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Policy-bank bonds issued in Macau for 1st time

Tony Wong

The Macau Monetary Authority (AMCM) announced in a statement yesterday that the China Development Bank Hong Kong Branch issued policy-bank bonds worth 5.5 billion yuan in Macau on Tuesday, marking the first issuance of policy-bank bonds in Macau.

The China Development Bank is one of the nation's three major policy banks, alongside the Agricultural Development Bank of China and the Export-Import Bank of China.

According to its website, the China Development Bank (CDB), established in 1994, is a state-funded and state-owned development finance institution. As an independent legal entity directly overseen by the State Council, it is dedicated to supporting the nation's economic development in key industries and under-developed sectors. With a mission to support national development and deliver a better life for the people, CDB aligns its business focus with the nation's major medium- and long-term economic development strategies.

CDB, according to its website, has 37 primary and four secondary branches in the Chinese mainland, one branch in Hong Kong, and 11 representative offices in foreign cities comprising Astana, Budapest, Cairo, Caracas, Jakarta, London, Minsk, Moscow, Rio de Janeiro, Sydney and Vientiane.

According to DeepSeek, a policy bank is a state-owned financial institution established primarily to implement national economic and development strategies rather than to pursue profit. Founded by government mandate, it provides long-term financing for projects in strategically vital sectors, such as infrastructure, agriculture, foreign trade, and social welfare, that are often underserved by commercial banks. Unlike commercial lenders, a policy bank operates with explicit government backing, which

may include sovereign credit guarantees, direct capital injections, and concessional funding. Its activities are closely aligned with the government's industrial and social policies, often focusing on promoting structural adjustment, regional development, and international cooperation. Globally, similar institutions exist under various other labels, though the term "policy bank" is most characteristically associated with China's model of state-directed finance.

Yesterday's AMCM statement underlined that the China Development Bank Hong Kong Branch's issuance of its policy-bank bonds in Macau also marks another significant milestone for issuers in Macau's bond market following the central government's issuances of sovereign bonds, Guangdong Province's issuances of government bonds, and Shenzhen City's issuance of government bonds in Macau.

The Ministry of Finance has issued sovereign bonds in Macau five times, while the Guangdong Provincial People's Government has issued offshore provincial government bonds in Macau five times as well. Last year, Shenzhen City issued offshore municipal government bonds in Macau for the first time.

Yesterday's AMCM statement also said that the bonds issued by the China Development Bank Hong Kong Branch in Macau on Tuesday are dedicated to financing projects concerning the nation's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and those in Portuguese-speaking countries.

The statement said that the policy bank's issuance of the bonds fully demonstrates its support for Macau to better play its role as a platform for financial services between China and Portuguese-speaking countries and to make greater contributions to the nation's BRI.

Continued on p.6



This poster provided by the Macau Monetary Authority (AMCM) yesterday explains the China Development Bank's (CDB) issuance of its policy-bank bonds in Macau.

5 die in Portugal as severe weather causes widespread damage

LISBON – At least five people have died in Portugal following severe weather brought by Storm Kristin, which caused extensive damage across several regions, authorities said yesterday.

Four of the fatalities occurred in the municipality of Leiria, north of the capital Lisbon, Mayor Gonçalo Lopes said. Two of the deaths were directly linked to the storm, while the other two resulted from cardiac arrests associated with the deterioration of weather conditions.

A fifth person died in Vila Franca de

Xira, a town north of Lisbon, also because of the storm.

Civil protection authorities reported widespread destruction, including damaged sports facilities, destroyed aircraft, and major disruptions to rail and power services. Several areas of the country remained without electricity yesterday.

At the Bissaya Barreto Municipal Aerodrome in Coimbra, a city north of Lisbon, strong winds overnight destroyed multiple aircraft and a maintenance hangar, causing losses exceeding 1 million euros

(US\$1.2 million), according to aerodrome director António Ferreira.

Power distributors said about 529,000 customers were without electricity, with around 1,200 workers deployed to restore services.

According to the National Authority for Emergency and Civil Protection, more than 3,300 incidents were recorded nationwide between Tuesday and noon yesterday. The most affected areas included Leiria, Coimbra, Lisbon, the Setúbal Peninsula, the Lezíria do Tejo region, and Aveiro.

An official from the Portuguese Institute for Sea and Atmosphere described the situation as rare, noting that similar conditions had not been seen since Hurricane Leslie in 2018.

While weather conditions improved temporarily yesterday, the institute warned of further deterioration later in the day, forecasting more rain, strong winds and particularly rough seas.

Weather warnings remained in place for coastal areas due to maritime agitation, as well as yellow alerts for northern and central regions because of expected rainfall. –Xinhua

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f The Macau Post Daily

AI allows China's digital natives to punch above their weight in tech scene

JINAN – A quiet yet profound shift is reshaping the landscape of China's digital economy – AI is fueling a new wave of individual entrepreneurship.

– Story on p. 6

Anglican church's first female leader confirmed at London service

Former nurse Sarah Mullally was officially confirmed yesterday as the first female Archbishop of Canterbury and the first woman to head the 85-million-strong global Anglican communion.

– Story on p. 10

Portugal conducts first hypersonic test

Portugal has carried out its first hypersonic test under real conditions, marking the country's entry into experimental research on extreme high-speed flows, the University of Lisbon announced last week.

– Story on p. 12

Gongbei customs seizes 472.9 grams of stony coral products at Wanzai Port

Armindo Neves

Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers seized 472.9 grams of stony coral products at Wanzai Port (border checkpoint).

According to the statement, on December 28, customs officers at the Wanzai Port departure hall noticed an anomaly in a Macau traveller's luggage during the X-ray inspection of outbound passengers' luggage.

Upon inspection, customs officers discovered two suspected coral products concealed in a paper bag, weighing 472.9 grams.

Upon appraisal by the Gongbei Customs Technology Centre, the two coral products were identified as species belonging to the order Scleractinia, under the subclass Hexacorallia of the class Anthozoa – commonly known as stony coral. All species within the order Scleractinia are listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of

Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and are classified as items prohibited from exiting the Chinese mainland.

In the statement, Gongbei Customs reminded the public that according to CITES and the Wildlife Protection Law of the People's Republic of China (PRC), as well as the regulations on the import and export of endangered wild animals and plants, it is prohibited to trade, carry, or mail endangered species and their products across border checkpoints without legal import and export certificates. The statement noted that serious violations may lead to criminal liability.

Gongbei customs seizes 86,000 cigarettes at HKZMB

Meanwhile, Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in a separate statement yesterday that its officers seized 86,000 cigarettes at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HKZMB).

According to the statement, on



This undated handout provided by Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs yesterday shows 472.9 grams of stony coral products seized by its officers at Wanzai Port on December 28.



This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs yesterday shows 86,000 cigarettes seized by its officers at Zhuhai Port of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HKZMB) on January 8.

January 8, custom officers at Zhuhai Port's (border checkpoint) arrivals lane noticed an anomaly during a routine X-ray inspection of a single plate cross-border vehicle arriving from Hong Kong.

Upon follow inspection, customs officers discovered that a total of 430 cartons, comprising 86,000 cigarettes, including brands

such as Marlboro and Taiwan's Alishan, concealed in various places in the vehicle such as the under the passenger seat, rear seats, in the boot and spare tyre compartment.

Gongbei Customs reminded the public that in line with the Chinese mainland's Tobacco Monopoly Law the state has implemented a monopoly management system

for the production, sale, import, and export of tobacco products, operating under a tobacco monopoly licence system. The export of cigarettes requires approval from the administrative department under the State Council in charge of the tobacco monopoly and the acquisition of a licence granted by the monopoly. ■

Police nab mainland woman for stealing backpack from hotel guestroom

Ada Lei

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested a woman from the Chinese mainland on Tuesday for stealing HK\$60,000 and 3,000 yuan in cash from a hotel guestroom, PJ spokesman Cheong Un Hong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Cheong identified the suspect as a 45-year-old businesswoman surnamed Zhang.

According to Cheong, the police received a report on Tuesday morning from a middle-aged man who said that his black backpack, containing his identification documents, HK\$60,000 and 3,000 yuan in cash, and some clothing, had been stolen from his hotel guestroom in Taipa.

Cheong noted that the victim and his male friend met Zhang at a casino on Saturday and invited her to share their guestroom. However, on Monday morning, the victim left the guestroom, leaving the backpack inside while his friend was asleep. On Tuesday morning, the victim received

a call from his friend, telling him that Zhang had taken the backpack while he was asleep and left the guestroom. Realising that Zhang had stolen the backpack, the victim immediately reported the case to the police.

The police identified Zhang as the suspect and apprehended her while she was gambling at a casino in Cotai after the theft, recovering HK\$2,300 in chips along with the stolen backpack, the victim's identification documents, and clothing.

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



This undated handout photo provided by the Judiciary Police (PJ) yesterday shows the HK\$2,300 in chips seized from the theft suspect.

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Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY INTERVALS. LIGHT RAIN AT NIGHT. FORCE 4 TO 5 EAST TO NORTHEASTERLY WINDS WITH GUSTS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 60% AND 95%.



16°C~20°C

Source: SMG

MGTO lowers travel alert for Egypt, removes alert for Indonesia

Kristina Valles

The Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) announced in a statement yesterday that it has adjusted its official travel alerts for Egypt and Indonesia.

MGTO has lowered its travel alert for Egypt from Level 2 to Level 1, which advises travellers to "exercise caution", the statement noted. Meanwhile, the Level 1 travel alert for Indonesia has been cancelled entirely. The statement cited "the latest situation in both countries" as the reason for the adjustments.

The Travel Alert System issues warnings at three levels. According to the MGTO statement, Level 3 advises residents to "avoid travel" due to an extreme threat to safety.

Level 2 advises to "reconsider non-essential travel" due to an elevated threat. Level 1, now in effect for Egypt, advises travellers to "exercise caution" due to an imminent threat.

MGTO, according to the statement, advised residents planning trips to always purchase comprehensive travel insurance that specifically aligns with the travel alert system and includes international emergency medical evacuation. MGTO also recommends clarifying any doubts about policy terms and conditions directly with insurance providers.

With the Chinese New Year holiday (CNY) approaching, the statement also reminded residents to safeguard their travel documents, avoid unsafe areas, comply with local

laws, and be vigilant against scams. A list of 110 countries and destinations currently covered by the alert system is available on the MGTO website: [https://www.dst.gov.mo/en/tourism-crisis-management-tourism-crisis-management-travel-alert.html](https://www.dst.gov.mo/en/tourism-crisis-management/tourism-crisis-management-travel-alert.html).

Furthermore, MGTO pointed out that the Travel Alert System is "not prohibitive", being up to each individual to "decide whether to travel or adjust their travel plans in accordance with the information provided."

In case of emergencies abroad, Macau residents can contact the 24-hour tourism hotline on 2833 3000, the nearest Chinese embassy or consulate, or the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs global emergency hotline on +86 10 12308. ■

Police bust mainland for falsely reporting theft to evade paying debts

Ada Lei

A woman from the Chinese mainland was arrested on Monday for falsely reporting a theft case to the police in an attempt to evade paying her debts, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Un Hong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Cheong identified the suspect as a 30-year-old businesswoman surnamed Li.

According to Cheong, the police received a referral on Monday from the Public Security Police (PSP) about a suspected theft case in which Li accused her middle-aged female friend of stealing 10,000 yuan in cash, HK\$285,000 in gambling chips, and her identification documents during their stay in a hotel guestroom in Cotai.

Cheong noted that Li checked into the hotel guestroom on Friday and invited her friend to visit. On Monday, after the victim had left the room, Li accused her of theft, claiming that the cash, chips, and identification documents she had placed in her handbag in the room had vanished. Li reported the purported theft to the security guards, who later intercepted her friend and reported the case to the police.

The police confirmed that the friend was intercepted by security after leaving the room, during which she neither gambled nor interacted with anyone else, and no stolen money or chips were found on her. Additionally, the police discovered that Li had gambled away HK\$184,000 in chips at a casino during her visit to Macau.

Under questioning, Li admitted to fabricating the theft in order to evade debts in the mainland owed to her friend, claiming that the 10,000 yuan she reported as stolen was actually at her mainland home.

Li has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing a charge of falsely reported a crime to the police. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Un Hong looks on during yesterday's regular press conference.
– Photo: Ada Lei

Spring craft market applications open for stalls & workshops

Kristina Valles

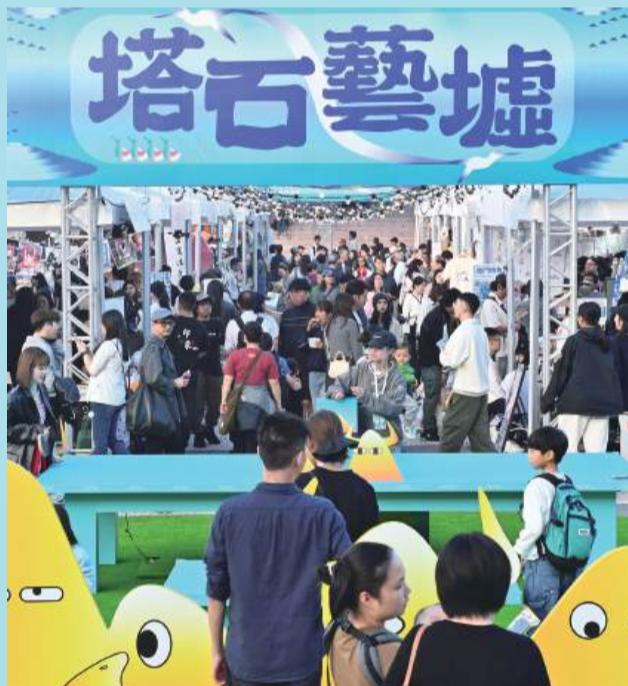
Applications are now open for stall operators and workshop instructors for the upcoming spring edition of the Tap Siac Craft Market, according to a statement from the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) on Tuesday.

The market will be held in Tap Siac Square over two consecutive weekends, from April 23 to 26 and again from April 30 to May 3. The statement said applications are free and will be accepted until February 12, noting that there will be over 200 handicraft and creative gastronomy stalls.

