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Debt securities custody surpasses 110 billion patacas: AMCM interim chief

Macau Monetary Authority (AMCM) Acting President Vong Sin Man addresses yesterday's event at the Macau Science Centre (MSC) in Nape. – Photo: Armindo Neves

Armindo Neves

Macao Central Securities Depository and Clearing Limited (MCSD) hosted its fourth anniversary and award ceremony at the Macau Science Centre (MSC) in Nape yesterday, during which Macau Monetary Authority (AMCM) Acting President Vong Sin Man revealed that Macau's debt securities custody* surpasses 110 billion patacas.

MCSD is a company fully owned by AMCM, it provides securities registration, clearing, settlement depository and other related services.

Vong said in a speech that in order to promote Macau's appropriate economic diversification, the local government has been consistently nurturing the debt securities market and enhancing its supporting infrastructure and legal frameworks.

As the core infrastructure operator in the market, MCSD has seen the scale of various debt securities under its custody exceed 110 billion patacas equivalent, he said.

Vong also said that a key highlight of last year's market was the direct linkage established between MCSD and the Hong Kong Central Moneymarkets Unit (CMU), thanks to which significant results have been achieved.

He also said that by the end of last year, the settlement of bilateral linkage transactions reached the equivalent to10 billion patacas, completing over 140 transactions. Last year, around 50 percent of the investment subscriptions for debt securities issued by the Ministry of Finance in Beijing and the local governments of different regions in the Chinese mainland came from CMU members conducting transactions through this linkage, Vong said.

CMU OmniClear Limited Business Development & Operations Head Raymond Ng (吳偉) said in a speech that since the direct linkage between MCSD and CMU was established, market participation and activity on both sides have significantly increased, with a notable growth in custody and settlement volumes. The collaboration has yielded positive results, effectively promoting the connectivity of financial infrastructure between Hong Kong and Macau and deepening the integration of their debt securities markets, Ng said.

Ng expressed confidence that the interconnection and cooperation between the Hong Kong and Macau markets will continue to drive the prosperity of the financial markets in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) in particular and across Asia in general, further strengthening the competitive advantages of Hong Kong and Macau as international financial hubs.

8 awards

According to a statement released during the ceremony, in order to recognise market participants who made significant contributions to the Macau bond market in 2025, MCSD presented eight awards during the event. Awards comprising Outstanding Underwriting Institution, Outstanding Issuing Institution, Outstanding Professional Service Institution, Exceptional Market Partner, Outstanding Market Promotion Institution, Leading Cooperation Partner, Excellence in Market Contribution Award and Outstanding Secondary Market Trading Institution. A total of 29 local and international institutions received these awards, the statement noted. ■

**The term "debt security custody" refers to the safekeeping and management of debt securities (like bonds or notes) by a financial institution or custodian. This process typically involves holding the physical or electronic certificates, managing transactions, and handling related administrative tasks. Debt securities are financial instruments that represent a loan made by an investor to a borrower, typically a corporation or government. They include bonds, notes, and debentures, and involve the borrower's promise to pay back the principal amount along with interest over a specified period. – Poe*

European Parliament votes to refer EU-Mercosur trade deal to EU court for review

BRUSSELS – The European Parliament yesterday voted to refer the EU-Mercosur trade agreement to the EU Court of Justice for a review, a move that could delay ratification and add uncertainty to the deal's implementation.

The vote was narrowly split, with 334 lawmakers backing the legal assessment, 324 voting against and 11 abstaining.

Parliament said the agreement would be referred to the court and that it would not be able to vote on granting its consent until the court issues an opinion.

The European Commission regretted the Parliament's decision, according to Commission spokesperson Olof Gill.

Gill said at a press briefing that the questions raised in the motion by the parliament "are not justified because the commission has already addressed those questions and issues in a very detailed way."

The European Union (EU) and Mercosur signed the free trade agreement on January 17 in Asunción, capital of Paraguay.

The agreement aims to reduce tariffs and expand trade between the two blocs and now awaits approval by the European Parliament, as well as ratification by the legislatures of Mercosur member states Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

Mercosur is the Spanish acronym for Southern Common Market. In Portuguese, the bloc is known as Mercosul. – *AFP, MPD*

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Hainan logs 106 million tourist arrivals, increased spending in 2025

China's tropical island province of Hainan received 106 million domestic and overseas tourists in 2025, up 9.1 percent from 2024, local authorities said yesterday.

– Story on p. 6

Gunman jailed for life in killing of Japan's ex-PM Abe

The gunman charged with killing Japan's former prime minister Shinzo Abe was found guilty yesterday and jailed for life, as the judge declared the broad-daylight assassination "despicable and extremely malicious". *– Story on p. 9*

Trump rules out force against Greenland but demands 'immediate' talks

US President Donald Trump ruled out using force to take Greenland for the first time as he addressed world leaders in Davos yesterday, but demanded "immediate negotiations" to acquire the island from Denmark. *– Story on p. 11*

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Gongbei Customs seizes nearly 1 tonne of red deer penises in 3 cars

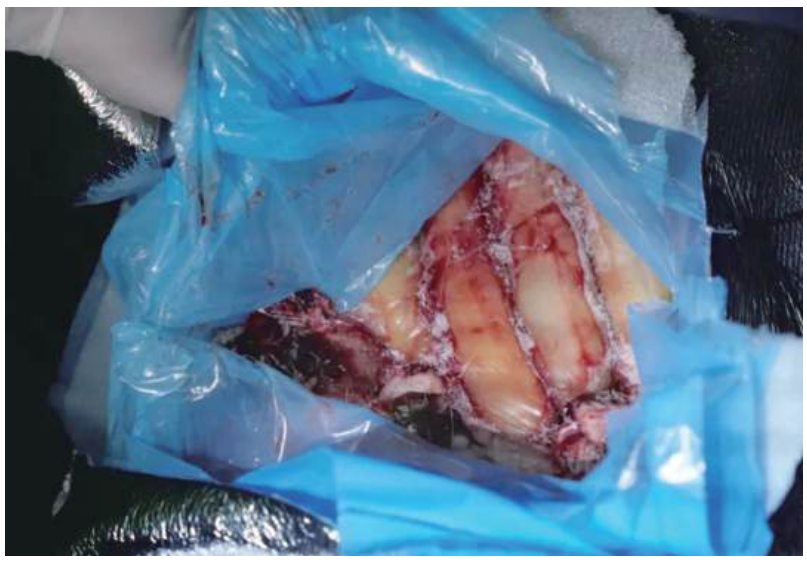
Armindo Neves

Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in statement yesterday that its officers seized 956.4 kilograms of red deer penises in three cars at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) on December 4.

According to the statement, on that day, customs officers at the bridge's Zhuhai Port checkpoint arrivals lane noticed an abnormality during a routine X-ray scan of a Guangdong-Hong Kong dual plates vehicle.

Upon a follow-up inspection, the officers discovered several white insulated bags hidden in various parts of the vehicle, including the spare tyre compartment at the rear of the vehicle and the rear seat area. Customs officers seized 346.7 kilograms of frozen meat stained with blood.

Almost at the same time, customs officers noticed abnormalities when scanning two other Guangdong-Hong Kong dual-plate vehicles in the same lane and promptly intercepted them for inspection. Officers then discovered two batches of frozen meat concealed in identical places within both vehicles using the same concealment method. The contraband weighed 311.3 kilograms and 298.4 kilograms, respectively.



This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs yesterday shows red deer penises seized by its officers at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge on December 4.

The three drivers admitted that they were travelling together and were hired to transport goods in exchange for a "delivery fee."

Following professional examination, the three batches of frozen meat were all identified as frozen European red deer penises.

Gongbei Customs reminded the public that according to the "Catalogue of Animals, Plants, and Their Products and Other Quarantine Materials Prohibited from Being Carried or Mailed into the People's Republic of China", any [raw or cooked] meat [including offal] and its products are prohibited from being brought into the Chinese mainland without prior approval and a quarantine certificate issued by the official authority of the exporting country or region. ■

CTT warns public against fraudulent SMS messages

Khalel Vallo

The Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) urged residents in a statement yesterday to remain vigilant after receiving reports of fraudulent SMS messages impersonating the bureau and attempting to obtain personal information.

According to CTT, the scam messages claim to be from the bureau and request recipients to re-verify their SIM card registration under the pretext of combating telecommunications fraud.

The messages typically include links directing recipients to fraudulent websites, where they are prompted to provide personal details, the statement said, clarifying that CTT will never send SMS messages containing website links, nor will it request citizens to submit personal data or credit card information through such means.

The bureau reminded the public to stay alert and strengthen awareness of scam prevention.

Residents who suspect they have encountered a scam are advised to contact the Judiciary Police (PJ) Anti-Fraud Enquiry Hotline on 8800 7777 or call the emergency hotline on 993 for assistance. ■

This image provided by the Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) yesterday urges residents to beware of fraudulent SMS messages.

Police nab Indonesian maid for usury & improper retention of 51 ID documents

Ada Lei

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested a domestic helper from Indonesia on Tuesday for usury and the improper retention of 51 identification documents, PJ spokesman Ho Wai Lok said during a special press conference yesterday.

Ho identified the suspect as a 43-year-old female surnamed Srirosmulyati.

According to Ho, the Judiciary Police (PJ) received a referral from the Public Security Police (PSP) on Friday about a non-resident who had borrowed a total of 4,000 patacas from Srirosmulyati between October and November due to urgent medical expenses for a family member. The victim was required to make a monthly repayment of 20 percent of the principal as "interest," in addition to handing over his or her passport as collateral. Unable to repay the debt, the victim managed only to pay 600 patacas in "interest," failing to clear the principal. After requesting the return of the passport to sort out work matters but being refused, the victim reported the case to the police.

The police apprehended Srirosmulyati on Tuesday at a flat in San Kio (新橋), recovering 51 passports and a blue card belonging to 50 victims from the same country. Ho did not reveal the home country of the victims.

The police later found three of the victims who had borrowed amounts, ranging between 3,000 and 4,000 patacas, due to urgent financial needs for medical or school expenses, and they too had only managed to repay partial "interest," without clearing the principal.

Ho noted that since December 2024, Srirosmulyati had lent money to around 60 individuals who faced urgent issues at home, such as medical or school fees. The amounts borrowed ranged from 500 to 5,000 patacas, with conditions including a monthly repayment of 20 percent of the principal as "interest" and the requirement of handing over their passport as collateral. Borrowers could only reclaim their passports upon full repayment of the principal. Ho added that Srirosmulyati had earnt about 90,000 patacas through her usurious lending.

Srirosmulyati was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, facing charges of usury and improper retention of others' passports. ■

Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the hooded Indonesian usury suspect to a PJ van outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday. – Photo: Ada Lei

Police nab local man for stealing construction materials worth 860,000 patacas

Ada Lei

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested a local man on Tuesday for stealing construction materials worth 860,000 patacas, PJ spokesman Ho Wai Lok said during a special press conference yesterday.

Ho identified the suspect as a 40-year-old construction worker surnamed Ian.

According to Ho, the police received two reports on November 1 and November 25 from a local man who said that two batches of building materials belonging to his company, stored in a vacant area near the Taipa Ferry Terminal, had vanished. The first batch included nine steel plates, each weighing about two tonnes. The second batch contained seven tools, comprising three 8-metre-long pile-driving machine columns and four 6-metre-long piling hydraulic support shelters. Suspecting that someone had stolen them, the victim reported a total loss of 865,000 patacas to the police.

Ho noted that between mid-October and mid-December, Ian had stolen the construction materials on four occasions. He claimed to be the owner of the materials and sold them for 70,000 patacas to two local hardware and recycling stores, arranging for those stores to use vehicles and tools to pick up the stolen materials.

The police identified Ian as the suspect and apprehended him near his flat in the northern district on Tuesday. The police recovered some of the stolen construction materials from the recycling stores, valued at over 20,000 patacas.

Ho said that Ian had previously been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) on October 2 for his involvement in a case of cable theft.

Ian was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, facing charges of theft and fraud. ■

Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the hooded theft suspect to a PJ van outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday. – Photo: Ada Lei

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Macau Post Daily

Macau Weather

TEMPERATURE FALLING SLIGHTLY. COLD AND DRY. MAINLY CLOUDY. FORCE 3 TO 5 NORTH TO NORTHEASTERLY WINDS WITH GUSTS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 45% AND 75%.

9ºC~14ºC

Source: SMG

Health Bureau weight loss challenge attracts over 3,500 participants

Armindo Neves

The Macau Health Bureau announced in a statement yesterday that its weight loss challenge has attracted over 3,500 participants registrations.

According to the statement, in response to the national strategy prioritising health development and in alignment with the nation's "Weight Management Year" initiative, the local government continues to roll out diverse weight management measures and activities through its "Healthy Community" programme.

The statement said that the weight loss challenge registrations, launched on November 26, originally set a cap of 350 participants for both individual and group categories combined. Due to residents' high regard for scientific weight management, the response was enthusiastic, with total registrations exceeding 3,500, the statement said.

In order to further promote public health and empower more residents to manage their weight scientifically, the number of participants has been increased, the statement said, adding that all eligible individuals who have registered are now able to take part in the challenge.

According to the statement, participants who have registered can visit health centres between yesterday and February 8 to complete pre-competition measurements, bringing either a physical or electronic Macau ID card. After completing the measurements, eligible participants will receive a confirmation notification via SMS on February 10. The statement said that all health centres are fully prepared, and relevant staff have completed training to provide residents with more convenient and accurate measurement services, working together with the community to build a "Healthy Macau." ■

This handout poster provided by the Health Bureau (SSM) yesterday shows its weight loss challenge pre-race measurement schedule and venue arrangements.

Health Bureau warns of hypothermia risk as temperature drops

Kristina Vallesteros

The Health Bureau (SSM) has issued a public health advisory in response to this week's "significant" drop in the temperature.

Moreover, a "Yellow" cold weather alert was issued by the Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) yesterday, forecasting cold weather in Macau today and tomorrow. The observatory urged the public, especially the elderly, children, and those with chronic illnesses, to bundle up to keep warm.

The observatory forecast on its website last night that the mercury will drop to between 9 and 14 degrees Celsius today.

