

Sam vows alignment with Guangdong's 15th Five-Year Plan

Tony Wong

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai has pledged that his government will align the Macau Special Administrative Region's (MSAR) third Five-Year Plan with Guangdong Province's 15th Five-Year Plan, elevating Guangdong-Macau cooperation to higher levels, and together making greater contributions to Chinese modernisation and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Sam made the remarks while delivering a speech during the 2026 Spring Festival Banquet of Guangdong Province (Macao) on Friday.

The banquet, held at the Macau Tower Convention and Entertainment Centre, was organised by the Guangzhou-based Council for the Promotion of Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Cooperation.

In his speech on Friday, Sam noted that the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan, which was passed by the National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing earlier this month, draws a grand blueprint for the country's development over the next five years. The 15th Five-Year Plan period, Sam noted, represents a crucial period for the country to lay a solid foundation necessary to basically achieve socialist modernisation.

The plan, officially known as 15th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development, covers the period between 2026 and 2030.

The 15th Five-Year Plan, Sam said, also provides greater opportunities and creates a broader stage for further deepening



Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai addresses Friday's Spring Festival Banquet of Guangdong Province (Macao) at Macau Tower. - Photo: GCS

Guangdong-Macau cooperation, pledging that Macau will work together with Guangdong Province to earnestly implement the plans outlined by the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan concerning Guangdong and Macau, and to ensure effective alignment and coordination between the MSAR's third five-year socioeconomic development plan and Guangdong Province's 15th Five-Year Plan.

The MSAR 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 noted that last year marked the concluding year of the nation's 14th Five-Year Plan, during which the country secured historic achievements in its socioeconomic development. The Chinese mainland's gross domestic product (GDP) surpassed the 140 trillion yuan benchmark last year, Sam noted,

adding that Guangdong Province, as an economic powerhouse in the country, saw its GDP exceed 14 trillion yuan, ranking first in the nation for 37 consecutive years.

The Chinese mainland's GDP grew by 5.0 percent to 140.19 trillion yuan in 2025, while Guangdong's economic output rose by 3.9 percent to 14.58 trillion yuan, according to official statistics.

Sam underlined that over the past year, under the central government's guidance and support and with the joint efforts of Guangdong and Macau, cooperation between the two sides has yielded fruitful results. Last year, Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau jointly hosted the National Games for the first time, while the 2025 Guangdong-Macau Cooperation Joint Conference was successfully held, Sam noted, pointing out that he visited all the nine Guangdong cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) on separate occasions last year.

The 11-member GBA consists of nine prefecture-level cities in Guangdong Province and the nation's two special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macau.

The province comprises a total of 21 prefecture-level cities.

Sam noted that Macau recorded 40.07 million visitor arrivals last year, the highest annual number on record, with 17.10 million of them from Guangdong Province, accounting for 42.7 percent of the total, and representing a year-on-year increase of 30.4 percent.

Continued on p.6

US firms welcome to seize development opportunities in China: vice premier

BEIJING – Enterprises from the United States are welcome to seize the development opportunities in China and deepen mutually beneficial cooperation with the country, Vice Premier He Lifeng said yesterday.

He, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks when meeting with a delegation of the US-China Business Council (USCBC).

Noting that China-US ties are the world's most important bilateral relations,

He said it is hoped that the USCBC will continue to play its role as a bridge to promote friendly exchanges and the stable and healthy development of economic and trade relations between China and the United States.

It is also hoped that US enterprises can fully seize the development opportunities in China, make good use of the potential of the Chinese market, and inject more stability and positive energy into China-US economic and trade relations, He added.

- Xinhua

China to inject greater certainty, positive momentum into global economy: official

BEIJING – China will continue to deliver stable and high-quality growth and inject greater certainty and positive momentum into the global economy, a senior official said yesterday.

China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) serves as a blueprint to create and expand new opportunities together with the rest of the world, Han Wenxiu, executive deputy director of the Office of the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs, said at the China Development Forum 2026 held in Beijing.

Despite global uncertainties, China will

remain committed to deepening reform comprehensively and expanding high-standard opening up over the next five years, Han said. He added that the country will further expand market access and open up more areas, particularly in the service sector, and open up wider in areas such as telecommunications, healthcare and education.

"We do not deliberately pursue a trade surplus; on the contrary, we are committed to promoting balanced trade development," Han said, adding that China, in fact, has long run a significant deficit in services trade.

- AFP

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Li Qiang stresses opportunities, fair competition, development confidence amid growing uncertainties

Premier Li Qiang has stressed creating new market opportunities through openness and technological progress, and upholding global market order through healthy and fair competition. - Story on p. 7

Iran threatens Mideast infrastructure after Trump ultimatum

Iran yesterday vowed to "irreversibly" destroy key infrastructure across the Middle East if US President Donald Trump acted on his threat to knock out the Islamic republic's power plants unless the Strait of Hormuz was swiftly reopened. - Story on p. 10

Portuguese parliament moves to toughen gender change law

Portugal's parliament on Friday advanced a draft law that would force individuals wanting to change their official gender to get backing from a doctor. - Story on p. 12

MUST student killed in robbery in Hengqin: PSB

Armando Neves

The Public Security Bureau (PSB) in Hengqin announced in a statement yesterday afternoon that two females fell victim to robbery in the adjacent island on Friday, one of whom was killed in the attack.

Later in the afternoon, the private Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST) identified both as its students.

In the brief statement, the bureau identified the suspect as a 26-year-old male surnamed Chen.

According to the statement,

the incident occurred on Friday evening when the suspect allegedly committed the robbery targeting the two women in a “residential community” in Hengqin, resulting in the death of one of the victims.

MUST said in its statement yesterday afternoon that it places great importance on the matter and has arranged for a working group to follow up. As the Public Security Bureau in Hengqin are still investigating the case, the university said that no further information on the case was available for the time being. ■



警情通报

2026年3月21日，横琴公安局及时侦破一宗刑事案件，抓获犯罪嫌疑人陈某波（男，26岁）。现已查明，陈某波于3月20日晚窜至横琴某小区，对两名受害人实施抢劫，并致其中一人死亡。案件正在进一步侦办中。

This image shows a police information circular issued by the Public Security Bureau (PSB) in Hengqin about the robbery-homicide yesterday.

Women’s Sports Carnival draws over 1,000 participants: ID

Ida Cheong

The 2026 Macau Women’s Sports Carnival held its recreational sport competitions yesterday, also featuring a disease prevention and health consultation booth set up for women, where doctors provided health services, aiming to enhance women’s health awareness and safeguard their physical and mental well-being.

The Macau Sports Bureau (ID), which organised the event, said that about 1,000 people were in attendance.

The two-day event, which started on Saturday in the city’s main square, Largo do Senado (議事亭前地), and concluded yesterday at the Tap Seac Multi-Sports Pavilion, drew participants from 70 women’s representative teams (58 local teams and 12 teams from Chinese mainland cities and provinces).

ID Acting President See Lei Si Leng noted in speech yesterday that the carnival has been held for over 20 years and has become an important platform in Macau for encouraging women’s participation in sporting activities, adding that the event uses sport as a bridge, has established a cross-regional exchange platform, promotes the integration of women’s sports cultures, and has injected diverse vitality into the development of women’s sport in Macau.

Lei underscored that beyond showcasing women’s health and wellness, she hoped the



Participants compete during the Women’s Sports Carnival at the Tap Seac Multi-sport Pavilion yesterday. – Photo: Ida Cheong

event would raise civil society’s awareness regarding personal physical and mental health, aiming to encourage everyone to integrate exercise into their daily life, thereby achieving a healthier lifestyle. She added that her bureau keeps actively promoting diverse large-scale sporting platforms to encourage citizens to develop a habit of regular exercise.

Women’s General Association of Macau (commonly known as Fu Luen in Cantonese) President Lau Kam Leng noted in a speech she hopes that her organisation can

leverage the annual event as an opportunity to continuously foster a social atmosphere of “lifelong sports and fitness for all”, allowing sports to become a key practice for Macau in proactively aligning with the nation’s sports development trends and expanding cross-regional cooperation.

By uniting the power of women through sport, the event aims to support the integration of Hengqin and Macau and showcase new achievements in the development of women’s sport in Macau, Lau added. ■

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Macau Customs seizes 70 terrapins worth 35,000 patacas

Armando Neves

Macau Customs Services announced in a statement last week that its officers seized 70 terrapins* worth 35,000 patacas, or 500 patacas per reptile, on Tuesday

Based on trends observed in smuggler activities, the statement said that customs officers identified and monitored a flat suspected of serving as a parallel-trading den, adding that on Tuesday, during surveillance, they observed three women leaving the flat and heading towards the Barrier Gate checkpoint, the statement said.

According to the Thursday statement, customs officers promptly intercepted the trio at the checkpoint’s Departures Hall and seized 12 live terrapins concealed among their personal belongings.

During questioning, the statement said, all three individuals admitted to engaging in parallel trading activities.

Customs immediately afterwards raided the flat, where a man in charge of the “business” was questioned and 58 live terrapins were seized. The man was unable to present documentation proving the origin of the terrapins.

The statement said that the male



This undated handout photo provided by the Macau Customs Service last week shows 70 terrapins seized by its officers at the Barrier Gate checkpoint and a parallel-trading den on Tuesday.

who ran the “business” had hired parallel traders to smuggle terrapins from Macau to the mainland.

According to the statement, the four individuals are local residents aged between 55 and 69.

The Macau Customs Service has taken legal action against the quartet in accordance with the External Trade Law, adding that they could face a maximum fine of 100,000 patacas.

The statement also said that the

three women are also suspected of violating provisions of the law implementing the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), adding that all terrapins have been handed over to the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) for follow-up action. ■

*A terrapin is a small to medium-sized aquatic or semi-aquatic turtle, typically found in fresh or brackish water. – Poe

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Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY PERIODS.
FORCE 2 TO 3 EAST TO SOUTHEASTERLY WINDS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 65% AND 95%.



20°C~26°C

Source: SMG

Macau Basic Law promotion events to feature seminars, speech contests & carnival

Ida Cheong

The Legal Affairs Bureau (DSAJ) announced in a statement yesterday that in order to commemorate the 33rd anniversary of the promulgation of the Basic Law of the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC), a raft of "vibrant" activities will be held from this month through December, including seminars, speech contests, carnivals, and training sessions.

The MSAR Basic Law was promulgated by the nation's then-president Jiang Zemin in Beijing on March 31, 1993.

The 10-month event themed "Know the law by heart, abide by the law", aims to deepen the public's understanding of the Macau Basic Law and carry forward the fine tradition of loving the country and Macau, the statement said.

The events will be organised by the Macao Basic Law Promotion Association, Legal Affairs Bureau (DSAJ), Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM), and the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ).

Meanwhile, the organisers will jointly host an academic seminar on Thursday at the Macau Science Centre (MSC), themed "The Nation's 15th Five Year Plan and the Sustainable Development of the Macau SAR", the statement said, adding that experts and scholars from Macau and the Chinese mainland will be invited to discuss the development of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle in the new era.

In addition, the organisers will host a Macau Basic Law popularisation carnival on Saturday in Praça do Tap Siac. Through law-themed booths, parent child challenge games, Q&A sessions, stage performances, and other activities, the public will be able to learn about the Macau Basic Law in a relaxed and enjoyable setting, the statement added.

Other joint activities include Macau Basic Law training courses, parent child challenge games, speech contests, online prize quizzes, and on-campus Basic Law promotion competitions, which will take place from this month until the end of the year.

For details, please visit the dedicated website at https://www.basiclaw.gov.mo/Activities/activity33_tc.aspx. ■



This poster provided by the Legal Affairs Bureau (DSAJ) yesterday shows a raft of events to be held throughout this year to commemorate the 33rd anniversary of the promulgation of the Macau SAR Basic Law.

Local youth spend more time on social media: Sheng Kung Hui survey

Armindo Neves

Macau's Sheng Kung Hui Macau Social Services Coordination Office hosted a press conference on Friday about the findings of its surveys showing that young people spend more time on social media, from around 1.64 hours a day in 2022 to around 3.53 hours a day last year.

The press conference was held at its service centre in Fai Chi Kei. The two surveys are titled "Survey on Youth Digital Literacy and New Technology Application in Macau 2025" and "Building a Healthy Macau – Survey on Youth Health Awareness and Behaviour 2025".

Sheng Kung Hui is the Anglican Church's Cantonese name.

Both surveys aimed to gather data to support policy formulation and the development of appropriate youth support services, and to collaborate with the social service sector in building a healthy network for young people were conducted between June and September last year. They collected 952 and 932 valid questionnaires respectively from young people, aged between 13 and 35.

The findings show that young people's self-assessed digital literacy awareness rose from 5.71 to 7.06 points (on a scale of 1.0 to 10). However, the findings also show that the scores remained relatively low in the categories of "use and management" and "digital ethics and cognition" of social media.

The survey also indicates that with the increasing use of AI tools, young people spend an average of 2.3 hours per week on them, commonly using platforms such as DeepSeek and ChatGPT. Notably, the findings also show that 68.2 percent of respondents were either unfamiliar with or had little understanding of "AI hallucinations". *



Sheng Kung Hui (SKH) Survey Research Centre Chief Cheong I Man (left) and two survey analysts look on during Friday's press conference about its surveys at SKH's service centre in Fai Chi Kei. – Photo courtesy of SKH

Sheng Kung Hui representatives said at the press conference that young people lack sufficient awareness of the risks associated with generative AI and called for enhanced education on the inherent risks of such applications.

The findings also show that while around 39 percent of young people experience a relatively high level of loneliness, 22.5 percent said they engage in conversations with AI during negative emotional periods, with about 35 percent of the latter finding such interactions helpful.

