

Police nab 'angry' woman for grabbing steering wheel of moving bus

Armando Neves

The Public Security Police (PSP) arrested an "angry" woman from the Chinese mainland for grabbing the steering wheel of a moving TCM bus last week, according to PSP spokesman Lei Chan Hong at a regular press conference yesterday.

Lei identified the suspect as a 60-year-old woman, surnamed Yang, who told police she is a retiree.

According to Lei, last Wednesday evening – the second day of the Chinese New Year (CNY) – the Public Security Police received a report about a public bus incident at the junction of Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro (亞美打利庇盧大馬路) and Avenida do Infante D. Henrique (殷皇子大馬路).

Upon arriving at the scene, Lei said PSP officers questioned a TCM bus attendant who had been in the area and was asked by the driver for assistance, as well as Yang.

TCM is one of Macau's two public bus operators.

Lei stated that while asking the driver what was happening, the attendant learnt that, while the bus was in motion, Yang became angry because the driver did



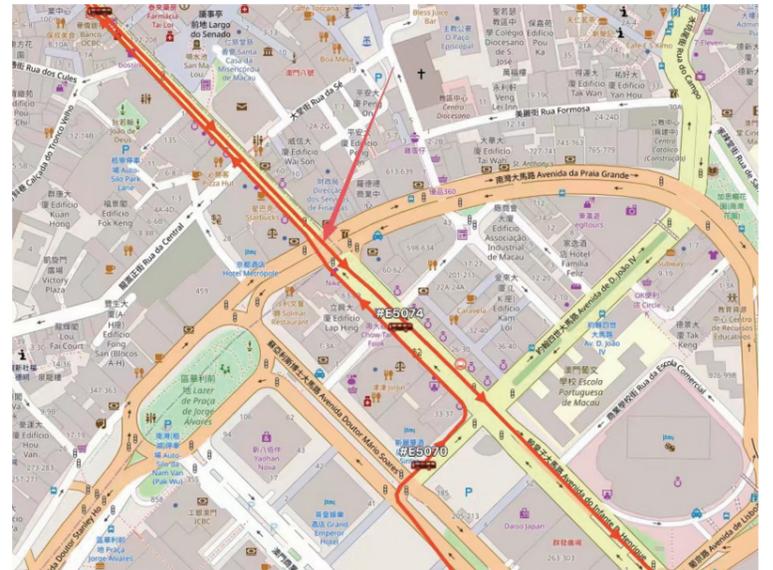
This handout photo provided by Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday shows PSP officers escorting Yang into the Praia Grande Police Station for questioning last Wednesday.

not immediately respond to her question about the bus route and then suddenly grabbed the steering wheel. According to Lei, the driver quickly braked and honked the horn, signalling the nearby TCM bus attendant to come to his assistance.

The attendant instructed Yang to exit the bus, allowing it to continue on its 3X route and avoid

inconveniencing other passengers. However, the attendant and Yang remained at the scene to wait for the police. The disturbance lasted about 10 minutes, Lei said.

At the Praia Grande Police Station, Yang admitted to the offence, according to Lei, adding that she told the police she had become "momentarily angry" when the driver did not respond to her



This map provided by the Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday shows an arrow pointing to the location where the bus incident happened last Wednesday.

question immediately as the traffic lights had turned green.

The bus was en route to the Barrier Gate checkpoint, and Yang had asked the driver whether the bus was heading to that location.

Lei confirmed that no one was injured in the incident.

A public advisory on the Transport Bureau (DSAT) website, titled "How to be a Good Passenger?", states:

"Do not speak to the driver while the bus is in motion."

Lei noted that Yang has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) for further questioning. He pointed out that she faces a charge in line with Article 278 of the Macau Penal Code for "endangering road transport safety." According to the article, she could face a prison term ranging from two to eight years. ■

Kremlin says open to political solution to Ukraine crisis

MOSCOW – Russia remains committed to resolving the ongoing Ukraine crisis through political and diplomatic efforts, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said yesterday.

"We continue efforts for peace. Our position is well known and consistent. Now everything depends on the actions of Kiev," Peskov

said, adding that Russia's special military operation will continue until its goals are achieved.

Peskov also noted that the operation has effectively turned into a broader confrontation between Russia and Western countries following "the direct involvement by Western European states and the United States."

Also yesterday, Russian Foreign

Ministry's Ambassador-at-Large Rodion Miroshnik said that 433 Russian civilians were killed and 2,958 were injured in 2025 in drone attacks launched by Ukraine.

Miroshnik said 8,000 Russian civilians had been killed and at least 27,000 injured in attacks by Ukrainian forces over the past four years. – Xinhua

Iran FM says nuclear deal 'within reach' ahead of US talks

TEHRAN – Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said yesterday that a nuclear deal was "within reach", ahead of talks with the United States

scheduled for later this week.

"We have a historic opportunity to strike an unprecedented agreement that addresses mutual concerns and

achieves mutual interests," said Araghchi in a post on X, adding that a deal was "within reach, but only if diplomacy is given priority." – AFP



A worker in the workshop of a wind power equipment company in an economic and technological development zone in Lianyungang, Jiangsu Province, yesterday. Factories and companies across the Chinese mainland resumed operations yesterday following the 9-day Spring Festival holiday. – Xinhua

China's Spring Festival spending boosts business for global markets

During the Chinese New Year holiday, China's consumer market has remained vibrant, with bustling shopping malls and heavy travel flows reflecting robust domestic demand and growing global appeal.

– Story on p.7

Gazans salvage ancient books in mosque library damaged by war

Inside the dusty shell of one of the oldest libraries in the Palestinian territories, a group of Gazan volunteers work diligently to salvage what remains of their ancient cultural heritage.

– Story on p.10

Paris says US envoy pledges not to 'interfere' in French affairs

The US ambassador to Paris, Charles Kushner, called France's foreign minister yesterday and pledged not to "interfere" in the host country's affairs, a diplomatic source said.

– Story on p.11



MPU joint lab wins ICWL Best Student Paper Award

Khalel Vallo

Investigation conducted by the Joint Research Laboratory in Advanced Technologies for Smart Cities of the public Macao Polytechnic University (MPU) and Portugal's University of Coimbra (UC) has received the Best Student Paper Award at the 24th International Conference on Web-Based Learning (ICWL), according to a recent MPU statement.

ICWL was founded by the Hong Kong Web Society and has been held in various countries and regions since 2002, including the Chinese mainland, Australia, Germany, Italy, South Africa and Spain, the statement noted, adding that the 24th edition was hosted by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) under the theme "Advancing Educational Technology in the Age of AI", focusing on how artificial intelligence (AI) can enhance teaching systems and promote personalised learning.

The award-winning study was presented by MPU PhD students Choi Wan-Chong from the Doctor of Philosophy in Computer Applied

Technology programme and Choi Iek-Chong from the Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Technology and Innovation programme, the statement said

The research was supervised by Dean of the MPU Faculty of Applied Sciences Lam Chan-Tong and Prof. António José Mendes from UC, the statement added.

The research, titled "Explaining Student Performance Prediction and Generating Personalised Actionable Feedback Using Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) with SHAP", the study focused on student performance prediction and explainable AI in the field of educational technology, according to the statement.

The statement said that traditional predictive models in educational data mining can estimate student performance but often lack transparency, making it difficult to provide actionable guidance for teachers and students, adding that in order to address the issue, the research team proposed an innovative approach that integrates an optimised XGBoost algorithm



This undated handout photo provided by the public Macao Polytechnic University (MPU) recently shows MPU PhD students Choi Wan-Chong (second from left) and Choi Iek-Chong (second from right), alongside MPU Dean of the Faculty of Applied Sciences Lam Chan-Tong (first from left) and Portugal's University of Coimbra (UC) Prof. António José Mendes, posing for an on-campus group photo after winning the International Conference on Web-Based Learning (ICWL) Best Student Paper Award.

with SHapley Additive exPlanations (SHAP)*.

By applying SMOTE-class** balancing and hyperparameter tuning, the model achieved improved performance across multiple indicators, enabling effective early prediction

and identification of potential learning risks, the statement said.

A key feature of the study is its ability to generate personalised analytical reports for individual students, clearly identifying the factors influencing their academic

performance, the statement noted, adding that this allows for tailored learning strategies and provides reference points for educational decision-making. ■

*SHAP (SHapley Additive exPlanations) is a game theory-based method used to explain the output of machine learning models. Its goal is to explain a prediction by computing the contribution of each feature to that prediction. It tells you, for a single prediction (e.g., why was this loan denied?), how much each feature (e.g., income, credit score, age) pushed the prediction away from the average. -DeepSeek

** SMOTE (Synthetic Minority Over-sampling Technique) is a data augmentation technique used to address class imbalance in machine learning. When you have a dataset where one class (the minority) has far fewer samples than another (the majority), a model will struggle to learn the minority class. SMOTE solves this by creating new, synthetic samples for the minority class, rather than simply duplicating existing ones. - DeepSeek

Govt recalls Spanish contrast agent containing impurities

Armindo Neves

The Pharmaceutical Supervision and Administration Bureau (ISAF) recalled yesterday a number of batches of a Spanish-made contrast agent* as it contains impurities.

According to a notification by a local pharmaceutical products importer, the bureau has been informed that certain batches of the contrast medium Gastrografin Liq Oral/Rectal, manufactured by BerliMed in Spain, was found to contain levels of the impurity N-Nitroso-Meglumine** exceeding acceptable limits.

As a precautionary measure, the bureau said, the manufacturer has voluntarily recalled four batches of the product exported to Macau.

The affected batches are MA04HF2, MA04MPR, MA04P3R, and MA04S8L.

According to the statement, the product is a prescription drug used for gastrointestinal examinations.

Based on information provided by the importer, the affected batches were supplied to the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre



This undated handout photo provided by the Pharmaceutical Supervision and Administration Bureau (ISAF) yesterday shows three boxes of the contrast agent imported from Spain.

(CHCSJ), the Islands Healthcare Complex – Macao Medical Centre of Peking Union Medical College Hospital (PUMCH), and several private hospitals in Macau, the statement said.

The Pharmaceutical Supervision and Administration Bureau has instructed the importer to proceed with the recall and has requested medical institutions immediately to cease using the affected batches. ■

*A contrast agent (or contrast medium) is considered a type of medication used in medical imaging procedures. These agents enhance the visibility of internal structures in imaging modalities such as X-rays, CT scans, and MRIs. - Poe

**N-Nitroso-Meglumine is a chemical compound that belongs to a class of organic compounds known as nitrosamines, a sugar alcohol used as a pharmaceutical excipient. Exposure to nitrosamines can potentially increase the risk of various types of cancer, including gastric and oesophageal cancers in humans. - Poe

Police arrest mainlander for stealing cash & gold nuggets from girlfriend's roommate

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) apprehended a man from the Chinese mainland for stealing gold nuggets from his girlfriend's roommate, PJ spokesman Cheong Kim Fong said during a special press conference yesterday.

Cheong identified the suspect as a 39-year-old man surnamed Guo who claimed to be jobless.

According to Cheong, Guo is the boyfriend of a female tenant in an apartment located in Zape.

Guo took the keys to the apartment's front door and had them copied without his girlfriend's knowledge, Cheong said, adding that by using the duplicate key, Guo got into the flat and used a fake key to open the door to the victim's room.

Cheong said that Guo broke into the unit twice, on February 7 and

on Saturday, stealing HK\$170,000 (174,700 patacas) in cash from a drawer and 19 gold nuggets from a clear bottle on the victim's dressing table.

The victim had returned to her hometown on February 7 and returned to Macau on Monday, Cheong said.

Early Monday morning, she returned to the flat and discovered the theft. She immediately reported it to the police. Later that morning, the suspect, realising his crime had been discovered, turned himself in to the Public Security Police (PSP)

Cheong said that PJ officers recovered all 19 gold nuggets from a pawnshop, which have a total estimated value of 24,730 patacas.

Guo was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, facing charges of theft and fraud. ■



Evidence of the theft-cum-fraud case is displayed at the Judiciary Police (PJ) headquarters in Zape yesterday – gold nuggets, a smartphone, a duplicate key, fake key, and a pawnshop receipt. - Photo: Armindo Neves

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Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY INTERVALS.
MIST AT FIRST.
FORCE 2 TO 4 EAST TO NORTHEASTERLY WINDS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 60% AND 98%.



20°C~27°C

Source: SMG

Portuguese Bookshop hosts Alexandre Simões' photo exhibition

Khalel Vallo

The exhibition "WHAT ARE YOU DOING THE REST OF YOUR LIFE?" by Alexandre Simões is currently on display in the city centre's Livraria Portuguesa ("Portuguese Bookshop"), bringing together images spanning from the 1990s to the present.

The exhibition runs until tomorrow. Inaugurated on February 5, the exhibition presents a selection of photographs described as entries in a visual diary, reflecting Simões' authorial universe* across multiple temporal layers, according to a statement by the bookshop.

The statement points out that the body of work explores memory, identity and the persistence of lived experience through photography.

The exhibition highlights Simões' devotion to analogue photography, emphasising it as a narrative tool that sustains connection with people and real life – their encounters, intimacy and cultural references, including music and cinema, the statement noted.

His images strive to preserve "the identity of an unextinguished era", creating

a labyrinth of visual moments that intersect past and present, the statement added.

The photographs convey themes of solitude, nostalgia, love and absence, alongside lifestyle references shaped by cultural influences. According to the statement, the aesthetic choices are deliberate: "There are no distractions," adding that attention is directed towards shadows, subtle gestures and the quiet emotional charge of each frame. Through the dialogue between images, the work reflects on the inexorable passage of time, suggesting that the past endures and expands within the present.

