

Kai Fong plans to set up residents' mutual aid association in Zone A: Chan



Macau General Union of Neighbourhood Associations (UGAMM – Kai Fong) President John Chan Ka Leong speak to reporters at Hotel Beverly Plaza in Zape during yesterday's Spring Festival media luncheon. – Photo: Armindo Neves

Armindo Neves

The Macau General Union of Neighbourhood Associations (UGAMM), widely known as Kai Fong, hosted a media reception yesterday, where its president, John Chan Ka Leong announced that the group plans to set up a residents' mutual aid association in Zone A.

The Spring Festival media luncheon was held at Hotel Beverly Plaza in Zape.

Chan noted in a speech that Kai Fong's "Kang Jun" Day Care Centre in Zone A has commenced operations, providing daytime care services for elderly residents in the new neighbourhood, adding that an initial quota of approximately 20 users is already available. Chan also said that the number of residents moving to Zone A was expected to gradually increase.

"Kang Jun" (康駿) means, literally translated, "Healthy Steed".

The government plans for up to 96,000 people to live in Zone A, a new land reclamation area covering 1.38 km²,

potentially resulting in a population density of 69,565 residents per km². The area is mainly earmarked for public housing projects, consisting of subsidised home-ownership flats and social rental housing units.

Kai Fong is in touch with relevant government entities regarding the possibility of establishing a residents' mutual aid association and a "Yee Hong" ("颐康" – "nurturing" or "care") Centre for Geriatric Care in Zone A, Chan said, adding the goal was to collect residents' opinions and assist them in addressing community-related issues.

Chan also said that this year, efforts would be made by his group to explore innovative models such as smart elderly care and smart communities, deepen Kai Fong's service presence in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) by optimising the operation of its elderly care centre in the "Macau New Neighbourhood" (MNN) in Hengqin, and promote the deep integration of technology into

community governance.

Last year, Chan said, Kai Fong provided over 4.64 million service visits and handled 6,686 social service cases.

Chan told reporters before the luncheon that the "Kai Fong Car" service currently comprises three vehicles with three drivers, adding that under normal conditions, each driver can provide around seven trips per day.

The primary function of "Kai Fong Car" is to assist disadvantaged groups and individuals with mobility challenges in travelling to and from medical facilities.

However, Chan also said that since the service was relaunched in January, an average of five to six trips per car has been operated daily, indicating that demand remains "very high".

Assessments are also being conducted to determine whether the service capacity can be expanded in the future to support more individuals with mobility needs, Chan said. ■

Efforts underway to ensure safe passage through Strait of Hormuz: Omani FM

MUSCAT – Omani Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi said yesterday that efforts are being made to secure safe passage arrangements through the Strait of Hormuz amid rising regional tensions.

In a post on social media platform X, Al Busaidi said Oman was working intensively to ensure the continuity of maritime navigation in the strategic waterway.

"Whatever your view of Iran, this war is not of their making," he said, warning that the conflict is already causing widespread economic disruptions.

"I fear they promise to get much worse if the war continues," he added.

Al Busaidi's remarks came amid heightened regional tensions following joint US-Israeli strikes on Iran starting on February 28, to which Iran and its regional allies responded with attacks on Israeli and US interests across the Middle East.

The conflict escalated sharply after US President Donald Trump on Saturday gave Tehran 48 hours to fully reopen the Strait of Hormuz, warning that otherwise Washington could strike Iranian power infrastructure. Tehran responded by signaling it would retaliate across the region if such attacks went ahead.

Earlier yesterday, Trump said he had ordered the military to delay strikes on Iranian power plants and energy facilities for five days after what he called "productive" talks with Iran. He also suggested the Strait of Hormuz could be "jointly controlled" by the United States and Iran.

Iran later denied having negotiations with the United States, adding that Tehran's stance on the Strait of Hormuz as well as its conditions to end the war have not changed. (More on pages 7, 10 & 11).

– Xinhua



President Xi Jinping (center), also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, visits the Xiong'an campus of Beijing No. 4 High School in the Xiong'an New Area, Hebei Province, yesterday. Xi inspected the Xiong'an New Area yesterday, when he also chaired a symposium on further advancing the high-quality construction and development of the area. (More on p.7) – Xinhua

Macau's most popular English-language newspaper – Your trustworthy source of news & views

The Macau Post Daily

Wang Yi meets British PM's national security adviser

Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Jonathan Powell, British prime minister's national security adviser, in Beijing yesterday, and the two sides exchanged views on the situation in Iran, the Ukraine crisis and other issues. – Story on p. 7

Runway collision kills two pilots, shuts NY airport

A plane carrying dozens of people collided with a fire truck on a runway at New York's LaGuardia airport, killing the pilot and co-pilot and causing "serious injuries" to others, authorities said yesterday. – Story on p. 11

EU-Mercosur trade deal to apply provisionally from May 1

The EU said yesterday a free trade agreement (FTA) with South American bloc Mercosur/Mercosul will provisionally enter into force on May 1 – despite a pending court ruling on its legality. – Story on p. 12

Macau Health Survey 2026 to start next Monday

Ida Cheong

The Health Bureau (SSM) announced in yesterday's press conference that the "Macau Health Survey 2026" will take place from March 30 to June 14, and its preliminary survey results are expected to be released in the fourth quarter. The survey target sample size is 3,000 residents, aged 18 or older.

According to the Statistics and Census Bureau's (DSEC) latest database, Macau's population stood at 688,900 at the end of last year, so that the sample size is about 0.4 percent of total population.

The press conference about the Macau Health Survey 2026 was held at the SSM Public Health Emergency Personnel Residence Hall on Guia Hill.

The health survey, conducted once every 10 years, will systematically collect data on chronic diseases and health risk factors among Macau residents, aiming to provide a scientific basis for improving public health policies, optimise the allocation of medical resources, and enhance community health services, while raising residents' awareness of health management, according to the conference.

Leong Iek Hou, who heads the SSM Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Division, noted that the initial round of mobile phone invitations and appointment scheduling will take place from March 30 to April 12. Selected residents who have made an appointment will receive a confirmation text message. During this process, no personal information is required, nor will any links need to be clicked.

The on-site survey will be conducted on Saturdays and Sundays from April 18 to June 14 (excluding May 2 to 10), including hearing tests, blood tests, blood pressure checks and others. Three sessions will be held daily, each

with six appointment slots. The entire process will take about one and a half hours, Dr Leong said.

Dr Leong added that participants will receive souvenirs and gift vouchers and will be able to access their personal health reports via the "Macau One Account" app.

Participants will be randomly selected through a stratified sampling method using the SSM registration card (commonly known as the "Gold Card") database, Dr Leong said.

Aiming to further enhance the professionalism of the survey, the Health Bureau has invited an expert team from the China National Health Survey (CNHS) to provide technical guidance, thereby deepening

exchanges and collaboration between Macau and the Chinese mainland in the health sector.

Community Health Stations to expand

Meanwhile, SSM Director Alvis Lo Iek Long said in a speech during the press conference that his bureau has collaborated with other government entities and community organisations on plans to expand the number of community "Health Stations" to 12.

Additionally, thematic "Community Culture Tea Talks" will be held monthly to actively listen to residents' health needs and proactively follow up on their suggestions, Dr Lo said. ■



This poster provided by the Health Bureau (SSM) yesterday shows the participatory procedure for the upcoming "Macau Health Survey 2026".



Health Bureau (SSM) Director Alvis Lo Iek Long (centre), Leong Iek Hou (second from left), who heads the SSM Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Division, and other representatives pose for a group photo during yesterday's press conference about the 'Macau Health Survey 2026' at its Public Health Emergency Personnel Residence Hall on Guia Hill. – Photo: Ida Cheong

'Old Taipa' stormwater pumping station project to start tomorrow

Ida Cheong

In order to alleviate flooding in old Taipa Village during heavy rainfall, the "Old Taipa Stormwater Pumping Station and Sewerage System Construction" project will commence tomorrow and is slated for completion in the second quarter of next year, according to a joint statement issued by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) and Macau Transport Bureau (DSAT).

Due to the low-lying topography of the old Taipa Village, the existing sewer system often reaches capacity at the rainwater box culverts along Estrada da Baía de Nossa Senhora da Esperança (望德聖母灣大馬路) to Avenida dos Jogos da Ásia Oriental (東亞運大馬路) during prolonged heavy precipitation and high tides, preventing effective drainage and resulting in flooding.

Aiming to effectively address the flooding issues in the area, the project will involve the construction of a stormwater pumping station within the warm-up zone of the Olympic Sports Centre (奧林匹克體育中心), in conjunction with a subsequent sewer system expansion to accelerate the drainage of rainwater from Taipa's old quarters, such as Rua de Fernão Mendes Pinto (飛能便度街), Chun Su Mei area (松樹尾), and Rua da

Ponte Negra (黑橋街), the statement said, adding that the project has been coordinated with the Sports Bureau (ID). The statement insisted that the sports competition venue will not be affected during construction.

Due to the first phase of construction, a section of Avenida Olímpica (氹仔奧林匹克大馬路) will have limited traffic from tomorrow to June 12. Meanwhile, the Estádio de Macau (澳門運動場) bus stop will be temporarily suspended, and a temporary stop about 50 metres from the original bus stop will be set up. For details, please refer to the attached table or the websites of the two bus companies:

TCM – <http://www.tcm.com.mo>

Transmac – <https://www.transmac.com.mo>

During the construction period, authorities will strictly supervise the contractor to ensure proper site enclosure management and cleanliness, minimising disruption to residents and users, the statement added.

The statement reminded residents and drivers to follow on-site instructions, refrain from entering the enclosed area, and remain cautious.

In addition, a raft of construction briefings were held earlier with local community groups to introduce the project and gather feedback, the statement added. ■



This image provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) and the Macau Transport Bureau (DSAT) yesterday shows an artist's rendition of the stormwater pumping station in 'Old Taipa'.



This image provided by the IAM and DSAT yesterday shows where the stormwater pumping station will be located near Avenida Olímpica (氹仔奧林匹克大馬路).

The Macau Post Daily is looking for Reporter – full- or part-time

- Hard working, curious, dependable
- Proficiency in Chinese and English
- Good communication skills
- Familiar with Macau matters
- 5-day working week

Please send your application together with detailed resume indicating your expected salary via email to joininmp@gmail.com



Published since Aug 2004

- Director & Chief Editor – Harald Brüning
- Office Manager – Sally Chong
- Marketing Manager – Kevin Cheung King Lok
- Managing Editor – Maria Cheang Ut Meng
- Editors – Lesley Wells, Johnny Un
- Senior Reporters – Tony Wong, Rui Pastorin
- Reporters – Khalel Vallo, William Chan, Ida Cheong, Armindo Neves
- Chief Graphic Designer – Simon Wang
- Graphic Designer – Colin Zhong
- Administrative Assistants – Ester Mak, Carl Leong
- Printed by Tipografia Welfare Lda., 82-86 Rua dos Pescadores
- Wire services – AFP, Xinhua
- Chatbots: Poe, DeepSeek

Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY PERIODS. MIST IN THE MORNING AND AT NIGHT. FORCE 2 TO 3 SOUTH TO SOUTHEASTERLY WINDS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 65% AND 98%.

21°C~27°C

Source: SMG

One hurt in motorbike-bus crash in Inner Harbour area

Armando Neves

The Fire Service Bureau (CB) announced in a statement that it had received a report at around 2 p.m. yesterday about a traffic accident between a bus and a motorcycle near Hotel Ponte 16 on Rua do Visconde Paço de Arcos (巴素打爾古街), resulting in the biker being injured.

When arriving at the scene, fireman confirmed that the accident involved a public bus and a motorbike. The firemen rushed the injured biker to hospital with bruised limbs.

The Public Security Police (PSP) announced in a follow-up statement that according to the investigation, the incident occurred shortly before 2 p.m. when the 18A route TCM bus, which was turning into Rua do Tarrafeiro (沙欄仔街) from Rua do Visconde Paço de Arcos, failed to give way.

An oncoming motorbike had to brake suddenly and its 29-year-old rider was trapped beneath the front of the bus, the statement said, adding that the rider was rescued by firemen.

Both rider and bus driver are local residents.

The Public Security Police said in the statement that the bus driver has been fined.

According to Macau's Road Traffic Law Article 34, the driver who has the duty give way must slow down, stop if necessary, or, in the case of crossing vehicles, reverse, in order to allow the passage of another vehicle, without altering its speed or direction. Anyone who violates the provisions of the article faces a fine of 900 patacas, unless a more severe penalty is applicable under another legal provision. ■



This photo downloaded from social media platform Facebook last night shows the rider lying under the bus after yesterday afternoon's crash near Hotel Ponte 16. The Post cannot vouch for its authenticity.

Int'l Gastronomy Forum explores cross-sector collaboration

Khalel Vallo

The "International Gastronomy Forum, Macao" was held yesterday at the Macau Fisherman's Wharf Convention and Exhibition Centre in Nape, bringing together representatives from nearly 50 member cities of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) to explore how collaboration across culinary culture and other fields can drive sustainable urban development.

Organised by the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO), the forum is a key highlight of the "2026 International Cities of Gastronomy Fest, Macao". The forum gathered representatives from 38 Creative Cities of Gastronomy across 22 countries, alongside 10 Creative Cities from other fields, as well as international organisations, scholars, industry stakeholders, and members of the public.

Under the theme "Creative Fusion: Reimagining Gastronomy Beyond the Plate", yesterday's discussions focused on how culinary culture can intersect with sectors such as culture, tourism, media and design to shape more inclusive and innovative urban futures. The forum also served as a platform for exchange and cooperation, aiming to reinforce Macau's positioning as a World Centre for Tourism and Leisure.

