



Health Bureau urges residents with emotional distress to seek help

Ida Cheong

The Health Bureau (SSM), Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) and Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) jointly held a press conference yesterday, aiming to raise public awareness of the need for people to seek help when they experience emotional distress.

The bureaux have joined hands and formed a support network covering all ages throughout the whole recovery process via a network of cross-departmental cooperation.

The press conference about the setting-up of the psychology support network was held at the SSM Public Health Emergency Personnel Residence Hall on Guia Hill.

Addressing the press conference, the Health Bureau's Conde de S. Januário Hospital Centre (CHCSJ) Psychiatry Department Head Lam Mei Fong urged residents who experience persistent low mood, anxiety or insomnia for more than two weeks that affect their daily lives – such as work and social interactions – to seek help promptly.

She emphasised the importance of not delaying in asking for help, as the longer symptoms persist the more severe they may become and the harder they are to treat. Early intervention leads to better outcomes, Lam said.

CHCSJ Acting Director Tai Wa Hou introduced the Health Bureau's four-tiered intervention mechanism for mental health issues, covering community level, health centre level, specialist level and rehabilitation level, including the 24-hour Sunny Mood Hotline, the Caritas Expat Life Hope Hotline



Conde de S. Januário Hospital Centre (CHCSJ) Psychiatry Department Head Lam Mei Fong (second from left), CHCSJ Acting Director Tai Wa Hou (centre), Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) Non-Tertiary Education Department Chief Choi Man Chi (second from right) and Social Welfare Bureau (IAS) Social Solidarity Department Head U Ka Wai (first from right) and Health Bureau (SSM) psychotherapy senior official Choi Ka Man pose for a group photo during yesterday's press conference about setting up a psychology support network, at the SSM Health Emergency Personnel Residence Hall on Guia Hill. – Photo: Ida Cheong

and the mood self-assessment on the “Macao One Account” app at community level.

Tai pointed out that nine local health centres and three community organisations offer psychotherapy and mental health services and pharmacological treatment, inpatient services, and crisis intervention at specialist level.

Through the tiered intervention mechanism, mild cases are addressed within the community, moderate to severe cases receive appropriate treatment, and recovering individuals benefit from continuous care, Tai said.

Cross-departmental collaboration mechanism

Meanwhile, DSEDJ Non-Tertiary Education Department Chief Choi Man Chi noted that her bureau has introduced a 24-hour student counselling hotline and an online consultation platform for the 2025/2026 school year, enabling students to seek companionship and a “listening ear” anonymously at any time.

“Mental Health Education Courseware” and “Youth Mental Health Education Materials,” have been developed, aiming to

encourage schools to regularly conduct mental health education classes, Chio said, adding that the material will be released later this year.

IAS Social Solidarity Department Head U Ka Wai noted that regarding elderly care services, efforts are being coordinated to conduct in-home assessments and follow-ups for cases identified as having mental health risks in the ongoing census of elderly residents living alone or in two-person households. In addition, an elderly care services information package is being compiled to consolidate service information, U said. ■



China launches Lijian-2 Y1 carrier rocket

JIUQUAN – China yesterday launched a Lijian-2 Y1 carrier rocket with three satellites onboard.

The rocket blasted off at 7 p.m. from a commercial aerospace innovation pilot zone in northwest China and successfully sent the satellites into the planned orbit.

Among the satellites was the Qingzhou Cargo Spacecraft Test Vehicle, developed by the Innovation Academy for Microsatellites of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. The test flight carried 27 projects with a total payload of 1.02 tonnes and will conduct in-orbit tests at altitudes ranging from 200 to 600 kilometers.

The launch marked the first flight of the Lijian-2 rocket. According to the developers, it is China's first launch vehicle using a “common booster core” design. The rocket stands 53 meters tall, with a liftoff weight of 625 tonnes and a thrust of 753 tonnes. It has a carrying capacity of 8 tonnes to a 500-kilometer sun-synchronous orbit and 12 tonnes for low Earth orbit.

“The Lijian-2 rocket marks a new milestone in the development of China's next-generation space cargo transportation system,” said Yang Haoliang, commander of the Lijian-2 rocket. He noted that this marks a shift from reliance on a single rocket type or approach to a more

systematic framework supported by multiple launch vehicles, enabling mutual backup and flexible deployment.

This systematic capability, he added, is fundamentally important for ensuring the long-term stable operation of the space station and for enhancing the safety and reliability of cargo transportation.

Yang said developers are currently working on reusable rocket technology. They have already completed initial tests on a smaller vehicle to verify key technologies such as controlled landing, and they plan to conduct further recovery tests later this year.

– Xinhua

A Lijian-2 Y1 carrier rocket with three satellites onboard blasts off from the Dongfeng commercial space innovation pilot zone in northwest China yesterday. – AFP

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Xi urges mobilizing whole society in tree-planting efforts

President Xi Jinping yesterday called for mobilizing the whole society to actively participate in afforestation, stressing that a sound ecological environment is shared by all and requires the joint efforts of all.

– Story on p. 7

Sweden charges man for selling wife to 120 men

A Swedish prosecutor yesterday charged a man, suspected of exploiting his “vulnerable” wife to have sex with men for money, with aggravated pimping, several rapes and assault in a case implicating some 120 men.

– Story on p. 11

School shooting in Argentina leaves one dead, 8 wounded

A 15-year-old boy opened fire in a school in Argentina yesterday, killing another student and wounding eight other people in a rare burst of US-style violence, officials said.

– Story on p. 12

Macau Different: Continuity in Motion (Part 3)

Continuity with Method: Identity, Legitimacy and the Future

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

The issue is easy to state and hard to solve: how to keep Macau distinctive, preserving Macanese* identity while ensuring renewal, continuity and real space for a new bilingual/trilingual generation—capable of contributing to education, the economy, culture and public life. The reactions I received to the previous piece confirm one essential point: this is not an academic debate – it is about the future. It is worth acknowledging those who gave this discussion substance through thoughtful contributions: André Ritchie, António Monteiro, Carlos Beja, Carlos Seruca Salgado, Diogo Calado, Fernando Gomes, Gilberto Camacho, Leonel Alberto Alves, Sérgio Pérez and Vicente Domingos Pereira Coutinho. To the many others who replied through other channels, my thanks as well – even when the response was brief, because that too shows how deeply the subject resonates.

André Ritchie was blunt when he shared the article: it is an old debate, with little visible progress, and mistrust – sometimes disguised as systemic paternalism – which remains convenient for some. The conclusion is harsh but clear: if opportunities are not created in time, they end up arriving “for our children” – and, without drama, life goes on, but continuity is lost. The line is uncomfortable precisely because it points to the cost of delay: words are not lacking; what is lacking is follow-through.

A recurring idea – highlighted by António Monteiro – is that “young” is not merely an age; it is a phase of life. Engagement must happen before life fills up with unavoidable obligations. If that window is missed, everything becomes harder: work, family and responsibilities reducing availability. This is not an excuse; it is reality. That is

why continuity cannot depend on occasional invitations: there must be a normal, predictable and demanding pathway that allows people to enter early, learn, take on tasks and grow without having to “ask for permission”.

Another point emerges clearly: when an association becomes personalised, renewal turns into an exception. Associations cannot exist to preserve positions; they must exist to fulfil a mission. Sérgio Pérez described how, at certain moments, the energy of younger members was held back by tutelage, mistrust or excessive “protection”, and how projects capable of bringing diverse people together lost momentum. Fernando Gomes touched the central nerve: leadership that fails to train successors weakens the “pipeline” and turns continuity into a vague promise.

Vicente Domingos Pereira Coutinho voiced a similar concern: when renewal is not treated as a normal process, progression depends on exceptions and rare moments, rather than resting on criteria and continuity.

The third point relates to identity. Gilberto Camacho reminded us, with the rare force of someone speaking from history and from the soul, that culture is not invented overnight. Macanese culture – like any culture – needs time, transmission and everyday life. Preserving it requires two things that are simple to state and difficult to sustain consistently: documenting and transmitting.

Documenting prevents loss; transmitting prevents freezing. Without documentation, what was lived disappears; without transmission, what was inherited becomes a museum piece. No one wants Macanese culture to survive only as a display case; we want it to survive as life.

This is where Carlos Beja’s message reads almost as a moral synthesis of the debate. He wrote, rightly, that there is “much more that unites us than divides us”. In a Macau made up of Chinese, Macanese and Portuguese – many with a dual attachment to their

motherlands – hope lies in intergenerational and multiracial solidarity, practised naturally across several languages. This is not a line for a frame; it is a programme. When the community organises around what unites it – service, competence, respect and continuity – Macau’s distinctiveness stops being mere memory and becomes a force for the future.

There is also a context that makes this debate more urgent. Carlos Seruca Salgado stressed an important point: Macau’s uniqueness and commitment to the motherland are not mutually exclusive; they reinforce one another. A Macau confident in its history and in its capabilities is more useful to the country. That is precisely why internal continuity – cultural and civic – is not an identity-related whim; it is a matter of public usefulness and stability. A Macau that knows who it is, and that trains successors, is a stronger Macau.

There is an institutional point that should be stated plainly, because it grounds this discussion. As Leonel Alberto Alves rightly recalled, the Basic Law itself, in Article 24, includes permanent residents linked to the historic Portuguese presence within the MSAR’s legal-political design. That means something fundamental: this reality was not treated as a “leftover of the past”, but as a structural component of the political community. More than 25 years on, the question is not whether a status exists; it is whether we can transform it into a civic project – with continuity, method and results – rather than reducing it to nostalgia, commemorative dinners or a museum.

And today, as the MSAR seeks to deepen co-operation with the Lusophone world and attract more Portuguese investment, one obvious point bears repeating in my own words: attracting investment also means attracting people. People with skills, languages, professional ethics and connective capacity – because it is human capital that gives depth and continuity to

financial capital.

As Leonel Alberto Alves also reminded me in wise words, there is a defining mark that has always characterised us: internationalism – not only in linguistic terms, but in the ability to adapt to different ways of living and working. This should be valued by new generations: keep Portuguese as a bridge, but invest also in other globally circulating languages with commercial reach, strengthening Macau’s competitiveness and the strategic usefulness of these profiles.

This is where Diogo Calado’s testimony helps bring the discussion down to earth: a Portuguese national with extensive experience in mainland China, now based in Macau, married to a Macau resident of Chinese background, with a clear family project to raise his daughter in a multilingual environment – an example of how Macau’s distinctiveness is built through concrete choices. Macau’s difference is not preserved by decree; it is built through study, languages, work and commitment to the city – and, above all, through transmission to the next generation. His example reminds us that the future is not abstract: it is made at home, at school, in professional choices, and in how we create conditions for the young to participate early, with demanding standards and a sense of mission.

The challenge, then, is not to “defend the past”, but to give it a future. And that future is not built through occasional speeches; it is built through pathways, responsibility, mentorship and a culture of normal renewal. If the answer is “one of these days”, then André Ritchie is right: opportunities arrive “for our children”. If the answer is “now, with method”, then Macau continues to stand out – not by chance, but by choice.

To be continued...

*Customarily, the term “Macanese” denotes Macau’s community of mixed Portuguese and Asian descent, and its diaspora. – Note by The Macau Post Daily

Ching Ming & Easter set to bring frequent showers, thunderstorms

Ida Cheong

The Macau Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) said in a statement yesterday that Macau will experience rising temperatures and an increase in intermittent showers and thunderstorms during the upcoming Easter and Ching Ming (spelt “Qingming” in Putonghua pinyin) holidays (April 3–6), with winter conditions now essentially over.

Residents planning outdoor

activities are advised to monitor the weather, carry rain gear, or adjust their itineraries as needed. However, due to the longer forecast lead time, there remains some uncertainty regarding the exact extent and intensity of the trough’s impact, according to the weather station.

Under the influence of warm, humid southerly air and an active trough, thunderstorms have occurred in Guangdong province in recent days. As the trough

moves closer, Macau is expected to see more showers and a few thunderstorms today.

Another trough is forecast to affect southern China from later this week into early next week, bringing persistent thunderstorm activity. According to current traditional numerical models and AI models, the coast of Guangdong province will experience significantly more showers from the weekend onwards, with higher accumulated rainfall.

As April begins, the interaction between various weather systems and cold/warm air masses increases the likelihood of severe convective weather*, including heavy rain, hail and strong wind gusts, the statement said.

The bureau urges residents to stay updated on the latest weather information from local meteorological authorities, whether they are planning local activities or travelling abroad, the statement said, adding that in the event of severe convective weather, they should seek shelter immediately in



This image provided by the Macau Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) yesterday forecasts this week’s weather in Macau.

a safe indoor location. ■

*The term “convective weather” refers to atmospheric conditions driven by convection – the vertical movement of air caused by

temperature differences (warm air rising, cool air sinking). Convection often leads to the formation of clouds, showers and thunderstorms. – Poe

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Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY INTERVALS. A FEW SHOWERS. A FEW THUNDERSTORMS LATER. FORCE 3 TO 4 SOUTH TO SOUTHWESTERLY WINDS, OCCASIONALLY FORCE 5 WITH GUSTS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 70% AND 95%.



22°C~28°C

Source: SMG

CEM encourages eco-friendly tasks for reward points

Rui Pastorin

Power utility CEM has announced the launch of its new "Green Point" environmental incentive programme, where, through the CEM app, customers can complete eco-friendly tasks in exchange for points to use for rewards.

According to a statement yesterday, paying bills using the e-wallet, reducing paper usage through using e-bills, or using EV charging services, are among the designated eco-friendly tasks.

The points earned can be used to redeem electricity, charging vouchers or CEM souvenirs, with the statement noting that the programme turns "every energy-saving and carbon-reduction action taken by customers into tangible rewards".

The statement said that one

can also enhance the experience by upgrading to a verified membership by completing e-ID verification via Macao One Account, enabling users to unlock advanced features, as well as earn 1.2 times the points for all completed eco-friendly tasks.

