



# UNU Macau continues to foster youth innovation, training

Rui Pastorin

A spring reception dinner hosted by the United Nations University Institute in Macau (UNU Macau) was held on Friday night, during which the institute's director, Huang Jingbo, highlighted to the *Post* its continued efforts to create and foster dedicated AI and technology-related programmes for young people.

UNU Macau has been organising a number of programmes for the younger generation over the years, including those being related to technology and AI and modelling, AI governance, social sciences, AI research, and other training programmes, Huang told the *Post* prior to the reception. She added that they also continue to send talented young people working at the institute to the local community to represent the institute to build more programmes for, and together with them, targeting both Macau and other cities in the Greater Bay Area (GBA).

Last year also saw the inaugural edition of the AI and Youth Innovation Competition in

Macau, with Huang adding that this created an opportunity for young people from Macau and around the world to present their AI applications and projects on climate.

"Looking forward, we'd like to do more, work with more partners and co-create success. We're the convener. As part of the UN, we would like to bring all the partners together on the platform to bring more interesting projects, interesting events to young people, not only in Macau, but elsewhere in the Greater Bay Area and in the world", she said.

Regarding what's in store for 2026, Huang said that the institute is planning to host another conference in Macau on AI and education with policy outputs, with the event being slated for some time in November and set to bring in researchers, policy makers, and potentially even ministers of education from 40 regions and countries in Asia and Europe.

The institute's role in, and commitments to, promoting research in the digital technology and sustainable development fields were also

highlighted by Huang during the reception and conversations with journalists, as well as collaborations she hopes to have with different sectors of society.

During the reception, which was attended by representatives of the local government, UNU Macau, enterprises, associations, and media, Huang also highlighted successful events held previously, including the "UNU Macau AI Conference" and "AI Education Day" that drew over 800 experts and scholars from more than 30 countries and regions. Other plans for 2026, meanwhile, were also elaborated on by Huang, including an AI conference set to be held in Africa. ■

\* The UNU Institute in Macau is one of the 13 institutes and units of the United Nations University (UNU), according to the institute's website, adding that it is "a global think tank dedicated to research, training and education on digital technologies for sustainable development". The institute was set up in Macau in 1992.



UNU Macau Director Huang Jingbo poses after an interview prior to Friday's reception at the headquarters of United Nations University Institute in Macau, at Casa Silva Mendes on Guia Hill.



Attendees of Friday's reception pose for a group photo. - Photos: Rui Pastorin

## Strategic oil stocks to be released 'immediately' in Asia and Oceania: IEA



PARIS – Strategic oil reserves will be released "immediately" in Asia and Oceania, and as early as the end of March in America and Europe, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said yesterday.

IEA members agreed on March 11 to tap oil stockpiles to cushion the surge in prices caused by the war in the Middle East, in by far the largest-ever response of its kind.

"Individual implementation plans have been submitted to the IEA by Member

countries. These plans indicate that stocks will be made available by IEA Member countries in Asia Oceania immediately," said the IEA.

"Stocks from IEA Member countries in the Americas and Europe will be made available starting from the end of March," it added.

The IEA said a total 271.7 million barrels of government-managed stocks would be released worldwide.

"The war in the Middle East is creating

the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market," it said.

It called the emergency stockpile release – the sixth in the history of the global energy body, and the first since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 – a "significant and welcome buffer".

The announced releases have not had a significant impact on the price of oil, which hovers around US\$100 a barrel, the highest since 2022 and up from below US\$70 before the start of the war.

The IEA added that "the most important factor in ensuring a return to stable flows is the resumption of regular transit of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz."

Iran has effectively blocked the strategic strait since the war started on February 28 with US-Israeli air strikes on Iranian targets.

"Adequate insurance mechanisms and physical protection for shipping are key to the resumption of flows," the IEA said.

(More on page 11) – AFP

### China launches Institute of Global Development

Aimed at advancing international development cooperation, the Institute of Global Development (IGD) was inaugurated yesterday at Zhejiang University.

- Story on p. 8

### War-related oil squeeze a 'short-term pain,' US official insists

US President Donald Trump's top energy official said yesterday that Americans will have to endure the "short-term pain" of higher prices at the pump as US forces conduct their war against Iran.

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### Mexico sends third major aid package to besieged Cuba

Two Mexican Navy ships loaded with 1,000 tonnes of humanitarian aid arrived on Friday in Cuba, whose economy has been hammered since becoming the target of a US energy blockade since February.

- Story on p. 12

# When benevolence and justice are not practised, the position of strength shifts



China's seasoned Foreign Minister Wang Yi's press conference on the sidelines of the "two sessions" in Beijing on March 8 proved his deep wit and predilection for metaphors and aphorisms once again. His annual press conference at the Great Hall of the People during the concurrent sessions of the National People's Congress (NPC) and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) has, for over a decade, become a "must-study" for me – and certainly for many others keen to understand China's foreign policy.

The press conference, attended by dozens of domestic and foreign journalists, lasted 80 minutes. The transcript of the English translation comprises nearly 8,000 words. For instance, when asked by a reporter about the ongoing US-Israel conflict concerning Iran, Wang insisted that "might does not make right."

When concluding his meeting with the press, he quoted the future US President Abraham Lincoln's February 1860 address that "right makes might," and also cited an ancient Chinese adage saying that "when benevolence and justice are not practised, the position of strength shifts."

The phrase "right makes might" has been attributed to Chinese essayist Jia Yi (c. 200-169 BCE) in his "Disquisition on Finding Fault with Qin," which, as its title suggests, critiques the Qin Dynasty and details his views on the reasons for its collapse.

On the contrary, the concept that "might makes right" has roots in ancient European texts, including works by Greek historian and general Thucydides (c. 460-460 BCE) and Italian philosopher and diplomat Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), who discussed the predicament of power and morality. For example, Thucydides in his work "The History of the Peloponnesian War" explores the idea that stronger states use their power to impose their will on weaker ones.

Prior to the Q&A session, Wang reaffirmed a host of core principles of China's foreign policy, such as

its "firm opposition to all unilateral acts, power politics, and bullying," stressing that "as the world's most important force for peace, stability, and justice, we have full confidence in the future of humanity."

Of course, he also reiterated China's commitment to "building a community with a shared future for humanity," a vision launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013, and stressed that "head-of-state diplomacy is the anchor of China's diplomacy."

Wang stated that "China's diplomacy provides the much-needed stability and certainty to a world in turmoil and serves as an irreplaceable mainstay amid global turbulence."

He also reminded everyone that China is slated to host major diplomatic events such as the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting and the second China-Arab States Summit this year. Both are of utmost importance given the turbulent situation large parts of the world are in right now.

When asked about Beijing-Moscow ties, Wang underlined that China and Russia are strategically independent and that both adhere to the principle of non-alliance, based on the broad strategic consensus and close strategic coordination they share.

Regarding the APEC meeting in Shenzhen on November 18-19, Wang emphasised that China's central objective throughout the whole year is "to translate the goal of building an Asia-Pacific community into action and turn its blueprint into reality," with the meeting's theme being "Building an Asia-Pacific Community to Prosper Together," based on the three priorities of openness, innovation, and cooperation.

Wang also mentioned that China "will construct the main pillars of an Asia-Pacific community, align different pathways towards the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific... and vigorously promote the transformation towards digital, smart, and green development." He underlined that the APEC meeting will be held in Shenzhen, "a frontier of innovation in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area" (GBA).

Concerning the Iran war, Wang called for a ceasefire and an end to hostilities. Unsurprisingly, he added that "ancient Chinese wisdom warns

that weapons are ominous tools, and should not be used without discretion."

"This is a war that should not have happened – it is a war that does no one any good." He also said that "as a sincere friend and strategic partner, China stands ready to work with Middle Eastern countries to implement the Global Security Initiative (GSI)..."

## China's four global initiatives

The 2022 GSI is the second of four global initiatives that China, under the guidance of President Xi, launched between 2021 and last year. The others are the Global Development Initiative (GDI, 2021), the Global Civilisation Initiative (GCI, 2023), and last year's Global Governance Initiative (GGI). I am not aware of any other country or group of countries that has been able, or willing, to get similar global initiatives – now forming an impressive quartet – off the ground. This shows that China has grown into a proactive shaper of the international community.

On the subject of the GGI, Wang highlighted that China has initiated the Group of Friends of Global Governance at the UN, in New York and Geneva. The group promotes the five major GGI principles, namely, sovereign equality, international rule of law, multilateralism, a people-centred approach, and real actions, Wang stated, who acknowledged that while "the UN is not perfect, without the UN, the world would only be worse."

I think so too. The UN, of which China is a founding member, is the outcome of two world wars, and let's hope that even in all its imperfection, it is able to avoid WWII.

Right now, many trigger-happy political figures and movements are on the loose.

Wang also said that as the world's largest developing country, "China is more conscious of the ardent expectations of the Global South countries, which include the 10-member Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the also 10-member BRICS." These two entities' members can be expected particularly to hope for a speedy end to the Iran war.

Some 85 percent of the world's population lives in the Global South's approximately 135 countries (the UN has 193 members). The term 'Global South' is not strictly geographical but denotes countries "outside the West." China and India, for instance, are geographically in the northern hemisphere but geopolitically are deeply embedded in the Global South, widely regarded as developing, emerging, less economically advanced, or having lower incomes.

"The collective rise of the Global South is the distinct hallmark of the great transformation unfolding in the world," Wang stated, pointing out that over the past four decades, its share of

the global economy has grown from 24 percent to over 40 percent.

## China rejects 'G2'

When asked about the ultra-important China-US relationship, Wang characterised it as "one of far-reaching and global implications," insisting that neither side "can remodel the other" and that both should "strive for the prospect of win-win cooperation." He described peaceful coexistence as the relationship's "bottom line."

"This year is a 'big year' for China-US relations," Wang said, urging both to "lengthen the list of cooperation and shorten the list of problems." He said that 2026 should become "a landmark year for sound, steady, and sustainable development of China-US relations."

I hope that US President Donald Trump's possible visit to China soon will help turn 2026 into a landmark year for solid, stable, and enduring relations. However, our American friends should always be fully aware of what President Xi said on December 26, 2013 when addressing a symposium commemorating the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mao Zedong's birth: "No country should assume that we will trade away our core interests, nor will we accept anything that harms our sovereignty, security, and development interests."

I assume that any state leader aware of their duties to their nation and its people will agree with Xi's remarks.

Wang categorically rejected the idea of China accepting a bipolar "G2" format as a framework for addressing global challenges with the US. While admitting that "no doubt, China and the US have a significant impact on the world," he cautioned that "we should not forget there are more than 190 countries on our planet."

"Diversity is the inherent nature of human society, and multipolarity is what the international landscape should look like," Wang said, adding that "building an equal and orderly multipolar world should be the common responsibility of all countries."

He cited the cooperation arrangements between China and nearly three dozen Latin American and Caribbean countries, as well as the People's Republic of China's (PRC) 70-year-long friendship with Africa, from Zhou Enlai to President Xi's visits to the continent of 1.5 billion residents. Wang mentioned that fresh steps are being taken towards building the China-Africa community with a shared future, alongside the full implementation of zero-tariff access for 100 percent of African imports starting from 1 May this year.

With respect to China's goal of building a community with a shared future with neighbouring countries, Wang acknowledged, realistically, that "there are often political changes within countries in the region, and complex, sensitive

issues left from history still exist between countries."

He also criticised those adopting a "beggar-thy-neighbour approach," i.e., the situation in which a country seeks to improve its economic situation at the expense of other countries.

I am convinced that, just as in domestic politics, the best way to tackle problems in international relations is to engage in dialogue - talking things over, as simple as that.

## 'Europe is China's key modernisation partner'

When asked about China-EU ties, Wang underlined that two-way trade topped US\$1 trillion last year, when two million European tourists travelled to China under visa-free policies. He stated that "Europe should naturally be a pole in a multipolar world... and Europe is a key partner for China in our modernisation."

However, he cautioned that "it is crucial for Europe to have a correct perception of China." Well, I am quite sure that, as far as the EU's "correct perception" of China is concerned, that's still a developing situation. Most importantly, in my view, the 27-nation bloc needs to consolidate its strategic sovereignty, which, let's be realistic, seems to still be in an embryonic state.

Wang insisted that "China is not a competitor but a global partner" and that China and Europe are mutually complementary." He underscored that as far as China-Europe cooperation is concerned, "independence is not a risk, intertwined interests are no threat... but building walls and barriers will only lead to self-isolation."

## From 'small attic' to 'fitness club'

Wang used a metaphorical phrase concerning progress made in China-EU ties: "We are glad to see European friends stepping out of the 'small attic' of protectionism and walking into the 'fitness club' of the Chinese market to build their strength and competitiveness."

According to analysts, the "attic" represents protective tariffs and barriers that ultimately lead to self-isolation. The metaphor describes protectionism as a gloomy space that shuts out durable growth and competitiveness.

When asked about the Palestinian question, Wang insisted that "the only one equitable and widely recognised solution is the two-state solution." He pledged that "China will continue to support Palestine's just cause of pursuing legitimate national rights."

On the global economic development front, Wang lamented that the world economy is facing headwinds, and globalisation is suffering a backlash. "A certain country is erecting tariff barriers and pushing economic and technological decoupling," Wang said, obviously without the need to name the culprit.

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### Published since Aug 2004

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### Macau Weather

**FINE APART FROM CLOUDY PERIODS.**  
**FORCE 3 TO 4 EASTERLY WINDS.**  
**RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 55% AND 95%.**



17°C~24°C

Source: SMG

# Macau's 1<sup>st</sup> 'Na Tcha Cultural Festival' slated for Sept

**Armando Neves**

Macau's Na Tcha Temple Association hosted its annual Spring Festival blessing ceremony on Saturday, announcing that Macau's first "Na Tcha Cultural Festival" will be hosted in mid-September.