In her opening remarks, MGTO Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes said the forum continued to promote preservation and innovation in gastronomy, with the goal of strengthening collaboration among Creative Cities. She noted that since Macau's designation as a Creative City of Gastronomy in 2017, it has expanded its international engagement



Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes (left) and UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) Secretary Denise Bax address yesterday's "International Gastronomy Forum, Macao" at the Macau Fisherman's Wharf Convention and Exhibition Centre in Nape. — Photos: Khalel Vallo

and fostered new opportunities across creative sectors, adding that preparations are underway for the 10th anniversary of the designation in 2027.

Meanwhile, UCCN Secretary Denise Bax highlighted the importance of cross-disciplinary collaboration, stating that cities must integrate culture and creativity to address modern urban challenges.

The forum featured three keynote sessions covering topics such as cross-sector collaboration in tourism, youth-led innovation in gastronomy, and digital storytelling in culinary culture. Speakers included representatives from Paris-based UNESCO, the Rome-based Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)

and international content creators, who gave their insights into engaging communities and promoting cultural heritage through innovative approaches.

Moreover, participants from cities such as Italy's Bergamo, Portugal's Braga, Thailand's Suphanburi and Wuhan Province exchanged ideas on integrating gastronomy with media arts, music, design and festivals to enhance urban experiences. A new addition this year, the Chinese Creative Showcase, highlighted seven Creative Cities from the Chinese mainland, demonstrating cross-sector collaboration through crafts, media arts, film, design and music, alongside culinary culture. ■

Fang Suo Commune adds to Macau's bookshops



Photos taken of the exterior and interior of the Fang Suo Commune at Grand Lisboa Palace (GLP) in Cotai on Thursday by Rui Pastorin.

Commentary by Rui Pastorin

On Thursday evening, I was running late. I was making my way to the Michelin Guide Ceremony hosted at Grand Lisboa Palace (GLP) and, as I have for the third or fourth consecutive year of covering the event, again found myself on the wrong side from where the event was scheduled to take place.

After a few more twists and turns, I was on the right path in no time. But I had yet to reach my destination, prompting me to increase my pace. In the middle of my rush, something caught my eye right before I arrived at the Grand Hall, which was

the event venue. As I got closer, I stopped for a few seconds when I realised that my eyes hadn't been deceiving me: it was a bookshop, a sight which I had not seen within an integrated resort for a long time.

After the event had concluded, I couldn't help but just circle back just to see what was on offer before I returned to the office. I later learnt that the bookshop that caught me off-guard is called Fang Suo Commune, a mainland Chinese cultural brand, with Macau being just one of their branches.

Fang Suo Commune in Macau opened a few months ago at the Grand Lisboa Palace (GLP) in Cotai. Located on Level 1 of the

integrated resort, Fang Suo Commune has branches in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Qingdao and Xi'an, according to its website. The opening of the Macau branch was announced on December 21, 2025, as noted in a Facebook post by the integrated resort operator that day.

The name of the brand comes from the phrase "If one is settled, it becomes a place (Fang Suo)" by Xiao Tong of the Southern Dynasties, the information page on the GLP website noted. The Macau branch features a selection of books, with most in Chinese though there is also a selection of English books of various genres available.

Besides books, Fang Suo Commune also sells clothing, accessories and other fashion items, as well as lifestyle products and decorative items.

Exhibitions are also held at the venue, with its recently concluded exhibition "China Color" that featured works by three artists, namely Au Chon Hin from Macau, Mao Jun from the Chinese mainland, and Stanley Wong Ping Pui, aka "Another mountain man", from Hong Kong.

Fang Suo Commune is open from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. One can find more details by visiting <https://www.grandlisboapalace.com/en/shops/fangsuo> ■



10 women aim to redefine ‘The Golden Ratio’ at art exhibition

Rui Pastorin

Ten women are showcasing their art pieces at the Former Municipal Cattle Stable at the junction of Avenida do Coronel Mesquita (美副將大馬路) and Avenida do Almirante Lacerda (罽些喇提督大馬路) until April 19, challenging traditional gender roles and social expectations while aiming to redefine the “golden ratio” with a female perspective.

The exhibition titled “The Golden Ratio – Macau Exchange Exhibition”, which kicked off on Friday, features works created by artists from Macau, Beijing, Chengdu, and Shanghai.

From Macau are Bianca Lei Sio Chong, Hio Lam Lei and Zhang Ke. Chengdu artists Wang Lu, He Linlin, Xu Jing and Zhao Huan represent Sichuan’s capital city, while the artists from Beijing comprise Yue Mingyue and Zhou Wenjing, with the latter also representing Paris, and lastly, Shanghai’s Qian Lili. The exhibition’s curation was entrusted to Zhao and Macau’s Wendy Wong (黃詠思).

Throughout the gallery are a raft of works created using different mediums, all presented with a style or concept in accordance with their respective artist, giving visitors an atmospheric experience. Dissonant sounds from installations and videos play amidst the quiet background of the venue, which has warm and low lighting.

Videos are projected on the floor and on the walls, where paintings and photos are also among the works found, just to name some of the mediums employed by the artists.

Regarding its title, in art, the golden ratio is a compositional tool used to create balanced, harmonious proportions; it appears in backgrounds and layouts, and its applications extend to architecture and photography, according to AI chatbot Poe.

A statement from the exhibition organisers described the golden ratio as a gauge of beauty. According to the statement, standards like this were historically shaped mainly by men in different fields, not women. Focusing on appearance is often disconnected from women’s health, comfort, and lived reality. As tastes, traditions and values shift, women are subtly pressured to meet narrow ideals – affecting their sense of happiness, the statement points out. Over time, these expectations become difficult to break free from, limiting women’s freedom to define themselves. The works create a dialogue and redefine the idea.

In her statement displayed at the venue, Zhao pointed out: “The artworks presented in this exhibition do not comply with mainstream aesthetic expectations; rather, they constitute a feminist practice articulated through visual language. With the body as a medium, lived experience as foundation and choice as standpoint, the artists transform suppressed corporeal sensibilities, obscured personal narratives and appropriated claims to subjectivity into artistic texts of critique and reflection”.

One can view the works on display until April 19. The exhibition is open daily from 10 a.m. through 7 p.m.

Photos taken yesterday by Rui Pastorin

Tai urges local businesses to adapt to new market realities

Tony Wong

Secretary for Economy and Finance Anton Tai Kin Ip said yesterday that with visitors' consumption patterns shifting from shopping-orientated to experience-orientated, local businesses should adjust their business operations with the aim of better adapting to the new market realities and achieving sustainable development.

Tai made the remarks when addressing a conference with senior representatives from the city's various business sectors. The conference was hosted by the Macau Chamber of Commerce (ACM), colloquially known in Cantonese as Chung Chung, at its headquarters in Zape.

Tai underlined that under the Central People's Government's strong leadership and with the joint efforts of the MSAR government and various sectors of civil society, Macau's economic foundation was consolidated while the momentum of its economic development continued to strengthen last year. The policy secretary noted that Macau recorded 40.069 million visitor arrivals in 2025, the highest annual number on record, representing a year-on-year increase of 14.7 percent, while its gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 4.7 percent in real terms to 418.04 billion patacas. The local government earned 42.92 billion patacas in 2025 from investing its financial reserves, representing an annual return of 6.9 percent, the highest return rate on record, he said.

Local residents' unemployment rate stood at 2.5 percent in 2025, remaining at a relatively low level, Tai said, pointing out that Macau's inflation rate stood at 0.33 percent last year, indicating stability in the price levels.

Macau's general unemployment rate comprises local residents and non-resident workers (NRWs).

The Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC) is scheduled



Senior representatives from the city's various business sectors attend yesterday's conference at the Macau Chamber of Commerce (ACM) headquarters.



Secretary for Economy and Finance Anton Tai Kin Ip addresses yesterday's conference with senior business representatives at the Macau Chamber of Commerce (ACM) headquarters in Zape.

- Photo courtesy of TDM

to announce today the official data on Macau's average unemployment rate for the whole of 2025.

Tai also underlined that since the beginning of this year, Macau's economy has maintained its positive development trend. As of Saturday last week, Tai said, Macau recorded 10.117 million visitor arrivals so far this year, representing a year-on-year increase of 14.8 percent, while the number of foreign visitor arrivals rose by 11.3 percent year-on-year to 668,000 during the period.

However, Tai said, the world is undergoing profound changes unseen in a century at an accelerated pace, with frequent geopolitical conflicts adversely affecting the stability of the global supply chain and the global economic recovery lacking momentum. As a highly open and externally orientated micro-economy, he said, Macau cannot remain immune to these influences.

Tai acknowledged that over recent years, visitors' per-capita spending has been dropping, with their consumption patterns shifting from shopping-orientated to experience-orientated. The new phenomenon, he said, has placed greater requirements on local businesses, where only by identifying changes, adapting to the changes and seeking alternatives can they better align themselves with the new market realities and achieve sustainable development, he stressed.

Tai vows stronger support for local businesses' transformation & upgrading

Tai pledged that the local government will roll out various aspects of campaigns and measures to help local businesses engage in business transformation.

Tai said that with the aim of further boosting spending in the community, the government will continue to strengthen its cooperation with business associations in various neighbourhoods, with the objective of organising its respective annual festive events in stronger conjunction with activities and events held in various communities across the city.

Tai also underlined that the government is extensively gathering opinions from various segments of civil society concerning its ongoing study on the feasibility of rolling out fresh measures to stimulate consumption and support the community economy.

Moreover, Tai said, the government will continue with its various programmes supporting local businesses' digital transformation, as well as its various schemes supporting time-honoured local old shops in engaging in innovation in their business operations.

Tai underlined that the local government will continue to improve the city's business environment, adding that the government is studying the feasibility of launching measures aiming to encourage businesses in Zape and the Inner Harbour district to engage in business transformation and upgrading, as well as measures aiming to attract new businesses to the areas.

In addition, Tai pledged that the local government will fully leverage the role of its Employment Promotion Coordination Working Group to dynamically assess the supply and demand of human resources across various sectors in the city, so as to provide employment referral of local residents for companies currently hiring non-resident workers (NRWs).

The working group set up last year aims to promote local residents' employment. ■

Gongbei Customs seizes 75 terrapins hidden in socks



This pixelated photo provided by the Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs yesterday shows the smuggler pointing at the terrapins seized by Zhuhai customs officers on March 6.

Armindo Neves

Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers seized 75 terrapins at the Zhuhai checkpoint of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) on March 6.

According to the statement, on that day, customs officers at the delta bridge's Zhuhai Port (checkpoint) noticed an anomaly in the X-ray image during a routine inspection of a single-plate vehicle from Hong Kong and intercepted it for further inspection.

Customs officers then discovered 75 live terrapins weighing a total of 21 kilograms, each concealed in a sock, under the driver and passenger seats, the statement said, adding that the driver was unable to provide any legal documentation and admitted to receiving a delivery fee for transporting the terrapins.

On March 9, the Technical Centre of Gongbei Customs identified the live terrapins as Kinosternon herrerai (aka Herrera's mud turtle), which are listed under Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

The official conservation status of the species, which is endemic to Mexico, is "near-threatened" (NT).

Gongbei Customs reminded the public in the statement that, in accordance with relevant laws and regulations, it is prohibited to carry endangered species and their products into or out of the Chinese mainland without a valid wildlife import and export permit. Cases that are serious enough to constitute a crime will be subject to criminal liability in accordance with the law. ■

MIECF to feature free 'Green Public Day'

Khalel Vallo

The three-day 2026 Macao International Environmental Cooperation Forum and Exhibition (MIECF2026) is set to feature a free "Green Public Day" this Saturday, encouraging residents to adopt low-carbon and waste reduction practices, according to a statement by the fair yesterday.

Organised by the local government, the fair will take place from Thursday to Saturday at The Venetian Macao's Cotai Expo under the theme "Low-Carbon, Zero Waste Cities: Embarking on a Global Collaboration", the statement said.

According to the statement, the final day will be open to the public free of charge, offering access to a wide range of environmental information and green technologies from both local and visiting participants. The opening hours run from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Visitors will be able to explore exhibitions showcasing sustainable products and solutions, while participating in interactive activities such as stage games, workshops and educational booths, the statement noted, adding that the programme will also include performances and themed activities designed to promote environmental awareness and practical low-carbon lifestyle tips. Saturday's event also includes a lucky draw.

In order to encourage green mobility, MIECF will provide four free electric shuttle bus routes connecting the peninsula and Taipa with the venue, the statement said, highlighting that a technical visit programme will also be held on Saturday, allowing participants to visit the Cotai Ecological Reserve and the Macau Refuse Incineration Plant in Pac On, Taipa to deepen understanding of environmental technologies.

Through its public day activities, MIECF aims to integrate environmental awareness into daily life and strengthen public engagement in building a low-carbon, waste-free city, the statement noted. ■

This poster provided by the Macao International Environmental Cooperation Forum and Exhibition (MIECF) yesterday promotes its upcoming "Green Public Day" this Saturday on the last day of the three-day MIECF2026 event in Cotai Expo.

Man takes video of female colleague in toilet: police

Tony Wong

A local man stealthily took a video of his colleague in a women's toilet in an office building in Nam Van district last week, Public Security Police (PSP) spokeswoman Kong Chi Ian said during a regular press conference yesterday.

The suspect surnamed Ip, who is in his thirties, told the police that he works as an engineer.

The office building is located on Avenida Comercial de Macau.

The victim is a local woman in her thirties.

When the woman was using the toilet on the floor where her company is located after work on Thursday evening last week, Kong said, she found somebody peeping at her from the next cubicle.

The woman quickly came out of her cubicle in an attempt to stop the Peeping Tom but he ran away. She reported the case to the police.

When the woman was waiting in the building's lobby for police officers to arrive, Ip approached her and falsely told her that "he had tried to catch the man who had peeped at her, but in vain".

Ip had meanwhile deleted the stealthily taken video clip on his smartphone.



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Ho Wai Lok (left) and Public Security Police (PSP) spokeswoman Kong Chi Ian address yesterday's regular press conference. — Photo: Tony Wong

However, Kong said, after scrutinising the office building's CCTV footage, PSP officers identified Ip as the suspected Peeping Tom.