With free admission, the exhibition remains open to the public in the bookshop's basement until tomorrow evening, from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., offering exhibitiongoers a reflective encounter with Simões' analogue photographic practice and its meditation on time, memory and permanence, the statement concluded. ■

* "Authorial universe" refers to the fictional world created by an author. – Poe



Some of the photos of Alexandre Simões' "WHAT ARE YOU DOING THE REST OF YOUR LIFE?" exhibition on display in the basement of Livraria Portuguesa ("Portuguese Bookshop") in the city centre. – Photo: Khalel Vallo

PJ urge public to beware of 'Gold-Plated Silver' scams

Ida Cheong

The Judiciary Police (PJ) urged both the general public and the business sector in a statement on Monday that several fraud cases involving the use of "gold-plated silver" jewellery purporting to be real gold have been reported in neighbouring regions recently.

According to the statement, "gold-plated silver" refers to ornaments with a silver core and a gold-plated surface. While they closely resemble pure gold jewellery in appearance, their value is significantly lower.

The Judiciary Police reminded businesses engaged in gold recycling and pawnbroking to heighten their vigilance, the statement said, adding that when recycling or accepting gold jewellery as collateral, they should conduct strict inspections; such as to avoid skipping the gold verification process based solely on professional experience, visual judgment or trust built from previous transactions. Moreover, professional instruments and multiple testing methods should be used for authentication, and transaction records should be properly kept to avoid falling into traps.

Meanwhile, the police also reminded residents to purchase gold jewellery only from reputable merchants with physical shops. If strangers offer to sell gold at prices significantly lower than the market rate, or claim they need to sell it urgently, consumers should remain wary and verify carefully the item to avoid suffering any losses due to negligence, the statement added.

The statement noted that if gold jewellery's price is much lower than the market gold price, it is highly likely a trap so residents

買賣金飾要留神
避免“金包銀”當真
司法警察局呼籲市民及商戶慎防“金包銀”充真金詐騙手法

“金包銀”指表面鍍金，實心為銀的飾品
外表與足金首飾極為相似，但價格比足金低

司法警察局報案熱線 993 | 防詐騙查詢熱線 8800 7777

This poster provided by the Judiciary Police (PJ) on Monday urges residents and businesses to remain wary of 'Gold-Plated Silver' scams.

should choose reputable merchants, keep the relevant receipts as proof of purchase for future verification, and be sure to examine labels and hallmarks* when buying the products.

The statement underscored that gold-plated silver does not have purity marks like "999" or "24K" that indicate solid gold. Therefore, consumers must not omit the verification process based on experience, appearance, or past trust, and conduct strict inspections when recycling their gold. If in doubt, residents can call the PJ Anti-Scam helpline on 8800 7777 or the emergency hotline on 993 for assistance. ■

*A hallmark is a mark or stamp that indicates the authenticity and quality of precious metals, such as gold or silver. It often includes the metal's purity, the maker's mark, and other relevant information. – Poe

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Mr. Bubbles: ‘a quiet friend who stays by your side through hard times’

Interview by Rui Pastorin

One day in 2020, Jessica Ieong (楊沅喬) experienced a stressful and tiring day at work. So, she did what she usually does to find relief and put her mind at ease: draw.

Local-born Ieong told the *Post* in a recent interview that while she graduated from the University of Macau (UM) with a degree in Civil Engineering and previously worked in the profession, art has always been an outlet for her, using it as a form of self-expression and creativity.

She found herself reconnecting with art in a “more significant way” during the COVID-19 pandemic, she said, highlighting that in spite of the lockdown having been a challenging time, it gave her the “time and space to reconnect with my creative passions”.

Going back to that day after work in 2020, Ieong recalled: “I wanted someone to give me positive energy, and suddenly, this cute, chubby character appeared in my mind”.

With that, the pink, comforting and ever-bubbly original IP character “Mr. Bubbles” was born as a drawing on her iPad, carrying with it a message of positivity. This creation went on to become something that not only resonated with the young artist, but with many others: “I started sharing

my work online and was thrilled to realise that so many people resonated with the simple optimism brought by Mr. Bubbles”.

Through the illustrations, which are accompanied with motivating quotes, Ieong further underlined that her aim is to bring positivity and, more importantly, spark conversations about mental health and personal growth, topics that can feel “heavy or daunting”. She added: “Through visual storytelling, I hope to soften that barrier and make these conversations feel more approachable and relatable”.

Ieong further noted: “Like everyone else, Mr. Bubbles also has his ups and downs. He is not simply a symbol of positivity, but a reflection of mindset, reminding us that it’s okay to feel, to pause, and to navigate life one moment at a time. More than a cheerful presence, Mr. Bubbles is like a quiet friend who stays by your side through hard times, offering resilience and gentle encouragement when you need it most”.

In the years since its inception, Mr. Bubbles has grown from a drawing in an iPad to being featured in exhibitions, products, and brand collaborations, such as the Chinese mainland’s milk tea brand Chagee, while the IP has been showcased both in and outside of Macau. The Mr. Bubbles universe was also expanded with the introduction of more

characters like Nimbus and Petals in 2024 with the “Mr. Bubbles Family”.

“What started as a hobby has slowly blossomed into a full-blown business”, said Ieong, who is continuing on her entrepreneurial journey, with plans of expansion and new projects brewing.

Ieong elaborated that prior to the Chinese New Year (CNY) holiday, she and her team gradually introduced special designs, stories and products for the period, hoping to convey joy, connection, and love to everyone. Mr. Bubbles is also poised to reach a wider audience as the team continues to develop an online shop with international shipping. “I can’t wait to reveal more details soon, so stay tuned!”.

And it doesn’t stop there, with more plans in the works. Ieong said: “In the new year, our team aims to expand the universe of Mr. Bubbles by creating storylines for all the characters within this world. We are also working to bring Mr. Bubbles to international audiences. It has been incredibly encouraging to see how people around the globe resonate with Mr. Bubbles’ messages, and we are committed to reaching and connecting with even more individuals”.

More of the Mr. Bubbles works can be found on platforms like Instagram, where the dedicated page currently has over 30,000 followers. ■

– Photos provided yesterday by Jessica Ieong



2026 Women's Sports Carnival slated for next month

Ida Cheong

The annual "Macau Women's Sports Carnival" is slated for March 21 (Saturday) in the city's main square, Largo do Senado (議事亭前地), and on the following day at the Tap Seac Multi-Sports Pavilion, aiming to enable women to participate in sport through different means, the Sports Bureau's (ID) Sports Development Department Chief Chao Kuok Wai announced in a press conference yesterday.

The press conference about the sports carnival took place at the bureau's headquarters in Zape.

The two-day event, jointly hosted by the bureau and the Macau Women's General Association (commonly known as Fu Luen in Cantonese), will be divided into two parts, namely the mass sports fitness display and the inter-team sports competition.

On the first day of the carnival, women's groups and associations from Macau, other cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) and the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin as well as local public fitness interest classes' coaches and trainees will demonstrate different sports with regional characteristics on March 21 at 4:30 p.m. in Largo do Senado.

The second day of the carnival at the Tap Seac Multi-Sports Pavilion will begin at 9 a.m. on March 22.

According to the press conference, female residents born between 1966 and 2008 can form their own teams and sign up under the name of local women's organisations or other institutions to participate. The participants will be divided into Group A (1986 to 2008) and Group B (1966 to 1985) based on age; initially, the maximum number of teams is set at 70. If the registration quotas are fully booked, an increase in the number of teams will be considered, Chao added.

Chao said in a speech during yesterday's press conference that in addition to continuing to invite women's organisations from cities in the GBA and the in-depth cooperation zone in Hengqin to participate in the event this year, the event will also invite women's organisations from other mainland cities to join, aiming to promote sports exchanges between Macau and mainland cities, as well as the Greater Bay Area and Hengqin.

Female residents can register via the ID website www.buy.gooutmall.com/macauwomenssportsfestival - applications can until March 13 (Friday) at 12 p.m. ■



Women's General Association of Macau Vice President Ng Ka Teng (left) and the Sports Bureau's (ID) Sports Development Department Chief Chao Kuok Wai pose during yesterday's press conference about the upcoming Macau Women's Sports Carnival, at the ID headquarters in Zape. - Photo: Ida Cheong

Macau logs 1.55 million visitors during 9-day CNY Golden Week

Tony Wong

Macau recorded some 1.55 million visitor arrivals during the Chinese mainland's nine-day Chinese New Year (CNY) "Golden Week" holiday period this year, representing a daily average of 172,698, according to data released by the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) yesterday.

The Chinese mainland's nine-day holiday ran between Sunday last week (February 15) and Monday this week.

This year, the Chinese mainland's Spring Festival holiday period lasted nine days for the first time, beginning on the day before the eve of the Chinese New Year of the Horse.

The Year of the Horse began on Tuesday last week.

The seventh day of the Year of the Horse was the last day of the Chinese mainland's CNY holiday period this year.

Last year, the Chinese mainland's Spring Festival holiday period lasted eight days, beginning on the eve of the Chinese New Year of the Snake.

The seventh day of the Year of the Snake was the last day of the Chinese mainland's CNY holiday period last year.

According to the MGTO data released yesterday, Macau recorded 131,960 visitor arrivals on the first day of this year's Spring Festival holiday, 85,894 on the second day, 147,031 on the third day, 186,537 on the fourth day, 227,905 on the fifth day (the third day of the Year of the Horse), 218,968 on the sixth day, 214,187 on the seventh day, 184,554 on the eighth day, and 157,249 on the last day (Monday this week).

Consequently, Macau recorded 1,554,285 visitor arrivals during the Chinese mainland's nine-day Spring Festival holiday this year, i.e., between Sunday last week and Monday this week, representing a daily average of 172,698 during the period.

The 227,905 visitor arrivals recorded on the third day of the Year of the Horse set a new record of single-day number of visitor arrivals, breaking the previous record set on the third day of the Year of the Pig in pre-pandemic 2019, at 226,326.



Tourists through the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ruins of St. Paul's landmark on Monday, the last day of this year's nine-day Chinese New Year holiday in the mainland. - Photo: Tony Wong

The average daily number of visitor arrivals during this year's nine-day Spring Festival holiday, 172,698, represented a 5.5 percent increase from the average daily number of visitor arrivals during last year's eight-day Spring Festival holiday, 163,700.

Macau sets average daily record of CNY visitors

This year, the average daily number exceeded the one recorded during the Chinese mainland's Spring Festival holiday in pre-pandemic 2019 (171,702), which lasted seven days, representing an increase of 0.6 percent.

A follow-up MGTO statement released last night noted that the average daily number of 172,698 was the highest ever recorded for the Chinese mainland's CNY holiday period.

According to the data released on the MGTO website, the number of visitor arrivals recorded on the third day of the Year of the Horse (2026) represented a 4.0 percent increase from the number recorded on the third day of the Year of the Snake (2025).

The number of visitor arrivals recorded on the seventh day of the Year of the Horse represented a 14.6 percent increase from the number recorded on the seventh day of the Year of the Snake, according to the MGTO data.

During this year's nine-day Spring Festival holiday in the mainland, according to the MGTO data, Macau recorded 1,205,905 visitor arrivals from the Chinese mainland, accounting for 77.6 percent of the total.

The average daily number of visitor arrivals from the Chinese mainland this time, 133,989, represented a 7.2 percent increase from the one during last year's Spring Festival holiday, according to the data on the MGTO website.

Last night's MGTO statement also said that Macau recorded some 71,000 visitor arrivals from foreign countries during this year's nine-day Spring Festival holiday, representing a daily average of nearly 7,900 during the period, up 8.2 percent from the average daily number during last year's Spring Festival holiday.

Customarily, Macau's CNY public holiday lasts three days. This year, it took place between Tuesday and Thursday last week.

Police log 5.967 million border crossings during CNY

Meanwhile, the Public Security Police (PSP) said in a statement last night that Macau recorded 5.967 million entries and exits at its border checkpoints during this year's nine-day Spring Festival holiday in the mainland, representing a daily average of 663,000, up 7.9 percent from the average daily number during last year's eight-day Spring Festival holiday, 614,000.

The entry and exit (border crossings) figures recorded by the Public Security Police, which run Macau's immigration service, comprise local residents, visitors, non-resident workers (NRWs), non-local students enrolled in Macau, and all others with a special permit to stay in Macau. ■

Local airport logs over 267,000 passengers during CNY holiday

Rui Pastorin

The Macau International Airport (MIA) noted in a statement yesterday that it welcomed 267,235 passengers and handled 1,943 flight movements between February 14 and during the Chinese New Year (CNY) holiday period from February 15 to 23, with the figures representing an increase of 11 percent and 9 percent respectively during the same period in 2025.

The Chinese mainland enjoyed, for the first time, a nine-day Spring

Festival holiday, which kicked off on February 15, the day before Chinese New Year's Eve.

According to the MIA statement, the peak in passenger traffic was on February 21 and 22, where daily passenger numbers reached 29,000 and 28,000 respectively.

Over the CNY period, the statement noted, the terminal had a "lively and bustling ambiance".

The statement pointed out that in an analysis of the overall

market structure during the period, passengers from Chinese mainland routes made up 43 percent of total passenger volume, while international routes accounted for 39 percent. Meanwhile, routes to China's Taiwan region stood at 18 percent.

The statement added that around 60 additional flights had been added on routes to and from Southeast Asia in order to manage peak passenger demand and flight movements during the holiday. ■



This recent photo provided by the Macau International Airport (MIA) yesterday shows its departures hall.

Police fine fire-breather for spouting flames

Staff Reporter

The Public Security Police (PSP) fined a man from the mainland on Monday for spouting flames while standing on the pavement in Avenida da Nave Desportiva in Cotai last week, public broadcaster TDM reported yesterday.

