

# Ding urges Macau to advance economic diversification, Hengqin's development

Staff Reporter

During a meeting with the Macau delegation of deputies to the National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing on Saturday, Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang urged Macau to make solid efforts to promote its appropriate economic diversification and advance the development of the Guangdong-Macau In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

Macau has 12 deputies to the NPC.

During the ongoing fourth session of the 14th NPC, according to Xinhua, Ding attended a deliberation meeting of the NPC delegation from the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and a deliberation meeting of the NPC delegation from the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) respectively on Saturday morning.

According to Xinhua, Ding urged the two special administrative regions to proactively align with the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan, better integrate into and serve the nation's overall development, and make greater contributions to advancing Chinese modernisation.

During his meeting with the NPC deputies from Macau, according to Xinhua, Ding urged Macau to solidly advance its appropriate economic diversification, deepen the development of the Guangdong-Macau In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, effectively leverage the driving effect of industrial clusters, and advance its "One Centre, One Platform, One Base" campaign.

The Macau government's "One Centre,



Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang (centre) attends Saturday morning's deliberation meeting of the National People's Congress (NPC) delegation from Macau during the fourth session of the 14th NPC, flanked by State Council Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office (HKMAO) Director Xia Baolong (right) and local NPC deputy Lao Ngai Leong, who is heading the Macau NPC delegation. - Photo: Xinhua

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.

According to local Chinese-language

media reports, Ding also said during the meeting of the Macau NPC delegation that Macau and Hengqin need to jointly study on how to tackle the issues hindering the strong alignment of rules, mechanisms and systems between the two sides, with the aim of transforming President Xi Jinping's aspiration for Hengqin's development into concrete achievements.

## Ding's 5 expectations for Macau

According to the local media reports, Macau NPC deputy José Chui Sai Peng, after the meeting, said that Ding raised five expectations for Macau. The first is to proactively align with the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan, while the second is to support the chief executive and the MSAR government in strengthening executive-led governance.

Continued on p.6

## China will remain most stable engine of global economy: Wang Yi

BEIJING – China will remain the most stable engine of the global economy, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday.

Over the past five years, China's economy has grown at an average annual rate of 5.4 percent, accounting for around 30 percent of global growth, greater than the contribution of the Group of Seven combined, Wang said at a press conference on the sidelines of the ongoing session of the national legislature.

As the world's largest potential consumer market and the biggest emerging economy, China has better conditions supporting a positive long-term outlook and a stronger trend of sustainable growth, said Wang.

Noting that a country's greatness lies in serving the greater good, he said China will expand high-standard opening up and act not only as "the world's factory" but also "the world's market."

"China is strongly committed to supporting trade and investment liberalization and facilitation, keeping global industrial and supply chains stable and smooth, upholding the WTO-centered multilateral trading system, and defending a fair and open economic and trade order," Wang said.

The world can count on China to deliver new contributions to strong and sustainable global growth, he added. - Xinhua

## Head-of-state diplomacy is Chinese diplomacy's anchor: Wang Yi

BEIJING – Head-of-state diplomacy is the anchor of Chinese diplomacy, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday.

Under the guidance and stewardship of President Xi Jinping, China's diplomacy provides the most-needed stability and certainty to a world in turmoil and serves as an irreplaceable mainstay amid global turbulence, Wang told a press conference on the sidelines of the ongoing session of the national legislature.

The series of important initiatives and propositions put forward by President Xi demonstrate exceptional strategic foresight and broad global vision, and point out the

right way forward for the changes in the world unseen in a century, the minister said.

This year, President Xi will receive guests from around the world, host major diplomatic events including the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting and the second China-Arab States Summit, and make several important visits abroad, which are bound to further advance China's relations with the world in a positive direction, open up new horizon for building a community with a shared future for humanity, and enable the Chinese nation to make new contribution to world peace and development, Wang said. (More on pages 7 & 8) - Xinhua

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### Israel says struck Iran's 'space force' HQ

JERUSALEM – The Israeli military said yesterday it had struck what it described as the "space force headquarters" of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in Tehran. - Story on p. 10

### Portuguese PM says not to endorse US-Israeli military action against Iran

Portuguese Prime Minister Luis Montenegro said last week that Portugal was not involved in and did not monitor or endorse the US and Israeli military operation against Iran. - Story on p. 11

### Trump offers LatAm leaders US missile strikes to hit drug cartels

US President Donald Trump on Saturday urged Latin American nations to use military power against the "cancer" of drug cartels, offering to support them with US missile strikes targeting narco kingpins. - Story on p. 12

# World Cup 2026: football in a world under strain

Commentary by Manuel Silvério\*

The 2026 World Cup will be played in stadiums, but it will also be shaped by something that cannot be seen on the pitch: geopolitics. International sport has long tried to be a place where peoples meet. Yet in a world marked by renewed geopolitical tensions, major sporting events can no longer be viewed only as athletic competition. Mega-events have become a mirror of the state of the world. A first-of-its-kind World Cup: scale, logistics and protocol World Cup 2026 will not be “just another edition”. It will be the first tournament with 48 national teams, hosted across three countries – the United States, Canada and Mexico – with an unprecedented calendar and logistical footprint: 104 matches across 16 host cities. That scale also raises the bar for governance: cross-border coordination, security planning, immigration procedures, diplomatic sensitivities and protocol decisions become part of the tournament’s invisible infrastructure.

## Mega-events are no longer ‘only sport’

Today, hosting a major international event means managing far more than competition: it means dealing with diplomacy, security and a world that is increasingly unpredictable. Over several decades, I have had the opportunity to observe this reality from close range – first as a sports administrator in Macau, later as a Vice-President of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA), and also as President of the Organising Committee of three major multi-sport events held in the Macao SAR: the East Asian Games, the Asian Indoor Games and the Lusofonia Games. I also chaired the Media and TV Broadcasting Commission in different editions of the Asian Games, which allowed me to see how security, diplomacy and public perception have become decisive elements in mega-event delivery. These experiences show that major events are now real exercises in international

cooperation. Their organisation involves governments, national Olympic committees, international federations, transport operators, consular services, security forces, global media – and thousands of athletes and officials from dozens of countries.

## IOC, OCA – and FIFA

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) – and, in Asia, the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) – have repeatedly stressed that sport should preserve a space for encounter and dialogue between peoples, even in a world marked by political tensions and conflict.

FIFA, as the organiser of the World Cup, operates under the same pressure: protecting the universality of the game while meeting increasingly demanding security, protocol and operational requirements. Yet reality shows that the international context inevitably influences major events – and the area where that influence has become most visible in recent decades is security.

## Security: an integrated approach

Every major competition reflects its time. There were periods when the main concern was essentially logistics and organisation. In other phases, diplomacy and preventive coordination became more important. More recently, issues linked to identity, social sensitivities and polarisation have also required particular attention, because these events concentrate large crowds and attract massive global exposure. Mega-event security is no longer merely about access control or visible police presence. It has become an integrated system involving international cooperation, risk anticipation, perception management and the practical safeguarding of coexistence among different communities.

## When geopolitics enters everyday life

In a deeply interdependent world, distant events can have an immediate impact on

ordinary life. A personal example illustrates this well: I was recently deprived of a visit from my son, who was due to travel from London to see me in Macau. Changes in flight routes driven by international tensions prevented the trip. It is a small family episode, but it shows how geopolitics can quickly enter normal life.

## World Cup 2026: a different context, very close in time

Against this backdrop, the 2026 World Cup – with matches in the United States, Canada and Mexico – will unfold in a particularly complex international environment, not only because of its scale, but also because of the global climate in which it will take place. With only a few months to go before kick-off, the list of qualified teams already includes countries from regions under heightened tension. Among those already qualified are, for example, Iran and Jordan, alongside Japan, South Korea, Australia, Uzbekistan and New Zealand, and the South American qualifiers Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, Paraguay and Uruguay – in addition to the three hosts (United States, Canada and Mexico). This is not about politicising football; it is simply acknowledging that the tournament will bring together delegations, fans, media and officials from contexts that may carry heightened diplomatic and security sensitivities. And beyond teams, this World Cup will also be a global stage for football stars whose value is, in many cases, incalculable – economically, socially, symbolically and, at times, even politically.

## Protocol: the host ultimately decides

In practice, the host country always has the final word on protocol and access: visas and entry permissions, accreditation of official guests and seating at ceremonies, and the security conditions associated with delegations and dignitaries. In 2026, that discretion may be exercised more strictly

than in previous editions, combining concerns about internal security, foreign policy, immigration and public scrutiny. It is therefore realistic to expect adjustments to some traditional protocol habits. Situations that in the past were handled by precedent – such as the presence of heads of state or other high dignitaries at official ceremonies – may be assessed through more pragmatic criteria. In a global event under intense media attention, protocol stops being “only etiquette” and becomes part of risk and perception management.

## What fans may feel – and a personal plan revised

For fans, these dynamics can translate into concrete consequences: higher travel costs, a stronger perception of risk, a less relaxed atmosphere and more constrained interactions between participants of different origins. There may also be practical disruptions – route changes, access rules and security procedures – accompanied by tighter scrutiny in circulation and public spaces linked to the event.

I admit that, in this context, a personal plan I once entertained – attending the World Cup – has been reconsidered and, for now, set aside.

## Competing is not confronting

No one can predict exactly what situations may arise. Some may be unavoidable; others unexpected. But experience also shows that sport can still offer a singular space where nations meet, compete and respect common rules. If mega-events reflect the state of the world, perhaps sport can also remind us of the world we still want to build. And – with a touch of well-intentioned humour – may this World Cup help bring, at least in spirit, an end to these wars.

*\*Manuel Silvério is an independent sports analyst and regional development consultant, as well as a former public-sector executive with international experience, long dedicated to public policy and sports development.*

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## Chinese-Portuguese cultural event aims to promote integration

Ida Cheong

In order to foster integration between the Chinese and Portuguese cultures and strengthen mutual friendship, the third “Chinese-Portuguese Cultural Interaction Activity” was held yesterday.

The one-day event, themed Chinese-Portuguese cultural exchange, which took place at the Taipa Houses, featured a traditional costume experience area, Chinese and Portuguese craft & arts display and various performances such as a children’s fashion show with Chinese and Portuguese attire.

Lau Kam Ling, president of the preparatory committee of women in the business and industry sector in Macau for the commemoration of International Women’s Day, told reporters on the sidelines of the event that this year’s exchange activity was held at the Taipa Houses with the aim of attracting more tourists and residents to participate in and experience the two countries’ distinct cultures.

Lau underscored that the core objective of the event was to implement Macau’s development initiative of “One Centre, One

Platform, One Base,” emphasising Macau’s unique role as a hub for exchanges between China and Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs). She also noted the leadership role of women’s groups in the effort.

Lau added that her organisation has been arranging exchange programmes and trips for women from Macau’s industrial and commercial circles to the Chinese mainland, with the aim of facilitating business exchanges and visits to help them integrate into the nation’s broader development, strengthen unity among women

in the industrial and commercial sectors and continue to focus on issues related to women’s rights.

Lau noted in a speech that Macau successfully established a China and Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking Countries Economic and Trade Service Centre last year, and was named the “Best Asian Conference City” and “Best Convention Business City” for the third consecutive year. She said that these achievements underscore Macau’s vital role as a “connector” between China and PSCs and as a gateway for international exchange. ■



Participants pose for a group photo during yesterday’s “Chinese-Portuguese Cultural Interaction Activity” at the Taipa Houses yesterday. – Photo: Ida Cheong

### Published since Aug 2004

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- Wire services – AFP, Xinhua
- Chatbots: Poe, DeepSeek

### Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY PERIODS.  
FORCE 3 TO 4 EAST TO NORTHEASTERLY WINDS, OCCASIONALLY FORCE 5.  
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 60% AND 90%.



17°C~23°C

Source: SMG

# Nearly 1,300 students showcase their music talents at Macau Science Centre

Armindo Neves

A two-day event organised by the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) named “Exhibition of Macau School Bands” concluded yesterday, involving 1,300 students from 27 local schools who showcased their musical talents.

The event, which took place in the heart-shaped Tree Square in front of Macau Science Centre (MSC) was held in conjunction with the Macau Band Directors Association (MBDA).

The performances encompassed a variety of musical forms, including wind, string, Chinese traditional, and pop music, which aimed to offer residents and tourists a rich artistic experience, according to a DSEDJ statement.

The concert band of Sacred Heart Canossian College was led by teacher Yetta Cheng Ka U. She told the *Post* yesterday that due to their heavy academic workload, students find relief through music and enhance their teamwork and adaptability by collaborating across different grades. In the face of unexpected factors such as outdoor weather conditions, the students learn to make real-time adjustments, strengthening their resilience, Cheng said, who thanked her school for its ongoing support, which has enabled the music ensemble to thrive.

A student surnamed Lei, who heads the concert band, MC'd the outdoor event for the first time, while its deputy head, a fellow student surnamed Cheong, participated in a



Sacred Heart Canossian College students performing in the heart-shaped Tree Square in front of Macau Science Centre (MSC) in Nape yesterday.



Hou Kong Middle School (Primary Section) students performing in the Tree Square outside Macau Science Centre (MSC) yesterday. – Photos: Armindo Neves

clarinet quartet. Both pointed out that, in the runup to the event, both needed to balance administrative duties with their performances. They underlined that the event was prepared in a week.

