

FM Commissioner Bian stresses 'diplomacy benefitting Macau' concept

Staff Reporter

Bian Lixin, the recently appointed Commissioner of the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the Macau Special Administrative Region, said yesterday that her office will fully carry out its concept of "diplomacy benefitting Macau" and align its work with the development of the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan, which was approved by the nation's lawmakers last Thursday, and support the local government in formulating and implementing its 3rd Five-Year Plan, which will undergo a public consultation process next month.

"We will fully leverage our diplomatic resources to serve Macau's high-quality development as well as its lasting prosperity and stability," Bian said in a one-hour press briefing headlined "China's Two Sessions".

The well-prepared and presented briefing, which included an informal gathering, was attended by consul-general, representatives from the Forum Macao member states, foreign chambers of commerce, the United Nations University Institute



Ministry of Foreign Affairs Commissioner Bian Lixin gives a briefing about the nation's recently completed "Two Sessions", at the headquarters of the Commission in Zape yesterday. The briefing was attended by diplomats, Forum Macao member states, foreign chambers of commerce, UNUI, print and broadcast media and other representatives. - Photo: MPDG

(UNUI) and Typhoon Committee Secretariat, as well as from Macau's English- and Portuguese-language print and broadcasting media.

Bian, a former head of the ministry's Personnel Department, succeeded Liu Xianfa at the helm of the commissioner's office early

this year. Liu concluded his five-year tenure in Macau on January 15, 2026 and has meanwhile been appointed the central authorities'

special representative on African affairs.

Her briefing consisted of three parts: I. Achievements of China's Economic and Social Development during the 14th Five-Year Plan Period; II. Main Points of the Outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan; III. New Opportunities of Development for Macau.

She mentioned at the beginning of the third part of her briefing that "Macau is a pearl in the palm of the motherland" and that "President Xi Jinping has always cared for the development of Macau and the well-being of all its residents".

She stressed that during the 14th Five-Year Plan period, under the leadership and care of President Xi, with the great support of the central government and the mainland, Macau's chief executive and government, uniting and leading all sectors of society, have fully implemented the "patriots governing Macau" principle, "upheld and improved the executive-led system, firmly safeguarded national security, accelerated appropriate economic diversification, and comprehensively improved governance efficiency".

Continued on p.3

US Fed keeps interest rate unchanged at 3.5-3.75 pct

NEW YORK – The US Federal Reserve yesterday decided to maintain its target range for the federal funds rate unchanged at 3.5-3.75 percent, in line with market expectations. - Xinhua



Merz urges swift end to war against Iran

BERLIN – German Chancellor Friedrich Merz yesterday called for efforts to achieve a swift end to the war against Iran through diplomatic means, warning that the ongoing conflict damages all parties, including the United States.

In an address to the Bundestag, the lower house of the German parliament, Merz noted that Germany still has many unanswered questions regarding the war and that there is no convincing concept of how this military operation could succeed.

He pointed out that Washington did not consult Berlin prior to the strikes. Had Germany been consulted, it would have advised against the operation, he added.

As long as the war continues, Germany will not participate in using military means to ensure freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, Merz reiterated.

Merz emphasized that Europe has an interest in seeing a swift end to the war. (More on pages 7-11) - Xinhua



Museumgoers look at a bronze human head from the Sanxingdui (present-day Guanghan City in Sichuan Province) archaeological site during an exhibition on the bronze civilization of southwest China at the Guadalajara Museum in Guadalajara, Spain, on Tuesday. The exhibition showcasing the bronze civilization of southwest China opened on Tuesday. -Xinhua

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The Macau Post Daily

Xi calls for strengthening cooperation with Turkmenistan

China and Turkmenistan should expand the scale of cooperation in the natural gas sector, and elevate trade and investment levels, President Xi Jinping said in Beijing yesterday. - Story on p. 7

US launches new era of drug war with LatAm allies

The US and allies in Latin America and the Caribbean have ushered in a new phase of anti-drug cooperation including extraditions, shared intelligence and security plans despite criticism from international organizations. - Story on p. 11

EU voices commitment to Mozambique security amid funding concerns

EU chief António Costa said on Tuesday that the 27-nation bloc was committed to "invest in regional stability" after talks with Mozambique's leader Daniel Chapo. - Story on p. 12

4 hurt in two-car bus crash on Avenida da Amizade

Armando Neves

The Fire Service Bureau (CB) announced in a statement that four local residents were injured in a two-vehicle bus crash on Avenida da Amizade (友誼大馬路) last night.

At 7:36 p.m., the bureau received a report about a traffic accident near Oceanus casino on Avenida da Amizade. After arriving at the scene, the statement said, the firefighters saw that while the bus's front windscreen was shattered, two private cars – one dark-coloured, the other white – were damaged, and nearby water-filled traffic barriers (known in Cantonese as “water horses”) were also damaged.

After the crash, several passengers got off the bus and remained by the roadside. Traffic at the scene was temporarily disrupted. The driver of the dark-coloured car was trapped inside.

Public Security Police (PSP) Traffic Police Division Chief Wong Chi Wang told reporters at the scene that upon investigation it was discovered that around 7:30 p.m., while the white car was heading towards Avenida Dr. Sun Yat-Sen (孫逸仙大馬路) from Rua dos Pescadores (漁翁街), its driver attempted to overtake another car on the bend leading to the Macau Grand Prix grandstand, after which the driver lost control and collided with the avenue's water traffic barriers and



This photo was downloaded from social media platform Facebook last night. The Post cannot vouch for its authenticity.

the dark-coloured car travelling in the opposite direction. The force of the impact was such that the dark-coloured vehicle was pushed into a TCM route 51 bus travelling behind it, Wong said.

Wong also said that the breathalyser tests for the driver of the white car and the bus driver both showed a reading of zero, while the police were unable to carry out a breathalyser test on the driver of the dark-coloured car as he had been rushed to the public Conde de S. Januário Hospital Centre adding that the traffic police were considering whether to take legal action against the driver of the white vehicle.

The Fire Service Bureau's Areia Preta Operational Centre Chief Ng Chon Leong told reporters that the four injured were the three male drivers and a female bus passenger, aged between 35 and 61, adding that apart from the trapped driver, who was believed to have sustained of a fractured thigh, the others suffered chest contusions.

The front of the dark-coloured vehicle was severely damaged in the accident, and the firefighters had to use cutting equipment to cut open the front of the vehicle in order to rescue the trapped driver, Ng said. ■

Macao Orchestra brings 'Music of Love' to community

Khalel Vallo

The “Music of Love” community concert series was played during the Spring Festival, as the Macao Orchestra visited elderly homes and special education schools from February 24 to 27, according to a Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) statement on Tuesday.

Organised by the bureau and the Macao Orchestra Company Limited, the initiative saw the orchestra's percussion section perform at multiple venues, including Care Home “Júbilo Brilhante” (“Shining Joy”), Elderly Home “Yee On” and its branches, Rehabilitation Service Complex “Cruz Iluminada” (“Illuminated Cross”), Asilo de Betânia (a care and rehabilitation shelter), Care Home “Sol Nascente” da Areia Preta (“Rising Sun”), and the Concórdia School for Special

Education, the statement noted.

The programme featured festive songs such as “Gongxi Gongxi”, “Sweet as Honey” and “The God of Wealth Is Coming”, performed using percussion instruments, the statement said, adding that interactive sessions were also conducted, allowing elderly participants and students to engage with the instruments and experience music firsthand.

According to the statement, the series forms part of the Macao Orchestra 2025–26 Concert Season, co-organised by multiple integrated resort operators and supported by the Bank of China Macau Branch.

The bureau added it will continue to conduct performances across the community, aiming to extend arts and culture beyond traditional venues while promoting inclusion and care through music. ■



This handout photo provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) on Tuesday shows the Macao Orchestra visiting the Care Home “Júbilo Brilhante” on February 24.

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Renovation worker suffers second-degree burns in fire: CB

Armando Neves

The Fire Service Bureau (CB) announced in a statement yesterday that a renovation worker suffered second-degree burns in a fire.

According to the statement, the fire erupted in a flat of Nova Taipa Gardens (Block 26) on Rua de Bragança (布拉干薩街) in Taipa. A resident called the CB to tell them about smoke coming from the residential building.

After arriving at the scene, the firefighters were confronted with open flames in a unit on the 24th floor, where the fire had broken out. Firefighters deployed hoses and quickly extinguished the blaze, the statement said, adding that around 30 people at the scene self-evacuated.

The Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) announced in a separate statement later yesterday that it is greatly concerned about the incident, adding that it immediately joined efforts with a social service organisation in Taipa to dispatch personnel to the scene and understand the needs of residents affected by the incident, adding that no residents requested temporary accommodation.

Meanwhile, the Fire Service Bureau said in a follow-up statement

that at the scene firefighters found an injured male with second-degree burns on his face, both palms, left forearm and both ankles, adding that his condition was stable. He was rushed to the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre for emergency treatment.

The Fire Service Bureau identified the injured as a 65-year-old local renovation worker.

The worker told firefighters that before the fire he had detected the odour of what appeared to come from liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) in the unit where he was working. He promptly responded to the

issue by opening the windows and checking the LPG canister.

Subsequently, while using a grinder to cut a wall, sparks resulted in a flash fire, the bureau quoted the renovation worker as saying. The bureau said that the incident was suspected to have been caused by a leak of flammable gas inside the unit.

Upon inspection by firefighters, the statement said that some furniture in a room of the unit was found to have been burnt, while the corridor was blackened by soot and all the windows in the unit were damaged. ■



A fire engine is stationed in front of Nova Taipa Gardens on Rua de Bragança (布拉干薩街) during yesterday morning's fire-fighting operation in Taipa.

– Photo courtesy of TDM

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Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY PERIODS. MIST AND FOG IN THE MORNING AND AT NIGHT. FORCE 2 TO 3 SOUTHEASTERLY WINDS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 65% AND 99%.



19°C~26°C

Source: SMG

IC encourages public voting, photography at int'l parade



This photo provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) shows the winning work taken by "2025 Macao International Parade" Photography Contest champion Lam Kok Kun.

Rui Pastorin

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) announced in a statement yesterday the launch of voting for the "Most Popular Group" and the photography contest for the upcoming "2026 Macao International Parade", which takes place on March 29.

Members of the public can vote for their favourite group for a chance to win "one round-trip economy class ticket from Macau to any destination operated by Air Macau", while the group garnering the highest number of votes will receive the "Most Popular Group" Award, according to the statement.

To vote, the statement said that one can access the parade's website starting at 10 a.m. on Tuesday through 5:30 p.m. on the parade day, or by scanning QR codes on promotional materials that day.

The "2026 Macao International

Parade Photography Contest", meanwhile, features a Champion Award, a 1st Runner-Up Award, a 2nd Runner-Up Award and 15 Merit Awards. Open to Macau residents aged 12 or older, participants can submit up to five photos themed around the parade and showcase "diverse performances, joyous scenes, images of the participants and highlights of the event", the statement noted. Submissions will be open from March 29 through April 6, with contest regulations available on the parade website.

Over 10 groups from countries and regions along the Maritime Silk Road hubs across Asia, Africa, and Europe as well as nearly 50 local groups will be brought together, totalling nearly 1,600 artistes this year. For more details, visit www.icm.gov.mo/macaoparade or follow IC's social media accounts. ■

FM Commissioner Bian stresses 'diplomacy benefitting Macau' concept

Continued from p.1

3 Macau-related tasks

Pertaining to Macau, Bian raised three tasks that the Commission will carrying out during the duration of the 15th Five-Year Plan, which was passed by the National People's Congress (NPC) at the end of its annual session in Beijing. Concurrently, the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) also held its annual session in the national capital.

"First, we will fully support the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) in accelerating its effort to become an important bridge for China's high-standard opening-up", Bian said, adding that the Commission will also promote the achievement of the chief executive's fruitful results of his overseas visits, expand exchanges and practical cooperation with Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries, as well as in countries and Southeast Asia and elsewhere".

The local government announced earlier this week that Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai will pay a working visit to Portugal and Spain on April 17-23.

Bian also said that the Commission "will support and assist the MSAR Government in successfully hosting the 13th APEC

Tourism Ministerial Meeting, thereby contributing to the development of Macau as a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure".

"Second, we will make targeted and effective use of foreign-related resources, support the MSAR government in advancing major projects such as the Macao-Hengqin International Education (University) Town and the establishment of China-Portuguese- and Spanish Speaking Countries Economic and Trade Service Centre, so as to help the MSAR accelerate the process of economic diversification".

"Third, we will encourage the MSAR Government and Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin to speed up the implementation of preferential measures facilitating the cross-border travel of foreign nationals in Hengqin. Moreover, we will promote visa facilitation policies for foreign nationals with permanent residency in Macau travelling to the Chinese mainland, and support Macau to build an international hub for high-calibre talents.

Bian also stressed that "the 15th Five-Year Plan is not only China's blueprint for development and a list of opportunities for the world, but also provides new opportunities and opens a new journey for Macau to achieve better and

higher-quality development".

She praised yesterday's guests, who "are rooted in Macau and dedicated to its development", as they "have played an important role and made contributions to expanding the MSAR's external exchanges and cooperation", as well as spread the word about the successful practice of "One Country, Two Systems".

"You are not only witnesses to Macau's development but also active participants and narrators of its success story. We hope that today's briefing will help you better understand and grasp the spirit of the Two Sessions, enabling you to further leverage your roles to support Macau in seizing the opportunities presented by the country's rapid development, thus contributing to Macau's economic diversification", she said during yesterday's briefing, which was held at the Commission's headquarters in Zape.

"Let us work together to embrace new opportunities with a more open attitude and drive new development with more pragmatic measures, to open up new prospects for the successful practice of 'One Country, Two Systems' with distinctive Macau features and write a new chapter in Macau's high-quality development!", she concluded her briefing. ■

Exhibition on the Resonant History and Aesthetic Memory of Macao Firecrackers

Exhibition Venue

Sands Gallery, Level 6,
The Grand Suites at
Four Seasons

Exhibition Period

2026.03.18 - 08.31

Opening Hours

11:00 ~ 19:00

Organizer: 金沙中國
Sands China Ltd.

