

Sam, Huang vow to deepen Macao-Guangdong cooperation on all fronts

Staff Reporter

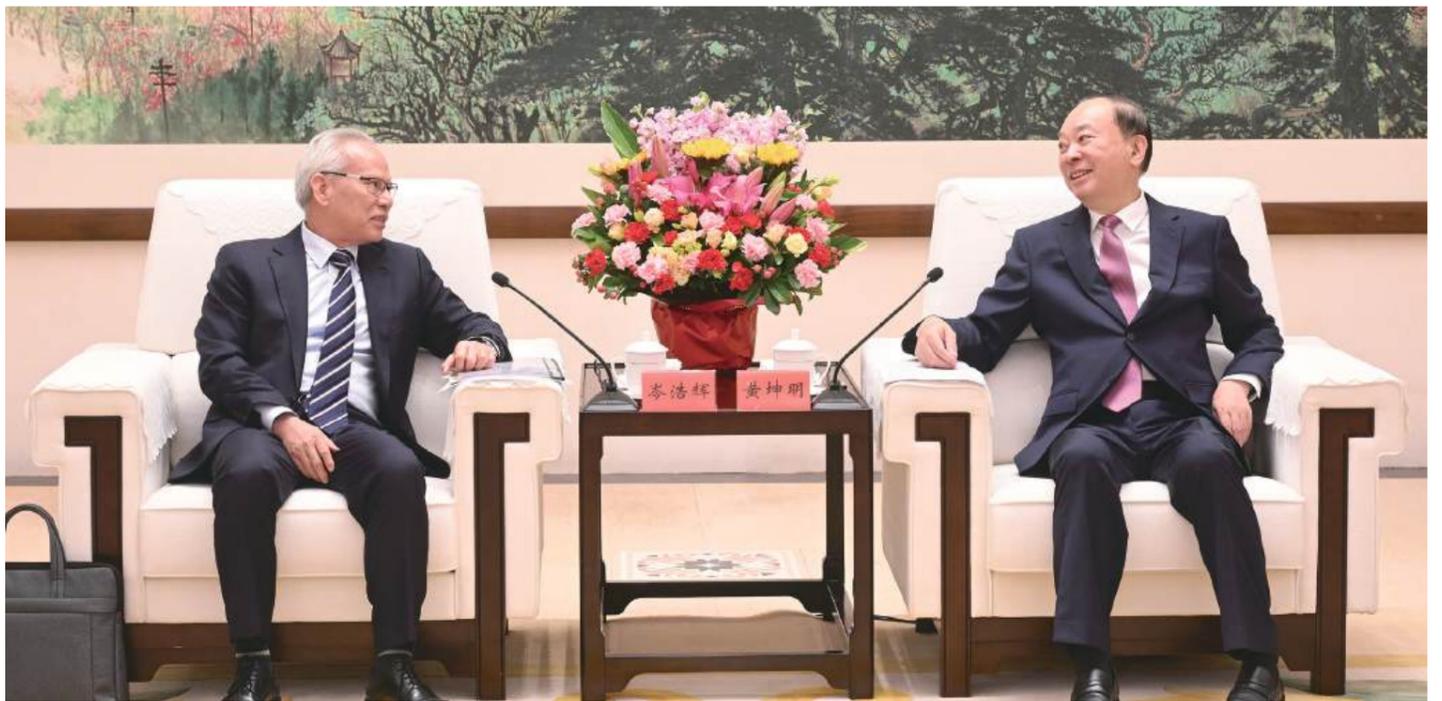
The Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) and Guangdong Province will jointly implement the guiding principles of the “two sessions” and convert the strategic deployments laid out in the country’s 15th Five-Year Plan into concrete action, visiting MSAR Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai and Guangdong Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Secretary Huang Kunming agreed in Guangzhou yesterday, the Macao Government Information Bureau (GCS) said in a statement last night.

Both sides will work together to deepen Guangdong-Macao cooperation, advance the high-quality construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), and promote Macao-Hengqin integrated development, deepening Macao-Guangdong cooperation on all fronts, the statement said.

Sam yesterday led an MSAR Government delegation to the capital of Guangdong Province to meet with Huang, Deputy Secretary of the CPC Guangdong Provincial Committee and Governor of Guangdong Province Meng Fanli, as well as other leading officials of the neighbouring province.

During the meeting, according to the GCS statement, Sam expressed his gratitude to the CPC Guangdong Provincial Committee and the Provincial Government for their continued care and support for the sustainable development of the MSAR, particularly their significant contributions to the joint construction of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

The recent “two sessions” in Beijing reviewed and approved the outline of the



Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai (left) meets with Secretary of the CPC Guangdong Provincial Committee Huang Kunming in Guangzhou yesterday. – Photo: GCS

country’s 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development, Sam noted. The outline explicitly set out a series of steps for important deployments to support Macao in consolidating and enhancing its competitive advantages, and in better integrating into and serving overall national development, thereby bringing new and significant developmental opportunities to Macao, Sam was quoted by the statement as saying.

The “two sessions” denote the annual sessions of the National People’s Congress

(NPC) and the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).

The MSAR Government will proactively align with the country’s 15th Five-Year Plan and properly compile and implement the 3rd Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the MSAR, Sam said.

The chief executive expressed hope for Guangdong’s continued strong support in jointly advancing the high-quality construction of the Greater Bay Area,

building upon the existing foundation of deepening comprehensive Guangdong-Macao cooperation, and thus achieving breakthroughs in key areas, the statement pointed out.

Sam emphasised the need to strengthen the alignment of rules and mechanisms in scientific and technological innovation, economic development, and public services, accelerating the transformation of the Greater Bay Area into a world-class city cluster with global influence and a premier international bay area.

Continued on p.6

China hopes Afghanistan and Pakistan will resolve differences, disputes through dialogue: FM spokesperson

BEIJING – China hopes that Afghanistan and Pakistan will remain calm and exercise restraint, engage face to face as soon as possible, achieve a ceasefire at the earliest opportunity, and resolve differences and disputes through dialogue, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said yesterday.

Lin made the remarks when answering a query related to China’s shuttle diplomacy between Afghanistan and Pakistan which have recently been engaged in military conflict.

Afghanistan and Pakistan are and will always be each other’s neighbors, Lin noted, adding that issues between the two countries can only be resolved through dialogue and consultation. He said that the pressing priority is to prevent the escalation of the conflict and return to the negotiating table at an early date.

Lin said that over the past few days, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi spoke on the phone respectively with Pakistani

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar and Afghan Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi.

Lin further noted that the special envoy on Afghan affairs of the Chinese foreign ministry has been shuttling between Afghanistan and Pakistan to mediate. Chinese embassies in Pakistan and Afghanistan have been in close communication with the two sides, added the spokesperson.

Both countries have expressed

appreciation for China’s active mediation efforts, Lin pointed out.

“China hopes that both sides will remain calm and exercise restraint, engage face to face as soon as possible, achieve a ceasefire at the earliest opportunity, and resolve differences and disputes through dialogue,” said Lin, adding that China will continue to make active efforts to facilitate reconciliation and ease tensions between the two sides (*More on page 9*) – Xinhua

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The Macau Post Daily

China, US hold candid, in-depth, constructive talks on economic, trade issues

The Chinese and US delegations held candid, in-depth and constructive exchanges and consultations in Paris from Sunday to Monday on economic and trade issues of mutual concern.

– Story on p. 7

Spanish king acknowledges ‘much abuse’ during Conquest

King Felipe VI yesterday acknowledged “much abuse” during Spain’s conquest of the Americas, the latest attempt by a top Spanish official to address Mexico’s longstanding historical grievances. – Story on p. 12

‘One Battle After Another’ dominates Oscars

“One Battle After Another” triumphed at the Oscars on Sunday, winning six awards, including the coveted best picture statuette, besting “Sinners” in a thrilling finale to one of the most competitive awards seasons in recent years. – Story on p. 15

Sport-1, March 2026

Notes of a Servant of Sport – Sport Has Memory, the Future Has Direction

Commentary by Manuel Silvério
Independent sports analyst and consultant
on regional development
(Former public official with international
experience and long-standing dedication
to public policy and sports development)

I write these notes simply as someone who has served sport from within the system – in Macau and beyond – without any personal interest. I do so with gratitude and with a simple yet genuine wish: that the path of sport in Macau may go further.

As I begin this column, my purpose is clear: to record, with calmness, restraint and a sense of responsibility, what I have learned over decades of service to public sport, in Macau and elsewhere. Not to offer lessons, nor to seek prominence, but to contribute to a more informed, more demanding and – I hope – more useful public debate, one with greater practical meaning.

In Macau, sport has never been merely a list of competitions. It has always been a mirror of what we are as a city: our capacity for organisation and mobilisation, the way we nurture young people, our sense of community, and our ambition to reach wider international stages. But sport has also often exposed our weaknesses: a dependence on short-term outcomes, fragmentation among institutions, administrative inertia that delays decisions, and the difficulty of turning talent into sustained pathways of development.

Over the years, I have seen institutions take shape, projects grow and infrastructure being built. I have seen athletes and coaches push beyond their limits with limited resources. I have also lived through less fortunate periods: moments when the vitality of the associative movement was not matched by coherent and stable policies; times when “governing” was confused with “operating”; situations in which there was too much intervention where autonomy should have prevailed, and too little where guidance, standards and vision were needed.

For that reason, these notes are not an exercise in nostalgia. Memory does not mean becoming trapped in the past; it means understanding the road already travelled in order to choose, with greater clarity, the direction ahead. And today, defining that direction requires at least three pillars: strategic vision, technical competence and the capacity to deliver – the ability to turn ideas into concrete results on the ground.

Macau’s challenges are clear. The first is structural: connecting what remains disconnected – schools and clubs, grassroots development and high performance, broad participation and excellence, sport and health, sport and education, sport and civic culture. The second is a question of governance: clarifying roles, avoiding overlap, reducing duplication and creating permanent mechanisms for coordination and accountability. There is also a third challenge, often overlooked: ensuring that

sport continuously generates measurable human and social value – healthier lifestyles, greater inclusion, stronger discipline, more opportunities for young people and stronger community cohesion.

This last idea has two dimensions. The first is more visible: raising the quality of sports practice and supporting the associative movement, creating better conditions for athletes to develop and represent Macau with professionalism and dignity. The second is deeper: using sport as an instrument of human development – to educate, to shape character, to build a sense of belonging and to offer positive pathways in a time when the attention of young people is constantly dispersed and contested.

The birth of this column is closely connected to the times we are living through. Macau is undergoing important institutional and social changes. Whenever structures are adjusted, the risk of losing memory, repeating mistakes or making decisions without fully understanding their real impact on the ground inevitably increases. That is why I have chosen this format of “notes”: to keep certain essential questions regularly present in the public sphere – what works, what does not, where there is room for improvement, and how that improvement may be achieved.

In the coming months, I will address concrete themes drawn from lived experience and personal reflection: the role of clubs in athlete development; the

relationship between school sport and the associative system; the professionalisation of coaches and sports administrators; the place of sport for all; major sporting events and what they do – or do not – leave behind as legacy; regional integration and the opportunities of the Greater Bay Area; and also the new frontiers of contemporary sport, including esports. In these emerging fields, the absence of institutional frameworks and technical understanding can often be more damaging than any rushed moral judgement.

I will write with frankness, but with respect. With criticism when necessary, but without cynicism. And with hope, because I sincerely believe that Macau can go further – if it makes the right choices and values those who sustain sport, often far from the spotlight: athletes, coaches, administrators, teachers, doctors, physiotherapists, rehabilitation professionals, managers, operational staff, volunteers and many others.

In essence, these “Notes” are simply that: an attempt to share, with clarity and honesty, the experience of someone who has served sport from within the system, recognising both its achievements and its shortcomings. And maintaining a calm conviction: the future of sport in Macau must be built with clarity, consistency and quiet courage.

Because institutions may change.

But the responsibility to serve Macau – and to think about its future – should never cease.

End

30 hurt in two-bus oil tanker crash on Macau Bridge

Armindo Neves

The Public Security Police (PSP) announced in a statement yesterday that 30 people were injured in a crash involving two buses and an oil tanker on Macau Bridge.

According to a separate statement by the Fire Service Bureau (CB), at around 10 a.m., the bureau received a report about a traffic accident near light pole No. 1717C07 on Macau Bridge.

When arriving at the scene, firemen confirmed that the accident involved a collision between two coaches and an oil tanker, the statement said, adding that 30 people sustained minor injuries, but all of them were found to be conscious and in stable condition. They were rushed to the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre for medical attention.

The bureau said that the injured

comprised 10 men and 20 women aged between 4 and 76. Among them were 11 mainlanders holding non-resident-worker IDs (common known as blue cards), 17 were from the Chinese mainland holding Exit-Entry Permits for Travelling to and from Hong Kong and Macau (EEP), one holding a Canadian passport and a local resident, the statement said, adding that their injuries consisted of abrasions and contusions.

Meanwhile, according to the PSP statement, its officers confirmed that the accident occurred on Macau Bridge near the Taipa exit in the direction from Macau Peninsula to Taipa, involving a coach that first crashed into the rear of another coach, the latter of which then crashed into the rear of the oil tanker.

Based on preliminary investigations, the statement said, PSP

officers suspect that the driver of the coach that crashed first was unable to brake in time, adding that the three drivers involved are local residents, all of whom passed breathalyser tests. The statement said that the oil tanker involved had no oil leaks.

According to Macau’s “Road Traffic Law” Article 21, Paragraph 1, the driver of a moving vehicle must maintain a sufficient distance between his or her vehicle and the vehicle preceding it to avoid accidents in the event of a sudden stop or reduction in speed of the latter. Anyone who violates the provisions of this article shall be punished with a fine of 600 patacas.

According to Article 30, Paragraph 1, the driver must regulate the speed so that, taking into account the characteristics and condition of the road and the vehicle, the load carried, the weather conditions, the intensity of traffic and any other special circumstances, he or she can, under safe conditions, stop the vehicle in the free and visible space ahead and avoid any obstacle that may appear under normally foreseeable conditions. Anyone who violates the provisions of this article shall be punished with a fine of 300 patacas.

Meanwhile, according to Macau Penal Code Article 142, Paragraph 1, whoever, through negligence, offends the body or health of another person shall be punished



This pixelated photo was downloaded from social media platform Facebook yesterday evening. The Post cannot vouch for its authenticity.

with imprisonment for up to two years or a fine. If the act results in a serious offence against physical

integrity, the perpetrator shall be punished with imprisonment for up to three years or with a fine. ■

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MACAU POST

Macau Weather

FINE APART FROM CLOUDY PERIODS.
FORCE 2 TO 4 EASTERLY WINDS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 65% AND 95%.



19°C~25°C

Source: SMG

4 key projects to be implemented this year: API chief

Armindo Neves

Macau's Alliance for Common People Building Up Macau (API) hosted a Spring Festival reception at Golden Dragon hotel in Zape yesterday, announcing that it will focus on four key projects this year.

API is one of the city's biggest community associations and is generally regarded as representing the city's sizeable Fujianese community.

