

# Documentary aims to eliminate Down syndrome prejudice

Review by Armino Neves

Macau's Dream Sail Association\* (DSA) and Macau Down Syndrome Association screened a documentary on Saturday with the aim of eliminating prejudice against people with Down syndrome and respecting differences, according to a joint statement by the two groups.

The screening was held at the Macau Federation of Trade Unions' (FAOM; customarily known as Gung Luen) headquarters on Rua da Ribeira do Patane.

The statement also said that screening the documentary, titled "My Beating Heart", served as an opportunity to rally support for people with special needs to realise their full potential.

Macau Down Syndrome Association Chairwoman So Po-Man said in a speech that the film showcased the real lives and pure love of individuals with Down syndrome.

So also said that her association is committed to helping society understand and accept people with Down syndrome, pointing out that they have dreams and the ability to love like anyone else, adding that their simple, genuine love is worth learning from. So said she hoped that the screening will promote greater social inclusion and care for people with Down syndrome

Local filmmaker Steven U (余志雲), who directed the film, said in a speech that the documentary differs from regular films in that it features no thrilling celebrity appearances or explosive action scenes. Its core lies in the



"My Beating Heart" film director Steven U (余志雲) talks about his documentary before its screening at the Macau Federation of Trade Unions' (FAOM - Gung Luen) headquarters on Rua da Ribeira do Patane on Saturday. - Photo: Armino Neves

authentic presentation of its content, U said, adding that the screened version on Saturday was a one-hour edited cut of the 2019 documentary.

U likened the documentary to red wine - able to withstand the test of time, revealing more depth with each viewing.

He also pointed out that the film takes on a bold subject matter, focusing on taboo themes surrounding individuals with Down syndrome - a topic civil society often finds difficult to accept.

U also noted that finding interviewees for the filming was quite challenging.

Meanwhile, Macau Women's General Association (commonly known as Fu Luen) Vice-President Jennifer Chau Wai I noted in a statement on March 23 that some individuals with Down syndrome required long-term care and medical needs, often accompanied by issues such as vision and dental problems, which place a significant financial burden on their families' daily lives and healthcare.

World Down Syndrome Day (WDSD) is observed annually on March 21 to signify the uniqueness of the triplication of the 21<sup>st</sup> chromosome, which causes Down syndrome. Officially recognised by the United Nations

since 2012, this day promotes awareness, advocacy, and inclusion for people with Down syndrome worldwide, according to a UN website dedicated to the condition: <https://www.un.org/en/observances/down-syndrome-day>.

Chau emphasised in the statement that supporting the integration of individuals with Down syndrome and their families into civil society is key to reducing their sense of isolation. In the statement, Chau pointed out that while some persons with Down syndrome are capable of self-care and employment, public awareness of their capability is generally low.

She recommended in the statement that the local government should provide diverse vocational training and internship opportunities for those with the ability to work through measures such as strengthening public education, improving the transition between education and employment, and supporting social enterprises.

\*According to a statement on its Facebook website, the purpose of the Dream Sail Association (夢啟航協會) is to encourage young people to find their dreams, so that they can exchange, express and discuss ideas with one another, and to provide a platform for communication and the sharing of opinions for young people who have dreams. It also aims to inspire new ways of thinking and the discovery of dreams, to foster concern for society, to serve Macau, and to help young people develop good character.

## As polls show him slipping, Brazil's Lula names VP as running mate

SÃO PAULO - Luiz Inácio Lula de Silva yesterday named his vice president as his running mate in October's election in Brazil, as polls show the veteran leftist president slipping to a dead heat with his main opponent.

At the age of 80 Lula will be seeking a fourth term as he faces off against Flávio Bolsonaro, the 44-year-old son of far right former president Jair Bolsonaro, who is serving a 27-year prison sentence after being convicted of plotting a coup against Lula.

Recent polls show Flávio Bolsonaro gaining ground and in a dead heat with Lula if they face each other in a runoff. In December, Lula led by 15 points.

Lula's vice president and running

mate is Geraldo Alckmin, a moderate conservative and ex-rival of the president. They teamed up in 2022 to take on the older Bolsonaro, who was then the incumbent. Besides being vice president, Alckmin is currently also industry minister.

"My colleague Alckmin is going to have to leave the ministry because he is candidate for vice president again," Lula said at a public meeting with his cabinet.

Alckmin, a 73-year-old doctor, served four terms as governor of São Paulo, Brazil's richest and most populous state. He ran for president twice as the candidate of the conservative Brazilian Social Democratic Party.

In 2006 he lost a runoff election to Lula.

Lula told his cabinet yesterday a story of how in 1978 he won re-election as head of Brazil's metalworkers union and told his family he would serve that one last term, then return to domestic life.

"Fifty years have gone by and I never did," he joked.

A poll published March 6 by Datafolha showed Lula with 46 percent of voter intentions against 43 percent for Bolsonaro, putting them in a draw as the gap falls within the margin of error.

The younger Bolsonaro, who serves in the Senate, was anointed presidential candidate by his father after the Supreme Court sentenced the latter to 27 years in prison for plotting to stay in power after losing the 2022 election to Lula. - AFP



Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (right) delivers a speech next to Vice-President Geraldo Alckmin during a ministerial meeting at the Planalto Palace in Brasília yesterday. - AFP

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### Pakistan's mediation efforts in common interests of all parties: Wang Yi

Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday that mediation efforts of the Pakistani side regarding the Middle East tensions are in the common interests of all parties.

- Story on p. 7

### King Charles to pay state visit to US in late April

King Charles III will visit the United States in late April, Buckingham Palace announced yesterday, despite some calls for the trip to be cancelled or delayed amid strains over the Iran war.

- Story on p. 11

### Chinese agricultural experts help improve agricultural productivity in Mozambique

At the Umbeluzi Agricultural Station in Maputo Province, Mozambique, vast rice fields have entered the harvest season.

- Story on p. 12

# USJ inaugurates Robotic Lab for architecture, design research

Kristina Vallesteros

The University of Saint Joseph (USJ) inaugurated its first Robotic Lab last Wednesday, marking a significant advancement in applied research at the intersection of design, technology, and community engagement, according to a statement issued by the private Catholic tertiary education institution yesterday.

Located at the Kent Wong Exhibition Gallery on the Ilha Verde Campus, the lab represents an eight-year strategic vision to build a comprehensive ecosystem combining institutional support, advanced facilities, and a focus on real-world challenges, the statement noted. It is part of the ARCH Centre for Applied Research in Architecture, Design and Art.

The facility is equipped with two KUKA robots, accessories for working with different materials, and a parametric storage system, valued at 1.5 million patacas, the statement said.

KUKA AG is a German manufacturer of industrial robots and factory automation systems.

Since 2020, USJ has been a member of the Association for Robots in Architecture (Rob|Arch), connecting it to a global network of about 100 universities and research institutions.

The statement noted that the lab's projects bring together cutting-edge technology with traditional craftsmanship and locally sourced



This undated handout photo provided by the University of Saint Joseph (USJ) shows two KUKA robots at the USJ Robotic Lab at the Kent Wong Exhibition Gallery on the Ilha Verde Campus of the private Catholic university. The photo provided by the university was uncaptioned.

materials. Researchers are creating new tools to work with materials from different regions, such as bamboo, wood, foam used for concrete moulds, and bricks, all sourced from places including Cambodia, the Philippines, Portugal, Thailand, Vietnam, the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong and Macau.

According to the statement, visitors can also explore an exhibition featuring research that blends digital design, material experiments, and on-site fieldwork. Among the projects on show are studies of Macau's urban development, AI research like Soundscape.AI, and innovative bamboo construction techniques. Collaborative efforts such as the

Infolab and the Southern Inner Harbour Master Plan highlight successful cooperation between universities, businesses, and government bodies, the statement said.

Head of the Department of Architecture and Design Nuno Soares was quoted as saying: "From today onwards, this becomes a new platform for collaboration. Together, we will be able to research, test, and build sustainable solutions in design and architecture, with our students, our partners, the industry, the public administration, and the wider community."

The Robotic Lab and the exhibition on applied research are open to the public until April 11. ■

# IAM warns of contaminated apple juice

Khalel Vallo

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) is urging residents and businesses to stop consuming and selling a batch of bottled apple juice imported from New Zealand after it was found to contain excessive levels of patulin, a harmful toxin.

According to an IAM statement on Friday, the bureau was notified by Hong Kong's food safety authorities that the product – "100% PURE NZ APPLE JUICE" under the brand "Homegrown" – had been found to exceed the officially permitted limits for patulin.

The affected product is in one-litre bottles with a best-before date of May 14, 2026, the statement said. Testing found that the sample contained 78 micrograms per kilogram of patulin, exceeding both Hong Kong standards and Macau's Administrative Regulation No. 13/2016 on maximum levels of mycotoxins in food.

Patulin, a toxin commonly found in mouldy apples and related products, may cause nausea, gastrointestinal discomfort and vomiting if consumed in large amounts.

The bureau called on businesses stocking the product to immediately stop supplying and selling the affected batch, while consumers – including those who purchased it through

online or parallel import channels – are advised to cease consumption at once. The bureau said it will continue to monitor the situation and take follow-up action to prevent the product from circulating in the local market.

According to the statement, businesses possessing the products should also immediately cease supplying and selling them, and contact the bureau's Food Safety Department on 2833 8181, while continuing to monitor the situation to prevent the affected products from circulating in the market. ■



This image downloaded from Woolworths website yesterday shows its "100% PURE NZ APPLE JUICE".

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# 'Easy Transfer', 'Anti-Scam Programme' linked up by financial regulator, police

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) announced in a joint statement with Macau Monetary Authority (AMCM) yesterday that the latter's interbank transfer system "Easy Transfer" has been linked up with the former's "Anti-Scam Programme".

According to the statement, in order to strengthen the prevention of telecom and online fraud, the two authorities have integrated the database of the "Anti-Fraud Programme" with the "Easy Transfer" system.

The statement pointed out that when the "Easy Transfer" system is being used to carry out an instant interbank transfer, financial institutions will automatically check whether the recipient's account is on the list of accounts suspected of being involved in fraud, adding that if a match is confirmed, a risk alert message will immediately pop up on the screen, reminding users to carefully assess the situation and avoid falling victim to scams.

In the first phase, the statement said, a total of 11 local banks and a local e-payment institution have joined the initiative.

Both entities said that they will continue to monitor the effectiveness of the measure and optimise it. This will include expanding coverage to more financial institutions and transaction scenarios, with the goal of comprehensively strengthening the safeguards for their users' financial security. ■

This handout poster jointly released by the Judiciary Police (PJ) and the Monetary Authority of Macau (AMCM) yesterday shows the local interbank transfer system "Easy Transfer" now linked up with the PJ's "Anti-Scam Programme".

The "Anti-Fraud Programme" database is now linked up with the "Easy Transfer" system. The Judiciary Police and the Macau Monetary Authority are working together to strengthen anti-fraud mechanisms.

- 1 市民使用「過數易」服務進行轉帳時，金融機構會自動將收款方資料與司警反詐程式資料庫作比對。
- 2 若收款方資料在涉詐名單中，畫面會即時彈出司警反詐中心的風險警示。
- 3 市民得悉涉詐風險後，應考慮取消交易，避免造成損失，守護財產安全！

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FORCE 3 TO 4 NORTHERLY WINDS WITH GUSTS, BECOMING EAST TO SOUTHEASTERLIES.  
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 70% AND 95%.

21°C~26°C

Source: SMG

# UFC Fight Night returns to Macau at Galaxy Arena

**Khalel Vallo**

The United States' Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) is set to return to Macau next month with a stacked fight card headlined by the Chinese mainland's Song Yadong against Brazil's Deiveson Figueiredo, aiming to mark the start of a multi-year partnership with Galaxy Macau, according to a statement by the integrated resort operator yesterday.

Scheduled from May 28 to 30 at the Galaxy Arena in Cotai, the event will feature UFC Fight Night alongside the opening rounds of ROAD TO UFC Season 5, bringing three consecutive days of mixed martial arts (MMA) action to the city, the statement said, adding that tickets will go on public sale on April 17, with early access available for "Galaxy Ultimate" WeChat members from April 14.

A fight card in Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) is the official schedule of matches for a specific event.

The headline bout will see Song, a rising bantamweight contender, face Figueiredo, a former two-time flyweight champion. Song, known for his "explosive" striking, returns to compete in front of a home crowd for the first time since 2018, while Figueiredo aims to break into the top tier of the bantamweight division.

In the co-main event, Zhang Mingyang from Anhui Province will take on Alonzo Menifield from Dallas, Texas in a light heavyweight clash between two knockout specialists, the statement said, adding that the fight card will

also include a series of high-profile bouts across multiple divisions.

These include a heavyweight matchup between Moscow's Sergei Pavlovich and São Paulo's Tallison Teixeira, as well as appearances from fighters such as Sichuan Province's Sumudaerji (sometimes spelt Su Mudaerji) and California's Alex Pérez.

The women's strawweight style-versus-style will feature [from Thailand] Buriram's Loma Lookboonmee and [from Brazil] Manaus' Jaqueline Amorim, the statement said, adding that a fast-paced flyweight bout will feature [from Japan] Chiba's Rei Tsuruya and [from Mexico] Ensenada's Jesús Aguilar, while Inner Mongolia's Aoriqileng will face [from Australia] Perth's Cody Haddon in a bantamweight bout.

As part of the programme, ROAD TO UFC Season 5 will spotlight emerging talent from across the Asia-Pacific region, with 32 fighters competing in a tournament format for UFC contracts, the statement said. Beyond the fights, the statement added, it will host a week-long series of fan engagement activities, including meet-and-greet and autograph sessions, aimed at expanding the sport's growing regional fan base.

The late May events mark the beginning of a four-year agreement that will bring multiple UFC Fight Night events to Macau through 2029, aiming to further strengthen the city's position as a regional hub for major international sporting events, according to the statement. ■



This poster provided by Galaxy Macau yesterday shows the headline fighters in next month's UFC FIGHT NIGHT at Galaxy Arena in Cotai.

## Gongbei Customs seizes 180,000 cigs at HZMB

**Armindo Neves**

Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers seized 180,000 cigarettes at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge (HZMB) on March 4.

According to the statement, on that day, customs officers at the delta bridge's Zhuhai checkpoint noticed an abnormality in the X-ray scanned image of a lorry.

Upon further inspection, customs officers discovered "BOHEM" brand cigarettes concealed within cardboard boxes wrapped in woven plastic bags, adding that a total of 900 cartons, amounting to 180,000 cigarettes were seized by the customs.

BOHEM cigarettes are a premium "cigar-cigarette" hybrid brand produced by South Korean manufacturer KT&G, according to Google AI Overview.