The statement also said that one can download the CEM app and register an eService account to check points and redeem rewards. A single bill can be linked to multiple eService accounts.

"Through this initiative, CEM hopes to integrate energy conservation and carbon reduction into the daily lives of citizens, encouraging more citizens to join the movement and injecting a steady stream of green momentum into Macau's sustainable development", the statement said. ■



This poster provided by CEM yesterday promotes the use of its new "Green Point" environmental incentive.

ITTF World Cup starts at Galaxy Arena

Khalel Vallo

The ITTF Men's and Women's World Cup Macao 2026 kicked off at Galaxy Arena in Cotai yesterday, with opening matches delivering tightly contested encounters.

Sanctioned by the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF), the seven-day event is co-organised by the Sports Bureau (ID), Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) and World Table Tennis (WTT) Management Group Limited, in conjunction with the Macau Table Tennis General Association (MTTGA).

According to the ITTF website, Japan's Mima Ito battled back from a game down to edge Canada's Mo Zhang 3-2 in Women's Group 8, while Japan's Miwa Harimoto defeated India's Manika Batra 3-0 despite a tightly contested opening game. In the men's competition, South Korea's Park Ganghyeon from Group 8 and Croatia's Tomislav Pucar from Group 6 both garnered 3-0 victories in their respective matches.

Meanwhile in the male Group 14, Japan's Shunsuke Togami defeated Macau's Mak Tin Ian 3-1.

Speaking to the *Post* after the match, Mak said his pre-match preparation played a key role. "I watched his [Togami]



Local player Mak Tin Ian speaks to the media after his match during yesterday's ITTF Men's and Women's World Cup Macao 2026 at Galaxy Arena in Cotai.

— Photo: Khalel Vallo

videos beforehand to prepare my strategy, and it played a big role in the match. I wasn't afraid in the crucial moments — I dared to stay aggressive and attack, which helped me win that game," he said. Mak noted the difference in facing international opposition, saying that small mistakes may result in big consequences.

"My opponent is very strong and

different to local players in Macau. At this level, if I'm not careful, I can lose points quickly because he will attack directly, making it difficult to defend," he said. Mak added that maintaining the right mindset will be crucial moving forward. "What I learnt from this match is that I need to keep the same mentality as today [yesterday]. That will help me perform at my usual level or even better," he said.

Mak also thanked the home crowd for their support. "Thank you very much for cheering for me today [yesterday]. I could hear it clearly, and it really motivated me. Your support helped me perform better," he said.

Togami, meanwhile, told reporters he had little prior information on his opponent and had to adapt during the match. He also acknowledged that he suffered a left knee injury in pre-match training but was able to continue playing, while remaining cautious ahead of upcoming tournaments.

With the group stage still in its early phases and top contenders yet to play, the opening day set the stage for an intense week of competition as the tournament continues in Cotai.

The finals will take place on Easter Sunday. ■

(More on page 14)



Photography Contest

In order to encourage photography enthusiasts to capture the wonderful moments of this year's Parade as well as the dynamic charm of the performers, IC will hold the "2026 Macao International Parade Photography Contest", allowing the public to participate and support this cultural event in various ways. The contest is open to all Macao residents aged 12 or above, and the entries must be themed around this year's Parade, showcasing diverse performances, joyous scenes, images of the participants and highlights of the event. Each participant can submit a maximum of 5 photos from 29 March to 6 April. The contest offers a Champion Award, a 1st Runner-Up Award, a 2nd Runner-Up Award and 15 Merit Awards. The Photography Contest regulations can be downloaded from the Parade's website.

"Where culture flourishes, happiness happens."

Outreach Performances

Date & Time	Venue	Performing Group
2026/04/04 15:30	Leisure Area in Edf. Lok Yeung Fa Yuen	Indian Cultural and Health Association of Macau Santo Niño de Cebu in Macau Association
2026/04/04 16:30	Iao Hon Market Park	Bisdak Association of Macau
2026/04/04 20:00	Iao Hon Market Park	Macao International Association of Oriental Dance Macao Youth Street Dance Association



Saint Paul School Pastoral Care Director Fr. Lawrence The Reh blesses the teachers and students on the school's campus on Rampa dos Cavaleiros in Areia Preta district during a one-day religious event on March 20.
- Photos: Armindo Neves

Saint Paul School's religious event encourages students to practise faith, social care

Armindo Neves

Saint Paul School Macau held a one-day religious event on its campus on Rampa dos Cavaleiros in Areia Preta district on March 20.

Saint Paul School is well known as one of the nine Catholic Diocesan Schools.

The school's Civic and Religious Subject Head Leong Sin Ion told the *Post* that the event centred around the lives of the saints, incorporating reflections on contemporary struggles, scripture copying, and the use of AI to create a video about the Stations of the Cross, allowing students to experience the faith.

Leong also said that the event, which has been held consecutively for four years, aims to integrate knowledge gained from religious classes into daily life and help students internalise "sound values".

In response to the challenge of young people becoming overly absorbed in the online world, Leong said that the school hopes to use religious education to develop students' Social Emotional Learning systematically.

Leong also said that this year, in conjunction with the school's 55th anniversary, a painting and colouring competition centred on the school's patron saint, Saint Paul, was also held, enabling students from kindergarten to Form 6 to deepen their understanding of the saint's spirit through creative expression, adding that the event has been held annually across all school divisions with around 2,800 participants each time.

The *Post* also interviewed students who ran some of the event's activities booths.

A Form 5 student surnamed Loi, who was tasked with presenting the story about Italian virgin martyr St. Maria Goretti (1890-1902), said that she learnt from the saint the importance of protecting women and children. Another Form 5 student, surnamed Lam, who presented the story about Belgian Jesuit scholastic St. John Berchmans (1599-1621), said that she learnt virtues such as honesty, obedience and respect for teachers and elders from the saint, and noted that these qualities are very beneficial for personal growth.

Students who participated in the games reflected with the *Post* on what they had learnt.

A Form 5 student surnamed Lio quoted the famous saying of St. John Berchmans, "If I do not become a saint in my youth, I will never have the opportunity to become one". From this, Lio said, he realised the importance of embracing a heart orientated towards goodness.

A Form 3 student surnamed Kuan said that he drew strength from the life of Spanish missionary Saint Francis Xavier's (1506-1552) missionary journey to the Far East a spirit of perseverance and resilience in the face of hardship.

A Form 6 student surnamed Wong said that he gained strength from the life of Italian priest, educator and writer

Saint John Bosco (1815-1888) the value of committing oneself to charity and caring for others.

Fr. Lawrence The Reh, the school's Director of Pastoral Care, told the *Post* that the event commenced with a prayer for peace in the Middle East, aiming to help students understand that faith extends beyond the school campus to encompass concern for the world.

He pointed out that Lent serves as a reminder to students to attend to their spiritual growth alongside their material lives, suggesting that they practise small acts of self-denial in their daily lives – such as reducing time spent on their smartphones or focusing more on their studies – as a way to cultivate self-discipline.

He emphasised that faith education should not remain merely theoretical but must be expressed through concrete acts of charity.

He also said he believed an approach combining education with fun can inspire students to actively participate.

Through Bible verses and stories of the saints embedded in games, students learn through experience, which is more effective than purely theoretical instruction, said The Reh.

He also said that he hopes the students will integrate acts of charity into their daily lives, becoming caring and compassionate individuals who can draw strength from their faith when facing future challenges.



MIECF logs 30 pct rise in cooperation deals inked

Rui Pastorin

The three-day 2026 Macao International Environmental Cooperation Forum & Exhibition (2026MIECF) concluded its run on Saturday, with organisers noting that there was an increase of over 30 percent year-on-year in cooperation agreements signed.

The data comes from a statement on Saturday by MIECF, noting that over 460 business matching sessions were held and more than 60 cooperation agreements signed during the eco-fair.

The statement also said that many exhibitors and participants noted being satisfied with the event's overall arrangements, giving "highly positive feedback, with green cooperation outcomes exceeding expectations". Macau's green financial institutions also organised professional forum activities attended by more than 180 enterprises, the statement said.

The statement added that on the last day of the event, members of the public were able to attend the free-admission "Green Public Day", where many joined environmental education activities.

Regarding the programme, the statement pointed

out that MIECF's Green Forum gathered nearly 50 experts, scholars and industry leaders from places such as the Chinese mainland, Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs), Southeast Asia and Europe, with four sessions focusing on ecological civilisation and green finance, among other topics. Meanwhile, over 500 green technology achievements and technical solutions were also presented at the Green Showcase, which covered 12,000 m².

Moreover, the statement noted that four Macau-Hengqin "multi-venue" activities were joined by over 230 representatives from PSCs and Southeast Asian business delegates, international environmental organisations and green financial institutions.

The Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) also presented Macau and Hengqin's investment advantages to over 170 enterprises. So far, 35 firms from Brazil, Portugal and the Chinese mainland have signalled intent to invest in Macau – a 60 percent year-on-year increase. The statement added that 15 of them have begun or completed procedures to set up companies in Macau. ■



This photo provided by the Macao International Environmental Cooperation Forum and Exhibition (MIECF) on Saturday shows a top-down view of some of the three-day fair's zones.

Police arrest 4 Mongolian thieves

Armando Neves

The Public Security Police (PSP) arrested four Mongolians for theft on Thursday, PSP spokeswoman Lai In Hong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Lai identified the quartet as comprising three men and a woman, all of them in their thirties who claimed to be jobless.

According to Lai, the Public Security Police received a report from a female victim on Thursday stating that while trying on clothes in a garment store located at a hotel in Taipa, her belongings in her handbag placed outside a fitting room were stolen. The loss included credit cards, an ATM card and 800 patacas in cash, Lai said.

Based on the CCTV footage, Lai said that PSP officers identified the quartet as the suspects in the case, adding that PSP officers found them in a hotel in Taipa.

According to Lai, during the operation, PSP plainclothes officers observed one of the suspects reaching into the trouser back pocket of a man, in what appeared to be an attempt to pick the man's pocket. The four suspects immediately left the scene afterwards, Lai said.

PSP officers promptly intercepted them and seized 230 euros (2,130 patacas) in cash, six smartphones and a quantity of stolen clothing, according to Lai.

A follow-up investigation revealed that the quartet had entered Macau on Wednesday and had stolen at least 10 items of clothing from three shops at the hotel, with a total estimated value of around 5,600 patacas, Lai said.

The quartet have meanwhile been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing theft charges. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday shows PSP officers escorting the four Mongolian theft suspects to a police station.

Denmark's Jeppe Borch wins Macao Match Cup

Khalel Vallo

In a statement issued by the Sports Bureau (ID) on Sunday, Denmark's Jeppe Borch claimed the title at the 2026 World Match Racing Tour – Macao Match Cup, which concluded that day.

Organised by the bureau and Ursa Major Sailing Event Management, co-organised by the Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA) and the Macau Sailing Association, and held in partnership with the World Match Racing Tour (WMRT), the five-day competition took place in Macau for the second consecutive year. The competitors raced in Macau's coastal waters between the Governador Nobre de Carvalho Bridge (commonly known as "old bridge") and Sai Van Bridge.

The event saw top international sailors compete in waters off Macau, the statement underlined. In the semi-finals, Borch garnered a dominant 3-0 victory over Sweden's Johnie Berntsson, while fellow Swede Oscar Engström edged past the United States' Christian Prendergast with a 3-2 scoreline in a closely fought contest.

Meanwhile, Berntsson later secured third place by defeating Prendergast 2-1 in the "petite final"*, the statement noted.

The championship race featured Borch against Engström, with the Danish skipper ultimately prevailing 3-2 in a tight and competitive final to lift the trophy.

An award ceremony was held after the races, attended by Macau Sports Bureau Acting President See Lei Si Leng and

representatives from the event organisers and sailing bodies, including WMRT Executive Director James Pleasance, Macau Sailing Association Vice Chairman Li Yue, and DSAMA Chief Lao Se Keng, the statement concluded. ■

* "Petite final" refers to a match or contest that determines a lower-place ranking, typically third place, rather than the overall championship. – Poe



This handout photo provided by the Sports Bureau (ID) on Sunday shows the Danish team celebrating their victory at the 2026 World Match Racing Tour – Macao Match Cup, on their boat at the pier of the International Yacht Club in Taipa that day.

Police nab quartet for drug party in hotel guestroom

Armando Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) nabbed four suspects from the Chinese mainland for participating in a drug party in hotel guestroom on Thursday, PJ spokesman Cheong Un Hong said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Cheong identified the quartet as a 38-year-old businessman surnamed Gao, a 43-year-old jobless man surnamed Zhou, a 37-year-old businessman surnamed Zheng and a 25-year-old saleswoman surnamed Lei.

According to Cheong, at noon on Thursday, the Judiciary Police received a report from a hotel in Cotai that a staff member had discovered drug-taking paraphernalia while cleaning a guestroom.

Upon arrival, with the assistance of hotel security, Cheong said, PJ officers intercepted the quartet and sized a packet containing around 2.8 grams of suspected crystal meth, along with drug-taking paraphernalia including a modified water bottle, aluminium foil and a lighter in the guestroom.

Tests by the Judiciary Police confirmed the substance as crystal meth worth around 8,400 patacas, Cheong said. Urine tests confirmed all of them as drug users.

The investigation revealed that the quartet are long-time friends, Cheong said, adding that Gao is suspected of smuggling the drugs into Macau, after which he and the others consumed them together in the guestroom.

The quartet have meanwhile been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP), facing charges of drug-taking and possession of drug-taking paraphernalia; additionally, Gao faces a drug-trafficking charge. ■



This undated handout photo provided by the Judiciary Police (PJ) yesterday shows evidence seized from the hotel guestroom booked by the drug-taking quartet and the suspects' drug-taking paraphernalia.