The association's president, Ip Tat, told the *Post* on Saturday that through the traditional Na Tcha customs and beliefs, they prayed for world peace, the nation's prosperity and the well-being of Macau residents.

According to Ip, this year's "Birthday of Prince Na Tcha and the upcoming 27<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR)", scheduled for late June, will be larger in scale and richer in content than in previous years. It will include blessing ceremonies, a colourful float parade, a Poon Choi banquet (Poon Choi is a traditional Cantonese dish originating from historic walled villages), and ritual opera performances, Ip said.

Na Tcha's (Nezha in Putonghua) birthday is on the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the fifth month in the Chinese Lunar Calendar. In the Western

calendar, his birthday this year falls on July 2.

Ip said the aim is to develop the birthday celebration into an appealing folk custom tourism brand, enabling more visitors to appreciate the significance of Macau's Na Tcha culture.

Ip also said that in mid-September, Macau's two Na Tcha temples will jointly host Macau's first "Na Tcha Cultural Festival". Representatives of the Na Tcha traditions and beliefs from the Chinese mainland, China's Taiwan region, Hong Kong, Macau, and Southeast Asia will be invited to participate, Ip said.

Macau boasts two temples dedicated to Na Tcha – the one close to the Ruins of St Paul's and the other on Calçada das Verdades behind Ginza Plaza.

The event's goal is to promote Macau's distinctive Na Tcha customs on the world stage, fostering cultural exchange, and ensuring the transmission of this local intangible cultural heritage, according to Ip.

According to his local adherents, Na Tcha, known in Putonghua as Nezha (哪吒),

aka Nezha the Crown Prince (哪吒太子), is a protection deity in Taoism, Buddhism, and Chinese folk religion. Besides, Na Tcha, a prominent figure in Chinese mythology, is a divine hero whose origins are rooted in ancient Chinese folklore and religious

traditions. According to the mythological narrative, Na Tcha was born during the Shang Dynasty (商朝, around 1600–1046 BCE), and his famed story is closely tied to the Investiture of the Gods (封神演义), a Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) novel set in that era. ■



Na Tcha Temple Association members pose during Saturday's annual Spring Festival blessing ceremony in front of Na Tcha Temple next to the Ruins of St Paul's. – Photo courtesy of Na Tcha Temple Association

## USJ Int'l Cultural Carnival brings different cultures to Ilha Verde campus

**Kristina Vallesteros**

The University of Saint Joseph (USJ) hosted its International Cultural Carnival on Saturday, transforming the Ilha Verde Campus into a vibrant gathering of cultures from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Organised by students and staff representing more than 50 nationalities, the event offered the public a glimpse into the university's multicultural community.

The afternoon kicked off with a grand parade, as students and staff carrying their national flags wound through the campus courtyard. What followed was an immersive journey across continents without ever leaving Macau.

Visitors wandered among over 30 stalls offering food, games, and cultural activities from regions and countries including the Chinese mainland, Angola, Brazil, Cabo Verde (Cape Verde), Guinea-Bissau, Myanmar, Mozambique, the Philippines Portugal, Russia South Korea and Timor-Leste (East Timor). Attendees were able to sample dishes from around the world, all prepared by members of the USJ community.

The stage programme kept energy high throughout the afternoon. Performances included lion dancing by the Zhuhai City

Polytechnic, a Myanmar traditional dance, an African fashion show, and musical sets from the USJ Music Club, Brazilian singer Jandira Silva, and student bands. A band from Our Lady of Fátima Girls' School and USJ's own "The 853" closed out the performances.

Meanwhile, an installation titled "Guardians of the Mangroves" transformed the university library into an immersive mangrove reading room. A collaboration between the USJ Institute of Science and Environment and the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the exhibits used AI and 3D printing to turn genetic sequences from local mangrove forests into tactile art.

For prospective students, academic information booths provided face-to-face conversations with professors about programmes and scholarships. Those who applied on-site received a full waiver of the application fee.

The atmosphere was lively and welcoming. Visitors painted their faces, families sampled unfamiliar dishes, students shared a laugh with friends, and solo visitors struck up conversations with strangers, all the while keeping cultural immersion among its aims. ■



Crowds explore booths during the on-campus University of Saint Joseph's (USJ) International Cultural Carnival in Ilha Verde on Saturday. – Photo: Kristina Vallesteros

## When benevolence and justice are not practised, the position of strength shifts

*Continued from p.2*

"Pursuing protectionism is akin to locking oneself in a dark room; it may keep out the wind and rain, but it also shuts out light and air," he said.

"China not only talks the talk but also walks the walk," Wang said, pointing out that "over the past five years, its economy has grown at an average annual rate of 5.4 percent – accounting for around 30 percent of global growth, greater than the contribution of the G7 Western countries combined."

### 'A Country's Greatness Lies in Serving the Greater Good'

Wang emphasised that "a country's greatness lies in serving the greater good," pledging that "China will expand high-standard opening-up not only as the 'world's factory' but also as 'the world's market.'"

When asked about China-Japan relations and Japan's claim that a Taiwan contingency could constitute a "survival-threatening situation" for Japan, Wang reminded Tokyo that "history is a mirror that reflects the rise and fall of human affairs and that the past, if not forgotten, can serve as a guide for the future."

Wang alluded to the fact that Taiwan was a Japanese colony for 50 years until the militarists in Tokyo were forced, in the wake of their WWII surrender, to hand the island back to the motherland – China.

Wang was adamant that Taiwan "never was, is not, and never will be a country." He also reaffirmed that "the Taiwan question is China's internal affair; it is at the core of China's core interests – a red line that must not be crossed or trampled on."

As for the "unstoppable" process towards the "complete reunification of our motherland... those who support it are on the right side of history; those who defy it shall perish," he stated bluntly.

With regard to the South China Sea, Wang diplomatically remarked that "making waves wins no hearts and fomenting trouble finds no takers." He also mentioned that "all relevant parties look forward to wrapping up" their consultations on a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) this year.

It is my sincere hope that the COC will be signed by all relevant parties by the end of the year

Nearing the end of his press conference, Wang said that "the Chinese have always had the noble tradition of acting for the common good and pursuing harmony for all... and we will continue to take the path of peaceful development." He stated that "this attests to the saying that 'right makes might.'"

Wang concluded that "a righteous cause is sure to garner the mighty support of the world's countries and pool the strength of the people."

Wang's informative and instructive remarks serve as a thesaurus for anyone eager to understand China's foreign policy – and much more, including relevant insights for all of us in Macau. This is particularly significant given that our tiny special administrative region (in terms of area and population, not its historic importance in East-West ties) plays a specific role in China's external relations, especially with Portuguese-speaking countries, the European Union, Southeast Asia, and, I hope, the Hispanic world before long, as well.

– Harald Brüning



# Moth & Bee: two artists explore life's contrasts in exhibition

*Kristina Vallesteros*

Tucked away above the bustling crowds at the Ruins of St. Paul's, a small exhibition space is hosting a contemplative dialogue between two local artists.

The "Double Vision" exhibition, organised by the Macau Artist Society (MAS), features work by Cheong Chan Kit and Chek Man Ha at the Ho's Clan Association Exhibition Hall (何族崇義堂盛荷堂展廳) on Rua de S. Paulo. The exhibition is set to run until March 28.

Located on the first floor of the building, visitors climb a narrow staircase to reach two interconnected rooms, each dedicated to one artist's work. Unlike the tourist-filled area below, the exhibition space remains quiet and peaceful.

The exhibition explores the contrasting creative approaches of the two artists through the imagery of moths and bees. According to a statement from the organisers, Cheong, who studied art and creative design in Taiwan and returned to Macau in 2020, uses the moth as a central motif. His works reflect a shift from early mythological and religious themes towards more personal expressions, the statement noted.

Additionally, Chek, also known as Lúcia, holds a master's degree in Illustration and Visual Media from the London College of Communication, the statement noted. Her work features imagery drawn from nature, transformed into delicate visual poetry. Using watercolour, gouache\*, and ink, she builds layered emotional spaces within small-scale compositions.

According to the statement, the moth represents a poetic obsession, drawn to light despite the risk of destruction, while the bee embodies gentle order, constructing honeycombs that blend reason and emotion. Together, the two bodies of work invite viewers to contemplate different attitudes toward life.

The exhibition is co-organised by the Federation of Associations of Cultural Sectors of Macau and the Macau Youth Art Association, with funding from the Cultural Development Fund of the Macao SAR Government. The venue is provided by the Macau Ho's Clan Association.

One may visit the free-admission exhibition from between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m., on Tuesdays to Sundays.

\*According to [dickblick.com](http://dickblick.com) gouache (pronounced "gwash") is a versatile, water-based paint known for its vibrant colours, opaque finish, and fast drying times. It's used for a vast spectrum of artistic applications, from delicate fine art illustrations to bold, graphic designs for comics and posters.

Photos taken yesterday by Kristina Vallesteros

# Brands & products expo aims to promote Zhongshan products: Zhongshan vice mayor

Armando Neves

The two-day brands and products expo, called “Guangdong Goods with Global Reach, Zhongshan Products in Macau” concluded yesterday in Praça do Tap Siac (塔石廣場), with the aim of promoting Zhongshan products in Macau.

Zhou Zuode, vice-mayor of the People’s Government of Zhongshan Municipality, said in a speech on Saturday the fair’s objective was to serve as a starting point for continuously deepening comprehensive cooperation between Zhongshan and Macau in areas such as industrial collaboration, commercial trade, cultural exchange, and public services.

The goal was to bring more high-quality Zhongshan products to Macau and to enable the residents of both cities to share in the development opportunities and the fruits of the expo, Zhou said.

Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) President Che Weng Keong said in a speech that the expo aimed to expand the brand influence of Zhongshan’s products and their coverage in



Booths promoting Zhongshan brands showcase their products in Praça do Tap Seac (塔石廣場) on Saturday.

– Photo: Armando Neves

overseas markets. While actively participating in the development of the Greater Bay Area (GBA) and the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, Che said that the bureau will join hands with Zhongshan to leverage their respective advantages, precisely build an investment attraction network, and pragmatically advance investment promotion efforts.

Permanent Secretariat of Forum for Economic and Trade Co-operation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Macao) Deputy Secretary-General Xie Ying said in a speech that the secretariat welcomes continued interaction and exchanges with Zhongshan.

She expressed the hope that the active participation of Zhongshan

enterprises in various China-Portuguese-speaking Countries’ economic and trade activities will further increase, working together to promote cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries and achieving mutual benefits and shared success for Zhongshan, Macau, and the Portuguese-speaking world.

According to a statement by the

expo organisers, the fair featured products in various categories including home appliances, houseware, electronics, clothing, chemical products, food, and cultural tourism. The statement said that the expo aimed to showcase Zhongshan’s image in terms of technological innovation, manufacturing capabilities, quality living, tourism appeal, and the preservation of intangible cultural heritage.

During the opening, Zhongshan Municipal Bureau of Commerce Director Zhang Junfeng and Che signed a cooperation agreement

The statement said the aim is to deepen economic and trade cooperation between Zhongshan and Macau, and leverage Macau’s role as a “commerce and trade cooperation platform for China and Portuguese-speaking countries” to further unlock the potential of Zhongshan’s manufacturing and commercial service sectors.

Zhongshan Municipality has some 4.4 million inhabitants. Zhongshan’s Tazhou Town lies near Macau. ■

## Over 10,000 lifts’ declaration due to expire this quarter: DSSCU

Armando Neves

The Lands and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU) said in a statement yesterday that over 10,000 approved lift inspection declarations are due to expire this quarter.

The statement said that according to the official “Lift Safety Regulation”, lifting equipment must be inspected at least once a year and can only be used after obtaining an “Approved Lift Inspection Declaration”.

The bureau urged each lift’s responsible person to promptly instruct the respective maintenance entity to carry out repairs, if needed, and to quickly engage an inspection entity to complete the inspection and renewal.

If the validity period expires without renewal of the declaration, the lift must be taken out of service; failure to do so may result in a fine, the statement said.

The bureau stated, however, that it already received the new year’s approved lift inspection declarations from some of the inspection entities, the statement said, adding that it will continue to conduct inspections and supervise the inspection work, including visiting sites to verify the situation and remind stakeholders of the important matters at stake.

Promotional materials are being distributed to residential and commercial premises, urging prompt renewal of the declarations, the statement said.

The DSSCU emphasised in the statement that the safety of lift equipment concerns every household and business, and that it will continue to disseminate relevant information through multiple channels and maintain communication with the industry. ■



This undated handout provided by Lands and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU) yesterday shows its officials and others inspecting the lift equipment.

## Gongbei Customs seizes 41 items of clothing at Qingmao Port



This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai’s Gongbei Customs on Saturday shows the female smuggler wearing 21 items of clothing, attempting to smuggle them into the Chinese mainland.

Armando Neves

Zhuhai’s Gongbei Customs announced in a statement on Saturday that its officers seized 41 articles of clothing on Wednesday at the Macau-Zhuhai Qingmao pedestrian checkpoint.

According to the statement, on that day, customs officers at the checkpoint’s arrival hall noticed a female traveller who entered the Chinese mainland through the “green channel” behaving abnormally during the routine X-ray of her luggage, because of which they intercepted her for inspection.

The statement said that customs officers discovered 20 branded shorts and yoga leggings in her luggage.

However, customs officers also noticed that the smuggler appeared unusually “bulky”, after which they discovered that she was wearing 21 additional branded items such



This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai’s Gongbei Customs on Friday shows 419 cartons of “Double Happiness” brand cigarettes, amounting to 83,800 cigarettes, seized by its officers at the HZMB Zhuhai Checkpoint on March 6.

as vests, shorts, yoga leggings, the statement said, adding that all 41 items of clothing still had the price tags attached.

The smuggler admitted to transporting the goods for others in exchange for a fee.