Gongbei Customs reminded the public that in line with the Chinese mainland's Tobacco Monopoly Law the state has implemented a monopoly management system for the production, sale, import, and export of tobacco products, operating under a tobacco monopoly licence system. The export of cigarettes requires approval from the administrative department under the State Council in charge of tobacco monopoly and the acquisition of a tobacco monopoly licence.

### Customs seizes 260 cultural relics at Qingmao checkpoint

Meanwhile, Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in a separate statement yesterday that its officers seized 260 cultural relics at the Qingmao checkpoint recently.

According to the statement, customs officers at the Qingmao checkpoint's passenger inspection hall noticed an abnormal image during the X-ray inspection of a traveller's hand luggage.



These undated handout photos provided by Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs yesterday shows cigarettes and cultural relics seized by its officers at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge's Zhuhai checkpoint and Qingmao checkpoint, respectively.

Upon further inspection, customs officers discovered a batch of suspected cultural artefacts in the traveller's backpack and crossbody bag, the statement said.

After appraisal by the Guangdong Provincial Cultural Relics Appraisal Station, the batch was found to include 104 items barred from being taken out of the Chinese mainland, and 156 items restricted from being taken out of the country.

The statement pointed that the contraband mainly consisted of documents, land deeds, official correspondence, letters, books, badges, and tax receipts dating from the Qing Dynasty to the Republican period. These artefacts provide valuable insight into the political, economic, social, and folk customs of their respective eras, as well as important historical events, the statement noted.

Gongbei Customs reminded the public that according to the Cultural Relics Protection Law of the People's Republic of China (PRC), any cultural relics intended for export must undergo examination agency designated by the State Council's cultural relics administration.

Upon approval, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage will issue an exit permit to verified cultural relics, and the relics can only be exported through designated border checkpoints.

Any entity or individual shipping, mailing, or carrying cultural relics out of the Chinese mainland must declare them to customs, and customs officers will release the items only upon presentation of the verified cultural relics' export permits. ■

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# Media learns about fresh opportunities from Hengqin's latest development

Tony Wong in Hengqin

A one-day fact-finding tour of Hengqin was organised for Macau media workers last week where they visited three facilities concerning economic cooperation between Macau and Hengqin, and the three facilities' representatives briefed the local journalists about their operations and latest developments.

The three facilities visited on Thursday last week comprised the Hengqin International Film Studio, the Service Centre for Economy and Trade between China and Portuguese/Spanish-speaking Countries, and the Cross-border E-commerce (Huafa) Innovation Industrial Park.

The first one was visited in the morning. After lunch, the media delegation visited the other two.

The tour, which the *Post* joined, aimed to enable Macau media workers to gain a better understanding of the latest achievements in the Macau-Hengqin integrated industrial development, and fresh opportunities for Macau to advance its appropriate economic diversification.

The 106-square-kilometre Hengqin island in Zhuhai City is officially known as Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, after the zone was inaugurated in September 2021. The adjacent island is three times the size of the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR).

The in-depth cooperation zone's governance consists of a management committee and an executive committee.

The management committee is the zone's top decision-making body run under a dual director system, jointly led by the governor of Guangdong Province and the chief executive of the MSAR. The zone's executive committee, which is run under the management committee, is the body tasked with the zone's daily functioning and execution of tasks.

There are nine bureaux administered under the zone's executive committee.

Last week's media trip was jointly organised by the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS), the zone's Administrative Affairs Bureau, and the Publicity, Culture and Sports Department of the Central People's Government Liaison Office in the MSAR.



Journalists visit a film set in the Hengqin International Film Studio during last week's tour. — Photos taken by Tony Wong

## Hengqin Studio filming 'micro-dramas' for foreign markets

During the visit to the Hengqin International Film Studio, Leo Li Ming, a senior representative overseeing the film studio's operation, briefed the journalists about the facility's establishment, current operation and future development.

The Hengqin International Film Studio is located on a site, comprising 13 buildings, initially earmarked for a service hub for Hengqin's financial industry, where six of the buildings have been converted into film studios.

The Hengqin Studio is the country's first film studio dedicated to filming "micro-dramas" for foreign markets.

"Micro-dramas", known as "duanju" in Chinese, is a type



Leo Li Ming briefs journalists in the studio's exhibition hall.

of short form web or television series that originated in China.

The current six indoor film studios, covering a total gross floor area of 17,000 square metres, in the Hengqin Studio feature a variety of Western-style film sets, including office, home, restaurant, hospital, police station, school, and church.

The six film studios comprise a total of 94 film sets.

The Hengqin Studio is operated and managed by COL (Guangdong Hengqin) International Film and Television Industry Development Company Limited, of which Li is the deputy general manager.

Five other buildings in the complex will be converted into film studios in the future, comprising 80 Chinese-style and Western-style film sets to be used for filming micro-dramas for both domestic and foreign markets, according to Li.

The five studios will cover a total gross floor area of 12,000 square metres.

The Hengqin Studio is committed to building itself into a full-chain, one-stop service platform for film shooting and production in the future, covering aspects such as equipment rental, costume, make-up, props, artiste management services, catering, accommodation, post-production, domestic and international distribution.

Li said that over the past three months, about 30 filming projects of different types have been carried out in the Hengqin Studio, including TV series, movies, ads, and micro-dramas.

Li underlined that one of the business objectives of the Hengqin Studio is to promote the integrated development of the film industry in Macau and Hengqin, adding that his company aims to attract those working in Macau's film sector to film and do their production in the Hengqin Studio.



Ng In Cheong briefs journalists on the ground floor of Block 8 of the Service Centre for Economy and Trade between China and Portuguese/Spanish-speaking Countries complex last week.

## The China & Portuguese/Spanish-speaking Countries Service Centre is committed to supporting businesses from both sides

During the visit to the Service Centre for Economy and Trade between China and Portuguese/Spanish-speaking Countries, Ng In Cheong, vice-president of the service centre's board, gave the visiting media workers a briefing. Ng is also a deputy director of the in-depth cooperation zone's Legal Affairs Bureau. Before her posting to Hengqin by the Macau government in September last year, she was a department chief of the Macau Legal Affairs Bureau (DSAJ).

The Service Centre is a non-profit organisation jointly established by the MSAR government and the in-depth cooperation zone's executive committee, under the guidance and support of the central government's respective ministries and commissions, and the Guangdong government.

Ng noted that the planning and preparation for the Service Centre's establishment was launched in April last year, before it started operating late last year.

She pointed out that the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries, known as Forum Macao for short, is a country-to-country top-level decision-making initiative and platform, while the Service Centre in Hengqin aims to provide companies from both sides with a comprehensive set of services, providing support for companies from China keen to enter the markets in Portuguese- or Spanish-speaking countries, and vice versa.

Enterprises from China wishing to enter the Portuguese- or Spanish-speaking markets may encounter difficulties and technical problems in various aspects – and vice versa, and the Service Centre is committed to helping them tackle and resolve all the various problems throughout the whole process, Ng noted.

She noted that the zone's executive committee bought a commercial complex in Hengqin comprising nine high-rises for the establishment and operation of the Service Centre.



This photo taken last week shows Block 8 of the complex.

The complex now comprises buildings used for offices and other facilities such as hotels and apartments.

The main office of the Service Centre in Hengqin is located on a floor of Block 8 of the complex.

Ng said that since its establishment, the Service Centre has got in touch with over 200 companies from China and Portuguese- or Spanish-speaking countries, about 80 of which have signed different types of business cooperation agreements.

Most of the companies that the Service Centre has helped are those from China wishing to enter the Portuguese or Spanish-speaking markets, Ng said, adding that the Service Centre is now aiming to strengthen its commitment to supporting companies from the other side wishing to enter the Chinese market.

Ng mentioned an example in which the Service Centre has recently helped a Brazilian company establish a presence in Hengqin.

She said that the Service Centre is aiming to become a national-level service centre next year.

## Cross-border E-commerce Industrial Park

During the visit to the Cross-border E-commerce (Huafa) Innovation Industrial Park, Vic Lam In Kit, chief of the Tourism, MICE and Commerce Division of the in-depth cooperation zone's Economic Development Bureau, briefed the media delegation about the park's activities. Before his posting to Hengqin, he was a civil servant of the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO).

Lam said that about 200 companies have established a presence in the park, about 40 of which are Macau-invested companies and 70 percent of which are e-commerce or related businesses, with 1,600 staff currently working in the park.

Lam underlined that the about 200 companies include many leading enterprises from the Chinese mainland.

He said that the park has been able to make the achievements thanks to a new policy rolled out by the zone's executive committee in 2024 aiming to strengthen support for the cross-border e-commerce industry.

He said that in the past, Chinese mainland e-commerce enterprises put stronger emphasis on expanding markets in Europe and North America, adding that new support measures to be launched in the near future can make it easier for them to expand markets in other regions such as Russia, the Middle East, and South America.



Vic Lam In Kit briefs journalists at the Cross-border E-commerce (Huafa) Innovation Industrial Park last week.



Journalists visit the park's Global Product Selection Centre last week.

## Entries open for photo contest 'discovering' Macau & Hengqin

Kristina Vallesteros

A photography contest titled "Discovering Macau and Hengqin" is now open for entries, according to a Monday statement by the International Institute of Macau (IIM), inviting participants to capture the diversity and beauty of both Macau and Hengqin.

According to the statement, contestants are encouraged to explore natural landscapes, urban settings, and the cultural interaction between the two areas. The aim is to portray Macau's multicultural communities, historical heritage, traditions, and festivities, while also documenting Hengqin's "development process" alongside Macau.

Entries are accepted in two categories: digital camera photography and drone photography, the statement said.

All submitted pictures must be original works created between September 2025 and September 2026. Each participant may join only one category and may submit up to five photos. Entries must be in JPEG format with a resolution of at least 2 megapixels.

The statement noted that digital montages or excessive edits that create unrealistic alterations will be rejected. Previously published or awarded works, as well as submissions to previous institute contests, will not be accepted either.

The deadline for submissions is September 25. Further details are available from IIM's website <https://iimacau.org.mo/>. ■



This poster provided by the International Institute of Macau (IIM) promotes its 2026 Photography Contest titled "Discovering Macau and Hengqin".

## The power of the arts in a child's development

Interview by Rui Pastorin

Children go through a lot as they grow and learn to traverse life. With that in mind, could engaging in more arts-related activities be helpful in their development?

Local artistes Chloe Lao Cho Wa, who serves as creative director of the Ieng Chi Dance Association, and Ivan Au Chi Hang, director of Big Mouse Kids Drama Group, say that it can, giving their opinions on its significance and implications during a recent interview with the *Post*.

### The power of the arts

Au's group focuses on children's drama in education, production and youth play, while therapy elements can also be found in their shows, he said, adding they also host workshops for kids and parents. Lao's group, meanwhile, is focused more on dance, its performance and promotion. They promote dance education through providing training sessions and courses on Chinese dance, ballet, modern dance, jazz dance and contemporary dance, according to their website, having taught students of all ages, including children aged two and up.

While backgrounds are not the same, both have collaborated on different projects and are proponents of the power of arts and how it relates to a child's development. Lao pointed out: "In different ways, we are also approaching the same direction – we hope to interweave more arts, culture and education to kids' lives as they grow up".

Lao highlighted that engaging in the arts is something that could help with individual thinking, courage and confidence, while Au highlighted that it could also help with building psychological resilience.

"I really appreciate that some schools give more artistic experiences to kids", said Lao, but she also mentioned that as the world continues to change, there is a need to build confidence and courage, as well as learning how to shape one's own world. Encouraging the further integration of the arts and engaging in it somehow could also be a path towards that, according to Lao.

Au, meanwhile, said he thinks that the development of one's ability to create, as well as problem solving, are needed to be developed for the future. In some schools, he cited some examples that look towards this and don't just focus on traditional academic subjects, but integrate activities such as having a "drama play month", wherein students work together and use their creativity to set up a small drama.

These activities, Au said, could help with developing problem solving, self-expression, creativity and storytelling. As they will also need to do research, their skills in this regard are also improved. "I think if the government wants to push to change this environment, I think it's a very good way to think about it", Au said, highlighting its significance.

### Raising kids in Macau

Beyond talking about the power of the arts, both Au and Lao highlighted their personal experiences in raising their respective children in Macau.

Chloe highlighted the government's support and measures provided to Macau's parents and parents-to-be, noting that she finds herself and her child lucky to be able to receive that support. But one thing that she hopes to see is encouraging



Ieng Chi Dance Association Creative Director Chloe Lao Cho Wa and Big Mouse Kids Drama Group Director Ivan Au Chi Hang pose for a photo at the latter's studio in Fai Chi Kei district.

– Photo taken recently by Rui Pastorin

civil society to give children more time to play outdoors and in open spaces like playgrounds.

Macau nowadays provides a variety of large parks that children can play in, with Lao highlighting that this is a good development. But providing more choices for activities that incorporate time outside are also important for a child's healthy development in Macau. This includes hoping for more outdoor field trips by schools and time at playgrounds during the day for more exposure to sunshine, which she deemed important, and even chances for parents and children to play together at playgrounds.

Au, meanwhile, highlighted that, in general, raising a child in Macau is a situation that has both its pros and cons. But among the points he highlighted were the fact that while Macau has many good schools, there is a highly competitive environment within and among them. This puts stress on children, which also extends to their parents.

He also noted that at times, he feels that kids who are considered more talented or gifted are provided with more resources to cultivate them compared to average students or those who have special education needs (SEN). Au, who himself is a parent of an SEN student, highlighted some of the worries that parents in this situation might have, including a child's future, biases that some students might have against SEN students, and even being accepted into schools or selecting the right ones that will not only cater to an SEN's student's basic educational needs, but cultivate their growth per se. "There are many good schools in Macau, but we need to choose carefully in this competitive society", noting that he is fortunate to have his son in a good one while adding: "We just want to give them a happy school life".

When his son's time to go to secondary school approaches, he hopes to find one that will be open to focus on each student's specific interests, possibilities, finding their talents that will altogether allow them to help them shape their own future rather than just academic competitiveness.

For him, a society that is fair and sees no labels, particularly one that looks for the good in each student, is a hard but necessary step to make it better. ■

## Govt to support schools affected by shrinking student numbers: O Lam



Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam addresses yesterday's plenary session in the legislature's hemicycle. – Photo courtesy of TDM

Tony Wong

Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam said yesterday that with the decreasing number of school students the result of a dropping birth rate, the local government is planning to roll out various new measures in the upcoming 2026/27 academic year aiming to advance Macau's education reform and encourage local schools to enhance their education quality, including helping schools affected by the falling number of students convert into other types of education institutions, or helping them merge with others.

