

Macau logs this year's 1st imported Zika case

Tony Wong

Macau recorded this year's first imported case of Zika fever yesterday, the Health Bureau (SSM) announced in a statement last night.

According to the statement, the patient is a 53-year-old local man who lives in Block 5 of the Kuong Wa San Chun (廣華新邨) residential estate in Areia Preta district. His workplace is located on the nearby Estrada de D. Maria II, i.e., the road where the CEM headquarters is located.

The man visited Malaysia with his family members between December 20 and Tuesday last week. After returning to Macau, the statement said, he came down with a fever, muscle pain, and a rash on Friday last week.

As his symptoms persisted, the statement said, the man sought treatment at the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre on Monday.

A blood test yesterday confirmed him to be infected with Zika virus.

Last night's statement said that the man was in a stable condition. However, the statement failed to mention whether he has been hospitalised.

The statement underlined that the Macau Health Bureau has classified the man's case as a Zika case imported into Macau after considering his travel history and the time

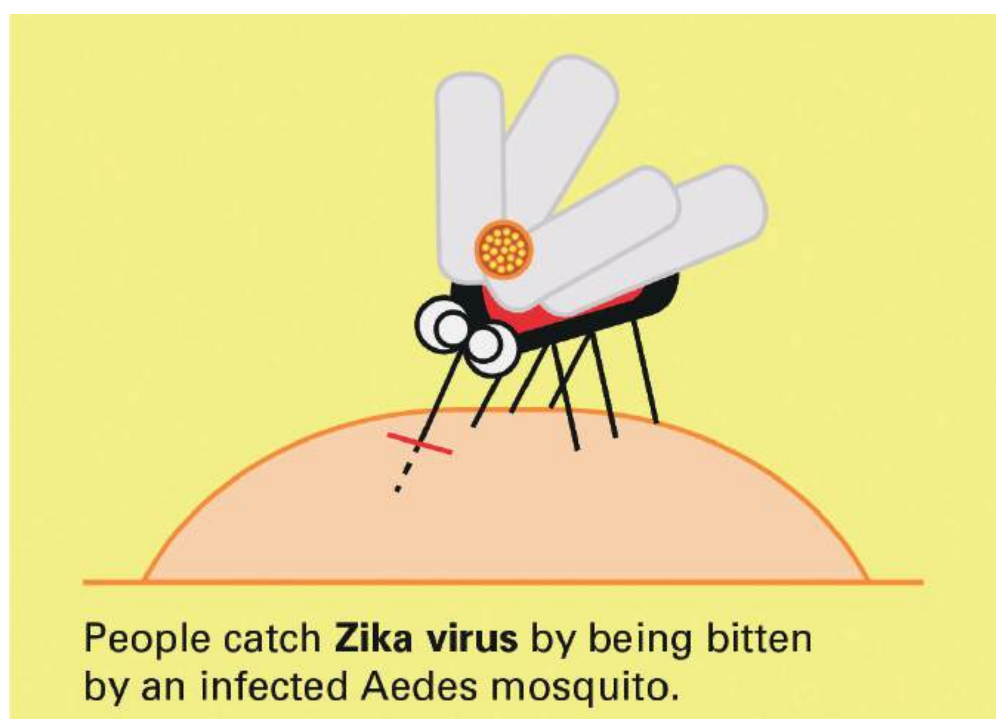


Image courtesy of unicef HK

of the onset of his symptoms, as well as its laboratory test results.

In response to the patient's case, the bureau has dispatched personnel to the vicinity of his main activity areas in the city to conduct inspections for mosquito breeding sources

and carry out preventive mosquito eradication operations.

The case reported yesterday came after Macau confirmed its first-ever imported Zika case last year, a case imported from the Philippines in September 2025.

According to last night's statement, the Zika virus is primarily transmitted through the bite of an infected Aedes mosquito. It can also be spread through sexual contact, blood transfusion, and from mother to foetus during pregnancy.

The statement also underlined that most infected individuals do not show obvious symptoms. Common symptoms, when they occur, include fever, rash, conjunctivitis, muscle and joint pain, and headache, with the level of the symptoms normally being mild.

The statement noted that Zika virus disease is primarily transmitted by the Aedes aegypti mosquito. Currently, the statement said, no Aedes aegypti mosquitoes have been detected in Macau. The mosquito species commonly found in Macau is the Aedes albopictus, which can transmit dengue fever and chikungunya fever.

Consequently, the statement said, the risk of sustained local transmission of Zika virus caused by the man's case detected yesterday is expected to remain low.

Details in English about Zika can be found at: <https://www.chp.gov.hk/en/healthtopics/content/24/43088.html>

While a Zika virus infection is typically mild for most people, it can be lethal, but this is rare and primarily affects specific, vulnerable groups, such as newborns. ■



Revelers visit Central Street in Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang Province, on Sunday. As one of the most popular attractions in Harbin, Central Street, which is renowned for its diverse European-style architecture, wows tourists with its colorful lights at night during the city's tourism boom this winter.

— Xinhua

Pope's Africa trip includes stop-off in Angola

LUANDA — Pope Leo XIV plans to make a trip to Africa soon, including to Angola, a Vatican representative announced yesterday in the Angolan capital, Luanda.

The US-born leader of the world's Catholics, who was elected last May, has said he hopes to go to Algeria this year as part of a trip to the continent.

It would be the first papal visit to Africa since Leo's predecessor, Francis, travelled to the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan in early 2023.

"I would like to inform you that the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, intends to travel to the African continent, and that Angola is also on the itinerary for this

trip," Apostolic Nuncio Kryspin Dubiel told a news conference.

"We don't yet have the details about the exact date and the itinerary but they will be communicated as soon as they are set. We are currently preparing the plan and programme for Pope Leo's visit to Africa."

The last pope to visit Angola was Benedict XVI in March 2009.

Angola, a former Portuguese colony, has been independent since 1975, following an over decade-long war of liberation. Its population, standing at about 36 million, is 44 percent Catholic and 35 percent Protestant, according to the 2024 census.

— AFP

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The Macau Post Daily

How Xi's letter encourages American youth to deepen China-US friendship

President Xi Jinping has replied to a letter from a US youth education exchange delegation, in which he encouraged more young Americans to serve as a new generation of envoys in the China-US friendship.

— Story on p. 7

'We choose Denmark,' says Greenland leader ahead of White House talks

Greenland would choose to remain Danish over a US takeover, its leader said yesterday, ahead of White House talks on the future of the Arctic island.

— Story on p. 10

Cuba denies being in talks with Trump on potential deal

Cuba's leader on Monday reacted defiantly to President Donald Trump's threats to "make a deal" or pay the price in the aftermath of key ally Nicolás Maduro's ouster in a US military raid.

— Story on p. 12

Police nab 4 mainlanders for robbery & money laundering, victim probed for illegal currency exchange

Ada Lei

The Judiciary Police (PJ) have arrested four men from the Chinese mainland for robbing an illegal currency exchange dealer of HK\$500,000 (515,000 patacas) and for money laundering, PJ spokesman Vong Kuan Hung said during a special press conference yesterday.

Vong identified the suspects as a 33-year-old male surnamed Wang who claimed to be jobless, a 34-year-old male surnamed Dan also claimed to be unemployed, a 29-year-old supermarket employee surnamed Zhang, and a 27-year-old store manager also surnamed Zhang. The victim is a man who engaged in illegal currency exchange activities in Macau.

According to Vong, the victim received a message early Saturday morning from Wang, whom he had previously exchanged currency with. Wang requested that the victim bring cash to a hotel guestroom in Cotai for another currency exchange deal. Upon arriving at the

guestroom with HK\$1.89 million, the victim found Wang absent and instead completed a HK\$10,000 transaction with two men who later fled to the Chinese mainland.

Vong noted that one of the men suddenly restrained the victim from behind, and together they forced him to the ground. They took the victim's smartphone and threatened to report him to the police for his illegal currency exchange activities unless he handed over HK\$600,000 in cash. Fearing for his safety and the risk of losing his funds to the police, the victim surrendered HK\$500,000 after three hours of bargaining.

Vong said that to prevent the remaining HK\$1.38 million from being discovered, the victim entrusted the money to an accomplice near the hotel for safekeeping. When he later demanded that Wang return the HK\$500,000, to no avail, he reported the case to the police.

Vong mentioned that after the robbery, the two attackers met up with Wang and Dan at a restaurant in



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the four hooded suspects to a PJ van outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday. – Photo: Maria Cheang Ut Meng

Zape. Following the victim's threat to alert the police, the attackers quickly left with the HK\$500,000 and proceeded to another hotel guestroom in Zape where they met the two Zhangs. The attackers exchanged the HK\$500,000 for yuan through the two Zhangs and transferred the funds to a designated

bank account in the Chinese mainland. Once the transfer was completed, they immediately fled Macau via the Macau-Hengqin joint checkpoint.

The police apprehended Wang that evening at the Barrier Gate checkpoint as he attempted to leave Macau, while Dan was arrested in

a hotel guestroom in Cotai early Sunday morning. The two attackers who had fled to Zhuhai were caught by mainland police at a hotel in Zhuhai. The two Zhangs were later intercepted near a hotel in Zape. The police seized five smartphones, HK\$1,300, 1,500 yuan, and 400 patacas in cash from the four suspects.

The suspects were transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, each facing charges of money laundering, while Wang and Dan additionally face robbery charges.

Vong noted that the case was resolved within five hours from the initial report to the apprehension of the main suspects, showcasing the effectiveness of the cooperative mechanism between the police in Macau and the Chinese mainland in combating cross-border crime.

Vong added that the Judiciary Police (PJ) have initiated a separate investigation into the victim's involvement in illegal currency exchange activities in Macau. ■

Taxpayers need to declare their tax domicile this year: DSF

Armindo Neves

The Financial Services Bureau (DSF) announced in a statement yesterday that in accordance with the implementation of the new Tax Code, taxpayers are required by law to register their tax domicile with

the bureau between January 1 and December 31 this year.

The tax domicile serves as the sole address to which the bureau will send official notifications to taxpayers, including payment notices, refunds, assessment results,

and other related documents, the statement said.

For taxpayers, according to the statement, their habitual residence is recognised as the tax domicile. For corporate taxpayers, their registered office, actual place of management, or in the absence of these, the seat of their permanent establishment in Macau is considered the tax domicile, the statement said.

The statement pointed out that if taxpayers are simultaneously liable for multiple types of taxes, they are only required to submit a single declaration of their tax domicile, in which case all tax-related notifications for any taxes will be sent to the declared tax domicile.

The statement also said that if the declaration of the tax domicile is not completed this year, starting in 2027, the most recent address provided by the taxpayer for any tax purpose will be considered the tax domicile. All tax notifications, payment notices, and other related documents for all taxes will then be sent to that address, the statement said.

Taxpayers, according to the statement, can submit the declaration online via the "Electronic Service" on the website of the bureau, DSF's mobile application, Macao One Account, and the Business & Associations Platform. The statement also said that taxpayers may submit it in person by visiting tax service counters located at the DSF headquarters on Avenida da Praia Grande, the Government Service Centre in Areia Preta, or the Government Service Centre on Rua de Coimbra in Taipa, to submit the declaration form. ■



This poster provided by the Financial Services Bureau (DSF) yesterday shows that taxpayers need to declare their tax domicile this year.

Police nab mainlander for 'proxy betting' fraud

Ada Lei

A man from the Chinese mainland was arrested on Monday for assisting his accomplices to steal chips from a male gambler while placing bets on his behalf, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Leng Kam Lon said during a special press conference yesterday.

Leng identified the suspect as a 33-year-old man surnamed Weng, who claimed to be jobless.

According to Leng, the gambler came across a video on Douyin (known as TikTok overseas) in May featuring someone claiming to be a gambling expert who offered assistance with "proxy betting." The gambler travelled to Macau on July 1 and 2, where he met Weng and his two accomplices at a casino in Cotai. He handed over HK\$500,000 for them to place bets on his behalf. During the gambling session, the victim noticed that the two accomplices were taking the

opportunity to steal chips from the gaming table. Although he did not intervene at the time, as he was winning money, he later felt aggrieved and reported a total loss of HK\$200,000 to the police on August 16.

Leng noted that Weng was tasked with keeping watch and distracting the victim, while his accomplices took advantage of the situation to steal chips. The police discovered that the gang was involved in at least seven similar cases, with each incident resulting in losses of no less than HK\$50,000 in chips.

The police apprehended Weng on Monday at the Barrier Gate checkpoint, seizing a smartphone and HK\$20,000 in chips from him. Under questioning, Weng admitted to receiving 2,000 yuan for his role in assisting his accomplices with the theft.

Weng was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, facing a theft charge. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the hooded theft suspect to a PJ van outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday. – Photo: Maria Cheang Ut Meng

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Macau Weather

FINE APART FROM CLOUDY PERIODS. MIST AT FIRST. FORCE 3 TO 4 EAST TO NORTHEASTERLY WINDS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 55% AND 90%.



15°C~21°C

Source: SMG

Civic leader Leong urges govt to help revitalise Chi Lam Vai village

Interview by Armindo Neves

As the second and final phase of cleaning up an ancient well in Chi Lam Vai (Pátio do Espinho) village near the UNESCO World Heritage-listed St Paul's Ruins and one of Macau's two Na Tcha temples concluded last Tuesday, the *Post* yesterday interviewed the convener of a concern group, Leong Heng Teng, about ideas of how to revitalise the once-walled neighbourhood.

Leong, 79, is a former Executive Council spokesman and lawmaker, whose wife was born in the village. He continues to be one of Macau's most respected community leaders. He heads the San Kio District Residents Mutual Aid Association, which is a part of the influential Macau General Union of Neighbourhood Associations (UGAMM), widely known as Kai Fong, its short name in Cantonese. Leong is one of the honorary chairmen of Kai Fong, which is represented by three members in the Legislative Assembly (AL).

Leong expressed the hope that the government will expedite the overall planning and positioning of the area to preserve its ancient trees, well and remnants of the wall as they constitute an important aspect of Macau's "urban memory". By integrating private investment, the aim was to develop the village into a distinctive community tourism site, he said, urging the government to help revitalise Chi Lam Vai.