Fang Teng, the instructor of the Chinese orchestra at Hou Kong Middle School (Primary Section), told the *Post* that the orchestra was established just over three years ago, evolving from various instrumental classes. He pointed out that the orchestra allows students to experience the joy of collaboration beyond monotonous

practice, boosting their confidence and adaptability.

The students have transformed from being nervous about performing to eagerly anticipating the chance to showcase their progress, which contributes to their personal development, Fang said.

A student surnamed U, who plays the yangqin\*, and a student who plays the erhu\*\* surnamed Si, said that, after three months of practice, they moved from initial anxiety to a sense of accomplishment and thanked their instructor for the encouragement. ■

\*The yangqin (扬琴; “raised strings”) is a traditional Chinese musical instrument, classified as a hammered dulcimer (a kind of zither). It features a rectangular wooden body and is played by striking strings stretched over the surface with small mallets. – Poe

\*\*The erhu (二胡; “two-stringed foreign instrument”) is a traditional Chinese musical instrument belonging to the category of bowed string instruments. It typically has two strings and a long neck, with no fingerboard. The body is usually made of wood and can have a resonator made from snake skin. – Poe

## Organisers unveil expanded festivities for Dragon Boat Races



This undated handout photo provided by the Sports Bureau (ID) on Friday shows participating teams competing during a previous SJM Macao International Dragon Boat Races

Kristina Vallesteros

The 2026 SJM Macao International Dragon Boat Races, set to take place on June 13, 14, and 19 at Nam Van Lake Nautical Centre, will feature a raft of cultural activities, performances, and food stalls alongside the competitions this year, according to details revealed at a press conference on Friday.

The Organising Committee held the press conference at Grand Lisboa Palace (GLP) in Cotai to introduce event details, the Sports Bureau (ID) said in a statement later that day. Attendees included Sports Bureau Acting President Lei Si Leng, SJM Managing Director Daisy Ho Chiu Fung, and representatives from co-organising bodies including the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) and the Public Administration and Civil Service Bureau (SAFP).

In her speech, Lei confirmed that cultural activities, performances, and food stalls will once again be featured this year to enrich the event and enhance the festive atmosphere. The organisers extended an invitation to athletes, residents and

tourists to join the celebrations.

Moreover, Ho noted in her speech that SJM has supported dragon boat competitions for over six decades. Ho said she hoped that the event would deepen cultural and sporting exchange across the Greater Bay Area (GBA) while consolidating Macau's standing as an international city for major sporting events.

Macau Dragon Boat Association President Vong Ka Hou highlighted in his speech that his group is committed to continuously enriching the event's content and enhancing its competitiveness and appeal.

The statement provided updated registration details. Teams that have successfully created an online account can register for specific categories from 10 a.m. today to 10 p.m. on March 15 on a first-come, first-served basis. Priority registration this year will be given to top-performing teams from last year's races. The team training period will begin on March 18.

One may visit the official website at [www.macaodragonboat.com](http://www.macaodragonboat.com) for more information. ■

## Chamber aims to promote joint development of youth, Macau & nation: JCI Hou Kong chief

Armindo Neves

Macau's Hou Kong Junior Chamber aims to promote the joint development of Macau, its youth and the nation as a whole, its president, Davii Chan Chong Kuan, said in a press conference on Saturday about its 2026 work plan.

The one-hour press conference was held at the Macao Daily News Building.

Hou Kong is one of Macau's ancient Chinese names.

Chan noted in a speech that the chamber has been serving Macau for 38 years, dedicating itself to cultivating young leaders and fostering international perspectives.

In 2026, according to Chan, in alignment with national and local development plans, it will launch innovative projects themed “Same Path, United Future.” The goal is to unite social forces, promote the shared development of youth, the city, and the nation, and support Macau's integration into the broader national development strategy, Chan said.

According to a statement released during the press conference, the chamber will launch several “innovative initiatives” this year.

The statement said that the initiatives include the “VOYAGE OF BUSINESS” series of activities focused on the IP economy, which will pair young creators with businesses through design competitions to help bring their creative ideas to fruition.

In the realm of social affairs, the “POSITIVE AGEING MACAO” programme will be held for the sixth year, fostering empathy and interaction between young people and the elderly to bridge generational gaps, the statement said.

The statement pointed out that international engagement is a key priority this year. The chamber will organise members to participate

in the 2026 JCI ASPAC\* Niigata, Japan in June, and the 2026 JCI World Congress in Clark, Philippines in November. In July, the Chamber will host the Junior Chamber International Chungli from northern Taiwan for a twinning visit to Macau, followed by an exchange and study trip to China's Taiwan region in August, the statement said.

In the area of member training, the statement also said that a workshop and seminar will be introduced, adopting a “learning by doing” approach to enhance project management and planning skills. For leadership development, the “Leaders Academy” will continue to operate, focusing on cultivating participants' strategic communication, teamwork, and resilience skills, the statement said.

Chan told reporters on the sidelines that the design competition is currently in the planning stages, with a public recruitment drive for approximately 20 participants expected in May, adding that legal experts will also be invited to provide insights on intellectual property protection. ■

\* Junior Chamber International Asia-Pacific



Hou Kong Junior Chamber President Davii Chan Chong Kuan speak to reporters before the chamber's press conference at the Macao Daily News Building on Saturday. – Photo: Armindo Neves

## ABOUT The Young Post

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



## From practice to podium: Pui Ching robotics team marks global success in Brazil

SIC Angel Lin Sin Chi (連善知)

Instructors: Sandra U Cheng Man, Kelly Ka Ka Chong, Rachel Tou Wing Sze

The Robotics Team from Pui Ching Middle School won third prize in the RoboCup 2025\* competition held in Brazil in July last year, making history as the first high school in the world to receive this award.

Competing against around 2,000 participants from more than 40 countries, including university students and researchers, the robotics team from Pui Ching Middle School was one of the youngest teams.

Team member Rayson Wu Iat Long said that the team has been training for over four years. Despite competing against opponents with far more advanced robots and larger budgets, as well as facing strict time and attempt limits, their initial goal was simply to gain experience. To their surprise, they advanced to the second round and performed exceptionally well.

Their teacher, Lam Kin Un, acknowledged the difficulty of balancing the demanding preparation for the competition with the students' academic pursuits. He noted that students today face significantly more academic pressure and extracurricular activities, making it difficult for them to find spare time to develop their interests. Lam emphasised, "To motivate them, we must first lead by example and set a good model. Once they have that motivation, everything will go more smoothly and they will come up with more new ideas."

Now, with valuable experience and surprising advancements under their belts, they aim to compete again at RoboCup 2026 in South Korea. Their goal is to improve their robot, strengthen teamwork, and better prepare for future challenges, proving that perseverance truly can take a team from practice to the podium.

The RoboCup competition, the largest international annual competition for autonomous service robots, is incredibly challenging. The team's robot must operate completely autonomously in a realistic home environment, facing changing lighting effects, moving people, and unexpected obstacles. It needs to use sensors, process voice commands, and navigate like a human to complete tasks safely and smartly. It also has to finish common housework tasks, such as understanding voice instructions, finding and carrying objects, opening doors, and greeting guests – all testing whether the robot can genuinely help people in daily life.

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*This text was provided to the Post by Pui Ching Middle School.*

*\*According to its official website, the RoboCup 2025 was held in the city of Salvador from July 15 to 21.*



Photos provided by Pui Ching Middle School

## IC holds trial kids' mini karting track event in Cotai, plans more

Ida Cheong

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) launched a kids' temporary mini karting track at the Macau Outdoor Performance Zone in Cotai yesterday, which ran from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

The bureau said in a statement that, based on the results of yesterday's trial operation, it aims to expand the functional use of the venue and announce the official opening arrangement in due course.

IC Deputy Director Cheang Kai Men told reporters yesterday that both the order and safety during yesterday's trial run have been ideal, so that his bureau plans to open it every weekend and public holidays.

The mini karting track is designed for children aged 2 to 8 and features a mini track and kid-sized four-wheeled vehicles, attracting on its launch day around 500 parents and children to participate, the

statement noted, adding that through the parent-child activity, families can experience the joy of sport and enhance family interaction.

### 3x3 court

Meanwhile, a three-a-side basketball court (3x3 court) will also be added to the Outdoor Performance Zone for public use in the future. Both the three-a-side basketball court and the mini karting track will be available to the public when no performances are scheduled there, aiming to improve the flexibility and overall benefits of the large-scale venue. The bureau is currently conducting relevant preparatory work for the additions, the statement added.

Further details on the opening of the 3x3 court and the mini karting track will be announced on the website [www.icm.gov.mo/outdoorvenue](http://www.icm.gov.mo/outdoorvenue). ■



Children participate in the trial kids' mini karting track event at the Macau Outdoor Performance Zone in Cotai yesterday. — Photo courtesy of TDM.

## 45<sup>th</sup> Macao Green Week opens with focus on eco-conservation



This handout photo provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) on Saturday shows Chao Wai Ieng, chairman of the Administration Committee on Municipal Affairs of IAM, addressing the 45<sup>th</sup> Green Week in Seac Pai Van Park in Coloane on that day.

### Khalel Vallo

The 45<sup>th</sup> Macao Green Week officially began on Saturday with an opening ceremony in Seac Pai Van Park in Coloane, bringing together government officials, organisations and members of the public to promote environmental protection and ecological awareness, according to a statement by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) that day.

The ceremony, held at 3 p.m., was officiated by several guests including Wong Sio Chak, secretary for Administration and Justice; Du Weimin, director of the Department of Office Work of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Macao SAR; Cheng Lei, deputy commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Macao SAR; Shao Chungui, chief of staff of the People's Liberation



This handout photo provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) yesterday shows members of the People's Liberation Army Macao Garrison (PLA) and locals maintaining trees in hilly woodlands in Coloane.

Army Macao Garrison (PLA); and Chao Wai Ieng, chairman of the Macau Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM), the statement said.

In his speech, Chao highlighted Green Week as an important annual event dedicated to ecological conservation in Macau, the statement said, adding that he thanked various sectors of civil society for supporting the city's greening efforts and noted that the bureau has continued to expand and improve urban green spaces, promote nature-themed facilities and strengthen ecological education, including the protection of ancient and valuable trees.

Following the ceremony, guests visited environmental protection booths and workshops set up by organisations from Guangzhou, Shenzhen, the Guangdong-Macao

In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, Suzhou, Hong Kong and Macau, the statement said, adding that they also toured newly built facilities in the park, including its Pavilion of Amphibians and Reptiles, Aviary and Butterfly-Friendly Garden.

According to the statement, more than 100 soldiers of the local PLA garrison and residents also joined tree maintenance activities in nearby hilly woodland, contributing to local ecological conservation.

This year's Green Week runs from last Saturday to this coming Sunday, featuring over 40 nature-themed activities, including eco-tours, birdwatching, tree conservation programmes and family-friendly events aimed at raising public awareness about protecting the natural environment. ■

## Chefs discuss heritage & community through 'Recipes with a Hope' at Macau Literary Festival

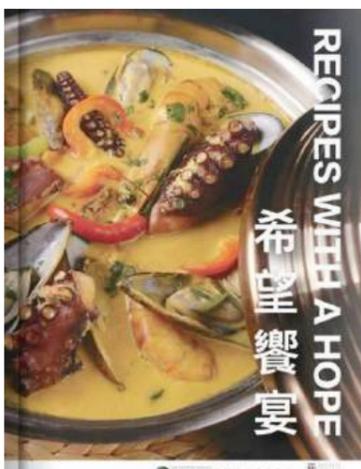
Khalel Vallo

The 15<sup>th</sup> Macau Literary Festival – The Script Road kicked off on Thursday in Casa Garden, with a wide-ranging programme of literature, films, art and music until this Sunday.

Chefs and food advocates gathered yesterday afternoon to discuss "Recipes with a Hope", a collaborative Chinese-English-language cookbook celebrating the Macanese community's culinary heritage, during a session at the festival.

The session featured chefs and contributors including André Lai, Sónia Palmer, Daniel Lai (黎浩然) and Florita Alves, who shared their experiences in cooking and preserving Macanese cuisine\*. The project was initiated by the Association of Rehabilitation of Dependencies of Macau (ARTM) President Augusto Nogueira and brings together recipes designed to be accessible for home cooks and students.

André Lai said the book



This image downloaded from the International Institute of Macau (IIM) yesterday shows its "Recipes with a Hope" book cover.

was the result of a "meaningful collaboration" among chefs who share a commitment to community engagement. "It was a great collaboration," he said, noting that the initiative also involved activities where students were invited to practise recipes and learn culinary skills.



Chef André Lai (second from left) addresses yesterday's "Recipes with a Hope" talk session during the 15<sup>th</sup> Macau Literary Festival – The Script Road in Casa Garden, alongside chefs (from left to right) Sónia Palmer, Florita Alves and Daniel Lai (黎浩然). — Photo: Khalel Vallo

Meanwhile, Alves, who participated in the collaboration, highlighted the community aspect of the cookbook. "It's a very interesting project, with recipes from several chefs that students can make at home," she said.

Moreover, Palmer reflected on decades of experience in Chinese and Macanese cuisine and the importance of passing knowledge to younger generations. "Many people ask for my mother's (Dona Aida, the late doyenne of Macanese cookery)

recipes, and I always like to teach those who show interest," she said, adding that she hopes Macanese cuisine will continue to grow and endure.

In addition, Daniel Lai noted that hotels mainly serve international visitors, which influences the types of dishes offered. "Most hotel customers are non-locals, so naturally the menus focus on what they expect," he said, adding that if hotels opened too many restaurants serving local cuisine, "it wouldn't

be fair to local restaurants and could affect their business".

