

# Govt to consult public in H2 on amending urban master plan: Tam

Tony Wong

Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man said yesterday that the government has decided to amend Macau's urban master plan, which came into force in February 2022, adding that it is aiming to launch a public consultation in the second half of this year on the matter.

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

Tam's remarks yesterday came after the government last year launched the first review of Macau's urban master plan for possible amendments, in the wake of its planning of several future large-scale projects aiming to inject new impetus into Macau's long-term development, which were first announced by Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai in his 2025 Policy Address, which he delivered in April last year.

The Macau Special Administrative Region's (MSAR) urban master plan for 2020 to 2040 is the city's first-ever official urban master plan, which took effect on February 15, 2022 after its promulgation in the Official Gazette (BO) on the previous day.

Macau's urban master plan is promulgated by an administrative regulation drawn up by

the government because of which it does not require the legislature's approval.

According to the Urban Planning Law, the government is required to launch its review of the urban master plan for possible amendments five years after it came into force, i.e., in 2027.

According to the law, the government is also required to launch its review of the urban master plan if the government decides to launch large-scale public projects which are expected to cause significant impacts on land uses and urban planning listed by the urban master plan, regardless of the length of time the urban master plan has been implemented.

The Lands and Urban Construction Bureau (DSSCU) is the public entity tasked with the city's urban planning.

According to an executive order published in the gazette in February this year, Sam decided that Macau's urban master plan will be amended for the first time.

Sam decided to amend the urban master plan after assessing a report prepared by DSSCU officials, as well as opinions gathered from the Urban Planning Council (CPU), according to the executive order.

The government-appointed council is a consultative body tasked with advising the



Secretary for Transport and Public Works Raymond Tam Vai Man addresses yesterday's plenary session in the Legislative Assembly's (AL) hemicycle. - Photo courtesy of TDM

government on its urban planning policies.

According to the executive order, the Lands and Urban Construction Bureau concluded that the urban master plan will need to be amended, after completing its first review of the plan, with the aim of creating the necessary conditions for the government to push ahead with two large-scale public projects.

The executive order did not specifically identify the two projects, but observers have noted that they refer to the Macau International Integrated Tourism and Cultural Zone, and the Macau Science and Technology Research and Development Industrial Park, two of the four announced in Sam's 2025 Policy Address.

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## Trump calls NATO 'paper tiger', considers withdrawal

LONDON - US President Donald Trump says he is strongly considering pulling the United States out of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) after the alliance failed to join the attacks on Iran, *The Telegraph* reported yesterday.

When asked by the British newspaper if he would reconsider America's membership in the alliance after the conflict, he said the question was "beyond reconsideration," adding: "I was never swayed by NATO. I always knew they were a paper tiger."

Trump also expressed dissatisfaction with NATO for "not being there," saying it was "actually hard to believe."

Singling out Britain, he said the country has "aircraft carriers that didn't work," suggesting that the British navy is inadequate for the task.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio had said before the interview that the United

States would have to "re-examine" its NATO membership after the conflict, the report said.

"If NATO is just about us defending Europe if they're attacked, but then denying us basing rights when we need them, that's not a very good arrangement. That's a hard one to stay engaged in," the report quoted Rubio as saying.

Trump told *The Telegraph* he was "glad" about Rubio's comments.

Following Trump's criticism, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said he is not changing his position on the war.

Multiple European countries have kept their distance from the conflict with Iran. Starmer on Monday said his country will not get dragged into the conflict "whatever the pressure and whoever it's coming from," while Spain on Monday closed its airspace to all flights related to the US and Israeli military strikes on Iran. - Xinhua, MPD

## Iran rejects Trump's ceasefire claim as 'false and baseless'

TEHRAN - Iran's Foreign Ministry yesterday dismissed US President Donald Trump's remarks about Iran seeking a ceasefire as "false and baseless," according to state-run Press TV.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei pushed back against Trump's remarks on social media platform Truth Social that the Iranian president "has just asked the United States of America for a ceasefire."

Trump added, "We will consider when the Hormuz Strait is open, free, and clear. Until then, we are blasting Iran into oblivion or, as they say, back to the Stone Ages!"

Seyyed Mehdi Tabatabaei, deputy for communications at the Iranian president's office, also dismissed Trump's claim in a post on social media platform X.

"Iran's position regarding the patriotic defense of the country's integrity against the aggression of the evil forces, and the preconditions for ending the imposed war has not changed at all, and no attention is paid to the criminals' delusions and lies," Tabatabaei said, adding that, "The Iranian nation, determined, steadfast, and united, is defending the integrity of its homeland."

Trump has repeatedly claimed in recent days that Iran is seeking negotiations to end the war.

Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi acknowledged that messages have been exchanged between Iran and the United States through intermediaries over the past few days, but stressed that no negotiations have taken place. - Xinhua (More on pages 7, 8, 10 & 11)

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### Li stresses building new-type power grid, optimizing energy structure

Premier Li Qiang has stressed efforts to advance the construction of a new-type power grid and accelerate the adjustment and optimization of the energy structure.

- Story on p. 7

### Australian PM warns months ahead 'may not be easy' due to Mideast war

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese warned yesterday the months ahead "may not be easy" because of the Middle East war, in a rare address to the nation across television networks.

- Story on p. 11

### Renovation project launched at China-Guinea-Bissau Friendship School

A renovation project for a school building on the Bafatá campus of the China-Guinea-Bissau Friendship School was launched last Thursday in Guinea-Bissau's Bafatá Region.

- Story on p. 12

# Over 3,000 people join 'Typhoon Drill Crystal Fish': police

Armando Neves

Unitary Police Service (SPU) Civil Emergency Protection Operations Coordination Division Chief Chan Kuok Tong and senior officer Lau Kuok Pou announced at yesterday's Central District Community Service Consultative Council meeting that over 3,000 people took part in "Typhoon Drill Crystal Fish" last year.

The government-appointed council held its regular monthly meeting yesterday at the Patane Activity Centre on Avenida de Demétrio Cinatti, where they invited Chan

and Lau to present this year's civil defence exercises and the results of last year's exercises. The meeting was held behind closed doors.

In the post-meeting press briefing, the council's deputy convenor Chang Ka Wa cited a SPU statement released by Chan and Lau to the council, which outlined the authorities' exercise hosted on April 26, 2025, which lasted over four hours, and simulated the scenario of a super-typhoon accompanied by a black-storm surge warning. A total of 2,486 people participated in the exercise, including civil protection

volunteers and members of the public. The exercise was conducted in three phases: evacuation, emergency incident response, and post-disaster recovery, Chang said.

According to Chang, 970 households involving 3,236 individuals were evacuated and 17 emergency shelters and four emergency evacuation assembly points were activated during the exercise.

Chang also said that last year's exercise involved the participation of 47 organisations, mobilising a total of 2,070 government and institutional personnel, 31 civil protection volunteers and 385 citizens, adding that the level of coordination improved significantly, while public awareness of disaster preparedness and emergency response skills generally strengthened.

Fellow councillor Leong Chon Kit said that this year's exercise will consider the gradual relocation of residents to Zone A, with plans



Central District Community Service Consultative Council deputy convenor Chang Ka Wa (right) and fellow councillor Leong Chon Kit look on during yesterday's press briefing after the government-appointed council's closed-door meeting at the Patane Activity Centre on Avenida de Demétrio Cinatti. — Photo: Armando Neves

to incorporate disaster prevention drills for the new neighbourhood. Recruitment for civil protection volunteers will also be strengthened, with an expected target of 450 individuals, he said.

Leong also said that the exercise

will simulate a wider range of extreme scenarios and apply technological means in disaster response scenarios, continuously strengthening disaster prevention drills and the public's ability to respond effectively. ■

## Macao Union Medical Centre to hold lecture on hepatitis, respiratory infections

Khalel Vallo

The Islands Healthcare Complex – Macao Medical Centre of Peking Union Medical College Hospital ("PUMCH"), colloquially known as "Macao Union Medical Centre" will hold a public health lecture on Saturday, April 25 to talk about the prevention and treatment of hepatitis and respiratory tract infections, according to a statement by the centre yesterday.

Hepatitis is a medical condition where the liver becomes inflamed. It is often caused by a virus, but can also result from alcohol use or other factors.

The lecture, part of the "Conversation with Doctors from the Macao Union Medical Centre" series, will start at 10 a.m. at the Blood Draw Area on the first floor of the General Hospital Building, the statement said, noting that the session will cover two key topics: "Early prevention

and treatment of hepatitis to safeguard your long-term health" and "Do not self-medicate for respiratory tract infections! Follow microbiology test results for accurate diagnosis".

The lecture will be delivered by Dr Lyu Wei, chief physician of the Infectious Disease Department, and Yu Shuying, technician of the Clinical Laboratory Department, the statement said, adding that both speakers are experts seconded from PUMCH.

Attendees will also have the opportunity to interact directly with the speakers and raise health-related questions during the session, the statement noted, adding that residents interested in attending must register in advance, with the deadline set for 1 p.m. on April 24.

The lecture is free of charge, with limited places available on a first-come, first-served basis, the statement noted, adding that attendees will receive a complimentary souvenir.

The medical centre reminded residents that it will not send SMS messages containing links, urging the public to stay vigilant against potential scams, according to the statement.

The Macao Union Medical Centre said it will continue organising similar lectures to promote health awareness and encourage residents to take a proactive approach in managing their well-being, contributing to the development of a "Healthy Macao", the statement concluded. ■



This image provided by the Islands Healthcare Complex – Macao Medical Centre of Peking Union Medical College Hospital ("PUMCH") yesterday shows the registration QR code for its public health lecture on Saturday, April 25.

## UM career fair connects students with 110 employers across 28 industries



UM Vice Rector (Public Affairs) Mok Kai Meng addresses yesterday's career fair opening ceremony.

Khalel Vallo

The University of Macau (UM) held its annual Career and Internship Fair yesterday on its Hengqin campus, bringing together over 110 companies and organisations to offer students job and internship opportunities across 28 industries.

The fair took place at the Multi-function Hall of the UM Guest House, providing a platform for students to directly engage with potential employers through recruitment booths, presentations, and career advisory services.

The event was part of its annual efforts to support graduating students in securing employment while striving to help others explore internship opportunities and career pathways.

Speaking at the event, Public Affairs Vice Rector Mok Kai Meng highlighted the significance of the fair in aligning education with broader national development goals. "The national 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan states that high-quality development is the primary goal," he said, adding that the plan promotes the integration of education, technology, and human resources,



Students engage with employers from various sectors during the public University of Macau's Career and Internship Fair on its Hengqin campus yesterday.

— Photos: Khalel Vallo

providing broader opportunities for youth development.

Mok noted that this year's fair featured more than 110 enterprises from Macau and the Chinese mainland, covering 28 industries and offering diverse employment and learning opportunities for students. "We have also set up a dedicated information website to collect and listen to information, as well as the opportunities for future career paths and to establish a more solid foundation," he said.

Mok also pointed out that the public university will continue to strengthen collaboration between academia and industry, accelerate the transformation of research, and nurture young talent with "professional abilities, innovative spirits and international vision". Mok also said that 80 percent of UM graduates in the past five years either secured employment or pursued further studies within three months of graduation.

Mok also said the university is advancing the development of its second Hengqin campus as part of a "one university, two campuses" model, in line with the

"15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan" and the local government's "1+4" economic diversification strategy. He noted that future plans include the establishment of new faculties such as medicine, information sciences, engineering and design, aimed at building an interdisciplinary innovation and talent development platform to meet demand for applied and multi-disciplinary professionals.

According to UM's 2024/2025 graduate survey, over 85 percent of students secured employment or pursued further studies within three months of graduation, a statement by UM said yesterday. The top employment sectors included education (17.4 percent), banking, finance and insurance (13 percent), gaming and entertainment (13 percent), wholesale and retail trade (13 percent), and construction and engineering (7.8 percent), while graduates were admitted to globally renowned institutions such as the University of Oxford, University of Cambridge, University College London, University of Pennsylvania, University of Chicago, Johns Hopkins University, and the National University of Singapore. ■

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### Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY INTERVALS.

A FEW SHOWERS.

FORCE 3 TO 5 SOUTHEASTERLY WINDS WITH GUSTS.

RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL

RANGE BETWEEN 70% AND 95%.



21°C~26°C

Source: SMG

MACAU POST

## Casino takings rise 15 pct to 22.6 billion patacas in March

Staff Reporter

Macau's casinos generated gross gaming revenue (GGR) of 22.61 billion patacas last month, marking a year-on-year increase of 15.0 percent, the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ) announced today. Month-on-month, GGR grew by 9.6 percent, from February's 20.62 billion patacas.

In the first quarter of this year, GGR rose year-on-year by 14.3 percent to 65.87 billion patacas. So far this year, the sector recorded its best GGR in January when it rose by 24.0 percent year-on-year to 22.63 billion patacas.

Macau's government-concessioned gaming industry is operated by six competing integrated resort (IR) operators: Sands, Galaxy, SJM, Melco, Wynn, and MGM. Under their concession agreements with the government, these operators are required to enhance their non-gaming attractions and support the promotion of Macau's cultural heritage and old-quarter renewal projects. The operators pay 35 percent of their GGR as a direct gaming tax to the government, along with an additional 5.0 percent in levies to fund various public causes.

As of the end of 2025, the six operators ran a total of 20 casinos, a 52.4 percent decrease from the peak of 42 casinos in 2021. This decline is primarily due to a government-ordered consolidation of the gaming industry, which included an official ban on "satellite casinos" operated by third-party enterprises in collaboration with gaming concessionaires.