Applicants from Macau may apply online through the Craft Market Booth Operator Database at <https://www5.icm.gov.mo/craftmarketV2>. Meanwhile, applicants from other regions may visit the Tap Siac Craft Market website for application details. The statement noted that all products for sale must be original designs, with a minimum of 10 models available for sale. If the number of eligible applicants exceeds the available spaces, participants will be selected by lucky draw.

Applications are also open for creative handicraft workshops to be held during the market. Proposals can be submitted via email or in person at the Cultural Affairs Bureau building. According to the statement, workshop proposals will be assessed based on criteria including feasibility, attractiveness, and instructor experience.

One may visit the official Tap Siac Craft Market website <https://www.craftmarket.gov.mo/> or contact IC staff during office hours for more details. ■



Crowds of people explore the booths' products at the Tap Siac Craft Market in the autumn in November 2025.

— Photo: Rui Pastorin

Macao Orchestra brings 'Peter and the Wolf' to 13 schools in campus concert series

Khalel Vallo

According to a statement by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) yesterday, the Macao Orchestra staged a series of campus concerts at 13 local schools in December and this month, introducing students to classical music through the symphonic work "Peter and the Wolf".

Organised by the bureau and Macao Orchestra Company Limited, the concerts formed part of the "Music for Future – Music in the Campus" programme under the 2025–26 Concert Season, the statement said, noting that the initiative aimed to promote music education by taking live orchestral performances directly into schools.

Conducted by Resident Conductor Tony Cheng-Te Yeh, the Macao Orchestra performed Sergei Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf" for nearly 3,000 primary students. The performances were held at 13 schools, including Escola Oficial de Seac Pai Van, Pooi To Middle School, Taipa Luso-Chinese

School (LCT), Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School, and The International School of Macao (TIS), the statement said.

According to the statement, through narration and engaging musical interpretation, the concerts introduced students to different orchestral instruments and musical storytelling in an accessible and interactive way.

The performances received an "enthusiastic" response from both students and teachers, the statement said.

The "Music for Future" concert programme is one of the orchestra's key education initiatives, designed to cultivate musical appreciation among young audiences through age-appropriate repertoires and interactive presentation, the statement noted, aiming to broaden students' cultural horizons and foster their long-term interest in classical music.

Registration for future sessions of the programme is now open, the statement said. Schools interested in participating may

contact the Macao Orchestra at 2882 2860 or via email at moc@moc.com.mo. ■

*In this musical tale, a naughty boy's

clever capture of a wolf saves both his animal friends and earns him a triumphant parade.

— DeepSeek



This undated handout photo provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) yesterday shows the Macao Orchestra performing at Taipa Luso-Chinese School (LCT) campus as part of the "Music for Future – Music in the Campus" concert programme under the 2025–26 Concert Season.

MTel chief says new lab to boost development in high-tech industries

Armindo Neves

Macau-based MTel Telecommunication Company Limited hosted an unveiling ceremony yesterday about its new joint laboratory with Yongjiang Laboratory (Y-LAB) and Wuhan Yangtze Optical Technology Co. Ltd. (YOTC).

MTel Chairman and CEO Michael Choi Tak Meng said in his speech at the ceremony that the laboratory was set to boost development in Macau's high-tech industries.

The ceremony was held at Macau Tower in Sai Van.

According to Choi, the laboratory marks a milestone in tripartite collaborative innovation. It will focus on areas such as optical communication and next-generation information networks, electronic information materials and devices, aiming to build a scientific and technological innovation platform that integrates research and development, commercialisation, and talent cultivation, he said.

4 key plans

Choi outlined the four key plans during the ceremony – 1) to deeply understand and address the needs of Macau, driving technology to serve urban development and improve people's livelihoods; 2) to build an open and collaborative platform to attract global scientific and technological innovation resources, accelerating the validation and transformation of technologies; 3) to focus on the commercialisation of research outcomes by establishing a seamless pipeline from research and development to market application, fostering interdisciplinary talent, and advancing products such as smart healthcare solutions; 4) to promote regional integration by deepening collaboration with the Chinese mainland, leveraging Macau's role as a platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, and supporting Macau's integration into the national development strategy.

The laboratory has already received support from the Ministry of Science and Technology in Beijing and Macau's



MTel Chairman and CEO Michael Choi Tak Meng speaks to reporters at Macau Tower in Sai Van yesterday.

— Photo: Armindo Neves

establish a "small yet sophisticated" demonstration hub for technological innovation in Macau, Choi said.

Choi pointed out that the laboratory plans to increase network access speeds to 100 gigabytes* by the end of this year and further to 200 gigabyte next year. Choi said that the measure aims to achieve ultra-low latency** and low-cost transmission, providing infrastructure support for applications such as smart cities and smart healthcare. Choi cited an example: in the future, smart bandages embedded with sensors could enable remote monitoring of wound conditions. ■

*Gigabyte (GB), a unit of digital information storage equal to 1 billion bytes or 1,024 megabytes in base-2 binary, it's a common measure for the capacity of storage devices (like hard drives, USB drives) and the size of files (like movies, software, games). — DeepSeek

**In computer science, latency refers to the delay between the initiation of a request for data and the beginning of the actual data transfer or the receipt of the response. It is a measure of the time taken for data to travel from the source to the destination and can significantly impact system performance, especially in network communications, storage, or processing tasks.

A dedication to music: journey of Vivian Ng & Cantate Chorus

Interview by William Chan

To celebrate the 450th anniversary of the Catholic Diocese of Macau, a sacred music concert will be held on February 7 at the Sé* Cathedral, featuring seven music groups from Hong Kong and Macau.

One of the performing choirs is the Cantate Chorus, led by local conductor Vivian Ng Wai Hang; and her choir which only made its debut in November. In an exclusive interview earlier this month, Ng shared her motivation for founding the choir, her musical insights from abroad, and her vision for the development of choral arts in Macau.

Vivian Ng's musical resume is impressive. Her journey began at the Academia de Música de S. Pio X in Macau, followed by advanced studies in the prestigious Junior Music Programme at The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. In 2015, she won the "Cultural Affairs Bureau Prize" at the 33rd Macao Young Musicians Competition and later earned a Bachelor of Arts in Music from the University of Oxford. She has just finished her Master of Sacred Music in Choral Conducting at the University of Notre Dame in the US with a full scholarship.

Founding Cantate Chorus: a stage for bridging passion & community

With numerous choirs already in Macau, why start a new one? Ng noted that she noticed a specific group of people: many who are passionate about singing, perhaps active in choirs during their school years, but who have not found a suitable platform to continue singing as adults. "I always think, Macau has a population of nearly 700,000. Even if only one in ten thousand is interested, there should be a space for them," Ng repeatedly calculated this possibility during the interview. "The reason for founding Cantate Chorus is to provide another opportunity for those who are interested for various reasons but may not be singing already."

This motivation defines the unique position of Cantate Chorus. It is not just a performing group, but a platform dedicated to promoting high-level small group singing and providing professional guidance for amateur singers. The choir members come from diverse backgrounds, including experienced singers, professionals who have rediscovered their passion after years, and even high school students. Ng believes this diversity is the source of the team's vitality.

Her studies at Oxford and Notre Dame allowed Ng to experience two vastly different choral cultures in the UK and the US. She observed that the British choral tradition is long-standing, closely integrated with the church and colleges, and highly popularised, having developed over centuries. While the US has a shorter history, its choral culture is equally vibrant and widely participated in. "You can't just turn Macau into the next UK," Ng realistically noted, "because the cultural foundations are completely different."

However, these overseas experiences were not in vain. They prompted Ng to consider how to cultivate a local choral scene on Macau soil by drawing on international experience. She hopes to build Cantate Chorus into a group capable of performing a variety of mainstream choral works. Within these "mainstream" works, sacred music holds a significant place. "We are not branding ourselves as a religious group," she emphasised, "but because many great choral works are sacred in theme. We want to appreciate, interpret, and present these masterpieces from a holistic artistic perspective." This artistic pursuit is reflected in their choice of repertoire for their debut, and their future hopes to perform larger works such as Handel's Messiah and Haydn's The Creation.

As a new group, Cantate Chorus faces many challenges. The biggest difficulty is recruitment, especially the severe shortage of male voices, which directly affects the balance of the sections and the choice of repertoire. In addition, balancing the varying musical levels of the members – keeping the experienced engaged while helping beginners keep up – is a constant balancing act for Ng as a conductor.

"My ideal number is 50 or more members," Ng said of her ambitions. "A sufficient number of people not only means we can tackle more large-scale works, but it also gives the team more room for development, such as creating different tiers based on skill level for more targeted training."

Despite the challenges, from the success of their debut in November to their upcoming solemn performance at the Cathedral, Cantate Chorus, under Ng's leadership, is steadily moving towards its musical ideals. This young conductor is injecting a new and exciting vitality into Macau's sacred music tradition and choral arts with her knowledge, passion, and practice.

Readers who are interested in participating in the choir can visit its Instagram page for more information: www.instagram.com/maacaocantatechorus or contact via cantatechorusmacao@gmail.com.

Ng especially welcomes English speakers – many of whom she believes are among our readers – noting that they often feel underrepresented in Macau's cultural landscape. She hopes to create a more inclusive space where their voices and contributions can thrive.

*The Portuguese word "Sé" means "See" (such as the Holy See in Rome) and "Cathedral". – MPD



Vivian Ng Wai Hang, artistic director of Macao Cantate Chorus, conducts her choir last November at St. Joseph's Seminary Church.
– Photos: Alexandre Chon



'Golden Fortunes' exhibition kicks off at GalaxyArt

Artist Zhu Bingren highlights Macau as int'l window for Chinese art

Rui Pastorin

Zhu Bingren is presenting his copper art in his first large-scale exhibition in Macau titled "Golden Fortunes: the Macau Debut of Zhu Bingren's Copper Art", which kicked off at GalaxyArt in Cotai yesterday morning.

Zhu, who pioneers the molten copper technique, is noted in a gallery statement provided during yesterday's event as a National-level Inheritor of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Copper Carving, Master of Chinese Arts and Crafts, as well as the Father of Contemporary Chinese Copper Architecture, among others.

The exhibition at Galaxy Macau features a total of 68 pieces and sets on display until April 12, all presented across five zones.

Gallerygoers will find a variety of works such as 38 horses in various artforms such as bronze and sculpture; works that were presented as national gifts; and pieces in a Macau-dedicated section "Macau's Molten Light", to name a few. Works by Zhu's son Zhu Junmin are also presented among the showcase of his father's most representative works.

In a group interview with local English and Chinese-language media prior to the opening, Zhu Bingren, who was born in 1944 in Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang province, noted that Macau is a place he has a special connection with, having travelled to the city

several times as well as having hosted talks for the local art community regarding his works and copper-making techniques.

Answering questions from the *Post*, Zhu Bingren said that he has a deep-rooted feeling for Macau, noting that he sees the city as an international window to showcase Chinese art, culture and contemporary artists.

Despite the prominence of gaming and tourism elements in the city, Zhu highlighted that he thinks Macau offers much more, with room for the development and growth of art, adding that the city is diverse and multicultural. With that, it is the perfect place to present Chinese art in the contemporary context. Zhu also underlined that arts and cultural elements should continue to be upheld. He urged artists from the Chinese mainland to present their best and most valuable works here.

Meanwhile, speaking about the significance of the exhibition, Zhu said that it is not only just about being a large-scale showcase in Macau, but also commemorating the 20th year since his innovations in the molten copper technique, which features the free flow of copper on canvas or other surfaces, symbolising the freeing of the copper, he concluded in his remarks to the *Post*.

Stay tuned for more photos and details of the free-admission exhibition in an upcoming Page 4. ■



Zhu Bingren poses with one of his works displayed at "Golden Fortunes: the Macau Debut of Zhu Bingren's Copper Art" exhibition after yesterday's group interview at GalaxyArt in Cotai.

- Photos: Rui Pastorin



"Golden Bai Cai (Cabbage)", one of the many exhibits highlighted, is displayed at one of the sections of the exhibition.

'2026 Sands China Macao Int'l 10K' set for March 15



Sports Bureau (ID) Acting President See Lei Si Leng (left) and Sands China Executive Vice Chairman Wilfred Wong Ying-wai address yesterday's 2026 Sands China Macao International 10K press conference at The Londoner Macao in Cotai.

- Photos: Khalel Vallo

Khalel Vallo

The "2026 Sands China Macao International 10K" will take place on March 15, with registration opening on Saturday and next Monday, integrated resorts operator Sands China Ltd announced yesterday.

The event is jointly organised by the Sports Bureau (ID), Sands China Ltd and the General Association of Athletics of Macau (AGAM).

Details of the race and registration arrangements were unveiled in a press conference yesterday at Sands China's The Londoner Macao in Cotai, attended by ID Acting President See Lei Si Leng, Sands China Executive Vice Chairman Wilfred Wong Ying-wai and AGAM President Chan Pou Sin.

In her speech, Lei said that the "Macao International 10K has, since its launch in 2021, enriched residents' leisure activities and gained wide public support". She noted that the event plays an important role in promoting sport participation and advancing the development of the local sports industry, while also contributing to sports tourism. She thanked

Sands China, AGAM and relevant government entities for their continued support in making the event possible.

Meanwhile, Wong said that the race has grown into "one of Macau's iconic international sporting events, having attracted more than 40,000 runners from over 40 countries and regions across its previous editions". He said that the event reflects Sands China's long-term commitment to community engagement through sport and its efforts to promote diversified development under the "tourism +" model. He also expressed appreciation to the bureau and AGAM for their ongoing support.

Moreover, AGAM President Chan Pou Sin said that participants will run through various streets and districts of Macau, allowing them to experience the city's "distinctive appeal and vitality". He added that the event aims to foster a sporting culture, encourage public participation in physical exercise and support the government's vision of building Macau into a "City of Sports".

The 2026 edition will offer

7,000 places for the 10K race and 3,000 for the Fun Run. The 10K will start at 7 a.m., followed by the Fun Run at 7:40 a.m., both beginning in Sai Van Lake Square. The route will cross Sai Van Bridge and proceed along the Cotai Strip, with the finish line at the Macau Olympic Sports Centre Stadium in Taipa.