According to Tuesday's SSM statement, the Health Bureau specifically urged the public to remain alert in preventing hypothermia*, warning vulnerable groups in particular about the potentially fatal condition. The bureau recommended several precautionary measures, including wearing appropriately layered clothing, ensuring indoor spaces are kept warm and ventilated, consuming warm and easily digestible foods and drinks, and limiting time spent outdoors in the cold.

The Health Bureau also advised members of the public to check on elderly neighbours or relatives, monitor their health conditions, and ensure they take prescribed medication. In case of an emergency where someone shows signs of hypothermia, such as a sustained drop in body temperature, muscle stiffness, or confusion, the public should call 999 or the Fire Services Bureau (CB) on 2857 2222 for assistance.

The statement pointed out that when calling for help, it is crucial to clearly state that the patient is believed to have hypothermia, and to provide their age, gender, symptoms such as whether the patient is conscious, confused, or unconscious, and the exact address. This will allow the ambulance to arrive promptly and enable medical institutions to prepare appropriately for the emergency, the statement said. ■

**Hypothermia is a life-threatening medical condition that occurs when the body loses heat faster than it can produce it, causing a dangerously low drop in core body temperature. – DeepSeek*

Shoppers are bundled up yesterday afternoon looking for souvenirs and warm clothing near S. Domingos Market close to the city's main square, Largo do Senado.
– Photo: Rui Pastorin

Event to gather pets, skateboarding this weekend

Rui Pastorin

Pets and skateboarding will be brought together for the first time with Macau's inaugural co-themed event slated for this weekend at THE POOL H853 Outdoor Event Space at the H853 Fun Factory.

Located at Lisboeta Macau, the two-day event will feature a line-up of scheduled events, the Macau-themed destination recently announced on its Instagram page, among which are Macau's first "pet skateboard workshop", while there will also be family-friendly skateboard experience sessions and skateboard competitions, as well as graffiti workshops.

A separate post elaborated that the "Beginner Class for Pets" will be guided by professional coaches, with the owners' assistance, to guide pets to learn the basics of skateboarding such as standing, slow rolling and balance. An advanced class featuring synchronised skateboarding and building teamwork are also slated to be held.

The event will take place from 2 p.m. through 7 p.m. and, aside from the slated activities, will also feature music through live DJ sets and busking performances. An open dining area will also be available, along with pet-related products.

More details, including registration and admission details, can be found by visiting the H853 Fun Factory Instagram page. ■

This poster downloaded from the H853 Fun Factory Facebook page last night promotes this weekend's pet skateboarding co-themed event at Lisboeta Macau in Cotai.

CCAC delegation visits HK ICAC to strengthen anti-graft cooperation

Khalel Vallo

A delegation led by Commissioner Against Corruption (CCAC) Ao Ieong Seong visited the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) of Hong Kong on Tuesday to exchange views on fighting and preventing corruption and promoting integrity through education, according to a CCAC statement that day.

During the visit, Ao Ieong met with ICAC Commissioner Woo Ying-ming and noted that the two sides have long maintained close cooperation in mutual case assistance, intelligence exchange and training, the statement said.

Ao Ieong said that Macau and Hong Kong will continue to strengthen liaison and jointly promote cooperation with other anti-graft agencies in the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) to help further strengthen the concept of integrity in civil society across the region, the statement noted, adding that she also introduced the role of the CCAC Personnel Discipline Monitoring Committee, which analyses and monitors non-criminal complaints against CCAC staff and makes recommendations to the chief executive.

Meanwhile, Woo outlined the ICAC's work in combating corruption, promoting integrity in civil society and fostering international cooperation, the statement said. He noted that both anti-graft and pro-integrity bodies would continue to work closely together, deepen exchanges and strengthen collaboration with anti-corruption agencies in GBA, according to the statement.

The delegation also visited the Prosecutions Division of Hong Kong's Department of Justice (DoJ), where they met Director of Public Prosecutions Yang Mei Kei for a briefing on procedures for handling corruption cases, the statement noted. ■

This handout photo provided by the Office of the Commissioner Against Corruption (CCAC) on Tuesday shows Commissioner Ao Ieong Seong (centre, right) and Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) of Hong Kong Commissioner Woo Ying-ming (centre, left) alongside other members of the delegation, posing for a group photo in Hong Kong.

Ox Warehouse director discusses 20-year journey & Macau art

Interview by William Chan

Following the launch of three concurrent solo exhibitions at the former municipal cattle stable earlier this month, the academic director of Ox Warehouse, Noah Ng Fong Chao sat down with the *Post* to reflect on the art space's two-decade history, its core philosophies, and the path forward in an era of regional integration and technological change.

In an in-depth interview on Saturday at the venue, Ng gave insights into the organisation's foundational mission and the challenges it has faced. Since its inception in 2003, Ox Warehouse's curatorial focus has been to champion contemporary and experimental art. It was founded to create a platform for alternative and conceptually driven works that were not widely seen in Macau at the time. "We want to show the Macau public that art can take thousands of forms," Ng said, emphasising a goal to broaden the public's understanding of what art can be.

"We were a group of young people with a simple motivation," Ng recalled. "As creators ourselves, we saw the world developing, and as part of that world, we wanted to create more opportunities for Macau's art scene to have a dialogue with it." For over two decades now, the space at the junction of Avenida do Coronel Mesquita and Avenida do Almirante Lacerda has been a hub for this mission, cultivating not only artists but also a new generation of arts administrators.

Academic director of Ox Warehouse, Noah, Ng Fong Chao, poses at the exhibition during Saturday's interview. – Photos: Grayson Wong

Looking ahead, Ox Warehouse is committed to strengthening international collaborations and expanding the scale of its "International Residency and Research Programme." The team is actively pursuing deeper regional partnerships with artists from the Chinese mainland, particularly from the Greater Bay Area (GBA). Maintaining its original mission, the organisation continues to champion artistic creativity and the spirit of experimentation, Ng said.

The erstwhile municipal cattle stable, originally constructed in 1912, served as a facility for beef trading, storage, and cattle quarantine. Following reconstruction in 1924, it retained its original function until the livestock operation relocated to Ilha Verde in 1987. Subsequently, part of the site was converted into a warehouse, while another section was designated as exhibition space in 2003. The site comprises two parallel single-storey buildings with large truss structures, featuring distinctive red-brown roofs and ochre-coloured walls that exemplify Portuguese eclectic architectural style.

Addressing the proliferation of new art spaces across the city, Ng views them not as competition but as vital components of a larger, interconnected "art ecosystem." He believes different organisations are non-competing, non-substitutable links in a single "ecosystem chain," each serving a distinct function. While some may focus on emerging student artists or local artists exclusively, Ox Warehouse has evolved to support more mature practitioners who are in their 30s and 40s, artists who have achieved a certain level of creative and conceptual maturity.

"It's not a conflict; we operate on different, non-substitutable links in the same chain," he explained. "Some notable art organisations in Macau have different focuses, such as student groups or local artists, for us we have aimed to invite artists globally to participate in our exhibitions." This symbiotic relationship ensures that local artists are supported at every stage of their careers, providing channels for international cooperation, strengthening the entire ecosystem.

This collaborative vision extends to a robust regional and international integration strategy. Ng is a vocal proponent of deeper integration with the Greater Bay Area (GBA), arguing that Macau's small size necessitates a broader stage. "Our vision cannot be confined to a population of 680,000," he said. "The GBA offers a massive population base and world-class institutions for exchange." This strategy is built on a foundation of shared Lingnan (southern Chinese) culture and language, which facilitates trust and deeper collaboration, he added.

Beyond the GBA, Ox Warehouse actively fosters a global dialogue through its "International Residency and Research Programme," inviting artists from Europe and other parts of the world. The current exhibitions, featuring three artists from the Chinese mainland, are part of this broader strategy of cultural exchange. Ng pointed out that Ox Warehouse actively runs residency programmes for artists from cities like Chengdu and Hangzhou, as well as international artists from Belgium and the Netherlands. This exchange-based model enriches the local scene with diverse perspectives while simultaneously promoting Macau's unique artistic identity – one shaped by over 400 years of Sino-Portuguese cultural history – on the world stage.

Members of the public may view the works at the free-admission exhibition daily from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. until February 8.

Photos of the "Land and Sea: David Fank" exhibits recently taken by Rui Pastorin

GCS vows to strengthen coordination b/w public entities & media

Tony Wong

The Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) hosted a high tea reception for the news media yesterday where its acting director Louie Wong Lok I pledged in a speech that his bureau will, as always, support and assist the development of the local media sector, maintain good communication with the media, strengthen coordination between various public entities and the press, vigorously provide news information, and offer greater assistance for news coverage and reporting.

The high-tea reception, which was held in a restaurant at the Macau Tower Convention and Entertainment Centre in Sai Van, was attended by about 80 people, including representatives from local media outlets, journalist associations in the city, and Chinese mainland media outlets stationed in Macau, as well as foreign media correspondents. Apart from GCS staff, press coordinators from the offices of government principal officials also attended the reception, which aimed to enhance mutual communication and exchanges between GCS and the news media.

In his speech, Wong noted that GCS held its annual tea reception for the news media again yesterday after it had not been held for "many" years, adding he expects his bureau to continue hosting the tea reception every year from now on, creating a communication platform to enhance interaction and exchange with the news media.

Wong has been GCS's acting director since July last year, after Inês Chan Lou's appointment as the bureau's director was not renewed when it expired on June 30 last year.

Wong said that last year was an "eventful" one for Macau's civil society and news media organisations, during which the election of the eighth-term Legislative Assembly (AL) was held smoothly, the 15th National Games, an event jointly hosted by Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau for the first time, was a complete success, and a string of activities commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the Victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War were successfully organised.

In addition, Wong said, the local government effectively responded to Super Typhoon "Ragasa" – which pummelled Macau in September last year, safeguarding the lives and property of residents, adding that none of this would have been possible without the cooperation and support of the news media.

Wong also expressed his gratitude to the news media for their sustained attention to, and follow-up on, the local government's administration and for their timely and widespread dissemination of information, which, he said, helped the government constantly improve its governance.

Wong noted that this year marks the beginning of the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan and Macau's third five-year socioeconomic development plan, as well as the fifth anniversary of the establishment of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin. Moreover, Wong noted, Macau will host the 13th APEC Tourism Ministerial Meeting in June this year.

Wong said that as the government is carrying out its various tasks in an orderly manner, he expects the news media to continue to assist the government in engaging in extensive publicity of its work and in gathering public opinions. ■

Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) Acting Director Louie Wong Lok I (centre) delivers a speech during yesterday's high-tea reception for the news media in a restaurant at Macau Tower, flanked by other GCS officials. – Photo: Tony Wong

Tai vows to help local jobseekers find admin jobs in tertiary institutions & public utilities

This undated handout photo released by the Office of Secretary for Economy and Finance Anton Tai Kin Ip yesterday shows Tai (centre) chairing this year's first meeting of the government's Employment Promotion Coordination Working Group.

Tony Wong

Secretary for Economy and Finance Anton Tai Kin Ip has convened and chaired this year's first meeting of the government's working group for promoting the employment of local residents, where he pledged that the government will proactively gather more information on administrative job vacancies offered by large organisations in the city such as higher education institutions and public utilities, with the aim of more accurately addressing local jobseekers' employment needs.

Tai's office released details of the meeting in a statement yesterday. The statement did not mention when the meeting was held.

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai decided in May last year to set up the cross-departmental working group aiming to boost local residents' employment in the city.

The working group, chaired by Tai, is officially known as Employment Promotion Coordination Working Group.

The working group is tasked with carrying out scientific assessments of the city's human resource trends, collecting and studying data concerning the supply and demand of the local labour market in various sectors with the aim of coming up with appropriate policies and measures to promote local residents' employment, and regularly monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the government's various policies and measures promoting local residents' employment.

The working group includes officials from Tai's office, the Office of Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam, the office of Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man, and the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL).

Banking admin jobs

During the meeting, yesterday's statement said, the working group reviewed the effectiveness of a number of recently-held employment matching sessions for jobs offered by Macau's banking sector. The statement said that data collected by the working group indicate that young local people in general are eager to look for and secure administrative jobs in the banking industry.

In response, the statement said, the Labour Affairs Bureau will further strengthen collaboration with the banking sector and discuss with the industry the possibility of organising employment matching sessions again in the near future.

Moreover, the statement said, industry seminars, special employment programmes, and other types of activities will be held with the aim of helping young local people wishing to work in the banking industry stay updated on industry development trends and job recruitment information while also enhancing their employment competitiveness.

According to the statement, Tai stressed during the meeting that in addition to the banking sector, it is also necessary for the working group to, through the government's cross-departmental cooperation mechanism, proactively gather more information on administrative job vacancies offered by large organisations in different sectors such as higher education institutions and public utilities, with the aim of more accurately addressing the employment needs of local jobseekers. ■

Symposium to invite experts to discuss heritage conservation, restoration

Rui Pastorin

The "Symposium on Cultural Heritage Conservation and Restoration" will be held this Sunday at the Macau Museum of Art (MAM) Auditorium, gathering experts, specialists and scholars to discuss technical knowledge and case-study experiences in heritage preservation.

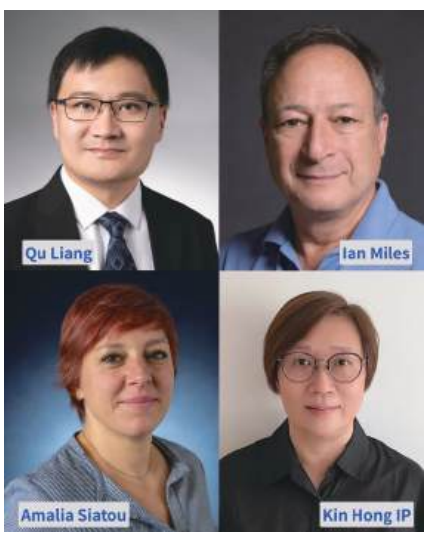
Promoting public awareness of heritage preservation and restoration, the free-admission symposium will be hosted by the Centre for the Preservation and Transmission of the Cultural Heritage of the Palace Museum in Macao, according to a recent statement by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC). Registration, which has been open since Saturday, will end today and can be done via one's Macao One Account.

