

Sam vows continuous improvements in systems for safeguarding national security

Tony Wong

After the State Council Information Office released a white paper titled “Hong Kong: Safeguarding National Security Under the Framework of One Country, Two Systems” yesterday morning, Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai said in a statement yesterday afternoon that the white paper has provided the direction for the MSAR to further advance the safeguarding of national security.

Sam pledged that the MSAR government will continue to implement the central authorities’ holistic approach to national security, steadily advance the improvements in Macau’s institutional systems and mechanisms for safeguarding national security, and improve the respective laws and regulations in a timely manner, with the aim of ensuring Macau’s long-term prosperity and stability and more strongly protecting the high-quality development of the “One Country, Two Systems” cause.

The white paper, Sam noted, concludes that Hong Kong’s practice of safeguarding national security is, in essence, the practice of upholding and advancing the “One Country, Two Systems” cause, the practice of protecting the basic human rights, dignity, and well-being of Hong Kong’s 7.5 million residents, and the practice of promoting world peace and development. The chief executive said that all these demonstrate the central authorities’ determination to unswervingly implement the “One Country, Two Systems” principle, and highlights the country’s firm support for the development of Hong Kong and Macau and its earnest expectations for good governance in the two special administrative regions.

According to the statement, which was released by the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS), Sam noted the fine tradition of patriotism and love for Macau in the city’s civil society. Since its return to the motherland 26 years ago, Sam said, the MSAR government has comprehensively and accurately implemented the “One Country, Two Systems” principle, remained steadfast in safeguarding the nation’s sovereignty, security, and development interests, and resolutely safeguarded the bottom line that Macau must not descend into chaos.

The local government has ensured the

strict implementation of the central authorities’ overall jurisdiction over the MSAR while also ensuring that the “patriots governing Macau” foundation remains rock-solid, Sam said.

Sam said that facts have proven that it is precisely because of the institutional guarantee of the “One Country, Two Systems” principle and the nation’s strong backing that Macau has become an exemplary case of the successful implementation of the “One Country, Two Systems” principle, where social stability and economic prosperity have been maintained.

According to the statement, Sam noted that the white paper comprehensively reviews the experience and insights gained from Hong Kong’s safeguarding of national security under the “One Country, Two Systems” principle, and concludes that safeguarding national security is a long-term and enduring task with no completion date.

Sam noted that Macau enacted its Law on Safeguarding National Security as early as 2009 in accordance with Article 23 of the MSAR Basic Law, prohibiting acts such as treason, secession, and subversion against the Central People’s Government. With the aim of implementing the requirements outlined by the central authorities’ holistic approach to national security and more effectively responding to the nation’s latest internal and external security situation, the MSAR revised and improved its Law on Safeguarding National Security in 2023, after which Macau further improved its legal system for safeguarding national security by enacting several other laws, including the Law on the Protection of State Secrets, the Chief Executive Election Law, and the Legislative Assembly Election Law.

Looking ahead, Sam said, under the resolute and effective implementation of President Xi Jinping’s clear requirements and important instructions, Macau will continue to improve its legal system for safeguarding national security, fully implement the “patriots governing Macau” principle, and consolidate the foundation of patriotism and love for Macau, with the aim of ensuring Macau’s prosperity and the well-being of its residents and making greater contributions to the steady and sustained implementation of the “One Country, Two Systems” principle. ■



Sam visits 4 social service facilities

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai lifts a baby during his visit to a day nursery run by the Macau General Union of Neighbourhood Associations in Mong Tak social housing estate yesterday.

— Photo: GCS

Tony Wong

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai visited four social service facilities in Mong Ha district yesterday, extending Chinese New Year greetings to staff and service users, according to a statement by the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) yesterday.

According to the statement, Sam visited a day nursery run by the Macau General Union of Neighbourhood Associations (Kai Fong), a family service centre operated by the Macau

Women’s General Association (Fu Luen), a rehabilitation centre run by Caritas Macau, and a service centre for senior citizens operated by the Macau Federation of Trade Unions (Gung Luen).

The first three facilities are located in the Mong Tak social housing estate, while the other one is located in the Mong Sin social housing estate.

Sam was accompanied by Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam and officials of the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS). ■

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State Council releases white paper on HK’s efforts in safeguarding national security

State Council Information Office yesterday released a white paper titled “Hong Kong: Safeguarding China’s National Security Under the Framework of One Country, Two Systems.”

— Story on p. 7

Swedish woman recognises ‘rapist’ in Epstein files

A Swedish woman filed a complaint in Paris yesterday, claiming that she recognised a man in the files on convicted US sex offender Jeffrey Epstein who allegedly raped her in the 1990s, legal sources said.

— Story on p. 11

Barcelona’s unfinished basilica hits new heights despite delays

Barcelona’s eternally unfinished Sagrada Familia has grown to become the world’s tallest church, but a conflict with residents threatens to delay the finish date for the monument designed over 140 years ago.

— Story on p. 12

Police nab 2 Indonesians for fraud, money laundering

Ada Lei

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested a man and a woman from Indonesia on Monday for fraud and money laundering, PJ spokesman Chao Teng Hin said during a special press conference yesterday.

Chao identified the suspects as a 38-year-old male waste collector surnamed Ho and a 45-year-old female store clerk surnamed Lilian. The victims are a middle-aged mainland woman and a young Vietnamese woman.

According to Chao, the mainland woman reported to the police on February 3 that she had become online friends with a man via social media on September 20, 2025. The man persuaded the victim to invest in a gold fund. On January 13, 2026, following the man's instructions, the victim registered an account online to invest and transferred 28,000 yuan to a bank account he designated. The victim later received a purported profit of 675 yuan. The man then enticed her to raise her investment. The victim promptly transferred 49,000 yuan to the designated



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the two hooded money laundering suspects from Indonesia to a PJ van outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday.

— Photo: Ada Lei

account and 74,000 patacas to Ho's account for the investment.

Chao noted that when the victim asked to withdraw her principal and supposed profit, the man demanded that she first pay 91,000 patacas as "tax". After paying the entire amount, she was still unable to retrieve her principal and "profit". Suspecting she had been scammed, the victim reported a total loss of

249,000 patacas to the police.

Chao said that Ho had received 74,000 patacas from the mainland victim as well as 18,000 patacas from the Vietnamese victim. The police apprehended Ho on Monday near a bank. Under questioning, Ho claimed that the amounts were merely collected on behalf of his fellow countrywoman, Lilian, and that he had already forwarded the entire sum to her.

The police contacted the Vietnamese victim and confirmed that she had also fallen victim to an online cryptocurrency investment scam in mid-January, depositing funds into Ho's account at the scammer's request, resulting in a loss of 18,000 patacas. The police later arrested Lilian near the Red Market. The police confirmed that Lilian had received a total of 160,000 patacas from both victims and other potential victims. Under questioning, Lilian claimed that these funds were received on behalf of a male online acquaintance.

The duo were transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, both facing charges of fraud and money laundering. ■

Police arrest 3 mainlanders for robbing man of phone

Ada Lei

The Judiciary Police (PJ) apprehended three men from the Chinese mainland on Monday for robbing a middle-aged mainland man of a smartphone, PJ spokesman Chao Teng Hin said during a special press conference yesterday.

Chao identified the suspects as a 32-year-old male surnamed Li, who claimed to be jobless, a 46-year-old male surnamed Wang, who also claimed to be jobless, and a 46-year-old hotel owner surnamed Wang.

According to Chao, the Judiciary Police received a referral on Sunday evening from the Public Security Police (PSP) about the man who had been robbed by the trio at the entrance of a hotel in Cotai.

Chao noted that the victim had met a mainland friend at a casino earlier this year. His friend was in need of a loan to recover gambling losses, and the victim introduced him to Li, whom he had previously met at the casino and offered to lend money. Chao added that the victim did not partake in the loan agreement between Li and his friend and received no commission or other benefits.

Chao said that the victim encountered the three suspects on Sunday outside a casino in Cotai, where Li requested that the victim contact the friend to demand repayment. When the victim refused to assist, Li and the two Wangs, along with another man, who was still at large at the time of the press conference, assaulted the victim. The victim attempted to report the case to the police, but one of the suspects forcibly took his smartphone to prevent him from making the call. The altercation eventually drew the attention of hotel security. The three suspects then fled the scene while the other man quickly left Macau.

Chao mentioned that the victim, who reported a loss of a smartphone valued at HK\$4,000, sustained multiple injuries. The police apprehended the trio on Monday in a restaurant in Nape and in a hotel guestroom. The police later recovered the smartphone in the hotel lobby.

The trio were transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, each facing a charge of robbery. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the three hooded robbery suspects to a PJ van outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday.

— Photo: Ada Lei

Man tries to set self-service photo kiosk ablaze: police

Armindo Neves

According to the Public Security Police (PSP), at around 3 p.m. yesterday, a local man in his 50s took a bottle of alcoholic liquid to the China Travel Service (CTS) branch on the ground floor of Nam Kwong Building on Avenida do Dr. Rodrigo Rodrigues (羅理基博士大馬路) in Zape.

He poured the liquid over a self-service photo kiosk and attempted to ignite it using paper. CTS staff immediately intervened, subdued the man, and prevented a fire or any damage. PSP officers arrived at the scene and arrested the suspect. The case has been handed over to the Judiciary Police (PJ) for further investigation. ■



Firefighters and police officers surround the failed arson suspect (seated, face pixelated) outside Nam Kwong Building in Zape yesterday afternoon.

— Photo courtesy of TDM

Police bust jewellery shop staff for HK\$40 million illegal currency exchange deals

Ada Lei

The Judiciary Police (PJ) busted a HK\$40 million (41 million patacas) illegal exchange operation run by a jewellery shop on Monday, arresting a female employee for illegal currency exchange activities, PJ spokesman Chao Teng Hin said during a special press conference yesterday.

Chao identified the suspect as a 36-year-old local surnamed Chou.

According to Chao, the police received a tipoff about a jewellery shop in an integrated resort in Cotai operating an illegal currency exchange business. On Monday morning, officers discovered that Chou was engaging in an illegal currency exchange deal with a middle-aged male gambler from the Chinese mainland. After the gambler transferred money using his smartphone, Chou took cash from a drawer and handed it to the gambler.

Chao noted that after the gambler exchanged 1,726 yuan for HK\$1,800 in cash, he immediately entered the casino and converted the Hong Kong dollars into chips for gambling. The police later intercepted the gambler in the casino and apprehended Chou at the shop. The police seized HK\$95,400 in cash, two smartphones and a laptop from the shop.

The police confirmed that the shop had conducted illegal currency exchange activities amounting to HK\$40 million since April 2025, resulting in an illegal profit of 1.35 million yuan (1.56 million patacas). Chao added that Chou received "remuneration" in the form of a monthly salary.

Chou was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, facing an illegal currency exchange charge. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the hooded illegal currency exchange suspect to a PJ van outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday.

— Photo: Ada Lei

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16°C~24°C

Source: SMG

CNY event aims to promote values of reunion & gratitude: St Paul School principal

Armindo Neves

Saint Paul School Macau held yesterday its one-day Chinese New Year (CNY – also known as Spring Festival) event on its campus on Rampa dos Cavaleiros in Areia Preta district.

The school's principal, Fr. Athanasius Chen Xin Wang, said in a speech he hopes that students will enjoy the festive atmosphere of traditional Chinese culture by personally decorating and participating in the event, thereby inheriting the values of family reunion and gratitude embodied by the Spring Festival.

Teacher Man Lai Fan, who organised the event and heads the Catholic school's History and Geography section, told the *Post* that the event has been held consecutively for four years. She said the event aims to allow students to experience the atmosphere of

traditional festivals while also providing them with an opportunity to relax and relieve stress amid the pressures of preparing for exams like the Joint Admission Examination for Macao's Four Higher Education Institutions (JAE). Man noted that Chen has been at the helm of the school since 2018 when he set up a team dedicated to Chinese culture, adding that there has been an active effort by the school to continuously promote Chinese culture through such events and activities like history quizzes. The initiative is striving to strengthen students' sense of connection to their families and country, Man said.

The event featured around 10 activity booths and performances such as choral singing, float parades, drama performances, and song-and-dance routines, all aimed at welcoming the Year of the Horse, which begins next Tuesday. ■



Teacher Man Lai Fan (right), teacher Leong Sin Ion (left) and two unnamed students wearing traditional Chinese New Year (CNY) garb pose during a Spring Festival event at Saint Paul School Macau on Rampa dos Cavaleiros in Areia Preta district yesterday. – Photo: Armindo Neves

Govt to set up 2 CNY pedestrianised zones In Old Taipa Village and Laahn Gwai Lau

Armindo Neves

In order to enhance the festive atmosphere of the Chinese New Year (CNY – also known as Spring Festival) and optimise travel conditions, the government announced in a statement yesterday that it will set up two CNY pedestrianised zones, one in Old Taipa Village and the other in Rua de Nossa Senhora do Amparo – a street in the UNESCO-listed Historic Centre of Macau's "Laahn Gwai Lau" neighbourhood – daily from noon to 7 p.m. between next Tuesday, the first day of the Year of the Horse, and Sunday, February 22, i.e., from the first to the sixth day of the Chinese New Year.

The statement said that the arrangement will be regularly implemented starting this year during the Chinese New Year, International Workers' Day (aka May Day or Labour Day) and National Day (October 1) holidays to manage pedestrian flow and boost business turnover in the two areas.

Rua de Nossa Senhora do Amparo (關前後街) is a street in a neighbourhood colloquially known in Cantonese as "Laahn Gwai Lau" (爛鬼樓 – Dilapidated Ghost Building).