During the gaming industry's three-year consolidation process, which officially ended on December 31, 2025, the gaming tables and slot machines from shuttered satellite casinos, along with their local employees, were transferred to casinos directly run by the gaming concessionaires.

Currently, SJM and Sands each own five casinos, Galaxy and Melco operate three each, while Wynn and MGM run two each.

According to DICJ statistics, baccarat accounted for 85.1 percent of local casinos' GGR across their 16 games of chance last year. In comparison, roulette, Europe's classic game of chance, generated a mere 0.49 percent of GGR.

At the end of last year, Macau's casinos operated 6,000 gaming tables and 12,000 gaming machines, according to the bureau.

Macau's officially concessioned casino industry got off the ground in 1849.

According to the latest available Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC) data, the number of persons engaged in the gaming sector amounted to 53,272 at the end of last year, accounting for 10.7 percent of Macau's total labour force of 496,600 around that time (Dec. 2025-Feb 2026).

In December, according to DSEC figures, the average earnings (excluding irregular remuneration) of the gaming sector's full-time employees stood at 28,020 patacas (US\$3,470). ■

## Culture, sports bureaux to host 2-day 'Cultural & Sports Carnival'

Armindo Neves

The Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) hosted a joint press conference with the Macau Sports Bureau (ID) at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape yesterday about their 2-day "Cultural and Sports Carnival" starting next Saturday.

Yesterday's press conference also announced a raft of cultural and sports activities to be co-hosted by the two bureaux this month.

The government announced in November last year the merger of the two bureaux by the end of this year.

IC President Deland Leong Wai Man said in a speech that the upcoming events represent a new endeavour in cultural and sports collaboration. She pointed out that culture is the soul and foundation of a city, while sport embodies its vitality and spirit of unity.

Leong said she hoped that the integration of culture and sports will inject new momentum into Macau's development as a "City of Performing Arts" and a "City of Sports."

According to a joint statement released during the press conference, the carnival will take place at the Nam Van Lake Nautical Centre, multiple UNESCO World Heritage sites, and various communities, involving a range of activities including dragon boat experiences, Cantonese opera, Portuguese folk dance, and Wing Chun kung fu\*.

Besides, the statement also said that this month's cultural and sports activities also include community activities, exhibitions, lectures, reading promotions, workshops, performances and others.

Sports Bureau Acting President See Lei Si Leng said in a speech that the core focus of this month's cultural and sports activities is to align with the government's policy direction by expanding sports resources into the community, cultivating a unique sports IP for Macau, leveraging the city's sports branding and its ripple effects, and strengthening the integration and synergistic development of culture and sports.

### Int'l Comedy Festival to start next Thursday

Meanwhile, Beijing Fun Age Entertainment Co., Ltd. co-hosted a press conference with Beijing Damai Culture Media Development Co., Ltd. at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) yesterday about co-organising the third four-day "Macau International Comedy Festival",



Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) President Deland Leong Wai Man (second from right), Macau Sports Bureau (ID) Acting President See Lei Si Leng (second from left), IC Vice President Choi Kin Long (right) and ID Vice-President Mok Chi Hang look on during yesterday's press conference at the Macau Cultural Centre in Nape. — Photo: Armindo Neves

starting next Thursday.

Beijing Fun Age Entertainment Co., Ltd., commonly known as Kaixin Mahua (or Mahua FunAge), is a prominent Chinese entertainment company founded in 2003, specialising in comedy stage plays, musicals, and film production, according to DeepSeek.

Beijing Damai Culture Media Development Co., Ltd. (Damai.cn) is the nation's largest online entertainment ticketing platform, established in 2003 and based in Beijing. Owned by Alibaba Group, it provides ticketing for concerts, theatre, and sports, according to DeepSeek.

The festival will be held in conjunction with the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC).

IC President Leong said in a speech during the press conference that in addition to maintaining coordinated activities between Macau and Hengqin, this year's event will also feature special programmes at Nam Van Lake.

By leveraging the scenic advantage of the lakefront and hosting distinctive performing arts events, the initiative aims to promote the integration of culture with other sectors and create an innovative cultural tourism experience, she said.

Leong pointed out that outstanding participants from her bureau's "Youth Actor Training Programme" will present a showcase performance on the festival

stage so that the trainees can gain practical experience and broaden their horizons in the performing arts.

Interested individuals can purchase tickets through online platforms such as the Damai app and WeChat mini-programs. For more information, please visit the website at [www.instagram.com/macaucomedyfestival/](http://www.instagram.com/macaucomedyfestival/). ■

\*Wing Chun is a concept-based Chinese martial art known for its efficiency, directness, and economy of movement. It is a form of kung fu (a term broadly meaning skill achieved through hard work) that emphasises practical self-defence over athleticism or showy techniques. According to tradition, Wing Chun was developed over 300 years ago by Ng Mui, a Buddhist nun who survived the destruction of the Shaolin Temple. She synthesised the essence of Shaolin kung fu into a more efficient system that did not rely on brute strength, making it suitable for smaller, weaker practitioners. She named it after her first student, Yim Wing Chun ("Beautiful Springtime"). Wing Chun gained worldwide recognition largely through Ip Man, a grandmaster who taught in Hong Kong in the mid-20th century. His students included Bruce Lee Siu-lung, who incorporated Wing Chun concepts into his own philosophy, Jeet Kune Do ("Way of the Intercepting Fist"). — DeepSeek

## SMG to hold family-friendly activities on meteorology

Rui Pastorin

The Macau Meteorological and Geophysical Bureau (SMG) will be hosting two family-friendly activities this month, with registration open until Tuesday, April 7.

Held in Cantonese, the local observatory said in a statement yesterday that the activities aimed at offering participants a fun way to explore meteorological science and enhance their understanding of Macau's meteorological services and operations through interactive

and engaging experiences.

Among these activities are a family trip slated for April 18, allowing young participants to take part in activities such as acting as a junior weather forecaster and learning more about typhoon signals in an interactive way, the statement noted. This activity is aimed at children aged between four and eight, and their parents.

The other activity is slated for April 25 and targets children aged six to 12, along with their parents,

and will feature experiencing weather detection, interactive games and weather workshops, according to the statement.

The statement added that both of the upcoming activities will include tours to learn about the meteorological facilities.

One can find more details on <https://www.smg.gov.mo/zh/news-detail/518>.

A lucky draw will be held if participants exceed the limit. Results will be available on April 10, the statement said. ■



This poster downloaded from the local observatory's website promotes its activities for children and their parents set to be held later this month.

# 4 Macau artists showcase jewellery art at 10 Fantasia exhibition

**Rui Pastorin**

Members of the public with an appreciation for jewellery and the craftsmanship behind it have a chance to explore works by four female local artists in a 10 Fantasia gallery exhibition jointly titled “Greater Bay Area Arts Exchange Project | Emerging Artists – Handcrafted Jewellery Exhibition”, which is on until April 26.

The free-admission showcases works across the gallery rooms A, B, C and D on the first floor, each respectively displaying the work of participating artists Penelope Ng Pui Ian, Tung Yuk (童昱), Lai Weng Ian and Leong Hoi Man (梁凱曼).

Each section offers a different style and theme for exhibitiongoers to explore. Ng’s section features embroidery, particularly taking on plant life and the microscopic world of plants, transforming and re-interpreting them into jewellery through fabrics and beads.

Diǎn cuì (點翠), a style of Chinese art featuring kingfisher feathers; bead weaving; róng huā\* (絨花); and wrapped flower techniques, meanwhile, are taking centre stage in Tung’s works at room B. The showcase aims to have the four techniques coexist with contemporary daily life, creating usable and wearable objects, according to a statement from the gallery about her section.

At room C, Lai presents works that weave more storytelling into her craft, taking fragments of memories through forms such as images and collages and turning them into wearable jewellery through metalworking. Elements distinct to Macau, its typhoon symbols, local buses from the past, traces of old Macau are among the elements that visitors to this section will find in each exhibit.

Lastly, Leong’s exhibits, mainly comprise those created through hand-strung beading, a process that she described in a statement in her section as requiring patience and concentration, to create beaded jewellery. Slowing down, she notes, is part of what inspired her for her exhibition and its theme.

With less than a month left in its run, the exhibitions, as highlighted in a statement provided at the gallery, invite young artists from Macau to “breathe new life into traditional crafts”. The exhibition is also aimed at building “a diverse exchange platform for industry professionals and citizens passionate about jewellery design, the statement said, as well as hopes to spark creativity and collaboration opportunities.

The public can view the works at the gallery near Calçada da Igreja de S. Lázaro (瘋堂斜巷) from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. from Tuesdays to Sundays. It is closed on Mondays.

\* Róng huā (“velvet flower”) is crafted using natural silk and copper wire as its primary materials. In ancient times, it was commonly used in folk festivals and ceremonial decorations. – Artisan From China website

Photos: Rui Pastorin



# Former church staffer from HK arrested for stealing from Macau donation boxes

Tony Wong

A Hong Kong man, who resigned from a Macau church in early 2023, has been arrested for repeatedly stealing from the church's donation boxes.

The suspect allegedly used a retained key to sneak into the premises during the early morning hours, stealing a total of about 50,000 patacas.

Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Un Hong disclosed the details during a press conference yesterday. The suspect, a 29-year-old surnamed Mok, currently works as a clerk in Hong Kong. He previously served the church in Macau as a non-resident worker (NRW), where his duties included organising activities and events.

According to Cheong, although Mok resigned from the church – located in the peninsula's central district – in early 2023, he failed to return his key. The church only

recently became aware of the thefts after noticing that monthly donation totals were significantly lower than usual. Following a careful internal investigation, a church representative reported the case to the police on Tuesday.

The police quickly identified Mok and intercepted him at the Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal on Tuesday as he was attempting to leave Macau.

Investigations confirmed that Mok had been entering the church several times a month since early last year. To avoid detection, he only took a small amount of the cash each time, averaging between 3,000 and 4,000 patacas per month.

Mok admitted to the stealing spree, telling police he used the 50,000 patacas to cover his daily living expenses. He has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) for further investigation. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Cheong Un Hong looks on during yesterday's regular press conference. – Photo: Tony Wong



This undated handout photo provided by the Judiciary Police (PJ) yesterday shows evidence seized from the suspected thief.

# 2026 National Security Education Exhibition eyes 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan



This file photo shows Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai (front) looking at a school textbook on national security on display at the 2025 National Security Education Exhibition in the Forum Macao Complex on April 15 last year after addressing its opening ceremony, accompanied by Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) National Committee Vice Chairman Edmund Ho Hau Wah (left), Wong Sio Chak (right), the local government's then secretary for security and now secretary for administration and justice, and Central People's Government Liaison Office Director Zheng Xincong. – Photo: GCS

Tony Wong

This year's annual National Security Education Exhibition, which will run between April 15 and May 15, is themed "Coordinating Development and Security, Safeguarding the New Journey of the 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan", the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) says.

The Central People's Government released the full version of the nation's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan on March 13 after the plan's draft outline was passed by the National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing on the previous day. The plan, officially known as 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development, covers the period between 2026 and 2030.

The local government is scheduled to complete the drawing-up of Macau's 3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan and start implementing the plan this year.

It has underlined its commitment to align Macau's third five-year socioeconomic development plan with the nation's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan.

The local government is scheduled to launch a public consultation later this month to

gather opinions and suggestions from Macau's civil society concerning its drafting of Macau's third Five-Year Plan.

Unchanged from last year, according to a GCS statement on Tuesday, the one-month National Security Education Exhibition will be held at the Services Platform Complex for Commercial and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (aka Forum Macao Complex), located near Macau Tower.

April 15 marks the country's annual National Security Education Day, which started in 2016. This time it will be the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of its National Security Education Day.

Macau's National Security Education Exhibition, aiming to mark the country's National Security Education Day, has been jointly held by the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) government and the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the MSAR annually since 2018.

This year's exhibition, which will start about a fortnight later, will be its ninth edition since its inception.

Tuesday's GCS statement said that with the aim of putting into

practice the central authorities' holistic approach to national security and consolidating the foundation of national security on the new journey in the new era, the MSAR Government and the Central People's Government Liaison Office in the MSAR will jointly hold the National Security Education Exhibition for the ninth consecutive year.

Unchanged from last year, according to the statement, the exhibition will open between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m. daily.

To facilitate visitors' understanding of the exhibition's information, the statement noted, guided tours will be available for them on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. during the exhibition's period. The Guided tours will be available in four languages: Putonghua, Cantonese, Portuguese, and English.

The statement said that after the opening ceremony of this year's exhibition as well as an award presentation ceremony for an essay competition and a short video contest on April 15, the exhibition will be fully open to members of the general public from 3 p.m. the following day. ■

時間: 2026, 04/21 (Tue) 20:00

澳門浸信中學 70週年 紀念合唱音樂會

# ROWING FORWARD!

FOR THE LOVE OF THE MOTHERLAND

— 黃河志 祖國心 —

男中音 / 李兆康  
Baritone / Lei Siu Hong

女高音 / 施欣然  
Soprano / See Yan Yin

指揮 / 查偉華  
Conductor / Veiga Jardim

演出團隊: 澳門浸信中學管弦樂團  
MBC Orchestra

澳門浸信中學合唱團  
MBC Choir

廣州番禺星海合唱團  
Guangzhou Panyu Xinghai Choir

洗星海作品 Xian Xinghai:

- 第一交響曲《民族解放》, 作品編號五, 第一樂章  
Symphony No 1, Op. 5 "Liberation of the Nation" (First contemporary performance)
- 《黃河大合唱》  
Yellow River Cantata (Sung in English)

A組

演出地點: 澳門文化中心綜合劇院  
Venue: Macau Cultural Centre Grand Auditorium

門票索取地點: 澳門浸信中學、澳門浸信教會 (免費索取, 不設劇位)  
Free Admission by Tickets: Macau Baptist College & Macau Baptist Church

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# Govt to consult public in H2 on amending urban master plan: Tam

Continued from p.1

During yesterday's plenary session, Tam noted that Sam has formally approved the bureau's decision to amend Macau's urban master plan, while the government is now working on the drafting of the amendments in an orderly manner.