Leong, who talked with the *Post* in San Kio Garden yesterday afternoon, pointed out that Chi Lam Wai, as one of the larger preserved areas, still partly walled villages on the peninsula, has in recent years attracted attention from academia, art groups, and tourists.

In the village, ancient trees, well, and remnants of the wall, serve as significant community landmarks, Leong underlined. Among these, an ancient well was previously sealed due to public hygiene concerns, he said. Following advocacy by residents and



The ancient well in Chi Lam Vai village has been temporarily closed with an iron manhole cover since the recent conclusion of its two-phase clean-up. — Photos: Armindo Neves

assistance from the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), two phases of archaeological research and cleaning-up of the well have been completed. The well was excavated to a depth of around 16 metres, where huge amounts of construction waste were removed and historical stone materials were discovered and preserved, Leong said.

Pátio do Espinho ("Courtyard of the Thorn") – Chi Lam Vai (茨林圍) in Cantonese – is a 400-year-old walled village that lies just a street away from the UNESCO World Heritage-protected Na Tcha Temple, one of Macau's two temples dedicated to the divinity known in Putonghua as Nezha. It is also close to the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ruins of St Paul's.

The village features a café and souvenir shop dedicated to Na Tcha, which has become globally famous thanks to two highly successful animation films about his exploits.

President Xi Jinping mentioned Na Tcha in his New Year address, as the Chinese

mainland's animated fantasy adventure film "Nezha 2" became a "global hit" promoting Chinese cultural intellectual property (IP) around the world last year. It turned out to be the world's highest-grossing film of 2025, and the fourth highest-grossing film of all time, according to Wikipedia.

In the first and second phase of the ancient well's clean-up, a total of 600 lorryloads of construction waste were removed, which experts estimate to be at least four centuries old.

Leong emphasised that in the village, small-scale eateries and cultural-creative spaces have been spontaneously established by residents, and they have quickly become tourists' points of interest. However, overall planning remains lacking, with some buildings still in disrepair and basic infrastructure such as tap water and electricity supply as well as drainage requiring further improvements, he said.

Leong said he hoped that under "legal, reasonable, and fair" conditions, the government will support the village's



A corner of Chi Lam Vai, a green wall adorned with a mural and various potted plants and decorative figurines neatly arranged by the villagers.

long-time residents to improve their living conditions while also encouraging investors to participate in community revitalisation. By integrating historical and cultural elements with tourism, the aim was to create a distinctive and vibrant living community, Leong said.

Chi Lam Vai is famous for being featured in one of Bruce Lee's most successful, *Fist of Fury*, which was shot there in 1971. ■

*The "urban memory" concept refers to the collective memories and shared experiences of individuals in an urban environment, focusing on how these memories shape identity, culture, and the perception of a city. The term encompasses various aspects, including historical events, personal experiences, and the relationship between inhabitants and their surroundings. — Poe

USJ & Guangzhou College of Commerce ink new partnership deal



This undated handout photo downloaded from the University of Saint Joseph's (USJ) website yesterday shows USJ and Guangzhou College of Commerce representatives posing during the signing of a new agreement during a ceremony held on USJ's Ilha Verde campus last Thursday.

Kristina Vallesteros

Macau's University of Saint Joseph (USJ) and the Guangzhou College of Commerce (GCC) have signed a new agreement to deepen their academic collaboration, according to a recent statement from the private Catholic university.

The agreement was signed during a ceremony on USJ's Ilha Verde campus last Thursday.

According to the statement, the agreement builds upon an existing Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to advance academic exchange and talent development within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

The partnership will focus on areas

including faculty and student exchanges, short-term study visits, and joint research initiatives, the statement noted. The agreement aims to leverage Macau's "distinctive role as a bridge" between the Chinese mainland and the world's nine Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs) within the GBA framework.

The USJ delegation was led by Vice-Rector for Student Life Teresa Loong (農韻淇). The GCC delegation was headed by Vice President Zhou Peng (周鵬).

The statement concluded that the agreement is a strategic step for both institutions, with the goal of cultivating globally minded professionals equipped to contribute to regional development. ■

MPU opens registration for spring English courses

Kristina Vallesteros

Registration is now open for a new series of English courses at Macao Polytechnic University (MPU) beginning this spring, according to a statement yesterday by the tertiary education institution.

The public university's website noted that the MPU-Bell Centre of English is "a joint project between MPU and Bell Education Trust based in Cambridge, England (a leading UK centre of excellence for English language teaching and learning for nearly 70 years)". MPU-Bell was formerly known as 'MPI-Bell', the website said.

The course offerings cover a wide range of areas, the statement noted. They include IELTS* preparation classes at foundation, intermediate, and advanced levels, as well as weekend intensive sessions. Other courses focus on English speaking enhancement for undergraduates, academic presentation and thesis writing for postgraduates, and English for job applications. Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) preparation and various introductory English courses are also available.

According to the statement, all courses are taught by experienced bilingual instructors or senior native English-speaking teachers. The instructors serve as certified examiners, assessors for

international English examinations, or professional curriculum consultants.

Registration is open to both local and non-local applicants, the statement said. Further details and registration are available on the centre's official website www.mpu.edu.mo/mpubell. For enquiries, one may call 8599 3163 or email mpubell@mpu.edu.mo. ■

* IELTS stands for International English Language Testing System. It is a standardised test that assesses the English language proficiency of non-native speakers. It is widely used for educational, immigration, and professional purposes, and evaluates four key skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. — Poe



This undated and unlocated handout photo provided by Macao Polytechnic University (MPU) shows a lecturer conducting a class.



Photo of the façade of the Old House Gallery.

Curator Catherine Fong (馮美玲) poses in front of some of the works on display for "The Flow of Memory" exhibition at the Old House Gallery on Rua de S. Paulo.
— Photos: Rui Pastorin



'The Flow of Memory' exhibition invites 8 artists to showcase paintings

Interview by Rui Pastorin

Just below the Ruins of St. Paul's, an exhibition hosted by the Old House Gallery is taking on the subject of memory, its connection with the present and how it shapes us with time, inviting a total of eight artists from Macau and the Chinese mainland to showcase their creations.

From acrylics to oils and Chinese paintings to a mixed media piece, "The Flow of Memory" exhibition at 27-27A Rua de São Paulo (大三巴街) is organised by the gallery and the Greater Bay Area Youth Art and Culture Association, being on show until March 1.

Visiting the free-admission venue, exhibitiongoers will find a total of 18 imaginative art pieces, with some of the works being showcased for the first time while others have been displayed in different parts of the Chinese mainland. Among the artists exhibiting their works are Ieong Man Hin, Lao I Wo and Lu Shaoyi from Macau. Alongside them are artists Du Yin, Gao Guanyi, Nan Chao, Song Wanjin and Xu Zhenghong, who are from Chengdu, Shanghai and Nanjing, exhibition curator Catherine Fong (馮美玲) told the *Post* during an interview at the gallery yesterday.

Fong said that each of the pieces on display represent the artists' memories. And exploring the venue, exhibitiongoers will find works such as one that reflects on the transition to motherhood through the symbolic use of lemons, a memory of marriage through painted traditional items related to it in Chinese culture, and a piece that shows that people eventually have the power to control their outcomes.

The past and present are tied together, Fong said, with this shown as each artist looks back at those memories and compares them to where he or she are right now, reflecting on the outcomes. "That's why this exhibition is called 'The Flow of Memory'. It makes us reveal our old memories. And when we see these paintings, we think about our past and how we have another meaning in the future", Fong underlined.

While each piece might contain a personal memory within the frames, Fong said that it isn't just limited to their respective artist, with each exhibitiongoer still possibly finding a connection with at least one of the works shown despite having different pasts and memories. "I think everyone should have a part of their story that they can connect to a painting [here]".

Moreover, Fong highlighted that with the exhibition featuring artists from different cultures and backgrounds, exchange remains ever important, pointing out: "Macau is too small, I think we need more exposure to learn from the other artists", inviting mainland Chinese artists to Macau and connecting with local artists and engaging in exchanges.

"When they see the artists from [mainland] China, they not only learn their techniques, but their mindsets, how they think about art, and how they paint. I like this exchange because I think we need to preserve our own technique, but we also need to improve and learn from the others. And to have more exposure", Fong pointed out.

Beyond hoping to continue mutual learning and exchange, Fong also hopes to promote Macau's contemporary art, aiming to break the idea of Macau not having an art market.

Fong added that she hopes that someday, they can help with making art become a sustainable way of life for the city's artists, being part of the local economy while also earning funds to improve their techniques.

Adding to that is wanting to put Macau and its many talented artists in the conversation when collecting art is brought up. "There should be a spot for Macau artists or Macau artwork in the art market", she underlined. And with the approaching Chinese New Year (CNY) holiday, Fong said that she hopes that they can expose the artists and their work at her gallery, targeting more visitors during that period, just as they did with a previous exhibition during the last CNY holiday where some works were sold. She aims to again be able to help the exhibiting artists sell their work and expose them to collectors.

Members of the public may view the works on the gallery's second floor daily from 11 a.m. through 7 p.m. Admission is free. The gallery is also selling limited-edition items featuring the works of the artists.



Macau-Hengqin industry-university-research support policy briefing held in Hengqin



This handout photo provided by Macau's Science and Technology Development Fund (FDCT) yesterday shows FDCT Administrative Committee President Vincent U U Sang addressing the 2026 Joint Support Scheme for Industry-University-Research Projects between Macau and Hengqin in the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin last Tuesday.

Khalel Vallo

According to a statement provided by Macau's Science and Technology Development Fund (FDCT) yesterday, a policy briefing session on the 2026 Joint Support Scheme for Industry-University-Research Projects between Macau and Hengqin was held in the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin last Tuesday, bringing together government officials and representatives from the technology sector.

The session was jointly organised by FDCT and the Economic Development Bureau of the Co-operation Zone (ECDHengqin). Vincent U U Sang, chairman of the FDCT Administrative Council, and Wu Chuangwei, director of ECDHengqin, delivered speeches, while more than 100 representatives from technology firms in Macau and Hengqin attended, the statement noted.

U said in the statement that the central authorities' 2025 Central Economic Work Conference in Beijing last month reaffirmed the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) as an international

science and technology innovation centre, adding that cooperation under the model of "R&D in Macao + transformation in Hengqin" is advancing steadily.

R&D stands for "Research and Development".

He noted that promoting industry-university-research collaboration has been identified as one of the FDCT's key tasks for this year, the statement added.

Meanwhile, Wu highlighted that the session focused on sharing the core elements of the joint support policy and application requirements, the statement said, adding that he encouraged enterprises to proactively connect with Macau's higher education and research institutions, put forward technical needs, and engage in deeper cooperation to enhance competitiveness and facilitate the transformation of research in Hengqin.

FDCT and ECDHengqin officials also provided details of application procedures, evaluation criteria and implementation requirements, including co-investment obligations and a maximum project duration of three years, the statement said. ■

'Trail of Matteo Ricci' exhibition opens at FRC gallery

Khalel Vallo

The Rui Cunha Foundation (FRC) inaugurated a collective Chinese painting exhibition, titled "Trail of Matteo Ricci", yesterday, showcasing 33 ink and colour works by PhD students under the academic supervision of University of Macau (UM) Prof. Zhang Yan.

Curated by artists Li Ranqing and Lei Meihang, the exhibition presents works created during a 2025 field trip that retraced the route of Italian Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) from Macau through the Chinese mainland and on to Italy.

According to an FRC statement yesterday, the journey covered cities including Guangzhou, Zhaoqing and Shaoguan in Guangdong Province, as well as Rome, Macerata, Genoa, Venice, Milan, and Florence.

In his speech, Zhang said the project was conceived as "taking Macau as a fulcrum to build a bridge

connecting history and the present," reinterpreting Matteo Ricci's cross-cultural journey through contemporary artistic practice.

He described overseas sketching not as simple landscape reproduction, but as "a spiritual dialogue and cultural translation" carried out through traditional Chinese painting, adding that the works demonstrate how brush and ink can "radiate unique charm in the collision of diverse civilizations."

The exhibition brings together 18 artists and is organised by the Rui Cunha Foundation in conjunction with the public university's Department of Art and Design and the Centre for Chinese History and Culture, with support from several Greater Bay Area (GBA) art organisations.

With free admission, the works can be viewed until January 24, with exhibitiongoers able to visit the gallery at 749 Avenida da Praia Grande, Luen Pong Building. The



University of Macau (UM) Prof. Zhang Yan addresses yesterday's "Trail of Matteo Ricci" opening ceremony at the Rui Cunha Foundation (FRC) gallery on Avenida da Praia Grande.

— Photo: Khalel Vallo

gallery is open from Monday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturdays. Admission is free.

Stay tuned for a photo feature in an upcoming Page 4. ■

Gongbei customs seizes 64 used smartphones in 2 electric wheelchairs seats

Armindo Neves

The General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China (GACC) announced in a statement yesterday that Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs officers seized 64 used smartphones in two electric wheelchairs seats.

According to the statement, on Thursday customs officers at the Gongbei Port (border checkpoint) arrival hall, intercepted a Hong Kong traveller surnamed Wang, while he was driving through the checkpoint in his electric wheelchair. The officers had discovered an anomaly which turned out to be two dozen used smartphones concealed in the wheelchair's seat.

On the same day, customs officers also intercepted a Hong Kong traveller surnamed Yeung, which unearthed 40 used smartphones hidden in Yeung's electric wheelchair seat.

In the statement, GACC reminded the public that according to relevant regulations, evading customs supervision by hiding or bringing goods subject to

taxes into the mainland constitutes smuggling. If the circumstances are severe enough to constitute a crime, criminal liability will be pursued. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China (GACC) shows 40 used smartphones concealed in a smuggler's electric wheelchair seat.

More gaming operators announce wage rise

Rui Pastorin

Integrated resort operators Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG), Wynn Macau, Limited, SJM Resorts and Melco Resorts & Entertainment have each announced a salary increase for staff in separate statements yesterday.

