

# CNY visitor arrivals drop 3.5 pct to 1.3 million: PSP

William Chan

Macau welcomed 1.309 million visitors during the Chinese New Year (CNY) holiday, marking a 3.5 percent period-on-period decline from last year's 1.358 million arrivals, Lao Ka Weng, head of the Border Control Department, said during a press conference at a Public Security Police (PSP) press room in Zape yesterday.

The mainland's eight-day Spring Festival "Golden Week" holiday, began on January 28 and ended on Tuesday this week. Lao noted that Macau recorded 4.918 million border checkpoint entries and exits; the average daily cross-border traffic was 614,000 people, a 0.6 percent increase compared to the same period last year. The Barrier Gate checkpoint remained the main crossing point, accounting for 2.17 million.

Lao pointed out that the Hengqin Port checkpoint recorded 659,000 border crossings, representing a relatively large period-on-period increase of 16.4 percent. Meanwhile, the Macau



Lei Tak Fai (right), who heads the Public Security Police's (PSP) Public Relations Division, and Border Control Department head Lao Ka Weng look on during yesterday's press conference at a PSP press room in Zape. - Photo: William Chan

Port checkpoint of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge (HZMB) saw a new high of over 142,000 border crossings on Saturday.

As for visitor arrivals, Lao noted that the daily average was 163,000 people. While the overall number of visitor arrivals declined by 3.5 percent period on period, the

number of visitor arrivals on Friday, the third day of the new year, broke the single-day record since the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching 219,000 - Macau's second highest visitor number a day on record. The following day also saw a high visitor number, at 218,000, the third highest on record.

Lao pointed out that mainland visitors accounted 1.0 million, or 76.3 percent, of the total number of visitor arrivals. Visitors from Hong Kong, Taiwan and foreign countries made up 17.7 percent, 1.5 percent, and 4.5 percent, respectively. The Barrier Gate was the busiest border checkpoint, accounting for 38.4

percent of all border crossings.

According to a statement from the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) released yesterday, mainland visitors decreased by 3.2 percent period on period, while Hong Kong visitors fell by 8.9 percent; in contrast, foreign visitors saw an increase of 10.2 percent.

To ease the city's traffic and pedestrian flow, Lei Tak Fai, who heads the PSP's Public Relations Division, said that the police conducted crowd control measures at the Ruins of St. Paul's on six occasions during the eight-day holiday period.

During the holiday, Lei pointed out, the police recorded a total of 15 cases of taxi-related violations, including overcharging and refusal of service, along with 11 cases involving unlicensed "white plate" vehicles.

The police also received 220 noise complaints. Among them, they issued warnings for 56 of the complaints, and took enforcement action concerning 32 of them, according to Lei. ■

## China opposes forced displacement of people in Gaza: spokesperson

BEIJING - China has all along believed that "the Palestinians governing Palestine" is the fundamental principle of post-conflict governance of Gaza, foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said yesterday.

The spokesperson made the remarks at a daily press briefing when asked to comment on US President Donald Trump's speech in which he said the US will "take over" and "own" the Gaza Strip after resettling Palestinians living there to neighboring countries, like Jordan and Egypt.

Lin noted that China has

all along believed that "the Palestinians governing Palestine" is the fundamental principle of post-conflict governance of Gaza.

"We oppose the forced displacement of the people in Gaza, and hope that relevant parties will take the opportunity of the ceasefire and post-conflict governance in Gaza to bring the Palestinian question back to the right track of a political settlement based on the two-State solution, so as to realize lasting peace in the Middle East," Lin said. (More on p.10)

- Xinhua



A man sells goods in front of the rubble of destroyed buildings along Saftawi Street in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip yesterday during a ceasefire deal in the war between Israel and Hamas. Palestinian militant group Hamas lashed out yesterday at President Donald Trump's shock proposal for the US to take over the Gaza Strip and resettle its people in other countries, seemingly whether they want to leave or not. - AFP

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### China firmly opposes US irresponsible remarks on Panama Canal issue: spokesperson

A foreign ministry spokesperson yesterday said the United States has recently made irresponsible remarks on the Panama Canal issue, and intentionally distorted, attacked and mischaracterized relevant cooperation.

- Story on p. 7

### Swedish king leads mourning after school massacre

Sweden yesterday mourned the victims of its worst mass killing on record as police indicated that the gunman likely shot himself after killing 10 people at an adult education centre.

- Story on p. 11

### Aga Khan, leader of Ismaili Muslims, dies in Lisbon

The Aga Khan, imam of the Ismaili Muslims and head of a major development aid foundation, died on Tuesday in Lisbon at the age of 88, his foundation announced.

- Story on p. 12

# Macau post office suspends parcel mail to US, except by air

Yuki Lei

The US Postal Service (USPS) has announced that it has temporarily suspended incoming parcels from the mainland and Hong Kong, in response to which the Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) announced yesterday the suspension of mailing parcels to the US, with immediate effect.

However, shortly after the restriction took effect on Tuesday, the US Postal Service announced yesterday that it would, for the time being, continue accepting all international inbound mail and packages from mainland China and Hong Kong. In a separate statement, it said that the "USPS and Customs and Border Protection are working closely together to implement an efficient collection mechanism for the new China tariffs to ensure the least disruption to package delivery".

The US Postal Service (USPS) said on Tuesday that it had halted

acceptance of international packages from mainland China and Hong Kong until further notice, which, however, would not apply to letters and flat mail\*. US Customs and Border Protection also announced that day that in line with US President Donald Trump's executive order on combating synthetic opioids and fentanyl, customs clearance and duty-free entry arrangements for small parcels from mainland China and Hong Kong would also be suspended with effect from February 4, i.e. Tuesday.

The USPS statements did not mention Macau.

According to the CTT measure, the suspension does not cover letters and documents to be sent to the US, as well as packages sent by airmail, including express parcels.

However, according to a CTT statement yesterday, express shipments to Illinois, USA (ZIP code IL60004-IL62903) are also suspended due to the fact that the



This photo taken yesterday shows the main entrance to the Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) headquarters in Largo do Senado.

- Photo: Maria Cheang Ut Meng

service has to be transhipped via Hong Kong.

When asked by the Post earlier yesterday, a General Post Office (GPO) counter clerk said that parcels containing liquid, including face and hand creams among other

creamy substances, must pass through Hong Kong before they can be sent to the US by ship, because of which these kinds of parcels could not be accepted, but daily necessities, such as trousers and shoes, were still available to

members of the public opting to use airfreight instead.

The clerk reminded the public that the airfreight price per kilogram amounts to about 183 patacas, which was twice the cost of sea freight, and that sea freight would usually take three months, unlike airfreight which would normally only take about three weeks.

Regarding that the US Postal Service yesterday halted an order to suspend incoming shipments from mainland China and Hong Kong, the Post last night made enquiries with a CTT official, who said that no updates on service resumption had been received yet. ■

\* "Flat mail" refers to a type of mail that is flat in shape, typically consisting of documents, letters, or other items that do not exceed a certain thickness. Flat mail is distinguished from packages or parcels, which may be thicker or irregularly shaped. - Poe

## Police nab Moroccan for stealing & damaging goods in supermarket

Ada Lei

A man from Morocco was arrested on Sunday for stealing and damaging goods in a supermarket in the city centre, Public Security Police (PSP) spokesman Wong Chi Weng said at a regular press conference yesterday.



This undated handout photo provided by the Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday shows a PSP officer escorting the Moroccan suspect to a police station.

The suspect surnamed Amine is in his forties. He told the police that he is jobless.

According to Wong, PSP officers received a report about the case from a supermarket last Sunday. A staff member of the supermarket recognised Amine as the suspect who had stolen items from the supermarket last month. The staff member told police he had seen Amine grab food items from the shelves and leave without paying. The staff member intercepted him and called the police.

Before the police arrived, Amine tried to escape and knocked over products on the shelves, damaging multiple items. This time, Amine stole five items worth 89 patacas and damaged 23 items worth 1,021 patacas, or 1,110 patacas in total. According to Wong, Amine had also stolen products from the same supermarket last month. Under questioning, Amine refused to cooperate.

According to Wong, Amine has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing theft and damaging property charges. ■

## Flower City Park playground to be revamped: IAM

Ada Lei

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) has announced that it will start a project next Monday to upgrade the children's playground in Flower City Park, with the aim of creating a more comfortable area for its users.

According to an IAM statement yesterday, the playground facilities at Flower City Park have aged and both the equipment and mats require replacing. The project will start on February 10, and the playground will be temporarily closed during the construction.

This project will include installing climbing and balancing equipment suitable for children aged between 2 and 12 years, providing a diverse range of fun facilities. The upgrade will also include seamless safety mats, while an accessible



This artist's rendition provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) yesterday shows the children's playground in Flower City Park after its revamp, including new facilities and mats.

path will be added to connect the playground with an activity room, and new children's sinks will also be installed.

According to the IAM statement, the project is expected to take 150

days, but the actual duration may be extended due to weather or other factors. The area will be cordoned off during the construction process, and the public are advised to avoid entering the project area. ■

## E-cars make up 27 pct of newly registered cars last year: DSPA

Yuki Lei

The Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) has announced that electric cars accounted for 27 percent of all newly registered cars last year, while electric motorbikes accounted for 35 percent of all newly registered motorcycles last year.

According to the bureau, at the end of last year Macau had a total of 12,302 e-vehicles, comprising 6,480 e-cars, 1,239 electric heavy vehicles and 4,583 e-motorcycles, as reported by public broadcaster TDM yesterday.

The bureau released the figures in response to a query by TDM's current affairs phone-in programme - Ou Mun Gwong Cheung, hosted by Ou Mun Tin Toi - the broadcaster's Chinese-language radio channel.

According to TDM, the bureau pointed out that the number of electric motorcycles has increased by about 11.8 times compared to the

period before the relevant subsidy scheme was launched in 2022.

In term of supporting facilities, according to the bureau, more than 2,200 and 600 parking spaces in the city's public carparks are now equipped with charging point for cars and motorbikes respectively.

The bureau added that there are currently 49 public carparks providing 204 national standard sockets.

As cited by TDM, the Transport Bureau (DSAT) has noted that as of the end of last month, the city's two public bus operators had put 929 new-energy vehicles (NEVs) into service, accounting for more than 92 percent of the total. As for taxis, there were 210 fully electric taxis in operation, accounting for about 11.9 percent of the total number of taxis, while about 86.2 percent were hybrid taxis. ■



This file photo taken during the Chinese New Year holiday last week shows two electric shuttle buses at the integrated resort Grand Lisboa.

- Photo: Rui Pastorin

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### Macau Weather

MAINLY CLOUDY.  
A FEW LIGHT RAIN PATCHES.  
FORCE 2 TO 3 NORTHEASTERLY WINDS.  
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 50% AND 85%.



14°C~19°C

Source: SMG

# Macau set to be affected by 'China-US trade war': economist

Interview by Yuki Lei

After US President Donald Trump introduced a 10 percent tariff on all goods from China, the Ministry of Finance in Beijing also announced on Tuesday 10-15 percent higher duties on all imports from the US as a countermeasure – and Macau Association for the Study of International Law and International Relations Chairman Ip Kuai Peng told the *Post* yesterday that for Macau, as a special administrative region (SAR) of China, its trade and economic development would be affected to a “certain” extent, but the local government could capitalise on Macau’s unique advantages by accelerating the process of the city’s appropriate economic diversification to cope with the risks that may be brought about by a potential “China-US trade war”.



Undated file photo of Macau Association for the Study of International Law and International Relations Chairman Ip Kuai Peng, a professor at the City University of Macau (CityU).

– Photo provided by the association yesterday.

A Tariff Commission under the State Council announced on Tuesday that it will impose additional tariffs from next Monday, i.e., as of February 10, on coal and liquefied natural gas exported by the US, as well as a 10 percent increase on crude oil, agricultural machinery and certain cars, including large-displacement fuel vehicles and pick-up trucks. The announcement was made shortly after US tariffs on Chinese goods went into effect on Tuesday, pointing out that “the unilateral imposition of tariffs by the US seriously violates the rules of the World Trade Organisation [WTO],” which was damaging to the normal economic and trade cooperation between China and the US.

On the situation of Macau in the trade war, the *Post* interviewed Ip, a professor at the City University of Macau (CityU), in a Q&A session by WeChat yesterday.

**Q: Will Macau be adversely affected by the China-US trade war, and what will be its impact on local imports and exports as well as the city’s overall trade and economic development?**

A: Against the backdrop of the China-US tariff war in 2025, Macau, as a special administrative region of China, will be affected to a certain extent in its trade and economic development. However, while Macau’s economic structure is dominated by the integrated tourism and leisure industry, it is also stepping up its efforts to promote the appropriate diversification of its economy by actively developing the diversified industries of high-tech, big health, modern finance, and MICE and commerce as well as culture and sport. In terms of trade, although Macau engages in a significant amount of re-export trade, it is not the main pillar of its economy.

The central government will continue to support Macau in leveraging its unique advantages to foster economic growth and development, deepen its economic cooperation with the mainland, especially its participation in the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area (GBA), and expand into a wider range of diversified international markets, with a view to achieving higher-quality development while mitigating the adverse impacts of changes in the external environment.

I believe that under the leadership of the central authorities, the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) government will proactively respond to the challenges and ensure the steady development of Macau’s economy, so as to make new and significant contributions to the prosperity and stability of the country as a whole.

**Q: How should Macau respond to the risk?**

In the face of the risks that may be brought about by the current China-US tariff war, the MSAR government should seriously implement the central government’s decisions and implementations, such as by deepening the development of Macau as “One Centre, One Platform, One Base”\*, tightening economic cooperation with the mainland, and proactively participate in the development of the Greater Bay Area, with a view to enhancing its own economic resilience and competitiveness.

In addition, Macau can make use of its unique advantages – being a free port and having a low tax environment – to continue to optimise the city’s business environment to attract more foreign investment, speed up the process of its appropriate economic diversification and ensure stable economic development.

