that the US could control the South American country for years.

The Vatican’s chief diplomat Pietro Parolin, a former papal envoy to Venezuela, spoke with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio last week.

The two discussed “efforts to improve the humanitarian situation, particularly in Venezuela,” the US Department of State said in a statement.

– AFP

‘No conversations’ with US, says Cuban president after Trump threats

HAVANA – Cuba’s leader said yesterday there were “no conversations” with the United States, after President Donald Trump urged the communist-ruled island to “make a deal” or pay the price.

“There are no conversations with the US government except for technical contacts in the area of migration,” Miguel Díaz-Canel wrote on X after Trump said the nations were in talks following the US military toppling of Havana’s leftist ally Nicolas Maduro

of Venezuela.

Trump on Sunday urged Havana to “make a deal” soon, pledging to cut off all oil and money Venezuela had provided before the arrest of Maduro in a lightning raid on January 3.

Washington has imposed economy-crippling sanctions on its island neighbour for decades, but Trump has ramped up the pressure in recent days.

“THERE WILL BE NO MORE OIL OR MONEY GOING TO CUBA – ZERO!” Trump said on his Truth

Social platform. “I strongly suggest they make a deal, BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE.”

Trump provided almost no details about what potential deal he was referring to.

Díaz-Canel retorted angrily that “no one” would tell Cuba what to do, adding on Monday that relations with the US “must be based on international law rather than hostility, threats, and economic coercion.”

– AFP

Mexico rules out US troops, Sheinbaum tells Trump

MEXICO CITY – Mexico’s President Claudia Sheinbaum said yesterday that she had discussed her country’s security and sovereignty with Donald Trump after the US president threatened ground attacks against drug cartels.

She said she told Trump that any US troop deployment in Mexico was “not on the table.”

“We spoke about various topics, including security with respect for our sovereignties, reducing drug trafficking, trade, and investments,”

Sheinbaum said on social media.

Trump again said last week that land attacks against drug cartels would follow recent US maritime operations in the Pacific and Caribbean, without specifying where or when.

Mexico extradited dozens of cartel leaders to the United States in 2025 and reinforced border cooperation, but Sheinbaum has repeatedly voiced opposition to any military intervention from outside.

Trump recently told Mexico it had to “get their act together,” following

months of pressure over drugs and trade on the United States’ southern neighbour.

He said Sheinbaum – whom he met in Washington in December – was a “terrific person” but added he was pushing her to let him send US troops to tackle drug cartels in Mexico, an offer he said she has previously rebuffed.

Since seizing Venezuela’s president from Caracas, Trump has also made threats against other leftist governments in the region, including Cuba, Colombia and Mexico. – AFP

ECOWAS, Guina-Bissau junta discuss release of detainees, transition

BISSAU – African leaders representing regional bloc ECOWAS held talks on Saturday with Guinea-Bissau's junta government on the release of detainees and the transition to constitutional rule, sources said.

They also met two opposition figures, one of whom is in detention and another who was forced to take refuge in a foreign embassy.

Sierra Leone President Julius Maada Bio, who currently holds the rotating chairmanship of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and Senegal President Bassirou Diomaye Faye met officials from the country's new ruling junta, which is being led General Horta N'Tam.

The talks were aimed at achieving rapid progress on the country's transition back to constitutional order, a source close to Guinea-Bissau's foreign ministry told AFP.

"Our discussions were constructive", Bio posted on Twitter after the meetings, calling "for a short transition led by an inclusive government reflecting Guinea-Bissau's political spectrum and society".

At the heart of Saturday's discussions was the release of

those detained in the coup, Guinea-Bissau officials said.

Just days after Guinea-Bissau held a presidential election in November, the country's military overthrew president Umaro Sissoco Embaló, who was seeking a second term, and suspended the electoral process.

Bio, Faye and their delegations visited opposition figure Domingos Simões Pereira who is being held in police headquarters prison, an AFP reporter witnessed.

Pereira was barred by the Supreme Court from running in the November election and has been in custody since the coup.

They also visited opposition candidate Fernando Dias, who ran against Embaló and who has taken refuge in Nigeria's embassy, which granted him asylum.

At the end of December the junta released six members of the political opposition who were close associates of Pereira. Three more opponents were released recently.

"The ECOWAS delegations had requested the unconditional release of all political prisoners, arguing that their detention hinders any climate of trust necessary for resolving the crisis", a member

of the junta's governing body, the High Military Command, told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity.

But Guinea-Bissau's authorities favour a gradual approach on the release of prisoners without providing a precise timetable, the source said.

According to the same source, the duration of the transition was another point of contention at the talks.

After taking over, the army announced it would control the coup-prone west African country for a period of one year.

The junta, however, now says a "security period" to stabilise the country before elections is needed, specifying that one year is not enough.

