

Govt aims to reduce number of manhole covers on roads

Tony Wong

Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man said yesterday that the government is aiming to reduce the number of manhole covers on roads where roadwork projects are slated to be carried out, with the objective of improving road surface conditions and enhancing the safety of motorcycle riders.

According to Wikipedia, a manhole cover is a removable plate forming the lid over the opening of a manhole, an opening large enough for a person to pass through that is used as an access point for an underground pipe or cable, allowing inspection, maintenance, and system upgrades. A manhole cover is designed to prevent anyone or anything from falling in, and to keep out unauthorised persons and material.

Tam made the remarks while chairing a meeting of the government's Working Group for Optimising the Coordination of Roadwork Projects yesterday.

It is a new working group set up by the government in March last year, aiming to "fundamentally" minimise the adverse impact of roadworks on residents by improving its cross-departmental coordination of roadwork projects.

The Transport Bureau (DSAT) released information of yesterday's



This DSAT photo released yesterday shows a manhole cover on Avenida Panorâmica do Lago Sai Van, near the exit of the Macau-Taipa Sai Van Bridge. This section of the avenue is one of various roads where the government plans to reduce the number of manhole covers in future roadwork projects.



Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man chairs yesterday's meeting of the Working Group for Optimising the Coordination of Roadwork Projects. – Photo: DSAT

meeting in a statement.

The working group, chaired by Tam, is tasked with reviewing the operation of the government's mechanisms for coordinating the city's roadwork projects and making the necessary improvements to the mechanisms.

The working group comprises officials from various public entities.

During yesterday's meeting, according to the statement, Tam urged the members of the working group to continue improving the coordination of the city's roadwork projects in closer alignment with the group's five main work directions.

During the working group's first meeting following its establishment in March last year, Tam raised five main directions that the working group must comply with for its task of improving the coordination of roadwork projects, namely reserving space for the installation of underground pipes and cables with the aim of avoiding repeated excavation; rigorously assessing roadwork projects' duration proposed by the respective entities with the aim of minimising the projects' duration; encouraging the applications of new equipment, new materials, and new techniques; reviewing and streamlining the government's administrative procedures for assessing and approving applications for roadwork projects; and strengthening promotional campaigns and improving the transparency of roadwork projects.

During yesterday's meeting, according to yesterday's statement, Tam ordered the working group, when planning a roadwork project to be conducted on a particular road, to study the feasibility of also reducing the number of manhole covers there.

The statement said that one of the working group's key tasks this year is to review the number and distribution of existing manhole covers on roads where roadwork projects are slated to be carried out. The working

group, the statement said, will study the feasibility of removing certain manhole covers, or merging multiple manhole covers into one, thereby reducing the number of manhole covers on the roads, with the aim of improving road surface conditions and better ensuring the safety of motorcycle riders.

Meanwhile, the statement also said that the working group will continue promoting the applications of new techniques for roadworks, such as those enabling no excavations, with the aim of reducing the area of road surface where excavations are required in a roadwork project. ■

Trump doesn't rule out sending US troops into Iran

WASHINGTON—US President Donald Trump said yesterday he was not ruling out sending US troops into Iran, while threatening a new, "big wave" of attacks.

The 79-year-old Republican has long campaigned against decades of US military entanglements in the Middle East, but ordered a large-scale war against Iran starting Saturday.

While so far the assault has focused entirely on aerial attacks by missiles and bombs, Trump refused to rule out sending ground troops – something far riskier in

terms of possible casualties.

"I don't have the yips with respect to boots on the ground," Trump said, using a golf term for anxiety. "Every president says, 'There will be no boots on the ground.' I don't say it."

"I say 'probably don't need them,' [or] 'if they were necessary,'" he told the *New York Post* in one of numerous brief interviews he has given since launching the Iran operation.

Trump also spoke to CNN yesterday, flagging what he said

would be an escalation in the assault on Iran.

"We haven't even started hitting them hard. The big wave hasn't even happened," he told CNN, without elaborating. "The big one is coming soon."

Trump, speaking at a White House event, also for the first time clearly laid out what he said were four objectives.

They include destroying Iran's missile capabilities and "annihilating the navy."

"We've knocked out already 10

ships. They're at the bottom of the sea," Trump said.

He said that the other goals were stopping Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon and "ensuring the Iranian regime can't continue to arm, fund and direct terrorist armies outside of their borders."

US and Israeli forces have so far struck hundreds of targets across Iran, including the Islamic republic's missiles, navy and command-and-control sites.

Four US military members have been announced killed and

three fighter jets have been shot down – officially in friendly fire.

Iran has fired missiles at Israel, at US bases around the region and also at targets in regional Arab countries – Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates – something that Trump called "the biggest surprise."

Trump, speaking at the White House award ceremony, said that the United States could sustain the assault beyond the month-long timeframe he has publicly spoken about. (More on pages 5, 7–11 & 14). –AFP

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

The Macau Post Daily

Wang Yi calls for immediate stop of military operations in Middle East

Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday that the urgent priority concerning the current situation in the Middle East is to immediately halt military operations and prevent the conflict from further spilling over.

– Story on p. 7

UK's Cyprus military base comes under attack amid Middle East war

A British military base on Cyprus came under attack by an unmanned drone yesterday amid the US-Israeli war with Iran, as authorities issued evacuation orders for the surrounding area.

– Story on p. 10

FDI in Portugal plunges to US\$10 billion in 2025

Foreign direct investment (FDI) in Portugal fell to US\$10.06 billion in 2025, down by 34.9 percent, according to data released on Friday by the Bank of Portugal.

– Story on p. 12

IAM to host 45th Macao Green Week March 7-15

Ida Cheong

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) announced in a statement yesterday that the 45th Macao Green Week will take place from this Saturday to March 15, featuring over 40 ecological guided tours and hands-on activities for local schools, groups, and residents at various locations around the city.

According to the statement, the one-week event themed “Passing on the love of nature to build a beautiful city together”, aims to introduce Macau’s greening efforts, ecological resources, and conservation status, while also engaging residents in caring for seedlings at Taipa Grande Nature Park, fostering a collective effort to protect natural resources.

The opening ceremony of the Green Week will be held this Saturday at 3 p.m. in Seac Pai Van Park, while a two-day Greenery Week Carnival will run from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., the statement said, adding that the carnival will feature various themed booths, providing information on the protection and nature conservation

work of the wetlands, ancient and valuable trees, butterfly and otters, animal specimens and insect hotels, and low-carbon living, as well as tips for maintaining home potted plants.

Meanwhile, the fees for the Guia Hill cable car and Hac Sá Off-Road Track – pedal go-karts for children – are waived for the public during the Green Week, the statement said.

Moreover, a brand-new themed activity “Ecological Encounter in Seac Pai Van”, where guided tours will lead participants through the newly built pavilion of herptiles*, the aviary and butterfly garden, the statement said.

The statement added that one of the spotlights activities, the “Walking and Tree Conservation Activity of the 45th Macao Green Week”, will take place on March 15 at Taipa Grande Nature Park, allowing participants to plant and take care of tree saplings planted in Taipa Grande.

Moreover, the bureau will continue to organise eco-tours in Hengqin to provide the public with



This poster provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) yesterday shows the Macao Green Week running from March 7-15.

more opportunities to get close to nature there.

The statement noted that this year’s Green Week will also feature China’s Arbour Day with a “commemorative envelope distribution and postmark cancellation activity for China’s Arbour Day”, which will be held

in the city’s main square, Largo do Senado, on March 12. Throughout the Green Week, six “Citywide Love for Greenery – Plant Distribution” activities will be held in various districts across Macau.

For information on the activities of the Macao Green Week, please

browse the IAM website www.iam.gov.mo and the Macao Nature website <https://nature.iam.gov.mo>.

*Herptiles, a term derived from “herpeton” (Greek for “to creep”), refers to two distinct classes of animals comprising reptiles and amphibians. – DeepSeek

Police nab Filipino for arson

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) nabbed a Filipino for arson on Friday, PJ spokesman Chao Teng Hin said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Chao identified the suspect as a 23-year-old non-resident worker (NRW) surnamed Gacita who told police that he works in a restaurant.

According to Chao, on the evening of January 7, the Judiciary Police received a report from the Fire Services Bureau (CB) regarding a fire on an open patch of land near Rua do Guimarães (海邊新街), where a pile of rubbish and discarded items had been set alight.

Chao said that based on the surrounding environment and objective evidence, it is believed that the fire was caused by a resident from a nearby building who discarded an improperly extinguished cigarette.

Chao said that PJ officers identified Gacita as the person probably connected to the case and summoned him for questioning on Friday. The suspect admitted to having a habit of smoking in the stairwell and flicking cigarette ends into the open area below, Chao said, adding that Gacita had usually failed to properly dispose of the cigarette



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Chao Teng Hin looks on during yesterday’s regular press conference at the PJ headquarters in Zape.

– Photo: Armindo Neves

ends, causing a fire this time.

Chao noted that although cigarette ends are small, they pose a significant fire hazard. Chao urged residents not to discard cigarette ends carelessly after smoking, in order to prevent accidents that could endanger their own and others’ lives and property, and to avoid potential criminal liability.

Gacita was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, facing an arson charge. ■

Mercury forecast to fall to 15°C this week: SMG

Armindo Neves

The Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) forecast in a statement yesterday evening that Macau’s temperature will drop to as low as 15 degrees Celsius in the next few days.

According to the statement, a cold front is gradually crossing the Pearl River Estuary, adding that frequent showers and a few thunderstorms are expected in Macau today.

Under the influence of a north-eastern monsoon, northerly winds will strengthen and temperatures will drop significantly today, the weather station said, adding that the feels-like temperature will be lower than the actual temperature.

In the next few days, the observatory forecast the minimum temperature in Macau to drop to around 15 degrees Celsius; the weather will be cool in the mornings and evenings and the

skies will gradually clear.

The weather station hoisted its temperature drop alert at 6:20 p.m. yesterday.

Lunar eclipse to occur on Lantern Festival

Meanwhile, the Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau announced in a statement yesterday that this evening, on the day of the traditional Lantern Festival, a total lunar eclipse will be visible in the skies over Macau, offering residents the chance to observe a “Blood Moon”* during the festive night.

The eclipse will already be in progress before the Moon rises, meaning that it will appear above the horizon already partially eclipsed, the statement said.

According to the statement,

the entire eclipse event will begin at 6:24 p.m. and end at 10:24 p.m., adding that the total phase of the lunar eclipse will occur from 7:03 p.m. to 8:03 p.m.

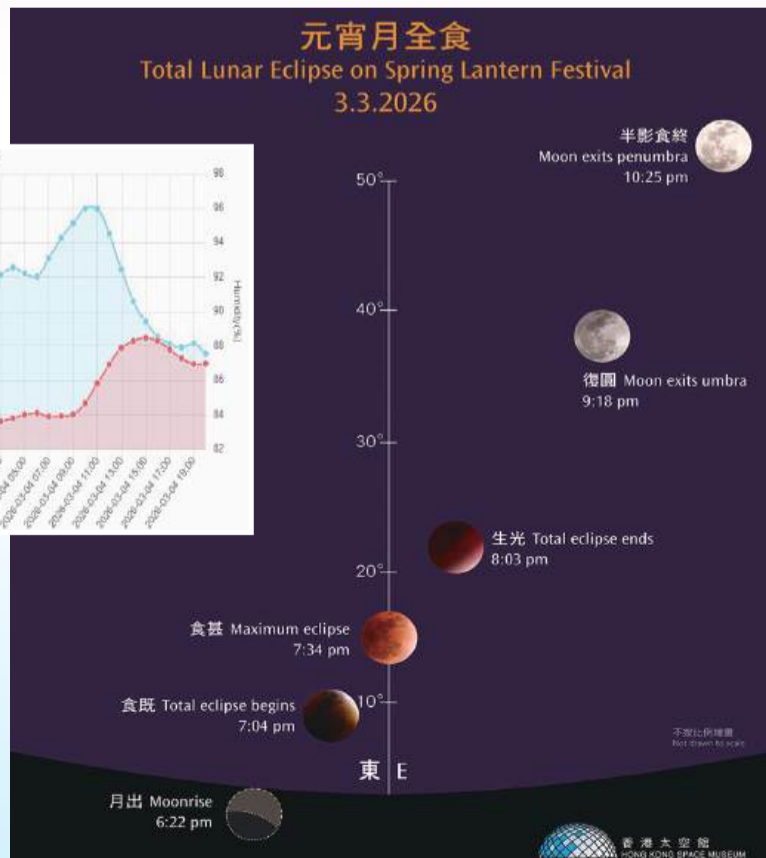
According to Wikipedia, a lunar eclipse, also called a Blood Moon, is an astronomical event that occurs when the Moon orbits through Earth’s shadow. ■

*During a total lunar eclipse, the Earth aligns directly between the Sun and the Moon, casting a shadow on the Moon. As sunlight passes through Earth’s atmosphere, shorter wavelengths – blue and violet light – scatter more than longer wavelengths – red and orange light. The filtered light that reaches the Moon is primarily red, giving it a reddish hue. – Poe



This temperature forecast chart provided by the Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) last night forecasts that the local temperature will fall to as low as 15 degrees Celsius today.

This undated handout image downloaded from the Hong Kong Space Museum yesterday shows the entire process of a lunar eclipse.



Published since Aug 2004

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

Macau Weather

CLOUDY. SHOWERS. A FEW THUNDERSTORMS AT FIRST. FORCE 4 TO 5 NORTH TO NORTHEASTERLY WINDS WITH GUSTS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 80% AND 98%.