The chefs agreed that promoting Macanese cuisine requires collaboration, education and storytelling. ■

\* Macanese cuisine is a unique centuries-old fusion of Portuguese, Malay, Cantonese and other culinary traditions, such as from Africa and India, reflecting Macau's history as an entrepôt. It is considered by food writers to be one of the world's oldest existing Eurasian fusion cuisines. — MPD

## Ding urges Macau to advance economic diversification, Hengqin's development



Central People's Government Liaison Office in MSAR Director Zheng Xincong (third from right) attends Saturday afternoon's meeting of the NPC delegation from Macau, at Beijing Hotel. — Photo courtesy of TDM

Continued from p.1

Ding's third expectation, according to the reports, is for Macau to solidly promote its appropriate economic diversification, while the fourth is to firmly safeguard national security and Macau's social stability. Ding's fifth expectation is for Macau to strengthen the local forces promoting patriotism and love for Macau.

Macau NPC deputy Vong Hin Fai told local Chinese-language media after the meeting that Ding's expectations indicate that the central authorities are paying closer attention to the development of the two special administrative regions and raising higher requirements for them.

Macau NPC deputy Ng Siu Lai told local Chinese-language media after the meeting that Ding acknowledged the achievements that Macau has made in its social services, particularly those for the elderly and children. Ng also quoted Ding as saying that both Hong Kong and Macau need to further enhance their awareness of risk prevention concerning national security.

Ng also quoted Ding as saying

that national security is not limited to the realms of diplomacy and military affairs but is also integrated into all aspects of residents' daily lives and that safeguarding security across various social sectors requires the broad participation and joint efforts of all residents.

### Liaison chief expects upgraded mainland-Macau cooperation

Meanwhile, during a separate meeting of the Macau NPC delegation on Saturday, which was held in the afternoon, the director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in MSAR, Zheng Xincong, said that the nation's development plan for 2026 provides significant guiding importance for Macau in promoting its appropriate economic diversification through technological innovation, according to the local media reports.

Zheng also said he expects the Ministry of Commerce to continue advancing the upgrading of cooperation between the Chinese mainland and Macau, based on the development positioning of

"Macau + Hengqin", and optimise CEPA (Mainland and Macau Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement) policies to reduce burdens and restrictions on enterprises from Macau.

### Principal official voice support for 'two sessions'

Meanwhile, Macau's nine principal officials, chief public prosecutor, as well as Legislative Assembly (AL) President André Cheong Weng Chon and Court of Final Appeal (TUI) President Song Man Lei have respectively issued statements voicing their support for the ongoing fourth session of the 14<sup>th</sup> NPC and the ongoing fourth session of the 14<sup>th</sup> National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).

The annual sessions of the NPC and the CPPCC National Committee are known as the nation's "two sessions".

In their respective statements, they also vowed to advance their work in compliance with the spirit of the "two sessions". ■

## 'Mulan' dance drama shows to take place at Macau Cultural Centre

Rui Pastorin

The dance drama "Mulan" by the award-winning Ningbo Performance & Arts Group will take to the stage at the Macau Cultural Centre's (CCM) Grand Auditorium on the evenings of March 27 and 28, with tickets now available.

According to a Friday statement by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), the production, directed by Zhou Liya and Han Zhen (aka "twin stars of Chinese Dance"), has won many awards including the China Dance Lotus Award and has toured globally. The group, meanwhile, is the recipient of various national awards.

Combining dance, martial arts, drama and technology, the production is about the legendary story of Mulan\* and depicts her heroic endeavour. It centres on filial piety, loyalty, courage and love, the statement said.

Meanwhile, quilling\*\* and clay modelling workshops are set to take place for participants aged six and above, with sessions set to be hosted at Lou Kau Mansion. Moreover, at The House of Macao Literature, the "Mulan" Ethnic Dance Costume Dress-Up Experience Workshop will be held for children aged

between four and eight years old.

One can find more details on their Macao One account ([activity.mo.gov.mo/activity-h5/activity-list-web](https://www.macao.gov.mo/activity-h5/activity-list-web)).

The upcoming shows, scheduled to start at 7:30 p.m. on both nights, are presented as part of the "1st Chinese Culture Performances Season" that has been on since November last year and concludes this month. In that period, the statement said, the performance season presented 37 premium performances, exchanges and outreach activities and reached over 10,000 people.

Programme details are also on [www.icm.gov.mo/ccps](https://www.icm.gov.mo/ccps). ■

\*Mulan is a legendary Chinese figure, known for her story of bravery and honour. Traditionally depicted in Chinese folklore, she disguises herself as a man to take her ageing father's place in the army, fighting against invaders. — Poe

\*\*Quilling, also known as paper filigree, is an art form that involves rolling, shaping, and glueing strips of paper to create decorative designs. This technique allows for intricate patterns and three-dimensional shapes, often used in cards, artwork, and crafts. — Poe



This photo provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) shows a scene from the upcoming dance drama "Mulan" by the Ningbo Performance & Arts Group.

## Workshop gathers curious minds to learn about Nüshu



Pang Shengwen guides participants in the Nüshu workshop yesterday afternoon at Casa Garden. — Photos: Rui Pastorin



This photo shows Nüshu characters.

Rui Pastorin

A glimpse into Nüshu (女书; "women's script"), a unique syllabic script created and used entirely by women, was provided through the workshop "Nüshu: Learning how to write the secret language of women" at Casa Garden yesterday afternoon.

Gathering a group of participants, the workshop was held as part of the "15<sup>th</sup> Macau Literary Festival – The Script Road" and coincided with International Women's Day yesterday. Leading the workshop was Pan Shengwen, one of the students of a Nüshu transmitter\* from a dedicated museum in the Chinese mainland, she told the *Post* after yesterday's event, introducing the language to keen participants of different backgrounds.

Nüshu was developed by rural women in the Xiao River valley of Jiangyong county, Hunan province, mainly taught by mothers to daughters and practiced for fun among sisters and friends, according

to an article on the UNESCO Courier website.

Wikipedia notes that Nüshu is a phonetic script with around 600–700 characters, each representing a syllable. It allowed women to express their thoughts and connect within a supportive community. Typically, groups of three or four unrelated young women would pledge friendship through letters and songs in Nüshu, Wikipedia pointed out, adding that women were typically not taught to read and write the mainstream Chinese script. It likely peaked during the late Qing Dynasty (1644–1911).

Pan, who has been learning about the language for four years, said she first heard about the culture behind it over the internet. She described Nüshu and its related works to be inspiring, inclusive and empowering.

Presenting this language to yesterday's workshop participants, Pan said it was showcased through three sections, namely offering

a basic introduction and history, engaging in the creation of related works, and exploration through song.

Moreover, while Nüshu was a language used exclusively by women, Pan said that with the development of times, it had also garnered interest from many men, who have shown willingness to join workshops, being welcome to learn more.

Following yesterday's workshop, a screening of the 2022 Chinese documentary film on the language titled "Hidden Letters" was held in the Casa Garden Auditorium.

The 15<sup>th</sup> literary festival continues through Sunday, with a raft of programmes featured in its schedule from book presentations to concerts. For more details, one can visit <https://www.facebook.com/macaulitfest/>. ■

\*To preserve its heritage, a Nüshu museum was opened in 2002, and "Nüshu transmitters" were designated in 2003, Wikipedia points out.

# Wang Yi reaffirms China's support for peace, multipolarity as new conflicts flare

BEIJING – China's top diplomat yesterday reaffirmed the country's role as a vital force for world peace, stability and justice, calling for an immediate ceasefire in the Middle East and proposing that China and the United States focus on win-win cooperation.

Meeting the press on the sidelines of the annual session of the national legislature, Foreign Minister Wang Yi remarked on the Iran situation with a call for an immediate stop to military operations and for all sides to "return to the negotiating table as quickly as possible."

Middle Eastern affairs should be determined by regional countries independently, said Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee.

"Plotting color revolution or seeking regime change will find no popular support," he said.

On China-US ties, Wang said 2026 is a "big year" for bilateral relations, noting that "the agenda of high-level exchanges is already on the table."

"What the two sides need to do now is to make thorough preparations accordingly, create a suitable environment, manage the differences that do exist, and remove unnecessary disruptions," Wang said.

"Neither side can remodel the other, but we can choose how we want to engage, that is, to commit to a spirit of mutual respect, to hold the bottom line of peaceful coexistence,

and to strive for the prospect of win-win cooperation," he said.

The foreign minister hailed China-Russia relationship, saying it has "stood rock-solid against all odds."

The China-Russia strategic partnership of coordination has been based on equality, respect and mutual benefit since day one, which represents the direction of a new type of major-country relations, he said.

On China-Europe ties, Wang said China consistently believes that Europe should naturally be a pole in a multipolar world, and that Europe is a key partner in China's modernization drive.

Noting that China and Europe are mutually complementary, he said, "Interdependence is not a risk; intertwined interests are not threats; and openness and cooperation will not weaken economic security, but building walls and barriers will only lead to self-isolation."

On China-India ties, Wang suggested the two countries uphold good-neighborliness and friendship and focus on development.

"We must maintain the correct strategic perception of each other as partner rather than rival, and opportunity instead of threat," he said.

Wang said the future of China-Japan relations "hinges on Japan's choice."

Noting that last year marked the 80th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, Wang said Japan should have deeply



Foreign Minister Wang Yi, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, waves after a press conference on China's foreign policy and external relations on the sidelines of the fourth session of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing yesterday. — Xinhua

repented of the wrong path it chose, including its brutal invasion and colonization of Taiwan. However, the current Japanese leader claimed that a Taiwan contingency would constitute a "survival-threatening situation" for Japan to exercise the so-called "right of collective self-defense."

"Since Taiwan affairs are purely China's internal affairs, what gives Japan the right to interfere with them? Why is Japan entitled to invoke self-defense if anything happens in China's Taiwan region?" he asked.

A strong China with 1.4 billion people will never allow anyone to justify colonialism or reverse history's verdict on aggression, Wang said.

## TOWARD A MULTIPOLAR WORLD

At the press conference, Wang highlighted the significance of the Global Governance Initiative (GGI) and the building of a community with a shared future for humanity in an increasingly turbulent world. He also called for upholding, not challenging, the central role of the United Nations (UN).

"China will never take the beaten path of seeking hegemony as its strength grows, nor do we subscribe to the logic that the world can be run by major countries," Wang said.

Wang said China's proposal is to build an equal and orderly multipolar world. "This should be the common

responsibility of all countries."

In particular, the Global South has become a key driving force in promoting a multipolar world, he said, calling for enhancing the voice and representation of Global South countries in the UN.

On China's relations with Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries, Wang said LAC countries should make their own decision in choosing friends.

"We never engage in geopolitical schemes, nor interfere in other countries' internal affairs, nor ask others to pick sides," he said. "Cooperation between China and LAC countries does not target any third party and should not be subject to interference by any third party."

On China-Africa ties, Wang said the friendship has withstood the test of changing international circumstances to demonstrate strong vitality. This year, China-Africa relations will see many new developments, including the implementation of zero-tariff access for 100 percent of African imports starting on May 1.

The 33rd Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting will be held in Shenzhen in November. This marks China's third time hosting the event, following Shanghai in 2001 and Beijing in 2014.

Wang said China, as a good host, will work toward the goal of translating the vision and blueprint for building an Asia-Pacific community into actions and reality. — Xinhua

## Kenya grants visa-free entry to Macau SAR passport holders

Kristina Vallesteros

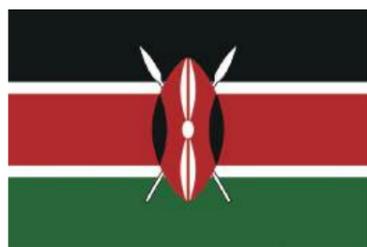
Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) passport holders can now enter Kenya visa-free for a stay of up to 90 days per entry upon completing certain requirements.

According to a statement issued on Friday by the Identification Services Bureau (DSI), Macau passport holders must now obtain an Electronic Travel Authorisation\* (eTA) before travelling to Kenya.

The statement said that the Macau government received notification from the Embassy of the Republic of Kenya in Beijing regarding the new entry measures. All travellers, including Macau passport holders, are required to apply for the eTA prior to departure.

Once approved, travellers can enter Kenya visa-free for a maximum stay of 90 days per entry, the statement noted. Applications and further details are available on the official Kenya eTA website.

The bureau reminded residents that entry policies of various countries may change without notice. Travellers are advised to



This image downloaded from Wikipedia last night shows the flag of Kenya.

check official government websites or consult relevant embassies before their trip, and to prepare all required documents in advance to avoid travel disruptions.

For information on visa-free access or visa-on-arrival arrangements for MSAR travel document holders, residents can visit the Identification Services Bureau website <https://www.dsi.gov.mo/en/visa>. ■

\*An Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) is a digital pre-travel screening requirement that allows citizens from visa-exempt countries to travel to a participating nation for short stays. It is not a visa, but rather a permission to travel that is electronically linked to one's passport. — DeepSeek

## Global South key driver of multipolarity in world: Wang Yi

BEIJING – The Global South has become a key driver of multipolarity in the world, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday.

The collective rise of the Global South is the distinct hallmark of the great transformation unfolding in the world, with the share of the Global South in the world economy having grown from 24 percent to over 40 percent over the past 40 years, Wang told a press conference on the sidelines of the ongoing session of the national legislature.

