

Safeguarding residents' jobs vital for Macau's overall stability: Sam

Tony Wong

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai underlined yesterday that his government will regard the promotion of local residents' employment "as a critical task essential for ensuring and maintaining Macau's overall stability", pledging his commitment to prioritising the hiring of local residents for jobs they are capable of and willing to do.

Sam made the remarks at Macau Fisherman's Wharf last night while delivering a speech during the swearing-in ceremony for the new, 37th term of the board members of the Macau Federation of Trade Unions, commonly known as Gung Luen in Cantonese.

Last night's event also marked the 76th anniversary of the establishment of Gung Luen, which was founded on January 20, 1950.

In his speech, Sam said that since its return to the motherland, Macau has experienced sustained economic development, continuous improvement in residents' well-being, and social stability, all of which are inseparable from the hard work and dedication of the city's workforce.

The Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) was established on December 20, 1999.

Sam praised Gung Luen for its consistent adherence to the principles of patriotism and unity,



Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai delivers a speech during yesterday's swearing-in ceremony for the 37th term of the board members of the Macau Federation of Trade Unions, at the Convention and Exhibition Centre of the Macau Fisherman's Wharf entertainment complex in Nape.

Photo: GCS

safeguarding workers' rights and interests, engaging in society, and serving society, while firmly upholding the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, collaborating with the local government, and making positive contributions

to protecting labour rights and interests, providing community services, enhancing workers' occupational skills, and promoting economic development.

Sam underlined that Macau's economic development is currently

presenting a stable and promising trend, with key economic indicators showing continuous improvement and the city's general unemployment rate remaining at a relatively low level, while stressing his government's commitment to prioritising local

residents' employment, such as by establishing a new working group aiming to promote the employment of local residents, particularly young people.

Sam said that a key focus of his government's work this year is to safeguard local residents' employment rights and interests and promote their high-quality employment, pledging that his government will address the promotion of local residents' employment "as a critical task essential for ensuring and maintaining Macau's overall stability", with a commitment to achieve the objective of prioritising the hiring of local residents for jobs they are capable of and willing to do.

"As long as local residents are capable of and willing to do particular jobs, they should be hired on a priority basis," Sam said.

'Dynamic' adjustment to NRW permits

Moreover, Sam said, his government will comprehensively review and improve its system for assessing and approving local companies' applications for permits to hire non-resident workers (NRWs), while "dynamically" adjusting the number of NRWs in the city in line with its latest situation.

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Mozambique floods causing spiralling emergency: UN

GENEVA — Severe flooding in Mozambique has triggered a rapidly escalating emergency that is already affecting more than half a million people, the United Nations warned yesterday.

"The numbers keep rising as extensive flooding continues and dams keep releasing water to avoid bursting," said Paola Emerson, head of Mozambique operations at the UN humanitarian agency OCHA.

Heavy rains and storms have battered Mozambique and neighbouring South Africa for weeks, claiming at least 150 lives, authorities in those countries have said.

"The situation remains fluid and dangerous," Emerson told a press conference in Geneva.

The damage to roads and infrastructure is making it hard for aid agencies to reach the worst-affected people, she said.

She was speaking from the city of Xai-Xai, around 200 kilometres northeast of the capital Maputo and in the Limpopo River basin.

Nearly 5,000 kilometres of roads had been damaged across nine provinces, including the main artery linking Maputo to the rest of the country, she said.

More than 50,000 people are sheltering in

over 50 temporary accommodation centres.

The agency called for additional funding.

"This flooding emergency comes on top of massive conflict-related displacement in northern Mozambique that has depleted stocks," Emerson said.

"This latest disaster is a stark reminder of Mozambique's vulnerability to the convergence of multiple shocks – including conflict, drought, cyclones in recent years and now severe flooding."

Several rivers have burst their banks and swallowed entire neighbourhoods, raising risk of crocodiles entering communities,

notably in Xai-Xai.

"The crocodiles that are in the Limpopo river, in this case, are able to get into... urban or populated areas that are now submerged under water," she said.

UN children's agency UNICEF said January's exceptionally heavy rains had "triggered a rapidly escalating emergency across vast swathes of Mozambique, particularly in the south".

"The flooding that we're seeing is not just destroying homes, schools, health centres and roads," said UNICEF spokesman Guy Taylor. (Photo on p.12)

— AFP

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Xi stresses securing good start for new five-year plan

President Xi Jinping yesterday called for solid efforts to secure a good start to the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030).

— Story on p. 7

Venezuela taps new investment czar as US oil firms eye return

Venezuela's interim president Delcy Rodríguez has appointed a US-educated banker to head the South American country's major investment agency, as she sacked a close ally of her ousted predecessor Nicolás Maduro.

— Story on p. 11

Far-right progress to presidential run-off vote shakes Portugal's politics

A far-right contender has reached the second round of Portugal's presidential election for the first time, unsettling mainstream parties and the right-wing minority government of Prime Minister Luis Montenegro.

— Story on p. 12

Cold shelter opens as mercury drops

Arminio Neves

The Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) announced in a statement yesterday evening that its cold shelter, due to the issuance of a Yellow or Orange* cold weather alert, has opened its doors.

The shelter is located at 34 Rua Leste da Ilha Verde, Edifício do Bairro da Ilha Verde (青洲東街34號青洲坊大廈E1的避寒中心).

Yesterday evening, the Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) hoisted its Yellow cold weather alert and Temperature Drop Alert.

The weather station's Temperature Drop Alert means a significant decrease in temperature is forecast for Macau within the next 48 hours.

Last night, the local observatory forecast that today's temperature will range between 11°C and 16°C only.

For more information, one can visit the websites of the local observatory and Social Welfare Bureau.

According to the weather station's weather outlook, a winter monsoon is currently affecting southern China, bringing significantly lower temperatures and strong winds; Macau will experience cold and dry conditions in the coming days. The observatory also said that this weekend and early next week, an easterly airflow will gradually bring warmer daytime temperatures, though mornings and evenings will remain cool.

At 10 p.m. yesterday, the mercury stood at 17.7°C in Dr. Sun Yat Sen Municipal Park near the shelter.

Yesterday was Dahan (大寒) in the Chinese calendar**, and

the weather station said that according to Macau's climate data between 1991 and 2020, the daily minimum temperatures during the Dahan period ranged from 5.2°C to 18.1°C. Around 40 percent of days during this period were classified as cold, with some years experiencing days of severely cold weather, the observatory said, adding that the minimum temperatures ranged from 5°C to 7°C.

The Health Bureau (SSM) also issued a warning urging members of the public to take precautions against hypothermia and ensure adequate warmth. Attention should be paid to the elderly, those with chronic illnesses, their carers and relevant institutions, who need to implement appropriate preventative and care measures to safeguard their wellbeing.

It also urged the public to bundle up. ■

*The Orange cold weather alert signifies that it is forecast to be, or is, "very cold". The "Yellow" alert predicts that it will be, or is, "cold".

** The Chinese calendar is a lunisolar calendar system traditionally used in China and other East Asian societies. It determines dates for festivals, guides agricultural activities, and is used for selecting auspicious days for events like weddings and opening businesses. In the Chinese calendar, the Dahan period (大寒) refers to the "Major Cold" solar term. It is the 24th term in the traditional Chinese lunisolar calendar and generally falls around January 20. This period marks one of the coldest times of the year in many parts of China. –DeepSeek



This undated handout photo recently provided by the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) shows the cold shelter in Edifício do Bairro da Ilha Verde.

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Macau Weather

TEMPERATURE FALLING. COLD AND DRY. CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY INTERVALS. FORCE 4 TO 5 NORTHERLY WINDS, OCCASIONALLY FORCE 6 WITH GUSTS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 45% AND 75%.



11°C~16°C

Source: SMG

Call for proposals opens for 2026 Macao Int'l Parade

Kristina Valleseros

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) is now inviting local associations, schools, and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to submit proposals for this year's Macao International Parade, according to a statement from the bureau on Monday.

The parade will be held on Sunday, March 29. The application period for the upcoming event is open until this Sunday at 5:30 p.m.

This year's parade encourages participants to highlight Macau's historical role as a "City of Sails" during the Age of Exploration (a period from approximately the 15th to the 17th century), the statement said. The procession will start at the Ruins of St. Paul's (大三巴牌坊) and finish in Praça do Lago Sai Van (西灣湖廣場).

Groups may participate in four categories: Themed Parade Group, Artistic Parade Group, Parade of Large-Scale Artistic Installations, and Special Planning Parade. A range of prizes will be awarded.

The statement said that outreach activities will be held in communities in the days prior to the main event. Participants may join as "Community Performance and Street Art Groups" or apply to take part in the opening



This undated handout photo provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) on Monday shows a participating group posing for a photo during a previous "Macao International Parade" in front of the Ruins of St. Paul's.

or closing ceremonies.

The statement added that the bureau will host the VIVA Carnival at Anim'Arte NAM VAN on the eve of and during the parade. Local SMEs are invited to submit proposals to provide specialty food, drinks, and creative interactive experiences at the carnival.

The statement said that groups eager to join can submit proposals to the Division of Recreational Activities of the Cultural Affairs

Bureau, at the Cultural Affairs Bureau building in Praça do Tap Siac by the deadline. Submissions must indicate the following on the envelope: "2026 Macao International Parade – Call for Proposals by Local Parade Groups" or "2026 Macao International Parade – Call for Proposals by Local Small and Medium Enterprises for VIVA Carnival", noted the statement.

More information is available on the IC's website <https://www.icm.gov.mo>. ■

Police nab mainland for stealing 8,800 yuan

Ada Lei

The Public Security Police (PSP) arrested a man from the Chinese mainland on Saturday for stealing 8,800 yuan (10,100 patacas) from a mainland woman, PSP spokeswoman Lai In Hong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Lai identified the suspect as an installation worker in his forties surnamed Song.

According to Lai, the police received a report on December 15 from a woman from the Chinese mainland who said that she had met Song online in October via a mobile dating platform. They arranged to travel to Macau together and checked into a hotel guestroom registered in Song's name on

December 13. On the morning of December 15, Song claimed that he was going out for breakfast alone and left the room. When the victim tried to contact Song afterwards, she discovered that she had been blocked. Upon checking her belongings, she discovered that 8,800 yuan in cash, which had been in her handbag, had vanished. Suspecting that Song had stolen the money, she immediately reported the case to the police.

Through their citywide CCTV surveillance and hotel footage, the police identified Song as the suspect and apprehended him on Saturday at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Macau checkpoint. Under questioning, Song denied the crime.



Public Security Police (PSP) spokeswoman Lai In Hong looks on during yesterday's regular press conference. – Photo: Ada Lei

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

Police nab mainland for hotel room booking fraud

Ada Lei

The Public Security Police (PSP) arrested a man from the Chinese mainland on Sunday for hotel room booking fraud, PSP spokeswoman Lai In Hong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Lai identified the suspect as a businessman in his forties surnamed Yu.

According to Lai, the police received a report in late December from a woman from the Chinese mainland who said that she had used a smartphone application to purchase a two-night stay in a hotel guestroom on Estrada do Istmo (路氹連貫公路) for 1,988 yuan (2,288 patacas) in Cotai from Yu. They arranged to meet at Estrada do Istmo for the transaction on December 21, during which the

victim obtained the guestroom key. After staying for one night, she returned to her room the following evening and discovered that her key card had become invalid and that someone else was occupying her room. She attempted to contact the man but was unsuccessful. Suspecting she had been scammed, she immediately reported the case to the police.

Using their citywide CCTV surveillance footage, the police identified Yu as the suspect and apprehended him at the Macau-Hengqin joint checkpoint as he was re-entering Macau. Under questioning, Yu denied the crime.

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



This undated handout photo provided by the Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday shows PSP officers escorting the fraud suspect into a police station.

Locals shop, dine across border as Macau eateries feel mixed impact: vox pop

Khalel Vallo, Ida Cheong

As more and more local residents head to Zhuhai for shopping and dining, citing lower prices and the perception of better-quality goods and services there, local spending patterns are shifting.

The *Post* spoke to several local eatery representatives yesterday to gauge how the trend is affecting local businesses, with views ranging from resilience to growing concern.

Mimi, 30, who works as a cook in a Filipino restaurant, told the *Post* that the trend of locals spending more and more of their money in the mainland was driven mainly by affordability. "They want to spend more money in the Chinese mainland because it's cheaper there," she said. However, she noted that her restaurant has not been affected, as its core clientele is Filipino. "Our customers are mostly Filipinos. Filipinos prefer Filipino food, so we don't really feel the impact", she added.

Meanwhile, 27-year-old Iris, who runs a local café, also said her business had seen limited effects.

She said that her café mainly serves local office workers and is focused on healthier options that, she said, were "not that usual in the Chinese mainland". While weekend turnover is less predictable, she said that her cafés overall performance remained stable. Iris added that other food businesses, particularly those offering daily meals, were more affected, and suggested that improving service quality could help local businesses compete with their counterparts in the mainland. "Mainland Chinese service is actually better than us," she said, adding that better customer service could encourage locals to spend more of their money in Macau again.

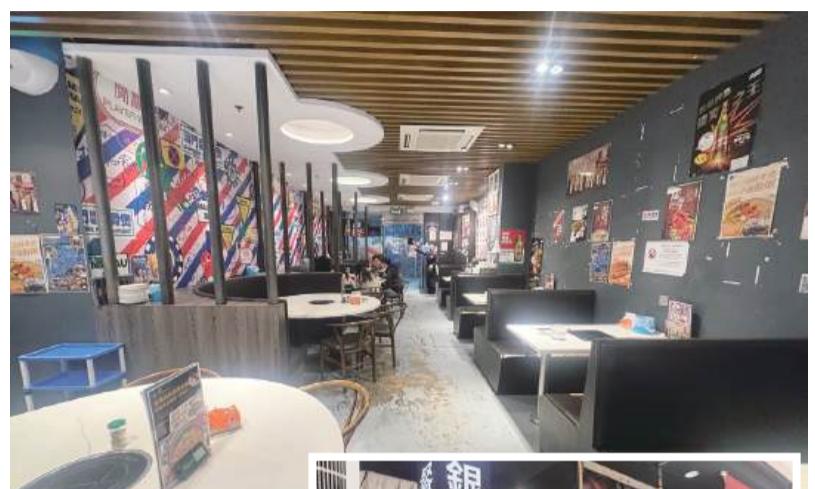
In contrast, Liz, 33, said her restaurant has been hit by the downturn. "Business is worse than before," she said, adding that discounted set menus and coupons starting at 3 p.m. were now needed to attract customers. She said that the decline was due to residents saving money and choosing to eat in Zhuhai instead, where prices are lower.

A local seafood restaurant owner surnamed Liu spoke to the

Post in a phone interview, pointing out that the overall local catering industry situation is "severe", with businesses being particularly pessimistic about public holidays and weekend evenings, adding that compared to pre-pandemic levels, both turnover and the spending power of Macau residents have declined by about one-third.

