

Sam vows full compliance with 'two sessions' spirit

Tony Wong

After attending the opening meeting of the fourth session of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing yesterday morning, Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai underlined that the ongoing "two sessions" are of significant importance and far-reaching influence as this year marks the start of the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan, pledging that his government will advance its administration and governance in full compliance with the spirit of the two sessions, firmly seize the development opportunities brought about by the nation's development strategy, and unswervingly integrate into and serve the nation's overall development, thereby writing a new chapter in the implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, according to a statement by the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) yesterday.

The nation's two sessions refer to the annual sessions of the NPC and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).

Sam and his Hong Kong counterpart, John Lee Ka-chiu, attended yesterday morning's opening meeting of the fourth session of the 14th NPC at the Great



Macau Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai (left) listens to Premier Li Qiang delivering his annual government work report during yesterday's opening meeting of the fourth session of the 14th NPC at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing as his Hong Kong counterpart John Lee Ka-chiu reads the report. — Photo: GCS

Hall of the People, when Premier Li Qiang delivered his annual government work report.

Sam and Lee returned to Macau and Hong Kong respectively yesterday afternoon.

Premier's work report mentions HK & Macau

Yesterday's GCS statement noted that in his government work report, Li reaffirmed the central government's unswerving commitment to

implementing the principles of "One Country, Two Systems", "Hong Kong people governing Hong Kong" and "Macau people governing Macau", and maintaining a high degree of autonomy for the nation's two special administrative regions (SARs).

In his work report, the GCS statement noted, Li underlined the need to ensure the implementation of the "patriots governing Hong Kong" and "patriots governing Macau" principles, enhance governance

effectiveness in Hong Kong and Macau, and promote their economic and social development.

Li also said in his work report that the central government will support Hong Kong and Macau in better integrating into and serving the nation's overall development, and leveraging their unique advantages and important roles of being backed by the motherland and connected to the world, thereby fostering their long-term prosperity and stability.



The fourth session of the 14th NPC, which began yesterday morning and is scheduled to conclude on Thursday afternoon next week, is now reviewing the central government's annual work report, which Li delivered yesterday, as well as the draft outline of the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan.

The nation will start implementing its 15th Five-Year Plan after the expected passage of its outline by the NPC on Thursday next week.

The plan, officially known as 15th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development, covers the period between 2026 and 2030.

Continued on p.6

Trump says Zelensky 'has to get a deal done,' insists Putin ready

WASHINGTON—US President Donald Trump yesterday described Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky as the obstacle to a deal with Russia, whose leader Vladimir Putin he insisted was cooperative.

"Zelensky, he has to get on the ball, and he has to get a deal done," Trump said in an interview with Politico.

Trump, returning to language he used during a tense White House meeting a year ago where he and Vice President JD Vance publicly berated Zelensky, suggested that the Ukrainian

leader was in a weak position and needed to make compromises.

"It's unthinkable that he's the obstacle," Trump was quoted as saying. "You don't have the cards. Now he's got even less cards."

"I think Putin is ready to make a deal," Trump said.

Trump has long said that US support for Ukraine is wasteful to the United States and has spoken admirably in the past about Putin, whom he invited to Alaska in August.

Trump's latest comments on Ukraine came after he launched

a war with Israel against Iran on Saturday, which is estimated to have cost the United States billions of dollars already.

Trump vowed to end the Ukraine war on his first day in office in January 2025 but has acknowledged that he has found the goal difficult, with Russia keeping up attacks on Ukraine.

Trump has balked at taking more aggressive action against Putin, arguing that he is the only leader who can negotiate with both sides. —AFP



President Xi Jinping, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, takes part in a deliberation with his fellow deputies from the delegation of Jiangsu Province at the fourth session of the 14th National People's Congress in Beijing yesterday. (More on pages 6 & 7) — Xinhua

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Xi urges major provincial economies to gain experience in solving new problems

President Xi Jinping yesterday urged major provincial economies to redouble efforts to gain experience in analyzing new situations and solving new problems. — Story on p. 7

Michelangelo's works hidden in 'secret room', researcher says

Renaissance artist Michelangelo ordered many of his artworks to be hidden by his pupils in a secret room to protect them for posterity, an Italian researcher claimed on Wednesday. — Story on p. 11

Portugal mourns acclaimed writer António Lobo Antunes

Portugal's government ordered a day of national mourning for writer António Lobo Antunes, internationally acclaimed for his work on the divisions in Portuguese society, after his death was announced yesterday at the age of 83. — Story on p. 12

Macao riding tide of Greater Bay Area

Commentary by Kou Hoi In*

The 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-30) represents a critical stage in which China will consolidate the substantial achievements of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), intensify efforts across the board, and largely realize socialist modernization.

As Macao pursues its own economic diversification and actively integrates into the country's overall development, a major challenge before us is to better harness its unique strengths, align with national priorities, support the establishment of a high-standard open economic system, and foster more coordinated regional development.

We have just celebrated the 26th anniversary of Macao's return to the motherland in December, and ushered in the inaugural year of the 15th Five-Year Plan. Since its return, Macao has made steady progress in economic diversification, substantially raised living standards, and strengthened its residents' sense of fulfillment and belonging.

Its global profile and influence have also grown significantly, a clear testament to the enduring vitality and institutional strength of the "one country, two systems" principle.

Guided by the motivating and morale-boosting spirit of President Xi Jinping's important speech, made during his inspection tour of Macao, we will focus on advancing regulatory alignment and institutional connectivity, strengthen collaborative legislation, break down systemic barriers, and inject strong momentum into the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

This will integrate the practice of "patriots administering Macao" deeply into Greater Bay Area governance, expand opportunities for youth development, and write a new chapter in regional coordination and open development.

The development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin is strategically positioned to serve the dual objectives of promoting Macao's economic diversification and facilitating the daily lives and employment of Macao residents.

To achieve this, it is essential to harness the complementary

strengths of both regions, dismantle institutional and systemic barriers, and enable the efficient flow of resources and production factors. This requires the creation of a high-quality, efficient, transparent and predictable legal and regulatory environment through institutional innovation and system-building.

By aligning rules and integrating mechanisms, the aim is to establish an open economic system that is compatible with Macao and internationally aligned. At its core, the construction of the cooperation zone hinges on institutional innovation, with strengthened Guangdong-Macao collaborative legislation serving as the key to breaking down institutional barriers.

Since its establishment in September 2021, the cooperation zone has focused on addressing bottlenecks, challenges, and obstacles in key areas such as industrial development, social integration, customs supervision and tax coordination. Drawing on best practices from the mainland, Macao, and internationally, the cooperation zone has rolled out a list of 306 initiatives for regulatory alignment and reform.

Through targeted, small-scale legislative measures, these efforts aim to tackle larger systemic issues and facilitate smoother development for Macao residents, enterprises, and capital in the zone.

For example, to overcome barriers to cross-border professional practice, regulations have been introduced allowing Macao professionals in fields such as healthcare and construction to work in Hengqin. To date, over 1,600 professionals from Hong Kong and Macao have obtained practice qualifications in the zone.

Moving forward, collaborative legislation should be guided by the functional positioning and development goals of the cooperation zone.

Starting from the demand side – addressing the zone's need for coherent rules and systems – and strengthening the supply side of institutional design, efforts should leverage the advantages of multiple legislative bodies, particularly by making full use of Zhuhai's special economic zone legislative authority.

Guided by the needs of Hengqin



Undated file photo of Kou Hoi In provided by China Daily

and Macao residents, the demands of enterprises, and the requirement of practical applications, and grounded in the principle of respecting systemic differences while achieving effective regulatory integration, the aim is to develop more pragmatic and actionable measures for alignment. This will accelerate the connectivity in institutional mechanisms and rules.

The strategic objective behind developing the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area is to foster complementary strengths and mutually beneficial cooperation, fully leveraging the institutional advantages of "one country, two systems", or the unique strengths of Hong Kong and Macao, and Guangdong's pioneering role in reform and opening-up.

This will further establish a win-win regional partnership among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, driving coordinated regional economic growth. As a new frontier in advancing the Greater Bay Area's development, the cooperation zone bears the foundational mission of promoting Macao's economic diversification and facilitating the lives and employment of Macao residents.

To this end, it is essential to fully harness the comparative advantages of all regions involved, strengthen industrial policy coordination

and planning alignment, optimize regional functional layouts, and innovate and refine policy measures to advance the integrated development of Hengqin and Macao.

The cooperation zone has introduced industrial development plans that prioritize key sectors such as traditional Chinese medicine and high-tech industries. Seven enterprises and 18 products have already received certification, propelling the formation of a cross-border industrial ecosystem centered on "Macao drugs, Hengqin production". This demonstrates a promising start for the synergy between industrial policies and development mechanisms.

By harmonizing regulations with policy coordination across the Greater Bay Area, we will achieve greater rule alignment in key sectors such as bio-medicine, technology R&D, culture and tourism, conventions and exhibitions, and modern finance. This will facilitate the free cross-border flow of resources and factors of production, injecting fresh momentum into the coordinated industrial development of the Greater Bay Area.

Over the past 26 years, one of the key factors behind the successful implementation of the "one country, two systems" principle with Macao characteristics has been the steadfast adherence to the principle of "patriots administering Macao".

Equally important has been the continuous cultivation of a "love for the motherland and Macao" ethos among the younger generation, strengthening their sense of national identity and belonging, and encouraging their active and conscious participation in integrating into the country's development agenda – particularly in the development of the Greater Bay Area and the cooperation zone.

This forms the vital driving force ensuring the sustained practice of "one country, two systems" and the long-term prosperity of Macao.

President Xi emphasized that young people are the hope and future

of Macao, and a vital force in building both the city and the country.

The Macao SAR government has extended 78 public services to Hengqin, achieving cross-border integration in social welfare and governance. From extending education allowances for Macao residents' children to operating cross-border school buses serving 27 Macao schools, the harmonization of rules has enhanced the sense of fulfillment in the dual-city lifestyle.

Standing at the historical starting point of the 15th Five-Year Plan period, Guangdong-Macao cooperation is advancing with institutional innovation at its core, driven by technological and industrial innovation, supported by regulatory alignment, and linked by the active participation of Macao's younger generation in employment and entrepreneurship.

Guided by the goals of enhancing regional coordinated development and contributing to the country's high-standard opening-up, Guangdong and Macao are pooling their strengths to better connect domestic and international dynamics and sharpen their competitive edge through opening-up.

Looking ahead, as collaborative legislation deepens and rule alignment continues to improve, Guangdong and Macao will further leverage the institutional strengths of "one country, two systems".

Together, they will develop the cooperation zone into a strategic hub for Greater Bay Area integration, providing stronger support for the implementation of national strategies.

The author's views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

– Courtesy of China Daily

**Kou is a member of the Standing Committee of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC), and vice-chairman of the Macao Chamber of Commerce. He is a former lawmaker and president of the Macao Legislative Assembly. – MPD*

Premier Li calls for enhancing efficiency of HK, Macao governance

Wu Kunling in Beijing

Premier Li Qiang yesterday called for enhancing the governance efficiency of the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions in accordance with the law.

The premier made the remarks while delivering the government work report at the opening of the fourth session of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC) – the nation's top legislature.

He reaffirmed the nation's commitment to the policy of "one country, two systems", under which the people of Hong Kong

and Macao administer their cities with a high degree of autonomy.

Emphasizing more effective governance in accordance with the law in Hong Kong and Macao, Li also said the two SARs should further leverage their unique strengths and important roles – derived from the backing of the motherland and from their close links with the rest of the world – to achieve long-term prosperity and stability.

Li also stressed the importance of more coordinated regional development, saying that the nation will optimize functional

zoning to help localities better "leverage their comparative advantages based on their defined functions".

As this year marks the beginning of 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30), he urged all sectors to forge ahead with one heart and one mind to accomplish the objectives and tasks for this year's economic and social development, and get off to a good start in implementing the new national plan.

The blueprint has been drawn up, and the time for action has come, Li said.

– Courtesy of China Daily

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MACAU POST

Macau Weather

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FORCE 3 TO 4 EAST TO
NORTHEASTERLY WINDS,
OCCASIONALLY FORCE 5.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL
RANGE BETWEEN 50% AND 90%.**



16°C~23°C

Source: SMG

Lúcia Lemos unveils 'A White Diamond' photo exhibition at Creative Macau

Khalel Vallo

A photography exhibition titled "A White Diamond" by Macau-based Portuguese artist Lúcia Lemos opened yesterday at Creative Macau in Nape, showcasing black-and-white photographs inspired by the Portuguese concert hall Casa da Música in Porto.

The exhibition presents a series of black-and-white photographs, reflecting Lemos's fascination with the fleeting moment between framing and releasing the camera shutter. According to Lemos, photographing with traditional film brings a sense of happiness and discovery, especially when unexpected details emerge within the image, the exhibition text points out.

A central focus of the exhibition is Porto's architectural landmark Casa da Música ("House of Music"). Lemos first photographed the building in 2006 using her Rolleiflex camera. The concert hall's white cement structure, often compared to a diamond, stands in contrast

to the surrounding early-20th-century granite houses, creating a distinctive visual presence in Portugal's northern city.

Lemos also photographed the interior of the building, describing the experience as emotionally dazzling due to its luminous design. According to Lemos, the architecture integrates Portuguese handcrafted glass and tiles within a minimalist framework, forming what she describes as "a symbiosis of tradition and modernity".

Through the displayed works, Lemos highlights both the exterior forms and the atmospheric qualities of the building, which initially sparked controversy when constructed but later became beloved by Porto residents.

With free admission, the exhibition runs until March 28 on the ground floor of the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) from Monday to Saturday, between 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Stay tuned for more pictures and an interview with Lemos in an upcoming page 4. ■



Macau-based Portuguese artist Lúcia Lemos addresses last night's opening ceremony of her "A White Diamond" photo exhibition at Creative Macau in Nape. — Photo: Khalel Vallo

3 eco-facilities to open at Seac Pai Van Park tomorrow

Armando Neves

The Seac Pai Van Park in Coloane is an important venue showcasing natural and ecological resources and providing popular ecological science education in Macau, the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) said in a statement yesterday, pointing out that three ecological facilities will open to the public tomorrow.

The three facilities comprise the park's new Pavilion of Amphibians and Reptiles, Aviary and enclosed Butterfly-Friendly Garden.

The *Post* joined a guided media tour organised by the bureau yesterday morning. At the same time, a group of students from Pui Ching Middle School were also touring the park.