At a time when hegemonism and power politics are asserting themselves and dealing a heavy blow to the international order, the Global South countries should increase communication and coordination, jointly defend their legitimate rights and interests, and work together to expand the space for independent development, Wang said.

He pointed out that the Global South is an emerging, positive force for good on the international stage.

"In a changing and more turbulent world, we should forge greater confidence and unity, pull together and jointly champion peace, development, cooperation and win-win outcomes," he said.

"China's heart is with the Global South, and China's root is in the Global South," Wang affirmed, expressing China's readiness to join hands with other Global South countries on the journey toward modernization and the building of a community with a shared future for humanity. — Xinhua

## China calls for translating Asia-Pacific community vision into reality: Wang Yi

BEIJING – China will work toward the goal of translating the vision and blueprint for building an Asia-Pacific community into actions and reality, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday.

The 2026 APEC meeting to be held in China's Shenzhen will focus on the three priorities of openness, innovation and cooperation, and, once again, chart the course and rally strengths for Asia-Pacific cooperation at the crossroads, Wang said at a press conference on

the sidelines of the ongoing session of the national legislature.

The 33rd Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting will be held in Shenzhen in November. This marks China's third time hosting the event, following Shanghai in 2001 and Beijing in 2014.

Noting that decades have passed since the concept of the Asia-Pacific community was first put forward, Wang said the idea must not stay on paper or remain just a vision. He called for finding

broad consensus, clear priorities and workable steps in APEC Shenzhen.

China will align different pathways toward the Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific, make appropriate arrangements for regional connectivity, and vigorously promote the transformation toward the digital, smart and green development, according to Wang.

China is ready to promote a restart from APEC Shenzhen toward the goal of the Asia-Pacific community, said Wang. — Xinhua

## Diplomatic service remains enabler of China's high-standard opening up: Wang Yi

BEIJING – China's diplomatic service will continue to be an enabler of the country's high-standard opening up and create a more favorable international environment for Chinese modernization, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday.

China will continue to facilitate the high-quality development of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), keep industrial and supply chains stable and smooth, and secure a fair, open and non-discriminatory environment for Chinese companies operating abroad, Wang said at a press conference on the sidelines of the ongoing session of the National People's Congress (NPC).

China will continue to expand the fast track for people-to-people exchanges, Wang said, adding that China has to date granted unilateral visa exemption to 50 countries and made mutual visa-free entry arrangements with 29 countries.

As many as 73 percent of visitors came to China visa-free last



Foreign Minister Wang Yi, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, attends a press conference on China's foreign policy and external relations on the sidelines of the fourth session of the 14<sup>th</sup> National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing yesterday.

– Xinhua

year, according to Wang.

China will continue to refine cross-border travel policies, further

leverage the benefits of visa-free entry, and upgrade support services, Wang added.

– Xinhua

## Vision of building community with shared future for humanity lights way forward: Wang Yi

BEIJING – The vision of building a community with a shared future for humanity is like a beacon lighting the way forward for humanity, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday.

Wang made the remarks at a press conference on the sidelines of the ongoing session of the national legislature.

Throughout history, even in the darkest times, there have always been those who never stopped chasing ideals and light, he said, noting that the truth and value of this vision are sinking in with people around the world.

“Our enemies are not each other – they are war, poverty, hunger, and injustice,” Wang

said. “We cannot defeat them by fighting alone or looking after only ourselves.”

Building a community with a shared future for humanity is both a beautiful vision and a historic process, which requires the united efforts of many generations, said the foreign minister.

Wang said the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and its rise as a country of 1.4 billion people will not follow the beaten track where big powers vied for supremacy and territory.

“On the contrary, we will take a path of peaceful development, and we encourage other countries to take the same path,” he said.

– Xinhua

## Europe having correct perception of China crucial to China-Europe relations: Wang Yi

BEIJING – For China-Europe relations to stay steady and sound, it is crucial for Europe to have a correct perception of China, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday.

Since last year, relations between China and European countries have been regaining strength, Wang said, adding that two-way trade topped US\$1 trillion, and over 2 million European tourists traveled to China under visa-free policies.

European leaders also paid a number of visits to China, and a host of cooperation agreements have been reached, Wang said at a press conference on the sidelines of the fourth session of the 14<sup>th</sup> National People's Congress (NPC).

Facts have shown that China-Europe relations draw stability from shared interests and certainty from mutually beneficial partnerships, he added.

The foreign minister said China consistently believes that Europe is an important force underpinning the stability of the international order, and a key partner in China's modernization drive.

Noting that China and Europe are mutually complementary, he said “interdependence is not a risk; intertwined interests are not threats; and openness and cooperation will not weaken economic security; but building walls and barriers will only lead to self-isolation.”

– Xinhua

## Economic, technological decoupling will only backfire: Wang Yi

BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi yesterday warned that a certain country's practice of erecting tariff barriers and pushing economic and technological decoupling will only backfire.

Wang made the remarks at a press conference on the sidelines of the ongoing session of the national legislature.

“Pursuing protectionism is akin to locking oneself in a dark room; it

may keep out wind and rain, but it also shuts out light and air,” he said.

Wang said the problems facing economic globalization can only be addressed through more sustainable development and more equitable and effective governance.

Wang said China's vision of promoting an economic globalization that is universally beneficial and inclusive aims to make the pie of economic

globalization bigger and, more importantly, divide it more fairly.

The principle is to leave no country behind, and halt the widening wealth gap, Wang said, adding that the pathway is to encourage countries to draw on each other's strengths and share opportunities through economic openness, and pursue common development and mutual success through converging interests.

– Xinhua

## No individual or force allowed to separate Taiwan from China: Wang Yi

BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday that no individual or force will be allowed to separate Taiwan from China.

Wang described resolving the Taiwan question and realizing the complete reunification of China as a historic process that cannot be stopped.

Taiwan has been an integral part of China since ancient times, and “never

was, is not, and never will be a country,” Wang said at a press conference on the sidelines of the ongoing session of the national legislature.

The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) authorities' obstinate pursuit of their separatist agenda is the root cause undermining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, said Wang.

Noting that the one-China principle has overwhelming support in the international community, Wang said the firmer the international community stands against the “Taiwan independence” and upholds the one-China principle, the more assured peace and stability will be across the Taiwan Strait.

– Xinhua

## Peace, cooperation, friendship should be new narrative of South China Sea: Wang Yi

BEIJING – Peace, cooperation and friendship should be the new narrative of the South China Sea, while making waves wins no hearts and fomenting trouble finds no takers, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday.

The South China Sea is home to the world's busiest, safest and freest shipping lanes. Over the past year, cooperation in the South China Sea

has kept a sound momentum, Wang said at a press conference on the sidelines of the fourth session of the 14<sup>th</sup> National People's Congress.

“As we continue with the full and effective implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, consultation on a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea has reached

crunch time,” Wang said, noting that all relevant parties look forward to wrapping it up this year.

“We also hope that as this year's ASEAN Chair, the Philippines will recognize and fulfill its responsibility, resist the pull of self-interest, and play a positive role for peace and stability in the region,” he added.

– Xinhua

## China-India mutual trust, cooperation benefit common development; division, confrontation detrimental to Asian rejuvenation: Wang Yi

BEIJING – Mutual trust and cooperation is beneficial to the development of China and India, while division and confrontation is detrimental to the rejuvenation of Asia, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday.

Wang made the remarks at a press conference on the sidelines of the ongoing session of the national legislature.

China and India must maintain the correct strategic perception, uphold good-neighborliness and friendship, focus on development, which is the biggest common denominator of the two countries, and make BRICS cooperation more substantive to bring new hope to the Global South, Wang said.

– Xinhua

## Philippines shifts to four-day work week as Iran war pushes oil prices up

MANILA—Oil-poor Philippines is to shift to a four-day work week with fuel prices set to rocket up amid the Iran war, President Ferdinand Marcos said on Friday.

Marcos announced the shift, set to start at all government offices today, among measures aimed at easing the economic impact of the armed conflict involving Iran, Israel and the United States.

He warned the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil supply transits, would increase local pump prices next week by 7.48 pesos per litre for gasoline, 17.28 pesos for diesel, and 32.35 pesos for kerosene (13-55 US cents).

"We are victims of a war that is not of our choosing," Marcos said in a statement, adding it was uncertain when it would end.

"But we control how we will protect the Filipino."

The Philippines imports most of its crude oil from the Middle East and still relies on oil-fired power plants to generate electricity.

The war also threatens the safety and job security of more than two million Filipinos working in the Middle East.

Marcos also ordered all government agencies to cut their fuel and power consumption by 10-20 percent, banned government study tours and team-building activities, as well as "meetings that can be done online".

He urged Congress to authorise him to reduce excise taxes on petroleum products if the price of crude oil breached US\$80 per barrel, as well as to amend a biofuels law so cheaper bioethanol can be used for blending with petroleum products.

The government will also provide fuel subsidies and cash transfers to affected sectors, he said without giving details.

Marcos said the four-day workweek will be "temporary" but gave no end date.

Frontline services, police, and firemen are exempt from the four-day workweek, he added. —AFP

## Indonesia to ban social media access for under-16s: minister

JAKARTA — Indonesia said on Friday it would ban social media access for children under 16, citing threats from online pornography, cyberbullying, online fraud and internet addiction.

"Accounts belonging to children under 16 on high-risk platforms will start to be deactivated, beginning with YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, Threads, X, Bigo Live, and Roblox," Communications Minister Meutya Hafid said in a statement.

"The government is stepping in so that parents no longer have to fight alone against the giants of the algorithm. Implementation will begin on March 28, 2026," she said.

The ban will be introduced in stages "until all platforms fulfil their compliance obligations".

TikTok Indonesia and Google

Indonesia did not respond immediately to requests for comment.

A European Union expert group began work this week on a similar social media ban for children after Australia required TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat and other sites in December to remove accounts held by under-16s.

Brussels is keeping a close eye on how successful the Australian ban proves to be, with legal challenges already filed against it.

France, along with Denmark, Greece and Spain, has been pushing for similar action at EU level, and India has been considering a teen social media ban of its own.

Meutya said the government understood the new regulation "may cause some initial inconvenience" for users in Indonesia, but "we

believe that this is the best step the government must take in the midst of a digital emergency".

"We are taking this step to reclaim the sovereignty of our children's future. We want technology to humanise humans, not sacrifice our children's childhood," she said.

YouTube, the Google-owned online video-sharing platform, said it was looking into the ban.

"We are reviewing the new regulation to ensure it supports this goal, empowers parents, and preserves access to learning for millions of Indonesians," a YouTube spokesperson said in a statement.

"We will continue to engage constructively with the government and remain committed to protecting youth in the digital world, not from it."

—AFP

## Sri Lanka hospital releases 22 rescued from torpedoed Iranian vessel

Amal Jayasinghe

COLOMBO — Sri Lanka discharged 22 Iranian crew from hospital who were plucked from life rafts after their warship was sunk by a US submarine, officials said yesterday.

The crew had been treated at Karapitiya Hospital in the southern port city of Galle since Wednesday after the IRIS Dena was torpedoed just outside Sri Lanka's territorial waters.

The attack on Dena was the first military strike far outside the Middle East since the United States and Israel launched their war on Iran a week ago.

Those discharged overnight had been taken to a beach resort in the same district, as Sri Lanka's navy ended its search yesterday for survivors from the vessel. Just over 60 people remain missing, according to an official Sri Lankan estimate.

"Another 10 are still undergoing treatment," a medical officer at the hospital told AFP. He said the bodies of 84 Iranians retrieved from the Indian Ocean were also at the hospital.

Sri Lanka has denied claims that it was under pressure from Washington to stop the Iranians from returning home, saying Colombo would be guided solely by international law and its own domestic legislation.

The survivors from the Dena

were being handled according to international humanitarian law, and the government had contacted the International Committee of the Red Cross for assistance, officials said.

The island is also providing safe haven for another 219 Iranian sailors from a second ship, the IRIS Bushehr, which was allowed to enter Sri Lankan waters after the Dena was sunk.

The crew from the Bushehr have been moved to a Sri Lanka Navy camp at Welisara, just north of the capital Colombo, and their vessel has been taken over by Sri Lanka's navy.

Sri Lanka announced it was taking the Bushehr to the north-eastern port of Trincomalee, but an engine failure and other technical and administrative issues had delayed the movement, a navy spokesman said.

### Pressure denied

A US State Department spokesperson said the disposition of the Bushehr personnel and Iranian crew rescued at sea was up to Sri Lanka.

"The United States, of course, respects and recognises Sri Lanka's sovereignty in the handling of this situation," the spokesperson told AFP in Washington.

India, meanwhile, said Saturday that it had allowed a third Iranian

warship, the IRIS Lavan, to dock in one of its ports on "humane" grounds after it too reported engine problems.

"I think it was the humane thing to do, and I think we were guided by that principle," Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said on Saturday.

The three ships were part of a multinational naval exercise held by India before the war in the Middle East started last week.

The Lavan docked in the southwest Indian port of Kochi on Wednesday. "A lot of the people on board were young cadets. They have disembarked and are in a nearby facility," Jaishankar said.

Sri Lankan authorities meanwhile reported an oil slick at another nearby beach resort and said about 50 workers and volunteers had been deployed for a clean-up, while boats were being sent to check for more pollution.

"We saw a thin oil patch at Hikkaduwa beach yesterday [Saturday]," said Samantha Gunasekara, chairman of the Marine Environment Protection Authority (MEPA).