The policy secretary said that the government is now aiming to launch a public consultation in the second half of this year on the matter.

Tam underlined he is confident

that the government could complete amending the urban master plan in line with its schedule.

Tam also noted that the urban master plan will never be set in stone after its promulgation, and instead the government needs to promptly review the master plan and make the necessary amendments in line with the city's latest socioeconomic development.

Meanwhile, Tam also said that Macau's sluggish property market is currently one of the biggest challenges making it difficult for

the city to advance its urban renewal initiative, adding that the weak property market is discouraging condominium owners from having their buildings redeveloped.

Tam underlined that the government is studying the feasibility of rolling out fresh measures aiming to provide condominium owners with stronger incentives to redevelop their buildings, including tax incentives, and a reduction or exemption of the respective registration fees charged by the government. ■



Tsedekyi (front, seventh from right) and other elders pose for a photo at a care center in Sangri County of Shannan City, Xizang Autonomous Region, last Wednesday. Tsedekyi, an 82-year-old former serf, now enjoys her twilight years in the care center. In contrast, her life in old Xizang was filled with suffering. Tsedekyi lost both her parents and was forced to beg for a living from a very young age. During those years, she often endured hunger and cold, filling her stomach by picking up roasted barley from the ground. She had no residence to live in and no clothing to protect her from the cold. In the bitter winter, Tsedekyi could only curl up in others' cattle pens, seeking warmth against the cattle. Without shoes, her feet were frozen stiff and numb. After the democratic reform in Xizang in 1959, Tsedekyi's life changed completely as various national policies aimed at improving people's well-being were put into effect. Living together with 80 other senior citizens, Tsedekyi enjoys medical insurance, diverse daily meals, and a comfortable living environment, spending her remaining years in warmth and happiness. — Xinhua

## China launches in-orbit experiment projects in space hospital quest

### Analysis

SHENZHEN — Five medical research projects aimed at establishing the world's first space hospital, proposed by a university in the nation's innovation hub Shenzhen, were transported to space aboard a test spacecraft on Monday. These projects will complete in-orbit experiments and tests over the next three years.

China launched a Lijian-2 Y1 carrier rocket at 7 p.m. (Beijing Time) on Monday from a commercial aerospace innovation pilot zone in northwest China, with the Qingzhou Cargo Spacecraft Test Vehicle onboard.

The test vehicle features 27 projects with a total payload of 1.02 tonnes and will conduct in-orbit tests at altitudes ranging from 200 to 600 kilometers.

The idea of a future space hospital was proposed by the Shenzhen University of Advanced Technology (SUAT), which in July 2025 signed an agreement with the Innovation Academy for Microsatellites of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (IAMCAS) to jointly build the hospital.

The initiative aims to enhance astronaut health protection and improve human health, and expand capabilities for in-orbit medical monitoring and life support systems, with focuses on advanced disease prevention and treatment.

The endeavor will integrate multiple disciplines including aerospace, medicine and biology, conduct cutting-edge research in space life and health support, and prepare health safeguards for non-astronaut space travel and interplanetary exploration.

Xu Zhiming, executive director of SUAT's Future Medicine Center

and dean of the Faculty of Clinical Medicine, was the first to propose this vision. According to Xu, the construction of the future space hospital will follow a three-step approach.

First, cutting-edge medical projects were adapted for aerospace engineering and placed aboard the Qingzhou cargo spacecraft, and this will be followed by in-orbit experiments and tests. After this a space hospital outpost will be established to conduct space emergency rescue and space scientific research.

In the next step, medical modules for the future space hospital will be constructed on the moon or planets to explore health protection for lunar landing and space travel.

The in-orbit projects include use of a contact-type UV non-invasive phototherapy device developed by Gu Ying, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and director of SUAT's Future Medicine Center.

The phototherapy device can simulate specific wavelengths in sunlight that promote vitamin D synthesis in the human body. Regular use by astronauts aboard space stations or deep-space spacecraft can safely and efficiently maintain vitamin D levels in the body, preventing vitamin D deficiency.

In microgravity environments, reduced skeletal loading leads to rapid bone density loss at a rate of about 1 percent to 2 percent per month. Maintaining appropriate vitamin D levels through this device can directly support calcium metabolism, and work with space exercise and pharmaceutical interventions to form a more comprehensive bone health protection system.

Also aboard the cargo spacecraft is a plasma therapeutic device for

refractory wounds, jointly developed by Xu Zhiming and Chen Zhitong from the Shenzhen Institutes of Advanced Technology under the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Xu said that in the microgravity environment of space, changes in human body fluid distribution and abnormal blood circulation can significantly slow wound healing and make wounds prone to becoming chronic.

The plasma therapeutic device can directly promote cell proliferation and collagen synthesis by releasing reactive oxygen and nitrogen particles, accelerating tissue regeneration to counteract healing delays caused by microgravity.

The device does not require liquid or gel media, as the plasma acts on wounds in gas form, avoiding liquid splashing or contamination of the cabin environment in weightless conditions. The device can also disinfect equipment surfaces such as medical tools and wearable device interfaces, achieving multi-functional use in one machine.

Xu said they will continue to utilize Shenzhou spacecraft for in-orbit experiments and tests to serve four major scenarios, namely space stations, lunar landings, Mars exploration and future space travel, and extend space medical achievements from space applications to civilian benefits.

SUAT Party secretary Zhu Dijian noted that the health challenges astronauts face in space are the university's key focus. The SUAT brings together strengths in medical devices, biomedicine, innovative medical technology and aerospace technology from institutions such as the IAMCAS, with the aim of building a space medical platform for the future. — Xinhua

## Emerging frontier technologies drive future industries, power economic growth

BEIJING — Emerging frontier technologies are accelerating industrial applications, with the development of future industries becoming a powerful engine for new quality productive forces in the new era, according to officials and experts.

Officials and experts from various sectors shared their views on this topic during the latest episode of China Economic Roundtable, an all-media talk show hosted by Xinhua News Agency.

Liu Dongmei, Party secretary of the Chinese Academy of Science and Technology for Development, said that in recent years, various frontier technologies have experienced rapid development.

In fields such as artificial intelligence (AI), quantum information and biomanufacturing, China has entered a new phase characterized by a mix of leading in some areas and keeping pace with global counterparts, she added.

Liu noted that China has formed a relatively mature development pattern featuring breakthroughs in basic research, accumulated core technologies, large-scale industrial applications, and a growing voice in international competition.

China's AI sector ranks among the global top tier, said Liu, noting that the number of downloads for open-source large models provided by Chinese enterprises in 2025 ranked first globally according to data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

Liu Hui, head of a research institute with JD.com, said that as a technology and service company built on supply chain capabilities, new technologies serve as the fundamental driving force for the company's growth. He noted that the company has deployed 50,000 internal agents, or "digital colleagues," to help improve efficiency.

Zhai Tianrui, a deputy director of Beijing Municipal Science and Technology Commission and Zhongguancun Science Park Administrative Committee, said that in 2025, the number of unicorn enterprises in Beijing reached 116, ranking first among Chinese cities and third globally in both number and valuation.

Beijing's unicorn enterprises span 11 industries, with the largest number in the AI sector, he added. — Xinhua

# Li stresses building new-type power grid, optimizing energy structure

CHENGDU – Premier Li Qiang has stressed efforts to advance the construction of a new-type power grid and accelerate the adjustment and optimization of the energy structure.

Li, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks during a field trip to Sichuan Province between Monday and yesterday.

Li visited the cities of Chengdu and Deyang and inspected enterprises engaged in new energy development and related equipment manufacturing.

He noted that advancements in photovoltaic technology over recent years have effectively improved solar energy utilization. He called for strong support for enterprises to pursue innovations, increase R&D investment, overcome key technological bottlenecks, integrate various application scenarios, and accelerate the large-scale adoption of new technologies.

Li also noted that building a new-type power grid is of great significance for ensuring energy security and promoting green development. He emphasized the need to build a power grid



Premier Li Qiang (center) is being briefed about the development in photovoltaic technology and the research of battery modules at Tongwei Global Innovation R&D Center in Sichuan Province on Monday. Li concluded a three-day field trip to the province yesterday. – Xinhua

that is safe, reliable, green, low-carbon, strong, resilient, smart and flexible.

He encouraged enterprises to target the technological frontiers and market demands,

promote the deep integration of advanced technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) with the manufacturing sector, and continuously achieve new breakthroughs

in areas such as clean energy equipment manufacturing.

Li also visited the Zipingpu water control project on the Minjiang River, where he inspected the reservoir area and learned about the province's water conservancy construction before touring the Dujiangyan irrigation system. He noted that water management is an undertaking that will benefit generations to come and called for efforts to carry forward and develop the wisdom of water management.

Li stressed accelerating the modernization of water conservancy facilities and better leveraging their comprehensive functions in flood control, irrigation, water supply, power generation and ecological conservation.

In Guanghan, the premier inspected a demonstration zone for improving wheat yields. Noting that it is currently the crucial period for spring plowing and sowing, he urged efforts to seize the farming season by ensuring the supply of agricultural materials and technical services, increasing the application of new technologies and equipment like smart agricultural machinery, and implementing high-standard field management. – Xinhua

## China welcomes int'l participation in Middle East, Gulf region initiative

BEIJING – The China-Pakistan initiative on the Gulf and Middle East region is open, and all countries and international organizations are welcome to respond to and participate in it, foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said yesterday.

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 on Tuesday.

The five points are: immediate cessation of hostilities, starting peace talks as soon as possible, ensuring the security of nonmilitary targets and shipping lanes, and safeguarding the primacy of the United Nations Charter.

One month into the US-Israeli war with Iran, its spillover effects have continued to spread, dealing an increasingly severe blow to regional and global peace and stability, Mao

said at a regular news briefing.

These spillover effects have caused extensive disruptions to the stability of global energy supplies, the unimpeded operations of industrial and supply chains, and the development of the world economy, she said, adding this is not in the interest of regional countries and the wider world.

As important countries in the Global South, China and Pakistan have voiced a rational and just position in the hope of building up greater consensus and pooling stronger efforts in the international community to contribute to easing the current tense situation, and restoring peace and tranquility in the Gulf and the Middle East region at an early date, she said.

“China will continue to maintain close communication with Pakistan and all relevant parties to play a constructive role in promoting a ceasefire and ending the hostilities,” the spokesperson noted. – Xinhua

## Mainland to make proper preparations for KMT chairwoman's visit: spokesperson

BEIJING – A Chinese mainland spokesperson yesterday said the mainland will make proper preparations for the upcoming visit of the chairperson of the Chinese Kuomintang (KMT) party, Cheng Li-wun, in April.

Zhang Han, a spokesperson for the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office, made the remarks at a press conference.

This will mark the first time in a decade that a KMT chair leads a delegation to the mainland, Zhang said, adding that the visit will be an important part of the exchanges and dialogue between the KMT and the Communist Party of China (CPC) under the new circumstances.

Strengthening exchanges and dialogue between the two parties will have a significant and positive impact on maintaining peace and

stability in the Taiwan Strait and promoting the peaceful development of cross-strait relations, the spokesperson said.

She stressed that the mainland – on the common political foundation of upholding the 1992 Consensus and opposing “Taiwan independence” – is willing to work together with all political parties, groups, and individuals from various sectors in Taiwan, including the KMT, to strengthen exchanges and cooperation and jointly promote the peaceful development of cross-strait relations.

Zhang said the Taiwan question is part of China's internal affairs.

As long as the 1992 Consensus is upheld and “Taiwan independence” is opposed, the Strait can remain peaceful and stable, Zhang said.

Otherwise, she said, the Strait would become tense and turbulent. – Xinhua

## China firmly opposes US manipulation of so-called 'general licenses' to restrict China-Venezuela cooperation: spokesperson

BEIJING – China firmly opposes the United States' manipulation of the so-called “general licenses” to restrict China-Venezuela cooperation, and China's lawful rights and interests in Venezuela must be safeguarded, a foreign ministry spokesperson said yesterday.

Spokesperson Mao Ning made the remarks at a regular news briefing when responding to a query about the US Treasury Department's recent issuance of Venezuela-related general licenses for mineral investment and operations, with the

US side stating the move will help bring the Venezuelan economy back online and benefit Americans and Venezuelans. The licenses exclude China, Russia, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Cuba and Iran.

“What the United States should do is immediately lift its illegal unilateral sanctions on Venezuela, rather than manipulate the so-called ‘general licenses’ to whitewash its actions that undermine the legitimate rights and interests of all parties concerned, including Venezuela,” Mao said.

– Xinhua

## China expresses serious concerns over Japan's deployment of long-range missiles: foreign ministry

BEIJING – China expresses serious concerns over Japan's deployment of long-range missiles in Kumamoto and Shizuoka prefectures, foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said yesterday.

According to reports, long-range missiles with counterstrike capabilities have been brought into service for the first time at two Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) bases in Japan.