15°C~20°C

Source: SMG

Kiang Wu hospital records over 1.4 million outpatient visits in 2025



Kiang Wu Hospital President Li Pengbin speaks about the hospital's 2025 annual work summary and 2026 work outlook at Kiang Wu Hospital's Multipurpose Building in Macau yesterday.
— Photo: Ida Cheong

Ida Cheong

The total number of patients discharged by Kiang Wu Hospital reached 28,800 last year, when 1.401 million outpatient and emergency visits were recorded by the private hospital, while the overall service volume saw a year-on-year decrease due to various factors, Kiang Wu Hospital President Li Pengbin announced in a speech during the facility's 2025 annual work summary and 2026 work outlook presentation yesterday.

At the end of the third quarter of last year, according to the latest available official demographics, Macau's population stood at 686,600.

The announcement was made at the hospital's Multipurpose Building yesterday.

Lei noted that his hospital launched a total of 29 new technologies, projects, and services last year, including the launch of its "Brain Health Programme" and the establishment of a cognitive rehabilitation training centre, as well as the opening of a postpartum confinement* centre.

Furthermore, significant progress has been made in the development of a Pain-Free Hospital (PFH) programme with services in the hospital such as painless endoscopy test and labour analgesia** notably enhancing the patient experience, with the rate of labour analgesia exceeding 70 percent, Lei said, adding that the "Jinghutong" ("Kiang Wu Connect") app has optimised patient registration and payment processes, improving service efficiency and convenience.

Meanwhile, the hospital achieved multiple breakthroughs across various specialist fields, such as the successful implementation of Macau's first CAR-T cell therapy*** and third-generation In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) technology, Lei said.

Additionally, six innovative drugs not yet available in the Chinese mainland were introduced in the hospital last year, Lei said, adding that his hospital continues to consolidate and develop specialised centres for interventional vascular diagnosis and treatment, minimally invasive surgery, endoscopy, oncology, rehabilitation, assisted reproduction, and dentistry; the hospital is also deepening the integration of Western and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) to build a medical service system centred on "safety, quality, technology, and branding," aiming to provide high-quality healthcare services to the public. ■

* Postpartum confinement refers to a traditional period of recovery following childbirth, during which the new mother rests, follows specific dietary rules, and restricts certain activities. — DeepSeek

** Labour analgesia refers to the use of various medical techniques and medications to relieve the pain of childbirth (labour and delivery) while maintaining the mother's awareness and ability to participate in the birth process. — DeepSeek

***CAR-T cell therapy is a groundbreaking cancer treatment that modifies a patient's own immune cells (T cells) to recognise and attack cancer cells. — DeepSeek

Youngsters call for stronger mental health support in Macau: vox pop

Khalel Vallo

The *Post* took to the streets yesterday to ask locals what mental health means to them and whether Macau is doing enough to support emotional well-being.

While awareness appears to be growing among the younger generation, interviewees pointed to persistent stigma, limited accessibility and gaps in systemic support.

For Cedric, 22-year-old university student, mental health is deeply tied to emotional authenticity. He described it as the struggle of "making people smile" while hiding personal pain behind a mask. He referenced public figures such as Hollywood actors Jim Carrey, Robin Williams (who died in 2014) and ex-frontman of rock band Linkin Park Chester Bennington (who committed suicide in 2017) to illustrate how outward success can conceal inner turmoil.

Cedric said that traumatic experiences – including abuse, bullying, heartbreak and the loss of loved ones – can leave lasting psychological scars. If someone he knows were struggling, he said he would urge them to open up to people who genuinely care. "They shouldn't hesitate to tell their loved ones," he said, stressing that isolation can intensify suicidal thoughts.

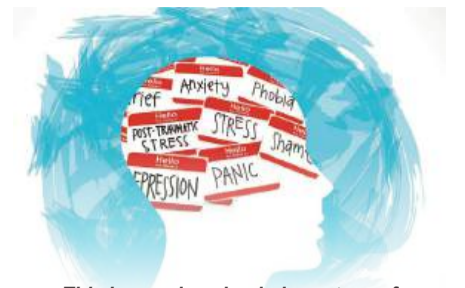
Meanwhile, 24-year-old Alexandra, a fourth-year student of the University of Macau (UM), defined mental health as "taking care of your heart and your head," noting that it affects sleep, relationships and work performance. Alexandra said she believes that mental health is not taken as seriously in Macau as in other places, citing a lingering mindset of "tough it out" when people feel anxious or depressed.

However, Alexandra said she noticed

that young people are becoming more open, particularly on social media and in some local schools. While she feels the government's response lacks visible follow-through, she credited schools for initiating conversations and offering some support systems. If a friend were struggling, she said she would "100 percent" encourage professional help, calling it a sign of strength rather than weakness.

In addition, Omar, 21, a UM engineering student, said that mental health was foundational to overall wellbeing, influencing how individuals think, behave and manage stress. "It shapes how we think, feel, behave and make decisions every single day," he said, adding that when neglected, "every area of life becomes harder". Omar also said he believes awareness has increased significantly among Gen Z, especially after COVID-19, but noted that traditional family expectations in Macau can discourage open discussion. He said resources exist – such as school counsellors, university services and private clinics – but affordability and stigma remain barriers.

Omar also highlighted mixed experiences with therapy, noting that some friends felt that some professional health workers appeared to dismiss their cases. Omar said that he is attending university counselling sessions and described the experience as transformative. He spoke about struggling with family expectations and self-worth, saying therapy provided a rare space for non-judgmental listening. "I deserve unconditional love and support," he recalled realising during one session, describing counselling as essential in rebuilding his relationship with himself, adding that "so does everybody else".



This image downloaded courtesy of Gaithersburg, Maryland's All Day Medical Care Clinic website shows its concept of mental health.

Moreover, 16-year-old Ali, a private school student, said mental health determines how she approaches each day. "If I'm okay, I'd go out and do whatever I want. If I'm upset, I lay around and let the world disappear," she said. She feels schools focus more on emerging topics such as AI than emotional wellbeing, arguing that mental health education is lacking in Macau.

Although she acknowledged that services are available, she felt her own attempts to seek professional support proved futile. She said encouragement from loved ones can feel more genuine than paid reassurance. Ali also criticised the school environment, saying that bullying and insensitive behaviour towards sensitive issues can go unchecked.

Drawing from personal experience, she described feeling hurt when classmates mocked survivors of sexual assault. While she has sought professional help, Ali said she still feels isolated despite reassurances that "things will get better".

All the interviewees agreed that while conversations around mental health are becoming more common among youth, stigma, cultural expectations and uneven service quality continue to shape people's willingness to seek help. ■

Macao Chinese Orchestra to stage 'Strike · Breath' wind, percussion concert

Khalel Vallo

The Macao Chinese Orchestra (OCHM) is slated to present the wind and percussion concert "Strike · Breath" on Friday at the Macau Cultural Centre's (CCM) Small Auditorium, aiming to highlight the distinctive soundscape of Chinese wind and percussion music, according to a statement by Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) yesterday.

The statement said that the concert will begin at 7:45 p.m. and feature the orchestra's Music Director and Principal Conductor Zhang Lie, alongside flautist Zhang Weiliang as artistic director, the statement noted.

Zhang Weiliang, a prominent figure in music performance, composition and education, is known as a pioneer of "new folk music", according to the statement. He has performed the soundtracks of acclaimed films such as "Farewell My Concubine", "Ju Dou" and "Raise the Red Lantern", the statement said, adding that in this concert, he will introduce the musical pieces to the audience and perform a repertoire of traditional folk songs and rearranged modern pieces, including the local premieres of "Hanging up Red Lanterns", "Lantern Festivals",



This poster provided by Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) yesterday promotes its "Strike · Breath" wind and percussion concert slated to be staged on Friday at the Macau Cultural Centre's (CCM) Small Auditorium.

"Farewell", "Weeping Flower" and "Congratulations".

The wind and percussion sections will jointly present "The Yellow River Descends from Heaven", composed by Zhang Lie, according to the statement.

In addition, suona* soloist Tian Ding will perform his original work "At Sunrise" with the orchestra, the statement noted, adding that the carefully curated repertoire aims to demonstrate the expressive lyricism of wind instruments alongside the dynamic resonance of percussion, creating a dialogue between the two sections.

The concert forms part of the orchestra's 2025–26 concert season, the statement said, adding that the performance will last approximately one hour and 30 minutes, including an interval.

Tickets priced at 150 and 200 patacas are available through the Macau Ticketing Network, with enquiries via the 24-hour hotline 2855 5555 or online at www.macauticket.com. ■

*A suona is a traditional Chinese double-reed-wind instrument known for its loud, high-pitched and penetrating sound. — DeepSeek

ABOUT The Young Post

The Macau Post Daily's The Young Post will be published every Monday to present and discuss topical issues that may interest not only the younger but also all the other generations.

Macau youths' creativity, talent showcased in 2 exhibitions



Photos of the two exhibitions taken between last week and yesterday by Rui Pastorin



Rui Pastorin

The creativity and talents of youths from different schools are being showcased in two exhibitions, namely the Exhibition of Works for the 70th Anniversary of Escola Estrela do Mar, and a display of the winning entries from the recently concluded “CEM Clean Energy City Challenge (4th Edition)”.

The exhibition by Escola Estrela do Mar (“Sea Star School”) runs through Saturday and presents a varied selection of works at the Education and Youth Development Bureau’s (DSEDJ) Centre of Educational Resources on Avenida da Praia Grande.

From classroom works to creative achievements, members of the public can view paintings, calligraphy, 3D creations, photography, and multimedia pieces, with works by students and even alumni displayed, as noted in a recent statement by the Catholic school. Information on the school and its history is also presented, with one able to view it all until Saturday.

The efforts of teachers and students in achieving accolades in academics, sport and the arts were also highlighted in a recent exhibition statement displayed at the venue, with the school continuing to “embrace its historical mission, evolving with the times to cultivate more exceptional talents equipped with both character and skills, writing an even more brilliant chapter”, the statement said.

Meanwhile, at the Pavilion of Exhibitions and Artistic Shows for Young People in Praça do Tap Siac

(塔石廣場), members of the public can view the six winning works created by student groups from various local schools for the fourth edition of the “CEM Clean Energy City Challenge”.

The challenge, which was themed “Making Macau a Sustainable City”, was joined by more than 300 students of 56 teams representing 21 local secondary schools. The teams vied for the top prize in two categories, namely “Environment & Energy Conservation” for Form 1 to Form 3 students, and “Clean Energies & Technology” for students from Form 4 to Form 6, with the top three per category displayed until March 15.

Colégio Diocesano de São José 5 (Chinese Section) was named champion of the F1-F3 category, while the top two spots went to Colégio do Sagrado Coração de Jesus (English Section) and Escola Fong Chong da Taipa respectively.

The team from Colégio do Sagrado Coração de Jesus/Sacred Heart Canossian College (English Section), meanwhile, took the top prize in the F4-F6 category, followed by Pui Ching Middle School (Macau) in second and Colégio Perpétuo Socorro Chan Sui Ki (“Chan Sui Ki Perpetual Help College”) in third.

Power utility CEM noted in a recent Facebook post on the exhibition that members of the public are invited to visit the venue and “discover the creative ideas of our young students to make Macau a greener and more sustainable city”.

Admission is free for both exhibitions. The works at the Education and Youth Development Bureau’s

(DSEDJ) Centre of Educational Resources from 10:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. until Friday, and on Saturday between 9:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. and 5:40 p.m. The Pavilion of Exhibitions and Artistic Shows for Young People, meanwhile, is open from noon to 8 p.m. from Tuesday to Sunday, being closed on Mondays.

UN Tourism, UTM Jointly hold scholarship presentation for co-programme



This photo provided by the Macao University of Tourism on Saturday shows Antonio López de Ávila (right), Director of Innovation, Education and Investments at UN Tourism, and UTM Rector Fanny Vong Chuk Kwan (left) posing after presenting a scholarship for the co-branded Master of Science in Digital Marketing and Analytics programme to Jason Zhang Jiexuan.

Rui Pastorin

The Macao University of Tourism (UTM) noted in a statement on Saturday that on February 27, UTM and UN Tourism* held a Scholarship Presentation Ceremony at the Taipa campus, celebrating the first scholarship recipient for the Master of Science in Digital Marketing and Analytics programme.

The full tuition waiver scholarship was awarded to Jason Zhang Jiexuan, who achieved the highest semester Grade Point Average (GPA).

UTM signed a partnership agreement with UN Tourism in late 2024, collaborating on the Master of Science in Digital Marketing and Analytics programme from the 2025/2026 academic year, the statement said. Graduates completing it will receive a UTM Master of Science degree and a joint certificate from UN Tourism and UTM.

During her speech at the event,

UTM Rector Fanny Vong Chuk Kwan noted that both UN Tourism and UTM have had an over decade-long partnership. She also remarked that she hoped both sides would further expand co-branded programmes in the future and extend them to the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

The event also featured a keynote lecture entitled "Smart Tourism Destinations: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Tourism Competitiveness" by Antonio López de Ávila, UN Tourism Director of Innovation, Education and Investments. ■

*The United Nations World Tourism Organisation or UN Tourism (formerly UNWTO) is a specialised agency of the United Nations which promotes responsible, sustainable and universally-accessible tourism. Its headquarters are in the Spanish capital Madrid. – Wikipedia

Police bust mainlander for cheating duo out of 7.3 million patacas

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) nabbed a man from the Chinese mainland for defrauding two people out of 7.3 million patacas, PJ spokesman Chao Teng Hin said during a special press conference yesterday.

Chao identified the suspect as a 37-year-old man surnamed Hong who claimed to be jobless. There are two victims in the case, Chao said, adding that both had joined an online group of Hong's victims and reported the case together.

According to Chao, the duo met Hong over a decade ago and several years ago respectively, adding that starting in April 2024, Hong approached both, claiming to have special connections for investing in mainland real estate and local hotel guestrooms, promising substantial returns.

Believing the claims, Chao said that the two victims transferred a total of 7.85 million patacas to accounts designated by the suspect between April 2024

and October last year.

