

DIRECTOR: Harald Brüning

YEAR 21

NO.5232

FRIDAY January 23, 2026

<https://www.macaupostdaily.com>

MOP 6.00

Health Bureau urges balanced diet during CNY gatherings

Armindo Neves

The Macau Health Bureau (SSM) hosted a press conference yesterday urging residents to eat a balanced diet during Chinese New Year (CNY) gatherings.

The presser was held at the bureau's conference hall in a building adjacent to the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre (CHSCJ).

Yesterday's press conference was attended by the bureau's Tap Seac Health Centre dietitian Lam Ieok Hang, Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) dietitian Ip Ka Kei, and CHSCJ internist Lei Chong Iok.

Lam said that residents should heed the "Chinese Food Guide Plate"*(中國居民平衡膳食餐盤) for meal planning. According to Lam, each meal should include at least "over half a bowl" of vegetables. The portion for meat, fish, eggs, or legumes should be limited to "the size of one palm." The staple food, consisting of whole grains or mixed grains, should be around "over half a bowl" per meal.

Before or after the meal, a fruit portion "the size of a fist" can be consumed to increase satiety. She advised residents to eat slowly, chew thoroughly, and reduce the intake of high-fat, high-salt, and high-sugar festive foods such as traditional cakes sweets and "poon choi,"** Lam said.



Health Bureau (SSM) Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre (CHSCJ) internist Lei Chong lok (centre), SSM Tap Seac Health Centre dietitian Lam Ieok Hang (left) and SSM's Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) dietitian Ip Ka Kei look on during yesterday's press conference at the bureau's conference hall in a building adjacent to the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre.

— Photo: Armindo Neves

Lei pointed out that the global average daily salt intake among adults exceeds the recommended limit of five grams by approximately twofold. High sodium consumption is a major contributor to hypertension and damage to the heart, brain, and kidneys, Lei said.

Lei recommended to follow the principle of "eating until 80 percent full" to control portion sizes and maintain a slow eating pace. Lei

suggested residents eat vegetables first, followed by protein, and finally carbohydrates. He urged residents to avoid consecutive meals of rich, heavy foods, and to "reduce salt, sugar, and oil while increasing vegetable intake." Lei also said that patients with chronic conditions are particularly reminded to consistently monitor their blood pressure and blood glucose levels daily and to take medications on time.

Ip also said that in order to promote its health messages, the bureau will collaborate with community organisations to set up "Healthy Community Pop-up Stations" along five routes in Macau tomorrow afternoon. Interactive games will be used to convey information on healthy eating during the Chinese New Year – also known as Spring Festival – to residents.



The Chinese New Year this year falls on February 17, when the Year of the Horse begins.

* The Chinese Food Guide Plate developed by the Chinese Nutrition Society is a visual representation designed to help individuals make informed dietary choices based on traditional Chinese dietary culture.

– Poe

**Poon choi ("vegetable pot") is a traditional Chinese communal dish, particularly associated with southern China. It consists of many layers of luxury ingredients – such as abalone, seafood, pork, duck, and mushrooms – arranged in a large basin or pot and served in layers. It is typically enjoyed during festivals and family gatherings such as during the Spring Festival. - DeepSeek

Greenlandic PM reiterates firm stand on sovereignty

OSLO – Greenlandic Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen reiterated yesterday that sovereignty remains a red line for his government, even amid intense pressure from the United States.

"Our territorial integrity and borders are absolutely red lines that must not be crossed," Nielsen told a press conference in Nuuk, capital of Greenland. "Greenland chooses the Greenland we know today, as part of the Kingdom of Denmark."

US President Donald Trump

said Wednesday he had ruled out using military force to acquire Greenland, claiming his talks with NATO Secretary General Mark had produced "the framework of a future deal" concerning Greenland and the broader Arctic region.

However, Nielsen said that he does not know the specific details of this framework. He stressed that no one other than Greenland and Denmark can make agreements concerning Greenland and Denmark.

When questioned whether Greenland now considers itself safe, Nielsen said that, prior to Wednesday's statement by Trump, the possibility of a US military attempt could not be dismissed.

He stressed that Greenland demands future talks be conducted with full respect for its sovereignty.

Earlier yesterday, Trump told Fox Business that the White House is negotiating a deal to secure US "total access" to Denmark's Greenland with no time limit.

– Xinhua



Greenland's Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen addresses a press conference yesterday in Greenland's capital Nuuk. – AFP

Macau's most popular English-language newspaper – Your trustworthy source of news & views

[f The Macau Post Daily](#)

Computing power woven into hair-thin fibers, paving way for smart clothes, brain implants

Scientists in China have created a flexible, thread-like "fiber chip" that can be woven into fabric, opening the door to advanced brain implants capable of processing signals internally. — [Story on p. 6](#)

US touts 'New Gaza' filled with luxury real estate

US officials yesterday presented their vision for a "New Gaza" that would turn the shattered Palestinian territory into a glitzy resort of skyscrapers by the sea, saying the transformation could emerge in three years. — [Story on p. 10](#)

Spain's train drivers call strike after deadly accidents

Spanish train drivers on Wednesday called a three-day strike for February, plunging the country's under-scrutinized railways into further turmoil, after two accidents just days apart killed 44 people. — [Story on p. 12](#)

Police nab newly employed jewellery shop staff for illegal currency exchanges

Tony Wong

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested a newly employed salesman of a jewellery shop in a casino-hotel resort in Cotai on Wednesday for his alleged involvement of the shop's illegal currency exchange activities, PJ spokesman Ho Wai Lok said during a special press conference yesterday.

According to Ho, the police discovered that the jewellery shop had been engaging in illegal currency exchange activities since February 2023, and even after the law criminalising illegal currency exchanges came into force in October 2024, the shop continued with its illegal activities.

At the time of yesterday's press conference, the police, Ho said, were still looking for the jewellery shop's owner and investigating how much the shop's illegal currency exchange activities had involved since the law took effect.

The new criminal law on illicit gambling, which came into force in late October 2024, criminalises unauthorised currency exchange activities for gambling purposes. According to the law, known as Law 20/2024, unauthorised currency exchange activities conducted on or in the vicinity of casino premises are regarded as currency exchanges for gambling purposes, which are punishable by a prison term of up to five years.

Ho identified the salesman arrested on Wednesday as a

43-year-old local man surnamed Ho, who had just started to work at the jewellery shop early this month.

According to Ho, the Judiciary Police were tipped off earlier this month about the jewellery shop's illegal currency exchange activities, after which PJ officers put the shop under surveillance on Wednesday morning.

The PJ officers saw that a male gambler collected cash in HK dollars from the salesman. After the gambler exchanged the cash for chips at the casino cashier, Ho said, the PJ officers intercepted the gambler and then went to the shop to arrest the salesman.

The police found that the gambler collected HK\$20,000 in cash from the salesman after transferring 19,200 yuan to the jewellery shop by scanning a QR code provided by the salesman.

Under questioning, Ho said, the suspect told the police that he was hired by the jewellery shop early this month as a salesman for a monthly salary of 13,600 patacas, but he was also told by the owner to engage in currency exchange activities with gamblers.

According to Ho, the police seized HK\$1.17 million in cash, gaming chips worth HK\$56,000, a tablet computer, and four smartphones from the jewellery shop.

The suspect has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing an illegal currency exchange charge. ■



HK banknotes, gaming chips, a tablet computer, and four smartphones seized from the jewellery shop are displayed in a pressroom of the Judiciary Police (PJ) headquarters yesterday. – Photo: PJ

Published since Aug 2004

- Director & Chief Editor – Harald Brüning
- Office Manager – Sally Chong
- Marketing Manager – Kevin Cheung King Lok
- Managing Editor – Maria Cheung Ut Meng
- Editors – Lesley Wells, Johnny Un
- Senior Reporters – Tony Wong, Rui Pastorino
- Reporters – Ada Lei, Khalel Vallo, William Chan, Ida Cheong, Armando Neves
- Chief Graphic Designer – Simon Wang
- Graphic Designer – Colin Zhong
- Administrative Assistants – Ester Mak, Carl Leong
- Printed by Tipografia Welfare Lda, 82-86 Rua dos Pescadores
- Wire services – AFP, Xinhua
- Chatbots: Poe, DeepSeek

Macau POST

Macau Weather

COLD, CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY INTERVALS. FORCE 2 TO 4 NORTHEASTERLY WINDS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 50% AND 80%.



Source: SMG

Cristina Leiria's 'Soul to Soul' exhibition shares personal journey



Cristina Maria de Faria Rocha Leiria poses with one of her exhibits of the "Soul to Soul" exhibition in the ground-floor Gallery of Regency Art Hotel in Taipa yesterday.

– Photo: Khalel Vallo

Khalel Vallo

"Soul to Soul", an exhibition by Portuguese architect-cum-artist Cristina Maria de Faria Rocha Leiria, who designed the landmark Kun Iam Statue and Ecumenical Centre in Nape, in the groundfloor Gallery of Regency Art Hotel in Taipa, presents a deeply personal collection of sculptures created by her over decades, shaped by her life experiences marked by loss and resilience.

Speaking to the *Post* at the exhibition yesterday, Leiria said that the title "Soul to Soul" reflects her intention of transmitting personal emotions and values through her work. "What you are going to see here is what I made from how I felt, what I thought was valuable, and what I want to pass to other people," she said, adding that each piece took her about a month to complete, allowing time "to think, to write and, sometimes, to compose a little poem".

The exhibition features sculptures in crystal, bronze, tin and epoxy resin, including rare crystal works produced over 20 years ago, some bearing her name, date and serial number.

Leiria said that the exhibition is both artistic and practical in nature. "I'm hosting the exhibition to sell my sculptures. My objective is to show and to sell," she noted.

Trained as an architect specialising in low-cost housing for slums in Mozambique, Leiria said her path into sculpture began after she took early retirement in her early 50s due to health issues. She recalled falling into a depression before being encouraged by her father to revisit sculpturing, a skill she had practised in her youth. "He took me to a crystal factory and they welcomed me with open arms and said, we can start," she said. "I can't thank them enough."

The exhibition features sculptures in crystal, bronze, tin and epoxy resin, including rare crystal works produced over 20 years ago, some bearing her name, date and serial number.

Leiria described these pieces as "treasures", stressing their artistic and investment value. "You will see that the sculptures here are a treasure, and they are just for people who appreciate things of good quality," she said.

While the exhibition space also displays paintings by other artists, Leiria emphasised that her focus is on presenting and explaining her sculptural works. She also revealed that "Soul to Soul" will be followed by a large-scale virtual exhibition in Shanghai, which she said would allow her work to "spread all over the world".

With free admission, "Soul to Soul" runs until the end of the month at the Gallery of Regency Art Hotel in Taipa, with opening hours from 12 p.m. to 2 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

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

Govt warns more infant formula products contain *Bacillus cereus*

Ida Cheong

French dairy company Lactalis is proactively recalling six batches of its infant formula brand Picot due to contamination of raw materials with the microorganism *Bacillus cereus*, but the Pharmaceutical Supervision and Administration Bureau (ISAF) and Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) confirmed yesterday that the product has not been imported by local businesses, according to a joint ISAF and IAM statement yesterday.

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

The six batches of the French brand are as follows: 8000003312, 8000003280, 8000003281, 80000003297, 80000003298, and 8000003400. Specific details can be found via the webpage link: <https://www.gov.mo/zh-hant/news/1212043/>.

Meanwhile, according to a separate IAM and ISAF statement yesterday, the Taiwan Food and Drug Administration (TFDA)

announced that two batches of "Neoangelac Plus Anbu" infant formula products, manufactured by Taiwan-based brand - Neoangelac (新安琪兒), are being recalled due to potential contamination of their raw materials with *Bacillus cereus*. However, the bureau underlined that the affected brand of infant formula from China's Taiwan region has not been imported by Macau. The batches of problematic products are as follows: 8000003215 and 8000003675.

The Health Bureau and the Municipal Affairs Bureau are continuously monitoring and jointly following up on the incidents, the statement said.

The statement urged residents to immediately stop letting infants and young children consume products from the affected batches, regardless of whether they were purchased through online shopping, overseas purchasing services, or other channels, adding that if any infant or young child experiences discomfort after consuming the



This image courtesy of the Soin et Nature French pharmacy website shows the Picot AR 2nd stage 800g format, one of the affected batches of infant formula containing *Bacillus cereus*.

involved products, they should seek medical attention right away.

For any enquiries regarding the related products, please call the Food Safety Hotline on 2833 8181. ■

Stamp issue to mark 450th Anniversary of Catholic Diocese of Macau today: CTT

Armindo Neves

Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) announced in a statement yesterday that it will issue a set of four stamps to mark the “450th Anniversary of the Catholic Diocese of Macau”.

The statement said that the four stamps, which feature several iconic buildings closely associated with the Catholic Church, namely the Diocesan Curia*, St. Lazarus’ Church, St. Joseph’s Seminary Church, and the head office of Caritas Macau.

According to the statement, the souvenir sheet’s design depicts an ancient map serving as the background, featuring the new Catholic Centre, aiming to showcase Macau’s pivotal role as a hub for the eastward transmission of Catholicism.

The bottom of the souvenir sheet, the statement noted, displays a row of churches that are part of Macau’s UNESCO-listed World Heritage, with the aim of showing the profound historical, cultural, and social importance of the Catholic Diocese of Macau.

The statement said that the issue will be available for sale at the General Post Office (GPO) on Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro (亞美打利庇盧大馬路), the Communications Museum on Estrada de D. Maria II (馬交石炮台馬路) and Post Office on Rua do Campo (水坑尾街).

According to its official website, the Catholic Diocese of Macau was set up on January 23, 1576 by

Pope Gregory XIII through the Bull super Specula Militantis Ecclesiae** (“Bull on the Watchtower of the Militant Church”), the first diocese created in the Far East in modern times.*** The earliest diocese in the Far East – the archdiocese of Beijing – was erected in China in 1307, during the reign of the Yuan Emperor Chengzong, according to the website, adding that in 1313, during the reign of Yuan Emperor Renzong, the Diocese of Quanzhou in Fujian was established.

In the early years, the Macau Catholic Diocese was responsible for a wide swath of Asia, including China as a whole (including Macau), Japan, Korea, Tonkin (North Vietnam), and the islands around the continental Far East. ■

**The Diocesan Curia is the administrative body of a diocese in the Catholic Church. It assists the bishop in the governance of the diocese and carries out various administrative, judicial, and pastoral functions. – Poe*

*** The phrase “Bull super Specula Militantis Ecclesiae” refers to a papal bull (an official decree or letter issued by the Pope) that addresses matters relevant to the Church, particularly regarding its mission and guidelines for its followers. – Poe*

**** The phrase “in modern times” refers to the period of history that is characterised by significant social, political, technological, and cultural changes, typically beginning in the late 15th century and continuing to the present day. – Poe*



This handout digital souvenir sheet and set of four stamps, by the Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) yesterday, marks the 450th Anniversary of the Macau Catholic Diocese. The stamps and souvenir sheet will be issued today.