Registration for the 10K opens at 9 a.m. on Saturday, while registration for the Fun Run begins at 9 a.m. next Monday. Participants may register via the official website or the "Macao 10K" mobile app.

Registration will close once all places are filled.

The "Sands 10K Presents: The FUNkiest Costume Award" will return this year under the theme "East Meets West Run", aiming to encourage runners to combine Chinese and Western elements in their costumes. 10 winners will be selected and awarded prizes. Participants are urged to review the event regulations carefully and prepare according to their physical condition. Further details are available on the event's official website (www.macao10k.com) and mobile app. ■

Azerbaijan grants visa-free entry to Macau passport holders from Feb 2

Rui Pastorin

Azerbaijan will allow visa-free entry for Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) passport holders beginning Monday, February 2, with visa requirements exempted until February 2, 2027.

The Identification Services Bureau (DSI) said in a statement yesterday that it received a notification from the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the People's Republic of China noting that considering the "strategic partnership between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the People's Republic of China [PRC], in order to further expand the relations in economic, cultural, tourism and other spheres between the two countries", the visa requirement will be exempted for a year for Macau SAR passport holders.

The statement added that Macau SAR passport holders can visit Azerbaijan up to three times without a visa for a maximum stay of 30 days per

entry during the one-year period.

More details are available on <https://beijing.mfa.gov.az/en>, while one can also find more details about visa-free access or visa-on-arrival for Macau travel document holders by visiting: https://www.dsi.gov.mo/download/visa_free_list_e.pdf. ■



National flag of Azerbaijan – Image courtesy of Wikipedia

Kiang Wu Hospital inaugurates 'Brain Health Centre' to enhance screening and treatment of cognitive disorders



Guests yesterday unveil the inaugural plaque of Kiang Wu Hospital's Brain Health Centre, at the hospital's Dr. Henry Y. T. Fok Specialist Medical Centre, including Huang Huagai (fifth from left), who heads the Social Work Department of the Central People's Government Liaison Office in Macau, Kiang Wu Hospital Charitable Association President Tommy Lau Veng Seng (fifth from right), Kiang Wu Hospital President Li Pengbin (right), and BrainAU CEO Cai Longjun (third from left). — Photo: Tony Wong

Tony Wong

The private Kiang Wu Hospital yesterday inaugurated its "Brain Health Centre", after the commencement of its trial operation in November last year, pledging to further enhance its capability to screen and identify those with higher risks of cognitive disorders and strengthen its training and treatment programmes for those with cognitive impairment, thanks to the technology provided by BrainAurora Medical Technology Limited (腦動極光) from the Chinese mainland.

Kiang Wu Hospital's collaboration with the tech firm, aka BrainAU, to operate its Brain Health Centre formally started yesterday, when a cooperation agreement between the two sides was signed.

The tech company specialises in digital therapeutics for cognitive impairment, particularly in the field of neuroscience and mental health, according to its website (<https://www.66nao.com/>). The company operates in Beijing and Zhejiang Province's Shaoxing City. It is listed on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.

With collaboration with BrainAU, Kiang Wu Hospital launched its "Brain Health Programme" in June last year, after which its Brain Health Centre started operating in

November on a trial basis.

The Brain Health Centre's inauguration ceremony and the agreement signing ceremony between Kiang Wu Hospital and BrainAU were held at the hospital's Dr. Henry Y. T. Fok Specialist Medical Centre yesterday.

Delivering a speech yesterday, Kiang Wu Hospital Charitable Association President Tommy Lau Veng Seng noted that according to the findings of a research study, the number of those with dementia in Macau stood at around 6,000 in 2021, making the prevention and early treatment of cognitive disorders an urgent priority.

Based on Macau's population of 683,200 in 2021, about 0.87 percent were afflicted by dementia.

Lau said that after its research and planning process lasting one year, Kiang Wu Hospital decided to introduce and adopt the digital therapeutics for cognitive impairment developed by BrainAU, with the aim of creating a linked "hospital-community-home" service model for the screening, diagnosis and treatment of dementia.

Also delivering a speech, Kiang Wu Hospital President Li Pengbin noted that a team of Kiang Wu healthcare professionals went to

Beijing in February last year to study the nation's latest therapeutics for dementia and cognitive impairment, after which the hospital decided to introduce the digital therapeutics for cognitive impairment developed by BrainAU, with the aim of creating a one-stop service model ranging from early screening, accurate diagnosis and treatment, multidisciplinary intervention, to extended services to the community and homes.

Li noted that Kiang Wu Hospital launched its Brain Health Programme in June last year, after which the hospital launched the operation of its Brain Health Centre in November on a trial basis, as part of its healthcare services provided by its rehabilitation department.

One of the functions of the centre, according to Li, is to screen the hospital's outpatients and inpatients aged 50 or over for dementia or cognitive disorders.

Li noted that the centre officially started operation yesterday, with its operation supported by a multidisciplinary healthcare team from various medicine departments.

BrainAU's digital therapeutics is an AI-based platform and solution to the screening and treatment for cognitive disorders through the use of big-data models. ■

Policy-bank bonds issued in Macau for 1st time

Continued from p.1

According to the statement, the renminbi-denominated policy-bank bonds issued in Macau on Tuesday, which were only available to professional investors, comprise three-year-maturity bonds worth 3.5 billion yuan with an interest rate of 1.75 percent and five-year-maturity bonds worth two billion yuan with

an interest rate of 1.85 percent.

"Renminbi" ("people's currency") is the official name of the nation's legal tender, informally known as "yuan".

Yesterday's AMCM statement also said that the bonds' issuance on Tuesday has also broadened the variety of bonds in Macau's offshore yuan market, exemplified

the synergistic benefits arising from the coordinated development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), injected new impetus into the development of Macau's bond market, advanced the internationalisation of yuan, and enabled Macau to better integrate into and serve the nation's overall development. ■



Engineer Li Qiang (left) and Assistant Engineer Tian Dong clear snow from the top of the antenna radome at the Mohe Station of the China Remote Sensing Satellite Ground Station in Mohe, Heilongjiang Province, on Sunday, China's northernmost satellite data receiving station. Normally, the facility has only one staff member on duty, but as the Spring Festival approaches, four of its staff members have gathered in severe cold weather to conduct thorough winter inspections and maintenance. Developed by the Aerospace Information Research Institute under the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), the Mohe Station commenced operations on December 12, 2025. — Xinhua

AI allows China's digital natives to punch above their weight in tech scene

Analysis

JINAN — A quiet yet profound shift is reshaping the landscape of China's digital economy. The startup culture that once buzzed with activity during the smartphone boom is back, but this time it is artificial intelligence (AI) that is fueling a new wave of individual entrepreneurship.

The top ranks of the country's mobile app stores, long the exclusive domain of deep-pocketed tech giants, are now being breached by a new breed of software, namely simple, niche applications created by individual developers and tiny teams, often in a matter of hours.

A quintessential example is "Little Cat Fill Light," an app that recently topped China's app store paid charts. Its creator, Chen Yunfei, an economics graduate with some coding experience, spotted a specific demand on social media where users employed solid-color images as makeshift photo fill lights.

Using AI-powered programming tools, Chen built a working version in roughly one hour — a feat he asserts would have required a full team and months of effort just a few years ago.

In recent months, homegrown large language models, such as Alibaba's Qwen3 and Zhipu AI's GLM series, have cultivated a devoted following among indie developers and geeks, thanks to their robust coding prowess. These tools are rapidly evolving from simple code generators into end-to-end development companions, capable of shipping production-ready software.

Dubbed the "handmade economy" across China's cyberspace, this grassroots movement has seen non-professional teams and solo operators achieve striking success. By leveraging next-generation AI assistants to dismantle once-daunting technical barriers, individual creators armed with little more than sharp market insight can now swiftly transform ideas into fully functional, polished products.

AI technology has also streamlined short drama production into a one-person job. "What once took a team over a month to complete now takes one person a month," said Qin Lin, CEO of Nanjing Sci&Tech Create Horizon. Nine of the startup's developers, armed with AI models, produced an 8-minute video clip in under 72 hours, with their product winning an AIGC film award in 2024.

Such micro-shorts are now hitting international markets, becoming viral sensations across multiple countries. Major Chinese tech firms including SenseTime, ByteDance and Kuaishou have launched paid AI tools for short drama creation.

This trend has extended beyond pure software. On video-sharing platforms, the viral hashtag "handmade everything" showcases everything from DIY movies and innovative robots to market-ready smart devices.

Sun Yingdong, from the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen in Guangdong Province, bridged his agile creativity with industrial discipline. After prototyping a smart massager, he used crowdfunding to finance mold costs and a move into standardized production, achieving annual sales of over 10,000 units.

In response, a pedestrian street in Huaqiangbei, a grand electronics bazaar in this city, is evolving. The recent establishment of a one-person-company (OPC) innovation community there provides lifecycle support for AI entrepreneurs, connecting individual innovators with hardware manufacturing chains, thereby effectively upgrading the entire ecosystem.

Local governments in the eastern cities of Shanghai, Nanjing and Hangzhou are also establishing OPC incubation zones, enabling a single individual armed with AI tools to handle everything from content production and product operations to service delivery.

"The most significant advantage of this model lies in cost control and decision-making efficiency," said Li Xiaolei, an analyst from the Guangdong provincial investigation and research center.

"OPCs are transforming solo creators into 'super individuals' capable of operating at scale," said Shen Yang, a professor at Tsinghua University in Beijing. He predicts that this model will emerge as a significant pillar of the digital economy within the next five years.

Ding Chunfa, CEO of iMakrbase, an innovation and entrepreneurship incubator founded in Shenzhen, noted that digital-native creators, big-tech executives with commercial networks and scientists developing promising projects have emerged as the main protagonists of this entrepreneurial wave.

The grassroots movement represents a wave of experimentation characterized by distributed, low-cost innovation and maximum agility, said Liu Yiming, an associate professor of economics at east China's Shandong University.

"It lowers the barriers to entry for digitally-savvy youth with keen market instincts, and is poised to emerge as a vital complement to traditional employment within the platform economy," said Liu.

Additionally, against a backdrop of the AI monetization bottleneck, OPCs hold the potential to unlock new consumption scenarios and stimulate domestic market demand, Liu added.

— Xinhua

China, France should jointly inject much-needed stability into world: Wang Yi

BEIJING – China and France, both as major countries acting independently, should strengthen communication and coordination, jointly inject much-needed stability into the world, and better leverage the strategic value of China-France relations, Wang Yi, director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs, said yesterday.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks in a phone call with Emmanuel Bonne, diplomatic adviser to the French president.

At the beginning of the new year, the international landscape has undergone significant changes, marked by turbulence and instability, said Wang.

China and the European Union (EU) are partners rather than rivals, which has been proved by the fruitful outcomes of their cooperation over the past 50 years and more, he said, noting that China and the EU share similar positions on promoting a multipolar world and many other issues, and are capable of properly resolving specific trade disputes through dialogue and coordination.

Under the current circumstances, the two sides should in particular enhance communication, promote mutual trust and deepen cooperation, he said.

The recent visits to China by several European leaders have strongly advanced China-Europe relations, said Wang, voicing his hope that France will continue to play a constructive role within the EU and help promote the sound and steady development of China-EU relations.

For his part, Bonne said that France attaches great importance

to the France-China comprehensive strategic cooperation and stands ready to work with the Chinese side to implement the important consensus reached by the two heads of state.

Based on the spirit of mutual trust and cooperation, France is willing to strengthen strategic communication and coordination with China on major international hotspot issues within bilateral and multilateral frameworks, jointly address challenges, and make positive contributions to safeguarding global security and

stability as well as promoting common development and prosperity, said Bonne.

Moving in the same direction and further stabilizing relations fully serve the interests of both the EU and China, and the French side is willing to make active efforts to promote the steady development of EU-China relations, he said.

Both sides also coordinated positions and exchanged views on hotspot issues such as the Ukraine crisis and the situations in Venezuela and Iran.

—Xinhua

70,000-year-old handle implements found in China redefine East Asia's technological history

BEIJING – A groundbreaking archaeological discovery at an ancient site in central China's Henan Province is reshaping views of prehistoric innovation, after an international research team uncovered clear evidence that early humans in East Asia were crafting sophisticated handled stone tools as early as 70,000 years ago.

The study, published yesterday in the journal *Nature Communications*, focuses on 22 specific stone tools excavated from the Xigou site, nestled in the Qinling Mountains. Detailed technological and microscopic use-wear analysis confirmed these artifacts were hafted, or intentionally modified at the base to be attached to wooden or bone handles, forming composite tools like knives.

"This represents the earliest confirmed evidence of hafting technology in East Asia supported by both technical typology and traceology," said Yang Shixia, corresponding author of the study and a researcher at the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology (IVPP) of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS).

"It significantly pushes back the recorded emergence of this technology in the region," Yang added.

Dated securely to between 160,000 and 72,000 years ago, the Xigou site functioned as a workshop and yielded over 2,600 stone artifacts, primarily crafted from quartz and quartzite, which were once considered unsuitable for refined toolmaking.

The international research team, led by the IVPP, found that the ancient inhabitants of the site had mastered systematic core technologies for producing flake tools. One method involved detaching small flakes from larger ones, while the other entailed efficiently and

centripetally striking flakes off a stone core. The toolkit included scrapers, borers and points.

Analysis revealed that the hafted pieces exhibit clear basal modifications for attachment, with some retaining direct evidence of having been mounted onto handles. Much like fitting a blade into a knife handle, these early humans employed two connection methods – insertion and lateral hafting – to enhance the effectiveness of their stone tools.

This finding directly challenges the long-standing academic view of a "technologically conservative" East Asia during the period from the late Middle Pleistocene to the early Late Pleistocene (approximately 300,000 to 50,000 years ago), when complex behaviors like hafting technology, formal bone tool production, and the use of personal ornaments and pigments were emerging in both Africa and Europe.

The research team applied multiple luminescence dating techniques, which measure when buried minerals last saw sunlight, on the site's sediments to establish the robust chronological framework.