The symposium, which will be conducted in Putonghua and English with simultaneous translation in both languages, will feature Palace Museum Conservation Standards Department Director Qu Liang; metals conservation expert Ian Miles from Australia; Amalia Siatou, a senior heritage conservation expert from Greece; and University of Macau (UM) Research Assistant Professor Kin Hong Ip.

The speakers will tackle topics including the state of heritage preservation in the Chinese mainland, best practices for restoring and maintaining metals and bronze, and their experiences with, and opinions about, the conservation of the bronze statues at the façade of the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ruins of St. Paul's. They will also share insights through case studies of practices with conservation efforts in Australia and Greece, among others. A Q&A session will also be included.

The statement highlighted that the centre has been conducting restoration and maintenance works on the seven bronze statues at the façade of the Ruins of St. Paul's in phases, with the second phase of restoration work underway.

The statement said that the Sunday symposium will be held from 2:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. One can find more details on www.icm.gov.mo, as well as the bureau's Facebook page and WeChat account. ■



This image recently provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) shows the four speakers invited for this Sunday's "Symposium on Cultural Heritage Conservation and Restoration".

Shanghai's GDP exceeds 5.67 trillion yuan in 2025

SHANGHAI – Shanghai's gross domestic product (GDP) soared to over 5.67 trillion yuan in 2025, registering an annual growth of 5.4 percent, the municipal statistics bureau said yesterday.

Industries and the service sector are the main driving forces of the economic development in the financial hub in east China, as the added value of Shanghai's primary, secondary and tertiary industries stood at 9.94 billion yuan, 1.165 trillion yuan and 4.496 trillion yuan, respectively, reflecting year-on-year increases of 2 percent, 3.5 percent and 6 percent.

According to the municipal bureau of statistics in Shanghai, last year the city's industrial added value witnessed a 5 percent rise from the year before. In terms of industries, the output value of the railway, shipbuilding, aerospace and other transportation equipment manufacturing industry surged by 15.8 percent year on year. The electrical machinery and equipment manufacturing industry saw an 11.1 percent rise, while the automotive manufacturing industry experienced a 7.8 percent increase.

Notably, Shanghai has made significant strides in the development of new quality productive forces. In 2025 the manufacturing output value of the three leading industries in Shanghai, namely integrated circuits, biomedicine and artificial intelligence (AI), recorded a 9.6 percent year-on-year increase. Among them, the integrated circuit and the AI manufacturing industries posted growth rates of 15.1 percent and 13.6 percent, respectively.

"The Shanghai economy is embarking on a new growth trajectory driven by functional enhancement and new quality productive forces as core engines," said Ma Haiqian, vice president of the Shanghai Academy of Development and Reform.

"Its three leading industries are gradually gaining momentum through focused planning and sustained cultivation, becoming a crucial pillar of stable growth. This represents a concentrated manifestation of breakthroughs in new quality productive forces, innovation across the entire chain and the release of cluster effects," Ma said.

This aerial drone photo shows the festively illuminated Bund riverfront in celebration of the New Year in Shanghai, Dec. 31, 2025. – Xinhua

In 2025, the total output value of Shanghai's strategic emerging industries increased 6.5 percent year on year, accounting for 45 percent of the total output value of major industries.

Shen Kaiyan, director of the Institute of Economics at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, noted that new quality productive forces are not only a new economic growth driver for Shanghai, but also serve as the core engine driving industrial transformation breakthroughs for the megacity and the entire Yangtze River Delta region, thereby enhancing the global competitiveness of the region's industrial clusters.

Despite the backdrop of international trade friction, Shanghai's foreign trade reached an all-time high, with total imports and exports hitting 4.51 trillion yuan, representing a 5.6 percent year-on-year increase.

Exports of "new trio" products – electric vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and photovoltaic products – stood out as a particularly bright spot, with the combined export value reaching 160 billion yuan, up 17.4 percent. The export value of electric vehicles, in particular, rose by 13.8 percent.

Shen said that these positive economic indicators demonstrate Shanghai's achievements in its resource allocation capabilities, hub functionality and institutional openness. "Shanghai is evolving into a world-leading city, a critical node in the global supply chain and a key strategic pivot for national development."

According to Ma, in its next phase, Shanghai will strive to achieve another leap forward in both proper quantitative growth and effective qualitative improvement.

Particularly in the realm of innovation-driven development, the city will plan systematically around new technologies, new production factors, new business models and new application scenarios, Ma revealed.

Shanghai's GDP first exceeded 5 trillion yuan in 2024, three years after it first surpassed 4 trillion yuan. In 2006, the city became the first Chinese mainland city to have a GDP of more than 1 trillion yuan. – *Xinhua*

China's economy demonstrates resilience, optimism prevails for future growth: ADB's country director for China

Interview by Xinhua writers Ren Jun and Pang Yuanyuan

BEIJING – China's economy demonstrated remarkable resilience and vitality in 2025, achieving robust growth despite a complex domestic and international environment, said Asif Cheema, the Asian Development Bank (ADB)'s country director for China.

In an exclusive interview with Xinhua, Cheema expressed confidence in the country's economic trajectory, noting that the ADB had upwardly revised its 2025 growth forecast for China in December.

China announced on Monday that its economy posted a 5-percent increase in 2025 amid domestic and external challenges, delivering on its 2025 growth target.

"China's economy is performing very well. It has shown quite a lot of resilience," Cheema said, attributing the strength to a very strong export performance and vigorous industrial activity, particularly in high-tech and new energy sectors.

In 2025, China entered the top 10 of the Global Innovation Index and achieved an R&D spending intensity of 2.8 percent, surpassing the average level of OECD countries.

When asked to describe China's economy in a few key words, Cheema highlighted "resilience" and "innovation."

He said he was particularly impressed by the rapid advancements in artificial intelligence (AI). "China is leading in AI research as well as patenting," he said, emphasizing the deepening integration of AI with traditional industries, which enhances productivity and industrial transformation.

"AI is already a very strong growth engine for China's economy," Cheema noted, pointing to significant growth in corporate revenues turbocharged by AI.

The official, who oversees the Manila-based multilateral development bank's operations in China, also underscored the positive impact of China's macroeconomic policies.

He regards policy measures to enhance productivity, boost domestic consumption through building stronger social security nets, and further open up the economy as "very much needed and very welcome" for sustaining high-quality development.

Cheema also noted growing foreign investors' confidence in the Chinese market and Chinese assets, citing that in the first 10 months of 2025, offshore inflows into China stocks totaled US$50.6 billion, a substantial increase from the US$11.4 billion recorded for the full year of 2024.

Looking ahead, Cheema expressed strong optimism about the Chinese economy. "The outlook is very stable," he said, adding that continued efforts to boost domestic consumption and bolster high-tech sectors will ensure sustainable growth.

As the world's second-largest economy, largest exporter, and a major source of foreign direct investment, China plays a crucial role in the global economy, Cheema stressed.

"China's economy is injecting certainty into the global recovery and bringing new opportunities," Cheema said.

He noted that China is currently developing its high-tech sectors both through trade and through new overseas investments. "These foreign direct investments are not only creating new jobs, but also creating economic opportunities, as well as technology transfers."

– *Xinhua*

All missing found dead in steel plant blast, death toll rises to 10

HOHHOT – Eight individuals previously reported missing after a steel plant explosion in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region last week have been confirmed dead, raising the death toll to 10, authorities announced yesterday.

All eight were found with no vital signs following extensive search and rescue efforts, according to a notification issued by the emergency rescue headquarters for the explosion at a plate plant of Baogang United Steel in Baotou City.

Sunday's explosion of a 650-cubic-meter saturated water and steam spherical tank has resulted in 10 fatalities and 84 injuries to date. All those who sustained injuries remain in stable condition.

More than 1,000 personnel from multiple government departments were mobilized for the rescue operation following the explosion.

A major city-wide inspection to identify hidden work safety risks has been launched. Public security authorities have taken lawful measures against those responsible for the accident within the relevant enterprise.

Follow-up procedures and a thorough investigation into the cause of the accident are currently underway. – *Xinhua*

Hainan logs 106 million tourist arrivals, increased spending in 2025

HAIKOU – China's tropical island province of Hainan received 106 million domestic and overseas tourists in 2025, up 9.1 percent from 2024, local authorities said yesterday.

Total tourist spending rose 10.5 percent year on year to 225.4 billion yuan, according to the Hainan provincial department of tourism, culture, radio, television and sports.

Inbound tourism expanded sharply last year, with Hainan recording approximately 1.5 million inbound visits – a rise of 35.2 percent – and inbound overnight stays totaling 5.94 million nights, which was up 59 percent from the previous year, the department said.

It was the first time the province exceeded 100 million tourist visits in a single year and recorded more than 200 billion yuan in annual tourist spending.

For 2026, Hainan has set the goal of receiving 115 million domestic or international tourist visits, representing growth of about 8 percent. Spending on tourism is expected to reach roughly 248 billion yuan this year, and inbound visits are projected to total 2 million, which would be a rise of 33.3 percent year on year.

Chen Tiejun, director of the department, said that Hainan will accelerate its efforts to become an international tourism and consumption hub this year, focusing on the development of flagship tourism brands, the expansion of high-quality international tourism offerings and the improvement of overall consumption environment.

China aims to build Hainan into a globally influential tourism and consumption destination by 2035.

– *Xinhua*

Mainland says DPP's so-called trade deal with US sells out Taiwan's interests

BEIJING – The so-called "consensus" reached by Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) authorities in tariff talks with the United States amounts to a betrayal of the well-being of Taiwan people and the interests of its industrial development, a Chinese mainland spokesperson said yesterday.

Peng Qing'en, spokesperson for the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office, made the remarks at a press conference when asked to comment on the recent tariff talks between the DPP authorities and the United States.

The US Department of Commerce has announced that Taiwan will make new, direct investments totaling at least US$250 billion in the United States through its semiconductor and technology enterprises, and will provide credit guarantees of at least US$250 billion for Taiwan companies investing in the United States, in exchange for a reciprocal US tariff rate on Taiwan-made goods of no more than 15 percent.

The DPP authorities claimed that these tariff talks with the United States had achieved their goals.

"The so-called trade talks are in essence the United States using tariffs to exert maximum pressure, coercing Taiwan to sharply increase investment in the United States and attempting to hollow out Taiwan's advantageous industries," the spokesperson said.

The DPP's tolerance of the United States plundering Taiwan's industries will "only completely jeopardize the island's development prospects," Peng noted.

Responding to a query about US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick's remarks that Washington aims to shift 40 percent of Taiwan's semiconductor supply chain capacity to the United States, Peng said such a move would wipe out the island's core industrial strengths.

The outcome of the tariff talks has fully proved that seeking "Taiwan independence" is a dead end and that relying on external forces is futile, said Peng.

At a recent meeting with a delegation from the US state of Arizona, Taiwan leader Lai Ching-te said he hoped that companies such as Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. (TSMC) would maintain a long-term presence in the United States and create well-paid local jobs.

Commenting on these remarks, Peng stated that the United States has always put its own interests first, and the so-called US-Taiwan trade and supply chain cooperation endeavor would only drain Taiwan's economy dry.

It's reported that labor costs at TSMC's US plant are about twice those in Taiwan, while its gross profit rate is only around one-eighth of that generated on the island, Peng said, adding that further increasing TSMC's investment in the United States would only undermine Taiwan's industrial foundations.

He further said that in the eyes of the United States, Taiwan is seen not as a supply-chain partner, but as a "pawn" to contain China and a "cash cow" for its military-industrial complex.

– Xinhua

China highly concerned about EU's cybersecurity package reportedly targeting China: FM spokesperson

BEIJING – A foreign ministry spokesperson yesterday expressed grave concern over the latest cybersecurity package rolled out by the European Commission aimed at forcibly de-risking supply chains in the mobile networks, which some commentators say targets China.

Guo Jiakun, the spokesperson, said Chinese companies are never a security threat to European countries as they have long been conducting lawful operation in Europe and are law-abiding and high-quality providers for the EU's telecom and digital sector.

He said that forcefully limiting or banning companies from the market without any evidence and based on non-technical standards "seriously violates market principles and fair competition."

This act of protectionism is yet another example of turning normal cooperation to political and security issues, he said, adding that attempts to arbitrarily intervene in the market and violate economic rules don't make one country safer but pay huge price.

"Facts prove that in a handful of countries, phasing out quality, safe and secure Chinese telecom equipment not only stifles digital and cyberspace advancement, but also causes huge economic loss," Guo said.

The European Commission dismissed the sheer fact that Chinese companies have provided secure and high-quality products, and that China and the EU have sound foundation and potential for cooperation in digital network industry, but used security as a pretext for political manipulation, the spokesperson said.

"This not only gravely hinders the EU's technological progress and economic growth, but also tarnishes its reputation for an open market and saps foreign companies' confidence in investing in the EU," he said. "We urge the EU to stop pursuing the wrong path of protectionism."

China will do what is necessary to defend Chinese companies' lawful rights and interests, Guo added.

– Xinhua

Tourists walk under light decorations displayed at the Confucius Temple scenic area during the 40th Qinhuai Lantern Festival in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, yesterday. The lighting ceremony of the festival was held at Bailuzhou Park yesterday.The festival can be visited in several exhibition areas near Nanjing's Qinhuai River. *– Xinhua*

New plant species with lemon fragrance discovered in Guizhou

GUIYANG – A new plant species with a lemon fragrance, named Neocinnamomum citratum, has been discovered in the limestone mountainous area within Xingyi Global Geopark in Guizhou Province.

The finding was made by researchers from the academy of agricultural and forestry sciences of Qianxinan in Guizhou and published in the latest issue of the international plant taxonomy journal *PhytoKeys*.

The plant emits a strong lemon-like scent, initially mistaken for lemon trees, according to the research team, who also noted that the plant's distinct aroma and morphological traits distinguish it from known species.

It thrives in evergreen forests at altitudes of 1,000 to 1,300 meters, with over 100 individuals identified across five locations.

