

Govt proposes bill on Committee for Safeguarding National Security

Tony Wong

The local government announced yesterday that it has finished drafting a bill regulating the operation of the Macau Special Administrative Region's (MSAR) Committee for Safeguarding National Security, the organisational structure and operation of which are currently governed by an administrative regulation.

Government-drafted bills must be passed by the legislature to become law, while government-drafted administrative regulations, aka by-laws, do not require the legislature's approval.

The government said yesterday that the bill proposes to list various new statutory functions and powers of the committee, which an administrative regulation cannot govern and must be regulated by a law.

Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak, who is also the spokesman for the government's top advisory Executive Council, made the announcement during a press conference at Government Headquarters yesterday.

The bill will be submitted to the



Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak (right) and his chief-of-cabinet Chang Cheong address yesterday's Executive Council press conference at Government Headquarters. — Photo: Tony Wong

Legislative Assembly (AL) in due course for debate, review and vote. The government proposes that the bill, if passed by lawmakers in its final reading, will take legal effect on the day after its promulgation in the Official Gazette (BO).

The MSAR government set up its Committee for Safeguarding National Security in 2018 through

an administrative regulation, which is tasked with various duties and functions such as coordinating the government's various tasks concerning the safeguarding of the nation's sovereignty, security and development interests; studying and evaluating the situation in Macau concerning national security and the city's social stability; formulating

local policies on the safeguarding of national security; and promoting work on improving the local legal system on safeguarding national security.

The Committee for Safeguarding National Security is chaired by the MSAR's chief executive, with the secretary for security as its vice-chairman.

The committee has an office tasked with providing administrative

support to the committee. The office is headed by the secretary for security.

Since its establishment in 2018, the committee's administrative regulation was amended in 2021 adding the posts of a national security affairs adviser and three national security technical advisers appointed by the central government to the committee.

The national security affairs adviser, according to the administrative regulation's current version, is tasked with supervising, guiding, coordinating, and supporting the MSAR in safeguarding national security, while the three national security technical advisers are tasked with assisting the national security affairs adviser and advising on matters pertaining to the duties and functions of the office of the committee.

The post of the National Security Affairs Adviser is held by the director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the MSAR, while the three National Security Technical Adviser positions are filled by other officials from the Liaison Office

Continued on p.6



A local opera performance is staged aboard a high-speed train in Anhui Province yesterday. China ushered in its largest annual population migration yesterday, 15 days ahead of the 2026 Spring Festival, also known as the Chinese New Year (CNY). — Xinhua

Hamas says ready to hand over Gaza admin to national committee



GAZA—Hamas said yesterday that it has completed preparations to hand over its governmental and administrative assets to the Gaza national committee, which is expected to administer the Gaza Strip once it enters the territory through the Rafah border crossing.

Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said the handover will begin immediately upon the committee's arrival in Gaza and will be conducted transparently and comprehensively across all sectors.

He said a high-level body has been formed to oversee the process, including representatives

of Palestinian factions, tribal leaders, civil society figures, and international organizations.

Qassem urged all parties to facilitate the committee's work, saying it is essential for Gaza's recovery after what he described as the "catastrophe" caused by two years of Israeli war.

A member of the National Committee for the Administration of the Gaza Strip said, however, that technical problems have so far prevented committee members from entering the enclave through the Rafah crossing. Aed Yaghi, speaking at a news conference, said the committee hopes to arrive

within the next few days but did not elaborate on the obstacles.

Another committee member, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the body does not yet have a headquarters or an operating budget. He said a building or plot of land in Gaza City may be rented to begin work and that no funding has yet been received.

The committee plans to hold meetings with Palestinian factions and government officials upon its arrival to arrange the handover of ministries and government offices so they can resume operations, the member said. — (More on p.10)

— Xinhua

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The Macau Post Daily

Li Qiang urges efforts to boost development, improve people's well-being

Premier Li Qiang stressed yesterday the need to advance development, improve people's well-being and boost growth momentum in a more solid and effective way.

— Story on p. 7

N Ireland university drops use of ex-US senator's name over Epstein links

A top university in Northern Ireland said yesterday it was dropping former US senator George Mitchell's name from one of its institutes because of his links with the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

— Story on p. 11

Portugal pledges US\$2.9 billion for deadly storm recovery as rains persist

Prime Minister Luis Montenegro on Sunday pledged 2.5 billion euros (US\$2.9 billion) to support recovery efforts after Storm Kristin swept across Portugal last month, killing five people and causing widespread damage. — Story on p. 12

Macau, Hengqin jointly release consumer protection cooperation results

Khalel Vallo

The Macau Consumer Council (CC) announced in a statement on Friday that the Macau and Hengqin consumer protection authorities jointly released the latest outcomes of their collaborative efforts, highlighting new progress in cross-border consumer rights protection under the “Macau + Hengqin” strategic positioning.

According to the statement, a joint meeting was held in the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, bringing together representatives from both sides to present cooperation achievements, discuss rule alignment in consumer protection, and explore innovative cross-border collaboration models.

The event was attended by CC President Leong Pek San; Peng Jiuru, deputy director of the Commerce and Business Services Bureau of the Cooperation Zone; and Lin Shennan, secretary-general of the zone's Consumer Association, among others, the statement noted.

The statement quoted Leong as saying that the meeting demonstrated the progress of Macau-Hengqin cooperation in consumer protection and helped build a new framework for consumer safeguards in both places. She said that the CC will strengthen coordination with its Hengqin counterpart to deepen synergy and jointly create a safe, reliable and convenient cross-border consumption environment.

Meanwhile, Peng said that both sides will work together to improve the cross-border consumer rights protection linkage mechanism, promote efficient connection and collaborative handling of consumer complaints, and effectively enhance confidence and satisfaction in cross-border consumption, the statement added.

During the meeting, both sides cited the comparative testing of thermal underwear conducted jointly by Macau and Hengqin as an example to introduce collaborative product testing, providing practical references for consumer purchasing decisions, the statement said.

Meanwhile, on the same day, the official website of the In-Depth Cooperation Zone's Consumer Association was officially launched, the statement noted, adding that it is interconnected with information from the CC, enabling information sharing on certified shops, consumer prices, and consumer protection laws and regulations between Macau and Hengqin.

The launch marked concrete progress in cooperation projects, the statement said, promoting the integration of people's livelihoods and advancing the goal of “dual-city integration”. Following the release, representatives from both consumer protection authorities also took part in thematic discussions focusing on cross-border consumption issues, jointly exploring new approaches towards consumer rights protection, the statement added. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Macau Consumer Council (CC) on Friday shows president, Leong Pek San, delivering a speech during a joint meeting at the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

Police nab smuggler with 4.5 kg of heroin worth 6.38 million patacas

Ada Lei

The Judiciary Police (PJ) apprehended a man from the Chinese mainland on Saturday for smuggling 4.559 kilograms of heroin worth 6.38 million patacas, PJ spokesman Cheong Siu Keong said during a special press conference yesterday.

Cheong identified the suspect as a 20-year-old male surnamed Kang.

According to Cheong, based on a tip-off, the Judiciary Police (PJ) identified Kang as a drug-smuggling suspect on a flight from a foreign country to Macau on Saturday. Officers from the Macau Customs Service (SA) and the Public Security Police (PSP) apprehended Kang when he was retrieving his suitcase.

The officers found the suitcase unusually heavy after removing all his personal items and realised that the fabric of its side compartments had been unfastened, creating hidden spaces that concealed two bags coated with pungent chilli oil and coffee powder, suspected to mask the drug's scent to deceive sniffer dogs. The officers seized the two bags containing a total of 4.559 kg of a pale powdery substance, which



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the hooded drug-trafficking suspect to a PJ van outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday. — Photo: Ada Lei

was later confirmed to be heroin, with an estimated street value of 6.38 million patacas.

Cheong noted that Kang had been recruited by a drug trafficking syndicate and was promised a “remuneration” of 5,000 yuan to smuggle drugs from overseas to Macau.

Kang was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, facing a drug-trafficking charge.

Cheong reaffirmed that drug trafficking is a serious criminal offence, punishable by up to 15 years in prison. Cheong urged the public to remain vigilant and refrain from accepting requests to carry unknown items to Macau. Additionally, the Judiciary Police (PJ) will continue to strengthen drug enforcement efforts at all border checkpoints to prevent the influx of drugs, Cheong said. ■

Police nab mainlander for cheating 3 currency exchange dealers out of 223,300 yuan with fake chips

Ada Lei

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested a man from the Chinese mainland on Sunday for cheating three illegal currency exchange dealers out of 223,300 yuan (260,000 patacas) using counterfeit gambling chips, PJ spokesman Cheong Kim Fong said during a special press conference yesterday.

Cheong identified the suspect as a 38-year-old male surnamed Liu who claimed to be jobless. The victims are three middle-aged men from the Chinese mainland who engaged in illegal currency exchange activities in Macau.

According to Cheong, the Judiciary Police (PJ) received a report from the casino security and a referral from the Public Security Police (PSP) on Sunday about two fraud cases involving counterfeit casino chips.

Cheong noted that the first victim engaged in an illegal currency exchange deal with a man, who was still at large at the time of the press conference, in a hotel guestroom at an integrated resort in Cotai early Sunday morning. The victim transferred 133,500 yuan to the man's designated account in exchange for chips worth HK\$140,000. After receiving the transfer, the man left the scene and quickly exited Macau. The victim later noticed something was amiss with the chips, and after consulting with casino staff, they

were confirmed to be counterfeit. Realising that he had been scammed, the victim reported the case to the casino security department.

Cheong said that the second victim met Liu at the same casino on Saturday and offered a currency exchange deal. Early Sunday morning, Liu contacted the second victim, claiming he could exchange HK\$100,000 in chips for 89,800 yuan. The second victim, along with the third victim, went to the hotel's entrance to complete the exchange with Liu. They transferred a total of 89,800 yuan to Liu's account and received 10 chips valued at HK\$10,000 each. The second victim found the chips suspicious, leading

to a noisy row that alerted hotel security and the Public Security Police (PSP).

Cheong added that during the dispute, Liu buried the 10 counterfeit chips in a flowerbed near the hotel. The police later recovered all the counterfeit chips and seized a smartphone from Liu.

Cheong noted that the bogus chips were similar in size and weight to genuine chips, making them difficult to discern. However, there were slight differences in colour and the laser sticker. Additionally, they did not contain a chip inside.

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



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

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MACAU POST

Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY PERIODS.

FORCE 3 TO 4 EAST TO NORTHEASTERLY WINDS, OCCASIONALLY FORCE 5. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 55% AND 90%.



14°C~20°C

Source: SMG

Large-scale events reshape city life, spark mixed reactions among locals: vox pop

Khalel Vallo

As concerts, sports competitions and festivals have become common in Macau, locals hold mixed views on whether large-scale events bring benefits or inconvenience.

The *Post* spoke to five residents yesterday, who expressed rather different views on how such events affect daily life, the economy, and who ultimately benefits the most.

Susana, 24, said the impact of large-scale events largely depends on the location and organisation. Recalling concerts held near the Macau Olympic Sports Centre Stadium in Taipa, she described them as “really disturbing,” particularly for families with different work schedules. While she acknowledged that these events attract tourists and are profitable, she stressed that poor planning can create chaos and “bring negative effects to Macau”. On the economic front, Susana noted that Macau has long relied on the gambling industry, and while diversification towards more non-gaming entertainment is understandable after COVID-19,

she questioned its long-term sustainability given the city’s size. Still, she believes both locals and tourists can benefit through increased job opportunities and cultural exposure, even though crowding inevitably affects daily life in a city as small as Macau.

John, 20, focused more on practical inconvenience. He said concerts often lead to traffic jams and overcrowded integrated resort restaurants, with long waiting times. Although John agreed that large events can help the economy, he felt the government should ensure visitors spend more time and money in the city. During major events, he deliberately avoids dining in the city’s integrated resorts to dodge congestion.

Meanwhile, 21-year-old Omar took a more positive view. He said that “the growing presence of international acts and major events is obvious”, adding he believed that the benefits outweigh the inconvenience. In his view, Macau, as a tourism- and gambling-centric city, already experiences heavy



This handout image downloaded from the official Macau Grand Prix (MGP) website yesterday shows Formula 4 cars in action during the 72nd MGP, one of Macau’s large-scale annual events, on November 17 last year.

visitor flows regardless of events. He said large-scale events give tourists another reason to visit, especially when held in Cotai’s integrated resort district, where spending on accommodation, dining and shopping extends economic benefits beyond a single day. Omar insisted that locals benefit in a broader sense, as such events raising Macau’s global profile and allowing residents to enjoy

international exposure without having to travel abroad. Aside from the Macau Grand Prix (MGP), he said, his daily routine is largely unaffected.

Moreover, Ela, 23, shared a similar sentiment, saying large-scale events do not inconvenience her because she lives far from typical venues. However, Ela said she believes these events help the economy, particularly by attracting international visitors, but noted that locals mainly benefit only if they are genuinely interested in the events, while tourists tend to be more enthusiastic overall.

Another interviewee, 23-year-

old Kian viewed the increase in large-scale events as a positive step for Macau’s long-term development. He said hosting more events is “healthy for Macau” as it helps reduce the city’s heavy reliance on the gambling industry. In terms of inconvenience, Kian pointed to the Macau Grand Prix as the main disruption, noting that road closures at that time often lead to traffic congestion. Economically, he said, large events help attract tourists, who in turn spend money in restaurants, hotels and shops. Kian also said he believes locals benefit more overall, as such events make the city “livelier” and provide residents with more recreational options. However, he added, his daily routine can be affected during major events such as the Macau Grand Prix, as he needs to leave home earlier to avoid traffic delays.

The vox pop suggests that while large-scale events are widely seen as an economic boost and a step towards economic diversification, their impact on daily life varies by location, planning and personal lifestyle. For some residents, congestion and disruption remain concerns, while others see such events as a natural part of Macau’s evolution into a more diverse international city. ■

Iao Hon stall owners say IAM optimisation project needs improvements

Armindo Neves

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) announced in a statement on Friday that three of the four phases of its Iao Hon vendors’ stall optimisation project have been completed.

According to the statement, the project aims to revitalise the Iao Hon vendor area by comprehensively upgrading its stall facilities, enhancing fire safety measures, improving electrical safety, increasing recreational space, and enhancing the business environment.

The project began on September 3 last year.