Under questioning, Kong said, Ip admitted to having peeped at his colleague "out of curiosity". He told the police that after running away from the toilet, he saw the victim in the building's lobby. With the aim of preventing the victim from discovering that he was the Peeping Tom, Ip decided to falsely tell her that "he had tried to catch the man who had peeped at her".

Ip has been transferred to the

Public Prosecutions Office (MP) for further questioning, facing an invasion of privacy charge.

Woman loses 100,900 patacas in 'fortune-telling' fraud

Meanwhile, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Ho Wai Lok said during yesterday's regular press conference that a young local woman lost 100,900 patacas in an online scam where the fraudster falsely told her that he could provide her with "fortune-telling" services.

According to Ho, the victim



This undated handout photo provided by the Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday shows two PSP officers escorting the suspected peeping Tom to the police station near the city centre, officially known as Praia Grande (Nam Van) Police Station.

reported the case to the police on Friday last week.

In late October last year, the victim saw an advertisement on a social media platform offering "fortune-telling" and "luck-enhancing" services. The victim contacted the "advertiser", and during their communication, the fraudster claimed that purchasing "ritual objects" and having "prayer ceremonies" performed could improve her fortune, asking the victim to transfer money to buy items such as necklaces, bracelets and a treasure bowl, promising that "prayer

ceremonies" would be conducted for her after her payments.

According to Ho, the victim believed the claims, after which she made multiple money transfers, between October 30 and December 10 last year, totalling 14,200 patacas to pay for the "ritual objects" and "prayer ceremonies".

After receiving the payments from the victim, Ho said, the fraudster falsely told the victim in December last year that during the fortune-enhancing process, he had purchased a Mark Six lottery ticket for her and won HK\$1.23 million. However, the fraudster told her that she needed to pay a "handling fee" and "taxes" of 38,000 patacas in order to obtain the winnings, after which the victim transferred the money.

Over recent weeks, Ho said, the fraudster again told the victim to transfer more money, citing requirements to pay "postage", "insurance fees" and "import and export taxes". The victim made multiple transfers totalling 48,700 patacas between March 6 and Thursday last week.

After being repeatedly asked to pay money, the victim eventually realised that she had been defrauded, and reported the case to the police on Friday last week. ■

Regulator completes patent screening at universities, research institutions to enhance commercialization

BEIJING — China's top intellectual property regulator said yesterday it had completed its first-ever screening of over 1.3 million patents held by universities and research institutions nationwide.

In this process, it identified 680,000 invention patents with strong commercialization potential and connected them with 460,000 companies in a push to move innovation from lab to market.

This patent stock review is part of a special action plan for patent transformation and utilization issued by the State Council in 2023. Sorting out and revitalizing existing patents at universities and research institutions is one of the major tasks. Over the past three years, about 80,000 invention patents from more than 2,700 universities and research institutions across the country have entered the market.

"By the end of 2025, the industrialization rates of these patents from universities and research institutes had reached 10.1 percent and 17.2 percent, respectively, showing greater improvement compared with the pre-action period," said Hu Wenhui, deputy commissioner of the China National Intellectual Property Administration, at a press conference.

Hu added that the action plan was forward-looking, with a group of key core technology patents deployed in future-oriented industries, such as quantum technology, bio-manufacturing, brain-computer interfaces and 6G communications, laying a solid

foundation for high-value patent commercialization.

Additionally, a number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that focus on hard tech and hold strong patents have benefited from this initiative and grown stronger. Hu noted that cutting-edge companies known as Hangzhou's "Six Little Dragons," including globally trending startup Unitree Robotics, have thrived under the SME patent industrialization program implemented in Zhejiang Province.

Large companies that have cultivated and developed patent-intensive products also generated high profits and achieved a significant increase in overseas sales, Hu said, highlighting that commercialized patents contribute to economic growth.

China has become the first country to amass over 5 million valid domestic invention patents, and its international patent applications have led globally for six consecutive years. However, its industrialization rate of invention patents remains low, especially in universities and research institutions. Prior to the special action, data from 2022 showed that the industrialization rate for China's university invention patents was only 3.9 percent, leaving many patented technologies unused.

According to Hu, there are several factors that have contributed to the low rate: a lack of commercial vision among lab researchers, long transfer cycles and high risks that weaken incentives, a shortage

of professionals skilled in patent transfers, and an inefficient patent transfer ecosystem.

The country has in recent years stepped up efforts aimed at enhancing patent transfers, seeking to turn scientific and technological research outcomes into tangible drivers of economic and social development.

Over the past three years, multiple measures have been introduced to address these problems, such as establishing a pre-application evaluation system for lab inventions, providing researchers with rewards for successful commercialization rather than for patent filing, setting up specialized platforms and cultivating talent in the field of technology transfers, and rolling out a series of new favorable policies like technology shares to remove barriers on the path from the lab to the market.

The Ministry of Education is also exploring the use of technologies including artificial intelligence and big data to create smart profiles of university patents, identifying their potential value and possible application scenarios, said Zhou Dawang, an official with the ministry.

"Inventions that simply sit in labs are like castles in the air," noted Wei Wei, an official at the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. "Technology must move out of the lab and onto the production line to become tangible products that people can see, touch and use in their daily lives." — Xinhua

China, UN urge stronger multilateralism, South-South cooperation

NAIROBI — Vice President Han Zheng yesterday met with heads of United Nations agencies in Kenya, with both sides calling for upholding multilateralism and advancing South-South cooperation.

Han held talks in Nairobi, the Kenyan capital, with UN officials including Zainab Hawa Bangura, director-general of the United Nations Office at Nairobi, Anaclaudia Rossbach, executive director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), and Xia Huang, the UN secretary-general's special envoy for the Great Lakes Region.

China attaches great importance to the role of the United Nations and has long maintained sound cooperation with UN agencies in Kenya, Han said.

Noting that last year marked the 80th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, he recalled that Chinese President Xi Jinping, during his meeting with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said that as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China always stands firmly on the right side of history and practices true multilateralism, and China will always be a trustworthy partner of the United Nations.

Han said that the United Nations plays an irreplaceable role in global governance, and China firmly supports safeguarding its authority and status.

China, he said, remains committed to being a builder of world peace, an advocate for global development and a guardian of the international order.

The Global Governance Initiative (GGI) proposed by President Xi last September has, through concrete actions, cast a "vote of confidence" for

the UN and multilateralism, he said, noting that the initiative aligns with the shared aspirations of the international community and has received support from more than 150 countries and international organizations.

China, leveraging the UN platform, has initiated the establishment of the Group of Friends of Global Governance, which has attracted active participation from countries of the Global South, injecting confidence and momentum into multilateralism, Han added.

Against the backdrop of deepening UN reforms and the collective rise of the Global South, China stands ready to strengthen cooperation with the UN to promote a more just and equitable global governance system, and to contribute more to global peace, stability and prosperity.

Bangura and other UN officials expressed appreciation for China's consistent support for the United Nations and its agencies in Kenya. They said that China is an important pillar of world peace and multilateralism, playing a vital role in promoting peace as well as economic and social development in Africa, and in advancing cooperation among Global South countries.

UN agencies in Kenya, they said, attach great importance to and look forward to further deepening cooperation with China to support sustainable development in Africa, advance South-South cooperation, promote global peace and security, and better uphold multilateralism amid profound changes in the international landscape.

Following the meeting, Han, accompanied by Bangura, visited the United Nations Office at Nairobi.

— Xinhua

Xi urges efforts to build Xiong'an New Area into innovation hub, model of high-quality development

XIONG'AN, Hebei Province – Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, yesterday called for efforts to build the Xiong'an New Area in Hebei Province into an innovation hub in the new era and a model of promoting high-quality development.

Xi, also Chinese president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, inspected the Xiong'an New Area yesterday, where he also chaired a symposium on further advancing the high-quality construction and development of the new area.

He emphasized the need to firmly uphold Xiong'an New Area's primary functional positioning as the major recipient of functions relieved from Beijing that are non-essential to its role as China's capital.

The new area should strengthen endogenous development momentum through reform and innovation, and unlock vitality via reasonable concentration of production factors and resources, Xi said.

Yesterday morning, Xi arrived in Xiong'an and traveled by vehicle to inspect construction progress in the start-up zone. He then visited

China Huaneng Group Co. Ltd., which moved over 1,000 employees to Xiong'an in October 2025, and heard briefings on the company's relocation, industrial layout and innovative development.

At the company, he had a cordial exchange with representatives of officials and staff from relocated organizations already operating in the new area and those currently under construction, to learn about their life and work.

Xi also visited the Xiong'an campus of Beijing No. 4 High School, where he conversed with teachers and students in the classroom to learn about the teaching situation there. In the school canteen, he examined the dining environment and the variety of dishes available.

Yesterday afternoon, Xi chaired the symposium and delivered an important speech. He acknowledged that important progress has been achieved in the construction and development of the Xiong'an New Area.

It has been fully proved that the CPC Central Committee's decision to develop the new area is entirely correct, and all related work has been solid and effective, he added.



President Xi Jinping (center), also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, visits the Xiong'an campus of Beijing No. 4 High School in the Xiong'an New Area, Hebei Province, yesterday. Xi inspected the Xiong'an New Area yesterday, when he also chaired a symposium on further advancing the high-quality construction and development of the area. – Xinhua

Xi stressed efforts to relieve Beijing of functions non-essential to its role as the national capital and integrate them into the new area in a more vigorous and orderly manner, and advance the construction of relocation projects for state-owned enterprises directly administered by the central government, universities

and hospitals in an active, steady and phased manner.

Xi stressed systematic planning and the integrated advancement of high-quality development and efficient governance, urging efforts to improve the public service system, safeguard and enhance people's well-being, and actively

explore future-oriented smart city management models.

Xiong'an must develop a modern industrial system suited to its realities, Xi said, noting that it should advance the high-standard development of a science park to accelerate the application of scientific and technological achievements.

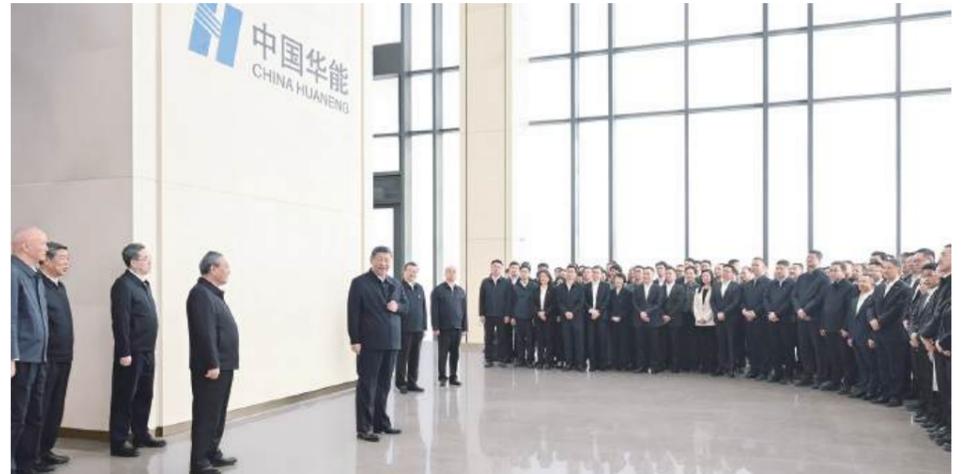
The new area should cultivate clusters of emerging industries and industries of the future, pioneer the implementation of innovative policies in science and technology, finance and other fields, and create a market-oriented and law-based business environment that is up to international standards, he added.

Xi further urged the new area to strengthen Party leadership and Party building while firmly establishing and practicing a correct understanding of governance performance.

Xi was accompanied by Premier Li Qiang, Cai Qi, director of the General Office of the CPC Central Committee, and Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang, who are all members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee. – Xinhua



President Xi Jinping addresses students and teachers during a visit to the Xiong'an campus of Beijing No. 4 High School in the Xiong'an New Area, Hebei Province, yesterday. – Xinhua



President Xi Jinping yesterday greets representatives of officials and staff from organizations relocated as part of the project to relieve Beijing of functions non-essential to its role as China's capital, which have moved in or are under construction, in the Xiong'an New Area. – Xinhua

Spanish PM Sánchez to visit China April 13-15

MADRID – Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez will travel to China from April 13 to 15 for an official visit, his office said yesterday, without giving further details of his schedule.

The visit, Sánchez's fourth trip to China in as many years, comes in the wake of the Spanish leader's fervent criticism of US President Donald Trump over the war against Iran, an economic partner of Beijing's.

The Socialist premier has doubled down on his refrain of "no to the war" and refused Washington's requests to use Madrid's military bases against Iran, despite Trump's threat to sever trade with Spain as a result.

On the foreign policy front, Sánchez has sought to help Spanish companies break into new markets and find new investors for the eurozone's fourth-largest economy.

The upcoming trip comes at a time when oil prices have soared due to Iran's de facto blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic choke point for global crude and natural gas supplies, in retaliation for the US-Israeli strikes.

China has been bracing for the economic fallout from the Middle East, as more than half of Beijing's seaborne crude imports come from the region, most of which pass through the strait, according to the Kpler analysis firm.

On his last visit to Beijing in April 2025, the Socialist leader told a press conference following his meeting with President Xi Jinping that tensions over trade should not impede cooperation between the European Union and China.

For his part, Xi urged Sánchez and the European Union to join hands to resist "unilateral bullying", referring to Trump's imposition of swingeing trade tariffs. – AFP

Wang Yi meets British PM's national security adviser

BEIJING – China's top diplomat Wang Yi met with Jonathan Powell, British prime minister's national security adviser, in Beijing yesterday, and the two sides exchanged views on the situation in Iran, the Ukraine crisis and other issues.

Wang, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs, introduced China's objective and impartial position, stating that the spillover effects of the situation in Iran have expanded and the prolonged war will only bring more damage and serious aftereffects.

What all parties should do now is not to add fuel to the fire but to address the root cause and jointly bring the issue back to the track of political settlement through dialogue and negotiation, Wang added.