The representatives also said that AI chat is not a substitute for professional counselling and should be approached cautiously in terms of its role in emotional support, encouraging individuals to seek help from trained professionals.

In terms of health, the findings show that 65 percent of respondents reported experiencing sleep disturbances, 60 percent engage in physical exercise on a weekly basis, averaging 3.06 hours per

week. Among adolescents aged 13 to 18, some 50.4 percent reported "often or always" looking at smartphone screens while eating.

The organisation said a positive correlation was found between digital literacy and AI literacy, with higher levels in both areas associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression.

The challenges facing young people today are complex, intersecting digital life with physical and mental health, the representatives said, adding that it would be advisable to simultaneously advance efforts in three areas, namely enhancing digital literacy, focusing on health promotion, and strengthening support networks. ■

* AI hallucinations are instances when an artificial intelligence system (typically a generative model) produces information that is incorrect, misleading, or fabricated, while presenting it as if it were true or factual. – Poe

Macao Orchestra to perform Bach's St. John Passion at S. Domingos Church

Kristina Vallesteros

The Macao Orchestra will present Johann Sebastian Bach's St. John Passion on Maundy Thursday, according to a Friday statement by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC).

The concert will start on April 2 at 8 p.m. at S. Domingos Church, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The orchestra will be joined by British conductor Laurence Cummings, several European early music vocalists, and the Hong Kong Philharmonic Chorus, the statement said. The performers include tenor Nicholas Watts, soprano Miriam Allan, bass Callum Thorpe, and alto Sophie Harmsen.

Based on Chapters 18 and 19 of the Gospel of John, St. John Passion is one of Bach's most representative sacred works, the statement noted. The piece uses dramatic musical language to portray the Passion of Christ.

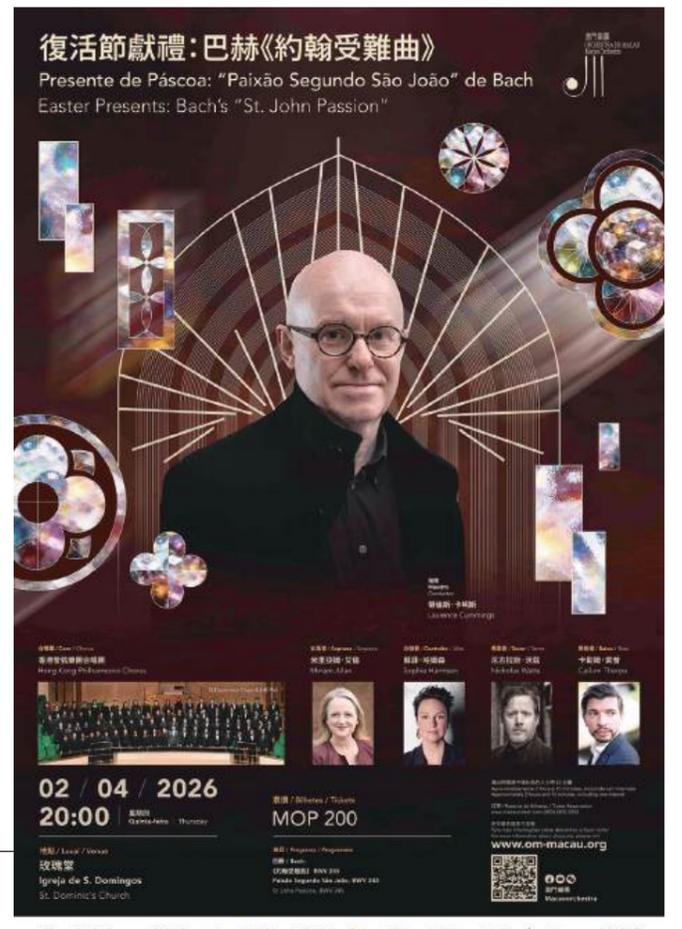
Bach (1685-1750) was a German composer and musician of the late Baroque period.

The concert was originally scheduled for this coming Saturday but has been rescheduled to the new date and venue. It will last approximately two hours and 15 minutes, including an interval.

Tickets are priced at 200 patacas and are available through the Macau Ticketing Network on www.macaoticket.com.

The Macao Orchestra 2025–26 concert season is co-organised by the Cultural Affairs Bureau, Macao Orchestra and all six of Macau's integrated resort operators, with support from BOC Macau. More information is available on the orchestra's website. ■

This poster provided by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) promotes the concert "Easter Presents: Bach's St. John Passion" set to be held on April 2 at S. Domingos Church.





← Centre of Macau Studies director Agnes Lam (centre) and religious representatives from Macau's six faiths unveil the "Silent Radiance of Unity – Macao in Harmony" exhibition at the centre on March 5.
→
– Photos: William Chan

This photo taken on March 5 shows Chinese calligraphy artwork displaying "太初有道" ("taai cho yauh dough" – In the Beginning Was the Word) from John 1:1. The Chinese character 道 (dao) is also the central concept of Daoism, representing "the Way" – the fundamental principle underlying the universe. Early Bible translators deliberately chose this character to render the Greek "Logos," creating a bridge between Christian theology and Chinese philosophy.



← City University of Macau professor Ma Ming recites Surah Al-Fatiha, the Koran's opening chapter, from a scroll at the exhibition on March 5.
→ Moderator Chong Chon Fai (left) facilitates discussion with of the Buddhist Association of Macau Vice Chairman Master Xin Hui (Centre) and Secretary-General of the Taoist Association of Macao Sou Ka lan, during Thursday's "Multicultural Salon: Silent Radiance of Unity - Macao in Harmony" salon at the University of Macau on March 5.



'Silent Radiance of Unity' arrives at UM with salon series

William Chan

The "Silent Radiance of Unity – Macao in Harmony" religious art exhibition, presented by Macau's religious communities and launched last November at Kun Iam Temple, has now moved to the University of Macau's (UM) Centre for Macau Studies. It coincides with a series of four multicultural salons this month.

The exhibition features dozens of religious works by artists from Macau and abroad, all of whom aim to express shared spiritual values through media such as calligraphy, sculpture, Portuguese-style tile painting, Chinese painting, and seal engraving.

During the opening ceremony on March 5, Agnes Lam Iok Fong, director of the Centre for Macau Studies, traced the interfaith platform's growth: from five faiths in 2021 (Catholicism, Buddhism, Daoism, Protestantism, Bahá'í), adding Islam in 2023 for "Winds from Afar," music in 2024, and now Hinduism and Judaism making it eight religions in total.

"Light does not argue. It illuminates," she said, highlighting their shared pursuit of goodness, beauty, and peace.

Prof. Kong Siew Huat, UM associate professor in management and president of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'is in Macau, expressed delight at hosting the exhibition on campus to engage students. He stressed that its goal is not proselytising but using rationality to appreciate the universal values and goodness in all religions, promoting inclusivity among people and faiths.

At the multicultural salon on March 5, which featured Buddhism and Daoism, Master Xin Hui, vice chairman of the Buddhist Association of Macau, told the audience how their associations assist individuals of all ages in navigating daily pressures and challenges. She said that their primary strategy involves imparting religious insights to help people shift their perspectives and develop coping mechanisms.

Master Xin Hui underlined, "To better help others, you have to first help yourself. Helping is a form of blessing, and

instead of teaching purely conceptual ideas, we prioritise practice and interaction among people." She further noted that many global events, from family members suffering from Alzheimer's disease to ongoing conflicts like the Iran war, are beyond individual control, and adopting new perspectives can aid in coping with such difficulties.

In addition, Master Xin Hui, supported by other religious representatives, also advocated for establishing community and support centres in Hengqin for Macau residents. She suggested that such facilities could enhance the religious lives and psychological well-being of residents, particularly those with religious affiliations.

Admission to the upcoming salons is free, held in Putonghua at UM E34-G016. The last talk, which is about Hinduism and Judaism, will be held this Wednesday. Admission to the exhibition is also free of charge, and held on weekdays from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. until the end of this month.

Japan's Utsunomiya Brex win EASL Finals



Utsunomiya Brex's DJ Newbill (left) and MVP Hiejima Makoto speak to the media during yesterday's post-match press conference.



Players from Utsunomiya Brex and Taoyuan Pauian Pilots compete in yesterday's EASL Finals at Studio City Macau's Event Centre in Cotai.

Khalel Vallo

Japan's Utsunomiya Brex defeated Taoyuan Pauian Pilots from China's Taiwan region with a score of 90-81 to win the EASL Finals Macau 2026 at Studio City Macau's Event Centre in Cotai yesterday, securing the championship in their debut home-and-away season structure.

EASL stands for East Asia Super League.

The Japanese side established control early in the game with a dominant first quarter, converting a high volume of three-point shots to build a decisive lead. Taoyuan Pauian Pilots attempted to respond across the remaining quarters, improving in rebounds, assists and turnovers, but were unable to close the gap.

The first quarter ended with Brex scoring 39 points while Pilots scored 13. The latter eventually secured 19 points in the second quarter as Brex scored only 12. The Pilots scored 24 in the third quarter, while Brex scored 21. Lastly, the Pilots ended with 25 points in the final quarter, as Brex concluded with 18.

Among the audience was Mario Ho Yau Kwan, co-owner of the US National Basketball Association's (NBA) Boston Celtics, member of the All-China Youth Federation, member of the Hubei Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), and son of late Macau gaming mogul Stanley Ho Hung Sun.

Speaking at the press conference after the match, Pilots' head coach Iurgi Caminos pointed to the Brex's shooting efficiency as the key difference. "When one team is able to score 19 threes out of 41, there is nothing to say. Congratulations. They deserve the championship," he said, adding that despite losing, his team showed resilience. "We won the last three quarters. We won more rebounds. We assisted more. We have less turnovers".

Meanwhile, on the Brex side, head coach Zico Coronel praised his team's strong start and composure under pressure. "It was great that we started out the game well. We kept fighting and we were able to get the win," he said.

Hiejima Makoto, Brex's named MVP (Most Valuable Player), and teammate DJ Newbill played key roles, contributing 19 and 21 points respectively. Speaking to the *Post*, Coronel said winning the title was satisfying but the team remained focused on upcoming competitions. "It's certainly pleasing. But we've got more work to do," he said.

Makoto reflected that "we were able to prove that everything we've been doing is correct. We were able to prove that by winning the EASL. It was great. We would like to continue to fight and keep representing Asia. Even though there was a lot of pressure, we were able to prove that we still lead Asia. We would like to continue to do that from now on".

"I think it was a great accomplishment for our team. Especially with the tough schedule with the B-League schedule and EASL," Newbill said, adding that "we took pride in coming out in EASL and competing at the highest level. Just seeing a lot of our players step up and give a moment to the tournament was really great." ■



EASL Finals 2026's champions Utsunomiya Brex celebrate their victory with their trophy. - Photos: Khalel Vallo

Kun lam Ecumenical Centre marks 27th anniversary with community activities

Khalel Vallo

The Kun lam Ecumenical Centre (KIEC) in Nape marked its 27th anniversary on Saturday with a series of cultural and wellness activities, bringing together residents and volunteers at the site.

The event, initiated by the centre's designer Cristina Leiria and organised by volunteers, featured a programme focused on mindfulness, movement and cultural appreciation. Activities began in the afternoon with an indoor monochord performance titled "Embracing Inner Peace" by a local musician identified by the organiser during the event as "Miss Alice" (劉小伶) followed by an outdoor yoga session, "Listening to the Body's Voice".

A monochord is a single-stringed musical instrument.

Participants also joined a guided tour of the centre led by Leiria online, where attendees learnt about the design concept and cultural significance of the site. The organisers told the *Post* on the sidelines of the event that Leiria was currently in India.

The session was conducted in English with Cantonese interpretation for reference. The programme concluded with an outdoor picnic behind the Kun lam statue, where participants shared food and interacted in a relaxed setting, aiming to foster a sense of community.

The anniversary event highlighted the centre's role as



Miss Alice (劉小伶) plays the monochord "Embracing Inner Peace" piece at the centre in Nape on Saturday. - Photos: Khalel Vallo



Participants of all ages perform an outdoor yoga session during Saturday's 27th anniversary of the Kun lam Ecumenical Centre (KIEC) in Nape.

a space for cultural exchange and reflection, with organisers encouraging continued public participation in future activities. ■

Thai wellness brand opens first Macau boutique with tea-inspired concept

Kristina Vallesteros

Thai holistic wellness brand PAÑPURI* has opened its first sensorial boutique in Macau, located at The Venetian Macao in Cotai, according to a statement from the company.

The Teahouse of Scent draws inspiration from Macau's tea culture and heritage. According to founder and CEO of PAÑPURI Vorravit Siripak, Macau represents an important chapter in the brand's regional expansion.

Siripak was quoted in the statement as saying: "It [Macau] is a city shaped by cultural exchange, craftsmanship, and ritual. These are values that closely align with our philosophy of holistic well-being."

In the centre of the boutique, which is on Level 3 at Shoppes, is Oolong Ritual, a signature scent inspired by traditional tea culture. According to the statement, the fragrance reimagines the tea ceremony as a contemporary sensorial practice.

Siripak added that as the brand continues to expand across Asia, its focus remains on place-driven experiences. In Macau, he said, the tradition of tea offered a natural

foundation for translating a deeply rooted ritual into a contemporary expression of scent and mindful living.