West African mediators have been pushing for a short, structured, and transparent transition, with a clear electoral timetable to restore constitutional order.

Also discussed at the talks was the potential for an ECOWAS standby force, which would be deployable should the crisis worsen.

However, several sources in Bissau indicate that local authorities perceive such a force as a threat to sovereignty. – AFP

Portugal launches 400-million-euro AI plan

LISBON – Portugal's National Artificial Intelligence Agenda (ANIA) was officially launched last week with an investment exceeding 400 million euros (US\$467 million) through 2030, the Ministry for State Reform announced.

Regarding the total ANIA cost, "it will have investment of more than 400 million euros in the 2026-2030 period, mostly with European funds," and "this is a strategic investment made with budgetary rigor," the ministry said.

The government views AI "as an opportunity to accelerate Portugal's competitive position, capable of generating an estimated 18-22 billion euros increase to GDP in the next decade."

The ministry lists a solid and growing talent base, universities and research centers of excellence in technical areas, a renewable, stable, and accessible energy structure, expanding technology and startup ecosystem, international talent attraction capacity, and a unique geostrategic location between three continents.

"Portugal can lead in strategic sectors and areas, using AI as an instrument to accelerate economic growth and social wellbeing," the ministry stated.

Portugal has a candidacy for a European gigafactory, led by the Portuguese Development Bank, in the initial evaluation phase in the European Union within the EuroHPC program. – Xinhua

Relief for Lula as Brazil inflation slows

RIO DE JANEIRO – Inflation in Brazil slowed in 2025 to 4.26 percent for the 12-month period, providing relief for President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva as he enters an election year, according to data released on Friday.

The leftist Lula, who is planning to run for a fourth term in October polls, had faced criticism for much of last year due to the rising cost of living.

But while prices rose slightly in December, full-year inflation was down from 4.83 percent in 2024, below the upper limit of the government's target of 4.5 percent.

According to statistics agency IBGE, the slowdown was largely driven by falling prices for basic food items, as improved supply followed weather-related disruptions to the 2024 harvests.

Offsetting this, electricity prices pushed inflation higher after tariff adjustments raised consumer bills.

This slowdown in inflation could pave the way for an easing of

the central bank's strict monetary policy.

In December, the central bank decided to maintain its key interest rate at 15 percent, one of the highest in the world.

Since returning power in 2023 for a third term, veteran left-winger Lula has repeatedly called for a rate cut to stimulate the country's economy.

Lula hails EU-Mercosur deal as 'historic day for multilateralism'

Meanwhile, Lula hailed the EU's approval on Friday of a free-trade agreement (FTA) with South American trade bloc Mercosur/Mercosul as marking "a historic day for multilateralism".

"In an international context of growing protectionism and unilateralism, this agreement is a vote in favour of international trade as the engine of economic growth, with advantages for both blocs," he wrote on X. – AFP, MPD

Equatorial Guinea's president reaffirms capital's relocation

YAOUNDE – Equatorial Guinean President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo has affirmed the relocation of the capital city from Malabo, located on Bioko Island, to the mainland city of Ciudad de la Paz in Djibloho Province, the government's Information and Press Office has announced.

Obiang signed the decree on the relocation plan on January 2 during a ceremony attended by top government officials.

Ciudad de la Paz, which in Spanish means "City of Peace," aims to improve accessibility and address logistical and security issues associated with island-based Malabo.

"The relocation of the nation's capital, from a security standpoint, is a crucial step, given that the government has been the victim

of several attacks originating from abroad via maritime routes," the Information and Press Office said in a statement.

The relocation also allows the Central African country to break with outdated colonial-era structures that no longer contribute to its modernization, the statement added.

According to local media, it will take one year to transfer all administrative services to the new capital.

Equatorial Guinea is a former Spanish colony. Apart from Spanish, French and Portuguese also are official languages. The country is a member of the Macau-based Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries, also known as Forum Macao.

– Xinhua, MPD



This undated handout photo released yesterday by Spanish National Police shows Spanish police officers posing in front of some of the nearly 10 tonnes of cocaine seized on a cargo ship that was sailing across the Atlantic between Brazil and Spain, at the port of Santa Cruz de Tenerife in Spain's Canary Islands. The authorities announced yesterday that they seized the largest cocaine seizure on the high seas ever made by the National Police, hidden among a shipment of salt on a cargo ship that had departed from Brazil, and arrested all 13 people on board. – AFP

At least 85 killed in rainy season in Mozambique

MAPUTO – At least 85 people have been killed and 70 others injured in Mozambique since October amid the ongoing rainy season, local media reported last week.

Citing a report by the country's disaster management authorities, more than 105,000 people have been affected by adverse weather conditions during the period.

Figures show that by late last week 9,851 houses had been totally or partially destroyed, while another 8,969 had been flooded. In the agricultural sector, more than 6,400 hectares of farmland had been inundated, affecting 2,866 farmers.

