



Govt aims to ensure transparency of guidance fund's operation via 'multidimensional' oversight mechanism

Tony Wong

The local government hosted a presentation session yesterday for representatives from the finance industry and other sectors briefing them about its ongoing preparations for setting up a so-called "guidance fund" aiming to channel different types of private capital towards investments in Macau's key emerging industries, where officials underlined that the operation of the fund will be subject to a "multidimensional" oversight mechanism with the aim of ensuring its transparency.

Yesterday's presentation session, held at the Macau Science Centre (MSC) in Nape, came after the government announced details of the fund during a press conference late last month.

Delivering a speech during yesterday's presentation session, Macau Monetary Authority (AMCM) President Vong Sin Man summarised basic information about the guidance fund outlined by Secretary for Economy and Finance Anton Tai Kin Ip during last month's press conference.

Tai said during last month's press conference, Vong noted yesterday, that the local government is planning to allocate 11 billion patacas to the guidance fund from the returns that it has earned from investing its financial reserves over the years, with the size of the fund expected to amount to 20 billion patacas after including the first tranche of private capital. Tai said at that time that the guidance fund aims to channel



Macau Monetary Authority (AMCM) President Vong Sin Man (centre) speaks during yesterday's presentation session at the Macau Science Centre (MSC) as other officials including Tam Chi Neng (second from right), an advisor to the Secretariat for Economy and Finance, look on. — Photo: Tony Wong

different types of private capital towards investments made in Macau's key emerging industries and future industries.

Tai underlined during last month's press conference, Vong noted yesterday, that the government will play a leading role in guiding the fund, but with its operation to be mainly driven by market forces. Tai also stressed at that time that the operation of the guidance

fund will stick to the principle of "patient capital", a synonym for long-term capital, without prioritising short-term financial returns as its main objective, and instead favouring a long-term and systematic strategy to vigorously promote the development and upgrading of key industries.

According to DeepSeek, patient capital is a long-term investment approach that

prioritises sustainable growth and significant future impact over immediate, short-term financial gains. It involves providing funding with the expectation of returns over an extended period, allowing investments in areas like infrastructure or pioneering technologies to mature and deliver substantial long-term economic or social benefits.

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Trump says he's 'nowhere near' ordering US ground troops into Iran

WASHINGTON – US President Donald Trump said yesterday that he is "nowhere near" ordering US ground troops into Iran to safeguard nuclear material at Isfahan, according to the *New York Post*.

"We haven't made any decision on that. We're nowhere near it," Trump told the newspaper in a phone interview.

Trump also said he is "not happy" with Mojtaba Khamenei as Iran's new supreme leader.

On Sunday, Trump said that Iran's next supreme leader "is not going to last long"

without his approval.

"He's going to have to get approval from us," Trump said in an interview with ABC News. "If he doesn't get approval from us he's not going to last long."

On February 28, the United States and Israel launched joint attacks on Tehran and several other Iranian cities, killing Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, dozens of senior officials and military commanders, as well as hundreds of civilians. — *Xinhua* (More about Iran war on pages 7, 8, 9, 10 & 13)



Portugal's new president António José Seguro (right) is sworn in during a ceremony at the Assembly of the Republic (parliament) in Lisbon yesterday. Seguro yesterday began his five-year mandate after winning the country's presidential runoff election on February 8, mainly backed by the opposition Socialist Party (PS) President Xi Jinping congratulated Seguro on assuming the presidency. — *Xinhua* (More on page 12)

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The Macau Post Daily

China to raise gasoline, diesel retail prices

China will raise its retail prices of gasoline and diesel from today, following a sharp rise in international oil prices, the country's top economic planner said yesterday.

— Story on p. 6

Asian economies move to limit Mideast war's impact at home

Faced with soaring prices and disruptions to their oil and gas supplies, Asian economies heavily dependent on fossil fuels from the war-struck Gulf are moving to protect their domestic markets.

— Story on p. 9

Stop the flow of US guns to Mexican narcotics, Sheinbaum urges

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum called yesterday on the US to halt the flow of weapons to her country's drug cartels, after President Donald Trump criticised her record on fighting the groups.

— Story on p. 11

Gongbei customs seizes 623 grams of stony coral

Armando Neves

Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers seized 623 grams of stony coral at Gongbei checkpoint on February 8.

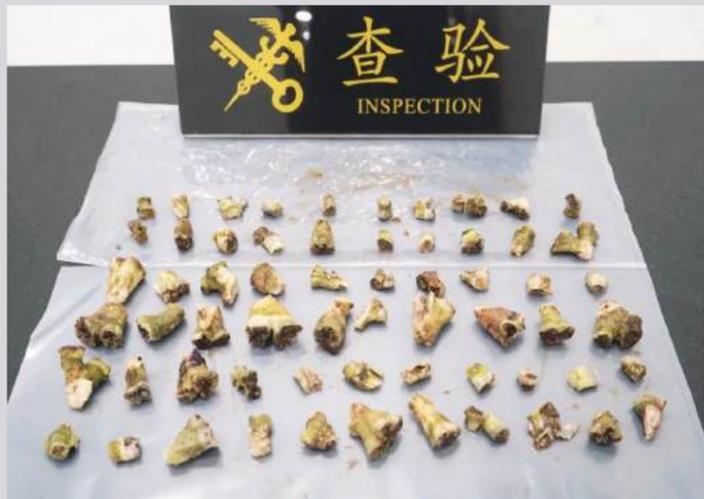
On that day, customs officers noticed a Macau traveller behaving strangely and walking with a rigid gait when entering the Chinese mainland through the checkpoint's "green channel" in the arrivals hall so they intercepted him for inspection.

Customs officers discovered 623 grams of suspected coral concealed in a yellow bag.

The Gongbei Customs Technology Centre later confirmed that the coral belongs to the order Scleractinia – commonly known as stony coral. All species within the

order Scleractinia are listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and are classified as items prohibited from exiting or entering the Chinese mainland.

In the statement, Gongbei Customs reminded the public that according to CITES and the Wildlife Protection Law of the People's Republic of China (PRC), as well as the regulations on the import and export of endangered wild animals and plants, it is prohibited to trade, carry, or mail endangered species and their products across border checkpoints without legal import and export certificates. The statement noted that serious violations may lead to criminal liability. ■



This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs yesterday shows stony corals seized by its officers at Gongbei checkpoint on February 8.

Sports Bureau hosts 'Putting the Community in Motion with Energy' initiative for all ages

Khalel Vallo

A new community sports initiative aimed at promoting healthy lifestyles was held on Sunday in Seac Pai Van, aiming to draw residents of all ages to participate in health and fitness activities, according to a statement by the Sports Bureau (ID) that day.

The programme, titled "Putting the Community in Motion with Energy," was organised by the bureau as part of the government's policy to bring more public resources into neighbourhood communities, the statement said.

The statement added that the programme was held at the leisure area of Ip Heng Building in Seac Pai Van district under the theme "Sports Health × Community Sports Activity Day" featuring a series of activities, underlining that the event aimed to raise awareness of the health benefits of regular physical exercise while creating a lively and engaging atmosphere for residents.

A range of activities was on offer, including blood pressure checks, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) consultation services, recreational sports experience zones and a home exercise demonstration area, according to the statement.



This handout photo provided by the Sports Bureau (ID) on Sunday shows residents "of all ages" engage in a home exercise demonstration during its "Putting the Community in Motion with Energy" initiative held at Ip Heng Building in Seac Pai Van that day.

The statement noted that professional instructors were invited to guide residents through simple home workouts and share practical health tips based on traditional Chinese medicine, adding that residents of different age groups – including seniors, youngsters and families with children – participated in the event.

In the home exercise area, participants practised easy stretching routines under the instructors' guidance,

helping them relax both physically and mentally while encouraging family interaction, the statement said.

The bureau said that the initiative highlighted the vitality of community neighbourhoods while promoting healthier lifestyles. Additional activities focusing on stress relief through exercise and sports nutrition will be held between May 10 and June 28 as part of the ongoing community fitness programme. ■

Macau customs seizes 107 kg of silver granules in 8 days, worth 2.21 million patacas



This undated handout photo released by the Macau Customs Service on Sunday shows a customs officers checking the silver granules at a parallel trading den in the peninsula's northern district.



This undated handout photo provided by the Macau Customs Service on Sunday shows silver granules concealed in a shower gel dispenser.

Armando Neves

The Macau Customs Service announced in a statement on Sunday that its officers seized 107 kilograms of silver granules worth 2.21 million patacas in eight days.

According to the statement, customs officers raided a parallel-trading den in the peninsula's northern district on Friday where they seized 12 kilograms of silver granules worth around 240,000 patacas in total.

The statement said that the officers caught a 47-year-old local male who ran the business and hired parallel traders to smuggle the silver granules from Macau to the Chinese mainland.

Meanwhile, the statement also said that between February 27 and

March 5, customs officers busted 33 smugglers attempting smuggle 95 kilograms of silver granules worth 1.97 million patacas through the Barrier Gate and Qingmao checkpoints.

Customs officers noticed that 33 travellers were behaving suspiciously and so intercepted them, the statement said, adding that they discovered that the smugglers had concealed silver granules within their personal belongings and clothing or wrapped them around various parts of their body, attempting to smuggle them into the Chinese mainland.

The statement said that the ages of the smugglers involved in the case range from 16 to 71.

The Macau Customs Service

has initiated legal proceedings against them in accordance with the provisions of the External Trade Law.

The man who was in charge of the parallel trading den and the 33 smugglers could face a maximum fine of 50,000 patacas each. Furthermore, the seized goods will be declared forfeited to the local government.

Separately, as some of the smugglers involved are students, the Customs Service has immediately activated its communication mechanism to report the matter to the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) for follow-up.

As the business premises in question did not possess a valid operating licence, the case has been referred to the Financial Services Bureau (DSF) for follow-up. ■

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Macau Weather

**MAINLY CLOUDY.
LIGHT RAIN AT FIRST.
FORCE 3 TO 4 NORTH TO
NORTHEASTERLY WINDS,
OCCASIONALLY FORCE 5.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL
RANGE BETWEEN 60% AND 85%.**



16°C~20°C

Source: SMG

Writers discuss Hotel Central's place in literature on rooftop

Rui Pastorin

"A Literary Celebration of the Hotel Central" was held last night on the rooftop of the eponymous hotel in Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro (亞美打利庇盧大馬路) last night, gathering book lovers for cocktails and book readings conducted by British writer and China historian Paul French, and Annemarie Evans, a broadcaster and journalist also from the UK.

Excerpts from books by four authors were read to last night's attendees, with each featuring Hotel Central and the writers' depictions of Macau's past. Held as part of the 15th Macau Literary Festival—The Script Road, the excerpts read and discussed were by authors Han Suyin, Ernest Gann and Richard Mason, with the works published during the 1950s. The last of the excerpts came from the 1963 travelogue titled "Thrilling Cities" by British writer and James Bond creator Ian Fleming as a journalist for *The Sunday Times*. Yesterday's speakers noted that all the writers had stayed at least once at the hotel, which opened nearly a century ago, on July 22, 1928.

Also presented yesterday was a brief introduction to Hotel Central, which was



British writer and China historian Paul French reads an excerpt from one of the four books presented last night as broadcaster and journalist Annemarie Evans holds up a lamp for better lighting.

— Photo: Rui Pastorin

the tallest building in Macau and the whole Portuguese colonial empire and the city's first building to have lifts. The hotel was, at one point, also Macau's first premier integrated entertainment and gaming destination. After

a period of decline, it was revamped and reopened as a two-star hotel in 2024.

Regarding the speakers, French, who first visited Macau in the late 1980s as a language student, has written various books on China,

with among his works being *The New York Times* bestselling and Edgar Award-winning murder mystery "Midnight in Peking", "City of Devils: A Shanghai Noir", and the biography "Her Lotus Year". Macau has also been the subject of French's works, those being his 2021 book "Strangers on the Praia: A Tale of Refugees and Resistance in Wartime Macao", and "Destination Macao", published just last year. The latter is the third of his "Destination" series and features "18 true stories of fascinating people who lived in or visited Macau in the 19th and 20th centuries", according to a summary of the book on Amazon.

The *Post* published a book review by Harald Brüning, titled "Destination Macao" by Paul French - a good read", on April 27, 2025 <https://macaupostdaily.com/news/24724>

Evans, meanwhile, is based in Hong Kong, having lived there for 32 years. She is also a writer and noted that she loves visiting Macau.

The literary festival continues tonight with a book launch at the Portuguese Bookshop and a film-screening at Cinematheque•Passion. The schedule and more details of the festival, which lasts through Sunday, can be found on <https://www.facebook.com/macaulitfest/> ■

Macau logs 46 chikungunya fever cases last year

Ida Cheong

The Health Bureau (SSM) announced in a statement yesterday that Macau recorded 46 cases of chikungunya fever (38 imported, 8 local) and 36 cases of dengue fever (35 imported, 1 local) last year.