He added that parts of a damaged life raft, a barrel of lubricants and footwear had washed ashore, and officials were trying to establish if they were from the sunk Dena. —AFP

## Prabowo says will quit peace board unless Palestinians benefit

JAKARTA — Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto will quit US President Donald Trump's Board of Peace if it does not benefit Palestinians, a government statement said, as the country's involvement faces scrutiny following the US-Israeli war on Iran.

The former general has come under mounting criticism from Muslim groups for his decision to join the board and pledge to send thousands of peacekeeping troops to Gaza under a ceasefire agreement that halted two years of devastating war there.

Prabowo told leaders of local

Muslim groups this week that Indonesia's membership of the Board of Peace aimed to achieve a lasting peace in Gaza, according to a government communication agency statement on Friday.

But he added that the country would withdraw from the board if it does not bring benefits to Palestinians or align with Indonesia's national interests, a statement quoted Hanif Alatas, of the Islamic Brotherhood Front, as saying.

"The President said that if he sees that there is no longer any benefit for Palestine... and it is not

in line with Indonesia's national interest, then he will withdraw," Hanif said.

In a statement this month, the country's top clerical body, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), urged the Indonesian government to withdraw its membership from the board, calling it "ineffective in realising true peace in Palestine".

Prabowo attended the inaugural meeting of the Board of Peace in Washington last month, and pledged to send 8,000 troops to Gaza under the International Stabilisation Force.

—AFP



A resident throws water as he tries to put out fire engulfing shanties at a slum area in Quezon City, the Philippines, on Friday. —Xinhua

## Indian police arrest alleged killers of Bangladesh uprising leader

NEW DELHI — Indian police said yesterday they had arrested two Bangladeshi nationals accused of murdering a popular student leader in Dhaka, after they allegedly entered India illegally.

Sharif Osman Hadi, a vocal India critic who took part in the mass uprising in 2024 that led to the ouster of Bangladesh's then-premier Sheikh Hasina, was shot by masked assailants last year and later died from his injuries at a Singapore hospital.

Bangladeshi police alleged that the killer had fled to India, a claim rejected at the time by Indian authorities.

However, police in India's West Bengal state, which borders Bangladesh, said yesterday that preliminary interrogation of two Bangladeshi nationals in their custody suggested they had been involved in Hadi's murder.

There was "secret credible information" that the pair had fled

Bangladesh and illegally entered India, trying to "take shelter in the border area... with the intention of crossing back into Bangladesh", the police said in a statement.

Hadi's death set off violent protests in Bangladesh, with angry mobs torching several buildings including two major newspapers deemed to favour India, as well as a prominent cultural institution.

The killing further strained ties between India and Bangladesh that had frayed since Hasina fled the pro-democracy uprising and sought refuge in India.

India's foreign ministry has said it rejects "false narratives" about New Delhi's involvement in Hadi's killing.

In a sign of a potential thaw, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated the Bangladesh Nationalist Party for winning the first parliamentary elections after Hasina's exit in February. —AFP

## Israel strikes Beirut hotel as Lebanon says war toll nears 400

BEIRUT – Israel struck a hotel in central Beirut yesterday, the first attack on the city centre since the start of the new war with Hezbollah, as Lebanon said nearly 400 people were killed over the past week.

Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East war last Monday, when Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah attacked Israel in response to the killing of Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei during US-Israeli strikes.

Israel, which has kept up strikes targeting Hezbollah despite a 2024 ceasefire, launched multiple waves of strikes last week across Lebanon and sent ground troops into border areas.

Hezbollah said yesterday that it repeatedly targeted northern Israel, including attacking a naval base in Haifa and sending a swarm of drones towards the city of Nahariya.

Israel's military, meanwhile, said that two of its soldiers were killed in combat in southern Lebanon, the first of its troops to have died since the latest offensive began on March 2.

It also reiterated its call for Lebanese residents to leave the area south of the Litani River, which covers many hundreds of square kilometres.

Lebanon's health minister Rakan Nassereddine yesterday said that Israeli strikes on Lebanon killed 394 people over the past week, including 83 children and 42 women.

Earlier the same day, the health ministry said an Israeli air strike hit Beirut's city centre, targeting "a hotel room" and killing four people and wounding 10 others.

### 'No safe place'

"I came here from the southern suburbs to be safe with my children and the strike hit," said Abu Hussein, a 45-year-old taxi driver while showing his damaged car.

"There is no safe place."

The strike was the first since last Monday to target central Beirut.



First aid responders inspect a Ramada hotel room targeted by an Israeli strike, in Beirut's seaside Rawche area yesterday. – AFP

An AFP photographer at the bombarded seafront hotel saw one room on the fourth floor with shattered glass and charred walls, while security forces cordoned off the site.

Israel's military said it had "conducted a precise strike targeting key commanders" in the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force, its foreign operations arm.

A security official at the scene told AFP on condition of anonymity that Hezbollah-linked rescuers recovered three bodies from the hotel.

The area of Raouche is a major tourist destination and remained untouched by Israeli strikes during the previous war between Israel and Hezbollah, which ended with a ceasefire in November 2024.

Along its Mediterranean coast, the area is home to dozens of hotels, now overcrowded with displaced people who fled their homes elsewhere in Lebanon.

### Iranians evacuated

Lebanon's government on Thursday banned any activity by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps – a main backer of the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

A Lebanese official who requested anonymity told AFP that

"a total of 117 Iranians, including diplomats and embassy staff, were evacuated on a Russian plane that left Beirut overnight from Saturday to Sunday" for Turkey.

In the south, a strike on Sir al-Gharbiyeh, right above the Litani, killed 11 people including children according to the health ministry, with rescue efforts ongoing to find people under the rubble.

Standing next to a destroyed home, resident Ali Youssef Taha told AFP that "a family was sleeping inside" before "Israeli warplanes bombed the building, resulting in a massacre".

Later yesterday, Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported two Israeli strikes on the Palestinian refugee camp of Ain al-Hilweh in the south.

Israel's army said, meanwhile, that it struck "over 600" Hezbollah targets and killed 200 members of the group in the past week.

Lebanon's health minister insisted that "these are civilians being targeted, not, as they claim, military personnel and military installations", adding that nine rescuers had been killed since the start of the latest war.

On Friday night, a failed Israeli commando operation to find the remains of airman Ron Arad, missing since 1986, killed 41 people in eastern Lebanon. – AFP

## From stadiums to social media, Turkey swoons over anti-war Spain

ANKARA – A wave of affection for Spain has swept Turkey in recent days over Madrid's firm stance against the war in the Middle East, with football fans roaring their support and social media awash with pro-Spanish sentiment.

Countless images of Turkish and Spanish flags flying side-by-side have emerged alongside memes of a budding romance between a bull representing Spain and a wolf for Turkey, as well as footage of Eskisehirspor fans chanting Spanish tunes and shouting "Olé!" as they perform a Mexican wave.

It began when Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez defiantly refused to let US troops use its bases to attack Iran at the start of the conflict, repeatedly posting "No to the war" in a move that won hearts and minds in Turkey.

Already popular in Turkey over his strong criticism of the Gaza war which mirrored Turkey's stance, the Socialist leader's refusal to bow to US pressure has angered President

Donald Trump but won him legions of fans in Turkey.

"Greetings to the Turkish Twitter community," wrote Sánchez in a post on X on Saturday alongside footage showing a large Turkish flag being waved at a party gathering alongside a huge banner reading: "No to the war".

The conflict began on February 28 when Israeli and US warplanes began bombing Iran, in a move sharply denounced as "illegal" by Turkey, which has also criticised Iran's indiscriminate retaliation.

Spain's aura was further burnished after its troops manning a Patriot missile battery on Turkish soil spotted a Turkey-bound ballistic missile launched from Iran which was intercepted by NATO.

The troops, who are based at the Incirlik air base, a key NATO facility in southern Turkey, had "detected and reported the missile attack", Spanish Defence Minister Margarita Robles told Cadena Ser radio on Thursday, although they were not the ones who shot it down. – AFP

## Israel says struck Iran's 'space force' HQ

JERUSALEM – The Israeli military said yesterday it had struck what it described as the "space force headquarters" of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in Tehran.

"As part of the strikes, the IDF targeted and dismantled the Iranian terror regime's IRGC Space Force headquarters," the military said.

"The headquarters served as a reception, transmission and research centre for the Iranian Space Agency, which is affiliated with the regime's military," it said.

The military said the site included research facilities as well as the command-and-control centre for the "Khayyam" satellite, which was used to "monitor the State of Israel and its residents".

In August 2022, Russia launched

the satellite on a Soyuz-2.1b rocket from Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan.

Iran's space agency said at the time that the device was constructed by Russia under Iranian supervision.

The US said that the Khayyam satellite would give Iran "significant spying capabilities".

Iran's space agency rejected that, saying that the purpose of Khayyam was to "monitor the country's borders", and help with the management of natural resources and agriculture.

Yesterday, the Israeli military said it had also targeted other sites in Tehran, including around 50 bunkers that stored ammunition and a compound belonging to the IRGC ground forces. – AFP

## Pope prays 'roar of the bombs' in Middle East will cease

VATICAN CITY – Pope Leo XIV yesterday prayed the "roar of bombs" in the Middle East will cease, as the war triggered by US-Israeli air strikes on Iran extended into its ninth day.

News from the region "continues to arouse deep dismay", the US-born pope said at the end of the Angelus prayer.

"Added to the episodes of violence and devastation and the widespread climate of hatred and fear, is the fear that the conflict will spread, and that other countries in the region, including beloved Lebanon, may once again sink into instability," he said.

Iran was preparing yesterday to reveal its new supreme leader,

after US-Israeli air strikes destroyed fuel dumps and triggered fires that choked much of Tehran in a thick blanket of smoke.

Iranian missile-and-drone retaliation has targeted many Gulf countries and further afield in the Middle East.

US President Donald Trump has refused to rule out sending American ground troops into Iran, but continues to insist that the war is progressing speedily.

Leo said he prayed "that the roar of the bombs may cease, the weapons may fall silent, and a space for dialogue may open in which the voices of the peoples may be heard". – AFP

## US says it will not hit Iran energy sector

NEW YORK – The United States will spare Iran's energy infrastructure as it wages war with Israel against the Islamic republic, Energy Secretary Chris Wright said yesterday.

With oil prices rising dramatically, he told CNN that disruptions to the petroleum and gas industry will be short lived – "worst case, that's a few weeks. That's not months."

Israel attacked oil storage facilities on Saturday in and around Tehran, sparking huge fires in the first such attacks

reported since the war started last weekend. Wright seemed to downplay them.

"These are Israeli strikes, these are local fuel depots to fill up the gas tank," Wright said.

He added: "The US is targeting zero energy infrastructure. There are no plans to target Iran's oil industry, their natural gas industry, or anything about their energy industry."

The war has all but shut down the Strait of Hormuz, through which nearly 20 percent of the world's crude oil and about 20

percent of liquefied natural gas usually transit.

Energy markets have been riled by this disruption and oil prices shot up. West Texas Intermediate, the US benchmark for oil, rose 12 percent just on Friday and is up 36 percent in a week.

Iran accounts for about four percent of world oil production, according to the US Energy Information Administration.

Its oil industry is subject to international sanctions but some is still exported, mainly to China, oil industry data shows. – AFP

## OpenAI senior robotics exec resigns over Pentagon deal

LOS ANGELES – OpenAI's top robotics executive said on Saturday she had resigned over the artificial intelligence (AI) giant's deal with the US government to allow its technology's deployment for war and domestic surveillance.

The company behind ChatGPT secured a defence contract with the Pentagon last month, hours after rival Anthropic refused to agree to unconditional military use of their technology.

OpenAI's CEO Sam Altman later posted to X saying the startup would be modifying a contract so its models would not be used for "domestic surveillance of US persons and nationals," after criticism it was giving too much power to military officials without oversight.

Caitlin Kalinowski said she cared deeply about "the Robotics team and the work we built

together," but that "surveillance of Americans without judicial oversight and lethal autonomy without human authorisation are lines that deserved more deliberation than they got."

"This was about principle, not people," she wrote in a post on X.

Kalinowski wrote in a follow-up post that she took issue with the haste of OpenAI's Pentagon deal.

"To be clear, my issue is that the announcement was rushed without the guardrails defined," she wrote.

"It's a governance concern first and foremost. These are too important for deals or announcements to be rushed."

Anthropic's refusal to authorise use of its Claude AI models had prompted backlash from US officials.

Kalinowski previously worked at Meta, developing its augmented reality (AR) glasses. – AFP

## Drone strikes on Sudan markets kill 33: doctor

KHARTOUM – Drone strikes on markets in paramilitary-controlled towns in the Kordofan region killed 33 people yesterday, while a strike in Darfur resulted in a raging oil fire, sources told AFP.

Two of the attacks were on small towns in West Kordofan state – part of the resource-rich Kordofan region, currently the fiercest battlefield in the nearly three-year war between Sudan's army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

In RSF-controlled Abu Zabad and Wad Banda, a combined 33 people were killed and 59 injured, according to a doctor at Abu Zabad hospital, where the victims were brought.

Using a satellite internet connection to circumvent a communications blackout, Abu Zabad resident Hamad Abdullah said he helped bury 20 people.

"Four of them were my relatives who worked in the market," he told AFP, blaming the army for the strike.

A military source denied the

accusations, telling AFP that the "armed forces do not bombard civilian areas".

Since war broke out in April 2023, both sides have been accused of war crimes including targeting civilians and indiscriminately shelling residential areas.

Air strikes by the army, carried out first by fighter jets and then drones, have killed dozens of civilians at a time.