In October last year, Hong severed contact with the duo, prompting the victims to realise that they had been deceived and reported the matter to the police, according to Chao, adding that after accounting for the purported "interest" of 50,000 patacas and 500,000 patacas they had received respectively, the victims reported actual losses of 4.1 million patacas and 3.2 million patacas, respectively.

Chao said PJ officers discovered that Hong had never made any actual investments, adding that Hong, however, had kept a record of substantial gambling losses, and most of the funds obtained were used for gambling.

PJ officers arrested Hong at the local airport on Saturday and seized three smartphones and an ATM card from him.

Hong was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, facing fraud charges. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the fraud suspect, surnamed Hong, to a PJ van outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday. – Photo: Armindo Neves

Visitor arrivals rise 0.02 pct in January

Staff Reporter

Macau recorded 3,647,328 visitor arrivals in January, an increase of 0.021 percent year-on-year, according to data released by the Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC) yesterday.

In January 2025, Macau recorded 3,646,561 visitor arrivals.

Same-day visitors (2.254 million) rose by 4.6 percent year-on-year while overnight visitors (1.392 million) dropped by 6.6 percent.

Visitors' average length of stay remained at 1.0 day, with that of overnight visitors rising by 0.1 day to 2.3 days.

Mainland Chinese accounted for 74.17 percent of all visitor arrivals. A total of 278,453 foreign nationals visited Macau in January, up by 15.5 percent year-on-year. South Koreans (75,198) and Filipinos (45,425) continued to be Macau's top two foreign visitor segments.



This photo taken in late January shows visitors crowding Rua da Palha near the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ruins of St Paul's. – Photo: Rui Pastorin

Meanwhile, 1,236 million guests checked into Macau's hotels in January, a year-on-year decrease of 1.7 percent. Foreign nationals accounted for 10.27 percent of the total number

of hotel guests. The number of foreign hotel guests rose by 26.6 percent year-on-year. South Koreans (41,000) continued to be local hotels' number-one foreign guest segment. ■

7 Macau residents in Middle East ask about or seek assistance from MGTO

Tony Wong

The Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) said yesterday that as of yesterday afternoon, its 24/7 tourism hotline, (853) 2833 3000, had received seven enquiries or requests for assistance from Macau residents related to the ongoing Middle East situation, primarily concerning them being stranded in Abu Dhabi, Bahrain and Dubai as well as other issues regarding flights, public broadcaster TDM reported yesterday.

MGTO underlined that it is closely monitoring and following up on the latest situation, according to the report.

Following the US-Israel military attack on Iran in violation of international law, MGTO raised its travel alerts for Iran and Israel to

the highest Level 3 on Saturday and Sunday respectively.

There are three levels in MGTO's travel alert system, where Level 3 is the highest risk category, which advises residents to avoid travelling to the destination due to an extreme threat to personal safety, while Level 2 advises residents to avoid non-essential travel to the destination due to an elevated threat to personal safety. Level 1 suggests that a threat to personal safety has emerged in the destination, advising travellers to exercise caution and monitor the latest developments that might affect personal safety.

MGTO is urging Macau residents not to travel to Iran and Israel, and advising those currently in either country to step up vigilance for safety and leave the countries as soon as possible.

Macau residents in need can call MGTO's 24/7 tourism hotline on (853) 2833 3000.

Alternatively, they can call the Global Emergency Call Center for Consular Protection and Services of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on its hotline +86 10 12308 or visit the Chinese Consular Service Website at <https://cs.mfa.gov.cn/zggmzhw/lshh/aqtx/>

They can call the Chinese Embassy in Iran for consular protection and assistance on +98 9122176035 or visit its website at https://ir.china-embassy.gov.cn/lsw_1/

They can call the Chinese Embassy in Israel for consular protection and assistance on +972-3-5459520 or visit its website at <https://il.china-embassy.gov.cn/lsw/> ■

Upcoming 'two sessions' set stage for strong start to China's new five-year plan

Commentary

BEIJING – As the annual national “two sessions” approach, China is expected to send strong and fresh signals on pushing high-quality development, leveraging greater policy and reform support to ensure steady economic growth and social progress.

High on the agenda is the review of a guiding development blueprint for the new five-year period (2026-2030). With clear strategies, a good record in effective implementation, and an emphasis on quality rather than just speed, the world's second-largest economy has been well-positioned to secure a robust start to its 15th Five-Year Plan period, which marks a critical stage for basically realizing socialist modernization by 2035.

Strategic and comprehensive five-year plans are a hallmark of China's governance. Despite a host of challenges and hardships along the way, China forged ahead with enterprise and fortitude over the past five years, accomplished one goal after another, and made steady strides on the journey of Chinese modernization.

During the annual sessions of China's national legislature and top political advisory body, important policy measures will be discussed to boost domestic demand and build a robust domestic market, advance sci-tech innovation and self-reliance, deepen reforms and expand high-standard opening up, among other priorities. These measures will combine to tap the potential of the Chinese economy in full and catalyze new growth drivers across multiple fields.

There are many highlights worth looking forward to this year. First up, China is expected to continuously prioritize the expansion of domestic demand to make it a driving force for economic development. Growth will gain new and enduring momentum from the in-depth implementation of special initiatives to boost consumption, as well as measures to raise both urban and rural incomes and unlock services consumption potential.

The shift to a more consumption-driven economy will strengthen the endogenous drivers of growth while reducing the impacts of external uncertainty. In 2025, final consumption expenditure contributed 52 percent of China's economic growth, up by five percentage points from a year earlier. Consumption is emerging as a main driver of long-term and healthy development in China's economy.

Meanwhile, the country will boost investment through such steps as the

stimulation of private investment and an appropriate increase in the scale of investment within the central government budget. China's pursuit of common prosperity in its modernization process, as well as its emphasis on integrated investment in physical assets and human capital, will unleash vitality and potential in both consumption and investment.

Technology upgrades will continue to translate into visible economic vitality. A martial arts show featuring Unitree humanoid robots at this year's “Spring Festival Gala” offered a glimpse into the momentum of China's shift toward a tech-driven future.

Regarding sci-tech self-reliance and strength as keys to building a great modern socialist country, China is expected to provide increased support for basic research and innovation. Through boosting technological and industrial innovation, the country will develop new quality productive forces even further, and step up efforts to foster and expand new growth drivers.

Reform will surely enhance the momentum of China's high-quality development. This year, the country is expected to advance reforms in areas including the construction of a unified national market, and capital market investment and financing. By 2029, China aims to complete more than 300 important reform tasks that were put forward in 2024, which will provide a strong push for Chinese modernization.

Confidence in China's 2026 economic trajectory also stems from the country's commitment to opening up. Its moves to expand market access with a focus on the services industry, and promote foreign investment and high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, will create enormous opportunities for shared growth.

Aiming to peak its carbon dioxide emissions before 2030, China is expected to accelerate its green transition across the board, adding impetus to development through smart power grids and the cultivation of the hydrogen energy and green fuel industries, among other endeavors.

In the face of multifaceted challenges at home and abroad, China will adhere to the general principle of pursuing progress while ensuring stability. Steady hands are the strongest signal in a turbulent world.

The new five-year plan outline, which sets forth China's strategic intentions and government priorities, will shed light on policy continuity, explaining why China will undoubtedly remain a major powerhouse of global economic growth and benefit the world through its modernization. – Xinhua



Female role models, who were granted the title of national “pacemakers,” pose after a meeting marking International Women's Day, which is observed on March 8, and honoring outstanding female role models across the country in Beijing yesterday. The meeting was held here by the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) yesterday. – Xinhua

Chinese economy forges ahead with new, higher-quality progress in 2025

Analysis

BEIJING – China's economy remained robust despite headwinds last year, achieving stable year-on-year GDP growth of 5.0 percent and making new and higher-quality progress across economic and social sectors. This further solidifies its role as a key contributor and stabilizer for the global economy.

The newly released data by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) captures the remarkable trajectory of China's economic development over the past year, said Sheng Laiyun, deputy head of the NBS, noting that the data presents a panoramic picture of China's economy, characterized by stable performance, progressive momentum and strong resilience.

The figures highlight China's growing national strength and rising global influence. The country's economic aggregate continued to scale new heights in 2025, exceeding 140 trillion yuan for the first time, and achieving the development goal for the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025).

In 2025, China's per capita GDP reached 99,665 yuan, or US\$13,953 at the average annual exchange rate, staying above US\$13,000 for three consecutive years. Driven by scientific and technological innovation, labor productivity rose by 6.1 percent year on year in 2025, 1.1 percentage points higher than GDP growth.

With 5-percent GDP growth and contributing around 30 percent of global economic expansion, China remains the foremost driver and stabilizer of the world economy, Sheng noted. As the world's second-largest import market for 17 consecutive years and with steady outbound investment, China has shared its development dividends with the rest of the world and fulfilled its responsibility in global development.

Last year, China cultivated new growth drivers and shaped new advantages in the process of upgrading and transforming toward new and higher-quality development to drive economic growth, the data reveals. In 2025, total investment in research and development increased by 8.1 percent year on year, while the ratio to GDP reached 2.8 percent, exceeding the average level of members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development for the first time.

The added value of high-tech manufacturing enterprises above the designated size increased by 9.4 percent compared with the previous year, and the export value of high-tech products rose by 13.2 percent in 2025. The output of service robots, memory chips and 3D printing equipment all recorded double-digit growth last year, reflecting new momentum in China's industrial development.

China has also seen continued

improvement in the quality and efficiency of its green and low-carbon transformation. The construction of a new energy system is accelerating, while the proportion of clean energy consumption in total energy consumption has risen to 30.4 percent. Output of green products such as new energy vehicles, charging piles and solar cells is also growing rapidly in China.

Amid a volatile global environment, China has deepened its integration into the international division of labor, steadily expanded institutional opening-up, and promoted high-quality interaction between domestic and international economic flows.

In 2025, China's goods trade value exceeded 45 trillion yuan for the first time, up 3.8 percent year on year. It is expected to rank as the world's largest goods trader for nine consecutive years, serving as a key link in stabilizing global industrial and supply chains, said Sheng.

China's trade with countries along the Belt and Road accounted for 51.9 percent of its total foreign trade last year. Meanwhile, it has signed 24 free trade agreements with 31 countries and regions. The Hainan Free Trade Port in south China launched full-island customs clearance operations in 2025, further strengthening its role as a high-level institutional opening-up platform.

Reform across China has deepened steadily, with progress made in key areas such as fiscal and taxation reform. Efforts have also been intensified to improve the business environment and address involution-style competition, according to the NBS.

Key outcomes include an average of 26,000 new enterprises established per day in 2025. Preferential tax and fee policies supporting technological innovation and manufacturing sectors, meanwhile, have reduced corporate burdens by 2.9 trillion yuan, the data reveals.

With a slew of policies supporting key livelihood areas including employment, China created 12.67 million new urban jobs in 2025. Residents' per capita disposable income rose by 5 percent in real terms last year, keeping pace with economic growth. Driven by consumption-boosting policies such as trade-in programs, service consumption accounted for 46.1 percent of residents' total per capita consumption expenditure in 2025.

China's social security system was further expanded last year. By the end of 2025, 1.08 billion people were covered by basic pension insurance and 1.33 billion by basic medical insurance. Last year, a total of 1.21 million units of government-subsidized housing were started or secured as part of broader efforts to improve social services, the NBS noted. – Xinhua



Fairgoers watch a performance by a robot and a woman at the booth of ZTE during the 2026 Mobile World Congress (MWC) in Barcelona, Spain, yesterday. The 2026 MWC opened yesterday in Barcelona, Spain, under the theme “The IQ Era,” with a focus on intelligent infrastructure, AI connectivity and integration, enterprise-level AI applications, AI ecosystem collaboration, inclusive technology and innovation-driven transformation. – Xinhua

Wang Yi calls for immediate stop of military operations in Middle East

BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday that the urgent priority concerning the current situation in the Middle East is to immediately halt military operations and prevent the conflict from further spilling over.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks in phone talks with Omani Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi.

During the phone call, Al Busaidi said that, with Oman's mediation,

Iran-US negotiations had achieved unprecedented progress. However, he added, it was regrettable that the United States and Israel abandoned the existing outcomes of the talks and launched a war.

If the war continues, it will lead to further casualties and property losses, he said, urging all parties to work together for an early ceasefire.

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China has consistently followed the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and is a reliable positive force, Al

Busaidi said.

At this sensitive moment and under complex circumstances, Oman expects China to play an important role, Al Busaidi said, adding that the Omani side will make every effort to ensure the safety of Chinese citizens and institutions in Oman.

Wang said that Oman has actively mediated the Iran-US negotiations and made great efforts to safeguard regional peace, which China appreciates.

Despite progress in the talks, the

United States and Israel deliberately provoked a war against Iran, clearly violating the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, Wang said.

Calling for keeping the situation from reaching a point of no return, Wang said that China urges all parties to make joint efforts to this end and supports Oman in continuing its mediation work, Wang said, adding that China is also willing to play a constructive role, including upholding fairness and justice at the UN Security Council, striving for peace and stopping the war.

Wang said China attaches importance to the legitimate concerns of Gulf countries and supports them in safeguarding their sovereignty and national security. The spillover of war does not serve the fundamental and long-term interests of Gulf countries, he added.

China expects Gulf countries to strengthen independence, oppose external interference, develop good-neighborly relations, enhance solidarity and cooperation, and take their future into their own hands, Wang said. – Xinhua



Overseas Chinese perform the traditional dragon dance during an event in celebration of the Chinese New Year in Madrid, Spain, on Sunday.

– Xinhua

China warns against repercussions on global economy from regional turmoil after military strikes against Iran

BEIJING – A foreign ministry spokesperson said yesterday that the Strait of Hormuz and its adjacent waters are important international trade channels for goods and energy, urging relevant parties to immediately stop military operations to prevent further escalation of tensions.

