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## LRT expansion plan proposes 6 new lines to form circular network

**Tony Wong**

The Macau government is gathering public opinion on its plan to expand the city's Light Rapid Transit (LRT) network in the short, medium, and long terms, comprising six new lines that, together with the existing lines, will form a circular LRT network.

The plan's full version was released on Friday.

Construction of two of the six proposed lines is earmarked for the near future, namely the current Seac Pai Van Line's extension to Coloane Village, and the under-construction East Line's extension to the Qingmao pedestrian border checkpoint in Ilha Verde and the future sports park in Fai Chi Kei.

Construction of the proposed South Line connecting Barra and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge's (HZMB) Macau checkpoint is earmarked for the medium term.

Concerning the proposed West Line running between the Qingmao checkpoint and Barra, the government is proposing to schedule construction of the section between Qingmao and the Fai Chi Kei waterfront in the medium term, while the section between the Fai Chi Kei waterfront and Barra will be designated as a construction project to be launched in the long term.

The proposed Taipa Central Line serving central Taipa and the proposed Taipa North Line running between the Zone E1 land reclamation area and the current LRT Ocean Station will also be

earmarked as LRT projects to be launched in the long term.

While the proposed Seac Pai Van Extension Line will be an elevated line, all other proposed LRT lines will be built underground and/or underwater.

The government's LRT expansion plan, officially known as Strategic Study for the Development of the Macau Light Rapid Transit, does not propose exact schedules as to when construction of the six lines could get off the ground, merely classifying them as projects to be launched in the short, medium, and long terms.

The government started its process on Friday to gather opinions from members of the public until February 28 about its LRT expansion plan. The plan's ongoing public opinion collection process are coordinated by the Public Works Bureau (DSOP), the public entity tasked with organising and overseeing public construction projects. The plan's full version, available in Chinese and Portuguese, was uploaded onto a dedicated website (<https://www.dsop.gov.mo/public/event/lrt2026/>) on Friday.

The government has scheduled six sessions to gather opinions from attendees about its LRT expansion plan and answer their questions, comprising two sessions for members of the general public and four sessions for representatives from different segments and sectors of civil society.

The two sessions for the general public will be held on February 1

and 8 at the auditorium on the ground floor of the headquarters of local power utility CEM.

The government held the first session on Friday, attended by legislators, members of the government-appointed Urban Renewal Council, and officials from various public entities. Friday's session was chaired by Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man, flanked by several officials under his portfolio.

Macau's LRT system currently comprises Taipa Line, Seac Pai Van Line, and Hengqin Line in operation. The Taipa Line serves Taipa and Cotai with its extended section connecting to the peninsula's Barra through the lower enclosed deck of the Macau-Taipa Sai Van Bridge.

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

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

The LRT East Line is scheduled to come into service in 2029.

*Continued on p.5*



This map released on Friday shows the LRT's existing lines together with future lines proposed by the government's LRT expansion plan.

## US will hit Canada with full tariffs if Ottawa finalises China trade deal: Treasury secretary

WASHINGTON, United States – The United States will slap 100-percent tariffs on Canadian imports, should Ottawa finalize a new trade deal with China, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said yesterday, amplifying a similar threat from President Donald Trump a day earlier.

"We can't let Canada become

an opening that the Chinese pour their cheap goods into the US," Bessent said on ABC's "This Week."

During a visit to Beijing on January 16, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney announced a thaw in bilateral relations with China, saying the two countries had struck a "new strategic partnership"

and a preliminary trade deal.

Under the deal, China is expected to reduce tariffs on canola imports from Canada by March 1 to around 15 percent, down from the current 84 percent.

China will also allow Canadian visitors to enter the country visa-free. In turn, Canada will import 49,000 Chinese electric vehicles

(EVs) under new, preferential tariffs of 6.1 percent.

The deal came amid a trade war with Canada, with the Trump administration imposing import duties on its northern neighbor.

When "This Week" host Jonathan Karl asked Bessent to clarify whether the United States would make good on a threat made

by Trump on Saturday to impose tariffs of 100 percent on Canadian imports, the Treasury chief, replied: "There's possibility of 100 percent tariffs if they do a free trade deal."

He added that the new tariffs would be imposed "if they go further, if we see that the Canadians are allowing the Chinese to dump goods."

– AFP

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### China resolute in winning anti-corruption war in military: PLA Daily

An editorial to be published by a flagship newspaper of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) yesterday vows to fight and win the war against corruption in the military.

– *Story on p. 7*

### 2<sup>nd</sup> killing in Minneapolis by US federal agents sparks uproar

The killing of a US citizen by federal immigration agents on Saturday – the second in Minneapolis this month – sparked new protests and demands by local leaders for the Trump administration to end its operation in the city.

– *Story on p. 11*

### Xi says China's high-quality development to provide more opportunities for cooperation with Brazil

– *Story on p. 12*

# Police bust jewellery shop for illegal currency exchange worth HK\$90 million

**Armindo Neves**

The Judiciary Police busted a jewellery shop moonlighting as an illegal currency exchange den and nabbed four local men on Thursday in a case involving around HK\$90 million (92 million patacas), PJ spokesman Ho Wai Lok said during a special press conference on Friday.

Ho identified the four suspects as a 51-year-old jewellery shop owner surnamed Chak, and three salesmen age between 30 and 44, surnamed Wong, Tong and Che.

According to Ho, after receiving a tipoff on Thursday, the Judiciary Police launched an investigation and conducted surveillance of a jewellery shop at a casino-hotel resort in Cotai. PJ officers observed two mainlanders entering the store separately and engaging in illegal currency exchange

activities with three male employees inside, Ho said.

After the transactions were completed via QR code transfers, Ho said the three salesmen immediately handed over the Hong Kong dollars in cash. The two customers then exchanged the cash for casino chips and proceeded to gamble, at which point they were intercepted and inspected by Judiciary Police officers, Ho said.

PJ officers arrested the three salesmen inside the shop and apprehended Chak in a flat in Taipa, according to Ho.

Based on a follow-up investigation, Ho said, PJ officers confirmed that the shop had operated in the resort since January 2023 and began engaging in illegal currency exchange activities in August 2025.

The three salesmen were instructed by Chak to carry out the illicit activities.

According to Ho, PJ officers seized cash suspected to be used for illegal currency exchange activities, totalling HK\$844,000, 25,900 patacas, and 5,100 yuan. Evidence including mobile phones, tablets, and cash-counting machines was also confiscated. Additionally, HK\$16,500 worth of chips involved in Thursday's case were recovered from the two gamblers. Preliminary estimates indicate that the total amount of currency illegally exchanged at the shop between August 2025 and Thursday amounts to around HK\$90 million.

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



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the four hooded illegal currency exchange suspects from the PJ headquarters in Zape to a van on Friday. – Photo: Armindo Neves

## Police nab mainlander for loan sharking, robbery in 'chip-pooling' case

**Armindo Neves**

The Judiciary Police arrested a mainlander for loan sharking and robbery, PJ spokesman Ho Wai Lok said during a special press conference on Friday.

Ho identified the suspect as a 39-year-old male surnamed Lang who told the police that he is jobless. Two accomplices were still at large at the time of the press conference.

According to Ho, the Judiciary Police received a robbery case from the Public Security Police (PSP) for follow-up investigation on Thursday.

The PJ investigation revealed that on Wednesday evening the

victim gambled together with Lang and his accomplices through a chip pooling\* arrangement at a casino in Zape.

Each side had agreed to contribute HK\$600,000, HK\$1.2 million (1.23 million patacas) in total, for their joint gambling "fund", with the condition that 20 percent of the victim's winnings would be deducted based on each bet, as "interest", Ho said.

Ho said that the victim handed over HK\$600,000 in cash to Lang and received HK\$1.2 million worth of gaming chips. Lang was tasked with deducting "interest". After the victim had gambled away

chips worth HK\$400,000, Lang abruptly removed the remaining HK\$600,000 worth of chips from the table and demanded that gambling cease at once, Ho said.

The victim was only able to retrieve HK\$200,000 worth of chips, according to Ho. The victim considered it unreasonable for Lang to reclaim half of the gambling "fund", leading to a noisy row between them that alerted casino security. Security personnel escorted both individuals to the security department for "mediation" between the two sides, during which Lang returned chips worth HK\$350,000 to the victim to "resolve" the situation, Ho said.

Afterwards, Ho said that Lang and the victim left the casino together. In a nearby street, two unidentified men suddenly approached and assaulted the victim, snatching the HK\$350,000 worth of chips from him, Ho said, adding that after seizing the chips, they fled the scene along with Lang. The victim and a friend immediately gave chase and managed to intercept Lang in a nearby street, after which they sought assistance from the police, Ho said.

The victim sustained injuries to his head, the left side of his chest, and left hand and a loss of HK\$350,000 worth of chips, according to Ho.

The investigation also revealed that throughout the chip-pooling gambling arrangement, the victim had been charged HK\$300,000 in "interest", Ho said, adding that PJ officers seized a mobile phone involved in the case from Lang.

Lang was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) on Friday, facing charges of usury and robbery. ■

\* In the context of gambling, the purpose of pooling chips is primarily to combine financial resources, enabling participants to place larger collective bets than they could individually. – DeepSeek



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the hooded usury and robbery suspect from the PJ headquarters in Zape to a van on Friday. – Photo: Armindo Neves

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### Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY INTERVALS. A FEW RAIN PATCHES LATER. FORCE 3 TO 4 EAST TO NORTHEASTERLY WINDS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 60% AND 95%.



16°C~22°C

Source: SMG

## Taipa veterinary clinic ordered to suspend operation over drugs of 'unknown' origin

**Ida Cheong**

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) said in a statement on Friday that it recently received a report from the Pharmaceutical Administration Bureau (ISAF) indicating that a veterinary clinic in Taipa was suspected of possessing drugs of "unknown" origin.

Following a joint inspection by IAM and ISAF officials, "unapproved" drugs were found on the clinic's premises, according to the joint statement on Friday.

Public broadcaster TDM identified the clinic as TaipaVet.

According to a preliminary analysis, the clinic was found to possess multiple types of drugs and vaccines not approved by the Pharmaceutical Administration Bureau, the statement said, adding that clinic's person in charge failed to provide legitimate documentation regarding the origin of the medications, constituting a suspected violation of the Animal Diagnosis and Commercial Activities Act and related regulations on drug safety and pharmaceutical operations.

As evidence showed that the clinic's activities pose risks to public health and safety, the Municipal Affairs Bureau immediately investigated and ordered the temporary closure of the premises, the statement said, adding that the case has been

referred to relevant authorities for further legal action, while the Pharmaceutical Administration Bureau seized the drugs concerned for follow-up investigation.

The statement noted that the clinic is required to rectify the situation within a specified period, including clarifying the sources of all drugs and ensuring the use of only legally compliant medications. It may only resume operations after meeting all regulatory standards and passing a follow-up inspection.

The statement urged all animal diagnosis and treatment facilities and registered veterinary practitioners to strictly adhere to legal obligations and relevant technical guidelines to avoid breaching any regulations. Under current laws and regulations, registered veterinarians are permitted to use veterinary drugs and human medications within "appropriate" limits, the statement said.

The statement underscored that the full implementation of veterinarians' regulations concerning drugs and pharmaceutical activities includes the sale and use of narcotics and psychotropic substances.

In order to safeguard animal welfare and medical rights, pet owners affected by the incident may call 2833 7676. ■



This undated photo download from TaipaVet's official Instagram page shows the clinic's facade on Avenida Olímpica in Taipa's Flower City neighbourhood.

# Central govt posts new FM commissioner to Macau

**Staff Reporter**

The Central People's Government has decided to appoint Bian Lixin as Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR), replacing Liu Xianfa, Xinhua reported on Friday.

Bian, a senior official of the ministry, previously headed the ministry's Department of Personnel.

Liu concluded his five-year posting to Macau on January 15.

The Commissioner's Office is one of the three central government entities in the MSAR, along with the Liaison Office and the local garrison of the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

According to a statement released by the office, Bian is an ethnic Han Chinese, born in 1967. She is a member of the Communist Party of China (CPC), holding a B.A. degree, the statement noted.

The official website of the Commissioner's Office states that "the Basic Law of the Macao SAR of the People's Republic of China (PRC) provides that the Central People's Government shall be responsible for the foreign affairs relating to the Macao SAR and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC shall establish an office in the Macao SAR to deal with foreign affairs. The Commissioner's Office is the agency established by the Foreign Ministry in the Macao SAR according to the above-mentioned provisions.

"The purposes of the Commissioner's Office are to implement the principles of 'One Country, Two Systems', 'Macao people administrating Macao' and a high degree of autonomy in strict accordance with the Basic Law, pursue the Central People's Government's foreign

policy, safeguard state sovereignty and national interests, protect the legitimate rights of Macao compatriots and promote long-term prosperity, stability and development of the Macao SAR."

According to the website, the main functions of the Commissioner's Office are:

1. to deal with the foreign affairs affecting the Macao SAR, which are the responsibilities of the Central People's Government.

2. to coordinate the handling of matters concerning the Macao SAR's participation in relevant international organisations and conferences, the establishment of offices by international organisations and agencies in the Macao SAR, and inter-governmental conferences to be held in the Macao SAR.

3. to deal with matters concerning the application of relevant international conventions to the Macao

SAR, and to assist the Macao SAR Government in obtaining authorisations to negotiate and conclude bilateral agreements with foreign countries, which require the approval of the Central People's Government.

4. to coordinate the handling of matters concerning the establishment of foreign consular offices or other official and semi-official organisations in the Macao SAR, and to deal with relevant consular affairs.

5. to execute any other tasks entrusted by the Central People's Government or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Commissioner's Office has five departments: Department of Policy Research, Department of International Organisations and Legal Affairs, Department of Consular Affairs, Department of Information and Public Diplomacy, and Department of General Affairs. ■



Official file photo of the new Commissioner of the Commissioner's Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Macao, Bian Lixin, released by the office on Friday.

## Ruins of St. Paul's renovation slated for completion next month



Tourists visit Macau's UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ruins of St. Paul's during its ongoing restoration project yesterday afternoon. — Photos: Ida Cheong

### Ida Cheong

Architectural Heritage Conservator Ip Kin Hong told reporters on the sidelines of a symposium yesterday that the Ruins of St. Paul's (Mater Dei Church) bronze statues restoration (Phase III) project is slated to be completed by mid-February, adding that the restoration of the highest bronze statue, depicting a dove, has been relatively complicated due to its height and its poor condition, requiring the involvement of structural engineers and bronze experts.

The one-day "Symposium on Cultural Heritage Conservation and Restoration", organised by the Cultural Affairs Bureau's (IC) "Centre for the Preservation and Transmission of the Cultural Heritage of the Palace Museum in Macau", was held at the Macau Museum of Art (MAM) auditorium in Zape. Experts who participated in the restoration works on the façade of the Ruins of St. Paul's explored the cutting-edge concepts, technologies and practical case-studies of cultural heritage conservation from

the Chinese mainland and the international community.

Ip pointed out that the core restoration approaches consist of deeply integrated technology, science and traditional restoration techniques, adding that the restoration process is essential to first identify the root causes of cultural relic issues through instrumental testing and analysis before carrying out targeted restoration, moving away from traditional, rather ineffective methods, that rely solely on appearance.