Govt proposes bill granting concessions or permits for coastal waters' use

Tony Wong

The local government announced yesterday that it has finished drafting a bill regulating the use of the Macau Special Administrative Region's (MSAR) coastal waters, proposing the formal establishment of a system on granting private entities a concession or permit to use designated maritime areas for a certain period of time.

The bill proposes that a concession will be granted to private entities, through public tender, to use a maritime area for a long period of time, for up to 15 years, involving major investment projects, while a "temporary" permit will be granted to private entities to use a maritime area for a short period of time. The bill proposes that they will be required to pay to use maritime areas.

Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak and Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA) Director Susana Wong Soi Man made the announcement during a press conference at Government Headquarters yesterday. Wong Sio Chak is also the spokesman for the government's top advisory Executive Council.

The bill will be submitted to the Legislative Assembly (AL) in due course for debate, review and vote.

On December 20, 2015, i.e., the 16th anniversary of the establishment of the MSAR, the Central People's Government granted Macau formal jurisdiction over its coastal waters covering 85 square kilometres. Previously, unlike Hong Kong, Macau did not have formal jurisdiction over its coastal waters. Macau's current land area amounts to 33.4 square kilometres.

Afterwards, in July 2018, Macau enacted its current framework law on the management of its coastal waters, officially known as Maritime Areas Management Framework Law.

The current framework law lists the objectives of the local government's management of the MSAR's coastal waters as well as the principles with which the local government must comply when managing the maritime areas.

During yesterday's press conference, Wong Sio Chak noted that the 2018 framework law stipulates that Macau's coastal waters are owned by the nation and that the Central People's Government authorises the MSAR government to exercise its administrative power to manage the coastal waters.

He noted that the framework law requires the local government to draft laws and regulations on the management of Macau's coastal waters. The framework law also enables the MSAR government



Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak (right) and Marine and Water Bureau (DSAMA) Director Susana Wong Soi Man address yesterday's Executive Council press conference at Government Headquarters.

— Photo courtesy of TDM

to allow certain entities to use designated maritime areas by granting a concession or permit or through other official means, which is to be regulated by a specific piece of legislation, the policy secretary pointed out.

Consequently, Wong Sio Chak said, the local government has drafted the bill, officially known as Law on the Use of Maritime Areas, establishing a legal system formally governing the use of the MSAR's coastal waters, putting the respective requirements listed by the 2018 framework law into practice.

The bill proposes that the MSAR government can grant private entities a concession to use a maritime area for a long period of time or grant them a "temporary" permit to use a maritime area only for a short period of time.

The bill proposes that private entities will have to pay to use maritime areas.

Wong Sio Chak said that the different fees that private entities will need to pay to use the respective maritime areas will be determined by a chief executive order to be promulgated after the future enactment of the new Law on the Use of Maritime Areas.

During yesterday's press conference, Susana Wong said that a concession will be granted to private entities to use a maritime area for launching a long-term project requiring a large sum of investment, such as those involving public interest and those set to make major contributions to Macau's economic development.

She said the bill proposes that a concession to use a maritime area may last between 2 and 15 years and that such a concession will be granted through public tender.

Susana Wong said that a "temporary" permit will be granted to private entities to use a maritime area only for a short period of time

"in which their application to use the respective maritime area does not involve any major investment projects".

She underlined that after the future enactment of the new law, the local government will assess private entities' applications to use maritime areas in full compliance with its official plan for the coastal waters' marine functional zoning.

The local government's official plan for the coastal waters' marine functional zoning, which was promulgated in 2024, divides the MSAR's coastal waters into various zones earmarked for different use and purposes.

Susana Wong also pointed out that activities such as sightseeing cruises and sailing races are classified as maritime activities in general where the respective organisers or entities are only required to file an application under the current administrative procedures, because of which such activities will not be regulated by the future Law on the Use of Maritime Areas.

According to the current Maritime Areas Management Framework Law, use of maritime areas covers the surface of the water, the water per se, the seabed and the subsoil.

Susana Wong also said that about 30 square kilometres out of Macau's 85-square-kilometre coastal waters are currently being used in different ways and for different purposes.

Wong Sio Chak also said yesterday that the government is still planning its "ecological island" project.

The project was first proposed by the local government about two years ago, for the reclamation of an artificial island to be used as a landfill for construction waste, to be located in a maritime area about one kilometre off Coloane's Hac Sa Long Chao Kok coast. ■

Woman tries to smuggle 59 hermit crabs from Macau to mainland

Tony Wong

Gongbei customs announced in a statement yesterday that a woman attempted to smuggle 59 *Coenobita perlatus*, a type of hermit crab, from Macau to the Chinese mainland via the Gongbei checkpoint early this month.

The statement identified the woman as a mainlander surnamed Jiang.

According to the statement, customs officers noticed that the

woman, who was entering the Chinese mainland through "the nothing to declare" channel on March 4, was walking hurriedly and appeared nervous.

The customs officers intercepted her, and found 59 live hermit crabs in her bag.

Yesterday's statement said that, based on technical assessments, Gongbei customs has confirmed that the crabs are all *Coenobita perlatus* specimens. ■



This undated handout photo released by Gongbei customs yesterday shows the seized hermit crabs.

108 startups selected for HK-Shenzhen I&T Park incubation scheme – incl from Macao

HONG KONG – The Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park Limited announced yesterday that 108 startups have been selected and incorporated into its incubation program.

Focusing on life and health sciences as well as AI and data science, the incubation program offers startups full-spectrum support covering everything from R&D and validation to commercialization.

The scheme received over 750 applications between November 17 and December 30 last year. The

final cohort of 108 startups includes participants from Hong Kong, Macao, the Chinese mainland, as well as Southeast Asia, Europe and the United States.

Officially opened on December 22, 2025, the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park serves as the Hong Kong component of the Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Cooperation Zone. Situated in the Lok Ma Chau Loop, it covers an area of approximately 87 hectares.

— Xinhua

Shenzhen airport opens first direct passenger route to Central Asia

SHENZHEN – Shenzhen Bao'an International Airport yesterday launched a direct passenger route to Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent, the first non-stop passenger service from the city to Central Asia.

The airport said the route, operated by Uzbekistan Airways, marks its first new international route launched this year.

The service will run once a week on Mondays. Flights from Tashkent depart at 1:20 local time and arrive in Shenzhen at 7:40 Beijing time, while outbound flights leave Shenzhen at 9:10 Beijing time and land in Tashkent at 16:20 local time.

The new direct flight route comes as China and Uzbekistan deepen cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative, with closer exchanges in trade, investment, energy, infrastructure and people-to-people ties.

Airport authorities said the route would facilitate cross-border travel and business links, while offering Shenzhen firms a more direct gateway to the Central Asian market.

With the launch of the Tashkent service, Shenzhen airport now has links to 42 cities in 23 Belt and Road (B&R) partner countries, according to the airport.

— Xinhua

Xi urges mobilizing whole society in tree-planting efforts

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping yesterday called for mobilizing the whole society to actively participate in afforestation, stressing that a sound ecological environment is shared by all and requires the joint efforts of all.

Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks when taking part in a voluntary tree-planting activity in Beijing.

Xi and other Party and state leaders, including Li Qiang, Zhao Leji, Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang and Li Xi, arrived at the tree-planting site in Changping District of Beijing in the morning. Xi waved to the crowd to extend his greetings before picking up a shovel to join the activity. He planted saplings of multiple types of trees.

While planting the trees, he asked the children at the site about their studies and daily lives, their participation in labor and sports, and their involvement in tree-planting activities. He stressed the importance of setting great goals at a young age, fostering a love of learning, work and nature, and striving to become pillars of society.

Xi also talked with officials and members

of the public on site. He said that China has seen sustained increases in both forest area and stock volume, as well as continuous reduction in desertified and sandy land areas. This has made it the country with the largest and fastest increase in greening in the world.

Xi hailed the Ecological and Environmental Code adopted in March, noting that it further strengthens the legal foundation for building a Beautiful China.

Afforestation is an important task in building a Beautiful China, Xi said, urging sustained and solid efforts to advance the initiative.

This year marks the first year of implementing the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) and the 45th anniversary of the nationwide voluntary tree-planting campaign, Xi noted.

Under the new circumstances, efforts to advance greening programs should place greater emphasis on improving quality, developing related industries, and delivering benefits to the people, he said.

Xi emphasized the importance of facilitating the channels for realizing the value of ecological products, and advancing urban and rural greening in a coordinated manner. – Xinhua



President Xi Jinping (center), also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, plants a tree during a voluntary tree-planting activity at Baishan Town in Changping District of Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

German university in Hainan FTP to enroll 800 students in China this year

HAIKOU – Hainan Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences (BiUH) is expected to enroll 800 students across 25 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities in China this year, according to the admissions office of BiUH.

BiUH, a campus established by Germany's Hochschule Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences and Arts (HSBI), is the first independent institution run by a foreign university on the Chinese mainland.

Last Saturday, BiUH, located in Danzhou City Hainan Province, hosted its 2026 Campus Open Day and university admission information session. Many high school students and parents from Beijing, Shanghai, Hainan and other places across China attended the event.

"This event not only provides an important opportunity to showcase our educational achievements, but also serves as a platform for dialogue, exchange, and mutual understanding," said Ingeborg Schramm-Wölk, president of BiUH.

She noted that the university is committed to serving as a bridge between Chinese and German education systems, placing students at the center of its mission while promoting the deep integration of theoretical learning and practical skills to cultivate high-quality, application-oriented talent with international

perspectives and innovative capabilities.

BiUH enrolled its first students in 2023, marking the first time China allowed a foreign university to operate independently without a local partner. Currently, it offers seven undergraduate programs, including Computer Science and Technology, Digital Technologies, Industrial Engineering, Logistics Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Software Engineering and Business Administration.

In April 2018, China announced plans to transform Hainan into a pilot free trade zone, with a long-term vision of developing a free trade port with Chinese characteristics. A master plan released two years later aimed to build Hainan Island into a globally influential and high-level free trade port by the middle of the century.

Under the plan, high-level overseas universities and vocational institutions in science, engineering, agriculture and medicine are permitted to operate independently in the Hainan free trade port (FTP).

To date, Hainan has partnered with 48 domestic and overseas universities, and won approval for two independently operated campuses of foreign universities and 26 Sino-foreign higher-education institutions and programs, according to the provincial department of education. – Xinhua

Foreign ministry hosts seminar on advancing arms control diplomacy

BEIJING – At a recent seminar hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, participants engaged in in-depth discussions on advancing multilateralism in arms control, injecting fresh impetus for the international arms control process, a ministry spokesperson said yesterday.

Spokesperson Mao Ning made the remarks at a regular news briefing when responding to a query about the Seminar on Promoting Multilateralism and Advancing Arms Control Diplomacy held in Beijing from March 24 to 27, as well as organized visits to decommissioned nuclear facilities.

Mao added that foreign representatives attending the seminar visited a Chinese nuclear company and also traveled to Chongqing to visit decommissioned nuclear facilities.

"This was an important diplomatic event for China to implement the Global Governance Initiative and the Global Security Initiative, support the UN's role in arms control, and uphold the international arms control system," Mao said.

Participants exchanged views on practicing multilateralism in arms control, the review conference of the parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, governance of emerging science and technology, and the rights of developing countries to peaceful use of science and technology, Mao added.

"These discussions effectively enhanced mutual understanding on arms control policies, deepened strategic mutual trust, and provided new impetus for the international arms control process," Mao said. – Xinhua

CPC leadership deploys guidance teams to oversee Party-wide education campaign

BEIJING – The Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee has decided to dispatch eight guidance teams to oversee a Party-wide study and education campaign for the establishment and application of a correct understanding of what it means to perform well, an official statement said yesterday.

The teams will guide and supervise relevant work in eight provincial-level regions and 12 institutions, including government departments, financial institutions, state-owned enterprises and universities, the statement added.

A training meeting for the guidance teams was held in Beijing yesterday. According to the meeting, the move is a key step to ensure the campaign delivers solid results by strengthening oversight and promoting effective problem-solving.

It stressed that the guidance teams

should carry out precise and effective supervision, thoroughly identify problems, ensure resolute rectification, and address pressing public concerns.

The teams were also instructed to help identify institutional weaknesses, improve regulatory frameworks, and ensure strict implementation of rules, according to the meeting.

The CPC Central Committee initiated the campaign in late February, prodding Party members, particularly officials at the county and director level and above, to fix their mindset regarding governance performance.

The campaign, which will run until July, aims to correct misguided views on governance that often breed vanity projects, hidden risks, heavy burdens on local communities, and public discontent.

– Xinhua

China marks 10 years of anti-domestic violence law with 33,000 protection orders

BEIJING – China's top court said yesterday that courts across the country have issued around 33,000 personal safety protection orders since the anti-domestic violence law took effect in 2016, as the law marks its 10th anniversary this year.

The personal safety protection order, a civil injunction mechanism that allows victims to seek swift legal protection, is a centerpiece of the 2016 law, which was China's first legislation specifically targeting domestic abuse.

At a briefing yesterday, the Supreme People's Court said the 33,000 orders had been issued over the past decade.

The court also released four typical cases to clarify legal standards for identifying domestic violence and to reinforce the enforceability of protection orders.

In one case, a man was detained for 15 days after returning to the victim's home and assaulting her and her relatives, despite having been served with a protection order. Police notified the court after responding to the incident, and judges ordered the

detention in what the court described as giving protection orders "teeth."

Two of the cases illustrated how courts are recognizing non-physical forms of abuse. In one divorce case, a man's prolonged insults and humiliation towards his spouse were deemed to constitute psychological control.

In another case, a man was found to have imposed a form of "soft violence" by restricting his wife from talking to other men without any evidence of wrongdoing, effectively trapping her in what the court called an "invisible cage."