**Q: What do you say about the China-US trade war and are there any so-called “winners” or “losers” involved?**

A: The China-US tariff war is a complicated episode in international trade and economic relations. In 2018, then US President Donald Trump announced that he would impose massive tariffs on goods imported from China, provoking economic and trade friction between the US and China. Since 2021, the Joe Biden administration had not only extended the tariff hikes, but also clamoured for “decoupling, and disrupting industrial and supply chains” and “de-risking” China, creating a “high fence in the small yard” while engaging in “friendshoring”\*\*, all of which was destroying the global trade and economic system.

In the more than six years since the US unilaterally provoked a trade war with China, rather than being crushed, China has stepped into a new stage of high-quality development. This time, in the face of the return of Trump to the White House and his imposition of a “tariff war” again, China has taken more moderate trade countermeasures, leaving time and space for future negotiations between China and the US.

As the world’s two largest economies, only the healthy development of economic and trade relations between China and the US can be a stabiliser and ballast for the relationship between the two countries. In the final analysis, the nature of the China-US trade and economic relations is mutually beneficial and win-win, and the trade and economic cooperation between the two sides not only serves the fundamental interests of the people of the two countries, but is also conducive to the stability and prosperity of the world economy.

China has always maintained an open attitude and is committed to resolving trade differences through dialogue and consultation, promoting the construction of a balanced and win-win trade environment, and fostering closer connectivity and interaction between domestic and international markets. In the China-US tariff war, China has adhered to the path of peaceful development, steadfastly deepened reforms and expanded

openness and, at the same time, endeavoured to contribute Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions to improve global economic governance and promote world economic growth, demonstrating the responsibility and commitment of a great nation.

**Q: What is your outlook for Macau’s economic development in 2025?**

A: Looking ahead to 2025, despite the external challenges posed by the uncertainty of the international environment, the local economy is expected to find a balanced and healthy development amidst its recovery and transformation, with the nation’s continued support and care.

Among them, the steady growth of the local integrated tourism and leisure industry and the breakthrough of the “1+4”\*\*\* new industries are the keys to the city’s economic development. At the same time, it is also necessary to vigorously optimise the business environment by supporting the development of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to enhance their quality, thus promoting the revival and development of the city’s “community economy”, with a view to enabling more residents and enterprises to share the fruits of economic development.

Macau can take a solid step forward in the appropriate diversification of its economy with the in-depth integration of the Guangdong-Macau In-depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin and Macau, the acquisition of international high-end talents, policy innovations and regional collaboration, consolidating Macau’s strategic positioning as “One Centre, One Platform and One Base” in the global economy. ■

\*The MSAR government’s “One Centre, One Platform and One Base” policy refers to its determination to further develop Macau’s role as a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure, an economic and trade cooperation platform for China and Portuguese-speaking countries as well as a cultural exchange and cooperation base.

\*\*“Friendshoring” refers to the practice of relocating supply chains or production to countries that are considered politically or economically friendly. – Poe

\*\*\* According to previous statements by the local government, the “1+4” strategy aims to reinforce Macau’s function as “One Centre” for integrated tourism and leisure, officially known as the World Centre of Tourism and Leisure, while facilitating the development of four emerging industries: big health; modern financial services; high-tech; and conventions, exhibitions, sports, and the commercial and trade industries.

## CAC to host CNY Year of the Snake party

Rui Pastorin

A raft of free-admission activities are set to take place at Albergue SCM\* next Wednesday for the “Celebration of the Chinese New Year of the Snake” party.

Albergue SCM is located on Calçada da Igreja de S. Lázaro (瘋堂斜巷).

Kicking off at 6:30 p.m., the evening event aims to celebrate the Moon Lantern Festival, according to a statement by CAC - Círculo dos Amigos da Cultura de Macau (“Circle of the Friends of Macau’s Culture”), adding that the festival is one of the city’s celebrations for the Chinese New Year.

Among the activities set to take place are the distribution of festive snacks, the launch of both “An Alluring Inheritance of Beauty: Chinese Cheongsam\*\* Exhibition” and the “Chinese Calligraphy Art Exhibition 2025” by local calligraphy master Choi Chuen Heng, who will be joining the event, as well as an eight-session workshop held in Cantonese.

The workshop, entitled “DIY Frog Button Accessory Workshop”, aims to showcase frog button\*\*\* accessories by adding them to earrings, necklaces, or rings. Sessions

will take place from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m., with each session lasting half an hour. One can register on <https://forms.gle/EciQBQrfoFT25NVMA>

One can find more details by visiting [www.facebook.com/AlbergueSCMMacau/](http://www.facebook.com/AlbergueSCMMacau/) ■

\*SCM stands for Santa Casa da Misericórdia (“Holy House of Mercy”), Macau’s oldest charitable organisation.

\*\*According to Wiktionary, cheongsam is a tight-fitting Chinese formal woman’s dress, usually brightly coloured, patterned and/or embroidered, with a split to the thigh.

\*\*\*According to Wikipedia, A frog or pankou (盤扣;), also called Chinese frog closure and decorative toggle is a type of ornamental garment closure. Made from braiding, cord, fabric, or covered wire, they consist of a decorative knot button (a Chinese button knot for a traditional Chinese style) and a loop. Its purpose is to fasten garments while providing a decorative element on the clothing. It can be used to fasten openings edge-to-edge, avoiding an overlap. It is especially used on the cheongsam, where the pankou represents the cultural essence of the dress.



This undated handout photo provided by CAC – Círculo dos Amigos da Cultura de Macau yesterday shows a previous Chinese New Year celebration party taking place at Albergue SCM on Calçada da Igreja de S. Lázaro (瘋堂斜巷).

# Collection of antiques from 4<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century on display at FRC gallery

**Rui Pastorin**

A collection of artworks, ceramics, documents and books from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century are being showcased in an exhibition entitled “Crescent on the Sea” at the Rui Cunha Foundation (FRC) gallery, which all those interested in curiosity items can still visit until Saturday.

The Maritime Silk Road antiques are exhibited by third-generation antique collector Luis Au (歐路易), featuring around 50 items on display. The exhibition is co-organised by the gallery in conjunction with the Au Family Collection, which has held exhibitions to promote local history annually since 2023. Its title is derived from a crescent-shaped lake in Dunhuang, Gansu Province, according to a statement on the FRC website.

A statement displayed at the gallery noted that the Au family have been collecting antiques since the 1950s, due to a passion for studying Macau history.

Expanding on the family’s background, the statement said that the Au family relocated to Macau during the late Qing Dynasty\* and its members have worked at the Moorish Barracks (which is the headquarters of what is now called the Marine and Water Bureau [DSAMA]) since the Republican Era of China (1911 to 1949). Au, like his grandfather and father before him, works in the maritime field.

“After a century of work in Macau, a city with a rich combination of Eastern and Western cultures, my family, with a Sino-Portuguese cultural background, devoted itself to promoting Macau’s cultural heritage education and local ancient treasures and relics”, Au said in the gallery statement.



Moreover, the online statement said that the exhibition aims to celebrate “the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Silk Road between Chang’an (ancient Xi’an) and Tianshan (a mountain range that crosses the borders of China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) inscription in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2014; as well as the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Historic Centre of Macau inscription on the same UNESCO World Heritage List in 2005”, the FRC website said.

One can visit the free-admission exhibition from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. today and tomorrow, as well as from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturday.

\*The Qing Dynasty, according to Wikipedia, ruled China from 1636/1644 to 1912.



Photos: Rui Pastorin



# 2025 Macau Int'l Parade calls for proposals from performers: IC

Ginnie Liang

The 2025 Macau International Parade is calling for proposals by registered local performing associations, schools, institutes and organisations until February 15, according to a Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) statement yesterday.

Organised by the Cultural Affairs Bureau, the one-day parade will be held on Sunday, March 23, the statement said.

This parade, which started in 2011 and was suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2023, and resumed in 2024, is slated to be held this year with distinctive costumes and styles, aiming to get residents and tourists singing and dancing in the streets, highlighting the unique cityscape of the Historic Centre of Macau, promoting the concept of "Love, Peace and Cultural Integration", facilitating interactive exchanges of culture and art.

The statement said that this parade aims to further enhance Macau's new name card of "Culture City of East Asia 2025", and promote the spirit of "coexistence, innovation and harmony" of Macau.

The route of the parade will start at the Ruins of St. Paul's (大三巴牌坊) and finish in Praça do Lago Sai Van (西灣湖廣場), the



This undated file photo provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) shows last year's Macau International Parade.

statement said.

A series of outreach activities will be held on the days prior to the parade, according to the statement, adding that a range of different prizes will be awarded to performers this time in order to further boost the engagement level of participating groups.

Participating groups may join the parade in four categories, namely the "Themed Parade Group", the "Artistic Parade Group", the "Parade of Large-Scale Artistic Installations", and

the "Special Planning Parade", the statement said.

The parade, formerly known as "Parade through Macau, Latin City" was renamed "Macau International Parade" in 2017.

Interested individuals or groups can find more information about the upcoming parade on IC's official website at [www.icm.gov.mo](http://www.icm.gov.mo).

## IC calls for stall operators, workshops for spring craft market

In addition, the Cultural Affairs

Bureau (IC) is calling for stall operators and creative handicraft workshops for this spring's Tap Siac Craft Market slated for late April to early May, according to the bureau's separate statement yesterday.

"Tap Siac" is the bureau's alternate spelling for "Tap Seac".

The bureau said that the application period is open until February 19, with applications free of charge.

The statement noted that the craft market will be held from

April 24 to 27 and May 1 to 4 in Praça do Tap Seac, adding that there will be over 220 handicraft and creative gastronomy stalls.

Applicants from Macau and around the region can apply online at [www5.icm.gov.mo/craftmarketV2](http://www5.icm.gov.mo/craftmarketV2), while those from the mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan can visit [www.craftmarket.gov.mo](http://www.craftmarket.gov.mo) for more details.

The statement pointed out that the products proposed must be of original designs, with a minimum of 10 models available for sale, and may include both cultural and artistic experience services. Lucky draws will be set up if applications exceed the number of places.

Meanwhile, for workshops, the application form can be submitted to [apply.DPICC@icm.gov.mo](mailto:apply.DPICC@icm.gov.mo) or in person to the Cultural Affairs Bureau in Praça do Tap Seac. Application requirements and the application form can be downloaded at [www.craftmarket.gov.mo](http://www.craftmarket.gov.mo), the statement said, noting that the workshops will be chosen and assessed based on "comprehensive criteria".

Enquiries can be made by calling IC representatives Ms Zhou or Ms Lio on 8399 6289 or 8399 6292 during office hours. ■

## Ex eco-bureau chief to return as deputy

Tony Wong

The government has appointed Vai Hoi leong, a former director of the Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA), as a deputy director of the said bureau effective from February 17.

The bureau has two deputy directors in its organisational structure.

Vai was the bureau's director between June 2015 and March 2016. Since then he has worked as a public servant in the Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG).

Vai had been a deputy director of the Environmental Protection Bureau since its establishment in June 2009 before being promoted to its director in June 2015.

Since March 2016, Vai has also been a vice-chairman of the Macauport – Port Management Company Limited, a public enterprise where the government currently holds about 32 percent of the shares.

Since Raymond Tam Vai Man, who had headed the Environmental Protection Bureau since March 2016, became the secretary for transport and public works on December 20 last year, the bureau has been headed by Ip Kuong Lam, who had been a deputy director of the bureau since June 2015. Consequently, one of the bureau's

two deputy director positions has been left vacant.

The only serving deputy director of the bureau currently is Hoi Chi Leong, who took up the position in January 2021.

Vai's appointment as a deputy director of the Environmental Protection Bureau again, which will start on February 17, has been made through an executive order by Tam published in the Official Gazette (BO) yesterday. Tam signed the order on Monday last week.

Vai's appointment is scheduled to last one year, and can be renewed upon expiration.

Vai's previous appointment as the bureau's director, which started on June 29, 2015, was initially slated to last one year, but it was prematurely terminated on March 2, 2016 when the director position was taken up by Tam.

The government decided in February 2016 to prematurely terminate Vai's then appointment as the bureau's director and appoint him as a vice-chairman of the Macauport – Port Management Company Limited.

The company, headquartered at Ka Ho Port in Coloane, is currently headed by gaming executive Pansy Ho Chiu-king.



Vai Hoi leong speaks to reporters in June 2015 after his swearing-in ceremony for his then appointment as the director of the Environmental Protection Bureau (DSPA) as Ip Kuong Lam (back), who was then appointed as a deputy director and has now been the bureau's director since December 20 last year, looks on. – Photo: Leong Lok lan

The company, one of Macau's publicly-funded companies, is tasked with overseeing Macau's deep-harbour cargo operations.

According to yesterday's executive order, Vai holds a bachelor's degree in Chemical Engineering from the University of Calgary in Canada, a master's degree in Environmental Engineering from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and a master's degree in Public Administration from the National Academy of Governance in Beijing. ■

## Sam to attend Harbin Asian Winter Games' opening ceremony

Tony Wong

The Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) announced in a statement last night that Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai will travel to Heilongjiang's provincial capital Harbin today for a three-day visit where he will attend tomorrow's opening ceremony of the 9<sup>th</sup> Asian Winter Games.

The 2025 Asian Winter Games will be held between tomorrow and Friday next week, with its opening ceremony to be held at the Harbin International Conference, Exhibition and Sports Centre tomorrow.

Last night's GCS statement said that while in Harbin Sam will also meet with top leaders

of the nation's north easternmost province.

During Sam's absence from Macau, Secretary for Administration and Justice André Cheong Weng Chon will be acting chief executive, the statement noted.

Sam is scheduled to return to Macau on Saturday.

The Asian Winter Games launched in 1986, is normally held every four years although this is the first since 2017.