GEG

GEG noted in their statement that their pay rise will benefit around 98 percent of staff, with eligible employees at Senior Manager grade and below set to receive it from April 1.

The statement said that eligible staff who joined the company before January 1, 2026 will benefit, noting that those with a monthly base salary and guaranteed tips (if applicable) of 16,000 patacas or below will be awarded with an increment of 500 patacas. Staff with a monthly base salary and guaranteed tips (if applicable) over 16,000 patacas will receive a 2.0

percent salary increase, according to the statement.

"GEG thanks all team members for their dedication and hard work, and looks forward to achieving greater success together, guided by the belief of 'One Team, One Goal'", the statement said.

Wynn Macau, Limited

Wynn Macau, Limited announced a salary increase of between 2.0 percent and 4.5 percent for eligible staff (excluding senior management) of Wynn Macau and Wynn Palace, covering 98 percent of its current 11,803 workforce and will be effective from March 1.

The statement said that eligible staff with a monthly salary of 16,000 patacas or below will receive a 500 pataca salary increase, equivalent to an increase of 3.1 percent to 4.5 percent. Moreover, those earning over 16,000 patacas will receive an average of a 2.0 percent salary increase.

Wynn Macau, Limited President, Vice Chairman and Executive Director Linda Chen Chih-ling was quoted by the statement as saying: "The company's success relies on the tireless efforts and dedication of every team member. We hope to share the fruits of our collective achievements through this salary increase".

Chen also highlighted that this year holds a "special significance" with the 20th anniversary of Wynn Macau and the 10th anniversary of Wynn Palace.

SJM

SJM Resorts had also announced a salary increase for staff, according to an internal announcement released yesterday that was seen by the *Post*, being effective from April 1.

The memo noted that the salary increases will be given to staff who joined the company before January 1, 2026. Eligible staff earning 16,000 patacas or less monthly will

receive a salary increase of 500 patacas. Eligible staff earning more than 16,000 patacas will receive a 2.0 percent pay rise.

Melco Resorts & Entertainment

Melco Resorts & Entertainment noted in their announcement last night that a pay rise ranging from 2.0 percent and 6.3 percent will be effective from April 1 for eligible non-management staff in Macau and Hong Kong.

An increase of 500 patacas will be paid to eligible full-time non-management employees earning a monthly base salary (including guaranteed tips) of up to 16,000 patacas, representing an increase of 3.1 percent to 6.3 percent.

Eligible full-time non-management employees earning a monthly base salary (including guaranteed tips) of more than 16,000 patacas per month will receive an increment of 2.0 percent.

Melco Resorts & Entertainment Chairman and CEO Lawrence Ho Yau-lung was quoted as saying: "Our team is fundamental to the service we provide at Melco. We are pleased to implement this pay increase to recognise their commitment, dedication and hard work".

Sands China was the first to announce a salary increase for its employees, having done so in the same statement on Monday that announced its discretionary bonus for staff. Moreover, each of the six operators have also previously announced discretionary bonuses equivalent to a month's pay for staff. ■



Photo courtesy of the Education Executive website.

E-car charging fees to be lowered by 10 pct from next month

Tony Wong

The fees for charging e-cars in public carparks or at street parking spaces equipped with charging piles will be reduced by 10 percent from next month, the government has announced.

The reduced fees for charging e-cars, which will take effect on

February 1, were announced by a chief executive order published in the Official Gazette (BO) on Monday, when the Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) also issued a statement on the matter.

E-car charging piles in public carparks and street parking spaces are run by the city's power utility

CEM. Three types of charging are provided, namely slow, medium, and quick.

Effective from February 1, according to Monday's announcements, drivers choosing slow charging will only have to pay 1.28 patacas per kilowatt-hour (kWh) during non-peak hours, a 9.9 percent decrease from the current 1.42 patacas, while they will have to pay 1.94 patacas per kWh during peak hours, a 9.8 percent decrease from the current 2.15 patacas.

Peak hours for slow charging run between 9 a.m. and 8 p.m., while its non-peak hours run between 8 p.m. and 9 a.m. the next day.

Unlike slow charging with different fees between peak and non-peak hours, drivers choosing medium charging pay the same fees per kWh throughout the day, while drivers choosing quick charging also pay the same fees throughout the day as well.

Effective from February 1, according to the announcements,

drivers choosing medium charging will only have to pay 2.68 patacas per kWh, a 10.1 percent decrease from the current 2.98 patacas, while drivers choosing quick charging will only have to pay 3.10 patacas per kWh, a 9.9 percent decrease from the current 3.44 patacas.

The current charging fees have been in force since May 2024, after the fees were then reduced by different rates ranging between 10.2 percent and 24.4 percent depending upon which types of charging drivers choose.

Currently, in Macau, e-car slow charging refers to a rated output power of up to 7.4 kilowatt (kW), while medium charging refers to a rated output power of over 7.4 kW

and up to 25 kW. Quick charging refers to a rated output power of over 25 kW.

According to Monday's announcements, the e-car charging piles in public carparks and street parking spaces for slow charging and quick charging will be adjusted from next month. Medium charging's rated output will remain unchanged.

Effective from February 1, slow charging will have a rated output power of over 3.4 kW and up to 7.4 kilowatt, while medium charging will, as currently, have a rated output power of over 7.4 kW and up to 25 kW. Quick charging will have a rated output power of over 25 kW and up to 120 kW from February 1. ■



This photo taken yesterday shows street parking spaces equipped with e-car charging piles near the waterfront outside the Ocean Gardens residential neighbourhood in Taipa.

— Photo: Tony Wong

Long March-8A rocket launches new satellite group

WENCHANG, Hainan — China launched a Long March-8A carrier rocket yesterday in the southern island province of Hainan, sending a new group of internet satellites into space.

The rocket lifted off at 11:25 p.m. from the Hainan commercial spacecraft launch site. It successfully placed the payloads, the 18th group of low-orbit internet satellites, into preset orbit.

— Xinhua

China to ramp up solid waste management in green transition push

Analysis

BEIJING — China has released an action plan to achieve a notable increase in its solid waste treatment capacity in the next five years, as part of its broader efforts to propel a comprehensive green transition in its economy and society.

The plan, drafted by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) and 24 other government departments, prioritizes the treatment of solid waste that has a direct impact on public health or workplace safety. It calls for the expedited establishment of a comprehensive, long-term governance framework alongside resolute measures to curb the growth momentum of solid waste.

By 2030, the annual utilization of bulk solid waste is expected to reach 4.5 billion tonnes, while the annual recycling volume of major renewable resources will hit 510 million tonnes, according to the plan.

The plan comes as China steps up efforts to accelerate the green transition across the board, while seeking to address the challenges posed by the accumulation of solid waste during its industrialization and urbanization processes.

It sets out detailed measures to improve resource utilization, enhance the source control and reduction of solid waste, standardize

its collection, transportation and storage, and strengthen the capacity for its safe disposal.

"Solid waste should not be viewed as trash, but as valuable resources that are currently mismanaged," Zhou Haibing, deputy head of the NDRC, told a press conference yesterday.

The plan details requirements for cutting waste at the source, improving how waste is managed, and recovering valuable materials. It aims at building sustainable commercial frameworks, channeling market forces toward a circular economy, and driving greater success in comprehensive waste governance.

For solid waste like smelting slag, construction debris and crop straw from production sectors, measures will be taken to facilitate their direct reuse as well as the efficient extraction and integrated use of valuable components, according to Zhou.

For waste products and equipment from both industrial and domestic sources, efforts will be made to facilitate the extraction of recyclable materials including plastics, metals and glass, it said.

The plan also aims to leverage both institutional frameworks and market mechanisms to guide manufacturers in scaling up the use of

recycled materials, including recycled metals, plastics and paper pulp.

Furthermore, resources from existing funding channels will be pooled to support the development of qualified resource recycling projects, while research and development in key solid waste recycling technologies will be intensified, it said.

As a country with a large population and a major agricultural sector, China generates solid waste from farming on a vast scale and wide distribution, making its integrated management and recycling a formidable challenge, said Yang Ru, an official of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

According to the plan, efforts will be made to promote both high-strength and fully biodegradable plastic mulch films, to improve the recycling of pesticide packaging waste based on local conditions, to advance the recycling of livestock manure, and to adopt science-based methods for returning straw to fields or using it as animal feed.

It also emphasizes the enhancement of policy incentives and support to attract diverse stakeholders to the agricultural solid waste recycling sector, aiming to boost the motivation and technical capacity of businesses involved.

— Xinhua



A modified version of the Long March-6 rocket carrying the Yaogan-50 01 remote sensing satellite blasts off from the Taiyuan Satellite Launch Center in Shanxi Province last night. Launched at 10:16 p.m., the satellite has entered planned orbit. The launch was the 624th flight mission undertaken by the Long March rocket series and marked China's first successful orbital launch of 2026.

— Xinhua

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How Xi's letter encourages American youth to deepen China-US friendship

Analysis

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping has replied to a letter from a US youth education exchange delegation, in which he encouraged more young Americans to serve as a new generation of envoys in the China-US friendship.

After visiting Chinese cities in October last year, members of the delegation wrote to Xi to express their gratitude, saying the trip has helped them gain a better understanding of China.

The visit by the US delegation was a part of the “50,000 in Five Years” initiative proposed by President Xi, which aims to bring 50,000 young Americans to China for exchange and study programs over a five-year period.

US delegation members, as well as long-time American participants in bilateral people-to-people exchanges, have said that fostering friendly exchanges and cooperation is the shared aspiration of the people of both China and the United States.

A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF CHINA

“My first reaction was one of deep surprise, gratitude, and honor. While we wrote with sincerity and respect, we did not expect to receive a personal reply,” said Milinda Sylvain, principal of Diamond Minds Transformational Leadership Academy, in Miami, Florida.

Sylvain's school was one of several US institutions represented in the youth education exchange delegation to China. In the letter to Xi, the delegation members reflected on their visit, during which they experienced the country's blend of culture, education, technological innovation and warm personal interactions.

“From our October trip, we learned that China is far more dynamic, welcoming and diverse than many of our students had imagined,” said the principal.

In his reply, Xi said he was pleased to learn that the teachers and students had a pleasant and rewarding journey in China, and felt their strong interest and sincere feelings for Chinese culture, noting that the hope of China-US relations lies in the people, and its future relies on the youth.

Sylvain noted that Xi's letter conveyed a clear and powerful message: that youth exchange matters, that people-to-people connection is valued at the highest level, and that the students' experiences and voices were truly heard.

Fredline Dorvil, a program director at the academy, said Xi's letter reinforces the importance of youth exchange. “We are incredibly grateful for this opportunity -- and we can't wait to keep building on this work, reaching more students, and creating even stronger connections in the future.”

Abella, a junior student, said, “This exchange has inspired me to keep learning about China and to encourage more young people around me to explore the world with open minds.”

Nayah, another student, said the experience deepened her respect for Chinese culture and motivated her to continue learning, connecting with others, and serving as a bridge between the two countries.

A FRIENDSHIP BRIDGE

Since Xi proposed this initiative during his visit to San Francisco back in late 2023, more than 40,000 American youth have participated in the program. As Xi said in his reply, the initiative is building a bridge to carry forward the friendship between the two peoples.

In their letter to Xi, the delegation members also recalled their visit to a local senior high school in China's eastern Jiangsu province. They said that their most unforgettable activity there was working with Chinese students to build a Luban bridge using ancient Chinese woodworking techniques.

While building the model bridge with their Chinese partners, the US students “not only learned scientific concepts, but also built a symbolic bridge of friendship and mutual understanding,” read the letter.

“Supporting each other makes the structure stable. This small Luban bridge is a symbol of friendship between Chinese and American youth,” said Feng Chunxi, a student from the high school.

Following the exchange, the two schools established a sister-school partnership and planned for future exchanges, including teacher and student visits, joint curriculum development, and shared learning projects.

That 80 percent of the five-year goal of 50,000 Americans studying in China has already been reached speaks to the strong desire among youth to understand China, said Sylvain.

Xi's reply letter “is a wonderful letter to the people of Miami and all Americans,” said Gary Dvorchak, executive director of the Sino-US Friendship House in Muscatine, Iowa, who has long been involved in promoting people-to-people exchanges between the two countries and actively supporting youth programs.

The “50,000 in Five Years” initiative has been highly successful, Dvorchak said, crediting both the merit of the idea itself and the efforts of the many people who helped bring it to life.

“Americans and Chinese have shared aspirations for a better life, a good education for their children, and health and prosperity,” he said.

— Xinhua

China to launch top-tier int'l science journal

BEIJING – *Vita*, a top-tier international journal in life sciences and biomedicine led by China, is set to launch in spring 2026, Westlake University* said on Saturday.

Derived from the Latin word for “life,” the name *Vita* aptly reflects the journal's disciplinary focus while conveying an inclusive and borderless academic vision, said Li Dangsheng, editor-in-chief of the journal.

Preparations for *Vita* are now advancing steadily. An international serial number has been secured, an expert advisory committee comprising nearly 100 distinguished scientists from around the world has been established, and the first set of original research articles is now in final review. These articles will go live in the first quarter of 2026, with the print edition to follow in June of the same year.

The creation of *Vita* responds to a pressing need in China's scientific

advancement. Despite the country's rise as a global leader in life sciences research over the past decade, the development of high-quality domestic journals has not kept pace.

“Therefore, establishing a world-class scientific journal led by China and recognized internationally is not only necessary but urgent,” said Shi Yigong, president of Westlake University.

Vita will build a professional editorial team committed to upholding rigorous academic standards, thereby ensuring the innovativeness and credibility of the research it publishes.

The journal is co-founded by Higher Education Press and Westlake University, in partnership with the Life Science Open Alliance. — Xinhua

*Westlake University (西湖大学) is a private research university in Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang Province. It was founded in October 2018. — DeepSeek



A farmer promotes strawberries via livestreaming at a strawberry greenhouse in Donggang City, northeastern Liaoning Province, on Monday. As China's largest strawberry production and export base, Donggang boasts a stable strawberry planting area of approximately 200,000 mu (about 13,333 hectares). More than 100,000 farming households in the city are engaged in strawberry cultivation. Local authorities have been investing heavily in talent development, brand building, and financing support to further upgrade strawberry-based economy here. — Xinhua

HK court concludes mitigation hearing for Jimmy Lai's case

HONG KONG – The High Court of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) yesterday afternoon concluded the mitigation pleas of Jimmy Lai Chee-ying, an instigator of anti-China riots in Hong Kong, as well as those of other defendants in the case, with the court set to hand

down sentencing at a later date.