According to the statement, the pedestrian zone in Old Taipa Village will cover the area from the junction of Rua Fernão Mendes Pinto (飛能便度街) and Rua do Supico (素啤



Pedestrians walk past shops on Rua de Nossa Senhora do Amparo in the UNESCO-listed Historic Centre of Macau's "Laahn Gwai Lau" neighbourhood yesterday. – Photo: Armindo Neves

古街) to the junction of Rua Correia da Silva (告利雅施利華街) and Rua Governador Tamagnini Barbosa (巴坡沙總督街). The pedestrian zone in the Laahn Gwai Lau area will encompass the entire length of Rua de Nossa Senhora do Amparo (關前後街) and a section of Rua da Tercena (果欄街), the statement said.

According to the statement, in order to accommodate residents in Old Taipa Village, the government will provide a resident shuttle service in the district. The service will offer free transport for people with mobility difficulties between three designated points and a temporary bus stop, the statement said.

The statement also said that the Transport Bureau (DSAT) will implement temporary traffic control

measures around the pedestrianised zones, necessitating detours for some bus routes, adding that passengers are advised to use the temporary bus stops. The Public Security Police (PSP) and the Fire Services Bureau (CB) will deploy additional personnel to maintain order and ensure safety, the statement said.

During the CNY holiday, the statement said, both pedestrianisation zones will host a raft of activities including CNY-themed markets, performances, interactive booths, and photo spots, known as "da kat" – 打卡 – in Cantonese and "da ka" in Putonghua. Tourists and residents who spend 50 patacas or more at the zones' designated businesses can exchange their receipts for a commemorative token, the statement said. ■




Year of the Horse Tap for a Feast of Fortune

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Encounter with Ei Wada: barcode scanner as musical instrument



Ei Wada performs with his electric fan, posing as a guitarist. - Photos provided by New Media Art Macau



Ei Wada scans a participant's clothes with a barcode scanner on Friday night at his workshop. - Photo: William Chan

Interview and review by William Chan

ProjectPlayaround Macau, the second three-day session of the TouchDesigner Performing Arts Workshop, featured a captivating performance and insightful interview with renowned Japanese sound artist, Ei Wada.

I attended the first section on Friday, where Wada showcased his unique brand of electronic music, followed by an in-depth interview.

Many, including myself, were first introduced to Wada through a viral video where he ingeniously transformed the mundane act of scanning barcodes into a musical performance. The intriguing and unconventional nature of his work left a lasting impression, and the opportunity to witness it live was not to be missed.

During the workshop, the atmosphere was electric, with many participants even dressing in zebra-striped clothing, a nod to the barcodes that have become synonymous with Wada's art.

As a programmer and artist, Wada utilises a variety of self-made appliances to create his music. In one mesmerising performance, a stationary scanning device changed the pitch of the sound based on the performer's distance from it, effectively turning movement into melody. The highlight, however, was when Wada transformed an ordinary electric fan into a guitar-like instrument. Beyond the initial gimmickry, the performance was sonically captivating, a work of contemporary art.

In our interview, Wada delved into the philosophy that underpins his creative practice. He expressed a deep fascination with primitive and original sounds, a theme evident in his work. For Wada, who has been researching new ways of transforming daily items into musical instruments for decades, said that creating music for him is a process of constant experimentation and discovery.

This approach is rooted in the understanding that all instruments were once not instruments. "A guitar, for example, is just a string that you pluck. The first sound is very simple. But over a long period of time, it became a guitar."

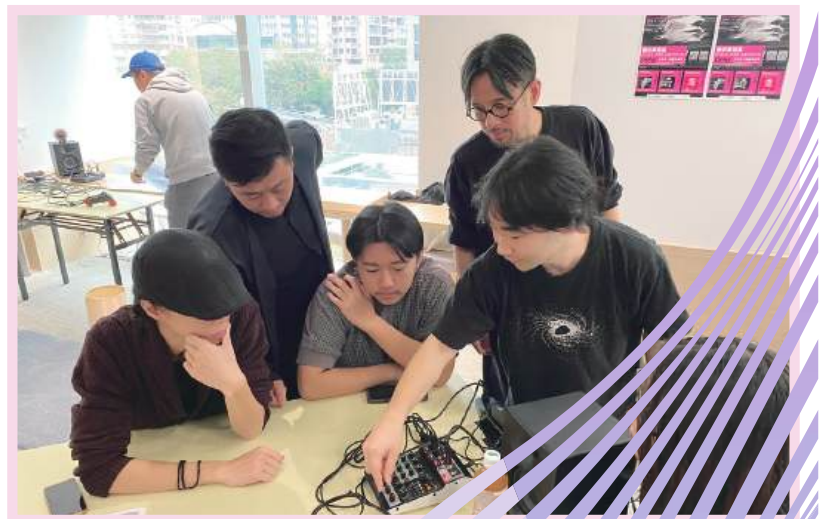
Wada sees his work as a continuation of this tradition, exploring the sonic potential of everyday objects.

One of the most compelling aspects of Wada's work is his use of outdated technology, such as CRT* televisions. He said that he uses the static electricity from the old televisions to create sound. These obsolete objects are given a new life in his performances. "For me, it's like a festival," he said, comparing the large, heavy televisions to the drums used in traditional Japanese festivals. "The size, on the contrary, is like a festival-like thing, and I can see it like a taiko drum*."

Looking towards the future, Wada envisions his music evolving into a more interactive and participatory experience. He is less interested in big stages and more focused on creating a festival-like atmosphere where the audience can participate. "I want to make it a festival where people can participate," he underlined. "It's more like folk music, something that is born in the present day."

During the presentation, Wada also gave a profound reflection on the nature of media and expression, which was written in Chinese in the original article. Translated, it reads:

"The medium is both a 'container' and can become a constituent element of



expression at the same time. We are already accustomed to the premise that the narrative must be contained within the 'interior' of the medium. However, when we begin to consciously pay attention to the structure, materiality, and system of the medium itself, we can reorganise it as a theme, material, and object of operation. The medium is no longer just a simple container, but can become the narrative itself. This understanding can leap over existing dimensions and generate new experiences and time structures. This is a creative act of re-understanding expression from a higher dimension."

When asked about the possibility of his experimental approach becoming institutionalised, Wada expressed a thoughtful ambivalence. He acknowledged that many forms of music have followed a similar path, eventually becoming codified and taught in formal settings. However, he cautioned against the rigidity that can come with institutionalisation. "If it becomes fixed in a certain format, it might not be interesting anymore," he reflected.

For Wada, the most important lesson is not how to play a television as an instrument, but rather the practice of looking at familiar objects from an outside perspective and becoming conscious of the medium itself. This critical innovativeness, he believes, is more valuable than any specific technique. "It is about cultivating the ability to see beyond prescribed uses and to imagine alternative possibilities, a skill that remains vital regardless of how music evolves," he said.

*CRT Television refers to a television set that uses a cathode ray tube (CRT) as its display technology. CRT televisions were the dominant display technology for several decades before the transition to flat-screen models began in the early 2000s. - Poe

**Taiko (太鼓) is the Japanese word for "drum." In a broad sense, it refers to any drum from Japan. However, in modern global usage, "taiko" most commonly refers to the art of Japanese ensemble drumming (known as kumi-daiko), which involves a variety of these drums played in a highly physical, rhythmic, and theatrical style. - DeepSeek

CNY Market blends festive shopping with youth entrepreneurship: vox pop

Khalel Vallo

Macau's traditional Chinese New Year Market (CNY) has returned to Praça do Tap Siac for its 2026 edition, offering festive goods, flowers, snacks and cultural performances, aiming to attract revellers ahead of the Spring Festival.

The market features a total of 26 stalls, including 16 selling CNY products, six offering festive flowers and four selling snacks. Visitors can browse a range of decorations and gifts, as well as seasonal food items, with fresh flowers, potted plants and traditional red couplets remaining popular choices for families preparing for the holiday.

The *Post* yesterday interviewed some of the stall operators about

their expectations.

Linda, a 17-year-old student, told the *Post* that her stall is run by high-school students attending a course on modern finance, applying their classroom knowledge through real business operations. She said the group mainly sells Spring Festival gifts and game-based items, hoping to "bring joy and happiness" as well as good luck to visitors, while also allowing more students to gain hands-on entrepreneurial experience.

Meanwhile, Harry, 25, said he and his team had previously set up in the market but paused for a year due to weaker business conditions following the COVID-19 pandemic. He said they returned this year mainly to "gain experience through



Marketgoers check out stalls at Macau's traditional Chinese New Year Market (CNY) in Praça do Tap Siac yesterday afternoon. – Photo: Khalel Vallo

an entrepreneurship competition", adding that the weeklong market provides opportunities that cannot be learnt in school. He noted yesterday

drew strong crowds despite the cold weather and said this year's stalls were "more creative and visually appealing", helping attract both

tourists and local residents.

Daney, 37, said she set up her stall with friends to enjoy the festive atmosphere while jointly operating a booth. She introduced her product "nata," a Portuguese egg tart-scented hand cream designed as a portable souvenir for tourists. She added that the booth also features an A-Ma Temple-inspired theme and an archery activity.

The market will run until Sunday from noon to midnight, as well as next Monday and Tuesday from midday to 1 a.m.

The CNY Market aims to provide a festive space to shop and enjoy seasonal cultural activities ahead of the holiday, according to a statement by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) last week. ■

AMCM hosts Guangzhou roadshow to promote Macau Investment Funds Law



This handout photo provided by the Macau Monetary Authority (AMCM) yesterday shows its board member Chan Kuan I delivering a speech at the "Promotion Seminar on the Advantages and Opportunities of Macao's Investment Fund Industry" in Guangzhou on Friday.

Khalel Vallo

The Macau Monetary Authority (AMCM) announced in a statement yesterday that it recently held a seminar in Guangzhou to introduce Macau's Investment Funds Law and supporting measures, aiming to attract more qualified fund management companies to set up shop in Macau.

The event, titled "Promotion Seminar on the Advantages and Opportunities of Macao's Investment Fund Industry", was organised by AMCM, co-organised by the Securities and Funds Industry Association of Macao (SFIAM), and supported by the Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM), the statement said.

AMCM is Macau's quasi-central bank.

The statement added that the event drew around 110 representatives from government entities, industry associations, fund management companies, banks and securities firms from both Macau and the Chinese mainland.

AMCM board member Chan Kuan I said that the local government has introduced multiple improvements in legal, regulatory and taxation aspects to strengthen the wealth management market and promote investment fund development, the statement said, adding that Chan underlined that the official implementation of the

Investment Funds Law and its supporting framework this year was expected to enhance regulatory alignment with overseas fund markets and create a more favourable environment for the sector.

The statement said that the seminar also featured presentations on Macau's business environment and company registration procedures, as well as sessions by industry representatives on cross-border fund opportunities.

A business matching session was held on-site, with participating firms saying the event helped them better understand Macau's financial development trends and its advantages in connecting with Portuguese-speaking countries markets, the statement noted.

During the seminar, the Securities and Funds Industry Association of Macao and the Guangdong Securities and Futures Association set up a strategic partnership to strengthen cooperation in securities and fund business development, according to the statement.

Meanwhile, the statement added that AMCM plans to continue promotional activities in Hengqin and elsewhere in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) in the first half of the year to attract more fund managers and support Macau's appropriate economic diversification. ■

Macao Chinese Orchestra holds Na Tcha-themed concerts at kindergartens

Kristina Vallesteros

The Macao Chinese Orchestra has conducted a series of concerts for kindergarten pupils, according to a statement from the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) on Monday.

As part of the orchestra's 2025-26 concert season under the banner "Planting Musical Seeds", the programme was held across 16 kindergartens between October last year and February this year, the statement said. It was attended by nearly 2,500 kids.

According to the statement, the performances centred on a story featuring the mythological figure Na Tcha, designed to introduce the four main sections of a Chinese orchestra. Musicians performed a mix of well-known children's tunes and traditional Chinese pieces, such as "The Horse Race" and included interactive segments where the children could try playing the instruments, the statement noted.

The concerts were staged at multiple schools including Escola Oficial de Seac Pai Van, Macau Baptist College, Keang Peng School, and St. Anthony's Kindergarten & Nursery, among others, the statement noted. After the performances, the children were given colouring sheets featuring Chinese instruments.

The programme was organised by the Cultural



This undated handout photo provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) shows performers from the Macao Chinese Orchestra posing with children at a local kindergarten.

Affairs Bureau and coordinated by the Macao Orchestra Company. It aims to foster an early appreciation of traditional music, the statement added. Schools interested in hosting similar events are invited to contact the Macao Chinese Orchestra directly. ■

CEM, Housing Bureau mark decade of home safety checks for elderly

Kristina Vallesteros

CEM and the Housing Bureau (IHM) have marked the 10th year of a joint initiative to conduct voluntary electrical safety inspections for elderly residents, according to a Monday statement from CEM.

The programme is part of CEM's Community Programme launched in 2000. It recently focused on elderly individuals living alone in rental social housing units, the statement noted. Themed "Safe Electricity Usage, Community Integration" technicians from both entities visited homes to perform inspections and promote electrical safety awareness.

Housing Bureau Acting Vice Director Cheang Sek Lam underlined, according to the statement, that the programme has served about 200 households in need over the past decade. The statement said that the sustained cooperation highlights the shared commitment of both entities to community safety, particularly for vulnerable senior citizens.

CEM Regulatory Affairs and



CEM representatives pose for a group photo during the recent round of household electrical safety inspections for seniors living alone in social housing units. – Photo: CEM

Corporate Communications Office Director Cecilia Nip Lai Peng was quoted by the statement as saying that the power utility is dedicated to fulfilling its social responsibilities, with special attention to the electrical safety of the elderly. The activity aimed to educate residents on the importance of regularly checking their home electrical installations, the statement noted.