O made the remarks when replying to oral interpellations by lawmakers during a plenary session in the legislature's hemicycle.

The new measures aim to turn the reality of a shrinking student population in Macau

into new opportunities to drive educational reform and enhance the quality of education in Macau, O said.

O said that the government will provide support for schools affected by a decreasing number of students and wishing to convert into continuing education institutions. After their transformation, she said, they can provide education services such as continuing education for residents in general, vocational training, and senior citizens' learning.

The government will grant subsidies for these schools to modify their on-campus equipment and facilities, as well as subsidies for their teachers to obtain the required qualifications, with the aim of ensuring that they can eventually be converted into continuing education institutions.

Moreover, she said, the government will provide support for schools with a similar educational philosophy wishing to merge.

The government will also provide subsidies to the respective schools helping them consolidate and share educational spaces and resources among them.

In addition, O said, the government will provide subsidies for schools to launch more extracurricular activities, potential development programmes, and vocational education, which are conducive to students' physical and mental development.

Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) Director Kong Chi Meng said during yesterday's plenary session that six schools have separately informed the government about their intention to merge. ■

## Gen Z-fueled 'Guochao' drives new shift for Chinese manufacturers

### Analysis

BEIJING – As China's Gen Z emerges as a new leading consumer group, it is also driving manufacturers towards a shift that reflects both emotional needs and rising cultural confidence.

One of the dominant trends is 'Guochao' (国潮), which literally means "national trend," referring to domestically created designs, often inspired by traditional Chinese culture, that can be applied to toys, decorations, apparel, everyday items, and even food and beverages.

The surge is particularly evident in the booming collectible toy market. In 2025, China's domestic retail sales of trendy and collectible toys had totaled 67.69 billion yuan, up 45.4 percent from the previous year, according to the 2026 China Toy and Juvenile Products Industry Development Report released last week.

Another report released by iiMedia Research projects that the Guochao market will exceed 3 trillion yuan by 2028.

"Consumers today want more emotional resonance and cultural identity in their spending," said Xiong Haifeng, an associate professor at the School of Cultural Industries Management, Communication University of China, located in Beijing.

This is why manufacturers are incorporating stronger cultural elements into their products, he explained, rather than the "made-in-China" products featuring little added value of past decades.

A survey of key toy retail outlets in China's first-tier and emerging first-tier cities found that 24.4 percent of respondents said trendy and collectible toys were the fastest-growing category in terms of sales, the aforementioned toy industry development report revealed.

To win their market share, manufacturers are responding with faster innovation cycles and stronger design capabilities. In Yiwu, the global small commodity wholesale hub in east China's Zhejiang Province, local manufacturers have invested more

in design as part of their business strategies.

Lu Yi, general manager of a local accessory manufacturing company, said his team designs around 100 bag charm products each month. These decorative items, now commonly seen on young people's bags, have become both a fashion trend among Gen Z and a notable segment in the collectible market.

In return, the company's bag charm sales are now growing at an average rate of 20 percent per month, with sales doubling during peak seasons.

Manufacturers' efforts to meet strong market demand have further encouraged improvements in quality and efficiency across the industrial chain, promoting transformation and upgrading of the industry, said Dang Qiong, associate professor at the School of Journalism and Communication of Guangxi University in south China.

At the same time, companies are increasingly tapping into the booming Guochao IP through collaborations and spin-off products, extending their reach in terms of both markets and culture.

Domestic animated films have emerged as key carriers of such IP. Last year, the Chinese animated blockbuster "Nobody" launched more than 800 derivative products, driving its total consumer sales to over 2.5 billion yuan.

Data from the China Film Administration reveals that in 2025, every yuan spent on movie tickets in China was estimated to have generated roughly 15.77 yuan in related economic activity across sectors such as cultural and creative industries, catering and tourism.

Museums are also joining the trend. The Chengdu Museum in Sichuan Province has collaborated with popular IPs to promote its prized collections to young people. For example, the museum has reimaged a Han Dynasty (202 B.C.-220 A.D.) figurine as Fat Tiger, a popular cartoon character that is familiar to people through

a series of WeChat stickers, and developed several derivative products such as posters, reinterpreted illustrations of relics and short dramas.

Integrating Guochao IP across culture, commerce and tourism can build sustainable consumption and help the trend evolve from a short-lived fad into lasting popularity, said Xu Chao, head of the cultural and creative IP committee of the China Advertising Association.

### GROWING CULTURAL CONFIDENCE

Observers believe that what lies behind Gen Z's Guochao consumption wave is the desire to express cultural identity and pride in traditional Chinese culture, as their spending increasingly expands beyond functional needs.

By supporting domestic brands, choosing traditional handicrafts and favoring local designs, the younger generation is offering a tangible answer to the question of who they are in a globalized context.

This shift is especially visible in the fashion industry. Once a niche segment, Guochao apparel, which incorporates traditional motifs into modern design, has gained broader public recognition through promotion efforts by young consumers, who see wearing Guochao as a new type of fashion.

"Consumer demand for Guochao apparel is shifting from trend-chasing to cultural identity," said Xie Fangming, full-time vice chairman of the China Fashion Association.

At major fashion events, including the recent 2026 China International Fashion Week (Spring) held in Beijing, designers are showcasing collections that highlight a distinctly Chinese aesthetic, drawing on intangible cultural heritage and regional traditions.

Sun Ruizhe, head of the China National Textile and Apparel Council, said the trend is driving the rapid emergence of more differentiated and culturally distinctive fashion products.

—Xinhua

## Chinese Embassy break-in incident reveals Japan's obsession with militarism

TOKYO – A shocking incident involving a young officer of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) has sent ripples far beyond a mere security breach, after he scaled a barbed-wire wall and broke into the Chinese Embassy last week with an 18-centimeter blade, vowing to kill Chinese diplomatic personnel "in the name of god."

The Japanese police filed the case only under the minor charge of "unlawful entry." Senior officials, including the defense minister, offered nothing more than a perfunctory expression of "deeply regrettable."

However, the crime of Kodai Murata, a 23-year-old GSDF second lieutenant, should hardly be dismissed as an "isolated public security incident." Rather, it exposes deeper undercurrents within Japanese society and its military institutions: a convergence of ideological distortion, political radicalization, and institutional complacency.

According to Japanese media reports, Murata had recently graduated from the GSDF officer candidate school, an institution intended to train the backbone of Japan's military and now observed to be a breeding ground for historical revisionism.

Textbooks used at the school in 2024 were reported to describe the Battle of Okinawa in terms of "Japanese forces fighting bravely for a prolonged time," while omitting references to atrocities committed by Japanese troops against local civilians. The school later made partial revisions under public pressure.

At the core of the issue lies the enduring influence of the so-called "Yasukuni historical view," a narrative that whitewashes and distorts Japan's wartime aggression.

At institutions such as the National Defense Academy of Japan, a primary source of SDF officers, cadets have reportedly participated in marches culminating in visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, a symbol of Japanese militarism where 14 Class-A war criminals are enshrined, under the guise of "building physical and mental fortitude." Such practices risk normalizing a revisionist understanding of history among future military leaders.

This internal ideological conditioning has evolved alongside an increasingly right-leaning political climate. In recent years, right-wing forces in Japan have pushed for the relaxation of restrictions on arms exports and the acquisition of "counterstrike capabilities," moves seen as eroding the spirit of Japan's pacifist constitution. Since taking office, Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi has accelerated this trajectory.

The interplay between political messaging and social trends has created a volatile environment.

The embassy intrusion thus appears not as the product of one individual's extremism, but as the cumulative outcome of long-term ideological influence. The parallels with Japan's militarist past are difficult to ignore.

This incident underscores a broader warning. When armed personnel begin to challenge diplomatic norms and constitutional principles, the risk is no longer that of a rare "black swan" event, but of a systemic problem looming on the horizon.

The international community would do well to remain vigilant. History has shown that the resurgence of militarist thinking rarely announces itself loudly at first, but its consequences can be far-reaching.

—AFP

## Yangtze River fishing ban yields notable phased results

SHANGHAI – China has achieved notable phased results since the launch of the 10-year fishing ban on the Yangtze River in 2021, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs said yesterday.

From 2021 to 2025, a total of 351 indigenous fish species were monitored in the Yangtze River basin, 43 more than in the pre-ban period, while the monitored unit volume of resources in the main stream of the Yangtze River in 2025 recovered to twice the pre-ban level, according to the ministry.

During the same period, the index of biological integrity in key waters including the main stream of the Yangtze River improved compared with the period from 2017 to 2020, reversing the decline in aquatic biological resources.

Fisheries law enforcement

capacity has improved across the country, while cross-regional and multi-department joint enforcement has been strengthened, helping curb illegal fishing, transport and sales.

In 2025, the number of fishery-related criminal cases fell by nearly 40 percent year on year.

The ministry said efforts should be made to further strengthen the protection of aquatic life in the Yangtze River, advance flagship species conservation programs, step up the restoration of important habitats, and promote the overall recovery of aquatic ecosystems.

Solid steps should also be taken to secure the livelihoods of former fishers, promote stable employment and social security through multiple measures, and steadily improve their living standards, according to the ministry.

—AFP



A Changying-8 cargo unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) conducts a test flight at an airport in Zhengzhou, Henan Province, yesterday. The cargo UAV successfully completed its maiden flight at an airport in Zhengzhou yesterday. The fixed-wing cargo UAV is China's first 7-tonne-class cargo UAV platform validated through flight test. The Changying-8 cargo UAV has an ultra-large cargo compartment with a volume of 18 cubic meters, a maximum takeoff weight of 7 tonnes, and a maximum payload capacity of 3.5 tonnes. It can accommodate diverse loading requirements, including conventional supplies, fresh and cold-chain goods, and emergency equipment. The aircraft boasts a maximum range exceeding 3,000 kilometers.

—Xinhua

# Pakistan's mediation efforts in common interests of all parties: Wang Yi

BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday that mediation efforts of the Pakistani side regarding the Middle East tensions are in the common interests of all parties.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks in his talks with Pakistani Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar in Beijing. During their talks, the two sides exchanged views on current international issues and regional conflicts.

Wang welcomed the visit of the Pakistani side to Beijing for discussion on easing tensions in the Middle East, just after its holding of a quadrilateral foreign ministers' meeting in Islamabad.

He said China supports and looks forward to Pakistan playing a unique and important role in easing the situation and resuming peace talks. This process is no easy task, and Pakistan's mediation efforts are in line with the common interests of all parties, Wang added.

He noted China is willing to make joint efforts with Pakistan to end the hostilities as soon as possible, create opportunities for peace and open the window for peace talks.

On bilateral ties, Wang said this year marks

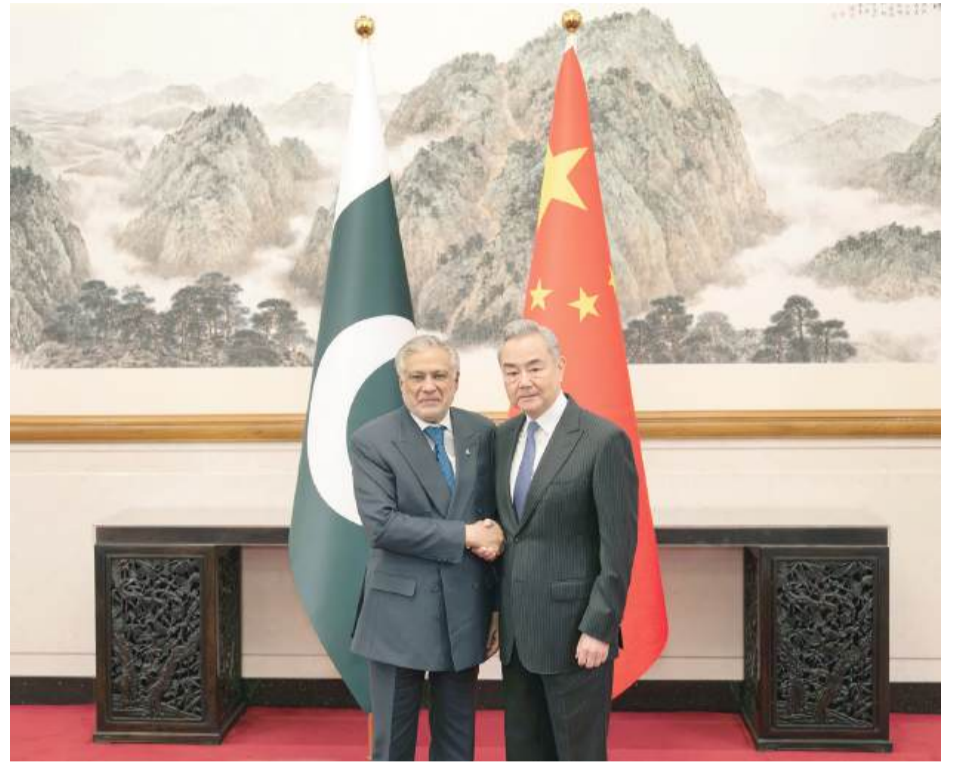
the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Pakistan, calling on both sides to implement the important consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries and constantly advance the building of a China-Pakistan community with a shared future.

For his part, Dar said the Pakistan-China friendship is precious and deeply rooted in people's hearts, adding that Pakistan is willing to work with China to promote the continuous development of the all-weather strategic cooperative partnership between the two countries.

Dar thanked China for supporting Pakistan's mediation of the situation in Iran, adding that the current conflict has disrupted international energy supplies and caused heavy damage to developing countries.

Noting that solutions can only be found through negotiation, Dar said Pakistan is willing to strengthen communication and coordination with China to push all parties to start peace talks as soon as possible and restore regional peace.

The two sides also put forward a five-point initiative for restoring peace and stability in the Gulf and the Middle East region. – Xinhua



Foreign Minister Wang Yi (right), also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, holds talks with Pakistani Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

## Xi's article on correct understanding of governance performance to be published

BEIJING – An article by Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, on establishing and practicing a correct understanding of governance performance will be published today.

The article by Xi, also Chinese president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, will be published in this year's seventh issue of the *Qiushi Journal*, a flagship magazine of the CPC Central Committee.

Titled "Establishing and Practicing a Correct Understanding of Governance Performance," the article is a collection of excerpts of Xi's important discourses on the issue made between December 2012 and February 2026.

In late February, the CPC launched a Party-wide campaign to guide its members, especially officials, in establishing and practicing a correct understanding of governance performance. The campaign will run until July.

Noting that the view on governance performance is a fundamental issue, the article calls for efforts to proceed from reality, act in accordance with the laws, and deliver results that can stand the test of practice and history, truly benefit the people, and earn public recognition through sound decision-making and solid work.