API Chairman Si Ka Lon said in a speech that the four key projects comprise the establishment of an office in the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, the optimisation of the group's elderly care centre's services, the upgrading of its citizens' service centre in Fai Chi Kei, and the addition of a medical centre in Taipa.

Si's speech included a review of the group's work last year, pointing out that over 200 events were organised, involving more than 1.5 million participants, and following up on nearly 1,300 cases.

Si, the first secretary of the Legislative

Assembly's executive board, noted that this year marks the beginning of the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan and Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan, adding that his group will set up a modern patriotic association system integrating "service, policy advocacy, and think tank" functions into one entity.

The Central People's Government's relevant 15th Five-Year Plan was published on Saturday. Its Chapter 17, pertaining to Macau, outlines support for Macau to diversify its economy and develop tourism and culture; strengthen cooperation with the Chinese mainland to enhance competitiveness; and encourage international education and exchanges. Meanwhile, the drafting of Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan has yet to be completed. Its public consultation process is slated to be held next month, the local government has announced recently.

Regarding the four key projects, Si said that while the Hengqin office will address the living and employment needs of Macau residents in the In-Depth Cooperation



Alliance for Common People Building Up Macau (API) President Nick Lei Leong Wong speak to reporters at Golden Dragon hotel in Zape yesterday. – Photo: Armindo Neves

Zone, the elderly care centre will enhance its outreach services and encourage seniors to remain active. Si also said that while the service centre in Fai Chi Kei will transition to a "regular activity model", the group's fifth medical centre, in alignment with government's Chronic Disease Management Programme, will be set up on Rua do Regedor (地堡街) in Taipa.

Effective March 1, Si pointed out, Macau's paid maternity leave for female employees with one year of service has been increased from 70 days to 90 days adding that paternity leave for male employees remains at seven days.

API President Nick Lei Leong Wong told reporters on the sidelines that the Hengqin office was expected to be established in the In-Depth Cooperation Zone this year. The initial phase would focus on detailed issues such as residents' customs clearance, property management, and childcare services, Lei, a directly-elected lawmaker, said.

The service centre in Fai Chi Kei will be relocated to an industrial building, providing a larger community activity space, according to Lei, adding that the group's fifth medical centre was expected to open in the third quarter, accepting cases referred to it by public health centres. ■

UM forum explores poetry, Dunhuang history



This handout photo provided by the University of Macau (UM) recently shows US sinologist and historian Prof. Charles Sanft lecturing on "Land of Marvels: Twenty Poems about Dunhuang" during the Macao Humanities Forum held at the public university in Hengqin on February 4.

Khalel Vallo

The University of Macau (UM) announced in a recent statement that it conducted a session of the Macao Humanities Forum featuring a lecture on the poetic sequence "Twenty Poems about Dunhuang".

The lecture, titled "Land of Marvels: Twenty Poems about Dunhuang," was delivered by Charles Sanft, professor of History at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville and guest professor at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (LMU), the statement said.

Dunhuang is a city in northwestern Gansu Province, on the edge of the Gobi Desert that once served as a frontier garrison on the Silk Road, also known for its Mogao Caves.

The event was organised by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities (FAH), which was attended by students and faculty members, the statement noted. In his welcome remarks, FAH Assistant Dean Joaquim Kuong Io-Kei noted that the lecture focused on Chinese history and poetry, highlighting similarities between Macau and Dunhuang as cultural crossroads with rich artistic and literary traditions, the statement said, adding that Zhang Yue, another FAH assistant dean, also introduced Sanft's academic background, noting his research on ancient Chinese history and culture.

Sanft, a sinologist who graduated from universities in the US and Germany, is the author of works including "Communication and Cooperation in Early Imperial China: Publicizing the Qin Dynasty" and "Literate Community in Early Imperial China: The Northwestern Frontier in Han Times".

During the lecture, Sanft presented historical photographs of the Mogao Caves while discussing the theme of "topophilia," describing the emotional bond between poets and the places they write about, the statement said, adding that he analysed selected poems from "Twenty Poems about Dunhuang", emphasising how the works reflect both literal descriptions and metaphorical portrayals of social realities.

The Mogao Caves are also known as the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas or the Buddha Grottoes.

Sanft also noted that the first and final poems in the sequence echo one another, representing the poet's inner journey and attachment to the place, the statement said.

During the Q&A session, Sanft discussed topics such as poetry translation and regional literary characteristics, the statement noted. Sanft said that effective translation requires balancing literal accuracy with explanatory notes while allowing readers space to interpret metaphors. ■

Colouring contest links Macau, Hengqin consumer awareness



This poster provided by the Macau Consumer Council (CC) yesterday promotes its "Macau and Hengqin Linked by Honesty" primary school colouring contest, inviting students to submit entries by May 8.

Khalel Vallo

The Macau Consumer Council (CC) announced in a statement yesterday that it has opened registration for the 2026 primary school colouring contest titled "Macau and Hengqin Linked by Honesty", inviting students to submit entries by May 8.

The competition is jointly organised by CC and the Consumer Association of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, the statement said.

According to the statement, the contest aims to help students understand initiatives related to certified shops in the In-Depth Cooperation Zone, including the mutual recognition mechanism between certified shops in the two places. The initiative also seeks to strengthen consumer confidence in both regions, noted the statement.

The contest is divided into two groups: lower primary and upper primary. Each category includes an excellence prize, first prize, second prize and five third prizes. Winners will receive vouchers valued at 1,500, 1,200, 1,000, and 500 patacas respectively,

along with trophies, the statement said.

Meanwhile, a new "Most Creative Fantastic Item" prize has been added this year for the upper primary group, with two winners each receiving a 500-pataca voucher and a trophy, the statement said, adding that participating schools may also receive a certificate of appreciation encouraging them to promote the competition among students.

Participants are free to create their colouring works using any type of paint and style, provided the artwork is hand-drawn. However, according to the statement, three-dimensional (3D) creations, collages and digital design software are not accepted.

Upper primary participants may also design a "consumer protection item" for characters in their drawings, although this will not affect judging for the main awards.

Competition guidelines, registration forms and colouring sheets can be downloaded from the Consumer Council's website. Completed entries and application forms can be submitted to the council's office on Avenida de Horta e Costa until May 8. ■

ABOUT The Young Post

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

Hou Kong Maths Cultural Week event aims to develop students' critical thinking & practical skills

Armando Neves

Macau's renowned Hou Kong Middle School (Primary Section) hosted the last day of its Mathematical Cultural Week event yesterday, and Wang Shize, deputy director of the school, told the *Post* that the event aimed to develop students' critical thinking and practical skills.

Wang said that centred on the concept of "Viewing the world through a mathematical lens," nearly 20 mathematics competitions and activities were held in just over 10 days, with over a thousand students from the school participating. The activities aimed to enhance students' logical and critical thinking, as well as practical application skills through games, problem-solving, and interdisciplinary practices, Wang said.

Nicholas Chao Man Fai, who heads the school's Mathematics Panel, told the *Post* that the most challenging aspect of the preparations was to organise the participation of the entire student body, involving over 20 mathematics teachers who joined forces to design the activities, arrange the venues, and prepare all the materials.

Chao also said that some of the annual event's most popular activities will be retained and refined, while those found dull or ineffective will be phased out, ensuring they align with the abilities and interests of students across different grade levels.

The activities featured unique projects such as "tangram"* puzzles for first graders, creative problem-solving for third graders, and comprehensive application for fifth graders, according to Chao.

During the planning and development of the curriculum, 'Maths Reading' and 'Maths Transformation' were incorporated. Chao also said that using programming activities that integrate mathematics with information technology aims to lay a strong foundation for advanced robotics programming.

Wang pointed out that primary school mathematics education is not just about calculation; it is more importantly about cultivating students' ability to questions, think, and modelling, preparing them for development in the AI era.

Wang noted that the primary section places strong emphasis on ensuring a smooth transition from primary to secondary education. During the primary years, students are encouraged to engage in group collaboration and active teacher-student interaction, gradually preparing them for the self-directed learning model used in secondary school. Wang added that the school will continue to deepen interdisciplinary integration in the future, exploring links between mathematics and other subjects such as general studies and physical education.

This will allow students to appreciate the practical value of mathematics in real-life contexts, Wang said.

University of Macau (UM) Faculty of Education Associate Professor Jiang Chunlian told the *Post* that the event added a new programming course aimed at cultivating students' computational thinking. Through puzzle game and programming activities, students can develop their mathematical thinking and enhance their problem-solving skills, Jiang said.

Jiang chairs the Macao Mathematics EduCation Study Association.

She expressed the hope that learning mathematics will not only develop the intellect but also foster a resilient character in students when facing difficulties, preparing them for an uncertain future world.

Two parents, surnamed Lam and Ho both told the *Post* that their children's interest in mathematics has greatly increased since participating in the activities, adding that they now actively practise speed calculation and challenge themselves with difficult problems.

Both thanked the school for thoughtfully designing the activities and competitions, allowing students to experience the joy of mathematics through games and no longer view it as a dull subject.

Seeing their children receive awards filled the parents with pride, Lam and Ho said, adding they hope that the school can provide more interactive and engaging activities to continuously stimulate their children's enthusiasm for learning.

Several students who participated in the event told the *Post* of their experiences.



University of Macau (UM) Lui Che Woo College Associate Master Coffee Chao Kuok Fai (centre), the Chinese mainland's outstanding teachers Zhao Dandan (third from left) and Lin Tong Shuo (third from right), UM Faculty of Education Associate Professor Jiang Chunlian (second from left), Hou Kong Middle School (Primary Section) Director Rebecca Choi Keng Man (second from right), and deputy directors Lei loi (left) and Wang Shize pose on stage during yesterday's on-campus event on Rua de Afonso de Albuquerque. – Photos courtesy of Hou Kong Middle School



A third-grade student surnamed Lam, found that he got faster at playing with the Rubik's snake with practice, and thanked his classmate, surnamed Ng, for teaching him certain techniques.

A fourth-grade student surnamed Hoi, learnt through playing with the Klotski puzzle not to rush things.

A fifth-grade student surnamed Ip, used programming to calculate his body mass index (BMI) and discovered that mathematics can be applied to real-life scenarios like facial recognition.

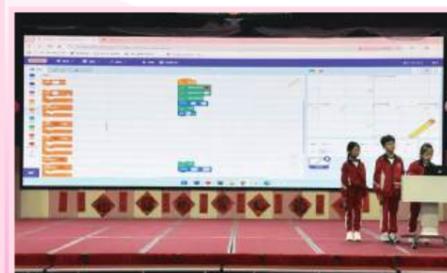
Two sixth-grade students surnamed Ho and U noted that solving the nine-linked rings puzzle requires mathematical thinking; one wrong move means having to start all over again, which they related to real-life situations like shopping and managing one's finances.

Zhao Dandan, an outstanding teacher** from the Chinese mainland, spoke highly of the event. She told the *Post* that the school has incorporated puzzle toys into its curriculum, achieving a blend of fun and critical thinking. By downplaying individual competition and emphasising collective participation, Zhao said that the school protects students' interest in learning. Zhao, who is from Shanghai, said she plans to take these curriculum design concepts back to the mainland to show the teachers there.



*A tangram (七巧板) is a dissection puzzle originating from China, consisting of seven flat pieces called tans that can be rearranged to form various shapes and figures. Each tan is typically a polygon, and the aim is to use all seven pieces to create a specific shape without any overlaps. Tangrams are used for educational purposes, promoting skills in geometry, spatial reasoning, and problem-solving. They can also serve as a fun recreational activity for all ages. – Poe

**In the Chinese mainland, recognition as an outstanding teacher may come through awards, promotions, or other formal acknowledgment by educational authorities or institutions. – Poe



SkateFest energises Studio City with street culture showcase

Khalel Vallo

A two-day skateboarding festival brought sport, art and youth culture to integrated resort Studio City Macau over the weekend, drawing more than a thousand participants and spectators.

The “SONDAY SkateFest powered by adidas Skateboarding” took place at the resort’s Sk8te Park in Cotai, located on Level 3 of Studio City’s East Wing. Organised by the integrated resort operator Melco Resorts & Entertainment, the festival combined skateboarding competitions, international showcases and creative workshops, highlighting the influence of street culture.

According to a Melco statement yesterday, around 30 international skateboarders took part in four showcase sessions across the weekend, performing tricks and interacting with fans. The programme included autograph sessions and meet-and-greet opportunities with athletes sponsored by adidas Skateboarding.

The event also featured a series of skate challenges such as Skate



Skateboarders display their skills during the two-day SkateFest “SONDAY SkateFest powered by adidas Skateboarding” at Studio City Macau in Cotai on Saturday. — Photos: Khalel Vallo



Bowling, Skate Jam and Best Tricks competitions, encouraging both experienced riders and beginners to participate. Judges evaluated performances based on technique and personal style, while instant prizes were awarded during the open-registration trick sessions.

Speaking to the *Post*, two locals

shared their impressions of the festival. Zhang, 30, praised the skill of the participants. Even though he attended as a spectator rather than a competitor, he said he enjoyed watching the performances. “I think this event is very lively, and it is a very good international competition”, he said, adding that it was the second time he

had attended the event. Zhang noted that the younger skaters particularly impressed him. “They all skate very well, especially the kids here. Their level is beyond our imagination”.

Meanwhile, Thomas, 21, said he recently returned to Macau after spending five years in the United Kingdom and had been reconnecting

with the local skateboarding scene. “There’s a lot of great skaters out here, a lot of good people out here”, Thomas said, adding that the festival provided an opportunity to meet other skaters and enjoy the atmosphere. Reflecting on his interest in skateboarding, Thomas said that it had simply become a passion over time, inspired by watching skateboarders when he was very young.

Beyond the sporting element, the festival incorporated creative activities including graffiti workshops led by artists MCZ_THOMAS, AAFK, BONG and GRAPE. Participants used spray paint to create designs on skateboards, T-shirts and caps. Meanwhile, a pop-up retail store showcasing the latest adidas Skateboarding collection also made its local debut during the festival.

According to the statement, the retail store, located at Studio City, will remain open until June 13 and features collaborative collections including a series with the United States’ professional skateboarder Mark Gonzales, also known as “Gonz”. ■

Weather to become damp, misty this week: SMG

Rui Pastorin

The local observatory noted in a statement yesterday that Macau again is expected to experience misty weather and a rise in relative humidity from tomorrow, while light rain might also occur during the mornings and evenings.

The statement said that Macau has consistently experienced sunny weather recently, but due to the influence of an easterly airflow, winds have been relatively strong, making it feel cooler in the mornings and evenings.