The SSM prevention of dengue fever working group held its 2026 work conference yesterday, with the aim of effectively addressing the heightened risk of dengue and chikungunya fever in Macau and neighbouring regions, and to safeguard public health.

According to the statement, last year's data indicate a severe dengue situation globally and in nearby regions. Notable case counts from neighbouring areas last year include Vietnam (184,903), Indonesia (161,928), Cambodia (63,016), Thailand (57,440), Malaysia (51,406), Singapore (4,036), Guangdong Province (3,991), and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) (59 dengue cases and 82 chikungunya cases).

With increased population movements and the onset of the peak activity period for the *Aedes albopictus* mosquito* next month, the bureau's working group has concluded that the risk of cross-border transmission and the subsequent local spread of the "two fevers" is rising. This necessitates enhanced efforts in the fight against mosquito-borne diseases, the statement said.

The statement noted that the working group evaluated the transmission risks for this year and discussed the implementation of various control and publicity measures. The planned actions include, according to the statement, a raft of inspection campaigns, source reduction (eliminating breeding sites), and mosquito control operations.

Concurrently, the working group will intensify educating the community through outreach activities, emphasising that the most effective way to prevent mosquito breeding is to eliminate standing water, the statement added.

The bureau reminded the public to adopt the "three mosquito prevention steps" to collectively curb the threat of mosquito-borne diseases, including regularly removing stagnant water in the workplace and at home; using mosquito nets or turn on the air conditioner at home to reduce the chance of mosquito bites; and wearing light-coloured long-sleeved shirts and trousers and use repellent during outdoor activities.

The statement urged residents to seek medical attention immediately if suspected symptoms of dengue fever or chikungunya fever appear such as fever and rash. ■

* *The Aedes albopictus* is a small, aggressive, black-and-white mosquito known for its distinctive striped appearance and its ability to transmit several harmful viruses to humans. — DeepSeek



This handout provided by the Health Bureau (SSM) yesterday shows its 2026 work conference yesterday about preventing chikungunya fever and dengue fever.

DSEDТ consultations focus on optimising 'Consumption Tax Regulations' procedures



Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSEDТ) Director Yau Yun Wah (second from right), DSEDТ senior official Sarah Lo Chi Man (left) and other representatives pose for a group photo in the Luso International Bank Building in Nam Van during one of yesterday's two industry consultation sessions about reviewing the government's "Consumption Tax Regulations" procedures. — Photo: Ida Cheong

Ida Cheong

Aiming to optimise the import of alcoholic beverages and tobacco business operations for the industry and shorten the required cash flow time, the Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSEDТ) is holding four industry consultation sessions to review procedures outlined in the government's "Consumption Tax Regulations" and extensively gathered opinions from local tobacco and alcohol importers.

The first two sessions were held at Luso International Bank Building in Nam Van yesterday. The last two will be held today at the building where the bureau is headquartered. The consultation process will end on Sunday.

DSEDТ Director Yau Yun Wah noted that the current "Consumption Tax Regulations" govern only two categories of imported goods: spirits with an alcohol content of 30 percent or more (excluding rice wine) (Group II) and tobacco (Group III), including shredded tobacco, cigars, and cigarettes.

A review of the current procedures under the regulations showed that most tobacco and alcohol importers or operators predominantly use the "simultaneous voluntary payment system" stipulated by the regulation, Yau said, adding that the system requires taxpayers to pay the consumption tax to the government before the goods arrive in Macau. For importers, this operational process increases their costs.

Additionally, if an import permit is cancelled or there is a shortfall in the goods upon arrival, importers must apply to the government for a refund of the prepaid taxes, based on the current regulation, Yau added.

Yau noted that the proposed amendments primarily focus on optimising the "deferral of tax payment deadlines" and the "full digitalisation of tax payment procedures".

Considering that the tax payment deadlines may affect business' cash flow, the bureau's senior official Sarah Lo Chi Man added that the proposed amendments means that importers would no longer have to pay consumption taxes before the goods arrive in Macau. Instead, the tax payable would be retained. She noted that this change would eliminate the need for operators to apply for tax refunds or wait for reimbursements, thereby reducing the required cash flow time.

Furthermore, regarding plans for the full digitalisation of tax payment procedures, Lo added that importers would only need to open an account at a participating bank and provide a one-time authorisation, which would allow the bureau to retain, release, or deduct the applicable consumption tax from the designated account for each import permit.

Once authorised, importers would no longer need to apply for individual import permits or arrange separate tax payments using different methods, saving time, effort, and costs associated with each transaction, Lo said. ■



Lúcia Lemos explores architectural beauty at 'White Diamond' solo exhibition



Macau-based Portuguese visual artist Lúcia Lemos poses with one of her exhibits at Creative Macau in Nape on Thursday.
- Photos: Khalel Vallo

Khalel Vallo

An exhibition by Portuguese Macau-based visual artist Lúcia Lemos is currently on display at Creative Macau, presenting black-and-white photographs of the iconic Casa da Música in Portugal. Titled "A White Diamond Exhibition," the show opened last week and runs until March 28.

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

A central focus of the exhibition is Porto's architectural landmark Casa da Música ("House of Music").

Speaking to the *Post* at the opening ceremony on Thursday, Lemos said the series was inspired by her fascination with the striking architecture of Casa da Música, which she photographed in black-and-white in 2006 using her Rolleiflex camera.

The "Rolleiflex" name is most commonly used to refer to Rollei's premier line of medium format twin lens reflex (TLR) cameras produced in Germany.

Lemos said that the exhibition's title, "White Diamond," reflects the distinctive appearance of the concert hall. "Casa da Música is an iconic white building in a very old city," she pointed out. "It is surrounded by buildings from the 19th and 20th century made of dark granite. In contrast, Casa da Música, built in 2005, is very white and bright, with many faces like a diamond. That is why I named it 'White Diamond.'"

She told the *Post* that the building immediately captured her attention when she first encountered it. According to Lemos, the unusual structure created a strong emotional response, both visually and personally. "It had a big impact on my eyes and my feelings," she said, describing the attraction she felt toward its form and presence.

Lemos noted that the building was controversial when it was constructed because of its modern design, adding that appearing suddenly among Porto's historic architecture, the structure stood out for its innovative and unconventional style, which was very different from the surrounding buildings.

Lemos added that her interest in photographing the structure was driven by its visual qualities rather than technical aspects. Reflecting on the process of photographing the site, Lemos said she experienced a sense of happiness while framing each shot. "Any angle of the building – the light, the shape, the brightness – made me happy," she said. "When I frame the picture, I try to capture reality and the singularity that the building gives to us."

Lemos is an award-winning multidisciplinary visual artist whose work spans photography, video fine art printmaking, jewellery, ceramics, sculpture and installation art. Her solo exhibitions have been held in cities including Berkeley in the US, Lisbon, Macau, Monza and Palermo in Italy, Porto, Salzburg in Austria, and Shanghai.

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

Govt proposes tougher anti-smoking rules

Tony Wong

The government is proposing several amendments to Macau's anti-smoking law. Key changes include expanding the smoking ban to more outdoor public areas, prohibiting the use of e-cigarettes in all public spaces, and allowing anti-smoking inspectors to be equipped with body-worn video cameras (body cams).

The Health Bureau (SSM) has launched a 32-day public consultation on proposed amendments to Macau's Tobacco Prevention and Control Law, which was announced during a press conference on its premises adjacent to the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre on Friday.

The public consultation, which started on Sunday, is running until April 8, during which a session for members of the general public will be held on Thursday next week.

The public consultation document, available in Chinese and Portuguese, can be downloaded from the consultation's dedicated website (https://www.ssm.gov.mo/portal1/tc_consult).

Amendments to laws proposed by the government must be passed by the legislature to take effect.

After the completion of the ongoing public consultation process, the government will assess the opinions and suggestions gathered during the process, draft an amendment bill, and submit it to the legislature for debate, review and vote.

During Friday's press conference, SSM Deputy Director Cheang Seng Ip delivered a speech outlining the government's proposed amendments to the anti-smoking law and its rationale for proposing the amendments, after which Lam Chong, who heads the bureau's Tobacco and Alcohol Prevention and Control Office, presented details

on the matter listed in the public consultation document.

After the Tobacco Prevention and Control Law came into force in 2012, it was amended in 2018 and 2022.

According to the current version of Macau's anti-smoking law, smoking is banned in all indoor public venues and facilities, except smoking lounges in casinos and at the airport. In addition, smoking is also prohibited in certain outdoor public areas such as public parks and gardens, public beaches, footbridges, pedestrian underpasses, and within 10 metres of all public bus stops.

Illegal smoking carries a fixed fine of 1,500 patacas.

Smoking ban outside schools and crèches

The consultation document proposes to newly list outdoor areas within 10 metres of the entrances to the city's schools and crèches as statutory no-smoking zones.

The document notes that with the aim of better protecting children from exposure to second-hand smoke, the Health Bureau rolled out a smoking ban in outdoor areas within 10 metres of the entrances to three schools and a crèche on November 24 last year, where those violating the smoking ban are fined 1,500 patacas. The document notes that after assessing the implementation of the smoking ban at these four pilot sites, the government is now proposing to newly classify outdoor areas within 10 metres of the entrances to all schools and crèches as statutory no-smoking zones.

During the press conference, Lam noted that according to the current version of the Tobacco Prevention and Control Law, the Health Bureau can, on a case-by-case basis,



Health Bureau (SSM) Deputy Director Cheang Seng Ip (centre) speaks during Friday's press conference as Lam Chong (left), who heads the bureau's Tobacco and Alcohol Prevention and Control Office, and Rui Amaral, a legal advisor to the bureau, look on. — Photo: Tony Wong

designate additional outdoor public areas as statutory no-smoking zones beyond those listed in the law after obtaining the green light from the respective public entities governing the areas concerned. Consequently, Lam said, the outdoor areas within 10 metres of the entrances to the three schools and the crèche are also statutory no-smoking zones so that those smoking there face a fine of 1,500 patacas.

Lam noted that after the government-proposed amendments to the anti-smoking law take effect in the future, the Health Bureau will no longer need to obtain the green light from the respective public entities to designate outdoor areas outside additional schools and crèches as statutory no-smoking zones on a case-by-case basis.

Govt proposes to ban smoking on streets on case-by-case basis

The document notes the current implementation of a pilot no-smoking zone on pavements around Dr. Carlos D'Assumpção Park in Nape, which started last month.

The pilot no-smoking zone is

implemented on the pavements outside Dr. Carlos D'Assumpção Park, the pavements outside nine buildings on Alameda Dr. Carlos D'Assumpção, i.e., the two-way avenue outside Dr. Carlos D'Assumpção Park, and the recreational area located between the park and the waterfront Kun Iam statue. Smokers can smoke at the nine designated smoking spots set up in the pilot Dr. Carlos D'Assumpção Park no-smoking zone.

As streets in general are not statutory no-smoking zones and the Dr. Carlos D'Assumpção Park no-smoking zone is being implemented on a pilot basis, those smoking in the zone will not be fined and instead they will merely be urged by anti-smoking inspectors not to smoke there.

In line with the experience from the current implementation of the pilot Dr. Carlos D'Assumpção Park no-smoking zone, the consultation document also proposes that after listening to public opinion and from the respective public entities governing the areas concerned, the government can designate certain streets and squares with dense

pedestrian flows as statutory no-smoking zones on a case-by-case basis, through the promulgation of a chief executive order, with the aim of better addressing the issue where non-smokers are affected by those smoking while walking.

Govt proposes to bar smoking e-cigarettes in all public spaces

Moreover, the consultation document also proposes to bar smoking e-cigarettes in all public spaces

The 2018 amendments to the anti-smoking law barred the sale of e-cigarettes in Macau. The 2022 amendments to the law further toughened the regulations on e-cigarettes. Since December 2022, Macau has barred the manufacture, distribution, sale, import and export of e-cigarettes. In addition, travellers are barred from bringing e-cigarettes into and taking them out of Macau.

The consultation document notes that as the toughened regulations on e-cigarettes have been in force for over three years, e-cigarettes' related products, including e-liquid and pods, held by people, theoretically, should have already been used up. However, the government says it still detects the use of e-cigarettes in Macau due to various reasons, such as the ease of purchasing them in neighbouring regions, and the small size of e-cigarettes making it easier for travellers to smuggle them into Macau without being detected by the authorities.

Consequently, according to the document, the government is proposing to bar the possession of e-cigarettes in all public spaces. The document notes that the practice of smoking e-cigarettes in public spaces will be regarded as possessing such items there. ■

Young man falls victim to nude chat scam, loses 812 patacas

Armindo Neves

A young local man fell victim to a nude chat scam losing 812 patacas, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Lei Chi Hou said during a regular press conference yesterday.

According to Lei, the Judiciary Police received a report from the victim on Sunday that he came across an advertisement for a pornographic website on a messaging app, adding that after "liking" the ad, someone contacted him and suggested downloading an app unknown to him that could remotely control sex toys.

