

New warning mechanism aims to prevent youth parallel trading

Armando Neves

The Macau Customs Service and the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) announced in a joint statement on Easter Monday that they are setting up an early warning mechanism to prevent youngsters from engaging in parallel trading.

According to the statement, in order to address the issue of high-risk behaviour among students moonlighting as parallel traders, both authorities, in conjunction with other law enforcement agencies and education organisations, have decided to establish a mechanism called “Interdepartmental Collaboration to Foster a Protective Network for Youth Development”. The initiative aims to set up a warning mechanism to prevent young people from engaging in parallel trading.

In Hong Kong and Macau, parallel trading is customarily regarded as a kind of smuggling when individuals – such as retirees and students – carry small quantities

of goods across border checkpoints multiple times a day to avoid duties.

In general, analysts point out, Customs authorities view parallel trading as the importation or exportation of genuine goods through unauthorised distribution channels for profit, often exploiting individual visitor status for high-frequency, small-volume transport. While importing these goods is generally lawful, it becomes illegal when it involves violating import/export regulations, tax evasion, or falsely selling these goods as “authorised products”.

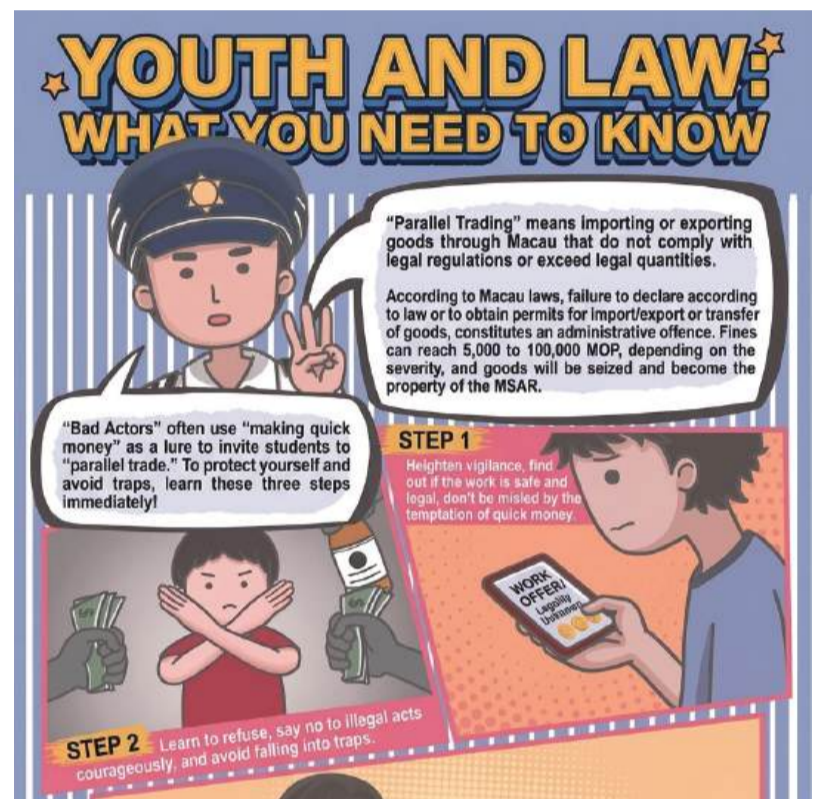
The statement noted that DSEDJ officials and Customs Service officers have begun holding legal awareness lectures in schools to address the issue. By explaining relevant laws and presenting real-life case studies, the lectures aim to inform students about the serious personal consequences of engaging in parallel trading, as well as to strengthen their ability to recognise and resist being used for such

activities, the statement pointed out.

Additionally, the statement also said that during the long holiday for Ching Ming Festival and Easter (April 3-7), the two entities carried out public education campaigns at the Border Gate checkpoint, raising awareness among young people and parents about the personal responsibilities and potential repercussions of participating in parallel trading.

In order to curb the exploitation of young people by individuals engaging in illegal activities, the statement said, both authorities were preparing to issue a “Letter to Parents”.

The upcoming letter aims to strengthen legal guidance for parents, helping them understand the legal risks of “parallel trading” and its harmful effects on their children’s development, the statement said, adding that the letter seeks to guide parents in paying closer attention to their children’s daily behaviour, social circles, and activities during holiday periods. ■



This poster released by the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ) and the Macau Customs Service on Monday aims to raise awareness among youngsters of Macau’s External Trade Law. Translation arranged by the Post.

Bill Gates to testify in front of US House panel on Jeffrey Epstein

WASHINGTON – US billionaire Bill Gates is to testify on June 10 before a congressional committee investigating the late convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein and his accomplice Ghislaine Maxwell, a source close to the matter told AFP yesterday.

The Microsoft co-founder is among the prominent names appearing in documents released by the US Justice Department that revealed close friendships, illicit financial dealings and private photos with Epstein.

The source said Gates would sit for a “transcribed interview,” signalling his testimony would take place in the same closed-door setting used for that of former president Bill Clinton

and Hillary Clinton, the former secretary of state and senator.

Gates “welcomes the opportunity to appear before the Committee,” a spokesperson for Bill Gates said in an email to AFP.

“While he never witnessed or participated in any of Epstein’s illegal conduct, he is looking forward to answering all the committee’s questions to support their important work.”

Gates has admitted making a “huge mistake” in associating with Epstein, telling staff at his charity foundation in February that he had affairs with two Russian women but denying any involvement in the disgraced financier’s crimes. – AFP

Iranians form human chains at power plants: state media

PARIS – Iranians formed human chains to protect power plants yesterday after President Donald Trump’s threats to strike energy infrastructure, according to images published by state media, as top officials said they were also prepared to sacrifice their lives.

After a campaign online and through SMS texts to sign up for the human chains nationwide, officials claimed that more than 14 million people had joined.

It was not immediately possible to verify that figure or how many people were taking part, although initial images showed dozens involved at each location.

The state-run IRNA news agency showed people forming a human chain “to support power

plants” in the southern city of Bushehr, which is home to Iran’s nuclear power plant.

State television and the Mehr news agency showed dozens of people outside the main power station in the northern city of Tabriz, as well as at a plant in the northeastern city of Mashhad

With US-Israeli strikes also targeting bridges, people gathered on the main span over a river in the western city of Ahvaz, Mehr reported.

While the more than five-week war between the Islamic republic and the United States and Israel has seen a whole echelon of the Iranian leadership killed, strikes on energy plants would mark a major escalation.

Iran’s parliament speaker

Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, seen by some as the country’s de-facto number one after the killing of supreme leader Ali Khamenei at the start of the war, published a screenshot of what was purportedly the registration system for the human chains.

Saying he had registered his own name, he added: “Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf is ready to sacrifice his life for Iran.”

The Persian word for self-sacrifice – janfada – became a trending hashtag on social media.

US President Trump earlier warned “a whole civilization will die” in Iran if the country did not heed his midnight deadline to open the Strait of Hormuz. (More on pages 7, 8 & 10) – AFP



KMT chairwoman begins visit to Chinese mainland

Cheng Li-wun, chairwoman of the Chinese Kuomintang (KMT) party, led a KMT delegation to the Chinese mainland yesterday.

– Story on p. 7

Artemis II crew snaps historic Earthset photo on way home

The Artemis II astronauts snapped a stunning shot of Earthset – the moment when the Earth dips below the Moon’s horizon – on their long journey back home yesterday after wrapping up a historic lunar flyby.

– Story on p. 11

Portugal to invest in strategic supercomputing, AI projects

Portugal vows to invest up to 19.3 million euros (US\$22.4 million) in two strategic supercomputing and artificial intelligence (AI) projects over the coming years.

– Story on p. 12

From Identity to a Geo-economic Asset: Making the Lusophone Bridge Operational (Part 5)

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

Macau stands out because of a rarity that cannot be manufactured overnight: the ability to live and work across languages, cultural codes and social habits without friction. For too long, we have treated that difference as memory, ceremony, or heritage to be preserved – important, but not enough. The question that matters now is different: how do we turn identity into “installed capability”? How do we move from “bridge” as metaphor to “bridge” as an operating mechanism - with teams, skills, responsibilities and results?