Gongbei Customs reminded the public in the statement that according to relevant regulations, evading customs supervision by hiding and taking goods subject to taxes into the Chinese mainland constitutes smuggling. If the circumstances are severe enough to constitute a crime, criminal liability will be pursued.

### Gongbei Customs seizes 83,800 cigarettes at HZMB

Meanwhile, Zhuhai’s Gongbei Customs announced in a statement on Friday that its officers seized 83,800 cigarettes at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge’s (HZMB) Zhuhai checkpoint on March 6.

According to the statement, on that day, customs officers noticed an abnormality during a routine X-ray inspection of a dual-plate vehicle.

Upon inspection, the officers discovered 419 cartons of “Double Happiness” brand cigarettes, amounting to 83,800 cigarettes, concealed in various parts of the vehicle, such as the dashboard, doors, floor, and boot.

The statement quoted Article 3 of the Chinese mainland’s Tobacco Monopoly Law as stipulating that “the state shall, according to law, exercise monopoly administration over the manufacture, sale, import and export of tobacco monopoly commodities, and adopt a tobacco monopoly licensing system”, according to which, the export of cigarettes must obtain a licence from the State Tobacco Monopoly Administration. ■

# Lu Jian meets local poets & writers at Casa Garden



Chinese mainland poet Lu Jian (second from right) speaks during the “Verses in Transit” talk alongside local poets (from left to right) Lai Ka Io, Si Tou Chi U and Yao Feng at Casa Garden on Friday evening. – Photo: Khalel Vallo

**Khalel Vallo**

The 15<sup>th</sup> Macau Literary Festival –The Script Road concluded yesterday in Casa Garden, with a wide-ranging programme of literature, films, art, and music.

Poets and writers gathered at Casa Garden on Friday for the talk “Verses in Transit”, where visiting poet Lu Jian from the Chinese mainland met local writers and poets to discuss the relationship between travel, culture and poetic creation as part of the city’s Literary Festival activities.

The talk was moderated by local poet Yao Feng, who introduced the visiting guest and guided a conversation about how journeys – both physical and psychological – inspire literary expression.

Yao described travel as a key creative catalyst for writers, noting that “travel breaks the static clock in the study”, allowing poets to encounter new people and

experiences that spark inspiration.

Lu, a professor and a poet, reflected on how travel shapes creative thinking. He said that encountering new environments helps writers discover different perspectives of themselves and the world. “Every time we go to a new place, we can meet a new self”, Lu said, adding that observing unfamiliar cultures and daily life allows writers to deepen their understanding of humanity.

Meanwhile, local poet Si Tou Chi U shared her perspective as a young writer who has studied and lived outside Macau in recent years. She said distance from home allowed her to rediscover the city’s cultural identity. “When I returned to Macau, I realised our city is inseparable from travel,” she said, pointing to the city’s history of cultural exchange between Chinese, Portuguese and other communities.

Another local poet, Lai Ka Io,

spoke about how short journeys within the Greater Bay Area (GBA) can also inspire creative work. She described writing poetry while travelling to neighbouring cities and observing shared cultural elements such as weather, landscapes, and daily life. “Poetry can be a bridge that connects people,” Lai said, noting that exchanges between writers in Macau and nearby cities help strengthen literary dialogue.

Throughout the discussion, speakers emphasised that poetry can capture both personal experiences and universal emotions, helping readers reflect on life, culture and human connections across borders.

The discussion highlighted Macau’s role as a meeting point for diverse cultural voices, bringing together Chinese mainland and local writers to exchange ideas and explore how travel, observation and cultural encounters continue to shape contemporary poetry. ■

## Health Bureau reports scrub typhus case

**Khalel Vallo**

The Health Bureau (SSM) announced in a statement on Saturday a case of scrub typhus, the first recorded in Macau this year.

According to the bureau, the patient is a 31-year-old male resident. He first noticed a small black spot on his left thigh late last month, accompanied by a localised rash. On March 6, he developed fever, headache and muscle pain, followed by a full-body rash the next day.

The patient initially sought medical treatment at a local hospital but his symptoms did not improve, the statement said, adding that on March 12, he sought medical attention at the public Conde de São Januário Hospital, where doctors discovered a painless eschar\* about the size of a soybean on his left thigh.

Based on his symptoms, clinical signs and treatment response, doctors made a clinical diagnosis of scrub typhus, the statement noted, adding that after treatment, the patient’s fever subsided and his condition stabilised. He is receiving hospital treatment.

According to the statement, health authorities said the case has been classified as an imported infection. The

statement highlighted that the patient had travelled to Jiangmen City in Guangdong Province on February 24 and 25, where he went camping at a site with grassy surroundings and reported being bitten by insects, adding that no similar symptoms have been reported among people living with him, and he did not visit parks or rural areas while in Macau.

Scrub typhus, also known as tsutsugamushi disease, is an acute infectious disease caused by infection with the bacterium *Orientia tsutsugamushi*\*\* transmitted through bites from infected chigger larvae. Rodents living in warm and humid environments with dense vegetation are common hosts. Symptoms typically include fever, headache, muscle pain and skin rash. A characteristic sign is a painless ulcer-like eschar at the bite site. If left untreated, severe complications such as pneumonia, encephalitis or myocarditis may occur, potentially leading to respiratory failure, shock or death.

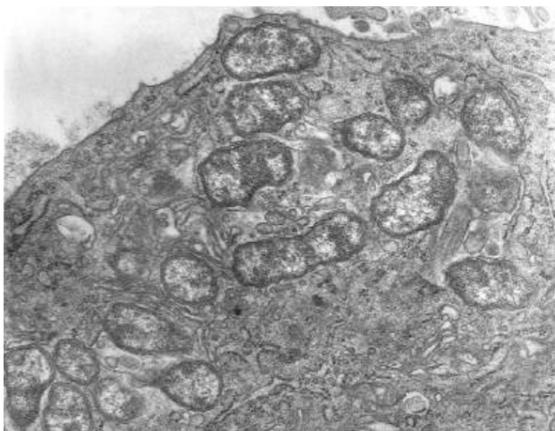
The statement noted that the bureau urged residents who visit parks, grassy areas or rural environments to take preventive measures, including wearing protective clothing, applying insect repellent containing DEET (diethyltoluamide)\*\*\*, taking a shower and changing clothes after leaving such areas.

Residents experiencing fever or related symptoms are advised to seek medical attention promptly. ■

\* Eschar is a thick, dry, black or brown layer of dead tissue (necrosis) that forms over wounds, burns, or infections, often indicating severe skin damage. It acts as a protective barrier, but can hinder healing – DeepSeek

\*\* *Orientia tsutsugamushi* is a mite-borne bacterium belonging to the family Rickettsiaceae and is responsible for a disease called scrub typhus in humans – DeepSeek

\*\*\* Diethyltoluamide (DEET) is the most common and effective active ingredient in insect repellents, designed to repel mosquitoes, ticks, fleas, and biting flies – DeepSeek



This photo courtesy of Wikimedia downloaded yesterday shows the scrub typhus.

## leong U Fan, 13, wins ‘Cultural Affairs Bureau Prize’

**Khalel Vallo**

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) presented special prizes for the 43<sup>rd</sup> Macao Young Musicians Competition during an awards ceremony held recently, according to a statement by the bureau on Friday.

The ceremony on February 26 took place at the Cultural Affairs Bureau Building in Praça do Tap Siac, where 13-year-old leong U Fan received the “Cultural Affairs Bureau Prize”, while 11-year-old Ngai Ieok Ham was awarded the “Best Performance in Intermediate Category” prize, the statement said.

The awards were presented by IC Vice President Cheang Kai Meng and IC Department of Performing Arts Development Chief Kuok Mio U, the statement noted. Both winners expressed gratitude to their teachers and parents for their guidance and support, saying their preparation and dedication helped them achieve the awards.

leong began learning piano at the age of five under the guidance of mentors Odilia Ip and I-Ian Long, the statement said, adding that he later obtained the LRSM (Licentiate of the Royal Schools

of Music) diploma in music performance from the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM).

In recent years, leong has achieved notable results in several piano competitions, including the third prize in the “Chinese Composition Junior Category” at the 18<sup>th</sup> Shanghai International Youth Piano Competition National Final, the statement said, highlighting that in the latest Macao Young Musicians Competition, he won first prize in the Chinese Composers Piano Work (Advanced) Category and the Piano Four-hands (Advanced) Category, as well as third prize in the Piano Concerto Category.

According to the statement, last year’s competition attracted more than 600 participants, and featured 26 competitions across 15 categories and awarded a total of 375 prizes.

The statement noted that the Macao Young Musicians Competition aims to promote the development of classical music in Macau by providing young musicians with performance opportunities and encouraging them to pursue professional music careers. ■



This handout photo provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) on Friday shows 13-year-old leong U Fan (left) holding the “Cultural Affairs Bureau Prize” together with the bureau’s Vice President Cheang Kai Meng at the IC headquarters in Praça do Tap Siac.

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# Sam says 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan offers Macau fresh and major development opportunities

Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Executive Sam Hou Fai said on Friday that this year's "two sessions" carried great significance, serving as a bridge between the past and the future, with the adoption of the outline of the country's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan providing Macau with new and major development opportunities.

Sam made the remarks during a briefing to promote policies and aspirations outlined in the concluded "two sessions" in Beijing yesterday. Those were the fourth session of the 14<sup>th</sup> National People's Congress (NPC) and the fourth session of the 14<sup>th</sup> Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) National Committee.

The briefing was hosted by the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR), at its headquarters in Zape.

Provided that the MSAR maintains confidence in its development path, strengthens its sense of responsibility and practical action, fully leverages Macau's unique strengths, and proactively aligns with national development strategies – while advancing its various undertakings in a high-quality manner – it will surely realise the policy visions of "Law-based Macau", "Vibrant Macau", "Cultural Macau", and "Blissful Macau", Sam said.

In doing so, Macau will continue to write a new chapter in the great cause of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle with Macau characteristics, and make fresh and greater contributions to Chinese modernisation.

During this year's "two sessions", President Xi Jinping delivered important instructions on key issues such as developing new quality productive forces; building a "Healthy China"; and the integrated advancement of education, science and technology, and talent development, Sam noted.

Premier Li Qiang's Government Work Report set clear requirements for Macau to enhance law-based governance, to promote economic and social development, and to integrate better into – and serve – the national development agenda, Sam said.

Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang outlined significant arrangements regarding Macau's proactive alignment with the country's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, solid advancement of appropriate economic diversification, and deeper development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

The care and high expectations for Macau expressed by the country's leaders served as a great encouragement to the MSAR and provided clear direction for its development, Sam said.

The MSAR must translate the spirit of the "two sessions" into concrete action, proactively and closely aligning with the country's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan – particularly the plan's raft of strategic arrangements supporting Macau in consolidating and enhancing its competitive advantages, and in better integrating into the national development framework, the chief executive noted.

By doing so, Macau can effectively formulate and implement its 3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan for the Social and Economic Development of the MSAR, and continuously open new chapters in Macau's development through active participation in, and contribution to, the great cause of national rejuvenation.

## Sam's 6 points of understanding

Sam shared six points of understanding in the context of the actual situation of Macau.

First, there is the need to align proactively and closely with the country's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan and scientifically formulate and implement the MSAR's 3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan.

Second, there is the need to uphold and improve the MSAR's executive-led system and effectively enhance its government's governance capacity.

Third, there is the need to safeguard resolutely both national security and social stability, while actively promoting the growth of patriotic and Macau-loving forces.

Fourth, there is the need to advance solidly Macau's appropriate economic diversification and deepen Macau-Hengqin integration.

Fifth, there is the need to strengthen livelihood initiatives, deliver tangible improvements in people's lives, and build a happy Macau.

Sixth, there is the need to integrate into, and serve, the national development framework, and leverage Macau's role as an important window for cultural exchange and mutual learning between Chinese and Western civilisations.

## Ho stresses MSAR economy's appropriate diversification

Meanwhile, CPPCC National Committee Vice Chairman Edmund Ho Hau Wah said in a speech at the briefing that the MSAR must proactively align with the country's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan and formulate the MSAR's 3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan. He expressed full confidence that Macau's government is capable of successfully achieving this important task.

Ho noted that the Central People's Government has emphasised Macau's need to advance appropriate economic diversification, with the goal of gradually reducing the economy's reliance on a single industry.



Macau SAR Chief Executive Sam Ho Fai addresses a briefing on the recently-concluded "two sessions" (NPC) and CPPCC National Committee, hosted by the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the Macau SAR, at the headquarters of the Liaison Office in Zape, on Friday. – Photo: GCS

At the same time, by fostering diversified economic development, Macau could better integrate into, and serve, the overall national development agenda. In this process, careful consideration must be given to how Macau's social structure, economic framework, and demographic composition can be aligned with national development objectives, he added.

Ho also said that the MSAR Government must adopt a forward-looking vision, embrace diverse perspectives, and demonstrate determination in reform and progress – the principles set forth by President Xi when he was in Macau for the MSAR's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The key to formulating and implementing the city's 3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan lies in pursuing high-quality development, focusing on cultivating and developing new quality productive forces, intensifying talent development, and actively enhancing Macau's competitiveness, to achieve a higher level of openness to the world.

Ho added that when drafting Macau's 3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan, the MSAR Government should adopt a long-term perspective, fully leverage Macau's unique strengths, and refine its industrial structure. It should also consider the appropriate introduction of new quality productive forces. He encouraged the local government to show courage through a stronger sense of responsibility, consolidate social consensus, and provide sound political leadership.

The patriotic and Macau-loving sectors must fully support, and cooperate with, the MSAR Government, working in unity and harmony to seize the historic opportunities presented by national strategies. Together, they should lead

Macau forward, steadfastly integrating into, and contributing to, the nation's development framework, Ho concluded.

## Liaison Office Director Zheng offers 3 suggestions

During the briefing, the director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the MSAR, Zheng Xincong, offered three suggestions on studying and implementing the spirit of the "two sessions".

