

Sam urges local NPC deputies & CPPCC members to help Macau reach new heights

Tony Wong

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai hosted a dinner last night for Macau deputies to the National People's Congress (NPC) and Macau members of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), where he underlined in a speech that his government is steadily advancing its administration and governance and vigorously drawing up Macau's third five-year socioeconomic development plan, urging the local NPC deputies and CPPCC members to, due to their profound insights, help Macau open new horizons and reach new heights, and to work together with the local government to bring its various initiatives to a new stage, according to a statement released by the Government Information Bureau (GCS) last night.

The statement did not mention where the dinner took place.

In his speech, according to the statement, Sam underlined that over the past year, under the central government's strong leadership, and through the united efforts of the MSAR government and all sectors of Macau's civil society, Macau has achieved stable economic and social progress with advances on various fronts.

Sam, who took office as the MSAR's chief executive on December 20, 2024, said that over the past year, his government's main policy objectives have largely been met, while its inaugural year of administration and governance has been smooth and steady, marked by innovation, breakthroughs, and tangible results, making a good start.

These achievements, Sam said, would not have been possible without the strong



Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai delivers a speech during yesterday's dinner with local NPC deputies and CPPCC National Committee members. — Photo: GCS

support and dedicated efforts of the local NPC deputies and CPPCC members, to whom Sam extended, on behalf of the MSAR government, the highest respect and sincere gratitude, according to the statement.

Sam noted that the local NPC deputies and CPPCC members are the elite leaders across various fields and sectors in Macau. They are key participants representing the MSAR in national governance at the highest level, and constitute the core force in ensuring the implementation of the "patriots governing Macau" principle, Sam said, acknowledging

their glorious mission and the magnitude of their responsibilities.

Sam raises 3 points of view

According to the GCS statement, Sam raised three points of view for the local NPC deputies and CPPCC members in combination with the spirit of President Xi Jinping's various important instructions concerning Macau's development.

First, Sam urged the local NPC deputies and CPPCC members to help foster social consensus through ideological guidance. He suggested that they should further expand

the forms, models and ways of engaging with members of the public, strengthen unity and communication, and fully leverage their role as a bridge between residents and the authorities, focusing on residents' concerns and reflecting public sentiment.

Sam urged the local NPC deputies and CPPCC members to skilfully integrate the central authorities' fundamental policies with Macau's specific situations, translating these into concepts and actions widely recognised by Macau's civil society.

Sam said that they should cultivate a sense of big-picture thinking, build social consensus, vigorously promote the core value of patriotism and love for Macau, jointly safeguard national security and social stability, and continuously break new ground in the high-quality development of the cause of "One Country, Two Systems".

Second, Sam urged the local NPC deputies and CPPCC members to drive progress by setting examples, pointing out that they enjoy high visibility and extensive connections, where their words and actions carry influence and exemplary effect.

Sam said that they should take a leading role in their respective occupations and work, firmly uphold the MSAR's executive-led governance, and support and assist the MSAR government in exercising law-based governance and advancing the integrated development of Macau and Hengqin in close alignment with its two main pillars, namely appropriate economic diversification and public administration reform.

Continued on p.5

UK police arrest ex-envoy Peter Mandelson in Epstein case

LONDON – London police yesterday arrested Britain's former ambassador to the United States, Peter Mandelson, amid allegations over his ties to disgraced US financier Jeffrey Epstein.

"Officers have arrested a 72-year-old man on suspicion of misconduct in public office," the Metropolitan Police said in a statement.

Images on UK television appeared to show Mandelson being driven away from his north London home accompanied by a man and a woman, after police raided his properties earlier this month.

"He was arrested at an address in Camden

on Monday, 23 February and has been taken to a London police station for interview," the Met added.

The arrest comes days after ex-prince Andrew, King Charles III's younger brother, was arrested in a misconduct in public office probe also related to the latest release of documents related to Epstein.

Mandelson, a pivotal figure in British politics, is being probed over allegations that he sent sensitive documents to the late US sex offender Epstein when he was a government minister, including during the 2008 financial crash.

The ex-politician was sacked by

Prime Minister Keir Starmer as envoy to Washington last year when an earlier release of documents linked to Epstein showed the extent of their friendship.

The latest Epstein files released by the United States on January 30 have resulted in the high-profile UK investigations.

Starmer has apologised to Epstein's victims and accused Mandelson of lying about the extent of his ties to the financier during the vetting process for his appointment to Washington.

But Mandelson's appointment has unleashed a political storm with two of Starmer's top aides resigning over the row.

The government is to release tens of thousands of emails, messages and documents on Mandelson's vetting procedure, which could ramp up the pressure on the prime minister and other senior ministers.

Mandelson, also a former European Union trade commissioner, stood down from parliament's unelected upper chamber, the House of Lords, earlier this month.

Officers from the Met's specialist crime team were also deployed earlier this month to search two of his addresses, one in the western English county of Wiltshire and the other in London, according to the police.

— AFP

Macau's most popular English-language newspaper – Your trustworthy source of news & views

The Macau Post Daily

China ready to work with all countries to improve global human rights governance: Wang Yi

China stands ready to work with all countries to improve global human rights governance, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday. — Story on p.7

Healthcare crisis looms over Greenland's isolated villages

The Greenlandic settlement of Kapisillit has no defibrillator – which, given it is only accessible via a two-hour boat ride or by helicopter, means that if you go into cardiac arrest while there, you could be in real trouble. — Story on p.11

Dozens dead in Mexico violence after drug kingpin killed

Twenty-five Mexican troops died in clashes with cartel gunmen following a raid that led to the death of the country's most-wanted drug lord, a top security official said yesterday. — Story on p.12

SJM to present 'Classics on Strings' with Macao Orchestra, int'l virtuosos

Khalel Vallo

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), Macao Orchestra Company, Limited and SJM Resorts, S.A. will jointly present the concert "Classics on Strings" on March 14 at the Macao Cultural Centre's (CCM) Grand Auditorium in Nape, featuring the Macao Orchestra (OM) under the baton of Lithuanian violinist Julian Rachlin, according to a statement by the bureau on Friday.

Scheduled for 8 p.m., the concert will showcase a programme of celebrated string pieces, including Beethoven's Coriolan Overture, Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante in E-flat Major, and Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 3 in A Minor "Scottish".

Rachlin, according to the statement, is an internationally acclaimed violinist and violist based in Vienna, who will serve as conductor for the evening. Over a career spanning more than three decades, Rachlin has

collaborated with numerous leading orchestras and conductors worldwide, the statement added.

He has appeared with prestigious ensembles and currently serves as Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Northern Sinfonia in the UK, the statement said.

Joining him on stage will be Canadian violinist and violist Sarah McElravy, the statement added. Known for her refined technique and expressive performances, according to the statement, McElravy has performed extensively across Asia, Europe and the US.

The concert will run for approximately one hour and 30 minutes, including an interval, the statement noted. Tickets are priced at 150, 200, 250 and 300 patacas, and are available through the Macao Ticketing Website (www.macaoticket.com).

Enquiries can be made via the 24-hour hotline 2855 5555. ■



This poster provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) on Friday promotes its upcoming concert "Classics on Strings" slated to be staged on March 14 at the Macao Cultural Centre's (CCM) Grand Auditorium in Nape.

Young man falls victim to prostitution scam, loses 86,000 yuan: PJ

Armindo Neves

A male non-resident worker (NRW) fell victim to a prostitution scam and lost 86,000 yuan (99,800 patacas), PJ spokesman Cheong Kim Fong said in a regular press conference yesterday.

On December 8, Cheong said, the victim came across an online advertisement offering commercial sex. After contacting the individual as directed, he was told that he needed to complete an online game first before the "date" could be arranged, Cheong said, adding that the victim was a young man.

The scammer sent a link and instructed the victim to top up his application to take part in the game with 2,000 yuan, Cheong said, adding that, subsequently, the victim was told that an operational error had caused his account to be frozen and that an additional payment would be required before any refund could be processed.

Cheong said that the victim, believing the predicament to



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Kim Fong looks on during yesterday's regular press conference at the PJ headquarters in Zape.

— Photo: Armindo Neves

be genuine, made more than 10 payments to the designated account between mid-December and February 8, totalling 86,000 yuan. However, the "date" never materialised, according to Cheong, adding that, suspecting he had been deceived, the victim reported the case to the Judiciary Police on Friday. ■

University of Oxford's Dame Jessica Rawson visits UTM



This undated, captionless handout photo provided by the Macao University of Tourism (UTM) yesterday shows Dame Jessica Rawson of the University of Oxford (front, third from left) posing for a group photo alongside UTM's assistant professor Gai Jorayev (front, second from right) with others outside the public university's Educational Restaurant in Mong Ha.

Khalel Vallo

University of Oxford Prof. Dame Jessica Rawson visited the Macao University of Tourism (UTM) on February 5, where she met with Rector Fanny Vong Chuk Kwan and engaged in academic exchanges with faculty and students, according to a statement by the public university yesterday.

A scholar in Chinese art and archaeology, the statement noted, Rawson is a former Keeper of the Department of Oriental Antiquities at the British Museum and former Pro Vice-Chancellor of the

University of Oxford.

The statement added that she was appointed Dame* in recognition of her contributions to Oriental Studies.

According to the statement, Rawson, 83, currently collaborates academically with UTM's assistant professor Gai Jorayev, and the visit aimed to further strengthen institutional exchange and cooperation.

During the meeting, Rawson spoke about the heritage value of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) and expressed appreciation for UTM's newly launched

Cultural Heritage degree programmes, the statement said.

Vong thanked Prof. Rawson for her visit, saying it would enhance UTM's international academic network and reinforce foundations for future collaboration in Cultural Heritage Studies, the statement noted, adding that Rawson also held in-depth discussions with faculty members and met individually with PhD students in Cultural Studies, offering feedback on their research proposals and methodologies.

According to the statement, the students described the session as "highly beneficial". During her visit, she toured key heritage sites in the Historic Centre of Macau and Coloane, where she noted the diversity of monuments, the level of conservation and research, and the active involvement of UTM scholars in local heritage work. ■

*The title "Dame" is a honorific title in the UK, awarded to women as a recognition of their significant contributions to society, typically in fields such as arts, sciences, or public service. It is equivalent to the male title of "Sir," and both titles are components of the British honours system. — Poe

Police arrest mainlander for cheating illegal currency exchange dealer

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police nabbed a man from the Chinese mainland on Saturday for defrauding an illegal currency exchange dealer, PJ spokesman Cheong Kim Fong said during yesterday regular press conference.

Cheong identified the suspect as a 26-year-old man surnamed Wu who claimed to be jobless.

According to Cheong, Wu recently met a fellow mainlander engaged in illegal currency exchange activities in a local casino.

On Saturday evening, Cheong said, Wu and the victim arranged to meet at a casino in Cotai.

Wu told dealer that he needed to film a short video for social media and asked to borrow cash to use as a prop. The dealer believed him and handed over gaming chips worth HK\$170,000 (174,000 patacas) to Wu, according to Cheong, adding that both went to

the casino cage and converted the chips into the equivalent amount of cash.

After receiving the cash, Cheong said, Wu said that he urgently needed the money to cover cash flow issues and right away grabbed the cash from the dealer. A dispute broke out between the two, which alerted casino security personnel, who then contacted the police, Cheong said.

Cheong said that PJ officers arrested Wu and seized the HK\$170,000 in cash involved in the incident, as well as his smartphone.

Wu has meanwhile been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing a fraud charge, according to Cheong, adding that as the victim is suspected of engaging in illegal currency exchange activities in local casinos, the Judiciary Police have opened a separate case to investigate the matter. ■



This undated photo provided by the Judiciary Police yesterday shows evidence seized from Wu.

Published since Aug 2004

- Director & Chief Editor – Harald Brüning
- Office Manager – Sally Cheong
- Marketing Manager – Kevin Cheung King Lok
- Managing Editor – Maria Cheang Ut Meng
- Editors – Lesley Wells, Johnny Un
- Senior Reporters – Tony Wong, Rui Pastorin
- Reporters – Ada Lei, Khalel Vallo, William Chan, Ida Cheong, Armindo Neves
- Chief Graphic Designer – Simon Wang
- Graphic Designer – Colin Zhong
- Administrative Assistants – Ester Mak, Carl Leong
- Printed by Tipografia Welfare Lda., 82-86 Rua dos Pescadores
- Wire services – AFP, Xinhua
- Chatbots: Poe, DeepSeek

Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY INTERVALS. MIST IN THE MORNING AND AT NIGHT. FORCE 2 TO 4 EAST TO SOUTHEASTERLY WINDS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 65% AND 98%.

20°C~26°C

Source: SMG

'My Library' now features more payment tools

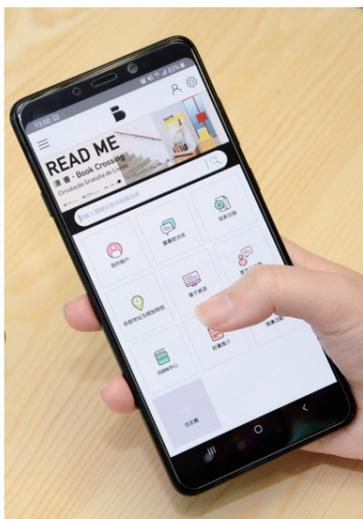
Rui Pastorin

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) said in a statement on Friday that more e-payment methods for the "My Library" app have been introduced in addition to the payment tools currently available.

The statement noted that Alipay (Macau), BNU App, CGB Pay, ICBC e-Payment, Luso Pay, Tai Fung Pay, UnionPay App and WeChat Pay, among others, are now available for making online payments. This supplements BOC Pay of Bank of China (Macau) and MPay. The added methods are aimed at "providing readers with more diversified and convenient services", the statement said.

Payments of fines can also be made at public library service counters or through the "Macau One Account - My Borrowed Books" function, according to the statement.