Ip noted that the Chapel of Our Lady of Guia (next to Guia Lighthouse) suffered weathering damage, and her team will probably be involved in the future restoration process.

Regarding the shortage of local professionals with restoration experience, Ip said that her heritage restoration team welcomes science and engineering students to fill related positions in areas such as technological testing.

IC President Deland Leong Wai Man said in a speech that the IC heritage preservation centre has selected the façade of the Ruins of St. Paul's explored the cutting-edge concepts, technologies and practical case-studies of cultural heritage conservation from



Architectural Heritage Conservator Ip Kin Hong speaks to reporters on the sidelines of yesterday's Symposium on Cultural Heritage Conservation and Restoration at the Macau Museum of Art (MAM).

St. Paul's as its first restoration project, which has witnessed centuries of Chinese and Western cultural exchange by safeguarding the iconic heritage site, adding that the centre aims to foster further exchanges between traditional and contemporary restoration techniques from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Leong added that the centre will assemble multinational teams of specialists to undertake collaborative restoration projects according to requirements of different projects and will leverage Macau's unique blend of Chinese and Western cultural resources to advance international cultural exchange.

The symposium aimed to enhance the public's understanding of heritage site preservation such as the Ruins of St. Paul's ongoing restoration project, facilitating exchange, collaboration and mutual learning on the subject, and injecting new perspectives and vitality into the preservation of Macau's cultural heritage, according to an IC statement about yesterday's symposium. ■

## Govt warns 3 more infant formula products contain Bacillus cereus

### Armindo Neves

Dairy companies Hochdorf from Switzerland and Danone from France, as well as Australian dairy company ALULA are recalling batches of some of their infant formula products due to contamination of raw materials with the microorganism *Bacillus cereus*, but the Pharmaceutical Supervision and Administration Bureau (ISAF) and Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) underlined that the products have not been imported by local businesses, according to two joint ISAF and IAM statements on Friday and Saturday respectively.

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

The three batches of Hochdorf have been identified by the respective statements as 30484024, 30484025 and 30484247, a Danone batch has been identified as 31-10-2026, and two ALULA batches have been identified as 8000003387 and 8000003407. Specific details can be found via the webpage links: <https://www.gcs.gov.mo/news/detail/zh-hant/N26AWo8hWg> and <https://www.gcs.gov.mo/news/detail/zh-hant/N26AXo6coT>.

Both bureaux 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 problematic products, they should seek medical attention right away.

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

A raft of infant formula products has been recalled by their respective manufacturers around the world recently for containing the *Bacillus cereus*. ■



This image courtesy of the Chemist Warehouse Australia's pharmacy website shows the ALULA GOLD REFLUX 0-12MTHS 900G format, one of the affected batches of infant formula containing the *Bacillus cereus*.

## Interruption Of Recycled Water Supply Notice

Please be informed that due to the checking in the network, the recycled water supply to the following areas will be temporarily interrupted per below details:

Date : 2026/01/27  
Time : 00:00 AM TO 08:00 AM

Work location: Avenida da Universidade

Affected areas: Universidade de Macau;

Corpo de Bombeiros Posto Operacional de Hengqin;

Posto do Novo Campus da Universidade de Macau na Ilha de Hengqin;

Subestação Dos Universidade de Macau;

Campus da Universidade de Macau, IAM

Customer Service Hotline : 28220088

To support the SAR Government's implementation of the recycled water supply plan, Macao Water will conduct a scheduled inspection of the public recycled water network separation. This may result in intermittent and temporary suspension of toilet flushing and landscape irrigation water supply for certain users. The process will not involve potable water or affect potable water supply.

Attention Please: Water supply will be re-connected anytime based on the progress of the construction.





## 'Soul to Soul' exhibition showcases Cristina Leiria's sculptural journey



*Khalel Vallo*

The Gallery of Regency Art Hotel's "Soul to Soul" exhibition in Taipa presents a collection of sculptures by Portuguese architect-cum-artist Cristina Maria de Faria Rocha Leiria that spans decades of personal and artistic development.

The sales exhibition features 28 sculptural works created in crystal, bronze, tin and resin, reflecting Leiria's exploration of form, emotion and symbolism. Leiria told the *Post* last week in an interview at the exhibition that the exhibits were created over a long period of time, with each work developed around a single theme and completed in about a month, allowing space for reflection and conceptual refinement.

Leiria trained as an architect and is professionally specialised in low-cost housing design for the underprivileged and slum dwellers. Her sculptural practice emerged later in life, following her early retirement from public service due to health reasons.

Sculpture subsequently became both a creative outlet and a means of her livelihood, with Leiria saying that for her livelihood she relies on the sale of her works. The exhibition also includes

bronze and tin sculptures, alongside resin works intended to be more accessible due to their durability and affordability.

Among the sculptures on display, two crystal pieces are very valuable, Leiria said, because they are numbered, signed by her and were produced about 20 years ago, "and they are not produced like that anymore". She noted that other sculptures in bronze also hold special value due to their "unique design".

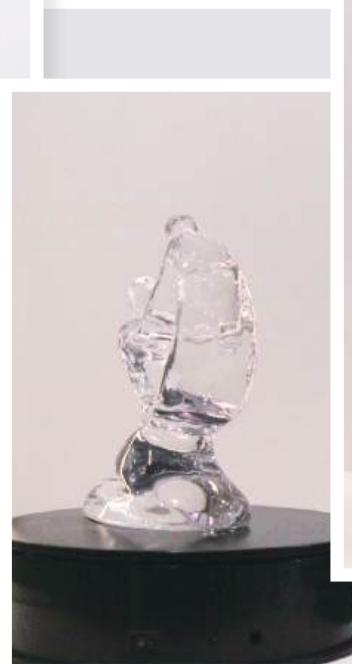
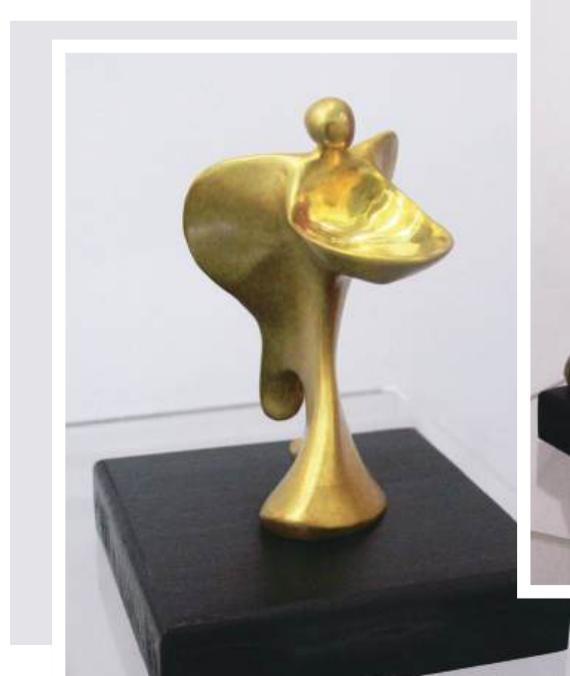
While the gallery also displays paintings by other artists, "Soul to Soul" centres on Leiria's sculptural output and her intention to convey personal values and experiences through tangible form.

The exhibition is also positioned as a prelude to a larger virtual exhibition planned in Shanghai later this year, which will present her work to an international audience.

With free admission, the exhibition runs through this Saturday, with opening hours from 12 p.m. to 2 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

The exhibition offers visitors an insight into Leiria's transition from architecture to sculpture, highlighting a body of work shaped by personal history, craftsmanship, and artistic perseverance.

*Photos: Khalel Vallo*



## Foreigners may use automated clearance at HZMB checkpoint from today

**Khaled Vallo**

According to a statement provided by the Public Security Police Force (PSP) and the Public Security Forces Affairs Bureau (DSFSM) on Friday, eligible foreign passport holders can start using the automated immigration clearance channels at the Zhuhai-Macao Port of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) checkpoint starting today, following an agreement between the local and Zhuhai authorities to expand smart clearance measures after a successful pilot at the joint Macau-Hengqin checkpoint.

According to the statement, the Public Security Police, the bureau and the Zhuhai Entry Exit Border Inspection Station have been strengthening cooperation to enhance immigration efficiency and service quality, as part of Macau's integration into the national development plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

The expansion follows a pilot scheme launched on October 28, 2024 at the Macau-Hengqin checkpoint, where foreign passport holders have been allowed to use "joint inspection automated channels" since then, the statement said.

The immigration authorities said that foreign nationals used the automated channels at Hengqin about 34,000 times last year, demonstrating their smooth operation and improved cross-boundary movement, the statement noted.

Starting today, the same categories of eligible foreign passport holders can use the automated channels at the Zhuhai-Macao checkpoint of the HZMB.

The eligibility criteria, according to the statement, remain unchanged and apply to three groups: foreign nationals holding People's Republic of China (PRC) Foreigner Permanent Resident ID Cards; foreign e-passport holders with PRC Foreigner's Residence Permits valid for over six months; and Macau residents of foreign nationality holding a Macau Resident Identity Card (BIR), subject to specific document requirements.

All users must be aged 7 or above and at least 1.2 metres tall, the statement said, adding that eligible foreign passport holders are required to complete advance registration for automated clearance in both places.

Those who have already registered for the Hengqin automated channels can use the new facilities at the bridge checkpoint without re-registration, undergoing immigration clearance through a streamlined process involving "one line-up, one document scan, plus one biometric check," the statement said.

After registering for Macau's automated immigration clearance, eligible foreign nationals can also use automated channels at other checkpoints in Macau, including the Barrier Gate, Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal, Taipa Ferry Terminal, Inner Harbour Ferry Terminal, the passenger inspection hall of Macau International Airport (MIA), and the Hong Kong-Macao passenger inspection hall of the HZMB, the statement said.

More countries and regions have also been added to the automated clearance registration scheme, significantly improving passenger throughput and accessibility for international tourists and business travellers, according to the statement, which did not identify the countries and regions concerned. ■

## LRT expansion plan proposes 6 new lines to form circular network

*Continued from p.1*

### East Line Extension Line

According to the LRT expansion plan released on Friday, the government is proposing to prioritise the construction of the East Line Extension Line.

The proposed East Line Extension Line, classified by the plan as a project that could get off the ground in the near future, would run from the Barrier Gate checkpoint to the Qingmao checkpoint, from where the proposed West Line would start, meaning that the East Line Extension Line and the West Line would be connected to each other at Qingmao Station.

According to the plan, the proposed East Line Extension Line would have a spur line running to the future sports park, located on the plot of land where the now-defunct greyhound racetrack (Yat Yuen Canidrome) is located. Construction of the sports park's first phase got off the ground earlier this month and is slated to be completed in 2029.

The whole East Line Extension Line would be built underground, with a total length of 1.5 kilometres.

### Seac Pai Van Extension Line

According to the plan, the 2.1-kilometre-long Seac Pai Van Extension Line would run between Coloane's sprawling Seac Pai Van public housing estate and Coloane Village, along which two other stations would be set up, namely a station near the Giant Panda Pavilion in Seac Pai Van Park, and a station near the Lai Chi Vun shipyards area.

The whole Seac Pai Van Extension Line would be an elevated line.

The plan says that construction of the Seac Pai Van Extension Line would not be difficult, because of which the government is proposing to designate the line as a project for the near future.

### South Line

According to the plan, the proposed South Line would run from the HZMB Macau checkpoint to the future ES5 station in the southern area of Zone A (a station of the ongoing LRT East Line project), from where it would run to Nape where two stations would be set up with one near the waterfront Kun Iam statue and the other one near Avenida 24 de Junho, to Nam Van Lake district with a station near Plot A9, to Sai Van district with a station near Macau Tower, before finally arriving in Barra.

Plot A9 is the still undeveloped plot on the waterfront between AIA Tower and the Nam Van Peninsula residential building.

Most of the 7.7-kilometre-long South Line would be built underground and underwater, but with the section on the HZMB man-made island to be an elevated segment.

### West Line

According to the plan, the proposed West Line would run from the Qingmao checkpoint to the Fai Chi Kei waterfront, from where it would run along the Inner Harbour to Barra.

The 3.7-kilometre-long West Line would be built underground and underwater along the Inner Harbour, with stations at Patane district, near Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro (the city's main thoroughfare, commonly known as San Ma Lou in Cantonese), and near Praia do Manduco neighbourhood

(known as Ha Van in Cantonese).

The plan says that the section between Qingmao and the Fai Chi Kei waterfront would be less difficult because of which it could get off the ground in the medium term. Concerning the section between the Fai Chi Kei waterfront and Barra, however, the construction would need to be carried out in tandem with future flood-prevention projects for the Inner Harbour. Consequently, the government is proposing to designate this section as a project to be launched in the long term.

### Taipa North Line

According to the plan, the proposed Taipa North Line would run from the future ES6 station in Zone E1 (a station of the ongoing LRT East Line project, to be known as Pac On Station) to the future Zone D land reclamation area (reclamation scheduled to be completed in November 2029), to the current Zone C land reclamation area (reclaimed but not yet developed), and to the current Ocean Station located near the Ocean Gardens residential estate.

The 3.9-kilometre-long Taipa North Line would be built underground and undersea.

### Taipa Central Line

According to the plan, the proposed Taipa Central Line would run from the future Zone D land reclamation area to near Estrada Almirante Marques Espartero in Taipa, near the Taipa Central Park, and the current Jockey Club Station on the Taipa Line.

The 2.2-kilometre-long Taipa Central Line would also be built underground and undersea.

Both the Taipa North Line and the Taipa Central Line are earmarked as LRT projects to be launched in the long term. ■

## 2.75 million foreigners visit Macau last year, 6.87 pct of total visitor arrivals

**Staff Reporter**

Some 2.755 million foreign nationals visited Macau last year, a year-on-year growth of 13.7 percent, the Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC) announced on Friday.

Foreigners accounted for 6.87 percent of last year's record 40.069 million visitor arrivals. Macau's previous record of visitor arrivals of 39.406 million was achieved in pre-pandemic 2019.

In 2024, foreign visitor arrivals – also known as international visitor arrivals – stood at 2.423 million, accounting for 6.93 percent of the total of 34.928 million visitor arrivals in that year.

In 2019, the year before the COVID-19 pandemic began to have a severe impact on Macau's tourism industry for three consecutive years (2020-2022), foreigners accounted for 3.065 million, or 7.77 percent, of its 39.406 million visitor arrivals.

In 2025, visitor arrivals from the Chinese mainland, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), and China's Taiwan region accounted for 93.13 percent of the total number of visitor arrivals.

As far as last year's international visitor arrivals are concerned, South Korean and Philippine nationals took up the number-one and number-two spots respectively.

Regarding the Southeast Asian source markets, visitors from the Philippines (540,284), Indonesia (208,043), Malaysia (188,977), and Thailand (185,963) rose by 9.5 percent, 13.6 percent, 3.9 percent, and 38.1 percent year-on-year respectively, while those from Singapore (117,165)

decreased by 1.7 percent.

With respect to the South Asian source markets, visitors from India (114,040) rose by 9.8 percent year-on-year. For the Northeast Asian markets, visitors from South Korea (547,638) and Japan (159,455) grew by 11.3 percent and 26.1 percent respectively. As regards long-haul source markets, visitors from the United States (162,460) grew by 9.8 percent year-on-year.