The statement said that all 29 vendor stalls in the area have meanwhile returned to their original locations. The project’s fourth phase primarily involves building a small leisure area, which will not affect the daily operations of the vendors’ area, the statement said.

The *Post* interviewed several stall owners about the optimisation yesterday.

The owner of a joss paper* stall expressed dissatisfaction with the optimisation project. She said the main issues are the narrow space of her stall, measuring just 2 x 2 x 2.65 metres, which makes it difficult for her to sit down and to display her goods, and the new design’s inability to effectively provide shade or shelter from rain, leading to goods being easily discoloured by exposure to sunshine and getting wet when it rains. She also mentioned that, especially compared to more spacious stalls such as those in the Red Market area, her new stall’s space is too narrow, negatively impacting both operations and customer attraction. Although safety features such as fire sprinklers have been added, the overall practicality of the stall remains inadequate, she said.

Another joss paper stall owner complained that her new stall space has become narrower after relocation, which has negatively

impacted her business and the display of her goods. Although safety features such as fire sprinklers have been added and the stall appears somewhat “fresher” in design, the most critical issue is the severe lack of effective sun and rain protection, she said.

She said that installing a larger, more effective awning was currently the most urgent need to cope with the upcoming rainy season and typhoons.

Choi, who owns a nearby stall still being prepared for reopening, interrupted his work to talk to the *Post* about several unmet basic needs to improve the new stall arrangements.

Choi said that the most pressing issue is the vulnerability of goods being drenched by rain, leading to potential commercial losses. He also strongly called for the addition of a public toilet, as stall operators currently must endure long hours without any such facilities nearby and walk to “far-away” locations to access a toilet.

Furthermore, Choi requested the installation of a water tap in the area to facilitate water access, eliminating the inconvenience of frequently returning home to get water. ■

*Joss paper is a type of paper used in Chinese and other Asian cultures, typically burned as an offering to deities or deceased ancestors in various rituals. Joss paper is often made to resemble money or other valuable items and is used in religious practices to symbolise respect and remembrance. — Poe



Pedestrians walk past vendor stalls, which are in the final phase of an optimisation project by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM), in Iao Hon district yesterday. — Photo: Armindo Neves

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Notice

To uphold the operational order and reputation of the Islamic Association of Macau (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Association’), in accordance with the Association’s Statutes and the relevant laws of the Macau Special Administrative Region, the Association hereby issues the following notice:

It is notified that the Extraordinary Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Islamic Association of Macau, which was held on 25th January 2026, has discussed and deliberated on the following agenda, with immediate effect until further notice:

The membership, position and responsibilities of the following members are suspended with immediate effect. This suspension will be in force until further notice.

- Bin Amir Abdul Halek Junas (馬學智), former Secretary of the Director Board
- Osman Carim, former Board Member of the Director Board
- Binti Junas Bin Amir Ahmad Halimah (馬希雯), former President of the Supervisory Board

The Association hereby **clarify again** that the above three persons do not represent the Association and their acts and announcements, performed under their name or under the Association’s name, made before and after 25th January 2026 do not represent the Association, and not the responsibility of the Association.

For matters concerning membership status or authorisation of duties, please refer to official written responses bearing the Association’s stamp and signature of the President or Vice-President. All external documents issued by the Association shall only be valid upon signature by the President or Vice-President and affixation of the Association’s stamp (as shown in this notice).

(Association contact details: aisha@iam.org.mo; request for minutes requires valid identification and a written application with valid reason and subject to prior approval from the Board of Directors of the Association)


AHMAD DIN KHAN
President of the Board of Directors of the Islamic Association of Macau


AISHA DAD
Vice-President of Board of Directors of the Islamic Association of Macau
25th January 2026



ABOUT The Young Post

The Macau Post Daily's The Young Post will be published every Monday to present and discuss topical issues that may interest not only the younger but also all the other generations.

From LAB to LIFE: Macau Teenagers Develop Protein- Based Flame Retardant Coating

Analysis by iGEM team of Pui Ching Middle School

Pui Ching–Macau, the city's first high-school iGEM team, has explored an eco-friendly, safe, and sustainable biological flame-retardant coating.

Their work has been published in the international journal *Synthetic and Systems Biotechnology* and earned them a Gold Medal at the International Genetically Engineered Machine (iGEM) Competition.*

A flame can only form when three essential elements are present: fuel, an oxidizer, and heat. Under normal conditions, oxygen in the air serves as the oxidizer. When a fuel is exposed to heat above its ignition temperature while oxygen is available, combustion—and therefore fire—begins.

Halogen-containing compounds are among the most widely used types of flame retardants. However, they have been shown to pose risks to both human health and the environment. These flame retardants can act as potential mutagens and, more critically, have been linked to tumour formation and neurodevelopmental disorders.

Biomacromolecules such as DNA and proteins have been explored as alternative flame retardants because they are biodegradable and non-toxic. Owing to their high phosphorus and nitrogen content, certain biomacromolecules can markedly reduce flammability and help suppress combustion. When materials are coated with phosphate-containing compounds and exposed to fire, they promote char formation, which insulates the underlying material from oxygen. Nitrogen-rich compounds, on the other hand, decompose upon heating to release ammonia and other gases that react with oxygen to form water and nitrogen gas – the latter serving as an inert barrier that limits oxygen availability.

According to the Pui Ching–Macau team, their study introduces a protein-based alternative flame retardant that functions by limiting oxygen availability and thereby preventing combustion. They selected two proteins for their flame-retardant properties: Serine/arginine-rich splicing factor 1 (SRSF1), an SR protein with a high nitrogen content, and α -casein, which is expected to contain a high level of phosphorus.

To ensure the coating adheres effectively to a variety of surfaces, the team incorporated strong adhesive protein domains – specifically mussel foot protein-5 (mfp-5) or a cellulose-binding domain (CBD) – by fusing them to the flame-retardant proteins, enhancing the overall performance of the alternative fire retardants (FRs).

They began by engineering *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) to biosynthesize the target proteins using synthetic biology methods. Subsequent experiments were carried out to validate the flame-retardant efficiency and to explore the potential application range of these protein-based FRs.

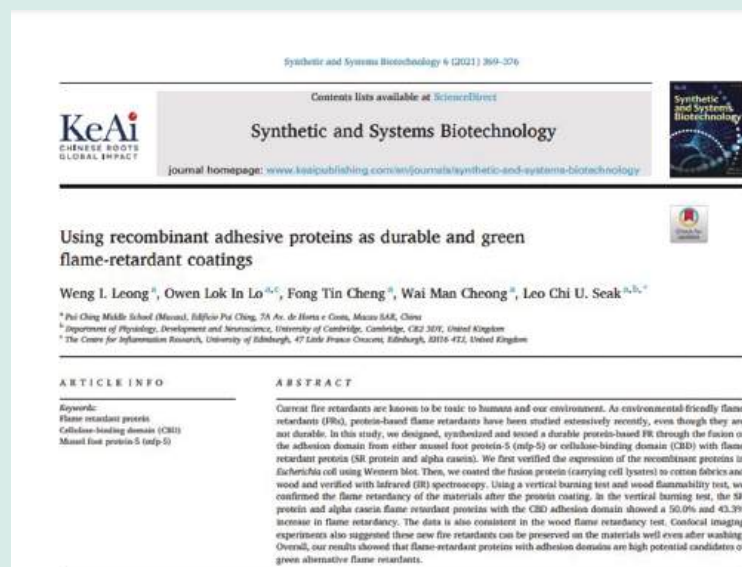
The findings indicate that the alternative FRs perform exceptionally well, demonstrating strong flame-retardant properties along with robust adhesion. To evaluate how these FR proteins function in practical applications, the team carried out flammability tests following the BS476-4:1970 standard, as well as vertical burn testing in accordance with ASTM D6413. Their results show that FR proteins fused with CBD enhanced flame-retardant performance by 50 percent without producing any toxic by-products, effectively preventing flare-ups and offering an environmentally friendly solution.

This innovation not only fills a market gap for environmentally friendly fire-resistant materials in Macau but also offers a sustainable, green alternative for the wider flame-retardant coatings industry. Free of hazardous chemicals and exhibiting outstanding adhesive stability, it shows strong potential for broad adoption in the future. With continued development, it could gradually replace traditional fire-retardant coatings, reducing risks to human health and the environment while guiding the industry toward a more sustainable path.

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Full text in English recently provided to the *Post* by Winston Wong – iGEM team of Pui Ching Middle School. Link to the study: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/355970140/Using_recombinant_adhesive_proteins_as_durable_and_green_flame-retardant_coatings/fulltext/61969ddd3068c54fa5fd5321/Using-recombinant-adhesive-proteins-as-durable-and-green-flame-retardant-coatings.pdf?origin=scientificContributions

* iGEM is an international not-for-profit organisation dedicated to advancing the field of synthetic biology and building the global synthetic biology workforce through education and competition, while cultivating an open, collaborative and cooperative community that strives to find solutions for a healthier, more resilient and sustainable world.



Screenshots of the study taken yesterday

W.I. Leong et al.

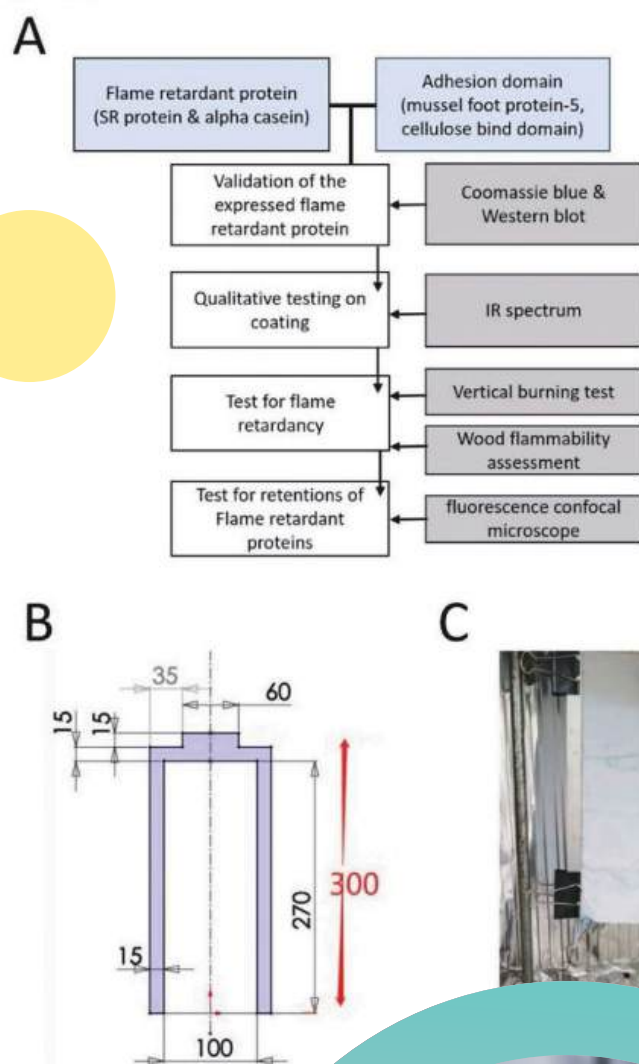


Photo of beakers and lab equipment courtesy of Unsplash

280th Distinguished Artist Lecture to be held at MUST

Rui Pastorin

The 280th Distinguished Artist Lecture “Architecture for Humanity” and “Innovative Offsite Systems for Architecture” are slated to be held on Thursday at the private Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST).

The upcoming three-hour lecture, organised by MUST’s Faculty of Humanities and Arts and CAC – Círculo dos Amigos da Cultura de Macau (Circle of the Friends of Macau’s Culture), will feature Politecnico di Milano professor and researcher Marco Imperadori, whose work centres on high-energy efficiency buildings, Structure/Envelope construction systems, and sustainability, as keynote speaker.

In a CAC statement provided on Saturday, it was noted that Imperadori is the Rector’s delegate for the Far East and represents Politecnico di Milano (Polimi) in Asia. He has published research on architectural innovation, sustainability, and energy conservation, according to the statement.

He has lectured globally and was visiting professor at the University of Saint Joseph (USJ) in Macau from 2015 to 2023, the statement said.

The upcoming lecture will be divided into two parts. According to the statement, the first will feature experiences by Imperadori and his team “VeluxLab” at the Department of Architecture, Built Environment, and Construction Engineering Department of Politecnico di Milano University, which is “dedicated to very difficult situations of post



This photo recently provided by CAC - Círculo dos Amigos da Cultura de Macau shows Politecnico di Milano professor and researcher Marco Imperadori.

disaster, emergency or situation of difficulty for social or economic reasons”.

The second part of the lecture, meanwhile, will present innovative systems that Imperadori has designed with various companies that have “created industrial follow up”, with prototypes used for social or cultural public purposes in different sites also to be presented.

The lecture will be held at Room 214, Block N, from 3:30 p.m. through 6:30 p.m. One can participate by registering online at <https://forms.gle/zXHj4CLHP8FTp48A>. One can also find more details by visiting CAC’s Facebook page on <https://www.facebook.com/CACMacau/>. ■

MGTO promotes Macau during Fitur in Spain

Rui Pastorin

The Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) recently promoted Macau in Spain, setting up the “Macau Pavilion” during the five-day tourism trade fair Fitur (Feria Internacional de Turismo) in Madrid.

Joining Fitur, one of the largest international tourism fairs in the world that was held from January 21 to 25, were MGTO Deputy Director Cheng Wai Tong and a delegation comprising Macau’s travel trade and integrated resort operator MGM, according to an MGTO statement last week.

At the Macau Pavilion, the statement said, Macau’s “tourism +” offerings and culture were showcased, while Macanese* delicacies and workshops related to Macau’s intangible cultural heritage were held. Also invited to visit the pavilion were Chinese Ambassador to Spain and Andorra, Yao Jing, and Minister-Counsellor of the Chinese Embassy in Spain, He Yong.

MGTO also showcased Macau’s “destination appeal, latest development, travel stimulation programme and other dimensions” during a destination presentation session on January 22 and on the following day, MGTO

and the China Pavilion partnered for the first time for a tourism presentation on Macau and an activity featuring Macanese delicacies.

Highlighting upcoming plans, MGTO said that it will be joining this month’s “os Especialistas” (“the Specialists”) and Lisbon Travel Market (BTL) in Portugal, as well as the world’s leading travel trade fair ITB Berlin. A promotional event for travel trade and media will also be organised in London in March.