First, there is the need to gain a deep appreciation of the hard-won achievements in development, security, and stability, and further strengthen confidence and determination regarding the achievement of high-quality development.

Second, there is the need to understand fully the national strategy and Macau's mission, and effectively seize the new opportunities presented by the new era.

Third, there is the need to recognize clearly the key tasks for Macau in implementing the spirit of the "two sessions": study the new circumstances, address new challenges, and generate more best practices.

## Zheng proposes 5 priority areas

Specifically, Zheng proposed concerted efforts in five priority areas.

First, there is the need to align with the country's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, widely build social consensus, and formulate and implement the MSAR's 3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan – covering not only economic development but also social and livelihood sectors.

Second, there is the need to uphold and improve the executive-led system, support the chief executive and MSAR Government in governing in accordance with the law, advance reform, and enhance governance effectiveness.

Third, there is the need to promote solidly economic diversification and make every effort to advance the development of the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin as a major strategic initiative.

Fourth, there is the need to safeguard resolutely national security and social stability, and uphold the fundamental principle that Macau must remain stable and orderly.

Fifth, there is the need to promote actively the growth of patriotic and Macau-loving forces, and expand the broadest possible consensus in support of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle. – GCS, MPD

*N.B. English-language text provided by the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) tonight. Minor edits by the Post. Subheadings, italics, and bold type have been added by the Post for emphasis.*

## 15<sup>th</sup> Macau Literary festival concludes 11-day programme

Rui Pastorin

The 15<sup>th</sup> Macau Literary Festival – The Script Road marked its final day yesterday, ending the eleven-day run of an extensive programme.

Concluding the events yesterday was the poetry session "Final Verses" at Casa Garden, bringing together local poets and guests for the festival's closing act. Award-winning Colombian-American poet Carlos Andrés Gómez, who is also an actor and writer, kicked off the session, which was a multi-lingual one that broke boundaries between languages through the spoken word.

The rest of the afternoon prior to the poetry session saw book talks and launches at the same venue, where a dedicated space was also the site of a two-day Women's Month Pop-up

Exhibition that launched on Saturday, featuring the works by Ana Jacinto Nunes, a Portuguese artist residing in Macau who has had works exhibited worldwide in the past 30 years.

Meanwhile, outside of Casa Garden, the second of the two-day performance of the Portuguese version of Suzie Miller's courtroom drama "Prima Facie" was also presented at the Macau Cultural Centre's small auditorium over the weekend. It stars Portuguese actress Margarida Vila-Nova and was directed by film director Tiago Guedes, also from Portugal.

The 15<sup>th</sup> edition of the festival, which launched in 2012, ran from March 5 to March 15 and featured a host of activities and highlights from concerts and exhibitions to book launches and presentations, along with

film screenings. Among the invited guests were many from the Chinese and Portuguese-speaking world, alongside Macau writers. Guests from elsewhere included English writer and journalist Lawrence Osborne, who wrote the novel "The Ballad of a Small Player", and Mike Goodridge, a producer involved in the book's 2025 film adaptation; China historian and writer Paul French; and Indian author Amitav Ghosh, who, according to Wikipedia, received the 54<sup>th</sup> Jnanpith award in 2018, India's highest literary honour.

The programme also brought together local and visiting poets, filmmakers, musicians, actors and visual artists. Events were mainly held at Casa Garden, the local headquarters of the Macau delegation of the Lisbon-based Orient Foundation (FO). ■



Colombian-American poet Carlos Andrés Gómez recites his poem during the "Final Verses" session at Casa Garden, which was the last programme of the 15<sup>th</sup> Macau Literary Festival – The Script Road.

– Photos: Rui Pastorin

# Ethiopia's Aklilu Asfaw, Kenya's Fridah Mweu win Sands 10K

Rui Pastorin

Thousands of runners took part in the "2026 Sands China Macao International 10K" early yesterday morning, with Ethiopia's Aklilu Asfaw and Kenya's Fridah Mweu respectively winning the men's and women's 10K categories.

The event was divided into the 10K and Fun Run, which covered 5.5 km. The 10K's race route kicked off from Sai Van Lake Square, with runners crossing the Sai Van Bridge, passing through Cotai and ending at the Olympic Sports Centre Stadium in Taipa. The Fun Run also started from the square, with the route being more direct to the stadium.

Asfaw topped the men's category with a time of 28:47, followed by Kenyan athletes Ezekiel Tiepus, who ended the race a second behind the champion, and Martin Njenga at 29 minutes flat rounded out the top three, as noted in a statement yesterday by the Sports Bureau (ID).

The statement added that the women's category was dominated by Kenyan athletes. Winner Mweu ended the race at 32:21, just one second ahead of defending champion

Cintia Chepngeno, while Clare Ndiwa came third with a time of 32:31.

In the Macau men's and women's athlete category, the statement highlighted that Ip Seng Tou and Hoi Long won with times of 33:20 and 38:49 respectively. Second and third place winners of the Macau male athletes were Wong Chin Wa and Chan Yin Cheung respectively. The Macau female athletes, meanwhile, had Chao Kin I in second followed by Chio Tong Tong in third.

The prize for the winner of the general classification of the 10K is US\$10,000 (80,607 patacas) for both the men's and women's categories, while Macau winners receive 10,000 patacas, according to the Macao International 10K website. Meanwhile, this year's "Sands 10K Presents: The FUNkiest Costume Award" was themed "East Meets West Run", with winners receiving prizes yesterday morning.

Runners can check their results on [www.macao10k.com](http://www.macao10k.com) or the 'Macao 10K' mobile app, and download their certificate at [www.marathon-photos.com](http://www.marathon-photos.com) starting from 31 March. ■

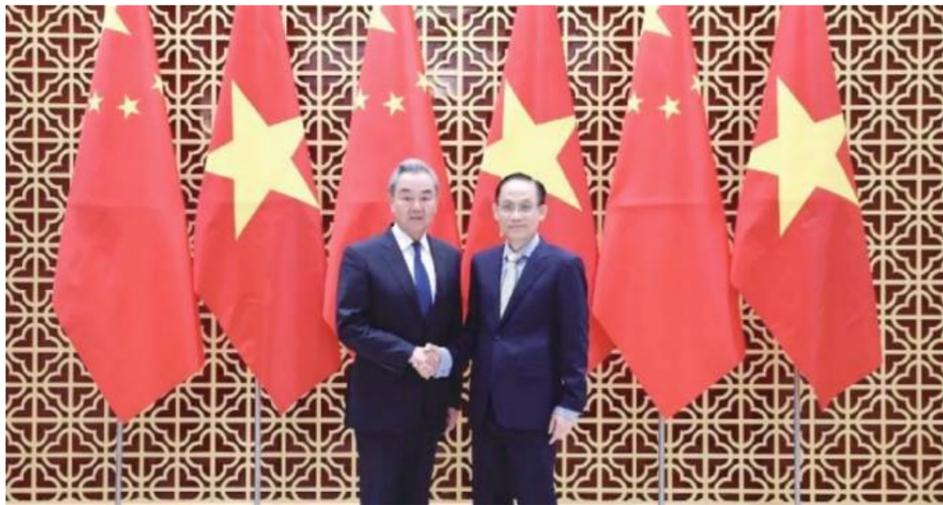


This photo provided by the Sports Bureau (ID) yesterday shows Kenya's Fridah Mweu winning the women's 10K race.



Ethiopia's Aklilu Asfaw crosses the finish line to win the men's 10K race. – Photos: Sports Bureau

## Wang Yi meets with Vietnamese counterpart



Visiting Foreign Minister Wang Yi (left) shakes hands with Vietnamese Foreign Minister Le Hoai Trung in Hanoi yesterday. – Photo courtesy of Vietnamese Foreign Ministry

HANOI – Visiting Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Vietnamese Foreign Minister Le Hoai Trung in Hanoi yesterday.

During the meeting, Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, noted that following the 14<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) in January this year, the top leaders of the two parties agreed to hold the first ministerial meeting of the China-Vietnam "3+3" strategic dialogue on diplomacy, defense, and public security, and the 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of the China-Vietnam Steering Committee for Bilateral Cooperation.

In accordance with the strategic consensus reached by the top leaders, these two important mechanisms should be used to deeply explore the coordination of the two major issues of development and security, clarify important measures for following the socialist path, and send a positive signal to the international community of China-Vietnam solidarity, mutual trust, and joint progress, Wang said.

Stating that this year marks the beginning of China's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan and the new era for Vietnam's national rise, presenting unprecedented opportunities for the socialist cause of both countries, Wang said that the advantages of the socialist systems of China and Vietnam are becoming increasingly prominent, and the strategic value of the China-Vietnam community with a shared future continues to rise.

He pointed out that the two countries should deepen strategic mutual trust, strengthen strategic

cooperation, promote development amid change, safeguard security amid crisis, enhance the respective national strategic resilience and development momentum, respond external uncertainties with the stability of China-Vietnam cooperation, so as to inject lasting impetus into improving the well-being of the two peoples, safeguard the socialist cause, and build a community with a shared future for humanity.

For his part, Trung, also a member of the Political Bureau of the CPV Central Committee, said that guided by the spirit of comrades and brothers between Vietnam and China, both sides will certainly be able to implement the strategic consensus reached by the top leaders of the two parties.

Trung added that as friendly neighbors, comrades, and brothers, Vietnam is always willing to support China's development and growth, the enhancement of its international status, and its greater contributions to the socialist cause, as well as world peace, stability, and development.

Vietnam firmly adheres to the one-China policy and, as always, supports China's position on issues related to Xinjiang and Xizang, said Trung.

He also noted that Vietnam is willing to work with China to plan the next stage of high-level exchanges, strengthen inter-party exchanges, promote pragmatic cooperation in trade, investment, green development, and connectivity, implement cultural exchange projects, and join hands to deepen and solidify the strategically significant China-Vietnam community with a shared future. – Xinhua

## China launches Institute of Global Development

HANGZHOU – Aimed at advancing international development cooperation, the Institute of Global Development (IGD) was inaugurated yesterday at Zhejiang University.

According to its organizers, IGD is designed to further translate the Global Development Initiative (GDI) into practice as well as to promote the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the post-2030 planning.

Hosted by Zhejiang University, IGD operates as an entity under the policy guidance of China's Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Education, and the Zhejiang Provincial Government.

It will recruit mid to senior-level government officials and business leaders from around the world for training and academic programs.

"We will rely on Zhejiang University's applied economics and public administration disciplines to offer degree programs and provide long-term, strategic talent support for global sustainable development," said Huang Xianhai, dean of IGD.

The school has already begun global recruitment for its degree programs, with the first cohort of doctoral students expected to enroll in September 2026.

The idea of establishing the institute was put forward by China at the 20<sup>th</sup> G20 Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, where China proposed creating a dedicated institution to strengthen cooperation among countries.

The launch ceremony also highlighted the institute's ambition to foster global partnerships. At the launch ceremony, Zhejiang University signed a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Population Fund to conduct joint research on issues including population and development and to establish a collaborative global research platform.

More international organizations have also expressed interest in working with the new institute. Amakobe Sande, UNICEF Representative to China, said UNICEF hopes to explore cooperation with IGD to advance sustainable development outcomes for children.

"Platforms such as the Institute of Global Development can help translate development experience into shared knowledge, South-South Cooperation, and practical solutions for countries seeking to accelerate progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals," she said. – Xinhua

## CPC Central Committee, State Council congratulate Chinese Winter Paralympics delegation

BEIJING – The Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and the State Council yesterday sent a congratulatory message to the Chinese delegation for the Milan-Cortina 2026 Winter Paralympics, commending the delegation for leading both the gold and overall medal tables.

Winning 15 gold, 13 silver and 16 bronze medals, the delegation was praised for earning acclaim for the motherland and the Chinese people.

The athletes demonstrated the resilience and optimism of Chinese people with disabilities in the new era, the message read, adding that they competed fairly, communicated friendly

and enhanced friendship with their peers from around the world.

The delegation was urged to follow the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, create more outstanding achievements, and promote all-around, high-quality development of related programs for people with disabilities in China.

The Olympians were also encouraged to make new contributions to the great cause of building a great country and advancing national rejuvenation on all fronts through Chinese modernization. (More about Winter Paralympics on pages 14 & 16) – Xinhua

# Philippine women's group condemns escalating US-Israeli strikes on Iran, warns of risks to Philippines

Xinhua writers Zhang Yisheng, Li Meng

MANILA – Wearing pink and purple ribbons, around 100 Filipinos marched through Manila yesterday to commemorate victims of wartime atrocities and call for peace amid rising tensions in the Middle East.

The march was organized by Lila Pilipina, a group advocating justice for Filipino victims of wartime sexual slavery by Japanese troops during World War II. Participants held daylong rallies and activities aimed at raising public awareness about the human cost of war.

During the event, the group condemned the escalating US-Israeli strikes on Iran, warning that a widening conflict could have far-reaching economic and security consequences for the Philippines.

In an interview with Xinhua, Lila Pilipina coordinator Sharon Cabusao-Silva expressed concern over the growing tensions in the Middle East and their potential impact on the global economy, including that of the Philippines, which has more than 2 million citizens living and working in the region.

“There is the prospect of the Philippines being dragged into a war that we do not want because of the US facilities in the country,” she said.

Silva said the consequences of the conflict



Filipinos take part in a rally to commemorate victims of wartime atrocities and call for peace amid rising tensions in the Middle East, in Manila, yesterday. – Xinhua

could extend far beyond the region, with countries hosting US military facilities potentially becoming targets as tensions escalate.

She warned that the Philippines, given its long-standing military ties with the United States and the presence of US military facilities in the country, could face security risks if the conflict broadens.

Silva also condemned what she described as the targeting of women and children in ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, drawing parallels with atrocities committed by Japanese forces against women in territories they occupied during World War II (WWII).

Beyond security concerns, she said a prolonged conflict could also disrupt the

livelihoods of overseas Filipino workers in the region and affect the remittances they send home, a key pillar of the Philippine economy.