According to the statement, technicians conducted safety checks, replaced damaged components like

cables and sockets, repaired small appliances, and explained essential daily safety precautions to the residents during the visits.

The statement added that the CEM Community Programme accepts referrals from local organisations and also welcomes referrals from the public for individuals in need who hold a valid Beneficiary Card from the Social Welfare Bureau (IAS). Further details and registration are available on the CEM website www.cem-macau.com. ■

Toi San condo owners accept 'flat swap' after redevelopment

Ida Cheong

Toi San district's over 60-year-old Public Servants Building has obtained consent agreements from 95.5 percent of its condominium owners to proceed with redevelopment, including five government-owned units, while four household owners have not signed the agreement.

After redevelopment of the building, the owners will be able to get a new unit of an equivalent size, the building's management committee announced in a press conference yesterday.

The official Cantonese name of the Public Servant Building is Kong Mou Un Tai Ha (公務員大廈).

The press conference about the building's urban renewal project was held at the building.

Lou Hok Fu, vice chairman of the owners management committee, told reporters yesterday that the owners would be able to "exchange their units for new ones" post-redevelopment. Each condominium owner is required to fork out about 38,500 patacas in legal fees, Lou said, adding that the total construction cost, estimated at over 90 million patacas, along with the other expenses for newly added units, will be borne by the contractor, which



Lei Pui Seng, the chairperson of Toi San's Public Servant Building's management committee and Lou Hok Fu (left), vice chairman of the building's management committee told reporters on the sidelines of press conference about the Toi San's Public Servant Building's urban renewal project at the building yesterday.

— Photos: Ida Cheong

will recoup the construction costs by selling the newly added ground floor shops after redevelopment.

Lou noted that the redevelopment project will be undertaken by Kwan Shing Property Development Company Limited. After redevelopment, the ground floor will be expanded to accommodate 14 shops, while floors 1 to 6 will be residential, increasing the number of residential units from the original 90 to 107, as well as the 14 shops. The size of the owners' original flat of around 39.12 m² will essentially remain almost unchanged, Lou said. He pointed out that the building's

height is limited to 20.5 metres, according to the draft plan.

The reconstruction project is expected to take two years, followed by around six months for government inspections, according to Lou.

The redevelopment of the building is the first case under Macau's new "Urban Renewal Legal System", which took effect on June 1, 2023. According to the system, buildings aged 40 years or older can initiate redevelopment procedures with the consent of a minimum of 80 percent of the condominium owners. Therefore, the redevelopment of the Public Servants Building will proceed with



Public Servant Building (公務員大廈) located in Toi San district.

the consent of 86 of the 90 owners, i.e., 95.5 percent of the total number of owners, while four owners who have not signed the agreement will have their cases resolved through arbitration, Lou added.

Built in 1965 without lifts, the building suffers from issues such as water leakage, peeling walls and outdated electrical wiring due to its age exceeding 60 years, raising widespread safety concerns among residents, Lou said, adding that the condominium owners' general meeting passed the redevelopment resolution on January 7, 2019; on May 4, 2019, the general meeting authorised

the constructor to apply to the Lands and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU) and the Financial Services Bureau (DSF) for redevelopment permits and "Tax Incentives for Property Redevelopment" for the redevelopment process, not for a transfer of condominium ownership rights.

However, Lou added that due to the complexity of ownership and the time required for administrative procedures, the submission and approval of the Conditions of Urban Planning were not completed until June 24, 2021; therefore, the whole process, ongoing since 2018, has now lasted seven years.

Lei Pui Seng, the chairperson of the building's owners management committee, told reporters that the owners have appealed to the relevant government's bureaux to complete the arbitration process as soon as possible, expedite the review procedures, and promptly announce the rental terms for temporary housing to ensure the owners have a place to live during the reconstruction period, adding that currently there are about 10-20 households living in the building. Lei pointed out that most of the owners are quite old. ■



These photos taken yesterday show the condominium building's dilapidated state of repair.

Is there a difference between a church pew and a park bench?

Commentary by Rui Pastorin

Last month, I wandered into a church near the city centre. I am not a devout Catholic, but this is a habit I picked up not too long ago as I have always enjoyed the solemn environment found in many of Macau's well-preserved churches. Faith, irrespective of what you might believe in, is also what I believe to be a great answer to a loud and cluttered mind, and a place of worship never fails to be the perfect antithesis.

As I entered through the church doors, I expected it to be just like any other visit – a quiet, peaceful time that not only allowed for prayer, but introspection. Unfortunately, this was different.

On one side of the church, a pair was talking as loudly as they would in a city square. Shopping bags were placed on a church pew as three other people engaged in conversation, all the while a young woman was snoozing soundly. At that point, I couldn't help but wonder if they had bothered to ask if there was a difference between a church pew and a park bench.

And while it isn't out of the ordinary to see people snapping photos of the intricacies and details



A set of rules is displayed at the entrance to Igreja de São Domingos (玫瑰聖母堂). — Photo taken yesterday by Rui Pastorin

found in a church's architecture, at that point I wished that it would occur to that group that while Macau is a city that has a lot to offer and welcomes visitors with open arms, certain places are more than just tourist attractions. Respect is to be exercised for places and, by extension, the people who still frequent it for its intended purposes, which, in this case, is for prayer and contemplation. Places of worship, whether it be a church, temple, mosque, whatever the setting might be, is considered sacred for those who want to practise their respective faiths.

People are always welcome to visit Macau's historical churches and marvel at how well they have been preserved, a feat that the city should definitely be proud of. But in any case, for all of those who choose to visit, respect should always remain. Rules and reminders are there for a reason after all. If you miss them, then remember that these are not just considered tourist attractions for everyone and are still sacred to many.

There is a stark contrast between a church pew and a park bench. It's obvious. Don't mix it up. ■

Bus QR Code allows payment of up to 3 fares at the same time

Ida Cheong

The Transport Bureau (DSAT) announced in a statement yesterday that in order to speed up fare payment and enhance bus operational efficiency, after coordination and testing, the WeChat Pay (its Chinese mainland and Hong Kong versions) and Alipay (the Chinese mainland version) have introduced a bus "Companion Code" feature starting yesterday, which allows passengers to simultaneously pay the bus fares for up to two additional companions.

Using the "Companion Code" payment methods, the fare per person per trip is 6 patacas, and no fare discounts or transfer concessions are applicable, the statement added.

The statement noted that the Transport Bureau has been in continuous communication with the Monetary Authority of Macao (AMCM), Macau's two public bus companies, and payment service providers to develop a wider range



This photo downloaded from Mobus Fandom shows a Macau Pass Machine on a bus.

of electronic payment methods for public buses, further facilitating public use of Macau's bus services.

The Transport Bureau will closely monitor the effectiveness of the new payment options and continue to actively coordinate the introduction of other payment methods to further facilitate travel for both residents and tourists, according to the statement. ■

Lawmakers unanimously pass outline of bill on Committee for Safeguarding National Security

Tony Wong

The Legislative Assembly (AL) yesterday unanimously passed the outline of a government-initiated 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 bill, the outline of which was passed by the legislature yesterday, 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.

After yesterday's passage of its outline, the bill will be passed to one of the legislature's standing committees for an article-by-

article review, after which it will be resubmitted to another plenary session for its second and final debate and article-by-article vote.

Secretary for Security Chan Tsz King introduced the outline of the bill during a plenary session of the legislature's hemicycle yesterday.

Chan said during yesterday's plenary session that the bill aims to formally regulate the operation of the Committee for Safeguarding National Security in the form of a law, which highlights the seriousness and authority of the committee tasked with carrying out various duties and functions concerning Macau's safeguarding of national security.

Chan also said that by taking the opportunity to enact a law to regulate the committee, the bill also proposes various improvements to the functions and powers, organisational structure, and operation of the committee.

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

an administrative regulation, which is tasked with assisting the chief executive in policymaking for matters concerning the safeguarding of national security.

The bill proposes that the committee will be an entity tasked with the MSAR's affairs concerning the safeguarding of national security and assuming the MSAR's primary responsibility for safeguarding national security, with its operation subject to the oversight and accountability of the Central People's Government.

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 bill, the outline of which was passed by the legislature yesterday, proposes formally listing the committee's current duties of assessing whether chief executive



Secretary for Security Chan Tsz King addresses yesterday's plenary session in the Legislative Assembly's (AL) hemicycle. — Photo: GCS

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.

These duties are currently not formally listed in the current

administrative regulation governing the committee's operation.

In addition to the regulation of the Committee for Safeguarding National Security, the bill also proposes amendments to the Judicial Organisation Framework Law.

According to the current version of the Judicial Organisation Framework Law, only judges holding Chinese nationality can conduct trials for cases of the crimes listed in Macau's national security law, and only prosecutors holding Chinese nationality can handle such cases as well.

The bill proposes that the rule (Chinese nationality) will also be extended to all types of litigation processes such as civil litigation, if the respective cases concern national security.

The bill also proposes that trials for any types of cases shall be conducted behind closed doors if the respective judges have concluded that open trials of such cases will adversely affect national security. ■

Wang Yi introduces key tasks of APEC China 2026

GUANGZHOU – The Chinese side will work to promote the adoption of an outcome document that is clear in direction and rich in content at the Leaders' Meeting this year, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said when delivering a speech at the opening session of the First Senior Officials' Meeting of APEC China 2026 in Guangzhou on yesterday.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee,

said that the Chinese side will actively expand the pathway for the building of the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific, and promote the formulation of a blueprint for upgrading connectivity.

Driven by innovation, the Chinese side will promote the digital, intelligent and green transition for APEC members, said Wang, noting that the Chinese side will also work for deepening practical cooperation in various fields around development-related governance issues. — Xinhua

China launches official website for 2026 APEC 'China Year'

BEIJING – The official website for the 2026 APEC "China Year" (www.apec2026.cn) has been officially launched, the foreign ministry said yesterday.

As the host of the 2026 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), China will hold the 33rd APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting

in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province in November. Approximately 300 APEC-related meetings and events will take place in multiple Chinese cities throughout the year.

The website provides authoritative content, the latest reports, and service information regarding the APEC "China Year." — Xinhua

Chinese optical clock contributes to calibration of Int'l Atomic Time

BEIJING – For the first time, a Chinese-developed optical clock named NIM-Sr1 has contributed to the calibration of International Atomic Time (TAI), the State Administration for Market Regulation said yesterday.

The strontium optical lattice clock is developed by the National Institute of Metrology. Experts say the event marks a milestone in China's optical

clock research and will enhance the country's influence in international time and frequency studies.

TAI is the basis for Coordinated Universal Time (UTC), which is the world's civil time standard. TAI is generated by timekeeping institutions around the world and calibrated using the most precise atomic clocks available internationally. — Xinhua

MECC unveils survey findings on foreign-linked companies



USJ Faculty of Business and Law Dean Jenny Philips presents the findings of the "2025 Business Sentiment Survey" on Monday evening at the University of Saint Joseph (USJ) in Ilha Verde. — Photos: Rui Pastorin

Rui Pastorin

The findings of the "2025 Business Sentiment Survey" for foreign-linked companies were unveiled this week, noting that amidst certain economic challenges, businesses maintain a cautious optimism towards the economic prospects of Macau and its neighbouring regions.

The data was unveiled during a presentation of the report at the University of Saint Joseph (USJ) on Monday evening. Valid responses were received from 27 member companies of chambers of commerce, with the survey, the first one tailored for Macau and serving as an initial exploratory study, conducted by the Macau European Chamber of Commerce's (MECC) Economic Development Group in conjunction with USJ's Faculty of Business and Law from June 11 to August 8.

"The purpose of this survey is to take the pulse of the European companies that are established here in Macau, to try to understand what is their sentiment regarding the business environment and what are their prospects for the future",

MECC Executive Vice President and convener of the survey working group Rui Pedro Cunha told reporters on Monday, before the presentation.

Cunha also told the *Post* that they expect to have the survey done periodically in the future. The survey, he added, will allow them to understand where the opportunities are, what is going well, and what can be adjusted to "make sure that Macau is more attractive for foreign companies that want to establish themselves here".

The findings were presented by USJ Faculty of Business and Law Dean Jenny Philips.

Among notable findings were opportunities in technological innovation, regional integration and talent mobility. The data showed that 70.4 percent of the surveyed enterprises prioritise technology and AI in their research and development focus, while over 60 percent of the foreign invested enterprises have established business agreements or partnerships with Chinese mainland entities.

Moreover, while there is optimism for regulatory changes



MECC Executive Vice President and convener of the survey working group Rui Pedro Cunha speaks with reporters before the survey presentation.

to attract foreign investments, challenges persist in cross-border data protection, legal matters, and trade regulations. Findings also show that there is interest in Hengqin, being mainly driven by its cost benefits and market access.

Following the survey presentation, Philips told reporters that from the small sample surveyed, there was "a general direction showing that there is high expectation in the regulatory changes" in Macau and the Chinese mainland, as well as towards a positive expectation of business. "As we can see that most companies either did not change or increase investment in their business last year".

Philips told the *Post* that while the sample size for the research is small, it provides "a dashboard of what is happening now", adding that this can give them a view of how the business scene for foreign-linked business in Macau looks. From there, Macau's researchers can identify angles and directions for broader application to get better result for generalisation, she said. ■

Xi stresses care for the elderly, children



President Xi Jinping, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, waves to the crowd while visiting the Longfusi commercial area in Dongcheng District of Beijing yesterday. Xi visited primary-level officials and residents in Beijing during a two-day inspection tour on Monday and yesterday. — Xinhua

BEIJING — Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, on Tuesday stressed the importance of caring for the elderly and children during his inspection tour in Beijing ahead of the Spring Festival.

