

# Health Bureau expects risk of dengue fever & chikungunya fever to rise

Ida Cheong

Leong Iek Hou, who heads the Health Bureau's (SSM) Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), told reporters on the sidelines of an award ceremony yesterday that as Macau has been experiencing higher-than-usual temperatures this winter and spring, the local mosquito ovitrap index\* (OI) reached 2.2 percent between February and so far this month, which is significantly higher than the same period last year (0.7 percent in February and 1.2 percent in March in 2025), leading to an increased risk of dengue fever and chikungunya fever transmission.

Dr Leong made the remarks during the "Healthy Enterprise" award ceremony at the Macau Science Centre (MSC) in Nape.

Dr Leong pointed out that the areas with a higher OI are located in the city's old quarters such as the Patane waterfront area and Fai Chi Kei district, where ageing infrastructure leads to water accumulation and public awareness of prevention remains low.

Dr Leong added that her bureau continues to conduct inspections at high-risk locations to eliminate mosquito breeding sources, adding that starting in March, the frequency of mosquito

control operations increased from once to twice a month.

Dr Leong also urged residents to actively adopt "three key mosquito prevention measures", such as eliminating stagnant water, installing window and door screens, taking protective measures outdoors, actively removing mosquito larvae from their premises, and cooperating with official prevention and control efforts.

## 'Healthy Enterprise' programme benefits 98,512 people

Meanwhile, the award ceremony about the bureau's "Healthy Enterprise" programme was held yesterday. A total of 26 enterprises met the required standards and were awarded the "Healthy Enterprise" designation, with nine of them receiving the "Excellent Enterprise" distinction; a total of 98,512 people benefited from the programme last year, according to an SSM statement yesterday.

The statement pointed out that the programme benefited 91,664 people in 2024 and 98,512 people in 2025, and is projected to reach nearly 113,000 people in 2026.

SSM Director Alvis Lo Iek Long noted in a speech yesterday that all

26 participating enterprises met the programme's standards, achieving a 100 percent compliance rate, reflecting active participation and effective implementation, adding that over the course of the year, more than 1,200 health promotion activities were organised, reaching both employees and the public in general, with over 220,000 participants.

Among the awarded enterprises, 12 operate a total of 24 staff canteens, all of which strictly adhere to the programme's guidelines. More than half of the food options provided in each meal consist of whole grains, vegetables, and fruit, or are prepared with reduced salt, sugar, and oil, benefiting about 86,500 employees daily, Dr Lo said.

Dr Lo pointed out that a total of 168 self-service blood pressure and weight monitoring stations have been set up in employee lounge areas, with over 47,000 employees using them throughout the year, adding that all participating enterprises have promoted workplace stretching exercises. ■

*\*The ovitrap index (OI) is a key indicator used in public health to measure the population density of Aedes mosquitoes, the primary vectors for dengue, chikungunya, and Zika viruses. – DeepSeek*



Leong Iek Hou, who heads the Health Bureau's (SSM) Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), speaks to reporters during yesterday's "Healthy Enterprise" award ceremony at the Macau Science Centre (MSC) in Nape. – Photo: Ida Cheong

## Trump to meet Xi in Beijing on May 14-15: White House

WASHINGTON – US President Donald Trump will meet his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in May after delaying an earlier summit because of the war against Iran, the White House said yesterday.

The Trump visit to Beijing will take place May 14-15, Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters. There will be "a reciprocal visit in Washington, DC, at a later date to be announced this year." – AFP



## UK govt denies cover-up after PM ex-aide's phone stolen

LONDON – UK officials denied yesterday any conspiracy over the theft of a phone belonging to the prime minister's ex-chief aide after the government vowed to release messages related to the Jeffrey Epstein scandal.

The theft of Morgan McSweeney's mobile phone is raising questions about whether the government will be able to disclose all the relevant messages relating to the appointment of Peter Mandelson as Britain's ambassador to the United States.

Lawmakers in February ordered Prime Minister Keir Starmer's Labour government to release tens of thousands of emails, messages and documents detailing how Mandelson, a friend of late US sex offender Epstein, was vetted for the role and appointed in late 2024.

McSweeney quit Downing Street last month, saying he took "full responsibility" for advising Starmer to appoint Mandelson to Washington.

Mandelson was sacked after only months in the post after the depth of his ties to the convicted US sex offender were revealed, and police have opened an investigation into allegations of misconduct in office by Mandelson.

A spokesperson for the main opposition Conservative party suggested yesterday that the theft of McSweeney's phone in London in October 2025, a month after Starmer sacked Mandelson, was "very fortunate timing".

But Downing Street and senior government ministers denied any cover-up.

"The phone was stolen... several months before the... motion passed," Starmer's

spokesman said yesterday, referring to a parliamentary mechanism that triggered the disclosure of the documents.

Health Secretary Wes Streeting told Times Radio the loss of any correspondence between McSweeney and Mandelson was a "cock-up rather than conspiracy".

London's Metropolitan Police force meanwhile took the highly unusual step yesterday of releasing the transcript of the 999 call that McSweeney made after his phone was stolen.

It showed that McSweeney failed to inform the call handler that he worked for Downing Street, however he did say the stolen device was a "government phone".

His employment "was not information provided to us and could not reasonably have shaped our decision making", police said in a statement. – AFP

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## Wang Yi urges Mideast countries to maintain calm, address disputes through dialogue

Foreign Minister Wang Yi yesterday said China supports countries in the Middle East in maintaining calm and addressing disputes and differences through dialogue. – Story on p. 7

## Iran media casts doubt on US peace plan

State media in Iran said yesterday that Tehran had rejected a US plan to end fighting, as the head of the United Nations warned that the Middle East war was spiralling out of control. – Story on p. 10

## Sánchez says Middle East war 'far worse' than Iraq in 2003

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez warned yesterday that the Middle East war presented a "far worse" scenario than the invasion of Iraq in 2003. – Story on p. 12

# Macau Different: Continuity in Motion

## THE BET MACAU CANNOT DELAY: CONTINUITY IN THE NEW GENERATION

*Commentary by Manuel Silvério  
Former President of the General  
Assembly of the Macau Civil Servants'  
Association (ATFPM)*

Macau does not stand out by accident. It stands out because, for decades, it has been able to educate local people with a rare competence: living and working naturally across several languages and cultural codes - at school, at work, in culture, in civic associations, in the economy, in sport and in public life. That difference is a strategic asset. And if Macau is to remain Macau, the mission is simple to state and demanding to deliver: to ensure continuity and to invest in this generation with real responsibilities, not merely occasional praise.

In a speech addressed to the Macanese community on February 10, 2026, Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai offered a guiding idea: "We believe that the Macanese community has broad opportunities to contribute significantly and achieve remarkable accomplishments". It is precisely through such contributions - by method, continuity and results - that Macau gains and preserves its distinctiveness.

Today there is a group of well-educated, independent young Macanese (and Macau residents of Macanese background), with experience and genuine affection for the city - a "cleaner" generation - less bound by the internal disputes of the past and more focused on what matters: building, serving and making things happen. A generation connected to the Lusophone world in a

practical, contemporary way: language as a tool for the future, not as a ritual of nostalgia.

Some names are already evident and deserve to be called for what they represent. In alphabetical order: Anabela Barros Silvério, Ângela Ramos, André Ritchie, António Monteiro, Bernardo Alves, Duarte Alves, Duarte da Silva Rosário, Elisabela Larrea, Fernando Lourenço, Gisela Nunes, Giulio Acconci, Isabel Salvado Silva, Jerusa Antunes, Jorge Neto Valente, José Basto da Silva, Mariana César de Sá, Mina Pang, Paula Carion, Sérgio Peres, Wong Ka In.

I stress that this is not a closed list; it contains specific people I know and for whom I take responsibility in naming, while acknowledging that others have the same profile and merit.

Some of these names already serve on consultative and technical bodies - and that is a good sign. But the decisive point is different: continuity. Macau does not need only "guests" for panels, nor names to fill committees. It needs coherent pathways, missions with timelines, projects with budgets, measurable targets and constant renewal. In short: a serious commitment, with real consequences. Let me say this plainly: the mission of the Macau SAR is to put this generation in positions where they decide and execute - not merely "represent". And, even more directly: It is not enough to seat them at the table; they must be given the tools - responsibility, continuity, resources, and demanding standards.

That principle becomes even more relevant when we look at regional integration.

In the same speech, the Chief Executive explicitly called for a proactive attitude: "We encourage and support our Macanese friends to travel proactively ... to ... the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area." This is precisely where bilingual and trilingual profiles - with a culture of mediation, professional discipline and a link to the Lusophone world - can make a difference: connecting people, institutions, projects, investment, education and culture, with credibility and results.

And here is a difference that must be stated clearly, without drama. In the MSAR there are various neighbourhood and social organisations and trade unions which, through internal discipline, networks, training and strategy, promote, prepare and propel their members into senior positions. That is part of how they operate and, in itself, is an organisational reality that produces results. It is precisely here that our community, being less organised, falls short: We have capable people and talent, and many are bilingual or trilingual, with the world in their experience and Macau in their hearts. Yet we often lack a stable civic mechanism to promote them, support them and ensure continuity. The result is clear: merit exists, but the ladder is short; competence is there, but the path to the top is uneven; there is substance, but structure is missing.

There is also a structural aspect: models of participation and consultation were designed to ensure stability, predictability and administrative continuity. When there are no formal, regular mechanisms for

renewal, with clear criteria and transparent pathways, the incorporation of new talent tends to be slower and dependent on occasional openings. That is why when I speak of "making use of this generation" it is not rhetoric: it is a work programme for the city and its institutions. It involves creating transparent and predictable routes for merit-based progression; ensuring that consultative and technical bodies are not merely places to be present but places of real impact; supporting projects that strengthen bilingualism and trilingualism as living practice in education, culture and the economy; and ensuring that talented people are not held hostage by cultures of closure that sometimes resist renewal - so that new talent can enter through a normalised pathway, rather than only when barriers happen to give way.

Macau wins when this generation stops being a "promise" and becomes an engine. Less ceremony, more execution. Less photography, more work. Less folklore, more future. Continuity is not a pretty word; it is public policy, method, courage and commitment.

To conclude, let us do this with cool heads and steady hands, without turning every name and every appointment into a matter of life or death.

Macau already has enough walls and history; we do not need to invent new sieges at the 'Fortaleza do Monte' simply because we decided to do something straightforward: to invest, with continuity, in those who are good.

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#### Macau Weather

**CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY INTERVALS.  
MIST AT FIRST.  
LIGHT RAIN AT FIRST.  
FORCE 2 TO 4 SOUTH TO SOUTHEASTERLY WINDS.  
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 65% AND 98%.**



21°C~27°C

Source: SMG

## Liaison Office gets new deputy director

### Staff Reporter

The State Council in Beijing has appointed Yang Weiqun as a deputy director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR), succeeding Huang Liuquan, the Liaison Office announced in a statement yesterday.

Before his appointment to his new post that took effect yesterday, Yang had been one of the four vice-chairmen of the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA) since December 2023.

CIDCA is the country's agency tasked with foreign aid and international development.

CIDCA, also branded as China Aid, is a deputy ministerial-level agency administered under the State Council.

The Liaison Office in the MSAR has four deputy directors in its organisational structure.

After Yang succeeded Huang yesterday, the Liaison Office in the MSAR now has three serving deputy directors, i.e., one of the four deputy director positions is still left vacant. The other two currently serving deputy directors of the Liaison Office are Lyu Yuyin and Zhang Yingjie.

Huang had been a deputy director of the Liaison Office in the MSAR since late 2022.

Before working for the China International Development Cooperation Agency, Yang, born in February 1968, worked in the Ministry of



Undated file photo of Yang Weiqun, a newly appointed deputy director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the MSAR – Photo courtesy of Liaison Office

Commerce (MOC) where he held various senior positions, including head of the ministry's Asian Department and head of its Personnel Department.

The Liaison Office in the MSAR has been headed by Zheng Xincong since May 2022. Zheng is the highest-ranking official of the Central People's Government posted to the MSAR. ■

## MSAR reserves hit record 673.8 billion patacas

### Staff Reporter

The fiscal reserves of the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) reached a record 673.8 billion patacas (US\$83.66 billion), or 0.673 trillion patacas, at the end of January, according to Monetary Authority

of Macau (AMCM) figures gazetted on Monday.

It was the second consecutive month for the MSAR fiscal reserves to hit a new record.

The reserves rose by 7 billion patacas month-on-month. ■

# UTM holds Career Day with over 1,200 vacancies



Students engage with employers from various sectors during the public Macao University of Tourism's (UTM) Career Day on its Taipa campus yesterday.

— Photo: Khalel Vallo

## Khalel Vallo

The public Macao University of Tourism (UTM) held its 2026 Career Day yesterday on its Taipa campus, bringing together 64 organisations and offering more than 1,200 job vacancies for graduating students.

The one-day event provided a direct platform for students to engage with employers from various sectors, including hospitality, finance, retail and integrated resorts. Participating enterprises included Macau's six integrated resort operators – Galaxy, Sands, SJM, Melco, MGM, and Wynn.

On-site interviews were arranged, and two “outstanding alumni” discussed their career development and experience with students. In her speech, Rector Fanny Vong Chuk Kwan said that Career Day is not only about recruitment but also about “conversations that open doors” and partnerships that support students' transition into the workforce. She highlighted UTM's efforts to align its programmes

with industry needs, including the introduction of new courses integrating management, data science and digital competencies.

According to a recent graduate employment survey, UTM graduates earned a median monthly salary of around 16,000 patacas, entering industries such as tourism, catering, finance, and public administration.

The public university said in a statement on the sidelines of yesterday's Career Day that it continues to expand its regional presence, with plans to extend its master's degree programmes to Hengqin starting this September, further strengthening ties within the Greater Bay Area (GBA).

The statement also said that yesterday's Career Day reflected its ongoing commitment to preparing students for evolving industry demands, while strengthening collaboration between academia and employers to support Macau's talent development and economic diversification. ■

# Police arrest drunk man for grabbing steering wheel of moving bus

## Armando Neves

The Public Security Police (PSP) arrested a drunk man for grabbing the steering wheel of a moving TCM route 27 bus last week, PSP spokeswoman Kong Chi Ian said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Kong identified the suspect as a local resident in his fifties surnamed Iong.