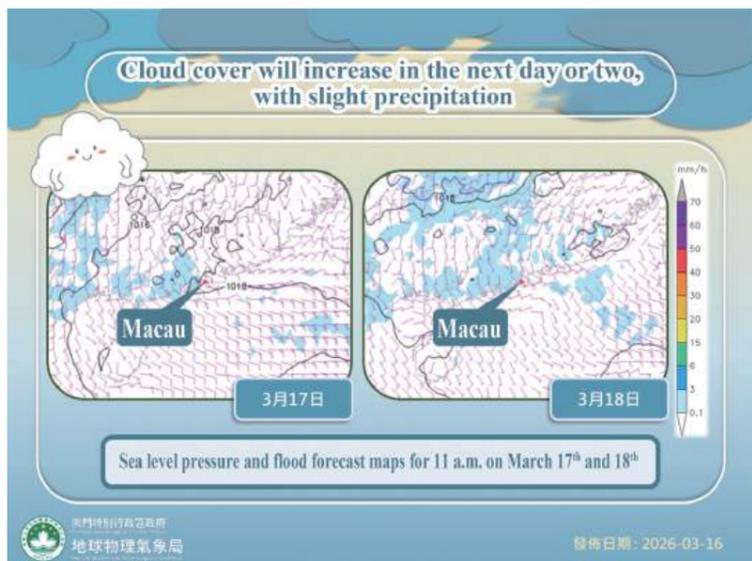
The statement said that as the easterly airflow gradually weakens between today and tomorrow, the winds will become milder while it will also be cloudier. Some light rain may also occur in the mornings and evenings.

From tomorrow onwards, SMG predicted in the statement that a warm and moist air flow will lead to a rise in relative humidity. With lighter winds, one can expect light mist or fog in the early mornings and evenings, which will lower visibility, according to the statement.

The statement added that the mercury will gradually rise due to the warm, moist air, with minimum temperatures reaching 20 degrees Celsius or more. Towards the weekend, it will become even warmer and more humid, with ongoing light mist or fog in the mornings and evenings.

Moreover, as the spring equinox approaches, the Northern Hemisphere will have longer days and shorter nights, and temperatures will gradually rise, the statement said, adding that one can expect changing weather conditions. Members of the public were urged to pay attention to the latest weather information.

According to AI Chatbot Poe, the spring equinox is an astronomical event that occurs around March 20 or 21 in the Northern Hemisphere. It marks the moment when the Sun crosses the celestial equator, resulting in nearly equal lengths of day and night. It signifies the beginning of spring, leading to warmer weather and longer days. ■



This image downloaded from the local observatory’s website last night notes that between today or tomorrow, cloud cover will increase with light rain.

AMCM urges public to be wary of money transfer scams

Rui Pastorin

The Monetary Authority of Macao (AMCM) is urging members of the public to exercise caution when approached by third parties requesting money transfers or screen-sharing to avoid the exposure of personal banking information and passwords.

Macau’s quasi-central bank, which issued the reminder in a statement on Sunday, noted that it was concerned about recent incidents where people have been tricked by criminals into transferring money into unknown bank accounts.

The statement also highlighted instances where people have been asked to activate their screen-sharing function and then use their online or mobile banking, exposing sensitive information such as bank account

numbers, card numbers, login passwords, and transaction passwords for unauthorised transactions.

The financial regulator reminded members of the public to be on high alert “when encountering requests from third parties to transfer money or perform mobile screen sharing operations to avoid disclosing important banking information and passwords”, the statement pointed out

The statement said that those doubting the origin of any calls or messages can use the Judiciary Police’s (PJ) Anti-Fraud Programme to assess potential risks. Those who have shared personal information as well as bank account details, card numbers, passwords or have conducted any transactions through calls, messages, hyperlinks or screen

sharing should immediately contact their relevant financial institution.

One can also reach PJ’s anti-fraud enquiry hotline on 8800 7777 or the reporting hotline on 993.

Meanwhile, “AIA International Limited” has also issued a notice on its website and app in line with the financial regulator’s request to warn members of the public to be wary of counterfeit websites pretending to be the company to avoid fraud and losses, AMCM noted in a separate statement yesterday.

The statement yesterday reiterated that one can use PJ’s Anti-Fraud Programme to check for fraud whenever they have doubts about phone numbers and hyperlinks, as well as contact the aforementioned hotlines to report anything dubious. ■

Four Seasons unveils ‘Awakening March’ campaign

Rui Pastorin

The five-star Four Seasons Hotel Macao has recently unveiled its “Awakening March” culinary and wellness campaign to welcome the spring.

Among the hotel’s highlights for the campaign are an eight-week seasonal menu at the Michelin-starred Zi Yat Heen, celebrating the “freshest ingredients of the season”, according to a statement by the hotel on Thursday.

Steamed garoupa with ham and caviar, sautéed clams with asparagus and black truffle, and crispy chicken with black truffle are among the delicacies on offer, with each dish featured spotlighting the season’s natural flavours, the statement said.

Other signature restaurants will unveil a series of culinary highlights, the statement said, while a guest chef collaboration “A Tale of Two Cities” at Belcanção



This file photo downloaded from the Four Seasons Macao website last night shows the five-star hotel in Cotai.

will bring together “the aromatic spices of South India and the rich heritage of Macanese flavours”. More offers include those from Ohte, the “Spring Awakening Afternoon Tea” at Xiao Ting and the launch of the Australian Dinner Buffet at Belcanção, with highlights including indoor

barbecue, the statement noted.

Meanwhile, the Yoga Studio will be hosting special sessions while The Spa will offer the “Ancient Indian Head Massage”, which the statement described as being “designed to release accumulated tension, restore systemic balance, and calm the soul”. ■

Ancient Chinese academies foster cross-cultural exchanges through Eastern wisdom

Analysis

NANCHANG – As the world seeks ways to engage in dialogue across different civilizations while preserving distinct identities, “shuyuan,” or ancient Chinese academies, have emerged as a guide from Chinese history.

SEEKING CONSENSUS AMID DIFFERENCES

Originating in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), “shuyuan” were unique Chinese institutions combining education, libraries, ritual observance and scholarly debate. By the Song Dynasty (960-1279), they had become China’s primary intellectual hubs, where scholars often engaged in critical reflections, rigorous exchanges and debates.

Chinese “shuyuan” wisdom began resonating with the West during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). In the late 16th century, Italian missionary Matteo Ricci visited the Yuzhang Academy in Nanchang, east China’s Jiangxi Province, and enjoyed the company of Zhang Huang, then head of the renowned Bailudong (White Deer Grotto) Academy. Ricci brought knowledge of Western astronomy, geography and mathematics, while Zhang inherited a millennia-old Confucian theory. Ricci studied the Confucian classics under Zhang’s guidance, while Zhang incorporated Western geographical knowledge into his own work, featuring mutual respect and interaction.

In a letter to Rome, Ricci wrote that they had found in the Chinese classics quite a few things that agreed with their faith.

Xiao Hongbo, president of the Jiangxi Academy of Social Sciences and director of its Academy Culture Research Center, identifies this spirit of “seeking consensus amid differences and building synergy through exchange” as a vital wisdom within traditional Chinese culture for managing divergence and resolving conflict.

This spirit of dialogue lives on to this day. In October 2025, nearly 200 scholars from 51 countries and regions gathered at the Kaoting Academy in east China’s Fujian for the Conference on Zhu Xi’s Philosophy and Dialogue of Global Civilization, to explore how the late Chinese philosopher Zhu Xi’s thought could offer insights for resolving civilizational clashes.

Former UNESCO General Conference President Simona-Mirela Miculescu noted that Zhu’s belief in the inseparability of learning and virtue aligns with UNESCO’s mission to build peace through understanding, learning and mutual respect.

At a time when the “Clash of Civilizations” theory still has a foothold in the world, and divisions and conflicts hinder human progress, Chinese academies, with their thousand years of practice, offer Eastern wisdom that promotes dialogue and strengthens cooperation.

NEW PLATFORM FOR CIVILIZATIONAL DIALOGUE

Inspired by “shuyuan,” Korean scholar Ju Se-bung established Baegundong Academy in 1543 by modelling on Bailudong Academy, the first of its kind on the Korean Peninsula. In the time of about two centuries, over 900 academies sprang up across the region. To date, the Bailudong Academy Directives are still being upheld as school mottos in some institutions in South Korea and Japan.

Another leading Korean scholar, Yi Hwang, later expanded Baegundong Academy into Dosan Academy in Gyeongsangbuk-do to promote the philosophy of Zhu Xi. Its cultural imprint is woven into daily life: the 1,000-won banknote features Yi Hwang’s portrait on the front and Dosan Academy on the back – a shared cultural heritage carried by every South Korean.

“For modern South Koreans, academies remain part of their daily life and one of the most important cultural symbols,” said Keum Jia, an associate professor at Peking University’s School of Foreign Languages.

Deng Hongbo, director of the Chinese Academy Research Center, notes that while overseas academies share a bloodline with their Chinese counterparts and retain their core cultural functions, they have developed distinct characteristics influenced by factors such as the time of transmission and geographical location, as Korean academies emphasize ceremonial rites, Japanese academies focus on publishing, while Southeast Asian Chinese academies serve as spiritual anchors connecting communities to their homeland.

Deng has found that through the

systematic collection and collation of historical documents from the Korean Joseon Dynasty and Japanese academies, valuable archival materials have been revitalized. Such work confirms the academy system’s contribution to the East Asian Confucian civilization rooted in Chinese characters, providing solid academic support for the historical practice of mutual learning among civilizations.

As academies spread eastward, another path led toward the West.

In Naples, Italy, beside a winding lane named “Salita dei Cinesi” (Chinese Slope), stands a three-story ochre building – “Collegio dei Cinesi” (Chinese College) founded by Italian missionary Matteo Ripa.

Serving as a painter and translator at the royal court of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), Ripa returned to Italy in 1723 and established the college with a clear mission to overcome language and cultural barriers by nurturing truly inclusive, cross-cultural talent.

In more than 100 years to 1868, it educated 106 Chinese students from more than 10 provinces, most of whom returned to China to serve as bridges between the East and the West. When the British Macartney Embassy visited China in 1793, the interpreter was a graduate of the college – a testament to its legacy.

After several name changes, the college evolved into the University of Naples L’Orientale, remaining a leading center for Sinological studies in Italy.

In the contemporary era, academies are again serving as platforms for civilizational dialogue. The Nishan Forum on World Civilizations in Shandong Province uses the culture of the academies to connect global scholars. Yuelu Academy in Hunan Province is recruiting international faculty to conduct cutting-edge digital humanities research, while Bailudong Academy’s lectures reach a global audience via live streams.

These exchange practices centered on academies enable Chinese culture to continuously absorb nutrients, develop and innovate through dialogue with diverse civilizations around the world. Simultaneously, they allow the world to gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of China through the window of these ancient educational institutions. – Xinhua

Sam, Huang vow to deepen Macao-Guangdong cooperation on all fronts

Continued from p.1

According to the statement, Sam added that Guangdong and Macao must consistently benchmark their performance against President Xi Jinping’s three keypoint requirements in order to step up efforts in building the In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin. It is imperative to implement firmly the “Macao + Hengqin” development positioning, aim for Macao-Hengqin integration, and strengthen Guangdong-Macao synergy, he said.

The focus will be, Sam stressed, on developing a batch of landmark, pioneering projects, including those mentioned in the 15th Five-Year Plan, such as the Macao-Hengqin International Education (University) Town, the Macao International Airport Hengqin Upstream Cargo Terminal, and the Hengqin section of the Guangzhou-Zhuhai (Macao) High-speed Railway.

Meanwhile, efforts should be made to promote the synergistic development of industries in Macao and Hengqin, integrate civic and social services between the two areas, and realise infrastructure connectivity and institutional connectivity in relation to rules and mechanisms.

Sam underlined that the MSAR is looking forward to working hand in hand with Guangdong, based on the principles of reciprocal cooperation, making every effort to elevate to a new level pragmatic cooperation across multiple fields, thereby serving overall national development via higher-quality Guangdong-Macao cooperation.

Meanwhile, Secretary Huang congratulated Macao on the progress achieved in its socio-economic development under Sam’s leadership, thanking Macao for its long-standing strong support for Guangdong’s various endeavours.

Following CPC General Secretary Xi Jinping’s inspection visits in 2024 to Macao and Guangdong, he visited Guangdong again last year to attend and declare open the 15th National Games, which were jointly hosted by Guangdong Province, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, (HKSAR) and the MSAR. This fully demonstrated Xi’s deep and affectionate interest in the development of Guangdong, Macao, and the Greater Bay Area, Huang was quoted by the statement as saying. The resounding success of the 15th National Games vividly showcased the many manifestations of Chinese modernisation in the Greater Bay Area, and clearly highlighted the unique advantages and bright prospects of the “One Country, Two Systems” principle, Huang added.

Secretary Huang also said that the Central People’s Government’s latest Government Work Report and the outline of the 15th Five-Year

Plan – which were passed at the recently-concluded “two sessions” – included vital deployments relating to the construction of the Greater Bay Area and the development of Hengqin. The documents also provided new and significant opportunities for Guangdong and Macao to advance higher-level cooperation from a new starting point, he added.

Guangdong will deeply implement the guiding principles of Xi’s important speeches on building the Greater Bay Area, as well as his series of important speeches and instructions regarding Guangdong, Huang said. In accordance with the Central People’s Government’s deployments and requirements, Guangdong will anchor itself to the new positioning of “one strategic pivot and two places” and join hands with the HKSAR and the MSAR to make fresh strides in promoting the Greater Bay Area, enabling Guangdong to play better its role as the main force and locomotive of this endeavour, Huang said.

Huang also said that Guangdong aims to shoulder greater leadership responsibility in such matters, setting an example and bearing the heavy burden, while striving to create new advantages and achieve new breakthroughs on this new journey. Huang said that Guangdong is willing to work with Macao to advance pragmatically cooperation in all fields during the period covered by the 15th Five-Year Plan, strengthening planning synergy and policy alignment, and focusing on achieving the second-stage goals of the Cooperation Zone in Hengqin.

Huang also said Guangdong and Macao will work more closely to enhance the quality and efficiency of the Cooperation Zone, continuously deepen infrastructure connectivity and institutional connectivity in terms of rules and mechanisms, and constantly boost the capacity to attract and gather high-quality resources and elements from home and abroad, the statement said.

In addition, the two sides will endeavour to expand the four new industries earmarked for Hengqin and facilitate greater convenience for residents of both places in their daily lives and employment in Hengqin. The two sides will also further strengthen the Macao-Zhuhai pivot, and jointly open a new horizon in Guangdong-Macao cooperation, injecting a continuous stream of new momentum into the high-quality development of the “One Country, Two Systems” principle, Huang concluded.

Members of the MSAR Government delegation participating in the meeting included Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak, Secretary for Economy and Finance Anton Tai Kin Ip and Chief-of-Office of the Chief Executive’s Office Chan Kak. ■



Staff members monitor a board production line of a wood products company in Pingyi County of Linyi City, Shandong Province, yesterday. China’s value-added industrial output, an important economic indicator, went up 6.3 percent year on year in the first two months of 2026, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed yesterday. The pace was 1.1 percentage points faster than the level in December last year, according to the NBS. In February alone, the industrial output grew 0.83 percent from January. – Xinhua

Ministerial meeting of China-Vietnam '3+3' strategic dialogue held in Vietnam

HANOI – The first ministerial meeting of the China-Vietnam “3+3” strategic dialogue on diplomacy, defense and public security was held in the Vietnamese capital of Hanoi yesterday.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Minister of Public Security Wang Xiaohong and Minister of National Defense Dong Jun chaired the meeting, together with Vietnamese Foreign Minister Le Hoai Trung, Defense Minister Phan Van Giang and Minister of Public Security Luong Tam Quang.