Liu noted that residents' spending power has weakened, earning money has become more difficult and post-pandemic consumption has grown more cautious, reducing residents' willingness to spend. He added that under the "Macao Vehicles Northbound Travel" policy, many residents choose to spend holidays and weekends in the mainland, diverting customer flow away from local restaurants.

Liu said he hopes that the government will develop special projects in the northern district and Fai Chi Kei district to attract tourists for photo-op venues – known in Cantonese as "da kat" – and consumption, thereby driving foot traffic to nearby eateries. He added



About half a dozen customers have their dinner at a seafood restaurant in Fai Chi Kei district yesterday evening.

– Photos: Ida Cheong

A customer orders food at a beef offal takeaway in the Horta e Costa area yesterday.



that the three-day "Celebrating the Return: Dine-in Discount" campaign last month, which offered a 30 percent discount, had had some effect. However, he stressed that the current consumption weakness and business downturn are not short-term phenomena but part of a longer-term shift, noting that the local customer base alone is insufficient to support a recovery in the restaurant sector.

Meanwhile, a beef offal shop owner surnamed Kwok told the *Post* yesterday that her business relies mainly on local customers and remains relatively stable on weekdays. However, at weekends and public holidays, the shop depends largely on tourists, leading to fluctuations in overall business due to varying visitor numbers, without significant growth or sharp declines. She observed that customer numbers drop noticeably after 5 p.m. to 6 p.m., as many residents travel to

the mainland to dine.

Facing competition from mainland catering brands, Kwok said she has not made targeted adjustments through discounts to balance profits. Instead, she focuses on improving competitiveness by enhancing value for money and the flavour of her dishes. She added that residents' spending power has declined, with a growing tendency to prioritise essential goods while reducing spending on non-essential items such as beverages and snacks.

A customer surnamed Ho told the *Post* yesterday that when choosing a restaurant, she prioritises a comfortable environment, followed by personal preference for the cuisine. She noted that dining prices in Macau are inherently higher than those on the mainland and believes acceptance of this price difference ultimately depends on the individual mindset. ■

Toi San new sitting-out area receives mixed bag of reactions

Vox pop by Armindo Neves

Since the seven-month revamp of the Toi San sitting-out area on Rua Central de T'oi Sán (台山中街) was concluded last month, the area has been given a brand-new look – and has received a mixed bag of reactions.

According to a Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) statement on December 26, the area, covering around 870 square metres, incorporates natural elements in its design. All the trees have been preserved and integrated with landscaped greenery, aiming to create a leisure experience reminiscent of an urban oasis, the statement said.

The statement noted that given the proximity of the site to several schools and the area's foot traffic by parents and children, the reconstruction and enhancement project was focused on upgrading the children's play area and adult fitness zone, which also included adding treehouse-themed play equipment and installing elevated exploration walkways.

By making the most of the limited space, the aim is to provide children and teenagers with opportunities for play and nature exploration, helping them develop coordination and balance, and improve their physical fitness, the statement said.

The *Post* interviewed several residents yesterday at the sitting-out area about its revamp.

A housewife surnamed Si said that the area was now boasting more play facilities, with children eagerly anticipating visits after school each



Parents and children gather at the Toi San sitting area on Rua Central de T'oi Sán yesterday.

– Photo: Armindo Neves

day and appearing happier than before. However, she noted that certain installations – such as the tall slide and fencing – present safety concerns, as they obstruct visibility and prevent timely observation of children jostling above. She also acknowledged that the newly added handwashing stations and seating arrangements offer convenience for both parents and children.

A fifth-grade primary school student surnamed Wong said that the area was more enjoyable than before, particularly the newly installed swings. He said the area's biggest change is that it has become larger, attracting more children to visit, though sometimes waiting in line is necessary.

A parent surnamed Ao Ieong acknowledged that the area provides an important recreational space for children but pointed out

several perceived shortcomings, such as a lack of dedicated equipment suitable for toddlers aged between one and two, and the increased risk of older and younger children bumping into each other while playing on the facilities. Ao Ieong also pointed out that the newly installed drinking fountains have remained "under maintenance", according to a sign put up there, for a long time, causing inconvenience for thirsty children, and the absence of public toilets inside the sitting-out area forcing its users to visit nearby restaurants to use their toilets, which was "highly inconvenient". He suggested that if the space allows in the future, consideration should be given to adding toddler-friendly play equipment, activating the water fountains, and installing public toilets to enhance the area's practicality and safety. ■



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'Highly Collectable Art Fair' reaches its final 5 days



Interview by Rui Pastorin

The "Highly Collectable Art Fair" hosted in Casa Garden is coming to its close, with art lovers, collectors and other members of the public able to view the over 180 art pieces on display until Sunday.

Now in its seventh edition, the art fair has normally been held twice a year since 2019. On show this time are ceramics, sculptures, engravings, wood and mixed media, with prices going from thousands to even hundreds of thousands of patacas for some of the pieces.

Among the items displayed and for sale are the creations of local artists, with the exhibition highlighting and celebrating the ceramic works of Macau's creators. Other pieces featured and sold in this edition are reproductions by Spanish artist Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), Belarus-born Marc Chagall (1887-1985), French artist Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), and Chinese painter Qi Baishi (1864-1957), as well as works by Japanese masters.

Elaborating more on this edition and showcase, curator and the fair's founder James Wong Cheng Pou told the *Post* in an interview on Monday that more ceramic works from the local art circles are presented this time. Most of them, Wong said, are related to the idea of plants and flowers, highlighting that people have not only purchased these works simply for aesthetics, but practicality, along with having a chance of better understanding the artist behind a particular piece. "They buy not only for beauty, but it could also be more beauty related to their life".

The exhibition kicked off on December 21, and overall, Wong said that the fair has had a good run, noting that close to around 40 percent of artworks have already been sold. Wong also went on to point out that some of the artworks by Macau's artists have been "selling very well", noting the abilities of local artists.

Wong added that the fair has also seen collectors from both Hong Kong and China's Taiwan region who have already ordered some of the pieces from the total of 180 works presented, while there are those who have also shown interest in the works by icons like Chagall and Picasso, highlighting that he was confident that most of these works will have been sold before the exhibition ends.

While this edition has done well, Wong said that the sales this time, however, still haven't topped the first and second times that they held the fair, noting that the first two editions were "totally awesome" as works had been sold within just two days. However, he stressed, this edition's close to 40 percent figure by Monday was still "a very good number".

With the support of local artists and collector circles, Wong said he hopes to keep the fair going and, depending on the venue's schedule, adding that plans for the second edition of the fair this year are in the works. It could take place in the summer or between November and December.

Overall, Wong said he believes that the art fair held biannually at the local headquarters of the Lisbon-based Fundação Oriente in Praça de Luís de Camões (白鵠巢前地) has become "one of the most interesting gatherings" for the art circles involved. Supported by collectors, the fair is an event that artists, collectors and their respective circles know about. "I'm not a dealer, but essentially I just try to do something good for the artists", he said regarding the event's concept.

Art lovers, collectors and other members of the public may view the works on show from 10 a.m. through 7 p.m. during its run through Sunday.

-Photos taken yesterday by Rui Pastorin

Safeguarding residents' jobs vital for Macau's overall stability: Sam

Continued from p.1

Sam said that his government will continue to work on the improvements in labour-related laws and regulations, while further increasing the frequency of job-matching initiatives and conducting more vocational training programmes and occupational health and safety activities.

Xi's deep care for Macau

Sam pointed out that he paid his duty visit to Beijing last month where President Xi Jinping fully affirmed the local government's work over the past year while making important instructions and raising new requirements for Macau to carry out its various tasks well. Sam said that the close attention and deep care shown by Xi and the central authorities for Macau's development have injected new and powerful impetus into the city's continuous development in the new stage.

Sam pledged that his government will unite and lead people from all sectors of

civil society in thoroughly studying and implementing the spirit of Xi's important speeches and instructions, while effectively carrying out its key tasks in the next step.

Sam raises 5 hopes for Gung Luen

In this regard, Sam raised five hopes for Gung Luen.

First, Sam urged the federation to thoroughly study and implement the spirit of Xi's important speeches and instructions, unite and guide the broad masses of workers to support the local government's law-based administration, and work together with the government in enhancing Macau's governance effectiveness and safeguarding national security and social stability.

Second, Sam noted that this year marks the beginning of the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan and Macau's third five-year socioeconomic development plan, pledging that his government will proactively align with the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan and scientifically draw up and implement Macau's third five-year

socioeconomic development plan. Sam urged Gung Luen to continue to offer opinions and suggestions for the local government's administration and play its role as a bridge between residents and the government.

Third, Sam urged the federation to assist local residents in engaging in diversified industries, support local workers, particularly young ones, in improving their professionalism and competitiveness, vigorously promote Macau's appropriate economic diversification, and make greater contributions to the long-term development of Macau and the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

Fourth, Sam urged Gung Luen to deepen exchanges and cooperation with its counterparts in the mainland, carry out its tasks in close alignment with the projected "Macau + Hengqin" development model, do more work in improving measures and facilities concerning people's daily lives, workers' services, and talent cultivation in Hengqin and in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-

Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), and support Macau in integrating into and serving the nation's overall development.

Fifth, Sam urged the federation to carry forward the fine tradition of patriotism and love for Macau, strengthen its work capacity, demonstrate a good work style and image, make good use of latest technology to improve its service levels, provide workers with better and broader range of services, strengthen the cultivation and training of its key young members, develop and expand the force of patriotism and love for Macau, and further consolidate the social foundation of patriotism and love for Macau.

Gung Luen's new, 37th term of its board members started yesterday, with lawmaker Lam Lon Wai being its new chairman. He was one of the federation's vice-chairmen in the previous term.

Lam is one of the three vice-principals of Lou Hau High School. The school was previously named Workers' Children High School. ■

Speed cameras to operate in Colane from next month



This undated handout photo provided by the Transport Bureau (DSAT) yesterday shows the speed camera systems to start operating on February 1 on Estrada de Hac Sá (賈梅士大馬路) and Avenida de Luís de Camões (黑沙馬路) near Hellene Garden.

Ida Cheong

In order to ensure road user safety, the government-appointed Higher Traffic Council (CSV) has authorised, in coordination with the Transport Bureau (DSAT) and the Public Security Police (PSP), speed-detection cameras at four locations in Coloane to start operating at midnight on February 1, according to a joint statement released by the DAST and PSP yesterday.

The speed-detection system will be operational from midnight on the first day of next month on four roads in Coloane, namely Estrada do Altinho de Ká Hó (九澳高頂馬路) near Rotunda de Seac Pai Van (石排灣圓形地); Estrada de Hac Sá (黑沙大馬路) near the Hac Sá Youth Activity and Development Centre (also known as Hac Sá Youth Adventure Camp), Avenida de Luís de Camões (賈梅士大馬路) near Hellene Garden, and the junction between Avenida de Luís de Camões and Estrada de Hac Sá the statement added.

In recent years, the area along Coloane's Hac Sa Road has become a notorious hotspot for reckless speeding and illegal street racing, such as a serious motorcycle and car accident in 2019, resulting in a motorcycle rider being seriously injured, and the Public Security Police said at that time that the incident may have involved illegal racing.

According to current legislation, drivers who violate speed limits may face a fine ranging from 600 patacas to 20,000 patacas, and repeat offenders or cases involving severe speeding may result in a driving disqualification, the statement said.

The statement urged all drivers to comply with the law and drive safely. ■

'Helena Almeida: I Am Here – Presence and Resonance' to kick off on Friday

Rui Pastorin

Helena Almeida's (1934-2018) first large-scale retrospective in Asia will kick off on Friday at the Macau Museum of Art (MAM) in Nape, with close to 42 sets comprising 190 works by the Portuguese contemporary artist to be showcased, according to a statement by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC).

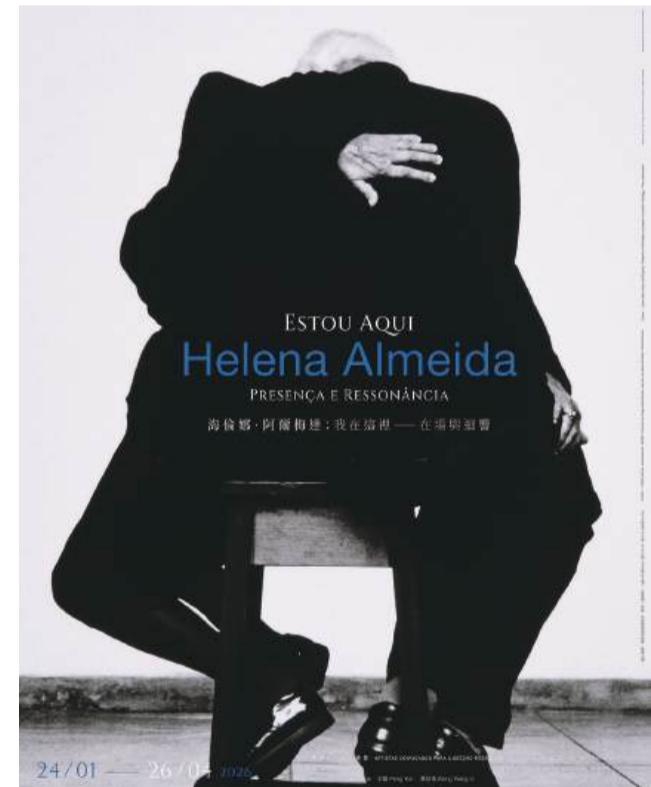
The Friday statement noted that the exhibition, titled "Helena Almeida: I Am Here – Presence and Resonance" and held until April 26, will also feature 14 sets of Almeida-inspired works created by artists from the mainland and Macau.

Presented in two sections, the exhibition aims to showcase the Portuguese artist's works as well as "reveal how her art and influence continues to reverberate in contemporary Chinese artistic practice", the statement said.

In terms of the two sections, "Presence" will feature early paintings, photographic series, final sketch studies, preparatory sketches, and video works. "Resonance", meanwhile, has been open since December 2025 and sees the Almeida-inspired works by mainland and Macau artists, demonstrating "how the enduring power of her art continues to resonate within the international art community".

The Friday launch event will take place at 6:30 p.m., after which members of the public may view the works from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. from Tuesday to Sunday. It is closed on Mondays. More details can be found on www.MAM.gov.mo.

Stay tuned for an upcoming Page 4. ■



This poster provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) on Friday promotes the ongoing exhibition "Helena Almeida: I Am Here – Presence and Resonance" at the Macau Museum of Art (MAM).

Cambodia to grant visa-free entry to Chinese nationals, incl. MSAR passport holders

Khalef Vallo

According to a statement by the Identification Services Bureau (DSI) yesterday, the Royal Government of Cambodia will grant visa-free entry to Chinese nationals, including Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) passport holders.

Under the arrangement announced by Cambodia's Ministry of Tourism, Chinese citizens holding passports of the People's Republic of China – including MSAR passport holders – will be allowed to enter Cambodia without a visa for up to two weeks per single entry during the four-month trial period, the statement noted.

According to a separate statement by Cambodia on Friday, the measure

will also include Hong Kong SAR passport holders but exclude those holding passports issued by Taiwan.

