

Beijing okays Macau cars with Hengqin permits to enter whole of Guangdong

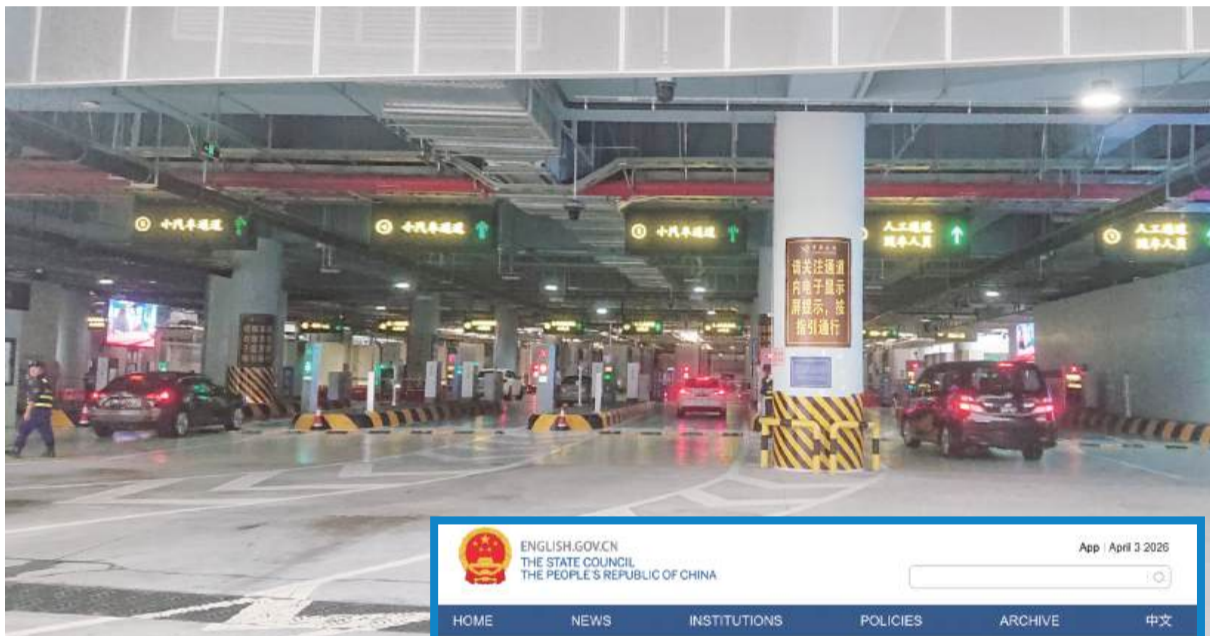
By Tony Wong

The Central People's Government's measure allowing Macau cars with Hengqin entry permits to travel throughout Guangdong Province from the adjacent island is expected to be implemented later this year, according to an announcement published on its website yesterday.

Yesterday's announcement concerns the State Council's approval of a vehicle bond exemption for eligible Macau cars entering the rest of Guangdong from Hengqin. This policy is a necessary step for the Guangdong Provincial People's Government and the General Administration of Customs to launch the measure allowing Macau cars with Hengqin permits to travel to the rest of the province.

The State Council, which is synonymous with the Central People's Government, stated in the announcement that the vehicle bond exemption aims to advance the development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin and deepen cooperation within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

The 11-member GBA consists of nine prefecture-level cities in Guangdong and the nation's two special administrative regions,



This photo taken in 2024 shows Macau cars returning to Macau from Hengqin via the vehicle inspection channels of the Macau-Hengqin joint border checkpoint.

— Photo: Tony Wong

The screenshot taken last night shows the English version of yesterday's announcement by the central government on its website. The English version is a shortened version of the official Chinese one.



Hong Kong and Macau. The province comprises a total of 21 prefecture-level cities.

The 106-square-kilometre island of Hengqin in Zhuhai is officially

known as the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, following its inauguration in September 2021. The adjacent island is three times the size of

the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR). The neighbouring city of Zhuhai is one of the nine Guangdong GBA cities.

Yesterday's announcement was



the State Council's official reply to a joint request from the Guangdong Provincial People's Government, the Ministry of Justice, the General Administration of Customs, and the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office (HKMAO). The reply, dated Monday and released yesterday, confirmed the State Council's decision to approve the request for the vehicle bond exemption.

The reply stated that the Guangdong Provincial People's Government and the General Administration of Customs are now required to establish the necessary systems to ensure the upcoming launch of the measure.

Continued on p.3

Iran says preparing joint Hormuz navigation protocol with Oman

TEHRAN – Iran said yesterday it was drafting a peacetime protocol that would supervise maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz with Oman, state media reported, with Tehran's closure of the vital oil corridor roiling the global economy.

Deputy foreign minister Kazem Gharibabadi told Russia's Sputnik state media that the protocol would apply after the ongoing war with the United States and Israel had ended, setting basic rules to manage ship movements, the IRNA news agency said.

"We are currently finalising the drafting of this protocol and, once it has been finalised internally, we will undoubtedly begin negotiations with the Omani side in order to reach a joint protocol," he said.

Oman has yet to report any such negotiations. Its foreign minister said last month his country was "working intensively to put in place safe passage arrangements for the Strait of Hormuz". (More on pages 7 & 9 – 11) — AFP



Students clean tombstones at a martyrs' cemetery in Qianjiang District, Chongqing Municipality, yesterday. Citizens across the country attended various activities to pay tribute to martyrs ahead of the Qingming Festival, or Tomb-Sweeping Day, which falls on Sunday, April 5, this year. — Xinhua

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The Macau Post Daily

Wang Yi says UN Security Council actions should not legitimize unauthorized military operations

Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday that UN Security Council actions must not provide legal cover for unauthorized military operations, nor should they heighten tensions or escalate conflict. — Story on p. 7

Iran vows 'crushing' attacks on US after Trump threats

Iran yesterday threatened "crushing" attacks on the United States and Israel, firing missiles at Tel Aviv after US President Donald Trump vowed to bomb the Islamic republic "back to the Stone Ages".

— Story on p. 10

Air France-KLM, Lufthansa bid for stake in TAP Air Portugal

Air France-KLM and Lufthansa both said yesterday they had submitted offers to take a minority stake in TAP Air Portugal, which is in the process of being privatised by the Portuguese government.

— Story on p. 12

Macau: An Open Gathering of the Lusophone Diaspora (Part 4)

No formalities – from debate to delivery

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

The reactions to the previous article confirmed that this subject is, at once, strategic, institutional and deeply human. António Costa raised the discussion to a higher level: a genuine “Macanese* pipeline”, able to train young people to operate internationally as managers, consultants and cultural mediators – a geo-economic instrument, not a nostalgic gesture. José Basto da Silva (and “Boscoquinho**” in his own way) pressed the central point: without public policy, targets and measurement, everything remains symbolic. Anabela Ritchie captured the urgency with a line that needs no ornament: “Only those who do not want to see, fail to see”.

Rui Marcelo, in unmistakably Portuguese register, said he is crossing his own Cape of Storms – in *The Lusiads* style: Bartolomeu at the helm, Adamastor trying to seize the fleet, Bacchus plotting in the Council of the Gods, and the hope that Venus appears in time to steer the voyage away from danger. In plain terms, there are difficult phases and entrenched obstacles, but the journey continues – and we do not need melodrama to keep our course. Diogo Calado then offered the most grounded testimony of all: he and his family chose Macau for its promise as a meeting point of cultures, openness and better opportunities, yet he sounded a calm warning – beyond geography, expectations can fall short when the city becomes overly protectionist, with informal barriers that slow down those who want to contribute with work and results. His suggestion is straightforward: look to references such as Hong Kong and Singapore and learn from their mechanisms for predictability, talent

integration and delivery. That is why this text is practical: how to move from conversation to delivery.

The current context makes this urgency even clearer. The Macau SAR seeks to deepen co-operation with the Lusophone world and attract more Portuguese investment. This is a real opportunity – but it does not end with capital: it requires people, networks and capability. Investment without talent, and without channels for human cooperation, is incomplete. Macau can and should position itself as a platform that welcomes qualified professionals – in technology, medicine, business, management, education and culture, as well as sport and major events – people who can raise standards, build bridges and accelerate projects.

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

That is why I propose an immediate, simple step: an Open Gathering of Young People and Professionals from the Lusophone Diaspora in Macau. A gathering that brings together young Macanese, Portuguese nationals, Lusophone descendants, and those shaped by Macau’s newer realities – people of mixed ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including Chinese, Filipino, African, Brazilian, Russian, Mongolian and others, reflecting the city’s living multicultural mosaic. Not as an identity slogan, but as Macau’s contemporary reality – and as an advantage, if organised well.

The objective is direct: build networks,

map skills, and launch two or three deliverable tasks, with a timetable, in areas such as business, technology, health, education, culture, sport and events. Mobilisation can be equally simple and effective: each participant brings and invites one or two young people ready to take on the challenge. Within weeks, a critical mass can be formed without relying on heavy organisational machinery.

One condition is essential: no formalities. No stage, no rigid protocol, no endless speeches, no ceremonial choreography. A working session, direct and focused, centred on people and outcomes. Macau already knows this model works: many condominium management committees prove it. When there is a volunteer core with good sense, and minimal competent support (clear rules, technical guidance, a contact to unblock what gets stuck), things move forward – and nobody needs a “minister for the garage”. Community work is similar: less pomp, more core, tasks and continuity.

To ensure credibility and focus, the gathering can be prepared by a provisional organising committee, with temporary and consensual leadership – for example, a respected public figure broadly accepted socially and politically, such as our fellow Macanese Leonel Alberto Alves, if he so wishes and if there is convergence.

As for the framework, the ideal is plural and transparent institutional support, without politicisation: invitation and presence from the MSAR Government, the Liaison Office of the Central People’s Government in the MSAR, and the Consulate-General of Portugal in Macau and Hong Kong, as entities that can facilitate contacts, open doors and signal publicly that this effort is welcome. “Support” here should mean exactly that: enable, clear pathways, remove friction – not capture the agenda.

After the gathering, the key is not to let the energy fade. For that, light coordination is enough: an annual (or semi-annual) Macau–Lusophone cooperation forum, with two or three shared priorities, simple targets and reviews – focused on projects, not on “representation”. Within that framework, a practical line of work on “Macau–Portugal: young people and entrepreneurs” would help turn intent into partnerships, with less friction and better results.

To start without bureaucracy, a short preparatory committee (for example, 90 days) could be set up simply to map initiatives, select priorities and define minimum rules for rotation and transparency. With one guarantee: it does not replace existing associations; it coordinates what is common. And where institutions are present, their role should be technical support or observer – enabling and unblocking, not taking over.

Ultimately, this requires a genuine culture of change: renewal as normal practice, not something met with reflexive defensiveness each time it appears. This is not about confrontation; it is about method. Not about replacing people, but ensuring that experience becomes mentorship, and that renewal becomes the rule – not the exception.

Macau already has enough walls and history. What it needs now is harder and more dignified: continuity with courage, turned into simple, regular and measurable initiatives. Fewer exceptions, more pathways. Fewer announcements, more delivery. And above all: more mission – not only representation.

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

***Typical of his father, Bosco. The word is a diminutive form in Portuguese. – MPD*

Good Friday, Ching Ming & Easter public holidays

Due to it being the Good Friday, Ching Ming and Easter public holidays between today and Sunday, followed by two days of civil service (but not public) holidays, *The Macau Post Daily* team will take a break between today and Monday. The editorial team will be back to work on Tuesday for the return of our print edition on Wednesday, April 8.

Our management team will return to work on Wednesday.

However, our website <https://www.macaupostdaily.com/> will be updated 24/7 for breaking news.

We wish all our readers, advertisers, distributors and contributors a restful holiday break.

All government offices and banks will be closed from today until Tuesday returning to work on Wednesday. Customarily, local banks are closed in line with their counterparts in Hong Kong. Hong Kong’s public holiday runs from today through Tuesday.

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Macau Weather

CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY INTERVALS.

A FEW THUNDERSTORMS BY THE END OF THE DAY.

FORCE 4 TO 5 SOUTH TO SOUTHWESTERLY WINDS, OCCASIONALLY FORCE 6 WITH GUSTS.

RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 75% AND 98%.

23°C~27°C

Source: SMG

Michelle Yeoh to appear at Macau Int’l Comedy Festival

Armino Neves

The 4-day Macau International Comedy Festival to be co-hosted by Beijing Fun Age Entertainment Co., Ltd. (known as Kaixin Mahua or Mahua FunAge) and Beijing Damai Culture Media Development Co., Ltd. simultaneously in Macau and Hengqin between next Thursday and Sunday, has invited Michelle Yeoh (楊紫瓊), the first Chinese actress to win an Oscar, as their mystery guest, Cheng Le’er, assistant president and CFO of Mahua FunAge, said in Macau earlier this week.

Addressing a press conference on Wednesday at the Macau Cultural Centre (CCM) in Nape, Cheng said that the initiative aimed to promote the future development of the comedy industry in Macau.

Michelle Yeoh Choo Kheng Todt is a Malaysian-Chinese actress, Yeoh is the first Malaysian artist to be conferred the title of Dato* and the first Chinese artist to be conferred the title of Tan Sri.