At an elderly care home in Xicheng District, Xi told residents that the Party Central Committee pays special attention to both the elderly and the young.

Noting that senior citizens are treasure

of the country, Xi said the steady increase in average life expectancy is a reflection of the strengths of the socialist system.

“Caring for and supporting the elderly is a shared responsibility of the whole society,” Xi added.

He also said that children represent the future of the nation and efforts must be made to ensure their healthy growth and well-rounded development.

— Xinhua

Ensuring high-quality development of ‘One Country, Two Systems’ with high-standard security

BEIJING — The white paper titled “Hong Kong: Safeguarding China’s National Security Under the Framework of One Country, Two Systems” is of far-reaching significance in ensuring high-quality development of the One Country, Two Systems policy with high-standard security.

The document, released yesterday by the State Council Information Office, provides a review of Hong Kong’s endeavors in safeguarding national security as well as the experience and insights gained in this process.

Following Hong Kong’s return to the motherland in 1997, a delay in completing legislation required by Article 23 of the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) left significant loopholes in Hong Kong’s system of laws regarding national security.

Under the guise of pursuing democracy, freedom and human rights, agitators and external anti-China forces exploited these deficiencies and intensified sabotage, openly challenging the One Country, Two Systems principle. The 2019 turmoil in Hong Kong, characterized by extreme violence and destructive incidents sparked by secessionist aims, inflicted so much damage on the region, imperiled China’s security, and posed the greatest challenge for the One Country, Two Systems practice.

In response to the turmoil, the central government introduced a series of decisive measures, including reinforcing the legal framework and enforcement mechanisms for

safeguarding national security in the HKSAR, improving the region’s electoral system and governance, and implementing the principle of patriots administering Hong Kong. These measures effectively put an end to the chaos and ushered in a new period in safeguarding national security in Hong Kong.

Through the concerted efforts of both the central government and the HKSAR, a historic transformation has been realized in safeguarding national security in the region with marked achievements. Bidding farewell to disorder, the region has entered a new phase of stability and prosperity.

Safeguarding national security is a long-term and enduring task. Hong Kong continues to face a complex situation in safeguarding national security. It is key to adhere to a holistic approach to national security as a guiding principle, while unswervingly building a high level of security, so as to ensure steady and sustained progress in the One Country, Two Systems practice.

A safe Hong Kong that is free, developed, open and vibrant aligns fully with the One Country, Two Systems policy, serves China’s fundamental interests, benefits Hong Kong’s 7.5 million residents, and meets the interests of all investors. Any attempt to destabilize Hong Kong or use it to contain China will never prevail in a Hong Kong now anchored by effective laws and shielded by the endeavors of the central government and the HKSAR to sustain a robust security framework.

— Xinhua

State Council releases white paper on HK’s efforts in safeguarding national security under ‘One Country, Two Systems’ framework

BEIJING — State Council Information Office yesterday released a white paper titled “Hong Kong: Safeguarding China’s National Security Under the Framework of One Country, Two Systems.”

Consisting of five parts in addition to a preface and a conclusion, the white paper details the unrelenting fight for safeguarding national security in Hong Kong and the central government’s fundamental responsibility for national security matters concerning Hong Kong.

It also expounds on the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR)’s achievements in fulfilling its constitutional responsibility for safeguarding national security, Hong Kong’s transition from disorder to stability and prosperity, and efforts in creating high-standard security for high-quality development of the One Country, Two Systems policy.

The Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee with Xi Jinping at its core has fully, faithfully, and resolutely implemented the policy of One Country, Two Systems, emphasizing that the highest principle of the policy is to safeguard national sovereignty, security, and development interests, according to the white paper.

The white paper says that the central government has applied a holistic approach to national security, and effectively exercised overall jurisdiction over the HKSAR in accordance with the country’s Constitution and the HKSAR’s Basic Law. It has enacted the Law on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region — which has been enforced in the region — and ensured that Hong Kong is administered by patriots.

The central government supports the HKSAR in fulfilling its constitutional responsibility to safeguard national security

by effectively preventing, halting, and punishing any activities that endanger national security, according to the white paper.

Hong Kong’s endeavors to safeguard national security are, at their core, efforts to uphold and advance the One Country, Two Systems policy, protect the fundamental human rights, dignity, and wellbeing of Hong Kong’s 7.5 million residents, and promote world peace and development, according to the white paper.

In today’s world, global transformation on a scale unseen in a century is accelerating, and the development environment facing China is undergoing profound and complex change. Safeguarding national security is a long-term and enduring task, the white paper says.

The central government firmly supports the HKSAR in fully and faithfully implementing the policy of One Country, Two Systems, shouldering its constitutional responsibility for safeguarding national security, and continuously strengthening its national security shield, to ensure steady and sustained progress in the One Country, Two Systems practice with high-standard security, according to the white paper.

Hong Kong, enjoying high-standard security, is bound to overcome all risks and challenges on the journey forward, and remain as steady as a rock in a turbulent world, the white paper says.

Under such a condition, Hong Kong will achieve long-term peace, stability, and prosperity. It will also fully leverage the strengths of One Country, Two Systems, and better integrate into and contribute to China’s overall development, the white paper adds.

— Xinhua

White paper on HK’s national security deepens public understanding of ‘One Country, Two Systems’: Liaison Office in HKSAR

HONG KONG — The white paper on Hong Kong’s efforts in safeguarding national security will deepen public understanding that safeguarding national sovereignty, security, and development interests is the primary principle of “One Country, Two Systems,” the Liaison Office of the Central People’s Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) said yesterday.

The white paper was released at a critical juncture as the implementation of “one country, two systems” has entered a new stage and Hong Kong has taken fresh strides in transitioning from disorder to stability and prosperity, a spokesperson for the office said.

Titled “Hong Kong: Safeguarding China’s National Security Under the Framework of One Country, Two Systems,” the white paper was issued on Tuesday by China’s State Council Information Office.

The spokesperson said the document exposes and refutes attacks and smears by anti-China agitators against the legislation, law enforcement and judicial

process for national security in Hong Kong, while also aiding the public in better grasping the situation, tasks and practical requirements for ensuring national security in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong is a local administrative region of China, and safeguarding national security is its constitutional responsibility. The practice of Hong Kong since its return to the motherland has repeatedly proved that only with national security can Hong Kong be safe, families be happy and industries thrive, the spokesperson said.

The spokesperson noted that the HKSAR has ensured that Hong Kong is administered by patriots, the Hong Kong economy has sustained an upward momentum and people’s livelihoods have been constantly improved.

Leveraging the release of the white paper as a new starting point, Hong Kong will step up its national security efforts to continuously ensure that its high-quality development will be safeguarded by high-level security.

— Xinhua

Man arrested in Thailand for smuggling rhino horn inside meat

BANGKOK – Thai authorities arrested a man for allegedly smuggling more than 11 kilograms of rhino horns inside wrapped meat, in a case officials linked yesterday to an international wildlife trafficking network.

The 36-year-old Vietnamese man was detained on Monday after landing at Bangkok's main international airport on suspicion of illegal wildlife imports, the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation said in a statement.

He was travelling from Lubumbashi in the Democratic

Republic of Congo to Laos, transiting through Ethiopia and Thailand, according to the department.

Airport authorities and police seized six pieces of rhinoceros horn and around 12 kilograms of unidentified meat used to conceal them inside a polystyrene icebox.

"There were some irregularities in the X-ray scan of the checked luggage so the authorities checked it," the department said.

Sadudee Panpakdee, director of the department's CITES division, told AFP officials were unsure of the value of the seized horns

or what type of meat was used to conceal them.

The items were sent to a wildlife forensic laboratory for examination, officials said.

If convicted, the suspect faces up to 10 years in prison and a fine up to one million baht (US\$32,000).

All five rhino species are protected under international law and trade in their horns is banned.

Thailand is a major transit hub for wildlife smugglers who often sell highly prized endangered creatures on the lucrative black market in Asia. –AFP



This handout photo taken on Monday and released yesterday by Thailand's Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP) shows rhino horns confiscated by customs from a Vietnamese traveller at Suvarnabhumi International Airport in Bangkok.

– AFP

Philippine ferry death toll hits 51 as divers recover more bodies

MANILA – The confirmed death toll from a ferry that sank off Basilan province in the southern Philippines has risen to 51 after Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) divers retrieved more bodies from the wreck, authorities said yesterday.

In a report, the PCG said its technical divers began search and recovery operations yesterday morning, concentrating on the vessel's first-deck economy accommodation area.

The MV Trisha Kerstin 3 sank on January 26 while traveling from Zamboanga City to Jolo in Sulu province. The location of the sunken vessel is approximately 1.8 nautical miles off Baluk-Baluk Island.

At least 316 passengers and crew survived the incident, according to the PCG.

The tragedy is among the deadliest maritime incidents in the region in recent years. –Xinhua

Thai man's prison term for royal insult extended to 50 years

BANGKOK – A Thai court yesterday extended the prison sentence of a man convicted for criticising the country's king to 50 years, one of the longest terms imposed under the kingdom's strict royal insult law, a legal rights group said.

Thailand's lese-majeste law shields King Maha Vajiralongkorn and his family from criticism and carries a maximum sentence of up to 15 years per offence.

The criminal court sentenced Phuritikon Sarakul to 30 years under the law over posts made on his social media account between 2021 and 2022, Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR) said in a statement.

In December, the 43-year-old who lives outside of Thailand was sentenced in absentia to 20 years in prison for the same offence over separate internet posts, the rights group said.

The combined sentences, totalling five decades in prison, meant he had received one of the "harshest sentences under Section 112 in history", TLHR said, referring to the law by its provision in the penal code.

Rights groups and critics say the lese-majeste law has long been used to stifle dissent and silence political opponents.

At least 289 people have been charged under the law since 2020, according to TLHR.

In 2024, a clothing vendor was sentenced to 50 years in prison for insulting the monarchy over posts made on his personal Facebook account.

Last year, a former civil servant sentenced to a 43-year term under lese-majeste laws was freed from prison after eight years when she received a royal pardon.

The woman, who confessed, had shared audio clips online of a podcaster who was critical of the monarchy.

The latest verdict came days after a national election in which the conservative, pro-royalist Bhumjaithai party secured a surprise victory, according to preliminary results.

The previous version of the reformist People's Party campaigned on amending the royal insult law ahead of the last election in 2023.

But the constitutional court ruled the following year that its pledge amounted to an attempt to overthrow the constitutional monarchy, and dissolved the party.

The issue was absent from People's Party most recent campaign and it finished second in Sunday's election. –AFP

S Korean police raid spy agency over drone flights into North

SEOUL – South Korean authorities raided the country's spy agency yesterday as they investigated how a drone was flown across the border and shot down over North Korea.

Pyongyang accused Seoul of flying a drone into Kaesong earlier this year, releasing images that purported to show debris from the downed aircraft.

South Korea initially denied government involvement, suggesting civilians may have been responsible.

But police said yesterday they were investigating three active-duty soldiers and one spy agency employee suspected of involvement in the case.

Search and seizure warrants have been executed "at a total of 18 locations, including the Defense Intelligence Command and the

National Intelligence Service," authorities said in a statement.

Three civilians have been charged for their alleged role in the drone scandal.

One of them has publicly claimed responsibility, saying he acted to detect radiation levels from North Korea's Pyongsan uranium processing facility.

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung has previously said flying the drone into North Korea was akin to "firing a shot" across the border.

Disgraced ex-president Yoon Suk Yeol is currently standing trial on charges he illegally sent drones into North Korea to help create the pretext for declaring martial law in late 2024.

His attempt to overturn civilian rule failed, and Yoon was impeached and ousted from office in April last year. –AFP



South Korean divers wearing traditional hanbok dresses hold a placard reading "Happy New Year!" during an underwater show to celebrate the upcoming Lunar New Year at the COEX aquarium in Seoul yesterday. –AFP

Japan elects fewer women MPs in snap election

TOKYO – The number of women in Japan's powerful lower house has fallen after snap elections, results showed yesterday, dealing a blow to already underrepresented women in male-dominated Japanese politics.

Sanae Takaichi tightened her grip on power on Sunday, four months after becoming Japan's first woman prime minister, but has shown little appetite for framing her leadership around gender.

Women now make up 15 percent of lawmakers, winning 68 of 465 seats in the house of representatives – down from 73 elected in 2024 – in a vote that handed Takaichi's conservatives a historic landslide.

A record 24 percent of candidates were women on Sunday, but that figure was just one percentage point up from 2024.

Hikaru Fujita stood for the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)

while pregnant and won against a veteran lawmaker, securing nearly half the votes in her district.

During her campaign in the central province of Nagano, she promised to support young people and women, and was personally endorsed by Takaichi when she announced her pregnancy.

In Japan, gender roles are rigid, with women usually expected to look after the home and family, even if they work.

Takaichi, a staunch conservative who admires Margaret Thatcher, named a male-dominated cabinet when she took the helm in October, despite pledging to boost female representation.

'Conservative stance'

"The inauguration of Prime Minister Takaichi doesn't appear to have sparked a strong movement

within the LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) to significantly increase the number of female candidates," Yuki Tsuji, professor of Tokai University and politics expert, told AFP as election campaigning began.

Of the 68 women elected to parliament, 39 came from the LDP – just over 12 percent of their 315 lawmakers.