Supporting Entities: 澳門特別行政區旅遊文化局
Macao Special Administrative Region of Tourism
Cultural Affairs Bureau

Academic Support: 澳門博物館
Macao Museum

Design and Production: 澳門設計
Macao Design

Curator: 吳宜鳴
Ng Yee-Keung

Ancient Egypt treasures dazzle HK crowds

Review by William Chan, in Hong Kong

During the Chinese New Year holidays, I went to the Hong Kong Palace Museum in West Kowloon Cultural District to witness “Ancient Egypt Unveiled: Treasures from Egyptian Museums,” an exhibition jointly organised with the Supreme Council of Antiquities of Egypt.

Even on a weekday, the seventh day of the Lunar New Year, the long queues were a sight to behold – a level of enthusiasm for a paid exhibition rarely seen in Macau, signalling the profound draw of this ancient civilisation.

The exhibition is a monumental undertaking, featuring 250 spectacular treasures from seven major Egyptian museums and the Saqqara archaeological site. With artefacts spanning nearly 5,000 years, a curator could hardly fail. The collection, much of which is still being unearthed and studied, offers a stunning glimpse into the politics, arts, and religious beliefs of ancient Egypt.

The precision of a golden collar and bracelets, crafted with breathtaking skill nearly 4,000 years ago, was a personal highlight.

Elsewhere, magnificent colossal statues stood in silent grandeur, their creation in ancient times a feat that defies imagination. The exhibition also delves into the architectural genius behind the pyramids, the sole surviving Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, alongside the iconic mummies, sarcophagi, and the intricate hieroglyphs that represent one of humanity’s earliest writing systems, emerging around 3200 BCE, about 5,226 years ago.

A particularly thought-provoking section placed the civilisations of China and Egypt side-by-side. It was a humbling moment of reflection. Despite China’s own vast and ancient culture, the timeline shows that writing systems in Egypt and Mesopotamia predate Chinese characters by a millennium. The concepts of dynasty and pyramid construction also came long before the Great Wall. It is a powerful reminder of the sheer depth of human history.

Nevertheless, the comparison also highlights a crucial difference. The ancient Egyptian civilisation as it was known eventually faded after Roman rule and was later absorbed into a new cultural identity. In contrast, Chinese culture has demonstrated a unique tenacity, allowing it to endure and evolve through millennia.

This truth was powerfully underscored by the museum’s concurrent exhibition of treasures from the Qing Dynasty’s Forbidden City on a lower floor. It served as a vivid showcase of how cultural fusion can lead to greater heights and how China, while taking pride in its own heritage, extends a grand welcome to guests from around the world. In an age of frequent disputes, the lesson of embracing and cooperating from other cultures is one we must continuously protect and cherish.

The Hong Kong Palace Museum is open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays, with extended hours until 8 pm on Fridays, Saturdays, and public holidays. The museum is closed on Tuesdays (except public holidays), and the exhibition ends on August 31. Standard tickets are priced at HK\$190, with various discounts and combination packages also available.

For more information, visit: <https://www.hkpm.org.hk/en/home>

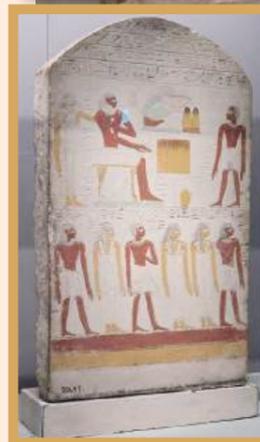


The colossal statue of Akhenaten, from the 18th Dynasty (about 1550–1295 BCE) and carved from sandstone with pigment, is originally housed in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

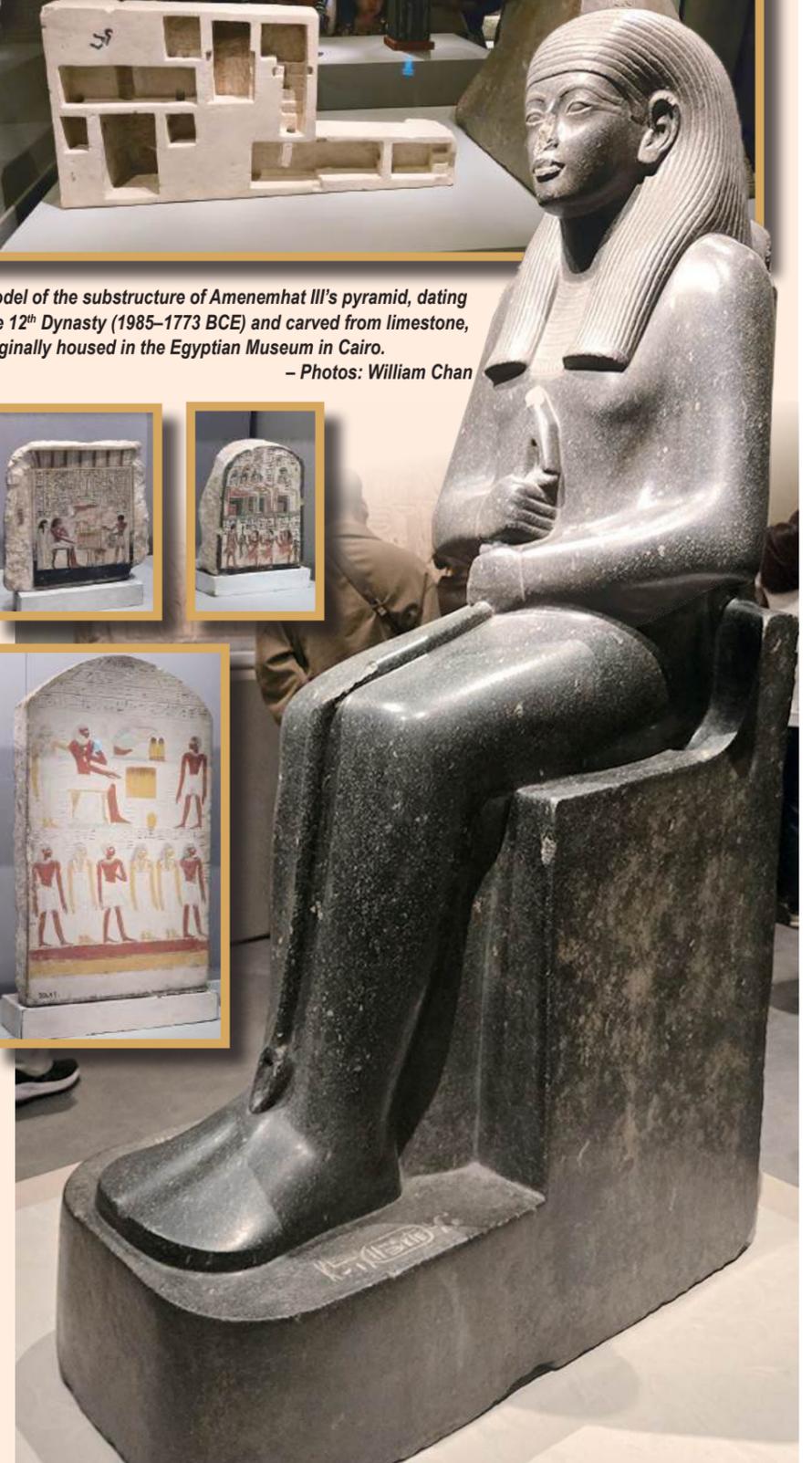


A model of the substructure of Amenemhat III’s pyramid, dating to the 12th Dynasty (1985–1773 BCE) and carved from limestone, is originally housed in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

– Photos: William Chan



A lintel inscribed with a cartouche of Thutmose I and text of deities, dating to the 18th Dynasty (about 1550–1295 BCE) and carved from limestone, is originally housed in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.



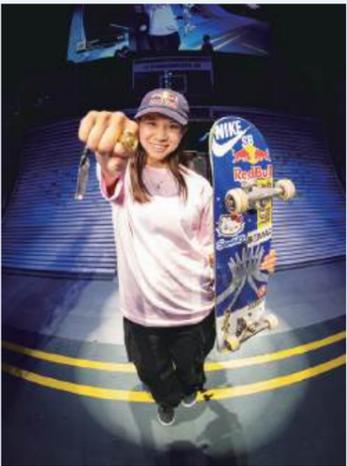
Battle of the Champions wraps up at Studio City

Khalel Vallo

The three-day FISE: Battle of the Champions 2026 concluded on Tuesday, bringing high-intensity skateboarding to Studio City in Cotai, crowning South Korea's Juni Kang and Japan's Yumeka Oda champions, according to a statement by integrated resort operator Melco Resorts & Entertainment.

FISE stands for International Festival of Extreme Sports.

Held at the Studio City's Event Centre, the competition featured a custom-built Fusion Park inspired by retro Macau and Hong Kong film culture, combining street and park elements in a cinematic setting, the statement said. The event adopted a 1v1 battle format, with skaters competing head-to-head from practice rounds through to the finals.



This photo provided by Melco Resorts & Entertainment on Tuesday shows FISE: Battle of the Champions 2026 women's pro final champion Yumeka Oda posing with her skateboard and award in Cotai.

In the women's pro final, Oda defeated compatriot Miyu Ito after advancing through the top eight, the statement said, adding that both competitors showcased technical precision and creativity, but Oda secured the title with a Flip Front Feeble.

Meanwhile, the men's final saw Kang face Brazil's Pedro Quintas in a three-minute showdown, where Kang delivered a "strong performance under pressure", landing a 36 Front board to claim the championship, the statement added.

Beyond the competition, the event also featured live DJ sets, MC performances and community activities, aiming to highlight Macau's push to develop its image as a "City of Sports" and a destination for international action sporting events, the statement noted. ■



This photo provided by Melco Resorts & Entertainment on Tuesday shows FISE: Battle of the Champions 2026 men's pro final champion Juni Kang displaying his skateboard skills in Cotai.

No need to fear HIV, early testing & treatment matter most: social worker

Armando Neves

Macao AIDS Care Association (MACA) President Kelvin U Wai Yip said during the recent "8th AIDS Forum of Beijing, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan" that the accumulated number of HIV cases stood at about 500.

The forum was held at the Lisboeta resort in Cotai on December 6.

As the affected population ages, U expressed concern about the existing community support system. Speaking at the start of the forum, U said he expected it to discuss response strategies with experts from various regions in China.

The *Post* interviewed yesterday the S.Y. Tribe of Christian New Life Fellowship (In Macau) on Estrada Nova da Ilha Verde (青洲新馬路), which offers free, confidential and anonymous rapid testing for HIV, syphilis, and hepatitis C to everyone who lives in Macau. A mobile testing van service has also been introduced by the organisation to facilitate early screening for high-risk groups.

"S.Y." stands for "smart youth". Tony Wong Ka Kit talked to the *Post* at the organisation's headquarters in Ilha Verde yesterday. He is a social worker who oversees the organisation's testing service and a programme called "Dance Together", supported by the Health Bureau (SSM), promotes safe sex and HIV prevention knowledge among men who have sex with men, providing prevention services and support for individuals living with HIV.

Wong said that the entire testing process takes about 20 minutes and ensures privacy, adding that the rapid HIV test has an accuracy



Christian New Life Fellowship (In Macau) S.Y. Tribe social worker Tony Wong Ka Kit poses next to testing tools and prevention and control materials for HIV, syphilis, and hepatitis C at the non-governmental organisation's headquarters on Estrada Nova da Ilha Verde yesterday. — Photo: Armando Neves

rate of over 90 percent. If a result is positive, staff will accompany the individual to schedule a blood test for confirmation and subsequent treatment, as well as provide emotional support, he said.

Last year, Wong said, a number of syphilis cases were confirmed through testing, adding that accompaniment and support services can also be arranged for the sufferers.

Wong pointed out that with advancements in medicine, HIV is no longer a terminal illness. Infected individuals who adhere to their prescribed medication can effectively manage the condition and even reduce the virus to very low, virtually untransmittable levels, he said.

According to Wong, women living with HIV can also give birth to uninfected children if they follow medical advice regarding medication and monitoring.

Wong called on civil society to put an end to discrimination, learn more about the current reality of the

disease, and support those living with HIV by integrating them into the community.

Wong also said that in recent years, there has been an increase in the number of residents willing to undergo testing, with some proactively seeking help due to concerns after traveling abroad.

Wong said that the organisation also promotes testing information through homosexual dating apps and organises physical and mental health activities to help establish mutual support networks and alleviate stress related to sexual orientation or health issues.

"HIV is nothing to be afraid of; early testing and treatment are what really matters", according to Wong.

Individuals in need of testing can call the hotline on 68471010 to schedule the mobile testing service.

The Christian non-governmental organisation (NGO) also provides drug and alcoholism rehabilitation, according to Wong. ■

Sands Gallery presents over 400 exhibits of Macau's former firecracker industry

Rui Pastorin

The centenary of the founding of the erstwhile Iec Long Firecracker Factory is being commemorated this year, with over 400 exhibits related to the history and memory of a once thriving industry on display at Sands Gallery.

Launched yesterday afternoon and lasting over five months until August 31, "A Century of Iec Long Firecracker Factory in Radiance – An Exhibition on the Resonant History and Aesthetic Memory of Macao Firecrackers" features displays related to the industry's development, the manufacturing process involved and original documents, as well as hundreds of colourful packaging labels, all across various zones. Interactive elements are also found throughout the venue.

The exhibition is presented by the integrated resort operator in conjunction with the private Macau University of Science and Technology's (MUST) Library and Faculty of Humanities and Arts.

During his speech at yesterday's launch ceremony, Sands China Executive Vice Chairman Wilfred Wong Ying-wai noted that



Guests and representatives pose for a group photo during the opening ceremony of "A Century of Iec Long Firecracker Factory in Radiance – An Exhibition on the Resonant History and Aesthetic Memory of Macao Firecrackers" at Sands Gallery in Cotai. — Photos: Rui Pastorin

firecrackers are "a living imprint of generations of Macau people, carrying the name 'Made in Macau' across the globe, while bearing witness to countless families and craftsmen who devoted themselves to this industry for their livelihoods". He added that the exhibition presents the development of the industry as well as the city's creativity and spirit, reflecting its "unique blend of East and West and its cultural diversity".

Curating the pieces on display, meanwhile, is veteran local artist

and MUST Distinguished Professor Guilherme Ung Vai Meng. He highlighted in his speech that between the 1950s and 1960s, Macau-produced firecrackers were estimated to account for 30 percent, or even more than half of the world's firecracker output. "It can truly be said that Macau's firecracker industry once held a pivotal position in the international market", he said, with enabling members of the public to gain a deeper insight into the local firecracker industry's



This photo shows some of the many exhibits being presented at Sands Gallery.

history and enhancing appreciation of the artistry in their packaging among its aims.