In the early hours of Saturday, Kong said that the Public Security Police received a report of a disturbance at the junction of Estrada Marginal da Ilha Verde (青洲河邊馬路) and Avenida do Parque Industrial (工業園大馬路). When arriving at the scene, PSP officers questioned the bus driver and Iong, Kong said.

The bus driver told police that while driving the bus, Iong, who appeared to be heavily intoxicated, suddenly signalled that he needed to get off immediately and reached

for the steering wheel three times, causing the bus to swerve, Kong said, adding that the driver promptly pulled the bus over to the side of the road and called the police for assistance.

According to Kong, Iong told police that during a meal the previous evening, he had consumed a large amount of alcohol, and while on the bus heading home, he mistakenly believed he had missed his stop and told the driver to let him off. After being refused, an argument ensued, and he admitted to grabbing the steering wheel, Kong said.

Kong noted that Iong has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) for further questioning. She pointed out that Iong faces a charge in line with Article 278 of the Macau Penal Code for “endangering road transport safety.” According to the article, he could face a prison term ranging from two to eight years. ■

# Labour, youth bureaux to hold Big Health job seminar



This poster provided by the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) yesterday promotes its Big Health job seminar on April 15 at the Youth Activities Centre in Areia Preta district.

## Khalel Vallo

The Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) and the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) will co-host a job seminar on April 15 to help local youth better understand the development trends and career opportunities in the Big Health\* industry, according to a DSAL statement yesterday.

Held under the theme “The Path to Entrepreneurship – Towards Big Health”, the seminar will start at 6:30 p.m. at the Youth Activities Centre in Areia Preta district, the statement said, adding that online registration opened yesterday and will run until April 13, with places available on a first-come, first-served basis.

The statement did not say whether attendance is free of charge or fee-based.

The seminar targets young

locals, including secondary school students, interested in entering the Big Health sector, the statement noted. Guest speaker Tam Man Hou, partner and sales director of Trendyi Health Technology Limited, will elaborate on market opportunities and development trends, while analysing talent demands and required professional skills in the industry, the statement said, adding that he will also share practical experience in career planning and entrepreneurship.

The seminar is organised to align with the local government's “1+4” economic diversification strategy and its “student career planning blueprint,” aiming to broaden participants' career perspectives and support more informed academic and employment decisions, the statement said, noting that through case studies and professional

insights, the session seeks to help young people develop innovative thinking and better understand the industry's potential.

According to the statement, the seminar aims to promote stronger alignment between local talent and industry needs, contributing to the cultivation of a stable talent pool for emerging sectors. Interested participants are encouraged to register early via the Labour Affairs Bureau website ([www.dsal.gov.mo](http://www.dsal.gov.mo)). ■

\*Big Health refers to large-scale, systemic approaches to health that focus on population-level outcomes rather than individual care. It emphasises prevention, public health policy, social determinants of health (education, housing, income), and interventions that affect whole communities or national populations. — Poe

# 2026 MIECF

Macao International Environmental Co-operation Forum & Exhibition  
2026年澳門國際環保合作發展論壇及展覽

Low-carbon, Zero Waste Cities:  
Embarking on a Global Collaboration

Grand Opening Today 26-28/03/2026

2026 MIECF Event Programme		
26 March 2026 (Thursday)		
10:30 - 11:30	2026 MIECF Opening Ceremony (By Invitation Only)	
10:55 - 11:30	Keynote Speech Dual Carbon Initiatives and Zero Waste City Development Professor of the School of Environment, and Dean of the Institute for Carbon Neutrality at Tsinghua University, Academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering Mr. He Kebin	Sicily Meeting Room
11:00 - 18:30	Green Showcase and Green Matching	Expo Hall A
14:00 - 18:00	Green Forum Session 1 2nd Global Carbon Credit Market Development Forum	Sicily Meeting Room
14:15 - 18:00	Concurrent Events	
27 March 2026 (Friday)		
09:30 - 12:00	Green Forum Session 2 Building an Ecological Civilization: Regional Cooperation on the Green Silk Road (Co-developed with the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, People's Republic of China, and the BR International Green Development Coalition)	Sicily Meeting Room
10:30 - 12:00	Green Forum Session 3 Pan-Pearl River Delta Environmental Protection Industry Conference for Co-operation and Exchange (Internal Meeting)	Naples Meeting Room 2606
15:00 - 17:30	Green Forum Session 4 Building Zero Waste Cities Through Innovative Thinking	Sicily Meeting Room
10:00 - 18:00	Green Showcase and Green Matching	Expo Hall A
11:30 - 12:00	Protocol Signing Ceremony	Green Conference Zone, Expo Hall A
14:30 - 15:30	Presentation Session on the Advantages of Macao as China-Portuguese-speaking Countries Commercial and Trade Service Platform	Green Networking Zone, Expo Hall A
14:30 - 18:30	2026 MIECF - Macao Experience Tour (By Registration)	
10:00 - 18:00	Concurrent Events	
28 March 2026 (Saturday)		
10:00 - 17:00	Green Showcase and Green Matching	Expo Hall A
10:00 - 17:00	Green Public Day	Green Conference Zone, Expo Hall A
10:00 - 11:00	Technical Visit (By Registration) The Cotal Ecological Zones and the Macao Refuse Incineration Plant	
09:30 - 17:00	Concurrent Events	

Note: In the event of any changes to the programme, the final version shall prevail.  
For the latest schedule, please visit the MIECF official website: [www.macaomiecf.com](http://www.macaomiecf.com)

Enquiry Hotline: (853) 8798 9675 Venue: Cotal Expo, The Venetian Macao

Free shuttle bus services will be provided for the public on 28 March (Saturday). Please refer to the routes at: <https://www.macaomiecf.com/miecf2026/overview/shuttle>

**2026 MIECF Keynote Speaker**

**Mr. He Kebin**  
Professor of the School of Environment, and Dean of the Institute for Carbon Neutrality at Tsinghua University, Academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering

**Speech Topic:**  
Dual Carbon Initiatives and Zero Waste City Development

**Free admission - all are welcome!**

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- New Energy Global Matching Session
- Macao-Hengqin Public Institutions Environmental Matching Session
- Environmental Protection Technology Matching Session
- Green Building Matching Session

Scan the QR code for Green Matching registration

**2026 MIECF Opening Hours**

26 March 2026	11:00-18:30	Open to trade and professionals only
27 March 2026	10:00-18:00	Open to trade and professionals only
28 March 2026	10:00-17:00	Open to trade, professionals, and the public

**Free admission to Green Public Day**  
— all are welcome!

# 3 Macau artists hope to reach a wider audience during Art Central

## Rui Pastorin in Hong Kong

Art lovers, artists and galleries from Hong Kong and other parts of the world have a chance to explore art from Macau at this year's Art Central, with the Sands Gallery booth showcasing the works and distinct art styles of three of our local artists: Lei Ieng Wai, Leong Chi Mou and Dor Lio Hak Man.

Art Central is being held at the Central Harbourfront until Sunday, with the Sands Gallery booth showcasing over 40 artworks.

Each spoke to the *Post* about the art they are presenting in Hong Kong during the launch of the booth on Tuesday, highlighting with their excitement to showcase their works and spotlight Macau.

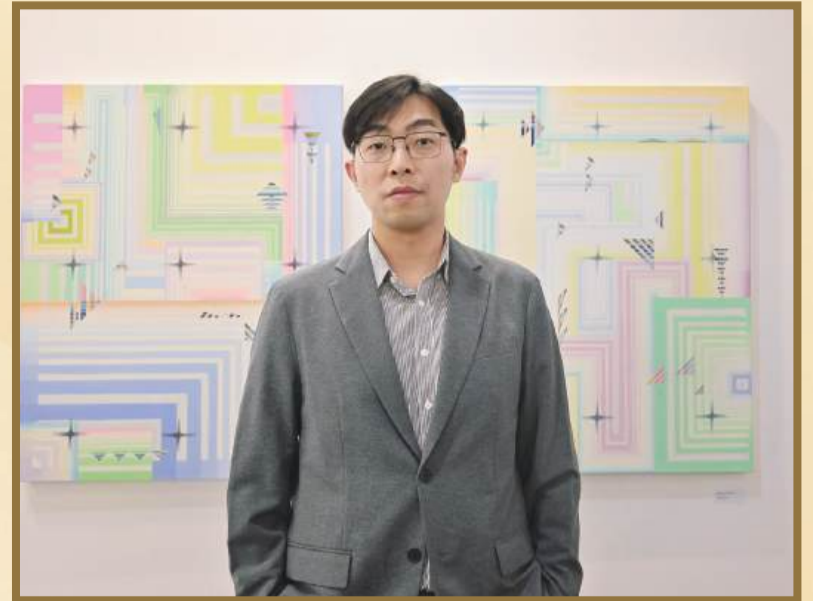
## Science meets art

The worlds of science and art meet in artist Lei's paintings, with three series of artworks presented at booth that were created over a span of 10 years.

As an artist, Lei uses scientific theory to make art – turning colour, ratios, and carefully calculated geometry into neat, repeating blocks and planes of light that mirror the movement and change of city life.

A message that Lei hopes to convey through his work is to encourage people to take things slow in a world where technology makes everything go faster, asking: "Do we really have to do it so fast? Can we do it slowly?", he asked rhetorically, adding that these being reflective of his art and creation process, taking up to a year to complete a piece.

The artist added that being able to exhibit pieces at Art Central is a great opportunity, hoping to engage in artistic exchanges and meet other artists from different parts of the world during the period that his works are showcased, while also advancing his career.



Lei Ieng Wai stands between two paintings from the series of works he is showcasing in Hong Kong.

## Turning change into a new expression

Leong's works, meanwhile, reflect change. As an artist, he explores how value and culture shape identity, as described in a statement by Sands China, with his work also exploring the tensions and connections between Macau's culture and "artistic essence".

Among the several pieces he is showcasing are mixed media works and paintings. Among them are those created using what he described as new media such as metals and gold, reflecting 10 years of change, he said, while also noting that he used Macau's unique characteristics such as its cultural blend, aesthetics and way of life to turn them into a new style of expression. His works created through other mediums can also be found at the booth.

Through the event and the showcase of art, he hopes that people visiting from different parts of the world can have a new perspective of Macau and learn more about the city.

## A playful twist

Lio's art, meanwhile, sees a mix of Japanese manga and Western painting to build imaginative scenes and stories that speak to both everyday moments and deeper ideas.

Among the works he is presenting are acrylic paintings where he playfully depicts his friends as door gods (門神), which are divine protectors of doorways and gates in Chinese folk religion.

Creating a fun twist, the pieces, which include the representative work titled "Door Gods' Game Battle", see a mix of the traditional with modern elements, while smaller details in the background prompt a closer look at the many elements found in the pieces. Through these works specifically, he hopes that viewers will be able to get a harmonious and warm feeling as they walk through these doors.

Aside from these works, Lio also presents other more colourful and playful pieces at the Sands Gallery booth at Art Central, where he said he felt excited to showcase his work to people from all over, hoping that they will get to know both Macau and his art. He also hopes that people can resonate with the pieces he is showcasing, while also helping to encourage them to slow down and relax amidst a busy life.

*\*This article is the second of a two-part article, with more on <https://www.macaupostdaily.com/news/27786>*



Leong Chi Mou poses with one of works displayed at the Sands Gallery booth in Hong Kong until Sunday. – Photos taken on Tuesday in Hong Kong by Rui Pastorin



Dor Lio Hak Man poses with one of his works being showcased at the Sands Gallery booth at Art Central in Hong Kong.



## Public cemeteries to extend opening hours for Ching Ming



This undated handout photo, taken at São Miguel Arcanjo Cemetery and provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) yesterday shows a technician applying mosquito control insecticide.

Ida Cheong

As the traditional Ching Ming (spelt “Qingming” in Putonghua pinyin) Festival on April 4 approaches, the six municipal cemeteries under the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) will extend their opening hours from 7:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. this coming Saturday and Sunday, as well as from April 3 to 7, allowing public to visit the cemeteries during off-peak times.

The tradition is also known as Tomb-Sweeping Festival (清明節). Qingming is one of the 24 solar terms (節氣, jieqi) in the traditional Chinese lunisolar calendar. It is the 5<sup>th</sup> solar term, occurring when the sun reaches 15° celestial longitude – around April 4–6 in the Gregorian calendar. The solar terms were developed by agricultural societies to mark seasonal changes important for farming. “Qingming” means “clear (and) bright”.

Additionally, traffic restrictions will be implemented on the roads surrounding the cemeteries from April 3 to 5. The statement advised citizens to take note and use public transport whenever possible.

Meanwhile, the bureau has installed large incense burners and small incense buckets at the cemeteries. During visits, citizens

should burn joss paper only at the designated facilities, ensure all flames are completely extinguished before leaving, and remove all offerings and rubbish, the statement said, adding that setting off firecrackers is strictly prohibited within the cemeteries.

The statement noted that additional rubbish bins have also been placed in the cemeteries, and the bureau will deploy more staff to empty the bins to maintain cleanliness.

In order to prevent mosquito infestations and reduce the risk of dengue fever and chikungunya transmission, the bureau has strengthened mosquito control and removed weeds from the cemeteries, the statement said.

The bureau also advised visitors not to put fresh flowers in vases to reduce the risk of mosquito breeding caused by stagnant water in vases. Furthermore, during the festival period, portable toilets will be added at the Our Lady of Mercy Cemetery in Mong-Ha district and Coloane Municipal Cemetery.

During the festival, the bureau will increase patrols at all municipal cemeteries. Citizens are reminded to maintain order and follow the instructions of on-site staff. ■

## No unmanned aircraft during int’l parade: AACM

Rui Pastorin

The flying of unmanned aircraft or drones will be banned during the 2026 Macao International Parade this Sunday, being effective from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., the Civil Aviation Authority (AACM) announced in a statement yesterday.