PAÑPURI describes itself as a holistic wellness lifestyle brand that blends Thai healing rituals with contemporary knowledge. All formulations are screened through the company's proprietary Zerolist standard, which prohibits over 2,300 questionable ingredients. ■

*According to the statement, PAÑPURI is "derived from the Pali word 'panna' which means wisdom, inferring how we draw from Thai heritage and contemporary knowledge to deliver holistic wellness solutions. 'Puri', a holy city in India and a site of pilgrimage, signifies purity and how the PAÑPURI experience is powered by the potency of nature for the harmony of the body, mind and soul".



This undated handout photo provided by PAÑPURI shows the PAÑPURI Sensorial Boutique located at The Venetian Macau in Cotai.

Macau's newest 1-MICHELIN Star winners highlight team for success

Rui Pastorin

After the Michelin Guide Ceremony was held on Thursday night* at the Grand Lisboa Palace (GLP) in Cotai, English-speaking media interviewed chefs of Macau's newest One-MICHELIN starred restaurants, along with one that retained the distinction, with all highlighting the team effort that goes towards winning the award.

The newly awarded restaurants comprise "Palace Garden" and "Don Alfonso 1890", both of which are located in GLP and were promoted from previously being "MICHELIN Selected". The number of 1 MICHELIN starred establishments in Macau now stands at 13.

During the interview with reporters after the ceremony marking the 18th edition of the MICHELIN Guide in Hong Kong and Macau, Palace Garden Head Chef Ken Chong said in response to a question by the *Post* that winning the award was made possible with a good team: "Winning this award is not something I can do alone. There has to be a good team, environment, and atmosphere to make this happen", thanking the team for their dedication and passion. Moving forward, Chong told reporters that the team views the win as a new beginning and will continue to evaluate themselves, improve and make quality dishes.

Don Alfonso 1890 Chef Ernesto Iaccarino also told reporters that it was a great feeling for the restaurant to receive the distinction, highlighting



Chefs from the newly awarded One MICHELIN Star restaurants from Hong Kong and Macau including Palace Garden Head Chef Ken Chong (right) and Don Alfonso 1890 Chef Ernesto Iaccarino (third from right) pose with Bibendum, aka the Michelin Man. — Photo: Rui Pastorin

the work that the team has been putting in. "I'm quite happy for what they did inside the kitchen and the front of the house service. I'm very happy that MICHELIN recognised the great work of the team". He added: "The team is essential. The team is everything", highlighting a symbiotic relationship for everything from inspiration and mentorship to executing plans and visions.

Meanwhile, one of the restaurants that retained their distinction was 8½ Otto e Mezzo BOMBANA at Galaxy Macau, with Executive Chef Marino D'Antonio telling reporters: "To retain this star is a great honour and a great opportunity to do better for the year to come", as well as to improve and try to follow one's

dream, which, along with standards, only goes higher. He continued to highlight the role of the entire team from the kitchen to operations towards retaining the award, while competition always inspires the restaurant to keep doing better and better.

In all, 278 establishments are featured in the MICHELIN Guide Hong Kong & Macau 2026. From the figure, 59 are in Macau, with 21 being MICHELIN Starred. The full list of Macau's awardees can be found on <https://guide.michelin.com/ku/en/macau-region/macau/restaurants> ■

*This article is a follow-up to a story published on Friday, which can be read on: <https://www.macaupostdaily.com/news/27739>

Sam vows alignment with Guangdong's 15th Five-Year Plan

Continued from p.1

According to official statistics, Macau's total number of visitor arrivals in 2025 rose 14.7 percent from the previous year. Macau recorded 29.02 million visitor arrivals from the Chinese mainland in 2025, accounting for 72.4 percent of the total, and representing a year-on-year growth of 18.5 percent.

Sam outlines Hengqin's development achievements

Moreover, Sam also underlined that new sequential achievements have been made in the development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, with its GDP amounting to 54.7 billion yuan in 2025, while its retail sales of consumer goods totalled 5.7 billion yuan, up 20.3 percent year-on-year.

The 106-square-kilometre Hengqin island in Zhuhai City is officially known as Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, after the zone was inaugurated in September 2021.

The neighbouring city of Zhuhai is one of the nine Guangdong GBA cities. According to official statistics, Zhuhai's GDP grew by 2.7 percent to 457.3 billion yuan in 2025, while Hengqin's GDP rose by 2.1 percent to 54.7 billion yuan.

Sam said that there were 7,681

Macau-invested enterprises in Hengqin in 2025, which he said indicated a significant increase in the level of Macau-Hengqin integration.

Sam also underlined that new progress has been made in the GBA's development, while outstanding achievements have been made in Guangdong-Macao cooperation in various key areas such as economy, finance, sci-tech, people's daily lives, education, healthcare, and social security.

Sam noted that this year marks the start of the nation's 15th Five-Year Plan, Guangdong Province's 15th Five-Year Plan, and the MSAR's third five-year socioeconomic development plan, pledging that his government will proactively align with the nation's development strategy and seize development opportunities with the aim of promoting deeper and more substantive Guangdong-Macao cooperation and better serving the nation's overall development.

Sam said that he expects Guangdong Province to continue supporting Macau-Hengqin cooperation while further strengthening its efforts to develop Hengqin and bringing its high-quality investment projects into Hengqin.

Sam also said he expects the province to launch a batch of landmark and influential construction

and investment projects in Hengqin with the aim of injecting fresh and greater impetus into Macau-Hengqin integrated development and the GBA's market integration.

Also delivering a speech, Wang Xi, a member of the Standing Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Guangdong Provincial Committee and head of the United Front Work Department of the CPC Guangdong Provincial Committee, pledged that the province will advance deep alignment and coordination between its 15th Five-Year Plan and Macau's third Five-Year Plan, while accelerating Hengqin's ongoing second-phase development.

In addition to Sam, the banquet was attended by other dignitaries including Edmund Ho Hau Wah, the MSAR's first chief executive and now a vice-chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Central People's Government Liaison Office in the MSAR Deputy Director Lyu Yuyin, Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Macau Garrison Commissar Lin Qinghua, Foreign Ministry Deputy Commissioner Cheng Lei, Macau Legislative Assembly (AL) President André Cheong Weng Chon, as well as other senior officials from Guangdong Province. ■

Galaxy Macau's Grand Resort Deck to reopen on April 3

Rui Pastorin

Integrated resort operator Galaxy Macau announced in a recent statement that its Grand Resort Deck is scheduled to reopen on April 3.

Accredited by Travel + Leisure Southeast Asia as "Macau's Best Hotel Pool 2025", the Grand Resort Deck spans 75,000 square metres, the statement said, and boasts the world's largest Skytop Wave Pool at 8,000 square metres and generates surfable waves up to 1.5 metres high. It also features 150 metres of white sand beaches while a raft of child-friendly aquatic experiences are available, according to the statement.

Among the new features is the newly accelerated Skytop Adventure Rapids experience, the statement added, while the "Galaxy Fitness Hour" will feature interactive fitness games and weight training, while they can also take part in "Aqua Zumba" at the Skytop Wave Pool. DJ performances will also be held during the weekend.

The Grand Resort Deck is located within the sprawling Galaxy Macau property and is exclusively open to guests staying at Galaxy Macau's nine award-winning hotels. More details and offers can be found by visiting the integrated resort operator's website on galaxymacau.com. ■



This photo recently provided by Galaxy Macau shows the wave pool on its Grand Resort Deck.

Macau visitor arrivals in Feb rise 32.6 pct to 4.17 million

Staff Reporter

Macau recorded 4.172 million visitor arrivals in February, a year-on-year increase of 32.6 per cent, driven by the Chinese New Year holidays, the Statistics and Census Bureau said in a statement on Friday.

The daily average of visitor arrivals reached 149,033 last month.

Same-day visitors (2.676 million) and overnight visitors (1.496 million) rose by 41.8 per cent and 18.8 per cent, respectively.

Visitors' average length of stay fell by 0.2 days year-on-year to 0.9 days (21.6 hours). Overnight visitors' average length of stay dropped by 0.1 day to 2.1 days.

Visitors from the Chinese mainland rose by 43.6 per cent year-on-year to 3.291 million in February, accounting for 78.8 per cent of the total number of visitor arrivals.

Visitors from the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

(591,300) and China's Taiwan region (89,628) rose by 2.0 per cent and 31.9 per cent, respectively.

Foreign visitors dipped by 3.3 per cent year-on-year to 200,848 in February, accounting for 4.8 per cent of Macau's visitor arrivals that month.

South Korea (55,994) and the Philippines (45,195) continued to be Macau's top two visitor source markets.

In the first two months, the number of visitor arrivals rose by 15.1 per cent year-on-year to 7.820 million.

Last year, Macau's number of visitor arrivals reached a record 40.069 million, up 14.7 per cent year-on-year.

According to official demographics, Macau, which covers 33.4 square kilometres, had a population of 688,900 at the end of last year, or 20,625 people per square kilometre. ■



A woman holds a sign advertising the services of a pharmacy as visitors and locals walk along Macau's main square, Largo do Senado, on Friday. Macau's many pharmacies and jewellery shops are particularly popular with visitors from the Chinese mainland. — Photo: Carl Leong

Committee for Macau's Safeguarding National Security's secretariat to have 34 personnel

Tony Wong

After the Legislative Assembly (AL) passed a government-initiated bill establishing a law regulating the Macau Special Administrative Region's (MSAR) Committee for Safeguarding National Security on Thursday, the local government announced on Friday the completion of its drawing-up of an administrative regulation governing the organisational structure and operation of the committee's secretariat, comprising 34 officials.

Government-drafted bills must be passed by the legislature to become law, while government-drafted administrative regulations, aka by-laws, do not require the legislature's approval.

The duties, organisational structure, and operation of the MSAR's Committee for Safeguarding National Security are currently governed by an administrative regulation, which came into force in 2018 when the committee was set up.

The new law, when it takes legal effect, will replace the 2018 administrative regulation governing the Committee for Safeguarding National Security.

The new law, with its final draft passed by the MSAR's legislature on Thursday, regulates the duties, organisational structure, and operation of the Committee for Safeguarding National Security in the form of a law.

The new law, which will take effect on the day after its promulgation in the Official Gazette (BO), formally defines the committee as an entity tasked with the MSAR's affairs concerning the safeguarding of national security and assuming



Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak (right) and Judiciary Police (PJ) Director Sit Chong Meng address Friday's press conference at Government Headquarters. — Photo: Maria Cheang Ut Meng

the MSAR's primary responsibility for safeguarding national security, with its operation subject to the oversight and accountability of the Central People's Government.

The committee is chaired by the MSAR's chief executive.

According to the new law, the composition of the committee includes a secretariat, which is a standing administrative unit tasked with the committee's daily operations and functioning. The secretariat is headed by the government's secretary for security.

According to the new law, the organisational structure and operation of the committee's secretariat shall be governed

by an administrative regulation, which was announced by the local government during a press conference at Government Headquarters on Friday.

Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak, who is also the spokesman for the government's top advisory Executive Council, and Judiciary Police (PJ) Director Sit Chong Meng hosted Friday's press conference.

According to the press conference, the committee's secretariat is directly accountable to the committee's chairperson, i.e., the MSAR's chief executive. In terms of administrative structure, the secretariat operates under the

direct authority of the MSAR's chief executive.

The new administrative regulation governing the committee's secretariat will take effect on the same day as the new law on the committee.

The new law on the committee can be expected to be gazetted today at the earliest, in which case the law, alongside the new administrative regulation, will take effect tomorrow.

The organisational structure of the committee's secretariat, according to Friday's press conference, consists of 34 personnel, comprising a secretary-general, two deputy secretaries-general, two assistant secretaries-general, the heads of five departments, and 24 other personnel.

The secretariat's five departments comprise Policy Study Department, Risk Prevention and Control Department, Liaison and Coordination Department, Publicity and Education Department, and General Support Department.

Wong said during the press conference that the government will announce the list of the officials taking up the posts of the secretary-general, the two deputy secretaries-general, and the two assistant secretaries-general, with the post of the secretary-general held by the secretary for security and the post of one of the two deputy secretaries-general held by the PJ director.

However, Wong said that the names of the officials taking up the posts of the five department heads as well as other personnel shall be kept confidential so the government will not announce their names to the public. ■

Li Qiang stresses opportunities, fair competition, development confidence amid growing uncertainties

BEIJING – Premier Li Qiang has stressed creating new market opportunities through openness and technological progress, and upholding global market order through healthy and fair competition.

He also said high-quality development and stable economic growth of China will continue to provide development opportunities for the world.

Li made the remarks while delivering a keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the China Development Forum 2026 in Beijing yesterday, saying the world is undergoing profound and complex changes, with multiple trends coexisting, intertwining, and colliding.

Unilateralism and protectionism are running rampant, while forces advocating cooperation and promoting development continue to grow stronger; economic growth in traditional sectors faces difficulties, while development in emerging fields is gaining momentum; the international rules-based order suffers severe damage and disruption, while many countries actively advance reforms and improvements to global governance; power politics prevails with arbitrary and reckless conduct, while calls for upholding fairness and justice grow ever louder, Li said.

Li's three observations

The premier shared with the attendees his key observations.

First, the market has become a scarce resource, yet it can be continuously expanded, he said.

History shows that every time the global economy emerged from hardship and

moved toward prosperity, it was not through competing over existing markets, but by creating new ones through openness and technological progress, Li said.

"Protectionism is no panacea," he said. "We must uphold the spirit of openness and pioneering endeavor, expand free trade, and actively foster innovation."

He said China's imports and exports constitute fair trade conducted within the rules-based framework. China will unswervingly advance high-standard opening up, import more high-quality goods from abroad, work with all parties to promote optimized and balanced trade development, and jointly expand the global economic pie.

Second, development inevitably involves competition, yet healthy competition and cooperation can yield mutual benefits and win-win outcomes, he said.