One can find more information by calling the library on 2856 7576



This photo downloaded from the Macao Public Library website last night shows a person using the "My Library" app.

or 2884 3105, as well as visiting the Public Library website on www.library.gov.mo. The "My Library App" can meanwhile be downloaded from the app store or Google Play. ■

Man, 89, becomes this year's 1st Legionnaires' disease patient

Tony Wong

Macau recorded this year's first case of Legionnaires' disease yesterday, the Health Bureau (SSM) announced in a statement last night.

According to the statement, the patient is an 89-year-old local man with a history of chronic illness, smoking, and a long-standing cough. During the incubation period, the statement said, he had a history of living in both Macau and neighbouring Guangdong Province's Zhongshan City.

While in Zhongshan, the statement said, the man came down with hoarseness and a worsening of his cough on February 13, but did not run a fever. He did not seek medical treatment at that time.

As his symptoms persisted after returning to Macau on

Friday, the statement said, the man sought treatment at the private Kiang Wu Hospital the next day, where a chest X-ray indicated his pulmonary infection and he was hospitalised. He was diagnosed with Legionnaires' disease on Sunday after testing positive for Legionella pneumophila, the statement said.

Kiang Wu Hospital reported the man's case to the Health Bureau yesterday.

The man was undergoing inpatient treatment at Kiang Wu Hospital at the time of last night's statement, which said that he requires oxygen treatment.

The statement noted that people can be infected with Legionnaires' disease after inhaling mist contaminated with Legionella bacteria released by artificial water systems such as central air-conditioning systems' cooling towers, jacuzzis, fountains, and household respiratory medical devices.

The statement underlined that people normally will not be infected with the disease after drinking water contaminated with the bacteria.

The statement noted that while anyone may develop Legionnaires' disease, certain groups of individuals are more susceptible to the disease, including males, senior citizens, smokers, alcoholics, and those with weakened immune systems, particularly those with chronic illnesses, such as cancer, diabetes, chronic lung or kidney diseases, and those taking steroids or drugs that suppress body immunity.

The statement noted that antibiotics are effective in treating Legionnaires' disease provided that they are taken early after the onset of the illness. ■

Symptoms of Legionnaires' disease

© Cleveland Clinic

Image courtesy of US Ohio's Cleveland Clinic

Market aims to boost cultural tourism & economic vitality in Mong Ha: organiser



Visitors attend the "MONG-HA VILLAS CULTURAL AND CREATIVE MARKET SERIES ACTIVITIES" on its opening day on Avenida do Coronel Mesquita (美副將大馬路) yesterday. - Photo: Armindo Neves

Armindo Neves

A four-day event, called "MONG-HA VILLAS CULTURAL AND CREATIVE MARKET SERIES ACTIVITIES", started yesterday, and the event organiser, Otto Ieong Hong Wai, CEO of 369 Co-op Town Ltd., said that the market aims to boost the cultural tourism and economic vitality in the neighbourhood.

The market is being held at Mong-Ha Villas on Avenida do Coronel Mesquita (美副將大馬路).

The market opening ceremony was also attended by Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, director of the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO).

The market, according to a statement posted on the organiser's social media account, themed "Traditional New Year Meets Trendy Fun," features 40 booths offering quality products and unique cultural and creative goods. The products on sale include handicrafts, woven items, cocktails and snacks, alongside coffee booths, as well as song and dance performances, the statement said.

Ieong also said that is company

has engaged more than 60 local businesses in the surrounding area, including several traditional time-honoured shops and small and micro enterprises, adding that these establishments are offering discounts and photo ops, known as "da kat" in Cantonese.

The market aims to provide residents and tourists alike with an ideal destination for the ongoing Chinese New Year (CNY) festivities, while also striving to stimulate cultural and tourism integration and boosting economic vitality within the neighbourhood.

Customarily, the Chinese New Year period, also known as Spring Festival, ends on the 15th day of the lunar calendar, i.e., next Tuesday.

Drone display to precede fireworks: MGTO chief

MGTO Director Helena de Senna Fernandes told reporters yesterday that Macau's government-organised drone and firework display sequences have been readjusted, featuring drone displays first before the conventional pyrotechnic displays.

Senna Fernandes talked to reporters at Mong-Ha Villas on Avenida do Coronel Mesquita on the sidelines of the opening ceremony of a four-day community market in the area.

Senna Fernandes said that, based on public opinion about the first time that the readjusted display sequences were held on Thursday, lasting just 15 minutes, the duration of the two remaining drone and firework shows - one of which took place last night, while the other is slated to be held next Tuesday on the evening of the Lantern Festival - has been extended to around 25 minutes each.

"The drone and pyrotechnic displays will be presented separately. The drone show will go first, followed by the fireworks, to ensure that the drone formations are clear," said Senna Fernandes.

She underlined that the display includes 3,888 drones, forming patterns on an exceptionally large scale. Spectators do not need to gather near the Macau Tower, she said, as they can enjoy the clear display even from the Taipa water front. ■

HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT FOR THE FLOOD VICTIMS IN PORTUGAL

Macau in Solidarity

MONETARY DONATIONS

- Banco Nacional Ultramarino (BNU) - Macau
- Account MOP: 9021818628
Account HKD: 9021818645
- Account Holder: Support Fund for Flood Victims in Portugal

EVERY GESTURE COUNTS. EVERY CONTRIBUTION IS A HELPING HAND EXTENDED TO THOSE WHO HAVE LOST EVERYTHING



FRC gallery rings in Year of the Horse with CNY exhibition

Rui Pastorin

The Rui Cunha Foundation (FRC) gallery continues to celebrate the Chinese New Year (CNY) and ring in the Year of the Horse with an ongoing exhibition that features a display of chosen artworks from the FRC Collection.

Titled “Riding the Year of the Fire Horse” and having kicked off a few days before the start of the Chinese New Year (CNY) holiday, members of the public dropping into the free-admission gallery in the city centre will find a variety of works of different disciplines. Among these are paintings of different styles and subjects, as well as sculptures and pieces of calligraphy, including those by the Flora Garden Poetry Friends Association, with all exhibits showcased under bright red festive lanterns.

Contributing and showcasing these pieces on display until March 7 are a variety of Chinese and Portuguese artists who have shown their work at the gallery in different exhibitions within a period of close to 14 years. Among the artists are Lei Iat Po, Natalie Lao (劉春紅), Lee Chau Ping, He Jianguo, Liu Shengli, Benson Lam Iang Sang, Li Jinxiang, Lei Pui Seong, Paulo Valentim, Arlinda Frota, Rui Calado and Vasco d’Orey Bobone, according to a statement on the FRC website, which notes a strong Asian influence on the artworks.

In all, the statement said, the exhibition features 26 works, presenting just a portion from more than a hundred pieces in the FRC collection. Themes explored, meanwhile, include movement, energy, spirituality and renewal, which the statement noted are closely related to traditional celebrations.

“The artworks on display reflect the dialogue between cultures, traditions, artistic languages, and diverse materials, highlighting the fusion of this symbolic richness associated with the lunar calendar holidays”, according to the statement.

The statement added that through the exhibition, the gallery, founded by local Portuguese lawyer Rui Cunha in 2012, aims to strengthen its commitment to promoting the arts and fostering communication among local artists from diverse backgrounds, highlighting Macau’s unity during historical events and celebrations.

The gallery is located at 749 Avenida da Praia Grande, Luen Pong Building. Members of the public can visit from Monday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturdays. ■

**According to AI chatbot Poe, the Year of the Fire Horse is part of the Chinese zodiac cycle and occurs every 60 years, with the previous one being in 1966. People born in the Year of the Fire Horse are believed to be energetic, confident, and independent. It also symbolises a dynamic personality that loves freedom and adventure.*



– Photos: Rui Pastorin

Sam urges local NPC deputies & CPPCC members to help Macau reach new heights

Continued from p.1

On matters of principle, Sam said, they should take a clear stand and remain resolute. In the exchange of diverse ideas, Sam said, they should keep to the correct direction, build the broadest possible consensus, and forge a powerful synergy for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and Macau's long-term prosperity and stability.

Third, Sam urged the local NPC deputies and CPPCC members to offer insightful advice with a sense of responsibility, underlining that their participation in national affairs is an honour and, more importantly, a responsibility.

With the annual sessions of the NPC and the CPPCC National Committee about to convene (next month), Sam said, the local NPC deputies and CPPCC members should, as always, fulfil their duties for the country and their responsibilities for the people, speak frankly, offer candid advice, and present sound proposals, fully

demonstrating Macau's sense of mission and responsibility and showcasing Macau's wisdom and strength.

Looking ahead to this year, Sam pledged that his government will unite and lead all sectors of Macau's civil society in thoroughly implementing the spirit of Xi's various important speeches concerning Macau's development, proactively align with the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan, and ensure the effective implementation of the MSAR's third five-year socioeconomic development plan.

Sam underlined that his government will uphold and improve the MSAR's executive-led governance, resolutely safeguard national security and social stability, solidly advance Macau's appropriate economic diversification, accelerate the development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, strengthen the local forces promoting patriotism and love for Macau, and effectively enhance governance effectiveness. ■

IAM tries to rescue 2 sick banyan trees near waterfront Kun lam Statue

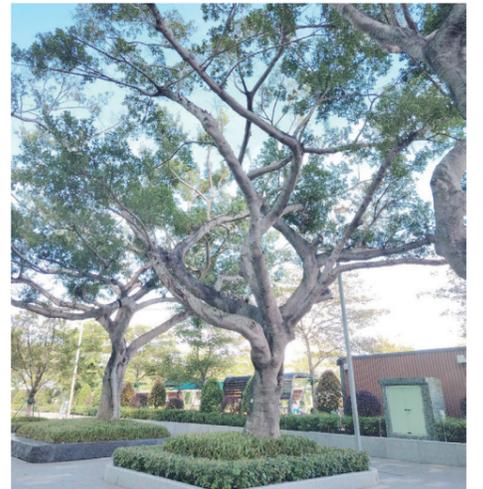
Tony Wong

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) said in a statement yesterday that its tree maintenance workers are trying to rescue two Chinese banyan trees, scientifically known as *Ficus microcarpa*, infected with brown root rot disease in the Kun Lam Statue Waterfront Leisure Area in Nape.

The statement said that during a routine inspection of trees' conditions across the city last year, IAM tree maintenance workers observed that the two banyan trees in the recreational area, located between the Macau Science Centre (MSC) and the waterfront Kun Lam Statue, showed various signs of infection, including slight yellowing of their canopy leaves, wilting of small branches at the top of the canopies, and fungal mats emerging at the base of the trees, which are clear symptoms of brown root rot.

Consequently, the statement said, immediate measures were taken with the aim of stabilising the two trees and reducing the risk of collapse, including pruning them and installing cables around the canopies. Moreover, the statement said, various treatment measures were implemented, such as removing fungal fruiting bodies from the tree bases and applying root stimulants and fungicides.

However, the statement said, the two banyan trees infected with brown root rot disease continued to weaken, with the canopies shrinking, leaves becoming smaller, new leaves yellowing, and small branches drying out, indicating a deterioration in their condition.



This undated handout photo released by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) yesterday shows the two Chinese banyan trees in the Kun Lam Statue Waterfront Leisure Area.

The statement underlined that IAM tree maintenance workers will continue to treat the two banyan trees, closely monitoring changes in their health to take timely measures. Information boards have been placed on the two trees to inform the public of their condition, the statement said.

During the treatment of the two trees, the statement said, members of the public are advised to avoid walking near them. The bureau also said that those who notice any abnormal conditions in trees can report to the bureau via its "IAM Connect" mobile app or by calling its service hotline on 2833 7676. ■



Passengers leave the arrivals hall of Baiyun International Airport in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong Province, yesterday. According to official data, the airport has handled 5.27 million passengers since the Spring Festival travel rush began on February 2. - Xinhua

RTHK to make regional mark with ASEAN push

HONG KONG – Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) is set to strengthen its international presence by pursuing partnerships with broadcasting organisations in Southeast Asia, according to Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development Algernon Yau Ying-wah.

Speaking at RTHK's spring reception yesterday, he revealed that the public broadcaster would explore the possibility of signing memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with its counterparts in ASEAN countries, including Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand.

"Looking to the future, RTHK is committed to expanding international connections," Yau said.

His remarks followed a review of what he described as an "impressive" year for the broadcaster.

Yau praised RTHK for consistently delivering high-quality and diverse programming while effectively leveraging its media platforms to share compelling stories about both the nation and Hong Kong.

He highlighted several key achievements from the past year, especially the production of a five-episode mini-drama commemorating the 80th anniversary of victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War in collaboration with the Information Services Department.

Yau also pointed to RTHK's successful broadcasting of the National Games at the end of last year.

Beyond its local output, he noted the broadcaster's growing engagement with the mainland.

That, he said, saw RTHK teams visiting various provinces and cities to strengthen ties with local media, resulting in MOUs being signed with partners such as the Guangzhou Broadcasting Network and Guangxi Radio and Television.

Yau expressed strong confidence in the broadcaster's future based on this momentum.

"I firmly believe that RTHK will continue to take innovative steps forward in the new year," he said.

"Let's strive to bring more quality programmes and services to the citizens. Additionally, we will play a bridging role in telling wonderful stories of our nation and Hong Kong to the world."

Adding to the forward-looking tone of the event, Director of Broadcasting Angelina Kwan Yuen-yeo echoed the ambition for greater global engagement.

She expressed hope that RTHK would not only continue to deliver more high-quality productions to its audience but also significantly expand its collaboration with media outlets around the world.

- RTHK, MPD

PERCORREI OS CAMINHOS DE

CAMILO

NOS 100 ANOS DO PASSAMENTO DE

PESSANHA

CONVIDADOS

ANTÓNIO CARLOS CORTEZ

FREDERICO RATO

JOSÉ BASTO DA SILVA

MODERADOR

SHEE VÁ



3 DE MARÇO | 18:30

BIBLIOTECA CAMILO PESSANHA

IPOR - INSTITUTO PORTUGUÊS DO ORIENTE

Organização



Associados IPOR
FUNDAÇÃO ORIENTE

Parceria



Apoio



CLUBE DE LEITURA

From trash to cash – tech-driven recycling boosts circular economy in China

HANGZHOU – Scanning a code, opening a hatch, and tossing in bottles, Yuan Meirong completes the recycling process in less than 10 seconds. With a ding, 0.8 yuan is credited to her account.