UM, PUMCH symposium for further cooperation

The University of Macau (UM) yesterday told media that it has recently held its second joint symposium with the Macao Union Medical Center (PUMCH), drawing more than 100 medical experts and scholars to deepen cooperation in medical research, education, and clinical practice.

The two sides reached consensus on topics such as research and clinical data sharing, mechanisms for student and clinical staff exchanges, and systematic cooperation in precision medicine and the diagnosis and treatment of major diseases, according to the public university.

Liu Zhengyin, director of the Macao Union Medical Center, also known as the Islands Healthcare Complex – Macao Medical Center of Peking Union Medical College Hospital, said during the event that the partnership between both parties integrates the strengths and resources of both institutions in scientific research, thereby enhancing the standard of medical education in Macau and supporting the cultivation of medical professionals.

For his part, Ge Wei, vice rector of UM, highlighted that UM’s plan to establish a Faculty of Medicine in its new campus in Hengqin is of significant strategic importance, and that the Macao Union Medical Center will serve as a core partner in UM’s clinical teaching and research collaboration.

Earlier this month, the university announced that it will restructure and establish the Faculty of Medicine and four other science and technology faculties. – Xinhua, MPD

Govt to improve Zone A’s public bus services before CNY

Tony Wong

The government said yesterday that new and improved public bus services for the Zone A new urban area, which has been served by public buses since September last year, will be launched before the upcoming Chinese New Year (CNY), after Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man paid a fact-finding visit to the 1.38-square-kilometre land reclamation area “recently”, with the aim of gaining a better understanding of the government’s ongoing efforts to improve the area’s public transport and community facilities.

The Chinese New Year this year falls on February 17, when the Year of the Horse begins.

Zone A, a new land reclamation area primarily being developed for public housing projects, is located between the peninsula’s north-eastern coast and the man-made island where the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) Macau checkpoint is located.

Construction of the first three subsidised home-ownership scheme (HOS) estates in Zone A was completed in 2024, comprising a total of 3,017 flats.

The government started in September last year to arrange for those who had chosen and purchased their flats to move into the three estates, namely Tong Seng Building (東城大廈) comprising four blocks on plot B4, Tong Chong Building (東創大廈) comprising two blocks on plot B9, and Tong Kai Building (東啟大廈) comprising two blocks on plot B10.

Correspondingly, Zone A has been served by public buses since September last year.

Zone A is currently served by three public bus routes, 101X, 102X and 103.

A public health station, located on the first floor of the Tong Chong estate, opened in November last year. It is the first public facility serving members of the public to come into service in Zone A.

Yesterday’s government announcements about the upcoming improved public bus services for Zone A were made by the Housing Bureau (IH) in a statement, which also said that a supermarket, an eatery, and a pharmacy located in the Tong Chong estate are being decorated and are scheduled to

open before the upcoming Chinese New Year.

Concerning the upcoming improved public bus services, the statement said that public bus route 2A will extend its service to Zone A.

Currently, route 2A travels between Praça de Ferreira do Amaral in the city centre and the neighbourhood near the Areia Preta Health Centre.

According to yesterday’s statement, a temporary public bus terminal will be set up in a street near the Tong Chong estate and the

Tong Kai estate to be used for route 2A.

Moreover, the statement said, route 103 will newly serve Iao Hon district.

Currently, route 103 travels between the Taipa Ferry Terminal and Areia Preta district, over the sea-crossing Macau Bridge, the HZMB Macau checkpoint, and Zone A.

The extended public bus services for Zone A will get off the ground before the upcoming Chinese New Year, the statement said. ■



This undated handout photo released by the Housing Bureau (IH) yesterday shows Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man (third from left) being briefed by officials under his portfolio about their work to improve Zone A’s public transport and community facilities during his recent inspection visit there.



This diagram released by the bureau yesterday shows the upcoming improved public bus services for Zone A. In addition to the setting-up of a temporary public bus terminal for route 2A, a new public bus stop will also be set up near the three HOS estates in addition to the current two bus stops there.

MGM concludes 'Traditional Macanese Cuisine Programme'



This handout photo provided by MGM yesterday shows participants demonstrating what they had learnt by preparing several authentic dishes for guests during the graduation ceremony of "MGM Traditional Macanese Cuisine Programme" at MGM COTAI last Saturday.

Khalel Vallo

Integrated resort operator MGM said in a statement yesterday that it has concluded its "MGM Traditional Macanese* Cuisine Programme", a culinary training initiative aimed at preserving Macanese cooking traditions and nurturing local youth, with a graduation ceremony held last Saturday at MGM COTAI.

Supported by the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) and the Macao University of Tourism (UTM), the programme was completed in last year's fourth quarter. It brought together MGM team members and 64 secondary school students from 17 local schools, the statement noted.

The programme was led by Macanese chef Antonieta Fernandes Manhão, known professionally as Chef Neta, and conducted at the public university, the statement noted, adding that in addition to practical cooking sessions covering signature Macanese dishes and desserts, participants explored the historical and cultural influences behind Macanese cuisine.

At the graduation ceremony, students showcased their skills by preparing traditional dishes for guests, while three representatives spoke about their learning experiences, according to the statement.

Chef Neta said that "every Macanese dish carries far more than a culinary technique. It holds a piece of the city's cultural memory". She added she hoped that participants would "take these traditional

flavours home, weaving them into the everyday dishes of their own families," the statement said.

One participant, Koni Tai from Santa Rosa de Lima Secondary School, said the programme deepened her understanding of Macau's cultural identity, the statement said. "I realised that Macanese cuisine is not a static relic, but a living tradition passed down through generations," she remarked.

According to the statement, guests at the ceremony included officials from the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO), DSEDJ and UTM, as well as representatives from local schools, youth associations and MGM management.

Beyond the training programme, MGM has continued to promote Macanese cuisine through community initiatives and internal activities, the statement said, adding that these include collaborations with local organisations, incorporating Macanese dishes into staff dining, and hosting roadshows featuring Chef Neta to enhance awareness of this intangible cultural heritage.

**Customarily, the term "Macanese" denotes Macau's community of mixed Portuguese and Asian descent, including their culture and cuisine, as well as their diaspora. Macanese cookery is a fusion cuisine dating back centuries featuring Portuguese, Chinese, Malay, Indian and other Asian ingredients and recipes. - MPD*

Four Seasons Hotel Macao announces CNY celebration fare

Rui Pastorin

Hotel operator Four Seasons Hotel Macao highlighted in a recent statement its offerings to celebrate the coming Chinese New Year (CNY) and welcoming the Year of the Horse.

Among the five-star hotel's offerings are the artisanal Four Seasons Pudding Cakes from Michelin-starred Zi Yat Heen, which features premium ingredients, with the selection featuring Coconut Milk Rice Pudding, Abalone Radish Pudding, Spanish 5J Ham Taro Pudding, and the Sakura Water Chestnut Pudding. "This collection is a tribute to tradition, capturing the harmony and blessings of the new year", the statement said.

Michelin-starred Zi Yat Heen's Year of the Horse menu features dishes like Whole Five-Head South African Abalone with Fish Maw. Moreover, Xiao Ting serves classics such as Poon Choi and Honey Kumquat Mousse Cake, along with a special Stallion Afternoon Tea Set that includes Jellyfish & Shredded Chicken Lo Hei, Peach and Salted Egg Yolk Choux, and Pistachio Mille-Feuille.

The Prosperity Buffet Dinner at Belcançao offers Suckling Pig, Braised Abalone, and Eight Treasure Rice Cake, while Buddha Jumps Over the Wall Ramen and Ruby Cocktails are available at Ohte.

Moreover, the statement said that offerings also include a curated room package that includes an exclusive "Prosperity Tray" welcome amenity and a Michelin-starred lunch for two at Zi Yat Heen.

Meanwhile, a 120-minute "ceremony" at The Spa will feature a symbolic Pomelo Leaf Foot Bath, a luminous Mandarin and Grapefruit Body Scrub, and a Cypress and Sweet Orange Body Massage, according to the statement.

"The season's offerings are designed to usher in prosperity, happiness, and good fortune through unforgettable dining, rejuvenation, and luxury", according to the statement.

One can make enquiries or reservations by calling 2881 8888.



This photo recently provided by the Four Seasons Hotel Macao shows its artisanal pudding cakes on offer for the Chinese New Year (CNY).

NAAM at Artyzen Grand Lapa garners Thai Select 2-star recognition

Rui Pastorin

Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau's NAAM Thai Restaurant has recently received its third "Thai Select Award" and achieved the "Thai Select 2-star Restaurant" recognition from the Ministry of Commerce, The Royal Thai Government.

The hotel operator said in a recent statement that the award is valid for three years from December 2025 to November 2028.

The statement added that the Thai Select 2-Star Restaurant is awarded to "outstanding Thai restaurants globally that deliver excellent food quality within a beautiful and memorable setting", being recognised for their professional service, creativity in presentation and distinctive culinary character.

The "Thai Select" symbol is granted to restaurants in type, decor, food quality, and service. A total of 1,610 restaurants in 65 countries have been recognised so far, the statement said.

The award was officially presented by Department of International Trade Promotion (DITP) Deputy Director General Suparporn

Sookmark and Royal Thai Consulate General (HK) Trade Commissioner Pannakarn Jiamsuchon, with Executive Thai Chef Sutthaporn Chulavachana and hotel General Manager Rutger Verschuren, along with the NAAM service and kitchen team, all representing the restaurant at an award presentation.

Naam is Thai for water.

Verschuren, Area Vice President, Macau and Hengqin of Artyzen Hospitality Group and General Manager of Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau, was quoted by the statement as saying: "As one of the first Thai restaurant in Macau, NAAM has been part of the city's dining landscape for over 20 years, it is valued for its relaxed ambiance and genuine warm hospitality. This is our third Thai Select Award, now with 2-Star recognition, is a well-deserved achievement for the entire NAAM culinary and service team."

Executive Thai Chef Sutthaporn Chulavachana was also quoted as saying: "Receiving this recognition again is a great honour, and it motivates us to continue sharing an authentic Thai discovery with our guests."



This photo recently provided by Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau shows Rutger Verschuren, Area Vice President, Macau and Hengqin of Artyzen Hospitality Group and General Manager of Artyzen Grand Lapa Macau (2nd from right), and the team of the NAAM Thai Restaurant being presented with the Thai Select Award.

How reclaimed water tariff system works

Review by Tony Wong

The government has announced the unit prices of reclaimed water, the generation and supply of which will start on March 1, for all categories of users (domestic and non-domestic), according to which the unit prices of reclaimed water will be 15 percent lower than those of tap water for the respective categories of users, but unlike households' tap water usage with a tiered-fee system, such a system will not be implemented for their use of reclaimed water.

The unit prices of reclaimed water were announced in a chief executive order published in the Official Gazette (BO) on Monday, when the Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA) also issued a statement on the matter.

Coloane's sprawling Seac Pai Van public housing neighbourhood and the University of Macau (UM) campus will be the first two areas in Macau to where reclaimed water will be supplied.

The UM's current campus is situated in a one-square-kilometre area of Zhuhai City's Hengqin island that is under the Macau Special Administrative Region's (MSAR) direct jurisdiction, i.e., Macau's laws and regulations fully apply there.

Reclaimed water in Macau will be used for two purposes first after its upcoming launch on March 1, namely toilet flushing and landscape irrigation. In the future, the government will study the feasibility of extending the use of reclaimed water to more non-potable purposes.

Macau's tap water tariff system currently comprises three categories of users, namely domestic (household), general non-domestic, and special non-domestic.

According to the current tariff system, general non-domestic users of tap water are charged 6.04 patacas per cubic metre, while special non-domestic users are charged 7.75 patacas per cubic metre.

General non-domestic users include business premises in general, government premises, schools, hospitals, and community



This photo taken during a media tour on Saturday last week shows pumping equipment in the newly completed first phase of the Coloane Reclaimed Water Station, located next to the Coloane Wastewater Treatment Plant.

- Photo: Tony Wong

associations, while special non-domestic users include gaming premises, hotels, saunas, golf courses, and construction projects.

A tiered-fee system is not implemented for both general non-domestic and special non-domestic users of tap water, meaning that they pay a constant unit price regardless of the volume of their tap water consumption.

Conversely, a tiered-fee system is implemented for household tap water users, meaning that households using more tap water pay a higher unit price. Household tap water users are currently billed by the city's water utility Macao Water every two months instead of every month.

The tiered-fee system for household tap water users has four tiers, where a household using up to 28 cubic metres in two months pays the first-tier unit price, 4.48 patacas per cubic metre.

The system's second tier applies to households with tap water consumption

between 29 and 60 cubic metres in two months where they pay the first-tier unit price, 4.48 patacas per cubic metre, for the first 28 cubic metres and the second-tier unit price, 5.18 patacas per cubic metre, for the following 29 to 60 cubic metres.

The third tier applies to households with tap water consumption between 61 and 79 cubic metres in two months, to which a unit price of 6.04 patacas per cubic metre applies.

The top, fourth tier applies to households with tap water consumption of 80 cubic metres or above in two months, where they pay a unit price of 7.27 patacas per cubic metre for their tap water consumption beginning with the 80th cubic metre.

Reclaimed water unit prices for different categories of users

According to Monday's announcements about the upcoming reclaimed water tariff system, general non-domestic users of

reclaimed water will be charged 5.13 patacas per cubic metre, while special non-domestic users will be charged 6.59 patacas per cubic metre, i.e., 15 percent lower than the unit prices of tap water for the respective two categories of users.

According to the announcements on Monday, a tiered-fee system will not be implemented for household reclaimed water users, meaning that they will be charged a constant unit price, 3.81 patacas per cubic metre, regardless of the volume of their reclaimed water consumption, i.e., 15 percent lower than the first-tier tap water unit price (4.48 patacas per cubic metre).

The newly completed first phase of the Coloane Reclaimed Water Station will be able to generate up to 2,500 cubic metres of reclaimed water per day, which will be delivered to the Seac Pai Van public housing neighbourhood and the UM campus from March 1 this year.

The Seac Pai Van public housing neighbourhood comprises one social rental housing estate and three subsidised homeownership scheme (HOS) estates.