On December 15, 2025, the High Court of the HKSAR handed down a verdict on the national security case of Lai and three companies linked to the now-defunct Apple Daily, under charges of breaching the national security law in Hong Kong and

other relevant legislation.

Lai was found guilty on two charges of conspiring to collude with external forces and a charge of conspiracy to publish seditious materials. The mitigation plea hearing for the defendants in Lai's case opened on Monday.

— Xinhua

Nation's 'digital valley' reports computing power surge in 2025

GUIYANG – Guizhou Province saw its computing power scale top 150 EFLOPS in 2025 – nearly tripling its 2024 figure – with intelligent computing accounting for over 90 percent of the total, according to the provincial 2026 data work conference yesterday.

Guizhou is known as China's “digital valley” and has become

one of the country's key hubs for AI computing. A total of 50 data centers have been built or are under construction in the province, which is also home to a national computing network node that has attracted 48 service providers.

Fixed-asset investments in computing facilities exceeded 22 billion yuan in 2025, official data shows.

In 2026, Guizhou aims to boost its computing power to 190 EFLOPS by promoting new projects and green, efficient data centers.

EFLOPS, or ExaFLOPS, is a unit measuring computing performance, with each unit representing 1 quintillion floating-point operations per second.

— Xinhua



This drone photo taken yesterday shows the construction site of a 20-megawatt offshore wind turbine unit in the coastal waters of southeastern Fujian Province. The wind turbine unit was successfully hoisted and installed yesterday. — Xinhua

‘Serious threat’: Indonesia legal reform sparks rights challenges

Marchio Gorbiano

JAKARTA – Activists are challenging Indonesia’s new criminal code, which outlaws sex outside marriage and the insulting of top officials, saying it threatens rights and gives authorities broad power with minimal oversight.

The government has celebrated the new framework, which replaced the Dutch colonial-era criminal code on January 2, and insisted the overhaul was not seeking to quash freedoms.

But activists – mostly students – are trying to counter the sweeping legal changes, with some cases already before the nation’s highest courts.

The new laws pose a “serious threat” to human rights, said Amnesty International Indonesia executive director Usman Hamid.

“Civil liberties are increasingly threatened by widespread criminalisation, while the rights of suspects and vulnerable groups could be neglected,” he told AFP.

Then-president Joko Widodo signed the changes into law three years ago, while a separate procedural law that President Prabowo Subianto ratified last month also came into effect on January 2.

The Constitutional Court began hearing on Friday the first of several petitions challenging the new code, which authorities argue includes sufficient protections.

When lawmakers approved it in 2022, the United Nations office in Indonesia warned that some provisions could infringe on “fundamental freedoms and human rights”.

But the government has defended the change.

Yusril Ihza Mahendra, a minister overseeing legal affairs and human rights, hailed a “historic

momentum” for Indonesia as it sheds the penal system inherited from Dutch colonial rule, which ended eight decades ago.

‘Grateful’ for criticism

Sexual relations outside marriage were criminalised and now carry a sentence of up to a year in jail, effectively outlawing same-sex relations as such unions are not recognised in Indonesia.

And the cohabitation of unwedded couples can see violators imprisoned for up to six months.

To ease concerns, Law Minister Supratman Andi Agtas noted last week that only spouses, parents or children of anyone involved in these actions can report them.

Other provisions that sparked backlash include prison terms of up to three years for insults or slanders against the president or vice president.

While the code stipulates that only they can file complaints, activists say this rule would stifle criticism of public officials.

Deputy Law Minister Edward Omar Sharif Hiariej dismissed the claim that the new law was aimed at restricting the freedom of expression.

“Criticism and insults are two different things... critics are not prohibited in this article,” Edward told a press conference on January 5.

President Prabowo said he was “grateful” to hear criticism.

“If I am being corrected, I consider it as I am being helped,” the former general told a public event after the new code came into effect.

‘Low point’

Critics warn that the new criminal procedural law, which lays out the framework for the enforcement of the

criminal code, grants officials broad powers with minimal oversight.

Now “the police have a far greater authority to seize evidence, to arrest people”, said Andreas Harsono, Indonesia researcher of Human Rights Watch.

The rules grant investigators, for example, the power to decide what constitutes “urgent situations”, meaning they can search and seize evidence without a court order.

Authorities can also detain suspects if they do not cooperate during the inquiry, said Ifitahsari, a lawyer and researcher at the Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (ICJR). “Granting these extensive powers could... create greater space for corruption,” Ifitahsari, who goes by one name, told AFP.

When the rules “are unfair from the start”, abuse of power and procedural injustice can easily increase, she said.

Ifitahsari also warned of a democratic decline in Indonesia, which adopted democracy following the fall of the late leader Suharto, who ruled with an iron fist for more than three decades until the late 1990s.

The new rules “are certainly far from what is aspired” in terms of upholding the rights of citizens in a democracy, said the lawyer.

Amnesty’s Usman urged the government to revoke the code, calling it a “low point in rule of law and respect for human rights in Indonesia”.

The new regulations “further legitimise authoritarianism by excessively expanding police powers without adequate judicial oversight mechanisms, undermining the principle of checks and balances principle”, he said.

Edward, the deputy law minister, declined to comment on these claims, citing the ongoing court case. – AFP

100-meter lava fountain observed at Philippines’ Mayon Volcano

MANILA – The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) yesterday reported a short-lived incandescent lava fountain that shot up to about 100 meters from the summit crater of Mayon Volcano on Luzon island.

In an advisory, Phivolcs reported that the volcanic activity was observed early yesterday morning and lasted approximately 35 seconds.

Phivolcs said the volcano remains under the third-highest alert based on a five-tier scale that measures the probability of an explosive eruption. Entry into the six-km permanent danger zone is strictly prohibited.

The institute noted that an ongoing magmatic eruption is

occurring at Mayon and that the activity is currently effusive, meaning lava is steadily flowing from the crater rather than erupting explosively.

Meanwhile, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council said that more than 4,000 people have been affected by the ongoing unrest at Mayon Volcano.

Mayon Volcano has been in a state of unrest again in recent weeks, with red-hot lava oozing, prompting authorities to order evacuations of villagers around the danger zone.

The Philippines lies along the Pacific “Ring of Fire,” making it highly prone to earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. – Xinhua



Tourists visit the 15-metre-tall Great Buddha statue which was built in 752 AD, at Todaiji Temple in Nara, Japan yesterday. – AFP

Malaysia to take legal action against X, xAI over Grok concerns

KUALA LUMPUR – Malaysian regulators said yesterday they would take legal action against Elon Musk’s X and xAI over user safety concerns sparked by their in-built artificial intelligence chatbot Grok.

Grok is facing a global backlash for allowing users to create and share sexualised pictures of women and children using simple text prompts.

The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) already suspended access to Grok on Sunday.

It has now appointed solicitors to commence “legal proceedings” against X and xAI, the regulatory body said, without specifying what form the proceedings would take.

Grok is integrated into both the X and xAI platforms.

“This action concerns their failure to ensure user safety in Malaysia in relation to the use of Grok,” the MCMC said.

It said authorities had “identified the misuse of Grok to generate and disseminate harmful content”

deemed obscene, sexually explicit and involving non-consensual manipulated images.

“Content allegedly involving women and minors is of serious concern”, violated Malaysian law and undermined the companies’ commitments to safety, the regulator added.

It said it issued notices to X and xAI on January 3 and January 8 ordering the removal of the content but the companies took no action.

It also accused the companies of failing to enforce their own internal policies over harmful content, and said they may still be held liable even if such content was generated by users.

Neighbouring Indonesia on Saturday became the first country to block access to Grok entirely, and the bot’s image creation feature has been limited to paying subscribers in other markets.

European officials and tech campaigners have criticised the latter move, saying it fails to address concerns about sexualised deepfakes. – AFP



Prime minister and Bhumjaithai Party’s party leader Anutin Charnvirakul, (left to right) People’s Party’s prime ministerial candidate and party leader Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut and Pheu Thai Party’s prime ministerial candidate Yodchanan Wongsawat interact at the Global Dynamics and Thailand’s Future event at Queen Sirikit National Convention Centre in Bangkok on Monday. – AFP

Death toll in central Philippine landfill collapse rises to 11

MANILA – The death toll from a landfill landslide in the central Philippine city of Cebu has climbed to 11, as rescuers continued searching yesterday for 25 missing workers, authorities said.

Cebu City Mayor Nestor Archival told a news conference on Monday that all 18 survivors were injured and have been receiving treatment in hospitals.

“The 72 hours have lapsed already, but we’re hoping we still

have people who are alive, so that’s why we continue to be on this rescue operation,” Archival said.

The dumpsite collapse occurred last Thursday at a waste management facility in the city.

Archival acknowledged the concerns of victims’ families over the pace of the rescue, but said operations must proceed cautiously to avoid further danger.

“The building is actually a metal structure, and all the parts are

interconnected. If we try to lift it, the trapped individuals could be caught in the middle,” he said, noting that rescuers are working slowly and carefully based on assessments by the command center.

He also warned of fire risks from gas emissions at the site. “We cannot simply cut the pieces. There is gas spewing, and a spark could trigger a fire, which would be disastrous for both those trapped and our rescuers,” Archival said. – Xinhua

S Korean prosecutors demand death penalty for ex-leader Yoon

Kang Jin-kyu

SEOUL — South Korean prosecutors called yesterday for the death penalty to be handed down to former president Yoon Suk Yeol for his December 2024 declaration of martial law, which plunged the country into chaos.

Yoon triggered a political crisis when he announced an end to civilian rule in December 2024 and sent troops to parliament to enforce it.

But his attempt failed and he became the country's first sitting president to be taken into custody when he was detained last January.

Yoon's criminal trial for insurrection, abuse of power and other offences linked to the declaration drew to a close yesterday after 11 hours of proceedings.

In closing remarks, prosecutors accused him of being the ringleader of an "insurrection" motivated by a

"lust for power aimed at dictatorship and long-term rule".

They accused Yoon of showing "no remorse" for actions which threatened "constitutional order and democracy".

"The greatest victims of the insurrection in this case are the people of this country," they said.

"There are no mitigating circumstances to be considered in sentencing, and instead a severe punishment must be imposed."

Yoon's defence team, meanwhile, have made theatrical arguments in a bid to help him and his alleged accomplices.

Yesterday they compared the disgraced former leader to great historical figures like Italian scholars Galileo Galilei and Giordano Bruno, who were wrongfully condemned.

"The majority does not always reveal the truth," they said.

Prosecutors also asked that former



Supporters of South Korea's impeached former president Yoon Suk Yeol gather in front of the Seoul Central District Court in Seoul yesterday, as Yoon's final criminal trial on insurrection charges is scheduled to be held in the court. — AFP

defence minister Kim Yong-hyun be sentenced to life imprisonment.

Proceedings were expected to wrap up last Friday, but were postponed after 15 hours of

deliberation — it took eight hours to examine evidence alone for Kim.

Kim's lawyer insisted "a short tongue" was preventing him from reading more quickly.

The current trial features eight defendants seen as ringleaders of the martial law bid, including Yoon and Kim.

If found guilty, Yoon will become the third South Korean president convicted for insurrection, alongside two military leaders in connection with a 1979 coup.

Even if he is convicted and sentenced to death, it is highly unlikely that it would be carried out as South Korea has had an unofficial moratorium on executions since 1997.

Prosecutors are also seeking a 10-year prison term for Yoon on obstruction of justice charges, with a Seoul court expected to deliver a verdict in that case this Friday.

And he faces a trial on charges of aiding the enemy over allegations he ordered drone flights over North Korea to strengthen his effort to declare martial law. — AFP

India hunts rampaging elephant that killed 20 people

PATNA — Indian wildlife officers are hunting a rampaging wild elephant blamed for killing at least 20 people and injuring 15 others in the forests of Jharkhand, villagers and officials said yesterday.

The elephant, a lone bull, is reported to have gone on the rampage for nine days beginning in early January, creating panic in the rural West Singhbhum district.

"We are trying to trace and rescue this violent wild elephant that killed so many people," government forest officer Aditya Narayan told AFP, confirming the toll of 20 dead.

Children and the elderly are among the dead, as well as a professional elephant handler, known as a mahout.

But after wreaking a trail of destruction, it had not been spotted since Friday, despite multiple patrols in the area.

Officials said search teams, aided by drones, are combing dense forest tracts, including a national reserve in neighbouring Odisha state.

Fear has driven residents of more than 20 villages to abandon their farms or barricade themselves indoors at night, elected village head Pratap Chachar told AFP.

"A police team, or forest official vehicle, visits in the night to provide essential help to villagers," Chachar said.

Hundreds of thousands of Indians

are affected each year by crop-raiding elephants.

Asian elephants are now restricted to just 15 percent of their original habitat.

The usually shy animals are coming into increasing contact with humans because of rapidly expanding settlements and growing forest disturbance, including mining operations.

As elephant habitats shrink, conflict between humans and wild elephants has grown — 629 people were killed by elephants across India in 2023-2024, according to parliamentary figures.

The elephants that pose the most danger to humans are often rogue bulls, solitary male animals enraged during "musth", a period of heightened sexual activity when testosterone levels soar.

A former forest official said the elephant was likely in musth, and may now have calmed down and rejoined its herd.

India is home to the majority of the world's remaining wild Asian elephants, a species listed as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and increasingly threatened by shrinking habitat.

The Wildlife Institute of India last year issued a new estimate, that put the country's wild elephant population at 22,446, a report that also warned of the deepening pressures on one of India's most iconic animals. — AFP

Cambodia suspends sales at properties owned by accused cyberscam front

PHNOM PENH — Cambodia has frozen sales of luxury properties by a US-sanctioned conglomerate after its founder was extradited to China and charged by Washington for allegedly running multibillion-dollar transnational cyberscams.