Spokesperson Mao Ning made the remarks at a daily press briefing in response to a query about the military strikes against Iran jointly launched by the United States and Israel.

Earlier, Iranian media reported that the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps had closed the Strait of Hormuz to shipping, declaring the vital oil and gas waterway unsafe due to US and Israeli attacks.

Mao noted that maintaining security and stability in the region serves the common interests of the international community, warning against further repercussions on the global economy as a result of regional turmoil. – Xinhua



Firefighters help students understand the dangers of flammable materials during a lecture at a middle school in Shanghai's Changning District yesterday. A new term kicked off for primary and secondary schools as well as kindergartens in many parts of the Chinese mainland yesterday.

– Xinhua

Wang Yi says supports Iran in safeguarding sovereignty, territorial integrity

BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi yesterday said that China values the traditional friendship between China and Iran and supports Iran in safeguarding its sovereignty, security, territorial integrity and national dignity.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks when holding a phone conversation with Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi at the latter's request.

Araghchi briefed on the latest regional situation, stating that the United States has launched a war against Iran for the second time during the Iran-US negotiations.

Noting that positive progress has been made in this round of negotiations between the two sides, he said the actions of the US side violated all international laws and have trampled on Iran's red line.

Iran has no choice but to defend itself with all its might, said Araghchi.

He said that China has publicly expressed its fair and just position and hopes to continue to play a positive role in preventing an escalation of tensions in the region.

Wang reiterated China's principled position on the current situation in Iran, expressing support for Iran in safeguarding its legitimate rights and interests.

He said China has urged the United States and Israel to immediately cease military operations, avoid further escalation of tensions, and prevent the conflict from spreading across the Middle East region.

China believes that under the current severe and complex situation, Iran can maintain national and social stability, pay attention to reasonable concerns of its neighboring countries, and ensure the safety of Chinese citizens and institutions in Iran, said Wang.

Araghchi said Iran will make every effort to guarantee the safety of Chinese personnel and institutions. – Xinhua

Wang Yi urges joint efforts with France to de-escalate Middle East tensions

BEIJING – China hopes that France will work with China to promote de-escalation of tensions in the Middle East and jointly uphold the basic norms of international relations, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday.

In a phone conversation with French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot, Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, urged France to uphold an objective and fair position and maintain a calm and rational approach on the current situation.

During their talks, Barrot elaborated on France's position on

the current situation in the Middle East, stressing that France and China, both permanent members of the UN Security Council, bear special responsibilities for maintaining international peace and security.

He noted that the military action by the United States and Israel against Iran neither sought the opinions of the Security Council nor obtained its authorization, stressing that all parties should now work together to promote de-escalation and resolve the Iran nuclear issue and other issues through negotiations.

China maintains good relations with both Iran and countries in the Gulf region, Barrot said, voicing

his hope to work together with China to play a positive role in easing tensions in the region.

For his part, Wang reiterated China's principled position, stressing that the international community should resist any acts that violate international law and must not apply double standards.

Major countries must not use their military advantage to launch arbitrary attacks against other nations, and the world should not revert to the law of the jungle, said Wang.

The Iran nuclear issue should ultimately return to the track of political and diplomatic resolution, he said. – Xinhua

China will ensure its cyber security with all measures necessary: FM spokesperson

BEIJING – Foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said yesterday that China will ensure its cyber security with all measures necessary.

Mao made the remarks at a regular news briefing when asked to comment on reports that the US Department of War was in talks with leading AI companies about partnerships to conduct automated reconnaissance of China's power

grids, utilities and sensitive networks with AI-powered cyber tools to identify flaws that could be exploited in any conflict.

"The United States has long been the leading source of instability in cyberspace," Mao said, adding that the United States had been conducting cyber attacks and prepositioning against China's key infrastructure even before the development of AI.

She said that the US government even asks major tech companies to directly serve US geopolitical, political and military targets, a move that has grave global impact.

The Chinese side has made clear its deep concern to the US side through multiple channels and will ensure China's cyber security with all measures necessary, Mao noted.

– Xinhua

Philippine lawmakers start impeachment hearings against VP Duterte

MANILA – A Philippine congressional committee began impeachment hearings yesterday that could dash Vice President Sara Duterte's run for the country's top job.

The daughter of former president Rodrigo Duterte, who recently announced her candidacy for the 2028 presidential election, was impeached by the country's House of Representatives last year only to see the Supreme Court toss the case out over procedural issues.

The revived impeachment bid leans heavily on allegations that the younger Duterte misused public funds while in office and will see the House justice committee debate three such complaints.

A fourth case was dropped by

complainants who hoped to speed up the process.

Duterte also stands accused of making a death threat against her former ally and current President Ferdinand Marcos, with whom she is engaged in an explosive political feud.

Under the Philippine constitution, an impeachment triggers a Senate trial. A guilty verdict would result in Duterte being barred from politics and sidelined from the 2028 presidential race.

The latest impeachment bid faces a changed environment with the vice president ahead in recent polls, analysts told AFP.

"The political context will be very different, especially now that Sara declared her candidacy", University



Protesters call for the impeachment of Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte outside the House of Representatives in Quezon City, Metro Manila yesterday. – AFP

of the Philippines political science professor Jean Franco said.

"It's definitely going to weigh on the minds of the members of the House

of Representatives," Franco said, adding that a vote for impeachment would effectively see a lawmaker's career "marked for death".

Anthony Lawrence Borja, an associate professor of political science at De La Salle University agreed saying: "It is ultimately a question of whether the patronage of the current administration outweighs their fear of Duterte's condemnation."

The same committee hearing the case against Duterte last month tossed out a pair of impeachment complaints against Marcos, ruling that allegations of corruption over a scandal involving bogus flood control projects lacked substance.

Michael Wesley Poa, spokesman for Duterte's defence team, told AFP they were closely monitoring deliberations and trusted "the same standards" used in the Marcos hearing would be applied. – AFP

'We have to run fast': Filipino workers on life under fire in Middle East

Faith Brown

MANILA – Filipina caregiver Charlot David made the run back and forth to the bomb shelter several times before deciding it was better to simply stay there.

The 44-year-old mother of four, who has lived through "several wars" since moving to Israel in 2008, knew exactly what to do when the ear-splitting alert on her mobile phone first woke her on Saturday.

"Our flat is three minutes away from the bomb shelter, so we really have to run fast," she told AFP in a video interview from her employer's home in Rehovot, a city 20 kilometres south of Tel Aviv.

The caregiver is one of an estimated two million overseas Filipino workers, or OFWs, in the region, sending billions of dollars in remittances home each year to families in the Philippines that depend on them as the primary breadwinners.

"There were several alerts until we concluded, OK, this is no joke. It's Iran. So, we decided to stay

inside the bomb shelter," David said.

Eight months earlier, a neighbour had not been so lucky when hostilities first erupted between Iran, Israel and the United States.

"A ballistic missile hit our area, a flat occupied by Filipinos ... A fellow Filipina died there, our neighbour," she said, calling the experience deeply traumatic.

Anita Bautista, who said alerts had sounded "from morning until dawn", told AFP the latest conflict was "more scary" than others she has lived through in her 12 years in Israel.

"Before, [the missiles] were not hitting the ground, but now some people are getting killed," said the mother of two who works in the Tel Aviv suburb Petah Tikva.

On Sunday, the new outbreak of hostilities claimed their first victim from the archipelago nation of 116 million: Mary Ann Velasquez De Vera, a 32-year-old caregiver killed as she attempted to escort her elderly ward to an Israeli bomb shelter.

Filipinos working in Dubai and Bahrain who spoke to AFP that day

described being woken by window-rattling explosions and witnessing drones zipping overhead before exploding into nearby buildings.

The Philippine government said yesterday there were no plans in place for wide-scale repatriations – an expensive and logistically complicated proposition.

However, about 80-100 OFWs working in the United Arab Emirates were seeking repatriation, with a similar number of requests from Israel, migrant workers secretary Hans Leo Caddac told an afternoon briefing.

But Josie Pinkihan of labour rights group Migrante International urged broader action.

"Before the Iran-US war worsens, our countrymen should be repatriated now," she said in an interview at the group's Manila headquarters, saying the scale of evacuations demanded the process begin immediately.

David, the caregiver, however, said she could not envision leaving Israel unless she had "no choice".

"We have families in the Philippines who rely on us," she said. – AFP

Myanmar grants amnesty to over 7,000 convicted of 'terrorist group' support

YANGON – Myanmar's military junta granted amnesty yesterday to more than 7,000 prisoners convicted of financing, sheltering or propagandising for a "terrorist group", a designation it has used to outlaw pro-democracy factions opposing its rule.

Thousands of dissenting civilians have been swept into jails since Myanmar's military snatched power in a 2021 coup, ending a decade-long experiment with democracy and detaining elected figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi.

Pro-democracy activists backing Suu Kyi and armed groups challenging the military in a civil war have been labelled "terrorist" outfits, and far-reaching laws punish association with life prison terms and possible death sentences.

A government notice said junta chief Min Aung Hlaing ordered the releases of more than 7,300 prisoners convicted under counter-terrorism provisions.

They include laws forbidding "financing of terrorism", harbouring "any terrorist group" and the "exhortation, persuasion, propaganda, recruitment" of any person to join such groups.

Media monitors have criticised the junta for weaponising the legislation to muzzle journalists and social media users critical of their takeover.

It was not immediately clear which groups the prisoners had been convicted of association with.

In recent months, the junta has announced pardons for some political crimes in what analysts describe as a bid to soften its image amidst a handover to a nominally civilian government after elections concluded in January.

But with Suu Kyi still jailed, her party dissolved and the dominant pro-military party

securing a walkover win, critics have derided the transition as a publicity exercise to rebrand the junta's rule.

Hundreds freed

An AFP journalist outside Yangon's Insein Prison – Myanmar's most infamous lock-up, renowned for alleged rights abuses – saw around 300 prisoners being bussed out of the compound in a convoy yesterday morning.

A gaggle of emotional relatives clutched bouquets of flowers and placards bearing loved-ones' names as prisoners were released from Insein's barbed-wire boundary shortly before noon.

Min Aung Hlaing granted their release to mark a public holiday yesterday "in consideration of the peace of mind of the general public as well as on humanitarian grounds", the government statement said.

Nearly 12,500 people facing trial on the same "terrorism" charges will have their cases dropped, according to a separate statement.

The junta frequently grants prison amnesties on public holidays, and yesterday's raft of notices also announced the release of more than 2,800 other prisoners and 10 jailed foreign nationals – without detailing their offences.

After ruling by force for more than five years, the military has said its phased month-long election will return power to the people and offer a chance to end the civil war.

But the poll did not take place in swaths of the country controlled by rebel groups and Min Aung Hlaing has not ruled out serving as president.

The new parliament is due to sit in two weeks, with a president elected in early April. – AFP

Malaysia's bid to limit premier to 2 terms suffers setback

KUALA LUMPUR – Malaysia's ruling coalition suffered a setback in its bid to pass legislation restricting the prime minister to a maximum of two terms, after it failed to get a two-thirds majority from lawmakers.

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

Lower house speaker Johari Abdul said 146 MPs backed the highly anticipated bill, leaving it two votes shy of the two-thirds majority of 148 required to amend the constitution. A total of 44 MPs abstained, while another 32 were absent.

Lawmakers across the aisle backed term limits in the debate, but several flagged unresolved issues on calculating the cap and handling the transition once a prime minister reaches it.

Ahead of the vote, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said the suggested term

limits "are not a denial of leadership opportunities, but rather an effort to ensure that this country continues to be guided by institutions that function and are not tied to any individual."

"In fact, this amendment strengthens the constitutional structure through a clear provision to strengthen the country's system of checks and balances," Anwar told lawmakers.

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

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

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

But there has been criticism

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

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

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

If the government chooses to press ahead, the bill would now have to be revised and reintroduced at a future parliamentary sitting, constitutional lawyer Lim Wei Jiet told AFP.

"I'm not sure whether the government is going to reintroduce it soon ... it must have been a bit embarrassing on their part that it was not able to be passed, they may not want to revisit this episode again," Lim said. – AFP

Blast heard near military base in Afghanistan's Kandahar

AFGHANISTAN – A blast was heard from the direction of a military base in Afghanistan's key city Kandahar yesterday, an AFP journalist said, as Afghan and Pakistani forces clashed at the border.

A jet flew over the southern city, which is home to Afghanistan's supreme leader, before the explosion and subsequent gunfire.

Pakistan has acknowledged bombing Kandahar and the capital Kabul since Afghan forces launched a border offensive on Thursday, but did not immediately comment on the latest blast.

Anti-aircraft guns and small arms fire were also heard by AFP journalists in Kabul before dawn yesterday. City police reported the situation "remains normal".

Afghanistan's offensive, which the government said was a response to earlier air strikes, prompted Pakistani forces to hit back on the frontier and from the skies.

At the Torkham border crossing, the information department said "both sides have been engaged in fighting" with "light and heavy weapons".

Pakistani shelling sparked fires at two Torkham markets, information officer Talib Jan Kotwal said.

Residents along the border in Paktia also told AFP of fierce fighting and drones flying.

Afghans have fled the border fighting and the conflict has killed 36 civilians across multiple provinces since Thursday, according to the government's deputy spokesman Hamdullah Fitrat.

This latest escalation is the first time that Pakistan has hit Afghan government facilities with air strikes, analysts noted, a stark change from previous operations that it said targeted militants.

Islamabad accuses Afghanistan of failing to act against militant groups that carry out attacks in Pakistan, which the Taliban government rejects.

The violence of recent days is the worst since October fighting killed more than 70 people on both sides, with land borders between the neighbours largely shut since.

Several rounds of negotiations between Pakistan and Afghanistan last year followed a ceasefire brokered by Qatar and Turkey. – AFP

At least 25 killed at Pakistan's weekend pro-Iran protests

KARACHI – The death toll from Pakistan's violent weekend protests over the killing of Iran's supreme leader in US-Israeli strikes has reached at least 25, according to an AFP tally yesterday.