Across state lines, in the East Darfur state capital of El-Daein, another drone strike targeted the local market, according to two eyewitnesses.

It hit oil barrels being sold at the market, causing a fire "that is still raging four hours after the drone hit," one resident said, requesting anonymity for their safety.

The RSF accused the army of carrying out the strike.

Both West Kordofan and East Darfur are controlled by the RSF, who dominate Sudan's west and much of the south, while the army holds the centre, east and north.

Both sides have relied on drone warfare, leaving massive civilian casualties and drawing frequent condemnation from the United Nations.

Last week, clashes in the South Kordofan city of Dilling killed at least 28 people and injured 60 more, a medical source said.

Yesterday, one of the injured, a Red Crescent volunteer who was at the Dilling Hospital when it was shelled, died of her wounds.

Hospitals have repeatedly been targeted throughout the war.

By December, over 1,800 people had been killed in attacks on health facilities since the start of the war, including 173 health workers, according to the United Nations.

Across the country, fighting has killed tens of thousands and more than 11 million people have been driven from their homes.

The fighting has fuelled what the UN describes as the world's largest displacement and hunger crises, where over half the population is in need of humanitarian aid. – AFP

## US court voids mass layoffs at Voice of America parent

WASHINGTON – A federal judge ruled ON Saturday that President Donald Trump's pick to oversee mass layoffs at Voice of America and other government-funded media was unlawfully appointed, rendering the job cuts invalid.

Kari Lake, a former TV anchor, was hired by Trump to head the US Agency for Global Media, part of his administration's efforts to clamp down on what he considers unfriendly journalism.

She soon announced funding and job cuts, including the dismissal of more than 500 employees of Voice of America, created in the wake of World War II as a key instrument of American soft power worldwide.

Employees sued Lake over the firings, which were temporarily halted last September pending judicial review.

In his ruling, US District Judge Royce Lamberth determined that Lake's appointment as senior

advisor to the agency was made "in violation of the Appointments Clause and the Federal Vacancies Reform Act."

As a result, he wrote, "any actions taken by Lake during her asserted tenure as acting CEO between July 31 and November 19, 2025, including but not limited to the August 9 reduction-in-force efforts...are void."

The Agency for Global Media is an independent agency tasked with promoting Western democracy and countering propaganda overseas through entities that include VOA, Radio Free Europe, Radio Free Asia and the Office of Cuba Broadcasting.

Trump frequently attacks media outlets and denounced the editorial firewall at VOA that prevents the government from intervening in its coverage.

Lake, a Republican, unsuccessfully ran to be a US Senator representing Arizona in 2024. – AFP



(From left to right) White House Chief of Staff Susie Wiles, US President Donald Trump, US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff, first lady Melania Trump, US Attorney General Pam Bondi, Vice President JD Vance, and second lady of the United States Usha Vance stand at attention during a dignified transfer at Dover Air Force Base March on Saturday in Dover, Delaware. Six soldiers from the 103rd Sustainment Command were killed in action by an Iranian drone strike on March 1 in Port Shuaiba, Kuwait during the United States' "Operation Epic Fury" against Iran. – AFP

## Fitch keeps Portugal's rating unchanged at 'A', revises outlook to positive

LISBON – US credit rating agency Fitch Ratings kept Portugal's sovereign credit rating unchanged at "A" but revised its outlook from stable to positive, citing expectations of a steady decline in public debt and prudent fiscal policy.

According to a Fitch statement issued on Friday, Portugal's economy is expected to grow by about 2.0 percent this year and slow to 1.8 percent in 2027. Consumption and investment are projected to support growth, while net exports may weigh on activity due to tariff-

related risks.

Fitch estimates that the Iberian country posted a fiscal surplus of 0.4 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2025, supported by higher-than-expected tax revenues. For this year, however, the agency expects a return to a deficit of 0.8 percent of GDP due to spending related to storms and reconstruction.

Uncertainty over the scale of such spending introduces additional risks to public finances, Fitch said. The agency expects the deficit to narrow to about 0.5 percent of GDP in 2027. – Xinhua

## Portuguese PM says not to endorse US-Israeli military action against Iran

LISBON – Portuguese Prime Minister Luis Montenegro said last week that Portugal was not involved in and did not monitor or endorse the US and Israeli military operation against Iran.

According to Portugal's Lusa News Agency, Montenegro on Wednesday also emphasized that "the Portuguese state defends diplomatic and negotiation pathways to guarantee international peace."

The statement follows controversy over US military operations at Lajes Air Base in the Azores, with opposition parties and experts questioning whether proper authorization was obtained for operations potentially supporting the Iran strikes.

According to Lusa, 15 US KC-46 Pegasus refueling aircraft have been stationed for more than one week at Lajes Air Base on Terceira Island, a volcanic island in the Azores archipelago that is approximately 1,500 km west of mainland Portugal in the mid-Atlantic. Thirteen aircraft departed the base on March 1, one day after the US and Israeli joint attack on Iran.

The Left Bloc (BE) party in the Azores "vehemently" condemned the US use of Lajes Base for Iran-related operations, criticizing "total submission" to American interests.

The Socialist Party (PS) then requested that parliament summon the government to clarify the legal

framework for recent US force movements at Lajes Base.

In a request submitted to the Foreign Affairs and Portuguese Communities Committee, Socialist Party deputies noted that increased movements at the military base "are of great sensitivity, with doubts remaining about the ultimate purpose of operations in question and respective international legal framework."

Under the Portugal-US Defense Cooperation Agreement, any use of the Lajes Base by the United States beyond the framework of NATO or other international organizations supported by Portugal "should be subject to prior authorization."

– Xinhua

# Trump offers LatAm leaders US missile strikes to hit drug cartels

Aurelia End and Matthew Pennington

DORAL – US President Donald Trump on Saturday urged Latin American nations to use military power against the “cancer” of drug cartels, offering to support them with US missile strikes targeting narco kingpins.

Trump, currently waging a war with Iran, laid out a muscular position for advancing Washington’s interests in the Western hemisphere, pronouncing that communist-led Cuba was “in its last moments of life”.

He also advocated tough action by allies against organised crime blighting the region.

He formally launched a 17-nation “counter cartel” coalition that the White House described as a pledge from governments to use “hard power” against security threats.

“We’re working with you to do whatever we have to do. We’ll use missiles. You want us to use a missile? They’re extremely accurate,” Trump told a dozen right-wing leaders from Latin America and the Caribbean at his Doral golf club near Miami.

“Piu,” right into the living room,” he said, suggesting the sound of a missile in flight. “That’s the end of that cartel person. But we’ll do whatever you need.”

Trump has already staked bold claims in Latin America with the ouster of Venezuela’s leader Nicolás Maduro and working with his replacement, Delcy Rodríguez, to claim Venezuelan oil reserves for the US.

Among the leaders attending the “Shield of the Americas” summit were Argentina’s President Javier Milei, Ecuador’s Daniel Noboa and El Salvador’s Nayib Bukele, who has arrested tens of thousands of people in a crackdown on gangs.

All three leaders posted to social media photos of them standing beside Trump. Noboa wrote in Spanish: “For too long, organised crime believed that America was its territory. That they could cross borders, move drugs, weapons, and violence without consequences. That time is over for them.”

But Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel posted on X that the “neocolonial” gathering of right-wing



US President Donald Trump (center, front) poses with (from left to right) Trinidad and Tobago’s Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Santiago Peña, President of the Republic of Paraguay, Luis Abinader, President of the Dominican Republic, Rodrigo Paz Pereira, President of Bolivia, Nayib Bukele, President of El Salvador, Javier Milei, President of Argentina, José Raúl Mulino, President of Panama, Mohamed Irfaan Ali, President of Guyana, Nasry “Tito” Asfura, President of Honduras, Rodrigo Chaves Robles, President of Costa Rica, José Antonio Kast, President-elect of Chile, and Daniel Roy Gilchrist Noboa Azín, President of Ecuador, at the start of the “Shield of the Americas” Summit at Trump National Doral in Miami, Florida, on Saturday. – AFP

leaders “commits them to accepting the lethal use of US military force to solve internal problems.”

Irene Mia, a Latin America expert at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), said drug cartel violence had hit countries in the region that until recently were considered fairly safe, such as Ecuador and Chile.

The strained security situation has contributed to the right wing’s recent string of electoral victories in Latin America and means the trend of US intervention has received less pushback than in the past, Mia told AFP.

## ‘They have no money’

Trump urged regional leaders to use military force to stamp out criminal organisations, which he likened to a cancer, saying “We don’t want it spreading.”

“The only way to defeat these enemies is by unleashing the power of our militaries. We have to use our military,” he said.

Trump also doubled down on his recent warnings toward Cuba, which he has implied could be “next” after taking out leaders in Venezuela and Iran.

“I’ll take care of Cuba,” Trump told the leaders.

“They have no money, they have no oil. They have a bad philosophy,

they have a bad regime that’s been bad for a long time,” he said, adding, “Cuba’s in its last moments of life.”

That warning came a week after Trump, with Israel, launched devastating strikes against Iran, sparking a regional conflict that has upended usually peaceful areas of the Gulf.

Also this week, the United States and Ecuador announced joint operations to combat drug trafficking and on Friday released video of a house exploding in a forested area of Ecuador, calling it a successful blow against “narcoterrorists.”

In addition to Milei, Bukele and Noboa, Trump hosted the leaders of Bolivia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, and Trinidad and Tobago – as well as José Antonio Kast, the president-elect of Chile.

The analyst, Mia, pointed to some glaring absences: Mexico and Brazil, which are currently led by leftists Claudia Sheinbaum and Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

“Without Mexico and Brazil, it’s not going to be very successful in tackling those issues” of narco-trafficking and counterterrorism, she said, given that Mexican cartels play a key role in the trafficking supply chain and Brazil’s ports are critical narco-trafficking routes to Europe. – AFP

# Portuguese scientists reprogram anti-tumor immune cells in lab

LISBON – Portuguese scientists have successfully created anti-tumor immune cells in a laboratory using cellular reprogramming for the first time, opening new possibilities in the fight against cancer, according to a press release issued on Thursday by Portugal’s University of Coimbra.

The breakthrough was achieved by a research team coordinated by the Center for Neurosciences and Cell Biology of the University of Coimbra (CNC-UC), part of the Center for Innovation in Biomedicine and Biotechnology (CiBB), in partnership with Sweden’s Lund University.

The researchers succeeded in recreating Natural Killer (NK) cells – a type of immune cell that serves as a first line of defense against tumors – through cellular reprogramming, a process that converts one type of cell into another.

To achieve this, the team developed a platform called REPROcode, designed to help scientists map and reprogram immune cells.

The platform contains a library of more than 400 transcription factors – proteins capable of reprogramming most types of immune cells. Each factor is identified by a unique “barcode,” allowing researchers to track which factors drive the reprogramming of different immune cell types.

“This tool allows us to test dozens of combinations of factors simultaneously to identify those that enable the production of various types of immune cells,” said Carlos Filipe Pereira, a researcher at CNC-UC who coordinated the study.

Beyond enabling the production of NK cells, the research also identified factors that improve the reprogramming of other known immune cell types and provides a “guide map” of the factors that control the formation of different immune cell lineages.

The findings are particularly relevant for the field of immunotherapy, a treatment approach that harnesses a patient’s own immune system to fight cancer and is currently one of the most promising areas in modern medicine.

However, many tumors and patients do not respond to existing immunotherapy treatments. In addition, several useful immune cell types are rare in the blood and difficult to obtain directly from patients, making laboratory production a major scientific goal.

“Our approach works like a ‘toolbox’ that allows us to generate immune cells in the laboratory from cells that are easier to collect and replicate, such as skin cells,” Pereira explained.

Looking ahead, Pereira said the platform could eventually be used to produce cells capable of teaching the immune system not to attack the body itself, potentially paving the way for new therapies targeting autoimmune diseases such as diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis.

The study, which also involved researchers from institutions in Sweden and Germany, was published in the journal *Cell Systems*. – Xinhua

# Chinese-built jetty bridge improves access to Mozambique tourism island

MAPUTO – Mozambican President Daniel Francisco Chapo on Friday attended the inauguration ceremony of a jetty bridge on Inhaca Island in Maputo Bay, a project built by China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC).

Located about 30 km from the capital, Maputo, Inhaca Island has around 6,000 residents and is known for its tourism resources. Previously, shallow waters around the island prevented large passenger boats from docking directly, forcing passengers to transfer to smaller boats and wade ashore.

The newly completed jetty bridge, with a total length of about 1.3 km, allows passenger vessels to dock under different tidal conditions. Visitors can now reach the island directly via the jetty, improving the safety and efficiency of passenger transport.

Speaking at the ceremony, Chapo said the infrastructure would help improve mobility and create new opportunities for economic and tourism development on the island.

Wang Lijun, general manager of the CRBC, said the project will

help facilitate the movement of people and goods and contribute to the development of tourism and the local economy.

The jetty is located near the environmentally sensitive waters of Maputo National Park. Wang said environmental protection measures were strictly implemented throughout construction. Third-party institutions conducted regular seawater and air quality monitoring and all construction waste was transported to the mainland for proper disposal.

Construction also faced logistical challenges due to shallow waters and limited maritime transport resources. More than 30,000 tonnes of construction materials were transported from the mainland, mainly via barges towed by local vessels.

During peak construction, the project created around 300 jobs, most filled by local workers.