When I speak of “bridge” and of bilingual and bicultural profiles, I mean a wider human ecosystem: Macanese*, Lusophone** descendants, Portuguese nationals and other Lusophone residents in Macau – all those who, with competence and commitment, help Macau connect different worlds.

The idea is simple, and demanding: if Macau wants to be a platform, it cannot limit itself to celebrating its distinctiveness; it must make that distinctiveness work. Making it work means treating this advantage as human infrastructure: training, placing, evaluating and sustaining it over time. Put more plainly: fewer slogans, more system.

A bridge, not a slogan

“Lusophone bridge” cannot be just a pleasing phrase. It must translate into real work: people able to unblock projects, reduce cultural friction, accelerate decisions and ensure that rules and expectations do not collide at the first bend. It must also mean credibility - the trust Macau earns when it places capable professionals at the junctions between institutions, businesses, and markets. And it must mean the circulation of talent: without practice, experience and exposure, the bridge becomes cardboard and distinctiveness turns into scenery.

Shared responsibility: not only “for associations”

If continuity is the goal, responsibility cannot rest solely on “associations”, nor solely on “individuals”. It must be shared, clearly, among three actors: the Central People’s Government (concerning national strategy and horizon-setting), the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) (concerning policy design, channels and instruments), and the Lusophone community living in Macau (concerning networking, mentorship and mobilisation). The question

is straightforward, yet rarely asked aloud: why are so many well-educated young people – trilingual or not – increasingly distant from this multiculturalism which is perhaps Macau’s rarest wealth, its gift and its most valuable asset? If the answer is merely “times have changed”, we are giving up. If the answer is “pathways are missing”, then the remedy is obvious: create real routes, useful missions and continuity.

There is also an organisational reality that matters. At times, there are many leaders and many “presidents”, but not always enough coordination for concerted action - shared priorities, a calendar and measured outcomes. Without that minimum articulation, effort disperses: each institution does what it can, but the sum does not become critical mass.

And there is another, more subtle reality: identity is not always embraced in a straight line. Some Macanese prefer not to be identified as such; others live that sense of belonging quietly; others assume it fully. This is not a moral failure; it is the portrait of a small and plural community. But it has practical consequences: when self-identification is fragile, continuity becomes harder to build, because succession stops being natural and becomes dependent on chance.

4 safe principles for a more mature community

Without pointing at anyone, there are four principles that help clarify where improvement is possible - and that can be discussed in a constructive spirit.

1) The community also includes the private sector

We cannot think only about those being part of associations and institutions. A mature community must also consider those who invest, take risks, employ people, pay market rents and try to create pathways through their own effort. Whenever public support exists for internal structures (which can be legitimate), one simple principle should be safeguarded: transparency and proportionality. Social missions should be protected; what matters is that rules are clear, so that an environment is not created – even unintentionally – that discourages investment and local entrepreneurship.

2) Participation with continuity: energy and talent need a channel

Macau has electoral, consultative and associative mechanisms. What is often missing is

continuity: turning energy, talent and legitimacy – wherever they exist – into concrete missions, with a timetable, responsibilities and evaluation. When there is no predictable channel, people reorganise pragmatically and in a dispersed manner. The collective cost is evident: constructive critical mass declines, unity weakens and succession becomes fragile.

It is also important to recognise a simple fact: decision-making positions are limited, and systems naturally favour predictability and continuity. In such a context, it is natural that different profiles – including professionals who have developed relevant competence in Portuguese language and culture through training pathways in Macau and in Portugal – are called upon to perform certain functions. The essential point is not to choose “some” against “others”, but to ensure that Macau’s specific advantage – the capacity to mediate and work between worlds – is treated as a priority, with clear criteria, ongoing training and mixed teams that deliver results and succession.

3) Intangible heritage must be a programme, not an ornament

Macanese culture – cuisine, Patuá, memory, humour, sociability – and also cultural expressions embedded in Macau’s historic DNA, such as Portuguese folk dance, cannot survive merely as a calling card or occasional appearance. Valuable initiatives already exist, for example through institutions such as *Casa de Portugal em Macau*, which promote cultural activities, gatherings, themed programmes, and training. But if this is truly an asset for Macau, it must be treated as such: with multi-year programmes, targets, regular scheduling, documentation, and transmission. That requires structured proposals and stable financial support, because living culture needs continuity, not applause.

4) Identify who is available and can be developed

There are people with skills and the will to contribute – bilingual/trilingual profiles, experienced professionals, well-trained young people. A practical, low-controversy step would be to create a simple mechanism to map skills and availability, and link that map to projects with clearly defined tasks and deadlines. This reduces personalisation, normalises

entry routes and turns goodwill into delivery.

Measure, rather than imagine

Debates about continuity often die for lack of numbers. If we want to be serious, we need aggregate data: how many bilingual profiles exist, where they work, how they progress, what training they have had, which projects have been rotated, and what outcomes have been delivered. Without that, discussion remains trapped in “I think”, “I feel” and “it has always been this way”.

Ultimately, all of this has a political and cultural consequence: Macau should not limit itself to the “Macau paragraph”. Integration into national development requires reading the whole picture and asking where Macau adds value. If Macau wants to be a bridge, then it must treat that bridge as human infrastructure - with training, circulation, mission and evaluation.

And here I return to the essential point: Macau’s distinctiveness is not preserved by decree, nor by automatic succession and closure, as if certain positions were fixed; it is built through concrete choices - study, languages, work and commitment - and, above all, through transmission to the next generation. But that transmission cannot be an occasional act of goodwill; it must be a system.

If we do this with serenity, without strife or vanity, everyone wins. The community stops being remembered only in ceremonies and becomes useful, present and respected. Macau stops using “bridge” as a slogan and begins operating it as capability. The alternative is familiar: continuing to praise a difference while it slowly fades - and that would be a strategic loss, for Macau and for the country. ■

**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*

*** Etymologically, the term is derived from “Luso-” (referring to Lusitania, the ancient Roman province corresponding roughly to modern Portugal) + “-phone” (meaning “speaker”). Describes people, communities, or countries where Portuguese is the primary language. The collective Portuguese-speaking community is known as the Lusosphere (or Lusofonia in Portuguese). – DeepSeek*

UNU launches 2 hubs in Chinese mainland

Rui Pastorin

The first two UNU hubs in the Chinese mainland have been recently launched by the United Nations University (UNU) via the UNU Institute in Macau (UNU Macau), according to a UNU Macau statement yesterday.

Following the establishment of the UNU Hub on Humanitarian Innovation and Technology at Lingnan University in Hong Kong in 2025, the statement pointed out that there are now three hubs in China, with the two new hubs comprising the UNU Hub for Promoting Ethical and Responsible Artificial Intelligence Development at Tsinghua University, and the UNU Hub for AI-Finance at East China Normal University (ECNU). They were launched with partners in Beijing and Shanghai and are aimed at strengthening collaboration between academia and the UN system, according to the statement.

The statement highlighted that in Beijing, the Tsinghua-based hub will advance work on “AI

risk monitoring, ethical evaluation, and inclusive governance frameworks, supporting multi-stakeholder dialogue and helping shape trusted standards for responsible AI”.

The ECNU-based hub in Shanghai will tackle “AI-driven finance -including financial risk analysis, macro-financial decision-making, and policy simulation – to support financial inclusion and sustainable growth, particularly in the Global South”.

UNU Rector and United Nations Under-Secretary-General Tshilidzi Marwala was quoted by the statement as saying: “The UNU Hub at Tsinghua University reflects our global commitment to ensuring that AI development is aligned with human values... helping societies address systemic risks and establish trusted frameworks”.