This is the second time that the Asian Winter Games is held in Harbin, the other being in 1996, and the third time in China, with Jilin's provincial capital Changchun in 2007 being the third. (More on p.14) ■



This photo taken last week shows staff members preparing the operation of the main press centre for the 9<sup>th</sup> Asian Winter Games in Harbin. – Photo: Xinhua

## STOCK MARKETS

### Hang Seng Index closes 0.93 pct lower

HONG KONG – Hong Kong's stock market ended lower yesterday with the benchmark Hang Seng Index down 0.93 percent to close at 20,597.09 points. The Hang Seng China Enterprises Index fell 1.01 percent to end at 7,566.27 points, while the Hang Seng Tech Index fell 0.95 percent to end at 4,930.2 points. – Xinhua

## Bus hits roadside railings and lamp post, no injuries

Ginnie Liang

A bus hit roadside railings and a lamp post yesterday on Avenida do Conselheiro Ferreira de Almeida (荷蘭園大馬路) near Lai Kei Ice Cream eatery, at around 1:30 p.m., according to the Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday.

According to the statement, the incident involved a bus driver, a local man in his fifties.

PSP officers confirmed that the driver passed a breathalyser, ruling out drunk-driving as a factor in the crash.

Preliminary investigations suggest that the accident was caused by the driver accidentally hitting the

accelerator instead of the brake, causing the bus to run out of control mounting the kerb, hitting the roadside barrier and colliding with a lamp post before coming to a halt.

The front of the bus was damaged with the bumper crumpled. There were passengers on the bus, but no injuries were reported, the statement said.

From a photo circulating on the internet, the bus involved in the accident is owned by Transmac.

The bus driver faces a charge of "failing to stop safely," and further investigations are underway to determine the exact cause of the incident. ■



This photo circulating on a social media platform yesterday shows a bus crash in Avenida do Conselheiro Ferreira de Almeida (荷蘭園大馬路), with its front and the roadside railings damaged.

## Cooperation a winning proposition for all

China Daily Editorial

Just two weeks after the new US administration was sworn in and already some countries are lamenting that being Washington's adversary may be safer than being its ally, having had a bitter taste of "America first".

Although the tariffs on Canadian and Mexican exports to the United States have been put on hold after both neighbors vowed to retaliate in kind, they are a stern warning to all US allies and partners that when it comes to "America first", Washington will not hesitate to strong-arm anyone, even the European Union and the United Kingdom, in its endeavor to "Make America Great Again".

Calling the EU's €300 billion (US\$312 billion) deficit with the US an "atrocious" on Sunday, the US president said tariffs on EU goods will "definitely happen".

Despite their reluctance to get into a trade war with a key traditional ally, EU leaders have seen the need for unity in the face of the threat, vowing at an informal summit in Brussels on Monday that the bloc would fight back.

In an era marked by global interconnectedness and economic interdependence, the US administration is threatening to disrupt the delicate balance of international commerce and sow seeds of discord among nations primarily for the benefit of that country's uber-wealthy. The US administration's shortsighted protectionism will inflict widespread harm. The US-China trade disputes since 2018 exemplify this: tariffs disrupted supply chains, raised

consumer costs and stifled innovation.

The notion that there will be a winner in a trade war is a fallacy, as the destructive ripple effects of protectionist measures reverberate far beyond the immediate countries involved, inflicting harm on economies, businesses and consumers around the globe.

By erecting barriers to trade, such as tariffs and export restrictions, countries stifle the flow of goods and services, disrupt supply chains, and hamper investment and innovation. This leads to reduced productivity, higher costs for businesses, and ultimately, slower economic growth.

In a world where economies are increasingly interconnected, the repercussions of such actions are felt far and wide. Such protectionist measures ignore the broader lesson: economic interdependence demands cooperation, not confrontation.

China and the EU, as two of the world's largest economies, have consistently demonstrated that cooperation yields dividends. Bilateral trade surpassed US\$785.8 billion in 2024, up 0.4 percent from 2023, with China remaining the EU's top trading partner. They have also shown that dialogue and negotiation are the more productive way to resolve differences.

The hard-negotiated Comprehensive Agreement on Investment between the two sides – though pending ratification due to pressure from the US – highlights the potential for balanced economic ties, as it addresses market access, subsidy transparency, and fair competition. Moreover, collaboration on climate change – a shared exist-

tential challenge – has borne fruit through joint initiatives such as the China-EU Partnership on Climate Change, which pursues clean energy and biodiversity goals.

Linking unrelated issues such as the Ukraine crisis to trade relations is politically motivated obstruction. Those in the EU who conflate China's economic ties with Russia as a threat to the bloc misunderstand them. The trade, which is conducted transparently under World Trade Organization rules, does not undermine China's commitment to partnership with the EU.

History teaches that trade wars leave scars but no victors. China's unwavering commitment to multilateralism and mutually beneficial cooperation stands in stark contrast to the isolationist winner-take-all agenda of the US administration.

By prioritizing dialogue, respecting market principles, and leveraging platforms such as the World Trade Organization, China and the EU can chart a course toward shared prosperity – one that transcends the zero-sum thinking that has Washington in its grip – and fortify the global economy against mutually harmful fragmentation.

In an era of unprecedented challenges, cooperation is not merely an option – it is the only viable path to a future that does not entail a small human survival colony on Mars.

Only through collaboration and shared prosperity can we build a more resilient, equitable, and interconnected global economy for the benefit of all.

– Courtesy of China Daily

## Civil aviation sector carries 18.24 million passengers during Spring Festival holiday

BEIJING – China's civil aviation industry transported 18.24 million passengers during the eight-day Spring Festival holiday that ended on Tuesday, an increase of 2.9 percent compared to the same period in 2024, the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) said yesterday.

Some 145,000 flights were

operated during the holiday, with a flight punctuality rate of 96 percent, up 3.4 percentage points compared with the flight punctuality rate achieved in the same period last year.

During the 2025 holiday, the average number of international passenger flights per day reached 1,888 – an increase of 24.6 percent compared to the same period in

2024. This figure is 86.6 percent of the daily average level recorded in 2019.

The most popular international routes during the 2025 Spring Festival holiday were those connecting China with Japan, Thailand, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam.

– Xinhua

## US Postal Service halts China suspension after stoking trade fear

WASHINGTON, DC – The US Postal Service (USPS) said yesterday it would continue accepting packages from mainland China and Hong Kong, hours after an order to suspend shipments over President Donald Trump's new tariffs sparked fears of major trade disruptions.

Tensions between the US and China have soared in recent days as the world's two largest economies slapped a volley of tariffs on each others' imports, hitting hundreds of billions of US dollars in trade.

As part of Trump's tariffs – which he enacted citing drug trafficking concerns – the United States on Tuesday scrapped a duty-free exemption for low-value packages.

The "de minimis" exemption allows goods valued at US\$800 or below to enter the United States without paying duties or certain taxes, but it has faced scrutiny due to a surge in shipments in recent years.

The US Customs and Border Protection agency said last month that exemption shipments were worth over US\$1.36 billion in 2024, creating challenges for its enforcement of trade laws, health and safety requirements, intellectual property rights, and consumer protection rules.

US officials have pointed to the growth of Chinese-founded online retailers Shein and Temu as a key factor behind the increase – and Tuesday's halt threatened major delays to parcels from both companies from entering the country.

The developments at the USPS came as the latest data showed the US trade deficit swelled last year to its second-largest on record, a metric that Trump has used in the past to justify trade battles with China and others.

In an apparent climbdown, the USPS on yesterday morning (local time) said it would "continue accepting all international inbound mail and packages from China and Hong Kong Posts."

"The USPS and Customs and Border Protection are working closely together to implement an efficient collection mechanism for the new China tariffs to ensure the

least disruption to package delivery," it added, without further details.

Beijing had responded to the move by accusing the United States of "politicising trade and economic issues and using them as tools."

Vowing to "take necessary measures to resolutely safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese companies," foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian accused Washington of "unreasonable suppression."

Other retailers such as Amazon might also be impacted by the "de minimis" removal.

The low-cost retailers took another hit yesterday as the European Commission announced it would seek to impose new fees on e-commerce imports – the bulk of which come from China.

Brussels says the measures are part of efforts to tackle a surge of "harmful" products into the bloc.

Tuesday saw Beijing say it would impose levies on imports of US energy, vehicles and equipment in a return salvo minutes after Trump's threatened tariffs on Chinese goods came into effect.

A day earlier, Trump suspended duties on Mexico and Canada for a month after both countries vowed to step up measures to counter flows of the drug fentanyl and the crossing of undocumented migrants into the United States.

Beijing's moves hit roughly US\$20 billion worth of US goods per year – about 12 percent of total American imports into China, according to calculations by Capital Economics.

But their impact is a far cry from US tariffs announced over the weekend, which will affect some US\$450 billion worth of goods.

Although earlier it appeared that US parcels could still be sent from Macau, by yesterday evening the city's post office announced that its service was also suspended.

Trump had signalled earlier that the talks with Xi could take place early this week, but addressing reporters at the White House on Tuesday afternoon, he said he was in "no rush." – AFP, MPD



A visitor shakes hands with a humanoid robot on display in Wuhan, central China's Hubei Province, yesterday. Ten humanoid robots of the "Chucui" series were displayed during a conference in Wuhan, showcasing a variety of abilities. – Xinhua

## Xi holds talks with Kyrgyz president

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping and Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov held talks in Beijing yesterday, pledging high-quality Belt and Road (B&R) cooperation for more win-win outcomes.

Xi said bilateral relations have achieved leapfrog development in recent years and been elevated to a comprehensive strategic partnership for a new era.

China supports Kyrgyzstan in pursuing a development path suited to its national conditions, and stands ready to work with Kyrgyzstan to further align development strategies and expand experience-sharing in state governance, he said.

China is willing to continue expanding its economic, trade and investment cooperation with Kyrgyzstan and import more quality goods from the country, Xi said.

China supports more Chinese enterprises in investing and starting businesses in Kyrgyzstan and hopes that Kyrgyzstan will earnestly protect the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese investors.

On enhancing connectivity, Xi stressed efforts to construct the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway with high standards and high quality, renovate and modernize existing ports, and open more passenger and freight flights to facilitate the flow of people and goods.

Xi also called on both sides to create new drivers for growth by expanding cooperation on cross-border e-commerce, big data and artificial intelligence.

The two sides should run the Chinese Cultural Center, the Luban Workshop and the Confucius Institute well and strengthen subnational exchanges, he said.

Japarov said he is delighted to visit China at the beginning of the Chinese New Year and would

like to extend his best wishes to President Xi and the Chinese people. He also wishes China a success in hosting the 9th Asian Winter Games.

China sets an example for the world by preserving its fine traditional culture while advancing modernization. Kyrgyzstan is willing to learn from China's successful experience, he said.

He lauded the longstanding exchanges between the two countries, noting China is a reliable friend and partner of Kyrgyzstan.

Japarov said Kyrgyzstan will continue to support China on the Taiwan question and issues related to Xinjiang and Hong Kong.

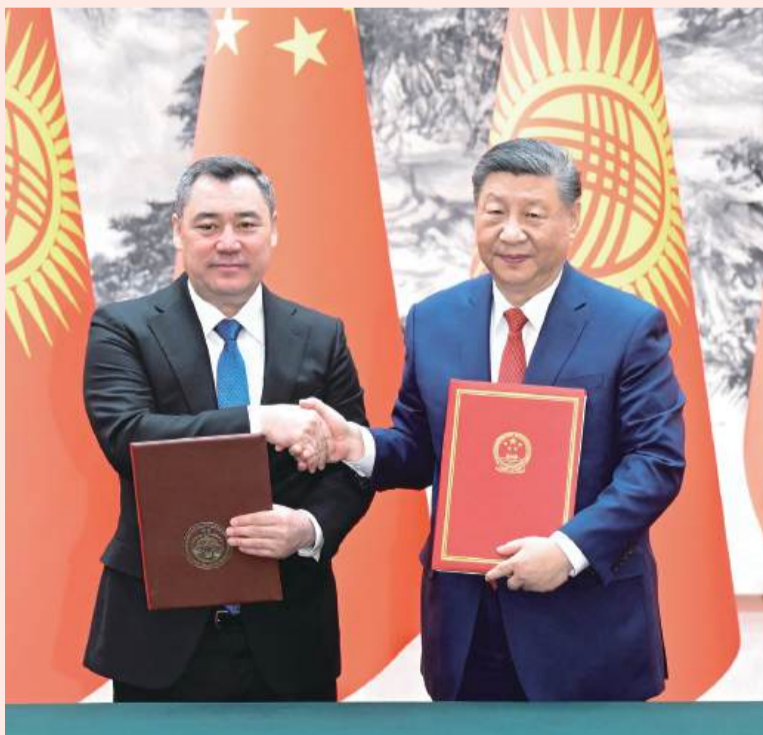
Kyrgyzstan will strengthen high-quality Belt and Road cooperation with China, ensure the success of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway, and advance bilateral cooperation on industry, investment, trade, transportation, e-commerce and education.

The two sides agreed to work closely to promote greater development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the China-Central Asia mechanism, and implement the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative.

After the talks, the two heads of state signed a joint statement on deepening the comprehensive strategic partnership for a new era between the two countries.

They also witnessed the signing of a cooperation plan for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and several cooperation documents in the fields of diplomacy, economy, trade and agriculture.

Prior to the talks, Xi and his wife Peng Liyuan held a welcome ceremony for Japarov and his wife Aigul Japarova. A welcome banquet was also held for the guests around noon. – Xinhua



President Xi Jinping (right) and Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov shake hands after signing a joint statement on deepening the comprehensive strategic partnership for a new era between the two countries, after their talks at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. Xi held talks with Japarov, who is on a state visit to China, in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

## Xi holds talks with Pakistani president

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping held talks with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari in Beijing yesterday.

Xi said China and Pakistan enjoy ironclad friendship and are all-weather strategic cooperative partners.

In recent years, the two countries have provided firm political support for each other, maintained close high-level exchanges, and advanced the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and cooperation in various fields, setting a good example for relations between countries, he said.

China stands ready to work with Pakistan to advance their respective modernization drives, accelerate the building of an even closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era, bring more benefits to the two peoples, and make greater contributions to regional peace, stability and prosperity, Xi said.