"Only by embracing competition with a positive mindset and advancing cooperation through pragmatic actions can we empower one another and draw on respective strengths," Li said.

He stressed that the competitive advantages of China's relevant industries are not derived from subsidies or protection, but stem from persistent deepening of reform, steadfast implementation of innovation-driven development, and, most importantly, the diligence and hard work of the Chinese people and Chinese enterprises.

"We oppose disorderly and irrational competition. Under market economy conditions, however, healthy competition unleashes greater impetus for development," he said.

China will continue to safeguard a fair and orderly market environment, strengthen



Premier Li Qiang addresses the opening ceremony of the China Development Forum 2026 and delivers a keynote speech, in Beijing yesterday. — AFP

communication and collaboration with all parties, and jointly promote the stability and security of global industrial and supply chains, he added.

Third, although the path ahead remains challenging, a brighter future is increasingly within reach, Li said, stressing the need for maintaining confidence, shouldering responsibilities, and taking concrete actions.

The outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) for national economic and social development serves not only as a new blueprint for China's development but also as a new opportunity for global progress, he said.

China will focus on promoting high-quality development, strive to sustain stable economic growth, continue to foster a sound business environment, fully implement national treatment for foreign-funded enterprises, and enable businesses from all countries to operate in China with confidence and realize their full potential, he said.

The opening ceremony was attended by about 750 representatives from industrial and business communities at home and abroad. The forum is hosted by the Development Research Center of the State Council.

— Xinhua

Tigers in trouble as Malaysian big cat numbers dwindle

Jan Hennop

KUALA LUMPUR – For two years, Malaysian conservationists tracked a tiger named “Bulan” as she raised four cubs. Then a fatal traffic accident made her another statistic in the country’s dwindling population.

Malaysia’s national animal is in trouble.

Poaching, food loss and diminishing habitat have slashed the population from 3,000 in the 1950s to less than 150 roaming free today, according to official estimates.

The government said last month it was ramping up efforts to combat wildlife crime, introducing AI-enabled camera traps and methods to detect smuggling at airports.

But experts and officials admit that resources fall far short of what is needed to protect the country’s famed big cat, listed as critically endangered.

Bulan (Moon in Malay) was killed on the East-West Highway, a throughfare notorious for animal traffic incidents.

“We were devastated when we lost her,” said Lara Ariffin, president of the Tiger Protection Society of Malaysia (RIMAU).

“Not only that, she was butchered after she was run over,” Ariffin told AFP, showing graphic pictures of the animal’s carcass.

“They took her canines, they took her claws. For me, it was like desecrating the dead.”

The fate of the apex predator’s population leapt back into local headlines recently after a dead tiger was found in the back of a car in southern Johor state, sparking public outrage.

Three poachers were later handed seven-year jail sentences and a US\$59,000 fine, but experts say the business remains enticing.

‘Serious money’

A single Malaysian tiger carcass can fetch around US\$60,000 on the black market, according to Malaysia’s Department of Wildlife and National Parks.

“The pelt alone can fetch around RM100,000 (US\$24,000), while a tiger penis has been valued at RM20,000 (US\$5,000),” the department’s national director-general Abdul Kadir Abu Hashim told the New Straits Times newspaper late last year.

Tiger bones go for about US\$1,186 per kilogramme, while teeth, claws, and even whiskers – used in acupuncture – fetch around US\$118 each, Kadir said.

The department did not respond to AFP’s request for comment.

Even animals that escape poachers can be harmed by snares made from



Two Malaysian tigers fight at the National Zoo in Kuala Lumpur on November 21, 2017. For two years, Malaysian conservationists tracked a tiger named “Bulan” as she raised four cubs. Then a fatal traffic accident made her another statistic in the country’s dwindling population.

– AFP

cheap plastic, rope or metal cable.

Camera traps have spotted animals with injuries or even missing limbs.

Research shows Malaysia feeds demand for tiger parts in Vietnam and further afield in China, with cross-border poaching syndicates using drug, gun and human trafficking routes to move their wares.

The first six months of 2025 saw 201 wildlife smuggling arrests and seized illegal assets valued at US\$30.5 million, Malaysia’s top internal security and public order police officer told local media.

“These figures tell you poaching

is no longer a small-scale crime. It is organised, cross-border – and backed by serious money,” Azmi Abu Kassim said.

‘No overnight success’

The Malaysian government admits it has limited manpower, funding and equipment to deal with the challenge, though there are efforts to address the problem.

Joint operations by Malaysian police and wildlife services have resulted in hundreds of arrests and millions of dollars in seizures, officials said.

Community-based ranger programmes run by NGOs like RIMAU employ more than 1,000 local community members.

“Malaysia has made great progress in fighting illegal poaching,” said Ariffin, who produced a documentary called “Malaysia’s Last Tigers”.

“We are moving in the right direction, but there is no guaranteed success overnight.”

The local chapter of the New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) estimates at least 5,000 rangers are needed to properly patrol Malaysia tiger habitats.

“The first line of defence is not there, meaning we don’t have enough front-line rangers to protect our wildlife from poachers,” WCS country director Mark Rayan Darmaraj told AFP.

“Poachers are still able to operate simply because they outnumber enforcement personnel, and once they’re inside the jungle, it’s like looking for a needle in a haystack,” he said.

That’s a view echoed by other NGOs working on conservation.

“The issue is not a lack of commitment, but a lack of capacity,” WWF-Malaysia told AFP.

“The next 10 years will decide whether we can bring back the roar of the Malaysian tiger.” – AFP

14 killed in S Korean car plant fire

SEOUL – Fourteen people were killed in a fire in a car parts factory in South Korea that also injured 59 others, authorities told AFP Saturday, updating a previous toll of 11 fatalities.

Fire crews were initially unable to enter the factory in the central city of Daejeon to look for survivors due to the risk of the building collapsing.

The response was also hampered by sodium stored at the site, which can explode if improperly handled, according to South Korea’s Yonhap news agency.

Around 170 workers were at the plant when the fire broke out at about 1p.m. [local time] Friday, according to Yonhap.

“We can confirm the latest death toll has risen to 14, with no one reported missing,” an official from the interior ministry’s department that handles fires and other disasters told AFP.

Officials have not said what may have caused the fire, which spread rapidly. A witness told Yonhap about hearing an explosion.

Fire crews could be seen shooting water onto the site from cranes while a thick column of black smoke filled the sky in



Heavy smoke rises following a fire at a car parts plant in Daejeon, South Korea on Friday.

– AFP

images released by Yonhap.

The fire was extinguished by Saturday afternoon.

President Lee Jae Myung visited the site and met bereaved families, promising to provide full support for victims and their families, Yonhap said.

“The government will thoroughly investigate the cause of the incident and prepare fundamental measures to prevent such tragedies,” Lee wrote on X.

Wealthy South Korea has a patchy record on labour safety,

with more than 10,000 worksite deaths between 2000 and 2024, according to official statistics.

In September, South Korea sentenced the CEO of battery maker Aricell to 15 years in prison over one of the country’s worst industrial fires.

The 2024 blaze at the lithium battery factory in Hwaseong, south of capital Seoul, killed 22 people, most of them Chinese nationals.

In its verdict, the Suwon District Court said the company had prioritised profit over workers’ safety.

– AFP

Cambodia records 3rd newborn rare Mekong dolphin in 2026

PHNOM PENH – Another newborn Mekong Irrawaddy dolphin has been spotted, raising the number of newborn dolphins in Cambodia to three so far this year, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) said in a news release on Saturday.

The calf was sighted on Wednesday afternoon at the Kampi dolphin pool in northeast Kratie province’s Chetr Borei district by a research team of the Fisheries Administration and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

“This two-day-old new calf was

healthy and seen swimming alongside a pod of five adult dolphins,” the news release said. “It is the third baby dolphin born in 2026.”

The Mekong Irrawaddy dolphins have been listed as critically endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species since 2004.

It’s estimated that currently, there are about 115 Irrawaddy dolphins living along a 120-kilometer main channel of the Mekong River in northeast Kratie and Stung Treng provinces, according to the MAFF.

– Xinhua

Prabowo calls acid attack on activist ‘terrorism’

JAKARTA – An acid attack that maimed an Indonesian rights activist was an act of terror, President Prabowo Subianto said in an interview, vowing accountability.

Andrie Yunus, deputy coordinator of Jakarta-based NGO 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.

“This is terrorism, isn’t it? A barbaric act. We must pursue [the perpetrators],” Prabowo said in an interview published Thursday on his personal YouTube channel.

The former general vowed to “uphold the law” regardless of who was behind the attack.

The military detained four soldiers from the armed forces’ intelligence unit on Wednesday,

suspecting their involvement.

The same day, the Jakarta Police released CCTV footage showing the faces of two people suspected of attacking Andrie. Their links to the detained soldiers were unclear.

Andrie has repeatedly taken issue with the military’s influence in the government and had recorded a podcast on the topic shortly before he was attacked.

Lawmakers agreed on Wednesday to form a special committee to oversee the handling of the case.

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

Indonesia “has undergone further democratic backsliding, crackdowns on protests, media censorship and intimidation of activists” under Prabowo, Human Rights Watch said in its latest report on the country. – AFP

Alert level 1 raised over Bulusan volcano in Philippines amid rising unrest

MANILA – The Philippine authorities yesterday raised the alert status of Bulusan volcano in Sorsogon province to Alert Level 1, signaling low-level unrest.

In an advisory, the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and

Seismology said the volcano has recorded 475 volcanic earthquakes since last Sunday. Most of these were weak volcano-tectonic earthquakes that are associated with rock fracturing at shallow depths beneath the

volcano edifice.

Bulusan volcano is located in the Bicol Region on the island of Luzon. The Philippines has 24 active volcanoes, four of which are under close monitoring.

– Xinhua

Blaze reduces 43 shops to ashes in N Afghanistan

KABUL – At least 43 shops were reduced to ashes after a fire broke out at a local market in northern Afghanistan’s Badakhshan province, the provincial department of information and culture said in a statement Saturday evening.

The blaze erupted in Ab Jim market in Raghistan district, said the statement, adding that preliminary estimations indicate that shop owners have incurred damage worth nearly 22 million afghanis (around US\$349,000).

The cause of the fire remains unknown. Investigation teams have been dispatched to the scene, and investigations are underway to determine the circumstances surrounding the incident, according to the statement.

Fire incidents are common across Afghanistan, frequently caused by inadequate safety standards, faulty electrical wiring and the lack of modern firefighting equipment, especially in remote provinces. – Xinhua

Himalayan glaciers melting twice as fast, threatening billions: report

KATHMANDU – Himalayan glaciers that provide a vital source of fresh water for around two billion people are melting twice as quickly as in 2000, a report warned Saturday.

The Hindu Kush-Himalayan range, which stretches from Afghanistan to Myanmar, holds the largest reserves of ice and snow outside the Arctic and Antarctica and feeds at least 10 major Asian river systems that underpin water, food and energy security across the continent.

But a third of that ice is in zones highly vulnerable to rapid warming.

The average rate of ice loss in the region has nearly doubled from about 34 centimetres per year before 2000 to 73 centimetres annually since, according to two studies released by the Kathmandu-based

International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD).

“This isn’t a distant problem, it’s a crisis unfolding in real time,” ICIMOD director general Pema Gyamtsho said.

“We must scale up monitoring and invest in adaptation now.”

The region has lost up to 27 metres of ice thickness since 1975, the studies said – with about 12 percent of its glacier area disappearing between 1990 and 2020.

Rising temperatures mean glaciers are “unable to regain their mass,” lead author Farooq Azam told AFP.

He urged cuts to black-carbon emissions, released by the burning of fossil fuels, waste and other materials, that accelerate melting. – AFP

Modi, Iranian president discuss regional developments

NEW DELHI – Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday spoke with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on regional developments, local media reported.

In a post on social media platform X, Modi wrote that he spoke to Pezeshkian and conveyed Eid al-Fitr and Nowruz greetings. The two leaders expressed hope that this festive season brings peace, stability and prosperity to West Asia.

During their conversation, Modi reiterated the importance of safeguarding freedom of navigation and ensuring that shipping lanes remain open and secure. He also appreciated Iran’s continued support for the safety and security of Indian nationals in Iran.

The prime minister also condemned attacks on critical infrastructure in the region, which threaten regional stability and disrupt global supply chains, according to the post. – Xinhua

Nepali youth demand release of govt report into deadly September uprising



Activists spatter a woman with red powder to symbolise blood during a protest demanding the release of the inquiry report by a Nepal government investigation commission probing the September 2025 youth-led uprising that toppled the government, in Kathmandu yesterday. – AFP

KATHMANDU – Nepali youth staged a demonstration in Kathmandu yesterday, demanding the release of findings into the deadly 2025 uprising, which forced the previous government to collapse.

At least 77 people were killed in the September 8-9 protests which began over a brief social media ban, but tapped into longstanding fury over corruption and economic hardship. No one has been held accountable for the deaths.

Just days after Nepal went to the polls March 5, interim leader Sushila Karki formed a commission to probe the violence – in which parliament and scores of government buildings were set ablaze.

More than 200 people were

questioned, including ousted former prime minister KP Sharma Oli, and a 900-page report with an additional 8,000 pages of evidence were submitted to the commission for investigation.

“We are here seeking the report of why the incident happened, why so many youths were killed,” Sanatan Rijal, a 26-year-old activist told AFP.

Laxmi Ghimire, another activist at yesterday’s protest, said “promoting a motto of good governance will not make the country and its people feel it”.

Yesterday’s demonstration is one of many that have erupted in Nepal’s capital over the past week calling on the interim government for transparency.

