

# 99 pct of local students use AI chatbots: survey

Armando Neves

The Macau General Union of Neighbourhood Associations (UGAMM), aka Kai Fong, hosted yesterday a conference about the findings of its survey showing that 99 percent of Macau students use AI chatbots.

The conference was held at the group's headquarters in Toi San. The survey titled "Macau Non-Tertiary Students' Cognition and Behaviour in Using Generative AI".

The survey was conducted between December last year and March this year, collecting 5,971 valid questionnaires from 18 local schools. Respondents were aged between 10 and 19. The survey aimed to understand the latest trends in students' use of AI.

The findings show that the frequency of AI use among students increases significantly with grade level, with over 30 percent of secondary school students using AI five days a week or more, as AI is becoming an increasingly preferred

source of assistance for students; among senior secondary students, AI has even surpassed teachers as a priority for seeking help, reflecting a growing dependence on AI.

The findings also show that nearly 20 percent of students have sought emotional support or interpersonal advice from AI, primarily due to its characteristics of "low social cost" and "high privacy"; furthermore, some students even regard AI as a friend or a "virtual social worker".

The Kai Fong research team expressed concern during the conference that if students become overly immersed in virtual companionship over the long term, they might mistake fictional content for reality, thereby delaying their access to professional assistance.

## 5 key recommendations

The research team put forward five key recommendations during the conference.

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Members of the Macau General Union of Neighbourhood Associations (Kai Fong) survey research team (from right to left) Hoi Tin Iek, Sam Keng Wan and Chan Ka Ian present the findings of their survey to a conference at the Kai Fong headquarters in Toi San district yesterday. – Photo: Armando Neves



This aerial drone photo taken on Wednesday shows the photovoltaic panels at the low-carbon demonstration zone of Lamadian Oilfield in Daqing, Heilongjiang Province. As an important energy production base in China, Daqing Oilfield has been exploring new pathways for green transformation and development in recent years. While maintaining stable production of traditional energy, it has actively promoted the construction of photovoltaic, wind power and geothermal energy projects.

– Xinhua

## US cannot meet Iran war-induced LNG shortfall: industry leaders

HOUSTON – Business leaders are warning that the United States lacks the infrastructure to alleviate a global liquefied natural gas (LNG) shortage caused by the US-Israel war on Iran, which has kept a fifth of the world's energy supplies from leaving the Gulf.

US President Donald Trump's commitment to fossil fuels has been typified by his "Drill, baby, drill" mantra and policies that have sidelined renewable energy.

At the CERAWeek energy conference in Houston this week, however, energy leaders said the US LNG industry has the reserves but not the capacity to quickly expand production.

"We will not be able to make that volume up," said Charles Reidl, chief of the Center for Liquefied Natural Gas (CLNG),

which represents several US giants in the sector.

"It's not that we don't have the resources to do it," he told AFP at CERAWeek, dubbed the "Davos of energy," which runs to today in Houston. "We don't have the infrastructure to provide it."

In response to US-Israeli strikes launched on February 28, Iran has virtually blocked the Strait of Hormuz, through which nearly 20 percent of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas flows.

Qatar, the world's second-largest LNG producer, has seen exports hit a brick wall due to the blockade, with Iran also carrying out strikes on its energy facilities.

That has turned attention to the United States, which in recent years has become the world's leading LNG exporter.

Since 2016, the United States has ramped up LNG production and its exports have increased 30-fold, according to the US Energy Information Administration.

Eight LNG export terminals are in operation, eight are under construction and nine more projects have been approved, according to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

Reidl said facilities were running hard, "at about 135 percent" of their usual capacity.

Still, "we have not reached a level of maturity in the US LNG space that we have extra supply available."

The crisis is causing concern in Europe – the leading market for US LNG – that it may not be able to build up gas reserves for next winter, or may have to do so at extremely high prices. (More on pages 7-10 & 13) – AFP

### Sam, Hainan CPC Secretary Feng vow to strengthen ties

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai, who attended the plenary session of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2026 yesterday morning, met with CPC Hainan Provincial Committee Secretary Feng Fei on Wednesday night. – Story on p. 6

### UN designates African slave trade as 'gravest crime against humanity'

The UN General Assembly on Wednesday designated the transatlantic African slave trade as "the gravest crime against humanity," despite opposition by the United States and some European countries. – Story on p. 11

### Portuguese drivers cross into Spain for cheaper fuel

At a gas station near the southern Spanish city of Huelva, close to the Portuguese border, cars pull in one after another on the weekend under the midday sun. Among them are many vehicles with Portuguese license plates. – Story on p. 12

# Melco hosts skateboarding workshops for kids

Kristina Vallesteros

Melco Resorts & Entertainment has hosted a series of skateboarding workshops for local kids, marking the second consecutive year of the initiative, according to a statement yesterday.

The workshops took place on March 14 and 15 at the Studio City Sk8te Park, coinciding with the “2026 FISE: Battle of the Champions•Macau” event and the “SONDAY SkateFest powered by adidas Skateboarding” competition held at the venue.

The statement by the integrated resort operator said that over 50 beneficiaries participated in the sessions, including children aged 5 to 12 from the Mong Ha Children & Youth Home and Macau Special Olympics (MSO), as well as Melco parent-child participants. Each session included skateboarding instruction led by professional skateboarders, a DIY graffiti workshop, mini games, and complimentary tickets to the FISE skateboarding competition.

According to the statement, to further engage with the local community, the company also donated event tickets to local students, families, and persons with disabilities through partnerships with several associations, including Macao True Goodwill Friend Association, Fuhong



This undated handout photo provided by Melco Resorts & Entertainment yesterday shows participants in one of the skateboarding activities recently hosted by the integrated resort operator at Studio City Sk8te Park.

Society of Macau, and Macau Autism Association.

Executive Vice President and Chief of Staff to Melco Chairman & CEO Akiko Takahashi was quoted in the statement as saying: “In our commitment to nurturing young talent, we welcome the local community to experience the thrill of skateboarding. Through workshops and a world-class competition, we aim to provide a stimulating environment that

encourages youth to pursue their passions and unlock their full potential, whilst also promoting the diversified development of Macau through the experience of wide-reaching sporting and cultural offerings.”

A parent-child participant from Macau Special Olympics expressed gratitude for the experience, noting that the workshops helped showcase skateboarding as a more mainstream activity, according to the statement. ■

# 99 pct of local students use AI chatbots: survey

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**First** is to strengthen risk education and AI literacy. They suggested that while the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) promote technology education, it should also consider incorporating “AI safety and ethics” as a mandatory subject to help students develop a clear awareness of digital risks.

**Second** is for civil society to pay attention to the potential risks of young people seeking emotional support from AI. The research team expressed concern that if students become overly immersed in AI’s virtual companionship over the long term, they may mistake fictional content for reality, potentially delaying their access to professional assistance. The team recommended conducting a long-term follow-up study and maintaining ongoing attention to the phenomenon of “AI emotional companionship.”

**Third**, the team recommended that efforts focus on enhancing students’ “higher-order thinking skills” to counter the risk of “cognitive outsourcing”\*\*, adding the goal is to guide students in learning how to collaborate effectively with AI rather than relying on it blindly.

**Fourth**, the team calls on parents

to be mindful of the evolving nature of parenting in the age of AI. By fostering authentic and meaningful emotional connections, parents can guide their children to benefit from technological conveniences while still maintaining the ability to engage in genuine interpersonal interactions.

**Fifth**, the team recommended that the Health Bureau (SSM) collaborate with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to implement measures aimed at equipping young people with foundational knowledge of mental health. These efforts would help address the physical and emotional developmental needs of adolescents growing up in the AI era. ■

\*Higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) are cognitive processes that go beyond basic recall or simple comprehension of facts. They involve complex, reflective, and analytical mental activities used to understand, evaluate, and create new knowledge or solve novel problems. – Poe

\*\*Cognitive outsourcing refers to contracting out tasks that require mental processes – thinking, decision-making, analysis, creativity, or judgment – to external people, teams, or even systems rather than handling them in-house. – Poe

# Health Bureau finds cluster of flu-like illness at school

Kristina Vallesteros

The Health Bureau (SSM) announced in a statement last night a cluster of influenza-like illness detected at a local school.

The cluster involves six students (three male, three female) from Class P5D at Saint Paul School on Rampa dos Cavaleiros, the statement said.

The affected students began developing symptoms including fever and cough on March 19. Some have sought medical attention, and all cases are reported to be mild with no severe complications. Testing confirmed that two of the patients tested positive for Influenza B.

The bureau reminded the public that January to March is the peak influenza season in Macau. The 2025–26 seasonal influenza

vaccine, which provides protection against both Influenza A and B, remains the most effective measure for preventing flu-related severe illness and death. Residents who have not been vaccinated since September last year are advised to do so.

The bureau also urged the public to take additional preventive measures. These include receiving seasonal influenza and updated COVID-19 vaccinations, ensuring adequate rest and a balanced diet, maintaining good personal and hand hygiene, covering mouth when coughing and sneezing with a tissue or elbow, and avoiding crowded places. Those experiencing symptoms are advised to wear a mask, seek medical attention promptly, and rest at home. ■

# Pier accident kills local lorry driver

Khalel Vallo

The Fire Services Bureau (CB) reported receiving a call about a person who was injured in an apparent work-related accident at the No.5 pier in the Inner Harbour area.

According to preliminary information by the bureau, a 70-year-old local man was found unconscious with injuries to the forehead and knee, and no sign of breathing or heartbeat at the scene. He was rushed to hospital for emergency treatment.

The Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) said in a statement yesterday that a local lorry driver died after being struck by cargo during lifting operations at a pier in the Inner Harbour yesterday, prompting the bureau to launch an investigation and order the immediate suspension of related work at the site.

According to statement, the accident occurred yesterday morning, when the victim was hit by cargo being hoisted at a pier on Rua de Almirante Sérgio. The man sustained a head injury and was taken to the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre for emergency treatment, where he was pronounced dead upon arrival.

The bureau expressed deep condolences to the victim’s family and said it would provide appropriate support and assistance, the statement said, adding that it



This handout photo provided by the Labour Affairs Bureau (DSAL) yesterday shows personnel dispatched by the bureau to the scene to assess the situation after the accident earlier that day.

immediately dispatched officials to the scene to investigate the circumstances of the incident.

According to the statement, the exact cause of the accident remains under investigation. If the case is confirmed as a work-related accident, DSAL will assist the victim’s family in following up on workers’ compensation procedures.

In order to ensure workplace safety, the bureau has issued a suspension order to halt relevant operations at the site with immediate effect. Work may only resume after occupational safety conditions are improved and approved by DSAL.

The authorities also urged employers to strengthen supervision, provide proper guidance to workers, and strictly comply with safety regulations and procedures to prevent similar incidents, the statement said.

The statement pointed out that the bureau reiterated the importance of lifting operation safety, noting that it regularly conducts training courses on crane operations and occupational safety, as well as seminars and educational outreach. The bureau urged the industry to remain vigilant and prioritise workplace safety to avoid further tragedies, the statement said. ■

## Published since Aug 2004

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- Wire services – AFP, Xinhua
- Chatbots: Poe, DeepSeek



## Macau Weather

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FORCE 2 TO 3 SOUTH TO SOUTHEASTERLY WINDS.

RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 65% AND 95%.



22°C~28°C

Source: SMG

## Macau eco-fair 2026MIECF opens, officials stress green transformation, global cooperation

**Khalel Vallo**

The 2026 Macao International Environmental Co-operation Forum & Exhibition (2026MIECF) kicked off yesterday, with senior officials highlighting the importance of green transformation, low-carbon development, and international collaboration in advancing sustainable growth.

Hosted by the local government, the three-day event is being held at The Venetian Macao's Cotai Expo under the theme "Low-Carbon, Zero-Waste Cities: Embarking on Global Collaboration".

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Secretary for Economy and Finance Anton Tai Kin Ip said the event reflects both national and global priorities in addressing environmental challenges. He noted that the nation's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan emphasises accelerating green transformation, while Macau will align its own policies with national strategies, including its long-term decarbonisation goals and upcoming environmental protection plan for 2026–2030.

Tai added that the forum serves as a key platform for regional and international exchange, promoting waste reduction, resource utilisation, and industrial upgrading. He highlighted new features such as the "Zero-Waste Circular Economy Exhibition Zone", as well as the participation of global energy enterprises showcasing innovative solutions to support sustainable development.

Representing the Ministry of Ecology and Environment in Beijing, Zhao Yingmin said the forum's theme of low-carbon and zero-waste cities reflects the shared global direction towards green development. He

noted that the nation has made progress in reducing pollution, improving ecological conditions, and expanding green industries, while continuing to contribute to global climate governance and international cooperation. He added that Macau plays an important role in the nation's modernisation and international engagement, and called for deeper collaboration in green development, particularly within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) and through global partnerships.

Also addressing the ceremony, Director-General of the Department of Energy Conservation and Comprehensive Utilisation at the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) Wang Peng emphasised the role of industry in driving green transformation. He said that China will continue to promote renewable energy, green manufacturing, and resource recycling systems, while strengthening technological innovation and industrial upgrading to support sustainable economic growth. Wang added that advancing green and low-carbon industries requires joint efforts across sectors, with cooperation in technology, finance, and human resources essential to building a more sustainable future.