According to Cheng, the key highlights of this year’s festival are a showcase performance by

20 outstanding participants in the Macau Cultural Affairs Bureau’s (IC) “Youth Actor Training Programme.” These participants will also have the chance to be “discovered” by Chinese stars Shen Teng and Ma Li and subsequently signed by Mahua FunAge, Cheng said.

According to DeepSeek, Shen Teng and Ma Li are a celebrated Chinese comedic actor duo, best known for their long-running partnership in sketch comedy, film, and theatre. They are the core members of the Mahua FunAge; their on-screen chemistry, often portraying bickering couples or hapless partners, has made them one of China’s most beloved comedy pairs.

Cheng also said that an event to be set up at Nam Van Lake, named “Park of Joy”, features an immersive lakeside music show inspired by Macau’s four-century history of cultural exchange between East and West, adding that, during the daytime, the lakeside area will offer interactive activities with historical figures, band performances, and more. ■

*Dato’ and Tan Sri are titles of the Malaysian honours system. Dato’



Michelle Yeoh poses with her Honorary Golden Bear at the 76th Berlinale International Film Festival in the German capital on February 12. – Photo courtesy of Elena Ternocaja/Wikimedia Commons.

is a title conferred by a State Ruler or Governor. It is the equivalent of a “Knighthood.” Tan Sri is a higher, Federal title conferred by the King. It is the second-highest federal honour of the Federation of Malaysia. – DeepSeek

Beijing okays Macau cars with Hengqin permits to enter whole of Guangdong

Continued from p.1

While the bond exemption policy implemented by the General Administration of Customs took effect yesterday, both the provincial government and Customs have yet to finalise the systems required to get the new measure for Macau cars off the ground.

Currently, Macau vehicles with a Guangdong-Macau dual licence plate – including cars, tourist coaches, and lorries – can travel throughout Guangdong.

The existing measure allowing Macau cars without dual plates to apply for a permit to enter Hengqin was launched in 2016. However, these vehicles, colloquially known as “single licence plate” cars, are currently restricted to the island and are not allowed to enter the rest of the province. Unlike other schemes, these cars can enter Hengqin at any time without an appointment.

Meanwhile, the “Northbound Travel for Macau Vehicles” policy, launched in January 2023, allows Macau cars without dual plates to enter the whole of Guangdong directly from Macau. However, this scheme requires drivers to make an appointment for every trip. Each car is limited to three appointments per month, and they must enter the province via the Macau-Zhuhai checkpoint of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) under a quota-based system.

At present, Macau cars are only permitted to hold either a single licence plate for Hengqin entry or a permit issued under the “Northbound Travel for Macau Vehicles” policy. ■

6-seater Tesla Model Y L arrives in Macau



Tesla Motors HK Limited Regional Sales Manager Kenneth Lui (呂建韜) poses between two Tesla Model Y L at Lisboeta Macau in Cotai yesterday.



Interior of Tesla Model Y L at Lisboeta Macau in Cotai yesterday. – Photos: Armino Neves

Armino Neves

US automaker Tesla hosted a media event at Lisboeta Macau in Cotai yesterday about its new 6-seater Tesla Model Y L public display at the resort’s Tesla Macau Experience Centres

The left-hand drive version of this car was launched in the Chinese mainland last autumn, while the version launch yesterday is a right-hand drive model suitable for Macau drivers.

According to Tesla Motors HK Limited Regional Sales Manager Kenneth Lui (呂建韜), the new model is a derivative of the previous Model Y, featuring a three-row, six-seat configuration.

Lui said that Model Y L offers a maximum cargo capacity of 2,539 litres, a WLTP*-rated range of 681 kilometres, and accelerates from 0 to 100 km/h in just

4.5 seconds. The price is 398,750 patacas, with deliveries expected in the second quarter of 2026, Lui said.

The Model Y L is equipped with a new active comfort suspension system and electronic shock absorbers, and the entire vehicle features acoustic glass, resulting in a quieter and more comfortable cabin.

Lui pointed out that both the first and second-row seats are ventilated and heated, with the second-row independent seats capable of being electrically folded flat, while the third-row seats also come with a heating function and independent air conditioning vents.

The onboard audio system has been upgraded to 18 speakers and one subwoofer, debuting the Immersive Sound X system, Lui said, adding that, the vehicle also features 16-inch and

8-inch dual touchscreens.

According to a statement released during the conference, in response to the government’s promotion of electric vehicle adoption, new order customers who obtain approval for charger installation will receive a free wall-mounted charger package including basic installation. Tesla currently operates 98 supercharger stations and 127 destination charging stations in Hong Kong and Macau, with a charger availability rate of 99.95 percent, the statement said. ■

*WLTP stands for Worldwide Harmonised Light Vehicles Test Procedure. It is a global standard laboratory test cycle used to measure fuel consumption, -CO2 emissions, and pollutant emissions (and, for electric vehicles, energy consumption and range). – Poe

Exhibition on the Resonant History and Aesthetic Memory of Macao Firecrackers

Exhibition Venue
Sands Gallery, Level 6,
The Grand Suites at
Four Seasons

Exhibition Period
2026.03.18 - 08.31

Opening Hours
11:00 ~ 19:00

Central Illustration: A Century of Ice Long Firecracker Factory in Radiance. 澳門出品, 流益光溢, 益隆百年, 金沙中國.

ABOUT The Young Post

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



Photos taken in the school's hall yesterday courtesy of Hou Kong Middle School (Primary Section)



Hebei Provincial Acrobatic Troupe Makes Exclusive Visit to Hou Kong Middle School (Primary Section)

Review by Hou Kong Middle School (Primary Section) Teachers and Students

On the morning of April 2, 2026, the “Acrobatics on Campus” even – a key highlight of the “Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Acrobatics Art Week” [粵港澳大灣區雜技藝術週 (Macao Station)] – was successfully held at Hou Kong Middle School (Primary Section). Artistes from the Hebei Provincial Acrobatic Troupe (河北省雜技團) presented a spectacular showcase combining performances, artistic sharing, and interactive experiences, drawing continuous rounds of applause and laughter from the audience.

The event was guided by the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles (中國文學藝術界聯合會), organised by the Hebei Federation of Literary and Art Circles (河北省文學藝術界聯合會) and the Federation of Associations of Cultural Sectors of Macau (澳門文化界聯合總會), and coordinated by several organisations including the Hebei Acrobats Association (河北省雜技家協會) and the Hebei Provincial Acrobatic Troupe Co., Ltd (河北省雜技團演藝有限公司). Hou Kong Middle School (Primary Section) was honoured to be the only school invited to host this exclusive performance during the Art Week's Macao stop.

The event was hosted by magician Shen Shuang, who served as the Master of Ceremonies. During the programme, she noted that Hou Kong Middle School (Primary Section) has long placed great importance on education in traditional Chinese culture, actively promoting the integration of arts and culture into the school curriculum and even the campus. She highlighted that the school not only incorporates traditional elements such as Chinese calligraphy, Chinese painting, and martial arts into school curriculum but also organises traditional cultural performances and exchange activities to create a vibrant artistic atmosphere regularly. It is this steadfast commitment to and passion for excellent traditional culture that earned the school unanimous favour from the organisers, making it the sole venue for this special performance.

Before the performances commenced, Vice Principal Chan Pou Sin presented a commemorative souvenir to the Hebei Provincial Acrobatic Troupe as a token of appreciation. During the address, the Vice Principal noted how rare and precious it was to be able to invite such a prestigious troupe to the school. He emphasised that acrobatics requires long-term, rigorous, and disciplined practice; this serves as a meaningful metaphor for the students, encouraging them to apply the same spirit of perseverance and hard work to their own studies.

During the event, the performers from the Hebei Provincial Acrobatic Troupe delivered a series of classic acts, including Celestial Beans (仙人摘豆), Three Immortals Returning to the Cave (三仙歸洞), Ripples: Fan Transformation (漣漪·扇變), Hand Balancing (對手倒立), and Flying Trident (飛叉). The exquisite skill and breathtaking manoeuvres garnered gasps of amazement and enthusiastic cheers from the teachers and students. In the sharing segment, artistes briefly explained the principles of magic; during the subsequent interactive session, students from grades one to three eagerly took to the stage to try simple acrobatic moves and magic tricks under the artists' guidance.

The school stated that the activity allowed students to experience the unique charm of Hebei acrobatics – known as the “hometown of Chinese acrobatics and the cradle of world acrobatics” (中國雜技的故鄉, 世界雜技的搖籃) – firsthand, deepening their understanding and identification with China's excellent traditional culture.



'HAHALULU x MGM Trend Art Exhibition' to continue until end-August



This photo provided by integrated resort operator MGM yesterday shows the "HAHALULU x MGM Trend Art Exhibition" at Grand Praça of MGM MACAU in Nape.

Rui Pastorin

Integrated resort operator MGM is holding the "HAHALULU x MGM Trend Art Exhibition" until the end of August, bringing the Eastern art IP "HAHALULU" to Macau for the first time.

According to an MGM statement yesterday, the IP was created by Dennis Chan, the founder of Qeelin, who is also known as "Father of the Gourd". The statement said: "With decades of deep engagement in traditional Eastern culture, Dennis draws inspiration from the gourd, a classic symbol of good fortune in Chinese tradition, blending it with a contemporary aesthetic".

The five-month-long exhibition is being held in partnership with One Central

Macau, the statement noted, with its current phase taking place at MGM MACAU's Grand Praça, where a gourd-shaped zone was created for the IP. Highlights include various installations such as a 5.4 metre-tall HAHALULU installation, a light show, and Chan's "Master's Tribute Series" where the IP "steps into iconic Western masterpieces by artists such as Van Gogh, da Vinci, and Vermeer".

In May, the statement said that the IP's presence will extend to other key areas and One Central Macau. Moreover, there will be themed offerings at the Pastry Bar at MGM MACAU, while other themed experiences are also set to be held at the integrated resort and One Central Macau, the statement noted. ■

Sands China donates 1 million patacas to 5 NGOs

Rui Pastorin

Integrated resort operator Sands China said in a statement yesterday that it recently donated a total of 1 million patacas to five local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to support their efforts in promoting responsible gaming in the community.

Cumulative donations by the company since 2006 have reached nearly 10 million patacas, the statement said.

The statement noted that on March 25, Michael Lee, Sands China vice president of concession administration and casino compliance, presented a cheque to representatives from the Youth Volunteers Association of Macao, Sheng Kung Hui Macau Social Service Coordination Office, Young Men's Christian Association of Macau, Macao Leisure Industry Employees Home,

and Bosco Youth Service Network. The event took place at The Venetian Macao in Cotai.

The statement said that the donation will support the five organisations in conducting responsible gaming promotions in the community. Among the initiatives are holding parent-child financial management activities, workshops, short film production, and community promotion days.

Lee was quoted by the statement as saying: "Since 2006, we have donated annually to social service organisations, drawing on community networks to thoroughly implement relevant education, promotions, and training programmes in the community. This support for responsible gaming social service organisations has continued for 21 years, successfully integrating the concept of responsible gaming more broadly and practically into the daily lives of the public". ■



Sands China's Vice President of Concession Administration and Casino Compliance Michael Lee (third from right) presents a ceremonial donation cheque for 1 million patacas to representatives of the five NGOs. - Photo: Sands China



澳門樂團
ORQUESTRA DE MACAU
Macao Orchestra

WYNN Presents



Lio Kuokman and Daniel Müller-Schott

11 / 04 / 2026

20:00 | Saturday

Music Director and Principal Conductor of Macao Orchestra

Lio Kuokman

Venue

Macao Cultural Centre
Grand Auditorium

Cello

Daniel Müller-Schott

Tickets

MOP 300 / 250 / 200 / 150

Programme

Wagner:
Prelude to "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg"

Elgar:
Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85

Bruckner:
Symphony No. 4 in E-flat Major, WAB 104 "Romantic"

Ticket Reservation
www.macauticket.com | (853) 2855 5555



For more information about discounts, please visit
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澳門樂團 MacaoOrchestra

CPTTM honours 134 local firms with int'l management certs

Khalel Vallo

The public Macau Productivity and Technology Transfer Centre (CPTTM) honoured 134 local enterprises at its “2026 Macao Enterprises International Management Certification Award Presentation Ceremony” yesterday, recognising companies that have continuously maintained international management certifications.

The ceremony was held at the Macau Science Centre (MSC) in Nape, where awards were presented based on the number of consecutive years companies have been awarded certifications, including gold, silver and bronze awards.

A new “Integrated Management Achievement Award” was also introduced to recognise exemplary enterprises. This marks the third consecutive year the productivity centre has organised the ceremony.

In addition to recognising companies that have maintained certifications for more than six, 12 and

20 years, the newly added award honours firms that have been awarded certifications in quality management, environmental management, and occupational safety and health, with at least one gold award among them. The recognised certifications cover areas such as quality management, environmental management, occupational safety and health, food safety, information security, and energy management.

Award-winning enterprises come from sectors including public utilities, food production, security services, cleaning services and construction, reflecting the tangible progress made in management systems, risk control and continuous improvement, according to a CPTTM statement yesterday.