The report added that the ongoing rainy season has led to the opening of 15 accommodation centers nationwide. Of these, 11

have meanwhile closed, while four still remained operational last week, having sheltered a cumulative total of 4,303 people.

Mozambique is currently at the peak of its rainy season, a period marked by frequent alerts for heavy rains and strong winds, particularly in the central and southern regions. Typically, the country's last between October and April. – Xinhua, MPD

Carrick is frontrunner for interim Man Utd job: reports

Premier League MANCHESTER — Michael Carrick is in pole position to be named as Manchester United's interim manager until the end of the season, according to media reports yesterday.

The BBC and Sky Sports said talks between the 44-year-old and the club's hierarchy had progressed well, with United keen to make an appointment before players returned to training tomorrow.

Carrick previously had an unbeaten three-game stint as caretaker boss at Old Trafford in 2021.

The former midfielder, who won 12 major trophies in his 12-year playing career at United, was appointed manager of Middlesbrough in October 2022.

Carrick guided Middlesbrough to the Championship play-offs in his first season in charge but was dismissed in June after finishing 10th in the second tier.

United have also been in discussions with former boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer about a return to the club.

The Red Devils dismissed Ruben Amorim last week after a dismal 14-month stint under the Portuguese coach.

Caretaker boss Darren Fletcher has overseen a 2-2 draw against lowly Burnley in the Premier League and a 2-1 defeat to Brighton in the FA Cup.

United's exit from both domestic cup competitions at the first hurdle, plus a lack of European football, means they will play only 40 matches this season - their lowest number since the 1914/1915 campaign.

The 20-time English champions are seventh in the Premier League, but just three points outside the top four and one point behind fifth-placed Brentford.

A top-four finish would guarantee a return to the lucrative Champions League and top five is likely to be enough thanks to the strong performance of English sides in European competition so far this season.

United host local rivals Manchester City on Saturday in what could be Carrick's first game in charge.

— AFP

Alonso leaves Real Madrid, Arbeloa appointed as coach



MADRID — Real Madrid said yesterday that coach Xabi Alonso has left the Spanish giants by mutual consent, to be replaced by Alvaro Arbeloa.

A day after the team lost the Spanish Super Cup final against Barcelona, the club parted ways with the Basque coach eight months after his arrival and immediately appointed former Madrid player Arbeloa, who was coaching the reserve side.

"Real Madrid announce that, by mutual agreement between the club and Xabi Alonso, it has been decided to bring his tenure as first-team coach to an end," said the Los Blancos in a statement.

In a separate statement Madrid then announced Arbeloa would take Alonso's place, without specifying the length of the 42-year-old's contract.

"Arbeloa has been the coach of Castilla since June 2025 and has developed his entire coaching career in Real Madrid's academy since 2020," said Los Blancos.

Arbeloa's first match at the helm is a Copa del Rey last-16 visit to face second-tier Albacete tomorrow.

The Spaniard played 238 times for Madrid between 2009-2016, winning two Champions League titles and La Liga once, among other silverware.

Arbeloa also lifted the World Cup with Spain in 2010, as well as the European Championship in 2008 and 2012, playing alongside



Real Madrid's defender Alvaro Arbeloa celebrates with the Champions League trophy after winning the UEFA Champions League Final against Atletico de Madrid at Luz stadium in Lisbon, on May 24, 2014.

— AFP

Alonso for club and country.

Alonso joined in June, replacing veteran Carlo Ancelotti, but Madrid struggled to find consistency under the Basque coach and are second in La Liga, four points behind Barcelona.

Los Blancos were outplayed in a 3-2 defeat in Saudi Arabia on Sunday by Hansi Flick's side, the 44-year-old's last at the helm.

Alonso was close to the sack towards the end of 2025 but a run of five consecutive wins kept him in his position, until the Super Cup defeat.

Alonso had signed a three-season deal after leaving Bayer Leverkusen, until June 2028.

The team were thrashed 4-0 by Paris Saint-Germain in July in the Club World Cup semi-finals, which

was an early setback for the coach.

Despite a Clasico win over Barcelona in October, it appeared president Florentino Perez had not fully warmed to Alonso, who had intended to bring a modern coaching approach to the team.

The team struggled through a run of poor form amid an injury crisis, with Spanish media reporting some players had fallen out with him and that Alonso would be ousted if they failed to beat Manchester City in the Champions League in December.

Madrid lost but the performance was solid enough that Alonso was given more time to try and save his job.

However, the defeat by Barca in Jeddah was the final straw for Madrid, who agreed a deal with Alonso for him to depart.

— AFP

Rosenior plots long Chelsea stay as Arsenal loom



LONDON — New Chelsea boss Liam Rosenior said yesterday he would love to be at the club for six years or longer as he prepares for a blockbuster League Cup semi-final against Arsenal.