From March 1, according to the DSAMA website, reclaimed water will be supplied to Lok Kuan Building (social housing), Ip Heng Building (HOS estate), and Koi Nga Building (HOS estate) in the Seac Pai Van public housing neighbourhood. However, On Son Building (HOS estate) there will not be included in the upcoming supply of reclaimed water because the estate is not equipped with a dual-pipe system as it was the first to be built in the neighbourhood.

In addition, the neighbourhood's three public-facility complexes will also be supplied with reclaimed water namely Seac Pai Van Community Complex, Seac Pai Van Social and Health Services Building, and the complex consisting of Seac Pai Van Public School, Language Teaching Activity Centre, and Vocational and Technical Education Activity Centre. ■

GEG launches 15th edition of youth programme

Highlights previous edition achievements

Rui Pastorin

Integrated resort operator Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) held both the 14th YAP Award Presentation and the 15th YAP Launching Ceremony of the GEG Youth Achievement Program (YAP) at the Galaxy International Convention Centre (GICC) in Cotai last night, celebrating the achievements of the participants of the programme's previous edition while also launching the newest edition.

The programme, which has been co-organised with the Macau Management Association (MMA) since 2011, features a raft of activities and training opportunities for participants aged between 18 and 29. To date, over 3,600 participants have joined the programme.

The 14th edition centred on "Empowering Technology, Creating Value," featuring lectures and workshops on green technology and AI. Outstanding participants, including the winning group of the programme's final competition, were recognised, with prizes distributed last night.

The 15th edition will be themed "Cultural Heritage, Careers Set Sail", with workshops on Macau's intangible cultural heritage, cultural seminars, art exhibitions, and study tours set to be among the activities to be held, according to a statement provided by GEG yesterday.

Delivering a speech at yesterday's ceremony,

GEG Director Philip Cheng Yee Sing said: "GEG has always attached great importance to nurturing talent. Over the years, we have worked closely with MMA to build YAP into a dynamic platform that brings together diverse elements of learning and exchange. Looking ahead, GEG will continue to support young people to 'Reach Out, Reach Beyond', pushing past their limits and achieving excellence".

MMA Council Chairman Tommy Lau Veng Seng said in his speech: "MMA is committed to advancing the holistic development of local youth. Together with GEG, which shares our vision, we have co-organised YAP for many years, providing solid and diverse activities and training to help participants grow academically, professionally, and socially."

Other guests attending yesterday's event were Director of the Economic Affairs Department of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Macau SAR Sun Yaohua, and Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) Director Chan Un Tong, along with representatives from local government entities and GEG.

15th National Games Gold medallist in the Male Amateur Team Kata and two-time member of "Galaxy Entertainment Group Presents: We Are Macau Athletes" was also present at the event for a section talking about his story. ■



Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) Director Philip Cheng Yee Sing (3rd from left) and Macau Management Association Council Chairman Tommy Lau Veng Seng (3rd from right) pose for a group photo with other guests last night during the 14th YAP Award Presentation and the 15th YAP Launching Ceremony of the "GEG Youth Achievement Program [YAP]" at the Galaxy International Convention Centre (GICC) in Cotai.

- Photo: Rui Pastorin

Community app providing over 20,000 services ends: Bosco Youth Service

Ida Cheong

The director of the Bosco Youth Service Network's programme "Free Teen Land", Dickson Tam Tek Sang, said in a speech yesterday that since its mobile app "GoGoGoal" launch five years ago, the app had accumulated nearly 3,400 registered users and provided over 20,000 services. However, in response to the constantly evolving needs of society and following an evaluation of the overall service direction and resource integration, the app "GoGoGoal" has recently ceased operating.

Tam made the remarks during a "GoGoGoal Youth Partners Appreciation Ceremony" at the Macau Science Centre (MSC) in Zape, with

the aim of commending the merchants who sponsored the mobile app "GoGoGoal" last year, and the 109 "friendly support organisations" that "enthusiastically" backed the Bosco Youth Service Network.

Tam noted that the app users were able to cultivate exercise habits, actively engage in community activities, pursue continuous self-improvement, and enhance environmental awareness by completing various tasks within the app, thereby establishing a healthy lifestyle and distancing themselves from addictive temptations.

Tam pointed out that in addition to the core services consistently promoted by his group, one example

was a student microfilm project with a responsible gambling theme, and a microfilm, named NG Life, which premiered in September last year, which aimed to encourage young people to unleash their creativity and promote positive values.

Participants were engaged in the entire process, including scriptwriting, learning shooting techniques, on-site performances, and post-production editing. Through the lens of youths, his group conveyed the message of how to prevent addiction, Tam said.

Meanwhile, prizes for the "GoGoGoal 5th Anniversary Grand Lucky Draw" were also presented at last night's ceremony. ■



Bosco Youth Service Network's "Free Teen Land" Programme Director Dickson Tam Tek Sang (second from left, front row) and other attendees pose for a group photo during "GoGoGoal Youth Partners Appreciation Ceremony" at the Macau Science Centre (MSC) in Zape yesterday.

— Photo: Ida Cheong

Computing power woven into hair-thin fibers, paving way for smart clothes, brain implants

SHANGHAI — Scientists in China have created a flexible, thread-like "fiber chip" that can be woven into fabric, opening the door to garments that function as interactive screens, advanced brain implants capable of processing signals internally and hyperrealistic virtual reality touch.

Researchers from Fudan University successfully integrated a functioning integrated circuit — combining processing, memory and signal capabilities — directly into a single, elastic polymer fiber thinner than a human hair.

The breakthrough, published in the journal *Nature* yesterday, moves beyond the rigid, planar form of traditional silicon chips.

"The human body is made of soft tissue, so emerging fields like future brain-computer interfaces demand soft, compliant electronic systems," said Peng Huisheng, who led the study. His team has spent over a decade developing functional fibers for lighting, display and power.

However, the central challenge was constructing complex, stable microelectronics on a soft, curved material that can stretch and twist, "akin to building a skyscraper on soft, bumpy mud and making it withstand deformation," explained Chen Peining, a corresponding author of the study.

SUSHI-ROLL INNOVATION

The team circumvented the limitations of fiber's tiny surface area by looking inward, drawing inspiration from "rolling sushi."

To solve the problem that ultra-precise integrated circuits cannot be patterned on rough, uneven surfaces, they created an

ultra-smooth, nanometer-flat surface on a stretchable elastomer, turning a "rugged mountain range" into a "glass-smooth plain."

Then, the researchers fabricated high-precision circuits on this sheet using standard lithography manufacturing processes, and protected them with a dense coating to resist chemical solvents. Finally, they rolled this film into a tight, multi-layered spiral within the fiber itself.

This architecture allows for a remarkable integration of transistors, resistors and capacitors, according to the study.

Lab tests have shown that the resulting fiber circuit could withstand repeated bending and abrasion for 10,000 cycles, and even being crushed by a 15.6-tonne truck. Crucially, it packs 100,000 transistors into every centimeter, so a single one-meter fiber hosts as many transistors as a classic computer's CPU.

In a demonstration, the fiber chips are shown to be capable of processing digital and analogue signals and performing neural computing tasks for image recognition with high accuracy. "The fabrication is fully compatible with today's lithography lines, so it can plug straight into high-volume manufacturing," Chen said.

GAME-CHANGER

The implications of the innovation span multiple frontier industries.

In brain-computer interfaces, today's rigid neural probes must connect to external processors. The soft, biocompatible fiber chip might be implanted to detect, pre-process and even provide feedback for neural signals within the body, reducing infection risk and



improving compatibility with brain tissue.

A 1,024-channel-per-centimeter electrode array, together with on-board circuitry, can be integrated on ultra-thin fibers as slender as 50 micrometers in diameter, which match brain tissue in softness and can record neural signals whose signal-to-noise ratio rivals that of commercial devices, according to the study.

In consumer electronics, the same technology could be harnessed to create futuristic smart wearables.

"For electronic textiles, past fabric displays could only show simple static patterns. To achieve dynamic video or touch interaction, an information-processing module is indispensable," said Chen Ke, a co-first author of the study.

At Davos, IKEA CEO calls Chinese market 'super important', announces new stores in Beijing, Shenzhen

Martina Fuchs

DAVOS, Switzerland — The CEO of IKEA, the world's home furnishing giant, told Xinhua at the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos yesterday that China is a "super important market" and that the company is expanding its retail footprint.

"China is a super important market for us. From an IKEA sourcing perspective, it is really important. Also, we are investing in recycling capabilities, making recycled products and then investing in companies", IKEA CEO Juvencio Maeztu said.

IKEA entered the Chinese mainland in 1998. Apart from running bricks-and-mortar stores in many big cities on the mainland, it also operates its own online sales platform, while running stores on e-commerce platforms JD.com and Alibaba Group.

"On the retail side, we are also expanding and are adjusting the footprint. We are opening new stores in Beijing and Shenzhen, the first coming next month and the next one coming in April," Maeztu explained.

"China is super important for us from the full scale of the value chain. There are many homes in China that need to have IKEA furniture," he said.

Maeztu spent the last 25 years within IKEA in different roles, starting out in the early 2000s as store manager in Spain. In November, he succeeded Jesper Brodin who had served as IKEA CEO for the past eight years.

Asked about his global business and performance outlook for 2026, Maeztu expressed caution and optimism.

"The good thing in IKEA is that we are really focused on making life at home as affordable as possible for everyone. This is a time when people need affordability the most," said the CEO.

"We are well placed with all the capabilities we have in omnichannel, and we are determined to be as close as possible to as many people as possible," he added.

— Xinhua

A researcher displays rolled-up "fiber chips" and a smart tactile glove made by weaving the chips into textiles at Fudan University in Shanghai on Monday. Scientists in China have created a flexible, thread-like "fiber chip" that can be woven into fabric, opening the door to garments that function as interactive screens, advanced brain implants capable of processing signals internally and hyperrealistic virtual reality touch. — Xinhua

Clothing integrated with these fibers could display navigation, health data or videos directly on the sleeve.

In virtual and augmented reality, gloves woven with sensor-laden fiber chips could provide precise, distributed tactile feedback. "A surgeon wearing them for remote surgery could clearly perceive the hardness of organs while a game player could realistically feel virtual props," said Wang Zhen, another co-first author.

At present, the team is already collaborating with a hospital to explore use in cardiovascular surgery.

"We hope that one day electronic fabrics built on 'fiber chips' will exchange information as efficiently as today's phones and computers," Chen Peining said. — Xinhua

Beijing targets computing capacity of 200,000 PFLOPs by 2027 to fuel AI growth

BEIJING – Beijing plans to accumulate a total computing capacity of approximately 200,000 petaflops by 2027, as part of the city's efforts to support the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) and other digital industries.

At a press conference held by the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Economy and Information Technology yesterday, Zhang Jinrui, deputy director of the digital industry division, announced that Beijing will establish a cross-regional computing supply system, develop large-scale computing clusters in neighboring Hebei Province and Tianjin Municipality through partnerships with telecom operators and internet firms, and

expand supply corridors in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, and in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and Qinghai Province to gather high-quality resources for foundational AI model training.

One PFLOP, or petaflop, equals a one quadrillion floating-point operation per second.

In 2026, Beijing will also advance green transformations for 40 existing data centers, Zhang said.

Beijing has since 2023 allocated over 700 million yuan in computing subsidies, reducing computing costs for nearly 100 enterprises by more than 15 percent and raising overall computing utilization to over 85 percent, Zhang noted.

– Xinhua

Senior official urges sustained crackdown on cross-border gambling

BEIJING – A senior official yesterday urged maintaining a high-pressure stance against cross-border gambling, while strengthening comprehensive and coordinated measures.

Wang Xiaohong, a member of the Secretariat of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and state councilor, emphasized the urgency and importance of tackling cross-border gambling during a

national video conference.

He stressed the need to focus on key cases, major fugitives, and criminal gambling networks, applying persistent and precise operations.

Wang also called for systematic approaches and stronger organizational support, along with improved mechanisms and professional capacity, to achieve greater results in combating cross-border gambling.

– Xinhua

PBOC to conduct 900-billion-yuan MLF operation on Friday

BEIJING - The People's Bank of China (PBOC) announced yesterday that it will conduct a 900-billion-yuan, one-year medium-term lending facility (MLF) operation today, aiming to maintain ample liquidity in the country's banking system.

The central bank said the MLF

operation will be carried out via a fixed-quantity, interest-rate-bidding and multiple-price-bidding method.

The MLF was introduced in 2014 to help commercial and policy banks maintain liquidity by allowing them to borrow from the central bank using securities as collateral.

– Xinhua

China's outbound investment maintains steady growth in 2025: MOC

BEIJING – Mainland China's enterprises' outbound investment maintained healthy, steady and orderly growth in 2025, driven by high-quality cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Ministry of Commerce (MOC) said yesterday.

By the end of 2025, Chinese investors had established over 50,000 overseas enterprises across 190 countries and regions, and China's cumulative outbound investment had ranked among the world's top three for nine consecutive years, ministry spokesperson He Yongqian told a regular press conference.

China's outbound direct investment reached US\$174.38 billion in 2025, up 7.1 percent from a year earlier and remaining among the world's top,

according to the spokesperson.

Chinese companies going global have actively fulfilled their social responsibilities, creating more than 2 million jobs on average each year, the spokesperson said. They have financed and built numerous livelihood projects in education, healthcare and environmental protection, earning widespread recognition from host countries, He noted.

In 2026, the ministry will promote integrated development of trade and investment, support enterprises in international operations, and deepen cooperation in emerging sectors such as the digital economy and green development, to make greater contributions to the steady growth of the global economy, said the spokesperson.

– Xinhua

China unveils first-ever policy to boost high-quality development of pharmaceutical retail sector

BEIJING – The Ministry of Commerce (MOC) and eight other government departments yesterday issued the country's first policy document specifically targeting the pharmaceutical retail sector, aiming to transform pharmacies into comprehensive "health stations" that serve public health needs in an improved manner.

The new policy emphasizes the enhancement of professional pharmaceutical services, health promotion and emergency supply capabilities.

It comes as the sector, which has long been a key component of China's medical and health system, enters a critical phase of innovation-driven transformation amid rising public demand for quality health care, medicines and wellness services.

According to Ministry of Commerce data, China's pharmaceutical distribution market expanded steadily during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025), with annual sales rising

from 2.41 trillion yuan in 2020 to 2.95 trillion yuan in 2024.

The new policy has a three-pronged approach: empowerment, quality upgrading and accountability reinforcement.

To empower pharmacies, it allows pharmaceutical retail chains to establish in-house pharmacy services platforms, enabling licensed pharmacists registered with headquarters to provide remote prescription reviews and medication counseling.