According to the report, the police intercepted the fire-breather, who is in his thirties, at a hotel in Zape on Monday after becoming aware of a video clip circulating on social media. The clip showed the man spouting flames four times at the location in the early hours of Tuesday last week, the first day of the Chinese New Year.

Under questioning by the police, the man admitted to the offence, telling them he used yak butter and paper to perform the fire-spouting acts intended to “enhance the festive atmosphere.”

The police fined the man for breaching municipal general regulations governing public areas. The report did not specify the amount of the fine.

The police urged residents and visitors alike to abide by the law and refrain from any acts that could endanger their own or public safety. They stated that should these acts cause damage to property or loss of life, the offenders would face criminal liability. ■



This video clip, circulating on social media, uploaded by local Chinese-language online media UTV on its official Facebook account yesterday shows the man spouting flames on Avenida da Nave Desportiva in Cotai on Tuesday last week.



Passengers crowd the platform at Harbin Railway Station in Harbin, the capital of Heilongjiang Province, on Sunday. China's railways handled 121 million passenger trips during the recently concluded Spring Festival holiday, an increase of 11.5 percent compared to last year's holiday period, official data revealed yesterday. — Xinhua

Modernization evidenced by festival's opening-up

China Daily Editorial

In a hyperconnected world where algorithms increasingly choreograph our daily lives, China's special nine-day shopping campaign during the Spring Festival holiday has demonstrated how a society once rooted in agrarian rhythms has rewired itself for the digital age without severing its cultural roots.

Announced by the Ministry of Commerce of China and rolled out from February 15 to Monday, the campaign featured activities across six areas – dining, accommodation, transportation, tourism, shopping and entertainment – via five policy tools such as trade-in subsidies and inbound-tourism facilitation. But the real story is not the policy architecture. It is the transformation of Spring Festival itself from a traditional family reunion into a hybrid celebration that mirrors China's high-standard opening-up and modernization.

Consider the numbers. In just the first four days of the holiday, Hainan's offshore duty-free sales hit 970 million yuan, up 15.8 percent year-on-year, and average daily sales at key retail and catering enterprises nationwide rose 8.6 percent year-on-year. Flight bookings to China surged more than 400 percent around the holiday period. These are not merely statistics; they are signals of a society shifting from export-led growth to consumption-driven resilience.

The Chinese New Year was born in a world where prosperity meant a harvest and a full granary. Today, prosperity is measured in livestream clicks, mobile-payment scans and duty-free receipts. Yet the emotional core remains intact: reunion dinners, temple fairs, lantern festivals. What has changed is the interface. Multilingual festival maps guide foreign visitors to intangible-heritage markets. Digital “red envelopes” replace paper ones. AI-driven logistics ensure gifts arrive overnight. Tradition has not been replaced; it has been increasingly platform-evolved in many places.

This evolution reflects what anthropologists call “cultural layering” – new technologies settling onto ancient rituals like sediment on riverbeds. In the country, different generations may

celebrate the same festival through different consumption patterns: grandparents buying time-honored brands in temple fairs, parents upgrading home appliances through trade-in subsidies, and Gen Z livestream-shopping niche domestic labels. The pro-consumption campaign's 62.5 billion yuan in trade-in subsidies is an accelerator for household modernization and green transition.

Foreign companies have noticed. Nestlé Greater China told the media that Spring Festival showcases the sophistication of Chinese demand. Tesla reported surging showroom traffic after holiday promotions. European appliance makers and healthcare brands rolled out more localized products to capture the festival economy. China is no longer merely the world's factory; it is an increasingly world marketplace shaping global product design.

Inbound tourism tells a parallel story. Shanghai's airports handled an average of 113,000 daily cross-border travelers during the holiday. Beijing Capital International Airport processed nearly 8,000 tax-refund applications in the pre-holiday shopping season in January, up 469.81 percent year-on-year. It is fair to say that Spring Festival has become both a cultural magnet and a consumption gateway, illustrating how the festival demand radiates outward, shaping cross-border trade and service innovation.

In a sluggish world economy, the Chinese New Year is emerging as a seasonal stabilizer – not just for China, but for global supply chains that now synchronize product launches, marketing cycles and logistics flows around this holiday. The nine-day holiday has become a feedback loop between domestic consumption and global integration.

The inscription of the Chinese New Year on UNESCO's representative list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity in 2024 underscores its enduring cultural vitality. What we are witnessing today is a dynamic process of modernization: tradition is not confined to the past, but remains a living heritage that continuously adapts to the changing times.

— China Daily

Xinhua think tank report emphasizes China's commitment to rebuilding trust in global governance

BEIJING—China is helping steer the international community away from “position-based confrontation” and back toward “problem-solving,” thereby rebuilding trust in global governance, said a Xinhua think tank report released yesterday.

Seeking common ground while shelving differences is a core tenet of traditional Chinese philosophy and a crystallization of the wisdom

of China, said the report titled “Upholding International Justice and Jointly Addressing World Turbulence – Focusing on China's Solution to Global Governance,” released by Xinhua Institute, a think tank affiliated with Xinhua News Agency.

One of the most pressing challenges facing global governance today is the steady erosion of issue-

based consensus by ideological divisions and geopolitical rivalry, the report added.

“In advancing the Global Governance Initiative, China has consistently emphasized cooperation as the objective and sought to maximize consensus amid differences. Whether in development, security, climate change, or public health, China

advocates respecting the legitimate concerns of all countries, opposes the amplification or absolutization of differences, and promotes the search for solutions acceptable to all parties through dialogue and consultation,” said the report.

China underscores that consensus should be grounded in shared interests and shared responsibilities.

“While countries may pursue

different development paths, their interests are deeply intertwined. By emphasizing a shared future and shared responsibilities, China works to shift consensus-building from value-based declarations toward action-oriented cooperation, making global governance more responsive to real-world challenges and more operational in practice,” the report noted. — Xinhua

China's Spring Festival spending boosts business for global markets

Analysis

BEIJING – During the Chinese New Year holiday, China's consumer market has remained vibrant, with bustling shopping malls and heavy travel flows reflecting robust domestic demand and growing global appeal.

More notably, the holiday spending surge is generating opportunities far beyond China's borders. From upgraded imported goods to booming cross-border tourism, global businesses and destinations are actively engaging with the Chinese market and sharing in its growth.

Observers abroad note that as China continues to expand high-level opening-up and further unlock consumption potential, the spillover effects of the Chinese New Year economy are becoming increasingly visible, providing fresh momentum for trade, services and broader global recovery.

UPGRADED IMPORTS GAIN MOMENTUM

From Dubai-style chocolate to French cosmetics, high-quality imported festive goods are gaining popularity among Chinese consumers. The Chinese New Year has evolved into not only a major cultural celebration but also a powerful consumption platform with global reach.

In response to Chinese consumers' growing preference for green, healthy and high-quality products, international companies are launching new items and refining services during the holiday season. Imported New Year goods are showing clear trends toward premiumization, specialization and diversification.

South African rooibos tea and wine are finding a growing niche in China. More South

African wineries are shifting their market strategies, aiming to explore the Chinese market with stable supply, optimized product structures and localized operations, said Zhang Xin, CEO of Buffalo International Logistics in South Africa.

Chilean cherry exporter Ocho Fuegos is also adapting to Chinese festive demand. Patricio Ulloa, the company's commercial manager, said a newly designed 880-gram "gold bar"-shaped gift box had been particularly well received by Chinese consumers. The company expects to export nearly 2 million boxes to China this season, underscoring the scale and purchasing power of the Chinese market.

The holiday also inspires overseas manufacturers. Italian scooter brand Vespa has recently introduced a special edition for the Year of the Horse, integrating zodiac symbolism with classic Italian industrial design. The model has attracted attention at the brand's experience store in Milan.

Meanwhile, international exhibitors are actively participating in themed markets in China. A new year fair in central Beijing launched an international section for the first time, drawing exhibitors from 14 countries and regions showcasing food, cosmetics and specialty products, bringing global flavors closer to Chinese consumers during the festive season.

CROSS-BORDER TRAVEL DRIVES GROWTH

The longest-ever nine-day Chinese New Year holiday has fueled a boom in cross-border tourism, with immersive and experience-

oriented travel becoming increasingly popular.

Authorities estimate that average daily cross-border passenger flows during the holiday will exceed 2.05 million, up 14.1 percent year on year.

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Dubai International Airport has adopted festive decorations, while major shopping malls are providing discount coupons through Chinese e-wallet services.

Shahab Shayan, regional director at Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism, described China as one of Dubai's most important strategic markets and said the city is continuing efforts to create a welcoming environment for Chinese tourists, enterprises and investors.

In Thailand, lantern festivals and lion dance performances were held in Bangkok and Hat Yai of Songkhla Province. Thapanee Kiatphaibool, governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, said the events, held in the year marking over five decades of diplomatic ties between Thailand and China, reflect the two sides' commitment to preserving shared cultural heritage and promoting high-quality tourism cooperation.

VAST MARKET DIVIDENDS

This year's Spring Festival also highlighted evolving consumption patterns within China. Smart technology products are in strong demand, trendy collectibles have become popular festive gifts, and traditional cultural performances are being revitalized through more interactive forms.

Data from online platforms show that as of Sunday, total box office revenues for the

2026 Spring Festival film season, including pre-sales, had exceeded 5 billion yuan.

Meanwhile, data from the People's Bank of China indicate that on Chinese New Year's Eve alone, the bankcard operator China UnionPay and online clearing platform NetsUnion handled a combined 4.93 billion payment transactions, up 21.64 percent from the same day last year.

The strong holiday consumption reflects faster release of domestic demand, a quicker recovery in the services sector and sustained vitality in digital consumption, indicating expanding regional consumption potential, Leseko Makhetha, head of the Department of Economics at the National University of Lesotho, told Xinhua.

Building on the holiday momentum, international brands are stepping up targeted engagement with Chinese consumers. Andrea Cicini, a professional member of Italy's Public Relations Federation, said China's vast market continues to hold strong appeal for global brands, and more foreign brands are viewing the New Year consumption season as an important opportunity to deepen their presence in China.

Kenyan economist James Shikwati said China is accelerating its transition from the "world's factory" to the "world's market."

He noted that African countries are making use of China's zero-tariff arrangements for exports from African countries having diplomatic relations with China and adjusting their export structures to better align with Chinese market demand, particularly during peak consumption seasons such as the Chinese New Year. — Xinhua

Civil aviation reports 7.7 pct increase in Spring Festival trips

BEIJING – The Chinese mainland's civil aviation sector handled 22.05 million passenger trips during the 2026 Spring Festival holiday – up 7.7 percent from the same period of 2025, according to data released yesterday by the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC).

The sector operated an average of 18,956 flights each day of the nine-day holiday, which concluded on Monday, marking a 4.4 percent increase from the previous year, the CAAC said.

The Spring Festival, which is also known as Chinese New Year, fell on February 17 this year, providing an occasion for family reunions and travel. The 2026 holiday was a record-long nine days, driving even stronger demand for transport during the peak period.

Data from the Ministry of Transport shows that more than 2.8 billion passenger trips were made across all regions of China during the holiday.

— Xinhua

China places great importance on economic, trade cooperation with Germany: MOC

BEIJING – China places great importance on its economic and trade cooperation with Germany, the Ministry of Commerce said yesterday.

Over the more than 50 years since the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Germany, bilateral economic and trade cooperation has deepened steadily, according to a spokesperson for the ministry.

Germany has remained China's largest trading partner and largest source of foreign investment in Europe, and the two countries have achieved extensive industrial integration, the ministry said.

It noted that in recent years, annual trade between China and Germany has consistently exceeded US\$200 billion, and two-way investment stock has surpassed US\$65 billion, with each figure accounting for nearly one-quarter of China's

total engagement with the European Union.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz is set to lead a high-level trade delegation to China this week, accompanied by senior executives from about 30 leading German companies in key sectors such as automotives, chemicals, biopharmaceuticals, machinery manufacturing and the circular economy, the spokesperson said, noting that this underscores Germany's strong commitment to deepening bilateral economic and trade relations.

China places great importance on its economic and trade cooperation with Germany, and is actively preparing for joint initiatives such as the China-Germany economic advisory committee meeting, aiming to provide a platform for dialogue and collaboration between enterprises from both sides, the ministry said. — Xinhua

Xinhua publishes book on China's governance under Xi's leadership



This photo shows books of the Chinese and English editions of the first volume of "China's Governance Under Xi Jinping's Leadership." The Xinhua Publishing House, the publishing arm of Xinhua News Agency, has released the first volume of "China's Governance Under Xi Jinping's Leadership." Compiled by Xinhua, the book is available in both Chinese and English versions and is being distributed to readers at home and abroad. — Xinhua

BEIJING – The Xinhua Publishing House, the publishing arm of Xinhua News Agency, has released the first volume of "China's Governance Under Xi Jinping's Leadership."

Compiled by Xinhua, the book is available in both Chinese and English versions and is being distributed to readers at home and abroad.

Since the 18th Communist Party of China (CPC) National Congress, the CPC Central Committee with Xi at its core has, with great historical initiative, tremendous political courage and a strong sense of responsibility, secured historic achievements and brought about historic changes in the cause of the Party and the country.

Amid the great practices in the new era, Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era has taken shape, serving as the scientific action guide to building a great country and advancing national rejuvenation on all fronts through Chinese modernization.

Xinhua reporters have witnessed history as it unfolds, producing a wealth of news stories that reflect the profound thinking, extensive practice, deep commitment, and remarkable achievements of Xi, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, in the governance of China.

The first volume includes 26 Xinhua feature stories and 41 news photos of Xi, presenting a vivid account of his visionary leadership in steering China toward national rejuvenation, as well as the power of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and its tremendous strength in practice.