“Japan, under the pretext of defense and counter-strike, is deploying offensive weapons, going far beyond the scope of ‘self-defense’ and its exclusively defense-oriented policy,” Mao told a regular press briefing, adding that Japanese “new militarism” is threatening regional peace and stability, and the international community should be highly vigilant against it.

Japan's action severely violates the provisions of international law instruments such as the Cairo Declaration, the Potsdam Proclamation and the Japanese Instrument of Surrender, and it also goes against the

Japanese constitution and existing domestic norms, Mao said.

This once again reflects that Japan's right-wing forces are driving the country's security policy toward an offensive and expansionist direction, she pointed out.

“I have also noticed that many Japanese groups and individuals have voiced opposition publicly,” Mao said.

Recently, an officer of Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDF) illegally broke into the Chinese embassy in Japan with a knife, Mao noted, adding that instead of reflecting on the SDF's mismanagement and loss of control, Japan continues to focus on fomenting external threats and accelerating military buildup. “This trend is highly perilous.”

“We sternly urge Japan to deeply reflect on its history of militarist aggression, honor its commitments in the military and security domains, and act with prudence,” the spokesperson said.

– Xinhua

## Philippines seeks safe passage for oil in Iran meeting

MANILA – The Philippines has sought safe passage for desperately needed oil shipments in a meeting with Iran, a presidential spokeswoman said yesterday, as the import-dependent archipelago jockeys with other regional countries for fuel.

The price of fuel has hit historic highs in the Philippines since treaty ally the United States and Israel launched strikes on Iran on February 28, with Tehran effectively closing the vital Strait of Hormuz to traffic since.

President Ferdinand Marcos declared a state of national energy emergency last week, later saying that “nothing was off the table” as the country of 116 million tried to meet its need for fuel.

Yesterday, Foreign Secretary Theresa Lazaro said she had explored “key avenues for cooperation” in a meeting with Iranian ambassador Yousef Esmaeilzadeh that included the Philippines’ energy secretary.

“Building on the momentum of our Political Consultations last November 2025, we are committed to deepening our cooperation across all fronts, particularly energy cooperation,” she said in a post on social media platform X.

Presidential spokeswoman Claire Castro later told reporters that Lazaro had sought safe passage through the strait for oil shipments bound for the Philippines.

“Secretary Lazaro requested that Iran formally designate (the Philippines) as a ‘non-hostile country’ and ensure safe passage for PH-flagged



In this handout photo taken yesterday and released by the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs shows Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Theresa Lazaro (left), Iranian Ambassador to the Philippines Yousef Esmaeilzadeh (centre) and Philippine Secretary of Energy Sharon Garin posing for a photo during a bilateral meeting in Manila. – AFP

vessels and oil shipments,” Castro told reporters via messaging app.

“This is vital for the protection of our seafarers and our energy supply.”

She added the Iranian ambassador had been “awaiting our outreach and reaffirmed their strong willingness to assist the Philippines with our specific requests”.

Lazaro was expected to speak with Iran’s foreign minister today to formally secure those commitments, she said.

The Iranian embassy in Manila declined to comment on the meeting.

In a report to the Philippine stock exchange released Monday, the operator of the country’s sole oil refinery said it had agreed to purchase Russian crude after seeing at least four

million barrels in shipments cancelled since the start of the Middle East war.

Its purchase of 2.5 million barrels of Russian crude had been made out of “extreme necessity”, the report from Petron Corp said.

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

Yesterday’s meeting between the Philippines and Iran comes just days after Malaysia announced its tankers would be permitted to pass through the Strait of Hormuz without paying any toll to Tehran. – AFP

## Indonesian peacekeeper’s family shocked by his death in Lebanon

CIMAHI, INDONESIA – The father of an Indonesian soldier killed amid fighting between Israeli troops and Hezbollah in Lebanon said yesterday he was shocked that peacekeepers were losing their lives.

Zulmi Aditya Iskandar was one of the two Indonesian peacekeepers killed Monday in “an explosion” that blew up their vehicle, the Southeast Asian country’s defence ministry said.

“We were really sad and regretful, because this is a UN troop, a peacekeeping troop, not deployed for war,” 60-year-old Iskandarudin told reporters at his house in West Java province, with photos of his deceased 33-year-old son on the wall.

Iskandarudin, who like many Indonesians has one name, said he was not worried when he learnt his

son was being sent to Lebanon.

His oldest son had also been deployed to the country as a peacekeeper in 2012.

The 60-year-old said he would have been more concerned had Zulmi been sent to Papua where Indonesian security forces battle a low-key separatist insurgency in the country’s easternmost region.

“His mission was a peace mission, not (to fight the) enemy,” said Iskandarudin, himself a retired soldier.

He said the family was hoping to receive the fallen soldier’s remains soon to perform the necessary rites before he is laid to rest.

The UN Security Council convened Tuesday following the deaths in recent days of three Indonesian peacekeepers from the United Nations Interim Force

in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in two incidents in the country’s south.

A UN security source told AFP on Tuesday that Israeli fire had killed an Indonesian peacekeeper – not Zulmi – at the weekend. The UN force said it was investigating the incident.

The source told AFP on condition of anonymity that investigations had shown the fire came from an Israeli tank, adding “debris from a tank round has been recovered” at the site.

Israel’s military said it was investigating the incidents to “determine whether they resulted from Hezbollah activity or from IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) activity”.

In a joint statement, 10 European countries including France and Britain urged all sides to ensure UNIFIL members’ safety. – AFP

## Scientists uncover over 110 new deep-sea species in Australia’s Coral Sea

SYDNEY – Marine researchers have identified more than 110 new fish and invertebrate species from the deep waters of Australia’s Coral Sea Marine Park.

Marine taxonomists said the number could exceed 200 as more cryptic species are identified in one of the region’s largest deep-sea biodiversity surveys, said a statement yesterday from the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO), Australia’s

national science agency.

The discoveries were made by scientists on board the CSIRO research vessel Investigator. Specimens were collected from depths of 200 to 3,000 meters across seamounts, atolls and unexplored deep reefs in the million-square-kilometer marine park.

Will White, CSIRO voyage chief scientist and shark expert, said the finds, which are “crucial for protecting Australia’s marine biodiversity,” include new species of rays,

deepwater catsharks and chimaeras.

Other notable discoveries included species of brittlestars, crabs, sea anemones and sponges that are new to science, with the voyage samples to be curated in national collections for future research, CSIRO said.

The team recorded a rich diversity of marine life using the Investigator’s deep-towed camera, including the rare sand tiger shark, a deep-water relative of the grey nurse shark, it said. (More on Australia on page 11) – Xinhua

## N Korean hackers suspected of attack on widely used software tool

SEOUL – Hackers linked to North Korea are suspected of an ambitious attack on an inconspicuous but widely used software package, Google analysts and other cybersecurity experts said yesterday.

The cyberattack on a technical tool called Axios, which has tens of millions of weekly downloads by developers, could have far-reaching implications.

A Google Threat Intelligence blog post said the impact of the attack “by North Korea-nexus actors” is “broad and has ripple effects” as other popular packages rely on Axios.

“Hundreds of thousands of stolen secrets could potentially be circulating as a result of these recent attacks.”

That could enable further cyberattacks including ransomware, extortion and cryptocurrency theft, it said.

Google yesterday described Axios as “the most popular JavaScript library used to simplify HTTP requests” – a behind-the-scenes part of computer programming targeted in the so-called “supply chain attack”.

The tools used were similar enough to those wielded in previous attacks to point the finger at a “financially motivated North Korea-nexus threat actor active since at least 2018”, Google said.

A UN panel estimated in 2024 that North Korea had stolen more than US\$3 billion in cryptocurrency since 2017.

The stolen money helps fund the country’s nuclear weapons programme, the panel said.

Separate analysis of the hack, allegedly carried out on Tuesday, was also published yesterday by several cybersecurity companies.

In one example, Elastic Security Labs also said it suspected a “DPRK-linked threat cluster”, using the initials of North Korea’s official name.

The attacker gained control of an account that manages the Axios project and published two “backdoored” versions of the software package, it said.

Computer programmers use Axios to send requests to servers, allowing software to connect to the web, according to Bloomberg.

Other companies including StepSecurity warned developers that had installed the two versions to assume their system had been compromised.

North Korea’s cyber-warfare programme dates back to at least the mid-1990s.

It has grown to a 6,000-strong cyber-warfare unit known as Bureau 121 that operates from several countries, according to a 2020 US military report. – AFP

## Malaysia starts enforcing total ban on e-waste imports

KUALA LUMPUR – Malaysian customs officials started enforcing a total ban on e-waste imports yesterday, seeking to close loopholes on illegal shipments that still plague the Southeast Asian nation.

Tens of millions of tonnes of e-waste are produced globally every year, and many discarded devices and appliances can leak heavy metals, plastics and other toxic chemicals.

Many countries, including Malaysia, have banned the import of e-waste, but weak enforcement and reports of systemic corruption continue to made it an attractive target for unscrupulous brokers.

Malaysia saw more than 7,500 containers of suspected e-waste sent to the country from the United States between January 2023 and February last year, said the Basel Action Network, which works to

prevent the dumping of toxic waste by rich, industrialised nations.

Malaysian authorities in February decided to impose a total ban on e-waste imports without exemptions.

From yesterday “the importation of electronic waste (e-waste) to Malaysia is completely banned at all entry points nationwide,” Customs Malaysia director general Amran bin Haji Ahmad said.

The move is “part of efforts to tighten controls on the entry of hazardous waste into the country and to protect the environment”, Amran said in a statement.

Authorities have seen successes in recent months in clamping down on e-waste imports.

Special task force officials intercepted 242 tonnes of e-waste during a raid on Monday at Port Klang, Malaysia’s biggest and busiest harbour. – AFP



New primary schoolchildren have their first lesson in the Daebo Primary School in Pothonggang District in Pyongyang yesterday. – AFP

## India begins nationwide population census

NEW DELHI – India yesterday began a nationwide census after years of delay, officials said.

The census is being conducted digitally for the first time.

India's federal home ministry's office of the registrar general and census commissioner rolled out online self-enumeration for many states, including the national capital territory of Delhi, to allow citizens to provide their household information online before an enumerator visits. The online portal will remain open until April 15.

According to officials, the house listing and housing census

will begin on April 16 and will be carried out until May 15.

In the second phase, information on demographic, socio-economic, education, migration, fertility and so on, will be collected from each individual by the enumerators, officials said.

About 3.1 million Indian government employees are reportedly to spend a year in a staggered manner to complete the task.

The last census of India was conducted in 2011, and the once-in-a-decade population count due in 2021 was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. – Xinhua



Afghan men carry their household goods from damaged homes after flash floods on the outskirts of Pul-e Khumri in Baghlan Province yesterday.

Rain sweeping across Afghanistan has caused floods and landslides in multiple provinces. Among the poorest countries in the world after decades of war, Afghanistan is particularly exposed to the effects of climate change, which scientists say is spurring extreme weather. – AFP

## Pakistan's blossom season brings calm in a troubled world

Manzoor Balti

GILGIT, PAKISTAN – The harsh days of winter are over in Pakistan's high north and while snow still tops the towering peaks that dominate the landscape, spring has arrived in the foothills.

But this year, visitors who have come to witness the region's cherry and apricot blossoms see it as the perfect tonic to the war in the Middle East and its knock-on effects.

"There's war going on all over the world right now. It's petrol crisis, this and that, everything has become more expensive, everyone is in a depression," Hatib, 27, from Pakistan's biggest city, Karachi, told AFP.

"But to get out of depression, you need to step outside, go out somewhere for a bit, see places, explore, and relax the mind," he said.

The blossoms that turn bare trees into a vibrant shade of pink carpet the thawing farmland of Gilgit-Baltistan from late March every year, marking renewal and the promise of fruit harvests to come for local people.

"The best part is when these flowers are falling. It literally feels like a dream," Hatib said.

The region, home to about 1.7 million people, has some of the world's highest mountains, including

K2, which soars to 8,611 metres – second only to Mount Everest.

The jagged mountain ranges, high-altitude lakes and glaciers of Gilgit-Baltistan are a magnet for the daring and adventurous.

But more sedate visitors can instead take selfies in the orchards of the flowering deep valleys, under a clear blue sky with only the chirrup of birdsong and the bleat of foraging goats to break the surrounding silence.

"No matter how much inflation there is in Pakistan today, no matter how much petrol prices are going up, tourists still don't want to miss the cherry blossom and apricot blossom season," said local visitor Maria Akbar, 29.

"Even if we have to spend extra money, it's not a problem, but we'll enjoy this view."

"Things like cherry blossom and apricot blossom are what make Gilgit-Baltistan unique compared to all other regions," added Junaid Ahmed, 31.

"Tourists from all over the world come to enjoy this season. As you can see around me how beautiful it is, the beautiful view of these cherry and apricot blossoms is right before your eyes." (Photo on page 16)

– AFP

## Japan allows joint child custody after divorce

Tomohiro Osaki

TOKYO – Divorcing parents in Japan can opt to share custody starting yesterday, ending a system, both criticised for encouraging parental child "abductions" and defended as a safeguard for domestic abuse survivors.

For decades in Japan, only one side – almost always the mother – was granted parental authority post-divorce, making it an outlier among developed economies.

Takeshi Hirano, 49, who came home from work one day in 2018 to find his wife had disappeared with his two daughters, told AFP the new legal framework was a "huge step forward".

Under the previous system, "once you separated or got divorced, the parent-child relationship could easily be severed".

But opponents to the change argue that joint custody may re-traumatise domestic violence survivors by making it harder to put their marriages behind them.