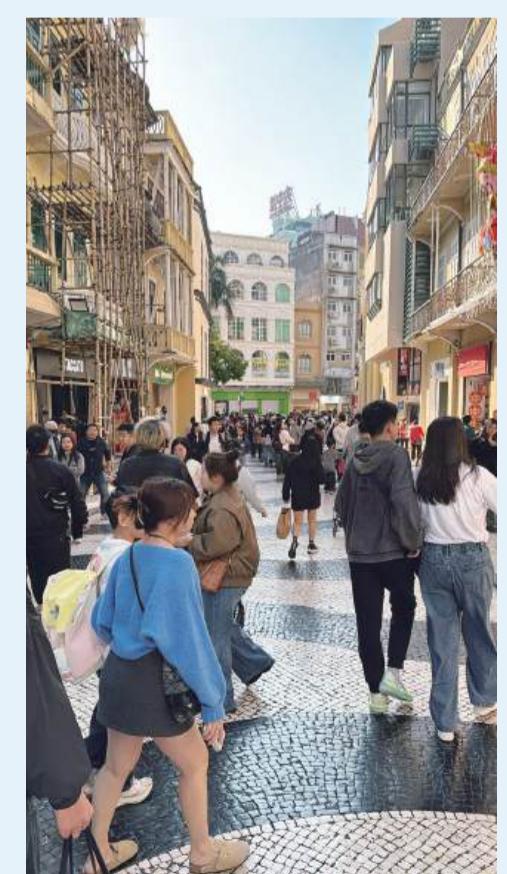
### Record 40.069 million visitor arrivals in 2025

Meanwhile, Macau welcomed a record 40.069 million visitor arrivals last year, up by 14.7 percent year-on-year. Same-day visitors (23,524,943) and overnight visitors (16,544,417) rose by 24.6 percent and 3.1 percent year-on-year respectively. Meanwhile, the average length of stay of visitors shortened by 0.1 day year-on-year to 1.1 days, due to the growth in the proportion of same-day visitors in the total number of visitors. The bureau noted, however, that the duration of stay for same-day visitors (0.2 day) and overnight visitors (2.3 days) both remained unchanged.

Visitors from the Chinese mainland increased by 18.5 percent year-on-year to 29.017 million in 2025. Visitors from the nine Pearl River Delta cities in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) rose by 23.7 percent year-on-year to 14.828 million, driven by an upsurge of 58.1 percent in the number of visitors from Zhuhai, which abuts Macau. Visitors from the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (7.300 million) and

China's Taiwan region (996,140) went up by 1.7 percent and 19.4 percent year-on-year respectively.

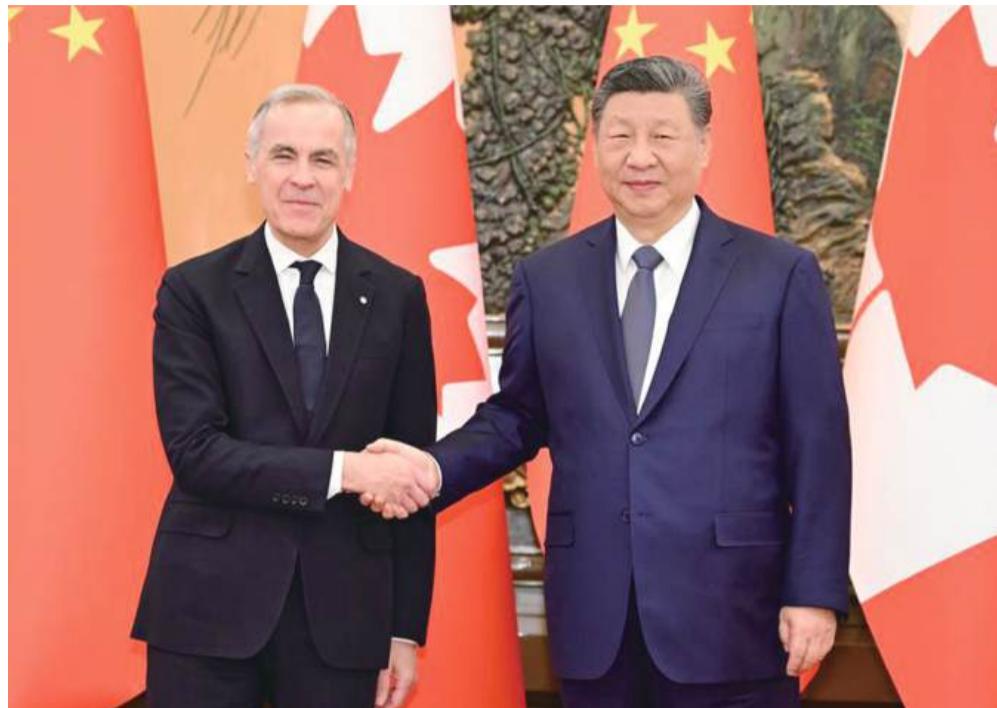
Last year, 82.6 percent of visitor arrivals arrived by land, 9.8 percent arrived by sea and 7.6 percent by air. ■



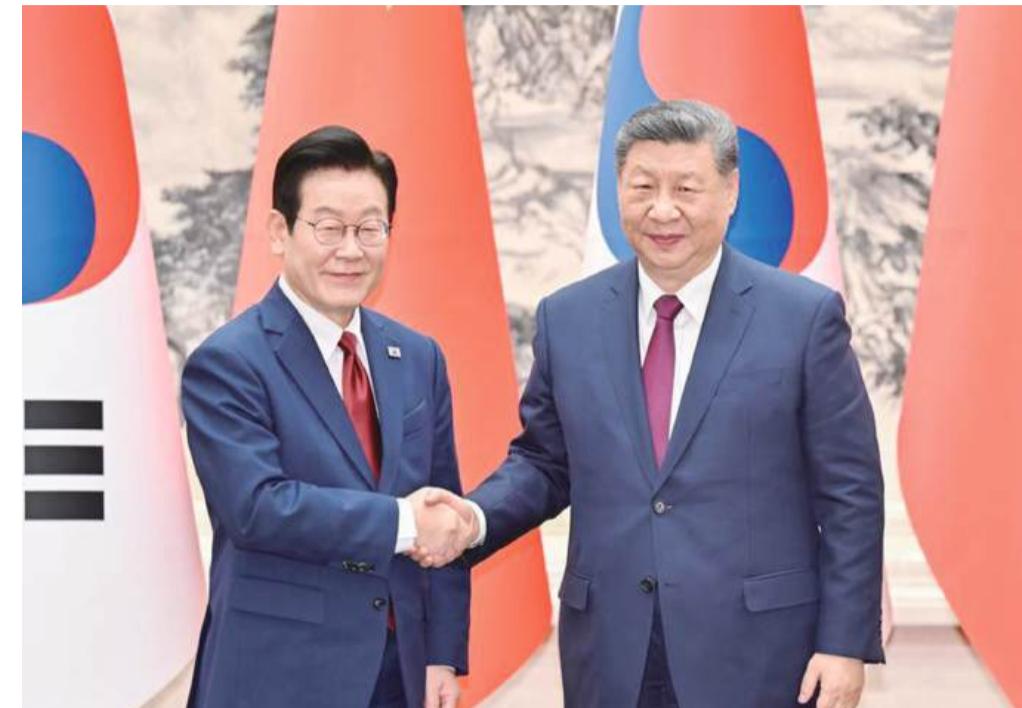
Tourists throng Rua de S. Domingos near the city's main square, Largo do Senado, yesterday.

— Photo: Carl Leong

# Xi leads China's diplomacy to usher in new chapter in turbulent world



President Xi Jinping (right) shakes hands with Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on January 16, 2026. — Xinhua



President Xi Jinping (right) and Republic of Korea (ROK) President Lee Jae Myung shake hands while witnessing the signing of cooperation documents after their talks in Beijing on January 5, 2026. — Xinhua

## Analysis

BEIJING — In the opening weeks of 2026, President Xi Jinping's intensive bilateral and multilateral interactions spanning China's neighboring regions, Europe, North America and the Global South, have drawn widespread attention across the world.

At a time when humanity once again stands at a crossroads, China's diplomacy under Xi's leadership opens a magnificent new chapter, demonstrating China's commitment to building a community with a shared future for humanity and promoting world peace and development.

## CONSTRUCTING CLOSER GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS

On New Year's Eve, Xi and Russian President Vladimir Putin exchanged New Year greetings. Xi took a comprehensive look back at 2025, a year marking a concrete step in the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era, and expressed readiness to maintain close exchanges with Putin to jointly push for continuous new progress in bilateral ties in the new era.

On Jan. 5, Xi held talks with President of the Republic of Korea (ROK) Lee Jae Myung, the first foreign head of state visiting China in 2026.

Xi said he and President Lee have met twice and conducted reciprocal visits, reflecting the importance both sides attach to China-ROK relations. As both friends and neighbors, China and the ROK should increase exchanges and maintain frequent communication.

On the same day, Xi met with Taoiseach of Ireland Micheal Martin, whose visit to China marked the first by an Irish Taoiseach in 14 years. Xi summarized the valuable experience gained from the long-term stable development of bilateral ties, and said China is willing to strengthen strategic communication with Ireland, deepen political mutual trust and expand pragmatic cooperation to benefit the peoples of both countries and add momentum to China-EU relations.

In addition, Finnish Prime Minister Petteri Orpo is paying an official four-day visit to China concluding on Wednesday, which is expected to further deepen bilateral relations.

On Jan. 16, Xi met with Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, whose visit to China marked the first by a Canadian prime minister in eight years. Xi put forward four proposals on bilateral relations, and called on both sides

to steer their ties onto the track of sound, steady and sustainable development, and bring more benefits to both peoples.

China's new year diplomacy also highlighted its firm solidarity with the Global South. On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of launching diplomatic relations between China and Africa, Xi sent a congratulatory letter to the opening ceremony of the 2026 China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi made his first overseas trip of the year to Africa, continuing a diplomatic tradition that has been carried out for 36 consecutive years.

During a phone call with Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on Jan. 23, Xi noted that China is committed to always being a good friend and partner to countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), and to jointly advancing the building of the China-LAC community with a shared future.

These events have highlighted China's sincere willingness to unite with Global South countries to address global challenges and jointly advance modernization.

With intensive and proactive diplomatic engagements in less than a month, China is deepening and expanding global partnerships that feature equality, openness and cooperation.

## STRENGTHENING ECONOMIC AND TRADE CONNECTIONS

Xi's new year diplomacy has strongly conveyed to the international community China's clear and consistent commitment to upholding openness, cooperation, and joint development amid a world beset by unilateralism, protectionism, and hegemonism.

During Lee's visit to China, Xi and Lee witnessed the signing of 15 cooperation documents between China and the ROK in fields including scientific and technological innovation, ecological environment, transportation, and economic and trade cooperation.

Martin said Ireland is committed to developing the strategic partnership for mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries, and is willing to deepen cooperation with China in trade, investment, science and technology, biomedicine, renewable energy, artificial intelligence, education and other fields.

During Carney's visit, both sides issued a joint statement of the China-Canada leaders' meeting, and signed eight cooperation

documents, including an economic and trade cooperation roadmap. The two sides also made specific arrangements to properly address trade issues related to electric vehicles (EVs), steel and aluminum products, rapeseed, and agricultural and aquatic products.

Ahead of Orpo's visit to China, which began yesterday, the Finnish side noted that "China is an important export market for Finnish companies and the EU's second largest trading partner," and the visit is expected "to promote business opportunities for Finland in China."

As 2026 marks the beginning of China's 15th Five-Year Plan period, the momentum of various parties looking to embrace Chinese opportunities and pursue win-win cooperation clearly highlights the vast space for shared prosperity embedded in Chinese modernization.

China will open its doors still wider, and inject greater certainty and fresh momentum into the world through its high-quality development, so that countries will realize common development and shared prosperity, Xi said.

## DEEPENING PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE BONDS

Friendship, which comes from close contact between people, holds the key to sound state-to-state relations. Promoting people-to-people exchanges and mutual understanding stands as another highlight of China's head of state diplomacy at the beginning of 2026.

When exchanging New Year greetings with Putin, Xi announced that 2026-2027 will be designated as the China-Russia Years of Education.

During his talks with Lee, Xi called on both sides to increase personnel exchanges and promote interactions in areas such as youth, media, sports, think tanks and local governments.

In his meeting with Martin, Xi extended a warm welcome for more Irish youth to come to China for study and exchanges.

Responding to a letter from a US youth education exchange delegation comprised of teachers and students, Xi said he looks forward to more American youth joining the cause of China-US friendship, becoming a new generation of envoys of friendship between the two countries, and making greater contributions to enhancing people-to-people exchanges and promoting the development of bilateral relations.

Xi's diplomatic style has showcased to the world the distinct traits of China's foreign policy — treating all nations as equals and upholding a long-term vision — and embodied the grandeur of Chinese civilization that is inclusive and embraces the diversity of all cultures.

In today's context, the broad-mindedness to replace civilizational estrangement and clashes with exchanges and mutual learning is particularly precious.

## ADVANCING MULTILATERALISM FOR SHARED FUTURE

"The world today is undergoing both changes and turbulence, and some regions are still engulfed in war. China always stands on the right side of history, and is ready to work with all countries to advance world peace and development and build a community with a shared future for humanity," Xi said in his 2026 New Year message, reflecting deep concern for the evolving global landscape.

Facing the severe challenge of fragmented global governance, China adheres to practicing true multilateralism. While managing its own affairs well, the country strives for human progress, emerging as a driving force for peaceful development and a stabilizer in a turbulent world.

All countries should respect the development paths chosen by the peoples of other nations, and abide by international law as well as the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, Xi said, stressing that major countries should particularly take the lead in doing so.

Xi's point of view demonstrates the country's sense of responsibility for humanity's shared future.

Division, confrontation and zero-sum games have no future, and returning the world to the law of the jungle is unpopular. Instead, global solidarity and cooperation represents the only right path forward. Xi's statement, made to newly appointed ambassadors to China, has found broad resonance.

At this critical historical juncture, where human society yearns for stability, reliability and direction, President Xi has steered China's major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics to a steady start in 2026, injecting into the world vital hopes for stable progress, broad opportunities for cooperation and positive forces for win-win outcomes.

— Xinhua

## What makes China likelier than the US to win the AI race?

Commentary by Steven Hoffman\*

As the Chairman and CEO of Founders Space, I spend a great deal of time in conversations with influential entrepreneurs and investors across China. Those discussions reveal a picture of the global artificial intelligence (AI) race that feels very different from the one often portrayed in Western media.

When you look closely at what platforms like DeepSeek, Qwen, Kimi Chat, and Doubao are building, you start to see a structural shift that gives Chinese companies momentum the United States is struggling to match. Three forces in particular stand out, and together they form a foundation that could reshape the balance of global AI power.

The first force comes from a surprisingly old-fashioned element of modern technology: energy. Training frontier models depends on enormous amounts of power. In China, the state views this as a national priority and has created an environment where energy costs can be brought down through direct support and long-term planning.

At the same time, the United States is experiencing rising energy costs, aging infrastructure, and policy decisions that have set back renewable investments. With the country moving away from clean energy incentives and stumbling on grid modernization, the gap grows wider.