Karki said the interim

government would make a summary of findings public but would entrust the newly elected Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), who are expected to be sworn in next week, with how to implement any of the commission’s possible recommendations.

The RSP campaigned alongside popular rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah, presenting him as its prime-ministerial candidate.

Shah, 35, defeated veteran four-time premier KP Sharma Oli whose Marxist-led government was ousted during last year’s protests.

His upset victory and rapid rise from Kathmandu mayor to expected prime minister mark one of the most dramatic shifts in recent Nepali politics. – AFP

Sri Lanka refused ground access to US warplanes: president

Amal Jayasinghe

COLOMBO – Sri Lanka refused permission to the United States to station two of its warplanes at a civilian airport in the island’s south in early March, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake said on Friday.

Washington wanted to relocate two of its missile-armed aircraft from a base in Djibouti to Sri Lanka’s civilian Mattala International Airport, Dissanayake told parliament.

The request, made on February 26, was turned down to maintain Colombo’s neutrality and ensure its territory was not used for any military purpose that could help or hinder either side, he said.

The Indian Ocean nation was drawn into the consequences of the war when a US submarine torpedoed an Iranian frigate, IRIS Dena, just off its coast in March.

“They wanted to bring two warplanes armed with eight anti-ship missiles to Mattala International Airport from March 4 to 8, and we said ‘no,’” Dissanayake said.

He did not say whether the US request was to use Sri Lanka as a base for the aircraft to carry out

any offensive action against Iran.

Sri Lankan military sources told AFP that Sri Lanka would not have allowed its airspace to be used to launch aggression against any other nation, in line with the island’s foreign policy.

Dissanayake said Iran too had made a request for a port call by three of its warships, returning from India after a naval exercise, on the same day the US requested permission to station their two aircraft.

“We were still considering the Iranian request to bring the three ships to Colombo from March 9 to 13. Had we said ‘yes’ to Iran, we would have had to say ‘yes’ to the US too,” he said.

“But we didn’t. We are steadfastly maintaining our position of neutrality,” he added, drawing applause from the 225-member legislature. “We will not succumb to pressure from anyone.”

The US attack on IRIS Dena on March 4 killed at least 84 sailors whose remains have since been repatriated to Iran.

Saving lives

Dissanayake said Sri Lanka’s

navy and the airforce swung into action to rescue 32 sailors from the sunken frigate and recovered the remains of 84.

A second Iranian ship, IRIS Bushehr, was allowed to enter Sri Lankan waters the following day amid fears for the safety of its 219 crew, who have since taken shelter in Colombo.

“It was a humanitarian gesture to shelter the sailors,” Dissanayake said. “We were saving lives.”

The third vessel, IRIS Lavan, made it to the south Indian port of Kochi and some of its sailors have returned home, according to Indian officials.

Dissanayake said his government had also demonstrated its neutrality by abstaining on a UN Security Council resolution last week condemning Iran’s attacks.

“We did not support that resolution because it was a half-truth. It did not reflect the full story,” Dissanayake said. “We stand for justice and fairness.”

Sri Lanka maintains close ties with both the United States, the island’s main export market, and Iran, the main buyer of Sri Lankan tea. – AFP



Activists and members of the LGBTQ community hold placards during a protest against the proposed ‘Transgender Persons Amendment Bill’ in Ahmedabad, India yesterday. – AFP

Iran threatens Mideast infrastructure after Trump ultimatum

TEHRAN – Iran yesterday vowed to “irreversibly” destroy key infrastructure across the Middle East if US President Donald Trump acted on his threat to knock out the Islamic republic’s power plants unless the Strait of Hormuz was swiftly reopened.

Iran also vowed to fully close the strait if Trump followed through on the ultimatum, choking off what little traffic has continued to transit the vital shipping lane for oil and gas.

The tit-for-tat threats came as the war that has reverberated across the Middle East entered its fourth week, with alarm mounting over energy and water facilities, and over strikes around nuclear sites.

Trump, under pressure due to rising fuel prices, said the US would “obliterate” Iranian power plants if Tehran did not end its de facto blockade of the strait within 48 hours, or by 23:44 GMT today, according to the time of his Truth Social post.

“If the United States’ threats regarding Iran’s power plants are carried out... the Strait of Hormuz will be completely closed, and it will not be reopened until our destroyed power plants are rebuilt,” the military’s operational command Khatam Al-Anbiya said in a statement carried by state TV.

The military said it would also strike Israel’s “power plants, energy, and information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure”, along with power plants in regional countries hosting US bases and companies with US shareholders.

Iran’s powerful parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said vital infrastructure across the region “will be considered legitimate targets and will be

irreversibly destroyed” if its own plants are attacked.

Iran’s energy minister said US-Israeli strikes had already inflicted “heavy damage” on the country’s water and energy infrastructure since the start of the war on February 28.

Nuclear worries

Iran’s defiance came a day after its missiles evaded Israel’s much-vaunted air defences and struck two southern towns, including Dimona, which houses a nuclear facility. The projectiles injured dozens of people.

“We thought we were safe,” Galit Amir, a 50-year-old care provider, told AFP in Dimona. “We didn’t expect this.”

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to pursue senior commanders of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards “personally” as he inspected the damage in Arad, the other town struck by an Iranian missile.

Iran’s attacks on Israel indicated that its arsenal still poses a threat across the region, even after Trump and Netanyahu claimed to have decimated Tehran’s forces.

Dimona hosts what is widely believed to be the Middle East’s only nuclear arsenal, although Israel has never admitted to possessing nuclear weapons, insisting the site is for research.

The missile fell about five kilometres from the nuclear facility, according to rescuers.

Iran said the strike on Dimona was in response to an earlier attack on its nuclear site at Natanz.

Asked about Natanz, the Israeli military said it was “not aware of a strike”.

“The war in the Middle East has reached a perilous stage” with the strikes on Natanz and

Dimona, World Health Organisation (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on X.

“I urgently call on all parties to exercise maximum military restraint and avoid any actions that could trigger nuclear incidents.”

Hormuz blockade

Iran’s chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz, which typically carries around a fifth of the world’s crude oil and liquefied natural gas, has rattled markets and sent fuel prices soaring.

Yesterday, North Sea Brent crude was trading above US\$105 a barrel, feeding fears about higher inflation and weaker global growth.

In recent days, Iran has allowed some vessels from countries it considers friendly to pass, while warning it would block ships from countries it says have joined the “aggression” against it.

Iran’s parliament is mulling imposing tolls on shipping through the strait, with parliament speaker Ghalibaf saying maritime traffic would “not return to its pre-war status”.

Patrick Pouyanne, the head of French oil giant TotalEnergies, said the economic outlook would worsen the longer the conflict dragged on.

“If it’s more than six months, we will have some real impacts. All the economies of the world will be damaged,” he told Chinese broadcaster CGTN.

Attacks across the region

The impact from the war continued to be felt across the region.

Early yesterday, AFP journalists in Jerusalem heard blasts and air raid sirens as Iran launched a fresh barrage of missiles at

Israel, while Israel said it was striking Tehran in response.

Hostilities also intensified in Lebanon, with Israel’s military reporting “a wide wave of strikes” against Hezbollah infrastructure in southern Lebanon following orders to destroy bridges allegedly used by the Iran-backed militant group across the Litani River.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun slammed the Israeli strikes on bridges and other infrastructure in the south, calling them a “prelude to a ground invasion”.

Lebanon was pulled into the Middle East war when Hezbollah began firing rockets into Israel on March 2 to avenge the killing of Iran’s supreme leader Ali Khamenei in US-Israeli attacks.

Lebanon’s health ministry said four people were killed yesterday in two strikes in the south, and authorities have reported 1,029 dead in three weeks of conflict, as well as more than one million displaced.

Israel said rocket fire from Lebanon killed one person, the first Israeli fatality due to Hezbollah fire since the war began.

Pope’s ‘dismay’

Iran also kept up retaliatory attacks on Gulf nations it accuses of serving as a launchpad for US strikes.

Saudi Arabia said yesterday it detected three ballistic missiles around the capital Riyadh. One was intercepted, and two fell in uninhabited areas, the defence ministry said.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) said it responded to new missile and drone attacks from Iran.

Pope Leo XIV said yesterday he was following the situation in the Middle East “with dismay”. – AFP



Men gather around a destroyed Palestinian police jeep that was targeted by an Israeli air strike in Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip yesterday. The killings by the Israeli military are the latest to rock the war-shattered Palestinian territory despite a ceasefire in place since October 10. The war on Gaza was sparked by Hamas’s October 7, 2023 attack on Israel, which resulted in the deaths of 1,221 people. Israel’s retaliatory assault on Gaza has killed at over 73,000 people, according to figures from the health ministry that the UN considers reliable. – AFP

Syrians protest alcohol sale limits, personal freedom curbs

DAMASCUS – Hundreds of Syrians protested in central Damascus yesterday against new restrictions on alcohol sales, reflecting wider fears that the Islamist authorities may tighten curbs on personal freedoms.

The Syrian capital last week banned the sale of alcoholic beverages in restaurants and bars, only allowing stores in three Christian neighbourhoods to sell bottles.

In one of them, Bab Tuma, demonstrators gathered in a silent protest following calls by civil society groups to condemn what they say

deepens sectarian divisions, with banners that read “personal freedom is a red line”.

Security forces monitored the gathering, according to an AFP team on the ground.

“This type of decision will not stand,” 37-year-old television writer Rami Koussa told AFP at the protest.

For university professor Hanan Assi, Syrians have “thousands of forgotten issues, from poverty to the displaced, the homeless, and refugees” that should be prioritised instead.

The restriction follows a series

of decisions, like the nationwide imposition of “modest” swimwear on public beaches and the banning of makeup for public sector workers in Latakia.

These moves have fuelled fears of creeping social conservatism since the Islamist authorities took over after the 2024 fall of longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad.

The new government has also pledged to protect minorities, including Christians, but the country has been shaken by several instances of sectarian violence. – AFP

Are Iran’s power plants the next targets in the war?

TEHRAN – More than three weeks into the Middle East war, key infrastructure across the region – from gas and oil facilities to nuclear sites – has come under fire.

Now, the conflict could spill over to power plants.

US President Donald Trump has threatened to strike those located in Iran if Tehran does not reopen the strategic Strait of Hormuz, vital to global oil supplies, by tonight.

Iran has more than 90 power plants, some of them on the Gulf coast at the heart of the hostilities that began on February 28 with US-Israeli strikes on Tehran.

About 38 percent of its electricity comes from combined-cycle plants, followed by gas-fired stations (26 percent).

Renewables make up 13 percent of output and nuclear energy only about one percent, according to the state IRNA agency, citing officials in December 2024.

Iran currently has just one operational nuclear power plant at Bushehr, with a capacity of 1,000 megawatts – only a fraction of the country’s needs.

Russia helped build the plant.

Iran and Russia signed a US\$25-billion deal in September 2025 to build four nuclear plants in southern Iran, each with a capacity of about 1,255 MW, according to IRNA.

Rationing electricity

An arid country, Iran regularly faces drought and sweltering summers, which push up electricity demand for air conditioning.

Despite its vast oil and gas resources, the country suffers from energy shortages due to ageing infrastructure and international sanctions.

Iran therefore sometimes has to ration electricity for lack of sufficient gas and fuel to run its plants.

The country’s largest power plant is in Damavand, on the outskirts of Tehran province.

It covers around 193 hectares and generates roughly 2,900 megawatts of electricity, according to MAPNA, a company involved in the construction of power plants and energy infrastructure.

The second largest is the Shahid Salimi Neka plant, in northern Mazandaran province, with a capacity of 2,214 megawatts.

The third, the Shahid Rajaee Combined Cycle Power Plant, is in northern Qazvin province, with a total capacity of 2,042 megawatts. – AFP

Can nations save the shorebird that flies 30,000 km a year?

Fran Blandy

RIO DE JANEIRO – Chasing an endless summer, one shorebird species undertakes a gruelling annual journey from the Arctic to the tip of South America and back – a feat increasingly fraught with peril.

The Hudsonian godwit (*Limosa haemastica*) is one of the world's most remarkable travellers, but its population has plunged 95 percent in four decades due to a complex mix of environmental changes across multiple countries.

It is one of 42 species proposed for international protection at a meeting of parties to the UN Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) that starts in Brazil today.

Iconic creatures like the snowy owl – of Harry Potter fame – striped hyena and hammerhead shark are also on the list deemed in danger of extinction and needing conservation by the countries they pass through.

Migratory birds are facing “rapid and dramatic declines,” said Nathan Senner, an ecologist and ornithology professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst who has studied the Hudsonian godwit for 20 years.

Scientists are still unravelling the mysteries of the shorebird – which can fly up to 11,000 kilometers in one stretch without stopping to eat, drink, or sleep.

And it is only part of the 30,000 kilometres that the godwit travels every year from their breeding grounds in the Arctic to Patagonia where they spend the southern summer.

Disrupted migrations

In order to do this “epic flight,” they need “really predictable, abundant food resources” at every step of the journey, Senner told AFP.

That predictability is crumbling. In the Arctic, shifting spring timing attributed to climate change has created a mismatch between when chicks hatch and the peak availability of insects they feed on.

One of the puzzles Senner is currently working on is why Hudsonian godwits have begun migrating later by six days than they did a decade ago.

Something “has either disrupted the cues that they use to time their migrations or their ability to successfully and rapidly prepare for the migration,” he said.

In southern Chile, a boom in salmon and oyster farming has led to a build-up of infrastructure and the presence of people in the intertidal zones where they feed.