Cambodia is known to be a staunch defender of the "one China" policy, according to which Taiwan is a Chinese region.

Travellers will not be required to apply for a visa in advance or pay visa fees, provided they complete the E-Arrival Card before entering the country, the statement noted, adding that the visa-free measure will be effective from June 15 through October 15 and is introduced on a trial basis.

The statement added that currently, MSAR passport holders may enter Cambodia by applying for a visa on arrival or an electronic visa. The



This image shows the flag of the Kingdom of Cambodia.

bureau has advised residents to refer to its official website at https://www.dsi.gov.mo/download/visa_free_list_e.pdf for the latest information on visa-free access and visa-on-arrival arrangements applicable to Macau travel document holders. ■

Hainan FTP sees business surge after launch of island-wide special customs operations

Analysis

HAIKOU – Business activity in China's Hainan Free Trade Port (FTP) picked up in the first month of island-wide special customs operations, with surging company registrations, rising trade volumes and stronger duty-free sales, according to a press conference on Monday.

A total of 21,000 new companies were registered during the period, representing a 16.42 percent year-on-year increase. Among them were 331 foreign-funded firms – up 13 percent from the previous year, underscoring rising market vitality and investor confidence.

The policy dividends generated by the special customs operations are already being translated into concrete benefits for market entities both at home and abroad, said Cui Weijie, deputy director of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, a think tank with the Ministry of Commerce.

"Chinese enterprises can leverage the Hainan FTP to access global markets more conveniently, while foreign companies can use Hainan as a bridgehead to enter the mainland market," he said.

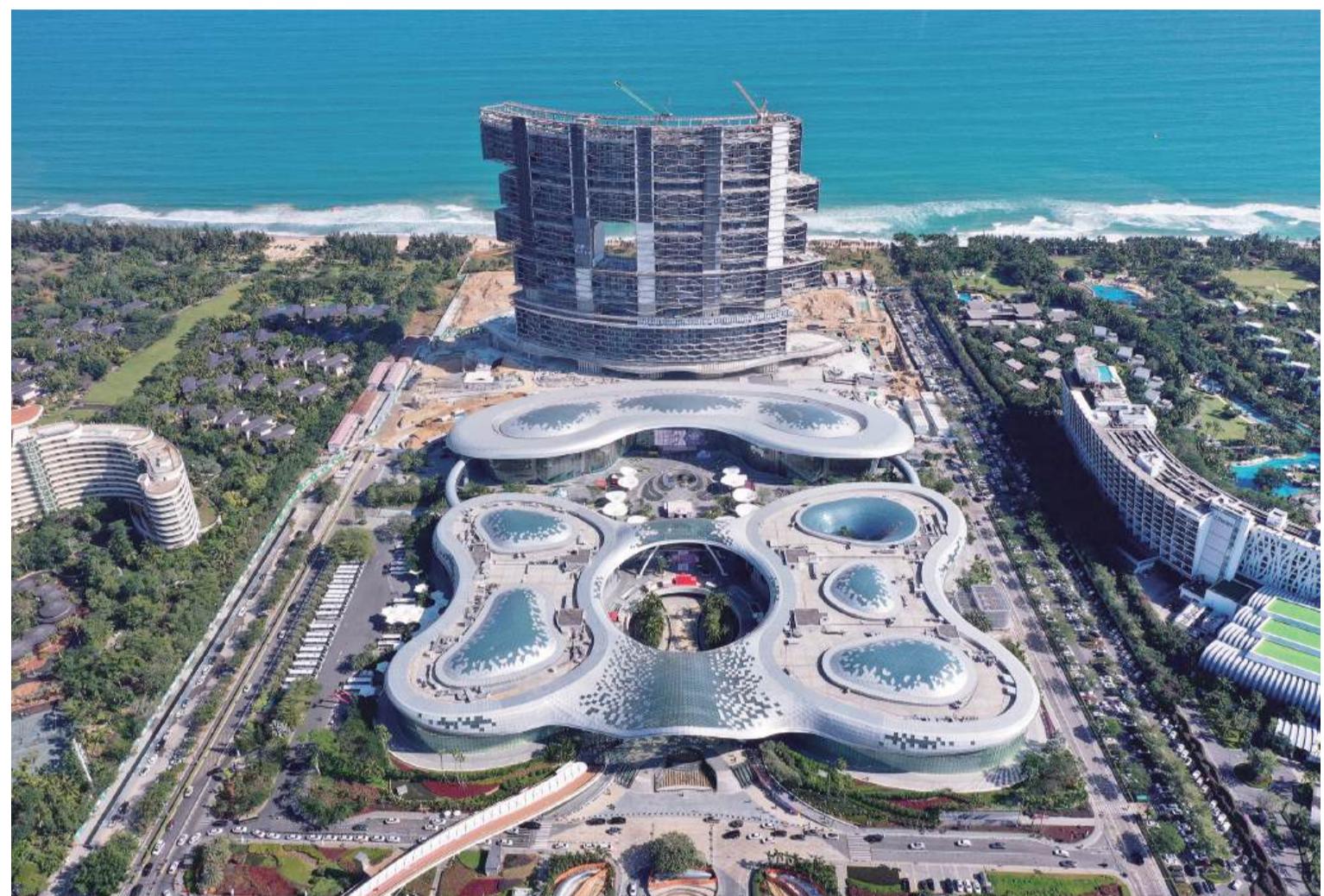
China launched island-wide special customs operations in the Hainan FTP on December 18. The policy features "freer access at the first line" for trade between Hainan and areas outside China's customs borders, and "regulated access at the second line," where standard customs rules apply to goods moving from Hainan to the mainland.

In the first month of the new customs arrangement, the total value of "first line" imported zero-tariff goods rose 38.9 percent year on year to 753 million yuan, while tax reductions surged 194.6 percent to 109 million yuan, according to the press conference.

The value of processed and value-added goods sold domestically through the "second line" rose 37.2 percent, involving goods totaling nearly 85.87 million yuan, with tariff reductions coming in at 3.32 million yuan, it said.

At the operational level, companies say the new rules are translating into concrete cost savings.

Located in the Yangpu Economic Development Zone – a front-runner in the implementation of the Hainan FTP's preferential policies, including tariff reductions and exemptions – Hainan Hongyan Food Co., Ltd. mainly imports beef from overseas, processes it into jerky products and sells them to the mainland market duty-free.



This aerial drone photo taken earlier this month shows the Sanya International Duty Free City in Sanya, Hainan Province. One month into the island-wide special customs operations, Hainan Free Trade Port (FTP) has made initial achievements in trade and logistics efficiency.

– Xinhua

Over the past two years, the company has saved more than 3 million yuan in taxes, said Liu Heping, its chairman. "The policy has reduced our production costs and will also open new opportunities to expand into Southeast Asian markets," he said.

Alongside domestic firms, foreign investors are also expanding their presence. On the first day of Hainan's island-wide special customs operations, Siemens Energy (Hainan) Co., Ltd., a wholly owned subsidiary of Fortune Global 500 company Siemens Energy, was officially established in Yangpu, marking the company's first gas turbine assembly and service center in China.

Lars Völker, general manager of Siemens Energy (Hainan) Co., Ltd., said that strong government support enabled the project to move forward in a very short time, laying a solid foundation for future development.

To facilitate such investment, local

authorities have introduced a package of measures aimed at easing market entry. These include simplified documentation requirements, expanded verification methods and one-stop registration services, said Zhu Mengwen, who works in the market regulation administration in Danzhou, where Yangpu is located.

Beyond trade and investment, eased cross-border movement and duty-free shopping policies have also boosted consumption. Official data shows that duty-free sales supervised by customs totaled 4.86 billion yuan in the first month of Hainan's new customs environment, rising 46.8 percent year on year.

Experts say the developments in the Hainan FTP reflect a broader national push to expand institutional opening-up. Recommendations for the formulation of China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) for national economic and

social development have called for continuing to expand opening-up at the institutional level, safeguarding the multilateral trading system, and promoting broader international economic flows.

"The Hainan FTP not only demonstrates China's unwavering commitment to high-standard opening up, but also injects greater certainty and positive momentum into the global economy and international trade cooperation," Cui said.

Guan Jirong, a provincial official, noted that 2026 marks the opening year of both China's 15th Five-Year Plan period and the island-wide implementation of special customs operations in the Hainan FTP.

He said that Hainan will use this year as a new starting point to accelerate its development as an FTP and work to build it into a leading gateway for China's opening up in the new era.

– Xinhua

China applies to locate Xiamen City as host of marine biological diversity agreement secretariat: FM spokesperson

BEIJING – China has decided to present the candidate of Xiamen City to host the Secretariat of the Agreement on Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction, and has informed the United Nations Secretary-General of the relevant decision last Friday, a foreign ministry spokesperson said yesterday.

The agreement, with 82 countries including China and the EU as its contracting parties, entered into force on January 17.

In response to a related query at a daily press briefing, spokesperson Guo Jiakun said the milestone international treaty under the UN framework opens a new chapter in global governance in the marine field and shows the victory of multilateralism.

"As one of the first countries to sign the agreement and one of its first contracting

parties, China welcomes and congratulates the entry into force of the agreement," Guo said.

He said that China upholds true multilateralism, supports the UN-centered international system, and attaches high importance to the conservation and sustainable use of oceans. As a responsible major country, China is deeply involved in global marine governance, and is willing to and capable of making greater contributions to the implementation of the treaty.

Xiamen, which is known as "garden on the sea," is a beautiful and livable city with a time-honored history marked by the spirit of openness and inclusiveness, Guo said, adding that the city is well-known around the world for its favorable innovation environment and thriving blue economy.

As an important hub for international marine cooperation, the city's relentless pursuit of sustainable development dovetails with the purposes and objectives of the agreement, he said. The city stands ready to provide the most satisfying work environment for the secretariat, and to help realize the purposes and objectives of the agreement.

"China believes that Xiamen is the most ideal host city for the secretariat of the agreement," the spokesperson said.

China is willing to step up communication and cooperation with all parties, jointly support the full, accurate and effective implementation of the agreement, and make greater contributions to advancing global marine governance and upholding international maritime order, Guo added.

– Xinhua

Russia-China relations unprecedented in level, depth: Lavrov

MOSCOW – Russia-China relations are unprecedented in their level and depth, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told an annual press conference in Moscow yesterday.

"I have already spoken about our relations with China. They are unprecedented in terms of their level, depth, and the convergence of our stances on the evolving situation in Eurasia and the world arena as a whole," Lavrov said.

– Xinhua

Guangdong reports record foreign trade of US\$1.36 trillion in 2025

GUANGZHOU – Guangdong Province saw its foreign trade hit a record high of 9.49 trillion yuan in 2025, rising 4.4 percent year on year, local authorities have said.

This has secured Guangdong's position as China's leading provincial-level region in terms of total trade volume for a 40th consecutive year, according to the provincial branch of the General Administration of Customs of China.

Guangdong's exports rose 2.5 percent to 6.03 trillion yuan last year, while its imports increased 7.8 percent to 3.46 trillion yuan.

Guangdong's foreign trade accounted for approximately one-fifth of the national total, contributing 24.1 percent to the growth of China's overall foreign trade.

Zhang Ke, deputy director of the provincial customs branch, said that Guangdong's export structure has optimized, gearing toward higher-end, smarter and greener products.

In 2025, its exports of electromechanical products totaled 4.15 trillion yuan, which was up 7.3 percent. Such products accounted for 68.7 percent of the province's total export value, an increase of 3.1 percentage points compared to the previous year.

Notably, exports of green and intelligent products such as drones, 3D printers and industrial robots surged 40.9 percent, 37.1 percent and 33.9 percent, respectively, and agricultural machinery exports doubled.

Zhang noted that Guangdong's import demand continued to expand last year, with the province importing integrated circuits worth a cumulative 1.3 trillion yuan -- up 15.5 percent year on year and accounting for 37.5 percent of its total import value.

Imports of essential consumer goods such as grain, dairy products, aquatic products and edible oil all achieved double-digit growth.

In 2025, the number of companies in Guangdong that reported on import and export performance climbed 17.6 percent year on year to 172,000.

Of these firms, private enterprises numbered 148,000, which was a rise of 20 percent, with their combined import and export value growing 4.9 percent year on year to 6.07 trillion yuan.

Meanwhile, the import and export volumes of foreign-invested enterprises came in at 3.03 trillion yuan, rising 6.5 percent and indicating a sustained, positive recovery trend.

— Xinhua

Scientists discover single-walled carbon nanotubes, graphitic carbon in Chang'e-6 lunar samples

BEIJING – Researchers have recently identified and confirmed the natural occurrence of single-walled carbon nanotubes and graphitic carbon in lunar samples collected by the Chang'e-6 mission, offering key insights into the Moon's geological evolution, the China National Space Administration announced yesterday.

A team from Jilin University in northeast China conducted a systematic analysis of samples from the lunar far side using multiple microscopic and spectroscopic techniques. Their study marks the first unambiguous identification of graphite carbon on the moon, along with an investigation into its likely process of formation and evolution.

The study represents the first international confirmation that single-walled carbon nanotubes can form naturally without human intervention. These findings highlight the sophistication of high-energy physico-chemical processes on the lunar surface and provide evidence of more active geological processes on the moon's far side.