Cheap and reliable power may sound mundane compared to algorithmic breakthroughs, but behind the scenes, it influences every important decision a frontier model company makes. Costs compound over time, and China is deliberately positioning its ecosystem to carry those costs with far more ease.

The second advantage is China's new relationship with data. In the United States, data remains locked away in private silos, guarded by corporations and fragmented across thousands of institutions. The government has limited authority to open these vaults, even when shared access would serve innovation.

China is taking the opposite approach. It has the ability to mandate that large companies contribute data to shared pools and is building a national data exchange system designed specifically to fuel the next wave of AI growth. This does not simply create larger training sets. It also allows Chinese startups to train finely tuned models for every major industry, from finance to logistics to healthcare. When that type of domain-specific data becomes widely accessible, it accelerates an entire ecosystem rather than a handful of tech giants.

The third force comes from Huawei, whose reach across both chip technology and networking gives China a structural edge the United States cannot easily replicate. Because Huawei controls the networking layer inside its data centers, it has redesigned those systems so they can extract more performance out of cheaper, lower-power chips.

Most Western companies rely on chips from one firm and networking gear from another, which limits how deeply they can integrate the two. Huawei is crafting data centers where the network fabric and the chips speak the same native language. The result is a path to future parity using less expensive hardware, and that creates an economic advantage that compounds at scale.

When you place these pieces together, a larger picture emerges. Cheap power reduces the cost of training and inference. Open and mandated data access strengthens the diversity and quality of models. Integrated networking and chip design narrows the performance gap even when using less advanced hardware. Combined with China's embrace of open source model development, these advantages create an ecosystem where AI becomes both powerful and accessible at prices Western companies will struggle to match.

This is not a story about who has smarter engineers or more ambitious founders. It is a story about national strategy, infrastructure, and the structural forces that shape technological eras. And right now, those forces are tilting in China's favor.

\* Steven Hoffman is Chairman and CEO of Founders Space, and is the author of "Make Elephants Fly."

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the positions of Xinhua News Agency.

## China resolute in winning anti-corruption war in military: PLA Daily

BEIJING — An editorial to be published by a flagship newspaper of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) yesterday vows to fight and win the war against corruption in the military.

China on Saturday announced the investigation into two senior military officials, Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli, suspected of serious violations of discipline and law.

Zhang is a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and vice chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC). Liu is a member of the CMC and chief of staff of the CMC Joint Staff Department.

The decision made by the CPC Central Committee to investigate Zhang and Liu has once again demonstrated the clear stance of the CPC Central Committee and the CMC that in the fight against corruption, no place is out of bounds, no ground is left unturned, and no tolerance is allowed, says the *PLA Daily* editorial.

It shows the determination of the Party to persevere in the fight against corruption and the firm stand that no matter who they are or what position they hold, anyone involved in corruption will be dealt with without leniency, says the article.

The editorial hails the investigation as a major outcome of the anti-corruption fight and an important demonstration of the determination and strength of the Party and the military, adding that it carries great significance for winning this tough, protracted, and all-out battle in the military.

Zhang and Liu, as senior officials of the Party and the military, have gravely betrayed the trust placed in them by the CPC Central Committee and the CMC, and seriously trampled on and undermined the system of ultimate responsibility resting with the CMC chairman, the editorial says.

They have severely fueled political and corruption problems that threaten the Party's absolute leadership over the armed forces



A fighter jet launches a ground attack during a training session conducted by an aviation brigade of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force on June 22, 2025. —Xinhua

and undermine the Party's governance foundation, according to the editorial.

They have gravely tarnished the image and authority of the CMC leadership and severely damaged the political and ideological foundation of unity and progress among all military personnel.

They have inflicted grave harm on efforts to strengthen political loyalty in the military, the military's political environment, and overall combat readiness, posing a serious adverse impact on the Party, the country and the military.

The investigation against Zhang and Liu will help the military undergo a thorough renewal, injecting powerful momentum into the development of a strong military, says the *PLA Daily*.

It has been well demonstrated that the more the military combats corruption, the stronger and purer it becomes, with greater combat capacity. The more thoroughly corruption is eradicated, the more confident and capable the armed forces will be in achieving the centenary goals of the PLA, says the editorial.

Under the firm leadership of the Party Central Committee with Xi Jinping at its core, the PLA will resolutely clear all types of inaction and corruption, and will always remain the heroic armed forces

that the Party and the people can fully trust and rely on, says the *PLA Daily*.

The year 2026 marks the launch of the 15th Five-Year Plan and a critical year in the arduous journey towards achieving the centenary goals of the PLA, says the article, noting that the entire military must advance the strict self-governance of the Party and the military in all respects, with higher standards and more practical measures.

The editorial urges continuous efforts to confine power within the cage of institutional constraints and make concerted efforts to eradicate the breeding grounds and conditions for corruption.

Party members and cadres in the military, especially those holding senior positions, should strengthen their ideals and convictions, enhance political integrity and improve conduct, and resolutely implement the major decisions and plans of the Party Central Committee, the CMC and Xi — who is the chairman of the CMC, says the article.

The military should rally more closely around the Party Central Committee with Xi at its core, implement the system of ultimate responsibility resting with the CMC chairman and accelerate the building of a world-class military, it stresses. —Xinhua

## CMC unveils regulations on Party organization elections within armed forces

BEIJING — The Central Military Commission has issued a set of regulations on the election work of the Communist Party of China (CPC) organizations within the military, which will take effect on February 1, 2026, said a statement released yesterday.

Drawing on experience from Party election practices in the military since the 18th CPC National Congress, the

regulations standardize the election of delegates and Party organizations at various levels of the armed forces, according to the statement.

The regulations are expected to improve the system of intra-Party election in the military, strengthen the implementation of the Party's democratic centralism, and enhance the leadership, organizational capacity and

performance of Party organizations, the statement said.

They are also of great significance in strengthening the Party's leadership and Party building within the armed forces, and in providing a strong organizational guarantee for advancing efforts toward the centenary goals of the People's Liberation Army, it added.

—Xinhua



This aerial drone photo taken yesterday shows the concrete pouring site of the crossbeam on the east main tower of the Fuchimen road-rail bridge on the Ningbo-Zhoushan Railway in Zhoushan, Zhejiang Province. The concrete pouring operation for the crossbeam on the east main tower of the Fuchimen road-rail bridge was completed successfully yesterday, marking a breakthrough in the main tower's primary structure construction and laying a foundation for the subsequent construction of the entire bridge deck system. The Fuchimen road-rail bridge connects Zhoushan Island and Fuchi Island and is one of the key projects of the Ningbo-Zhoushan Railway. The bridge measures 1,726 meters in length with a main span of 388 meters, featuring a double-track railway and a six-lane expressway arranged on the same level. —Xinhua

# Indonesia resumes search for dozens missing in deadly landslide

CISARUA – Indonesian rescuers resumed searching yesterday for around 80 people missing in a deadly landslide, after the mission coordinator said operations had to be suspended overnight due to harsh weather.

Triggered by heavy rain, the landslide barrelled into villages in Java's West Bandung region early Saturday morning, burying residential areas and forcing dozens of people to evacuate their homes.

At least nine people were killed and around 80 are still missing, the local search and rescue agency confirmed on Saturday, warning that the figures were provisional.

The rain forced rescue efforts to pause overnight, mission coordinator Ade Dian Permana said in a statement.

But operations resumed yesterday morning as the rain subsided, an AFP reporter saw.

Rescuers, helped by the military, police and volunteers, have been excavating manually.

They are also deploying drones and canine units to scour the area for victims, according to the national rescue agency.

West Bandung's mayor warned on Saturday that the terrain was



An aerial picture shows a landslide at Pasirlangu village, Bandung, West Java yesterday, after the disaster killed 16 people and left around 80 missing. – AFP

extremely difficult and the ground remained unstable.

Floods and landslides are common across the vast archipelago during the rainy season, which typically runs from October to March.

The disaster comes after tropical storms and intense monsoon rains late last year triggered flooding and landslides that killed around 1,200 people and displaced more than 240,000 in Indonesia's Sumatra island, according to official figures.

Environmentalists, experts and the government have pointed to the role forest loss played in the flooding and landslides that washed torrents of mud into villages.

The government filed multiple lawsuits following the Sumatra floods, seeking more than US\$200 million in damages against six firms.

This month, torrential rains battered Indonesia's Siau island, causing a flash flood that killed at least 16 people. – AFP

## Buddha statue built in place of Hindu one on disputed Thai-Cambodia border

BANGKOK – A Buddha statue has been built on Thailand's disputed border with Cambodia, Bangkok's army said Saturday, the same site where it knocked down and removed a likeness of a Hindu deity last month.

The Southeast Asian neighbours have traded barbs over the statues placed in the contested area since December when a ceasefire ended three weeks of deadly fighting, the latest eruption in their years-long dispute.

That month, Thai forces destroyed a likeness of the Hindu deity Vishnu in a border region known to Thais as An Ma and to Cambodians as An Ses.

Cambodian officials condemned the move, while Thailand said it was necessary to assert control over the area and was not intended to disrespect religious beliefs.

On Wednesday, Phnom Penh said Thai armed forces had installed a Buddha statue at the site, adding that the act was "inconsistent with de-escalation measures" in the ceasefire.

The Thai army on Saturday accused Cambodia of "distortions".

The Buddha statue "was not intended to insult or undermine the beliefs of any party", it said in a statement.

"This was carried out within the

framework of religious freedom and belief, as well as to boost morale among Thai citizens in the area."

Both Cambodia and Thailand are Buddhist-majority countries.

Their long-standing conflict stems from a territorial dispute over the colonial-era demarcation of their 800-kilometre border.

Fighting last month killed dozens of people on both sides.

Since the truce, Cambodia has said Thailand has seized several areas in border provinces, and has demanded the withdrawal of Thai troops from the territories that both sides claim. – AFP

## 3 killed in ambush on southern Philippine mayor

MANILA – Three gunmen in an ambush targeting a town mayor in Maguindanao del Sur province in the southern Philippines were killed, while two of the mayor's security escorts were injured in the attack yesterday, police said.

Police said the ambush occurred early yesterday morning as the mayor of Shariff Aguak town was

traveling in his bulletproof vehicle. The mayor was uninjured.

The mayor's backup vehicle was also riddled with bullets during the attack, police added.

According to investigators, the suspects were on board a white minivan when they opened fire on the two-car convoy.

Authorities launched a pursuit

operation that resulted in a brief firefight, resulting in the deaths of the three suspects. High-powered firearms were recovered from the minivan, police said.

The Shariff Aguak mayor has survived two assassination attempts in the past five years, according to local media reports, underscoring persistent security concerns in the area. – Xinhua

## 4 minors killed, 3 hurt in truck-tricycle collision in Philippines

MANILA – Four minors were killed and three others injured in a collision between a trailer truck and a tricycle in Isabela province in the northern Philippines, police said yesterday.

Police said the crash occurred on Friday evening in Santiago City after a tricycle, driven by a 17-year-old and carrying six minors, allegedly made a sudden left turn

and was struck by a truck traveling in the opposite lane.

The victims – four siblings and their three cousins – were rushed to a local hospital, where four were declared dead on arrival, police said. The three injured people have been undergoing treatment.

The initial police investigation showed that the tricycle was

heading home from a grade school when the accident occurred.

Police have taken the truck driver into custody as investigators work to determine accountability for the incident.

A tricycle is a three-wheeled motorized vehicle in the Philippines, often used for short-distance public transport. – Xinhua

## Myanmar junta wraps election with ally set to seal victory

MANDALAY – Voting concluded in Myanmar's month-long election yesterday, with the dominant pro-military party on course for landslide victory in a junta-run poll critics say will only prolong the army's grip on power.

The Southeast Asian nation has a long history of military rule, but the generals took a back seat for a decade of civilian-led reforms.

That ended in a 2021 military coup when democratic figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi was detained, civil war broke out, and the country descended into humanitarian crisis.

The election's third and final phase closed after voting took place in dozens of constituencies across the country, just a week shy of the coup's five-year anniversary.

The military pledges the election will return power to the people but with Suu Kyi sidelined and her hugely popular party dissolved, democracy advocates say the ballot is stacked with military allies.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing – who has not ruled out serving as president after the poll – toured voting stations in Mandalay, wearing civilian dress.

"This is the path chosen by the people," he told reporters in response to a question from AFP. "The people from Myanmar can support whoever they want to support."

Voting is not being held in rebel-held parts of the country, and in junta-controlled areas rights monitors say the run-up has been characterised by coercion and the crushing of dissent.

Teacher Zaw Ko Ko Myint cast his vote at a Mandalay high school around dawn.

"Although I do not expect much, we want to see a better country," the 53-year-old told AFP. "I feel relieved after voting, as if I fulfilled my duty."

### Fabricated vote

The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) – packed with retired officers and described by analysts as a military puppet – won more than 85 percent of elected lower house seats and two-thirds of those in the upper house in the poll's first two phases.

"States that endorse the results of these polls will be complicit in the junta's attempt to legitimise military rule through a fabricated vote," UN rights expert Tom Andrews said in a statement Friday.

Official results are expected late this week.

A military-drafted constitution also gives the armed forces a quarter of the seats in both houses of parliament, which will vote as a whole to pick the president.

"I don't expect anything from this election," a 34-year-old Yangon resident told AFP earlier, requesting anonymity for security reasons. "Things will just keep dragging on."

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party thrashed the USDP in the last elections in 2020, before the military seized power on February 1, 2021, making unfounded allegations of widespread vote-rigging.

The 80-year-old Nobel Peace Prize laureate remains detained incommunicado at an unknown location on charges rights monitors dismiss as politically motivated.

### 'Not safe at all'

The military has long presented itself as the only force guarding restive Myanmar from rupture and ruin.

But its putsch tipped the country into full-blown civil war, with pro-democracy guerrillas fighting the junta alongside a kaleidoscope of ethnic minority armies which have long held sway in the fringes.

Air strikes are frequent in some regions, others enjoy relative peace, while some zones are blockaded, haunted by the spectre of starvation.

Polling was called off in one in five lower house constituencies, but some frontline locations went to the polls yesterday.

"Candidates still haven't held any campaigning because of security," complained one parliamentary candidate, speaking on condition of anonymity for security reasons. "It's not safe at all to travel."

There is no official death toll for Myanmar's civil war.

But monitoring group ACLED, which tallies media reports of violence, estimates more than 90,000 have been killed on all sides.

Meanwhile, more than 400 people have been pursued for prosecution under stark new legislation forbidding "disruption" of the election and punishing protest or criticism with up to a decade in prison.

Turnout in the first and second phases of the vote was just over 50 percent, official figures say, compared to roughly 70 percent in 2020.



A People's Party supporter holds signs with People's Party leader and prime ministerial candidate Nattaphong Ruengpanyawut (right) and former Thai prime ministerial candidate and ex Move Forward Party leader Pita Limjaroenrat (left) and at a People's Party rally ahead of the general election, in Bangkok yesterday. – AFP

## Fans bid farewell to Japan's only pandas

TOKYO – Panda lovers in Tokyo said goodbye yesterday to a hugely popular pair of the bears that are set to return to China, leaving Japan without the beloved animals for the first time in half a century.