Prof. Marwala added: “The UNU Hub at ECNU embodies our vision of inclusive growth... supporting the Global South in opening new pathways towards financial inclusion and sustainable growth.” ■

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MACAU POST

Macau Weather

**MAINLY CLOUDY.
A FEW SHOWERS.
FORCE 4 TO 5 SOUTHEASTERLY
WINDS WITH GUSTS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL
RANGE BETWEEN 80% AND 98%.**



23°C~26°C

Source: SMG

Police arrest mainland woman for false rape accusation

Armindo Neves

The Judiciary Police (PJ) apprehended a woman from the Chinese mainland for making a false rape accusation on Thursday, PJ spokesman Leng Kam Lon said during a regular press conference on Monday.

Leng identified the suspect as a 31-year-old female surnamed Zhong, who claimed to be a "livestream saleswoman".

According to Leng, the Judiciary Police received a report from Zhong on Thursday in which she claimed that she had been raped by a man in a hotel guestroom in Cotai.

Upon investigation, Leng said, PJ officers confirmed that Zhong met the man on March 20, after which they kept in touch. At around 1 p.m. on Thursday, they met at a casino and gambled together, adding that about one to two hours later, the woman followed the victim to his hotel guestroom, where they had sexual intercourse, the woman told the police.

Afterwards, both continued gambling, but later got into a dispute over money, after which the woman reported the alleged rape to the police. Zhong claimed that she had sex with the man against her will, Leng said.

However, based on the man's statements and on-site evidence, investigators found that the

woman's allegations did not match the actual circumstances, Leng said, adding that a medical examination revealed no visible injuries to Zhong's body.

Zhong has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) on Saturday, facing a false accusation charge.

Young man falls victim to prostitution scam, loses 24,530 yuan

Meanwhile, a young local man fell victim to a prostitution scam in which he lost 24,530 yuan (28,700 patacas), PJ spokesman Leng Kam Lon said during the same press conference on Monday.

According to Leng, on Friday the victim met a purported "customer service" provider through the messaging app Telegram, who claimed to be able to arrange a "sexual partner" for him.

Following the instructions, the victim added "friend" from several Telegram accounts, purportedly belonging to women, through which he could contact them.

At 11:30 p.m., Leng said that the "customer service" provider recommended a woman to him and requested payment in advance. During the process, the "customer service" provider sent two Alipay QR codes, and young man made two transfers totalling 6,530 yuan, Leng said.

After that, the "customer service" provider told him to switch to WeChat transfers, after which he made 11 transfers via WeChat, totalling 18,000 yuan, according to Leng.

After the transfers were completed, Leng said that the fraudster claimed that a woman would contact the victim shortly. However, after waiting for a long time without receiving any message or being able to reach the other party again, the victim finally suspected he had been scammed and reported the case to the Judiciary Police, Leng said. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Leng Kam Lon looks on during Monday's regular press conference.

— Photo: Armindo Neves

China's Wang & Sun crowned ITTF World Cup Macao champions

Khalel Vallo

China's Wang Chuqin and Sun Yingsha were crowned men's and women's champions respectively at the ITTF Men's and Women's World Cup Macao 2026 finals held on Easter Sunday, coinciding with Qingming, at the Galaxy Arena in Cotai.

The tournament, sanctioned by the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) and organised by the Sports Bureau (ID), Galaxy Entertainment Group (GEG) and World Table Tennis Management Group Limited (WTMG), concluded with semi-final and final clashes featuring the world's top players.

In the women's final, Sun faced compatriot Wang Manyu. Sun made a commanding start, taking the first three games with consistent control and aggressive play. Although Wang responded by claiming the fourth game, Sun quickly regained momentum and closed out the match 4-1 (11-9, 11-8, 13-11, 8-11, 11-7) to successfully defend her World Cup title, becoming the first female player to win three consecutive years.

Meanwhile, the men's final saw Wang Chuqin go head-to-head with Japan's Sora Matsushima in a tightly contested encounter. Both players exchanged leads throughout the match, pushing it to a deciding seventh game after being locked at 3-3. Wang ultimately delivered under pressure, securing the final game to win 4-3 (9-11, 18-16, 11-8, 11-13, 8-11, 11-4, 11-8) and claim his first World Cup title.

Following the finals, a trophy presentation was held, featuring a flag handover segment led by Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai, who presented the ITTF World Cup flag to ITTF President Petra Sörling of Sweden, whom then passed the flag to Yang Yang, who represented the ITTF Mixed Team World Cup Chengdu 2026 Organising Committee.

Speaking after his victory, Wang Chuqin reflected on the intensity of the tournament and the significance of his first World Cup triumph. "I think every game I played on the stage was very impressive. It was so hard that I feel like every day is the last day of my life," he said,



China's Wang Chuqin (left) and Sun Yingsha pose after the trophy presentation after winning the men's and women's championships at the ITTF Men's and Women's World Cup Macao 2026 on Easter Sunday.

— Photo: Khalel Vallo

adding that "each match is really memorable, because each of them is really tough and challenging".

He also expressed gratitude to his supporters throughout his journey. "I want to thank my fans for not giving up on me, and that I am very happy that I have this chance to say this very sentence to you again, that I did not let you down," he said through an interpreter.

Meanwhile, Sun said the final was more competitive than the scoreline suggested. "For tonight's [Sunday's] final, as always, it was a nailbiter, despite that I won 4-1. In the first three sets, there were crucial points, and in the last two sets, well, actually, there were moments for Wang Manyu to turn around," she said.

"Before this match, I didn't put too much thought into the outcome of the goal, but of course, I'm glad that I have claimed the titles for three years in a row. I think today, both Wang and I played to our level,

and we put on a great match for the fans". Reflecting on her overall campaign, Sun highlighted the difficulty of the tournament despite her title defence. "I do have a lot of takeaways. Like I said before, right from the first round of the main draw, every player is among the top players in the world," she said through the same interpreter.

"Tonight [Sunday], the match score may tell you it's the easiest one, but it's not the case. So, throughout this week, I have a lot of takeaways. I have ups and downs, and every day, I got up to a different mindset", Sun added.

The conclusion of the World Cup marks another major international sporting event successfully staged in Macau, striving to reinforce its role as a regional hub for elite competitions while showcasing top-tier table tennis talent on the global stage, according to a statement by the Sports Bureau on Monday. ■

Youths compete in 2-day 'PSG Academy Macau Youth GBA Tournament'

Rui Pastorin

The "PSG Academy Macau Youth GBA Tournament 2026" was held over the weekend at the Macau Workers' Stadium, concluding on Sunday with the trophy presentation to the winners.

The two-day event was organised by PSG* Academy GBA, with the Consulate General of France in Hong Kong and Macau as partner. It was sponsored by Hong Kong insurance company CTF Life.

According to a statement by the organisers, the two-day tournament aimed to "promote youth development

through football, providing young players with a valuable platform to grow via sport and build confidence", this year gathering over 20 youth teams comprising hundreds of young players from across the Greater Bay Area (GBA) to compete across U9, U11, U13, and U15 categories.

A separate statement on Sunday highlighted the winners, noting that after multiple legs, the teams "IVO", "SASL", "Tekkerz" and "STM" respectively emerged as champions in the U9, U11, U13, and U15 categories. Awards including "Fair Play Team", "Best Player", and

"Best Goalkeeper" were also given out in recognition of individual and group winners.

According to PSG Academy GBA Chief Executive Officer Yannick Ngassa, as summarised by the statement, said that the "successful completion of this year's tournament not only provided valuable match experience and development opportunities for young players, but also injected new momentum into the development of youth football across the Greater Bay Area". ■

*Paris Saint Germain (PSG) is a French Ligue 1 football club.



This photo provided by organisers of the "PSG Academy Macau Youth GBA Tournament 2026" on Sunday shows youngsters who recently competed in the event.

‘Cruising Through This Mortal Coil’ exhibition tackles tradition & death

Interview by Rui Pastorin

At Albergue SCM’s D1 Hall, a solo exhibition has translated the offering rituals in the Hungry Ghost Festival*, the anxieties surrounding death, and the reflections and confrontation of life’s finite nature into art.