“It’s so convenient,” said the resident from Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang Province, gesturing at a smart recycling bin. “Now I can easily recycle delivery boxes and bottles for a little reward. It’s fun.”

Operated by the internet recycling firm Lovere, the smart bin is one of 870 units deployed across nearly 400 residential communities in Hangzhou’s Xihu District since its July 2024 pilot launch.

Residents can enter a phone number or scan a QR code to recycle items such as plastic bottles, cardboard, old clothes, and takeaway containers. The bin automatically weighs the items and pays about 0.6 yuan per kg directly to the user’s account.

More than a mere convenience, the bins demonstrate how technology is monetizing waste streams across Chinese cities, transforming passive disposal into people’s active participation in the circular economy.

Since deploying the smart bins, recyclable-sorting accuracy has reached 98.5 percent, with monthly recycling volume averaging 1,000 tonnes, said Zhang Yixiang, Lovere’s Hangzhou chief.

The company has placed over 50,000 bins in 38 cities and has recycled 2 million tonnes for 30 million users.

In Xihu District alone, residents have used the bins 2.58 million times,

receiving 4.2 million yuan in total. The top user recycled 9 tonnes, earning 5,400 yuan, according to the company.

Zhang Kang, Lovere’s Hangzhou operations head, said the sensors trigger pickups only when bins are full, and an automated sorting center categorizes materials into more than 80 types for sale.

“With scale, the business is expected to become profitable,” he said.

The Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee’s recommendations for formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) for the country’s economic and social development propose promoting a circular economy.

At Xianyu, a leading second-hand trading platform of China’s internet giant Alibaba, 7 million used items were listed on average every day in 2025, with daily trading volume up 30 percent year on year.

“Every transaction is users’ participation in a green lifestyle,” said Ding Jian, the platform’s CEO.

From April 2024 to March 2025, Xianyu users reduced carbon emissions by 11.8 million tonnes through trading and recycling – equivalent to the annual electricity consumption of 7.4 million households, Ding said.

According to the China Association of Circular Economy, the circular economy accounted for about 30 percent of the country’s carbon reduction from 2021 to 2025, and this share is expected to rise to 35 percent by 2030.

In Hangzhou’s Yuhang District, resident Chai Yuyong praised “Huge,”

a door-to-door recycling service, which collected his old sofa and table for free in 20 minutes.

Residents place orders via an app, and a worker arrives within an hour to collect, weigh and pay for items such as old appliances.

“Living on a high floor, I found it a hassle to dispose of the bulky old furniture by myself. Now, with just a tap on my phone, they come to collect and carry them for free. It’s a real relief,” Chai said.

Hu Shaoping, vice president of the company Huge Recycle, said that over the past 10 years, the company has built an end-to-end chain from household collection to sorting, dismantling and resource reuse.

The service offers transparent pricing for used appliances of different sizes. Residents are paid in “green coins,” which can be redeemed for cash or spent at Huge’s online mall, further driving green consumption. To date, the company has issued nearly 500 million yuan in green coins.

Xu Lin, a professor at Zhejiang University, noted that smart technology has made recycling and green consumption as simple as a phone scan. These small actions, he said, show how the public has moved from being told what to do to taking the lead in the circular economy.

“If the full potential of public participation is unleashed, carbon reduction will become a social consensus and daily habit for everyone,” Xu said.

– Xinhua

Superintelligence development: Better slow than sorry

Analysis by Jin Ding/China Daily

Editor’s note: As tech giants and research institutes across the world are racing to develop artificial general intelligence and even aiming to usher in the future of superintelligence, an open letter issued months ago and calling for temporary “prohibition” on the development of superintelligence has garnered support from some scientists, including artificial intelligence pioneers. Zeng Yi, a researcher at the Institute of Automation of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, spoke to Peng Fei, a commentator of People’s Daily, about the impact superintelligence could have and why safety should be the top priority. Below are excerpts of the interview. The views don’t necessarily represent those of China Daily.

Artificial general intelligence generally refers to an information processing tool with high generalization capability, which approaches or reaches the level of human intelligence and boasts broad application prospects.

Artificial superintelligence, by contrast, refers to intelligence that surpasses human intelligence in all aspects and is regarded as a life-like entity. This means it would develop autonomous consciousness, and many of its thoughts and actions would likely be incomprehensible to humans, and therefore less controllable.

It is hoped that superintelligence will be “super-altruistic”, but what if it turns out to be “super-malevolent”? It is this sense of uncertainty that causes concern.

Superintelligence cannot be simply compared to any technological tool in history, as the possibility of it possessing independent cognition and surpassing human intelligence presents an unprecedented challenge. If the goals of superintelligence are inconsistent with human values, even minor deviations could be amplified by its capabilities and lead to catastrophic consequences.

Safety must be the first priority for the development of superintelligence. That is to say, it should be embedded in its “genes”. Safety guardrails should not be lowered over concerns that they may affect the model’s capabilities. Comprehensive assessment is needed to identify as many potential hazards as possible and strengthen the model’s safety.

Typical security issues such as privacy leakage and disinformation can be effectively addressed and short-term risks properly handled through the technical cycle of “attack-defense-evaluation” and the continuous upgrading of the model.

But in the long run, the real challenge lies in aligning artificial superintelligence with human expectations. Reinforcement learning from human feedback, the current approach that embeds human values into AI through human-machine interaction, will likely prove ineffective for superintelligence.

Given that superintelligence may develop self-awareness, an ideal vision is to make it develop moral intuition, empathy and altruism on its own, rather than merely relying on values and rules imposed from the outside. Risks can only be minimized when AI evolves from being ethically compliant to having morality.

Humanity needs to prevent the development of AI from turning into an “arms race”. The creation of the world’s first superintelligence might not require international cooperation, but ensuring that superintelligence is safe and reliable for all humanity will require global collaboration.

The world needs an efficient and effective international institution to coordinate the governance of AI and ensure its safety. In August 2025, the United Nations General Assembly decided to establish the Independent International Scientific Panel on AI and the Global Dialogue on AI Governance to promote sustainable development and bridge the digital divide. Explorations in this regard should be further deepened and continued.

Those countries with advanced AI technologies bear a greater responsibility and obligation to prevent the reckless development of superintelligence in the absence of rules.

China advocates building a community with a shared future for humanity and a community with a shared future in cyberspace. Emphasizing the coordination of development and safety, the country has put forward the Global AI Governance Initiative. These initiatives deserve global promotion and implementation in relation to AI as well.

It is better to slow down a bit to lay a solid foundation for safety, than to seek quick success and instant benefits that might lead human society into an irreversible and perilous situation.

– Courtesy of China Daily



A dragon dance performance is staged during a Chinese New Year celebratory event at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia, on Sunday.

– Xinhua

CPC launches education campaign to promote sound performance mindset

BEIJING – The General Office of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee has issued a circular to launch a Party-wide campaign to guide CPC members, especially officials, in establishing and practicing a correct understanding of what it means to perform well.

The campaign, running from late February to July, will focus on leadership teams and leading officials of the CPC at the county and director level

and above, with particular emphasis on chief officials, according to the circular.

It urges efforts to guide Party organizations at all levels, as well as Party members and officials, to deliver tangible benefits to the people through practical work, address misguided views about achievements, and ensure the effective implementation of major decisions made by the Party Central Committee, laying a solid foundation for the start of the 15th Five-Year Plan

period (2026-2030) and supporting China’s broader modernization drive.

The campaign will emphasize guiding CPC members to maintain a people-centered approach and take concrete action to meet public needs, the circular notes.

The circular also stresses the need for a differentiated approach tailored to local and sectoral conditions in carrying out the campaign, while warning against empty formalities.

– Xinhua

Xi congratulates Kim on election as general secretary of Workers' Party of Korea

BEIJING – General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee Xi Jinping yesterday congratulated Kim Jong Un on his election as the general secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) at the Ninth Congress of the party.

In his message, Xi noted that since the Eighth Congress of the WPK, the Central Committee of the WPK headed by Kim has united and led the DPRK people in hard work, continuously achieving new accomplishments in the cause of socialist construction in the country.

Comrade Kim's re-election as general secretary of the WPK once again reflects the high trust and wholehearted support of the party, the government, and the people of the DPRK for the general secretary, Xi said.

He added that it is of great significance that the Ninth Congress of the WPK was successfully held at a crucial stage, when the party's and the country's undertakings enter a phase that builds on the past and ushers in the future.

He expressed hope that under the strong leadership of the Central Committee of the WPK headed by the general secretary, the

party and the people of the DPRK will take this congress as an opportunity to continuously open up new prospects for the socialist cause of the DPRK.

China and the DPRK are friendly socialist neighbors who stand by each other, Xi said, stressing that it is an unswerving policy of the CPC and the Chinese government to preserve, consolidate and develop China-DPRK relations.

In recent years, Xi noted, he has met with Kim multiple times, jointly guiding the positive development of China-DPRK relations.

Noting that the world is undergoing accelerated changes unseen in a century and

that the international landscape is marked by transformation and turbulence, Xi said he stands ready to work with Kim to guide relevant departments and local authorities of both sides to implement the important consensus reached by the two sides, continuously write new chapters of China-DPRK friendly cooperation, advance the socialist cause of both countries, enhance the well-being and friendship of the two peoples, and make positive contributions to promoting peace, stability, development and prosperity in the region and the world at large. (More on page 8) – Xinhua

China assessing impact of US Supreme Court's tariffs ruling: MOC spokesperson

BEIJING – The Ministry of Commerce said yesterday that it has noted the US Supreme Court's ruling against the US government's tariffs imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), and is conducting a comprehensive assessment of its relevant content and impact.

The US Supreme Court ruled on Friday that the US government's imposition of tariffs on trading partners under the IEEPA is illegal.

While responding to media inquiries, a ministry spokesperson said that China has always opposed all forms of unilateral tariff hikes, emphasizing that there are no winners in a trade war and that protectionism leads to a dead end.

The unilateral measures of the US side, such as the imposition of reciprocal tariffs and

fentanyl tariffs, not only violate international economic and trade rules but also contravene domestic laws of the United States, and are not in the interests of any party, the spokesperson added.

"China urges the United States to lift the unilateral tariffs imposed on trading partners," the spokesperson said, stressing that when China and the United States cooperate, both benefit; and that when they fight, both suffer.

The spokesperson further stated that China has noted that the US side is preparing to use alternative measures, such as trade investigations, in an attempt to maintain tariffs imposed on its trading partners. "China will closely monitor this and firmly safeguard its own interests." – Xinhua

Sci-tech museums draw over 3.5 million visits during Spring Festival holiday

BEIJING – The Chinese mainland's sci-tech museums received over 3.5 million visits during the nine-day Spring Festival holiday, presenting festive science exhibits that integrated knowledge, fun and cultural experiences to the public, the China Science and Technology Museum (CSTM) in Beijing said yesterday.

CSTM itself welcomed more than 200,000 visitors with themed events celebrating the Year of the Horse, while sci-tech museums

nationwide tailored their activities to local conditions, launching a variety of science-themed events that blended Chinese zodiac culture, intangible cultural heritage and cutting-edge technologies.

According to CSTM, it will lead the country's sci-tech museums to continue innovating forms of science popularization and providing better services in 2026, aiming to strengthen the foundations for the nation's self-reliance in science and technology. – Xinhua

China ready to work with all countries to improve global human rights governance: Wang Yi



Foreign Minister Wang Yi, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, in Beijing yesterday delivers a speech via video link at the high-level segment of the 61st session of the United Nations Human Rights Council. – Xinhua

BEIJING – China stands ready to work with all countries to improve global human rights governance and promote the sound development of the international human rights cause, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday.

Wang, who is also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks in a speech delivered via video link during the high-level segment of the 61st session of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Wang noted that the international situation is complex and intertwined, and that global human rights governance and the post-World War II international order are facing new tests of the times. The Global Governance Initiative proposed by China has received support and responses from more than 150 countries and international organizations, he added.

Wang called for upholding sovereign equality and safeguarding the original aspirations of global human rights governance. The only path that can lead to ever-broader prospects is one of human rights development, rooted in a country's specific national conditions and responsive to the needs of its people, he said.

All parties should abide by the international rule of law and consolidate the foundations of global human rights governance, Wang noted. Together, all countries should uphold the "golden rule" of non-interference in one another's internal affairs, and firmly reject words and deeds that create double standards in the name of human rights, he said.

He called for practicing multilateralism and addressing the challenges to global human rights governance. All countries should reject all forms of colonialism or racial discrimination, and respond properly to rising issues such as artificial intelligence, as well as climate change and human rights.

Wang emphasized that all parties should advocate a people-oriented approach to global human rights governance and enrich the connotations of such governance. The international community should also position the right to development in a more prominent position on the multilateral human rights agenda, he said.

Calling for action-oriented approaches to and the enhanced efficacy of global human rights governance, Wang said that China is willing to coordinate its actions with the international community to collectively chart a new blueprint for this global cause.

Noting that 2026 marks the start of China's 15th Five-Year Plan period, he said the country will continue advancing its whole-process people's democracy, ensuring the achievements of Chinese modernization benefit all people in a more equitable manner.

China stands ready to work with all countries to promote common development and prosperity, safeguard international fairness and justice, uphold the common values of humanity, and build a community with a shared future for all, with the aim of ensuring that the progress of human rights civilization benefits the whole world, he stressed. – Xinhua



Xinhua News Agency President Fu Hua (left) shakes hands with World Trade Organization (WTO) Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala in Geneva, Switzerland, yesterday. – Xinhua

Duterte authorised murders, ICC told as hearings open

Richard Carter with Cecil Morella in Manila

THE HAGUE – Rodrigo Duterte personally authorised murders and hand-picked some of the victims of his “war on drugs”, the International Criminal Court heard yesterday, as proceedings against the former Philippines president kicked off.