“Disruptions to overseas Filipino workers and their remittances caused by war could put a major lifeline of the economy at risk,” she said.

Silva also criticized the Philippine government for maintaining close military ties with the United States and called for a more independent foreign policy. “We must refuse to be dragged by the US into its warmongering and orchestration of destruction in any region of the world.”

For many participants, the march was also a reminder of history. Monica Bangalan, a volunteer at the event, urged Filipinos to remember the suffering of Filipino “comfort women” during World War II and remain vigilant against attempts to deny or revise that history.

Data showed that more than 1,000 Filipino women were forced to serve as sex slaves during Japan’s occupation of the Philippines during WWII. There are only a few surviving women victims, most of them sickly and poor in their 90s.

“We need to remember the past and let more people know the truth,” Bangalan said. (Xinhua reporters Guo Yige and Dario Agnote also contributed to the story.) – Xinhua

## Sophon Zaram elected new House speaker of Thailand

BANGKOK – Sophon Zaram, a member of parliament (MP) from the Bhumjaithai Party, was elected the new speaker of the House of Representatives of Thailand yesterday.

Under the Thai constitution, the House speaker will also be the president of the National Assembly. The new speaker will officially take office after the royal endorsement.

During the first parliamentary session following last month’s general election, Sophon ran for the House speaker post against People’s Party candidate Parit Wacharasindhu.

In a secret ballot vote, Sophon received 289 votes to become the new speaker, compared to 123 votes for Parit, acting Speaker Pairoj Lohsunthorn announced.

Sophon Zaram joined the Bhumjaithai party in 2008, and served as the country’s

transport minister from 2008 to 2011. He held the position of Thailand’s caretaker deputy prime minister since September 2025.

In his vision statement, Sophon called on parliament to combine experience with modern tools such as artificial intelligence to maximize public benefit.

He said parliamentary mechanisms should prioritize bringing citizens’ hardships to light while ensuring high-quality, balanced and rational oversight between the legislative and executive branches.

Following the election of the House speaker, the House of Representatives will convene a session in the coming days to vote for the prime minister. The candidate who secures the support of more than half of all members of the House of Representatives will be elected prime minister. – AFP

## Calls for justice mount as Indonesian activist maimed in acid attack



Activists hold posters during a demonstration in support of Andrie Yunus, a staff member of Indonesian human rights NGO KONTRAS (Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence), who was attacked with acid by an unidentified person, in Yogyakarta, on Saturday. – AFP

JAKARTA – Two men on a motorbike threw acid in the face of an Indonesian rights activist, leaving him badly hurt and prompting calls Friday for a thorough investigation amid concerns of democratic backsliding in the country.

Andrie Yunus, deputy coordinator of the KontraS rights group, sustained serious injuries to his face, an eye, hands and chest in the attack in Jakarta late Thursday.

Andrie was riding a motorbike when he was approached by two men on a scooter, one of whom threw acid at him, according to KontraS coordinator Dimas Bagus Arya. Both attackers had their faces concealed.

Andrie, who had previously received threats for his activism, was rushed to hospital with burns to 24 percent of his body, said Dimas.

“We view this acid attack as an attempt to silence critical voices in society,” he added.

UN rights chief Volker Turk said he was “deeply concerned” by the “horrific acid attack.”

“Those responsible for this cowardly act of violence must be held to account,” he said on X. Human rights defenders “must be protected in their vital work and able to raise without fear issues of public concern.”

Andrie has been a vocal critic of moves to increase the influence of the military in the

Indonesian government and had just finished recording a podcast on the topic when he was attacked.

Dimas, the coordinator, urged police “to identify the perpetrators and motives behind the attack” as soon as possible.

Jakarta police spokesman Budi Hermanto told AFP an investigation has been opened.

UN special rapporteur on human rights defenders Mary Lawlor also called for a thorough probe into the attack, saying in an X post Friday that impunity for violence against human rights defenders was “unacceptable”.

Indonesia’s minister for law and human rights Yusril Ihza Mahendra said the incident was “an attack on democracy” and pledged that the perpetrators will be brought to justice.

“Acts of violence like this must not be tolerated. Whoever the perpetrators are, whatever their motive, [they] must be prosecuted according to the law,” Yusril said in a statement Friday.

In its latest report on Southeast Asia’s biggest economy, Human Rights Watch said Indonesia under President Prabowo Subianto, an ex-general in office since 2024, “has undergone further democratic backsliding, crackdowns on protests, media censorship, and intimidation of activists”. – AFP

## India arrests another suspect in Bangladesh uprising

KOLKATA – Indian police said yesterday they had arrested a Bangladeshi man for allegedly helping two fellow nationals, accused of murdering a popular student leader in Dhaka, enter India illegally.

Sharif Osman Hadi, a vocal India critic who took part in Bangladesh’s 2024 mass uprising, was shot by masked assailants in Dhaka on December 12 and later succumbed to his injuries at a hospital in Singapore.

West Bengal police named Faisal Karim Masud and Alamgir Hossain as the prime suspects in the killing and said they allegedly fled Bangladesh through the Haluaghat border with India shortly after Hadi’s attack. India arrested the pair on March 8 and they remain in police custody.

Yesterday, West Bengal’s Special Task Force Superintendent Indrajit Sarkar told AFP that Philip Sangma had been arrested on suspicion of helping Masud and Hossain enter the state of West Bengal through its porous border.

Sangma was “held on Saturday for facilitating the illegal entry of the two prime suspects in the murder of Bangladeshi youth activist [Sharif Osman] Hadi,” Sarkar said, adding that he appeared in a district court on Saturday before being remanded to police custody for a week.

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

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

India’s foreign ministry has said it rejects “false narratives” about New Delhi’s involvement in Hadi’s killing.

In a sign of a potential thaw, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated the Bangladesh Nationalist Party for winning the first parliamentary elections since Hasina’s exit. – AFP

# Pakistan says hit military facilities in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD – Pakistan said yesterday its forces had attacked military facilities in southern Afghanistan, as well as “terrorist hideouts”, in the latest strikes between the two sides.

Security sources said troops “effectively destroyed technical support infrastructure and equipment storage facility in Kandahar”, which is home to the Taliban administration’s supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada.

Another strike targeted a tunnel in Kandahar purportedly used by the Afghan Taliban and the Pakistani Taliban militant group or TTP, which Islamabad blames for a wave of strikes, they added.

The military later said that four civilians – all brothers – were killed when Afghan shelling hit a house in Bajaur, on the Pakistan side of the border. Another person was seriously injured.

Both sides maintain they do not target civilians. Independent verification of deaths and injuries is difficult to obtain, given the hard-to-reach locations.

Local residents in Kandahar told AFP they saw jet planes flying over the city and heard explosions during the night.

“Military planes flew over the mountain where there is a military facility, and an explosion followed,” one said, adding flames could be seen.

An air strike was also heard in Spin Boldak, southeast of Kandahar,



A Taliban security personnel member shows mortar shell remains after Pakistani airstrikes in the Daman district of Kandahar, Afghanistan yesterday. – AFP

residents said, while authorities in the eastern border province of Khost said there were clashes on Saturday night.

Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told AFP that the strikes caused some damage to a drug rehabilitation centre and an empty container in Kandahar.

“The places they are talking about are far away from these two places,” he added.

Pakistan said on Saturday it had thwarted “drone attacks” launched by Afghanistan which were intercepted on Friday night.

At least three locations were targeted, including the Pakistani military headquarters in Rawalpindi, near the capital Islamabad, authorities said.

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari’s office said the Afghan

Taliban had “crossed a red line” by targeting civilians, and promised a response.

Islamabad launched a military operation against Afghanistan last month, targeting what it said were Islamist extremists following attacks in Pakistan.

The Taliban government has denied any involvement or the use of Afghan territory for militancy, while Pakistan insists it does not target civilians.

There have been repeated clashes at the border in recent weeks, hampering trade and forcing nearby residents to leave their homes.

The UN mission in Afghanistan said on Friday that at least 75 civilians have been killed and 193 injured in Afghanistan as a result of the clashes since February 26. – AFP

## N Korea conducts test of nuclear-capable rocket launchers

SEOUL – North Korea tested nuclear-capable rocket launchers, state media reported yesterday, a day after Seoul detected the launch of around 10 ballistic missiles.

The test comes after South Korean and US forces kicked off their springtime military drills, due to run until March 19.

North Korea’s leader Kim Jong Un oversaw the testing on Saturday of the multiple rocket launcher system (MRLS), the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

It said the test involved 12 600mm-calibre ultra-precision multiple rocket launchers and two artillery companies.

Kim said the drill gave Pyongyang’s enemies, within the 420 kilometres striking range, a sense of “uneasiness” and “a deep understanding of the destructive power of tactical nuclear weapon”, KCNA reported.

The rockets battered an island target in the East Sea of Korea more than 360 km away, KCNA said yesterday.

Kim praised the MRLS as a “very deadly yet attractive weapon”.

Photos released by state media showed several rockets blasting off large vehicles into the air.

Another picture shows Kim and his daughter Ju Ae watching

the launch from afar, flanked by a military official.

Ju Ae has long been seen as next in line to rule the country, a perception stoked by a string of recent high-profile outings.

South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said it had detected multiple launches on Saturday from the North into the East Sea, also known as the Sea of Japan.

Seoul’s presidential Blue House condemned the launches as a “provocation that violates United Nations Security Council resolutions” and urged Pyongyang to immediately stop such acts.

The launches came hours after South Korean Prime Minister Kim Min-seok said that US President Donald Trump thinks a meeting with Pyongyang’s Kim would be “good”.

The Trump administration has pushed in recent months to revive high-level talks with Pyongyang, eyeing a possible summit with Kim this year, potentially during Trump’s visit to Beijing set for late March.

After largely ignoring these overtures, Kim said recently that the two nations could “get along” if Washington accepted Pyongyang’s nuclear status.

### Joint drills

The US and South Korea’s

springtime military drills, dubbed “Freedom Shield”, will involve about 18,000 Korean troops and run until March 19.

Kim’s comment on the rockets suggested it was in response to the ongoing exercise, Hong Min, a senior analyst at the Korea Institute for National Unification, told AFP.

“The launch pattern... is closely synchronised with the schedule” of the joint drills, he said.

“This suggests the weapons system is being operated as a means of nuclear deterrence and practical demonstration” against the alliance.

This week, Kim Yo Jong, a powerful confidante of her brother Kim Jong Un, said the joint drills “may cause unimaginably terrible consequences”.

She went on to say the drills were taking place at “a critical time when global security structure is collapsing rapidly and wars break out in different parts of the world”.

Pyongyang has condemned the US-Israeli attack on Iran as an “illegal act of aggression”, claiming it shows the “rogue” nature of the United States.

North Korea also recently carried out missile tests from the naval Choe Hyon destroyer, claiming the country was in the process of “arming the Navy with nuclear weapons”. – AFP

## Cambodia approves draft law targeting cyberscammers

PHNOM PENH – Cambodia’s government approved a draft law Friday that will hand down harsh sentences against fraudsters running cyberscam operations, a minister told AFP.

Cambodia has emerged as a hotspot for crime syndicates running a multibillion-dollar fraud industry that sees scammers lure internet users globally into fake romantic relationships and cryptocurrency investments.

Largely concentrated in Southeast Asia, the global cyberscam industry has reached “industrial proportions”, with estimates of its annual revenues as high as US\$64 billion, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.

Some of the hundreds of thousands of people carrying out scams in the region are trafficked and held against their will, while others work voluntarily.

The draft law – which aims to stamp out transnational cyberscam operations – was approved during a cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Hun Manet, Information Minister Neth Pheaktra told AFP.

He said the draft bill, which will be sent to parliament soon for approval, would “eliminate online scams from Cambodian territory”.

Lawmakers from the ruling party dominate both houses of parliament, so the draft law is expected to pass easily.

“Cambodia is not a paradise or a safe haven for criminals,” Neth Pheaktra said, adding that the government’s crackdown on scammers will continue.

Ringleaders of cyberscam centres will face between five- and 10-years imprisonment and a fine of up to one billion riels (US\$245,996) under the new law.

They will face 10 to 20 years and a fine of up to 2 billion riels

(US\$491,992) if their operations are found to involve violence, torture, confinement, human trafficking, or forced labour, according to the draft law seen by AFP.

Cyberscam bosses will face 15 to 30 years or life imprisonment if their activities lead to one or more deaths, the draft law said.

For lower-level fraudsters, cyberscamming is punishable by 5 to 10 years in prison and a fine of up to one billion riels if it is committed by an organised group and with many victims, it said.

Last month, Hun Manet told AFP in a rare interview that scam centres were destroying his country’s economy and giving the nation a bad name, vowing to “clean this out”.

A 2024 report by the United States Institute of Peace estimated the return on cyberscamming in Cambodia to exceed US\$12.5 billion annually – half the country’s formal GDP – but Hun Manet denied the country was dependent on scams.

Chhay Sinarith, senior minister on the government’s anti-cyberscam commission, told AFP this week that his country hoped to close all online scam centres by the end of April.

Since a government crackdown began in July, authorities have shut down around 250 scam sites and 91 casinos, he said.

He added that more than 200,000 people have fled scam sites and left Cambodia, and that the country has deported around 10,000 foreign nationals.

The law enforcement push, which analysts have criticised as window-dressing, nabbed its biggest player with the January arrest of Chinese-born tycoon Chen Zhi, who was extradited to China. – AFP

## Cambodia investigates 2,000 shuttered petrol stations over shortage claims

PHNOM PENH – Cambodian authorities are investigating around 2,000 petrol stations that have closed temporarily, claiming shortages since the Middle East conflict sent oil prices surging, a government official told AFP Friday.

Commerce ministry spokesman Penn Sovicheat confirmed that around 2,000 of Cambodia’s 6,300 fuel depots and petrol stations had stopped operating in recent days.