Displaying a total of nine works, “Cruising Through This Mortal Coil” features a 24-minute short film titled “If They Really Exist”, watercolours, installations, pieces made using the traditional Chinese joss paper craft, from which the intricate creations are traditionally burnt as offerings in ancestral worship, funerals and to deities.

The mind behind each work is Macau interdisciplinary artist Hio Lam Lei, with the artist telling the *Post* yesterday afternoon that since its launch on March 25, the ongoing exhibition, which is organised by Art For All Society (AFA), has gained traction from passers-by, seeing groups from Macau and tourists. “There is quite a lot every day”.

The concept and ideas, Hio noted, stemmed from research that she was doing back in 2023 about the offering rituals involved in the Hungry Ghost Festival and while shooting her film.

After finishing her film, Hio, who deploys Analytical Psychology as a research tool and whose recent research focuses on exploring the psychodynamics underlying ritual and healing practices in Han folk religious context, noted: “I really wanted to make it an expanded experience so I created a series of drawings” that eventually turned into her “Mortal Journal” series, all reflecting ideas about how people can “potentially meditate on the idea of death in our daily life”.

The other exhibits then followed suit, resulting in a mix of the entirely imaginative and the textually based. Among the artworks that Hio introduced yesterday are the installations “Protagonist in Blue” and “Reflect Me Gently”, which will greet gallerygoers as they enter the venue. Hio noted that both are derived from Chinese folklore and tradition, looking at what people will encounter in the underworld after death, particularly the ideas of the “sea of agony” that one traverses and the “mirror of karma” where one reflects on past deeds while one was alive.

The piece “Time Will Not Tell” is meanwhile one of the works that incorporates joss paper craft, with Hio noting that the pieces are normally burnt after the rituals. “But here, we try to make it like a temporary space for remembrance, a temporary monument for the past”.

The resulting clock-shaped piece reflects ideas like how emotions shift with time, said Hio. She elaborated that when people look at all the random deaths reported by the news occurring daily, they begin to reflect on their finiteness, having limited time, physical existence and bodies that will eventually fade. And this idea of being finite is strongly internalised, she said.

“Taking this as a starting point, we want to get something, and we want to achieve something. We don’t want to waste our time. And I think this is actually the crucial anxiety we have in this discourse about death and how we contemplate it”.

The hall at Albergue SCM houses all these works, with Hio noting that this was a deliberate decision for its background and history as a shelter. Albergue is Portuguese for “hospice”, while SCM stands for Santa Casa da Misericórdia (“Holy House of Mercy”), Macau’s oldest charitable organisation, as noted by the *Post*.

“All these places were actually shelters or places that provided for people in need. And I think it actually resonates with what people do in offering rituals because they try to take care of those ghosts who don’t have their predecessors to worship them or to remember them. That’s why I think it’s such an ideal spot for the exhibition to take place”.

As the exhibition continues, she hopes visiting gallerygoers will be able to take away two things, namely how one can react to symbolisms related to death, and how we can reflect on and interact with death-related anxieties rather than just stowing them away.

Death is inevitable as it comes in many unpredictable forms and ageing, though society tries hard to push the narrative that it is all within our control, according to Hio, noting that this is a tension that has always existed. When we acknowledge this fate, inevitability and collective fear, Hio said that one might feel more connected in this limited journey of life and make the best of it while living with that anxiety. In the end, Hio said that it’s “about recognising the anxiety and trying to decide how to interact with this anxiety”.

The free-admission exhibition is on until April 24, being open daily from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Mondays, and from 12 noon to 7 p.m. the rest of the week. One can find more information on the exhibition by visiting the AFA Facebook page and website.

*The Hungry Ghost Festival is a traditional East and Southeast Asian observance (mainly in Chinese communities) held on the 7th lunar month. It’s believed that the gates of the underworld open and spirits roam the living world. Families honour deceased ancestors and appease wandering ghosts with offerings – food, incense, paper money, and paper goods – so the spirits are fed and placated. - Poe



Local artist Hio Lam Lei poses with her installations displayed at the D1 Hall. – Photos taken yesterday by Rui Pastorin



Gongbei Customs seizes 50 lizards smuggled from Macau

Armindo Neves

Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers seized 50 lizards smuggled from Macau at the Gongbei checkpoint on March 15.

Gongbei Customs identified the smuggler as a male from the Chinese mainland surnamed Chen.

According to the statement, on that day, customs officers at the Gongbei checkpoint's arrival inspection hall noticed Chen's unusual demeanour when he entered Zhuhai through the checkpoint's "green channel".

Upon investigation, customs officers discovered 50 live lizards concealed in a laundry bag inside a plastic box carried by Chen.

The 50 live lizards were later identified by the Gongbei Customs Technical Center as belonging to the genus Hydrosaurus.

According to DeepSeek, Hydrosaurus is a genus of large, semi-aquatic lizards commonly known as sailfin dragons or sailfin lizards. They are native to Southeast Asia (Indonesia, the Philippines, and Papua New Guinea). They have a sail-like crest – a prominent fin running down their tail, formed by enlarged vertebral spines, and they are large, reaching 1 metre or more. The reptiles live near rivers and mangroves and are excellent swimmers, often escaping predators by diving and running across water by using their tail fin and hind legs.

Gongbei Customs reminded the public in the statement that, in accordance with relevant laws and regulations, the import of live animals without prior approval is prohibited. Those who violate these regulations will be subject to legal liability as stipulated by law. ■



This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs yesterday shows one of the 50 lizards seized from its officers at the Gongbei checkpoint's arrival hall on March 15, smuggled by a mainlander arriving from Macau.

Macau logs over 460,000 visitor arrivals during Ching Ming holiday, up 12.5 pct

Tony Wong

Macau recorded a total of 460,013 visitor arrivals during the Chinese mainland's three-day Ching Ming Festival holiday period between Saturday and Monday, or a daily average of 153,338, according to calculations based on daily immigration statistics released by the Public Security Police (PSP) during the period.

This represented an increase of 12.5 percent from last year's corresponding period, during which 408,778 visitor arrivals were recorded, or a daily average of 136,259.

On the Ching Ming Festival this year, i.e., April, 5, 2026, Macau recorded 172,057 visitor arrivals, a slight decrease of 0.69 percent from last year's Ching Ming Festival, i.e., April 4, 2025, when 173,256 visitor arrivals were recorded.

This year, the Chinese mainland's Ching Ming Festival holiday period partially coincided with Macau's Easter public holiday period.

Macau's three-day Easter public holiday period annually runs between Good Friday and Easter on Sunday. This year, in addition to a civil service holiday on Easter Monday as normal, public servants were also on holiday yesterday as



Tourists walk along Rua de S. Paulo yesterday, a narrow pedestrian-only street near the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ruins of St. Paul's landmark. – Photo: Tony Wong

this year's Ching Ming Festival fell on a Sunday.

According to the PSP immigration statistics, Macau recorded a total of 579,362 visitor arrivals during this year's four-day period between Good Friday and Easter Monday, or a daily average of 144,841.

This represented an increase of 11.4 percent from last year's four-day period between Good Friday and Easter Monday, during which 520,065 visitor arrivals were recorded, or a daily average of 130,016.

The Public Security Police are scheduled to release their immigration statistics today,

including visitor arrivals, for the whole Ching Ming-cum-Easter five-day period between Good Friday and yesterday.

The entry and exit (border crossings) figures recorded by the Public Security Police, which run Macau's immigration service, comprise local residents, visitors, non-resident workers (NRWs), non-local students enrolled in Macau, and all others with a special permit to stay in Macau.

Qingming is the festival's spelling in Putonghua pinyin. Apart from Ching Ming, it is also spelt Cheng Ming. In English it is also known as Tomb-Sweeping Festival. ■

Citywide clean-up drive kicks off to boost community hygiene

Khalel Vallo

The "Citywide Clean-up Campaign", organised by the City Beautification and Cleaning Working Group, was launched on March 28 in Iao Hon Market Park, aiming to enhance environmental hygiene and promote public participation across the city, a statement by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) said on that day.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak, alongside representatives from various government entities and community organisations, the statement said.