The discovery at Xigou is not an isolated case. It joins a series of recent findings across China, such as evidence of prepared core technology, bone tool shaping, and pigment use at other sites, that collectively portray early human populations in East Asia as innovative adaptors.

Facing a climate of intense fluctuation, they developed a versatile and flexible technological repertoire, according to Yang.

"This discovery rewrites the traditional narrative of early human behavioral development and adaptation in East Asia," she said. "It underscores that this region played a critical and dynamic role in the global story of human evolution." —Xinhua

Starmer arrives in Beijing for official visit

BEIJING – British Prime Minister Keir Starmer arrived in Beijing yesterday for an official visit to China through Saturday.

In August 2024, President Xi Jinping had a phone call with Starmer at the latter's request, and in November that year, during his attendance at the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Xi met with Starmer, leading China-Britain relations onto a track of improvement and development.

During Starmer's visit, the first by a British prime minister in eight years, President Xi will meet with him, Premier Li Qiang will hold talks with him, and China's top legislator Zhao Leji will also meet with him. The two sides are expected to have in-depth exchanges on bilateral relations and issues of common interest.

In addition to Beijing, Starmer will visit Shanghai.

Since taking office, the British Labor Party government has clearly expressed its willingness to develop a consistent, enduring and strategic relationship with China and actively promote dialogue and cooperation between the two countries.

Starmer is leading a delegation



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer addresses a business delegation following his arrival for a four-day official visit to China, at a hotel in Beijing yesterday. —AFP

comprising senior executives from over 50 major British firms and representatives of British institutions. They represent Britain's leading sectors including finance, medicine, manufacturing, culture and creativity.

Foreign ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said on Tuesday that

China wishes to use this visit as an opportunity to enhance political mutual trust with Britain, deepen practical cooperation, jointly open a new chapter of healthy and stable development in bilateral relations, and work together for global peace, security and stability.

—Xinhua

Significance of China-Australia ties extends far beyond bilateral scope: Chinese ambassador

CANBERRA – The significance of China-Australia relations extends far beyond the bilateral scope, and China has always regarded Australia as an important partner both regionally and globally, Chinese Ambassador to Australia Xiao Qian said in Canberra yesterday.

Bilateral relations made progress toward stability, with political mutual trust deepening, economic and trade cooperation improving, vibrant cultural exchanges enhanced, and strategic interests increasingly entwined, Xiao said in his address at a New Year media briefing.

Last year, bilateral trade between the two sides once again exceeded AU\$300 billion (US\$210 billion), Xiao noted, adding that for 16 consecutive years, China has remained Australia's largest trading partner, largest export destination

and largest source of imports.

The year 2025 marked the 80th anniversary of the victory of the World Anti-Fascist War and of the founding of the United Nations, the ambassador said, noting that as major countries in the Asia-Pacific region, both China and Australia are builders and defenders of the post-war international order.

Amid a complex and ever-changing international landscape, the strategic interests of our two nations are more tightly entwined, he said, adding that the two countries have also enhanced cooperation within multilateral frameworks, and increasingly supported and coordinated with each other in multilateral affairs.

China wishes to work with the Australian side to enhance mutual trust, handle differences properly, and promote China-

Australia relations to achieve more developments, Xiao said.

Answering questions from journalists, the ambassador refuted the recent remarks by a Japanese senior official that Japan should have nuclear weapons and elaborated on China's principles and position.

The recent remarks are consistent with Japan's struggle to revive militarism, he noted. "Once Japan revives militarism, peoples in the Asia-Pacific region will bear the brunt of the consequences. China and Australia fought side by side in World War II and made tremendous sacrifices in resisting Japanese aggression," he said.

The two countries must remain highly vigilant against the resurgence of Japanese militarism and firmly oppose the attempts by Japan's right-wing forces to revive militarism, he stressed.

—AFP

Nepal says election preparations on track for March 5

KATHMANDU — Nepal's Election Commission said yesterday it is ready to hold elections as planned, despite concerns over weather conditions in high-altitude Himalayan regions when the vote takes place on March 5.

The poll follows deadly anti-corruption protests in September that toppled the previous government, prompting an accelerated election schedule and an unusual early-year date for voting.

"As of today [yesterday], we are prepared to conduct the election in all locations," the commission's assistant spokesman, Prakash Nyaupane, told AFP, saying logistical, administrative and security arrangements were progressing as planned.

The elections were called after an interim government was formed to guide the nation of 30 million people following the resignation of veteran leader KP Sharma Oli.

Former chief justice Sushila Karki, 73, is serving as interim prime minister until the vote.

Nyaupane said the commission had consulted with political parties about the date, and "there is no alternative to this."

"If we do not hold the elections on March 5, it will invite more trouble."



A worker sews bags with election materials at the Election Commission's office ahead of parliamentary elections in Kathmandu yesterday. — AFP

Nepal, home to eight of the world's 10 highest peaks including Mount Everest, faces particular challenges as many high-altitude areas may be snowbound that early in the year.

Previous elections have typically been held in November, when the weather is milder.

"We are moving ahead with preparations to hold the elections in all districts," Nyaupane said, adding that helicopters will be used in five high-altitude districts for voting logistics.

"It is a challenge for us if

the climate is not favourable in Himalayan districts."

There are about 18.9 million eligible voters, including more than 800,000 first-time voters, who could cast ballots in 10,967 polling booths.

The elections will determine the makeup of the 275-seat House of Representatives, the lower chamber of parliament, with 165 members chosen in a direct vote and 110 through party lists.

A total of 3,406 candidates have registered their names for the direct seats, according to the commission. — AFP

India says 2 Nipah virus cases, but situation contained

MUMBAI - Indian authorities said they had ensured "timely containment" of the deadly Nipah virus after two cases were confirmed in West Bengal state.

Nipah, spreads from animals to humans, has no vaccine and a fatality rate ranging from 40 to 75 percent, according to the World Health Organisation.

"Enhanced surveillance, laboratory testing, and field investigations were undertaken... which ensured timely containment of the cases," India's health

ministry said in a statement late Tuesday.

It did not give further details on the two infected patients.

"The situation is under constant monitoring, and all necessary public health measures are in place", it added, saying 196 contacts linked to the cases had been traced, and all were negative.

Nipah was first identified in 1998 after it spread among pig farmers in Malaysia.

In India, the first Nipah outbreak was reported in West

Bengal in 2001.

In 2018, at least 17 people died from Nipah in Kerala, and in 2023, two people died from the virus, also in the southern state.

Symptoms include intense fever, vomiting and a respiratory infection, but severe cases can involve seizures and brain inflammation that results in a coma.

Fruit bats are the natural carriers of the virus and have been identified as the most likely cause of subsequent outbreaks. — AFP

Thailand uses contraceptive vaccine to limit wild elephant births

BANGKOK — Thailand has given a contraceptive vaccine to wild elephants for the first time in an effort to control their ballooning population, a conservation official said yesterday.

Wildlife authorities and a veterinary team administered the shots to three female elephants in southeastern Trat province on Monday, said Sukhee Boonsang, a director of the Wildlife Conservation Office.

The aim was to manage the wild elephant population, he told AFP, adding that the mammal's birth rate in five provinces of eastern Thailand rises about eight percent yearly compared to three

percent in other regions.

This "will cause more conflict between humans and elephants in the long term if we let it continue", he said.

Veterinarians and officials administered the vaccines this week using a dart gun without anaesthesia, the conservation office said in a statement.

Wild elephant numbers in Thailand rose from 334 in 2015 to almost 800 last year, with thousands more in captivity.

Human-elephant conflict has caused almost 200 human fatalities and more than 100 elephant deaths since 2012, the conservation office statement said.

Asian elephants, Thailand's national animal, are classified as endangered globally by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

Sukhee said the three elephants had been checked for signs of infection, were well and "living their normal life", adding that his team will follow up with blood checks every six months.

The vaccine was tested on seven captive elephants in northern Chiang Mai two years ago, he said.

Another 15 doses will be used on elephants in other herds in Thailand before this year's rainy season starts from May, Sukhee said.

— AFP

23 unexploded World War II bombs retrieved in Davao

MANILA — An Army team recovered 23 unexploded explosive ordnance in Davao City in the southern Philippines, the military has said.

A technical inspection team from the Army's Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Battalion Support Command identified the recovered items as 32-kilogram Type 99, No. 3, Mark 3 bombs.

The team reported on Tuesday that the bombs, which were recovered on January 24, were among the types used by the Japanese military during the second world war.

Despite their age and visible corrosion, the explosives were assessed as still posing a serious

threat to nearby residents and the surrounding community.

Following the discovery, the EOD team immediately cordoned off the area and implemented strict safety protocols to prevent any accidental detonation during the extraction process.

The recovered bombs were subsequently transported to a secure facility, where they will undergo proper disposal and eventual destruction in accordance with established military procedures.

Japan occupied the Philippines from early 1942 until 1945 during World War II. Vintage bombs have been discovered in many parts of the country in recent years, including in Metro Manila. — Xinhua



People wearing face masks wait at a bus stop amid high air pollution levels in Bangkok yesterday. — AFP

Indonesian landslide death toll rises to 38, dozens missing

JAKARTA — The death toll from a landslide in Indonesia climbed to 38 with dozens still missing, authorities said yesterday, days after a torrent of debris crashed through a mountain village.

Heavy rain triggered the landslide that barrelled through Pasirlangu on Saturday, wrecking dozens of homes and displacing hundreds.

A total of 38 victims had been identified by 6:30 p.m. [local time] yesterday, Ade Dian Permana, head of the Bandung Search and Rescue Agency, said in a statement.

The number of people still missing was revised down to 27, he said, from an earlier tally of 32.

Rescuers have been scouring the unstable area in Java island's West Bandung region by hand and using heavy equipment.

But they are treading carefully for fear of more landslides due to severe weather.

The navy said on Monday that 23 troops, who were training in the area ahead of a deployment to

Indonesia's border with Papua New Guinea, were among those caught in the landslide.

The disaster seriously damaged more than 50 houses and displaced more than 650 people, according to local authorities.

West Java's governor Dedi Mulyadi blamed the landslide on the sprawling plantations around Pasirlangu, which is mostly used to grow vegetables, and pledged to relocate affected residents.

The government has pointed to the role forest loss played in flooding and landslides on Sumatra island late last year, which killed around 1,200 people and displaced more than 240,000.

Forests help absorb rainfall and stabilise the ground held by their roots, and their absence makes areas more prone to landslides.

Such disasters are common across the vast Indonesian archipelago during the rainy season, which typically runs from October to March. — AFP

Kim says N Korea soon to unveil 'next-stage' nuclear deterrent plans: KCNA

SEOUL - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has announced that his country's next steps in developing its nuclear arsenal will be revealed at the upcoming ruling party congress, KCNA reported yesterday.

The congress meeting "will clarify the next-stage plans for further bolstering up the country's nuclear war deterrent," Kim was quoted as saying as he oversaw a ballistic missile test on Tuesday.

North Korea is set to hold a landmark congress of its ruling party in the coming weeks, its first in five years.

KCNA said Kim, accompanied by senior North Korean officials, attended the test-firing of a "large-calibre" multiple rocket launcher that fired four missiles.

While acknowledging that development of the rocket launcher system had "not been plain sailing", Kim said Tuesday's test was "of great significance in improving the effectiveness of our strategic deterrent."

The rockets "hit a target" in waters 358.5 kilometres away, according to the North Korean leader.

The ballistic missiles were fired towards the Sea of Japan, with two missiles landing outside the country's Exclusive Economic Zone, Japanese state news agency Jiji Press had reported, citing defence ministry sources.

"The result and significance of this test will be a source of excruciating mental agony and serious threat to the forces that attempt to provoke a military confrontation with us," Kim said.

Tokyo condemned Pyongyang for Tuesday's missile test, saying it violated UN Security Council resolutions and was a threat to the peace and safety of the region as well as Japan, the Kyodo News Service reported.

2nd test in January

The test was Pyongyang's second of the month, following a salvo of missiles fired hours before South Korea's leader headed to China for a summit.

It came a day after a high-level visit to Seoul by the Pentagon's number three official, Elbridge Colby, who hailed South Korea as a "model ally".

Ties between the United States and South Korea, longstanding treaty allies, were forged in the bloodshed of the Korean War [1950-53].

Washington still stations 28,500 troops in South Korea as a deterrent against the nuclear-armed North.

Pyongyang routinely denounces Washington and Seoul's joint military drills as rehearsals for invasion.

Last month, Kim bashed Seoul's push to develop its own nuclear-powered submarines with the United States, calling it a "threat" that "must be countered".

During his first term, US President Donald Trump met with Kim three times, in an effort to reach a denuclearisation deal.

But since a summit in Hanoi fell through over differences about what Pyongyang would get in return for giving up its nuclear weapons, no progress has been made between the two countries.

Trump had expressed hopes for a meeting with Kim ahead of a regional summit in South Korea in October 2025, but these went unanswered by the North Korean leader.

- AFP

Few women on Japan's election ballot

up on the last general election.

The government set a goal in 2020 for 35 percent of the candidates for parliament's powerful lower house to be women by 2025. A new target has yet to be announced.

"The inauguration of Prime Minister Takaichi doesn't appear to have sparked a strong movement within the LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) to significantly increase the number of female candidates," Yuki Tsuji, professor of Tokai University and politics expert, told AFP.

The proportion of women candidates within Takaichi's ruling LDP is just 12.8 percent, down by more than three percentage points since the last election, Jiji Press reported.

Meanwhile, the opposition isn't highlighting

the presence of women and diverse candidates as a party advantage, Tsuji said.

But she also noted that the sudden dissolution of parliament by Takaichi last week for the February 8 election, "left little time to carefully select and field candidates" and could be "the main reason why the number of female candidates hasn't grown much".

The party with the highest proportion of women is Sanseito - a small but fast-growing party pledging "Japanese first" policies - which has 82 women among 190 candidates, around 43 percent, according to Jiji Press.

Despite promising "Nordic" levels of representation in her government, Takaichi named just two other women in her 19-strong cabinet.

In Japanese politics and boardrooms,

women are rare. The country ranked 118 out of 148 in the World Economic Forum's 2025 Gender Gap Report.

Nordic nations Iceland, Finland and Norway occupied the top three places.