ICC deputy prosecutor Mame Mandiaye Niang said the week-long “confirmation of charges” hearings, where judges will decide whether to open a full trial against Duterte, was “a reminder that those in power are not above the law”.

The 80-year-old Duterte did not appear after the court granted a defence request for his absence, despite judges ruling he was fit to take part.

Following the hearings, the judges will have 60 days to issue a written decision on whether he should face a full trial.

Niang said Duterte played a “pivotal” role in the extrajudicial killings of suspected drug dealers and users, first as mayor of Davao City then as president.

He “authorised murders and personally selected some of the victims”, said Niang.

Duterte’s defence lawyer Nicholas Kaufman hit back, calling the charges “grievously misplaced and politically motivated.”

Duterte “stands behind his legacy resolutely. He maintains his innocence absolutely,” said Kaufman.

Kaufman acknowledged that his client was “a unique phenomenon” who was “gung-ho in his ways” and full of “hyperbole, bluster and rhetoric.”

However, he accused the prosecution of “cherry-picking” Duterte’s speeches, adding that many of them insist on the importance of sticking to the law.

Rival groups of demonstrators camped outside the court from early yesterday.

Patricia Enriquez, a 36-year-old researcher, said it was a “historic moment” for victims of Duterte’s alleged crimes.

“It is emotional. It is hopeful. It is also very painful,” she told AFP.

“I’m hoping that all the Filipinos and everybody in the world will stand



Protestors, rallying in support of the detention of former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, hold a placard which reads as « hold Duterte accountable now » outside of the International Criminal Court (ICC) where he will be questioned by the International Criminal Court on charges of crimes against humanity, in The Hague yesterday. – AFP

with us, stand with truth, stand with justice and stand with accountability.”

However, 35-year-old chef Aldo Villarta said it was a “slap in the face” for the Philippines that an international court was trying the country’s former leader.

“We’ve already suffered so long from colonisation,” said Villarta, who also argued that Duterte’s human rights were being infringed by imprisonment.

‘High value targets’

Duterte faces three counts of crimes against humanity, with prosecutors alleging his involvement in at least 76 murders between 2013 and 2018.

The true number of killings during his campaign in the Philippines is thought to be in the thousands, and lawyers for the victims have argued that a full trial could encourage more families to come forward.

Niang said the murders charges were “merely a fraction” of the real numbers killed.

Another prosecutor, Julian Nicholls, said: “The evidence shows... that Mr Duterte murdered thousands of his own people, Filipino men, women, and children.”

Showing multiple videos of Duterte threatening to kill criminals, Nicholls said: “He repeatedly promised to kill people. He said it. He did it. That is who he is.”

Duterte, who was president from 2016 to 2022, was arrested in

Manila in March last year, flown to the Netherlands and has since been held at the ICC’s detention unit at Scheveningen Prison.

He followed his initial hearing three days later by video link, appearing dazed and frail and barely speaking.

The first of three counts against Duterte concerns his alleged involvement as a co-perpetrator in 19 murders carried out between 2013 and 2016 while he was mayor of Davao City.

The second relates to 14 murders of so-called “High Value Targets” in 2016 and 2017 when he was president.

The third charge covers 43 murders committed during “clearance” operations of lower-level alleged drug users or pushers across the Philippines between 2016 and 2018.

In Manila, about 60 relatives of those killed in the crackdown gathered around two television monitors to watch the hearing at a Catholic Church-run community centre for the poor.

The mainly elderly and middle-aged women whose husbands or sons were shot dead in police operations told AFP they were disappointed Duterte had not been required to appear.

“Maybe he does not want to own up to his sins,” said Gloria Sarmiento, whose boyfriend was found dead alongside his brother in the last few weeks of the Duterte presidency.

“Maybe he is a coward.” – AFP

S Korea protests ‘Victory’ banner hung from Russian embassy

SEOUL – South Korea has protested to Russia after its embassy in Seoul unfurled a giant banner declaring “Victory will be ours”, an apparent reference to the anniversary of the Ukraine war.

South Korea opposes Moscow’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine and its recruitment of soldiers from North Korea, with which Seoul remains technically at war.

The red, white and blue banner, written in Russian, was first spotted over the weekend and remained in place at the embassy yesterday morning, an AFP reporter saw.

Its appearance has coincided with the four-year anniversary of the Ukraine war, which falls today.

“The South Korean government has consistently maintained the position that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is an illegal act,” Seoul’s foreign ministry said in a statement on Sunday.

“In this context, we have conveyed our position to the Russian side regarding the recent display of a banner on the outer walls of the Russian Embassy in Seoul and public remarks made by the Russian Ambassador to South Korea.”

Neither the Russian nor Ukrainian embassies in Seoul

immediately responded to a request for comment.

The incident follows reported remarks this month by Moscow’s ambassador Georgy Zinoviev in praise of the North Korean soldiers fighting for Russia.

“Russia is well aware of how much North Korean troops contributed to liberating the southern part of the Kursk region from Ukrainian forces,” Zinoviev said during a meeting with South Korean reporters, according to the *Chosun Ilbo* newspaper.

North Korea has sent thousands of troops to fight for Russia, according to South Korean and Western intelligence agencies.

Seoul has estimated that around 2,000 have been killed.

Analysts say North Korea is receiving financial aid, military technology, food and energy supplies from Russia in return.

Seoul has said the troop deployments constitute a “serious threat to our national security” and that military cooperation between North Korea and Russia “must therefore cease”.

North and South Korea are still technically at war because the 1950–53 Korean War ended with an armistice rather than a peace treaty. – AFP



A girl holds a lantern during the national on Sunday. The national Lunar New Year festival themed “Harmony of the Nusantara’s Lunar New Year” is held here from February 22 to March 3. – Xinhua

N Korea touts nuclear advances as Kim re-chosen to lead ruling party

SEOUL – North Korea’s ruling party touted nuclear advances as it re-elected Kim Jong Un to the top post of general secretary, state media said yesterday, during a rare national congress.

Thousands of party elites have packed the capital Pyongyang for a once-in-five-years summit of the ruling Workers’ Party, a gathering that directs state efforts on everything from diplomacy to war planning.

The congress offers a rare glimpse into the political workings of reclusive North Korea, and is widely seen as a forum for Kim to flex his grip on power.

Military top brass made a “pledge of loyalty” to Kim as delegates rubber-stamped his re-election as general secretary on Sunday, the

Korean Central News Agency said.

The congress singled out Kim’s efforts to keep unnamed foes at bay by “radically” improving its “nuclear forces”.

“He has energetically led the work to turn the Korean People’s Army, the pivot of national defence and pillar of safeguarding peace, into an elite and powerful army,” read a party statement.

“And thus [he has] built the revolutionary armed forces capable of coping with any threat of aggression on their own initiative and fully prepared for any form of war.”

China’s President Xi Jinping hailed a “new chapter” in relations with North Korea after Kim’s re-election.

In a striking display of his

elevated status on the world stage, Kim appeared alongside Xi and Russia’s Vladimir Putin at a military parade in Beijing last year.

Kim is expected to unveil the next phase in North Korea’s nuclear weapons programme later in the days-long congress.

Under Kim, North Korea’s nuclear arsenal has been transformed from a source of mild global concern to something treated as a genuine threat.

It has been more than eight years since North Korea’s last nuclear test triggered a man-made earthquake underneath the northern Hamyong mountains.

Pyongyang’s atomic scientists have worked since then to harness this power in portable warheads that can

be attached to long-range missiles.

Kim unveiled a battery of huge nuclear-capable rocket launchers just days before the congress opened.

Friend or foe

Photos released by state media showed dozens of launch vehicles parked in neat rows on the plaza of Pyongyang’s House of Culture.

It is just the ninth time the Workers’ Party congress has convened under North Korea’s decades-spanning Kim rule.

The meeting was shelved for decades under Kim’s father Kim Jong Il, but was revived in 2016.

Analysts will scour photographs to see which officials are seated closest to Kim, and who is banished

to the back row.

Particular attention will be placed on the whereabouts of Kim’s teenage daughter Ju Ae, who has emerged as North Korea’s heir apparent according to Seoul’s national intelligence service.

At the previous congress five years ago, Kim declared that the United States was his nation’s “biggest enemy”.

There is keen interest in whether Kim might use the congress to soften this stance, or double down.

US President Donald Trump stepped up his courtship of Kim during a tour of Asia last year, saying he was “100 percent” open to a meeting.

Kim has so far largely shunned efforts to resume top-level diplomatic dialogue. – AFP



Volunteers distribute drinks to Muslim devotees during the Islamic holy fasting month of Ramadan in Karachi, Pakistan yesterday.

– AFP

Malaysia mulls law to curb premiership to 2 terms

KUALA LUMPUR – Malaysia introduced new legislation yesterday to restrict the prime minister's tenure to a maximum of two terms, a move aimed at boosting accountability and curbing the overreach of executive powers.

The Southeast Asian nation currently places no cap on how many terms a premier can serve.

Former leader Mahathir Mohamad held office for 24 years across two stints – from 1981 to 2003 and again between 2018 and 2020.

Current Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in January announced a push for a two-term limit amid renewed calls for him to tackle corruption and improve governance.

In its election manifesto in 2022, Anwar's ruling Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition in 2022 pledged a two-term limit on the premiership.

But there has been criticism

about the slow pace of reform, local media reports said, with the move seen as an attempt to win back urban voters in the run-up to general elections slated for next year.

Anwar last week said that if the law is implemented, it would apply to him first.

He added that a 10-year period was sufficient for those in office to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

"I won't be making laws for other people. The law must be applied to me first," he said.

The proposed change requires approval from at least two-thirds of lawmakers, or 148 out of the 222 seats in the lower house, to pass.

Currently, there is no formal constitutional limit on how long a prime minister may serve, provided the individual commands majority support in the Dewan Rakyat, the Malaysian parliament.

– AFP

Myanmar to convene new parliament sessions in March

YANGON – Myanmar will convene the first session of its third Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) on March 16, according to an announcement issued by the Pyithu Hluttaw last night.

The National Defense and Security Council also released an announcement yesterday, stating that the first session of the third Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) and the first sessions of the third Region and State Hluttaws (Region and State Parliaments) will be held on March 18 and March 20, respectively.

Myanmar's Union Solidarity and Development Party has won a majority of seats in the Union Parliament in a general election earlier this year, according to official results released by the Union Election Commission.

Myanmar's Union Parliament consists of two houses with a total of 664 seats: the 440-seat Pyithu Hluttaw and the 224-seat Amyotha Hluttaw.

The newly formed Union Parliament will elect a new president, who will then form a new Union Government.

– Xinhua



Actors dressed as Hindu deity Hanuman take part in a religious procession in Amritsar, India yesterday.

– AFP

India replaces British architect's statue with independence hero

NEW DELHI – India unveiled a bust of an independence-era nationalist icon at the presidential palace yesterday, replacing a monument to British architect Edwin Lutyens in a symbolic break from its colonial past.

Lutyens was the chief architect of New Delhi, the area that houses India's power centre, and still often referred to as Lutyens' Delhi.

His bust was replaced with that of Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, known as Rajaji, a towering statesman, jurist and writer who served as Governor General from 1948 to 1950, bridging the transition from British rule to the modern Indian republic.

"This initiative is part of series of steps being taken towards shedding the vestiges of colonial mindset and embracing, with pride,

the richness of India's culture," said President Droupadi Murmu in a statement.

Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi has long sought to eliminate remnants of India's colonial past by reshaping several key British-era relics with his own mega projects.

In 2023 he inaugurated a grand new hexagonal national parliament, replacing a colonial-era building, also designed by Lutyens along with his British colleague, Herbert Baker.

Modi said the move to replace Lutyens' bust was part of initiatives to achieve "freedom from the mindset of slavery".

"Statues of British administrators were allowed to remain... but those of the nation's greatest sons were denied space," he said in a radio

broadcast on Saturday. "Today, the country is leaving that colonial mindset behind."

In 2022, Modi's government erected a statue of an independence hero venerated for taking up arms against colonial rule – but controversial for his collaboration with Nazi Germany's war machinery.

The statue of Subhas Chandra Bose was placed in a canopy near the India Gate war memorial in New Delhi on a long empty plinth that had once housed a statue of British monarch King George V.

The canopy, too, had been designed by Lutyens.

Lutyens' great-grandson, British biologist Matt Ridley, said he was "sad to read that the bust of Lutyens [my great grandfather] is to be removed from the presidential palace he designed in Delhi".

– AFP

Scientists trial e-DNA to guard Antarctica from invasive marine species

MELBOURNE – Antarctic scientists in Australia have trialled a DNA "barcoding" technique that could help prevent invasive marine species from reaching polar ecosystems.

Researchers from the Australian Antarctic Program (AAP) used environmental DNA, or eDNA shed by all organisms into the environment, to detect species known to hitch-hike on ships' hulls during a 2022 voyage from the island state of Tasmania to sub-Antarctic Macquarie Island, an AAP statement said yesterday.

The research, published in *Science of The Total Environment*, showed that eDNA sampling could help ensure effective biosecurity practices, such as hull cleaning, and

identify invasive species before they can establish, said AAP molecular biologist Leonie Suter from Australia's University of Tasmania.

"By collecting environmental samples, such as soil or water, we can analyze this DNA and identify what organisms are present," Suter said.

The research showed that eDNA monitoring could validate biofouling management to protect sub-Antarctic and Antarctic marine environments.

To collect the eDNA samples, the team used small sponges contained inside perforated plastic balls, to absorb seawater containing DNA fragments shed by organisms.

Visual checks identified 24 species attached to the ship hull,

while eDNA detected 41, including worms, sea stars, molluscs, sponges, algae, crabs and sea squirts, the study showed.