A seminar on global governance and the launch ceremony of the English version of the book were held yesterday in Geneva, Switzerland. Guests at the event highly commended China's exploration and thinking in the realm of governance in the new era and expressed their willingness to further deepen exchanges and cooperation with China in the field of global governance. — Xinhua

Duterte drew up 'death lists', boasted about murders: ICC prosecutor

Richard Carter

THE HAGUE — Former Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte personally drew up "death lists" and boasted about murders committed during his "war on drugs", an International Criminal Court prosecutor alleged yesterday at a crimes against humanity hearing.

On day two of proceedings against Duterte, ICC prosecutor Edward Jeremy laid out searing testimony including allegations that children had their heads wrapped in packing tape and were strangled to death.

"As president, Duterte publicly named persons he alleged were involved in drugs, and many of those would end up as victims in his so-called war on drugs," Jeremy said.

The "Duterte list" was "basically a death list", Jeremy cited a witness as saying, showing a video of Duterte himself saying: "I am the sole person responsible for it all."

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

Prosecutors say this is a "mere fraction" of the thousands believed killed in his "war on drugs" as mayor of Davao City and then president.

"As witnesses stated, the poor were often targeted, because they were the ones least likely to file complaints against the police," said Jeremy.

'The bodies pile up'

Jeremy played a clip of Duterte joking about "extrajudicial killings" during a speech.

"And in this opulent, gilded, presentation room, the officials laugh along with their president while he boasts about his skills in extrajudicial killing," said Jeremy.

"And outside on the streets of the Philippines, the bodies pile up."

Jeremy alleged that almost 1,500 people had already been killed at the time of this video.



Relatives of the victims of extrajudicial killings of former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte's drug war, perform a theatre play called "Teatro Paghilom", a holistic programme that aims to help the widows and orphans of extrajudicial killings victims rebuild and re-create their lives, at a university in Manila yesterday. — AFP

The prosecutor said that on two occasions, children aged around 14 or 15 were taken into custody.

"On each occasion, the police wrapped the child's head in packing tape. So no one could hear them scream. And then strangled the child to death with wire," said Jeremy.

"It's difficult to imagine a more terrifying end to two lives that had barely even begun. And these murdered children were then sold to funeral homes."

The week-long ICC proceedings are not a trial but a "confirmation of charges" hearing, enabling judges to weigh whether to move ahead with a trial.

Another prosecutor, Robynne Croft, described the alleged crimes as a "widespread and systematic attack" on the people of the Philippines.

The killings were "highly organised, planned and coordinated" and without Duterte's "essential contribution", would not have occurred, Croft alleged.

Duterte, 80, is not in court after exercising his right not to appear.

His defence team says he is weak and in cognitive decline. The prosecution and victims counter that he is healthy but does not want to face the loved-ones of victims.

The court passed him fit to attend but granted his right to stay away.

Once the hearings wrap up Friday, the court will take up to 60 days to decide whether to proceed to a full trial, usually in a written judgement.

A lawyer for the victims, Paolina Massidda, said loved-ones of those killed "have waited years for this moment."

Addressing the three-judge panel, Massidda said: "Today, the victims stand before you with the hope that justice long denied may finally be within reach. This court is their last refuge."

"For the victims, the confirmation of charges is not merely a legal step. It is a recognition that their loved ones mattered. It is an acknowledgement that what happened to them was wrong," she added.

Duterte's defence lawyer, Nicholas Kaufman, on Monday said his client "maintained his innocence absolutely".

He argued that while Duterte used "bluster and hyperbole" in his speeches, he also frequently ordered authorities only to shoot in self-defence.

Kaufman will address the court tomorrow. — AFP

Thailand, Cambodia dispute exchange of fire at border

Thanaporn Promyamyai with Suy Se in Phnom Penh

BANGKOK — Thailand's military said its troops exchanged fire with Cambodian forces along their border yesterday, accusing its neighbour of violating a December truce, while Phnom Penh denied the use of "any weapons".

The Southeast Asian nations' decades-long border dispute erupted into several rounds of clashes last year, killing dozens of people and displacing more than a million in July and December.

The countries signed a ceasefire agreement in late December but tensions on the border remain, with both sides trading accusations of truce violations.

Thailand's military said Cambodian forces "fired a single 40 mm grenade round" near a Thai patrol in the border province of Sisaket yesterday, prompting return fire, according to a statement.

Thai army spokesman Winthai Suvaree accused Cambodia of violating their ceasefire deal, which ended three weeks of clashes.

Cambodia's Information Minister Neth Pheaktra said the allegation were "entirely false" and designed to "mislead public opinion and provoke tension".

No Thai personnel were injured yesterday, the army said.

"Following the incident, Thai forces responded by firing an M79 [grenade launcher] in the direction from which the shot originated... as a warning and for self-defence," it added.

The Thai army, citing a preliminary assessment, said the "incident may have resulted from a rotation of Cambodian troops, with new personnel lacking familiarity with regulations and command control".

'Fabricated'

Neth Pheaktra said the claims that its military fired on patrolling

Thai troops were "fabricated and grossly distort the facts".

The minister reiterated Cambodia's "unwavering commitment" to the December truce and an earlier short-lived ceasefire deal from October.

"Cambodia is deeply concerned that unilateral allegations made without joint verification, consultation or factual substantiation risk misrepresenting the situation on the ground and undermining mutual trust," he said.

Cambodia's defence ministry spokeswoman Maly Socheata said liaison teams from the Cambodian and Thai militaries promptly discussed the matter after "reports of explosions and gunfire on the Thai side".

"Cambodian officials explicitly informed their Thai counterparts that Cambodian forces did not fire any weapons as alleged," Maly Socheata said in a statement.

Under the December truce, Cambodia and Thailand pledged to cease fire, freeze troop movements and cooperate on demining efforts along their border.

But last month, Thailand accused Cambodia of violating the truce, saying cross-border mortar fire wounded a soldier, while Phnom Penh said a "pile of garbage" exploded, injuring two of its own troops.

Since the latest round of heavy fighting, Cambodia has said Thai forces captured several areas in border provinces — contrary to their agreements — and has demanded their withdrawal.

Bangkok has insisted it merely reclaimed land that was part of Thailand and had been occupied by Cambodians for years.

While the two nations agreed in December to stop fighting, they still need to resolve their century-old conflict, stemming from a dispute over the French colonial-era demarcation of their 800-kilometre frontier. — AFP

Malaysia curbs non-AI data centres as power squeeze looms

KUALA LUMPUR — Malaysia has frozen the development of new data centres not used for artificial intelligence over power and water concerns, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said yesterday, as the country pivots to resource-hungry AI facilities.

The Southeast Asian nation is emerging as a major regional IT infrastructure hub, but it faces growing challenges, including a sharp rise in electricity and water supply demands — both needed to keep the data centres running.

"For the past one and a half years, almost two years ago, we have limited the entry of new data centres that are not related to AI," Anwar told Malaysia's parliament during a question session.

"So all new applications that were not related... have already been stopped," he said.

Data centres that offered high-technology benefits related to AI will still be approved, he added.

Anwar, who is also Malaysia's finance minister, stressed the country still had sufficient capacity to meet current energy supply needs, though he noted it would have to look further afield in the future.

This includes tapping electricity supply from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Power Grid, an ambitious plan connecting the 11-member bloc.

Future power supply could also come from Malaysia's Sarawak state, situated on Borneo island, which boasts an abundant supply of hydro and solar energy.

"Hopefully, it will fulfil these needs [in the future]. But, for the next one or two years, it is sufficient," Anwar said of the energy supply.

When resource constraints led Singapore to halt new data centre developments between 2019 and 2022, international tech companies began to build across the border in Malaysia, which has fast become a powerhouse for the sector.

Malaysia accounts for more than half of under-construction data centre capacity among five Southeast Asian countries, also including Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam, according to market intelligence firm DC Byte.

The building boom has been particularly rapid in the southern state of Johor, which neighbours Singapore and has imposed tighter requirements on water and power use for new data centres in order to stop them from straining local resources. — AFP



Local residents move hotel guests using a rubber dinghy through the water on an inundated street amid floods following heavy rain in Legian Kuta near Denpasar on Indonesia's resort island of Bali yesterday. — AFP

N Korea's ruling party promotes Kim's younger sister

SEOUL – North Korea's ruling party has elevated leader Kim Jong Un's powerful younger sister to a top position, state media said yesterday, a sign of her far-reaching influence within the reclusive nation.

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.

Kim Yo Jong – long considered one of her brother's closest lieutenants – was promoted to department director within the party's apex central committee, the Korean Central News Agency said.

Although it was not clear which department she would lead, she has previously held a senior role within the party's propaganda unit.

Kim Yo Jong has in recent years emerged as one of the most powerful figures in North Korea, playing a highly visible role in diplomacy, nuclear negotiations and other matters of state.

"Kim Yo Jong is one of the very few people Kim Jong Un can trust and rely on," said Ahn Chan-il, a researcher originally from North Korea.

"She also served as a working-level official for Kim's summits with Trump in Singapore and Hanoi. She is experienced and seasoned," he told AFP.

Kim Yo Jong burst on to the international scene in 2018, when she was dispatched to Seoul as North Korea's envoy for the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics.

With that trip, she became one of the first members of the ruling Kim dynasty to set foot in the South since the Korean War.

Since then she has gained a reputation for her vitriolic denunciations of Washington and Seoul.

She once derided the government of former South Korean president Yoon Suk Yeol as a "faithful dog" of the United States.

Her tone has softened somewhat since South Korea's incumbent

leader Lee Jae Myung – who has sought to mend ties with the North – took office last year.

Kim Yo Jong's latest advancement "amounts to promotion to ministerial rank," said Lim Eul-chul from the Institute for Far Eastern Studies at Kyungnam University.

Rapid rise

Remarkably little is known about Kim Yo Jong given her prominent role in North Korea's dealings with the outside world.

Born in 1988, according to the South Korean government, she is one of three children born to Kim's father and predecessor, Kim Jong Il, and his third known partner, former dancer Ko Yong Hui.

She was educated in Switzerland alongside her brother and rose rapidly up the ranks once he inherited power after their father's death in 2011.

Pyongyang has never officially disclosed any information about Kim Yo Jong's marital status or children.

Rare footage released by state media last year showed her attending an art show with two young children.

The Workers' Party 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.

It is just the ninth time the gathering has been called to order under North Korea's decades-spanning Kim dynasty.

There is keen interest in whether the congress might also promote leader Kim Jong Un's teenage daughter Kim Ju Ae.

Kim Ju Ae has emerged as a clear frontrunner to continue the family dynasty, according to South Korea's national intelligence service.

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

But the North Korean leader has so far largely shunned efforts to resume top-level diplomatic dialogue. – AFP

Yoon appeals insurrection verdict

SEOUL – South Korea's former president Yoon Suk Yeol has filed an appeal against an insurrection conviction stemming from his 2024 martial law declaration, his lawyers said yesterday.

The Seoul Central District Court found Yoon guilty last week of leading an insurrection designed to "paralyse" the National Assembly, and sentenced him to life in prison.

Yoon initially branded the verdict "difficult to accept" but did not immediately indicate whether he would appeal.

His legal team said yesterday they would challenge the verdict.

"We believe we have a responsibility to clearly place on record the problems with this ruling – not only in the court's records, but also before the judgement of history in the future," Yoon's lawyers said in a statement.

They said they took issue with the prosecution's "excessive indictment" and would take action against "the contradictory judgement rendered... based on that premise, and the political context surrounding it".

Last week, presiding judge Ji Gwi-yeon said Yoon sent troops to the National Assembly building in an effort to silence political opponents who had frustrated his attempts to govern.

"The court finds that the intention was to paralyse the assembly for a considerable period," Ji said.

Yoon was a deeply unpopular president at the time of the martial law crisis.



This screen grab made from a handout video distributed by the Seoul Central District Court and released by Yonhap shows South Korea's former president Yoon Suk Yeol (2nd row, left) attending a sentencing trial on his insurrection charges at the Seoul Central District Court in Seoul on Thursday. – AFP

His party was vastly outmuscled in parliament, which had voted to block budget measures and impeach key figures in his administration.

With support from senior military figures, Yoon dispatched troops to seize control of the assembly building and arrest critics.

The judge said that Yoon "became fixated" on his belief that the opposition "could effectively neutralise the president".

Protests and panic

Yoon appeared on late-night television on December 3, 2024, to deliver a shock address to the nation.

Pointing to vague threats of North Korean influence and dangerous

"anti-state forces", he declared the suspension of civilian government and the start of military rule.

Martial law was lifted around six hours later, after lawmakers raced to the assembly building and voted it down.

The crisis triggered protests, sent the stock market into panic and caught key military allies such as the United States off-guard.

Yoon was ousted in April last year, and voters elected President Lee Jae Myung in a snap election in June.

Yoon apologised last week for the "hardship" caused by his martial law decree, but insisted it was a measure taken "solely for the sake of the nation". – AFP

Jailed Khan gets eye treatment: hospital

ISLAMABAD – Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan received eye treatment yesterday, according to a hospital statement, although a spokesman for the ex-cricket star complained he was not allowed to see his personal doctor.

Khan has been in jail since 2023 and was sentenced late last year along with his wife to 17 years on corruption charges they both deny.

The 73-year-old's family and lawyer say that he has lost most of the vision in his right eye.

Khan was taken to the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) in Islamabad for a second dose of eye injections, the hospital said.

"Khan was found to be clinically stable," it added.

However, Khan's press adviser Sayed Zulfiqar Bukhari said that "access should be granted to his personal physician and family".

Last week, more than a dozen international cricket captains concerned for Khan's health urged the Islamabad government to give him "adequate" medical treatment.

Khan was prime minister from 2018 to 2022 before being removed in a no-confidence vote during a political crisis over tensions between his government and Pakistan's powerful military establishment.