It also aligns outpatient insurance reimbursement policies for designated retail pharmacies with those of local primary health care institutions, meaning patients will be able to benefit from the same co-payment ratios, deductibles and coverage caps when they fill prescriptions at pharmacies as they would at clinics.

In a move to lower drug prices, the policy encourages retail pharmacies to participate in centralized drug-procurement programs. For medicines not covered

by these programs, it promotes joint purchasing among retailers to leverage volume-based pricing and strengthen bargaining power.

On quality improvement, the document calls for a streamlined licensing process for pharmaceutical business permits, as well as the facilitation of retail-channel access for innovative drugs and reference-listed products. It also supports mergers, acquisitions and integrated wholesale-retail operations to optimize supply chains and foster fair competition.

To reinforce accountability, the policy mandates enhanced emergency response functions. Large pharmacy chains are urged to develop dynamic demand forecasting and low-stock early-warning systems.

During public health emergencies or disasters, they are encouraged to offer 24-hour services, medicine-splitting services, free delivery and public health education, and to implement price stabilization measures.

– Xinhua



A driver charges an electric vehicle in Taizhou, Jiangsu Province, yesterday. China has built the world's largest electric vehicle (EV) charging network, which can meet the charging demand of more than 40 million new energy vehicles, the National Energy Administration (NEA) said on Wednesday.

– AFP

China's efforts in climate response, renewable energy widely recognized : FM spokesperson

BEIJING – As a responsible major developing country, China's endeavors in climate response and promoting global development and application of renewable energy are widely recognized, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said yesterday.

Guo made the remarks at a news briefing in response to US President Donald Trump, who reportedly said on Wednesday at Davos that China made lots of wind turbines but he had not "been able

to find any wind farms in China." He also said China has been selling wind turbines to "stupid" people.

China has developed the world's most complete policy system on reducing carbon emissions, as well as the world's largest renewable energy system, and actively shares its achievements in green development, Guo said.

He stressed that China's installed capacity of wind power had ranked the first in the world for 15 consecutive years. Up till the

end of November 2025, China's installed capacity of wind power had exceeded 600 million kw.

During the 2021-2025 period, the wind power and photovoltaic products China exported helped reduce around 4.1 billion tonnes of carbon emission in other countries in total, the spokesperson said.

China stands ready to work with all sides to continue to promote global green and low-carbon transition, and jointly build a clean and beautiful world, he added.

– Xinhua

Philippines convicts journalist on terror charge called 'absurd'

Cecil Morella

TACLOBAN — A young Philippine journalist who spent nearly six years in a crowded provincial prison was found guilty of terror financing yesterday in a case rights groups and a UN expert labelled a "travesty of justice".

Community journalist and radio broadcaster Frenchie Cumpio, 26, is the first Filipina journalist to be prosecuted under the terror financing laws, which defence lawyer Julianne Agpalo said have become the government's "weapon of choice" for silencing dissent.

Cumpio and former roommate Marielle Domequil broke down in tears and hugged each other as the guilty verdict was read and they were sentenced to up to 18 years in prison by judge Georgina Uy Perez of the Tacloban regional court.

The duo, who were both acquitted on a lesser weapons charge, will be eligible for parole in about 12 and a half years.

In a copy of the decision seen by AFP, the court said it was convinced by the testimony of former rebels who said the pair had provided the New People's Army (NPA), a designated terrorist group, with cash, arms and fabric for clothing.

The Samar-Leyte region that is home to Tacloban is one of the last remaining operating areas of the Maoist insurgency.

Both Cumpio and her advocates have insisted she was a victim of "red-tagging", in which the government links its critics to the communist forces to silence them.

Speaking outside the courthouse, lawyer Norberto Robel said his team would file an appeal.

"Despite this (ruling), there is still a legal remedy and pending application for bail," he said.

The case has been closely monitored by human rights groups including Amal Clooney's Clooney



Frenchie Mae Cumpio (right, wearing yellow), a detained Filipino journalist, and her former roommate Marielle Domequil (left, wearing yellow) arrive at Tacloban Regional Trial Court on Leyte island yesterday, to attend their court case. — AFP

Foundation for Justice, which in October questioned the lengthy detainment, citing "repeated postponements and slow progress".

UN Special Rapporteur Irene Khan had previously said the charges against Cumpio appeared to be "in retaliation for her work as a journalist".

Cumpio and Domequil were arrested in February 2020 on weapons charges, accused of possessing a handgun and a grenade.

More than a year later, the terror financing charge, which carried a potential 40-year jail sentence, was added.

Absurd verdict'

Yesterday, Beh Lih Yi, Asia-Pacific director of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), condemned the court's decision.

"This absurd verdict shows that the various pledges made by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to uphold press freedom are nothing but empty talk," she said, adding it was the first time a journalist had been charged with financing terrorism in the Philippines.

"The ruling underscores the lengths that Philippine authorities are willing to go to silence critical reporting."

Aleksandra Bielakowska, advocacy

manager for Reporters Without Borders, said the verdict demonstrated a "blatant disregard for press freedom".

"The Philippines should serve as an international example of protecting media freedom - not a perpetrator that red-tags, prosecutes and imprisons journalists simply for doing their work," she said.

Prosecutors declined to speak with AFP outside the courthouse.

In September, more than 250 journalists and media groups called on President Marcos to release Cumpio, calling the charges "trumped up".

Following an evening mass on Wednesday, Cumpio's mother, Lala, told AFP that she visited her daughter in prison once each month, bringing her groceries, medication and chicken from Jollibee.

Bringing in the gravy and soft drinks that accompanied the fast-food meals was prohibited by guards, she added.

"Of course, I'm worried," Lala said of the looming decision. "My youngest keeps asking when his big sister will come home."

She broke down in tears alongside her two sons outside the courthouse as the verdict was announced. — AFP

Malaysian ex-army chief, wife charged with corruption

Isabelle Leong

KUALA LUMPUR — A Malaysian ex-army chief and his wife were charged yesterday with money laundering in a case stemming from a sweeping graft probe into military procurement that has also snared other top officers.

Muhammad Hafizuddeain Jantan, 57, and his wife Salwani Anuar, 26, pleaded not guilty over allegations linked to hundreds of thousands of dollars they allegedly received.

The Southeast Asian nation's defence establishment has become the focus of a Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) probe, after a series of controversies alleging kickbacks for high-ranking officers.

Hafizuddeain was placed on immediate leave in December, and the MACC opened an investigation that included raids on several companies and the freezing of bank accounts linked to the pair. He retired January 1, 2026.

The probe has also led to the arrest

of several other top military officers.

Prosecutors say Hafizuddeain received proceeds from illicit activities totalling 2.122 million ringgit (US\$524,892) between February 2024 and November last year, which were paid into his bank accounts.

His wife Salwani, is accused of receiving 77,000 ringgit paid into an account belonging to a company she controlled.

Both were released on bail, but ordered to surrender their passports and report to the MACC once a month while the case is pending.

Each count of money laundering is punishable by up to 15 years in jail and a fine of five times the value of the illicit funds or five million ringgit, whichever is higher.

Today, Hafizuddeain will face two additional charges in court in Shah Alam, outside Kuala Lumpur.

Meanwhile, Salwani will also face an additional charge under the same act in the northeastern state of Terengganu on Monday.

Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim last week ordered an immediate temporary freeze on all procurement decisions by the police and Malaysian armed forces to ensure full compliance with procedures.

Local media reported the MACC was probing owners of 26 companies linked to the military procurement projects, saying several firms had repeatedly secured high-value contracts between 2023 to 2025.

Separately, former armed forces chief Mohd Nizam Jaafar will be charged today with abuse of power, criminal breach of trust and for illegally accepting gifts, the MACC said on Wednesday.

The MACC added that a probe into two other senior military officers is currently in the "final stage", with investigation papers to be submitted to prosecutors soon for further action.

Anwar this week said Malaysia is to review all other procurements that have been approved and yet to be finalised. — AFP

Marcos hit with impeachment complaint

Pam Castro

MANILA — Members of Philippine civil society groups filed an impeachment complaint against President Ferdinand Marcos yesterday, accusing him of systematically bilking taxpayers out of billions of dollars for bogus flood control projects.

Rage over so-called ghost infrastructure projects has been building for months in the archipelago country of 116 million, where entire towns were buried in floodwaters driven by powerful typhoons in the past year.

The filing, endorsed by the Makabayan bloc, a coalition of left-wing political parties, accuses Marcos of betraying the public trust by packing the national budget with projects aimed at redirecting funds to allies.

Under the Philippine Constitution, passage of articles of impeachment in the House of Representatives triggers a Senate trial, where a guilty verdict would mean removal from office and disqualification from future public posts.

A copy of the complaint was filed at the House's Office of the Secretary General "in accordance with House rules", petitioners said yesterday, though it was not marked as received as the top official was not present.

"The President institutionalised a mechanism to siphon over 545.6 billion pesos (US\$9.2 billion) in flood control funds, directing them into the hands of favoured cronies and contractors and converting public coffers into a private war chest for the 2025 (mid-term) elections," a summary of the filing seen by AFP says.

It also accuses the president of directly soliciting kickbacks, a charge that relies heavily on unproven allegations made by a former congressman who fled the country while under investigation.

Presidential spokeswoman Claire Castro, who told reporters yesterday that Marcos was recovering after spending the night under medical observation for an undisclosed illness, declined to discuss the filing.

"Let's wait (to see) its contents, we cannot address that as of now if we don't have the details of their complaints," she said.

Marcos has consistently noted that he was the one who put the issue of ghost projects centre stage and taken credit for pushing investigations that have seen scores of construction firm owners, government officials and lawmakers implicated.

But complainant Liza Maza told reporters yesterday she believed the moves were only intended to deflect blame.

"We think the investigation he initiated is just a cover-up," she said. "Because the truth is, he is the head of this corruption."

Hours later, a group with ties to former president Rodrigo Duterte showed up at the House of Representatives with their own corruption-based impeachment complaint against the president, only to depart without leaving a copy.

'Slim chance'

Yesterday's complaint was not the first filed against Marcos this week.

Under the constitution, any citizen can file an impeachment complaint provided it is endorsed by one of the more than 300 members of Congress.

On Monday, a local lawyer brought a case citing Rodrigo Duterte's arrest and transfer to the International Criminal Court, as well as unproven allegations of drug abuse.

Dennis Coronacion, chair of the political science department at Manila's University of Santo Tomas, told AFP at the time that the document relied largely on "rehashed or recycled allegations" and lacked "sufficient evidence".

Yesterday, Coronacion said the new complaint was also unlikely to go far in a Congress packed with Marcos allies.

"(It) has a very slim chance of getting the approval of the House Committee on Justice and (even less) so, in the plenary, because the president still enjoys the support of the members of the House of Representatives," Coronacion said.

— AFP



A lawyer (seated) signs documents as he verifies the impeachment complaint against Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos prior to submitting them to the Office of the Secretary General in the House of Representatives in Quezon City, suburban Manila yesterday, alongside legislators of the progressive group Sara Elago (left standing), Louise Co (centre) and Antonio Tinio (right). — AFP

Japan suspends restart of world's biggest nuclear plant

TOKYO – The restart of the world's largest nuclear power plant was suspended in Japan yesterday, with the operator saying it does not know when the problem would be solved.

The Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant in Niigata province had been closed since the 2011 Fukushima disaster, but operations to relaunch it had begun on Wednesday after it received the final green light from the nuclear regulator.

However, its operator the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) said yesterday that "an alarm from the monitoring system... sounded during the reactor startup procedures", causing it to suspend operations.

"We don't expect this to be solved within a day or two. There is no telling at the moment how long it will take," site superintendent Takeyuki Inagaki told a news conference.

"We will for now fully focus on trying to identify the cause of what happened," he said.

The alarm that went off prompted TEPCO to "investigate the malfunctioning electrical equipment," spokesman Takashi Kobayashi told AFP.

And "once it became clear that it would take time, we decided to reinsert the control rods in a planned manner", he said, adding that the reactor "is stable and there is no

radioactive impact outside".

Control rods are a device used to control the nuclear chain reaction in the reactor core, which can be accelerated by slightly withdrawing them, or slowed down or stopped completely by inserting them deeper.

The restart, initially scheduled for Tuesday, had been pushed back after another technical issue related to the rods' removal was detected last weekend - a problem that was resolved on Sunday, according to TEPCO.

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.

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

Public opinion in Niigata is

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

"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 this week during a protest in front of the plant.

Earlier this month, seven groups opposing the restart submitted a petition signed by nearly 40,000 people to TEPCO and Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority, saying that the plant sits on an active seismic fault zone and noted it was struck by a strong quake in 2007. —AFP



Police personnel inspect the debris of a shopping mall in Karachi, Pakistan yesterday, after a massive fire broke out on Saturday. The death toll from a mall fire in Pakistan's biggest city rose to at least 55 people, a Karachi government official told AFP yesterday.

— AFP

Cambodia to pay tuition fees after accused scam boss' scholarship axed

PHNOM PENH – Cambodian students told AFP yesterday the government had promised to pay their university tuition after more than 400 scholarships given by an alleged cyberscam kingpin were abruptly cancelled following his arrest.

Cambodian authorities deported tycoon Chen Zhi to China this month following allegations he ran multibillion-dollar internet fraud operations from Cambodia using trafficked scammers.

US authorities indicted Chinese-born Chen, a former adviser to Cambodia's leaders, in October on fraud and money-laundering charges, alleging his firm Prince Group was a front for a transnational cybercrime network.

Chen, who founded and headed the internationally sanctioned conglomerate, also started a foundation in 2015. A scholarship in his name was launched in 2021 to support Cambodians pursuing bachelor's degrees, its website says.

Several students at the public Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) told AFP they were informed by a Prince representative on Tuesday that their full-tuition scholarships and living stipends had been cancelled.

"They said their company has a problem," said Narak, 20, who studies computer science.

But RUPP told scholarship recipients yesterday that the "education ministry will cover the tuition until we graduate", he said.

Khuon Vicheka, a spokeswoman for the education ministry, told AFP

that officials were working with universities to ensure 418 students who had been awarded the scholarship could complete their degrees.

"We will not leave them behind," she said.

A Prince statement announcing the scholarship's launch said it would help to "train, nurture and educate the leaders of tomorrow".

A poor student from a rural area, Narak said the scholarship - which had covered his annual tuition fee of US\$500 and US\$50 monthly stipend since late 2024 - "had lifted a burden" for his family.

But after learning last year about how Chen allegedly made his fortune, he felt "very guilty" and had even thought about giving up his scholarship, the third-year student said.