Addressing the ceremony, CPTTM President Victoria Alexa Kuan Chan highlighted that 2026 marks the centre’s 30th anniversary. “Today, we gather to witness this important moment, celebrating the remarkable achievements of local enterprises that have gained international

recognition through professionalism, perseverance and innovation,” she said. Kuan noted that over the past three decades, the centre has worked closely with local enterprises, supporting their transformation from “quantity” to “quality”.

“In a rapidly changing era, robust management systems and sound risk control are not only tools to address uncertainties, but also key to turning challenges into opportunities and achieving sustainable growth,” Kuan noted, adding that since the launch of the “International Management Certification and Accreditation Subsidy Programme” in 1996, the centre has received over 850 applications from local enterprises, reflecting their commitment to excellence and international standards.

According to the statement, the centre will continue expanding support for international certifications through training and technical assistance, encouraging more enterprises to enhance competitiveness and contributing to Macau’s long-term economic development. ■



Macau Productivity and Technology Transfer Centre (CPTTM) President Victoria Alexa Kuan Chan addresses yesterday’s “2026 Macao Enterprises International Management Certification Award Presentation Ceremony” at the Macau Science Centre (MSC) in Nape.

– Photo: Khalel Vallo

Registration opens for Tap Siac Craft Market workshops

Rui Pastorin

Once again, the time for the annual Tap Siac Craft Market is approaching, being slated to take place from April 23 to 26 and from April 30 to May 3, with registration for the variety of creative handicraft workshops to be on offer during the period now open.

The annual fair has been held twice a year since 2008, particularly in the spring and autumn, according to the craft market website.

According to a statement by

the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) yesterday, 73 handicraft workshops, including 15 family sessions, will be held at the upcoming craft market.

With registration available until 5 p.m. on April 8, workshops on ceramics, glass, clay, leather, silver accessories and floral art are among those on offer, with more details available on www.craftmarket.gov.mo, while registration can be done on the Macao One Account on activity.mo.gov.mo/activity-h5/activity-list-web

Applicants may only register for up to two workshops, but only once for each, the statement said, with the same applying for children in family workshops. Selected applicants will be notified via SMS on April 9.

The statement said that the fee for each workshop is 50 patacas. The statement reminded selected participants to arrive on time, with latecomers to be replaced by on-site applicants, with no refunds provided. One can find more details on “Registration Notes”. ■

Mainland man arrested for selling bogus iPhone



The two undated handout photos provided by the Public Security Police (PSP) yesterday show the fake iPhones and other evidence seized, and a PSP officer escorting the suspect to a police station.

By Tony Wong

A mainland man has been arrested for defrauding a female passer-by out of 4,000 patacas by selling her a counterfeit iPhone, Public Security Police (PSP) spokeswoman Lai In Hong announced during a regular press conference yesterday.

The suspect, a jobless man in his 40s surnamed Jiang, was apprehended following a report from the victim, a middle-aged foreign non-resident worker (NRW).

According to Lai, Jiang approached the victim on Estrada do Istmo in central Cotai last Thursday. He claimed he was selling an iPhone for 4,000 patacas, despite having purportedly purchased it in Macau for 12,000 patacas. Estrada do Istmo is a major thoroughfare

connecting Taipa and Coloane, with its northern section – the “Cotai Strip” – flanked by casino resorts.

The victim inspected the device Jiang initially presented – a genuine iPhone – and confirmed it was in working order. She also noted that the phone’s serial number matched the provided receipt and box. Satisfied, she agreed to the purchase and went to a nearby ATM to withdraw the cash.

After receiving the 4,000 patacas, Jiang handed the victim a different device – a fake – and quickly fled the scene.

The victim did not attempt to switch on the phone until the following day, at which point she discovered it was faulty. She then realised the serial number did not match the documentation. Suspecting that Jiang

had swapped the genuine phone for a dummy while she was at the ATM, she reported the incident to the police.

Using the city’s CCTV surveillance system, officers identified Jiang and intercepted him at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) checkpoint on Tuesday as he attempted to re-enter Macau.

Under questioning, Jiang admitted to the fraud. He told police he had purchased seven counterfeit iPhones on the mainland for 400 yuan each. He claimed he targeted the victim last Thursday because he needed funds after gambling away his money.

Police seized the remaining six counterfeit phones from the suspect. Jiang has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) to face fraud charges. ■

Macau travel expo to open next Friday with ‘grand lucky draw’, 1,500 booths

Khalel Vallo

The 14th Macao International Travel (Industry) Expo (MITE) will open next Friday, April 10, at The Venetian Macao’s Cotai Expo, featuring around 1,500 booths and a range of promotional offers to boost tourism spending, according to a statement by the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) yesterday.

The three-day event will run until April 12 under the theme “Global Convergence, Future Horizons”, aiming to bring together global tourism resources and industry players to explore new opportunities in “tourism +”, the statement said.

The expo will span 30,000 square metres across Halls A, B and C, attracting over 700 exhibitors and more than 600 hosted buyers from home and abroad, the statement said, adding that more than 130 activities, including destination presentations, industry forums, workshops and performances, will be held throughout the event.

Alex Lao Nga Fong, president of the Macau Travel Agency Association, pointed out at a recent press conference that the expo is Macau’s largest international travel fair and a key platform supporting the city’s role as a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure, the statement noted.

“MITE has become one of the most iconic events that embodies the positioning of Macau’s development into a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure endorsed by the Central People’s Government,” Lao said, adding that the event draws over 10,000 exhibitors, buyers and visitors annually, generating more than 10 million online impressions, while strengthening connections between Macau, the Guangdong-

Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) and international markets, the statement underlined.

In order to stimulate spending, exhibitors will offer time-limited deals on travel-related products, including hotel stays, tour packages and air tickets, the statement said, adding that visitors who spend 300 patacas or more during the event can enter the “MAK MAK grand lucky draw” for a chance to win prizes.

In addition, instant discount vouchers will be available through Luso International Banking Ltd. via its WeChat mini-programme. The vouchers offer a 100-pataca discount for purchases of 1,000 patacas or above at participating exhibitors, the statement said, noting that the expo will be open to the public with free admission across all three days, alongside shuttle bus services and free parking, as organisers aim to attract visitors and further boost Macau’s tourism sector. ■



This poster provided by the Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) yesterday promotes its upcoming three-day 14th Macao International Travel (Industry) Expo (MITE) slated to start next Friday at The Venetian Macao’s Cotai Expo.

Wang Yi says UN Security Council actions should not legitimize unauthorized military operations

BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday that UN Security Council actions must not provide legal cover for unauthorized military operations, nor should they heighten tensions or escalate conflict.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks in a phone conversation with Kaja Kallas, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the European Commission.

Kallas shared her views on the situation in the Middle East and commended China's active diplomatic mediation efforts to ease the situation, including the latest

five-point joint initiative issued by China and Pakistan for restoring peace and stability in the Gulf and the Middle East.

The European side has not been involved in this war but has suffered from its spillover effects, she said, expressing hope for swiftly de-escalating the war and resuming dialogue and negotiations.

The European side supports UN humanitarian operations, the protection of civilians and non-military targets, and will make every effort to ensure the opening of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, she said.

Wang said that amid the current international turmoil, it is the shared

responsibility of China and Europe to step up communication and exchanges, and to uphold the UN-centered international system and the international order based on international law.

Wang elaborated on China's principled position on the Middle East situation, noting that the five-point initiative proposed by China and Pakistan reflects a broad international consensus, whose core elements include a cessation of hostilities, the start of peace talks as soon as possible, ensuring the security of non-military targets and security of shipping lanes, and safeguarding the primacy of the UN Charter.

A ceasefire and an end to

hostilities are the strong call of the international community, and also the fundamental solution to ensuring safe navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, Wang said, adding that all parties should build greater consensus and create the necessary conditions to that end.

The UN Security Council actions should focus on cooling down the situation and de-escalating tensions, Wang said, adding that China stands ready to maintain communication and cooperation with the European side to promote an early end to hostilities and restore regional peace.

The two sides also exchanged views on China-EU relations. Wang said that China's development

represents opportunities for Europe, and that the challenges Europe faces do not originate from China.

Protectionism does not enhance competitiveness, and decoupling from China means decoupling from opportunities, Wang said, expressing hope that the European side will develop a comprehensive and objective perception of China and maintain the correct direction of China-EU relations.

Kallas said that the European side views China as an important cooperation partner, does not seek decoupling from China, and looks forward to maintaining dialogue and communication between the two sides. – Xinhua

HK gov't files application with court to forfeit Jimmy Lai's offense-related properties

HONG KONG – The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government yesterday filed an application with the Court of First Instance for forfeiture of the offense-related properties of Jimmy Lai Chee-ying in order to achieve the important objectives of preventing and suppressing acts and activities endangering national security.

The application was made in accordance with the Law of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on Safeguarding National Security in the HKSAR and the Implementation Rules for Article 43 of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the HKSAR.

The Court of First Instance of the High Court earlier convicted Lai of three charges of offenses endangering national security.

The court pointed out that Lai was the mastermind and driving force behind the case, consciously using the now-defunct *Apple Daily* and his personal influence to carry out a consistent campaign with a view to undermining the legitimacy or authority of the central government,

the HKSAR government and their institutions, and harming the relations between the central government and the HKSAR government with the people in Hong Kong, which went far beyond what should be permissible under the law; and that he repeatedly colluded with foreign forces to beg for sanctions and engaged in hostile activities against the central government and the HKSAR government. The court sentenced Lai to 20 years' imprisonment in the end.

According to Article 32 of the national security law in Hong Kong, "proceeds obtained from the commission of an offense under this Law, including financial aid, gains and rewards, and funds and tools used or intended to be used in the commission of the offense, shall be seized and confiscated."

The application for and issuance of a forfeiture order must comply with the strict conditions set out in Schedule 3 to the Implementation Rules. The Court of First Instance may order the forfeiture only if it is satisfied, after an application is made by the secretary for justice, that

the property to be forfeited meets relevant conditions, according to Article 32 of the law.

A spokesperson for the HKSAR government stated that the HKSAR is a society underpinned by the rule of law and has always adhered to the principle that laws must be obeyed and lawbreakers be held accountable. Amongst others, applying to the court for a forfeiture order is one of the effective means to combat serious crimes and protect the public interest, and laws and mechanisms for forfeiture of offense-related properties are commonly found around the world.

A forfeiture order made for the purpose of safeguarding national security can prevent persons convicted of offenses endangering national security, their accomplices or agents from continuing to use their offense-related properties to engage in acts and activities endangering national security, so as to cut off the funding chains for offenses endangering national security and to weaken their capacity to commit offenses endangering national security, the spokesperson said. – Xinhua

Wang Yi says Strait of Hormuz remains unstable if war doesn't end

BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday that the issue of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz is a spillover effect of the current conflicts, noting the Strait of Hormuz remains unstable if the war doesn't end.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks in a phone conversation with Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud.

The Saudi Arabian foreign minister briefed Wang on the latest developments of the Middle East situation, saying the war in Iran has caused severe impacts on countries in the region and the world at large.

Saudi Arabia attaches

importance to China's important role in international affairs, and values high-level strategic cooperation with China, he said, adding that the kingdom is ready to further enhance consultation and coordination with China on platforms including the United Nations, to jointly push for the de-escalation of the situation and an end to the conflict.

Wang noted that the prolonged war in Iran, which has lasted for over a month, has caused enormous casualties and losses, and undermined the security and stability of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, over which China expressed concerns.

Wang said China and Pakistan recently jointly issued a five-point initiative for restoring peace and stability in the Gulf and Middle East

region, which includes safeguarding the sovereignty and security of the Gulf states, stopping attacks on civilians and non-military targets, and ensuring the security of shipping lanes.

Wang said the top priority is to focus on cessation of hostilities. Actions by the UN Security Council should avoid escalating confrontations and should not legitimize unauthorized military operations; otherwise, it will lead to endless trouble, with small and medium-sized countries being the first to bear the brunt, he added.

Wang noted that China appreciates Saudi Arabia's commitment to promoting peace and ceasefire, and stands ready to work with Saudi Arabia to make efforts for the early restoration of regional peace. – Xinhua



Students lay flowers for Red Army martyrs at a memorial park in Quanzhou County, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, yesterday. A solemn ceremony takes place ahead of the Qingming Festival, or Tomb-Sweeping Day, to pay tribute to the fallen. – Xinhua

Wang Yi urges respect for Gulf states' sovereignty, protection of civilians and shipping lanes

BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday that the sovereignty and security of the Gulf states should be respected, and civilians and non-military targets must receive the necessary protection.

The safety of shipping lanes, as well as energy and infrastructure facilities, should also be safeguarded, said Wang during a phone conversation with German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl over the current situation in the Middle East.

The current situation in Iran is severe and complex, and has a serious impact on global economic, energy and food security, Wadepuhl said, noting that ending the conflict as soon as possible is in the common interests of the international community.

Germany supports the United Nations in playing its due role and attaches importance to the five-point initiative for restoring peace and stability in the Gulf and Middle East region that was put forward by China and Pakistan, said the minister, adding that

his country is ready to continue to maintain communication and cooperation with China.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, elaborated on China's principled position, saying that the military strikes launched by the United States and Israel against Iran were not authorized by the UN Security Council and clearly violated international law.