Meanwhile, outside of the exhibition, Sands China and MUST will also host academic dialogues, along with two joint exhibitions. Firecracker exhibits will also be showcased during Sands Gallery's participation in Art Central in Hong Kong, where Ung will also deliver a lecture on firecracker packaging.

Ung, who is not only passionate about the local firecrackers, but

Macau as a whole, talked more about the exhibits and the former firecracker industry in an interview with the *Post* yesterday, with more in an upcoming Page 4.

The free-admission Sands Gallery at The Grand Suites at Four Seasons Hotel Macao in Cotai is open daily from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. More exhibition and activity details are available on <https://en.sandsresortsmacao.com/sands-lifestyle/sands-art-gallery/iec-long-exhibition-2026.html> ■

Sam vows Macau's distinct contributions to nation's journey of becoming sci-tech powerhouse

Tony Wong

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai yesterday pledged his government's commitment to ensuring that Macau "is not absent nor left behind but makes distinct contributions" to the nation's journey of becoming a scientific and technological powerhouse.

Sam also underlined that the ultimate objective of sci-tech research and development and investments in Macau should be the transformation of knowledge into productivity and the industrialisation of technologies, not the intention of merely creating a "superficially appealing technological image".

Sam made the remarks in a speech while chairing this year's first plenary meeting of the government-appointed Science and Technology Council at the Services Platform Complex for Commercial and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (aka Forum Macao Complex), located near Macau Tower.

The meeting, which was held behind closed doors, was open to the media at the start when Sam made his opening speech.

The chief executive noted in his speech that the world is undergoing profound changes unseen in a century at an accelerated pace, while the international landscape is complex and intricate, marked by intensified geopolitical rivalries and the resurgence of unilateralism and protectionism.

At the same time, Sam said, with a new wave of technological revolution and industrial transformation, scientific and technological innovation has become the main battlefield in international strategic rivalries. With profound changes in the external environment and various risks and challenges, Sam said, identifying changes, adapting to them, and seeking alternatives while responding to various types of uncertainties with the certainty of high-quality development constitute the strategic foundation for addressing external risks and challenges, seizing the initiative in development, and safeguarding national security.

Sam noted that the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan draws a grand project for the country's development over the next five years, more strongly establishing self-reliance and strength in science and technology as a core strategic position in the nation's overall development. The

15th Five-Year Plan period, Sam noted, represents a crucial five-year period that serves as a bridge for the country to reach the goal of basically achieving socialist modernisation. For Macau, Sam said, it is also a crucial five-year period, marking the transition from recovery-driven growth to high-quality development, and concrete breakthroughs in achieving appropriate economic diversification.

The central government released the full version of the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan on Friday last week after the plan's draft outline was passed by the National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing on the previous day. The plan, officially known as 15th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development, covers the period between 2026 and 2030.

In his speech yesterday, Sam pledged that his government will take the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan as the fundamental guide in drawing up and implementing Macau's third five-year socioeconomic development plan with high standards and a far-sighted vision. During the implementation of Macau's third five-year plan, Sam said, his government will comprehensively and precisely align with the nation's strategic guidelines, improve Macau's scientific and technological innovation system, strengthen the transformation of scientific and technological achievements, and closely integrate the nation's needs with Macau's strengths, with the aim of ensuring that, on the nation's journey of becoming a scientific and technological powerhouse, Macau "is not absent nor left behind but makes distinct contributions".

The local government is scheduled to launch a public consultation next month to gather opinions and suggestions from Macau's civil society concerning its drafting of Macau's third five-year socioeconomic development plan.

Sam also pledged yesterday that his government will fully leverage Macau's unique advantages of being backed by the motherland and connected to the world, and continue strengthening its role as "One Centre, One Platform, One Base", while working together with the Guangdong-Macau In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin to consolidate and strengthen Hengqin's development, thereby promoting Macau's appropriate economic diversification and



Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai addresses the Science and Technology Council's first 2026 plenary meeting at the Forum Macao Complex yesterday. — Photo: GCS

supporting Macau in developing itself into a high ground for gathering international high-end talent.

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

Sam also underlined the local government's commitment to intensifying policy support and investment efforts with the aim of fostering the development of Macau's high-tech industry. Sam pledged that his government will advance the construction of the Macau Science and Technology Research and Development Industrial Park, while also attracting enterprises and investments to the park, with the aim of laying a solid foundation for the development of Macau's tech industry.

Moreover, Sam said, his government is aiming to complete the setting-up of its "guidance fund" within this year, pointing out that the fund aims to channel private capital towards investments in Macau's key emerging industries, solidly advance its industrial upgrading, and optimise its employment structure.

In his speech, Sam also outlined several aspects that Macau will need to address for the development of its tech industry, such as the effective management of international sci-tech research teams and organisations established in Macau, improvements in Macau's internationalised sci-tech service system, and the cultivation of internationalised sci-tech

professionals. should be the transformation of knowledge into productivity and the industrialisation of technologies.

Sam convenes meeting about Macau's 3rd Five-Year Plan

Meanwhile, Sam also convened a closed-door meeting at Government Headquarters yesterday concerning the local government's upcoming drafting of Macau's third five-year socioeconomic development plan, according to a statement by the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) yesterday.

The meeting was attended by Legislative Assembly (AL) President André Cheong Weng Chon and Court of Final Appeal (TUI) President Song Man Lei, Macau's nine principal officials, chief public prosecutor, as well as officials of the Policy Research and Regional Development Bureau (DSEPDR), the public entity tasked with the drafting of Macau's third five-year plan.

During the meeting, according to the statement, Sam raised three requirements for the drafting of Macau's third five-year plan.

The first requirement is to closely align with the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan, while the second requirement is to conduct in-depth analysis of Macau's internal and external development landscape over the next five years so as to ensure that the drawing-up of Macau's third five-year plan is forward-looking, scientific and practical.

The third requirement outlined by Sam is the use of major projects and policy initiatives as drivers to coordinate key tasks across all sectors and promote Macau's high-quality socioeconomic development. ■

Macau's bus passengers rise 1.81 pct to 231 million in 2025

Tony Wong

Macau recorded 231 million public bus passengers in 2025, or a daily average of 636,000, an increase of 1.81 percent from 2024, according to the latest data released by the Transport Bureau (DSAT) on its website yesterday.

In 2024, the total number of

Macau's public bus passengers stood at 227 million, or a daily average of 624,700.

Last year's number of public bus passengers was the highest number on record, surpassing the previous record of 229 million, or a daily average of 627,200, set in pre-COVID-19 pandemic 2019. ■



Members of the government-appointed Science and Technology Council, comprising government officials as well as experts, scholars and community leaders from the city's science and technology sectors, attend yesterday's meeting chaired by Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai at the Forum Macao Complex. — Photo: Tony Wong



This file photo taken last year shows public buses queuing at a bus stop on Rua do Campo. — Photo: Tony Wong

Xi calls for strengthening cooperation with Turkmenistan in natural gas, trade, non-resource fields

BEIJING – China and Turkmenistan should expand the scale of cooperation in the natural gas sector, and elevate trade and investment levels, President Xi Jinping said in Beijing yesterday.

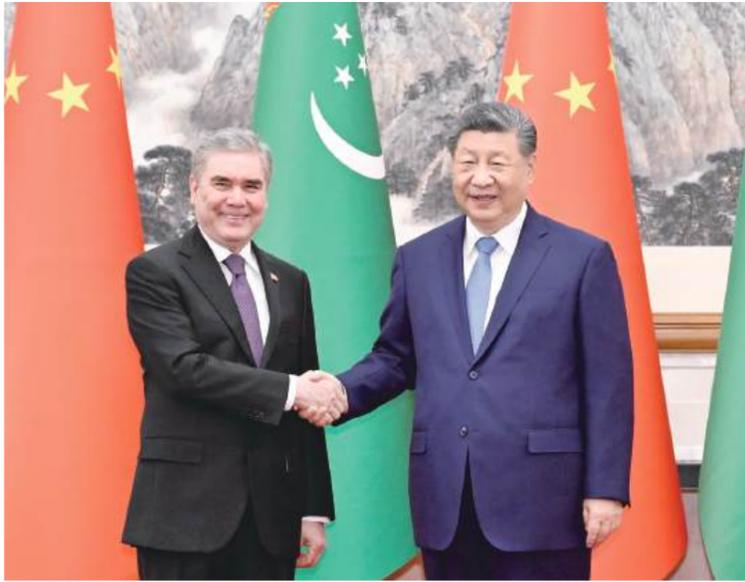
Xi made the remarks when meeting with National Leader of the Turkmen People and Chairman of the Halk Maslahaty of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, adding that the two sides should expand cooperation in non-resource fields, including connectivity, agriculture, artificial intelligence, digital economy and clean energy.

China's "two sessions" were successfully held not long ago, during which the outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) for national economic and social development was approved, Xi said.

He also stated that the implementation of this outline will lay a solid foundation for China towards achieving socialist modernization, which benefits countries around the world.

Over the past 35 years since its independence, Turkmenistan has forged an independent development path suited to its national conditions, Xi said.

At the beginning of the Year of the



President Xi Jinping (right) shakes hands with National Leader of the Turkmen People and Chairman of the Halk Maslahaty of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, who is on a goodwill visit to China, at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing yesterday.

– Xinhua

Horse, China stands ready to discuss cooperation and share development opportunities with Turkmenistan to promote the building of the China-Turkmenistan community with a shared future, he said.

Stressing that mutual support is the core essence of the China-Turkmenistan comprehensive strategic partnership, Xi said

regardless of how the international situation evolves, China will always support Turkmenistan in safeguarding its national independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Moreover, China will always support Turkmenistan in pursuing a policy of permanent neutrality and will remain a trustworthy partner for Turkmenistan.

Both sides should accelerate the alignment between the Belt and Road Initiative and Turkmenistan's development strategy, he said, calling on both sides to accelerate the progress of establishing Luban Workshops, traditional Chinese medicine centers and cultural centers.

China and Turkmenistan must resolutely combat the "three evil forces" of terrorism, extremism and separatism to foster a secure environment for the development of both countries, Xi said.

As a myriad of global challenges keep emerging, China stands ready to work with Turkmenistan to firmly uphold the status and authority of the United Nations and practice genuine multilateralism.

Xi called on both sides to adhere to a global governance philosophy that emphasizes extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, and lead the transformation of global governance with the principles of fairness, justice, openness, and inclusiveness.

For his part, Berdimuhamedov extended his congratulations on China's successful "two sessions," which makes important decisions and arrangements for the development of various initiatives.

Noting that China's prosperity and development benefit the world, he said that Turkmenistan-China cooperation has become an important and positive factor in the economic and social development of the two countries and is in the long-term interests of the two peoples.

Turkmenistan will, as always, abide by the one-China principle and is willing to strengthen the alignment of development strategies with China, expand practical cooperation in energy, trade, connectivity and other fields, and seek common development and prosperity, as well as promote security and stability, Berdimuhamedov said.

He said that Turkmenistan thanked China for its support of Turkmenistan's permanent neutral status, spoke highly of the four global initiatives proposed by Xi, and appreciated China for upholding a fair stance in international affairs.

Turkmenistan is ready to strengthen coordination and cooperation with China in multilateral platforms such as the United Nations and the China-Central Asia mechanism to jointly safeguard peace and stability of the region and the world at large, Berdimuhamedov said. – Xinhua

Peng Liyuan calls for global action against TB

BEIJING – Peng Liyuan, wife of President Xi Jinping and also the World Health Organization (WHO) goodwill ambassador for tuberculosis (TB) and HIV/AIDS, yesterday called for international support and participation in global TB prevention and treatment.

In a written statement to a virtual event commemorating the WHO World TB Day 2026, Peng said that it is of great significance that the WHO is hosting this virtual event to hold discussions under the theme "Led by countries, powered by people," as it will facilitate joint actions among the international community against TB as a public health challenge.

Peng said that with a firm commitment to the mission of protecting people's health and the goal of ending the TB epidemic, the WHO has done a great deal of effective work, and reversed the recent upward trend in global TB cases.

Always placing great importance on preventing and treating TB, the Chinese government has coordinated government departments to implement response measures, and facilitated rapid technical and operational progress through scientific and technological innovation, enabling new advances in China's TB response, Peng said.

Peng pointed out that China's

healthcare network, covering 1.4 billion-plus urban and rural residents, has effectively improved access to TB prevention and treatment services, contributing to a sustained decline in TB incidence, and positioning China as a country with moderate to low TB prevalence.

Peng said this year marks the 15th year of China's large-scale volunteer campaign to raise awareness for TB prevention and control. Over the past 15 years, more than 1 million volunteers have participated in this campaign, carrying out over 80,000 programs, she added.

"I have been joining many of them on visits to local neighborhoods, schools and healthcare facilities, and I am a proud witness of their compassion, commitment and contribution, as well as the progress in China's fight against TB," Peng said.

Peng called on people from all walks of life in all countries to act, to support and to participate in global efforts against TB.

"Let us share with each other warmth and care, and build together confidence and hope. Let us work for progress in TB response to the benefit of all humanity, and join hands to build a community of health for all," she said.

– Xinhua

Wang Yi urges avoiding further casualties, losses regarding war in Middle East

BEIJING – China's top diplomat Wang Yi yesterday urged avoiding further casualties and losses regarding the war raging in the Middle East, and pledged China's mediation efforts to facilitate a ceasefire.

Wang, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs, made the remarks in talks with Khaldoon Khalifa Al Mubarak, special envoy of the president of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to China, in Beijing.

Conveying President Xi Jinping's cordial greetings to President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Wang said under the strategic guidance of the two heads of state, the China-UAE relations have made considerable progress.

Amid the once-in-a-century shifts evolving at a faster pace, the fluid and turbulent international situation and the unsettling war in the Middle East, China-UAE relations carry more prominent strategic significance. Timely strategic communication and the enhancement of strategic mutual trust between the two sides are increasingly important, as these elements contribute to the early realization of peace and stability in the Middle East, said Wang.

He said China is willing to intensify high-level exchanges with the UAE, deepen the alignment of development strategies, and push the China-UAE comprehensive strategic partnership to a higher level.



Wang Yi (right), a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs, holds talks with Khaldoon Khalifa Al Mubarak, special envoy of the president of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to China, in Beijing yesterday.

– AFP

Khaldoon Khalifa Al Mubarak conveyed President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan's sincere greetings to President Xi, noting that the UAE-China relations have reached an unprecedented high level.