"If his business is bad, I think he wanted to launder money through education because people may not be suspicious about him," Narak told AFP, who asked to be identified by one name due to safety concerns.

Cambodian authorities this month suspended sales at five luxury properties owned by Prince Group, while the US-sanctioned Prince Bank was ordered into liquidation.

A 21-year-old RUPP student, who asked not to be named, said the end of his scholarship had left him worried.

But the third-year IT student had scant sympathy for his former benefactor.

"If he (Chen) did commit the alleged crimes, he should face the law."

— AFP

73 S Korean scam crime suspects detained in Cambodia to be forcibly returned home

SEOUL - Seventy-three South Korean suspects, who have been detained in Cambodia over alleged involvement in scam crimes, will be forcibly returned home, the presidential Blue House said yesterday.

Presidential spokesperson Kang Yu-jung told a press briefing that a joint investigation team will forcibly repatriate 73 South Korean suspects this morning, as they were accused of defrauding 869 South Koreans of about 48.6 billion won

(about US\$33.1 million) based in Cambodia.

Kang said it would mark the largest repatriation of criminal suspects, stressing that it was the result of a long-term pursuit by the joint investigation team composed of South Korean and Cambodian police as well as the National Intelligence Service.

The investigation team raided seven scam complexes in Sihanoukville, Poipet and

Mondulkiri of Cambodia to round up the suspects.

Kang said all of the repatriated suspects, for whom arrest warrants were already issued, will be handed over to the investigative authorities upon their arrival for thorough investigations and subsequent legal processing, adding that the authorities will forfeit criminal proceeds by tracking down the suspects' hidden assets to the end.

— Xinhua

S Korean law to regulate AI takes effect

Claire Lee

SEOUL – South Korea became the first country to have a wide-ranging law regulating artificial intelligence (AI) take full effect yesterday, including specific provisions targeting deepfakes.

The country, home to memory chip powerhouses Samsung and SK hynix, has said it aims to join the United States and China as one of the top three AI powers.

"The AI Basic Act comes into full effect today," President Lee Jae Myung said.

The law requires companies to give users advance notice when services or products use generative AI.

It also says they must clearly label content, including deepfakes, that cannot readily be differentiated from reality, among other requirements.

The act, passed in December 2024, is meant to "establish a safety- and trust-based foundation to support AI innovation", the Ministry of Science and ICT said in a statement.

Violations are punishable by a fine of up to 30 million won (US\$20,400).

South Korean media said it was the first comprehensive AI regulation law in the world to take effect.

The ministry described it as the second of its kind in the world to be enacted.

The European Parliament says it adopted the "world's first rules on AI" in June 2024, but these are coming in more gradually and will only become completely applicable in 2027.

For the past year, however, the European Union has allowed regulators to ban AI systems deemed to pose "unacceptable risks" to society, under its Artificial Intelligence Act.

That could include identifying people in real time using cameras in public spaces, or evaluating criminal risk based on biometric data alone.

‘Unknown era’

South Korea has said it will triple spending on artificial intelligence this year.

The Asian nation's new legislation designates 10 sensitive fields - including nuclear power, criminal investigations, loan screening, education and medical care - that are subject to heightened requirements on AI transparency and safety.

"Sceptics fear the regulatory consequences of the law's enactment," Lim Mun-yeong, vice chairman of the presidential council on national AI strategy, said this week.

"The nation's transition toward AI, however, remains in its infancy with insufficient infrastructure and systems," Lim said, adding that

"acceleration of AI innovation is needed to explore an unknown era".

If necessary, "the government will accordingly suspend regulation, monitor the situation and respond appropriately", he said.

Deepfakes have returned to global attention in recent weeks after Elon Musk's Grok AI chatbot drew outrage and bans in several countries for enabling users to generate sexualised images of real people, including children.

South Korea's science ministry said applying digital watermarks or similar identifiers to AI-generated content was a "minimum safety measure to prevent the misuse of technology – including manipulated AI-generated videos, or deepfakes".

"It is already a global trend adopted by major international companies," the ministry said.

In October, California signed a landmark law regulating AI chatbots, defying a push from the White House to leave such technology unchecked.

It followed revelations about suicides by teenagers who had used chatbots before taking their own lives.

California's law requires operators to implement "critical" safeguards when users interact with their AI chatbots, and opens an avenue for people to file lawsuits if failures to do so lead to tragedies.

— AFP



This photograph taken on January 6 shows a diorama depicting the Afghan resistance to the Soviet invasion of 1979, with the figurine of a horse plastered for censorship at the Manzar-e-Jahad or the Jihad Museum in Herat. An Afghan who fought against Soviet forces still visits a museum celebrating the resistance, but, in keeping with rules by the Taliban authorities, the displays have undergone notable changes recently. When the museum opened in 2010, the figurines showed the faces of these women and men; now those faces are covered in plaster. The Taliban government, which took power for the second time in 2021, has banned depictions of living things under its strict interpretation of Islamic law. In 2024 the government's morality police ordered the rule's gradual nationwide enforcement.

US touts 'New Gaza' filled with luxury real estate

Joseph Schmid

DAVOS, Switzerland – US officials yesterday presented their vision for a "New Gaza" that would turn the shattered Palestinian territory into a glitzy resort of skyscrapers by the sea, saying the transformation could emerge in three years.

The war in Gaza, sparked by Hamas's October 2023 attack on Israel, left much of the Palestinian territory damaged or destroyed and forced most of its residents to flee their homes.

A US-brokered ceasefire took effect last October, reducing the level of bombing and fighting, but for most Gazans, the humanitarian disaster has endured three months on.

"We're going to be very successful in Gaza. It's going to be a great thing to watch," President Donald Trump said while presenting his controversial "Board of Peace" conflict-resolution body in Davos.

"I'm a real estate person at heart... and I said, look at this location on the sea. Look at this beautiful piece of property. What it could be for so many people," he said at the World Economic Forum.

His son-in-law Jared Kushner, who has no official title but is one of Trump's envoys for the Gaza ceasefire, said his "master plan" aimed for "catastrophic success".

With a slide showing dozens of shiny terraced apartment towers overlooking a tree-lined promenade, he promised a Mediterranean utopia rising from the scarred Gaza landscape.

"In the Middle East they build cities like this, you know for two or three million people, they build this in three years," Kushner said.

"And so stuff like this is very doable if we make it happen."



US businessman Jared Kushner speaks as a "Gaza Timeline" plan is displayed on a giant screen at the "Board of Peace" meeting during the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos yesterday.

– AFP

He touted investments of at least US\$25 billion to rebuild destroyed infrastructure and public services.

Within 10 years, the territory's GDP would be US\$10 billion, and households would enjoy average income of US\$13,000 a year thanks to "100-percent full employment and opportunity for everybody there", he said.

"It could be a hope. It could be a destination, have a lot of industry and really be a place that the people there can thrive."

'Amazing' opportunities

Kushner said the so-called National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG) had enlisted help from Israeli real estate developer Yakir Gabay.

"He's volunteered to do this not for profit, really because of his heart he wants to do this," Kushner said.

"So the next 100 days, we're going to continue to just be heads down and focused on making sure this is implemented."

Trump had earlier in the conflict floated his vision of turning Gaza into a "Riviera of the Middle East", sparking outrage around the world.

Notably absent from Kushner's presentation was Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, whose country had spearheaded in 2025 a reconstruction plan for Gaza supported by Arab nations and welcomed by the European Union.

According to a brief statement from his office, Sisi flew home at dawn yesterday,

hours after he and Trump exchanged praise in a tête-à-tête, with the US president calling him "a great leader, a great guy".

Ali Shaath, Gaza's recently appointed administrator under Trump's "Board of Peace", has said the Egyptian plan was the "foundation" of his committee's reconstruction project.

A top UN official warned this month that Gazans were living in "inhumane" conditions even as the US-backed truce entered its second phase.

Entire neighbourhoods, hospitals and schools have been heavily damaged or destroyed, forcing hundreds of thousands of people to live in makeshift shelters.

Kushner said 85 percent of Gaza's economic output had been aid for a long time.

"That's not sustainable. It doesn't give these people dignity. It doesn't give them hope," he said.

He insisted that the full disarming of Hamas, as called for in the October ceasefire, would convince firms and donors to commit to the territory.

"We'll announce a lot of the contributions that will be made in a couple of weeks in Washington," he said.

"There'll be amazing investment opportunities."

Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel resulted in the deaths of 1,221 people, and 251 people were taken hostage that day, including 44 who were dead.

Israel's retaliatory assault on Gaza has killed at least 71,562 people, according to figures from the territory's health ministry that the United Nations considers reliable.

The ministry also said 477 Palestinians have been killed since the ceasefire took effect on October 10.

– AFP



A young boy mourns over a body bag at Al-Shifa hospital after four Palestinians were killed whilst collecting firewood east of the Zeitoun neighbourhood of Gaza City yesterday. The health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said yesterday that the overall death toll since the war broke out on October 7, 2023, now stands at 71,562. Since October 10, a fragile truce in Gaza has largely halted the fighting between Israeli forces and Hamas, but both sides have accused each other of frequent violations. The ministry also said that 477 Palestinians have been killed since the ceasefire came into effect on October 10. – AFP

US revises Q3 GDP growth up on exports, investment

WASHINGTON - US economic growth in the third quarter was slightly stronger than originally estimated, hovering at its highest rate in two years, delayed government data showed yesterday.

US gross domestic product rose at an annual rate of 4.4 percent in the July to September period, the Commerce Department said, above its initial estimate of 4.3 percent.

This shift primarily reflected "upward revisions to exports and investment that were partly offset by a downward revision to consumer spending," the department added.

Overall, however, consumption was a key driver behind GDP growth, with consumers "spending freely on both goods and services despite all the headwinds from tariffs and little hiring," said Navy Federal Credit Union chief economist Heather Long.

This comes even as Americans shift toward warehouse stores as many become more price sensitive due to high costs of living.

All eyes have been on the US economy as its key employment market cools and President Donald Trump unleashed sweeping tariffs on trading partners.

Besides consumer spending, exports, government spending and investment also boosted third quarter growth, the Commerce Department said.

The 4.4 percent rate is the highest in two years, providing

some reassurance about the health of the world's biggest economy.

The GDP report, published later than originally scheduled, was held back due to a lengthy government shutdown between October and mid-November.

Beneath the rosy figures, the situation remains "uneasy" for many middle-class families, Long said.

"Strong growth is powered by AI investments and consumption by wealthier families," she added, but there is "almost no hiring" and it remains unclear if middle class households will start to feel the uplift from this boom.

US officials nonetheless have been drumming up optimism about the economy's future performance.

Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos that the first three months of 2026 could see growth exceeding five percent.

He added that if interest rates were lower, the uptick could be greater.

The Trump administration has been calling for lower interest rates, criticising the Federal Reserve for not slashing levels more aggressively.

But before then, observers expect growth in the final months of 2025 to reflect a hit from the 43-day government shutdown.

In the second quarter, GDP growth was 3.8 percent. – AFP

Russia calls German spy charges 'ridiculous', vows response

BERLIN – Russia's embassy in Berlin yesterday vowed retaliation after Germany expelled a diplomat accused of being an intelligence officer who worked as the handler of a woman arrested on spy charges.

In a statement to AFP, the embassy called the allegations "a ridiculous, hastily concocted provocation" and added: "We made it clear that Berlin's unfriendly actions would not go unanswered."

The German foreign ministry earlier announced it had summoned the Russian ambassador, Sergei Nechayev, to inform him of the expulsion of a diplomat "who spied for Russia".

German prosecutors contend

he served as the case officer for a German-Ukrainian businesswoman – partly identified as Ilona W. – who was arrested in Berlin on Wednesday on allegations of spying for Russia.

The Russian embassy, however, dismissed the allegations as a "clearly fabricated pretext" to "further aggravate Russian-German relations".

The embassy contended that the information the alleged spy is accused of collecting in Germany is publicly available.

Details of German military aid to Ukraine, for example, "were until recently regularly published on the website of the German Ministry of Defence" and are still "reported in

detail by German media".

The embassy also reacted to the separate arrests on Wednesday of two men suspected of providing cash and support to pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine's Donbass region.

Russian diplomats yesterday made clear to the German government that "we see Berlin's approach as criminalising any contact with the residents and organisations of Donbas, including humanitarian ones," the embassy told AFP.

One of the two suspects is a Russian citizen, and the embassy said it had demanded consular access to "clarify the situation" and "protect his rights and interests".

– AFP

Zelensky blasts EU, says US 'security guarantees' ready

DAVOS, Switzerland – Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday blasted the EU's lack of "political will" in countering Russian leader Vladimir Putin, during a fiery address criticising some of Kyiv's top allies at the World Economic Forum.

The speech to the Davos elite came minutes after Zelensky had met with US President Donald Trump, a conversation which he said brought agreement about what post-war US security guarantees for Ukraine would look like.

Zelensky did not say what the security guarantees included, only that they were "done" and were ready to be signed by the leaders and ratified by the Ukrainian parliament and US Congress.

But in a marked departure from his usual warm rhetoric towards the EU, Kyiv's main political and financial backers, Zelensky slammed what he cast as inaction, drawing parallels with the cult film "Groundhog Day" to describe the slow progress on key areas of support for Kyiv.

"What's missing: time or political will?" he said at one point, referencing delays over the establishment of a European war crimes tribunal on the Russian offensive.

He also said Europe, without mentioning any single country, was failing to agree on how to address global problems.

"There are endless internal arguments and things left unsaid that stop Europe from uniting and

— Xinhua

speaking honestly enough to find real solutions," Zelensky told the forum.

"Instead of becoming a truly global power, Europe remains a beautiful but fragmented kaleidoscope of small and middle powers," he added.

He said Europe looked "lost" over how to deal with the challenge presented by Trump.

"Europe looks lost trying to convince the US president to change. But he will not change. President Trump loves who he is, and he says he loves Europe, but he will not listen to this kind of Europe," he said.

Trump had hailed a "good" meeting with Zelensky in the Swiss ski resort, hours before his envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner were due in Moscow for talks with Putin.

"This war has to end," Trump told reporters including AFP when asked what message he was sending to the Russian leader.

Zelensky said the question of territory was the one outstanding issue in the talks to find an end to the war.

"It's all about the eastern part of our country. It's all about the land. This is the issue which we [have] not solved yet."

Russia, which controls around 20 percent of Ukraine, is pushing for full control of the country's eastern Donbas region as part of a deal – but Kyiv has said ceding

ground will embolden Moscow.

— Xinhua

Canadian park that threatened to kill whales wants to sell them to US

TORONTO – Canada's Marineland, which has threatened to kill its captive whales, wants government approval to sell the belugas to the United States after its China export proposal was rejected, an official and a former trainer said yesterday.