Addressing the event, IAM President Chao Wai leng said that the campaign builds on last year's results, which saw nearly 50,000 participants taking part in community clean-up efforts, the statement added.

According to the statement, the various activities included hygiene inspections of around 6,900 flats in so-called "three no's" buildings*, and the removal of more than 3.8 tonnes of waste. Chao noted that the campaign demonstrated the effectiveness of strengthening source control, enhancing interdepartmental collaboration, and encouraging public participation.

This year's campaign will be expanded, focusing on consolidating management outcomes, strengthening joint



This handout photo provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) recently shows IAM President Chao Wai leng addressing the campaign's launch ceremony in Iao Hon Market Park on March 28.

community efforts, and enhancing public education and outreach, the statement said, underlining that the initiative aims to promote a more normalised, refined and "smart" approach to urban cleanliness.

Following the ceremony, teams formed by government entities and associations carried out clean-up and outreach activities in nearby neighbourhoods, the statement said, adding that promotional materials were distributed to residents, shop operators and property management staff to raise awareness of environmental hygiene.

At the same time, relevant government entities conducted inspections at food processing

facilities and construction sites, urging operators to implement proper hygiene management measures, the statement said.

In addition to neighbourhood activities, the working group will organise the "Beautiful and Clean Beach – Take Your Trash with You" initiative on May 9 at Hac Sa and Cheoc Van Beach, where participants will collect rubbish from along shorelines and in surrounding waters, the statement noted, pointing out that other activities include roving photo exhibitions and street consultation booths across various districts, aiming to further promote environmental awareness within the community.

According to the statement, the campaign will continue to mobilise government entities, associations and members of the general public to improve urban hygiene, with the goal of fostering long-term behavioural change and building a cleaner Macau. ■

*According to local government and media sources, a building is classified as a "three no's" building if it has 1) no formally established condominium owners' association or condominium committee; 2) no property management company hired to handle daily operations; 3) no active resident group to coordinate maintenance, and often a general lack of awareness or initiative from owners or tenants regarding building upkeep. – DeepSeek

活動名稱	日期	地點
啟動禮	3.28	氹仔海濱公園
主題圖片展覽	3.28 - 4.2	氹仔海濱公園
攤位遊戲及諮詢站	3.28 - 3.29	氹仔海濱公園
清潔海濱 自己帶走	5.9	黑沙海灘
三邊特快(嘉路利街)	4.3 - 4.9	嘉路利街
綠道淨化活動	4.10 - 4.16	綠道
淨化海濱公園之空地(嘉路利街)	4.17 - 4.23	嘉路利街
石排灣康樂大廈平台淨化	4.24 - 4.30	石排灣
三邊特快(嘉路利街)	4.4 - 4.5	嘉路利街
淨化海濱公園之空地(嘉路利街)	4.11 - 4.12	嘉路利街
淨化海濱公園之空地(嘉路利街)	4.18 - 4.19	嘉路利街
石排灣康樂大廈平台淨化	4.25 - 4.26	石排灣

This poster provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) last month promotes its ongoing "Citywide Clean-up Campaign".

Bus route No.15 b/w Taipa's Ocean Gardens & Coloane's Ka Ho to be revamped

Tony Wong

The public bus route No.15 travelling between Taipa's Ocean Gardens and Coloane's Ka Ho hamlet will be revamped from this coming Saturday, when the route will become a more direct one, a change from its current convoluted route, with the aim of shortening the route's journey time and increasing its trip frequency.

The route No.15 is run by Transmac, one of Macau's two public bus operators.

The Transport Bureau (DSAT) announced the route's revamp in a statement late last week.

After departing from Taipa's Ocean Gardens, the route No.15 currently runs along Estrada Governador Albano de Oliveira (the avenue outside the now-defunct Macau Jockey Club), travels past Flower City Park, and runs along central Cotai's Estrada do Istmo flanked by casino resorts, before arriving at Coloane's Seac Pai Van public housing neighbourhood.

From there the No.15 runs to Coloane Village, travels near Cheoc Van Beach, and serves Ha Sac Beach, before stopping outside Hac Sa Reservoir Natural Park, from where it finally runs towards Ka Ho hamlet.

The return segment of the No.15 runs to Hac Sa Reservoir Natural Park, Ha Sac Beach, Cheoc Van Beach, Coloane Village, the One Oasis private residential estate, the Seac Pai Van public housing neighbourhood, central Cotai, Taipa Village, and Estrada Governador Albano de Oliveira, before finally returning to Ocean Gardens.

Due to its particularly convoluted route, each trip of the No.15, which operates between 5:30 a.m. and 7:15 p.m. daily, only departs every 30 to 35 minutes, even though quite a few vehicles are used for this route.

In addition to the route No.15, Transmac currently runs an express one-way route, No.15S, enabling those in Ka Ho hamlet to travel to central Taipa and Ocean Gardens in a much shorter

time. The No.15S only stops at the Seac Pai Van public housing neighbourhood, near the Broadway Macau casino resort in west Cotai, outside Taipa Central Park, and outside the CTM headquarters, before arriving at Ocean Gardens.

However, the No.15S only departs once a day between Mondays and Fridays, at 7:30 a.m. It does not operate on Saturdays, Sundays, and public holidays.

Moreover, the public bus operator currently runs an express return route, No.15S1, travelling between the Seac Pai Van public housing neighbourhood and the Vila de Nossa Senhora cultural heritage (former leprosarium) area, which is located between the Ka Ho oil depot and the area's social service facilities.

However, the No.15S1 currently only has eight return trips every day, between 8:20 a.m. and 6 p.m.

According to late last week's DSAT statement, the current routes No.15S and No.15S1 will merge into the route No.15 from this coming Saturday, meaning that the No.15S and No.15S1 will be abolished, while the No.15 will be significantly shortened from a convoluted one.

The statement underlined that the revamp will enable the No.15 to depart more frequently. The new version of the route will depart every 22 to 26 minutes. Its operating hours will be extended a bit longer, between 5:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. daily.

According to the statement, the new version of the route No.15 will have the same itinerary between Taipa's Ocean Gardens and Coloane's Seac Pai Van public housing neighbourhood as the current version. Afterwards, the route's new version will travel towards Ka Ho much more directly, by using Estrada do Altinho de Ká Hó.

In addition to the hamlet of Ka Ho, the new version of the route No.15 will also stop outside the Vila de Nossa Senhora cultural heritage area and near the Ka Ho oil depot, neither of which are on the route's current version.

The statement advises passengers getting onto a No.15 bus



This map in Portuguese released by the Transport Bureau (DSAT) last week shows the new version of the route No.15, and suggested transfer routes to Coloane Village, Cheoc Van Beach, and Ha Sac Beach.

but wishing to travel to areas such as Coloane Village, Cheoc Van Beach, and Ha Sac Beach to transfer to other suitable routes, starting from this coming Saturday.

Route between Seac Pai Van & 'A Ma La'

Meanwhile, the statement also announced that the No.52, travelling between Coloane's Seac Pai Van public housing neighbourhood and the peninsula's Praça de Ferreira do Amaral (colloquially known in Cantonese simply as "A Ma La"), will newly serve the One Oasis private residential estate and its adjacent Concórdia Industrial Park from this coming Saturday.

Except the newly served locations, the itinerary of the No.52 will remain unchanged as currently, where the route, after departing from Seac Pai Van, runs to the Broadway Macau casino resort in west Cotai, Estrada Governador Albano de Oliveira, and Ocean Gardens, before arriving at "A Ma La", from where the return segment runs to Ocean Gardens, and Galaxy Macau casino resort in west Cotai, before returning to Seac Pai Van. ■



Passengers get onto a No.52 bus at the Praça de Ferreira do Amaral bus terminal yesterday. — Photo: Tony Wong



A No.15 is parked outside the Ocean Gardens bus terminal earlier this week. — Photo courtesy of TDM

German firms eye vast opportunities as China's five-year blueprint unfolds

Analysis

HANGZHOU – Nearly six months on, Benjamin Joithe, managing director of Mankiewicz China, still vividly recalls the opening ceremony of the company's largest production base globally, located in Zhejiang Province.

