



Convention & exhibition industry yields 6.28 billion patacas in 2025: MCECA chief

Armando Neves

The “Macau Federal Commercial Association of Convention & Exhibition Industry” (MCECA)* hosted a Spring Festival reception at Macau Tower yesterday, announcing that local convention and exhibition activities increased by 22.1 per cent year-on-year to 1,861 events last year, increasing the industry’s revenue to 6.28 billion patacas in 2025.

The association’s president, Osborn Lo Wang Chun, underlined in a speech that an “international technology giant” has chosen Macau as the venue for its annual conference, with over 6,000 attendees. He did not identify the enterprise.

Lo also noted that while an international environmental exhibition will be held in Macau at the end of this month, a travel expo is slated for next month.

The association, the setting-up of which was gazetted in May 2012, will continue to align with the government’s “1+4” development strategy, deepen cooperation with the government and integrated resort enterprises, and focus on talent cultivation, Lo said.

The 1+4 model aims to consolidate and diversify the development of the city’s tourism and leisure industry (1) while putting special emphasis on promoting the development of four nascent industries (+4), namely 1) big



Liaison Office of the Central People’s Government in the Macau SAR Economic Affairs Department Deputy Director Yang Yi (seventh from left), Macau Federal Commercial Association of Convention & Exhibition Industry (MCECA) Director-General Lawrence Che Fong Sang (sixth from left), MCECA President Osborn Lo Wang Chun (seventh from right), Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) Director Elaine Wong Yee Lam (fifth from left), Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes (sixth from right) and other representatives pose during yesterday’s Spring Festival reception at Macau Tower in Sai Van.

health, 2) modern finance, 3) high-tech, and 4) MICE and commerce as well as culture and sport.

Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) Director Elaine Wong Yee Lam said in a speech that the convention and exhibition industry is a key sector for Macau’s appropriate economic diversification.

Wong also said that IPIM will focus its activities on three main

priorities: enhancing Macau’s role as an international convention and exhibition centre, promoting industrial upgrading, and attracting international projects.

Wong said that these initiatives aim to deepen the coordinated development of Macau, Hengqin and the Greater Bay Area (GBA), thereby contributing to the country’s high-level opening-up.

The association’s director-general, Lawrence Che Fong Sang, said in a speech that in terms of talent cultivation, they will continue to offer a series of training programmes this and next month.

Che also said that for the sixth consecutive year, the association will also promote in secondary schools and universities young people’s career prospects in the



convention and exhibition industry, adding that this year, it has already arranged short-term courses with Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School.

Che also said that the association has welcomed new talent from the sport and performance industries. In the future, it will seize the opportunities presented by the “multi-venue events” model in the Macau-Hengqin area to drive international development, he added.

The “multi-venue events” model refers to a convention or exhibition event being held simultaneously in Macau and Hengqin. ■

*According to Macau’s Official Gazette, the association’s officially registered abbreviation is MFCACEI. However, the association uses MCECA as its customary abbreviation.

Top US, China economy officials to meet for talks in Paris



WASHINGTON – Top economic officials from the United States and China are set to convene in Paris, the US Treasury Department said yesterday, ahead of US President Donald Trump’s planned meeting with President Xi Jinping next month.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent will meet Vice Premier He Lifeng in France between Sunday and Monday (March 15-16), the department said.

US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer is also expected to attend the talks, his office confirmed to AFP.

“Thanks to the bonds of mutual respect between President Trump and President Xi, the trade and economic dialogue between the United States and China is moving forward,” Bessent said in a statement.

The gathering of Bessent, Greer and He is widely expected to set the stage for Trump’s visit to Beijing, where he is due to meet Xi.

The talks are likely meant to hammer out trade and economic achievements to be announced at the leaders’ summit, Fudan University professor Wu Xinbo told AFP.

But they come after a turbulent year in US-China economic ties since Trump returned to the presidency.

Washington and Beijing engaged in an escalating tariffs war in April last year as China pushed back against Trump’s sweeping duties against trading partners.

This brought their tariffs on each other’s exports to triple-digit levels, forcing trade to a halt before both sides eventually eased tensions.

Washington has announced that Trump will visit China from March 31 to April 2, although Beijing has yet to confirm those

dates – in line with its usual practice.

Trump and Xi last met in October in South Korea where they agreed on a year-long trade truce.

Preparations for the upcoming Paris meeting are underway, and industry leaders are hoping for positive outcomes.

US-China Business Council president Sean Stein believes Trump’s visit to China is a “time for ambition” when it comes to addressing “longstanding issues with the business climate in China.” – AFP

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China’s Mars sample return mission to start flight model development in 2026: designer

China’s mission to retrieve samples from Mars will advance to the flight model development phase within this year, Liu Jizhong, chief designer of the Tianwen-3 mission, said yesterday.

– Story on p. 6

US military ‘not ready’ to escort tankers through Hormuz Strait: energy secretary

The US military is currently “not ready” to escort tankers through the critical Strait of Hormuz because all its assets are focused on striking Iran, Energy Secretary Chris Wright said yesterday.

– Story on p. 10

UK mother jailed for keeping woman as ‘house slave’ for 25 years

A UK judge yesterday jailed for 13 years a mother-of-10 who forced a vulnerable woman to work as a “house slave” for more than two decades.

– Story on p. 12

13 residents lose 3.27 million in 'customer service' scams

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) issued a warning yesterday about 13 residents who fell victim in separate "customer service" scams, losing around 3.27 million patacas in total.

The Judiciary Police reminded the public to be wary of the scams.

Between March 9 and yesterday, the statement said, the Judiciary Police received multiple reports from citizens that they had received fraudulent phone calls or text messages from scammers impersonating customer service representatives of various major platforms, including Taobao, Alipay, WeChat, Douyin, and banks.

According to the statement, the scammers falsely claimed that the victims' "fund or payment security" was about to expire and that they would be subject to automatic monthly deductions. They instructed the victims to follow their directions if they wished to cancel the service.

The statement noted that the PJ's Anti-Fraud Enquiry Hotline and Anti-Fraud Programme have received information from nearly 50 citizens between March 9 and yesterday who were not deceived but reported receiving the same type of fraudulent calls and messages.

The statement pointed that Taobao's and Alipay's "Fund/Payment Security" are free services provided by the platforms and do

not require renewal. If citizens receive a phone call from someone claiming to be a customer service representative for Taobao, Alipay, or other platforms, claiming that an insurance premium was due and asking for screen sharing operations or the disclosure of any personal banking information, it is a scam, the statement underlined, adding that citizens should hang up immediately.

If citizens have any doubts, they should use the PJ's "Anti-Fraud Programme" to check the fraud risk index and call the Judiciary Police's Anti-Fraud Hotline on 8800 7777, or the crime report hotline at 993 for assistance, the statement said. ■



This handout image provided by the Judiciary Police (PJ) yesterday warns residents to be wary of "customer service" scams.

Financial regulator AMCM finds shops' illegal financial businesses

Tony Wong

The authorities have found several shops illegally engaging in financial businesses, such as remitting foreign currencies to other countries for customers, the Macau Monetary Authority (AMCM) said yesterday.

An AMCM statement yesterday said that the Macau Monetary Authority "recently" received reports that a number of shops, which mainly sell goods to non-resident workers (NRWs), were suspected of providing members of the public with illegal currency exchange and remittance services.

The Macau Monetary Authority, with the assistance of the Judiciary Police (PJ), "recently" investigated six shops, located in the peninsula's Avenida de Horta e Costa neighbourhood and central district as well as in Taipa, over suspected illegal financial activities, the statement said.

The findings of the investigations, according to the statement, indicate that some of the six shops illegally remitted abroad foreign currencies converted from patacas received from customers here, through the use of overseas e-wallets or bank accounts.

The statement underlined that according to Law 13/2023,



This undated handout photo released by the Macau Monetary Authority (AMCM) yesterday shows its inspectors investigating one of the six shops.

the main law regulating Macau's financial system, only authorised financial institutions are permitted to engage in financial businesses in Macau. Any individual or entity engaging in financial activities without authorisation, according to the law, faces a fine of between 500,000 and five million patacas.

The statement noted that if the unauthorised financial activities have seriously disrupted the stability of Macau's financial system or the normal operation of its financial market, according to

the law, the respective offenders face a fine of up to 10 million patacas.

In the statement, the Macau Monetary Authority pledged to continue combating illegal financial activities to ensure the stability and order of Macau's financial system, urging members of the public to always engage in financial activities through authorised financial institutions, so as to avoid falling victims to scams and incurring unnecessary losses. ■

Police bust 3 illegal exchange dealers in a day



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the three hooded illegal currency exchange suspects to PJ vans outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday. - Photos: Armindo Neves

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) nabbed three illegal exchange dealers on Wednesday, PJ spokesman Lei Chi Hou said during a special press conference yesterday.

Lei identified the trio as a 31-year-old mainland male surnamed Zhou, a 35-year-old mainland female surnamed Yan and a 43-year-old local female surnamed Lam, all of whom claimed to be jobless.

According to Lei, PJ officers noticed Zhou and a gambler engaged in an illegal currency exchange at a casino in Cotai.

After questioning the duo, the officers confirmed that Zhou had exchanged 36,320 yuan for

HK\$40,000 in cash, earning 400 yuan from the illicit transaction.

Lei said that Zhou had been engaging in illegal currency exchange activities since mid-January, earning around 10,000 yuan until his arrest, adding that PJ officers seized HK\$20,000 in cash and a smartphone from Zhou.

In another casino in Cotai, PJ officers noticed that Yan and Lam separately exchanged currency with one gambler, Lei said. Yan exchanged 13,000 yuan for chips worth HK\$14,000, while Lam exchanged 4,600 yuan for HK\$5,000 in cash. Lei added that Yan earned around HK\$80 from the illicit deal, while Lam earned around HK\$150.

According to Lei, Yan had been engaged in illegal currency exchange activities since last August, earning HK\$6,400 until his arrest. PJ officers seized HK\$30,200 in gambling chips and a smartphone from Yan, Lei said.

Lei also said that Lam had been conducting illegal currency exchange activities since last November, earning around HK\$50,000. PJ officers seized HK\$45,000 in cash, HK\$30,000 in gambling chips and two smartphones from her.

The trio were transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, each facing an illegal currency exchange charge. ■

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15°C~21°C

Source: SMG

'Int'l Cities of Gastronomy Fest' to open next Friday

Khalel Vallo

The Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) announced in a press conference at Macau Fisherman's Wharf Convention and Exhibition Centre yesterday that the "2026 International Cities of Gastronomy Fest, Macao" will run for 10 days from next Friday to March 29, bringing together nearly 40 Creative Cities of Gastronomy from around the world.

Details of the event were unveiled in the press conference attended by MGTO Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, Deputy Directors Cheng Wai Tong and Jennifer Si Tou, and representatives of partner government entities.

The festival will feature five main highlights, namely the "International Gastronomy Promenade", "City of Gastronomy Showcase" and "International Gastronomy Forum, Macao", alongside two new additions – the "World Wines Lounge" and the "Global Goodies Market".

According to Senna Fernandes, Macau's designation as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy in 2017 recognised the city's culinary culture shaped by the convergence of



Representatives of partner government entities including Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes (front, centre), MGTO Deputy Directors Cheng Wai Tong (front, second from left) and Jennifer Si Tou (front, second from right), look on during yesterday's "2026 International Cities of Gastronomy Fest, Macao" press conference at Macau Fisherman's Wharf Convention and Exhibition Centre in Nape.

Eastern and Western influences. She said that the festival aims to promote the preservation and innovation of Macau's culinary traditions while fostering international exchange.

This year's edition will feature participation from nearly 40 cities across six continents, including eight newly designated Creative Cities of Gastronomy in 2025, marking the largest lineup since the annual event was launched. The main venue will once again be Macau Fisherman's

Wharf in Nape, specifically the Roman Amphitheatre Square and Legend Boulevard.

Additionally, a new community venue will be set up near Rua de Cantão and Rua de Xangai in Zape to help stimulate the district's economy.

The International Gastronomy Promenade will feature around 100 food booths offering dishes from different regions of the world, including cities such as Fujian



Workers putting the final touches yesterday on the row of booths at Macau Fisherman's Wharf in Nape for next Friday's opening of the international culinary festival. – Photos: Khalel Vallo

Province's Quanzhou, Guangdong Province's Chaozhou and Shunde, Jiangsu Province's Huai'an and Yangzhou, and Sichuan Province's Chengdu, as well as cities from the Americas, Africa and Asia.

About 800 dining seats will be available at the Macau Fisherman's Wharf venue, alongside stage performances and interactive games. The City of Gastronomy Showcase will present 53 culinary sessions by chefs from 25 Creative Cities of Gastronomy, allowing participants to demonstrate cooking techniques and share culinary

cultures. Among them will be young chefs participating in the programme organised by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations (UN).

Moreover, the International Gastronomy Forum, slated for March 23 at the Convention and Exhibition Centre of Macau Fisherman's Wharf will explore how culinary arts can collaborate with other sectors to promote sustainable urban development under the theme "Creative Fusion: Reimagining Gastronomy Beyond the Plate". ■

A Lorch, Nok Song garner Michelin Guide's 'Bib Gourmand' award

Rui Pastorin

The latest recipients of the "Bib Gourmand" distinction for the 18th edition of the MICHELIN Guide Hong Kong & Macau have been unveiled, with Macau restaurants "A Lorch" and "Nok Song" listed among the eight establishments receiving the award between the two regions.

The "Bib Gourmand" is a special distinction that celebrates restaurants that "serve exceptional food at great value", according to the Michelin Guide website. It was introduced in 1997, with the award taking its name from MICHELIN Guide mascot Bibendum (aka the Michelin Man), while "gourmand" is a French word meaning a person who enjoys good food and drink.

Regarding Macau's newest recipients, "A Lorch", located in Barra near A-Ma Temple, serves Portuguese cuisine and was this year "moved" from its previous "MICHELIN Selected" designation. With various highlights, the MICHELIN Guide noted that it is enjoyed by both locals and tourists. "Nok Song", meanwhile, serves Thai fare with high quality ingredients sourced worldwide and is located along Avenida do Dr. Rodrigo Rodrigues.