The statement highlighted that visitor arrivals from Spain, Portugal and other parts of Europe to Macau in 2025 saw “a double-digit growth” compared to corresponding figures in 2024. APAVT** also commended Macau as the “Preferred Destination 2026”, marking its fourth designation. ■

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

*** Portuguese Association and Travel and Tourism Agencies*



Fairgoers explore the offerings at the Macao Pavilion during Fitur in the Spanish capital Madrid during its international tourism fair, which was held from January 21 through 25. – Photo: Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO)



rota das letras • 萬文不朽 • the script road
FESTIVAL LITERÁRIO DE MACAU • 澳門文學節 • MACAU LITERARY FESTIVAL

PRESS RELEASE

MACAU LITERARY FESTIVAL CELEBRATES ITS 15TH EDITION FROM 5 TO 15 MARCH 2026

The event will feature literature, cinema, theatre, music and visual arts, and will return to Casa Garden.

Macau, 2 February 2026 – The 15th edition of the Macau Literary Festival – The Script Road will take place from 5 to 15 March 2026, once again establishing itself as a key meeting point between Eastern and Western cultures, languages and artistic expressions. Under the motto of celebration and intercultural dialogue, the festival will be staged mainly at the historic Casa Garden, extending to various theatres in the city with a rich programme that includes cinema, theatre, music and visual arts.

The 15th anniversary edition will pay special tribute to Portuguese poet Camilo Pessanha on the centenary of his death. His deep connection to Macau and his literary legacy will be revisited through various initiatives, highlighting the city’s role as a bridge between worlds. António Carlos Cortez, Carlos Morais José and Christopher Chu are some of the authors involved in the celebration.

The opening of the festival, on 5 March, will be marked by the inauguration of the exhibition ‘**Human Territories: Photography, Belonging and Memory**’, which brings together the distinctive perspectives of Portuguese photographer **Alfredo Cunha** and Chinese photographer **Liu Zheng**. The exhibition explores identities and intersecting narratives and will be accompanied by the launch of two photography books.

This edition will see a constellation of international and local authors in attendance. Among the confirmed names are:

- **Amitav Ghosh**, a leading figure in world literature and author of a trilogy of novels centred on the time and space of the Opium Wars;
- **Hernán Díaz**, the most recent winner of the Pulitzer Prize;
- **Lawrence Osborne** and **Mike Goodridge**, both associated with the novel and film adaptation of *Ballad of Small Players*, a film shot in Macau and released in 2025;
- The renowned biographer **Adam Sisman**;
- The French-Swiss novelist of Korean origin **Elisa Shua Dusapin**;
- Acclaimed travel cartoonist **Guy Delisle**;
- Poet and spoken word artist **Carlos Andrés Gomez**;

Chinese-language literature will also be well represented, including:

- **Bi Feiyu**, one of the biggest names of his generation, winner of the Lu Xun Prize and the Man Asia Literary Prize for his novel *Three Sisters*;
- **Xiao Bai**, a journalist and thriller master, also winner of the Lu Xun Prize;
- **Gu Shi**, one of the leading voices of the new generation of Chinese science fiction, winner of the Nebula and Locus Awards;
- **Lu Jian**, poet of the human condition, winner of the Zhang Qian Poetry Prize;
- **Xie Youshun**, one of the most influential voices in the analysis of contemporary Chinese literature, winner of the Feng Um Literary Criticism Prize.

From the Portuguese-speaking world, journalists **João Miguel Tavares** and **Miguel Carvalho** will be present. They recently published investigative works on former Prime Minister José Sócrates and the right-wing Chega Party, respectively.

Two other Portuguese journalists, **Filipa Queiroz** and **Andreia Sofia da Silva**, will be returning to Macau, the former to screen the documentary *Salatinas*, about a historic case involving a threat to architectural heritage in Coimbra, and the latter to present the book *Lápis Vermelho*, about press censorship in Macau during the Portuguese 20th century old regime era.

The local literary scene will be well represented by authors such as **Yao Feng**, **Rai Matsu**, **Zita Si Tou Chi U**, **Cheung Wai Man**, **Ka Lo**, **Kam Um Loi**, **Nick Groom**, **Konstantin Bessmertny** and **Veiga Jardim**. The work of the recently deceased Macanese architect José Maneiras will be remembered by **Rui Leão**, **Maria José de Freitas** and other local authors.

In addition to the traditional book launch sessions and discussions on different topics, the festival will offer a multidisciplinary programme, ranging from cinema to theatre and music.

Portuguese cinema will be represented by director **Tiago Guedes** and two of his films: *A Herdade* and *Restos do Vento*.

Theatre will also feature at The Script Road, with the performance of *À Primeira Vista*, directed by Tiago Guedes, which will mark the return to Macau of actress **Margarida Vila-Nova**.

Originally titled *Prima Facie*, the play is the work of Australian playwright Suzie Miller and has already been staged in London, New York, and around 30 other cities worldwide, including Shanghai and Hong Kong.

Musically, the highlight of The Script Road will be the performance by **Rodrigo Leão** at the Macau Cultural Centre on the evening of 11 March.

Additional names to this initial guest list will be announced shortly.

The 15th Macau Literary Festival is organised with the support of the Macau Government, diplomatic representations, local associations, companies – with special emphasis on the hotel sector – and the media. Casa Garden, headquarters of the Orient Foundation, will once again serve as the base for The Script Road. This network of partnerships reflects the collective commitment to cultural life and exchange that defines Macau.

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About the Macau Literary Festival:

The Macau Literary Festival is an annual event that celebrates the written word and the arts, promoting dialogue between writers, artists and audiences from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It has become an essential part of Macau’s cultural calendar, highlighting the region’s unique role as a meeting point between East and West. Launched in January 2012, it will hold its 15th edition in 2026.

Customs Service seizes 40 kg of silver granules worth 1.3 million patacas

Armindo Neves

Macau Customs Service announced in a statement on Sunday that its officers seized 40 kilograms of silver granules* worth around 1.3 million patacas at the local checkpoint of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) on Thursday.

According to the statement, on that day, customs officers at the checkpoint's arrivals hall noticed a local female acting suspiciously. A follow-up inspection revealed 40 kilograms of silver granules in her hand luggage, which she was attempting to smuggle into Macau. The statement said that the silver granules have an estimated market value of around 1.3 million patacas.

According to Macau's External Trade Law, the woman faces a maximum fine of 100,000 patacas, while the seized contraband has been confiscated. ■

* Silver granules are high-



This undated handout photo provided by Macau Customs Service on Sunday shows 40 kilograms of silver granules seized by its officers at the local checkpoint of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge on Thursday.

purity, irregularly shaped grains of metallic silver; valued for their high reactivity due to their significant surface area, making them ideal for chemical processing, melting, and jewellery casting. - DeepSeek



Passengers queue to pass through electronic ticket gates at Hankou Railway Station in Wuhan, capital of Hubei Province, yesterday. China ushered in its largest annual population migration yesterday, 15 days ahead of the 2026 Spring Festival, also known as the Chinese New Year (CNY). A total of 9.5 billion passenger trips are expected during this year's travel rush period that will end on March 13, which would be a historic high. - Xinhua

Govt proposes bill on Committee for Safeguarding National Security

Continued from p.1

During yesterday's press conference, Wong noted that under the guidance of the central authorities' holistic approach to national security, the MSAR government set up its Committee for Safeguarding National Security in 2018 tasked with assisting the chief executive in policymaking for matters concerning the safeguarding of national security.

The central authorities' holistic approach to national security lists various non-traditional threats to national security that the country is facing, in addition to the traditional ones.

Wong underlined that with the aim of further improving Macau's legal system for safeguarding national security and strengthening the local government's top-level structure concerning the city's institutional system for safeguarding national security, it is necessary to more comprehensively define and regulate the functions and powers, organisational structure, and operation of the MSAR's Committee for Safeguarding National Security through a law, as part of the local government's commitment to firmly safeguarding the nation's sovereignty, security and development interests and building a more solid barrier for national security.

Wong noted that the bill proposes to establish a law to comprehensively define and regulate the nature, duties, and powers of the Committee for Safeguarding National Security, as well as the composition including the committee's chairman, national security affairs adviser, and national security technical advisers, as well as the administrative unit under the committee to be tasked with performing the committee's daily functioning and execution of tasks.

Wong underlined that the future law will list various new statutory functions and powers of the committee, which an administrative regulation cannot govern and must be regulated by a law.

Since the Chief Executive Election Law and the Legislative Assembly Election Law were amended in 2024, the MSAR's Committee for Safeguarding National Security has also been tasked with assessing whether chief executive election candidates uphold the MSAR Basic Law and bear allegiance to the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the MSAR, as well as assessing whether legislative election candidates uphold the MSAR Basic Law and bear allegiance to the MSAR. However, these new duties are currently not formally listed in the current administrative regulation governing the committee's operation.

Wong said yesterday that the bill proposes to formally list the committee's new duties concerning its assessments of the qualifications of chief executive election candidates and legislative election candidates.

Wong noted that the future law will replace the current administrative regulation governing the committee.

Currently, it is the Judiciary Police (PJ) who provide administrative, financial and technical support to the operation of the committee and the office under the committee.

Wong said yesterday that the bill proposes that the composition of the Committee for Safeguarding National Security will include a standing secretariat to be tasked with the committee's daily operations and functioning. He said that the standing secretariat will replace the current office operated under the committee. He said that the operation of the standing secretariat will be equipped with financial resources and government staff, in which case the committee's operation will no longer need to be supported by the Judiciary Police.

Wong said that the proposed establishment of a standing secretariat under the committee will be of the same practice as its counterparts in the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong. ■

First amphibian footprints from Jurassic of Asia discovered in Beijing

BEIJING – A China-led study has reported the discovery of amphibian track fossils in Middle Jurassic strata in Beijing, the first such record in Asia. The research has been published online in the journal *Ichnos*.

According to experts, the find not only fills a gap in the study of Jurassic amphibian trace fossils across Asia, but also provides key evidence for understanding the paleogeography, paleoecology, and biodiversity of northern China about 160 million years ago.

The fossils consist of two footprints preserved on a single slab. They were found on a roadside slope in Longquan town,

Mentougou district in Beijing, forming a linked fore- and hind-foot pair, said Xing Lida, a dinosaur specialist and associate professor at the School of Earth Sciences and Resources, China University of Geosciences (Beijing).

Based on the relative size, spacing, and roughly aligned orientation of the two impressions, researchers determined that they were likely made by the same animal in the course of continuous movement.

One of the impressions, well-preserved, was identified as the left front footprint of a small animal, displaying a clear, fan-shaped morphology with four slender,

pointed toes. The entire palm print measures only 1.5 cm in length and 1.3 cm in width.

To extract the maximum amount of information from these tiny impressions, the researchers employed modern digital techniques. They used photogrammetric 3D modeling to generate a high-precision 3D digital model, visually revealing the subtlest surface features of the impressions and providing a solid data foundation for morphological analysis.

Through detailed morphological comparisons and quantitative skeletal-track correlation analysis, the researchers concluded that the

trackmaker most likely belonged to the salamander suborder.

"This is the first time that amphibian track fossils have been discovered and scientifically described in Jurassic strata in China and across Asia," Xing said. Previously, records of Jurassic vertebrate tracks in the Beijing area were dominated by dinosaurs and turtles, with no amphibian tracks reported.

This discovery indicates that during the deposition of the Middle Jurassic Yaopo Formation, small-sized, land-adapted amphibian groups existed in the lake-swamp environments of the Beijing area. They coexisted with abundant

ferns, ginkgos, and cycads, forming a complex ecosystem.

It is worth noting that this important fossil was first discovered by Ni Jingchen, a Beijing elementary school student and fossil enthusiast, who came across it on a rocky slope in Mentougou while exploring in early 2025.

"This is a vivid example of public participation in paleontological discovery. It reminds us that the profound chapters of Earth's history are sometimes preserved in the subtlest traces of the surrounding rocks, waiting to be discovered and interpreted by those with a keen eye," Xing said.

— Xinhua

Li Qiang urges efforts to boost development, improve people's well-being

JINAN — Premier Li Qiang stressed yesterday the need to advance development, improve people's well-being and boost growth momentum in a more solid and effective way.

Li, who is also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks during an inspection tour of Shandong Province.

Smart manufacturing is the primary focus for driving technological transformation and industrial upgrading, Li said, noting that artificial intelligence technologies should be actively leveraged to comprehensively reshape the entire production and manufacturing chain across its full lifecycle.

He called for efforts to accelerate the research, development and application of green and low-carbon technologies, and to convert industrial waste heat into a stable and clean thermal energy source.

During the tour, Li was briefed on the development of energy infrastructure and nuclear power projects in Shandong. He underscored the importance of coordinating the construction and safe operation of clean energy projects, enhancing technological capabilities and regulatory oversight, and strengthening support for the development of a modern energy system.

Also on the tour, Li chaired a symposium to solicit opinions and suggestions on the draft government

work report and the draft outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development, as well as on the work of the government.

Governments at all levels should leverage their local comparative advantages and actively foster new growth drivers, Li said.

In conjunction with the formulation and implementation of the 15th Five-Year Plan, they should formulate plans for a series of major initiatives and key projects to achieve greater progress in priority areas, the premier noted. These areas include the development of new quality productive forces tailored to local conditions, the improvement of the domestic economic cycle, and the promotion of the employment and income growth of residents. — *Xinhua*



Premier Li Qiang (center), also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, visits the Jier Machine-Tool Group Co. Ltd., in Shandong Province, yesterday. Li paid an inspection visit to Shandong yesterday. — *Xinhua*

China urges US to stop unwarranted interrogations of Chinese enterprise personnel

BEIJING — China urges the United States to stop unwarranted interrogations of personnel from Chinese enterprises, effectively implement the important consensus reached by the two heads of state, and ensure the normal and friendly exchanges between the two peoples, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said yesterday.

Recently, the US law enforcement authorities have repeatedly interrogated and detained personnel from Chinese companies for extended periods before repatriating them, Lin said at a regular news briefing.

Their brutal law enforcement measures have severely infringed on the legitimate rights and interests of the Chinese nationals, soured the atmosphere for the

normal commercial cooperation and people-to-people exchanges between the two countries, and violated the common understandings reached between the two presidents on strengthening economic and trade cooperation in Busan, the Republic of Korea, he said.