As responsible major countries, China and Germany should uphold an objective and impartial stance, play a constructive role, and promote the quick calming of the war and the restoration of regional peace and stability, Wang said.

During the phone conversation, the two sides also exchanged views on bilateral relations and agreed to implement the outcomes of German Chancellor Friedrich Merz's visit to China, enhance strategic communication, increase strategic mutual trust, and promote greater development of the all-round strategic partnership between China and Germany. – Xinhua

Japan axe coach Nielsen 12 days after winning Women's Asian Cup

TOKYO – Japan abruptly axed Nils Nielsen as coach yesterday just 12 days after taking them to Women's Asian Cup glory, with football chiefs accusing him of being “lax” and “lacking passion”.

Greenlander Nielsen led a rampant Japan to their third Asian title in four tournaments, beating hosts Australia 1-0 in the final in Sydney on March 21.

The 54-year-old had been in the job since December 2024 and was the first foreign-born coach of the Japan women's team.

The Japan Football Association (JFA) said Nielsen's contract expired after the Asian Cup and the board of directors had decided not to offer him a new one.

“Thinking about winning major

international tournaments and weighing up various factors, we came to this conclusion,” said JFA president Tsuneyasu Miyamoto.

Japan won plaudits for their performances at the Asian Cup, where they scored 29 goals and conceded just one.

Nielsen described his team as “inspirational” and said he was “very lucky to be working with players that are that good”.

There was no indication at the time that he would soon depart.

Women's national team director Norio Sasaki said Japan could not win next year's World Cup in Brazil if Nielsen remained in charge.

“His coaching was a little too lax, a little too soft. A more rigorous approach and rigorous training is

necessary,” said Sasaki, who coached Japan to the World Cup crown in 2011.

Sasaki said Nielsen had “a gentle character” and was not tough enough to win major global titles.

“From speaking to him about what he could do to take the team to the next level, there was a sense that he lacked passion,” he said.

Japan are scheduled to play three away friendlies against the United States in April.

Michihisa Kano will take over as interim coach for the tour.

Sasaki said that the next full-time coach would likely be Japanese.

Nielsen previously coached Denmark and Switzerland's women's teams and served as technical director of Manchester City's women's side. – AFP

Indonesia issues fresh summons for Google, Meta over teen social media ban

JAKARTA – Indonesia issued a second round of summons letters yesterday to Google and Meta for allegedly flouting a days-old ban on social media access for under-16s.

The Communication and Digital Ministry said it had “issued a second summons letter to Google (YouTube) and Meta (Facebook, Instagram, Threads) after both parties failed to comply” and warned of “sanctions”.

App-addicted Indonesia began enforcing a social media ban for users under the age of 16 last Saturday, citing threats from online pornography, cyberbullying and internet addiction.

The ministry said yesterday Google and Meta had asked for a postponement and had failed to comply with a first summons issued earlier in the week for alleged non-compliance.

“Summonses can be issued up to a maximum of three times before sanctions are imposed,” the ministry statement said.

It added that “compliance with child protection regulations is not merely an administrative obligation, but a responsibility that has a direct impact on children's safety in the digital space”.

Concerns have grown globally over the impact of social media on children's well-being, with Australia becoming the first in the world to require sites to remove accounts held by under-16s.

“Every delay prolongs the risks faced by children in the digital space. Therefore, we demand concrete and timely compliance from all platforms, including global platforms,” said the ministry's Director General for Digital Space

Supervision, Alexander Sabar.

If not, “enforcement mechanisms will proceed”, he added without providing further details.

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

Meta said it had requested an extension that was approved by the government, the company's head of public policy in Indonesia and the Philippines Berni Moestafa said in a statement yesterday.

Berni added that Meta will meet with the ministry next week and that it is “committed to protecting teens on our platforms and will share more information once it is confirmed”.

Google did not immediately respond to AFP's requests for comment. – AFP

Manila says Iran to allow Philippine oil shipments through Strait of Hormuz

MANILA – The Philippines said yesterday that Iran has pledged to allow safe passage for shipments of oil to the import-dependent archipelago through the Strait of Hormuz.

President Ferdinand Marcos last week declared a state of national energy emergency, saying “nothing was off the table” as the country of 116 million tries to navigate a global fuel crisis driven by the Middle East war.

Fuel prices have 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.

Yesterday, the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs said a “productive phone conversation” between Foreign Secretary Theresa Lazaro and her Iranian counterpart had opened the door to crucial oil shipments.

“The Iranian Foreign Minister assured the Secretary that Iran will

allow the safe, unhindered, and expeditious passage through the Strait of Hormuz of Philippine-flagged vessels, energy sources, and all Filipino seafarers,” the foreign affairs department said in a statement.

The Philippines imports the majority of its energy requirements from the Middle East with the move ensuring “the steady delivery of critical oil and fertilizer supplies to the Philippines” the ministry added.

Lazaro said in a post to X the call had reached a “positive understanding on the safety of our seafarers and the security of our energy supply”.

A day earlier, Lazaro met with Iran's ambassador in Manila to seek the formal designation of the Philippines as a “non-hostile country”.

US President Donald Trump said yesterday that the United States was “very close” to achieving its objectives while simultaneously threatening to

bomb Iran “back to the Stone Ages” over the next two to three weeks.

In a report to the Philippine stock exchange this week, 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 war.

Its purchase of around 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.

The Philippines' announcement of an accord with Iran comes just days after neighbouring Malaysia said its tankers would be permitted to pass through the Strait of Hormuz without paying any toll to Tehran. – AFP



A woman dressed in an anime outfit hands out flyers to people passing in a busy shopping area in Toshima City, Tokyo yesterday. – AFP

Nepal charges 32 over fake helicopter rescue scam

Kathmandu, Nepal

KATHMANDU – Nepal has charged 32 people over a multi-million-dollar insurance scam involving fake helicopter rescues of trekkers, police said yesterday, a long-running racket that has cast a shadow over the country's vital tourism industry.

The Himalayan nation attracts thousands of trekkers each year, many walking remote high-altitude trails where emergency airlifts are common and often costly.

But investigators say some operators have for years orchestrated fraudulent evacuations to cash in on insurance payouts.

Police say they uncovered cases in which multiple insurance claims were filed for a single rescue, chartered flights were falsely billed as emergency evacuations and private hospitals issued inflated or fabricated medical invoices.

“Court proceedings are underway. Charges have been filed against 32 people. So far 10 people have been arrested,” Manoj Kumar KC, chief of Nepal's Central Investigation Bureau (CIB), told AFP.

The companies involved allegedly defrauded insurers of at least US\$19.69 million, with cuts distributed at different levels, the police had said in January, when the first arrests were made.

Those named in the chargesheet, seen by AFP, include people in trekking agencies, helicopter firms and hospitals allegedly linked to the racket.

Investigators said guides sometimes sickened travellers – including by mixing baking soda into their food or serving contaminated meals – to justify helicopter evacuations.

Trekkers were also pressured into airlifts even for minor illnesses, according to the chargesheet.

Six suspects were first detained in January.

The arrests came after nearly three months of inquiries by the CIB that they said uncovered a trail of forged documents and manipulated records.

A 2018 government probe identified 15 companies involved in similar scams, but no action was taken, allowing them to persist despite new guidelines introduced after warnings from insurers. – AFP



Police officers look at a building of the North Sumatra's National Sports Committee of Indonesia (KONI) damaged following a severe 7.4-magnitude offshore quake in Manado, North Sulawesi yesterday.

A major 7.4-magnitude quake struck off the coast of eastern Indonesia yesterday, killing one person, damaging buildings and sending people running into the streets in panic.

The early-morning tremor in the Molucca Sea between the Sulawesi and Maluku island groups triggered waves up to 75 centimetres high in places and prompted a tsunami warning that was subsequently lifted. – AFP



A view of a snow-covered area in Ghazni province, Afghanistan yesterday. — AFP

Pakistan says onus on Afghanistan to end hostilities

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan said yesterday that the burden of ending its cross-border conflict lay with Afghanistan, as the two sides held preliminary talks to try to end hostilities.

The neighbours and one-time allies have been locked in an escalating conflict over claims from Islamabad that Afghanistan is harbouring militants responsible for cross-border attacks, which the Taliban government denies.

Negotiations in Urumqi, in northwest China, were announced Wednesday by Pakistan, after Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar travelled to Beijing for talks with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi.

Pakistan foreign ministry spokesman Tahir Hussain Andrabi told reporters in the capital that the government hoped for a “durable solution”.

“Our participation (in talks) is a reiteration of our core concerns,” he said.

“The burden of real process, however, lies with Afghanistan, which must demonstrate visible and verifiable actions against terrorist groups using (its) soil against Pakistan.”

Following China’s request for talks, the Taliban government said it had sent a “mid-level delegation” to Urumqi.

The Afghan side “intends to hold comprehensive and responsible talks with the other side on good neighbourliness, strengthening trade relations, and effective

management of security issues”, foreign ministry spokesman Abdul Qahar Balkhi said.

Pakistan described the negotiations as “working level talks”.

“Our delegation has not returned yet,” Islamabad’s foreign ministry spokesman said.

Beijing deployed a special envoy to try to broker a deal last month, but the diplomatic effort was followed by Pakistani strikes on a Kabul rehab centre that prompted international condemnation.

More than 400 people were killed in the attack, according to Afghan officials, which Islamabad said targeted military installations.

The two sides then announced a pause in fighting to mark the end of Ramadan, at the request of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey.

But sporadic attacks have been reported in border areas since the temporary truce ended.

Pakistani shelling killed two civilians and wounded 10 others on Wednesday, a provincial official said.

Two of those wounded were in critical condition, Najib Hanif, Kunar province information chief, told AFP.

While addressing hostilities with its neighbour, Pakistan has also been engaged in a flurry of diplomacy to try to bring Washington and Tehran to the table and end their war.

China has backed Pakistan’s efforts, aligning itself with the aims of Gulf countries affected by the spread of the conflict in the region.

— AFP

What Nepal’s inquiry found about the deadly 2025 protest crackdown

KATHMANDU — Nepal’s inquiry commission into the deadly crackdown on anti-corruption protests in September 2025 that toppled the government has recommended prosecuting multiple top figures, including former prime minister KP Sharma Oli.

Oli and his ex-home minister Ramesh Lekhak have been detained since a new government took power in March. Neither has been charged, and both deny responsibility for the violence.

The three-member commission, headed by a former Supreme Court judge, interviewed more than 200 people and produced report exceeding 900 pages, a leaked copy of which has been seen by AFP.

The unrest initially erupted over a brief social media ban but quickly broadened into nationwide protests driven by longstanding fury over economic hardship.

Parliament and government offices were set ablaze, leading to the collapse of Oli’s government.

Here are some of its key findings of the report:

Who was killed?

At least 76 people were killed and more than 2,500 wounded during the two days of violence, the report said.

That included at least 19 people killed on the first day, 20 the next day, and 36 who died later of their injuries.

The vast majority were shot dead - 51 of the victims had bullet wounds. Autopsy reports detailed that many were shot in the head or chest.

Three police officers were beaten to death, while nine people were burned alive when they were trapped in buildings set ablaze.

What happened on September 8?

Young protesters marched on parliament.

“While there is compelling evidence that the demonstrators

were violent, there is no way to say with certainty that their actions posed an imminent threat to the police,” the report read.

The report said it had “not established that there was an order to shoot” from top officials, including Oli.

“It was the understanding of the then-police chief and some officers that the decision to fire is made by the field commander,” it read.

“The use of force by security forces was not targeted but indiscriminate,” it said, adding that gunfire continued for about four hours.

It said “no effort was made to stop or control the firing and, due to their negligent conduct, even minors lost their lives”.

What happened on September 9?

Crowds gathered the next day to protest the previous day’s killings, but the report said people with “criminal tendencies also joined” the unrest, without identifying them.

Attackers then simultaneously targeted police officers, government buildings and properties linked to politicians.

“The pattern of the attack was the same in almost all the places,” it noted, a modus operandi that included first disabling security cameras, stopping water supplies and damaging data server rooms in government buildings.

“After that, they would burn documents, carry out looting, and finally set fire to the buildings by igniting gas cylinders,” it added. “If those were not available, they would pour petrol into bottles, and throw them inside.”

The rapid spread of fires suggested the possible use of highly flammable substances such as sodium or magnesium, it said, while urging authorities to form a specialised team to identify perpetrators.

What did Oli say?

Oli, 74, has blamed “infiltrators”

for the violence. He has denied issuing an order to open fire.

“The prime minister does not issue orders to the police, the Ministry of Home Affairs is the responsible authority,” Oli said, in a written statement to the commission.

“Therefore, the prime minister is not answerable in this matter.”

Oli resigned on the second day as protesters attacked government buildings and his home.

“If the movement had occurred because of me, then everything should have improved after my resignation - but it did not,” he said, describing the attacks as planned.

Lekhak, in his statement to the commission, said he had told Oli when protests turned violent.

“While clashes were ongoing between protesters and police inside and outside the parliament, it was my position that the federal parliament building must be protected anyhow,” Lekhak told the inquiry.

“However, I did not give any order to use lethal force, that is, to open fire.”

What does the report recommend?