The statement noted that the ban aims to ensure that the event will be conducted smoothly. “Groups or individuals who previously obtained an activity permit from the Authority to operate unmanned aircraft on the above date must also comply with this no-fly ban”, according to the statement, pointing out that violations will result in penalties

imposed by the Civil Aviation Authority pursuant to Paragraph 2 of Article 59 of Law No. 4/2025 (Civil Aviation Activity Law). ■



This image provided by the Civil Aviation Authority (AACM) yesterday warns against unmanned aircraft activities.

## ‘Mulan’ on at CCM tomorrow, Saturday

Rui Pastorin

“Mulan” by the Ningbo Performance & Arts Group will be staged at the Grand Auditorium at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) tomorrow and Saturday night, with the director Liu Wei, along with lead performers Hao Ruoqi, who plays the titular heroine, and ballet dancer Xia Tian, who stars opposite Hao as General Wei, talking about the show with the media yesterday at CCM.

The winner of various awards and featuring themes like loyalty, courage, filial piety and love, the production tells a heroic story of a young woman who becomes a fearless warrior, with the upcoming show, which is presented as part of the “1<sup>st</sup> Chinese Culture Performances Season”, scheduled at 7:30 p.m. on both nights, each lasting around two hours and five minutes.

According to Liu, the dance drama blends a classic story with modern twists, integrating multimedia elements. In addition to dance and drama, it incorporates martial arts and technology while also presenting the emotional connection between the leads, while also tackling familyhood, among others. Peace, love and togetherness are also elements that can be found within the show, which, according to performer Xia, also presents the synergy and emotions between all the performers, as well as the work they put in.

Hao, who said she has played the role for over nine years, added that the story has an important



Performers Xia Tian (from left to right) and Hao Ruoqi, as well as director Liu Wei answer questions from the moderator of yesterday’s press briefing at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM). – Photo: Rui Pastorin

place in Chinese culture. In telling it through the upcoming performance, she highlighted the use of modern elements to transmit the story to a younger audience.

Hao added that she is proud to have been able to play the role, highlighting the development of the dialogue between her and Mulan’s character from the movements to the story, altogether helping her get into character and play the role better. She hopes to transmit Mulan’s characteristics and personality to the audience during the upcoming shows.

The production has received numerous awards, among which are the China Dance Lotus Award, while Macau is the latest stop in a performance that has toured around the world. Liu further highlighted the impact of Chinese dance drama outside of China, noting a positive

reception and experience during performances in 2023 in Boston and Washington as examples. He noted that the group is looking forward to developing more ways to share the impact Chinese dance drama with the rest of the world, while new performances are in the works. ■

\*Mulan (花木蘭) is a legendary Chinese heroine best known from folk tales, poems, and later literary and theatrical retellings. Her story has been told and reworked across centuries. The etymology of Mulan’s name can be explained as follows: 花木蘭 literally reads as “flower-wood-orchid.” As a personal name, it evokes floral beauty and delicacy (花, 蘭) plus a sylvan or natural element (木). The balance of characters can suggest both feminine grace and inner strength. – Poe

## Police bust loan-sharking quintet

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) arrested five men from the Chinese mainland for casino loan sharking, PJ spokesman Ho Wai Lok said during a special press conference yesterday.

Ho identified the quintet as being aged between 34 and 41, surnamed Zhang, Wang, Zhu, Guo and Liu, all of whom claimed to be jobless, adding that a sixth suspect was still at large at the time of the press conference.

According to Ho, at around 1 a.m. on Tuesday, a gambler asked the gang to loan him some money, after which they discussed the lending terms in the victim’s hotel guest room in Cotai.

Ho said both sides agreed that the gambler would contribute HK\$100,000 (102,868 patacas) while they would provide HK\$200,000 to a joint gambling pool totalling HK\$300,000. The victim was required to sign an IOU that stated if he won a baccarat hand with a total of 7, 8, or 9, he would be obligated to pay the group 30 percent of the bet as “interest”, according to Ho.

Liu, Guo and Zhu accompanied the victim to a casino in Cotai to gamble, Ho said.



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the five hooded casino loan-sharking suspects from the Chinese mainland to a PJ van outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday. – Photo: Armindo Neves

Liu provided HK\$300,000 in chips and the victim placed bets independently, according to Ho. Guo and Zhu were tasked with collecting the “interest”, while Zhang monitored the situation nearby and assisted with chip exchanges. Wang held onto the IOU.

By around 6 a.m., three of the victim’s friends arrived to persuade him to stop gambling, Ho said, adding that a noisy row broke out between them and the five suspects,

which alerted security personnel and led to the police being called.

According to Ho, during the investigation, PJ officers discovered that the victim was charged HK\$50,000 in “interest”. The officers seized HK\$340,000 in cash, chips worth HK\$263,000, six mobile phones, the IOU and a receipt from the quintet, Ho said.

The quintet were transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) yesterday, facing usury charges. ■

## Police nab Vietnamese masseuse for drug dealing

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) nabbed a masseuse from Vietnam for dealing in drugs, PJ spokesman Ho Wai Lok said at a regular press conference yesterday.

Ho identified the suspect as a 34-year-old non-resident worker (NRW) surnamed La.

According to Ho, based on a tip-off, the Judiciary Police identified La as a suspected drug dealer and took action on Tuesday afternoon.

In La's flat, in the city centre, PJ officers seized 37 ecstasy pills, complete with packaging, weighing a total of 22.92 grams; five small packets of crystal meth, weighing a total of 5.52 grams; and four small packets of ketamine, weighing a total of 4.3 grams; as well as HK\$45,000 (46,278 patacas) and 1,900 yuan in suspected proceeds from drug-related activities, Ho said, adding that the estimated street value of the drugs was



This undated handout photo provided by the Judiciary Police yesterday shows evidence seized from the Vietnamese drug trafficking suspect surnamed La.

around 28,000 patacas.

Under questioning, Ho said, La claimed that most of her customers were her compatriots. La's urine test returned a negative result for drug use.

La has been transferred to

the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) recently, facing a drug trafficking charge, Ho said, adding that the Judiciary Police are still investigating the origin of the drugs and pursuing any other individuals probably involved in the case. ■

## China's forward-looking businesses, vibrant innovation ecosystem 'very impressive': WEF managing director

TIANJIN – China's sense of optimism, forward-looking businesses, and vibrant innovation ecosystem are very impressive, said Gim Huay Neo, managing director of the World Economic Forum (WEF), yesterday.

In an exclusive interview with Xinhua during the two-day Tianjin 2026 Global Business Leaders Roundtable, slated to end today, in Tianjin Municipality, Neo said that in a recent survey that the WEF conducted among businesses globally, China's business leaders and new entrants to the job market had emerged as the most optimistic about the implications of technology for their prospects in the future.

"In many industries in China, there is appetite to embrace technology to drive productivity gains, to bring about new possibilities, and to enhance quality output," Neo said.

"China has been investing in technology and talent capabilities over the last decades, but the 'a-ha' moment about how frontier China's developments have been came about when DeepSeek actually had their launch early last year, and all of a sudden there was a lot of spotlight on how far and how deep China has gone in investing in technology, and how much this technology has diffused across industries, across the economy, and in society right now," Neo said, adding that there is a lot of interest from international businesses, as

well as governments, to look at China's capabilities.

She explained that they expected to learn from China's best practices and China's experience, and to know where they can collaborate with China – whether it is to build capabilities, to license Chinese technology, or to enhance their own productivity – and how they can also be part of this technology dividend.

Neo further noted a shift in how multinational companies engage with China. "Many of these international businesses are not just looking at building manufacturing bases in China. They are looking at setting up innovation hubs to tap into the richness of the talent base, the sophistication of how these technologies have been deployed in the economy across all sectors, and also to be close to the market where things are happening."

This year marks the start of China's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan period. In Neo's eyes, there are many opportunities in this Five-Year Plan, both in the domestic market and in the upgrading of industries, the catalytic growth of new businesses, new business models, and also how China will collaborate and invest overseas.

"There's a lot in there for businesses to explore and to look at how they can work closely with the Chinese government to realize the ambitions and the vision that is embodied in this plan," Neo said.

– Xinhua

## Pump pain, plug gain: Oil shock fuels demand for Chinese NEVs

Analysis

BEIJING – The sting of expensive petroleum is doing what years of policymakers struggled to achieve: pushing drivers towards electric cars. In countries like the Philippines and Australia, showrooms selling Chinese new energy vehicles (NEVs) are reporting a noticeable rise in curious walk-ins, test drives and conversion to orders as fuel prices soar.

The recent surge in the interest in NEVs comes as geopolitical tensions have sent shockwaves through global energy markets, with Brent crude at one point jumping nearly 50 percent since March.

As high oil prices squeeze household budgets and strengthen the economic case for EVs, Chinese manufacturers, backed by years of strategic and industrial foresight that have given them a global edge, are drawing increasing attention from consumers.

Leading Chinese carmaker BYD's showrooms are bustling across Asia after the oil shock, Bloomberg reported, citing higher demand at new energy car dealerships in cities like Manila.

Over the past two weeks, sales of NEVs by automakers including BYD and GAC Group had risen notably in Australia, with foot traffic at many offline showrooms increasing by more than 30 percent compared with the same period last month, business news network Yicai reported on Monday.

"Oil is the Achilles' heel of the global economy... Oil volatility means electric vehicles are a common-sense choice for countries wishing to insulate themselves from future shocks," said Daan Walter, a principal at Ember, a think tank on the future of energy.

The shift is already evident in the data. An Ember analysis shows that scaling electrotech – EVs, renewables and heat pumps – to replace imported fossil fuels in road transport, heating and power, would enable importers to cut their fossil fuel imports by 70 percent, underscoring the growing role of electrification in cushioning energy shocks.

The latest global turn toward NEVs is playing to the long-term structural strengths of China's automotive industry. While soaring oil prices have undoubtedly acted as a recent "accelerant," the growth in Chinese NEV exports suggests a competitive foundation that was solidified long before the current energy volatility.

Even before the oil shock began, China's overseas shipments of electric cars and plug-in gas-electric hybrids in the first two months of 2026 had already more than doubled from a year ago, according to data from the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

Chinese exports of NEVs were already on a strong growth trajectory before the latest oil crisis. Rising fuel prices are acting more as a short-term catalyst than a structural driver, according to Sun Xiaohong, secretary-general of the automotive internationalization committee of the China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Machinery and Electronic Products.

After years of growth, China's NEV industry has entered a phase of scale, maturity and expanding global reach. Backed by a fully integrated supply chain spanning batteries, components and vehicle assembly, Chinese manufacturers have achieved a combination of cost competitiveness and rapid innovation.

In 2025, domestic production and sales of NEVs both exceeded 16 million units, with NEVs accounting for over 50 percent of new car sales in the domestic market. By the end of February 2026, the total number of NEV charging points reached 21.01 million in the country, up 47.8 percent year on year.

But in many regions elsewhere in the world, the rollout of NEVs remains at an early stage, with infrastructure lagging behind demand. Public charging networks are often sparse, charger density remains low, and standards are fragmented. For many consumers, especially outside major cities, "range anxiety" remains a real concern, while long charging times and inconsistent charging experiences continue to weigh on adoption, explained Lang Xuehong, deputy secretary-general of the China Automobile Dealers Association.

While the current surge in demand across Asia-Pacific markets reflects heightened cost sensitivity among consumers, the long-term growth trajectory of Chinese NEVs overseas remains underpinned by deeper advantages, including cost competitiveness, a fully integrated supply chain, technological progress, and the ability to adapt to diverse energy and infrastructure conditions across global markets, according to analysts.

Sustained global demand for Chinese NEVs will depend less on short-term tailwinds but more on a shift in strategy, which involves moving beyond simple vehicle exports towards exporting entire industrial ecosystems, bringing battery and component suppliers overseas, building local supply chains, and establishing localized production, Lang said. – Xinhua

## China's technological advances critical to greater humanitarian impact: ICRC official

BOAO, Hainan – China's leadership role in technological innovation, especially in the fields of digital and energy transition, can increase the resilience of societies in the face of a crisis, said a senior official with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) yesterday.

Gilles Carbonnier, vice president of the ICRC, made the remarks in an exclusive interview with Xinhua on the sidelines of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference running from Tuesday to tomorrow in Hainan Province.

China is playing an important role in advancing the global humanitarian cause, particularly at the intersection of technology and humanitarian work, Carbonnier said.

"Humanitarian crises often last decades, affecting generations," he noted. "We cannot wait for the end of a crisis to begin working on development." In this context, China's tech advances are helping bridge the gap between emergency relief and long-term development,

enabling more efficient and scalable solutions.

"This is why we are partnering with Chinese counterparts to try to bring innovations to fruition for greater humanitarian impact," he told Xinhua, adding that such cooperation will continue with stakeholders attending the forum in Hainan.

The ICRC is deepening its engagement with Chinese research institutions to better harness emerging technologies while assessing their risks, Carbonnier added, citing a recent exchange with Tsinghua University in Beijing on how innovation could improve the effectiveness of humanitarian endeavors.

The high-ranking official also welcomed a growing international push to elevate respect for international humanitarian law as a political priority. The initiative, launched about a year and a half ago by China together with Brazil, France, Kazakhstan, Jordan and South Africa, has since drawn broad participation. – Xinhua

# Wang Yi urges Mideast countries to maintain calm, address disputes through dialogue

BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi yesterday said China supports countries in the Middle East in maintaining calm and addressing disputes and differences through dialogue.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the appeal in a phone conversation with Turkish

Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan at the latter's request.

The right and wrong of the conflict in the Middle East are clear, and the international community should adopt an objective and impartial position, Wang said.

Noting that the conflict is now rapidly spilling over and spreading across the region, Wang said the top priority is to actively promote peace

talks, seize opportunities for peace, and work toward de-escalation.

China supports countries in the region in remaining calm, and responding rationally to the current situation from a long-term perspective based on fundamental interests, Wang said.

China also supports Türkiye in playing a constructive role in promoting the resumption of

negotiations, Wang added.

For his part, Fidan said that Türkiye and China are highly consistent in their positions regarding the current situation in the Middle East, and both countries oppose launching military attacks without authorization from the UN Security Council and oppose further escalation of the conflict.