Prince Group founder and chairman Chen Zhi was extradited to China from Cambodia last week, both governments said.

The United States indicted the Chinese-born businessman in October, alleging he directed online investment schemes that have netted billions and were run by hundreds of scammers trafficked into compounds in Cambodia.

Four Prince Group properties in the capital Phnom Penh and one in the coastal city of Sihanoukville were "suspended from further sales" of condo units and homes in gated communities, Cambodia's real estate regulator said in a statement late Monday.

The announcement is the latest blow to Prince Group — a

multinational conglomerate that US authorities say served as a front for "one of Asia's largest transnational criminal organisations" — after Chen was charged, and his company was sanctioned by Washington and London in October.

The real estate regulator said individuals who have signed sales contracts for units at any of the five properties were obligated to complete the agreed purchase.

Those who have paid in full have the option to sell their property, after registering ownership with the government, an official at the regulator said.

At one of the Prince complexes in the capital, The Pinnacle Residence condominiums — also known as Prince Happiness Plaza, according to the regulator — several employees told AFP yesterday that the sales office had been closed.

One employee who declined to give his name said the sales team had been scaling down since October.

"I don't know what is happening and I hope it won't affect my job," he said.

The shimmering 47-floor towers of the residential and business complex were completed in 2024 and 75 percent of its nearly 1,800 units were sold, according to Cambodia property website realestate.com.kh.

The developer is listed as Prince Real Estate Cambodia, another entity under US sanctions.

Chen was charged by US authorities with wire fraud and money laundering conspiracy charges involving approximately 127,271 seized bitcoin, worth more than US\$11 billion at current prices.

Since then, authorities in Europe, the United States and Asia have targeted Prince Group with a frenzy of asset confiscations.

Cambodia's central bank placed another one of its companies, the US-sanctioned Prince Bank, into liquidation last week.

Prince Group has denied the allegations. — AFP

Kim revamps private security detail, South says

SEOUL — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has replaced three top officials in charge of his personal security, Seoul said yesterday, a sign the despot may increasingly fear assassination plots.

Seoul's Unification Ministry — responsible for managing relations with Pyongyang — said three state agencies handling Kim's security had new bosses.

The reshuffle was spotted during a military parade in October, the ministry said.

The changes at the Bodyguard Command in particular, which handles security measures against drone or electronic attacks, could be linked to Kim's decision to send troops to aid Russia's war in Ukraine, an expert said.

"Change in the pattern of Kim's security detail was detected from October 2024, when he deployed North Korean troops to Russia," Hong Min, an analyst at the Korea Institute for National Unification, told AFP.

"He could have judged there could be an assassination attempt against him involving Ukrainians amid heightened international spotlight due to the deployment," he added.

Seoul's spy agency previously said Kim had upgraded the level of security around him due to the risk of attempts on his life.

Kim's office sought to obtain equipment capable of jamming communications and drone detection gear in response, the agency said.

In the past year, Kim has often been seen accompanied by his daughter Ju Ae on official duties including the inspection of a nuclear-powered submarine.

Analysts say she is likely next in line to run the nuclear-armed dictatorship.

This month's capture by the United States of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has also likely heightened security fears in Pyongyang, analysts say.

The 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.

— AFP



Artists perform the folk dance 'Chindu Yakshaganam' during the harvest festival Makar Sankranti in Hyderabad, India yesterday. — AFP

'We choose Denmark,' says Greenland leader ahead of White House talks

Camille Bas-Wohlert

COPENHAGEN – Greenland would choose to remain Danish over a US takeover, its leader said yesterday, ahead of crunch White House talks on the future of the Arctic island which President Donald Trump has repeatedly threatened.

Trump has been talking up the idea of buying or annexing the autonomous territory for years, and further stoked tensions this week by saying the United States would take it "one way or the other".

"We are now facing a geopolitical crisis, and if we have to choose between the United States and Denmark here and now, we choose Denmark," Greenland's Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen said at a press conference.

"One thing must be clear to everyone: Greenland does not want to be owned by the United States. Greenland does not want to be governed by the United States. Greenland does not want to be part of the United States."

He was speaking alongside Danish leader Mette Frederiksen, who said it had not been easy to stand up to what she slammed as "completely unacceptable pressure from our closest ally".

"However, there are many indications that the most challenging part is ahead of us," Frederiksen said.

Danish Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen and his Greenlandic counterpart Vivian Motzfeldt are to meet US Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio today to discuss Greenland's future.

Lokke said they had requested a meeting with Rubio, and Vance had asked to take part and host it at the White House.

Vance made an uninvited visit to the island in March where he criticised Denmark for what he said was a lack of commitment to Greenland and security in the Arctic, and called it a "bad ally".

The comments enraged Copenhagen, which has been an ardent trans-Atlantic supporter and which has sent troops to fight US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

'Misunderstandings'

For Greenland and Denmark,



Greenland's Head of Government (Naalakkersuisut) Jens-Frederik Nielsen (left) and Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen give a press conference in the Mirror Hall at the Prime Minister's Office in Copenhagen yesterday. – AFP

today's meeting at the White House is aimed at ironing out "misunderstandings".

These relate to Greenland's defence, Chinese and Russian military presence in the Arctic, and the relationship between Greenland and Copenhagen, which together with the Faroe Islands make up the Kingdom of Denmark.

"To the uninformed American listener, the ongoing [independence] talks between Denmark and Greenland might have been construed as if Greenland's secession from Denmark was imminent," said Greenland specialist Mikaela Engell.

For these listeners, "I can understand that, in this situation, it would be better for the Americans to take hold of that strategic place", the former Danish representative on the island told AFP.

But this "discussion has been going on for years and years and it has never meant that Greenland was on its way out the door", she stressed.

Denmark's foreign minister said the reason Copenhagen and Greenland had requested today's meeting was "to move the entire discussion... into a meeting room, where you can look each other in the eyes and talk through these issues".

Greenland's location is highly strategic, lying on the shortest route for missiles between Russia and the United States. It is therefore a crucial part of the US anti-missile shield.

Washington has accused

Copenhagen of doing little to protect Greenland from what it perceives as a growing Arctic threat from Russia and China, though analysts suggest Beijing is a small player in the region.

Denmark's government has rejected US claims, recalling that it has invested almost 90 billion kroner (US\$14 billion) to beef up its military presence in the Arctic.

The Danish prime minister yesterday called for stronger cooperation with the US and NATO to improve the region's security.

She also called for NATO to defend Greenland, and said that security guarantees would be "the best defence against Chinese or Russian threats in the Arctic".

Diplomats at NATO say some Alliance members have floated the idea of launching a new mission in the region, although no concrete proposals are yet on the table.

Rutte said on Monday that NATO was working on "the next steps" to bolster Arctic security.

Greenland's foreign minister and Danish Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen are to meet NATO's Secretary General Mark Rutte next Monday to discuss the issue.

"We are now moving forward with the whole issue of a more permanent, larger presence in Greenland from the Danish defence forces but also with the participation of other countries," Lund Poulsen told reporters. – AFP

WHO says sugary drinks, alcohol getting cheaper, should be taxed more

Robin Millard

GENEVA – Sugary drinks and alcohol are getting relatively cheaper, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said yesterday, urging countries to hike taxes to reduce consumption levels and boost health funding.

The WHO said consistently low taxes on the products in most countries were fuelling obesity, diabetes, heart disease and cancers.

"Weak tax systems are allowing harmful products to remain cheap while health systems face mounting financial pressure from preventable non-communicable diseases," the UN health agency said.

The organisation said that while such drinks generate billions of US dollars in profit, governments capture a relatively small share of that through health-driven taxes, leaving societies to bear the long-term health and economic costs.

"Health taxes are one of the strongest tools we have for promoting health and preventing disease," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a statement.

"By increasing taxes on products like tobacco, sugary drinks, and alcohol, governments can reduce harmful consumption and unlock funds for vital health services."

Tedros told a press conference that in poorer countries left struggling as aid funding dries up, such taxes could help make the transition towards sustainable self-reliance in running health systems.

'Powerful industries with deep pockets'

Jeremy Farrar, WHO assistant director-general in charge of health promotion, disease prevention and care, said the evidence on tobacco taxation reducing consumption was clear – and sugary drinks should be seen in the same light.

"This is also about using taxation as a move to shift behaviour," he said, adding it could also bolster prevention in countries struggling to deal with

the rise in non-communicable diseases, and allow countries to invest in healthcare.

Tedros warned that health taxes were not simple to implement.

"They can be politically unpopular, and they attract opposition from powerful industries with deep pockets and a lot to lose," he told reporters.

"But many countries have shown that when they are done right, they are a powerful tool for health," he said, citing measures in the Philippines, Britain and Lithuania.

The WHO is urging states to raise and redesign their taxes as part of its "3 by 35" initiative, aimed at increasing the prices of tobacco, alcohol and sugary drinks by 2035.

Slipping through the net

The WHO issued twin global reports on taxes on alcohol and on sugar-sweetened beverages.

They said at least 116 countries tax sugary drinks like sodas.

"But many other high-sugar products, such as 100 percent fruit juices, sweetened milk drinks and ready-to-drink coffees and teas, escape taxation," said the WHO.

The alcohol report found beer had become more affordable in 56 countries from 2022 to 2024, and less affordable in 37.

It said wine was exempted from excise taxes in at least 25 countries, particularly in Europe.

"Excise taxes should apply to all alcoholic beverages," it said.

"There is significant room for better design and higher excise taxes on alcoholic beverages to decrease affordability and thereby reduce alcohol consumption and its related harms."

More affordable alcohol "drives violence, injuries and disease", said Etienne Krug, head of the WHO's health determinants, promotion and prevention department.

"While industry profits, the public often carries the health consequences and society the economic costs." – AFP

US designates Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan as terrorists

WASHINGTON – The United States yesterday designated the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as well as Lebanon and Jordan as terrorist organisations, fulfilling a long demand of Arab allies and US conservatives.

"These designations reflect the opening actions of an ongoing, sustained effort to thwart Muslim Brotherhood chapters' violence and destabilisation wherever it occurs," Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in a statement.

"The United States will use

all available tools to deprive these Muslim Brotherhood chapters of the resources to engage in or support terrorism."

President Donald Trump in November set in motion the process to take action against the pan-Islamist movement, which was founded in Egypt in 1928 and has since spread across the Arab world.

The Trump administration designated the Egyptian as well as Jordanian chapters of the Muslim Brotherhood on the basis of their support for Hamas, the Palestinian

armed group long classified as terrorists by the United States.

The Muslim Brotherhood rose to power in Egypt democratically through the election of Mohamed Morsi. He was deposed in 2013 in a military coup by then military chief Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who has since pursued a sweeping crackdown against the Muslim Brotherhood.

Egypt as well as fellow US allies Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have long sought to suppress the Muslim Brotherhood.

– AFP



Palestinians mourn over a body during the funeral of three displaced members of the Hamoda family who died after parts of a war-damaged building where they had taken shelter collapsed on a windy winter day in Gaza City yesterday. A fragile ceasefire has been in place since October, following a deadly war waged by Israel in response to Hamas's unprecedented October 7, 2023 attack on Israel. Nearly 80 percent of buildings in Gaza have been destroyed or damaged by the war, according to UN data. – AFP

Furious farmers roll hundreds of tractors into Paris in fresh protests

Maryam El Hamouchi and Sofia Bouderbala

PARIS, France – Some 500 tractors parked near the French parliament building yesterday after driving down the Champs-Élysées avenue, as farmers protested a litany of woes including the EU-Mercosur/Mercosul* trade deal.

The protests reflect a deep sense of malaise afflicting France's agricultural sector, with the planned signing of an accord between the European Union and the Mercosur bloc seen as the last straw.

French farmers have complained about economic uncertainties and environmental rules, and have since December staged protests and set up roadblocks over the government's handling of a lumpy skin disease outbreak.

Arriving from towns around Paris and beyond, the protesters parked their tractors not far from the National Assembly in central Paris.

"We're at the end of our tether," said one of the activists, Guillaume Moret, 56.

"We haven't made any money from our farms for three years," said the head of the FNSEA union for the Paris region.

"The peasant revolt continues," read a banner unfurled in front of the legislature.

The FNSEA, France's leading

agricultural union, and another union, Jeunes Agriculteurs ("Young Farmers"), are demanding "concrete and immediate action" from the government.

Agriculture Minister Annie Genevard, who came out to meet the farmers, said Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu would make a new announcement later Tuesday.

The protesters also spoke with Yaël Braun-Pivet, head of parliament's lower house.

No cows at agriculture show

The government last week already announced a planned 300-million-euro (US\$349.5 million) package to support the farmers, as well as other measures including an increase in the number of wolves that can be killed.

In a move highlighting the atmosphere, France's biggest agricultural show will this year feature no cows, for the first time since the event's creation in 1964.

Farmers, driven by health concerns and a sense of solidarity with breeders affected by the lumpy skin disease outbreak, have refused to present their cattle at the fair in February.

The event's chairman, Jerome Despey, called the move a "blow to the show."

The first convoy of about 15 tractors rolled into the French capital



French farmers dump potatoes during a protest in front of the National Assembly to demand "concrete and immediate action" from the government, in Paris yesterday. Called by two farmers' unions and a few days before the signing of the EU-Mercosur/Mercosul agreement, a convoy of farmers entered the capital yesterday morning (local time). – AFP

shortly before 6:00 a.m. (local time). Joined by dozens of others, they drove down the Champs-Élysées honking their horns.

"We won't leave without measures that allow us to catch our breath a little," said protester Guillaume Moret.

Several days before the scheduled signing of the agreement in Paraguay on Saturday, the FNSEA union reiterated its opposition to the deal and also listed several national "priorities" to be defended.

The union is calling on the government to address a number of

issues including wolf predation and the use of fertilisers.

Police said some 400 protesters had gathered near the parliament building. The FNSEA union put turnout at over 500 tractors and 800 farmers.

Dissatisfaction

Most of the European Union's 27 nations back the trade deal, which supporters argue is crucial to boost exports, help the continent's ailing economy and foster diplomatic ties at a time of global uncertainty.