And in the United States, changes in farming practices are making the shallow water wetlands that the godwits rely on rarer and less predictable – meaning they spend more time looking for a place to stop and feed.

“I think that is emblematic of lots of species, that most species can respond to one kind of change, but not a whole bunch of them all at the same time,” said Senner.

Essential to ecosystems

“Climate change is taking a heavy toll on species that rely on a ‘geological clock’ for their survival; many are disappearing,” Rodrigo Agostinho, president of Brazil's environmental agency (Ibama), told AFP last week.

These are some of the issues CMS parties will tackle at their meeting in Brazil's biodiversity-rich Pantanal, one of the world's most important global meetings for wildlife conservation.

These countries are legally obliged to protect species listed as at risk of extinction, conserve and restore their habitats, prevent obstacles to migration and cooperate with other range states.

Nevertheless, among the species listed under CMS, a report released earlier this month showed that 49 percent now have populations that are declining, up from 44 percent two years ago.

Amy Fraenkel, CMS executive secretary, told AFP that most of the species doing worse were birds, such as the Hudsonian godwit.

She said the situation was also “particularly alarming” for fish species, with 97 percent of those listed under the treaty threatened with extinction.

Migratory species “are essential to healthy ecosystems and a healthy planet,” playing a key role in pollination, pest control and transporting nutrients, she said.

In a piece of good news, the meeting will propose removing Central Asia's Bactrian deer from its list of animals needing high protection, due to an increase in its population. – AFP

Trump orders immigration agents to airports amid crippling budget standoff



Travellers wait in line at a TSA security checkpoint at George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston, Texas on Friday. US airport security officers missed their first full paycheck on March 13 as a partial funding shutdown of the government approached the one-month mark, with no breakthrough in a congressional standoff that is beginning to disrupt travel across the country. The lapse in funding is forcing thousands of Transportation Security Administration (TSA) staff to work without pay as spring travel picks up, raising fears of staffing shortages, longer security lines and flight delays. – AFP

WASHINGTON – Immigration agents will be deployed in US airports from today, aiming to alleviate soaring congestion at security screenings amid a weeks-long budget standoff over President Donald Trump's mass deportation drive, officials said.

Trump announced the extraordinary move in a social media post yesterday morning, sending officials racing to quickly develop a plan.

Tom Homan, the president's senior border aide, confirmed to CNN that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents would be shifted from their normal duties to airports today, but they would not be doing jobs they were untrained for.

“I don't see an ICE agent looking at an X-ray machine, because you're not trained in that,” he said on CNN's “State of the Union.”

Rather, the agents would help “wherever we can provide extra

security,” such as monitoring exits.

Funding has been lapsed since February 14 for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), as Democratic lawmakers demand reforms in the wake of the Trump administration's deadly immigration crackdown in Minnesota.

However, the DHS also oversees the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), the agency responsible for airport security screenings, meaning staff around the country have worked for weeks without pay.

Many TSA agents have begun calling out from work, prompting soaring wait times at screening lines, sometimes as high as multiple hours.

More than 300 TSA employees have quit since the shutdown began on February 14, according to the DHS, while US media reported that unscheduled absences had more than doubled.

Some officers are taking on second jobs or relying on donations, labour union officials say, and several major airports are collecting gift cards and stocking food pantries for TSA staff struggling without pay.

Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said yesterday he believes the situation is “going to get much worse” in the coming days.

“As it gets worse, I think that puts pressure on the Congress to come to a resolution,” he told ABC's “This Week.”

Democrats have demanded curtailed patrols, a ban on face masks and a requirement that ICE agents obtain a judicial warrant before entering private property.

While ICE is part of the Department of Homeland Security, it has nonetheless been able to maintain operations using funds approved by Congress last year.

– AFP

A herd stop: Train kills 3 rare bison in Poland

WARSAW – Three wild European bison died yesterday after being hit by a train in Poland's vast UNESCO-listed Bialowieza Forest in the east, the local police told AFP.

According to a police spokesman, a herd of Europe's largest mammals, whose male specimens can reach 900 kilograms, crossed onto the train tracks as a locomotive carrying some 50 passengers between Bialystok and Warsaw was steaming ahead.

“No passenger was injured but three animals perished in this accident, which happened at 7 a.m. [local time], near the village of Witowo,” spokesman Konrad Karwacki told AFP.

The “Zubr” line train, which takes its name from the Polish word for bison, did not derail and was able to resume its journey around an hour and a half after the collision.

Some 1,200 bison, an emblematic animal in the eastern European country, currently inhabit the Polish part of the great Bialowieza Forest, considered the last primeval woodland in Europe.

The forest, which is divided by the Poland-Belarus border, is a treasure of biodiversity and a giant carbon sink.

Yet several bison fall victim to road accidents in the region every year.

“They are sometimes hit by trains, but these are usually isolated

incidents,” Prof. Rafal Kowalczyk, from a local branch of the Polish Academy of Sciences, told AFP.

“I don't recall an accident where three bison were killed at the same time, run over by a train,” the mammals specialist added.

Devastated by hunting, deforestation and the expansion of agriculture, the European bison nearly became extinct at the beginning of the 20th century.

After disappearing from Bialowieza, its last habitat in Europe, before the outbreak of World War II, the species was saved at the 11th hour thanks to the release of bison reared in zoos back into the wild. – AFP



This photo taken in Churchill, Canada on November 20, 2014 shows a Hudsonian Godwit in breeding plumage. – Photo courtesy of Francesco Veronesi/Wikimedia Commons

Cuba hit by 2nd nationwide blackout in a week

Laurent Thomet and Rigoberto Díaz

HAVANA – Cuba plunged into darkness for the second time in less than a week on Saturday after its national power network failed again, strained by aging infrastructure and a US oil blockade.

As night fell, Havana's streets were mostly pitch black, with people navigating using phone lights or flashlights, just five days after the previous blackout.

In the touristy old city, some restaurants were able to stay open thanks to generators, with musicians playing music, but the regular blackouts have made life more difficult for Cubans.

"This is becoming unbearable," Ofelia Oliva, a 64-year-old Havana resident, told AFP.

"It hasn't even been a week since we experienced a similar situation. It is getting tiresome," Oliva said as she returned home after giving up on plans to visit her daughter.

The "total disconnection" of the national electricity system was due to an outage in a power unit at one of the country's thermoelectric plants, causing a "cascading effect", the state-owned power utility Unión Eléctrica de Cuba said.

It said it was activating micro-

grids to provide power to critical facilities, including hospitals and water treatment plants.

"I wonder if we're going to be like this our whole lives. You can't live like this," Nilo López, a 36-year-old taxi driver, told AFP.

US blockade

The country's electricity generation is sustained by a network of eight aging thermoelectric plants – some in operation for over 40 years – that suffer frequent breakdowns or must be shut down for maintenance cycles.

Cubans face daily blackouts of up to 15 hours in Havana. In the interior of the island, these outages can exceed 40 hours.

The breakdowns have intensified since Cuba's main regional ally and oil supplier, Venezuela's socialist leader Nicolás Maduro, was captured in a US military operation in January.

And US President Donald Trump has threatened to impose tariffs on countries that sell oil to Cuba.

No oil has been imported to the island since January 9, hitting the power sector while also forcing airlines to curtail flights to the



A man walks on a street without electricity during a nationwide blackout in Havana on Saturday. – AFP

island, a blow to the all-important tourism sector.

The blackout occurred as an international aid convoy began to arrive in Havana this week, bringing sorely-needed medical supplies, food, water and solar panels to the island.

'Honour of taking Cuba'

The crisis in the country of 9.6 million inhabitants comes as Trump has made no secret of his desire to

see regime change in Havana.

"I do believe I'll be...having the honour of taking Cuba," he said.

"Whether I free it, take it – think I could do anything I want with it, you want to know the truth. They're a very weakened nation right now."

The next day, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel warned that "any external aggressor will encounter an unbreakable resistance."

Tanieris Diéguez, Cuba's deputy chief of mission in Washington,

told AFP earlier this week that Havana was open to broad talks with Washington and allowing more investment.

But she said Cuba's political system would "never" be part of the negotiations.

The outages as well as regular shortages of food, medicine and other basics are spurring frustrations, with demonstrators vandalising a provincial office of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) last weekend.

With Cuba in desperate need of fuel, maritime trackers reported this week that two tankers carrying Russian oil and diesel appeared to be on their way to the island, but their status remains unclear.

Some took the latest outage in stride.

Meiven Rodríguez, 40, kept working in a small shop, selling cigarettes and using her phone light to count money.

"You have to keep going, otherwise you won't bring money home," she said.

A few fishermen cast for sardines into the dark waters of the oceanfront city.

"What would we do at home?" said Leonsio Suárez, 50. – AFP

Spain to spend US\$5.8 billion to ease Middle East war fallout

MADRID – Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez announced on Friday a sweeping package worth five billion euros (US\$5.8 billion) aimed at cushioning the economic impact of the Middle East war, including a "drastic reduction" in energy-related taxes.

Speaking after an emergency cabinet meeting, the Socialist leader said the 80-measure package was necessary to shield households and key sectors from surging costs.

"Extraordinary situations require extraordinary responses," Sánchez said, calling it the "largest social and economic shield" being implemented in the European Union.

"Clearly, these measures will not prevent the effects of this illegal war from reaching Spain, but they will at least mitigate their impact and make them somewhat more bearable."

The package, which took effect on Saturday following publication in the Official Gazette, includes cuts to value-added tax (VAT) on gas and fuel expected to reduce pump prices by as much as 30 euro cents per litre, or roughly 20 euros per tank for the average car.

Sánchez also said the government would cap the maximum price of butane and propane.

The government will also slash electricity taxes by 60 percent, suspend a production tax and reduce the value-added tax on electricity to 10 percent from 21 percent.

Additional support includes a direct subsidy of 0.20 euros per litre of fuel for transport operators,



This photo taken on Friday shows prices of combustible per litre displayed at a petrol station in Burgos, northern Spain. – AFP

farmers, ranchers and fishermen, along with equivalent aid for fertiliser purchases.

'Extremely angry'

Sánchez also announced a decree introducing a "temporary freeze" on rents in Spain, which like other European nations is grappling with a housing crisis as rents skyrocket.

This measure still requires approval from parliament, where the government lacks a majority.

It was included under pressure from Sánchez's junior coalition partners, the far-left Sumar party.

"I am extremely angry about the situation the world is in, which certain decisions and governments are pushing us into," Sánchez said, repeating his opposition to the war being waged by the United States and Israel against Iran.

"Spaniards will have to bear a cost of five billion euros – money that could have been spent on scholarships, healthcare or social services."

Sánchez defiantly refused to let US troops use its bases to attack Iran at the start of the conflict, a move that drew sharp criticism from US President Donald Trump.

He said Spain was the "best prepared" country to face the crisis thanks to its higher reliance on renewable energy.

Renewable power makes up around 55 percent of Spain's energy mix, while the country imports most of its crude oil from the Americas and Africa.

The EU's fourth-largest economy has in recent years registered growth rates far higher than its peers, notably thanks to domestic consumption, tourism and exports. – AFP

Portugal govt toughens illegal migrant measures

LISBON – Portugal's government on Thursday approved a bill aimed at making it easier to remove illegal immigrants, the latest such measure taken by the centre-right cabinet.

The bill will now be put to a vote in parliament, where the government does not hold a majority but has so far been able to count on the far-right's support to pass other immigration control measures.

Since it took office in 2024, Prime Minister Luís Montenegro's government has introduced several measures to tighten migration policy, which under the previous Socialist Party (PS) government

was one of the most open in Europe.

The bill passed on Thursday extends the time migrants can be held in temporary detention centres to up to 18 months, compared with 60 days at the moment.

It also reduces deadlines in removal procedures and extends re-entry bans for those expelled, among other measures.

"There must be consequences for illegality, and that implies removal, and faster removal," government spokesman António Leitão Amaro said after the cabinet meeting.

"Portugal was among the European countries with the lowest removal rates," he added. – AFP

Portuguese parliament moves to toughen gender change law

LISBON – Portugal's parliament on Friday advanced a draft law that would force individuals wanting to change their official gender to get backing from a doctor.

The first reading of the law was passed with votes from Prime Minister Luís Montenegro's centre-right Social Democratic Party (PSD), its allied conservative People's Party (CDS-PP) and the far-right Chega party.

The move would effectively repeal a 2018 law which allowed Portuguese citizens over the age of 16 to register a gender change and name change through a simple legal request.

Three texts in the draft bill will now be merged and put to a final vote.

"Decisions of this nature should not be made without the necessary clinical support," PSD lawmaker Andreia Neto

said ahead of Friday's vote.

Opposition Socialist Party (PS) lawmaker Isabel Moreira argued that the texts constituted "an attack on the health, dignity, and freedom of transgender and intersex people".

The proposal has also been criticised by rights and medical groups.

The Family Planning Association (APF) called parliament's action "a political step backwards", while the Portuguese Society of Clinical Sexology denounced a "scientifically unfounded" measure, likely to harm an already vulnerable population.

ILGA-Europe, an LGBTQ rights group, said that across the continent "we are witnessing how some political parties have increasingly targeted trans and intersex people" by invoking "family protection". – AFP

Araujo header scrapes Liga leaders Barcelona win over Rayo

Rik Sharma



BARCELONA – Ronald Araujo's header helped Barcelona extend their lead on Real Madrid at the top of La Liga to seven points with a tight 1-0 win over Rayo Vallecano yesterday.

Alvaro Arbeloa's Real Madrid host Atletico Madrid, fourth, later on in a derby clash.