Chan Hoi Fong, head of the IAM Division of Nature Conservation Studies, told reporters during the tour of the park that the renovation budget for the Pavilion of Amphibians and Reptiles was around 6.1 million patacas, while the Aviary cost around 5.0 million patacas and the Butterfly-Friendly Garden about 680,000 patacas, with the work primarily involving the upgrading and optimisation of existing structures.

Following the commencement of trial operations tomorrow, Chan said that the public can book visits to the pavilion through their "Macao One Account" or the website of the bureau, with each session capped at around 120 visitors.

Chan also said that groups may also book guided tours and workshops, adding that the bureau hopes to establish Seac Pai Van as an ecological education base, focusing its efforts on the promotion of ecological conservation.

The statement said that the Pavilion of Amphibians and Reptiles covers an area of around 1,080 square metres and is home to over 40 animals representing 26 species, including a black-throated monitor lizard, a Burmese python and a giant African tortoise nicknamed Ah-Sou, adding that all the animals were either transferred by the Macau Customs Service,



Municipal Affairs Bureau Division of Nature Conservation Studies Chief Chan Hoi Fong speaks to reporters at Seac Pai Van Park in Coloane yesterday. — Photos: Armando Neves



Pui Ching Middle School students observe the African tortoise, nicknamed "Ah-Sou" by the park's staff, during their visit to the Pavilion of Amphibians and Reptiles in Seac Pai Van Park, Coloane Island, yesterday.

handed over by members of the public, or rescued from public areas such as local streets, including abandoned pets.

The pavilion features six themed exhibition rooms equipped with multimedia installations, conveying messages about rejecting illegal wildlife trade and discouraging the indiscriminate abandonment of pets, the statement said.

The aviary features a steel-structured dome design and houses a variety of bird species, including the scarlet ibis and macaws, some of which are endangered, according to the statement. A diverse range of plants and a pond have been incorporated into the garden to simulate a natural wild habitat, the statement said.

The statement also pointed out

that the Butterfly-Friendly Garden is the first facility of its kind in Macau. Covering an area of about 640 square metres, it features 18 selected plant species to create an ecological space conducive to butterfly habitation, the statement said.

Cheang and Lei, students come from Pui Ching Middle School, told reporters after the visit that their favourite animals in the park were the birds, snakes, and frogs, many of which they had seen for the first time. Through the visit, the two girls said that they had gained an understanding of the importance of protecting the natural environment and being responsible pet owners to prevent abandonment, as well as deepened their understanding of the living habits of amphibians and reptiles. ■

CCAC discovers court driver's family subsidy fraud

Khalel Vallo

The Commission Against Corruption (CCAC) announced in a statement yesterday that it discovered a case in which a public servant allegedly provided false information to fraudulently obtain more than 120,000 patacas in family subsidy.

According to the CCAC, the case involves a light vehicle driver working for the Office of the President of the Court of Final Appeal (TUI). The anti-graft body received a report claiming the driver had submitted inaccurate information in subsidy applications, the statement said.

The statement did not say for how long the subsidy fraud remained undetected.

Following an investigation, the

CCAC discovered that the driver had been living for years with his wife, father-in-law and mother-in-law, the statement said. Despite knowing that his father-in-law held full-time employment with a stable monthly income, and that both parents-in-law were receiving old-age pensions, the driver allegedly declared otherwise, the statement added.

The statement noted that the combined annual income of the parents-in-law exceeded the per-capita income threshold required to qualify for the subsidy. Nevertheless, the driver reportedly submitted an "Application Form for Family Subsidy" and supporting documents containing bogus information to his employer, according to the statement.

Through these declarations, the

driver allegedly obtained more than 120,000 patacas in family subsidy payments, the statement said, adding that the individual is suspected of fraud involving a large amount of money under the Penal Code.

The case has been referred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) for further handling, while his employer has also been notified, the statement noted.

According to the statement, the CCAC stressed that the family subsidy scheme is intended to assist public servants with the living expenses of their family members, adding that public servants must declare information truthfully and accurately and should not attempt to obtain subsidies through false declarations.

Meanwhile, the Court of Final Appeal said in a statement yesterday that it has immediately put the driver under investigation, following notification from the CCAC, proceeding with the investigation in a legal, fair and rigorous manner. The statement added that the court will take this case as a lesson, aiming to reinforce disciplinary rigour and legal awareness among its staff, and conducting a thorough review of internal management and supervisory mechanisms to ensure the rigorous application of the family allowance allocation system.

The TUI statement emphasised that if any illegality or disciplinary breach by the individual is confirmed, the staff member will face "severe penalties". ■



廉政公署
CCAC

This image downloaded from the Commissions Against Corruption (CCAC) website yesterday shows its official logo.



Photo exhibition by Mil-Homens pays homage to architect José Maneiras

Interview by Rui Pastorin

Black and white photos taken by Portuguese photographer António Duarte Mil-Homens are being displayed at Casa Garden until April 5, being not only a showcase of architectural photography, but a homage to the late Macanese architect José Maneiras (1935-2025).

The exhibition, “José Maneiras: From Architecture to Urban Management in Macau”, is held as part of the 15th Macau Literary Festival – The Script Road and features 49 photos. With the exception of one recent image, all were shot by the Lisbon-born photographer back in 2018 when he was commissioned by Docomomo Macau, a non-profit organisation promoting public interest and recognition of modern architecture, for the exhibition “José Maneiras – Macanese Modernism”.

Eight years since the initial exhibition and months since Maneiras’ passing, Mil-Homens told the *Post* that he wanted to pay homage to the local architect, who he remembers fondly and has great respect for. A self-taught lensman who has taken pictures for nearly 52 years, Mil-Homens highlights Macau-born Maneiras’ many projects in Macau, with among the works photographed being the Residence for the Visually Impaired in Areia Preta, the Houses on Estrada do Visconde de São Januário, and Torre de Funcionários (“Civil Servants’ Tower”) em São Francisco. Captured are not only the projects in their entirety, but the smaller intricacies and details as well.

Maneiras studied architecture at the University of Porto’s Faculty of Fine Arts, graduating in 1962. When he returned to Macau, Mil-Homens said, Maneiras brought with him a kind of new Western way of building, which he also kept adapting and rethinking. He highlighted the architect’s design considerations and special details found in projects like the Residence for the Visually Impaired, taking into account challenges while designing with purpose.

Looking back at the 2018 project, Mil-Homens noted that it was a pleasure for him to take the pictures and was happy for them to be showcased again. “It’s a way of remembering [Maneiras]” and to admire as well as appreciate both his work and mindset. It goes beyond being for those who met him, but even young people who are studying architecture.

“He was really an amazing person. I’m pretty sure there is nobody that knew him along his life that disliked him. It’s impossible. The kind of person he was, it was a pleasure to talk with him”, Mil-Homens said of the architect, noting that the literary festival was both the right time and place for this to be done.

Maneiras, who passed away at the age of 90 in November 2025, was described on the Docomomo website as being a “seminal figure of Modern Architecture in Macau and a key contributor to the creation of a practice rooted in territory, climate, and community”. He was also the president of Leal Senado (now the Macau Municipal Affairs Bureau/IAM) from 1989 to 1993, adding that he was also made an honorary member of the Portuguese Order of Architects in 2006, and one of the founders of the Macau Architects Association in 1987.



António Duarte Mil-Homens introduces the photos displayed at his exhibition about late Macanese architect José Maneiras at Casa Garden. – Photos taken last night by Rui Pastorin



IAM revises maximum levels of heavy metal contaminants in food

Ida Cheong

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) said yesterday that its administrative regulations on the maximum limits for heavy metal contaminants in foods will be revised, the public consultation period of which runs until the end of this month, and feedback from the industry and the public is welcome.

The officials made the remarks during a meeting with members of the government-appointed Northern District Community Service Consultative Council at the Patane Municipal Market Complex (沙梨頭街市市政綜合大樓).

Briefing reporters after yesterday's closed-door meeting, Ip Weng Hong, a member of the government-appointed council, noted that since the current regulations came into effect in 2018, the Codex Alimentarius Commission* (CAC) international food standards, the authorities in the Chinese mainland, and other regions close to Macau have updated their relevant standards, so that the upcoming revision aims to align Macau's standards with these updates.

Chan Ian Ian, a deputy convener of the council, noted that the revision focuses on a total of 135 maximum levels for five types of heavy metal contaminants in food (including lead, mercury, cadmium, arsenic, and tin). She pointed out that the heavy metal contaminants

in vegetables, cereals, aquatic products and various other types of food may exceed maximum levels.

Following the internationally accepted "As Low As Reasonably Achievable" (ALARA) principle, the revision can manage heavy metal content in food through legislation and the promotion of good agricultural standards as well as proper food manufacturing practices, Chan said.

To date, 13 food safety standards have been promulgated and implemented in Macau in phases. Among these, two have been updated and three have been repealed, essentially completing the Macau food safety framework's standards, which have been notified to the Geneva-based World Trade Organisation (WTO), Chan added.

Chan said that the current phase focuses on reviewing existing standards, strengthening supervision and enforcement, and integrating domestic and international standard updates, aiming to optimise food safety standards and supervision in a timely manner. ■

* *The Codex Alimentarius is a collection of internationally adopted food standards and related texts presented in a uniform manner. It is overseen by the Rome-based Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nation and the Geneva-based World Health Organisation (WHO).* – FAO



Northern District Community Service Consultative Council Deputy Convener Chan Ian Ian (right) and fellow council member Ip Weng Hong look on during yesterday's press briefing after the government-appointed council's closed-door meeting at the Patane Municipal Market Complex (沙梨頭街市市政綜合大樓). – Photo: Ida Cheong

DSFSM warns public of bogus phone calls mimicking its staff

Armindo Neves

The Macau Public Security Forces Affairs Bureau (DSFSM) urged the public in a statement yesterday to remain vigilant and be wary of fraudulent phone calls from individuals impersonating its staff.

According to the statement, recently residents have received suspicious phone calls from fraudsters using unidentified numbers claiming to be staff members of the bureau and falsely presenting themselves as police officers.

Under the pretext of various matters such as immigration investigations or case verifications, the statement said, the fraudsters attempt to deceive residents into engaging in video calls and providing personal information, bank account details and passwords, or even transferring money, as part of the scam.

In the statement, the bureau reminded the public that neither

the bureau nor any other local law enforcement agency will ever request members of the public to engage in video calls, provide bank account passwords, make fund transfers, download any software, or perform screen-sharing operations over the phone, adding that neither will they ask individuals to verify sensitive personal information or handle financial matters over the phone.

The statement underlined that upon receiving a call from someone claiming to be from the Public Security Forces Affairs Bureau or other law enforcement agencies, citing immigration issues or case investigations as a reason to demand a video call, financial information, or monetary transfers, the public should not believe the caller, should not comply with his or her request, and should not provide any information. They should hang up immediately. ■

MPU discovers AI-assisted Alzheimer's disease drug development

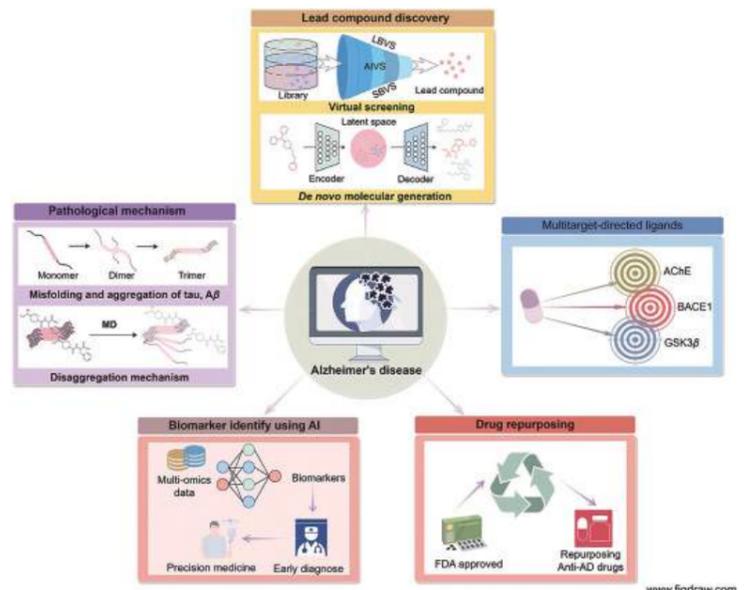
Ida Cheong

The public Macao Polytechnic University (MPU) announced in a statement yesterday that its research team from the Centre for Artificial Intelligence-Driven Drug Discovery, Faculty of Applied Sciences, has made significant progress in the field of AI-assisted drug development for Alzheimer's disease.

The statement pointed out that the research team consists of Prof. Yao Xiaojun, Prof. Liu Huanxiang, Lecturer Zhang Qiangian from the MPU AI centre, and doctoral student Gong Xiaoqing.

The statement noted that through a systematic review, the research team comprehensively analysed the latest groundbreaking applications of AI and computational methods in Alzheimer's disease drug development, providing important theoretical support for accelerating drug research in this area.

The statement added that the team systematically reviewed innovative applications of AI and computational methods in Alzheimer's disease drug development, with a particular focus on the entire process from target identification and molecular design to precision clinical medicine.



This image provided by the Macao Polytechnic University (MPU) yesterday shows how artificial intelligence (AI) assists Alzheimer's drug development progress.

The review suggests that future therapeutic approaches for Alzheimer's disease will increasingly emphasise multi-target drug (MTDs) design and precision medicine to achieve efficient and low-cost treatment solutions, offering valuable insights for research into innovative treatment strategies for Alzheimer's disease, the statement said.

The research findings have been published under the title "Application of computational methods in the drug discovery and development of Alzheimer's disease" in the internationally renowned journal *Acta Pharmaceutica Sinica B*, according to the statement.

The full content of the research findings can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apsb.2025.07.038>. ■

MIECF to feature 3 themed exhibition zones

Kristina Vallesteros

The 2026 Macao International Environmental Co-operation Forum & Exhibition (2026MIECF) will feature three themed exhibition zones when it returns later this month, according to a statement by the Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) yesterday.

The fair will take place from March 26 to 28 at the Cotai Expo in The Venetian Macao, under the theme "Low-carbon and Zero Waste Cities: Embarking on a Global Collaboration".

According to the statement, this year's Green Showcase will cover 12,000 square metres and be divided into three industry-focused zones.

The statement said that the newly established "Zero-waste Circular Economy Exhibition Zone" will highlight the latest achievements in waste management, resource

recycling, zero-waste innovation, and green building. The "Green Mobility Zone" will focus on new energy vehicles (NEVs), charging infrastructure, and sustainable transport solutions, in line with local government policies promoting eco-friendly vehicles. The "Green and Low-carbon Project Zone" will present carbon neutrality strategies, ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) initiatives, and green investment case studies.