Following the instructions, Lei said that the victim scanned a QR code provided by the scammer, downloaded an app and entered a "verification code." Subsequently, the victim granted the app permission to access the phone's contacts and photos, Lei said.

After completing these steps, Lei said that the victim engaged in a nude chat with the fraudster via Telegram, adding that the call was ended by the fraudster after around two minutes.



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Lei Chi Hou looks on during yesterday's press conference at the PJ headquarters in Nape. — Photo: Armindo Neves

Subsequently, the fraudster claimed to have recorded the nude chat and obtained access to the victim's contact list, threatening to make the footage public unless a "ransom" of 2,500 yuan was paid. The victim transferred 695 yuan (812 patacas) to the scammer, Lei said.

Following discussions with family members, Lei said that the victim reported the matter to the Judiciary Police, stating a loss of 812 patacas. ■

Govt aims to ensure transparency of guidance fund's operation via 'multidimensional' oversight mechanism

Continued from p.1

Tai also underlined last month that the guidance fund ultimately aims to solidly advance Macau's appropriate economic diversification and its industrial upgrading, support the transformation of technological achievements and their industrialisation, create more quality jobs for local residents, and promote the diversification of employment opportunities in the city.

In his speech yesterday, Vong pointed out that the setting-up of the guidance fund will be an important measure to innovate Macau's investment and financing mechanisms, maximise the effectiveness of public financial resources, and serve the real economy and industrial diversification.

Presenting details of the fund during yesterday's session, Tam Chi Neng, an advisor to Tai's office, noted that the guidance fund's operation

will be overseen by the chief executive, while the government will set up a public enterprise tasked with the fund's day-to-day operation and management.

Tam underlined that the government will now advance various aspects of preparation tasks with the aim of completing the setting-up of the guidance fund within this year, including the setting-up of the public enterprise running the fund and the drawing-up of an administrative regulation governing the fund's operation.

Tam said that it will be important to ensure the transparency of the guidance fund's operation. He said that the fund's operation will be subject to a "multidimensional" oversight mechanism, the modus operandi of which will be outlined by the future administrative regulation governing the fund's operation.

Government-drafted administrative regulations, aka

by-laws, do not require the legislature's approval.

Tam noted that according to the future administrative regulation, the guidance fund will be operated and managed by a public enterprise, because of which members of the public can check details of the public enterprise's operation, personnel structure and other aspects as well as its annual reports on the website of the Public Assets Supervision and Management Bureau (DSGAP).

Tam said that according to the future administrative regulation, the guidance fund's operation will be required to undergo regular evaluation of its performance conducted by a third-party entity, and its operation will be published by a report every year.

Moreover, Tam noted, the fund's operation will be subject to oversight by the Legislative Assembly (AL). ■

'Local View Power' open for submissions until April 10



This poster provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) calls for submissions for "Local View Power".

Rui Pastorin

Proposals for the Cultural Affairs Bureau's (IC) "Local View Power" programme are now open to Macau ID holders aged 18 or older and are interested in film production, with applications accepted through April 10.

According to a statement by the bureau on Friday, the programme is divided into documentary, short-feature and animation, each further divided into advanced, open and freshman levels.

The statement said that professionals will be invited to form an adjudicating panel to select up to 16 works. The shortlisted works, according to the statement, will receive "a total prize of up to 1.55 million patacas, subject to the category and level"; while individual shortlisted works can get up to 280,000 patacas

for production costs, according to the statement. Professionals will guide and provide one-on-one advice to each of the selected teams.

The statement said that the programme will this year introduce "new targeted support measures", adding that the adjudicating panel "will select no more than three outstanding works from the selected shorts, providing film festival strategy planning and international sales promotion services to the selected teams for a year".

One can find regulations and application forms on www.icm.gov.mo. One can make submissions to the Cultural Affairs Bureau Building in Praça do Tap Siac (塔石廣場) or send scanned documents by email to LVP@icm.gov.mo. More details are available on the website. ■

Foreign envoys, journalists closely watch 'two sessions' for policy signals amid global uncertainty

BEIJING – With China's annual legislative and political consultative sessions, known as the "two sessions," underway in Beijing, foreign envoys and international journalists are closely watching the event for signals on the world's second-largest economy's development trajectory and its global implications.

They describe the gathering, during which the draft outline of the country's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) is being examined, as a crucial window into China's policy direction and a source of stability in an uncertain world.

"China is one of the biggest countries in the world. Everybody wants to know what is happening here and what policies will be adopted," said Daouda Bitie, Burkina Faso's ambassador to China. "That's why the 'two sessions' attract everyone."

For many, that means witnessing China's governance model up close. "My primary goal is to explain China's political system in more detail, because many audiences in the West don't really understand how it works," said Mojca Pisek, a journalist from Slovenia.

Bruno Falci, a Brazilian journalist with Latin American television channel teleSUR covering his first "two sessions," noted the diversity of participants at the annual gathering, where people from various ethnic groups and sectors including education, healthcare and technology

have their voices heard. He also described China as a model for Latin America in poverty eradication.

James Kimonyo, Rwanda's ambassador to China, who has been invited to observe the annual "two sessions" for the seventh time, said the gathering offers insights into China's policy priorities and strategic direction. He noted that discussions on high-quality development, technological innovation, green transformation and opening up carry implications for Rwanda and the wider world.

With China set to embark on its new five-year plan, foreign observers are eager to understand the blueprint – from health and technology to trade and global cooperation.

Martin Taylor, the World Health Organization (WHO) representative to China, welcomed the plan's emphasis on improving the healthcare of the people.

"I'm very happy to see a big focus on improving health and healthcare in the 15th Five-Year Plan, so that people can live healthy and productive lives," he said.

"We are looking into how technology and innovation can further advance China's development agenda as well as the global development agenda," said James George, the United Nations Development Programme's Resident Representative ad interim for China. "Innovation, artificial intelligence and the digital economy will be key."

Bangladeshi Ambassador to China Md. Nazmul Islam said he was most focused on China's modernization and opening-up efforts, noting both countries' commitment to closer cooperation, particularly in areas such as modernization and connectivity under the Belt and Road Initiative.

"We need a world where we share prosperity," said Shahbaz Khan, director of the UNESCO Regional Office for East Asia. "I am very much looking forward to the next chapter of progress under China's 15th Five-Year Plan, and to seeing how the world benefits from it."

In a world grappling with volatility, many are looking to China for certainty. "In these turbulent times, I want to see how China can contribute to global stability," said Eric Napoli, a journalist with Brazil's A Tarde.

Maldivian Ambassador to China Fazeel Najeeb noted that in an uncertain world, China's role and its global initiatives are very important. "China is showing very steady hands. That is very encouraging for developing countries," he said.

"China is not only an example for socialist countries but also a hope for the world," said Alberto Blanco Silva, Cuba's ambassador to China, speaking in Chinese. "Hope, confidence, stability and unity – that is the future we all want to see."

– Xinhua

NPC holds 2nd plenary meeting



Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs Han Jun gives an interview after the second plenary meeting of the fourth session of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

BEIJING – The fourth session of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC), the country's top legislature, held its second plenary meeting yesterday.

Xi Jinping and other Party and state leaders, including Li Qiang, Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang, Li Xi and Han Zheng, attended the meeting.

Zhao Leji, chairman of the NPC Standing Committee, delivered a work report of the Standing Committee at the meeting.

Noting that new progress had been made across various areas of work in 2025, Zhao highlighted the NPC Standing Committee's efforts in improving the system of socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics and in building a socialist country under the rule of law at a higher level.

Looking ahead, Zhao said the NPC Standing Committee will move forward with steady progress to promote the high-quality development of people's congresses, making due contributions to attaining a strong start to China's 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-2030). The report also outlines the NPC Standing Committee's priorities for this year.

Delivering the top court's

work report, Zhang Jun, president of the Supreme People's Court (SPC), said the SPC in 2025 focused its work on providing high-quality judicial services to advance Chinese modernization.

In 2026, Zhang said, Chinese courts will place greater emphasis on safeguarding and promoting social fairness and justice, and strengthen case adjudication to provide strong judicial services and guarantees for a good start to the 15th Five-Year Plan period.

Delivering the top procuratorate's work report, Ying Yong, procurator-general of the Supreme People's Procuratorate (SPP), said that over the past year, the SPP worked to ensure the high-quality and efficient handling of every case, achieving new results in its work.

In 2026, procuratorates will step up efforts to safeguard and promote social fairness and justice, and fulfill their duties as state organs for legal oversight, Ying said.

A report of the NPC Standing Committee on the work of the overhaul of laws and the proposed handling of certain laws and decisions was submitted for deliberation at yesterday's meeting. – Xinhua



A shopper buys mushrooms at a market in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, yesterday. The Chinese mainland's consumer price index (CPI), a main gauge of inflation, rose 1.3 percent year on year last month, driven by the effects of the Spring Festival holiday, official data showed yesterday. The core CPI, which excludes food and energy prices, increased 1.8 percent year on year, according to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). On a month-on-month basis, CPI went up 1 percent in February from the 0.2-percent gain in the previous month, the highest in nearly two years, the data revealed. – Xinhua

China to raise gasoline, diesel retail prices

BEIJING – China will raise its retail prices of gasoline and diesel from today, following a sharp rise in international oil prices, the country's top economic planner said yesterday.

Gasoline and diesel prices will increase by 695 yuan (US\$100.5) and 670 yuan per tonne, respectively, according to a statement released by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC).

The NDRC's price monitoring center said that developments in the Middle East will be the key factor influencing global oil price trends in the period ahead.

China's three biggest oil companies – the China National Petroleum Corporation, the China Petrochemical Corporation, and the China National Offshore Oil Corporation – and other refineries have been directed to

maintain production and facilitate transportation to ensure stable supplies.

Relevant departments in various regions should intensify their market supervision and inspection efforts. They should implement strict measures to crack down on activities that violate national pricing policies to ensure market order, the NDRC said.

– Xinhua

Wang Yi says all acts of attacking civilians, non-military targets should be condemned

BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday that the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of all countries should be respected, and all acts of attacking civilians and non-military targets should be condemned.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks in a phone conversation with Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani.

Zayani briefed Wang on the regional situation and the Bahraini position, saying that Bahrain has always been a peace-loving country and should not be subject to unlawful attacks.

The Bahraini side expressed its appreciation and gratitude for China's just stance while voicing its willingness to work with Gulf countries and China to strengthen communication and coordination at both bilateral and multilateral platforms, including the United Nations, so as to achieve regional peace and stability at an early date.

Bahrain will continue to take strong measures to safeguard the security of Chinese personnel and institutions, he said.

For his part, Wang said that the situation in the Gulf region is rapidly escalating and the security of Bahrain has also been compromised, which is of deep concern to China.

China's position is consistent and clear: the sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity of all countries should be respected, and attacks on civilians and non-military targets should be condemned, he said.

The top priority is to immediately cease military operations to prevent the further spread of conflicts, Wang said.

The path to a breakthrough lies in returning to dialogue and negotiation as soon as possible, so as to strive to restore peace, he said, adding that the lasting solution is an unwavering commitment to jointly abide by international law and the fundamental norms of international relations.

As a strategic partner of the Gulf countries and a responsible major country, China has been actively promoting peace and stopping wars, Wang said.

The Chinese government's special envoy on the Middle East issue is currently shuttling through the region for visits and will also visit Bahrain, he said, adding that China will continue to play a constructive role in safeguarding peace and stability in the Gulf region.

Wang also expressed hope that the Bahraini side will continue to ensure the safety of Chinese citizens and institutions in Bahrain. – Xinhua

Wang Yi calls for ceasefire in Gulf region as soon as possible

BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday that the highest priority is to achieve a ceasefire as soon as possible, adding that China appreciates the consistent calls from Gulf countries for dialogue and negotiation.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks in a phone conversation with Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

The Kuwaiti foreign minister briefed the Chinese side on the latest developments in the regional situation, stating that although Kuwait is not a party to the conflict, it has still been impacted by the warfare, adding that Gulf countries, including Kuwait, remain committed to resolving disputes through dialogue but will not relinquish their legitimate right to self-defense.

Kuwait highly appreciates China's position and efforts and is willing to strengthen communication and coordination with China to jointly promote the restoration of security and stability in the region at an early date, he said, adding that Kuwait attaches great importance to and will continue to ensure the safety and security of Chinese personnel and institutions.

Wang noted that China has always stood for settling disputes through political and diplomatic means, stressing that the ongoing fighting is a war that should not have happened and serves no one's interests.

The United States and Israel launched military strikes against Iran without authorization from the United Nations, while negotiations between Iran and the United States were still ongoing, constituting a clear violation of international law, Wang said.

Meanwhile, the sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity of Gulf countries must be fully respected, and any attack on innocent civilians and non-military targets should be condemned, he noted.

China commends the Gulf countries for their consistent calls for dialogue and negotiation, Wang said, adding that China will continue to make efforts for peace.