Xi stressed that China always views its relations with Pakistan from a strategic perspective, and maintains a high degree of stability and continuity in its friendly policy toward Pakistan. He said that China will, as always, support Pakistan firmly in safeguarding its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, in combating terrorism, and in following a development path suited to its national conditions.

He called on the two countries to deepen the docking of development strategies and the exchange of governance experience, strengthen exchange at all levels and across all authorities, and consolidate the political foundations of China-Pakistan relations constantly.

China welcomes Pakistan to become one of the first countries to benefit from China's further deepening of reform comprehensively and expanding high-standard opening up, Xi said, adding that China is ready to deepen practical cooperation with Pakistan in various fields, work



President Xi Jinping shakes hands with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. Xi held talks with Zardari, who is on a state visit to China, in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

together to upgrade China-Pakistan Economic Corridor cooperation, and help Pakistan consolidate its development foundations and unleash its development potential.

He said that China hopes Pakistan will intensify the security measures for Chinese personnel, projects and institutions in Pakistan, and strengthen bilateral and multilateral counter-terrorism cooperation.

Noting that next year marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Pakistan, Xi called on the two sides to deepen exchange and cooperation on culture, education and the media, with the aim of passing on the China-Pakistan friendship from generation to generation.

“China appreciates Pakistan's active support for the three global initiatives and participation in relevant cooperation, and stands ready to work with Pakistan to adhere to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, resist unilateralism and hegemonic practices, strengthen multilateral coordination, and safeguard the common interests of developing countries,” Xi said.

Pakistan will stand steadfastly

with China no matter how the situation changes, Zardari said. He expressed Pakistan's appreciation for the selfless assistance China has provided for Pakistan's economic and social development. He said that Pakistan is willing to learn from China's successful experience and promote the high-quality development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and cooperation in various fields, so as to realize industrialization and modernization.

He said that under the brilliant leadership of President Xi, China has played an ever-growing leadership role in international affairs and has become an increasingly important force for world peace, stability and prosperity.

Pakistan is willing to work closely with China to uphold multilateralism, safeguard free trade, and promote the common interests of the two countries and the vast number of developing countries, he added.

After their talks, the two heads of state witnessed the signing of a number of bilateral cooperation documents in the fields of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, trade, science and technology, and radio and television. – Xinhua

## China firmly opposes US irresponsible remarks on Panama Canal issue: spokesperson

BEIJING – A foreign ministry spokesperson yesterday said the United States has recently made irresponsible remarks on the Panama Canal issue, and intentionally distorted, attacked and mischaracterized relevant cooperation. China firmly opposes it and made stern demarches to the US side.

Spokesperson Lin Jian made the remarks when answering a relevant query at a daily news briefing.

He added that since the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was proposed in 2013, its cooperation areas and scope have kept expanding and it has become a popular international public good and international cooperation platform with extensive participation.

Over the past decade and more of Belt and Road cooperation,

parties have upheld the Silk Road spirit of peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit, followed the principle of extensive consultation and joint contribution for shared benefit, worked for fruitful outcomes in Belt and Road cooperation, and contributed to enhancing the friendship and promoting the economic and social progress of relevant countries, which is widely welcomed by these countries and people, said Lin.

“Currently, cooperation between China and Panama under the framework of the BRI is carrying out normally and has achieved fruitful outcomes,” Lin added.

Lin noted that the Chinese side hopes relevant party will strengthen confidence, resist external

interruption, and make the right decision while keeping in mind the overall bilateral relations and the long-term interests of the people of the two countries.

When answering another query regarding a Hong Kong company operating ports near the Panama Canal, Lin said that the government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) had already responded to the matter.

Noting that Panama is a popular destination for international investment and has been renowned for its sound rule of law and transparent business environment, Lin said that the Chinese side believes it will provide a fair and just environment for companies from all countries and regions, including China's Hong Kong SAR. – Xinhua

# Philippine House votes to impeach VP Sara Duterte

Cecil Morella, Pam Castro, Chad Williams

MANILA – Philippine lawmakers voted yesterday to impeach Vice President Sara Duterte, who has fallen out spectacularly with the country's leader, paving the way for a Senate trial that could see her removed from office.

The House resolution charges Duterte with "violation of the constitution, betrayal of public trust, graft and corruption, and other high crimes".

Accusations spelled out in the 44-page document include an alleged Duterte plot to assassinate President Ferdinand Marcos, first lady Liza Marcos and House Speaker Martin Romualdez that has been the subject of an investigation.

"Having been filed by more than one-third of the membership of the House of Representatives, or a total of 215 members... the motion is approved," Romualdez, a Marcos cousin, told lawmakers yesterday afternoon.

At a small rally outside the House of Representatives, student protester Darlene Cerico told AFP the impeachment represented a major victory, if an incomplete one.

"I feel so happy because this proves the power of collective action. We know there are still many things to accomplish... to fully hold Sara Duterte accountable," Cerico said.

The fate of the former president's daughter now lies in the hands of

the Philippines' 24 senators, two-thirds of whom must vote for her impeachment to remove her from office and disqualify her from future public positions. A trial date has yet to be set.

Yesterday's impeachment vote follows on the heels of a trio of complaints filed in December that accused Duterte of a range of crimes including the "brazen misuse" of millions of dollars in public funds.

It also comes days before campaigning officially begins for mid-term elections, widely expected to set the table for the 2028 presidential race.

## 'Political opportunity'

Whether 16 senators cast their vote for Duterte's impeachment could come down to President Marcos, Dennis Coronacion, chairman of the political science department at the University of Santo Tomas, told AFP.

"If [Marcos] is committed to this one, to the impeachment process... I think getting the required number of Senate votes is possible," he said.

But should the administration stay hands-off, the chances of Duterte being impeached are closer to 50-50, Coronacion said, pointing to the sitting senators' need for votes from the vice-president's stronghold of Mindanao in the coming election.

Jean Franco, assistant professor of political science at the University of the Philippines, said the coming



Protesters including legislators France Castro (centre, in purple dress), Arlene Brosas (front third right, with shawl), and Raoul Manuel (front second right), who filed one of the four impeachment complaints, shout slogans as they carry placards during a rally in front of the House of Representatives in Manila yesterday, as members of congress voted to impeach Philippine Vice-President Sara Duterte. – AFP

trial represented a major opportunity for incumbent senators, who would benefit from hours of free television exposure.

"This is a political opportunity for politicians. It can make or break politicians this impeachment process," she said, adding those not already in office would be on the outside looking in.

"The game has been changed by this impeachment. All eyes are going to be on the process, so you're just going to be reacting to what's going to happen."

## Family feud

The relationship between

Duterte and President Marcos is at a nadir, their former alliance giving way to a months-long public battle that has seen wild accusations traded, including the alleged death threat.

But Marcos had previously urged Congress not to pursue Duterte's impeachment, calling it a "storm in a teacup" that would distract the legislature from its primary responsibilities.

Marcos's executive secretary Lucas Bersamin, however, said Monday that the Office of the President would "not interfere" with the impeachment complaints.

Duterte was widely tipped

to succeed her father Rodrigo as president in 2022 elections but stepped aside to back Marcos and later ran for vice president on his ticket.

But the alliance has since imploded. In November, she delivered an expletive-laden speech saying she had ordered someone to kill Marcos if she herself was assassinated.

She later denied that her comments constituted a death threat, saying she had only been expressing "consternation" with the administration's failures.

The alleged assassination threat was among the allegations included in the last of the three complaints filed against Duterte.

With her impeachment, Duterte becomes one of only four high-ranking officials to share that fate since the Philippines returned to democracy after the 20-year rule of Ferdinand Marcos Sr came to an end in 1986.

Along with a Supreme Court justice and a high-profile prosecutor, then-president Joseph Estrada was impeached in November 2000 on charges of embezzlement and taking kickbacks from illegal gambling operations.

When the Senate tribunal refused to accept key evidence, Filipinos took to the streets in a bloodless revolt, leading Estrada to step down when the military withdrew its support. – AFP

## Bid to sell Suu Kyi's Myanmar mansion flops for 3<sup>rd</sup> time

YANGON – Myanmar's junta failed in an attempt to auction Aung San Suu Kyi's lakeside mansion yesterday, with no bids submitted for the former democracy leader's home – the third time the sale has flopped.

The two-storey Yangon house, on about 0.8 hectares of land, was put up for sale with a minimum price of US\$140 million following a lengthy legal wrangle over the property between the Nobel laureate and her brother.

Suu Kyi, who spent years under house arrest at the mansion under a former junta, has been detained since the military seized power once again in February 2021.

Around a dozen journalists, watched over by security personnel in plain clothes, attended the kerbside sale run by junta-appointed officials outside the colonial-era house on leafy University Avenue, a few doors from the US embassy.

After calling for bids starting from 297 billion kyats – around US\$140 million at the official exchange rate – and getting no response, the auctioneer called off the sale, AFP reporters at the scene saw.

"I announce the auction is not successful after calling for bids three times," the auctioneer said.

The sale is being run by junta-appointed officials on behalf of Suu Kyi's estranged brother Aung San Oo, who won a court ruling granting him ownership of half of the property.



An auction official reads a statement outside the gate of the family house of detained Myanmar civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi in Yangon yesterday, during an attempt to sell the lakeside mansion. – AFP

Aung San Oo, who has lived outside Myanmar for decades, agreed the minimum sale price with the junta, which has run two previous unsuccessful auctions, in March and August last year.

With Myanmar's economy shattered by the civil war triggered by the military coup, it is unclear who in the country would be in a position to spend US\$140 million on a single, increasingly dilapidated property.

Real estate agents say similar-sized properties in upmarket Yangon areas might fetch US\$1 million to US\$2 million.

The house holds a special place in Myanmar history – Suu Kyi was confined within its crumbling walls for around 15 years after shooting to fame during huge demonstrations against the then-junta in 1988.

Cut off from her husband and children in England, Suu Kyi spent time playing the piano, reading detective novels and meditating as her status as a democracy leader grew.

Hundreds of people would regularly gather on the pavement outside to hear her talk about democracy and fighting military rule through non-violence.

After her release in 2010 she continued living at the villa, receiving a string of foreign leaders – including then US president Barack Obama, journalists and diplomats.

Suu Kyi, 79, is serving a 27-year prison sentence on charges ranging from corruption to not respecting COVID-19 pandemic restrictions – charges rights groups say are a junta sham designed to eliminate her politically. – AFP

## Thailand cuts power to Myanmar border regions to fight scam centres

BANGKOK – Thailand cut cross-border electricity supplies to five locations in Myanmar yesterday, in an effort to stamp out online scam centres blamed for scaring away Chinese tourists.

Scam compounds have mushroomed in Myanmar's lawless borderlands, run by criminal gangs and staffed by foreigners trafficked and forced to work swindling their compatriots in an industry analysts say is worth billions of dollars.

Beijing has grown increasingly concerned about the centres as many of those involved – both victims and perpetrators – are Chinese.

"Thailand has stopped the electricity supply to Myanmar in five locations based on the decision of the National Security Council," Interior Minister Anutin Charnvirakul told reporters.

Transmission was cut at two points in Mae Sai in the north, two in Mae Sot in the west and one at Three Pagodas Pass, also in the west.

Anutin said electricity sales to Myanmar at these five

locations earned Thailand around 50 million baht (US\$1.5 million) a month.

"The electricity supply is not being stopped because the companies violated the contract, but because the electricity is being misused for scams, drugs and call centres," Anutin said.

"No one can accuse Thailand now of being part of supporting illegal businesses."

The move came as Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra travelled to Beijing for talks with President Xi Jinping, with the scam centres likely to be on the agenda.

Fears among Chinese tourists of being kidnapped and forced to work in scam centres was blamed for a sharp drop in visitor numbers over the Lunar New Year holiday last week.

China is a hugely important market for Thailand as it seeks to rebuild its crucial tourism sector after the devastating impact of travel shutdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Deputy Prime Minister Phumtham Wechayachai said the scam centres were a "national security issue". – AFP





This handout photograph taken yesterday and released by the Indian Press Information Bureau (PIB) shows India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi taking a holy dip in the sacred waters of Sangam, the confluence of Ganges, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati rivers during Maha Kumbh Mela festival, in Prayagraj. India's Hindu nationalist prime minister Modi made a ritual river dip yesterday at the world's largest religious festival, a week after a stampede killed at least 30 pilgrims. – AFP

## US flies back expelled Indian migrants

AMRITSAR – A US Air Force plane carrying more than a hundred Indian migrants expelled by the United States landed in India yesterday, local media reported.

Thousands of undocumented migrants have been arrested since Trump's January 20 inauguration, including some accused of crimes.

An AFP photographer in the northern city of Amritsar saw the US military aircraft land, with Indian media reporting it was carrying 104 Indian migrants.

Trump's flurry of executive actions aimed at overhauling immigration to the United States is estimated to impact 11 million undocumented migrants.

Neither New Delhi nor Washington have commented specifically on the deportations.

But a US embassy spokesperson in India said Washington was "vigorously enforcing its border, tightening immigration laws, and removing illegal migrants".

India's foreign ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said last week that New Delhi was "firmly opposed to illegal migration, especially as it is linked to other forms of organised crime".

"As part of India-US migration and mobility cooperation, both sides are engaged in a process to deter illegal migration, while also creating more avenues for legal migration from India to the US," Jaiswal said.

India is the world's fifth-largest economy and enjoys world-beating GDP growth, but hundreds of thousands of its citizens still leave the country each year seeking better opportunities abroad.

While its diaspora spans the globe, the United States remains the destination of choice.

According to data from the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, over 5,000 Indians were deported from the country between 2018-2023.

The US president and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi – whom critics both accuse of authoritarian tendencies – enjoyed warm relations when Trump was in the White House from 2017 to 2021.

Indian media have widely reported Modi is likely to visit Washington next week, where he is expected to meet with Trump.