The three-day event has brought together government officials, industry leaders, and experts to explore environmental technologies and cooperation opportunities. Through forums, exhibitions, and business matching sessions, the 2026MIECF aims to strengthen Macau's role as a regional platform for green development and support the transition towards low-carbon, zero-waste cities. ■

## Toddlers' emotional education pilot to be launched at 2 crèches midyear: IAS chief



**Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) President Wilson Hon Wai speaks to reporters at the Macau General Union of Neighbourhood Associations' (Kai Fong) headquarters in Toi San district yesterday.**

**Armando Neves**

Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) President Wilson Hon Wai told reporters at the headquarters of the Macau General Union of Neighbourhood Associations (UGAMM), colloquially known as Kai Fong, in Toi San district yesterday that its toddlers' emotional education pilot scheme will be launched at two nurseries in the middle of the year.

Hon said that the teaching materials have been designed in collaboration with the University of Macau (UM), after the trial run's validation the materials will be rolled out for use in crèches across Macau.

Hon stressed that the period until the age of 3 is a crucial stage in which infants and toddlers\* learn to express their feelings and emotions through language, which is highly important for future emotional management.

He pointed out that the bureau began planning relevant emotional education initiatives for very young children last year, including training for nursery staff, adding that a four-themed lecture has been arranged for parents, enabling them to take on the role of coaches in supporting their children's emotional development.

Meanwhile, Hon also said that the "Survey and Registration of Isolated Elderly and Families of Two" has collected over 30,000 questionnaires. The data is currently being integrated with geographic



**Kai Fong President John Chan Ka Leong delivers a speech during yesterday's opening ceremony at the group's headquarters.**

– Photos: Armando Neves

mapping to obtain a more precise distribution of elderly residents across different districts, Hon said.

Hon also said that his bureau's 10-year plan for rehabilitation services will incorporate smart technology. Considerations will include aspects such as facility management, occupational safety and health for facility staff, and home arrangements, Hon said, adding that technology products designed to ensure home safety will also be included in the procurement list.

### 2-day seminar focuses on smart technology and mental health

Meanwhile, Kai Fong hosted a launch ceremony about its 2-day seminar titled "2026 Asia-Pacific Youth Conference—Integration and Innovation of Smart Technology and Mental Health" at the group's headquarters in Toi Son district yesterday.

Kai Fong President John Chan Ka Leong said in a speech that the seminar has invited experts from the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore and other regions to discuss "integration and innovation of intelligent technology and mental health".

Chan expressed hope that the seminar will be able to respond to the demands of the new era and promote youth services to keep pace with the times.

Chan pointed out that the rapid development of AI and intelligent

technology has brought opportunities and challenges to teenagers' growth and social services.

The popularisation of technology has reshaped teenagers' learning modes, knowledge acquisitions and mental health support systems, Chan said. However, he warned that problems such as Internet addiction, information overload and online bullying are also increasingly prominent.

Chan highlighted that the seminar also aims to explore how to guide teenagers from passive "users" to active "good users" and "creators", prevent excessive dependence on intelligent technology and transform AI into a tool to promote academic progress, career planning and mental health support.

The seminar, which ends today, features a combination of online and offline keynote speeches, along with roundtable discussions and breakout sessions\*\*. It also includes an organised visit to social service organisations. ■

\*"Toddler" typically refers to a child aged about 1 to 3 years. Infants' age range typically runs from birth to 12 months. – Poe

\*\*"Breakout sessions" are small-group meetings or activities that take place within a larger event (conference, workshop, training, or class). They allow participants to focus on specific topics, engage in discussion, practice skills, or work collaboratively in a more intimate setting than the plenary session.



**Secretary for Economy and Finance Anton Tai Kin Ip (left) and representative of the Ministry of Ecology and Environment Zhao Yingmin address yesterday's 2026 Macao International Environmental Co-operation Forum & Exhibition (2026MIECF) opening ceremony at the Sicily Ballroom of The Venetian Macao's Cotai Expo.**

– Photos: Khalel Vallo

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

-Photos: Rui Pastorin



## 10 Fantasia exhibition by youngsters fuses science, creativity

**Rui Pastorin**

For a little over two weeks, a science popularisation exhibition was held on the second floor of the 10 Fantasia Gallery that showcased the works of youngsters ranging from kindergarteners to secondary school students from Colégio Diocesano de São José (CDSJ), being held as part of the celebrations of the school's 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

While the exhibition ended on Wednesday, the *Post* was still able to visit the event titled "Science Popularisation and Cultural Creativity Exhibition", yesterday afternoon at the gallery near Calçada da Igreja de S. Lázaro (瘋堂斜巷).

The exhibition had featured a variety of exhibits created over the years that feature both the application of scientific knowledge and creativity, two points that were highlighted through the works as going hand in hand.

Among the student-made exhibits displayed at the venue located on the second floor of the gallery were experiments, installations and multimedia projects. These include the application of different models, new technology, the understanding of reflections, light and shadow, as well as 3D modelling, just to name a few.

According to a recent statement by the gallery on its Facebook page, each exhibit embodied students' "diligent efforts, accumulated knowledge, and creative passion –

a genuine reflection of their holistic competence", pointing out that both science and creativity both complement each other.

Moreover, the statement said that throughout the exhibition's run, it was hoped that visitors ranging from parents and students to partners and other members of the public could exchange ideas and spark new ones, all being aimed towards jointly exploring the "limitless possibilities of education and aesthetic cultivation". Igniting public interest in science was also among the goals hoped to be achieved, a separate statement on the CDSJ Facebook page highlighted.

Aside from the exhibition, the statement said that a teacher-led student creative market had also been held during the exhibition opening earlier this month. It sold products designed by both teachers and students.

While the exhibition is over, there are several others being held across the gallery's different sections. One can visit the venue from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. from Tuesdays to Sundays. It is closed on Mondays.

*\*CDSJ was founded in 1931. It is affiliated with the Catholic Diocese of Macau and comprises Chinese and English sections. It offers education ranging from kindergarten through secondary school, according to the statement by the organisers.*



# UTM marks all-time high in QS World University Rankings

## 2 MPU subjects make rankings for 1<sup>st</sup> time

Rui Pastorin

The Macao University of Tourism (UTM) achieved the 10<sup>th</sup> position globally, 1<sup>st</sup> in Asia and 1<sup>st</sup> in Macau in the QS [Quacquarelli Symonds] World University Rankings by Subject 2026 for hospitality and leisure management, garnering an “all-time high total score” in the area where over 1,500 global institutions were evaluated, the public university said in a Wednesday statement.

The statement said that the rankings rate

universities worldwide by individual topic areas, with academic reputation, employer reputation, and citations per paper among the factors considered.

UTM shows steady growth in the rankings’ “academic reputation” indicator and a continuous rise in “employer reputation”. This reflects its graduates’ strong competitiveness and industry recognition, according to the statement.

UTM added in the statement that it is expanding its international cooperation

network through various initiatives. The public university also noted in the statement that it will “remain committed to improving the quality of its education and fostering the next generation of professionals”.

### 2 MPU subjects make rankings for 1<sup>st</sup> time

Meanwhile, two disciplines from the public Macao Polytechnic University (MPU) were placed in the rankings for the first time, with “Linguistics” in the 301–350 band, and “Computer Science and Information Systems” in the 451–500 band.

MPU Rector Professor Marcus Im Sio Kei said, as summarised by the statement, that guided by its “AI+” strategy, MPU promotes “synergistic innovation across key interdisciplinary areas, including machine translation, smart wellness and care, drug discovery, and sports technology, while accelerating the translation of research outcomes into practical applications”.

Marcus Im, as summarised by the statement, highlighted that the university continues to leverage its “distinctive Sino-Lusophone characteristics to deepen international collaboration and support Macau’s role as a high-level gateway for educational openness”. ■



This poster provided by the Macao University of Tourism (UTM) yesterday shows its recent accolades from the QS World University Rankings by Subject 2026.



This photo provided by the Macao Polytechnic University (MPU) shows its campus on Rua de Luís Gonzaga Gomes (高美士街).

# Police nab man for defrauding 255,000 patacas

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) have nabbed a man from the Chinese mainland for defrauding 255,000 patacas, PJ spokesman said during a special press conference yesterday.

Ho identified the suspect as a 31-year-old man surnamed Du, who claimed to be a car salesman.

According to Ho, on November 25 the victim met Du in the mainland, where the latter showed her a WeChat account purporting to have a balance of over 1.8 million yuan (2.1 million patacas) in savings, leading the victim to trust Du’s financial standing.

On November 29, Ho said, Du invited the victim to Macau to gamble and subsequently took her to two casinos in Zape to teach her “gambling techniques”.

While gambling, Du, under the pretext of borrowing money for gambling, requested funds from the victim and again displayed his

WeChat account balance to gain her trust. Believing Du to be genuine, the victim handed over a total of 67,000 yuan and HK\$172,000 to him, most of which he promptly gambled away.

Afterwards, Ho said that Du delayed repayment, citing purporting limits on the WeChat account, and promised to return the money upon arriving back at the mainland, adding that Du later blocked the victim and cut off contact.

The victim reported the case to the police on January 2, having lost a total of around 255,000 patacas.

During the investigation, PJ officers revealed that Du’s WeChat, bank, and Alipay accounts did not contain the purported 1.8 million yuan, nor sufficient funds to repay the victim.

At around 11 p.m. on Tuesday, Du was intercepted while entering Macau through the Barrier Gate checkpoint. The smartphone used in the crime was seized from him. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the hooded fraud suspect from the Chinese mainland to a PJ van outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday.

— Photo: Armindo Neves

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鳴謝：澳門浸信中學管弦樂團、澳門浸信中學合唱團、廣州番禺星海合唱團

圖片來源：詹建俊、臧軍。《黃河大合唱——流亡·奮起·抗爭2》。中國美術館，2009。

# Sam, Hainan CPC Secretary Feng vow to strengthen ties

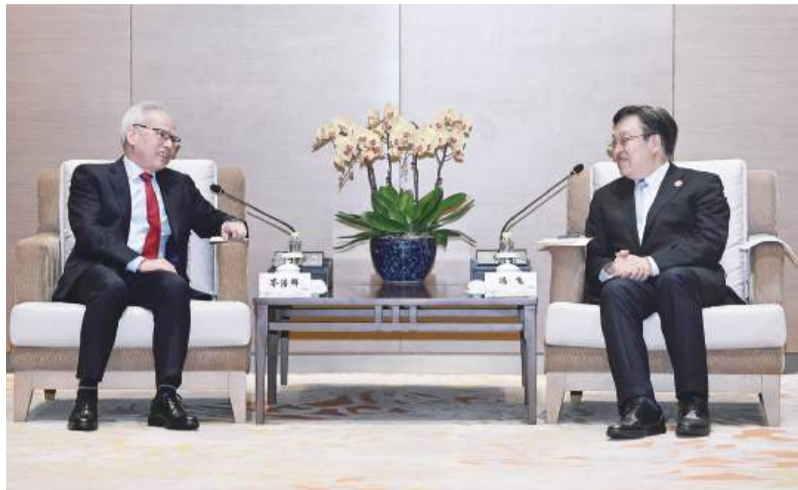
Tony Wong

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai, who travelled to Hainan Province on Wednesday to attend yesterday morning's plenary session of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2026, met with Communist Party of China (CPC) Hainan Provincial Committee Secretary Feng Fei on Wednesday night, according to a statement by the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) yesterday.

The four-day Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2026, which began on Tuesday, ends today. Its plenary session was held yesterday morning, when National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee Chairman Zhao Leji, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, delivered a keynote speech.

During his meeting with Feng on Wednesday night, according to yesterday's GCS statement, Sam said that Macau and Hainan have long maintained strong and constructive interactions, forming a solid foundation for cooperation that continues to deliver tangible results.

Sam said that with the official launch of an island-wide independent customs operation in the Hainan Free Trade Port (FTP) at the end of last year, and the ongoing second-phase development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, Sam said, Macau-Hainan



Communist Party of China (CPC) Hainan Provincial Committee Secretary Feng Fei (right) meets with Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai in Boao, Hainan Province on Wednesday night. — Photos: GCS

cooperation will certainly be provided with unprecedentedly significant development opportunities during the nation's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan period.

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

Sam suggested that both sides should work together to put the spirit of this year's "two sessions" into practice, pursuing win-win cooperation and jointly serving the nation's overall development.

The nation's two sessions refer to the annual sessions of the NPC and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).

According to the statement,

Sam also said that Macau and Hainan are both important gateways for the country's opening up to the outside world. The Hainan Free Trade Port has made notable achievements in institutional innovation, internationalisation, and improvements in the island's business environment, while Macau has fully leveraged the advantages of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle in its commitment to build itself into an important bridge for the nation's high-standard opening up, Sam underlined.

Sam also underlined that his government is proactively aligning with the nation's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, pledging that it will ensure the effective drawing-up and implementation of Macau's third



Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai (centre), Foreign Ministry Commissioner in the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Bian Lixin (left), and Sam's chief-of-cabinet Chan Kak pose for a photo after attending yesterday morning's plenary session of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2026 with the theme "Shaping a Shared Future: New Dynamics, New Opportunities, New Cooperation". Bian joined Sam's delegation to Boao as an adviser.

Five-Year Plan, with an emphasis on improving the mechanisms for Macau to better play its role in the country's opening up to the outside world, building a new regional development landscape enabling Macau to better connecting the Chinese mainland with the rest of the world, playing a better role as the "precise connector" for cooperation between China and Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries, and helping more enterprises from the Chinese mainland to "go global".

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

socioeconomic development plan.

According to the statement, Sam said he expects Macau and Hainan to continue strengthening their coordination and collaboration, deepen their joint efforts, and work together to explore international markets, thereby jointly contributing to the nation's high-standard opening up.

Sam and members of his delegation returned to Macau yesterday after a two-day visit to the island province.