The article emphasizes the decisive role of Party consciousness in establishing and practicing a correct understanding

of governance performance, calling on CPC members to take serving the people as their foremost accomplishments and to reject practices such as seeking quick gains, and engaging in falsification and "vanity projects."

The article stresses that adherence to high-quality development should be an important component in officials' understanding of governance performance. It also calls on officials to implement the new development philosophy in the entire process of economic and social development, and improve performance evaluation mechanisms to prevent the vicious cycle in which the promotion of officials based on inflated figures would fuel data fabrication.

Noting that this year marks the first year of implementing the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) and will see transitions of local leadership teams at various levels, the article stresses the importance and necessity of guiding leadership teams and leading officials at various levels to establish and practice a correct understanding of governance performance.

It also calls for earnest and solid efforts to address prominent problems, establish sound systems and rules, and improve accountability mechanisms, so that institutions can fully play their role in guiding and motivating the performance of officials, as well as in providing effective regulation and constraint.

– Xinhua

## China, Pakistan put forward five-point initiative for restoring peace, stability in Gulf region and Middle East

BEIJING – China and Pakistan put forward a five-point initiative for restoring peace and stability in the Gulf and Middle East region during talks between Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Pakistani Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar in Beijing yesterday.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, and Dar reviewed the situation in the Gulf and the Middle East region during their talks.

The two sides put forward the following:

**I. Immediate cessation of hostilities:** China and Pakistan call for immediate cessation of hostilities and utmost efforts to prevent the conflict from spreading. Humanitarian assistance must be allowed to all war-affected areas.

**II. Start of peace talks as soon**

**as possible.** Sovereignty, territorial integrity, national independence and security of Iran and the Gulf states should be safeguarded. Dialogue and diplomacy is the only viable option to resolve conflicts. China and Pakistan support the relevant parties in initiating talks, with all parties committing to peaceful resolution of disputes, and refraining from the use or the threat of use of force during peace talks.

**III. Security of nonmilitary targets.** The principle of protecting civilians in military conflict should be observed. China and Pakistan call on parties to the conflict to immediately stop attacks on civilians and nonmilitary targets, and fully adhere to International Humanitarian Law, and stop attacking important infrastructure, including energy, desalination and power facilities, and peaceful nuclear infrastructure, such as

nuclear power plants.

**IV. Security of shipping lanes.** The Strait of Hormuz, together with its adjacent waters, is an important global shipping route for goods and energy. China and Pakistan call on the parties to protect the security of ships and crew members stranded in the Strait of Hormuz, allow the early and safe passage of civilian and commercial ships, and restore normal passage through the Strait as soon as possible.

**V. Primacy of the United Nations Charter.** China and Pakistan call for efforts to practice true multilateralism, to jointly strengthen the primacy of the United Nations, and to support the conclusion of an agreement for establishing a comprehensive peace framework and realizing lasting peace based on the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and international law. – Xinhua

## China firmly opposes armed attacks against peaceful nuclear facilities: spokesperson

BEIJING – China firmly opposes armed attacks against peaceful nuclear facilities under the safeguards and monitoring of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), advocating the peaceful settlement of the Iranian nuclear issue through political and diplomatic means, a foreign ministry spokesperson said yesterday.

Spokesperson Mao Ning made the remarks at a regular news briefing when responding to a query about the recent military operations that the United States and Israel struck

Iran's Arak heavy water production plant, Khondab heavy water reactor, Ardakan yellowcake production plant and Bushehr nuclear power plant.

"Armed attacks against peaceful nuclear facilities under the safeguards and monitoring of the IAEA violate the purposes of the UN Charter, international law and the Statute of the IAEA," Mao said, adding that the attacks deal a heavy blow to the authority of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), undermine the international efforts to uphold

the international nuclear non-proliferation regime, and could bring serious consequences to regional peace, security and stability.

Mao noted that the Eleventh Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT is to be held soon. "China is concerned about the negative impact of the military strikes by the United States and Israel. China stands ready to work with all sides to earnestly safeguard the international nuclear non-proliferation regime, and promote peace and stability in the Middle East," she said. – Xinhua

## 21 Indonesian fishing crew saved after boat sinks

JAKARTA – All 21 crew members reported missing after their fishing vessel sank off the Indonesian coast were rescued yesterday, packed into a rickety raft floating in the open water, an official said.

The boat sank in bad weather early Monday, having left Taliabu island in the Molucca Sea the day before, heading for North Sulawesi several hundred nautical miles away.

The Central Sulawesi search and rescue agency said in a statement the crew members were found yesterday morning some 25 nautical miles from where their boat sank.

The manifest had indicated 27 crew, but it turned out six had never made it on board, said the agency.

Photos and videos shared by authorities showed the crew, all in life jackets, being rescued from a wooden fishing platform.

Marine accidents are a regular



Rescuers approach surviving crew members during a rescue operation in the waters of South Bolaang Mongondow, North Sulawesi, Indonesia, yesterday. All 21 crew members of the motor vessel Nazila 05 were rescued alive by a joint search and rescue (SAR) team after the boat sank in waters north of Taliabu Island in Indonesia's North Maluku province, local authorities said yesterday. – Xinhua

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

## Blazes cloak northern Thailand in hazardous air pollution

BANGKOK – Swathes of northern Thailand choked under a blanket of haze caused by crop burning and forest fires, putting the country's second city atop global air pollution rankings yesterday.

Seasonal air pollution is a feature of life for much of Asia, associated with agricultural burning and weather patterns that trap pollutants.

The issue has become a political and economic headache for tourist-dependent Thailand, and prompted lawsuits and a legislative push by clean air activists.

Despite the efforts, northern Thailand's Chiang Mai tourist destination topped the global rankings for world's most polluted major city for part of yesterday, according to the IQAir monitor.

The level of PM2.5 pollutants – cancer-causing microparticles small enough to enter the bloodstream through the lungs – hit 110 micrograms per cubic metre.

The World Health Organisation recommends 24-hour average exposures should not be more than 15 micrograms for most days of the year.

Even worse hit was Pai, a usually verdant destination for backpackers and nature lovers in Mae Hong Son province, where PM2.5 levels topped 600, according to some monitors.

Dao, a cafe worker who declined to give her family name, has lived through years of seasonal air pollution in Pai but said this year was especially bad.

"I've never seen this much pollution in Pai before," she told AFP.

She shared photos showing the usually green, hilly vista from the cafe obscured by grey-brown haze.

"I feel suffocated. How are we going to live like this?"

### Clean air bill

Another long-time Pai resident, organic farmer George Wolstencroft, also declared the haze "probably the worst I've ever seen it".

The Brit, who has lived in the region for 22 years, called the situation a "humanitarian disaster".

"In any direction, the smoke is visible less than 50 metres away... Even homes that are fully sealed are unable to stop the smoke infiltrating the air."

Chiang Mai's governor and other senior provincial officials were meeting with the national government to discuss the situation yesterday.

In a statement, the Chiang Mai governor's office said illegal burning and forest fires in national parks were causing the hazardous haze.

The interior ministry issued a statement urging stepped up

monitoring and enforcement against those carrying out illegal burning.

Local media said one subdistrict in Chiang Mai was preparing a disaster declaration over the situation, a move that would speed up deployment of emergency spending and compensation for those affected.

Thailand's Geo-Informatics and Space Technology Development Agency, a government body, said it had recorded a "new high" for 2026 of 4,750 fire hotspots across the country on Monday.

It said more than 5,000 hotspots were detected across the border in Myanmar, with thousands more combined across Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Malaysia.

The spike in air pollution comes as clean air activists warn a bill to enshrine the right to breathable air and to tax emitters is in danger of dying in parliament.

The bill was put on hold when parliament was dissolved last year, and if it is not picked back up within a limited window, the process will go "back to the drawing board", the Thailand Clean Air Network has said.

More than 10 million people required treatment for pollution-related health problems in Thailand in 2023, according to the health ministry. – AFP

## Indonesia summons Google, Meta for 'not complying' with teen social media ban: minister

JAKARTA – Indonesia issued summons letters to Google and Meta over their failure to comply with a social media ban for under-16s that entered into force over the weekend, the communications minister said.

In a video posted on Instagram late Monday, Minister Meutya Hafid said "the government is sending summons letters" to Meta, which owns Facebook, Instagram and Threads, as well as to Google, which oversees YouTube, adding they "violated Indonesian law".

The summonses were issued "as part of the application of administrative sanctions in accordance with the applicable provisions", the minister added.

App-addicted Indonesia began enforcing a social media ban for users under the age of 16 on Saturday, citing threats from online pornography, cyberbullying and internet addiction, as concerns grow globally over the impact of social media on children's well-being.

Australia, which in December became the first country to introduce measures to protect teens from online threats, is investigating Facebook, TikTok and YouTube for possible breaches.

Meutya said over the weekend there would be "no room for compromise regarding compliance".

In Monday's video, she accused Google and Meta of having opposed the new regulations "from the very beginning".

She named TikTok and Roblox as examples of platforms not yet fully compliant but "making efforts". They will receive warning letters.

"We will focus on working with platforms that have the goodwill to respect Indonesia, not only as a digital market, but also [by] committing to Indonesian laws and legal instruments for child protection," she said.

Indonesia, with its population of over 284 million, boasts among the most social media users in the world, including about 70 million children under the age of 16.

"We understand this is not easy. Indonesia is indeed one of the most active countries in the digital space, with average scrolling time of 7–8 hours per day," said the minister.

She urged parents and children to help the government monitor compliance and report companies that flout the law. – AFP

## Indonesia to deport Interpol-wanted UK fugitive nabbed in Bali



Scottish national Steven Lyons (centre) is escorted by police officers at the Bali police headquarters in Denpasar, on Indonesia resort island of Bali yesterday. – AFP

DENPASAR – Indonesia will deport a UK national arrested in Bali over the weekend and wanted by Interpol for alleged transnational drug trafficking and money laundering, police said yesterday.

The 45-year-old, identified by police just as "SL" but by British media as Steven Lyons, of Scotland, was nabbed upon arrival at the Indonesian resort island's Ngurah Rai International Airport, Bali police chief Daniel Adityajaya told reporters.

The fugitive, wanted in Spain, is alleged to be the "leader of a large-scale transnational criminal organisation engaged in drug trafficking and money laundering", Adityajaya said.

Lyons, who arrived on a flight from Singapore, was flagged upon arrival Bali as an "Interpol red notice subject" during a routine system check, said the airport's immigration head, Bugie Kurniawan.

Untung Widyatmoko, secretary of Interpol's Indonesia bureau, added Lyons' criminal group operated in countries including Spain, Scotland, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Turkey.

Untung said the suspect was expected to be deported to the United Kingdom today.

Police were searching for two associates who arrived in Bali with Lyons but managed to evade detection. – AFP

## Indonesia urges UNSC meeting after peacekeepers killed

JAKARTA – Indonesia urged warring parties in the Middle East "to respect international humanitarian law" after three of its peacekeepers were killed in Lebanon, and called for an urgent UN Security Council meeting.

"The safety of peacekeeping troops must be the top priority. All parties to the conflict are urged to respect international humanitarian law and ensure the security of peacekeeping personnel," defence ministry spokesman Rico Ricardo Sirait said in a statement.

The UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) said two of its personnel were killed Monday in an explosion and another died late Sunday when a projectile hit their position.

The UN force said it launched an investigation into the separate incidents.

Condemning the "heinous" attacks, Indonesian Foreign Minister Sugiono said yesterday that he had discussed the deaths with UN chief Antonio Guterres, and asked for an emergency UN Security Council meeting as well as "a swift, thorough and

transparent investigation".

"The safety and security of UN peacekeepers is non-negotiable and must be upheld at all times," said Sugiono, who like many Indonesians goes by only one name.

Jean-Pierre Lacroix, UN under-secretary-general for peace operations, condemned "these unacceptable incidents and said "all acts that endanger the peacekeepers must stop".

Permanent Security Council member France has said it was seeking a meeting of the body over the matter. – AFP

# Japanese rape accuser condemns prosecution's failure to protect victims

TOKYO – A Japanese prosecutor who publicly accused her boss of rape condemned her office yesterday for failing to protect victims, after it rejected her request for an independent probe into harassment within the organisation.

Very few women in Japan speak out about sexual assault but Hikari (not her real name) came forward in 2024 to accuse Osaka's then top prosecutor of raping her six years earlier.

Kentaro Kitagawa, head of the Osaka District Public Prosecutor's Office, was arrested and admitted the assault but later withdrew his statement, saying the sex was consensual.

Hikari has made a request to the justice ministry and the prosecutors' office that a third-party panel be set up to investigate cases involving others in the legal profession, and to implement measures to prevent harassment.

Hikari has previously said

she was "certain that there are other instances of harassment and additional offences" besides those involving her.

But they said they would "refrain from responding" as Hikari also filed a suit against the state last month, seeking compensation.

"Whenever a public body or a company is involved in a scandal, they set up an independent committee to rectify the situation immediately and ensure (harassment) never happens again," Hikari told reporters in Tokyo on Tuesday.

The prosecutors' office "conceals crimes committed by its own members and abandons victims, all in the name of protecting the organisation", she added.

"This should never happen. After all, the work of the prosecution service is directly linked to the lives and safety of the public."

Public records show that 21 people at prosecutors' offices have



This photo taken yesterday shows lawyers alongside "Hikari" (not her real name) and hidden, who alleges she was raped by her former boss, the former head of the Osaka District Public Prosecutor's Office, as she takes part in a press conference in Tokyo. – AFP

been disciplined for sexual violence in the past 16 years, according to Hikari.

Before filing her case in 2024, she was diagnosed with

post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Hikari says people close to Kitagawa, especially an assistant prosecutor – whom Hikari says

is his lover – spread malicious rumours.

These included identifying her as the victim – her name had not been made public – and that she had been attracted to Kitagawa, consented to sex and was not drunk.

She has been on leave ever since and has been seeing a psychiatrist.

Hikari filed a criminal complaint against the assistant prosecutor in 2025, but the Osaka prosecutor's office dismissed it, only imposing a reprimand.

Hikari has said she was not used to drinking strong alcohol and lost her memory halfway through an office gathering in 2018.

The next thing she knew, she said, she was in Kitagawa's home and was being raped.

Hikari kept quiet after it happened, as Kitagawa had pleaded with her not to go public, saying it would be a damaging scandal for the prosecutor's office, she said, and even threatened to kill himself. – AFP

## Newly-hatched rare Indian bustard chick gets 50-strong guard

AHMEDABAD – Fifty wildlife officers are now the devoted guardians of a newly-hatched great Indian bustard chick, born after a marathon road trip to provide a fertilised egg for the critically endangered bird, officials said yesterday.