Loaned out as part of China's "panda diplomacy" programme, the distinctive black-and-white animals have symbolised friendship between Beijing and Tokyo since the normalisation of diplomatic ties in 1972.

Some visitors at Ueno Zoological Gardens were left teary-eyed as they watched Japan's only two pandas Lei Lei and Xiao Xiao munch on bamboo.

The animals are expected to leave for China tomorrow following a souring of relations between Asia's two largest economies.

"I feel like seeing pandas can help create a connection with China too, so in that sense I really would like pandas to come back to Japan again," said Gen Takahashi, 39, a Tokyo resident who visited the zoo with his wife and their two-year-old daughter.

"Kids love pandas as well, so if we could see them with our own eyes in Japan, I'd definitely want to go."

The pandas' abrupt return was announced last month after Japan's conservative premier

Sanae Takaichi hinted Tokyo could intervene militarily in the event of any attack on Taiwan.

Her comment provoked the ire of Beijing, which regards the island as its own territory.

The 4,400 lucky winners of an online lottery took turns viewing the four-year-old twins at Ueno Zoo while others gathered nearby, many sporting panda-themed shirts, bags and dolls to celebrate the moment.

Mayuko Sumida travelled several hours from the central Aichi region in the hope of seeing them despite not winning the lottery.

"Even though it's so big, its movements are really funny – sometimes it even acts kind of like a person," she said, adding that she was "totally hooked".

"Japan's going to be left with zero pandas. It feels kind of sad," she said.

Their departure might not be politically motivated, but if pandas return to Japan in the future it would symbolise warming relations, said Masaki Ienaga, a professor at Tokyo Woman's Christian University and expert in East Asian international relations.

"In the future...if there are intentions of improving bilateral ties on both sides, it's possible that [the return of] pandas will be on the table", he told AFP. – AFP



Giant panda Xiao Xiao walks in his enclosure during the final day for public viewing before his departure for China, at Ueno Zoo in Tokyo yesterday. – AFP

## Nepali Congress, CPN-UML become winners in Nepal's National Assembly polls

KATHMANDU – The Nepali Congress won nine seats, while the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML) emerged victorious in eight seats in the National Assembly election held yesterday, the Election Commission said.

The commission said in a statement that the Loktantrik Samajwadi Party-Nepal, or the Democratic Socialist Party-Nepal, won one seat. The Nepali Communist Party, formed after the merger of several communist parties, including the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Center), failed to win a single seat, as the Congress and the

CPN-UML had allied.

About one third of the National Assembly seats fall vacant every two years, to be filled by election.

Of the 19 seats falling vacant on March 4 this year, elections were held for 17 seats, as one candidate was elected unopposed. President Ram Chandra Poudel, on the recommendation of the government, will nominate one member to the assembly.

With 25 seats, the Congress has become the largest party in the 59-member upper house, followed by the Nepali Communist Party, and the CPN-UML stands third.

– Xinhua

## Defiance as a profession: Pakistan's jailed lawyer Imaan Mazari

### Zain Zaman Janjua

ISLAMABAD – No amount of pressure, cyberbullying or arrest warrants has so far succeeded in silencing one of Pakistan's most prominent dissidents, the human rights lawyer Imaan Mazari.

She vows not to let a prison term dealt this weekend dent her resolve either.

The 32-year-old shot to prominence tackling some of the country's most sensitive topics while defending ethnic minorities, journalists facing defamation charges and clients branded blasphemers.

As Mazari's reputation grew, so too did her own rap sheet, with charges including "cyber terrorism" and "hate speech".

On Saturday, an Islamabad court handed her and her husband, fellow lawyer Hadi Ali Chattha, 10-year jail terms over "anti-state" social media posts.

The vocal critic of Pakistan's military "disseminated highly offensive" content, according to a court document.

The sentencing came a day after the couple were arrested again as they were heading to a court hearing to face the charges.

### We will not back down'

"Truth seems overwhelmingly difficult in this country," Mazari said in court on Tuesday.

"But we knew that when we got into this work, we're ready to face that," she told AFP. "We will not back down."

Her refusal to yield has led to comparisons with Pakistan's late leading human rights lawyer Asma Jahangir, which Mazari said is "a huge honour and a privilege".

Mazari is the daughter of Pakistan's former minister for human rights, Shireen Mazari, while her late father was the South Asian country's top paediatrician.

Her mother told AFP that it had been difficult for the family to cope with the threats they were facing because of her daughter's defence of the "dispossessed and marginalised", a cause she said made her proud.



Pakistani human rights lawyer Imaan Mazari speaks during an interview with AFP, after a hearing at the Islamabad High Court Bar Association in Islamabad last Tuesday. From raising her voice for marginalised communities to representing those up against blasphemy charges, Imaan Mazari has emerged as Pakistan's top human rights lawyer as tolerance for dissent diminishes.

– AFP

### 'We will keep fighting'

The University of Edinburgh graduate has also faced sexist remarks and doctored photos circulated on social media, in a country where women's participation in the workplace remains low.

Mazari was honoured in 2025 with the Young Inspiration Award by the World Expression Forum for her "extraordinary courage, integrity, and impact in the struggle for the rule of law and justice".

The same year, the UN special rapporteur for human rights defenders said the cases against her "appear to reflect an arbitrary use of the legal system to harass and intimidate".

Mazari was targeted in a January 2026 news conference by Pakistan's military spokesman, who shared one of her X posts while building a case against "hidden elements committing subtle crimes".

"They operate under the guise of democracy and human rights to promote terrorism," Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said.

Despite such accusations, Mazari vowed to continue her work along with her husband.

"We're not the first people who will be unlawfully incarcerated in this country," she told AFP.

"We will keep fighting."

– AFP

## Bangladesh criticises India over fugitive leader Hasina's speech

DHAKA – Bangladesh said yesterday it was "surprised" and "shocked" that India had allowed fugitive former prime minister Sheikh Hasina to make a public address in New Delhi.

Hasina, 78, fled to neighbouring India in August 2024 after a student-led uprising ended her iron-fisted 15-year rule. She made her first public speech since then in an audio address to a packed press club in Delhi on Friday.

She was found guilty in absentia by a Dhaka court in November of incitement, issuing an order to kill and inaction to prevent atrocities

and was sentenced to be hanged.

"The government and the people of Bangladesh are surprised and shocked," Dhaka's foreign ministry said in a statement.

"Allowing the event to take place in the Indian capital and letting mass murderer Hasina openly deliver her hate speech... constitute a clear affront to the people and the Government of Bangladesh."

It said allowing Hasina to make the speech set "a dangerous precedent" that could "seriously impair bilateral relations".

Bangladesh voters go to the polls on February 12 to choose new

leaders after a period of turmoil that followed the overthrow of Hasina's autocratic government.

Hasina said in her audio address that "Bangladesh will never experience free and fair elections" under interim leader Muhammad Yunus.

More than 100,000 people watched the address, which was broadcast online.

Bangladesh has asked India to extradite Hasina, but New Delhi has yet to comment on the request.

India's past support for Hasina has frayed relations between the South Asian neighbours since her overthrow.

– AFP

# Netanyahu, US envoys discuss opening Rafah crossing: Israeli media

JERUSALEM – US envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner urged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to reopen the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt during talks in Jerusalem, Israeli media reported yesterday.

The reports came after a newly appointed administrator for Gaza said on Thursday that the crossing would be operational in both directions this week.

Israeli news site Ynet reported, citing an unnamed Israeli official, that while the meeting between Netanyahu, Witkoff and Kushner was “positive”, Witkoff pressed Israel to reopen Rafah even before Hamas returns the remains of the last Israeli hostage believed to be held in Gaza.

According to the official, Witkoff also raised the possibility of Turkey playing a role in Gaza’s future.

“Witkoff pushed to bring our greatest rival, Turkey, to our border,” the official was quoted as saying.

“The clock is ticking toward a confrontation with Turkey, which would pose a real threat to our security.”

The official also accused Witkoff of acting on behalf of Doha, saying he had “become a lobbyist for Qatari interests”, according to Ynet.

When asked to confirm the Israeli media reports, Shosh Bedrosian, spokeswoman for Netanyahu’s office, told AFP that she would look into the matter.

Netanyahu has repeatedly rejected any Turkish role in post-war Gaza, despite US President Donald Trump having invited President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to join his so-called “Board of Peace”.

Relations between Israel and Turkey have deteriorated since the war in Gaza broke out in October 2023 following the



A Palestinian boy searches for recyclable material at a garbage dump against the backdrop of destroyed buildings in Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday. Since October 10, a fragile US-sponsored truce in Gaza has largely halted the fighting between Israeli forces and Hamas, but both sides have alleged frequent violations.

– AFP

Hamas attack on Israel.

Reopening Rafah forms part of a Gaza truce framework announced by Trump in October, but the crossing has remained closed after Israeli forces took control of it during the war.

However, Ali Shaath, appointed to head a committee of 15 Palestinian technocrats tasked with overseeing Gaza’s day-to-day administration, said at the World Economic Forum (WEF) on Thursday that the gateway would reopen this week.

The crossing is a key entry point for humanitarian aid to Gaza’s 2.2 million residents.

“For Palestinians in Gaza, Rafah is more than a gate, it is a lifeline and a symbol of opportunity,” Shaath said.

Israeli officials are under pressure

from the family of the last hostage whose remains are still in Gaza. Of the 251 people seized during the Hamas attack of October 7, 2023 that triggered the war, only the body of Ran Gvili remains in the territory.

“We ask that the prime minister of Israel make clear to the respected American envoys that anyone who truly seeks to advance the rehabilitation of Gaza and peace in the Middle East must first and foremost bring Rani home,” Gvili’s family said in a statement ahead of Netanyahu’s meeting with the US officials.

A fragile ceasefire has been in place in Gaza since October 10 and entered its second phase this month, though Israel and Hamas have repeatedly accused each other of violations.

– AFP

## Damascus opens humanitarian corridor to Kurdish-majority town

DAMASCUS – Syria’s military said yesterday it had opened a humanitarian corridor to the Kurdish-majority town of Kobane, filled with people displaced by recent clashes, as a UN convoy carrying life-saving aid headed there.

The aid came as the Syrian government and Kurdish forces extended a ceasefire

agreement by 15 days, after Kurdish forces relinquished swathes of territory to government troops.

Earlier this week, residents in Kobane, also known as Ain al-Arab in Arabic, told AFP that they lacked food, water and power and that the enclave was flooded with people who had fled the Syrian army’s advances.

In a statement, the Syrian military

said it was opening two corridors, one to Kobane and another in nearby Hasakeh province to allow “the entry of aid”.

Gonzalo Vargas Llosa, representative of the United Nations’ refugee agency in Syria, said on X that “thanks to the cooperation with the Syrian government... a convoy of 24 trucks carrying essential food, relief items, and diesel” departed for Kobane “to deliver life-saving and winter assistance to civilians affected by the hostilities”.

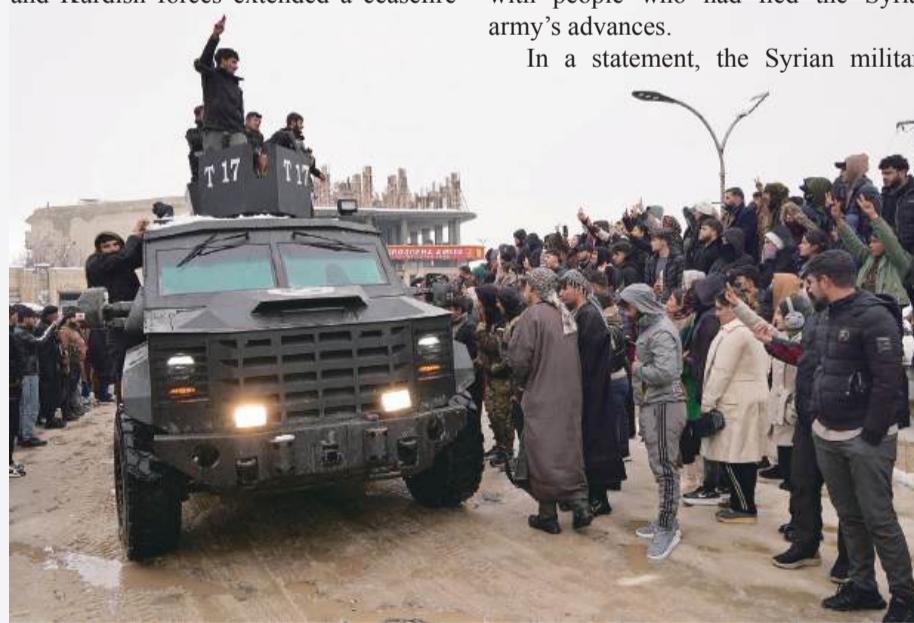
The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) lost large areas to government forces during the weeks-long clashes, and find themselves restricted to Kurdish-majority areas in the northeast and Kobane in the north.

The town is surrounded by the Turkish border to the north and government forces on all sides. It is around 200 kilometres from the Kurds’ stronghold in Syria’s far northeast.

Kobane, which Kurdish forces liberated from a lengthy siege by the Islamic State (IS) group in 2015, became a symbol as their first major victory against the jihadists.

On Saturday, Syria’s government and Kurdish forces extended their truce with Damascus saying it was intended to support the US transfer of IS group detainees from Syria to prisons in Iraq, which started earlier this week.

– AFP



Members of Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) arrive at the Kurdish-held city of Ain al-Arab, also known as Kobane, on Friday, after they withdrew from the Al-Aqtaan prison in Syria’s Raqa province. Europeans were among 150 senior Islamic State (IS) group detainees transferred last week by the US military from Kurdish custody in Syria to Iraq, whose premier urged EU countries to repatriate their nationals. They were among an estimated 7,000 jihadists due to be moved across the border to Iraq as the Kurdish-led force that has held them for years relinquishes swathes of territory to the advancing Syrian army.

– AFP

## Anger as woman’s headless body found in Istanbul bin

ISTANBUL – The decapitated body of a woman, whose legs were also cut off, was found in a rubbish bin in Istanbul overnight, Turkish media reported yesterday, sparking fury from women’s groups.

Her body was wrapped in a sheet and dumped in a rubbish container in the Sisli district where it was discovered on Saturday evening (local time) by a paper collector looking for items to recycle, the DHA news agency said.

Investigators identified the victim as a 37-year-old Uzbek national.

They were not immediately able to find the victim’s head or her legs but while reviewing security camera footage, spotted two men dumping a suitcase at a different bin. It was not immediately clear what it contained.

Hours later, police detained two suspects, also Uzbek nationals, at Istanbul Airport as they were trying to leave the country, DHA said. They later arrested a third suspect.

Women’s rights groups expressed outrage and called for protest marches in Istanbul and Ankara to demand action against femicides.

“We don’t yet know the murdered woman’s name, but we know this crime is the result of male violence!” Feminists Against Femicide wrote on X, pledging to “take our anger to the streets so that not one more is lost”.

Sisli’s jailed mayor Resul Emrah Sahan, who was arrested around the same time as Istanbul mayor Ekrem Imamoglu in a crackdown widely seen as politically motivated, said such murders were a “major social problem”.

“Femicides are turning into an ever-growing massacre through impunity, negligence, and silence,” he wrote on X, demanding coordinated action to tackle the issue.