Wednesday night's meeting between Sam and Feng, according to yesterday's statement, was also attended by Hainan Governor Liu Xiaoming and other top officials of the province. ■ — (More on p.7)

## Manila's double-dealing won't work

China Daily Editorial

When the China Coast Guard (CCG) began conducting routine law enforcement training in the jurisdictional waters adjacent to China's Huangyan Island recently, it issued maritime safety information in advance in accordance with the law. Despite that, the Philippines dispatched multiple vessels into the training zone under the pretense of "fishing" with reporters on board broadcasting live.

CCG spokesman Liu Dejun on Wednesday called on the Philippines to immediately cease its provocative actions and smear campaigns, and said that the CCG will continue to carry out its operations in the waters, resolutely safeguarding national territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) also separately expelled Philippine aircraft that had illegally intruded into China's territorial airspace over Huangyan Island and over the waters adjacent to the Meiji Reef of China's Nansha Islands.

The Philippines now finds itself at a crossroads in its relationship with China. On the one hand, it seeks cooperation with Beijing on crucial trade issues such as fertilizer supply amid global shortages caused by the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. On the other hand, it continues to provoke China in the South China Sea, at the behest of external forces. This double-handed approach is not only damaging bilateral relations, but also undermining the

Philippines' credibility.

China has been a responsible neighbor to the Philippines, particularly in times of difficulty. Amid a global shortage of chemical fertilizers, China has assured the Philippines, as well as other regional countries, of continued fertilizer exports, which are a critical need for their agricultural sector. Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, in an interview on Tuesday, thanked China for its timely assistance. "They've been very helpful with fertilizers," he said.

That underscores China's role as a stabilizing force in the region. By providing much-needed resources, China is demonstrating its commitment to supporting its neighbors in times of need, including those that it has maritime disputes with.

However, the Philippines' provocations in the South China Sea contradict the "appreciative" chord Marcos struck. They belie Manila's hypocrisy and risk further escalating tensions in a region already fraught with geopolitical complexities. According to media reports, Japan's Self-Defense Forces will join an upcoming annual US-Philippines military exercise, marking the first time Japanese combat troops land on the Philippines soil since World War II. This suggests an alignment against China in the Asia-Pacific with the Philippines pushed to do the dirty work on the front.

Manila's scheme is shortsighted. By aligning itself with Washington's geopolitical agenda, it risks

undermining regional stability and cooperation, and its losses will far outweigh any fleeting gains. The only reason it has not yet felt the full consequences is that China continues to exercise strategic restraint in the face of its provocations — a reality Marcos is well aware of, yet dares not acknowledge, for fear of being exposed as a speculator attempting to play both sides.

The recent energy crisis should serve as a catalyst for the Philippines to reassess its foreign policy priorities and adopt a more balanced approach. Upholding the principles enshrined in the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and striving for a mutually agreed Code of Conduct in the region represent the sensible path forward. Dialogue and cooperation ought to be the guiding principles of Manila's policy.

The ASEAN-China Senior Officials' Meeting on the DOC in the South China Sea, held in January, highlighted the importance of maintaining dialogue and cooperation to safeguard maritime stability. Manila should heed this consensus and align its actions accordingly, recognizing that its provocations could destabilize the entire region.

Manila cannot expect to reap the benefits of economic cooperation with Beijing while simultaneously undermining China's territorial sovereignty. No country would ever tolerate another country biting its hand when it is trying to help feed it.

— Courtesy of China Daily

## Customs seizes undeclared used electronic products in Inner Harbour worth 4.96 million patacas

Tony Wong

The Macau Customs Service announced in a statement last night that its officers intercepted a shipment of undeclared goods entering Macau at a pier in the Inner Harbour on Friday last week, seizing 2,409 used tablet computers, 651 used laptop computers, 567 used DVD drives, and 3,062 used CD drives, with a total estimated market value of about 4.96 million patacas.

During a routine inspection of piers in the Inner Harbour on Friday last week, the statement said, Macau Customs Service officers spotted someone acting suspiciously while moving goods from a pier and

loading them onto a lorry.

The officers immediately ordered the person concerned to present the relevant customs declaration documents for the goods. Upon examination, the statement said, the officers found that some of the goods loaded onto the lorry had not been declared to the Macau Customs Service.

According to the statement, the Macau Customs Service will fine the logistics company concerned in accordance with the relevant provisions listed in the External Trade Law. The company faces a fine of up to 50,000 patacas, and the seized goods will be confiscated by the customs, the statement noted. ■



This handout photo released by the Macau Customs Service last night shows the seized used electronic products at a pier in the Inner Harbour.

# 25 years on, Boao forum provides reassuring voice amid global instability, uncertainty

## Commentary

BOAO, Hainan – As the humid spring breeze drifts in from the South China Sea, Boao, a tranquil town on China's tropical island of Hainan, once again draws global attention.

The 2026 annual conference of the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) is being held here from March 24 to 27 under the theme "Shaping a Shared Future: New Dynamics, New Opportunities, New Cooperation."

As the world faces increasing geopolitical tensions and rising protectionism, policymakers, business leaders and scholars from across the globe have gathered at the resort town with a shared expectation that "Boao voices" can offer clarity, confidence and consensus at a time of mounting uncertainty.

This year marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the BFA. Zhao Leji, chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, said at Thursday's plenary that the forum has become a prestigious platform for promoting exchanges, collaboration and common development among Asian nations and the wider world.

Only by working together in solidarity can humanity address global risks and challenges and create a better future, Zhao said.

This year, participants have widely viewed Boao as more than an annual gathering. It has become a barometer of Asia's confidence and a venue where ideas for a more inclusive and balanced form of globalization are tested, an indication that even in turbulent times, dialogue and cooperation remain within reach.

## A QUARTER-CENTURY LONG COMMITMENT

Founded in 2001, the BFA is celebrating its silver jubilee at this year's annual conference, underscoring both its symbolic weight and the scale of Asia's transformation.

Over a quarter century ago, few in this once-quiet fishing village at the mouth of the Wanquan River would have imagined it could command the world's attention one day, nor could they foresee a key platform promoting the development of the whole continent rising from their flake yard.

Yet over the past 25 years, Boao has grown into a platform closely intertwined with Asia's rise, serving as both a witness to and participant in the region's transformation.

When the forum was founded, China's GDP stood at roughly 9.59 trillion yuan and was just a newcomer to the World Trade Organization (WTO). Today, the figure has surpassed 140 trillion, with China emerging as a leading advocate of globalization and trade liberalization.

The broader region has followed a similar trajectory, transforming from a fast-moving



**Zhao Leji, chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC), addresses a plenary session of the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) Annual Conference 2026 and delivers a keynote speech in Boao, Hainan Province, yesterday.** – Xinhua

latecomer into a pace-setter in many fields and turning Asia from a participant in global development into one of its central hubs.

Today, Asia is home to the world's largest population, generates roughly half of global GDP, and serves as a key anchor for globalization and free trade.

"Many people believe that the 'Asian Century' has already arrived," BFA Secretary General Zhang Jun said when addressing a press conference.

A BFA report said Asia remains the world's primary growth engine, with its share of global GDP expected to rise to 49.7 percent in 2026 from 49.2 percent in 2025 on a purchasing power parity basis.

The report also noted that Asia continues to be the premier destination globally for foreign direct investment, recognized for its resilience, growth potential and enduring appeal to global investors, with China and ASEAN leading as the most attractive destinations.

Emphasizing the sweeping changes reshaping the global landscape, along with the rise of unilateralism and protectionism, Ban Ki-moon, BFA chairman and former UN Secretary-General, said that Asia's robust growth has been driven largely by globalization, free trade and regional integration.

"We are proud to be one of the few international organizations that are still committed to rebuilding trust, reuniting solidarity and rekindling cooperation," Ban noted.

"Over the past 25 years, we can recall many pictures when Asia had to overcome a multitude of challenges, ranging from financial crises, non-traditional security issues, public health challenges, natural disasters, even the challenge of having to navigate various potential for disputes in our region," said Marty Natalegawa, BFA board member and former Foreign Minister of Indonesia.

But it is precisely thanks to the Boao forum and similar approaches that Asia, as a region, has grown stronger over the past 25 years, Natalegawa noted.

## ANSWERS FOR UNCERTAINTY

Unilateralism, protectionism and power politics are on the rise, casting a long shadow over the global outlook. From debates at the World Economic Forum in Davos earlier this year to the latest flare-ups in the Middle East, signs of fragmentation have become increasingly hard to ignore.

There is far more uncertainty than certainty in the world today, Zhang Jun said during this year's BFA annual conference. Many believe Asia plays a crucial role in this context; this also means the BFA carries greater responsibility and a heavier task at a time like this.

At this year's event, China's high-quality development and further opening up took center stage as an answer to the uncertainties in the world.

Facing headwinds including tariffs and global crises, China has demonstrated strong resilience in recent years, injecting invaluable stability into global supply chains, said Denis Depoux, global managing director at Munich-based consultancy Roland Berger.

Over the past five years, China's economy has grown at a notable average annual rate of 5.4 percent. Its contribution to global economic growth has remained at around 30 percent, underscoring its role as a key engine of the world economy.

China unveiled the outline of its 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) at the "two sessions" earlier this month, stirring interest among BFA participants.

"In an increasingly uncertain geopolitical landscape, the new Five-Year Plan provides a level of institutional certainty that is rare globally," said Zheng Yongnian, a renowned scholar and professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen.

Highlighting China's status as the largest trading partner for more than 160 countries and regions, Kazakhstan's First Deputy Prime Minister Roman Sklyar echoed this view, noting that China's economic sustainability remains a key pillar of global stability due to its central role in supporting the world economy.

"The 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan will not only present opportunities for China, but also for the global community at large," said Sklyar.

Zheng said that the "open-source" nature of Chinese modernization offers a new path to solving the problems of unbalanced and inadequate global development. "China's open-source approach extends the 'ladder' after its own rise, advancing common global modernization through encouraging and assisting other nations' development."

This approach is reflected in China's continued push for opening up. During this year's four-day BFA annual conference, China's Hainan Free Trade Port (FTP), the world's largest FTP by area, marks the 100th day since the launch of the island-wide special customs operations, a landmark policy in China's efforts to promote free trade and expand high-standard opening up.

In the 100 days, total imports and exports of the FTP have exceeded 80 billion yuan, up 32.9 percent year on year.

Underscoring China's commitment to free trade and deeper international cooperation, Zhao Leji, the top legislator, said the country will expand institutional opening up and enhance the quality and standards of trade and investment cooperation.

"China will further expand high-standard opening up and share opportunities and create a better future together with the rest of the world," Zhao said. – Xinhua

## US, Iran should be encouraged to return to negotiating table for political settlement: Chinese FM

BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday that both the United States and Iran have the willingness to resume negotiations, and the international community should encourage both sides to return to the negotiating table and seek effective ways for a political settlement.

China and Canada can jointly play a constructive role in this regard, said Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, in a phone conversation with

Canadian Foreign Minister Anita Anand at the latter's request.

Anand briefed Wang on Canada's position regarding the situation in the Middle East, noting that Canada is committed to protecting civilians in the conflict, promoting de-escalation of the situation, preventing the spillover of the conflict, and reducing its impact on the global economy as well as industrial and supply chains.

The Iranian nuclear issue bears on the international nuclear non-proliferation

regime, and ensuring the safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz is in the common interests of all parties, Anand said.

Canada stands ready to work with China to push for a ceasefire and promote regional peace and stability, she added.

Wang elaborated on China's principled position, saying that the Iranian nuclear issue should be resolved through dialogue and should not be a reason for the use of force.

The abuse of force will only lead to grave repercussions, and the spillover of the war

will threaten regional security and stability, he said.

The two sides also exchanged views on China-Canada relations and agreed that they should implement the outcomes of Prime Minister Mark Carney's visit to China with a positive and pragmatic attitude, resume dialogues at various levels, expand mutually beneficial cooperation, and push for the stable and healthy development of the China-Canada new strategic partnership.

– Xinhua

## Belarus' Lukashenko gifts automatic rifle to Kim

SEOUL – Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko gifted Kim Jong Un an automatic rifle during his maiden visit to Pyongyang, joking that the North Korean leader may need it “in case enemies appear”, state media said yesterday.

Both nations have aided Russia in its war in Ukraine, with Pyongyang dispatching ground troops and weapons and Minsk serving as a launchpad for the invasion in 2022.

The two leaders signed a “friendship and cooperation” treaty yesterday after Kim gave a lavish welcome to Lukashenko, declaring the two countries were now “entering a new phase”.

Video footage released by

Belarusian state media showed Lukashenko presenting Kim with what appeared to be an automatic rifle, prompting Kim to respond with a mock reloading gesture and say “thank you”.

“That’s right,” Lukashenko said, adding, “Just in case enemies appear,” prompting Kim to laugh.

The video also showed Kim presenting Lukashenko with a large mosaic vase bearing a portrait of the Belarusian, with the North Korean leader appearing to explain that crafting it involved around 30 seashells.

Both Belarus and North Korea have aligned themselves with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russia’s Vladimir Putin to create a

“multipolar world” and challenge Western hegemony.

Lukashenko said the world’s major powers “ignore and violate the norms of international law”, appearing to criticise the United States.

Kim said North Korea opposes “illegitimate pressure on Belarus from the West”.

In addition to the friendship and cooperation treaty, the two sides agreed to expand cooperation across sectors ranging from agriculture to information, Belarusian state media said.

The visit was wrapped up with Kim personally accompanying Lukashenko to the airport for a “warm farewell”, it added. – AFP



South Korean Buddhist monks carry placards reading “Stop the war” as they march during a prayer service opposing the war on Iran at Gwanghwamun Square near the US embassy in Seoul yesterday.