“China expresses strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition to these moves,” Lin said, urging the United States to take the Chinese concerns seriously and immediately stop the wrongdoing of its law enforcement authorities.

China will continue to take resolute measures to firmly protect the lawful rights and interests of Chinese nationals, the spokesperson said.

— *Xinhua*

Central authorities approve spatial coordination plan for modern capital metropolitan area

BEIJING — The Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and the State Council have issued approval for the spatial coordination plan for the modern capital metropolitan area (2023-2035), marking a major new step in deepening the coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region.

The capital metropolitan area has been designated as a critical zone for optimizing and safeguarding the capital's core functions, serving as the primary engine for building a world-class city cluster, according to the document made public on Monday.

It also functions as a key area for the inheritance and development of Chinese civilization, a leading zone in regional collaborative

governance, and a pilot area in building a Beautiful China.

The approved plan aims to build a world-class metropolitan area centered on Beijing, establish it as a model zone for Chinese modernization, and provide strong support for the development of a world-class city cluster in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei area.

Under the plan, Hebei's Xiong'an New Area will be developed to high standards and quality, while Beijing Municipal Administrative Center will emerge as a new growth pole for the capital. Meanwhile, Beijing and Tianjin will jointly advance high-quality development, with Tianjin reinforcing its role as a core area for international maritime shipping in north China. — *Xinhua*

China plays leading role in global wetland conservation, restoration: foreign ministry

BEIJING — China is an important participant, contributor, and frontrunner in global wetland conservation and restoration, and its philosophy and practice of green development have been highly recognized and acclaimed by the international community, a foreign ministry spokesperson said in Beijing yesterday.

This year's World Wetlands Day, which falls on February 2, is themed “Wetlands and traditional knowledge: Celebrating cultural heritage.”

“Wetlands, forests and oceans are collectively known as the three major ecosystems of the Earth, and they are vital for human survival and development,” spokesperson Lin Jian told a regular press when asked to comment on China's achievements in wetland conservation.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, China has adhered to

the philosophy that “lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets” and has made historic progress in wetland conservation and restoration, he said.

He noted that China is now home to the largest wetland area in Asia and the fourth largest in the world, and it has the highest number of internationally recognized wetland cities in the world.

As a contracting party to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, China is an important participant, contributor, and frontrunner in global wetland conservation and restoration, Lin said.

Lin noted that China initiated the establishment of the International Mangrove Center, which now has 20 prospective member states, and it has carried out international cooperation on sharing knowledge on mangrove conservation in regions such as Southeast Asia and Africa.

China has also held international workshops on mangrove conservation and restoration to provide policy, technical, and management training for personnel from Global South countries, Lin added.

China has successively been awarded global environmental honors such as the Champions of the Earth Award and UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, he said.

“Protecting wetland resources and addressing climate change remain an arduous task and a shared responsibility of the international community,” Lin said.

China will continue to firmly promote a modernization in which humans and nature can coexist in harmony, firmly support and participate in global ecological governance, and work with all parties to build a community of all life on Earth, he said. — *Xinhua*

Chinese researchers reveal mechanism for anxiety induced by social isolation

BEIJING — A group of Chinese researchers have shown that social isolation triggers “iron accumulation” in specific regions of the brain to induce anxiety, providing inspiration for the development of new interventions for anxiety disorders, according to a study recently published in the journal *Cell Metabolism*.

In daily life, many people have after prolonged periods of being alone, even without any particular incident occurring, often experienced restlessness and anxiety, and even developed a fear of social interaction. This loneliness-induced anxiety and its underlying biological mechanisms have long perplexed the scientific community.

Researchers from South China University of Technology, Zhejiang University and Southern Medical University in Guangdong Province conducted this study by constructing a mouse model that simulates human long-term isolation.

They discovered that in mice

housed alone, the iron content in a brain region called the ventral hippocampus, a sub-region more focused on the regulation of emotions, had demonstrated abnormal iron accumulation.

Further studies revealed that excess iron acts as an erroneous signal, activating a molecule known as iron- α -synuclein (α -Syn), which triggers excessive neuronal firing, like an electrical short circuit continuously sending anxiety alarms to the body.

More importantly, this change precisely targets the emotional center of the brain, causing the brain to mount a highly specific stress response to social isolation.

The study demonstrates that under psychological stress, iron, which helps maintain neural health, can directly drive the remodeling of synaptic structure and function. Termed “ferroplasticity,” the mechanism directly links brain iron metabolism disorders to emotional

disturbances, shedding new light on the understanding of mental illnesses.

The researchers conducted nasal administration of various agents in mice, targeting molecular iron or α -Syn for intervention. After two weeks of treatment, anxiety behaviors of these mice significantly decreased, and their neuronal activity returned to normal.

The study not only unveils the longstanding mystery of how loneliness affects the brain, but also paves the way for developing novel interventions that are non-invasive, reversible and independent of traditional anti-anxiety medications, said Wang Zhuo, the first and corresponding author of the paper.

Many people in the world suffer from psychological issues related to social isolation. High-risk groups for such problems include elderly people living alone, workers in isolated or confined positions, post-surgical patients and adolescents who socially withdraw. — *Xinhua*

Impeachment complaints filed against VP Sara Duterte

MANILA – Philippine civil society leaders and members of a left-wing coalition filed impeachment complaints against Vice President Sara Duterte yesterday, restarting a process sidelined by the country's Supreme Court last year.

Both cases accuse Duterte of misusing public funds during her term as education secretary, while one revives allegations that she threatened to assassinate former ally President Ferdinand Marcos.

The filings come on the same day that a committee in the House of Representatives was to begin hearings into impeachment complaints against Marcos, accused of corruption tied to a spiralling scandal over bogus flood control projects.

Under the Philippine constitution, an impeachment by the House triggers a Senate trial, where a guilty verdict means expulsion from office and a lifetime ban on political service.

Duterte, daughter of former president Rodrigo Duterte, is widely considered a potential presidential candidate in 2028.

"It's about time that VP Sara must be held accountable," Representative Leila de Lima, who endorsed one of the fresh complaints, said yesterday.

"The complaint basically ... raises the same grounds as the previous complaint, just much condensed and streamlined."

Key to both filings yesterday are allegations surrounding about US\$10 million in unexplained spending while Duterte was education secretary.

Duterte was successfully impeached by the House last year on similar charges brought by a



People holding placards protest to call for the impeachment of Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte outside the House of Representatives in Quezon City, Metro Manila yesterday. — AFP

group backed by de Lima and other lawmakers.

In addition to questions over her spending, that complaint alleged that she had made an assassination threat against the president during a late-night press briefing, charges she has denied.

An abortive Senate trial that followed saw the senior body kick the case back to the House while questioning its constitutionality.

The Supreme Court subsequently ruled that the impeachment was a violation of a constitutional rule against multiple complaints being filed in the same year.

The court upheld its ruling last week.

In a statement, lawyers for the vice president said they were confident the accusations would be proven baseless.

President Marcos is separately facing impeachment complaints

accusing him of accusing him of systematically bilking taxpayers out of billions of dollars for bogus flood control projects.

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

The House justice committee began hearings over the Marcos complaints yesterday.

Outside, a group of about 100 protesters gathered by the left-wing Makabayan bloc held aloft banners calling for the ouster of both Marcos and Duterte.

"We are protesting ... to remind the lawmakers that their loyalty should be to the people, not to their political patron, not to their political dynasty, not to the president," Raymond Palatino, 46, told AFP. — AFP

Elephant kills tourist at Thai national park

BANGKOK — A wild bull elephant killed a tourist in central Thailand's Khao Yai National Park yesterday, a park official said, the third fatality linked to the same animal.

The 65-year-old Thai tourist from Lopburi province was out for a morning walk with his wife when he was trampled to death by an elephant named Oyewan, national park chief Chaiya Huayhongthong told AFP.

His wife managed to escape after park rangers scared the animal away, Chaiya said.

"He was the third person killed by Oyewan," he said, adding that the wild bull elephant could have been responsible for several more deaths that remain unsolved.

Chaiya said authorities will meet on Friday to decide what to do with the elephant.

"We will probably decide to relocate him or change his behaviour," he said, without elaborating.

More than 220 people, including tourists, have been killed by wild elephants since 2012, according to the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation.

Wild elephant numbers in Thailand rose from 334 in 2015 to almost 800 last year, prompting authorities to administer contraceptive vaccines to female animals in an effort to control their ballooning population.

An elephant killed a Spanish tourist while she was bathing the animal at a sanctuary in southern Thailand in January last year.

Another tourist was killed by an elephant at a national park in Loei province in northern Thailand in December 2024. — AFP

Interpol issues red notice for Indonesia's 'gasoline godfather'

JAKARTA — Interpol issued a red notice for the arrest of one of Indonesia's biggest oil tycoons over a US\$17 billion corruption scandal, authorities said.

Mohammad Riza Chalid, nicknamed the "gasoline godfather", is wanted in Indonesia for his alleged involvement in corruption at state-owned oil company Pertamina between 2018 and 2023, including money laundering and manipulating a lease agreement.

Untung Widyatmoko, secretary of Interpol's Indonesia National Central Bureau, said late Sunday a red notice had been issued by Interpol on January 23.

"We can't specify exactly where he is, but we already know," he said.

The notice was sent to Interpol's 196 member countries to request law enforcement worldwide help locate and provisionally arrest 66-year-old Riza.

In July, Riza, his son, Muhammad Kerry Adrianto Riza

and several of Pertamina's high-ranking officials were named in the corruption case.

They are accused of working together to import crude oil from overseas suppliers at higher prices rather than source it domestically as mandated by Indonesian law, according to the Attorney General's Office.

The AGO estimates the corruption at 285 trillion rupiah (around US\$17 billion) and said 18 people have so far been named suspects in the case.

Riza's Indonesian passport was revoked in October, according to the country's immigration office.

Indonesia has long struggled with graft and has arrested scores of public officials in recent years.

In 2023, a former communications minister was jailed for 15 years after being found guilty of corruption in a case that investigators said cost the country more than US\$530 million. — AFP

Australian woman dies after caught in Japan ski lift

TOKYO—An Australian woman died after her backpack caught on a ski lift on a Japanese mountain and she became suspended mid-air, police said yesterday.

The 22-year-old woman was preparing to get off the lift on Friday morning at Tsugaike Mountain Resort in Hakuba Valley, a popular ski destination in the central region of Nagano.

But a loose buckle from her backpack became caught in the lift chair, according to the lift operator Tsugaike Gondola Lift.

The woman, who had secured

the rucksack with a chest strap, was then dragged by the lift and became "suspended" mid-air, a spokesman for Nagano regional police told AFP on customary condition of anonymity.

"Because the chest strap was fastened, the backpack could not be removed from the [woman's] body, and the guest was dragged along with the backpack after disembarking from the lift," Tsugaike Gondola Lift's president Tsuneo Kubo said in a statement.

"An attendant pressed the stop button to halt the lift. After rescue

efforts, the guest was transported by ambulance to hospital," he said.

The woman died in hospital on Sunday, the police spokesman said.

Kubo said the firm was cooperating with investigators and pledged to improve its safety.

"We will handle matters with the utmost sincerity for our deceased guest and her bereaved family members," he said.

"We take this situation seriously and will strive to operate the ski resort with the utmost safety measures to ensure our guests can enjoy it with peace of mind," it said. — AFP

Death toll in Indonesian landslide reaches 80

JAKARTA — The search for victims of a landslide in Indonesia's West Java province continued yesterday, with the number of recovered bodies reaching 80, local media Kompas.com reported.

The news website quoted

Ade Dian Permana, head of the Bandung Search and Rescue Office, as saying that by 11:45 a.m. local time yesterday, all recovered bodies had been evacuated.

The landslide struck the Cisarua area in West Bandung regency on

January 24, affecting 158 people, displacing 564 individuals from 164 families, and damaging 48 homes.

Indonesia is prone to floods and landslides during the rainy season, which typically runs from October to March. — Xinhua



An aerial view shows workers from Indonesia's state electricity company PLN shutting down operations at a high-voltage transmission tower near a ground collapse owing to landsliding at the Pondok Balik village in Ketol district, Aceh province on Sunday. — AFP

Nearly 16 million Afghans face severe WASH needs in 2026: OCHA

KABUL — An estimated 15.9 million people in Afghanistan will require water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) assistance in 2026, as the country grapples with overlapping humanitarian shocks, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said in a report.

According to a report on the “OCHA Afghanistan” X account yesterday, the escalating needs are driven by large-scale population returns, prolonged drought, outbreaks of acute watery diarrhoea (AWD) with dehydration and cholera, recurrent flooding, and earthquakes, placing immense strain

on already fragile water systems.

OCHA’s assessments show that 67 percent of households across Afghanistan are affected by drought and water scarcity, while 32 percent rely on unsafe water sources. In addition, 18 percent of the population lacks sufficient access to safe drinking water, significantly increasing the risk of disease outbreaks and malnutrition.

To prevent the collapse of water systems, curb the spread of waterborne diseases, and address rising malnutrition, the agency has called for US\$163.3 million in urgent funding. — *Xinhua*

Rare fishing cat reappears in western Cambodia amid conservation efforts

PHNOM PENH — A fishing cat, one of Asia’s most elusive small wild cats, has reappeared for the first time in the restored flooded forest of around Tonle Sap Lake in western Cambodia’s Pursat province, a conservationist group said in a joint press release yesterday.

Confirmation of the rare fishing cat (*Prionailurus viverrinus*) marked

a major milestone in the 15-year conservation effort in restoring one of Southeast Asia’s most important freshwater ecosystems, the press release said.

The sighting was confirmed after the fishing cat was photographed 46 times by camera traps in mid-2025, the press release added. — *Xinhua*



This photo of a Fishing Cat was lifted from Wikipedia, taken by Kelinahandbasket in Cincinnati Zoo on June 25, 2008.

Wife of S Korea’s ex-president Yoon appeals against 20-month prison sentence

SEOUL — Kim Keon-hee, wife of the impeached former South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol, filed an appeal against her 20-month prison sentence, Yonhap news agency said yesterday.

The legal team of Kim, who was sentenced to 20 months in prison with a forfeiture of 12.81 million won (about US\$8,780) for corruption charges, submitted the notice of appeal to the Seoul court.

The court charged Kim with receiving valuables from Unification Church officials in return for favorable treatment of the religious group in 2022. Meanwhile, the court found her not guilty of the charges of violating the Capital Markets Act and the political funds act.