The commission urged criminal investigations and prosecution of several senior officials, including Oli, Lekhak, the former police chief, other top security officials and a senior Kathmandu administrator.

The report said statements given to the commission by Oli and Lekhak suggesting they did not know about the violence were part of a bid to shift responsibility and amounted to “criminal negligence”.

“Even after some people had already died due to gunfire on September 8, neither the then prime minister nor any other officials took initiative to stop the shooting,” it added. “Due to such negligence and careless conduct, further human casualties occurred.” — AFP



A dog takes a dip in the polluted waters of river Ganges at Manikarnika Ghat in Varanasi, India yesterday. — AFP

Bhutan hikes fuel due to Mideast war

THIMPHU — The Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan is feeling the impact of the Mideast war, with the government saying “external conditions beyond our control” have forced a hike in fuel prices.

Carbon-negative Bhutan has aggressively promoted hydropower projects, earning substantial revenue by exporting electricity to energy-hungry neighbour India.

But the landlocked nation of about 800,000 people imports its fuel via India, and shortages of fuel have sparked long queues at filling stations in the capital Thimphu, AFP reporters saw yesterday.

“I don’t know what to say. It’s not like our government is responsible, they are trying their

best despite the war in the Middle East and price hike in India,” said Karma Kalden, 40, a resident of Thimphu. “We are helpless,” she added.

The government issued the latest rise in fuel price late on Wednesday, when it also issued energy saving measures.

“There has been a substantial increase in global fuel prices in recent weeks,” the prime minister’s office said in a statement.

It added that the rise in fuel costs is “driven by external conditions beyond our control”.

Bhutan, squeezed between giants India and China, introduced a government fuel subsidy on March 21 to “cushion the effect on households and the economy”.

The price of petrol at the pump has shot up by more than 60 percent since war began in the Middle East on February 28, even with government subsidies.

It has risen from around 65-95 ngultrum since February, up to the new government subsidised set price on April 1 (US\$0.69-US\$1.04 a litre).

The government has appealed for the public to help as fuel prices surge.

“Given the significant burden on the national exchequer, all public service agencies are directed to put in place measures to reduce fuel consumption, such as walking to work, avoiding non-essential travel and working remotely,” the government added. — AFP

Iran vows 'crushing' attacks on US after Trump threats



Deacons prepare garments ahead of the Maundy Thursday's Washing of the Feet ceremony at the Christ the Saviour Church in the old city of Jerusalem yesterday. Holy sites in Jerusalem's old city have remained closed for security reasons since the outbreak of the Middle East war on February 28, when Israel and the US launched strikes on Iran. — AFP

TEHRAN — Iran yesterday threatened “crushing” attacks on the United States and Israel, firing missiles at Tel Aviv after US President Donald Trump vowed to bomb the Islamic republic “back to the Stone Ages”.

The war, which was started more than a month ago by US-Israeli strikes on Iran, has spread throughout the Middle East and roiled the global economy, impacting hundreds of millions of people worldwide.

In a White House address, Trump said the US was “very close” to achieving its objectives but warned its attacks would intensify if Iran did not reach a negotiated settlement.

“Over the next two to three weeks, we are going to bring them back to the Stone Ages, where they belong,” he said.

Iran’s response was immediate, with Israeli air defences pressed into action. Four people were reportedly lightly injured in the Tel Aviv area. AFP journalists in Jerusalem heard fresh blasts on yesterday evening.

In Tehran, AFP journalists reported a series of loud explosions, sending reverberations across the city. The targets were unclear.

Iranian state TV said that US-Israeli strikes hit a bridge in Karaj, west of Tehran, twice yesterday, with the first strike leaving two civilian casualties and the second coming as emergency teams were deployed.

The country’s two largest steel plants have meanwhile been forced offline by several waves of US and Israeli attacks, the companies said.

Despite the bombardments, families gathered at Tehran’s Melat park, with men smoking water pipes and children running around playgrounds, to mark the 13th day after Nowruz, the Persian New Year, when people traditionally picnic outdoors, AFP journalists said.

A 30-year-old resident told AFP there was an increase in checkpoints throughout the city manned by

Iran’s Revolutionary Guards.

“They gather in the streets in order to show people that they are still in power and nothing is gonna change,” said the man, who requested his name not be used.

In Israel, Jewish Israelis were celebrating Passover, which some were forced to do underground due to Iran’s attacks.

“This is not my first choice,” said a writer who gave his name as Jeffrey, at a meal organised in a Tel Aviv bunker.

‘Much more reasonable

The war continues to disrupt shipping, with British Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper stressing the “urgent need” to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, where one-fifth of the world’s oil usually passes.

Trump has urged oil-importing countries to seize the key waterway, which has been virtually closed since the war began, though French President Emmanuel Macron said yesterday a military operation to liberate the strait was “unrealistic”.

Italy called for a “humanitarian corridor” to be opened through the strait for fertiliser, to head off a food disaster in Africa.

Trump has said talks to end the war could be possible with Iran’s new leadership, which he described as “less radical and much more reasonable” than their predecessors.

Tehran has dismissed Washington’s ceasefire overtures, describing US demands to end the conflict as “maximalist and irrational”.

“Messages have been received through intermediaries, including Pakistan, but there is no direct negotiation with the US,” said Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei, quoted by the ISNA news agency Thursday.

Trump warned that if no agreement with Tehran was struck, Washington had “our eyes on key targets including the country’s electric generating plants”.

The country’s health ministry said the Pasteur Institute of Iran, a century-old medical centre in

Tehran, had been extensively damaged in a strike.

In Lebanon, militant group Hezbollah said its fighters launched drones and rockets at northern Israel on Thursday.

A day earlier, Israel killed a top Hezbollah commander, two sources told AFP, in a Beirut strike that the Lebanese health ministry said killed seven people.

Authorities in Lebanon say Israeli attacks have killed more than 1,300 people in the country since war erupted between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah on March 2.

The conflict has drawn in Gulf countries once seen as a safe haven in a volatile region, with air defences in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) responding to missile and drone attacks on Thursday.

The war has also highlighted the importance of the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran’s Revolutionary Guards have vowed to keep it shut to the country’s “enemies” while Trump has made reopening it a condition for a ceasefire.

Trump’s speech did nothing to reassure markets, as oil prices spiked and stocks tumbled.

The World Bank’s Managing Director Paschal Donohoe told AFP the institution was “extremely concerned” about the war’s impact on inflation, jobs and food security.

The economic fallout is being felt worldwide, with airlines in China saying they will hike fuel surcharges and Malaysian civil servants being asked to work from home.

Iraq’s oil export revenues in March dropped more than 70 percent from February, an Iraqi official said yesterday.

Even the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan is feeling the impact as fuel prices spiked.

AFP reporters in the capital Thimphu saw long queues at petrol stations yesterday amid shortages in the landlocked nation of around 800,000 inhabitants.

“It’s not like our government is responsible, they are trying their best,” said Karma Kalden, 40. — AFP

Body camera video released from Tiger Woods arrest

MIAMI — Authorities in Florida released the body camera video of Tiger Woods being arrested last Thursday following a rollover car crash last week that led to him stepping away from golf to seek treatment.

In the footage released by the Martin County Sheriff’s Office, Woods tells authorities he was looking at his phone when he struck the trailer of another vehicle.

“I looked down at my phone and all of a sudden, boom,” Woods said.

The 50-year-old winner of 15 major titles and a PGA Tour record-tying 82 events is shown taking a sobriety test and being handcuffed after that.

“At this time, I do believe your normal faculties are impaired,” a deputy told Woods. “And you’re under an unknown substance, so at this time you are under arrest for DUI.”

Police found two hydrocodone painkiller pills on Woods when he was arrested.

Woods told deputies he had taken “a few” prescription medications earlier in the day and told authorities he had undergone seven back operations and more than 20 surgeries on his right leg, according to the arrest report.

Woods has pleaded not guilty to driving under the influence. He was

also charged with refusing to take a urinalysis test.

Woods, who had been hoping to play in next week’s Masters, said he planned to step away from golf and was granted permission to leave the United States in order to undergo treatment.

“I know and understand the seriousness of the situation I find myself in,” Woods said in a statement.

“I am stepping away for a period of time to seek treatment to focus on my health. This is necessary in order for me to prioritise my well-being and work toward lasting recovery.

“I’m committed to taking the time needed to return in a healthier, stronger and more focused place, both personally and professionally.”

The PGA of America has announced Woods will not serve as captain of the 2027 US Ryder Cup team.

The Masters, PGA of America and PGA Tour all issued statements supporting Woods and his decision to seek treatment.

Woods suffered severe injuries in a 2021 car crash in California but returned to competition at the 2022 Masters and finished 47th despite struggling to walk 72 holes at Augusta National.

He has not competed in a PGA Tour-level event since missing the cut at the 2024 British Open. — AFP

UK funeral director admits dozens of botched cremations

LONDON — A British funeral director yesterday pleaded guilty to 30 counts of preventing a lawful burial, by failing to cremate bodies and giving grieving families the wrong ashes.

Local police found 35 bodies and 100 sets of ashes when they raided the Legacy Independent Funeral Directors in the city of Hull in March 2024.

They determined that there should only have been four bodies there “with others being identified as having been there much longer than necessary”.

Humberside Police said in a statement it had been “an incredibly heartbreaking and complex sixteen-month investigation” following “concern for the care of the deceased”.

Robert Bush, 48, admitted Thursday to 30 charges of preventing a lawful and decent burial, meaning he has now pleaded guilty to a total of 67 allegations following an earlier plea hearing.

He was bailed until a sentencing hearing due on July 27, but was told by Judge Nicholas Hilliard a prison term was “inevitable”.

The rampant malpractice relates to funeral plans involving “over 150 individuals”, prosecutor Chris Paxton said, with 240 people set to provide victim impact statements to the court.

Bush previously pleaded guilty to 30 counts of fraud by false representation relating to the same 30 people — telling grieving families that the bodies had been cremated

when they were in fact still at the funeral home.

He also admitted to four fraud charges following pregnancy losses, by presenting ashes to women falsely claiming they were the remains of their unborn babies.

He was also guilty of theft from a dozen charities for failing to send donations collected at funerals.

‘Monster’

“The distress and devastation that this has caused for those families is simply unimaginable,” said Detective Superintendent Alan Curtis.

Karen Dry, whose parents’ funerals were handled by Bush, said the actions were “heartbreaking”, calling the funeral director a “monster”.

“I’ve had people ringing me saying, ‘I had a tattoo done for my grandma, from her ashes’, and it turns out that the ashes that she’s now got tattooed are not her grandma’s,” Dry told the Press Association news agency.

“Thirty-one families believed that their loved one had been cremated, when in fact they remained on site within the Legacy premises,” Curtis said.

“Other families ... were left waiting for ashes that have never been provided, or were deceived by Bush and given ashes that we now know were not their loved ones.”

“These charges represent some of the most serious breaches of trust possible in the funeral industry,” said Laura Tams from the Crown Prosecution Service. — AFP

Artemis astronauts await green light for lunar orbit

Charlotte Causit and Chris Lefkow

WASHINGTON – The four Artemis astronauts circling Earth were awaiting the green light from NASA yesterday to head for the Moon and carry out the first crewed lunar flyby in more than 50 years.

The enormous orange-and-white Space Launch System (SLS) rocket blasted off flawlessly from Kennedy Space Center in Florida on Wednesday for the long-anticipated journey around the Moon.

The astronauts – Americans Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover and Christina Koch and Canadian Jeremy Hansen – spent their first hours in space performing checks and troubleshooting minor problems on their Orion capsule – including a communications issue and a malfunctioning toilet.

Before getting a few hours of sleep, they ignited the spacecraft's main engine to place it in a high Earth orbit, the US space agency said.

NASA's mission management team was slated to meet later yesterday (local time) to perform an assessment of the spacecraft's performance and decide whether to give the go-ahead for the astronauts to begin their three-day voyage toward the Moon.

Assuming everything checks out, the translunar injection (TLI) burn that will send the astronauts on their way is scheduled for 25 minutes after the decision by the mission management team.

Orion is to loop around the Moon as part of the 10-day Artemis 2 mission aimed at paving the way for a Moon landing in 2028.

'Brave astronauts'

US President Donald Trump praised "our



The Artemis II crewed lunar mission lifts off from Pad 39B at Kennedy Space Centre in Cape Canaveral, Florida, on Wednesday. Four astronauts blasted off aboard a massive NASA rocket on Wednesday on a long-anticipated journey around the Moon, the first crewed lunar flyby in more than 50 years. – AFP

brave astronauts" at the top of his televised address on Wednesday evening on the war against Iran, calling the launch "quite something."

Before their rest period, the astronauts performed various checks to ensure the reliability and safety of a spacecraft that had never carried humans before.

NASA said they carried out "proximity operations," which tested how the Orion capsule can move relative to another spacecraft, and manoeuvres that mimic what

would be needed to dock with a lunar lander.

Among the issues they identified was a "controller issue with the toilet when they spun it up," said Amit Kshatriya, NASA's associate administrator.

NASA head Jared Isaacman said a communications problem had been resolved and the astronauts were "in great spirits."

"NASA is back in the business of sending people to the Moon," he said.

The mission marks a series of historic accomplishments: sending the first person

of colour, the first woman and the first non-American on a lunar mission.