The new awardees in both regions means that number of restaurants designated with the Bib Gourmand award now stands at 83, with 70 in Hong Kong



This image provided by the MICHELIN Guide announces A Lorch and Nok Song as being newly designated with the "Bib Gourmand" distinction.

and 13 in Macau, as noted in a MICHELIN Guide statement yesterday.

MICHELIN Guide International Director Gwendal Poullennec was quoted by the statement as saying that the cuisine from each newcomer highlights both Macau's and Hong Kong's "rich gastronomic tapestry and truly embody the accessible excellence and spirited gastronomy for which both cities are known for, inviting food lovers to experience outstanding food at affordable prices."

The announcement was made ahead of the full restaurant selection of the 18th edition of the MICHELIN Guide Hong Kong & Macau, which is set to be unveiled on Thursday during the invitation-only MICHELIN Guide Ceremony at Grand Lisboa Palace (GLP) in Cotai. ■

Macao Union Medical Centre holds lecture on gastrointestinal health, shingles prevention

Khalel Vallo

The Islands Healthcare Complex – Macao Medical Centre of Peking Union Medical College Hospital (PUMCH), colloquially known as "Macao Union Medical Centre", announced in a statement last week that it recently conducted a public health lecture to raise awareness of gastrointestinal* health and shingles prevention.

According to the statement, the lecture featured two sessions led by specialists from the gastroenterology and dermatology departments of the medical centre.

In the first session, Dr Tan Bei, a gastroenterology** expert from PUMCH, spoke on key information about *Helicobacter pylori****, including its common symptoms, transmission routes and treatment methods, the statement said.

The statement noted that the second session was presented by Dr Su Fei, an attending physician in dermatology, who focused on shingles, and outlined the condition's causes, risk factors and typical symptoms, while addressing common misconceptions.

Shingles is a painful, blistering rash caused by the reactivation of the chickenpox virus.

Dr Su also advised residents – particularly those aged 50 and above – to take proactive measures to well manage their health and reduce the potential impact of shingles, the statement underlined.

During the question-and-answer session, participants raised questions about their own health conditions and those of their family members, while some attendees



This undated handout photo provided by the Macao Union Medical Centre (PUMCH) last week shows a doctor conducting a public lecture on gastrointestinal health at the facility in Cotai.

also sought clarification on common medical myths, the statement noted.

One participant said the lecture helped him gain a better understanding of warning signs in the body that he had previously overlooked, adding that the lecture encouraged him to take a more proactive approach to health management. According to the statement, the lecture aligned with the local government's policy of improving healthcare services and prioritising disease prevention.

The statement added that the centre plans to continue organising health lectures on different topics to enhance residents' health literacy and awareness of chronic disease management. ■

* Gastrointestinal (or GI) refers to the system in your body responsible for digestion, which includes your stomach and intestines. It is the long pathway that food travels through from your

mouth to your anus. – DeepSeek

** Gastroenterology is the branch of medicine focused on the digestive system and its disorders, encompassing the organs from the mouth to the anus along the gastrointestinal tract. Physicians in this field, known as gastroenterologists, diagnose and treat conditions such as acid reflux, ulcers, irritable bowel syndrome, and hepatitis, often performing specialised procedures like endoscopies to examine the digestive tract. – DeepSeek

*** *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*) is a type of bacteria that infects the stomach, often leading to irritation, inflammation, and ulcers in the stomach lining. While it is very common and often causes no symptoms, it is a primary cause of digestive issues and is treated with antibiotics to reduce the risk of more serious problems like stomach cancer. – DeepSeek

Sands China to promote local artists' works in HK Art Central

Rui Pastorin

Integrated resort operator Sands China will be showcasing the selected works of three outstanding emerging Macau artists through a Sands Gallery booth slated to be set up at the international art event Art Central in Hong Kong for the special administrative region's art month.

In a statement yesterday, the company noted that it was "the first integrated tourism and leisure enterprise from Macau invited as an Associate Partner" of the event, which was held its first edition in 2015 and will take place at the Central Harbourfront from March 25-29.

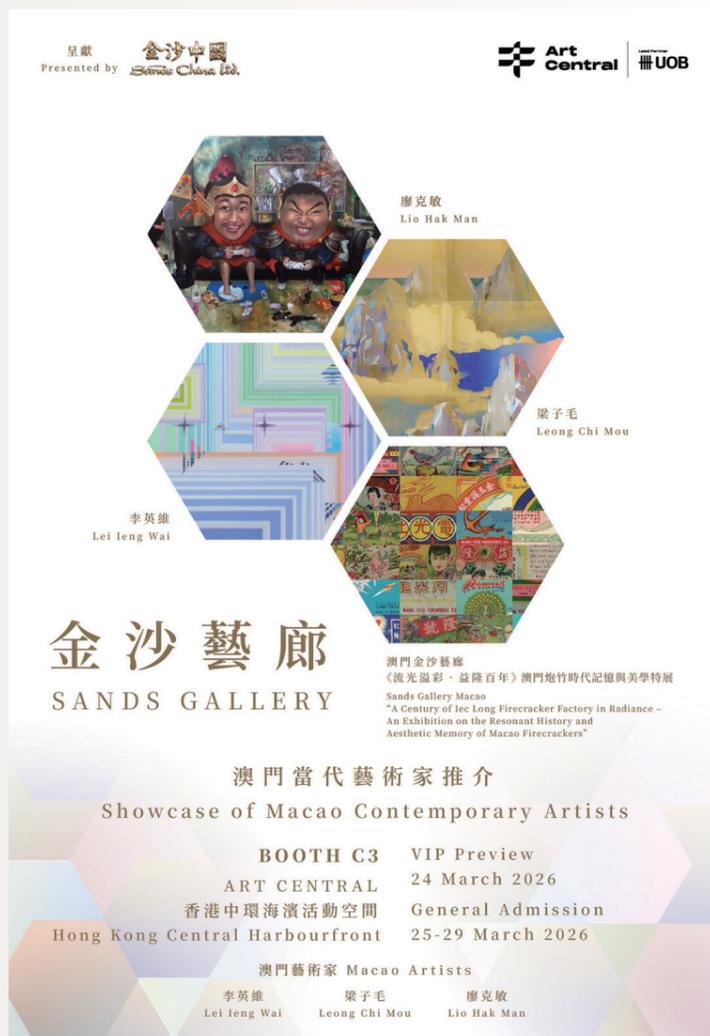
Over the five-day period, Sands China's booth will showcase the works and distinctive art styles of Macau artists Lei Ieng Wai, Leong Chi Mou, and Dor Lio Hak Man. The three artists are described in the statement as being "rising forces within the Macau Artist Society, whose creativity, craftsmanship, and conceptual approaches demonstrate international vision and professional standards". The statement added that the trio have started building a reputation in Macau and abroad.

Describing the three artists' styles, the statement said that Lei focuses on optical exploration with structured colour fields and geometric compositions that reflect life's urban rhythms; Leong uses gilding to create textured surfaces that evoke Macau's memory and landscape; and Lio combines delicate painting with urban life themes that "resonate deeply with audiences".

"Through Art Central, the company aims to promote young Macau artists onto major international art stage, demonstrating the vitality of Macau's new generation of contemporary artists, highlighting Macau's attributes through artistic lens, and further advancing the city's cultural talent development", according to the statement.

Moreover, the statement added that the company's presence at Art Central through Sands Gallery "represents significant recognition from the international art community and further reinforces its role as an international cultural portal for Macau".

One can find more information and ticketing on artcentralhongkong.com.



This poster provided by Sands China yesterday promotes the upcoming showcase of works by three local artists during Art Central in Hong Kong, along with snippets of each artists' work.

GEG's Training & Development wins 'Team of the Year' at HK awards

Rui Pastorin

Integrated resort operator Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) said in a statement yesterday that its Training & Development (T&D) department was named "Team of the Year – Hospitality & Leisure" at the recent "Hong Kong Business Management Excellence Awards 2026" in Hong Kong, marking the company's third human resources recognition in the year.

The statement said that the team garnered the award for "its success in executing a comprehensive people-readiness plan", with the company being the only winner in the category and in Macau. GEG Senior Vice President of Human Resources and Administration Bill Lu accepted the award on the company's behalf.

The statement said that the company's previous two accolades were achieved at the "5th National Human Resources Innovation Competition", organised by the Human Resources Management Committee of the China Chamber of International Commerce and HRLead.

The awards were namely "Best Talent Development Brand – Leading Brand" for its talent training programme, and the "Best Innovative HR Innovation practice – Leading Brand" for the "Experience Macau with GEG – Nurturing Talents through Cultural and Tourism Excellence" case study.

The statement said that the integrated resort operator offers growth opportunities for staff through structured induction training, systematic service concept courses, and cross-departmental platforms. The company also promotes continuous education, encouraging staff to pursue professional qualifications such as Forbes hospitality training, the statement said, noting that to date, over 4,000 employees have attained professional certifications. GEG's hotels and F&B outlets have received numerous international awards.



This photo provided by Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) yesterday shows GEG Senior Vice President of Human Resources and Administration Bill Lu (centre) posing with members of the Training & Development (T&D) department during the "2026 Hong Kong Business Management Awards for Excellence" ceremony.

Wynn hosts ceremony for training programme, recognises previous achievements

Rui Pastorin

Integrated resort operator Wynn Macau Limited hosted the "Wynn's Shining Talents Ceremony 2026" on March 2 to kick off the "Wynn Local Development Program 2026" and recognise the achievements of its previous trainees.

The event was held at Wynn Macau.

The programme, which covers 13 sub-programmes, is a collaboration between the integrated resort operator and the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL), the company noted in a statement earlier this week.

During her speech at the recent ceremony, Wynn Macau and Wynn Palace Senior Vice President of Human

Resources Stephanie So (蘇家雯) said, as summarised by the statement, that the partnership with the bureau to launch specialised recruitment programmes enables the company to attract young talent to the hospitality industry with a targeted approach, broadening the company's reach and enhancing talent training programmes.

The statement noted that over the past two years, the development programme has recruited 169 local trainees and achieved an overall retention rate of over 80 percent. Moreover, the statement said that "40 trainees have graduated and received a promotion, while others are undergoing structured on-the-job training and are expected to complete the programme starting this year".

The statement added that programme trainees take on 12–36-month specialised training across various departments, with this year seeing two more areas, namely information technology and customer relationship management.

The recent event also saw a commencement ceremony held for the inaugural Wynn Management Foundation Program, which the statement said offers a 12-month curriculum to over 80 local staff who are "high-potential leadership talent selected from the food & beverage and hotel departments at manager, assistant manager, supervisor or equivalent levels".

The statement said that the initiative aims to broaden local talent's global perspective and enhance their leadership and team management skills, as well as expand the talent pool for Macau's tourism and leisure sector while strengthening local management capabilities.



This group photo provided by Wynn Macau Limited on Sunday shows guests, representatives and staff posing during the recent "Wynn's Shining Talents Ceremony 2026" at Wynn Macau.

2026 Macau Int'l Parade set for March 29, with over 60 troupes

Tony Wong

The 2026 Macau International Parade will be held on Sunday, March 29, featuring a total of 1,600 performers from nearly 50 local troupes and over 10 from around the world, the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) announced during a press conference yesterday.

As in previous years, this year's parade will set off from the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ruins of St. Paul's and conclude in Praça do Lago Sai Van (Sai Van Lake Square).

This year, the parade is organised by the Cultural Affairs Bureau in conjunction with five of the city's six gaming operators – Wynn, SJM, Sands China, MGM, and Galaxy.

As previously, the organisation of the parade is also supported by various other public entities as well as Air Macau and the Macau General Union of Neighbourhood Associations (known as Kai Fong in Cantonese).

Yesterday's press conference, chaired by IC Vice President Cheang Kai Meng, was held at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape.



Flanked by other officials and representatives, Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) Vice President Cheang Kai Meng (front, centre) poses for a group photo holding a placard on the sidelines of yesterday's press conference at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape. – Photo: IC

The press conference was also attended by officials from the various public entities as well as senior representatives from the five gaming operators, Air Macau, and Kai Fong.

Last year's parade was organised by the Cultural Affairs Bureau in conjunction with all of the city's six gaming operators, i.e., the five involved in this year's parade plus Last Melco, when the parade's cost was shared by the six gaming operators,

without the bureau having to pay for the parade.

This year, according to yesterday's press conference, the parade's budget will be shared by the five gaming operators and the Cultural Affairs Bureau, with the bureau slated to pay 3.8 million patacas.

According to yesterday's press conference, the parade will set off from the Ruins of St. Paul's at 3 p.m. before arriving at Sai Van Lake Square at 6:30 p.m., passing through

Largo de S. Domingos, Largo do Senado (the city's main square), and along Avenida Panorâmica do Lago Nam Van.

Launched in 2011, the parade has become a signature festive event of Macau, drawing participation of residents and visitors from around the world, the bureau said yesterday, adding that it aims to strengthen international cultural and artistic exchange through the parade, leveraging Macau's role

as an exchange and cooperation base with Chinese culture as its mainstream and co-existence of different cultures.

Cheang also underlined during the press conference that his bureau is committed to improving its planning and organisation of this year's parade based on the achievements made in the parade's previous editions, aiming to enable this cultural fest to be "more intimately" connected with the people and "more influential".

Through the participation of "outstanding" troupes from over 10 countries and regions, together with "elite" local troupes, Cheang said, the parade aims to present a fusion of Macau's historical heritage, cultural characteristics, and international perspective, allowing the spectators to experience an immersive atmosphere where "scenery and art merge while the ancient and modern coexist".

Cheang also acknowledged that the total number of performers slated for this year's parade, 1,600, will be "slightly" less than the 1,800 last year. ■

First China nuclear power project with private investment connected to grid

HANGZHOU – The No. 1 generation unit of China's first nuclear power project with minority private capital investment in the eastern province of Zhejiang was connected to the power grid yesterday.