– AFP

## Fukushima nuclear plant operator to dismantle water tanks next week

TOKYO – The operator of Japan's crippled Fukushima nuclear plant said yesterday it will start dismantling treated water tanks next week to clear space needed to store nuclear fuel debris to be extracted from the reactors.

The step is a milestone of a sort as Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) moves ahead with a decades-long project to dismantle the entire plant in northern Japan, which went into meltdown after it was hit by a catastrophic tsunami in 2011.

"The company will start dismantling welded water tanks on February 13, if the weather condition allows," a TEPCO spokesman said.

Since the accident, TEPCO has stored around 1.3 million tons of water – a combination of groundwater, seawater and rainwater – at the site along with water used for cooling the reactors.

The water is filtered to remove various radioactive materials, but

has remained inside more than 1,000 tanks that occupy much of the plant's ground.

TEPCO has taken down other kinds of water tanks before, but scrapping welded tanks has been seen as a key to advancing the overall work on the plant as a whole.

After removing the tanks, the utility plans to build facilities to store highly dangerous molten fuel debris to be extracted from inside the reactors.

Scrapping the water tanks became possible after TEPCO began releasing the stored water from the plant into the Pacific Ocean in August 2023.

Japan has insisted that the water does not harm the environment, a position backed by UN atomic watchdog the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

But the move has met angry reactions from China, which banned imports of Japanese seafood.

– AFP

## Taliban raid women's radio station in Afghanistan: broadcaster

Aysha Safi and Susannah Walden

KABUL – Afghanistan's Taliban authorities raided well-known women's radio station Radio Begum on Tuesday, arresting two employees, the broadcaster said, calling for the speedy release of its staff.

The Taliban information ministry said the broadcaster had been suspended for "multiple violations", in the latest search by the government of local media outlets in Afghanistan.

"Officers from the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI) assisted by representatives of the Ministry of Information and Culture raided today (Tuesday) Begum's compound in Kabul," a statement from Radio Begum said.

The station said Taliban authorities held back staff as they searched the office, seizing computers, hard drives and phones, and detaining two male employees "who do not hold any senior management position".

It said it would not provide further comment, fearing for the security of the detained employees, and asked that the authorities "take care of our colleagues and release them as soon as possible".

In a statement on social media site X the Taliban information ministry said the station had been suspended.

"Besides multiple violations, it was providing materials and programmes to a TV station based abroad," it said.

"Due to the violation of the broadcasting policy and improper use of the licence [from the ministry], the radio station was suspended today so that the related documents can be carefully evaluated and the final decision can be taken," it added.

Radio Begum said it has never been involved in any political activity and was "committed to serving the Afghan people and more specifically the Afghan women".

The station was founded on March 8, International Women's Day, 2021, five months before the Taliban swept to power, ousting the US-backed government and implementing a strict interpretation of Islamic law.

The Taliban authorities have imposed sweeping restrictions on women, squeezing them out of public life with rules the United Nations has labelled "gender apartheid".

Women have been barred from secondary school and university as well as squeezed from certain types of work.

The few women who still appear on TV channels are covered except for their eyes. Many radio stations have ceased broadcasting women's voices.

Radio Begum station staff have broadcast programming for women, by women, including educational shows, book readings and call-in counselling.

In 2024, Radio Begum's Swiss-Afghan founder Hamida Aman also launched a satellite television station, Begum TV, broadcasting educational programmes from Paris to help Afghan girls and women continue their education.

Thousands of videos covering the Afghan national curriculum have also been uploaded on a sister website, available for free to anyone with an internet connection.

The suspension of Radio Begum is the latest such action against local media in Afghanistan.

In December last year, Afghan station Arezo TV was shut down and seven employees detained after Taliban authorities said its office was used for dubbing "vulgar" programmes for banned media.

The Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV) accused people working within Arezo TV of providing content to Afghan media based outside the country, which have been heavily restricted and criticised by the Taliban authorities. – AFP

## Tokyo police bust alleged prostitution ring targeting tourists

TOKYO – Japanese police said they have arrested seven people suspected of running an illegal sex business that reportedly targeted tourists in Tokyo's busy red-light district.

A record 36.8 million foreign visitors came to Japan last year, drawn partly by the weak yen – a figure the government wants to almost double to 60 million annually by 2030.

But some campaigners have raised concerns that the tourism influx could also be boosting the sex industry.

A Tokyo police spokesman told AFP yesterday that seven people, including a Brazilian national, had been arrested for running prostitution businesses under the guise of massage parlours for men in the central Kabukicho red-light district.

One of those arrested, a 54-year-old Japanese man named Kazuki Sudo, is believed to have headed the prostitution ring that ran from October and November last year,



A man (bottom centre) walks past advertising hoardings for "host clubs" in the Kabukicho area of Tokyo yesterday.

– AFP

the spokesman said.

They allegedly created an English-language website because 60 to 70 percent of their clientele were from abroad, including from Asian countries and North America, Japan's *Mainichi* daily reported.

The newspaper said that the

businesses employed foreign touts and payments were accepted in different currencies.

The *Tokyo Shimbun* newspaper said one 25-year-old Malaysian man who used the group's services told police he wanted to "make memories" before returning home. – AFP

## German tourist killed by wild elephant in India

NEW DELHI – A German tourist died in India after he was attacked by a wild elephant in a forest reserve, police said yesterday.

The 77-year-old was riding a hired scooter in Tiger Valley in southern Tamil Nadu state on Tuesday evening when the agitated elephant attacked him on a hilly forest road, tossing the tourist into the woods.

"He failed to understand warnings by other travellers who had stopped a safe distance after

spotting the wild elephant and drove ahead," said Uma, a police officer who uses only one name.

"The elephant attacked him and he died on the way to a local hospital," the officer told AFP.

Police said they had tried contacting the dead man's family "but no one responded to our calls".

Local media reported that the tourist continued driving towards the wild elephant despite warnings by travellers who were waiting for

the animal pass – and honked loudly to drive it away.

His decision to "ignore warnings and attempt to cross the road despite the elephant's presence led to the fatal accident," forest officer G. Venkatesh said, according to the *New Indian Express* newspaper.

India has an estimated 30,000 wild Asian elephants.

In India, elephants attack locals regularly – and vice versa – as humans encroach into forest areas. – AFP

# Trump's plan to 'take over' Gaza, in his own words

WASHINGTON, DC – Donald Trump's stunning proposal that the United States could take control of the Gaza Strip has drawn criticism from governments around the world.

But the US president's apparent plan – announced at the White House alongside Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu – remains thin on details.

It came in the context of mediated negotiations between Israel and Hamas to reach the "second phase" of a ceasefire deal that would bring a more permanent end to the devastating war in Gaza.

This is what Trump said at Tuesday's news conference:

## 'Long-term ownership'

"The US will take over the Gaza Strip and we will do a job with it, too. We'll own it. And be responsible for dismantling all of the dangerous unexploded bombs and other weapons on the site.

"Level the site, and get rid of



US President Donald Trump (right) meets with Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, DC, on Tuesday. – AFP

the destroyed buildings, level it out, create an economic development that will supply unlimited numbers of jobs and housing for the people of the area."

Pressed for details, he added later: "I do see a long-term ownership position, and I see it bringing great stability to that part

of the Middle East and maybe the entire Middle East."

## Palestinian displacement

"It should not go through a process of rebuilding and occupation by the same people that have really stood there and fought for it and lived there and died there

and lived a miserable existence there."

"The only reason the Palestinians want to go back to Gaza is they have no alternative," Trump said.

He later said: "I envision world people living there. The world's people. I think you'll make that into an international, unbelievable place... And I think the entire world, representatives from all over the world, will be there.

"Palestinians, also, Palestinians will live there. Many people will live there. But they've tried the other and they've tried it for decades and decades and decades. It's not going to work. It didn't work. It will never work."

## US troops

The president hinted his plan could require US boots on the ground in Gaza "if necessary."

"As far as Gaza is concerned, we'll do what is necessary. If it's necessary, we'll do that," Trump said when asked if American troops would be involved.

## 'Riviera of the Middle East'

Trump said the Gaza Strip could become "the Riviera of the Middle East. This could be something that could be so magnificent."

He added: "We're going to take over that piece, and we're going to develop it, create thousands and thousands of jobs, and it will be something that the entire Middle East can be very proud of."

Trump later said, "I think the potential in the Gaza Strip is unbelievable."

## Support from Arab leaders?

Trump claimed that Arab leaders supported his plan, despite their overwhelming opposition after his announcement.

"I can tell you, I spoke to other leaders of countries in the Middle East, and they love the idea. They say it would really bring stability, and what we need is stability."

– AFP

## 5 obstacles to Trump's designs on controlling Gaza

Didier Lauras

JERUSALEM – Donald Trump on Tuesday announced his intent to "take over" and "own" Gaza but despite the US president's escalating rhetoric there are overwhelming obstacles to his proposal.

The idea aligns with other grandiose schemes he's floated since returning to the White House, including annexing Greenland or making Canada the 51<sup>st</sup> US state.

Here are five reasons Trump's Gaza proposal appears unworkable:

### Palestinian roots

Trump ignores Palestinians' deep attachment to their land. After the Gaza ceasefire, half a million displaced people rushed back north.

"This is the happiest day of my life," one of them, Lamees al-Iwady, said on January 28.

The Palestinian envoy to UN, Riyad Mansour, dismissed the idea outright.

"Our homeland is our homeland," he said. "For those who want to send them to a happy, nice place, let them go back to their original homes inside Israel, there are nice places there, and they will be happy to return to these places."

### Arab opposition

Contrary to Trump's assertions, Arab states have firmly rejected the plan.

On Saturday, Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) denounced any "infringement of the inalienable rights" of Palestinians.

Palestinian Authority president Mahmud Abbas went to Jordan yesterday to consult King Abdullah II, signalling deep concern in Amman and Ramallah.

Public opinion in Arab states is also expected to be unanimously hostile to the proposal.

"Expect reactions to range from confusion to outrage, including demonstrations across the Middle East and beyond in the coming days," Emily Harding of the Washington-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies wrote on X.

### Intervention fatigue

Trump's proposal involves sending US troops into Gaza. Any such deployment would be an immediate reversal of a key campaign promise not embroil Washington in foreign wars.

Those forces would meet fierce opposition from Palestinian militants Hamas – much weakened by 15 months of war against Israel but by no means eradicated.

Hamas and its ally, Islamic Jihad, have shown the ability to sustain a violent insurgency against conventional military force of the kind that looms large in the American memory following failed military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Vietnam.

### International law

With an intervention in Gaza, Trump would tear apart international law, the inheritance of the post-WW II international order that until recently Washington had proudly championed, at least in its rhetoric.

"The US could only take control of Gaza with the consent of the sovereign authority of the territory. Israel can't cede Gaza to the US," said Tamer Morris, a specialist in international law at the University of Sydney.

"A government, such as the Palestinian Authority, cannot give this consent on behalf of a people. People have a right to



Palestinians warm themselves by a fire inside a heavily damaged building in Jabalia, in the northern Gaza Strip, yesterday during a ceasefire deal in the war between Israel and Hamas. – AFP

self-determination – the right to determine their own future," Morris wrote on *The Conversation* website.

The legal expert added even if Trump's proposal doesn't come to fruition, his casual dismissal of international norms is damaging on its own.

"The nonchalant way Trump is discussing things such as taking over a territory and moving a population gives the impression these rules can easily be broken, even if he doesn't break them himself," Morris said.

Underlining the legal ramification of Trump's proposal, the United Nations reiterated international law strictly prohibits any expulsion of people from an occupied territory.

### Israeli caution

While Netanyahu and his supporters have appeared emboldened by Trump's declarations, Israel's wider political class have appeared cautious as they eye legislative elections in a year's time.

## Arab League rejects Trump Gaza proposal as 'recipe for instability'

CAIRO – The Arab League said yesterday that a shock suggestion by US President Donald Trump to take over Gaza and displace Palestinians would violate international law and cause further instability.

While "confident in the United States and its president's desire to achieve a just peace in the region", the Arab League's secretariat said Trump's proposal promotes "the displacement of Palestinians, which is rejected on the Arab and international levels".

The 22-member regional bloc said that such a move, after more than 15 months of devastating war between Israel and Palestinian group Hamas, was "a recipe for instability" and would be in "violation of international law".

Trump, in a White House news conference on Tuesday with visiting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, had said the United States should "take over" the Gaza Strip, expelling its people to other countries.

The announcement was met with audible gasps in the room, and has faced resounding rejection since from Palestinians, Middle East leaders and governments around the world.

More than two weeks into a fragile truce in the Gaza war, the Arab League yesterday called for a push towards comprehensive peace.

The secretariat's statement urged the implementation of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with "the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip together constituting the territory of the future Palestinian state" and "no separation or infringement on the rights of the Palestinians". – AFP

## 'No indication of terrorism' as Brussels police hunt gunmen

BRUSSELS, Belgium – Brussels police searched for two gunmen yesterday after shots were fired outside a metro station, with authorities saying there was “no indication of a terrorist motive”.

Locals officials instead linked the incident to the drug trade in the city which has spurred a rise in gun crime.

A police spokeswoman said shots were heard at around 6:00 a.m. (local time) outside a station close to the city centre.

Surveillance footage obtained by broadcaster RTBF showed two masked people carrying automatic rifles, with at least one letting off repeated shots.

“CCTV footage shows two people, at least one of whom is armed, the shots were fired into the air, there are no injuries,” the police spokeswoman told AFP.

The suspects fled into the metro and entered tunnels under a main railway station, she added.

“A major search operation was launched,” prosecutors said in a statement. “At this stage, there is no indication of a terrorist motive for this shooting.”

Brussels transport authorities said three metro stations had reopened after police had initially ordered them closed.

Traffic on the network was resuming after the interruption.

Brussels has seen an increase in gun crime linked to disputes between rival drug gangs in the city.

Local media citing police figures say that there were 89 shooting incidents, killing nine people, in the city last year.

“No place for violence in Brussels and our big cities. This has gone on long enough!,” said Belgium’s Interior Minister Bernard Quintin, part of a new government sworn in this week.