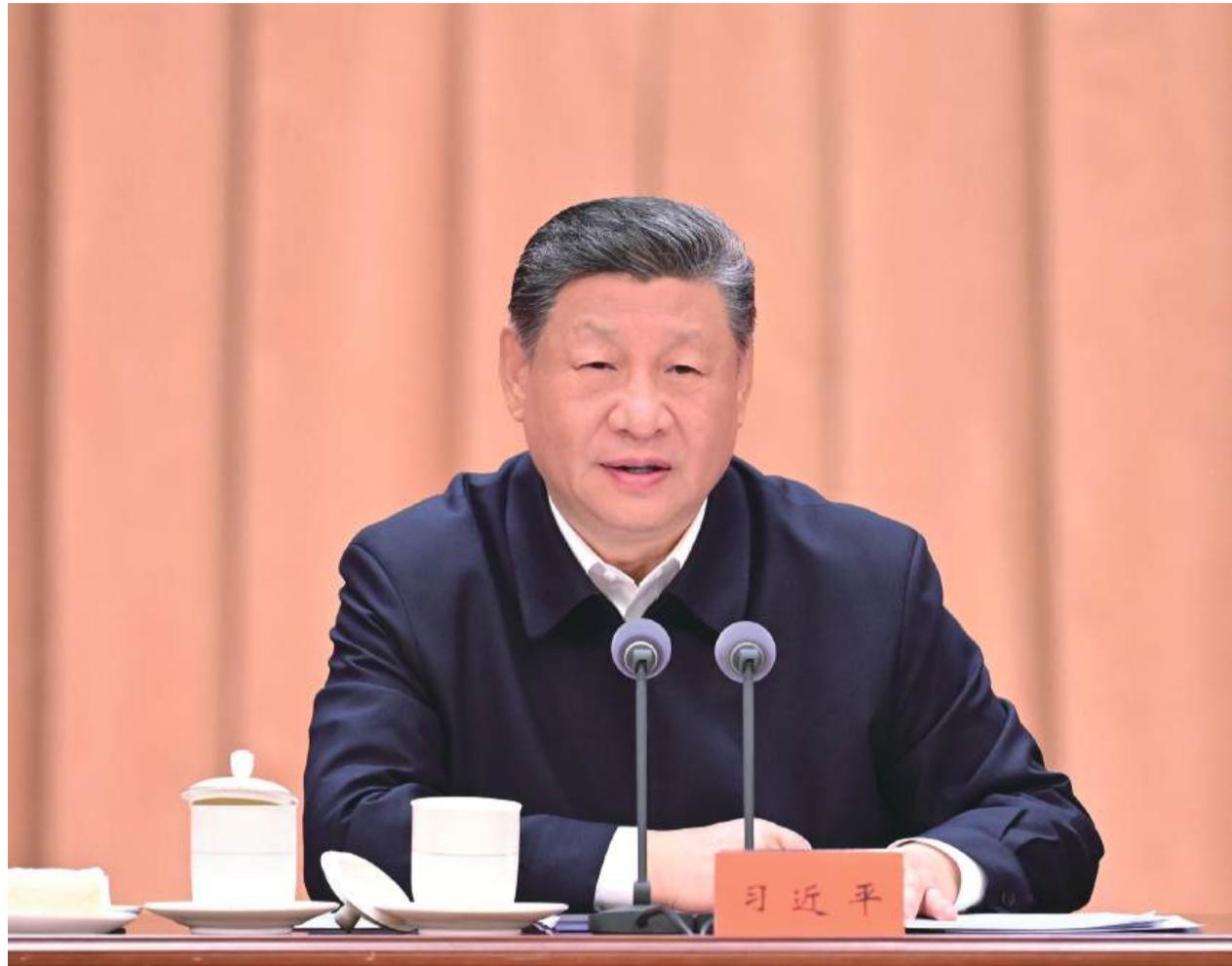
The research suggests that the formation of these carbon nanotubes may be closely tied to iron-catalyzed reactions driven by a combination of factors, including micrometeorite impacts, volcanic activity and solar wind irradiation throughout lunar history. This reveals nature's capacity to synthesize advanced materials under extreme conditions.

In a comparative study involving Chang'e-6 far-side lunar samples and Chang'e-5 near-side samples, the team also observed more distinct defect features in the carbon structures of the far-side material, a difference potentially linked to a history of more intense micrometeorite bombardment on the lunar far side. This finding further points to a newly recognized asymmetry in composition and evolution between the Moon's near and far sides.

The related findings were recently published in the journal *Nano Letters*.

— Xinhua

Xi stresses securing good start for new five-year plan



President Xi Jinping, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, addresses the opening of a study session at the Party School of the CPC Central Committee (National Academy of Governance) for principal officials at the provincial and ministerial level, yesterday.

— Xinhua

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping yesterday called for solid efforts to secure a good start to the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030).

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks when opening a study session at the Party School of the CPC Central Committee (National Academy of Governance) for principal officials at the provincial and ministerial levels.

Xi noted that the formulation and implementation of five-year plans constitutes important experience for the Party in governing the country and managing state affairs, as well as a significant political advantage of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, which is conducive to maintaining policy continuity.

It is necessary to develop a comprehensive, profound and accurate understanding of the strategic arrangements for economic and social development during the 15th Five-Year Plan period that were made at the fourth plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Committee, he said.

He stressed that China is currently at a stage where strategic opportunities and risks coexist, with increasing uncertainty and unpredictable factors. He added that building a modern industrial system and achieving an overall industrial structure upgrade are key strategic tasks for the 15th Five-Year Plan period.

Xi emphasized the importance of maintaining a reasonable share of manufacturing in the economy, and of developing advanced manufacturing vigorously. He also highlighted the need to build modern infrastructure.

China is well-positioned to accelerate its creation of a new development pattern, he said, noting that the domestic economy should serve as the mainstay, and investment in physical assets should be closely integrated with investment in human capital.

Xi said that improving livelihoods should be prioritized to promote social development. And while advancing economic growth, steady efforts should be made to raise quality of life for the people.

He urged efforts to strengthen the Party's capacity to lead socioeconomic development and maintain a high-pressure stance against corruption.

Li Qiang, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, presided over the opening of the study session. The other members of the Standing Committee -- Zhao Leji, Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang and Li Xi -- were also in attendance, as was China's Vice President Han Zheng.

Li Qiang called on the attendees to gain a deep understanding of the rich connotations of Xi's important speech, translate what they learn into concrete actions and results, and promote high-quality development with continuous progress.

— Xinhua

Chinese military expels intruding Philippine aircraft from territorial airspace over Huangyan Dao: spokesperson

BEIJING – The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) yesterday expelled a Philippine government aircraft that illegally intruded into the territorial airspace over China's Huangyan Dao without the approval of the Chinese government, a spokesperson said.

Air Force Senior Colonel Tian Junli, spokesperson for the PLA Southern Theater Command, said that the naval and air forces dispatched by the theater command warned and expelled the Philippine aircraft

in accordance with law and regulations.

The Philippine action has severely infringed upon China's sovereignty and gravely violated the relevant provisions of Chinese law and international law, Tian said.

"Huangyan Dao is China's inherent territory. We urge the Philippine side to stop immediately infringing upon China's rights, making provocations and to cease irresponsible hype," the spokesperson added.

— Xinhua

Indonesia revokes permits of 28 firms after deadly floods

JAKARTA - Indonesia stripped more than two dozen permits from forestry, mining and hydroelectric companies in Sumatra yesterday, a government minister said, just weeks after deadly floods devastated parts of the island.

Environmentalists, experts and the government said deforestation played a role in last year's disaster that killed more than 1,000 people across three provinces on the island, according to a National Disaster Mitigation Agency tally.

A task force audited companies in the three provinces and presented its findings to President Prabowo Subianto during a teleconference on Monday, State Secretariat Minister Prasetyo Hadi told reporters the day after.

"Based on the report, the president

has decided to revoke the permit of 28 companies that were proven to commit violations," Prasetyo said during the briefing yesterday.

He did not specify what type of violations the firms had allegedly committed or which permits were revoked.

The companies affected include 22 forestry firms covering a combined area of more than one million hectares, Prasetyo said.

Six other companies include a mining firm and a hydroelectric power plant developer, he added, saying that the government is committed to ensuring that natural resources-based businesses comply with the prevailing regulation.

More than 240,000 hectares of primary forest were lost in 2024, according to

analysis by conservation start-up The TreeMap's Nusantara Atlas project.

Forests help absorb rainfall and stabilise the ground held by their roots, and their absence makes areas more prone to flash flooding and landslides, founder of The TreeMap David Gaveau told AFP in December.

Indonesia is regularly among the countries in the world with the largest annual forest loss, NGOs have said, adding that mining, plantations, and fires have caused the clearance of large tracts of the country's lush rainforest over recent decades.

Last week, the government filed multiple lawsuits seeking more than US\$200 million in damages against six other firms accused of unspecified environmental damage. — AFP



Larry "the Downing Street cat" walks past as Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer (centre left) welcomes Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto in Downing Street for their meeting in central London yesterday.

— AFP

Japan arrests man over AI-generated celebrity porn

TOKYO - Japanese police have arrested a man suspected of using generative AI to create more than 500,000 obscene images resembling women celebrities and selling them online, a police spokesman and media reports said yesterday.

Concern is growing worldwide over the use of artificial intelligence tools for malicious purposes including through deepfakes, which turn genuine photos, video or audio of people into false likenesses.

Between December 2024 and May 2025, Japanese man Tetsuro Chiba allegedly "allowed internet viewers to see 14 obscene electromagnetic image files online at set prices", a police spokesman told AFP.

The 31-year-old, who is unemployed and lives in Sapporo in northern Japan, was arrested by Tokyo police on Monday "on suspicion of displaying obscene" content online, said the spokesman, who declined to be named.

Kyodo News, citing unnamed police sources, said the suspect is believed to have created more than 520,000 sexual deepfake images of some 300 celebrities, earning around 11 million yen (US\$70,000) by promoting the content on social media and other outlets.

Jiji Press, reporting similar details, said he had told investigators he "did it for earning money".

Several countries have recently moved to ban or take legal action against Elon Musk's X and xAI over user safety concerns sparked by their in-built chatbot Grok, which allowed used to create and share sexualised pictures.

Grok has said it would restrict image generation and editing to paying subscribers, and X announced it would block the feature in some countries.

The Philippines last week became the third country to ban Grok, following Southeast Asian neighbours Malaysia and Indonesia. — AFP

Mahathir recovering after fall

KUALA LUMPUR - Malaysian former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad is showing positive signs of recovery and will continue to undergo physiotherapy as part of his recovery process, his press team said in a statement yesterday.

The recovery process is expected to take a considerable amount of time, it said in a statement.

"The medical team and specialist doctors are currently satisfied with the progress of his recovery and treatment. However, the physiotherapy-based recovery process is expected to take a considerable amount of time," it said.

The centenarian has been admitted after suffering a fall on January 6 and is being treated at the National Heart Institute. — Xinhua



Thailand's prime minister and Bhumjaithai Party leader Anutin Charnvirakul greets people while campaigning ahead of the general election, in Chinatown in Bangkok yesterday.

— AFP

Thai forces razed Cambodian homes on border: rights group

Suy Se

PHNOM PENH - Thai forces demolished Cambodian homes in contested border areas after a ceasefire ended clashes between the neighbours, a local rights group said yesterday.

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

The two countries agreed to a ceasefire in late December, ending three weeks of clashes.

Since then, Cambodia has said Thailand seized several areas in four border provinces and demanded the withdrawal of Thai troops from territory claimed by Phnom Penh.

The Thai military has denied using force to seize Cambodian territory, insisting its forces were present in areas that had always belonged to Thailand.

Rights group LICADHO yesterday said a "significant number of homes and structures" in Thai-controlled areas of two villages in Cambodia's Banteay Meanchey province "have been razed and cleared by Thai forces" following the December 27 truce.

"The destruction of civilian homes during a conflict goes against the Geneva Conventions and international human rights law, regardless of which side of the contested border the houses stand," LICADHO said in a statement.

The demolitions had occurred in disputed areas claimed by both countries, the organisation said.

Homes were also destroyed on land recognised by both sides as Thailand, and land recognised by both sides as Cambodia, it added, citing imagery from the European Space Agency's Sentinel-2 satellites as well as images and footage published by media outlets.

"Their clearance post-ceasefire serves no legitimate military objective," LICADHO said.

'We lost everything'

Earlier this month, Cambodia accused Thai forces of annexing the two contested border villages, Chouk Chey and Boeng Trakuon, among several disputed areas Phnom Penh says were seized.

A Cambodian minister said at the time that Thai forces had installed barbed wire and shipping containers to create a "border fence".

Bangkok has countered that the territory was always part of Thailand.

Tep Chheang, 43, said he lived in Chouk Chey before his house was burned down during the December fighting and access to the village was blocked by the barbed wire and containers.

"We lost everything now," he told AFP yesterday. "I have four children and I don't know where we will live."

He is currently staying at a camp for displaced people.

Pen Rithy, the village chief, said around 880 families were blocked

from their homes in Chouk Chey.

They could hear the sounds of excavators clearing the area from behind the row of containers, he told AFP.

"It is like we are being buried alive. Our homes, land and belongings are gone," Pen Rithy said.

"We don't know when we can go back into the village."

'Full compliance'

Cambodia's foreign ministry this month condemned Thai forces for the "demolition of Cambodian civilian homes and other civilian infrastructures" in seized areas, saying the actions violated international law.

A Thai foreign ministry spokesperson yesterday referred AFP to a January 12 statement from the ministry, which rejected "Cambodia's unfounded allegation of illegal territorial annexation" on the border.

"Security measures undertaken by the Thai forces following the ceasefire are in full compliance" with the December 27 truce agreement, it said.

The Thai army did not immediately reply to an AFP request for comment yesterday.

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

More than 127,000 Cambodians remain displaced following the December clashes, according to the interior ministry.

— AFP

1 rescued, search ongoing for 14 missing off southern Philippines

MANILA - The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) yesterday said it has rescued a male survivor from a motorboat carrying 15 people that went missing in waters off Davao Oriental province in the southern Philippines.

In a statement, the PCG's southeastern Mindanao district said the survivor, identified as a

member of the boat's crew, was found yesterday morning. He was immediately brought to safety as search and rescue operations continued for the remaining 14 missing passengers and crew.

The "recreational" motorboat, which had four crew members and 11 passengers on board, was reported missing on Monday, prompting the

PCG to deploy search-and-rescue teams to scour the area where the vessel was last seen.

According to the coast guard in Manila, the motorboat departed from Davao City on Saturday for a diving expedition but failed to reach its destination in the municipality of Governor Generoso on Monday.

— Xinhua

Nepal's rapper-turned-mayor challenges ousted PM

Anup Ojha

KATHMANDU — Nepal's rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah will go into a head-to-head election battle with the veteran prime minister he helped unseat, as he champions youth demands that toppled last year's government.

The 35-year-old resigned last week as mayor of Kathmandu to contest general elections, announcing yesterday that he will directly challenge ousted prime minister KP Sharma Oli by running in the same constituency.

Nepal will hold general elections on March 5, the first since mass anti-corruption protests in September 2025 overthrew Oli, a 73-year-old Marxist leader and four-term prime minister.

"Contesting against a major figure... signals that I am not taking the easy way out," Shah told AFP, ahead of his formal confirmation of candidacy.

"It demonstrates that, despite the problems or betrayals that have affected the country, we are moving toward addressing them", he added.

Better known as Balen, the former mayor arrived for the interview at a Kathmandu hotel dressed in black and wearing a traditional Nepali hat or "topi", though he was without his trademark square sunglasses.

His hip-hop songs tackling corruption and inequality have drawn millions of views.

A civil engineer and rapper before joining politics, Shah stunned the political establishment in 2022 when he became the first independent candidate to be elected as Kathmandu mayor.

He built a reputation as a sharp-tongued reformer, launching campaigns targeting tax evasion, traffic congestion, education and city waste.

Shah's approach, however, drew criticism for heavy-handed enforcement and for communicating directly with his millions of social media followers rather than engaging with journalists.

"We made many processes that operated through informal arrangements transparent, through open procurement," he said.

'Ripple effect'

In December, Shah joined the centrist Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), led by television host Rabi Lamichhane, 50.

RSP, which became parliament's fourth-largest force in the last elections in 2022, challenged parties that had dominated Nepal since the end of its civil war in 2006.



This combination of pictures created yesterday shows Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) election candidate and Kathmandu's former mayor Balendra Shah (left) addressing supporters during a campaign rally in Janakpur on Monday and Nepal's then prime minister KP Sharma Oli waving after casting his vote in an election for the country's new president in Kathmandu on October 28, 2015. — AFP

If the RSP secures a parliamentary majority, Shah would become prime minister.