On Sunday, around 100 people – mostly women – rallied in Tokyo showcasing a purple banner and balloons that symbolise domestic violence awareness.

They chanted slogans including "No to a system that blocks our escape!"

The revised laws that took effect yesterday come as societal changes, such as fathers becoming more involved in child-rearing, increased pressure for reform.

The changes mean parents can now discuss the terms of custody when divorcing.

Couples can choose sole custody if they agree it is the best option. Should they disagree, family courts will intervene to make decisions for them, designating sole custody in the case of domestic violence.

### 'Abducted with impunity'

Critics said the old system incentivised one party to take away their child and establish themselves



This photo taken on Sunday shows boards written with "Learn about joint custody and protect your children" displayed at a rally to protest against the coming into force of post-divorce joint custody yesterday, in Tokyo's Shinjuku. – AFP

as the resident parent first in order to win courtroom favour in custody battles.

"Your kid could be abducted with impunity," said Hirano, a lawyer by profession.

But he cautioned that joint custody does not automatically mean more meetings with children or more time spent together.

And the new law still allows one parent to unilaterally make decisions on everyday matters such as what their children should eat, wear and do after school.

What does change is that parental authority can now be split on major issues, including new home addresses, school choices and medical surgery.

"It's significant that the non-resident parent is now granted involvement in matters they previously had no say in at all," Hirano said.

Fundamentally, the legal revision is based on the idea that "both parents being involved in child-rearing, even after divorce, is in the best interest of children", he explained.

### Domestic violence

But domestic violence survivors worry that joint custody can force them to remain in close contact with

former partners, especially in cases of intangible forms of abuse that courts may fail to recognise.

Shiho Tanaka fled financial and psychological abuse by her former husband who she says talked her into quitting her full-time job, then "used his financial power to treat me like a slave".

While sole custody can be maintained in court-recognised cases of spousal violence, Tanaka, a local assemblywoman who heads a support group for single parents, told AFP that "psychological abuse tends to be disregarded by Japanese courts".

"I seriously doubt that court mediation officials with low awareness of domestic violence can truly see it for what it is."

The lopsided power dynamics mean victims may be pressured into accepting joint custody after all, and end up working together with abusers to co-parent, family lawyer Harumi Okamura told the rally.

The mediation system for divorcing couples "prioritises listening to both sides equally, and, under the banner of neutrality, courts neither point out abusive behaviour to perpetrators nor urge them to change their conduct," Okamura said. – AFP

## Sri Lanka set to offer free tourist visas to 39 countries

COLOMBO – Sri Lanka is set to introduce a six-month program granting free tourist visas to passport holders from 39 countries, with draft regulations to be submitted to the parliament following cabinet approval, a government official has said.

The initiative, aimed at supporting the recovery and growth

of the tourism sector, was initially approved at a cabinet meeting on July 21, 2025. Under the program, eligible visitors will be issued tourist visas free of charge, cabinet spokesman Nalinda Jayatissa said at a press briefing on Tuesday.

Draft regulations for the scheme have been prepared by the Legal Draftsman's Department

in line with the provisions of the Immigration and Emigration Act. These regulations will now be presented to the parliament for approval. The proposal was submitted by the Minister of Public Security and Parliamentary Affairs and subsequently endorsed by the cabinet.

– Xinhua

## Malaysia to cooperate with WHO to improve infectious disease preparedness

KUALA LUMPUR – Malaysia will strengthen its cooperation with the World Health Organization to improve its preparedness in facing infectious diseases, Health Minister Dzulkefly Ahmad said on Tuesday.

Following his meeting with the World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom

Ghebreyesus, who is on an official visit to Malaysia, Dzulkefly said this cooperation is being advanced through key global negotiations.

"Our focus is on safeguarding lives, and this cooperation with WHO aims to enhance early warning systems and strengthen the resilience of the healthcare system. With improved capacity to detect

and respond to crises, disruptions to economic activities and daily life can be minimized," he said.

For his part, Tedros expressed his appreciation for Malaysia's commitment and active involvement in international health issues, as well as its constructive role in strengthening global cooperation based on solidarity. – Xinhua

# Israeli strike on Beirut kills senior Hezbollah commander

BEIRUT – Israel killed a top Hezbollah commander yesterday, two sources told AFP, in a Beirut strike that Lebanon’s health ministry said killed seven people.

A Lebanese security source and a Hezbollah source told AFP that the commander, Youssef Hashem, had been responsible for the group’s military affairs in Iraq and was in a meeting inside a tent when Israel struck.

Israel’s military said Hashem was Hezbollah’s commander for its south Lebanon front.

Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East war in early March when the Tehran-backed Hezbollah launched rockets towards Israel to avenge a US-Israeli attack that killed Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Israel has responded with massive strikes across Lebanon and a ground offensive.

A source close to Hezbollah said Hashem is “the highest-ranking official to be targeted since the start of the war”.

Another Hezbollah member, Mohammad Baqir al-Nabulsi, was also killed in the strike on the Beirut area of Jnah, the group said.

## ‘Sleeping in the open’

Several large blasts were heard across the city yesterday and a column of smoke was seen rising from Jnah, which is home to apartment buildings, cafés and shops.

Hassan Jalwan, who lives nearby, told AFP he heard “big explosions” overnight.

“Nobody knows what’s happening,” he said, adding that “displaced people have been sleeping in the open” across the area.

Lebanese authorities say the war has forced more than one million people from their homes.

An earlier strike on a car in Khaldeh, just south of the capital, late on Tuesday killed two more people and wounded three, the health ministry said.

An AFP correspondent there saw a charred vehicle and paramedics taking a wounded person away on a stretcher.

Lebanese state media also reported a strike early yesterday on the Hadath district near Beirut’s southern suburbs, which has largely emptied of residents following repeated Israeli strikes.

State media said Israeli artillery and airstrikes also hit Lebanon’s south and east.

## Army repositions

In the south near the border, Israel has said it intends to reoccupy a swathe of Lebanon to create what officials have called a buffer zone to push back Hezbollah. Israel already occupied southern Lebanon for around two decades until 2000.

Defence Minister Israel Katz said on Tuesday that “all the houses in the villages adjacent to the border in Lebanon will be demolished”.

Katz’s Lebanese counterpart Michel Menassa decried those plans, while Canada’s Prime Minister Mark Carney denounced what he called an “illegal invasion”.

The Lebanese army announced yesterday “a repositioning and redeployment operation” in the south “as a result of the escalation of the Israeli aggression”.

A Lebanese military source told AFP that the army had withdrawn from some southern towns but remained in others.

“Where there is an Israeli incursion or advance, we evacuate,” the source said.

“Because... there is a possibility of a direct targeting of the Lebanese army... and even if there is no direct targeting, there is a risk the army could be encircled.”

The source said the Israelis had advanced up to 10 kilometres in some places.

Hezbollah early yesterday claimed cross-border attacks against Israel and said its fighters were engaged in “fierce clashes” with soldiers in the Lebanese town of Shamaa, around five kilometres from the border. It also said it was behind rocket fire targeting a group of Israeli soldiers in another area.

Late on Tuesday night, air raid sirens sounded across northern Israel’s Galilee region, according to the Israeli military’s Home Front Command, hours after what Israeli media said was a barrage of more than 40 rockets fired by Hezbollah.

Israel’s military has reported several casualties among its ranks in recent days in south Lebanon.

Lebanese authorities say the war has so far killed more than 1,300 people. – AFP

# Israel medics say 14 wounded after Iranian missile fire



A man holds in place a protective helmet on the head of a child as other motorists take shelter from an incoming missile attack in a ditch on the side of the highway in Latrun, Israel, yesterday. The Israeli military said its air defences responded to a missile attack from Iran yesterday, with warning sirens activated across central Israel. – AFP

## Bnei Brak, Israel

BNEI BRAK, Israel – Israel’s emergency services said 14 people, including an 11-year-old girl, were wounded near Tel Aviv yesterday during a missile attack that the military blamed on Iran.

Later in the day, medics said they were treating a 61-year-old man in mild condition with blast injuries in the north following fire from Lebanon, where Israeli forces are fighting Iran-backed Hezbollah.

Yesterday morning, the military said it had identified a missile launched from Yemen, as well as four rounds of Iranian missiles, which activated air raid sirens across large parts of central and northern Israel.

In the central city of Bnei Brak, near Tel Aviv, the Magen David Adom emergency service said it had treated and evacuated to hospital 14 wounded people, including an 11-year-old girl in critical condition with shrapnel injuries.

It said a 13-year-old boy and 36-year-old woman, also with shrapnel injuries, were in moderate condition, while a further 11 casualties were in mild condition.

Police reported damage at several sites in central Israel, sharing an image of what appeared to be missile debris on a road.

AFP images from Bnei Brak, which is largely populated by ultra-Orthodox Jews, showed first responders and residents carrying small children out of an apartment building that was hit.

AFP footage and images from downtown Tel Aviv showed first responders at another impact site and a small crater on the road near the French embassy.

Iran has claimed it targets military objectives.

Due to military censorship rules in place in Israel since the start of the current war, sensitive military sites are closed to the public and the press, while other impact sites in populated areas are generally closed off until they are cleared of missile debris and unexploded ordnance.

Israeli media said cluster munitions, which explode mid-air and scatter bomblets across a wide area, were used in the latest attack.

Iran and Israel have previously accused each other of using cluster bombs.

“Targeting civilians and increasing casualties through missiles equipped with cluster bombs is part of a long list of war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated for decades by the Iranian fanatical regime,” Israel’s foreign ministry posted on X.

A new wave of alerts warning of incoming Iranian missiles sounded in central Israel at around 5:30 p.m. (14:30 GMT), as Israeli Jews were preparing for the Passover holiday.

No injuries were immediately reported.

Israeli media reported that around 10 missiles had been fired from Iran. – AFP



A woman holds a portrait of Alireza Tangsiri, commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards’ navy during his funeral alongside others killed in US-Israeli strikes on Iran at Enghelab Square in Tehran yesterday. Iran confirmed on March 30 that an Israeli strike had killed the commander of the naval force of the Revolutionary Guards, who Israel had said was responsible for the blocking of the Strait of Hormuz. A statement carried by the Guards’ Sepah News website said Alireza Tangsiri “succumbed to severe injuries” from the attack last week. – AFP

# Qatar says Iran missile struck tanker in its waters

DOHA – Qatar said yesterday that a tanker leased to its state-owned energy company was struck by an Iranian missile in the Gulf country’s territorial waters.

“Qatar was targeted... by three cruise missiles launched from Iran,” the Gulf state’s defence ministry said in a statement.

The military “intercepted two of the cruise missiles, while the third missile struck an oil tanker leased to QatarEnergy in Qatar’s territorial waters,” it said.

“Coordination was established with relevant authorities to evacuate the tanker, which had 21 crew members on board, without any human casualties,” the defence ministry added.

Iran’s Revolutionary Guards later confirmed they had hit the tanker, the Aqua 1, claiming in a statement cited by state television the vessel was targeted because it belonged to Israel.

Gulf countries have faced repeated drone and missile salvos

from Iran over the past month in response to US and Israeli strikes that began at the end of February.

Iran has targeted hydrocarbon infrastructure in the oil-rich Gulf nations as well as shipping, effectively closing the strategic Strait of Hormuz, through which one-fifth of global oil usually passes.

QatarEnergy said in a statement the Aqua 1, a fuel oil tanker, had been “the subject of a missile attack in the northern territorial waters of the State of Qatar in the early

morning hours of Wednesday”.

It confirmed no crew members had been injured and there was “no impact on the environment as a result of this incident”.

According to the British marine security agency UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO), the incident occurred 17 nautical miles north of Doha.

The agency later said “the vessel was struck by two projectiles” north of Ras Laffan, the world’s largest liquefied natural gas (LNG) hub.

“One projectile caused a fire, which was extinguished, and another “remains unexploded within the vessel’s engine room”, UKMTO said.

Private security firms Ambrey and Vanguard also reported unexploded ordnance within the tanker’s engine room, adding that authorities were investigating.

Earlier, UKMTO said the tanker had been “hit by unknown projectile on the port side causing damage to the hull above water line”. – AFP

# Australian PM warns months ahead 'may not be easy' due to Mideast war

SYDNEY – Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese warned yesterday the months ahead “may not be easy” because of the Middle East war, in a rare address to the nation across television networks.

“The months ahead may not be easy. I want to be upfront about that. No government can promise to eliminate the pressures that this war is causing,” Albanese said.

The conflict that began on February 28 with US-Israeli attacks on Iran has mushroomed throughout the region, sending energy markets into a tailspin and threatening to

torpedo the global economy.

Facing historic spikes in petrol prices, Albanese urged Australians to switch to using public transport, preserving fuel for rural communities and essential services.

“Australia is not an active participant in this war. But all Australians are paying higher prices because of it,” he said.

“Farmers and truckies, small businesses and families are doing it tough. And the reality is, the economic shocks caused by this war will be with us for months,” he said.

Albanese has previously

sought to reassure motorists that shipments of fuel continue to arrive in Australia, and petrol shortages in rural towns stem from panic buying and distribution bottlenecks.

Australians can help the situation by switching to taking the train, bus or tram to work, he said.

This would preserve fuel for nurses, shift workers, trades people and miners who rely on driving, Albanese said.

The Australian government this week announced temporary tax relief for small businesses and halved a fuel tax to help motorists experiencing

soaring petrol prices, but has resisted imposing fuel restrictions.

Geographically isolated and with only two working oil refineries, Australia is heavily exposed to disruptions in global fuel supply and imports most of its petrol.