The China General Nuclear (CGN) Zhejiang San'ao project is the first nuclear power project in China to incorporate private investment. An investment arm of Geely Technology Group has a 2 percent stake in the first phase of the plant, which comprises the No. 1 and 2 generation units.

Private capital investment in the second phase of the project, which includes another two units, has been increased to 10 percent as the country encourages more private investment in the nuclear power sector.

Following the grid connection, the generation unit will start on-load trial operation and conduct power output increase and various performance tests before official commercial operation.

The power station, located in Cangnan County in the city of

Wenzhou, is designed to have six units of Hualong One, a domestically developed third-generation reactor. Three units have either already been built or are currently under construction.

After all six units are operational, the project will be capable of supplying over 54 billion kWh of clean electricity annually to Zhejiang Province and other regions in the Yangtze River Delta.

When fully operational, the project will be able to meet the annual electricity demand for production and daily life of about 5.4 million people and help reduce annual coal consumption by more than 16 million tonnes and carbon dioxide emissions by 50 million tonnes, said Tang Lyu of State Grid Zhejiang Electric Power Co. Ltd.

Currently, Zhejiang has over 100 gigawatts of installed clean energy power generation capacity, including over 10 gigawatts of nuclear power capacity, said the State Grid subsidiary. – Xinhua

China's 15th Five-Year Plan a global invitation to shared prosperity

Commentary

BEIJING – With the adoption of China's new development blueprint for the next five years, the world is seeing far more than a national development roadmap – it is embracing inclusive growth, technological advancement and win-win cooperation that transcend borders.

The global community is grappling with growing division and conflicts – from rising protectionism and a widening wealth gap to disrupted supply chains and mounting strains on multilateralism. To avoid beggar-thy-neighbor practices, the international community must prioritize enhanced cohesion, foster a spirit of openness, and cultivate a long-term vision.

China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) reinforces a message that the country is a stable anchor for the world economy and a reliable partner in addressing common challenges. The modernization drive of a country with 1.4 billion people brings certainty and positive momentum to a turbulent world, providing an alternative path in exploring a new form of modernization.

The 15th Five-Year Plan period is critical to basically achieving socialist modernization by 2035. Its focus on high-quality development prioritizes innovation, sustainability, and making domestic demand a more prominent economic driver, which will translate into tangible opportunities across key sectors for investors and businesses worldwide.

Technological self-reliance and strength, a core pillar of the plan, are not about isolation. China's massive investments in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, smart economy, and advanced manufacturing will create new demand for international

talent, technology, and partnerships.

Multinational corporations, research institutions, and startups worldwide stand to benefit from expanded access to China's innovation ecosystem – through joint R&D projects or participation in emerging industrial clusters.

Sustainability, another cornerstone of the plan, aligns China's development with the global fight against climate change and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The plan reinforces China's commitment to achieving peak carbon emissions and carbon neutrality, with ambitious targets for renewable energy deployment, the development of a circular economy, and investments in green infrastructure. This creates substantial market opportunities for green technology cooperation, spanning European renewable energy firms to African clean energy partners. China is not advancing its green transition in seclusion; rather, it acts as a catalyst for global green initiatives.

By turning its vast population into a primary engine of domestic demand, China is building a more resilient domestic market that is less vulnerable to the whims of global trade cycles and foreign tariffs.

In 2025, final consumption expenditure contributed 52 percent of China's economic growth, up by five percentage points from a year earlier. Its ongoing transition to a consumption-driven economy means fresh opportunities for foreign goods, services and investments.

Contrary to the narrative of decoupling promoted by some, China is doubling down on connecting its market with the world as enormous opportunities lie in the plan's emphasis on high-standard opening up.

The plan pledges to further liberalize trade and investment, upgrade pilot free trade zones, and optimize the business environment for foreign investors, including stronger intellectual property rights protection and fairer competition policies. This means greater access to China's super-large consumer market, where demand for high-quality goods and services is on the rise.

The plan reaffirms China's commitment to inclusive global development through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative to boost connectivity, green development, and people-to-people exchanges.

In addition, the adoption of the law on national development planning, which sets the rules for formulating and implementing the country's five-year plans, marks a pivotal step in institutionalizing long-term economic governance. The legislation delivers greater policy transparency and predictability for foreign investors, which reinforces China's appeal as a stable, high-potential destination for global capital.

The 15th Five-Year Plan is a testament to China's conviction that unity, strength and resolve will prevail. Global prosperity is by no means a zero-sum game. China's development is closely intertwined with the development of other countries.

The world needs neither new divisions nor confrontations; it requires vision, cooperation, and action. China's new Five-Year Plan extends an invitation to those willing to collaborate for a safer, cleaner, and brighter future. It embodies a promise of stability and partnership, offering a gift to a world that is desperately seeking direction and hope. – Xinhua



A transparent OLED TV is pictured at the booth of LG during the 2026 Appliance & Electronics World Expo (AWE2026) in Shanghai yesterday. AWE2026 kicked off in Shanghai yesterday. More than 1,200 enterprises from all over the world have joined the expo to showcase their latest innovations. – Xinhua

China's 'two sessions' highlight innovation, promote shared growth

BEIJING – With embodied artificial intelligence (AI), brain-computer interfaces and 6G mobile communications featuring prominently in documents released during the “two sessions,” innovation is set to drive China’s high-quality development in the new stage.

Experts around the world highlighted that, driven by quality improvement, technological upgrading and structural optimization, the country’s 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) is expected to continue boosting domestic development and channel its innovations into global cooperation.

INNOVATION FOR PEOPLE’S WELL-BEING

The outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) for national economic and social development signals a clear shift toward higher-quality, innovation-led growth, while placing the improvement of people’s social well-being at the forefront, said Gerald Mbanda, a Rwandan publisher and researcher.

“It is an important indicator that the government leadership puts first the interest of the people,” he said.

China’s 15th Five-Year Plan highlighted “new quality productive forces,” with a focus on scientific advancement, industrial upgrading, and long-term development, said Richard A. Black, a senior scholar with the

Schiller Institute.

Black said the plan reflects a view that long-term prosperity depends on a commitment to “the real economy” – manufacturing, infrastructure and energy systems.

Marcela Vera, an economist at Chile’s University of Santiago, said that while innovation in the West tends to be confined to big firms using tech barriers to protect profits, it is widely applied to advance social development and enhance people’s well-being in China.

Citing his experience in China, Dennis Munene Mwaniki, executive director of the China-Africa Center at the Africa Policy Institute in Kenya, said that China has become a leading nation in AI development and integration.

He recalled visiting a hotel where a robot served him, noting that such machines can also handle jobs far too risky for humans, like welding.

He added that China has developed AI capable of detecting some health conditions early, improving the healthcare system and saving lives. It has also been “instrumental” in agriculture, he said, helping cultivate crops resistant to harsh conditions, delivering people from hunger and starvation.

INNOVATION FOR SHARING

Experts pointed out that the policy

priorities unveiled at the “two sessions” further cemented China’s role as a global innovation hub while creating major opportunities for global cooperation.

Mwaniki said that China’s AI has been effectively applied through international cooperation and partnerships, noting that the country has worked with African countries to breed climate-resilient crops in regions where people are dying from hunger.

Ismael Buchanan, a senior lecturer at the College of Arts and Social Sciences of the University of Rwanda, expressed a similar view.

“I believe African countries could greatly benefit from learning from Five-Year Plans launched by the Chinese government,” he said, suggesting that they strengthen trade and partnerships with China, a path many are already actively pursuing.

European countries are also closely following the “two sessions,” looking forward to sealing some deals.

“For the outside world, especially for Europe, it is important to see where the new space for China’s further growth lies,” said Marina Ragus, deputy speaker of the National Assembly of Serbia.

Ragus said that China’s “sustained investment in innovation, advanced production lines and automation” has

driven structural transformation, generated employment and improved living standards.

Clemens Schuette, chairman of the board of the German-Chinese Business Association, said China has evolved from “a low-cost manufacturing base into a major market and an important innovation hub,” citing BMW, Volkswagen, Siemens and BASF as examples of companies expanding local research and engineering capacities in China.

German firms are increasingly recognizing China’s role as a global innovation leader, he noted. “Many companies are expanding cooperation with Chinese partners not only to remain competitive in China but also to benefit globally,” he said.

Satyajit Bose, professor of Practice at Columbia University, praised China’s role in expanding the global reach of clean energy. The 15th Five-Year Plan’s emphasis on “high-quality development” demonstrates a commitment to ensuring that growth must incorporate environmental sustainability and structural upgrading, Bose said.

Describing renewable energy as a “promising part of Chinese development,” he noted that falling solar production costs have made clean power more accessible to lower-income countries and created opportunities for longer-term cooperation. – Xinhua



A fairgoer looks at a rocket engine on display at the 2026 Shanghai Commercial Aerospace Conference & Exhibition at Shanghai New International Expo Center in Shanghai yesterday. The fair's opening kicked off yesterday and ends tomorrow. – Xinhua

Symposium held in Taipei to mark 160th birth anniversary of Dr Sun Yat-sen

TAIPEI – A symposium to commemorate the 160th anniversary of the birth of Dr Sun Yat-sen was held in Taipei yesterday.

More than 20 representatives from Taiwan’s academic circles, social organizations and overseas Chinese communities attended the event.

Dr Sun was born in 1866 and died on March 12, 1925. He is known among the Chinese people as a great pioneer of China’s democratic revolution for his leading role in the 1911 Revolution, which put an end to more than 2,000 years of feudal rule in China.

Dr Sun visited Taiwan three times – in 1900, 1913 and 1918 – when the island was under Japanese colonial rule. Inspired by his discourse, many young patriots emerged in Taiwan, some of whom headed to the mainland to participate in the revolution while others organized anti-Japanese efforts on the island.

Today, many counties and cities across Taiwan and the mainland have roads or parks named after Dr Sun.

“Unification is the hope of all Chinese nationals. If China can be unified, all Chinese will enjoy a happy life; if it cannot, all will suffer,” Dr Sun once said.

Hua Chuen-hsiung, honorary chairman of the Alliance for China’s Peaceful Reunification USA, said in his speech that Dr Sun’s ideas could help boost integrated development through cross-Strait exchanges and advance toward peaceful reunification.

Liu Yuan-tsun, professor emeritus at Soochow University in Taiwan, noted that Dr Sun’s thought has had a profound influence on both sides of the Strait.

He added that the two sides of the Strait should work together to carry forward the patriotic spirit and core ideals of saving the nation championed by Dr Sun.

Last year, China’s top political advisory body adopted a decision to commemorate the 160th anniversary of the birth of Dr Sun Yat-sen.

According to the decision, a grand commemoration will be held to commemorate Dr Sun’s immortal contributions to national independence, social progress and people’s well-being, and to consolidate and strengthen the great unity of all Chinese sons and daughters at home and abroad.

It also seeks to advance the peaceful development of relations across the Strait and the great cause of national reunification, and to rally the strength of the entire Chinese nation for building a strong country and realizing national rejuvenation through Chinese modernization, according to the decision.

Local media professional Chang Chun-kai said that revisiting Dr Sun’s efforts to pursue national reunification holds important contemporary significance on the occasion of the 160th anniversary of his birth.

Despite attempts by secessionists seeking “Taiwan independence” to diminish or erase Dr Sun’s influence, commemorative activities held across the Strait over the years have demonstrated that his thought and spirit have been passed down from generation to generation, becoming a shared spiritual legacy for people on both sides, Chang said. – Xinhua

China’s Mars sample return mission to start flight model development in 2026: designer

BEIJING – China’s mission to retrieve samples from Mars will advance to the flight model development phase within this year, Liu Jizhong, chief designer of the Tianwen-3 mission, said yesterday.

Building on the preliminary technical research and demonstrations, the mission has achieved breakthroughs in key technologies. The engineering team is now focused on developing prototypes, Liu, also a national legislator, told reporters.

The Mars sample return mission is scheduled for launch around 2028, with the goal of returning no less than 500 grams of Martian samples to Earth by around 2031.

International scientists are invited to collaborate in advancing deep space exploration technology development and engineering, according to Liu.

In terms of engineering, the mission is developing an orbiter, a returner, a lander, an ascender, and a service module, which will compose the orbiter-returner complex and the lander-ascender-service module complex.

The development work also includes achieving breakthroughs in key technologies such as Martian surface sampling and sealing, Martian surface takeoff and ascent, Mars orbital rendezvous, sample capture and transfer, and planetary protection.

The mission is expected to search for potential signs of life on Mars, investigate Martian geological formation, and examine Martian atmosphere, with the objective of making major discoveries in the study of habitable evolution of terrestrial planets.

“The Tianwen-3 mission represents a highly challenging, innovative and pioneering major space endeavor,” said Liu. “It is expected to achieve humanity’s first Mars sample return mission, thus significantly advancing the integrated development of space science, space technology and space applications.”

Liu also noted that China’s Tianwen-2 probe, launched in 2025, has traveled approximately 700 million kilometers and will reach the near-Earth asteroid 2016HO3 this year to begin flying around it for exploration. – Xinhua



The 14th National People's Congress (NPC) holds the closing meeting of its fourth session at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. President Xi Jinping (center, front) and other leaders including Li Qiang, Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang, Li Xi and Han Zheng attended the meeting. — Xinhua

China adopts law to promote ethnic unity and development

Analysis

BEIJING—The nation's top legislature yesterday adopted a law to promote ethnic unity and progress, reinforcing the legal foundation for national cohesion and common prosperity among 56 ethnic groups as the country enters the final decade in its drive to basically achieve modernization by 2035.

The Ethnic Unity and Progress Promotion Law, a fundamental law on ethnic affairs in China, was adopted at the closing meeting of the fourth session of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC). It will take effect on July 1, 2026.

The new law embeds the vision of "fostering a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation" into the country's legal framework and advances the law-based governance of ethnic affairs, said Li Hongzhong, vice chairman of the NPC Standing Committee, in his explanatory remarks on the draft.

The law dedicates chapters to fostering a shared sense of belonging for the Chinese nation, promoting interaction, exchange and integration, and advancing common prosperity and development among all ethnic groups.