“This government will apply zero tolerance to all forms of crime.”

Quizzed by Belgian television at the scene, local mayor Fabrice Cumps said that it appeared “evident” that the shooting was linked to the drug trade.

“It reminds us of the need to mobilise fully to occupy the terrain and not give space to the traffickers,” he said.

“It occupies my days and nights – we need to strengthen security for our residents.”

Perched on the northwestern coast of the European mainland, Belgium has become a key hub for criminal gangs supplying narcotics across the continent.

The country has become a focal point for traffickers due to its giant Antwerp port that has served as a major smuggling gateway into Europe

– AFP



Belgian police discuss the situation outside the Clemenceau metro station following a shooting, in Brussels yesterday. Brussels police searched for at least two gunmen yesterday, after shots were fired outside a metro station, authorities said. – AFP

## Shooter captured in Ohio after 1 killed, 5 wounded

WASHINGTON – Police have arrested a suspect in a shooting that left one person dead and five wounded in the US state of Ohio, authorities said yesterday.

The attack occurred on Tuesday evening (local time) in New Albany, Ohio, at a cosmetics warehouse, said Greg Jones, the city’s police chief.

Late Tuesday night police carried out a search warrant at a home and arrested a suspect in the shooting who is named Bruce Foster, police said in a statement yesterday.

Jones said the number of people wounded was five but the police statement only said “multiple victims” and gave no details on the

shooting or what the motive might have been.

“It appears this was a targeted type of attack,” Jones said, adding that police evacuated about 150 people and that a firearm was found in the warehouse.

“This is a tragedy. It has happened across the United States, we had hoped it would never happen here,” Jones added.

Shootings are alarmingly commonplace in the United States, which has more guns than people.

Since January 1, there have been at least 26 mass shootings – defined as a shooting involving at least four victims, dead or wounded – across the country, according to the Gun Violence Archive database. – AFP

## Swedish king leads mourning after school massacre



Sweden’s Queen Silvia (front, left) and King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden (front, right), Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson (back, right) and his wife Birgitta Ed arrive at a memorial to place flowers outside the adult education center Campus Risbergsska school in Orebro, Sweden, yesterday, one day after a shooting at the adult education center Campus Risbergsska school, where eleven people including the gunman were killed. – AFP

### Nioucha Zakavati

ÖREBRO – Sweden yesterday mourned the victims of its worst mass killing on record as police indicated that the gunman likely shot himself after killing 10 people at an adult education centre.

Candles were lit and flowers laid in front of the cordoned off Campus Risbergsska school for young adults in Orebro as residents flocked to pay their respects.

“We are very shocked,” King Carl XVI Gustaf told reporters, after he and Queen Silvia laid flowers near the school, highlighting the country’s struggle to understand events.

“All of Sweden is mourning today.”

Police have not given details on the gunman or his motive. But they confirmed that 11 people, “including the killer”, died in Tuesday’s shooting spree in the town west of Stockholm.

Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson, who also visited the site yesterday, has described the massacre as “the worst mass shooting in Swedish history”.

“Tuesday, February 4 will forever mark a dark day in Swedish history,” he said in a statement.

Asked about reports that the gunman turned his gun on himself, Örebro police chief Roberto Eid Forest told reporters that “there is a lot to indicate that”.

Forest told a press conference the suspect was dead when police reached him.

Police were working to establish the reason for the killing spree, and had not seen an indication of an “ideological motive”, he said. The suspect was not previously known to police.

### Six in hospital

“I can’t say more about the suspected perpetrator, other than

that he was obviously motivated and had access to firearms,” Lars Wiren, regional police chief, told AFP.

“When the first police officers entered the building shots were fired, likely at the police, but no one of our staff is injured,” Wiren added.

Police said not all the victims had been fully identified and have not disclosed any information about them.

Health authorities said six people were being treated at Örebro’s university hospital.

Three women and two men had undergone surgery for gunshot wounds and were in a “stable but serious” condition.

A woman was treated for minor injuries, Örebro County authorities said in a statement, adding that all the wounded were over the age of 18.

Kristersson has invited all of Sweden’s political party leaders to a meeting today that would begin with a minute of silence.

“We are a country in mourning, and we must all come together,” he said.

### 'Numb, speechless'

The TV4 television channel reported that police raided the suspected gunman’s home in Örebro on Tuesday. It said the man was around 35 years old, licensed to carry a weapon and had no criminal record. Reports have not identified him however.

The man lived reclusively, was unemployed, and had distanced himself from his family and friends, *Aftonbladet* newspaper reported, citing family members.

The attack was carried out about midday on Tuesday.

“I saw some bodies lying on the ground. I don’t know if they were dead or injured,” 16-year-old

Linn, who goes to school near the site of the massacre, told AFP.

“There was blood everywhere, people were panicking and crying ... it was chaos,” she added.

“I became numb, speechless. I didn’t really know where to go,” Liv Demir, 36, whose son attends a school near Campus Risbergsska, told AFP.

Her son has gym classes at Campus Risbergsska. “My thoughts were spiralling because I packed his sports bag in the morning,” Demir said.

### 'Dark hour'

Sweden’s Royal Court announced that flags would be “flown at half-mast at all royal palaces”. The government announced a similar measure for its offices and parliament.

European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen called the shooting “truly horrifying”.

“Such violence and terror have no place in our societies – least of all in schools. In this dark hour, we stand with the people of Sweden,” she said in a post on X.

School attacks are rare in Sweden, but the country has suffered shootings and bombings linked to gang violence that kill dozens of people each year.

In March 2022, an 18-year-old student stabbed two teachers to death at a secondary school in Malmo. Two months earlier, a 16-year-old wounded another student and a teacher with a knife at a school in the small town of Kristianstad.

In October 2015, three people were killed in a racially motivated attack at a school in the western town of Trollhattan by a sword-wielding assailant who was killed by police.

– AFP

# Aga Khan, leader of Ismaili Muslims, dies in Lisbon

PARIS – The Aga Khan, imam of the Ismaili Muslims and head of a major development aid foundation, died on Tuesday in Lisbon at the age of 88, his foundation announced.

He was the founder and president of the Aga Khan Development Network, which employs 96,000 people and finances development programmes particularly in Asia and Africa.

“His Highness Prince Karim Al-Hussaini, Aga Khan IV, 49<sup>th</sup> hereditary Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims and direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), passed away peacefully in Lisbon on 4 February 2025, aged 88, surrounded by his family,” the foundation said on social media.

“The announcement of his designated successor will follow,” it added, regarding who could become the fifth person to hold the post since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Present in multiple countries, notably in central and southern Asia, Africa and the Middle East, the

Ismaili community numbers 12 to 15 million, according to its website.

United Nations chief António Guterres described the Aga Khan as “a symbol of peace, tolerance and compassion in our troubled world” following the religious leader’s death.

Malala Yousafzai, Nobel Peace laureate and education campaigner, said his legacy will “live on through the incredible work he led for education, health and development around the world”.

## Islam ‘religion of peace’

Born in Geneva, the Aga Khan spent his childhood in Kenya and was appointed in Tanzania to succeed his grandfather in 1957.

His father was passed over in the line of succession after a tumultuous marriage to American actress Rita Hayworth.

A billionaire owner of yachts and jets, the Aga Khan was a regular on the racetrack and continued the family tradition of breeding thoroughbreds.



*The Aga Khan, chairman of the Aga Khan Development Network, applauds during the inauguration ceremony of The Aga Khan Academy in Hyderabad on September 20, 2013.* – AFP

He also ploughed a large amount of his inherited wealth into philanthropic projects and was awarded honorary Canadian citizenship for his work on development and “tolerance around the world”.

The Aga Khan also held British and Portuguese citizenship. The Ismaili leadership is based in Lisbon, where there is a significant community.

Despite his role as the spiritual head of the Ismaili Muslims, he was reluctant to discuss Middle East conflicts, religious fundamentalism or Sunni-Shi’ite tensions.

Islam is not a faith “of conflict or social disorder, it’s a religion of peace,” he told AFP in 2017.

It is used in situations which are “essentially political, but which are presented, for various reasons, in a theological context. This is simply not correct,” he said. – AFP



*Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa (right) meets with Prince Karim Aga Khan IV at Belém Palace in Lisbon on July 9, 2018.* – AFP

## UK says ‘no change’ to lease terms in Chagos deal

LONDON – The British government was grilled in parliament yesterday as it denied claims by Mauritius that a new deal to return the Chagos Islands changes the lease terms for a key US military base.

The Foreign Office hit back at reports that Britain would pay Mauritius up to £18 billion (US\$22 billion) to use Diego Garcia island in the Indian Ocean chain where the base is.

Britain and its former colony reached a deal in October to hand back the isles – which it kept control of after Mauritius gained independence in the 1960s – on condition that the military base remains on Diego Garcia, the largest island.

The base is leased to the United States and has become one of its key military facilities in the Asia-Pacific.

Mauritian Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam, who demanded the terms be renegotiated after taking office in November, said on Tuesday that the rewritten agreement would give his country a say on extending the terms of the lease beyond 99 years.

The previous agreement had allowed the UK to unilaterally extend the lease by 40 years, but the new terms would require the

consent of Mauritius, he said.

“There has been no change to the terms of extension in the treaty,” a Foreign Office spokesperson said in a statement emailed to AFP.

Ramgoolam also suggested that Britain’s payment to Mauritius to lease the base should take into account inflation, which led UK media to report that the cost could double from £9 billion to £18 billion.

“The figures being quoted are entirely inaccurate and misleading,” the Foreign Office spokesperson added.

## Opposition ire

The £18 billion figure was seized on by opposition figures during a weekly question session with Prime Minister Keir Starmer in parliament.

Opposition Leader Kemi Badenoch accused Starmer of “shovelling money to Mauritius”, while hard-right Reform UK head Nigel Farage raised an urgent question on the deal.

However, Starmer said the base was “vital to our national security”.

“Without legal certainty the base cannot operate in practical terms as it should,” Starmer said in parliament.

In 2019, the International Court of Justice recommended that Britain

hand the archipelago to Mauritius after decades of legal battles.

The UK government says handing the islands back is essential so Britain and the United States can keep using the base.

Responding to Farage, Foreign Office minister of state for Europe, North America and Overseas Territories Stephen Doughty added that Britain and Mauritius had made “very good progress towards this deal” following “technical talks”.

“Both sides have agreed that, given the importance of the base to the United States as well as ourselves, it is right that the US administration has the chance to consider the full agreement properly,” Doughty added.

The United States has used Diego Garcia as a hub for long-range bombers and ships, notably during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In creating the base, Britain evicted thousands of Chagos Islanders who have since mounted a series of legal claims for compensation in British courts.

If Washington refuses to support the deal, Ramgoolam has said Mauritius would pursue its fight for full sovereignty over the Chagos Islands. – AFP

## Aga Khan: racehorse billionaire & Islamic spiritual leader

PARIS – Racehorse billionaire and Islamic spiritual leader the Aga Khan died in Lisbon on Tuesday aged 88, leaving millions of followers in mourning across the world.

Prince Karim al-Husseini was regarded as a direct descendent of the Prophet Mohammed, given nearly divine-status as the 49<sup>th</sup> hereditary imam of the Ismaili sect of Shia Islam.

The Swiss-born philanthropist was bequeathed the title of Aga Khan aged 20 by his grandfather, who skipped the line of succession for the first time since the seventh century to appoint a “young man” of the “new age”.

He was the son of a British socialite and a playboy ambassador for Pakistan, who became known for having a string of high-profile lovers that landed him in the diary columns of glossy magazines.

The Aga Khan went on to have a jetset lifestyle himself marked by private planes, yachts, skiing in the Winter Olympics, and a marriage to a British model, with whom he had three children.

They later divorced and he married German singer Gabriele Thysen, with whom he had a son.

During the divorce case, French judges had difficulty estimating the Aga Khan’s wealth, because of a rare fiscal privilege that allows him to pay taxes in Switzerland, despite living in France.

## Leave a ‘better world’

Fuelled by his enormous wealth, he launched an apolitical secular development foundation in 1967 credited with raising literacy levels in 18 countries across South and Central Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

Its work in Pakistan earned the Aga Khan the wrath of Sunni Taliban militants who accused the foundation’s schools of “brainwashing” men and women to stay away from Islam.

In his youth he had dreamed of becoming an architect, before graduating instead from Harvard University with a degree in Islamic history.

He also pursued a goal of educating the world about the richness of Muslim culture.

“I was born with Islamic ethics in a Muslim family. There is nothing wrong with being well off as long as money has a social and ethical value

and is not the object of one’s own greed,” he told AFP in 2008.

“One of the principles of Islam is that on his deathbed every person must try to leave behind a better world.”

The Aga Khan has among other things helped finance the reconstruction of Bosnia’s Ottoman-era Mostar bridge, which was destroyed during the Balkan Wars in the 1990s.

He boasts an enviable collection of over 1,000 years of Islamic art, one of the world’s largest and most valuable, that he put on display in his cultural centres in London, Lisbon, Vancouver, and Dubai.

“We don’t do enough to illustrate to the peoples of our world the greatness of Islamic civilisations,” he told AFP in an interview in 2008 in Syria, after funding the restoration of Aleppo’s majestic citadel.

## Racing empire

Just three years after taking on his religious responsibilities, he acquired a racehorses empire assiduously built up by his grandfather and his father.

“The idea of entering into an activity that was in no way central to the Ismaili Imam, an activity in which no member of my family – neither my brother nor my sister nor I – had any understanding, in itself raised a major question mark,” he said in a book published in 2011 celebrating 50 years in the racehorse business.