Researchers found evidence of hull-associated species both in the waters of the Tasmanian state capital Hobart and around Macquarie Island.

"Additional assessments, such as visual surveys and further sampling, are needed to determine whether living organisms are transported on the ship's hull, and whether they could pose a risk to the environment," Suter said.

The researchers said eDNA monitoring offers a valuable new tool as climate change and increased human activity heighten biosecurity risks.

– Xinhua

Drones disrupt 50 Vietnam flights during Lunar New Year: state

HANOI – Unauthorised drones disrupted more than 50 flights at Vietnam's Danang international airport during the busy Lunar New Year holiday, state media said yesterday.

Two separate incidents last week saw flights delayed or forced into holding patterns before landing when authorities detected drones flying dangerously close to

aircraft, the *Thanh Nien* newspaper reported.

It was not clear who was operating the drones or how close they came to the aircraft.

However, a total of 54 flights were delayed because of the drone incursions, *Thanh Nien* said, citing airport authorities.

Danang airport officials did

not immediately respond to AFP's request for comment.

Vietnam bans the private use of unmanned aerial vehicles and high-intensity lighting around airports.

Danang is Vietnam's main aviation hub for its central regions, handling more than 300 flights per day during the peak holiday season, according to *Thanh Nien*.

– AFP

Vietnam proposes national database center to combat fake news

HANOI – Vietnam's Ministry of Public Security has proposed establishing a national database center for the prevention and control of fake news and false information, local newspaper *Tuoi Tre* (Youth) reported yesterday.

The draft decree defines fake news as completely fabricated information, while false information refers to content that is partially untrue.

The center is expected to receive reports, complaints and denunciations related to fake and false information, publicly announce and warn of verified cases, and provide guidance and clarification to the public.

The proposed center will be tasked with coordinating data sharing and the labeling of fake or false information among ministries, agencies and local

authorities to ensure nationwide consistency.

The ministry has proposed applying the maximum fines stipulated under the Law on Handling Administrative Violations, with penalties of up to VND100 million (about US\$3,850) for individuals and VND200 million (about US\$7,700) for organizations violating regulations on fake and false information.

– Xinhua

Israeli minister says army will occupy all Gaza if Hamas does not disarm



Palestinian volunteers distribute food to families in need at the Bureij camp in Gaza for the displaced during the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan yesterday. — AFP

JERUSALEM – Israeli far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said yesterday that Palestinian Islamist group Hamas may soon be given a deadline to lay down its weapons.

“We estimate that in the coming days, Hamas will be given an ultimatum to disarm and completely demilitarise Gaza,” Smotrich said in an interview with public broadcaster Kan.

Israel invaded the Gaza Strip in 2023, in retaliation for Hamas’s unprecedented October 7 attack.

Under the first phase of a US-sponsored ceasefire in Gaza intended to halt two years of war, the Israeli army withdrew to positions behind a so-called Yellow Line, but still controls over half of the territory.

Both Hamas and Israel accuse each other of near-daily ceasefire violations, with the health ministry in Gaza reporting 615 people killed by Israeli forces since the truce started.

The Israeli military says it has

lost five of its soldiers during the same period.

If Hamas does not comply with the Israeli ultimatum to disarm, the army “will have international legitimacy and American backing to do it itself, and the IDF [Israel Defence Forces] is already preparing for this and is making plans”, said the minister, who is a member of Israel’s security cabinet charged with approving large-scale military operations.

The second ceasefire phase, which officially began last month, calls for a gradual withdrawal of the Israeli army and the disarmament of Hamas, which the militant group has vehemently opposed.

“The IDF will definitely enter and occupy Gaza if Hamas does not disarm,” Smotrich said.

Asked how the military would do this, he said “there are two or three alternatives right now that we are examining”.

The peace plan put forward by US President Donald Trump also

calls for the establishment of a 20,000-strong peacekeeping force, called the International Stabilisation Force (ISF), to which several countries have committed troops.

Asked how the Israeli army would operate against Hamas when foreign soldiers were deployed on the ground, Smotrich said the latter would “pull out very quickly and allow the IDF to enter. This is coordinated with the Americans.”

“By the way, I don’t yet see them going in that fast,” he added of the ISF.

A security source in Gaza, meanwhile, said yesterday that Israeli forces shelled Beit Lahia in the north.

The source also said that Israeli tanks opened fire in the south Gaza city of Khan Yunis, where at least two air strikes were also conducted.

Israel’s military said yesterday that Israeli troops “eliminated” a fighter who had crossed the Yellow Line into Israeli-held territory the previous day. — AFP

US orders exit of Beirut embassy personnel amid Iran tension

WASHINGTON – The United States yesterday ordered non-emergency personnel to leave its embassy in Beirut as President Donald Trump threatens strikes on Iran, which has close relations with Lebanese Shi’ite militia Hezbollah.

“This is a temporary measure intended to ensure the safety of our personnel while maintaining our ability to operate and assist US citizens,” a senior State Department official said on customary condition of anonymity.

Around 40 embassy personnel left through Beirut’s international airport yesterday, a Lebanese security source told AFP.

The order applies to non-emergency employees and their family members but the embassy will remain open.

“We continuously assess the security environment, and based on our latest review, we determined it prudent to reduce our footprint to essential personnel,” the US official said.

Trump has ordered a major buildup of US forces in the region as he threatens to attack Iran, saying it must accept an onerous deal on concerns starting with its nuclear programme.

Iran’s cleric-run government – which last month was confronted

with mass protests – says it expects talks on Thursday with the United States in what could be a last-ditch attempt at diplomacy.

Since the October 7, 2023 attacks by Iranian-backed Hamas, Israel has carried out strikes in Lebanon that have devastated Hezbollah, including killing its leader Hassan Nasrallah.

Hezbollah had been expected in the past to form another front against Israel in a war with Iran.

The militant group on Saturday vowed “resistance” after a new Israeli strike killed eight of its operatives. — AFP

EU rues Hungary veto of new Russia sanctions over Ukraine

BRUSSELS – The EU’s foreign policy chief yesterday expressed regret that the bloc failed to agree new sanctions on Russia for the fourth anniversary of the Ukraine war, after Hungary vetoed the move.

The 27-nation bloc has been pushing to impose a new round of economic punishment on Moscow as the Ukraine war hits the grim milestone today.

“This is a setback and message we didn’t want to send today, but the work continues,” top diplomat Kaja Kallas said after a meeting of EU foreign ministers yesterday.

Hungary’s Prime Minister Viktor Orban – the friendliest EU leader to the Kremlin – is stalling the sanctions and a 90-billion-euro EU loan to Ukraine until Kyiv re-opens a key oil pipeline.

Ukraine says the Druzhba pipeline, which crosses its territory to deliver Russian oil to Slovakia and Hungary, was damaged January 27 by Russian strikes.

EU sanctions have to be approved unanimously, and the blockage from Budapest has sparked ire from Hungary’s counterparts in the bloc.

It will also rob EU leaders Ursula von der Leyen and Antonio Costa of the chance to

showcase the measures on a visit to Kyiv today.

“The Hungarian government is once again blackmailing Ukraine,” Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski said.

“This has been met with widespread disapproval and arguments urging Hungary to step back.”

Budapest has repeatedly stalled EU measures on Ukraine during the nearly four-year war.

The EU has already imposed 19 rounds of sanctions on Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine.

Brussels has proposed banning shipping services for Russian crude oil as part of the latest sanctions in a bid to curb Moscow’s revenues further.

While the EU failed to agree the latest round of sanctions, Kallas said that she was nonetheless limiting the size of Moscow’s diplomatic mission to the bloc to 40 personnel.

“We will not tolerate abuse of diplomatic power,” she said.

The top diplomat also said that she was working on proposals to potentially deny Schengen visas to “hundreds of thousands” of Russians who have fought in Ukraine.

“We do not want war criminals and saboteurs to roam our streets,” she said. — AFP

Spanish court annuls jury trial for PM’s wife, but graft probe continues

MADRID – A Madrid court has annulled a judge’s decision to order Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez’s wife, Begoña Gómez, to a jury trial over alleged embezzlement of public funds, calling it “premature”.

It added, however, that the investigation was ongoing.

The long-running probe is one of several into Sánchez’s family and former close allies that have embarrassed the Socialist leader and heaped pressure on his minority coalition.

“The decision taken by the investigating magistrate is premature and lacks factual, legal and procedural grounding,” the court said in a ruling dated February 20 made public yesterday.

Judge Juan Carlos Peinado opened an investigation in April 2024 to determine whether Gómez exploited her position as Sánchez’s wife for private benefit.

In September 2025 he ordered Gómez to be tried before a jury on charges of public

embezzlement linked to the hiring of an assistant who is also under investigation.

Her lawyer appealed the ruling, denouncing a lack of evidence and questioning the judge’s interpretation of the criminal code.

Gómez has consistently denied any wrongdoing.

Sánchez has dismissed the allegations against his wife as an attempt to undermine his government by the right, which has demanded his resignation.

Separate corruption probes have ensnared two former Socialist heavyweights, Santos Cerdán and ex-transport minister José Luis Ábalos, as well as the prime minister’s younger brother David Sánchez.

The legal troubles compound woes for the minority government which engages in laborious negotiations with an array of fringe and regional separatist parties to try to pass legislation. — AFP

BBC apologises for 'involuntary' Tourette's racial slur during BAFTA awards

LONDON – The BBC apologised yesterday for not editing out a racial slur during the BAFTA awards, saying it was an “involuntary” verbal tic by a Tourette’s* sufferer who inspired a winning film.

British actor Robert Aramayo triumphed over established stars Timothee Chalamet and Leonardo DiCaprio to win the best actor prize for his portrayal of a man with Tourette’s syndrome in “I Swear”.

The film was inspired by the real life story of Tourette’s campaigner John Davidson whose life has been irrevocably changed by the condition.

Davidson shouted the N-word as “Sinners” actors Delroy Lindo and Michael B Jordan, who are both black, presented the award for special visual effects.

Actor Alan Cumming, the ceremony’s host, apologised for the language viewers may have heard during the broadcast.

But the BBC did not edit the offending language out of its broadcast which was shown on a two-hour delay on Sunday evening. It was edited out of the version on the BBC’s streaming service yesterday.

“Some viewers may have heard strong and offensive language during the Bafta Film Awards,” a BBC spokesperson said.

“This arose from involuntary verbal tics associated with Tourette syndrome, and as explained during the ceremony it was not intentional.

“We apologise that this was not edited out prior to broadcast

and it will now be removed from the version on BBC iPlayer.”

A spokesperson for the charity Tourettes Action said it “deeply” understood the offence and harm caused by racial slurs.

But they said it was “vital that the public understands a fundamental truth about Tourette syndrome – tics are involuntary. They are not a reflection of a person’s beliefs, intentions or character.

“People with Tourette’s can say words or phrases they do not mean, do not endorse and feel great distress about afterwards,” the spokesperson added.

The charity added it was “incredibly proud” of Davidson and others involved in the film.

** Tourette syndrome is a neurological disorder characterised by repetitive, involuntary movements and vocalisations known as tics. These tics can include motor tics (such as blinking, head jerking, or facial grimacing) and vocal tics (such as throat clearing, grunting, or uttering words). The syndrome typically appears in childhood and can vary in severity. While the exact cause is not fully understood, it is believed to involve genetic and environmental factors. Symptoms may improve with age, and various treatment options are available to help manage the condition. The name Tourette syndrome is derived from the French neurologist Georges Gilles de la Tourette, who first described the disorder in 1885. – Poe*

US judge blocks release of Trump documents case report

MIAMI – A federal judge yesterday blocked the release of a report by former special counsel Jack Smith about US President Donald Trump’s alleged mishandling of classified government documents.

District Judge Aileen Cannon, a Trump appointee, dismissed the documents case against Trump in July 2024, ruling that Smith was unlawfully appointed.

The Justice Department appealed Cannon’s ruling but dropped the case after Trump won the November 2024 presidential election.

Trump was also accused of plotting to overturn the results of the 2020 election he lost to Democrat Joe Biden. That case was also dropped by Smith in line with a Justice Department policy of not prosecuting a sitting president.

Cannon yesterday granted a motion filed by Trump and two co-defendants seeking to block the public release of Smith’s

investigative report into the classified documents case.

She said it would be unfair to release evidence gathered by prosecutors in a case where there had been no finding of guilt.

“Disclosure of non-public discovery material... would contravene basic notions of fairness and justice,” Cannon wrote. “The former defendants in this case, like any other defendant in this situation, still enjoy the presumption of innocence.

“The Court strains to find a situation in which a former special counsel has released a report after initiating criminal charges that did not result in a finding of guilt,” she said.

Trump was accused by Smith of stashing classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida after leaving the White House in January 2021 and obstructing efforts to have them returned. He denied the allegations. –AFP

Healthcare crisis looms over Greenland’s isolated villages

Florent Vergnes

KAPISILLIT – The Greenlandic settlement of Kapisillit has no defibrillator – which, given it is only accessible via a two-hour boat ride or by helicopter, means that if you go into cardiac arrest while there, you could be in real trouble.

“It would be too late” by the time help arrives, village leader Heidi Nolso – who is fighting to bring in the much-needed medical device for the 35 inhabitants – told AFP.

The situation facing Kapisillit underscores the challenges to the healthcare system in the vast Arctic island, recently called out by US President Donald Trump.

On Saturday, Trump – who has backed off threats to seize the autonomous Danish territory, but still insists it must come under US control for security reasons – proposed sending a “great hospital boat” to Greenland.

It would provide care to the “many people who are sick, and not being taken care of there”.

The proposal was soundly rejected by Greenland’s Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nelson and by Copenhagen, both touting Greenland’s free public healthcare system.

Nevertheless, Trump’s statements touched “a sensitive nerve,” Greenland’s Health Minister Anna Wangenheim acknowledged in a post to Facebook.

“Many citizens have experienced that serious illness means long and difficult journeys away from family and home,” she said – though she added that such “structural challenges are not solved by isolated, symbolic initiatives from the outside.”