Specific provisions direct central and local governments to strengthen infrastructure, foster industrial growth, ensure better access to public services, and intensify efforts to protect the environment, among other measures.

According to Li, the new legislation sets out China's major policies for supporting high-quality development in ethnic

minority regions, providing institutional and legal backing to help these regions integrate into the national development agenda and meet the aspirations of all ethnic groups for a better life.

"Development in ethnic minority regions should not just rely on temporary assistance but also on sustained policy support guaranteed by the new law," said Chen Zhen, an NPC deputy from the Dong ethnic group in south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

Many ethnic minority communities reside in mountainous areas, far-off regions or other historically underdeveloped parts of China. Benefiting from China's poverty alleviation drive and ongoing rural revitalization efforts, ethnic minority regions have recorded rapid economic and social development.

During China's eight-year campaign to eliminate absolute poverty, declared victory in 2021, all 420 poverty-stricken counties in ethnic autonomous areas and all 28 ethnic groups with relatively small populations shook off poverty.

The combined GDP of the five autonomous regions, which are home to large ethnic minority populations – Inner Mongolia, Guangxi, Xizang, Ningxia, and Xinjiang – grew at an average annual rate of 5.6 percent from 2020 to 2024, outpacing the national average.

Public services in ethnic minority regions have leapfrogged. Xizang, for example, led the entire country in starting to provide 15 years of publicly-

funded education from kindergarten to senior high in 2012. The 15-year free schooling has also been available in four southern prefectures in Xinjiang.

The new law provides that the state shall promote the standard spoken and written Chinese language. The right to study and use ethnic minority languages shall also be respected and safeguarded, according to the law.

Lawmakers and experts said the remarkable economic and social achievements in ethnic minority regions have been buttressed by continuous efforts to safeguard ethnic unity, which is one underlying logic behind the new law.

"Unity is the precondition for progress, while progress reinforces unity," Chen said.

The new law stipulates that upholding national unity and ethnic solidarity is the responsibility of all Chinese citizens, and prohibits discrimination and suppression against any ethnic group.

It also combats violent terrorism, ethnic separatism and religious extremism, saying organizers, planners, perpetrators, instigators and funders of these activities may face criminal liability.

"Development in ethnic minority areas requires a stable and harmonious environment, and such an environment must be safeguarded by the rule of law," said Yin Jianmin, an NPC deputy from the Manchu ethnic group and chairperson of an agricultural technology company from Gansu Province in northwest China.

— Xinhua

Wang Yi calls for end to military operations in Middle East

BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi yesterday called on all parties to urge those involved in the current conflict in the Middle East to cease military operations as soon as possible and prevent the situation from deteriorating further.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the appeal in a phone conversation with Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty.

Abdelatty briefed Wang on the regional situation and Egypt's position, expressing Egypt's deep concern about the current war. Citing a resolution recently passed by the UN Security Council, Abdelatty said the Egyptian side called on all parties to exercise restraint and avoid further regional unrest.

The Egyptian side highly appreciates China's balanced and impartial position and the important role it has played, and is willing to continue to maintain close communication with China to help de-escalate the situation as soon as possible, he said.

For his part, Wang reiterated China's principled position, saying that China and Egypt, as responsible countries, both advocate resolving regional issues through dialogue and consultation and oppose the reckless use of force.

The prolonged conflict in the Middle East will only bring more suffering to the local people, weigh heavily on the regional economy, and further undermine international and regional security and stability, Wang said.

Stressing that an immediate ceasefire represents the broad consensus of the international community, Wang said that China stands ready to maintain communication and coordination with regional countries, including Egypt, and continue to play a constructive role in striving for peace. (More on pages 8–10)

— Xinhua

Uber plans Tokyo robotaxi trial with Nissan and Britain's Wayve

TOKYO – Uber announced yesterday its first robotaxi partnership in Japan, teaming up with Nissan and British artificial intelligence autonomous driving startup Wayve for a trial this year in Tokyo.

Companies worldwide, from Alphabet subsidiary Waymo to Tesla and China's Apollo Go, are racing to roll out self-driving taxi services, although the actual level of autonomy on offer varies.

Wayve – which announced an US\$8.6 billion valuation last month – is a pioneer in the development of vehicle AI that learns from the environment instead of relying on pre-mapped routes.

Nissan is integrating Wayve's AI-powered systems into its cars, and Uber and Wayve are already planning commercial robotaxi trials in London this year.

The three companies said yesterday they plan a pilot deployment of robotaxis in Tokyo "by late 2026" subject to approval from authorities.

A trained safety operator will be in the Nissan car as part of the trial.

"This will be an experience where AI will drive the vehicle, you can hail it through the Uber app, and it will be supervised by a safety



CEO, Nissan Motor Co. Ltd Ivan Espinosa (left), CEO, Wayve Technologies Ltd Alex Kendall (centre) and Global Head of Autonomous Mobility and Delivery Uber Technologies Sarfraz Maredia address a joint press conference next to a prototype vehicle in Tokyo yesterday.

Uber announced on March 12, its first robotaxi partnership in Japan, teaming up with Nissan and British artificial intelligence autonomous driving startup Wayve for a trial this year in Tokyo. – AFP

operator," Wayve co-founder Alex Kendall told a news conference.

Wayve's robotaxi rollout with Uber "includes planned services across more than 10 cities worldwide, including London", the companies said.

Tokyo is "one of the world's most challenging markets" for robotaxis due to its "dense traffic patterns, complex road layouts and high safety standards", they added.

Wayve has said it intends to deploy its autonomous driving software in consumer vehicles made by Nissan in fiscal 2027.

Nissan is on a bumpy road to recovery after being squeezed by an ultra-competitive business environment and US trade tariffs – just a few years after former boss Carlos Ghosn's shock arrest and escape from Japan. – AFP

Helicopter rescue saves men, dog from Australian floodwaters

SYDNEY – A helicopter pilot airlifted two men and a dog from the roof of a car engulfed in raging floodwaters in a dramatic rescue in northern Australia that was captured on video.

The driver, passenger and the sodden canine were trapped as white water from a flooded creek roared around the half-submerged vehicle on Wednesday, video images released by police and emergency services showed.

The drama unfolded in the

remote locality of Manbulloo, near Katherine, after the car was swept off a highway following days of flooding in the region, police said yesterday.

A Heli-Muster R44 helicopter perched partly on the car roof as it picked up the two men and the pet dog, in white-knuckle scenes shared by the authorities on social media.

"A passing-by helicopter pilot dropped a police officer on top of the vehicle to help the stranded driver and passenger and then went

back to retrieve their dog from the vehicle," NT Emergency Service's Katherine volunteer unit said in a social media post.

"Everyone is safe."

Police in the territory praised the rescuers for saving the men and the dog – reportedly a German Shepherd.

"This was a life-threatening situation that goes to show just how quickly these flood waters can turn dangerous," said Northern Territory Police incident controller Emma Carter. – AFP

3 crew 'believed trapped' aboard Thai ship attacked in Gulf: firm

Montira Rungjirajitranon

BANGKOK – Three crew members believed to be trapped aboard a Thai bulk carrier hit by projectiles while travelling through the crucial Strait of Hormuz were yet to be rescued yesterday, the vessel's owner said.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said Wednesday they had struck the Thai-registered Mayuree Naree, as well as a Liberia-flagged vessel, in the strait because the ships had ignored "warnings".

The Thai ship was struck Wednesday morning while transiting through the Gulf waterway, after departing Khalifa port in the United Arab Emirates.

The two projectiles damaged the Mayuree Naree's engine room and caused a fire, Thai transport

company Precious Shipping said in a statement Wednesday evening.

"Three crew members are reported missing and believed to be trapped in the engine room," it said, adding that authorities were working to rescue them.

"Unfortunately, that remains the case," the firm's managing director Khalid Hashim told AFP yesterday.

"We still have not been able to get anyone to board our ship, even though the fire has been extinguished," Hashim said in an email.

"We are trying different avenues to get onboard."

The Omani navy rescued 20 of the vessel's sailors on Wednesday, the Thai navy said.

Thailand's foreign ministry said all 23 crew members were Thai.

All Thai vessels have left the Strait of Hormuz and Bangkok had "protested against the violence done to the commercial ships", the ministry's deputy spokesman Panidol Patchimsawat told reporters yesterday.

"Please be assured that we are on a mission to find the missing three," he added.

Since strikes by the United States and Israel against Iran in late February ignited the Middle East war, the Islamic republic has launched its own attacks against its oil-exporting neighbours.

The strikes have threatened shipping in the Strait of Hormuz and plunged the global energy economy into crisis.

The strait is a crucial waterway through which a fifth of global oil supplies usually pass. – AFP

Fear, boredom for Philippine sailors stuck in Hormuz strait

Pam Castro and Cecil Morella

MANILA – Filipino sailor George Miranda was racing to help a stricken vessel aboard the tugboat Mussafah 2 when he last spoke to his wife and young daughter.

The 46-year-old, whose small ship was struck by a pair of missiles this week in the Strait of Hormuz, is the only seafarer from the Philippines known to be missing in the Middle East war, the government says.

But more than 6,000 others from the country that supplies a quarter of the world's sailors are still working in the conflict zone and "surrounding areas", many waiting for the green light to pass through the now-deadly shipping lane.

A series of Iranian strikes have effectively closed the strait, which carries 20 percent of world oil and gas supplies, plunging the global energy economy into crisis.

For John Winston Isidro, life aboard his VLCC, or Very Large Crude Carrier, has been marked by equal parts monotony and precaution since his ship began playing the waiting game.

"The crew stopped working above deck, and we installed a double watch on the bridge," the 32-year-old told AFP, describing off-hours spent scrolling Facebook, playing computer games and watching the occasional movie.

That routine was becoming normal, he said, though the engine crew was being kept on standby, ready to "fire up our engines" in case of emergency.

Stranded for days

Welbin Maghanoy, whose ship was carrying crude oil bound for Japan, had been stranded for nine days when he spoke to AFP.

"It's getting boring, and I'm a little scared, because there are many ships being attacked, mostly oil tankers like ours," he said from a vessel located 100 nautical miles off the coast of the United Arab Emirates.

"Those whose contracts are about to end... they really want to go home," he said of his fellow sailors.

Judy Domingo, president of the 50,000-strong United Filipino Seafarers union, told AFP she had taken hundreds of calls from concerned sailors bottled up in the strait, with food supplies one of the immediate concerns.

"There are also members expressing their desire to leave the ship. But of course, we cannot get them out of there immediately. We have to consider their location and a safe port for them to disembark," Domingo said.

One stranded Philippine sailor who has been posting online videos of his experiences under the name Choi described a vote in which the crew was asked if they wanted to risk passage through the strait, where traffic has slowed to a trickle.

"Our captain gathered us in the conference room to ask us who wanted to pass through," he said in a video posted to Facebook and verified by AFP Fact Check.

"We chose to go home alive," he said.

"There are 27 of us. Almost everyone said they refused to sail."

Isidro, the VLCC sailor, said he was happy his crew had not been consulted about the decision to stay put.

"Our captain will not risk our vessel's safety... It's too dangerous," he said.

"Let's just pray this US-Iran war ends soon so every ship trapped here is able to get out safe." – AFP

Australian plane owner charged over 'black flight' to Indonesia

SYDNEY – An Australian aircraft owner appeared in court yesterday charged with people smuggling after allegedly helping two fugitives flee to Indonesia on a "black flight" from a remote peninsula, police said.

Indonesian officials detained four men in the Merauke district of Indonesia's easternmost region of Papua upon arrival in November, after the small fixed-wing aircraft's two pilots failed to declare their two passengers in documents.

An investigation found one man was on bail for alleged kidnapping offences in Sydney and the other was wanted for alleged drug trafficking, Australian federal police said.

The pair travelled thousands of kilometres from Sydney to Australia's north-eastern tip, boarding the plane at a remote indigenous fishing town on the Cape York peninsula in Queensland.

The plane flew with its transponder turned off until it reached international waters, police said.

A "black flight" typically sees planes log false flight plans, fly

at low altitude or turn off their transponders in a bid to evade detection by authorities.

"This was a very sophisticated strategy to exit Australia," detective superintendent Adrian Telfer told reporters.

Police allege the 43-year-old owner of an aviation company in Rockhampton, Queensland, coordinated the escape.

He appeared in court yesterday charged with people smuggling offences that carry a maximum penalty of 10 years in jail.

The man was granted bail and did not enter a plea, a court official said.

The four men on the flight remain detained in Indonesia, police said.

Authorities have stepped up surveillance of Australia's vast northern coastline.

Federal police last month vowed to crack down on "black flights" operating across the vast and porous border between Queensland and Papua New Guinea over community concerns about drug trafficking and regional security. – AFP

Bangladesh parliament reconvenes after uprising and polls

Sheikh Sabiha Alam

DHAKA—Bangladesh's parliament convened yesterday for the first time since a deadly 2024 uprising plunged the country into political turmoil and following elections last month.

The government of Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), took over after February 12 elections from the interim administration that had led the country of 170 million people since August 2024.

"After more than a decade and a half of fascist and subservient rule, the activities of parliament are beginning today with representatives elected by the people," Rahman told parliament.

"The BNP wants to build a prosperous, safe and democratic country," he added, calling on all lawmakers, whatever their political opinions, to work together.

Rahman blamed the toppled government of Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League party for undermining the previous parliament.

Hasina, 78, who has been sentenced in absentia to death for crimes against humanity, is in self-imposed exile in India.

"The fallen dictatorship made parliament dysfunctional, instead of making it the centre of all national

activities," Rahman said, promising it would change under his watch.

"We will make parliament the centre of all debates and arguments aimed at resolving the country's problems."

They include tackling a sluggish economy, restoring stability and reviving growth after months of turmoil that rattled investor confidence and strained state finances.

The world's second largest garment exporter, heavily dependent on fossil fuel imports, has also been hit hard by an oil price spike caused by the war in the Middle East.

Rahman's appeal for unity is a bid to heal rifts in a country polarised by years of bitter rivalry.

A new speaker, Hafiz Uddin Ahmad, and his deputy, Kayser Kamal, were elected to office. Both are members of the BNP.