Takaichi's views on gender place her on the right of an already conservative LDP, and she opposes revising a 19th-century law requiring married couples to share the same surname, a rule that overwhelmingly results in women taking their husband's name.

Yu Uchiyama, political science professor of the University of Tokyo, said that "Takaichi is so famous for her conservative stance that it is unlikely that she will devote her energies to such policies" like promoting DEI (diversity, equality, and inclusion). - AFP

S Korea's ex-first lady jailed for 20 months for taking bribes

Claire Lee

SEOUL - A South Korean judge handed the country's former first lady Kim Keon Hee 20 months in jail yesterday for accepting lavish gifts from a cult-like church, but acquitted her of alleged stock manipulation and other charges.

Controversy has long followed 53-year-old Kim, while accusations of graft, influence peddling and even academic fraud have dominated her husband Yoon Suk Yeol's time in office.

Both are now in custody - Yoon for actions taken during his disastrous declaration of martial law in December 2024 and Kim for corruption.

Yesterday, Judge Woo In-sung of the Seoul Central District Court found Kim guilty of corruption and sentenced her to 20 months in prison.

She was found to have accepted lavish bribes from the cult-like Unification Church - including a Chanel bag and a Graff necklace.

Prosecutors requested 15 years, but Kim was acquitted of stock manipulation and violations of campaign financing laws yesterday, and received a far lighter sentence.

Woo said that Kim's close proximity to the president had given her "significant influence" that she had taken advantage of.

"One's position must never become a means of pursuing private gain," he added.

The former first lady sat in court as the sentence was read out, wearing a black suit, a white face mask and glasses.

Kim later released a statement apologising for "the concern" she may have caused, saying that she "accepted the court's stern criticism".

Her lawyers told AFP Kim had not decided whether she would appeal against the decision.

Prosecutors at Kim's final hearing in December said she had "stood above the law" and colluded with the Unification Church to undermine "the constitutionally mandated separation of religion and state".

Min Joong-ki, a Prosecutor on the case, said at the time that South Korea's institutions were "severely undermined by abuses of power" committed by Kim.

Yesterday, prosecutors called the ruling "hard to accept" and said they would appeal.

The former first lady previously denied all charges against her, claiming



South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol and his wife Kim Keon Hee disembark from an aircraft after landing at London Stansted Airport on November 20, 2023, for a three-day state visit to the UK. A South Korean court sentenced former first lady Kim Keon Hee yesterday, to one year and eight months in prison. - AFP

the allegations were "deeply unjust" in her final testimony last month.

She still faces two additional trials on bribery and Political Parties Act violations over allegations that she

arranged the mass enrolment of more than 2,400 Unification Church followers into Yoon's conservative People Power Party.

Dogged by scandal

A self-professed animal lover known internationally for her work campaigning for South Korea to ban dog meat, Kim's scandals frequently overshadowed her husband's domestic political agenda.

In 2023, hidden camera footage appeared to show Kim accepting a US\$2,200 luxury handbag in what was later dubbed the "Dior bag scandal", further dragging down Yoon's already dismal approval ratings.

The scandal contributed to a stinging defeat for Yoon's party in the general elections in April 2024, as it failed to win back a parliamentary majority.

Yoon vetoed three opposition-backed bills to investigate allegations against

Kim, including the Dior bag case, with the last veto in November 2024.

A week later, he declared martial law.

Kim's sentencing came days after former prime minister Han Duck-soo was handed 23 years in prison for aiding and abetting Yoon's suspension of civilian rule.

And this month Yoon was sentenced to five years for obstructing justice and other crimes in the first of a number of trials linked to that declaration.

The probe into Kim also led to the arrest of Han Hak-ja, leader of the Unification Church, which claims 10 million followers worldwide and runs a vast business empire.

Also yesterday, the Seoul Central District Court sentenced Yun Young-ho, a former Unification Church official, to 14 months in prison for offering luxury gifts to the former first lady and providing illegal political funds to a lawmaker.

Opposition lawmaker Kwon Seong-dong, an ally of ex-president Yoon, was also jailed for two years for receiving 100 million won (US\$70,000) from the controversial sect. - AFP

Kyoko Hasegawa

TOKYO - The proportion of women running in Japan's general election next month has barely advanced, reports said yesterday, despite a trailblazing win last year by Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi.

Takaichi, a staunch conservative who admires Margaret Thatcher and took the helm in October, has shown little appetite for framing her leadership around gender and named a male-dominated cabinet despite pledging to boost female representation.

Although a record 24 percent of the 1,285 lower house candidates who kicked off their campaigns on Tuesday were women, according to the *Asahi Shimbun* and other media, the figure is just one percentage point

up on the last general election.

The government set a goal in 2020 for 35 percent of the candidates for parliament's powerful lower house to be women by 2025. A new target has yet to be announced.

"The inauguration of Prime Minister Takaichi doesn't appear to have sparked a strong movement within the LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) to significantly increase the number of female candidates," Yuki Tsuji, professor of Tokai University and politics expert, told AFP.

The proportion of women candidates within Takaichi's ruling LDP is just 12.8 percent, down by more than three percentage points since the last election, Jiji Press reported.

Meanwhile, the opposition isn't highlighting

the presence of women and diverse candidates as a party advantage, Tsuji said.

But she also noted that the sudden dissolution of parliament by Takaichi last week for the February 8 election, "left little time to carefully select and field candidates" and could be "the main reason why the number of female candidates hasn't grown much".

The party with the highest proportion of women is Sanseito - a small but fast-growing party pledging "Japanese first" policies - which has 82 women among 190 candidates, around 43 percent, according to Jiji Press.

Despite promising "Nordic" levels of representation in her government, Takaichi named just two other women in her 19-strong cabinet.

In Japanese politics and boardrooms,

Anglican church's first female leader confirmed at London service

LONDON – Former nurse Sarah Mullally was officially confirmed yesterday as the first female Archbishop of Canterbury and the first woman to head the Church of England, the mother church of the 85-million-strong global Anglican communion.

At a historic service at London's St Paul's Cathedral, Mullally, 63, legally took up the position ahead of her formal installation – or enthronement – at Canterbury Cathedral on March 25.

Mullally will begin her public ministry and full programme of public engagements after that date, according to the church.

A heckler briefly interrupted proceedings and was escorted from the cathedral, although it was not immediately clear what the person said.

Her appointment has caused a backlash among some conservative members of the Anglican communion, particularly in Africa, with The Church of Uganda describing it last October as "sad news".

Conservative churches have been at odds for years with more liberal Western counterparts, particularly over women priests and LGBTQ issues.

Ahead of the service, Mullally had spoken of her hopes to lead with "calmness, consistency and compassion", in what she described as

"times of division and uncertainty for our fractured world".

"It is an extraordinary and humbling privilege to have been called to be the 106th Archbishop of Canterbury," she said in a statement.

Archbishop of York Stephen Cottrell, who is second in rank in the Anglican hierarchy, said he hoped that as she took the "baton" the church would learn from its "past failings" and become "simpler, humbler and bolder".

'Hope'

Mullally was named in October as the successor to Justin Welby, who announced he would be stepping down last January amid fallout over an abuse scandal.

He resigned after a report found the Church of England had covered up a 1970s serial abuse case and that Welby had failed to report the abuses to authorities when they came to his attention in 2013.

According to the independent probe, John Smyth, a lawyer who organised evangelical summer camps in the 1970s and 1980s, was responsible for the abuse of as many as 130 boys and young men.

The Church of England became Britain's state establishment church following King Henry VIII's split

from the Roman Catholic Church in the 1530s.

The British monarch is its supreme governor, while the Archbishop of Canterbury is seen as the spiritual leader of Anglicans worldwide.

Mullally, who is married with two children, worked in Britain's state-run National Health Service for more than three decades, rising to become chief nursing officer for England in 1999.

Ordained a priest in 2002, she became the first female Bishop of London in 2018, only four years after the church began allowing women bishops following years of bitter factional wrangling.

Mullally has reportedly described herself as a feminist and called the decision to finally allow priests to bless same-sex couples in 2023 as "a moment of hope for the church", although she recognised that differences remained.

She said in an interview with some UK media yesterday that she was committed to speaking out against misogyny where she sees it.

There were an estimated one million regular Anglican worshippers in Britain in 2024.

Globally, the church estimates there are around 85 million Anglican followers in more than 165 countries.



The new Archbishop of Canterbury Sarah Mullally (centre) poses with members of the church on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral after taking part in a 'Confirmation of Election' ceremony in London yesterday. Sarah Mullally, a former nurse, was named as the first female Archbishop of Canterbury last October, pledging to improve safety at the Church of England following an abuse scandal that ousted her predecessor. – AFP

UK proposes to let websites refuse Google AI search

Ben Perry

LONDON – Britain's competition watchdog proposed yesterday that websites be allowed to opt out of having content used by Google's "AI Overviews" feature as it tackles the technology giant's dominance in online search.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) in October paved the way for tougher regulation on the matter, under new targeted measures focused on technology giants.

Last year it designated Google with "strategic market status" (SMS), subjecting it to special requirements, following a nine-month investigation.

CMA chief executive Sarah Cardell said yesterday that the regulator's proposal, which is out for consultation until February 25, "would give UK businesses and consumers more choice and control over how they interact with Google's search services".

She added in a statement that it "would also provide a fairer deal for content publishers, particularly news organisations, over how their content is used in Google's AI Overviews".

The CMA proposed that publishers "be able to opt out of their content being used to power AI features such as AI Overviews or to train AI models outside of Google search".

"Google will also be required to take practical steps to ensure publisher content is properly attributed in AI results," it added.

Website publishers, particularly media outlets, say that AI pilfers their content without compensation to feed its models.

They also argue that the AI-generated summaries discourage clicks to publishers' original pages, reducing traffic to their sites and in turn cutting their advertising revenue.

"Google is able to extract valuable data without reward, harming publishers and giving the company an unfair advantage over

competitors in the AI model market," said Owen Meredith, chief executive of industry group, News Media Association.

Confusing experience'

Google's search engine accounts for more than 90 percent of online enquiries in the UK, according to the regulator.

It also says that over 200,000 businesses in the UK rely on Google search advertising to reach customers.

Responding to the watchdog's announcement, Google said it was already exploring updates to its controls "to let sites specifically opt out of search generative AI features".

"Any new controls need to avoid breaking search in a way that leads to a fragmented or confusing experience for people," the company's principal for product management, Ron Eden, said in a statement.

Among its other proposals, the CMA suggests displaying a screen to facilitate changing a user's default search engine, and rules guaranteeing a fair ranking of results, which Google should be able to demonstrate.

"These measures will give publishers – including news and other content producers – stronger bargaining power and support the long-term sustainability of trusted information online," Will Hayter, executive director for digital markets at the CMA, said in a blog post.

"They will also help people verify sources in AI-generated results and build trust in what they see," he added.

The UK's stricter regulation is modelled on the European Union's Digital Markets Act (DMA), which a handful of tech giants – including Apple, Google, and Meta – must comply with.

Google employs more than 7,000 people in the UK, according to its website. – AFP

Hamas says ready to transfer Gaza governance to Palestinian committee

DEIR EL-BALAH, Palestinian Territories – Hamas said yesterday it was ready to transfer the governance of Gaza to a Palestinian technocratic committee, while insisting the key Rafah border crossing be fully reopened within days.

"Protocols are prepared, files are complete, and committees are in place to oversee the handover, ensuring a complete transfer of governance in the Gaza Strip across all sectors to the technocratic committee," Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem told AFP.

The 15-member National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG) is a team of Palestinian technocrats created as part of the US-sponsored ceasefire agreement which came into effect on October 10.

It is charged with managing the day-to-day governance of post-war Gaza and will work under the supervision of the "Board of Peace", which US President Donald Trump will chair.

The NCAG, headed by former Palestinian Authority deputy minister Ali Shaath, is expected to enter the Gaza Strip once the territory's Rafah crossing, on its border with Egypt, reopens.

Hamas spokesman Qassem added that the Rafah crossing "must be opened in both directions, with full freedom of exit and entry to the Gaza Strip, without any Israeli obstacles".

Rafah is Gaza's only gateway to the outside world that does not lead to Israel and is a key entry point for both people and goods.

It has been closed since Israeli forces took control of it in May 2024, except for a limited reopening in early 2025, and other bids to reopen have failed to materialise.

NCAG head Shaath announced last week

that Rafah would reopen in both directions the following week.

Qassem told AFP the "independent national committee's announcement of the opening of the Rafah crossing is important".

"What is more important is that we monitor this committee's handling of citizens' departures and entries in full freedom in accordance with the agreement, and not according to Israeli conditions," he added.

Israel has said it would only allow pedestrians to travel through the crossing as part of its "limited reopening" once it had recovered the remains of the last hostage, Ran Gvili.

Israeli forces brought back Gvili's remains on Monday and his funeral was held in the southern town of Meitar yesterday.

Qassem said yesterday that "it is clear that Hamas is committed to the agreement to stop the war on the Gaza Strip", which began after the militant group's deadly attack on southern Israel on October 7, 2023.

"It has carried out everything required of it in the first phase and is ready to enter all tracks of the second phase," he added.

With the technocratic committee's creation and the last hostage held in Gaza returned to Israel, the ceasefire deal's next important milestones will be Hamas's disarmament and Israel's withdrawal from Gaza.

Though Hamas said the return of Gvili's body showed its commitment to the ceasefire deal, it has so far not surrendered its weapons.

The group has repeatedly said disarmament is a red line, but it has also suggested it would be open to handing over its weapons to a Palestinian governing authority.

Neither Israel nor Hamas have committed to a clear date or strategy for withdrawal or disarmament. – AFP

US embassy angers Danish veterans by removing flags

COPENHAGEN – Danish veterans yesterday criticised the US embassy in Copenhagen for removing national flags put up in front of the mission to honour Danish soldiers killed in Afghanistan.

The embassy later backtracked, telling Danish media it would not have taken the flags down if it had been aware of the intention behind them.

US President Donald Trump last week angered some allies by downplaying the role of non-US NATO troops in the Afghanistan war, saying in an interview that NATO troops "stayed a little back, a little off the front lines".