The former tourist attraction near the famed Niagara Falls has been mired in controversy for years. Twenty animals, including 19 belugas, have died at the park since 2019, according to a tally by *The Canadian Press*.

Marineland, which is closed to visitors and wants to sell off its land, shocked the public last year – after its China proposal was rejected – saying that it was running out of resources to care for its 30 whales and may euthanise them.

Fisheries ministry spokesperson Ira Khedkar told AFP in a statement yesterday that Marineland representatives met with the government on Wednesday.

"The Minister [Joanne Thompson] was presented with new export permit applications. The Minister will review them

expeditiously," Khedkar said.

Phil Demers, a former trainer turned whistleblower at the reportedly bankrupt Marineland, told AFP the park wants to sell the belugas to several institutions in the United States.

The Canadian Press also reported yesterday that Marineland wants to sell the animals to a series of US parks.

Marineland did not immediately reply to a query about a CP report that the park has prepared a euthanasia plan and intends to kill its whales if its US export proposal is rejected.

Thompson has said she rejected Marineland's 2025 request to sell the whales to the Chimelong Ocean Kingdom theme park in China because that would have perpetuated the whales' exploitation.

The ministry did not comment on the specifics of Marineland's latest proposal.

Marineland has said all the beluga deaths at the park have resulted from natural causes, but animal welfare officials from the province of Ontario have been investigating the park for five years.

— AFP

Trump warns of 'big retaliation' if Europeans dump US Treasuries

DAVOS, Switzerland – President Donald Trump warned yesterday of major reprisals if European countries dumped key holdings of US Treasury bonds to pressure Washington, as temperatures fluctuated over the future of Greenland.

"If that would happen, there would be a big retaliation on our part, and we have all the cards," Trump said on Fox Business Network's "Mornings with Maria."

But he acknowledged that European countries had notable holdings of US Treasury securities.

Trump's remarks came after tensions flared over the fate of the autonomous Danish territory of Greenland – which the US leader covets.

The American president has repeatedly said that the United States, the key force in NATO, deserves Greenland as it would be forced to defend the island against Russia or China. Neither of those countries holds any claim to the territory.

More recently, Trump's threats to impose tariffs on European countries for not going along with his demand to get Greenland rattled global markets.

But at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, Trump on Wednesday backed down on threats to seize Greenland by force from ally



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky (left) and US President Donald Trump pose during their meeting on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, yesterday.

— AFP

administration and growing US debt.

This made it the second large Nordic fund to make such a decision public, with Danish fund Akademiker Pension announcing on Tuesday that it was selling its US Treasuries.

But the Danish fund said its decision was unrelated to the situation over Greenland, linking it instead to poor US government finances.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent this week rejected the idea that Europeans were targeting US debt in retaliation for Washington's designs on Greenland.

— AFP

Macron squares up to Trump in rebel shades at macho Davos gathering

PARIS – Top Gun or Terminator? French President Emmanuel Macron's sporting of aviator shades at Davos this week tickled the press and inspired viral memes online, while prompting a surge in visitors to the eyewear brand's website.

Macron, speaking at the World Economic Forum (WEF) on Tuesday, wore sunglasses on stage due to a broken blood vessel that has left him with a bloodshot eye since last week, according to the Élysée's chief physician.

While the French president stood up for European sovereignty and blasted "unacceptable" threats by his US counterpart Donald Trump to impose tariffs on countries opposed to his plans to seize Greenland, it was Macron's flashy blue sunglasses that grabbed much of the attention.

"Top Gun or Terminator?", read a headline in *Le Parisien* daily, highlighting the viral commentary which ranged from memes photoshopping laser beams shooting from Macron's eyes to his face on the "Miami Vice" film poster.

Other images on social media showed Macron playing the rebel Maverick from the Top Gun franchise, while facing off to Trump.

"These sunglasses were unintentionally a very fitting visual vocabulary for the message he wanted to convey," said communications

professor Philippe Moreau-Chevrolet at Paris's Sciences Po university.

"It gave a Hollywood-style dimension – cool and masculine at once – that answered Trump."

Trump mocked the look, stating: "I watched him yesterday with those beautiful sunglasses. What the hell happened?"

"But I watched him sort of be tough," Trump added, after Macron said France rejected "bullies".

The UK's *Telegraph* newspaper published the headline "Can Macron's sunglasses save the West?" in an analysis of the heated and divisive tone taken by largely male world leaders at the summit.

"Testosterone is the primary

currency in Davos this year, and the French president's aviators have placed him at the top of the pecking order," the *Telegraph* wrote.

The hype surrounding Macron's look led to a surge in traffic to the French eyewear maker Henry Jullien's website, causing it to crash.

"Our eShop website is experiencing an exceptional volume of visits and enquiries" following the "significant visibility" given to the sunglasses by Macron, said a notice on the brand's website.

It added that it had launched a "temporary page" featuring solely the 'Pacific' model worn by Macron, "to ensure stable and secure access for everyone".

— AFP



France's President Emmanuel Macron sporting aviator shades looks on during the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos on Tuesday.

— AFP

Spain's train drivers call strike after deadly accidents

Rosa Sulleiro and Daniel Silva

BARCELONA – Spanish train drivers on Wednesday called a three-day strike for February, plunging the country's under-scrutiny railways into further turmoil, after two accidents just days apart killed 44 people.

A train driver died and 37 people were injured – several seriously – in the latest incident on Tuesday, when a commuter service hit a retaining wall that fell onto the tracks in Géldida near Barcelona.

Spain was already observing three days of national mourning from Sunday's collision involving two high-speed trains in the southern region of Andalusia that killed 43 people – the country's deadliest rail accident in more than a decade.

The back-to-back tragedies have raised doubts about the safety of train travel in Spain, which boasts the world's second-largest high-speed network which has received huge investment in recent years.

The February 9-11 walkout will affect all train companies and is "the only legal route left for workers to demand the restoration of the rail system's safety" for staff and users, the Sema train driver union said in a statement.

The two disasters "represent a turning point", the union added, saying numerous reports about "the poor state of the tracks" went unanswered "for months, even years".

Transport Minister Oscar Puente said "we understand" the drivers' mood and demands "but we don't agree that a general strike is the best way to convey them",

vowing to negotiate to have it called off.

"We cannot nor should we question our network or our country's public transport. It is not perfect, not infallible, but it is a great transport system," he told a press conference in Madrid.

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

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

'Fix the problem'

Services across the northeastern Catalonia region's main commuter rail network have been suspended completely after Tuesday's incident while safety checks are carried out. Officials say they will not resume until lines are considered safe.

Adif has also 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.

The conservative opposition People's Party (PP) has demanded "an immediate clarification" from the leftist government, while worry has also crept in among some passengers.

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

"They need to fix the problem," she told AFP at the train station in the southern city of Córdoba.

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.

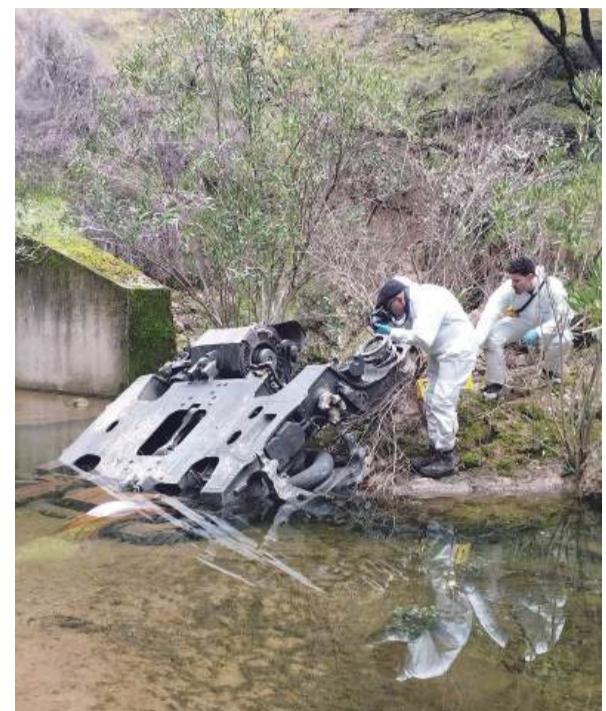
Some unions have accused the Socialist government of using low-cost materials, a charge Puente called "outrageous".

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

Spain will hold a state tribute for the victims of the high-speed train collision on January 31 in the southern city of Huelva, one of the service's destination, the central and Andalusian regional governments said.

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

– AFP



This handout photo taken and released on Wednesday by Spain's Guardia Civil (gendarmerie), shows Guardia Civil officers taking photographs of a train bogie in a stream, near the site where on Sunday a high-speed train derailed and hit another train in Adamuz, southern Spain. A train bogie is a wheeled assembly that supports a railway car and allows it to move along tracks. At least 43 people died and more than 120 injured in the deadliest train accident in Spain in over a decade. The crash happened on Sunday evening when a train operated by rail company Iryo travelling from Málaga to Madrid derailed near Adamuz, crossing onto the other track where it crashed into an oncoming train, which also derailed.

– AFP



Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa delivers a speech to members of the European Parliament during a formal sitting marking the 40th anniversary of Spain and Portugal joining the EU in Strasbourg, eastern France, on Wednesday. – AFP

Venezuela's interim president to visit US soon

CARACAS – Venezuela's interim president will soon visit the United States, a senior US official said on Wednesday, further signalling President Donald Trump's willingness to embrace the oil-rich country's new leader.

Delcy Rodríguez would be the first sitting Venezuelan president to visit the United States in more than a quarter century – aside from the South American nation's presidents attending United Nations meetings in New York.

She said on Wednesday that she approached any dialogue with the United States "without fear."

"We are in a process of dialogue, of working with the United States, without any fear, to confront our differences and

difficulties...and to address them through diplomacy," said Rodríguez.

The invitation reflects a head-snapping shift in relations between Washington and Caracas since US Delta Force operatives swooped into Caracas, seized president Nicolás Maduro and spirited him to a US jail to face narcotics charges.

Rodríguez was a former vice president and long-time insider in Venezuela's anti-US government, before changing tack as interim president.

She is still the subject of US sanctions, including an asset freeze.

Rodríguez on Wednesday began reorganising the leadership of the country's military forces, appointing 12 senior officers to regional commands.



This combination of pictures shows Venezuela's interim President Delcy Rodríguez waving after a press conference at the Miraflores Presidential Palace in Caracas last Wednesday, and US President Donald Trump waving as he boards Air Force One at Joint Base Andrews, Maryland, on September 11, 2025.

– AFP



As a flotilla of US warships remains off the Venezuelan coast, she has allowed the United States to broker the sale of Venezuelan oil, facilitated foreign investment and released scores of prisoners.

A senior White House official said Rodríguez would visit soon, but no date has been set.

All for oil

The last bilateral visit by a sitting Venezuelan president came in the 1990s – before leftist leader Hugo Chávez took power.

Since then, successive Venezuelan governments have made a point of thumbing their nose at Washington and building close ties with China, Cuba, Iran and Russia.

The US trip, which has yet to be confirmed by Venezuelan authorities, could pose problems for Rodríguez inside the government – where some hardliners still detest what they see as Washington's hemispheric imperialism.

Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello and Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino López remain powerful forces in the country, and analysts say their support for Rodríguez is not a given.

Cabello on his weekly state television programme on Wednesday denied reports he had met with US officials ahead of Maduro's ouster.

"It's a campaign. They say, 'Diosdado met with the United States'...I haven't met with anyone," he said.

Trump has so far appeared happy to allow Rodríguez and much of Venezuela's government to remain in power, so long as the United States has access to Venezuelan oil – the largest proven reserves in the world.

Trump hosted Venezuela's exiled opposition leader and Nobel peace laureate María Corina Machado at the White House earlier this month.

After initially dismissing Machado and her ability to control the country's powerful armed forces and intelligence services, he said on Tuesday that he would "love" to have her "involved in some way."

Machado's party is widely considered to have won 2024 elections that Washington claimed were "stolen" by Maduro.

Analysts say Trump's embrace of Rodríguez and avoidance of wholesale regime change can be explained by an unwillingness to repeat mistakes made in the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

"Those kinds of intervention operations – and the deployment of troops for stabilisation – have always ended very badly," said Benigno Alarcón, a politics expert at the Andrés Bello Catholic University in Caracas.

– AFP, MPD



Casemiro to leave Man Utd at end of season

LONDON — Casemiro will leave Manchester United at the end of the season following the expiry of his contract, the Premier League club announced yesterday.

The Brazil international arrived from Real Madrid in 2022 for a fee of £70 million (US\$94 million) and has so far played 146 games for the club, scoring 21 goals.

"A serial winner, we thank Case for his contributions in red so far and hope to finish his time at the club on a high together," United said on X.

Casemiro said in a club statement that he would "carry Manchester United with me throughout my

entire life".

"From the first day that I walked out at this beautiful stadium, I felt the passion of Old Trafford and the love that I now share with our supporters for this special club," he said.

"It is not time to say goodbye — there are many more memories to create during the next four months."

The midfielder, 33, forged his reputation at Real Madrid, where he won five Champions League titles.

Casemiro scored the opening goal in United's League Cup final win against Newcastle in 2023 as the club finished third in the league.

But he did not feature in the

club's FA Cup final win against Manchester City the following year.

Casemiro, one of the highest earners at Old Trafford, said on his personal Instagram account that he would be "forever" a Red Devil.

"Knowing when to say goodbye when you feel that you will be remembered and respected forever," he posted.

"Four months to give my all for this badge and for our goal. Eternal respect and affection for Manchester United and its wonderful fans."

United are fifth in the Premier League ahead of Sunday's trip to leaders Arsenal.

— AFP



Manchester United's Brazilian midfielder Casemiro reacts to a missed chance during the English Premier League match against Manchester City at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, on Saturday. — AFP



Supporters raise a banner in the likeness of members of the Beatles reading a copy of a southern French regional newspaper in the stands prior to the UEFA Champions League, league match between Olympique de Marseille (OM) and Liverpool FC at the Stade Velodrome in Marseille, southern France, on Wednesday. — AFP

Ligue 1 leaders Lens still waiting for PSG title charge

LIGUE 1 PARIS — Lens coach Pierre Sage says he is waiting for champions Paris Saint-Germain to turn on the after-burners as the surprise Ligue 1 pace-setters bid for a ninth straight league win to maintain their championship lead.

Ahead of this weekend's trip to third-placed Marseille, Lens have managed to maintain their slender one-point lead in recent weeks to boost their hopes of a second French top-flight title and first since 1998.