The deal, more than 25 years in the making, would create one

of the world's largest free-trade areas, boosting commerce between the EU and the South American bloc comprising Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina and Uruguay.

It would see the European Union export machinery, chemicals and pharmaceuticals with lowered tariffs applied.

But farmers in France and several other countries fear being undercut by an influx of cheap beef and other agricultural products from South America.

Thousands of farmers in France and Ireland staged protests over the weekend.

In France, politicians across the divide have also been up in arms against the deal, which they view as an assault on the country's influential farming sector. – AFP

*The Southern Common Market (commonly known by abbreviation Mercosur in Spanish and Mercosul in Portuguese) is a South American trade bloc established by the Treaty of Asunción in 1991 and Protocol of Ouro Preto in 1994. Its full members are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Venezuela is a full member but has been suspended since December 1, 2016. Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Panama, Peru, and Suriname are associate member countries. – Wikipedia

Israel to take part in first Eurovision May 12 semi-final

VIENNA – Israel will take part in the first semi-final of the Eurovision Song Contest on May 12 in Vienna, according to the draw on Monday, as five countries are staying away this year over Israel's participation.

The world's biggest live televised music event heads into its 70th anniversary edition mired in its biggest-ever political boycott, with just 35 countries set to part – the fewest since entry was expanded in 2004.

Israel will compete against 14 other countries, including past Eurovision winners Estonia, Finland, Greece, Portugal, Serbia and Sweden, for spots in the May 16 final, the draw at Vienna's City Hall revealed.

In the other semi-final held on May 14, the 15 countries vying for spots include past winners Azerbaijan, Denmark, Latvia, Norway, Ukraine and Switzerland, according to the draw.

From each semi-final, 10 songs that get the most points from the jury combined with a public vote will qualify for the final.

Host Austria and the biggest financial contributors France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom automatically qualify for the final.

Public broadcasters in Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain have all

announced they are boycotting this year's event.

Matters came to a head over widespread concerns about the conduct of Israel's two-year war in Gaza.

There were suspicions too that the televoting system was being manipulated to boost Israel after it comfortably topped the public voting in Basel at Eurovision 2025, with extraordinary sequences of maximum points from other countries.

Some broadcasters also raised concerns about European Broadcasting Union (EBU) values and media freedom, with Israel preventing their journalists from accessing Gaza, while targeting and killing Palestinian journalists in the territory.

EBU members have adopted measures aimed at improving the voting system, enhancing fraud detection and curbing government-backed promotional campaigns.

Abolished in 2022, professional juries of music experts are returning in the semi-finals with expanded, more diverse panels that include young jurors aged 18 to 25.

Austria is hosting the contest in Vienna after Austrian artist JJ won in Basel, Switzerland, last year.

Austrian broadcaster ÖRF is presenting the 2026 edition.

– AFP

US Republicans seek Clinton contempt charge in Epstein probe

Frankie Taggart

WASHINGTON – Republicans moved yesterday to hold former US president Bill Clinton in criminal contempt after he skipped a subpoenaed deposition in the congressional investigation into sex offender Jeffrey Epstein – marking a sharp escalation in a politically charged inquiry.

The Republican-led House Oversight Committee said it would begin contempt proceedings next week after the 79-year-old Democrat did not show up for closed-door testimony scheduled for yesterday morning (local time).

The panel is also threatening similar action against former secretary of state Hillary Clinton, who is due to testify today but is also expected to be a no-show.

The pressure comes as President Donald Trump faces mounting calls for transparency, with the Justice Department angering his supporters – many of whom believe Epstein was murdered in a cover-up – by releasing only a sliver of case files nearly a month past the legal deadline.

"As a result of Bill Clinton not showing up for his lawful subpoena – which was voted unanimously by the committee in a bipartisan manner – we will move next week... to hold former President Clinton in contempt of Congress," committee chairman James Comer told reporters.

In an eight-page letter to Comer, the Clintons said they did not plan to

appear for the depositions, describing the moment as one requiring resistance "no matter the consequences."

Invoking contempt against a former president is rare and would represent a significant step by House Republicans.

Any contempt resolution would require approval by the full House before being referred to the Justice Department, which ultimately decides whether to prosecute.

Criminal contempt of Congress is a misdemeanour punishable by up to one year in prison and fines of up to US\$100,000, though referrals are unevenly enforced.

The Oversight Committee is investigating Epstein's ties to powerful figures and how information about his crimes was handled by US authorities.

Conspiracy theories

Epstein, once a friend and associate of Trump and other high-profile figures, was convicted of sex crimes and later jailed pending trial for allegedly trafficking underage girls.

The financier died in a New York jail cell in 2019 while awaiting trial, a death officially ruled a suicide but long the subject of conspiracy theories amplified by Trump's supporters.

The Clintons were subpoenaed in August alongside other current and former officials, including former FBI director James Comey.

Their depositions were initially scheduled for October, then delayed twice – once after Bill Clinton said

he needed to attend a funeral.

Bill Clinton's spokesman Angel Urena has accused Comer of singling out the former president, saying his legal team offered the same terms accepted for other witnesses.

Hillary Clinton's office has questioned why she was subpoenaed at all, saying the committee had failed to explain the relevance of her testimony.

The dispute comes amid controversy over the Trump administration's handling of Epstein-related records.

Weeks after a legal deadline to release the Epstein files, the Justice Department has offered up only one percent of the total archive, angering Trump supporters who had expected sweeping disclosures.

Those documents included multiple photographs of Bill Clinton from the early 2000s.

The former president has acknowledged travelling on Epstein's private plane during Clinton Foundation trips before the financier was charged with any sex crimes, but denies wrongdoing and says he cut ties years before Epstein's 2006 arrest.

No evidence has emerged implicating either Bill or Hillary Clinton in criminal conduct related to Epstein.

Contempt of Congress has taken on greater weight in recent years. Two Trump allies were jailed for defying subpoenas during the investigation into the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol – underscoring that defiance can carry real legal consequences. – AFP

Trump sets meeting with Venezuelan opposition leader

Patrick Fort and Ahiana Figueroa

CARACAS – Washington announced on Monday that Venezuelan opposition figure Maria Corina Machado will meet President Donald Trump this week as pressure grew on the interim leadership in Caracas to speed up the release of political prisoners.

Machado has been sidelined by Washington since US forces seized long-term leader Nicolás Maduro on January 3 and the Trump administration announced it would be “running” Venezuela.

Disregarding Machado and her understudy Edmundo González Urrutia, Trump has been working instead with acting president Delcy Rodríguez, left in power with other Maduro allies.

Trump has warned Rodríguez to toe Washington’s line or face the consequences – particularly on granting access to the South American country’s vast oil reserves.

A US administration official told AFP the Republican president will

meet Machado at the White House tomorrow.

Venezuela, meanwhile, announced it had freed 116 more people jailed under Maduro – many for taking part in protests after his disputed 2024 election.

Rights groups questioned the numbers, and family members clamoured for speedier releases promised by Caracas under pressure from Washington.

Relatives have been camped out at prisons for days, growing increasingly restless as loved ones have failed to appear.

“We simply ask that they keep their word,” said Manuel Mendoza, who had driven six hours to be at the El Rodeo prison, about 30 kilometres from Caracas, for his son’s Jose Daniel’s anticipated release.

“It’s already been four nights waiting out in the open air, suffering.”

UN experts and the opposition said on Monday that only about 50 prisoners have been freed so far out

of the 800-1,200 that rights groups estimate are being held.

Papal intervention?

Machado on Monday urged Pope Leo XIV to “intercede” on behalf of prisoners.

“I asked him to intercede for all Venezuelans who remain kidnapped and disappeared,” Machado said after an audience with the pontiff at the Vatican.

González Urrutia – who ran as the opposition’s presidential candidate in 2024 after Machado was disqualified by institutions loyal to Maduro – said “every hour that passes is a new form of violence against families” of prisoners.

Rodríguez, despite being a staunch Maduro ally, is negotiating with Washington, which is looking to take advantage of Venezuela’s vast oil reserves.

US envoys visited Caracas last week to discuss reopening Washington’s embassy there seven years after diplomatic ties were severed.

On Sunday, Trump said he was open to a meeting with Rodríguez and that his administration was working “really well” with hers.

He said he hoped the freed prisoners “will remember how lucky they got that the USA came along and did what had to be done.”

But experts mandated to a UN fact-finding mission said in a statement on Monday that the dozens of people freed so far was “far short of Venezuela’s international human rights obligations.”

Frustration was growing among about 40 relatives still camped out outside El Rodeo prison, where some had set up tents.

Rights NGO Foro Penal said 15 people had been released from the facility, but family members told AFP they were whisked away through a back exit without seeing the loved ones waiting for them.

The government in Caracas said a review of prisoner files was ongoing.

Machado said she had underscored Urrutia’s “legitimacy”

in her talks with Leo and sought the pope’s backing for “the prompt advancement of the transition to democracy in Venezuela.”

The opposition and the West consider Urrutia the legitimate victor of Venezuela’s last presidential election.

Machado was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize last year and dedicated it to Trump, who has made no secret of his frustration at being passed over for the award.

In Caracas on Monday, Rodríguez made a number of ministerial changes, naming a former Maduro bodyguard as minister of the presidential office – charged with managing her agenda and liaising with state agencies.

She also replaced the head of the presidential guard, who leads the counterintelligence unit.

Her government said it was ready to pursue a “new agenda” with the European Union and Britain following talks on Monday with their envoys.

– AFP



Spain's King Felipe VI arrives to meet French President Emmanuel Macron at the Élysée Palace in Paris yesterday. – AFP

Former Panama leader on trial over mega LatAm graft scandal

PANAMA CITY – Former Panamanian President Ricardo Martinelli went on trial on Monday for money laundering in a sprawling corruption case that has drawn in several South American leaders.

Brazilian construction giant Odebrecht, which has since changed its name to Novonor, has admitted to paying hundreds of millions of US dollars in bribes throughout Latin America to secure huge public works contracts between 2001 and 2016.

The so-called “Car Wash” scandal, which erupted in 2014, has landed dozens of top politicians and business figures behind bars.

Former Peruvian presidents Alejandro Toledo and Ollanta Humala are serving lengthy sentences in their country after

being convicted of being on the take from Odebrecht.

Politicians in Argentina, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela have also been convicted over their roles in the scandal.

Martinelli, who faces a 12-year prison sentence if convicted in absentia, appeared in a Panama City court via video conference from Colombia, where he sought asylum last year.

“I am innocent, I am not responsible” the 73-year-old, who was president from 2009 to 2014, pleaded.

Odebrecht has admitted to paying US\$59 million in bribes during Martinelli’s tenure to win the tender for construction of Panama City’s metro, the modern coastal highway in the capital,

and for the expansion of Panama’s international airport.

The prosecution argues that, although there is no evidence of payments being paid directly into Martinelli’s personal accounts, he was the final recipient of the funds and had “full knowledge of the illicit origin” of the money.

“This case is entirely political,” Carlos Carrillo, the former president’s lawyer, told AFP.

Another former president, Juan Carlos Varela, and two of Martinelli’s sons are also accused in the case but will be tried at a later date by the Supreme Court.

Martinelli sought asylum in Colombia last year to avoid arrest in a separate money laundering case over which he was sentenced to nearly 11 years imprisonment.

– AFP

Cuba denies being in talks with Trump on potential deal

HAVANA – Cuba’s leader on Monday reacted defiantly to President Donald Trump’s threats to “make a deal” or pay the price in the aftermath of key ally Nicolás Maduro’s ouster in a US military raid.

Trump has been ramping up pressure on Cuba, one of the few Latin American countries still run by a leftist administration after Venezuelan leader Maduro’s capture on January 3.

“We’re talking with Cuba,” Trump said aboard Air Force One on Sunday, hours after urging Havana to do a deal to head off unspecified US actions.

The Republican president, who says Washington is now effectively running Venezuela, earlier vowed to cut off all oil and money Caracas had been providing to ailing Cuba.

“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,” he said, without specifying what kind of deal he was promoting or what would happen if Cuba refused to negotiate.

Cuba, which is struggling through its worst economic crisis in decades, has reacted defiantly to the US threats even as it reels from the loss of a key source of economic support from Caracas.

President Miguel Díaz-Canel denied Monday being in talks with Washington, saying there are “no conversations with the US government except for technical contacts in the area of migration.”

“To the last drop”

On Sunday, Díaz-Canel vowed that the Caribbean island’s residents were “ready to defend the homeland to the last drop of blood.”

Cuba has been a thorn in the side of the United States since the

revolution that swept communist Fidel Castro to power in 1959.

The deployment of Soviet nuclear missile sites on the island triggered the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, when Washington and Moscow took the world to the brink of nuclear war.

During his first presidential term, Trump walked back a detente with Cuba launched by his predecessor Barack Obama.

Immediately after the US capture of Maduro in a dramatic raid in Caracas, Trump stated that Cuba was “ready to fall.”

He noted that the island, which has been plagued by blackouts due to crippling fuel shortages, would find it hard to “hold out” without heavily subsidised Venezuelan oil.

The *Financial Times* last week reported that Mexican oil exports to Cuba had surpassed those of Venezuela last year.

Role for Rubio?

Trump’s Secretary of State Marco Rubio, a child of Cuban immigrants who is a sworn foe of the communist government, has long had Havana in his sights.

“If I lived in Havana and I was in the government, I’d be concerned at least a little bit,” he told reporters on January 3, after Maduro’s capture and transfer to the United States on drug trafficking and weapons charges.

Aboard Air Force One on Sunday, Trump referred to the generations of Cubans, like Rubio’s parents, who had fled the island to the United States.

“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 saying how he would achieve that.

He also reposted a message that jokingly suggested Rubio could serve as president of Cuba.

– AFP



Middlesbrough's English manager Michael Carrick celebrates at the end of the English League Cup quarter-final against Port Vale at Vale Park in Stoke-on-Trent, central England on December 19, 2023. Manchester United have reached an agreement in principle to appoint Carrick as interim manager until the end of the season, reports said yesterday. – AFP

Try to be Mourinho and I'll fail: new Real Madrid coach Arbeloa



MADRID – New Real Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa insisted yesterday he would be himself at the helm of the Spanish giants rather than trying to imitate Jose Mourinho.