The Chinese government's special envoy on the Middle East issue has already left for the region to mediate and will strengthen communication with Kuwait and other countries, he said.

Wang expressed his hope and belief that Kuwait will ensure the safety of Chinese institutions and personnel. – Xinhua



The National People's Congress (NPC) Constitution and Law Committee holds a plenary meeting to review the draft environmental code, the draft law on promoting ethnic unity and progress, and the draft law on national development planning at the fourth session of the 14th NPC in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

Ceasefire essential to avert global catastrophe: China Daily Editorial

What was framed by the United States as a "necessary" military operation to prevent an "imminent threat" from Iran has devolved into a geopolitical nightmare, proving once again that in the modern era, war is a fire that no one can truly contain.

"It is a war that should not have happened – it is a war that does no one any good," as Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said when speaking to the media on the sidelines of the annual session of China's top legislature in Beijing on Sunday.

Stressing that China calls for an immediate stop to military operations to avoid the escalation of the situation and prevent the conflict from spilling over and spreading, Wang rightly said that "force provides no solution and armed conflicts will only increase hatred and breed new crises".

The economic consequences of the attacks the US and Israel launched against Iran have been instantaneous and devastating. The Strait of Hormuz, a vital artery for global oil shipments, faces tangible disruptions, amplifying fears of stronger spillover effects. Yesterday, crude oil prices surged past US\$114 a barrel, a jump of 23 percent from Friday's closing price, to touch their highest levels since July 2022. The threat to the energy supply chain of many countries is an important factor that will influence the course of the war.

On top of this, the targeting of civilian

infrastructure, including desalination plants on which the region depends for its drinking water, in both Iran and some other Gulf states, risks creating a humanitarian crisis. The international community's condemnation of the conflict is loud and clear. From the halls of government to the streets of over 50 cities in the US, the message is clear: there must be a ceasefire and an end to the hostilities.

In this context, Wang articulated the fundamental principles that must be observed to find the right solution to the issues relating to Iran and the Middle East.

The sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of Iran and all countries in the Gulf region should be respected and must not be violated. Violations of these principles destabilize the international system and set dangerous precedents.

And by rejecting force, the international community can prevent unnecessary loss of life and promote peaceful conflict resolution. Might does not make right, and the law of the jungle must not return and rule the world. Willful use of force does not prove one's strength. Civilians are innocent and should not be victimized.

Also, the affairs of the Middle East should be determined by regional countries independently. Plotting color revolutions or seeking regime change will not find popular support.

All sides should return to the negotiating

table as quickly as possible, resolve their differences through equal dialogue, and make efforts to realize common security. This underscores the importance of diplomatic efforts to achieve these goals and prevent further conflict.

In this process, major countries should play a constructive role and use their strengths in goodwill. They should act in the spirit of justice and righteousness, and contribute more positive energy to peace and development of the Middle East.

The US bears a significant responsibility to end this conflict. The world cannot afford another prolonged war in the Middle East and continued hostilities threaten a global catastrophe.

Mojtaba Khamenei, the son of Iran's former supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has been selected as Iran's new supreme leader, Iran's Assembly of Experts announced on Sunday. For many observers, the choice signals continuity rather than rupture in Iran's power structure.

With both Washington and Tel Aviv having hinted that any successor to Khamenei could become a new focus of pressure or confrontation, how the US and Israel respond will be read as a measure of whether strategic restraint or narrow geopolitical calculations take precedence in a region already strained by volatility.

– Courtesy of China Daily

Filipinos race to fill tanks ahead of petrol price jump



Motorists queue at a petrol station amid rising prices in Quezon City, Metro Manila yesterday.

— AFP

MANILA — Queues formed at Philippine petrol stations and officials warned against hoarding yesterday as residents raced to fill their tanks ahead of an expected surge in prices driven by the US-Israeli war against Iran.

The fighting in the Middle East has disrupted shipping and damaged oil and gas facilities in the region, sending global oil prices soaring as countries scramble to deal with concerns over supply.

In the Philippines, consumers will be hit with a series of staggered price increases from today, Energy Secretary Sharon Garin told a congressional committee.

The news comes as President Ferdinand Marcos has announced a four-day government work week to save fuel, and governments across Asia are considering suspending exports, installing price caps and even dipping into strategic reserves to stabilise their domestic fuel markets.

The price of diesel, which powers the Philippines' public buses and ubiquitous jeepneys, would jump between 17 and 24 pesos (29 to 40 US cents) per litre, Garin said at an afternoon press briefing.

The cost of normal gasoline would increase by seven to 13 pesos, while kerosene prices would be hardest hit, jumping between 32 and 38.50 pesos, according to a chart she shared.

"You have to remember though that the price is not regulated by (the Department of Energy)," Garin told reporters.

"What we can do is monitor and have them explain why their prices are like that, but we cannot impose."

At a petrol station in Metro Manila, AFP journalists saw motorcycles, taxis and private cars queuing in scorching heat.

Gas station attendant Enrico Guda, 31, said the normal number of vehicles the station handled in a day had doubled to about 1,000 as customers sought to fuel up before prices jumped.

"The line started 24 hours ago. Morning, afternoon, even at dawn," he said.

Francis Aranda, a 25-year-old university student, told AFP the spike "hurts".

"I'm planning to use half my [weekly] fuel allowance so I won't have to worry in the coming days in case the war in Iran continues," he said.

Police, meanwhile, have been instructed "to inspect gasoline stations in their localities... and gather evidence of profiteering or hoarding", Philippine National Police spokesman Brigadier General Randolph Tuano told a news briefing yesterday.

The ferries that tens of thousands rely on each day to traverse the archipelago nation of 116 million were also in the process of hiking fares.

Starlite Ferries, a relatively small operator in the central Philippines, announced that a 25 percent increase would take effect today for both passengers and cargo.

Montenegro Shipping Lines, which operates a fleet of 48 vessels, said its prices would go up 10-20 percent from March 23.

Marcos last week called on Congress to authorise him to reduce excise taxes on petroleum products if the price of crude oil breached US\$80 per barrel, a request an administration spokeswoman said he would formalise yesterday.

West Texas Intermediate, the main US oil benchmark, and Brent crude prices surged north of US\$110 a barrel yesterday. — AFP

Indonesian landfill collapse kills 5

JAKARTA — A landslide on Indonesia's biggest landfill buried trucks and food stalls, killing five people, rescuers said yesterday as they searched for at least four more reported missing.

The landslide struck at 2:30 p.m. [local time] on Sunday at Bantargebang, a landfill just 25 kilometres outside the capital, according to the national search and rescue agency.

"The rescuers are opening access using heavy equipment like backhoes and deploying tracking dogs to search for any indication of victims," the agency said in a statement.

The collapse took place after hours of heavy rain in the area, local media reported.

Jakarta and its satellite cities, collectively known as Jabodetabek, are home to about 42 million people and generate an estimated 14,000 tonnes of waste daily.

Bantargebang, one of the world's largest open landfills, sprawls over more than 110 hectares and holds about 55 million tonnes of rubbish, according to a local environment agency official.

Environment Minister Hanif Faisol Nurofiq pointed the finger at local authorities for allowing the accumulation of garbage despite a 2008 ban on open landfills.

"Bantargebang belongs to the Jakarta administration, so they have to take responsibility," Hanif told broadcaster Kompas TV late Sunday while visiting the disaster site.

"This incident must truly serve as a bitter lesson for us so that Jakarta can promptly make improvements."

The Jakarta environmental agency did not respond to AFP's request for comment.

President Prabowo Subianto said last month that most of Indonesia's landfills, which are being gradually phased out, would exceed their capacity by 2028.

The government will invest US\$3.5 billion in a project to build 34 waste-to-energy sites within two years that would incinerate garbage to produce electricity, he said.

A landfill landslide killed 143 people in West Java in 2005, triggered by a methane gas explosion and heavy rain in the area. — AFP



This aerial picture shows a rescue team using heavy machinery to search for people following a landslide at Bantargebang landfill in Bekasi, West Java, Indonesia yesterday.

— AFP

Sedan crashes into jeepney in central Philippines, injuring 16

MANILA — A sedan crashed into a passenger jeepney in the central Philippine province of Cebu yesterday morning, injuring at least 16 people, police said.

Police said the accident occurred in Naga City when a sedan swerved into the opposite lane and struck a jeepney

that had stopped along the roadside to pick up passengers. The impact caused the jeepney to overturn.

Police added that the drivers and passengers of both vehicles, as well as several individuals standing on the pavement nearby, sustained injuries in the crash.

All injured individuals were taken to a local hospital for medical treatment, police added. No fatalities were reported at the time of writing.

Police have launched an investigation to determine the cause of the crash. — Xinhua

Singapore launches AI economy essay contest for pre-university students

SINGAPORE — Singapore yesterday launched an essay competition for pre-university students on the theme of the city-state's artificial intelligence (AI)-driven economic future, with a top prize of S\$3,000 (about US\$2,338).

Participants are asked to examine how AI can boost

productivity, create new industries and strengthen Singapore's competitiveness, while also addressing challenges such as its impact on the labor market and issues of ethical governance, the Monetary Authority of Singapore and the Economic Society of Singapore said in a joint statement.

The organizers said the theme aligns with the government's push for AI adoption in 2026.

The contest is open to all pre-university students studying in Singapore, regardless of nationality, as well as Singaporean pre-university students studying overseas. — Xinhua

Jail for up to 16 years for Australian hitmen who killed compatriot in Bali

DENPASAR — Two Australian hitmen were sentenced to 16 years in prison yesterday for shooting dead a compatriot over a debt dispute on the Indonesian resort island of Bali last year.

A third man, convicted of organising the hit on Zivan Radmanovic at a tourist villa, was jailed for 12 years by a court in Denpasar, Bali, where violent crime is rare and guns hard to come by.

Radmanovic was killed when gunmen burst into his villa in Badung last June and opened fire. A second man, 34-year-old Sanar Ghanim, was seriously injured.

Gunmen Paea-I-Middlemore Tupou, 27, and Mevlut Coskun, 23, said they had been hired to collect a debt from Ghanim, but refused to name their client.

The third man, 27-year-old

Darcy Jenson, was found guilty of supplying weapons and planning the attack.

Jenson was arrested at the airport in the Indonesian capital, Jakarta, while apparently trying to flee. The other two did manage to escape, but were returned to Bali from Cambodia to stand trial.

Prosecutors had sought sentences of 17 and 18 years for the men.

Judge I Wayan Suarta found Coskun and Tupou guilty of premeditated murder and illegal gun possession, and Jenson of "aiding and abetting" the crime.

Radmanovic's wife and lawyer avoided the media after the verdict and left the court without commenting.

Gun crime is rare on the island of Bali and in wider Indonesia, and the archipelago has strict laws for illegal gun possession. — AFP



Women pray as they offer alms to a Buddhist monk at a market in Phnom Penh, Cambodia yesterday. — AFP

Stranded Iran sailors put Sri Lanka, India in diplomatic dilemma

Amal Jayasinghe with Uzmi Athar in New Delhi

COLOMBO—Sri Lanka and India are providing sanctuary to 434 sailors from three Iranian naval vessels targeted or threatened by the United States, a diplomatic conundrum as the war spills into the Indian Ocean.

The ships had taken part in a naval exercise organised by India off the coast of Visakhapatnam, when the United States and Israel began bombing Iran.

For Sri Lanka and India, wary of a US response, the dilemma of what to do with the ships and crew has sent legal officials scouring conventions and the laws of the sea.

What happened?

IRIS Dena, a frigate, was sunk with a torpedo fired by a US submarine on Wednesday, just outside Sri Lanka's territorial waters. Between 130 and 180 sailors were on board, and at least 84 were killed.

Sri Lanka rescued 32 survivors, many since discharged from hospital to be hosted at the Koggala air force base in the island's south.

IRIS Lavan, an amphibious landing ship, docked in India's southern port of Kochi on Wednesday. It had 183 sailors aboard, now hosted in naval facilities.

IRIS Bushehr, a supply vessel, entered Sri Lankan waters on Thursday, carrying 219 crew members.

Among those, 15 remain onboard to assist Sri Lanka's navy, which has taken full control of the vessel. The total of Iranian sailors hosted by Sri Lanka is currently 251.

What have the countries said?

The two South Asian nations have not taken sides in the Middle East war and have justified their decision to host the Iranian sailors on humanitarian grounds.

"Our approach is that every life is as precious as our own," Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayake said in a statement.

Sri Lanka maintains close ties with the United States, its biggest export market, and Iran, a key buyer of tea, Sri Lanka's main export commodity.

Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar spoke in

parliament in New Delhi yesterday about the sailors.

"We believe that this was the right thing to do and the Iranian Foreign Minister has expressed his country's thanks for this humane gesture," Jaishankar said.

Media reports suggested Washington was pressing Sri Lanka not to repatriate the Iranians.

But a US State Department spokesperson said their fate was up to Colombo.

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

What happens now?

Sri Lanka is keeping the sailors from the two vessels apart because separate international conventions apply.