However, he told AFP that authorities were investigating “whether they really ran out of stockpiles or they are withholding the fuel to sell later when prices rise”.

He warned vendors who lied about why they had closed their doors would be fined or have their permits revoked.

Authorities say the country has yet to face fuel shortages

stemming from the Middle East crisis, but they have urged people to avoid stockpiling.

Penh Sovicheat said the country, which relies on imports for its consumer fuel needs, has continued to receive shipments from Singapore, Vietnam and Malaysia – although prices had risen since the start of the conflict. The price of a litre of regular petrol has been fixed at 5,200 riels (US\$1.30) since Wednesday, a sharp jump from 3,850 riels on Saturday, while a litre of diesel now costs 6,050 riels (US\$1.51), a more than 50 percent jump.

The commerce ministry is expected to set new prices for the next three days on Friday.

Petrol stations in the capital, Phnom Penh, appeared to be operating normally on Friday, according to AFP journalists. – AFP

# War-related oil squeeze a 'short-term pain,' US official insists

WASHINGTON – US President Donald Trump's top energy official said yesterday that Americans will have to endure the "short-term pain" of higher prices at the pump as US forces conduct their war against Iran.

Now in the third week of a multi-dimensional Middle East conflict that has seen US and Israeli forces pound Iran's military targets, and Tehran responding with missile and drone attacks against several neighbouring states, global energy prices have soared.

And concern has swelled that a lengthy blockage by Iran of the critical Strait of Hormuz could send crude prices through the roof.

"President Trump needed to act now... to stop the killing of American soldiers, to stop the destabilisation of the region, and to end Iran's ability to threaten energy markets," US Energy Secretary Chris Wright told ABC News talk show "This Week."

He said economic conditions would grow dramatically worse

without the ongoing military operation "to defang the Iranian regime" and ensure it can no longer threaten the world with nuclear weapons.

"This is short-term pain to get through to a much better place where the Middle East can no longer be held hostage by the one rogue nation in Iran," Wright added.

The energy secretary also said he predicted the war could end "in the next few weeks, and we'll see a rebound in [fuel] supplies and a pushing down of prices after that."

Since the war began, gas prices have soared in the United States, where Trump in 2024 campaigned relentlessly on a vow to lower fuel costs for Americans. The issue is a critical one for US voters, who head to the polls in November for the country's mid-term congressional elections.

Gas prices have jumped 25 percent in the past month, to US\$3.70 per gallon, according to the American Automobile Association.

The Trump administration has

stressed other governments should help in a possible effort to unblock the Strait of Hormuz by escorting tankers through the narrow waterway along Iran's coast.

US Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, speaking on Fox News "Sunday Morning Futures," said oil could soon flow through the strait if such escorts – and shipping insurance – are worked out.

"Could be day, could be a week," Duffy said of possible escorts.

– AFP

## Israel approves emergency military funding as Iran war rages

JERUSALEM – Israel has approved an US\$827-million emergency budget allocation for military purchases, Israeli media reported yesterday, as the war with Iran entered its third week.

The 2.6-billion-shekel package was approved over the weekend by cabinet ministers during a telephone meeting, the daily *Haaretz* reported.

It will be used for "security purchases" and to address "urgent needs", it said, without providing further details.

The government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has not yet officially commented on the measure nor specified what purchases the funds will cover.

Foreign Minister Gideon Saar, meanwhile, dismissed reports over the weekend saying that Israel had informed the United States that it was running short of missile interceptors.

When asked by journalists to comment, Saar, who was visiting a site recently struck by an Iranian missile, said: "The answer is no."

A finance ministry document circulated to all ministers and reported by several media outlets, including Channel 12, said that "given the intensity of the fighting" the additional budget allocation was necessary.

"An urgent and immediate need has arisen to provide an operational response, including the acquisition of munitions, the procurement of advanced weapons systems and the replenishment of critical combat stocks," the document said.

The document added that the move constituted "an exceptional emergency decision intended solely to address needs arising from the conduct of the fighting".

The funds will be drawn from the state budget, totalling US\$222 billion and approved by the government on March 12, and expected to be adopted by the Knesset by March 31, according to the reports.

Since the Israeli-US bombardments against Iran that began on February 28, Israel has been targeted daily by Iranian ballistic missile fire, which the military has mostly intercepted using its missile defence systems.

According to *Haaretz*, citing security officials, 250 ballistic missiles had been fired by Iran at Israel as of March 13.

Twelve people have been killed in Israel by missiles or falling debris since the start of the war, according to an AFP tally of figures given by Israeli authorities and first responders.

– AFP



An Israeli self-propelled howitzer artillery gun fires rounds towards southern Lebanon from a position in the upper Galilee in northern Israel near the border yesterday. Israel said yesterday that no direct talks were planned with Lebanon to end the war, a day after a Lebanese official said Beirut was preparing a delegation to negotiate with Israel. – AFP

## Netanyahu mocks social media rumours about his death

Jerusalem – Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu published a short video yesterday making light of rumours on social media that he was dead.

"I'm dead for coffee," he said sarcastically on his official X account as he received a steaming cup at a café outside Jerusalem, employing a colloquial Hebrew expression meaning to love something to death.

He then raised his hands to the camera, asking, "Do you want to

count the number of fingers?" – a reference to speculation on social media that his latest televised address was generated by AI as he appeared to have six fingers on one hand.

The premier then urged Israeli citizens to respect safety instructions in the event of incoming rockets, adding their resilience "gives strength to me, to the government, to the army, to the Mossad [spy agency]."

"We are doing things that I

cannot share at this moment, but we are striking Iran very hard, and also Lebanon," he added.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) threatened yesterday to kill Netanyahu, as the war against the Islamic republic led by Israel and the US entered its third week.

"IRGC vows to pursue and kill 'child-killer' Netanyahu if he is still alive," Iran's IRNA news agency said in a post on X.

– AFP

## Pope criticises those who invoke God to wage war

ROME – Pope Leo XIV renewed his appeal yesterday for peace in the Middle East and criticised those who invoke religion to wage war, saying that "God cannot be enlisted by darkness".

"Currently, many of our brothers and sisters in the world are suffering from violent conflicts, caused by the absurd claim that problems and differences can be resolved through war," he said on a pastoral visit to a Rome suburb.

He added: "Some claim to involve the name of God in these deadly decisions, but God cannot be enlisted by darkness.

"It is peace that those who invoke him must seek."

Earlier yesterday, the US pontiff used his weekly Angelus prayer at the

Vatican to again pray for the victims of the "atrocious violence of war" in the Middle East and urge dialogue and peace.

"I renew my closeness to all those who have lost loved ones in the attacks that have hit schools, hospitals, and residential areas," the 70-year-old said.

Leo said the situation in Lebanon was a particular cause for concern.

"On behalf of the Christians of the Middle East and of all women and men of goodwill, I address those responsible for this conflict," he said.

"Cease fire! Let paths of dialogue be reopened!

"Violence can never lead to the justice, stability and peace that people are waiting for."

– AFP

## Iran arrests dozens over suspected links to Israel: media

TEHRAN – Iranian authorities have arrested dozens across the country on suspicion of cooperating with Israel, local media reported yesterday, more than two weeks into the Middle East war.

"Twenty people were arrested and detained" after they were found to be "sending details of military, law enforcement and security locations to the Zionist enemy," the Fars news agency said, quoting provincial

prosecutor Hossein Majidi.

Those arrests took place during raids on networks linked to Israel in West Azerbaijan province, it added.

At least 18 people were also arrested over "sending images of locations bombed by Israel and the US" and other sites to the London-based TV channel Iran International, the Tasnim news agency said, quoting the intelligence ministry.

In January, Iran banned

cooperation with Iran International, saying it was "affiliated with the Zionist regime".

The war began on February 28 with US-Israeli strikes that killed Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, sparking Iranian retaliation.

Authorities have since carried out sweeping raids across Iran, arresting in recent days hundreds of people suspected of cooperating with Israel and the United States, local media reported. – AFP

# Protesters ransack Cuban Communist Party office

HAVANA – Protesters angry over Cuba’s persistent blackouts and food shortages vandalised a provincial office of the Cuban Communist Party overnight Friday into Saturday, state-run media said.

The rare outburst in the town of Morón showed the depth of Cubans’ discontent as they endure economic hardship made worse by a US oil blockade and other pressure from President Donald Trump, who has stated openly he would like to see regime change in Havana.

The unrest was part of a new trend of protests in which people bang pots and pans at night in the street or at home to vent frustration over shortages of food, medicine and other basics as well as frequent rolling power blackouts that can last almost all day.

The state-run newspaper Invasor said five people were arrested in what it called an incident of vandalism in Morón, a town of around 70,000 residents, 500 kilometers east of Havana.

The newspaper published a brief article on the unrest, in which it said people threw

rocks at the local Communist Party office and ignited a fire in the street with furniture from the building.

“What began peacefully, after an exchange with the authorities in the area, degenerated into vandalism against the headquarters of municipal committee of the Communist Party,” the newspaper said.

Video circulating on social media shows a small group of protesters breaking into and ransacking the party office, removing documents, computers and furniture and burning it in the street.

In some footage people are heard banging pots or shouting “libertad” (“freedom”).

Cuba’s President Miguel Díaz-Canel acknowledged in an X post “the discontent our people feel because of the prolonged blackouts.”

“What will never be comprehensible, justified or admitted is violence,” he said.

## ‘Huge amount of people’

Overnight in Morón demonstrators also

damaged other government buildings, Invasor said.

It said a person who was inebriated suffered a fall and was being treated in a hospital.

Two Morón residents who spoke to AFP on condition they not be named said the protest was big.

“It was a huge amount of people. People just cannot take it any more,” one person said, adding that Morón had electricity for only 90 minutes per day.

Hotels in the town, a main source of money and jobs thanks to tourism, have shut down because of the energy crisis and this means no income for a lot of people, this person said.

The second Morón resident who spoke to AFP said most people in the overnight demonstration behaved peacefully.

## ‘Extraordinary threat’

Independent media and social media posts say that Havana, which has suffered blackouts of up to 15 hours a day in recent weeks, is the

epicentre of the new nightly protests that have since spread to other parts of the country.

Cuba’s authorities on Friday began a prisoner release negotiated with the Vatican and confirmed that talks were underway with the United States but did not say what the nature of these discussions was.

Trump has said Cuba will be “next” on his agenda after the Iran war and the US overthrow of Cuba’s top ally, Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela, in January.

Cuba relied on Venezuela for oil but Trump, who says he effectively runs Caracas, has cut off the supply.

The oil embargo has brought Cuba’s already troubled economy to the brink of collapse.

Trump has placed the impoverished island under a US oil blockade, strangling its fuel supply on the basis of what he called the “extraordinary threat” posed by Cuba to the United States.

This comes on top of a six-decade-old US trade embargo. –AFP

# Jailed Brazil ex-leader Bolsonaro shows improvement in hospital



Brazilian Senator Flavio Bolsonaro (centre), son of former President (2019–2022) Jair Bolsonaro, speaks to the press after visiting his father, who had been admitted to the DF Star Hospital after falling ill in the early hours of the morning at the Papuda prison in Brasília on Friday. –AFP

RIO DE JANEIRO – Former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro showed signs of improvement yesterday on his third day in intensive care, according to the hospital where he is being treated for pneumonia he developed while in prison.

The far-right leader who governed Brazil from 2019 to 2022 has been serving a lengthy sentence since September at the Papuda prison in Brasília for an attempted coup.

On Friday he was urgently transferred to DF Star Hospital with high fever, a drop in oxygen saturation, sweating and chills.

The hospital said in a statement yesterday that the patient “showed clinical stability and improvement in renal function,” which had deteriorated on Saturday.

However, Bolsonaro also showed a rise in markers that detect inflammation, which prompted doctors to expand his antibiotic therapy.

There are no immediate plans to release him from intensive care.

The clinic said Bolsonaro’s lung infection stems from a process called bronchoaspiration, in which gastric material like food is inhaled

into the respiratory tract rather than the oesophagus.

It has been a frequent problem for Bolsonaro since he was stabbed in the abdomen in 2018 while campaigning to become president.

The attack has led to numerous operations and other health problems, including persistent hiccups and vomiting, which doctors said was the direct cause of his current lung infection.

Last year Bolsonaro was sentenced to 27 years in prison for his alleged role in a botched coup attempt after his 2022 election loss to Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the current president.

Bolsonaro’s lawyers have asked that he be allowed to live under house arrest but the Supreme Court has rejected these requests.

“They are playing with my father’s life,” his son Flávio Bolsonaro said on Friday as he left the hospital.

Brazil’s next presidential election is slated for October, and despite his incarceration Bolsonaro remains a central figure on the political stage.

The former president has designated Flavio Bolsonaro as the right-wing candidate to challenge Lula. –AFP

# Mexico sends third major aid package to besieged Cuba

HAVANA – Two Mexican Navy ships loaded with 1,000 tonnes of humanitarian aid arrived on Friday in Cuba, whose economy has been hammered since becoming the target of a US energy blockade since February.

US President Donald Trump has vowed to starve Cuba of oil after the US military ouster of former president Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela, which had been the communist nation’s main supplier of the commodity.

Mexico was Cuba’s other key oil supplier, and the de facto US embargo has led to power outages that threaten to plunge the Caribbean island into complete darkness.

The Mexican foreign ministry had already dispatched two aid shipments to Cuba in February, including food donated by people during a food drive as well as personal hygiene items.

“Thank you Mexico, once again,” Cuba’s trade minister Betsy Diaz said during a welcoming ceremony at the Havana port, in images broadcast by Cuban television.

The island of 9.6 million inhabitants, under a US trade embargo since 1962, has for years been mired in a severe economic crisis marked by extended power cuts and shortages of fuel, medicine and food.

It has now also been cut off from critical oil supplies from Venezuela and from Mexico under the threat of US tariffs.