China has always been committed to maintaining regional

and world peace, and it is believed that China will continue to play an important role, he said.

Türkiye is willing to make joint efforts with China to promote a ceasefire and bring the world back to the right track of peaceful development, he added.

The two sides also exchanged views on other regional issues.

– Xinhua

## Wang Yi calls on world to promote dialogue among parties to Mideast conflict

BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi yesterday called on the international community to actively promote dialogue among the parties involved in the conflict in the Middle East.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks in a phone conversation with Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty at the latter's request.

Abdelatty briefed Wang on his views on the development of the regional situation. Expressing that the Egyptian side is deeply concerned about the current situation, he said that if energy and power facilities are attacked and paralyzed, it will lead to chaos throughout the region.

To cool down the situation, the Egyptian side is communicating with all parties and actively promoting negotiations, he said.

Noting that Egypt and China are comprehensive strategic partners, Abdelatty said that Egypt is willing to maintain close coordination with China and jointly enhance diplomatic efforts to prevent the region and the world from falling into turmoil.

For his part, Wang said that both China and Egypt are

responsible countries. They both oppose military operations without authorization from the UN Security Council, oppose attacks on civilians and civilian facilities, and do not approve of affecting the Gulf countries, Wang said.

The situation in the Middle East is changing rapidly, Wang said, citing that both the United States and Iran are signalling their readiness to negotiate. A glimmer of hope for peace has emerged, he said.

If this war continues, it will only bring more casualties and unnecessary losses, leading to further spillover of the situation, Wang said.

Stressing that as long as there is dialogue, there is hope for peace, Wang said that the actions of the Security Council should help ease the situation and promote dialogue, and help prevent the expansion of the war instead of giving a pass to the use of force.

Noting that China supports Egypt in continuing to play a mediating role in promoting the resumption of peace talks and the cessation of the war, Wang said that China is also willing to continue to make constructive efforts for this purpose. (More on pages 9, 10 & 12)

– Xinhua

## China urges Philippine side to immediately stop provocations, smear campaigns

BEIJING – The China Coast Guard (CCG) yesterday urged the Philippine side to immediately stop provocations and smear campaigns in the territorial waters off China's Huangyan Dao in the South China Sea.

The CCG recently conducted routine rights-protection and law-enforcement training in the territorial waters near Huangyan Dao and issued a navigation safety notification in advance in accordance with the law, said Liu Dejun, spokesperson of the CCG.

However, during the exercise, a

lot of Philippine vessels converged on the training area under the pretext of "fishing," trying to create incidents, incite and hype the situation, and attract international attention, Liu said.

Liu said that the CCG will continue to carry out rights-protection and law-enforcement operations in the territorial waters off Huangyan Dao in accordance with the law and is determined to safeguard the country's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests.

– Xinhua

## Vice Premier Ding calls for building global sci-tech community

BEIJING – Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang said yesterday that China stands ready to work with all parties to build a global science and technology community.

Ding, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks at the opening ceremony of the 2026 Zhongguancun Forum (ZGC Forum) Annual Conference in Beijing.

Ding proposed developing a more open and inclusive innovation network to strengthen the bonds of cooperation among various innovation entities. He also suggested pursuing more extensive and diverse sci-tech cooperation, enhancing collaboration on basic and frontier research, and promoting the application of emerging technologies, so as to empower the economic and social development of all countries.

In addition, Ding called for promoting more equitable and inclusive sci-tech governance, and properly addressing the regulatory conflicts, social risks and ethical challenges that may arise from sci-tech development.

Ding noted that during the 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025), China had achieved significant new progress in the sci-tech sector. The country's sci-tech strength was markedly enhanced, and its influence as



Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, addresses the opening ceremony of the 2026 Zhongguancun Forum (ZGC Forum) Annual Conference in Beijing yesterday.

– Xinhua

a key pole of global innovation grew considerably.

During the 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan period (2026-2030), China will accelerate efforts to achieve greater self-reliance and strength in science and technology, build international centers for sci-tech innovation, and forge key strategic pillars for making China a sci-tech power, said Ding.

The 2026 ZGC Forum Annual Conference is themed "Full Integration Between Technological and Industrial Innovation." Approximately 1,000 people attended the opening ceremony, including Chinese and global scientists and engineers, business executives, government officials and heads of international organizations.

– Xinhua

## China to establish nationwide long-term care insurance system

BEIJING – The central authorities issued a set of guidelines yesterday to accelerate the establishment of a nationwide long-term care insurance system, with the aim of addressing the basic care needs of people who have difficulty in taking care of themselves.

The long-term care insurance system is a form of social insurance designed to provide services or financial support for basic living care and related medical services to individuals who are unable to

care for themselves, according to the guidelines issued by the general offices of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the State Council.

Since China began piloting long-term care insurance in 2016, nearly 310 million people have enrolled, and over 3.3 million people with disabilities have benefited from the program.

According to a long-term care insurance service list released by the government in September 2025, a long-term care fund would

pay for 20 living care services, such as assistance with meals, toileting and hygiene, and 16 medical care services, including general checkups, basic care and rehabilitation, for eligible insurance participants.

This system is considered a vital component of China's broader social security framework and a crucial strategy to tackle challenges posed by the country's aging population, the document noted.

– Xinhua

## Belarus leader visits N Korea for first time

**Kang Jin-kyu**

SEOUL – Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko began his first official visit to North Korea yesterday, with the two countries united by Western sanctions, closeness to Russia and accusations of rights violations.

Belarusian state news agency Belta reported that the two sides would sign during the two-day visit a treaty of friendship and cooperation.

Both nations have provided Moscow assistance with its war in Ukraine, with Pyongyang dispatching ground troops and weapons and Minsk serving as a launchpad for Russia's invasion in 2022.

Kim Jong Un and Lukashenko met in September in Beijing when they attended a military parade at Tiananmen Square, where the North Korean leader reportedly extended an invitation.

The visit is intended to "show solidarity" among nations opposed to the Western order, Lee Ho-ryung of the Korea Institute for Defence Analyses told AFP.

"Kim will try to use the occasion to raise its diplomatic profile and strengthen solidarity among the so-called anti-Western bloc," she said.

In a letter to Lukashenko earlier this month, Kim said he was "willing to expand and develop the traditional relations of friendship and cooperation... to a new, higher stage in line with the demands of the new era", the North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported.

The Belarusian leader in return said that "Minsk affirms it has an interest in actively expanding political and economic ties with Pyongyang at all levels".

Belta quoted Belarusian Foreign Minister Maxim Ryzhenkov as saying that in addition to the treaty of friendship and cooperation, the two sides would agree to cooperate in an array of fields from agriculture to information.

"Our greatest interest... is strengthening truly friendly, partnership relations. We have friends here, and they are waiting for us. Just as we await them in Belarus," Ryzhenkov said.

### Prison camps

North Korea has been under a barrage of Western sanctions, mostly due to its nuclear weapons programme and missiles activity, but also because of its support for

Russia's war against Ukraine.

South Korean and Western intelligence agencies have estimated that the North has sent thousands of soldiers to Russia, primarily to the Kursk region, along with artillery shells, missiles and rocket systems.

Around 2,000 North Korean soldiers have been killed and thousands more wounded, according to estimates from South Korea.

Analysts say North Korea is receiving financial aid, military technology, food and energy supplies from Russia in return. President Vladimir Putin visited in 2024.

This has enabled Pyongyang to lessen dependence on its main long-term backer, China.

International rights organisations accuse the North Korean regime of torture, public executions, prison camps, forced labour and restrictions on the freedom of expression and movement.

### Crackdown

Lukashenko meanwhile has moved Minsk deeper into Russia's orbit and come down hard on any dissent inside the country during his three decades in power.

The West had heavily sanctioned Minsk over its role in facilitating the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as well as a crackdown on protests in 2020.

But US President Donald Trump has sought to build ties with Belarus in his second term, easing sanctions and welcoming it to his "Board of Peace".

Belarus has released dozens of prisoners in recent months, largely due to US efforts, including 250 earlier this month.

But it still holds hundreds of political prisoners in its jails, many of whom were arrested after the 2020 election that saw a landslide victory for Lukashenko seen as a sham by the opposition.

Trump met Kim in his first term and there has been speculation of a re-run when the US president makes his delayed upcoming visit to China.



In this handout picture taken and released by the Belarusian presidential press service yesterday, Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko (second right) and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un attend a welcoming ceremony prior to their talks in Pyongyang. – AFP

## Australia's public broadcaster hit by staff walkout

SYDNEY – Hundreds of journalists went on strike yesterday at Australia's main public broadcaster, demanding better pay and protections to stop artificial intelligence taking their jobs.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation was forced to replace live programming with pre-recorded shows after more than

2,000 journalists and staff called a 24-hour strike.

It is the first major strike to hit the broadcaster in around 20 years.

"ABC staff don't want to strike, they want to do their jobs," the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance said in a statement.

"They want fair pay, secure work, and guardrails around the use

of technologies like AI to protect editorial integrity and public trust," the union added.

Union members voted this month to reject a pay offer they said would fall below inflation.

Falling advertising revenues and the rise of social media have fuelled repeated rounds of job cuts across Australia's media. – AFP

## Investigation underway for Bengal tiger cub death in Indonesian zoo

JAKARTA – A Bengal tiger cub has died at Bandung Zoo in Indonesia's West Java province, with authorities launching an investigation to determine the cause of death, officials said yesterday.

The cub, named Hara, was confirmed dead by the West Java Natural Resources Conservation Agency (BBKSDA), which said

the exact cause remains under examination by veterinarians.

"Yes, it has died, but we have not yet obtained the complete results, pending the veterinarian's examination," BBKSDA West Java spokesperson Eri Mildranaya said, as quoted by local media.

Hara was born on July 12, 2025, along with its sibling, Huru, adding

to the Bengal tiger population at Bandung Zoo.

Authorities said a necropsy has been conducted and further analysis is underway to determine the precise cause of death. BBKSDA West Java said the full results would be released once the veterinary assessment is finalized.

– Xinhua



Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos speaks during a press conference at the Malacañang Palace in Manila yesterday. Marcos earlier declared a state of "national energy emergency" on Tuesday, citing risks to the domestic fuel supply and energy stability created by the Middle East war. – AFP

## Japan's reusable rocket experimental vehicle aborts first flight test

TOKYO – The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) aborted the scheduled first flight test of its small reusable rocket experimental vehicle RV-X yesterday due to an unexpected issue that arose before launch, local media reported.

According to Kyodo News, the RV-X had completed fueling early yesterday at the Noshiro Rocket Testing Center in Akita Prefecture. However, JAXA later discovered

that a device connecting the rocket body to external equipment had "issues requiring confirmation," and therefore decided to cancel the day's flight test.

The RV-X is about 7.3 meters long with a diameter of around 1.8 meters. Its first flight test had originally been scheduled for March 7 but was postponed several times due to weather conditions. A new test date has not yet been determined. – Xinhua

## 'Hero' Australian dog who saved 100 koalas retires

SYDNEY – An Australian dog credited with saving over 100 koalas from bushfires is retiring after a decade of service.

Bear, an 11-year-old Australian Koolie, was one of the first dogs in the country to be trained on the scent of koala fur.

The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) called using dogs to detect koalas a "novel" approach.

"No one knew if it could be done," IFAW head of programmes Josey Sharrad wrote in a statement about Bear on Monday.

As a pup, the four-legged hero's boundless energy made it tough to stay indoors, but he found his true potential in the bush.

"He literally went from chewing the walls of a Gold Coast apartment to roaming through the Aussie bush on a mission to save our most iconic species," Sharrad said.

Bear's skills saved over 100 koalas as the Black Summer bushfires raged across Australia's eastern seaboard from late 2019 to early

2020, razing millions of hectares, destroying thousands of homes and blanketing cities in noxious smoke.

The tail-wagging detective with a "joyful and goofy" personality retires with an extensive list of accolades – including an Animal of the Year award and Puppy Tales Photos Australian Dog of the Year award.

He also features in a "dogumentary" called "Bear: Koala Hero", and in a book, "Bear to the Rescue".

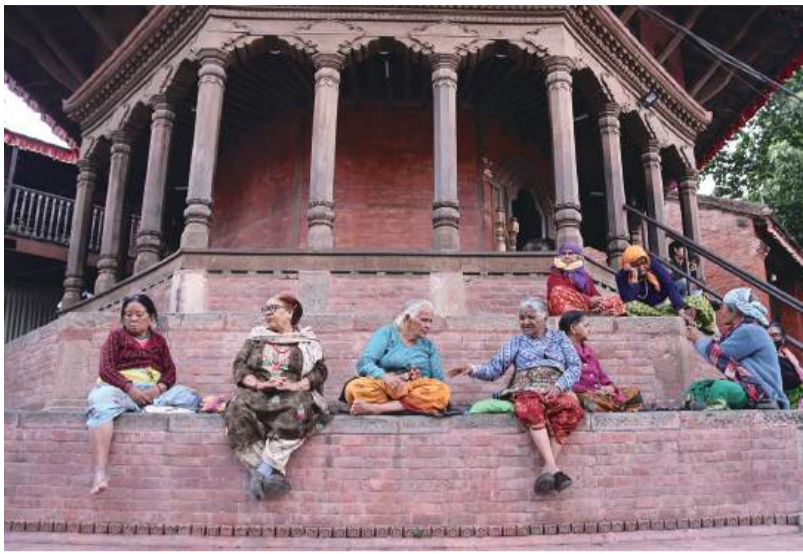
Bear will embark on a slower-paced chapter on the Sunshine Coast with one of his former handlers, getting belly rubs and playing his favourite game, fetch.

One of his former handlers, Romane Cristescu, said Bear had been a "tireless ambassador for koalas for a decade".

"He melted hearts all around the world, and opened many doors so we could have critical and difficult conversations about climate change and its impacts on the threatened koalas, as well as so many other species." – AFP



This handout picture taken on September 15, 2019 and released by the International Fund for Animal Welfare yesterday shows dog handler Riana Gardiner unloading Bear, an Australian koolie, from the cargo area of her transport vehicle in the New South Wales town of Bangalow. – AFP



Women sit at Durbar Square in Kathmandu, Nepal yesterday.