Noting that British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's successful and historic visit to China in January was positively received in both countries and by international community, Wang said this fully demonstrates that

developing a long-term, stable comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Britain is an inevitable trend and aligns with the aspirations of the people.

It also shows that as long as both sides move toward each other and engage in constructive communication, they can properly address challenges and issues to achieve mutual benefit and win-win results, Wang added.

Both sides should implement the consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries, carry out exchanges at all levels, deepen cooperation in various fields, effectively manage differences, and promote the consistent and forward development of China-Britain relations, Wang said.

For his part, Powell said that the British side is willing to work with China to implement the outcomes of Prime Minister Starmer's visit to China, enhance communication and cooperation, and jointly develop a long-term and consistent comprehensive strategic partnership. – Xinhua

Kim reappointed as president of state affairs

Kang Jin-kyu

SEOUL – North Korea's rubber-stamp legislature has re-elected Kim Jong Un as president of state affairs, state media reported yesterday.

Kim's reappointment as head of the authoritarian nation's highest policymaking and governing body, the State Affairs Commission, was announced by the state news agency KCNA.

Critics argue that elections in North Korea are pre-determined and designed to give the country's leadership a veneer of democratic legitimacy.

"The Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK re-elected Comrade Kim Jong Un as President of the State Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at the First Session, the first state affairs activity of its 15th term, on March 22," KCNA reported.

The report said the decision to re-elect Kim to the "top post" reflected "the unanimous will and desire of all the Korean people".

Kim is the third-generation ruler of the nuclear-armed state founded by his grandfather Kim Il Sung in 1948. He has ruled the country since his father's death in 2011.

The election is a "highly choreographed event with a pre-determined outcome", said Lee Ho-ryung of the Korea Institute for Defence Analyses.

"Throughout the third-generation rule, the North has staged such events to showcase a procedure in an attempt to achieve political legitimacy," she said.

"But no one thinks any different outcome would emerge from it."



This picture taken on Sunday and released by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) yesterday shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (centre) attending the First Session of the 15th Supreme People's Assembly at Mansudae Assembly Hall in Pyongyang. – AFP

Photos released by KCNA show Kim dressed in a formal western suit and seated at the centre of a stage, flanked by top officials in front of two giant statues of his father Kim Jong Il and grandfather.

Barometer

Prior to the event, 687 deputies were elected to the SPA, with North Koreans over 17 given the choice of approving or rejecting the sole candidate put forward by the ruling party.

The new deputies were duly approved with 99.93 percent of votes in favour and 0.07 percent against, KCNA reported earlier, with turnout at 99.99 percent.

The Pyongyang assembly hall was "full of the extraordinary political awareness and revolutionary enthusiasm" by the newly elected members, it said.

Analysts say the current assembly session may also take up

possible constitutional amendments that could include formally codifying inter-Korean relations as those between "two hostile states".

The language Kim uses to describe his stance towards South Korea in his assembly speech will be a "barometer" of his inter-Korea plans, Hong Min, a senior analyst at the Korea Institute for National Unification, told AFP.

"The extent to which terms such as 'national unification' or 'Korean unity' are removed and replaced by aggressive expressions including 'territorial control' could serve as a barometer of his ideological framework," he said.

The key point lies in how far he will "flesh out issues of territory, territorial waters and airspace" in dealing with Seoul, he added.

The gathering follows a five-yearly meeting of the ruling party last month. – AFP

DPRK senior official says doesn't want to see Japanese PM in Pyongyang

PYONGYANG – A senior official of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) said she does not "want to see the prime minister of Japan coming to Pyongyang," the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported yesterday.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is the official name of North Korea.

"However, this is just my personal position," said Kim Yo Jong, department director of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea.

Kim's remarks came after Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi expressed during her recent visit to Washington her intent for a summit with the DPRK leader.

"This is not the one that comes true, as wanted or decided by Japan," Kim said.

"If the prime minister of Japan seeks to resolve its unilateral matter not recognized by us, our state leadership will have no intention to meet or sit face to face with her," she added. – Xinhua/MPD

Philippines pushes stronger ASEAN+3 cooperation to boost financial resilience

MANILA – The Philippines is pushing for concrete measures to strengthen financial resilience and deepen cooperation among ASEAN Plus Three countries, the Philippines' Department of Finance (DOF) said yesterday.

The DOF said that closer collaboration among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations countries, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea is increasingly critical amid global uncertainty.

The finance authorities said while each country faces its own domestic pressures, a coordinated

regional approach is essential to safeguarding stability and building resilience against external shocks.

As part of this effort, the Philippines is pushing for stronger regional disaster risk financing mechanisms to address climate-related threats, according to DOF.

The ASEAN Plus Three framework serves as a platform for dialogue on financial and macroeconomic developments and for addressing shared risks.

The Philippines is the chair of ASEAN for 2026. – Xinhua

New species, rare wildlife discovered in Cambodia's karst caves: conservationists

PHNOM PENH – A new biodiversity survey has revealed the vast array of species living within karst ecosystems in western Cambodia's Battambang province, the conservationists said a joint press release yesterday.

Exploring over 60 caves across ten hills in the province, the survey uncovered a treasure trove of extraordinary creatures, many found nowhere else on Earth, the press release said.

Led by Fauna & Flora-Cambodia Programme in collaboration with Cambodia's Ministry of Environment, some of the most significant findings of the survey included the discovery of many species that are new to science such as three new geckos, two micro-snails, and two millipedes, while another 3 new geckos and a new pit viper species are currently being described, it added.

The survey confirmed the presence of several global threatened species, including the Sunda pangolin, Indochinese silvered langur, long-tailed macaque and green peafowl, the press release said, adding that this finding highlights the urgent need to protect this habitat.

Karst landscapes are formed from limestone hills and caves, creating unique features such as sinkholes, springs and underground streams. Although still little explored, karst is one of the most biodiverse habitats on Earth, with high levels of endemism. These landscapes are also culturally and spiritually important to local communities and are increasingly valued for ecotourism.

Karst areas face growing threats

from quarrying, poorly managed tourism, wildfire, illegal logging and wildlife hunting, the press release said.

Khvay Atitya, an undersecretary of state and spokesperson for the Ministry of Environment, said the survey once again demonstrated that Cambodia is a country of outstanding natural richness and global biodiversity significance.

"Our karst ecosystems are not only home to rare and newly discovered species, but they also provide cultural, spiritual and economic value to local communities," he said.

Atitya said Cambodia is strongly committed to strengthening the protection and sustainable management of these unique landscapes.

"We will continue to work closely with our partners to ensure that development is balanced with conservation, so that our natural heritage is safeguarded for future generations," he said.

Sothearn Thi, Karst Biodiversity Coordinator for Fauna & Flora-Cambodia Programme, said Cambodia's karst areas are a treasure trove of scientific secrets waiting to be uncovered.

"From undiscovered reptiles and snails, to hidden caves – there is still so much we do not know about these unique ecosystems and the diversity of creatures living within them," she said.

"But, without sustainable management, we may never find out what these areas truly hold. Karst landscapes are facing many human-driven challenges, and biologically significant species could go extinct before they have even been discovered," she added. – Xinhua

Indonesia arrests Swiss man for allegedly insulting Hindu holiday

DENPASAR – Indonesia has arrested a Swiss man accused of using expletives to denigrate a Hindu religious holiday observed on the tourist island of Bali, a police official said.

Luzian Andrin Zraggen risks up to five years in prison on hate speech charges, Bali police spokesman Ariasandy said in a statement late Sunday that did not specify the suspect's age.

Bali's Day of Silence or "Nyepi," was celebrated on Thursday and requires locals and tourists on the Hindu-majority island to stay at

home for 24 hours for self-reflection.

No work, travel, entertainment and even electricity use is discouraged.

Zraggen was arrested on Saturday after he was reported to police over an Instagram post, said Ariasandy, who like many Indonesians uses only one name.

In the post, he repeatedly used the "f" word to refer to the holiday.

The tourist stands accused of spreading hate speech online, an offence which under Indonesia's new criminal code can land him as many as five years in prison.

Ariasandy said police would seize Zraggen's iPhone and question witnesses.

Bali attracts millions of foreign visitors each year but has seen recent high-profile cases of misbehaving tourists.

Last week, authorities on the island arrested two French nationals and an Italian on accusations of producing and distributing pornography, which is forbidden in the Muslim-majority country, which officially recognises six religions as well as indigenous beliefs. – AFP

Indonesia says no to US\$1 billion fee for Trump's 'Board of Peace' seat

JAKARTA – Indonesia's president, under fire at home for signing up to US counterpart Donald Trump's so-called "Board of Peace", has insisted his country would not pay the US\$1 billion joining fee for permanent membership.

Jakarta had only committed peacekeeping troops for the initiative, Prabowo Subianto said in a statement published on the presidential YouTube channel Sunday.

The "Board of Peace" came together after the Trump administration, teaming up with Qatar and Egypt, negotiated a ceasefire in October to halt two years of devastating war in Gaza.

Countries that want to be permanent members must pay US\$1 billion – sparking criticism the board could become a "pay-to-play" version of the UN Security Council.

Prabowo, a former general, has come under criticism from Indonesian Muslim groups for joining the board and pledging to send 8,000 peacekeeping troops to Gaza.

Prabowo attended the inaugural meeting of the "Board of Peace" in Washington last month.

But he later said he would withdraw from the board if it does not bring benefits to Palestinians or align with Indonesia's national interests.

"We never said that we wanted to contribute US\$1 billion," Prabowo said in statements broadcast on his YouTube channel Sunday.

He said he did not make any financial commitments "at all".

Prabowo signed a tariff deal with the US last month, but insisted Sunday that Indonesia could withdraw from any agreement if its conditions or execution threatens the national interest.

Talks with Washington about any peacekeeping mission to Gaza have been put "on hold", according to state news agency Antara, citing Foreign Ministry spokesman Vahd Nabyul Achmad Mulachela. – AFP

Nepal's anti-graft body charges 21 in airport corruption case

KATHMANDU – Nepal's anti-graft commission has filed charges against 21 people, including two Chinese citizens, in a case alleging multi-million-dollar corruption in a major airport construction project, officials said yesterday.

The charges are the latest against officials involved in the China-backed Pokhara airport project, after charges were filed against 55 people in December 2025, including five former ministers, taking the total number charged to at least 76.

The airport project in the major tourism hub of Pokhara, which opened in 2023, inflated cost estimates by around US\$75 million, according to the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA).

The charges, submitted on Sunday, come after the election this month of a new parliament, after youth-led anti-corruption protesters in September 2025 overthrew the government and set parliament on fire.

The CIAA released documents on Sunday that detailed how the procurement process for hiring a consultant was made with

“malicious intent”, and done without official approval.

“From our investigation, we have found that they embezzled around US\$3.08 million,” CIAA spokesperson Suresh Neupane told AFP.

Those named include a former tourism secretary, three former Director Generals of Civil Aviation Authority Nepal (CAAN), and two Chinese citizens.

Nepal on March 5 elected a new 275-seat lower house of parliament, with the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) winning a commanding mandate.

The RSP capitalised on mass support in the wake of September protests, sparked by a government ban on social media but later morphed into nationwide fury over economic hardship and growing anger over corruption.

The World Bank says a “staggering” 82 percent of Nepal's workforce is in informal employment, with GDP per capita at just US\$1,447 in 2024.

Before the uprising, Nepal was ranked 107 out of 180 on Transparency International's corruption perceptions index.

– AFP

Scientists develop hair-thin sensors to revolutionize cancer detection

CANBERRA – Scientists have developed hair-thin sensors that detect multiple cancer biomarkers simultaneously, potentially revolutionizing the diagnosis and monitoring of diseases like cancer.

Researchers from Australia and Germany worked together to develop the tiny sensors using ultrafast 3D micro-printing technology, said a statement from Australia's Adelaide University yesterday.

The sensors target biomarkers and are printed onto optical fiber tips to measure several biomarkers simultaneously, including temperature and chemical changes, according to the study published in the journal *Advanced Optical Materials*.

“This breakthrough could lead to next-generation medical tools that track disease, guide treatment and monitor the body

in real time,” said Associate Professor Shahaam Afshar, the project's lead researcher from Adelaide University's Institute for Photonics and Advanced Sensing.

The sensors work by detecting changes in the body brought on by cancer at a molecular level through light, delivering reliable disease detection in a minimally invasive way, enabling smarter healthcare, environmental monitoring and wearable tools, according to the study in collaboration with the University of Stuttgart in Germany.

“Molecules emit light when they come into contact with a by-product of cancer. The amount of light they emit depends on the concentration of the cancer cells. By inserting the sensors into tissue and measuring the amount of light emitted, we believe we can determine the presence of cancer,” Afshar said. – Xinhua

Nepal to allow solo trekkers to visit restricted mountain areas

KATHMANDU – Nepal will allow solo foreign trekkers to visit designated restricted areas by ending the group-only permit system, the Department of Immigration said yesterday.

The South Asian country has designated 15 areas across 13 mountain districts as restricted areas. In a notice published on its website, the department said the

decision was to address complaints from travel trade entrepreneurs.

However, solo travel to these areas will be subject to certain conditions, including submitting applications through a trekking agency, assigning a trekking guide, and requiring the concerned agency to take full responsibility for rescue operations in emergencies, among others. – Xinhua

Pakistan vows to 'eradicate terrorism' as Afghan truce nears end

ISLAMABAD – Pakistan's foreign minister said yesterday that the country remains committed to “eradicating the menace of terrorism”, as the clock ticked down to the end of a temporary ceasefire with Afghanistan.

Both countries last Wednesday announced a halt to weeks of hostilities for the Eid al-Fitr holiday marking the end of Ramadan, agreeing to a temporary ceasefire until midnight last night.

But in a message to mark Pakistan Day, a national holiday, Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar indicated that the country's approach to the conflict had not changed.

“Pakistan remains firmly committed to eradicate the menace of terrorism,” he said in a statement. “Pakistan's actions inside Afghanistan... are directed towards this goal.”