The Englishman, who swapped Strasbourg for Stamford Bridge last week, took charge of his first game on Saturday - a 5-1 FA Cup win at Charlton.

But tomorrow he faces a challenge of a different order when he comes up against Premier League leaders Arsenal in the first leg of the League Cup semi-final.

Rosenior last week replaced Enzo Maresca, who became the fourth permanent manager to leave Chelsea since the American-backed BlueCo consortium took control in May 2022.

The Italian won the UEFA Conference League and Club World Cup in his only full season in charge.

Rosenior, who has signed a six-and-a-half-year deal with the London club, told his pre-match press conference that he would like to be given time, as Mikel Arteta has been at Arsenal.

But the 41-year-old knows he must hit the ground running at a club that has become renowned for hiring and firing its managers.

"I'd love to be here for six years and longer," said. "I'd be here as long as possible. But I'm aware in order for that to happen, I need to win. It's as simple as that."

"I understand every club has a different project. This word project comes out a lot now in

football. But the idea in any project is that every game you play, you're trying to win it."

Rosenior said he believed Chelsea were strong enough to make an impact this season.

"I've got ideas about what I want the team to look like in a year's time, two years, three years' time," he said.

"But I think I've got enough resources and enough tools with me now... I've made that clear to the players. We're going to give it our best shot on Wednesday."

Rosenior was questioned whether the clash at Stamford Bridge would be one of the biggest games of his brief managerial career, which included a spell at English second-tier club Hull before his time at Strasbourg.

"I don't see it that way," he said. "I think every session that I take, every meeting that I take, every game that we play is the most important thing."

"I live in the now. So it is the most important game because it's the next one. I mean that."

"If you start to prioritise games or think something's more important than the other, then you're not focused."

Newcastle take on Manchester City in the other League Cup semi-final, with the final taking place at Wembley on March 22.

The Newcastle/Manchester City game will be played at 4 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time and the Chelsea/Arsenal game will be played at 4 a.m. Thursday morning Macau time.

— AFP/MPD

Espanyol lose Puado for rest of season after knee injury



BARCELONA — Espanyol captain Javi Puado is set to miss the rest of the season after being diagnosed with a torn knee ligament yesterday.

The 27-year-old winger missed three months with a knee sprain before returning in January, but was taken off hurt in Espanyol's 1-1 draw at Levante on Sunday, shortly after coming on as a substitute.

"Tests carried out on Javi Puado confirm that the player has suffered a tear of the anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee," said Espanyol in a statement, adding that he would have surgery on Thursday.

The Catalan club, often involved in the relegation battle, are fifth in La Liga, four points behind fourth-place Atletico Madrid.

— AFP

Folk healer held for fraud after promising AFCON Mali victory

BAMAKO — A self-proclaimed marabout, or traditional folk healer, who collected 33,500 euros by promising victory for Mali in the Africa Cup of Nations was arrested for fraud after the team lost.

Mali's national team was

eliminated on Friday in the quarter finals by Senegal 1-0.

The man, identified only as Mr Sinayogo, collected more than 22 million CFA francs in donations, according to an associate.

Following Mali's defeat, an angry mob showed up at his home before police intervened and removed him.

Sinayogo was arrested in the Malian capital Bamako on Saturday for "fraud" and was being held at the cybercrime division, according to two videographers who visited him.

"Charlatanism is punishable by law in Mali", an official from the division told AFP.

However, arresting the man while the national team was still competing would have been difficult "in the heat of the Africa Cup of Nations," he added.

The man, formerly known as a political activist, "proclaimed himself a marabout overnight and made a fortune", a social media content creator close to him said.

— AFP

Aberdeen fan jailed for throwing seat that injured player

GLASGOW — An Aberdeen fan who permanently disfigured one of the club's players after throwing part of a seat was jailed for 18 months yesterday.

David Gowans, 32, hurled the object onto the pitch following Aberdeen's 2-1 loss away to Dundee United at Tannadice on May 17 last year.

It struck Aberdeen defender Jack MacKenzie, who was thanking travelling Dons fans for their support in the Scottish Premiership fixture.

MacKenzie suffered a deep laceration to his left eyebrow and an abrasion below his eye.

Gowans, who had been a member of the Aberdeen ultras supporters' group, admitted culpable and reckless conduct in October.

Passing sentence at Dundee Sheriff Court, judge Alastair Carmichael told Gowans: "Your actions were selfish, stupid, dangerous and utterly irresponsible. You must have known that by throwing this item it could hit somebody".

Gowans was sentenced to 18 months in prison and handed a banning order, barring him from attending football matches for 10 years.

He had already received a lifetime ban from Aberdeen Football Club.

His lawyer, Larry Flynn, told the court his client had been drunk at the time he threw the seat and was "extremely embarrassed" over the incident.