The birds, metre-tall desert dwellers, have plummeted in number over the past 25 years, with only around 150 believed to remain in the wild.

They are threatened by feral dogs, habitat encroachment, and collisions with power lines in areas now increasingly used for vast solar projects.

It was the first chick hatched successfully in the state of Gujarat for a decade.

"The hatching... is rare and momentous occasion for our conservation efforts," Gujarat state conservation officer Dheeraj Mittal told AFP.

"But the real challenge begins now," he added. "We have teams of about 50 people monitoring

the movement of the mother bird, around the clock."

The bird is listed as critically endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

India's Supreme Court had ordered power lines be buried in key breeding zones after bustards were killed in collisions.

The government, however, successfully petitioned to overturn the ruling, arguing it would hinder renewable energy targets.

Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav said a "jumpstart approach" was used to provide an egg for the three birds – all female – that made up the last population in the desert grasslands of Kutch.

Wildlife officers took an egg from its breeding programme on a 19-hour-long road trip using a handheld incubator, a nearly 800-kilometre journey, Yadav said.

Mittal said villagers had been asked to keep their cattle away.

"Our priority is to secure and protect the chick and its mother from other predators," he added. – AFP

## Australia investigates tech giants over social media ban breaches

SYDNEY – Australia is investigating Facebook, TikTok and YouTube for possible breaches of the country's under-16 social media ban, accusing the big tech companies yesterday of "failing to obey" the world-leading laws.

Australia in December banned under-16s from a raft of the world's most popular social media sites, citing the need to protect young minds from "predatory algorithms" filled with sex and violence.

Three months since the landmark laws came into effect, Australia's online safety watchdog found a "substantial proportion of Australian children" were still scrolling banned platforms.

"Australia's world-leading social media laws are not failing. But big tech is failing to obey the laws," Communications Minister Anika Wells told reporters.

"Australia will not let the social media giants take us for mugs."

Australia's eSafety Commission flagged "significant concerns" about Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and YouTube.

"None of this is impossible. None of this is even difficult for big tech, who are innovative billion dollar companies," Wells said.

"If these companies want to do

business in Australia, they must obey Australian laws."

Australia would decide any punishments by mid-2026.

Tech companies face fines of up to US\$33.9 million (Aus\$49.5 million) under the laws.

More than five million accounts belonging to underage Australian users have been removed since the laws came into effect, the eSafety Commission said.

A growing body of research suggests too much time online is taking a toll on teen well-being.

Australia's ban has been hailed as a godsend for parents sick of seeing children glued to their phones.

It has also drawn interest across the globe – with Malaysia, France, New Zealand and Indonesia among the nations now eyeing similar measures.

Although social media companies have pledged to abide by the laws, they have warned the measures could instead push teenagers into dark, unregulated corners of the internet.

### Prove it

Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, said accurately proving users' ages had been "a challenge for the whole industry".

It told AFP it would "keep investing in enforcement to detect and remove under-16 accounts".

Image-sharing platform Snapchat told AFP it was "fully committed to implementing reasonable steps under the legislation" and had so far locked 450,000 accounts.

TikTok said it had no comment, while enquiries on YouTube did not receive a reply.

Social media companies bear the sole responsibility for checking that Australia-based users are 16 or older.

They must prove they have taken "reasonable steps" to weed out young teenagers, although it remains unclear how this will be interpreted by the government.

Some platforms have said they would use AI tools to estimate ages based on photos, while users could also choose to prove their age by uploading a government ID.

Online discussion site Reddit has filed a legal challenge against Australia's ban, which it described as "legally erroneous".

The US-based company said there were serious privacy concerns associated with platforms verifying age, with the collection of personal data creating a risk of leaks or hacks.

Reddit's challenge is yet to be heard in Australia's High Court.

– AFP



Security personnel pose with Maoist rebels and fighters upon their surrender, at a police facility in Dantewada in Chhattisgarh state's Bastar division, India yesterday. India on Monday, declared the country free of the Maoist insurgency, fulfilling a long-standing deadline to defeat the decades-long rebellion. – AFP

## Camel couriers caught carrying contraband booze to Delhi

NEW DELHI – Indian police have arrested a man for smuggling alcohol into the capital Delhi using camels, seizing two animals and a large consignment of liquor.

The camels were used to carry the alcohol through "forest routes" from the neighbouring city of Faridabad in Haryana state across state lines into the sprawling megacity of Delhi – where taxes on alcohol are far higher.

"Staff... busted an illicit liquor smuggling racket using camels for transportation," police said in a statement after the arrests on Monday.

"The contraband was seized and the camels were rescued and handed over to concerned authorities."

Authorities said the smuggler turned to forest paths and camels to avoid road checkpoints after

police increased monitoring along the highways between Faridabad and Delhi.

The Hindustan Times newspaper reported that the same camels had been stopped last year for alcohol smuggling.

It reported that the smugglers would offload the contraband once inside city boundaries and deliver the drink to clients – using bicycle rickshaws. – AFP

## Palestinians horrified by Israel's new death penalty law

RAMALLAH – Fear for her son's fate kept Maisoun Shawamreh awake through the night in the occupied West Bank following the Israeli parliament's approval of a law permitting the execution of Palestinians convicted of deadly terror attacks.

"The mothers of prisoners – none of us slept last night," Shawamreh told AFP as she joined a protest in Ramallah against the law yesterday.

Her son has been in detention for three years, awaiting sentencing on charges of attempted murder.

"He may or may not be subject to execution," she said, uncertain of what lies ahead.

Under the new law, passed in parliament late Monday, Palestinians in the West Bank convicted by military courts of carrying out deadly attacks classified as "terrorism" will face the death penalty as a default sentence.

Because Palestinians in the territory are automatically tried in Israeli military courts, the measure effectively creates a separate and harsher legal track.

In Israeli civilian courts, the law allows for either death or life imprisonment for those convicted of killing with intent to harm the state.

While the law does not provide for retroactive application, critics say the distinction underscores a system of unequal justice.

In Ramallah, dozens of activists, political factions and civil society groups gathered to protest the law.

Some held placards depicting a blindfolded prisoner flanked by two hanging nooses – a stark image of what they fear lies ahead.

"Stop the execution of prisoners law before it's too late," read the placards, held alongside portraits of imprisoned Palestinians.

Abdullah al-Zaghari, director of the Palestinian Prisoners Club, condemned what he described as an openly discriminatory law.

"This fascist and racist legislation reflects the reality of the occupation," he said. "It applies to Palestinians – not to Israeli Jews who carry out daily violence against Palestinian civilians."



Relatives of Palestinian prisoners hold portraits and shout slogans during a rally in the Israeli-occupied West Bank city of Nablus yesterday, protesting against a bill approved by Israel's parliament that would allow the execution of Palestinians convicted on terror charges for deadly attacks. – AFP

Haitham, a 28-year-old employee of an international humanitarian organisation, said the law was "horrible".

"But we expected it... What can you expect from a government with people like Netanyahu?" he told AFP, declining to give his last name.

After lawmakers approved the bill, Israel's far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir celebrated its passage with a champagne toast in a parliamentary corridor, joined by some fellow legislators.

### Doubt in Israel

Even within Israel, however, some scepticism has emerged.

The legislation is "primitive and very stupid", said Meyir Lahav, a physician from Tel Aviv, adding that such measures were "deplorable and unacceptable in our society".

"We should be ashamed." "What I don't like is that it doesn't apply to everyone," said Tom, a software engineer, who gave only his first name.

"If someone commits murder, it should apply to all – Jews, Arabs, Muslims alike."

Yves, a French resident of Israel, also opposed the measure.

"To decide that, once a person has been captured, they should be put to

death – regardless of what they have done – and to entrust another with carrying out that act, is something I reject on principle," he said.

But others, like businessman Noah Levi, firmly backed the law.

"The death penalty is a very good thing; we should have implemented it a long time ago," Levi said.

According to him, Palestinians "have killed innocent people, which is why we must take measures to prevent a future catastrophe for Israel".

The death penalty exists in Israel but it has been applied only twice: in 1948, shortly after the state's founding, against a military captain accused of high treason, and then in 1962, when the Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann was hanged.

Meanwhile, the new law is already facing legal challenges.

Several Israeli human rights groups, along with three members of parliament, filed petitions to the Supreme Court seeking to overturn the law.

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) said the law created "two parallel tracks, both designed to apply to Palestinians", and should be struck down on constitutional grounds.

The bill appears to conflict with Israel's Basic Laws, which prohibit arbitrary discrimination. – AFP

## UN warns of huge cost of Mideast war to Arab countries

AMMAN – The war sparked by the joint US-Israeli attack on Iran and which has spread across the Middle East has cost Arab countries US\$186 billion, a top UN official said yesterday, as he called for an immediate halt to the fighting.

"We hope the fighting will stop tomorrow, as every day of delay has negative repercussions on the global economy," UN assistant secretary-general Abdallah Al Dardari told reporters in Amman.

"We estimate that the loss to the Arab region's GDP as a result of one month of fighting will be around six per cent... Six per cent of GDP means the region has lost around US\$186 billion from its economy in a single month," he said.

Al Dardari, who is also a top UN official for the Arab region, said the countries of the oil-rich Gulf were shouldering the heaviest burden.

"The impact on GDP is very significant in the Gulf region, where it could reach US\$168 billion, and in the Levant region, where it could reach around US\$30 billion," he said.

The war that erupted with a US-Israeli attack on Iran on February 28 spread quickly across the region, as Iran launched retaliatory attacks targeting Gulf countries and Israel.

Lebanon and Iraq have been drawn into the fighting, with pro-

Iran groups launching attacks of their own on Israel and US interests.

Al Dardari warned against the Gulf's economic dependence on oil, saying the crisis around the vital waterway of the Strait of Hormuz had proved the need to diversify.

He also said there was a need to seek out routes other than the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas flowed pre-war.

"The Arab economy relies on virtually a single commodity; even countries that do not export oil depend on remittances from expatriates in oil-exporting countries and on aid from those same countries, while the oil-exporting countries themselves rely on a single product," he said.

"This fragility in the Arab economy is demonstrated by recent events, which prove that it is unsustainable."

Dardari sounded the alarm over the expected impact on jobs in a region already wracked by inequality.

"We estimate that the number of jobs we will lose as a result of this conflict is around 3.7 million," he said.

"As for the impact on poverty, we expect that around four million more people in the region will fall, or have already fallen, below the poverty line this month as a result of the hostilities." – AFP

## Iran confirms killing of general sanctioned by US over oil network

PARIS – Iran's Revolutionary Guards yesterday confirmed the killing in a US-Israeli airstrike of a brigadier general sanctioned by the US in 2025 over an international network shipping oil to China and using profits to fund Tehran-backed regional proxies.

Revolutionary Guards commander-in-chief Ahmad Vahidi issued a message of condolences for Jamshid Eshaghi, the head of the budget and financial affairs at Iran's armed forces general staff.

The general staff is a powerful military body that coordinates between the regular army and the ideological force of the Islamic republic, the Revolutionary Guards.

Vahidi, whose predecessor was killed at the start of the conflict, said Eshaghi had been killed along with several members of his family in a US-Israeli strike, without giving a date or further details.

He praised Eshaghi for "improving the strength of the defence forces of the homeland", according to the message published by the state-run IRNA news agency.

In February 2025, the US treasury sanctioned Eshaghi and other individuals, entities and vessels over what it said was an "international network for facilitating the shipment of

millions of barrels of Iranian crude oil worth hundreds of millions of dollars to China."

It said revenues are used to fund militant groups in the region including Hamas in Gaza, the Houthis in Yemen and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

It accused the Iran general staff of using "networks of foreign-based front companies and brokers" to enable these shipments and "obfuscate" their Iranian origin.

Eshaghi had previously served as an official with one of these front companies, Sepehr Energy and coordinated with the Guards on the sale of Iranian crude oil to China, according to the US treasury.

He is the latest top Iranian official to have been confirmed by Tehran to have been killed in the war.

Supreme leader Ali Khamenei was killed on the first day of the war on February 28 and the Islamic republic's powerful security chief, Ali Larjani, was killed earlier this month, along with over a dozen other prominent figures.

Israel and the United States have said they have dealt a major blow to Iran by killing top officials, but some analysts say the Islamic republic is still showing resilience and capacity to recover from setbacks. – AFP

## Iranian attack sparks fire on Kuwaiti oil tanker at Dubai Port

KUWAIT – An Iranian attack sparked a fire on a Kuwaiti oil tanker at Dubai Port, state media reported yesterday, as Tehran continued its campaign in the Gulf in response to US-Israeli strikes.

"The Kuwaiti giant crude oil tanker was subjected to a direct and malicious Iranian attack while in the anchorage area of Dubai Port in the UAE," official news agency KUNA reported, citing Kuwait's state-owned oil company.

There were no injuries, according to the report, and Dubai authorities later said firefighters had extinguished the blaze.

KUNA reported the tanker

was fully laden at the time of the attack, which had caused "material damage to the ship's hull" and "the possibility of an oil spill in the surrounding waters".

Authorities in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) said there had been no oil spill.

UAE authorities had indicated earlier that the tanker was targeted by a drone in Dubai waters. According to the Dubai government's Media Office, the ship's 24 crew members were safe.

Kuwait's military also said yesterday its air defences were responding to "hostile missile and drone attacks", according to an X post.

Maritime intelligence agency

Vanguard and ship tracker MarineTraffic identified the ship as the Al Salmi, a 332-metre-long Kuwait-flagged crude tanker.

Vanguard said it was "struck by an unknown projectile" 31 nautical miles northwest of Dubai.

MarineTraffic said in a post on X that the Al Salmi was en route to Qingdao, China, "carrying an estimated two million barrels of crude oil".

The oil-rich Gulf has borne the brunt of Iran's attacks in response to US-Israeli strikes that sparked the Middle East war late last month.

Tehran has threatened to target vital infrastructure across the Gulf, including energy sites. – AFP

## Angola records over 85,000 TB cases in 2025

LUANDA – Angola's Ministry of Health has reported that a total of 85,793 cases of tuberculosis (TB) were recorded nationwide in 2025. This makes tuberculosis the third leading cause of overall mortality in Angola.

Last week, the ministry also noted that the mortality rate decreased from 3.4 to 1.8 deaths per 100,000 people.

Tuberculosis remains a significant public health concern in Angola, particularly affecting individuals aged 25 to 34, who accounted for 25 percent of the total

registered cases, it said.

Despite this concerning scenario, authorities highlighted a decrease in cases compared to 2024, when 90,058 cases were reported.