The two sides held in-depth exchanges on developments and changes in the international landscape, safeguarding political security, and advancing defense and law enforcement cooperation, and reached broad consensus.

Wang Yi said the “3+3” strategic dialogue on diplomacy, defense and public security between the two countries at the ministerial level represents the first strategic communication platform of its kind globally, established by both sides as a vital initiative to safeguard political system security and deepen strategic coordination.

The mechanism is both an inherent requirement for advancing the building of the China-Vietnam community with a shared future and a necessary step for revitalizing the world socialist cause, fully demonstrating the high level and strategic nature of the relations between the two parties and countries, Wang Yi noted.

The stability and development of both China and Vietnam will demonstrate to the world the significant advantages of the socialist system, the vigorous vitality of the socialist cause, and the bright prospects for human development and progress, he added.

Wang Yi emphasized that as friendly socialist neighbors, China and Vietnam should not only focus on the fundamental well-being of their peoples, coordinate development and security, and firmly follow their own development paths, but also embrace the common interests of all humanity, grasp the correct direction of historical progress, and jointly promote

an equal and orderly multi-polar world and a universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalization through the building of the China-Vietnam community with a shared future with strategic significance.

Wang Xiaohong noted that the public security ministries of the two countries should prioritize political security and enhance efforts to prevent and resist “color revolutions.”

He added that the two sides should also focus on improving law enforcement and security cooperation mechanisms in areas such as cybersecurity, combating online gambling and telecom fraud, drug control, and fugitive repatriation and asset recovery.

Dong stated that China is willing to work with Vietnam to continuously enhance mutual trust in military security, further expand cooperation areas, improve the quality and effectiveness of cooperation, jointly safeguard maritime security and stability through positive interaction, and push bilateral defense exchanges and cooperation to a new level, setting an example of unity and self-reliance for the armed forces of socialist countries.

The Vietnamese side stated that, given the rapidly evolving and increasingly unpredictable regional and international landscape, it has become particularly urgent for the two parties and countries to strengthen solidarity and cooperation in addressing shared challenges.

Vietnam is willing to work hand in hand with China to prepare for high-level exchanges, promote cooperation in various fields, and strengthen multilateral coordination to jointly elevate the Vietnam-China comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership to a higher level, according to the Vietnamese side.

Both sides agreed to hold the second ministerial meeting of the “3+3” strategic dialogue in China, and to deepen counterpart exchanges in diplomacy, defense and public security by fully leveraging the role of routine liaison between senior officials under the mechanism. – Xinhua

China, US hold candid, in-depth, constructive talks on economic, trade issues



Vice Premier He Lifeng (right), also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, shakes hands with US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent prior to their talks in Paris, France, on Sunday. The Chinese and US delegations convened on Sunday and yesterday for talks on economic and trade issues in Paris. – Xinhua

PARIS – The Chinese and US delegations held candid, in-depth and constructive exchanges and consultations here from Sunday to yesterday on economic and trade issues of mutual concern, including tariff arrangements, promoting bilateral trade and investment, and maintaining existing consultation consensus.

During the talks, which are guided by the important consensus reached by the two heads of state, the two sides reached some new consensus and agreed to continue consultations.

Under the strategic guidance of the important common understandings between the two heads of state, and following five rounds of economic and trade consultations last year, China and the United States have reached a series of outcomes in the economic and trade area, said Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng during the new round of China-US economic and trade talks with US lead person Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer.

These outcomes have injected greater certainty and stability into bilateral economic and trade relations as well as the global economy, He said.

Recently, the US Supreme Court ruled that the tariffs imposed by the US government under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act were unlawful, said He, noting that subsequently, the US side levied an additional 10 percent import surcharge on all trading partners under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974, and successively

introduced a series of negative measures concerning China, including the Section 301 investigations, corporate sanctions and market access restrictions.

China has consistently opposed the unilateral tariffs imposed by the United States, He said, urging Washington to completely remove such tariffs and other restrictive measures.

China will take necessary steps to firmly safeguard its legitimate rights and interests, He added.

China expects the United States to move in the same direction, follow through on the important consensus reached by the two heads of state, expand areas of cooperation and reduce problems, so as to promote the healthy, stable and sustainable development of China-US economic and trade relations, He said.

The US side said that a stable China-US economic and trade relationship is of great importance to both countries and the world, and helps promote global economic growth, supply chain security and financial stability. Both sides should reduce frictions, avoid escalation of the situation, and resolve differences through consultation.

The two sides agreed to study the establishment of a cooperation mechanism to promote bilateral trade and investment, continue to make good use of the China-US economic and trade consultation mechanism, strengthen dialogue and communication, properly manage differences, expand practical cooperation, and promote the sustained, stable and sound development of bilateral economic and trade relations. – Xinhua

Paris talks continue momentum of previous rounds with incremental confidence-building

China Daily Editorial

Candid conversation rather than confrontation appeared to define the latest round of China-US economic and trade consultations in Paris – despite the latest 301 investigations the US administration has launched against multiple countries, including China.

Speaking to the media after the consultations concluded yesterday Li Chenggang, China's international trade representative with the Ministry of Commerce and vice-minister of commerce, described the discussions as “in-depth, candid and constructive”.

After years in which the economic relationship between China and the US has oscillated between wary engagement and open friction, the mere fact that the two sides can continue the momentum of their negotiations in the current volatile global environment is itself a modest but meaningful step forward.

What emerged from the discussions was a shared acknowledgment that stable bilateral economic relations benefit not only the two countries but the wider world.

The consultations reviewed progress

made since last year's five rounds of talks and touched upon unresolved issues ranging from tariff levels to nontariff measures. Importantly, both sides agreed to work together to maintain the stability of bilateral tariff levels. For global businesses already navigating inflation, fragmented supply chains and geopolitical uncertainty, stability is a valuable commodity.

Of course, the talks also revealed the continuing friction that exists. The two new Section 301 investigations the US has launched under the pretexts of “overcapacity” and “forced labor” being a case in point. The concern is less about the investigations per se than what they say about the US approach to trade relations and the uncertainty these measures introduce into the consequential relationship. Businesses and investors on both sides of the Pacific prefer predictability. As Li stressed, China will closely monitor developments and take appropriate measures to safeguard its legitimate rights and interests.

But more importantly and intriguingly a development from the Paris talks is the possibility of the two sides establishing a

working mechanism aimed at promoting trade and investment cooperation.

For years, while Washington has viewed the relationship through a competitive lens, Beijing has argued that it should rest on the principles of mutual respect, equality and win-win cooperation. The idea of creating a dedicated mechanism to facilitate cooperation in trade and investment suggests that at least some policymakers in Washington have started recognizing that competition alone is infeasible.

It is telling that this mooted pro-cooperation mechanism surfaced alongside the existing consultation framework. If realized, it could complement the negotiation process by focusing on pragmatic collaboration – trade flows, investment facilitation, and regulatory dialogue – rather than managing disagreements.

China's principled posture has been consistent: It is open to negotiations conducted on an equal footing and with mutual respect. At the same time, it insists that openness should not be mistaken for acquiescence.

The US side should refrain from taking any further actions that could disrupt or

undermine a stable China-US economic relationship. Actions that inject uncertainty – whether tariffs, restrictive measures or unilateral investigations – do just that.

This is not merely a bilateral matter. The scale of the China-US economic relationship means its ripple effects extend across supply chains worldwide.

Seen through this lens, the Paris talks represent valuable continuity. They carry forward the momentum established during last year's consultations while reinforcing several key themes: dialogue over confrontation, stability over escalation and cooperation wherever possible.

Preliminary consensus has been reached on some issues, and both sides agreed to continue consultations. That process matters. But the tests of it will come in the time ahead.

The challenge now is the US recognizing that the best deals are rarely built on “clever tactics” or coercive leverage. Instead, they are built on candid communication, predictable behavior, a willingness to recognize mutual interests and ensuring that words are matched by deeds.

– Courtesy of China Daily

Filipinas seek abortions online in largely Catholic nation

Pam Castro and Ara Eugenio

MANILA – Jane had been bleeding heavily for days before finally seeking help, not from a hospital but from the man who sold her the pills meant to end her six-week pregnancy.

Abortions are strictly outlawed in the mainly Catholic Philippines, forcing women to turn to a patchwork of providers operating in the online shadows.

While rare in practice, Philippine law allows for prison terms of up to six years for abortion patients and providers, leaving thousands of Filipinas to search for solutions in online forums where unlicensed sellers promote abortifacients.

“It was very painful, as if my abdomen was being twisted,” Jane, whose name has been changed to protect her identity, told AFP, describing the visit where the seller, a purported doctor, inserted a pill into her cervix without anaesthesia.

Jane was warned not to disclose the abortion if anything went wrong, she said.

“I heard stories that some women were reported to the police, ignored or left to die when they reached the hospital,” the 31-year-old added.

While post-abortion care has been legal for over a decade, many health workers remain hesitant to provide it, over fears of being arrested or losing their licences, said Junice Melgar, whose Likhaan Center for Women’s Health serves Manila’s poorest.

“I believe that a lot of providers... would like to help. They might find it ethical, but it’s a scary proposition for them,” she said.

‘A chilling effect’

As women have flocked to online sources, authorities have taken notice.

In January, a lawmaker filed a resolution calling for an investigation into the growing number of Filipinas resorting to social media for help in ending their pregnancies.

The Senate last year also urged the Department of Health and the Food and Drug Administration to crack down on what a top lawmaker called “brazen crimes”.

But Jane, while acknowledging the potential safety issues, said she feared targeting online sources would only further limit access to a much-needed medical procedure.

“There might be a chilling effect, and we won’t know where else we can get the proper information,” she said.

A reproductive health services law passed in 2012 aimed to normalise comprehensive sex education and free contraceptives across the country.

But the measure faced fierce opposition from the Catholic Church and conservative legislators, who weakened its implementation.

Funding was slashed, healthcare workers were allowed to refuse services, and access to emergency contraceptives like Plan B was heavily restricted.

“The Catholic Church will always oppose abortion and its applications,” priest Dan Cancino of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines told AFP, citing its commitment to the preservation and dignity of human life.

In rare situations, such as ectopic



This photo taken on December 3, 2025, shows a case study talking during an interview with AFP in Quezon City, Metro Manila. – AFP

pregnancies that threaten a woman’s life, interventions that might lead to foetal death can be morally permissible, he said.

But the Church’s position against “intentional abortions” is absolute, he said, even in cases of rape or on grounds of mental health or financial hardship.

Cancino said the Church provides support to mothers and children facing unintended pregnancies, though he admitted those efforts remain “very fragmented”.

Lawyer Clara Padilla of the Philippine Safe Abortion Advocacy Network (PINSAN), meanwhile, said even legal exceptions for rape, incest or health risks would “not be enough”, noting most abortions were sought

by married women with at least three children.

‘People need this’

More than 250 women are hospitalised every day due to complications from unsafe abortions, according to a PINSAN study. About three of them die.

Padilla said her group has documented cases of women binding their stomachs, inserting wire hangers into their cervix, or even asking people to kick them in attempts to induce abortion.

“Some people are opposing [abortion] because it’s against their morals,” Padilla said.

“We’re just saying that people need this, and you shouldn’t be barring them from accessing healthcare that can save their lives.”

Even if contraceptives were easily available, abortion would remain a necessary backstop for women for whom an unplanned pregnancy can mean sliding further into poverty and violence, said the Likhaan Center’s Melgar.

“There will be rapes, there will be other circumstances where protection simply does not work,” she said.

Jane, who said she suffered from abdominal pain, weakness and loss of appetite for up to three months after the procedure, told AFP she would make the same decision if forced to do it over.

“When you talk about abortion in the Philippines, the discussion is reduced to whether it is legal or moral. People forget that abortion is a health issue,” she said.

“This is my body, my health, my life, and it’s up to me to decide what happens to it.” – AFP

20 Thai sailors return home after vessel attacked in Gulf

Watsamon Tri-Yasakda

BANGKOK – Twenty Thai crew members of a cargo ship attacked in the crucial Strait of Hormuz arrived in Thailand yesterday, with three of their colleagues still stranded on the vessel in the Gulf.

The Thai-registered Mayuree Naree was hit by two projectiles on Wednesday while transiting through the Gulf waterway, after departing a port in the United Arab Emirates.

Iran’s Revolutionary Guards said they had struck the Thai ship, as well as a Liberia-flagged vessel, in the strait because they had ignored “warnings”.

The 20 sailors landed at Thailand’s main international airport early yesterday morning and were immediately escorted away by officials without speaking to gathered media.

The wife of one of the returned crew, who gave her name as Bass, told reporters she was still waiting to see her husband after the ordeal.

“We are all afraid, but they are employees – if they refuse to go [out to sea], they won’t get paid,” the 32-year-old woman said.

“I don’t know where they went or when they will return home. The company hasn’t told me anything,” she added.

‘Highest priority’

Bass said she had only spoken with her husband over Facebook Messenger and had brought their one-year-old son to the airport at her husband’s request.

AFP journalists saw the returning crew members board a bus after arriving at the airport.

When the Mayuree Naree was struck last week, Bass’s husband was only able to grab his phones before fleeing, she told reporters.



Thai crew members of the bulk carrier Mayuree Naree arrive at Bangkok’s Suvarnabhumi International Airport after a flight from Oman, yesterday. – AFP

He had apologised to his wife for leaving onboard a token from his son – a small pillow.

“I want [the company] to be sure during this war situation that the ship will be safe when it goes out,” she said.

“I want them to look at the employees like their own family. If one of them were their family, how would they decide?”

The vessel’s owner Precious Shipping said yesterday that the firm would provide “welfare support for the crew, including medical examinations and mental health assessments”, according to a statement.

Its “highest priority” remained the “continued efforts to locate the three crew members who are still missing”, it added.

The company said last week that the three crew were “believed to be trapped in the engine room”, which was damaged in the attack.

Precious Shipping did not answer questions about the three crew from AFP yesterday.

Thailand was seeking assistance for them from two other nations, foreign ministry deputy spokeswoman Maratee Andamo told reporters.

The Omani navy rescued the 20 sailors on Wednesday, the Thai navy said last week.

Since strikes by the United States and Israel against Iran more than two weeks ago ignited the Middle East war, the Islamic republic has launched its own attacks against its oil-exporting neighbours.

The strikes have threatened shipping in the Strait of Hormuz – through which about a fifth of global oil supplies usually pass – and have plunged the global energy economy into crisis.

– AFP
(More on page 10)

Indonesian police seek 4 suspects for acid attack on activist

JAKARTA – Indonesian police are hunting for four people wanted for an acid attack that maimed an activist critical of the military’s growing role in government, an official said yesterday.

Andrie Yunus, deputy coordinator of the KontraS rights group, was riding a motorbike last week when he was approached by two men on a scooter, one of whom threw acid at him, the group said in a statement.

He suffered injuries to his face, an eye, hands and torso.