There are five regional hospitals across Greenland, which is home to just 57,000 people but is roughly the size of western Europe. The hospital in the capital Nuuk serves patients from all over the territory.

But for the 35 residents of Kapisillit, getting to that care is an obstacle course.

The village does have a medical office – but it has stood empty for months due to lack of staff, and travelling to receive care elsewhere is expensive.



This photo taken on February 15 shows an ice-covered beach located below the settlement of Kapisillit, Greenland. Isolated, the settlement is only accessible after a two-hour boat trip or by helicopter. Access to healthcare is a real struggle for the residents of Kapisillit. – AFP

A trip to Nuuk on the weekly shuttle costs over US\$100, and the average price for a night in a hotel in the capital is in the same range.

The lack of regular check-ups means that diseases such as cancers – the leading cause of mortality in Greenland – are often detected late.

Nolso, who suffers from high blood pressure, does her own medical follow-ups.

“I know that I should have blood samples taken, but no one is checking up on me,” the leader, who is in her 40s, said.

Rifles to prevent rabies

Kaaleeraq Ringsted, the catechist of the tiny parish, lives alone at 74.

His teeth are in very poor condition and, as he ages, he knows the risk of cancer and other diseases is increasing.

Doctor consultations only take place via online video calls. Those who don’t have internet access make use of the small town hall.

Once a year, a dentist comes to visit, but many dental procedures are not covered by the universal healthcare.

Wangenheim says one of the primary challenges is the “recruitment and retention of healthcare professionals”.

For Nolso, the requirement to master Danish in order to work in the healthcare system makes it

harder for foreign doctors to come and help make up for the shortfall.

The problems are compounded by an exodus towards cities by young people, leaving remote settlements such as Kapisillit disproportionately populated by older people.

Wangenheim has conceded there is a “significant backlog in Greenland’s healthcare system,” estimated at about one billion kroner (US\$158 million).

The island “needs long-term capacity building, stronger local services, and investments that reduce inequality” in relation to Denmark, she said.

Official statistics show that life expectancy on the Arctic island is 69.6 years for men and 73.5 for women – far lower than in Denmark, where people on average live 10 years longer.

But Wangenheim also said that funding has been secured for those improvements, and work is “well underway”.

In the meantime, residents of villages such as Kapisillit do what they can to prevent disease.

In a village where nature and the outdoors form the backbone of daily life, for example, few people are vaccinated against rabies.

Instead, residents walk around with rifles, ready to shoot any wildlife exhibiting odd behaviour.

– AFP

Trump threatens countries that would 'play games' with tariffs

WASHINGTON – President Donald Trump threatened nations yesterday with punishing hikes on import duties if they choose to “play games” after the US Supreme Court struck down his global tariffs last week.

“Any Country that wants to ‘play games’ with the ridiculous supreme court decision, especially those that have ‘Ripped Off’ the U.S.A. for years, and even decades, will be met with a much higher Tariff, and worse, than that which they just recently agreed to,” Trump

wrote on social media.

The high court’s decision has dealt a sharp blow to Trump’s economic agenda, of which tariffs – and his ability to impose them rapidly – have been a key feature.

For now, US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer has said that he expects partners to “stand by” the tariff deals they have struck with Washington.

After Supreme Court ruled against Trump’s country-specific tariffs last week, saying he exceeded his authority in tapping emergency

economic powers to impose them, the US leader turned to a separate law to announce new 15-percent duties on imports.

Trump insisted in a separate Truth Social post yesterday that “as President, I do not have to go back to Congress to get approval of tariffs.”

He also claimed that the court gave him “far more powers and strength” with its ruling, and that he could use “licences to do absolutely ‘terrible’ things to foreign countries.” –AFP

Dozens dead in Mexico violence after drug kingpin killed

GUADALAJARA – Twenty-five Mexican troops died in clashes with cartel gunmen following a raid that led to the death of the country's most-wanted drug lord, a top security official said yesterday.

Nemesio “El Mencho” Oseguera, leader of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), was wounded on Sunday in a shootout with soldiers in the town of Tapalpa, in Jalisco state, and died while being flown to Mexico City, the army said.

News of his death triggered spasms of violence, with cartel members across the country blocking roads in 20 states and torching vehicles and businesses.

At least 25 National Guard members were killed in subsequent clashes, Security Secretary Omar Garcia Harfuch said.

Harfuch added that a prison guard, a member of the state prosecutor's office and 30 suspected members of Oseguera's criminal organisation were also killed.

Oseguera had a US\$15 million US bounty on his head.

Eight suspected cartel gunmen were killed in the special forces operation to capture him and three soldiers were wounded, Defence Secretary Ricardo Trevilla said.

Fearful residents went into hiding, and tourists took shelter in their hotels and resorts as cartel members went on the rampage.

While US President Donald Trump had yet to respond publicly to the elimination of Oseguera, he posted briefly on his Truth Social platform: “Mexico must step up their effort on Cartels and Drugs!”

Although the violence appeared to be subsiding, Mexico remained on high alert.

The government sent 2,500 troops to Jalisco – a state that is scheduled to host four World Cup soccer games this summer.

The streets of Jalisco's state capital Guadalajara were almost empty yesterday.

Schools, stores, pharmacies and gas stations remained shuttered, all events involving large crowds were cancelled and public transportation was suspended.



A policeman walks near a burning bus set on fire by gangsters at one of the main avenues in Zapopan City, Jalisco State, Mexico, on Sunday. – AFP

María Medina, who works in a gas station that was torched on Sunday, said gunmen showed up and told everyone to get out.

“I thought they were going to kidnap us. I ran to a taco stand to take cover with the people there,” Medina told AFP.

The violence gripped the resort city of Puerto Vallarta, and spread to neighbouring Michoacan state, where Oseguera's cartel has been waging war against a rival coalition of criminal groups.

‘Shelter in place’

Travel warnings from Britain, Canada and the United States were issued in the fallout, with Australia urging citizens to “exercise a degree of caution” yesterday.

Washington asked US citizens to “shelter in place until further notice.”

Dozens of US and Canadian flights were cancelled.

Oseguera, 59, was considered the last of the drug lords who acted in the brutal mould of the now-imprisoned Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán and Ismael “El Mayo” Zambada.

With his son Rubén “El Menchito” Oseguera González, 35, convicted by a federal jury in Washington in September, experts have warned the “absence of a direct succession” could lead to a power vacuum.

“That opens the door to violent realignments within the organisation,” David Mora, an expert at the Crisis Group analysis centre, told AFP.

US ‘intelligence support’

Mexico said in addition to its own military intelligence, the operation to seize Oseguera was carried out with “complementary information” from US authorities.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said Washington “provided intelligence support.”

Sheinbaum was adamant, however, that no US forces took part in the capture raid.

Two suspected cartel members were arrested and a variety of weapons seized during the operation, including rocket launchers capable of downing airplanes and destroying armoured vehicles, the army said.

Oseguera was a founding member of CJNG, which was formed in 2009 and has grown into one of the most violent drug cartels in Mexico, ahead of the Sinaloa cartel.

Washington has classified CJNG as a terrorist organisation and accuses it of sending cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine and fentanyl into the United States.

US Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau welcomed the operation and called Oseguera “one of the bloodiest and most ruthless drug kingpins.”

The raid came amid pressure from Trump for Mexico to stem the flow of drugs into the United States.

Trump has threatened repeatedly to slap tariffs on Mexican exports, arguing Sheinbaum has not done enough to combat the drug trade.

– AFP

Mennonites in Colombia face trial for deforestation

BOGOTÁ – Colombia says it will prosecute 12 Mennonites for deforestation in the country's east, where the austere Christian sect is expanding its agricultural footprint and clashing with indigenous groups.

The twelve defendants, all Mexican nationals, will go on trial for logging natural areas “without the necessary permits and/or legal authorisations” between 2016 and 2021 in Puerto Gaitán, the Chief Public Prosecutions Office said.

Members of the reclusive religious group face similar legal troubles in Bolivia and Peru.

The Mennonites – who have roots in 16th-century Europe – eschew modernity and mixing with others. They communicate among themselves primarily in German, the language of their ancestors.

Members arrived in the Llanos region of central Colombia in

2014, and purchased large tracts of land for agricultural use.

They often clear forests to plant large-scale crops such as soy and corn, sparking conflict with local people, who say they are occupying indigenous territory and damaging the environment.

Satellite images show significant deforestation in Liviney, one of their prosperous settlements.

Mennonites arrived in Mexico at the beginning of the last century. The first Mennonite churches in Colombia date back to approximately the 1950s.

A 2021 study carried out by researchers at Canada's McGill University counted 214 Mennonite colonies in Latin America occupying some 3.9 million hectares, an area bigger than the Netherlands.

– AFP

Venezuelan FM demands ‘immediate release’ of Maduro

GENEVA – Venezuela's Foreign Minister Yvan Gil Pinto yesterday demanded the immediate release of Nicolás Maduro, who was ousted as president in a January 3 raid by the United States.

Addressing the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Gil demanded “the immediate release by the government of the United States of America of the constitutional president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro Moros, and his wife, the first lady Cilia Flores”.

Maduro, who ruled Venezuela between March 2013 and his capture by US forces nearly two months ago, is in US custody along with his wife, awaiting trial.

Maduro, 63, has pleaded not guilty to drug trafficking charges and declared that he was a “prisoner of war”.

“January 3, 2026, marked a turning point of extreme gravity,” the Venezuelan foreign minister told the UN rights council.

“An illegal military action against our country resulted in the deaths of more than 100 people and the arbitrary detention” of Maduro and his wife, Gil said.

“Despite this action, carried out in a context of profound technological and military asymmetry between our country and the nuclear power of the United States ... we have chosen to open a diplomatic channel to resolve our differences with that country,” he said.

“Not through submission, but in the sovereign equality of states. Not through fear, but with the conviction that dialogue is the only civilised path between nations.”

Aiming for ‘reconciliation’

Gil said Venezuela was insisting on the need for “international cooperation based on the legal equality of states”.

Venezuela's top diplomat stressed that his country was “working toward a process of acknowledging past wounds, forgiveness, and reconciliation”, referring to a new amnesty law passed.

The legislature unanimously adopted the landmark amnesty law last Thursday, and interim leader Delcy Rodríguez hailed its passage, describing it as a step toward “a more democratic, fairer, freer Venezuela”.

Opposition figures have criticised the new legislation, which appears to include carve-outs for some offences previously used by authorities to target Maduro's political opponents.

It explicitly does not apply to those prosecuted for “promoting” or “facilitating ... armed or forceful actions” against Venezuela's sovereignty by foreign actors.

Rodríguez, who had served as Maduro's vice president since 2018, has levelled such accusations against opposition leader and Nobel peace laureate María Corina Machado, who hopes to return to Venezuela at some point from the United States.

The law also excludes members of the security forces convicted of “terrorism”-related activities.

But the amnesty extends to 11,000 prisoners who, over nearly three decades, were paroled or placed under house arrest.

– AFP, MPD

Panama finalises ruling axing Hutchison canal deal

Panama City

PANAMA CITY – Panama yesterday published its Supreme Court ruling annulling the concession granted to Hong Kong-based company CK Hutchison Holdings to operate two ports at the Panama Canal.

In January the court had declared as “unconstitutional” the contract which had allowed Hutchison to manage the ports of Balboa on the Pacific and Cristóbal on the Atlantic since 1997.

Publication of the ruling in the official gazette yesterday effectively finalises the legal process, and the decision is not subject to appeal.

On Friday, a spokesman for Hutchison's Panama Ports Company, Alejandro Kouruklis, acknowledged that publication of the ruling in the gazette would mean “the concession ceases to exist,” and urged Panama to negotiate with the firm over the future of the ports in order to “avoid chaos.”

Following the court's January ruling, which came amid pressure from Washington over China's presence in the Panama Canal, the Panama Maritime Authority said a division of the Danish Maersk Group would temporarily take over operation of the Balboa and

Cristóbal ports on either side of the waterway.

The Hutchison concession was extended for 25 years in 2021. The decision to scrap that agreement has led to uncertainty in the two ports.

Last Thursday, the conglomerate warned of possible legal action against Maersk and others over the annulment of its contract.

The canal, which handles about 40 percent of US container traffic and five percent of world trade, was built by the United States, which operated it for a century before ceding control to Panama in 1999.

– AFP

Tudor says Tottenham can still beat the drop despite Arsenal loss

Premier League LONDON – Igor Tudor believes there is still enough time for his Tottenham Hotspur side to avoid relegation from the Premier League provided they “stay humble”.

Spurs were overwhelmed 4-1 at home to league leaders and arch-rivals Arsenal in a lopsided north



Tottenham Hotspur's Croatian coach Igor Tudor is pictured before the start of the English Premier League match against Arsenal at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London, on Sunday. – AFP

London derby, with Sunday's defeat leaving them 16th in the table and just four points above the bottom three.

A woeful run of two league wins in 17 games under Thomas Frank saw the Dane sacked as Spurs manager earlier this month, with Tudor brought in to replicate the kind of mid-season recovery he managed with Italian sides Juventus and Lazio.

Tottenham last played outside the English top flight in the 1977/78 season and Tudor, following his first game in charge, insisted that they could avoid dropping down to the second-tier this term.

“Of course there is enough time,” Tudor said.

“I saw the passion, I saw the will, so I was not angry, because they wanted to do [it], but then they were not able to do in this moment the things” they need to do.

“I speak from day one at the club, I come here to resolve the problems.”

The 47-year-old Croat added: “Stay humble, that is the key for each of us and try to become what I said before – a team, a squad, a hard-working team. That is the only goal we have now in this moment.” – AFP

UEFA suspend Benfica's Prestianni after alleged racist abuse



MADRID – UEFA yesterday suspended midfielder Gianluca Prestianni from Benfica's Champions League play-off second leg against Real Madrid this week after he was accused of racially abusing Vinicius Junior.