The UAE regards China as a dependable and trustworthy true friend, and is confident about China's future development, Khaldoon Khalifa Al Mubarak said.

He said the UAE is willing to strengthen high-level exchanges with China, deepen cooperation in education, culture, energy and economy, among others, as well as advance the development of bilateral relations.

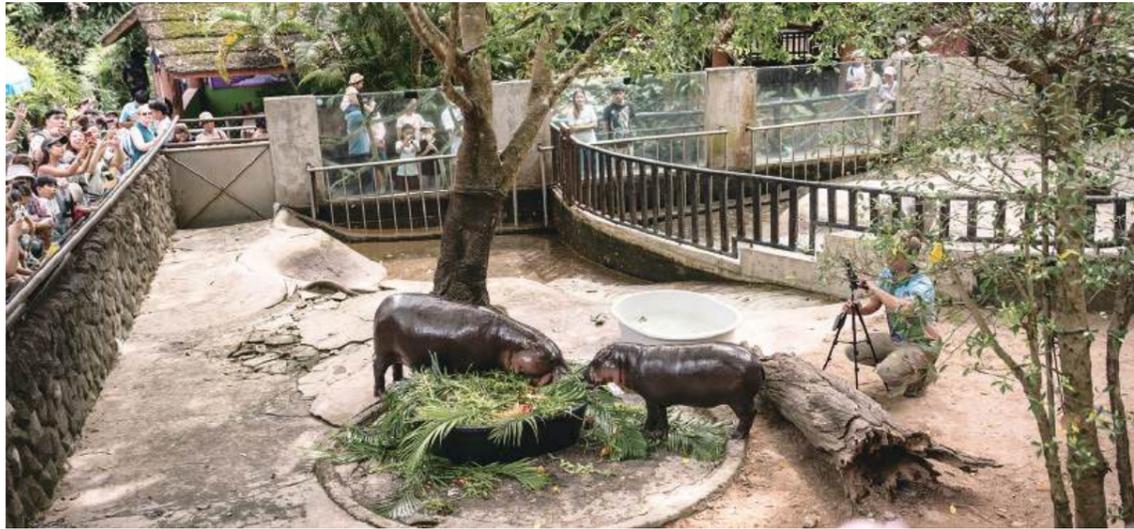
Khaldoon Khalifa Al Mubarak also briefed on the latest developments of the Middle East situation.

Reiterating China's principled positions, Wang expressed gratitude to the UAE for its efforts in ensuring the safety of Chinese citizens and institutions, and emphasized that this war should never have occurred and there is no need for it to continue, calling for avoiding greater casualties and losses.

China firmly supports the UAE in safeguarding its sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity, condemns attacks targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure, and will continue efforts to mediate a ceasefire and an end to hostilities, so that peace and stability will be restored in the Middle East at an early date, Wang said.

– Xinhua

Trespasser caught in viral hippo Moo Deng's Thai zoo pen



Moo Deng (right), a 1-year-old female pygmy hippo who became a viral internet sensation, eats birthday cake with her mother at Khao Kheow Open Zoo in Chonburi province on July 10, 2025. — AFP

BANGKOK — A Thai man broke into the zoo enclosure of Moo Deng, an endangered baby pygmy hippo and internet sensation, police said yesterday, as the zoo filed a trespassing complaint.

Moo Deng — whose name translates as “bouncy pork” — has gained global attention thanks to social media videos showing her adorable antics, drawing tens of thousands of visitors and boosting zoo ticket sales.

Khao Kheow Open Zoo, about a two-hour drive from the capital Bangkok, said a Thai national had unlawfully entered the animal's pen on Tuesday.

Footage of the close encounter released by local media showed a man wearing a tank top, shorts and sandals inside the enclosure and recording Moo Deng with a tablet.

Zoo staff took about 10 minutes to remove the man from the pen, which also houses Moo Deng's mother, local media reported.

“The individual entered a restricted animal area,” the zoo said in a statement.

It would “pursue legal action without exception” and added that Moo Deng was unharmed but “slightly startled” by the incident.

Police told AFP the intruder, a man who visited the zoo with his

grandnephew, had wanted a closer look at the animal.

“We have initiated a trespassing case,” said local investigating officer Athiwat Siralerthakorn.

No arrest has been made so far, he added.

Under Thai law, trespassers face up to one year in jail, a fine of up to 20,000 baht (US\$618) or both.

The pygmy hippo calf, which marked her first birthday in July, has inspired merchandise and memes since first going viral online in 2024.

Moo Deng has even featured in a beauty campaign by cosmetics giant Sephora, highlighting her glowing, peach-toned face.

Indonesian military detains 4 soldiers over acid attack

JAKARTA — The Indonesian military detained four soldiers yesterday suspected of links to an acid attack that maimed a rights activist who criticised the armed forces' growing influence, an official said.

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

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

The military police have detained four soldiers from the armed forces' intelligence unit suspected of involvement in the assault, commander Yusri Nuryanto said.

An internal investigation into the attack had found “irregularities” that led to the detentions, Yusri said, without giving further details.

“We are still investigating the motives of the four alleged perpetrators,” he told a press conference.

The soldiers, identified by their initials NDP, SL, BHW and ES, will be held at a maximum security facility in Jakarta, he added.

Separately, Jakarta police released CCTV footage yesterday

showing the faces of two people suspected of attacking Andrie.

They had the initials BHC and MAK, police official Iman Imanuddin said. Their links to the four soldiers are unclear.

On Monday, police said that CCTV footage showed four suspects on two scooters had followed Andrie before the attack.

Lawmakers agreed yesterday to form a special committee to oversee the handling of the case, according to member of parliament Habiburokhman, who like many Indonesians uses only one name.

Andrie has been a vocal critic of moves to increase the influence of the military in the Indonesian government and had recently recorded a podcast on the issue when he was attacked.

UN rights chief Volker Turk said last week he was “deeply concerned” by the “horrific” attack and called for accountability.

Human Rights Watch says 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

Frequent bad dreams raise dementia risk in adults aged 60s: study

SYDNEY — Older adults who experience frequent disturbing dreams may have a higher risk of developing dementia, particularly men and those in their 60s, an international study has revealed.

The research, led by the Center for Healthy Brain Ageing (CHEBA) at Australia's University of New South Wales (UNSW), found that adults aged 60-69 who reported disturbing dreams were nearly four times more likely to develop dementia than those who did not, a UNSW statement said yesterday.

Among men, weekly disturbing dreams were linked to a more

than threefold increased risk of Alzheimer's disease, according to the study published in *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences*, which analyzed data from more than 10,000 adults aged 60 to 89 years across Asia, Europe, and South America.

“We found the strongest association in people in their 60s, which may suggest that disturbing dreams could be an early marker of dementia risk for some individuals,” said Darren Lipnicki, lead author and research fellow at CHEBA.

“It's important to emphasize that not everyone who experiences

disturbing dreams will go on to develop dementia,” Lipnicki said, adding that they may instead be an early warning sign of underlying brain changes.

The study controlled for a wide range of factors, including sleep problems, medications, physical and mental health, cognitive performance, and genetic risk.

Several possible explanations for the association are being explored, including early brain changes, overactive threat-detection networks, or changes in the body's stress system that are associated with dementia risk. — Xinhua

Marcos puts brakes on transport fare hike

MANILA — Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos yesterday put the brakes on a public transportation fare hike announced just a day earlier, promising the country's commuters free rides instead.

The archipelago nation, which imports nearly all of its crude oil from the Middle East, has been scrambling to deal with eye-watering price increases triggered by the US-Israeli war with Iran.

Since hostilities erupted, the Philippines has instituted a four-day workweek for civil servants, distributed cash handouts to tricycle drivers, and seen its sole refinery

open discussions to buy Russian oil.

On Tuesday, the country's transportation regulator announced fare hikes across an array of public transport, with rides in jeepneys, used by millions of Filipinos every day, set to jump about eight percent.

“In my opinion ... now is probably not the time to raise fares for the people,” Marcos said yesterday in walking back the increase, citing the ongoing Middle East war.

Instead, Marcos said he had ordered the country's transportation department “to launch free rides all over the Philippines” along with discounts on light rail systems and toll roads.

Marcos did not specify which forms of public transport would be made free.

In a statement that followed shortly, the transportation department said it would suspend the fare hikes in line with the president's request while “preparing” programmes, including free rides.

Mody Floranda, president of a local jeepney drivers' union, told AFP that his group was unhappy with the decision.

“We are dismayed that the president of our country had ruthlessly recalled what his government has granted to us,” he said. — AFP

Suspected bullet from S Korean army range hits child

SEOUL — South Korea's army said it suspended some training nationwide after a bullet hit a child in the neck, prompting a probe.

The incident occurred at playground in the southern city of Daegu on Monday when the child, whose identity was withheld, was injured by a suspected stray bullet from a nearby shooting range, according to officials.

She was taken to hospital and later discharged as she was not in a life-threatening condition.

“The army has halted all firing drills of individual firearms in the wake of the incident,” Bae Seok-jin, head of the army's public relations office, said at a press briefing on Tuesday.

The army launched a probe to determine the cause of the

accident, Bae said, adding that a shooting drill was being conducted at the time of the incident.

“The bullet tip was found in the child's wound during hospital treatment,” an army official was quoted as saying by Yonhap news agency.

In 2020, a golf caddie collapsed on a field in South Jeolla after being struck by a stray bullet fired from a nearby military shooting range and underwent an emergency operation. She survived.

Last year, two South Korean fighter jets accidentally dropped eight bombs on a village near the border with the North during a joint exercise with US forces, injuring nearly 30 people.

— AFP



Representatives leave after a session of the Amyotha Hluttaw, the Upper House of Parliament of Myanmar, in Naypyidaw yesterday. — AFP

Nepal's 'icefall doctors' fix Everest route for spring season

KATHMANDU – Highly skilled mountaineers known in Nepal as “icefall doctors” have begun fixing ropes and ladders on Mount Everest to prepare for the coming spring climbing season, officials said yesterday.

The team has reached the base camp before starting work on the treacherous Khumbu Icefall, a constantly shifting maze of crevasses and ice blocks that forms the gateway to the world's highest peak.

“Our team of eight have reached the base camp and begun their work,” Lama Kazi Sherpa, chair of the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee, which oversees route-setting, told AFP.

As tradition dictates, the group began with a sacred ceremony at base camp to seek divine blessings before stepping onto the mountain.

This year, authorities increased the permit fee for the spring season from US\$11,000 to US\$15,000 for climbers aiming to scale the 8,849-metre summit.

Authorities also tightened rules to reduce pollution, requiring each climber to bring back at least two kilogrammes of waste to

Camp 2 and enforcing the use of “poo bags”.

Camp 2 is a broad glacial valley above the Khumbu Icefall where climbers often spend several days to acclimatise for higher altitudes.

Expedition operators in Kathmandu are also gearing up for the season, although they anticipate some impact from the travel chaos caused by the Middle East war.

“Flight disruption may affect some of the climbers but we don't expect a big impact,” said Dambar Parajuli, president of the Expedition Operators Association.

Nepal is home to eight of the world's 10 highest peaks and attracts hundreds of climbers each spring, when temperatures are warmer and winds calmer.

A climbing boom has made mountaineering a lucrative business since Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa made the first ascent in 1953.

Around 700 people reached Everest's summit last year, according to Nepal's tourism department, with another 100 climbers believed to have reached the peak from the northern Tibet side. – AFP

Pakistan announces Eid 'pause' in conflict with Afghanistan

Phil Hazlewood with Qubad Wali in Kabul

ISLAMABAD – Pakistan announced yesterday a “temporary pause” in hostilities with Afghanistan to mark the end of Ramadan, after Kabul promised to avenge the deaths of hundreds killed in a strike on a Kabul drug treatment centre.

The halt in operations for Eid al-Fitr from today to Monday had been requested by “brotherly Islamic countries” Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, information minister Attaullah Tarar said.

“Pakistan offers this gesture in good faith and in keeping with the Islamic norms,” he wrote on X.

But he warned: “In case of any cross-border attack, drone attack or any terrorist incident inside Pakistan, [operations] shall immediately resume with renewed intensity.”

There was no immediate response from the Taliban authorities.

On Monday night, Pakistani jets struck a drug rehabilitation centre in the Afghan capital, in the deadliest attack yet in the escalating violence between the two neighbours.

The Taliban authorities have said that around 400 people were killed and more than 200 wounded but the government in Islamabad rejected claims from Kabul of a deliberate strike.

Pakistan accuses Kabul of harbouring extremists behind cross-border attacks on its territory. Afghanistan denies doing so.

Mass funeral

A mass funeral for some of the victims of Monday's strike was held on a rainswept hillside above the Afghan capital earlier yesterday afternoon.

Afghan Red Crescent Society volunteers carried dozens of simple wooden coffins from a fleet of ambulances to a mass grave dug in the rocky ground by giant excavators.

At the graveside, Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani said they were innocent victims targeted by “criminals”, days before the end of the Muslim holy month.

“We will take revenge,” he added and warned those behind Monday night's bombing: “We are not weak and helpless. You will see the consequences of your crimes.”

But Haqqani, who until last year had a US\$10-million US bounty on his head, also suggested that talks were the government's preferred option to halt the fighting.



Sirajuddin Haqqani (centre), Interior Minister of Afghanistan's Taliban government arrives to attend a mass funeral held for victims of a Pakistani air strike on a drug rehabilitation centre, at the Badam Bagh Hilltop in Kabul yesterday. – AFP

Mediation stalled

Afghanistan and Pakistan have faced calls for an immediate end to the conflict, with the overall civilian death toll mounting and concern about those displaced.

The UN said before Monday's strike that at least 76 Afghan civilians had been killed in the fighting since February 26, and that more than 115,000 families had been forced from their homes.

Mediation efforts, however, have so far proved fruitless.

The focus of Gulf countries, which led early attempts, has shifted to the situation in their own backyard since the start of US-Israeli strikes on Iran last month.

China has sent a special envoy to mediate and pledged to play a “constructive role in de-escalating tensions”.

Russia's special representative for Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, said Moscow “will be ready” to help broker talks if both sides request it.

“So far, this has not happened,” he told pro-Kremlin outlet Izvestia.

Afghanistan announces Eid pause

Afghanistan yesterday announced a “temporary cessation” in its fighting with Pakistan during celebrations for the end of Ramadan.