Australia holds roughly 37 days' worth of petrol in reserve, according to government figures, far below the 90-day minimum dictated by the International Energy Agency (IEA).

“No government can promise to eliminate the pressures that this war is causing. I can promise we will do everything we can to protect Australia

from the worst of it,” he added.

Australian prime ministers typically reserve an address to the nation for only the gravest of circumstances.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made one at the height of the Global Financial Crisis in 2008, while Scott Morrison did the same as COVID-19 swept the globe in 2020.

Trump, whose statements on the war have swung from combative to conciliatory, said on Tuesday the war could be over in “two weeks, maybe three”.

“But we’re finishing the job,” he insisted. – AFP

## Germany halts rescue efforts for stranded whale

BERLIN – Experts said yesterday they were halting rescue efforts for a humpback whale struggling in shallow waters off the German coast and had given up hope for its survival.

The 13.5-metre animal has been floundering off Germany's Baltic Sea coast for more than a week, having first been spotted stuck on a sandbank on March 23 near the city of Lübeck.

The creature managed to free itself but then became stuck again several more times near the city of Wismar. Coverage of its struggle for survival has gripped much of the German public.

Experts had hoped the whale's odyssey would end with it finding its way back to its natural habitat in the Atlantic Ocean.

But yesterday scientist Burkard Baschek, who had taken part in the rescue efforts, told reporters: “We are convinced that the animal is going to die” near Wismar.

The whale's ordeal had severely weakened it, its breathing had become “very, very irregular”

and it was exhibiting “virtually no” reaction to the presence of human beings, he added.

The chances of it freeing itself again were “very low” and any further rescue efforts would therefore “be pure animal cruelty”.

Since it was spotted last week the whale had prompted a large-scale rescue operation involving firefighters, scientists and the maritime police.

“Now we have the task of giving him some peace,” said Till Backhaus, the environment minister for the state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

The animal will now “have to depart this life,” he said.

An exclusion zone of 500 metres will be put in place around the whale in order to avoid disturbing it.

The authorities have ruled out putting the whale to sleep, saying this would be too dangerous both for the whale itself and those taking part in the operation.

In the case of its death, Backhaus said it would be transferred ashore for investigations to determine the cause of death. – AFP

## Family of man killed in 2020 arrest to sue French state

PARIS – The family of a man who died during a 2020 police arrest in Paris will seek to hold the French state liable for his death, their lawyers said yesterday.

The case of Cédric Chouviat, who died in January 2020 after policemen tackled him to the ground, has drawn comparisons to the death several months later in the United States of George Floyd.

Three police officers are to be tried for the involuntary homicide of the 42-year-old, who said “I'm suffocating” before being taken to a hospital where he died two days later.

His family now intends to bring a further claim of liability against the French state, their lawyers said.

The move hinges on a decision by French rights ombudswoman Claire Hédon, who said police used “disproportionate force” during the arrest in Paris on January 3, 2020.

The officers held the delivery driver in a prone restraint for an extended period while he was wearing a full-face helmet and handcuffed behind his back – a combination of manoeuvres leading to his death, said Hédon's ruling.

Lawyers for the family said their claim would aim to highlight the lack of internal sanctions or disciplinary proceedings against the officers, who “have continued to



This photograph shows a T-shirt with the picture of late French delivery driver Cédric Chouviat who died following a police stop in 2020, during a gathering by family and friends to pay their respects in Paris on January 3, 2025. – AFP

serve and lead normal lives”.

They are also due to file a motion over the trial's delay.

No hearing date for the three officers has been scheduled more than six years after Chouviat's death.

A fourth, female police officer present at the scene will not face trial.

The family's lawyers have further argued that the charge of involuntary homicide “does not correspond to the facts of the case”.

“You cannot call repeated deliberate actions on the body of a man who is already immobilised

‘involuntary homicide’,” said Christian Chouviat, the victim's father, yesterday.

Activists have repeatedly accused French police of violence and racism.

Few police brutality cases make it to criminal court in France, as most are dealt with internally.

A French court in early 2024 gave suspended sentences to three officers over an assault that inflicted severe rectal injuries to a black man during a stop and search in 2017. – AFP

## Suspect charged after car hit pedestrians in English city

LONDON – A 36-year-old man accused of driving a car into several people on a street in a central English city was remanded in custody yesterday following his first court appearance.

Sandhu Ponnachan was charged with six counts over the incident in Derby on Saturday night, police announced late Tuesday.

Seven people were injured when a car struck pedestrians around 9:30 p.m. (local time) in the city's Friar Gate area, a popular nightlife spot.

Ponnachan has been charged with causing grievous bodily harm with intent, dangerous driving and possession of “a bladed article”, Derbyshire Constabulary said in a statement.

Police have not suggested a possible motive.

Ponnachan appeared yesterday

at the Southern Derbyshire Magistrates' Court, where he spoke only to confirm personal details, including his address.

He did not apply for bail. The judge said the case would be referred to the crown court given the seriousness of the charges.

The wounded were taken to hospital with serious but not life-threatening injuries. Four have since been discharged, according to police.

When the suspect was arrested, police said he was originally from India, but is a Derby resident who has lived in the UK “for a number of years”.

UK police forces have started to release such details in some high-profile cases, after a 2024 Southport mass stabbing targeting children was initially falsely blamed on a supposed immigrant. – AFP

## German ministers slam cannabis reform

BERLIN – German conservative ministers yesterday slammed the previous government's legalisation of cannabis two years ago after a report showed the law has led to stronger varieties of the drug and less help to deter young people.

Health Minister Nina Warken said the law was a “mistake”, while Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt said it had “completely backfired” and “creates nothing but danger”.

Cannabis was partially legalised in Germany on April 1, 2024 under the centre-left government of former chancellor Olaf Scholz.

Under the legislation, adults can obtain up to 25 grammes (0.8 ounce) of the drug per day for personal use through regulated cannabis

cultivation associations, as well as to have up to three plants at home.

However, cannabis remains banned for under-18s and around schools, kindergartens and playgrounds.

The conservative CDU-CSU alliance, now leading a governing coalition with the centre-left SPD, was always strongly opposed to the move.

A report published yesterday by experts at three German universities showed no evidence of a significant increase in cannabis consumption and said there were indications the black market was starting to shrink.

However, the experts also noted a decline in youth prevention and support services and warned

that much of the cannabis that is legally available has very high concentrations of THC, the main psychoactive ingredient in the drug.

“Early interventions designed to deter children and young people from using cannabis are in sharp decline,” Warken said.

“Anyone who turns a blind eye to this is putting the health of our youngest at risk.”

A key part of the 2024 law was the creation of so-called “cannabis clubs” to sell the drug legally.

However, although around 300 clubs have been authorised, few have actually begun growing and supplying cannabis due to bureaucratic hurdles, according to the report. – AFP

## Renovation project launched at China-Guinea-Bissau Friendship School

BISSAU – A renovation project for a school building on the Bafatá campus of the China-Guinea-Bissau Friendship School was launched last Thursday in Guinea-Bissau's Bafatá Region.

Funded by the Chinese Embassy in Guinea-Bissau, the project aims to improve teaching conditions and provide students with a safer and more conducive learning environment.

Speaking at the launch ceremony, Chinese Ambassador to Guinea-Bissau Yang Renhuo said education is "the cornerstone of a country's development," noting that China has always attached great importance to educational exchanges and cooperation with Guinea-Bissau.

He said the school stands as "a concrete outcome of educational cooperation between the two countries" and "a vivid symbol of the traditional friendship" between China and Guinea-Bissau.

According to Yang, the renovation project will further enhance teaching conditions and provide "stronger support for students' growth and development."

Noting that this year marks the China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges, Yang encouraged students to contribute to national development, deepen their understanding of China and Chinese culture, and become "inheritors and promoters of the friendship" between the two nations.



Chinese Ambassador to Guinea-Bissau Yang Renhuo (center) takes part in the launch ceremony for a renovation project for a school building on the Bafatá campus of the China-Guinea-Bissau Friendship School in Bafatá, Guinea-Bissau, last Thursday. – Xinhua

Bafatá Region Governor Mustafa Cassama and Infamara Nanqui, headmaster of the Bafatá campus, expressed gratitude to the Chinese side for its support in improving the school's infrastructure.

"The school bears witness to the profound friendship between our two peoples," Cassama said,

expressing the hope that it will nurture more young people to carry forward the ties between Guinea-Bissau and China.

The Bafatá campus of the China-Guinea-Bissau Friendship School was completed in 2009 and currently has 1,573 students.

– Xinhua

## China launches short video contest in Mozambique to promote people-to-people exchanges

MAPUTO – The Chinese Embassy in Mozambique on Tuesday launched a short video contest at Eduardo Mondlane University in the capital Maputo, marking the start of activities for the China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges in Mozambique.

Speaking at the event, Chinese Ambassador to Mozambique Zheng Xuan highlighted the growing role of new media in fostering cross-cultural communication, saying that short videos, with a vivid and accessible format, have become an important tool for sharing stories and connecting people across borders.

It is hoped that China and Mozambique will carry forward their traditional friendship and strengthen exchanges and mutual learning between civilizations, said Zheng.

As a key activity under the China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges in Mozambique, the contest invites Mozambican

participants to document stories of friendship, cooperation, and cultural interaction between the two countries.

According to the organizers, submissions are open to Mozambican citizens, including those who have studied, worked, or engaged with China.

Manuel Guilherme Júnior, rector of Eduardo Mondlane University, described the event as an important step in promoting cultural exchanges between Africa and China.

Highlighting the role of youth, he encouraged Mozambican students to actively participate in the contest by sharing their experiences of friendship, cooperation, and cultural exchanges with China.

"Many of our students have had opportunities to study in China and have rich stories to tell. This competition will provide a valuable platform to showcase those experiences," he added. – Xinhua

## Mozambique saves US\$20 million annually under China's zero-tariff policy: ambassador

MAPUTO – Mozambique saves an estimated US\$20 million annually as a result of China's zero-tariff policy, Chinese Ambassador to Mozambique Zheng Xuan has said.

In a report by Mozambique's national news agency AIM on Monday, Zheng said that the policy, which took effect in December 2024, marks an important milestone in bilateral economic relations and provides a strong boost to Mozambique's economic growth.

"By 2025, the tariff exemption policy helped Mozambique save about 140 million yuan (around US\$20 million), reflecting the principle of mutual benefit and win-win cooperation," she said.

According to the Chinese ambassador, the initiative forms part of China's long-term economic policy aimed at promoting sustainable and shared development with African countries.

Zheng said the policy has broad economic impacts, including

boosting gross domestic product (GDP), creating jobs, reducing trade imbalances, attracting foreign direct investment and facilitating technology transfer.

She added that the measure also helps increase Mozambique's export volume while contributing to narrowing its trade deficit with China.

Meanwhile, Zheng highlighted China's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan as a strategic framework guiding the country's economic and external policies, reaffirming China's commitment to supporting Africa's development, with Mozambique playing an important role in bilateral cooperation.

The plan aligns with Mozambique's development priorities in key sectors such as agriculture, trade, infrastructure, and mineral resources, and is expected to create new investment opportunities and further strengthen economic and technical cooperation between the two countries, she added. – Xinhua

## Russia will keep helping Cuba, diplomat says after first oil tanker arrives

MOSCOW – Russia will keep providing assistance to Cuba, Russia's foreign ministry spokeswoman said yesterday, a day after a Russian oil tanker provided the fuel-starved island with its first shipment of crude in months.

Cuba has been suffering from an energy crisis since January, when US forces abducted Venezuelan president and Cuban ally Nicolás Maduro.

His removal deprived Cuba of its main oil supplier.

"Cuba is our closest friend and partner in the Caribbean and we don't have the right to abandon it. Assistance to Cuba will continue," Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said at a weekly briefing.

A Russian tanker entered the Cuban port of Matanzas on Tuesday carrying 730,000 barrels of oil following a three-week journey from Russia.

Moscow historically maintains close ties to Havana and has criticised Washington for blocking fuel deliveries to the island.

US President Donald Trump said on Sunday he had "no problem" with Russia sending oil to the island.

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

## Cape Verde suspends automatic fuel pricing mechanism to cushion global oil shocks

PRAIA – The Cape Verdean government announced on Monday the suspension of its automatic fuel pricing mechanism and imposed caps on fuel price increases from April to June in a bid to cushion the impact of rising global oil prices on households and businesses.

The announcement was made at a press conference by Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Olavo Correia, who said the measure was aimed at preventing surging international oil prices from being fully passed on to domestic electricity, transport and food costs.

"To prevent the historic rise in Brent crude prices, which has

exceeded 160 percent year on year, from being fully transmitted to the cost of living for Cape Verdeans, the government has decided to suspend the automatic pricing mechanism implemented by the Multisectoral Economic Regulatory Agency of Cape Verde (ARME)," Correia said.

Under the government-set limits for April, price increases will be capped at 8 percent for gasoline and regular diesel, 5 percent for butane gas and marine diesel, and 2 percent for diesel used in electricity generation as well as fuel oil.

Correia said the government would absorb a significant share of the costs arising from the current

crisis to ensure continued fuel supply by oil companies without fully transferring the real price burden to consumers. According to Correia, the government will cover about 70 percent of the resulting deficit.

Under the measure, ARME will calculate fuel prices based on the variation limits defined by the government, with the aim of softening the impact of the global energy crisis on the archipelago.