– AFP

## Russian oil arrives as Philippines battles ‘energy emergency’

Pam Castro

MANILA – A ship carrying more than 700,000 barrels of Russian crude oil has arrived in the Philippines, a source with knowledge of the matter told AFP yesterday, days after the country declared a national energy emergency over the Middle East war.

The purchase, unthinkable before longtime treaty ally the United States eased sanctions tied to Russia’s war in Ukraine, comes as the import-dependent archipelago scrambles to expand its options in a suddenly volatile oil market.

The Sierra Leone-flagged Sara Sky and its cargo from Russia’s ESPO pipeline arrived Monday, with documents showing the consignee as Petron Corp, operator of the Philippines’ sole oil refinery, said the source, who asked to remain anonymous as they were not authorised to speak to the press.

The Philippines has seen the price of fuel hit historic highs since the US-Israeli war with Iran forced the partial closure of the Strait of Hormuz, with President Ferdinand Marcos saying the country’s dwindling stocks could last about 45 more days.

Presidential spokeswoman Claire Castro later confirmed the Russian oil purchase to reporters in a group chat on a messaging app.

An AFP journalist yesterday saw the Sara Sky at anchor in Limay port just outside Manila, where the Petron refinery is located. It is believed to be the first shipment of Russian oil to the country in five years.

Ramon Ang, CEO of Petron, told AFP last week the company was “in talks” to potentially purchase Russian oil. Ang declined yesterday to confirm the arrival of the shipment.

President Marcos said on Wednesday that the Philippines was casting a wide net in its search for fuel.

“We have not only gone to our... traditional oil suppliers, we have tried to explore other sources that are not affected by the war that is ongoing in the Middle East,” he said in a press briefing addressing the state of emergency.

“Nothing is off the table. We are looking at everything, everything that we can do.”

### ‘All possible partners’

Asked about the Russian oil, the Philippines’ foreign affairs department told AFP yesterday the country would cooperate with “all possible partners to contribute to regional and global stability, balanced with our duty to protect and secure Philippine national interests”.

The United States this month eased some restrictions on sales of

Russian crude, allowing countries to purchase oil that was already at sea until April 11.

Ateneo de Manila University economist Ser Pena Reyes said buying the Russian crude – equivalent to about two days of national demand – was a pragmatic move that might help stabilise prices in the short term.

Ongoing geopolitical volatility, however, made Moscow less attractive as a long-term partner, he told AFP.

“Russia can be a useful supplementary supplier... but the Philippines will likely benefit more from a balanced approach, maintaining strong ties with traditional partners while gradually investing in renewable energy and regional energy cooperation,” Pena Reyes said.

The Department of Energy yesterday separately announced the arrival of 142,000 barrels of government-procured diesel, part of its target of “up to 2 million barrels of additional supply for the country”, it said in a statement.

Energy secretary Sharon Garin told AFP the shipment had come from Japan.

Earlier in the day, Garin said the department had taken the “proactive step” of activating a 20 billion-peso (US\$332 million) emergency fund aimed at securing fuel supplies.

– AFP

## Indonesia’s military intelligence chief resigns after acid attack on activist

JAKARTA – The head of Indonesia’s military intelligence has stepped down after four members of his unit were arrested over an acid attack on an activist critical of the military’s growing role in government, according to a spokesman from the armed forces.

Andrie Yunus, deputy coordinator of the KontraS rights group, suffered serious injuries when two men on a scooter threw acid at him this month while he was riding a motorbike, right after he finished recording a podcast about the military’s influence in the Indonesian government.

Four members of the military’s Strategic Intelligence Agency (BAIS) were arrested, and remain in custody.

Police separately announced the arrest of two other suspects, prompting questions on the links,

if any, between the six suspects – something the authorities have yet to clarify.

BAIS head Yudi Abrimantyo stepped down on Wednesday in a move military spokesman Aulia Dwi Nasrullah described as a “form of responsibility”.

The spokesman did not give further details or specify who would replace Yudi.

UN rights chief Volker Turk has condemned the attack on Andrie as a “cowardly act of violence” and called for a full investigation.

Yesterday, Amnesty International Indonesia said the case was “taking on political undertones” with “conflicting facts” emerging from police and military probes, which appear to be separate.

It urged President Prabowo Subianto to launch an independent

investigation and for the case to be referred to a civilian court.

Amnesty director Usman Hamid told AFP it was unclear what Yudi’s resignation meant or where the investigation was headed next.

The Andrie case “is a systematic terror designed to silence critical voices and the constitutional rights of citizens to express their opinions,” Usman said in a statement.

Prabowo, an ex-general in office since 2024, has described the attack as “terrorism” and has vowed to “uphold the law” regardless of who was responsible.

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

## Marcos says new well to extend crucial gas field’s life

MANILA – Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos said yesterday the country’s newest offshore well will yield 60 million cubic feet of gas per day, adding years to the life of the critical Malampaya gas field.

The Philippines has some of the region’s highest energy costs and faces a looming crisis as the Malampaya field, which supplies about 40 percent of power to the archipelago’s main island, Luzon, has long been expected to dry up within a few years.

“The Camago-3 well has been successfully drilled and tested, producing up to 60 million standard cubic feet of gas per day,” Marcos said in a video posted to his official Facebook page, adding the well was expected to come fully online by the fourth quarter of 2026.

He said that the single well’s output would exceed the entirety of a new discovery east of the Malampaya field touted in January.

“Camago-3 holds an estimated 2.5 times more recoverable gas than the Malampaya East-1 discovery. Together, these two wells are projected to extend the life of the Malampaya gas field by an estimated six years,” the president said.

In a statement, Malampaya operator Prime Energy said the new well “effectively doubles the volume of gas that can be produced” from the field’s remaining reserves.

While natural gas accounts for an estimated 14 to 17.5 percent of the country’s electricity, the Philippines – regularly affected by electricity outages – relies on imported carbon-emitting coal for more than half of its power generation.

On Tuesday, the country’s energy secretary said the Philippines would “temporarily” be forced to lean even more heavily on coal for power, with the cost of imported liquefied natural gas soaring due to the war in the Middle East. – AFP

## Cambodian court upholds 14-year jail term for journalists over border photo

PHNOM PENH – A Cambodian court upheld 14-year prison sentences yesterday for two journalists convicted of treason for posting a photo taken in a military-restricted area after a round of border clashes with Thailand, a rights group said.

Journalists Pheap Phara and Phorn Sopheap were arrested in late July after posting a photo on Facebook that appeared to show them with Cambodian soldiers at the centuries-old Ta Krabei temple, located on the disputed frontier with Thailand, according to local rights group LICADHO.

Thai media outlets later republished the image, alleging it showed unplaced landmines in the background, the group said in a statement.

The Southeast Asian nations’ decades-long border dispute erupted into several rounds of clashes last year, killing dozens of people and displacing more than a million in July and December.

Thailand has repeatedly accused Cambodia of planting new landmines in contested border areas that have wounded patrolling Thai soldiers, while Cambodia has denied the allegation.

The two journalists were convicted and sentenced to 14 years

in prison in December for “supplying a foreign state with information prejudicial to national defence”.

An appeal court in Battambang province upheld their convictions on Thursday following an appeal by the journalists, LICADHO said.

Their lawyer could not be immediately reached for comment.

“This case affects journalism, especially the space of free press that will make journalists worry about their safety because of these convictions,” Am Sam Ath, operations director of LICADHO, told AFP.

Cambodia ranks 161st out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders advocacy group’s World Press Freedom Index.

Information ministry spokesman Tep Asnarith said the case was “a lesson for journalists to carefully think about publishing news and the protection of national security, and to uphold national interests”.

“Freedom of the press must go hand in hand with responsibility before the law and the national interest,” he said in a statement.

Cambodia and Thailand signed a ceasefire agreement in late December, but tensions on the border remain, with both sides trading accusations of truce violations. – AFP

## Families of Kabul bombing victims still search for answers

Isabelle Wesselingh

KABUL – Abdul Hai Hamidi gently opened each of the dozens of coffins, hoping to recognise one of his relatives who was killed in a Pakistani strike on a Kabul drug treatment centre.

But it left him none the wiser and like other loved ones, he prepared to carry on his search.

“He’s the son-in-law of my brother. We’ve been searching for him after the strike but we haven’t yet found him,” he told AFP in front of the Eidgah mosque before a funeral for the victims yesterday.

“We went to the hospitals but we weren’t given any clue about him. His name is Samiullah and he was 30 years old.”

The airstrike— just days before the end of Ramadan – hit a drug rehabilitation centre in the Afghan capital on March 16, prompting international condemnation.

Islamabad, which has been in conflict with Afghanistan for months, maintains that it hit a military target.

The force of the blast left many bodies torn apart, and it was difficult to identify some of the victims, the Norwegian Refugee Council, a humanitarian NGO, said after visiting the site shortly afterwards.

According to the spokesperson for the Afghan health ministry, Sharafat Zaman, the toll now stands at 411 dead and 263 wounded.

Two people died of their injuries and another person’s body was found in the destruction since the Taliban government’s first preliminary toll.

The UN mission in Afghanistan said its provisional toll was 143 dead and 119 wounded but added that was “very likely to increase”.

“There are still bodies missing and hundreds of family members are contacting us,” said Zaman. “There were rooms in the hospital where around 20 young people aged 18 or 19 were together.

“But everything was destroyed and their bodies have not been found.”

### Reduced to ashes

Samira Muhammadi went to the mosque to mourn her son, Aref Khan, 20, who dreamed of “becoming a good person, to help others”, before he fell prey to drugs.

“They told me his body was completely burned, in ashes,” she said. He had only been in the centre for a little over two weeks.

Muhammadi was not allowed to go onto the mosque forecourt where more than 50 wooden coffins were placed because she was not accompanied by a man, as required by the Taliban authorities’ laws.

But later, at the cemetery where the victims were buried in mass graves, she looked in each coffin, hoping to find her son’s remains. She couldn’t find him.

In all, about 100 bodies have been buried in a mass grave in Kabul, according to the Afghan government. About 50 were interred last week. Others will be buried by their families privately.

Pakistan and Afghanistan have been in conflict for months, with Islamabad accusing Kabul of harbouring extremists who have carried out cross-border attacks on their territory.

The authorities in Kabul deny the accusation.

The conflict intensified on February 26, a few days after Pakistani airstrikes followed by a ground offensive by Afghan forces.

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

Burhanuddin Kamali also came to the mosque hoping for answers. He has been looking for news of his 21-year-old nephew, Mohammed Issa, who was working in an emerald mine in Panjshir province until he got into drugs.

“I haven’t succeeded in finding his body,” he said, showing a photo of a smiling young man on his phone.

“Everyone in the family, his mother and father, are sad,” he added. “When someone is missing in the family, it’s a different feeling.” – AFP

## Nepal’s PM-in-waiting raps first post-election message, urges unity

KATHMANDU – Nepal’s rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah, set to be sworn in as the new prime minister, issued his first post-election message via a rap song yesterday, urging unity.

“The strength of unity is my national power,” Shah, better known as Balen, sang in the track, which racked up tens of thousands of views within minutes of being released on social media and streaming sites.

“Undivided Nepali, this time, history is being made,” the 35-year-old added, singing in Nepali.

The sharply dressed Shah, who usually sports trademark dark sunglasses, has emerged as a symbol of youth-driven political change and will formally become premier today.

His Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) won March 5 polls in a landslide, the first elections since a deadly youth-led uprising in September 2025.

At least 77 people were killed in the anti-corruption protests, which began over a brief social media ban but tapped into longstanding fury over economic hardship.

Shah, who had maintained a public silence since his election victory, delivered a message of solidarity in his track “Jay Mahakaali”, named after a powerful Hindu goddess.

“My heart is full of courage, my red blood is boiling; my brothers stand with me, this time we will rise,” he sang, over a video of him campaigning for election.

“This time, joy and happiness will burst in every home. Like wood from a green forest, I will break whatever comes. May my breath not run out, I will



Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) leader Balendra Shah (centre) arrives to take oath during a swearing-in ceremony at the parliament in Kathmandu, Nepal yesterday. – AFP

run like a leopard.”

He took the oath of office as a lawmaker earlier yesterday, but will be sworn in as prime minister today.

It caps a bold gamble by the reformist, who resigned as Kathmandu mayor to challenge KP Sharma Oli, the 74-year-old four-time premier, in his own seat.

Shah not only unseated Oli, but the RSP also secured a powerful parliamentary majority, securing 182 of 275 seats in the lower house. – AFP

## Why is Pakistan involved in efforts to stop the war in Iran?

ISLAMABAD – Pakistan has emerged as a key intermediary between Iran and the United States to try to secure talks to end their war in the Gulf.

Yesterday, Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar confirmed Islamabad was involved, saying “US-Iran indirect talks are taking place through messages being relayed by Pakistan”.

“Pakistan has strong credentials as the only country in the region enjoying good relations with the US and Iran,” said the country’s former ambassador to Tehran, Asif Durrani.

“Concurrently, it enjoys strategic relations with Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states and Türkiye,” he told AFP, using Turkey’s official name.

### What has Pakistan said about the war?

Pakistan has avoided taking sides and tried instead to maintain stable relations with all parties.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif condemned both the US-Israeli strikes that killed Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and Tehran’s retaliation against its neighbours.

He and Dar have both been busy, talking to senior Iranian government ministers and regional leaders.

Pakistan “has consistently advocated for dialogue and diplomacy to promote peace and stability in the region”, foreign ministry spokesman Tahir Hussain Andrabi said.

### What are Pakistan’s ties to Iran?

Pakistan shares a 900-kilometre border in its southwest with Iran, and also deep historical, cultural and religious links.