On Friday, the team of special counsel Min Joong-ki, who led the investigation into corruption allegations involving Yoon and his wife, filed an appeal against the court ruling, saying the court failed

to properly recognize Kim’s alleged role as a joint offender.

The special counsel demanded a 15-year jail term with a fine of 2 billion won and about 948 million won in forfeitures.

Kim was indicted under detention in August last year on charges of her participation in the stock price manipulation between October 2010 and December 2012.

She was also charged with conspiring with Yoon to receive illegal public opinion poll results worth about 270 million won free of charge from a political broker on 58 occasions from April 2021 to March 2022 ahead of the presidential election.

The court, however, ruled that there was no evidence to prove the presidential couple’s order of the opinion polls.

Kim became the first wife of a former South Korean president to be tried under detention, as she has been held at a detention center since last August. — *Xinhua*

Afghan returnees in Bamiyan struggle despite new homes

Isabelle Wesselingh

BAMIYAN — Sitting in his modest home beneath snow-dusted hills in Afghanistan’s Bamiyan province, Nimatullah Rahesh expressed relief to have found somewhere to “live peacefully” after months of uncertainty.

Rahesh is one of millions of Afghans pushed out of Iran and Pakistan, but despite being given a brand-new home in his native country, he and many of his recently returned compatriots are lacking even basic services.

“We no longer have the end-of-month stress about the rent,” he told AFP after getting his house, which was financed by the UN refugee agency on land provided by the Taliban authorities.

Originally from a poor and mountainous district of Bamiyan, Rahesh worked for five years in construction in Iran, where his wife Marzia was a seamstress.

“The Iranians forced us to leave” in 2024 by “refusing to admit our son to school and asking us to pay an impossible sum to extend our documents,” he said.

More than five million Afghans have returned home since September 2023, according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), as neighbouring Iran and Pakistan stepped up deportations.

The Rahesh family is among 30 to be given a 50-square-metre home in Bamiyan, with each household in the nascent community participating in the construction and being paid by UNHCR for their work.

The families, most of whom had lived in Iran, own the building and the land.

“That was crucial for us, because property rights give these people security,” said the UNHCR’s Amaia Lezertua.

Waiting for water

Despite the homes lacking running water and being far from shops, schools or hospitals, new resident Arefa Ibrahim said she was happy “because this house is mine, even if all the basic facilities aren’t there”.



This photograph taken on January 19 shows Arefa Ibrahim (left), an Afghan returnee from Iran, speaking while her children watch during an interview with AFP at a newly constructed house in Jar-e-Khushk on the outskirts of Bamiyan province. — AFP

Ibrahim, whose four children huddled around the stove in her spartan living room, is one of 10 single mothers living in the new community.

The 45-year-old said she feared ending up on the street after her husband left her.

She showed AFP journalists her two just-finished rooms and an empty hallway with a counter intended to serve as a kitchen.

“But there’s no bathroom,” she said. These new houses have only basic outdoor toilets, too small to add even a simple shower.

Ajay Singh, the UNHCR project manager, said the home design came from the local authorities, and families could build a bathroom themselves.

There is currently no piped water nor wells in the area, which is dubbed “the dry slope” (Jar-e-Khushk).

Ten litres of drinking water bought when a tanker truck passes every three days costs more than in the capital Kabul, residents told AFP.

Fazil Omar Rahmani, the provincial head of the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation Affairs, said there were plans to expand the water supply network.

“But for now these families must secure their own supply,” he told AFP.

2-hour walk

The plots allocated by the government for the new neighbourhood lie far from Bamiyan city, which is home to more than 70,000 people.

The city grabbed international

attention in 2001, when the Sunni Pashtun Taliban authorities destroyed two large Buddha statues cherished by the predominantly Shia Hazara community in the region.

Since the Taliban government came back to power in 2021, around 7,000 Afghans have returned to Bamiyan according to Rahmani.

The new project provides housing for 174 of them. At its inauguration, resident Rahesh stood before his new neighbours and addressed their supporters.

“Thank you for the homes, we are grateful, but please don’t forget us for water, a school, clinics, the mobile network,” which is currently non-existent, he said.

Rahmani, the ministry official, insisted there were plans to build schools and clinics.

“There is a direct order from our supreme leader,” Hibatullah Akhundzada, he said, without specifying when these projects will start.

In the meantime, to get to work at the market, Rahesh must walk for two hours along a rutted dirt road between barren mountains before he can catch a ride.

Only 11 percent of adults found full-time work after returning to Afghanistan, according to an IOM survey.

Ibrahim, meanwhile, is contending with a four-kilometre walk to the nearest school when the winter break ends.

“I will have to wake my children very early, in the cold. I am worried,” she said. — *AFP*

Afghanistan & Pakistan launch 1st nationwide polio vaccination drives of 2026

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan yesterday launched its first nationwide polio vaccination campaign of 2026, aiming to vaccinate more than 45 million children from yesterday to Sunday, the National Emergency Operations Center said.

The campaign was inaugurated in Islamabad by Prime Minister’s Focal Person for Polio Eradication Ayesha Raza Farooq, with representatives of UNICEF and the World Health Organization also attending.

Speaking at the ceremony, Farooq said polio eradication remains a top government priority,

calling the campaign “crucial” to eliminating the disease.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan also launched its first polio vaccination campaign of 2026 yesterday, aiming to protect over 7.3 million children under 5 years old against poliovirus, the Ministry of Public Health reported.

The four-day campaign, scheduled from today to Thursday, will administer polio vaccine drops to children in 18 of the country’s 34 provinces, according to ministry spokesperson Sharafat Zaman Amarkhil.

In a public statement, Amarkhil

called on tribal elders, religious scholars, and parents to fully cooperate with health workers to ensure the campaign’s success.

No polio cases have been recorded so far in 2026. However, at least nine cases were confirmed in Afghanistan in 2025, despite ongoing government efforts to eliminate the paralyzing disease in the post-conflict nation.

Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan remain among the few countries worldwide where wild poliovirus transmission has yet to be eradicated. — *Xinhua*

Gaza's Rafah crossing makes limited reopening after two-year war

RAFAH, Palestinian Territories – Gaza's Rafah border crossing has reopened to Palestinians, an Israeli security official said, with 150 people due to leave the territory yesterday and 50 allowed to enter, according to Egyptian authorities.

The resumption of operations comes after Gaza's civil defence reported dozens killed in a wave of Israeli strikes over the weekend, in what the military said was retaliation for Palestinian fighters exiting a tunnel in Rafah city.

The border crossing with Egypt is Gaza's only gateway to the outside world that does not lead to Israel and is a key access point for both people and goods.

Mahmud, a 38-year-old leukaemia patient from Gaza City, told AFP he felt lucky to be able to travel to Egypt for treatment, after receiving approval from Israel to go with his sister.

"In Gaza, [there is] no treatment and no life..., of course, I am lucky, but I am still sad because my father and mother are still in Gaza," he said.

Ali Shaath, the head of a Palestinian technocratic committee established to oversee the day-to-day governance of Gaza, said yesterday that Rafah's reopening offered a "window of hope" for people in the territory.

Israeli forces seized control of the crossing in May 2024 during the war with Hamas, and it has

remained largely closed since.

A partial resumption of operations began on Sunday in a tightly restricted pilot phase that did not involve travel of people, following months of appeals from aid groups.

"The Rafah crossing has now opened to the movement of residents, for both entry and exit," the Israeli official said.

Three Egyptian border officials told AFP that 150 Palestinians would be allowed into Egypt yesterday, composed of 50 patients each accompanied by two companions.

Another 50 Palestinians would be allowed to enter Gaza, the officials said.

Khaled Mogawer, governor of North Sinai – which includes the Egyptian side of Rafah – said on Egyptian state-linked AlQahera News that 50 Palestinian patients and 84 companions were expected to enter Egypt yesterday.

Israeli state broadcaster Kan reported that the crossing would be open for about six hours daily, while AlQahera News said the Egyptian side would remain open "round the clock".

'I will hug my mother'

Abdul Rahim Mohamed, 30, said he was eagerly awaiting the return to Gaza of his mother who had left for cancer treatment in Egypt in March 2024.



Young Palestinian patients sitting in wheelchairs wait in the grounds of the Red Crescent Hospital to be evacuated from the Gaza Strip via the Rafah border crossing with Egypt for treatment abroad, in Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday. – AFP

"Two days ago, she was informed she could return to Gaza and told me on the phone, 'Come and wait for me at the crossing,'" he told AFP yesterday.

"I am very happy today... I will hug my mother," he added.

Rafah lies in an area held by Israeli forces following their withdrawal behind a so-called "Yellow Line" under the terms of a US-brokered ceasefire in effect since October 10.

Israeli troops still control more than half of Gaza, while the rest remains under Hamas authority.

The EU's top diplomat Kaja Kallas said the opening of the crossing "marks a concrete and

positive step in the peace plan" for the territory, where humanitarian conditions remain dire after two years of war.

Despite the ceasefire, violence continued over the weekend. Gaza's civil defence agency, which operates as a rescue force under Hamas authority, said Israeli bombings killed 32 people including children on Saturday.

Israel's military said the strikes were retaliation for an incident on Friday in which eight Palestinian fighters exited a tunnel in Rafah, which it said was a truce violation.

The Rafah crossing had been briefly opened in early 2025 but has

been largely shut since it was seized by Israeli forces.

No aid entry

The director of Gaza City's Al-Shifa Hospital, Mohammed Abu Salmiya, said there were 20,000 patients in the territory in urgent need of treatment, including 4,500 children.

AlQahera News, citing Egypt's health ministry, reported that 150 hospitals and 300 ambulances had been prepared to receive Palestinian patients.

It said 12,000 doctors and 30 rapid deployment teams had been allocated to work with those transferred.

COGAT, the Israeli defence ministry body coordinating Palestinian civilian affairs, made no mention of allowing in a long-hoped-for surge of aid for Gaza.

Israel had previously tied Rafah's reopening to the return of the remains of Ran Gvili, the last Israeli hostage held in the territory. His body was recovered and buried last week, prompting Israel to announce the phased reopening.

The Gaza war was sparked by Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel, which resulted in the deaths of 1,221 people, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures.

Israel's retaliation has left at least 71,800 people dead in Gaza, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory, whose figures the UN considers reliable. – AFP

Greenland PM seeks 'concrete' results from US talks

NUUK – The prime minister of Greenland, which is coveted by US President Donald Trump, said yesterday he was seeking "concrete results" from ongoing talks with Washington.

Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen's comments came as the Danish autonomous territory's parliament opened its latest session.

"The dialogue has begun, and the Naalakkersuisut [Greenlandic government] will work with determination to bring it to concrete results," Nielsen told the Inatsisartut (parliament).

Trilateral talks began after Trump in January backed down from his threats to seize the autonomous Arctic territory of EU and NATO

member Denmark.

The first meeting of the working group was held on January 28 in Washington, bringing together senior Danish, Greenlandic and US civil servants.

"It went well in a very constructive atmosphere and tone, and new meetings are planned. It's not that things are solved, but it's good," Danish Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen told reporters the next day.

"I'm slightly more optimistic today than a week ago," he added.

Nielsen, who together with Denmark's prime minister met with French and German leaders last week, said talks with the Trump administration must take place in parallel with the strengthening of "close dialogue with

Western countries" and cooperation with the European Union.

"We are not alone, and we are protected. All EU countries support us," he stressed.

He also reiterated that "Greenland ... can neither be bought nor sold".

Trump's threats over Greenland plunged the transatlantic alliance into its deepest crisis in years.

The US leader backed off his desire to seize the island after saying he had struck a "framework" deal with NATO chief Mark Rutte to ensure greater influence from Washington.

But few concrete details appear to have been agreed, with authorities in Denmark and Greenland refusing to discuss handing over any sovereignty. – AFP

Israel says it struck Hezbollah targets in Lebanon after warnings

BEIRUT – Israel's military struck several locations in south Lebanon yesterday, including in two villages where it issued evacuation warnings, saying it was hitting Hezbollah targets.

Despite a November 2024 truce that sought to end more than a year of hostilities including two months of all-out war between Israel and the Iran-backed group, Israel has kept up regular strikes on Lebanon and has maintained troops in five areas it deems strategic.

The Israeli military said it struck "several Hezbollah weapons storage facilities in southern Lebanon, in order to prevent reestablishment attempts".

It added that one of the targets was "in the heart of a civilian area", accusing the group of "continued operations from within civilian infrastructure".

The Israeli army had previously sent evacuation warnings for the towns of Kfar Tibnit and Ain Qana in southern Lebanon.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported strikes on the targeted buildings in both towns.

Earlier yesterday, the Lebanese health ministry said an Israeli strike on Ansariyeh in southern

Lebanon killed one person and wounded four others.

Another strike on Qleileh, elsewhere in the south, also wounded four people, according to the ministry.

The NNA reported Israeli strikes on vehicles near both areas, which came without warning.

The Israeli army said it killed an operative who "was involved in attempts to rehabilitate Hezbollah military infrastructure" in Ansariyeh.

Lebanon has repeatedly protested Israeli strikes on Lebanon as violations of the ceasefire.

In January, Lebanon's army said it had completed the first phase of its plan to disarm Hezbollah, covering the area south of the Litani river, around 30 kilometres (20 miles) from the Israeli border.

Israel, which accuses Hezbollah of rearming, has criticised the army's progress as insufficient, while Hezbollah has rejected calls to surrender its weapons.

More than 360 people have been killed by Israeli fire in Lebanon since the ceasefire, according to an AFP tally of health ministry reports. – AFP

Son of Norway's crown princess arrested over alleged assault, threats

OSLO – Norwegian police said Monday the son of Norway's future queen who will go on trial for rape this week has been arrested on suspicion of assault, making threats and violating a restraining order.

"The Oslo Police District can confirm that Marius Borg Hoiby was arrested by the police on Sunday evening, suspected of causing bodily harm, making threats with a knife, and violating a restraining order," the

police said in a statement.

It added that they had requested that Hoiby be remanded in custody for four weeks "on the grounds of risk of reoffending".

The 29-year-old, who was born before his mother Mette-Marit Tjessem Hoiby married Norway's Crown Prince Haakon, will go on trial in Oslo's district court today accused of 38 counts, including four alleged rapes and assaults against ex-girlfriends.

Hoiby has admitted to some minor offences, but denies the more serious charges.