The statement noted that the exhibition will feature a range of innovative green technologies with practical applications. These include the world's first carbon capture partition, carbon-sequestration autoclaved aerated concrete technology* used by a mainland fast-food chain, Macau's first dry-process pulp recycling system, eco-friendly antibacterial

meal boxes made from rice husks, and Macau's first second-hand trading platform. The statement pointed out that these examples aim to "enrich scenarios for green technology in everyday life".

International participation is expected to exceed last year's levels, the statement said. Exhibitors will include Fortune Global 500 energy companies, leading environmental enterprises from the Chinese mainland, environmental organisations from Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs), and technology firms from various countries and regions.

A series of concurrent activities will be held during the exhibition period, including the "2nd Global Carbon Credit Market Development Forum", themed business matching sessions, green roadshows, and workshops, according to the statement.

Further information is available on the official website <http://www.macaomiecf.com>. ■

* *Carbon-sequestration autoclaved aerated concrete (AAC) technology refers to a building material and construction approach designed to reduce carbon emissions during its production and use. Autoclaved refers to a process that involves the use of an autoclave, which is a high-pressure container employed to sterilise or cure materials. In the context of construction materials like Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (AAC), it describes the method of curing the product under high pressure and temperature.* – Poe



This undated handout photo provided by the Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) yesterday shows fairgoers interacting with a robot during a previous Macao International Environmental Co-operation Forum & Exhibition (MIECF).

Sam vows full compliance with 'two sessions' spirit

Continued from p.1

Sam thanks central gov't's fundamental guarantee

Yesterday's GCS statement quoted Sam as saying that the central government has always attached great importance to Macau's long-term prosperity and stability and sustainable development, and has consistently provided Macau with profound care and strong support, offering a fundamental guarantee for Macau in addressing risks and challenges, promoting appropriate economic diversification and high-quality development, and improving residents' well-being.

On behalf of the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) government and all residents, Sam expressed the highest respect and sincere gratitude to the central government, the statement said.

In the GCS statement released after yesterday morning's opening meeting, Sam noted that, building upon the beneficial experience and positive outcomes of the nation's 14th Five-Year Plan, the draft outline of the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan continues to include a dedicated chapter on fostering the long-term prosperity and stability of Hong Kong and Macau, outlining the nation's strategic plan to support Hong Kong and Macau in consolidating and enhancing their competitive advantages and better integrating into and serving the nation's overall development.

15th Five-Year Plan's dedicated chapter for HK & Macau

The dedicated chapter, Sam noted, includes the nation's commitment to further supporting Macau's appropriate economic diversification, supporting Macau in advancing its

"One Centre, One Platform, One Base" campaign, supporting Macau in enhancing its competitiveness of industries such as big health driven by traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), finance with "special features", high-tech, MICE and commerce, supporting Macau in strengthening cooperation with the Chinese mainland in areas such as economy, trade, technology and culture, and rolling out new policies and measures to make it more convenient for Macau residents to live and pursue personal development in the Chinese mainland.

The Macau government's "One Centre, One Platform, One Base" concept refers to Macau developing itself into a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure, a commercial and trade cooperation service platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, and an exchange and cooperation base with Chinese culture as its mainstream and co-existence of different cultures.

Sam noted that the 15th Five-Year Plan's dedicated chapter for Hong Kong and Macau also includes the nation's commitment to deepening Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau cooperation, deepening the Macau-Hengqin integrated development, and advancing the construction of major projects such as a new high-speed railway between Guangzhou and Zhuhai (Macau), the Macau-Hengqin International Education (University) Town, and Macau International Airport's upstream cargo terminal in Hengqin.

The dedicated chapter, Sam noted, also includes improving the mechanisms for Macau to better play its role in the country's opening up to the outside world, and leveraging Macau's role as an important window of exchanges and mutual learning between Chinese

and Western civilisations.

In the statement, Sam underlined that integrating into and serving the nation's overall development is the fundamental foundation for Macau's sustainable development and an inevitable requirement for the steady and far-reaching implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle.

Sam noted that this year marks the start of the MSAR's drawing-up and implementation of its third five-year socioeconomic development plan, adding that with the aim of aligning with the strategic plans outlined by the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan, particularly those concerning Macau, his government will scientifically draw up Macau's third five-year plan covering the period between 2026 and 2030.

Sam underlined that Macau's third five-year plan will outline the MSAR government's commitment to fully leveraging the institutional advantages of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle and Macau's unique advantage of its blending of Chinese and Western cultures, comprehensively enhancing the city's overall competitiveness, vigorously participating in the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) and the nation's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), deepening Macau-Hengqin coordinated development, and accelerating the development of key industries such as modern finance, big health driven by TCM, technological innovation, MICE and commerce as well as culture and sport.

Moreover, Sam also acknowledged Macau's deputies to the NPC and the local members of the CPPCC National Committee as being an important bridge connecting Macau with national governance at the highest level. ■

China's 2026 economic growth target 'proactive and pragmatic': official

BEIJING – China's economic growth target for 2026 is "proactive and pragmatic," reflecting a broad assessment of domestic conditions and shifts in the external environment, an official said yesterday.

The target of 4.5 percent to 5 percent economic growth, while striving to achieve better results in practice, is intended to strike a balance between what is needed and what is feasible, said Shen Danyang, head of the group responsible for drafting this year's government work report, which was submitted to the national legislature for deliberation earlier in the day.

At a press conference, Shen said the target range leaves room for structural adjustment, risk prevention and reforms while remaining broadly aligned with the country's 2035 vision.

It preserves flexibility to respond to a more complex external environment, allows local governments to tailor regional goals, and helps steer attention toward high-quality development, he stressed.

The target is also consistent with China's growth potential, Shen said, noting that many economic institutions, economists and think tanks at home and abroad have run their own estimates and found results broadly in line with the government's expectations.

The projected pace would also be among the highest for major economies globally, the official said.

China's economic resilience, the growth of new quality productive forces, more proactive macro policies and deeper

reforms in key areas will help unlock further potential, Shen added.

"As long as we make full and effective use of all favorable conditions, we can fully strive for better results, achieving a tangible improvement in quality and a reasonable increase in quantity," he said.

On the country's macro policies, Chen Changsheng, a member of the work report drafting group, said at the press conference that China will strengthen policy support this year as external uncertainties intensify and a "strong supply, weak demand" pattern persists domestically.

China still has room for further policy action, Chen said. Compared with other major economies, China's government debt ratio – especially that of the central government – remains relatively low, and the conditions for cuts to required reserve ratios and interest rates are still in place.

China's government work report has positioned the expansion of domestic demand at its priority task for two consecutive years, with an emphasis on special initiatives to bolster consumption.

Shen detailed the country's policy toolkit to stimulate consumption, which includes raising household incomes and upgrading supply, strengthening health care, elderly care and childcare support, using fiscal and financial measures to back consumer goods trade-in programs, and removing barriers and restrictions regarding consumption. – Xinhua

15th Macau Literary Festival kicks off



The ribbon-cutting hosts and guests including Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) President Deland Leong Wai Man (9th from left) and Consul General of Portugal in Macao and Hong Kong Alexandre Leitão (7th from right) pose for a group photo after launching the 15th Macau Literary Festival – The Script Road at Casa Garden last night. – Photo: Rui Pastorin

Rui Pastorin

The 15th Macau Literary Festival – The Script Road kicked off last night in Casa Garden, with a robust programme of literature, films, art and music until March 15.

The festival programme features local and visiting writers, poets, filmmakers, musicians, actors and visual artists, with most events taking place at the headquarters of the Macau delegation of the Lisbon-based Orient Foundation (Fundação Oriente).

The festival debuted in 2012 and was created by Ricardo Pinto and other journalists from *Ponto Final*. Aside from writers, it has evolved to include actors, directors,

journalists, cartoonists, musicians and photographers from around the world. The extensive programme includes everything from book presentations to film screenings, as well as upcoming concerts.

Delivering a speech, Pinto, one of the festival directors, further highlighted the festival's growth. "It has been a long journey, beginning as a dream of dialogue between cultures, and today standing as an important meeting point between languages, sensibilities, and artistic expressions from the East and West". He also pointed out the festival's multidisciplinary nature as well as the organisers' appreciation for the continuous support received.

The festival's two other directors, Yao Feng and Carlos Morais José, also gave speeches at the opening.

Yao noted that since the festival's launch, it has grown into "a distinctive and internationally acclaimed literary gathering, as well as a vital bridge linking local Macau writers with literary talents across the globe". In his speech, Yao also touched on the unprecedented challenges on literary creation brought on by the rise of AI but noted that "literature endures because it is the art of being human – its very core is the beating human heart".

Morais José highlighted in his speech that commemorating literature is "celebrating our

imperfection, inconsistency and emptiness, that is, what makes us dare to create new worlds in the interstices of millions of existences and endows us with some traces of tragic beauty".

The first day of the festival saw a book presentation on "Encounter of the Extremes: Tracing the History of Literary Exchanges between China and Portugal", an orchestral performance, and the launch of the exhibition "José Maneiras: From Architecture to Urban Management in Macau", with more on the latter on Page 4.

The detailed festival programme can be found by visiting <https://www.facebook.com/macaulitfest/>. ■

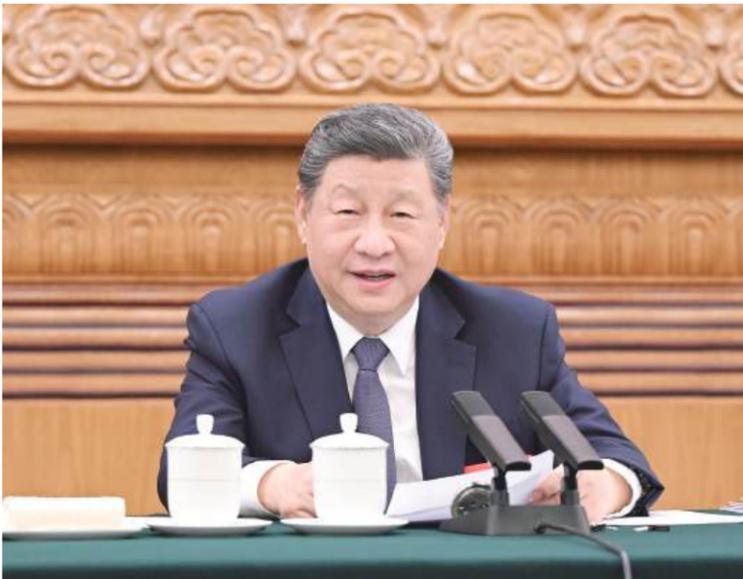
Xi urges major provincial economies to gain experience in solving new problems

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping yesterday urged major provincial economies to redouble efforts to gain experience in analyzing new situations and solving new problems.

Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks while taking part in a deliberation with his fellow deputies from the delegation of Jiangsu Province at the fourth session of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC).

To fulfill the development goals of the 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-2030), China must navigate a more complex environment and resolve more deep-seated contradictions, he said.

After listening to presentations from several NPC deputies, Xi laid out the requirements for Jiangsu, an economic powerhouse in east China, to advance economic and social development over the next five years.



President Xi Jinping, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, takes part in a deliberation with his fellow deputies from the delegation of Jiangsu Province at the fourth session of the 14th National People's Congress in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

With solid foundations, the province should take the lead in developing new quality productive forces, which is crucial to driving high-

quality development and enhancing economic competitiveness, Xi said.

Xi urged the province to promote the integrated development

of education, technology and talent, and strive to make breakthroughs in original innovation and core technologies in key fields.

Jiangsu should break new ground in upgrading traditional industries, bolstering emerging industries, and making forward-looking plans for future industries, Xi said, calling for new progress in further deepening reform and removing the institutional barriers that hinder the development of new quality productive forces.

Stressing the role that major provincial economies play in underpinning national economic stability, Xi said that Jiangsu needs to continue strengthening its economic resilience and comprehensively integrate into the unified national market, while expanding its high-standard opening up and broadening its access to global markets.

Noting that Chinese modernization is the modernization of common prosperity for all, he said that Jiangsu must take

the initiative to tackle such tasks as promoting high-quality and sufficient employment, increasing the incomes of urban and rural residents, and improving basic public services and social security, as part of efforts to explore effective ways to achieve common prosperity for all.

Xi said effective Party governance provides a stronger guarantee for economic and social development, urging earnest efforts to organize and carry out the Party-wide education campaign on establishing and practicing the correct view of what it means to perform well.

He also called for efforts to strengthen public trust through concrete steps in full and rigorous Party self-governance.

Cai Qi, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and director of the General Office of the CPC Central Committee, attended the event. – Xinhua

Chinese leaders attend deliberations at annual legislative session

BEIJING – Senior Chinese leaders yesterday attended deliberations at the fourth session of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC).

When joining NPC deputies from Yunnan Province in a group deliberation, Premier Li Qiang noted that this year marks the first year of the 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-2030) amid increasing uncertainties in the external environment and arduous tasks in domestic reform and development.

Li urged more proactive and pragmatic actions to effectively tackle various risks and challenges.

Top legislator Zhao Leji participated in a group deliberation with deputies from Sichuan Province, urging solid and in-depth implementation of all work to make a good start to the 15th Five-Year Plan period.

Zhao, chairman of the NPC Standing Committee, also called on the province to build a modern industrial system with its own features and strengths, and play an active role in advancing the construction of a unified national market.

Top political advisor Wang Huning joined his fellow deputies from Guizhou Province in a group deliberation, calling on the province to develop new quality productive forces in line with local conditions, and promote the deep integration of sci-tech innovation with industrial innovation.

Wang, chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, emphasized that Guizhou should adhere to ecological priority and green development, consolidate and expand

poverty alleviation achievements, and accelerate the comprehensive revitalization of rural areas.

Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang, when joining deliberation with his fellow deputies from Liaoning Province, called for pursuing genuine rather than inflated growth, and promoting high-quality, sustainable development.

He also stressed the need to accelerate efforts to build greater self-reliance and strength in science and technology.

Li Xi, secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of the Communist Party of China (CPC), joined lawmakers from Fujian Province in a group deliberation. He urged the Party members and officials to firmly uphold a correct view on governance performance.

He also called for intensified efforts to eradicate the breeding grounds and conditions for corruption, and firmly pursue the path of anti-corruption with Chinese characteristics.

Li Qiang, Zhao Leji, Wang Huning, Ding Xuexiang, and Li Xi are all members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee.

While speaking with his fellow lawmakers from Shandong Province, Vice President Han Zheng urged efforts to ensure a solid beginning for the 15th Five-Year Plan period.