Takaichi's views on gender place her on the right of an already conservative LDP, and she opposes revising a 19th-century law requiring married couples to share the same surname.

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

Japan ranked 118 out of 148 in the World Economic Forum's 2025 Global Gender Gap Report. –AFP

Death toll from heavy snowfall in Japan rises to 46

AOMORI – Almost three weeks of heavy snowfall has killed 46 people and injured 558 others in Japan, fresh data from the Fire and Disaster Management Agency showed yesterday.

Continued snowfall since

late January has buried northern communities and caused traffic chaos, particularly along the coast facing the Sea of Japan.

Many fatal accidents happened when mounds of snow fell on residents from roofs or people tumbled while

trying to clear it, according to police and local officials.

In the northern regional hub of Aomori, residents are having to deal with 1.3 metres of snow on the ground, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency. –AFP

Sri Lanka's palm-sap tappers ride UNESCO boost

Amal Jayasinghe

AMBEGODA – When Sri Lankan mechanic Sarath Ananda left his job in Kuwait to make traditional palm sweets, he never imagined the career switch would bring global acclaim.

Ananda returned home in 2008 and embraced his family's traditional vocation – tapping sap from the kithul palm, becoming a fifth-generation practitioner of a craft now recognised by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The honour has cast a global spotlight on a fragile cottage industry battling labour shortages, rampant adulteration and dwindling sap supplies.

At dawn and sunset, Ananda, 63, climbs towering Caryota urens trees to collect the sweet, milky sap that is boiled into treacle – a caramel-coloured syrup with a pleasant aroma that enhances the flavour of desserts.

When boiled longer, it reduces into jaggery, a mineral-rich palm sugar with a lower glycaemic index than the commonly available white cane sugar.

But the yield from his five trees – about 200 litres a day – falls far short of demand for his homemade brand.

So Ananda has built a network of 55 tappers who supply their harvest to him daily, enabling exports to Australia, Britain, New Zealand and the Middle East.

"I returned home after working in Kuwait for 10 years. Then I took up the family vocation," he told AFP at his village home in Ambegoda, about 100 kilometres south of the capital Colombo.

But he is worried the art of tapping will fade away, with the new generation unlikely to take it up.



This photograph taken on January 26 shows Sarath Ananda, a kithul tapper collecting sap from kithul palm trees in Ambegoda village in southern Sri Lanka. – AFP

"My son is studying engineering," he said. "I don't think he will want to climb trees."

'Living heritage'

His wife, Padma Nandani Thibbotuwa, 61, handles the boiling and stirring.

"The big problem we face is adulterated products – some people add sugar," she said. "This is because pure kithul is very expensive."

If the sap is not boiled immediately after collection, it ferments into a potent alcoholic drink known as kithul toddy.

Most kithul-producing households divide labour the same way – husbands collect the sap while the wives process it into sweets.

The UNESCO inscription has boosted recognition for the rural industry, which is still regarded as a lowly occupation in caste-conscious Sri Lankan society.

"As a living heritage, kithul tapping is integral to communal harmony, shaping cultural identity

and values, and reflecting both unity and a deep spiritual connection with nature," UNESCO said when conferring the honour in December.

The palms grow wild and need no fertiliser. But attempts to commercially cultivate kithul have repeatedly failed.

The state-run Kithul Development Board says it is training 1,300 tappers to preserve the centuries-old craft.

"Kithul is not unique to Sri Lanka – it is found across South and Southeast Asia," KDB chairwoman M. U. Gayani told AFP.

"But the method of tapping the flowers is practised only by us, which is why UNESCO recognised it."

She said export earnings from kithul products totalled a modest US\$1 million per year, largely due to supply shortages.

Gayani estimates the island has roughly half a million kithul palms, fewer than half of which are tapped – a sign of both the industry's struggles and its potential. – AFP

Pets seen as 'silent witnesses' unlock new DNA clues at

CANBERRA – Household pets may play a surprising role in solving crimes, with new Australian research showing that dogs and cats can carry and transfer human DNA.

The research confirms the potential for police forensic investigators to carefully consider the presence of pets at crime scenes, as a credible new avenue for finding and investigating DNA leads to solve the case, said a statement from Australia's Flinders University yesterday.

The long-running research by Flinders University and Victoria Police experts in the Australian state of Victoria demonstrates how dogs and cats can be tested for indirect DNA transfer at crime scenes from people other than householders or pet owners, the statement said.

"Dogs and cats are present in the majority of households worldwide and they routinely interact with multiple people and environments," said Heidi Monkman, PhD student from Flinders University's College of Science and Engineering.

Dogs and cats act as DNA transfer intermediaries, with major implications for cases where animals are present, said Monkman, lead author of several research articles on the topic.

The research found that even short contact between pets and suspects leaves detectable human DNA on pets, which dogs and cats then carry and spread across homes and other locations.

"Awareness and use of this phenomenon could offer investigators important clues when piecing together evidence in serious criminal cases," Monkman said.

The studies tested DNA transfer via controlled pet-volunteer interactions. Owner DNA on pets can transfer to mock offenders, potentially linking them to crime scenes, she said, adding the DNA can also reach locations that the owners never touched, possibly linking them to crime scenes where they were not present.

"We are exploring the potential for cats and dogs to be silent witnesses, to act as vectors of contamination and transfer at residential crime scenes," said Monkman. – Xinhua

Bangladesh police deploy to guard 'risky' polling centres

DHAKA – Bangladesh's police chief said yesterday that more than 150,000 officers will be deployed for this week's elections, warning that more than half of polling stations were flagged as vulnerable to violence.

Police records show that five people were killed and more than 600 injured in political clashes during the campaign period from December 11 to February 9.

More than 157,000 police officers, backed by 100,000 soldiers and other security forces, will guard tomorrow's vote – the first since a mass uprising toppled the autocratic government of Sheikh Hasina in 2024.

"We are 1,000 percent confident about doing our part," Inspector General of Police Baharul Alam told reporters in Dhaka.

The country of 170 million has remained in political turmoil since the uprising against Hasina, when police carried out a deadly crackdown during her failed bid to cling to power.

Alam said police had assessed that "more than 24,000 polling centres have been marked as either high-risk or moderately risky" for possible unrest, violence or ballot stuffing – more than half of the 42,000 centres nationwide.

"The location of some centres is very remote, and there is intense competition, and hostility among candidates and their supporters," he said, adding that 1,300 police guns looted during the 2024 unrest have still not been recovered.

"In high-risk and moderately risky centres, police will carry out patrol duty with body-worn cameras for the first time."

Rights organisation Ain o Salish Kendra counted 158 people killed and more than 7,000 injured in political violence between August 2024 and December 2025.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) raised concerns over the law-and-order situation, accusing parties of forming "mobs" and setting up roadblocks.

Alam said the police were determined to ensure the polls were peaceful, but said he accepted that distrust of his force remained.

"It is quite understandable why people do not trust the police," he said. "Over the last 15 years, based on what we have delivered – in fact, for the last 150 years, our predecessors mostly beat people."

– AFP

Herbal medicine offers healing, hope to Afghans

KABUL – In Afghanistan's persistent health and humanitarian crises, herbal medicines are surging in popularity, attracting citizens to natural remedies that fuse ancient traditions with modern demands, offering superior quality, minimal side effects, affordability, and healing amid scarce resources and resilient economies.

"Herbal medicines have benefited me more than any others. My treatment lasted just two months, and in that time, I regained my health completely," said Nooria, 53, a longtime sufferer of digestive issues and stomach acidity.

"Other doctors insisted I needed surgery, but this medicine healed me without it. I urge others to try herbal medicines too. The cost is far lower than modern drugs." Stories like Nooria's highlight the humanitarian impact of these treatments, providing hope and recovery to those facing barriers to conventional care.

Abdul Baqi Habibi, a consultant at a herbal medicine production company in the capital

Kabul, said the consumption of herbal medicines is high "because patients have achieved good results and they have fewer side effects."

Comparing the two approaches, Habibi emphasizes affordability and caution. "Herbal medicine is cheaper than chemical medicine, but it should be used under a doctor's supervision."

Institutional backing is strengthening this revival. Last week, Afghanistan's Ministry of Higher Education launched the Faculty of Prophetic Traditional Medicine at Kabul Medical University, aiming to scientifically link traditional healing with medicinal plants, promote systematic treatment, and expand humanitarian access to culturally grounded, locally based healthcare solutions.

Economically, Afghanistan's vast array of medicinal plants, spanning asafetida, glycyrrhiza glabra (licorice), nigella sativa (black cumin), caraway, cichorium, ginger, green cumin, cinnamon, thyme, and many others, serves as

a vital lifeline. These resources, grown abundantly across the country, not only treat local diseases but also fuel economic growth.

Over the past nine months, the western province of Herat has exported an impressive 22,000 tons of these botanicals, valued at more than US\$24 million, to international markets, marking a remarkable threefold surge compared to the same period last year and underscoring the humanitarian potential of sustainable trade in bolstering livelihoods.

Officials from Afghanistan's Ministry of Agriculture are further fueling this momentum, initiating efforts to expand cultivation and nurturing areas for medicinal plants nationwide.

By harnessing these natural resources through proper, scientific utilization, they aim to broaden exploitation scopes while sustainably developing farming regions, transforming traditional assets into pillars of health equity and economic humanitarian aid for a resilient future. – Xinhua



A worker weaves a carpet at a workshop in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, yesterday. – Xinhua

Swedish woman recognises 'rapist' in Epstein files

RAPIST – A Swedish woman filed a complaint in Paris yesterday, claiming that she recognised a man in the files on convicted US sex offender Jeffrey Epstein who allegedly raped her in the 1990s, legal sources said.

Ebba Karlson, 56, accuses the man, identified partially as Daniel S. and whom she met in Sweden, of having taken her to Monaco, then France, on the promise of a modelling career.

Her complaint to the Paris prosecutors' office, which AFP has seen, alleges the man raped her in the swimming pool area of a house in Cannes, in the south of France.

He then allegedly took her to Gérald Marie, the former European head of the Elite modelling agency.

The woman lodged a claim of rape in 2020 against Marie but the case was one of a number closed due to France's statute of limitations. She did not file a complaint against Daniel S., as she did not know his identity.

Thirty-six years later, however, the woman said she recognised her attacker in photos published by the US Justice Department in the Epstein case.

Her boyfriend at the time, who met Daniel S., also said he recognised him.

The name Daniel S. appears in a number of exchanges with Epstein, who killed himself in a New York prison in 2019 while awaiting sex trafficking charges.

The woman's lawyer, Anne-Claire Lejeune, said "Mrs Karlson would like the Paris prosecutor's office to take up her complaint in order to allow for an investigation into acts of rape and human trafficking".

She also wants to determine "if this behaviour has been repeated, to shed light on how it operated and, if necessary, identify any potential victims in cases that have not expired under the statute of limitation", she added.

The person accused by the woman could not immediately be contacted by AFP. – AFP

US commerce chief denies Epstein ties as he faces calls to resign

Beiyi Seow

WASHINGTON—US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick yesterday denied having regular interaction with the late convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, as political pressure mounted with lawmakers calling for him to resign.

"Over a 14-year period, I did not have any relationship with him. I barely had anything to do with that person," Lutnick told a Senate committee hearing.

The billionaire was referring to a period starting in 2005 when he moved to a New York home where Epstein was his neighbour.

A rising number of US lawmakers have called for Lutnick's resignation from President Donald Trump's cabinet, as files released by the Justice Department contradicted his earlier comments that he severed ties with Epstein more than two decades ago.

US Democratic Senator Adam Schiff said on Monday that "Lutnick has no business being our Commerce Secretary, and he should resign immediately."

A day prior, Republican congressman Thomas Massie also told CNN that the commerce secretary "should just resign."

And Robert Garcia, the top Democrat on the House oversight committee, charged in a social media post that Lutnick "has been lying about his relationship with Epstein."

"He said he had no interactions with Epstein after 2005, yet we now know they were in business together," Garcia said.

At the Senate Appropriations Committee hearing on Tuesday, Lutnick said that he met Epstein when they were both in New York.

But records also emerged showing Lutnick's subsequent plans in 2012 to meet Epstein for lunch in Little Saint James, notoriously known as Epstein Island.

Lutnick acknowledged having lunch on the island for an hour, but stressed that he was on the trip with his wife, children and nannies.

"We were on family vacation," he said.

Asked if he saw anything untoward, Lutnick maintained that

besides his family and another couple who travelled with them, he only saw staff who worked for Epstein on the island.

Lutnick also denied that he had dinner in Epstein's New York City home in 2011, although he acknowledged that the released documents indicated a planned meeting with Epstein in May that year.

The commerce chief was also questioned about documents that suggested Epstein had an interest in meeting his nanny, but said this "had nothing to do with me."

"I have nothing to hide, absolutely nothing," Lutnick said.

The White House has appeared to stand by Lutnick, with spokesman Kush Desai telling AFP: "The entire Trump administration, including Secretary Lutnick and the Department of Commerce, remains focused on delivering for the American people."

Lutnick – a close ally of Trump's – served as chief executive of financial services firm Cantor Fitzgerald before becoming US commerce secretary last year. – AFP

Egypt blocks Epstein-themed party, arrests event organiser

CAIRO – Egypt blocked plans yesterday for a nightclub event themed around US sex offender Jeffrey Epstein's notorious parties, and arrested its organiser, the interior ministry said.

The event, promoted as "A Day on Epstein's Island" had been scheduled for yesterday. The event had been announced on social media with free entry for women, the ministry said.

The statement added that the gathering had been advertised "without obtaining the necessary permits from the competent authorities".

Alongside the statement, authorities released blurred photos of the detained organiser as well as the promotional flyer.