Cuba’s communist authorities acknowledged Friday that talks were underway with the United States amid the intense pressure from Trump, who said this month that Cuba was next on his agenda after Iran, predicting that the communist-run island was “gonna fall pretty soon.” –AFP

# Venezuela’s leader urges US to lift all sanctions

CARACAS – Venezuela’s interim leader Delcy Rodríguez asked US President Donald Trump on Friday to totally lift the sanctions imposed on her country, as the countries begin to restore diplomatic ties.

American officials are seeking greater access to Venezuela’s oil and mineral wealth since a US military operation ousted leftist leader Nicolás Maduro January 3.

The US Treasury began imposing sanctions in 2014 that have crippled Venezuela’s economy, which saw inflation soar to 475 percent in 2025.

Its oil infrastructure has also suffered from years of underinvestment, with the country currently producing only a few million barrels per day despite having the world’s largest oil reserves.

But since January, the US has eased a seven-year-old oil embargo on Venezuela and issued licenses allowing a handful of multinationals to operate in the country under certain conditions.

On Friday, the US also authorised imports of fertilizer from Venezuela, as the US-Israel war against Iran drives up prices of the key agricultural commodity.

“Unilateral coercive measures against the Venezuelan people also affect people across Latin America,” Rodríguez said during a meeting with a Colombian delegation in Caracas.

“It affects the economy of Colombia, the economy of Venezuela, and our people,” she said.

The talks in Caracas aimed to mark a thaw in relations between the two South American neighbours, with Rodríguez now pushing Colombian rebels back across the border.

The Trump administration has pressed both sides to tackle groups operating across the border like the National Liberation Army (ELN), a leftist guerrilla group deeply involved in the drug trade.

“This is a problem we have as countries and we are determined to make progress together,” Rodríguez said.

Her predecessor Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores were taken by US forces to New York to face trial on drug trafficking charges. They have pleaded not guilty. –AFP

## Japan hammer Philippines 7-0 to sweep into Women's Asian Cup semis



SYDNEY – Ruthless Japan crushed the Philippines 7-0 yesterday to book a Women's Asian Cup semi-final with South Korea and close in on a third continental title.

The dominant victory at Stadium Australia in Sydney also ensured they will be at a 10<sup>th</sup> consecutive World Cup in Brazil next year.

Japan are the only Asian country to have won the World Cup, in 2011. They were runners-up four years later.

Currently ranked eight, the highest at the Asian Cup, they were a class above with two goals in three minutes late in the first half opening the floodgates.

Tottenham defender Toko Koga collected a brace with Mina Tanaka, Remina Chiba, Manaka Matsukubo, Momoko Tanikawa and Riko Ueki also on target in another warning shot to their title challengers.

Japan have blasted a tournament-high 24 goals and conceded none.

"They didn't really challenge our defenders and we were in complete control," said Japan coach Nils Nielsen.

"It's always nice to score a lot of goals and for the players to show what they can do."

It set up a last-four clash in Sydney on Wednesday against an equally ominous-looking South Korea, who crushed Uzbekistan 6-0 to progress.

Hosts Australia face defending champions China in the other semi-final in Perth tomorrow.

"So 24 goals, I wasn't even aware of that, but I knew we had scored a lot, and that's nice," added the Greenlander Nielsen.

"We will be ready to play South Korea. We have good relations with them, so it's an interesting, fun match for the players."

Japan were unrelenting, launching waves of first-half attacks without being able to penetrate a solid Philippines defence and the safe hands of young goalkeeper Nina Meollo.

They had to wait until the 45<sup>th</sup> minute to open their account when Tanaka headed in from close range after a goalmouth scramble.

With the Philippines rattled, Koga added the second deep in stoppage time, rising above the defence to connect with Honoka Hayashi's corner.

The second half was played almost exclusively in Philippines territory.

The third goal arrived when Eintracht Frankfurt striker Chiba rifled into the left corner before Matsukubo showed deft touch to skip past two defenders and score two minutes later.

Koga added the fifth with her head and Tanikawa and Ueki piled on the misery late on.

Despite the defeat not all is lost for the Philippines, who move to a play-off game against Uzbekistan and will qualify for Brazil should they win.

North Korea take on Chinese Taipei in the second play-off.

China vs Australia will be played at 6 p.m. tomorrow and South Korea vs Japan will be played at 5 p.m. on Wednesday. – AFP/MPD

## Man Utd sink Villa to boost top-4 bid

Steven Griffiths



LONDON – Manchester United bolstered their bid to qualify for the Champions League with a vital 3-1 win against top-four rivals Aston Villa yesterday.

Michael Carrick's side took the lead through Casemiro's second-half opener at Old Trafford before Ross Barkley hauled Villa level.

United finished strongly, with Matheus Cunha and Benjamin Sesko scoring in the closing stages to seal Carrick's seventh win in nine games since taking over as interim boss.

Sitting third in the Premier League, United are three points clear of fourth-placed Villa in the race to reach the Champions League via a top-four finish.

United co-owner Jim Ratcliffe this week praised Carrick's "excellent" work, but stopped short of committing to the former Old Trafford star on a long-term basis.

But Carrick is making a strong case to earn the job on a permanent basis after stabilising United following Ruben Amorim's sacking.

United's latest victory came after an 11-day break since the first defeat of his reign at Newcastle, and Carrick celebrated with a jig of delight on the touchline after Sesko wrapped up the points.

"We looked a good team. It was a big game coming off the defeat. The boys reacted incredibly well," Carrick said.

"It's a good feeling and something we want to keep getting used to. We are in a good position at the moment."

Spluttering Villa have lost their last three league games and have just one win in seven top-flight matches, leaving them three points above fifth-placed Chelsea with eight games left in the battle for European places.

After a lethargic first-half, United finally prised open the Villa defence in the 53<sup>rd</sup> minute.

Bryan Mbeumo's stinging strike was palmed away by Emiliano



Manchester United's Brazilian midfielder Casemiro (top centre right) heads away a free kick by Aston Villa's Argentinian midfielder 10 Emiliano Buendia (foreground centre) during the English Premier League match between Manchester United and Aston Villa at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, yesterday. – AFP

Martinez, earning a corner that brought the opener.

Bruno Fernandes curled a corner to the near post and Casemiro made a perfectly timed run to glance a header past Martinez for his seventh league goal this season.

In his first Premier League start for 14 months, Barkley slammed a superb strike past Senne Lammens from 12 yards after United failed to clear the danger in the 64<sup>th</sup> minute.

### Assist king Fernandes

But Cunha netted in the 71<sup>st</sup> minute to ensure Carrick's men didn't pay for their stumble.

Bursting onto Fernandes's sublime pass into the Villa area, the Brazilian forward slotted a fine finish into the far corner.

It was Fernandes's 16<sup>th</sup> Premier League assist this term, moving the United captain past David Beckham's previous club record of 15 in 1999-2000.

He has 100 assists for United in all competitions since signing from Sporting Lisbon in 2020.

"He's proven over a period of time how impactful he is in the big moments. He's there all the time, he puts himself forward in training and games," Carrick said.

Sesko came off the bench to prove a point to Carrick after being dropped, the Slovenian striker firing home with a deflected effort in the 81<sup>st</sup> minute.

Nottingham Forest climbed out of the relegation zone after a 0-0 draw against Fulham at the City Ground.

Still waiting for their first win under Vitor Pereira, fourth-from-bottom Forest, who have had four managers this term, are above third-from-bottom West Ham on goal difference.

Ten-man Leeds held on for a 0-0 draw at Crystal Palace despite Dominic Calvert-Lewin's missed penalty and a bizarre red card for Gabriel Gudmundsson.

Gudmundsson had already been shown a yellow card when he committed another foul on Ismaila Sarr that referee Thomas Bramall deemed worthy of a booking.

Bramall had forgotten the first booking and initially failed to give the Swede his marching orders, before he was told through his earpiece to show the red card.

In the late game Tottenham Hotspur scored in the 90<sup>th</sup> minute to salvage a 1-1 draw against Liverpool. – AFP/MPD

## Ulreich injury compounds Bayern's goalkeeping woes



MUNICH – Bayern Munich's goalkeeping woes have gone from bad to worse with the club confirming that third-string Sven Ulreich has been sidelined with a groin injury.

Bayern host Atalanta in the second leg of their Champions League last-16 tie on Wednesday and may be forced to play a fourth-string player between the sticks.

Captain Manuel Neuer is missing with a calf strain, while second-choice Jonas Urbig was concussed in Bayern's 6-1 win over Atalanta in the first leg.

Ulreich played his first match of the season on Saturday and impressed with a number of crucial saves to grab a point away to Bayer Leverkusen as Munich finished the match with nine men.

The veteran keeper, who has spent most of his career as Neuer's back-up, finished Saturday's match but was unable to take a final goal kick after feeling a twinge in his thigh.

Bayern issued a statement saying that Ulreich "suffered an adductor strain in the 1-1 draw at Bayer Leverkusen", adding that

he "is therefore sidelined for the time being".

The statement did not indicate how long Ulreich would be out for, but tabloid *Bild* reported he would miss six weeks.

Bayern said that Neuer would be absent until at least April, while coach Vincent Kompany said on Friday that the club was consulting with doctors about Urbig's availability.

Leon Klanac, the reserve team's number one, is also out with injury, meaning that 19-year-old Jannis Baertl or Leonard Prescott, 16, could receive a rapid promotion.

The defending champions sit nine points clear of second-placed Borussia Dortmund in the Bundesliga.

In the Champions League, Bayern's big first leg win over Atalanta means that the club is on track for a meeting with Real Madrid or Manchester City in the quarter-finals of the Champions League.

Real hold a commanding 3-0 advantage ahead of their second leg in Manchester.

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

– AFP/MPD

## Raphinha hits treble as Liga leaders Barca thrash Sevilla



BARELONA – Raphinha bagged a hat-trick as Barcelona thrashed Sevilla 5-2 to restore their four-point lead at the top of La Liga yesterday.

After Real Madrid cut the gap by beating Elche on Saturday the Spanish champions responded by romping to a comfortable victory.

Dani Olmo and Joao Cancelo also struck for Hansi Flick's side, who host Newcastle in the Champions League on Wednesday.

Fans streamed to the stadium to vote in the club's presidential elections, with either Joan Laporta or Victor Font to be announced the new chief later last night.

After the 1-1 draw in Newcastle in the last-16 first leg, Flick left Lamine Yamal on the bench and handed youngster Xavi Espart his first start, at right-back.

Barcelona were handed two

penalties by a sorry Sevilla side to get off to the perfect start at the partially-rebuilt Camp Nou, which finally received clearance to open the north stand.

Around 56,000 fans attended and they were able to watch a fairly straightforward rout of the Andalusians.

Djibril Sow clumsily clipped rampaging Barca full-back Cancelo in the box and Raphinha dinked home from the spot to open the scoring in the ninth minute.

The Brazilian winger was afforded another penalty to put Barca two goals up when Jose Angel Carmona, lying on the floor, handled as Cancelo tried to dribble around him.

This time Raphinha fired it low to the left and although Odysseas Vlachodimos went the right way he could not keep it out.

The hosts netted a third in the 38<sup>th</sup>

minute when Marc Bernal's deflected cross from the left found Olmo, who produced a clinical finish.

Sevilla pulled one back before the break when Juanlu Sanchez got in behind Cancelo and crossed for Oso to score unmarked at the back post.

Raphinha completed his hat-trick early in the second half with a heavily deflected shot as Barca strolled in the spring sunshine.

Cancelo capped an impressive attacking display with a goal of his own, driving into the box and finishing through Vlachodimos's legs.

Barca coach Flick sent on 21-year-old midfielder Gavi for the final 10 minutes, for his first appearance since August after suffering a severe knee injury.

Sow pulled another one back for Sevilla in stoppage time, nodding home Oso's cross, with Barcelona already thinking about Newcastle's visit on Wednesday. – AFP

# Lebrun claims men's title at WTT Champions Chongqing

## Table tennis

CHONGQING – France's Felix Lebrun defeated China's Wen Ruibo 4-1 in a clash of two 19-year-olds to claim the men's singles title at the WTT Champions Chongqing yesterday.

Fifth-ranked Lebrun, who is regarded as one of the world's leading penhold players, relied on his trademark quick-fire attacks to beat Wen 11-5, 11-8, 9-11, 11-7, 13-11.

"This is an amazing journey," said Lebrun. "I am super excited that I won an event held in China."

Lebrun had earlier eliminated Brazil's World Cup winner Hugo Calderano and Japan's Sora Matsushima, both in seven sets, on his way to the final.

Asked about how he twice came from 3-1 down to triumph, Lebrun said: "I just kept going. I kept telling myself that I would have chance to turn the tables if I never lost my mind."

In the women's final earlier yesterday, Japan's teenage star Miwa



Felix Lebrun serves during the men's singles final against Wen Ruibo of China at the WTT Champions Chongqing 2026 in Chongqing, yesterday. – Xinhua

Harimoto edged China's Kuai Man 4-3.

Harimoto, 17, avenged her 4-1 defeat to Kuai at the Asian Cup in February, prevailing 11-6, 9-11, 7-11, 11-9, 11-6, 9-11, 11-5.

Kuai appeared to fade in the deciding set as Harimoto surged into a 3-0 lead with aggressive forehand attacks before sealing the match with a series of winners. – Xinhua

## No country 'formally' boycotting Paralympics ceremony: organisers

MILANO CORTINA 2026 - Organisers of the Milan-Cortina Paralympics said yesterday that no countries are "formally" boycotting the closing ceremony in protest at Russian athletes being allowed to compete under their own flag.

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) issued a list of all countries' flag-bearers for the closing ceremony, which took place at the Cortina curling stadium later yesterday [local time].

Several nations, including many of those that boycotted last Friday's opening ceremony, were indicated as having a "volunteer" as their flag-bearer, rather than one or two of their athletes.