Iran was the first country

to recognise Pakistan after independence in 1947. Pakistan returned the favour for the Islamic republic after the 1979 revolution.

They cooperated against Moscow during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

Cross-border militant activity in the Balochistan region is a concern for both.

But Pakistan also represents some Iranian diplomatic interests in Washington, where Tehran has no embassy.

And it is home to the world’s second-biggest Shia Muslim population after Iran.

### How about the US?

Pakistan’s powerful army chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, has built up a personal rapport with US President Donald Trump and spoke to him last Sunday.

Munir – in a Western business suit rather than army fatigues – visited Washington with Sharif last year after a flare-up in hostilities between Pakistan and India in divided Kashmir.

Sharif praised Trump’s “bold and visionary” intervention, while Munir said the US leader deserved the Nobel Peace Prize for stopping an escalation between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

On Iran, Trump said Pakistan knows the country “better than most” and this week shared Sharif’s X post that Pakistan was “ready” to host talks to end the conflict.

Personal relations have long helped boost bilateral ties shaped by shifting strategic interests.

But even as a non-NATO ally in the post-9/11 “war on terror”, Pakistan faced US claims that it was

harbouring militants responsible for attacking coalition troops across the border in Afghanistan.

Relations strained further when US troops killed al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden on Pakistani soil in 2011 without telling Islamabad, and Pakistan faced accusations of complicity in harbouring the fugitive.

### Saudis and Shia

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed a strategic mutual defence agreement in 2025, cementing longstanding ties but also restricting how far Islamabad can go in supporting Tehran.

Sharif and his government have been quick to keep Riyadh on side, and the prime minister recently visited for talks with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

If Pakistan were seen as aligning itself against Iran, that would risk angering the country’s Shia population, who have already held deadly protests against Khamenei’s death.

### What’s in it for Pakistan?

Neutrality makes economic sense for Pakistan, which relies on oil and gas imports through the Strait of Hormuz. Continued disruption could worsen fuel supplies, drive up prices and force further austerity measures.

“Pakistan, being located right on the war’s doorstep, clearly would prefer to take steps meant to help end the war, and not get dragged into it,” South Asia expert Michael Kugelman posted on X this week.

An end to the conflict would not only boost regional stability and security but also Pakistan’s international standing. – AFP

## Bangladesh rescuers recover 24 bodies after bus plunges into river

DHAKA – Rescue teams including navy divers in Bangladesh have recovered 24 bodies from a bus that plunged into a river at a ferry crossing, officials said yesterday.

The bus sank into the deep waters of the Padma river in Goalanda on Wednesday, about 65 kilometres west of the capital Dhaka. It had around 50 passengers on board, many of whom managed to escape.

A fire service report said that 24 bodies, including those of five children, had been recovered by midday yesterday.

Some were pulled out by fire service officers, others by locals who come to help, as well as by the navy divers.

“The bus was waiting to board a ferry, when it fell into the river,” said Noor Jahan Begum, 35, who saw the accident.

“Some passengers got out of the bus, but their family members died, trapped inside.”

Deadly crashes are relatively common in the South Asian nation,

because of poor roads, badly maintained vehicles and reckless driving.

Bangladesh’s Road Safety Foundation reported over 200 deaths during the just-concluded Eid holidays. In one incident, a train rammed into a bus, killing 12.

The World Health Organisation says that while reported road traffic fatalities in Bangladesh are around 5,000 a year, it estimates that actual deaths are far higher, at more than 31,500, according to figures from 2023.

That translates to more than 85 a day in the country of 170 million people.

In neighbouring India, at least 13 people were killed in a bus crash yesterday in Andhra Pradesh state, which Prime Minister Narendra Modi called “tragic”. The bus burst into flames, burning the bodies.

India, with 1.4 billion people, recorded more than 177,000 road traffic deaths in 2025, according to the roads ministry, or 485 a day. – AFP

# Trump insists Iran operations 'extremely' ahead of schedule

Danny Kemp

WASHINGTON – US President Donald Trump said yesterday that the Iran war was “extremely” ahead of schedule, as he pushed Tehran to make a deal at his first cabinet meeting since the conflict began nearly a month ago.

As Tehran publicly rebuffed negotiations, Trump again cited the original timeframe of four to six weeks that he gave early on in the joint US-Israeli military offensive.

“They’re lousy fighters, but they’re great negotiators, and they are begging to work out a deal,” Trump said at the White House alongside top officials including Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth.

“We estimated it would take approximately four to six weeks to achieve our mission. Twenty-six days in we’re extremely, really, a lot ahead of schedule,” added Trump.

“The Iranian regime is now admitting to itself that they have been decisively defeated.”

Trump has been saying for days that Iran wants to make a deal, amid growing signs he is seeking a quick end to the conflict. Iran, however, says there are no direct negotiations.

The US leader also launched a fresh attack on NATO allies after they rejected his appeals to send naval assets to secure the Strait of Hormuz, the oil chokepoint Iran has effectively closed in response to the US-Israeli attacks.

“I’ll say it publicly. We’re very disappointed with NATO, because NATO has done absolutely nothing,” Trump said.



US President Donald Trump speaks during a cabinet meeting in the Cabinet Room of the White House yesterday in Washington, DC. – AFP

He particularly lambasted Britain, saying it had offered to send aircraft carriers too late and describing the UK ships as “toys” compared to their US equivalents.

## ‘Inflection point’

During the meeting, roving US envoy Steve Witkoff confirmed for the first time from the US side that Washington had sent a 15-point “action list” to Iran via mediator Pakistan.

Businessman Witkoff, who led failed negotiations with Iran in the weeks before the US-Israeli strikes began, said there were indications Tehran was ready to make a deal.

“We will see where things lead, and if we can convince Iran that this is the inflection point with no good alternatives for them, other than more death and destruction,” Witkoff said.

“We have strong signs that this is a possibility.”

In his usual style for his lengthy cabinet meetings, Trump let officials

around the table have their say.

Vice President JD Vance, previously a staunch anti-interventionist who was widely reported to be against the Iran operation, said Trump was ensuring that Iran “didn’t get a nuclear weapon.”

Noting that Easter is approaching, Catholic convert Vance said US forces were “fighting at a time... that celebrates the return of Jesus Christ to Jerusalem.”

Top US diplomat Rubio appeared to quote rappers Public Enemy as he praised Pentagon chief Hegseth, saying that “every day, the Department of War lets the drummer get wicked over every portion of Iran.”

Hegseth launched an attack on the media for failing to support Trump’s war, before hailing for “doing the work of the free world.”

“We pray for a deal, and we welcome a deal,” Hegseth said. “But in the meantime... the Department of War will continue negotiating with bombs.” – AFP

## Sperm struggles to navigate during weightless sex

Daniel Lawler

PARIS – Scientists have used a tiny plastic “obstacle course” to test how much sperm would struggle to navigate during sex in the weightlessness of space.

Some particularly resilient sperm still made it through the course, suggesting that conceiving children in space will still be possible, according to research published yesterday.

However, a bigger problem could be that the development of embryos after fertilisation was harmed by a lack of gravity, the Australian team of researchers found.

With humanity setting its eyes on colonising space – next week NASA hopes to launch its first crewed mission around the Moon in half a century – scientists have been studying how difficult it will be to procreate on spaceships or other worlds.

One of the biggest challenges is that sperm will no longer be pulled downwards by Earth’s gravity.

“Sperm need to actively find their way to an egg, and this study is the first to put that ability to the test under space-like conditions,” Nicole McPherson, a researcher at Adelaide University in Australia, told AFP.

The scientists used a plastic chamber that resembles the female reproductive tract to act as a “miniature obstacle course”, the senior author of the new study said.

“Think of it as a tiny race track... sperm are introduced at one end and have to swim their way through to the other.”

## Filtering out weak runners

Both human and mice sperm were sent down the course, which was inside a device that uses constant rotation to simulate the microgravity of space.

The sperm was about 50 percent worse at navigating through the course compared to how they perform under Earth’s gravity.

This worked out to be roughly a 30-percent drop in successful fertilisation, according to the study in the journal *Communications Biology*.

However, the sperm that did make it through seemed to produce better-quality embryos, which could turn out to be “beneficial”, McPherson said.

It appeared that the stress of microgravity acted as a “filter” that effectively cleared the field, “leaving only the most capable sperm in the

running,” she explained.

A bigger problem came in the first 24 hours after sperm had fertilised the eggs.

“The results reversed sharply, with fewer embryos formed, and those that did were of poorer quality,” McPherson said.

This suggests that microgravity “may not be the deal-breaker we feared, but protecting the embryo from weightlessness in those critical first hours will likely be essential for reproduction in space,” she added.

Some including billionaire SpaceX founder Elon Musk have ambitious plans to make humans an interplanetary species by establishing settlements on the Moon then Mars.

There has also been speculation that the first baby conceived outside the bounds of Earth could be the result of a couple having sex on a flight launched by the booming space tourism industry.

McPherson emphasised that much more research is needed to understand how reproduction works in space, adding that fertilisation is “only one small piece of a very long and complex puzzle”.

“We are still a long way from seeing the first space baby.” – AFP

## Iran responds to US plan via intermediaries, awaiting reply: report

TEHRAN – Iran has responded through unnamed intermediaries to a 15-point US plan to end the war, the country’s news agency Tasnim reported yesterday, and is now waiting for Washington’s reply.

The exact contents of the US plan, conveyed to Iran via Pakistan according to Pakistani officials, are not officially known.

“Iran’s response to the 15 points proposed by the US was officially sent last night through intermediaries, and Iran is awaiting the other side’s response,” Tasnim reported yesterday, citing an informed source.

Iran responded by sending a five-point counterproposal, according to the source cited by Tasnim.

The five points were ending the “aggression”, the establishment of a mechanism guaranteeing that neither Israel nor the United States would return to war, financial compensation, and the end of hostilities on all fronts – meaning that Israel would stop fighting Hezbollah in Lebanon and possibly Hamas in Gaza.

The source also indicated that Iran wanted its sovereignty over the vital Strait of Hormuz to be recognised. – AFP

## Hezbollah boycotts cabinet session over Iran ambassador expulsion

BEIRUT – Ministers from Hezbollah and its ally Amal boycotted Lebanon’s cabinet session yesterday in protest after the government declared the Iranian ambassador persona non grata, a Lebanese official told AFP.

The two Shia parties have a combined four ministers, while one independent Shia minister was instead present at the meeting, the official said, as the spat over the Iranian diplomat’s expulsion escalated.

Hezbollah is an armed movement backed by Iran, which also has political representation in both government and parliament.

Lebanon’s foreign ministry this week gave the Iranian ambassador until Sunday to leave the country, the latest unprecedented step by Lebanese authorities since a new war erupted on March 2 between Israel and Hezbollah.

The foreign ministry had accused him of making statements “interfering in Lebanon’s internal politics”.

Hezbollah has called the decision a “sin” and demanded the authorities reverse the move.

Yesterday, dozens of protesters gathered in front of the Iranian embassy to protest the decision, AFP correspondents said.

Some waved Iranian, Lebanese or Hezbollah flags, or chanted “death to America, death to Israel” near the embassy, located on the outskirts of Beirut’s southern

suburbs, which Israel has repeatedly bombed in recent weeks.

Protester Mohammed, who declined to provide his surname, told AFP that “we came here to show our support for the Iranian ambassador in Lebanon, so that the government will back down on this decision, which is not befitting” of Lebanon.

“There are a number of ambassadors in Lebanon who violate our sovereignty, who speak and act to stir up internal strife, but nobody says anything to them,” he added.

“This decision will not pass,” said protester Elham al-Mokdad, adding: “We stand with Iran proudly. Iran has supported us for 40 years.”

Farida Nouredine, 43, instead demanded the expulsion of the US ambassador in Lebanon and of Lebanon’s Foreign Minister Youssef Raggi.

Raggi “does not represent us. He is carrying out Israeli decisions,” she said.

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

Israel has responded with heavy air strikes and has sent ground troops into the country’s south.

Beirut this month banned any activity by the Iran’s Revolutionary Guards, and also prohibited Hezbollah’s military activities. – AFP



Parents and siblings pay tribute to staff sergeant Ori Greenberg, 21, during his funeral at the Mount Herzl military cemetery in Jerusalem yesterday. “Staff sergeant Ori Greenberg, aged 21, from Petah Tikva, a soldier of the Reconnaissance unit, Golani Brigade, fell during combat in southern Lebanon,” the military said. In total, three Israeli soldiers have been killed in fighting in south Lebanon since Hezbollah drew the country into war by launching rocket attacks against Israel on March 2 to avenge the killing of Iran’s supreme leader. – AFP

# UN designates African slave trade as 'gravest crime against humanity'

UNITED NATION, New York – The UN General Assembly on Wednesday designated the transatlantic African slave trade as “the gravest crime against humanity,” despite opposition by the United States and some European countries.

In a move advocates hailed as a step towards healing and possible reparations, the resolution was adopted to applause by a vote of 123 in favor, three against and 52 abstentions.

The United States, Israel and Argentina opposed the measure, while Britain and EU member states abstained.

Ghana's President John Mahama, one of the African Union's most vocal supporters of slavery reparations, was at the United Nations headquarters in New York to support the vote.

“Today, we come together in solemn solidarity to affirm truth and pursue a route to healing and reparative justice. The adoption of this resolution serves as a safeguard against forgetting,” said Mahama.

Despite being non-binding, the resolution goes beyond simple acknowledgment and asks nations involved in the slave trade to engage in restorative justice.

It also highlights the legacy of slavery via “the persistence of racial discrimination and neo-colonialism” in today's society.

“The transatlantic slave trade was a crime against humanity that struck at the core of personhood, broke up families, and devastated communities,” UN Secretary-General António Guterres said.