– AFP

## Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh worry ahead of food aid cuts

DHAKA – Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh expressed concern yesterday as the cash-strapped UN World Food Programme (WFP) prepares to cut aid for large portions of the 1.2 million-strong group.

Bangladesh's vast refugee camps shelter Rohingya who fled persecution in neighbouring war-torn Myanmar, with more than 150,000 new arrivals since 2024, according to the WFP.

The agency is the sole provider of monthly food assistance for the community. But with global funding stretched thin and more people needing aid, resources are already under pressure.

Currently, Rohingya in the Cox's Bazar camps receive food aid equivalent to US\$12 per month.

From April 1, rations will be cut to just US\$7 for groups deemed to be at lower risk, and US\$10 for a middle category.

Only those deemed "extremely food insecure", who make up around a third of the current beneficiaries, will maintain the same US\$12 payment. The designation includes households headed by children or women, or the elderly or physically challenged.

WFP spokesperson Kun Li said the changes aim to "deliver assistance more equitably and in line with real needs".

"Every household continues to receive support according to their food gap, with the most food-insecure receiving the highest level," she added.

But refugee representative Sayed Ullah, president of the United

Council of Rohingya civil rights platform, said people were already struggling on meagre rations.

"Do you think US\$12 is enough for a person to have food for an entire month?" Ullah told AFP.

"How on earth will a person survive on US\$7 to US\$10 worth of food assistance?"

Refugees are officially not allowed to work, and Ullah said smaller rations may push many to engage in "illegal activities just to survive".

Bangladesh's Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner Mohammad Mizanur Rahman acknowledged that aid agencies are "facing a funding crisis" but warned of the potential fallout.

"The ramifications of this decision will be reflected on multiple fronts," he said.

"Hungry people are angry people, and there may be law and order issues."

Many of the Rohingya escaped Myanmar during a brutal military crackdown in 2017.

The campaign, which saw Rohingya villages burned and civilians killed, is the subject of a genocide case at the United Nations' top court in The Hague.

Worldwide WFP funding fell by about 40 percent in 2025.

US President Donald Trump slashed foreign aid after taking office last year, dealing a heavy blow to humanitarian operations worldwide.

In March 2025, following the cuts, the WFP said it would have to cut monthly aid to US\$6, but the measures were not implemented.

– AFP

# War-linked power crunch pushes Sri Lanka to 4-day week

Amal Jayasinghe

COLOMBO – Millions of Sri Lankans enjoyed a government-ordered extra day off yesterday as the island nation battles an energy crisis triggered by the Middle East war.

Rail and bus stations were largely deserted as most state institutions, schools and universities shifted to a four-day working week.

"I am really enjoying the mid-week break because it is a fully paid holiday," said housing ministry official Prarthana Perera, 40.

Her office, like many government departments in Battaramulla – the capital's main administrative hub – was closed.

Banks operated on shorter hours, while many private firms introduced work-from-home arrangements, industry bodies said, urging members to help curb energy use.

Sri Lanka has already raised fuel prices by a third since the United States and Israel began bombing Iran, triggering retaliatory attacks that have disrupted global energy supplies.

About half of Sri Lanka's electricity is generated by coal and diesel.

The cabinet has set a target of cutting electricity consumption by 25 percent, ordering street lights

switched off and asking civil servants to use table fans instead of power-hungry air conditioners.

Shipping executive Varuna Perera welcomed the day off but was uncertain of its impact.

"It will not be effective in the long term," Perera said. "But the government will have a breather for a couple of weeks, to save some energy."

Environmental lawyer Ravindranath Dabare was more sceptical, arguing the move would have limited impact as those needing government services would have to travel on other days.

"We can't close hospitals... the doctors and health officials can't work from home," Dabare said.

The influential Chamber of Commerce said it had urged members to follow government guidelines or adopt remote work where possible, if "business continuity can be effectively maintained".

And Sri Lanka's leading technology firm WSO2 made working from home mandatory for its 500 employees on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

"This is our way of contributing to the national cause," WSO2 spokeswoman Zaihoon Bin-Ahamed told AFP.

**'Improving productivity'**

Media Minister Nalinda Jayatissa said the government had yet to assess the impact of the energy-saving measures, but expected broad compliance.

Sri Lanka has been running coal and diesel power plants at full capacity to meet electricity demand.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake urged electric vehicle owners not to charge their cars overnight, as they would add a surge to an already strained grid.

He asked motorists instead to plug in during the day, when excess solar power is available.

Officials said the country's diesel stocks are sufficient to last until mid-May, while petrol could last a week longer.

The government is seeking oil supplies from Russia and hopes to tap Iran for crude oil, Jayatissa said.

Political commentator Kusal Perera said the crisis also presented scope to boost productivity across the state sector.

"They must use this opportunity to have a national dialogue on improving productivity," he told AFP. "We have to address the inefficiency in the public sector."

– AFP

## Indian parliament passes bill on transgender rights as activists cry foul

NEWDEHLI – India's parliament yesterday passed a bill that LGBTQ groups warned could roll back key protections for transgender people, including the right to determine their own gender identities.

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill 2026 narrows the legal definition of trans people by emphasising traditional Indian socio-cultural identities such as "hijra" and "aravani", a move critics say risks excluding trans men, trans women and non-binary people.

It also introduces a certification process requiring approval from medical boards and district authorities, with additional hurdles for those undergoing gender-affirming procedures.

Authorities say the changes are meant to streamline implementation

and strengthen safeguards against exploitation and trafficking.

Opposition leaders and rights groups argue the bill runs counter to a landmark 2014 Supreme Court ruling that recognised transgender people's right to self-identify, calling the new provisions a form of "medical gatekeeping".

The bill was debated and cleared by both houses yesterday. It will be sent to the president for assent before it can become law.

Activists have vowed to challenge the legislation in the Supreme Court and to take to the streets.

"This is a country which has a glorious history of allowing people to identify their gender identity... This bill is nothing but trashy colonial legislation," opposition Trinamool Congress MP Saket

Gokhale said during debates.

MP Sanjay Singh, from the opposition Aam Aadmi Party, said the bill will "severely impact the community's self-respect and it needs to be thrown out".

"We cannot let this happen to us, this legislation will be challenged," said Kabir Maan, an educator and a trans man.

India has been seen as a regional leader in legally recognising transgender rights over the past decade, following the court ruling and a 2019 law aimed at protecting the community.

But discrimination, stigma and barriers to healthcare and employment remain widespread, and activists and community members fear the amendments could deepen these challenges by making legal recognition harder to obtain. – AFP

## Afghanistan accuses Pakistan of killing 2 civilians

JALALABAD – Taliban officials said two civilians were killed in attacks by Pakistani forces in eastern Afghanistan on Tuesday and yesterday.

Afghanistan and Pakistan have been fighting for months over claims from Islamabad that Kabul is harbouring extremists behind cross-border attacks on its territory. Afghanistan denies the allegation.

One person died due to artillery fire in Nari district, Ziaur Rahman Spin Ghar, head of the information and culture department in Kunar province, said in a statement.

In Kunar's Sarkani district, Afghan forces attacked Pakistani military posts, he added, while Pakistani forces launched artillery fire and drone strikes, killing one civilian.

Given the inaccessibility of some remote areas in Pakistan and Afghanistan, it is difficult to independently and immediately verify the number of casualties.

Both sides announced a truce over the Eid al-Fitr holiday marking the end of Ramadan, but it ended on Monday evening.

The truce came after a Pakistani strike on a drug rehabilitation

centre in Kabul on March 16 which Afghan authorities said killed more than 400.

The UN assistance mission in Afghanistan on Monday 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.

According to a UN toll, 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. – AFP



Afghans with their cars wait to cross a flooded road after rainfall in Kandahar yesterday.

– AFP

## Iran media casts doubt on US peace plan

TEHRAN – State media in Iran said yesterday that Tehran had rejected a US plan to end fighting, as the head of the United Nations warned that the Middle East war was spiralling out of control.

In a first public acknowledgement of US efforts to discuss peace, state television cited an unidentified official as saying the war would end on Tehran's terms, shortly after Iran said it had fired a volley of cruise missiles at a US aircraft carrier.

"Iran has responded negatively" to the American proposal, the official said, dismissing the reported overture from US President Donald Trump, according to the English-language broadcaster Press TV, in a report picked up by Iran's main news agencies.

"The end of the war will occur when Iran decides it should end, not when Trump envisions its conclusion," the Iranian official said.

Tehran had five conditions for ending the war, he added, including guarantees against future attacks and reparations for war damages.

The rebuttal came after two senior officials in Islamabad told AFP that Pakistan had conveyed to Tehran a 15-point plan proposed by the US to stop the fighting that began on February 28 with a US-Israeli bombing campaign on Iran and sparked retaliatory strikes across the region.

As the human and economic cost of the fighting mounts, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said the war was "out of control".

"The conflict has broken past the limits even leaders thought imaginable," he told reporters. "The world is staring down the barrel of a wider war, a rising tide of human suffering, and a deeper global economic shock. This has gone too far."

On the ground, there was no let-up in the hostilities, with targets in Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan and Saudi Arabia all coming under fire.

Iran's military said its cruise missiles fired at the USS Abraham Lincoln carrier group had "forced



An Iranian woman reads a digital copy of the Javan newspaper on her mobile phone in Tehran yesterday. Iranian newspapers yesterday ridiculed what they called Donald Trump's "lies" about ongoing diplomatic discussions to end the war, publishing cartoons of the US president styled as Pinocchio. – AFP

it to change its position", warning of "powerful strikes" when the "hostile fleet" comes into range.

US ally Israel, meanwhile, said it had struck targets in Tehran as well as a submarine development facility in the central city of Isfahan.

From the Iranian capital, 40-year-old Shayan told AFP: "There is gasoline, water and electricity. But there is a sense of helplessness in all of us. We don't know what to do and there's really nothing we can do."

### Iran sets 5 conditions

Trump has in recent days repeatedly claimed progress in talks with Iran, even as Tehran denied any formal negotiations were taking place.

But there have been increased signs of tentative diplomatic efforts, with mediators in the region saying work was ongoing behind the scenes to relay messages.

"There is hope but it's too early to be optimistic," said a diplomatic

source in the region, who requested anonymity to discuss sensitive issues.

Both sides need to be able to climb down without losing face, the source noted.

According to *The New York Times*, citing anonymous officials, the American 15-point plan touches on Iran's contested nuclear and missile programmes, as well as "maritime routes".

Tehran has largely blocked the vital Strait of Hormuz oil route in retaliation for the US-Israeli attacks, pushing up global energy prices.

The Iranian official quoted by Press TV said Tehran has put forward its own five conditions for hostilities to end.

These include ending "aggression and assassinations" against the country and its leaders, setting up a robust mechanism guaranteeing that neither Israel nor the US will resume the war, as well as compensation for the destruction caused.

Iran's conditions also include a cessation of hostilities on all regional fronts and against all "resistance groups" – an implicit reference to the Tehran-backed Lebanese group Hezbollah.

Tehran also wants international recognition and guarantees of Iran's rights to exercise its sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz.

### 'Our heart is here'

It remains unclear whether Israel is on board with America's diplomatic overture.

While striking targets in Iran yesterday, Israel kept up its campaign against Hezbollah in Lebanon, where Israeli warplanes pounded the southern suburbs of Beirut.

An AFP correspondent saw a street covered in shattered cement and warped metal after the early morning strike, while an apartment building's upper floors appeared damaged.

Lebanon was pulled into the

war when Hezbollah began firing rockets into Israel on March 2 to avenge the killing of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

According to Lebanese authorities, more than 1,000 people have been killed in over three weeks of Israeli strikes and upwards of one million people displaced.

In the southern Lebanese city of Tyre, almost cut off from the rest of the country by bombs, Khalil, a man in his 30s, voiced his defiance.

"They'll have to take us by force," he told AFP.

Despite Israeli ground operations and the spectre of a full-blown invasion, "we don't want to leave our land... our heart is here", said Khalil, sheltering with his young family in a theatre.

### 'Unbelievable price'

Stocks rose and oil prices tumbled on optimism over potential negotiations, but focus remained on the Strait of Hormuz, through which one fifth of the world's oil passes.

Trump told reporters in the Oval Office on Tuesday that Iran had given him "a very big present worth a tremendous amount of money", which he said demonstrated that "we're dealing with the right people".

The US president did not elaborate further but said it was related to the Strait of Hormuz.

Tehran, in a message circulated by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), assured safe passage through the strait to "non-hostile vessels".

However, the IMO also cited a statement from Iran's foreign ministry as saying no passage would be granted to vessels belonging to "the aggressor parties – namely the United States and the Israeli regime".

Hanoi resident Nguyen Van Chi said higher fuel prices meant he had not driven his truck in the past two weeks, instead opting to cycle.

"With this unbelievable price of diesel, I cannot even sell my truck as no one is going to use it," the 54-year-old businessman told AFP.

– AFP

## NATO commander says allies must urgently rethink defence

PARIS – NATO countries urgently need to rethink how they ensure their defence, but many have yet to fully grasp the scale of the challenge, particularly when it comes to boosting weapons production, a top NATO officer said yesterday.

Since Vladimir Putin launched Russia military offensive in Ukraine in February 2022, Russia has put its economy on a war footing and boosted its weapons production.

"Russia has changed," Pierre Vandier, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, told a security and defence forum in Paris.

"We need to be prepared for a new enemy – if we don't, we will experience what the Gulf

experienced," he said, referring to Iran's retaliatory attacks on the Gulf nations after the United States and Israel attacked the Islamic republic on February 28.

Vandier said that NATO should adapt to produce more weapons and faster, urging allies to make "the right choices."

"It's not a question of money. It's a question of speed," he said in English.

He stressed the need for NATO to respond to challenges such as Russia and Iran mass-producing drones, whose capacities were rapidly evolving.

"It's a moment of truth for all of us," Vandier said.

"The question for us is not to do more of the same, it is to see what we

need to do to maintain our security."

He said NATO countries were "not organised" for mass production of weapons, unlike its adversaries.

He said the military bloc was also too slow, with allies taking between two and three years to just "define what we need."