Local villagers have long collected its leaves and branches as a culinary spice, suggesting that it may have other potential applications in food flavoring, said the researchers.

The discovery enriches China's plant diversity records and highlights the ecological uniqueness of Xingyi Global Geopark, which was added to UNESCO's Global Geoparks Network in March 2024 for its Triassic fossil sites and karst landscapes. *– Xinhua*

Mainland to open 41 new duty-free shops for inbound international travelers

BEIJING – The Chinese mainland authorities are set to establish duty-free shops at 41 listed ports of entry to the country, including airports, sea ports and land border crossings, aiming to facilitate tax-free shopping for inbound travelers.

Five government departments, including the Ministry of Finance, made the announcement on Wednesday. They defined port-of-entry duty-free shops as stores located within the restricted zones of airports, sea ports or land border crossings. Spread across the country, these stores will only offer duty-free goods to inbound international passengers.

Analysts say the move will boost consumption and promote the sustained growth of the duty-free retail sector.

Beyond China's natural scenery and cultural appeal, shopping in the country is becoming an increasingly integral part of international tourists' travel itineraries. China has also been expanding its visa-free entry policies and refining tax-refund-upon-departure services for international tourists in recent years.

– Xinhua

Beijing's GDP surpasses 5 trillion yuan mark

BEIJING – Beijing's GDP exceeded 5.207 trillion yuan in 2025, up 5.4 percent year on year, surpassing the 5 trillion yuan mark for the first time, according to the municipal statistics bureau.

Beijing has become the second city in the country to have an economic scale of more than 5 trillion yuan after Shanghai.

The per capita disposable income of Beijing residents reached 89,090 yuan last year, an increase of 4.3 percent year on year.

Beijing's primary industry achieved an added value of 10.92 billion yuan, down by 0.7 percent year on year. The added value of the secondary and tertiary industries stood at 718.74 billion yuan and nearly 4.478 trillion yuan, respectively, reflecting year-on-year increases of 3.5 percent and 5.8 percent.

Beijing's growth is anchored in its continuous industrial upgrading, with the tertiary sector – dominated by high-tech and services industries – contributing considerably. The digital economy's added value accounts for over 40 percent of the city's GDP.

Innovation remains Beijing's core advantage. An average of over 300 technology enterprises are established daily in the city, with the capital's number of large AI models filed and launched online leading the nation.

Metrics like energy consumption and carbon emissions per unit of GDP remain the lowest nationwide, proving that economic expansion can coexist with environmental sustainability. The city's PM2.5 pollution levels have dropped by two-thirds since 2013, earning it international acclaim for its green transition. *– Xinhua*

Over 1,400 Indonesians leave Cambodian scam groups in 5 days: embassy

PHNOM PENH – More than 1,400 Indonesians have left cyberscam networks in Cambodia in the last five days, Jakarta said yesterday, after Phnom Penh pledged a fresh crackdown on the illicit trade.

Scammers working from hubs across Southeast Asia, some willingly and others trafficked, lure internet users around the world into fake romances and cryptocurrency investments, netting tens of billions of dollars each year.

Some foreign nationals have evacuated suspected scam compounds across Cambodia this month as the government has pledged to "eliminate" problems related to the online fraud industry, which the United Nations says employs around 100,000 people in the country.

Between January 16 and 20, 1,440 Indonesians left sites operated by online scam syndicates and went to the Indonesian embassy in the capital Phnom Penh for help, the mission said in a statement.

The "largest wave of arrivals" occurred on Monday when 520 Indonesians turned up, the embassy said.

Indonesian Ambassador Santo Darmosumarto said law enforcement agencies in both nations would be tasked with determining whether the arrivals had been perpetrating fraud willingly or had been forced to do so under the threat of violence.

However, he told AFP, "We haven't identified any clear indications that, at the moment, any of them (were)... victims of human trafficking," adding they showed no visible evidence of physical abuse.

Asked whether any could face criminal charges, he said the embassy was working to ensure "at least a sample" of the repatriated Indonesians would undergo a process to "find out how they were involved" in scam activities.

Many of those arriving at the embassy did not have passports and were staying in Cambodia without valid immigration documents, the embassy has said.

People check their names on a list in front of the Indonesian Embassy in Phnom Penh yesterday. – AFP

'Something of a change'

According to Santo, Indonesia was "optimistic" about recent measures by Cambodian authorities against scam operators.

"It's an effort that is real because I think you are seeing the results. And the result is that a lot of these compounds are closing up their shop," he said.

"The fact that there are so many people in front of our embassy is a clear indication that this is something of a change."

"We are seeing that more Indonesians are saying that they want to go back to Indonesia now."

But a scam industry expert this week noted alleged links between Cambodian officials and cyberscam networks, and said previous crackdowns had amounted to "performative acts".

The latest measures were likely part of a strategy to relocate scam equipment, managers and workers, Mark Taylor told AFP, adding that the industry would undoubtedly carry on.

Indonesia said this week that more than 80 percent of all the consular service cases it handled for its citizens in Cambodia last year concerned people who "admitted to being involved with online scam syndicates".

From January 1 to 20, at least 1,576 Indonesians left scam sites in Cambodia, the embassy said in a statement to AFP.

Cambodia arrested and deported Chinese-born tycoon Chen Zhi, accused of directing multibillion-dollar internet scam operations from Cambodia, to China this month.

Chen, a former adviser to Cambodia's leaders, was indicted by US authorities in October. – *AFP*

Supporters of Frenchie Mae Cumpio (not pictured), a detained Filipino journalist, stage a demonstration mass at a church in Tacloban City in Leyte island yesterday, ahead of the promulgation of her court case. – AFP

Philippines to end short-lived ban on Musk's Grok chatbot

MANILA – The Philippines said yesterday it will end its ban on Elon Musk's Grok, less than a week after blocking the AI chatbot over its ability to generate sexualised deepfakes.

The decision follows developer xAI agreeing to modify the tool for the local market and eliminate its ability to create "pornographic content", the Philippines' Cybercrime Investigation and Coordinating Center (CICC) said in a statement.

Musk's social media platform X announced last week that it would "geoblock the ability" of all Grok and X users to create images of people in "bikinis, underwear, and similar attire" in jurisdictions where such actions are illegal.

The archipelago nation on January 15 became the third country in Southeast Asia - following Indonesia and Malaysia - to block the chatbot amid a global backlash.

"The Grok AI app has reached out to us and stated that its platform will no longer use any content manipulation," CICC undersecretary Renato Paraiso was quoted as saying in yesterday's statement.

"The company has pledged to modify the tool specifically for the local market, including the omission of image/content manipulation features that allowed for deepfake creation," the statement said.

The new changes would also include the "total exclusion of pornographic content, particularly child sexual abuse material," it added.

A formal meeting with xAI will determine a timeline for the tool's reinstatement, according to the statement.

At a press briefing announcing the ban last Thursday, Philippine telecommunications secretary Henry Rhoel Aguda said the government needed to "clean the internet now, because much toxic content is appearing, especially with the advent of AI".

The X platform's geoblocking move came after California's attorney general launched an investigation into xAI over the sexually explicit material, and several countries opened their own probes. – *AFP*

Dump truck-jeepney crash kills 3, injures 8 in Philippines

MANILA – Three people were killed and eight others were injured after a dump truck collided with a passenger jeepney along a highway in Isabela province in northern Philippines yesterday morning, police said.

Police said the crash occurred in the town of Luna and killed two men and a woman, all passengers of the jeepney.

The Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB), the government agency that oversees public utility vehicle operations, immediately sent a team to investigate after confirming the fatal road crash.

The dump truck driver lost control of the vehicle due to speeding and slippery road conditions, resulting in a collision with a passenger jeepney traveling in the opposite direction, the LTFRB said in a statement.

The agency said the strong impact caused the jeepney to overturn, throwing some passengers out and detaching its roof.

The eight injured victims, including the jeepney driver, were rushed to a local hospital for treatment. – *Xinhua*

Food poverty in Philippines drops sharply in Q4 2025

MANILA – Food poverty in the Philippines fell sharply in the fourth quarter of 2025, signaling easing pressure on households as food access improved and prices stabilized amid government interventions, according to the latest survey from local polling and consultation firm OCTA Research.

The nationwide poll, released on Tuesday, showed that self-rated food poverty dropped by 19 percentage points to 30 percent in the fourth quarter from 49 percent in the previous quarter.

OCTA said this translates to about 5 million families no longer considering themselves food-poor, one of the fastest improvements recorded in the survey series.

Self-rated overall poverty also declined significantly, falling 17 percentage points quarter on quarter to 37 percent, or an estimated 4.5 million families no longer identifying as poor, the largest single-quarter drop in the series, the survey showed.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel said the findings reflect sustained efforts to secure the food supply while supporting both consumers and producers.

"These results show that our programs are reaching Filipino families," he said, adding that the government would continue to ensure affordable food with stable prices while boosting the incomes of farmers and fisherfolk.

The OCTA survey involved 1,200 respondents and was conducted nationwide from December 3 to 11, 2025.

– *Xinhua*

North produces enough nuclear material a year for 10-20 weapons: S Korean president

SEOUL – North Korea is producing enough nuclear material a year for up to 20 weapons, South Korea's President Lee Jae Myung said yesterday.

"Even now, nuclear materials sufficient to produce 10 to 20 nuclear weapons a year are still being produced" in North Korea, Lee told reporters at a New Year news conference.

At the same time, the North is continuing to improve its long-range ballistic missile technology aimed at striking the US mainland, Lee added.

"At some point, North Korea will have secured the nuclear arsenal it believes it needs to sustain the regime, along with ICBM capabilities capable of threatening not only the United States but the wider world," he said, referring to intercontinental ballistic missiles.

"And once there is excess, it will go abroad - beyond its borders. A global danger will then emerge," he said.

A pragmatic approach was needed in addressing North Korea's nuclear issue, he said.

"The suspension of nuclear material production and ICBM development, as well as a halt to overseas exports, would also be a gain," he said.

"It would be a gain for everyone," he added, noting that he had laid out the argument to both US President Donald Trump and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping.

Since his inauguration in June, Lee has pushed for dialogue with the North without preconditions, a stark departure from the hawkish approach of his predecessor.

But Pyongyang has not responded to his overtures and recently accused South Korea of flying a drone into the border city of Kaesong.

Lee's office has denied it was behind the incursion but alluded it might have been carried out by civilians. – *AFP*

Gunman jailed for life in killing of Japan's ex-PM Abe

Tomohiro Osaki

NARA – The gunman charged with killing Japan's former prime minister Shinzo Abe was found guilty yesterday and jailed for life, as the judge declared the broad-daylight assassination "despicable and extremely malicious".

The shooting more than three years ago forced a reckoning in a country with little experience of gun violence, and ignited scrutiny of alleged ties between prominent conservative lawmakers and a secretive sect, the Unification Church.

As he handed down the sentence at a court in the city of Nara, judge Shinichi Tanaka said Tetsuya Yamagami, 45, had been "determined" to shoot Abe.

The fact he "shot him from behind and did so when (Abe) was least expecting it" points to the "despicable and extremely malicious" nature of his act, he said.

Yamagami looked down and expressed little emotion during the sentencing for charges including murder and firearms control law violations, after he used a handmade gun to kill Japan's longest-serving leader during a campaign speech in July 2022.

The defence team of Yamagami - who had admitted to murder at the trial opening in October - told a press conference they had not yet decided whether to appeal, which under Japan's legal system must be done within two weeks.

In a statement to Japanese media, Abe's widow Akie urged Yamagami to "face up to what he has done and pay for the crime of taking the life of my precious husband".

This courtroom sketch illustrated by Haruka Matsumoto depicts Tetsuya Yamagami, the defendant in the trial related to the shooting of former prime minister Shinzo Abe, listening to the explanation of the verdict at the Nara District Court in Nara, Japan yesterday. – AFP

'Significant grief'

Prosecutors had argued that the defendant's motive to kill Abe was rooted in his desire to besmirch the Unification Church.

The months-long trial highlighted how his mother's blind donations to the church plunged his family into bankruptcy and how he came to believe "influential politicians" were helping the sect thrive.

Abe had spoken at events organised by some of the church's groups.

Judge Tanaka said "it is undeniable that the defendant's upbringing influenced the formation of his personality and his mindset... and that it even played a distant role" in his actions.

But "each criminal action he took was based on nothing but his own decision-making, the process of which deserves strong condemnation", he added.

Katsuya Nakatani, a 60-year-old member of the public who was in the courtroom, said the judge had convinced him that "even if there was room for extenuating circumstances... opening fire with so many people around is, after all, something that cannot be forgiven".

"I even began to think it might have been a stroke of luck that only one person died," he said.

Another man outside the court held a banner urging the judge to take Yamagami's difficult life circumstances "into the fullest consideration".

Draw attention

Yamagami "thought if he killed someone as influential as former prime minister Abe, he could draw public attention to the Church and fuel public criticism of it", a prosecutor told a district court in western Japan's Nara region in October.

The Unification Church was established in South Korea in 1954, with its members nicknamed "Moonies" after founder Sun Myung Moon.

In a plea for leniency, his defence team stressed his upbringing had been mired in "religious abuse" stemming from his mother's extreme faith in the Unification Church.

In despair after the suicide of her husband - and with her other son gravely ill - Yamagami's mother poured all her assets into the Church to "salvage" her family, Yamagami's lawyer said, adding that her donations eventually snowballed to around 100 million yen (US$1 million at the time).

Yamagami was forced to give up pursuing higher education. In 2005, he attempted to take his own life before his brother died by suicide.

The defence team's Kohei Matsumoto called it "regrettable" that the court dismissed their claim that tragic events in Yamagami's adulthood "form a continuous sequence" from his upbringing and "are directly connected to his motive for the crime".

Investigations after Abe's murder led to cascading revelations about close ties between the Church and many conservative lawmakers in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, prompting four ministers to resign.

In 2020, Yamagami began hand-crafting a firearm, a process that involved meticulous test-firing sessions in a remote mountainous area.

This points to the highly "premeditated" nature of his attack on Abe, prosecutors said.