A further case highlighted economic control as a form of domestic violence. A man with a physically disabled wife restricted her access to medical care and controlled their finances to force her compliance. The court issued a protection order and coordinated with local authorities to help the woman receive job training, aiming to prevent future abuse by strengthening her economic independence.

– Xinhua

Myanmar paves way for junta chief to become civilian president

NAYPYIDAW — Myanmar cleared the way yesterday for coup-leading general Min Aung Hlaing to become president and maintain his rule in civilian garb, with lawmakers nominating him as a vice-presidential candidate and the junta replacing him as military commander.

Min Aung Hlaing has ruled Myanmar since 2021 when he ordered a coup toppling the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi — detaining the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, dissolving her party and triggering civil war.

After five years of hardline rule, he oversaw heavily restricted elections that criminalised protest or criticism of the vote and returned a walkover win for pro-military parties in late January.

“This political manoeuvring signals that Min Aung Hlaing intends to continue ruling the country with an iron fist,” said analyst Naing Min Khant of the Institute for Strategy and Policy Myanmar think tank.

“He fundamentally lacks legitimacy but desperately craves the facade of it.”

Lower house MP Kyaw Kyaw Htay nominated Min Aung Hlaing for vice-president yesterday morning, according to a television broadcast of a parliamentary session on state-run media.

Three vice-presidents will be chosen, one of whom will be elected as president in a parliament-wide vote.

The lower house also nominated Kyaw Swe for vice-president, lower house speaker Khin Yi said in parliament.

Kyaw Swe is from the junta-aligned National Unity Party, formed by retired military officers in 1988 after mass pro-democracy protests challenging the rule of former military dictator Ne Win were brutally crushed by the armed forces.



This handout picture taken and released yesterday by the Myanmar Military Information Team shows Myanmar's outgoing military chief Min Aung Hlaing (left) and his successor Ye Win Oo saluting an honour guard during a handover ceremony in Naypyidaw. — AFP

The upper house nominated two other vice-presidential candidates: Tuu Jar, a former ethnic minority armed group leader from northern Kachin state whose party is now aligned with the military, and Nan Ni Ni Aye, a regional MP from Karen state with the pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party.

Democracy watchdogs have long warned that the government will be a proxy of the military, which has ruled Myanmar for the vast majority of its post-independence history.

Military responsibilities

The junta also installed a new military commander-in-chief, with former spymaster Ye Win Oo replacing Min Aung Hlaing, according to a junta statement.

“Today the current responsibilities of the commander-in-chief of the Tatmadaw have been transferred to General Ye Win Oo,” the statement said, referring to the Myanmar military.

Min Aung Hlaing “will continue to work with all his strength and intelligence for the

benefit of the state, the people and the Tatmadaw”, it added.

Ye Win Oo was promoted to the top military role at a ceremony in the capital Naypyidaw.

The two generals, bedecked with military medals across their chests, were seen shaking hands at the event, which was broadcast by state media.

In a further reshuffle of generals, armed forces deputy commander Soe Win was replaced by Kyaw Swar Lin, who was also made army chief, a junta statement said.

“A transfer of duties within the Tatmadaw is not a routine or normal handover. Rather, it is a transfer based on trust, confidence and the systematic pre-training of suitable candidates,” Soe Win was quoted in the statement as saying in a speech.

“Duties are being transferred to the younger generation through successive levels of responsibility.”

Kyaw Swar Lin was only a lieutenant colonel when Min Aung Hlaing assumed the mantle of armed forces chief in 2011, but he quickly became a favoured protege and was promoted to lieutenant general in 2020. — AFP

Jakarta confirms Indonesian peacekeeper killed in Lebanon

JAKARTA — Indonesia confirmed yesterday that one of its peacekeepers was killed in Lebanon, where the UN force said a projectile hit one of its positions.

The war in the Middle East spread to Lebanon in early March after Iran-backed Hezbollah fired rockets at Israel.

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has reported that its positions have been hit more than once since the start of the latest fighting.

On Sunday, a projectile exploded near the town of Adchit Al Qusayr, killing one peacekeeping soldier on Sunday, said UNIFIL.

UNIFIL said it did not know the origin of the projectile but had launched an investigation to find out.

The Indonesian foreign ministry said “indirect artillery fire” near town of Adchit Al Qusayr killed one

of its peacekeepers and wounded three others.

“Our thoughts and prayers are with the bereaved family, and we wish a full and swift recovery to the injured personnel,” the ministry said.

“Indonesia is working with UNIFIL to ensure the prompt repatriation of the fallen and the best possible medical treatment for the injured.”

Indonesia strongly condemned the incident and called for an investigation, adding that safety and security of UN peacekeepers must be respected “at all times”.

Adchit Al Qusayr lies near Lebanon’s southern border with Israel, where Israeli forces have been battling Hezbollah fighters for nearly a month.

On March 7, three Ghanaian soldiers were wounded by gunfire in a border town in southern Lebanon. — AFP



Activists demonstrate in front of the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) headquarters in Manila yesterday, as they call for the protection of Philippine migrant workers in the Middle East after US-Israeli strikes on Iran last month triggered a war in the region. — AFP

Philippines oil refinery secures 2.5 million barrels of Russian crude

MANILA — The Philippines’ sole oil refinery has secured nearly 2.5 million barrels of Russian crude out of “extreme necessity”, a stock exchange filing revealed yesterday, as the country seeks to replenish fast-dwindling fuel reserves.

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 most recently saying stocks could last until June 30.

AFP reported last week that a tanker filled with Russian crude oil had arrived at the harbour servicing refinery operator Petron Corp, a purchase unthinkable before longtime treaty ally the United States eased sanctions tied to Moscow’s war in Ukraine.

In a report to the Philippine stock exchange released yesterday, Petron said it had agreed to purchase Russian crude after seeing at least four million barrels in shipments cancelled since the start of the Middle East war.

“The purchases were undertaken strictly out of extreme necessity as an extraordinary emergency measure

in response to unprecedented geopolitical and supply-chain disruptions and only after exhausting all commercially and operationally viable alternatives,” the report reads.

“A refinery shutdown for failure to secure crude would lead to serious nationwide fuel shortages and sharp price spikes,” said the company, whose refinery accounts for about 30 percent of the country’s fuel needs.

Since the war began, the cost of diesel and petrol has skyrocketed, driving protests by groups representing the country’s jeepney drivers and others.

Prices were set to tick up again today.

The United States earlier this month eased some restrictions on sales of Russian crude, allowing countries to purchase oil that was already at sea until April 11.

The Philippines’ Department of Energy last week announced the arrival of 142,000 barrels of government-procured diesel, part of its target of “up to two million barrels of additional supply for the country”.

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

Philippines’ fertility rate declines over past 3 decades

MANILA — The Philippines’ fertility rate has steadily declined over the past three decades, according to a report released yesterday by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

The Philippines’ 2025 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) found that the total fertility rate (TFR) among women aged 15 to 49 dropped to 1.7 children per woman, indicating

a continued decline from 4.1 children per woman in 1993.

Fertility rates declined across both rural and urban areas during the same period. From 1993 to 2025, rural TFR fell from 4.8 to 2.0 children per woman, while urban TFR declined from 3.5 to 1.5.

The survey also showed that fertility was closely linked to education and income levels. Women with some primary education had

the highest TFR at 3.1 children per woman, with rates declining as educational attainment increased.

The TFR represents the average number of children a woman would have over her lifetime based on current age-specific fertility rates.

The 2025 NDHS is the 13th survey of its kind since 1968. The survey obtained interview responses from 29,694 women aged 15 to 49. — Xinhua

Rescuers search for 27 missing after Indonesia fishing boat sinks

Jakarta, Indonesia

JAKARTA — More than two dozen crew are unaccounted for after their fishing boat sank off the east coast of an Indonesian island yesterday, a local search and rescue agency said.

The vessel, which carried 27 crew, sank early yesterday in bad weather after it departed Taliabu island in the eastern province of North Maluku a day before, the

agency said in a statement.

The skipper informed the shipowner at around 4 a.m. local time that the boat had sunk and all crew had carried out “self-evacuation” to a longboat, it added.

“The team is continuing the search but as of now, there is no information regarding the whereabouts of the victims or of the longboat that reportedly evacuated

them,” said the statement.

Marine accidents are a regular occurrence in the Southeast Asian archipelago, due in part to lax safety standards and inclement weather.

In January, three Spanish tourists died when their boat sank off eastern Indonesia, and a 10-year-old boy was listed as officially missing after authorities ended the search. — AFP



Police personnel clash with supporters of Nepal's former prime minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli, during a protest against his arrest in Kathmandu on Sunday. Nepal's Supreme Court yesterday ordered the government to justify the detention of former prime minister Oli, arrested for his alleged role in a deadly crackdown on 2025 protests that ousted him.

The order came as hundreds of his supporters marched demanding the release of Oli, blocked by heavy police deployments as they neared the charred old parliament building, set on fire in the September violence in which at least 76 people were killed. — AFP

Seoul seeks to calm rush to buy rubbish bags over Mideast war

SEOUL — South Korea's energy minister sought yesterday to ease fears over shortages of plastic rubbish bags after sales in Seoul jumped nearly fivefold due to energy supply concerns sparked by the Middle East war.

South Korea is a major importer of oil and related by-products used to make plastic and a vast array of other items, and household rubbish can only be disposed of in special bags sold in shops.

The Seoul city government told AFP that daily sales of the bags surged nearly fivefold to 2.7 million last week, and major retailers have imposed limits on how many customers can buy.

"There is no need to worry about the supply of standard garbage bags," Energy Minister Kim Sung-whan said on social media yesterday.

"There is ample capacity to use recycled raw materials, meaning there will be no supply issues for

more than a year," he said, adding that there would be no price hike.

Even under the worst-case scenario, the government would consider allowing general plastic bags to be used as waste bags, he said.

"You will never be in a situation where you are forced to store rubbish at home."

Most of South Korea's oil imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz, which has been effectively shut by Iran since the United States and Israel began attacking the country on February 28.

This prompted the government of Asia's fourth-largest economy to introduce caps on fuel prices — a first since 1997 — and prepare a "wartime" supplementary budget worth 25 trillion won (US\$16.5 billion).

Korean authorities have also urged people to save energy, including by taking shorter showers, walking or cycling more and charging mobile phones during daytime hours. — AFP

Bangladesh PM orders probe into measles outbreak

DHAKA — Bangladesh's prime minister has ordered an urgent nationwide review following a measles outbreak with more than 600 cases, officials said yesterday.

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has directed two senior ministers to travel across the South Asian nation of 170 million people to assess the scale of the crisis and coordinate response efforts, according to a statement from his Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

Ministry of Health senior official Md Halimur Rashid, head of the disease control unit, said there have been 674 measles cases across the country this year.

Measles is one of the world's most contagious diseases, according to the World Health Organisation, and spreads through coughs or sneezes.

Complications can include brain swelling and severe breathing

problems. While it can affect anyone, it is most common in children.

Bangladesh has made significant advancements in vaccinations to tackle infectious disease, but a measles drive that had been due in June 2024 was delayed by unrest during a mass uprising that toppled the government.

"Regular vaccine drives have been ongoing, only the special campaign drive which was scheduled for June 2024 had to be postponed due to political unrest," Rashid told AFP, saying the next campaign will begin in June.

The WHO estimates as many as 95,000 measles deaths globally every year, mostly among unvaccinated or under-vaccinated children under the age of five, according to its latest statistics.

There is no specific treatment for measles once caught. — AFP

Thai undertaker reveals corpse to justify fuel buy

BANGKOK — When a Thai garage attendant refused to fill Preecha Ngerkasem's jerrycans with the diesel he wanted, the temple attendant opened up his vehicle to show him why he needed the fuel: a corpse awaiting cremation.

Many petrol stations in Thailand have imposed restrictions like purchase limits or container bans as supplies run short and prices soar on the back of disruptions from the Middle East war.

Preecha had been assigned to collect the body of an unidentified homeless man who had died of unknown causes from a hospital in Chonburi province and give it a Buddhist cremation.

He stopped en route to fill the three 18-litre jerrycans he needs for each body he burns, but the attendant at first refused the sale.

Emerging from his cab, Preecha — livestreaming the exchange on Facebook — opened the back of his

pick-up truck and lifted the coffin lid so the stunned staffer could see the corpse inside.

"You are refusing to sell me fuel, so I have to show you the reason why I need it," he said in the video.

The attendant laughed uncomfortably before a colleague intervened and a manager approved the transaction.

The dead man was given an appropriate cremation later on Saturday afternoon, Preecha told AFP yesterday.

"I have never had to do anything like this before, and I never expected to," he said.

Garages should be willing to sell fuel on production of a hospital death certificate, he added.

Iranian forces have effectively slowed shipping through the Strait of Hormuz to a trickle during the Middle East war, which began on February 28.

More than 80 percent of the crude oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) that passes through the narrow waterway heads to Asia, according to the US Energy Information Administration, and many parts of Southeast Asia have suffered fuel supply difficulties.

Thailand initially capped diesel prices before raising the limit six baht (US\$0.18) per litre last week.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul apologised at the weekend for the public disruption, adding that he hoped "the conflict might be short-lived".

An agreement had been reached with Iran to allow Thai oil vessels safe passage through the Strait, he said.

Reaction to Preecha's video on social media was swift.

"How have we come to this situation?" asked one poster.

Another added: "Take the coffin to Government House." — AFP

Japan's cherry blossom season dazzles locals and tourists

TOKYO — Japanese locals and tourists packed the country's most stunning cherry blossom spots yesterday to enjoy the dazzling flowers in full bloom.

The tiny white and pink petals of cherry flowers, known as sakura, herald the start of spring in Japan, and full bloom ushers in a brief period of boisterous outdoor parties held by residents.

Across the nation families and friends rolled out blankets and tarpaulins in parks, temples and even cemeteries over the weekend to eat and drink under cherry trees for traditional "hanami" or flower viewing gatherings.