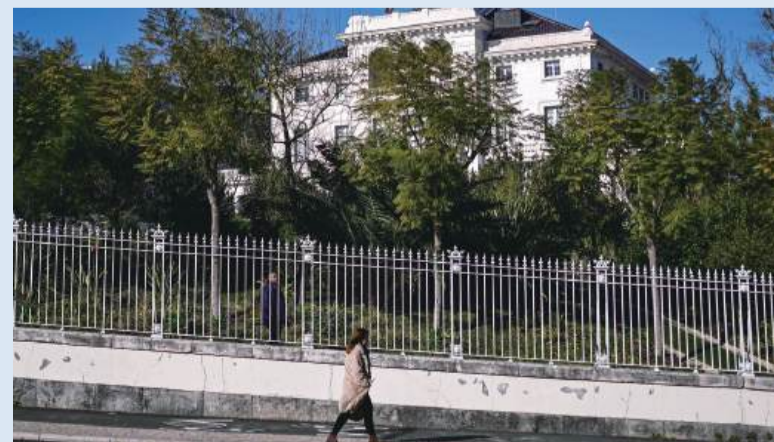
He will be, in the public’s eye, forever best remembered for the ill-fated Shergar, who clinched a mind-bogglingly easy win at the 1981 Epsom Derby.

John Matthias, the jockey of the second horse Glint of Gold, actually believed he had won the race because he couldn’t see the winner.

Shergar was kidnapped two years later from the Aga Khan’s Ballymany Stud in Ireland.

In March 2016, the Ismaili spiritual leader, then aged 79, fell for an audacious scammer who tricked rich targets out of millions of euros by impersonating one of France’s top politicians.

His Aga Khan Development Network made bank transfers totalling 20 million euros to accounts in France, Poland and China. Some of the transfers were later blocked, but eight million euros disappeared without trace. – AFP



*The Aga Khan, chairman of the Aga Khan Development Network, applauds during the inauguration ceremony of The Aga Khan Academy in Hyderabad on September 20, 2013.* – AFP



Paraguay's goalkeeper Facundo Insfran (on the ground) reaches for the ball during the 2025 South American U-20 football championship final against Colombia at the Brigido Iriarte stadium in Caracas on Tuesday. Columbia won the game 4-0. - AFP

## Liverpool's Slot not a fan of in-stadium VAR announcements

LIVERPOOL – Liverpool manager Arne Slot says he is not a fan of in-stadium VAR announcements as he fears they will increase the pressure on referees.

The initiative is being trialled by the English Football League during the League Cup semi-finals, with the second legs taking place this week.

Referees announce the final decision following a visit to the VAR pitchside monitor or at the "conclusion of factual matters such as accidental handball by a goalscorer or offside judgements".

Only the final decision is announced to supporters.

The Premier League last year said the supporter experience of video technology was "nowhere near good enough".

The organisation's chief football officer Tony Scholes said this week that the league's "intention" was that referees would announce the outcome of VAR reviews from the start of next season.

But Slot, whose in-form team will seek to overturn a 1-0 deficit from the first leg when they host Tottenham at Anfield today, voiced doubts about the potential change.

"I wonder if it is a good thing for the referee because he's already under a lot of pressure in every game from the home fans," the Liverpool boss said at his pre-match press conference yesterday.

"And I think him explaining if it's against the home team would even add more pressure in the next and the next and the next decision he has to make.

"But they always tell me they are very well trained for this which I am certainly not because

if I need to blow my whistle during a training session then I'm always like 'OK, he's a bit frustrated, let's give him the free kick for the next time', so I would probably not be a good referee."

Slot said defender Trent Alexander-Arnold was out of today's match against Spurs and is a doubt for Sunday's FA Cup fourth-round game at Plymouth.

"He left the pitch with a bit of a pain in his leg [against Bournemouth on Saturday]," said the Dutchman. "That's why he misses the game tomorrow (today) but he's already on the pitch, not with the team, but with the rehab coach, so let's see how long it's going to take but he will not be available tomorrow."

Liverpool, six points clear at the top of the Premier League, are still in contention for a quadruple of trophies in Slot's first season in charge and he is relaxed about the club's inactivity in the January transfer window.

"Maybe there are not many managers that have such a good squad as I have," he said. "We have a very good squad and if you look at the league table I think the players have shown that the trust we have in them was correct and we don't have many injuries, not long-term injuries."

The winner of the two-legged tie between Liverpool and Tottenham will face either Newcastle or Arsenal in the League Cup final at Wembley in March.

Eddie Howe's Newcastle are 2-0 up after the first leg ahead of the second leg at St James' Park yesterday.

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

- AFP/MPD

## Even in career twilight, Ronaldo's star undimmed at 40

### Football

#### Haitham El-Tabei

RIYADH – Cristiano Ronaldo's playing days may be numbered but his following is bigger than ever as he celebrated his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday in his adopted home of Saudi Arabia yesterday.

The Portuguese great appeared to trade an end-of-career payday for football obscurity when he moved to Riyadh's Al Nassr two years ago in a deal said to be worth US\$250 million.

But his influence became clear when he was followed by a parade of ageing superstars, including Karim Benzema and the perennially injured Neymar, to the big-spending Saudi Pro League.

Saudi Arabia was then awarded the 2034 World Cup in December, the crowning glory for the oil-rich kingdom's strategy of revamping its image through sports, tourism and culture.

Leading the charge has been Ronaldo, an ambassador for the Saudi World Cup and now an online phenomenon, with more than a billion followers across his social media channels.

When Ronaldo launched his YouTube channel in August, he

gained one million subscribers in just 90 minutes and 20 million within 24 hours. He currently has 73.5 million.

While Ronaldo's perfect white teeth, bulging torso and product promotions are ubiquitous online, he remains equally energetic on the pitch.

He scored twice for Al Nassr on Monday, including a trademark leaping header, and berates his own and team-mates' mistakes as fiercely as if he was still playing El Clasico for Real Madrid.

"With age, one's physical prowess diminishes hence it would have been easy for Ronaldo to take Saudi Arabian money and gently fade from view," Simon Chadwick, professor of Sport and Geopolitical Economy at Skema Business School, told AFP.

"However, the gusto and passion that he continues to display suggests a consummate professional, deeply passionate player, and a physically determined athlete, the likes of which we don't commonly see," he added.

### Stay, go or retire

Although World Cup glory has probably eluded him, unlike his Argentine rival Lionel Messi, records still dangle in front of the five-time Ballon d'Or and

Champions League winner.

In September he passed 900 professional goals, an unmatched feat in official matches. Now on 923, and with a record 35 Saudi Pro League goals last season, the hallowed 1,000 is not too far away.

Despite this prodigious form Ronaldo is yet to win a Saudi or continental trophy with Al Nassr, with the Arab Club Champions Cup of 2023 his only triumph with the club.

Questions now surround his future as his contract expires in June, with no confirmation on whether he will extend his stint in Saudi Arabia.

Stay, go or retire, he has indelibly changed football in the desert country, while managing to grow his own brand at the same time.

"Undoubtedly, his presence was key for the Saudi bid for the World Cup, especially with his constant positive talk about Saudi Arabia," Egyptian TV football analyst Omar Nassef told AFP.

"Ronaldo's presence opened the way for players at European elite clubs to come directly to the Saudi league.

"It's not only about the amount of money, it's also about going to play in a league that has one of the best players in the world." - AFP

## Mathys Tel '100 percent' committed to Spurs, says Postecoglou



LONDON – Ange Postecoglou said Mathys Tel is "100 percent" committed to Tottenham after the French forward signed on loan despite reportedly rejecting a move to the club earlier in the January transfer window.

Tottenham were busy in the final hours of Monday's deadline day as they bolstered Postecoglou's injury-ravaged squad, bringing in Tel and defender Kevin Danso.

Bayern Munich's Tel, 19, was also linked with Manchester United and Arsenal before opting for Tottenham, who have an option to make the move permanent in the summer transfer window.

Postecoglou, whose team take a 1-0 lead into today's League Cup semi-final second-leg at Liverpool, told his pre-match press conference that Tel had been right to take his time over such a major decision.

"It's not so much that he rejected us or rejected anyone else," said the Spurs manager. "Rightly so he was getting as much information as possible."

The Australian added: "I had a conversation with him and I guess mine was purely around the football

and I think he'll find a really great place here in terms of where he is in his career.

"He obviously wants to play. We've already shown that irrespective of age, he'll get an opportunity here, and the way we play will suit him.

"Certainly with what we have in the next few months and then more importantly what we're building beyond, I thought he would be a perfect fit."

When asked if he felt the France under-21 international was fully committed to Spurs, Postecoglou said: "Yes, 100 percent. I am more than 100 percent sure because he took so much time, was so diligent about finding out everything when he made a decision that it's us.

"He obviously had options and that sort of gave me even more confidence that we are getting the right kind of mentality, the right kind of player.

"He is very ambitious. He's got a great deal of self-belief and self-confidence. He feels he can reach the top of the game and he has chosen us, which is a great vindication of what we are doing."

Tel and Danso will both be

available for today's match at Anfield, but Micky van de Ven and fellow centre-back Cristian Romero are set to miss out, with Postecoglou taking a "conservative" approach after the duo's injury absences.

Tottenham are one match away from a League Cup final at Wembley as they seek to end a trophy drought that stretches back to 2008.

Former Celtic boss Postecoglou, in his second season at Tottenham, put himself under pressure earlier in the campaign when he said he "always wins things in my second year".

But he said Premier League leaders and League Cup holders Liverpool would also be feeling the pressure.

"I don't think Liverpool will be any less anxious than us about the fixture," he said. "You're in a semi-final, particularly a second leg and it's still very tight.

"It's a big game for both clubs so you recognise that, you embrace that but ultimately if you want to be successful these are the games you want to be involved in."

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

- AFP/MPD

## Barca avoiding 'excuses' after Real Madrid ref complaints: Flick

### Football

BARCELONA – Barcelona coach Hansi Flick said yesterday his team would not hide behind "excuses" after rivals Real Madrid attacked Spanish refereeing following a surprise La Liga defeat.

Los Blancos were beaten 1-0 at relegation-battling Espanyol on Saturday and subsequently sent a furious letter to the Spanish

football federation blasting the country's refereeing as "rigged" and "completely discredited".

Madrid were angry after Espanyol defender Carlos Romero avoided a red card for hacking down striker Kylian Mbappe and went on to score the winning goal.

"This [letter] is their choice, they do it like this, it's not our way - I said no excuses and we will do it like that," Flick told a news conference

ahead of Barcelona's Copa del Rey quarter-final at Valencia today.

"Every club has some reasons to say something. We're humans, it's normal in life, everyone makes mistakes.

"The referees have tough jobs. We have to take care of them, it's not easy this situation... when I arrived I said no excuses, no complaining and no blaming, I don't like that."

Real Madrid remain top of

La Liga by one point ahead of city rivals Atletico Madrid, whom they host on Saturday in the top flight.

Carlo Ancelotti's side were in action last night at Leganes in the Copa del Rey, while Atletico thrashed Getafe 5-0 on Tuesday to reach the semi-finals.

Record 31-time Spanish cup winners Barcelona thrashed Valencia 7-1 in La Liga in January but Flick said it would be harder

going at Mestalla.

"The atmosphere [previously there] was unbelievable, and they press well, and it was not easy to win there, and I think it will be the same tomorrow," added Flick.

"It's a cup match and you cannot win a trophy tomorrow but you can lose one, and this we don't want to do."

The game will be played at 4:30 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time.

- AFP/MPD

## Olympics on horizon as China hosts Asian Winter Games



Mary Yang

HARBIN – China will welcome a mix of world-class athletes and relative novices from desert and tropical nations when the Asian Winter Games open in the city of Harbin on Friday.

It is the ninth edition of the event, stretching back to 1986, but the first since 2017 and crucially comes with the Winter Olympics in Milan-Cortina a year away.

Harbin is in China's northeast, towards the borders with Russia and North Korea, and temperatures were minus 24 Celsius during the day yesterday.

A total of 1,275 athletes across 34 countries and territories have registered for the Games, organisers say.

Competitors will battle for medals and continental glory in 11 disciplines.

Staples of the Olympics are in the week-long programme, including speed skating, figure skating, alpine skiing, snowboarding, ice hockey and curling.

There is no direct qualification for the Winter Olympics but the Asian Winter Games will act as preparation.

"This is the last comprehensive competition before the 2026

Winter Olympics," said Zhang Jing, head coach of China's short track speed skating squad.

"We will cherish this opportunity, strive to showcase our athletes' best condition and deliver top performances."

The Asian Winter Games are a greatly scaled-down version of the summer Asian Games, which featured about 12,000 athletes in 2023 when China also played host.

### Olympic pedigree

China, Japan and South Korea are the traditional powers at the Games and boast Olympic medallists and world champions.

They include Japanese figure skaters Kaori Sakamoto, a three-time world champion, and two-time Olympic silver medallist Yuma Kagiyama.

South Korea's formidable short track speed skaters are also in action.

"We are looking at winning six gold medals or more," head coach Yoon Jae-myung said, according to South Korea's Yonhap news agency.

Short track speed skater Lin Xiaojun, who won gold for hosts South Korea at Pyeongchang in 2018, will lead China's short track squad.

Lin, also known as Lim Hyo-jun, was naturalised by China in 2021 after he was banned from the South Korean team for a now-overturned

sexual harassment conviction.

Also naturalised to compete for China are short track speed skaters Liu Shaolin and Liu Shaoang – brothers who previously won Olympic gold for Hungary.

China will however be missing Eileen Gu, the double Olympic champion and face of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, after the California-born free skier pulled out injured on Tuesday.

North Korea are set to send three figure skaters.

Also taking part are competitors from nations with far warmer climates who have never competed at the Winter Olympics.

That includes three alpine skiers from Saudi Arabia, who will host the Asian Winter Games in 2029.

Four Swiss-born curlers make up the Philippines' men's team - including the former owner of an online sex toy shop who took up the niche sport in 2023.

There are also four snowboarders from Cambodia.

The first medals are up for grabs on Saturday in speed skating, short track, curling, skiing and snowboarding.

Sports on ice will take place at venues across Harbin while ski and snowboard events will be held in Yabuli, 200 kilometres to the southeast of the city. –AFP

## Zhou joins Ferrari as reserve driver for 2025

F1

PARIS – China's Zhou Guanyu will represent Ferrari as a reserve driver in the 2025 Formula One season after losing his regular spot with Sauber, the Italian team announced yesterday.