— AFP

Malinin spearheads US Olympic figure skating challenge



LOS ANGELES — Two-time world reigning world champion Ilya Malinin headlines a powerhouse US Olympic figure skating team named on Sunday for next month's Milan-Cortina Winter Games.

One day after capturing a fourth straight US title in St. Louis in dominant style, skating's "Quad God" is officially headed to his first Olympics, where he'll be an overwhelming favourite for gold.

Four years ago Malinin suffered heartbreak when he was left off the US team for Beijing Games.

Since then he has revolutionised his sport with his jumping prowess,

winning back-to-back world titles and piling up unprecedented performances such as his seven-quad free skate at the Grand Prix Final in December.

"It just means so much to me to make this Olympic team," said Malinin, the son of two Olympians who said he's eager to experience the Olympic spirit firsthand.

"I'm just so excited to go there and to represent Team USA and hopefully get that gold for Team USA."

Malinin is joined by Andrew Torgashev, US silver medallist on Saturday and national bronze medallist Maxim Naumov, who punched his Olympic ticket less than a year after his parents Vadim

Naumov and Evgenia Shishkova died in an air crash.

The couple who inspired Naumov's Olympic dream perished in a mid-air collision between a passenger jet and a military helicopter in Washington that killed 67, with 28 of the dead being members of the figure skating community.

"Every day, year after year we talked about the Olympics," said Naumov, who carried an old photo of himself with his parents during the US championships. "I can't even say in words how much this means to me."

Amber Glenn, Alysa Liu and Isabeau Levito make up a blockbuster US women's squad after finishing

one-two-three at nationals.

They'll be out to claim the United States' first women's individual figure skating medal since Sasha Cohen won silver in 2006.

Glenn won her third straight US title in St. Louis, edging world champion Liu — who is headed to a second Olympics after hanging up her skates for two years after competing in Beijing in 2022.

Three-time reigning ice dance world champions Madison Chock and Evan Bates head to Milan on the heels of a record seventh US title.

The husband-and-wife team will look to cap another stellar season, possibly their last, with a first Olympic ice dance medal in their

fourth Winter Games as a duo.

They were part of the US squad that won team gold in Beijing in 2022, but they settled for fourth in their signature event.

They will be joined in ice dance by Emilea Zingas and Vadym Kolesnik, and Christina Caeira and Anthony Ponomarenko.

The US will send two pairs teams to Milan: US silver medallists Ellie Kam and Danny O'Sea and Emily Chan and Spencer Howe, who were fourth at nationals.

US gold medallists Alisa Efimova and Misha Mitrofanov missed out on the Games as Finland-born Efimova is still awaiting US citizenship confirmation.

— AFP

Sport in brief

Variawa leads South African charge over Dakar dunes

PARIS — Saood Variawa led a South African one-two in the eighth stage of the Dakar Rally in Saudi Arabia yesterday ahead of Toyota team-mate Henk Lategan.

Variawa, who last year became the youngest stage winner in race history, completed the 483-kilometre circuit that started and ended in Wadi Ad Dawasir in four hours, 20 minutes and 35 seconds, just three seconds ahead of Lategan.

Swede Mattias Ekstrom was third, 29 seconds behind in a Ford.

"The car was perfect on a very long stage on which it was difficult to keep up with the pace," said Variawa.

"In the dunes, we navigated well while a lot of others got lost. At times we went our own way and perhaps that's where we made a difference. We pushed and overtook other cars. It was difficult in the dust."

Five-time Dakar winner Nasser Al Attiyah finished fifth in his Dacia but the Qatari retained the overall lead, four minutes ahead of Ekstrom.

"It was a nice and fast stage with a bit of everything, dunes, fast tracks," said veteran Sébastien Loeb who finished eighth. "It was pretty nice to drive. It was long, though: 480 km is a lot."

Argentinian Luciano Benavides

won his second straight stage in the motorbike class, finishing 4min 50sec ahead of KTM team-mate Daniel Sanders, to take first overall by 10 seconds over the Australian.

— AFP

Trailblazing Milos Raonic retires from tennis

MELBOURNE — Trailblazing former world number three Milos Raonic announced his retirement from tennis yesterday, ending a career that earned him eight ATP titles.

The big-serving 35-year-old, the first Canadian man to reach a Grand Slam singles final, has not competed in over a year.

He has long been plagued by injuries and said on social media it was time to call it quits.

"This is a moment you know will come one day, but somehow you never feel ready for it," he said.

"This is as ready as I will ever be. I have been the luckiest person to get to live out and fulfil my dreams."

Raonic's best season was in 2016, when he reached the Wimbledon final after defeating Roger Federer in the semis, losing to Andy Murray in the decider.

He also advanced to the Australian Open semi-finals and the ATP Finals the same year, finishing the season as world number three.