UEFA's disciplinary body, who are still investigating the alleged incident from last week's first leg, said in a statement they had “decided to provisionally suspend Mr. Gianluca Prestianni for the next UEFA club competition match for which he would otherwise be eligible”.

Prestianni will therefore be unable to feature for Benfica tomorrow at the Santiago Bernabeu as the Portuguese side bid to overturn a 1-0 deficit and reach the last 16.

Brazil international Vinicius scored the goal that splits the teams and reported the alleged racist abuse to the referee in the aftermath of his celebration, with the game stopped for around 10 minutes.

UEFA said Prestianni's provisional one-match suspension is “without prejudice to any ruling that the UEFA disciplinary bodies may subsequently



SL Benfica's Argentine forward Gianluca Prestianni hides his mouth while arguing with Real Madrid's Brazilian forward Vinicius Junior (left) who complained about alleged racist insults during the UEFA Champions League knockout round play-off first leg between SL Benfica and Real Madrid CF at Estadio da Luz in Lisbon last Tuesday. – AFP

make following the conclusion of the ongoing investigation”.

If UEFA find Prestianni, 20, racially abused Vinicius he will be banned for a minimum of 10 matches.

Prestianni, who argued with Vinicius while covering his mouth with his shirt, insists he did not racially abuse the Real Madrid forward.

Real Madrid defender Trent Alexander-Arnold said the incident

was a “disgrace to football”, while striker Kylian Mbappe said Prestianni “doesn't deserve to play in the Champions League any more”.

Benfica coach Jose Mourinho, who is also suspended for the second leg, controversially criticised Vinicius for his effusive goal celebration and said his club could not be racist because their greatest icon, Eusebio, was black. – AFP

Bayern to face Leverkusen in German Cup semis



BERLIN – Bayern Munich face a tricky trip to Bayer Leverkusen while holders Stuttgart will host local rivals Freiburg in the semi-finals of the German Cup after Sunday's draw.

Record 20-time winners Bayern made it to the semis this season for the first time since they last lifted

the trophy in 2020.

That season, they defeated Leverkusen in the final.

Leverkusen won a league and cup double in 2023-24 and knocked Bayern out of the competition in the last 16 last season.

Stuttgart, who beat third-tier Arminia Bielefeld to win the Cup in

May, are four-time winners.

Freiburg, losing finalists to RB Leipzig in 2022, are the only one of the semi-finalists never to have won the trophy.

The semi-finals will take place at the end of April with the final held at Berlin's Olympic Stadium on May 23. – AFP

Advocaat leaves Curacao 4 months from World Cup



PARIS – Dick Advocaat has left his role as head coach of Curacao for family reasons ahead of the island nation's debut appearance at the 2026 World Cup, the federation announced yesterday.

“Dick Advocaat has stepped down with immediate effect as head coach of the national football team of Curacao,” the country's football federation announced on social media.

The statement added that the 78-year-old will “devote his full

attention to his daughter, who is facing health issues”.

“I have always said that family comes before football,” Advocaat, who has managed the Netherlands national team three times and gained extensive experience around the world before taking charge of Curacao in 2024, added in the statement.

Curacao is the smallest country ever to qualify for a World Cup, with an area of 444 square kilometres and just under 160,000 inhabitants.

Under Advocaat's tutelage, Curacao qualified for their debut appearance at a World Cup finals after they emerged unbeaten from CONCACAF qualifying.

Advocaat is replaced at the helm of the national team by another Dutchman, Fred Rutten, who has notably coached FC Twente, PSV Eindhoven, Feyenoord and Schalke.

Curacao will face Germany, Ivory Coast and Ecuador in Group E in the World Cup, which runs from June 11 to July 19. – AFP

Chivu confident Inter can overturn Bodo/Glimt deficit in Champions League



MILAN – Cristian Chivu said yesterday that his Inter Milan team can turn around a two-goal deficit against Bodo/Glimt and reach the last 16 of the Champions League.

Inter lost 3-1 in Norway last week and risk joining reigning Italian champions Napoli in being eliminated from Europe's elite club competition.

“We don't have any obligations, only a duty. All we need to do is go out on the pitch and do what we know

we can do,” Chivu told reporters ahead of today's clash at the San Siro.

“We have to go out there knowing that if there's a team to turn this around, it's us... We can't lose faith in ourselves or our self-confidence.

“If we want to have any chance of qualifying from the play-offs we need to be the best version of ourselves.”

Inter will be without captain Lautaro Martinez in attack, while Chivu gave no update on the condition of key midfielder Hakan Calhanoglu who has had a variety of

muscular problems in recent weeks.

The winners of the tie will play either Manchester City or Sporting of Portugal in the last 16 next month.

Bodo/Glimt have had a remarkable debut campaign in the Champions League, sneaking into the knock-out stage with shock victories over Manchester City and Atletico Madrid in their final two league-phase matches.

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

Police investigating racist abuse of Premier League quartet



LONDON – Police said yesterday they are investigating “abhorrent” racist abuse directed online at four Premier League footballers last weekend.

Wolves striker Tolu Arokodare and Sunderland midfielder Romaine Mundle were the latest players to be targeted on Sunday, with Chelsea's Wesley Fofana and Burnley's Hannibal Mejbri suffering similar abuse on Saturday following a 1-1 draw between their clubs.

Chief Constable Mark Roberts, the head of the UK Football Policing Unit (UKFPU), said yesterday: “There is absolutely no place for racial abuse, either online or in person, and anyone who believes they can hide behind their keyboards should think again.

“The UKFPU condemns this abhorrent behaviour and we will ensure that, through our dedicated team of officers, we do everything possible to identify those responsible and bring them to justice.”

Arokodare missed a penalty in Sunday's 1-0 defeat at Crystal Palace and subsequently received racist messages from several accounts.

Sunderland later revealed Mundle had endured similar attacks following his substitute appearance in a 3-1 loss at Fulham.

Kick It Out, a British-based charity aiming to combat racism in football, issued a statement late Sunday condemning an “appalling weekend” of abuse.

“But the sad fact is, we know it happens regularly,” the statement

also said, adding: “Action must follow. Players cannot be expected to tolerate this behaviour, and nor should anyone else.”

The Premier League issued its own statement, warning of “serious consequences” for those found guilty of abuse, insisting: “Football is for everyone - there is no room for racism.”

But French defender Fofana, who previously shared images of messages directed to his Instagram account, had little hope of significant action.

“2026, it's still the same thing, nothing changes,” he posted. “These people are never punished.

“You create big campaigns against racism, but nobody actually does anything.”

Nigel Dewale, who sent online abuse to England defender Jess Carter during last year's Women's Euros, is set to be sentenced on March 25 after pleading guilty to a charge of malicious communication in January.

European football governing body UEFA last week began an investigation into claims by Real Madrid forward Vinicius Junior he was racially abused on the pitch by Benfica's Gianluca Prestianni during a Champions League game in Lisbon.

The Argentinian has denied the allegations.

Benfica have also launched their own probe into two fans who were filmed making what appeared to be monkey gestures towards Brazilian forward Vinicius. – AFP

Fiji to start Nations Championship at 'home' to Wales in Cardiff

Rugby

LONDON – Fiji will begin rugby union's inaugural Nations Championship with a 'home' game against Wales in Cardiff on July 4, officials announced yesterday.

The match will take place at the 28,000-capacity Cardiff City Stadium rather than the city's Principality Stadium, the base of the Wales rugby side.

The biennial Nations Championship will feature leading teams from both the northern and southern hemispheres.

It will replace ad-hoc tours and one-off Tests, giving more meaning to internationals played in the July and November windows, outside of major tournaments.

The bulk of the July block of fixtures will be staged in the southern hemisphere.

But a statement issued yesterday said playing their games against Wales, England and Scotland in July would provide "an unprecedented opportunity for Fiji Rugby", one of the sport's financially poorer nations, "to generate significant commercial returns".

Premier League football club Everton's Hill Dickinson ground in Liverpool will stage the England match but the Scotland game will take place at a traditional rugby venue in Murrayfield.

Fiji Rugby Union chief executive Koli Sewabu said playing games overseas would "enable us to invest more into grassroots rugby supporting the continued growth and success of the team".

Fiji beat Wales 24-19 when the teams last met at the Principality Stadium in a 2024 November international.

Wales coach Steve Tandy said a Nations Championship opener 'away' to Fiji in Cardiff would be "incredible", adding: "We know they like a fast, free-flowing game and I'm sure it'll be an exciting match for fans."

– AFP

Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics closes as China posts best-ever overseas result

VERONA – The Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics concluded on Sunday, after 17 days of competition that saw broad participation, historic breakthroughs and China's best-ever performance at an overseas Winter Games.

International Olympic Committee president Kirsty Coventry declared the Games closed at the historic Verona Arena, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

"This is the true Olympic spirit: competing, embracing, lifting each other up whatever the result. You showed us what excellence, respect and friendship look like in a world that often forgets these values," Coventry said in her closing speech.

"The flame may soon go out, but its light will stay with us - in every child inspired to dream big, in every person reminded that courage and kindness still matter."

"The Olympic Games will continue to be a space where the athletes can inspire the world through sport - freely, safely and proudly," said the former Olympic swimming champion.

The Games officially opened on February 6, featuring 2,880 athletes from 93 delegations - including first-time Winter Olympic participants from Benin, Guinea-Bissau and the United Arab Emirates - competing in 116 events across eight sports and 16 disciplines, with women accounting for a record 47 percent of competitors.

As the most geographically spread-out Winter Olympics in history, the Games' competition venues were divided into four clusters: the urban hub of Milan, and the mountain venues of Cortina, Valtellina and Val di Fiemme, spanning over 22,000 square kilometers in northern Italy.

Norway topped the medal tally with 18 gold, 12 silver and 11 bronze medals, followed by the United States and the Netherlands. Host nation Italy finished fourth with 10 golds, six silvers and 14 bronzes, delivering its strongest performance in Winter Olympic history.

Norway's Johannes Hoesflot Klaebo delivered one of the standout performances of the Games, becoming the first athlete to win six gold medals at a single Winter Olympics by sweeping all men's cross-country events. The feat extended his record as the most decorated Winter Olympian with 11 gold medals.

China sent its largest-ever delegation to an overseas Winter Olympics, fielding 126 athletes in 91 events across 15 disciplines. The team finished with five gold, four silver and

six bronze medals, marking its best result at an overseas Winter Games and also equaling its overall medal count from Beijing 2022.

A highlight of China's campaign came in the men's 1,500m speed skating, where Ning Zhongyan clinched gold, breaking the century-long dominance of European and North American skaters in the event.

"Ning has fought extremely hard," said Tong Lixin, deputy head of the Chinese delegation. "He kept his focus and took the lead in a sport long dominated by Western athletes, helping China break new ground in an event where we previously had little chance to compete for medals."

Tong said China's medal haul of 15 consolidated the medal-winning structure established at Beijing 2022 and sustaining balanced development across both ice and snow disciplines. He added that the depth of China's winter sports talent pool is also growing.

Meanwhile, Tong stressed that despite the strong showing, China's overall standing in global winter sports remains that of a "chaser," with long-term development still required.

"We must recognize that we still lag behind the world's winter sports powers," he noted.

– Xinhua
Closing ceremony photos on page 16



West Indies' Shimron Hetmyer plays a shot during the 2026 ICC Men's T20 Cricket World Cup Super Eights match against Zimbabwe at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai, India yesterday. Hetmyer blasted 85 off 34 balls as the West Indies piled up 254-6 against Zimbabwe in the T20 World Cup Super Eights in Mumbai yesterday, the second highest total in the history of the tournament. The West Indies won by 107 runs. – AFP

MILANO CORTINA 2026		Medal Table			
Order	NOC	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	Norway	18	12	11	41
2	USA	12	12	9	33
3	Netherlands	10	7	3	20
4	Italy	10	6	14	30
5	Germany	8	10	8	26
6	France	8	9	6	23
7	Sweden	8	6	4	18
8	Switzerland	6	9	8	23
9	Austria	5	8	5	18
10	Japan	5	7	12	24
11	Canada	5	7	9	21
12	China	5	4	6	15
13	Republic of Korea	3	4	3	10
14	Australia	3	2	1	6
15	Great Britain	3	1	1	5
16	Czechia	2	2	1	5
17	Slovenia	2	1	1	4
18	Spain	1	0	2	3
19	Brazil	1	0	0	1
19	Kazakhstan	1	0	0	1

Sport in brief

World No.1 Sun Yingsha leads China's dominance in Singapore Smash

Table tennis

SINGAPORE – Chinese players dominated the second day of main-draw action yesterday at the 2026 World Table Tennis Singapore Smash, with women's world No. 1 Sun Yingsha advancing, along with Huang Youzheng, Xiang Peng, Chen Yuanyu, He Zhuojia, Kuai Man, Shi Xunyu and Wang Yidi.

In the men's singles, Huang beat India's Manav Thakkar 3-1, while Xiang defeated Egypt's Youssef Abdelaziz by the same scoreline. Chen edged Slovenia's Darko Jorgic 3-2 in a five-game thriller.

In the women's singles, Sun defeated Thailand's Orawan Paranang 3-1 and will face Romania's Elizabeta Samara next. He Zhuojia beat Chinese Taipei's Yeh Yi-tian 3-1. Kuai, Shi and Wang all won in straight games, defeating Germany's Annett Kaufmann, Gaia Monfardini of Italy and South Korea's Joo Cheon-hui, respectively.

– Xinhua

Dane Vingegaard to start season at Paris-Nice in March

Cycling

PARIS – Two-time Tour de France winner Jonas Vingegaard announced yesterday that he will begin his 2026 season next month at the Paris-Nice stage race.

The 29-year-old had been due to start his campaign last week at the UAE Tour but a training crash in Spain on January 26 forced him to change plans.

He also crashed last year during Paris-Nice and was forced to abandon the race ahead of the sixth stage, while sitting second in the overall standings behind Visma-Lease a Bike team-mate Matteo Jorgenson.

"I am excited to be at the start of Paris-Nice once again," Vingegaard said in a statement released by his team.