In response, 44 Danish flags, which carried the names of the 44 Danish soldiers killed in Afghanistan, were put up on Tuesday in flower beds outside the US embassy in Copenhagen.

A video published by Danish media showed embassy staff taking down the flags yesterday morning (local time).

The embassy originally told Danish media that it had removed the flags because they had been put up without coordination with the embassy. But politicians and veterans' representatives condemned the move.

"This was an unnecessary action, which has been perceived as a provocation by many Danes," Carsten Rasmussen, chairman of

the Danish Veteran Association, told AFP.

Many felt Trump's comments represented a "a betrayal" of their brothers in arms, he added.

'Completely unacceptable'

Jens-Kristian Lutken, a Copenhagen city official representing the Liberal Party (Venstre), called the embassy's move and the questioning of Danish efforts in Afghanistan "completely unacceptable".

"We have fought alongside the Americans in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere, and we have lost many soldiers in Afghanistan – per capita, as many as the Americans have lost," he told broadcaster TV2.

Following the news of the removal, new flags were put up yesterday, and the embassy told the *Berlingske* newspaper that they would be left in place.

By yesterday afternoon, hundreds of small Danish flags had been put up in the flowerbeds, TV2 reported.

"If the American ambassador is fully aware of what is going on in Denmark, then they will know what this is all about," Rasmussen told AFP about the original move to take down the flags.

"They will know that it seems like a provocation."

The Danish Veteran Association is also planning a silent march towards the embassy on Saturday.

– AFP

Rubio expects 'good outcome for everybody' on Greenland

WASHINGTON – US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said yesterday he expected a "good outcome" on Greenland as negotiations start, after President Donald Trump said he would not order force to seize the island from ally Denmark.

"There'll be some technical

level meetings between us and our partners in Greenland and Denmark on this issue, and I think we have in place a process that's going to bring us to a good outcome for everybody," Rubio told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

– AFP

Top Trump aide Stephen Miller initially justified Pretti's killing by branding him a "would-be assassin" – despite video evidence clearly showing the 37-year-old man posed no threat when he was gunned down. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, another key Trump loyalist, had claimed Pretti committed "domestic terrorism."

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On Tuesday, Miller acknowledged that the Customs and Border

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Denmark last year said it would ban access to social media for minors under 15.

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Brazil declares açaí a national fruit to ward off 'biopiracy'

Fran Blandy

RIO DE JANEIRO – Brazil has declared the açaí berry a national fruit, a move to stamp its ownership on the popular “superfood” as concerns grow about foreign companies staking claims to the Amazon’s biological riches.

Açaí has been a savory staple in the Amazon for centuries, eaten as a thick paste alongside fish and manioc flour.

The dark purple berry went global in the early 2000s after it was reinvented as a sweet sorbet, often topped with granola and fruit, and marketed for its antioxidant-rich properties.

Açaí’s active ingredients piqued the interest of food and cosmetic companies worldwide.

In one case cited in parliamentary debates, a Japanese company trademarked the use of the name açaí in 2003. It took Brazil four years to cancel the registration.

Cases like these drove the law declaring açaí a national fruit, first introduced in 2011 and signed earlier this month.

Brazil’s agriculture ministry told AFP the measure helps showcase açaí as a “genuinely Brazilian product” that generates income for thousands of Amazonian families.

However, experts say the law is largely symbolic and aimed at highlighting the challenge of growing international interest in a wide range of fruits native to the Amazon.

Brazil is one of several countries increasingly concerned about so-called “biopiracy,” the use of genetic resources without permission or benefit-sharing.

The law “helps prioritise the issue on the public agenda,” said Bruno Kato, founder of “Horta da Terra” (“Earth’s Garden”), a company that develops and markets Amazonian ingredients.

‘Enormous’ risk

Sheila de Souza Corrêa de Melo, an intellectual property analyst at Brazil’s Agricultural Research Corporation, Embrapa, who works in the Amazon, told AFP the law was “primarily symbolic and culturally affirming.”

Brazil is one of the most biodiverse nations in the world, and a wide range of fruit with unique properties are at “enormous” risk of being



Farmer José Santos Diogo climbs up an açaí palm tree to pull out its fruit bunches to harvest berries at his plantation in Abaetetuba, Pará State, in the Brazilian Amazon Forest, on August 4, 2023. – AFP



A bird is about to pick an açaí berry from a basket on a boat in the town of Melgaço, Pará State, northern Brazil, on June 11, 2020. – AFP

used in new products developed and patented abroad, said de Melo.

Kato cited the “emblematic” case of the creamy fruit, cupuaçu, which is related to cocoa and used in desserts and cosmetics.

Cupuaçu was registered as a trademark by another Japanese company in the late 1990s, which demanded the payment of US\$10,000 in royalties for any product mentioning “cupuaçu” on the label.

It took two decades to overturn the trademark.

Several patents have been filed abroad for specifically developed uses of açaí’s active ingredients in food and cosmetics, said Corrêa de Melo.

‘Clear rules’

Ana Costa, vice president of sustainability at Brazilian eco-conscious cosmetics giant Natura – known for its use of Amazonian ingredients such as açaí – told AFP

that the law showed the need for “clear rules that guarantee the fair sharing of benefits.”

Brazil is a signatory to the 2014 Nagoya Protocol, an international treaty on sharing benefits from genetic resources.

The treaty has run into a major loophole as genetic data has become digitised, and researchers can now merely download a DNA sequence and use it to develop medicine or cosmetics, without physically collecting plants or seeds.

Corrêa de Melo said the main challenge for Brazil was that raw materials such as açaí pulp were often exported to countries which then carry out the research needed to create high-value products.

She said Brazil should focus on investing in research and technological development in the Amazon to generate wealth locally. – AFP



Erica Raimundo Mimbir, 17, holds her baby, Rosita, at an emergency shelter in the town of 3 de Fevereiro on Tuesday. She delivered her first baby on a school desk on January 19, the lone patch of dry ground she found after days marooned in her flooded home in southern Mozambique. Evacuated by boat the next day, Mimbir is now staying with relatives. Her baby, born prematurely at 1.5 kilos, has been named Rosita after Rosita Salvador, whose mother gave birth while clinging to a tree during the catastrophic 2000 floods that killed 800 people. – AFP

Portugal conducts first hypersonic test

LISBON – Portugal has carried out its first hypersonic test under real conditions, marking the country’s entry into experimental research on extreme high-speed flows, the Instituto Superior Técnico (IST) of the University of Lisbon announced last week.

According to IST, the experiment successfully generated a hypersonic flow at around eight kilometers per second, equivalent to Mach 25. The institute said the speed can be compared to “crossing mainland Portugal from north to south in just over five minutes.”

The test produced shock intensities capable of heating the gas flow to temperatures exceeding those on the surface of the Sun, IST said, noting that the light emitted by the shock wave resembles the flash of a shooting star.

The hypersonic flow, defined as traveling at least five times the speed of sound, was generated in demanding physical conditions. The operation of the shock tube, which is remotely controlled for safety reasons, involves the use

of hydrogen, oxygen and helium mixtures at very high pressures, the institute said.

The test was conducted on November 19, 2025, by the Institute for Plasmas and Nuclear Fusion (IPFN), a research unit of IST, using the European Shock Tube for High Enthalpy Research (ESTHER) facility, located on the Técnico campus in Loures, a municipality north of the capital Lisbon.

IST said the ESTHER facility will help scientists study phenomena that only occur at extreme speeds, including the atmospheric re-entry of rockets and spacecraft, as well as the exploration of the atmospheres of planets such as Mars, Venus and Jupiter, and Saturn’s moon Titan.

In a statement, the institute said the successful test marks “Portugal’s entry into the experimental capability to study hypersonic phenomena,” adding that the infrastructure is expected, in the medium term, to support the planning of missions by the European Space Agency (ESA), of which Portugal is a member state.

– Xinhua

Spain tracking suspected Russia shadow tanker in Mediterranean

MADRID – Spanish authorities said on Tuesday they were escorting in the Mediterranean an oil tanker that had broken down and is under Western sanctions for allegedly serving Russia’s sanctions-busting “shadow fleet”.

The Mozambique-flagged “Chariot Tide” lost power on January 22 while heading to Tanger Med port in the Gibraltar Strait, a narrow body of water separating Spain and Morocco, Spanish transport ministry sources said.

The vessel, sanctioned by the European Union and Britain, then dropped anchor “close to the coast of Morocco” before a recent storm “moved the ship eastwards through the Alboran Sea” in the western Mediterranean.

The sources did not indicate the nature or quantity of the ship’s cargo but said there was “no risk of approaching the coast”.

After initially entering an area of Moroccan responsibility, the tanker “found itself without power in international waters” but within Spain’s search and rescue zone.

The ship is navigating towards its declared destination of Tanger Med after an engine repair, escorted by a ship belonging to Spain’s maritime rescue service, the ministry sources said.

“Spain has monitored the situation at all times” through its maritime rescue service “and will continue to do so until the ship calls at its port of destination”, they added.

According to tracking platform Global Fishing Watch, the “Chariot Tide” was docked at the Russian oil terminal of Vistino in late December before travelling towards the Mediterranean.

Western powers have targeted vessels believed to allow Russia to continue reaping profits from its sanctioned energy industry, a major source of finance for Moscow’s almost four-year-old invasion of Ukraine.

Last week, the French navy boarded a sanctioned vessel believed to be a Russian oil tanker flying a false flag in the Mediterranean, after a similar operation in September. – AFP

Brazil to grant visa exemptions to Chinese citizens

RIO DE JANEIRO – Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has announced that Brazil will grant exemptions from certain categories of short-term visas to Chinese citizens, in reciprocity for China’s visa exemption policy for Brazilian nationals, the Brazilian presidency said last week.

According to an official statement, the decision was

made in the context of deepening cooperation between Brazil and China, with the aim of further facilitating people-to-people exchanges and promoting bilateral interaction.

The Brazilian government said the specific implementation date of the visa-free policy will be announced in due course.

– Xinhua, MPD



Brazil's Corinthians' midfielder Duda Sampaio (right) looks to pass the ball during the FIFA Women's Champions Cup semifinal at Brentford Stadium, London between NWSL and Concacaf champions Gotham FC and Corinthians at the Gtech Community Stadium in London yesterday. Gotham FC won 1-0.

- AFP

Football shorts

La Liga to pay fans for tip-offs on bars showing football illegally

BARCELONA - Spanish football fans can earn 50 euros (US\$60) for giving La Liga tip-offs about venues showing football illegally, the Spanish league said yesterday.

"The aim... is to double down on the fight against piracy in bars, restaurants and betting shops through the responsible collaboration of consumers and users," said La Liga in a statement.

"La Liga is launching a reward plan whereby users who make a valid and effective complaint can receive 50 euros as a thank you for their collaboration."

La Liga provided instructions for fans to be able to identify whether a broadcast or stream is legal and asked for photos to be uploaded to a website to prove it, which they will then analyse before paying out the reward.

"Piracy harms the entire football ecosystem and, especially, bars, restaurants, and betting shops that comply with the law," said La Liga president Javier Tebas.

"We want everyone to be able to identify an illegal broadcast and to know that they can report it to us easily, securely, and confidentially."

La Liga have taken a strong stance against piracy over the last few seasons, with Tebas warning it costs the football industry hundreds of millions of euros a year.

- AFP

Bournemouth owners Black Knight buy out French club Lorient

LORIENT - The American investment fund Black Knight have taken full control of French top-flight football club Lorient, the Brittany outfit's president Loic Fery said yesterday.

Black Knight already owned 40 percent of the club and have now acquired the remainder from Fery, who retains the presidency and becomes a shareholder in the fund.

"Our industry continues to evolve towards ever-fiercer competition, requiring us to adapt our model to meet new challenges," Fery said

"Joining BKFC represents a real opportunity to secure an ambitious future," he added.

Lorient sit in ninth position in Ligue 1.

Black Knight also own English Premier League club Bournemouth and has a majority share in Portuguese side Moreirense.

- AFP

Top Malaysian football officials quit over foreign-born players scandal

Football

Noel Achriam

KUALA LUMPUR - The entire executive committee of Malaysia's football association resigned yesterday, the latest blow in a damaging eligibility row over forged documents used to field foreign-born players in Asian Cup qualifiers.

The move follows FIFA's probe last year into the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) over its inclusion of "heritage players" in the national team - foreign-born athletes accused of falsely claiming Malaysian ancestry.

"The resignations are to safeguard the reputation and institutional interests of [the association] and to mitigate the risk of further adverse consequences that could affect Malaysian football as a whole," acting president Yusoff Mahadi told reporters.

He described the move as voluntary, and a "measured and principled step taken in response to recent developments that have attracted significant public attention and external scrutiny".

Yesterday's resignations will "provide the appropriate space for FIFA and the Asian Football Confederation to independently assess, review, and, where necessary, address governance, administrative, and procedural matters within FAM", Yusoff added.

FIFA suspended seven foreign-born players for a year in September and fined the FAM US\$400,000 for submitting doctored papers claiming they had Malaysian ancestry.

FIFA accused the country's federation of submitting the documents to make them eligible to represent the Southeast Asian nation, ostensibly to give the national



Asian football confederation (AFC) general secretary Windsor John (second right) talks as his deputy Vahid Kardany (right), Malaysian football association's (FAM) acting president Yusoff Mahadi (second left) and FAM's secretary general Noor Azman Rahman listen during a press conference at the FAM's headquarters in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

- AFP

football team a boost.

Football's global governing body then launched a probe after receiving a complaint following Malaysia's 4-0 thrashing of Vietnam in a June Asian Cup qualifier.

An investigation by the body showed that none of the players - Hector Hevel, Jon Irazabal, Gabriel Palmero, Facundo Garces, Rodrigo Holgado, Imanol Machuca and Joao Brandao Figueiredo - had a parent or grandparent born in the country.

FAM appealed the sanctions, but a FIFA committee rejected it and issued a scathing report slamming the association for "not taking any discernible disciplinary action" in the wake of the allegations.

FAM has since appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Switzerland, where the case is pending.

In December FIFA again penalised the Southeast Asian nation with three 3-0

defeats in friendlies and slapped on an additional US\$12,500 in fines.