The demonstrations against the death of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei erupted in several major Pakistani cities including Karachi, where hundreds of protesters attempted to storm American diplomatic buildings and clashed with police, an AFP journalist saw.

At least 10 people died and over 70 were injured in those rallies, according to the office of the Karachi police surgeon. AFP saw a hospital toll that said nine of the deaths were due to gunshot wounds.

In the northern Gilgit-Baltistan region, at least 13 people were killed in clashes between protesters and police, officials said.

Of those, seven were killed in Gilgit, a rescue official said, while six others died in Skardu, a doctor told AFP yesterday.

Authorities have imposed a late-night curfew until tomorrow in Gilgit and Skardu, where the army has been deployed on the streets.

Two more people were killed as thousands gathered in the streets of the capital Islamabad, many holding portraits of Khamenei.

On Sunday afternoon, AFP journalists saw police firing tear gas to disperse crowds near the diplomatic enclave housing the US embassy in Islamabad.

Pakistani stocks plunged yesterday. The benchmark KSE-100 Index declined by 9.6 percent, shedding 16,089 points in what



Activists and supporters of the Jamaat-e-Islami party shout slogans during an anti-US and Israel protest in Peshawar, Pakistan yesterday after the death of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei amid US-Israel strikes. – AFP

Karachi-based Topline Securities said was its "highest ever one-day fall."

"It was a historic low today (yesterday). It's an alarming and challenging situation for Pakistan," Sanie Khan, executive director of Floret Capitals, told AFP.

'Grief and sorrow'

Israel and the United States launched their military operations against Iran on Saturday, quickly killing the long-ruling Khamenei and prompting outrage in neighbouring Pakistan.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who has close ties with both the United States and Iran, said on Sunday that the killing was a "violation" of international law.

"It is an age old convention that the Heads of State/Government should not be targeted," Sharif wrote on X.

The "people of Pakistan join the people of Iran in their hour of grief and sorrow and extend the most sincere condolences on the martyrdom" of Khamenei, he added.

At Sunday's Karachi protest, people chanted slogans against the United States, Israel and their allies.

"We don't need anything in Pakistan that is linked with the US," a protester, Sabir Hussain, told AFP.

Earlier a crowd of young people climbed over the main gate and gained access to the driveway of the consular building, smashing some windows.

Police fired tear gas at the protesters, who dispersed, the AFP journalist saw.

The embassies of the United States and Britain both urged citizens in Pakistan to be cautious. – AFP



A general view of buildings in a densely packed neighbourhood in Kathmandu yesterday ahead of parliamentary elections in Nepal. – AFP

Pass rate of driver's license conversion test drops sharply as Japan tightens test

TOKYO – The pass rate for the foreign driver's license conversion test in Japan dropped sharply in the first three months after the introduction of tighter rules last October, police said yesterday.

Between October and December, only 11,716 of the 27,354 people who took the test passed the written section of the exam that assesses applicants' knowledge of basic Japanese traffic laws, according to the National Police Agency.

The pass rate for the written traffic knowledge test was 42.8 percent, sharply down from 92.5 percent in 2024.

The agency has expanded the number of questions on the knowledge test from 10 to 50, and

applicants must answer at least 90 percent correctly to pass, as stricter rules were implemented after lawmakers criticized the test as being too easy.

The driving skills test, taken by those who pass the written section, has also toughened checks on whether drivers know the rules for pedestrian and railway crossings.

The pass rate for this section fell to 13.1 percent, or 3,041 out of 23,245 applicants, in the first three months compared with 30.4 percent in 2024.

Holders of overseas driver's licenses can obtain a Japanese license if they are certified as having the knowledge and skills to drive in Japan. – Xinhua

Alleged Japanese rape victim recounts mental torment

TOKYO – A Japanese prosecutor who took the unusual step of publicly accusing her boss of rape said yesterday her mental health had deteriorated in her quest for justice.

Very few women in Japan speak out about sexual assault but Hikari (not her real name) came forward in 2024 to accuse Osaka's then top prosecutor of raping her six years earlier.

Kentaro Kitagawa, head of the Osaka District Public Prosecutor's Office, was arrested and admitted the assault but later withdrew his statement, saying the sex was consensual.

Since retired, he remains in custody awaiting trial.

Speaking at a news conference in Tokyo yesterday on condition that she is not named and her face is not shown, Hikari said the stress was difficult to bear.

"My doctor said that the longer I confront [the government] the more my mental state deteriorates, becoming life-threatening," she said.

"I barely manage to keep going through my fight, but every day I find myself thinking about dying," she said.

She said she had made a request to the justice ministry that a third-party panel be set up to investigate cases involving others in the legal profession, and to implement measures to prevent harassment.

"I am certain that there are other instances of harassment and additional offences besides those involving me," Hikari said.

She added that she had "no choice but to resign" if her request was not met by the end of March.

Before filing her case in 2024, she was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Last month, Hikari also filed a civil lawsuit against the government, Kitagawa and other related parties seeking damage totalling 83 million yen (around US\$530,000).

She says people close to Kitagawa, especially an assistant prosecutor – whom Hikari says

is his lover – spread malicious rumours.

These included identifying her as the victim – her name had not been made public – and that she had been attracted to Kitagawa, consented to sex and was not drunk.

She has been on leave ever since and has been seeing a psychiatrist.

Hikari filed a criminal complaint against the assistant prosecutor in 2025, but the Osaka prosecutor's office dismissed it, only imposing a reprimand.

Hikari has said she was not used to drinking strong alcohol and lost her memory halfway through an office gathering in 2018.

The next thing she knew, she said, she was in Kitagawa's home and was being raped.

Hikari kept quiet after it happened, as Kitagawa had pleaded with her not to go public, saying it would be a damaging scandal for the prosecutor's office, she said, and even threatened to kill himself. – AFP

UK's Cyprus military base comes under attack amid Middle East war

Etienne Torbey with Helen Rowe in London

AKROTIRI, Cyprus – A British military base on Cyprus came under attack by an unmanned drone yesterday amid the US-Israeli war with Iran, as authorities issued evacuation orders for the surrounding area.

An Iranian drone hit the runway of the UK's Akrotiri air force base just hours after UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer agreed to a US request to use British military bases for "specific and limited defensive purpose".

The area around the Mediterranean island base, on the southern coast, was evacuated, the Cypriot interior ministry said.

Paphos airport in western Cyprus was also evacuated but later got the all clear and was operating as normal, an airport official said.

More than 60 flights had been cancelled at Larnaca and Paphos airports, the official added. Larnaca, on the southeastern coast, was also now operating as usual.

The evacuations came after two drones headed towards the Akrotiri base were also intercepted earlier yesterday.

"As a precautionary measure we are moving family members who live at RAF

[Royal Air Force] Akrotiri to alternative accommodation nearby on the island of Cyprus," the UK Ministry of Defence told AFP, although the base continued to operate as normal.

The damage had been "minimal" and there were "no casualties", a spokesperson added.

Runway hit

Greece, meanwhile, said it was sending two frigates and two F-16 fighter jets to Cyprus.

Athens would assist Cyprus in "countering threats and illegal actions on its territory", its defence ministry said.

Defence Minister Nikos Dendias also said he would travel to Cyprus today.

Britain's foreign minister Yvette Cooper said the strike on the Royal Air Force base at Akrotiri, a British overseas territory near the coastal city of Limassol, hit the "airport runway".

Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides said the incident just after midnight (local time) involved "a Shahed unmanned aerial vehicle".

UK 'not at war'

Cooper said the government was "working on every possible option" to help its nationals in the region return home if needed.

"There's an estimated 300,000 British citizens in Gulf countries that have now been targeted by Iran, including countries where now airspace is closed," she told Sky News.

More than 100,000 UK nationals had so far registered their presence in the region, she said.

UK Middle East minister Hamish Falconer insisted the nation was "not at war".

"Let me be really clear: the UK took a deliberate decision not to be part of the first wave of strikes conducted by the United States and Israeli governments.

"But in the face of reckless attacks from Iran... we took the decision, as the Prime Minister announced last night, to support the US's request to use our bases in order to conduct defensive actions," he added.

Iraq mistakes

Starmer announced late on Sunday that he had agreed to the US request to use British

military bases for "defensive purpose".

He said he had earlier taken a "deliberate" decision not to be involved, adding that the mistakes of the Iraq war had been "learnt".

The initial decision not to back the United States attracted the ire of US President Donald Trump, who said he had been "very disappointed" in Starmer's reaction.

Trump, in an exclusive interview with *The Daily Telegraph*, described the prime minister's later decision to allow the use of bases on specific grounds as "useful" but said it "took far too much time".

Any potential military action in the Middle East is politically sensitive in the UK following former prime minister Tony Blair's disastrous support for the US-led invasion of Iraq.

Evie Aspinall, director of the British Foreign Policy Group think-tank, said that the UK would not want to be "seen as a key party in this conflict".

"Hence allowing defensive not offensive strikes, although the difference between the two is, in practice, often very minimal," she said. – AFP



Residents stand amid debris beside a damaged residential building near Niloufar Square in Tehran during the ongoing joint US-Israeli military campaign on Iran yesterday. The United States and Israel launched strikes against Iran on February 28, killing Iran's supreme leader and top military leaders, prompting authorities to retaliate with strikes on Israel and across the Gulf. – AFP

Iran war spells trouble for Suez Canal: Egypt's al-Sisi

CAIRO – Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has warned a prolonged war in the Middle East threatens the Suez Canal, the country's key economic lifeline.

Three major container shipping companies have halted passage this week through two of the region's vital waterways as US-Israeli strikes on Iran and Tehran's retaliation disrupt global maritime traffic.

"We are very cautious about the continuation of the war because of developments... in the Strait of Hormuz and its impact... on navigation in the Suez Canal," Sisi said in a speech broadcast on state television on Sunday.

He said Egypt had "suffered from this issue for the past two years", causing "very large financial losses".

MSC, Maersk and CMA CGM stopped operations in the Strait of Hormuz in the Gulf, next to Iran, and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait,

which connects the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.

Many ships are now re-routing around the Cape of Good Hope off the tip of southern Africa, bypassing the region's vital waterways.

Sisi previously said the canal's revenues plunged 60 percent in 2024, a loss of US\$7 billion.

Traffic through the waterway had begun to recover in recent months from Houthi attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea following the October 7, 2023 attack on Israel and the ensuing war in Gaza.

The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most strategic waterways, carrying nearly a quarter of global seaborne oil and a significant volume of cargo to and from Gulf ports.

The Suez Canal is the region's other major artery, linking the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, and is a crucial shortcut between Europe and Asia. – AFP

Lebanon bans Hezbollah military activities: PM

BEIRUT – Lebanon's government has decided on an "immediate ban" of Iran-backed Hezbollah's military and security activity, Prime Minister Nawaf Salam said yesterday, in an unprecedented move as Israel retaliated to rocket fire.

Hezbollah is represented in both the government and parliament and the move came hours after the party announced it had launched rockets and drones towards Israel early yesterday, to avenge the killing of Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei in US-Israeli attacks Saturday.

Israel began bombarding Beirut's southern suburbs and dozens of villages in south Lebanon, vowing to make the group pay a "heavy price" and killing at least 31 people and wounding at least 149 according to the Lebanese health ministry.

After an emergency cabinet meeting, Salam said: "The Lebanese state declares its absolute and unequivocal rejection of any military or security actions launched from Lebanese territory outside the framework of its legitimate institutions.

"This necessitates the immediate prohibition of all of Hezbollah's security and military activities, considering them to be outside the law, and obliging it to hand over its weapons".

Salam yesterday ordered the military and security agencies to take "immediate measures" to implement the cabinet decision and prevent "any military operation or the launching of missiles or drones from Lebanese territory".

Justice Minister Adel Nassar announced in a post on X that the judicial authorities have tasked "security agencies with immediately arresting those who launched the rockets and their instigators".

A source close to the Lebanese government reported that two ministers from the Amal Movement, Hezbollah's fellow Shiite party and key ally, and one minister from the group itself approved the cabinet's decision.

The group has not issued any comment

since claiming responsibility for the attack on Israel.

Renewed strikes

Israel renewed its strikes on Beirut's southern suburbs yesterday afternoon and hit several buildings belonging to Al-Qard al-Hassan, a Hezbollah-linked financial firm sanctioned by Washington, in several parts of the country, particularly the south.

They came after the Israeli military had issued evacuation warnings for several towns in the south and east and the capital's southern suburbs.

The US Embassy in Lebanon renewed its call for citizens to leave Lebanon immediately.

Lebanon's education ministry announced the closure of schools, universities and educational institutions in the country today, due to "security conditions".

The authorities in Beirut have repeatedly said they do not wish to involve their country in the outbreak of conflict in the region, which started after a massive US-Israeli attack on Iran.

Beirut had decided last August to gradually disarm Hezbollah, following a year-long war fought with Israel that ended in a November 2024 ceasefire.

But the agreement did not stop Israel from continuing to strike targets it said were linked to Hezbollah, which it accused of trying to rearm.

The truce is monitored by a committee bringing together Lebanon, Israel, the United States, France and UN peacekeepers.

Salam yesterday called on the countries guaranteeing the ceasefire – the United States and France – to "obtain a clear and final commitment from the Israeli side to cease all attacks on the entirety of Lebanese territory".

He announced the government's "full readiness to resume negotiations" with Israel, "with civilian participation and under international auspices".

– AFP

Bored of peace? Trump keeps choosing war

Analysis by Danny Kemp

PALM BEACH – On a US late-night television show on Saturday, the host played a clip from 2011 of a businessman warning that president Barack Obama “will start a war with Iran because he has absolutely no ability to negotiate.”

That businessman was Donald Trump. Fast-forward 15 years and Trump, now in his own second term as president, ordered huge military strikes on Iran when talks with Tehran brought no breakthrough.