The resolution, approved by the Council of Ministers, is intended to mitigate the impact of rising international fuel prices on energy costs and safeguard the country's economic and social stability. – Xinhua



A visitor takes photos of a Chinese calligraphy work at a Chinese-Brazilian calligraphy and painting exhibition at the Municipal Theatre of Rio de Janeiro last Wednesday. The exhibition, themed "Horizons in Dialogue," kicked off in Rio de Janeiro on that day. – Xinhua

## 'Tarnished' Spain probes anti-Muslim chants at Egypt friendly

### Football

MADRID – Spanish police yesterday said they were investigating “Islamophobic and xenophobic” chants that were heard during a Spain-Egypt international football match in Barcelona, which the prime minister said “tarnish” the country.

Egypt's national anthem was also jeered ahead of the 0-0 draw on Tuesday in a pre-World Cup friendly, while authorities at La Liga side Espanyol's RCDE Stadium appealed to fans more than once over the public announcement system to refrain from making offensive comments.

It was the latest in a string of similar incidents to overshadow Spanish football in recent years, with Real Madrid's Brazilian attacker Vinicius Junior in particular repeatedly racially abused.

“We are investigating yesterday's Islamophobic and xenophobic chants at RCDE Stadium during the Spain-Egypt friendly match,” Catalonia's regional police force, the Mossos d'Esquadra, wrote on X.

A section of supporters had chanted: “Whoever doesn't jump is Muslim.”

One of Spain's starters during Tuesday's match, forward Lamine Yamal who plays for Espanyol's city rivals Barcelona and is Muslim, slammed the chants as “a lack of respect and something intolerable”.

“To those who sing these things: using a religion as a form of mockery on a pitch shows you up as ignorant and racist,” the teenage star wrote on Instagram.

Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez condemned an “unacceptable” incident on X, adding: “we cannot allow an uncivil minority to tarnish the reality of Spain, a diverse and tolerant country.”

Justice Minister Felix Bolanos said on X that “racist insults and chants embarrass us as a society”.

“The far right will not leave any space free from their hatred, and those who remain silent today will be complicit,” he added.

### 'Intolerable'

The Egyptian Football Association expressed in a statement its “total condemnation of the vile racist incident” by some spectators who “went beyond the limits”.

The Spanish Football Federation also condemned the chants, as did most major political parties.

But the leader of the far-right Vox party, Santiago Abascal, reposted a photo taken at the match of fans waving red and yellow Spanish flags along with the message: “Proud fans, proud country”.

“When Spain plays, there's no room for doubts or division,” the message added.

The game in Barcelona was moved from Qatar due to the war in the Middle East and was played out in a hostile environment from the start.

A message urging fans to stop xenophobic chants and remarks was displayed on the screen at half-time and read aloud by the stadium announcer at the ground.

The announcement was repeated early in the second half, prompting some sections of the crowd of 35,000 to respond with whistles.

“I don't know exactly what the protocol is, but I think it was the right decision to display the message on the screen and make the announcement,” Spain coach Luis de la Fuente said after the match, calling the chants “intolerable”.

“Violent people use football to carve out a space for themselves. They must be removed from society, identified, and kept as far away as possible,” the 64-year-old added.

### First conviction

Spain has struggled to stamp out racism at football matches.

Vinicius, 25, has become a lightning rod for racist abuse since arriving in the Spanish capital in 2018 from Brazilians Flamengo.

In January 2023, Atletico Madrid fans hung an effigy of Vinicius from a bridge near Real Madrid's training ground.

In 2025, five Real Valladolid fans, who racially abused Vinicius in a 2022 match, were found guilty by a court of committing a hate crime - the first such ruling in Spain regarding insults at a football stadium.

Spain's game with Egypt was a warm-up fixture for this summer's World Cup, with both nations qualified for the tournament in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

La Roja will face Cape Verde, Saudi Arabia and Uruguay in Group H, while Egypt are scheduled to play against Belgium, New Zealand and Iran in Group G. – AFP

## Italy again miss out on World Cup as Bosnia, Turkey, Czechs and Sweden qualify



PARIS – Italy failed to qualify for a third consecutive World Cup as a play-off defeat on penalties to Bosnia and Herzegovina on Tuesday meant the Azzurri will not go to this year's tournament in North America, while Turkey, the Czech Republic and Sweden all secured their places at the finals.

Italy have won the World Cup four times, but they failed to qualify for the 2018 and 2022 tournaments and will once again have to watch from afar as the field is expanded to 48 teams in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Bosnia won 4-1 in the shoot-out in Zenica after their play-off final finished 1-1 at the end of extra time, with Sandro Tonali the only Italy player to score from the spot as Francesco Pio Esposito blazed their first penalty over and Bryan Cristante smashed his kick against the crossbar.

Moise Kean had given Gennaro Gattuso's Italy the lead on 15 minutes, but they were reduced to 10 men when Alessandro Bastoni was shown a straight red card late in the first half.

Bosnia equalised on 79 minutes through Haris Tabakovic, and with no further goals in extra time the tie was decided on penalties.

“I don't think the boys deserved to suffer such a blow,” said Gattuso. “It's difficult to digest.”

Ranked 66<sup>th</sup> in the world, Bosnia finished second in qualifying Group H behind Austria before beating Wales on penalties in their play-off semi-final.

Their only previous World Cup appearance came in 2014. Now they go into Group B at this year's tournament along with Canada, Qatar and Switzerland.

The 2014 edition is the last time Italy qualified. They went out in the group stage, like in 2010. They have not won a World Cup knockout game since they last lifted the trophy in 2006.

In 2018 they failed to qualify after losing a two-legged play-off final to Sweden, and they also missed out in 2022 after losing a play-off to North Macedonia.



Bosnia-Herzegovina's forward Esmir Bajraktarevic scores during the penalty shoot-out at the FIFA World Cup 2026 European qualification final match against Italy at the Bilino-Polje stadium in Zenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina on Tuesday. – AFP

### Kosovo dream over

Turkey qualified as Kerem Akturkoglu's 53<sup>rd</sup> -minute goal secured a 1-0 win in Kosovo, shattering their hosts' dream of appearing at the tournament for the first time.

It will be Turkey's first appearance at a World Cup since reaching the semi-finals in 2002. Vincenzo Montella's team will go into Group D along with co-hosts the United States, Paraguay and Australia.

Montella's side are ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> in the world but this will only be Turkey's third ever appearance at the World Cup - they went to the 1954 tournament before coming third 24 years ago in South Korea and Japan.

“We achieved our dreams. The World Cup is the pinnacle in this profession,” Montella told UEFA.com.

Kosovo, ranked 78<sup>th</sup>, were targeting a first ever World Cup appearance, having only been accepted as FIFA members a decade ago.

### Gyokeres heroics, Danes denied

Sweden recovered from a desperate performance in the group stage of qualifying to secure their place at the finals in dramatic fashion.

Having beaten Ukraine 3-1 in last week's semi-final, they edged Poland 3-2 in Stockholm, with Arsenal's Viktor Gyokeres scoring an 88<sup>th</sup>-minute winner.

Earlier, Sweden had twice taken the lead only to be pegged back, with

Anthony Elanga's opener on 20 minutes cancelled out by Nicola Zalewski, only for Gustaf Lagerbielke to put the hosts back in front before half-time.

Karol Swiderski got Poland's second early in the second half, but Gyokeres forced the ball over the line after a frantic goalmouth scramble late on.

They finished bottom of qualifying Group B without a win, but secured a play-off spot thanks to their performances in the UEFA Nations League.

Now coached by Englishman Graham Potter, they will go into Group F at the World Cup along with the Netherlands, Japan and Tunisia.

The Czech Republic matched Bosnia's achievement by qualifying thanks to back-to-back shoot-out victories, as they followed their success against Ireland last week by defeating Denmark 3-1 on penalties in Prague.

The match finished 2-2 after extra time, with Pavel Sulc firing the hosts ahead only for Joachim Andersen to head the Danes level.

Ladislav Krejci then put the Czechs back in front in extra time, but Kasper Høgh made it 2-2.

However, Denmark converted just one of their four penalties, with Rasmus Hojlund, Anders Dreyer and Mathias Jensen all failing from the spot as the Czechs qualify for a first World Cup since 2006.

They go into Group A with South Africa, South Korea and Mexico. – AFP

## Italy's sport minister asks football chief to step down after World Cup disaster

### Football

MILAN – Italy's Sport Minister Andrea Abodi said yesterday the head of the country's football federation should step down after the national team failed to qualify for a third consecutive World Cup.

The Azzurri fell at the play-offs again, this time after a penalty shoot-out against Bosnia and Herzegovina on Tuesday, and will miss this summer's finals in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

The head of the federation (FIGC), Gabriele Gravina, said he would not resign but a board meeting next week would decide whether he will keep his position.

“It's clear that Italian football needs to be rebuilt from the ground up and that starts with changes at the top of the FIGC,” Abodi said in a statement.

Gravina has been in charge of the FIGC since late 2018, when he was elected to be the permanent replacement for Carlo Tavecchio who stepped down after Italy's first World Cup play-off

disaster against Sweden the year before.

A FIGC source confirmed to AFP that Gravina would hold a meeting this afternoon with the heads of Italy's three professional divisions, and both the players and referees' associations.

Some fans made their feelings known about Gravina and the FIGC by chucking eggs at the governing body's headquarters in Rome.

Abodi's comments come amid hostilities between the Italian government and Gravina, who when speaking to the media after Italy's defeat lashed out at a perceived lack of support for football from the state.

Gravina admitted that Italian football “is in a profound crisis”.

“It is a crisis that requires serious reflection and not only by the FIGC but also from politicians who have only pushed for resignations,” said Gravina.

He also referred to other sports as “amateur” and “state sports” compared to football due to the large number of

athletes, particularly Olympians, who are nominally employed by different arms of Italy's armed forces and police.

Italy claimed a record 30 medals at the recent Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics, including 10 golds, and left the 2024 Summer Games in Paris with 40 medals.

The Mediterranean nation also has top performers in a wide variety of other sports, with tennis star Jannik Sinner, a four-time Grand Slam winner, the most obvious example.

“I believe it is a mistake to deny responsibility for the third missed World Cup qualification and accuse the institutions of a presumed failure while downplaying the importance and professionalism of other sports,” added Abodi, who has been sport minister in Giorgia Meloni's hard-right government since 2022.

Speed skater Francesca Lollobrigida, who won two Olympic golds this past winter, was one of several athletes to react to Gravina's comments, sarcastically saying on Instagram “I'm an amateur”. – AFP

# All Chinese women through at ITTF Macao World Cup

## Table tennis

MACAO – All six Chinese women paddlers advanced from the group stage at the 2026 ITTF Men's and Women's World Cup in Macao yesterday, while on the men's side only world No. 1 Wang Chuqin and 19-year-old Wen Ruibo progressed to the last 16.

Wang Chuqin completed the group stage with two 3-0 victories to advance comfortably to the knockout draw. Against Australia's Finn Luu, the world No. 1 pulled away from 5-3 in the opening game before taking it 11-4. The second game was far more tense, with Wang rallying from 4-0 and 6-4 down to claim a narrow 12-10 win. He then stamped his authority on the third, racing to a 7-0 lead and never looking back as he took the game 11-3 and the match 3-0.

"I've never reached a World Cup final before, so going into the second stage I need to adjust my mindset, try to perform to the best of my ability and leave no regrets," said Wang.

Asked whether the new best-of-five group format gives him more room to adapt, he added: "For me, it actually helps to release some of the mental pressure. With a best-of-five format, the result feels more clearly decided, and compared with a four-game system it's much better for my mindset. It gives me a little more room to settle in and make adjustments as the match goes on."

China's 19-year-old Wen Ruibo booked his place in the last 16 with a 3-0 victory over France's Simon Gauzy, winning 11-8, 14-12, 11-9.



Manav Thakkar of India hits a return during the men's singles group match against Truls Moregard of Sweden at the ITTF Men's and Women's World Cup 2026 in Macao, yesterday.

– Xinhua

Making his World Cup debut, Wen said Gauzy was a player he highly respected and that he came in well prepared for a tough battle. "His level is indeed above mine, so I had no pressure and just went out there to play freely," he said.

But all the other Chinese male paddlers failed to reach the last 16, all losing to German opponents. Chen Yuanyu lost 3-0 to Germany's Dang Qiu, and Liang Jingkun was edged 3-2 by Dimitrij Ovtcharov in the group stage, suffering a second straight defeat

and missing out on the last 16. Zhou Qihao lost 3-2 to Patrick Franziska and was also eliminated.

Defending champion and Brazilian star Hugo Calderano, world No. 2 Truls Moregard of Sweden, Japan's Tomokazu Harimoto and Chinese Taipei's Lin Yun-Ju all advanced safely in the men's singles.

On the women's side, world No. 1 Sun Yingsha cruised into the knockout stage with two wins from two group matches. She followed up a 3-0 victory over Chinese

Taipei's Li Yu-Jhun Monday with another 3-0 win over Egypt's Dina Meshref in yesterday's group play.

World No. 2 Wang Manyu also advanced to the women's knockout stage after a 3-0 victory over India's Sreeja Akula, winning 11-8, 11-7, 11-3.

"I think my performance today was normal," Wang said. "In the first game, because my opponent has a special playing style, I needed some time to adapt to her game, and I was a bit tight at the beginning. But after winning the first game, my mindset and my shots both became more relaxed."

China's Chen Xingtong, Wang Yidi, Qin Yuxuan and Kuai Man all advanced to the knockout stage. Chen beat Chinese Taipei's Yeh Yi-Tian 3-0 on the day, while Wang took a 3-1 win over Doo Hoi Kem of Hong Kong. The 19-year-old Qin defeated Japan's Hina Hayata 3-1 to advance, while Kuai progressed with a dominant 3-0 win over American Amy Wang.