If all proceeds smoothly, the astronauts will set a record by venturing farther from Earth than any human before.

It is also the inaugural crewed flight of SLS, NASA's new lunar rocket.

SLS is designed to allow the United States to repeatedly return to the Moon with the goal of establishing a permanent base that will offer a platform for further exploration.

It was meant to take off as early as February after years of delays and massive cost overruns.

But repeated setbacks stalled it and even necessitated rolling the rocket back to its hangar for repairs.

Compete with China

The current era of American lunar investment has frequently been portrayed as an effort to compete with China, which aims to land humans on the Moon by 2030.

During a post-launch briefing, Isaacman said competition was "a great way to mobilise the resources of a nation."

"Competition can be a good thing," he said. "And we certainly have competition now."

The Artemis program has come under pressure from Trump, who has pushed its pace with the hope that boots will hit the lunar surface before his second term ends in early 2029.

But the projected date of 2028 for a landing has raised eyebrows among some experts, in part because Washington is relying heavily on the private sector's technological headway.

– AFP

Pope Leo celebrates first Easter amid Middle East war

Clément Melki

VATICAN CITY – Pope Leo XIV is celebrating Easter for the first time as pontiff a year after his predecessor's death, as concerns grow among Christians over the Middle East war.

Holy Week began with a clash in the Holy Land as the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Italian Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, was denied entry to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem by Israeli authorities in what he called a first "in centuries".

On Tuesday, Leo said he hoped that US President Donald Trump was "looking for an off-ramp" to end the war, as he called for an end to the violence.

"We are in Holy Week, Easter is coming, and it should be the holiest, most sacred time of the whole year," but the world was witnessing "so much suffering, so many deaths, even of innocent children", Leo told journalists.

"We continually appeal for peace, but unfortunately many people want to promote hatred, violence, and war."

Against this tense backdrop, Rome is preparing to welcome thousands of worshippers for the Easter celebrations, the most important feast in the Christian calendar, which commemorates the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Among Catholics, the memory of the late pope Francis will loom large.

Last year, Holy Week was the setting for the Argentine pontiff's final public appearances, during which he appeared frail and short of breath.

He died on Easter Monday, following a final tour around St Peter's Square in his popemobile to greet the crowd. Leo was chosen as his successor on May 8.

Eagerly anticipated this year will be the

traditional "Urbi et Orbi" ("To the City and the World") blessing, which Leo will deliver on Sunday at noon from St Peter's Basilica – usually a message as political as it is spiritual.

The 70-year-old US-born pope has so far shown diplomatic caution and has not directly condemned his home country's role in the turbulent Middle East region.

This past Sunday, during the Palm Sunday Mass marking the beginning of Holy Week, he expressed regret over "Christians of the Middle East who suffer the consequences of a terrible conflict and in many cases cannot fully live the rites of these holy days".

Sombre Easter in Mideast

Easter celebrations are shaping up to be sombre for Christians in the Middle East. In southern Lebanon, where Israel is stepping up its bombardment of the Iran-backed Hezbollah movement, Christian villages are on the front lines.

Many are "afraid to leave and not be able to return to their homes, given Israel's intention to occupy this area," said Hugues de Woillemont, general director of L'Oeuvre d'Orient ("The Work of the Orient"), an association that helps Eastern Christians.

"If Christians were to disappear in large numbers, it would also mean the loss of educational and healthcare services in many of these countries – in Lebanon, but also in Syria and elsewhere," he told AFP.

In Rome, the Easter celebrations began yesterday, Maundy Thursday, with Mass in the morning at St Peter's Basilica and another in the afternoon at the Basilica of St John Lateran, one of the four major basilicas in the Italian capital.

On this occasion, Leo returned to tradition by performing the traditional "washing of the feet" of 12 Roman priests.



Pope Leo XIV performs the "Washing of the Feet" during the Mass of the Lord's Supper at the St. John Lateran archbasilica in Rome yesterday. – AFP

Pope Francis had performed this ceremony, which re-enacts Jesus's gesture toward his apostles, among marginalised people, whether prisoners, migrants or the homeless.

Carrying the cross

Today, Good Friday, the pope will preside over the liturgical celebration of the Passion, then attend the traditional Way of the Cross at the Colosseum in Rome, a ceremony that customarily draws thousands of people each year to the illuminated amphitheatre.

The pope will personally carry the cross through all 14 stations retracing Christ's journey, from his condemnation to his

crucifixion and to his burial, according to Vatican sources.

The carrying of the cross was performed by John Paul II during the first part of his long pontificate, which lasted from 1978 to 2005, and then by Benedict XVI on a more limited basis.

But Francis had not resumed this tradition, largely for health reasons.

Tomorrow, Holy Saturday, the Easter Vigil will be held in the atrium of St Peter's Basilica.

Leo's first Easter as pope comes just ahead of his first major international tour, in which he will visit Algeria, Cameroon, Angola and Equatorial Guinea from April 13 to 23.

– AFP

Air France-KLM, Lufthansa bid for stake in TAP Air Portugal

PARIS – Air France-KLM and Lufthansa both said yesterday they had submitted offers to take a minority stake in TAP Air Portugal, which is in the process of being privatised by the Portuguese government.

“The non-binding offer was

submitted to Parpublica,” Franco-Dutch company Air France-KLM said in a statement, referring to the Portuguese agency that manages state holdings.

A spokesman for German carrier Lufthansa meanwhile said it had “submitted a non-binding bid for TAP Air

Portugal”, without giving further details.

The Portuguese government announced last September it was seeking a major international airline to buy most of the 49.9 percent stake that it plans to privatise.

TAP was renationalised in 2020 to

stem losses from the COVID-19 pandemic and is among the few remaining state-owned carriers in Europe.

International airlines are circling around TAP primarily because of its routes to Brazil and Portuguese-speaking Africa.

“Thanks to its ideal geographical position, Lisbon would become the group’s unique southern European hub,” Air France-KLM said in a statement, adding it would offer “extensive connectivity” to the Americas and Africa. – AFP

US slams Spain over woman’s euthanasia

WASHINGTON – The United States on Wednesday urged Spain to investigate the euthanasia of a young woman, the latest criticism by President Donald Trump’s administration against the left-led European country.

Noelia Castillo, 25, who after being sexually assaulted had attempted suicide by throwing herself off a building and was left paralysed, died by choice at a hospital last Thursday after she won a legal battle with her father who wanted her to live.

“It is imperative that authorities investigate this tragic case,” said Riley Barnes, the US assistant secretary of state for human rights.

“Every life is sacred. Noelia was failed in life. We cannot afford to fail her once again,” Barnes wrote on X.

Spain legalised euthanasia in 2021 despite fierce opposition from the Catholic Church, which historically has played a prominent social role in the country.

The US state of Oregon in 1994 voted to become one of the first places in the world to allow assisted suicide for terminally ill

people, with a number of other US states following suit.

But nowhere in the United States permits so-called active euthanasia, where a doctor or specialist puts a person to death.

Noelia’s case drew wide attention and was the first of its kind to reach a Spanish court for consideration.

Under Trump, the United States has broken with precedent by openly criticising European allies over their domestic policies, especially on restrictions against hate speech and on welcoming immigrants.

In a national security strategy released late last year, the Trump administration said it would aim at “cultivating resistance” within Europe against its trajectory.

Trump has had particularly tense relations with Spain’s Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, an outspoken progressive.

Sánchez is the rare European leader to criticize Trump openly for his war with Israel against Iran and has refused to let US jets attack from NATO bases in Spain. – AFP

New frog species carrying eggs on back discovered in Peru

LIMA – Scientists have discovered a new species of miniature marsupial frog in the Peruvian Amazon that carries its young in a natural pouch on its back, a research institute reported yesterday.

The new amphibian species, with the scientific name *Gastrotheca mittaliiti*, measures 2.7 to 3.3 centimetres and was discovered in a mountainous ecosystem in the Amazonas region bordering Ecuador.

The frog is bright green and has small protuberances on its back. The number of specimens in the wild is not known.

Its pouch enables the marsupial frog to nurture its young rather than, as other frogs, rely on aquatic environments

for egg development.

The study says the amphibian is at “high risk” because its habitat is suffering the effects of climate change and the impact of fires started by farmers clearing the region.

“This is further evidence of the enormous natural wealth we possess... If we continue our research, there are many species still waiting to be discovered,” Manuel Oliva, director of the Ceja de Selva Research Institute for Sustainable Development, part of the Toribio Rodriguez de Mendoza National University, told AFP.

The discovery was published in the New Zealand scientific journal *Zootaxa* and undertaken in collaboration



This handout photograph taken and released by the Ceja de Selva (“Eyebrow of the Jungle”) Institute for Sustainable Development Research shows a *Gastrotheca mittaliiti*, a new species of frog discovered in the Peruvian Amazon. The miniature marsupial frog in the Peruvian Amazon carries its young in a natural pouch on its back, a research institute reported on Wednesday.

with research departments at Florida International University and the University of Seville in Spain. – AFP



Concurso de Vídeos de Curta Duração ‘A Minha História Sobre a Medicina Tradicional Chinesa’

Para promover ainda mais o intercâmbio cultural entre a China e Portugal na área da Medicina Tradicional Chinesa (MTC) e aumentar o conhecimento e a identificação do público português com a MTC, a Embaixada da China em Portugal irá organizar um concurso de vídeos de curta duração sobre MTC dirigido ao público residente em Portugal e em Macau. Esta atividade é coorganizada pela Universidade de Ciência e Tecnologia de Macau e pelo Centro Sino-Português de Medicina Chinesa. Os detalhes relevantes são os seguintes:

I. Tema do Vídeo

“A Minha História Sobre a Medicina Tradicional Chinesa”

II. Participantes

Pessoas que residem habitualmente em Portugal ou em Macau.

III. Requisitos de Participação

1. Período de submissão: De 1 de abril de 2026 a 31 de maio de 2026.

2. Conteúdo: Relatar histórias sobre a cultura da MTC e como esta se integra na vida quotidiana dos participantes, dos seus familiares ou amigos. O conteúdo deve ser positivo, refletir os princípios de “preservar a essência, respeitar a ciência e promover a saúde”, e estar em conformidade com

as leis e regulamentos, bem como com os bons costumes e a ordem pública, tanto da China como de Portugal.

3. Formato: Duração de aproximadamente 3 minutos, não excedendo 5 minutos; resolução mínima de 720P.

4. Idioma: A narração pode ser em chinês, português ou inglês, mas deve ser legendada (obras em chinês ou inglês devem ter legendas em português; obras em português devem ter legendas em inglês).

5. Uso de materiais: As músicas, imagens, vídeos e outros materiais utilizados na obra devem ter os respetivos direitos de utilização legalmente adquiridos pelo participante, que concorda em autorizar a organização a reproduzir e partilhar a obra. Todas as responsabilidades legais e consequências relacionadas com direitos de autor serão assumidas pelo participante, ficando a entidade organizadora isenta de qualquer responsabilidade. O participante mantém os direitos de autor da obra, concordando que a organização a utilize gratuitamente para fins de exibição, divulgação, edição e promoção.

6. A obra deve ser original. É estritamente proibido o plágio ou a cópia, bem como qualquer violação dos direitos legais de terceiros. É permitido o uso de tecnologias de IA como apoio à criação, desde que a obra seja essencialmente original, sendo proibido utilizar IA para plagiar ou reproduzir obras de terceiros.

7. A entidade organizadora reserva-se o direito de interpretar e rever o regulamento do concurso, sem necessidade de aviso prévio.

8. A submissão da obra pelo participante será considerada como aceitação de todos os termos acima. O participante autoriza voluntariamente a entidade organizadora a utilizar a sua obra para fins não comerciais, incluindo promoção do concurso, exibição e intercâmbio académico. A organização respeitará o direito de atribuição do autor e não fará uso comercial da obra. Os direitos de autor permanecem com o autor. O participante deve garantir que não existem litígios sobre direitos relacionados com a obra; caso contrário, assumirá integralmente as responsabilidades correspondentes.

IV. Como Submeter

Os participantes devem publicar as suas obras primeiro nas plataformas de redes sociais (YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, X, etc.) e, em seguida, preencher o formulário de inscrição através do seguinte link para participar no concurso:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdntsMutm1M9uoQMULetD7wzDBxWbPey4Pv1JxP_v7z8dkSqQ/viewform?usp=dialog

As obras selecionadas serão exibidas no canal temático “A Minha História Sobre a Medicina Tradicional Chinesa” do YouTube, entre outros meios de comunicação.

V. Critérios de Seleção

A classificação final será baseada nos seguintes critérios:

- Impacto nas Redes Sociais (peso de 40%): visualizações, gostos, partilhas e qualidade dos comentários desde a publicação do vídeo até 15 de junho.
- Pontuação do Júri (peso de 60%): atribuída por júri designado.

Com base na pontuação total, serão decididos os prémios.

VI. Prémios

Serão atribuídos os seguintes prémios:

- 1.º Prémio (2 vencedores): 800 € e um certificado
- 2.º Prémio (4 vencedores): 400 € e um certificado
- 3.º Prémio (8 vencedores): 200 € e um certificado
- Menções Honrosas (número a determinar): um certificado

Os resultados do concurso serão anunciados no final de junho. A cerimónia de entrega de prémios terá lugar em Lisboa, sendo a data e o local anunciados posteriormente.