Several ex-girlfriends are now plaintiffs in the case against him, and he is under strict orders to not contact them.

He faces up to 16 years in prison if the Oslo district court finds him guilty.

The trial, scheduled to last until March 19, is expected to attract intense media coverage. – AFP

N Ireland university drops use of ex-US senator's name over Epstein links

BELFAST – A top university in Northern Ireland said yesterday it was dropping former US senator George Mitchell's name from one of its institutes because of his links with the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

The announcement came after the US Justice Department released a huge new batch of documents on the Epstein case.

"Queen's University Belfast has taken the decision to remove the name of its former Chancellor, Senator George J. Mitchell, from the Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice," said a statement sent to AFP.

Mitchell, 92, brokered the negotiations which led to the 1998 peace deal that largely ended three decades of conflict over British rule in Northern Ireland.

He was chancellor of the university, Northern Ireland's most prestigious, from 1999 to 2009.

Queen's said its decision followed the emergence of new information contained in the Epstein files released on Friday.

The latest tranche of millions of documents include 339 references to Mitchell, including several to get-togethers, appointments and lunches.

"JE [Jeffrey Epstein] would like you to try and schedule George Mitchell to come see him and Peter Mandelson while Peter is in NY," said one mail dated September 10, 2011.

Mandelson, 72, who was the UK's Northern Ireland Secretary under prime minister Tony Blair

from 1999-2001, is also named in the Epstein files.

Sacked as Britain's ambassador to the United States last year over his ties to Epstein, he allegedly received several payments from Epstein in the early 2000s. He has said he believes the claims to be "false".

Mitchell has previously said he regrets having met and known Epstein and that he had no knowledge of any of his illegal actions.

"While no findings of wrongdoing by Senator Mitchell have been made, the university has concluded that, in light of this material, and mindful of the experiences of victims and survivors, it is no longer appropriate for its institutional spaces and entities to continue to bear his name," the statement said.

It also said it would "remove the bust commemorating him from the University campus".

Epstein accuser Virginia Giuffre previously alleged that his close associate Ghislaine Maxwell instructed her to have sex with Mitchell among others, an accusation he has denied.

The allegation was contained in documents unsealed by a New York court in 2020 that related to a settled defamation suit that was filed by Giuffre against Maxwell in 2015.

On Sunday, the US-Ireland Alliance organisation which sends Americans to Ireland and Northern Ireland for a year of graduate study also said that its George J. Mitchell Scholarship Programme would no longer bear his name over his Epstein links. – AFP

Germany hit by public transport strike

BERLIN – Subway trains, buses and trams across Germany ground to a halt yesterday in a public transport strike called by one of the country's biggest unions in a dispute over pay and conditions.

Bitter winter weather and icy pavements in large parts of the country meant that alternatives such as walking or cycling were more hazardous than usual for commuters.

The Verdi services sector union is pushing for shorter shifts for public transport workers and bigger bonuses for evening and weekend shifts.

It has called on almost 100,000 staff in 150 transport companies to take part in the stoppage.

In some states, the trade union is also pushing for pay increases of around 10 percent.

"If we don't go on strike for better conditions, the jobs will remain unattractive, as we have seen in the past few years," Verdi spokesman Andreas Schackert told public broadcaster ZDF.

The strike affects services in all states except Lower Saxony.

Mainline and regional trains

are still running, but are not always the most reliable alternative.

Luis Hermann, a 23-year-old student in Berlin, said the regional S-Bahn in his part of the city, officially exempted from the strike, was also not running.

"There were works on the line and then the strike as well – it's a bit annoying," Hermann told AFP, adding that his journey to the library had taken an hour instead of the usual 30 minutes.

Yesterday's strike follows warning strikes last month in several parts of the public sector, as unions sound the alarm over staff shortages and loss of purchasing power for workers.

The Berlin public transport operator BVG called the strike "disproportionate" and appealed to Verdi to return to negotiations.

"I can certainly understand that people are trying to strengthen their position and get money from their employer," said another commuter, 52-year-old consultant Frank Ewert.

"It's not great that we, as users of the BVG, are the ones who suffer as a result." – AFP

Starmer orders probe into Mandelson's Epstein ties

LONDON – UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer has ordered an urgent inquiry into the ties between London's former ambassador to Washington, Peter Mandelson, and the late US sex offender Jeffrey Epstein during the politician's time as a government minister, Downing Street said yesterday.

Starmer also believes Mandelson should be stripped of his title as a lord and no longer sit in the upper chamber of parliament, the House of Lords.

The review, which will be led by Cabinet Secretary Chris Wormald, comes after newly released US documents revived scrutiny of Mandelson's close connection to the disgraced financier.

He will examine "all available information regarding Peter Mandelson's contacts with Jeffrey Epstein during his period as a government minister", the spokesman said.

Mandelson – a back-room architect of Labour's revival as an electoral force in the 1990s under

Tony Blair – quit the party on Sunday to avoid causing it "further embarrassment".

Bank records released on Friday by US authorities suggested that in 2009, Mandelson, who was then business secretary, forwarded an economic briefing to Epstein intended for then-leader Gordon Brown, captioning it: "Interesting note that's gone to the PM".

Epstein also appeared to have transferred a total of US\$75,000 in three payments to accounts linked to the top Labour politician between 2003 and 2004.

Starmer's official spokesman said the prime minister "believes that Peter Mandelson should not be a member of the House of Lords or use the title".

"However, the prime minister does not have the power to remove it," he added.

Starmer called on peers to work with the government to "modernise disciplinary procedures" and "allow for the easier removal of Lords who

have brought the house into disrepute".

Mandelson, 72, who was sacked as ambassador by Starmer last year over his ties to Epstein, told the BBC on Sunday he had no memory of the money transfers and did not know whether the documents were authentic.

He also appears in an undated photograph, wearing a T-shirt and underwear beside a woman, in a dressing gown, whose face has been redacted by US authorities.

Other documents suggest Epstein sent £10,000 in 2009 to Reinaldo Ávila da Silva, Mandelson's partner and now husband, at a time when Mandelson was serving as a government minister.

The former ambassador was removed from his post in September after being appointed by Starmer in late 2024.

Mandelson apologised in January to Epstein's victims and for maintaining his friendship with Epstein. – AFP

Chile officially backs Bachelet candidacy for UN top job

SANTIAGO – Chile has officially backed the candidacy of its former president Michelle Bachelet to become the UN's first female secretary-general, with backing from Mexico and Brazil.

Outgoing President Gabriel Boric made the announcement yesterday following concerns that Bachelet's bid could be blocked by right-winger José Antonio Kast, due to take over the Chilean presidency next month.

Bachelet, 74, has been a trailblazer for Latin America: the first woman to serve as defence minister and the first female elected as the Chilean president, serving two terms from 2006 to 2010 and 2014-18.

She has also served as the UN high commissioner for Human Rights and the first head of the then-newly created UN Women agency.

Last year, she was nominated for the UN's top job by Boric, and later met Kast to seek his backing.

After that meeting, in December,



Chile's former president (2006-2010 and 2014-2018) Michelle Bachelet poses during an interview with AFP in Santiago de Chile on December 22, 2025. – AFP

Bachelet told AFP "the world is ready" for a woman to take over and make "a different contribution through a different kind of leadership."

The UN, which marks its 81st anniversary this year, has never had a woman at the helm and only one Latin American – Peruvian diplomat

Javier Pérez de Cuellar who served as secretary-general from 1982 to 1991.

The post traditionally rotates between world regions, with Latin America next in line as Portuguese António Guterres's term comes to an end.

"President Bachelet's candidacy, which has already been registered with the United Nations, will be presented jointly with our sister countries Brazil and Mexico," Boric told reporters yesterday.

Three other women from Latin America and the Caribbean are in the running for the UN top job: Costa Rican Rebeca Grynspan, secretary-general of the UN Conference on Trade and Development; Mexican Environment Minister Alicia Barcena; and Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley.

The other candidate is International Atomic Energy Agency (AEA) chief Rafael Grossi from Argentina. – AFP

EU agency proposes toxin dose limits in powdered milk

ROME – The EU's food safety agency yesterday proposed reference doses for a toxin sometimes found in powdered milk following recalls in dozens of countries.

The EFSA said that a concentration of over 0.054 micrograms of cereulide per litre in infant formula or over 0.1 micrograms per litre in follow-on formula "may lead to safe levels being exceeded".

"EFSA's scientists proposed an ARfD [acute reference dose] of 0.014 micrograms of cereulide per kilogramme of body weight in infants," the Italy-based agency said in a statement.

"This advice is intended to help EU risk managers determine when products should be withdrawn from the market as a precautionary public health measure," the statement said.

It was not immediately clear whether the new advice would lead to further recalls.

Several manufacturers, such as giants Nestlé, Danone and Lactalis, have issued recalls of infant formula in more than 60 countries and regions, including Macau, since December due to a risk of cereulide contamination.

Cereulide, a toxin produced by certain bacteria, is "likely to cause

primarily digestive problems, such as vomiting or diarrhoea," according to the French health ministry.

Two criminal investigations have already been opened in France following the deaths of two infants who consumed infant formula recalled by Nestlé due to "possible contamination" by a bacterial substance.

The French health ministry said that no "causal link" has yet been established.

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has been tasked by the European Commission with establishing a standard for cereulide in children's products. – AFP

Amb. Loro Horta says Timor-Leste joining ASEAN ‘an important moment’

Interview by Christopher Chu

• In a sit-down interview in Macao last Wednesday with *The Bay*, Ambassador Loro Horta shares why Timor-Leste* must urgently pivot the economy away from oil and gas and into tourism and agriculture.

• Dili’s commitment to host its first ASEAN Summit by 2029 serves as a major test for the bloc’s newest member, coming at a time when fiscal resources are under strain.

Timor-Leste’s application to join the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) took 14 years to achieve. For ASEAN’s 700 million inhabitants and its US\$4.3 trillion economy – roughly the size of India’s GDP – Timor-Leste’s 1.4 million population and US\$2.1 billion economy adds relatively little to the bloc’s overall profile. Instead, its inclusion speaks volumes for Asia’s youngest country, underscoring its future ambitions and the role it envisions within the region.

“Our cultural, political, and economic links with the ASEAN bloc long existed before our membership,” the half-island nation’s ambassador to China, Loro Horta, told *The Bay*. “Given these ties and based on our geographic location, it would have been weird not to join the organisation.”

Despite being the newest member, Timor-Leste has always been historically connected to ASEAN. The nation shares an island with founding member Indonesia, which supplies about a third of the country’s imported goods. Taken together with Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam, the aggregated value of ASEAN goods entering Timor-Leste accounts for more than half of total imports.

“Though we do not foresee any immediate economic benefits, the ASEAN partnership is an important moment for Timor-Leste,” Horta said, noting that while the now eleven-nation grouping embraces a complementary vision to strengthen regional

collaborations, it is also mired in regional competition.

Beyond oil and gas, Dili relies on agricultural exports, such as coffee, to drive economic growth and create jobs. But while Timor-Leste shipped about 10,000 tonnes of coffee last year, this pales in comparison to the 1.1 million tonnes exported by Vietnam.

Underinvestment in rural infrastructure has widened that production gap and lowered crop yields, with prized coffee production falling by about half. “We don’t need ASEAN to remind us of our uncompetitiveness, we are doing it ourselves,” Horta lamented.

‘We need everything’

For now, oil and gas define Timor-Leste’s economy. Its Norwegian style Petroleum Fund, valued at around US\$18 billion, provides a fiscal cushion that sustains government spending for roughly a decade. Yet the growth of the oil fund has come at the expense of other critical investments.

“To build out our oil and gas industries, we neglected our farming capabilities, which is directly tied to our food security. Our tourism and biodiversity offering is also underutilised, which is quite a shame, because Timor-Leste’s beaches are more pristine than those found in Indonesia’s Bali” the ambassador told *The Bay*.

Bipartisanship has helped elevate attention to the urgency. The capital’s main airport was recently expanded to accommodate larger aircraft. With an annual intake of 80,000 international arrivals, these figures are overshadowed by the near 17 million arrivals that land in Bali, whose airport serves as a major connecting hub for those heading to Dili.

“I applaud the prime minister’s resolve to compensate and relocate families that were living near the airport so that the aviation facilities could be modernised,” Horta said, describing it as an unenviable and politically unpopular task. “But even after the runway was extended, aeroplanes still can’t land at night,”



Timor-Leste’s Ambassador to China, Loro Horta, poses during his interview with *The Bay* in Macao last Wednesday. Photo courtesy of *The Bay*

a testament to the amount of work ahead.

Time is not on the country’s side, and the clock is ticking. Dili’s commitment to host its first ASEAN Summit by 2029 serves a major litmus test, not just in its ability to accommodate heads of state from Southeast Asia, but representatives from Asia’s largest economies and those from the G7. From roads, infrastructure and staffing, the ambassador summarised it bluntly: “We need everything.”

Job creation in Timor-Leste

On the policy front, a positive trajectory is unfolding. In an official visit to Dili last week, Anthony Albanese, the Australian prime minister, reaffirmed the shared ambition to develop the Greater Sunrise gas fields, located approximately 450 kilometres north-west of Darwin.

The project is reported to allocate 10 percent of its revenues into an infrastructure fund for Dili, augmenting the government coffers. And in addition to royalty payments, the Greater Sunrise project houses about 30 years of gas reserves and

opens employment opportunities for Timor-Leste workers. “But that lifeline does not replace the urgency to diversify the economy,” Horta commented.

“This all assumes that oil and gas are still valuable in the future.”

Attracting foreign investments that generate meaningful jobs domestically remains the priority, as few opportunities at home are visible in the number of Timor-Leste citizens working abroad. Total remittances exceeded US\$240 million in 2024, representing about 12 percent of the economy.

“As more young people are educated overseas, we hope that they return, but if the economy does not produce worthwhile occupations outside the public sector, many will find employment elsewhere, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, or South Korea,” the ambassador said with a tone of regret.

While Timor-Leste’s literacy rate stands above 70 percent but below the ASEAN bloc’s range of 85 to 98 percent, Horta applauds the growing use of and familiarity with English, notably among the country’s younger population, which makes them more competitive when

finding employment opportunities overseas.

About 70 percent of Timor-Leste’s workforce is under the age of 35. But without any substantial career prospects, their energy goes to waste, or worse, is at risk of being channelled into harmful activities. “Thankfully, there is relatively little social unrest, reflecting the patience of the people, [however] we can’t rely on this generosity forever,” the ambassador emphasised.