On Sunday, the Taliban government and a medical source said one person was killed by a mortar shell fired by Pakistan in the eastern border province of Kunar.

Afghanistan and Pakistan have been locked in conflict for months over claims from Islamabad that

Kabul is harbouring extremists behind cross-border attacks on its territory.

The Taliban authorities deny the claim.

In his own Pakistan Day message, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif yesterday said military action inside Afghanistan was “a symbol of our national resolve against terrorism”.

“We will not allow any harm to the peace and security of our country,” he added.

Identification

The Eid truce came after a Pakistani strike on a drug rehabilitation centre in Kabul last Monday, which Afghan authorities said killed more than 400.

The Norwegian Refugee Council, an international NGO, said the following day that “hundreds” were killed and injured.

Interior ministry spokesman Abdul Mateen Qani told AFP yesterday that identification of the bodies was still ongoing and new funerals were expected to take place in the coming days.

About 50 bodies were buried in a mass grave in Kabul last Wednesday.

On Saturday, the Afghan Health Ministry called on families to contact the forensic medicine department to help identify “dozens of bodies”.

The UN assistance mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) yesterday said preliminary figures from their investigation indicated that there were 143 killed and 119 wounded.

But a spokesperson told AFP the toll was likely to increase, with the process slowed by difficulties in identifying some bodies.

According to a UN toll last Tuesday, not taking into account the drug rehabilitation centre strike, at least 76 Afghan civilians have been killed in the fighting since it intensified on February 26.

More than 115,000 people have been displaced in Afghanistan, it added.

“The calls for a ceasefire continue... China has offered to mediate and the Secretary General has said that he would support such a mediation,” the UNAMA spokesperson said. – AFP



Kashmiri Muslims conduct a donation drive for war-stricken Iran, collecting cash, gold, and other contributions amid the Middle East conflict, on the outskirts of Srinagar, India yesterday. – AFP

Indian police seize 20,000 books in major blow to piracy ring

NEW DELHI – Indian police have seized more than 20,000 pirated books, including titles by novelists Arundhati Roy and Haruki Murakami, to dismantle a major piracy ring, publishers said yesterday.

The raids, which took place on March 15, highlight the scale of piracy in India's book market – and the country's enduring love of reading.

It exposed a “sophisticated and large-scale distribution operation”, Penguin Random House India said in a statement, who said it worked with police in collaboration with fellow publishers Hay House, and Simon & Schuster India.

“The nearly 24-hour operation targeted multiple warehouses as well as an illegal printing press,” Penguin Random House said.

It said it had dealt “a substantial blow to an entrenched piracy network”, and marked “one of the largest recent seizures of pirated books” in the capital.

Books seized included works by historian Yuval Noah Harari, Nobel-winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman, leadership expert Simon Sinek, and James Clear, who writes about personal improvement. – AFP

2 killed as water tanker hits motorcycle in Karachi

ISLAMABAD – Two motorcyclists, including a 12-year-old boy, were killed after a water tanker hit their motorcycle in Pakistan's southern port city of Karachi yesterday, rescue officials said.

The accident occurred in South District of Karachi near Defence Mor, where a speeding tanker lost control and rammed into a motorcycle, according to state-run Rescue 1122.

Both victims died on the spot,

and their bodies were taken to a nearby hospital for legal formalities.

Police said the tanker driver fled the scene after the accident, and efforts were underway to apprehend him.

– Xinhua

Trump sees 'regime change' in surprise Iran talks

Saul Loeb, Danny Kemp and Sebastian Smith

PALM BEACH – US President Donald Trump said yesterday that “regime change” was underway in Iran as the United States holds peace talks with an unidentified alternative leader.

Trump’s surprise announcement to reporters in Florida was short on detail about whom the US side had contacted, but he said it was “not the supreme leader,” Mojtaba Khamenei.

He described the unidentified negotiator as “a top person” and “the most respected and the leader.”

“We’re going to get together today, by probably phone, because it’s very hard to find a country – it’s very hard for them to get out, I guess,” Trump told reporters before boarding his plane yesterday.

Trump was speaking shortly after he backed down from a threat to bombard Iran’s power stations within the next day – an escalation Iran vowed would be met by reprisals at sensitive regional targets, further roiling the US and world economies.

Trump announced on his Truth Social site that he was allowing five days for talks.

But if talks don’t produce results, he told reporters later, “we’ll just keep bombing our little hearts out.”

Venezuela comparison

Trump said there were already “major points of agreement” with the Iranian negotiators.

US conditions, he said, include Iran abandoning any nuclear ambitions and giving up its enriched uranium stockpiles.

“We want no enrichment, but we also want the enriched uranium,” he said.

Trump said the unidentified Iranian officials reached out under pressure of his threat to attack power stations.

“They called, I didn’t call,” he said. “They want to make a deal, and we are very willing to make a deal.”

Iran has lost a swath of leadership to US and Israeli bombing.

Mojtaba Khamenei is the son of the previous supreme leader, but he has not been seen in public since the war began and US officials say he may be badly injured.

Trump suggested that he was looking for an arrangement similar to Venezuela, where US forces toppled long-time strongman Nicolás Maduro in January. The country is now run by a US-backed figure.

“Look at Venezuela, how well that’s working out,” Trump said. “Maybe we find somebody like that in Iran.”

‘Going very well’

Earlier, Trump told AFP in a brief phone interview that “things

are going very well.”

Trump has repeatedly said he does not know whom to negotiate with because so many leaders have been killed.

Yesterday he dismissed Khamenei, saying “I don’t consider him really the leader.”

“But we think we have people that are very representative of the country and will do a good job,” he said.

Asked why he wouldn’t identify the people talking to the United States, Trump said “because I don’t want them to be killed.”

However, Iranian media said yesterday that there were no negotiations underway towards ending the war.

“There are no talks between Tehran and Washington,” said Iran’s Mehr newswire citing the country’s foreign ministry, adding that Trump’s statements were part of a push “to reduce energy prices”.

Trump’s backtrack on attacking Iranian energy sites came just hours before Wall Street was set to open after brutal selloffs on European and Asian markets and a further climb in the price of oil.

The oil price has posed an increasing political headache for Trump as Americans complain of higher prices at the pump, ahead of crucial midterm elections in November that will determine the make-up of Congress. – AFP

Why Israel is targeting bridges over Litani



A fireball rises on Sunday from the site of an Israeli airstrike that targeted the Qasmiyeh bridge in Southern Lebanon on a main highway linking villages in the Tyre district with others further north, after Israel said the bridge was being used by Hezbollah. – AFP

Analysis by Richard Salame

BEIRUT – As it engages in heated battles with pro-Iran militant group Hezbollah in a number of Lebanese border villages, Israel has bombed at least five of the six principal bridges across a river dividing the country’s south.

Military experts agree the strikes are an attempt to cut off the region south of the Litani river from the rest of Lebanon, but are divided on whether the move will change the course of the fighting.

It is a familiar strategy: in an earlier 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel, Israel struck 97 bridges and overpasses across the country, according to government data, including in areas far removed from the battlefield.

Many of the bridges now being struck – among them one on Lebanon’s main highway linking major cities across the country – were rebuilt after that war using donor funds.

The bombing of the bridges, including another smaller one yesterday, adds to widespread fears in Lebanon that Israel intends to permanently depopulate the region south of the Litani.

Lebanon was drawn into the broader Middle East war on March 2 when Hezbollah launched rockets towards Israel in retaliation for the US-Israeli attacks that killed Iran’s supreme leader.

‘Significant impact’

The Lebanese government and military have taken pains to stay out of the war, but Israeli attacks on state infrastructure like bridges and an electrical plant, and the killing of army troops, is causing strain.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun called the bridge attacks a “flagrant violation of Lebanon’s sovereignty”, and “an attempt to sever the geographical link between the area south of the Litani and the rest of Lebanon’s territory”.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said the army was ordered “to immediately destroy all the bridges over the Litani River that are used for terrorist activity, in order to prevent Hezbollah terrorists and

weapons from moving south”.

The country’s military chief later announced the expansion of ground operations against Hezbollah in the south.

“In any military ground operation, first priority, or among the first priorities, is to disrupt your enemy’s transportation and ability to move freely, to get supplies,” military expert Riad Kahwaji told AFP.

The Litani divides “large chunks of south Lebanon” from the north, he added, “so it will have a significant impact”.

“All those who are south of the Litani river are now trapped unless they choose to take the longer routes, to go via Hasbaya” in the east, near the southern edge of the Bekaa valley.

‘Don’t need to cross back’

But retired Lebanese army general Hicham Jaber questioned the tactical usefulness of taking out the bridges.

Hezbollah’s frontline forces south of the river could keep fighting for months on their own, he said, and its missile and drone teams north of the river can also continue launching towards Israeli forces with no need to move closer.

“The fighters have all their equipment with them... They don’t need to cross back, except if they require specific logistical support.”

The Lebanese army announced in January it had dismantled Hezbollah’s military facilities south of the Litani, but in the current war Hezbollah’s fighters are again battling Israel in the border region.

“Hezbollah is not going to move south of the Litani in order to use rockets. Whatever can be moved without bridges will be moved, and whatever cannot be moved will be dispensed with,” Jaber said.

The relatively shallow depth of the Litani makes it feasible to cross on foot, Jaber said, further reducing the impact of the bridge attacks.

But Kahwaji said even shallow water is impassable for heavy weapons requiring transport by vehicle. – AFP

Trump’s ever-shifting positions on war on Iran

Analysis

WASHINGTON – How long will the Iran war last and what are the US goals? President Donald Trump has issued a dizzying number of conflicting answers to these questions since launching the conflict three weeks ago.

The stakes have risen as Iran has retaliated with drone and missile strikes across the Gulf after the United States and Israel started their attacks on February 28.

Here, in Trump’s own words, are his shifting positions:

Duration of the war

March 1: “Well, we intended four to five weeks.” (To *The New York Times*)

March 9: “I think the war is very complete, pretty much.” (To CBS)

March 20: “We are getting very close to meeting our objectives.” (Truth Social)

March 20: “I think we have won... I don’t want to do a ceasefire.” (To reporters at the White House)

March 23: “If talks fail..., we’ll just keep bombing our little hearts out.” (To reporters in Florida)

Negotiate or not?

March 1: “They want to talk, and I have agreed to talk, so I will be talking to them.” (To *The Atlantic*)

March 3: “They want to talk. I said ‘Too Late!’” (Truth Social)

March 21: “There’s nobody to talk to. We have nobody to talk to. And you know what – we like it that way.” (To reporters at the White House)

March 23: “I AM PLEASED TO REPORT THAT THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, AND THE COUNTRY OF IRAN, HAVE HAD, OVER THE

LAST TWO DAYS, VERY GOOD AND PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS.” (Truth Social)

Hormuz: need allies or not?

March 14: “Many countries...will be sending War Ships, in conjunction with the United States of America, to keep the Strait open and safe.” (Truth Social)

March 16: “We strongly encourage the other nations to get involved with us and get involved quickly and with great enthusiasm.” (To reporters at the White House)

March 17: “WE DO NOT NEED THE HELP OF ANYONE!” (Truth Social)

What does winning mean?

February 28: Trump announces war in a video message. Says goals are to eliminate Iran’s ballistic missile capability, destroy their navy, ensure it never gets a nuclear weapon, and ensure Iranian proxy groups can no longer carry out attacks.

He also encourages a popular uprising: “Take over your government.” (Video message, speaking to Iranians)

March 9: “We’ve already won in many ways.” (Speaking to Congressional Republicans)

March 13: “When I feel it in my bones.” (Response to Fox Radio on when the war will be over)

March 21: “If Iran doesn’t FULLY OPEN, WITHOUT THREAT, the Strait of Hormuz, within 48 HOURS from this exact point in time, the United States of America will hit and obliterate their various POWER PLANTS.” (Truth Social)

March 23: “I HAVE INSTRUCTED THE DEPARTMENT OF WAR TO POSTPONE ANY AND ALL MILITARY STRIKES AGAINST IRANIAN POWER PLANTS.” (Truth Social) – AFP

Colombia military says transport plane crashes on takeoff

Bogotá, Colombia

BOGOTÁ – Colombia's defence minister said a large transport plane crashed on takeoff yesterday, with many feared dead.

Minister Pedro Sánchez said with "deep sorrow" that an Air Force Hercules had crashed on takeoff from Puerto Leguizamo, near the southern border with Ecuador.

State broadcaster RCN broadcast images of a badly damaged fuselage

aflame in a forest clearing.

The aircraft can typically carry about 100 troops.

"Military units are already at the scene. However, the number of victims and the causes of the crash have not yet been confirmed," Sanchez posted on social media.

"It is a deeply painful event for the country. May our prayers bring some measure of comfort," said Sánchez. –AFP

Countries act to limit fuel price rise, cut consumption

Analysis

PARIS – The surge in fuel prices triggered by the war in the Middle East has prompted countries to take measures to limit the financial impact on consumers and businesses.

Countries have also moved to reduce consumption, especially when they have limited reserves.

Here are some of the measures that have been adopted:

Tax cuts and aid

Some countries are targeting the price of fuel in order to limit the impact of the rise of crude oil prices on consumers and businesses.

Spain has launched a five-billion-euro (US\$5.8-billion) plan that reduces the value added tax (VAT) on fuel which should result in a reduction of 30 euro cents per litre.

A similar measure is in place in Portugal and has been announced in Sweden.

Since US-Israeli attacks on Iran set off the war on February 28 a number of countries such as Croatia, Hungary, South Korea and Thailand have set price limits on fuel.

Vietnam has waived customs duties on fuel imports through the month of April.

Japan is using subsidies to refiners to ensure the pump price of petrol stays around 170 yen (US\$1.07) per litre, having hit a record 190.8 yen in the middle of the month.

China yesterday limited the amount that fuel prices may rise at the pump.