The association's general-secretary, Noor Azman Rahman, will now continue to oversee the FAM's daily operations with the help of the Kuala Lumpur-based Asian Football Confederation, officials said yesterday.

"What we have discussed in today's meeting is to help assess the FAM in regards to several internal aspects," AFC general secretary Windsor John told the press conference.

The AFC is then to provide a report of their findings at an upcoming FAM congress.

Meanwhile, the FAM on Monday said the CAS granted the seven players a reprieve pending the outcome of the hearings, now set for February 25.

AFC's John said the move would allow the players to play for their football clubs, but it was unclear whether they could return to their careers as national players.

Villa's Tielemans ruled out for up to 10 weeks



Premier League

LONDON - Aston Villa's Premier League title bid has suffered a major blow after Belgian midfielder Youri Tielemans was ruled out for up to 10 weeks with an ankle injury.

Tielemans sustained the problem in Villa's 2-0 win over Newcastle United at St James' Park on Sunday.

The 28-year-old was replaced in the 74th minute following a clash with Newcastle's Lewis Miley.

Tielemans' extended absence adds to Villa's mounting list of injured midfielders, with Boubacar Kamara and John McGinn already sidelined.

McGinn will be out for two months with a knee injury, while Kamara is not expected back this season due to a knee problem.

"We know about Kamara, McGinn and Tielemans. Kamara is a long time, I think he's not going to play this season. McGinn, more or less, is 6-8 weeks out, and Tielemans is 8-10 weeks out," Villa boss Unai Emery told reporters yesterday.

"We need to see how we can manage central midfielders in the matches we are going to play."

Bidding to win the English title for the first time since 1981, third-placed Villa sit just four points behind Premier League leaders Arsenal.

Help is on the horizon for Emery, who revealed Douglas Luiz is close to rejoining the club.

The 27-year-old Brazilian midfielder previously made over 200 appearances for

Villa before leaving to join Juventus in 2024.

Luiz spent the first half of the season on loan at Nottingham Forest and is ready to return to Villa Park for the remainder of the campaign.

Asked about his other midfield options, Emery added: "Amadou Onana will be coming back and Barkley will be back in a few days.

"He has been training individually but he's so close to joining us."

"I think Luiz is close to happening."

Emery's injury-hit side are in Europa League group stage action at home to RB Salzburg today.

Villa have secured their place in the last 16 and are looking to claim top spot in the league phase with victory.

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

- AFP/MPD

Sterling agrees Chelsea exit after troubled spell



Premier League

LONDON - Raheem Sterling left Chelsea by mutual consent yesterday as the former England forward finally ended his nightmare spell at Stamford Bridge.

Sterling had been training away from the rest of his Chelsea team-mates after failing to secure a move in the summer transfer window.

"Raheem Sterling has today [yesterday] departed Chelsea Football Club by mutual agreement, bringing to an end three-and-a-half seasons as our player," a Chelsea statement said.

"We thank Raheem for the contribution he made while a Chelsea player and wish him well for the next stage in his career."

The 31-year-old was regarded as one of

England's leading wingers when he joined Chelsea from Manchester City in a £47 million (US\$64 million) deal in 2022.

But the four-time Premier League winner's move to west London quickly turned sour as he failed to replicate his City form.

Even the departure of Enzo Maresca, who had consigned Sterling to the so-called "bomb squad" of unwanted Chelsea players, was unable to resuscitate the former Liverpool star's career at Stamford Bridge.

A season-long loan spell at Arsenal last season was a disappointment, with Sterling struggling to break into Mikel Arteta's side.

Sterling had reportedly been kept apart from the rest of the Chelsea players this season, arriving and leaving at a different time

to the squad and using a different building.

Liam Rosenior, hired as Maresca's successor on January 6, did not pick him in any of his five matches in charge to date.

Sterling, who was signed in Thomas Tuchel's reign as Chelsea manager, last played for the club in a competitive game in May 2024, making a total of 81 appearances.

He had 18 months remaining on a contract worth a reported £325,000 per week.

The man capped 82 times by England, had been linked with Juventus, Bayer Leverkusen and Fulham before the start of this season, but a move never materialised.

He is now able to join any club as a free agent even after Monday's transfer deadline.

- AFP

Djokovic gets lucky to set up Sinner semis showdown in Melbourne



MELBOURNE — Novak Djokovic admitted he got lucky after opponent Lorenzo Musetti retired hurt yesterday to send the Serbian great into his 13th Australian Open semi-final and a showdown with reigning champion Jannik Sinner.

Earlier on day 11 in Melbourne, Jessica Pegula and Elena Rybakina both won in straight sets and will meet for a place in the final. The 38-year-old Djokovic, chasing an all-time record 25th Grand Slam crown, has the tennis gods smiling on him.

His last-16 opponent Jakub Mensik pulled out without a ball being hit and Musetti was forced to retire with the Italian leading 6-4, 6-3, 1-3 on Rod Laver Arena. The fifth-seeded Musetti was well on top when he needed treatment on his upper right leg, and with his movement badly impeded, was forced to reluctantly throw in the towel.

"I feel really sorry for him, he was the far better player, I was on my way home tonight," said Djokovic, who had been uncharacteristically error strewn and staring down the barrel. "It has happened to me a few times. He was in full control.

"So unfortunate, I don't know what else to say.

"He should have been the winner today no doubt. I am extremely lucky to get through this one today."

Djokovic has been trying to move past Margaret Court and clinch the landmark 25 since his last major title at the US Open in 2023.

It has proved increasingly difficult with the emergence of Sinner and world number one Carlos Alcaraz.

Djokovic, who needed treatment during the match for a gruesome blister, added: "I am going to double my prayers and gratitude tonight to God for giving me this opportunity again."

Italian second seed Sinner was sublime in sweeping past big-serving American Ben Shelton 6-3, 6-4, 6-4.



Italy's Lorenzo Musetti (right) speaks at the net with Serbia's Novak Djokovic after retiring injured during their singles quarter-final match at the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday.

— AFP

Sinner holds a 6-4 win-loss record over Djokovic and has won their last five encounters.

Despite that, Sinner said Djokovic still sets the standard for professionalism.

"Me, as a 24-year-old, I'm lucky to have someone like him in front of my eyes, and I can hopefully learn something," said Sinner, who together with Alcaraz has dominated the last eight majors.

"He's an inspiration for all of us and especially the young players," he added.

Alcaraz plays third seed Alexander Zverev in the other semi-final.

Pegula sets up Rybakina clash

Moscow-born Kazakh Rybakina, the 2022 Wimbledon champion, stunned second seed Iga Swiatek 7-5, 6-1 to book her spot in the last four.

Pegula swept aside Amanda Anisimova 6-2, 7-6 (7/1) in an all-American affair.

Two-time champion Aryna Sabalenka takes on Ukrainian 12th seed Elina Svitolina in the other semi-final.

Rybalkina has made the Melbourne final once before, in 2023 when she lost in three tough sets to Sabalenka.

The 26-year-old fifth seed took her latest victory in her stride, saying a calmer mindset helped in the heat of battle.

"In the beginning, when it's the first final and you go so far in a tournament, of course you are more emotional," said Rybakina.

"Now I feel like I'm just doing my job, trying to improve each day. So, it's kind of another day, another match."

Defeat denied Swiatek in her latest bid for a career Grand Slam of all four majors, having already won Wimbledon, the French Open and the US Open.

Sixth seed Pegula and Rybakina have shared three wins each in their six matches so far.

Pegula is arrowing in on her first major crown at the age of 31, and like Rybakina, is yet to drop a set.

"It's awesome," Pegula said of reaching her first Australian semi-final, having beaten defending champion Madison Keys in the previous round.

She was helped by an error-riddled display from fourth seed Anisimova, who racked up 44 unforced errors to Pegula's 21.

Her frustrations boiled over at the end as her hopes of reaching a third major final in a row melted away in a blur of mistakes. — AFP

Pakistan face Australia with T20 World Cup participation uncertain

Cricket

LAHORE — Pakistan take on Australia in a three-match Twenty20 international series starting in Lahore from today, despite doubts over their participation in next month's World Cup in cricket's shortest format.

The country's cricket chief Mohsin Naqvi will announce a final decision on taking part in the mega event either tomorrow or Monday.

Pakistan are protesting over last week's decision by the International Cricket Council (ICC), which rejected Bangladesh's demand to relocate their matches out of India over security fears.

Bangladesh are replaced by Scotland in the 20-team event, which runs from February 7 to March 8 with Sri Lanka as co-hosts.

However, despite the doubts,

the Pakistan team was preparing for the World Cup with skipper Salman Agha stressing the importance of the Australia series.

"These three games will give us an idea how prepared we are for the World Cup," Agha told a news conference yesterday. "Australia is a top team and will give us the best final preparations."

Pakistan are placed in Group A alongside defending world champions India, the United States, Namibia and the Netherlands.

Pakistan's spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi returns to full fitness after injuring his knee in the Big Bash League in Australia this month.

"We need to see how many boxes we tick in the series which are important for the World Cup as we aim to do well and win the Cup," Agha said.

A 17-member Australian squad led by Mitchell Marsh arrived in Lahore early yesterday, with the last two matches set for January 31 and February 1.

The Australians are without the injured quartet of Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, Tim David and Nathan Ellis, while allrounder Glenn Maxwell was rested to manage workload.

Marsh still believes Australia were ready for the World Cup tune-up series.

"These are very important times in both teams' preparations for the World Cup," said Marsh, whose team will be in Group B with Sri Lanka, Oman, Ireland and Zimbabwe.

"This is a very important series as the conditions are similar and that is against a quality side, so we will assess the situation and be clear about our plans ahead." — AFP

Fury confirms April comeback fight against Makhmudov

Boxing

LONDON — Former heavyweight world champion Tyson Fury will face Arslanbek Makhmudov in his comeback fight in April, weeks after saying he would come out of retirement.

The bout between the Briton and Canada-based Russian Makhmudov will take place in the UK on April 11, with no venue yet announced, and will be broadcast on Netflix.

The bout between the Briton and Canada-based Russian Makhmudov will take place in the UK on April 11, with no venue yet announced, and will be broadcast on Netflix.

The 37-year-old "Gypsy King" said earlier this month he would return to the sport in 2026 and has been training in Thailand.

"Well it's official, I'm back

doing what I love to do," Fury posted on Instagram.

"I've brought the biggest network along with me @netflix @netflixuk this is going to be astronomical. Blessed by God."

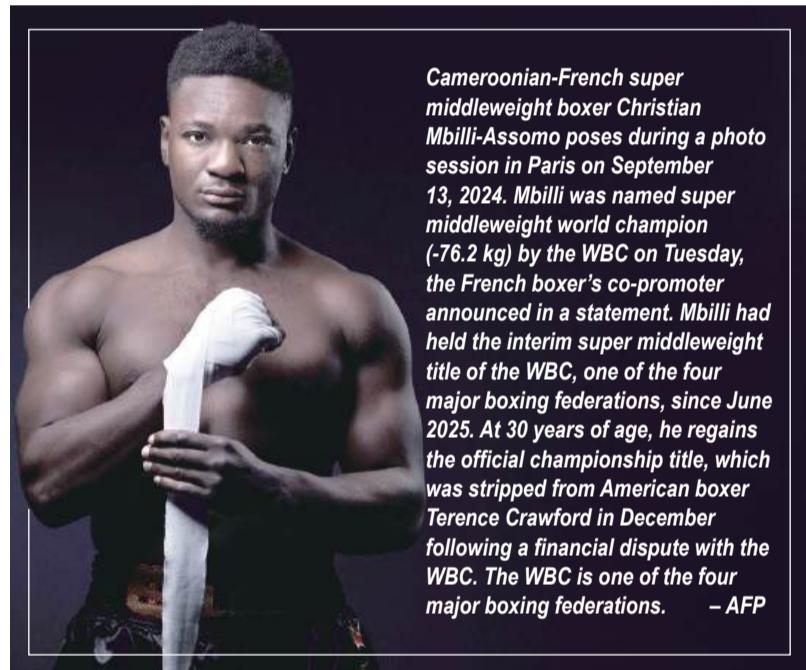
Fury has a record of 34 wins, two defeats and one draw.

"I am thrilled about the opportunity," said 36-year-old Makhmudov, who has won 21 of his 23 fights. "I'm coming to deliver a war."

"Tyson Fury has been a big champion. I will be more ready than ever to leave with a massive W."

Fury had been expected to build towards a long-awaited fight against fellow British former heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua, but Joshua's future is uncertain after a car crash in December, in Nigeria, in which two of his close friends were killed.

— AFP



Camerounian-French super middleweight boxer Christian Mbilli-Assomo poses during a photo session in Paris on September 13, 2024. Mbilli was named super middleweight world champion (-76.2 kg) by the WBC on Tuesday, the French boxer's co-promoter announced in a statement. Mbilli had held the interim super middleweight title of the WBC, one of the four major boxing federations, since June 2025. At 30 years of age, he regains the official championship title, which was stripped from American boxer Terence Crawford in December following a financial dispute with the WBC. The WBC is one of the four major boxing federations.

Red Bull, Ferrari defy rain as F1 testing continues

F1

BARCELONA — Formula One endured a rainy second day of private testing in Barcelona on Tuesday, with only Red Bull and Ferrari braving the wet conditions.

According to several media outlets, Frenchman Isack Hadjar of Red Bull, who had set the fastest time on Monday, was involved in a minor off-track incident at the end of the day, slightly damaging the rear of his car.

Ferrari took to the track for the first time this week with Monégasque driver Charles Leclerc, who racked up 64 laps in the morning despite the rain, before handing over the wheel to seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton, who put in a sturdy 57-lap stint.

"For now it's all about trying to understand if everything is working properly, which it kind of did," Leclerc said.

"It's not the best conditions because it has been a little bit raining this morning but actually we did our programme anyway because we are not focused on performance whatsoever."

Four-time Dutch world

champion Max Verstappen also drove for Red Bull and set the fastest time of the day in dry conditions, more than a second ahead of Leclerc.

McLaren, the two-time defending constructors' champion, preferred to fine-tune their settings on Tuesday and confirmed that their car would take to the track yesterday and is also expected to run today and tomorrow.