He has since faced multiple legal cases on corruption and other charges.

Khan and his party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, maintain that the cases against him are politically motivated.

His arrest triggered nationwide protests in May 2023, some of which turned violent and led to hundreds of arrests.

Khan's lawyer, Salman Safdar, told a news conference on February 12 that "one of Khan's eyes has only 15 percent vision", following a jail visit.

The former premier's son, Kasim Khan, said his father's condition was the result of "medical neglect" during his confinement.

"The responsibility lies squarely with the regime in power, the Army Chief and the puppets enabling this cruelty," Kasim Khan said on social media platform X. – AFP

3 foreigners among 19 killed in Nepal bus crash

KATHMANDU – Nepal's police said yesterday that three foreign nationals – British, Chinese and Indian citizens – were among the 19 people who died a day earlier in a Himalayan bus crash.

The bus, en route from the tourist city of Pokhara to the capital Kathmandu, fell more than 200 metres into the icy Trishuli River in Dhading district in the early hours of Monday morning.

Police on Monday confirmed 19 were killed, but yesterday released more details of the dead, saying a 24-year-old British tourist, a Chinese woman and an Indian man were among the victims.

"We have now identified all those who died," senior local police officer Prakash Dahal told AFP.

There were 44 people on board at the time of the accident, including

five foreigners. One Chinese citizen and a New Zealander were injured.

In July 2024, two buses with more than 50 people on board were swept off the highway into the same river after a landslide.

Deadly crashes are relatively common in the Himalayan republic because of poor roads, badly maintained vehicles and reckless driving. – AFP



Kim Yo Jong, sister of North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un, attends a reception in the Great Hall of People following a military parade marking the 80th anniversary of victory over Japan and the end of World War II, in Beijing on September 3, 2025. – AFP

Aid groups petition Israel's top court to halt ban on Gaza, West Bank operations

Gianluca Pacchiani and Louis Baudoin-Laarman

JERUSALEM – More than a dozen international humanitarian organisations have petitioned Israel's Supreme Court to block an imminent order that would force 37 NGOs to cease operations in Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem, warning of catastrophic consequences for Palestinians.

Organisations including Doctors Without Borders (MSF), Oxfam, the Norwegian Refugee Council and CARE were notified on December 30, 2025 that their Israeli registrations had expired and that they had 60 days to renew them by providing lists of their Palestinian staff.

If they fail to do so, they will have to cease operations in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, including east Jerusalem, from March 1.

The petition, described as unprecedented in its scale, seeks an urgent interim injunction from Israel's top court to suspend the closures pending full judicial review.

The 17 petitioners, which include some of the NGOs hit by the ban, argue the Israeli measures are incompatible with an occupying power's obligations under international humanitarian law.

The NGOs say compliance would expose local employees to potential retaliation, undermine the principle of humanitarian

neutrality and violate European data protection law.

"Turning humanitarian organisations into an information-gathering arm for a party to the conflict stands in total contradiction to the principle of neutrality," the petition states.

According to the United Nations, 133 NGO workers have been killed in the Gaza Strip since the war started on October 7, 2023, including 15 MSF employees.

The petitioners say they have proposed practical alternatives to handing over staff lists to Israel, including "independent sanctions screening" and "donor-audited vetting systems."

'New Era'

The organisations say that they collectively support or implement more than half of all food assistance in Gaza, 60 per cent of field hospital operations and all inpatient treatment for children suffering severe acute malnutrition.

Audrey Rayburn, director of AIDA, an umbrella organisation of international NGOs working in Palestinian territories, told reporters Tuesday that NGO presence in Gaza, where foreign media is not allowed, also allows outsiders to witness the war.

The petitioners say enforcement has already begun in practice, with supplies blocked and visas denied to foreign staff.



Children stand next to water containers at a makeshift camp sheltering displaced Palestinians in Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday. 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. Nearly all of Gaza's 2.2 million residents were displaced at least once during the war sparked by Palestinian Islamist group Hamas's unprecedented October 7 attack.

– AFP

"We haven't been able to get international staff inside Gaza since the beginning of January. Israeli authorities denied any entry to Gaza, but also to the West Bank," MSF head of mission in the Palestinian territories Filipe Ribeiro told AFP last week.

"For the time being, we are still working in Gaza, and we plan to keep running our operations as long as we can," he added.

The ban comes as Israel hardens its stance towards humanitarian actors in general, having banned the UN agency for Palestinian refugees,

UNRWA, from Israel in early 2025.

UNRWA, whom Israel accused of employing people who took part in Hamas's October 7 attack which triggered the war, also can no longer coordinate with Israeli authorities in the occupied West Bank, as will be the case for the banned, or deregistered, NGOs.

For international NGOs, the current ban goes back to a change in rules for foreign organisations working with Palestinians in March 2025.

The law updated the framework for how aid groups must register to

maintain their status within Israel, along with provisions that outline how their applications can be denied or registration revoked.

Complicates relief work

The absence of coordination with Israel complicates operations by denying entry to Israel, the West Bank or Gaza to foreign aid workers or by denying direct contact to plan around Israeli military operations in the Palestinian territory.

"We are arguing that Israel acted here without any authority, because according to the Oslo Accords, the whole registration of organisations issue was handled by the Palestinian Authority," Yotam Ben-Hillel, an Israeli attorney who filed the appeal for the international organisations, told reporters.

The NGOs argued in their petition that Israel, as an occupying power in the West Bank and parts of Gaza, "must facilitate relief for civilians under its control" under the Geneva Convention.

"This is a new era in how Israel deals with international nonprofits", Ben-Hillel said.

He stressed that under the 2025 rules, foreign NGOs can also lose their registration if Israel deems it has "delegitimised Israel" by reporting on the West Bank or Gaza, a rule he called "vague and subjective".

He said the Israeli state had until today 12:00 GMT to provide the court with an answer. – AFP

Gazans salvage ancient books in mosque library damaged by war

GAZA CITY – Inside the dusty shell of one of the oldest libraries in the Palestinian territories, a group of Gazan volunteers work diligently to salvage what remains of their ancient cultural heritage.

The Great Omari Mosque library sustained terrible damage during the war in Gaza, which erupted in October 2023 and devastated swathes of the Palestinian territory, including cultural and religious sites.

The mosque – in the old town of Gaza City – now stands largely ruined, with its library littered with rubble and dust.

"I was shocked and stunned when I saw the extent of the destruction in the library," Haneen Al-Amsi told AFP, saying the scenes of devastation had spurred her to help launch the restoration initiative.

Amsi, who heads the Eyes on Heritage Volunteer Foundation, said the western part of the library was burned when the mosque was hit, causing irreversible damage.

"The library was estimated to contain about 20,000 books, but currently we are left with fewer than 3,000 or 4,000," she explained.

Among the debris, volunteers hoping to restore the collection pored over charred fragments of

manuscript and shards of yellowed paper.

"The library of the Great Omari Mosque is considered the third largest library in Palestine after the Al-Aqsa Mosque library and the Ahmed Pasha al-Jazzar library," Amsi said.

"It is an important historical library that contains original manuscripts and a diverse collection of books on jurisprudence, medicine, Islamic law, literature and various other subjects."

Gaza's history stretches back thousands of years, making the tiny territory a treasure trove of archaeological artefacts from past civilisations including Canaanites, Egyptians, Persians and Greeks.

But more than two years of war between Israel and Hamas took a heavy toll on Gaza's heritage sites.

As of January 2026, the UN's cultural agency UNESCO, had verified damage to 150 sites since the start of the war on October 7, 2023 sparked by Hamas's attack on Israel.

These include 14 religious sites and 115 buildings of historical or artistic interest.

'Represent history'

Inside one of the library's old stone rooms, one woman used a paintbrush

to dust off an old tome, while other volunteers wearing facemasks and gloves crouched on the floor to leaf through piles of books.

"The condition of the rare and historical books is deplorable due to their being left for more than 700 to 800 days," Amsi said, talking of "immense damage and gunpowder residue" on the volumes.

An independent United Nations commission said in June 2025 that Israeli attacks on schools, religious and cultural sites in Gaza amounted to war crimes.

"Israel has obliterated Gaza's education system and destroyed more than half of all religious and cultural sites in the Gaza Strip," the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory said in a report.

Israel rejected the commission as "an inherently biased and politicised mechanism of the Human Rights Council" and said the report was "another attempt to promote its fictitious narrative of the Gaza war".

For Amsi, the importance of restoring the books lay in preserving crucial historic records.

"These books represent the history of the city and bear witness to historical events," she said. – AFP

Hamas calls for sanctions against Israel over new West Bank moves

GAZA CITY – Hamas yesterday called for sanctions against Israel, welcoming a joint condemnation by nearly 20 countries of new Israeli measures aimed at tightening control over the occupied West Bank.

Israel has approved a series of initiatives this month backed by far-right ministers, including launching a process to register land in the West Bank as "state property" and allowing Israelis to purchase land there directly.

Late on Monday, 18 countries including regional heavyweights Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and European powers France and Spain, slammed Israel over the recent moves.

They "are part of a clear trajectory that aims to change the reality on the ground and to advance unacceptable de facto annexation", the countries said.

"Such actions are a deliberate and direct attack on the viability of the Palestinian state and the implementation of the two-state solution."

Hamas hailed the condemnation as "a step in the right direction in confronting

the occupation's expansionist plans, which flagrantly violate international law and relevant UN resolutions".

The group in a statement urged the countries involved "to impose deterrent sanctions and exert pressure on the fascist occupation government to halt its policies aimed at entrenching annexation, colonial settlement and forced displacement".

It said the Israeli measures were part of ongoing "aggression" against Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

In addition to roughly three million Palestinians, more than 500,000 Israelis live in settlements and outposts in the West Bank, which are considered illegal under international law.

Israel's current government has accelerated settlement expansion, approving a record 54 settlements in 2025, according to activists.

The West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967, is envisioned as the core of a future Palestinian state, but many on Israel's religious right view it as part of Israel's historic homeland.

– AFP

Paris says US envoy pledges not to 'interfere' in French affairs

Delphine Toutou and Anna Smolchenko

PARIS – The US ambassador to Paris, Charles Kushner, called France's foreign minister yesterday and pledged not to "interfere" in the host country's affairs, a diplomatic source said, after a fallout over Washington's remarks following the killing of a far-right activist.

The new diplomatic row between the two NATO allies broke out after Kushner flouted a summons over the US administration denouncing what it called "terrorism" and left-wing violence in France after the fatal beating of far-right activist Quentin Deranque, 23, earlier this month.

France blocked the ambassador – whose son Jared is married to Donald Trump's daughter Ivanka – from having access to French government ministers until he explained himself.

A member of Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot's team yesterday said that Kushner had called him.

"The latter reiterated the reasons that had led to the summons: France cannot accept any form of interference or manipulation of its national public debate by the authorities of a third country," they told AFP.

"The ambassador took note, expressed his willingness not to interfere in our public debate, and recalled the friendship that binds France and the United States."

There was no official public comment from the US embassy yesterday.

France has repeatedly said it will not tolerate attempts to intervene in its affairs and use tragedy for political purposes.

Barrot earlier yesterday said Kushner would only be able to resume his duties after



This combination of files pictures created yesterday shows Charles Kushner (left), the new US ambassador to France and Monaco, leaving the Elysee Presidential Palace in Paris after a meeting with the French president on July 18, 2025, and French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Noel Barrot leaving after the weekly cabinet meeting at the presidential Elysee Palace in Paris, on October 1, 2024. – AFP

he provided an explanation over his failure to respect "the most basic customs of diplomacy".

He urged him to explain himself "so that he can resume the normal exercise of his duties as ambassador".

"It's the basics," a visibly irritated Barrot told broadcaster France Info, calling Kushner's no-show a "surprise".

Kushner, 71, a multimillionaire real estate developer and former attorney who spent time in prison for tax evasion and other crimes –

before being pardoned by Trump in 2020 – is not a professional diplomat.

Kushner was already summoned to the French ministry last year but skipped that meeting as well, sending an official instead.

'Creating difficulties'

"He is creating difficulties for himself, because for an ambassador to be able to do his job, he needs to have access to members of the government," Barrot said earlier yesterday.

"Once explanations have been provided, the US ambassador to France will naturally regain access to the French government."

A diplomatic source had told AFP the ambassador cited "personal commitments" and sent a senior embassy official instead.

Barrot stressed that the incident would not affect the Franco-US relationship on the whole.

But he reiterated that France would not tolerate intervention in its domestic affairs.

"We do not accept that foreign countries can come and interfere in, then insert themselves into, our national political debate, whatever the circumstances," he said.

"I believe all French people share the same feeling."

Deranque died from head injuries following clashes between radical-left and far-right supporters on the sidelines of a protest against a politician from the far-left France Unbowed (LFI) party in Lyon on February 12. His death has sparked tensions in France.

Barrot said Paris also wished to raise the issue of US sanctions against several European figures, including former European commissioner Thierry Breton.

Kushner's behaviour raised eyebrows even among US diplomats.

"One of the basic rules is that when you are summoned by the host country's foreign minister, you show up. On time," Charles Shapiro, a former US ambassador to Venezuela, said on X. "It's not optional."

In December 2024, Trump defended the choice of Kushner as France's envoy.

"It's a great thing because he's in our family," Trump told the French magazine Paris Match. – AFP

Workplace equality exists nowhere: World Bank

WASHINGTON – Full workplace equality does not exist anywhere in the world and only a tiny fraction of women live in countries with a labour market that comes close to it, the World Bank said yesterday.

Even when workplace equality laws are passed by lawmakers they are truly enforced in only about half of all cases, the bank said in a report on women, business and the law.