Greece has earmarked 300 million euros (US\$347 million) in relief for households and farmers in April and May to help them cope with rising fuel prices.

Morocco has put in place a special direct subsidy for road transport firms.

Brazil has announced temporary measures to limit fuel price increases, including suspending taxes on diesel fuel.

Germany has banned service stations from raising prices more than once per day.

Stocks, rationing, restrictions

The war is also forcing countries to dip into their strategic stocks and take other measures

to avoid shortages, including rationing and reducing travel.

The 32 member countries of the International Energy Agency (which includes the G7 nations) have released a record amount from their strategic reserves.

Bangladesh has imposed rationing.

Egypt has limited non-essential travel by government employees.

The Philippines has reduced ferry services and prices of local public transport have risen.

India, the world's number two importer of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) which is used to produce cooking gas, has prioritised supplies for households.

South Korea's ruling party said the country will lift a cap on coal-powered generation capacity set at 80 percent and boost the use of nuclear power to about the same level.

Reducing energy consumption

Other countries are introducing measures to reduce fuel consumption.

Thailand is encouraging government employees to work from home, while Vietnam is encouraging employers to do so.

Indonesia is looking at imposing one day of working from home for government employees, while the Philippines has gone further, introducing a four-day work week for government employees.

In Thailand, the temperature in public buildings has been raised to 26 degrees Celsius to reduce electricity consumption for air conditioning.

Vietnam is encouraging people to ride bicycles, share rides and use public transport.

Bangladesh shut universities and brought forward the Eid holidays, the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, to limit electricity consumption.

It also cancelled decorative light displays on government buildings on Eid and those scheduled for Independence Day celebrations on March 26 and asked shopping malls to do the same.

Countries are also looking at importing Russian crude after the United States temporarily suspended sanctions in mid-March. –AFP

Runway collision kills 2 pilots, shuts NY airport



An Air Canada Express CRJ-900 sits on the runway after colliding with a Port Authority fire truck at LaGuardia Airport in New York yesterday. –AFP

Angela Weiss

NEW YORK – A plane carrying dozens of people collided with a fire truck on a runway at New York's LaGuardia airport, killing the pilot and co-pilot and causing "serious injuries" to others, authorities said yesterday.

Due to the crash late Sunday (local time), US aviation authorities halted all flights at LaGuardia, and the port authority said the airport would stay shut until at least 2 p.m. (local time) "to allow for a thorough investigation."

The closure follows the dramatic collision that left the Air Canada Express plane tilted back on its tail on the tarmac with a smashed cockpit, and flanked by emergency vehicles with flashing lights.

The pilot and co-pilot were killed in the crash, Kathryn Garcia, the head of the city's port authority, said at a press conference.

Forty-one people were taken to the hospital, some with "serious injuries," though 32 have since been released, Garcia said.

Two aircraft rescue and firefighting officers remain in the hospital in "stable condition with no

life-threatening injury," she added. "They were able to speak and we're notifying their families."

The port authority said the aircraft operated by Jazz Aviation, a regional partner of Air Canada, struck one of its firefighting trucks on Runway 4 at around 11:40 p.m. on Sunday as the vehicle drove to a separate incident.

Emergency response protocols had been "immediately activated," it said.

A preliminary passenger list showed 76 people on board the flight, including four crew members, Jazz Aviation said in a statement.

The National Transportation Safety Board said it had sent a "go team" to the scene to investigate the collision.

Runway crash

Jazz Aviation said the crash involved a CRJ-900 aircraft that had flown into LaGuardia from Montreal as flight AC8646.

Flight tracking platform FlightRadar24 said the plane "was rolling down the runway when it struck" the rescue vehicle as it crossed its path.

New York's emergency management authority warned people to "expect cancellations, road closures, traffic delays & emergency personnel," and use alternate routes near the airport.

LaGuardia had already been suffering from flight disruptions due to poor weather, the airport said on Sunday on X.

Passengers were also waiting longer to pass security due to "staffing impacts" from a federal funding lapse, it said last week.

Located in the New York borough of Queens, LaGuardia is New York's third-busiest airport, serving 33.5 million passengers in 2024, according to port authority figures.

It completed a US\$8 billion redevelopment in 2024, upgrading its ageing infrastructure with new terminals and roadways.

Deadly air crashes in the United States in recent years include a collision between a passenger jet and an army helicopter near Washington in January 2025 that killed 67 people.

Other incidents and close calls have taken place while aircraft were on the ground. –AFP

US Supreme Court hears mail-in ballot case that could impact midterms

WASHINGTON – The US Supreme Court was weighing yesterday whether mail-in ballots received by electoral authorities after Election Day can be counted, in a case that could have repercussions for November's midterm elections.

The case involves a challenge by the Republican National Committee (RNC) to a law in the southern state of Mississippi that allows ballots to be counted if they arrive within five business days after Election Day.

The ballots must be postmarked by Election Day.

Fourteen US states allow mail-in ballots to be tallied after the date of the election if they bear a postmark by Election Day.

Republican President Donald Trump has been a vocal critic of

mail-in ballots and has claimed that they contributed to his 2020 election loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

A federal judge ruled in favour of Mississippi but was overturned by an appeals court panel which said ballots must arrive by Election Day to be counted.

Mississippi Solicitor General Scott Stewart, arguing before the top court yesterday, said "states have broad power over elections" and have been allowed to count ballots received after Election Day for "over a century."

"Congress has respected it and no one challenged it until now," Stewart said.

Democrats tend to use mail-in ballots more than Republicans and the practice became more widespread during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Trump administration has joined the opponents of the Mississippi law and a ruling by the conservative-dominated Supreme Court could affect the ballot-counting rules in other states.

The mail-in ballot counting case is one of a number of voting rights cases being heard by the Supreme Court this term.

The court, which includes three justices nominated by Trump, heard arguments last year over the use of race to draw congressional electoral districts.

The Supreme Court is likely to deliver its rulings in the cases by the end of June or early July, which would provide enough time for them to be applied to the November congressional elections. –AFP

Cuba restores power grid after latest blackout

Laurent Thomet and Lisandra Cots

HAVANA – Cuba’s power grid was restored on Sunday, officials said, a day after the second nationwide blackout in a week as the crisis-hit island struggles under a US oil blockade.

Two-thirds of Havana had power again in the afternoon, the capital’s electricity company said, a day after the energy ministry reported a “total disconnection” of the national electric system in the country of 9.6 million inhabitants.

“Thanks to the efforts of our electrical workers, the SEN [National Electric System] was restored,” Prime Minister Manuel Marrero Cruz said on X late Sunday.

Authorities cautioned, however, that demand would still exceed supply.

The outage comes as Cuba’s communist government has faced growing pressure from US President Donald Trump, who imposed the de facto oil blockade in January and mused recently about “taking” the Caribbean island.

A top Cuban diplomat said the country’s military was “preparing these days for the possibility of military aggression.”

“We truly hope that it doesn’t occur,” Deputy Foreign Minister Carlos Fernández de Cossio told NBC’s “Meet the Press” in an interview taped before the blackout.

He said Havana was willing to continue talking with Washington, but discussing changes to its political system was off the table.

“Cuba has no quarrel with the United States. We do have the need and the right to protect ourselves. But we are willing to sit down,” Fernández de Cossio said in the interview, which aired on Sunday.

Restless night

There have been seven nationwide blackouts since 2024, making life more difficult for Cubans who fear food will spoil in refrigerators, among other problems in a country in economic crisis.

“The truth is, it gets harder every day to live with this situation,”



A woman prepares her cart after filling her water containers in Havana during a nationwide blackout on Sunday. Cuban authorities managed on Sunday to restore power to the island after the second nationwide blackout in less than a week, as the grid struggles due to an aging infrastructure and a US oil blockade. – AFP

Alina Quinones, a 48-year-old nurse, told AFP as she headed to the Havana hospital where she works, after barely sleeping.

She had no power, internet or phone connection, making it impossible to reach relatives in Matanzas, a city east of the capital.

Francisco González, a 79-year-old retiree, also said he had a sleepless night in the dark, “sitting in an armchair at home, waiting for the power to come back on.”

Regular outages, as well as persistent shortages of food, medicine and other basics, are fuelling public frustration, with people banging pots at night as a form of protest.

In a rare moment of violence, demonstrators vandalised a provincial office of the Cuban Communist Party earlier this month.

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.

Trump subsequently threatened to impose tariffs on countries that sell oil to Cuba.

No oil has arrived since January 9, hitting the power sector, while public transport has dwindled and airlines have curtailed flights to the island, a blow to its all-important tourism business.

‘Very severe’

The latest grid failure was due to an outage in a generating unit at one of the country’s aging thermoelectric plants, triggering a domino effect in the system, according to authorities.

The blackout occurred as an international aid convoy began arriving in Cuba last week, bringing sorely-needed medical supplies, food, water and solar panels to the Caribbean island.

But getting oil to power its decades-old thermoelectric plants is becoming increasingly urgent.

“It is very severe. And we are acting as proactively as we can to cope with the situation,” Fernandez de Cossio told NBC.

“We do hope that fuel will reach Cuba one way or the other and that this boycott that the United States has been imposing does not last and cannot be sustained forever,” he said. – AFP

New Trump envoy visits Honduras for organised crime-fighting partnership

TEGUCIGALPA – Kristi Noem visited Honduras in her new role as US President Donald Trump’s special envoy for his “Shield of the Americas” regional crime-fighting initiative, after being fired from her position as homeland security chief.

The 54-year-old made the trip on Sunday and met with Honduras’s new right-wing president, Nasry Asfura, he told the press afterward.

A former congresswoman and governor of South Dakota, Noem was one of the leading faces of Trump’s controversial immigration crackdown since his return to power in January 2025.

Trump announced earlier this month that she would be removed and take up the role of special envoy to the “Shield of the Americas,” a coalition with 17 Latin American nations – so far – aimed at countering cartels.

According to multiple media reports, Trump was upset with Noem’s handling of the mass immigration crackdown in Minnesota, during which federal immigration agents shot dead two Americans. – AFP

“It was a meeting...with a very positive reception,” Asfura said after the talks at the presidential palace in Tegucigalpa.

Honduras is one of the most violent countries in Central America, with gangs including Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18 – designated as terrorist organizations by Washington – in operation.

Issues including security and migration were discussed to “work together and build a more prosperous America,” Asfura said.

Both parties agreed on “strengthening cybersecurity and waging a full-scale fight against drug trafficking and organized crime,” as well as bolstering the Honduran police and military “through specialised technical assistance,” a Honduran government statement said.

Trump backed Nasfura in his election late last year and threatened US funding if he did not win, raising accusations of foreign meddling.

Nasfura’s rise to power comes amid a series of right-wing wins in Latin America on promises of taking a firm approach to crime. – AFP

EU-Mercosur trade deal to apply provisionally from May 1

BRUSSELS – The EU said yesterday a free trade agreement with South American bloc Mercosur/Mercosul will provisionally enter into force on May 1 – despite a pending court ruling on its legality.

The mammoth deal to eliminate tariffs on more than 90 percent of trade between the two blocs has proven divisive in Europe, with France leading opposition over concerns some of its farmers will be worse off because of it.

But – backed by a majority of EU countries – Brussels has ploughed ahead as it pushes to diversify trade in the face of perceived challenges from the United States and China.

“Today is an important step in demonstrating our credibility as a major trading partner,” EU trade chief Maros Sefcovic said yesterday.

“The priority now is turning this EU-Mercosur agreement into concrete outcomes, giving EU exporters the platform they need to seize new opportunities for trade, growth and jobs.”

The move comes as Paraguay ratified the deal last week, becoming the last Mercosur/Mercosul member to do so after Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay.

“Provisional application ensures the removal of tariffs on certain products as of day one, creating predictable rules for trade

and investment,” the European Commission, in charge of EU trade policy, said yesterday.

It added it had notified Mercosur/Mercosul partners.

“EU businesses, consumers and farmers can thus start reaping the benefits of the deal immediately.”

The EU had already signalled in February it would provisionally implement the deal, prompting a public split between its two largest member states France and Germany.

The pact still needs a green light from lawmakers in the European Parliament, which referred it to the EU’s top court within days of being inked in January.

France unsuccessfully attempted to block the deal over worries for its farmers, who fear being undercut by cheaper goods from Brazil and its neighbours.

The accord creates one of the world’s biggest free trade zones. Together, the EU and Mercosur/Mercosul account for 30 percent of global GDP and more than 700 million consumers.

It favours European exports of cars, wine and cheese, while making it easier for South American beef, poultry, sugar, rice, honey and soybeans to enter Europe.

The acronym of the five-nation Southern Common Market is Mercosur in Spanish and Mercosul in Portuguese. – AFP, MPD

Mexican president condemns deaths of migrants in US custody

MEXICO CITY – Mexico’s President Claudia Sheinbaum has condemned the deaths of three Mexican nationals after they were taken into custody by US immigration authorities this year.

“This can’t be happening,” Sheinbaum told reporters on Friday, referring to the death of a 19-year-old at a detention centre in Florida last Monday and two others who died earlier this year.

“The report says the young man killed himself,” Sheinbaum said. “Nonetheless, we want a full investigation.”

Royer Pérez Jiménez was

reported dead by US Immigration and Customs (ICE) at Glades County Detention Center in Florida. The cause of death was “presumed suicide” but remained under investigation, ICE said.

Other Mexicans reported dying while caught in President Donald Trump’s crackdown on illegal immigration included a 48-year-old man in California in March and a 34-year-old in Georgia in January.

The Mexican government said on Thursday that “these deaths are becoming unacceptable” and that officials “won’t hold back in using available legal and diplomatic tools

to defend the rights” of Mexicans abroad.

“We’re going to use all measures to make our protests and support the family in everything they need,” Sheinbaum said.

At least 30 migrants died in US detention centres last year, the highest number since 2004, a year after the creation of ICE.