Turkey does not collate official figures on femicides, leaving the job to women’s organisations which collect data on murders and other suspicious deaths from press reports.

Figures compiled by We Will Stop Femicides show that in 2025, 294 women were killed by men and 297 women were found dead under suspicious circumstances.

## 86 arrested after protesters breach London prison grounds

LONDON – Eighty-six people were arrested on suspicion of aggravated trespass after protesters breached the grounds of a London prison in support of a pro-Palestinian hunger striker, UK police said yesterday.

The group were “protesting in support of a Palestine Action prisoner on a hunger strike” late Saturday and then refused to leave the prison grounds when ordered to do so, London’s Metropolitan Police said on X.

“They allegedly blocked prison staff from entering and leaving, threatened police officers and a number managed to get inside a staff entrance area of a prison building,” police said, adding “all those involved” were detained.

A Ministry of Justice spokesperson described the incident as “deeply concerning”.

The incident took place outside HMP Wormwood Scrubs in West London, where a man named Muhammad Umer Khalid is being held and has been on hunger strike for over two weeks, according to the campaign group Prisoners for Palestine.

He is one of several people who have been on hunger strike at various points in recent months as they await trial for an alleged break-in and criminal damage on behalf of the Palestine Action campaign group before it was banned under anti-terrorism laws.

Khalid and the others deny those charges and have called for them to be dropped.

– AFP

## 2<sup>nd</sup> killing in Minneapolis by US federal agents sparks uproar

**Roberto Schmidt**

MINNEAPOLIS – The killing of a US citizen by federal immigration agents on Saturday – the second in Minneapolis this month – sparked new protests and impassioned demands by local leaders for the Trump administration to end its operation in the city.

Federal agents shot dead Alex Petti, a 37-year-old ICU nurse, while scuffling with him on an icy roadway, less than three weeks after an immigration officer shot and killed Renee Good, also 37, in her car.

The Trump administration quickly claimed that Petti had intended to harm the federal agents, as it did after Good's death.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) pointed to a pistol and ammunition it said was discovered on Petti.

"He was there to perpetuate violence," Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem told a briefing, while White House deputy chief of staff Stephen Miller referred to Petti as an "assassin," in a post amplified on X by Vice President JD Vance.

However, as with Good's death, cell phone footage of the incident raised serious questions about the federal government's description of the incident.

Video aired widely by US media, which AFP has not verified, shows Petti filming agents in the snow-lined street and directing traffic.

After an agent shoves a woman protester to the ground on the sidewalk, Petti steps in between them and is sprayed in the face by a chemical irritant.

The agent then pulls Petti to the ground and several officers struggle to detain him on the icy roadway.

Seconds later, as an officer apparently discovers and pulls a gun from Petti's pants, agents open fire, also shooting his motionless body several times from a distance.

Minnesota Governor Tim Walz called



A picture of Alex Petti is left at a makeshift memorial in the area where he was shot dead a day earlier by federal immigration agents in Minneapolis, Minnesota, yesterday.

– AFP

the shooting "horrific" and demanded state authorities lead the investigation.

"The federal government cannot be trusted to lead this investigation. The state will handle it, period," Walz told a press conference.

Federal authorities controversially blocked local investigators from jointly probing Good's death.

### Insurrection'

Republican President Donald Trump meanwhile ratcheted up his war of words with Walz and Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, accusing the Democratic leaders of "inciting insurrection" with their rhetoric.

Trump had previously threatened to

send troops to Minnesota by invoking the Insurrection Act.

As the president presses a sweeping campaign to deport undocumented migrants, thousands of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents have been deployed to the Democratic-led city.

Public outrage was also rekindled earlier this week by the detention of a five-year-old boy as federal agents sought to arrest his father.

Frey at a press conference urged Trump to end the federal immigration operation, which has sparked sometimes violent demonstrations.

"This is a moment to act like a leader. Put Minneapolis, put America first in this moment

– let's achieve peace. Let's end this operation."

Police chief Brian O'Hara said an "incredibly volatile scene" erupted after the shooting as protesters arrived, with local officials unable to secure the scene for investigation.

O'Hara told a later briefing that Minnesota National Guard troops would help secure a vehicle exclusion zone set up around the site.

Local resident Maria, 56, told AFP the situation in the city was "escalating."

"They're attacking and terrorising our communities right now."

Hundreds of protesters gathered in a park in Minneapolis Saturday evening (local time), despite bitterly cold temperatures in the northern US city.

The shooting came a day after tens of thousands of people braved the cold to gather in downtown Minneapolis to voice opposition to the federal operation.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment

O'Hara said police believed the victim did not have any serious criminal background and was a "lawful gun owner with a permit to carry."

Some gun rights advocates – often staunch supporters of the president – have raised concerns after the Trump administration quickly linked Petti's legal gun possession to an intent to do mass harm.

The Gun Owners of America (GOA) condemned a statement by Bill Essayli, a federal prosecutor in California, who had said on X: "If you approach law enforcement with a gun, there is a high likelihood they will be legally justified in shooting you."

"The Second Amendment protects Americans' right to bear arms while protesting – a right the federal government must not infringe upon," the GOA said in a statement.

– AFP

## Labour blocks potential Starmer rival from standing as MP

LONDON – The UK's ruling Labour Party yesterday blocked Greater Manchester mayor Andy Burnham from standing to be an MP in an upcoming by-election.

The move is likely to trigger outrage from supporters of the former cabinet minister, who is seen by some as a potential rival to Prime Minister Keir Starmer for leadership of the party and country.

Sources close to Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC) said a "very clear majority" opposed Burnham's bid due to concerns about the cost of an election to replace him as mayor, UK media initially reported.

The decision was made by a subgroup of the NEC.

The Labour Party later said in a statement that it had made this decision to avoid an "unnecessary" mayoral election in Manchester.

"Although the party would be confident of retaining the mayoralty, the NEC could not put Labour's control of Greater Manchester at any risk," it said.

"Andy Burnham is doing a great job as mayor of Greater Manchester. We believe it is in the best interests of the party to avoid an unnecessary mayoral election which would use substantial amounts of taxpayers' money and resources that are better spent tackling the cost-of-living crisis."

Burnham had announced on X his desire on Saturday evening (local time) to stand in the Gorton and Denton by-election.

Former Labour MP Andrew Gwynne – who stood down on Friday – won the constituency comfortably in 2024.

But the collapse in Labour's polling numbers since then means the party now faces a tough fight with the anti-immigrant Reform UK and the Green Party to retain the seat.

## Minneapolis shooting: what the videos show

MINNEAPOLIS – Video footage of the moment immigration agents shot dead a 37-year-old nurse in Minneapolis on Saturday appears to contradict Trump administration claims the man was a violent aggressor who sought to "massacre" federal law enforcement officials.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) after the shooting said Alex Petti had "approached US Border Patrol officers with a 9 mm semi-automatic handgun" and "violently resisted" when they attempted to disarm him.

Administration officials did not say whether Petti had the gun in his hands at the time.

Video shared widely by US media, which AFP has not verified, however, shows Petti with a phone in his hands, filming agents in a snow-lined street and directing traffic.

After an agent shoves a woman protester to the ground on the sidewalk, Petti steps in between them and is sprayed in the face by a chemical irritant.

The agent then pulls Petti to the ground and several officers struggle to detain him on the icy roadway.

Seconds later, as an officer in grey appears to pull a gun from Petti's waist while Petti is bent forward on his knees with multiple officers on top of him, agents open fire.

They shoot his motionless body several times from a distance after initially dispersing. At least 10 gunshots

can be heard in the footage.

In one clip, a man can be heard saying, "Where's the gun?" as Petti is motionless on the ground.

The DHS after the shooting posted on X a photo of the handgun purportedly found on Petti.

The department said it looked "like a situation where an individual wanted to do maximum damage and massacre law enforcement."



A mourner visits a makeshift memorial in the area where Alex Petti was shot dead a day earlier by federal immigration agents in Minneapolis, Minnesota, yesterday.

– AFP

# Xi says China's high-quality development to provide more opportunities for cooperation with Brazil

BEIJING – China's high-quality development via high-level opening-up will provide more opportunities for cooperation with Brazil, President Xi Jinping said on Friday.

Xi made the remarks during a phone call with Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

Xi noted that he and Lula in 2024 jointly announced the elevation of China-Brazil ties to a community with a shared future for a more just world and a more sustainable planet.

Over the past year, the building of a China-Brazil community

with a shared future has gained solid momentum, with deepening alignment between their development strategies and setting an example of unity and cooperation between Global South countries, Xi added.

This year marks the start of China's 15th Five-Year Plan period, said Xi, voicing China's readiness to work with Brazil to comprehensively deepen mutually beneficial cooperation across various fields and push for greater development of bilateral relations so as to usher in an even brighter future.

Amid the current turbulent

international situation, China and Brazil – both important countries in the Global South – are a constructive force in safeguarding global peace and stability and improving global governance, said Xi.

Xi called on the two countries to firmly stand on the right side of history, make more efforts to defend the common interests of both countries and of the Global South, and jointly safeguard the central role of the United Nations, as well as international fairness and justice.

China is committed to always

being a good friend and partner to countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), and to jointly advancing the building of the China-LAC community with a shared future, he noted.

For his part, Lula said that Xi's historic visit to Brazil in 2024 has elevated bilateral ties to a new height of building a community with a shared future for a more just world and a more sustainable planet and that bilateral cooperation in various fields has made remarkable progress.

Lula voiced Brazil's readiness to

work with the Chinese side to push for greater growth in bilateral ties and the relationship between Latin America and China.

He depicted Brazil and China as important forces in defending multilateralism and upholding free trade.

Against a concerning international landscape, Lula said that Brazil is willing to work closely with China, uphold the authority of the United Nations, and strengthen cooperation among BRICS countries so as to safeguard peace and stability in the region and beyond.

– Xinhua



Equatorial Guinea's Vice President Teodoro Nguema Obiang looks on during the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos last Tuesday. The annual forum concluded on Friday. – AFP

## Spain smashes prostitution ring, frees 15 Chinese

MADRID – Spanish police on Saturday said they had freed 15 Chinese women forced into prostitution in "conditions of slavery" in Palma de Mallorca, the capital of the Balearic islands, and arrested 14 people.

The network profited not only from sexual exploitation, but also from selling stimulants and drugs to clients.

"The victims were kept in conditions of slavery; they had to be available at all times," the national police said.

Some of the women were already on the Spanish mainland or "had travelled from China to Spain after accepting purported job offers as therapeutic massage therapists, with a salary of around 2,000 euros a month, or as cooks or caregivers," the statement said.

The operation ended with 14 arrests: 12 in the Balearic Islands and two in Barcelona.

Seven of those arrested were remanded in custody.

All the detainees are Chinese nationals except one, a Spaniard.

"Money was sent to Chinese citizens in charge of converting it into yuan, after which it was deposited into bank accounts in China," the police said.

The women were forced to work "24 hours a day, seven days a week, without freedom of movement and with no possibility of refusing any client".

The police received two anonymous reports, and one of the victims managed to escape and reported having suffered sexual and physical assaults, a testimony that was "crucial" to the investigation. – AFP

### Ramon Sahmkow

BRASÍLIA – Brazil's latest Oscar-nominated thriller "The Secret Agent" has resonated with audiences around the world as a universal tale of governments using their power "to crush people," director Kleber Mendonça Filho told AFP in an interview.

Following on "I'm Still Here," winner of last year's Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film, the new film about Brazil's 1964-1985 military regime has captivated Hollywood.

Fresh from winning two Golden Globes, the period thriller picked up four Oscar nominations on Thursday – Best Picture, Best International Feature Film, Best Actor for Wagner Moura and Best Casting.

Mendonça Filho, the director of 2016's "Aquarius," about a woman refusing to be driven out of her home by developers, and 2019's anti-imperialism drama "Bacurau," links the current boom in the Brazilian film industry to the return to power of leftist President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in 2023.

Under Lula's rightwing predecessor Jair Bolsonaro, "culture was extinguished in Brazil," he said.

Mendonça Filho spoke with AFP from Recife, his hometown in northeastern Brazil, where he received the news of the Oscar nominations.

In the film set in Recife, Moura – of "Civil War," "Elite Squad" and "Narcos" fame – plays a university professor recently arrived from São Paulo, who is unaware that he is being hunted by hitmen linked to the military regime.

Mendonça Filho lavished Moura with praise, saying "he's a great actor, a great artist and a great person. And he's exactly where he

should be" among the nominees for best performance.

Below are excerpts from the interview, edited for clarity.

### How do you explain this moment in Brazilian cinema?

"Brazilian cinema reconnected with the current with Lula's election in 2022, after four years in which culture, practically speaking, was extinguished in Brazil," Mendonça Filho said.

"The Ministry of Culture was eliminated. All support mechanisms were deactivated.

"[The] two films that were very well received in Brazil and internationally, 'I Am Still Here' and 'The Secret Agent,' became showcase films for Brazilian cinema."



Brazilian film director Kleber Mendonça Filho poses during the 2025 Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France, on May 19 last year. – Photo courtesy of Harald Krichel/Wikimedia Commons

### How did US audiences receive the film?

"The reaction is very positive. Many people in contemporary America can identify with its story. I think the reaction is largely due to the historical moment the United States is going through," Mendonça Filho said.

–

### Does cinema have a political role to play?

"I don't see any obligation to make political films," Mendonça Filho said.

"If you make a film or tell a story honestly, frankly and knowledgeably, you will probably contribute to a better understanding of a country or society."

"My films have contributed to the debate in some way, but they weren't designed for that purpose."

"I don't make films to be symbols of resistance, but I believe that art, artistic expression, can function very well as a form of resistance." – AFP

## Cuba defends military drills as deterrent against US aggression

HAVANA – Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel defended his country's military preparedness exercises on Saturday as a deterrent against potential aggression from the United States.

US President Donald Trump this month warned that Cuba "is ready to fall" and told Havana to "make a deal" or pay a price similar to Venezuela, whose ousted leader Nicolás Maduro

was taken to America by US forces in a January 3 bombing raid that killed dozens of people.

Venezuela was a key ally of Cuba and a critical supplier of oil and money, which Trump has vowed to cut off.

Díaz-Canel on Saturday supervised military exercises that included a tank unit from Cuba's armed forces.

He was accompanied by Cuban General Álvaro López Miera, who is the minister of the armed forces, and other high-ranking military officials.

"The best way to prevent aggression is for imperialism to have to calculate the price of attacking our country," Díaz-Canel said in remarks broadcast on Cuban television.

"And that has a lot to do with

our preparation for this type of military action... This takes on significant importance in the current circumstances," he added.

Cuba's National Defence Council, which is led by Díaz-Canel, recently met "with the objective of increasing and improving the level of preparedness and cohesion" among the country's leadership, according to an official government statement.

The council met to "analyse and approve the plans and measures for transitioning to a State of War," the statement added, without providing further details.

These military exercises are part of the country's preparation "under the strategic concept of the War of the Entire People," a term used by authorities for the mobilisation of civilians in the event of armed conflict. – AFP

## Football shorts

### Atletico down Mallorca to tighten grip on 3<sup>rd</sup>

MADRID – Atletico Madrid eased to a 3-0 win over Mallorca yesterday to strengthen their position in third in La Liga and move seven points behind provisional leaders Real Madrid.