"We share the same ideology," Shah said, describing a vision of "a liberal economic system with social justice," including free education and healthcare for the poor.

Rather than contesting from his Kathmandu base, Shah will challenge Oli in his stronghold of Jhapa-5, a largely rural district 300 kilometres southeast of Kathmandu.

"This should not be perceived as an egoistic decision," Shah said. "The ripple effect would simply be greater if I contest from Jhapa."

The September 8-9 demonstrations were initially triggered by anger over a brief government ban on major social media platforms, with protesters gathered under a loose "Gen Z" banner.

But deeper grievances - economic stagnation and entrenched corruption - fuelled the unrest in the country of 30 million, in which at least 77 people were killed.

'Grow our economy'

Shah backed the protests while urging restraint, emerging as a central figure in the movement.

"Gen Z's number one demand is good governance, because there is a high level of corruption in the country," he said, adding that his party had drawn on protesters for support.

"The Gen Z protest has opened a door - 40 percent of our central committee members and proportional representatives are new faces who emerged from the September protest," he said.

Young Nepalis are looking for leaders promising economic reform. The World Bank estimates 82 percent of Nepal's workforce is in informal employment, with GDP per capita at US\$1,447 in 2024.

"We need to grow our economy," Shah said, citing tourism, trade and skilled jobs as ways to stem the mass outflow of workers.

Landlocked Nepal, wedged between regional giants India and China, faces geopolitical pressures, but Shah sees an opportunity to make Nepal a trade hub.

"My approach is to maintain a natural relationship with both neighbouring nations," he said.

And while focused on politics, he said that music remains central to his identity.

"Music is a medium to express oneself," he said. "I will continue it, even if I am elected as prime minister." — AFP

Kim sacks vice premier, rails against 'incompetence'

Claire Lee

SEOUL — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has fired his vice premier, compared him to a goat and railed against "incompetent" officials, state media said yesterday, in a rare and very public broadside against apparatchiks at the opening of a critical factory.

Vice Premier Yang Sung Ho was sacked "on the spot", the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said, in a speech in which Kim attacked "irresponsible, rude and incompetent leading officials".

"Please, Comrade Vice Premier, resign by yourself when you can do it on your own before it is too late," Kim reportedly said.

"He is ineligible for an important duty," he added.

"Put simply, it was like hitching a cart to a goat - an accidental mistake in our cadre appointment process," the North Korean leader explained.

"After all, it is an ox that pulls a cart, not a goat."

Nuclear-armed North Korea, which is under multiple sets of sanctions over its weapons programmes, has long struggled with its moribund state-managed economy and chronic food shortages.

Kim has been quick to scold lazy officials for alleged mismanagement of economic policy but such a public dismissal is very rare.

Touring the opening of an industrial machinery complex on Monday, Kim blasted cadres who for "too long been accustomed to defeatism, irresponsibility and passiveness".

Yang was "unfit to be entrusted with heavy duties", Kim said, according to KCNA.

And he urged a quick turnaround in the "centuries-old



This picture taken on Monday and released by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) yesterday shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (top, centre) delivering a speech at the completion of the first phase of renovation and modernisation of the Ryongsong Machine Complex in South Hamgyong Province, North Korea. — AFP

backwardness of the economy and build a modernised and advanced one capable of firmly guaranteeing the future of our state".

Images released by Pyongyang showed a stern-looking Kim delivering a speech at the venue in South Hamgyong Province in the country's frigid northeast, with workers in attendance wearing green uniforms and matching grey hats.

Lazy officials

The impoverished North has long prioritised its military and banned nuclear weapons programmes over providing for its people.

It is highly vulnerable to natural disasters including flood and drought due to a chronic lack of infrastructure, deforestation and decades of state mismanagement.

The new machine complex makes up part of a large machinery-manufacturing belt linking the northeast to Wonsan further south, "accounting for about 16 percent of North Korea's total machinery

output", according to Yang Moon-jin of the University of North Korean Studies.

Kim's public dismissal of Yang mirrors past cases such as Jang Song Thaek, Kim's uncle, who was executed in 2013 after being accused of plotting to overthrow his nephew, Yang said.

The North Korean leader is "using public accountability as a shock tactic to warn party officials", he told AFP.

Pyongyang is gearing up for its first congress of its ruling party in five years, with analysts expecting it in the coming weeks.

Economic policy, as well as defence and military planning, are likely to be high on the agenda.

Last month, Kim vowed to root out "evil" at a major meeting of Pyongyang's top brass.

State media did not offer specifics, though it did say the ruling party had revealed numerous recent "deviations" in discipline - a euphemism for corruption. — AFP

S Korea designates President Lee's stabbing incident as terrorist act

SEOUL — South Korea officially designated President Lee Jae Myung's stabbing incident in January 2024 as a terrorist act, multiple media outlets said yesterday.

Prime Minister Kim Min-seok presided over the national counter-terrorism committee meeting, formally recognizing the 2024 incident as a terrorist act. It marked the first official designation since the anti-terrorism act was established in 2016.

Lee, then opposition leader of

the Democratic Party, was stabbed on the left side of his neck with a modified knife by a man in his 60s who disguised himself as a supporter and approached Lee, who was visiting the construction site of the new Gadeokdo airport near the southeastern port city of Busan in January 2024.

Lee suffered laceration and damage to his internal jugular vein, and the top court finalized a 15-year prison sentence for the assailant in February 2025.

The Democratic Party had raised allegations that the National Intelligence Service (NIS) under the impeached former President Yoon Suk-yeol downplayed and distorted the incident by destroying evidence at the scene and failing to designate it as a terrorist act.

An additional investigation to uncover the full truth behind the incident will be conducted, according to the prime minister's office. — Xinhua

Child malnutrition claims lives of over 60 in N Afghanistan province

KABUL — More than 60 children have died from severe malnutrition over the past 11 months in northern Afghanistan's Badakhshan province, local media Tolo news reported yesterday.

According to the report, nearly 16,000 children were diagnosed with malnutrition during the period, with

16,468 cases officially registered and receiving treatment at health facilities across the province.

Several key factors driving child malnutrition in Badakhshan include a lack of mothers' milk, limited access to nutritious food, short intervals between births, and low public awareness about proper

child nutrition, the report said.

Local residents echoed these concerns, pointing to deepening poverty and shortages of medical facilities and trained health workers in rural areas. Many villages remain far from clinics, making timely diagnosis and treatment difficult, especially during harsh weather conditions. — Xinhua

Chagos Islands: int'l dispute & human drama

NAIROBI – Britain agreed to return the Chagos Islands to Mauritius in May 2025 – a move described by US President Donald Trump as “an act of great stupidity” yesterday.

The remote Indian Ocean archipelago was bought by Britain in 1965 before Mauritius gained independence, after which it expelled the local population and leased the territory to the United States for what became one of its most important military bases.

Britain's ownership was disputed for years, with the United Nations ruling in 2019 that the UK should hand back the roughly 55 islands and atolls.

Mass eviction

In 1965, Britain separated the Chagos Islands from the rest of Mauritius, then a semi-autonomous British territory, and paid £3 million to acquire them, the equivalent of around US\$65 million today.

When Mauritius became independent three years later, the islands remained under British control and were renamed the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT).

In 1966, Britain leased the islands to the US for 50 years so that it could set up a military base. In 2016, the deal was extended to 2036.

Between 1968 and 1973, around 2,000 Chagos islanders were evicted, described in a British diplomatic cable at the time as the removal of a few “Tarzans and Man Fridays”. Most were shipped to Mauritius and the Seychelles.

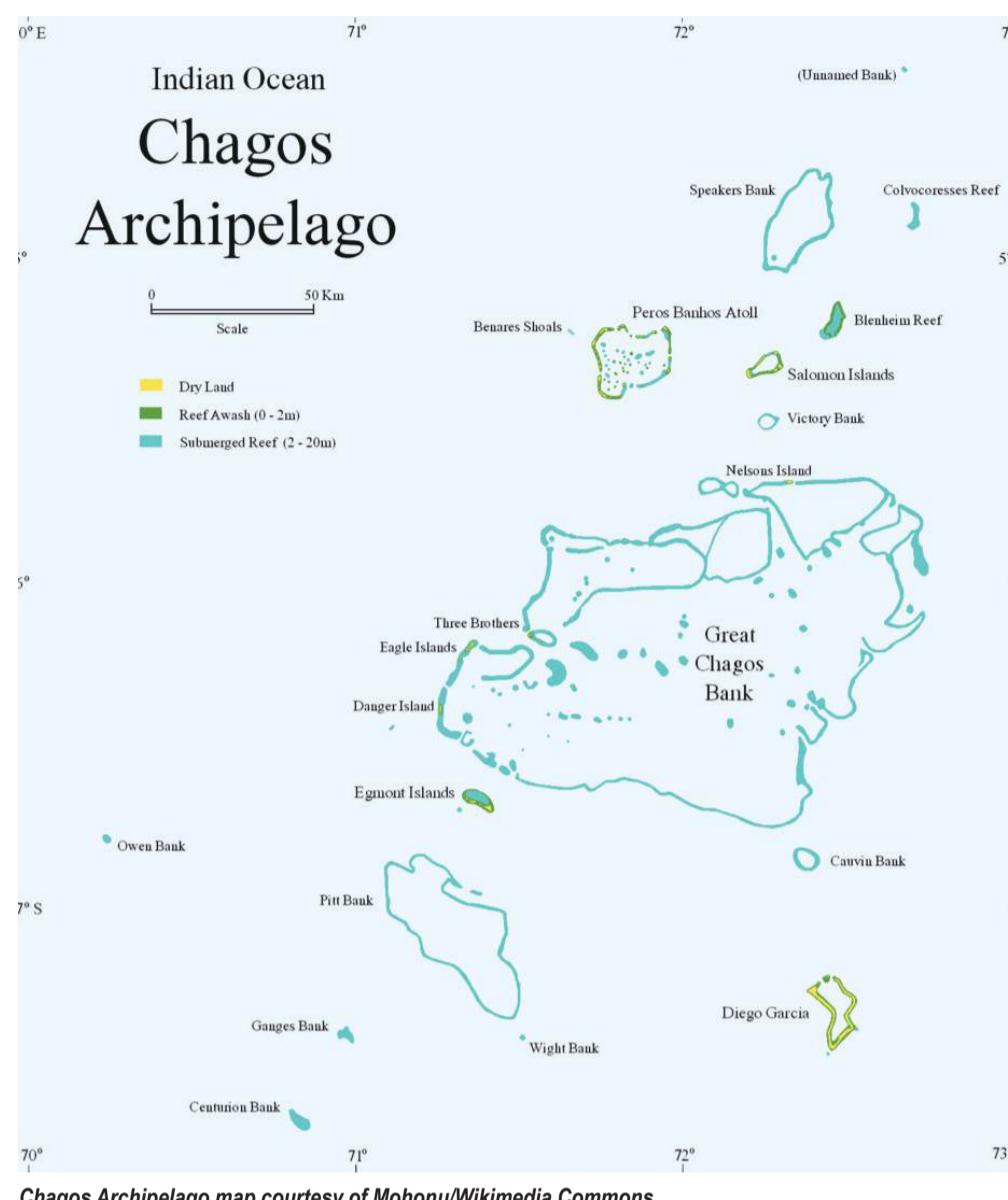
Mauritius argued it was illegal for Britain to break up its territory and demanded the right to resettle former residents.

Strategic military base

The US military base on Diego Garcia, the largest island, took a major strategic role in the Cold War.

It offered proximity to Asia as an assertive Soviet navy was extending communist influence in the Indian Ocean.

After the 1979 Iranian revolution, the US expanded the base to receive more



Chagos Archipelago map courtesy of Mohonu/Wikimedia Commons

warships and heavy bombers.

It later served as a staging ground for US bombing campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, and was used recently to launch B-2 bomber attacks on Houthi rebels in Yemen during the Gaza war.

Islands returned

Britain signed a deal with Mauritius in May 2025 to return the islands, while paying

to lease Diego Garcia for US\$136 million annually for 99 years, which London says will secure the use of the military base.

It follows decades of legal wrangling dating back to 1975 when Chagos islanders living in Mauritius launched legal proceedings against their expulsion, resulting in a 1982 payment of four million pounds in compensation along with land valued at one million pounds.

In 2007, a British appeals court paved

the way for Chagossians to return home but its decision was annulled by the upper branch of parliament, the House of Lords, the following year.

In 2016, the British government confirmed its opposition to the resettlement of Chagossians, including for reasons of defence, security and cost.

Today, around 10,000 Chagossians and their descendants are divided between Mauritius, the Seychelles, and Britain.

ICJ ruling

In 2010, Britain declared the islands part of a Marine Protected Area, arguing that people should not be permitted to live there.

Diplomatic cables revealed by WikiLeaks quoted a British official as saying the plan “put paid to the resettlement claims of the archipelago's former residents”.

The move backfired as a UN arbitration tribunal declared it illegal in 2015. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) stated in 2019 that Britain had illegally split the islands and should relinquish control.

Britain rejected the ruling, insisting that Mauritius was wrong to bring the case to court, and arguing the Diego Garcia base played a “vital role” in keeping the region safe.

Later that year, a UN General Assembly resolution demanded Britain cede the islands.

Colonial history

Located several hundred kilometres south of the Maldives, the Chagos Islands were colonised by France in the 18th century and African slaves were shipped in to cultivate coconuts and copra.

In 1814, France was made to cede the islands to Britain, which in 1903 merged them with Mauritius, its colony around 2,000 kilometres to the southwest.

After the abolition of slavery in 1834, Indian workers arrived and mixed with the first settlers.

Only three of the islands were inhabited: Diego Garcia, Salomon and Peros Banhos.

— AFP

Yazidi survivor of IS says world has abandoned Kurds who battled ‘evil’

BEIRUT – Nadia Murad, a prominent rights activist and Yazidi survivor of sexual slavery at the hands of the Islamic State (IS) group, condemned yesterday what she said was the world's abandonment of the Kurds in Syria.

Murad, who won the Nobel Peace Prize for her work, pointed to the key role Kurdish forces played in the defeat of IS, which they achieved with the backing of a US-led coalition.

“Now, at a critical moment, those who stood on the front lines against evil are being abandoned. What the international community is doing in Syria – and across the broader region – is chaos, and innocent people will pay the price,” she wrote on X.

Murad is a prominent member of the Yazidi community of Iraq, a group whose distinct religious beliefs made them the target of IS in their 2014 onslaught across the Syria-Iraq border.

During their offensive, which UN investigators and several countries went on to condemn as a genocide, jihadists killed men en masse and abducted thousands of women and girls as sex slaves.

Murad set up an initiative to support

survivors of sexual violence after she escaped captivity in 2016, and went on to win the Nobel two years later.

She won the award along with Denis Mukwege, a doctor from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who has treated tens of thousands of women raped or mutilated by militias.

Murad helped shed a light on the terrible plight of women and girls at the hands of jihadists who at the height of their power held swathes of Syria and Iraq.