Zhou became the first Chinese driver to race in F1 when he joined Alfa Romeo in 2022.

He won 16 points across his three seasons before he and Valtteri Bottas were replaced by Sauber

for the upcoming season by Nico Hulkenberg and Gabriel Bortoleto.

Zhou, who was previously part of Ferrari's driver academy between 2015 and 2018, will share reserve driver duties with Antonio Giovinazzi.

Italian Giovinazzi lost his F1 drive at Alfa Romeo to Zhou after the 2021 season.

Seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton makes his debut for Ferrari this season following 12 seasons at Mercedes. –AFP

## MotoGP champion Martin breaks hand and foot in Malaysia crash



Aprilia Racing's Spanish rider Jorge Martin looks on during the first day of the 2025 MotoGP pre-season test at the Sepang International Circuit in Sepang, Malaysia yesterday. –AFP

MotoGP

SEPANG – MotoGP world champion Jorge Martin has been ruled out of the remaining pre-season testing in Malaysia and will undergo surgery in Europe after crashing badly on the opening day at the Sepang track.

The Spaniard broke his hand and foot after being thrown off his Aprilia machine at turn two of the Sepang circuit. He had emerged unscathed from a crash earlier in the day.

He now faces a race against time to be fit for the start of his title defence in the season-opening Thailand Grand Prix on March 2.

"Jorge Martin has been diagnosed with a right hand fracture and fractures in his left foot," MotoGP organisers said in a statement.

"He has undergone a CT scan and Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), both of which were negative for any injuries.

"He will stay in hospital overnight and tomorrow he will fly back to Europe to undergo surgery on his right hand and left foot."

The 27-year-old, who made the move to Aprilia after winning the 2024 championship for Pramac Ducati, had completed 13 laps when he lost control of his new bike and was flipped high into the air.

The Spaniard landed hard on his left foot before his head banged onto the asphalt.

Massimo Rivola, Principal of Aprilia Racing, said he had "no explanation" for the crash and that Martin had made "no mistake".

"It was a bad crash with apparently no reason from his side and from the bike," he said.

"He is a world champion, but he is also a MotoGP rider. He's not an amateur. And the bike had no problems."

Trackhouse team rider Raul Fernandez of Spain was also ruled out of the remaining two days with hand and foot fractures.

Frenchman Fabio Quartararo, meanwhile, topped the timesheets on the opening day of testing with a time of 1min 57.555sec.

"I was feeling quite good. We were focused on many things to try and make a good lap time and I think I did a good job," he said.

The 25-year-old Yamaha rider was fastest for most parts of yesterday's session and claimed the fastest time on his 50<sup>th</sup> lap.

Six-time Spanish MotoGP world champion Marc Marquez came in second fastest with a time of 1:57.606 on his new Ducati machine, while his brother Alex Marquez was third after clocking 1:57.738. –AFP



## France prop Gros happy to go 'under radar' for Dupont's benefit

Florian Soenen

PARIS – France's hopes of a rare away win over England on Saturday in the Six Nations will hinge on the impact of superstar scrum-half Antoine Dupont.

However, without the unglamorous work from the likes of prop Jean-Baptiste Gros, Sevens Olympic gold medallist Dupont will find it hard to shine at Twickenham, where France have tasted victory only once since 2007.

Gros is likely to start this weekend's second round game as the joint tournament favourites aim to continue their march to the title.

"It doesn't bother me to go under the radar," Gros told AFP on Monday.

"I play this sport to have fun and enjoy myself. Everything that comes with playing rugby, putting yourself in the limelight, it's a bit based on my temperament, my character, being quite discreet and reserved.

"If we have clean running lines, quick ball, it's easier for them, the backs, namely Antoine," the 25-year-old added.

France opened their Six Nations campaign by hammering a sorry Wales 43-0 last Friday as Gros made his 33<sup>rd</sup> international appearance.

He has suffered various injuries since sustaining a forearm fracture in October 2022.

The Toulon front-rower started a Test for just the 14<sup>th</sup> time last

week, benefitting from Cyril Baille's lack of game time.

Gros has often played second fiddle to Baille, coming off the bench for all five games in 2022's Six Nations Grand Slam success.

He started November's three Tests in Baille's absence and was a key but unassuming part of the victory over New Zealand.

Toulouse's Baille is considered one of the world's leading loose-head props due to his off-loading ability while Gros' strengths are with less subtler carries and consistent set-piece displays.

"We're not the same style of players," Gros said of Baille.

"We play the same position but we play totally differently. We complement each other. I think it's good for the coaches.

"We try and support each other. We send each other messages, it's cool," he added wearing his thin-framed rounded spectacles.

### 'Intensity'

Gros grew up on the banks of the Rhone river in the town of Tarascon, between Marseille and Montpellier, before heading east along the Mediterranean coast to join Toulon's academy as a teenager.

He won two under-20s World Championships before breaking through into the first team at Toulon.

Toulon are no longer the 'galacticos' of Jonny Wilkinson

and Matt Giteau, winning three straight European Cups, but the passion in the sun-kissed port city for their rugby team remains.

"The atmosphere around the city, the club has represented something for me since I was young," Gros said,

"There are very few clubs I see myself playing for.

"The club, for me, has something special.

"It can be hard sometimes, you have to be made of strong stuff.

"To give everything for the club, the city, I think it's really cool," he added.

This weekend, France return to Twickenham for the first time since inflicting a record home defeat (53-10) on England in their 2023 Six Nations meeting, which Gros missed due to the forearm issue.

Steve Borthwick's England started their campaign with an impressive first half against two-time champions Ireland last Saturday, before wilting in the final 40 minutes.

"Against England we're expecting more intensity, a level above Wales," Gros said.

"We saw their match against Ireland, it was quite impressive.

"They're going to raise the bar even higher against us, we're expecting that and we have to raise our bar even higher too," he added. –AFP

## Baldoni, Lively lawyers face off in US\$400 million 'It Ends With Us' case



US actor Justin Baldoni's lead counsel, Bryan Freedman, gestures while speaking to the press as he arrives at US District Court for a pre-trial hearing in a US\$400 million defamation suit by Baldoni against Hollywood power couple Blake Lively and Ryan Reynolds in New York on Monday. Lively and Reynolds are being targeted in the suit by Baldoni, Lively's co-star on bleak romance "It Ends With Us" – the latest caustic twist in the legal battle engulfing the film. – AFP

NEW YORK – Lawyers for Hollywood stars Justin Baldoni and Blake Lively faced off on Monday in their US\$400 million defamation fight, as Baldoni's side dropped a cache of case documents online prompting censure from the judge.

Hollywood power couple Lively and Ryan Reynolds are being targeted by Baldoni, Lively's co-star on bleak romance movie "It Ends With Us," after she sued Baldoni and alleged sexual harassment.

In the latest caustic twist in the legal battle engulfing the film, Baldoni's team created a website containing a trove of messages and documents relating to the case.

In court, Judge Lewis Liman said the latest amended complaint, which included emails and text messages between Baldoni and Lively and Reynolds – who Baldoni is also suing – broke court procedure, US media reported.

The Manhattan federal judge threatened to bring forward the date of the trial, currently slated for next month, if the parties to the case continue to litigate the dispute in the media.

"You've got a lot in front of the court that gives, I think, the public plenty to feast upon," Liman said reportedly.

The US\$400 million suit from Baldoni, who also directed the film, came after Lively filed a sexual harassment complaint against him, protesting her treatment on set, and then a lawsuit accusing him of launching a retaliatory media campaign against her.

Baldoni has sought to have the case against him dismissed.

"We just couldn't be more pleased with how all the issues were managed. We're going to move as quickly as we possibly can and prove our innocence," Baldoni's lawyer Bryan Freedman said outside court following the hearing.

Lively's lawyer Michael Gottlieb said he was "very happy with how the hearing went" – but did not elaborate.

The war between the stars was dragged into the spotlight when fans noticed during promotion of the film that they did not follow one another on social media.

It quickly emerged that Lively had complained of Baldoni's behaviour on the set, accusing him of – among other things – speaking inappropriately about his sex life and seeking to add intimate scenes into the film that she had not previously agreed to.

Lively also said lead producer Jamey Heath had watched her while she was topless, despite having been asked to turn away.

Then, Lively alleges, Baldoni ignited a PR campaign to smear her and divert attention away from complaints she might make about the men's alleged actions.

Baldoni has also sued *The New York Times* after it published a piece about that alleged smear campaign, including what it said were emails and texts discussing the media outcry.

Baldoni countered that Lively hijacked the production of "It Ends With Us" and that she defamed him and, with Reynolds, sought to extort him. – AFP

## Netflix drops 'Emilia Pérez' star Oscar bid over offensive posts: reports

LOS ANGELES – Netflix has dropped Karla Sofia Gascón, the star of "Emilia Pérez," from its high-profile Oscars campaign and distanced itself from the best actress nominee over her offensive social media posts, Hollywood trade outlets reported on Tuesday.

Images of Gascón, who made history as the first openly transgender acting nominee in Academy Awards history, had adorned posters, billboards and advertisements for the musical film, which earned 13 Oscar nods – more than any other movie this year.

But that campaign has abruptly changed tack, after old social media posts were uncovered and widely shared last week in which Gascón called Islam "an infection" and "deeply disgusting."

Gascón also denigrated or mocked wide-ranging subjects, including diversity efforts, China and George Floyd, the black man whose 2020 killing by police spurred massive protests.

The Spanish star, 52, initially apologised in a statement issued

via Netflix and deactivated her account on X, formerly Twitter, but soon reversed course by defending herself publicly.

She told CNN she is "not a racist" and will not withdraw from Oscar contention, and blamed "cancel culture" in an Instagram post.

The *Hollywood Reporter* and *Variety* said streaming giant Netflix, which has invested heavily in hopes that "Emilia Pérez" will provide its first ever best picture Oscar win, has now dropped Gascón from all campaign efforts.

A Netflix web page promoting the film "for your awards consideration" on Tuesday contained an image of Zoe Saldana, the movie's best supporting actress nominee.

At a peak moment in Hollywood's award season, Gascón will no longer attend events including Friday's Critics Choice Awards gala as scheduled, trade magazines reported.

Contacted by AFP, Netflix declined to publicly comment.

"Emilia Pérez" tells the story of a Mexican drug cartel boss who

transitions to life as a woman and turns her back on crime.

It had previously received criticism for its depictions of Mexico and its drug war, its representation of trans issues, and its use of artificial intelligence (AI) to increase Gascón's voice range in musical scenes.

But at least until now it had appeared to weather those storms, remaining a perceived frontrunner for multiple Academy Awards.

Controversy has not always prevented films from going on to enjoy success at the Oscars.

"Green Book," a drama based on the real-life story of a black musician and his white driver in the 1960s Deep South, was widely condemned for perpetuating "white saviour" stereotypes.

A tweet surfaced during Oscars campaigning, in which one of the movie's producers expressed support for false claims that Muslims were celebrating in New Jersey following the 9/11 terror attacks.

It went on to win best picture. – AFP



French actor and cast member Jean-Paul Rouve (centre) poses among performers upon arrival for a photocall ahead of the French premiere of the comedy film "God Save The Tuche" at the Le Pathé Palace multiplex in Paris on Tuesday. – AFP



Vietnamese-American actor Ke Huy Quan poses upon arrival for the premiere of romantic action comedy film "Love Hurts" at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Los Angeles on Monday. As a child actor, Quan rose to fame playing Short Round in "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom" (1984) and Data in "The Goonies" (1985). – AFP



French singer Clara Luciani (right) poses next to her wax statue during its unveiling at the Musée Grévin in Paris on Tuesday. – AFP

### World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -13°C~0°C	Manila 24°C~32°C	New York 3°C~4°C	Lisbon 9°C~16°C
Shanghai 0°C~9°C	Bangkok 23°C~34°C	London 3°C~9°C	Rio de Janeiro 23°C~34°C
Hong Kong 15°C~19°C	Tokyo -2°C~9°C	Frankfurt 2°C~5°C	Luanda 24°C~31°C
Taipei 14°C~22°C	Singapore 23°C~32°C	Vancouver -6°C~2°C	Maputo 24°C~32°C
Guangzhou 12°C~18°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~35°C	Paris 3°C~7°C	Dili 25°C~30°C
Nanjing -3°C~10°C	Jakarta 24°C~30°C	Moscow -3°C~1°C	São Tomé 26°C~29°C
Guilin 6°C~10°C	Seoul -9°C~1°C	Las Vegas 12°C~21°C	Praia 15°C~26°C
Xi'an -5°C~8°C	Sydney 20°C~26°C	Monte Carlo 5°C~14°C	Bissau 19°C~35°C



**1 Not a jack o'lantern**

A cat stands on a pumpkin at the Zonal Belen market in Tegucigalpa, Honduras yesterday. - AFP

**2 Life saver**

An avalanche dog, rescuers and trackers take part in a search and rescue exercise for avalanche victims in the French Alps ski resort of La Rosiere, south-eastern France, on Tuesday. - AFP

**3 Picture perfect**

This photograph shows a general view of the snowy resort Les Saisies in the French Alps, on Tuesday. - AFP



**4 Fun for some**

Tourists have fun at a snow resort in Nanchuan District, Chongqing, on January 18. - Xinhua

**5 Crazy trio**

Early morning swimmers venture into the sea to cold water swim as the sun rises over the Palace Pier in Brighton, southern England yesterday. - AFP

**6 Forget Pisa**

Attendees arrive for a UNESCO ceremony celebrating the final phases of restoration work on heritage monuments in old Mosul, Iraq yesterday, as part of ongoing reconstruction projects in the city that was damaged during the fight with the Islamic State (IS) group. Eighty percent of Mosul's old city was destroyed in the fight against IS, and more than 12,000 tons of rubble were removed for a UNESCO restoration project, which included the famous Al-Hadba or "hunchback" leaning minaret and its historic Al-Nuri Mosque, Al-Tahira and Our Lady of the Hour churches, and 124 heritage houses. - AFP