CCTV recordings showed four suspects on two scooters following Andrie before the attack, Jakarta police official Iman Imanuddin told reporters yesterday.

Authorities are conducting forensic tests on a motorcycle helmet and a container that allegedly contained the acid used in the attack, he added.

KontraS representative Jane Rosalina said Andrie’s most severe injury was to his right eye, and he was receiving specialised treatment in intensive care.

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.

UN rights chief Volker Turk last week 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”, added Turk.

UN special rapporteur on human rights defenders Mary Lawlor also called for a thorough probe into the “unacceptable” attack.

Indonesia’s minister for law and human rights Yusril Ihza Mahendra vowed that the perpetrators would be brought to justice.

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

Nepal welcomes first transgender lawmaker

KATHMANDU – Draped in garlands, Bhumika Shrestha yesterday became Nepal's first transgender woman lawmaker, marking a proud milestone for the marginalised community in the Himalayan nation.

Nepal's Election Commission confirmed the 37-year-old as a proportional-representation MP from the centrist Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) which won a majority in parliament with 182 seats last week.

"I am very excited but also feel the responsibility on my shoulders," Shrestha, an LGBTQ rights advocate, told AFP.

"Our constitution has provisions for our community but they have not translated to laws and policies. Our community expects me to raise our issues [in parliament]."

Shrestha will sit in the 275-member House of Representatives elected on March 5, the first election since the deadly anti-corruption protests toppled the government in September last year.

RSP, led by rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah, won 125 of 165 directly elected seats and secured 57 more through



Nepal's first elected transgender woman lawmaker, Bhumika Shrestha (centre) poses with members of the LGBTQ community for a photograph in Kathmandu yesterday. – AFP

proportional representation, leaving it just two short of a two-thirds majority.

Umisha Pandey, president of the Blue

Diamond Society (BDS), a leading LGBTQ rights group, called Shrestha's election a "historic" moment.

"Our pains, our sufferings, our feeling, our stories and our every problem is only understood by us, not by others," said Pandey.

Supporters gathered at the BDS office in Kathmandu to congratulate Shrestha, offering her scarves, flowers and gifts, including a pen symbolising the legislative power she will now wield.

Nepal has some of South Asia's most progressive laws on LGBTQ rights.

It outlawed discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation in 2007. A third-gender category for citizenship documents was introduced in 2013, and passports with an "others" category followed in 2015.

In 2023, an interim order from the Supreme Court allowed same-sex and transgender couples to register their marriage.

But no one from the community has held public office since 2008, when an openly gay man became a lawmaker, nominated under the proportional representation system.

More than 900,000 people in Nepal identify as sexual minorities, according to BDS. – AFP

Sri Lanka announces 4-day work week over fears war will drag

COLOMBO - Sri Lanka announced a shorter work week to conserve its scarce fuel reserves as it prepares for a prolonged war in the Middle East, officials said yesterday.

The Strait of Hormuz, a key waterway through which some 20 percent of global exports pass in peacetime, has been effectively closed by Iran in retaliation over the US and Israeli war against it, now in its third week.

Commissioner-General of Essential Services Prabath Chandrakerthi said state institutions will operate only four days a week starting tomorrow.

The new austerity measures will also apply to schools and universities and will remain in place indefinitely.

"We are also asking the private sector to follow suit and declare every Wednesday a holiday from now on," Chandrakerthi told reporters after an emergency meeting chaired by President Anura Kumara Dissanayake.

"We must prepare for the worst, but hope for the best," Dissanayake told senior officials, according to one who attended the meeting.

Dissanayake said essential services, including hospitals, ports and emergency

services will continue to operate as usual.

The government is also suspending all public ceremonies and asking civil servants to work from home where possible to limit fuel use.

Sri Lanka imports all of its oil and also buys coal for electricity generation.

Fuel rationing began Sunday, limiting each motorist to 15 litres of petrol or diesel per week, while public transport was allocated up to 200 litres.

Officials said the country's petrol and diesel reserves would last nearly six weeks, but any warned that any disruption to fresh supplies could severely affect the island.

Sri Lanka buys refined petroleum products from Singapore, Malaysia and South Korea, while crude oil for its Iran-built refinery is sourced from the Middle East.

The government has warned that any escalation in fighting in the Middle East and a prolonged war could seriously undermine its efforts to emerge from the economic meltdown of 2022.

Sri Lanka defaulted on its US\$46 billion foreign debt in 2022 after the country ran out of foreign exchange. Since then, Colombo has secured a US\$2.9 billion IMF bailout. – AFP

Afghan govt says 4 civilians killed by Pakistan shelling

KHOST – Three children and a woman were killed by Pakistani shelling in eastern Afghanistan overnight between Sunday and yesterday, Afghan officials said.

In total, 18 civilians have been killed in Afghanistan in the past week as a result of cross-border clashes between the two sides, according to the Afghan authorities.

"At 12:00 am last night [yesterday] (1930 GMT Sunday), the Pakistani forces fired mortar shells on the Nari village of Gurbuz district, killing a woman and a child", Mustaghfir Gurbuz, the governor's spokesman in eastern Khost province, told AFP.

Shells were also fired on a market, a health clinic and on another village, wounding four people, including a woman. Two of the wounded were in a critical condition, he added.

Pakistani mortar shelling killed two children on Sunday night in the Afghan Dubai area of Khost, the governor's office said in a statement.

One person was also killed in eastern Nuristan province when shelling hit a "civilian home" on Sunday, the government's deputy spokesman Hamdullah Fitrat said on X.

Immediate independent verification of deaths and injuries is difficult to obtain in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, given the hard-to-reach locations.

Both sides maintain they do not target civilians.

But on Friday, the United Nations mission in Afghanistan confirmed the deaths of at least 75 civilians in the country since clashes with Pakistan intensified on February 26.

Food distribution

Afghanistan and Pakistan have had strained relationships for months.

Islamabad accuses Afghanistan of harbouring militants from the Pakistani Taliban (TTP), who have claimed responsibility for a series of deadly attacks in Pakistan, as well as from the Islamic State Khorasan Province.

The Afghan Taliban authorities deny the charge.

Dozens of people were killed in fighting between the two countries in October last year, which led to the near-total closure of the border.

Clashes decreased after mediation but the conflict flared again on February 26 when Afghanistan launched a border offensive in retaliation for earlier Pakistani air strikes said by Islamabad to be targeting the TTP.

Pakistan then declared "open war" against the Taliban authorities, bombing the capital Kabul on February 27.

Repeated border clashes in recent weeks have hit trade and about 115,000 people have been forced to leave their homes, according to the UN refugee agency.

The World Food Programme (WFP) said on Sunday that it has started delivering "life-saving food" to over 20,000 displaced Afghan families and warned that "further instability will push millions into hunger".

Just over 100 people forced to leave their homes gathered from dawn yesterday at a WFP distribution site in Paktia province, on Afghanistan's eastern border, to receive fortified biscuits, an AFP photographer said. – AFP

10 dead in Indian hospital fire

NEW DELHI – A fire at a government-run hospital in eastern India killed at least 10 critically ill patients who were admitted in the trauma care unit, officials said yesterday.

Building fires are common in India due to a lack of firefighting equipment and a routine disregard for safety regulations.

The fire broke out early yesterday on the first floor of the SCB Medical College and Hospital in Odisha state's Cuttack city, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi told reporters.

"A short circuit caused the fire in the trauma ICU ward where patients were being treated," he said, adding that 23 patients were present on the floor at the time of the incident.

Ten people died following the blaze,

while the remaining patients were moved to other wards, he added.

At least 11 staff members suffered burn injuries as they tried to rescue the patients.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the incident "deeply painful" in a post on social media and offered his condolences to the families of the victims.

He also announced compensation of US\$2,160 to affected families.

Electrical short circuits, often caused by poorly maintained wiring, remain the leading cause of fire incidents in India.

In 2024, a fire at a private hospital in the southern state of Tamil Nadu killed at least six people and injured more than two dozen.

The same year, 10 newborns were killed when a fire engulfed a hospital in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. – AFP

5 killed, 20 injured as roof collapses in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD – Five women were killed and 20 others injured yesterday when the roof of a building collapsed during the distribution of welfare payments in the Rahim Yar Khan district of Pakistan's eastern Punjab province, officials said.

Deputy Commissioner Zaheer Anwar Jappa told Xinhua that the incident occurred when more than 200 women gathered on the first floor of a building to receive payments under the Benazir Income Support Program.

Rescue 1122 teams launched relief operations and took bodies and the injured to

the Sheikh Zayed Medical College Hospital, where the district administration declared an emergency to handle the casualties.

Authorities said the roof, reportedly constructed with substandard material, could not withstand the weight of the large crowd and suddenly collapsed, trapping several women underneath the debris.

An eyewitness claimed that seven women died at the scene and more than 30 others were injured during a stampede following the collapse, but officials have not confirmed the claim. – Xinhua

Iran defiant as strikes hit Gulf transport

TEHRAN – Iran said it was ready to take the Middle East war “as far as necessary” as it launched strikes across the region yesterday, while US allies pushed back against Donald Trump’s call for help to reopen a vital shipping lane.

Global oil prices have surged by 40 to 50 percent as Iran attacks shipping in the Strait of Hormuz and launches waves of missile and drone strikes in the Gulf in retaliation for the war launched by the United States and Israel on February 28.

US President Trump said he would hold a news conference, after several European countries rejected the idea of a NATO mission to reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

“By now they have... understood what kind of nation they are dealing with, one that does not hesitate to defend itself and is ready to continue the war wherever it may lead, and take it as far as necessary,” Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told reporters in Tehran.

A drone sparked a fuel tank fire near Dubai airport, disrupting travel, while a missile killed a civilian in their car in Abu Dhabi, and another drone sparked a blaze in an area housing oil infrastructure in the eastern emirate of Fujairah.

“It has been a difficult few weeks hearing explosions regularly, but the Iranian attacks followed me in my last hours before I could fly back home,” a witness at Dubai airport told AFP, adding that passengers had been evacuated to a lower floor after the attack.

Explosions hit the Iranian capital yesterday as air defence systems were activated, an AFP journalist said, and Israel said it had also targeted the cities of Shiraz and Tabriz.

More than two weeks into the Middle East war, Israeli military spokesman Brigadier General Effie Defrin said they still had “thousands



This image, taken from an undated video released by the Iranian Red Crescent Society on Sunday, shows members of the Iranian Red Crescent and Iranian firefighters searching the rubble of a collapsed building following a reported military strike in an undisclosed location. On February 28, Israel and the United States launched strikes on Iran, killing its supreme leader and triggering a war that spread across the Middle East.

– AFP

of targets in Iran, and we are identifying new targets every day”.

‘Very bad’

Trump called this past weekend for world powers to send warships to escort tankers through the Strait of Hormuz, which normally carries one fifth of global crude.

He told the *Financial Times* it would be “very bad for the future of NATO” if they refused, and he has threatened to delay a planned visit to China.

Britain’s Prime Minister Keir Starmer said yesterday he was working with allies on a plan but ruled out a NATO mission.

Several European governments rejected the idea outright, with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz’s spokesman saying the war

had “nothing to do with NATO”. Japan and Australia said they would not be deploying warships.

Meanwhile, a Pakistani oil tanker was able to transit the Strait of Hormuz yesterday with its location transmitter activated – suggesting it may have negotiated safe passage.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) said more strategic oil stocks could be released if necessary to limit the fallout from the Hormuz disruption.

Lebanon ground assault

On another key front in the wider war, Israel announced “limited ground operations” against Iran-backed Hezbollah in southern Lebanon “aimed at enhancing the forward defence area”.

Lebanon was drawn into the

Middle East war on March 2 when Hezbollah attacked Israel in response to the killing of Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

“We have identified Hezbollah is intending to expand their operations... and firing hundreds of rockets a day” toward Israel, military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Nadav Shoshani said in a briefing.

The army’s announcement echoed statements in 2024, when Israel and Hezbollah fought a major war in Lebanon, and during the start of operations in Gaza in 2023.

Israel has ordered evacuations on an unprecedented scale across vast areas of Lebanon since the war began, and Defence Minister Israel Katz said the displaced “will not

return” until northern Israel is no longer threatened.

In Iraq, a strike yesterday near the border with Syria killed six fighters from the former paramilitary coalition Hashed al-Shaabi, the alliance said.

Saudi, UAE call

The war has engulfed much of the region, with Iran striking at least 10 countries that host US forces. Its Revolutionary Guards say it has fired some 700 missiles and 3,600 drones.

Saudi Arabia intercepted more than 60 drones overnight, its defence ministry said yesterday, and Iraqi authorities said rockets wounded five people the day before at Baghdad’s airport, which houses a US diplomatic facility.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Emirati President Mohamed bin Zayed expressed solidarity against “the continued and blatant Iranian attacks” in a call yesterday, without mentioning US-Israeli strikes, according to a statement published by Emirati media.

Despite the violence and 17 days of internet blackout, some Iranians have sought to restore a sense of normalcy, with cafes and restaurants reopening and the popular Tajrish bazaar busy over the weekend ahead of the upcoming Persian new year.

There is little sign of a popular uprising within Iran. Judiciary chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni said yesterday there must be no leniency in issuing “final verdicts” against regime opponents during the war.

More than 1,200 Iranians have been killed by US and Israeli strikes, according to the last toll from Iran’s health ministry on March 8, which could not be independently verified.

The UN refugee agency says up to 3.2 million people have been displaced in Iran. – AFP

Mideast war ‘not a matter for NATO’: Merz

BERLIN – Chancellor Friedrich Merz yesterday said the war in the Middle East started by US-Israeli strikes on Iran was “not a matter for NATO” and Germany would not be taking part in it.

“It has been clear at all times that this war is not a matter for NATO,” Merz said, adding that the US and Israel “did not consult us prior to this war”.

“There was never a joint decision on whether to intervene. That is why the question of how Germany might contribute militarily does not arise. We will not do so,” Merz said at a press conference alongside his Dutch counterpart Rob Jetten.

US President Donald Trump on Sunday called for nations including South Korea, France, China and Britain to help ensure safe passage in the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran has declared closed to US and US-allied traffic.

He later upped the pressure on NATO allies, telling the *Financial Times* newspaper that the alliance faced a “very bad” future if its members did not do their bit to reopen the strait.

Merz ruled out Germany sending ships to the Strait of Hormuz.

“For as long as the war continues, we will not be involved in ensuring free passage in the Strait of Hormuz by military means,” he said.

Merz’s spokesman Stefan Kornelius earlier also said the war had “nothing to do with NATO”.

“NATO is an alliance for the defence of territory” and “the mandate to deploy NATO is lacking”, Kornelius told a regular press briefing.

At a separate briefing yesterday, Defence Minister Boris Pistorius said Germany wanted all those involved to prevent “further military escalation”.

“There will be no military participation” from Germany but Berlin is prepared to support diplomatic efforts to “to ensure safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz”, he said.

“We have a situation which we did not provoke... This war started without any consultations,” Pistorius added.

Germany’s main responsibility is “for the eastern flank and the high north”, he said, and “we stay committed to that but we can’t be anywhere in the world”.