After Villarreal, fourth, fell to defeat against Los Blancos on Saturday, Diego Simeone's team capitalised with a solid home victory to go three points clear of the Yellow Submarine.

Alexander Sorloth and Thiago Almada struck for the hosts, either side of a David Lopez own goal at the Metropolitano stadium.

Atletico took control from the start, with Mallorca goalkeeper Leo Roman making a fine triple save to deny Sorloth, Giuliano Simeone and Pablo Barrios.

"We wanted to win and win like this, with a comfortable result in front of our fans... this is the path to follow," said Atletico midfielder Marcos Llorente.

The hosts took the lead after 22 minutes when Marcos Llorente wallop the ball towards goal, with Roman saving well but unable to keep the ball from falling to Sorloth to tap home.

It was the Norwegian target man's third goal in his last three league games and his seventh of the season, equalling Julian Alvarez as the team's top goalscorer in the competition.

Midway through the second half Atletico doubled their advantage when an attempted clearance from Llorente's cross comically deflected off Lopez into his own net.

Almada wrapped up the win late on when an Atletico corner came through to him and he found some space in the box before firing home. – AFP

### Undav helps Stuttgart sink Gladbach and go 4<sup>th</sup>

BERLIN – Deniz Undav made it 11 goals in 12 Bundesliga matches as Stuttgart cruised to a 3-0 victory at Borussia Mönchengladbach yesterday to climb to fourth.

The German Cup holders barely broke a sweat against a poor Gladbach side, who are on the slide having lost four of their past six games.

Stuttgart are only behind third-placed Hoffenheim, who have a game in hand, on goal difference.

Gladbach's Haris Tabakovic missed an early penalty before Stuttgart's Jamie Leweling scored the opener.

After Joe Scally bundled the ball into his own net, substitute Undav sealed the match with a late strike.

Tabakovic's limp penalty was easily stopped by Germany goalkeeper Alexander Nuebel with 13 minutes gone.

It was the Bosnian's second missed spot-kick in three months.

Gladbach dropped their heads and Stuttgart pounced, Leweling dancing through the penalty area



Madrid eased to a 3-0 win over Mallorca yesterday to strengthen their position in third in La Liga and move seven points behind provisional leaders Real Madrid.

before blasting home on the half-hour mark.

Undav's introduction in the 61<sup>st</sup> minute proved key as the ball bounced in off Scally's back while he tried to mark the German international at a corner.

Undav then added one of his own with 23 minutes remaining, piloting a low shot into the bottom corner.

Earlier yesterday, former Manchester City striker Edin Dzeko scored on his debut with second-tier Schalke in a 2-2 home draw with Kaiserslautern, helping his side maintain a two-point lead at the top of the table.

Signing from Fiorentina on Friday, the 39-year-old Dzeko came off the bench late on and scored with three minutes remaining to become the oldest goalscorer in Bundesliga 2 history. – AFP

### Senegal goal hero admits AFCON final walk-off was 'a mistake'



PARIS – Senegal's Africa Cup of Nations hero Pape Gueye admitted that his team's walk-off in the final against hosts Morocco was a "mistake", in an interview with French television yesterday.

Gueye, who scored the only goal of a controversial final in Rabat, also thanked Senegal star Sadio Mane for persuading the team to come back from the dressing room and finish the match.

Morocco were awarded a late penalty in normal time just moment after Senegal had a goal disallowed for a push.

The Senegalese players were furious and walked off the pitch, leading to a lengthy delay of more than 15 minutes as their fans clashed with security.

When Senegal came back on the field, Brahim Diaz fluffed his penalty, an attempted Panenka, before Gueye scored the winner in extra-time.

"We are only human, we realised our mistake and came back out," said the 26-year-old midfielder Gueye.

"Anyone can make a mistake," he added.

Gueye praised former Liverpool star Sadio Mane, who remained on the pitch and urged his team-mates to return to the game for the penalty.

"He found the right thing to say at the right moment and it shows just how important he is to us," he said.

"We owe him a big thank you."

It was Senegal's second AFCON title which left Morocco still waiting to add to their only crown from 50 years ago.

Gueye also expressed surprise that Diaz dared attempt a chipped Panenka penalty.

"It was daring and I would not have risked that myself," he said.

The Moroccan Football Federation has formally referred the walk-off and Senegalese supporters' behaviour to the Confederation of African Football (CAF), which organises AFCON, and FIFA. – AFP

## Yamal nets stunner as Barca beat Oviedo to reclaim top spot



BARCELONA – Barcelona reclaimed top spot in La Liga with a 3-0 win over Real Oviedo yesterday, thanks to goals from Dani Olmo, Raphinha and an acrobatic Lamine Yamal effort.

After Real Madrid beat Villarreal on Saturday to take pole position overnight, the Catalans edged a point ahead again.

Although Oviedo are bottom of the table with just two victories all season, Barca had to scrap for their victory as the visitors worked hard defensively to keep Hansi Flick's team at bay until the second half.

Eventually the hosts' quality told at the partially-reopened Camp Nou and after Olmo opened the scoring Barca never looked back.

The pick of the goals was Yamal's strike, an impressive volley from Olmo's cross to secure Barca's triumph.

"I know we didn't play on our

highest level in the first half... but the team has done a fantastic job in the last few weeks, months," Flick told DAZN.

The coach praised Yamal for his hard work in terms of pressing and also hailed his fine strike.

"It was great... I'm happy that he scored such a [good] goal, and the third goal for us was really important," added Flick.

Barca struggled to make inroads in a dry first half and their passing was unusually imprecise.

Injured midfield maestro Pedri Gonzalez watched on from the stands with an unimpressed expression.

Oviedo sought to attack on the counter and Haissem Hassan drew a save from Joan Garcia from long distance.

At the other end, Aaron Escandell made a fine stop at his near post to thwart Raphinha before half-time.

Barca came out with renewed

energy for the second half and soon took the lead.

After Yamal and Raphinha pressed in the box the ball broke loose to Olmo, who steered home.

Oviedo gave away a poor second goal after 57 minutes, with Raphinha running on to an undercooked back-pass from David Costas and lofting the ball over Escandell.

Barcelona's third was expertly taken by Yamal, as Olmo's cross was falling behind him he produced an eye-catching sideways scissor-kick to wrap up the victory.

A huge downpour hit the stadium, sending fans scurrying as there is no roof yet, and those who remained saw Escandell deny Robert Lewandowski a potential fourth with a fine save.

"I think we were not at our best in the first half, [but] in the second we could score the goals and that is the most important thing," said Raphinha. – AFP

## Aston Villa beat Newcastle to stay in title hunt

### Man United dent Arsenal title bid with dramatic win



LONDON – Aston Villa closed to within four points of the Premier League summit with an impressive 2-0 win at Newcastle.

But Villa bounced back from a shock 1-0 defeat at home to Everton last weekend to remain on the fringes of the title race.

Emi Buendia put Unai Emery's men on course for their first win at St. James' Park since 2005 with a brilliant strike from outside the box on 19 minutes.

Newcastle were shorn of inspiration without injured captain Bruno Guimaraes in a damaging defeat for their chances of Champions League qualification.

Ollie Watkins set the seal on Villa's victory when the England international headed in Lucas Digne's cross two minutes from time.

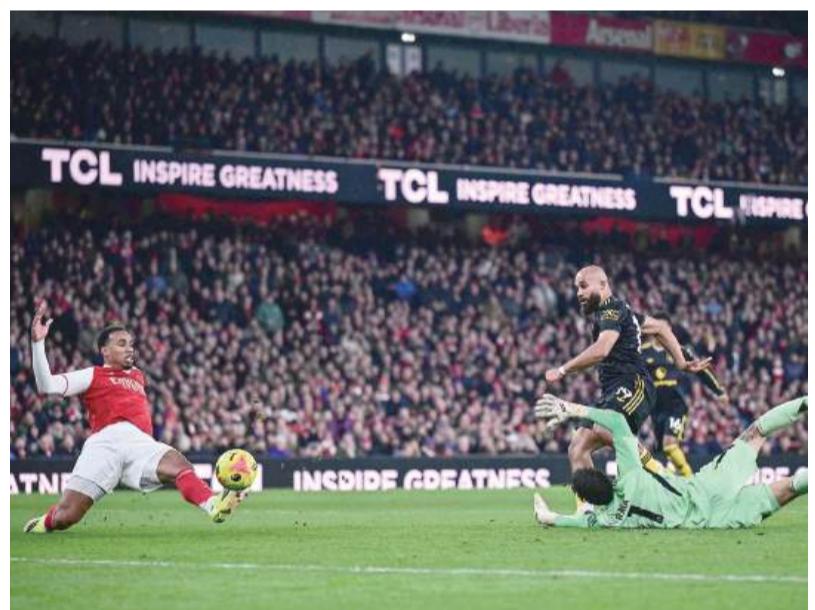
Newcastle slip to ninth but still only three points outside the top five, which will likely be enough for a place in the Champions League.

Even if Villa fall short on a first league title since 1981, they are well on course for a return to Europe's elite competition with an 11-point advantage over sixth-placed Manchester United.

Chelsea piled more pain on Crystal Palace with a 3-1 win at Selhurst Park.

Oliver Glasner promised to do his best to turn around a miserable run for the Eagles despite announcing he will leave the club when his contract expires at the end of the season.

The Austrian was furious at the manner club captain Marc Guehi was allowed to depart for Manchester City earlier this week and could also lose star striker Jean-Philippe Mateta before the transfer window closes.



Manchester United's Cameroonian midfielder Bryan Mbeumo (top right) scores his team's first goal to equalise during the English Premier League match against Arsenal at the Emirates Stadium in London yesterday. – AFP

inflicting just a second home defeat of the season on Brentford.

West Ham's victory over Sunderland on Saturday piled the pressure on Sean Dyche's men.

But they responded to move five points clear of the drop zone with a 2-0 win in west London thanks to goals from Igor Jesus and Taiwo Awoniyi.

### United move into 4<sup>th</sup>

Manchester United dealt a blow to Arsenal's Premier League title charge as Matheus Cunha's superb strike clinched a thrilling 3-2 win over the leaders yesterday.

Lisandro Martinez's own goal put Arsenal ahead at the Emirates Stadium, but Bryan Mbeumo equalised before half-time.

Patrick Dorgu's brilliant blast gave United the lead after the interval, but Mikel Merino's late leveller looked to have rescued a point for Arsenal until Cunha's sublime effort three minutes from full-time. – AFP

# Djokovic, Alcaraz into Melbourne quarters as next gen roars



MELBOURNE – Carlos Alcaraz powered into the Australian Open quarter-finals yesterday and Novak Djokovic joined him without hitting a ball, as the next generation roared.

Aryna Sabalenka surged through but Coco Gauff was forced to fight at Melbourne Park, where temperatures eased to 22C after the brutal heat of a day earlier.

Top seed Alcaraz was in ominous touch at Rod Laver Arena, dismissing the American Tommy Paul 7-6 (8/6), 6-4, 7-5 in a masterclass.

The 22-year-old plays home hope and sixth seed Alex de Minaur, who defeated 10th seed Alexander Bublik in straight sets.

Djokovic, chasing a record 25th Grand Slam crown, was scheduled to face Jakub Mensik in the last 16 today but the Czech player pulled out injured.

Djokovic will face American ninth seed Taylor Fritz or fifth seed Lorenzo Musetti of Italy for a place in the semi-finals.

Alcaraz, who like Djokovic is yet to drop a set at this year's tournament, has never gone beyond the quarter-finals in Melbourne.

If he can finally break his Australian duck he will become the youngest man in history to win a career Grand Slam of all four majors.

The Spaniard has in the past struggled with precision and a lack of consistency in his serving technique.

He is now sporting a new-look serve that has become a handy weapon - and been compared to Djokovic's serve.

"I had a Djokovic message saying, 'you have to pay me,'" he said in his on-court interview after making light work of 19th seed Paul, to laughter from an adoring crowd.

Alexander Zverev, well beaten by Jannik Sinner in last year's final, plays Learner Tien of the United States next.

Germany's third seed demolished Argentina's 18th seed Francisco Cerundolo in straight sets.



Ukraine's Elina Svitolina hits a shot against Russia's Mirra Andreeva during their singles match at the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday.

– AFP

The 25th seed Tien ran out a surprisingly easy three-set winner over three-time finalist Daniil Medvedev.

Tien, 20, eased into his first Grand Slam quarter-final despite a nosebleed in the first set that required lengthy treatment.

He later said his nose was just dry.

"Every year since I've been coming here, the crowd support has been amazing," said Tien, the youngest men's quarter-finalist at Melbourne Park since Nick Kyrgios in 2015.

"A crowd like this with this much energy and support, it means the world to me to do it here."

## Teen test for Sabalenka

World number one Sabalenka will face impressive 18-year-old American Iva Jovic in a tasty last-eight encounter.

Belarusian top seed Sabalenka, a two-time Melbourne champion, opened the day on Rod Laver Arena and saw off the brave challenge of 19-year-old Canadian Victoria Mboko.

Sabalenka won 6-1, 7-6 (7/1) while Jovic destroyed unseeded Yulia Putintseva 6-0, 6-1 in just 53 dominant minutes.

"What an incredible player for such a young age," said Sabalenka of the 17th-seeded Canadian Mboko, who has emerged as a serious threat in the past year.

"She pushed me really hard today and played incredible tennis."

Sabalenka raced through the second-set tiebreak - the 20th Grand Slam tiebreak in a row she has won - to seal victory.

She has yet to drop a set as her title charge gathers pace.

But in Jovic, who only turned 18 last month, she clashes with a player in red-hot form and rising fast, now ranked 27 having been 191 this time last year.

Jovic, who stunned two-time Grand Slam finalist and seventh seed Jasmine Paolini in the third round, said she did not consider herself an underdog.

"It's just another week that I'm winning more matches," she added.

Jovic is the youngest player to reach the women's quarter-finals at the Australian Open without dropping a set since Venus Williams in 1998.

Third-seeded American Gauff faces Ukraine's Elina Svitolina.

The 12th-seeded Svitolina saw off another 18-year-old, Russian Mirra Andreeva, 6-2, 6-4.

Gauff dropped a set for the second match in a row before clawing her way past Karolina Muchova 6-1, 3-6, 6-3.

The 21-year-old Gauff, a two-time major champion, has never gone beyond the last four at Melbourne Park.

– AFP

## 2029 Asian Winter Games in Saudi Arabia postponed



RIYADH – The Asian Winter Games, due to be held in Saudi Arabia in 2029, have been postponed, the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) and the Saudi Arabian Olympic Committee said in a joint statement on Saturday.

"The Saudi Olympic and Paralympic Committee and the (OCA) have agreed on an updated framework for future hosting of the Asian Winter Games, confirming the postponement of the 2029 edition to a later date to be announced in due course," the bodies said.

"Under the revised framework, Saudi Arabia will host a series of standalone winter sports events in the coming years. These competitions are designed to promote winter

sports... while providing additional preparation time to support wider regional representation at future Asian winter events," the statement added.

In August, the OCA had said preparations for the games were on schedule after South Korea and China emerged as potential replacements.

The OCA in 2022 unanimously approved the desert kingdom's bid to stage the Games at its US\$500 billion megacity NEOM, part of Saudi Arabia's splurge on major sporting events, including the 2034 football World Cup.