But four straight victories for PSG have kept the capital club right on their shoulders and coach Sage admits that his team are still big outsiders.

"Humbly, we must acknowledge that PSG are an extraordinary team," he said.

"As soon as PSG put their foot down in the final stretch, it's possible we won't see them again."

Qualification for the Champions League for only the second time since the 2002/03 season would still represent an excellent campaign for Lens.

They boast a 10-point advantage over fourth-placed Lyon in the battle for automatic places in next season's league phase.

Whether or not they can sustain a title challenge, it has been an excellent turnaround for Lens this season under Sage, having missed out completely on European football last term with Will Still at the helm.

Marseille have hung around on the fringes of the title race, as they did for much of last season, and sit eight points behind Lens in third.

Roberto De Zerbi's men have suffered damaging setbacks in recent weeks with defeats by Lille and lowly Nantes.

Their confidence was dented further in midweek by a 3-0 Champions League humbling by Liverpool at the Stade Velodrome which left their hopes of reaching the knockout phase on a knife-edge.

Marseille are hoping to notch back-to-back Ligue 1 wins for the first time since November after a 5-2 thumping of Angers last time out.

"The real difficulty is playing 10 matches in a row like the one against Angers," said De Zerbi after the Liverpool loss.

"We just can't manage it. I sit on the bench and I don't know if we're going to be like the Angers team or the Nantes team."

PSG are in action today when they visit Auxerre and could put the pressure on Lens by taking top spot with a victory.

The European champions have not fired on all cylinders yet this season and are still sweating on a top-eight finish in the Champions League and direct qualification to the last 16 after a midweek loss to Sporting Lisbon.

PSG were also dumped out of the French Cup a fortnight ago by city rivals Paris FC. — AFP

Football

LONDON — Real Madrid stayed top of football's rich list as Liverpool outstripped their English rivals for the first time, according to Deloitte's Money League study yesterday.

Spanish giants Madrid generated nearly 1.2 billion euros (US\$1.4 billion) in revenue in the 2024/25 season despite failing to win a major trophy.

The refurbishment of the club's Santiago Bernabeu stadium into a multi-purpose venue continues to pay rich dividends — Madrid's 594 million euros of commercial revenues alone would be enough for a place in the top 10.

Barcelona climbed back into second place in Deloitte's table (975 million euros) despite delays forcing them to play the whole season away from the Camp Nou, which is still being redeveloped.

Bayern Munich were third on the list (861 million euros), marginally ahead of Paris Saint-Germain, whose income was boosted by winning the Champions

League for the first time.

The rest of the top 10 is dominated by Premier League clubs, with Liverpool leading the English contingent for the first time.

An expansion of Anfield plus a return to the Champions League and winning the Premier League title boosted the Reds' revenue to 836 million euros.

Manchester City and Manchester United both slipped down the list.

Pep Guardiola's City fell from second to sixth after an early exit from the Champions League and a third-placed Premier League finish following four consecutive titles.

United dropped behind Arsenal to eighth after missing out on the Champions League and finishing 15th in the Premier League.

Together, the 20 top-earning clubs in Europe reported an 11 percent increase in revenues to 12.4 billion euros.

"It is no coincidence that the clubs in the top half of the ranking are those with the ability to focus on commercial revenue development, particularly as domestic broadcast

rights plateau," said Tim Bridge, lead partner in the Deloitte Sports Business Group.

"There is a pivotal shift in some club business models with an increased focus on maximising the impact of their brand and their stadium assets."

"The presence of on-site breweries, hotels and restaurants is now commonplace and illustrates a strategic move to diversify income and create year-round entertainment destinations."

The first 32-team Club World Cup had an impact, helping lift Bayern into the top three for the first time since 2020/21, while Benfica, in 19th spot on the 20-team list, are the first entrant outside the traditional "big five" leagues of England, Spain, Germany, Italy and France in four years.

Arsenal were the highest-earning women's team for the first time after winning the Champions League.

The Gunners, with revenues of 25.6 million euros, edged out London rivals Chelsea and Barcelona. — AFP

Football shorts

Barca star Pedri out for month with hamstring injury



BARCELONA — Barcelona midfielder Pedri Gonzalez is set for a month out with a hamstring injury, the Spanish champions said yesterday.

Pedri went off hurt in the second half of the 4-2 win at Slavia Prague in the Champions League on Wednesday.

"Tests taken this morning have confirmed that first team player Pedri has a muscular injury in his right hamstring," said Barca in a statement.

"The recovery time will be one month."

The 23-year-old Spain international will miss Barcelona's final European league phase match against Copenhagen next week, as

well as La Liga games against Real Oviedo, Elche, Girona and Mallorca.

Should Barca beat second-tier Albacete in the Copa del Rey on February 3, Pedri would also be out for the first leg of the semi-finals the following week. — AFP

Veteran Dzeko joins Schalke on 6-month deal



BERLIN — Veteran striker Edin Dzeko has signed with Bundesliga 2 side Schalke until the end of the season, the German club announced yesterday.

The Bosnia and Herzegovina captain has been brought in to boost Schalke's promotion hopes amid a flagging attack.

Schalke are four points clear at the top of the Bundesliga 2 table but have scored just 22 goals in 18 games — only three teams in the

league have scored fewer.

Former Manchester City and Inter Milan forward Dzeko, 39, joins from Serie A side Fiorentina, where he had played a bit-part role this season.

"Since their initial interest, I've been following the club and have watched several Schalke games," Dzeko said in a statement, adding that "it's very impressive how the team has developed this season after some difficult years."

Seven-time German champions, although not since 1958, Schalke have been relegated twice in the past decade, most recently at the end of the 2022-23 season.

A title-winner with Wolfsburg in 2009, Dzeko scored 85 goals in 142 matches in Germany and was the Bundesliga's top scorer in 2010 before moving to City, where he won two Premier League titles. — AFP

Djokovic, Sinner plough on in Melbourne, Wawrinka makes history

Peter Stebbings

AO MELBOURNE — Novak Djokovic and Jannik Sinner barreled ominously into the Australian Open third round yesterday as 40-year-old Stan Wawrinka survived an epic to make Grand Slam history.

An erratic Madison Keys did enough to keep her title defence on track and Iga Swiatek and Naomi Osaka also triumphed on a sunny but cooler Melbourne Park day five.

The tournament fell briefly silent in the evening to remember the 15 people killed at Bondi Beach last month by gunmen who opened fire on a Jewish festival.

Djokovic sent 141st-ranked qualifier Francesco Mazzatorta packing in straight sets at Rod Laver Arena.

The Serbian great is on his latest mission to win a record 25th Grand Slam title and dismissed the Italian 6-3, 6-2, 6-2.

Djokovic faces 75th-ranked Botic van de Zandschulp of the Netherlands next.

Djokovic is well known for his sometimes unusual preparations, which include hugging a Brazilian fig tree in Melbourne's botanical gardens.

"That is my oldest friend here in Melbourne," said the 38-year-old former world number one, who has won 10 Australian Open titles, more than anyone in history.

"He has been there to heal my wounds and give me company. We have a friendship going over 20 years."

Two-time reigning champion Sinner wasted no time in powering on with a demolition of home player James Duckworth, with the Italian second seed romping to a 6-1, 6-4, 6-2 victory in just one hour and 49 minutes.

Sinner plays big-serving Eliot Spizzirri, the 85th-ranked American, next as he pursues a Melbourne Park hat-trick.

Beer for Stan

Exhausted warhorse Wawrinka battled to a marathon five-set win in



his Australian Open farewell.

He was joined in the next round by another experienced campaigner in the 37-year-old Marin Cilic, who defeated Denis Shapovalov in straight sets.

In Melbourne as a wildcard, Wawrinka pulled heroically through in four hours and 33 minutes against French qualifier Arthur Gérard.

He won 4-6, 6-3, 3-6, 7-5, 7-6 (10/3) to become the first player aged 40 or over to reach the men's third round at a Slam since Ken Rosewall at the Australian Open in 1978.

The former Australian Open champion is playing his last season before retiring and faces the American ninth seed Taylor Fritz next.

"Exhausted. I am trying to last as long as possible on my last Australian Open," Wawrinka said.

Asked what his plans were for the rest of the evening, Wawrinka replied: "I might pick up a beer, I deserve one."

Lorenzo Musetti, the fifth seed, beat fellow Italian and good friend Lorenzo Sonego 6-3, 6-3, 6-4.

American eighth seed Ben Shelton was a comfortable 6-3, 6-2, 6-2 victor over Australia's Dane Sweeny.

Sour ending

Women's champion Keys blew hot and cold before getting over the line 6-1, 7-5 against fellow American Ashlyn Krueger.

Keys, who upset Aryna Sabalenka in last year's final, admitted after her

laboured first-round win that she was a bundle of nerves and "too timid".

The 29-year-old threw off the shackles in the first set against the 92nd-ranked Krueger, taking it in just 23 minutes before having to rally from 2-5 in the second.

She meets the experienced Karolina Pliskova of the Czech Republic next.

In another all-American clash, sixth seed Jessica Pegula made light work of her doubles partner McCartney Kessler in a rapid 6-0, 6-2 win.

Another ruthless winner was fourth-seeded American Amanda Anisimova - 6-1, 6-4 against the Czech Katerina Siniakova.

Second seed Swiatek, who has won six major titles but never been successful in Melbourne, was in cruise control against Marie Bouzkova of the Czech Republic, 6-2, 6-3.

Fifth seed Elena Rybakina advanced but 10th seed Belinda Benic was stunned by qualifier Nikola Bartunkova in three sets.

Two-time former champion Naomi Osaka, who made a grand entrance in the first round in a jellyfish-inspired outfit, was error-strewn in beating Romania's Sorana Cîrstea, 6-3, 4-6, 6-2.

The match ended in acrimony with some angry words from Cîrstea at the net.

"She's a great player. I think this was her last Australian Open. So sorry she was mad about it," said Osaka.

— AFP

8 stadiums to host 2027 Rugby World Cup matches in Australia



MELBOURNE — Eight stadiums across Australia were yesterday locked in as host venues for the 2027 Rugby World Cup, with all matches in Melbourne to be played under a closed roof.

Sydney Olympic Stadium, an 80,000-seat venue purpose-built for the 2000 Olympics in the city's west, will be the most heavily used.

It will host the final on November 13, the third-place play-off, both semi-finals, two last-eight clashes and two pool games.

A second venue in the city, the centrally-located and recently rebuilt 42,500-capacity Sydney Football Stadium, will be home to three pool matches and two round-of-16 clashes.

Perth Stadium, which can hold 60,000, is where the tournament will kick off on October 1, it will play host to six other games.

The 53,000-capacity Docklands Stadium in Melbourne is the only one with a retractable roof, which will remain closed for all eight matches there.

Several venues will be familiar to fans who experienced the last Rugby World Cup in Australia in 2003, including Adelaide Oval and Brisbane Stadium where a

combined 16 games will take place.

North Queensland Stadium in tropical Townsville will make its World Cup debut, seating 25,000 and showcasing a striking roof design, as will Newcastle Stadium two hours north of Sydney, which holds 30,000.

"From iconic national arenas to vibrant regional hubs, each venue has been chosen for its ability to deliver world-class facilities and electric atmospheres that will showcase the very best of our game," said tournament managing director Chris Stanley.

"These stadiums are more than just places to play, they are stages for history, where passion and community come together to celebrate rugby's global spirit."

The match schedule is due to be announced on February 3.

Hosts Australia have been drawn in the same group as New Zealand, while holders South Africa are pitted with Italy, Georgia and Romania.

Only four teams have won the World Cup - South Africa (4), New Zealand (3), Australia (2) and England (1) - and there is a new look for the 2027 version with 24 sides in contention, up from 20.

— AFP



This undated photo released yesterday by Mercedes-Benz Group AG shows the company's new Mercedes-AMG PETRONAS F1 Team car, at an unconfirmed location. The team released digital images of its W17 car yesterday, describing the 2026 season as "the biggest technical shake-up in the sport's history".

— AFP

Bangladesh refuse to go to India for T20 World Cup



DHAKA — Bangladesh will not travel to India to play in next month's T20 World Cup, its cricket board said yesterday, effectively ruling the country out of the tournament.

"Our only demand is to play the World Cup - but not in India," Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) President Aminul Islam Bulbul told reporters.

The refusal came a day after cricket's governing body rejected Bangladesh's plea to play its games in Sri Lanka instead.

"There is no scope for changing our decision," said Asif Nazrul, an adviser for youth and sports issues in Bangladesh's interim government.

The T20 World Cup begins on February 7, with Bangladesh

scheduled to play their four group matches in the Indian cities of Kolkata and Mumbai.

The row between the neighbouring nations erupted on January 3 when the Indian cricket board ordered the Indian Premier League (IPL) franchise Kolkata Knight Riders to release Bangladesh fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman.

Mustafizur's removal from the IPL followed online outrage by right-wing Indian Hindus who invoked alleged attacks on a fellow community in Muslim-majority Bangladesh.

Dhaka maintains that Indian media had exaggerated the scale of the violence.

The sport's global governing body said on Wednesday it had "engaged with the BCB in sustained and constructive dialogue" to ensure

Bangladesh could participate in the tournament, but added that those efforts had been "rebuffed".

The International Cricket Council (ICC) said "independent security assessments, comprehensive venue-level security plans and formal assurances from the host authorities" found there was "no credible or verifiable threat to the safety" of the Bangladesh team.

Lose a huge audience'

However, Nazrul said Bangladesh's security concerns "did not arise from speculation or theoretical analysis".

"They arose from a real incident - where one of our country's top players was forced to bow to extremists, and the Indian cricket board asked him to leave India," he said.

Bangladesh will hold elections

during the World Cup, its first since a mass uprising in 2024 toppled then-prime minister Sheikh Hasina, a close ally of New Delhi.

Political relations have since soured between Bangladesh and India, where Hasina fled after she was ousted.

There are wider issues for India, which is preparing to host the 2030 Commonwealth Games that are seen as a stepping stone for its ambitions to host the 2036 Olympics.

"Bangladesh is a cricket-loving nation. If a country of nearly 200 million people misses the World Cup, the ICC will lose a huge audience," the BCB's Bulbul said.

"Cricket is entering the Olympics in 2028, Brisbane in 2032, India is bidding for 2036. Excluding a major cricket-loving country like Bangladesh would be a failure."

Bangladesh's appeal to the ICC was not without precedent, with India's arch-enemy Pakistan to play all its games in Sri Lanka.

That deal was struck after India, a financial and administrative powerhouse within cricket, refused to travel to Pakistan for the 2025 Champions Trophy and played its matches in Dubai instead.