He last competed at the 2024 Olympics in Paris.

— AFP



Victoria Mboko of Canada hits a return during her singles match against Beatriz Haddad Maia of Brazil during the 2026 Adelaide International Tennis Tournament at Memorial Drive Tennis Club in Adelaide yesterday. Mboko won the match 5-7, 6-3, 6-2. — AFP



Belgian rider Gerben Kuypers (left) competes during the men's elite race of the Cyclocross Otegem cycling event in Otegem, Belgium yesterday.

— AFP

Ukraine's Kostyuk defends 'conscious choice' to speak out about war

Tennis

BRISBANE — Ukrainian tennis player Marta Kostyuk has defended her "conscious choice" to address the plight of her country during the trophy presentation of a pre-Australian Open event in Brisbane.

The world number 20 did not shake hands with top-ranked Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka after being beaten in Sunday's final in straight sets.

Like many Ukraine players, Kostyuk refuses to shake hands with Russians or Belarusians following Moscow's invasion of her homeland.

In her speech at the trophy presentation, the 23-year-old

Kostyuk said: "I want to say a few words about Ukraine."

"I play every day with a pain in my heart and there are thousands of people who are without light and warm water right now."

"It's minus 20 degrees outside and it's very painful to live this reality every day," she said, her voice cracking with emotion.

Post-final ceremonies usually involve players congratulating their opponents.

Kostyuk did however thank "all the opponents I've played this week".

Sabalenka, who has said in the past that she does not support the war, congratulated Kostyuk on reaching

the final in her on-court speech.

Writing on Instagram, where some users accused Kostyuk of poor sportsmanship, she wrote: "The words I shared after the match sparked a lot of reaction."

"For me, it's a conscious choice to keep reminding people of what Ukraine and its citizens are going through."

"Thank you to everyone who showed support. And thank you to all the players I faced on the other side of the net this week."

Both players will be at the Australian Open starting on Sunday, where Sabalenka is favourite to win the title for the third time in four years.

— AFP

Kenya's NY marathon champ Albert Korir gets drug suspension

Athletics

NAIROBI — Kenya's former New York marathon champion Albert Korir was provisionally suspended yesterday after testing positive for a performance-enhancing drug in the latest hit to the reputation of the country's running programme.

Korir, 31, tested positive for the synthetic form of erythropoietin (EPO) that stimulates red blood cell production, the World Athletics Integrity Unit said.

He won the 2021 New York marathon in a time of 2:08:22, and came third in 2023 with a personal

best time of 2:06:57, and he won the Ottawa marathon in 2019 and 2025.

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) said in October that Kenya had made "significant" progress in tackling doping but the country remains on a six-month probation while it seeks to improve its monitoring.

That month saw Ruth Chepngetich, the current world marathon record holder, banned for three years after admitting the use of Hydrochlorothiazide (HCTZ), a banned diuretic used as a masking agent.

Running is a way out of poverty for many in Kenya, putting pressure on many to turn to drugs,

especially since the country lacks the sophisticated infrastructure to train stars.

Kenya worked to clean up its image after a string of doping scandals around the 2016 Rio Olympics led to it being declared non-compliant by WADA.

More than 140 Kenyan runners, mainly long-distance runners, have been sanctioned for drugs offences since then.

In June 2024, Kenya handed out its first lifetime ban to marathon runner Beatrice Toroitich and a six-year ban to 10km record-holder Rhonex Kipruto.

— AFP

Globes red carpet: chic black, naked dresses and a bit of politics

Frederic J. Brown with Susan Stumme

BEVERLY HILLS—Hollywood's top stars hit the red carpet on Sunday for the Golden Globes, the first major event on the road to the Oscars, and they delivered lots of old-school glamour.

Here is a glance at some of the looks seen at the Beverly Hilton Hotel:

Ever-chic black

Selena Gomez is a newlywed and her happiness shows. The best comedy actress nominee for her work on "Only Murders in the Building" radiated joy as she arrived on the arm of her husband Benny Blanco.

She oozed sophistication in a black Chanel column gown with a frothy white feathered strapless neckline, her black bob swept into soft waves.

Gomez was not alone in striking an understated pose, with lots of stars opting for black or dark, wintry hues.

Teyana Taylor, a winner for her searing turn as a leftist revolutionary in "One Battle After Another," scorched the carpet in a cut-out backless black Schiaparelli gown with a halter neckline – and a cheeky crystal bow on her backside.

Ariana Grande ("Wicked: For Good"), who competed with Taylor for the award for best supporting actress, turned heads in a black textured Vivienne Westwood ballgown with an asymmetrical



Newly-wed US actress Selena Gomez (left) and her husband US musician Benny Blanco pose upon arrival for the 83rd annual Golden Globe Awards at the Beverly Hilton hotel in Beverly Hills, California, on Sunday. — AFP

neckline and a bubble silhouette before trailing to the floor.