However, Riyadh has appeared to stall on delivery of the ski resort and had discussed staging the event four years later than planned.

The Saudis were mulling

approaching South Korea and China to instead play host in 2029, media reports at the time indicated.

South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported that the OCA asked Korean Sport & Olympic Committee (KSOC) president Ryu Seung-min if the country would be willing to replace Saudi Arabia.

South Korea and China had been suggested as potential replacements because they hosted the Winter Olympics in 2018 and 2022 respectively.

China also staged the Asian Winter Games in its northern city of Harbin in February.

The futuristic and under-construction NEOM was to feature a year-round winter sports complex in the mountains of Trojena.

– AFP

# Bowlers, Abhishek fire India to T20 series win over NZ

## Cricket

GUWAHATI – Inspired bowling and a 14-ball fifty by opener Abhishek Sharma led India to a crushing eight-wicket series-clinching win over New Zealand in the third T20 international yesterday.

Pace bowler Jasprit Bumrah with figures of 3-17 and leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi (2-18) kept New Zealand down to 153-9 after India elected to field first in Guwahati.

Left-handed Abhishek then hit an unbeaten 20-ball 68 and skipper Suryakumar Yadav made 57 not out as India romped home with 10 overs to spare to take an unbeatable 3-0 lead in the five-match series.

The series is a warm-up ahead of the T20 World Cup starting on February 7 in India and Sri Lanka.

Matt Henry bowled Sanju Samson with the first ball of India's chase but the hosts soon took charge with Ishan Kishan and fellow left-hander Abhishek hitting a flurry of fours and sixes.

The pair put on 53 runs off 19 balls before Kishan fell for 28 off Ish Sodhi, but Abhishek raced to India's second fastest in the format.

Abhishek missed out on his mentor Yuvraj Singh's fastest

T20 fifty record for India by two balls. Yuvraj scored a fifty in 12 balls in 2007.

Abhishek kept up the attack with Suryakumar, who hit his second successive fifty in his 26-ball knock. The duo put on an unbeaten stand of 102 to underline India's status as the world's number one-ranked T20 team.

India's bowlers set up victory with the pacers taking three wickets inside first six overs including Harshit Rana dismissing Devon Conway for the fifth time in successive white-ball matches.

Rachin Ravindra fell for four to Hardik Pandya. Bumrah then bowled wicketkeeper-batter Tim Seifert for 12 as New Zealand slumped to 34-3.

Glenn Phillips, who made 48 off 40 balls, and attempted to pull things back in a partnership of 54 for the fourth wicket with Mark Chapman before Bishnoi broke through.

Bishnoi, who made the Indian XI after nearly a year, had Chapman caught behind for 32 and later denied Phillips a half-century.

Wickets kept tumbling and despite skipper Mitchell Santner's 27 off 17 balls New Zealand fell well short of a testing total.

The fourth match is on Wednesday in Visakhapatnam.

– AFP

## Josh Hoey breaks 800m indoor world record in Boston

### Athletics

NEW YORK – American Josh Hoey clocked 1min 42.50sec to break the 800m indoor world record at the New Balance Indoor Grand Prix meeting in Boston on Saturday.

Hoey, the 2025 indoor world champion at 800m, broke the previous mark of 1:42.67 set by Denmark's Wilson Kipketer in Paris almost 30 years ago, on March 9, 1997.

The 26-year-old American had been closing in on Kipketer's mark, coming close last year when he clocked 1:43.24, then the second-fastest time in history, in New York.

On Saturday he settled in behind his brother Jaxson Hoey, who acted as pace-setter, and sailed home without a hitch.

"I just slotted in behind Jax and just tried to stay calm behind my brother and let him lead me," Hoey said.

"The last 200 I could feel just the support of everyone, and the work of the last couple of months just bottomed out and I'm happy I got that time," added Hoey, who narrowly missed out the US teams for both the 2024 Olympics and last year's outdoor World Championships.

American Hobbs Kessler

set an indoor world best in the 2,000m, using a stunning late burst to finish in 4min 48.79sec and eclipse the mark of 4:49.99 set by Ethiopia's Kenenisa Bekele on February 17, 2007.

Down the stretch he out-duelled compatriot Grant Fisher, who was second in 4:49.48.

"Oh, that felt so good," Kessler said after what was, for him, a redemptive run.

"I was super-deeply disappointed with how last summer went," he said "I didn't make the US team, I ran poorly at Diamond Leagues, and it was really hard to get training again because I worked really hard and I figured nothing came of it."

Sprint star Noah Lyles opened his season in the rarely raced 300m. The Olympic 100m gold medallist, also a four-time World Champion at 200m, Lyles finished second in 32.15, edged out on the line by his training partner from Trinidad and Tobago, Jareem Richards (32.14).

Jamaican Ackiem Blake won the men's 60m in 6:53sec. Eloy Benitez of Puerto Rico was second in 6:56, just edging out American Jordan Anthony, who was third in 6:57.

Britain's Dina Asher-Smith won the women's 60m in 7.08.

– AFP

## Spanish prosecutors dismiss sex abuse case against Julio Iglesias

**Diego Urdaneta**

MADRID – Spanish prosecutors on Friday shelved a sex abuse and human trafficking complaint against veteran singer Julio Iglesias, saying Spain's courts had no jurisdiction in the case.

Two women – a domestic worker and a physiotherapist – alleged they had suffered sexual and other forms of abuse while working at Iglesias's properties in the Dominican Republic and the Bahamas in 2021.

The allegations dominated headlines in Spain after being aired early this month in a joint investigation by online Spanish newspaper *elDiario.es* and US television network Univision.

But the preliminary investigation was dismissed because of a "lack of jurisdiction of the Spanish courts", Spanish prosecutors wrote in their decision.

After reviewing the complaint, they said they could not open an investigation because the victims "are foreign" and "do not reside in Spain", and the accused is also outside the country.

Madrid-born Iglesias, 82, lives between Miami, the Dominican Republic and the Bahamas.

The alleged acts took place "in countries fully competent" to investigate them, the prosecutors added.

Advocacy groups Women's Link Worldwide and Amnesty International had said a complaint filed with Spanish prosecutors on January 5 outlined alleged acts that could be considered "a crime of human trafficking for the purpose of forced labour" and "crimes against sexual freedom".

The two organisations called the prosecutors' decision "regrettable"



Spanish singer Julio Iglesias performs before a press conference in Mexico city, on September 23, 2015. – AFP

### World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -9°C~6°C	Manila 22°C~30°C	New York -10°C~0°C	Lisbon 13°C~17°C
Shanghai 4°C~12°C	Bangkok 20°C~34°C	London 6°C~8°C	Rio de Janeiro 23°C~27°C
Hong Kong 16°C~21°C	Tokyo -2°C~7°C	Frankfurt -1°C~3°C	Luanda 25°C~29°C
Taipei 15°C~23°C	Singapore 23°C~31°C	Vancouver 3°C~7°C	Maputo 23°C~28°C
Guangzhou 14°C~23°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~35°C	Paris 4°C~8°C	Dili 23°C~30°C
Nanjing 3°C~8°C	Jakarta 24°C~29°C	Moscow -11°C~10°C	São Tomé 26°C~32°C
Guilin 7°C~13°C	Seoul -6°C~10°C	Las Vegas 2°C~15°C	Praia 18°C~26°C
Xi'an -3°C~9°C	Sydney 20°C~26°C	Monte Carlo 5°C~10°C	Bissau 21°C~32°C

## This is spinal... brat? Charli XCX stars in mockumentary 'The Moment'

**Huw Griffith**

PARK CITY – What's a megastar to do when she has defined an entire summer, produced a multi-million-selling album and even persuaded the dictionary eggheads to declare "brat" a word of the year?

That's the conundrum at the heart of "The Moment," a tongue-in-cheek mockumentary starring Charli XCX as she grapples with her meteoric rise to fame and tries to prepare for a sell-out arena tour.

"I'm obviously quite related to my character," the 33-year-old British singer quipped at the Sundance Film Festival, where "The Moment" premiered on Friday.

"I would like to think I'm not as much of a nightmare as Charli in the film," she said to laughter.

The celluloid Charli is indeed a bit of a nightmare: a pastiche of a controlling diva who is on top of every detail, and yet is just a young singer thrust suddenly into the global spotlight and surrounded by an oppressive and needy entourage.

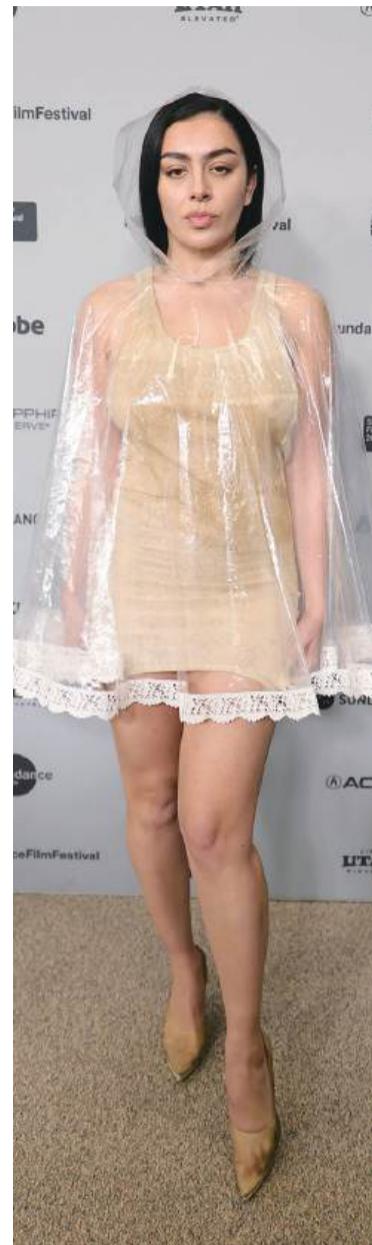
She and her tour's creative director, Celeste (played by Hailey Gates), want to move on from "brat," the skinny tank tops and IDGAF\* self-indulgence that dominated 2024, when her album of the same name ruled streaming platforms.

But the suits – the record label executive (Rosanna Arquette) and Johannes, the solipsistic film director hired to shepherd the tour movie (Alexander Skarsgård) – want to keep the "brat" money machine rolling.

The clash of artistic vision sees Celeste and Johannes battle it out over tour design, in which her on-brand strobe and in-your-face messaging gives way to his light-up wrist bands and a stage set that "looks like a lava lamp," she tells Charli.

A bizarre credit card endorsement aimed at young, queer customers ("How will they know?" asks a bewildered Charli) adds to the pressure and Charli jets off to a spa on Ibiza.

A chance encounter there with Kylie Jenner (in a cameo appearance) sends Charli further down the celebrity spiral, and she



British singer-songwriter-actress Charli XCX poses upon arrival for "The Gallerist" premiere during the 2026 Sundance Film Festival at Eccles Centre Theatre on Saturday in Park City, Utah, United States. – AFP

caves in to Johannes' sanitised vision of her tour.

### Tribute to Reiner

The script, written by Bertie Brandes and Aidan Zamiri, who also directs, draws heavily on archetypes in a plot that sticks closely to the familiar artist-against-the-machine formula.

But, Charli said, those characters accurately describe the music industry.

"I've met different versions of all of the characters in this film,"

she told filmgoers.

"I've met the people who are truly rooting for you... I've met the people who are in it to be close to the artist. I've met the sort of people who are so 'we totally get you', and they really don't."

Debut feature director Zamiri, whose background is in music videos, said the mockumentary style he was aiming for owed a debt of gratitude to "This is Spinal Tap" – the 1984 comedy about a fictional British band.

"I think this film wouldn't exist without Rob Reiner and 'Spinal Tap,'" he said, paying tribute to the director who was murdered alongside his wife in their Los Angeles home in December.

### Pivot

"The Moment" is one of three films starring Charli XCX that are screening at Sundance; she has smaller roles in ensemble pieces "I Want Your Sex" with Olivia Wilde and "The Gallerist," which features Natalie Portman.

The move into film is a deliberate effort to find something new, she told the audience.

"Right now, like the 'me' in the film, I am really wanting 'brat' to stop and actually really pivot as far away from it as possible," she said.

"And that's not because I don't love it. It's just because I think for all of us as artists, you want to challenge yourself, and you want to switch the creative soup that you're in and go and live in a different bowl for a while and just feel enriched by that."

Asked how she finds time for so many projects, she reached for a lyric from her smash track "365."

"I don't know, I just do. When you love it, you do it, right? 'Don't sleep, don't eat, just do it on repeat,' to quote myself," she said with a mock curtsy.

The Sundance Film Festival runs through Sunday. – AFP

\*"IDGAF" stands for "I Don't Give A F\*\*\*." It's a slang expression used to indicate that someone is indifferent or unconcerned about something, often used to express a strong disregard for a situation or opinion. – Poe

## Robbie Williams tops Beatles for most No.1 albums in UK

LONDON – Pop superstar Robbie Williams has surpassed the Beatles as the artist with the most number one albums in the history of the British charts, sales trackers said on Friday.

The news came a week after Williams released "Britpop", now officially his 16th UK chart-topping album.

"He's the one!" said the Official Charts Company, referencing the hit 1998 single "She's the One" by the former

Take That frontman.

Since Williams, 51, started his chart-topping career with his 1997 solo debut, "Life Thru a Lens", he has sold an estimated 20 million albums in the UK.

"Britpop" is his first in seven years.

"Not even the confident young 16-year-old from Stoke-on-Trent would have believed this were possible when he joined Take That back in 1990," Official Charts chief executive Martin Talbot said

in a statement.

"But here he is, on top of the world, the UK's number 1 album artist – of all time!"

In his 35-year career, Williams has sold 80 million albums worldwide.

The Beatles now stand in second place on the British album chart-topping list with 15, followed by the Rolling Stones and Taylor Swift, tied with 14, and Elvis Presley with 13.

– AFP



### Wait till I'm bigger...

A kitten is seen among poultry at the Moniz family's ranch in Sao Domingos municipality on Santiago Island, Cape Verde, on Saturday. In rural Cape Verde, a family struggles to keep traditional livestock farming alive while sustaining its own livelihood.

— Xinhua



### Fire n' ice

An artist performs during a show named "flaming ice" at an ice rink in a park in Moscow, Russia, on Saturday.

— Xinhua



### Bringer of good luck

A dancer wearing costume made of goat hair, known as Kukeri, performs during the International Festival of the Masquerade Games in Pernik, western Bulgaria, on Saturday. The festival, which started on January 16, has participants wearing multi-coloured masks, covered with beads, ribbons and woollen tassels while the main dancer, laden with bells to drive away sickness and evil spirits, sways like a wheat spikelet heavy with grain.

— AFP



### ▲ Beetles on parade

Visitors look at vintage cars during the annual antique cars show in Karachi, Pakistan yesterday. — AFP



### Crash waiting to happen!

Commuters drive through a snow-covered street in Murree, Pakistan on Friday. — AFP



### Bathing in the future

Models introduce the "Mirai Human Washing Machine," a bathing machine that gained attention at the 2025 Osaka-Kansai Expo, during a press preview at a showroom operated by Takara Leben, a company involved in condominium development and sales, in Tokyo on Thursday.

— AFP