On the day of this ceremony, Joithe hosted 50 global executives who had traveled thousands of kilometers to witness firsthand what China's development and vitality truly meant.

"Our business in China is growing rapidly, especially in the aviation and automotive sectors," said Joithe. The world-leading coating manufacturer has reported sustained sales growth in China over the years, fueled largely by the country's thriving high-end manufacturing.

As the outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) identifies emerging strategic industries to be nurtured, including new-generation information technology, new energy, robotics, and aviation and aerospace, German companies with deep roots in China are responding with concrete plans and fresh investment.

"We are confident of achieving steady growth in China. We look forward to seizing all growth opportunities over the next five years with our new plant in Zhejiang," Joithe told Xinhua.

Joithe's bullish view is shared by the majority of German companies operating in China. In its 2025/2026 business confidence survey, the German Chamber of Commerce in China said that 93 percent of respondents intend to remain engaged in the Chinese market. Around 65 percent said they are confident about China's economic development over the next five years.

German enterprise NEURA Robotics echoes this optimism, having established operations in Hangzhou, Zhejiang's capital city, last year.

The goals of high-quality development, further expanding high-standard opening up, and sharing opportunities with the rest of the world, set out in China's 15th Five-Year Plan, offer foreign-invested companies a more stable and promising environment for growth, said Yang Jun, CEO of NEURA Robotics (Hangzhou), in an exclusive interview with Xinhua.

"NEURA clearly sees China's commitment and sustained efforts to further expand high-standard opening up and deepen bilateral investment with strong institutional support and industrial coordination," said Yang.

Observers believe that such optimism stems from China's evolution from a manufacturing center into a global hub and testing ground for technological innovation. Moreover, China's commitment to high-level opening up provides ample opportunities for foreign investors to engage in its industrial transformation, offering much-needed stability and predictability for multinationals.

Additionally, support from local authorities also encourages German companies to tap into China's market. Joithe told Xinhua that local authorities' readiness to address the needs of enterprises had helped them establish a second factory in China.

At Zhejiang's Pinghu Economic and Technological Development Zone, over 50 German enterprises reported a combined output of more than US\$1 billion in 2025. This year, multiple companies have expressed their desire to invest further.

"We will improve our services for foreign enterprises,

and look forward to even closer China-Germany cooperation in the next five years," said Mao Fangying, the official in charge of German investment at the zone.

Yang also credited NEURA's development to local support. The "robot town" in Xiaoshan District of Hangzhou, where NEURA has set up operations, is a specialized industrial platform built by the government to help international companies connect with local industries and participate in regional industrial upgrading, according to Yang.

Also, the entire city is proving to be a favorable destination for their business. "Hangzhou is one of the world's most dynamic cities for robotics R&D and application," said Yang.

The company plans to set up its "NEURA Gym" in the city, where engineers will teach humanoid robots to perform everyday tasks and advance technologies from prototype to application via collaboration with global partners.

Germany has remained China's largest trading partner and biggest source of foreign investment in Europe, and the two countries have achieved extensive industrial integration.

China's appeal to German companies continues to strengthen. Data from the German Economic Institute show that new German direct investment in China amounted to roughly 7 billion euros (US\$8.08 billion) in 2025, well above the approximately 4.5 billion euros recorded a year earlier.

In February 2026, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz led a high-level economic delegation of 30 business representatives on a visit to China, during which enterprises from both countries inked more than 10 business agreements spanning industries including the automotive, machinery, energy, logistics and finance sectors. — Xinhua

Li Qiang calls for expanding China-Australia trade for win-win cooperation

BEIJING – China's vast market will remain open to the world, and China is willing to import more high-quality products from Australia, Premier Li Qiang said yesterday.

In a phone conversation with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Li also said that China stands ready to work with Australia to expand and upgrade bilateral trade, support enterprises of both countries in conducting cooperation based on market principles, and promote mutual benefit and win-win outcomes.

Amid the current complex and volatile international situation, with the global economy continuously affected by geopolitical turbulence and protectionism, China and Australia, as important cooperative partners, should steer their bilateral relations in the right direction, strive to foster and maintain a positive atmosphere, and consolidate the positive momentum in bilateral relations and cooperation, Li said.

China is ready to work with Australia to follow through on the important consensus reached by President Xi Jinping and Australian Prime Minister Albanese last year, maintain high-level exchanges, strengthen communication and coordination, consolidate mutual political trust, deepen mutually beneficial cooperation, safeguard multilateralism and free trade, inject momentum into the development of the two countries and provide more stability for the region and the world at large, he said.

Li noted that China-Australia economic and trade cooperation has strong internal momentum and still holds great potential in the long run. During the 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-2030), China will adhere to expanding domestic demand

as a strategic priority, vigorously boost consumption, promote a marked increase in the household consumption rate, and continuously unleash market demand, he said.

Both sides should accelerate the review and upgrade discussions of the bilateral free trade agreement to provide stronger institutional support for cooperation, Li said.

There is great potential for China-Australia green cooperation, and China is willing to leverage complementary advantages with Australia to deepen cooperation in such areas as clean energy, electric vehicles, energy storage and carbon reduction, jointly building stronger momentum for the development of the green economy, he added.

For his part, Albanese said the Australian government has always been committed to developing a stable, mature and constructive relationship with China. Under the current international circumstances, the steady development of Australia-China relations is particularly important, he said.

Australia has long adhered to the one-China policy and is willing to strengthen high-level exchanges with China, expand cooperation in trade, investment, mining, clean energy and people-to-people exchanges, properly manage differences in the spirit of mutual respect, and advance the Australia-China comprehensive strategic partnership, he said.

Albanese said he looks forward to visiting China to attend the 2026 APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting. Australia is willing to enhance multilateral communication and coordination with China to address global challenges and promote world peace, stability and development, he added. – AFP

China urges immediate end to military operations regarding Iran conflict

BEIJING – The top priority is to bring an immediate end to the military operations and return to dialogue and negotiation, so as to fundamentally resolve the issues and restore peace and stability in the Gulf region, foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said yesterday regarding the Iran situation.

Weeks into the Iran conflict, the two sides continue to exchange military strikes. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz drew widespread concern. There is a growing call for a ceasefire and safe passage. The United States and Iran have exchanged some tough rhetoric over the past few days. Sources say the two sides might reach a ceasefire deal.

The situation in the Middle East continues to worsen and the military conflict is still escalating, hitting the world economy and energy security and drawing deep concerns from the international community, Mao said at a regular news briefing.

Since the conflict began, China has held an objective, just and balanced position and has been working to help bring about a ceasefire and end to the conflict, she said.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi made 26 phone calls with parties including Iran, Israel, Russia and the Gulf states. The special envoy of the Chinese government on the Middle East issue traveled to the region in a mediation effort. Last week, China and Pakistan issued the five-point initiative, which embodies the international consensus for ceasefire and peace.

"The use of force does not bring peace. Political settlement is the right way forward. The root cause of the conflict is the US-Israeli launch of military attacks against Iran in violation of international law," she said.

All parties need to demonstrate sincerity and quickly end this war that should not have happened in the first place, the spokesperson added. – Xinhua

KMT chairwoman begins visit to Chinese mainland



Cheng Li-wun, the head of the Taiwan-based Chinese Kuomintang (KMT) opposition party, waves as she arrives in Shanghai by plane from Taipei yesterday for a six-day working visit. – Xinhua

NANJING – Cheng Li-wun, chairwoman of the Chinese Kuomintang (KMT) party, led a KMT delegation to the Chinese mainland yesterday.