The Macao connection

Improving bilateral ties with China has helped draw in much needed capital and expertise into Timor-Leste. After relations with Beijing were upgraded to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2023, more than 30 state-owned Chinese enterprises are now operating in the country, with at least half of them running local offices.

Horta expects a deepening commitment to benefit both Timor-Leste and China, given their shared interest in upholding the blue economy, a reference to the sustainable use of ocean resources, along with China’s leading innovation in clean energy technology. The ambassador said he hopes Timor-Leste will utilise Macao as a hub for culture and knowledge exchanges, particularly as links between China and Portuguese-speaking countries further develop.

But while there are aspirations that the shared Lusophone heritage between Macao and Timor-Leste would translate into strategic advantages, local coffee purchases reflect the uncomfortable reality. Macao imports about a mere US\$150,000 worth of Timor-Leste coffee annually, a fraction compared to the more than US\$583,000 worth from Vietnam.

“Much more needs to be done because we can’t afford to do any less. Timor-Leste’s future depends on what we do today,” Horta said.

– Courtesy of *The Bay*

*Timor-Leste is East Timor’s official Portuguese name

Portugal pledges US\$2.9 billion for deadly storm recovery as rains persist

LISBON – Prime Minister Luis Montenegro on Sunday pledged 2.5 billion euros (US\$2.9 billion) to support recovery efforts after Storm Kristin swept across Portugal last month, killing five people and causing widespread damage.

He also extended a state of calamity – one level below a state of emergency – in the hardest-hit areas until February 8 as the country braces for more heavy rainfall.

The measure, first imposed on Thursday, gives authorities the power to enforce safety measures and coordinate emergency responses. Initially, it was due to expire on Sunday.

“Some areas will face more serious situations, which may even require evacuation,” Montenegro said at a news conference in Lisbon following an emergency cabinet meeting, warning that “the ground is saturated”.

The national weather agency, IPMA, has placed all of mainland Portugal on alert for heavy rain and winds of up to 100 kilometres per hour, with rainy conditions expected throughout the week.

“Current weather predictions are very severe and could cause major damage,” national civil protection commander Mario Silvestre said.

“The soil can no longer retain water, so all the rain will run off into the basin areas. It is not a question of if, but when, and how severe it will be.”

Portugal’s civil protection agency has sent text alerts to mobile phones across large parts of the country warning of flood risks.

Storm Kristin’s hurricane-force winds struck central and northern Portugal overnight last Tuesday, causing flooding, landslides, and damage to buildings and infrastructure.

As part of the aid package, Montenegro announced a 90-day moratorium on mortgages and

other loans for residents in affected areas and earmarked 400 million euros for urgent road and railway repairs.

“We are mobilising all resources across the public, social, and private sectors to ensure that everything is fully restored as quickly as possible,” the prime minister said.

Some 167,000 customers remained without power on Sunday, mainly in central Portugal – down from over one million immediately after the storm, according to power company E-Redes.

The power utility’s president, José Careto, said he could not

specify when power would be fully restored, warning against creating “false expectations”.

A 73-year-old man died near Leiria on Sunday after carbon monoxide poisoning from a backup generator. Two other men died on Saturday in separate falls while repairing roofs damaged by the storm.

Leiria city councillor Luís Lopes, responsible for civil protection, urged residents to take care while carrying out home repairs and to keep generators “outside in ventilated areas to stay safe”.

– AFP

Football shorts

Struggling Serie A sides Pisa and Verona sack coaches

ROME — Former Italy international Alberto Gilardino has been sacked by Serie A strugglers Pisa, while the league's bottom side Verona dismissed coach Paolo Zanetti after another defeat at the weekend.

Pisa terminated Gilardino's contract after Sunday's 3-1 home loss to Sassuolo left the club with just one win from 23 matches this season in the Italian top flight.

The 43-year-old Gilardino, a 2006 World Cup winner, took over in the summer from Filippo Inzaghi after Pisa secured a return to Serie A for the first time in 34 years.

Pisa and Verona are both four points from safety and face each other in their next match on Friday.

Verona ended Zanetti's 18-month stint in charge following Saturday's 4-0 loss at Cagliari.

— AFP

Real Madrid's Bellingham set for month out with hamstring injury

MADRID — Real Madrid midfielder Jude Bellingham is expected to miss the club's upcoming Champions League play-off matches against Benfica after suffering a hamstring injury on Sunday.

"Following tests carried out today [yesterday] on our player Jude Bellingham by Real Madrid's medical services, he has been diagnosed with an injury to the semitendinosus muscle in his left leg," said Los Blancos in a statement, without specifying the length of his expected absence.

Spanish media reported the 22-year-old England international could miss around a month after he went off hurt in the opening stages of the 2-1 La Liga win over Rayo Vallecano.

As well as the play-off games against Jose Mourinho's Benfica on February 17 and 25, Bellingham is likely to miss league matches against Valencia, Real Sociedad and Osasuna.

Real Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa said a potential Bellingham absence would be a "big absence" but that he has an

"extraordinary squad" to help fill in for the midfielder.

— AFP

Barca coach Flick 'not happy' with Raphinha thigh strain

BARCELONA — Barcelona will be without winger Raphinha for the Copa del Rey clash at second-tier Albacete today because of a thigh strain and coach Hansi Flick said something had to "change" regarding the Brazilian's preparation.

Raphinha's injury, sustained in the win over Elche on Saturday in La Liga, is expected to keep him out for only a week, but Flick was notably upset by the issue.

The winger missed two months with a hamstring injury earlier this season and is a key player for the Spanish champions.

"To be honest I'm not happy with this, really, because he's a very important player," Flick told a news conference yesterday.

"We have to see what we have to change and also what he has to change. We'll speak about that in the next days because it's important.

"This is the important phase in the season, we need every player to be able to play and when he's out, it's not good."

Barcelona have not lost a match this season which Raphinha has started.

Albacete defeated Real Madrid in the previous round of the competition, and Flick said he was not surprised.

"This is why we love [cup games], there are sometimes unexpected results," said the coach.

"Of course it's like that - they have nothing to lose, they have only to win."

According to Spanish reports German goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen, on loan at Girona, has suffered a hamstring injury which could keep him out for two months.

"I didn't speak with him but I'm very sorry for him, but we have to wait for the results and we'll see what happened," added Flick.

Ter Stegen has played two games for Girona after joining them in January until the end of the season.

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

— AFP/MPD

Arsenal scoop US\$2 million prize for winning FIFA Women's Champions Cup



LONDON — Arsenal scooped the biggest financial prize in women's club football history by beating Corinthians 3-2 after extra time to win the inaugural FIFA Women's Champions Cup on Sunday.

The European champions edged out the challenge of the Brazilian underdogs thanks to Caitlin Foord's winner to collect a US\$2.3 million payout.

That is nearly four times the 500,000 euros (US\$590,000) Arsenal received for winning last season's Champions League.

The Gunners were heavy favourites to secure the trophy that pitted the winners of the champions of six continents together in competition for the first time.

However, Corinthians shocked US champions Gotham FC in Wednesday's semi-finals and pushed Arsenal all the way in front of over 25,000 at the Emirates Stadium.

Olivia Smith's early opener for Arsenal was quickly cancelled out by Gabi Zanotti.



Arsenal's German goalkeeper Anneke Borbe (in green) is hurt in this collision with Arsenal's English defender Lotte Wubben-Moy during the FIFA Women's Champions Cup final against Corinthians at the Emirates Stadium in London on Sunday. — AFP

England defender Lotte Wubben-Moy restored Arsenal's lead and the celebrations were beginning around the Emirates when Corinthians snatched a dramatic equaliser deep into injury time.

Vic Albuquerque stroked home

from the penalty spot after Gisela Robledo was tripped inside the area.

Arsenal's greater strength in depth showed in the extra time, though, as Foord sneaked a shot in at the near post to finally break Corinthians' spirit.

— AFP

S Korea's football bosses in talks to avert Women's Asian Cup boycott

SEOUL — South Korean football bosses said yesterday they were in talks with players to avert a boycott of next month's Women's Asian Cup and expected the national team to train for the tournament as scheduled.

The country's women's side last year complained of poor and "discriminatory conditions" provided by the Korea Football Association (KFA) compared to their male counterparts.

A team statement from September, made public in January, said that players faced gruelling long journeys on buses and economy-class flights, and were forced to stay in "inadequate" accommodation far from training grounds.

A KFA official told AFP: "We are continuing talks with the players

to resolve the matter and plan to proceed with our training schedule."

The governing body will call in the players for a pre-tournament training camp in mid-February, she added.

Players complained that they were required to pay for their own airport transfers and training kit.

The players' statement said they would "suspend participation in all training related to the upcoming 2026 AFC Women's Asian Cup" and refuse to play matches if the KFA did not respond by October 17.

It added there were "clear and undeniable differences" from the conditions enjoyed by the men's national team.

An internal KFA document seen by AFP showed that the women's

team was allocated US\$1.28 million in 2025.

That was less than 10 percent of the total budget for the men's team.

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

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

Midfielder Ji So-yun, who spent eight years at English club Chelsea, said recently: "It feels as though the players are not being treated in a manner befitting national team members.

"With a heavy heart I believe action is necessary to bring about change," she added in comments reported by Yonhap news agency.

— AFP

Arteta seeks Arsenal reinforcement for injured Merino



LONDON — Mikel Arteta said Arsenal are "actively looking" for a replacement for the injured Mikel Merino in the closing hours of the transfer window.

Merino, who has been a valuable contributor in midfield and attack for the Gunners, could miss the rest of the season with a fractured right foot that requires surgery.

Arteta stressed how significant the Spain international's absence as Arsenal compete to win four trophies.

The Arsenal boss hopes his club can come up with a new signing to fill the void before last night's 1900GMT deadline.

"We are actively looking at options and we will continue to do that," Arteta told reporters yesterday.

"When you lose a big player like this with four months to go,

and all the competitions to play for, you need to look and we need to do everything we possibly can to see if a player is available."

The loss of Merino has been tempered by the return to fitness of Germany forward Kai Havertz.

There was further good news for Arsenal as Arteta revealed an injury that kept England winger Bukayo Saka out of Saturday's 4-0 win over Leeds is only minor.

"Today, he [Saka] was better. Let's see how he responds. It doesn't look like something too serious," Arteta added ahead of today's League Cup semi-final second leg against Chelsea.

"Whether he is available for tomorrow [today] or the weekend, we will have to wait and see."

Arsenal remain on course for an unprecedented quadruple.

Arteta's side hold a six-point lead at the top of the Premier League, have progressed to the last 16 of the Champions League and face third-tier Wigan in the FA Cup fourth round.

But the Spaniard is focused on reaching the League Cup final as his side's first opportunity to end a six-year trophy drought.

Arsenal hold a 3-2 lead over Chelsea ahead of the second leg on home soil at the Emirates Stadium.

"The next one is always the most important one. And it is the closest, at least, to reach a final," said Arteta.

"We really need to create the atmosphere, the energy, the belief that we're going to do it."

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

— AFP/MPF



Cremonese's Indonesia goalkeeper Emil Audero reacts as a flare explodes on the pitch during the Italian Serie A match between Inter Milan at the Giovanni Zini Stadium in Cremona, northern Italy, on Sunday. — AFP

Djokovic hints at retirement as time seeps away on history bid

Tennis

Peter Stebbings

MELBOURNE — Novak Djokovic leaves the Australian Open still stuck on 24 Grand Slam titles and with fresh doubts about how many more tries he will have at winning an outright-record 25th.

The 38-year-old has consistently dismissed talk of retirement and said he is eyeing the defence of his Olympic gold at the Los Angeles Games in 2028.

But after losing to Carlos Alcaraz in four sets in the final on Sunday, the Serb suggested he may not be back in Melbourne.

“God knows what happens tomorrow, let alone in six months or 12 months,” he told the crowd at Rod Laver Arena.

“So, it has been a great ride. I love you guys.”

Djokovic has won a record 10 Australian Opens and until Sunday had never lost a final there.

But for all his success, Djokovic has not always had an easy relationship with the Melbourne fans.

“I want to just say in the end that you guys, particularly the last couple of matches, gave me something that I have never experienced in Australia,” he said.

“That much love, support, positivity. I tried to give you back with good tennis over the years.”

It had the ring of a farewell speech and did not appear to have been just an emotional response to defeat.

He said he had prepared two speeches, one for winning and the other for losing.

Faltering record

Djokovic won his 24th Grand Slam title at the US Open in 2023, drawing him level with the Australian Margaret Court at the top of the all-time list.

But age and injuries, plus the emergence of world number one Alcaraz and number two Jannik Sinner, have left him unable to win another.



Serbia's Novak Djokovic reacts during a press conference after his defeat against Spain's Carlos Alcaraz in their singles final at the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne on Sunday. — AFP

Before Sunday, his previous Grand Slam final had been in 2024, when he lost the Wimbledon decider, again to Alcaraz.

Last year he reached the semi-finals of all four majors but got no further, with Alcaraz and Sinner sharing the spoils.

He rolled back the years to defeat Sinner - 14 years his junior - in a five-set semi-final marathon in Melbourne.

But after Djokovic won the first set, the 22-year-old Alcaraz took a stranglehold on the final to sweep to victory 2-6, 6-2, 6-3, 7-5.

Underlining where Djokovic is now in the pecking order of men's tennis, he admitted he had not expected to reach another major final.

‘I always believe’

If the former world number one was going to win that elusive 25th, he may reflect that he has seen his best remaining chance come and go.

He is the undisputed king of Melbourne Park and Rod Laver Arena is the court where he has had the most success.

The fourth seed enjoyed two big pieces of luck in reaching the semi-finals.

Djokovic enjoyed free passage through the fourth round when Jakub Mensik pulled out with injury.

He was then facing defeat at two sets down to Lorenzo Musetti, only for the Italian fifth seed to retire injured.

He rolled back the years to beat Sinner and make the final, but a repeat success so soon after playing five sets was beyond him.

“Overall, for sure it's been a fantastic tournament,” he said.

“I knew that I'd probably have to beat two of them [Alcaraz and Sinner] on the way to the title.

“I beat one, which is great, so it's a step more further than I have gone in Grand Slams than last year.

“Very nice, encouraging. But, you know, not enough for me.”

So, what next for one of the all-time greats?