“To justify the unjustifiable, slavery's proponents and beneficiaries constructed a racist ideology – turning prejudice into a pseudoscience.”



A man looks at slavery images at the Cape-Coast Castle museum in Ghana on August 16, 2001. The UN General Assembly on March 25, 2026 designated the transatlantic African slave trade as “the gravest crime against humanity,” in a move advocates hailed as a step towards healing and possible reparations. The resolution was adopted to applause by a vote of 123 in favour, three against – the United States, Israel and Argentina – and 52 abstentions, including Britain and member states of the European Union. – AFP

## 'Hierarchy' of tragedies

The United States called the text “highly problematic.”

“The United States also does not recognise a legal right to reparations for historical wrongs that were not illegal under international law at the time they occurred,” said US ambassador Dan Negrea.

“The United States also strongly objects to the resolution's attempt to rank crimes against humanity in any type of hierarchy,” he added.

Britain and EU countries advanced similar

arguments while acknowledging the wrongs of slavery.

The resolution “risks pitting historical tragedies against each other that should not be compared, except at the expense of the memory of the victims,” said French representative Sylvain Fournel.

Ghanaian Foreign Minister Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa on Tuesday dismissed criticism that the text sought to rank human suffering.

He also said that some nations had refused to acknowledge their crimes.

“The perpetrators of the transatlantic slave trade are known, the Europeans, the United States of America. We expect all of them to formally apologise to Africa and to all people of African descent,” he told AFP.

One pathway toward restorative justice, he said, is that “all the looted artifacts are returned to the motherland.”

He also suggested that institutions continue to address structural racism and that “compensation” could be offered to those affected. – AFP

## 'He's the guru': juror says Zuckerberg's testimony sealed Meta's fate

Romain Fonsegrives

LOS ANGELES – A juror in the landmark social media addiction trial said Mark Zuckerberg's testimony hurt Meta's case, telling reporters after the verdict that the Facebook founder's answers on the stand were inconsistent and did not go over well with the panel.

“Some of his testimony was not it – he changed it back and forth, and that didn't sit well with us,” said the juror, who identified herself only as Victoria.

“He's the guru, so to speak, and he should have really, really known what he was going to say to us jurors before he even said anything.”

Another juror, Matthew, said the deliberations – which stretched almost two weeks – reflected the weight of the evidence rather than any division on the panel.

“The issues that we were having was really just going through all the evidence,” he said.

“We were really thorough, going through each and every witness. What is the evidence they provided, in both directions, and ultimately, where did that lead to? So that's what took so long.”

Victoria said the jury focused heavily on what protections the platforms had in place to shield the plaintiff known just as Kaley from harm, and on the long-term consequences for future young users.

“We looked at the history of everything that Kaley went through, and what was the process that these platforms had in place

that was going to possibly prevent any harm,” she said.

On the US\$3 million compensatory award, Victoria said jurors worked from an average salary calculation, projecting the plaintiff's earning potential over 40 years – down from an initial figure of 60 – and factoring in what kind of work she would realistically be able to hold, given what she had been through.

## 'Not acceptable'

The jury was also motivated by a desire to send a message, she said.

“We wanted them to feel it. We wanted them to realize that this was not acceptable.”

Victoria said she had hoped the award might be structured as a trust, with the money distributed in portions over time, but ultimately followed the law as it was presented to them.

She described the jury as cohesive despite some disagreements, saying members respected one another even when they diverged.

“We had a good group, a very diverse group. We all got along very well, even with the individuals that didn't agree with the majority of our decision – we respected each other.”

Victoria said the trial had been a revelation. “I learned a lot of things,” she said. “Moving forward, I probably am going to have some strong thoughts about social media, and probably stay off of it, as I have.” – AFP

## AU calls UN slave trade vote step towards 'healing'

ADDIS ABEBA – The African Union yesterday welcomed as “historic” a UN vote to designate the transatlantic African slave trade as “the gravest crime against humanity” and said it marked an important step towards “healing”.

“This historic decision marks an important step toward truth, justice, and healing, and reinforces the urgent need to address the

enduring legacy of slavery,” the AU's head Mahamoud Ali Youssouf said in a statement published on X.

The pan-African body is committed to working with the UN, member states and partners “to advance historical justice and ensure that such crimes are neither forgotten nor repeated”, it said.

– AFP

## Starmer 'very keen' to curb addictive social media after US ruling

LONDON – UK leader Keir Starmer said yesterday he was “very keen” to tackle addictive features on social media following a landmark US ruling that found Meta and YouTube liable for harming a young woman.

Britain's government is currently considering new restrictions for popular social media apps, as countries around the world grapple with how to keep children safe online.

Starmer said officials would study “very carefully” Wednesday's decision by a jury in Los Angeles, which found that Meta and YouTube were negligent in the design and operation of their platforms.

The jurors ordered the companies to pay US\$6 million in damages, including US\$3 million in punitive damages, holding them accountable for the mental health toll of their design choices.

“The status quo isn't good enough. We need to do more to protect children,” Starmer

said during a visit to Finland.

“I'm very keen that we do more on addictive features within social media,” he added.

The two chambers of Britain's parliament are currently in a stand-off over whether the government should follow Australia and issue a blanket ban on social media for children under 16.

The unelected upper House of Lords voted in favour of prohibiting social media for under-16s for a second time late Wednesday, piling pressure on the government to follow suit.

MPs in the House of Commons, where Starmer's Labour party enjoys a huge majority, have already rejected the proposal once.

Starmer has not ruled out a ban but is awaiting the outcome of a public consultation, due to close on May 26. – AFP

## Portuguese drivers cross into Spain for cheaper fuel

HUELVA, Spain – At a gas station near the southern Spanish city of Huelva, close to the Portuguese border, cars pull in one after another on the weekend under the midday sun. Among them are many vehicles with Portuguese license plates.

Paulo Costa has driven more than 50 km from Portugal’s Algarve region to refuel. “Diesel is about 0.3 euros (US\$0.35) cheaper per liter here,” he said. “And for gas cylinders, the difference is even bigger.”

For residents along the Iberian border, such trips are becoming increasingly common – reflecting how rising energy prices are beginning to shape everyday choices.

The escalating conflict in the Middle East has sent shockwaves through global oil markets. In Portugal, nearly 6,000 km away from the core of the conflict, where energy imports account for a significant share of supply, these effects are being felt in daily life.

“My income hasn’t changed, but my expenses keep rising,” said Tiago Santos, a Brazilian working in Lisbon.

Standing at a supermarket checkout, he described how higher fuel costs are filtering through the economy.

“When fuel prices go up, transport becomes more expensive, and then food and electricity follow. In the end, it’s ordinary families who pay.”

Economists have described the

situation as a classic supply shock.

“When energy prices rise and supply tightens, the impact spreads across the entire economy,” said economist Oscar Afonso, noting that effects can extend “from oil shipments in the Gulf to supermarket shelves in Portugal.”

Rodrigo Costa, head of Portugal’s national energy grid operator REN, warned that rising fuel prices will inevitably push up electricity and gas costs. If tensions escalate further, he said, supply chains could face significant disruption.

The pressure is already visible across many sectors.

At Silampos, a Portuguese export-oriented manufacturer, CEO Aníbal Campos said around 500,000 euros worth of goods are currently delayed in ports in Dubai and Saudi Arabia due to logistical disruptions.

Meanwhile, rising fuel costs are hitting agriculture even harder.

Carlos Mendes, a farmer in southern Portugal, said diesel prices have surged from about 1.0 euro per liter to 1.5 euros in less than a month.

“That’s a 50 percent increase in under 30 days,” he said. “All our operations depend on fuel.”

Fertilizer and agricultural chemical prices are also rising, he added, increasing concerns that production costs will eventually be passed on to consumers.

In response, the Portuguese government has introduced a series

of measures, including repeated cuts to fuel taxes and a mechanism allowing temporary caps on electricity prices if costs surge beyond certain thresholds.

However, differences in policy approaches between Portugal and Spain are contributing to price gaps that are influencing consumer behavior.

Spain has rolled out a broader support package worth around 5 billion euros to cushion the impact of rising energy costs. Yet Spanish public broadcaster RTVE reported that even relatively small fuel price differences can prompt drivers in border regions to cross into neighboring countries to buy cheaper gas.

Meanwhile, Portugal’s central bank and industry groups have already revised down growth forecasts for 2026, citing geopolitical uncertainty and rising energy costs.

Economists also warn that if energy-driven inflation persists, it could delay interest rate cuts in the eurozone, prolonging financial pressure on households – particularly in Portugal, where many mortgages are tied to variable rates.

Therefore, what began as a distant geopolitical tension is gradually filtering into daily decisions – how much to spend, what to buy, and increasingly, where to refuel.

For drivers like Costa, the calculation is straightforward. “When there’s a difference,” he said, “people will move.” – *Xinhua*

## Bank of Portugal cuts 2026 GDP growth forecast

LISBON – The Bank of Portugal has revised down its economic growth forecast for 2026 from 2.3 percent estimated in December to 1.8 percent, according to the central bank’s bulletin published on Wednesday.

The revision was driven primarily by the economic fallout from the US and Israeli military strikes against Iran since late February, which sent global energy prices surging, compounded by severe weather that battered Portugal in early 2026.

The inflation forecast was

revised upward to 2.8 percent for 2026, against a December projection of 2.1 percent.

Nonetheless, the bank expected price pressures to ease gradually, projecting inflation rates of 2.3 percent in 2027 and 2.0 percent in 2028 as the effects of the energy shock dissipate.

A prolonged or intensified Middle East conflict could trigger further commodity price spikes, financial market volatility, and global supply chain disruptions, according to the bank. – *Xinhua*

## Portugal sees record number of patent applications in 2025

LISBON – Patent applications from Portugal reached a record high of 368 in 2025, according to the European Patent Office (EPO) Technology Dashboard 2025 released on Tuesday. This represents a 6.1 percent year-on-year increase, and more than doubles the amount of patent applications since 2016.

According to EPO, the figures reflect an increasingly dynamic innovation ecosystem in Portugal. Computer technology and health-related sectors are the primary areas of innovation in the country, with medical technology posting particularly strong growth of 32 percent compared to 2024. Meanwhile, biotechnology grew by 5 percent, bucking a general downward trend at the EPO level.

Other sectors recording sharp increases included packaging and handling technologies, up more than 75 percent; furniture and games, up more than 62.5 percent; and transport and automotive technologies, up more than 50 percent. Pharmaceutical applications, however, fell by 9.5 percent.

OPRIMEE-Innovation Design Engineering Solutions led the

Portuguese applicants with 26 patent requests, followed by NOS Inovação with 18, and INESC Porto-Institute for Systems and Computer Engineering of Porto with 14.

The northern region of Portugal accounted for 39 percent of all national applications, making it the most active part of the country for patent activity.

At European level, the EPO received a record 201,974 patent applications in 2025. This represented a 1.4 percent rise from the previous year, and the first time the agency has surpassed 200,000 applications.

Applications from within Europe grew by 0.4 percent, while those from outside Europe increased by 2.1 percent.

EPO President António Campinos welcomed the figures as a sign of Europe’s innovation capacity but called for focused attention on strategic sectors. These include artificial intelligence (AI), semiconductors, health, and quantum technologies. Gaps remain despite the progress shown by the data, he underlined. – *Xinhua*

## Portuguese housing prices hit record high in 2025

LISBON – Housing prices in Portugal rose 17.6 percent in 2025, the highest rate ever recorded in the country’s available statistical series and an increase of 8.5 percentage points compared with 2024, the National Statistics Institute (INE) reported this week.

Prices of existing homes climbed

faster than new builds, rising 18.9 percent against a 14.2 percent increase for newly-built properties, the institute said on Monday.

A total of 169,812 homes were sold in 2025, up 8.6 percent from the previous year, which was also a record high. The total value of residential transactions reached 41.2 billion euros

(US\$47.8 billion), a 21.7 percent increase in value terms compared with 2024, according to the institute.

The Greater Lisbon metropolitan area remained the country’s dominant real estate market, accounting for 30.1 percent of the total transaction value last year, according to INE. – *Xinhua*

## In Cape Verde, waste reborn as school furniture

PRAIA – In São Francisco, on the outskirts of Cape Verde’s capital Praia, a community recycling project is turning waste into school desks and chairs, helping improve classroom conditions while cutting pollution.

At the center of the effort is Ekonatura, a community-based micro-enterprise located about 12 km from Praia.

Using discarded plastic and glass collected by residents and partner companies, the project gives waste a second life through practical products for schools and communities.

“The idea was to promote sustainable waste management, protect the environment and improve the well-being of people in the community,” João Ferreira, manager of Ekonatura and president of the local community association, told Xinhua.

Launched in 2019, the initiative later developed into a community-



At a community microenterprise in Praia, Cape Verde, last Thursday, a worker transfers recycled plastic pellets into a bucket to prepare the material for the next stage of heat pressing. – *Xinhua*



A worker arranges chairs for students restored with recycled materials at a community microenterprise in Praia, Cape Verde, on March 19, 2026. – *Xinhua*

based business. Today, the impact is visible in São Francisco, where cleaner streets reflect a growing awareness of recycling and waste management.

According to Ferreira, one of the

project’s main activities is restoring damaged desk and chair frames by replacing wooden parts with components made from recycled plastic.

“We re-use damaged desk

structures and replace the backrests and bases with materials made from recycled plastic,” he said. “This increases durability and reduces the need to use wood.”

In addition to school furniture,

Ekonatura also produces trash bins, flower pots, paving blocks and other items, promoting circular economy solutions adapted to local needs.