When contacted by AFP using the phone number printed on the flyer, the nightclub insisted it had no connection to the event. One of the three DJs listed also denied any involvement.

The controversy erupted after a video circulated online showing a women's rights activist expressing outrage over the event's theme, which she described as inappropriate

given Epstein's criminal history.

Epstein, who died by suicide in a US prison in August 2019, has returned to the spotlight following the online release of 2.8 gigabytes of documents related to his case, including interrogation recordings, flight logs and court files.

The documents mention European royals, diplomats and former heads of state, renewing scrutiny of the network surrounding the disgraced financier, who had pleaded guilty in 2008 to procuring a minor for prostitution. – AFP



Friends and family members carry the bodies of Palestinian men who were killed by an Israeli strike in Gaza City yesterday. Israel's military said on Monday it had killed four armed militants who emerged from a tunnel in southern Gaza and attacked its troops, accusing the suspects of a "blatant violation" of the ceasefire. Gaza's health officials said that six people were killed on Monday by Israeli fire in several incidents separate to the one in Rafah, including four killed in an air strike on an apartment in Gaza City. – AFP

Fury in Turkey as prisoner kills his wife, mum and daughter

ISTANBUL – Three women from the same family were shot dead in Ankara on Monday, sparking fury from feminist groups who said the killer was a jailed family member let out on day release.

According to Turkish media reports, the three victims were the mother, wife and daughter of the assailant who then turned the weapon on himself.

The suspect, who was serving time in northwestern Turkey for fraud and armed threats, had been let out of jail at the start of February for an 11-day period, the private DHA news agency reported.

"Last year, six women were killed by inmates who escaped

prison or were out on temporary release. The justice and interior ministers said nothing and nobody was held responsible! And today, another inmate has again sowed terror," the Women's Solidarity Committees wrote on X.

Turkish advocacy group We Will Stop Femicides also denounced the murders and called a protest in Ankara on Tuesday night.

Figures from the group show that in 2025, 294 women were killed by men and 297 women were found dead under suspicious circumstances.

Of those killed, 35 percent were murdered by their husbands, and 57 percent were killed with a firearm.

– AFP

Bulgaria probes murder-suicide in 'Twin Peaks' mystery

Sofia

SOFIA – Bulgarian investigators suspect four people found dead in a remote mountain region killed themselves, while two others, including a 15-year-old boy, were murdered.

The case – which one prosecutor has described as something out of the TV series "Twin Peaks" – has gripped the Balkan country and shone a spotlight on a group that hosts holiday camps for youngsters.

The bodies of two men, aged 51 and 22, and of a 15-year-old boy were found on Sunday in a camper van parked in a remote area of the Stara Planina mountain range in western Bulgaria.

"Based on the autopsy data for the three bodies, it appears that there were probably two murders committed successively and one suicide," the prosecutor's office

announced yesterday, citing the results of the autopsies of the bodies.

On February 2, police had already discovered the bodies of three men, aged 45, 49, and 51, in the courtyard of a private burned-out mountain hut near the Petrohan Pass in the same mountain range.

"There are no signs of a struggle or any trauma other than the gunshot wounds," Sofia high court deputy prosecutor Natalia Nikolova told a press conference on Monday, indicating that those three, too, had committed suicide.

According to investigators, security cameras around the hut showed all the six people who died remained together until the morning of February 1.

Part of the group, including the 15-year-old boy, then left in a camping van, while the others stayed at the shelter before setting it on fire.

The case, described on Sunday by the national police chief as "an unprecedented crime, at least for Bulgaria", has sparked a wave of speculation on social media, including criticism of the police investigation.

Most of the victims belonged to an NGO called the National Protected Areas Control Agency (NAKZT), which hosts holiday camps in the countryside for youngsters.

The prosecutor's office indicated it would examine the organisation's activities, particularly in light of allegations of cult-like practices.

Bulgaria's acting prosecutor general, Borislav Sarafov, last week evoked a similarity in the case with "Twin Peaks", the US TV show about an FBI agent making bizarre and horrific discoveries in a fictional town as he investigates a murder. – AFP

Barcelona's unfinished basilica hits new heights despite delays

Rosa Sulleiro

BARCELONA – Barcelona's eternally unfinished Sagrada Familia has grown to become the world's tallest church, but a conflict with residents threatens to delay the finish date for the monument designed over 140 years ago.

Swathed in scaffolding on a platform 54 metres above the ground, an enormous stone slab is being prepared to complete the cross of the central Jesus Christ tower.

A huge yellow crane will bring it up to the summit, which will stand at 172.5 metres and has snatched the record as the world's tallest church from Germany's Ulm Minster.

The basilica's peak will deliberately fall short of the 177 metres of Barcelona's Montjuic hill, in accordance with the devout Catholic faith of famed Catalan architect Antoni Gaudi, who took charge of the project in 1883.

"Gaudi did not want to exceed that height" because the Montjuic hill was the work of God, according to Mauricio Cortés, a senior architect working on the construction site.

When the structure is completed and the scaffolding dismantled, the tower will be blessed on June 10 to coincide with the centenary of the



Chief architect of Barcelona's Sagrada Familia Basilica Jordi Fauli poses with a model of the church during an interview with AFP in Barcelona on January 27, 2026. – AFP

death of Gaudi, whose body lies in the basilica's crypt.

The Vatican has not yet confirmed whether Pope Leo XIV will accept an invitation to the tower's inauguration.

"Once the cross is installed, the project will be nearly 80 percent complete," Jordi Fauli, the architect who has led the work for more than a decade, told AFP.

Residents in uproar

The construction board, a private canonical foundation, had intended to complete work on the

Sagrada Familia, considered the world's most famous unfinished building, this year.

But the COVID-19 pandemic paralysed the tourism industry – and with it the key source of income of the most-visited of Spain's monuments that charges an entrance fee.

Tourists from around the world are now flooding back: 4.8 million visitors arrived in 2024, boosting the coffers of the basilica, which relies on the takings as well as private donations.

Yet the board is reticent to set a new finish date for the remaining

work, including the divisive Glory Façade and its four bell towers.

The board's plan to precede the front entrance by a large flight of steps and a square would entail destroying up to two blocks of homes.

The residents have spent years fighting to halt the plan.

"Our houses are legal," reads a sign hanging from one of the threatened buildings.

"The Sagrada Familia owns a plot of land; it does not own the rest. So why should it reach my home?" said Salvador Barroso, president of an association for residents affected by the construction work.

Residents say their flats were purchased legally, and no one warned them that the area could form part of the Sagrada Familia site.

Barroso acquired his home in the late 1980s and only started hearing about the stairway project from 1992, when the Barcelona Olympics transformed the city's image as a tourist magnet.

"What this is really about is business," Barroso said of the expansion.

'Faithful' to Gaudi

The residents have also

questioned the stairs' place in Gaudi's original plan.

Critics frequently point out that the architect's models were mostly destroyed during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and say the church has lost its creator's essence.

Lead architect Fauli, speaking to AFP next to various models of the Sagrada Familia in a room away from the droves of tourists, insisted that "we are, in all parts of the project, faithfully following what Gaudi wanted".

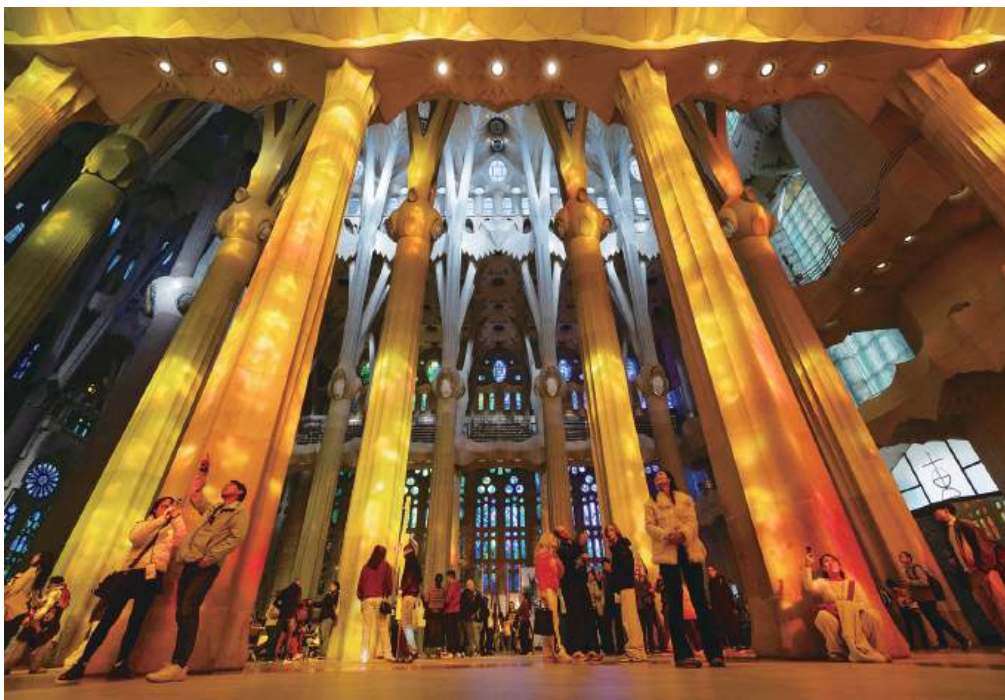
Other documents were saved, and a portion of the models were reconstructed afterwards by Gaudi's disciples, he added.

"Gaudi was an extraordinary architect, and it is worth following his project and finishing it," said Fauli, who hopes to find "a fair solution" for the Glory Façade.

Barcelona's town hall will mediate the conflict and says any agreement must guarantee a solution for the residents, in a city already undergoing a severe housing crisis.

But after years of disagreements, an end to almost a century and a half of work at the Sagrada Familia seems closer than ever.

"I hope the dispute is resolved. What I cannot say is whether it will be resolved in the courts or ... sat at a table," said Barroso. – AFP



Tourists visit Spanish architect Antoni Gaudi's Sagrada Familia Basilica in Barcelona last Tuesday. – AFP



This photo taken last Tuesday shows an outside view of Spanish architect Antoni Gaudi's Sagrada Familia Basilica in Barcelona. – AFP

Spain's Telefónica sells Chile unit in Latin America pullout

Madrid

MADRID – Spanish telecoms giant Telefónica announced the sale of its Chilean unit for US\$1.2 billion yesterday in its push to leave Latin America and concentrate on core markets elsewhere.

Once a jewel in the crown of public Spanish companies, debt-laden and loss-making Telefónica has adopted a strategic shift focusing on Britain, Germany, Spain and Brazil.

Its subsidiary Inversiones Telefónica Internacional Holding

transferred all of Telefonica Chile's capital to French holding company NJJ Holding and Luxembourg-based telecoms operator Millicom, the company said in a statement submitted to Spain's stock market regulator.

An additional payment of US\$150 million was possible "depending on the possible occurrence of certain events in the Chilean telecommunications market", the statement added.

The transaction lengthens a list of Latin American divestments in recent years including Colombia,

Argentina, Peru, Costa Rica, and Guatemala.

The company booked a net loss of 1.08 billion euros (US\$1.3 billion) between January and September 2025, weighed down by losses linked to asset sales in Latin America.

Telefónica Chile's debt stood at 479 million euros at the end of last year.

A voluntary departure plan is set to shed at least 4,500 jobs in Spain, around one quarter of Telefónica's workforce in the country.

– AFP

Brazil's inflation edges up after 3 months of slowdown

Brasília, Brazil

BRASÍLIA – Brazil's inflation climbed to 4.44 percent year-on-year in January after three months of slowdown, edging toward the upper end of the central bank's target range, official data showed yesterday.

The central bank is aiming for three percent inflation in 2026, with a tolerance of 1.5 points.

In 2025, consumer prices rose 4.25 percent.

Monthly inflation was 0.33 percent in January, unchanged from December, driven in part by a sharp increase in fuel prices, according to

the government's IBGE statistics office.

The central bank in January held its key interest rate at 15 percent for the fifth time in a row. Brazil has one of the world's highest interest rates.

The monetary policy committee signalled it might consider easing the rate at its next meeting in March.

President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who has announced he will run for reelection in October, has repeatedly criticised high interest rates, saying they curb growth.

Experts surveyed by the central bank forecast 3.97 percent inflation for 2026. – AFP

Liverpool need 'perfection' to reach Champions League, admits Slot

Premier League LIVERPOOL – Arne Slot conceded yesterday that his side are “not performing to the standards of Liverpool” and need to be nearly perfect for the remainder of the season just to qualify for the Champions League.

The defending English champions sit sixth in the Premier League, four points outside a place in the top five, which is likely to secure Champions League football for next season.

The Reds conceded twice in a dramatic finale to lose 2-1 to Manchester City on Sunday, but it is a wider trend that is most concerning for Slot.

Liverpool have won just six of their last 20 league games dating back to September and only one of seven in 2026.

“They know what the standards of Liverpool mean, and we are not performing to the standards of Liverpool at the moment, and they feel that disappointment,” Slot said in his pre-match press conference ahead of today’s trip to Sunderland.

“Every game, it feels as though we are going to win it, but it doesn’t happen. That is probably more difficult than when you play a game and throughout the whole game you feel like the other team is better and you’re just not good enough.

“But that’s not what they feel. They feel performance-wise that

they can compete with any other team in any league in the world.

“But reality is that we don’t perform to Liverpool standards.”

Leaders Arsenal and City are expected to battle it out to win the title, leaving three more places in the Champions League from four likely contenders.

Third-placed Aston Villa are eight points ahead of Liverpool with in-form Manchester United three points further back in fourth and Chelsea in fifth.