Her hair was swept into her signature ponytail, and she kept the jewellery simple with a diamond choker.

Amy Madigan, also in their category for her villainous turn in "Weapons," went for a tuxedo look with cropped pants and patent leather boots.

Nominee Jenna Ortega embraced the goth chic of her title character in "Wednesday" in a black high-neck Dilara Findikoglu gown with glittering epaulets and cut-offs that revealed a bit of side boob... and part of her hip bone.

Among the male stars in attendance, Colman Domingo was as usual a standout, wearing head-to-toe black Valentino, with silvery appliques scattered from his left shoulder down his lapel to his waist.

Naked ambition

Jennifer Lopez is no stranger to strong fashion statements. Her plunging green Versace gown at the Grammys in 2000 is still a reference for winning the red carpet by adopting the "less is more" rule.

On Sunday, Lopez – whose turn in "Kiss of the Spider Woman" was overlooked by Globes voters – wore a figure-hugging sheer gown with bronze patterns snaking over her body, ending in a mermaid fishtail.

Jennifer Lawrence – nominated for best drama actress in a film for "Die My Love" – got the memo as well, rocking a barely-there sheer nude Givenchy gown with only a smattering of strategically placed flowers.

Stars slam deadly ICE shooting –

Hollywood never quite has a night out without a bit of politics coming into play.

On Sunday, some of the stars including nominee Mark Ruffalo wore pins with the messages "BE GOOD" – a reference to Renee Good, the Minneapolis woman who was shot and killed by a federal immigration agent.

Comedian Wanda Sykes wore the same pin on her lapel, while actress Natasha Lyonne, a nominee for her TV show "Poker Face," attached one to her clutch handbag.

The campaign is endorsed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), one of the country's most prominent civil rights organisations. — AFP

'One Battle After Another,' 'Hamnet' triumph at Golden Globes

Andrew Marszal

BEVERLY HILLS – "One Battle After Another" reigned supreme at the Golden Globes on Sunday, winning best comedy, while "Hamnet" sprung a surprise by taking best drama film at the splashy Hollywood ceremony.

Paul Thomas Anderson's screwball thriller "One Battle," which centres on an aging revolutionary played by Leonardo DiCaprio, led the night by winning four of its nine nominations.

It also collected awards for best director, best screenplay and best supporting actress for Teyana Taylor at the lavish Globes gala, which is a key stepping stone on the road to the Oscars in March.

"You guys are being so generous with this affection for me and this film – and I'll take it," beamed Anderson.

His film – a rollicking ride featuring violent leftist radicals, immigration raids and white supremacists – has connected with audiences and critics at a time when the United States is deeply polarised.

But in the closely watched lead actor category, DiCaprio was passed over in favour of Timothée Chalamet's performance as an ambitious 1950s table tennis player in "Marty Supreme."

"I'm in a category with many greats – this category is stacked. I look up to all of you," said Chalamet, who also bested George Clooney ("Jay Kelly") and Ethan Hawke ("Blue Moon").

Chalamet said his four previous Globes losses "make this moment that much sweeter" before thanking his girlfriend Kylie Jenner.

'Hamnet' upset

The Globes offer separate awards for dramas and comedies/musicals – widening the field of stars in attendance.

The night's final award was its biggest surprise.

"Hamnet," a tragic literary adaptation that imagines the life of William Shakespeare and his wife as they cope with the death of their son, took best drama.

"Sinners," Ryan Coogler's



French-US actor Timothée Chalamet poses in the press room with the Best Actor in a Motion Picture – Musical or Comedy for "Marty Supreme" trophy during the 83rd annual Golden Globe Awards at the Beverly Hilton hotel in Beverly Hills, California, on Sunday. — AFP

period horror film about the segregated South of the 1930s, had been expected to prevail.

"I loved the book, but I felt there was really only one filmmaker on the face of the planet who could tell the story," said Steven Spielberg, a producer on the movie, before handing the microphone to director Chloé Zhao (赵婷).

Zhao, the Chinese-born director of best picture Oscar winner "Nomadland," dedicated the award to "Hamnet" cast and crew members who "lost their loved ones while we were making this film."

She also pointedly thanked Coogler, who honed his trade together with Zhao at the Sundance film labs set up by the late Robert Redford.

Jessie Buckley, playing Shakespeare's grief-stricken wife Agnes, won best drama actress honours.

"Sinners," which surprised moviegoers with its eclectic mix of vampires, politics, race relations and blues music, had to settle for best score, and the Globes' recent – and vaguely defined – "best cinematic and box office achievement" award.

"Sentimental Value," a Norwegian family dramedy, took best supporting actor for Stellan Skarsgård.

Rose Byrne won for best comedy actress for "If I Had Legs I'd Kick You." Netflix's musical mega-hit "KPop Demon Hunters" won best song and best animated film.