He also urged efforts to actively respond to external challenges, continue to deepen reform and opening up, and enhance the momentum and vitality for China's high-quality development. – Xinhua

Nation's top legislature opens annual session

BEIJING – The 14th National People's Congress, China's top legislature, opened its fourth session yesterday morning at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

Xi Jinping and other Party and state leaders, including Li Qiang, Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang, Li Xi and Han Zheng, were seated at the rostrum.

Zhao Leji, executive chairman of the session's presidium, presided over the meeting.

Premier Li Qiang delivered a government work report.

Noting that 2025 had been a "truly remarkable" year, Li said China, faced with profound and complex developments both at home and abroad, had accomplished the main goals and tasks for economic and social development and brought the 14th Five-Year Plan to a successful conclusion.

All 20 major targets, 17 strategic tasks and 102 major projects set out in the outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan had been accomplished, he said.

In accordance with the Recommendations of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China for Formulating the 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development (2026-2030), the State Council has prepared the draft outline of the plan, which has been submitted to this session for examination, said Li.

The draft outline has specified 20 main indicators, set out the major strategic tasks for the 15th Five-Year Plan period, and proposed a total of 109 major projects in six areas, Li noted.

On this year's main objectives, Li pointed out in the report that China targets an economic growth of 4.5-5 percent and will strive for better in practice.



Premier Li Qiang delivers a government work report at the opening meeting of the fourth session of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

"We must fully implement the Party Central Committee's overall plans for this year and take solid steps to do all our work well," he said.

According to the agenda, a series of documents were submitted to the NPC session for examination, which include the draft outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan, the report on the implementation of the 2025 plan for national economic and social development and on the 2026 draft plan, and the draft plan for national economic and social development in 2026, as well as the report on the execution of the central and local budgets for 2025 and on the draft central and local budgets for 2026, and the draft central and local budgets for 2026.

Li Hongzhong, vice chairman of the NPC Standing Committee, delivered explanatory remarks on a draft environmental code, a draft

law on promoting ethnic unity and progress, and a draft law on national development planning, respectively.

Compiling the environmental code will provide robust legal safeguards for ecological and environmental protection in China's journey toward modernization, according to the explanatory remarks.

The formulation of the law on promoting ethnic unity and progress is aimed at advancing the high-quality development of the cause of ethnic unity and progress, with a focus on fostering a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, said the remarks.

The law on national development planning, according to the remarks, is expected to raise the level of law-based governance in national development planning and enhance the strategic guidance role of national plans. – Xinhua



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

China targets quality growth in 2026 and beyond amid weakening global economy

Analysis

BEIJING — China yesterday set an economic growth target of 4.5 to 5 percent for 2026, aiming for a good start to the new five-year plan that charts the course for high-quality development and offers much-needed certainty to a troubled world economy.

The GDP growth target is well aligned with China's long-range objectives through the year 2035 and broadly in line with the long-term growth potential of China's economy, said a government work report submitted to the country's top legislature for deliberation.

China's economic growth target for 2026 is proactive and pragmatic, reflecting a broad assessment of domestic conditions and shifts in the external environment, said Shen Danyang, head of the group responsible for drafting this year's government work report.

The projected pace would also be among the highest for major economies globally, Shen said.

"The signal this target sends to the international community is clear that China is no longer pursuing growth speed alone," said Zhang Ying, associate dean of the Guanghua School of Management at Peking University, in an interview with Xinhua. "This year's target reflects China's firm commitment to high-quality development."

The country has made it clear that it will strive for better in practice regarding this year's growth target, and favorable conditions for achieving this target are in place, according to the report.

FURTHER ASSURANCE

The government work report outlined this year's major tasks, including building a robust domestic market, fostering new growth drivers at a faster pace, and moving faster to achieve greater self-reliance and strength in science and technology.

To achieve these goals, China will continue to implement a more proactive fiscal policy and apply an appropriately accommodative

monetary policy. The orientations highlight policy continuity and offer further assurance to a global economy unnerved by trade and geopolitical tensions.

China's global economic heft means its policy moves are pivotal to the world economy. Over the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025), China saw its economy grow at an average annual pace of 5.4 percent, well above the global average, and contributed around 30 percent of global growth.

The country has remained the world's second-largest importer for 16 consecutive years, has cemented its position as the world's largest trader of goods, and has become a major trading partner of more than 160 countries and regions.

The weight of the role is only set to grow. According to a World Bank forecast, global growth is projected to ease to 2.6 percent in 2026. If the forecast holds, the 2020s are on track to be the weakest decade for global growth since the 1960s.

"What we achieved in 2025 was indeed hard won," according to the government work report. "Rarely in many years have we encountered such a grave and complex landscape, where external shocks and challenges were intertwined with domestic difficulties and tough policy choices."

LONG-TERM PREDICTABILITY

In a sign of assurance to the troubled global economy in the longer term, China yesterday unveiled a slew of development priorities for the 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-2030).

The 15th Five-Year Plan sets a clear anchor: doubling China's 2020 per capita GDP by 2035 to reach the level of a moderately developed country. Getting there will require navigating a middle stretch that China has chosen not to over-prescribe, as annual growth targets will be set year by year, a flexibility that reflects both confidence in the trajectory and awareness of the uncertainties ahead.

The 15th Five-Year Plan marks a pivotal stretch in China's modernization drive, and its ambitions reach well beyond domestic growth metrics. By directing capital into frontier technologies, deepening trade and investment linkages, and advancing green development, the blueprint is poised to affect the global economy across multiple dimensions, from the tempo of the energy transition to the landscape of advanced manufacturing worldwide.

Simon Smith, director and general manager of Taikoo Engine Services (Xiamen) Co. Ltd., an engineering branch of the multinational company Swire Group, said long-term policy clarity changes the calculus for multinationals operating in China.

"The five-year plan transforms investment decisions from probabilistic bets to calculated strategic positioning," Smith told Xinhua in an interview. "Without the plan, the company may hesitate on a specific capability expansion or investment, uncertain whether regulatory support, skilled labor availability, or customer demand will materialize."

That strategic positioning comes with a concrete roadmap. According to China's technology agenda, the country will nurture emerging industries and industries of the future. During the 2026-2030 period, China will foster new drivers of economic growth such as quantum technology, biomanufacturing, hydrogen and nuclear fusion power, brain-computer interfaces, embodied artificial intelligence, and 6G mobile communications.

Hu Jinbo, a national political advisor and head of the Shanghai Institute of Organic Chemistry, said the next five years represent a critical window for China's economic transition from high-speed growth to high-quality development, and sci-tech innovation will serve as the core engine of this transformation.

BROADER OPPORTUNITIES

As China continues to achieve sci-tech innovation breakthroughs, developing countries

can draw on China's experience to accelerate their own industrialization, while developed countries will also gain broader opportunities for collaboration in advanced manufacturing and frontier technologies, Hu said.

For the rest of the world, what may matter most in the longer run is not the pace of growth, but its composition. China has set an explicit goal of raising household consumption as a share of GDP over the next five years.

For a global economy straining under the weight of trade tensions, geopolitical fragmentation and weak growth, China's dual pledges — to sustain its own steady expansion and to open its vast market further to the world — offer a rare note of predictability.

A more balanced Chinese economy underpinned by stronger domestic demand would generate far-reaching spillover effects globally, according to a recent Bloomberg article citing Robin Xing, chief China economist at Morgan Stanley.

"Chinese and foreign companies alike would benefit from the depth and scale of the China market, which would help cushion today's geopolitical challenges," Xing was quoted as saying.

According to the government work report, China will deepen reform of the institutional framework for promoting foreign investment this year. It will open wider to the outside world, with efforts to expand market access and open up more areas, particularly in the service sector.

Zhang Ying highlighted three aspects of China's opportunities for global investors: a massive unified market with rising purchasing power of residents, highly efficient and cost-effective supply chains, and an increasingly open, pro-investment regulatory environment.

"Against a backdrop of global volatility and macroeconomic headwinds, these fundamentals offer significant appeal to international investors and corporations," Zhang said. — Xinhua

Nepal awaits results in key post-uprising polls

By Paavan Mathema and Anup Ojha, with Aishwarya Kumar in Jhapa

KATHMANDU – Nepal voted yesterday for a new parliament in a high-stakes showdown between an entrenched old guard and a powerful youth movement, six months after deadly anti-corruption protests toppled the government.

Key figures contesting for power include the Marxist former prime minister seeking a return to office, a rapper-turned-mayor bidding for the youth vote, and the newly elected leader of the powerful Nepali Congress party.

Election commission officials collected ballot boxes after voting closed, with papers taken under guard to centres before counting.

“The voting process has been concluded peacefully and enthusiastically,” Chief Election Commissioner Ram Prasad Bhandari told reporters, saying turnout had been around 60 percent according to initial estimates.

Some winners are expected to be published as early as today, but full results may take several days.

It may then take time before a government is formed if, as many analysts expect, no party wins an outright majority.

“Nepalis have been waiting for change for so long, from one system

to another,” said Nilanta Shakya, 60, a retired engineer, who was among the first to vote at a college in the capital, Kathmandu.

“I hope there is a meaningful change this time,” she added.

Voters have chosen who replaces the interim government in place since the September 2025 uprising, in which at least 77 people were killed, and parliament and scores of government buildings were torched.

Youth-led protests under a loose Gen Z banner began as a demonstration against a brief social media ban, but were fed by wider grievances at corruption and a woeful economy.

Sushila Karki, the interim prime minister, said the vote was critical in “determining our future”.

The polls are one of the most hotly contested elections in the Himalayan republic of 30 million people since the end of a civil war in 2006.

Thousands of soldiers and police have been deployed.

The election saw a wave of younger candidates promising to tackle Nepal’s dismal economy, challenging veteran politicians who have dominated for decades and argue that their experience guarantees stability and security.

“Today feels like a day of celebration,” said Nirmala Bhandari,



This combination of pictures shows Nepal’s first-time voters posing for a photograph as they arrive to cast their ballot at a polling station during Nepal’s parliamentary election in Kathmandu yesterday. – AFP

50, a housewife, who danced in the street with friends for a video for social media, after casting her vote in Bhaktapur district outside the capital.

“I am hopeful that the country will get new leaders and that we will build a better nation.”

‘Blood will bring change’

Helicopters will be used to collect ballot boxes from snowbound mountain regions across Nepal, home to eight of the world’s 10 highest peaks, including Mount Everest.

But all eyes will be focused on the hot farming plains south of Kathmandu, where all three prime ministerial hopefuls contested seats

– a departure from past elections that focused on the capital.

KP Sharma Oli, the 74-year-old Marxist leader ousted as prime minister last year and seeking a return to power, was challenged in the usually sleepy eastern district of Jhapa by former Kathmandu mayor Balendra Shah, a 35-year-old rapper-turned-politician.

“This election must reestablish democracy and contribute to end non-political, anarchic and violent tendencies,” Oli said after voting, insisting his party would win the largest number of seats.

The Jhapa-5 constituency, with around 163,000 voters, will determine whether Oli secures his seat or

whether Shah enters parliament.

Shah, from the centrist Rastrriya Swatantra Party (RSP), who queued to vote in Kathmandu dressed in a black suit and sunglasses, has cast himself as a symbol of youth-driven political change.

Also in the race as aspiring prime minister is Gagan Thapa, 49, the new head of the country’s oldest party, Nepali Congress, who has said he wants to end the “old age” club of revolving veteran leaders.

After casting his ballot, Thapa told AFP that it is “the duty of the leaders” not to let the events of last September occur again.

On social media, voters shared images of their ink-marked thumbs – alongside photographs of the September protests.

“At the Gen Z protest, people died – and their blood will bring change, we hope,” said Tek Bahadur Aale, 66, who voted in Jhapa.

“We hope a government with good governance, no corruption, comes this time.”

More than 3,400 candidates are running for 165 seats in direct elections to the 275-member House of Representatives, the lower chamber of parliament, with 110 more chosen via party lists. – AFP

Philippines, S Korea elevate economic partnership with upgraded MoU

MANILA – The Philippines and South Korea have elevated their economic partnership through the signing of an upgraded memorandum of understanding (MoU), the Philippines’ Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said yesterday.

The MoU is aimed at expanding cooperation in trade, investment and economic cooperation at a time of rapid global economic shifts, the DTI said in a press release.

“By institutionalizing a more responsive and forward-looking cooperation mechanism, we are ensuring that trade and investment remain central pillars of a resilient and future-ready Philippine economy,” DTI Secretary Cristina Roque said.

Under the enhanced framework, the two countries

agreed to deepen cooperation in sectors such as automotive, shipbuilding, marine equipment, semiconductors, electronics and electrical equipment, mold and die, critical raw materials, energy, and the digital economy.

The MoU introduces operational enhancements, including the creation of a vice-ministerial or undersecretary-level ad hoc consultative body to address issues faced by businesses and investors. The mechanism is expected to provide a faster channel for resolving bottlenecks and facilitating smoother trade and investment flows.

The MoU was signed during this week’s state visit by South Korean President Lee Jae Myung.

– Xinhua



This picture taken on Wednesday and released by North Korea’s official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) yesterday shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un inspecting a sea-to-surface strategic cruise missile test launch conducted on the destroyer Choe Hyon at an undisclosed location in North Korea. – AFP

Dietary fats shape immunity against disease: study

SYDNEY – The types of dietary fats consumed directly impact the survival and strength of the body’s immune cells and ability to fight disease, researchers have found.

An international collaboration led by Australia’s University of Queensland (UQ) found that diet can alter the fat composition inside T cells – the immune cells that help protect a person from infections and cancer, according to a UQ statement released yesterday.

The team found that diets lower in

polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs) relative to monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFAs) enhance T-cell resistance to oxidation-induced cell death, according to Professor Yu Di of UQ’s Frazer Institute, corresponding author of the study published in *Nature*.

“The kinds of fats you eat change the fat composition inside your T cells, and those changes can make T cells either weaker or stronger in terms of immune protection,” Yu said, adding that how bodies and cells process

dietary fats, or lipid metabolism, is critical to immune function.

“This discovery shows that dietary changes could potentially boost the effectiveness of vaccines and cancer therapies,” he said.

PUFAs are found in fatty fish and soybeans, while MUFAs include olive oil and avocados, though the ideal PUFA-MUFA ratio remains unclear, and further research is needed to determine the exact role of the different fats in T-cell death, Yu said. – Xinhua

Japan startup’s space rocket fails for 3rd time

Kyoko Hasegawa

TOKYO – A Japanese startup’s third attempt to put a satellite in orbit failed yesterday after its rocket spiralled back to Earth shortly after take-off.