Araujo nodded home Joao Cancelo's corner after 24 minutes to secure the three points at Camp Nou but goalkeeper Joan Garcia's superb display played just as big a part in their victory.

"We knew how important it was to get this win before the international break, we did it, but it's true we suffered more than we would have liked," Garcia told DAZN.

"They knew how to cause us damage and we weren't at the level we have been with the ball above all.

"We knew we had to win and what the other teams do is not up to us."

Hansi Flick's side were caught snoozing in the opening stages but Garcia made a fine save to deny Carlos Martin from close range.

Called up by Luis de la Fuente to the Spanish national team for the first time ahead of March's upcoming friendlies, Garcia made several excellent saves to keep Rayo at bay, with the Madrid side dominant in the second half.

At the other end, Raphinha was guilty of profligate finishing on numerous occasions. The winger scuffed wide after picking Pathe Ciss's pocket and charging through on goal.

A few minutes later Ciss appeared to bring down teenage star Lamine Yamal in the area but the Barcelona player's appeals were ignored by the referee.

Yamal's superb cross, with the outside of his boot, created another fine chance for Raphinha but the Brazilian's mis-hit effort was tipped over by Augusto Batalla.

The champions took the lead through Araujo's header from Joao Cancelo's corner midway through the first half.

Araujo has not featured much since taking a mental health break late last year, but came on as a substitute in Barca's 7-2 Champions League rout of Newcastle in midweek.

With Eric Garcia rested following a muscle overload, Flick started the Uruguayan at right-back and was rewarded with what proved to be the winner.

"I feel very good, physically well, it's important that I can help the team," said Araujo.

"I'm in a good rhythm, working hard to be able to support where I have to, I'm always ready to help the team."

Barca cling on

The Catalans came close to a second after the interval but Yamal dragged a low effort across the face of goal.

Inigo Perez's Rayo took control and started generating dangerous chances as they searched for an equaliser.

Joan Garcia denied Alvaro Garcia and then produced a spectacular save to push away Unai Lopez's header.

Pacha Espino should have pulled the visitors level but, after beating Barca's high defensive line and staying onside, curled over the bar.

Garcia pushed away a Jorge de Frutos drive before six minutes of stoppage time were added but Barca clung on to triumph.

"This is why we bought him," said Flick. "I know how important he is and how [important] his performance today was."

The Barca coach had lots of praise for Rayo coach Perez after his team's impressive display.

"We didn't play our best game but we have to say Rayo played a fantastic game, congrats – Inigo made a fantastic job," added Flick.

"His team played really great football, a great style, it's really amazing to see this and I'm really happy for him."

Perez's side are 14th and fighting to stay clear of the relegation zone while also playing in the UEFA Conference League.

"The second half was perfect but we lacked the goal," Perez. "(Joan Garcia) appeared in the key moments when we might have been able to draw."

Later on, Alaves produced a sensational comeback from three goals down to beat Celta Vigo 4-3. Quique Sanchez Flores's team climbed to 16th, three points above the relegation zone.

Ferran Jutgla struck either side of Hugo Alvarez's goal as Celta, sixth, racked up a seemingly comfortable lead.

However, Toni Martinez pulled one back before the interval to spark Alaves's comeback.

Angel Perez added another before Martinez scored again to level and Abde Rebbach cut in from the left and fired home to claim a memorable victory for the visitors. – AFP

Spurs felled by Forest in relegation battle, Sunderland shock Newcastle



Nottingham Forest's Nigerian striker Taiwo Awoniyi (right) scores their third goal during the English Premier League match against Tottenham Hotspur at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London, yesterday. – AFP



LONDON – Tottenham slipped ever closer to relegation from the Premier League with a 3-0 defeat to fellow strugglers Nottingham Forest yesterday as Sunderland stretched their hex over local rivals Newcastle.

Spurs have not tasted life outside the English top flight since 1978 but remain the only side without a Premier League win in 2026.

Goals from Igor Jesus, Morgan Gibbs-White and Taiwo Awoniyi inflicted the latest in a series of damaging defeats on interim Tottenham boss Igor Tudor.

West Ham's 2-0 defeat at Aston Villa ensured Spurs remain one point outside the relegation zone with seven games remaining.

Vitor Pereira's first league win as Forest boss propels his side four points above the drop zone.

Tottenham fans gathered in north London en masse before kick-off to line the streets in a show of support under the banner "all together, always."

But nerves quickly took over the state-of-the-art 63,000 capacity Tottenham Hotspur Stadium after Jesus rose highest to head in a corner just before half-time.

Gibbs-White could have been starting in white rather than red had

Forest not stood their ground after Spurs reportedly met his buyout clause last summer.

The Forest captain instead signed a new deal at the City ground and has played a big role in leading his side away from trouble.

Gibbs-White was left completely unmarked to turn in Callum Hudson-Odoi's cross on the hour mark for his third goal in four league games.

No side has taken fewer points at home in the Premier League this season than Tottenham and they failed to muster a response.

Awoniyi inflicted the final blow when he met Neco Williams' cross three minutes from time.

No excuses for Newcastle

Villa took full advantage of defeats for Liverpool and Chelsea on Saturday to close in on a return to the Champions League next season.

Unai Emery's men had taken just one point from a possible 12 in their previous four league games.

But the return of skipper John McGinn from injury has been a timely boost.

The Scotland international curled in from outside the box to give Villa the perfect start.

Ollie Watkins then pounced after

Mads Hermansen spilled Morgan Rogers' shot to bounce back from his exclusion from Thomas Tuchel's England squad on Friday.

Villa open up a six-point cushion on sixth-placed Chelsea with the top five set to qualify for next season's Champions League.

Newcastle's European ambitions and local pride were dealt a major blow as Sunderland came from behind to win 2-1 in the first Tyne-Wear derby at St. James' Park for 10 years.

Bryan Brobbey struck a 90th minute winner for the Black Cats, who have not lost to Newcastle in the league for 15 years.

Defeat compounded a miserable week for Newcastle, who were humbled 7-2 by Barcelona in exiting the Champions League in midweek.

"I've got very little to use as an excuse. Once you haven't performed and you know how much the game means you have to accept the criticism," said Newcastle boss Eddie Howe.

Defeat sees the Magpies slip below Sunderland in the table to 12th.

Newcastle also promised to identify and hold accountable anyone guilty after Sunderland defender Lutsharel Geertruida reported an incident of racist abuse from the crowd in the second half. – AFP

Football shorts

Como swat aside Pisa to boost Champions League hopes

MILAN – Como took another step towards a historic qualification for the Champions League after cruising to a 5-0 victory over lowly Pisa yesterday.

Assane Diao set Como on their way in the seventh minute with a fine low drive, and further strikes from Tasos Douvakis, Martin Baturina, Nico Paz and Maximo Perrone ensured a fifth straight win in Italy's top flight.

Ambitious Como have never played European football but the team coached by Cesc Fabregas sit fourth, three points ahead of fifth-placed Juventus who were held to a 1-1 draw by Sassuolo on Saturday.

Before kick-off, Como held a minute's silence, during which fans broke out into applause, for deceased billionaire co-owner Michael Hartono, who died at the age of 86 on Thursday.

Indonesian Hartono and his brother Robert, owners of tobacco giant Djarum which was founded by their father in the 1950s, bought Como in 2019 when the club was in Italy's third division.

Como had far too much for Pisa who look set to go straight back down to Serie B after promotion last season.

Pisa sit bottom of the division, nine points behind Lecce who are just outside the relegation zone. – AFP

Mainz beat Frankfurt to continue Bundesliga escape act

BERLIN – Mainz continued their impressive rise from last spot to mid-table safety with a 2-1 home win over Eintracht Frankfurt in the Bundesliga yesterday.

Paul Nebel's 89th-minute winner gave Mainz all three points after Frankfurt's Nathaniel Brown had equalised for the visitors in the 20th minute, cancelling out Nebel's early opener.

Stranded in last spot when former Union Berlin coach Urs Fischer took over in December, Mainz have since lost just two of 18 matches in all competitions and sit 11th in the Bundesliga, six points above the relegation play-off spot.

They are through to the quarter-finals of a European competition for the first time after beating Sigma Olmutz in the UEFA Conference League on Thursday. – AFP

Pogacar dreaming of cycling's 'Monument' Grand Slam

Cycling

Jacques Klopp

PARIS – Tadej Pogacar's victory on Saturday at Milan-San-Remo places the Slovenian rider in a position to potentially win all five Monuments in a single season – a feat that no cyclist has ever accomplished.

Asked about the upcoming Flemish classics, the two-time world champion insisted he needed a bit of time to let his triumph in the Primavera – which had become his main obsession – fully sink in.

But the dream of an unprecedented Grand Slam, requiring victories at the Tour of Flanders on April 5, Paris-Roubaix the following Sunday, Liege-Bastogne-Liege on April 26, and finally the Tour of Lombardy on October 10, is alive.

"Pogi" has a real chance to pull off what even the great Eddy Merckx – one of only three riders, along with fellow Belgians Rik Van Looy and Roger De Vlaeminck, to have won all five major classics in their careers – never managed within a single year.

Pogacar has already won the Tour of Flanders, his next big race, twice. The Slovenian finds the steep, cobbled climbs of the Ronde perfect terrain for his physique.

He will be an even bigger favourite at Liege-Bastogne-Liege, which he has won three times, and at the Tour of Lombardy, where he has not lost in five participations.

That leaves Paris-Roubaix, the only Monument missing from his collection and now, after solving the Primavera puzzle, his great challenge.

To Roubaix 'to win'

"My form is good, and I'll go to the Tour of Flanders and Roubaix with a very strong team. We're going there to win both races," said the UAE leader after his epic victory on the line in San Remo, bloodied after a crash in the closing stages.



UAE Team Emirates' Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar celebrates after winning the 117th Milan-Sanremo one-day classic cycling race, in Sanremo, Italy on Saturday. – AFP

On paper, the Hell of the North – where the power riders rule – is off-limits for a climber such as Pogacar: in the 21st century, winners at the Roubaix Velodrome have weighed on average around 77 kg. He weighs ten kilos less.

But his second place last year, at his first attempt, showed that he was capable of shining on this terrain as well.

"He has a better chance of winning Roubaix than he had of winning Milan-San Remo," said Italian veteran Matteo Trentin, a former teammate and still Pogacar's training partner around Monaco.

Pogacar's main rival on the northern cobbles will be Mathieu van der Poel, winner of the last three editions. Between them the two have won the last ten Monuments. But the Dutchman's defeat on Saturday will have an impact.

Yesterday, Van der Poel replied to a Pogacar Instagram post with a simple goat emoji – shorthand for 'Greatest of All Time'.

'Best of all time'

Pogacar, who has pared his schedule down this season, seems

more determined than ever.

"His mentality, the way he fought back after his crash to return to the front, is incredible," commented Tom Pidcock. "He's the best of all time, and he didn't need to do that, right? He's already won so much, and he was clearly suffering after the crash. But he kept fighting. Incredible."

Pogacar will arrive at Roubaix better prepared than last year, when he entered late after overcoming the reluctance within his team, worried about the risks of a crash.

After early reconnaissance of the route in December, he returned to the course in early March, after his Strade Bianche victory, for "two intense days" with his Belgian teammate Florian Vermeersch.

"We put a lot of effort this winter into preparing for Roubaix," Pogacar said Saturday evening – efforts he hopes will pay off on April 12 to complete his collection.

There will be time afterwards to think about the other major goals of the year: equalling the record of five Tour de France victories and claiming a third consecutive world champion title. – AFP

S Africa clinch 19-run win over NZ in 4th T20

Cricket

WELLINGTON – South Africa's spinners played a decisive role as the tourists won the fourth Twenty20 international against New Zealand by 19 runs yesterday to square the five-match series 2-2.

New Zealand were well placed to clinch the series midway through their chase in Wellington after the Proteas scored 164-5.

However, from 88-3 after 10 overs, they lost wickets in rapid succession to be all out for 145 off 18.5 overs.

It sends the series, played between weakened sides from both countries, to a decider in Christchurch on Wednesday.

The match swung in favour of South Africa when spinners Keshav Maharaj and Prenelan Subrayen turned the screws through the middle stages of the chase.

Captain Maharaj is comfortably the most experienced member of an experimental tour squad and proved hard to score from as he took 2-22 off four overs.

Subrayen, playing his first T20

international, bowled Dane Cleaver for 26 to spark New Zealand's middle order crumble and finished with 2-13 off three overs.

Maharaj said his side played with more energy than in defeats in Hamilton and Auckland.

"It was a perfect response to two disappointing losses in a row," he said.

"Coming into this game, you could see there was a little bit more energy and hunger.

"We are a young team, finding our way in international cricket so it takes a little bit of time."

Opener Tim Robinson top-scored with 32 for New Zealand while Proteas paceman Gerald Coetzee took 3-31.

South Africa's innings were dominated by 57 off 36 balls from wicketkeeper Connor Esterhuizen.

He was dismissed by a spectacular outfield catch from Katene Clarke, on his international debut, off Ben Sears' bowling.

Paceman Sears impressed, taking 1-22 off four overs, which included conceding just two runs off the last over of the innings.

– AFP



Ducati Lenovo's Spanish rider Marc Marquez (left) and Pertamina Enduro VR46 Racing Team's Italian rider Fabio Di Giannantonio compete during the MotoGP sprint of the Grand Prix of Brazil at the Ayrton Senna International racetrack in Goiania, state of Goias, Brazil, on Saturday.