Aston Martin announced on Monday that they would not be running until today, losing one of their three authorised days of testing, while Williams decided not to take part in this session in Spain due to delays in the development of their car.

On Monday, seven of the 11 Formula One teams took to the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya for the first day of private testing, held behind closed doors without spectators or journalists - they were Alpine, Audi, the new American team Cadillac, Haas, Mercedes, Racing Bulls and Red Bull.

With the upheaval in technical regulations set to take effect for the upcoming season, teams are focusing this week on the reliability of their cars rather than performance.

— AFP

Victoria Beckham honoured in Paris amid family rift

PARIS — Victoria Beckham escaped the bitterness of a family feud with a trip to Paris on Monday to receive an award from the French culture ministry for her contribution to the fashion and entertainment industries.

The former Spice Girl, after a weekend celebrating "Baby Spice" Emma Bunton's 50th birthday, headed to the French capital with husband David and her children — except Brooklyn — to be named an "Officer of the Order of the Arts and Letters."

The ceremony at the culture ministry was kept under wraps to avoid a scrum of journalists or onlookers after explosive claims about the Beckhams by eldest son Brooklyn last week.

French Culture Minister Rachida Dati praised Beckham as "a global

icon that holds a very special place in the hearts of French people". Dati paid tribute to the fashion designer's "meticulous, almost architectural" approach to clothing, according to a copy of the speech sent to AFP.

After starting with shows in London and New York, Beckham has been unveiling the new collections for her label in Paris since 2022.

"Through your journey, your work, and your commitment, you have woven a deep, sincere, and lasting bond with France," Dati told the 51-year-old singer-turned-designer.

Brooklyn Beckham deepened a rift with his parents after writing on social media last week that they had tried to "ruin" his relationship with his wife.

In a highly personal post that

confirmed a long-rumoured falling out, Brooklyn claimed Victoria Beckham "hijacked" his first dance on his wedding day and danced "inappropriately on me".

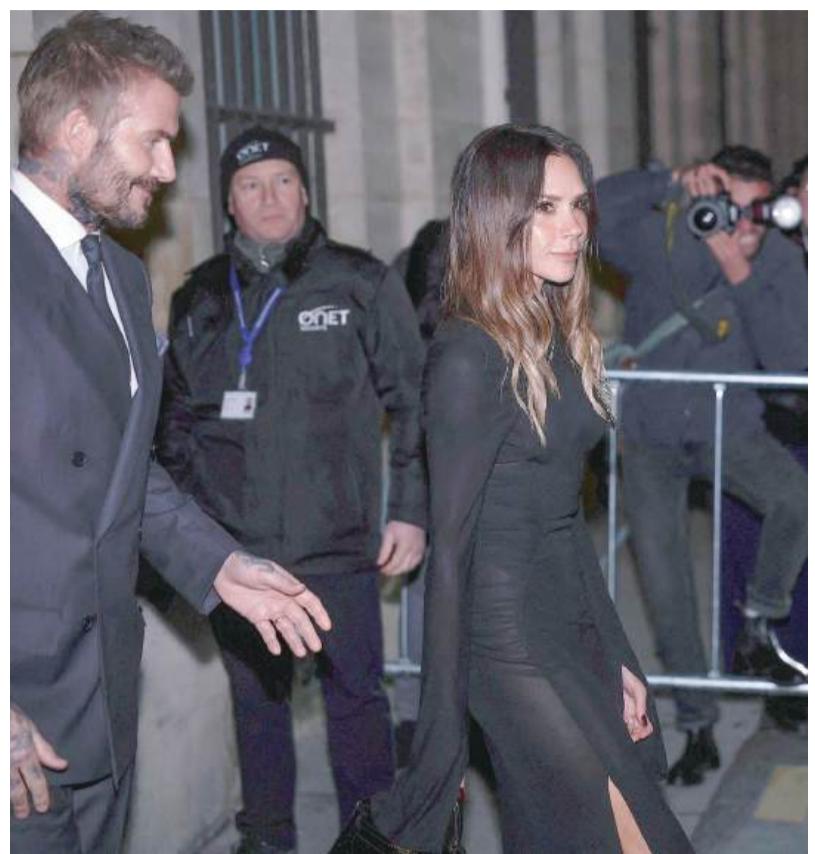
Video of Monday's ceremony by *Paris Match* magazine showed David Beckham and the rest of his clan looking on and applauding, along with French fashion bosses Antoine Arnault and Francois-Henri Pinault.

The Order of the Arts and Letters is reserved for figures judged to have contributed to France's cultural life and is separate to the more prestigious Legion of Honour, the state's top award.

President Emmanuel Macron decorated Louis Vuitton designer and rapper Pharrell Williams with a Legion of Honour last Friday at a private ceremony attended by US rappers Pusha T and Future.

Former England captain David Beckham received a knighthood from King Charles III in November in what he called his "proudest moment".

— AFP



British designer Victoria Beckham (centre) leaves with her husband David Beckham (left) after being awarded the French "Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters" honour during a ceremony at the Ministry of Culture in Paris on Monday. — AFP

Amy Winehouse's friends 'took advantage' of father, UK court told

LONDON — Two friends of late British singer Amy Winehouse who sold items belonging to the star worth around £730,000 (US\$970,000) "took advantage" of her father's forgetfulness, a lawyer said on Tuesday at London's High Court.

The singer's former stylist Naomi Parry and her friend Catriona Gourlay sold dozens of items, including a black Armani bag and dresses Winehouse wore on her last tour in June 2011.

Both deny acting dishonestly and say the items had been given or lent to them by the singer, even if there was no proof.

Amy's father, Mitch Winehouse, has brought a UK lawsuit against the pair, alleging they did not have the right to sell the items, which were sold between November 2021 and May 2023.

Henry Legge, representing for Winehouse, said it was claimed in an email to the late singer's father and his ex-wife Janis that the sale involved just a "few things", a description the lawyer said was "grossly misleading".

The court heard earlier that the two women sold 150 objects that had belonged to Winehouse.

Parry realised that Mitch Winehouse was in her words "lazy" about keeping tabs on such matters, Legge said.

"It is clear that they took advantage of his [Mitch Winehouse's] forgetfulness," he added.

The lawyer also hit back at suggestions he said came from the defendants' side that Mitch Winehouse was in some way "venal" or dishonest, and that the lawsuit was "motivated by that".

He described it as one of a number of "cheap shots".

'Gifts'

British singer-songwriter Amy Winehouse, who enjoyed meteoric global success, died in July 2011 from alcohol poisoning, aged just 27.

She was a distinctive figure with her beehive hairdo, heavy black eye makeup, multiple tattoos and smoky voice.

She shot to international fame with her Grammy Award-winning 2006 album "Back to Black", which included the track "Rehab", charting her battle with addiction.

According to court documents, her father believed that any sums collected from the sales organised by Los Angeles-based Julien's Auctions would be due to him.

The auctioneers had also been told that a third of the proceeds would be donated to the Amy Winehouse Foundation — a charity set up in the singer's name working with young people to foster hope and self-reliance.

However, Winehouse's team have accused the women of failing to donate the share of proceeds to the foundation.

Parry's lawyer Beth Grossman, rejecting the accusations, said she and Gourlay had different relationships with Amy.

Yet their accounts of the singer's "generosity" and how the items came to be in their possession were "very similar".

Ted Loveday, lawyer for Gourlay, argued at an earlier hearing that demanding proof of loaning or gifting was unrealistic in the circumstances.

"If a 19-year-old gives a scarf or a pair of earrings to their friends, no one signs a contract," he said.

A judgment in the case will be given at a later date. — AFP

Celebrities call for action against US immigration raids

LOS ANGELES — Celebrities from movie stars to pop singers are speaking up with calls to action against US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids after two Americans were shot and killed by federal agents in Minneapolis.

From red-carpet premieres to social media, the usually politics-averse celebrity crowd have been swept up in the fray after the shooting death of Alex Patti, a 37-year-old ICU nurse, on Saturday.

Below are some of the appeals for action by celebrities expressing their discontent with US President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown:

Pedro Pascal

The Chilean-American actor shared a series of posts on his Instagram, calling for a national strike to protest the killings and demanding more transparency from the federal government on the actions of ICE agents.

"Truth is a line of demarcation between a democratic government and authoritarian regime," Pascal wrote, as he paid tribute to Patti and another US citizen killed in Minneapolis this month, 37-year-old Renee Good.

"The American people deserve to know what happened," he added.

Jamie Lee Curtis

Oscar-winning actress Jamie Lee Curtis also joined the call for national protests against ICE raids.

"THESE WERE AMERICANS! SHOT BY OUR GOVERNMENT!" she wrote in a post on Sunday accompanied by drawings of Patti's and Good's faces.

On Tuesday, she shared a photo of Minneapolis and captioned it: "I BELIEVE IN US!"

"Turn anger into action," the 41-year-old singer wrote.

Kerry Washington

The "Scandal" actress posted a video to her 7.6 million Instagram followers explaining step-by-step how to call their elected representatives and demand funding be blocked for ICE.

"You are not powerless over what's happening in Minnesota," she said. There is something you can do about it right now."

Washington then demonstrated calling her representative's office in California on camera.

Billie Eilish

The 24-year-old singer-songwriter called out other celebrities to speak on Patti's death.

"Hey my fellow celebrities u gonna speak up?" the nine-time Grammy winner wrote in an Instagram story post.

Eilish has since shared posts denouncing tactics used by ICE during their immigration raids. — AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -6°C~2°C	Manila 20°C~30°C	New York -14°C~5°C	Lisbon 11°C~17°C
Shanghai 6°C~12°C	Bangkok 22°C~34°C	London 5°C~8°C	Rio de Janeiro 24°C~31°C
Hong Kong 16°C~20°C	Tokyo -2°C~9°C	Frankfurt 0°C~3°C	Luanda 25°C~29°C
Taipei 15°C~21°C	Singapore 23°C~31°C	Vancouver 8°C~9°C	Maputo 23°C~28°C
Guangzhou 15°C~23°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~33°C	Paris 4°C~9°C	Dili 24°C~31°C
Nanjing 3°C~12°C	Jakarta 23°C~28°C	MOSCOW -14°C~7°C	São Tomé 25°C~32°C
Guilin 11°C~19°C	Seoul -11°C~1°C	MOSCOW 5°C~19°C	Praia 17°C~27°C
Xi'an 0°C~5°C	Sydney 19°C~28°C	Monte Carlo 5°C~11°C	Bissau 19°C~33°C



What happened??

A model presents a creation by Yuima Nakazato for the Women's Haute Couture Spring/Summer 2026 collection fashion show as part of the Paris Haute Couture Fashion Week, in Paris, yesterday.

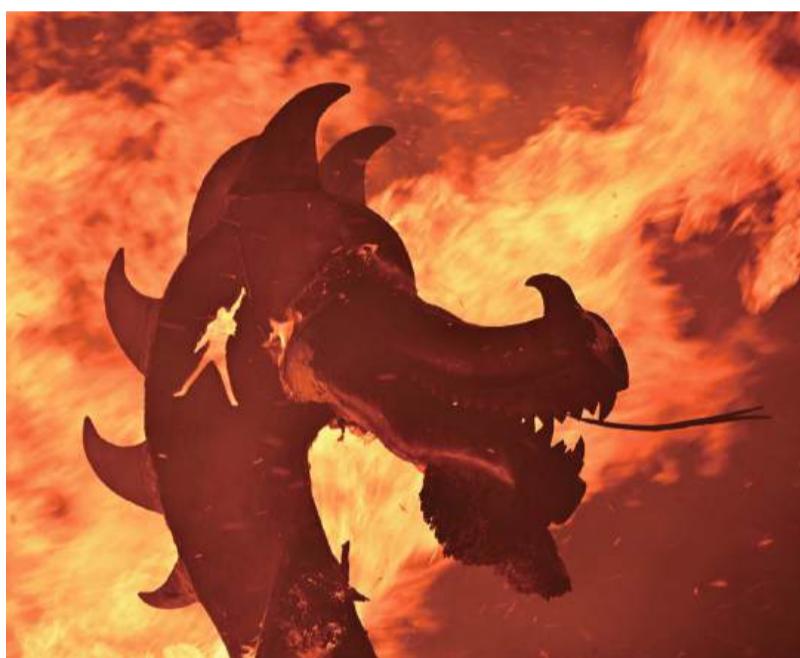
— AFP



Best dragon...ever!

A young visitor poses beside a white dragon exhibit made out of chocolate at the newly-opened Choc Choco Chocolate Museum, where nearly 50 tonnes of the confection was used in the creation of its displays, in Beijing yesterday.

— AFP



← Celebrating history

The head of the ship burns after members of the Up Helly Aa 'Jarl Squad' had thrown torches to set fire to their Viking galley longship, in Lerwick, Shetland Islands on Tuesday during the Up Helly Aa festival. Up Helly Aa celebrates the influence of the Scandinavian Vikings in the Shetland Islands and culminates with up to 1,000 'guizers' (men in costume) throwing flaming torches into their Viking longboat and setting it alight later in the evening.

— AFP

→ Hibernation over!

A participant dressed up as a 'Hartz' (bear) parades with bellringers, known as "Joaldunak" in Basque language, who march with big cowbells hanging on their backs during the traditional carnival of Ituren, in the northern Spanish province of Navarre on Monday. Locals from the neighbouring villages of Ituren and Zubieta dress up and participate in a pilgrimage through both villages in this annual three-day festival, revolving mainly around agriculture and sheep herding.

— AFP



Walk through a matryoshka

This photo taken on Monday shows a view of the starry sky in Tongjiang City, Heilongjiang Province. Heilongjiang Province has entered the golden period for winter starry sky observation. With auroras occasionally making an appearance, the brilliant starry sky and the icy landscape together unfold a serene and breathtaking picture.

— Xinhua



Toffee horse

A craftsman makes a horse-themed sugar painting in Tengzhou, Shandong Province, on Sunday. With the Year of the Horse approaching, a wide range of horse-themed cultural products, from museum souvenirs to traditional crafts, are gaining popularity in Shandong Province.

— Xinhua