Government spokesman Zabiullah said Kabul had agreed to the halt in what it called its “defensive operations to repel injustice” at the request Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey.

The Eid truce came just after Pakistan's own announcement of a temporary pause in operations.

– AFP



Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) chairman Rabi Lamichhane arrives to addresses an orientation programme held for its newly-elected Members of Parliament (MPs) in Kathmandu, Nepal yesterday.

The head of the victorious party in Nepal's election hailed its landslide triumph as a “win for the country” yesterday, urging new lawmakers to deliver for people who “sacrificed their blood” in last year's protests.

The March 5 polls elected a new 275-seat lower house of parliament, with 165 members chosen directly and 110 through proportional representation.

The RSP won a commanding mandate, taking 125 constituency seats and 57 proportional seats, falling just two short of a two-thirds majority. – AFP

Sri Lanka asks EV owners to unplug at night

COLOMBO – Sri Lanka has urged electric vehicle (EV) owners to stop charging their cars at night, saying the surge in demand is forcing the country to burn more coal and diesel to keep the power grid running.

In an address to the nation, President Anura Kumara Disسانayake said electric cars were adding an extra 300 megawatts of demand at night, straining the grid.

“Electric car owners charge

their vehicles when they return from work. This is placing an additional burden on the grid, and we are compelled to operate all our generators to meet this surge,” he said on Tuesday night.

Much of the electricity at night is generated by a 900-megawatt coal power station and another 1,000 megawatts from diesel – a far cry from the clean-green image EVs might hope to project.

Sri Lanka, still waiting for large-scale battery storage, currently has no way to bottle its abundant daytime solar power.

“Charge your car during the day when we have excess electricity from solar,” Disسانayake said, adding that authorities plan to introduce tariffs shortly to curb night-time charging.

The South Asian country has seen a surge in electric cars since a five-year ban on vehicle imports

was lifted in February last year.

More than 10 per cent of all vehicles imported since then have been fully electric.

Faced with an energy crisis following the war in the Middle East, Sri Lanka has begun rationing fuel. It has also imposed a four-day working week starting yesterday in a bid to conserve fuel.

Disسانayake said the country was unable to secure two shipments

of 90,000 tonnes of crude oil due to the Middle East war.

However, he said Colombo was in talks with “friendly states” including neighbouring India and Russia to purchase refined products.

Yesterday, streets were relatively free of traffic, with train and bus stations empty, as schools, government offices and banks closed in response to the government's energy-saving drive. – AFP

Israel conducts wave of strikes on Beirut, knocks out southern bridges

Lisa Golden

BEIRUT – Israel repeatedly struck central Beirut yesterday, with Lebanese authorities reporting a death toll of at least 12 including a director for Hezbollah's Al Manar TV channel, and began striking river crossings in south Lebanon.

Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East war on March 2 when militant group Hezbollah launched rockets towards Israel to avenge the killing of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Israel responded with intense strikes on Lebanon that have killed at least 968 people and displaced over a million, according to local authorities, and by launching ground operations in the south.

AFP journalists in the Lebanese capital said three densely populated neighbourhoods in the heart of Beirut were hit yesterday.

In Bashoura, a whole building collapsed into a mound of rubble after being struck.

"It was at 4 a.m. [local time], we were asleep," said Sara Saleh, a 29-year-old woman displaced from Beirut's southern suburbs, long a Hezbollah bastion but where hundreds of thousands of people live.

"We fled in our pyjamas," she told AFP, after she and her family fled a school they were sheltering in nearby.

Hezbollah TV

Lebanon's official National News Agency (NNA) earlier said a strike had hit an apartment in the central Zuqaq al-Blat neighbourhood, a densely populated area close to the government's headquarters and several embassies.

Two other strikes targeted apartments



Workers clear debris from a street after an Israeli airstrike in central Beirut's Zuqaq al-Blat neighbourhood yesterday. Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East war on March 2 when Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah launched rockets towards Israel in response to US-Israeli strikes that killed Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. – AFP

in the central Basta district, another heavily populated area that Israel struck during a 2024 war with Hezbollah.

An AFP correspondent saw emergency workers at the scene in Basta where the walls of apartments on two adjacent floors appeared to have been blasted off.

Another strike hit Zuqaq al-Blat later in the morning, where an AFP journalist saw people clearing dust and glass from cars and the streets.

Hezbollah's Al Manar TV said Mohammad Sherri, the director of its political programmes, had been killed along with his wife in one of the strikes in Zuqaq al-Blat.

Lebanese Information Minister Paul Morcos said that targeting "media professionals constitutes a flagrant violation of international law".

Hezbollah condemned what it said was Israel's "assassination" of Sherri, describing it as a "deliberate attack".

In last week's strike on the area, the Israeli military had told people to evacuate, but no such warning was given before the latest raid.

Lebanon's health ministry reported a preliminary toll for strikes on both areas of 12 dead and 41 wounded, adding that efforts were underway to identify those killed.

Panic in the south

Strikes also hit Beirut's southern suburbs, which Israel has pounded since the start of the war, and towns and villages across south Lebanon.

In south Lebanon Israel shelled two

bridges across the Litani River, which splits the south, the NNA reported.

AFP photos showed a bridge in an agricultural area north of the southern city of Tyre partially destroyed, with fires burning in the surrounding brush.

Israel said yesterday it would target bridges crossing the Litani, "to prevent the transfer of reinforcements and weapons" to the frontlines, essentially cutting off a large part of the south from the rest of the country.

Israel struck at least five gas stations belonging to the Al-Amana fuel company, which it said finances Hezbollah.

This came as Hezbollah announced it had repelled an attempt by "Israeli enemy soldiers to advance" in Khiam, a town about six kilometres from the border that has witnessed fierce clashes in recent days.

In the coastal city of Sidon, an Israeli strike hit a vehicle near the main seaside road, where many displaced people are staying and sleeping in their cars, according to an AFP correspondent.

The health ministry said two people were killed, including a civil defence rescuer.

Late Tuesday, the Israeli military had issued an evacuation order for most of the city of Tyre as well as swathes of surrounding areas, sending people fleeing northwards, an AFP correspondent said.

In a statement yesterday the UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) said "last night's violent escalation marks a further worrying deterioration".

"Heavy exchanges of fire, intensified air and ground activity, and increased presence of Israeli forces inside Lebanese territory are deeply concerning developments," it added. – AFP

Iran was not rebuilding nuclear enrichment, US intelligence finds

Shaun TANDON

WASHINGTON – US intelligence concluded yesterday that Iran was not rebuilding nuclear enrichment capacities destroyed last year by the United States and Israel, contradicting a key justification by US President Donald Trump for his ongoing war.

Tulsi Gabbard, a Trump ally who is director of national intelligence, offered mixed signals on the backdrop and outcomes of three weeks of war as she and other officials appeared before Congress.

She also assessed that Iran's leadership remained intact.

"As a result of Operation Midnight Hammer, Iran's nuclear enrichment program was obliterated," Gabbard said in prepared testimony to the Senate intelligence committee, referring to the June 2025 US attack.

"There has been no efforts since then to try to rebuild their enrichment capability," Gabbard wrote.

She did not repeat the conclusion before cameras. Pressed by a Democratic senator, Gabbard said that she did not have enough time to read the full testimony at the hearing but did not refute the assessment.

Trump has repeatedly said he ordered the attack on Iran alongside Israel on February 28 because of an "imminent threat."

Trump said after the June 2025 bombing that the United States had completely destroyed Iran's nuclear sites, but since his latest war he has maintained that Tehran was nonetheless weeks away

from a nuclear bomb and that he had to act.

The UN nuclear watchdog and most observers have not supported the finding of an imminent nuclear bomb by Iran, which was negotiating with Trump's envoys on a deal in the days before the attack.

John Ratcliffe, director the CIA, told senators when asked about the negotiations: "It was very clear that Iran, while they were talking, they had no intentions of following through."

'Policeman of the world'

Gabbard herself had been an outspoken opponent of war with Iran as a Democratic congresswoman.

One of her senior aides, Joseph Kent, resigned in protest on Tuesday as director of the National Counterterrorism Centre, saying that Iran posed no "imminent threat" and that Trump was misled by Israel and media outlets.

Democrats attacked Gabbard over the war, saying she had not proven that Iran posed any threat beyond what it has since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

"President Trump said, we are not the policemen of the world. He ran on that," Democratic Senator Michael Bennet said.

"Now he's turned us into the world's policeman, into its jury, into its judge, into its executioner," he said.

In her remarks to senators, Gabbard said Iran had been suffering heavy blows in the weeks of attacks – which included the killing of the longtime supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei – but that the Islamic republic was still functioning.

The US intelligence community "assesses the regime in Iran to be intact but largely degraded due to attacks on its leadership and military capabilities," Gabbard said.

"If a hostile regime survives, it will likely seek to begin a years-long effort to rebuild its military, missiles and UAV forces," Gabbard said, referring to unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones.

Russia 'upper hand'

In other findings, Gabbard predicted that Russia would keep pressing its four-year invasion of Ukraine, a war that Trump had vowed to end upon taking office, largely by pressing Kyiv to compromise.

US intelligence "assesses that Russia has maintained the upper hand in the war against Ukraine," Gabbard said.

"US-led negotiations between Moscow and Kiev are ongoing. Until such an agreement is met, Moscow is likely to continue fighting a slow war," she said.

Gabbard said the United States faced a threat if there were an "escalatory spiral" in Ukraine or elsewhere, which could potentially lead to the use of nuclear weapons.

She said that China was "rapidly" modernising its military with a goal of being able to seize Taiwan.

However, US intelligence "assesses that China likely prefers to set the conditions for an eventual peaceful reunification with Taiwan short of conflict."

Trump plans to travel in the coming weeks to China, a trip he delayed due to the war in the Mideast. – AFP

Israel says hit Hezbollah-controlled gas stations in Lebanon

JERUSALEM – Israel's military said yesterday it had struck gas stations in south Lebanon belonging to a company owned by the Iranian-backed armed group Hezbollah.

"Overnight, the IDF struck Al-Amana Fuel Company gas stations in southern Lebanon", the military said.

A map shared with the statement showed the locations of five gas stations the military said it struck, all in Lebanon's south, including two near the country's Mediterranean coast.

The statement added that the Al-Amana fuel company is controlled by Hezbollah "and constitutes fundamental economic infrastructure that supports Hezbollah's military capabilities".

It said Hezbollah receives "millions of dollars of profits" from the company via another Hezbollah-owned association to fund its military activities.

Since the war with Iran broke out, Israel has also bombed Al-Qard al-Hassan, a financial firm with links to Hezbollah.

The interest-free lender, which also faces US sanctions, is a lifeline for mainly Shia Muslim communities battling a years-long financial crisis that has locked Lebanese out of their bank deposits.

Lebanon has once again come under Israeli fire since Hezbollah launched attacks against its southern neighbour in support of its backers in Tehran, after Israel killed Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Since the start of the war, at least one million Lebanese have fled their homes and Israel's defence minister has warned that they should not return home until northern Israel is secure. – AFP

US launches new era of drug war with Latin American allies

Jordi Zamora

The United States and allies in Latin America and the Caribbean have ushered in a new phase of anti-drug cooperation including extraditions, shared intelligence and security plans despite criticism from international organizations.

The joint initiative dubbed “Shield of the Americas,” largely modeled on the Salvadoran approach, was announced on March 8 by President Donald Trump and leaders from 16 nations at a Florida summit.

On Saturday, US authorities took custody of Uruguayan drug trafficker Sebastian Marset following his capture in Bolivia – barely a year after he was added to Washington’s list of most-wanted fugitives.

Marset appeared before a judge on Monday following his swift expulsion by Bolivian authorities.

The collaboration has extended to other nations, with Ecuador recently carrying out an air strike on a FARC rebel training camp in a border area shared with Colombia.

Colombian President Gustavo Petro condemned the attack but his Defence Minister Pedro Sánchez told AFP cooperation exists with Ecuador, Venezuela and the United States to quell such pockets of rebellion.

The FBI has opened a permanent office in Ecuador, whose government recently imposed curfews in the regions hardest hit by violence related to organised crime.

Last week Washington also announced the arrest, pending extradition, of a suspect accused



Soldiers participate in a coca crop eradication operation in Chimore, Cochabamba Department, Bolivia on March 5, 2025. – AFP

of being one of the leaders of “Los Piratas,” the Chilean affiliate of the Tren de Aragua gang.

The suspected drug kingpin, 40-year-old Venezuelan national Rafael Enrique Gamez Salas, could be deported to Chile in the near future.

Picking up the pace

The Trump administration is acutely aware of the conservative political shift that has swept through the region and is trying to accelerate its efforts before a new political cycle.

The growing collaboration also means suspects can be sent home from the United States.

In January, the Department of Homeland Security announced the arrest of Chilean national Armando Fernandez Larios, a former military officer and agent of the DINA, the feared political police force of Augusto Pinochet’s regime.

Larios, who pleaded guilty to the 1976 assassination of former Chilean minister Orlando Letelier in Washington, had been living in the United States since the late 1980s.

After nearly four decades, he could soon be deported to his home country, a Department of Homeland Security spokesperson confirmed to AFP.

Three reluctant nations

Brazil, Mexico and Colombia did not attend the Florida summit, but intelligence cooperation remains ongoing, according to their leaders and diplomatic sources in Washington.

Trump continues to exert pressure on Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, as shown by Mexico’s operation that led to the death of kingpin Nemesio Oseguera, or “El Mencho,” leader of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG).

“The economic pressure from President Donald Trump, along with his veiled military threats,

has compelled her to take action,” observed Amanda Mattingly, a former diplomat and founder of ACM Global Intelligence.

In Brazil, the next chapter in a relationship marked by ups and downs could involve the official designation of two powerful criminal factions – the “Comando Vermelho” (“Red Command”) and the “Primeiro Comando da Capital” (PCC) – as terrorist groups.

Such a designation is a source of tension in the Brazilian government.

When questioned by AFP, a State Department spokesperson said Washington does not “anticipate possible designations” of the groups, but remains “committed to taking appropriate measures against foreign groups that engage in terrorist activities.”

The anti-drug campaign, which includes controversial elements such as attacks on suspected drug-smuggling boats in the Caribbean, is sparking alarm in some parts of the region.

“These serial extrajudicial killings constitute a grave violation of the right to life,” said Ben Saul, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights, in hearings recently held by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in Guatemala.