Trump has promised the most extensive deportation programme for undocumented migrants in US history and ICE has been at the forefront of often violent raids across US cities. – AFP

Football shorts ■■■■■■■■■■

Struggling Sevilla part ways with coach Almeyda



MADRID – Sevilla announced yesterday the sacking of their coach Matias Almeyda as the seven-time Europa League champions find themselves floundering in 15th place in La Liga.

The Andalusian club, who are three points above the relegation zone, issued a brief statement thanking the 52-year-old former Argentina international, who had only arrived in Seville last July.

“Matias Almeyda has been relieved of his duties as Sevilla FC first team head coach,” the statement read.

“Sevilla FC want to thank Matias Almeyda and his team for his efforts and professionalism and wish him the best for the future.”

The statement made no mention of a replacement or a potential interim coach, ahead of the upcoming two-week international break.

Almeyda, who began his coaching career at River Plate in 2011, managed AEK Athens from 2022 to 2025 before being appointed by Sevilla on a three-year contract. – AFP

Arsenal's White gets first England call-up since 2022



LONDON – Arsenal defender Ben White has been called up to the England squad for the first time since the 2022 World Cup.

The 28-year-old right-back has not featured for the national team since leaving the camp in Qatar for personal reasons.

He subsequently made himself unavailable for selection for the remainder of Gareth Southgate's spell in charge.

But he is back in the fold for friendlies against Uruguay and Japan, after Bayer Leverkusen's Jarell Quansah withdrew from Thomas Tuchel's 35-man squad with an injury.

White has won four England caps, last featuring in a 3-0 win against Ivory Coast in March 2022.

There is still no place in the squad for Real Madrid defender Trent Alexander-Arnold, who is also a right-back.

White's Gunners teammate Eberechi Eze is also out of the camp and has been replaced by Newcastle winger Harvey Barnes, 28, who won his only previous cap six years ago.

England host Uruguay at Wembley on Friday, with a match to follow against Japan on March 31. – AFP

Injured Chiesa dropped by Italy before World Cup qualifying play-offs



MILAN – Federico Chiesa has been dropped by Italy after being found not fit to play in the Azzurri's 2026 World Cup qualifying play-off with Northern Ireland, the country's football federation (FIGC) said yesterday.

Liverpool forward Chiesa “was not considered available for the coming two matches”, said the FIGC, referring to Thursday's semi-final with Northern Ireland and a potential final against Wales or Bosnia-Herzegovina next week.

Italy face Northern Ireland in Bergamo desperately trying to get through the play-offs and not miss out on a third consecutive World Cup finals.

The FIGC did not specify the 28-year-old's injury, the latest in a long list which has hampered the career of one of Italy's brightest talents.

Chiesa, a back-up player at Liverpool, was a star of Italy's Euro 2020 triumph but he has not played for his country since the dismal defence of their European title in 2024.

Bologna's Nicolo Cambiaghi has been called up to replace Chiesa, while Inter Milan defender Alessandro Bastoni and Atalanta striker Gianluca Scamacca are both trying to shake off knocks ahead of Thursday's match. – AFP

Asia champions Japan need 'different tools' to win World Cup - coach



TOKYO – Coach Nils Nielsen warned yesterday that Japan need “different tools” to win next year's Women's World Cup after sweeping to the Asian title with a series of barnstorming performances.

Japan beat Women's Asian Cup hosts Australia 1-0 in Saturday's final in Sydney to lift the trophy for the third time in four tournaments.

Nielsen's side dazzled along the way, scoring 29 goals and conceding just one to lay down a marker ahead of next year's World Cup in Brazil.

Japan are the only Asian team to have won the world title and Nielsen said they would need to keep improving if they want to do it again.

“We found some parts of ourselves that are really strong,” the Greenland-born coach said after returning to Tokyo.

“There are also elements that we saw, we had some difficulty getting the final to be on our terms because of the opponent's strength.

“We will see that again at the World Cup, that means we need to find some different tools how to get the game to be the way we want it.”

Japan won the World Cup in 2011 and reached the final again four years later, losing to the United States.

They have not gone past the quarter-finals at either a World Cup or Olympics since.

Nielsen's squad in Australia featured 16 England-based players



Japan's team celebrate with the trophy after winning the final of the AFC Women's Asian Cup Australia 2026 football tournament against Australia at Stadium Australia in Sydney on Saturday. – AFP

including captain Yui Hasegawa and forward Maika Hamano, who scored a spectacular winner in the final.

The coach said his team had “grown a lot together already and that's not going to stop”.

“You need to grow more, you need to constantly be moving,” said Nielsen.

“If you are satisfied and accept status quo, you're not going to be good enough in the end.”

Japan's win capped off a landmark tournament with more than 350,000 fans through the turnstiles, reinforcing the growth in popularity of women's football.

This was around six times as many as the previous record set in 2010 in China,

with the 74,397 fans at the Sydney final setting a new attendance mark for a single game in tournament history.

There was palpably less excitement in Japan, with the final not being shown on terrestrial TV and a muted media reaction to the team's win.

Nielsen urged Japanese media companies to provide more coverage, saying “you will get your value back if you do because they are worth following”.

“We are not at the same place as they are in Europe and around the world,” he said.

“We are competing with other sports that are very popular.” – AFP

Arteta defends Kepa selection after blunder sinks Arsenal in League Cup final

Steven Griffiths



LONDON – Mikel Arteta defended his decision to select Kepa Arrizabalaga in the League Cup final after the Arsenal goalkeeper's costly mistake sparked a 2-0 defeat against Manchester City on Sunday.

Kepa was guilty of a horrendous blunder in the second half at Wembley when he let Rayan Cherki's cross slip through his fingers, gifting Nico O'Reilly the chance to head in City's opener.

Arsenal never recovered and O'Reilly struck again four minutes later to leave the Gunners still waiting for their first major trophy since 2020.

Arteta had opted to keep faith with Kepa instead of picking first-choice stopper David Raya because the former Chelsea star has been a regular in the League Cup this season.

The gamble backfired as Kepa

endured another League Cup final moment to forget after his 2019 refusal to be substituted by Chelsea boss Maurizio Sarri prior to a penalty shoot-out defeat against Manchester City in which he failed to save a kick.

Kepa also missed a penalty in a shoot-out loss to Liverpool three years later.

Asked about the criticism of his decision, Arteta said: “I understand but I have to do what is right and fair.”

“Kepa had played all the competition, I think it would have been unfair to him and the team to do something different.

“He had gone all the way through this competition. Errors are part of football and unfortunately it happened today at a crucial moment.”

Sitting nine points clear at the top of the Premier League, Arsenal were favoured to beat City but they failed to rise to the occasion.

Far too conservative for long periods at Wembley, Arsenal remain without a trophy since the 2020 FA Cup after their quadruple bid came to a painful end.

“Very sad, very hard one to take. We know how much it means and how much we wanted it. The fact we haven't delivered that is disappointing and leaves a bad taste,” Arteta said.

“First half we were the better team and had the biggest chance of the game, if we scored that it would have changed the game.

“In the first 20 minutes of the second half we weren't at our best. We struggled to get out of our blocks and conceded the goal in an unexpected manner obviously.

“You have to give credit to the opposition. They raised their level and capitalised on their moments. We didn't.”

– AFP



Griezmann given go-ahead to talk with Orlando City

MIAMI – France's World Cup-winning striker Antoine Griezmann is to hold talks with Major League Soccer's Orlando City, having been permitted by his present side Atletico Madrid to go to the US during the international break, a source close to the player told AFP.

Should both parties agree a deal, the 35-year-old would move to Orlando this summer after seeing out the present campaign with the La Liga outfit.

Griezmann “has been authorised by his club to travel to Orlando during his days off in order to make progress in the discussions linked to his future,” said the source yesterday.

A move to the MLS has been rumoured for years, with

the 2018 World Cup winner known to be an admirer of other American sports leagues such as the NBA and NFL.

Atletico had shut the door on their all-time record goalscorer - he has scored 211 goals over two spells - moving this season with the MLS transfer window opening on March 26.

Griezmann, who also played in the 2022 World Cup final defeat by Argentina, retired from the French national side in 2024 having made 137 appearances, scoring 44 goals.

Griezmann signed an extension last year to his present contract, taking him up to June 2027, but is no longer an automatic first choice for Atletico.

Despite falling down the pecking order he has scored 13

times this season and can entertain hopes of ending his time with Atletico with one last hurrah.

They play Real Sociedad, the club he began his professional career with, in the final of the Copa del Rey on April 18, just after facing Barcelona in their two-legged Champions League quarter-final.

Griezmann inspired Atletico in his first spell to 2018 Europa League glory, but missed out on the biggest prizes, losing in the 2016 Champions League final and finishing runners-up in the title race in 2018 and 2019.

Orlando are badly in need of a cutting edge up front as in the present MLS campaign they have won just one of their five matches, losing the other four. – AFP

Hodgkinson in 'shape of her life' with eye on Kratochvilova's record

Athletics

Luke Phillips

TORUN, POLAND – Keely Hodgkinson's rivals will be grateful there is not a world outdoor champs or an Olympic Games this season as the Briton boasted of being in "the shape of her life" after wrapping up world indoor 800m gold.

The 24-year-old left the competition for dead in an impressive gun-to-tape performance in Torun, Poland, on Sunday that saw her win in a blistering 1min 55.30sec.

Her time was not only a championship record but also the second fastest time run over the distance indoors, Hodgkinson herself having set a new world indoor 800m record last month.

All eyes will now turn on Hodgkinson's plans for the outdoor season which offers up European and Commonwealth titles on home soil and ends with World Athletics' Ultimate Championships in Budapest in September.

Given her new world indoor record, there is the mouth-watering possibility of a potential tilt at the oldest world record in athletics - the 1min 53.28sec for the outdoor 800m set by Jarmila Kratochvilova of the then-Czechoslovakia in 1983.

Golden training partner

"It feels so, so nice being able to run and win. This is my first world title," said Hodgkinson, whose victory came fast on the heels of that of training partner Georgia Hunter Bell in the women's 1,500m.

"I have been in so many finals, I have been a favourite so many times and I had not won so to do that and prove to myself that I can do it, remove the pressure and win the gold, it's nice," she said, having accrued 11 international medals but also been denied three times at the world outdoors, winning two silvers and a bronze.



British gold medal winners, women's 1500m winner Britain's Georgia Hunter Bell (left) and women's 800m winner Britain's Keely Hodgkinson celebrate during the World Athletics Indoor Championships Kujawy Pomorze 2026 in Torun, Poland on Sunday. – AFP

"My word this year has been 'domination' - so when I'm in the shape of my life, why leave it to chance? If you want to beat me, you're going to have to work hard. I never, ever go down without a fight."

Hodgkinson and Hunter Bell are coached by the husband and wife team of Trevor Painter and Jenny Meadows, the latter having won world outdoor bronze (2009) and indoor silver (2010) over 800m.

"Me and Georgia, we work hard and we push each other at every practice - we are both in the shape of our lives," Hodgkinson said.

"It's great to have someone who can challenge me in training. I am really grateful for our friendship, our rivalry and our training."

"I had no doubts about Georgia. She's an incredible athlete. We've both been training so well, and we've just enjoyed everything. We can work so well together, and we have an amazing friendship."

Leading relay split

After her dominant 800m victory, Hodgkinson was soon back on the track

as part of Britain's 4x400m relay team in the championship-ending event.

Running the anchor leg, she had been left too much to do to push for the podium and the team eventually finished fifth.

But tellingly, Hodgkinson produced the quickest leg of any athlete in the event with a 50.10sec split.

"I am actually so impressed with myself about that. I really wanted to do it!" said Hodgkinson, who announced herself on the international stage by winning a first major title at the European indoors in Torun in 2021 before going on to claim silver on her Olympic debut in Tokyo later that summer.

"I wouldn't have gone for the 4x400 if I didn't think I had it in my legs... I wouldn't do something if I didn't think I was capable."

Hodgkinson added: "I managed to have such a clean winter with no interruption."

"It has been such a fun few days. I'm really grateful to be here and to be healthy. I'm glad I could show what I know I can do." – AFP

Un-Nooh stuns O'Sullivan to win snooker's 2026 Yushan World Open title

Snooker

NANCHANG – Thailand's Thepchaiya Un-Nooh produced a historic comeback to claim the biggest title of his career, beating Ronnie O'Sullivan 10-7 in the final of snooker's 2026 Yushan World Open on Sunday, headlined by a 147 maximum break in the penultimate frame of the best-of-19 showdown.

The 41-year-old Thai, famed for his fearless attacking style and rapid break-building, pulled off a remarkable turnaround, reeling off four consecutive frames to seal the title, having already stunned the sport by eliminating world number one Judd Trump in the semifinals 24 hours earlier.

O'Sullivan made a blistering start in Sunday's final, racing to a 4-0 lead in the afternoon session with a top break of 124 in the third frame. Un-Nooh refused to fold, turning the contest around to lead 6-4.

The seven-time world champion regained control in the second session, firing three consecutive century breaks - 114, 102 and a clinical 136 total clearance - to move 7-4 ahead and within touching distance of the trophy. Un-Nooh then unleashed an unstoppable run of scoring to turn the match on its head.

The Thai then wrote himself into the tournament's history books with the seventh official 147 maximum break of his career in frame 16, before closing out the match with a 131 total clearance in the 17th frame, leaving O'Sullivan without a chance to respond in the closing stages.

Speaking after the defeat, O'Sullivan admitted his technical limitations left him unable to match Un-Nooh's level, despite his improved form over the past two weeks.

"I knew there's only so many shots that I'm able to play at the moment. I'm playing better than I was for the last three years, but it's still not good enough to play against someone who plays like that," the 50-year-old said.

For Un-Nooh, the title marks a career-defining triumph, especially coming against his childhood hero O'Sullivan.

"Everyone knows Ronnie is the greatest of all time, not just in this world, in this galaxy. He was my snooker idol when I was young - I learnt his game, his style," he said in his post-match press conference.