International humanitarian law applies to the 32 survivors of the first vessel, the sunken IRIS Dena. That means they could be repatriated if they wish.

But the second vessel, IRIS Bushehr and its 219 sailors, falls under the 1907 Hague Convention on the rights and duties of a neutral power, a senior administration official told AFP.

That requires Sri Lanka to hold those sailors and their vessel until the end of hostilities. They are being held in a naval base, just north of Colombo.

"The two groups need to be treated differently under our treaty obligations," the official said, asking not to be named, saying Sri Lanka has asked the International Committee of the Red Cross for help.

Colombo would follow the Hague Convention, the official added, noting it says that "a neutral power which receives on its territory troops belonging to the belligerent armies shall intern them".

But the 84 bodies recovered from the IRIS Dena will be sent back to Iran once logistics are possible, the government has said.

Sri Lankan officials said India was also likely to treat the IRIS Lavan and its crew the same way as Colombo will deal with the IRIS Bushehr.

But India, for its part, has not publicly addressed the fate or status of its Iranian guests. — AFP

Asian economies move to limit Mideast war's impact at home

MANILA — Faced with soaring prices and disruptions to their oil and gas supplies, Asian economies heavily dependent on fossil fuels from the war-struck Gulf are moving to protect their domestic markets.

Here are some of the measures being considered to limit the war's impact:

S Korea eyes price caps

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung has said the manufacturing powerhouse, the world's eighth-largest consumer of crude oil, is moving towards instituting fuel price caps to alleviate pressure on the country's energy supply.

"We should swiftly introduce and decisively implement a price ceiling system for petroleum products that have recently seen excessive price increases," he told a cabinet meeting yesterday.

His chief of staff said Friday the country had already secured the "emergency delivery" of four million barrels of crude oil from ports in the United Arab Emirates.

Vietnam moves to slash tariffs

Vietnam has prepared a draft decree that would slash import tax rates to zero on certain petroleum products in a bid to "stabilise the domestic market", its finance ministry has said.

Current tariffs of 10 percent on unleaded petrol and seven percent on diesel, aviation fuel and kerosene would all be temporarily removed under the decree.

Japan may tap strategic stocks

According to Japanese news agency Kyodo, Tokyo is considering drawing on its national oil reserves to protect itself against possible prolonged supply disruptions — a measure being demanded by the country's refiners.

The government said last week that Japan had stocks equivalent to 254 days of crude oil consumption — including reserves held by the private sector — and three weeks of liquefied natural gas (LNG) consumption.

Philippines keeps civil servants home

Government departments in

the Philippines, a country heavily dependent on oil imports, began adopting a four-day working week yesterday to cope with soaring fuel prices.

President Ferdinand Marcos has also ordered all government agencies to reduce their fuel and electricity consumption by 10 to 20 percent, while police have warned against hoarding as queues were seen forming at some petrol stations.

India gambles on Russia

India has been pushing ahead with imports of Russian oil, after the United States issued a temporary waiver allowing New Delhi to buy Moscow's oil if it was currently stranded at sea.

An Indian government source, however, said that New Delhi does not need any country's permission to source the fuel from Russia, its largest crude supplier.

The source also said India was "well stocked" with more than 250 million barrels of crude and petroleum products to "handle short-term disruptions".

The country's petroleum ministry has reassured the public that India "has sufficient energy reserves", without ruling out potential measures to mitigate the impact.

China's Taiwan region locks down LNG supplies

China's Taiwan region dominated by the tech industry and highly dependent on hydrocarbon imports, is moving swiftly to compensate for missing LNG from Qatar.

"We need to organise the supply of about 22 shipments of LNG for March and April," economic affairs minister Kung Ming-hsin said yesterday, while noting 20 of those shipments had already been secured.

The government was also seeking to keep prices "as stable as possible" for consumers via "a fuel pricing formula" that would take into account neighbouring markets, he said.

China suspends exports

According to financial outlet Bloomberg News, China, the world's second-biggest economy, has asked its main refiners to suspend exports of diesel and

petrol to prioritise domestic needs.

The Middle East accounted for about 57 percent of China's direct imports of crude transported by sea in 2025, according to the analysis firm Kpler.

Indonesia warns subsidies won't last

Indonesia, under pressure due to a fiscal policy that worries the markets, warned of the limits of its room for manoeuvre.

"If the budget can no longer cope with [oil price increases], there is no other solution than to share... the burden with the population," Finance Minister Purbaya Yudhi Sadewa said Friday.

"This means that fuel prices will have to rise and the budget can no longer support" increased energy subsidies, he said.

Cambodia ups prices at the pump

Cambodia's commerce ministry set retail fuel prices higher for a three-day period to today, noting the increase was due to the spike in global oil prices.

The Southeast Asian country, which relies completely on imported diesel and petroleum for its consumer fuel needs, has enough reserves to last for about three weeks, its energy minister has said.

Myanmar rations, but holds prices steady

Since Saturday, Myanmar's military government has enforced rules to ration fuel, requiring half of all private vehicles to stay off the roads each day, depending on their licence plate numbers.

AFP reporters in Yangon have seen queues outside some petrol stations and restrictions on the amount of fuel sold to each driver, but the junta has only allowed modest price hikes so far.

Thailand halts exports

Thailand said last week it had secured two months' worth of oil supplies but was suspending exports to conserve its holdings.

The government also capped the price of diesel at just under 30 baht (US\$0.94) per litre for a 15-day period. — AFP / MPD



Police personnel dressed in plain clothes detain activists of the women's rights group Aurat March, upon their arrival ahead of a rally on International Women's Day in Islamabad, Pakistan on Sunday. — AFP

Iran war sends oil price soaring as Khamenei son takes charge



A woman poses with a picture of Iran's new Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei during a rally in his support at Eghelab Square in central Tehran yesterday. Iran marked the appointment of Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei to replace his father as its supreme leader with a new barrage of missiles against Israel and the Gulf states yesterday, as the Middle East war sent oil prices soaring. — AFP

TEHRAN — The Iran war sent oil prices spiralling above US\$100 a barrel yesterday after Tehran under new leader Mojtaba Khamenei fired a new barrage of missiles at Israel and its crude-exporting Gulf neighbours.

On the first day in power for Khamenei, the 56-year-old son of slain leader Ali Khamenei, Iran renewed its missile and drone attacks on Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel.

Another missile was fired at NATO member Turkey, the second such incident in five days, with the alliance's air defences intercepting it before it could hit its target.

With the key shipping route through the Strait of Hormuz off Iran remaining closed to almost all oil tankers, the price of benchmark crude oil contracts spiralled 10 percent to their highest levels since Russia launched its military operation in Ukraine in 2022.

EU Economy Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis warned that a "more protracted" war would lead to a "stagflationary shock" of high inflation and low growth for the world economy.

Finance ministers from the G7 group of rich nations met yesterday to discuss releasing strategic oil reserves to try to dampen prices, which are up around 40-50 percent since the US and Israel launched their first attacks.

Stocks markets around the world are also diving, hitting pension funds and savings, while inflation caused by higher oil prices will push up the price of goods for consumers everywhere.

Queues at petrol stations have been seen as far afield as Vietnam and France as drivers anticipate higher prices, raising the risk of shortages.

"I think we are all seeing right now the threat this clerical regime poses to the region and to the world," US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said yesterday.

"They are trying to hold the world hostage."

'Brutal aggression'

Iran faced a fresh blitz of

US and Israeli strikes after its Assembly of Experts, the top clerical body, appointed its first new supreme leader in 37 years.

Iran's security chief Ali Larijani told Khamenei that his appointment had "caused the hostile and warmongering enemies to despair."

US President Donald Trump told the *New York Post* he was "not happy" about the appointment yesterday after telling ABC News on Sunday that "if he doesn't get approval from us he's not going to last long."

After similar threats from Israel, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman warned that Beijing opposes targeting leaders and insists "Iran's sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity should be respected."

Ali Ansari, a professor of Iranian History at the University of St Andrews in Scotland, said the new supreme leader was a hardliner.

He said it was possible but very unlikely that he might attempt to make a deal with the Americans and Israelis to end the war, or even take a more modernising approach within Iran.

"But I find it very difficult to imagine because at the moment, the regime is probably thinking 'if we show weakness, we're finished'," he said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday pledged "unwavering support" to Khamenei amid unconfirmed US media reports that Moscow has been providing targeting intelligence to the Islamic Republic's military.

Oil risks

Oil traders, policymakers and central bankers are all watching the Middle East for news about Gulf energy infrastructure which is crucial for the world economy.

Larijani said that security within the strategic Strait of Hormuz could not be guaranteed for as long as the war continues.

French President Emmanuel Macron said that his country and allies were working to put together a "purely defensive" mission to reopen the strait through which nearly 20 percent of the world's

crude oil usually transits.

He said the mission would be aimed at escorting vessels "after the end of the hottest phase of the conflict", but experts say it would also mean putting navy vessels at risk of incoming fire from the nearby Iranian coast.

Following strikes on Bahrain's Al Ma'ameer oil facility that ignited a fire, the country's state-owned energy company Bapco joined its counterparts in Qatar and Kuwait in declaring "force majeure" — a warning that events beyond its control may lead it to miss export targets.

The Saudi defence ministry said yesterday it had thwarted a drone attack targeting an oil field in the kingdom's east, near the Emirati border.

As governments around the region seek to protect their image as safe havens, Qatari authorities said they have arrested more than 300 people for sharing images online and what they described as "misleading information".

The announcement followed similar but smaller scale arrests and warnings issued in Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.

At least one Israeli was killed yesterday, a man said to be approximately 40, when shrapnel showered a building site, emergency services said.

At least 10 explosions were audible in Tel Aviv, Israel's commercial hub, after the military announced it had detected missiles inbound from Iran.

The multi-front war also intensified in Lebanon.

Iran-backed militants Hezbollah said they were engaging Israeli forces who landed in eastern Lebanon on 15 helicopters across the Syrian border, and more strikes hit the southern districts of Beirut.

Large plumes of smoke rose from the area after the Israeli military warned it would destroy branches of Al-Qard al-Hassan, a Hezbollah-linked financial firm.

Lebanon was drawn into the conflict last week when Hezbollah attacked Israel in response to the killing of the elder Khamenei.

— AFP

Lebanese president lashes out at Hezbollah, says open to negotiations with Israel

BEIRUT — Lebanese President Joseph Aoun yesterday accused Hezbollah of working towards the "collapse" of the state, after the pro-Iran group launched an attack on Israel, expressing Beirut's readiness for "direct negotiations" with Israel.

Begun after Hezbollah launched rockets towards Israel a week ago, Israel's bombing campaign has killed at least 394 people and displaced more than half a million.

"Whoever launched those missiles wanted to bring about the collapse of the Lebanese state, plunging it into aggression and chaos... all for the sake of the Iranian regime's calculations and this is what we have thwarted so far

and what we will continue working to bring down and foil," Aoun told top European officials in an online meeting.

He added that the party's rocket launches "were an almost transparent trap and ambush for Lebanon, the Lebanese state, and the Lebanese people".

To stop the war, the Lebanese president proposed a four-point initiative and called on the international community to help implement it.

It included "establishing a full truce" with Israel, "logistical support" for the army to disarm Hezbollah, and "direct negotiations [with Israel] under international auspices". — AFP



A fireball rises from the site of an Israeli air strike in the southern suburbs of the Lebanese capital Beirut yesterday. — AFP

US Democrats urge impartial probe of Iran school blast

WASHINGTON — Democratic lawmakers yesterday urged the Pentagon to conduct an impartial probe of a reported attack on a school in Iran that left dozens dead, after allegations that US forces were to blame.

Iran has accused Israel and the United States of conducting the strike on the elementary school in the southern city of Minab at the start of the war. Iran says the blast killed more than 150 people, most of them students.

President Donald Trump has blamed Iran, while the Pentagon has said it is investigating.

"Independent analysis credibly suggests the strike may have been conducted by US forces, which if true, would make it one of the worst cases of civilian casualties in decades of American military action in the Middle East," several high-ranking senators said in a joint statement.

"The killing of school children is appalling and unacceptable under any circumstance," they added, saying the tragedy must be "fully and impartially reviewed" by Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth.

The New York Times says it has authenticated video uploaded by Iran's semi-official Mehr News showing a US Tomahawk cruise missile striking a structure described as a clinic inside a Revolutionary Guards' base next to the school.

According to the newspaper, in this war, the only military using Tomahawks is the United States.

The New York Times previously reported that US military statements indicating forces were attacking naval targets near the strategic Strait of Hormuz, where a Revolutionary Guards' base is located, "suggest they were most likely to have carried out the strike."

The lawmakers said the incident is all the more worrisome given what they called Hegseth's "openly cavalier approach" to the use of force. He said last week US strikes in Iran wouldn't be bound by "stupid rules of engagement."