The parliament building was looted during the August 2024 uprising against Hasina, but has since been repaired.

The BNP-led alliance secured 212 seats, while the BNP alone won 209 seats.

The leader of the opposition is Shafiqur Rahman, who heads the Jamaat-e-Islami-led alliance with 76 seats, with Jamaat alone holding 68.

—AFP

Behind Cambodian border casino, Thai military shows off a scam hub

Sally Jensen

O'Smach, Cambodia — Broken computer monitors in bombed-out offices, scattered fake police uniforms and phoney hundred-dollar notes: these were the vestiges of a frantic escape of suspected cyberscammers fleeing a resort on the Cambodia-Thailand border.

Southeast Asia has become the epicentre of the multibillion-dollar online scam industry in which hundreds of thousands of fraudsters — some trafficked, others willing workers — cheat internet users globally with romance and cryptocurrency investment schemes.

Yesterday, AFP was invited on a Thai military-organised tour of an area of Cambodia's O'Smach which Thai forces captured during border clashes last year.

Thailand says the area had been used as a base of operations by the Cambodian military as well as criminals running transnational scams.

The neighbouring nations engaged in deadly clashes along their disputed frontier for three weeks in December, the latest flare-up in a long-standing border conflict.

Thailand said that month its forces struck several casinos across the border, alleging they were being used as Cambodian weapons storage facilities and firing positions. At least two have been identified by monitors as fronts operating as scam hubs.

"It's by coincidence — the attack on these facilities was because they were used as military bases by the Cambodian forces," Thai defence ministry spokesman Surasant Kongsiri told reporters on the tour.

When Thai troops advanced their positions, aiming to neutralise the threat from the Cambodian side, they "discovered that the facilities behind the casinos turned out to be scam centres", he said.

Since a fragile truce was agreed in late December, the Thai military has maintained its presence in the area — despite repeated calls by Cambodia for Thailand to remove its forces from O'Smach and other



A Royal Thai Army officer shines a torch in a room disguised as a Chinese police station inside an abandoned scam centre in O'Smach town on the Thai-Cambodian border yesterday, during a press trip organised by Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Royal Thai Army. —AFP

border zones that were previously controlled by Cambodia.

Cambodian Information Minister Neth Pheaktra accused Thailand of attempting to justify its "de facto annexation" of Cambodian territory "under the pretext of anti-scams operations".

"Such actions represent a dangerous misuse of law enforcement narratives to justify military encroachment," he said in a statement to yesterday.

Scammer scripts, call lists

The destruction and debris remaining in O'Smach more than two months after the fighting ended indicated a rushed flight by thousands of people.

Journalists were led through offices and bunk-bed-filled dormitories where the tools of the scam trade were left behind: fake Australian, Canadian and Indian law enforcement office backdrops, scam call scripts and stacks of paper with phone numbers of targets from around the world.

The Thai military said around 20,000 alleged scammers who were living there escaped just before the missiles hit.

O'Smach and other casino sites Thailand targeted during the December fighting had potentially thousands of victims of human

trafficking inside, an analyst told AFP that month.

The sites visited yesterday — accommodations for scammers from Vietnam and Indonesia, and offices for Chinese bosses, according to the Thai military — were opposite the O'Smach resort and casino, owned by Cambodian senator and businessman Ly Yong Phat.

He was sanctioned by Washington in 2024 over his firm's alleged role in "serious human rights abuses related to the treatment of trafficked workers subjected to forced labour in online scam centres", according to US authorities.

Ly Yong Phat in November denied media reports linking him to cybercrime and money laundering networks, calling the accusations "fake and damaging to his reputation" in an interview with a Cambodian news outlet.

Prapas Somchaidee, of the Thai Air Force, said Cambodia — which has pledged to stamp out scam operations before May — should cop to their proliferation and elicit international support to combat them.

"If Cambodia were to acknowledge that these [scam] activities are taking place and that they cannot control them, and coordinate with Thailand and other countries so the problem can be addressed, that would be much better." —AFP



Members of the All India Democratic Women's Association demonstrate around a liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinder after price hikes and disruptions in cooking gas in Chennai, India yesterday.

Far from the Middle East, restaurants in India, the world's fastest-growing major economy, are feeling the conflict's heat with disruptions in cooking gas supplies. —AFP

1 dead, 2 critical after chemo injections at Japanese children's hospital

TOKYO — One teenage leukemia patient died and two others have fallen unconscious after undergoing chemotherapy injections at a children's hospital near Tokyo, local media reported yesterday.

The Saitama Prefectural Children's Medical Center in Saitama City reported the cases to police on Tuesday after discovering that the patients' spinal fluid contained a cancer drug that should not have been administered around the spinal cord, according to Kyodo News.

The drug in question was not part of the cancer medication originally

prescribed, and no records of its administration were found. The hospital, therefore, notified police, NHK reported.

After receiving the injections between January and October last year, all three patients developed neurological symptoms such as difficulty walking. One male patient in his teens died this February.

The hospital has launched a full investigation into the cases. It has not ruled out the possibility of either a criminal act or a serious medical accident.

—Xinhua

Nepal's RSP party of Balendra Shah wins majority: election commission

KATHMANDU — Nepal's centrist RSP party of rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah won a majority in parliament with 182 seats, Election Commission results showed yesterday.

The March 5 vote elected a new 275-member House of Representatives, the lower house of parliament, with 165 seats chosen directly and 110 through a proportional representation vote.

"The counting of votes for the election of members of the House of Representatives... has been completed," Election Commission spokesman Narayan Prasad Bhattarai said in a statement.

In direct elections, RSP won 125 of the 165, and secured another 57 in PR votes, leaving them only two seats short of securing a powerful two-thirds majority.

The Nepali Congress, which was the biggest party in the last parliament, secured 38 seats and the Marxists of now-defeated KP Sharma Oli trailing with 25 seats. The Maoists have seven seats.

"A letter has been sent to the concerned political parties today to select the names of the candidates, and submit them to the Commission within three days," Bhattarai said.

The vote was the first since deadly September 2025 youth anti-

corruption protests toppled the government.

The demonstrations, under a loose Gen Z banner, began over a brief social media ban but quickly tapped into broader grievances over corruption and a struggling economy.

Shah himself defeated veteran four-time prime minister KP Sharma Oli — whose Marxist-led government was ousted in the violence last year — in his own seat.

His victory over the 74-year-old Oli, and his rise from the capital's mayor to expected prime minister, caps a bold gamble and marks one of the most dramatic results in recent Nepali politics. —AFP

US military 'not ready' to escort tankers through Hormuz Strait: energy secretary

Asad Hashim

WASHINGTON – The US military is currently “not ready” to escort tankers through the critical Strait of Hormuz because all its assets are focused on striking Iran, Energy Secretary Chris Wright said yesterday.

Wright’s comments came as an attack on two oil tankers off Iraq killed at least one person, and oil prices briefly soared past US\$100.

Since launching the war on Iran, US President Donald Trump has sought to calm the markets by offering US Navy escorts for oil tankers and reinsurance facilities for shipping companies – but no escorts have so far taken place.

“It’ll happen relatively soon, but it can’t happen now. We’re simply not ready,” Wright told CNBC. “All of our military assets right now are focused on destroying Iran’s offensive capabilities and the manufacturing industry that supplies their offensive capabilities.”

He added that it was “quite likely” such escorts would be taking place by the end of the month.

On Tuesday, Wright sent oil prices seesawing when he said US ships had carried out an escort, before his social media post was swiftly deleted and the White House denied that such an operation had occurred.

As Iran launches a new wave of attacks against Gulf energy targets, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said the war “is creating the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market”.

US and Israeli strikes on Iranian targets – including energy infrastructure – have also disrupted supplies.

The conflict has sent energy prices spiking, including in the United States, creating a political headache for Trump.

The US president yesterday sought to address the issue, saying that stopping Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons was more important to him than gasoline prices.

“The United States is the largest Oil Producer in the World, by far, so when oil prices go up, we make a lot of money. BUT, of far greater interest and importance to me,

as President, is stopping an evil Empire, Iran, from having Nuclear Weapons, and destroying the Middle East and, indeed, the World,” said Trump in a post on his Truth Social platform.

Releasing reserves

IEA member countries on Wednesday agreed to unlock 400 million barrels of oil from their reserves – their largest release ever.

The United States will be releasing 172 million barrels, Wright said, under a swap arrangement that would see 200 million barrels flow back to its Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) “within a year.”

The move was unable, however, to overcome fears about the choking of energy supplies, with the Strait of Hormuz – through which a fifth of global crude passes – effectively shut down.

Wright said he had meetings at the Pentagon yesterday to discuss possible US Navy escorts for tankers.

The US energy secretary told CNN yesterday that he believed markets were “very

well supplied with oil right now” and that short-term pricing was “based on psychology more than flows of oil.”

The United States has also moved to ease sanctions on some Russian at-sea oil, notably allowing India a temporary waiver to buy that oil in order to address supply issues caused by the war.

Wright told CNN that waiver did not amount to “sanctions relief” for Russia, arguing the oil was already bound for China.

“Russia is not getting sanctions relief. All of that oil is oil on the water that’s waiting in line to unload into China,” he said, terming the waiver a “pragmatic solution” in the current crisis.

Wright’s comment came a day after an envoy for Russian President Vladimir Putin met with US negotiators in Florida, in the first talks between Moscow and Washington since the start of the Iran war.

Kirill Dmitriev called the meeting “productive” and said Washington was “beginning to better understand” the importance of Russian oil. – AFP

Iran’s new supreme leader says vengeance is priority ‘until fully achieved’

TEHRAN – Iran’s new supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei, who is yet to appear in public, vowed yesterday to avenge the deaths since the start of the war with the US and Israel, in a statement read out by a presenter on state TV.

“A limited amount of this revenge has so far taken concrete form, but until it is fully achieved, this case will remain among our priorities,” Khamenei, said according to the statement.

“We will seek compensation from the enemy, and if they refuse, we will take as much of their property as we determine, and if that is not possible, we will destroy the same amount of his property,” he added.

Iran’s health ministry said on Sunday that more than 1,200 people had been killed, and over 10,000 civilians injured.

It was his first statement since he was proclaimed as the Islamic republic’s new supreme leader on Sunday and after the killing of his father and predecessor in US and Israeli strikes.

On February 28, the US and Israel killed late supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in initial strikes which triggered a war that has since spread across the Middle East.

Iran has responded with drone and missile strikes on Israel and US interests across the region and effectively closed the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

The 56-year-old Khamenei has yet to make a public appearance since his appointment and state television had reported he had been wounded during the ongoing war.

In his statement, Khamenei called for the closure of US bases across the region, saying “the claim of establishing security and peace by America was nothing more than a lie.”

He also called for using “the lever of blocking the Strait of Hormuz” – a strategic waterway through which a fifth of global oil passes.

The new leader also thanked Iran’s allies in the region including Lebanon’s Hezbollah, Yemen’s Houthis and armed groups in Iraq.

“We consider the countries of the Resistance Front our best friends, and the cause of resistance and the Resistance Front are an inseparable part of the values of the Islamic Revolution,” he said.

Following the reading of the statement, Iran’s Revolutionary Guards said they had launch strikes on Israel and US bases across in tribute to Khamenei and his family. – AFP

EU court says ID docs must respect transgender people’s status

SOFIA – European Union countries must issue transgender citizens with ID documents that respect their chosen gender so they can live anywhere in the bloc without discrimination, the EU’s highest court ruled yesterday.

The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) was responding after Bulgaria refused to issue one of its nationals with a passport recognising her wish to be defined as a woman.

The court said EU law enabled transgender people to change their status on their ID documents – and this legislation took precedence over national laws that contradicted it.

“Member state legislation which does not permit the amendment of the gender data of one of its nationals who has exercised his or her right to freedom of movement is contrary to EU law,” it said in a statement.

The complainant, who launched her legal challenge in 2017 in Bulgaria, welcomed the ruling.

“This decision will finally allow me to have a Bulgarian passport that respects what I have always been since I can remember, since my childhood – a woman.

“I chose to live in Italy a long time ago and this formal step will finally allow me to find a job without being discriminated against,” she said in a statement issued by her lawyer Alexander Schuster.

Dozens of similar cases are currently on hold in Bulgaria as they awaited the EU top court’s decision.

Schuster said the ruling also applied to other EU members, such as Hungary and Slovakia, which also currently refuse to grant transgender people the right to have documents that reflect their identity. – AFP

Israel army says Hezbollah fired 200 rockets in ‘biggest barrage’ of war



Three women react as they clear their family’s house of belongings after it was damaged by a rocket reportedly fired by Tehran-backed militant group Hezbollah in Haniel, near Kfar Yona in central Israel, yesterday. Fighting flared last week between Israel and Lebanese militant group Hezbollah as part of a wider regional war, prompting the Israeli military to warn people across swathes of southern Lebanon to flee. – AFP

MAJD EL-KROUM, Israel – Israel’s military said yesterday that Hezbollah had fired around 200 rockets at Israel the night before, in what it described as the Lebanese armed group’s “biggest barrage” since the war began.

“Last night, Hezbollah timed a simultaneous attack with Iran, firing rockets and drones at towns and communities across Israel,” military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Nadav Shoshani told journalists in a briefing yesterday.

“The numbers [are] approximately 200 rockets, approximately 20 UAVs [drones], and combine those with ballistic missiles that were being fired from Iran at the same time.”

Shoshani said “this was Hezbollah’s biggest barrage” since the start of the war.

But he added that “we had a good aerial defence and rapid response, resulting in minimal casualties, only two or three direct hits... and a few civilians that were lightly injured”.

The Israeli military has been battling Tehran-backed Hezbollah since the group began firing rockets into Israel on the second day of joint US-Israeli strikes on Iran.

An AFP team visited a house in an Arab village close to the town of Majd el-Kroum in northern Israel with a large hole blown through the living room ceiling.

Standing among the rubble, owner Khalil Khalil told AFP that air raid sirens sounded as his family of nine was sipping coffee after the evening meal to break their Ramadan fast.

A projectile struck their house as they were heading towards the safest room, but fortunately only caused light injuries to several of them.