VII. Contactos

Para quaisquer esclarecimentos, os interessados podem contactar o seguinte endereço de e-mail: tcstory@outlook.com

Convidamos todos a participar ativamente e a partilhar as vossas histórias sobre a Medicina Tradicional Chinesa através de vídeo!



Final ticket sales phase begins for FIFA World Cup



WASHINGTON – The fourth and final phase of ticket sales for the 2026 World Cup in North America began on Wednesday, FIFA announced.

The phase for the June 11–July 19 event in the United States, Mexico and Canada involves more than three million tickets.

This “last-minute” sales phase opened at 1500 GMT [11 p.m. Macau time] on the official website, [FIFA.com/tickets](https://www.fifa.com/tickets), the global governing body stated in a press release.

Tickets are being sold on a “first-come, first-served” basis and will remain available until the end of the competition on July 19, it added.

Tickets will be released for sale on a rolling basis - including, on occasion, for matches taking place on the very same day - according to FIFA.

At the scheduled time, prospective buyers were directed to a “waiting” page to “queue” while awaiting access to the site, a wait that could last several hours.

“A countdown will appear before you can enter the ticket sales phase. Once the countdown is over, an ‘Enter’ button will be available for 5 minutes. Click it to access,” instructions specify.

In total, nearly seven million tickets are being offered for the competition, taking into account the capacities of the 16 stadiums hosting the global tournament.

More than three million of these tickets have already been sold during the first three sales phases - including over one million during the random selection draw phase alone (held in January and February), which received 500 million requests, according to FIFA.

The global governing body is likely to break the all-time record of 3.5 million tickets sold for a World Cup - a mark set during the 1994 edition.

This summer, the tournament will feature 48 teams and 104 matches, 78 of which will take place on American soil.

The issue of ticketing has sparked controversy, with FIFA facing accusations of offering tickets at exorbitant prices, in disregard of promises made when the tournament was awarded to the three host nations.

On March 24, Football Supporters Europe (FSE) - an organisation representing European fans - and Euroconsumers - a group representing consumers across the continent - announced they had filed a complaint against FIFA with the European Commission.

They alleged abuse of a dominant market position and seek to compel the organisation to abandon its “opaque and unfair” ticket purchasing procedures. FIFA has defended its ticket pricing, which, according to president Gianni Infantino, is driven by “crazy” demand.

However, in December, the governing body did introduce a US\$60 ticket category reserved exclusively for official supporters’ clubs; yet, according to the FSE, this quota was virtually sold out before sales even opened to the general public.

Additionally, FIFA was set to reopen its official ticket resale and exchange platform yesterday. This platform has also come under fire due to the equally prohibitive prices at which tickets are listed for resale.

The global governing body explained that it does not intervene in this “fan-to-fan market,” where the reseller “determines the listed price of each ticket” in Canada and the United States.

The legal framework differs in Mexico, however, where reselling a ticket for more than its original purchase price is prohibited.

– AFP

FA Cup quarters on return from international break



LONDON – The Premier League will have to wait to resume after the international break, with the four FA Cup quarterfinals taking center stage in England this weekend.

The timing of the quarterfinals appears unusual, as it means some Premier League sides will not play between March 22 and April 10 or 11, a three-week break just as the season enters its decisive stage.

However, Chelsea coach Liam Rosenior should welcome a return to action as his side faces Port Vale for a place in the semifinals.

Premier League defeats to Newcastle United and Everton, along with an 8-2 Champions League exit to Paris Saint-Germain before the break, have increased the pressure on Rosenior, whose side have not won since a 4-2 victory after extra time against second-division Wrexham in the fifth round.

Port Vale visit Stamford Bridge bottom of League One, the third

division, and although they produced the shock of the previous round with a 1-0 home win over Sunderland, Chelsea should be expected to win comfortably. In the current circumstances, however, anything other than a convincing victory would bring further pressure on the coach.

Manchester City at home to Liverpool is the standout tie of the round, with Pep Guardiola’s side chasing a cup double after their triumph in the Carabao Cup. With Manchester City out of Europe and nine points behind Arsenal in the Premier League, Guardiola has every reason to field his strongest side in the FA Cup as he looks to end the season with two trophies.

Liverpool travel to Paris in the Champions League next Wednesday, leaving coach Arne Slot with a dilemma. Winning the FA Cup would salvage something from a disappointing season, but he will also need his best players fresh to face the European champions.

The good news for Slot is that Hugo Ekitike, Mohamed Salah and Alisson Becker should all be available, while Alexander Isak is back in training after breaking his leg in December, although it is too early for him to return to action.

Plenty of attention will be paid to Arsenal’s starting lineup away to second-division Southampton after a number of the club’s players, including Declan Rice, Bukayo Saka, Leandro Trossard, Martin Zubimendi and Noni Madueke, left their national teams with physical issues in recent days.

Some players such as Eberechi Eze will not be fit, but at least Martin Odegaard should be available to ease coach Mikel Arteta’s concerns.

The fourth quarterfinal is between Premier League strugglers West Ham and Leeds United in what should be an even contest between two sides that would welcome FA Cup success but have top-flight survival as their main priority this season.

– Xinhua



Iraq's players celebrate after winning the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers final playoff against Bolivia at the BBVA Stadium in Guadalupe, Nuevo Leon state, Mexico, on Tuesday.

Music, fireworks and the occasional round of gunfire erupted across Iraq's capital Baghdad early Wednesday after the national team qualified for the World Cup for the first time in decades.

The “Lions of Mesopotamia” secured the country's first World Cup appearance since the 1986 competition in Mexico with a 2-1 win over Bolivia on Tuesday night.

– AFP

Women's Asian Cup finalists accuse governing body over equal money



SYDNEY – Women's Asian Cup finalists Japan and Australia renewed calls yesterday for equal prize money with the men's tournament in a direct challenge to the Asian Football Confederation and accused the governing body of “ignoring” previous requests.

Japan beat hosts Australia 1-0 in the final in Sydney on March 21 in front of more than 74,000 fans, the biggest crowd in the competition's history.

It concluded a tournament which made global headlines after seven members of the Iran squad sought asylum after being branded “traitors” at home for refusing to sing the national anthem. Two players remain in Australia.

The prize fund for last month's Women's Asian Cup was widely reported to be US\$1.8 million, the same as in 2022, compared to the US\$14.8 million on offer at the men's equivalent.

In February a report issued by the

global footballers' union FIFPRO said the event could generate up to US\$82.4 million in revenue.

A record 350,000 fans came through the turnstiles during the three weeks of the tournament.

In a joint statement released by FIFPRO yesterday, the Japan and Australia teams said: “Despite the success of this tournament it remains the lowest-paying continental tournament in the world and inequality between the men's and women's game remains.

“Our pre-tournament invitation to the AFC to work together on equal prize money, a guaranteed share to all players, and to co-develop a lasting legacy has so far been ignored.

“Equal prize money would be transformational for all players and football communities across Asia.

“Equal prize money would help to raise standards at all levels of the game across our region.

“Equality benefits players in the short term, but football in the long term.”

The statement said that the tournament “was played against a backdrop of real challenges that the AFC and the players need to work in partnership to address”.

It highlighted the plight of the Iranian team and how India's players were left with kits that did not fit them properly.

South Korea's squad had threatened to boycott the 12-team tournament in the build-up over “poor” treatment by the national federation compared to their male counterparts.

“These challenges can only be tackled together in partnership,” the statement added.

“As we look forward, we expect FIFA to honour its pledge of equal prize money for the 2027 FIFA Women's World Cup and we will continue to fight for equality and respect for women players across our region.”

AFP has contacted the Kuala Lumpur-based AFC for comment.

– AFP



Arsenal's Australian striker Caitlin Foord (centre) is put under pressure by Chelsea's English striker Lauren James (left) and Chelsea's German midfielder Sjoekie Nusken during the UEFA Women's Champions League Quarter Final second-leg between Chelsea and Arsenal at Stamford Bridge in London on Wednesday.

Chelsea boss Sonia Bompastor said poor officiating had cost her side a place in the women's Champions League semi-finals after Arsenal progressed 3-2 on aggregate, despite a 1-0 defeat at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday.

Bompastor was sent off in the final seconds of the match after a hair pull on Alyssa Thompson by Katie McCabe went unpunished.

– AFP

Sun Yingsha survives all-Chinese battle while Wang Manyu sweeps Ito at Macao World Cup

Table tennis

MACAO – World No. 1 Sun Yingsha of China edged compatriot Kuai Man 4-2 in a dramatic all-Chinese clash, while Wang Manyu produced a 4-0 victory over Japan's Mima Ito in the women's singles knockout stage at the 2026 ITTF Men's and Women's World Cup in Macao, yesterday.

Sun, who lost to Kuai in quarterfinals at WTT Champions Chongqing in March, showed her strength here, but only after a fierce six-game battle.

Kuai took the opening game 11-9, but Sun responded emphatically in the second, racing to a 3-0 and then 10-4 lead before leveling the match 11-4.

The third game proved a key momentum swing as Kuai again pulled ahead. Sun led 8-6, but Kuai fought back, saving a game point at 9-10 and edging it 12-10 to move 2-1 up. Under pressure in the fourth, Sun was locked at 4-4, 6-6, 8-8 and 10-10, but she held her nerve to take it 12-10 and square the match again.

In the fifth, Sun pulled away from 3-3 to close out the game 11-6 for a 3-2 lead. The sixth was another rollercoaster. Sun fell behind 2-7, then trailed 4-8 before staging a comeback, leveling at 8-8 and again at 9-9 and 10-10, before finally sealing the victory 13-11 for a 4-2 win.

"It really feels like fate that I played Kuai Man in the final here last year, and this time we met again in the very first match of the knockout stage," Sun said, who beat Kuai in the Macao World Cup final last year and retained her title. "Although I was lucky enough to win in the end, I think Kuai's overall performance today was excellent. In recent years everyone has seen how her overall level and the quality of her play have been improving step by step."



Sun Yingsha hits a return during the women's singles round of 16 match against Kuai Man of China at the ITTF Men's and Women's World Cup 2026 in Macao, yesterday. – Xinhua

Earlier, world No. 2 Wang Manyu of China delivered a commanding 4-0 win over long-time Japanese rival Mima Ito.

Wang made a slow start in the opening game, falling behind 0-5 and 0-6, but gradually settled, narrowing the gap from 1-6 to 6-8 and then overturning an 8-9 deficit to steal it 11-9. She carried that momentum into the second, taking control for an 11-6 win.

The Chinese star tightened her grip in the third, pulling away from 4-2 to 10-5 before closing it out 11-5, and she dominated the fourth 11-3 after surging ahead 5-1 and never allowing Ito back into contention.

"Our preparation time for this match was actually quite tight, but Ito is a very familiar old opponent for me, so in terms of tactics I know her game quite well and we were well prepared," Wang said. "The most important thing today was my performance and execution. Winning the first game from 0-6 down was really crucial."

China's Wang Yidi also advanced with a 4-1 victory over Japan's Miwa

Harimoto. Wang took the first three tight games 11-7, 11-9 and 12-10, lost the fourth 11-9, but closed out the match 11-8 in the fifth.

There was disappointment for China's Qin Yuxuan, who fell 4-1 to Germany's Sabine Winter. Qin took the opening game 11-9, but Winter turned the match around to win the next four 11-5, 11-6, 11-6, 11-8.

In the men's round of 16, Japan's Tomokazu Harimoto edged Germany's Dang Qiu 4-3 in a thriller, prevailing 11-13, 8-11, 12-10, 13-11, 11-9, 8-11, 11-6. Harimoto's compatriot Sora Matsushima defeated South Korea's Jang Woo-jin 4-1 (11-13, 11-6, 11-7, 12-10, 11-8), while Sweden's Truls Moregard swept Germany's Patrick Franziska 4-0 (13-11, 11-5, 11-7, 11-4).

China's star paddler Wang Chuqin will take on Felix Lebrun of France in the round of 16 today while Wen Ruibo will meet Lin Yun-Ju of Chinese Taipei.

The 2026 ITTF Men's and Women's World Cup runs from March 30 to April 5 in Macao.

– Xinhua

Italy's football chief resigns after World Cup disaster

Football

MILAN – The head of Italy's football federation (FIGC) resigned yesterday, falling on his sword after the men's national team failed to qualify for the World Cup for a third consecutive time.

Gabriele Gravina revealed he would step down as the country's top football official following a meeting held at the FIGC's headquarters in Rome yesterday.

His announcement came a day after Sport Minister Andrea Abodi called on him to resign.

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

The shock waves of the latest humiliation for one of the world's most successful football nations forced Gravina, 72, to go back on his initial plans to wait until a FIGC board meeting next week to announce a decision on his future.

The FIGC said in a statement that a vote for a new president would be held on June 22.

Giovanni Malago, the former long-time head of the Italian Olympic Committee who was president of the Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics organisation committee, is reportedly one of the names in the hat.

Before then, head coach Gennaro Gattuso is expected to also step down, while general manager Gianluigi Buffon, the former Italy goalkeeper, announced his resignation yesterday.