Cheng led the delegation to Nanjing, capital of Jiangsu Province, after arriving in Shanghai by plane. The visit, which covers Jiangsu, Shanghai and Beijing, will run through Sunday.

The KMT chairwoman was invited by the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee. In Nanjing, she thanked Xi and the mainland for the warm reception, saying her visit aims to safeguard peace across the Taiwan Strait.

Welcoming Cheng in Shanghai, Song Tao, head of the Taiwan Work Office of the CPC Central Committee, said Cheng will certainly feel the deep bond between people on the mainland and their Taiwan compatriots, and her trip will be widely supported by people on both sides of the Strait.

Song said that by placing the interests of the Chinese nation first and keeping in mind people's well-being, the CPC and the KMT

must work together to promote the peaceful development of cross-Strait relations and strive for national rejuvenation.

Cheng's trip marks the first time in a decade that a KMT chairperson has led a delegation to the Chinese mainland. The visit is regarded as an important part of the exchanges and dialogue between the KMT and the CPC under the new circumstances.

The Taiwan question is a scar left over by a full-blown civil war fought between the forces led by the CPC and the KMT about eight decades ago. In 1949, the remnants of the defeated KMT retreated to Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded under the leadership of the CPC.

The unresolved civil war and foreign interference have left the two sides of the Taiwan Strait in a prolonged state of political confrontation. However, the fact that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory has never changed.

In 1971, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 2758 by an overwhelming majority, clarifying

that the PRC government is the sole legal government representing the whole of China. It is widely recognized by the international community that there is only one China and that Taiwan is part of China's territory.

Cheng was elected KMT chairperson in October last year. Since taking office, she has repeatedly expressed her willingness to visit the mainland.

After accepting the invitation, Cheng told a press conference in Taipei that the visit is in line with the mainstream public opinion in Taiwan.

She said that her visit, like previous visits to the mainland by former KMT chairmen Lien Chan and Ma Ying-jeou, is on the basis of the same political foundation – adherence to the 1992 Consensus, which embodies the one-China principle, and opposition to "Taiwan independence."

In Nanjing, Cheng reiterated that the KMT will continue to uphold the 1992 Consensus, oppose "Taiwan independence," and play an important role in promoting the peaceful development of cross-Strait relations. – Xinhua

China concerned about Japan's plan to revise 'three principles on transfer of defense equipment and technology': spokesperson

BEIJING – A foreign ministry spokesperson said yesterday that China is gravely concerned about the Japanese government's plan to revise the "three principles on transfer of defense equipment and technology".

"We urge the Japanese side to deeply reflect on its history of militarist aggression, honor its commitments and act prudently in military and security areas, and stop going further down the wrong path," spokesperson Mao Ning said at a regular press conference.

It is reported that the Japanese government plans to revise the implementation guidelines for the "three principles on transfer of defense equipment and

technology" this month to loosen restrictions on arms export.

"China is gravely concerned," Mao said, adding that international scholars and those with insights in Japan also find the development deeply concerning and believe it marks a fundamental shift in Japan's postwar arms export policy and constitutes a grave violation of instruments with legal effect under international law such as the Cairo Declaration, the Potsdam Proclamation and the Japanese Instrument of Surrender.

The development goes against Japan's own Constitution and norms, and will sabotage institutional safeguards designed to prevent the revival of Japan's militarism, Mao said.

A survey conducted by the Japanese government previously shows that the majority of Japanese people oppose relaxing arms export controls, Mao added.

"Various signs show that the Japanese right-wing forces are pushing for a more offensive and expansionist defense policy. Japan's remilitarization is gathering pace," Mao said, adding that this is already a reality with an actual roadmap and concrete steps, and it is posing a threat to regional peace and stability.

"The international community must stay on high alert and firmly reject the reckless moves of Japanese neo-militarism," she added.

– Xinhua

Indonesia charges 19 over baby trafficking ring

BANDUNG – Indonesian prosecutors charged 19 people with human trafficking yesterday for their alleged roles in buying babies from new parents and selling them at a profit to clients at home and abroad.

A man and 18 women, including alleged ringleader Lie Siu Luan, 70, were formally charged during an appearance at the Bandung district court in West Java province.

If found guilty, they could face up to 15 years in prison under Indonesian

laws governing human trafficking and child protection, officials said.

The defendants were arrested last year after a parent reported an alleged baby kidnapping to police in West Java.

Investigators tracked down a suspect who allegedly confessed to having traded more than two dozen infants, some as young as three months old.

They were bought from people who did not want or could not afford

to keep their babies.

The person who reported the kidnapping had actually entered into an agreement with the syndicate but never got paid, police said.

“Most of those babies were trafficked to Singapore,” prosecutor Sukanda – who like many Indonesians has only one name – told the court yesterday.

Police rescued several infants held by the syndicate in Indonesia, before they could be sold.

Others, rejected by would-be clients in Singapore, had already been sold domestically, including to adoptive parents in the capital Jakarta.

Police said the syndicate had started operating in 2023 and had sent at least 14 babies to Singapore.

The defendants allegedly played distinct roles: some were assigned to find babies, some to care for them, and others to prepare identity documents and passports.

One of the women told

prosecutors she had procured 34 children for the group.

Human trafficking is a recurring problem in Indonesia, a sprawling nation of more than 17,000 islands.

In one of the worst cases in recent years, at least 57 people were found caged on a palm oil plantation in North Sumatra province in 2022.

Abortion is illegal in the Muslim-majority archipelago except in cases of rape or medical necessity. – AFP



Job seekers register at a jobs fair in Surabaya, Indonesia yesterday

– AFP

Indonesian couple get 100 lashes each for sex outside marriage

BANDA ACEH – A couple was publicly flogged in Indonesia’s staunchly Islamic Aceh province yesterday for having sex outside of marriage, an AFP reporter witnessed, in the country’s only region to apply a version of Sharia law.

The man and woman, whose ages were not disclosed, received 100 cane lashes each in a public park in the provincial capital, Banda Aceh, with dozens of people watching.

“We implement Islamic law in Aceh, so whenever someone violates it, we have to carry out punishments like the caning we

just conducted,” Rajesh Kana, an official from the local prosecutors’ office, told AFP.

Sexual relations between unmarried people are outlawed in Aceh.

Police flogged the pair with a rattan cane, according to an AFP reporter at the scene.

They were among six people flogged yesterday.

Four others received between eight and 29 strokes each for offences such as having physical contact with a member of the opposite sex or drinking alcohol.

A woman who was sentenced to 27 lashes fainted at the last whip of the rattan stick and had to be treated by paramedics.

Caning retains strong support in Aceh to punish a range of offences that also include gambling and gay sex.

In January, Sharia police in Aceh caned an unmarried couple 140 times each – likely the severest punishment since Sharia law was implemented in the province in 2015.

Indonesia is the world’s largest Muslim-majority country, but officially recognises six religions as well as indigenous beliefs. – AFP

Philippines says second national confirmed killed in Mideast war

MANILA – The Middle East war has claimed its second Philippine victim, Manila said yesterday, when a missile struck the home of a Filipina living in Israel.

The woman was killed in the port city of Haifa on Sunday “alongside her Israeli husband and elderly parents-in-law”, the foreign affairs department said, without naming the victims.

Israeli rescue services said Monday that the bodies of four people had been recovered from the rubble of a residential building in the city, after it was struck by an Iranian missile the previous day.

Israeli news outlets identified the Filipina victim’s given name as Lucille-Jean, saying that she and her family had been pulled from the rubble of their collapsed residence following an hours-long rescue effort.

“The Philippine Embassy in Tel Aviv has informed the family and is providing all necessary assistance, including arrangements for the earliest possible repatriation of her remains despite the current travel situation in the region,” the foreign affairs department said yesterday.

Mary Ann Velasquez De Vera, a 32-year-old caregiver, became the war’s first Philippine fatality on March 1 as she attempted

to escort her elderly ward to an Israeli bomb shelter.