IS went on to be defeated in Iraq and then Syria with the backing of the United States, though isolated cells still operate in the Syrian desert.

In Syria, the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) carved out a de facto autonomous region under their control in areas populated by Kurds and which had been battlegrounds with IS.

This month, the SDF has suffered major blows at the hands of Syria's military, which is pushing to establish Damascus's authority across the country.

Yesterday, the army was deploying reinforcements to flashpoint areas in the north.

— AFP

UAE president accepts US invitation to join ‘Board of Peace’

DUBAI – The UAE's president has accepted an invitation to join US President Donald Trump's “Board of Peace”, the foreign ministry said yesterday, the body meant to oversee post-war reconstruction in Gaza.

The positive response comes amid controversy over the body, with Washington asking various leaders to sit on the Trump-chaired board on which a permanent seat costs US\$1.0 billion.

Although originally meant to oversee Gaza's rebuilding, its charter does not seem to limit its role to the Gaza Strip, and appears to want to rival the United Nations.

“Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, has accepted the invitation from the United States to join the Board of Peace,” the ministry said in a statement.

The move comes amid tensions between the United States' top Arab allies the UAE and Saudi Arabia, both of which have sought to curry favour with the Trump administration with pledges of investment and business deals.

The board's charter, seen by AFP, says that member countries will serve no longer than three years, subject to renewal by the chairman.

However, the three-year restriction does not apply if they “contribute more than US\$1,000,000,000 in cash funds to the Board of Peace within the first year of the Charter's entry into force”.

Emirati Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed said “the UAE's decision reflects the importance of fully implementing President Donald J Trump's 20-point peace plan for Gaza, which is critical for the realisation of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people”.

The oil-rich UAE is a top US ally in the region and one of the few Arab nations with official ties to Israel after signing the Abraham Accords during Trump's first term in 2020.

Abu Dhabi has faced a backlash in the Arab world over its Israel ties, especially since the Gaza war and its humanitarian consequences for Palestinians in the enclave.

But the UAE has continued to provide aid to the Gaza Strip, including with air drops when Israel limited land entry during the war.

The UAE also has a state minister, Reem Al Hashimy, sitting on a subcommittee of the board.

The board is a key phase-two element of a US-backed peace plan to end the war in Gaza, which came into force on October 10 last year.

— AFP

Poland moves to phase out aid for Ukrainian refugees

WARSAW — Poland's government yesterday moved to phase out assistance for Ukrainian refugees put in place when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, as public support for the aid wanes.

"After four years, the situation is more stable" in Ukraine, Adam Szlapka, spokesman for Poland's pro-European government, said at a press conference.

"These extraordinary regulations can be phased out and we can move from temporary solutions to systemic ones."

The draft law, which will now go to parliament, says initial aid for Ukrainians was "adopted as an emergency, temporary measure".

It includes plans to repeal previous provisions creating a separate system of assistance for Ukrainians, and would eliminate most of their special entitlements to social benefits, accommodation and medical care.

Some existing protections, such as means of confirming legal residence and identity, will be retained.

The draft law has drawn criticism, including from business interests.

The Lewiatan Confederation, an NGO representing Polish entrepreneurs, argues the move "could paralyse the labour market".

Macron says prefers 'respect to bullies'

DAVOS, Switzerland — President Emmanuel Macron said yesterday France preferred "respect to bullies" and rejected "unacceptable" tariffs, following US President Donald Trump's threat to impose levies on countries opposing his plans to seize Greenland.

"France and Europe are attached to national sovereignty and independence, to the United Nations and to its charter," he said at the World Economic Forum in Davos, as his US counterpart seeks to take over the Danish autonomous territory, and has invited countries around the world to a new global "Board of Peace".

"We will do our best in order to have a stronger Europe, much stronger and more autonomous," he said, wearing a pair of aviator sunglasses after appearing in public with a bloodshot eye last week.

"Here in the epicentre of this continent, we do believe that we need more growth, we need more stability in this world," he added.

"But we do prefer respect to bullies," the French president said. "And we do prefer rule of law to brutality."

The French leader warned of "a shift towards a world without rules", one "without effective collective governance", leading to "relentless competition".

Macron described "competition from the United States of America through trade agreements that undermine our export interests, demand maximum concessions, and openly aim to weaken and subordinate Europe".

They were "combined with an endless accumulation of new tariffs that are fundamentally unacceptable — even more so when they are used as leverage against territorial sovereignty", he said.

Last week, Macron had appeared on stage with a bloodshot eye for a New Year's address to the military, asking his audience to "please excuse the unsightly look of my eye".

— AFP

California governor urges Europe: Grow 'backbone' and 'punch' back at Trump

DAVOS, Switzerland — California Governor Gavin Newsom urged Europeans yesterday to stop playing nice with US President Donald Trump over Greenland, "develop a backbone" and "punch him in the face".

In blunt remarks to reporters at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, the prominent

Democratic politician called Trump "weak" and said the European Union should "push back very aggressively" against the US leader.

"He's good at exploiting weaknesses, but he backs down when he's punched in the face," Newsom said.

"You can't play all sides. Enough of the niceties," he added. "Stop trying

to appease him. Fight fire with fire."

He called Trump's bid to take over Greenland "madness" but said the US president would not try to seize it "militarily".

"This whole excursion in Greenland is absurd and people need to recognise what they're up against and stand tall and firm,

Venezuela taps new investment czar as US oil firms eye return

CARACAS — Venezuela's interim president Delcy Rodríguez has appointed a US-educated banker to head the South American country's major investment agency, as she sacked a close ally of her ousted predecessor Nicolás Maduro.

Rodríguez said she dismissed Alex Saab, a Colombian-born Venezuelan businessman, from the International Centre for Productive Investment (CIIP), which is responsible for attracting foreign investment.

The move marks another possible signal to Washington that Venezuela is adopting a more cooperative stance regarding its energy sector and US oil companies eyeing a return to the country.

Late Monday she announced Saab's replacement as Calixto Ortega, a former Venezuelan central bank president and ex-diplomat

once posted to Houston — the Texas city at the centre of the US oil refining industry.

Ortega's appointment "will allow the continued attraction of national and international investment for the national productive system in this stage of economic recovery," Rodríguez posted on X.

Installing Ortega in the role could be aimed at smoothing relations between Caracas and the US energy industry after President Donald Trump ordered the raid which captured Maduro and his wife and brought them to New York to face trial on drug-trafficking charges.

Trump has said Washington now controls Venezuela, and he supports Rodríguez as the country's new president so long as she toes the line on US access to Venezuela's vast oil reserves.

He has said he expects US oil companies to make a high-profile return to Venezuela.

Saab's ouster comes days after Rodríguez also sacked him from the post of industry minister, a job Maduro appointed him to in October 2024 shortly after his release from the United States as part of a prisoner exchange.

Washington had accused Saab of money laundering. He had become close to Venezuela's government in the final years of leftist firebrand Hugo Chávez's 1999-2013 presidency and then managed a vast import network for Maduro's administration.

Rodríguez, furthering the changes she has made as Venezuela's new leader after serving as vice president under Maduro, also announced the appointment of a new health minister. — AFP

Thousands of farmers protest EU, Mercosur trade deal ahead of vote

Pauline Froissart

STRASBOURG, France — Thousands of farmers driving tractors and waving flags descended yesterday on the European parliament in Strasbourg in protest at a major trade deal signed with South America, ahead of a vote on whether to refer it to the courts.

The deal inked earlier this month between the 27-nation European Union and Mercosur/Mercosul bloc members Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay creates one of the world's largest free trade areas after 25 years of tricky negotiations.

But the 4,500 farmers and their supporters from France, Italy, Belgium and Poland protesting yesterday, according to police estimates, fear it will cause an influx of cheaper goods produced with lower standards and banned pesticides.

"This free trade may, in some cases, open up opportunities for Italy and reduce customs duties, but it endangers everyone's health," said Nicolò Koliotassis, 23, a winemaker and member of the Italian farmers' union Coldiretti.

Although final approval on the Mercosur treaty is not expected for several months, members of the European Parliament (MEPs) will vote today on whether to refer the deal to the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) to determine if the agreement is compatible with EU policy.

The court's ruling could then



Protesters walk among tear gas smoke during clashes with police outside the European Parliament building during a protest against the recently signed free trade agreement between the European Union and the Mercosur/Mercosul countries, on the eve of a vote on a referral to the courts, in Strasbourg yesterday.

— AFP

force the deal to be amended.

"We want MEPs to do their job, to appeal to the court so the agreement can be reviewed," Emmanuelle Poirier, 45, told AFP. The French cattle breeder added she fears "mass imports of meat that do not meet France's specifications."

Farmers plan to remain in Strasbourg until today.

The treaty, expected to come into force by the end of the year, eliminates tariffs on more than 90 percent of bilateral trade.

The deal will favour European exports of cars, wine and cheese, while making it easier for South American beef, poultry, sugar, rice,

honey and soybeans to enter Europe.

French farmer Baptiste Mary, 24, warned it would result in food imports "produced in a way completely different from Europe, with more crop protection products and different standards," while carrying a sign that read: "Mercosur = certain death".

According to EU estimates, European exports to Mercosur/Mercosul are expected to rise by 39 percent, while the bloc's exports to the EU could increase by 17 percent.

Mercosur is the Spanish acronym of the Southern Economic Market, Mercosul being its Portuguese acronym.

— AFP, MPD

develop a backbone and speak with one unified voice. Punch him in the face," Newsom said.

The US president, who will address the annual gathering of global elites today, has put the transatlantic alliance to the test with his demand to take over Greenland.

The EU is weighing counter-

measures after he threatened levies on eight European countries, though Washington has said any retaliatory levies would be "unwise".

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen told the meeting of global political and business elites that the EU's response would be "unflinching, united and proportional". — AFP

Far-right progress to presidential run-off vote shakes Portugal's politics

Thomas Cabral

LISBON – A far-right contender has reached the second round of Portugal's presidential election for the first time, unsettling mainstream parties and the right-wing minority government of Prime Minister Luis Montenegro.

Socialist candidate António José Seguro topped the first-round ballot on Sunday and will now face off against the far-right's André Ventura, whom he outscored with a vote share of 31.1 percent to 23.5, according to official near-complete results.

Leading newspaper *Público* said on Monday the run-off on February 8 would be a battle between moderation and extremism.

Although he failed to top the first-round standings in line with pre-vote opinion polls, Ventura, of the far-right Chega ("Enough!") party, eased out liberal rival João Cotrim Figueiredo and government-endorsed candidate Luis Marques Mendes.

Cotrim came third with 16 percent, while Mendes trailed in fifth place with just 11.3 percent.

This was the first time in four decades that a candidate had not won outright in the first-round ballot.

Pollsters predict Seguro will trounce Ventura in the run-off vote to succeed outgoing conservative president Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa.

Sunday's outcome was nonetheless "another step forward for the electoral and political growth of the radical right", said António Costa Pinto of the Institute of Social Sciences at the University of Lisbon.

"What matters now is what level of hegemony Ventura will achieve on the right, depending on his election results" in the run-off vote, Costa Pinto told AFP.

"That represents a major problem for a minority government which must negotiate with André Ventura in order to survive," he concluded.

Major problem

In a sign of the difficulty in which Montenegro finds himself,



The leader of the far-right Chega ("Enough!") party, presidential candidate André Ventura addresses supporters on the night of Portugal's presidential election first round in Lisbon on Sunday. – AFP

the prime minister declined on Sunday evening to advise traditional conservatives to vote for either Seguro or Ventura.

"This may serve him in the short term, in order not to alienate André Ventura's voters, but the lack of demarcation may ultimately penalise him electorally," said political science professor Paula Espírito Santo.

Even though Ventura failed to garner most votes in the first round, he achieved "a major victory, insofar as he has overtaken the traditional right-wing parties and confirmed his status as leader of the opposition", said Espírito Santo, who works at Lisbon University's Higher Institute of Social and Political Sciences.

Chega became the biggest opposition party in the May 2025 general election, replacing the Socialists, when it won 22.8 percent of the vote and 60 parliamentary seats.

Espírito Santo said the presidential election might help boost Chega's standing in the next legislative polls, pointing out that Ventura has made no secret of his ambition to become prime minister.

Unpredictability

Although observers say Seguro

remains favourite to become president, some sounded a note of caution, given the fragmentation of the Portuguese electorate.

"There is still an element of unpredictability," said Espírito Santo, although she stressed Ventura was unlikely to galvanise sufficient support to win.

This did not mean Seguro, a Socialist from the political centre, had an easy task ahead, cautioned Costa Pinto.

He "is the probable next president – but he will have to mobilise more voters", he said.

Seguro would need to keep pushing a moderate's pitch to win over centrist and above all centre-right voters.

Ventura would, by contrast, seek to "polarise" the contest and to "blackmail" other leaders on the right by making them appear responsible for handing the left a victory by not supporting him, Costa Pinto said.

Público said in an editorial on Monday the second-round ballot would be a battle "between moderation and radicalism" in a political landscape that has become starkly fragmented. – AFP



Residents wade through floodwater caused by heavy rainfall in Matola City, Maputo Province, Mozambique, last week. Mozambique is at the peak of its rainy season, a period marked by frequent alerts for heavy rains, strong winds and severe floods, particularly in the central and southern regions. – Xinhua

Cape Verde announces dates for legislative, presidential elections

PRAIA – Cape Verde will hold legislative elections on May 17 and a presidential election on November 15, President José Maria Neves announced on Monday following a meeting of the Council of the Republic, an advisory body to the head of state.

The setting of election dates is a constitutional requirement, Neves pointed out, noting that parliamentary polls must be held within a 60-day

window surrounding the end of the current legislature.

"The National Assembly was constituted on May 19, so elections must be held between April 19 and June 19," he said. He added that the dates were determined after consultations with political parties registered with the Constitutional Court.

If no candidate secures an outright majority, a second round of

the presidential election will be held on November 29.

Neves said that the National Elections Commission has confirmed that all conditions are in place for the legislative polls to proceed as scheduled. He called on political actors and civil society to exercise restraint and engage in high-level debate to ensure inclusive and peaceful elections. – Xinhua

Spain mourns as train disaster toll rises to 41

Imran Marashli and Daniel Silva

ADAMUZ – Spain began three days of national mourning yesterday for 41 people killed after two high-speed trains collided in the country's deadliest train accident in over a decade.

The disaster took place late Sunday when a train operated by rail company Iryo, travelling from Málaga to Madrid, derailed near Adamuz in the southern Andalusia region.

It crossed on to the other track, where it crashed into an oncoming train, which also derailed.

The death toll rose to 41 after the body of a passenger was recovered on Monday evening from one of the Iryo train carriages, the regional government said.

Over 120 people were injured, with 39 still in hospital yesterday, including four children, it added.

Flags flew at half-mast on public buildings, television anchors wore black, and cabinet ministers curtailed public appearances as Spain observed the first of three days of national mourning.

Heavy machinery was deployed on Monday to lift the most severely damaged train carriages and give rescuers better access.