“We were very lucky, thank God, no one was killed,” Khalil said.

A local civil defence official, who refused to give his name, told AFP that the damage appeared to have been caused by a stray air defence missile fired by the Israeli military.

Israeli military spokesman Shoshani said the army had carried out a wave of strikes against Hezbollah Wednesday night in southern Lebanon to limit its ability to fire rockets and continued to hit Beirut’s southern suburbs.

Shoshani said that overall Hezbollah has fired more than 1,000 drones, rockets and missiles at Israel over the past 12 days.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said yesterday that he had ordered the military to prepare for expanding operations in Lebanon, after the latest barrage.

The military later expanded its evacuation order for residents living in southern Lebanon, saying it was acting “strongly” in the area. – AFP

UK mother jailed for keeping woman as 'house slave' for 25 years

LONDON – A UK judge yesterday jailed for 13 years a mother-of-10 who forced a vulnerable woman to work as a “house slave” for more than two decades.

Amanda Wixon subjected the woman, who was a teenager when the ordeal began, to more than 25 years of abuse at her squalid home in Gloucestershire, western England.

The 56-year-old forced the victim, who has a learning disability, to do manual labour, regularly assaulted her and deprived her of food and healthcare, it emerged during an earlier 13-day trial.

Gloucester Crown Court heard Wixon would regularly beat the victim, who is now in her 40s, including with a broom handle, knocking out her teeth on one occasion.

Wixon – referred to as “The Witch” by her tormented victim – would also squirt washing-up liquid down her throat, splash bleach on her face and repeatedly shaved her head against her will.

The vulnerable woman had first moved into the home in 1995, remaining there until 2021.

Wixon was convicted in January of false imprisonment and modern-day slavery offences, including two counts of requiring a person to perform forced or compulsory labour and charges of assault occasioning actual bodily harm.

“The gravity of your offending is so serious that I am

imposing a significant period of custody,” judge Ian Lawrie said as he handed down yesterday’s sentence.

He added Wixon was in “permanent denial” about the impact of her actions.

During the trial, the court heard Wixon knew the victim through family connections and had spent time with her and her relatives before taking responsibility for the woman in 1996.

It emerged social services had been involved with the Wixon family in the late 1990s, but there were no records of any other contact with any agency since then.

The victim now lives with a foster family and attends college, but has little comprehension of the abuse she suffered, her anonymous foster mother said yesterday.

She added the victim was terrified of Wixon and broke down in hysterics when she accidentally bumped into her in a supermarket recently.

“She called her The Witch,” the foster mother told Britain’s Press Association domestic news agency.

“She’s really scared of her.”

The foster mother added the victim was “going through therapy” with “a good psychologist”.

“I think she will be OK in time. But it’s just going to take time.” – AFP

Polish capital bans nighttime alcohol sales

WARSAW – Warsaw’s city council yesterday voted almost unanimously to ban night-time alcohol sales in the capital of Poland, which ranks among the EU countries with the highest drinking-related mortality rates.

It is the latest in a series of bans in Polish cities that have proved popular with the public and have been followed by a fall in arrests for alcohol-related offences.

The new ban follows pilot programs in two Warsaw districts – including the city centre – where alcohol in shops and gas stations were banned from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.

“We are responding to a real problem, namely noise, public disturbances, interventions by services, and sleepless nights for residents,” said Warsaw mayor Rafal Trzaskowski.

Night-time alcohol sales restrictions have been growing in popularity across Poland, with around 180 municipalities introducing controls between 2018 and 2024.

Many of the country’s largest

cities, including tourist hotspot Krakow (southern Poland), Wroclaw, Szczecin and Lodz, have implemented such measures.

Krakow in particular noted a marked reduction in night-time disturbances after implementing night-time bans.

According to Eurostat data from 2022, Poland was second in the EU for alcohol-related deaths, behind only Slovenia.

Poland’s Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS) found that 74 percent of Poles said they most often drank alcohol at home, compared to only nine percent in bars.

Provided the Warsaw ban is not challenged by the regional government, it will come into force on June 1.

Businesses that refuse to comply with the new regulations risk fines or the loss of their liquor licences.

Night-time alcohol sales will still be permitted in restaurants, bars, entertainment venues, and duty-free shops at the Warsaw Chopin Airport. – AFP

Spain cites Israeli ‘insults’ in decision to withdraw ambassador

MADRID – Spain yesterday explained its decision to permanently withdraw its ambassador to Israel, citing repeated “insults and slanders” by the country.

Veteran diplomat Ana María Salomón Pérez was officially relieved of her duties on Tuesday at the proposal of Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares.

She was recalled from Tel Aviv in September after Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez unveiled measures designed to “stop the genocide in Gaza, pursue its perpetrators and support the Palestinian population”.

With the ambassador’s removal, Spain’s diplomatic representation will now be handled by its chargé d’affaires, a lower-ranking official whose status is meant to reflect the downgraded relations.

Israel withdrew its ambassador to Madrid in 2024 after Spain recognised Palestinian statehood and has since also been represented by a chargé d’affaires.

“It’s become clear that Spain’s goodwill in maintaining cordial relations hasn’t been reciprocated – not diplomatically – through an increase in Israel’s representation in Spain, nor by restraining insults and slanders aimed at the Spanish people,” Albares said.

“As a result, keeping an ambassador who had been called back for consultations for six months no longer made sense,” he added during an interview with Spanish public television.

Spain’s decision to definitively retire the ambassador follows years of tense exchanges between the two governments.

Sánchez, one of the most vocal critics of Israel’s war on Gaza, has also opposed the US-Israeli military strikes on Iran that began on February 28.

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sarr has accused the Spanish government of “standing with tyrants” by opposing the US-Israeli attacks on Iran.

He also accused Spain of being “complicit in inciting genocide against Jews and war crimes” after it recognised a Palestinian state.

Spain only established diplomatic ties with Israel in 1986 following the death of Generalissimo Francisco Franco in 1975.

Under Franco, Spain avoided recognising Israel and maintained closer diplomatic ties with Arab states. – AFP



A university worker shouts slogans during a demonstration demanding a rise in salaries and pensions outside the National Assembly in Venezuela’s capital Caracas yesterday. – AFP

Tesla set to supply UK with electricity

LONDON – A subsidiary of Tesla, Elon Musk’s electric vehicle maker, has won approval to supply UK households and businesses with electricity, Britain’s energy regulator said yesterday.

The company applied to become an electricity supplier in Britain in July, a first such move outside the United States by the operation run by tech billionaire Musk.

Tesla Energy Ventures obtained a licence to produce electricity in the UK in 2020, notably using solar panels, without selling it directly to consumers.

It currently provides power across Texas.

The regulator Ofgem said Tesla Energy Ventures “has been granted a licence authorising it to supply electricity to domestic and

non-domestic consumers in Great Britain”.

A spokesperson added that “protecting consumers and maintaining a secure, fair energy market underpins every licensing decision we make”.

The announcement comes as Tesla suffers a global decline in sales of its cars. – AFP

2 injured, gunman dead in shooting at Virginia university

NORFOLK – Two people were injured and the gunman is dead following a shooting yesterday at Old Dominion University in the southern US state of Virginia, the school said.

The gunman opened fire in a building on the campus in Norfolk,

injuring two people, the university said in a statement. The victims were taken to a hospital.

It said police and emergency personnel “responded immediately” and “the gunman is now deceased.”

The university said classes had

been suspended for the remainder of the day.

School shootings are a shockingly regular occurrence in the United States, where guns outnumber people and regulations on purchasing even powerful military-style rifles are lax. – AFP

Mexican govt mulls social media curbs for minors



Mexico's Secretary of Public Education Mario Delgado speaks during an interview with AFP in Mexico City on Tuesday. – AFP

Jean Arce

MEXICO CITY – Mexico is considering implementing Australia-style social media restrictions for minors, Public Education Secretary Mario Delgado told AFP.

Several nations are toughening up age restrictions on social media platforms as concerns grow over excessive screen time for children and their exposure to harmful content online.

Delgado said the government had launched consultations with a range of civil society groups, including teachers and parents' representatives, with a view to developing regulatory proposals by June.

Australia has since December required TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat and other top social media services to remove accounts held by under-16s, or face heavy fines.

French lawmakers in January approved a social media ban for under-15s, although it still needs to be ratified by the Senate.

Britain, Spain, Denmark, India, Indonesia and Portugal are studying similar restrictions.

"The state has the responsibility for the guardianship and education of minors. And that's where we should think about setting certain limits," Delgado told AFP.

"What Meta, Facebook and TikTok are interested in is having followers, and there are no filters on content that could affect children's emotional health," he said, citing their exposure to violent or pornographic content and cyberbullying.

TikTok, in a statement to AFP, said it has made efforts to prevent children from using its platform and that children under

13 should not be on social media.

TikTok and Meta, parent company of Facebook and Instagram, require users to be at least 13 years old, and have automatic safety and privacy settings for teenagers between 13 and 17 years old.

That hasn't stemmed criticism over implementation of these controls.

Responsible, critical and conscious'

Delgado insists that any ban needed to come "from the grassroots, from the lived experiences of parents, different communities, and teachers."

"We want them to tell us what these limits should be and how to regulate them," he stressed.

He added that tech companies would be given a voice in the debate, which aims to promote a "responsible, critical, and conscious" digital culture, rather than prohibit.

Australian officials say that the country's ban has already reduced cyberbullying and increased student concentration in schools.

"I personally like the Australian model," Delgado said, while adding that, as the father of a teenager, he understood the challenges of curbing children's social media use.

He added that, for now, Latin America's second-most populous country after Brazil was not considering banning mobile devices in public schools.

Brazil and Chile last year joined a growing number of nations that have banned non-emergency smartphone use by children in schools. – AFP

Mexican Congress rejects electoral reforms in president's first legislative defeat

MEXICO CITY – Congress rejected Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum's proposed electoral reforms, inflicting her first legislative defeat since she took power in 2024.

The proposal sought to reduce government financing for political parties and change the way they pick candidates for Congress so that these would only be elected directly, rather than from lists drawn up by the parties.

The leftist Sheinbaum presented the bill a week ago despite opposition from her own congressional allies, who considered the bill unfair to small parties.

In a country where most voters consider political parties to be corrupt and disconnected from the concerns of the population, the proposal received widespread popular support, according to opinion polls.

A study published last Friday by the

Mexican edition of Spanish newspaper *El País* found an 80 percent acceptance rate for the proposal that all congressional deputies be elected by direct vote and the reduction of public funds for political parties.

"Why do the parties need money? When elections happen they go out and buy people. I've seen it myself," Silvia Zapata, a 69-year-old street merchant and supporter of the President's Morena party, told AFP.

The legislation, however, needed to garner a two-thirds majority of the Chamber of Deputies – at least 330 votes out of 494 legislators present. It obtained 259 in favor, 234 votes against, and one abstention.

Opponents like the conservative National Political Action (PAN) party and allies like the Labour Party (PT) had denounced the reform as damaging for democracy and political pluralism. – AFP

Sheinbaum drops legal threat against Musk over narco accusation

MEXICO CITY – Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said on Tuesday that she's dropping a potential lawsuit against Elon Musk for a message on X in which he accused her of working for drug cartels.

On February 23, after the powerful drug lord Nemesio Oseguera "El Mencho" was killed in a military operation in Mexico, the president gave a speech addressing the raid, to which Musk responded by saying, "she's just saying what her cartel bosses tell her to say."

Following this remark Sheinbaum said she and her legal team were considering suing Musk, who runs Tesla and the social media outlet X.

"I finally took the decision to not denounce him, to not open a civil lawsuit, which was what we thought about for this case. We'll see

what comes now, and then we'll reevaluate," the president said at her morning press conference without explaining her decision not to sue.

Musk, who worked for President Donald Trump last year with the mission of firing tens of thousands of federal workers and is an on-and-off ally of him, has repeatedly accused Sheinbaum and her government of going soft against drug cartels, alleging she is in cahoots with them. Trump is always pressing Mexico to do more against the cartels.

In 2023, the business magnate announced the construction of a new Tesla factory in the northern Mexican state of Nuevo León, but abandoned the project in 2024 in the face of Trump's threats to impose tariffs on Mexico. – AFP



This combination of file pictures shows Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum (left) speaking during her daily press conference at the Women's Oncology Hospital in Mexico City on Monday, and CEO of SpaceX and Tesla, South African-Canadian-US businessman Elon Musk speaking during the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos on January 22. – AFP

Far-right rise looms over Spanish regional vote

MADRID – Spain's scandal-hit governing Socialists and the conservative opposition will seek to fend off an ascendant far right in a regional vote on Sunday that could be an indicator for national elections due next year.

Regions wield significant powers in key areas such as health and education in Spain's decentralised political system, making the results in Castile and León keenly scrutinised.

A third regional electoral debacle in a row could await Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez after resounding defeats in Extremadura and Aragón in recent months.

The vote will also be Sánchez's first

electoral test since he broke with Western allies by denying the United States use of Spanish bases for strikes on Iran and openly denounced the war.

The popularity of his party has taken a battering on a backdrop of sexual harassment scandals and corruption investigations affecting his wife, brother and former Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) heavyweights.

The right-wing People's Party (PP) won in Extremadura and Aragón but fell short of a majority, forcing it to reach out to the far-right Vox to continue governing in those regions.

The PP has governed for almost four decades in Castile and León, a vast and heavily agricultural region to the northwest of Madrid marked by depopulation.

But in 2022, Vox entered a regional government for the first time since Spain's return to democracy in the 1970s after forming a coalition with the PP there.

The alliance fell apart in 2024 due to disagreements between the parties' national leadership.

Polling suggests Vox could gain seats to consolidate its position as the third-largest party in Castile and León, with the Socialists

second and the PP winning but far from a majority.

The PP has already expressed a willingness to work again with Vox, a scenario that could repeat itself at a general election due in 2027.

"The only red line is with socialism in Castile and León, because they cannot be trusted," the region's PP leader Alfonso Fernández Manueco told *El País* daily.