Japan's Honoka Hashimoto also secured her place in the last 16.

According to the draw released later in the day, Sun will face compatriot Kuai in the round of 16, while Wang Manyu will meet Japan's Mima Ito and Wang Chuqin will face France's Felix Lebrun.

The 2026 ITTF Men's and Women's World Cup runs March 30-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

## The 'million dollar' Senna helmet bought at Japan GP

### F1

#### Nicolas Revise

SUZUKA – When Canadian collector Darren Jack discovered that an Ayrton Senna helmet he values at a million [US] dollars was for sale in Japan, he jumped on a plane to acquire the piece of sporting history that the legendary Brazilian driver had with him during his fatal final Formula One Grand Prix.

Jack, who AFP met at the Japan Grand Prix last weekend, showed off the iconic yellow helmet in its original 'A.S.'-initialised



Darren Jack, a Canadian motorsports memorabilia collector from Toronto, poses with the racing helmet worn by late Formula One legend Ayrton Senna, in Nagoya on Monday.

– AFP

bag, which both belonged to the three-time world champion, who was killed aged 34 in a crash at the Imola circuit in San Marino on May 1, 1994.

The Bell helmet is not the one Senna wore during that fatal race. But it is one of the three or four he had with him at the start of the 1994 season in Brazil, Japan and Imola, Jack claims.

"(Senna) definitely wore it in Brazil during the race weekend. But it travelled with the team to round two in Pacific Grand Prix and to Imola in this final race weekend," Jack said.

"It was the only race weekend he had the Senna logo on. So this was added for Imola, which is significant because it means it was there. And it's quite a crazy moment to think that (it's a) part of life and part of history."

As evidence, Jack presented photos and videos from that period, which have been compared and analysed using recognition software, along with authentication letters, serial numbers, and letters from the manufacturer Bell and the Japanese seller.

Jack, the CEO of a motorsport memorabilia collection, refused to reveal how much he paid for the item, but insisted "it's clear that it's a million-dollar helmet".

However, despite already receiving lucrative offers - including from inside the F1 paddock at Suzuka - Jack said he won't sell the helmet... yet.

"I love having it. I'm proud to own it. I'm a passionate collector first. That's how I started the business," the 46-year-old said.

"So for me, it's a dream. What would I spend the money on?"

"There was a current F1 driver, who shall remain unnamed, who basically said, 'what if I gave you a million dollars now for it in the paddock this weekend?' And I said, 'no, not for sale'."

– AFP

## Late-charging Ganna denies Van Aert at Across Flanders

### Cycling

Filippo Ganna won the one-day semi-classic Across Flanders race yesterday as local favourite Wout van Aert was agonisingly caught just 100 metres from the finish after a brave solo breakaway.

"This is an amazing victory for me," said Ganna, of the Ineos-Grenadiers team, who had to fight back after breaking his front wheel and handlebars in two separate incidents earlier in the 185-kilometre race from Roeselare to Waregem.

"Wout made an impressive performance. To catch him was not easy, but in the end, the legs supported me to the finish line."

Three days after another long-range bid by Van Aert - alongside his great rival Mathieu van der Poel when he was caught a kilometre from the finish of In Flanders Fields - the Belgian was again denied at the death.

And it was the second straight year he had finished second in this race, called Dwars door Vlaanderen in Dutch, meaning he has not won a major one-day race in more than two years.

The 31-year-old Belgian was far from down after the race.

"On this race I found the confidence that I've been lacking, I feel on good form," said Van Aert.

Van Aert had launched his attack up the Eikenberg cobbled climb with about 40km to ride and quickly caught three riders from an earlier breakaway.

He shed those three companions one by one as a charging peloton ate into the 45-second lead they had built up.

With the gap coming down, Ganna and Belgian Florian Vermeersch launched a counter-attack to try to catch Van Aert.

Vermeersch, who similarly was part of unsuccessful counter-attacks at In Flanders Fields and two days before that when Van der Poel won the E3 Saxo Classic, faded, but Ganna pushed on.

And the Italian was rewarded as he surged past the fading Van Aert with 100m left to finish just ahead of the Belgian and one second in front of the peloton, with Norwegian Soren Waerenskjold winning the race for third place.

– AFP



INEOS Grenadiers' Italian rider Filippo Ganna celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win the men's elite race of the Dwars door Vlaanderen cycling event, 184.6km from Roeselare to Waregem, Belgium yesterday. – AFP

# Far cry from 16-pixel start, Mario makes it ‘so big’ on screen: Miyamoto

Mathias Cena

KYOTO – Super Mario’s creator Shigeru Miyamoto told AFP he had never imagined that the “little character I drew would become so big”, bouncing through the decades from pixelated New York sewers to a silver-screen space epic.

There were more technical constraints when the red-capped plumber made his 1980s debut, the design mastermind of Japan’s Nintendo said in an interview ahead of the release of “The Super Mario Galaxy Movie” yesterday.

In the earliest Mario arcade games, the character was only 16-pixel tall, a far cry from the rich visuals of the new film, a sequel to 2023 smash hit “The Super Mario Bros. Movie”.

The simple original format forced the young Miyamoto to use his imagination – resulting in some of Mario’s most distinctive features, from his moustache to his dungarees, which were easy to render and stood out on screen.

But the near-infinite possibilities granted by modern technology come with their own challenges, Miyamoto told AFP in Kyoto, where the video game giant is based.

“If there are no longer any limits, anyone can do it. And Nintendo has always wanted to make things that only we are able to.”

The first feature-length Mario animation was that year’s second-highest-grossing title after “Barbie”, bringing in US\$1.3 billion despite a mixed reception from critics.

It was co-produced by Miyamoto and Chris Meledandri of Illumination, the US studio behind the “Despicable Me” franchise, and the pair teamed up again for the sequel.

The aim was to “build something incredible, so we could include elements that are typically Nintendo”, the 73-year-old Miyamoto said.

## Zero gravity

Burned by the first-ever Mario film – a 1993 live-action flop that was one of the earliest game-to-movie adaptations, now relegated to kitsch curiosity – Nintendo has sought tighter control of its intellectual property.

The new film takes place in the universe of “Super Mario Galaxy”, a 2007 platform game made for the Wii console.

Transposing the game’s distinctive floating-in-space dynamics to the big screen was not easy, Miyamoto said.

“There were lots of discussions about the difference between a gravity experience that’s fun to play, and one that’s fun to watch.”

Meledandri told AFP that “we didn’t set out to try to create the same sensations, because it just wouldn’t be possible”.

For example, one scene unfolds in a zero-gravity space casino.

“And as we were making that sequence, [Miyamoto] would also point to opportunities within the sequence to even more fully evoke the feeling of the game,” Meledandri said.

Meledandri’s animation studio is based in Paris, and he said he likes to encourage a “French sensibility, whether it’s through visual expression or character performance” in the films.

While the 2023 feature cashed in on its stream of cheeky insider references, the mission this time around was to develop the sense of story.



Japanese video game designer Shigeru Miyamoto points to the handset of the new Nintendo 64 flagship game, Super Mario 64, at the Los Angeles Electronic Entertainment Expo on May 15, 1996.

– AFP

“With the first film, we wanted above all to translate the experience of game play into the movie,” Miyamoto said.

This time, the team wanted to give more depth to characters whose background had deliberately been left sparse in the video games.

“We had plenty of back-and-forth [with the screenwriters] until we were happy that the scenarios and plot did not contradict what’s in the games,” Miyamoto said.

## ‘Too many’ characters

“The Super Mario Galaxy Movie” introduces green dinosaur Yoshi and the mercenary Fox McCloud, while exploring the mysterious origin story of Princess Peach – long portrayed as a damsel in distress, kidnapped by the evil turtle-like Bowser.

Nintendo’s voluminous line-up of characters forced some difficult choices.

“There were too many, we had to drop some,” said Miyamoto.

The game designer is legendary among Nintendo teams for “upending the tea table”, a Japanese phrase referring to his tendency to

want everything re-done at a very late stage.

But he said he has changed his ways for the movie project.

“In a game, we have the ability to complete the individual pieces and then change the structure. But for a film, that’s impossible.”

Meledandri said Miyamoto “is never shy about challenging a decision”.

“But out of that challenging, we actually may find an unexpected path,” he added.

For Miyamoto, as Mario’s creator, “I try to provide as much information, context and ideas as possible on my vision of these characters, and this world.”

But “it’s Chris and his team who make the film”, Miyamoto said.

“This balance works well,” he added, and Nintendo is trying to use the approach for separate projects like the live-action film based on the “Legend of Zelda” franchise, due for release in May 2027.

– AFP



(From left to right) US actors Chris Meledandri, Jack Black, Benny Safdie, Donald Glover, Chris Pratt, Anya Taylor Joy, Charlie Day, Keegan-Michael Key and Brie Larson as well as Japanese producer Shigeru Miyamoto pose on the sidelines of the world premiere of ‘The Super Mario Galaxy Movie’ at Minamiza Theatre in Kyoto on Saturday last week.

– AFP

## BBC defends action in new sex abuse scandal

LONDON – The BBC defended yesterday its handling of a DJ sacked years after he was the subject of a police investigation into allegations of sexual offences against a teenage boy.

The controversy surrounding former radio host Scott Mills, 53, is the latest involving a high-profile presenter to roil the publicly funded broadcaster.

London’s Metropolitan Police said this week that it questioned Mills in 2018 over allegations of “serious sexual offences” against a boy under the age of 16.

The case was opened in 2016 and the offences were alleged to have taken place between 1997 and 2000, when Mills was in his 20s.

Prosecutors decided there was not enough evidence to bring charges and the investigation was closed in 2019, police said.

The BBC admitted that it was “made aware” in 2017 of the police probe and was “doing more

work to understand the detail of what was known”.

“What we can confirm is that in recent weeks, we obtained new information relating to Scott and we spoke directly with him,” a spokesperson said.

“As a result, the BBC acted decisively in line with our culture and values and terminated his contracts on Friday 27 March.”

The BBC has faced growing pressure in recent days to explain the Radio 2 DJ’s sudden departure and whether it had known about the probe.

“The BBC has made a significant commitment to improve its culture, processes and standards,” the spokesperson added.

“Last year, following an independent culture review, we set out the behavioural expectations for everyone who works with or for the BBC and we were clear action would be taken if these were not met.”

Mills has not yet commented publicly on his departure, which was first reported by the Daily Mirror tabloid.

The BBC has been rocked by multiple sexual scandals involving top personalities in recent years, including former news anchor Huw Edwards and ex-presenter Jimmy Savile.

Last year, former BBC Radio 1 DJ Tim Westwood pleaded not guilty to counts of rape and sexual assault alleged to have taken place between 1983 and 2016.

Comedian Russell Brand, who presented a BBC Radio 2 show between 2006 and 2008, is on trial in London accused of sexual offences.

Former Google executive Matt Brittin is to become BBC director-general in May, succeeding Tim Davie who resigned in November over the editing of a documentary about US President Donald Trump.

– AFP



A shopper walks past a Super Mario display at an electronics store in the popular shopping precinct of Akihabara in central Tokyo on September 8, 2025.

## World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 11°C~21°C	Manila 21°C~34°C	New York 7°C~11°C	Lisbon 11°C~23°C
Shanghai 14°C~23°C	Bangkok 26°C~36°C	London 7°C~12°C	Rio de Janeiro 22°C~30°C
Hong Kong 21°C~24°C	Tokyo 7°C~15°C	Frankfurt 5°C~15°C	Luanda 25°C~29°C
Taipei 19°C~26°C	Singapore 24°C~33°C	Vancouver 7°C~11°C	Maputo 20°C~29°C
Guangzhou 21°C~26°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~35°C	Paris 3°C~14°C	Dili 23°C~32°C
Nanjing 14°C~24°C	Jakarta 23°C~32°C	Moscow 6°C~14°C	São Tomé 26°C~32°C
Guilin 17°C~22°C	Seoul 6°C~18°C	Las Vegas 11°C~26°C	Praia 19°C~29°C
Xi’an 11°C~21°C	Sydney 17°C~26°C	Monte Carlo 10°C~17°C	Bissau 19°C~37°C



**1. Fine tuning nature**

This aerial view shows Estancia La Guitarra (The Guitar Farm), surrounded by cornfields near General Levalle in the south of Cordoba province, Argentina, on Monday. A labour of love created by the late Pedro Martin Ureta in memory of his wife, Graciela Yraizoz, the giant guitar was planted beginning in 1979 with more than 7,000 cypress and eucalyptus trees, forming a guitar 1,100 metres long and 400 metres wide - visible only from the air. - AFP

**2. Ginger wall**

A staff member works at the venue of the upcoming 27<sup>th</sup> China (Shouguang) International Vegetable Science and Technology Expo in Shouguang, Shandong Province, yesterday. The 27<sup>th</sup> China (Shouguang) International Vegetable Science and Technology Expo has entered its final stage of preparation. Scheduled from April 20 to May 30, this year's expo will showcase over 2,600 varieties of vegetables. - Xinhua

**3. Clowning around**

Clowns and mimes perform during April Fools' Day celebrations in Saint Petersburg, Russia yesterday. - AFP

**4. Changing winter coat**

This photo taken on Tuesday shows a squirrel in a park in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. - Xinhua

**5. Catnastics**

Women take a selfie picture with a cat as they exercise at Lumpini Park in Bangkok yesterday. - AFP

**6. Contrasts**

A man walks with children past apricot blossom trees at Ghanche district in Gilgit-Baltistan region, Pakistan on Monday. - AFP