Japanese people hold "very special feelings for sakura", said Tokyo resident Akiko Nyman, 48, as she admired flowers in crowded Ueno park in the centre of the capital.

"We love it, because it is so short... it doesn't last long, it

comes every year, something very special," she said.

At this time of the year, weather forecasters are laser focused on when the blossom will peak in each city, and they advise excited residents on the best weather days for picnics and how long the flowers might last.

In the ancient capital of Kyoto, officials yesterday declared full bloom after examining a sample tree within the grounds of Nijo-jo Castle, a world heritage site.

"Good photo opportunity" "We observed the cherry blossoms in full bloom on March 30," Kyoto Local Meteorological Office said.

Cherry flowers at ancient temples and shrines in Kyoto are particularly popular among visitors and locals.

Australian tourist Olivia Martell-Groves went all in for the seasonal experience, and donned

a flower-printed kimono while marvelling at the flowers.

"We wanted to see them because they're really pretty, good photo opportunities and something you can only see in certain times of the year... and also it just feels so peaceful and nice," she said.

In Tokyo, the flowers reached full bloom during the weekend, entering a brief period of stunning beauty, before the petals will fall like flurries of snow.

The flowers symbolise both the youthful energy and the fragility of life in Japanese culture as full blooms only last about a week.

The season marks the start of the new business year when university graduates join the work force.

It is also a time of farewells, when school graduates leave their hometown while many corporate professionals receive assignments in new cities. (Photo on Page 16)

— AFP

Rain, storms kill dozens in Afghanistan and Pakistan

KABUL — Heavy rain and storms have killed at least 45 people over the past few days across Afghanistan and Pakistan, disaster officials in both countries said yesterday.

Rain sweeping across Afghanistan since Thursday has caused floods and landslides in multiple provinces.

"Twenty-eight people were martyred, and 49 people were injured," Afghanistan's disaster management authority (ANDMA) said, while more than 100 homes have been destroyed.

Across the border in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, 17 people were killed and 56 wounded since Wednesday, the provincial disaster management authority said.

Those killed in Afghanistan include a 14-year-old boy struck

by lightning in the northwestern Badghis province, police spokesman Sediqullah Seddiqi told AFP.

In the same province, Seddiqi said "three people drowned while trying to recover driftwood to use for heating".

The stormy weather also destroyed at least 130 homes, while more than 430 houses were damaged, ANDMA said.

In central Daikundi, the provincial disaster management department said a five-year-old was killed when a roof collapsed.

A woman was killed in the same circumstances in eastern Nangarhar, which borders Pakistan, according to police spokesman Sayed Tayeb Hamad.

Afghanistan's disaster management authority warned people to

stay away from "rivers and flooded streams, and follow the weather forecast seriously".

The weather has already prompted the closure of several highways, officials in central and eastern Afghanistan said, with further rain and storms forecast for today.

The latest casualties follow more than 60 people being killed in snow and heavy rain that hit Afghanistan in January.

Afghanistan frequently experiences deadly floods, landslides and storms, particularly in remote areas with fragile infrastructure.

Among the poorest countries in the world after decades of war, Afghanistan is particularly exposed to the effects of climate change, which scientists say is spurring extreme weather. — AFP

Trump threatens to destroy Iran oil island despite price surge

WASHINGTON – US President Donald Trump threatened yesterday to destroy Iran's crude export hub of Kharg Island, along with its oil wells and power plants, unless Tehran quickly accepted a peace deal, compounding fears that have already sent energy prices soaring.

The risk of further escalation, including a potential US ground operation to seize Kharg Island, is sending tremors through financial markets, as well as neighbouring Gulf countries.

In a post on his Truth Social network, Trump expressed confidence that a negotiated settlement would soon be reached, adding that the United States was in "serious discussions" with "a more reasonable regime" in Tehran.

But he warned that if a deal was not struck – including to reopen the Strait of Hormuz shipping lane – US forces would destroy "all of their Electric Generating Plants, Oil Wells and Kharg Island (and possibly all desalination plants!)."

Destroying civilian infrastructure such as power and water facilities would be illegal under international humanitarian law and could constitute a war crime, experts say.

Iran has previously threatened to retaliate by targeting energy infrastructure and desalination plants in its Arab neighbours in

the Gulf who host US military bases, such as the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Market experts warned that any US ground operation or wider Iranian retaliation could send oil prices to levels not seen since the July 2008 commodity boom, when the cost of world benchmark crude Brent hit close to US\$150 per barrel.

Brent has already risen in price by nearly 60 percent this month, and the US benchmark WTI by more than half.

"If the US were to launch a ground invasion of Iran, possibly taking the Kharg Island, or if Tehran were to intensify retaliatory strikes on energy infrastructure or fully close the Strait, projections of US\$200 [a barrel] oil will not be an otherworldly supposition anymore," analyst Tamas Varga of PVM Energy said.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, whose country is playing a role in mediating indirect talks between the US and Iran, appealed directly to Trump yesterday to find an off-ramp.

"Please, help us to stop the war, you are capable of it," Sisi told a press conference with Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides in Cairo.

The United States has been sending more military assets into the region, including an amphibious assault ship carrying 3,500

Marines, leading Iranian officials to call the diplomatic efforts a smokescreen for further intervention.

Diplomatic efforts

On the ground yesterday, there was no let-up in hostilities.

Israel said its air defence batteries responded to "missiles launched from Iran" after earlier announcing it was striking "terror regime military infrastructure across Tehran."

Israel's fire and rescue services reported a fire at an oil refinery in the northern port city of Haifa, which also suffered a blaze on March 19.

Kuwait reported strikes on a power station and a desalination plant.

Israel confirmed that in recent days it had hit the Imam Hossein University in Tehran, which it says is used by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) for advanced weapons research.

In keeping with its tit-for-tat targeting, Tehran has warned it could strike US universities across the Middle East.

On the diplomatic front, Pakistan – acting as a go-between for Washington and Tehran – hosted foreign ministers from Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt in Islamabad on Sunday for talks on the crisis.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said

they had discussed how to "bring an early and permanent end to the war."

He said Iran and the United States had expressed "confidence in Pakistan to facilitate the talks" and that he had spoken to his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi as well as UN Secretary-General António Guterres and other foreign ministers who also backed the idea.

Economy ministers and central bankers from the G7 club of rich countries met in Paris where they pledged to use "all necessary measures" to stabilise the energy markets.

Developed countries agreed on March 11 to their biggest-ever release of oil reserves, with more releases predicted by analysts, especially if the war escalates.

Semblance of routine

The weeks of strikes have also taken a heavy toll on ordinary people in Iran.

Residents of Tehran painted a picture of a city that is still clinging to some routine, with cafés and restaurants open and no shortages reported in supermarkets or petrol stations.

"When I make it to a café table, even for a few minutes, I can almost believe the world hasn't ended," said Fatemeh, 27, a dental assistant.

"And then I go back home, back to the reality of living through war, with all its darkness and weight." – AFP

Israel renews strikes on Beirut suburbs, kills Lebanese soldier

BEIRUT – Israel renewed its bombardment of Beirut's southern suburbs yesterday while continuing air strikes on Lebanon's south, one of which targeted an army checkpoint and killed a soldier.

Lebanon was pulled into the Middle East conflict when Tehran-backed armed group Hezbollah fired rockets at Israel on March 2 in revenge for the killing of Iran's supreme leader, the opening salvo in the US-Israeli war against the Islamic republic.

Israel has responded with large-scale air strikes across Lebanon and a ground offensive in the south. Lebanese authorities say more than 1,200 people have been killed since the hostilities began.

Yesterday, two strikes hit Beirut's southern suburbs, one of them targeting an apartment in a residential building, according to an AFP photographer, who said Hezbollah gunmen imposed a security cordon at the site after the attack.

A security source told AFP that three Hezbollah members were killed in the strike and three others wounded.

The health ministry reported one person killed and 17 wounded in the strike.

An eyewitness who declined to be named said victims were evacuated from the site following the strike.

The building targeted is located in a residential neighbourhood packed with shops and commercial establishments, several of which were damaged, according to the photographer.

The Israeli army, which had issued an evacuation order for the area – where most residents had already fled – said it had "begun striking Hezbollah terrorist infrastructure in Beirut".

In south Lebanon, where state media reported a series of Israeli air strikes, the Lebanese army said one of its soldiers was killed and others wounded in an attack on one of its checkpoints in the Tyre region.

A military source told AFP that the strike was the first direct targeting of a



A first responder walks towards the wreckage of a vehicle at the site of an Israeli airstrike in the southern Lebanese village of Hanouiyeh, east of Tyre, yesterday. Israel renewed its bombardment of Beirut's southern suburbs on March 30 while continuing air strikes on Lebanon's south, one of which targeted an army checkpoint and killed a soldier. – AFP

Lebanese army checkpoint since the start of the war.

Earlier, the army's command announced the deaths of eight soldiers in the south and east of Lebanon since the war's start, although they were not on duty at the time of their deaths.

On Sunday, an Indonesian soldier with the UN's peacekeeping force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was also killed when a projectile exploded near a UNIFIL position close to the border, while three others were wounded.

The source of the projectile has not yet been determined.

Other UN peacekeepers were wounded yesterday in an "explosion" that "severely damaged a UNIFIL vehicle".

"Some of the injured were able to be extracted, but we were not able to access

the scene to extract two others due to a lack of security guarantees," UNIFIL spokesperson Kandice Ardiel told AFP.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun condemned "the targeting of peacekeeping forces" in a phone call with the UNIFIL commander yesterday, adding that he "continues to conduct multiple international contacts to push matters towards achieving negotiations with Israel".

Hezbollah, for its part, continued to claim attacks against Israeli positions and forces, including on an intelligence base on the outskirts of Tel Aviv.

The Israeli military announced yesterday that one of its soldiers was killed fighting in south Lebanon, and another seriously wounded, bringing the number of Israeli soldiers killed in Lebanon to six.

– AFP

'Get used to new regional order' says head of Iran Guards foreign wing

PARIS – The commander of the foreign operations branch of Iran's Revolutionary Guards issued a rare message yesterday hailing Iranian proxy groups for helping create a "new regional order".

Esmail Qaani became head of the Guards' Quds Force after the killing of Qassem Soleimani in a US strike in Iraq in 2020.

His message, just the second attributed to him since the US-Israeli war against the Islamic republic began on February 28, was posted on X under the handle @general_Qaani, although the social media giant then rapidly suspended the account with a note that "X suspends accounts which violate the X Rules."

The message was also widely published by Iranian news agencies and state television.

Qaani said that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wanted to create a "security belt across the region" but the actions of Tehran-backed militant groups including Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen had "exposed the regime's false promises".

"Get used to the new regional order," he said.

Qaani was reported to have been killed in the 12-day war between Israel and Iran last June, but re-emerged in public.

Intense speculation has since surrounded his whereabouts and standing, amid unconfirmed reports he had come under pressure due to alleged intelligence lapses including the 2024 killing in Lebanon by Israel of Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah.

A dozen key figures in the security apparatus, including supreme leader Ali Khamenei and overall Guards chief Mohammad Pakpour have been killed in airstrikes in the latest war.

But Qaani is one of the most prominent individuals not to have been declared dead.

On March 20, Iranian state media issued the first message of the war in Qaani's name, predicting that Iran would "soon witness the shameful defeat" of its enemies. – AFP

Sweden charges man for selling wife to 120 men

Johannes Ledel

STOCKHOLM – A Swedish prosecutor yesterday charged a man, suspected of exploiting his “vulnerable” wife to have sex with men for money, with aggravated pimping, several rapes and assault in a case implicating some 120 men.

Sweden has been shocked by the revelations and comparisons have been made to Frenchwoman Gisèle Pelicot, whose husband Dominique Pelicot was sentenced to 20 years in prison in 2024 after admitting to repeatedly drugging his then-wife and inviting dozens of men to rape her while she was unconscious.

The 62-year-old suspect, reportedly a former Hell’s Angel, was arrested in October after his wife reported him to police in northern Sweden. He has been held in custody since.

According to the charges, the man had for years made money from pressuring his wife

“to perform and submit to sexual acts”.

The man was accused of creating online adverts, setting up meetings, keeping guard and pressuring the woman.

He was also accused of using violence and threats, taking advantage of her drug addiction as well as supplying her with drugs.

The prosecutor labelled it “ruthless exploitation”.

Sweden’s law on prostitution bans the buying of sex but not the selling, however it is also illegal to facilitate the sale of sex.

In addition to being charged with aggravated pimping, the man – who denies the accusations – was charged with eight rapes.

They include one incident with a client and several incidents where she was made to perform sexual acts to herself for online video.

Prosecutor Ida Annerstedt told AFP that the woman, who was described as being in

a vulnerable position, to “some extent” had “agreed to sell sex”.

‘Boundaries’

But the woman had objected to selling sex to certain people or under certain circumstances.

Her husband was also charged with four attempted rapes and four assaults.

The charges also detailed threats made to the wife, with some of them including warnings about unleashing “the monster”.

The incidents were alleged to have occurred between August 11, 2022, and October 21, 2025.

A trial is scheduled to start on April 13.

Annerstedt told AFP that authorities had identified some 120 individuals suspected of having bought sexual services.

Twenty-six men have been charged over the buying of sex related to the case, and

Annerstedt said the other individuals were being investigated.

Silvia Ingolfsdottir, a lawyer representing the woman, told AFP the charges resulted from the “serious and aggravated crimes” her client had been a victim of.

“She now hopes to obtain justice,” Ingolfsdottir said in a text message.

According to public broadcaster SVT, the man had previously been a high-ranking member of the Hells Angels biker group.

The case has received widespread attention in Sweden.

Sweden’s Minister for Gender Equality, Nina Larsson in February said that men must “stop buying and selling women’s bodies.”

“The media reports about the so-called ‘Swedish Pelicot case’ are shocking and disgusting,” she said in a post to X.