The health authority attributes this reduction to increased access to diagnosis and treatment of the disease, saying that the high number of cases continues to negatively impact public health and the economy, affecting families, communities, and national development due to school and work absenteeism and loss of productivity. – AFP

## French witch, sworn virgin make Int'l Booker shortlist

LONDON – Novels by women writers about a family exiled from Iran, a suburban French witch and an Albanian sworn virgin have made the shortlist for the International Booker Prize, organisers announced yesterday.

The prestigious award, to be handed out at a ceremony at London's Tate Modern gallery on May 19, recognises works of fiction from around the world that have been translated into English.

The £50,000 (US\$62,000) prize is split equally between the author and the translator.

This is the 10<sup>th</sup> year that the prize has been awarded in its current form. Organisers say the award gives the authors a significant boost in profile and sales.

Four winners have gone on to become Nobel laureates.

The books on this year's list feature "unforgettable characters" and "reverberate with history", said the chair of the judges, British novelist Natasha Brown.

The shortlist includes several established authors.

"The Director", set in the Nazi-controlled film industry, is by bestselling German-Austrian writer Daniel Kehlmann, who is known for

darkly funny historical novels and is the only male author on the list.

Another prominent figure is French novelist and playwright Marie NDiaye, winner of the country's top Goncourt prize, whose books have been widely translated.

Her novel "The Witch" is about a woman living in the suburbs in the 1990s who passes magical powers on to her daughters.

Brazilian Ana Paula Maia is author of seven novels and has been selected for "On Earth As It Is Beneath", a horrifying tale of a brutal prison colony in a remote wilderness.

The shortlist also features two debut novels.

"The Nights Are Quiet In Tehran", a saga by German writer Shida Bazayr, is about a family fleeing Iran and then returning decades later.

The other is "She Who Remains" by award-winning Bulgarian poet and writer René Karabash, about a woman who opts to become a "sworn virgin" – a vanishing Albanian tradition under which a woman renounces marriage and lives as a man.

Last year, Indian writer, lawyer and activist Banu Mushtaq won the coveted prize for her short story collection "Heart Lamp", written in regional language Kannada. – AFP

## US Supreme Court rules against ban on 'conversion therapy' for LGBTQ minors

WASHINGTON – The US Supreme Court ruled yesterday against a Colorado state law banning "conversion therapy" for LGBTQ minors, siding with a Christian therapist who challenged it on the grounds of free speech.

At issue is the constitutionality of Colorado law from 2019 that prohibits licensed practitioners from conducting "conversion therapy" on patients under 18.

The therapies claim to change the sexual orientation or gender identity of LGBTQ people.

In a 8-1 decision, the court ruled in favour of Kaley Chiles, a licensed mental health counsellor

who invoked her Christian faith and challenged the law, arguing that it violated her First Amendment right of free speech.

"Colorado's law addressing conversion therapy does not just ban physical interventions. In cases like this, it censors speech based on viewpoint," wrote conservative Justice Neil Gorsuch in the decision on behalf of the majority of the Court.

Conversion therapy is banned in more than 20 US states and much of Europe, with both the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association opposed to its use. – AFP

## King Charles to pay state visit to US in late April

Helen Rowe

LONDON – King Charles III will visit the United States in late April, Buckingham Palace announced yesterday, despite some calls for the trip to be cancelled or delayed amid strains over the Iran war.

Confirmation of the monarch's first state visit to the US comes at a rocky time for the so-called US-UK "special relationship", with US President Donald Trump repeatedly criticising Prime Minister Keir Starmer's reticence over the US-Israel war against Tehran.

But Trump, whose mother came from Scotland and is a big fan of the British monarchy, welcomed news of the visit as "TERRIFIC".

The US leader posted on his Truth Social platform that the trip would take place on April 27-30 and include a "beautiful Banquet Dinner at the White House on the evening of April 28<sup>th</sup>".

"I look forward to spending time with the King, whom I greatly respect. It will be TERRIFIC!" he added.

The visit will come as the US marks its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence and will be followed by an official visit by the king to Bermuda, a British Overseas Territory.

Washington's envoy to Britain, Warren Stephens, warned last week it would be a "big mistake" for the US visit to be cancelled.

Trump has repeatedly railed against Starmer since the start of the war, accusing him of not doing enough to support the US.

"This is not Winston Churchill that we're dealing with," Trump said earlier last month, after Starmer initially declined to let US warplanes fly from UK bases to strike Iran.

"I'm disappointed with Keir," Trump has also said, slamming Starmer's "big mistake".



Britain's King Charles III (left) and US President Donald Trump talk as they inspect a guard of honour during a ceremonial welcome in the Quadrangle at Windsor Castle, in Windsor, on September 17, 2025, during the US president's second state visit. – AFP

Trump also caused offence with recent remarks about UK troops' participation in Afghanistan.

The visit will be Charles's first trip to the US as king, after he hosted Trump for a lavish state visit last September.

The mercurial US president has frequently expressed admiration for Britain's royal family, which treated him to a full state dinner at Windsor Castle, military parades and a flyover during last year's visit.

### Soft power diplomacy

It was an unprecedented second state visit for Trump, who was also hosted in 2019 by the late queen Elizabeth II before her death.

But in his latest broadside aimed at Starmer's government, Trump told countries like Britain to secure the Strait of Hormuz themselves because "the USA won't be there to help you anymore, just like you weren't there for us".

A YouGov poll published on Thursday found nearly half of British citizens opposed the king's visit to the US, with only a third saying it should go ahead.

Emily Thornberry, a senior MP

in Starmer's ruling Labour party, said earlier last month it would be "safer to delay" the trip.

She warned Charles and Camilla could be left feeling "embarrassed" because of the ongoing conflict.

"Why are we rewarding Donald Trump with a state visit from our king?" asked Ed Davey, leader of the minority opposition Liberal Democrats party.

The last British monarch to make a state visit to the US was Queen Elizabeth II in 2007.

That visit was the last of four made by the late queen whose visit in 1991 included an address to Congress.

The royal family's soft power diplomacy is viewed as an important way of engaging with Trump.

Charles helped smooth Starmer's visit to the White House last year by signing a letter inviting Trump to visit the UK which the prime minister handed to the president in the Oval Office.

In front of the TV cameras a beaming US president read the invitation and declared the king "a beautiful man, a wonderful man".

– AFP

## Wolf bites woman in Germany in first attack for decades

HAMBURG – A woman was bitten by a wolf in a shopping centre in the German city of Hamburg, its deputy mayor said yesterday, in the first such attack in modern times.

The wolf entered the complex in the northern city's Altona area on Monday evening (local time) after being repeatedly spotted in different parts of Hamburg over several days, Katharina Fegebank told journalists.

The incident is the first of its kind since the species began returning to Germany almost 30 years ago, according to the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN).

According to the *Bild* daily, the woman was bitten in the face.

The wolf had previously been

sighted on Saturday in the west of Hamburg and at other locations on Sunday morning and afternoon, according to the local environment agency.

Fegebank said that "until yesterday evening the wolf had shown typical behaviour for a wild animal and had avoided human contact".

She said it was not clear why the wolf had entered the shopping centre, suggesting that "the confined space and proximity to people led to a situation of extreme stress" for the animal.

The wolf has since been captured by police and taken to a wildlife park.

Fegebank said that "we will find a solution for the wolf very quickly".

The animal is most likely a cub that was in the process of leaving its pack, according to experts.

Wolves were effectively wiped out in Germany by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, largely due to persecution, bounties and habitat loss.

However, wolves migrating from Poland began settling again in eastern Germany after reunification, when stronger wildlife protections were introduced.

An official study last year recorded 219 packs of wolves across the country, as well as 43 wolf pairs and 14 lone wolves.

The German government in December backed legislation that would allow regular hunting of wolves in order to manage populations in areas with large packs. – AFP

# Chinese agricultural experts help improve agricultural productivity in Mozambique

## Analysis

MAPUTO – At the Umbeluzi Agricultural Station in Maputo Province, Mozambique, vast rice fields have entered the harvest season. Golden rice panicles sway gently in the breeze as two small harvesters move across the fields, presenting a vivid scene of abundance.

The site is a comprehensive rice production base jointly established by the fourth batch of Chinese agricultural experts assisting Mozambique and the Mozambique Agricultural Research Institute (IAM). It focuses on high-yield rice demonstration, variety trials, seed breeding, and the promotion of field management techniques.

“From land preparation and seedling cultivation to fertilization and pest control, Chinese experts have introduced a complete set of systematic cultivation techniques,” said Tito Chimbamba, an agricultural technician at the Umbeluzi station. With guidance from Chinese experts, he has

mastered key rice farming skills and learned to operate and maintain various agricultural machines.

Li Yuhao, a rice and agro-processing expert with the Chinese agricultural team, said preliminary yield estimates show that rice output in the demonstration fields has exceeded 8 tonnes per hectare, significantly higher than traditional local levels, while some high-yield plots have surpassed 10 tonnes per hectare.

In addition to rice, oil crops are another important focus of China-Mozambique agricultural cooperation. Sesame and sunflower, both traditional oil crops in Mozambique, have seen steady export growth in recent years and have become important sources of foreign exchange. Sunflower, in particular, is widely regarded as having strong potential for import substitution.

The Chinese agricultural team has established demonstration bases for oil crops, collecting high-quality hybrid varieties and promoting advanced techniques such as seed

treatment, integrated pest and weed management, and foliar fertilization\* during key growth stages, aiming to improve yields and support industry development.

“We have collected 68 hybrid varieties of sunflower, sesame and soybean, and are conducting comparative trials with local varieties to identify those best suited to local conditions,” said Zhao Jun, an oil crop expert. She added that the promotion of these improved varieties and efficient cultivation techniques will help increase farmers’ incomes and provide technical support for scaling up the oil crop sector.

Seed quality is fundamental to agricultural development. Wu Guiyun, a seed production and quality testing expert with the Chinese team, said a seed laboratory has been established at the Umbeluzi station, integrating testing services, technical support, talent training and external exchanges, significantly enhancing local seed quality management capacity.

“The laboratory has helped address the shortage of seed testing capacity in the region,” Wu said. In one case, rice samples submitted from another agricultural station initially showed a germination rate below standard.

Further analysis revealed that a high level of seed dormancy was the main cause. The laboratory then proposed technical measures such as high-temperature sun-drying, providing a practical solution for seed utilization.

Technology transfer remains a core goal of China-Mozambique agricultural cooperation. Over the past three years, the expert team has trained more than 1,000 local agricultural technicians, farmers and students.

Relying on the demonstration base, it has also provided a platform for university students to engage in research and practical training, promoting the localization of efficient rice and oil crop cultivation technologies.

Meanwhile, the demonstration base and seed laboratory have attracted visits and exchanges from agricultural experts and students from multiple countries, gradually becoming an important hub for regional agricultural technology dissemination and talent cultivation.

As an important component of bilateral cooperation, Chinese agricultural experts continue to support Mozambique in improving agricultural productivity and efficiency, enhancing food production capacity, and contributing to food security and agricultural development. – Xinhua

\* Foliar fertilization is the practice of applying nutrients directly to plant leaves (and sometimes stems) in liquid form so plants absorb them through the foliage rather than – or in addition to – through the roots. It’s used to supply essential nutrients quickly, correct deficiencies, and support growth during times when root uptake is limited. – Poe

## Chinese embassy donates humanitarian aid to fire victims in Bafata Region of Guinea-Bissau

BISSAU – The Chinese Embassy in Guinea-Bissau has held a donation ceremony in the city of Bafata, in Bafata Region, to provide humanitarian aid to people affected by a fire.

Chinese Ambassador to Guinea-Bissau Yang Renhuo and Bafata Region Governor Mustafa Cassama last Wednesday attended the ceremony and jointly distributed the donation to representatives of the victims.

“China and Guinea-Bissau have long maintained friendly cooperative relations,” Yang said, adding that Bafata Region is an important area of cooperation between the two countries.

According to the ambassador, after the fire that occurred in Bafata Region in February, the Chinese Embassy closely followed the progress of relief efforts. He said the donation was intended to “help the affected people ease their difficulties and overcome the impact of the disaster as soon as possible.”

Cassama thanked the Chinese side for its donation, saying that the



Chinese Ambassador to Guinea-Bissau Yang Renhuo (second from right) hands over humanitarian aid during a donation ceremony for fire victims in Bafata, Guinea-Bissau, on Thursday last week. – AFP

supplies “meet the urgent needs” of local victims.

He added that the materials will help affected families improve their living conditions and gradually return to normal life.

In February, a fire at a temporary fuel sales point in Bafata Region caused heavy casualties and significant property losses, leaving many people injured and hospitalized. – Xinhua

## Americans in Portugal hold anti-Trump protest

LISBON – About 200 Americans residing in Portugal gathered on Saturday in front of Porto City Hall to protest against US President Donald Trump’s administration, particularly its military actions in the Middle East.

According to Lusa – News Agency of Portugal, the protest aimed to express opposition to authoritarian tendencies and to emphasize the importance of democratic principles.

The rally was initiated by US volunteers living in Portugal as part of coordinated actions in multiple cities worldwide to draw attention to the direction of US politics and policies pursued by the Trump administration, the protest organizers said.

Robert Glassburner, an American who has lived in Portugal since 1983 and currently performs with the Casa da Música

Symphony Orchestra in Porto, said at the rally that he opposes the current US government’s domestic and foreign policies, especially its military actions in the Middle East.

“We are against these policies of the current US government, both abroad and at home. And above all, against the war that is taking place in the Middle East. That war was ordered solely by Trump and was not authorized by Congress. The [American] Constitution says that any military action must be approved by the United States Congress,” said Glassburner.

During the demonstration, participants chanted slogans and voiced concerns over a range of issues related to the United States.

The organizers said the event reflects the “frustration and alarm” felt by Americans living abroad over policies that “undermine democratic institutions and the rule of law.” – Xinhua

## Portugal launches 6 satellites in New Space push

LISBON – Portugal launched six satellites into orbit on Monday as part of its New Space Portugal Agenda, marking a significant step forward in the country’s ambition to become a key player in the European space ecosystem.

Two of the satellites will reinforce the Constelação do Atlântico, Portugal’s Earth observation constellation, while the remaining four will join the newly established Constelação Lusíada, designed to strengthen maritime

navigation communications.

Monday also saw the formalization of a cooperation agreement between satellite company Satellogic, N3O, and Geosat, establishing a framework for collaboration in new satellite technologies and downstream services, including within the Atlantic Data Hub platform.

Two additional very high-resolution optical satellites are currently under development through a partnership between

CEiA, N3O, and German aerospace company OHB.