“To close the gap to numbers three, four and five, that means you have to win a lot and that is not what we have done this season,” added Slot.

“That is why that has to be better and that is why we have to be close to perfection.”

Dominik Szoboszlai’s suspension for a red card against City creates another selection dilemma for Slot.

The Hungarian has filled in at right-back in recent weeks with both Conor Bradley and Jeremie Frimpong out injured.

Joe Gomez has only just returned to training so one of midfielders Curtis Jones or Wataru Endo are set to start in defence against a Sunderland side which boast the only undefeated home record in the Premier League this season.

The game will be played at 4:15 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time. – AFP/MPD

Guardiola seeks solution to Man City’s 2nd half struggles

Premier League MANCHESTER – Pep Guardiola said yesterday Manchester City must address a habit of second half slumps if they are to retain any hope of chasing down Arsenal at the top of the Premier League.

City scored twice late on to snatch a 2-1 victory away to Liverpool on Sunday and move back within six points of the Gunners.

However, those were the first goals Guardiola’s men have scored in the second half of any Premier League game in 2026.

City blew a 2-0 first half lead to draw 2-2 against Tottenham the week before and were again outplayed for large parts of the second half at Anfield after dominating the first 45 minutes.

Victory over Fulham today will cut the gap at the top down to three points for 24 hours at least before Arsenal visit Brentford.

But Guardiola said talk of a title race is premature until City iron out their inconsistency.

“We have to be better and to be closer to make the first half in Anfield and not the second,” Guardiola said at his pre-match press conference.

“What is the reason why in the second half still we are dropping our performance?”

“Not [whether the gap is] three, four, five, six points because if we don’t do that, we will not win. Maybe not against Fulham, maybe

it’ll be against Newcastle or maybe in the next game at Leeds.”

City’s quest to win silverware in four different competitions was boosted by the return of Ruben Dias as a second half substitute against Liverpool.

But in the absence of centre-backs Dias and Josko Guardiola through injury, Abdurkadir Khusanov has taken his chance for more first-team opportunities.

Guardiola hailed the improvement of the young Uzbek defender, who arrived in Manchester just over a year ago with little English and took time to adapt.

“I admit he doesn’t speak like William Shakespeare, but he’s getting better and better,” added Guardiola.

“He’s so, so fast. To recover that position is one of his attributes. But not just that he’s intelligent.

“Normally when a player has this physicality he doesn’t use what’s going on [in his head] and it’s always his physical condition, and he has both.

“That’s why on the ball he’s getting better. That’s why he’s encouraged to improve and he can improve. At that age and he’s open minded and I said recently, ‘City have a player in central defence for many, many years’.”

The game will be played at 3:30 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time. – AFP/MPD

Robot dogs to help Mexican police at 2026 World Cup



MONTERREY – A pack of robot dogs will help Mexican police tackle crime during the 2026 World Cup this summer, authorities said Monday.

The four-legged robots are designed to enter dangerous areas and broadcast live video back to security forces, who can watch before taking action during the football tournament.

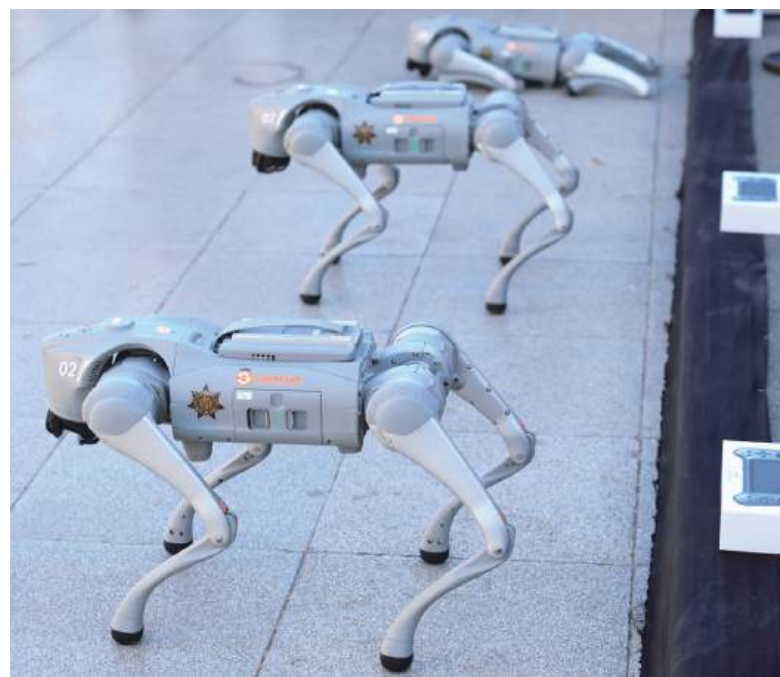
The global spectacle, which will take place from June 11 to July 19, is being hosted by Mexico alongside the United States and Canada.

The animaloid robots were acquired for 2.5 million pesos (US\$145,000) by the city council of Guadalupe, part of the Monterrey metro area, which will host one of the World Cup venues.

A video released by the local government shows one of the robots walking on four legs through an abandoned building and climbing stairs, though with some difficulty.

The robo-hound can be seen transmitting live images to a group of police officers walking stealthily behind it.

In the demonstration the canine



This handout picture released by Municipality of Guadalupe shows robot dogs designed to help Mexican police tackle crime during the World Cup, unveiled by the city council of Guadalupe, Nuevo Leon state, Mexico on Monday. – AFP

robot encounters an armed man and orders him to drop his gun using a loudspeaker.

The purpose of the robot dogs is “to support police officers with initial intervention... to protect the physical safety of officers,” said

Guadalupe mayor Hector Garcia.

They will be deployed “in case of any altercation,” he added.

BBVA Stadium, which will be known as Estadio Monterrey during the tournament, will host four matches. – AFP



Chengdu Rongcheng’s Brazilian midfielder Romulo Pacheco (left) fights for the ball with Buriram United’s Brazilian defender Eduardo Dos Santos during their AFC Champions League football match in Chengdu, Sichuan Province yesterday. Buriram United won the game 1-0. – AFP

S Korea avert boycott of Women’s Asian Cup weeks before kickoff



SEOUL – A dispute that saw South Korea’s players threaten to boycott next month’s Women’s Asian Cup over “discriminatory conditions” has been resolved, football officials in the country said yesterday.

South Korea’s national women’s squad last year complained of “poor” treatment by the Korea Football Association (KFA) compared to their male counterparts.

A statement from September, made public in January, said players would boycott games and training ahead of the Asian Cup if the KFA did not address their

concerns over travel, training facilities and accommodation.

The KFA told AFP that the matter had “been resolved” and named a 26-player squad for the Asian Cup, which is being held in Australia and kicks off on March 1.

The KFA said that starting from this year, the association would provide business-class travel for all women’s team squad members when long-haul travel was involved.

The association also said that they aim to “strengthen a sustainable support system that allows the players to perform at their best while taking pride in

wearing the national colours”.

The squad will convene at South Korea’s national training centre on Sunday before leaving for Australia four days later.

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

Coach Shin Sang-woo’s squad includes former Chelsea midfielder Ji So-yun and US-born 18-year-old Casey Phair of Angel City FC.

Eight overseas-based players were named, including AC Milan’s Park Soo-jeong.

South Korea open their campaign against Iran at the Gold Coast on March 2. – AFP

More Olympic pain for Shiffrin as Austria win team combined

Terry Daley

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO – Mikaela Shiffrin suffered more Winter Olympic pain yesterday after the US ski star failed to claim a medal in the women's team combined, bringing back memories of her disastrous performance at the Beijing Games four years ago.

America's top team were firm favourites to win gold after Breezy Johnson topped the times in the morning's downhill run, but Shiffrin stuttered through her slalom and the pair finished out of the medals, in fourth.

Shiffrin's unusually underpowered display in a discipline she has dominated for years allowed Austria's second-ranked duo of Ariane Raedler and Katharina Huber to claim gold.

"I didn't quite find a comfort level that like allows me to produce full speed, so I'm going to have to learn what to do, what to adjust in the short time we have before the other tech races," Shiffrin told reporters.

She added: "There's something to learn from this day, and I'm going to learn it."

Johnson and Shiffrin, already world champions in the discipline, had a slender lead of 0.06sec over Austria 2's downhill specialist Raedler.

Shiffrin's World Cup form had been so good that the prospect of any other winners seemed impossible,

but she was only 15th fastest down the slope in Cortina d'Ampezzo, her flop costing new downhill champion Johnson a second gold medal in northern Italy.

"We already celebrated the medal and when it was silver, it was more than OK," said Huber. "Now it's gold and it's unbelievable."

Shiffrin left Beijing without a single Olympic medal four years ago - failing to finish three of six races - and her disappointing display in her favoured discipline came in complete contrast to her form throughout this season.

Pressure

The 30-year-old, who previously won Olympic golds in slalom (2014) and giant slalom (2018) and a combined silver in Pyeongchang, has won a record 108 races on the World Cup circuit, including seven of this season's eight slalom races.

But she was a full second slower than Emma Aicher whose session-leading time of 44.38sec gave Germany silver, with Kira Weidle-Winkelmann having raced the downhill.

An American pairing did claim a medal, but it was the USA 2 pairing of Jacqueline Wiles and Paula Moltzan, who took bronze, the latter almost half a second faster than Shiffrin in the slalom run.

There will now be huge pressure

on Shiffrin for next week's slalom, the final women's alpine skiing event at this year's Olympics.

Petra Vlhova, Shiffrin's main rival for slalom honours before suffering a knee ligament injury, made her return to competition after two years away but failed to finish her run.

There was also disappointment for Italy as only one of the host nation's four teams managed to complete the race.

Sofia Goggia, the downhill bronze medallist, lost control of her skis and skidded off the piste in the morning, thankfully keeping enough control to not smash into the netting.

Laura Pirovano's impressive downhill run, the Italian finishing 0.27sec behind Johnson, was for nothing as Martina Peterlini was one of eight athletes to fail to complete the slalom.

The team combined made a successful Olympic debut at this year's Games, with Switzerland's Franjo von Allmen and Tanguy Nef winning the men's event on Monday.

It comprises two racers from the same nation racing a downhill and a slalom, with the fastest aggregate time earning the gold medal.

Countries are allowed to enter multiple teams in the event, with women's skiing powerhouses the USA, Switzerland, Italy and Austria each having four pairings entered yesterday.

– AFP

| Medal Table | | | | | |
|-------------|-------------------|------|--------|--------|-------|
| Order | NOC | Gold | Silver | Bronze | Total |
| 1 | Norway | 6 | 1 | 4 | 11 |
| 2 | Switzerland | 3 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| 3 | Austria | 2 | 3 | 0 | 5 |
| 4 | Italy | 2 | 2 | 7 | 11 |
| 5 | Japan | 2 | 2 | 3 | 7 |
| 6 | Germany | 2 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| 6 | Sweden | 2 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| 6 | USA | 2 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| 9 | France | 1 | 2 | 0 | 3 |
| 10 | Czechia | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 10 | Netherlands | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 12 | Canada | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 13 | China | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 13 | Republic of Korea | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 13 | New Zealand | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 16 | Poland | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 16 | Slovenia | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 18 | Belgium | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 18 | Bulgaria | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |



Pakistan's Shaheen Shah Afridi bowls during the 2026 ICC Men's T20 Cricket World Cup group stage match against USA at the Sinhalese Sports Club (SSC) Ground in Colombo, Sri Lanka yesterday. Pakistan won by 32 runs. – AFP

India look forward to Pakistan 'challenge' after T20 World Cup U-turn



Faisal Kamal

NEW DELHI – India said yesterday it would be "a challenge" to face a "quality" Pakistan team in Colombo after Islamabad U-turned and decided to play the blockbuster T20 World Cup clash.

The Pakistan government late Monday ended a week-long stand-off by rescinding its order for the cricket team to boycott the February 15 match.

"It's great that the game is back on, we kind of never changed the preparation," said India assistant coach Ryan ten Doeschate.

India will face a second Group A match against Namibia on tomorrow in New Delhi before flying to Sri Lanka.

It means a quick turnaround for Sunday's match, the biggest and most lucrative clash in world cricket.

"It's going to be a challenge going to Colombo where Pakistan have been for the last two weeks," added Ten Doeschate.

"We are delighted to have another chance to play against a quality side in the first phase of the tournament.

"We are fully focused on just bringing our best game to that fixture."

Pakistan's decision to go ahead with the match was hailed yesterday as an outbreak of "good sense" and "good for cricket".

A frantic weekend of negotiations saw International Cricket Council (ICC)

and Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) chiefs fly to Lahore on Sunday for talks with the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB).

The governments of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka both wrote to the Islamabad government on Monday urging it to change its stance and allow the game to go ahead.

After "multilateral discussions, as well as the request of friendly countries, the Government of Pakistan hereby directs the Pakistan National Cricket Team to take the field on February 15", the Islamabad government said on its official X account late Monday night.

The decision had been taken with the aim of "protecting the spirit of cricket", it added.

'Good for cricket'

Former India cricketer Madan Lal told AFP yesterday that it was "good for cricket".

"We want strong teams to play so that the charm of the World Cup is not lost," he added.

Sri Lanka, who will host the match which generates multi-millions of dollars in advertising, broadcast rights, sponsorship and tourism, also praised the decision.

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, in a social media post, thanked Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for "ensuring the game we all love goes on".

Veteran Indian journalist Pradeep Magazine told AFP "Good sense has prevailed on all sides".

Financial considerations would have been taken into account, he added.

"Everyone realised that losing the revenue from an India-Pakistan match would have been a loss-loss situation for all ICC member nations."