For whatever time is left, he won't give up on that 25th Grand Slam crown, even if the odds are now stacked against him.

“I always believe I can,” Djokovic said about finally eclipsing Court.

“Otherwise, I wouldn't be competing.” — AFP

Sport in brief

Italian biathlete Passler fails doping test before Olympics: testers

ROME — Italian biathlete Rebecca Passler has failed a doping test ahead of the Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics, the Italian anti-doping agency said yesterday.

Passler, 24, has been “provisionally suspended” after her sample showed the presence of letrozole, a prohibited substance used to treat breast cancer, the agency (NADO Italia) said in a statement.

According to reports in Italy, the test was carried out outside of competition.

Passler currently stands 33rd in the overall World Cup standings.

The Milan-Cortina Games open on Friday. — AFP

England captain Itoje on the bench for Six Nations opener against Wales

LONDON — England captain Maro Itoje will be on the bench for his side's Six Nations opener at home to Wales on Saturday.

Itoje has been grieving the death of his mother Florence, with Saracens team-mate Jamie George — himself a former England captain — now leading the side out as they seek to make it 12 wins in a row.

Fellow forward Itoje will, however, take over as skipper should he take the field at Twickenham.

Henry Arundell will make his first England start since the 2023 World Cup after being named on the left wing in a team announced yesterday — unusually early — by coach Steve Borthwick.

Arundell featured in the bronze

final against Argentina two-and-a-half-years ago but became unavailable for England selection when he signed for French club Racing 92 because of a Rugby Football Union rule effectively banning players at non-English clubs from Test duty.

Now at Bath, the 23-year-old flyer made his England comeback as a replacement against Fiji in November. — AFP

Sri Lanka drop Test captain De Silva from T20 World Cup squad

COLOMBO — Sri Lanka yesterday dropped Test captain Dhananjaya de Silva from their 15-man T20 World Cup squad led by Dasun Shanaka.

De Silva had been recalled for a three-match T20 international series against Pakistan early last month after an 18-month absence and played the opening game against England in an ongoing series.

But he was dropped for the second T20, while the final match is scheduled for today.

Since his recall, he has only scored 43 runs in three innings and taken one wicket with his off-spin.

Against England at Pallekele last week, he laboured to 11 off 12 balls before being dismissed by Adil Rashid.

Seam bowler Eshan Malinga has been named in the squad despite suffering a shoulder injury against England on Sunday.

Sri Lanka are co-hosting with India the T20 World Cup, which starts on Saturday, and face Ireland in their opening game in Colombo on Sunday.

They will also play Australia, Oman and Zimbabwe in Group B, with the top two teams to qualify for the Super 8 stage. — AFP

Mercedes ready to win F1 world title, says Russell

F1

LONDON — George Russell believes he has been handed a car ready to win the world championship as Mercedes head into a new era for Formula One as the title favourites.

Under the leadership of Toto Wolff, Mercedes won eight consecutive constructors' championships and seven drivers' titles between 2014 and 2021.

Since Russell joined in 2022 they have struggled to keep pace with Red Bull and McLaren.

However, a major upheaval of the sport's technical rulebook for the new season means a fresh start for all the teams on the grid.

Mercedes caught the eye in last week's first test at Barcelona's Circuit de Catalunya by boasting both impressive speed and reliability, with the bookmakers making Russell favourite for his first world title.

“I feel ready to fight for a world

championship, and whether we have that tag as favourites above us or not, it doesn't change my approach one single bit,” said the British driver at Mercedes' digital launch yesterday.

“There are a lot of things we need to learn very quickly, but I feel I can take advantage of that and I feel confident in myself and in the team.”

Four-time world champion Max Verstappen will lead Red Bull's challenge, aiming to regain the title after losing out to Lando Norris last season.

Russell and Verstappen have clashed on and off the track in recent years and the former is relishing the prospect of a title battle to add to the feud between the pair.

“I would love that. He is very much going to be in the fight this year,” added Russell.

“You obviously wish you had a slightly easier time of it, but it should never be easy, and if you

are going to win, you want to have fought for it and won it fair and square on track.

“The best-case scenario is if you have a number of teams battling it out, and at the moment it does look like Red Bull, McLaren, Ferrari and ourselves are the four teams that are quite close.”

Wolff is relieved to have what appears a competitive car at the front of the grid after four seasons of disappointment, but is not getting carried away despite a positive first test session.

“It is always nice if your driver is the favourite with the bookmakers, and he [Russell] deserves it because he is one of the best,” said the Austrian.

“But it is always the best driver and the best car that wins, and we have not proven yet that we have a package that is good enough.”

There will be two three-day tests in Bahrain later this month before the season begins in Australia on March 8. — AFP



First-placed Netherlands' rider Mathieu van der Poel celebrates on the podium after winning the Cyclocross World Championships in Hulst, Zeeland on Sunday. Dutch cycling giant Van der Poel won a record eighth world cyclo-cross title at Hulst in the Netherlands on Sunday.

Van der Poel bettered the record of seven world titles originally set by Belgian Eric De Vlaeminck, a cyclo-cross star of the 1960s and 70s. — AFP

Trump threatens legal action against Grammy host over Epstein comment

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump threatened legal action yesterday against the host of the 68th Grammy Awards over the comedian's comment on the US president and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

After congratulating Billie Eilish for winning the Grammy for Song of the Year for her track "Wildflower," host Trevor Noah brought up Trump and Epstein.

"Wow. That's a Grammy that every artist wants — almost as much as Trump wants Greenland," he quipped, referring to the president's threats to seize the Denmark's autonomous Arctic territory.

Noah then added: "Which makes sense because, since Epstein's gone, he needs a new island to hang out with Bill Clinton."

Noah, who announced that this will be his final year hosting the Grammys after six turns as emcee, has been light on political commentary in previous years.

His comments drew the ire of the president, who took to his Truth Social platform first saying that the "Grammy Awards are the WORST and virtually unwatchable," before criticising Noah.

"I can't speak for Bill, but I have never been to Epstein Island, nor anywhere close, and until tonight's [Sunday night's] false and defamatory, statement, have never been accused of being there, not even by the Fake News Media," Trump said.

The Republican then branded South African Noah a "total loser" who needs to "get his facts straight."

"I'll be sending my lawyers to sue this poor, pathetic, talentless, dope of an M.C. ... Get ready Noah, I'm going to have some fun with you!" Trump added.

Trump, who moved in the same social circles as Epstein in Florida and New York, has fought for months to prevent the release of a vast trove of documents about the disgraced financier and has given varying accounts of why he eventually fell out with Epstein.

More than three million documents were released on Friday that included mention of numerous powerful figures, including the 79-year-old president, Elon Musk, Bill Gates, Bill Clinton and former British prince Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor. — AFP

Bad Bunny makes Grammys history with Album of the Year win

Paula Ramon and Susan Stumme

LOS ANGELES — Puerto Rican superstar Bad Bunny made history on Sunday at the Grammys, winning Album of the Year for his "Debi Tirar Más Fotos" ("I Should Have Taken More Photos") -- the first Spanish-language work to take the top honour in music.

Rapper Kendrick Lamar added five more gramophones to his trophy cabinet, including another Record of the Year award, while Billie Eilish and her brother Finneas took the Song of the Year prize.

Britain's Olivia Dean was named best new artist, on a night that featured electric performances from a constellation of stars including Lady Gaga, who won two prizes including best pop vocal album.

But the night belonged to Bad Bunny, who earned cheers as he delivered a powerful political message, ripping the nationwide immigration raids that have polarised America.

"Before I say thanks to God, I'm gonna say 'ICE out'," Bad Bunny said as he accepted the award for best música urbana album.

"We're not savages, we're not animals, we're not aliens; we are humans and we are Americans," the 31-year-old said, one week before he takes one of the world's biggest stages, headlining the Super Bowl halftime show.

Later, when he won the night's top prize, he appeared overcome with emotion at his seat, before getting up on stage and delivering most of his speech in Spanish, honouring the people of Puerto Rico, a US territory in the Caribbean.

"I want to dedicate this award to all the people that had to leave their homeland, their country, to follow their dreams," he said in English.

Bad Bunny's third award of the night was for best global music performance.

Lamar's five Grammys equalled his haul from last year, when he swept up prizes for "Not Like Us," his viral diss track targetting rival Drake.

This time, he was honoured for a variety of songs, from the Record of

the Year-winning melodic "Luther" featuring US singer-songwriter SZA, which contains a sample from a hit by late crooner Luther Vandross, to the more classic hip-hop song "tv off."

"I'm not good at talking about myself, but I express it through the music. It's an honour to be here," said Lamar, a Pulitzer Prize winner.

History

Bad Bunny is in the middle of a world tour, just months after a hugely successful residency in San Juan.

His 2002 "Un verano sin ti" ("A Summer Without You") was the first Spanish-language album nominated for Album of the Year honours. But he made good on his second attempt with "Debi Tirar Más Fotos".

The album is an exploration of what it is to be Puerto Rican in the context of persistent colonialism — all set to folkloric sounds, infectious salsa and reggaeton rhythms.

Host Trevor Noah repeatedly joked with the Latin megastar, born Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio, about not performing due to Super Bowl contractual restrictions — and even sang a few bars in Spanish himself before Bad Bunny indulged with a short verse.

Big performances

K-pop singer Rose and Bruno Mars kicked off the televised gala with a high-octane performance of "APT."

Lady Gaga offered an energetic version of "Abracadabra" and Justin Bieber stripped to his boxers — and socks — for a rendition of "Yukon."

Pop princess Sabrina Carpenter belted out her hit "Manchild."

Reba McEntire and Lauryn Hill sang in honour of those who died over the last year in the world of music.

Late rocker Ozzy Osbourne's wife Sharon and children Kelly, Jack and Aimee looked on as Post Malone fronted an all-star band including guitarist Slash for Black Sabbath's "War Pigs."

The majority of the 95 awards were handed out at a pre-gala



Bad Bunny accepts the Album of the Year award for "Debi Tirar Más Fotos" ("I Should Have Taken More Photos") onstage during the 68th GRAMMY Awards at the Crypto.com Arena on Sunday in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

ceremony before the televised broadcast.

"Golden," from the Netflix animated smash hit "KPop Demon Hunters," won the prize for best song written for visual media, and top Oscar nominee "Sinners" won two soundtrack awards.

Country star Jelly Roll and R&B singer Leon Thomas were among the other winners.

Joni Mitchell — one of several attendees wearing an "ICE OUT" pin in protest of US President Donald Trump's sweeping immigration crackdown — took a prize for best historical album.

— AFP

Dalai Lama expresses 'gratitude' at first Grammy win

NEW DELHI — The Dalai Lama said yesterday he was grateful for his first Grammy, after bagging the top music industry award for audio book, narration and storytelling.

The 90-year-old lives in India. He was announced as the winner at the Grammys ceremony in Los Angeles for his book "Meditations: The Reflections of His Holiness the Dalai Lama".

"I receive this recognition with gratitude and humility," he said on social media.

"I don't see it as something personal, but as a recognition of our shared universal responsibility."

In his maroon robes, simple sandals and wide-rimmed spectacles, the Dalai Lama is a global celebrity, in the West in particular.

"I truly believe that peace, compassion, care for our environment, and an understanding of the oneness of humanity are essential for the collective well-being of all eight billion human beings," he added.

"Meditation: Reflections Of His Holiness The Dalai Lama" features artists such as Rufus Wainwright, who accepted the award on behalf of him, and Maggie Rogers.

Beijing, which condemns the

Dalai Lama as a separatist, opposed his Grammy win, calling his work "anti-China political manipulation".

"We firmly oppose relevant parties using art awards as a tool for anti-China political manipulation, and this position is consistent and clear," foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian told a regular press conference in Beijing yesterday.

The Nobel Peace Prize laureate insists he has many more years to live, but his supporters are preparing for the inevitability without him.

Tibetan Buddhists believe he is the 14th reincarnation of a spiritual leader first born in 1391. — AFP, MPD



South African comedian Trevor Noah hosts the 68th GRAMMY Awards at Crypto.com Arena on Sunday in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -2°C~8°C	Manila 21°C~31°C	New York -3°C~1°C	Lisbon 11°C~14°C
Shanghai 4°C~12°C	Bangkok 22°C~34°C	London 5°C~6°C	Rio de Janeiro 23°C~30°C
Hong Kong 15°C~19°C	Tokyo -1°C~11°C	Frankfurt 0°C~3°C	Luanda 24°C~29°C
Taipei 12°C~19°C	Singapore 23°C~33°C	Vancouver 10°C~13°C	Maputo 21°C~31°C
Guangzhou 11°C~22°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~35°C	Paris 3°C~11°C	Dili 24°C~31°C
Nanjing 1°C~13°C	Jakarta 23°C~30°C	Moscow -18°C~13°C	São Tomé 25°C~32°C
Guilin 9°C~19°C	Seoul -4°C~4°C	Las Vegas 9°C~24°C	Praia 16°C~25°C
Xi'an 1°C~11°C	Sydney 18°C~25°C	Monte Carlo 9°C~13°C	Bissau 18°C~36°C



Back to the 1780's!

An estimated crowd of 30,000 braved sub zero temperatures to await Punxsutawney Phil's weather prediction of six more weeks of winter during the 140th annual Groundhog Day festivities yesterday in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. Groundhog Day is a popular tradition in the United States and Canada. If Punxsutawney Phil sees his shadow he regards it as an omen of six more weeks of bad weather and returns to his den. Early spring arrives if he does not see his shadow, causing Phil to remain above ground. — AFP

Pink panther-hound

An Italian Greyhound wears a onesie in the benching area during the 150th Annual Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in New York City yesterday. — AFP



It certainly snowed!

A full Snow Moon is seen next to the Sacre Coeur Basilica at sunrise in Montmartre, Paris, France, yesterday. — Xinhua



Lady peacock

A dancer performs a traditional dance during the annual Navam Maha Perahera parade in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on Sunday. — Xinhua



No work today!

A man cleans his snow-covered car in Bucharest, Romania, yesterday. Romania's National Meteorological Administration (ANM) yesterday issued a Code Yellow warning for severe cold and frost, affecting more than half of the country, from yesterday morning until today. — Xinhua



Far from the madding crowd!

A hippo rests on a small island in Lake Naivasha in Nakuru County, Kenya, on Sunday. World Wetlands Day is observed annually on February 2 to raise global awareness of the vital role of wetlands for people, nature and culture. — Xinhua