– AFP

Top Spanish court rules non-consensual hand kiss is sexual assault

MADRID – Spain’s Supreme Court has ruled that kissing a person’s hand without their consent constitutes sexual assault rather than street harassment, according to a decision obtained by AFP yesterday.

The ruling upheld the sexual assault conviction of a man who in 2023 kissed a woman’s hand without her consent at a bus stop in Alcobendas, a suburb of Madrid, and gestured for her to accompany him while offering money.

The defendant’s lawyers had sought to reclassify the act as mere street harassment, but the court found that any physical contact of a sexual nature goes beyond that category. It said the man had “acted with the intention of violating her sexual integrity”, according to the ruling dated March 5.

“There was therefore an act of sexual assault, insofar as the action describes

contact of a sexual nature and tone that the victim had no obligation to endure, with clearly sexual content and an infringement upon the victim by reducing her to an object,” the court added.

The court ordered the man to pay a fine of more than 1,500 euros (US\$1,718), as imposed in his original conviction.

Spain, a leader in combating gender-based violence, in 2022 toughened its laws on rape by requiring explicit consent for sexual acts, a move long demanded by survivors and women’s rights groups.

In 2025, a Spanish court convicted the former head of the Spanish Football Federation, Luis Rubiales, of sexual assault over an unsolicited kiss he gave forward Jenni Hermoso on the lips during the 2023 Women’s World Cup in Sydney, fining him 10,800 euros.

– AFP

US Fed chief says can look past oil shock but wary of deeper risks



US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell speaks during a press conference following the Federal Open Market Committee meeting at the Federal Reserve Board Building in Washington, DC, on March 18, 2026. Powell said yesterday that the US central bank can look past the energy shock from war in the Middle East, but may have to act if rising costs change expectations about inflation. – AFP

WASHINGTON – US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said yesterday that the central bank can look past the energy shock from war in the Middle East, but may have to act if rising costs change expectations about inflation.

“The tendency is to look through any kind of a supply shock,” Powell told a Harvard University event.

This is because “energy shocks have tended to come and go pretty quickly” but monetary policy changes take time to flow through the economy, he said.

His comments come after US-Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28 triggered Tehran’s retaliation that sharply restricted access to the Strait of Hormuz.

The waterway is a critical shipping route for energy resources, and the situation has caused global oil prices to rocket as the war stretches into a fifth week.

Around a fifth of global crude oil and liquefied natural gas passes through the strait in peacetime.

US gasoline prices have surged, threatening higher inflation in the world’s biggest economy.

For now, Powell said, “we feel like our

policy is in a good place for us to wait and see how that turns out.”

He stressed that “inflation expectations do appear to be well-anchored beyond the short term.”

But he acknowledged that supply shocks can lead the public to start expecting persistently higher prices.

The Fed faces “tension” between its two objectives of stable prices and low unemployment, Powell said, and there are currently both risks of higher inflation and a weakening labour market.

Asked about the risks of another financial crisis, Powell said the United States has “significantly hardened” its system since the 2008 global financial crisis.

While officials should not try to “regulate risk out of existence,” he flagged the need for maintaining the financial system’s resilience.

He added that policymakers are closely monitoring areas like private credit.

As Powell’s term as Fed chair expires in May, he also maintained that the bank “needs to be fully politically independent” and not reactive to politics.

The chair, he added, ought to be “a person who can be reappointed by either side.” – AFP

Russia expels UK diplomat on spying allegations

MOSCOW – Russia yesterday kicked out a British diplomat over allegations he was working as a spy – charges rejected by London as “complete nonsense”.

Moscow and London have each expelled multiple embassy staff over the last decade, trading accusations of espionage.

Expulsions from one side have typically been followed by a tit-for-tat response from the other.

The diplomat was expelled for engaging in “subversive intelligence activities that threaten Russia’s security”, Russia’s FSB security service said.

The diplomat was ordered to leave Russia within two weeks, the FSB said.

The Russian foreign ministry said it had summoned Britain’s chargé d’affaires over the incident and warned London not to retaliate.

Britain accused Russia of waging an “increasingly aggressive and co-ordinated campaign of harassment”.

“The accusations made today by Russia against our diplomats are complete nonsense,” a foreign ministry spokesperson said yesterday, adding Russia was “pumping

out malicious and completely baseless accusations about their work”.

“The UK does not stand for intimidation of British embassy staff and their families,” the British spokesperson added.

Russia previously announced the expulsion of a British diplomat in January, prompting the UK to revoke a Russian diplomat’s accreditation last month.

Relations between London and Moscow, currently at a low point over the Ukraine war, have been strained by spying allegations for decades.

In 2006, former FSB officer and Russian defector Alexander Litvinenko was killed in London, poisoned by polonium in what British investigators said was a hit by the Russian secret service.

In 2018, the UK said Russian double agent Sergei Skripal was poisoned with a Novichok nerve agent in the British cathedral city of Salisbury.

A member of the public was killed after handling the delivery device, a discarded perfume bottle, triggering the largest Western expulsion in decades of Russian diplomats alleged to be spies. – AFP

Chile axes plans to give papers to almost 200,000 migrants

SANTIAGO – Chile’s new right-wing government said yesterday it will cancel plans to grant legal status to tens of thousands of migrants who entered the country without permission.

The previous leftist government of president Gabriel Boric had prepared a decree giving the green light to 182,000 migrants who applied for legal status.

But the new government of José Antonio Kast, who campaigned with a pledge to crack down on immigration, will not act on this decree, the Migration Service told AFP.

“We are not going to proceed with a massive granting of residency papers as proposed by the Boric government,” Migration Service director Frank Sauerbaum said.

Earlier this month Kast ordered the start of construction of new barriers on the Peruvian border to crack down on immigration from Peru and Bolivia and create a “border shield,” vowing to impose a state of emergency to that end.

He said yesterday that recent years had seen “Chile damaged by illegal immigration, drug trafficking and organized crime.”

Kast has also pledged to take action to stem a rise in murders, kidnappings and extortion, which he blames on undocumented immigrants.

Explaining why the decree would not proceed, the Migration Service said that “today we found out 6,000 of the 182,000 have already committed a crime.”

Kast’s election brought the most right-wing president to power in Chile since the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet from 1973 to 1990.



Chile’s rightwing President José Antonio Kast speaks next to soldiers near the Chacalluta border post along the Chile-Peru border on March 16, 2026. – AFP

The government estimates there are around 337,000 foreign nationals in Chile, mainly Venezuelans, who lack residency papers.

The previous government wanted irregular migrants to register on a voluntary basis in order to identify them – but Kast’s arrival has changed all that.

“All this situation is generating much uncertainty,” Freymar Márquez, a Venezuelan homemaker of 30, told AFP.

“If they denying regularisation to those who have registered, what will be left for those who have not?”

Murders and kidnappings have increased and foreign criminal gangs such as Venezuela’s Tren de Aragua have entered the country. But Chile remains one of the region’s safest countries with a homicide rate of 5.4 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2025, one of Latin America’s lowest.

Five days after taking office, Kast travelled to the Arica region, on the Peruvian border, to oversee the construction of barriers to prevent entry into three northern regions.

He also set a 90-day deadline for their completion and announced he would beef up the number of military personnel deployed and upgrade surveillance technology, including drones, cameras, sensors and specialized equipment.

He further plans to submit two bills to Congress aimed at curbing migration.

One will punish those helping migrants enter Chile irregularly and a second would make illegal entry into the country a crime, although he ruled out mass raids.

“We don’t want to conduct house-to-house searches. But every single person knows that they will have to face the authorities at some point,” Kast told broadcaster Canal 13. – AFP

School shooting in Argentina leaves one dead, 8 wounded

BUENOS AIRES – A 15-year-old boy opened fire in a school in Argentina yesterday, killing another student and wounding eight other people in a rare burst of US-style violence, officials said.

The assailant was taken into custody after the shooting in the Mariano Moreno School in the central town of San Cristóbal, the Santa Fé provincial government said.

“I went upstairs, and just as I was about to come down, some students saw a boy come out of the bathroom with a gun and started screaming,” Priscila, a student at the school, told local broadcaster Radio Con Vos. “He started shooting into the air and we all ran out.”

Six students were treated for superficial injuries sustained fleeing

the scene and are all out of danger, the ministry said.

Two other students were transferred to the Rafaela Regional Hospital, one in serious though stable condition.

The identities of the assailant and the victims were not immediately released.

The shooting happened as students waited to raise the national flag, a ritual performed daily before classes begin at the school in the town of some 16,000 residents.

The weapon used by the assailant “is believed to be a shotgun,” Ramiro Muñoz, San Cristóbal government secretary, told TN television.

Classes were suspended and the students sent home.

– AFP

Mexican president announces ‘protest actions’ after migrant dies in US custody

MEXICO CITY – President Claudia Sheinbaum yesterday announced “protest actions” after the latest death of a Mexican immigrant in US custody over the weekend.

“We are going to take several protest actions over yet another death of a Mexican, a fellow citizen, in the United States,” she told a news conference.

Fourteen Mexicans have now died in US custody or in immigration raids during President Donald Trump’s second stint in the White House, Mexico’s foreign ministry says.

She said this time the government would go further than it has in previous such incidents, when it sent diplomatic notes of protest to US authorities.

Sheinbaum said the new protest measures would be announced at a press conference in Los Angeles, California, the US state where the death occurred.

In this latest case a Mexican citizen was being held in a detention centre in the town of Adelanto and then transferred to a hospital in Victorville where he died, the foreign ministry said in a statement on Friday. – AFP

Spain, Catholic Church sign deal to compensate abuse victims

MADRID – The Spanish government and the Catholic Church signed an agreement yesterday to compensate victims of sexual abuse by clergy in cases that can no longer be pursued through the courts.

The deal for the Church to pay reparations comes ahead of a June 6-12 visit by Pope Leo XIV, in what will be the first papal visit to the country since 2011.

Justice Minister Felix Bolanos said the deal, first reached in January, is aimed at victims who are unable to pursue legal action because the crimes have proscribed or the alleged abusers have died.

After signing the agreement in Madrid, Bolanos called it “a day of justice” for “the thousands of victims who suffered sexual abuse within the Catholic Church and were not only left without support, but were doubted and forgotten”.

Under the system,

compensation will be determined on a case-by-case basis rather than through fixed guidelines.

The process will involve representatives from the government, the Church and Spain’s ombudsman, with the state having final authority over decisions.

The Church will be responsible for paying the compensation awarded.

Bolanos described the model as “pioneering worldwide”, saying it ensures state oversight while requiring the Church to provide reparations to victims.

Luis Arguello, president of the Spanish Episcopal Conference (CEE), described the agreement as “a gesture” by the Church.

“Even though we are dealing with cases that are legally time-barred or where the accused have died, the Church wants to acknowledge its responsibility as part of the same body,” he said.

The agreement follows years of scrutiny over clerical abuse in Spain.

A 2023 report by Spain’s ombudsman found that more than 200,000 minors had suffered sexual abuse by Roman Catholic clergy since 1940.

That number could rise to 400,000 if abuse by laypersons in religious settings is included.

The Church’s own records list 1,057 “registered cases”, with 358 deemed “proven” or “credible”.

Unlike in other nations, in Spain – a traditionally Catholic country that has become highly secular – clerical abuse allegations only recently started to gain traction, thanks mainly to media reporting on the issue.

Church efforts to compensate abuse victims have long been inconsistent, with programmes and payouts varying widely around the world. – AFP

Russia ‘glad’ oil shipment reached Cuba amid US blockade

MOSCOW – Russia is pleased that a shipment of its oil reached Cuba, the Kremlin said yesterday, after US President Donald Trump said he was not bothered by the delivery despite Washington’s de facto blockade of the island.

Russia sent the Anatoly Kolodkin, a sanctioned oil tanker carrying 730,000 barrels of crude, to Cuba earlier this month as the Communist-run island grappled with fuel shortages.

Shipping data showed it sailing off Cuba’s northeast coast yesterday but it was not immediately clear whether it had docked at a port.

Russia is a close ally of Havana and has criticised Washington for blocking fuel deliveries to the island.

“Russia considers it its duty to step up and provide necessary assistance to our Cuban friends,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

“We are pleased that this shipment of petroleum products

will arrive on the island, or rather, it has already arrived,” he added.

The shipment of oil would be the first to Havana since January, when US forces abducted Venezuelan president and Cuban ally Nicolás Maduro in a raid.

Maduro’s removal deprived Cuba of its main oil supplier and triggered an energy crisis on the island, sending fuel prices soaring and triggering daily blackouts.

Trump said on Sunday he had “no problem” with Russia sending oil to the island.

“Cuba’s finished. They have a bad regime. They have very bad and corrupt leadership and whether or not they get a boat of oil it’s not going to matter,” he said.

Peskov said Moscow and Washington had been in touch over the shipment.

“This issue was indeed raised in advance during our contacts with our American counterparts,” he told reporters, without providing more details. – AFP

Premier League fans back call to scrap VAR



LONDON – More than three-quarters of Premier League fans would like to see VAR scrapped and even more believe it has a detrimental impact on the matchday experience, according to a survey by the Football Supporters' Association (FSA).

The poll of nearly 8,000 supporters, just over half of whom attend more than 15 home games a season, showed how unpopular the current system has become despite the Premier League insisting it has

resulted in more correct decisions.

Asked if they support the use of VAR, 76 percent said they do not, with more than 70 percent disagreeing that it has improved the overall accuracy of refereeing decisions.

The consensus that VAR has made football less enjoyable was nearly unanimous at 97 percent, while over 90 percent disagreed it has made the matchday experience better.

"The results show that most fans want VAR removed," said Thomas Concannon, the FSA's Premier

League network manager.

"People are annoyed about the time that it takes, annoyed about the accuracy, and annoyed about the [reduced] spontaneity.