Beyond satellite capabilities, Portugal’s New Space Agenda also includes a strategic space access component coordinated by the Portuguese Air Force, which foresees the development of a space base in the Azores archipelago.

The facility is intended to support European launch and recovery operations, positioning Portugal as an Atlantic hub within the broader European space ecosystem. – Xinhua



A woman paints during the Women's Meeting of Luanda Province at the Bay of Luanda in Angola last week. More than 100,000 women on Saturday attended the inaugural Women's Meeting of Luanda Province, held under the theme “Women of Luanda, Essence that Transforms”. – Xinhua

## Football shorts

### Napoli threaten absent Lukaku with disciplinary action

Napoli threatened Romelu Lukaku with disciplinary action yesterday after he decided to stay in Belgium for treatment on a hip injury.

"Romelu Lukaku has not responded to our call to return to training," said Napoli in a statement.

"The club reserves the right to take appropriate disciplinary measures, as well as to review the player's continued involvement with the squad."

Lukaku, who has had a season severely disrupted by injuries, withdrew last Tuesday from Belgium's World Cup warm-up friendlies against tournament co-hosts Mexico and the United States.

The centre-forward explained on Monday that he had inflammation and liquid on his hip flexor muscle.

"I chose to do the rehab in Belgium... [But] I could never turn my back on Napoli, never," said Lukaku.

Having suffered a hamstring 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.

Napoli host second-placed AC Milan on Easter Monday hoping to leapfrog the seven-time European champions in the league standings. — AFP

### China U-23 beats Vietnam to finish 2<sup>nd</sup> at Xi'an youth soccer tournament

XI'AN — China's under-23 men's football team defeated Vietnam 1-0 yesterday to finish second in the 2026 International Youth Tournament in Xi'an.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea secured the title after beating Thailand 3-1 earlier in the day, edging China on goal difference. Both sides ended the tournament with one win and two draws.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is the official name of North Korea.

China had an early chance to take the lead in the seventh minute, but Mao Weijie's long-range effort deflected off a defender and was comfortably saved by Vietnam goalkeeper Cao Van Binh.

The breakthrough came just before halftime, when Du Yuezheng broke the deadlock with a long-range lob that beat the Vietnamese goalkeeper.

China controlled the early stages of the second half and pushed to extend its lead, while Vietnam looked to respond on the counterattack.

Both teams created chances after the break. Nguyen Dang Duong missed a clear opportunity to equalize in the 71<sup>st</sup> minute when he was denied in a one-on-one by China defender Shi Songchen, who recovered to make a crucial tackle. Mutalifu Yimingkari fired wide from a low effort in the 80<sup>th</sup> minute as China sought a second goal.

"It is the best game we played at the tournament. Generally, I was satisfied with my players' performances. We competed in some competitive games and I observed some players here," said China head coach Antonio Puche Vincente.

"Our team will regroup and play some warm-up matches in June, then complete our final preparations for the Asian Games in September. I will continue to observe and discover good players across the country in the coming months," the Spaniard added. — Xinhua

# Tottenham appoint De Zerbi in battle for Premier League survival



LONDON — Tottenham appointed Roberto De Zerbi as the club's third manager of the season yesterday as they battle to avoid relegation from English football's top flight for the first time in nearly 50 years.

Former Brighton and Marseille boss De Zerbi has reportedly been handed a lucrative five-year deal to convince him to take the job immediately rather than waiting to see which division Spurs are in next season.

Tottenham sit just one point outside the relegation zone with seven games of the Premier League season remaining.

De Zerbi replaces Igor Tudor, whose interim reign at the north London club lasted just seven games after Spurs crashed out of the Champions League and fell ever closer to dropping into the second tier.

"I am delighted to be joining this fantastic football club, which is one of the biggest and most prestigious in the world," said De Zerbi in a Tottenham statement.

"I am here because I believe in that ambition and have signed a long-term contract to give everything to deliver it.

"Our short-term priority is to climb the Premier League table, which will be the complete focus until the final whistle of the last game of the season."

### 'Number one target'

Spurs' sporting director Johan Lange insisted De Zerbi - "one of the most creative and forward-thinking coaches in world football" - had always been the club's first choice to take over on a full-time basis.

"Roberto was our number one target for the summer and we are very pleased to be able to bring him in now," said Lange.

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

His time at Marseille also started well, with the club finishing second to Paris Saint-Germain in Ligue 1 last season to qualify for



Marseille's Italian coach Roberto De Zerbi looks on from the technical area during the French Cup round of 32 football match against FC Bayeux at the Michel-d'Ornano Stadium in Caen on January 13. — AFP

the Champions League.

But he left the French club in February after failing to make it out of the Champions League league phase and following a humiliating 5-0 defeat by PSG.

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

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.

Last season they ended a 17-year trophy drought by winning the Europa League.

But the warning signs of a battle for survival were there as Ange Postecoglou was dismissed despite victory over Manchester United in the Europa League final after finishing 17<sup>th</sup> 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 and replaced by Tudor.

De Zerbi's first match in charge will be away to Sunderland on April 12.

However, his appointment has been far from universally approved by the Tottenham fanbase.

Some fan groups have raised objections to his support for Mason Greenwood during his time at Marseille.

Former England international Greenwood controversially signed for Marseille in July 2024 after a season on loan from Manchester United at Spanish club Getafe.

He was suspended by United in January 2022 following allegations of attempted rape and sexual assault.

Greenwood always denied the allegations and prosecutors dropped charges in February 2023.

But the Tottenham Supporters' Trust responded to De Zerbi's appointment by saying in a statement: "Any perceived sympathy toward alleged perpetrators of physical or sexual violence against women fundamentally undermines trust in the custodianship of this club." — AFP

## 'Iran will be at World Cup' and play in US, FIFA's Infantino tells AFP



Rémi Banet

ANTALYA — FIFA president Gianni Infantino told AFP yesterday that Iran "will be at the World Cup" and will play their group matches in the United States as scheduled, despite the Middle East war.

"Iran will be at the World Cup," Infantino said at half-time as Iran beat Costa Rica 5-0 in a friendly in southern Turkey.

"That's why we're here. We're delighted because they're a very, very strong team, I'm very happy."

"I've seen the team, I've spoken to the players and the coach, so everything is fine," added Infantino, whose attendance at yesterday's game was unannounced.

Infantino went on to stress that Iran's "matches will be played where they are supposed to be, according to the draw".

The World Cup, being hosted by the United States, Mexico and Canada, starts on June 11.

Iran are set to play their first Group G game against New Zealand in Los Angeles on June 15. They are then scheduled to play Belgium in Los Angeles on June 21 and Egypt in Seattle on June 26.

Iran's participation had been thrown into doubt by the war with the US and Israel that broke out on February 28.

"For us, what matters most are FIFA's rules and regulations. We will comply with

whatever FIFA decides. Every host country has made commitments to FIFA and must honour them," Mehdi Mohammad Nabi, the vice president of the Iranian Football Federation (FFIRI), told AFP at the match.

The FFIRI had said earlier this month it was "negotiating" with FIFA to relocate the country's World Cup matches from the United States to Mexico.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum also said that her country is prepared to host Iran's first-round matches at the tournament if needed.

### 'Fruitful discussion'

Infantino initially said that US President Donald Trump had given assurances that the Iranian team would still be welcome.

But Trump then stated that Iran's team should not travel to the tournament "for their own life and safety".

Iran hit back at Trump's comments, saying that "no one can exclude Iran's national team from the World Cup".

Yesterday, Mohammad Nabi said Infantino had been en route from Mexico to Qatar.

"Having learnt that we were organising friendly matches here, he came to see us in person, and we had a fruitful discussion," Mohammad Nabi said.

"Given our history in this competition, it is only natural that FIFA should support the

Iranian team. Mr Infantino is providing the necessary support to our national team and has given our players a great boost."

Asked before the game if Iran would be at the World Cup, back-up striker Dennis Eckert Ayensa told AFP: "Inshallah" (god willing).

Iran, who also played a friendly against Nigeria in the Turkish town of Belek last Friday, crushed Costa Rica, who have not qualified for the World Cup, 5-0 yesterday.

Skipper Mehdi Taremi, with two penalties, Ali Gholizadeh and Mohammad Mohebbi put Iran four goals up by the break. Half-time substitute Mehdi Ghayedi added a fifth in the 51<sup>st</sup> minute by which time coach Amir Ghalenoei had started to empty his bench.

Before the game, Iran's players wore black armbands and posed with photos of what officials said were young victims of the war, including those killed in an airstrike on a primary school in Iran on the first day of the conflict.

The airstrike on the school in the southern Iranian city of Minab on February 28 killed at least 170 people, including students and teachers.

The New York Times has reported that the preliminary findings of a US military investigation indicate that a US Tomahawk cruise missile hit the school due to a targeting mistake. — AFP

## China's ZXMOTO claims historic WorldSSP wins at WSBK in Portugal

### Superbikes

CHONGQING – Chinese motorcycle manufacturer ZXMOTO has secured a landmark double victory in the World Supersport (WorldSSP) category at the Portuguese round of the Superbike World Championship, marking a breakthrough for the country's presence in top-level production-based racing.

Valentin Debise powered the ZXMOTO 820RR-RS to victory in Saturday's WorldSSP Race 1, starting from second on the grid before taking the lead early and controlling the race to finish 3.685 seconds ahead of Spain's Jaume Masia.

"I felt from day one that this bike had something special," Debise said. "This result is a real team effort."

The team followed up with another win in Sunday's Race 2, underlining the competitiveness of the Chinese-developed machine across the weekend.

The victories came in the

WorldSSP class, a support category within the Superbike World Championship, rather than the premier WorldSBK class. However, the results represent a milestone for a Chinese manufacturer competing against established international brands in a globally recognized championship.

ZXMOTO, based in Chongqing, was founded in April 2024 by entrepreneur Zhang Xue. The company unveiled its first model at the Chongqing International Motorcycle Trade Exhibition in September that year, with initial deliveries beginning in March 2025.

Zhang told Xinhua on Monday that the results had strengthened his confidence in China's manufacturing capabilities and reflected the company's focus on innovation and performance.

According to Zhang, ZXMOTO achieved an output value of 750 million yuan (US\$104 million) in

2025, with nearly 70 million yuan invested in research and development.

Industry observers say the rapid rise of ZXMOTO reflects the broader strength of Chongqing's motorcycle sector. Official data show that one in every three motorcycles exported from China is produced in the city.

Analysts note that Chinese manufacturers have increasingly shifted from cost-based competition to technology-driven development, with greater investment in engine design, lightweight materials and performance optimization.

Zhang said the WorldSSP victories represented not only a breakthrough for the company but also growing confidence in China's ability to compete in high-performance segments of the global motorcycle industry.

"Within the next five years, we aim to capture over half of the market share currently held by these international big brands," he said. – Xinhua

## China teen diving prodigy nearly retired after 'reaching mental limit'

### Diving

BEIJING – China's three-time Olympic gold medallist diver Quan Hongchan considered retiring after struggling with her mental health and says she has been subjected to intense scrutiny over her weight.

The 19-year-old won gold at the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Games in 2021 when she was just 14. She won two more golds in Paris in 2024.

Now one of China's most popular athletes, crowds have descended on the teenager's hometown in rural Guangdong Province and mobbed her at hotels.

A tearful Quan said she started her periods after the Paris Games, which caused her to gain weight even when only "eating a little".

"After the Olympics I actually thought about retiring," she told the Chinese magazine *Renwu* in an

interview published Monday.

"I really, really wanted to, but in the end I still wanted to keep going and continue diving."

Having taken that decision, Quan said she was asked repeatedly about her weight, thrusting herself into training and running to try to shed the kilos.

"During that time, not just within the team but also in public opinion outside, I saw people every day saying I was fat," Quan said.

"But I was already starving myself – I dieted to the point where I felt like I was about to collapse," she added.

"Everyone knows weight is a nightmare for female divers."

Adulation towards China's sports stars has included fans obsessing over athletes' personal lives and cyberbullying opponents.

State media have called such behaviour "toxic fandom" and Chinese

authorities vowed to crack down on it.

Quan said the amount of attention and criticism she received made her afraid of cameras.

"I had reached my limit. I was exhausted – physically, mentally, emotionally – everything piling up together," she said, adding that injuries exacerbated her struggles.

State-backed *China Daily* wrote in November that Quan was now heavier and had a "larger body frame" after she returned from a six-month hiatus to compete in China's National Games in late 2025.

Social media users rallied in support of Quan following the interview.

"Whether or not you want to continue diving, that decision is entirely up to you. Do whatever you want to do. You don't owe anyone anything," one user posted on the Weibo platform.

"Little Hong, be happy," the person added. – AFP

## Wang Chuqin off to winning start at ITTF World Cup



Wang Chuqin of China serves during the men's singles group 1 match against Eduard Ionescu of Romania at the ITTF Men's and Women's World Cup 2026 in Macao, yesterday. – Xinhua

### Table tennis

MACAO – World No. 1 Wang Chuqin of China opened his ITTF World Cup campaign in style with a dominant 3-0 victory over Romania's Eduard Ionescu, while his compatriot Liang Jingkun slipped to a surprise 3-2 defeat against Argentina's Horacio Cifuentes in yesterday's group-stage action.

Wang led 5-1 in his opening game before Ionescu fought back to 5-5 and then 5-6. Wang edged ahead again to 7-6, but was pegged back to 7-7. After going up 8-7, he was caught once more at 8-8, before finally pulling away to take the game 11-8.

In the second game, Wang raced to a 7-0 lead before Ionescu closed the gap to 7-5. Wang then regrouped and closed out the game 11-7. In the third game, Wang dominated, taking it 11-1.

"It was my first time playing against him," Wang said. "And the key was really in the first game - at 8-8, it was about who could take control and win the game. He is a very strong player, and before the match I wasn't completely sure of myself. I'm satisfied with how I played today."

World No. 13 Liang suffered a shock upset, losing 3-2 to world No. 79 Cifuentes (11-5, 7-11, 8-11,

11-4, 8-11). Liang will meet Germany's veteran Dimitrij Ovtcharov today, with the latter beating Cifuentes 3-1 on Monday. Yesterday, fellow Chinese Wen Ruibo beat France's Stephane Ouaiche 3-1.

In the women's draw, China's Qin Yuxuan received a walkover in her first group match as her opponent Annett Kaufmann of Germany withdrew due to injury. Qin will meet Japan's world No. 9 Hina Hayata today.

Elsewhere, Doo Hoi Kem of Hong Kong edged Poland's Natalia Bajor 3-2. "We've played each other many times. We're about the same age, so we've basically grown up competing against each other," Doo said.