However, IPC communications officer Craig Spence told a press conference in Cortina: "No National Paralympic Committee (NPC) has formally informed the IPC that they are not attending for political reasons."

The opening ceremony was boycotted by Ukraine, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland following the IPC's decision to allow Russia and Belarus to take part in the Games under their national flags rather than as neutral competitors.

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

During last week's opening spectacle in Verona, representatives of the Russian team were booed by some spectators as they paraded behind the country's flag.

Of the seven countries that boycotted the ceremony at the Verona Arena, only Finland have named a flag-bearer for yesterday's closing event.

"Several NPCs have already started their journey home, having completed competition earlier in the week," Spence added.

"Some are attending, but have decided not to name flag-bearers.

"But I sincerely hope that the focus this evening is on those delegations that are here, celebrating what a big, spectacular Paralympic Games it has been." – AFP

## McLaren boss laments 'incredibly frustrating' double China failure

### F1

SHANGHAI – Team principal Andrea Stella said it was "incredibly frustrating" after both of his McLaren cars failed to start the Chinese Grand Prix yesterday because of technical problems.

World champion Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri were left kicking their heels in the pit lane because of issues before the start at the Shanghai International Circuit.

It compounded an awful start to the season for constructors' world champions McLaren.

"We came here to go racing and today we were not in condition to do so because of technical problems," Stella told Sky F1.

"This is very frustrating and disappointing for the team, for the drivers, for our technical and commercial partners, and obviously for our fans.

"So we are sorry for that. We will regroup. We will understand these technical problems and we will go again in Japan."

Norris was unable to leave the garage for a run to the starting grid.

"Once we were preparing the car of Lando to leave the garage, we found a problem on the

electrical side of the power unit," explained Stella.

"We tried to fix it, but actually there was no way to fix it."

Piastri did make it to the grid but was pushed back into the garage a few minutes later.

"We found another problem on the electrical side of the power unit on Oscar's car," said Stella.

"They seem to be different problems and they were basically meaning that there was no way to start the race."

Britain's Norris, who came fifth in the season-opening race in Melbourne, told Sky Sports: "Just frustrating.

"It is on the PU (power unit) side, so the guys tried as hard as they could to get things sorted, but they were unable to.

"My first DNS (did not start) in F1, tough to take, but that is racing sometimes."

Williams' Alexander Albon and Gabriel Bortoleto of Audi also failed to start.

Last weekend only one McLaren took part in the opening race after Piastri crashed on his way to the grid in Melbourne, meaning the Australian is yet to race in a grand prix this season. – AFP

MILANO CORTINA 2026		Medal Table			
Order	NOC	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
1	China	15	13	16	44
2	USA	12	5	6	23
3	Russian Federation	8	1	3	12
4	Italy	7	7	2	16
5	Austria	7	2	4	13
6	France	4	4	4	12
7	Ukraine	3	8	8	19
8	Canada	3	3	8	14
9	Netherlands	3	3	1	7
10	Sweden	3	0	4	7
11	Germany	2	6	9	17
12	Norway	2	4	2	8
13	Republic of Korea	2	4	1	7
14	Switzerland	2	2	2	6
15	Spain	2	1	1	4
16	Czechia	1	4	1	6
17	Belarus	1	1	0	2
18	Kazakhstan	1	0	1	2
19	Japan	0	3	1	4
20	Finland	0	2	0	2
21	Australia	0	1	1	2
21	Poland	0	1	1	2
23	Brazil	0	1	0	1
23	Great Britain	0	1	0	1
23	New Zealand	0	1	0	1
26	Slovakia	0	0	3	3
27	Latvia	0	0	1	1

## China takes Para ice hockey bronze at Milan-Cortina Winter Paralympics

MILAN – China defeated the Czech Republic 3-2 to claim bronze in Para ice hockey at the Milan-Cortina 2026 Winter Paralympics yesterday.

The two teams battled closely from the outset. The Czech Republic opened the scoring with two goals, but Tian Jintao and Wang Zhidong quickly brought China back on level terms within six minutes.

In the second period, China intensified its attack but did not score, while the Czech Republic also failed to find the net.

Tian scored his second just 18 seconds into the final period with an assist from Shen Yifeng. China then controlled the tempo better, forcing the Czech Republic to pull their goalie and add an extra attacker in the last two minutes.

However, China successfully

maintained the lead until the final second to secure the medal.

"Seeing the national flag raised in a foreign land is such a moment of pride for me," said Tian after the game. He added that, as a forward, pulling off such a comeback felt amazing. "Just one word: awesome."

"It is an incredible bronze for us," added Wang. "For three years in a row at the World Championships, we finished in fourth place. So coming into the Milan-Cortina Winter Paralympics, we really wanted to change that."

Qiu Dianpeng, who was injured in the semifinals and did not play in the final, cheered the team on from the bench. "We were on the ice carrying his spirit, giving it our all. And together with him, we won this victory," said Wang.

– Xinhua (Photos on page 16)

## Spielberg defends ballet, opera after Chalamet snub

AUSTIN – Legendary US movie director Steven Spielberg on Friday defended enjoying the arts as a shared live experience, appearing to take aim at Oscar nominee Timothee Chalamet’s controversial remarks about ballet and opera.

The man behind “Jaws” and “Saving Private Ryan” told a South by Southwest audience in Austin, Texas that communal artistic experiences – from cinema to the opera house – must be preserved.

Speaking at a keynote panel to promote his upcoming sci-fi film “Disclosure Day,” the 79-year-old director drew cheers when he invoked the performing arts forms that Chalamet seemed to dismiss in a recent appearance.

“The real experience comes when we can influence a community to congregate in a strange, dark space,” Spielberg said.

“All of us are strangers, and at the end of a really good movie experience, we are all united, with a whole bunch of feelings that we walk into the daylight with, or into the nighttime with, and there is nothing like that.”

“I mean, it happens in movies, it happens at concerts and it happens in ballet and opera. And we want that to be sustained.”

Spielberg grinned as the audience broke out into cheers.

The remarks landed as a pointed rejoinder to Chalamet, who sparked a firestorm last month after appearing to question the cultural relevance of classical performance arts.

Speaking at a CNN and *Variety* town hall event, the “Marty Supreme” star said he feared cinema could become like ballet or opera – describing them as art forms people feel obliged to champion even as audiences drift away.

He added that he had no interest in working in a field sustained by advocacy rather than genuine demand.

Spielberg, for his part, was careful not to disparage streaming.

“We make Netflix movies, and I like working with Netflix,” he said.

“Disclosure Day,” Spielberg’s

return to extraterrestrial science fiction starring Emily Blunt and Josh O’Connor, is slated for release in June.

Spielberg, whose “E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial” remains one of cinema’s defining alien stories, told the crowd he had believed since childhood that humanity was not alone in the universe.

He also said he was working on a western, a genre he had never attempted but had long aspired to tackle.

“There will be horses. There will be guns,” but “no stereotypes,” he promised.

– AFP



US director Steven Spielberg poses on stage at Keynote: “The Big Picture with Steven Spielberg” live from SXSW at Hilton Austin on Friday in Austin, Texas. – AFP

## Ryan Gosling’s ‘Hail Mary’ is about making theatre-going films

Antoine Guy

PARIS – As Hollywood grapples with existential questions and fickle audiences, one of its top stars, Ryan Gosling, has a simple credo.

“In this stage of my life, if I’m going to make films, I want it to be a film that is worth going to the theatre to see,” the Canadian actor told journalists in Paris.

The comment was made as part of a globetrotting publicity tour for his latest move, “Project Hail Mary” – but it could be read as part of the debate over the future of cinema.

The film is a sci-fi adventure about an astronaut who awakes on a spaceship with a mission to save the Earth from a sun-dimming phenomenon. Soon, he realises he is not alone in his quest, but has to work as a team with an alien he names Rocky.

Back on our real planet Earth, Hollywood is experiencing its own gloom, as industry layoffs accelerate, productions shift away from California, and streaming platforms eat into box office revenues.

The heroes it sends out to restore the shine are A-listers like Gosling, who proved more than up to the task in “Barbie”, “Blade Runner 2049” and “La La Land”.

But the 45-year-old has also been in a few less-than-stellar films, such as 2024’s loss-maker “The Fall Guy” and 2022’s Netflix thriller “The Gray Man”, which got big viewer numbers but a poor critical reception.

“Project Hail Mary”, which Gosling co-produced under a first-look deal with Amazon MGM Studios, has him carrying most of the story solo in front of the camera – along with the VFX alien Rocky, of course.

The movie is an adaptation of a novel by Andy Weir, who wrote “The Martian”, about another solo astronaut overcoming hardships.



Canadian actor Ryan Gosling speaks during a press conference for the film “Project Hail Mary” in Mexico City on Friday. – AFP

That became a 2015 film starring Matt Damon.

### Comedy chops

Gosling plays a not-especially-brave science teacher who has to rely on his knowhow as he pieces together his memory, and builds an alliance with Rocky.

“I felt appropriately intimidated by the challenge,” Gosling said ahead of the movie’s worldwide release in the coming days.

“I was really moved by Andy’s point of view, or this lens that he looks at the world through, which is, he gives you this opportunity to pivot away from fear, and to maybe approach fear with curiosity, and to say maybe the future isn’t something to be afraid of, but just to be figured out.”

The actor added that the movie – a dramatic comedy – “felt like something I really wanted to make for my kids, and hopefully for their generation”.

Gosling also reflected on

his three-decade trajectory in Hollywood, which has seen him rise to the top tier of actors – and, as displayed in “Barbie”, show off his long-hidden comedy chops.

“It took me a while to realise that I could do things the way I wanted to,” he said.

He started out in dramatic roles in serious independent films in which there “was really the unspoken rule that nothing funny can happen”. Now, however, he feels the door has opened to roles offering wider range.

Christopher Miller, who directed “Project Hail Mary” with longtime collaborator Phil Lord, said Gosling aptly married drama and comedy in the film.

“Few people can pull it off also, can make you laugh and cry at the same scene and moment... it’s hard to think of other people who could have done what Ryan did in this movie and do it in a way that feels authentic and true,” he said.

– AFP

## ‘Snow White,’ ‘War of the Worlds’ top Razzies

HOLLYWOOD – Dopey? Creepy? Unnecessary?

Bizarre remakes of “Snow White” and “War of the Worlds” have topped the Razzies, the anti-Hollywood awards show that annually shames the industry’s very worst films.

Disney’s latest live-action remake of “Snow White” had been mired in controversies years before its disappointing release nearly a year ago.

Its star Rachel Zegler enraged Disney fans for comments denigrating the beloved 1937 original – even labelling its Prince a stalker.

And the casting of a Latina actress was slammed as “woke” in some corners of social media.

But ultimately it was the film’s bizarre computer-generated dwarfs that drew the most flak, and earned

the movie two Razzies.

“Described as frightening, actually terrifying and garishly fake, the winner of the Worst Supporting Actor goes to all seven artificial dwarves,” Razzies organisers said on Saturday.

“AI doesn’t have to cost over US\$250 million -- maybe US\$20.50, or a seven day free trial period,” they added, referring to the Disney’s film’s reportedly enormous budget.

The seven cartoonishly gnome-like magical creatures were also named “worst screen combo.”

“War of the Worlds” – very loosely based on H.G. Wells’ seminal novel, but told entirely through Zoom calls – was named 2025’s worst movie, with worst actor honoree Ice Cube also among the film’s five “wins.”

The Amazon-released movie

was slammed for its awkward product placement – not least its climactic scene in which a Prime Air drone saves humanity from an alien invasion.

Despite – or perhaps because of – utterly scathing reviews, the film became an unlikely hit for Amazon, thanks to a phenomenon that critics dubbed “hate-watching” by “bored masochists.”

“Pinching the title of a sci-fi classic and slapping it on another reimagined movie has turned a science fiction masterpiece into an unintentional laugh riot,” said Razzies organizers.

Rebel Wilson was named “worst actress” for her role in “Bride Hard,” an action-comedy in which she plays a maid of honour who is secretly an international spy, at a wedding hijacked by mercenaries.

– AFP

### World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 1°C~15°C	Manila 19°C~30°C	New York 5°C~16°C	Lisbon 9°C~21°C
Shanghai 9°C~13°C	Bangkok 24°C~35°C	London 8°C~12°C	Rio de Janeiro 21°C~30°C
Hong Kong 16°C~22°C	Tokyo 6°C~13°C	Frankfurt 4°C~12°C	Luanda 25°C~29°C
Taipei 14°C~26°C	Singapore 23°C~33°C	Vancouver 9°C~10°C	Maputo 21°C~30°C
Guangzhou 14°C~27°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~34°C	Paris 4°C~13°C	Dili 24°C~31°C
Nanjing 7°C~11°C	Jakarta 23°C~33°C	Moscow -4°C~8°C	São Tomé 26°C~32°C
Guilin 13°C~20°C	Seoul 1°C~14°C	Las Vegas 16°C~29°C	Praia 18°C~27°C
Xi’an 7°C~13°C	Sydney 20°C~27°C	Monte Carlo 11°C~18°C	Bissau 19°C~36°C



China's Wenjing Zhang prepares for the women ski slalom during the Milano Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy on Saturday. - AFP

Ebba Aarsjoe of Sweden competes during the para alpine skiing women's slalom standing event at the Milano-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, on Saturday. - Xinhua



Huang Lingxin (front) of China celebrates after the para cross-country skiing men's 20km interval start free standing at the Milano-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Tesero, Italy, yesterday. - Xinhua



China's players celebrate after winning the bronze medal after ice hockey match against Czech Republic at the Milano Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Milan, Italy yesterday. - AFP



Japan's Momoka Muraoka competes in the women ski slalom during the Milano Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy on Saturday. - AFP

Anja Wicker (left) of Germany and Aline dos Santos Rocha of Brazil hug after the para cross-country skiing women's 20km interval start sitting at the Milano-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Tesero, Italy, yesterday. - Xinhua