The project also carries out awareness activities in schools to teach children the importance of recycling and proper waste disposal.

With an average recycling capacity of about 100 kg of glass and plastic per hour, the initiative combines environmental protection, social inclusion and practical support for education, showing how discarded waste can be turned into useful community resources.

Despite growing demand from schools, Ferreira said, the company still faces shortages of funding and equipment.

“We have limitations in financial resources and machinery, and that affects our response capacity,” he said. “But with more support and partnerships, this project can expand to the national level.” – *AFP*



Real Madrid's Spanish defender Maria Mendez and Barcelona's Spanish midfielder Clara Serrajordi (left) fight for the ball during the UEFA Women's Champions League quarter final first leg between Real Madrid CF and FC Barcelona at the Alfredo Di Stefano stadium in Madrid on Wednesday. Barcelona won the game 6-2. — AFP

## Postecoglou 'not done yet' as he watches Spurs and Forest battle relegation



SYDNEY — Ange Postecoglou said yesterday he was "not done yet" while admitting it was hard to watch as the two clubs that dumped him last year battle to avoid English Premier League relegation.

The former Celtic, Tottenham Hotspur and Nottingham Forest boss has been out of work since October.

But the Australian is almost ready to take the plunge back into the turbulent waters of European football.

"I want to win things still. I still have that drive and passion to achieve, that hasn't changed," he told Australian sport's radio station SEN.

"The fact now it's the first time I'm coming off a bad experience - that's just more fuel for me.

"Wherever I go there will be plenty of scepticism - that's brilliant, that's what I need. Get the gloves, put the helmet on again and go really hard.

"I still feel like what I do still has an impact at this level," he added. "I'm not done yet, mate!"

Postecoglou, 60, said he does not know exactly where he will go next, but "I've got an idea".

"I think part of it is going to be making sure that the people I work with are ready for what I'm going to deliver and that they understand me as a person and the kind of football [I play], and I see

the ambition in them," he said.

"I know whatever it is going to be, I have this thing in my head that this will be the best one I've done yet because of the recent experiences, maybe I needed them."

Postecoglou oversaw the end of Spurs' 17-year wait for a major trophy when they beat Manchester United in the 2025 Europa League final.

But poor league form meant he was still sacked after two years in the role before an ill-fated 40 days as Forest boss before being axed in October.

Since his departure, both clubs have continued to struggle and are in a desperate relegation fight with Tottenham just one point above the drop zone and Forest three.

The two sides met in a crunch clash on Sunday, with Spurs collapsing to a 3-0 home defeat.

Postecoglou said it was "uncomfortable" watching the game with the Australian still attached to the London club despite how his tenure ended.

"To watch them struggle has not been easy and it's not the way I thought it would go," he said.

"They're in a hell of a fight, relegation is massive for any club but for Tottenham, it's a pretty big deal.

"They have some fighting to do and they have the quality to get out. They need a circuit-breaker for sure." — AFP

## Asian Cup 2027 draw postponed amid Middle East war



KUALA LUMPUR — Next month's draw for the 2027 Asian Cup in Saudi Arabia has been indefinitely postponed, the continental football body said yesterday, amid the war in the Middle East.

No new date was immediately set by the Asian Football Confederation, which has also seen regional club competitions disrupted following the US and Israeli war on Iran.

The draw was supposed to take place on April 11 in Riyadh

but has been postponed "after careful consideration to ensure the uninterrupted attendance of all stakeholders", the AFC said.

It added: "Further updates on the new arrangements for the final draw will be communicated in due course."

The 19th edition of the Asian Cup is scheduled to take place from January 7 to February 5 next year.

Riyadh, Jeddah and Al Khobar are the host cities.

The 24 teams will be divided into six groups of four. — AFP

# Final phase of World Cup ticket sales to open April 1

FIFA WASHINGTON

- The fourth and final ticket sales phase for the 2026 World Cup will open on April 1, FIFA announced on Wednesday, without specifying how many tickets will be made available.

The "last-minute" sales phase will then remain open through the end of the tournament, which runs from June 11 to July 19, global football's governing body said in a statement.

Tickets will be sold on a first-come, first-served basis and be "released for sale on a rolling basis, including, on occasion, for matches taking place on the same day."

The last-minute phase is the fourth and final official ticket sales phase. During prior phases, FIFA

said, more than 1 million tickets were sold out of more than 500 million requests.

In total, some 7 million tickets are expected to be sold, taking into account the capacities of the 16 stadiums being used for the tournament in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

But FIFA has been heavily criticised over the price of tickets, with the Football Supporters of Europe (FSE) group filing a lawsuit on Tuesday with the European Commission over "excessive ticket prices."

The group claims FIFA has "abused its monopoly position to impose excessive ticket prices and opaque and unfair purchasing conditions and processes on European fans ahead of the 2026 World Cup."

FIFA has defended ticket prices, with president Gianni Infantino saying they are driven by "insane" demand.

Under pressure, FIFA created a category of 60-dollar tickets reserved for official supporters' clubs.

According to FSE, this category was practically exhausted before sales opened to the general public.

FIFA also announced on Wednesday they will reopen the official platform for ticket resale and exchange on April 2.

The platform has also been at the centre of criticism due to the prohibitive prices of tickets listed for resale, although FIFA says it does not interfere in this "fan-to-fan market" where the reseller sets the displayed price of each ticket. — AFP



Australia's Ante Suto (centre) joins teammates for a training session at Accor Stadium in Sydney yesterday, ahead of their FIFA series 2026 football match against Cameroon. Suto had never set foot on Australian soil until this week - but today he could be a capped Soccerero and heading to the World Cup. The Hibernian striker was a surprise call-up for Australia's final two home games before the global showpiece in North America this summer.

They face Cameroon in Sydney today and fellow World Cup qualifiers Curacao in Melbourne on Tuesday.

The 25-year-old Suto was born and raised in Croatia but holds an Australian passport through his father.

"It's actually the first time I've been here," said Suto. "All I can say is it's much better weather than in Scotland and I'm happy to be here.

"It's a great opportunity for me."

The game will be played at 5:10 p.m. Macau time. -AFP/MPD

## Senegal victims of 'most blatant scam' in football history: federation



PARIS - Senegal football boss Abdoulaye Fall yesterday labelled the decision to strip the country of its 2025 Africa Cup of Nations title the "most blatant administrative scam in the history of our sport".

But "Senegal refuses to accept this as inevitable", the country's football federation (FSF) president added during a press conference held in Paris to introduce the team of lawyers appointed to defend Senegal's "honour" before the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

On Wednesday, the FSF lodged an appeal with the CAS against the Confederation of African Football's (CAF) decision to overturn the result of the AFCON final after several Senegal players had walked off the pitch in protest at a penalty awarded to hosts Morocco, shortly after the west Africans had had a goal disallowed.

The full Senegal team then retook the field, before going on to win 1-0 in extra-time courtesy of a Pape Gueye goal.

"It is not only the integrity of African football but the integrity of the world of football that will be judged before the CAS," said Juan de Dios Crespo-Perez, one of the Federation's lawyers and a specialist in sports law and the CAS.

"This is an attack on the

federation, football, and sporting discipline," added Seydou Diagne, who heads up the team of lawyers.

He outlined Senegal's case before the CAS, arguing that stripping them of their title would amount to "calling into question the referee's decision and brazenly violating Laws 5 and 6 of the game", which pertain to the referee and other match officials.

"After what Morocco has managed to get the CAF to do, whether through surprise or malice, if the CAS allows it to go ahead, the next World Cup will be played out in law firms in Paris or the United States," Diagne said.

"There'll be no point in setting up football academies. To get stars on the shirt, you'll need lawyers," he added, referring to the stars that denote a country's victories in a particular tournament.

### Trophy presentation

A third lawyer, Serge Vittoz of Switzerland, explained that proceedings before the Lausanne-based CAS usually last between nine and 12 months.

"The idea is to request an expedited procedure. But for this expedited procedure to be put in place, everyone must agree," he said. "If there is an expedited procedure, we could expect a decision within two months."

For its part, the Senegalese

government last week called for an investigation into allegations of corruption within CAF.

French lawyer Pierre-Olivier Sur has been tasked with "carrying out the necessary investigations that will one day allow me to tell you, and that day seems very close, that a complaint has been filed", said the former president of the Paris Bar.

In late January, following the chaotic final in Rabat which also featured disturbances in the crowd during the nearly 20-minute break caused by the Senegalese protest, CAF imposed a series of disciplinary sanctions for unsporting behaviour on both countries' federations, but did not call into question the final result.

However, on March 17, CAF announced that it had upheld an appeal by the Moroccan football federation, saying that Senegal had infringed tournament regulations by walking off.

As a result, it declared Senegal to have forfeited the match, turning its 1-0 victory on January 18 into a 3-0 defeat, making hosts Morocco the champions.

According to the group of lawyers, Morocco have not, however, received the medals, the CAF prize money or the trophy, as requested by the North African country.

Indeed, Senegal intend to present this same trophy to their supporters on Saturday at the Stade de France during their friendly match against Peru. — AFP

# Olympic women's sport to be limited to 'biological females'

Coralie Febvre

LAUSANNE—The International Olympic Committee (IOC) said yesterday it was re-introducing testing for gender to determine eligibility to compete in the female category, preventing transgender women from competing.

The screening will mean Olympic women's sports from the 2028 Los Angeles Games will be limited to biological females, which would also rule out those with differences in sexual development (DSD) from competing.

In a major shift of policy, the IOC is abandoning rules it brought in in 2021 which allowed individual federations to decide their own policy and is instead implementing a policy across all sports.

"Eligibility for any female category event at the Olympic Games or any other IOC event, including individual and team sports, is now limited to biological females, determined on the basis of a one-time SRY gene screening," the IOC said in a statement.

They will be carried out through a saliva sample, cheek swab or blood sample.

IOC president Kirsty Coventry said: "The policy we have announced is based on science and has been led by medical experts.

"At the Olympic Games even the

smallest margins can be the difference between victory and defeat.

"So it is absolutely clear that it would not be fair for biological males to compete in the female category. In addition, in some sports it would simply not be safe."

## Removes potential Trump clash

The new policy removes a potential source of conflict between the IOC and US President Donald Trump at the Los Angeles Olympics.

Trump issued an executive order banning transgender athletes from women's sport soon after he came to office.

While sports such as swimming, athletics, cycling and rowing have brought in bans, many others have permitted transgender women to compete in the female category if they lowered their testosterone levels, normally through taking a course of drugs.

The new ban will also cover athletes with DSD, the rare condition in which a person's hormones, genes and reproductive organs may have a combination of male and female characteristics.

The best-known DSD athlete of recent years is South African runner Caster Semenya, the two-time Olympic women's 800m champion who has male XY chromosomes.

Gender testing was first

introduced at the 1968 Olympics and last used at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta but then scrapped.

The new policy is likely to face some criticism from the scientific community.

*The British Journal of Sports Medicine* said in an article this month there was "no scientific data of acceptable quality regarding sport performance advantage of people with DSDs possessing an SRY gene."

It added: "Evidence regarding their athletic performance is extremely limited and problematic."

The IOC is bringing in the new policy after the women's boxing competition at the 2024 Paris Olympics was rocked by a gender row involving Algerian fighter Imane Khelif and Lin Yu-ting of Chinese Taipei.

Khelif and Lin were excluded from the International Boxing Association's 2023 world championships after the IBA said they had failed eligibility tests.

However, the IOC allowed them both to compete at the Paris Games, saying they had been victims of "a sudden and arbitrary decision by the IBA".

Both boxers went on to win gold medals.

Lin has since been cleared to compete in the female category at events run by World Boxing, the body that will oversee the sport at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. —AFP



Gordon Reid of Great Britain returns a shot to Casey Ratzlaf of the United States during the Men's Singles Wheelchair Quarterfinals at the Miami Open Presented by Itau at Hard Rock Stadium on Wednesday in Miami Gardens, Florida. Reid won the game 6-2, 6-2. —AFP

## Mercedes teen ace Antonelli wants more of the same after maiden win

F1

SUZUKA —Kimi Antonelli said yesterday that his maiden Formula One win had given him more "awareness" of his potential as he and Mercedes look to ram home their early season advantage in Japan.

The 19-year-old Italian came home first at the Chinese Grand Prix to become the second-youngest race winner in history behind Max Verstappen, after finishing second at the season-opener in Australia.

Mercedes have claimed one-two finishes at both grands prix so far in 2026, with Antonelli's team-mate George Russell winning in Australia.

Antonelli said his approach would not change at this week's Japanese Grand Prix but admitted his win had boosted his confidence.

"I think the only difference is that the win gave me a bit more awareness of the potential, on what is possible to achieve," he said.

"But in terms of approach, I want to keep the same because it's been working well so far."

Antonelli, who also became the youngest pole-sitter in F1 history in Shanghai, was given a hero's welcome when he returned to his

native Bologna.

He is the first Italian to win an F1 grand prix since Giancarlo Fisichella 20 years ago.

He and Russell have the chance to build on their scorching early form in Suzuka, where Mercedes have not won since Valtteri Bottas in 2019.

The race is followed by a one-month gap in the schedule caused by the cancellation of races in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia because of war in the Middle East.

"It's never good to have a break, especially when you have such momentum," said Antonelli.

"You need to look at the positive side of it, which is you get a bit of time to reflect and to try and analyse where are the areas where you have to work on."

Russell leads the early championship standings by four points from Antonelli, with Ferrari's Charles Leclerc 13 further back in third.

Russell is chasing his first world title and he said Mercedes were reaping the benefits after some lean years.