Sánchez said the PP and Vox were trying to demobilise progressive voters, calling their strategy "quite clear" in an interview with online newspaper *elDiario.es*. – AFP

N Korea vow no more protests in Women's Asian Cup

PERTH — North Korea pledged yesterday there will be no more sideline protests during their Women's Asian Cup quarter-final with Australia after causing a stir against China.

An incensed North Korea refused to play for several minutes in their 2-1 loss to the Chinese during a group game on Monday.

They were left fuming when former Tottenham attacker Wang Shuang scored in first-half stoppage time, demanding the referee look at the pitchside monitor.

The three-time champions refused to resume the game for four minutes as boos rang out.

"If that kind of situation happens again in tomorrow's match, we will follow the referees, the match official's decision, and respect it," coach Ri Song Ho told reporters in Perth through an interpreter.

Ri was yellow-carded for his part in the fracas.

North Korea are set to face a partisan full house at Perth Rectangular Stadium today against the hosts, who beat them on penalties in the 2010 final after it ended 1-1.

Australia's Sam Kerr is the only player left from the match,

with North Korea now boasting a young and physical side.

They are looking to build on defending their Women's U17 World Cup title in Morocco last year, which came on the heels of winning the U20 World Cup in Colombia in 2024.

Talented striker Choe Il Son played in both those triumphs before transitioning to the full national side.

"We know Australia are a formidable team, so tomorrow we will give our best to support each other and perform at our highest level," she said.

"We have talent on our side and we've been preparing carefully for the match. We're excited to show what our team can do on the pitch."

Not only is a semi-final berth at stake, but also 2027 World Cup qualification with the top six finishers booking their tickets to the Brazil showpiece.

The game will be played at 6 p.m. today.

China vs Chinese Taipei will be played at 1 p.m. tomorrow, South Korea vs Uzbekistan will be played at 5 p.m. tomorrow and Japan vs Philippines will be played at 1 p.m. on Sunday.

— AFP/MPD

Spurs extend season ticket deadline as relegation fears grow



LONDON — Tottenham have extended the deadline for fans to renew their season tickets because of the growing threat of relegation from the Premier League.

Spurs are just one point above the bottom three, without a win in their past 11 league games, while boss Igor Tudor is under intense scrutiny after just four matches in charge.

In a message sent to fans, the London club announced the period to renew season tickets would run until June 7, after the end of the season.

The club said it recognised the "seriousness of the current league position" and wanted fans to have "full clarity on next season before renewing".

"Everyone at the club remains absolutely steadfast in our collective commitment to improve our Premier League position and finish the current season as strongly as possible," it added.

Former England defender Gary Neville, now a television pundit, has branded Tudor's brief tenure a "car crash" that needs to be brought to an end.

The Croatian's position was weakened significantly by Tuesday's 5-2 defeat against Atletico Madrid in the first leg of their last-16 tie in the Champions League.

Tudor selected reserve goalkeeper Antonin Kinsky only to substitute him in the 17th minute after calamitous errors.

Speaking on The Overlap's Stick to Football podcast, Neville said the

treatment of Kinsky was "brutal".

"I thought the whole thing of the last few weeks and then that, the whole thing is just a car crash, a shambles," he said.

Tudor was only appointed last month following the sacking of Thomas Frank but Neville believes Tottenham must act again immediately after four defeats out of four matches on his watch.

"If you're going to make another change, that for me needs to be today or tomorrow, because you don't wait," he said.

Tottenham are 16th in the Premier League, a point clear of Nottingham Forest and West Ham.

They face a daunting trip to Liverpool this weekend before a crunch match against Forest the following week.

— AFP

Australia setback with Catley, Raso out of Asian Cup quarter-final



PERTH — Australia suffered a setback yesterday with star players Hayley Raso and Steph Catley ruled out of their Women's Asian Cup quarter-final against North Korea in Perth.

The hosts already faced a daunting prospect against a young and physical side ranked six places above them at nine in the world.

Arsenal defender Catley and Eintracht Frankfurt striker Raso are both dealing with concussion symptoms and coach Joe Montemurro said they would not play.

"They're recovering well. They were very close, but they won't be included in the squad against North Korea," he told reporters ahead of today's clash at the Perth

Rectangular Stadium.

"We've got enough backup in our squad and we trust the players coming in to make a difference.

"We truly believe that if we play our game well we will be fine."

Courtney Nevin is likely to take over from Catley with Amy Sayer a potential replacement for Raso.

Australia are bidding to lift the trophy for the first time since 2010.

Skipper Sam Kerr, the only survivor from the team that beat North Korea on penalties in the final, said they know what to expect from their opponents.

"They like to run a lot, they're aggressive, they never give up," said the Chelsea forward.

"Every time we've played them it's been difficult. They've

been aggressive on the front press. They've gone after us. And it's been a tough game.

"And I think tomorrow, if we're not ready for the battle, it will be a loss for us. But we have to be ready."

The last time the teams met was in 2016 during qualification for the Rio Olympics when Australia won 2-1 with goals from Michelle Heyman and Katrina Gorry, both in the current squad.

The game will be played at 6 p.m. today.

China vs Chinese Taipei will be played at 1 p.m. tomorrow, South Korea vs Uzbekistan will be played at 5 p.m. tomorrow and Japan vs Philippines will be played at 1 p.m. on Sunday.

— AFP/MPD



Real Madrid's Uruguayan midfielder Federico Valverde (right) scores his team's third goal during the UEFA Champions League last 16 first leg against Manchester City at Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid on Wednesday. — AFP



South Korea's goalkeeper Kim Min-jeong (right) fails to stop a shot by Australia's Alanna Kennedy (centre) who scores her team's first goal during the AFC Women's Asian Cup Australia 2026 match between Australia and South Korea in Sydney on Sunday. — AFP

Football shorts

Chelsea's Neto faces UEFA punishment for pushing ball boy

PARIS — Chelsea's Pedro Neto is set to be punished by UEFA for pushing a ball boy during his team's 5-2 defeat by Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League after European football's governing body announced yesterday it had opened disciplinary proceedings.

"Disciplinary proceedings have been instigated against... Pedro Neto for unsporting behaviour," a UEFA statement said.

"UEFA's disciplinary bodies will take a decision on this case in due course."

Neto knocked over the ball boy as he ran over to grab the ball late in Wednesday's last 16 first leg, with Chelsea trailing 4-2 at the time.

The incident led to a mass altercation involving players from both teams, and Neto later apologised and gave the ball boy his shirt.

"We were losing and in the emotion of the game I wanted to get the ball fast

and I gave him a little push," Neto told broadcaster TNT Sports.

"I'm not like this. It was in the heat of the moment and I want to apologise. I gave him my shirt. I'm really sorry about it - I feel I have to apologise to him."

Chelsea coach Liam Rosenior added: "If there was anything from our side that was wrong or out of order, I apologise on behalf of the club."

Neto, who has scored 10 goals in 42 games in all competitions for Chelsea this season, could face a suspension for next Tuesday's second leg.

— AFP

Real Madrid joy tempered by Mendy injury

MADRID The only negative news surrounding Real Madrid's 3-0 win at home to Manchester City in the Santiago Bernabeu on Wednesday night was the news that left-back Ferland Mendy suffered yet another muscle injury.

Mendy was doing an excellent job in defending against Savinho

and Antoine Semenyo in the match defined by Fede Valverde's first-half hat-trick, but didn't reappear for the start of the second half due to a hamstring problem, with Fran Garcia replacing him on the left of the Madrid defense.

The injury means Mendy will certainly miss this weekend's home game against Elche in La Liga as well as the trip to Manchester next Tuesday, although Alvaro Carreras could recover in time to help Madrid defend their first leg advantage.

The Frenchman has had a long list of injuries since joining Madrid in 2019 and has played just five games this season - starting the campaign with a thigh injury and then suffering other muscle issues.

Speaking after Tuesday's game, Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa admitted he had taken a risk in playing Mendy in consecutive games after such a long absence. "It doesn't look good and I am grateful for his efforts," commented Arbeloa in his post-match press conference.

— Xinhua

Djokovic ousted by Draper at Indian Wells as Alcaraz marches on



Jack Draper of Great Britain shakes hands at the net after his three set victory against Novak Djokovic of Serbia in their match at the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells Tennis Garden on Wednesday in Indian Wells, California. — AFP

Tennis

INDIAN WELLS — Novak Djokovic was dumped out by Jack Draper in a slugfest Wednesday as the defending champion won 4-6, 6-4, 7-6 (7/5) to reach the quarter-finals at Indian Wells.

World number one Carlos Alcaraz sailed into the last eight of the Masters 1000 event for the fifth straight year and there were straight-sets wins for Daniil Medvedev and Cameron Norrie.

But Britain's Draper did it the hard way, wearing down 38-year-old Djokovic in a punishing third set to deny the Serb superstar his first return to the quarter-finals since he won his fifth Indian Wells title in 2016.

"I came out here tonight and I won that match through determination and trying to problem-solve and do my best and have a great attitude," said Draper, who kept the former world number one on the move with multiple drop shots.

The margins were razor-thin over the first two sets. The tide turned on an epic point in the opening game of the third that saw both players chasing down drop shots and scrambling for lobs before Djokovic sealed it with an overhead for a 40-30 lead.

He flopped on the court exhausted

and was on his knees again after Draper won the next point. Djokovic would go on to hold serve, but he said it was the difference in the match for him.

"One point," he said. "It was great winning that point in that game, but I just ran completely out of gas."

Draper broke Djokovic in his next service game, but couldn't close it out when he served for the match at 5-4.

The reprieve wasn't enough for Djokovic, who led 4-3 in the tiebreaker but couldn't hang on.

"He played a sloppy game to close it out 5-4, and, you know, I got the crowd, you know, backing me, and I felt the energy," Djokovic said. "It was, like, maybe I'm gonna take this one. It was so, so close."

Draper, playing just his second tournament since missing the better part of six months with an arm injury, was delighted.

"To come out here against Novak, for me the greatest tennis player there is, I'm just incredibly proud of myself," he said.

He won't have long to savour the victory, with a quarter-final against two-time finalist Daniil Medvedev yesterday.

Medvedev beat American Alex Michelsen 6-2, 6-4.

Alcaraz shines

Alcaraz advanced with a sparkling 6-1, 7-6 (7/2) victory over Casper Ruud, extending his perfect start to 2026.

Alcaraz, who lifted the trophy in the California desert in 2023 and 2024, was untouchable in the first set, conjuring winners from every angle of the court.

"My first set, I think I was unplayable to be honest," Alcaraz said. "I was really, really happy about playing at that level."

Ruud stepped it up in the second set, but even he could only smile when Alcaraz seized a 5-1 lead in the tiebreaker with another leaping volley, the Spaniard closing proceedings fittingly with a backhand winner.

Alcaraz, 22, became the youngest man to complete a career Grand Slam with his victory at the Australian Open.

He followed that up with the Qatar Open title and with three wins under his belt in Indian Wells is now 15-0 on the season.

He next faces 29th-ranked Briton Norrie, who beat Australian qualifier Rinki Hijikata 6-4, 6-2.

Norrie, the 2021 Indian Wells champion, beat Alcaraz in the second round of the Paris Masters 1000 last year.

— AFP

Verstappen jokes new F1 cars 'more like Mario Kart'

F1

SHANGHAI — Four-time world champion Max Verstappen said yesterday he was not having much fun driving the new era of Formula One cars, joking he was "practising with Mario Kart" because it was more realistic than his simulator.

The Red Bull driver crashed in qualifying in the season-opener in Australia last weekend before having to carve his way from 20th on the grid to finish a creditable sixth.

The new cars require battery management and energy harvesting with a 50-50 split between conventional and electrical power.

They also have features such as straight-line mode, active aero, overtake and boost buttons, which Verstappen reckons are nearer to a video game.

"I swapped the simulator for my Nintendo Switch. I'm practising with Mario Kart, actually. Finding the mushrooms is going quite well, the blue shells are a bit more difficult."

Verstappen announced this week that he would be driving in the Nurburgring 24-hour race this year.

"I wish I had a bit more fun for sure," he said of Formula One at the moment.

"I mean, I get to race the Nordschleife (Nurburgring) and I hope in the coming years I can do Spa and hopefully Le Mans.

"So I'm combining stuff and I'm also doing other stuff that is a lot of fun.

"It's a bit conflicted because I don't really enjoy to drive the car, but I do enjoy working with all the people in the team and from the engine department as well."

He did express optimism that things would improve as the new rules and regulations were adjusted and said drivers were already in discussions over changes.

"I hope, of course, that it gets better," said the Dutchman.

"I've had discussions with F1 and the FIA and I think we are working towards something that will improve everything." — AFP

		Medal Table			
		MILANO CORTINA 2026			
Order	NOC	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	China	10	7	10	27
2	USA	6	5	3	14
3	Austria	5	1	4	10
4	Russian Federation	4	1	2	7
5	Italy	3	6	1	10
6	France	3	4	3	10
7	Ukraine	3	2	5	10
8	Sweden	3	0	3	6
9	Germany	2	4	6	12
10	Norway	2	2	0	4
11	Netherlands	2	1	1	4
12	Spain	2	1	0	3
13	Switzerland	2	0	1	3
14	Canada	1	3	6	10
15	Republic of Korea	1	3	1	5
16	Belarus	1	1	0	2
17	Czechia	0	3	0	3
18	Japan	0	2	0	2
19	Australia	0	1	0	1
19	Brazil	0	1	0	1
19	Finland	0	1	0	1
19	Great Britain	0	1	0	1
23	Slovakia	0	0	2	2
24	Kazakhstan	0	0	1	1
24	Latvia	0	0	1	1

China edge S Korea to win first curling gold of 2026 Paralympics

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO — China won the first wheelchair curling gold medals on offer at the Milan-Cortina Paralympics as they battled to a 9-7 victory over South Korea on Wednesday, while Latvia beat the United States to claim bronze.

The Chinese mixed doubles pair of Wang Meng and Yang Jinqiao secured the tight encounter with a two in the extra end after the sides were level at seven-apiece at the culmination of the regulation eight ends.

After China had raced into an early lead, Korean world number one pairing Baek Hye-jin and Lee Yong-suk battled back to force a decider, with notably a three in their away powerplay in the seventh end.