Arbeloa, who in his playing days at Madrid was an ally of his then coach Mourinho, has drawn comparisons to the Portuguese veteran for his approach to management.

The 42-year-old former defender was appointed to replace Xabi Alonso on Monday after Real Madrid lost the Spanish Super Cup final against rivals Barcelona on Sunday.

"I have not spoken to Jose yet. For me it was a privilege and an honour to be coached by Jose Mourinho," Arbeloa told a news conference.

"I have a great relationship with him... and obviously he was someone who influenced me a lot, I carry him within me.

"[However], I am going to be Alvaro Arbeloa, because while it's true I am not afraid of failing, and have never been, I'm sure that if I tried to be Jose Mourinho, I would fail spectacularly."

Mourinho, currently coaching Benfica, led Real Madrid between 2010 and 2013, winning one La Liga title.

During that era he battled against Pep Guardiola's dominant Barcelona when the fierce rivalry between the Catalans and Real Madrid was at its most bitter.

Barca currently lead Madrid by four points at the top of La Liga and Arbeloa's job is to revert the situation, although his first match in charge is at Albacete in the Copa del Rey last 16 today.

Arbeloa, who was coaching Madrid's reserve side and

previously working with the club's youth teams before he was promoted, said success is the most important thing for the record 15-time European champions.

"This club is winning, winning, and winning again. That demand on ourselves, showing the DNA of what brought us here, that has filled our trophy cabinets [is what I want]," continued Arbeloa.

"When I was a player I received those values from the players in the dressing room, and for me that is the most important thing... to be able to excite the fans we have all over the world and try to leave those cabinets even more full.

"That is my work, that is my obsession and what I will be living every day."

Madrid did not announce how long Arbeloa's contract as first-team coach would be.

"What I can tell you is that I've been here for 20 years, at home, and I will be at Real Madrid as long as they want me here," added Arbeloa.

"This is my home, that's how I feel and that's how it will always be."

Alonso, replaced after less than eight months at the helm, said on social media he was leaving the club having done the best he could.

"Things didn't go as I would have liked," wrote the Basque coach on Instagram yesterday.

"Coaching Real Madrid was an honour and a responsibility. I'm grateful to the club, the players and above all the fans for their confidence and support.

"I leave respectfully, with gratitude, and the pride of having done the best I could."

The game will be played at 4 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time. – AFP/MPD

Liverpool's Robertson blasts Szoboszlai for 'unacceptable' back-heel



LONDON – Liverpool defender Andrew Robertson slammed Dominik Szoboszlai's mistake in the FA Cup win over Barnsley as "unacceptable", admitting his side still have room for improvement despite their recent unbeaten run.

Szoboszlai was guilty of a careless blunder when his miscued back-heel inside his own penalty area allowed Barnsley's Adam Phillips to score in Monday's third round tie at Anfield.

Liverpool were leading by two goals at the time of Szoboszlai's miscued pass and went on to clinch a 4-1 win against their third-tier opponents.

Szoboszlai had scored a superb long-range opener earlier in the game, but Liverpool boss Arne Slot said he would speak to the Hungarian about what he called a "weird" decision.

Robertson was equally frustrated by Szoboszlai's needlessly casual error, which led Barnsley manager Conor Hourihane to accuse Szoboszlai of disrespect.

"The frustrating thing is Dom does this unbelievable 60-yard sprint to start with, he's getting the clap off The Kop and I don't know if that maybe went to his head," Robertson said.

"We can joke about it now but it's unacceptable to lose a goal like that. Dom obviously knows that. He's been magnificent for us this season and he was again really good.

"He just had a lapse of concentration, and we can't afford too many of them in the six-yard box."

Liverpool have extended their

unbeaten run to 11 matches to ease the crisis that engulfed the Premier League champions earlier this season.

But Scotland left-back Robertson said the Barnsley game provided further evidence that Liverpool still have a dangerous habit of letting teams back into games.

"Going 11 unbeaten is good but some of the performances still have to be better. Everyone knows that," Robertson said.

"We've looked a bit more secure defensively which is pleasing but now we need to put it all together because people are saying we're lacking an attacking threat.

"If you want to win trophies and go further in tournaments, you have to get the perfect balance. That's what we're working towards."

– AFP

Football shorts

Inter midfielder Calhanoglu sidelined with calf injury



ROME – Inter Milan midfielder Hakan Calhanoglu has suffered a left calf injury, the Serie A club said yesterday, with the Turkish international reported to be sidelined for three weeks.

"Calhanoglu underwent an MRI scan this morning," the club said in a statement. "The tests revealed a muscle strain in his left calf, and his condition will be assessed over the coming days."

According to media reports the midfielder will be sidelined for three weeks, meaning he could miss five matches, including the final two of the Champions League group stage.

Calhanoglu, 31, has scored seven league goals this season, as Inter lead AC Milan by three points with champions Napoli third four points behind.

Champions League finalists in 2023 and 2025, Inter are sixth in the league stage with 12 points from six matches. – AFP

Cancelo rejoins Barca on loan from Al-Hilal



BARCELONA – Defender Joao Cancelo rejoined Barcelona yesterday on loan from Saudi Arabian side Al-Hilal until the end of the season.

"There are places that you never forget... welcome back to Barca, Joao," said the Catalan club on social media.

"Barcelona and Al-Hilal have reached an agreement for the loan of the Portuguese full-back until the end of the season," continued Barca in a statement.

The 31-year-old right-back spent the 2023-24 season on loan at Barcelona from Manchester City, making 42 appearances.

Cancelo, a regular part of Roberto Martinez's Portugal squad, was not playing frequently for Al-Hilal, whom he signed for from Man City for £21 million (US\$28 million) in 2024.

La Liga leaders Barca had initially announced Cancelo's arrival yesterday before deleting the news and delaying his planned presentation, because of a paperwork issue.

After centre-back Andreas Christensen suffered a knee ligament injury in December, La Liga regulations allowed Barca to use part of the cost of his salary to register a new arrival, helping the financially struggling Spanish giants to bring in Cancelo and bolster Hansi Flick's defence.

Barca visit second division leaders Racing Santander in the Copa del Rey last 16 tomorrow. – AFP

New Indonesia coach Herdman targets 2030 World Cup

JAKARTA – New Indonesia coach John Herdman yesterday targeted qualification for the 2030 World Cup, warning there were no

more excuses.

"This is going to be an exciting project," the 50-year-old Englishman told reporters in the capital Jakarta at his first press conference as Indonesia boss.

Fans of the football-mad country deserve to see their team "winning on the world stage", said Herdman.

"I will bring my passion... to help bring this country to, hopefully, a place it's never been before. It's time."

Herdman said Indonesia "is ready, it has no more excuses".

The former Canada coach comes in following the departure of Barcelona and Dutch great Patrick Kluyvert.

Kluyvert left the Indonesia job after failing to get them to this year's World Cup.

Indonesia have been to the World Cup once, in 1938, when they were under Dutch colonial rule.

The Indonesian football association, PSSI, has hailed Herdman's appointment as "the beginning of a new era".

Herdman guided Canada's men to the 2022 World Cup, their first appearance in 36 years.

He took Canada's women to the quarter-finals of the 2015 World Cup hosted by the country.

In Indonesia, a country of more than 280 million, "80-90 percent of people are football mad", said Herdman.

"They love their football. This is the place to be." – AFP

Arteta urges Arsenal to learn from League Cup pain ahead of Chelsea semi



LONDON – Mikel Arteta has urged Arsenal to learn from the pain of last season's League Cup semi-final exit as they prepare to face Chelsea on the road to Wembley.

The Premier League leaders lost 4-0 on aggregate against Newcastle over two legs in the last four in 2024/25 as they ended a fifth straight season without major silverware.

Arteta's side travel to London

rivals Chelsea in the semi-final first leg today, with holders Newcastle taking on Manchester City in the other last four clash.

"We've been really consistent again in the competition, and now we have to knock another big team out to be in the final," Arteta told his pre-match press conference yesterday.

"That's the mission. Hopefully we learn from last year because it was painful, especially the manner that the

games went and the amount of chances that we made not to go through, but hopefully this year we are better and especially more efficient."

City won multiple League Cups during Arteta's stint as an assistant to Pep Guardiola at the Etihad Stadium, using it as a springboard for bigger trophies.

Arteta was asked whether winning Arsenal's first silverware since the 2020 FA Cup would ease the pressure

on him for the rest of the season.

"When you get to this stage in the competition, you get to the final and you get over the line and win it, it brings energy, it brings belief and the sense that everybody is very important and playing a part of that," he said.

"I think it's something when you get there and win it, everybody remembers and if not, nobody does. So once you get there, get the job done."

Arteta will pit his wits against new Chelsea boss Liam Rosenior, whom he faced on the pitch in the 2014 FA Cup final, when he captained Arsenal to victory against Hull.

"I've seen a few pictures of that, so, that's the beauty of football, two very different careers, but at the end, facing each other," he said.

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

– AFP/MPD

'Proving the boys wrong': Teenage racers picked for elite driver programme

F1

Jessica Howard-Johnston with John Weaver in London

MONTMELÓ - Teenage racer Zoe Florescu Potolea says it's nice to "prove the boys wrong" as she celebrates being named yesterday among five new drivers picked for a programme to develop elite female F1 talent.

The mission of the More Than Equal project is simple and fearlessly ambitious - to find and develop the first woman Formula One world champion.

F1 attracts legions of female fans, with the numbers turbocharged by the behind-the-scenes Netflix show "Drive to Survive".

But there has not been a single woman on the grid since 1976 - when Italian Lella Lombardi competed.

Florescu Potolea, recently put through her paces in an F4 car at Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya, is used to being the only girl on the track.

"It's nice because you're proving all of the boys wrong," the 17-year-old, with Romanian and US citizenship, told AFP.

"But on the other hand it's nice to have other people who are dreaming the same as you in a way and that they want to prove themselves as much as you."

Florescu Potolea, wearing a red helmet adorned with yellow "Zs", said it was "about time" a woman was back in F1.

"One of the biggest things is, honestly, believing that you can do it or believing that you're wanted in the sport," she added. "And to be honest I think it is very hard as a woman in the sport."

Florescu Potolea joins Sweden's Alexia Danielsson, Polish pair Amelia Wyszomirska and Julia Angelard and South Africa's Gianna Pascoal as the new kids on the block.



Austria's Ivonn Simeonova, (left to right) Romania's Zoe Florescu-Potolea, Sweden's Alexia Danielsson, and Britain's Skye Parker pose during a test training session at the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya in Montmeló, Barcelona province, on December 15, 2025.

- AFP

The existing cohort on the More Than Equal programme comprises Austrian Ivonn Simeonova, Lana Flack, from Australia, and Britain's Skye Parker.

Talent search

The project was founded by Czech entrepreneur and philanthropist Karel Komarek and former F1 driver David Coulthard.

Drivers are selected using a data-driven global talent ranking system, combined with in-depth assessments measuring driving performance, physical capability, psychological readiness and long-term development potential.

Each receives tailored technical and tactical coaching, physical and mental performance support.

"This work is about shaping what the future of the sport can and should look like, and we are proud to support the next generation of female drivers as they progress in their careers," said Britain's Coulthard.

In Spain the girls were given technical briefings and went through various warm-up exercises,

including working on hand-eye coordination with tennis balls.

Danielsson was also in action in Montmeló, north of Barcelona, driving in mixed weather conditions on a track backdropped by mountains.

"Motorsport is just a male-dominated sport. And I think that many girls don't think that they belong in this sport, but they do," she said.

"When I was growing up, I didn't really have anyone to look up to that was female and a driver. And maybe in the future I get to be that role person."

"In ten years, my dream scenario would be racing in F1," she added. "And just living my dream life."

Tom Stanton, chief executive officer of More Than Equal, said it is exciting to build on the work already done with the first group of girls.

"This intake reflects the growing depth of female talent worldwide, strengthens our global programme, and reinforces our focus on giving talented drivers the preparation they need to progress through the ranks," he said.

- AFP

Italian Olympians 'insulted' by torch relay snub



ROME - Persistent complaints by former Italian Olympians that they had been snubbed as relay torchbearers in favour of celebrities, drew a reaction yesterday from politicians led by Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini.

"There is no respect for us champions," cross-country skier Silvio Fauner, a five-time Olympic medallist, told *Gazzetta dello Sport* in an interview that echoed earlier complaints by Alpine skier Kristian Ghedina about the relay, which began in Rome on December 4.

Fauner complained that quiz show celebrity Gabriele Sbatella, known as the Uomo Gato (Cat Man), had been preferred.

"I consider this an incredible insult," said Fauner, who won gold as a member of the Italian relay team in Lillehammer, Norway, in 1994.

He said he was speaking on behalf of his Olympic team-mate Marco Albarello and Turin 2006 gold medallists Giorgio Di Centa, Cristian Zorzi and Pietro Piller Cottler.

"We are all angry," Fauner said. "We have not been involved in any way in any initiative for the Winter Olympics in our country. No torchbearers, no ambassadors, no role whatsoever. Nothing."

"They preferred people from the entertainment world, such as Uomo Gatto, and singers who do not embody Olympic sport," Fauner said.

Ghedina made similar comments last month, but Fauner's statements triggered a reaction from politicians.

"The choice of torchbearers is incomprehensible and disconcerting. All the more so since it was not discussed with Matteo Salvini's Ministry of Transport, which has been more committed than anyone else to making the Games happen," wrote Salvini's far-right League party in a statement.

Sports Minister Andrea Abodi has asked the Milano-Cortina organising committee and the Italian Olympic Committee for "information to understand what the selection criteria were."

"In principle, it is obvious that sports legends, those who have made history, should be held in very high and absolute esteem. I too was a bit surprised," said Abodi.

The torch will pass through the hands of 10,001 bearers across Italy on its two-month, 12,000-kilometre journey to the San Siro stadium in Milan for the opening ceremony on February 6.