“What does Donald Trump expect from a handful of European frigates in the Strait of Hormuz that the mighty US navy cannot manage alone? This is the question I find myself asking,” Pistorius said. – AFP

Israel police say shrapnel from missiles, interceptors fell in Jerusalem holy sites

JERUSALEM – Israeli police said they found missile and interceptor fragments at holy sites in Jerusalem’s Old City yesterday, including areas near the Al-Aqsa mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

“During the recent missile salvo fired from Iran toward Jerusalem, several intercepts occurred over the city,” the police said.

Following the interceptions, police located “fragments of missiles and interceptor debris, some of significant size, at multiple sites in the Old City, including the Temple Mount complex, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre complex, and the Jewish Quarter”, they added.

The force shared photos showing debris on a roof near the Holy Sepulchre church, a cordon set up in the Al-Aqsa mosque compound and the smashed windscreen of a car.

“This incident underscores that the enemy does not distinguish between

religions or places of worship – synagogues, mosques, or churches,” the police statement said.

The Old City is located in east Jerusalem, which Israel occupied in 1967 and later annexed in a move that is not internationally recognised.

It houses the Al-Aqsa mosque, Islam’s third holiest site; the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where Christians hold that Christ was crucified, entombed and resurrected; and the Western Wall, considered the holiest site where Jews are allowed to pray.

AFP journalists also saw missile debris that had hit the roof of a residential building in east Jerusalem.

A cylinder about one metre in diameter and several metres long protruded from the tiled roof of the three-story building as first responders inspected the damage.

No injuries or deaths were reported in Jerusalem. – AFP

Ingredients of life discovered in Ryugu asteroid samples

Bénédicte Salvétat Rey

PARIS – All the essential ingredients to make the DNA and RNA underpinning life on Earth have been discovered in samples collected from the asteroid Ryugu, scientists said yesterday.

The discovery comes after these building blocks of life were detected on another asteroid called Bennu, suggesting they are abundant throughout the Solar System.

One longstanding theory is that life first began on Earth when asteroids carrying fundamental elements crashed into our planet long ago.

The asteroids that hurtle through our Solar System give scientists a rare chance to study this possibility.

In 2014, the Japanese spacecraft Hayabusa-2 blasted off on a 300-million-kilometre mission to land on Ryugu, a 900-metre-wide asteroid.

It successfully managed to collect two samples of rocks weighing 5.4 grams each and bring them back to Earth in 2020.

Research in 2023 showed that these samples contained uracil, which is one of the four bases that make up RNA.

While DNA, the famed double helix, functions as a genetic blueprint, single-strand RNA is an all-important messenger, converting the instructions contained in DNA for implementation.

On Monday, a new study by a Japanese team of researchers in *Nature Astronomy* demonstrated that the samples contained all the “nucleobases” for both DNA and RNA.

These included uracil as well as adenine, guanine, cytosine and thymine.

This “does not mean that life existed on Ryugu”, the study’s lead author, Toshiki Koga, told AFP.

“Instead, their presence indicates that primitive asteroids could produce and preserve molecules that are important for the chemistry related to the origin of life,” added the biochemist from the Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology.

The discovery also “demonstrates their widespread presence throughout the Solar System and reinforces the hypothesis that carbonaceous asteroids contributed to the prebiotic chemical inventory of early Earth,” according to the study.

César Menor Salvan, an astrobiologist at Spain’s University of Alcalá not involved in the research, emphasised that “these results do not suggest that the origin of life took place in space”.

However, “with this and the results from Bennu, we have a very clear idea of which organic materials can form under prebiotic conditions anywhere in the universe,” he added.

‘Unique’ ammonia finding

Last year, the same building blocks were found in fragments brought back to Earth by NASA from the asteroid Bennu.

Scientists have also detected their presence in the meteorites Orgueil and Murchison, which were part of asteroids that fell to Earth.

For the new research, the Japanese team compared the amount of each nucleobase detected in these different space rocks, finding the quantities varied depending on their history.

They also identified a correlation between the ratios of the building blocks and the concentration of another important chemical for life: ammonia.

“Because no known formation mechanism predicts such a relationship, this finding may point to a previously unrecognised pathway for nucleobase formation in early Solar System materials,” Toshiki Koga said.

Morgan Cable, a scientist at the Victoria University of Wellington in Australia not involved in the research, called this particular finding “unique”.

“This discovery has important implications for how biologically important molecules may have originally formed and promoted the genesis of life on Earth,” she said. –AFP

Stagflation risk in US ‘quite high’: Stiglitz

GENEVA – The war in the Middle East has put the United States at high risk of falling into stagflation, Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz told AFP yesterday.

Even before the war erupted on February 28 with a barrage of US and Israeli strikes on Iran, Stiglitz said the US economy was already “close to stagflation” – a troublesome blend of high inflation and anaemic growth.

There were a number of “readings for slow growth before the war”, he said in an interview at the United Nations’ European headquarters in Geneva, “and this just... pushes us over the brink”.

The Middle East war has virtually halted activity in the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world’s crude oil supplies and a substantial amount of gas normally run, sending oil prices soaring.

Global oil prices have surged by 40 to 50 percent after Iran choked off the waterway and attacked energy and shipping industry targets in the Gulf in response to the US-Israeli war against the Islamic republic.

This has sparked fears of a shock to a global trading system, which is already under stress from US President Donald Trump’s tariff offensive as well as the fragmentation of supply chains since the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia’s war in Ukraine.

‘Unbalanced’

Stiglitz, who jointly won the Nobel Economics Prize in 2001 for his analysis of markets with asymmetric information, said the United States was the country most at risk of falling into stagflation, as it did during the oil shocks in the 1970s.

“The risk of stagflation seems to be quite high for the US,” said the professor at Columbia University in New York.



US economist Joseph Stiglitz, winner of the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel, speaks during an interview with AFP in Geneva yesterday. The war in the Middle East has put the United States at high risk of falling into dreaded stagflation, Stiglitz told AFP in an interview. –AFP

The situation elsewhere was not as clear-cut, said Stiglitz, who served as chief economist at the World Bank in the late 1990s after being the chairman of US president Bill Clinton’s council of economic advisers.

While Europe would certainly face inflationary pressures on energy too, it was also seeing a growth “stimulus” as it dramatically ramps up defence spending, after Washington “made it very clear that you cannot depend on the US for your defence”, he said.

Trump’s policies had meanwhile significantly weakened the US economy even before the war, he maintained.

Stiglitz pointed to troubling indicators, like the lack of labour force growth in 2025 and last month’s hike in unemployment.

And while there had been growth, it had been “unbalanced”, he said, with around a third coming from the creation of artificial intelligence data centres.

The stock market, meanwhile, “is doing well because it’s dominated by AI and tech firms”, he said.

“If you look at the rest of the stock market, it’s just languishing.”

Trump ‘destroyed confidence’

At the same time, Stiglitz said he expected to see Trump’s tariff policy boost inflation.

Typically, when applying tariffs, a country could expect to see the value of its currency rise, since it is buying fewer goods abroad, which should lower inflation, the economist said.

But in this case, he pointed out that “the dollar has gotten weaker”.

That, he said, is because “Trump has destroyed confidence in America and the dollar”.

“The weaker [US] dollar means that, rather than less inflation from the tariffs, there’s more inflation... Everything we import is more expensive in dollar terms.”

Added to that now is inflation from the war, as well as greater uncertainty among households and businesses.

They “don’t know what the tariffs are going to be, [or] how long this war is going to last. They don’t know what energy prices are going to be”, Stiglitz said.

Businesses, he insisted, “can’t invest in these circumstances”. –AFP

Slovenia decries ‘attack’ on democracy over alleged graft recordings

Ljubljana, Slovenia

Slovenia’s government said yesterday that the Alpine EU member’s democracy was under “attack” after covertly recorded videos showing alleged corruption were published anonymously just ahead of Sunday’s parliamentary elections.

The conservatives of three-time-prime-minister Janez Jansa have been leading in voter opinion surveys over Prime Minister Robert Golob’s liberals, though the gap has been closing in recent months.

Earlier this month, a series of secretly recorded conversations with an influential Slovenian lobbyist, a lawyer, a former minister and a manager were published.

The videos show them suggesting ways of influencing decisionmakers in Golob’s centre-left coalition government in order to speed up

procedures or gain contracts.

Some of those implicated said they had been recorded secretly at meetings with people claiming to represent foreign investors and were manipulated to compromise them and the authorities.

A Slovenian rights group, together with an investigative journalist and two researchers, in a press conference yesterday claimed Israeli intelligence firm Black Cube was behind the videos and linked it to Jansa’s Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS).

“This is a direct attack against our sovereignty,” Foreign Minister Tanja Fajon told Slovenian journalists in Brussels later when asked about the allegations.

She slammed “an attack against democracy” if the alleged foreign interference was proven.

Nika Kovac, director of rights

group Institute 8 March, told reporters earlier yesterday that the publication of the videos was “very similar to those released ahead of the elections in other countries in Europe and the world mostly attributed to intelligence company Black Cube”.

Weekly *Mladina*’s investigative journalist Borut Mekina told the same press conference that he discovered Black Cube officials had visited Ljubljana three times by the end of last year.

On their last visit on December 22, Jansa welcomed them personally at the SDS headquarters, Mekina said, citing undisclosed sources.

Jansa’s SDS in a statement said they had never heard about Black Cube.

He slammed “unprecedented corruption of the leftist elite” revealed through the videos. –AFP

BBC asks US court to dismiss Trump’s US\$10-billion lawsuit

LONDON – The BBC said yesterday it had asked a US federal court in Florida to dismiss a US\$10-billion lawsuit brought by President Donald Trump against the British broadcaster.

Trump launched a lawsuit last year over a BBC documentary that edited his 2021 speech ahead of the US Capitol riot.

The documentary was “never aired in Florida – or the US” or available to stream there on any platform, a BBC spokesperson said in a comment sent to AFP.

“We have therefore challenged jurisdiction of the Florida court and filed a motion to dismiss the President’s claim.”

The spokesman said the BBC had “said throughout we will

robustly defend the case against us”.

Lawyers for the BBC had already written in documents submitted to the Miami court in January that the broadcaster would “move to dismiss the complaint” over the court’s lack of “personal jurisdiction”.

The BBC documentary spliced together two separate sections of Trump’s speech on January 6, 2021, making it appear that he had explicitly urged supporters to attack the US Capitol in Washington.

The US leader is seeking “damages in an amount not less than US\$5,000,000,000” for each of two counts against the BBC, for alleged defamation and violation of the Florida Deceptive and Unfair Trade Practices Act. –AFP

Spanish king acknowledges ‘much abuse’ during Conquest

MADRID – King Felipe VI yesterday acknowledged “much abuse” during Spain’s conquest of the Americas, the latest attempt by a top Spanish official to address Mexico’s longstanding historical grievances.

Laws imposed by the Spanish crown in the 16th century to govern its colonies had a “desire to protect” indigenous peoples, the king said during a visit to an exhibition of Indigenous Mexican art in Madrid.

But “reality later made it impossible to fully enforce, and there was much abuse,” he added,

according to a video posted by the royal palace on X.

“There are things that later, when we study them and learn about them, you say: ‘Well, by today’s standards and values, they obviously cannot make us feel proud,’” the king said.

“But we have to understand them in their proper context, not with excessive moral presentism, but with objective and rigorous analysis” in order “to draw lessons,” he added.

Relations between Mexico and Spain have been strained since

2019 when Mexico’s then president Andrés Manuel López Obrador demanded an apology from Spain’s monarchy for abuses committed during Spain’s 1519-1521 Conquest of Mexico and the ensuing three centuries of colonial rule.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, López Obrador’s political ally and successor, revived the call and excluded the king from her inauguration in October 2024 partly because Spain had not responded to the apology demand.

Spain’s Foreign Minister

José Manuel Albares last year acknowledged the “pain and injustice” inflicted on indigenous peoples during the Spanish conquest as he inaugurated the exhibition which the king visited yesterday.

Sheinbaum welcomed the comments, saying they were the “first step” by the Spanish government in recognising the abuses committed.

Shortly after, Spain’s Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said improving Spain’s ties with Mexico is a priority for his government, adding there was “light and shadow”

in the two country’s shared history.

Mesoamerica, a region that comprised parts of Mexico and Central America, had an estimated population of 15 million to 30 million people when conquistador Hernan Cortes arrived with an army of several hundred men, bringing horses, swords, guns – and smallpox – in 1519.

After a century of battles, massacres, and plagues, only an estimated one million to two million indigenous inhabitants remained.

– AFP

Cubans abroad will be able to invest, own businesses on island: minister

HAVANA – Cubans living abroad will now be allowed to invest and own businesses on the island, a senior economic official said yesterday, unveiling a key reform as the economy struggles under intense US pressure.

“Cuba is open to having a fluid commercial relationship with US companies” and “also with Cubans residing in the United States and their descendants,” Oscar Pérez-Oliva, who is foreign trade minister and also deputy prime minister, told NBC News.

The broadcaster said Pérez-Oliva will announce the reform to the nation this week.

Miami in particular has a large community of Cubans who fled after the revolution that brought Fidel Castro to power in 1959 or in subsequent years as hardship dug in on the communist island. These Miami Cubans tend to be virulently anti-regime.

President Donald Trump’s administration has imposed an oil blockade on the Cuban government as Washington presses for regime change, making life harder for people already enduring food shortages and frequent blackouts as Cuba struggles under US trade sanctions since 1962.

“This extends beyond the commercial sphere,” added the minister. “It also applies to investments – not only small investments, but also large



A food vendor arranges his stall decorated with a poster of late Cuban leader Fidel Castro (1976–2008) and a national flag in Havana on Friday. – AFP

investments, particularly in infrastructure.”

He said the goal of this reform is to boost key sectors of the economy such as tourism and mining and rebuild Cuba’s ageing and decrepit electrical grid, which breaks down often and sometimes causes nationwide blackouts.

Trump has said Cuba will be “next” on his agenda after the Iran war and the US overthrow of Cuba’s top ally, Venezuela’s Nicolás Maduro, 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 told reporters on Sunday that Cuba hopes to make a deal that could happen “pretty quickly.”

“Cuba also wants to make a deal, and I think we will pretty soon either make a deal or do whatever we have to do,” Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One.

“So we’re talking to Cuba, but we’re going to do Iran before Cuba... So I think something will happen with Cuba pretty quickly,” he said.

Cuba’s President Miguel Díaz-Canel confirmed on Friday that his government had held talks over “bilateral differences” with the United States, though without any details about the nature of the discussions. – AFP

Rwanda threatens to end anti-jihadist ops in Mozambique

NAIROBI – Rwanda on Saturday threatened to withdraw its troops involved in anti-jihadist operations in northern Mozambique, where French oil giant TotalEnergies operates, saying its efforts were not being funded.

It has had a force of around 1,000 soldiers and police officers in Cabo Delgado province since 2021 helping to fight insurgents affiliated with the Islamic State (IC) group.

“We are ready to leave Mozambique, if our work and achievements are not valued,” Foreign Minister Olivier Nduhungirehe said in a statement posted on X on Saturday.