The commander-in-chief has repeatedly declared himself to be a “President of Peace,” boasted of his dealmaking ability in ending global conflicts, and complained of being cheated of the Nobel Peace Prize.

His rise to power in 2016 on an “America First” platform was partly fuelled by his rejection of bloody foreign wars waged by the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Back on the campaign trail in 2024, he repeatedly said he had started “no new wars.” After returning to the White House he slammed the “so-called nation-builders” who “wrecked far more nations than they built.”

In line with his vision of himself, Trump earlier this year held the first meeting of his “Board of Peace” – a body originally created to uphold the Gaza ceasefire that has morphed into a would-be United Nations.

When the Nobel academy snubbed him, Trump even proudly accepted a peace award from football’s world governing body FIFA that appeared to have been specially created for him.

‘Major surprise’

But in the second year of his second term, Trump suddenly appears as comfortable prosecuting war as making peace.

In the space of less than two months, the man who once shunned “regime change” has revelled in the military operations that toppled Venezuela’s president and killed the supreme leader of Iran.

That’s not to mention threatening a military takeover of Greenland from NATO ally Denmark.

“All this comes as a major surprise,” said Richard Haass, a former diplomat in president George W. Bush’s administration.

“This is an administration that has shown no interest in regime change or democracy promotion elsewhere,” Haass said in a newsletter. “Why here and now is a mystery as there is no clear evidence that the Iranian regime (however unpopular and weakened) is on the edge of collapse.”

The scion of a property empire, Trump himself avoided the draft for the Vietnam war.

But the former military academy student has long shown a fascination for martial trappings, often surrounding himself with soldiers and visiting military sites.

He frequently brags about US military might, including in last year’s strikes on Iran’s nuclear facilities, and boasted of restoring America’s fighting force to its former glories with new battleships that critics say would be sitting ducks for missiles.



‘I got power’

The question now is what effect Trump’s wars will have on US voters, especially the Trump supporters who believed his campaign promises to end its “forever wars.”

The first major test will be the American public’s willingness to tolerate military casualties, with the announcement on Sunday of the first three service members to die in action against Iran.

After the strikes, only one in four Americans approved of the attacks while 43 percent disapproved, according to a Reuters/Ipsos poll released on Sunday.

Trump’s wars could figure heavily in November’s midterm elections, in which Republicans already fear they could lose control of the House of Representatives.

Trump is deep under water in the polls thanks largely to voters still feeling the pinch from the cost of living – an issue the Iran strikes could exacerbate if oil prices spike.

The effect on his base will be a particular concern. Former “Make America Great Again” firebrand Marjorie Taylor Greene, who split from Trump last year, called the Iran attack a “lie.”

But Trump makes no bones about how he enjoys commanding the world’s most powerful military.

Welcoming the Florida Panthers ice hockey team to the White House in January, Trump joked that he hated the assembled players because of their good looks and “all this power.”

“But I got power too, it’s called the United States military,” he said. – AFP

US President Donald Trump gestures as he boards Air Force One before departing Palm Beach International Airport in West Palm Beach, Florida, on Sunday, on his way back to Washington, DC. – AFP

Texas gunman expressed ‘pro-Iranian regime sentiment’: SITE

HOUSTON – The gunman who killed two people and wounded 14 early Sunday in Austin, the capital of the US state of Texas, had expressed “pro-Iranian regime sentiment” on social media, the SITE Intelligence Group said late Sunday.

The organisation, which monitors jihadist groups, identified the assailant, who was shot dead by police, as Ndiaga Diagne, a US citizen of Senegalese origin. Austin police confirmed that identification on Sunday.

Representative Chip Roy, a Republican member of the US House of Representatives, published a picture on X of the purported gunman showing him holding a rifle and wearing a sweatshirt that says “Property of Allah.”

SITE said Diagne had expressed “pro-Iranian regime sentiment and hatred for Israeli and American leadership” in Facebook posts dating back to 2017 and had posted a picture of himself holding what appears to be an assault rifle.

FBI special agent Alex Doran said earlier on Sunday that a motive for the attack was not known but “there were indicators on the subject and in his vehicle that indicate a potential nexus to terrorism.”

“In terms of specifically what type of terrorism, we’re just at this point prepared to say that it was potentially an act of terrorism,” Doran said at a press conference.

The FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force was brought in to participate in the investigation

alongside local authorities, he said.

The shooting comes amid heightened security in many American cities following the launching of US and Israeli air strikes on Iran that killed the country’s supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, and scores of other senior officials.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott said he was stepping up security at energy facilities, ports and along the US-Mexico border.

“To anyone who thinks about using the current conflict in the Middle East to threaten Texans or our critical infrastructure, understand this clearly: Texas will respond with decisive and overwhelming force to protect our state,” Abbott said in a statement.

Austin police chief Lisa Davis said the assailant was shot and killed by police who responded to the shooting, which took place in Austin’s entertainment district.

The officers “were faced with the individual with a gun and three of our officers returned fire, killing the suspect,” Davis said.

She said the gunman first opened fire with a pistol from his car on patrons of Buford’s Backyard Beer Garden in downtown Austin.

He then parked his car and emerged with a rifle and began shooting at people who were walking by, Davis said.

Three of the wounded were in critical condition, officials said. – AFP

Ukraine hits key Russian oil terminal after US warning

KYIV – Ukraine struck an oil terminal in the southern Russian port of Novorossiysk yesterday, the Ukrainian army said, several days after the US was reported to have warned Kyiv not to attack its interests at the port.

Ukraine hit the Sheskhari terminal last November, as well as the nearby Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) terminal, which handles the bulk of Kazakhstan’s oil exports.

The CPC is partly owned by US oil majors Chevron and ExxonMobil, and handles up to one percent of the world’s oil supplies.

The US State Department told Ukraine to stop attacking its interests at the port following those attacks last year, Ukraine’s ambassador to the United States said last week, according to US media reports.

It was not immediately clear when the United States made the warning, or which parts of the port it did not wish Ukraine to attack.

Novorossiysk handles around a fifth of Russia’s crude oil shipments and is the country’s largest export hub on the Black Sea.

Unverified videos posted on Russian social media appeared to show a fire burning at the port, as well as a projectile streaking across the night sky.

“During the night of March 2, units of the Ukrainian Defense Forces struck the Sheskhari oil terminal and the Novorossiysk naval base in Russia’s Krasnodar Krai,” the Ukrainian army said on Facebook.

“A large-scale fire has been recorded on the site.”

The attack wounded five people, the governor of Russia’s Krasnodar region said in a post on Telegram, without mentioning the oil terminal.

A state of emergency was declared in the city, he added. – AFP

France, Germany say establishing ‘nuclear steering group’

PARIS – France and Germany have set up a “nuclear steering group”, both countries said yesterday, after President Emmanuel Macron announced more nuclear weapons and cooperation with European countries to help protect the continent.

“France and Germany have established a high-ranking nuclear steering group,” they said in a joint statement in English, in an

arrangement they said would “add to, not substitute for, NATO’s nuclear deterrence”.

“France and Germany have agreed to take first concrete steps beginning this year, including German conventional participation in French nuclear exercises and joint visits to strategic sites as well as development of conventional capabilities with European partners.” – AFP

Bolsonaro son rallies the right as thousands protest against Brazilian govt



Senator and presidential candidate Flávio Bolsonaro (centre) gestures to supporters of his father, Brazil's former president Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022), sentenced to 23 years and 3 months for an attempted coup, during a demonstration in São Paulo on Sunday. – AFP

SÃO PAULO—Flávio Bolsonaro, son of Brazil's jailed former leader, on Sunday sought to rally and unite conservatives ahead of October elections in which he hopes to follow in his father's footsteps.

Thousands of supporters of former president Jair Bolsonaro demonstrated in several Brazilian cities, calling for him to be freed from prison and slamming leftist President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's government.

In São Paulo, protesters held up signs saying "Free Bolsonaro" or "Get out Lula." Some wore hats declaring "Flávio Bolsonaro 2026."

Far-right former president Bolsonaro is serving a 27-year jail term for multiple charges linked to a failed coup plot following his 2022 re-election loss.

In December, he anointed Flávio – a Rio de Janeiro senator – as his political heir.

The move sparked mixed reactions within the Bolsonaro family as well as the country's powerful conservative movement, with two right-wing governors launching their own presidential bids.

While even Flávio at first appeared unsure about his candidacy, at one point saying he might abandon his presidential aspirations for a "price", he has leaned into the role and slowly risen in opinion polls.

Lula, 80, is seeking a fourth term in the October 4 general election.

'Side by side'

An AtlasIntel poll last week showed that if Lula and Flávio faced off in a second-round election they would be tied with 46.2 percent and 46.3 percent, respectively.

Flávio, 44, sought to present a united front at Sunday's rally, appearing alongside potential rival candidates and social-media savvy lawmaker Nikolas Ferreira, who has become the most visible figure of the right.

"Together, we're not competing for votes. We're here thinking about what's best" for the country, Flávio told a crowd which University of São Paulo researchers estimated at around 20,000.

He vowed to work to overturn Lula's veto of legislation passed

by Congress that would drastically reduce Bolsonaro's prison sentence.

Flávio said he had promised his father he would walk alongside him into the presidential palace when he takes office in 2027.

His brother, Eduardo Bolsonaro, addressed protesters by video from the United States, where he lives, highlighting "the importance of being side by side" ahead of an election which would be "perhaps the quickest way for us to truly achieve justice" in the form of amnesty for his father.

On Sunday, Jair Bolsonaro distributed a hand-written note from prison saying he regrets "the criticism coming from the right itself, directed at some colleagues and at my wife," Michelle.

Earlier this month Eduardo Bolsonaro accused his stepmother and the lawmaker Nikolas Ferreira of showing tepid support for Flávio's candidacy on social media.

"Support must come through dialogue and persuasion, never through pressure or attacks among allies," said Jair Bolsonaro. – AFP

Ecuador approves mining law in area of Galápagos

QUITO—Ecuador's parliament approved a mining law last week slammed by environmentalists for allowing extraction in an area of the Galápagos Islands, a famed archipelago with unique flora and fauna.

With 77 votes in favour and 70 against, the National Assembly on Thursday gave the green light to the law promoted by the right-wing government of President Daniel Noboa, which seeks to encourage investment in the mining sector.

The text allows the extraction of rock materials in an area of the Galápagos Islands, a tourist gem about 1,000 kilometres off the coast of Ecuador, albeit outside the boundaries of its national park.

The archipelago is a UNESCO World Heritage Site famous for its unique flora and fauna, and is where British scientist Charles Darwin developed his theory of evolution.

The law "strengthens controls and regulations on extractive activity, with the aim of combating

illegal mining," the parliament, in which the government holds a majority, said in a statement.

Opposition lawmaker Verónica Iniguez criticised the passing of the law.

"We're going to see how the Galápagos Islands become a quarry," she said, also raising concerns about Amazonian territories and the páramos ("barren lands"), high-altitude Andean ecosystems.

Some 300 people marched against the law around the Constitutional Court in capital Quito, wearing masks of the faces of assembly members who voted in favour.

The protesters held signs with slogans including "Noboa, miner, life comes first" and "The land is not for sale."

CONAIE, the country's largest indigenous organisation, warned in a statement that the law would harm environmental protection and increase the risk of river pollution. – AFP

Opposition leader Machado eyes Venezuela return in coming weeks

CARACAS – Venezuela's opposition leader María Corina Machado said on Sunday she will return to her country "in a few weeks," following months of exile and an escape to Oslo to receive her Nobel Peace Prize.

The 58-year-old would return to a South American nation now ruled by interim president Delcy Rodríguez in the aftermath of a US raid that ousted leftist president Nicolás Maduro two months ago.

Venezuelan authorities had labelled her a fugitive from justice and accused her of calling for military intervention against the country.

"I will return in a few weeks to Venezuela," Machado said in a video posted on her social media accounts.

"We will arrive to embrace one another, to work together, to ensure an orderly, sustainable and unstoppable transition to democracy," she added.

Machado has remained in the United States for most of her exile. In January, just two weeks after US forces snatched Maduro and brought him to New York for trial, she met with President Donald Trump in the White House and presented him with her Nobel prize.

She has also met with US lawmakers, business leaders, foreign ministers and heads of state from countries she did not specify.

Trump has said he would like to "get her involved" in Venezuela's political process. But at the same time the president has sidelined Machado and backed former vice president Rodríguez as interim leader of the oil-rich country.

Machado was banned from running for president in the 2024 election. After Maduro controversially claimed a re-election victory, a wave of repression forced her to remain in hiding for more than a year. – AFP

Amazon to invest another US\$21 billion in data centres in Spain

BARCELONA – Amazon yesterday announced another 18 billion euros (US\$21 billion) of investment in data centre projects in Spain, more than doubling its spending there on the infrastructure crucial for AI and cloud computing.

The total of 33.7 billion in investments through to 2035 would support almost 30,000 jobs, Amazon said in a statement released during the Mobile World Congress telecoms trade fair in Barcelona.

Cash will flow "to expand and support data infrastructure, delivering advanced artificial intelligence and cloud computing capabilities to organisations across Europe," the company added.

The US tech giant had already committed 15.7 billion euros in 2024 to expand data centres in

the northeastern Spanish region of Aragón.

"In a world filled with uncertainty, our country is a safe bet," Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez posted to the X social network after meeting Amazon representatives at the Mobile World Congress (MWC) telecoms trade fair in Barcelona.

While large, the sums involved in the Spanish investment pale in comparison to the hundreds of billions AI and cloud giants including Amazon, Microsoft, Google and OpenAI plan to spend on computing infrastructure in the coming years.

The upped investment nevertheless marks "a long-term bet on Spain," Amazon's chief global affairs and legal officer David Zapolsky said in the statement.