Space One, hoping to become the first private Japanese firm to put a satellite in space, said that what went wrong was “under investigation”.

TV footage showed the Kairos rocket blasting off from the launch site in the coastal Wakayama region of western Japan at 11:10 a.m. [local time] up into the blue sky.

But shortly afterwards, the slim, white 18-metre rocket appeared to run out of power and head back downwards in a spin.

It was unclear where it landed.

Tokyo-based Space One told a press conference that “no major anomalies” had been identified within the aircraft itself and the rocket had not deviated from its flight path.

“So it seems reasonable to assume that some issue occurred within the flight interruption system,” the firm said, referring to a safety mechanism capable of automatically ending the flight.

The rocket was carrying several satellites including one for a high

school in Tokyo, according to the firm.

The company’s first launch attempt ended in spectacular failure in March 2024 when the solid-fuel rocket exploded seconds after lift-off.

A second try started off better only for the rocket to suddenly spiral downwards after engineers terminated the operation because of a technical problem.

The latest launch had been slated to happen on Wednesday, only to be cancelled due to another glitch just 28.9 seconds before lift-off.

Moon landing

Companies such as Space One want to offer cheaper and more frequent space exploration opportunities than governments.

The startup is hoping to establish a satellite-launching service to tap into expanding global demand –emulating Elon Musk’s SpaceX, which has contracts with NASA and the Pentagon.

Space One was founded in 2018 by businesses including Canon Electronics, IHI Aerospace, construction firm Shimizu and the government-run Development Bank of Japan.

The national Japan Aerospace

Exploration Agency (JAXA) is also on a mission to become a major player for satellite launches.

JAXA’s next-generation H3 launch system had experienced multiple failed take-off attempts before a successful blast-off in February 2024.

In December, however, Japan’s flagship H3 rocket failed to launch a geolocation satellite into orbit due to engine failure.

In 2024, JAXA landed an unmanned probe on the Moon – albeit at a crooked angle – making it just the fifth country to achieve a “soft landing”.

The Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM), dubbed the “Moon Sniper” for its landing precision, nonetheless intermittently sent back signals for many months.

Last year Japan’s ispace failed in its attempt to become only the third private firm – and the first outside the United States – to achieve a controlled arrival on the Moon.

Contact with the ispace’s unmanned Resilience craft was lost as the probe made its final descent onto the lunar surface and was believed to have crash landed. – AFP

20,000 seafarers, 15,000 passengers stuck in Gulf: UN agency

LONDON – The UN's International Maritime Organisation (IMO) told AFP yesterday that around 20,000 seafarers and 15,000 cruise ship passengers are stuck in the Gulf because of the Middle East war.

The shipping regulator's secretary general Arsenio Domínguez said that the "IMO is ready to work with all stakeholders to help ensure the safety and well-being of the seafarers affected".

Since war erupted on Saturday, the IMO has recorded seven incidents involving ships in the region that have resulted in two deaths and

another seven people wounded.

"Beyond the economic impact of these alarming attacks, it is a humanitarian issue. No attack on innocent seafarers is ever justified," Domínguez told AFP.

"I reiterate my call for all shipping companies to exercise maximum caution when operating in the affected region," he added.

Iran has effectively shut down the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's crude and considerable supplies of liquefied natural gas travel.

Several shipping groups, including

Danish shipping giant Maersk, have suspended bookings in the Gulf.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards on Wednesday claimed "complete control" of the Strait, with reports of additional vessels coming under attack.

Energy intelligence firm Kpler said oil tanker transits through the Strait had dropped by 90 percent from last week.

With energy prices already spiking, US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that the US Navy was ready to escort oil tankers through the crucial shipping route. – AFP

Iran thanks Saudi for not allowing territory to be used during war: ambassador

RIYADH – Iran's ambassador to Saudi Arabia Alireza Enayati said yesterday his country remained appreciative of Saudi Arabia's pledge to not allow its airspace or territory to be used during the ongoing war with the US and Israel.

"We appreciate what we have repeatedly heard from Saudi Arabia – that it does not allow its airspace, waters, or territory to be

used against the Islamic Republic of Iran," he told AFP.

Before the outbreak of war, Riyadh had thrown its support behind diplomatic efforts to diffuse tensions between Tehran and Washington and vowed that its airspace would not be allowed to be used for attacks against Iran.

Meanwhile, Alireza Enayati categorically denied that his country

attacked the US embassy in Riyadh this week, following accusations by Saudi Arabia that Iran targeted the compound with drones.

"We confirmed that Iran has no role in the attack on the US embassy in Riyadh," the ambassador told AFP.

"If the operations command in Tehran attacks somewhere, it takes responsibility for it." – AFP

Son of last shah says Iran clerics' next leader will be illegitimate

WASHINGTON – The son of the last shah toppled in Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution said yesterday that whoever the clerical government chooses to succeed the late Ayatollah Ali Khamenei will be illegitimate.

Reza Pahlavi, who has positioned himself as an alternative if the Islamic republic falls, said on social media that "victory is near" after Khamenei was killed last weekend as the United States and Israel launched the war.

"Any attempt to appoint a successor for him is pre-destined to fail. Whomever is introduced... will lack legitimacy and will be considered an accomplice to the bloody record of this regime and its criminal leaders," Pahlavi said.

Khamenei was Iran's top leader since 1989, developing a contested nuclear programme and confronting regional rivals led by Israel.

Mojtaba Khamenei, the son of Khamenei, is among the contenders to succeed his father.

Pahlavi said it made no difference if the next supreme leader were "Mojtaba or Hassan" – a reference to another potential contender, Hassan Rouhani, the former president who was considered a moderate within the system and championed diplomacy with the United States.

Pahlavi, who lives in exile in the Washington area, has voiced hope for mass defections. He has said that he wants to be a transitional leader before a referendum is called to establish a secular democracy.

He urged Iranian security forces to "hand over power immediately and without violence."

"Declare your allegiance to the nation's Lion and Sun Revolution, and contribute to Iran's stable and secure transition to a democratically elected national government," he said.

The lion was a symbol of the ousted monarchy while the sun has deep resonance in Iran's pre-Islamic Zoroastrian tradition. – Xinhua



A woman of the Iranian community in Romania holds an Iranian flag before the 1979 revolution with the Lion and Sun emblems, the Israeli flag and the US flag next to a picture depicting Iran's former crown prince and now key opposition figure Reza Pahlavi during a protest in front of the Iranian Embassy in Bucharest yesterday. Around one hundred participants held placards and chanted slogans in support of Israeli-US strikes on Iran and in support of the son of the last shah of Iran, Reza Pahlavi, the most prominent figure in the Iranian opposition in exile. – AFP

Israel warns citizens over Iran online recruitment attempts

JERUSALEM – Israel's police and domestic intelligence agency yesterday issued a warning over attempts by Iranian services to infiltrate and recruit Israelis online.

Israel, in coordination with the United States, began striking Iran on Saturday, killing supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and sparking a rapidly escalating regional war.

"The Shin Bet and the Israel Police reiterate their warning to the public against maintaining contact with Iranian intelligence elements online and carrying out security-related tasks at their direction," the two organisations said in a joint statement.

"Over the past year... attempts by Iranian intelligence elements to recruit Israelis via social

networks have intensified, for the purpose of carrying out missions aimed at gathering intelligence on strategic targets, the whereabouts of individuals and critical infrastructure," it added.

The statement said that efforts by "Iranian elements" to recruit Israeli citizens online were even taking place during Israel's current operation against the Islamic republic.

"In this context, the Shin Bet and the Israel Police are acting to arrest Israelis suspected of maintaining contact with Iranian intelligence elements," the statement said.

It added that since the start of strikes against Iran on Saturday, the Shin Bet and police had uncovered 16 such security-related cases. (More on page 12) – Xinhua

Israel's Economy Shows Resilience Amid Geopolitical Uncertainty

Statement by Amir Latif, Consul General of Israel in Hong Kong and Macau

Since the terrorist attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, the country has faced profound geopolitical uncertainty. Yet, despite these challenges, Israel's economy is not merely holding steady – it is demonstrating resilience. While global markets wrestle with volatility, the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange (TASE) recently recorded one of its strongest trading days in years, and the Israeli shekel showed surprising strength against a robust U.S. dollar. These developments highlight deep-seated investor confidence in Israel's economic fundamentals and cautious optimism that regional tensions may eventually ease as regional threats from Iran's would be removed.

On the first trading day of this week, the TA 35 Index surged by 4.6%, while the TA 90 climbed 5.1%, marking a significant rally. Insurance and Oil & Gas sectors led the charge, with gains approaching 8%. Individual companies such as G City posted double-digit increases, underscoring investor appetite. Simultaneously, the Israeli shekel strengthened by about 1.5% against the dollar, trading near 3.08 shekels per USD—a move that defied the global trend of dollar appreciation.

Israel has also demonstrated a proven capacity for rapid recovery. Following a sharp contraction in late 2023, GDP rebounded strongly in early 2024, echoing the resilience seen after the COVID 19 crisis.

Strong Economic Fundamentals:

Debt-to-GDP ratio: 68.6%, well below the OECD average of ~105%.

Foreign exchange reserves: Over \$230 billion, among the highest relative to GDP in the OECD.

Current account surplus: \$17 billion in 2024, reflecting financial stability.

Growth trajectory: GDP growth of 3.1% in

2025, with forecasts ranging between 4.0% and 4.9% in 2026.

Energy security: Domestic natural gas reserves provide a strategic buffer.

High-tech exports: Account for more than 50% of total exports, reinforcing Israel's global competitiveness.

Financial institutions remain cautiously optimistic. The Bank of Israel's steady interest rate policy has bolstered investor confidence, while analysts highlight Israel's positive momentum compared to challenges in other markets. Some investment managers advise maintaining exposure to Israeli assets, noting that a decisive resolution to regional threats could reduce Israel's risk premium, improve its credit rating, and lower financing costs.

The government's proactive stance has further instilled confidence. For example, extending war risk insurance for maritime and air cargo until March 2026, covering over \$1.1 billion in trade, has reassured exporters and importers alike. Meanwhile, regional trade flows hint at future opportunities: traffic through Jordan from Gulf states rose by 225% between 2020 and 2023, underscoring the potential for enhanced cooperation in a more stable Middle East.

The current geopolitical situation has posed economic and social challenges—defense expenditures have risen, and many workers have been drafted into reserve duty. Yet, Israel's economy continues to demonstrate exceptional resilience. The high-tech sector remains central, investor confidence is strong, and the prevailing outlook is one of cautious optimism. Significant growth opportunities are anticipated once stability returns, not only for Israel but for the broader regional and global economy.

US says attacks on alleged drug boats have spooked traffickers

DORAL, United States – The US campaign to hunt down and destroy boats allegedly bringing drugs from South America has been so successful it is now hard to find targets, Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth said yesterday.

The United States began targeting these alleged smuggling speedboats in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific in early September and has since destroyed dozens of them, with at least 150 people killed.

The attacks have drawn criticism that they amount to extrajudicial killings.

Hegseth hailed them as he spoke at a conference on fighting drug

cartels that was attended by officials from 18 Latin American countries.

“Last month, we went a few weeks without targeting a single boat. Why? Well, because we couldn’t find a whole lot of boats to sink,” Hegseth said.

“And that’s the whole point, is to establish deterrence from narco-terrorists who have been able to traffic almost unfettered,” said Hegseth.

President Donald Trump’s administration insists it is effectively at war with what it calls “narco-terrorists” operating in Latin America.

But it has provided no definitive evidence that the vessels it targets are involved in drug trafficking,

prompting heated debate about the legality of the operations.

International law experts and rights groups say the strikes likely amount to extrajudicial killings as they have apparently targeted civilians who do not pose an immediate threat to the United States.

Washington has deployed a large naval force in the Caribbean, where its forces have in recent months struck alleged drug-smuggling boats, seized oil tankers and carried out a stunning raid in which Venezuelan leftist leader Nicolás Maduro was captured and flown to New York for trial on drug trafficking charges.

–AFP



US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth speaks during the inaugural Americas Counter Cartel Conference at the US Southern Command Headquarters yesterday in Doral, Florida. The conference aims to address narco-terrorism with regional defense and security leaders from the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. –AFP

Michelangelo’s works hidden in ‘secret room’, researcher says



Italian researcher Valentina Salerno poses in front of a marble bust displayed inside the Basilica of Santa Agnese Outside the Walls after being identified by her as a work by Michelangelo Buonarroti after centuries without attribution, following a decade of archival research, in Rome on Wednesday. –AFP

Ella Ide

ROME – Renaissance artist Michelangelo ordered many of his artworks to be hidden by his pupils in a secret room to protect them for posterity, an Italian researcher claimed on Wednesday.

According to renowned art historian Giorgio Vasari, the Italian genius burned a large number of his own drawings and sketches before his death in Rome in 1564.

But researcher Valentina Salerno says she has unearthed unpublished archival documents that reveal a plot to squirrel away his works.

“One of these three unpublished documents I found in the archives speaks of a room” kept by students of the Michelangelo school, the origins of which “can be traced back” to the artist, Salerno told AFP on the sidelines of a press conference in Rome.

“Assets are hidden inside this room. These assets are locked away so tightly that they require a system of multiple keys, so that no one can access them without the permission of others,” she said.

Salerno was researching a book on Michelangelo when she came across a document that showed the artist had in 1550 joined the Brotherhood of the Most Holy Crucifix. Those close to him in his final years were members too.

Over a decade of research, she followed the document trail between a series of archives in the Vatican, Italy and European cities including Paris.

As part of what she called a “maniacal plan” cooked up by Michelangelo, his works were to be hidden “because otherwise it

would all end up with a nephew he detested”.

“The goal was to pass on to his poor, vulnerable, non-noble descendants the material to be able to continue studying, to transmit his art to future generations,” she said.

Those involved in the plan went on to form the famous art Academy of San Luca in the 16th century, she added. It still exists today.

Salerno believes the secret room designed to safeguard the artist’s creations was likely somewhere inside the Saint Peter in Chains church in central Rome.

Michelangelo bust

During her research, she also stumbled across a reference to a bust at the Basilica of Sant’Agnese, also in Rome, currently attributed to an anonymous artist.

She found documents attributing the white bust of Christ the Saviour to Michelangelo down the centuries.

In the 1930s it appears to disappear from documentation, only to reappear in the 1980s, attributed to a minor artist.

Italy’s cultural authorities later declared it to be a work by an unknown sculptor instead.

But Salerno insists the bust is a genuine Michelangelo, not just due to the paper trail, but also because it shares a striking resemblance to Tommaso dei Cavalieri.