However, the ICC said a year later a similar shift was impossible for Bangladesh.

"There are many precedents worldwide where matches have been moved to other venues due to security risks," Bangladesh's Nazrul said.

ICC sources told AFP this week that Bangladesh could be replaced by Scotland, the highest-ranked team that did not qualify outright for the World Cup.

— AFP

‘Sinners’ breaks all-time Oscars record with 16 nominations

Andrew Marszal

LOS ANGELES - Vampire period horror film “Sinners” smashed the all-time Oscars record with 16 nominations, the Academy announced yesterday.

The blues-inflected drama set in the 1930s segregated US South from director Ryan Coogler scored nominations in nearly every category possible, including best picture.

It blasted past the previous record of 14, jointly held by “All About Eve,” “Titanic” and “La La Land.”

The tally included a best actor nomination for Michael B. Jordan, who plays twins battling supernatural forces and racists, plus everything from screenplay to score.

“Sinners” also picked up a nomination for best casting, the first new category to be added to Hollywood’s most prestigious awards in more than two decades.

“One Battle After Another” came in second place with 13 nods including best picture, best actor for Leonardo DiCaprio and best director for Paul Thomas Anderson.

But its female lead, 25-year-old newcomer Chase Infiniti, was surprisingly snubbed by Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences voters.

Both of the top two nomination getters came from Warner Bros, the movie studio that is currently the target of a bidding war between Netflix and Paramount.

Guillermo del Toro’s monster epic “Frankenstein,” Timothee Chalamet’s ping-pong drama “Marty Supreme” and Norwegian arthouse favourite “Sentimental



US actors Lewis Pullman (left) and Danielle Brooks announce the nominees during the 98th Academy Awards nominations announcement at the Samuel Goldwyn Theatre in Beverly Hills, California, yesterday.

- AFP

Value” each bagged nine nominations.

“Hamnet,” a period drama in which William Shakespeare and his wife struggle to cope with the loss of their son in plague-ravaged Elizabethan England, secured eight.

Jessie Buckley was nominated for playing the Bard’s long-suffering wife Agnes, though the film’s male lead Paul Mescal missed out.

Acting races

The nominations set the stage for the 98th Oscars ceremony on March 15.

While “Sinners” tops the nominations, “One Battle” remains the frontrunner to

win best picture, having won almost every precursor prize going so far this awards season.

The zany thriller about a retired revolutionary looking for his teen daughter against a wild backdrop of radical violence, immigration raids and white supremacists, broke the all-time record for nominations by Hollywood’s Screen Actors Guild.

DiCaprio, Chalamet and Jordan will do battle for the best actor Oscar, along with Ethan Hawke for Broadway period drama “Blue Moon,” and Wagner Moura from Brazilian political thriller “The Secret Agent.”

For best actress, Buckley will compete

with Emma Stone playing an alien – or is she? – in conspiracy theorist drama “Bugonia,” Renate Reinsve in “Sentimental Value,” Kate Hudson in quirky music biopic “Song Sung Blue,” and Rose Byrne as a struggling mom in indie hit “If I Had Legs I’d Kick You.”

International voters

With the Academy’s overseas voter base rapidly expanding, both “Sentimental Value” and “The Secret Agent” were nominated for best picture.

But Persian-language Palme d’Or winner “It Was Just An Accident” missed out in the top category, and will compete for best international film, along with Spain’s nomadic hippie odyssey “Sirat” and heart-wrenching Palestinian docudrama “The Voice of Hind Rajab.”

Pop megastar Ariana Grande surprisingly missed out on a best supporting actress nomination for her portrayal of Glinda in “Wicked: For Good,” which failed to pick up any nods.

Recently appointed Academy president Lynette Howell Taylor opened the early-morning announcement in Los Angeles with a warning about the threat of artificial intelligence (AI).

“We live in a time of limitless technology that enables us to push the boundaries of our cinematic experience,” she said.

“And our profound belief is that the heartbeat of film is and will always remain unmistakably human.”

- AFP

Ariana snubbed and Chalamet supreme? 5 Oscars takeaways

Andrew Marszal

LOS ANGELES – “Sinners” set a new Oscars record with 16 nominations yesterday, but that was not the only surprise from the Academy’s announcement.

Here are five takeaways from this year’s Oscars nominations, ahead of the March 15 gala:

- Snubs and surprises -

Every year, the Oscars nominations bring hand-wringing over the names that were not read out.

This year’s highest-profile “snub” was Ariana Grande.

The pop sensation had earned a best supporting nod last year for the first “Wicked” film, but missed out this year despite taking a more prominent role in the Broadway adaptation’s second chapter.

Indeed, there was no love at all for “Wicked: For Good,” which failed to earn any nominations – despite the first movie landing 10 nods, and winning two Oscars.

Other notable omissions this year included “One Battle After Another” female star Chase Infiniti, and “Hamnet” male lead Paul Mescal.

Among the surprises were supporting acting nominations for veteran Delroy Lindo (“Sinners”) and Elle Fanning in Norwegian dramedy “Sentimental Value.”

- Warner swansong? -

It is a rare feat for a single Hollywood studio to boast the two clear Oscar frontrunners.

With “Sinners” (16 nominations) and “One Battle After Another” (13),

Warner Bros has pulled that off.

The studio has recently backed original fare from auteur filmmakers – like Zach Cregger’s horror hit “Weapons” (one nomination) and Bong Joon-ho’s “Mickey 17” – along with more commercial hits like “Superman” and “A Minecraft Movie.”

Ironically, that success comes in what could be the century-old studio’s swansong year as an independent distributor.

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

- Records tumble -

Sixteen nominations for “Sinners” were not the only record broken at yesterday’s announcement.

In a sign of the increasingly global outlook of Oscars voters, a record four non-English-language acting performances are nominated this year.

That includes three Norwegian actors from “Sentimental Value” – Renate Reinsve, Stellan Skarsgård and Inga Ibsdotter Lilleaas – and Brazil’s Wagner Moura, the star of “The Secret Agent.”

Meanwhile, “Hamnet” director Chloe Zhao (趙婷) became only the second woman to achieve multiple directing nominations, after Jane Campion. Zhao, who was born in China, previously won the category with her best picture winner “Nomadland.”

- Best casting -

This year, the Oscars introduced a prize for best casting – the

Academy’s first new category since the animated film award was created in 2002.

With no precedent, it was unclear what exactly voters would be looking for – star power, new discoveries, or a cohesive ensemble.

In the end, the category mostly mirrored the expected best picture frontrunners, with nominations going to “Hamnet,” “Marty Supreme,” “One Battle after Another,” “The Secret Agent” and “Sinners.”

- Chalamet supreme -

Timothee Chalamet is only 30, yet his Oscar nomination for “Marty Supreme” is his third for best actor – after “Call Me By Your Name” in 2018 and last year for playing Bob Dylan in “A Complete Unknown.”

Arguably the biggest star of his generation, Chalamet also earned a nod for his role as a producer in best picture nominee “Marty Supreme,” the semi-fictional tale of a talented, always-hustling ping-pong player in 1950s New York and Japan.

Will it be third time lucky for Chalamet, at the Oscars ceremony in March?

Though up against Leonardo DiCaprio, Chalamet’s chances are boosted by a strong all-round showing for “Marty Supreme” at yesterday’s nominations announcement.

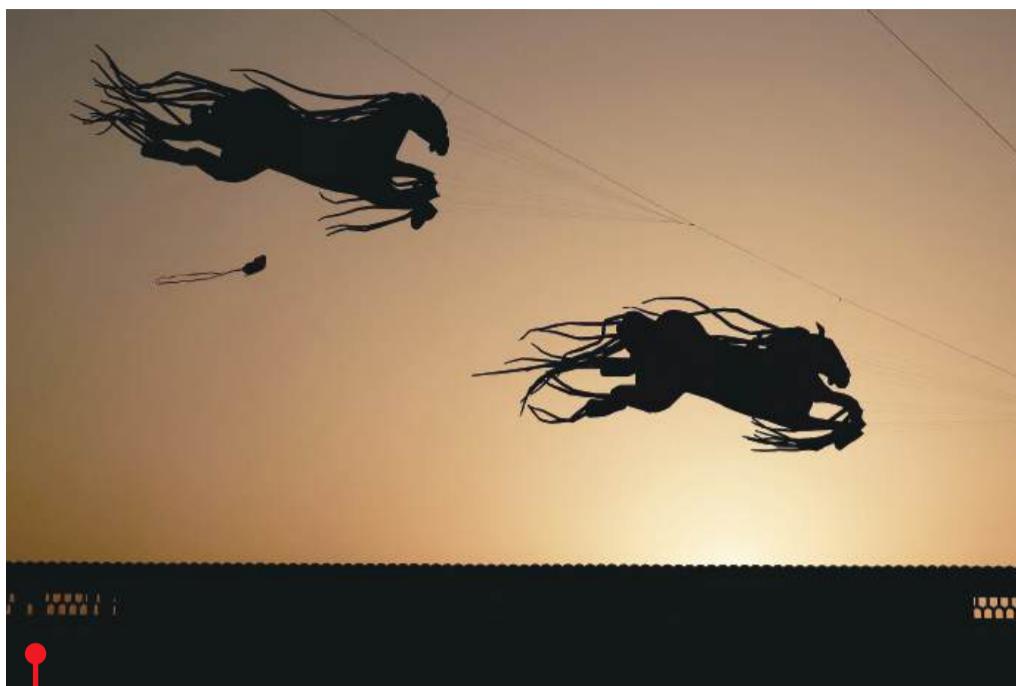
The movie exceeded most pundits’ expectations with nine nods, including best director for Josh Safdie, best cinematography and best production design – suggesting Oscars voters are paying close attention.



Norwegian actress Renate Reinsve rejoices after it was announced that the Norwegian film *Affeksjonsverdi* (“Sentimental Value”) has been nominated for several Oscars, during the Oscar nomination vigil at the Norwegian Film Institute in Oslo yesterday.

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -11°C~2°C	Manila 20°C~29°C	New York -11°C~3°C	Lisbon 8°C~12°C
Shanghai -1°C~10°C	Bangkok 20°C~33°C	London 5°C~9°C	Rio de Janeiro 21°C~22°C
Hong Kong 11°C~17°C	Tokyo -3°C~8°C	Frankfurt -1°C~4°C	Luanda 24°C~29°C
Taipei 13°C~19°C	Singapore 23°C~32°C	Vancouver 1°C~7°C	Maputo 23°C~28°C
Guangzhou 9°C~17°C	Kuala Lumpur 22°C~34°C	Paris 2°C~9°C	Dili 22°C~30°C
Nanjing -4°C~9°C	Jakarta 23°C~27°C	Moscow -19°C~10°C	São Tomé 27°C~32°C
Guilin 6°C~13°C	Seoul -9°C~0°C	Las Vegas 7°C~18°C	Praia 18°C~25°C
Xi'an -4°C~7°C	Sydney 14°C~24°C	Monte Carlo 6°C~9°C	Bissau 20°C~32°C



Flying in for CNY

Participants fly kites during the 4th Qatar Kite Festival, at Old Doha Port, in Doha on Wednesday.

— AFP



Total innocents

Cats, mostly evacuated from combat zones, sit on a cushion at the Hatul madan animal shelter experiencing low temperatures inside its premises due to regular power cuts in Kyiv on Wednesday, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

— AFP



Tough job!

A sanitation worker drags a rubbish bag through deep snow during early morning collection rounds in Nuuk, Greenland, yesterday.

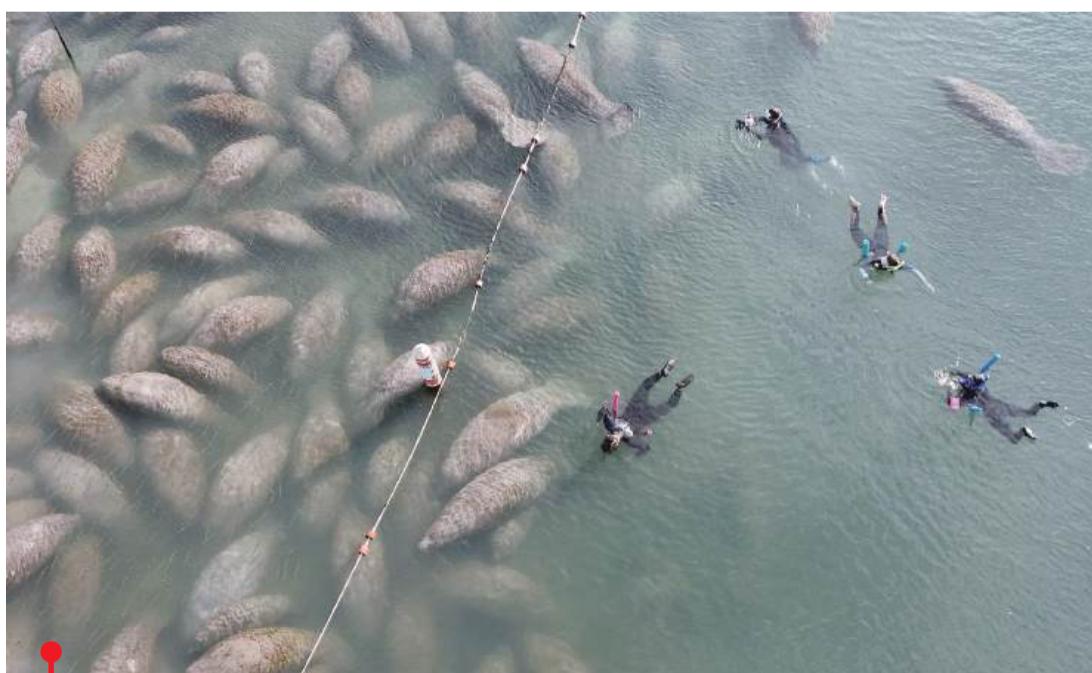
— AFP



Jack Frost's been busy!

Tourists view the rime scenery at the Hengshan Mountain scenic spot in Hengyang City, Hunan Province, yesterday.

— Xinhua



Sensible manatees

In an aerial view, tourists mingle in the water amongst the manatees at Three Sisters Springs on Wednesday in Crystal Springs, Florida. Large numbers of manatees congregate in the Crystal River refuge to shelter from cold spells and rest in the warmer water provided by the natural springs of Kings Bay.

— AFP

Independent lady

A newly born female Grevy's zebra foal roams inside her enclosure at the Mandai Zoo in Singapore yesterday. Born on December 2, 2025, the foal is part of an addition to the over 400 members of this endangered species in human care globally.

— AFP