Nduhungirehe was responding to media reports that the European Peace Facility finance for peacekeeping in the region was set to run out.

Rwanda’s government said on Friday that its costs were at least 10 times higher than the 20 million euros (US\$23 million) spent by the EU on anti-jihadist operations there.

The army’s work “countering terrorism in Cabo Delgado has benefitted the Mozambican people and the companies investing in LNG”,

said government spokesperson Yolande Makolo in a post on X.

Northern Mozambique has enormous reserves of gas, which have attracted the attention of energy giants including TotalEnergies, Italy’s ENI and US company ExxonMobil.

At the end of January, TotalEnergies relaunched construction on a massive gas project there, halted five years earlier after a jihadist attack that claimed hundreds of lives.

The liquefied natural gas (LNG) project is expected to generate thousands of jobs and help make Mozambique one of the world’s biggest LNG exporters.

While Cabo Delgado has not experienced another attack on the scale of the 2021 assault, there are regular attacks, including beheadings and kidnappings.

More than 6,400 people have been killed since the insurgency began in 2017, according to conflict tracker ACLED.

The violence has forced tens of thousands of people to feel their homes. – AFP

Mexico nabs suspect linked to ‘El Mencho’ raid

MEXICO CITY – Mexican authorities have arrested a suspected drug trafficker who played a key role in the raid that led to the death of Mexican drug lord Nemesio Oseguera last month, the defense ministry said on Sunday.

Oseguera, alias “El Mencho,” led the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) and was fatally wounded in a raid by elite Mexican troops on February 22 after being seen with a woman in a country club in the western state of Jalisco.

Mexican authorities have detained José N, nicknamed “El Pepe”, who was responsible for transporting Oseguera’s partner to a luxurious cabin in the Tapalpa municipality, the defence ministry said in a brief statement.

Military intelligence services managed to track down Oseguera after finding out about his

rendezvous, authorities said after the operation.

“El Pepe” was considered one of the main logistics operators of CJNG and was apprehended in the Tlajomulco municipality in Jalisco.

“Drugs, weapons, and a vehicle were seized from the detainee,” the defence ministry added.

Oseguera was Mexico’s most wanted man and was also sought by the United States, which had a US\$15 million bounty on him.

After his death, CJNG members blocked roads in 20 of Mexico’s 32 states and torched vehicles and businesses, including in Guadalajara and the Jalisco tourist resort of Puerto Vallarta.

Over 70 people were killed during the operation to capture Oseguera and subsequent clashes between the security forces and CJNG gunmen. – AFP

Chile’s new govt signs deal with US on critical minerals

SANTIAGO DE CHILE – The government of Chile’s new right-wing president José Antonio Kast signed a memorandum with the United States on Thursday to cooperate on the supply of critical minerals and rare earths.

Chile is the world’s leading producer of copper and the second-largest producer of lithium, critical to the tech and green energy sectors.

China, which dominates the global supply chain for critical minerals, is Chile’s top customer for both metals.

On his first full day in office, the US-backed Kast presided over

the signing of a joint declaration between US Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau and Foreign Minister Francisco Pérez Mackenna to “establish consultations” on the minerals.

The two countries committed to “explore financing mechanisms, both private and public, for investment projects involving critical minerals,” the Chilean foreign ministry said in a statement.

“Mutual support in the supply of critical minerals is fundamental for the national security and commercial industries of both countries,” the ministry added.

President Donald Trump has moved to aggressively reassert US dominance in Latin America in the face of competition from China for trade and influence.

Kast took office in the wake of a furore caused by a project to link Chile and Hong Kong via a submarine fibre optic cable.

Washington sanctioned three officials from former left-wing president Gabriel Boric’s administration for greenlighting the project, even after the government had rescinded its approval.

In the run-up to his inauguration, Kast accused Boric of withholding information about the project. – AFP

Australia urged to be brave against China in Asian Cup semis



PERTH - Australia coach Joe Montemurro urged his team yesterday to be brave in their Women's Asian Cup semi-final against defending champions China, who are wary of the hosts' attacking prowess.

The Matildas scraped into the last four after a 2-1 win over North Korea in which they were on the back foot for much of the game.

"We haven't always been brave enough to control the ball, and as you all know, my way of thinking is with the ball," said Montemurro ahead of the clash in Perth today.

"So obviously the focus has been on that. We're playing a team that is very, very well structured, very well organised."

Australia received a boost with star players Steph Catley and Hayley Raso both declared fit after missing the quarter-final with concussion.

The semi-final will be extra special for Leicester City midfielder Emily van Egmond, who will become Australia's most-capped player in her 170th game, surpassing Clare Polkinghorne.

Van Egmond has played at four World Cups, three Olympic Games and three Asian Cups, and said it was all about collective effort.

"We've worked hard to reach the semi-finals and it's all about team performance," said the 32-year-old, who Montemurro called "one of the best footballers that we've produced".

Australia have the benefit of an extra day's rest following their efforts against North Korea on Friday.

China played a day later and needed to toil through extra time to tame Chinese Taipei 2-0 in a game that saw key striker Wang Shuang pick up a second yellow card.

She is suspended for the semis, but China have a coach who knows Australia very well.

Ante Milicic coached the Matildas at the 2019 World Cup, leading them to the round of 16, and always keeps close tabs on them.

"I always follow the Matildas from afar and track the players' journey," he said.

"Right now I'm enjoying my time with China, and leading them to the semi-finals is a

dream for me and the staff."

Milicic is particularly wary of the threat posed up front by Australia's Sam Kerr, Raso and Caitlin Foord.

"These forward players of Australia can unlock any defence and have been performing at the top level for a long time," he said.

"Defensively we have to be very strong. We not only have to contain Australia's attacking threat, but we have also shown that we can attack and need to find the right balance."

The winner will face either Japan or South Korea in Saturday's final in Sydney.

The game will be played at 6 p.m. today Macau time.
 - AFP/MPD

Chelsea fined £10.75 million for historical financial breaches



LONDON - Chelsea were fined £10.75 million (US\$14.27 million) and received a suspended one-year transfer ban yesterday in relation to historical breaches of Premier League rules.

The Blues avoided a points deduction after self-reporting the undisclosed payments of more than £47 million under former owner Roman Abramovich.

The sanctions relate to information shared with the league by the consortium led by American businessman Todd Boehly following their takeover of Chelsea from Russian billionaire Abramovich in 2022.

The Premier League found that between 2011 and 2018 undisclosed payments by third parties associated with Abramovich were made to players, unregistered agents and individuals connected to clubs, helping to facilitate transfers for players including Eden Hazard, Samuel Eto'o and Willian.

The Premier League said those payments, which totalled £47,524,925.74, were made with the "knowledge and approval" of senior former Chelsea officials and were not properly disclosed.

However, the league determined that even if the payments had been

properly included in historical financial submissions, the club would not have been in breach of the profitability and sustainability rules (PSR).

Officials said that Chelsea's "proactive self-reporting, admissions of breach and exceptional co-operation" were also mitigating circumstances when it came to deciding the severity of the punishments to be imposed upon the west London side.

More than £23 million was paid to seven unregistered agents, or entities associated with them, in connection with the transfers of seven players to the club. Five of the seven were named in the sanction agreement as Hazard, Ramires, David Luiz, Andre Schurrle and Nemanja Matic.

Payments of over £19 million were made to facilitate the transfers of Willian and Eto'o to Chelsea from Russian club Anzhi Makhachkala in 2013, the sanction agreement revealed.

Chelsea have also been charged by the Football Association with 74 alleged breaches of the English governing body's rules, also in connection to the information shared by the Blues' new owners.

Chelsea are expecting a financial

rather than a sporting sanction in respect of those charges because of the level of co-operation their new owners have shown with the FA's investigation.

Responding to yesterday's announcement, the club issued a statement saying: "Chelsea Football Club is pleased to confirm that the club has reached a settlement with the Premier League in relation to historical regulatory matters that were self-reported by the club in 2022."

The Blues also said they welcomed the Premier League's recognition of its "exceptional co-operation" and that "without those voluntary disclosures and the act of self-reporting, a number of the Premier League rule breaches may never have come to the attention of the League".

Chelsea boss Liam Rosenior said the sanctions were not a "negative distraction".

"I think actually that's a line drawn through that issue and we can move on and we can plan to make this club as strong as possible in the long term," he said at a press conference ahead of today's Champions League last-16 second leg against Paris Saint-Germain.

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

- AFP/MPD



Arsenal's English midfielder Max Dowman takes part in a team training session at the Arsenal training centre in London Colney, north of London, yesterday, on the eve of their UEFA Champions League, Last 16, second-leg football match against Leverkusen.

Mikel Arteta said Dowman is ready to start "regularly" for Arsenal after the history-making teen sensation pushes for a place in today's Champions League clash with Bayer Leverkusen.

Dowman starred as Arsenal beat Everton 2-0 on Saturday to move nine points clear at the top of the Premier League. Aged just 16 years and 73 days, the midfield prodigy's goal against Everton on Saturday made him the youngest scorer in Premier League history.
 - AFP

Man City must be 'perfect' to stun Real Madrid: Guardiola



MANCHESTER - Pep Guardiola admits Manchester City will have to play a "perfect" game when they face the "massive" task of overturning a 3-0 deficit against Real Madrid in the Champions League today.

Guardiola's side are on the brink of elimination after the last-16 first leg loss in Madrid last week.

City must produce one of the greatest fightbacks in the history of the Champions League to avoid being knocked out by Real for a third successive season.

It is a daunting challenge against the 15-time European champions and City boss Guardiola knows only a sublime display in the second leg at the Etihad Stadium will give his team a chance of a miraculous escape.

"I have to admit the task is massive. To score more than three goals against Madrid is not easy," Guardiola told reporters yesterday.

"The result in the first leg was not the perfect one but at the same time we are here. It's a football game, everything can happen.

"We have to create as much momentum as possible with our people. It has to be a

perfect game in many, many departments.

"Always we can create chances, we know that, but this season we're not finishing. If we are able to be clinical there and defend well, always we will be in the game."

Guardiola called on City to emulate the spirit of one of their most memorable fightbacks as they seek inspiration against Real.

City came from 2-0 down with three goals in the final 14 minutes against Aston Villa in the last game of the 2021-22 season to win the Premier League title.

'You never know'

"Aston Villa, the last game to win the Premier League - 74 minutes 0-2 and we made three goals in 12 minutes," Guardiola said.

"Of course we have to take more risk in terms of trying, but even if the results are not good in the first half we have to keep going, carry on, go, because you never know."

City captain Bernardo Silva echoed Guardiola's belief that the tie is not over yet.

"This sport has taught us that a lot of things can happen in a football game," he said.

"Even though the result in Madrid was really bad, we will fight until the end.

"After a big defeat, on the day you feel like everything is very dark, then it gets brighter and brighter. We know what this team is capable of."

City's preparations for the match have been unusual as Guardiola opted to give his players a day off yesterday and not train the day before the game.

That decision could potentially risk censure from tournament organisers UEFA as clubs are obliged to allow media access to a training session or match preparation for 15 minutes.

Guardiola's said the team's recent heavy schedule was behind his decision, with a lacklustre 1-1 draw at West Ham on Saturday dealing a major blow to their Premier League title hopes.

"I prefer today everybody be at home. We'll train tomorrow," Guardiola said.

"Repetition for training will not make us play better in the game against Madrid because today in modern football, in the top teams, training doesn't much improve a lot."

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

- AFP/MPD

Chelsea's Neto avoids ban for pushing PSG ball boy



LAUSANNE - Chelsea winger Pedro Neto is free to play in this week's Champions League last-16 second leg against Paris Saint-Germain after being given a retrospective yellow card for pushing a ball boy last week, UEFA said yesterday.

The Portuguese forward apologised for the incident which happened in PSG's 5-2 first-leg win at the Parc des Princes.

A UEFA investigation found Neto was guilty of unsportsmanlike conduct and added a booking to his disciplinary record.

He will be available for today's second leg at Stamford Bridge.

"We were losing and in the emotion of the game I wanted to get the ball fast and I gave him a little push," Neto told broadcaster TNT Sports after the game.

"I'm not like this. It was in the heat of the moment and I want to apologise. I gave him my shirt. I'm really sorry about it - I feel I have to apologise to him." - AFP

Milan-Cortina Paralympics end as a 'beacon of unity'

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO – The 2026 Winter Paralympics came to an end on Sunday with a glitzy closing ceremony in Cortina as China topped the medal table of a Games that saw several countries protest the decision to allow Russian athletes to compete under their national flag for the first time since 2014.

Amid a global back-drop of war in the Middle East and Russia's ongoing offensive in Ukraine, International Paralympic Committee President (IPC) Andrew Parsons told the Games' Paralympians that they "rose above pressure, expectation and global tension to keep the focus where it belongs: on you and your sport".

The IPC's decision to allow Russia to return to the Paralympic fold after 12 years away dominated much of the headlines leading up to and during the Games, with the country finishing third in the medals table, courtesy of eight golds, one silver and three bronzes.

However, for the most part, the nation's return went off without incident in Italy.

Parsons hailed the Games as a "record-breaking success", saying they featured "more athletes, more nations, more women" than any previous edition.

President of the Milan-Cortina organising committee Giovanni Malago, during his speech, hailed Paralympians' ability to "inspire positive change in society".

The Italian added the Games were a "beacon of unity in a world threatened by darkness and division".

The ceremony started with a dance choreography featuring able-bodied and disabled dancers.

For the raising of the Italian flag, medallists representing the host country were brought out to rapturous applause before the national anthem was played.

Italy enjoyed its best-ever Paralympic Winter Games, winning 16 medals on home snow and finishing fourth in the table.

The opening ceremony was

boycotted by several countries following the move to allow Russia and Belarus to take part in the Games under their national flags rather than as neutral competitors.

Ukraine, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland were again absent on Sunday with a volunteer carrying their national flag.

However, no country "formally informed the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) that they are not attending for political reasons", the organisation's communications officer Craig Spence told a press conference earlier Sunday.

Contrary to the opening ceremony, there were no boos as the Russian flag entered the curling stadium in Cortina carried by double gold medallist Varvara Voronchikhina.

Over to France

As the ceremony drew to its climax, the Paralympic flag was lowered and a new one was handed by Parsons to representatives of French Alps 2030 - the hosts of the next Winter Games, which will follow the same dispersed model as Milan-Cortina.

Four members of the French Paralympic team then took to the stage as La Marseillaise was played and the Tricolore raised.

Sofia Tansella, an Italian girl with spinal muscular atrophy, brought the Games to an end by extinguishing the two Paralympic cauldrons in Milan and Cortina.

China again topped the medal table with 44 medals in total, including 15 golds. The United States came in second with a total of 24 medals.

Alpine skiers Johannes Aigner and Veronika Aigner were amongst the stand-out performers at the Games, with the Austrian brother and sister claiming three and four gold medals, respectively.

America's Oksana Masters further cemented her place in Paralympic lore as she won four golds and one bronze in biathlon and cross-country skiing. –AFP

Photos on page 16

Sinner tops Medvedev to win first Indian Wells title

Tennis

INDIAN WELLS – World number two Jannik Sinner surged home to beat Daniil Medvedev 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (7/4) on Sunday to capture his first Indian Wells ATP Masters 1000 crown.