The assassination was also a wake-up call for a nation which has some of the world's strictest gun controls.

Gun violence is so rare in Japan that security officials at the scene failed to immediately identify the sound made by the first shot, and came to Abe's rescue too late, a police report after the attack said.

The Japanese version of life imprisonment leaves open the possibility of parole, although in reality, experts say many die while incarcerated. – *AFP*

Japan restarts world's biggest nuclear plant

Mathias Cena with Kyoko Hasegawa in Tokyo

KARIWA - The world's biggest nuclear power plant was restarted yesterday for the first time since the 2011 Fukushima disaster, its Japanese operator said, despite persistent safety concerns among residents.

The plant was "started at 19:02" [local time], Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) spokesman Tatsuya Matoba told AFP of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata prefecture.

The regional governor approved the resumption last month, although public opinion remains sharply divided.

On Tuesday, a few dozen protesters – mostly elderly – braved freezing temperatures to demonstrate in the snow near the plant's entrance, whose buildings line the Sea of Japan coast.

"It's Tokyo's electricity that is produced in Kashiwazaki, so why should the people here be put at risk? That makes no sense," Yumiko Abe, a 73-year-old resident, told AFP.

Around 60 percent of residents oppose the restart, while 37 percent support it, according to a survey conducted in September.

TEPCO said yesterday it would "proceed with careful verification of each plant facility's integrity" and address any issues appropriately and transparently.

Kashiwazaki-Kariwa is the world's biggest nuclear power plant by potential capacity, although just one reactor of seven was restarted.

The facility was taken offline when Japan pulled the plug on nuclear power after a colossal earthquake and tsunami sent three reactors at the Fukushima atomic plant into meltdown in 2011.

However, resource-poor Japan now wants to revive atomic energy to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels, achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and meet growing energy needs from artificial intelligence.

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi has voiced support for the energy source.

Fourteen reactors, mostly in western and southern Japan, have resumed operation since the post-Fukushima shutdown under strict safety rules, with 13 running as of mid January.

Kashiwazaki-Kariwa is the first TEPCO-run unit to restart since 2011. The company also operates the stricken Fukushima Daiichi plant, now being decommissioned.

Nearly 15 years after the disaster, "the situation is still not under control in Fukushima, and TEPCO wants to revive a plant? For me, that's absolutely unacceptable", said Keisuke Abe, an 81-year-old demonstrator.

'Anxious and fearful'

The vast Kashiwazaki-Kariwa complex has been fitted with a 15-metre-high tsunami wall, elevated emergency power systems and other safety upgrades.

However, residents raised concerns about the risk of a serious accident, citing frequent cover-up scandals, minor accidents and evacuation plans they say are inadequate.

"I think it's impossible to evacuate in an emergency," Chie Takakuwa, a 79-year-old resident of Kariwa, told AFP.

On January 8, seven groups opposing the restart submitted a petition signed by nearly 40,000 people to TEPCO and Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority.

The petition said the plant sits on an active seismic fault zone and noted it was struck by a strong quake in 2007.

"We can't remove the fear of being hit by another unforeseen earthquake," it said.

"Making many people anxious and fearful so as to send electricity to Tokyo... is intolerable."

Before the 2011 disaster - which killed around 18,000 people--nuclear power generated about a third of Japan's electricity.

String of scandals

Japan's nuclear industry has also faced a string of scandals and incidents in recent weeks, including data falsification by Chubu Electric Power to underestimate seismic risks.

At Kashiwazaki-Kariwa, TEPCO said Saturday that an alarm system failed during a test.

"Safety is an ongoing process, which means operators involved in nuclear power must never be arrogant or overconfident," TEPCO President Tomoaki Kobayakawa said in an interview with the *Asahi* daily newspaper.

Japan is the world's fifth-largest single-country emitter of carbon dioxide after China, the United States, India and Russia, and is heavily dependent on imported fossil fuels.

Nearly 70 percent of its electricity in 2023 came from coal, gas and oil - a share Tokyo wants to slash to 30-40 percent over the next 15 years as it expands renewable energy and nuclear power.

Under a plan approved by the government in February, nuclear power will account for around a fifth of Japan's energy supply by 2040 - up from around 8.5 percent in the fiscal year 2023-24.

Meanwhile Japan still faces the daunting task of decommissioning the Fukushima plant, a project expected to take decades. – *AFP*

This photo shows the reactor startup procedure for Unit 6 at the Tokyo Electric Power Company Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant's central control room in Kariwa Village, Niigata Prefecture yesterday. – AFP

Israeli strike kills 3 Gaza journalists

GAZA CITY – An Israeli air strike killed an AFP freelancer and two other journalists in Gaza yesterday, the territory's civil defence agency said, while the military said it struck "suspects" operating a drone.

Since October 10, a fragile US-sponsored ceasefire in Gaza has largely halted the fighting between Israeli forces and Hamas, but both sides have alleged frequent violations.

In a statement, the civil defence said "the bodies of the three journalists killed in an Israeli air strike in the Al-Zahra area southwest of Gaza City were transported to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah".

It named the dead as Mohammed Salah Qashta, Abdul Raouf Shaat, and Anas Ghneim.

Shaat had contributed regularly to AFP as a photo and video journalist, but at the time of the strike he was not on assignment for the agency.

In a statement, the Israeli military said troops had "identified several suspects who operated a drone affiliated with Hamas in the central Gaza Strip".

The military did not elaborate what it meant by a "drone affiliated with Hamas".

"Due to the threat that the drone posed to the troops, the [Israeli military] precisely struck the suspects who activated the drone," it said, adding that the strike was "conducted in accordance with the required chain of command approvals" and that the details were under review.

The civil defence, which operates as a rescue force under Hamas authority, said in an earlier statement that an Israeli drone strike had targeted "a civilian vehicle" near Al-Zahra.

Palestinian family members and colleagues carry the bodies of Palestinian journalists killed in an Israeli strike, as they leave the Nasser Hospital for burial, in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. – AFP

According to an eyewitness, the journalists were using a drone to take images of aid distribution by the Egyptian Relief Committee in the Gaza Strip when a strike targeted a vehicle accompanying them.

Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas called the strike "a dangerous escalation of the flagrant violations of the ceasefire agreement."

Journalists under fire

In a statement, the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate condemned the strike "in the strongest terms," calling it a part of a "systematic and deliberate policy pursued by the Israeli occupation to intentionally target Palestinian journalists".

Israeli forces have killed at least 466 Palestinians in Gaza since the ceasefire took effect, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory.

The Israeli military said militants have killed three of its soldiers during the same period.

Gaza's health ministry said another eight Palestinians were also killed in Israeli attacks in the territory on Wednesday.

Media watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said that Israeli forces killed at least 29 Palestinian journalists in Gaza between December 2024 and December 2025.

The deadliest single attack was a so-called "double-tap" strike on a hospital in south Gaza on August 25, which killed five journalists, including two contributors to international news agencies Reuters and the Associated Press.

Since Hamas's attack on Israel in October 2023 sparked the war in Gaza, nearly 220 journalists have been killed by Israel, making the Palestinian territory by far the deadliest place for journalists, RSF data says.

The Israeli military claims that several journalists it targeted in Gaza had been "terrorists" affiliated with Palestinian militant groups.

Last week, US Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff announced the start of phase two of the Gaza ceasefire, saying it aimed to pave the way for reconstruction and the demilitarisation of all armed factions in the territory.

The strike yesterday came hours after the office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced he had accepted an invitation to join US President Donald Trump's "Board of Peace" aimed at resolving conflicts.

The board was originally conceived to oversee the rebuilding of post-war Gaza, but its charter seen by AFP does not appear to limit its role to the Palestinian territory, and members have to pay up to US$1 billion for a permanent spot on it. *– AFP*

Smoke and sparks ascend from the site of an Israeli airstrike that targeted a building in the southern Lebanese village of Al-Kfour yesterday. Israel has kept up regular strikes in Lebanon despite the November 2024 truce that sought to end more than a year of hostilities with Hezbollah, usually saying it is targeting members of the Iran-backed group or its infrastructure. – AFP

US sanctions Palestinian group in blockade-busting flotillas

WASHINGTON – The United States yesterday imposed sanctions on a group of Palestinians involved in civilian flotillas that aim to break Israel's sea blockade on Gaza, accusing it of working for Hamas.

The Treasury Department said that the Popular Conference for Palestinians Abroad (PCPA) has been a "main organiser" of the flotillas and charged that it was "clandestinely acting on behalf of Hamas."

President Donald Trump's administration also imposed sanctions on six Gaza-based self-described charitable organizations, alleging that they are part of Hamas's military wing.

The sanctions will block any assets the groups have in the United States and criminalize transactions with them.

"The Trump administration will not look the other way while Hamas leadership and enablers exploit the financial system to fund terrorist operations," Treasury Department official John Hurley said in a statement.

The PCPA, which has fiercely criticised US support for Israel, has a presence in Lebanon and has organised conferences in Turkey of Palestinians overseas.

The US Treasury Department also imposed sanctions on a PCPA official, Zaher Khaled Hassan Birawi, who is based in Britain.

The group has supported flotillas that have aimed to break through the Israeli blockade of Gaza, which has been reduced to rubble after two years of relentless Israeli bombing and where the United Nations previously determined there was famine.

Israel has intercepted the flotillas made up of multiple boats and detained its participants including Swedish climate campaigner Greta Thunberg.

Two Republican congressman, Andy Barr and Jefferson Shreve, have pushed for the Trump administration to declare the PCPA a terrorist organisation, saying the group was trying to "violate Israel's legal naval blockade of Gaza."

Hamas, long designated by the United States as a terrorist group, carried out an unprecedented attack inside Israel on October 7, 2023, triggering the Israeli offensive in Gaza.

The new US sanctions come as the Trump administration says that a ceasefire has moved to the next stage with a goal of disarming Hamas. *– AFP*

Netanyahu accepts Trump invitation to join 'Board of Peace'

JERUSALEM – Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has accepted an invitation to join US President Donald Trump's "Board of Peace" aimed at resolving conflicts, Netanyahu's office said yesterday.

"Prime Minister Netanyahu announced that he has accepted US President Donald Trump's invitation and will join as a member of the Board of Peace, which will be composed of leaders of the world," the office said in a statement.

The board was originally conceived to oversee the rebuilding of post-war Gaza, but its charter seen by AFP does not appear to limit its role to the Palestinian territory, and members have to pay up to US$1 billion for a permanent spot on it.

The board "seeks to promote stability, restore dependable and lawful governance, and secure enduring peace in areas affected or threatened by conflict", reads the preamble of the charter sent to countries invited to participate.

It will be chaired by Trump himself, who will also "separately serve" as the representative of the United States.

Dozens of countries and leaders have said they have received an invitation, including close US allies but also adversaries.

Longtime US ally France, however, has indicated it will not join.

While announcing the creation of the board last week, Trump also unveiled plans to establish a "Gaza Executive Board" operating under the body.

The executive board would include Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and Qatari diplomat Ali Al-Thawadi.

Netanyahu has strongly objected to their inclusion.

Ties between Turkey and Israel have deteriorated since the war in Gaza broke out in October 2023 following an unprecedented attack by Hamas on Israel.

A separate committee of 15 Palestinian technocrats has also been formed to oversee the day-to-day administration of Gaza as part of the second phase of a truce plan announced by Trump in October.

The committee, led by Gaza native and former Palestinian Authority deputy minister Ali Shaath, commenced its initial work in Cairo this week. *– AFP*

Trump rules out force against Greenland but demands 'immediate' talks

Danny Kemp

DAVOS, Switzerland – US President Donald Trump ruled out using force to take Greenland for the first time as he addressed world leaders in Davos yesterday, but demanded "immediate negotiations" to acquire the island from Denmark.

Trump's quest to take control of Greenland from a NATO ally has deeply shaken the global order and the markets, and it dominated his first address to the World Economic Forum in six years.

In a speech lasting more than an hour in the Swiss ski resort, Trump slammed "ungrateful" Denmark for refusing to give up Greenland, and said the United States alone could guarantee the security of the "giant piece of ice".

But Trump appeared to take the threat of military action off the table, in a dramatic turnaround from his previous threats that the US could use force to take control of the mineral-rich Arctic island.

"We probably won't get anything unless I decide to use excessive strength and force where we would be, frankly, unstoppable – but I won't do that," Trump said.

"I don't have to use force. I don't want to use force. I won't use force. All the United States is asking for is a place called Greenland."

Wall Street stocks opened higher yesterday after Trump's comments.

'Immediate negotiations'

Trump, however, pushed his claims to what he called "our territory" – and mistakenly called it Iceland on several occasions – during lengthy remarks on the deepest crisis in transatlantic relations for decades.

He said he was "seeking immediate negotiations to once again discuss the acquisition of Greenland by the United States" and added that Washington would "remember" if Denmark said no.

US President Donald Trump speaks during the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, yesterday. The five-day meeting ends tomorrow. – Xinhua

Trump says Greenland is under threat from Russia and China.

The US president also lambasted Europe on a number of fronts from security to tariffs and the economy, saying it was "not heading in the right direction".

Trump flew into Davos by helicopter, stepping onto a red carpet laid in the snow – but he flew into a growing international storm over Greenland.

He arrived some two hours behind schedule, after an electrical issue earlier forced Air Force One to turn back to Washington and switch planes.

In a sign of dissent against Trump, the words "No Kings" were dug into the snow overlooking mountain-fringed Davos overnight, referring to a US protest slogan.

Europe and Canada had earlier closed ranks against what they view as a threat to the US-led global order from Trump's territorial ambitions over semi-autonomous Greenland.

In Britain, Prime Minister Keir Starmer said yesterday he would not "yield" to pressure from Trump on Greenland.

Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney won a standing ovation at Davos on Tuesday when he warned of a "rupture" to the US-led system. French President Emmanuel Macron meanwhile said Europe would not be bullied.

But Trump, who was due to meet a number of leaders in Davos, renewed his attacks on the French president and Canadian premier.

He mocked Macron for wearing sunglasses at Davos, which the French president said was because of an eye condition, and said that Carney "wasn't so grateful" and that Canada "lives because of the United States".