But the State Department said the IACHR “lacks competence to examine issues regarding the interpretation and application of international humanitarian law” on such issues. – AFP

Guinea-Bissau launches 2026 cashew marketing, export campaign

BISSAU – Guinea-Bissau has officially launched its 2026 cashew marketing and export campaign, as the government moved to further regulate the sector that forms the backbone of the national economy.

Speaking at the launch ceremony last Wednesday, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation, and Communities João Bernardo Vieira said that the government aimed to ensure a more structured, balanced, and fairer cashew campaign for all actors along the value chain, from producers to exporters.

Describing cashew as a “true national wealth,” he underlined the sector as a main source of income for many families, contributing significantly to the country’s economic and social stability.

Latest data, released at the ceremony, indicated that the West African country’s cashew exports during the 2025 campaign exceeded 250,000 tonnes, with India and Vietnam as major destinations.

According to the Ministry of Commerce, Guinea-Bissau is currently the world’s seventh-largest producer of raw cashew nuts.

Last Tuesday, the Guinea-Bissau government set the reference producer price for raw cashew nuts at 410 CFA francs (US\$0.72) per kg for the 2026 marketing season, while fixing the purchase price for intermediaries at 478 CFA francs per kg and pledging a crackdown on smuggling. – Xinhua

Trump takes steps to curb energy cost hikes

Beiyi Seow

WASHINGTON – US President Donald Trump’s administration scrambled yesterday to rein in surging energy costs from war in the Middle East, temporarily waiving a century-old shipping law and easing Venezuela sanctions.

The moves came after oil prices rocketed following US-Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28. Tehran’s retaliation brought commercial shipping through the Strait of Hormuz to a virtual halt, snarling energy supply chains.

Around a fifth of global crude oil and liquefied natural gas pass through the critical waterway during peacetime, and Brent North Sea crude advanced over five percent earlier yesterday.

Average US gasoline prices have jumped more than 27 percent since the start of the war, according to data from the AAA motor club.

This strains American household budgets further – with consumers already facing high costs of living – piling pressure on the Trump administration as key midterm elections approach.

For now, Trump’s announcement of a 60-day Jones Act waiver would lift a ban on foreign-flagged vessels transporting cargo between US ports over this period.

The 1920 law was aimed at promoting American shipbuilding, but critics argue that it hampers free trade and has raised costs for consumers.

The move is “just another step to mitigate the short-term disruptions to the oil market as the US military continues meeting the objectives of Operation Epic Fury,” said White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt in a statement, referring to the US campaign against Iran.

“This action will allow vital resources like oil, natural gas, fertilizer and coal to flow freely to US ports for 60 days,” she added.

She vowed that the Trump administration “remains committed to continuing to strengthen our critical supply chains.”

The US Treasury Department separately issued a licence yesterday to authorise certain transactions between established US entities and Venezuela’s state-owned oil company PDVSA.

“This licence will benefit both the United States and Venezuela, while supporting the global energy market by increasing the supply of available oil,” said a Treasury spokesperson.

Vice President JD Vance touched on the issue yesterday during a visit to a manufacturing facility in Michigan: “We’ve got a rough road ahead of us for the next few weeks, but it’s temporary.”

Easing bottlenecks

The Jones Act requires that cargo transported by water between US ports be moved on vessels that are US-built, US-owned and registered under the US flag.

Just a fraction of the world’s tankers comply with the Act, said Colin Grabow, an associate director at the libertarian Cato Institute.

“So this is a dramatic expansion in the number of ships that are able to be used” in transporting goods within the world’s biggest economy, he told AFP, referring to Trump’s temporary waiver.

He said it is nearly five times as expensive to build a medium-range tanker in the United States than in Asia, which could explain why there are not many such vessels globally.

Grabow believes the measure will bolster US supply chains, but warned that effects on prices could be limited if the war rages on.

“It can help mitigate some of the disruptions,” he said. But moving forward, the situation could be less about reducing costs than “slowing the rate of increase.”

Josh Lipsky of the Atlantic Council told AFP that the shipping law waiver “is unlikely to have a significant impact on global energy markets and gas prices.”

“It’s too small a move to sway the larger forces at play in the Gulf,” he cautioned.

“The 60-day decision as opposed to the 30 we expected may signal a longer conflict however,” Lipsky added.

S&P Global analysts estimate that Jones Act deliveries can cost billions of dollars more than employing a foreign vessel. – AFP

EU voices commitment to Mozambique security amid funding concerns

BRUSSELS – EU chief António Costa said on Tuesday that the 27-nation bloc was committed to “invest in regional stability” after talks with Mozambique’s leader Daniel Chapo, as concerns mount over the funding of anti-jihadist operations in the African nation.

EU financial support for a security mission involving Rwandan troops in Mozambique’s oil-rich but restive northern Cabo Delgado province is set to run out later this year.

“We reaffirmed the strong partnership between the EU and Mozambique, and our commitment to invest in regional stability, sustainable connectivity and growth,” Costa, who presides over the European Council representing member states, wrote on X after meeting Chapo in Brussels.

Rwanda threatened on Saturday to withdraw its troops fighting Islamist insurgents from Cabo Delgado if funding was not secured and its efforts not “appreciated”.

But analysts say sanctions slapped by the United States on Rwanda’s military earlier this month over its alleged support for insurgents in the Democratic



European Council President António Costa (R) greets Mozambican President Daniel Chapo prior to a meeting in Brussels on Tuesday. – AFP

Republic of the Congo (DRC) have complicated the picture.

“The EU recognises the very important contribution made by Rwanda to efforts aimed at stabilising the situation in Cabo Delgado,” Anouar El Anouni, a spokesman for the European Commission, the EU’s top executive body, said on Tuesday.

“We are obviously in continuous dialogue on options in terms of how best the EU can support Mozambique with development, humanitarian and peace building, together with

security actions,” El Anouni told a press conference in Brussels.

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

Rwandan forces have been deployed to the area since 2021. The operation has been backed by 40 million euros (US\$46 million) in EU funding for equipment and strategic airlift, according to Brussels. – AFP

Mozambican troops kill at least 13 fishermen in insurgent-hit area: locals

MAPUTO – Mozambique troops shot and killed at least 13 fishermen in an area where they are pursuing Islamist insurgents, local sources and a conflict monitor said on Tuesday.

The attack at the weekend in the northern Cabo Delgado province – where French energy giant TotalEnergies relaunched a giant gas project in January – was reported separately by a local news platform.

The province has been ravaged since 2017 by an Islamic State-linked insurgency that has claimed the lives of hundreds of civilians and led to the deployment of Mozambique and Rwandan troops.

A local security official told AFP that Mozambican navy forces had opened fire on fishing boats off the port town of Mocimboa da Praia early Sunday.

“At least 15 people were killed and several others were injured,” he said on condition of anonymity.

A local politician who also spoke anonymously said: “Between 13 and 15 people died and three

were injured. My friend’s boat was hit but he survived.”

Residents sought a meeting with the force commander but had no response, he said.

ACLED, an independent global conflict monitor informed by local networks, confirmed the incident to AFP and said at least 13 were killed.

There was no immediate comment from the government or military.

Mozambican forces in Cabo Delgado have previously been accused of violence against civilians in their operations.

TotalEnergies in late January relaunched construction on a gas project in the province that was halted in 2021 after a jihadist attack that claimed around 800 lives, according to ACLED estimates.

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

Around 6,500 people have been killed since the insurgency began, ACLED says. – AFP

Brazil starts to restrict minors’ access to social media



Iago Miola, director of the National Data Protection Agency (ANPD), gestures as he speaks during an interview with AFP about the new Digital Children and Adolescents Statute in Brasilia last week. – AFP

BRASÍLIA – Brazil began implementing new measures on Tuesday to restrict minors’ access to social media and prevent them from viewing violent or illegal content.

A law regulating children’s use of social media was approved last year after a scandal involving the alleged sexual exploitation of minors on Instagram, and comes into effect this week.

The hyper-connected nation of 212 million inhabitants joins several other countries seeking to protect children from addictive social media algorithms.

Some, like Australia, have outright banned access, while others require stronger age verification measures or parental consent.

In Brazil, adolescents up to 16 years of age must now have their accounts linked to that of a legal guardian.

Digital platforms are required to demand “reliable” age verification to prevent minors under the age of 18 from accessing prohibited or inappropriate content, such as pornographic or violent material.

“What our legislation did was ban self-declaration” as an age verification mechanism, as “that method is ineffective,” said Iago Miola, Director of the National Data Protection Authority (ANPD), the government body tasked with implementing the law.

Details on how the mechanism will work have not yet been released.

On Tuesday, a “transition period” got off the ground, during which the ANPD will outline the technical aspects of the law.

Miola said he had met with representatives from technology companies to review their proposals.

He said the preferred verification method was, for the time being, users uploading an identity document and providing biometric photo verification.

The law also requires digital platforms to remove content that appears to depict sexual exploitation or abuse, and notify Brazilian authorities.

Companies that fail to comply with the new regulations face punishment ranging from fines of up to 50 million reais (US\$9 million) and account suspensions, to an outright “ban” in cases of repeated non-compliance.

The law bans advertising aimed at children and adolescents, as well as so-called “loot boxes” – items within video games which users pay for to receive a surprise reward.

“Unlike other countries, Brazil opted for a law that is not limited to regulating social media for children, but rather covers the entire internet,” Renata Tomaz, a professor at the Getúlio Vargas Foundation, told AFP. – AFP

From Hormuz to Lisbon – How a distant war is squeezing Portuguese pockets

LISBON – The Strait of Hormuz is nearly 6,000 km from Lisbon, yet for Tiago Santos, a Brazilian immigrant working as a salesman in the Portuguese capital, that distance is shrinking as it increasingly shows up in his grocery receipts.

“The salary stays the same, but the expenses keep going up,” Santos told Xinhua, voicing an anxiety shared by millions in this Atlantic nation on the western fringe of Europe. “Even if the war is far away, the effect reaches people’s daily lives very quickly.”

As tensions between the US-Israeli force and Iran escalated in March, raising fears over the security of one of the world’s most critical oil transit chokepoints, Portugal found itself exposed to a conflict in which it had no part.

The country imports almost all of its fossil fuels, leaving it highly vulnerable to global energy shocks. Natural gas prices have already spiked by as much as 30 percent during peak tension moments. Analysts warn the worst may be yet to come.

“This is a classic supply shock: energy becomes more expensive and scarce, raising production costs across virtually the entire economy,” said economist Oscar Afonso, flagging a transmission mechanism that reaches from oil tankers in the Persian Gulf to supermarket shelves in Porto and Faro.

The risk is visible. Rodrigo Costa, president of Redes Energéticas Nacionais (REN), the company

responsible for guaranteeing uninterrupted electricity and gas supply to mainland Portugal, is watching the situation with concern.

“Fuel prices are already changing, and those changes always have an impact on the final prices of natural gas and electricity,” Costa said. Should the conflict deepen further, “there will certainly be very serious disruptions in supply chains, with general repercussions across all sectors,” Costa warned.

Portugal’s government has signaled readiness to act. During a parliamentary debate earlier, Prime Minister Luís Montenegro said, “If petrol and diesel register a sharp rise, the government is open to a discount on the ISP [Portugal’s fuel tax] ... to mitigate the impact.”

In the industrial sector, the pressure on energy bills is tangible. Aníbal Campos, chief executive of Silamos, a Portuguese manufacturer with significant export activity, described a logistical nightmare unfolding in real time: around 500,000 euros (US\$577,000) worth of goods are currently stuck at ports in Dubai and Saudi Arabia.

“The orders have not been cancelled, but they are suspended for logistical reasons,” he said. This echoes the predicament of multiple exporters, indicating the outline of an economic slowdown.

The Confederation of Portuguese Industry (CIP) officially sounded the alarm. In its March 2026 business barometer, director-general Rafael Alves Rocha warned

of slowing activity alongside mounting disruption, urging the government to extend direct support to vulnerable companies.

Projections from the Bank of Portugal and the CIP/ISEG barometer now place economic growth for 2026 in a range of 1.8 percent to 2.2 percent – a meaningful downward revision from earlier estimates, with geopolitical instability cited as the primary drag.

Beyond industry, tourism – a pillar of the economy – is also at risk, as higher travel costs and weaker global demand could curb arrivals.

“The rise in energy prices is also putting pressure on food prices. Lower purchasing power will reduce business activity,” said businessman Luis Fernandes. “Our company has not been immune.”

The most insidious fear, however, may lie in the interest rate outlook. Portuguese households carry some of the highest mortgage debt burdens in Europe, much of it at variable rates. Economists warn that a new inflationary wave triggered by energy costs could prompt the European Central Bank to pause – or even reverse – its rate-cutting cycle, locking families into elevated monthly payments for longer than expected.

Back in Lisbon, the impact of the Strait of Hormuz situation is tangible. Standing at a supermarket checkout, Santos told Xinhua: “With fuel more expensive, transport costs go up, food goes up, electricity goes up – and it hits families directly.” – AFP

Vinicius 'should be loved by everyone' says Donnarumma after celebration row



MANCHESTER — Gianluigi Donnarumma has questioned why Vinicius Junior celebrated his goals at Manchester City on Tuesday in front of the home support, saying a player of his calibre "should be loved by everyone".

The Brazilian struck twice as Real Madrid secured a 2-1 victory at the Etihad, completing a convincing 5-1 aggregate win as the record 15-times European champions secured their place in the quarter-finals of the Champions League.

His initial penalty was celebrated with a mock-crying gesture — an apparent reference to a banner City fans displayed during Real's February visit reading 'Stop

Crying Your Heart Out'.

That in turn was a jibe at Vinicius' perceived disappointment at losing out to City star Rodri for the 2024 Ballon d'Or.

But it was the celebration for his stoppage-time second goal that really seemed to annoy Donnarumma, with the City goalkeeper approaching Vinicius as he stood in front of home fans pointing to the name on his shirt.

Donnarumma, asked about the incident afterwards, said: "He's a champion and should be loved by everyone. I told him that.

"He's played two great games, but I think someone like him should be loved by everyone. He should try to make everyone love him because he's a champion."

City played most of the game with 10 men after captain Bernardo Silva was sent off for deliberately handling a Vinicius shot.

Erling Haaland was on target as City racked up 22 shots, but a comeback triumph never looked truly likely and they only have a few days to restore their morale ahead of Sunday's League Cup final against Arsenal at Wembley.

"I think the sending-off was decisive, but football is like that, made up of incidents, especially in the Champions League," said Donnarumma.