Italy's failure to reach the first ever 48-team World Cup - which will feature the likes of Cape Verde and Curacao - led Abodi to release a statement saying: "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."

That came a day after Gravina had hit out at politicians "who have only pushed for resignations", while also admitting Italian football "is in a profound crisis".

– AFP

UEFA threat

Gravina was elected FIGC president in October 2018, becoming the permanent replacement for Carlo Tavecchio, who stepped down following Italy's first World Cup play-off defeat to Sweden the previous year.

The highlight of his reign was Italy's thrilling triumph at Euro 2020, when an Azzurri team under Roberto Mancini, which went unbeaten for 37 matches, beat England at Wembley to be crowned kings of the continent for the second time.

But two World Cup qualification failures and a dismal defence of the European title left Gravina with little choice but to resign as Italy's football woes deepen.

And those do not just relate to diminishing performances by the national team and Serie A clubs - none of whom have won the Champions League since 2010.

Italy are due to co-host Euro 2032 with Turkey but yesterday, UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin hit out at the state of Italy's stadiums, warning the country could be stripped of hosting rights.

"I just hope that the infrastructure (in Italy) will be ready. If that's not the case, the tournament will not be held in Italy," Ceferin said in an interview with the *Gazzetta Dello Sport*.

Italy's football malaise contrasts sharply with its success in other sports.

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, such as tennis star Jannik Sinner, a four-time Grand Slam winner.

Gravina caused anger on Tuesday by referring 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 branches of Italy's armed forces and police.

– AFP

Pacquiao says Mayweather fight 'not an exhibition'

Boxing

MANILA – Manny Pacquiao's planned September fight with Floyd Mayweather will not be an exhibition, the Philippine boxing legend said yesterday, days after his fellow hall of famer said their bout would be strictly entertainment.

Netflix last month announced a long-awaited rematch of the highest-grossing clash in boxing history, with Pacquiao and Mayweather - now both in their late forties - set to clash at the Sphere in Las Vegas on September 19.

But Mayweather this week stunned the boxing world by suggesting the rivals, whose 2015

bout drove 4.6 million pay-per-view buys, would only be entering the squared circle for show this time around.

"It's an exhibition, so we're both winners," Mayweather said in an interview with Vegas Sports Today. "We just want to go out there and entertain the people and put on a good show."

On Friday, Pacquiao begged to differ.

"I want to be very clear that the contract we signed is for a professional boxing match. This is not an exhibition; it is a real fight," he said in a statement sent to AFP.

"I wish to clear up any misinformation regarding my upcoming

bout against Floyd Mayweather. From the beginning, my intention has been to give the fans what they truly want to see. A high-level, competitive sanctioned fight," he said.

He added that Netflix's February announcement of the rematch had "reflected the exact terms of our agreement" and that his team expected the "original terms of the agreement to be honoured".

On Wednesday, Jas Mathur, CEO of Manny Pacquiao Promotions, blasted Mayweather's comments in an interview with ESPN, insisting the fight would take place.

"Floyd Mayweather is officially in breach of his contract," he told the US-based sports outlet. – AFP



Delhi Capitals' Indian cricket player Sameer Rizvi watches the ball after playing a shot during the 2026 Indian Premier League (IPL) T20 match against Lucknow Super Giants at the Ekana Cricket Stadium in Lucknow, India on Wednesday. Delhi Capitals recovered from a top-order collapse as Rizvi hit an unbeaten half-century to help secure a six-wicket win over the Lucknow Super Giants in the IPL on Wednesday. – AFP

Dutch recover stolen gold Romanian helmet

Richard Carter

The Hague – Dutch authorities yesterday showed off a recovered priceless gold 2,500-year-old helmet from Romania that was stolen last year during a brazen heist in the Netherlands.

Flanked by balaclava-clad police officers, a spokesman for Dutch prosecutors unveiled the 5th-century BC golden Helmet of Cotofenesti and two of the three gold bracelets stolen in January 2025.

Dutch police officer Corien Fahner said: “The Cotofenesti helmet and two Dacian gold bracelets have been returned and we are delighted to be able to announce this.”

The search for the third bracelet is ongoing, said Fahner.

The theft had sparked outrage in Romania and prompted a huge police search.

Dutch art detective Arthur Brand had confirmed the find to AFP hours earlier yesterday.

“It’s amazing. It’s the best news we could have got,” said Brand.

A gang of robbers used firework bombs to break into the Drents Museum in the northern Netherlands in January 2025, and smashed display cases inside.

Three men are on trial for the theft but have largely remained silent in court.

Brand said he and police have been working their contacts to persuade the alleged robbers to hand over the helmet in exchange for a more lenient punishment.

“We were pretty sure it had not been melted down because there were only four days between the robbery and the arrests,” said Brand.

“It’s a fantastic job by the Dutch police.”

Museum director Robert van Langh told reporters that there was a tiny bit of damage to the helmet, “very difficult even to see.”

The helmet can be “completely restored to its original state,” said

van Langh, who added that the two bracelets were in “perfect condition.”

Under huge pressure from Romania, Dutch authorities had made multiple attempts to convince the suspects to tell them where the treasures were stashed.

Police offered to halve the sentence of one suspect if he revealed the location of the helmet.

An undercover officer posing as a criminal mastermind reportedly offered another suspect 400,000 euros (US\$420,000) to tell him where the booty was hidden.

Police have also offered a reward of 100,000 euros for information leading to the helmet’s recovery.

‘People are devastated’

The theft and the search for the Dacian artefacts has gripped the Netherlands and regularly makes headline news.

In the aftermath of the theft, then Romanian prime minister



Under police guard, the recovered gold helmet of Cotofenesti and two gold bracelets that were stolen from the Drents Museum are displayed in a glass box in Assen yesterday. – AFP

Marcel Ciolacu voiced outrage that “priceless objects” had been stolen and was considering claiming “unprecedented damages”.

“You have no idea what the impact of this is on the Romanian community,” Romanian cultural journalist Claudia Marcu, who has lived in the Netherlands since 2003, told public broadcaster NOS.

“When I heard about the theft I thought: for the Dutch this would be like [Rembrandt’s] ‘The Night Watch’ being stolen. People are devastated.”

The Dutch government had set aside 5.7 million euros for a likely payout following the brazen theft.

The pieces were on loan from

a Bucharest museum, whose head was promptly sacked for lending the works out in the first place.

Dutch museums and galleries have been targeted by thieves in the past – including in November when works by artist Andy Warhol were taken, as well as a Van Gogh stolen from a museum in 2020.

The heists have prompted calls for better security to protect valuable artworks.

Romanian Foreign Minister Oana Toiu described the find as “extraordinary news.”

“It is so important not to give up when something is so valuable to multiple generations,” said the minister. – AFP

Seoul to dim digital billboards after complaints

Jihye Shin

SEOUL – Hopes of making downtown Seoul dazzle more than Times Square in New York have hit a setback with new guidelines to dim the digital billboards that light up the South Korean capital after a barrage of complaints.

The number of these sometimes huge electronic screens – often curved and showing waving K-pop stars or leaping dolphins in 3D – has soared, driving buzz on social media.

But not all locals are happy, particularly nighttime motorists bothered by the glare, with thousands of complaints in recent years prompting new guidelines, which took effect on Wednesday, to tone down the imposing installations.

The surge in digital billboards follows the designation of several areas as free advertising zones and a project to transform Seoul’s central Gwanghwamun Square by 2033 into a “media gallery” to surpass Times Square in New York.

One billboard in Gwanghwamun Square is the size of four basketball courts and its 6K ultra-high resolution display is split across two sides of the building, creating a wrap-around effect.

The symbolic heart of the city has four large digital screens, bustling shopping area Myeongdong has three and glitzy Gangnam – synonymous with South Korea’s economic and cultural strength – boasts 17.

The colours “are so vivid that it feels like they are spreading out like waves,” passer-by Kim Hee-soo, 23, an art student, told AFP on Wednesday evening.

“I didn’t realise it before, but the glass façades of the buildings also feel vibrant.”

“Gwanghwamun Square will be reborn as a new media gallery that



Pedestrians walk in front of digital billboards at Gwanghwamun Square in Seoul on Wednesday. Hopes of making downtown Seoul dazzle more than Times Square in New York have hit a setback with new guidelines to dim the massive digital billboards that light up the South Korean capital after a barrage of complaints. The guidelines took effect on Wednesday. – AFP

people around the world can enjoy,” district mayor Chung Moon-heon said last year as he announced the project – which boasts the slogan “Beyond your imagination, beyond Times Square”.

Repetitive flashes

But the new guidelines recommend a maximum of 7,000 candelas – a measure of luminous intensity – during the day, half the level detected on some screens, decreasing to 350-500 candelas at night.

The city also advises minimising high-brightness white backgrounds, using gradual instead of abrupt transitions in brightness, and avoiding repetitive flashing and intense strobe effects.

While the guidelines were drawn up before the Iran war – which has prompted the government to seek to reduce energy use – authorities hope they will also cut the installations’ electricity consumption by 15 percent.

The recommendations are

“a reasonable improvement that adjusts brightness beyond what is necessary to consider the readability of advertisements and reduce visual fatigue for citizens, while also enhancing energy efficiency,” said Choi In-gyu, a local official.

Oh Se-min, 68, a retiree from a construction company, told AFP that he was not personally bothered by the billboards, but that safety comes first.

“If drivers say they experience [glare], then it should definitely be addressed to prevent accidents,” he said.

But Lee Youn-kyu, 55, who works in the shipping industry, wasn’t convinced, saying that Seoul’s billboards were less extreme than other global cities.

“We also can’t ignore the overall convenience for pedestrians and the aesthetic value these lights add,” Lee told AFP.

“I think it’s important to find a good balance between all of these factors.” – AFP

Megan Thee Stallion falls ill during Broadway show

NEW YORK – US rapper Megan Thee Stallion said on Wednesday that she had a “wake-up call” after she was taken to hospital in the middle of a Broadway performance of “Moulin Rouge!” in New York City.

“I’ve been pushing myself past my limits lately, running on empty, and my body finally said enough. It honestly scared me,” the 31-year-old wrote on Instagram.

“I thought I was gonna faint on stage, I really tried to push through my performance but I just couldn’t.”

Megan Thee Stallion, who has been playing club owner Harold Zidler in the musical, was replaced halfway through the show Tuesday

night after she fell ill.

A spokesperson for the artist, who has won three Grammy awards, said she was transferred to a hospital after experiencing “concerning symptoms.”

“Doctors ultimately identified extreme exhaustion, dehydration, vasoconstriction and low metabolic levels as the cause of her symptoms,” the spokesperson told AFP.

“Megan has since been treated, discharged and is now resting.”

One of the leading women in American rap alongside the likes of Cardi B and Nicki Minaj, Megan Thee Stallion is known for her powerful stage presence, freestyles and aggressive flow. – AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 6°C~23°C	Manila 21°C~34°C	New York 14°C~19°C	Lisbon 12°C~24°C
Shanghai 14°C~17°C	Bangkok 27°C~36°C	London 9°C~16°C	Rio de Janeiro 23°C~30°C
Hong Kong 21°C~27°C	Tokyo 11°C~19°C	Frankfurt 9°C~14°C	Luanda 25°C~29°C
Taipei 21°C~28°C	Singapore 24°C~34°C	Vancouver 7°C~11°C	Maputo 18°C~28°C
Guangzhou 20°C~29°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~35°C	Paris 10°C~13°C	Dili 24°C~32°C
Nanjing 11°C~17°C	Jakarta 24°C~33°C	Moscow 3°C~16°C	São Tomé 26°C~32°C
Guilin 14°C~26°C	Seoul 11°C~22°C	Las Vegas 11°C~23°C	Praia 19°C~29°C
Xi’an 8°C~26°C	Sydney 19°C~25°C	Monte Carlo 11°C~19°C	Bissau 19°C~37°C



13 fountains surrounded by riot of colour

Growing team leader and plant specialist Martin Einchcomb poses for a picture with Tulips in the Great Fountain Garden during a photocall for the Hampton Court Palace Tulip Festival in south west London yesterday

The annual festival runs from today to April 26, transforming the former grounds of Henry VIII's home into a dazzling show of colour. — AFP

Two way comfort

A displaced girl cuddles her cat at the entrance of a tent at an unofficial camp for displaced people on Beirut's waterfront area in Lebanon yesterday. — AFP



Butterfly bunny

An oversized Easter bunny decorates the 'Gertrudenhof' adventure farm for children in Huerth, western Germany yesterday, ahead of the Easter celebrations. — AFP



Audio – visual journey

People visit the light installation "FOREST SEASONS" by Christopher Bauder at the DARK MATTER in Berlin, Germany on Wednesday.

Accompanied by a soundscape by Dutch musician Chris Kuijten, the installation surrounds visitors in a shifting forest of light, where rhythm and atmosphere echo the changing seasons. — AFP



1st full Moon of spring

The April full moon, also known as "Pink Moon" is pictured behind the weather vane atop the Church of the Three Kings (Dreikoenigskirche) in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany early yesterday. — AFP

Vibrant pink

Cherry blossoms are seen at the Castle Hill in Budapest, Hungary, yesterday. — Xinhua