"Even in economies that have modernized their laws, women still face constraints that shape the work they can do, the businesses they can start, and the safety they need to pursue opportunities," said Indermit Gill, the lender's chief economist.

The report assesses not only equality laws that have been passed but also public services created to help women in the workplace and ensure these laws are enforced.

The bank insisted that reforms are needed because 1.2 billion young people – half of them women – will enter the workplace over the next decade.

"Many will come of age in regions where women face the biggest barriers, and where the GDP boost that would result from their participation is most needed," said Tea Trumbic, the report's lead author.

And ensuring equal workplace access for women benefits not just them but society in general, the report argued.

Indeed, in countries where women have more opportunities, men's rate of labour force participation is also higher, the report says.

Advanced-economy countries have conditions most closely resembling equality, with Spain at the top, this report says. Countries in the Middle East and Pacific lag far behind.

The most significant progress in reducing the workplace equality gap came in low-income and developing countries such as Egypt, Madagascar or Somalia.

In these nations efforts were made to ease restrictions on women entering certain fields, institute equal pay for equal work and allow parental leave.

Altogether nearly 70 countries approved around 100 reforms from 2023 to 2025 seeking to give women more access to the job market and business world. – AFP

US consumer confidence rises in February

NEW YORK – US consumer confidence has improved in February despite persistent affordability worries and lingering unease over the labour market, according to survey data released yesterday.

After sinking in January amid cost-of-living pressures, the Conference Board's consumer confidence index rose by 2.2 points in February to 91.2, according to preliminary survey results through mid-month.

"Confidence ticked up in February after falling in January, as consumers' pessimistic expectations for the future eased somewhat," said Conference Board Chief Economist Dana Peterson, adding that the level is still

"well-below" a four-year peak from November 2024.

Consumer confidence is closely watched in the United States, where consumer spending accounts for more than two-thirds of GDP. However, in recent years retail sales have sometimes surprised to the upside given downcast readings in terms of sentiment.

Some of the sub-components in yesterday's reports pointed in opposite directions.

For example, while more people described jobs as "plentiful" compared with January, there was also an uptick in the number of people characterising work as "hard to get."

But the outlook for six months in

the future improved from the January readings in terms of how consumers see business conditions, the labour market and their income prospects.

The report indicates consumers are "still concerned about the economy, but they no longer think it's getting worse," said Heather Long, chief economist at Navy Federal Credit Union.

"American consumers are frustrated about high prices and a lack of job opportunities, but the vibes are no longer getting worse," Long said. "February was the first uptick in sentiment in half a year and it's notable that more people said they are considering buying a big-ticket item in the coming months." – AFP

Child sex abuse images found in Belgian serial killer's cell

BRUSSELS – Belgium has opened an investigation after child sexual abuse images were found in the cell of notorious serial killer Marc Dutroux, prosecutors said yesterday.

Sentenced in 2004 to life imprisonment, Dutroux was found guilty of kidnapping and raping six girls and young women in 1995-1996, four of whom he murdered.

The discovery dates back to July 2024, when authorities found a stash of pornographic images in his cell – where he is being held in solitary confinement.

"Investigators seized four

envelopes containing images of naked women, some of them young minors," said the prosecutor of Walloon Brabant, the Belgian province where the Nivelles prison holding Dutroux is located.

According to the weekly magazine *Humo*, which first reported on the investigation, authorities found some 200 pornographic images, around half of which were child sex abuse material.

Dutroux, now 69, could face new charges over the find, with the probe currently in the hands of an investigating magistrate, said a

prosecutor's statement.

According to *Humo*, the criminal told his lawyer the images did not belong to him, claiming to be the victim of "harassment" by other inmates who allegedly smuggled the photos into his cell without his knowledge.

Lawyer Bruno Dayez declined to comment.

Dayez took on Dutroux's case in 2016 and sought to obtain his release in 2021.

The bid was rejected after an expert report in 2020 concluded Dutroux should be considered a criminal highly likely to reoffend. – AFP

Brazilian court tries politicians over hit on black councilwoman

BRASÍLIA – Brazil’s Supreme Court yesterday opened the trial of politicians accused of ordering the 2018 murder of Rio de Janeiro councilwoman Marielle Franco, a case that exposed deep ties between politics and organised crime in the city.

Franco, a black, lesbian activist who grew up in a favela (slum) and became an outspoken critic of Rio’s powerful militia groups, was 38 when she was gunned down in the city centre alongside her driver, Anderson Gomes.

The two former military police officers who carried out the murders were given hefty jail terms in 2024.

The Supreme Court is now trying former federal lawmaker Chiquinho Brazão and his brother Domingos, a former state lawmaker, accused of ordering the assassination.

The prosecution says their motive was Franco’s opposition to plans that would have “legalised” land illegally seized by militias that control large parts of the city.

Marielle’s sister, Anielle Franco, Brazil’s minister of racial equality, was present in the packed courtroom as the trial began along with other family members.

It is “unacceptable that a parliamentarian be murdered,” Anielle said before entering the courtroom, adding those behind the crime must be punished.

Franco’s widow, Mônica Benício, warned in an editorial in the daily *O Globo* newspaper that the “criminal ecosystem that killed Marielle continues to operate and extend its tentacles.”

Rio’s militias emerged around four decades ago when former police officers and security agents created so-called self-defence groups to protect communities from drug gangs.

They quickly evolved into powerful criminal organisations, controlling large parts of the city, extorting residents, seizing public land, and benefiting from high-level political support.

Rivaldo Barbosa, a former police commissioner who first led the investigation, is also being tried for working “to ensure the impunity of those who ordered the killings.”

A former military police officer and a former advisor to Domingos Brazão are on trial as well.

The Brazão brothers deny their involvement and have challenged a plea agreement made with shooter



Luyara Franco, late Brazilian councilwoman Marielle Franco's sister gestures during a press conference before the trial for Franco's murder in 2018, at the Brazilian Supreme Court in Brasília yesterday. – AFP

Ronnie Lessa, a former military police officer, who confessed to his role in the murder.

Lessa, who was sentenced to 78 years in jail in 2024, said during his trial he was “blinded” and “driven crazy” by the prospect of a million-US-dollar reward for Franco’s murder.

The Supreme Court trial is being led by powerful judge Alexandre de Moraes, who oversaw the conviction of former president Jair Bolsonaro for plotting a failed coup in 2022.

Moraes said the prosecution’s case did not rest solely on Lessa’s cooperation and that “various pieces of evidence, depositions, and documents” backed up his confession.

– AFP

Telefónica reports 2025 loss as job cuts, divestments weigh

MADRID – Telefónica posted a steep net loss for 2025 yesterday, weighed down by the cost of a workforce reduction plan in Spain and losses from the sale of its Latin American subsidiaries.

The Spanish telecoms company recorded a net loss of 4.32 billion euros (US\$5.1 billion) last year, compared with a 49 million euro loss in 2024, citing “non-recurring factors” and the impact of divestments.

Telefónica said in its statement that it took a 2.05-billion-euro hit from a voluntary departure plan agreed with trade unions in December in Spain, which involves cutting more than 5,000 jobs.

Divestments of subsidiaries in Argentina, Peru, Uruguay and Ecuador

generated losses of about 2.27 billion euros, the company added.

The former state monopoly is undergoing a strategic overhaul to focus on its four core markets: Spain, Germany, the United Kingdom and Brazil.

Telefónica said it saw improved “momentum” in the fourth quarter, with revenues rising 1.5 percent year-on-year to 35.1 billion euros.

“We have embarked on a path of transformation of the company, and today we have before us the first results that make us optimistic,” Chairman Marc Murtra said in a statement.

Earlier this month, Telefónica agreed to sell its Chilean unit for US\$1.2 billion. – AFP

Spain’s conservatives set terms for far-right alliance

MADRID – Spain’s main conservative People’s Party (PP) has published conditions for a possible alliance with the far-right Vox party, signalling how the two could cooperate after a general election expected next year.

While the date of the vote has not been set, polls suggest the PP is on track to win but would fall short of an absolute majority, making Vox a potential kingmaker.

The two parties have been in talks since recent regional elections in Extremadura and Aragón, where the PP led but failed to secure a majority.

A PP document seen by AFP yesterday outlines policy positions any potential partner must adopt, including stricter migration controls and a burqa ban, closely aligning with Vox’s platform.

The PP also criticised climate policies, saying they “destroy jobs, raise energy costs and push industry

out of the country,” while calling for “respect for national unity”.

Much of Europe’s political mainstream avoids parliamentary cooperation with far-right parties.

But PP leader Alberto Núñez Feijóo defended his party’s approach, saying discussions with Vox were necessary to present “a credible alternative” to the ruling Socialists.

Vox chief Santiago Abascal criticised the PP approach during a television interview yesterday, accusing the conservatives of treating them “as if they were negotiating with savages”.

Both the PP and Vox regularly call for early national elections amid graft scandals affecting Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez’s inner circle.

Sánchez, in office since 2018, has rejected the calls and vowed to stand in the next general election. – AFP

Colombia’s ELN says it will put down arms during elections

BOGOTÁ – Colombia’s largest guerrilla group on Monday announced a unilateral ceasefire during upcoming elections, amid a surge in political violence including attacks, kidnappings and threats against candidates and leaders.

The country will elect new members of Congress on March 8 and a successor to leftist President Gustavo Petro on May 31.

The National Liberation Army (ELN) typically orders temporary truces during election periods and major holidays.

Ostensibly a leftist insurgent force, the 6,000-strong ELN doubles as one of Latin America’s most powerful drug-trafficking organisations.

Petro’s administration has abandoned unsuccessful efforts to negotiate peace with the ELN and experts say it has grown stronger recently thanks to cocaine revenues.

In a report on Monday on Colombia’s security climate, the Ombudsman’s Office said there had been 457 death threats against civil and political leaders during the pre-election period.

“It is very worrying, and it is clear that the situation is deteriorating,” Miroslav Jenca, UN special representative for Colombia, told AFP of the report.

The report cited the ELN, the Gulf Clan – Colombia’s main drug cartel – and dissident factions of the now-defunct FARC guerrilla group as a “source of threats” to free elections.

The assassination last year of conservative presidential candidate Miguel Uribe sparked fears of a return to the violence of the 1980s and 1990s, when cocaine cartels and various armed groups terrorised Colombia and political assassinations were common. – AFP

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Mourinho's Bernabeu homecoming upended by suspension, racism row



MADRID — Jose Mourinho has not set foot in the Santiago Bernabeu since leaving Real Madrid in 2013, but his Champions League homecoming with Benfica today will be far more complicated than initially anticipated.

Mourinho cannot sit in the dug-out for the play-off second leg after being sent off during his team's 1-0 first-leg defeat in Lisbon last week.

The 63-year-old also came under fire for his controversial comments in the aftermath of alleged racial abuse aimed at Madrid star Vinicius Junior by Benfica midfielder Gianluca Prestianni.

The Argentine will miss the second leg after UEFA provisionally suspended him for one game amid an investigation into the incident.

Mourinho, who won a La Liga title with Los Blancos during three years at the helm, made a big impact on the Spanish giants during a period of particularly bitter rivalry with Barcelona and a dressing room divided for and against him.

Madrid president Florentino Perez is known to be a big fan of



SL Benfica's Portuguese head coach Jose Mourinho (right) looks on during a training session on the eve of their UEFA Champions League knockout round play-off second leg against Real Madrid CF at Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid yesterday. — AFP

the Portuguese coach and rumours persist that Mourinho could be hired next season to replace Alvaro Arbeloa, if the current campaign ends badly.

The Spaniard, one of Mourinho's disciples during his spell at the helm of the 15-time European champions, faces his biggest test yet since replacing Xabi Alonso in January as

Benfica visit the Spanish capital.

Mourinho was dismissed in the first leg for vociferous complaints from the touchline.

The coach said referee Francois Letexier was avoiding booking Madrid players who were at risk of suspension for the second leg.

"I've had my butt on the bench for 1,400 games and [I could see

that] he knew perfectly well who he could book and who he couldn't," complained Mourinho bitterly.

"I [won't be] sitting on the bench, I can't go to the dressing room, I can't communicate with the team," he added. "It's hard for me, but my teammates and my assistants are there, they'll do their job."

Prestianni banned

The first leg was tarnished by Prestianni's alleged racial slur aimed at Vinicius.

UEFA's decision to suspend the Benfica player for one game has eased some tension ahead of the second leg, and he could miss at least 10 if European football's governing body finds he racially abused Vinicius.

Vinicius wrote that "racists are above all cowards", on social media after the game, while Madrid striker Kylian Mbappe backed his teammate and said he had heard Prestianni calling the winger a monkey.

The 20-year-old Benfica midfielder insists he did not racially abuse Vinicius while hiding his mouth with his shirt, after the

Brazilian's stunning goal which split the sides at the Estadio da Luz.

Mourinho said that he had spoken to both players and they had given him different versions of events.

Then the Portuguese coach said Vinicius's goal celebration was disrespectful and said Benfica was not a racist club because their biggest icon, Eusebio, was black.

"He's saying it's okay, when Vinicius provokes you, to be racist — and I think that is very wrong," former Netherlands midfielder Clarence Seedorf told Amazon Prime.

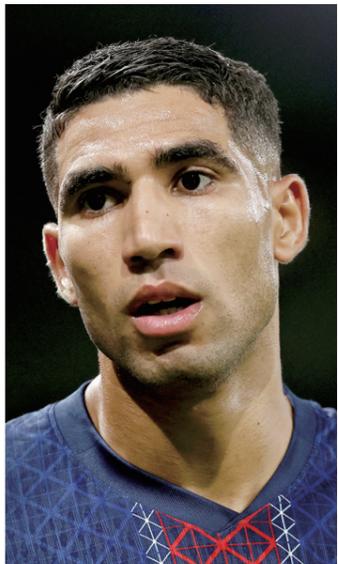
"We should never, ever justify racial abuse."