Cavalieri was a young nobleman with whom Michelangelo became infatuated in his 50s.

Salerno’s work has not yet been peer reviewed, but she was a member of the Vatican committee for the celebrations marking the 550th anniversary of Michelangelo’s birth. –AFP

Conservative Anglicans press opposition to Church’s first woman leader

ABUJA, Nigeria – Conservative Anglican bishops who oppose the Church of England for the first time appointing a woman as its head said yesterday they had created a new body to lead them.

The Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) named Laurent Mbanda, the archbishop of Rwanda, as the chairman of the new council in Nigeria’s capital Abuja.

Sarah Mullally, a former nurse, is set to become the Archbishop of Canterbury, the spiritual leader of the Anglican Church which has a foothold in about 165 countries, on March 25.

While the nomination of the 63-year-old was hailed as a historic first, several archbishops from Africa criticised the idea of a woman leading the Church of England, the mother church of the 85-million-strong global Anglican communion.

Archbishop Henry Ndukuba, of the Church of Nigeria, said following her nomination in October that “the majority of Anglicans” did not want a woman as the head of their Church.

Nigeria has the second-largest Anglican community after England, with about 18 million members.

The Archbishop of Canterbury typically presides over major royal events such as coronations, weddings and funerals.

The new Global Anglican Communion has three leading members including Mbanda, 71, who had been the chairman of GAFCON since 2023, the body said in a statement.

The body also has a wider membership that includes clergy and lay members, it added.

GAFCON describes itself as “a global movement, gathering authentic Anglicans, guarding God’s gospel, growing orthodox leaders and generating missional resources.”

It voiced strong opposition when Mullally was named.

“Though there are some who will welcome the decision to appoint Bishop Mullally as the first female Archbishop of Canterbury, the majority of the Anglican Communion still believes that the Bible requires a male-only episcopacy,” GAFCON said at the time. –AFP

Vatican warns AI could lead to ‘social control’

VATICAN CITY – The Vatican on Wednesday warned artificial intelligence (AI) could lead to “social control” and “manipulation” and called for more focus on human relationships to counter the dehumanising effects of digital technology.

In a wide-ranging document with the Latin title “Quo Vadis, Humanitas?” (“Whither Humanity?”), the Vatican’s International Theology Commission said humanity was faced with “never before imagined risks” from tech.

“Today we are witnessing a loss of the sense of history and a reduction of experience to the fleeting moment,” the document said.

“Digital culture tends to... transform the living culture of memory and hope into a postmodern culture of a present closed in on itself.”

It said AI was creating a “hyper-connected” world with “an increasing acceleration of economic, political, social, and military dynamics that risk becoming uncontrollable and therefore ungovernable”.

“In such a world, human action itself becomes material to be analysed and shaped according to power or market goals that are not always transparent. Social control increases, as does the risk of manipulation,” it said.

It said relationships, particularly within families, were “a barrier against the spread of a homogenising globalisation, which does not always help to shape authentic bonds”.

The document was approved by Pope Leo XIV, who has repeatedly warned about the risks of generative AI.

In a message marking the World Day of Social Communications in January, Pope Leo said AI systems reflect the worldview of their creators and can reproduce biases.

He has also condemned the use of AI by the military, warning against delegating life-and-death decisions to machines.

The Vatican’s warnings come as generative AI makes leaps and bounds towards replicating, altering and manufacturing images, music and text to levels sometimes indistinguishable from human-made works. –AFP

Portugal mourns acclaimed writer António Lobo Antunes

Thomas Cabral

LISBON – Portugal’s government ordered a day of national mourning for writer António Lobo Antunes, internationally acclaimed for his work on the divisions in Portuguese society, after his death was announced yesterday at the age of 83.

A trained psychiatrist, Lobo Antunes wrote more than 30 novels dealing with topics ranging from Portugal’s battles in its former colonies to the hard-right dictatorship that ran the country and social ills such as drug addiction.

He wrote in an elaborate, metaphorical style that he called “controlled delirium”. His storytelling earned several awards, including the 2007 Camões Prize, the leading Portuguese-language literary honour. He was regularly cited as a possible Nobel literature prize candidate.

The eldest of six sons of a leading Portuguese medical professor, Lobo Antunes trained as a doctor and

served with the Portuguese army in Angola from 1971 to 1973.

He worked in psychiatry until his second novel, published in 1979 and translated into English as “The Land At The End Of The World”, saw his writing career take off.

Lobo Antunes eventually devoted himself to novels, poetry and commentaries from 1985.

The government ordered a day of national mourning tomorrow.

“António Lobo Antunes wrote all his work as a novelist, but also as a columnist, in a register of incisive tenderness, placing side by side the pain and failure of ordinary lives with political tragedies, excess and empathy,” President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa said in a tribute.

Married at least twice and the father of three daughters, Lobo Antunes beat cancer three times while continuing to write an average of one novel a year until recently. A journalist who carried out a series of interviews with Lobo Antunes said



Portuguese writer António Lobo Antunes looks on during a conference at the International Festival of Culture 2017 in Cascais, on September 30, 2017. Lobo Antunes, one of the world’s most widely read and translated Portuguese-language writers and a perennial favourite for the Nobel Prize in Literature, died at the age of 83, his publisher, Leya Group, announced yesterday. – AFP

he had been suffering from a form of dementia. – AFP

Spain denies US claim of military cooperation on Iran as rift deepens

Robin Bjalon

MADRID – Spain on Wednesday doubled down on its opposition to Washington’s use of its bases against Iran, after US President Donald Trump’s threats of trade reprisals over the spat deepened a rift between the NATO allies.

Spain’s Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez defiantly repeated calls of “no to the war” on Wednesday after the weekend US-Israeli strikes on Iran triggered the regional conflict, in his latest policy clash with Trump.

Just hours later, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said Madrid had “agreed to cooperate with the US military”, without providing details on what the cooperation would entail.

But Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares told Cadena SER radio shortly afterwards that “our position on the use of the bases, on the war in the Middle East, on the bombardment of Iran, has not changed at all”.

Trump had lashed out at Sánchez’s government on Tuesday, calling Spain a “terrible” ally and threatening to sever all trade with one of the world’s most dynamic developed economies.

Sánchez defended his position on Wednesday, saying his government’s position “can be summed up in four words: no to the war”.

“We will not be complicit in something that is harmful to the world and contrary to our values and interests, simply out of fear of retaliation,” he added in a televised address.

Spain is part of the European Union, which allows goods to move freely between its 27 countries. This would complicate any bid to

impose trade restrictions on a single member state.

“Trump’s words don’t always become policy. We will have to see if he follows through, and how,” said Ángel Saz Carranza, director of the Esade Center for Global Economy and Geopolitics, a Spanish think tank.

‘Responsible conduct’

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian commended Spain on X for its “responsible conduct in opposing the Zionist-American coalition’s flagrant human rights violations and military aggression against countries”.

French President Emmanuel Macron, European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen and European Council chief António Costa were among the allies rallying around Sánchez on Wednesday.

“The EU will always ensure that the interests of its member states are fully protected,” Costa wrote on X.

Sánchez had already found himself in US crosshairs for refusing to join NATO allies in a pledge to boost defence spending to five percent of GDP as demanded by Trump.

He has also fiercely criticised Israel’s war in Gaza and the US military operation in January that captured Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro.

US forces use the Rota naval base and Morón air base in southern Spain under an agreement signed in 1953 under the rightwing dictatorship of General Francisco Franco.

During the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Spain, then led by conservative prime minister José María Aznar, staunchly backed the United States by sending troops.

Spain’s participation in the Iraq war sparked huge street demonstrations

and many Spaniards blame it for the March 11, 2004 Madrid train bombings that killed nearly 200 people.

A branch of Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attacks and called for the withdrawal of Spanish forces from Iraq.

Rally his base

Sánchez, in power since 2018, has emerged as a prominent figure for Europe’s disillusioned progressives, who see him as one of the few remaining openly leftist voices in a continent increasingly dominated by right-wing politics.

His opposition to the use of the bases is seen by some analysts as an attempt to rally his supporters around an issue that unites the Spanish left.

The popularity of his minority government has taken a hit from a string of sexual harassment and graft scandals ahead of the next general election due in 2027.

Many on Spain’s right consider Sánchez’s opposition to Trump as motivated more by domestic politics than by a moral compass.

The head of the main opposition conservative People’s Party (PP) which tops opinion polls, Alberto Núñez Feijóo, accused Sánchez on X of using foreign policy for “partisan” purposes.

In contrast, neighbouring Portugal authorised the United States to “conditionally” use an airbase on the Azores archipelago in the Atlantic Ocean for the Iran strikes, Prime Minister Luís Montenegro told parliament on Wednesday.

The authorisation was granted as long as “these operations are defensive or retaliatory, are necessary and proportionate, and exclusively target military objectives”, said the conservative leader. – AFP

Cuba says working to restore power after big blackout

HAVANA – Cuban authorities said yesterday they made progress toward restoring power to end a blackout that hit two-thirds of the beleaguered communist island nation.

The grid that failed on Wednesday and left Havana and much of the country without electricity has now been reconnected nationwide and people should gradually see the power come back on, the energy ministry said.

“As of 5:01 this [yesterday] morning the national electrical system is reconnected,” the ministry said in a statement.

It said more generation units were being brought back on line so people would have power again. Several areas of Havana did in fact have electricity yesterday morning (local time), AFP observed.

Cuba’s electricity generation system is in shambles. Daily

power outages of up to 20 hours are the norm in parts of the island, which lacks the fuel needed to generate power.

The crisis in the country of 9.6 million inhabitants comes at a particularly tense time, and has become more acute since the US ouster of Cuba’s top ally, Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela, on January 3.

Maduro’s administration supplied about half of Cuba’s fuel.

After his capture, Washington imposed an oil embargo on arch-foe Cuba but later eased it, amid warnings from other Caribbean countries that it could trigger an economic collapse and make everyday people suffer unduly.

Still, President Donald Trump has maintained his blockade of sorts, and oil shipments from Caracas to Havana are in limbo.

– AFP



People hold a party with portable lights during a blackout in Havana on Wednesday. – AFP

US allows American Airlines subsidiary to operate flights to Venezuela

WASHINGTON – The US Department of Transportation on Wednesday authorised an American Airlines (AA) subsidiary to operate direct flights to the Venezuelan cities of Caracas and Maracaibo from Miami, two months after Washington deposed the country’s leader.

Envoy Air, a wholly-owned AA subsidiary, is authorised to operate the flights for a two-year period, after applying for the permit on February 13, the US Department of Transportation said in a notice.

American Airlines confirmed the development in a statement to AFP. The US-based airline suspended services to Venezuela in 2019, having operated there for more than 30 years prior.

Envoy will operate daily nonstop services to both Venezuelan cities from the southern US city of Miami, AA said, with no start date immediately announced.

The United States launched a military raid on January 3 to seize then Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro, killing more than a hundred people, according to Caracas.

Since then, US President Donald Trump has backed

Maduro’s deputy, Delcy Rodríguez, as interim leader.

Rodríguez has largely toed Washington’s line, opening up the country’s vast oil reserves to US investment and implementing some political reforms.

American Airlines said in January, weeks after the US operation, that it was applying for the resumption of direct flights to the Latin American country.

“By restarting service to Venezuela, American will offer customers the opportunity to reunite with families and create new business and commerce with the United States,” Nat Pieper, American’s chief commercial officer, said at the time.

US-Venezuela ties had steadily deteriorated under Maduro’s rule, which was marked by an authoritarian crackdown on dissent and stark opposition to Washington’s international policies.

The country had been under strict US sanctions under both Trump and his predecessor Joe Biden, but some restrictions – particularly around the oil trade – began to be eased after the US operation to oust Maduro. – AFP

Australia join S Korea in quarters of Women's Asian Cup



GOLD COAST – Australia demolished Iran 4-0 to join South Korea in the quarter-finals of the Women's Asia Cup on Queensland's Gold Coast yesterday.

After South Korea earlier had a comfortable 3-0 win over the Philippines, the Matildas joined them on six points in Pool A after the easy win over Iran.

South Korea, who knocked the Matildas out of the 2022 tournament, top the group on goal difference ahead of the final pool match against Australia in Sydney on Sunday.

"At the back of our minds that's always there," Australian midfielder Alanna Kennedy said of the 2022 result.

"But at the forefront is us building into this tournament - we want a better performance than we had tonight."

After not singing their national anthem in the opening match on

Monday, the Iranians took a markedly different approach yesterday, singing the words and saluting.

But from the kick-off it was clear the Australians were far too strong for their opponents, who resorted to time-wasting to try and disrupt the flow of the Matildas.

This led to seven minutes of stoppage time in the first half and 13 minutes at the end of the second.

Australia opened the scoring after just nine minutes when Amy Sayer put in what looked like a cross, only for it to loop over the head of goalkeeper Maryam Yektaei.

Manchester City's Mary Fowler doubled the score after 27 minutes with her 17th goal for the Matildas when Yektaei spilled the ball and Fowler poked it home.

Kennedy scored eight minutes later with a lovely strike from inside the box after being teed up by Sam Kerr, giving the Matildas a 3-0 lead at the break.

Australia would have expected to continue their scoring in the second period, but apart from Kennedy's second goal in the 58th minute, they had nothing more to show for their dominance.

South Korea earlier cruised into the final eight with a dominant 3-0 win over an outmatched Philippines.

The South Koreans, runners-up to China in 2022, scored two goals in the first half and one in the second to book their place in the final eight.

The Philippines tried to take the game to South Korea, but never really looked like scoring.

By contrast, the South Koreans looked dangerous every time they attacked, and were rewarded in the 12th minute when Jeon Yu-gyeong got the ball in the box, turned sharply and fired low past goalkeeper Olivia McDaniel.

They made it 2-0 three minutes later, Park Soo-Jeong finding space



South Korea's players celebrate their third goal during the AFC Women's Asian Cup Australia 2026 match against Philippines in Gold Coast yesterday. – AFP

outside the box and sending a left foot rocket past McDaniel into the top right hand corner.

The Philippines did well in defence to snuff out the South

Korean chances, but 16 minutes into the second half, Mun Eun-ju took advantage of a scramble in the box to volley home from close range and seal the match. – AFP



Manchester City's Spanish midfielder Rodri (right) scores the team's second goal during the English Premier League match against Nottingham Forest at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England, on Wednesday.