"I'm proud of my team-mates, we played a great match and with 11 against 11 it would have been different." —AFP



Manchester City's Italian goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma (right) reacts as Real Madrid's Brazilian forward Vinicius Junior celebrates a goal which is subsequently disallowed for offside during the UEFA Champions League, round of 16 second leg between Manchester City and Real Madrid at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England, on Tuesday. —AFP

Stripping Senegal of AFCON title a 'disgrace for Africa' say fans

Becca Milfeed

DAKAR — Senegal football fans yesterday slammed the decision to strip the country of its

Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) title and give it to Morocco, calling the move a "disgrace for Africa" as their country demands an investigation.

Gora Ndiaye, a resident of Dakar who works as a driver, told AFP he felt like he had "been hit over the head" when he heard the news on the radio.

The Confederation of African Football (CAF) sensationally stripped Senegal of their title late Tuesday, citing regulations about leaving the field, which players did near the end of the final two months ago.

"If this law was applicable, it should have been applied immediately and the cup should have been awarded to the Moroccans", Ndiaye said, calling the move "a disgrace for Africa".

With the news ricocheting across social media and the airwaves yesterday fans are now waiting for the results of a promised appeal by their country's football authorities.

Senegal's government additionally called for "an independent international investigation into suspected corruption within the CAF's governing bodies".

Several Senegalese players walked off the pitch in protest during the final in Rabat on January 18 when the hosts were awarded a penalty late in second-half stoppage time.

After Senegal's players were coaxed back onto the pitch by captain Sadio Mane, Morocco missed the penalty. Pape Gueye then scored in extra time to give Senegal a 1-0 victory.

CAF said that having studied an appeal by Morocco, "the Senegal national team is declared to have forfeited the match" and the result was "officially recorded as 3-0" in favour of Morocco.

"I started by laughing and being surprised at the same time, because it really shocked me that two months later they took away our victory", Assietou Diallo, a 25-year-old accounting assistant, told AFP from downtown Dakar.

Senegalese press were unanimous, with headlines such as "Big Continental Farce", "Joke of the Century" and "Unprecedented Scandal".

Waiting for appeal

Senegal's football authorities said they will appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in the next 48 hours, condemning what they said was an "unjust, unprecedented and unacceptable decision".

Senegal defender Moussa Niakhate posted a photo on Instagram of himself holding the Africa Cup and wearing a medal, with the comment "Come and get them! They're crazy!"

Senegal fans maintain that even if the team are stripped of their trophy, they are still the true victor in the eyes of spectators.

"We played and we won", Senegal supporter Khola Diouf told AFP from Dakar, pointing to Morocco's missed penalty in the final moments of the game, adding that "the whole world is witnessing and knows that Senegal deserves the cup".

The trophy, said Ndiaye the driver, "is an object" and even "if we give it to the Moroccans, you have to know that Senegal beat them on the field".

In Rabat, where the match was played, fans were decidedly in favour even if less emotional, as they prepared their final shopping ahead of the Eid al-Fitr holiday, marking the end of Ramadan.

"Everyone is happy with this outcome", Mohamed Amine Boujdaini, a 53-year-old lawyer, told AFP, adding "the cup returns to its rightful home".

Omar Haryate, a 70-year-old retiree, meanwhile said "justice has been served".

The CAF Appeals Committee justified its decision by applying Articles 82 and 84 of the AFCON Regulations. They state that if a team "refuses to play or leaves the ground before the regular end of the match without the authorisation of the referee, it shall be considered [loser] and shall be eliminated for good from the current competition".

The articles add the team contravening the regulations "will lose its match by 3-0". —AFP

Football shorts

Cremonese sack Nicola, hire Giampaolo in bid to beat Serie A drop

MILAN — Cremonese hired Marco Giampaolo yesterday after sacking Davide Nicola due to a desperate run of form which left Jamie Vardy's Serie A club staring at relegation.

In a statement, Cremonese said experienced Giampaolo, 58, "has been appointed first team coach" following the dismissal of Nicola, who paid the price for a 15-match winless run.

Giampaolo had previously coached Cremonese during the 2014/15 season when the club were in the third tier, and was most recently in charge of Lecce who he kept in Serie A last term.

Owned by local billionaire steel magnate Giovanni Arvedi, Cremonese were promoted to Italy's top flight last season and started the season strongly with wins over AC Milan and Sassuolo.

Cremonese were sat in the top half of the table after beating Lecce on December 7, but since then they have picked up just four points and dropped into the relegation zone last weekend following a 4-1 home drubbing at

the hands of Fiorentina.

They signed Vardy in September on a one-year deal with an option for another season should they manage to stay in the top flight.

The former Leicester City and England striker, 39, has scored five times this season, his last goal coming back in early January in a 2-2 draw with Cagliari. —AFP

Getafe's Abqar banned for Sorloth crotch pinch

BARCELONA — Getafe defender Abdel Abqar will serve a two-match ban after being sent off for pinching Atletico Madrid striker Alexander Sorloth in the crotch.

The Morocco international said he had no intention of touching Sorloth's crotch during Atletico's 1-0 win in La Liga last Saturday in La Liga.

"The images are compatible with the facts described in the referee's report," said the Spanish football federation's disciplinary committee in a statement yesterday.

Referee Isidro Diaz de Mera, who sent off Abqar after a VAR review, wrote in his report that the red card was for "pinching the genital zone" of an opponent.

Abqar will be banned for Getafe's upcoming league matches against Espanyol and Athletic Bilbao. —AFP

PSG's Barcola ruled out for several weeks with ankle injury

PARIS — Paris Saint-Germain winger Bradley Barcola has been ruled out for "the next few weeks" with an ankle injury, the Champions League holders said yesterday.

The France international hobbled off just before the hour mark of PSG's Champions League last-16 second leg at Chelsea on Tuesday.

PSG said he had "suffered a severe ligament sprain in his right ankle".

The French side went on to win the game 3-0 and the tie 8-2 on aggregate to set up a quarter-final against either Galatasaray or Liverpool.

Barcola scored in both legs against Chelsea, his first goals in the competition since February last year.

Paris are back in action this weekend at Nice, hoping to extend their one-point lead over Lens at the top of Ligue 1.

Barcola has been in fine form in recent weeks, netting five times in his last six appearances. —AFP

Aston Villa want to be more than 'maybe team' in Europa League quest



BIRMINGHAM — Aston Villa captain John McGinn wants his side to be remembered as more than a "maybe team" in their quest for Europa League glory.

Villa have enjoyed several notable seasons under manager Unai Emery, making their presence felt towards the top of the Premier League and reaching the Champions League quarter-finals.

But the former European champions have no silverware to show for their recent efforts and McGinn is determined to bring a trophy back to Villa Park.

Villa take a 1-0 aggregate lead into the second leg of their Europa League last-16 tie today in Birmingham.

"That's what the manager has driven into us," said McGinn.

"He's a manager who has a reputation of not getting close to the finish line, he's got a reputation of getting over the finish line.

"So we don't want to be a maybe team. We don't want to be a team like, 'Aye, they were not bad'. We want something to show for it.

"And we know we've got an expectation and are one of the favourites to win the competition.

"We know that, but it's up to us to deliver performances and results that prove why we're one of the favourites because of how we've played over the last few years, domestically and in Europe."

Villa, however, have won just two of their last nine matches in all competitions.

But Emery, a four-time Europa League winner as a head coach,

said his current club's form needed to be put into context.

"It (our form) can feel a little strange, but we are playing the second leg in the last 16 of the Europa League, and when we arrived here three-and-a-half years ago, it was a dream in that moment," he explained.

"Wow, it was so difficult to think we could achieve it in the period time we have, so quick.

"And how we are being consistent in Premier League, being fourth, even though we have lost in the last three matches, we are fourth in the league."

Villa will face one of Italian sides Roma or Bologna in the quarter-finals if they can see off Ligue 1 club Lille.

The game will be played at 4 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time. —AFP/MPD

3 sporting champions to be stripped of titles for non-doping reasons

Pirate Irwin

PARIS – Senegal's shock disqualification as African football champions on Tuesday is not the first time winners of a sporting title have been stripped of their crown for non-doping reasons.

AFP Sports picks out three previous instances:

Jim Thorpe - 1912 Olympics

He achieved the remarkable double of winning both the decathlon and the pentathlon at the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm.

Thorpe became the first Native American to be crowned Olympic champion and was hailed as the "greatest athlete in the world" by Swedish King Gustav V.

However, a few months later, in January 1913, it was revealed Thorpe had earned money playing baseball for two seasons prior to the Games.

This was forbidden as only amateurs were permitted to compete in the Olympics at the time.

He tried desperately to avoid being punished.

"I hope I will be excused, because of the fact that I was simply an Indian school boy and did not know all about such things," he wrote in a letter admitting he had taken money.

This cut no ice with the authorities the American Amateur Athletic Union who stripped him of his titles in 1913 and shipped them back to International Olympic Committee (IOC).

The silver medallist - a Swede Hugo Wieslander - declined to accept the gold. Thorpe was reinstated as joint winner by the IOC in 1982 and as sole gold medallist in 2022.

Sadly, he had not lived to see those days. He died penniless in 1953 from a heart attack after battling alcoholism for years.

Gehnal Persson - 1948 Olympics

Thorpe's disqualification may have seemed tough, but Persson's over three decades later exposed a class divide, which seemed outdated post World War II.

Persson was an outstanding dressage rider, the only problem was he was a non-commissioned officer and in those days the equestrian discipline was restricted to officers only.

The Swedes thought they had got round this by promoting him to lieutenant shortly before the Olympic Games in London.

He rode so well the Swedes romped to

gold - well clear of runners-up France.

However, as sharp as he was on a horse, the French secretary-general of the International Equestrian Federation (FEI) Commandant Georges Hector was equally eagle-eyed.

He had noticed Persson was wearing an NCO cap in competition, investigated further and subsequently learnt the rider had been demoted back to his previous rank post the Games.

Persson was disqualified in April 1949 as were the Swedes with France elevated to gold.

Later that year the FEI relaxed its rules and opened up the event to NCO's, women and civilians.

Persson made the most of this to inspire the Swedes to team gold in 1952 and 1956.

Muhammad Ali - Boxing world title 1967

Ali was part of a generation of legendary heavyweight boxers.

However, Ali, born Cassius Clay, stood over his opponents not only in the ring but also for his quick wit and his willingness to confront divisive political issues in the 1960's, such as racism and the Vietnam War.

It was the latter that cost him dearly, when he refused to be drafted into the US Army for religious reasons.

"War is against the teachings of the Qur'an...I ain't got no quarrel with those Vietcong," he said.

At his US Army induction ceremony in April 1967 Ali backed up his words by refusing to step forward.

Not only was he charged with a felony carrying a potential prison sentence of five years but his boxing licence was suspended, across the country, and the WBA stripped him of his world title.

He was to return to the ring and reclaim the world title in the 'Rumble in the Jungle' in October 1974 against George Foreman and defend it in the 'Thrilla in Manila' in a brutal bout with Joe Frazier in October, 1975.

Regrets? He had none.

"Standing up for my religion made me happy; it wasn't a sacrifice," he wrote.

"When people got drafted and sent to Vietnam and didn't understand what the killing was about and came home with one leg and couldn't get jobs, that was a sacrifice."

– AFP

Sport in brief

Argentina eye bid for 2035 Rugby World Cup

Rugby

PARIS – The Argentine Rugby Union (UAR) announced late on Tuesday it was planning to bid to host the 2035 World Cup as it holds conversations with the sport's governing body.

World Rugby chief executive Alan Gilpin is visiting the country, which aims to organise the first World Cup in South America.

The UAR said it would look at involving nations from across the continent including Brazil, Chile and Uruguay.

"The 2035 bid represents a federal objective and a legacy project that transcends our borders," UAR president Gabriel Travaglini said in a statement.

"Welcoming Alan Gilpin to advance this technical analysis is a fundamental step in demonstrating that the region is ready.

"We want a World Cup that reflects the passion and development that rugby has achieved in every corner of our territory," he added.

Japan have also stated their intention of bidding for the event, having organised the 2019 World Cup.

The next edition of the competition will take place in Australia next year with the United States hosting the tournament in 2031. – AFP

Pidcock wins Milan-Turin with late solo dash

Cycling

MILAN – Tom Pidcock won the Milan-Turin one-day race yesterday, going it alone in the final moments to claim his second win of the season.

Briton Pidcock, who rides for Pinarello-Q36.5, made his move in the last kilometre of the climatic Superga climb with powerful acceleration which his rivals could not match.

Tobias Halland Johannessen trailed Pidcock by four seconds with Primož Roglič completing the podium a further second back.

Pidcock had already won a stage of the Vuelta a Andalucía last month and he was in fine form ahead of Milan-San Remo on Saturday. – AFP

O'Sullivan, Trump advance to last 16 at 2026 World Snooker Open

Snooker

NANCHANG – Ronnie O'Sullivan, Judd Trump and Zhao Xintong all advanced to the last 16 of the World Snooker Open in Yushan, Jiangxi

Province, yesterday with comfortable victories.

Seven-time world champion O'Sullivan won five straight frames to beat fellow Englishman Matthew Selt 5-0. In the second frame, he compiled a superb 138 break in just nine minutes to take the frame.

"I'm going to win the whole match," O'Sullivan said in his post-match interview. "I've felt in good form over the first two matches, and I'll keep this form going and try to keep winning."

World No. 1 Judd Trump also delivered a strong display, beating Welshman Jackson Page 5-2.

Reigning world champion Zhao Xintong of China opened with a century break of 100 before going on to seal a 5-1 win over England's Sam Craigie.

In the day's other matches involving former world champions, Shaun Murphy beat Xu Si 5-1, Stuart Bingham edged Wu Yize 5-4, Kyren Wilson thrashed Allan Taylor 5-1, and Mark Williams lost 5-2 to Hossein Vafaei. – Xinhua

Former Australian Test wicket-keeper Haddin to coach NSW

Cricket

SYDNEY – Former Australian Test wicketkeeper Brad Haddin was appointed head coach of New South Wales yesterday, vowing to bring "an aura" back to the struggling team.

Haddin replaces Greg Shipperd who was sacked midway through the season with NSW failing to fire in the domestic Sheffield Shield.

He got the nod after reportedly receiving high-level endorsements from former Test captains Mark Taylor and Steve Waugh.