Real Madrid defender Trent Alexander-Arnold said the incident, which led to the second half being paused for around 10 minutes, was a "disgrace to football".

The second leg will be played under its shadow as Madrid seek to avoid a humiliating early exit at the hands of Mourinho and qualify for the last 16.

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

— AFP/MPD



Paris Saint-Germain's Moroccan defender Achrif Hakimi looks on during the UEFA Champions League first round day 1 match against Atalanta (ITA) at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris on September 17, 2025.

Hakimi is being sent back to trial for the rape of a young woman in February 2023, AFP learnt yesterday from the player's lawyer and the Nanterre public prosecutor's office. In February 2023, a woman then aged 24 told police in Val-De-Marne southeast of Paris that Hakimi had raped her.

The 27-year-old footballer denies any wrongdoing.

"Today, a rape accusation is enough to justify a trial, even though I contest it and everything proves that it is false," he wrote on X on Tuesday.

"I await this trial calmly, which will allow the truth to come out publicly." — AFP

Nearly an own gull! CPR performed on bird at Türkiye football match

Football

ISTANBUL — A footballer acted on a wing and a prayer when he gave emergency CPR to a seagull after it was hit by a ball during a match in Istanbul this week — reviving the bird.

The incident unfolded when the low-flying bird got caught in the path of a clearance kick by Istanbul Yurdu Spor's goalkeeper during an amateur playoff match against Mevlanakapi Guzelhisar, a club official told AFP Tuesday.

As it struck the ground, Istanbul Yurdu Spor's captain raced over and started performing rudimentary CPR, pumping its ribcage, according to footage sent to AFP by team manager Fatih Buyuk.

"Something was falling and I realised it was a seagull. The first

thing that came to my mind was heart massage, because it couldn't breathe, so I tried my luck," Gani Catan told state news agency Anadolu.

When it started breathing, he carried it off the pitch to medical staff, who took care of it.

The seagull reportedly suffered a damaged wing but it was not immediately clear what happened to it after the match.

Despite the heroic rescue, Catan's team lost the match, crashing out of the playoffs.

The loss did not ruffle Catan's feathers, however.

"We missed out on the championship, but it's a wonderful thing to have helped save a life. This was more important than the championship." — AFP

UEFA can make fight against racism more than a slogan: Real Madrid's Arbeloa



MADRID — Real Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa yesterday called on European football governing body UEFA to make their fight against racism into more than just a slogan after the alleged abuse of star Vinicius Junior.

UEFA provisionally suspended Benfica midfielder Gianluca Prestianni for today's Champions League play-off second leg against Real Madrid after Vinicius accused him of racial abuse in the first leg last week.

If UEFA find Prestianni, who argued with the Brazilian while holding his shirt over his mouth, abused Vinicius at the end of their investigation into the incident he will be suspended for a minimum of 10 matches.

"We have a great opportunity to mark a turning point in the fight against racism," Arbeloa told reporters.

"UEFA, which has always been and has led this fight against racism, now has the chance not to leave it at just a slogan, at just a nice banner before matches, and I hope that they seize this opportunity."

Vinicius scored a brilliant goal in the first leg, enabling Real Madrid to claim a 1-0 victory, before the alleged abuse led to the game being stopped for around 10 minutes.

Arbeloa said he believed Vinicius will thrive today at the Santiago Bernabeu as the record 15-time champions bid to reach the last 16.

"Vinicius Junior has always shown a lot of bravery and a lot of character," said Arbeloa.

"That is always his response, it always has been and I think it always will be.

"He is a fighter and I'm sure tomorrow [today] he will go out to fight and have a great game, and keep showing he's one of the best players on the planet."

Courtois backs Vinicius

Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois backed the 25-year-old winger, despite Prestianni and Benfica insisting there was no racial abuse.

"[Benfica] are going to believe what their player says and we are 100 percent behind Vini, because Vini has fought thousands of battles on the pitch with defenders, there have been lots of clashes with players and he has never said something like this [happened]," Courtois told reporters.

"As [Prestianni] covered his mouth with his shirt, we can never know, and I think in the end Benfica will defend their player.

"There's not much more we can do and then it's up to UEFA and the institutions to decide what they want to decide."

The Belgian stopper said he disagreed with Benfica coach Jose Mourinho's words after the game, with the veteran Portuguese manager attacking Vinicius for what he deemed a disrespectful celebration.

"At the end of the day Mourinho is Mourinho. As a coach you're always, I think, going to defend your club and what your player has told you," said Courtois.

"The only thing that disappoints me a bit is using Vini's celebration, I don't think Vini did anything wrong there..."

"I don't think we can justify alleged racism because of a celebration."

Vinicius has been abused by opposition supporters on numerous occasions since arriving at Real Madrid. Video footage showed some Benfica fans making monkey gestures at the attacker last week.

"I think we have to be less stupid as a society," added Courtois.

Benfica have appealed against Prestianni's provisional one match ban to try and make him available to face Madrid.

"Prestianni is being labelled a racist person, and I can assure you he is anything but racist," Benfica president Rui Costa told reporters earlier yesterday.

The 20-year-old Argentine travelled to Madrid with his teammates in case Benfica win their appeal.

"UEFA has the decision in their hands, it made a decision, the club appealed, and we, as coaches, obviously have to prepare for every scenario, and that's one of them," said Joao Tralhao, one of Mourinho's assistants.

Former Real Madrid coach Mourinho will not be able to lead his team from the dug-out back at the Santiago Bernabeu because he was sent off for protesting towards the end of the first leg.

"Obviously he is our leader, and a leader is always missed, his presence is always missed," added Tralhao, standing in for the Portuguese veteran.

"[However], even though Jose Mourinho cannot be in the technical area, he is with us."

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

— AFP/MPD

World No.1 Wang Chuqin leads Chinese players into last 16 in Singapore Smash

Table tennis

SINGAPORE – China's paddlers maintained their momentum at the 2026 WTT Singapore Smash, as half of the round-of-16 spots in the men's and women's singles were decided yesterday, with world No. 1 Wang Chuqin leading a group of Chinese players advancing.

In the men's singles, Wang defeated Japan's Shunsuke Togami 3-0, and will face Denmark's Anders Lind in the next round. World No. 3 Lin Shidong, the defending men's singles champion, delivered a dominant 3-0 win over Kazakhstan's Kirill Gerassimenko, emerging victorious 11-6, 11-8, 11-1.

In the women's singles, Chen Xingtong defeated Australia's Constantina Psihogios 3-0, while Wang Manyu beat Chinese Taipei's Cheng I-ching 3-1. Chen



Wang Chuqin of China hits a return during the men's singles round of 32 match against Togami Shunsuke of Japan at the World Table Tennis (WTT) Singapore Smash 2026 in Singapore yesterday. – Xinhua

Yi also secured a 3-0 victory over Singapore's Ser Lin Qian.

In doubles, Lin and Huang Youzheng defeated Singapore's Clarence Chew and Josh Chua 3-1 to progress to the men's doubles

quarterfinals. Kuai Man and Chen Yi also advanced, beating Austria's Sofia Polcanova and Brazil's Bruna Takahashi 3-1 in the women's doubles to reach the quarterfinals.

– Xinhua

Mayweather to fight Pacquiao in Las Vegas in September

Boxing

Andrew Marszal

LOS ANGELES – Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao will meet in a long-awaited rematch of the highest-grossing clash in boxing history this September at the Sphere in Las Vegas, Netflix announced Monday.

The bout between two of boxing's biggest names – who famously fought a blockbuster clash in 2015, and are now both in their late forties – comes days after Mayweather announced he is coming out of retirement.

It will be broadcast live September 19 on Netflix, as the global streaming platform increasingly moves into live sports with glitzy one-off events.

"Floyd and I gave the world what remains the biggest fight in boxing history. The fans have waited long enough – they deserve this rematch," said Pacquiao, 47, in a joint statement.

Mayweather beat fellow welterweight Pacquiao in their money-spinning 2015 "Fight of the Century," which generated a record 4.6 million pay-per-view buys but largely failed to live up to the hype.

Mayweather is believed to have earned an estimated US\$300 million from the unanimous points victory over the Filipino icon, which remains the most lucrative fight in history and generated more than US\$600 million revenue.

Former multi-weight world champion Mayweather retired from boxing in 2017, unbeaten in 50 bouts, though he has continued to fight in exhibitions since,

including an upcoming clash this spring with Mike Tyson.

Pacquiao, also a multiple world champion, retired for a four-year period from 2021 in which he unsuccessfully ran for the Philippine presidency. He came out of retirement last year.

'One loss'

Rumours of a Mayweather-Pacquiao rematch have circulated for years, and speculation soared following Mayweather's announcement last week that he would return to the professional arena this year.

"I already fought and beat Manny once. This time will be the same result," said Mayweather, in the statement.

"I want Floyd to live with the one loss on his professional record and always remember who gave it to him," said Pacquiao.

The clash will be the first-ever professional boxing match to take place at Sphere; a venue primarily used for concerts and films which opened in 2023 and features an immersive 160,000-square-foot wraparound screen on its curved interior walls.

It will be shown globally on Netflix, which boasts some 325 million subscribers.

The streamer has recently increased its sports offerings, with a super middleweight clash between Terence Crawford and Saul "Canelo" Alvarez in Las Vegas last September viewed by 41 million people.

It also aired divisive fights pitting YouTuber-turned-boxer Jake Paul against a 58-year-old Tyson in November 2024,

and versus Anthony Joshua last December.

Both were criticised for proving to be lacklustre contests, but drew enormous global attention.

'Glory'

Nicknamed "Money", former multi-weight world champion Mayweather was once the world's highest-paid athlete. His last professional bout took place in 2017 against UFC star Conor McGregor.

The 48-year-old American has long been a controversial figure, often criticised for an overly defensive style, and accused by some of dodging the most dangerous opponents simply to embellish his record.

Mayweather has also spent time in prison for one of a string of domestic violence incidents.

Pacquiao known at home as "The National Fist" and more broadly as "PacMan," is an eight-division world champion.

He is beloved in the Philippines for his rags-to-riches story, having dropped out of high school at 14, selling donuts on the roadside and working as a grocery stacker.

Pacquiao, having already served as a Philippines senator from 2016, retired for a four-year period from 2021 in which he tried and failed to win the country's top political office.

The diminutive southpaw came out of retirement last year. He was held to a draw by Mario Barrios, putting his professional record at 62-8-3.

"As always, I dedicate this fight to my fellow Filipinos around the world and to bringing glory to the Philippines," said Pacquiao. – AFP

Brilliant Brook 100 puts England into T20 World Cup semis



Shahid Hashmi

KANDY – Captain Harry Brook scored his first T20 international century to take England into the World Cup semi-finals with a nervy two-wicket win against Pakistan in the Super Eights in Kandy.

Brook, promoted to number three for the first time in a T20 international, scored exactly 100 off 51 deliveries as England chased down their target of 165 with five balls to spare, despite a late wobble.

After England restricted Pakistan to 164-9, Brook came in second ball of the innings with the score 0-1 after Phil Salt's golden duck, caught behind off Shaheen Shah Afridi.

Wickets tumbled in the power play but Brook stood firm.

He lifted his side from a precarious 35-3 to 155-6 when he was dismissed, having scored the second fastest century in T20 World Cup history and the first by a team captain.

Brook hit four sixes and 10 fours, surpassing his previous best T20 international score of 81 not out against Pakistan in Karachi four years ago.

He went to the landmark in style, powering Afridi for a six and four to complete his century off 50 balls before being bowled by the left-arm quick next ball.

Brook explained that the decision for him to move up the order from five had been prompted by coach Brendon "Baz" McCullum.

"Baz said that this morning, what do you think about going number three? Pakistan's your team. I was just like, let's do it," said Brook.

"We wanted to try and maximise the power play a little bit more and everybody knows that I like to try and take the game on and I was going to do that from ball one.

"Thankfully it came off and I managed to get us a decent start."

Afridi, returning to the side, took 4-30 also removing Jos Buttler

for two and Jacob Bethell for eight in the power play.

Brook added 45 for the fifth wicket with Sam Curran (16) and even a burst of two wickets from Usman Tariq did not perturb the England skipper who batted with guts and resolve.

Will Jacks helped his skipper towards victory with a brilliant stand of 52, scoring 28 off 23 balls.

Spinner Mohammad Nawaz dismissed Jacks and Jamie Overton in the penultimate over to induce some late nerves, but Jofra Archer hit the first ball of the final over for the winning four.

'Outstanding' batting

The defeat leaves Pakistan needing to beat Sri Lanka on Saturday and hope other results go their way to reach the last four after their first match in the Super Eights against New Zealand was washed out.

"The way Harry Brook batted was outstanding. He completely took the game away from us," said Pakistan captain Salman Ali Agha.

"We just have to wait and see how the other results go. We'll be hoping they go our way, and then we know we'll have to win against Sri Lanka."

New Zealand face Sri Lanka today in Colombo.

Spinner Liam Dawson took 3-24 earlier and was ably supported by Overton (2-26) and Archer (2-32) to restrict Pakistan to 164-9.

Opener Sahibzada Farhan continued his good form with a 45-ball 63, with two sixes and seven fours, his third half-century of the tournament.

Archer dismissed Saim Ayub for seven in the third over while Dawson picked up Salman Agha for five in the next.

Farhan and Babar Azam added 46 for the third wicket.

Farhan completed his fifty off 37 balls before Overton trapped him lbw.