World Champion Marquez pounced on a late error by Di Giannantonio and then held off a desperate last-lap counter-attack to win the delayed sprint race as MotoGP continued its chaotic return to Brazil on Saturday. – AFP

World Athletics decision to hand Asia two world indoors 'strategic' – Coe

Luke Phillips



TORUN, POLAND – World Athletics president Sebastian Coe said Saturday that the decision to hold the next two world indoor championships in Asia was "strategic", with both venues having come through tough evaluations.

The city of Bhubaneswar in Odisha state in eastern India will host the world indoors in 2028, while the Kazakh capital Astana was chosen for the 2030 edition.

Coe, speaking to reporters at the ongoing world indoors in Torun, Poland, justified the decision to move the global three-day competition to Asia as an opportunity to "get more than a toe hold" in important markets.

"First of all, Asia is a very large continent and if you really want to define it, we're talking from Qatar to the Philippines," he said.

"So it's not a one size fits all. It's not sort

of saying it's like Europe, where in three hours, you're basically almost out of Europe in most directions."

Coe added: "Why those two? First of all, they threw their hats in the ring. Secondly, they went through a really tough set of evaluations."

An independent evaluation panel "makes judgements across competence, about integrity, about commercial opportunities, the strategic imperatives", added the two-time Olympic 1500m gold medalist for Britain.

Sports marketing landscape

With large populations, Coe continued, comes "a pretty sophisticated sports marketing landscape".

"We witness that in everything from cricket through to Formula One, now even the Premier League, you know it is where we need to be.

"I've been in Bhubaneswar on a few occasions... it is a big sporting hub in India. It has very strong political leadership down there.

"I was there not that long ago for the Asian track and field championships. World Cup hockey tournaments are held there. It's a sporting hub where they do deliver sports events."

Turning to Kazakhstan, Coe added: "I was in Astana not that long ago. They have identified athletics as their number one strategic sport.

"In Kazakhstan in the last six or seven years, they've built some outstanding indoor athletics facilities and their ability and their appetite to play a bigger role in world athletics is again another interesting market for us.

"Central Asia is hugely important, so for strategic reasons, they're good bids to have at the table, and I hope in both those cases, they open other opportunities for us to get more than a toe hold in those marketplaces."

The choice of Odisha comes with Amdavad, the city also known as Ahmedabad – in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state of Gujarat – confirmed as host city for the 2030 Commonwealth Games, which will feature a full track and field programme.

That is widely viewed as a stepping stone to bidding to host the 2036 Olympics, and erasing memories of the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi – an event marked by construction delays, substandard infrastructure and accusations of corruption.

When Amdavad was confirmed for the Commonwealths, Coe said at the time that India was "already expressing interest in hosting major global athletics events, and the long-term aspiration to host a World Athletics Championships – and one day the Olympic Games".

Coe said it was a "powerful sign of a nation thinking boldly about its sporting future".

– AFP

Chuck Norris dies at 86

LOS ANGELES – Chuck Norris, the US martial artist and Hollywood tough guy most famous for his role in the “Walker, Texas Ranger” television series, has died, his family said on Friday. He was 86.

Norris died on Thursday, the family said on Instagram, after media reports that he had been hospitalised for an undisclosed condition while on the Hawaiian island of Kauai.

“To the world, he was a martial artist, actor, and a symbol of strength,” the statement read. “To us, he was a devoted husband, a loving father and grandfather, an incredible brother, and the heart of our family.”

The family said it wanted to keep the details of Norris’s passing private, adding that “please know that he was surrounded by his family and was at peace.”

Tributes quickly began pouring in.

“My heart and prayers are with his family. He will never be forgotten,” said fellow action movie star Jean-Claude Van Damme.

Norris could be outspoken about his conservative political views, and President Donald Trump hailed him on Friday as a “great supporter.”

“He was a really good, tough cookie. You didn’t want to fight him,” Trump, who has cultivated deep connections with mixed martial arts and its fan base, told reporters at the White House.

Big screen icon

Born in Ryan, Oklahoma, on March 10, 1940, Carlos Ray “Chuck” Norris took up martial arts while serving in the US Air Force in South Korea.

He left the military in 1962 and set up a martial arts studio in Los Angeles, finding his calling in teaching and delivering roundhouse kicks.

His acting debut came with a cameo in a 1968 Dean Martin film, “The Wrecking Crew.” Four years later, his epic fight with the kung-fu superstar Bruce Lee in “The Way of The Dragon” helped turn Norris into an icon on big and small screen alike.

A slew of leading roles in karate films followed, from a US commando in “Good Guys Wear Black,” an all-American riposte to a slew of Hong Kong action flicks harnessing Lee’s fame, to the action horror feature “Silent Rage.”

As his acting career grew, he became a legendary martial arts figure, winning six world professional middleweight karate championships from 1968 to 1974 and earning black belts in multiple disciplines.

Norris v Superman

In 1983, Norris slipped into the role of a taciturn Texas ranger waging war against an arms dealer in “Lone Wolf McQuade,” which provided the template for the cult TV series “Walker, Texas Ranger.”

The show ran for eight seasons and spawned countless action-man jokes and memes, one being that Norris and Superman had a fight, with the loser (Superman) forced to wear their underpants on the outside.

The success of the bearded, ass-kicking Ranger marked a stunning reversal of fortune for Norris, who grew up a shy, unathletic child who “used to daydream about being strong... to beat up the bullies.”

An evangelical Christian, Norris was born into a family of three boys raised mainly by their Irish mother after her divorce from their alcoholic father.

He had two sons from his first marriage to his high school sweetheart Dianne Holechek, which lasted 30 years, and a son and a daughter with his second wife, Gena O’Kelley.

Norris also had a daughter from an affair during his first marriage.

A dyed-in-the-wool Republican, he urged his compatriots to vote out Barack Obama in 2012. A year later, he offered his bare-chested support to Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu in a video.

On Friday, Netanyahu called Norris “a great friend of Israel and a close personal friend.”

In 2017, Norris recovered from two cardiac arrests. He was mired in controversy two years later by becoming the public face of the arms company Glock, despite an epidemic of gun violence in the United States.

– AFP



Cast member Chuck Norris arrives at the premiere of “The Expendables 2,” at Grauman’s Chinese Theatre in Hollywood California August 15, 2012. – AFP

K-pop kings BTS stun Seoul in ‘2.0’ comeback concert



This handout photo taken on Saturday and provided by BIGHIT MUSIC and NETFLIX shows K-pop boy group BTS performing during their comeback concert at Gwanghwamun Square in Seoul. – AFP

Claire Lee

SEOUL – South Korean megastars BTS performed their first show in nearly four years on Saturday in front of enormous crowds in Seoul for a K-pop extravaganza livestreamed to millions more worldwide.

Widely lauded as the biggest boy band in the world, BTS went on hiatus in 2022 so the seven members could serve compulsory military service, some near the heavily fortified border with North Korea.

The comeback concert had as its backdrop the historic Gyeongbokgung (“Great Blessings Palace”) royal palace – fitting for the “Kings of K-pop” – with thousands of fans from South Korea and abroad singing along.

“It’s been a long journey but now we are finally here!” said BTS’s leader RM – whose injured ankle meant he had to perch on a stool at times – as the group performed songs from their new album, as well as old hits “Dynamite” and “Mikrokosmos”.

“We are finally here and seeing you again... all seven of us standing on the stage together makes me so happy,” said fellow member Jimin to cheers.

“BTS 2.0 is just getting started,” said J-Hope.

Fans – 260,000 were predicted earlier – descended on Seoul from morning onwards in colourful costumes, taking selfies with their tickets and clutching BTS “ARMY” glowsticks.

Before they came on stage the crowd chanted “BTS! BTS!” with the main boulevard leading up to Gwanghwamun Square ram-packed with people as far as the eye could see.

Gwanghwamun Gate was lit in rainbow colours before the show started, as a massive stage installation featuring three circular features – symbolising BTS’s new album “Arirang” – glowed beneath towering lighting rigs.

The megastars admitted to some nerves, with member J-Hope telling fans “there were moments when we wondered whether we might be somewhat forgotten, or whether you would remember us”.

Jimin said: “We are not such special people. We are afraid every time, but we believed that if we showed you our sincerity, it would reach you.”

Fans responded with a sea of glowsticks, singing along the songs while holding their phones high up to film their stars.

“It’s great that the show was held in Gwanghwamun, but it would have been just as good anywhere – even in a much smaller venue,” Park Young-mi, 34, a South Korean fan, told AFP.

“Fans have been waiting unwaveringly, and I hope they felt that today.”

“Seeing them on stage just felt as if I was being welcomed into a family... it felt very expressive and beautiful and you could just see it from the people who were here too,” gushed Gabriel Miranda, 34, from the United States.

“It’s a bit different from BTS’s usual flavour, but seeing this new side of them at this historic place is deeply moving,” said Jo Jung-hee, 60, her phone featuring a photo of BTS member V.

Millions more people across the world were able to watch the show broadcast live on Netflix.

The latest album, “ARIRANG” (“My Beloved One”), which was released on Friday, is billed as a reflection of the maturing boy band’s Korean identity.

It sold almost four million copies in the first day, BTS’s record label said.

Spotify said five million fans pre-saved it, the highest ever for a K-pop act, and that it was the most-streamed album in a single day so far this year.

“ARIRANG” takes its name from a folk song about longing

and separation that is often dubbed South Korea’s unofficial national anthem.

Featuring collaborations with multiple Western artists and producers, the 14 tracks on the album mix rap, heavy beats and experimentation.

“Compared to their earlier work, there’s a wider range of genres, which gives it a more mature and expansive feel,” Lee Ji-young, a university professor, told AFP.

Taylor who?

Saturday’s show preceded a world tour set to be a major money-spinner for BTS, potentially outdoing Taylor Swift’s recent Eras Tour.

South Korea too – whose music, films, books, food and cosmetics are all the rage – will benefit thanks to tourism and sales of merchandise from BTS dolls to toothbrushes and cans of tuna.

Starting in Goyang, South Korea on April 9 and ending in Manila 11 months later, BTS’s tour encompasses 82 shows in 34 cities in 23 countries.

Security was heavy for Saturday’s concert, with some 15,000 police and security guards, barricades lining the roads and local venues shut.

Wedding guests had to be transported by police.

BTS – short for Bulletproof Boy Scouts in Korean – have championed UNICEF campaigns, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and efforts to combat anti-Asian racism.

Members have also spoken candidly about the pressures of the music industry.

“Honestly, I became a fan simply because I love their music,” Seo Ra-jung, 40, told AFP after the concert.

“I first became a fan during a really difficult period in my life, and their lyrics gave me a lot of strength.” – AFP

BTS draws over 100,000 fans to Seoul comeback concert: label

SEOUL – More than 100,000 fans turned out to see K-pop superstars BTS’s first concert in nearly four years, their label said yesterday, a smaller number than originally expected for the highly anticipated event in central Seoul.

“An estimated 104,000 fans

attended the Gwanghwamun Square concert, based on ticket sales and data from the country’s three major mobile carriers,” HYBE said in a statement to AFP.

The figure was lower than an initial projection of 260,000, while police estimates of the crowd size

were far lower at about 42,000, according to Yonhap news agency.

Netflix livestreamed the concert to about 190 countries.

Some 15,000 police officers and security personnel were mobilised for the concert, with barricades lining the roads and nearby venues shut. – AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 7°C~19°C	Manila 20°C~32°C	New York 1°C~10°C	Lisbon 11°C~21°C
Shanghai 10°C~17°C	Bangkok 26°C~35°C	London 7°C~15°C	Rio de Janeiro 20°C~28°C
Hong Kong 19°C~25°C	Tokyo 6°C~14°C	Frankfurt 3°C~17°C	Luanda 25°C~30°C
Taipei 19°C~27°C	Singapore 23°C~35°C	Vancouver 6°C~11°C	Maputo 23°C~34°C
Guangzhou 18°C~29°C	Kuala Lumpur 23°C~36°C	Paris 5°C~17°C	Dili 24°C~30°C
Nanjing 10°C~18°C	Jakarta 23°C~33°C	Moscow -1°C~11°C	São Tomé 26°C~32°C
Guilin 16°C~25°C	Seoul 6°C~19°C	Las Vegas 19°C~35°C	Praia 17°C~27°C
Xi’an 7°C~12°C	Sydney 19°C~26°C	Monte Carlo 8°C~15°C	Bissau 20°C~35°C



My day...

This photo taken on March 10 shows a view of the Zangser Kangri Glacier at the Changtang National Nature Reserve, Xizang Autonomous Region. March 21 marks the World Day for Glaciers. – Xinhua

Not for summer!

An SSV tracked buggy, a new vehicle designed to attract tourists, drives down a street in Ilulissat, Greenland, on Thursday. – AFP



Squiggles and wriggles

A model presents a creation by FDCI x Pearl Academy First Cut during the Lakmé Fashion Week in Mumbai, India yesterday. – AFP

Mayan magic

People gather to watch as the shape of a serpent is cast in shadows on the El Castillo pyramid in Chichen Itza on the day of the equinox, Yucatan State, Mexico, on Friday. The Chichen Itza equinox is a twice-yearly event (spring and autumn) where sunlight and shadow create the illusion of a serpent, the deity Kukulcan on the world-famous landmark, Chichen Itza's main pyramid. – AFP

Look into my eyes...

A handler waits with her Huacaya alpaca as it is judged in the show ring at the British Alpaca Society National Show held at the Staffordshire County Showground, in Stafford, central England on Friday. The three-day British Alpaca Society National Show brings together 510 alpacas from 69 exhibitors from across the UK vying to be awarded the title of 'Supreme Champion' in either the Huacaya or Suri fleece categories. – AFP



Cherry dog!

People take pictures with their dog under a cherry blossom tree in Ueno park in Tokyo on Saturday. – AFP