Aragón is sparsely populated

and benefits from strong sunshine and wind, making it a popular site for solar parks and wind farms – two renewable energy sources that have surged in Spain in recent years.

Local leaders hope the energy boon can help make the region a hub for the data centres needed to power generative AI.

Amazon's investment comes as European countries are debating fiercely over the need for tech sovereignty, with some warning especially against relying on American giants for storing or processing data in the cloud.

The vast majority of cloud services aimed at European governments are controlled by Amazon Web Services, Google and Microsoft, with local alternatives struggling to take root. – AFP

FDI in Portugal plunges to US\$10 billion in 2025

LISBON – Foreign direct investment (FDI) in Portugal fell to 8.51 billion euros (US\$10.06 billion) in 2025, down by 34.9 percent compared to the 13.07 billion euros in 2024, according to data released on Friday by the Bank of Portugal.

Of the total inflows recorded in 2025, 3.9 billion euros went to the real estate sector, and European countries accounted for 5.78 billion euros of the total inflows.

According to a report by Portugal's Lusa News Agency, one of the main factors behind the sharp drop in FDI last year was a negative 3.4 billion euros in debt instrument investment, partly reflecting internal restructuring operations within corporate groups.

The report pointed out that FDI in 2024 was at a relatively high level, which also contributed to the decline in 2025. – Xinhua

Chelsea boss Rosenior warns players over discipline

Premier League LONDON – Liam Rosenior yesterday demanded an improvement in discipline from his Chelsea players after Pedro Neto became their ninth player to be sent off this season, threatening to drop players who do not show greater control.

Sunday's 2-1 loss to Premier League leaders Arsenal at the Emirates Stadium means Chelsea have won just two of their past six matches in all competitions.

They are sixth in the Premier League table ahead of tomorrow's match at fourth-placed Aston Villa, three points behind Liverpool in the battle for Champions League football next season.

Ill-discipline has been costly for Chelsea this season, with Neto the seventh Stamford Bridge player to be shown a red card in the Premier League.

Chelsea boss Rosenior, who replaced Enzo Maresca in the hot seat in January, said Neto had apologised to his teammates after he was dismissed in the 70th minute.

"My job is to create a culture of accountability, where if you make a mistake, it's OK, you hold your hands up and you make sure it doesn't happen again," said the English manager.

"But you have to hold your hands up to the original mistake. If I make the wrong team selection, or I get something wrong, my job is to be accountable, and it's the same for my players in that moment."

Rosenior said Portugal winger Pedro, who will miss this week's match at Villa Park, had apologised to his teammates.

"I just need to see an improvement in the behaviour now," he said.

"And it's not just Pedro. We've had bookings. People speak about dissent. We've had needless bookings in terms of fouls. If we are to improve and get to where we want to be, we have to make a conscious step now to make sure it doesn't happen again."

The Chelsea boss said there were different approaches to tackling the issue.

"Sometimes it's not a stick, it's showing what the value of not having a red card is," he said. "If you look at our stats, when we have 11 men on the pitch, before my job here and after my job here, our percentage chance of winning goes through the roof."

"So that needs to be motivation in itself, to make sure we stay disciplined in key moments, reacting to setbacks. Sometimes a setback is giving the ball away, sometimes a setback is a referee making a decision you disagree with."

"In that moment you have to react positively and you have to think of the next thing. Those are the things we have to go after in order for our discipline to improve."

Rosenior added: "You pick players who are showing that improvement. I can't afford to go through a season every two games or every three games with a red card, it's just not possible."

"So I need to see improvement in that and I need to adjust my team selection based on who's showing those capabilities."

The game will be played at 3:30 a.m. on Thursday morning.

– AFP/MPD

Lunar New Year heartache for Chinese team at Women's Asian Cup



SYDNEY – Skipper Wu Haiyan said yesterday the Chinese team was trying not to dwell on missing Lunar New Year celebrations with family as they prepare to defend their Women's Asian Cup title.

China edged South Korea 3-2 in Mumbai four years ago to win their ninth continental crown and are the most successful team in the tournament's history.

But they have struggled in recent times, slipping to 17 in the world and desperately want to kickstart their tournament in Sydney today with a statement win against debutants Bangladesh.

Seasoned defender Wu admitted they were pining for home during a period traditionally spent with family, but would not let it affect their performance.

"We know our responsibilities as players," said Wu.

"Even though it's Chinese New Year and we would like to be with our families, we have to put that aside and put our concentration and focus on this tournament."

Wu missed China's title-winning run in India in 2022 with injury, and it is fuelling her motivation for success in Australia.

"As the captain, I will try to fight and lead my team to go further," she said.

"The national team is coming off a low point and received a lot of criticism, so we are motivated to give a good performance."

They should have few problems against a Bangladesh side at the Asian Cup for the first time and ranked the lowest of the 12 teams.

Bangladesh skipper Afeida



Head coach of Chinese national women's football team Ante Milicic (left) and team captain Wu Haiyan pose after Team China's press conference of Women's Asian Cup at Western Sydney Stadium in Sydney, Australia, yesterday. – Xinhua

Khandaker said her side was approaching the match with excitement rather than fear.

"We are not feeling pressured even though this is our debut," she said. "We want to make the people of Bangladesh proud."

Uzbekistan and three-time winners

North Korea are also in their group. They too meet in Sydney today.

The North Korea vs Uzbekistan game will be played at 10 a.m. this morning Macau time, while the China vs Bangladesh game will be played at 4 p.m. this afternoon.

– AFP/MPD

Barca must 'make the impossible possible': coach Flick on Atletico cup challenge



BARCELONA – Barcelona coach Hansi Flick insisted yesterday his team could turn around a 4-0 deficit in the Copa del Rey semi-final tie against Atletico Madrid.

The Catalan giants host Diego Simeone's side today in the second leg after a heavy defeat by the Rojiblancos in February, needing a spectacular comeback if they are to defend the trophy.

"We are four goals behind, so we want to make the impossible possible, this is our goal for tomorrow," Flick told reporters.

"We all know that it's not easy but in the end we never give up, and we start this match [aiming] for a clean sheet, believing in our strengths and that we can do it."

Barca thrashed Villarreal 4-1 on Saturday at Camp Nou in La Liga, with a hat-trick from teenager star Lamine Yamal, the first of his career.

Flick said the winger would be important against Atletico but the team as a whole needed to deliver for Barca to make a comeback.

"The team is always in focus,"

said Flick. "The first goal from him was a great recovery of the ball and a great pass from Fermin [Lopez], [Yamal] has the outstanding quality to score this goal and be in the right position at this moment."

"How he played after that was great to see, really happy about that, but in the end we need everyone, not only Lamine."

Flick said the performance against Villarreal was a significant step forwards for Barca and called on his players to deliver in similar fashion against Atletico.

"We play against a fantastic team, they hurt us a lot in the last match, but we can do this," said Flick.

"We have to play smart, but with this hunger to make it happen. Last game against Villarreal we saw a totally different team, a different dynamic, a different intensity in our game."

"We have to play like one unit and this is the key for tomorrow."

Barca will be without injured striker Robert Lewandowski but Pedri Gonzalez may be in line to start after a couple of substitute appearances following a hamstring problem.

Make Lamine 'uncomfortable'

Simeone said his team's way of stopping Yamal would be to force him back into his own territory.

"He's a very good player individually, above all he can make things happen in the final third," said the coach.

"We have to take advantage of the chance that it gives us to attack in that area, we have to take him to where he's most uncomfortable, which is defending."

With Atletico third in La Liga, 13 points behind leaders Barcelona, their best chances of silverware this season are via a cup route.

"When you start in pre-season, you want to be fighting for everything in March. It's true we're a bit far from the top of La Liga, but we're doing well in the Copa and in the Champions League," added Simeone.

"We are doing well where we are, fighting for what we want to fight for."

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

– AFP/MPD

S Korea outclass Iran in Asian Women's Cup opener



GOLD COAST – South Korea went to the top of Pool A in the Women's Asian Cup after overcoming a dogged Iran 3-0 in their tournament opener on Queensland's Gold Coast yesterday.

The Koreans, runners-up to China in the 2022 edition, totally dominated a brave but outclassed Iran, who showed no signs of being affected by the war raging at home, while some supporters waved shah-era flags.

South Korea's Casey Phair, who came on as a second-half substitute, said her side had plenty of room for improvement.

"We worked really hard and performed really well but we could have scored a few more goals and we missed a couple of chances," Phair said.

"That's something we can work on in training but I think it was a really good starting point for the tournament."

South Korea now head their pool on goal difference after Australia only managed a 1-0 win over the Philippines on Sunday.

The Koreans dominated from the outset as Iran sat back in defence, trying to limit the damage rather than take the attack to their opponents.

For most of the first half the tactic was successful despite the Koreans having 81 percent possession and 20 shots at goal.

However, the relentless attack

eventually told in the 37th minute when a shot from Jang Sel-gi rebounded off the upright to Choe Yu-ri, who slotted home off her left boot, giving South Korea a 1-0 lead at the break.

Iran made three substitutions at halftime and came out in the second with a more attacking mindset.

They had a rare chance in the 56th minute, but Zahra Ghanbari's shot went straight to keeper Kim Min-jung.

But the game was as good as over four minutes later when Korea's Lee Eun-young was brought down in the box by Melika Motevalli and Kim Hye-ri slotted the penalty.

South Korean captain Ko Yoo-jin put the icing on the cake when she headed in from a 75th-minute Kim Hye-ri free kick to score her first goal for her country.

South Korea next play the Philippines, while Australia take on Iran in a double-header on the Gold Coast on Thursday.

The top two sides from each of the three groups, along with the two best third-placed teams, progress to the quarter-finals. At stake for the top six finishers is qualification for the 2027 World Cup in Brazil.

The Philippines vs South Korea game will be played at 11 a.m. Thursday morning Macau time, while the Australia vs Iran game will be played at 5 p.m. – AFP/MPD

A rough guide to F1 rule changes for 2026

F1

PARIS – The 2026 Formula One season has been flagged up as revolutionary because of the sweeping changes to chassis and power unit regulations, designed to create more overtaking opportunities and improve the sport's eco-sustainability.

Four-time world champion Max Verstappen has already said the new cars are "not fun to drive" while Lando Norris, the man who took his crown last season, stirred the pot by saying they were fun before reversing at speed by remarking they were "certainly not the purest form of racing".

But what does that mean? How different will 2026 be to 2025 when McLaren ran away with the constructors' title with Red Bull, Mercedes and Ferrari choking on their fumes?

AFP Sport looks at the main changes:

THE CARS

The cars will look noticeably different to the 2025 models, notably the Adrian Newey-designed 'pelican-nose' Aston Martin. Overall, they are 30kg lighter and 20cm shorter and 10cm more narrow. The wheelbase has been shortened which should make them more nippy through corners.

TYRES

Pirelli's 18-inch wheel size, introduced in 2022, will remain. But the width of the front tyres will be reduced by 25mm and the rears by 30mm, which will cut drag.

WINGS

Changes aplenty here but the big one is the introduction of active aero which allows cars to adjust the angle of both front and rear wing elements depending on where they are on track. This, again, should cut drag and boost top speed.



People walk through a Williams F1 team fan zone in Melbourne's central business district yesterday, ahead of the season-opening Australian Formula One Grand Prix. Australian Formula One chief Travis Auld said yesterday travel chaos due to US-Israeli strikes on Iran is not expected to impact the season-opening Grand Prix, but more than 1,000 staff have had to scramble and change flights. – AFP

THE SONS OF DRS

The drag reduction system (DRS) is no more. In its place come two aero-mode systems which will both help the driver find speed.

- 'Z-mode' opens elements on the front and rear wings to increase downforce and speed through corners.

- 'X-mode' reduces drag to maximise straight-line speed.

There is also a manual 'Overtake' mode, which the drivers access through the boost button when they are one second behind the car ahead, allowing them to unlock extra energy.

There is a risk to this strategy, though, as it could leave them vulnerable to being re-overtaken on the next straight as they try to recover the electrical energy.

POWER UNITS

The power units, of which the engine is the predominant factor, are set to deliver an almost 300 percent increase in electric power. There will also be an even split between

internal combustion engine and electric power, giving cars three times more electric braking power.

The FIA is moving to close down a loophole which Audi, Honda and Ferrari believe Mercedes have found to use thermal expansion and materials technology to exceed the mandated compression ratio - something that could gain them as much of 0.3 seconds per lap.

If they start the season with the advantage, however, it will not just benefit Mercedes as they also supply Alpine, Williams... and McLaren.

FUEL

No matter who runs away with the title no one is likely to be choking on fumes, as fuel in every car will be 100 percent sustainable, meaning no new fossil carbon will be burned.

Fuel will instead be derived from carbon that came from non-food sources, general waste or from carbon captured from the atmosphere. – AFP

Sport in brief

Anthony wins US 60m indoor title ahead of Bromell and Lyles

Athletics

NEW YORK – Rising sprint talent Jordan Anthony pulled off a 60m upset at the US Indoor Championships on Sunday, clocking 6.45sec to win ahead of Trayvon Bromell and Noah Lyles.

The 21-year-old Anthony, who was last year's NCAA collegiate champion, didn't match his season-leading time of 6.43, but he got the best of 2016 60m indoor world champion Bromell, who was second in 6:45, and Olympic 100m gold medallist Lyles who was third in 6.51.

Lyles, who earned 60m silver at the 2024 Indoor World Championships, is unlikely to be selected for the Indoor Worlds in Torun, Poland, from March 20-22.

Jacius Sears won the women's 60m in 7.04.

Seventeen-year-old sensation Cooper Lutkenhaus won the men's 800m in 1:46.68. Newly minted world record holder Khaleb McRae won the 400m in 45.01.