Fabien Mandon, France's chief of the defence staff, has said the country must be ready in the next three or four years for a clash with Russia.

The French Institute of International Relations (IFRI), a top think tank, warned in November that Europe could struggle to quickly produce enough weapons in case of a direct confrontation with Russia.

– AFP

## Netanyahu says Israel expanding 'buffer zone' in Lebanon

JERUSALEM – Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said yesterday that his country's forces were expanding a "buffer zone" in southern Lebanon as the military pressed ahead with its campaign against Hezbollah.

"We have created a genuine security zone preventing any infiltration toward the Galilee and the northern border," Netanyahu said in a video statement.

"We are expanding this zone to push the threat from anti-tank missiles further away and to establish a broader buffer zone."

Netanyahu said that dismantling Hezbollah "remains central" to Israel's objectives in Lebanon.

"It is connected to the broader confrontation with Iran," he said.

"We are determined to profoundly transform the situation in Lebanon," he added.

Lebanon was pulled into the Middle East war when Iran-backed Hezbollah began firing rockets into Israel on March 2 to avenge the killing of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

– AFP

# Oldest dog DNA suggests 16,000 years of human companionship

Frédéric Bourigault

PARIS – The discovery of the oldest ever dog DNA suggests they have been our best friends for nearly 16,000 years – 5,000 years earlier than had previously been thought, new research showed yesterday.

Despite being ubiquitous in the homes, backyards and hearts of people across the world, surprisingly little is known about where dogs come from.

“It’s just an interesting mystery,” Swedish geneticist Pontus Skoglund of the UK’s Francis Crick Institute told reporters.

Dogs are most likely a mix of two types of grey wolves, he said. However, exactly when dogs diverged from wolves has been difficult to trace, partly because

their ancient bones are tricky to tell apart.

That is why scientists behind two new studies published in the journal *Nature* sequenced the genomes from archaeological remains, shedding light on the elusive origins of our furry friends.

The first study revealed that the world’s oldest canine DNA was discovered in a piece of a skull in Pinarbasi in what is now Turkey.

The female puppy, which was perhaps “a few months old”, probably looked like a small wolf when it lived roughly 15,800 years ago, according to study co-author Laurent Frantz of the Ludwig Maximilian University (LMU) of Munich.

Before yesterday, the oldest-known dog DNA was from 10,900

years ago.

Also breaking that record was genetic evidence the team found in southwest England dating back 14,300 years, which illustrated how early dogs had spread across Europe.

Frantz said scientists could not prove exactly what role these dogs had among humans living during the last Ice Age.

“But I think we can assume that they must have played a role because they would have been expensive to feed,” he said.

Perhaps the dogs were used for hunting or protection, he speculated.

Even if these dogs were not treated the same as pets are today, there was likely still a strong bond, he said, adding that “kids will still have played with puppies”.

Another sign of a close relationship was that puppies had been found buried above human graves in Pinarbasi.

## ‘Search for the missing link’

For the other study, a large team of researchers compared the genomes of 216 dog and wolf remains from across Europe.

This allowed them to chart how dogs evolved on the continent.

Starting around 10,000 years ago, there was a huge migration of people from southwest Asia to Europe during what is known as the Neolithic agricultural revolution.

This mass arrival of farmers resulted in human genetic mixing as people from different areas met and had children.

However, this genetic mixing did not happen at the same time with dogs, the researchers were surprised to find.

It seems the hunter-gatherers who had been living in Europe before the farmers arrived had already been keeping dogs.

“Dogs were clearly important to our ancestors, as the first farmers seem to have adopted previous hunter-gatherer dogs into their groups as they moved into Europe,” said study co-author Skoglund.

This suggests that dogs must have been domesticated well before that point.

And there is still a “genetic abyss between dogs and wolves”, Skoglund added.

“The search for the missing link continues.” – AFP

## Skeleton which could be of musketeer d’Artagnan found in Netherlands

AMSTERDAM – A skeleton which could belong to d’Artagnan, the French soldier who inspired the novel *The Three Musketeers*, has been discovered in a church in the Dutch city where he died centuries ago, local media reported yesterday.

The skeleton was found in Maastricht, in the nave of a modern church whose origins date back to at least the 13<sup>th</sup> century, during repairs related to a partial floor collapse in February, reported *L1 Nieuws*, a media outlet in the province of Limburg.

Charles de Batz de Castelmor, known as d’Artagnan, the famous musketeer of King Louis XIII and King Louis XIV, spent his life in the service of the French crown.

The Gascon nobleman inspired Alexandre Dumas’s hero in *The Three Musketeers* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a character now known worldwide thanks to the novel and numerous film adaptations.

D’Artagnan was killed during the siege of Maastricht in 1673. His final resting place has remained a mystery

ever since.

A French coin was found near the skeleton in Maastricht, according to Deacon Jos Valke, who was present during the initial excavation.

“Furthermore, the location of the grave indicates that this was an important person: the skeleton was found where the altar used to be, and only royalty or other important figures were buried under an altar at that time,” he told *L1 Nieuws*.

The skeleton has been removed from the church and is now in an archaeological institute in Deventer in the east of the Netherlands, the outlet reported.

A DNA sample was taken from the skeleton on March 13 and is currently being analysed in a laboratory in Munich, southern Germany.

Archaeologist Wim Dijkman has been searching for d’Artagnan’s remains for 28 years.

“I’m always very cautious, I’m a scientist. But I have high expectations,” he told *L1 Nieuws*.

– AFP

## Rare mountain gorilla twins born in DR Congo: park



This handout photo distributed by the Virunga National Park shows a couple of twin baby mountain gorillas being held by their mother in the Mikeno sector of the park last Thursday. – AFP

KINSHASA – In a rare occurrence in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, twin mountain gorillas were recently born in the Virunga National Park, renowned for its biodiversity but threatened by conflict.

“The twins, believed to be a female and a male, are approximately two weeks old and are being closely monitored by field teams,” the park authorities said Tuesday in a statement.

A similar event was reported in January in the park with the birth of male twins.

Despite the recent events, twin births among gorillas, and particularly the threatened mountain gorilla species, are

considered highly unusual by experts.

“The arrival of twins among gorillas is a special occasion given their rarity,” Tara Stoinski, CEO and chief scientific officer of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, told AFP.

“From our nearly 60-year mountain gorilla database... we know that they occur in less than one percent of births.”

The survival of gorilla twins poses a challenge because “not only must the mother carry two infants, which makes walking more difficult particularly in the first few weeks... they must produce more milk, which is energetically very expensive,” Stoinski explained.

Virunga National Park is the

oldest nature reserve in Africa, inaugurated in 1925, and is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

But intensified conflict in the eastern DRC, where the Rwanda-backed M23 armed group has seized swathes of territory in recent years, poses threats to the site.

Virunga’s forests are also believed to have been used as a hideout by fighters from the ADF militia, which has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State jihadist group.

Globally, the mountain gorilla population is estimated at 1,063 living in the wild, with some 350 gorillas recorded in Virunga in 2021, according to park authorities. – AFP

## France jails ex-cop for raping domestic abuse victim

MELUN, France – A French court yesterday jailed a former police officer for 12 years for raping a woman who came to report domestic abuse.

The court found Jean-Pierre Dagos, 58, guilty of having twice raped the woman in 2023 in the town of Pontault-Combault east of Paris – once after she came to file the complaint, and then a few days later after summoning her back to his office.

The defendant, in custody since 2023, admitted during his trial to having imposed an oral sex act on her, but claimed he had no idea she had not consented.

The woman is from Angola and did

not have residency papers. She told the court she had been terrified, believing the officer was armed and had the power to deport her and force her to leave behind her three French-born children.

An internal police investigator told the court on Monday that women had filed 176 complaints against law enforcement officers in 2023, of which 19 had amounted to at least inappropriate behaviour.

Under French law, rape is “any act of sexual penetration, of whatever nature, or any oral-genital act committed on another person or on the person of the perpetrator through violence, coercion, threat or surprise”. – AFP

## Sánchez says Middle East war 'far worse' than Iraq in 2003

MADRID – Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez warned yesterday that the Middle East war presented a “far worse” scenario than the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

“This is not the same scenario as the illegal war in Iraq. We are facing something far worse. Much worse. With a potential impact that is far broader and far deeper,” he told parliament.

“This time, it’s an absurd and illegal war. A cruel one that sets us back from achieving our economic, social, and environmental goals.”

The Socialist premier has refused Washington’s requests to use Madrid’s military bases against Iran, despite US President Donald Trump’s threat to sever trade with Spain as a result.

Sánchez said the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 had failed to achieve its goals and instead made life worse for ordinary people, saying it led to a sharp increase in fuel and grocery prices, a migration crisis and jihadist attacks in Europe.

He warned that the attacks on Iran could have a similar economic impact for millions.

“Every bomb that falls in the Middle East eventually hits – as we are already seeing – the wallets of our families,” Sánchez said.

His government approved last



Spain's Prime minister Pedro Sánchez addresses parliament over the war in the Middle East at the Congress in Madrid yesterday. – AFP

week a sweeping package worth five billion euros (US\$5.8 billion) aimed at cushioning the economic impact of the Middle East war, which included reductions on taxes on fuel.

“It is not fair that some set the world on fire while others bear the ashes. It is not right that Spaniards and other Europeans should pay out of their own pockets for this illegal war,” Sánchez said.

His Iraq reference may strike a chord with Spanish voters.

Support for that war by the conservative People’s Party (PP) in power at the time which sent troops to Iraq was widely unpopular and

sparked mass protests.

Some analysts say it paved the way for the Socialist Party’s surprise win in March 2004, days after deadly jihadist bombings hit Madrid.

A branch of Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attacks and called for the withdrawal of Spanish forces from Iraq.

A majority of Spaniards, 53.2 percent, back Sánchez’s decision not to let the United States use the Rota naval base and Morón airbase in strikes against Iran, a poll published earlier this month in daily newspaper El País showed. – AFP

## Colombia seeks fossil fuel phase-out coalition amid Middle East crisis

RIO DE JANEIRO – Colombia plans to lead the formation of a global coalition of nations at an international meeting in April that want to end the use of fossil fuels, the country’s Environment Minister Irene Vélez said on Tuesday.

The conference, organized by Colombia and the Netherlands, will come as the world is facing an “extreme energy crisis” due to the war in the Middle East, which has driven up oil prices and sparked fears of a global economic crisis, Vélez said.

Colombia’s goal is to establish a “coalition of those of us who possess the will to eliminate fossil fuels” and are “ready for action,”

she said during an online meeting with journalists organized by the Climate Observatory, a Brazilian network of NGOs.

Vélez said 45 countries had confirmed their attendance at the meeting in the city of Santa Marta on April 28 and 29.

She said attendees would include major hydrocarbon producers from Europe and North America, but did not give further details.

The gathering was organized during last year’s COP30 meeting in Belém, northern Brazil, as interested nations sought to bypass a lack of consensus between around 200 participating nations over the

transition away from fossil fuels, a major driver of greenhouse gas emissions.

Vélez said she hoped that California Governor Gavin Newsom, a Democrat and a leading figure in the opposition to the dismantling of climate policies spearheaded by US President Donald Trump, will attend the conference.

Meanwhile, the Brazilian presidency of COP30 has been developing an international roadmap for phasing out fossil fuels since late 2025.

It is due to be presented next November at the next international climate conference, which will be hosted by Turkey. – AFP

## 13 Mexicans die in ICE raids or custody

MEXICO CITY – Thirteen Mexicans have died in raids by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), in its custody or in events linked to the agency in the past year, Mexico’s government said yesterday.

The report, given by the Mexican foreign ministry in a news conference, comes after ICE dramatically stepped up enforcement operations as part of President Donald Trump’s anti-immigration crackdown.

“We do not agree with these forms of detention,” said Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum. “We ask that human rights be respected.”

Six of the Mexican nationals’ deaths were linked to “medical complications,” and four were classified as suicides, said Roberto Velasco, the foreign ministry’s undersecretary for North American affairs.

Two others died in immigration raids, and one in a shootout at an ICE facility, Velasco said.

Mexico said it had sent 14 diplomatic communiqués in connection with the deaths and received 12 replies.

Washington’s response “is that there will be an investigation,” said Sheinbaum, who called on the United States to ensure the causes of death

were determined with certainty.

The most recent case was that of 19-year-old Royer Pérez Jiménez, who was found dead in a Florida detention centre.

Both ICE and the Mexican government gave the presumed cause of death as suicide.

The US Department of Homeland Security estimates that 11 million unauthorised immigrants were living in the United States as of 2022, with 44 percent of them from neighbouring Mexico.

Last year, at least 30 people died in US migrant detention centres – the largest number since 2004, the year after ICE was created. – AFP

## Bolsonaro to be discharged from hospital tomorrow

BRASÍLIA – Brazil’s former president Jair Bolsonaro is due to be discharged from hospital into house arrest tomorrow, two weeks after he was rushed to intensive care with bronchopneumonia, his doctor said.

Bolsonaro fell ill in prison where he is serving a 27-year sentence for allegedly attempting a botched coup after his 2022 election loss to President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

After more than a week in ICU, the 71-year-old was moved to a regular in-patient room on Monday and is considered “clinically stable,” his cardiologist Brasil Caiado told reporters yesterday.

“We are planning for discharge on Friday,” he said, adding that a chest X-ray had shown significant improvement, with only a residual lesion in the left lung.

Supreme Court justice Alexandre de Moraes on Tuesday granted a request by Bolsonaro’s lawyers to allow him to temporarily serve his sentence at home for a period of 90 days once he is discharged.

After this period the court will re-evaluate whether to extend the house arrest or if the former far-right leader should go back to jail.

Moraes had denied several previous requests for Bolsonaro to move to house arrest on humanitarian grounds.

Bolsonaro had been under house arrest before the official start of his sentence, however

was moved to prison after he took a soldering iron to his ankle monitoring bracelet in what the court saw as an escape attempt.

In his ruling, Moraes said Bolsonaro would be required to wear an electronic monitor and would not be allowed to use a phone or social media to communicate.

He can receive visits from his family, lawyers and doctors.

The clinic said Bolsonaro’s lung infection was the latest illness linked to his 2018 stabbing in the abdomen while campaigning to become president.