Manchester City's bid to win the Premier League title suffered a potentially fatal blow in a surprise 2-2 draw against lowly Nottingham Forest on Wednesday. Pep Guardiola's side twice squandered the lead at the Etihad Stadium as goals from Antoine Semenyo and Rodri were cancelled out by Morgan Gibbs-White and then Elliot Anderson. – AFP

Football shorts

Kane to miss Bayern game against Gladbach with calf knock

BERLIN – Harry Kane will miss Bayern Munich's Bundesliga match against Borussia Mönchengladbach with a calf injury, coach Vincent Kompany said yesterday.

The England striker, who has been an ever-present for Bayern this season, should be fit in time for the Champions League last-16 first leg at Atalanta next Tuesday.

"Harry Kane is out. He got a knock on his calf and hasn't recovered yet," Kompany said at a pre-match press conference ahead of today's game.

"It's just a knock, it's nothing serious over the long term, but we'd need maybe another a day for him to be involved.

"We're pretty relaxed. Of course we would have liked Harry to be involved, but these things happen..."

"Any time Harry isn't there, some of the boys will be hoping they can have their moment."

Bayern took a big step towards defending their Bundesliga title last weekend with a comeback 3-2 win at closest challengers Borussia Dortmund

to open up an 11-point lead.

Kane scored twice in that match to take his tally in all competitions this season to 45 goals.

The game will be played at 3:30 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time.

– AFP/MPD

Women's Africa Cup of Nations delayed two weeks before kick-off

PARIS – This year's Women's Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco, due to kick off on March 17, has been put back four months, the Confederation of African Football (CAF) said Thursday.

CAF said in a statement that it had decided to reschedule the tournament to July 25 to August 16 "in the light of certain unforeseen circumstances", without giving any details.

Some competing squads had already arrived in Morocco for the tournament which doubles as African qualification for the 2027 Women's World Cup with six slots at stake.

Morocco hosted the last men's AFCON, when Senegal beat the hosts in the final on January 18. The country will also co-host the 2030 men's World Cup with Portugal and Spain. – AFP

Real Madrid will 'keep fighting' in title race, vows Arbeloa



MADRID – Real Madrid will "keep fighting" as long as they mathematically have a chance of winning La Liga, after slipping four points behind Barcelona, under-pressure coach Alvaro Arbeloa said yesterday.

Los Blancos visit Celta Vigo today, hoping to move back within one point of Barcelona ahead of the reigning champions' match at Athletic Bilbao tomorrow.

Madrid lost their lead at the top of the table with a defeat at Osasuna a fortnight ago, before being humbled at home by Getafe last weekend to increase the scrutiny on Arbeloa.

"We're four points behind, not 18. This is Real Madrid. As long as we can mathematically fight, we will, and if there ever comes a time when we can no longer fight, we will still keep fighting,"

said Arbeloa, who replaced Xabi Alonso as coach in January.

"In the dressing room, we're aware that there's still a lot of the season left.

"We've had two consecutive league defeats. Of course, at a club like Real Madrid, defeat is always difficult to handle because of the expectations and the pressure, but right now the only thing we're thinking about is tomorrow's match."

Madrid have been hit badly by injuries in recent weeks.

Brazilian winger Rodrygo Goes joined Kylian Mbappe, Jude Bellingham and Eder Militao on the sidelines after suffering a serious knee injury against Getafe which will likely see him miss the World Cup in the summer.

Centre-back Dean Huijsen will also sit out the game at Celta through suspension.

"When you're winning and

everyone is playing well, it's easy to wear this shirt," added Arbeloa, who insisted that he would not "make excuses" due to the injuries.

"We need to show our true potential now. It's in moments like these that you see if we're worthy of wearing this shirt and this badge."

Real Madrid host Manchester City in their Champions League last-16 first leg next Wednesday.

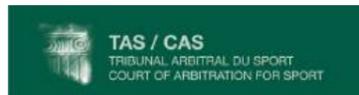
Mbappe has travelled to Paris for treatment on his knee injury and Bellingham is in London, with both hoping to recover in time to face City.

Arbeloa said that any decisions about the players' fitness would be taken "by the medical services of Real Madrid".

The game will be played at 4 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time and the Athletic Bilbao vs Barcelona game will be played at 4 a.m. Sunday morning Macau time.

– AFP/MPD

Banned players gain small CAS win in Malaysian passport scandal



LAUSANNE – Seven players banned for falsifying documents to play for Malaysia had their punishments slightly reduced yesterday by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), but the country's football association lost its appeal.

FIFA in December banned the players from all football activities for a year and fined them each 2,000 Swiss francs (2,2006 euros or US\$2,564), while fining the Football Association of Malaysia 350,000 Swiss francs.

CAS ruled the players could return to "football-related activities" and "can resume training with their clubs" but the year-long ban, backdated to September, remained

in place for "official matches".

In 2025, the FAM approached Hector Hevel, Jon Irazabal, Gabriel Palmero, Facundo Garces, Rodrigo Holgado, Imanol Machuca and Joao Brandao Figueiredo and said they could become international players if they became naturalised Malaysians.

FIFA started investigating after the players helped Malaysia beat Vietnam 4-0 in June 2025 in an Asian Cup qualifier.

World football's governing body said the naturalisations were obtained "using falsified documents" and none of the players had a parent or grandparent born in Malaysia. It said five of the applications were approved on the same day, June 3.

The FAM, whose executive committee members resigned en masse at the end of January, acknowledged its responsibility

for the fraud, explaining that "the players' role was limited to providing" documents, which they had "neither prepared nor altered".

Three of the players were originally Argentine, two Spanish, one Dutch and one Brazilian.

FIFA also converted three Malaysia friendly results last year - two of them wins - to 3-0 defeats.

A decision about Malaysia's status in the 2027 Asian Cup qualifiers now needs to be taken by the Asian Football Confederation.

"This matter will now be referred to the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee," the Kuala Lumpur-based AFC said in a statement.

AFC secretary-general Windsor Paul told Malaysia's The Star daily paper "it is our priority to get this resolved as quickly and efficiently as possible". – AFP



Ferrari's British driver Lewis Hamilton speaks at a press conference ahead of the Formula One Australian Grand Prix at Albert Park in Melbourne yesterday. - AFP

Hamilton vows 'no holding back' in his 20th F1 season

F1

MELBOURNE – Lewis Hamilton vowed there will be “no holding back” as he bids to improve on a bitterly disappointing debut year with Ferrari in what will be his 20th season on the grid.

The 41-year-old Briton, who has won a record 105 Grand Prix, will line up this weekend where it all began for him in Melbourne with McLaren in 2007 for what will be his 381st race.

The seven-time world champion failed to muster a single podium last year for the first time in his legendary career as he struggled to adapt to his new surroundings with the Scuderia.

But he is entering the new season in a positive frame of mind, taking to Instagram this week to reflect on his long career in the sport.

“Twenty seasons as an F1

driver. It’s hard to even grasp the reality of that number,” he said.

“It started with a dream. A dream some called ridiculous and said would never amount to anything. Despite that, the dream never changed, and I never stopped chasing it.

“There will always be people who doubt you, people who try to block you, but you can’t ever stop fighting,” he added.

“I’m forever grateful for the lessons, the quiet moments, the chaos, and the many people who helped me chase and achieve my dreams.

“I’m grateful for the doubters and for the ones who tried to knock me down, too. I’m still here, 20 years on, still standing, still hungry, still focused on the dream. No holding back.”

Every car on the grid this year has undergone radical alterations since the end of last season following dramatic regulation

changes to chassis, engines and aerodynamics.

It makes the season-opening race in Melbourne one of the most anticipated in years, given the uncertainty of what to expect.

Pre-season testing at Barcelona and Bahrain suggested that the big four - McLaren, Ferrari, Red Bull and Mercedes - would again dominate.

Ferrari team chief Fred Vasseur said they gathered “a great deal of useful information” in Bahrain and were confident of a better year ahead.

“Conditions at testing are never really representative and Melbourne will be the first real opportunity to assess how competitive we are compared to our opponents,” he said.

“As usual at the start of the season, there are a lot of unknowns and we will approach the weekend with focus and humility.” – AFP

7 countries to boycott Paralympics ceremony over Russia: organisers



CORTINA D’AMPEZZO – Organisers of the Milan-Cortina Paralympics confirmed yesterday that seven countries will boycott the opening ceremony in protest at Russian athletes being allowed to compete under their own flag for the first time since 2014.

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) said last month it would allow six Russians and four athletes from Belarus to take part in the Games under their national flags rather than as neutral competitors.

Russia and Belarus were banned from the 2022 Paralympics following the invasion of Ukraine, although they were permitted to compete as neutral athletes in the Paris Summer Paralympics two years later.

Following the IPC’s announcement, several countries, including Ukraine, said they would boycott today’s opening ceremony in Verona as a result.

“You will have seen also in the last 10 days news of some National Paralympic Committees (NPCs) who have decided not to come for political reasons and there’s been various numbers [reported],” IPC communications officer Craig Spence told a press conference in Cortina yesterday.

“I’ve seen numbers ranging from seven to 15. So let me be very clear on the NPCs who are not coming for political reasons. “We have Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine.”

Spence added the IPC “respect that decision” to boycott the ceremony.

With the curtain-raiser taking place far away from the competition sites of Cortina, Val di Fiemme and Milan, the IPC indicated that other countries would not have athletes present at the ceremony but insisted that was due to their decision to “prioritise athletic performance”.

“Canada, Great Britain, Germany, France, they’re not boycotting the ceremony,” Spence explained. “They’ve told us that they are not coming for performance reasons.”

With several events, including alpine skiing, starting on tomorrow from 0830 GMT, [4:30 p.m. Macau time] many athletes have elected to stay close to their bases.

Spence added that many countries informed the IPC last year that they would be unable to attend the ceremony at the historic Verona Arena.

“In November we were informed by several nations that they wouldn’t be able to come to the ceremony because they wanted to prioritise athletic performance and the IPC completely respects that,” he said.

“At the end of the day athletes have been training for this moment for many years and if they’re prioritising performance then we’re happy with that.”

The IPC said many nations have sent 12-second videos of their athletes, which will be “dropped into the opening ceremony”.

– AFP

India beat England in high-scoring T20 World Cup semi-final



MUMBAI – India clung on to beat England by seven runs in a thrilling T20 World Cup semi-final in Mumbai yesterday, despite Jacob Bethell’s superb 105.

After Sanju Samson’s scintillating 89 laid the platform for India to pile up a massive 253-7, England fell just short in what would have been a record chase, finishing on 246-7.

Phil Salt (5), Harry Brook (7) and Jos Buttler (25) fell early, but Bethell, aided by Will Jacks (35) kept England in the hunt.

The left-hander hit seven sixes and eight fours in his 48-ball thrash before his run out in the final over finally allowed India to celebrate in front of 35,000 jubilant fans in Mumbai’s Wankhede stadium.

India will face New Zealand in Sunday’s final in Ahmedabad as they attempt to become the first team to retain the trophy and the first to win it on home soil.

The hosts, having been asked to bat by Brook, earlier flayed England’s attack to all parts of the ground, hitting 19 sixes and 18 fours.

Samson signalled his intent with a four and six off Jofra Archer’s first over but was given a life on 15 when Brook dropped a simple chance at mid-off off Archer.

It proved a costly mistake as, helped by some ill-disciplined bowling, Samson raced to his half-century off 26 balls with another huge six as Liam Dawson’s first over was pummelled for 19 runs.

Ishan Kishan put on 97 from 48 balls with Samson for the second wicket before the left-hander holed out to Jacks off Adil Rashid in the 10th over to make it 117-2.

Samson powered on until Jacks returned to have him caught by Salt in the deep in the 14th over at which point India were 160-3.

Dube continued the onslaught with 43 off 25 balls with four sixes before being run out by Brook’s direct hit.

Hardik Pandya hit 27 off 12 balls late on and Tilak Varma 21 off seven to take India past the 250 mark.

Jacks was the pick of the England bowlers with 2-40 but the wayward Archer was plundered, taking 1-61 off his four overs.

– AFP

‘She’s coming back’: Djokovic predicts Serena return

Tennis

INDIAN WELLS – Novak Djokovic is convinced US tennis great Serena Williams will return to competition, and the 24-time Grand Slam champion is itching to see “one of the greatest athletes” back on court.

“I think she’s coming back,” Djokovic said Wednesday at the ATP/WTA Indian Wells Masters.

“I don’t know. I haven’t spoken to her, but I guess the sentiment is that she’s coming back. Where and how, singles, doubles, we don’t know, and if I’m in her position, I would hide it too.”

Williams, a 23-time Grand Slam champion, hasn’t competed since a third-round loss at the 2022 US Open.

But the 44-year-old mother of two re-entered the anti-doping testing pool in December and regained eligibility.

Initially she denied she planned a comeback, but in January she declined to rule it out, telling

NBC’s “Today” show: “That’s not a yes or a no. I don’t know, I’m just going to see what happens.”

Djokovic said players were buzzing at the prospect.

“Everybody is excited, and it’s definitely something that’s very highly anticipated,” he said.

Williams’s sister Venus, 45, accepted a wild card into the Indian Wells singles draw and will face France’s Diane Parry in the first round.

Djokovic suggested Serena could return for Wimbledon - where she is a seven-time singles champion.

“I pick that one as well as her comeback,” he said. “I don’t know. I think she might maybe play a doubles tournament or two with Venus. That would be nice to see, just from my point of view and tennis fans’, for sure.

“She’s one of the greatest athletes, really. It would be great to have her back too.”

Djokovic is seeded third in Indian Wells as he plays his first event since he fell to Carlos

Alcaraz in the Australian Open final, after toppling Jannik Sinner in the semis.

“For me that has been a phenomenal result,” the 38-year-old said. “I have proven to myself primarily and to others that I can still compete at the highest level and beat these guys.

“So my logic is why not keep going as long as I have that fire and flair and quality and also motivation to do that.

“There are objectives and goals that are always there. You want to win, so you want to get another title and get another Slam, hopefully,” he said. “I was close in Australia.”

Djokovic’s five Indian Wells titles are tied for the most with Swiss great Roger Federer.

But he hasn’t reached the quarter-finals since his last title run in 2016.

He’ll launch his latest desert campaign tomorrow against either France’s Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard or Poland’s Kamil Majchrzak.

– AFP

Berlin film festival chief to remain in job after Gaza row

BERLIN – The head of Berlin's international film festival will stay in the post despite controversy over a film director's anti-Israel remarks at the event, the German culture minister's office said on Wednesday.

Tricia Tuttle, a US festival programmer, film journalist and curator, had been under fire from some politicians after the comments by Syrian-Palestinian filmmaker Abdallah Al-Khatib, with some media reporting that culture minister Wolfram Weimer had sought to oust her from the job.