Bruno Chanicombo, a local tour guide, said the new facility would make it easier for visitors to reach the island and is expected to bring more tourists and business opportunities to the local community. – Xinhua

# Study finds 85 pct of young Portuguese use generative AI, above European average

LISBON – About 85 percent of Portuguese children and young people aged 9 to 17 have used generative artificial intelligence (AI) in the past month, 10 percentage points above the European average, according to a report released last week.

The study by NOVA University Lisbon analyzed responses from 2,111 children and young people, as well as interviews with 15 adolescents, focusing on

their practices, perceptions and experiences with generative AI.

Released on Safer Internet Day (March 3), the report found that 48 percent of respondents used AI to summarize or explain texts, while 47 percent used it to complete school assignments.

It also showed that one quarter of young Portuguese used generative AI for emotional or personal support, compared with a European average of 15 percent.

Study coordinators Cristina Ponte and Susana Batista said the findings confirmed a digital divide, with access and frequency of use shaped by socioeconomic conditions, while also highlighting the role of individual factors.

Despite widespread use, the report said children and young people were not uncritical, voicing concerns about manipulation, false content, deepfakes, and humans losing control of technology. – Xinhua

## Football shorts

### Villarreal down Elche to stay on Atletico's tail

VILA-REAL

Villarreal beat Elche 2-1 yesterday to keep pace with Atletico Madrid in the battle for third in La Liga.

After Atletico, third, beat Real Sociedad on Saturday, Marcelino Garcia Toral's Yellow Submarine, fourth, pulled level on 54 points.

Tajon Buchanan and Santiago Mourino's first-half goals were reward for a dominant performance by Villarreal, although Andre Silva pulled one back late on to make the hosts sweat.

"We relaxed a bit, until the 70<sup>th</sup> minute we were dominating the game, then we suffered until the end and that can't happen," Mourino told Movistar.

Villarreal had a host of chances in the first half but Elche goalkeeper Matias Dituro made several good saves to keep Nicolas Pepe and Georges Mikautadze at bay.

Elche started the season superbly but are yet to win in 2026 or away from home across the campaign and have slumped to 17<sup>th</sup>, one point above the drop zone.

"I think with a bit more time we could have got level, we finished in the way we should have played the whole game," said Silva.

"After letting in the first goal the team dropped in morale and we can't do that." – AFP

### Punishments in forgery scandal 'disproportionate': Malaysian FA

KUALA LUMPUR – Malaysia's football federation Friday said penalties against it were "disproportionate" after a ruling by the Court of Arbitration for Sport in a case involving foreign-born players.

Switzerland-based CAS on Thursday slightly reduced sanctions against seven players banned over falsified documents used to join the national side, while upholding a FIFA US\$448,000 fine against the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM).

"While FAM respects the authority of CAS, it considers that the sanctions imposed appear disproportionate, particularly when compared to sanctions imposed in similar cases before CAS," it said in a statement.

FAM accepted responsibility for its "oversight failure" in the case, but called the outcome "deeply disappointing", especially for the players banned from official matches for 12 months.

"The players were not involved in the administrative process and had no knowledge of related matters," FAM said, insisting the seven are Malaysians who obtained citizenship in accordance with Malaysian law.

CAS ruled that the players may resume training with their clubs and participate in football-related activities, though their one-year ban from official matches - backdated to September - remains in force.

FIFA launched an investigation after the players helped Malaysia beat Vietnam 4-0 in a June 2025 Asian Cup qualifier.

The governing body said their naturalisations were obtained "using

falsified documents" and that none had Malaysian parentage or ancestry.

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

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

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

### S Korea tops Group A at Women's Asian Cup after Australia draw



SYDNEY – South Korea secured first place in Group A at the 2026 AFC Women's Asian Cup after drawing 3-3 with host Australia in Sydney last night.

Mun Eun-ju gave South Korea a 1-0 lead in the 13<sup>th</sup> minute but Australia led 2-1 at half-time following strikes from Alanna Kennedy in the 32<sup>nd</sup> minute and Sam Kerr in the sixth minute of stoppage time.

The first 11 minutes of the second-half proved decisive in the match, as the away side restored the lead with Kim Shin-ji's 53<sup>rd</sup> minute penalty and a daisy-cutter from Kang Chae-rim.

Kennedy's equaliser in the eighth minute of second-half stoppage time came too late for Australia, who needed to win to overcome South Korea's goal difference advantage.

As Group A winner, South Korea will not have to leave Sydney again for the rest of the tournament and will play one of the best-ranked third placed teams in Saturday's quarterfinal.

Australia, meanwhile, will travel over 3,000 km to Perth for a quarterfinal on Friday.

In Group A's other match last night, the Philippines beat Iran 2-0 for its first win at the tournament. The win gives the Philippines a chance to progress to the quarterfinals as one of the two best third-placed teams. – Xinhua

### Spanish second division match paused after more alleged racism

MADRID – A second-tier Spanish football match was briefly paused after another incident of alleged racism on Saturday.

The referee wrote in his report that Real Sociedad B's Japanese defender Kazunari Kita told him he had been racially abused by Castellon's Alberto Jimenez.

"In the 94<sup>th</sup> minute the anti-racism protocol was activated," wrote referee Alonso de Ena Wolf, noting that the insult was "not heard by any member of the officiating team".

Mid-table Real Sociedad B beat second-place Castellon 4-2.

Last week Espanyol defender Omar El Hilali accused Elche forward Rafa Mir of a racist insult during a La Liga match.

Spanish football has struggled to deal with racism in the stands in recent years, with Real Madrid forward Vinicius Junior regularly targeted.

In February Brazil international Vinicius also accused Benfica midfielder Gianluca Prestianni of racially abusing him during a Champions League game. – AFP

# Bronze and Stanway on target for England in World Cup qualifying



England's defender Lucy Bronze (right) heads in the opening goal during the Women's FIFA world cup league A, group 3, qualifier against Iceland at The City Ground in Nottingham, central England on Saturday. – AFP



PARIS – European champions England made it two wins from two in their World Cup 2027 qualifying campaign with a 2-0 win over Iceland at the City Ground in Nottingham on Saturday.

After thrashing Ukraine 6-1 earlier in the week, England top group A3 ahead of world champions Spain, who were made to work hard by the Ukrainians for their 3-1 win in Antalya, Turkey.

Lucy Bronze, earning her 145<sup>th</sup> cap, powered England ahead midway through the first half after a cross from Lauren James on the left.

Goalkeeper Hannah Hampton needed to make a superb save to deny Sandra Maria Jessen, whose header was angling into the top corner, before Georgia Stanway sealed the win in the 78<sup>th</sup> minute.

"An important win. I think we played well, we know they're very disciplined, very powerful and really dangerous on the counter," England coach Sarina Wiegman told ITV.

"For the most part, we took that out so they didn't become dangerous. They had that one chance where Hannah Hampton did really well.

"Overall, we showed some good football. Of course, we want

to score more goals but it starts with winning the game."

England head the group on goal difference ahead of Spain, who were made to wait until the 44<sup>th</sup> minute before Bayern Munich striker Edna Imadel put them ahead against Ukraine.

In the third minute of added time in the first half they added a second through London City Lionesses' Lucia Corrales.

Barcelona forward Vicky Lopez added a third from the penalty spot in the second half before Olha Ovdychuk rescued a late consolation for the Ukrainians, who are playing in Turkey because they have not been able to host games in Ukraine since the Russian invasion in 2022.

England and Spain meet in a repeat of the Euro 2025 final and the 2023 World Cup final next month.

### Bosnia score 13

Germany top Group A4 after a 4-0 win in Norway while Slovenia kept their hopes alive with a 1-0 victory at home against Austria, who have now lost their opening two matches.

France made it two wins from two in Group A2 as Sakina

Karchaoui scored twice in a 4-1 victory over Poland.

Marie-Antoinette Katoto and Kadidiatou Diani also netted for Les Bleues, as Poland paid for Nadia Krezzyman's red card shortly before half-time when only 2-1 down.

France sit two points clear of the Netherlands who edged out Ireland 2-1.

Sweden were held to a 0-0 draw by Serbia in Group A1 and sit second in the standings, behind Denmark on goal difference after their fellow Scandinavians' 1-1 draw with Italy.

In Group C1, meanwhile, Bosnia and Herzegovina hammered Liechtenstein 13-1 in Zenica.

In spite of the scoreline, it was still a long way short of the women's international record of 21-0 which has occurred five times, most recently when Haiti saw off British Virgin Islands in 2022.

Only the winners of each of the four European 'League A' groups will qualify automatically for the World Cup.

The other 12 teams go into play-offs, which will also involve the four League B group winners and the six group winners and two best runners-up from League C. – AFP

## Southampton shock Fulham to reach FA Cup quarters



LONDON – Championship side Southampton reached the FA Cup quarter-finals with a shock 1-0 win against Fulham yesterday.

Ross Stewart's ice-cool penalty in stoppage-time at Craven Cottage sealed Southampton's fifth-round upset.

It was an embarrassing loss for Fulham manager Marco Silva, who paid the price for a selection gamble that backfired.

Silva made nine changes to the team following a disappointing 1-0 defeat against West Ham in the Premier League earlier this week, but his switches failed to produce the desired result.

Southampton won it in the first minute of stoppage-time when Finn Azaz was fouled by Fulham defender Joachim Andersen and Stewart drilled his spot-kick past Benjamin Lecomte.

Relegated from the Premier League last season, they are through to the FA Cup quarter-finals for the first time since 2022.

Southampton's success served as a fitting tribute to the greatest day in the club's history.

Their players wore a yellow commemorative kit to mark 50 years since they wore the same shirts when Bobby Stokes sealed then second-tier Southampton's shock 1976 FA Cup final win against

Manchester United at Wembley.

Southampton's current crop still have a way to go to emulate the achievement of Lawrie McMenemy's men.

But Tonda Eckert's side are unbeaten in 10 games in all competitions as they chase FA Cup glory and a place in the Championship play-offs.

Later yesterday, Sunderland travelled to Port Vale, who sit bottom of League One, and Leeds hosted second-tier Norwich, while West Ham meet Brentford today.

Arsenal, Chelsea, Manchester City and Liverpool have already booked their places in the quarter-finals. – AFP



Faisal Kamal

# India crush NZ to win 3<sup>rd</sup> T20 World Cup title

AHMEDABAD – India won a record third T20 World Cup title and became the first team to defend their crown with a 96-run thumping of New Zealand in a lop-sided final yesterday.

Suryakumar Yadav's India were also the first team to lift the trophy on home soil as over 86,000 fans celebrated at the Narendra Modi Stadium.

England and the West Indies have won two titles each.

Sanju Samson's blistering 89 off 46 balls guided the co-hosts to 255-5 and Jasprit Bumrah starred as New Zealand were bowled out for 159 in 19 overs.

Part-time spinner Abhishek Sharma claimed the final wicket of Jacob Duffy, securing a dominant victory.

Axar Patel struck two early blows, including the dangerous Finn Allen for nine, with his left-arm spin.

Bumrah was again at his mesmerising best, delivering a succession of brilliant slower-ball yorkers to finish with figures of 4-15.

Opener Tim Seifert hit 52 off 26 balls but his departure in the ninth over off struggling spinner Varun Chakravarthy effectively ended the Black Caps' slim hopes.

Wickets kept tumbling and Bumrah struck with successive deliveries to bring up a hat-trick ball which was just about negotiated by Lockie Ferguson.

Skipper Mitchell Santner hit 43 but was never going to be able to prevent New Zealand from slipping to their second T20 World Cup final loss after they went down to Australia in 2021.

India exorcised the ghosts of the past at the same venue from when they were shocked by Australia in the 2023 ODI World Cup final.



India's players celebrate after winning the 2026 ICC Men's T20 Cricket World Cup final against New Zealand at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad, India yesterday. – AFP

Earlier, the in-form Samson, who hit 97 not out and 89 in his previous two innings to keep India in the tournament, hit five fours and eight sixes to thrill the raucous home crowd, which included former World Cup winning captains Rohit Sharma and MS Dhoni.

Samson's opening stand of 98 with Abhishek, who plundered 52 off 21 balls, laid the platform for India to go on and score more than 250 for a second straight match, after their seven-run semi-final win over England, and for the third time in the tournament.

Abhishek and Samson waited two overs before they launched a batting blitz to flay New Zealand's attack to all parts of the ground during the powerplay.

Rachin Ravindra finally broke the partnership, having Abhishek caught behind off a wide delivery.

Samson was joined by Ishan Kishan, who hammered 54 off 25 balls with four fours and as many sixes.

Samson reached his third successive fifty and changed gears to hit Ravindra for three

straight sixes.

Jimmy Neesham pulled things back for New Zealand with three wickets in one over to give them hope of keeping India to a gettable total.

He removed Samson, Kishan and Suryakumar for a duck - the last two on successive balls.

But Shivam Dube finished with a flourish, blasting an unbeaten 26 off eight balls as he hit Neesham for three fours and two sixes in the 20<sup>th</sup> over, leaving New Zealand with far too much to do. – AFP

## Dominant Russell wins Australian Grand Prix in Mercedes 1-2

F1

Martin Parry

MELBOURNE – George Russell kept his cool to win a frantic season-opening Australian Grand Prix yesterday from Mercedes teammate Kimi Antonelli after a thrilling battle with Ferrari's Charles Leclerc.

The pole-sitting Briton took the chequered flag by 2.974secs in Melbourne with Leclerc third and Lewis Hamilton fourth in a race that tested Formula One's new-look cars for the first time in competitive conditions.