"Only now I can actually feel it hanging around my neck. It feels heavy," Yang said of his medal.

"I feel that the efforts of these four years have not been in vain, and it also justifies our efforts of the last four years."

Latvian duo Polina Rozkova and Agris Lasmans also held their nerve in an extra end to edge an 11-10 win over Team USA's Laura Dwyer and Stephen Emt.

Their bronze was Latvia's first medal of the 2026 Games.

"Team USA showed a really good performance," Rozkova said. "And we said, 'No, no, we are not ready to give up'.

"We put so much work in, not only this last year or the last three years; it's 10 years-plus of work." (Photos on page 16) — AFP

Oscar nominees in main categories

LOS ANGELES – Here are the nominees in key categories for the 98th Academy Awards, to be handed out in Hollywood on Sunday.

Vampire period horror film “Sinners” shattered the all-time record for nominations with 16, followed by “One Battle After Another” with 13.

“Frankenstein,” “Marty Supreme” and “Sentimental Value” tied with nine nominations each.

Best picture

- “Bugonia”
- “F1”
- “Frankenstein”
- “Hamnet”
- “Marty Supreme”
- “One Battle After Another”
- “The Secret Agent”
- “Sentimental Value”
- “Sinners”
- “Train Dreams”

Best director

- Paul Thomas Anderson, “One Battle After Another”
- Ryan Coogler, “Sinners”
- Josh Safdie, “Marty Supreme”
- Joachim Trier, “Sentimental Value”
- Chloe Zhao, “Hamnet”

Best actor

- Timothee Chalamet, “Marty Supreme”
- Leonardo DiCaprio, “One Battle After Another”
- Ethan Hawke, “Blue Moon”
- Michael B. Jordan, “Sinners”
- Wagner Moura, “The Secret Agent”

Best actress

- Jessie Buckley, “Hamnet”
- Rose Byrne, “If I Had Legs I’d Kick You”
- Kate Hudson, “Song Sung Blue”
- Renate Reinsve, “Sentimental Value”
- Emma Stone, “Bugonia”

Best supporting actor

- Benicio Del Toro, “One Battle After Another”
- Jacob Elordi, “Frankenstein”
- Delroy Lindo, “Sinners”
- Sean Penn, “One Battle After Another”
- Stellan Skarsgard, “Sentimental Value”

Best supporting actress

- Elle Fanning, “Sentimental Value”
- Inga Ibsdotter Lilleaas, “Sentimental Value”
- Amy Madigan, “Weapons”
- Wunmi Mosaku, “Sinners”
- Teyana Taylor, “One Battle After Another”

Best international feature film

- “The Secret Agent” (Brazil)
- “It Was Just an Accident” (France)
- “Sentimental Value” (Norway)
- “Sirat” (Spain)
- “The Voice of Hind Rajab” (Tunisia)

Best animated feature

- “Arco”
- “Elio”
- “Kpop Demon Hunters”
- “Little Amelie or the Character of Rain”
- “Zootopia 2”

Best documentary feature

- “The Alabama Solution”
- “Come See Me In The Good Light”
- “Cutting Through Rocks”
- “Mr. Nobody Against Putin”
- “The Perfect Neighbor”

Films with 8 or more nominations

- “Sinners” - 16
- “One Battle After Another” - 13
- “Frankenstein” - 9
- “Marty Supreme” - 9
- “Sentimental Value” - 9
- “Hamnet” - 8

– AFP

One surprise after another? Oscars night set to be unpredictable

Paula Ramon

HOLLYWOOD – With “Sinners” and “One Battle After Another” neck-and-neck for best picture and several acting races far too close to call, this Sunday’s Oscars gala is shaping up to be the most unpredictable in years.

A Hollywood ceremony set to feature music from “KPop Demon Hunters” and Conan O’Brien as host will feature several nail-biting reveals, culminating in the announcement of the year’s best film, which remains anyone’s guess.

Until “the final envelope is opened for best picture, we’re not going to know who’s going to win,” said Variety’s awards columnist Clayton Davis.

“Both have a huge opportunity in order to break multiple Oscar records,” he told AFP.

“Sinners,” a smash-hit vampire period horror film from director Ryan Coogler, has already made Academy Awards history with its whopping 16 nominations.

The blues-inflected race allegory has a chance to chase down the most Oscar wins by a single movie, shared at 11 between “Ben-Hur,” “Titanic” and “The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King.”

Coogler, previously best known for “Black Panther,” could become the first ever black person to win best director, in the 98 years of Oscars history.

“He’s only the seventh ever nominated,” noted Davis, who spoke to many Oscars voters and says “the love for Coogler is undeniable.”

But the frontrunner of this awards season has long been “One Battle,” a zany thriller about a retired revolutionary looking for his teen daughter.

Set against a wild backdrop of radical violence, immigration raids



Host Conan O'Brien sits on the carpet as he participates in the 98th Oscars arrivals carpet roll out at the Dolby Theatre at Ovation in Hollywood, California on Wednesday, ahead of the Academy Awards on Sunday (Monday morning in Macau). – AFP

and white supremacists, it earned 13 nods and could also break the overall wins record.

Its director Paul Thomas Anderson is one of the greatest auteurs of 21st century US cinema, but has never won any of his 11 previous nominations for films including “There Will Be Blood” and “Boogie Nights.”

Though “Sinners” was the bigger commercial hit, the exciting race between two “popular movies that people will know at home” should be good for ratings, Davis predicted.

‘Steamroller’

While suspense about best picture doesn’t happen every year, what is truly unusual this time is the amount of uncertainty surrounding the acting prizes.

A year after narrowly losing best actor honours with his uncanny Bob Dylan portrayal in “A Complete Unknown,” Timothee Chalamet had long appeared a lock for his pushy ping-pong player “Marty Supreme.”

But a series of ill-advised comments, most recently dismissing ballet and opera as art forms that “no one cares about,” have seen the 30-year-old golden boy’s chances plummet.

“Sinners” star Michael B Jordan, who plays two roles as twin brothers, won the important Screen Actors Guild’s Actor Award this month, just before Oscars voting closed.

“This is a movie star performance that we don’t get very often... he’s really two steps away from the finish line,” said Davis, who also does not rule out Leonardo DiCaprio (“One Battle”) or Ethan Hawke (“Blue Moon”).

The supporting acting prizes are also up for grabs.

Sean Penn could win a third acting Oscar for his comic yet terrifying soldier in “One Battle.”

But he is up against international arthouse favourite Stellan Skarsgard (“Sentimental Value”) and veteran Delroy Lindo, earning his first Oscar nod at 73 for “Sinners.”

Supporting actress could see a rare horror villain role rewarded for Amy Madigan in “Weapons,” or go to “One Battle” revolutionary Teyana Taylor or “Sinners” Hoodoo healer Wunmi Mosaku.

The only sure thing appears to be Jessie Buckley, who plays William Shakespeare’s wife in “Hamnet.”

“It’s been the steamroller all season. That’s the one thing you could take to the bank,” said Davis.

KPop, Redford tributes

Best international film is arguably the hardest to call of all, with Norwegian family drama “Sentimental Value” up against Brazil’s surreal political thriller “The Secret Agent.”

O’Brien returns to host the Oscars for a second year running, while Barbra Streisand is rumoured to be singing a tribute to her “The Way We Were” co-star Robert Redford, who died in September.

Ejae, Audrey Nuna and Rei Ami, the singing voices behind “KPop Demon Hunters” fictional girl group HUNTR/X, will perform the Netflix smash film’s Oscar-nominated song “Golden.”

The Oscars will air live on ABC and Hulu from 4 p.m. in Los Angeles on Sunday – 7 a.m. in Macau on Monday. – AFP

Barbra Streisand to receive Honorary Palme d’Or at Cannes

PARIS – Hollywood and Broadway legend Barbra Streisand will be awarded an Honorary Palme d’Or at this year’s Cannes Film Festival, organisers announced on Wednesday, honouring a career that has spanned more than six decades.

“It is with pride and deep humility that I am delighted to join the circle of Honorary Palme d’Or winners, whose work has inspired me for so long,” said the Broadway icon. She will receive the award at the festival’s closing ceremony in May.

Streisand, 83, will add the prize to a legendary collection that includes four Emmys, 10 Grammys, two Oscars, and a Tony. She is one of only 22 people to have achieved the elite EGOT* status, winning the top US prizes in television, music, cinema and theatre.

After her start as breakout star in theatre on Broadway, Streisand evolved into a global icon across both the film and music industries.

She famously won the Best Actress Oscar for her first film role in 1968’s “Funny Girl” at just 26-years-old before taking home a second in 1977 for “Evergreen”, the original song from “A Star Is Born”, in which she also played the lead role.

Streisand later stepped behind the camera to write, direct, and produce the film “Yentl” – the story of a young woman who disguises herself as a man to study the Talmud.

The project, based on a short story by Isaac Bashevis Singer, took 14 years to bring to the screen, but got seven Oscar nominations in 1984.

“It was the first time Hollywood had given such a large production budget to a female filmmaker,” noted the Cannes festival.

Streisand is also the only female artist to have had an album top the charts in each of the last six decades.

For Cannes director Thierry Fremaux, the prize recognises

Streisand’s contribution as the “legendary synthesis between Broadway and Hollywood, between the music hall stage and the big screen”.

New Zealand filmmaker Peter Jackson, best known for The Lord of the Rings trilogy, will also be awarded an Honorary Palme d’Or during the festival.

Past recipients of an honorary Palme d’Or include US actors Harrison Ford and Denzel Washington, as well as legendary Japanese animators Studio Ghibli. – AFP

*EGOT, an acronym for the Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and Tony Awards, is the designation given to people who have won all four of the major performing art awards in the United States. Respectively, these awards honor outstanding achievements in television, audio recording/music, film, and Broadway theatre. Achieving the EGOT has been referred to as the “grand slam” of American show business. – Wikipedia

World Weather

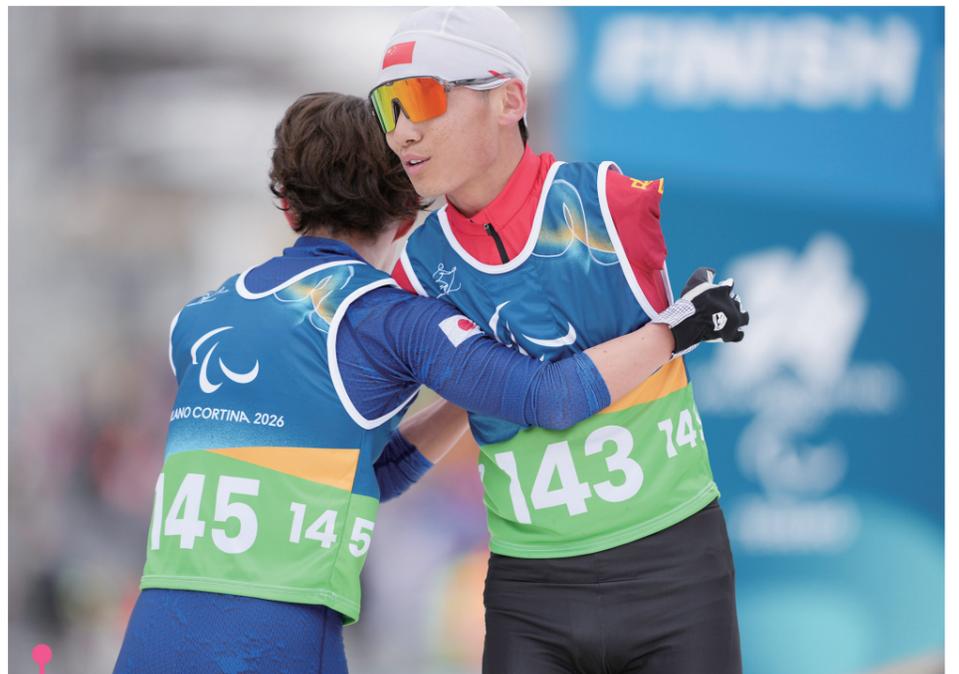
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 6°C~11°C	Manila 19°C~29°C	New York 6°C~9°C	Lisbon 11°C~18°C
Shanghai 5°C~15°C	Bangkok 23°C~35°C	London 1°C~9°C	Rio de Janeiro 22°C~28°C
Hong Kong 13°C~19°C	Tokyo 5°C~11°C	Frankfurt 7°C~15°C	Luanda 24°C~29°C
Taipei 11°C~19°C	Singapore 23°C~31°C	Vancouver 1°C~7°C	Maputo 21°C~26°C
Guangzhou 10°C~25°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~36°C	Paris 3°C~12°C	Dili 24°C~31°C
Nanjing 3°C~16°C	Jakarta 22°C~33°C	Moscow 0°C~9°C	São Tomé 27°C~33°C
Guilin 9°C~25°C	Seoul 4°C~13°C	Las Vegas 16°C~30°C	Praia 18°C~26°C
Xi’an 5°C~11°C	Sydney 18°C~22°C	Monte Carlo 9°C~16°C	Bissau 20°C~38°C



Chiara Mazzel (right) of Italy and her guide Nicola Cotti Cottini compete during the para alpine skiing women's combined vision impaired event at the Milan-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, on Tuesday. - Xinhua

Anna-Lena Forster of Germany competes during the para alpine skiing women's giant slalom sitting event at the Milan-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, yesterday. - Xinhua

Coach Ru Xia (right) of China sheds tears and hugs Wang Meng after winning the wheelchair curling mixed doubles gold medal match against South Korea at the Milan-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, on Wednesday. - Xinhua



Wang Chenyang (right) of China greets Kawayoke Taiki of Japan after the final of the men's 10km interval start classic standing of Para Cross-Country Skiing at the Milan-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Tesero, Italy, on Wednesday. - Xinhua

A British athlete takes part in a curling match during the Milano Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Cortina d'Ampezzo on Wednesday. - AFP



Thomas Grochar of Austria reacts during the Para Alpine Skiing Men's Alpine Combined Standing event at the Milan-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, on Tuesday. - Xinhua