"It does take away from what football is meant to be and what those special moments are about."

First introduced into the Premier League seven years ago, one of the common complaints about the technology is it is made for the television watching audience rather than those in the stadium, who are often unaware of the reason for

delays in the game.

However, the survey found even 94 percent disagreed that VAR makes watching football on TV more enjoyable.

In response, the Premier League said in a statement that their research "indicates fans are largely in favour of keeping VAR, but improving the way it is used."

The prospect of any immediate changes to the rules appear unlikely.

In 2024, 19 out of 20 Premier League clubs decided to keep VAR, with only Wolves voting against,

having proposed a vote themselves.

In order for VAR to be scrapped, 14 out of the 20 Premier League clubs would have to vote against it following a new proposal for abolition by one of the teams in the English top-flight.

At the upcoming World Cup, VAR's scope will even be expanded to include decision-making on corners and second yellow cards.

Until now VAR officials could only intervene on goals, penalty decisions, direct red cards, and cases of mistaken identity. – AFP

Hodgson says surprise return to management is only for short-term

Football

LONDON – Former England boss Roy Hodgson says his surprise return to management at Championship side Bristol City will not extend beyond this season.

Hodgson was hired as City's interim manager last week following the sacking of Gerhard Struber.

The 78-year-old had been out of football since leaving Crystal Palace in February 2024.

Hodgson's return to Ashton Gate, 44 years after a brief stint in charge of City, has taken him into half a century of football management.

After his first job at Swedish club Halmstad in 1976, his much-travelled career has included spells in charge at Liverpool, Inter Milan, Fulham and Udinese among other clubs.

Hodgson also had four turbulent years in charge of England, which ended in the disappointment of a shock Euro 2016 exit against Iceland.

Asked if he could be convinced to extend his return to management beyond this season, Hodgson told reporters yesterday: "I think it was the fact that it was a short-term project, a short-term appointment.

"After the club made their decision to change, I think they were looking for someone who could step in and was prepared to do a job for seven games.

"Of course that appealed to me, because I have retired from the real maelstrom of working as a professional coach again, but I thought that I could manage five weeks - and I might even look forward to the five weeks, which has been the case so far."

Hodgson insisted he had no interest in a sporting director role at City, saying: "No, I am too old.

"I hope to get some enjoyment from being here, to re-energise myself a little bit by being back on the grass and being back with players, something which has always been what I have wanted to do."

Hodgson takes over with City 16th in the Championship after six league games without a win.

His first match in charge of the Robins will be at Charlton on Friday.

"For me, it is going to be what happens on the pitch. I am here to coach the team and try and help the team to get results," Hodgson said.

"I will only be satisfied if the people watching the team can see that is going on." – AFP



Japan's players take part in a team training session at Wembley Stadium, in London, yesterday, on the eve of their international friendly football match against England. The game will be played at 2:45 a.m. tomorrow Macau time. – AFP

Tottenham close in on De Zerbi as next boss - reports



LONDON – Tottenham have targeted Roberto De Zerbi as their preferred candidate to lead the troubled Premier League club's fight to avoid relegation, according to reports yesterday.

De Zerbi is available after leaving Marseille by mutual consent in February.

Tottenham parted ways with interim boss Igor Tudor on Sunday after just seven games and 44 days in charge.

The north Londoners sit just one point above the relegation zone with seven matches left, having failed to win a league game in 2026.

De Zerbi established a positive reputation for himself in England during a two-year spell as Brighton boss between 2022 and 2024.

The Italian had reportedly been reticent to take the Tottenham job before knowing which division they will be playing in next season.

However, *The Athletic and Talksport* reported that progress has been made in talks, with Tottenham offering a lucrative long-term deal to convince the 46-year-old to take charge now.

Tottenham have not tasted life outside the top flight of English football since 1977-78.

Despite boasting a new 63,000-capacity stadium, state-of-the-art training ground and revenues that make them among the top 10 richest clubs in world football, they are at severe risk of a humiliating relegation to the Championship.

Just a few years ago they were

Champions League regulars under former manager Mauricio Pochettino, reaching the final in 2019.

Tottenham, then managed by Ange Postecoglou, ended their 17-year trophy drought by winning the Europa League last season.

But the warning signs of a battle for survival were there as Postecoglou was dismissed despite victory over Manchester United in the Europa League final after finishing 17th in the Premier League.

Thomas Frank was appointed as the Australian's successor, but the Dane was sacked in February after a run of two wins in 17 league games.

Tottenham are hopeful of making an appointment well before they are next in action at Sunderland on April 12. – AFP

Lukaku says 'could never turn back on Napoli' after treatment row



ROME – Romelu Lukaku yesterday defended his decision to undergo treatment in his home country rather than at his club after pulling out of Belgium's World Cup warm-up matches in the United States.

The 32-year-old has barely played this season because of injury but said that success for Napoli and his national team were all he wanted.

"This season has been a lot for me from dealing with the injury and the personal loss [of his father]," Napoli striker Lukaku posted on Instagram.

"I know there has been a lot of noise about my situation in the last few days and it's important to clarify the whole situation...

"The truth is the last few weeks I wasn't feeling right physically and I had it checked out while I was in Belgium and it showed that there was an inflammation and liquid on my hip flexor muscle."

After an injury-disrupted season, Lukaku withdrew last Tuesday from Belgium's World Cup warm-up friendlies - skipping the 5-2 win over co-hosts the United States and missing the upcoming match against Mexico.

"I chose to do the rehab in Belgium... [But] I could never turn my back on Napoli, never," he added, in response to internal criticism from the Serie A club and their supporters.

"There's nothing more I would

love to do than play and win [for] my team," he said. "But right now I have to make sure I am clinically 100 percent cause I haven't been recently and it took a toll mentally."

Lukaku, Belgium's all-time record goalscorer, said it had "been a lot this year", but "all I want" is to "get there and help Napoli and the national team to their respective objectives".

Having suffered a thigh injury during pre-season, Lukaku did not return to competitive action until January this year.

He has made just seven appearances for the Serie A champions in all competitions this term as they have endured a tough title defence - Napoli currently trail league leaders Inter Milan by seven points. – AFP



United fans, many wearing black as a protest, display a banner in the crowd against seat prices and the current ownership of Manchester United ahead of the English Premier League football match against Arsenal at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, on March 9, 2025.

A recent UEFA report found English football's "Big Six" - Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester City, Manchester United and Tottenham - earned nearly 20 percent more from selling tickets for home matches in 2025 than in 2024. Many clubs have focused on stadium renovations and expansions, promising improved facilities and a better matchday experience. But fans pay the price, particularly local supporters, fans, as clubs target fans from far and wide who are willing to pay a premium for a once-in-a-lifetime experience. – AFP

King Kimi, Max misery, Bearman smash: Japan GP talking points

F1

Andrew McKirdy

SUZUKA – Kimi Antonelli won the Japanese Grand Prix from pole ahead of McLaren's Oscar Piastri as Max Verstappen endured another miserable outing in his Red Bull.

AFP Sport looks at three talking points from the third race weekend on the 2026 Formula One calendar:

Mercedes protect teen hero

Antonelli is in only his second season, but already Mercedes are playing down expectations of the 19-year-old – now the youngest title race leader in Formula One history.

"We need to protect him now from people talking about world championships," said Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff after the race.

Antonelli admitted he had a stroke of fortune with a safety car that enabled him to dive in for fresh tyres and emerge in the lead after his rivals had already pitted.

It was the second race in a row where a slow getaway saw him relegated from pole position and having to play catch-up.

"I had a terrible start. I need to check what happened. Then I was lucky with the safety car to be in the lead but then the pace was incredible," said Antonelli.

"Luckily, I've got three weeks, so now I can practise some clutch drops just to get a better feel with it.

"It's been a weak point and I need to improve because you can easily win or lose races."

Verstappen quit threat

Red Bull's four-time world champion Verstappen openly questioned his future in Formula One after finishing eighth and lashing out again about the new cars and regulations.

"It's really anti-driving," he told the BBC.

"Then at one point, yeah, it's just not what I want to do."

Verstappen had won at Suzuka in each of the previous four years but was way off the pace and even waved goodbye to one car that overtook him, knowing that he did not have any capability to strike back.

The Dutchman said Formula One bosses "know what to do" to address his concerns and added: "You don't need to feel sorry for me, I'll be fine."

Bearman sparks safety call

Oliver Bearman escaped serious injury in a horror crash which prompted drivers to call for changes in the regulations.

The 20-year-old's Haas was closing rapidly at high speed on Franco Colapinto and smashed into the barriers after swerving to avoid the Argentine's Alpine.

Drivers and teams complained it had been an accident waiting to happen because of Formula One's new regulations that mean cars can be travelling at drastically different speeds on the track at the same time.

"These kinds of closing speeds and these kinds of accidents were always going to happen, and I'm not very happy with what we've had up until now," Grand Prix Drivers' Association chief Carlos Sainz told Sky Sports F1.

"Hopefully we come up with a better solution that doesn't create these massive closing speeds and a safer way of going racing," added the Williams driver.

Bearman said: "I think we've, as a group, warned the FIA what can happen, and this has been a really unfortunate result." – AFP



Chennai Super Kings' captain Indian cricket player Ruturaj Gaikwad is clean bowled during the 2026 Indian Premier League (IPL) T20 match against Rajasthan Royals at the Barsapara Cricket Stadium in Guwahati, India yesterday. Rajasthan Royals won by 8 wickets with 47 balls left. – AFP

Sport in brief

Pakistan's Fakhar Zaman charged with ball-tampering in PSL match

Cricket

LAHORE – Lahore Qalandars' Fakhar Zaman could face a ban after being charged with a ball-tampering offence in his side's defeat to Karachi Kings in the T20 Pakistan Super League.

The Kings, who needed 14 to win off the final over of Sunday's match, were awarded five penalty runs when the umpires decided that Pakistan international Fakhar had altered the condition of the ball.

The ball was changed at the request of the Kings, who then knocked off the nine remaining runs they needed to win.

Fakhar was charged with violating the playing condition "which makes it an offence to take any action which changes the condition of the ball", said a PSL statement yesterday.

"Fakhar denied the charge levelled against him during a disciplinary hearing led by the match referee Roshan Mahanama," the PSL added.

"Another hearing is set to take place within the next 48 hours after which the match referee will share his verdict."

Fakhar could face a ban of at least one PSL match if found guilty. – AFP

Chinese paddlers take opening wins at 2026 ITTF World Cup

Table tennis

MACAO – China had a strong start at the 2026 International Table Tennis Federation Men's and Women's World Cup in Macao as all seven paddlers, including Sun Yingsha and Wang Manyu, claimed victories in the first round of the group stage yesterday.

World No. 1 and defending champion Sun cruised to a 3-0 victory over Chinese Taipei's Li Yu-Jhun in their first-ever singles meeting.

"Li's serve has its own distinctive features, but I stuck to my usual rhythm in preparation and executed according to my tactics," Sun said after the match.

Wang dominated Portugal's Fu Yu 3-0, and her teammate Kuai Man edged past France's Charlotte Lutz 3-2.

"After Lutz fell 2-0 behind, she put me under a lot of pressure, particularly with the quality and variation in the first three shots," Kuai said, adding that she managed to settle down when trailing in the fifth game, and things improved afterwards.

In the men's draw, Eduard Ionescu of Romania defeated Australia's Finn Luu 3-1. Ionescu will face world No. 1 Wang Chuqin

of China in today's match. Wang's compatriot Zhou Qihao overcame Japan's 16-year-old Ryuusei Kawakami 3-1. Sweden's Anton Kallberg swept Feng Yi-Hsin of Chinese Taipei 3-0.

A total of 48 players per event were divided into 16 groups of three, with the group winners advancing to the knockout stage. – Xinhua

French heptathlete provisionally suspended for doping violation

PARIS – French

heptathlete Auriana Lazraq-Khlass, the current European silver medallist, has been provisionally suspended for failing to comply with her anti-doping whereabouts requirements, the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) said yesterday.

"The AIU has provisionally suspended Auriana Lazraq Khlass (France) for Whereabouts Failures," the AIU posted on social media.

The AIU did not specify either the date of the breaches or their nature.

Such a breach could involve either location data that was recorded incorrectly or too late in the software used by athletes to report their whereabouts or a no-show, meaning the athlete's absence from the registered location during an unannounced test.

A provisional suspension may be imposed after three breaches within a twelve-month period.

The 26-year-old Lazraq-Khlass, who claimed silver at the European Championships in Rome in 2024, faces a two-year ban.

She finished 16th in the heptathlon at the Paris Olympics but has been plagued by injuries since, and was unable to compete at the World Championships in Tokyo last year. – AFP

Torch relay for 6th Asian Beach Games in Sanya

SANYA – The torch relay for the 6th Asian Beach Games was held in Sanya, Hainan Province, on Sunday, with 74 torchbearers carrying the flame along a 10.5-kilometer route linking scenic spots along Sanya Bay.

The one-day relay featured a flame-collection ceremony, a launching ceremony and a flame-lighting ceremony.

Chang Yani, Olympic champion and the first torchbearer, said running with the torch on the beach alongside the sea was a unique experience that heightened her anticipation for the upcoming Games.

Qi Guangpu, a Winter Olympic champion

and the final torchbearer, said it was his first time participating in a torch relay despite competing in multiple Olympics. He expressed excitement and honor at carrying the flame, adding that he was particularly looking forward to the beach wrestling events and hopes athletes will experience Sanya's unique charm.

The 6th Asian Beach Games will be held in Sanya from April 22 to 30, featuring 14 sports, 15 disciplines and 62 events. – Xinhua

Kenya's former NY marathon champion Korir gets 5-year doping ban

Athletics

NAIROBI – Kenya's 2021 New York marathon champion Albert Korir has been banned for five years after he admitted using a banned performance-enhancing drug, the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) said yesterday.