World champion Lando Norris came fifth - 51 seconds adrift - in his McLaren with Red Bull's Max Verstappen a sensational sixth after starting from 20<sup>th</sup> following a crash in qualifying.

But there was disaster for home hero Oscar Piastri, who crashed on his out-lap to the grid and failed to start with major damage to his McLaren.

With the virtual safety car repeatedly brought out, pre-season favourite Russell stayed calm to clock a sixth Grand Prix win and his first since Singapore last year.

"Feeling incredible. It was a hell of a fight in the beginning," said Russell. "We knew it was going to be challenging.

"I made a bad start and some really tight battles with Charles at the start. Just really glad to cross the finish line."

Under new rules, half of every power unit now is a battery and

drivers had to recharge while braking or by lifting off the throttle to avoid it draining.

The challenge of Melbourne's 58-lap Albert Park circuit was its long sweeping straights, which deplete batteries, and relatively few twisty turns to brake and charge it up again.

Five cars failed to finish as they grappled with the changes, including Piastri, Audi's Nico Hulkenberg, Red Bull's Isack Hadjar, Cadillac's Valtteri Bottas and Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso.

### Strong pace

"Was not the best start we could have wished for, lost a lot of places and I had to recover," said Italy's Antonelli, who crashed heavily on Saturday and only just made qualifying after a major car rebuild.

"But overall was a good race, the pace was really strong especially at the end."

In fine conditions, Haas' Ollie Bearman was seventh and rookie Arvid Lindblad eighth in his Racing Bull. Audi's Gabriel Bortoleto and Alpine's Pierre Gasly rounded out the top 10.

"It was a very, very tricky race. None of us knew what to expect," said Leclerc.

"It has been quite challenging. It looked like Mercedes had a bit more pace than us today."

When the lights turned green Leclerc, on medium tyres, got a jump on Russell while Antonelli, who started second, slid down to seventh.

Hamilton also had a flying start for Ferrari and surged to third, ahead of Hadjar.

Russell immediately hit back, reclaiming the lead on lap two before Leclerc responded a lap later to go first again as they and Hamilton began pulling clear.

It morphed into a thrilling wheel-to-wheel battle at the front, with the lead changing hands three times on lap eight as Russell and Leclerc fought for supremacy.

The virtual safety car came out on lap 12 when Hadjar's car stopped with Russell and Antonelli pitting and coming back on hards.

Leclerc and Hamilton stayed out and when they resumed the Ferraris were 10 seconds clear of Russell, with Lindblad, Antonelli and Verstappen making up the top six.

The virtual safety car was again deployed when Bottas retired with Russell eight seconds behind the Scuderia when they got going again.

With his tyres starting to wear, Leclerc pitted on lap 26 but Hamilton stayed out and was passed by Russell before coming in.

Russell radioed that he thought a one-stop race was viable and he began pulling clear, with Antonelli second.

And there was no way back for the Ferraris, who were 15 seconds behind and barely made a dent in the Mercedes advantage in the second half of the race.

The season moves to China next weekend before Japan. Rounds four and five are scheduled for Bahrain and Saudi Arabia but are under threat given the war in Iran. – AFP

MILANO CORTINA 2026		Medal Table			
Order	NOC	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	China	8	5	3	16
2	Ukraine	3	2	5	10
3	Austria	2	0	0	2
4	Canada	1	3	2	6
5	USA	1	3	1	5
6	France	1	2	0	3
7	Germany	1	1	5	7
8	Italy	1	1	1	3
9	Republic of Korea	1	0	1	2
9	Switzerland	1	0	1	2
11	Norway	1	0	0	1
11	Sweden	1	0	0	1
13	Czechia	0	2	0	2
14	Australia	0	1	0	1
14	Spain	0	1	0	1
14	Netherlands	0	1	0	1
17	Russian Federation	0	0	2	2
18	Slovakia	0	0	1	1

## ‘Amazing!’ - Harry Styles wows fans with one-off gig

MANCHESTER – British pop sensation Harry Styles delighted thousands of fans in the northern English city of Manchester late on Friday with a one-off concert to mark the release of his new album.

Styles staged a special show at the Co-op Live arena to celebrate “Kiss All The Time. Disco, Occasionally” – the former One Direction star’s first studio album in four years.

For nearly two hours, he performed tracks from the new album, including the single “Aperture”, which he sang last weekend at the Brit Awards.

“It was amazing. I’ve been to see him a few times. That was one of the best experiences of my life,” Carly, a 25-year-old primary school teacher told AFP as she left the venue.

She praised the concert’s no-phones policy, with fans

instead handed disposable cameras to capture the moment.

“He’s unbelievable. Every song. Perfect. It was absolutely flawless,” said Catherine, another fan.

Wearing yellow trousers and a blue jumper over a floral shirt, Styles spoke emotionally on stage about his return to music.

“I’ve kind of rediscovered what a privilege it is to be in people’s lives through music over the last couple of years,” Styles told the crowd, according to the PA news agency.

“You’ve changed my life. Thank you so, so much.”

Most fans paid just £20 (US\$27) for a ticket, much less than the prices for his upcoming “Together, Together” world tour.

That opens on May 16 in Amsterdam before a run of 12 shows at London’s Wembley Stadium.

– AFP



A woman takes a selfie in front of pictures of Harry Styles, at the railway station in Holmes Chapel, north west England, on Wednesday. Boasting a centuries-old church, quaint pubs and rolling green countryside, Holmes Chapel looks like many other English villages. But having played a formative part in Harry Styles’ rise to global superstardom, nothing can be as it was for the village near Manchester, in northwest England. Fans from around the world – dubbed Harries – flock there year-round to pay homage at several sites linked to the “Watermelon Sugar” singer. – AFP

## ‘One Battle After Another’ location manager explains THAT car chase

Paula Ramon

GLAMIS – Most movie car chases involve screeching around city corners, weaving in and out of traffic and almost always smashing into a few police cars.

But for the dramatic pursuit that brings the Oscar-nominated “One Battle After Another” to its conclusion, director Paul Thomas Anderson wanted something a little bit different, his location manager Michael Glaser told AFP.

What the pair found was a desert highway that rolls up and down, like an asphalt serpent, with deadly blind peaks and treacherous hidden troughs.

The result is a high-octane cat and mouse hunt like no other in modern movie history.

“Things appear and then disappear and then appear again,” Glaser said.

“It’s the ebbs and flows of the road. You can’t really see what’s on the other side.”

The so-called “River of Hills,” in southern California captivated Anderson, whose low-to-the-ground camera angles give the audience the sweaty-palm feel of actually being aboard the roaring Ford Mustang, Dodge Charger, or modified purple Nissan Sentra in the scene.

### Pulling and pushing

“One Battle After Another,” which has been nominated for 13 Academy Awards, follows washed-up leftist revolutionary Bob Ferguson (Leonardo DiCaprio) as he is forced back into the game when his daughter (Chase Infiniti) goes missing.

Ferguson must battle through the mental fug of decades of pot-smoking to try to remember passwords and safe houses in his bid to best the deranged Colonel Lockjaw (Sean Penn), who has been hired by wealthy right-wing racists to hunt him down.



Location manager Michael Glaser poses at one of the film locations for “One Battle After Another” outside of Borrego Springs, California, last Monday. – AFP

The film’s final sequence sees Bob desperately searching for his daughter as she tries to outrun Lockjaw in the desert.

Glaser, who took AFP to the stretch of Highway 78 in Imperial County where part of the chase was filmed, said the road stands as a metaphor.

“It’s the characters pulling and pushing each other through something,” he said.

The crew also filmed on another stretch of road in Borrego Springs called “The Texas Dip,” one of the around 200 locations Glaser offered for the movie.

“It was the kind of thing where we shot over multiple days,” Andy Jurgensen, the Oscar-nominated editor of “One Battle After Another,” told AFP.

“You just start shooting and just make sure you get all the shots from in front and behind of all the cars, and make sure that the distance kind of makes sense.

“And then it was just like: ‘Okay, let’s put it together.’”

### ‘Subconscious character’

Location managers are among the first to join a project and among the last to leave, says Glaser.

The places they find are crucial to the look and feel of a movie.

In some cases, they take on a life of their own off-screen, like the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art from “Rocky,” which have become a place of pilgrimage for generations of fans.

“I often think of locations as a subconscious character in the movie,” said the 44-year-old Glaser.

They “create a mood, create a palette, create a feeling for characters, the places they inhabit.”

“One Battle After Another” ran the gamut of California locations, from north to south.

“Starting in Eureka, where everything’s green and lush, we step down to central California, where it’s a little bit more like wineries, oak trees, not quite as green, not quite as lush.

“And then you’re in the bleak starkness of desert as the characters wrap up their story.”

Before he received the script, Glaser had already begun his search, based just on the bullet point notes that the movie’s production designer gave him.

He describes the process of scouting for this movie as similar to the way a tree grows.

“Some branches would die off, and others would sprout up,” he said.

This was particularly the case with the desert, whose desolation and desperation gave shape to the film’s third act and the journey its characters were on.

“There’s nobody out here to watch over you or help you or confine you. You’re kind of on your own,” Glaser said.

“One Battle After Another” arrives at the Academy Awards this coming Sunday as the favourite to win best picture, offering Anderson his best chance at Oscars glory for the first time in a career that has seen him garner 14 nominations spanning writing, directing and producing.

For Glaser, whose work doesn’t fit neatly into any of the categories at Hollywood’s biggest night, any recognition the film receives is shared.

“Everyone’s DNA is in the film,” he said. “We’re not directing it. We’re not in front of the camera. But, you know, there’s a little piece of us.” – AFP

## Sony faces US\$2.7 billion class action from UK PlayStation users

LONDON – Japanese entertainment giant Sony will face a £2 billion (US\$2.7 billion) class action lawsuit starting tomorrow in London, accused of allegedly breaching competition law by overcharging millions of UK PlayStation users.

The claimants’ website accuses Sony of “exploiting its UK customers” for nearly a decade by charging them “too much for PlayStation digital games and in-game content”.

“This case seeks to bring that conduct to an end and to secure compensation for those affected,” consumer campaigner Alex Neill, who brought the action on behalf of an estimated 12.2 million users, told AFP.

The PlayStation Store is the official digital platform where gamers can buy Sony classics like “Gran Turismo” and “God of War”, as well as blockbuster titles like “Call of Duty”, “GTA” and “Assassin’s Creed” from other studios.

“Sony has a near monopoly on the sale of digital games” for its console, allowing it to dictate prices and charge a 30 percent sales commission to video game publishers, the claimants allege.

According to the claimants, PC game distribution platforms – which face greater competition – charge a lower commission of around 12 to 20 percent.

“Games are now designed to incentivise players to spend as much money as possible (including children),” the claimants’ website alleges, including for players to “progress, unlock more features, or customise their experience with new characters or weapons”.

Sony’s prices “are out of all proportion to the costs of Sony providing these services to its customers”, they said.

The trial is due to be heard at the Competition Appeal Tribunal in London, and is expected to last around 10 weeks.

The lawsuit launched in 2022 is seeking £1.97 billion in damages, to be shared by anyone who purchased digital games or add-on content via the PlayStation store in the decade leading to February 2026, with some limited exceptions.

Under UK law, all potentially affected persons are included in this type of class action by default, and may benefit from possible compensation, unless they voluntarily opt out.

Sony did not immediately respond to AFP’s request for comment, but in its defence to the claim argued that its distribution model is justified.

Last year, Apple lost a lawsuit in London for abusing its dominant position and charging excessive commissions on its in-house App Store.

The US tech giant, which has said it intends to appeal the decision, could be liable to reimburse millions of users. – AFP

### World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 0°C~13°C	Manila 22°C~31°C	New York 7°C~19°C	Lisbon 9°C~13°C
Shanghai 1°C~13°C	Bangkok 25°C~37°C	London 8°C~15°C	Rio de Janeiro 23°C~28°C
Hong Kong 16°C~21°C	Tokyo 3°C~11°C	Frankfurt 4°C~17°C	Luanda 25°C~29°C
Taipei 13°C~18°C	Singapore 23°C~33°C	Vancouver 2°C~7°C	Maputo 20°C~28°C
Guangzhou 14°C~24°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~36°C	Paris 8°C~17°C	Dili 24°C~30°C
Nanjing -1°C~15°C	Jakarta 23°C~31°C	Moscow 0°C~1°C	São Tomé 26°C~32°C
Guilin 8°C~13°C	Seoul -2°C~10°C	Las Vegas 12°C~26°C	Praia 18°C~27°C
Xi’an 4°C~17°C	Sydney 19°C~25°C	Monte Carlo 12°C~16°C	Bissau 21°C~39°C



Audrey Pascual Seco of Spain competes during the para alpine skiing women's downhill sitting match at the Milan-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Cortina D'amezzo, Italy, on Saturday. - Xinhua



Cai Jiayun (left) of China helps Marco Maier of Germany after the para biathlon men's sprint at the Milan-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Tesero, Italy, on Saturday. - Xinhua



China's Liu Wenxu fights for the puck with Germany's Sven Stumpe during the ice hockey match between China and Germany at the Milano Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Milan on Saturday. - AFP



Kurt Oatway of Canada competes during the para alpine skiing men's downhill sitting match at the Milan-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Cortina D'amezzo, Italy, on Saturday. - Xinhua



Baek Hyejin (front) of South Korea competes during the wheelchair curling mixed doubles round robin session 4 match against China at the Milan-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Cortina D'amezzo, Italy, on Friday. - Xinhua

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