The attack has led to numerous operations and other health problems, including persistent hiccups and vomiting.

“Those of us who are deeply familiar with the conditions he has, understand that the home environment is, from a human standpoint, healthier,” said the cardiologist Caiado.

The doctor said that recovery from bronchopneumonia, which includes the risk of scar tissue forming in the lungs during healing, could take between six weeks and six months.

Bolsonaro chose his eldest son Flávio, a 44-year-old senator, as flagbearer for his powerful conservative base in presidential elections in October.

Some opinion polls show a dead heat in a potential run-off election between Flávio Bolsonaro and Lula, 80, who is seeking a fourth term. – AFP



Former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro poses at his fenced property behind in Brasília on September 3, 2025. – AFP

## Morocco says IS suspects held in joint operation with Spain

RABAT – Three suspects affiliated with the Islamic State (IS) group were arrested yesterday in a joint security operation between Morocco and Spain, Moroccan counterterrorism police announced.

The official MAP news agency reported a statement from the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations (BCIJ) in Rabat as saying Moroccan forces arrested two suspects in the northern port city of Tangiers.

The report said that “the head of this terrorist cell” was arrested on the Spanish holiday island of Mallorca.

MAP said that initial findings of the Moroccan investigation showed that the two suspects in custody in the country were “involved in financing and logistical support” for IS jihadists in the Sahel and Somalia.

The agency quoted the BCIJ statement as saying the leader of the cell was “suspected of having planned the execution of a terrorist attack in Spain” as a lone wolf operation.

The BCIJ said Moroccan-Spanish security cooperation resulted in the dismantling of “more than 30 terrorist cells since 2014 in both countries”. – AFP

## Football shorts

### Sevilla turn to Garcia after axing coach Almeyda

Liga strugglers Sevilla on Tuesday appointed Luis Garcia Plaza as manager, the day after firing the Argentinian Matias Almeyda.

Sevilla, who finished 17<sup>th</sup> in La Liga last season, are currently 15<sup>th</sup> in the table but just three points above the relegation zone.

"Sevilla FC have reached an agreement with Madrid-born coach Luis Garcia Plaza," said the club in a statement on Tuesday adding that the new coach "will take charge of the first team to 30 June 2027".

Garcia Plaza, 53, has been out of work since being sacked by Alaves in December 2024 but is stacked with experience having managed 229 Liga matches with Levante, Getafe and Villarreal as well as Alaves.

He has also managed clubs in the United Arab Emirates, China and Saudi Arabia.

Almeyda, who was appointed this season and managed the team in 32 competitive matches, was sacked after a 2-0 defeat to Valencia on Saturday that left Sevilla deep in a relegation battle.

Sevilla have not won a Spanish domestic trophy since a 2010 Copa Del Rey triumph but the club have won the UEFA Cup and its successor the Europa League seven times since 2006. —AFP

### FIFA probe allegations of financial misconduct in Congo

PARIS — FIFA announced yesterday that its ethics committee is investigating officials of the Congo Brazzaville Football Federation (Fecofot) following allegations of financial misconduct.

The federation president, Jean-Guy Blaise Mayolas, its secretary general, Wantete Badji, and its financial director, Raoul Kanda, are suspected of embezzling funds allocated by FIFA.

The three men were found guilty on March 10 of "money laundering, forgery and use of forged documents, and embezzlement" by the Brazzaville criminal court.

Mayolas was sentenced to life imprisonment for misappropriating more than one million euros (US\$1.15 million) in funding from the international governing body. Badji and Kanda received five-year prison sentences.

Fecofot was suspended by FIFA in 2025 for political interference, following the Congolese government's dismissal of Mayolas.

The national team was forced to forfeit two 2026 World Cup qualifiers, against Zambia and Tanzania, before FIFA lifted the suspension. —AFP

## Salah's long goodbye brings curtain down on golden era for Liverpool



LIVERPOOL — Mohamed Salah's long goodbye from Liverpool signals the end of a glorious era and leaves the Premier League giants facing another expensive rebuild.

The Egyptian superstar announced on Tuesday that he would be leaving Anfield at the end of the season after a glittering nine-year spell at the club.

An emotional Salah, 33, expressed his love for Liverpool, where he stands alongside the all-time greats.

"Liverpool is not just a football club. It's a passion, it's a history, it's a spirit. I can't explain in words to anyone not part of this club," he said in a video posted on social media.

Salah, who arrived from Roma in 2017, has scored 255 goals for the Reds, putting him third on their list of leading goalscorers, behind only Ian Rush and Roger Hunt.

He has won two Premier League titles along with a Champions League and other silverware and piled up a remarkable number of personal awards.

But beyond his numbers, Salah was the poster boy of Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool revolution at Anfield, helping fire the German's team back to the summit of English and European football alongside the now departed Sadio Mane and Roberto Firmino.

Salah was again the main man last season under new boss Arne Slot, scoring 29 goals to collect the Premier League Golden Boot award for a record-equalling fourth time as the club romped to a 20<sup>th</sup> English title.

The winger signed a new two-year deal in April, riding a wave of goodwill, after months of speculation over whether he would stay or go.

But serious cracks emerged earlier this season when he said he had been "thrown under the bus" by Liverpool and that his relationship with head coach Slot had broken down after a dramatic dip in form that meant the Egyptian was repeatedly benched.

Soon afterwards he left for the Africa Cup of Nations but he returned



Liverpool's Egyptian striker Mohamed Salah celebrates after scoring their fourth goal during the English Premier League match against Tottenham Hotspur at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London, on December 22, 2024. —AFP

to the Liverpool fold in January, becoming a regular starter again.

Slot tried to draw a line under the incident but Salah did not publicly apologise and speculation over his future never entirely went away.

### Champions League glory

Salah is one of the few survivors from the Liverpool side that won the 2019 Champions League under Klopp, along with goalkeeper Alisson Becker and defenders Virgil van Dijk and Andy Robertson.

The Reds appeared to have engineered a smooth transition when Slot won the Premier League in his first season before splashing out nearly £450 million (US\$600 million) on new players including forwards Hugo Ekitike and Alexander Isak last summer.

But there were also many outgoing, which left the club light on options in various areas, while the impact of the death of Diogo Jota in July has been impossible to gauge.

A lack of depth has been exacerbated by significant injuries, including to Isak, and a collective loss of form in a disastrous title defence.

Salah himself has managed just five goals in the Premier League this season - a paltry return by his stellar standards.

It means Liverpool are braced for another expensive summer

transfer window as they seek to return to the top.

A wide attacking player to replace Salah will be a major priority and the club will look at reinforcements for an ageing defence that includes captain Van Dijk and Robertson, as well as fresh midfield options.

It is unclear though whether Slot will be in place to oversee the rebuild, with uncertainty over the Dutchman's future and continuing speculation linking former Liverpool midfielder Xabi Alonso with the Anfield job.

But Liverpool - and Salah - can still end the season on a high, with quarter-finals to come against Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester City in the Champions League and FA Cup.

They remain fifth in the Premier League table, which would almost certainly bring Champions League football next season, despite a poor recent run.

Salah's own future is uncertain - he has previously been linked with a switch to Saudi Arabia, while other options include Major League Soccer in the United States or a return Italy's Serie A.

But before his departure comes a lengthy and emotional farewell.

"You deserve a send off that reflects your status at LFC - the greatest," Robertson posted on Instagram. "Second to none." —AFP



Wydad Athletic Club's coach John Toshack arrives at the match against the Asec Mimosas club during the 20<sup>th</sup> CAF Champion League in Rabat, Morocco on August 14, 2016.

Liverpool and Wales great John Toshack, who managed Real Madrid and his national team, has been diagnosed with dementia his son announced yesterday. —AFP

## Advantage Arsenal in women's Champions League quarter-final against Chelsea



LONDON — Stina Blackstenius, Chloe Kelly and Alessia Russo were all on target as Arsenal beat Chelsea 3-1 at the Emirates Stadium on Tuesday in the first leg of an all-London women's Champions League quarter-final.

Lauren James pulled a goal back for Chelsea to keep the Blues in the tie but reigning European champions Arsenal will still be well-placed come kick-off in next week's second leg at Stamford Bridge.

"The game was very tight today," Gunners boss Renee Slegers told the BBC.

"We both had our moments. We were clinical and ruthless with our chances. There were different

momentum shifts - they started really well and we stayed in the game.

"It was hard at times. It was tight in individual duels but I'm very pleased with the squad from start to finish and how we managed the game."

The women's Champions League was the one major title that eluded Chelsea during Emma Hayes' trophy-laden 12-year reign and the Blues are still seeking to be crowned queens of Europe for the first time since Sonia Bompastor replaced the now-United States boss in 2024.

Bompastor, a Champions League-winner both as a player and manager with French side Lyon, was left frustrated by the quality of Romanian referee Alina Pescu's decision-

making after Chelsea had two goals disallowed for questionable fouls.

"It was not good enough," said Bompastor.

"When you are playing a quarter-final of the Champions League you need to have the best referees. Especially when you have the VAR.

"I think it's crazy the goals we got disallowed were actually good goals."

### Russo strikes again

Chelsea were twice denied by the woodwork early in Tuesday's tie before Arsenal broke the deadlock in the 22<sup>nd</sup> minute when Sweden striker Blackstenius headed home her first Champions League goal of the season from a Katie McCabe free-kick.

The Gunners doubled their lead

10 minutes later when Beth Mead played a crossfield pass to Kelly, who took a touch before lashing a 20-yard drive underneath another England international in Blues goalkeeper Hannah Hampton.

Chelsea had the ball in the net five minutes before half-time but Veerle Buurman's effort was disallowed for a shove on Laia Codina - a borderline decision upheld by VAR.

Chelsea gave themselves a lifeline when James left fly in the 66<sup>th</sup> minute with a brilliant left-footed curling lob from some 25 yards out.

But Russo restored Arsenal's two-goal advantage 14 minutes from time when, after being played in by Blackstenius, she flicked the ball up and volleyed past Hampton

in fine style.

Russo's eighth goal of the competition cemented her position as the leading scorer in this season's Champions League, with the England forward three ahead of nearest rivals Lineth Beerensteyn, Pernille Harder, Evelyne Viens and Caroline Weir.

Chelsea suffered fresh frustration in stoppage time when Kadeisha Buchanan bundled the ball into the net only to be penalised for a foul on goalkeeper Anneke Borbe.

The sides meet again next Thursday, April 2 with the winner set to meet Wolfsburg or eight-times champions Lyon, with the German side leading 1-0 after the first leg.

—AFP

## NBA team owners approve exploring expansion to Seattle and Las Vegas



Donovan Mitchell of the Cleveland Cavaliers enters the court before the game against the Orlando Magic on Tuesday at Rocket Arena in Cleveland, Ohio.

– AFP

**NEW YORK** - The NBA Board of Governors voted yesterday to authorise the league to explore potential expansion teams for Las Vegas and Seattle that would bring the league to 32 clubs.

The move is the first step in a lengthy process that could lead to a new team in Seattle, where the SuperSonics once played before moving to Oklahoma City, and Las Vegas, which has hosted NBA All-Star events and each year hosts Summer League games involving recruits and free agents.

As part of the process, the NBA engaged investment bank PJT Partners as a strategic adviser to evaluate prospective markets, ownership groups, arena infrastructure and broader economic implications of adding two new teams.

“Today’s vote reflects our board’s interest in exploring potential expansion to Las Vegas and Seattle - two markets with a long history of support for NBA basketball,” NBA commissioner Adam Silver said.

“We look forward to taking this next step and engaging with interested parties.”

It would take approval by 23 of the NBA’s 30 governors to pass

any motion on adding new teams, a move still several steps away.

Team values have skyrocketed in recent years with the price tag for any new club expected to be in the range of US\$7 billion to US\$10 billion.

The Phoenix Suns were sold in 2022 for a then-record NBA sum of US\$4 billion, but the Boston Celtics were sold last year for US\$6.1 billion and the Los Angeles Lakers were sold the same year for US\$10 billion - the highest-ever price paid for a US sports team.

Expectations are for the league to add the new teams, if approved, in the 2028-29 campaign.

The NBA last expanded in 2004 when adding a team in Charlotte, North Carolina.

### Sporting hotbeds

Should Seattle and Las Vegas both land expansion teams, the league would likely place both in the Western Conference and move one current West team into the Eastern Conference, with the Memphis Grizzlies and Minnesota Timberwolves most often mentioned as likely teams to make that shift.

The Seattle SuperSonics joined the NBA in 1967 as an expansion

team and won the city’s only NBA title in 1979. The Sonics made their last NBA Finals in 1996, losing to Michael Jordan’s Chicago Bulls.

Seattle boasted such top players as Spencer Haywood and Gary Payton, and Kevin Durant captured the 2008 NBA Rookie of the Year award in the final season before the team relocated to Oklahoma City, which celebrated a first NBA title in its new home last season.

Las Vegas has been the home of the Women’s NBA Aces since 2018 and that team has taken three of the past four WNBA crowns.

Both cities have seen a boost in sporting fortunes in recent years, each landing a National Hockey League expansion club - the Vegas Golden Knights opening in 2017 and Seattle Kraken starting in 2021 - which have drawn impressive crowds.

Each city has an NFL squad and Las Vegas is scheduled to match Seattle with a Major League Baseball team in 2028 when a new stadium opens for the former Oakland Athletics.

The NFL Raiders moved to Las Vegas from Oakland in 2020 and Vegas also hosts many special sporting events, including a Formula One race.

– AFP

## McEvoy says best is to come after breaking long-standing swim record

### Swimming

**SYDNEY** – Cameron McEvoy said yesterday he can “get faster” after breaking one of swimming’s oldest world records, but the Australian added it was “crazy” that he had received no financial prize for his exploits.

McEvoy, the Olympic and world 50m freestyle champion, clocked 20.88sec at the China Open meet in Shenzhen last Friday to shave 0.03sec off the men’s 50m freestyle world record set by Cesar Cielo 17 years ago in the era of polyurethane bodysuits.

The starting block from which McEvoy launched his jaw-dropping performance has been signed by the Australian and will be preserved in a sports museum in Shenzhen.