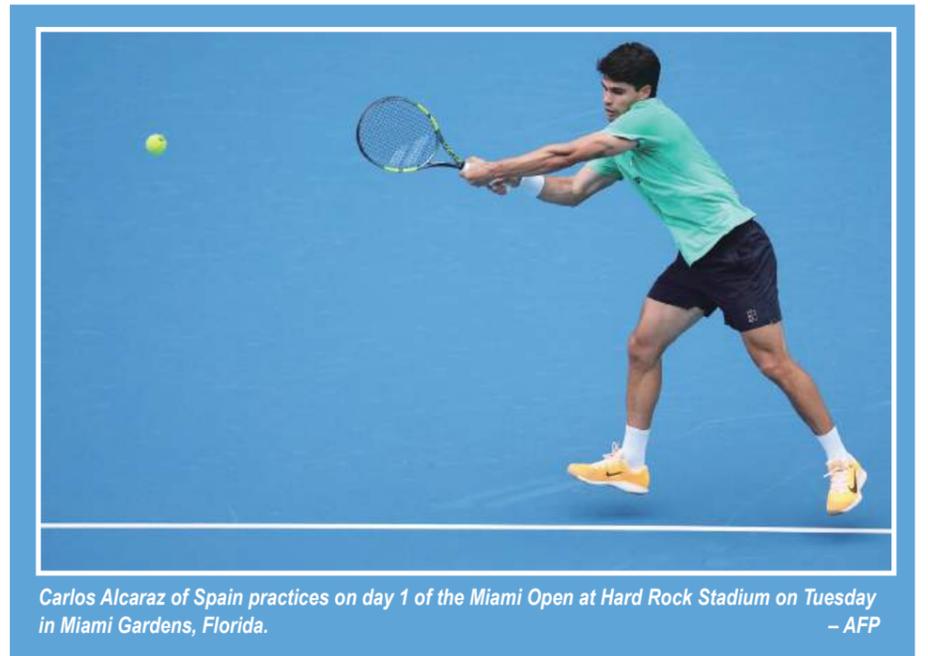
"Wearing the baggy blue was incredibly special and gave me some of the greatest memories of my career," said Haddin of his playing time with NSW.

"I am looking forward to working with our current crop of talented players to bring back an aura to NSW cricket and to have a team with a formidable, distinctive style of play we can all be proud of."

The appointment continues Haddin's rise through coaching ranks, having previously served as an assistant in the Australian teams under Darren Lehmann and Justin Langer.

He also worked under Trevor Bayliss at Indian Premier League sides Sunrisers Hyderabad and Punjab Kings.

Haddin played 66 Tests and 126 ODIs before his retirement in 2015. – AFP



Carlos Alcaraz of Spain practices on day 1 of the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium on Tuesday in Miami Gardens, Florida. – AFP

Buttler ready to continue England career despite 'poor' T20 World Cup

Cricket

LONDON – Jos Buttler is refusing to accept his England career is over despite admitting he had a "poor tournament" at the recent T20 World Cup.

Widely regarded as one of the outstanding white-ball batsmen of his generation, Buttler managed just 87 runs in eight innings at the tournament as England reached the semi-finals before losing to co-hosts and eventual champions India.

"Obviously I had a poor tournament, which is disappointing," Buttler, who remains on an England and Wales central contract, said on his For the Love of Cricket podcast with former England fast bowler Stuart Broad.

"But I have been playing some of the best cricket of my [career] in recent years, so hopefully I can get back to playing my best.

"I certainly have ambitions [to play for England again], but no longer being a captain, I am not a selector and whatever, so what will be, will be."

Buttler, 35, is set to play for Gujarat Titans in the upcoming Indian Premier League and hopes time away after the World Cup "up the mountains" in France with his family will leave him feeling reinvigorated.

"I couldn't have been further away from cricket, which for me at the time was just perfect," said Buttler. "It is exactly what I needed."

"Obviously the tournament didn't go personally how I would have liked it to go, and I just felt like I needed some space from cricket and not to think about the game, and I could not have been further away from cricket where I was in that week."

Buttler, a member of England's 2019 one-day international World Cup-winning team and also the skipper for their T20 triumph in Australia three years later, added: "It was really refreshing - I really enjoyed it, a complete sort of release, and slowly but surely, I would say at the start of this week, [I am] just starting to reflect a bit and have a few thoughts about what is important to me and my cricket, and why it probably didn't go quite as I would've liked.

"There's elements that I actually don't really know exactly. For all your best intentions and hard work and efforts to perform, it just didn't work, and sometimes that is OK as well.

"That is something I have had to realise. It wasn't for a lack of effort, it just didn't quite happen." – AFP

Global music market grows, calls for AI compensation: industry body

LONDON – The global music industry generated US\$31.7 billion last year, driven by online streaming, industry body IFPI said yesterday, as it called on the sector to ensure AI-generated content compensates musicians.

Music revenues rose 6.4 percent, marking the eleventh consecutive year of expansion, according to the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, which represents more than 8,000 global record labels.

Streaming accounted for nearly 70 percent of annual revenue, with paid streaming subscriptions reaching 837 million subscribers worldwide.

But the IFPI warned against the increasing threat of AI-generated streams of fake content.

“Streaming fraud is theft, plain and simple,” the group said in its annual report, calling instead for technology to “support and enhance creativity, not replace it.”

AI-generated tracks regularly go viral, such as the runaway success of an AI cover of Belgian musician Stromae’s “Papaoutai” at the end of January.

According to the report, Deezer revealed that it receives more than

60,000 AI-generated tracks every day.

AI music generation platforms – such as US based Suno and Udio – argue their work is covered by the American copyright loophole of “fair use,” which does not require rights holders’ consent.

The IFPI urged policymakers to uphold copyright protections.

“Music is embracing the future, demonstrated by record company partnerships with generative AI developers who respect the rights of creators,” the group said.

Suno reached an agreement with record label Warner Music Group in November to compensate artists whose work is used to create AI-generated tracks.

Revenues from physical formats were up, including from vinyl which grew 13.7 percent.

Asia drove the rise in vinyls and CDs, while these formats were almost non-existent in the North Africa and Middle East market, where streaming accounts for 97.5 percent of revenue.

Taylor Swift was the biggest-selling global artist of 2025, followed by Korean group Stray kids and Canadian rapper Drake.

– AFP

Russia slams Oscar-winning anti-Putin documentary

MOSCOW – Russia yesterday condemned the Oscar-winning documentary “Mr Nobody Against Putin”, saying it had featured children filmed without their parents’ consent, in Moscow’s first official reaction to the film scooping the prestigious award.

Small-town Russian school videographer Pavel Talankin, 35, won the Academy Award together with US filmmaker David Borenstein for the documentary, which chronicles pro-war patriotic lessons introduced in Russia’s schools under President Vladimir Putin amid Moscow’s Ukraine offensive.

Talankin, who fled Russia with the smuggled footage and now openly opposes the war, was instructed to film the propaganda lessons by the school administration, eventually deciding to secretly team up with the US director.

Russia’s human rights council, a government body, said that “images of minors were used without obtaining the consent of their parents” in the documentary.

It added that the footage was intended as an “internal record of school activities for educational use”, but then was used for commercial purposes.

The council said it requested the Academy that awards the Oscars and UN cultural agency UNESCO to launch an investigation.

Moscow has not commented on the substance of the film.

The documentary has proved polarising even among anti-Kremlin Russians, and some argued that children were filmed without parental consent.

Talankin fled Russia in 2024, leaving behind his mother and siblings.

– AFP

Tencent bets on AI agents

Luna Lin and Katie Forster

BEIJING – Tencent wants to bring artificial intelligence agents into its WeChat social media app, the Chinese tech firm’s president said yesterday, a move that could change how hundreds of millions of users interact with the platform in the Asian nation and beyond.

Agents – programmes that execute real-life tasks such as sending emails or booking flights – are being touted as AI’s next frontier after chatbots such as ChatGPT.

Their incorporation into WeChat may alter how people in the world’s second-largest economy use the so-called “super-app” that already boasts social messaging, digital payments and a long list of other features.

Tencent, also the world’s largest video game publisher, reported a 16 percent jump in full-year net profit yesterday, with gaming still the main business driver even as it extends its AI push.

The company has sought in recent years to integrate AI into WeChat, known as Weixin in China.

“We hope to create AI agents in Weixin, which could leverage Weixin’s close connection with users,” company president Martin Lau told reporters.

“It will be a highly diverse ecosystem, encompassing mini-programs, content, commerce, social networking and payments,” Lau added, without giving details such as when the service would become available.

Yesterday, Tencent said net profit for 2025 came to 224.8 billion yuan (US\$32.6 billion), beating estimates of 221.9 billion yuan in a Bloomberg survey of economists.

The company, which owns the developer of popular eSports including “League of Legends”, has sizeable operations in other sectors from cloud computing to entertainment.

Despite being China’s most valuable tech company by market capitalisation, so far Tencent has been seen as a cautious AI player, although founder Pony Ma has vowed to increase investment in the sector.

“Our highly resilient and cash generative core businesses provides us with the resources to fund our increasing investments in AI,” Ma said in a statement yesterday.

Agent fever

Like its rivals Alibaba, Baidu and ByteDance, Tencent has recently branched out into the world of AI agents with its WorkBuddy app.

The Shenzhen-based company has also been among the Chinese tech giants racing to take advantage of a surge in interest in the country in OpenClaw – an AI agent platform created by an Austrian programmer that has fascinated the tech world.

Tencent and others are offering simplified installation and affordable coding plans to help

users host OpenClaw agents on cloud servers.

Earlier this month the company’s cloud computing arm organised an OpenClaw setup event at its headquarters, which drew more than 1,000 attendees, with similar events planned across China.

The increasing capabilities of Tencent’s main large-language AI model, and AI agent tools such as WorkBuddy and new offering QClaw, “are encouraging early signs that these investments will unlock new opportunities”, the company said.

The Financial Times reported this month that the White House was debating whether Tencent’s investment in US and Finnish gaming groups pose a national security risk.

Discussions over its stakes in “Fortnite” creator Epic Games, Riot Games and Supercell revolve around the implications for US user data privacy, the British newspaper said, citing people familiar with the matter.

“We have been engaged in constructive discussions with the relevant US regulators for quite some time now,” said Tencent president Lau.

“Things are moving in a positive direction” with the overall risk “manageable”, he said.

“While there are due processes to be followed in the US, other regions are actually very keen for us to invest in gaming companies.”

– AFP

BTS light stick prices surge ahead of comeback concert



This picture taken on Monday shows pedestrians walking past a road closure notice for Saturday’s comeback concert of K-pop boy group BTS, at Gwanghwamun Square in Seoul on Monday. More than a quarter of a million fans are expected to throng central Seoul on Saturday for BTS’s open-air gig, the first performance in almost four years by the boy band seen as the biggest in the world. – AFP

SEOUL – Second-hand BTS light sticks were selling for up to six times the original price ahead of the K-pop megagroup’s huge comeback concert this weekend, an online reseller showed yesterday.

The world’s biggest boy band reunites on Saturday for their first show in nearly four years, taking over central Seoul for a K-pop extravaganza beamed live around the globe.

K-pop fans are known for their concert light sticks, which have become symbols of devotion to their artists.

BTS’s global fans, known as the ARMY, calls theirs the Army Bomb.

The original price of the latest official version is around 50,000 won (US\$33.67), but they are sold out.

Listings on Bunjang, a major platform for used goods, are priced at between 100,000 and

330,000 won per unit.

The concert on Saturday will see BTS take the stage on the doorstep of the famed Gyeongbokgung royal palace.

The area has also long been a site of political protests, including after former president Yoon Suk Yeol’s failed 2024 martial law declaration, when K-pop fans took part with glowsticks – a striking image that drew global attention.

– AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 3°C~17°C	Manila 20°C~31°C	New York 3°C~8°C	Lisbon 12°C~16°C
Shanghai 5°C~14°C	Bangkok 25°C~35°C	London 3°C~17°C	Rio de Janeiro 23°C~29°C
Hong Kong 18°C~25°C	Tokyo 8°C~18°C	Frankfurt 2°C~16°C	Luanda 25°C~29°C
Taipei 18°C~23°C	Singapore 23°C~33°C	Vancouver 11°C~12°C	Maputo 22°C~31°C
Guangzhou 18°C~28°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~35°C	Paris 3°C~17°C	Dili 24°C~30°C
Nanjing 6°C~14°C	Jakarta 24°C~34°C	Moscow -1°C~8°C	São Tomé 27°C~33°C
Guilin 11°C~18°C	Seoul 1°C~12°C	Las Vegas 20°C~36°C	Praia 18°C~27°C
Xi’an 3°C~12°C	Sydney 19°C~23°C	Monte Carlo 8°C~17°C	Bissau 20°C~35°C



Can't beat vinyl

A general view of the vinyl record collection in Guy Samba's shop in Brazzaville, Congo yesterday.

Guy Samba says he inherited the vinyl record collection after his father's death and would like to pass it on to his own children. At his shop customers can buy cassettes, DVDs and vinyl records. To update his stock of vinyl, he offers to buy them from customers wishing to part with them. – AFP

Making friends at last

A seven-month-old male Japanese macaque monkey named Punch (left), who was abandoned by his mother shortly after birth, is groomed by another monkey at Ichikawa City Zoo and Botanical Gardens in Ichikawa, Chiba Prefecture yesterday. – AFP



Expressive three

A man stands next to a poster showing robots mimicking human expressions from Shenzhen Xiaoquan Technology during the International AI Application and Robotics Innovation Exhibition in Beijing yesterday. – AFP



Colour changing tree

The light art installation "The Tree" of Ars Electronica Solutions from Austria is pictured during a preview of the new exhibition „Mythos Wald“ ("Forest Worlds") at the Gasometer in Oberhausen, Germany yesterday.

With "The Tree", visitors on the upper floor are provided with a unique view from the artistically designed root system into the abstract tree crown rising around 35 metres into the sky of the Gasometer. The exhibition runs from March 20 until December 30, 2026. – AFP

Right in the middle

Visitors walk on a skybridge overlooking the border between Thailand's Mae Sai (right) and Myanmar's Tachileik (left) at Wat Phra That Doi Wao Buddhist temple in Mae Sai in the northern Thai province of Chiang Rai on Tuesday. – AFP



Fantastical garden

A woman views flowers during the Floral Showcase: Bloomland in Oz at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington, Ontario, Canada, on Tuesday. Inspired by the pages of the original novel, "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz," this floral showcase is held here from January 31 to April 6. – Xinhua