The head of Andalusia's regional government, Juan Manuel Moreno, warned on Monday it would take another 24-48 hours "to know with certainty how many deaths have resulted from this terrible accident".

King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia met with rescuers and officials in Adamuz yesterday.

Harrowing

Aerial footage of the crash site from Spain's Guardia Civil police showed the two trains far apart, as rescuers in high-visibility neon vests worked nearby.

Among the survivors is a six-year-old girl who lost her parents, brother and cousin in the crash, according to Spanish media.

The 27-year-old driver of one of the trains was among those killed, daily newspaper *El País* reported.

The collision occurred in a hilly, olive-growing region accessible only by a single-track road, making it difficult for

ambulances to reach the area.

Firefighter Ángel Uceda, who was among the first rescuers on the scene, told the Onda Cero radio station that mobile phones were ringing beside injured victims as he entered the wrecked train carriages.

"It was harrowing, but we had to do our job and do what was needed," he said.

Unlike the 2013 accident, the derailment occurred on a straight section of track, and the trains were travelling within the speed limit, officials said.

Transport Minister Oscar Puente said the first train to derail was "practically new" and the section of the track where the disaster happened had been recently renovated, making the accident "extremely strange".

The company said around 300 people were on board its service from the Andalusian city of Málaga to the capital, Madrid. Renfe, the operator of the second train travelling to the southern city of Huelva, said it was carrying 184 passengers.

Solidarity

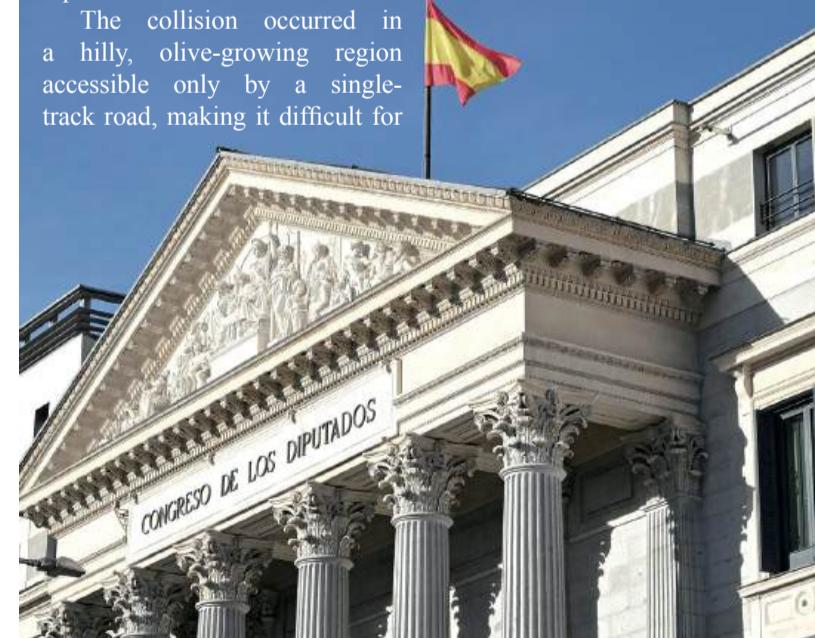
Human error has "been practically ruled out", Renfe President Álvaro Fernández Heredia told Spanish public radio RNE.

Heredia also ruled out speeding as a cause of the accident. He said both trains were travelling just over 200 kilometres per hour, below the 250 kilometres per hour limit for that section of track.

Spain has Europe's largest high-speed rail network, with more than 3,000 kilometres of dedicated tracks connecting major cities including Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, Valencia and Málaga.

In Adamuz, where white buildings gleam among orange-lined streets, residents rushed to the town hall with supplies as news of the disaster spread.

"We started bringing water, blankets, everything we could," Manuel Muñoz, a 60-year-old olive oil factory worker, told AFP. – AFP



Spain's flag flies at half-mast at the Congress of Deputies in Madrid on Monday, one day after high-speed train derailed and was hit by another train killing at 41 passengers and injuring more than 120 in Adamuz, southern Spain. – AFP

Football shorts

Last in Ligue 1, Metz fire coach Le Mignan

METZ – Ligue 1 strugglers Metz yesterday sacked coach Stephane Le Mignan and replaced him with Benoit Tavenot.

LIGUE 1 The club said in a statement that Le Mignan, who took over in the summer of 2024 after the club was relegated, had been “relieved of his duties”.

Tavenot was an assistant coach at the club from 2019 to 2022.

Le Mignan led Metz back to Ligue 1 in the summer of 2025.

But the club are having a disastrous season. They sit bottom of the table with 12 points from 18 games after three wins, three draws, 12 defeats.

Metz started the season with three consecutive losses, and did not win until matchday 10 in late October, when they beat Lens, who have since climbed to the top of the table, 2-0.

That heralded a brief upturn, but Metz have not won in six league games and are bottom on goal difference behind Auxerre.

Metz are two points behind Nantes, who occupy the relegation playoff spot, and six behind Nice in the 15th, a position that guarantees survival.

What ultimately cost Le Mignan his job was the attitude of his players, particularly in a 4-0 French Cup loss to Ligue 2 Montpellier on January 11.

They then lost 2-1 on January 18 to Strasbourg.

Metz host fourth-placed Lyon on Sunday.

– AFP

Rosenior keen to build winning ties with ‘world-class’ Fernandez

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE LONDON – Chelsea boss Liam Rosenior said he is hoping Enzo Fernandez can be convinced to remain at Stamford Bridge for the long term by success on the pitch.

The Argentina World Cup winner, who joined Chelsea from Benfica in 2023 for a then British record transfer fee of £107 million (US\$144 million), has been linked with a move to Real Madrid.

“It means nothing to me. When you are a world-class player there will always be speculation you cannot control,” Rosenior said ahead of his team’s Champions League home game against Pafos today.

“Enzo has been outstanding and he has surprised me in a good way --in terms of what he did on Saturday, covering the ground he did when he was ill.

“He is a Chelsea player, he is very important to me and hopefully we will have a winning relationship in the short-term and long-term.”

The 25-year-old missed training on Monday due to an illness which has affected a number of Chelsea players and staff.

In Rosenior’s first experience of Champions League football, the Blues can assure themselves of at least a place in the play-off round with victory over the Cypriot champions.

Chelsea are 13th in the 36-team table and would realistically need to win both their remaining games, including a trip to Napoli next week, to have any chance of making the top eight and securing direct passage into the last 16.

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

– AFP/MPD

S Korea’s women footballers threaten boycott over conditions

SEOUL – South Korea’s women’s football team threatened to boycott matches ahead of March’s Asian Cup over “discriminatory conditions” provided by their country’s football association, documents revealed yesterday.

The Korea Professional Footballers’ Association made public a joint statement that they sent with national team players to the Korea Football Association (KFA) in September last year, complaining of “poor conditions” on national team duty.

The statement said that players faced gruelling long journeys on buses and economy-class flights and were forced to stay in “inadequate” accommodation far from training grounds.

It also said that players were required to personally pay for items including airport transfers and training kit.

The statement, dated September 26, said that players would boycott games and “suspend participation in all training related to the upcoming 2026 AFC Women’s Asian Cup” if the KFA did not respond by October 17.

A KFA official told AFP yesterday that they had been “internally reviewing step-by-step improvements and discussing the issue internally since we received the statement”.

The 12-team Women’s Asian Cup will be held in Australia from March 1 to 21.

South Korea have been drawn in a first-round group with Australia, Iran and the Philippines.

The players’ statement said that “for many years, women’s national team players have silently endured poor and unreasonable conditions, sustained solely by their pride as ‘national representatives’”.

It said there were “clear and undeniable differences” from the conditions enjoyed by the men’s national team.

– AFP



Salah back in Liverpool squad after AFCON

LIVERPOOL – Mohamed Salah made his much-anticipated return to the Liverpool squad yesterday following the Africa Cup of Nations as the club prepare to face Marseille in the Champions League.

A smiling Salah was put through his paces at the club’s training centre with the rest of Arne Slot’s squad ahead of today’s match in France.

The return of the Egypt forward has been a major talking point after he took aim at Liverpool in an explosive interview early last month.

Salah accused the club of throwing him “under the bus” after he was benched for three games in a row and said he had no relationship with Slot.

But he appeared as a substitute in a 2-0 Premier League win against Brighton on December 13, providing an assist, and Slot subsequently said the club had moved on from the furore.

Last week, Slot said he welcomed Salah’s return, refusing to divulge the content of his conversations with the 33-year-old, whose team finished fourth at the Africa Cup of Nations.

Slot said before Saturday’s 1-1 draw against struggling Burnley he was unsure whether the forward would face Marseille.

But yesterday afternoon Liverpool said Salah had been named in the 20-man squad for the trip to France.

“Mohamed Salah is included having returned to the club after representing Egypt at the Africa Cup of Nations,” a statement on the club’s official website said.

Liverpool are currently ninth in the league phase of the Champions League.

The top eight qualify automatically for the last 16 while teams placed from ninth to 24th face a play-off round.

Salah is Liverpool’s third-highest goalscorer of all time with 250 goals in 421 appearances, winning two Premier League titles and the Champions League since joining from Roma in 2017.

He signed a lucrative new two-year contract last year as he played a starring role in guiding Liverpool to a record-equalling 20th English top-flight title.

But he has been a shadow of his former self during Liverpool’s struggles this season, managing just five goals in all competitions.

Liverpool’s Premier League defence collapsed with a run of six defeats in seven matches starting in late September.

The club are now unbeaten in 12 games in all competitions but remain 14 points behind Premier League leaders Arsenal.

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

– AFP/MPD



Supporters cheer as the Senegalese football players ride on a bus during a trophy parade in the streets of Dakar yesterday as they celebrate Senegal winning the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) that was hosted in Morocco. Senegal won the Africa Cup of Nations in Rabat on Sunday, Pape Gueye’s extra-time winner sinking hosts Morocco 1-0 after a chaotic final that saw the eventual champions storm off the pitch late in the game.

– AFP

E Africa to deliver ‘huge and memorable’ AFCON 2027, says Ugandan football head

CAF KAMPALA – The President of the Federation of Uganda Football Associations (FUFA), Moses Hassim Magogo, has expressed confidence that Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania will successfully co-host the 2027 CAF Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON).

In an interview with Xinhua yesterday, Magogo assured football fans that the three East African nations are working closely to ensure a well-organised and memorable AFCON in 2027.

“It is the first time we shall be hosting AFCON in the East African region and we want to make it huge and memorable,” Magogo said.

He noted that serious preparations are already under way

following the official handover of the Confederation of African Football (CAF) flag to the 2027 co-hosts at the conclusion of the AFCON tournament in Morocco on Sunday.

“We are not taking the hosting of AFCON 2027 lightly because it is a dream that will come true and we want everyone around the world who loves football to come and enjoy East Africa and the sweet hospitality as well,” he added.

Magogo also said the tournament is expected to strengthen regional cooperation, boost tourism and place East African football talent firmly in the global spotlight.

“We cannot have the same high class facilities like Morocco who hosted the AFCON that ended on

Sunday. But we have all it takes as Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania to organize a very successful tournament that many people will love and talk about for years,” he said.

According to Magogo, hosting AFCON 2027 will rank among Uganda’s biggest sporting achievements.

“We are still very determined to work hard and try to achieve more,” Magogo added.

At the recently concluded AFCON in Morocco, two teams from the Council of East and Central Africa Football Associations (CECAFA) - Sudan and Tanzania - advanced to the round of 16, while Uganda failed to progress beyond the group stage.

– Xinhua

Osaka steals show at Australian Open as Sinner strolls through

Peter Stebbings

AO MELBOURNE — Jannik Sinner barely broke sweat in launching his quest to win a third Australian Open in a row yesterday as Naomi Osaka stole the show with a bold fashion statement. (See page 16)

Popular Frenchman Gael Monfils meanwhile bid farewell to Melbourne Park with an epic defeat and thanks for "an amazing ride".

The Italian Sinner strolled into round two when French opponent Hugo Gaston retired on Rod Laver Arena with the second seed in full control at 6-2, 6-1.

Gaston, who had an abdominal injury, slumped to his chair and shook his head as his tournament ended in distress.

Two-time reigning champion Sinner said it was not how he wanted to win, but was pleased with his night's work.

"I knew from the beginning that I had to play a very high level and was trying to be as aggressive as possible, which I've done," he said.

Should he win three titles in a row in Melbourne, Sinner would join Novak Djokovic as the only men in the Open era to do so.

Great entertainer Monfils was bundled out in the first round in a brave goodbye to a tournament he has lit up so many times down the years.

The 39-year-old, one of the most colourful and popular players in men's tennis, battled all the way but Australian qualifier Dane Sweeny prevailed 6-7 (3/7), 7-5, 6-4, 7-5 in an epic lasting nearly four hours.

There was an on-court presentation and standing ovation afterwards for Monfils, who said: "Somehow it is the finish line, but thank you so much for an amazing ride."

Monfils, who has won 13 ATP titles in a career stretching back to 2004, said in October that this year would be his last in tennis.

Italian fifth seed Lorenzo Musetti moved on when his Belgian opponent Raphael Collignon retired in the fourth set.

Ben Shelton, the eighth seed and a semi-finalist last year, saw off France's Ugo Humbert, 6-3, 7-6 (7/2), 7-6 (7/5).

But Brazilian 19-year-old Joao



Indonesia's Janice Tjen hits a return to Canada's Leylah Fernandez during their singles match at the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. Tjen won the game 6-2, 7-6 (7/1). — AFP

Fonseca, touted on the eve of the tournament by Roger Federer as a star of the future, was dumped out by Eliot Spizzirri at the first hurdle.

The American defied the crowd of chanting Brazilian fans to win 6-4, 2-6, 6-1, 6-2.

Jellyfish-inspired

Former world number one Osaka emerged for the last match on Rod Laver Arena clutching a white parasol and wearing a matching wide-brimmed hat and veil.

The 28-year-old from Japan is well known for her on- and off-court fashion statements.

She wore her latest outfit as she came out for her night match against Croatia's Antonia Ruzic.

She waved regally to the crowd and the four-time Grand Slam champion then folded up the umbrella and neatly put the hat and veil to the side.

Osaka, a two-time former champion, went on to win 6-3, 3-6, 6-4 and said of her eye-catching outfit: "It is modelled after jellyfish, it's really beautiful."

In the first match of the day, Madison Keys admitted being "very nervous" as she launched her title

defence with a shaky win.

Keys lost the first four games before rallying to beat Ukraine's Oleksandra Oliynykova 7-6 (8/6), 6-1.

"I've been thinking about this moment for basically a year," the American said of walking out on centre court again.

Keys stunned Aryna Sabalenka 12 months ago in a three-set classic to win her first major crown at the age of 29, but she failed to push on, winning no more titles in 2025.

She threatened to implode against the Ukrainian ranked 92, before finding her feet to pull away in the second set.

Janice Tjen clocked another milestone in her rapid rise as she became the first Indonesian to win a match at the Australian Open in 28 years.