"The score is always like this when we play - very tight - so I had prepared for that, including longer rallies on every point. I'm really happy to win today, because this is the World Cup, the very top level, so every win really counts," added Doo, who will face China's Wang Yidi today.

The 2026 ITTF Men's and Women's World Cup runs from March 30 to April 5 in Macao, with 48 players in each singles draw. Players are split into 16 groups for a best-of-five round-robin phase, with only the group winners advancing to a best-of-seven knockout stage. – Xinhua

## Pakistan cricketer Zaman gets 2-match PSL ban for ball tampering



Lahore Qalandars' captain Shaheen Shah Afridi (left) speaks with teammate Fakhar Zaman during the Pakistan Super League (PSL) T20 match against Karachi Kings at the Gaddafi Cricket Stadium in Lahore, Pakistan on Sunday 2026. – AFP

### Cricket

KARACHI – Pakistan international Fakhar Zaman has been banned for two matches after being found guilty of ball tampering during the country's showpiece T20 league, cricket bosses said yesterday.

The 35-year-old opener was seen on video footage altering the condition of the ball during his team Lahore Qalandars' match against Karachi Kings in Lahore on Sunday night.

"Zaman has been suspended for two Pakistan Super League (PSL) matches after he was found guilty of a Level 3 offence for tampering the ball," the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said in a statement.

The PCB charged Zaman, who denied ball tampering, at a disciplinary hearing with match referee Roshan Mahanama of Sri Lanka.

Mahanama viewed television footage which showed Qalandars' players Zaman,

skipper Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf, and umpire Faisal Afridi inspecting the condition of the ball.

The umpire awarded five penalty runs against Qalandars, who lost the match by four wickets.

Earlier, fast bowler Naseem Shah was slapped with the biggest fine in Pakistan cricket history after criticising a politician on social media.

Shah's whopping US\$71,500 punishment is the latest incident to rock the PSL during a turbulent opening week.

Fellow fast bowler Shaheen was also fined US\$3,500 for breaking the tournament's tight security protocols.

The PSL is taking place behind closed doors without fans - and only at two venues instead of six - because of fuel supply concerns caused by the Iran war.

Naseem, who plays for Rawalpindiz, aimed a barb at Punjab chief minister Maryam Nawaz, who was the guest of

honour at a slimmed-down PSL opening ceremony before last Thursday's match between Qalandars and Hyderabad Kingsmen.

In a post on X, swiftly deleted after being widely shared, Naseem mocked Nawaz's arrival, saying: "Why is she treated like the Queen at Lord's?"

He later claimed his account had been hacked, but the PCB did not agree and ordered him to appear before a three-man disciplinary committee.

Naseem apologised before the committee imposed the record fine.

Afridi was fined by the Qalandars for breaching security protocols at his team hotel in Lahore, one of two host cities along with Karachi for this year's tournament.

Punjab Police said Afridi was refused permission to take visitors to teammate Sikander Raza's room but did so anyway.

– AFP

# Céline Dion announces comeback following health struggle

PARIS – Megastar singer Céline Dion on Monday announced her return to performing after a lengthy break prompted by a rare health condition, calling the comeback news revealed on her birthday “the best gift”.

Addressing fans in a video released on social media, the 58-year-old Canadian said her condition had improved and she would perform a series of shows in Paris beginning in September.

“This year, I’m getting the best birthday gift of my life. I’m getting the chance to see you, to perform for you once again,” she said.

Dion will also release a new single, her entourage confirmed to AFP, by one of her best-known composers, Jean-Jacques Goldman, who was behind the album “D’eux” (“Two”) that made her famous.

She is expected to perform the new song at the Paris shows – an event that comes more than six years since she was forced to step away from the stage.

Her “Courage World Tour,” launched in late 2019 was cancelled a few months after it began because of the COVID-19 pandemic, then due to the singer’s health problems.

## ‘Feeling good’

“I want to let you know that I’m doing great, managing my health,



This grab of a video released by the Olympic Broadcasting Services shows Canadian singer Céline Dion performing on the Eiffel Tower during the opening ceremony of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, in Paris, on July 26, 2024. – AFP

feeling good,” she said in her post on Monday.

Dion first disclosed in December 2022 that she had been diagnosed with Stiff Person Syndrome, an incurable autoimmune disorder.

The Quebec-born star was forced to cancel the remainder of her shows indefinitely.

Treatment can help alleviate symptoms of the condition that can cause stiff muscles in the torso, arms and legs.

The 2024 documentary “I Am:

Céline Dion” provided an intimate look at the charismatic performer’s career and the severity of her pain from the condition, including suffering a seizure.

Despite the diagnosis, Dion vowed she would fight her way back to the stage.

“I’m not dead,” the singer told AFP in 2024 on the red carpet ahead of the premiere of the documentary.

Later that year Dion sang from the Eiffel Tower for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games opening ceremony,

while athletes sailed down the river in pouring rain.

The Eiffel Tower was again lit up on Monday for Dion, as crowds gathered to watch a light show with written messages on the side of the tower saying “Paris, I’m ready,” followed by her cover of Edith Piaf’s “L’hymne à l’amour” (“Hymn to Love”).

## Singing again

Dion was launched onto the global stage in 1988 representing Switzerland at the Eurovision Song Contest in Dublin.

Then aged 20, she sang “Ne partez pas sans moi” (“Don’t Leave Without Me”), which won her the prize.

The following year, Dion opened the TV extravaganza for host Switzerland with her winning French-language song.

She then premiered the single

“Where Does My Heart Beat Now” – heralding her career switch into English, which set her on the path to global chart domination.

She has sold more than 260 million albums during a career spanning decades, and has won five Grammys – two for “My Heart Will Go On”, the hit song from the 1997 epic “Titanic”.

On Monday, Dion told fans that she has continued to feel their support despite her years off stage.

“Even in my most difficult times, you were there for me. You’ve helped me in ways that I can’t even describe, and I’m truly so fortunate to have your support,” she said, describing that she was now “singing again, even doing a little bit of dancing”.

Dion is set to perform 10 shows over five weeks at the Paris La Défense Arena beginning on September 12. – AFP

# Hindu devotional clubbing sways India’s youth

Sumit Dubei and Paavan Mathema

NEW DELHI – In India’s capital, Hindu “bhajan\* clubbing” is electrifying nightlife, with revellers dancing to traditional devotional songs reimagined through guitars and pounding drumbeats, transforming public venues into spiritual hangouts.

ChaiLeela, a café in the suburb of Noida, crackled with energy as devotees swayed to rhythmic riffs soaring into crescendos in songs praising the deity Krishna.

“I felt energised and alive,” said Himanshu Gupta, a 30-year-old IT professional and regular attendee of the song nights.

Bhajans – devotional songs with ancient roots in Hinduism – have long been used as a spiritual bridge between the individual and the divine.

But “bhajan clubbing” represents a modern twist that is gaining traction in New Delhi, which hosted at least five major devotional concerts in March alone, drawing tens of thousands.

One open-air event last month – at the grounds of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Purana Qila fort – drew about 7,000 devotees, with the atmosphere resembling a rave more than a religious gathering.

“It provides an opportunity for our youth to connect with devotion and spirituality,” said Aishwarya Gupta, 31, a nuclear physicist attending the concert, her face dotted with both paint and religious marks. “It feels great to be here.”

Musicians performed devotional

hits backed by guitars and drums as crowds danced in a near-trance.

“It is a calming feeling,” said Kumar Shubham, a 27-year-old doctor and fitness influencer, who said the events also instilled “pride” in Indians.

“When we see today’s youth, they seem more interested in things other than religious matters,” said businessman Jay Ahuja, 28. “But this... shows them the right path... it’s a good way to connect with God.”

## ‘Spirituality, not spirits’

The phenomenon reflects a broader revival of public expressions of Hindu identity in India, alongside the growing political and cultural influence of Hindu populist narratives.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has backed the trend, noting that bhajan traditions had been the “soul of Indian culture for centuries”.

The 75-year-old Hindu nationalist leader has praised how bhajan clubbing “incorporated the spirit of devotion into the youth’s experiences and lifestyles”, speaking in his weekly radio broadcast in January.

When tens of thousands packed Delhi’s Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium for a devotional show this month – with electric guitars and drum beats projected by giant speakers – it was introduced by Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, a member of Modi’s party.

Nikunj Gupta, 26, who organised the devotional music festival at Purana Qila, said that “spirituality is necessary to unite the next generation”.

He said such events offered young people a festive atmosphere without the alcohol commonly associated with concerts in Delhi, which some conservative Hindus frown upon.

“It gives them a medium to explore a different activity, rather than going to a regular club where they have to consume alcohol with friends,” he said.

“We want the youth to be high on spirituality, not spirits.”

The movement is also spreading beyond India. In neighbouring Hindu-majority Nepal, more than 3,000 people attended a bhajan club night in February.

“We wanted to raise the interests of youths in bhajans – the essence of the music remains the same, but we deliver it in a bit more modern style,” the night’s co-founder, Abhishek Adhikari, 28, told AFP.

“It is for anyone who wants to begin their spiritual journey... People really enjoy it – and it is growing popular.”

In India, fashion figure Ratnadeep Lal compared the shows to flashy international concerts.

“I have attended many international concerts, such as Shakira,” he said. “This kind of initiative in India, which uses devotional music to teach and connect with the next generation, is very good.” – AFP

\* The noun bhajana in Sanskrit means “worship,” “devotion,” “service,” or “a devotional practice.” It can also mean “participation” in an act, reflecting the root sense of sharing. – Poe



US singer, songwriter and actress Brandy poses with her newly unveiled Walk of Fame star in Hollywood on Monday. Brandy, 47, is known for her intricate vocal riffs, and is regarded as one of the most influential figures in contemporary R&B (rhythm and blues). – AFP

## World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 5°C~18°C	Manila 21°C~34°C	New York 11°C~24°C	Lisbon 12°C~23°C
Shanghai 10°C~21°C	Bangkok 26°C~37°C	London 6°C~15°C	Rio de Janeiro 21°C~29°C
Hong Kong 21°C~26°C	Tokyo 10°C~19°C	Frankfurt 0°C~12°C	Luanda 25°C~29°C
Taipei 15°C~21°C	Singapore 24°C~33°C	Vancouver 6°C~9°C	Maputo 22°C~30°C
Guangzhou 19°C~27°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~33°C	Paris 7°C~13°C	Dili 23°C~31°C
Nanjing 9°C~21°C	Jakarta 23°C~32°C	Moscow 6°C~17°C	São Tomé 27°C~32°C
Guilin 15°C~25°C	Seoul 6°C~18°C	Las Vegas 13°C~25°C	Praia 19°C~28°C
Xi’an 11°C~24°C	Sydney 16°C~26°C	Monte Carlo 10°C~16°C	Bissau 19°C~35°C

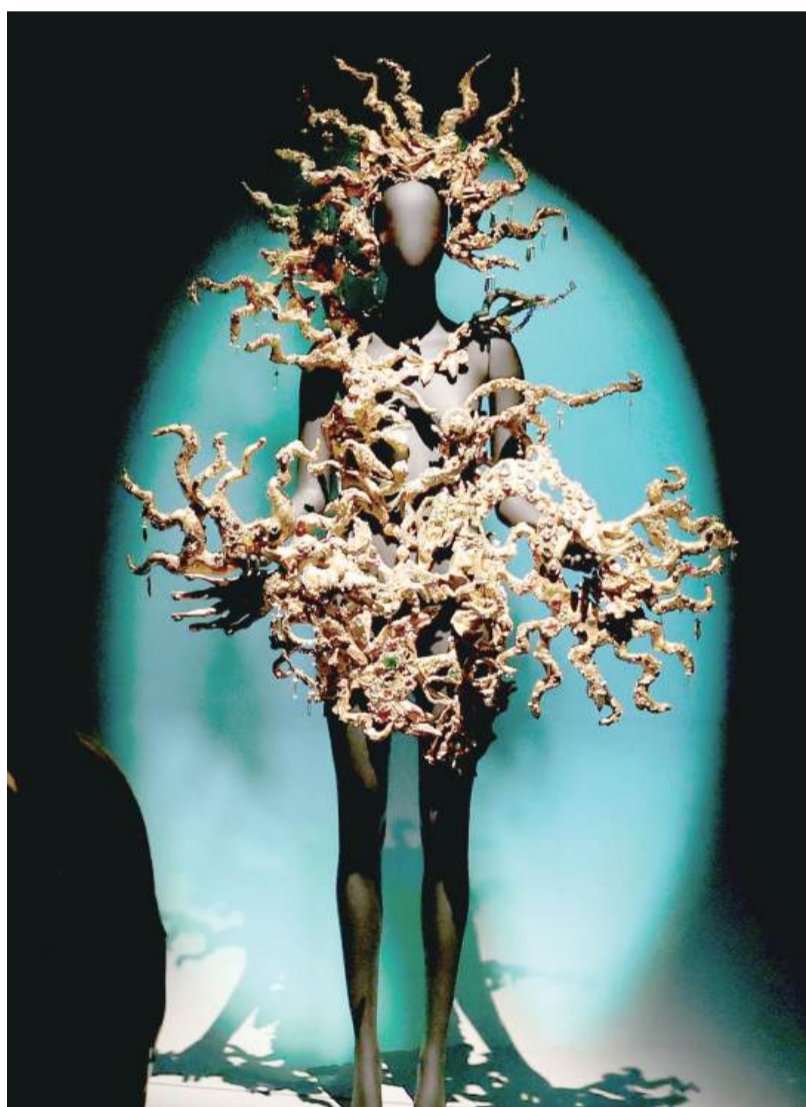


**Impossible task**

Geisha and maiko (apprentice geisha) take part in a rehearsal for the annual "Miyako Odori" - which means "capital city dance" in Japanese, at the Gion Kobu Kaburenjo in Kyoto yesterday. - AFP

**Why not in aquariums?**

A vendor displays tropical fish in plastic bags to sell at a market in Surabaya, Indonesia yesterday. - AFP



**Fashion victim!**

Photo taken on Monday shows a garment on display at the "Schiaparelli: Fashion Becomes Art" exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London. - Xinhua

**Feathered and bejewelled**

A woman waits to take part in the annual spring carnival parade in Mexico City on Sunday. - AFP



**Wicked witch of Fonseca Bay**

A fancy-dressed parishioner walks through the streets asking for money as part of the Holy Week folk tradition, in Santa Barbara, Honduras about 200 kilometres northwest of Tegucigalpa, on Monday. - AFP

**Taking the trump!**

A golden toilet sculpture sits on the National Mall yesterday in Washington, DC. Secret Handshake, a guerrilla art group, installed the golden throne near the Lincoln Memorial in protest against the Trump administration. - AFP