"As a team, we have a title to defend here.

"After crashing and falling ill, I took the necessary time to recover. Now I feel ready to start racing again."

Vingegaard finished third at Paris-Nice in 2023 behind Slovenian rival Tadej Pogacar and France's David Gaudu.

Jorgenson then won the race in the following two years but is not part of the Visma team this time around.

Paris-Nice will run from March 8-15, with Spaniard Juan Ayuso and Portugal's Joao Almeida expected to provide stiff competition for Vingegaard.

The Dane will then head to the Volta a Catalunya from March 23-29.

The first of his major objectives for the season is May's Giro d'Italia, after which he will try to dethrone Pogacar at the Tour, seeking to add to his 2022 and 2023 successes.

– AFP

'One Battle' triumphs at BAFTAs that honour British talent

Akshata Kapoor

LONDON – Paul Thomas Anderson's "One Battle After Another" continued its awards season streak by winning the top prize at the BAFTAs on Sunday, with the British awards also recognising homegrown talent across categories.

Following in the footsteps of Hollywood ceremonies last month, the London-based British Academy of Film and Television Arts association gave the best film award to the offbeat thriller "One Battle After Another".

Paul Thomas Anderson won the best director award for the political thriller, which has struck a chord with its portrayal of a deeply polarised United States – and also won the most prizes of the night with a tally of six.

"Unfortunately, the title makes sense," Anderson told reporters after the ceremony. "It just does start to seem like one battle after another these days. But stay hopeful."

Chalamet's ping-pong drama "Marty Supreme" left the night with no awards – having been nominated in 11 categories – but Guillermo del Toro's "Frankenstein" walked off with three wins in the technical categories.

Vampire period film "Sinners" left the night with three awards, including for best score and best original screenplay.

The BAFTA ceremony, often seen as a weather vane for the Oscars in three weeks time, recognised British and Irish talent in some of the top categories.

Aramayo, local hero

Loud cheers erupted in London's Southbank Centre when British actor Robert Aramayo triumphed



US film director Paul Thomas Anderson poses with the award for Best film for "One Battle After Another" during the BAFTA British Academy Film Awards ceremony at the Royal Festival Hall, Southbank Centre in London on Sunday. – AFP

over established stars Timothee Chalamet and Leonardo DiCaprio to snag the best actor honour.

Aramayo, the underdog in the category, won for his portrayal of a man with Tourette syndrome in "I Swear", inspired by the real life story of Scot John Davidson whose life was irrevocably changed by the condition.

"I honestly cannot believe I won this award. I really, really cannot," said a tearful Aramayo, who had already won in the rising star category.

"I'm just really happy that 'I Swear' has shown a spotlight on something that is really, really misunderstood," he added.

Ireland's Jessie Buckley continued her winning streak for her heart-wrenching portrayal of Shakespeare's wife Agnes in "Hamnet", scooping the best actress award, beating off strong competition from stars including Kate Hudson and Emma Stone



Irish actress Jessie Buckley poses with the award for Best leading actress in the film "Hamnet" during the BAFTAs ceremony at the Royal Festival Hall, Southbank Centre in London on Sunday. – AFP

"This really does belong to the women past, present and future that have taught me and continue to teach me how to do it differently," said Buckley, who made history as the first Irish actress to win a BAFTA in the category.

Royals in attendance

Unlike France's César Awards or Spain's Goya Awards, which champion national cinema, the BAFTAs are open to all nationalities. As a consequence, the awards have previously faced some criticism for the American-dominated roster.

This year however, local talent got wide recognition.

"Hamnet" won outstanding British film, and Nigerian-British actress Wunmi Mosaku won best supporting actress for her role in "Sinners".

Adapted from a novel by Maggie O'Farrell, "Hamnet" follows William Shakespeare and his wife Agnes as they navigate the

loss of their son in plague-ravaged Elizabethan England.

"Sentimental Value" won in the foreign language film category, becoming the first Norwegian film to win at the BAFTAs, according to director Joachim Trier.

The intimate drama follows the relationship between two daughters and their estranged father, as he struggles to reconnect with them

while making a film in their now hollowed-out family home.

"We felt ready to try to talk about family life, intergenerational trauma and all those things we don't know how to talk about," Danish-Norwegian filmmaker Trier told reporters.

Hollywood and British royalty were in attendance, including BAFTA president Prince William, his wife Princess Catherine, and A-listers DiCaprio, Chalamet, and Cillian Murphy.

William, the eldest son of King Charles III, was the latest royal to go about business-as-usual at the end of a dramatic week that saw his uncle and ex-prince Andrew arrested.

The Prince of Wales said he was not calm "at the moment" when asked about whether he had watched "Hamnet", according to the PA news agency.

"I need to be in quite a calm state and I'm not at the moment," William told Elaine Bedell, chief executive of the Southbank Centre.

But even the heir-to-the-throne smiled wide as Paddington Bear came onto the stage to present the award for best children and family film. – AFP

'GOAT' battles to top of N American box office

LOS ANGELES – Sony animated film "GOAT," produced by NBA superstar Stephen Curry, glided into the number-one spot at the North American box office, taking in US\$17 million, industry estimates showed on Sunday.

The film, the story of an undersized goat who wants to join a basketball-like "roarball" team, features Curry in a voice role.

Caleb McLaughlin and David Harbour ("Stranger Things"), Gabrielle Union and country star Jelly Roll also star in the family-friendly movie.

"GOAT" moved ahead of steamy literary adaptation "Wuthering Heights," which earned US\$14.2 million in its second week of release, according to Exhibitor Relations.

The Warner Bros film, starring Margot Robbie and Jacob Elordi as the doomed lovers Cathy and Heathcliff from Emily Bronte's

classic novel, features original songs from Charli XCX.

Debuting in third place with US\$8 million was Lionsgate's "I Can Only Imagine 2," a sequel about the singer who wrote and performed the number one Christian single of all time.

In fourth place was Amazon MGM's heist thriller "Crime 101," starring Chris Hemsworth, Halle Berry and Mark Ruffalo, with US\$5.8 million.

And in fifth place was horror flick "Send Help" from 20th Century, starring Rachel McAdams and Dylan O'Brien as a woman and her boss trying to survive on a deserted island after a plane crash.

It earned US\$4.5 million. "It's a quiet weekend for new releases. The market is full right now, and a number of pictures are having good runs," said analyst David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research. – AFP

Bad Bunny to star in movie about Puerto Rico

LOS ANGELES – Fresh from his success at the Grammys and a triumphant Super Bowl halftime show, Puerto Rican megastar Bad Bunny is set to take the lead role in an all-star film, producers announced last week.

"Porto Rico," which will be directed by Grammy-winning rapper René "Residente" Pérez Joglar, is described as a cross between a Caribbean Western and a historical drama about the island both men call home.

The film will also feature stars such as Viggo Mortensen, Javier Bardem, and Edward Norton, and will be produced by Academy Award winner Alejandro González Iñárritu.

"Porto Rico" tells the story of José Maldonado Roman, known as "Águila Blanca" ("White Eagle"), a revolutionary who fought against colonialism in the late 19th century.

"I have dreamed of making a film about my country since I was a child," said Pérez Joglar.

"Puerto Rico's true history has always been surrounded by controversy.

"This film is a reaffirmation of who we are – told with the intensity and honesty that our history deserves."

The film fuses "historical scope with a visceral, lyrical approach and a gripping narrative inspired by true events," a statement added.

The rapper and founder of the Puerto Rican hip-hop band Calle 13 ("Street 13") posted a carousel of historical photos and thanked the team accompanying him on the film project, which will center on Bad Bunny.

The 31-year-old reggaeton artist is on an unstoppable streak.

At the beginning of February, he won three Grammys with his acclaimed "DeBI Tirar Mas Fotos," which was crowned album of the year, a first for an all-Spanish language offering.

A week later, he delivered his Super Bowl halftime show, the most-watched musical performance in the world with over 120 million viewers, in which he celebrated the rhythms, colours, flavours, and traditions of Puerto Rico.

While many people acclaimed the joyous performance, President Donald Trump griped that he could not understand what was being said because it was in Spanish.

The performer, whose real name is

Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio had already ventured into film with minor roles in movies like "Bullet Train," alongside Brad Pitt, and "Caught Stealing," with Austin Butler.

But "Porto Rico" will mark another milestone in the career of the most popular performer on the planet.

Residente, also an actor and producer, said he had been looking for someone to lead his directorial debut who "feels Puerto Rico as deeply as I do and who is as proud as I am when they sing our true anthem."

Edward Norton, who also produces, highlighted the potential of the Residente-Bad Bunny duo.

"Everybody knows what a poet of language and rhythm Rene is. Now they're going to see what a visual visionary he is as well," said Norton, who recently appeared in Olivia Wilde's "The Invite" which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival.

"Bringing him and Bad Bunny together to tell the true story of Puerto Rico's roots is going to be like a flame finding the stick of dynamite that's been waiting for it."

– AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 2°C~10°C	Manila 22°C~32°C	New York -4°C~2°C	Lisbon 12°C~18°C
Shanghai 7°C~12°C	Bangkok 24°C~34°C	London 7°C~13°C	Rio de Janeiro 24°C~30°C
Hong Kong 18°C~24°C	Tokyo 10°C~17°C	Frankfurt 6°C~12°C	Luanda 23°C~29°C
Taipei 18°C~27°C	Singapore 24°C~32°C	Vancouver 3°C~8°C	Maputo 23°C~35°C
Guangzhou 18°C~27°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~34°C	Paris 6°C~15°C	Dili 25°C~29°C
Nanjing 5°C~10°C	Jakarta 24°C~31°C	Moscow -5°C~3°C	São Tomé 26°C~31°C
Guilin 12°C~18°C	Seoul -2°C~7°C	Las Vegas 11°C~23°C	Praia 18°C~28°C
Xi'an 3°C~15°C	Sydney 20°C~29°C	Monte Carlo 10°C~16°C	Bissau 20°C~37°C



An actress performs during the closing ceremony of the Milan-Cortina 2026 Olympic Winter Games at Verona Olympic Arena in Verona, Italy on Sunday. - Xinhua



Actors perform during the closing ceremony of the Milan-Cortina 2026 Olympic Winter Games at Verona Olympic Arena in Verona, Italy, on Sunday. - Xinhua



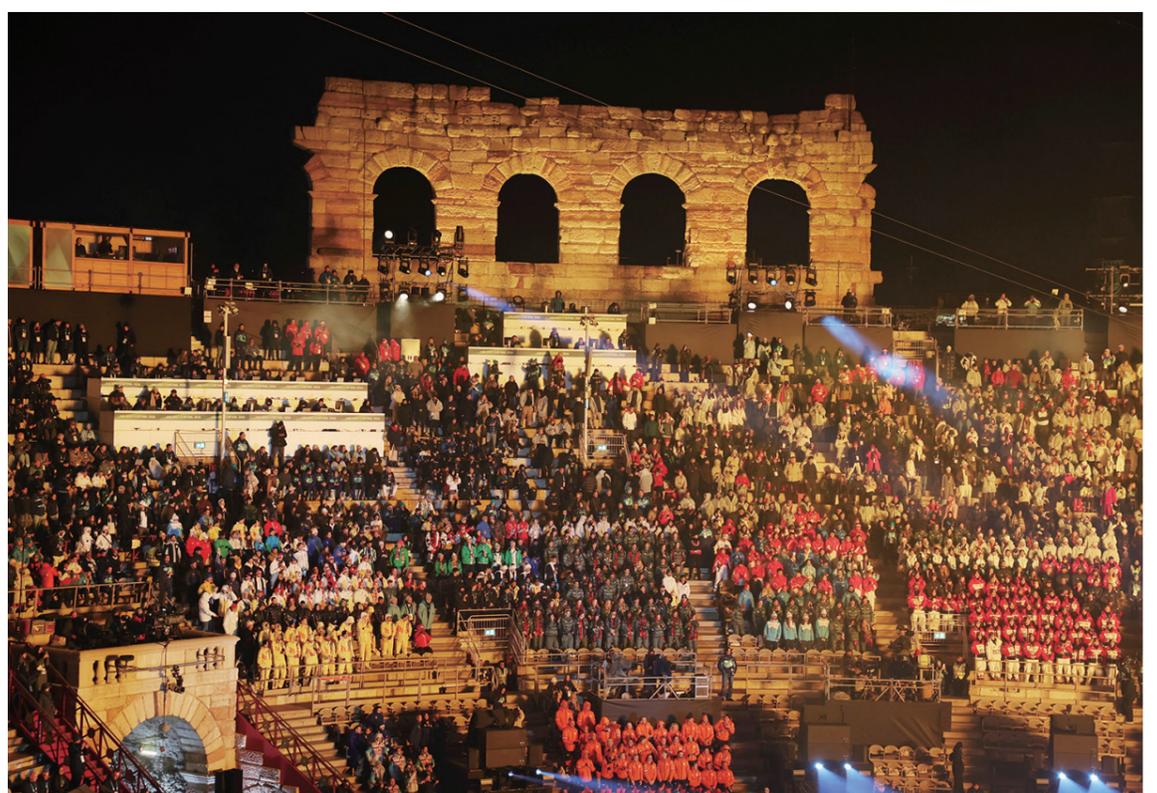
Actors perform during the closing ceremony of the Milan-Cortina 2026 Olympic Winter Games at Verona Olympic Arena in Verona, Italy, on Sunday. - Xinhua



This photo taken on Sunday shows the closing ceremony of the Milan-Cortina 2026 Olympic Winter Games at Verona Olympic Arena in Verona, Italy. - Xinhua



The Drop of Olympic Flame is carried into the venue during the closing ceremony of the Milan-Cortina 2026 Olympic Winter Games at Verona Olympic Arena in Verona, Italy, on Sunday. - Xinhua



This photo taken on Sunday shows the Verona Olympic Arena during the closing ceremony of the Milan-Cortina 2026 Olympic Winter Games in Verona, Italy. - Xinhua