'Thoughtful diplomacy'

Earlier, NATO chief Mark Rutte told Davos yesterday that "thoughtful diplomacy" was needed, as Trump's claims over Greenland provoke an existential crisis for the group.

Rutte also pushed back against Trump after the US leader said he doubted NATO would come to the aid of the United States if asked. "I tell him, yes they will," Rutte said.

Trump, however, repeated his doubts on NATO during his speech, saying Washington was treated "so unfairly".

The Greenland row has also soured relations with the European Union, which has threatened countermeasures after Trump vowed tariffs of up to 25 percent on eight European countries for backing Denmark.

But Polish President Karol Nawrocki, a Trump ally, told AFP after the "very important" speech: "I think the situation will be calm." He said he understood the US leader's stance amid Russian pressure at EU borders.

In a speech that veered from topic to topic, Trump also boasted of his achievements since his return to power a year and a day ago. He last spoke at Davos in his first term in 2020.

Trump unleashed his trademark anti-migrant rhetoric, particularly against Somalis in the United States – while hailing the US economy as the "engine" of the world.

The US president also expressed hope of ending the Ukraine war soon, saying he expected to meet President Volodymyr Zelensky in Davos today.

Also today, meanwhile, Trump is set to formally announce the first charter of his so-called "Board of Peace", a body for resolving international conflicts with a US$1 billion price tag for permanent membership.

– AFP

Prince Harry accuses tabloids of making wife's life 'absolute misery'

Joe Jackson and Helen Rowe

LONDON – An emotional Prince Harry yesterday blasted the publisher of two UK newspapers, accusing them of making his wife Meghan's life "an absolute misery" as he finished testifying at London's High Court.

Holding back tears, the prince said pursuing the years-long joint legal action against Associated Newspapers Ltd (ANL), the publisher of the *Daily Mail* and *The Mail on Sunday*, had been "a horrible experience".

He and six others, including pop icon Elton John, accuse the two tabloids of privacy invasions and unlawful information gathering, in the prince's last active legal case in his long-running crusade against some UK media.

"Having to sit here and go through this all over again and have them in their own defence claim that I don't have any right to any privacy is disgusting," Harry said as he concluded several hours in the witness box.

"It's a horrible experience, and the worst of it is that by sitting up here and taking a stand against them, like they have done through this litigation they continue to come after me. They've made my wife's life an absolute misery."

Harry, 41, in court on the third day of the highly anticipated nine-week trial, stepped back from royal duties in 2020 and relocated eventually to California with Meghan amid a bitter family rift.

But the couple, who have two children, have long complained about media intrusion and Meghan's treatment by Britain's newspapers after years of negative stories about her.

'Mission'

King Charles III's younger son has also blamed the media for the death of his mother Princess Diana, killed in a Paris car crash in 1997 while trying to shake off paparazzi.

The ANL joint lawsuit is the third and final case brought against a British newspaper publisher by Harry, who has called it his "mission" to take on the tabloids "for the greater good".

He made history in 2023 by becoming the first senior British royal to enter the witness box in more than a century, when he testified in his successful hacking claim against Mirror Group Newspapers (MGN).

Last year, on the eve of another scheduled trial, Rupert Murdoch's UK tabloid publisher NGN agreed to pay him "substantial damages" for privacy breaches, including phone hacking.

Six other high-profile figures – including actors Liz Hurley and Sadie Frost – have joined Harry in suing ANL, accusing the publisher of illegally intercepting voicemail messages, listening in on phone calls and deceptively obtaining private information.

They allege it paid private investigators implicated in other phone-hacking lawsuits for some of the unlawful information used to generate dozens of stories.

The accusations cover a period from at least 1993 to 2018 in some instances.

ANL has consistently denied the claims, calling them "lurid" and "preposterous".

'Greed'

Dressed in a dark suit and striped tie, Harry took the stand late morning yesterday (local time), swearing an oath on the Bible before facing questions from ANL's legal team.

He insisted in a witness statement unveiled that the trial was not "not just about me".

"There is obviously a personal element to bringing this claim, motivated by truth, justice and accountability, but it is not just about me," he said in the statement.

"There is also a social element concerning all the thousands of people whose lives were invaded because of greed," the prince argued.

He described press coverage of his ex-girlfriend Chelsy Davy as like "full blown stalking", while noting suspicion that people close to him were leaking stories to the press created an atmosphere of "distrust".

"This sort of intrusion was terrifying for Chelsy," he added.

While on the stand, Harry described the tabloid's coverage as "a recurring traumatic experience".

"I've never believed that my life is open season to be commercialised by these people," he added.

The seven claimants' legal team opened the trial on Monday by vowing to show "there was clear and systematic use of unlawful gathering of information" at ANL.

But ANL's lead lawyer has countered that evidence will prove it sourced its stories legitimately and that claims around the use of private investigators were "clutching at straws in the wind". *– AFP*

Britain's Prince Harry waves as he departs the High Court in London yesterday, following the third day of the trial in his case against a major UK newspaper group. – AFP

Railway safety questioned as Spain reels from twin train disasters

Rosa Sulleiro and Daniel Silva

BARCELONA – Spain's railway system was under scrutiny yesterday after a commuter service crashed near Barcelona, days after at least 43 people were killed in a collision between two high-speed trains.

A train driver died and 37 people were injured – several seriously – in the latest incident late on Tuesday (local time). The commuter train hit a retaining wall that fell onto the tracks in Gélida near Barcelona, regional officials said.

Railway operator Adif said the wall likely collapsed due to heavy rainfall that has swept across Spain's northeastern region of Catalonia in recent days.

Spain was already reeling from Sunday's collision in the southern region of Andalusia, the country's deadliest rail accident in more than a decade.

Another body was recovered yesterday at the site of the accident near the village of Adamuz, bringing the confirmed death toll to 43, authorities said.

"This is too much," the head of the conservative main opposition People's Party, Alberto Núñez Feijóo, wrote on X. His party demanded an "immediate clarification" of the state of the nation's railways.

Speaking to reporters on Tuesday before the Barcelona-area crash, far-right party Vox's spokeswoman Pepa Millan said Spaniards were now "afraid to get on a train".

Raluca María Pasca, a 45-year-old waitress, said she had noticed that high-speed trains "have been shaking lately".

"I've felt it myself. They need to fix the problem," she told AFP at the train station in the southern city of Córdoba.

Alexandra Leroy, a restaurant owner from France who was on holiday in Cordoba, said she was now "a little" worried to take the train.

"If it just happened in Barcelona too, twice, that's a lot," she added.

'Constant deterioration'

Services across Catalonia's main commuter rail network have been suspended completely while safety checks are carried out and officials say they will not resume until lines are considered safe.

Adif has imposed a temporary 160-kilometre per hour speed limit on parts of the high-speed line between Madrid and Barcelona after train drivers reported bumps.

Spanish train drivers' union Semaf has called a strike because of the two deadly crashes.

"This situation of constant deterioration of the railway is unacceptable," the union said in a statement.

Transport Minister Oscar Puente said the government would "sit down and talk" with the union to try to avoid the strike.

He also stressed during an interview with television station Telecinco that the two accidents were "completely unrelated", with the Barcelona-area one linked to weather conditions.

Rescuers work at the high-speed train collision site near Adamuz, in Córdoba, southern Spain, on Tuesday. Two high-speed trains collided in Córdoba Province on Sunday, killing at least 43 and injuring over 120. On Tuesday, a train driver died and 37 people were injured – several seriously – in a commuter train accident near Barcelona. *– Xinhua*

Spanish media reported that the probe into the accident in Andalusia was focusing on a crack more than 30 centimetres long in the track at the site of the accident.

The crack may have resulted from "a poor weld or a weld that deteriorated due to train traffic or weather", daily newspaper El Mundo said, citing unidentified technicians with access to the inquiry.

'Proper material used'

Puente has said investigators are looking to see if a broken section of rail was "the cause or the result" of the derailment.

The section of track where the disaster happened had been renovated in May, making the accident "extremely strange", he added earlier this week.

Some unions have accused the Socialist government of using low-cost materials, a charge Puente called "outrageous".

"All proper materials were used. The results of the investigation will confirm this," he told Telecinco.

Opened in 1992, Spain's high-speed rail network is the second largest in the world after China.

Private operators began running passenger trains in 2021 following the liberalisation of the rail sector, ending the decades-long monopoly of state operator Renfe.

Since then, passenger numbers on some routes have grown noticeably.

Spain is the world's second-most visited country after France, and the high-speed rail network plays an important role in the country's key tourism sector. *– AFP*

Portugal's auto output rises 2.7 pct in 2025

LISBON – Automobile production in Portugal increased by 2.7 percent year on year in 2025, reaching more than 341,300 vehicles, according to data released last week by the Portuguese Automobile Association (ACAP).

The figures show that factories operating in Portugal produced 269,468 passenger cars, 68,809 light commercial vehicles and 3,084 heavy vehicles, recording growth across all segments.

Despite the annual increase, vehicle production contracted sharply in December. Output declined 16.8 percent from a year earlier to 21,079 units in the final month of 2025, the ACAP data showed.

The association highlighted the sector's strong export orientation, noting that 97.8 percent of vehicles produced in Portugal were shipped abroad in 2025, making a positive contribution to the country's trade balance.

European markets remained the leading export destination, accounting for 88 percent of total output.

Africa ranked second, absorbing 4.3 percent of exports, while the Americas accounted for 2.8 percent of vehicles produced in Portugal. *– Xinhua*

Ban or Embrace? Portugal's education system grapples with human cost of AI

Analysis

LISBON – In a quiet university library in central Portugal, laptop screens glow late into the evening. Some students hesitantly type, while others scroll, copy, and paste. One question spreads faster than any new software update: is artificial intelligence (AI) expanding minds, or draining them?

That question now sits at the center of a growing debate in Portuguese higher education. Dozens of professors from universities and polytechnic institutes across the country have signed a manifesto calling for a ban on generative AI in teaching and learning, warning that students are being turned into "digital cretins."

The manifesto, signed by 28 academics, urges institutions to "promote the humanization of higher education" and to suspend the use of generative AI tools in academic processes. Students, the text argues, are the main victims of a digital environment dominated by large language models and chatbots that encourage plagiarism, intellectual laziness, and what the authors describe as a "factory of banalities."

"The health of students is collapsing, anxiety levels are soaring, and, transformed into digital cretins, they show little intellectual curiosity or enthusiasm for the demanding adventure of knowledge," the manifesto states.

Behind the provocative language lies a deeper concern. The professors argue that the rapid and largely uncritical adoption of AI by higher education institutions – driven by fear of "missing the train of progress" – has outpaced serious reflection on pedagogy, ethics, and cognitive development. In their view, conferences, workshops, and working groups have replaced firm decisions, while classrooms remain largely unchanged.

The discussion focuses on a practical challenge: how should education adapt when technology can produce answers faster than students can think?

These dilemmas in Portugal reflect broader international concerns. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) this week published its Digital Education Outlook 2026, which examines global research on generative AI in education. One cited study involved students from five American universities who were asked to write a short essay. Those who used AI tools received higher grades, but only 12 percent of these students could accurately quote their own text one hour later. Among students who used no AI or only search engines, 89 percent could do so.

The OECD described this gap as "metacognitive laziness," a term now frequently cited by critics of AI in education.

Still, the debate is far from one-sided. Portugal's Minister of Education Fernando Alexandre has rejected the idea of simply turning back the clock. Speaking during a visit to schools this week, he said AI "is a reality that cannot be ignored."

"What we must do is adapt – through teacher training, changes in teaching methods and curricula – to maximize the opportunities and minimize the risks," he said, arguing that AI should become a complementary tool to enhance students' capacities.

This tension between prohibition and adaptation divides educators themselves. Joseph Wheeler, who has been a professor for 20 years and was interviewed for this report, says skepticism is understandable, but warns against denial. "As educators, we need to embrace it, not ignore it," he said. "Misuse can be detrimental to learning, and studies clearly show that students who rely on AI remember very little. But there are guardrails that can be put in place."

Wheeler sees vast potential if AI is used carefully. "It can adapt to individual students, stimulate learning, and ease teachers' workloads," he said, while stressing that technology cannot replace the human core of education. "There is no substitute for a good teacher."

That view is shared by Gilberto Franca, a consultant developer and technology enthusiast, who considers that the progress of AI is irreversible. "It will be integrated so naturally into daily life that even people with difficulties using technology will be using it without realizing it," he said. The danger, Franca argues, lies in shallow learning. "When students just copy and paste, they don't create connections with the information, and become dependent on AI."

For Franca, the solution depends largely on educators. "If teachers use these tools well and make learning more dynamic, both students and teachers will grow," he said, pointing to improved accessibility and faster access to information.

Students themselves occupy the uneasy middle ground. Breno Moreira, an engineering student in Portugal, says that AI is already an integral part of academic life. "It's a path with no return," he said. "But it has to be used consciously. It shouldn't do the work for us."

Moreira describes AI as especially helpful in theoretical subjects, allowing students to study at their own pace and clarify doubts that crowded classrooms cannot always address. Nevertheless, he worries about over-reliance. "In an exam, you won't have an AI with you. You'll only have what you actually learned," he said.

He believes institutions should respond with education, not bans. "There should be training on AI throughout the course, not just at the end," he said, suggesting the creation of institution-specific educational AI systems to reduce risks and misinformation.

Back in the faculty offices, the authors of the manifesto remain unconvinced. They argue that without a pause – a suspension – universities risk accelerating a cognitive impoverishment that will be difficult to reverse. For them, the issue is not technology itself, but the speed and scale of its intrusion into learning.

As Portugal's universities weigh their next steps, the debate reflects a broader global dilemma. AI promises efficiency, personalization, and access. It also challenges memory, effort, and authorship - foundations on which education has long rested.

Between the glowing screens in libraries and the warnings written in manifestos, one thing is clear: the future of learning will not be decided by algorithms alone, but by how societies choose to live with them.

– Xinhua

China reaches AFC U23 Asian Cup final for the first time

JEDDAH – China reached the final of the AFC U23 Asian Cup for the first time after defeating Vietnam 3-0 in the semifinals in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia on Tuesday.