Korir, 32, tested positive for the synthetic form of erythropoietin (EPO) that stimulates red blood cell production during out-of-competition tests in Kenya in October 2025.

The AIU said that Korir had received a one-year reduction from the original six-year suspension "based on an early admission and acceptance of the sanction".

His five-year ban will run from January 8, 2026, the date he was provisionally suspended, until January 7, 2031.

Korir won the 2021 New York marathon in a time of 2hr 08min 22sec and came third in 2023 with a personal best time of 2:06:57.

He won the Ottawa marathon in 2019 and 2025.

Korir's sanction comes nearly six months after compatriot Ruth Chepngetich, the current world marathon record holder was banned for three years after admitting the use of Hydrochlorothiazide (HCTZ), a banned diuretic used as a masking agent.

Running is a way out of poverty for many in Kenya, putting pressure on many to turn to drugs, especially since the country lacks the sophisticated infrastructure to train stars.

Kenya worked to clean up its image after a string of doping scandals around the 2016 Rio Olympics led to it being declared non-compliant by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

More than 140 Kenyan runners, mainly long-distance athletes, have been sanctioned for drugs offences since then.

In June 2024, Kenya handed out its first lifetime ban to marathon runner Beatrice Toroitich and a six-year ban to 10km record-holder Rhonex Kipruto. – AFP

At 50, Apple confronts its next big challenge: AI

Glenn Chapman

SAN FRANCISCO – Apple celebrates its 50th anniversary as artificial intelligence (AI) challenges the Silicon Valley legend to prove it can deliver yet another culture-changing innovation.

Steve Jobs, a driven marketing genius, and Steve Wozniak, who invented the Apple computer, revolutionised how people use technology in the internet age and built a company now worth more than US\$3.6 trillion.

The two college dropouts changed the way people use computers, listen to music and communicate on the go, giving rise to lifestyles revolving around smartphone apps.

Apple's hit products – the Mac, the iPhone, the Apple Watch and the iPad – command a cult-like following, long after the company's humble beginnings on April 1, 1976 in Jobs' Cupertino, California garage.

Apple has sold more than 3.1 billion iPhones since the handsets debuted in 2007, generating about US\$2.3 trillion in revenue, according to Counterpoint Research.

For Counterpoint analyst Yang Wang, the iPhone is the most successful consumer electronics product ever, reshaping human communication while becoming “a global fashion and status symbol.”

Before the iPhone, Apple shook up home computing with the 1984 Macintosh, whose icon-based interface and mouse made computing accessible beyond specialists – and sparked a legendary rivalry between Jobs and Microsoft's Bill Gates.

“Apple was founded on the



The Apple logo is pictured on a large digital screen at the start of celebrations at the Battersea Power Station in central London last Wednesday, to mark the 50th birthday of US tech giant Apple. Apple celebrates its 50th anniversary as AI challenges the Silicon Valley legend to prove it can deliver yet another culture-changing innovation. Apple's hit products – the Mac, the iPhone, the Apple Watch and the iPad – command a cult-like following, long after the company's humble beginnings on April 1, 1976 in Steve Jobs' Cupertino, California garage. – AFP

simple notion that technology should be personal, and that belief – radical at the time – changed everything,” chief executive Tim Cook said in an anniversary letter posted online.

‘Cult of Apple’

Apple transformed the music market with the iPod and iTunes, made the smartphone a mass-market staple with the iPhone, and took tablets mainstream with the iPad.

The Apple Watch quickly seized the lead in the smartwatch market, despite debuting later than its rivals.

While not an inventor, Jobs – who died in 2011 at age 56 – was renowned for his uncompromising drive to marry technology with design to create products that were intuitive and hassle-free.

Apple marketed the Macintosh as the “computer for the rest of us,” but it was the iPhone that fulfilled

that promise, said David Pogue, author of the recently released “Apple: The First 50 Years.”

The iPhone's dominance reshaped Apple's business model. With the premium smartphone market widely seen as saturated, Cook has increasingly turned to selling digital content and services to the company's vast existing base of users.

Central to that strategy is the App Store, which Apple made the sole gateway to software on its devices, taking a cut of transactions – and thereby drawing accusations of monopoly abuse, regulatory scrutiny in Europe and court orders in the United States to open up its platform.

‘China factor’

No country has been more central to Apple's rise – or more fraught for its future – than China,

with Cook cementing ties to the Asian superpower through regular appearances at local Apple stores and official visits.

Cook was the mastermind of the strategy that made China the primary manufacturing base for Apple devices, with the vast majority of iPhones assembled by contractor Foxconn and other suppliers in Chinese factories.

It is also one of Apple's largest consumer markets, generating tens of billions of US dollars in annual revenue.

But the company faces mounting pressure on both fronts: trade tensions and tariffs have accelerated efforts to diversify manufacturing to India and Vietnam, while competition from domestic rivals such as Huawei has eaten into Apple's Chinese market share.

‘AI challenge’

A concern haunting investors is that Apple appears to be easing into generative AI while rivals Google,

Microsoft and OpenAI race ahead.

A promised upgrade to its Siri digital assistant was delayed, in what analysts called a rare stumble for the company.

And rather than relying on its own engineers to overhaul Siri, Apple has turned to Google for AI capability.

But whether built in-house or outsourced, Apple's obsession with user privacy and its premium hardware could position it to drive widespread adoption of personalised AI – and make it profitable, a goal that has proved elusive for much of the AI industry.

Already, Apple's AirPods are being steadily improved with sensors and smart software, and lessons learned from the Vision Pro could feed into AI smart glasses to rival Meta's.

“They are the ones that always seem able to create something so simple that users just fall in love with it,” said Carolina Milanesi, an analyst at Creative Strategies. – AFP

‘Project Hail Mary’ tops N American box office for 2nd week

LOS ANGELES – Space adventure flick “Project Hail Mary” topped the North American box office for a second straight week with US\$54.5 million in ticket sales, industry estimates showed on Sunday.

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

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

Standing firm in second place was Disney/Pixar animated hit “Hoppers,” with US\$12.2 million in the United States and Canada, according to Exhibitor Relations.

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

Debating in third place was horror flick “They Will Kill You,” at US\$5 million.

The Warner Bros film – which stars Zazie Beetz (TV's “Atlanta”), Tom Felton (of “Harry Potter”

fame) and Oscar winner Patricia Arquette – tells the tale of a woman working as a maid in a mysterious New York building where disappearances are common.

“These are respectable numbers for an original horror comedy with a modest budget of around US\$20 million to produce,” said analyst David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research. “Foreign business should be solid.”

Fourth place went to Hindi-language spy thriller “Dhurandhar: The Revenge” with US\$4.75 million.

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

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

Fifth place went to Universal's romance film “Reminders of Him,” with US\$4.7 million.

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

Music popstar will.i.am meshes AI and ‘micromobility’

SAN JOSÉ – Black Eyed Peas star will.i.am is putting artificial intelligence (AI) agents to work in three-wheel vehicles tailored for modern urban life.

The musician turned tech entrepreneur demonstrated a so-called autocycle called Trinity at Nvidia's annual developers conference in the heart of Silicon Valley earlier this month.

“I'm an artistic creator because of tech,” will.i.am told AFP.

“Creating with musical teams is great, but hopping into a different realm and being hyper creative with

full-stack developers, electrical engineers, mechanical engineers, world builders – that is the ultimate level of creativity.”

His Trinity startup is named for an alignment of human, vehicle and agentic AI.

The single-passenger electric vehicle, which shares its name with the startup, lets a human do the driving but is infused with an AI agent that acts as a virtual assistant for conversation-based collaborations on the move, he will.i.am said.

“When a human has an agent of their own, a company has a super

employee,” he said of brainstorming and delegating tasks to Trinity AI agents conversationally while commuting.

“Their vehicle that got them to work is a part of their tool set; and it's working in the parking lot while they work,” he added, referring to Trinity as “brains on wheels.”

The vehicle, designed to accelerate quickly from zero to 96 kmh, uses an Nvidia graphics processor to power built-in AI that can interpret and reason about the world around it, according to the startup.

The vehicles are to be made in a Los Angeles facility that will also serve as a school for robotics and agentic AI systems.

“I was ambitious, audacious and a little bit of naive,” will.i.am said of pursuing the project.

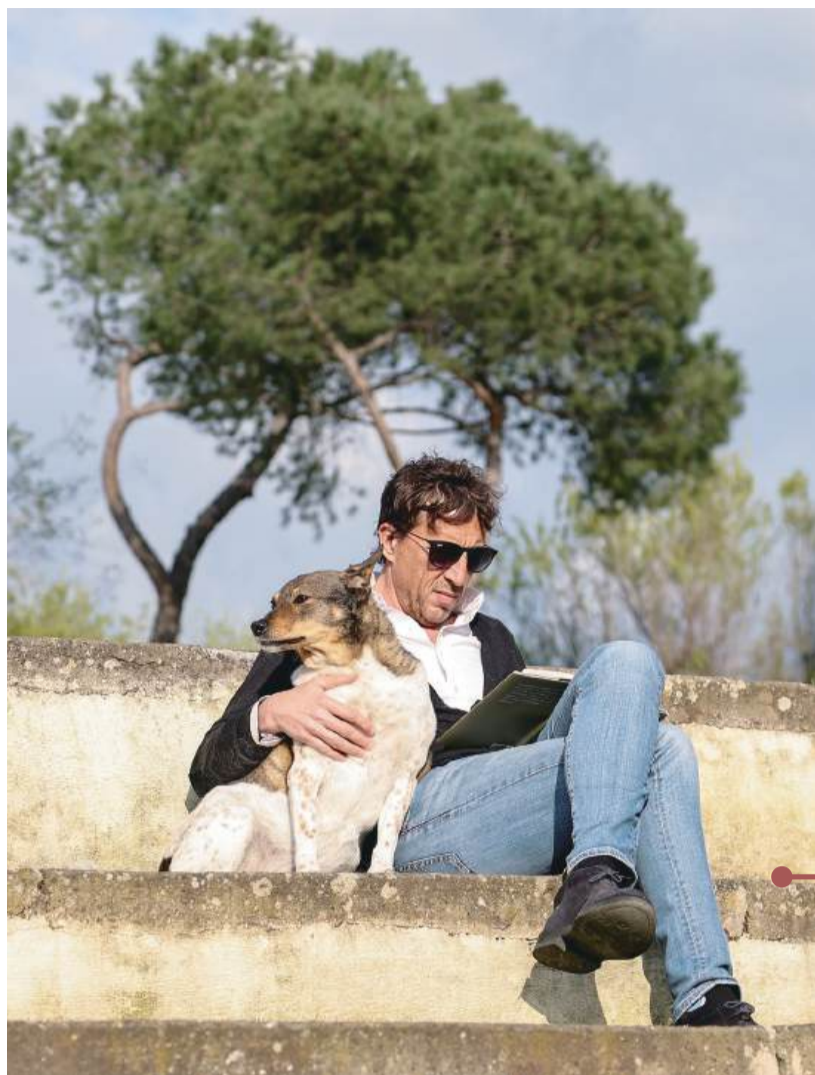
“That's a good combination, because if you don't have that little bit of naive and everything is skeptical, you probably wouldn't take crazy risks.”

An initial production of run of 500 units is planned, with an aim to begin deliveries in August of next year, and to keep the vehicle's price at less than US\$30,000. – AFP



US musician and tech entrepreneur Will.i.am poses inside Trinity, an AI-powered electric three-wheeled vehicle, at Nvidia's annual GTC developers conference, in San José, California on March 17, 2026. – AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 8°C~19°C	Manila 21°C~34°C	New York 17°C~24°C	Lisbon 13°C~24°C
Shanghai 11°C~18°C	Bangkok 26°C~36°C	London 8°C~16°C	Rio de Janeiro 22°C~27°C
Hong Kong 20°C~27°C	Tokyo 13°C~18°C	Frankfurt 2°C~11°C	Luanda 25°C~29°C
Taipei 20°C~28°C	Singapore 24°C~33°C	Vancouver 7°C~12°C	Maputo 21°C~31°C
Guangzhou 19°C~30°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~35°C	Paris 7°C~12°C	Dili 23°C~31°C
Nanjing 9°C~16°C	Jakarta 23°C~31°C	Moscow 5°C~16°C	São Tomé 25°C~32°C
Guilin 10°C~20°C	Seoul 10°C~20°C	Las Vegas 15°C~25°C	Praia 18°C~28°C
Xi'an 7°C~21°C	Sydney 16°C~25°C	Monte Carlo 8°C~17°C	Bissau 19°C~36°C



Better a book than a phone!

A man reads a book at Villa Borghese in Rome, Italy, on Sunday. – Xinhua

Don't go!!!

A man bungee jumps from a 26-metre-high pedestrian bridge over the Dnipro River in Kyiv, Ukraine on Sunday. – AFP

Not so sedentary

Racers riding on office chairs compete in the ISU-1 Grand Prix in Kyotanabe, Kyoto prefecture on Sunday. The ISU-1 Grand Prix is an endurance race supervised by the Japan Office Chair Racing Association (JORA), in which participants compete to see how many laps they can complete on office chairs over two hours. The event originated in 2010 in the Kirara shopping district of Kyotanabe, Kyoto Prefecture, and is now held at more than 20 locations across Japan. – AFP



Brief beauty

A woman photographs cherry blossom trees in Tokyo yesterday. – AFP

Lost board

A kitesurfer soars into the air above sea as the sun sets in Marseille, south-eastern France on Sunday. – AFP



50 shades of amber

This photo taken on Thursday shows a Pikachu Pokemon figurine next to jewellery made of Baltic amber displayed at the Amberif Fair in Gdansk. Around 200 exhibitors take part in this year's Amberif, a fair held annually in Gdansk, Poland where entrepreneurs, craftsmen and artists from all over the world who work with amber can sell or buy amber, establish new contracts or simply showcase their work. – AFP