The statement's signatories included Jeanne Shaheen, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

AFP has not been able to visit the site of the school blast to verify the toll or details of what happened. — AFP

Stop the flow of US guns to Mexican narcos, Sheinbaum urges



Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum speaks during an event marking International Women's Day in Mexico City on Sunday. — AFP

MEXICO CITY — Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum called yesterday on the United States to halt the flow of weapons to her country's drug cartels, after President Donald Trump criticised her record on fighting the groups.

Trump on Saturday singled out Mexico for criticism at a meeting with leaders of allied Latin American nations to discuss fighting the "cancer" of drug cartels.

He told the assembled group — mostly right-wing or hard-right figures — at his Florida golf club that "cartels are running Mexico" and were "getting worse."

"We can't have that," he declared at the launch of a 17-nation

"counter cartel" coalition and offered to use US missiles, vowing to "eradicate them [Mexican cartels]."

Sheinbaum yesterday put the ball firmly back in Washington's court.

"If the flow of illegal weapons from the United States into Mexico is stopped, these groups won't have access to the high-powered weapons they need to carry out their criminal activities," the leftist leader said.

She claimed that 75 percent of the cartels' weapons came from Mexico's northern neighbour.

Under pressure from Trump to halt the flow of drugs into the United States, Sheinbaum has

taken steps to up Mexico's fight against organised crime.

Last month, the army shot dead one of Mexico and the United States most-wanted drug traffickers, Nemesio "El Mencho" Oseguera, head of the powerful Jalisco New Generation Cartel.

While accepting to share intelligence with the United States, Sheinbaum has made clear she draws a line at US military intervention against the cartels.

"Operations in Mexico are carried out by the armed forces, the Ministry of Security, the National Guard, state police forces, and prosecutors," she insisted yesterday.

— Xinhua

Algerian parliament approves amended law criminalising French rule

ALGIERS — Algeria's parliament yesterday approved an amended law criminalising French colonial rule, removing earlier provisions that called for official apologies and broad reparations from France after the Senate demanded the changes.

The law, approved by the lower house in December, had declared France's colonisation of Algeria from 1830 to 1962 a crime and demanded an apology and reparations, with Paris calling it "hostile".

But in January the Senate said some articles of the text did not fully reflect the official approach set out by President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, who had said Algeria did not need financial reparations from France.

A clause seeking compensation for victims of French nuclear tests in Algeria remains unchanged.

Fawzi Bendjaballah, rapporteur

of the joint committee tasked with revising the bill, said the changes reflected the "principled and unwavering position of the Algerian state".

"Algeria, which sacrificed millions of martyrs for its freedom, independence and sovereignty, will never bargain away its memory or its sovereignty for any material advantage," he told the lower house.

France called the bill "clearly hostile", coming at a time of diplomatic friction between the two countries.

Relations soured in late 2024 when France officially backed Moroccan sovereignty over the disputed Western Sahara, where Algeria backs the pro-independence Polisario Front.

Algeria says the war with colonial France killed 1.5 million people. French historians put the death toll lower at 500,000,

400,000 of them Algerian.

The bill states that France holds "legal responsibility for its colonial past in Algeria and the tragedies it caused".

It lists the "crimes of French colonisation", including nuclear tests, extrajudicial killings, "physical and psychological torture", and the "systematic plundering of resources".

However, Tebboune had said in a speech in December 2024 that Algiers was "not tempted by money, neither euros nor dollars".

"We demand recognition of the crimes committed in the country" by France, he said. "I am not asking for financial compensation."

Before taking office, French President Emmanuel Macron had acknowledged that his country's colonisation of Algeria was a "crime against humanity", but Paris has yet to offer Algiers a formal apology. — AFP

Anthropic takes Trump administration to court over Pentagon row

WASHINGTON — Anthropic filed suit yesterday against the Trump administration, alleging it retaliated against the AI company for refusing to let its Claude AI model be used for autonomous lethal warfare and mass surveillance of Americans.

In the 48-page complaint, filed in federal court in San Francisco, Anthropic seeks to have its designation as a national security supply-chain risk declared unlawful and blocked.

In its lawsuit, Anthropic said the company was founded on the belief that its AI is "used in a way that maximizes positive outcomes for humanity" and should "be the safest and the most responsible."

"Anthropic brings this suit because the federal government has retaliated against it for expressing that principle," the lawsuit says.

Anthropic is the first US company ever to have been publicly punished with such a designation, a label typically reserved for organisations from foreign adversary countries, such as Chinese tech giant Huawei.

The designation requires defence vendors and contractors to certify that they do not use Anthropic's models in their work with the Pentagon.

"The consequences of this case are enormous," the lawsuit states, with the government "seeking to destroy the economic value created by one of the world's fastest-growing private companies."

The dispute erupted after Anthropic infuriated Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth by insisting its technology should not be used for mass surveillance or fully autonomous weapons systems.

President Donald Trump ordered every federal agency to cease all use of Anthropic's technology. Hours later, Hegseth designated Anthropic a "Supply-Chain Risk to National Security" and ordered that no military contractor, supplier or partner "may conduct any commercial activity with Anthropic," while allowing a six-month transition period for the Pentagon itself.

The row erupted days before the US military attack against Iran. Claude is the Pentagon's most widely deployed frontier AI model and the only such model currently operating on the Department of War's classified systems.

In its lawsuit, Anthropic argues the actions taken against it violate the First Amendment by punishing the company for protected speech on AI safety policy, exceed the Pentagon's statutory authority, and deprive it of due process under the Fifth Amendment.

"The Constitution does not allow the government to wield its enormous power to punish a company for its protected speech," the complaint states.

The company is seeking a permanent injunction blocking enforcement of the designation. — AFP

Russia ready to supply energy to Europe if it asks: Putin

MOSCOW — Russia would supply oil and gas to European buyers, provided such co-operation was "long-term" and did not put political pressure on Moscow, President Vladimir Putin said yesterday.

Oil prices have skyrocketed since the United States and Israel began striking Iran on February 28, trading above US\$100 this week for the first time since Russia launched its Ukraine offensive in 2022.

In a televised meeting, Putin said Moscow would continue to supply oil to "reliable" partners in Asia, as well as EU members Hungary and Slovakia.

"If European companies and European buyers suddenly decide to reorient themselves and provide us with long-term, sustainable cooperation, devoid

of political pressures, free from political pressures, then go ahead. We've never refused," Putin said.

"We're ready to work with Europeans, but we need some signals from them that they're ready and willing to work with us and will ensure this sustainability and stability," he added.

The European Union banned maritime imports of Russian crude in 2022, while Russia's pipeline exports to Hungary and Slovakia have been effectively halted since January due to damage to the Druzhba oil pipeline via Ukraine.

Putin's comments came hours after Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán urged the European Union to suspend sanctions on Russian oil and gas to counter prices sent soaring by the war in the Middle East. — AFP

Seguro sworn in as Portugal's new president

LISBON – António José Seguro was sworn in as Portugal's new president yesterday during a ceremony at the Assembly of the Republic (parliament) in Lisbon, formally beginning his mandate after winning the country's presidential runoff election.

Seguro, the center-left candidate backed by the opposition Socialist Party (PS), took the oath of office before lawmakers in Lisbon.

In his remarks, Seguro, 63, said that after "a cycle of three elections and four trips to the polls in just nine months," Portugal now has "a golden opportunity" to pursue "lasting solutions" during what he described as a new three-year period without national elections.

Seguro won the presidential election by defeating rightwing Chega party leader André Ventura by a wide margin in the second round of voting held on February 8.

The Portuguese president serves a five-year term and may be re-elected once.

While the presidency is largely ceremonial, it carries important constitutional responsibilities, including appointing the prime



Portugal's new President António José Seguro delivers an inaugural address during a swearing-in ceremony at the Assembly of the Republic in Lisbon yesterday. – Xinhua

minister, dissolving parliament and moderating during periods of institutional tension. The president also plays a key role as a political

– Xinhua

US, Ecuador carry out joint anti-drug strikes

WASHINGTON – US and Ecuadoran forces conducted joint strikes inside Ecuador as part of ongoing operations to combat drug trafficking in the South American country, according to a statement by US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM).

The statement posted to X said SOUTHCOM Commander General Francis Donovan, at the order of Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth, "directed the joint force to support Ecuadorian forces conducting lethal kinetic operations against Designated Terrorist Organizations within Ecuador March 6."

No details on casualties were immediately provided.

Ecuador's right-wing President Daniel Noboa said in an Instagram post the strikes targeted a training camp belonging to a dissident faction of the FARC guerrilla group.

The operation was carried out in the northeastern province of

Sucumbíos near the border with Colombia.

"We destroyed the hideout of Mono Tole, the leader of the CDF (Border Commandos), and a training area for drug traffickers," the 38-year-old leader wrote in the post, which was accompanied by a video of a house exploding in a forested area.

"I congratulate our joint forces and the Ecuadorian armed forces for the successful operation against narcoterrorists in Ecuador," Donovan said in a statement.

"This collaborative and decisive action is a strategic success for all nations in the Western Hemisphere committed to disrupting and defeating narcoterrorism."

Noboa, a close ally of US President Donald Trump, previously said that Washington was among "regional allies" taking part in the operation against drug cartels, which use Ecuador's ports

to smuggle cocaine to international markets.

Noboa earlier last week held talks in Quito with Donovan and Mark Schafer, head of US Special Operations in Central and South America and the Caribbean.

During the meeting, they discussed plans for information sharing and operational coordination at airports and seaports, Noboa's office said in a statement.

Around 70 percent of the drugs produced by Colombia and Peru, the world's largest and second-largest cocaine producers, respectively, are shipped through neighbouring Ecuador.

The drug trade has unleashed a bloody turf war that has turned one of Latin America's safest countries into one of its deadliest in the space of a few years.

The United States and Ecuador have boosted their security cooperation since the right-wing Noboa came to power in 2023. – AFP

Xi extends congratulations to Portugal's new president

BEIJING—President Xi Jinping yesterday sent a congratulatory message to António José Seguro on assuming the presidency of the Portuguese Republic.

In his message, Xi pointed out the profound traditional friendship between China and Portugal.

Xi said that since the establishment of diplomatic ties 47 years ago, the two countries have adhered to mutual respect and support, properly resolved the question of Macao with political wisdom, deepened mutually beneficial cooperation in the spirit of partnership and closely

coordinated in international affairs, adding that their bilateral relations have always developed in a sound and stable manner.

Xi said that he attaches great importance to the development of China-Portugal relations and is ready to work with Seguro to enhance strategic communication, consolidate high-level mutual trust, promote high-quality cooperation, and continuously enrich the connotation of the China-Portugal comprehensive strategic partnership, so as to bring more benefits to the people of both countries.

– Xinhua

Chile leaders bury the hatchet after cable project clash

SANTIAGO—Chile's outgoing president and his successor met on Sunday to cool tensions, after publicly clashing over a Chinese fiber optic cable project, with both promising a smooth handover of power tomorrow.

Hard-right president-elect José Antonio Kast met with leftist President Gabriel Boric earlier last week to coordinate the transfer after December's election.

But the meeting ended abruptly after Kast accused Boric of withholding information about the contentious submarine cable project with China Mobile.

The project for a cable linking China and Chile aims to expand Pacific connectivity and data capacity, while also reducing Chile's near-total reliance on cables running through the United States.

Washington, which gave its backing to Kast's election bid, opposes the Chinese cable project on national security grounds.

Kast had suspended cooperation with Boric on the transition, set for tomorrow, saying he did not trust the information provided by the outgoing government.

"The differences that may have existed are behind us," Boric told a press conference after talks with Kast at the Moneda palace in Santiago.

The goal "is to ensure there is no doubt about the full intent for transparency in all relevant matters... particularly for affairs of state and security," he added.

Kast said that "we agreed to do everything necessary" for a smooth handover.

– AFP

More than 30 hurt in explosion at Peru disco

LIMA – An explosion inside a nightclub in northern Peru injured 33 people on Saturday, according to authorities investigating the incident in a region plagued by organized crime.

The blast, described as a suspected "attack" in a statement by the regional government of La Libertad department (region), occurred before dawn at the Dalí discotheque near Trujillo, a coastal city some 500 kilometres north of the capital Lima.

Dozens of people were in the club enjoying a cumbia* performance when an explosion shook the facility, according to images on local channel Sol TV Peru.

"We have 33 injuries reported so far, including five in serious condition," regional health manager Alberto Florian told

the Latina Noticias television broadcast.

Trujillo province has been deeply impacted by organized crime in recent years, and has been in a government-declared state of emergency since March 2025 due to rises in extortion and contract killings.

Peru more broadly is experiencing a serious crime crisis. Last year there were 2,200 homicides related to organized crime, according to police data.

– AFP

* Cumbia is a genre of music and dance that originated in Colombia, blending indigenous, African, and Spanish influences. It typically features a combination of percussion instruments, such as drums and maracas, along with melodic instruments like accordion and keyboard. – Poe

Cuban president calls Trump's LatAm summit 'neocolonial'

HAVANA – Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel said on Saturday that last week's Latin American summit convened in Florida by his US counterpart was "neocolonial," after Donald Trump asserted the island nation is in "its final moments."