The victory marks a historic step forward for China in the tournament, who had failed to advance from the group stage in any of their five prior attempts.

Vietnam reached the knockout stage as Group A winner, scoring eight goals in four matches, second only to Japan. China scored once since the quarterfinal but has kept a clean sheet throughout the tournament.

After making several changes to the starting lineup, China put seven of its 16 shots on target. Defender Peng Xiao broke the deadlock in the 47th minute with a header, before Xiang Yuwang doubled the lead five minutes later. Wang Yudong sealed the victory with a close-range finish in stoppage time.

Peng appeared to score again in the 73rd minute, and Vietnam's Ly Duc Pham was sent off for a retaliatory action against China forward Baihelamu as Peng celebrated. The goal was later ruled out for offside after a VAR review.

Goalkeeper Li Hao continued his strong form for China, saving a free kick from Vietnam's Van Khang Khuat in the 24th minute and denying several chances in stoppage time.

China will face defending champions Japan in the final on Saturday. – *Xinhua*

Frank seeks Spurs 'momentum' after beating Dortmund

LONDON –Tottenham boss Thomas Frank said Spurs must use the momentum of a 2-0 Champions League win over Borussia Dortmund to turn around their dismal Premier League form.

Frank was reportedly on the brink of being sacked after Saturday's 2-1 home loss to West Ham that sank Spurs to 14th in the Premier League.

But they have thrived in the Champions League as a fourth consecutive European home win lifted Frank's men into fourth and within touching distance of a place in the last 16.

Tottenham face a Burnley side without a league win in 13 games on Saturday in what could still be Frank's final match in charge should Spurs fail to win.

"We need to bring this win and this performance into momentum," Frank told TNT Sports. "We need to go to Burnley, we need to perform and we need to win."

In stark contrast to the fan revolt at full-time against West Ham, the Spurs crowd were won over by a positive start from their side.

Cristian Romero opened the scoring before Dortmund's Daniel Svensson was shown a straight red card.

Dominic Solanke then added a second on his first start of an injury-disrupted campaign.

"Especially first half you felt that there could be a special night. I think the fans were absolutely great and they're really behind the team, so I'm very happy with that," added Frank.

"I really liked how we started the game: front-footed, aggressive, positive, scored two good goals.

"I would have loved us to keep the ball a bit better second half, but we haven't won as much as we wanted to, especially at home, so it was important to get over the line."

Victory at Eintracht Frankfurt in next week's final round of league phase fixtures should guarantee Spurs a top-eight finish and a place in the last 16. – *AFP*

Sporting Lisbon's Colombian forward Luis Suarez (right) scores his second goal during the UEFA Champions League league phase day 7 match against Paris Saint Germain at Jose Alvalade stadium in Lisbon on Tuesday. Holders Paris Saint-Germain fell 2-1 to Sporting Lisbon on Tuesday, making their chances of direct qualification for the Champions League last-16 more difficult.
Suarez scored twice for Sporting in the second half, sealing victory with a 90th-minute header after substitute Khvicha Kvaratskhelia had equalised for PSG after 79 minutes.
The French club are fifth with 13 points. They face Newcastle next Wednesday in their last group stage fixture. – *AFP*

Man City players to refund fans after Bodo/Glimt debacle

LONDON – Manchester City's players will refund ticket costs for fans who flew all the way to the Arctic Circle only to witness a humiliating 3-1 defeat to Bodo/Glimt in the Champions League.

City suffered one of the most chastening results in their history on Tuesday as the Norwegian minnows claimed their first Champions League group-stage victory.

The entire 55,000 population of Bodo could nearly fit into City's Etihad Stadium, while the financial gulf between the clubs is huge.

City's players have agreed to reimburse the cost of tickets for the 374 supporters who made the trip.

Tickets for the tie at the tiny Aspmyra Stadion cost around £25 (US$33) each.

A statement yesterday from City's group of captains, comprising Bernardo Silva, Ruben Dias, Rodri and Erling Haaland, said: "Our supporters mean everything to us.

"We know the sacrifice that our fans make when they travel across the world to support us home and away and we will never take it for granted. They are the best fans in the world.

"We also recognise that it was a lot of travelling for the fans who supported us in the freezing cold throughout a difficult evening for us on the pitch.

"Covering the cost of these tickets for the fans who travelled to Bodo is the least we can do."

City's only wins in their past seven games have come in the FA Cup third round against third-tier Exeter and in the first leg of the League Cup semi-final against Newcastle.

They have not won a Premier League match this year and last weekend's limp 2-0 loss at Manchester United left them seven points behind leaders Arsenal.

The refund gesture was welcomed by Kevin Parker, a representative of City's official supporters club.

"Manchester City fans will travel to the ends of the earth to support our team, and last night was no different in the Arctic Circle," Parker said.

"Bodo is not an easy place to get to, and the sub-zero temperatures made it a challenging evening on a number of levels for our fans.

"The City support has an incredible connection with the players on a match day, and this gesture is yet another reminder of that relationship - it means a lot to us." – *AFP*

Real Madrid's English midfielder Jude Bellingham (left) scores his team's sixth goal past Monaco's English defender Eric Dier (centre) and Monaco's Swiss goalkeeper Philipp Kohn during the UEFA Champions League league phase day 7 match between Real Madrid CF and AS Monaco at Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid on Tuesday. Bellingham said fans need to show "love" to Vinicius Junior and the rest of the team to get the best from them after Los Blancos hammered Monaco 6-1 in the Champions League on Tuesday.
Supporters showed their frustration at Vinicius and Bellingham in particular, as well as the team as a whole after some poor performances that led to coach Xabi Alonso being sacked and Madrid being knocked out of the Copa del Rey.
"(Vinicius) was really sharp, looked dangerous every time he had the ball, created loads," Bellingham told TNT Sports.
"I think he's a player who thrives when he gets love. You could see today when the kind of atmosphere changed towards him.
"He goes up leaps and bounds in his game and becomes so much more joyful to watch and to play with... – *AFP*

Barca's Ter Stegen joins Girona on loan

PRAGUE - Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen has joined Girona on loan until the end of the season, both clubs confirmed Tuesday.

Germany international Ter Stegen has fallen behind Joan Garcia and Wojciech Szczesny in the pecking order at Barca.

With the 2026 World Cup on the horizon the 33-year-old stopper needs to play regularly to make his case to start for Germany at the tournament.

"Today is my last day this season with my team-mates and the staff at Barcelona, and I truly have mixed feelings," wrote Ter Stegen on Instagram.

"So many memories and emotions are running through me right now. For nearly 12 years this club and especially this locker room, has been my home."

Barca coach Hansi Flick had confirmed the news earlier in a news conference ahead of the team's Champions League clash at Slavia Prague yesterday.

"This morning Marc said that he is going to Girona," said Flick.

"I think Marc is a fantastic goalkeeper. We decided (to go a) different (way) for the future for the club and I think it was the right decision. But I wish him all the best because he is a fantastic goalkeeper.

"Maybe we see him in the German national team in the World Cup. (My) fingers are crossed for this and I think he has good chances."

Ter Stegen, who joined Barca from Borussia Mönchengladbach in 2014, has won six La Liga titles with Barca and the Champions League once, among other silverware.

The goalkeeper missed much of last season with a severe knee injury, leading to Barca bringing Szczesny out of retirement to take his place.

Another injury kept Ter Stegen out of action for much of the current campaign, in which he has made only one appearance.

Ter Stegen did not travel to Prague, where Barca were aiming to secure a top eight finish in the league phase of the Champions League.

They were also without the suspended Lamine Yamal for yesterday's match, which will take place in sub-zero conditions.

"The good thing is that (the players) have to run because it's warmer," joked Flick.

Barca's 11-game winning run came to an end with a defeat at Real Sociedad in La Liga on Sunday.

Flick said it could make his team improve, particularly in their finishing.

"We played on the highest level and this is what I want to see, it was better to lose (like) this instead of showing a bad performance," added Flick.

"I think this could give us a little bit more confidence to believe in what we are doing... but I think we have to be more (accurate) in front of goal, this is what I want to see from the team." – *AFP*

Alcaraz spearheads big names into Australian Open 3rd round

Martin Parry

MELBOURNE – Top-ranked Carlos Alcaraz fended off a series of "bombs" before surging into the Australian Open third round yesterday, where he was joined by Aryna Sabalenka and a near-flawless Coco Gauff.

Three-time finalist Daniil Medvedev needed four sets to keep his Grand Slam dream on track at a cooler Melbourne Park after days of hot weather.

Alexander Zverev, the third seed well beaten in last year's final by Jannik Sinner, also went through in four sets.

Spanish superstar Alcaraz came through 7-6 (7/4), 6-3, 6-2 on Rod Laver Arena against hard-hitting German Yannick Hanfmann to take another step towards a career Grand Slam.

But the 22-year-old was put through his paces by a player 12 years older before setting up a showdown with France's Corentin Moutet.

"To be honest, it was tougher than I thought at the beginning," said Alcaraz, who already has six major titles but has never gone past the last eight in Melbourne.

"I didn't feel the ball that good. You know, the ball was coming as a bomb, forehand and backhand."

If Alcaraz does win the Australian Open to complete the career Grand Slam of all four majors, he would be the youngest man to do so, surpassing compatriot Rafael Nadal, who was 24 when he achieved that feat.

The unpredictable Medvedev, runner-up in 2021, 2022 and 2024, is trying to keep his emotions in check this year and was on his best behaviour against Frenchman Quentin Halys.

He lost a tight first set but the result was never in doubt as he surged to the finish line 6-7 (9/11), 6-3, 6-4, 6-2.

"It was a very tough match, happy I managed to fight," said the Russian, who faces Fabian Marozsan of Hungary next.

American Tommy Paul, Argentine duo Francisco Cerundolo and Tomas Etcheverry, Spaniard Alejandro Davidovich Fokina and Russian Andrey Rublev also safely negotiated the second round.

Heavy rain fell late in the evening, delaying Zverev's match against France's Alexandre Muller for more than 30 minutes.

The break failed to derail the German's victory charge, which resumed under a closed roof, as he won 6-3, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4.

Zverev, who faces Britain's Cameron Norrie in the third round, needed physio treatment for what appeared to be a lower leg injury.

"I took a painkiller and it was fine after that," said Zverev, who is still searching for a maiden major aged 28.

Great home hope Alex de Minaur, the sixth seed, dropped the first set to Hamad Medjedovic of Serbia but fought back to go through in four sets.

'Near perfect'

World number one Sabalenka started in imperious mood.

The four-time major winner raced into a 5-0 lead over qualifier Bai Zhuoxuan, ranked a lowly 702, on centre court before wobbling to give the Chinese player a glimmer of hope.

But the top seed quickly snuffed it out to race home 6-3, 6-1 and set up a clash next with Russian-born Anastasia Potapova, now representing Austria, who dispatched 2021 US Open champion Emma Raducanu.

"Super-happy to close the (first) set, it gives me confidence that my game is there, my focus is there," said Sabalenka, who is bidding for a third Australian Open title in four years.

"Step by step. Super-happy with my win. There is always a little gap to improve."

Sabalenka has dropped just nine games so far as she looks to make amends for her upset in last year's final to Madison Keys.

Third seed Gauff was clinical against Serbia's Olga Danilovic, who ended Venus Williams's tournament in round one.

The two-time major winner took just 78 minutes to race home 6-2, 6-2 on Margaret Court Arena.

It set up a showdown next against fellow American Hailey Baptiste, ranked 70, who downed home hope Storm Hunter in straight sets.

"Near perfect," said Gauff, whose best performance in Melbourne was a semi-final in 2024.

Ukrainian 12th seed Elina Svitolina, Turkish prospect Zeynep Sonmez and in-form Canadian teenager Victoria Mboko also won on day four, all sweeping past their opponents in straight sets.

Mirra Andreeva, the 18-year-old Russian sensation, underlined her talent with an impressive 6-0, 6-4 victory over Maria Sakkari of Greece. *– AFP*

Audi unveil new car for 2026 F1 season

F1

PARIS – German manufacturer Audi, which will make its Formula One debut this season after acquiring the Sauber team, unveiled its first-ever single-seater on Tuesday and declared its ambition to "win championships by 2030".

The livery of the car, named the Audi R26, features a predominantly grey colour scheme and displays the four rings of the German brand's logo in red on its rear wing and was designed to be "the most elegant and striking on the grid."

Last year's Sauber drivers Nico Huelkenberg and Gabriel Bortoleto will remain at the team in 2026 following the rebranding.

"The 2026 regulations created the perfect moment to enter Formula 1," said Italian Mattia Binotto, the project's chief.

Team principal Jonathan Wheatley added: "This car is the physical embodiment of thousands of hours of hard work from a hugely talented group of people across our facilities.

"Today, we start this journey with immense pride, but also with humility. This is just day one of a long campaign. Our mission is to embed a championship DNA into every fibre of this team.

"A culture of resilience, precision, and relentless curiosity where we stop at nothing to find performance. For everyone here, the excitement comes from this challenge: to build a team that gets stronger with every lap, every debrief, and every race. We will turn our long-term ambition into on-track reality, day by day, decision by decision."

Like the other ten F1 teams, this new car will make its track debut next week during closed-door tests at the Barcelona-Catalunya circuit. *– AFP*

The Audi Revolut F1 car is presented ahead of its entry into the 2026 Formula One season, on Tuesday, in Berlin. *– AFP*

Olympics opening ceremony to be non-divisive, designer says

MILAN – The opening ceremony of the Milan Cortina Winter Olympics will be less "divisive" than that of Paris, which drew criticism from conservative circles, its creative director Marco Balich said Tuesday.

The February 6 ceremony, which is expected to attract billions of viewers," is a unique platform for conveying positive messages, not divisive ones," the Italian artistic director said during an online press conference.

"I don't like making divisive statements."

The opening ceremony of the Winter Games – which run until February 22 – is to be held simultaneously at four venues, including Milan's San Siro football stadium, and Cortina d'Ampezzo, Livigno, and Predazzo, which will host the skiing and snowboarding events.

Numerous artists and 1,200 Olympic volunteers are expected to participate in front of many celebrities and government officials, including US Vice President JD Vance.