– AFP



England's captain Harry Brook (centre) changes his shoe in the drinks break during the 2026 ICC Men's T20 Cricket World Cup Super Eights match against Pakistan at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy, Sri Lanka yesterday. – AFP

Kristen Bell returns to host glitzy Actor Awards in Hollywood



US actress and singer Kristen Bell addresses a For Your Consideration (FYC) panel for "Nobody Wants This" at Televerse 2025 in Los Angeles, California, on August 15, 2025. — Photo courtesy of Kevin Paul/Wikimedia Commons

Paula Ramon

LOS ANGELES — American actress and singer Kristen Bell returns to host Hollywood's premier acting awards next month for the third time with a single goal: to entertain everyone equally.

In a country riven by polarisation, the actress says her role fronting the Actor Awards — previously called the SAG Awards — is just like hosting in your own home.

"If I invite you over for dinner, I make a nice meal. I put placemats out. I say, keep your shoes on. No big deal," Bell told AFP in a recent interview.

"I do those things to make you feel welcome, and I hope you have a good experience. That's a host's job."

The star of "Nobody Wants This" said part of the challenge when designing segments or writing jokes for a show like this is to "create ideas that match or elevate what you've done previously."

But gauging the mood of your audience is critical.

"You have to be mindful and conscientious," she said, noting that last year's hosting gig in the shadow of deadly fires that devastated Los Angeles was a case in point.

Bell is careful to avoid direct reference to US President Donald Trump, whose presence looms over Hollywood award shows — and who is not averse to making his feelings known about hosts he does not like.

She knows many in her industry have strong feelings, but is equally aware that not everyone watching shares those feelings.

"Some people are very connected to things and have a high emotional temperature about them," she said.

"I have those things in my life. I have them about family members. I have them about world issues.

"But for me, my job there is to create the most welcoming stage possible and not edit anyone; we want to celebrate our entire community that is very diverse."

Diverse they may be, but as performers, they will definitely have some things in common.

"This is an easier room than any other room, because everyone has been through the same thing," she said.

"Everyone has an old tape of themselves in a commercial that they wish no one would ever see because their hair looked insane," she laughed.

The gala, organised by the Screen Actors Guild—American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) — the largest actors' union in the United States and one of the most influential in the world with over 160,000 members — honours the best in film and television.

In the final stretch of Hollywood's awards season, the evening serves as a barometer for the Oscars, given that some of their voting members also have a voice in the Academy.

On occasion, their award for best ensemble cast has provided clues as to which film will win best picture.

The 32nd annual edition of the Actor Awards will be held on March 1 in Los Angeles and will be streamed live on Netflix. — AFP

Son of US director Rob Reiner pleads not guilty to parents' murder

Huw Griffith

LOS ANGELES — The son of US movie director Rob Reiner pleaded not guilty to the fatal stabbing of both of his parents when he appeared in a Los Angeles court on Monday.

Nick Reiner faces two counts of first-degree murder over the double killing that sent shockwaves through Hollywood days before Christmas.

The 32-year-old was arrested on December 14 after the bodies of his filmmaker father and his mother, photographer Michele Singer Reiner, were discovered at their home in the upmarket Brentwood neighbourhood of Los Angeles.

Prosecutors said 79-year-old Rob Reiner — who helmed huge hits including "When Harry Met Sally" and "A Few Good Men" — and his wife, 70, were stabbed to death.

Nick Reiner, who has a history of addiction, appeared in a downtown courtroom where he was formally told what charges he faces and had his rights explained.

A plea of "not guilty" is common at this stage, regardless of what the defence later does.

Reiner, who remains in jail and has not been granted bail, was ordered to return to court on April 29.

An arraignment would usually take place much sooner, but Reiner was unable to appear at the first scheduled attempt.

Another hearing last month was halted after the court heard that lawyer Alan Jackson was no longer representing Reiner.

The judge appointed an attorney from the public defender's office in his stead.

Jackson, a high-profile attorney who has previously represented Hollywood clients including Harvey Weinstein and Kevin Spacey, told reporters he was "legally and ethically" barred from explaining why he had stepped back.

"Circumstances beyond our control, but more importantly, circumstances beyond Nick's control have dictated that, sadly, it's made it impossible for us to continue our representation of Nick," he said.

Jackson said he and his team remained committed to Reiner's best interests and had faith that the legal process would "reveal the true facts of the circumstances surrounding this case."

"We've investigated this matter top to bottom, back to front. What we've learned — and you can take this to the bank — is that pursuant to the laws of this state, pursuant to the law in California, Nick Reiner is not guilty of murder."

If convicted as charged, Reiner could face life in prison without parole, or the death penalty, although California does not routinely carry out capital punishment.

Los Angeles County District Attorney Nathan Hochman told reporters outside court his office would be examining the circumstances around the killings before making a decision on whether to ask for the death penalty if Reiner is convicted.

Erratic behaviour

Reiner, who lived in a guest house on his parents' property, had attended a party at the home of comedian Conan O'Brien on December 13 with his parents, where some attendees reportedly spoke of his behaving erratically.

The New York Times, citing a source close to the family, said the couple had been due to dine with former president Barack Obama and his wife Michelle on Sunday evening, and had seemingly booked an in-home massage for that day.

The paper said that when no one answered the door for the appointment, the massagist contacted the couple's daughter, Romy Reiner.



Nick Reiner appears during his arraignment in Los Angeles County Superior Court in Los Angeles, California, on Monday. The son of US movie director Rob Reiner pleaded not guilty to the fatal stabbing of both of his parents when he appeared in a Los Angeles court on Monday. — AFP

When she arrived with a friend, she discovered her father's body, and emergency services were called. Paramedics told her that her mother's body was also at the property.

Police arrested Nick Reiner several kilometres away from the scene of the crime later that night.

Rob Reiner, the son of legendary comedian Carl Reiner, started his showbiz career in acting.

He won fame as the oafish son-in-law Michael "Meathead" Stivic on groundbreaking 1970s sitcom "All in the Family," before transitioning to directing.

As a director, he struck Hollywood gold.

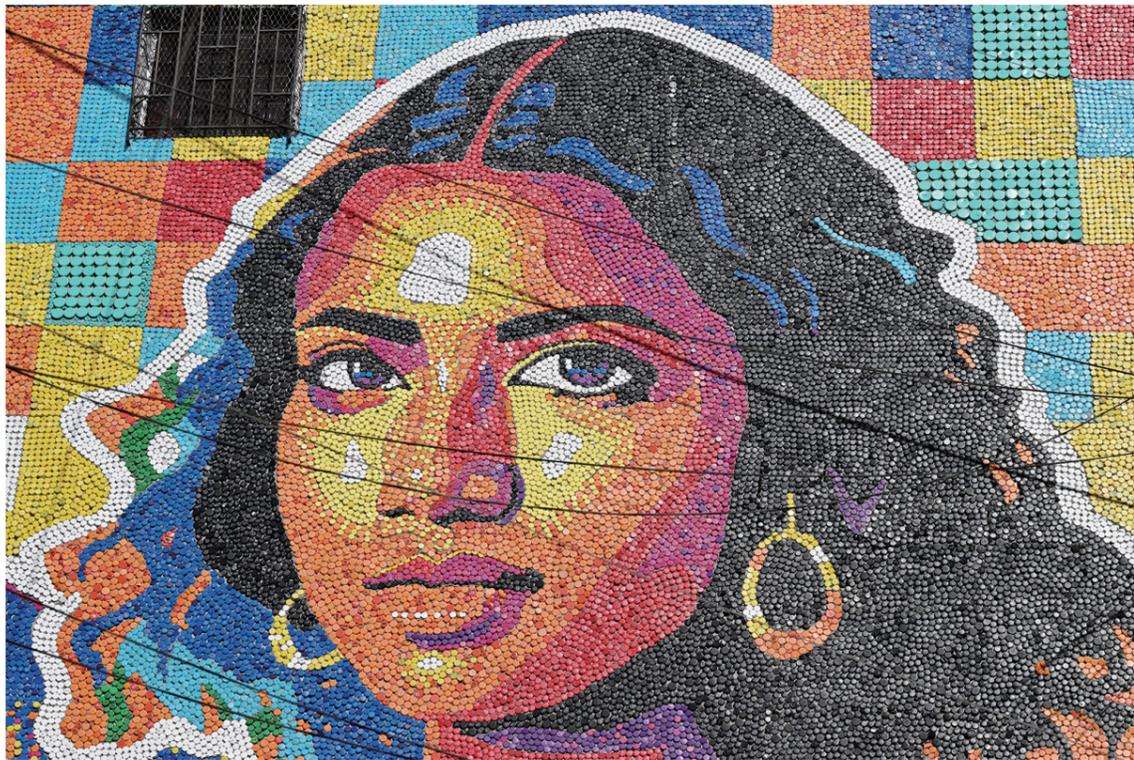
His output included classic films like 1984's rock music mockumentary "This is Spinal Tap," fantasy gem "The Princess Bride" from 1987, and seminal coming-of-age movie "Stand By Me."

"A Few Good Men," starring Hollywood heavyweights Tom Cruise and Jack Nicholson, earned an Oscar nomination for Best Picture. — AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 3°C~10°C	Manila 21°C~33°C	New York 1°C~8°C	Lisbon 9°C~17°C
Shanghai 9°C~13°C	Bangkok 24°C~34°C	London 8°C~16°C	Rio de Janeiro 24°C~30°C
Hong Kong 19°C~24°C	Tokyo 6°C~13°C	Frankfurt 4°C~15°C	Luanda 23°C~29°C
Taipei 19°C~21°C	Singapore 23°C~32°C	Vancouver 7°C~9°C	Maputo 23°C~34°C
Guangzhou 19°C~28°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~33°C	Paris 7°C~18°C	Dili 24°C~29°C
Nanjing 7°C~14°C	Jakarta 24°C~32°C	Moscow -6°C~2°C	São Tomé 26°C~31°C
Guilin 13°C~17°C	Seoul 1°C~15°C	Las Vegas 13°C~26°C	Praia 18°C~27°C
Xi'an 7°C~14°C	Sydney 21°C~29°C	Monte Carlo 9°C~16°C	Bissau 19°C~37°C



US actor Jon Hamm poses upon arrival for the premiere of Disney-Pixar's "Hoppers" at El Capitan Theatre in Los Angeles, California, on Monday. Hoppers is a US animated science fiction adventure comedy film produced by Pixar Animation Studios for Walt Disney Pictures. "Hoppers" will be released in theaters in the United States on March 6. The voice cast includes Hamm as Jerry Generazzo, a greedy mayor. The film is about a group of scientists who invent a way to "hop" human minds into lifelike robotic animal bodies. An animal-loving teenager uses their technology to embody a robotic beaver and thwart a construction company's plot to destroy the local animal habitat, unwittingly starting an animal uprising against all humans. — Photo: AFP. Caption: MPD/Wikipedia



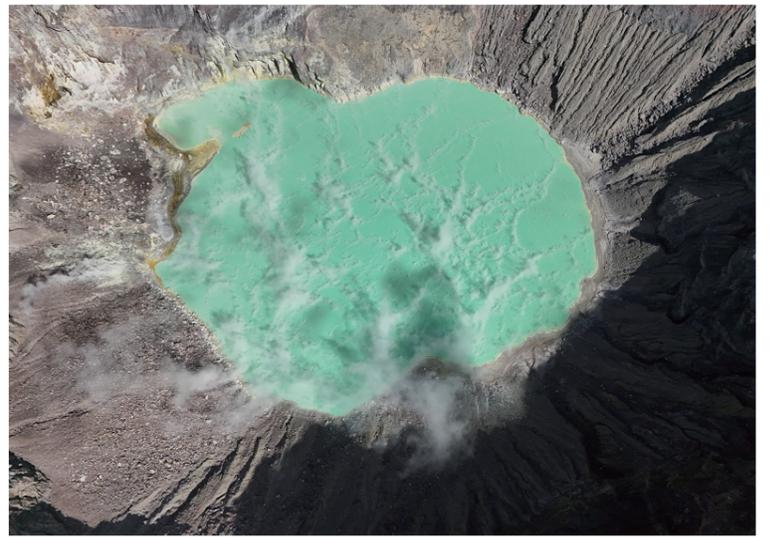
Amazing mural

A mural made with plastic bottle tops by Venezuelan artist Oscar Olivares is seen on an apartment building in the Zacamil neighbourhood in Mejicanos, El Salvador, on Friday. The artwork, over 13 metres tall and made with more than 100,000 recycled plastic bottle tops, is regarded as the world's tallest bottle-cap mural. The piece reinterprets the Mona Lisa with a Latin American identity and pays tribute to Salvadoran women. — AFP



Yummy pile

A staff member presents pancakes during the celebration of Maslenitsa, a religious holiday marking the end of winter and the beginning of spring, in Minsk, Belarus, on Saturday. — Xinhua



Boiling point

An aerial view of the crater of Ilamatepec Volcano in Santa Ana, El Salvador taken on Saturday. In El Salvador, there are 242 volcanoes, of which 36 are considered active, according to data from the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources of El Salvador. — AFP



Cave dweller flashmob

A group of PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) activists dressed as "Cavemen" armed with clubs and wrapped in fake fur, protested in a flashmob, "Fur Belongs to the Stone Age!" PETA demonstrated on the opening day of Milan Fashion Week to send the message that wearing the skins of tortured animals is decidedly prehistoric and to urge the National Chamber of Italian Fashion, the organiser of Milan Fashion Week, to follow the example of the London and New York fashion weeks by banning fur from its runways. — AFP



Breakfast in bed

A giant panda plays at Chongqing Zoo in Chongqing Municipality, yesterday. Giant pandas attracted numerous tourists at Chongqing Zoo. — Xinhua



Perfect view of race

A wolf wanders on the ski trail during the women's team cross country free sprint qualification event of the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic Games at Tesero Cross-Country Skiing Stadium in Lago di Tesero (Val di Fiemme), Italy last Wednesday.