The Globes also honour the best in television. Searing teen murder saga "Adolescence" topped the section with four wins, while "The Pitt" won best drama and "The Studio" took the best comedy prize.

'BE GOOD'

Brazilian thriller "The Secret Agent," set during the country's military dictatorship in the 1970s, won best non-English language film, and best actor for Wagner Moura.

Its director Kleber Mendonça Filho tried to make a political point, but was played off the stage by music.

"This is a very important moment in time and history to be making films – here in the US, in Brazil," he began.

"America's young filmmakers – make films."

Several celebrities including Mark Ruffalo, Natasha Lyonne and Wanda Sykes walked the red carpet sporting pins with the message "BE GOOD."

The badges are part of a tribute to Renee Good, the US woman whose fatal shooting by a federal agent has sparked renewed protests against President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown.

"Let's do the right thing," said Jean Smart, after winning best comedy series actress for "Hacks." She also was wearing a pin.

— AFP

'Avatar: Fire and Ash' leads in N American for 4th week

LOS ANGELES – "Avatar: Fire and Ash" kept the North American box office churning, claiming the top spot for a fourth week running with US\$21.3 million in ticket sales, industry estimates showed on Sunday.

The third instalment in director James Cameron's blockbuster fantasy series has now earned a massive US\$1.23 billion worldwide, according to Exhibitor Relations.

"Fire and Ash" stars Zoe Saldana as Na'vi warrior Neytiri and Sam Worthington as ex-Marine Jake Sully, who must battle a new foe threatening their family's life on the planet Pandora.

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

Debuting in second place in the United States and Canada was "Primate," a horror film about a violent pet chimpanzee, with US\$11.3 million.

"This is a good opening for an original horror film," said David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research.

"Horror stories that feature an evil creature generally perform better at the box office than horror stories about evil humans."

Not far behind in third place

at US\$11.2 million was "The Housemaid," an adaptation of Freida McFadden's best-selling novel about a young woman who is hired by a wealthy couple with dark secrets.

Sydney Sweeney and Amanda Seyfried star in the Lionsgate release.

Disney's feel-good animated film "Zootopia 2" – the other juggernaut of the holiday box office – dropped to fourth place at US\$10.1 million. Its global total now stands at US\$1.65 billion.

Lionsgate's disaster sequel "Greenland 2: Migration" starring Gerard Butler came in fifth place at US\$8.5 million.

— AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -7°C~4°C	Manila 22°C~30°C	New York 5°C~9°C	Lisbon 9°C~15°C
Shanghai 4°C~15°C	Bangkok 19°C~32°C	London 2°C~11°C	Rio de Janeiro 22°C~33°C
Hong Kong 13°C~22°C	Tokyo 1°C~15°C	Frankfurt 3°C~7°C	Luanda 24°C~29°C
Taipei 12°C~21°C	Singapore 23°C~32°C	Vancouver 8°C~14°C	Maputo 21°C~28°C
Guangzhou 9°C~24°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~33°C	Paris 7°C~11°C	Dili 24°C~31°C
Nanjing 1°C~16°C	Jakarta 22°C~29°C	Moscow -13°C~7°C	São Tomé 26°C~30°C
Guilin 5°C~22°C	Seoul -11°C~2°C	Las Vegas 7°C~20°C	Praia 18°C~26°C
Xi'an 1°C~11°C	Sydney 21°C~28°C	Monte Carlo 10°C~15°C	Bissau 18°C~33°C



1. Ships of the desert

Dromedary camels walk across the desert as drivers compete in Stage 8 of the 48th Dakar Rally 2026, between Wadi ad-Dawasir and Wadi ad-Dawasir in Saudi Arabia yesterday.

– AFP

2. Not looking too happy!

“Cry-Cry Horse” stuffed toys are displayed at a shop in the Yiwu International Trade City in Yiwu, Zhejiang Province, yesterday. A stuffed toy horse with a sullen face has gone viral recently on Chinese Internet.

– Xinhua

3. High-flyer

Tourists take part in the international kite festival at the Sabarmati riverfront in Ahmedabad, India on Sunday. – AFP



4. Is it fun?

People ride snow tubes in Gatchina, Russia on Sunday. – AFP

5. Play time

This photo taken yesterday shows tigers at the snow-covered Siberian Tiger Park in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province. Harbin saw snowfall recently, which added a touch of winter charm to its Siberian Tiger Park

– Xinhua

6. On their holidays

This combination of pictures created yesterday shows from top left to bottom right: A European Greenfinch, a European Stonechat, a female European Stonechat, a Common Chaffinch, a quartet of Common Chaffinch and European Greenfinch silhouetted, and a Sparrow Hawk, perched on a tree on the hillside of the Lebanese coastal city of Byblos on Sunday.

– AFP