The ceremony will first celebrate the beauty of Italy, with singer Andrea Boccelli and American pop star Mariah Carey singing in Italian.

It will then celebrate sport and the values of peace, "the harmony of cultures, religions and peoples that we need more than ever," said Balich, who helmed the ceremonies at the 2006 Turin Olympics and the 2016 Rio Olympics.

During the opening ceremony of the 2024 Paris Summer Olympics, a scene featuring drag queens was criticised around the world by religious authorities including the Vatican and conservative politicians, who saw it as an inappropriate reference to the Last Supper, Christ's final meal.

"Some nations prefer to convey different messages," Balich pointed out in response to a question about the Paris Olympics.

"I try to celebrate the values of humanity, I see the glass as half full, I am optimistic by nature," he added.

Milan will be reviving one of the innovations of the Paris Games, however, namely its Olympic cauldron, which attracted crowds in front of the Louvre.

Under the Arch of Peace, in the heart of Milan, the fountain will be animated every hour between 5-11 pm from February 7-22, then again from March 6-15 for the Paralympic Games.

"I expect it to go viral - it's our nod to social media," Balich said. *– AFP*

Sport in brief

Marcell Jacobs back with coach who led him to Olympic gold

Athletics

ROME – Italian sprinter Marcell Jacobs has announced he is returning to work with the coach who guided him to a shock Olympic 100 metres title in 2021.

Jacobs, 31, had left Paolo Camossi's group to base himself in Florida with Rana Reider two years ago, but he says he is returning home.

"I am happy to return to work with Paolo Camossi. Together we wrote a beautiful page of Italian sport history and I think together we can write another," Jacobs said on the website of the Italian athletics federation.

"We are looking towards Los Angeles 2028. Now, we'll get back to work to create new emotions and satisfaction for those who have always supported me," he added.

Since his stunning Olympic triumph in Tokyo, Jacobs has suffered a series of injuries and slipped down the world rankings, although he did finish fifth in the Olympic 100m final in Paris in 2024.

He also won the European 100m title in 2022 and 2024 but he was eliminated in the semi-finals at the world championships in Tokyo last September. *– AFP*

British & Irish Lions announce fixtures for first women's tour

Rugby

WELLINGTON - The British and Irish Lions women's team announced yesterday they will play five matches in New Zealand, including three Black Ferns Tests, during their first ever tour in September 2027.

The tour was first announced in January 2024 with confirmation of the match schedule and host cities to be confirmed.

Whangarei, Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch have now been confirmed to host matches, with the Lions playing tour matches against a Black Ferns XV and an invitational side during the tour.

Their first Test against the Black Ferns will be in Auckland, but at Mt Smart Stadium rather than the famed Eden Park.

The remaining two Test matches will be at Sky Stadium in Wellington and One NZ Stadium in Christchurch.

"This is a hugely significant milestone for the British & Irish Lions," Lions chief executive Ben Calveley said in a statement.

"This announcement makes our first ever tour feel closer for everyone, from fans planning their trip to players dreaming of pulling on the Lions jersey." *– AFP*

ICC rejects Bangladesh's plea to play T20 World Cup matches outside India

Cricket

NEW DELHI - Cricket's governing body said yesterday it had rejected Bangladesh's request to shift their T20 World Cup matches out of India, casting doubt on the team's participation in next month's tournament.

"In the absence of any independent security findings that materially compromise the safety of the Bangladesh team, the ICC is unable to relocate fixtures," the International Cricket Council said in a statement.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board has repeatedly refused to play its games in India, and the Dhaka government said on Tuesday that they would not be pressured into changing their stance. *– AFP*

Warner hits 'Sinners' and 'One Battle' tipped for Oscar nominations

Andrew Marszal

LOS ANGELES – Warner Bros may be for sale, but the studio's acclaimed hits "Sinners" and "One Battle After Another" are expected to dominate the Oscar nominations when the Academy announces its final contenders today.

Both are tipped to rack up a dozen or more nods for Hollywood's grandest awards ceremony -- from best picture and best actor to the new best casting prize.

The rare and enviable position of a single Hollywood studio boasting the two clear Oscars frontrunners ironically comes in what could be Warner Bros' swansong year as an independent distributor.

Warner Bros is the target of a fierce bidding war between Paramount Skydance and Netflix.

Yet despite the struggles of its parent company Warner Bros Discovery, the storied movie studio has enjoyed a banner year, bucking Tinseltown's obsession with sequels and backing original fare from auteur filmmakers.

"Sinners," a blues-inflected period horror film about the segregated US South, comes from "Black Panther" director Ryan Coogler.

It is expected to land a best actor nomination for Michael B. Jordan, who plays two twins battling vampires and racists in 1930s Mississippi, plus everything from screenplay to score.

According to *Variety* awards expert Clayton Davis, "Sinners" could break the all-time record for most nominations by a single film – currently 14, by "All About Eve," "Titanic" and "La La Land."

Coogler is "rewriting the math entirely," and could enter "a statistical stratosphere no filmmaker has ever touched," Davis wrote.

But so far this awards season, Paul Thomas Anderson – whose formidable, eclectic filmography runs from "Boogie Nights" to "There Will Be Blood" – has won almost every prize going for "One Battle After Another."

A zany thriller about a retired revolutionary looking for his teen daughter against a wild backdrop of radical violence, immigration raids and white supremacists, it broke the all-time record for nominations by Hollywood's actors guild.

Former best actor Oscar winner Leonardo DiCaprio is all but certain to secure his seventh acting nomination from the Academy.

Netflix has its own hopefuls in Guillermo del Toro's monster horror flick "Frankenstein," tragic Western pioneer drama "Train Dreams" and animated musical sensation "KPop Demon Hunters."

By contrast, rival Paramount's awards hopefuls shelf is noticeably bare.

Best casting

"Hamnet," a tragic literary adaptation that imagines William Shakespeare coping with the death of his son, is likely to land a bagful of nominations.

Jessie Buckley, who plays the Bard's long-suffering wife Agnes, appears a lock for a best actress nomination.

She is likely to be joined by Emma Stone playing an alien – or is she? – in conspiracy theorist drama "Bugonia," and Norwegian actress Renate Reinsve in arthouse darling "Sentimental Value."

With the Academy's overseas voter base rapidly expanding, "Sentimental Value" is one of a trio of non-English-language films that could contend for best picture.

Along with Persian-language Palme d'Or winner "It Was Just An Accident," there is also Brazil's "The Secret Agent," though "space feels limited" for all three to make the list, wrote Davis.

"The Secret Agent" star Wagner Moura, playing a scientist on the run from Brazil's 1970s dictatorship, is expected to vie with DiCaprio and Jordan for best actor.

But that category's frontrunner is Timothee Chalamet, whose turn as a bratty, talented and fiercely ambitious ping pong player in 1950s New York in "Marty Supreme," has already won a Golden Globe, a Critics Choice Award and more.

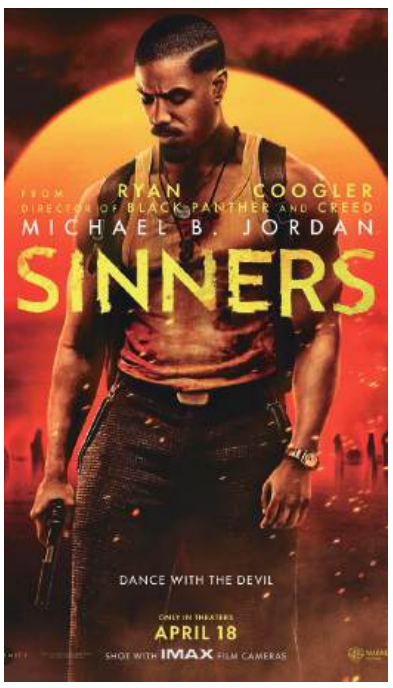
This year sees the introduction of a new Oscar for best casting, honoring the experts who attach actors to projects long before future blockbusters or indie hits begin production.

With no precedent, it is unclear what exactly voters will be looking for.

"Is it star power? Ensemble cohesion? Finding a discovery?" asked Davis.

The nominations will be unveiled today at 13:30 GMT in Los Angeles, with the 98th Oscars ceremony to follow on March 15.

– AFP



Theatrical release poster for "Sinners" – Image courtesy of IMDb

Canadian actress Rachel McAdams, 47, poses on her just unveiled Hollywood Walk of Fame star during a ceremony in Hollywood, California on Tuesday. After graduating from York University in 2001 with a BFA in theatre, she became known for her starring roles in comedy and drama films before transitioning to television and theatre. She has received various award nominations, including for an Academy Award, a British Academy Film Award, and a Tony Award. – AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -12°C~-1°C	Manila 20°C~30°C	New York -2°C~7°C	Lisbon 10°C~14°C
Shanghai -4°C~6°C	Bangkok 21°C~33°C	London 6°C~11°C	Rio de Janeiro 21°C~22°C
Hong Kong 10°C~16°C	Tokyo -4°C~7°C	Frankfurt -1°C~3°C	Luanda 24°C~29°C
Taipei 12°C~14°C	Singapore 23°C~32°C	Vancouver 1°C~7°C	Maputo 23°C~28°C
Guangzhou 7°C~14°C	Kuala Lumpur 22°C~34°C	Paris 5°C~11°C	Dili 22°C~29°C
Nanjing -7°C~4°C	Jakarta 23°C~26°C	Moscow -13°C~-7°C	São Tomé 26°C~31°C
Guilin 1°C~8°C	Seoul -12°C~-4°C	Las Vegas 7°C~18°C	Praia 19°C~25°C
Xi'an -5°C~5°C	Sydney 17°C~24°C	Monte Carlo 6°C~8°C	Bissau 19°C~31°C

'I do not want to reconcile with my family,' says Brooklyn Peltz Beckham

Martin Pollard and Anne-Laure Mondesert

LONDON – A searing family rift between Brooklyn Peltz Beckham and his celebrity parents, David and Victoria Beckham, dominated UK media on Tuesday after he exploded on social media saying he had no wish for a reconciliation.

The 26-year-old said on Monday that his parents have been controlling narratives in the press about his family and tried to "ruin" his relationship with his wife Nicola Peltz Beckham.

"I do not want to reconcile with my family," he wrote in a post to his 16.2 million Instagram followers, confirming the long-rumoured estrangement between Brooklyn and his mother and father.

"I'm not being controlled, I'm standing up for myself for the first time in my life."

Brooklyn is the eldest son of the former England football captain, David, and Victoria, who shot to fame with the Spice Girls pop group and is now a fashion designer.

David Beckham was recently knighted by King Charles III, becoming "Sir David", and both he and now Lady Victoria have starred in carefully curated Netflix documentaries tracing their stories.

Brooklyn married Nicola, an American actress and the daughter of billionaire businessman Nelson Peltz and former model Claudia Heffner Peltz, in 2022.

Spokespeople for David and Victoria Beckham did not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment on their son's statements.

"My parents have been trying endlessly to ruin my relationship since before my wedding, and it hasn't stopped," Brooklyn Peltz Beckham said.

"My mum cancelled making Nicola's dress in the eleventh hour despite how excited she was to wear her design, forcing her to urgently find a new dress."

British model Brooklyn Beckham (left) and his wife, US actress Nicola Peltz Beckham, arrive for the premiere of the movie "Lola" at the Bruin Theatre in Los Angeles, California on February 3, 2024. – AFP

Brooklyn went on to allege that his mother "hijacked" his first dance with Nicola on their wedding day and danced "inappropriately on me" in front of hundreds of guests, adding he had never felt more "uncomfortable or humiliated" in his life.

He also alleged that his wife had been "disrespected" by his family and that she was not invited to his father's 50th birthday party.

"My family values public promotion and endorsements above all else. Brand Beckham comes first," he added.

He concluded by saying that he grew up with "overwhelming anxiety", but now he has found "peace".

'Diplomacy' key

Brooklyn's surprise attack on his parents made front-page news in UK tabloids on Tuesday.

His father David did not respond to questions about Brooklyn's accusations during a public appearance at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland on Tuesday.

But when asked by US broadcaster CNBC about children using social media, he said parents should let children "make mistakes".

The former Manchester United, Real Madrid, LA Galaxy and Paris Saint-Germain midfielder stressed the importance of using social media "for the right reasons".

"I've been able to use my platform and my following, you know, for UNICEF and it's been the biggest tool to make people aware of what's going on around the world for children, and I've tried to do the same, I've tried to do the same with my children, to educate them," he said.

"They make mistakes, children are allowed to make mistakes, that's how they learn. So that's what I try to teach my kids. But you know, you have to sometimes let them make those mistakes as well."

The Beckham family's woes even came up during Tuesday's Downing Street press briefing.

"The prime minister is obviously dealing with a number of other issues at the moment, but I think he's always been clear that diplomacy is very important," Starmer's spokesperson said when asked about the matter. *– AFP*

1. Lady of the lake

Tourists take a boat viewing light decorations displayed at the Bailuzhou Park during the 40th Qinhuai Lantern Festival in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, yesterday. – *Xinhua*

2. Could be a smile...

Chinstrap (Pygoscelis antarcticus) penguins are pictured at Deception Island, in the western Antarctic Peninsula, on January 24, 2024. Penguins in Antarctica, a region on the front line of climate change, are adapting by shifting their breeding season at a 'record' pace, researchers conclude in a study published on Tuesday in the *Journal of Animal Ecology*. – *AFP*

3. Something we don't see

Aurora Borealis, or Northern Lights, are seen above the Wenzel church (Wenzelskirche) in Wartberg ob der Aist, Upper Austria, on Monday. – *AFP*

4. Protection

Residents walk past a large mural depicting a woman and a polar bear on the side of an apartment building in Nuuk, Greenland, yesterday. – *AFP*

5. Cool K9

Indian Army's Remount Veterinary Corps (RVC) personnel fixes safety goggles on an indigenous Polygar hound breed, the 'Rajapalayam hound', at an army centre ahead of the Republic Day parade in New Delhi yesterday. – *AFP*

6. Poor cat!

People take photographs of a cat in a street in Shanghai yesterday. – *AFP*