"The small, reactionary and

neocolonial summit in Florida, convened by the US with the participation of right-wing governments from the region, commits them to accepting the lethal use of US military force to solve internal problems and to maintain order and peace in their countries,"

Díaz-Canel said in an X post.

The summit gathered a dozen leaders aligned with Washington to address the fight against drug cartels as Trump imposes a de facto oil blockade on Cuba, which has faced blackouts and shortages of food and medicine. – AFP

Football Shorts

Real Madrid's Carreras to miss Man City game, Mbappe not training

MADRID – Real Madrid defender Alvaro Carreras will miss tomorrow's Champions League match against Manchester City, while superstar striker Kylian Mbappe did not train yesterday with his team-mates as he recovers from a knee sprain.

Madrid's top goalscorer Mbappe is not expected to feature at the Santiago Bernabeu against Pep Guardiola's side because of the knee problem which has bothered him since last December.

Carreras "has been diagnosed with a muscle injury in the calf of his right leg", Madrid said in a statement yesterday, without specifying how long he is expected to miss.

Los Blancos have several absences ahead of the clash against Man City, with Jude Bellingham, Eder Militao, Rodrygo Goes, Dani Ceballos and David Alaba all recovering from injuries.

The biggest worry for Madrid is Mbappe's likely absence, without a clear timeline for when the France

captain will be back in action, although Spanish media say he is targeting the return leg next week.

Mbappe has missed Madrid's last three matches and recently went to Paris for tests and treatment on his knee.

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

– AFP/MPD

Trump urges Australia to grant asylum to Iranian women footballers

WASHINGTON – US President Donald Trump urged Australia yesterday to grant asylum to the visiting Iranian women's football team, after players refused to sing the national anthem while playing there.

"Australia is making a terrible humanitarian mistake by allowing the Iran National Woman's Soccer team to be forced back to Iran, where they will most likely be killed," Trump said in a post on his Truth Social network.

"Don't do it, Mr. Prime Minister, give ASYLUM. The US will take them if you won't," added Trump, referring to Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. – AFP

Laporta stopped Messi Barca return to avoid power struggle: Xavi

BARCELONA – Former Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez said the club's president Joan Laporta scuppered the return of all-time great Lionel Messi in 2023 to avoid a power struggle.

The eight-time Ballon d'Or winner left Barca for Paris Saint-Germain in 2021 and then two years later moved to MLS side Inter Miami.

"Leo was signed, in January 2023 after winning the World Cup, we got in touch and he told me he wanted to come back," Xavi told Spanish newspaper *La Vanguardia* late on Sunday.

"We had the green light from La Liga [financially], but it was the president who threw it away..."

"Laporta told me, word for word, that if Leo came back he was going to wage war against him and that he couldn't allow that. And then suddenly Leo stopped answering my calls because he'd been told that it couldn't be done."

Xavi said everything was ready for Messi's return, there was "no doubt" in a football sense and "we were going to do a last dance,

like [former NBA star Michael] Jordan's".

Laporta, who resigned as president a few weeks ago to run for re-election this week, suggested yesterday former coach Xavi was bitter and said Messi's father and agent Jorge had told him the superstar had decided not to come back.

"With Xavi I saw we were going to lose and with [current coach Hansi] Flick that we will win," Laporta said at a presidential debate yesterday.

"I understand that [Xavi] is hurt - with the same players Flick wins."

Laporta said he sent a contract to Jorge Messi who later came to his house and told him that "here there would be too much pressure" if the forward returned.

Messi is Barcelona's all-time top scorer with 672 goals and won a club-record 34 trophies at Camp Nou.

Laporta also claimed Barca rejected a 250 million euro (US\$288 million) offer from PSG for teenage superstar Lamine Yamal, reported to have been made in the summer of 2024. – AFP

Incensed N Korea briefly refuse to play in bitter Asian Cup loss



China's Wang Aifang (left) is tackled by North Korea's Chae Un-yong during the AFC Women's Asian Cup Australia 2026 match between China and North Korea in Sydney, Australia yesterday.

– AFP

SYDNEY – An incensed North Korea refused to play for several minutes in a 2-1 Women's Asian Cup loss to China yesterday which sent them into a daunting quarter-final against hosts Australia.

Wang Shuang's controversial close-range finish in first-half injury time in rainy Sydney turned out to be the winner and means reigning champions China topped Group B ahead of North Korea.

China's reward is a likely meeting with Vietnam or Chinese Taipei in the last eight, while North Korea will have to face the Australians and a partisan home crowd.

Three-time former champions North Korea took the lead on 32

minutes when Kim Kyong Yong's shot squirmed under the body of goalkeeper Chen Chen.

China hit back two minutes later when Chen Qiaozhu struck left-footed from outside the box and into the bottom corner.

With the rain pouring down and neither side giving an inch in a physical battle, China went ahead through former Paris Saint-Germain and Tottenham attacker Wang in first-half stoppage time.

Her predatory finish was initially ruled out for offside by the on-field assistant referee, only for VAR to overturn the decision and award the goal.

Wang celebrated for a second time but the North Koreans were furious, imploring the referee to

look at the pitch-side monitor.

Then came a standoff with the North Koreans refusing to resume the game for four minutes as boos rang out from the pro-China crowd.

With their protests continuing and after booking coach Ri Song Ho, the referee decided against playing the little time left in the half and blew for the break.

North Korea came out for the second half and thought they had equalised with 10 minutes left, only for VAR to give offside.

In the other match in Group B, Uzbekistan thrashed tournament debutants Bangladesh 4-0 to keep their hopes alive of reaching the knockout rounds as one of the two best third-placed teams. – AFP/MPD



Newcastle United's German striker Nick Woltemade jumps on the back of Newcastle United's German defender Malick Thiaw in a team training session at the Darsley Park training centre in Newcastle upon Tyne, England yesterday, the eve of their UEFA Champions League Last 16 football match against Barcelona. Eddie Howe has challenged Newcastle to produce the performance of a lifetime as they aim to win the "biggest game" in the club's history against Barcelona today. Howe's side will make only their second appearance in the Champions League last 16 when the Liga leaders arrive on Tyneside for a highly anticipated first leg clash.

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

Premier League teams are faster: Atletico's Simeone on Spurs clash

MADRID – Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone highlighted the speed of Premier League sides' play yesterday ahead of the Champions League last 16 tie against Tottenham Hotspur.

Despite becoming embroiled in a relegation battle in the English top flight Spurs finished fourth in the league phase of Europe's top competition.

Five English sides finished in the top eight while six have reached the last 16, compared to three Spanish sides, the next most represented country.

"[English teams] have a faster pace. I don't know why, I can't quite put my finger on it," Simeone told reporters before today's game at the Metropolitano stadium.

"Some say the referees let the game flow more, I don't know if it's the tactics or the pre-game preparation,

but it's true that the speed is faster.

"When you watch it on television, you can see that the speed is faster than in Spain, Italy, Germany... it's the fastest league."

Despite that Simeone said that "technical quality" would also play its part in deciding the game, and that Tottenham could not win "just by intensity".

The Argentine coach did not agree that Atletico were favourites going into

the match, even though Igor Tudor's side have lost five straight matches.

"When you step onto the pitch, you don't remember where you are in the standings or what moment you're in," continued Simeone.

"The players want to win, to play well, I don't know anyone who thinks about their league position when they're about to have a shot."

Atletico take on a familiar face in midfielder Conor Gallagher, who

joined Spurs in January after a season and a half in the Spanish capital.

"He's a young man who worked with us with great humility and who arriving from midfield is very dangerous," said Simeone.

"He behaved very well [here], and we have very fond memories of his time at Atletico."

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

– AFP/MPD

Gauff retires with 'scary' injury to send Eala through at Indian Wells

Tennis

INDIAN WELLS – Coco Gauff retired from her third-round match at Indian Wells on Sunday with a “scary” left arm injury that “felt like it was on fire” but was optimistic she could sort out the problem in time to play in Miami.

The 21-year-old world number four was trailing Alexandra Eala 6-2, 2-0 when the American called it a day, sending the rising star from the Philippines into the last 16.

“I felt it, like, the second game of the first set,” Gauff said. “I guess a simple way to put it, it felt like a firework was going off inside of my arm, and then my whole arm felt like it was on fire.”

“And then as the match played, it got progressively worse, even on shots that I wasn’t even using my left arm for,” added Gauff, whose two-handed backhand is usually a formidable weapon.

“It was a scary feeling,” she said, adding that she would have an MRI scan to get an accurate diagnosis of what she’s been told is likely a nerve-related issue.

“Good news is they don’t think it’s going to be like a long-term type of situation, so I should be fine for Miami,” she said, looking ahead to the second leg of the ATP and WTA’s “Sunshine Double” that follows on the heels of Indian Wells.

It’s just the second time Gauff has retired during a match, the first coming back in 2022 against Marie Bouzkova in Cincinnati.

“I’d rather finish the match and lose 6-0, but at that point I just felt that because the pain was getting worse and



Coco Gauff of the United States talks with Alexandra Eala of the Philippines after she has retired with an arm injury from their match at the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells Tennis Garden on Sunday in Indian Wells, California. – AFP

I didn’t know what was going on, I just felt it was better to stop,” she said.

Gauff was trailing 5-2 in the first set when she took a medical timeout for treatment on her arm.

A trainer worked on Gauff’s shoulder and arm and after she was broken in the final game of the opening set, returned to wrap her forearm.

It was to no avail, and Gauff went to the net and told Eala she was calling it a day after 54 minutes.

“No one likes winning like that, and no one likes losing like that,” Eala said.

“Nevertheless, I’m really happy with how I played,” added Eala, who was trounced 6-0, 6-2 by Gauff in the quarter-finals at Dubai last month.

“I’m really happy with my performance, and I hope I can make the best out of the momentum,” added the 31st seed, who will face Czech Linda Noskova for a place in the quarter-finals.

Eala, 20, shot to prominence last year with a surprise semi-final run at the Miami Open, where she beat Iga Swiatek and Madison Keys.

At the US Open in August she became the first player from the Philippines to win a Grand Slam singles match.

She fell in the first round at the Australian Open but her adoring fans created a sensation in Melbourne, mobbing her practice sessions as well as her first ever main-draw match in the event. – AFP

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



Russia wins 'dream' first Paralympic gold since 2014

CORTINA D’AMPEZZO – Russia won its first Winter Paralympic gold medal under its own flag since 2014 as skier Varvara Voronchikhina was crowned women’s super-G standing champion yesterday in Cortina.

Despite Russia’s ongoing war with Ukraine, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) has allowed six Russian athletes and four from their allies Belarus to represent their countries, accompanied by their national flags, rather than competing as neutrals.

“It’s so special for me because it’s my first Paralympic Games and it’s my dream since I was a child,” Voronchikhina told reporters after collecting her medal.

“And when I see my flag, it’s so special and amazing.”

The 23-year-old dedicated the win to “our whole country, which was rooting for us... To my family and loved ones”.

Already a bronze medallist last weekend, when she claimed Russia’s first podium appearance at a Winter Games in 12 years, Voronchikhina beat French silver medallist Aurelie Richard by 1.96sec on the Olympia delle Tofane piste yesterday to claim top spot. Sweden’s Ebba Aarsjoe was third.

“Congratulations to Varvara Voronchikhina on Russia’s first gold medal in the super-G at the Milan-Cortina Paralympics,” Russia’s sports minister Mikhail Degtyarev posted on Telegram.

“The Russian anthem is playing,” he added of the podium ceremony, which took

place at the end of yesterday’s super-G events.

Voronchikhina received a polite smattering of applause as the gold medal was placed around her neck, before the playing of the national anthem and raising of the Russian flag were greeted with a respectful silence.

During Friday’s opening ceremony in Verona, representatives of the Russian team were booed by some spectators as they paraded behind the country’s flag.

Russia was banned from the 2018 Games due to a doping scandal, although some athletes were permitted to compete under neutral colours.

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

“I dedicate my medal to my [deceased] grandfather,” Voronchikhina added. “Who, unfortunately, was unable to wait and see my victory.”

“Because it should have happened earlier, when we won our medals, because we came to Beijing in 2022 and we were kicked out from there.”

Voronchikhina’s exploits have brought her to the attention of foreign media at the Games.

“They ask about food, emotions, feelings, of course,” she said.

“But they also ask about political topics, which I would rather not touch on, of course.” – AFP (Photos on page 16)

Sport in Brief

Sri Lanka call off Afghanistan series in UAE due to Mideast war

COLOMBO – Sri Lanka have indefinitely postponed a six-match white-ball series against Afghanistan that was due to start in the United Arab Emirates this week, an official said yesterday.

“We had to cancel because of the flight situation... and the ongoing fighting in the region,” a Sri Lanka Cricket official told AFP.

The teams were scheduled to play three T20 internationals in Sharjah on March 13, 15 and 17, and three one-day internationals in Dubai on March 20, 22 and 25.