Four-time Grand Slam champion Sinner won his first title of 2026, rallying from 0-4 down in the second-set tiebreaker to seal the win against a resurgent Medvedev, winner of the title in Dubai last month who was riding a nine-match ATP winning streak.

That included an upset semi-final triumph over Carlos Alcaraz that ended the top-ranked Spaniard's 16-match winning streak to start the season.

But Sinner, who didn't drop a set in the tournament, proved just that bit better in a match where both sets went to the tiebreakers without a break of serve.

"I kept believing and kept pushing," Sinner said of his closing burst. "I went for my shots a little more. A third set, we would have started even, so I tried my best to close it out and I am very happy."

"It was an incredible ending," added Sinner, who said he wasn't troubled by the hot afternoon temperatures thanks to the lack of humidity and some extra days of

pre-tournament preparation.

Sinner didn't face a break point in the one-hour 55-minute contest, winning 43 of the 47 points on which he put his first serve in play.

Medvedev saved the only two break points he faced in the seventh game of the opening set, but Sinner's tiebreaker prowess proved too much.

Medvedev was up 5-4 in the first-set tiebreaker when he let a ball sail by him and it landed in.

He'd go on to save one set point, but Sinner gave himself another with a blistering forehand that the Russian couldn't handle and pocketed the set with a thundering service winner.

Medvedev looked on track to level the match when he raced to a 4-0 lead in the second-set decider - aided by Sinner's second double-fault of the match.

But Sinner roared home to join Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer as the only players to win all six of the ATP's hardcourt Masters 1000 tournaments.

"It feels amazing, great achievement," said Sinner, who was already turning his gaze to the Miami Open, the second leg of the "Sunshine Double" where men's first-round play begins tomorrow.

"I have couple of days to relax [but] there is not so much time in

between here and Miami ... we try to play the best tennis possible there, too."

Bittersweet feeling

Medvedev said the outcome was "bittersweet" after a semi-final victory over Alcaraz - who beat him in the Indian Wells finals in 2023 and 2024 - that felt like winning the tournament.

"But that's not the reality," he said. "There is a final to play. I had my opportunity, small opportunity in the first set. A bit bigger opportunity in the tiebreak in the second."

"But at the same time, I was hanging by not big margins in the whole set."

"It's a bittersweet feeling where it feels good to do what I did this week. But of course I wanted to try to push him even more. He was serving phenomenal. [It] was super tough to be on the return position today."

While Medvedev missed a chance to become just the second player to beat both Alcaraz and Sinner in the same tournament, the former world number one underscored his return to form after a disappointing 2025 campaign and returned to the top 10 yesterday.

"It's great to see Daniil back playing this level," Sinner said. "I do believe that tennis needs him."

–AFP

Sport in brief

Rising star Antonelli says Chinese GP triumph 'starting point' for F1 success

MILAN – Kimi Antonelli said yesterday that he is eyeing further Formula One success after the teenage Italian announced himself on the world stage with victory in the Chinese Grand Prix.

The 19-year-old won his maiden GP from pole position on Sunday and was greeted by media and enthusiastic fans as he touched down in his native Bologna.

"I'm so happy for the win and to have brought the Italian flag back onto the highest step of the podium," Antonelli told reporters.

"It's a starting point and I hope I can keep going because we're on the right track. It won't be easy."

Antonelli, who took over Lewis Hamilton's old seat at Mercedes at the start of the 2025 season, is the first Italian to win an F1 GP since Giancarlo Fisichella 20 years ago.

He finished in front of Mercedes teammate George Russell and Ferrari's Hamilton after becoming the youngest pole sitter in F1 history.

Antonelli even hinted that he was aiming to become the first Italian to win the drivers' championship since Alberto Ascari in 1953.

"I've removed a bit of weight from my shoulders, I'm more relaxed. It's the kind of result which gives you strength and more awareness of what you can do," he said.

"There's another, bigger step, which is the most difficult. I'm sure that if I do everything well we can get there."

Antonelli's win was huge news in Italy and led to tennis superstar Jannik Sinner dedicating his Indian Wells triumph to F1's rising star.

"I was really surprised by Sinner's homage, I sent him a message because I really appreciated it, it was really nice of him," he said.

Antonelli sits four points behind Russell in the world championship standings with the Japanese GP coming up on March 29. –AFP

Djokovic withdraws from Miami Open

Tennis
MIAMI – Novak Djokovic has withdrawn from the Miami Open with a right shoulder injury, organisers said Sunday.

The 24-time Grand Slam champion reached the fourth round at Indian Wells this week, but the six-time Miami champion opted out of the second leg of the "Sunshine Double" - where he fell to Jakub Mensik in last year's final.

Indian Wells marked 38-year-old Djokovic's first tournament since he lost to Carlos Alcaraz in the Australian Open final.

He played with a compression sleeve on his right arm, telling Tennis Channel he was dealing with a forearm injury that was intermittently affecting his serve.

"If I don't serve for five or six minutes then I feel like the first

couple of serves of that game are a bit painful," Djokovic said. –AFP

Chinese paddler Fan Zhendong to join Borussia Dusseldorf

Table tennis
BERLIN - German table tennis club Saarbrücken announced yesterday that Chinese star Fan Zhendong will leave the team at the end of the current season to join Borussia Dusseldorf.

Fan joined Saarbrücken in June last year, and the club said signing a player of his caliber had allowed it to play a pioneering role in the sport, describing the move as a significant moment in the history of German and European table tennis.

"I would like to express my sincerest thanks to the Saarbrücken table tennis club for giving me this incredible opportunity," Fan said in a statement.

"It has been a very special experience in my career. However, at this stage of my career, I feel ready to take a new step. Borussia Dusseldorf is one of the strongest forces in European and world table tennis, and my close friendship with Timo Boll has also inspired me to embrace this new challenge."

At the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, Fan won gold medals in both the men's singles and men's team events. The victory completed his career Grand Slam after he had already secured singles titles at the World Cup and the World Table Tennis Championships. –Xinhua

Aryna Sabalenka poses with the championship trophy after defeating Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan during their Women's Singles Finals at the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells Tennis Garden on Sunday in Indian Wells, California. Sabalenka saved a match point on the way to a 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (8/6) victory over Rybakina on Sunday to claim a long-awaited first Indian Wells title. –AFP



'One Battle After Another' dominates Oscars

Paula Ramon

HOLLYWOOD – “One Battle After Another” triumphed at the Oscars on Sunday, winning six awards, including the coveted best picture statuette, besting “Sinners” in a thrilling finale to one of the most competitive awards seasons in recent years.

Director Paul Thomas Anderson personally won three Oscars, the first of his career, for his political thriller that tackles the hot-button issues of immigration raids and white supremacy.

“You make a guy work really hard for one of these,” he said to laughter as he accepted the award for best director.

“I wrote this movie for my kids to say sorry for the housekeeping mess that we left in this world we’re handing off to them,” he said after collecting the best adapted screenplay prize.

“But also with the encouragement that they will be the generation that hopefully brings us some common sense and decency

“One Battle” tells the story of a pot-addled ex-revolutionary, played by Leonardo DiCaprio, who struggles to remember passphrases in a battle of wits against the terrifying Colonel Lockjaw, played by best supporting actor winner Sean Penn.

The film also won best editing and the inaugural award for casting.

Anderson is one of the greatest auteurs of



Puerto Rican actor Benicio Del Toro (centre), US actress Chase Infiniti (right) and US actor Leonardo DiCaprio celebrate the award for Best Picture for “One Battle After Another” onstage during the 98th Annual Academy Awards at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California on Sunday. – AFP



Irish actress Jessie Buckley accepts the award for Best Actress in a Leading Role for “Hamnet” onstage during the 98th Annual Academy Awards at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California on Sunday. – AFP

contemporary US cinema, but until Sunday had never won an Oscar, despite 11 previous nominations for acclaimed films including “There Will Be Blood” and “Boogie Nights.”

‘Sinners’ wins four

Ryan Coogler’s “Sinners,” a bluesy vampire fable that offers a meditation on America’s difficult racial history, had come into the evening with a record-tying 16 nominations.

It left with four awards, including best original screenplay for Coogler and best actor for Michael B. Jordan, who plays gangster twin brothers Smoke and Stack seeking their fortune in the segregated South.

Jordan told reporters backstage that he had created detailed journals to flesh out the backstories of both roles in order to clearly express “those nuances between the two.”

Other prizes were best score for Ludwig Goransson and best cinematography for Autumn Durald Arkapaw, the first time a woman won in that category.

Coogler called his writing award “an incredible honour” and told journalists he credited a creative writing professor for his success.

Both “One Battle” and “Sinners” were produced by Warner Bros. Studio, which was the subject of an intense bidding war between Paramount and Netflix.

The studio claimed 12 of the 24 awards

on offer on Sunday.

In perhaps the least surprising award of the evening, Jessie Buckley won best actress for her portrayal of William Shakespeare’s heartbroken wife Agnes navigating the loss of their son in “Hamnet.”

Buckley told journalists backstage that it felt “crazy” to win the award on what is Mother’s Day back in her native Ireland.

“I feel like what a gift to get to explore motherhood through this incredible mother that Agnes is,” she said.

Amy Madigan took home the Oscar for best supporting actress for her turn as a demented witch in horror film “Weapons.”

The veteran performer, who scooped the Actors Award two weeks ago, said: “I was in the shower last night, and I thought, ‘Well, this must be a special day, because I’m shaving my legs.’”

Norwegian family drama “Sentimental Value” was named best international feature.

“KPop Demon Hunters” won for best animated feature and best original song for “Golden.”

Poignant tributes

Veteran host Conan O’Brien kept proceedings light and funny, with his signature blend of zany satire.

That included a swipe at allies of President Donald Trump, who had so

objected to Puerto Rican artist Bad Bunny being the star of the Super Bowl halftime show that they had put on their own.

“I should warn you tonight could get political, okay?” he told Tinseltown’s biggest names.

“And if that makes you uncomfortable, there’s an alternate Oscars being hosted by Kid Rock.”

A lengthy In Memoriam segment paid emotional tribute to director Rob Reiner, who was stabbed to death in his home in December, and to Robert Redford, which included a rare stage performance from Barbra Streisand.

Billy Crystal, whom Reiner cast opposite Meg Ryan in “When Harry Met Sally,” said Reiner’s effect on Hollywood was immeasurable.

“Rob’s movies will last for lifetimes because they were about what makes us laugh and cry and what we aspire to be: far better in his eyes, far kinder, far funnier and far more human,” he said.

Streisand, 83, who played opposite Redford in the 1973 classic “The Way We Were,” said she had loved a man who affectionately called her “Babs.”

“He was a brilliant, subtle actor,” she said. “Bob had real backbone, on and off the screen.

“I called him an intellectual cowboy who blazed his own trail. I miss him now more than ever.” – AFP



US actor Michael B. Jordan accepts the award for Best Actor in a Leading Role for “Sinners” onstage during the 98th Annual Academy Awards at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California on Sunday. – AFP

S Koreans bask in Oscars triumph for ‘KPop Demon Hunters’



South Korean singer Kim Eun-jae, known as EJAE, poses with her Oscar for best original song for “KPop Demon Hunters” as she attends the Vanity Fair Oscar Party at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) in Los Angeles on Sunday. – AFP

SEOUL – South Korean fans and media basked in the success of “KPop Demon Hunters” yesterday after the film clinched two Oscars and added to the country’s growing pantheon of cultural hits.

The fantasy flick, a clash of good versus evil drawing heavily on Korean mythology and driven by a pulsing K-pop soundtrack, won the Academy Awards for best animated feature and best original song at Sunday’s ceremony in Hollywood.

It had already built a massive global following, becoming the most-watched original film of all time on streaming giant Netflix and hoovering up accolades including a Grammy for lead track “Golden”, the first such win for a K-pop song.

South Koreans hailed their latest cultural product to infect the world with “K-syndrome” – the irresistible surrender to the country’s movies, music, books,

fashion and cuisine.

“So the so-called K-syndrome is now going into animated film as well,” wrote one viewer using the YouTube handle Kim Chang-soo, echoing widespread pride online.

Much of the domestic reaction centred on Korean-Canadian co-director Maggie Kang’s emotional acceptance speech, with the Seoul-born filmmaker dedicating the prizes to her motherland.

“The culture ministry should at least award her a medal for that speech!” one internet user commented on a news portal.

A headline in the *Hankook Ilbo* newspaper quoted Kang’s address directly, blaring: “This is for Korea and Koreans everywhere”.

News channel YTN lavished praise on Kang’s “heartfelt message to Korea”, referring to the movie by its affectionate shorthand “Kedehun”, a combination of the title’s first three syllables.

The film’s dual Oscars triumph

caps a remarkable run since its June release on Netflix.

On the back of its blockbuster-style debut, the platform also released a limited “sing-along” edition in North American cinemas for one weekend, which topped the box-office chart.

Netflix has already announced a

sequel, though no release date has been set.

The film’s Grammy win for “Golden” was widely viewed as a breakthrough moment for K-pop, marking the genre’s first victory at an awards show that had eluded the industry despite its global popularity. – AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 4°C~14°C	Manila 21°C~30°C	New York -1°C~7°C	Lisbon 13°C~20°C
Shanghai 11°C~13°C	Bangkok 25°C~34°C	London 6°C~14°C	Rio de Janeiro 21°C~30°C
Hong Kong 18°C~23°C	Tokyo 8°C~15°C	Frankfurt 2°C~11°C	Luanda 25°C~29°C
Taipei 15°C~27°C	Singapore 23°C~33°C	Vancouver 10°C~12°C	Maputo 21°C~30°C
Guangzhou 16°C~27°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~35°C	Paris 5°C~17°C	Dili 24°C~30°C
Nanjing 8°C~11°C	Jakarta 23°C~33°C	Moscow -2°C~7°C	São Tomé 27°C~32°C
Guilin 16°C~24°C	Seoul 6°C~16°C	Las Vegas 18°C~33°C	Praia 19°C~26°C
Xi’an 4°C~8°C	Sydney 21°C~29°C	Monte Carlo 11°C~17°C	Bissau 20°C~36°C



1. Volunteers parade with flags of countries participating during the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Paralympic Games closing ceremony at the Olympic Ice Stadium in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy on Sunday.

- AFP



2. The cauldron is extinguished at Arco della Pace in Milan, Italy, on Sunday. The closing ceremony of Milan-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games was held in Cortina d'Ampezzo of Italy on Sunday.

- Xinhua



3. Italian-Bulgarian cellist Francesca Formisano performs during the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Paralympic Games closing ceremony at the Olympic Ice Stadium in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy on Sunday.

- AFP



4. Milano-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Games mascots Milo (right) and Tina are seen during the closing ceremony of Milan-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, on Sunday.

- Xinhua



5. A dancer performs during the closing ceremony of Milan-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, on Sunday.

- Xinhua



6. Performers take part in the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Paralympic Games closing ceremony at the Olympic Ice Stadium in Cortina d'Ampezzo, on Sunday.

- AFP