"I think being loyal to those people through the ups and downs has paid dividends and there's a lot of trust," said the British driver, who joined Mercedes in 2022. —AFP

## Former badminton Olympic gold winner Marin retires due to injury

Badminton

MADRID — Spanish Olympic badminton gold medal winner Carolina Marin retired from the sport yesterday after a long struggle with a knee injury.

The 32-year-old won gold in the women's singles at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games, and remains the only player from a non-Asian country to do so.

Three-time world champion Marin had hoped to compete in the European Championships in April in Huelva, her home city in Andalusia, but did not want to risk further damaging her knee.

At the Paris Olympics in 2024 she reached the semi-finals but suffered a knee ligament injury during the match which forced her to withdraw, having already missed the 2020 Tokyo Olympics with

another knee injury.

"My journey in professional badminton has come to an end," said Marin in a post on Instagram.

"I would have liked to see each other on court one last time, but I don't want to put my body at risk for it..."

"I wish my career had ended another way but in life things don't always go as we want and we have to accept that.

"Deep down I did retire on court, in Paris in 2024, we just didn't know it at the time."

As well as winning gold by overcoming India's PV Sindhu in the Rio final, the tenacious Marin triumphed three times at the World Championships, in 2014, 2015 and 2018.

The latter of those finals was also against Sindhu, as Marin became the first woman to win three world singles titles. —AFP



New Zealand's Nensi Patel (right) attempts to catch the ball next to South Africa's Nadine de Klerk during the fifth Twenty20 international women's cricket match between New Zealand and South Africa at Hagley Oval in Christchurch, New Zealand on Wednesday. New Zealand won by 92 runs. —AFP

## Teen sprint star Gout Gout 'ready to rock and roll' in Melbourne

Athletics

MELBOURNE — Australian sprint sensation Gout Gout said yesterday he was "ready to rock and roll" as the teenager targets a lightning-fast 200m time in Melbourne this weekend.

The 18-year-old burst on the scene in 2024 when he clocked 20.04 seconds at the Australian All Schools Athletics Championships.

It shattered Peter Norman's national record of 20.06 from the 1968 Olympics and was the quickest time ever by a 16-year-old.

It earned him comparisons to Usain Bolt and he has since run 20.02.

In his debut world championships at Tokyo last year, Gout crashed out in the semi-finals.

He gets another chance to showcase his ability at the World Continental Tour Gold-level Maurie Plant meet tomorrow.

It will be a rematch with compatriot Lachlan Kennedy.

Kennedy upset Gout to win a pulsating 200m at the same event last year in 20.26.

The race this time also features Irish sub-20 second man Benjamin Richardson.

"I'm all clear, all healthy, I'm ready to rock and roll on Saturday," said Gout, who was troubled with a head cold earlier this month.

"I mean, the sprint is always the sprint, you have to run as fast as you can. Knowing Lachie, he is such a great starter.

"I know I have to work hard

from the beginning."

Gout, who was born in Australia after his parents migrated from South Sudan, has attracted global attention since hitting the headlines two years ago.

He has now finished school and expects to have more time to train to truly fulfil his potential.

"Training is definitely going to be a lot more professional in a way, knowing that I can train a lot more efficiently," he said.

"[I can] get a lot more reps and get in the gym a bit more. That's definitely going to be a major factor."

Other notable athletes in Melbourne include Olympic pole vault champion Nina Kennedy and British Olympic 1500m bronze medallist Georgia Hunter Bell. —AFP

# Internet providers not liable for music piracy by users: top US court

Chris Lefkow

WASHINGTON – The US Supreme Court ruled on Wednesday in a landmark copyright case that internet service providers (ISPs) are not liable for online pirating of music by their users.

Cox Communications, a major broadband ISP, had asked the top court to throw out a jury verdict awarding US\$1 billion in damages to Sony Music Entertainment and other record labels.

Cox was accused in the case of failing to take action against customers accused of illegally downloading copyrighted music.

In a unanimous 9-0 ruling, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of Cox and said an ISP was liable “only if it intended that the provided service be used for infringement.”

“A company is not liable as a copyright infringer for merely providing a service to the general public with knowledge that it will be used by some to infringe copyrights,” the court said in an opinion written by Justice Clarence Thomas.

“Cox repeatedly discouraged copyright infringement by sending warnings, suspending services, and terminating accounts,” the court said.

“A provider induces infringe-

ment if it actively encourages infringement through specific acts,” it said. “Cox neither induced its users’ infringement nor provided a service tailored to infringement.”

Cox Communications welcomed the court’s decision, calling it a “decisive victory for the broadband industry and for the American people who depend on reliable internet service.”

“This opinion affirms that internet service providers are not copyright police and should not be held liable for the actions of their customers,” the company said in a statement.

The ruling was also welcomed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which called it a “win for freedom of expression online.”

“If defined too broadly, secondary copyright liability for internet service providers can pose a serious threat to free speech online,” Evelyn Danforth-Scott, an ACLU attorney, said in a statement.

The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) meanwhile expressed disappointment.

“To be effective, copyright law must protect creators and markets from harmful infringement,” RIAA chairman and CEO Mitch Glazier said.

During oral arguments before the Supreme Court in December, Joshua Rosenkranz, an attorney representing Cox, had warned of “cataclysmic” consequences if the court did not limit the company’s copyright liability.

The only way for an ISP to avoid liability is to “cut off the internet, not just for the accused infringer, but for anyone else who happens to use the same connection,” Rosenkranz said.

“That could be entire towns, universities or hospitals, turning internet providers into internet police,” he said. – AFP

## Singer Rosalía quits Milan concert with food poisoning

ROME – Spanish singer Rosalía was forced to interrupt a concert in Italy half way through due to food poisoning, according to fan footage posted on social media.

The 33-year-old Grammy-winning singer was performing at the Unipol Forum in Milan on Wednesday, when she stopped to tell the crowds she was feeling unwell.

“I’ve tried to do this show. Since the beginning I’ve been sick. I’ve had big time food poisoning,” she said in English in a video posted on X.

“I’ve tried to push it until the end, but I’m feeling extremely sick. I’m puking out there. I really want to give the best show, and I’m like in [on] the floor,” she said.

After saying she would try to carry on if physically possible, a sad-looking Rosalía eventually blew a kiss to the crowds and – with a hand on her stomach – walked off stage.

Rosalía, hailed for her genre-defying versatility, was in Milan as part of a tour which began in France earlier this month and will end in Puerto Rico in September.

The singer, who won best international artist at the Brit Awards this month, has earned widespread praise for her fourth album “Lux”.

The sweeping, spiritual work, released at the end of last year, marks a departure from her previous flamenco and R&B rhythms.

The album features lyrics sung in 13 languages including German, English and Sicilian in addition to her native Spanish. – AFP



Spanish singer-songwriter Rosalía (centre) performs on stage during the BRIT Awards 2026 at the Co-op Live arena, in Manchester on February 28, 2026. Rosalía was forced to interrupt a concert in Milan, northern Italy, half way through due to food poisoning, according to fan footage posted on social media on Wednesday. – AFP

## Alleged Rihanna mansion shooter pleads not guilty

LOS ANGELES – The woman alleged to have shot up Rihanna’s luxury Los Angeles home pleaded not guilty to attempted murder when she appeared in court on Wednesday, as details emerged of a near miss for the global megastar.

The “Umbrella” singer and her partner, rapper A\$AP Rocky, were in an Airstream trailer on the sprawling property when 35-year-old Ivanna Lisette Ortiz is alleged to have opened fire.

Rihanna told police she heard the sound of several rounds hitting the trailer, and opened the curtains to find bullet holes in the windshield directly in front of where she was standing.

She said she got A\$AP Rocky, whose real name is Rakim Mayers, out of bed and told him they were being shot at as they both ducked to the ground, before rushing inside the property to make sure their three children and staff were safe.

Police said about 20 rounds had been fired. In addition to the trailer, they hit a patio area and a nursery room wall.

Bullet holes were also found at a neighboring property, a Los Angeles Police Department crime summary said.

Deputy District Attorney Alexander Bott told Los Angeles County Superior Court the gunfire from an assault-style rifle had erupted at a time several people were at home “putting numerous lives at risk” in the March 8 incident.

He said Ortiz, who was arrested in a vehicle with a rifle, ammunition

and a disguise – a wig – had behaved in a manner that was “extremely dangerous.”

Ortiz, who is from Florida, entered not guilty pleas to one count of attempted murder involving Rihanna, whose real name is Robyn Fenty, along with 10 counts of assault with a semiautomatic firearm.

She also denied two counts of shooting at an inhabited dwelling and one count of shooting at an inhabited vehicle, as well as allegations that she personally and intentionally discharged a rifle.

The defendant was ordered to return to court on April 8, and is being held in pre-trial detention after failing to pay a US\$1.875 million bail.

Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Theresa McGonigle also ordered that she not practice as a speech-language pathologist in California, where she has been licensed since 2016, while the criminal case is pending.

Ortiz could face life imprisonment without parole if convicted.

Entertainment news outlet TMZ reported Ortiz has previously been involuntarily committed.

A Facebook page that appears to belong to her includes a number of videos and posts that refer to celebrities including Rihanna, Kim Kardashian and Cardi B.

One post tags Rihanna, whom she challenged “to say something to me directly instead of sneaking around like you talking to me where I’m not at.”

In another video, she claims Rihanna wants to kill her. – AFP

## ByteDance quietly rolls out SeeDance 2.0 globally

BEIJING – Chinese artificial intelligence (AI) powerhouse and TikTok creator ByteDance has quietly rolled out its latest video generator SeeDance 2.0 worldwide, while its US rival OpenAI called time on a similar product.

The SeeDance 2.0 model was launched in China last month, both stunning and spooking the entertainment industry with its ability to produce near-Hollywood-quality clips from simple text prompts.

However, it has also sparked concerns over copyright infringement

“We have further expanded Dreamina Seedance 2.0 in more markets in CapCut today, across Africa, South America, the Middle East and Southeast Asia, with more regions coming soon,” CapCut, ByteDance’s popular video editing tool, posted on X yesterday.

It said the SeeDance 2.0 model

would initially be available to some paid users.

The rollout includes “firm safeguards” to prevent violations of its safety policies, including the unauthorised use of individuals’ likenesses or intellectual property, CapCut said.

Major Hollywood production studios including Disney, Paramount, Warner Bros and Netflix, have threatened legal action against Beijing-based ByteDance over accusations of copyright infringement.

Reports this month suggested that backlash had prompted ByteDance to pause SeeDance 2.0’s global launch.

It was not immediately clear if ByteDance had resolved those legal issues. The United States is not among the current rollout markets.

ByteDance, which runs popular short video platforms TikTok and

Douyin, has invested heavily in AI in recent years against a backdrop of increasing global regulatory scrutiny of such platforms.

ByteDance announced last Friday the sale of Moonton, an important gaming asset, to a subsidiary of Saudi Arabia’s sovereign fund for more than US\$6 billion.

Moonton runs Mobile Legends: Bang Bang, one of Southeast Asia’s most popular gaming titles.

ByteDance’s move coincides with a broader shift in the AI industry towards more “agentic” tools that focus on performing practical, real-life tasks.

US AI giant OpenAI said on Tuesday it was shutting down its popular consumer-facing video-generating service Sora, a move widely understood to focus more on providing business users with agentic AI capacities. – AFP

### World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 8°C~22°C	Manila 22°C~33°C	New York 3°C~14°C	Lisbon 10°C~21°C
Shanghai 8°C~17°C	Bangkok 26°C~36°C	London 4°C~12°C	Rio de Janeiro 21°C~30°C
Hong Kong 19°C~25°C	Tokyo 10°C~17°C	Frankfurt 0°C~10°C	Luanda 25°C~30°C
Taipei 19°C~23°C	Singapore 24°C~34°C	Vancouver 4°C~12°C	Maputo 23°C~32°C
Guangzhou 21°C~30°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~36°C	Paris 7°C~12°C	Dili 23°C~31°C
Nanjing 7°C~19°C	Jakarta 23°C~31°C	Moscow 4°C~11°C	São Tomé 26°C~33°C
Guilin 15°C~21°C	Seoul 5°C~20°C	Las Vegas 18°C~33°C	Praia 18°C~27°C
Xi’an 12°C~22°C	Sydney 15°C~18°C	Monte Carlo 7°C~14°C	Bissau 20°C~35°C

### 1. Sea cows

Local residents gather on Old Shastri Nagaram Beach on the outskirts of Campbell Bay at Great Nicobar Island, India yesterday. – AFP

### 2. Monster bike

This photo taken yesterday shows a GWM [Great Wall Motor Company] Souo S2000 CL motorcycle during the 47<sup>th</sup> Bangkok International Motor Show in Nonthaburi, Thailand. This year's motor show is held from March 25 to April 5. – Xinhua

### 3. Heading for danger

A firefighter controls a Unitree Go2 robotic dog on a demonstration of cooperation between the robotic dog and a fire department in simulated fire conditions in Zagreb, Croatia, on Wednesday. – Xinhua

### 4. Don't like change

A male Sumatran tiger snarls in his new enclosure at Berlin's Zoologischer Garten zoo yesterday. – AFP

### 5. Hand painted

This photo taken on March 11 shows a blue-and-white porcelain tea cup created by Cao Lang and Hu Yunyue at their studio in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi Province. Jingdezhen is renowned worldwide for its porcelain, attracting many young artisans to gather here.

Cao Lang and Hu Yunyue, a 36-year-old couple, are among the representatives who explore business opportunities and hold on to their artistic dreams. – Xinhua



### 6. Safe and sound

A staff member feeds rescued sea turtles at the Mnarani Turtle Conservation Project site in Zanzibar, Tanzania, on Monday. – Xinhua