Unseeded Tjen stunned Canadian 22nd seed Leylah Fernandez 6-2, 7-6 (7/1).

Tjen, who this time last year was ranked 413 but is now the world number 59, is the first Indonesian to win a match at the major since Yayuk Basuki in 1998.

Also through was Elena Rybakina, the fifth seed from Kazakhstan. — AFP

Sport in brief

Mercedes chief designer Owen to leave F1 team

F1

LONDON — Mercedes chief designer John Owen is to leave the Formula One team later this year, it was announced yesterday.

Owen, 52, joined the British-based outfit in 2007, when it was Honda, and has been a key figure in championships won under the name Brawn in 2009 and Mercedes from 2010.

Brawn GP clinched both the drivers' and teams' championships in 2009 and the team won seven drivers' and eight constructors' championships as Mercedes from 2014 to 2021.

"We can confirm that John Owen, our director

of car design, has decided that now is the right time to take a break from F1 and that he will be leaving the team later this year to begin a period of gardening leave, after assuring the transition to his successor," Mercedes said in a statement.

"John has been with our Brackley team since 2007 and played a considerable role in our success."

Mercedes said Owen's role would be filled by Giacomo Tortora, currently engineering director, while deputy technical director Simone Resta will oversee the group.

Pre-season testing starts in Bahrain next month, ahead of the first Grand Prix of the season in Australia on March 8. — AFP



Golden State's Butler out for season with ACL injury: reports

PARIS — Golden State Warriors star Jimmy Butler could be out for the rest of the NBA season after suffering a serious right knee injury, US media reports said.

Butler was helped off the court after falling following a collision with the Heat's Davion Mitchell during Golden State's 135-112 win over his former team Miami on Monday.

The Warriors said the team would provide an update yesterday after waiting for

results from an overnight MRI scan.

But multiple media reports suggested that Butler, a six-time NBA All Star, had torn his anterior cruciate ligament and would not play again this season.

"We're all really concerned but we'll know more after the MRI obviously. We don't know anything at this point," said Golden State coach Steve Kerr.

"Everybody is subdued because of the injury waiting to hear the news."

The 36-year-old Butler has averaged 20.1 points a game in his first full season at Golden State since joining from Miami last year. — AFP

Haas first team to release images of 2026 F1 car

F1

PARIS — The American Formula 1 team Haas on Monday released the first images of its 2026 car, which will once again be driven by Esteban Ocon and Oliver Bearman.

The US-based team, set to contest its eleventh season in motorsport's top tier, has kept its traditional colours for the car, named the Haas VF-26, prominently featuring white, red, and black.

"Like all teams, we've faced the challenge of competing in 2025 while looking to design and now build these new-regulation entries for the 2026 season," said Gene Haas, owner of the American outfit.

Like the 10 other F1 teams, this new car will make its on-track debut next week during closed-door testing in Barcelona.

"It's been a monumental effort from everyone on the team to work with such a tight turnaround time from the end of last season to putting cars on track in January," said Ayo Komatsu, the team's Japanese principal.

"It goes without saying that after so much talk, we can't wait to see how these cars will perform."

The cars will evolve significantly this season as they must comply with new technical regulations that will make them smaller and lighter.

The power unit, hybrid since

2014, will also change, with a greater contribution from electric power and the use of "100 percent sustainable" fuels.

"Clearly, the biggest change is from the engine side, and that's going to be the key for us to be prepared. It's an exciting challenge, and it's a different way of driving compared to before," said French driver Ocon, who is set to contest his tenth F1 season.

"I think we can forget everything that we've learnt since go-karts on how to go fast but it will be interesting to learn a new driving style and hopefully find speed with it."

Teammate Bearman says the rule changes will create great uncertainty as the cars line up for the opening races of the season.

"It's impossible to gauge where we're going to be right now," said.

"Everything I'm seeing from the team is positive but we don't know how we stack up, and we won't know until qualifying in Australia."

"In the first few races reliability is going to be playing a big factor. There are going to be teams and people making mistakes with these new regulations. It's going to be tough to establish a true pecking order."

Haas finished eighth out of 10 in the 2025 Constructors' World Championship with 79 points.

The new season begins at the Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne on March 8. — AFP



France's Gael Monfils acknowledges the crowd after losing to Australia's Dane Sweeny in their singles match at the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. Entertainer Monfils was bundled out of the Australian Open in the first round yesterday in a brave farewell to a tournament he has lit up so many times.

The 39-year-old, one of the most colourful and popular players in men's tennis, battled all the way but qualifier Sweeny prevailed 6-7 (3/7), 7-5, 6-4, 7-5 in an epic lasting nearly four hours.

There was an on-court presentation and standing ovation afterwards for Monfils, who said: "Somehow it is the finish line, but thank you so much for an amazing ride. I have a lot of great memories here."

— AFP

Farewells, fresh faces at Men's Fashion Week in Paris

Adam Plowright

PARIS – Men's Fashion Week kicked off in Paris on Monday, featuring six days of trend-setting catwalk shows, a farewell at Hermès and tributes to late Italian fashion icon Valentino.

The first day of the Fall/Winter 2026 edition was dominated by the latest mega-production from Louis Vuitton's celebrity menswear designer Pharrell Williams, as well as mourning for one of the industry's biggest names.

Williams unveiled his collection at the brand's glitzy gallery space in western Paris under the shadow of the death of Italy's Valentino Garavani, who passed away on Monday at the age of 93.

The giant in the world of haute couture died at his home in Rome, just four months after the death of fellow Italian great Giorgio Armani.

In a sign of industrial renewal, however, French designer Jeanne Friot took her first steps on the daunting Paris calendar on Monday, with the young stylist telling AFP it was a "quite an unusual joy and stress" to take part.

French designer Véronique Nichanian will meanwhile present her last collection for Hermès on Saturday after 37 years at the helm.

The 71-year-old Parisian – one of the few women designing in menswear – will leave behind a brand in tremendous financial shape with an image of timeless, refined masculinity that she has helped shape.

Her successor, London designer Grace Wales Bonner, who is of English and Jamaican heritage, represents a generational and stylistic shift for the classic family-run French house.

Fresh faces

Many fashionistas cast an eye on yesterday's Christian Louboutin show where Jaden Smith – son of US rapper-actor Will Smith – presented his debut collection.

The model and musician, 27, was unveiled as the creative director of the famed French brand last September by founder Louboutin, who appears to be preparing to hand over the reins to the Gen Z trendsetter.

The choice is seen as a bold bet on relatively inexperienced youth

by the veteran maker of red-soled stilettos, whose ready-to-wear menswear and accessories are estimated by analysts to account for about a quarter of his sales.

Today, much-hyped Dior designer Jonathan Anderson will unveil his second Homme collection, having made his debut in June last year with a widely praised show of unisex styling.

But the 41-year-old's womenswear collection in September didn't convince everyone, and some observers expect him to put a more decisive mark on Dior and cement the new identity he's begun sketching out.

"There's a lot of anticipation," Alice Feillard, men's buying director at Paris department store Galeries Lafayette, told AFP.

The luxury fashion industry has undergone a wave of changes over the last 12 months at a time of weak international growth following the bumper buying frenzy of the post-COVID-19 period.

Slowing demand from China, US tariffs on imports and uncertainty about the global economy have all weighed on sales of European brands.

Kenzo house

New faces such as Anderson, Matthieu Blazy at Chanel, Demna at Gucci or Sarah Burton at Givenchy represent the elevation of a new stable of couturiers who look set to dominate the major houses over the next decade.

Elsewhere over the week, Japanese brands from Yohji Yamamoto and Issey Miyake to Mihara Yasuhiro will be out in force.

LMVH-owned Kenzo held a presentation instead of a runway show yesterday inside the vast Parisian house of late founder Kenzo Takada in the French capital's trendy 11th district.

The four-storey modernist building, which features a Japanese garden, hosted a day-long gathering of design, food and music curated by chief creative Nigo.

US designer Willy Chavarria, who is one of a handful unafraid to express political views, also returns for his third season in Paris and might have something to say about Donald Trump's presidency on Friday. – AFP



Italian actress Sophia Loren (left) and Italian fashion designer Valentino Garavani pose as they arrive to attend the Green Carpet Fashion Awards Italia 2019, during the Women's Spring Summer 2020 fashion week, on September 22, 2019 in Milan. – AFP

Italy's fashion king Valentino dies at 93

ROME – One of the top designers of his era, Italy's elegance aficionado Valentino Garavani spent nearly half a century dressing the world's great beauties, from Jackie Kennedy to Princess Diana before his death on Monday at age 93.

"Valentino Garavani passed away today at his Roman residence, surrounded by his loved ones," wrote his Rome-based foundation on social media on Monday.

His funeral is planned for Friday in the Italian capital, with a lying in state today and tomorrow.

Best known as just Valentino, the designer's creations – many of them in "Valentino red" – were worn by the who's who of the international elite, from Elizabeth Taylor, Audrey Hepburn and Nancy Reagan to Sharon Stone, Julia Roberts and Gwyneth Paltrow in recent years.

When the empress of Iran, Farah Pahlavi, escaped the country during the 1979 revolution, she was wearing a coat made by Valentino.

Dubbed "the Sheik of Chic" by *Women's Wear Daily* in the 1980s, Valentino was celebrated by *The New York Times* in 1997 for his "single-minded dedication to glamour."

On the catwalk and in his own life, Valentino exuded luxury down to the last detail of his immaculate hairdo and caramel tan.

With his five pet pug dogs and a private jet, he shuttled between his Roman palace, New York apartment, chateau near Paris, chalet in Switzerland and his 50-metre yacht.

Boyhood passion

Named after the star of silent cinema Rudolph Valentino, who was known for "The Sheik" among many other films, Valentino Garavani was born on May 11, 1932 in Voghera, a small town south of Milan. His father owned an electric cables business.

As a boy he asked for made-to-measure shoes and was passionate about fashion. "I have had this illness since childhood," he told the Italian edition of *Elle* magazine in 2007. "I only like beautiful things."

"I do not like seeing men without ties, in a jumper, women with vulgar make-up and shapeless trousers. It is a sign of a bad education and a lack of self-respect."

He left home when he was 17 to study at prestigious arts and fashion schools in Paris, where the decadent French style of Christian Dior had revitalised a grim post-World War II fashion industry and would deeply impact Valentino's later aesthetic.

In 1952 he was hired by designer Jean Desses, who dressed wealthy clients including royalty, and five years later he went to work for Guy Laroche.

Rome fashion empire

In 1960 Valentino opened his own fashion house in Rome – at the time a thriving star-studded city thanks to its vast Cinecittà film studios that acted as a branch of Hollywood.

He was assisted by his lover



Italian fashion king Valentino salutes the public at the end of his Autumn/Winter 2006-07 ready-to-wear collection show in Paris on March 5, 2006. – AFP

Giancarlo Giammetti, who had business know-how and would over the years transform the company into a global brand, shepherding it through successive buy-outs.

"Being the friend, lover and employee of Valentino for more than 45 years required a lot of patience," Giammetti said in the 2008 documentary, "Valentino: The Last Emperor".

Valentino turned heads immediately with his opening collection in 1962 in Florence, which already featured what would become his signature colour – the deep rich "Valentino red".

Jackie Kennedy

In his first decade Valentino dressed the likes of Anita Ekberg, Sophia Loren and Liz Taylor, but it was a meeting with Jackie Kennedy in 1964 that would prove decisive.

He transformed her wardrobe, and in 1968 she picked an ivory-coloured lace dress from his famous white collection for her second marriage to Greek shipping mogul Aristotle Onassis.

It caused a sensation in the United States, and in 1970, Valentino was the first Italian designer to open a shop in New York. Over the years he would elevate the "Made in Italy" label to global prominence.

"I love a woman who eats food, who has a body, that is a woman

and not a stick," he said, quoted in *The New Yorker* in 2005, and underscoring his preference for sensual, figure-hugging designs.

Emperor bows out

For the 2006 Oscar-nominated Hollywood film "The Devil Wears Prada", starring Meryl Streep as a powerful fashion editor, Valentino made a cameo appearance at the recreation of one of his shows.

A year later and nearly a half-century after his first runway, he presented his last collection in Paris before retiring in January 2008.

"Valentino transported his audience to his world, where women in bubble gum pink cocktail dresses swing bags made of feathers and have high heels tied with satin ribbons and bows," said celebrated fashion critic Suzy Menkes in her write-up of the show in *The New York Times*.

In 2011 the Valentino Garavani Virtual Museum opened, offering an immersive 3D experience into the history and creations of the fashion house, and giving the world its first-ever virtual fashion museum.

"At some point, you do get to the end," Valentino told *The New Yorker* in 2005 as he approached retirement. "And when I do, I hope I will be remembered as a man who pursued beauty whenever he could." (Related photo on page 16) – AFP

World Weather

| CHINA | ASIA-PACIFIC | WORLD | LUSOPHONE |
|------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Beijing -14°C~1°C | Manila 21°C~31°C | New York 1°C~2°C | Lisbon 11°C~16°C |
| Shanghai -3°C~5°C | Bangkok 23°C~33°C | London 9°C~11°C | Rio de Janeiro 21°C~23°C |
| Hong Kong 10°C~17°C | Tokyo -2°C~6°C | Frankfurt -4°C~3°C | Luanda 25°C~30°C |
| Taipei 10°C~14°C | Singapore 23°C~32°C | Vancouver 2°C~9°C | Maputo 22°C~26°C |
| Guangzhou 6°C~16°C | Kuala Lumpur 22°C~33°C | Paris 7°C~12°C | Dili 24°C~31°C |
| Nanjing -7°C~1°C | Jakarta 23°C~28°C | Moscow -7°C~2°C | São Tomé 26°C~31°C |
| Guilin 0°C~4°C | Seoul -14°C~6°C | Las Vegas 8°C~17°C | Praia 19°C~25°C |
| Xi'an -6°C~3°C | Sydney 16°C~25°C | Monte Carlo 6°C~10°C | Bissau 19°C~31°C |



1. Not the best idea!

A woman takes a dip in the icy water during the Orthodox Epiphany celebrations in Minsk, Belarus, on Monday.
— Xinhua

2. Ready for the new year

This photo taken yesterday shows Phalaenopsis orchids growing in a greenhouse in Niuzhuang Township, Dongying District of Dongying City, Shandong Province.
— Xinhua

3. These boots are made for walking...

A model presents boots by Jeanne Friot during Menswear Ready-to-wear Fall-Winter 2026/2027 collection as part of the Paris Fashion Week in Paris yesterday.
— AFP



4. Normality through adversity

Wooden key rings with names carved on them, are displayed after being crafted in the shop in Ramallah, in the occupied West Bank, Palestine yesterday.
— AFP

5. Playtime with Mum

A 4-month-old giant otter (*Pteronura brasiliensis*) and its mother swim at the Cali Zoo in Cali, Colombia on Monday.
— AFP

6. Oh exhibition yourself...

Japan's Naomi Osaka arrives to face Croatia's Antonia Ruzic before their singles match at the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday.
— AFP