But after a meeting of the board of the state-owned KBB – the company that runs the Berlinale – on Wednesday, Weimer's office said in a statement that it welcomed Tuttle's willingness to "continue her work".

Angry rows over the Israel-Palestinian conflict have repeatedly rocked the Berlinale, held every February as Europe's first major film festival of the year.

This year, Khatib's comments at the closing ceremony accusing Germany of being complicit in "genocide" in Gaza provoked outrage from some German politicians.

Tuttle also faced criticism for posing for a photo with some of the team behind Khatib's film, "Chronicles from the Siege".

But Weimer on Wednesday said Tuttle had "put a great deal of energy into setting a new course" at the festival, which she has led for the past two years.

"I thank her for her willingness to continue on this path," he said.

"I welcome today's decision by the supervisory board to reaffirm its confidence in my leadership of the Berlinale," Tuttle said in a statement.

Weimer added that the board of the KBB had laid out recommendations for "strengthening" the festival, including a new code of conduct.

"The board has issued a number of recommendations, which we will carefully consider," Tuttle said.

Controversy surrounded this year's Berlinale almost from the beginning, after the jury president, acclaimed German director Wim Wenders, responded to a question about Gaza by saying cinema should "stay out of politics".

Heated debate about Wenders' comments followed, with award-winning Indian writer Arundhati Roy withdrawing from the festival and denouncing his remarks.

Tuttle received support from thousands of filmmakers after German tabloid *Bild* reported that Weimer was trying to remove her from the job.

– AFP, MPD



Berlinalde director Tricia Tuttle speaks during the Award Ceremony of the 76th Berlinale, Europe's first major film festival of the year, in Berlin on February 21, 2026.

– AFP

Voice coach to the stars says Aussie actors nail tricky accents

Oliver Hotham

SYDNEY – Geoffrey Rush, Rose Byrne, Cate Blanchett – voice coach Victoria Mielewska has trained some of Australia's most famous thespians in the delicate art of the accent and says actors from Down Under have a unique talent for getting it right.

Byrne, a native of the greater Sydney area, is vying for the best actress Oscar this month for her powerhouse role as an overwhelmed mother in "If I Had Legs I'd Kick You".

So uncannily convincing is her American accent that some have expressed shock that she is in fact Australian.

"She masters that American absolutely beautiful accent that she does," Mielewska, who worked with Byrne on the 2022 comedy "Seriously Red", told AFP at her home in Sydney's leafy north.

"She's worked quietly and beautifully for many years."

For Mielewska – whose company Creative Voice trains everyone from actors to business executives in speaking – teaching an actor an accent is much more than just an impression.

The actor must learn to really live in the physicality of the voice.

"I work in quite a vulnerable, free way," she explained.

"The ultimate goal is not to listen to an actor at work and not to listen to the accent, but for them to be able to work with it and through it – to get the truth of the work."

'Gym in your mouth'

To go American, Mielewska said it's all about getting the Rs and the vowels right.

"It's very intricate, an American accent," she told AFP, describing it as "very muscular".

"If I'm working with an Australian who is doing an American accent, I will say, 'You have to start going to the gym in your mouth'."



Australian voice coach Victoria Mielewska speaks during an interview with AFP in her home in Sydney on Monday.

– AFP

It's as much about where one's tongue sits in the mouth as it is about their seating posture, Mielewska explained.

A Midwestern twang is "a very feet on the ground, back in the heels of your boots type of accent", she said.

And what about the classic English "received pronunciation", long the go-to sound of the British ruling class?

"I'd get them to sit back in the chair... you actually feel that there's a lot of space between you," she said.

Australian actors can nail the US accent in part because Americans' natural way of speaking echoes the Antipodean approach to life – more relaxed and, in some ways, "lazy", Mielewska said.

"Australians can do American pretty well by and large, because we come from a fairly neutral place," she said.

"Australians can go from something that's kind of midline and relaxed and start to work with it, and the muscles respond in time."

Tongue twisters

It's not always so easy the other way round.

For years, some of Hollywood's biggest stars have endured mockery for mangled attempts at accents – from Don Cheadle as a Cockney in "Ocean's Eleven" to Leonardo DiCaprio playing a Rhodesian (modern-day Zimbabwean) in "Blood Diamond".

Some Americans, Mielewska

said, are unfairly maligned.

Meryl Streep's turn as wrongfully accused mother Lindy Chamberlain in the true story 1988 film "Evil Angels" ("A Cry in the Dark" in its US release) – and her often-misquoted line "a dingo took my baby" – has sometimes inspired ridicule in Australia.

But Mielewska said that, contrary to popular belief, Streep got it bang on – Chamberlain was born in New Zealand, and her accent is not typically Aussie.

Australian is also uniquely incompatible with the American lilt, she said.

That's because, Mielewska said, American actors need to "let go" and relax.

"What they're doing is surrendering their own accent and their own muscular habits of the way they speak," she said.

Some actors have shortcuts to get into a tricky voice.

Byrne has said she has a go-to phrase – "Patty hired 24-hour security for Katie" – when she finds herself struggling to summon the Yankee drawl.

She is now in the running to become the third Australian to win the best actress Oscar after Blanchett and Nicole Kidman.

Mielewska says the star – known for her humble and understated style – "comes from a very soulful, connected place".

"Of course, her work is going to be truthful."

– AFP

Marseille mayor opposes Kanye West gig over 'unabashed Nazism'

MARSEILLE – The mayor of France's second-biggest city Marseille said on Wednesday that US rapper Kanye West was "not welcome", after the music star known for his antisemitic rants announced a concert in June.

The 24-time Grammy winner has lost fans and business deals in recent years over racist or antisemitic outbursts, releasing a song titled "Heil Hitler" last May to mark the 80th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II.

The concert at the city-owned Vélodrome stadium scheduled for June 11 – for which the box office is not yet open – is West's only French date.

Socialist mayor Benoît Payan said the 48-year-old hip-hop star was

"not welcome" in the southern city.

"I refuse to let Marseille be a showcase for those who promote hatred and unabashed Nazism," he posted on X.

But local state authorities can only ban a concert under strict conditions, if statements at the event risk constituting a criminal offence and if public order is threatened, according to France's highest administrative court.

Organising agency Mars 360 told AFP that it had been very careful, inserting specific clauses into the concert contract "to ensure that no illegal remarks are made during the concert and that French law is fully respected".

Fabienne Bendayan, running mate to the right-wing candidate

in municipal elections later this month and former regional head of Jewish group CRIF, also contested the performance going ahead.

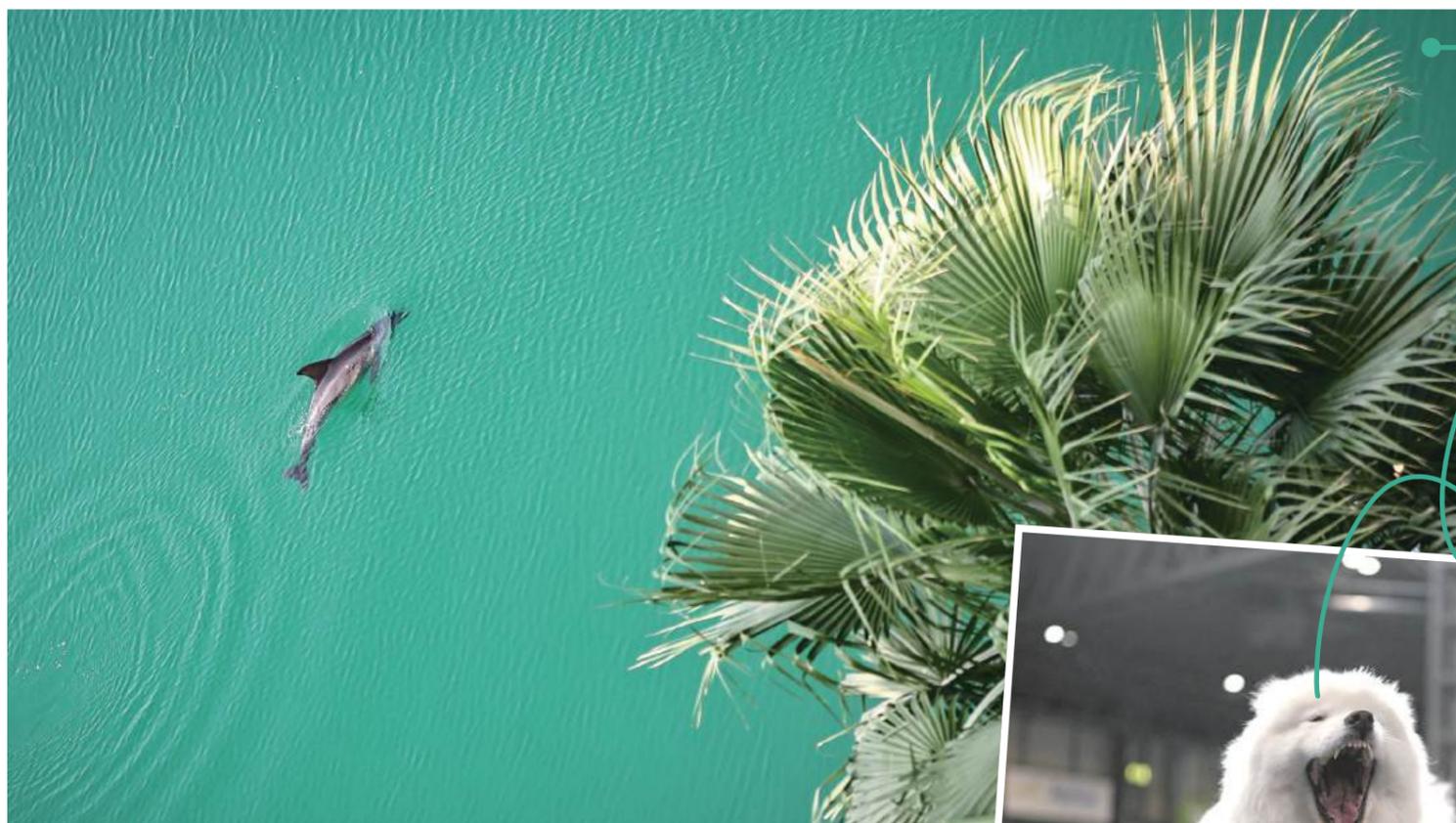
"Someone who openly proclaims his admiration for Hitler and espouses Nazi ideas cannot set foot on the stage of a city whose very soul is woven from diversity, remembrance and brotherhood," she said on X.

West, who has changed his name to Ye and struggled with bipolar disorder for years, in January said the disorder sometimes led to him having "disconnected moments" resulting in poor judgement and reckless behaviour.

In late 2023, West apologised to Jewish people for having said "I love Nazis".

– AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing -5°C~7°C	Manila 22°C~33°C	New York 4°C~8°C	Lisbon 9°C~13°C
Shanghai 4°C~12°C	Bangkok 24°C~35°C	London 8°C~14°C	Rio de Janeiro 23°C~30°C
Hong Kong 16°C~23°C	Tokyo 9°C~14°C	Frankfurt 3°C~16°C	Luanda 25°C~30°C
Taipei 15°C~19°C	Singapore 23°C~33°C	Vancouver 8°C~10°C	Maputo 25°C~34°C
Guangzhou 13°C~24°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~33°C	Paris 8°C~19°C	Dili 24°C~29°C
Nanjing 2°C~12°C	Jakarta 23°C~29°C	Moscow -4°C~0°C	São Tomé 26°C~33°C
Guilin 10°C~22°C	Seoul -3°C~7°C	Las Vegas 7°C~18°C	Praia 18°C~26°C
Xi'an 3°C~9°C	Sydney 22°C~28°C	Monte Carlo 13°C~18°C	Bissau 20°C~37°C

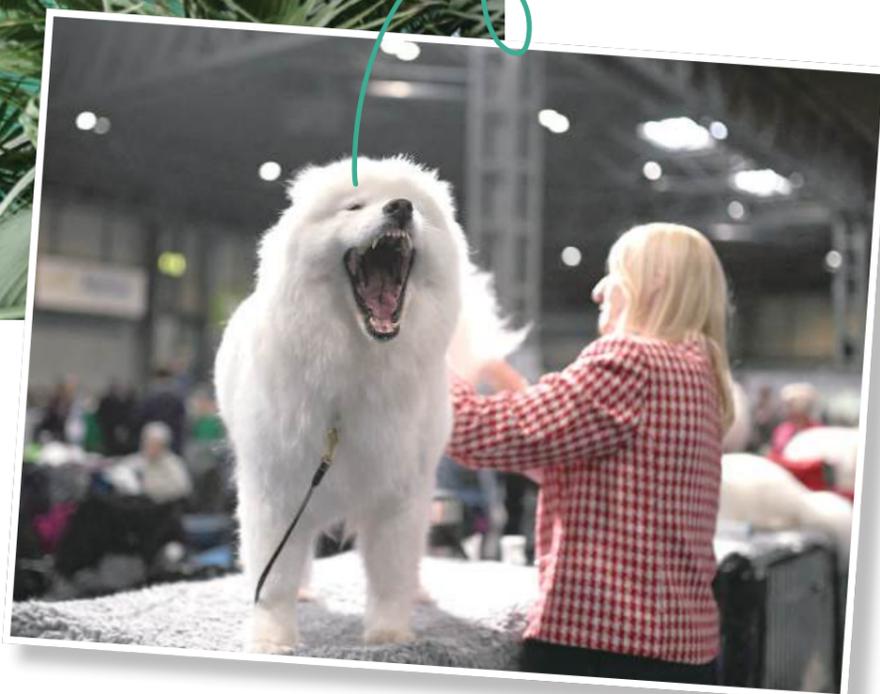


Lost the pod!

A dolphin is pictured off coast Palm Jumeirah in Dubai yesterday. – AFP

So tedious...

A Samoyed dog yawns as it is groomed on the first day of the Crufts dog show at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham, central England, yesterday. – AFP



72 mph adrenaline rush

Original large-scale mural created by world renowned artist Tristan Eaton at the "Fast & Furious: Hollywood Drift" First Look At Roller Coaster at Universal Studios Hollywood on Wednesday in Universal City, California. – AFP



Missing life around them

Men look at their phones as they sit in front of a flower shop in Hanoi yesterday. – AFP

Chew toys

Donald Trump-themed dog toys are pictured on the first day of the Crufts dog show at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham, central England, yesterday. – AFP



Light music

A light art installation is seen during the "Lumiere: The Art of Light" exhibition in Toronto, Canada, on Wednesday. The annual outdoor light exhibition is held here from February 16 to March 27. – Xinhua