The 20-team tournament has been overshadowed by an acrimonious political build-up.

Bangladesh, who refused to play in India citing security concerns, were replaced by Scotland.

As a protest, the Pakistan government ordered the team not to face co-hosts India in the Group A fixture.

Pakistan, who edged out Netherlands in the tournament opener on Saturday, would have conceded two points if they had forfeited the match.

Pakistan will play all their T20 World Cup matches in Sri Lanka as part of an International Cricket Council deal that ensures the two nations only meet on neutral territory.

India captain Suryakumar Yadav said on Friday before their opening win against the USA that his team would travel to Colombo for the clash, whether the game was on or not.

"We haven't said no to playing them," Suryakumar said. "Our flights are booked and we are going to Colombo." – AFP

Music world mourns Ghana's Ebo Taylor, founding father of highlife

Accra, Ghana

ACCRA, Ghana – Tributes have been pouring in from across Ghana and the world since the death of Ghanaian highlife legend Ebo Taylor.

A guitarist, composer and bandleader who died on Saturday, Taylor's six-decade career played a key role in shaping modern popular music in West Africa.

Often described as one of the founding fathers of contemporary highlife, Taylor died a day after the launch of a music festival bearing his name in the capital, Accra, and just a month after celebrating his 90th birthday.

Highlife, a genre blending traditional African rhythms with jazz and Caribbean influences, was recently added to UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list.

"The world has lost a giant. A colossus of African music," a statement shared on his official page said. "Your light will never fade."

The Los Angeles-based collective Jazz Is Dead called him a pioneer of highlife and Afrobeat, while Ghanaian dancehall star Stonebwoy and US producer Adrian Younge, who has worked with Jay Z and Kendrick Lamar, also paid tribute to his legacy.

Nigerian writer and poet Dami Ajayi described him as a "highlife maestro" and a "fantastic guitarist".

'Uncle Ebo'

Taylor's influence extended far beyond Ghana, with elements of his music appearing in the soul, jazz, hip-hop and Afrobeat genres that dominate the African and global charts today.

Born Deroy Taylor in Cape Coast in 1936, he began performing in the 1950s, as highlife was establishing itself as the dominant sound in Ghana in the years following independence.

Known for intricate guitar lines and rich horn arrangements, he played with leading bands including the Stargazers and the Broadway Dance Band.

In the early 1960s, he travelled to London to study music, where he worked alongside other African musicians, including Nigerian Afrobeat pioneer Fela Kuti.



May 10, 2013 file photo of Ebo Taylor attending the Festival Tême Vague ("7th Wave Festival") in Biarritz, southern France. The annual festival focuses on surfing culture and music, celebrating the ocean and its related activities. – Photo courtesy of Sylvain lasco/Wikimedia Commons

The exchange of ideas between the two would later be seen as formative to the development of Afrobeat, a political cocktail blending highlife with funk, jazz and soul.

Back in Ghana, Taylor became one of the country's most sought-after arrangers and producers, working with stars such as Pat Thomas and CK Mann while leading his own bands.

His compositions – including "Love & Death", "Heaven", "Odofo Nyi Akyiri Biara" and "Appia Kwa Bridge" – gained renewed international attention decades later as DJs, collectors and record labels reissued his music. His grooves were sampled by hip-hop and R&B artists and helped introduce new global audiences to Ghanaian highlife.

Taylor continued touring into his 70s and 80s, performing across Europe and the United States as part of a late-career renaissance that cemented his status as a cult figure among younger musicians.

Many fans affectionately referred to him as "Uncle Ebo", reflecting both his longevity and mentorship of younger artists.

For many, he remained a symbol of highlife's golden era and of a generation that carried Ghanaian music onto the world stage. – AFP

'Family and intimacy under pressure' at Berlin film festival

BERLIN – The 76th edition of the Berlin Film Festival opens tomorrow, featuring productions from over 80 countries and with German film legend Wim Wenders presiding over this year's jury.

AFP sat down with festival director Tricia Tuttle, who is in her second year at the helm, for a look-ahead at Europe's first big cinema festival of the year.

Here are five things to expect from this year's festival, which runs until February 22.

'Reflecting international cinema'

Of more than 200 films shown during the 10-day festival, 22 will compete for the coveted Golden Bear, which was won last year by the drama "Dreams" from Norwegian director Dag Johan Haugerud.

In assembling this year's diverse programme, Tuttle said that "the guiding principle was to reflect where international cinema is right now".

Tuttle said that she had noticed "family and intimacy under pressure, questions of care, power, belonging, and the experience of living between worlds" as themes running through this year's selection.

"Many of the films look at how private lives are shaped by larger political and social forces."

The festival will also honour Chinese-Malaysian actress Michelle Yeoh (楊紫瓊) – who won the best actress Oscar in 2023 for "Everything Everywhere All at Once" – with a lifetime achievement award.

Spotlight on women directors

As in 2025, women directed most of the films being screened at the festival.

Among those in the official competition, nine out of 22 were directed by women, a higher proportion than at the Cannes or Venice festivals.

"One thing that is encouraging for me is the number of second- and third-time female film-makers who have made strong work," Tuttle said.

The opening film, "No Good



Workers mount the Berlinale bear on the facade of the Berlinale Palace, the festival's main venue, as preparations for the Berlin International Film Festival, aka Berlinale, are under way in the German capital, on Friday. The festival's 76th edition takes place from tomorrow to February 22, 2026. – AFP

Men", is itself the third feature-length film from Afghan director Shahrbanoo Sadat.

"It's about Afghan women's experience, which you wouldn't see if it wasn't for Shahrbanoo's work," Tuttle said.

Sadat fled her home country following the Taliban takeover in 2021 and now lives in Hamburg.

US films remain elusive

In contrast to Cannes or Venice, which regularly attract Oscar contenders, Berlin does not feature as many large-scale US productions and the sprinkle of stardust that often accompanies them.

"Some of the biggest authored films of the year, those sort of commercial-arthouse crossover films, haven't launched out of festivals this year," Tuttle noted, perhaps in a nod to titles such as "One Battle After Another", "Sinners", and "Marty Supreme".

For such films, which can easily cost more than US\$100 million to make, producers and distributors are increasingly keen on controlling all aspects of a film's release.

"Festivals can be busy, noisy places where you might not get the cut-through that you want," according to Tuttle – not to mention running the risk of negative reviews from critics.

The era of co-productions

This year's festival will notably feature European co-productions with

financing from several countries.

According to Tuttle, "there's an opportunity right now for Europe, for European producers to work together" as the industry more broadly continues to fracture.

She cites the example of Joachim Trier's "Sentimental Value", nominated for nine Oscars, which is a co-production between Norway, Denmark, France, and Germany.

"Sentimental Value" is a film that is made by many countries in terms of investment, but it's very much the work of an author and a really important filmmaker," said Tuttle.

Streaming platforms almost absent

Unlike in Venice, where three Netflix-produced films entered the official competition, the giants of the streaming world are relatively marginal in Berlin.

"There's real value to be had in theatrical exhibition, not just because there's money to be made there ... but also, for us as movie fans, it's the best way to see a film," said Tuttle.

The only Netflix film at this year's Berlinale will feature in the "Special Presentation" section – outside of the official competition.

"Un hijo propio" ("A Child of My Own") is a documentary-length feature telling the story of a Mexican woman who invents a pregnancy in an attempt to escape pressure from her family to have a child. – AFP



(From left to right) French screenwriter and film director Alice Winocour, French actor Louis Garrel, US actress Angelina Jolie and French actor Vincent Lindon pose ahead of the screening of the film "Couture" at the Pathé Palace cinema, in Paris on Monday. "Couture" is the first fictional film allowed to be shot inside Chanel's Paris showroom and atelier. – AFP

World Weather

| CHINA | ASIA-PACIFIC | WORLD | LUSOPHONE |
|------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Beijing -4°C~10°C | Manila 22°C~31°C | New York 0°C~7°C | Lisbon 13°C~17°C |
| Shanghai 2°C~14°C | Bangkok 23°C~36°C | London 7°C~13°C | Rio de Janeiro 23°C~29°C |
| Hong Kong 15°C~23°C | Tokyo 1°C~9°C | Frankfurt 7°C~12°C | Luanda 25°C~30°C |
| Taipei 14°C~19°C | Singapore 23°C~32°C | Vancouver 4°C~9°C | Maputo 21°C~32°C |
| Guangzhou 13°C~25°C | Kuala Lumpur 24°C~33°C | Paris 9°C~14°C | Dili 24°C~30°C |
| Nanjing 0°C~15°C | Jakarta 22°C~30°C | Moscow -7°C~7°C | São Tomé 26°C~31°C |
| Guilin 9°C~15°C | Seoul -5°C~6°C | Las Vegas 7°C~20°C | Praia 17°C~26°C |
| Xi'an 1°C~13°C | Sydney 22°C~31°C | Monte Carlo 11°C~16°C | Bissau 18°C~36°C |

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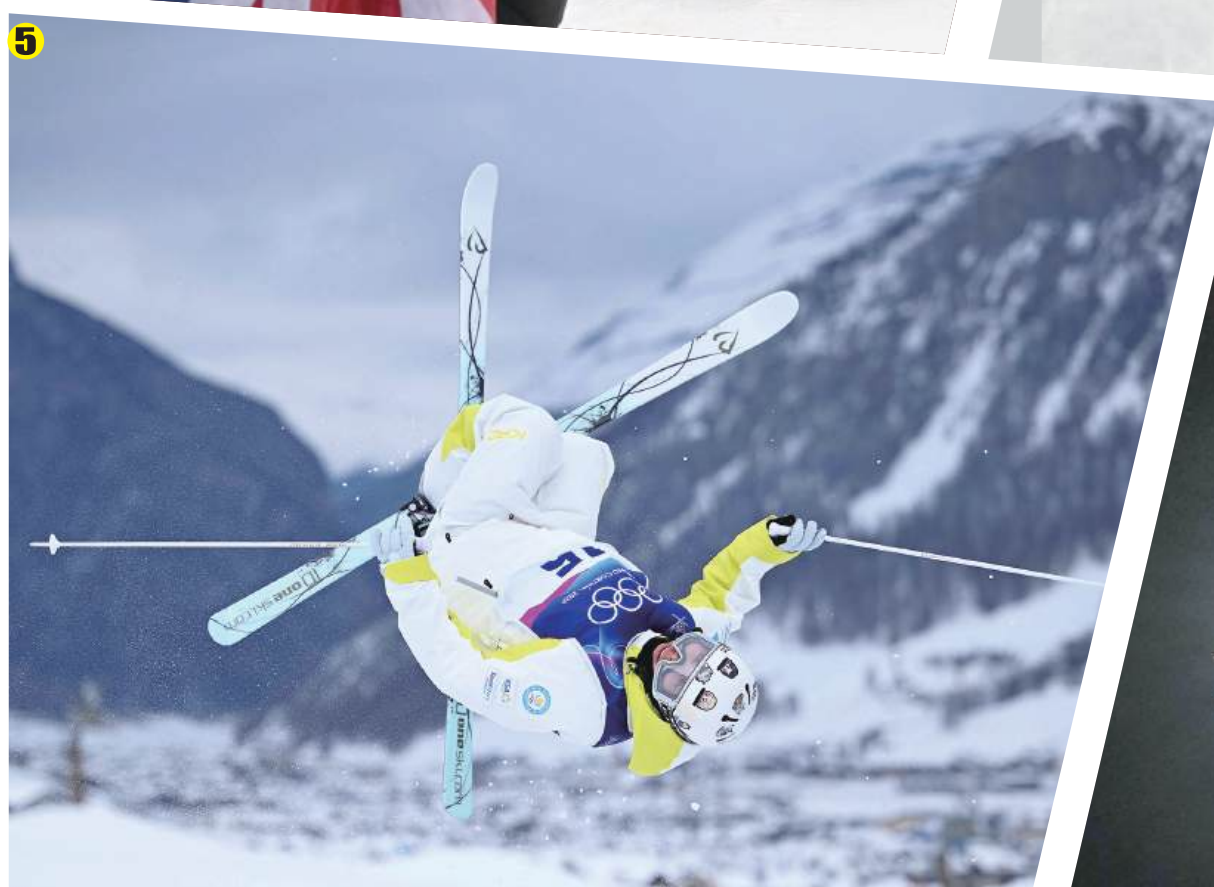
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1 South Korea's Hong Sujung takes part in the skeleton women's training session at Cortina Sliding Centre during the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic Games in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy yesterday. – AFP

2 China's Wang Xinran leads as US' Corinne Stoddard (left) and Italy's Arianna Sighele crash in the short track speed skating women's 500m heats during the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic Games at Milano Ice Skating Arena in Milan yesterday. – AFP

3 Bronze medallist New Zealand's Luca Harrington (foreground) looks on as his team members perform the haka on the slope to celebrate after the freestyle skiing men's freeski slopestyle final during the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic Games at Livigno Snow Park, in Livigno (Valtellina), Italy yesterday. – AFP

4 Italy's Pietro Sighele (front) celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win gold in the short track speed skating mixed team relay final during the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic Games at Milano Ice Skating Arena in Milan yesterday. – AFP

5 Kazakhstan's Ayaulym Amrenova warms up before the freestyle skiing women's moguls qualification 1 during the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic Games at Livigno Aerials & Moguls Park, in Livigno (Valtellina), Italy, yesterday. – AFP

6 Britain's Mia Brookes competes in the snowboard women's big air final run 2 during the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic Games at Livigno Snow Park, in Livigno (Valtellina), Italy on Monday. – AFP