Nathan Green sprung a surprise in the 1,500m, winning in 3:37.65, as Olympic champion Cole Hocker settled for fifth a day after winning the 3,000m. – AFP

Afghanistan to tour India for one Test and three ODIs in June

Cricket

NEW DELHI – Afghanistan's cricket team will tour India in June this year to play one Test and a three-match one-day international series, the Indian board said yesterday.

The tour will open with the Test in New Chandigarh on June 6, followed by three ODIs on June 14 (Dharamshala), June 17 (Lucknow) and June 20 (Chennai), said Devajit Saikia, secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India, in a news release.

Afghanistan's tour starts soon after this year's Indian Premier League (IPL) ends on May 31.

The IPL, the world's most lucrative domestic T20 league, features some of the biggest global cricketing stars, including from Afghanistan. – AFP

The Afghanistan team used India as a cricketing base for several years because of political and security challenges at home before shifting to the United Arab Emirates.

They bowed out of the ongoing T20 World Cup, co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka, in the group stage. – AFP

Brennan becomes first Briton since Cavendish to win Flemish classic in sprint finish

Cycling

KUURNE, BELGIUM –

The 20-year-old British sprinter Matthew Brennan rocketed out of an accelerating pack to win the Flemish classic Kuurne-Bruxelles-Kuurne for team Visma-Lease-a-bike on Sunday.

The Darlington native is the first Briton to win the race since Mark Cavendish in 2012 and 2015, whose finishing sprint was similar to the burgeoning star.

Brennan avoided the Cavendish comparison after the race.

"I won twice as a junior myself," he said. "I'm always there in these kind of races."

Second-tier ProTeam outfit Tudor had a pair of riders on the podium as Italians Luca Mozzato came second and the veteran Matteo Trentin third.

This was the second race of the Flemish opening weekend raced inclement weather over 193.6km and 13 hills and whose culminating 60km were winding but almost entirely flat.

Some three dozen riders played cat-and-mouse over the final 2km or so as teams jockeyed for position, Visma and Quick-Step featuring strongly.

"I was nervous all day and we got caught in a gap but we took the initiative and I'm really happy," Brennan said.

"The guys, each and every one of them, worked in the build up. I did the easy bit."

None of the pre-race favourites got a sniff with outgoing champion the Belgian Jasper Philipsen, his sprint rival the Italian Jonathan Milan and emerging French fast-man Paul Magnier out of the picture altogether. – AFP

Tennis players holed up in Dubai after Iranian strikes

Tennis

PARIS – A "small number" of tennis players remain stuck in Dubai following a men's tournament last week, owing to the war in the Middle East, the tour's governing body the ATP said yesterday.

Russian Daniil Medvedev, who won the singles title on Saturday, is among those who have been unable to leave the city because of the attacks from Iranian missiles and drones.

"The health, safety and well-being of our players, staff and tournament personnel is our priority," the ATP said in a statement published on X, formerly Twitter.

"We can confirm that a small number of players and team members remain in Dubai... They are being accommodated in the official tournament hotels.

"We are in direct communication with those affected."

Finnish player Harri Heliövaara, who won the doubles

alongside British player Henry Patten, wrote on his blog on Sunday "much of the airspace in the surrounding areas is closed" in response to the Iranian strikes.

The Finn estimated that around 30 people in total were being housed in a hotel close to the airport.

"We're just calmly waiting for things to improve," he added.

"Of course we want to leave as soon as possible, but sometimes the best thing is just to wait. Things will get better from here."

The players were offered a glimmer of hope when Dubai Airports announced "limited" flights would resume yesterday evening.

Emirates and low-cost carrier flydubai both said they would resume some flights yesterday evening.

Etihad Airways, which operates flights from Abu Dhabi, said it would resume operations today.

Targeted since Saturday by American and Israeli strikes, Iran has responded by sending drones

and missiles toward several countries in the region, including the United Arab Emirates.

Despite the numerous explosions heard since the beginning of the war in Dubai, the doubles final was played on Saturday and the trophy ceremony went ahead for the singles event.

The Dubai ATP 500 was the last in a series of tournaments on the men's and women's tours before they shift to California tomorrow for the Masters and WTA 1000 in Indian Wells.

Challenger and International Tennis Federation (ITF) tournaments, at the second and third tiers of the professional circuit, are still scheduled to be held in Fujairah, in the northeast of the Emirates, in the coming days.

AFP contacted the ATP and ITF yesterday to find out whether those tournaments would go ahead but neither responded immediately. – AFP



India's Sanju Samson prays as he celebrates his team's win against West Indies at the end of their 2026 ICC Men's T20 Cricket World Cup Super Eights match in the Eden Gardens, Kolkata, India on Sunday.

India yesterday hailed Samson as a "game-changer" after the opener's batting masterclass in Kolkata took the defending champions into the T20 World Cup semi-finals. Samson's unbeaten 97 led India's chase of 196 against the West Indies in the last Super Eights match to set up a semi-final against England in Mumbai on Thursday.

Samson paced his innings to perfection and had more than a billion India fans erupting in joy on Sunday night when he hit Romario Shepherd for a six and four to complete the chase at Eden Gardens. – AFP

'Sinners' wins top prize at US Screen Actors Guild awards

Paula Ramon

"Sinners" scooped the top prize at the US Screen Actors Guild (SAG) gala in Los Angeles on Sunday, tightening the race to the Oscars with two weeks to go before Hollywood's awards season finale.

The honour at the newly rebranded Actor Awards recognises the ensemble cast of a film – a decision that sometimes, but not always, presages Academy Award best picture glory.

Ryan Coogler's vampire fable about America's difficult racial history, has stormed through awards season, garnering a record 16 Oscar nominations.

"We brought our hearts, we brought our souls, we brought our spirits to this endeavour," said Delroy Lindo, who plays blues musician player Delta Slim, as he accepted the award on behalf of the cast.

"This project is anointed. And from that standpoint, we are all anointed to be a part of this incredible journey created by the genius Ryan Coogler."

It was the first time "Sinners" seized a top prize at a pre-Oscars gala, which have so far been largely swept by "One Battle After Another," including at the Producers Guild Awards on Saturday.

Paul Thomas Anderson's "One Battle" is a political thriller starring Leonardo DiCaprio as a pot-addled former revolutionary forced back into the game when his teenage daughter goes missing.

"Sinners" may have had the upper hand with the members of the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), which represents more than 160,000 members – but that may not hold true in two weeks' time for the Academy Awards.

"I'm not as confident that it's going to win the best picture Oscar," Scott Feinberg, awards columnist for *The Hollywood Reporter*, told AFP ahead of the gala, after predicting the SAG award win.

"Those two awards have gone to different films just about as often as they have gone to the same film."

Jordan bests Chalamet

Voting for the Academy Awards does not close until Thursday, meaning Sunday's results could be influential.

For best leading male actor,



US actor Harrison Ford, 83, poses with the 61st SAG-AFTRA Life Achievement Award during the 32nd Annual Actor Awards at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles on Sunday. – AFP

Michael B. Jordan pulled off a surprise win in a category that Timothee Chalamet ("Marty Supreme") has dominated all season.

"I'm so honoured and privileged to be nominated in categories with people and actors and humans that I love," he said.

"This ride has been unbelievable."

For best leading female actor, there were no surprises when Jessie Buckley's name was announced.

The Irish actress, who plays the grief-stricken wife of William Shakespeare mourning their son in "Hamnet" has so far won nearly every prize on offer.

"I have been categorically changed by so many people in this room and beyond," an emotional Buckley said.

"To get to work with my heart in my hand and stand beside my brilliant, daring friends who show me their heart – I mean, what a way to spend a life."

Unpredictable

The race for the Oscar for best supporting performers became even cloudier after Sunday's gala.

Amy Madigan took home the statuette for best supporting actress for her role as the sinister aunt in horror flick "Weapons," following her success at the Critics Choice Awards.

"I wasn't expecting this, but it does really mean a lot to me from my peers," she said.

The major awards in this category this season have gone to different people – the Golden Globe to Teyana Taylor in "One Battle After Another," and the BAFTA to Wunmi Mosaku for "Sinners."

For the men, Sean Penn – who was not at the ceremony – won for his wild turn as Colonel Lockjaw in "One Battle After Another," following on from his BAFTA win.

The Critics Choice Awards recognised Jacob Elordi for "Frankenstein," and the Golden Globe went to Stellan Skarsgard in "Sentimental Value," who did not even get a SAG nod.

The television side of the awards



US actor Michael B. Jordan accepts the award for Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Leading Role in a Motion Picture for "Sinners" during the 32nd Annual Actor Awards at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles on Sunday. – AFP

was dominated by Apple TV's Hollywood satire "The Studio" which won three statuettes, including a posthumous award for Catherine O'Hara, who died in January.

Series co-creator Seth Rogen, who accepted the award on her behalf, said he felt fortunate to have spent time with the actress – a Hollywood stalwart known for her work in "Home Alone" and "Schitt's Creek."

"Something that I've just been marvelling at over the last few weeks was really her ability to be generous and kind and gracious, while never ever minimising her own talents," he said.

The evening also honoured veteran Harrison Ford with a life achievement award for memorable roles that have included Han Solo in the "Star Wars" franchise and Indiana Jones.

"I feel incredibly grateful for this kind attention. But to be clear, I also am quite humbled," said Ford, whose big break came in George Lucas's "American Graffiti" in 1973.

"I'm in a room of actors, many of whom are here because they've been nominated to receive a prize for their amazing work, while I'm here to receive a prize for being alive," the 83-year-old said to laughs. – AFP

Miriam Margolyes tackles ageing in Oscar-nominated short

Huw Griffith

BEVERLY HILLS – At 84 years, Miriam Margolyes knows what it's like to be elderly.

So when she was offered a script by a first-time writer-director that tackles ageing and loneliness, she jumped at it.

"I knew this was good," she told AFP of the Oscar-nominated short film "A Friend of Dorothy."

"The truth, the emotion is real, the drama is not forced. It's very organic. So I just thought: 'I want this.'"

The 20-minute piece, which also stars Stephen Fry, is a delightful meditation on the importance of connecting with another human being – across generations and races.

Dorothy – like Margolyes still razor sharp, but with a body that she says is failing her – lives alone in a rambling London house.

One afternoon, the young J.J. rings her doorbell to ask for his ball back after kicking it into her garden.

The ball is quickly forgotten when J.J. (Alistair Nwachukwu) discovers her vast collection of plays, from which she encourages him to read aloud.

Their unlikely friendship is cast when she divines his –

presumably unacknowledged – homosexuality, along with his obvious talent for acting.

In what become daily visits, the friendship blossoms and the two tearfully understand that they finally feel "seen."

'Simple story'

Dorothy's life – her husband long dead, her son living on the other side of the world and a grandson absorbed by making money – is sadly nothing unusual, the actress told AFP.

"The predicament of an old lady alone is not unique," said Margolyes, a BAFTA winner for her role in Martin Scorsese's "The Age of Innocence."

"Unfortunately, so many millions of old people are shipwrecked alone.

"And we're cut off by technology. It doesn't help us to reach each other – it divides us."

Writer-director Lee Knight has the pair forge their connection through the very analogue practice of reading aloud from playscripts.

"They come to each other in a time where they need each other, and they're lonely in their own way," Knight told AFP.

"He's lonely; he hasn't found his people, and she's lonely too. It's a simple story, but we need these stories now more than ever."

For Knight, getting Margolyes – a fixture on British television, a stalwart of the theatre for decades and Professor Sprout in the "Harry Potter" movies – was non-negotiable.

"I just knew there was no one else to play it," he said. "I wrote it very much for her, and then I never, ever dreamt that I'd get her to do it."

The pair – generations apart – form something of an affectionate parallel with the characters of "A Friend of Dorothy."

During an AFP interview in Beverly Hills, they frequently clasp hands and talk over each other.

At one point, she good-humoredly tells him off for his imprecise language as he responds to a journalist's question.

"You mustn't say, 'Very, very unique'; 'unique' is enough," she chides him, adding with a laugh: "I'm just bossy."

"Listen, this is the person you want to lift your text off the page," chuckles Knight.

The Oscars take place on March 15 in Hollywood. – AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -1°C~12°C	Manila 22°C~33°C	New York 4°C~6°C	Lisbon 11°C~20°C
Shanghai 6°C~11°C	Bangkok 25°C~38°C	London 6°C~14°C	Rio de Janeiro 21°C~28°C
Hong Kong 15°C~19°C	Tokyo 5°C~10°C	Frankfurt 3°C~15°C	Luanda 25°C~30°C
Taipei 15°C~17°C	Singapore 24°C~32°C	Vancouver 8°C~10°C	Maputo 22°C~29°C
Guangzhou 13°C~19°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~34°C	Paris 5°C~16°C	Dili 24°C~31°C
Nanjing 3°C~12°C	Jakarta 24°C~31°C	Moscow -5°C~2°C	São Tomé 26°C~32°C
Guilin 6°C~16°C	Seoul 1°C~11°C	Las Vegas 10°C~24°C	Praia 17°C~25°C
Xi'an 4°C~15°C	Sydney 21°C~25°C	Monte Carlo 10°C~17°C	Bissau 20°C~37°C



No need for fur!

Protestors hold signs reading "Ban fur" ahead of the Giorgio Armani women's ready-to-wear Fall/Winter 2026 collection fashion show as part of the Milan Fashion Week, in Milan on Sunday.

- AFP



Fancy dress swimmers

Revellers attend the traditional carnival bath during the 141st Nice Carnival on the French riviera city of Nice on Sunday.

- AFP



Cat's lick and promise

A Eurasian lynx grooms itself at Moscow Zoo in Moscow on Sunday.

- AFP



International celebration

People participate in the Lunar New Year parade and festival in New York City on Sunday.

- AFP



Fine reason to get grubby

Revellers celebrate Holi, the Hindu spring festival of colours at the Durbar square in Kathmandu yesterday.

- AFP

Beach club

Dancers perform on the beach in Lome, Togo on Sunday.

- AFP