McEvoy said the world record fulfilled a childhood dream and he credited his training regime, which focuses on strength rather than hours in the pool, for the breakthrough.

Speaking in his home city of Brisbane, McEvoy said that his “harder pathway” was a “stark contrast” to the US\$1 million bonus promised to swimmers if they break a world record at the inaugural Enhanced

Games in Las Vegas in May.

Athletes at the Enhanced Games will controversially be allowed to dope by using banned drugs and doping agents, including steroids.

“It’s crazy to think that to get a world record without a suit and without any performance-enhancing drugs, as a clean athlete, the bonus is zero dollars,” McEvoy told reporters.

At 31, McEvoy said he had been denied a commercial sponsorship because of his age, but added that his world record had proved swimmers in their 30s could sprint.

McEvoy said his best was yet to come.

“I definitely think I can get faster,” he said.

A big motivation for his record was the presence of his infant son Hartley and wife Maddi watching in Shenzhen last Friday, said the Australian.

“I kind of had to step up to show off to him a little bit, make him proud,” he said.

McEvoy said he was now setting his sights on the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles and even further ahead to his home Games at Brisbane in 2032, when he will be 38.

– AFP

## Sport in brief

### Trailblazer Davidson to referee French Top 14 game

#### Rugby

**PARIS** – Scottish referee Hollie Davidson will become the first woman to officiate a French Top 14 game when she takes charge of Lyon’s trip to Clermont on the weekend of April 18-19, the league announced on Tuesday.

The 33-year-old also made history in this year’s men’s Six Nations, becoming the first women to referee a game in the Championship when she was in the middle for Ireland’s victory over Italy on February 14.

“A page in French rugby’s history books is being written,” the Top 14 said.

In 2025 she was named the World Rugby referee of the year and has already taken charge of games in the United Rugby Championship and the Challenge Cup, including last season’s final.

– AFP

### Li Chenyang breaks China’s national men’s pole vault record

#### Athletics

**SHANGHAI** – Shandong athlete Li Chenyang set a new Chinese national record in the men’s pole vault, clearing 5.86 meters at the fourth leg of the 2026 National Pole Vault Series here yesterday.

The mark improved the previous national record of 5.85m by one centimeter, a height jointly held by Li and Huang Bokai.

Li, who will turn 23 in May, has opened the 2026 season in strong form. He claimed titles in all of the first three stops of the domestic

series and produced a season highlight of 5.82m at the third meet, his second-best career performance. In February, he also secured a silver medal at the Asian Indoor Athletics Championships held in Tianjin.

In February 2025, Li cleared 5.85m at an international meet in France, surpassing the previous record of 5.82m set in 2017 by his coach, Xue Changrui. Later that year, Huang, who finished seventh at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, matched the 5.85m mark in July, leaving the national record jointly held until Li’s latest breakthrough.

– Xinhua

### S Africa seal T20 series win in NZ

#### Cricket

**CHRISTCHURCH** – South Africa completed a 3-2 series win over New Zealand yesterday as Connor Esterhuizen smacked 75 off 33 balls to set up a 33-run victory in the fifth T20 in Christchurch.

Esterhuizen’s knock included five fours and six sixes, and powered South Africa to 187-4 before the tourists restricted New Zealand to 154-8.

Gerald Coetzee, Wiaan Mulder and Otneil Baartman all took two wickets for South Africa. Bevon Jacobs top-scored with 36 for New Zealand, who never threatened to reach their target.

It was Esterhuizen’s second straight half-century of the series. The 24-year-old wicketkeeper made his international debut in the opening match as South Africa sent an experimental tour squad to New Zealand following the T20 World Cup.

– AFP

## India-US consortium buys IPL Royal Challengers Bengaluru for US\$1.7 billion

### Cricket

**BENGALURU** – A consortium of investors, including US asset management giant Blackstone, on Tuesday announced the takeover of Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB), one of the founding clubs of Indian Premier League, for nearly US\$1.8 billion.

The announcement comes just days before the start of the lucrative T20 tournament on Saturday.

The franchise, which won the IPL for the first time last year, was sold by United Spirits Limited, the Indian unit of British alcoholic beverage giant Diageo, for 166.6 billion rupees (US\$1.77 billion).

In a statement, the acquiring

consortium said it was “proud to become custodians of RCB.”

The group includes Bolt Ventures, run by leading sports investor David Blitzer, Indian media conglomerate The Times of India Group, along with Blackstone and Indian corporate giant Aditya Birla Group.

RCB’s “championship-winning culture” and its connection to the southern city of Bengaluru and “one of the most passionate fanbases in world sport make this an extraordinary opportunity.”

“We are committed to taking RCB to new heights, on the pitch and beyond.”

Praveen Someshwar, chief executive at United Spirits Limited,

said the deal was a milestone “as we sharpen focus on our core beverage alcohol business to unlock its true potential with sustained growth.”

The sale announcement came hours after RCB announced it will keep 11 seats at Bengaluru’s M. Chinnaswamy Stadium empty in memory of the fans crushed to death in title celebrations last year.

Eleven supporters, aged between 14 and 29, died in a stampede outside the stadium in June a day after RCB won the final against Punjab Kings and returned to a homecoming trophy parade.

Earlier this year, RCB’s women’s team won their second Women’s Premier League title.

– AFP

# Ex-Google chief Matt Brittin made new BBC director-general

Anna Malpas

LONDON – The BBC named a former Google executive with no television or journalism experience as its next director-general yesterday.

The long-expected appointment of Matt Brittin to the high-profile role comes as the under-fire British broadcaster faces drastic shifts in the media landscape and a US\$10-billion lawsuit brought by US President Donald Trump.

Brittin, 57, said he was honoured to be appointed at a “moment of real risk, yet also real opportunity”.

“Now, more than ever, we need a thriving BBC that works for everyone in a complex, uncertain and fast-changing world,” he added.

The British-born executive was president for over a decade of Google’s Europe, Middle East and Africa division, which earns around a third of its revenue. He had previously worked as a consultant for McKinsey.

Samir Shah, chairman of the BBC board, said Brittin “brings to the BBC deep experience of leading a high-profile and highly-complex organisation through transformation.”

He “is an outstanding leader and has the skills needed to navigate the organisation through the many changes taking place in the media market,” Shah added.

Brittin’s name had been circulating in the UK media for weeks, after the current director-general, Tim Davie resigned in November over the editing of a documentary about Trump.

The Times wrote that appointing a tech executive with no broadcasting experience “has raised some eyebrows”.

“While his experience in the world of big tech could be an advantage, Mr Brittin will have to quickly demonstrate a commitment to public service broadcasting,” opposition lawmaker Caroline Dinenage told the daily.

A columnist at the right-wing Daily Telegraph wrote that Brittin was “just what the BBC doesn’t need: a new Lefty boss”.

Davie, who has held the BBC post since 2020, will step down on April 2, and Brittin will take on the challenging role on May 18.

The BBC had described it as one of “the most important, high-profile public posts in the UK”.

Brittin stepped down from Google last year after 18 years saying he wanted a break.

## ‘Dr Who’ fan

Last year he became a fellow of the Royal Television Society, which hands out prestigious awards.

In his acceptance speech he admitted to “imposter syndrome”.

He voiced admiration for the British television industry he had “been trying to get into for a very long time”, saying his favourite shows included cult BBC sci-fi series “Doctor Who”.

Brittin updated his LinkedIn profile yesterday after the appointment was announced, saying “Got a job” and “Gap year: completed”.

He grew up in southern England and was educated at the University of Cambridge, but

he has said his late father grew up in a small shop in London with “BBC wireless [radio] for news and entertainment”.

He represented Great Britain at the Olympics as a rower after competing in the university Boat Race against Oxford as a student.

Early in his career he worked at Trinity Mirror newspaper group, now called Reach, in non-journalistic roles.

Last year he was made a CBE (Commander of the Order of the British Empire) for services to technology and digital skills.

## ‘Under pressure’

The BBC said earlier this month it had formally asked a US federal court in Florida to dismiss Trump’s lawsuit over the editing of a speech he gave to supporters ahead of the US Capitol riot in 2021 in a BBC documentary.

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

Brittin takes up the job at a politically sensitive time for the BBC, which is due to renegotiate the Royal Charter that outlines the corporation’s governance. Its current charter will end next year.

A sizeable proportion of the BBC’s income comes from the licence fee, which is payable by all UK households with a television, or whose occupants watch live screening online.

But the BBC lost more than £1.1 billion (US\$1.47 billion) in revenues last year as

fewer homes felt the need to apply for one, a parliamentary committee report said in November.

It also found that while the BBC remained “a trusted institution”, it was “under pressure” struggling to retain its foothold in an evolving media landscape and among younger people.

– AFP



November 7, 2018 file photo showing Matt Brittin, then president of Google’s EMEA Business & Operations on Centre Stage during day two of the Web Summit 2018 at Lisbon’s Altice Arena, Portugal. – Photo courtesy of Stephen McCarthy/ Web Summit/Wikipedia Commons

# BTS concert drew 18.4 million viewers: Netflix

SEOUL – The comeback concert by K-pop megastars BTS drew an estimated 18.4 million viewers worldwide, streaming giant Netflix said yesterday.

The seven-member group took to the stage together for the first time on Saturday following a years-long hiatus prompted by mandatory military service, and a day after releasing their latest studio album, “ARIRANG”.

The comeback concert was held against the backdrop of the historic Gyeongbokgung Palace – fitting for the “Kings of K-pop”.

Netflix said its livestream of

the show on Saturday “drew 18.4 million global viewers... proving the group’s influence has only intensified during their time apart”.

The live broadcast from Seoul’s Gwanghwamun Square reached Netflix’s weekly Top 10 in 80 countries and secured the number one spot in 24 countries, it said.

The event marked Netflix’s first live event in South Korea, as well as its first instance of live-streaming a music performance on a global scale.

Netflix added that its estimates were derived from so-called first-party data.

During the performance, they sang “Body to Body,” a track from the new album that incorporates a choral sample of the traditional Korean folk song Arirang, after which the album is named.

The folk song, about longing and separation, is often dubbed South Korea’s unofficial national anthem.

Fans waved a sea of glowsticks and sang along to the group’s hits, holding their phones aloft to film the performance as giant screens set up across the venue allowed the crowd to watch.

It drew more than 100,000 fans

to central Seoul, according to the group’s label.

The figure includes ticket holders and factors in data from the three major telecom carriers, budget mobile users and foreign visitors.

According to the Seoul metropolitan government’s crowd-tracking system, an estimated 40,000 to 50,000 people were in the area that night, a city official said.

Local reports said the figures vary as Seoul’s crowd-tracking system relies largely on mobile base station connections and does not capture signals from foreign visitors.

The group’s label, citing streaming platform Spotify, said “SWIM,” the title track of its latest album, topped the Daily Top Songs Global chart for three straight days from March 20 to 22, while “Body to Body” held at No. 2 over the

same period.

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

The latest album, “ARIRANG”, released on Friday, is billed as reflecting the maturing boy band’s Korean identity.

It sold nearly four million copies on its first day, according to the label.

Following Saturday’s concert, the superstars will embark on their “ARIRANG” world tour, beginning on April 9 in Goyang, South Korea.

The 2026–27 tour spans 82 concerts across 34 cities in Asia, North America, Europe and Latin America.

Tickets for shows in South Korea, North America and Europe sold out within hours.

– AFP



Fans watch the comeback concert of K-pop boy group BTS on a screen at the venue in Seoul on Saturday.

– AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
☀️ Beijing 11°C~26°C	☀️ Manila 22°C~33°C	☁️ New York 14°C~21°C	☀️ Lisbon 10°C~22°C
☁️ Shanghai 11°C~18°C	☀️ Bangkok 26°C~36°C	☁️ London 4°C~10°C	☀️ Rio de Janeiro 22°C~31°C
☔️ Hong Kong 20°C~24°C	☔️ Tokyo 9°C~14°C	☔️ Frankfurt -2°C~9°C	☔️ Luanda 25°C~29°C
☀️ Taipei 19°C~26°C	☔️ Singapore 24°C~34°C	☔️ Vancouver 4°C~9°C	☀️ Maputo 23°C~33°C
☔️ Guangzhou 19°C~29°C	☔️ Kuala Lumpur 24°C~36°C	☁️ Paris 1°C~10°C	☔️ Dili 23°C~31°C
☁️ Nanjing 11°C~20°C	☔️ Jakarta 23°C~31°C	☁️ Moscow -1°C~11°C	☁️ São Tomé 27°C~32°C
☔️ Guilin 16°C~26°C	☀️ Seoul 7°C~21°C	☀️ Las Vegas 18°C~34°C	☀️ Praia 18°C~27°C
☁️ Xi’an 8°C~21°C	☔️ Sydney 16°C~29°C	☁️ Monte Carlo 7°C~16°C	☀️ Bissau 19°C~35°C



### World of colour

A dog runs near the installation "Colirs" by Cameroonian artist Pascale Marthine Tayouat, in the CityLife Shopping District in Milan, Italy yesterday. - AFP



### Tranquillity and beauty

Tulips bloom in the Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden in Srinagar, India yesterday. - AFP



### Shopping for lunch

A Buddhist nun, or thilashin, holds her pet macaque at a wholesale banana market in Yangon, Myanmar yesterday. - AFP



### Ballet costume

People look at the artwork "Costume pour Le Bourgeois gentilhomme" (Costume for the Would-Be Gentleman) at the Louvre-Lens Museum as part of the exhibition "Par-delà les Mille et une nuits" (Beyond the Arabian Nights : Histories of Orientalism) during a press preview in Lens, northern France, on Tuesday. Running from yesterday to July 20, 2026, the exhibition features a remarkable collection from the Department of Islamic Art at the Louvre Museum with nearly 300 masterpieces seen together for the first time. - AFP



### Birthday cards

A temple worker attaches name cards with wishes of Buddhist followers to lotus lanterns installed for upcoming celebrations of Buddha's birthday at Jogyesa Temple in Seoul yesterday. - AFP

### Starry, starry night

This stitched photo taken on Monday shows the Milky Way and the aurora over Jiayin County in Heilongjiang Province. - Xinhua