- AFP



Spanish rider Toshia Schareina stands with his Honda CRF 450 after winning Stage 9, a marathon stage, of the 48th Dakar Rally 2026, between Wadi ad-Dawasir and Bisha, Saudi Arabia, yesterday.

- AFP

Kyrgios stands by decision to skip Australian Open singles

Tennis

MELBOURNE - Nick Kyrgios was feted like a rockstar at an exhibition event in Melbourne yesterday, but remained adamant a decision not to play singles at the Australian Open was the right one.

The 2022 Wimbledon finalist last week ruled himself out of contention for a wildcard as he makes a comeback after an injury-ravaged three years.

The Australian showman will instead focus on doubles at the Grand Slam tournament which starts on Sunday.

Swiss three-time Grand Slam champion Stan Wawrinka and Australians Jordan Thompson and Chris O'Connell were awarded the last three wildcards.

"Someone like Stan, who's played three or four competitive

matches in the United Cup, all at a super high level, there's absolutely no doubt in my mind that he deserves it," Kyrgios told broadcaster Channel Nine at the Kooyong Classic.

"And it just wouldn't be fair of me to have so many doubts physically to go out there and play some of the best players in the world in the best-of-five and not even be sure that I could back up one round."

Kyrgios was speaking after beating China's Zhang Zhizhen in a super tiebreak 6-3, 4-6, 11-9 watched by crowds of screaming fans.

"The atmosphere out here was nuts ... and if I didn't have this I don't know what else I'd do," he said.

"I've got a lot of other things going on off the court but there's no feeling like this."

- AFP

Williams loses golden oldie clash in final Australian Open warm-up

Tennis

HOBART - Venus Williams was dumped out of the Hobart International in straight sets by Tatjana Maria yesterday to dent her Australian Open preparations in a historic clash between two players with a combined age of 83.

It was the second consecutive tournament in which the 45-year-old Williams had crashed at the first hurdle after last week's Auckland Classic.

She survived 87 minutes in Hobart against German world number 42 Maria, who is 38, before slumping 6-4, 6-3, having gamely saved six of nine break points.

The first meeting between the pair set a new record for the highest combined age for a main draw match since the WTA Tour was founded in 1973.

Maria said her daughters

Charlotte, 12, and Cecilia, four, were probably cheering for Williams, one of their favourite players.

"Everybody loves Venus. I love her too," said Maria.

"For me, to play her was such an honour because I never played her before. It was not easy with all the wind but it was amazing."

Maria last year became the oldest WTA Tour singles winner since Serena Williams in 2020 when she won at Queen's Club in London.

She moves on to a last-16 clash with Hungary's Anna Bondar.

American seven-time Grand Slam champion Williams will now head to Melbourne for the Australian Open, where she has been handed a wildcard five years after she last played there.

Williams, who has played only sporadically in recent years, will be the oldest woman ever at the

opening Grand Slam of the year, which begins on Sunday.

Two-time Grand Slam winner Barbora Krejickova also lost in the first round, needing treatment and strapping on her knee before tumbling out 6-4, 1-6, 7-6 (7/4) to American Peyton Stearns.

The Czech former world number two, now ranked 55, ended her season early last year because of a knee injury, but successfully got through three matches in the United Cup last week, picking up two wins.

Krejickova, who won the French Open in 2021 and Wimbledon in 2024, missed last year's Australian Open with a back injury.

Stearns will meet Olga Danilovic next after the unseeded Serb beat American defending champion McCartney Kessler in three sets.

- AFP

AI helps fuel new era of medical self-testing

Thomas Urbain

LAS VEGAS – Beyond smart watches and rings, artificial intelligence (AI) is being used to make self-testing for major diseases more readily available – from headsets that detect early signs of Alzheimer’s to an iris-scanning app that helps spot cancer.

“The reason preventive medicine doesn’t work right now is because you don’t want to go to the doctor all the time to get things tested,” says Ramses Alcaide, co-founder and CEO of startup Neurable.

“But what about if you knew when you needed to go to the doctor?”

Connected rings, bracelets and watches – which were everywhere at last week’s Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas – can already monitor heart rate, blood pressure and glucose levels, with varying degrees of accuracy.

These gadgets are in high demand from consumers. A recent study published by OpenAI showed that more than 200 million internet users check ChatGPT every week for information on health topics.

Last Wednesday, OpenAI even launched a chatbot that can draw on a user’s medical records and other data collected by wearable devices, with their consent, to inform its responses.

Using electroencephalogram (EEG) technology, Neurable has developed a headset that records and deciphers brain activity.

The linked app compares data with the user’s medical history to check for any deviation, a possible sign of a problem, said Alcaide.

“Apple Watch can pick up Parkinson’s, but it can only pick it up once you have a tremor,” Alcaide said. “Your brain has been fighting that Parkinson’s for over 10 years.”



A representation of brain focus as a pattern of dots is displayed by the Prime application as a Neurable researcher demonstrates Neurable and HP Inc.’s HyperX collaboration brain-computer interface and gaming audio headset for neurofeedback to measure brainwave activity (EEG) and improve brain function, during the annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada last Wednesday. Beyond smart watches and rings, AI is being used to make self-testing for major diseases more readily available, from headphones that detect early signs of Alzheimer’s to an iris-scanning app that helps spot cancer.

– AFP

With EEG technology, “you can pick these things up before you actually see physical symptoms of them. And this is just one example.”

Detection before symptoms

Some people have reservations about the capabilities of such devices.

“I don’t think that wearable EEG devices are reliable enough,” said Anna Wexler, a University of Pennsylvania professor who studies consumer detection products,

although she acknowledges that “AI has expanded the possibilities of these devices.”

While Neurable’s product cannot provide an actual diagnosis, it does offer a warning. It can also detect signs of depression and early development of Alzheimer’s disease.

Neurable is working with the Ukrainian military to evaluate the mental health of soldiers on the front lines of the war with Russia, as well as former prisoners of war, in order to detect post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

French startup NAOX meanwhile has

developed EEG earbuds linked to a small box that can help patients with epilepsy.

Rather than detect seizures, which are “very rare,” the device recognises “spikes” – quick, abnormal electrical shocks in the brain that are “much more difficult to see,” said NAOX’s chief of innovation Marc Vaillaud, a doctor by training.

NAOX’s device – which has been cleared by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) – is designed to be worn at night, to track several hours of data at a time.

The company is working with the Rothschild and Lariboisiere hospitals in Paris to try to better understand the links between these brain “spikes” and Alzheimer’s disease, which have been raised in scientific papers.

Advances in AI and technology in general have paved the way for the miniaturisation of cheaper detection devices – a far cry from the heavy machinery once seen in medical offices and hospitals.

IriHealth is preparing to launch, for only about US\$50, a small smartphone extension that would scan a user’s iris.

The gadget relies on iridology, a technique by which iris colours and markings are believed to reveal information about a person’s health, but which is generally considered scientifically unreliable.

But the founders of IriHealth – a spin-off of biometrics specialist IriTech – are convinced that their device can be effective in detecting anomalies in the colon, and potentially the lungs or the liver.

Company spokesman Tommy Phan said IriHealth had found its device to be 81 percent accurate among patients who already have been diagnosed with colon cancer.

– AFP

AI pendants back in vogue at tech show after early setback

Benjamin Legendre

LAS VEGAS – Pendants and brooches packed with artificial intelligence (AI) abounded at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) last week, using cameras and microphones to watch and listen through the day like a vigilant personal assistant.

The return of the wearable tech comes about a year after the discontinuation of a Humane AI Pin panned by reviewers after it was launched amid high expectations in early 2024.

It also comes as OpenAI chief Sam Altman and renowned industrial designer Jony Ive collaborate on a device for interacting with AI, expected to be ready by next year.

Not everyone is a fan of always-watching neckwear as a fashion accessory.

“Go make some real friends” became common graffiti on New York City subway ads for Friend brand AI pendants late last year to protest “surveillance capitalism.”

Nonetheless, at the CES in Las Vegas, gadget makers have pitched AI pendants as note-takers or ways to remember beautiful or important moments of each day.

Technical advances including improved chips have helped overcome early problems with poor battery life, buggy software, and stumbling conversations that tainted early pendant models.

China-based laptop titan Lenovo unveiled a prototype pendant from its Motorola subsidiary that allows voice control of its AI assistant Qira.

The device worn around the neck will capture sound and images hands-free.

Amazon made a deal to buy wearable AI startup Bee last year, and Meta acquired AI device company Limitless.

Bee devices are worn on the wrist, belt or lapel, and primarily function as an assistant by taking notes, offering reminders and keeping calendars.

Meanwhile, Meta has made a priority of developing AI “superintelligence” and is successfully packing AI into Ray-Ban glasses.

Style choices

Companies are taking an array of approaches to wearable AI.

Startup Vocci, which focuses on AI-assisted notetaking, has opted for a ring, while Plaud has a pin as well as a rectangular device barely thicker than a credit card for keeping track of what is being said.

Chinese startup iBuddi came to Las Vegas to present a prototype of a companion medallion aimed at combating screen fatigue.

“Our core philosophy is to build a body-worn AI companion that replaces some phone interactions, rather than adding another screen

that absorbs attention,” iBuddi founder Yin Haitian told AFP.

The entrepreneur, who aims for a commercial launch in July, was adamant that iBuddi “is not driven by surveillance” but instead “reacts to the moments that matter instead of continuously recording everything.”

A Looki L1 AI wearable, on the other hand, continuously captures a wearer’s point of view, promising to advise when to avoid another cup of coffee, to comment on places or objects around you, and to summarise each day in a comic strip.

“Consumer expectations regarding privacy haven’t gone away entirely, but they are shifting,” said Avi Greengart, an analyst at tech research and advisory group, Techsponential.

“We’re already being surveilled by billions of smartphones, city camera networks and smart devices that we willingly placed in our homes.”

The analyst does not expect wearable AI to replace smartphones any time soon but sees them becoming common additions to personal tech ensembles along with smart watches, rings and glasses.

For those uncomfortable with idea of omnipresent surveillance, a startup at CES offered “Wearphone” – a mask with built-in earbuds and microphones designed to help keep conversations private.

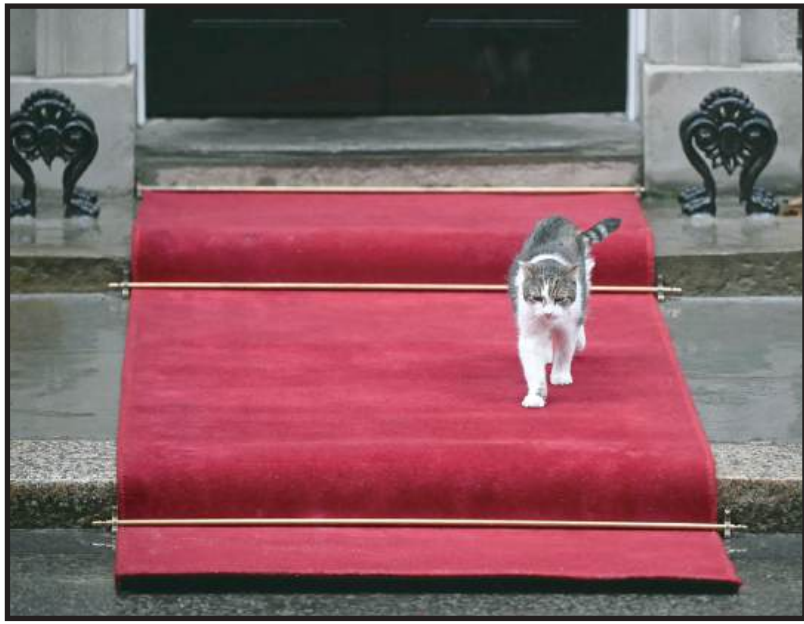
– AFP



This undated handout photo shows a person posing with a “Limitless Pendant” wearable AI device. – Photo courtesy of The Gadget Flow

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -5°C~3°C	Manila 22°C~30°C	New York 3°C~10°C	Lisbon 9°C~15°C
Shanghai 5°C~20°C	Bangkok 21°C~33°C	London 5°C~7°C	Rio de Janeiro 23°C~32°C
Hong Kong 15°C~21°C	Tokyo -1°C~11°C	Frankfurt 5°C~8°C	Luanda 24°C~29°C
Taipei 12°C~23°C	Singapore 23°C~31°C	Vancouver 6°C~11°C	Maputo 21°C~27°C
Guangzhou 10°C~24°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~32°C	Paris 7°C~12°C	Dili 23°C~29°C
Nanjing 4°C~19°C	Jakarta 22°C~29°C	Moscow -9°C~8°C	São Tomé 25°C~30°C
Guilin 9°C~23°C	Seoul 0°C~1°C	Las Vegas 6°C~22°C	Praia 18°C~26°C
Xi’an -1°C~14°C	Sydney 21°C~28°C	Monte Carlo 9°C~15°C	Bissau 18°C~35°C



WVIC – longest serving resident

Larry the cat walks on a red carpet outside of 10 Downing Street in central London yesterday, ahead of a visit by Poland's president. – AFP



Giant burgers

People attend HORECAVA in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, on Monday. The annual HORECAVA, a Dutch trade fair for the food, beverage and service industry, is held in Amsterdam from Monday to Thursday. – Xinhua



Fossilised resin

An exhibitor holds raw amber at the Katara International Exhibition for Kahraman, showcasing artwork and handicrafts made with amber, at the Katara cultural village in Doha, Qatar yesterday. – AFP



Hope you have more!

A tourist feeds a deer at Nara park in Nara, Japan yesterday. – AFP



Novel idea

A supporter of opposition leader and presidential candidate for the National Unity Platform (NUP), Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, popularly known as Bobi Wine, wears makeshift glasses made from tomatoes as he believes that they protect him from teargas, at the party's final campaign rally ahead of the 2026 general elections in Kampala, Uganda on Monday. – AFP



Extremely grand bank

This photograph shows gold decorations, paintings and ornamental sculptures inside the golden hall of the Banque de France, the French central bank, at the Hotel de Toulouse building, in Paris on Monday. – AFP