The Thai star joked he was "so sad" there was no bonus prize for his 147 maximum, but added that making the perfect break against O'Sullivan in a ranking final was "a dream come true and a fantastic night". He also expressed hope that his title win would help revitalize snooker in Thailand, calling for more support to inspire a new generation of young players in his home country.

– Xinhua

Sport in brief

Swiatek splits with coach Fissette after early Miami exit

Tennis

WARSAW – Iga Swiatek announced yesterday that she had parted ways with her coach Wim Fissette following her second-round exit at the Miami Open.

Following quarter-final defeats at the Australian Open, the Doha Open and Indian Wells, six-time Grand Slam champion Swiatek continued her uncertain start to the 2026 season with a three-set loss to Magda Linette in her opening match in Miami.

"Sometimes life and sport bring moments like this... Miami was challenging for me. I feel disappointment, bitterness and responsibility for my performance on the court," the Pole said on Instagram.

"I've also learned a lot of important lessons and I think that's very human."

"That being said, after many months of working together with my coach Wim Fissette I've decided to take a different path."

The 24-year-old thanked the Belgian for "his support, experience, and everything we achieved together - including one of my biggest dreams in sport".

Swiatek and Fissette joined forces in October 2024 and, working alongside the 46-year-old, Swiatek claimed the title at

Wimbledon for the first time in her career, despite having mixed fortunes earlier in 2025 on her surface of choice, clay.

"Wim, thank you for this time and for the lessons I've learned thanks to you. I wish you all the best - both professionally and personally," Swiatek added.

"The rest of my team remains unchanged. I know there are many questions, but I'll let you know what's next at the right time. I'm taking a moment to take care of myself, process this experience, and prepare for a new chapter."

She will start that chapter one place further down the rankings after being leapfrogged by Australian Open champion Elena Rybakina in the world number two spot. – AFP

Olympic champion Hassan pulls out of London Marathon

Athletics

LONDON - Olympic champion Sifan Hassan has withdrawn from next month's London Marathon with an Achilles injury, organisers announced yesterday.

The Dutch runner, who took gold over the distance at the 2024 Paris Games, picked up the injury while training on a treadmill.

Ethiopia-born Hassan, who won the 5000m and 10000m at the Tokyo Olympics,

said pulling out of London had been a tough decision to make.

"To compete at that level, you need to be in perfect condition," said the 33-year-old, who won the London Marathon in 2023.

"After the incident, I hoped the injury would settle but as training progressed it became clear that I wasn't able to prepare at the level I expect from myself."

The 2026 race on the streets of the British capital takes place on April 26. – AFP

Bezzecchi wins second race of the season at Brazil MotoGP

MotoGP

GOIANIA, BRAZIL – Italy's Marco Bezzecchi of Aprilia won the Brazil MotoGP Grand Prix on Sunday at the Autodromo Ayrton Senna in Goiania.

Bezzecchi also won the season's opening GP in Thailand three weeks ago and repeated the feat here by finishing ahead of his Spanish team-mate Jorge Martin and Italian pole-sitter Fabio Di Giannantonio of Ducati.

"Honestly, I didn't expect to leave Brazil with a win," Bezzecchi said, adding he was "super happy" with his performance, especially following Friday's poor practice showing in which he was 20th fastest on the grid.

"We worked super hard in the box with my guys to try to adjust everything, including my riding the bike - we tried to make the perfect combination," he added.

It was a milestone moment for the 27-year-old as it marked the first time in his career he had won four Grands Prix in a row, and was also the first time an Aprilia rider had done so.

Aprilia's one-two in Brazil also means they lead the constructors championship with 64 points.

Spanish reigning world champion Marc Marquez of Ducati, who had won Saturday's sprint race on the Brazilian circuit, had to settle for fourth place.

His compatriot Pedro Acosta (KTM), who had arrived in Brazil at the top of the championship standings, lost his lead to Bezzecchi after finishing seventh on Sunday.

Bezzecchi now boasts 56 points, 11 more than Martin in second, with Acosta a further three points adrift.

"Every day I'm closer to the top guys," Martin said, but he nonetheless insisted his chances for a title run over the 22-race season were very slim "at the moment".

The race was shortened from 31 to 23 laps due to the extreme heat, which was causing severe tyre degradation and raising safety concerns for the riders. – AFP

Tickets to toothbrushes: BTS's money-making machine

Claire Lee

SEOUL – The return of the world's biggest boy band BTS after their almost four-year hiatus looks set to be a major money-spinner – potentially beating Taylor Swift.

Ahead of the K-pop giants' massive comeback concert in Seoul on Saturday and the start of a world tour, AFP looked at how the mega-group earns money for itself – and others.

'BTSnomics'

Some projections suggest that the 82-date, 23-country tour could even surpass US megastar Swift, whose 21-month Eras Tour reportedly generated around US\$2 billion in ticket sales alone.

Even more than Swift, money comes not just from ticket sales but fans travelling from abroad and spending several days in the cities where BTS play – a phenomenon dubbed "BTSnomics".

Starting in Goyang, South Korea on April 9 and ending in the Philippines 11 months later, BTS's tour encompasses 82 shows in 34 cities in 23 countries, including around 30 shows in North America.

"I expect these economic ripple effects to be distributed across all the countries and cities where the performances take place," said Jang SooCheong, a tourism professor at Purdue University.

"Given the number of scheduled performances, the massive global fandom including ARMY, and the explosive release of pent-up longing for the group, I judge that

this impact will indeed surpass that of 'Taylornomics'," he told AFP.

Netflix and tourism

Analyst Kim Yu-hyuk of IBK Investment & Securities in Seoul said a "highly conservative" estimate for ticket sales and merchandise from BTS's 82-date tour is at least 2.9 trillion won (US\$2 billion).

Six million people could go the shows, Kim estimates.

And BTS may announce more dates next year.

On top of the estimated 100,000 spectators who filled central Seoul on Saturday, Netflix livestreamed the concert around the world.

"This is the biggest live musical performance Netflix has ever staged globally," Netflix executive Brandon Riegg said in Seoul on Friday.

"This is the biggest live musical performance Netflix has ever staged globally," Netflix executive Brandon Riegg said in Seoul on Friday.

The buzz could further increase the current global hunger for almost anything with a Korean flavour, from movies and TV series to books, food and cosmetics.

"KPop Demon Hunters" – Netflix's most-watched original film – recently won two Oscars and has already significantly helped boost tourism to South Korea.

Glowsticks to tuna cans

Merchandise – ranging from tuna cans and beauty devices to glow sticks, blankets, clothing and dolls – is also a major generator of cash.



This handout photo taken on Saturday and provided by BIGHIT MUSIC and NETFLIX shows members of K-pop boy group BTS, (from left to right) V, Jin, Jimin, Suga, Jungkook and J-Hope, performing during the BTS comeback concert at Gwanghwamun Square in Seoul.

– AFP

Shinsegae Duty Free said its Myeongdong "K-Wave Zone," which opened in central Seoul in January and sells K-pop-themed goods of multiple artists, is running out of BTS-related products.

Sales of BTS merchandise alone rose about 430 percent in the week of March 13–19 from the previous week, it said in statement.

"Key rings sold out the fastest, while toothbrush-and-toothpaste sets – popular with travellers – and disposable bandages also went out of stock," Kim Ji-min, a spokesperson for Shinsegae, told AFP.

"BTS has developed a new economic model for cultural IP [intellectual property], not one

particular, but several, such as copyright, trademarks, and design," said Dal Yong Jin, a culture and digital technology professor at Simon Fraser University.

"Their copyright extends to games, comics, music videos," he told AFP.

"In terms of trademarks, the sale of merchandise, including dolls, has been significant."

K-everything

South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported the number of foreign visitors to the country between March 1-18 this year rose by more than 30 percent compared with a year earlier.

BTS's agency HYBE cited Hotels.com data showing overseas searches for Seoul jumped 160 percent within 48 hours of the announcement for the upcoming tour, while Busan – another tour stop – saw a 2,400-percent surge.

Economically, the group's impact is indeed "measurable in increased tourism to South Korea, the global expansion of K-pop, and spillover effects into industries like K-drama, beauty, cuisine, and fashion," Gi-Wook Shin, a sociology professor at Stanford University, told AFP.

"In many ways, BTS helped catalyse the broader 'K-everything' wave, creating both cultural and economic multiplier effects." – AFP

Minecraft to come to life with UK theme park

LONDON – Britain is to welcome the world's first Minecraft roller-coaster and attractions with the opening of "Minecraft World" in 2027, the studio behind the video game announced on Saturday.

"Merlin Entertainments and Mojang Studios have today [Saturday] announced Minecraft World, the world's first fully immersive Minecraft theme park land," the Sweden-based video game developer and UK theme park company said.

The £50-million (US\$66.3 million) project will be part of the Chessington World of Adventures Resort, a theme park complex southwest of London.

It will be inspired by the "biomes, mobs and items" of the beloved Minecraft universe, according to a press release, and will feature a coaster, "block built playscapes" and themed retail and dining.

The attraction builds on the popularity of one of the best-selling video games of all time in which players build a three-dimensional world.

Minecraft was first made available on computers in 2011 and has since been released

on mobile phones and several gaming consoles.

"A Minecraft Movie" proved a box office hit last year, becoming the most successful film adaptation from a video game in North America and generating memes and TikTok trends that went viral worldwide.

UK cinemas had to restrict audiences from partaking in a viral "chicken jockey"* trend arising from the film.

"Minecraft World represents a meaningful milestone in our ongoing journey to expand the Minecraft universe," said Torfi Frans Ólafsson, senior creative director for entertainment at Minecraft.

Universal is also to build its first European theme park in Britain, with its first year planned for 2031.

– AFP

*Viewers, primarily young fans, shout the line "Chicken Jockey!" Some cinema audiences erupt by throwing popcorn and even drinks into the air at the climax of a scene featuring a baby zombie riding a chicken Jockey! – Google AI Mode

'Project Hail Mary' rockets to top of N American box office

LOS ANGELES – Amazon MGM's sci-fi adventure flick "Project Hail Mary" debuted at the top of the North American box office last week with an astronomical US\$80.5 million, industry estimates showed on Sunday.

Ryan Gosling stars in the film as a teacher-turned-astronaut who awakes on a spaceship with a mission to save Earth from a sun-dimming phenomenon.

It is adapted from a novel by Andy Weir, the author behind 2015 hit "The Martian" starring Matt Damon.

"Weir wrote the story as a stand-alone, but the weekend figure is more than double the average for a series launch – that's how strong this is," analyst David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research said.

Directed by filmmaking duo Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, the movie marks "Amazon MGM's first big hit" since the retail giant acquired the storied studio in 2021, Gross noted.

Falling to second place after two weeks on top was animated hit "Hoppers," with US\$18 million, according to Exhibitor Relations.

The latest original film from Disney's Pixar tells the story of a young animal lover who uses technology to transfer her consciousness into a robotic beaver so she can better communicate and protect wildlife.

It has now taken in US\$242 million globally, according to Exhibitor Relations.

Third place went to Hindi-language spy thriller "Dhurandhar: The Revenge" with US\$9.6 million.

deReleased just three months after the original aired in North America, "Dhurandhar" continues the story of an Indian spy infiltrating Pakistani crime syndicates and politics, seeking to dismantle a terror network.

Considered political propaganda by some of India's neighbours, it has been notably banned in Pakistan.

With US\$9.1 million, fourth place went to Searchlight's "Ready or Not 2," a follow-up to the 2019 original comedy horror in which a

bride must survive a deadly game of hide-and-seek with her new in-laws.

Australia's Samara Weaving reprises her starring role in the sequel, which sees her forced once again to run a gauntlet, this time against multiple families.

"This is a solid opening for the 2nd episode of a low-budget horror comedy series," Gross said. "This opening is up over the first picture, and that's rare."

Fifth place went to Universal's romance film "Reminders of Him," with US\$8 million.

It is the latest adaptation of a novel by Colleen Hoover and stars Maika Monroe and Tyriq Withers.

– AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 8°C~21°C	Manila 21°C~33°C	New York 3°C~10°C	Lisbon 11°C~21°C
Shanghai 10°C~14°C	Bangkok 26°C~35°C	London 5°C~15°C	Rio de Janeiro 22°C~30°C
Hong Kong 19°C~25°C	Tokyo 10°C~17°C	Frankfurt 8°C~18°C	Luanda 24°C~29°C
Taipei 19°C~27°C	Singapore 24°C~35°C	Vancouver 5°C~11°C	Maputo 22°C~29°C
Guangzhou 19°C~29°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~36°C	Paris 7°C~18°C	Dili 24°C~30°C
Nanjing 8°C~14°C	Jakarta 23°C~33°C	Moscow 1°C~11°C	São Tomé 27°C~31°C
Guilin 15°C~23°C	Seoul 6°C~18°C	Las Vegas 19°C~35°C	Praia 18°C~27°C
Xi'an 6°C~18°C	Sydney 18°C~27°C	Monte Carlo 9°C~16°C	Bissau 20°C~35°C



Searannosaurus Rex!

A paddleboarding enthusiast paddles on the sea during celebrations to mark the start of the paddleboard surfing season in Vladivostok, Russia, on Sunday. *- Xinhua*



Checking out the hyacinths

A cat walks in flower fields in Lisse, the Netherlands, on Sunday. *- Xinhua*



Race you there!

A dolphin is pictured from a boat part of the convoy with 30 tonnes of humanitarian aid bound for Cuba, organised by left-wing activists from several countries in the Americas and Europe, in the Caribbean Sea on Sunday. *- AFP*



Button up

A model presents a creation by FDCI x Pearl Academy First Cut during the Lakmé Fashion Week in Mumbai, India on Sunday. *- AFP*



50 shades of red!

An apparel vendor sorts decorative laces at her roadside shop in New Delhi, India yesterday. *- AFP*



Up, up and away

Revellers watch as hot air balloons decorated with traditional motifs are prepared for launch during the annual hot air balloon festival held to celebrate Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the Islamic holy fasting month of Ramadan, at Semayu village in Wonosobo, Central Java, Indonesia yesterday. *- AFP*