It would have been the first time that Afghanistan had hosted Sri Lanka for a bilateral series.

Fighting has spread across the Middle East since the United States and Israel attacked Iran on February 28, with Tehran launching retaliatory strikes.

The conflict has disrupted flights across the region, including in Dubai, where the airport was briefly closed on Saturday as Iran fired drones and missiles at targets across the Gulf.

War-ravaged Afghanistan has never hosted an international cricket match, instead having to play its home fixtures in India or the UAE. – AFP

China’s Wang Zhiyi ends An Se-young’s streak to win All England title

BADMINTON LONDON – China’s Wang Zhiyi defeated South Korea’s An Se-young to

win the women’s singles title at the All England Open Badminton Championships in Birmingham on Sunday.

Wang claimed her first All England crown and ended a 10-match losing streak against the world No. 1 in their 23rd career meeting.

Wang stayed patient in extended rallies and kept her errors to a minimum, securing a 21-15, 21-19 victory in 59 minutes. The win gave Wang her first women’s singles title of the season and snapped An’s 36-match winning streak.

“The key to today’s victory was my mindset against my opponent,” Wang said. “In previous matches, I couldn’t sustain rallies for that long, but today I managed to do it and my opponent made some mistakes.”

In the men’s singles final, Chinese Taipei’s Lin Chun-yi beat India’s Lakshya Sen 21-15, 22-20 to claim his first BWF World Tour Super 1000 title and extend his winning streak against Sen to five matches.

Top seeds captured both the men’s and women’s doubles titles. China’s Liu Shengshu and Tan Ning defeated South Korea’s Baek Ha-na and Lee So-hee 21-18, 21-12 to take the women’s doubles title, completing a career sweep of all Super 1000 tournaments.

South Korea’s Kim Won-ho and Seo Seung-jae defended their men’s doubles crown with an 18-21, 21-12, 21-19 win over Malaysia’s Aaron Chia and Soh Wooi Yik.

Chinese Taipei’s Ye Hong-wei and Nicole Gonzales Chan won the mixed doubles title, beating France’s Thom Gicquel and Delphine Delrue 21-19, 21-18. – Xinhua

Oscar nominee Benicio del Toro says ‘One Battle’ has ‘heart’

By Paula RAMON

LOS ANGELES – Benicio del Toro won his first Oscar 25 years ago for “Traffic.”

This year, he is once again in the Academy Award conversation for his soulful turn as karate dojo owner – and part-time saviour of immigrants – Sergio St Carlos in “One Battle After Another,” a role he says reflects his own sensibilities.

“There is a lot of me in there,” Del Toro told AFP ahead of the Oscars gala on March 15, where he will vie for best supporting actor honours with co-star Sean Penn, Swedish veteran Stellan Skarsgard, Jacob Elordi (“Frankenstein”), and Delroy Lindo (“Sinners”).

In Paul Thomas Anderson’s high-octane, politically charged thriller about leftist revolutionaries, white supremacists and immigration raids, Sensei Sergio provides a sense of calm at the film’s heart.

Most of Del Toro’s scenes come opposite Leonardo DiCaprio, who plays Bob Ferguson, a highly strung, and somewhat strung out,

former militant who must hunt for his missing daughter (Chase Infiniti) when the past comes back to haunt him.

The 59-year-old Puerto Rican actor acknowledged he was surprised by the reception he has received for his role, which accounts for less than 15 minutes of screen time.

“It feels good, and it also can make you a little bit uncomfortable too,” he said in a Zoom conversation. “I’m proud of it.”

“One Battle After Another” – which earned 13 Academy Award nominations – is the front-runner to take the best picture Oscar.

“I did enjoy the film, and I felt that the film did have a lot of potential,” Del Toro said, noting that he felt his co-stars were “really the protagonists,” with his to a lesser extent.

“Perhaps there’s something in a movie that is so dark... since it brings a little bit of a sense of hope,” he added of his character – though he admits he did not initially see him that way.

‘There’s a heart there’

Del Toro was initially studying business at a university in California when he dropped out to pursue acting.

After some small television roles, an appearance in a Madonna music video and a few big screen appearances, his major breakthrough came in 1995 with “The Usual Suspects.”

And then in 2001, he won the Oscar for best supporting actor for Steven Soderbergh’s “Traffic,” in which he played a Mexican border cop who tries to remain honest amid the drug wars. He bested a stacked field that included Willem Dafoe and Jeff Bridges.

A second Academy Award nomination followed for Alejandro González Iñárritu’s “21 Grams.”

Del Toro, who has worked with top directors from Soderbergh to Iñárritu to Denis Villeneuve, says he was immediately drawn to “One Battle” for the chance to work with Anderson for a second time, after “Inherent Vice” (2014).

The director “just creates a real



Puerto Rican actor Benicio del Toro attends the 98th Oscars Nominees Luncheon at the Beverly Hilton hotel in Beverly Hills, California on February 10, 2026. – AFP

comfortable place for creativity, for collaboration,” he said.

Anderson asked him if would play a karate instructor and sent him a photo of a tiger... in a martial arts kimono.

But as time passed, the character evolved from someone just helping Ferguson on his search into more of a “fighter for the underdog, a protector of these migrants who were looking for the American dream,” he said.

In one scene, Sensei Sergio

introduces Ferguson to his extended family – and to some of the migrants he hides so they can avoid arrest.

“I felt very, very, very, very strong about it,” Del Toro said. “I felt like it needed to be treated with humanity... with respect.”

He says he is happy his work has been honoured because of what his character represents.

“There’s a heart there... I think that’s why people are gravitating towards Sensei,” he said.

– AFP

Pixar’s ‘Hoppers’ jumps to top of N American box office

LOS ANGELES – “Hoppers,” the latest original animated film from Disney’s Pixar, easily topped the North American box office with US\$46 million in ticket sales in its opening weekend, industry estimates showed on Sunday.

The adventure comedy tells the story of Mabel (Piper Curda), a young animal lover who uses technology to transfer her consciousness into a robotic beaver so she can better communicate and protect wildlife.

The voice cast features Meryl Streep, Jon Hamm and Kathy Najimy.

“This is a very good opening for an original Pixar film,” said analyst David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research.

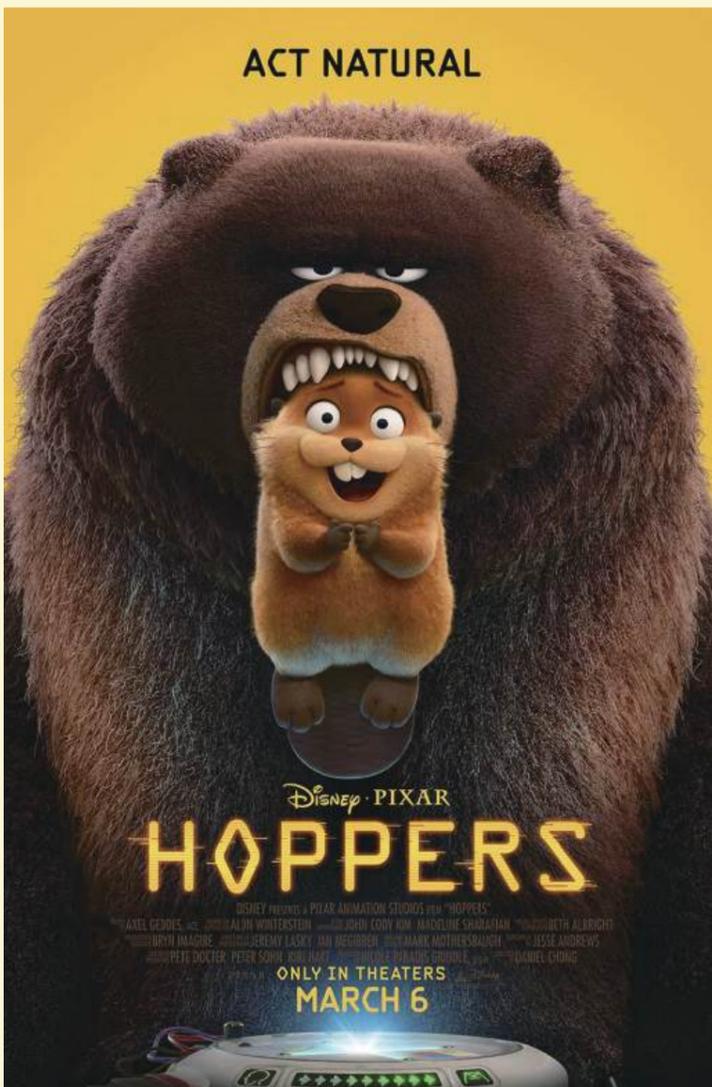
“The movie has strong ancillary business, merchandising, and theme park potential, and it’s going to be very profitable.”

“Scream 7,” the latest installment in the 30-year-old slasher series featuring yet another Ghostface killer, held strong in second place at US\$17.3 million in the United States and Canada, according to Exhibitor Relations.

The Paramount film features franchise veterans Neve Campbell, Courteney Cox and David Arquette.

“The Bride!” – Maggie Gyllenhaal’s genre-hopping take on 1935’s “The Bride of Frankenstein” starring Oscar hopeful Jessie Buckley and past Oscar winner Christian Bale – opened in a disappointing third place at US\$7.3 million.

“Warner Bros. has had recent success making films with auteur writer/directors and big budgets,” Gross said, citing Academy Award frontrunners “Sinners” and “One



Theatrical release poster for “Hoppers” – Image courtesy of IMDb

Battle After Another.”

“This time, the reception is weak.”

Sony’s family-friendly animated film “GOAT” – the story of an undersized goat who wants to join a basketball-like “roarball” team – finished in fourth place at US\$6.6 million.

The film was produced by NBA superstar Stephen Curry, who also takes on a voice role.

“Wuthering Heights” – starring Margot Robbie and Jacob Elordi as the doomed lovers Cathy and Heathcliff from Emily Bronte’s classic novel – dropped to fifth place at US\$3.75 million. – AFP

US cardinal slams ‘sickening’ White House war montage video

WASHINGTON – A US cardinal close to Pope Leo XIV has described a White House video montage mixing Hollywood film clips with real footage of strikes on Iran as “horrifying” and “sickening”.

“A real war with real death and real suffering being treated like it’s a video game – it’s sickening”, Cardinal Blase Cupich said in a statement on the diocese website.

In the 42-second video posted on X on Friday with the caption “Justice the American way”, Hollywood heroics are interspersed with footage released by the US military showing real strikes on various targets.

It was a “horrifying portrayal” as “more than 1,000 Iranian men,

women and children” have been killed by US and Israeli missiles, he wrote on Saturday.

“Our government is treating the suffering of the Iranian people as a backdrop for our own entertainment, as if it’s just another piece of content to be swiped through while we’re waiting in line at the grocery store.

He warned: “We lose our humanity when we are thrilled by the destructive power of our military”.

“I know that the American people are better than this,” he wrote.

Cupich is the archbishop of Chicago, Pope Leo’s hometown and one of the largest dioceses in the US. – AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 2°C~13°C	Manila 21°C~31°C	New York 10°C~20°C	Lisbon 8°C~16°C
Shanghai 3°C~13°C	Bangkok 24°C~37°C	London 9°C~13°C	Rio de Janeiro 23°C~27°C
Hong Kong 15°C~19°C	Tokyo 0°C~9°C	Frankfurt 7°C~18°C	Luanda 24°C~29°C
Taipei 13°C~15°C	Singapore 23°C~33°C	Vancouver 4°C~6°C	Maputo 21°C~29°C
Guangzhou 13°C~20°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~36°C	Paris 9°C~16°C	Dili 24°C~30°C
Nanjing 2°C~15°C	Jakarta 22°C~31°C	Moscow 0°C~6°C	São Tomé 27°C~32°C
Guilin 7°C~20°C	Seoul 0°C~10°C	Las Vegas 13°C~26°C	Praia 18°C~27°C
Xi’an 6°C~19°C	Sydney 18°C~26°C	Monte Carlo 10°C~14°C	Bissau 21°C~39°C



China's Wang Zhidong (front) celebrates a goal with his teammate during the Para Ice Hockey preliminary round Group A match against Italy at the Milan-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Milan, Italy, yesterday. - Xinhua



Slovakia's Adam Krupa (left) and China's Lijia Ji compete in the men's snowboard cross event during the Milano Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy on Sunday. - AFP



Emanuel Perathoner of Italy competes during the para snowboard men's cross LL2 event at the Milan-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Cortina D'ampezzo, Italy, on Sunday. - Xinhua



Patrick Halgren of the US prepares for the ski Super G during the Milano Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games yesterday in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy. - AFP



Gold medallist Varvara Voronchihina of Russia competes during the women's super G standing final match of para alpine skiing at the Milan-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Cortina D'Ampezzo, Italy, yesterday. - Xinhua

Athletes wait at the starting gate for track inspection prior to the ski Super G during the Milano Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games yesterday in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy. - AFP