At least two million Filipinos who live in the Middle East have found themselves in the crossfire since the United States and Israel launched their attack on Iran on February 28.

Mostly guestworkers, the overseas Filipino worker community in the region sends billions of dollars in remittances home each year to families that depend on them as the primary breadwinners.

Thousands of Filipino sailors, meanwhile, have found themselves effectively trapped in the Strait of Hormuz, awaiting safe passage through the now-deadly shipping lane, which Iran has effectively bottlenecked.

The Philippines said last week that Iran had pledged to allow “the safe, unhindered, and expeditious passage through the Strait of Hormuz of Philippine-flagged vessels, energy sources, and all Filipino seafarers”, though the timeline was unclear.

US President Donald Trump doubled down on Monday on a threat to wreck Iran’s civilian infrastructure, warning that US forces could destroy bridges and power plants in the country and that a truce proposal from international mediators was not yet enough. – AFP

40-metre scaffold collapses in Japan, 3 workers critical

TOKYO – A scaffold around the height of 12-storey building collapsed in Japan yesterday, leaving three workers in a critical condition and one missing, local media reported.

The spectacular industrial accident at a steelworks near Tokyo saw the 40-metre structure give way during the dismantling of a crane, broadcaster NHK reported.

Aerial footage from NHK showed a large, water-filled hole at the portside complex in Kawasaki, with fire engines and rescue crews at the scene and divers conducting searches.

Five people fell when the scaffold collapsed, according to NHK, citing police and fire officials.

Of them, three were left unconscious in a critical condition, while one was conscious and another remained missing, the reports said.

Kanagawa Prefecture Police told AFP the accident “happened at a steelworks of JFE Steel in Kawasaki City”, about 20 kilometres from Tokyo, without giving further details.

The site is located in a corner of the waterfront area of Kawasaki, where work was underway to dismantle the cranes used for unloading cargo from ships, according to NHK.

JFE Steel is Japan’s number two steelmaker after Nippon Steel. – AFP

AirAsia X to raise fares, cut capacity over Mideast war

KUALA LUMPUR – Southeast Asia’s largest low-cost carrier AirAsia X said Monday it was raising ticket prices by up to 40 percent and cutting routes to cushion the impact of the war on Iran, but stressed demand for flights remained high.

The Malaysia-based no-frills airline said about 10 percent of its overall flights had been cut so far.

However, it said its planned services to Bahrain, the airline’s first Middle East hub, and a move to expand its network beyond Southeast Asia, were still set to launch in June.

Many international airlines have hiked fuel surcharges since US-Israeli strikes on Iran triggered the conflict in late February, prompting Tehran to respond by effectively closing the Strait of Hormuz, a

crucial artery for global oil supplies.

AirAsia X chief commercial officer Amanda Woo said the Malaysia-based carrier, which flies to more than 150 destinations across 25 countries, was able to spread operations along routes “where we can recover the high fuel surcharges”.

Airline fares have gone up about “31 to 40 percent incremental”, Woo said, while fuel surcharges raised by 20 percent.

The airline was also taking measures to try to rein in price hikes, including reducing baggage fees, she added.

AirAsia X founder Tony Fernandes said higher prices were “unavoidable” and that capacity would be cut on routes “where we don’t believe we can cover the cost of the fuel”.

Hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, AirAsia gradually recovered, last year posting a 1.96 billion ringgit (US\$486 million) profit, according to its website.

Asked how the Middle East war would affect profitability for the rest of 2026, AirAsia X officials said the outlook remained “manageable” but would depend on the duration of the crisis.

AirAsia X turned a “very difficult chapter into a profitable year in 2025”, its independent non-executive chairman Jamaludin Ibrahim said.

“Just when we are about to take off with a big bang... we are now facing yet another crisis. These are real challenges that directly impact our costs, margins, and network decisions,” he said. – AFP

Storms, floods kill 188 in Afghanistan and Pakistan over two weeks

KABUL – Heavy rain, storms and floods have battered Asian neighbours Afghanistan and Pakistan for more than two weeks, killing at least 188 people, disaster officials in both countries said yesterday.

In Afghanistan, which already faces a severe humanitarian crisis, rain, floods, landslides and lightning strikes killed 123 people since March 26, the spokesman of the national disaster management authority, Mohammad Yousuf Hammad, told AFP.

Between Sunday and yesterday alone, 46 people died across several provinces, he said.

In Ghazni province, a newborn baby died when the family's car plunged into submerged ditch on the way back from the maternity ward on Monday, according to the provincial governor's office. The parents survived.

A mother and her child died in Parwan province after the roof of their house collapsed under rain and then snowfall, provincial disaster official Malawi Abdul Aleem Afzali told AFP.

Eight others died in Nangarhar province including the capital Jalalabad when the roofs of their houses collapsed overnight into yesterday, local authorities said.

In northern Pakistan, the death toll has risen in recent days, reaching 47 people including 27 children since March 25, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial disaster management agency told AFP.

And in southwestern Balochistan, at least 18 people have died since March 20, according to the latest figures from local authorities.

The severe weather has also caused widespread damage and blocked major roads.

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

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

In Pakistan, at least 652 houses have been damaged, including about 100 that were reduced to rubble in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Floods have also blocked a road in Afghanistan leading to the Iranian border since Monday.

Truck drivers using that road "are forced to wait here in the desert, even if we get hungry and thirsty, and even if it lasts two or three days", said one of them, Khalil Ahmad Qaderi.

He told AFP that the cost of fuel means turning back would be too expensive.

The Afghan military has deployed helicopters to rescue some people, according to images shared by the defence ministry and authorities in Nangarhar.

The World Food Programme meanwhile distributed food aid across several Afghan provinces.

– AFP

Ostrich on a side quest: runaway big bird sprints on Thai highway

BANGKOK – A pet ostrich went for a speedy jaunt down a busy Thai highway yesterday, before being returned safe and sound to its enclosure at an animal-themed cafe.

The six-month-old male ostrich raced along a three-lane highway in Thailand's coastal Chonburi province as cars and trucks sped by the flightless bird, according to a video posted by a man who was driving directly behind it.

"Who lost an ostrich on the road? Come get him. He runs so fast," the motorist, Chairat Sompong, is heard saying in the video.

Chairat, 33, later told AFP that he was driving home when he came upon a traffic jam.

"At first, I thought it was an accident but when I drove close, I saw an ostrich running in the middle lane," he said.

The ostrich "looked afraid and panicked", Chairat said, adding that he tried to make it move to the left lane, where it eventually stopped running.

Adult ostriches are the fastest running birds, with top recorded speeds of around 70 kilometres per hour.

The ostrich, named B1, was finally corralled around 15 kilometres from its pen in resort town Pattaya, said the animal's owner, Itsara Boriboon.

"I was mortified and worried," Itsara, 43, told AFP. "I was



This frame grab from a handout video courtesy of Chairat Sompong taken and released yesterday shows an ostrich running along a highway in Thailand's Chonburi province.

– AFP

concerned he might have had an accident."

He said he had bought B1 and a female ostrich called B2 five months ago for 15,000 baht (US\$460) and neither had fled their enclosure before.

Itsara, who owns a cat cafe that also features the pair of ostriches, said his employees told him B1 had escaped after noise from a truck

delivering construction materials frightened off the big bird.

The man who later caught B1 contacted Itsara, who drove to a neighbouring province to pick up his pet.

"I will have to take care of them very well from now on so that this kind of incident will not happen again," he said.

– AFP

Thai police seize 1.6 tonnes of drugs hidden under cabbages

BANGKOK – Thai police have seized 1.6 tonnes of ketamine and crystal methamphetamine buried under cabbages in the bed of a pickup truck, with the driver arrested on drug trafficking charges.

The Thai man, aged 39, was arrested over the weekend when he stopped his truck at a petrol station in central Ayutthaya province, police said.

Authorities found 900 kilograms of ketamine and 700 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine in packages hidden underneath bags of

the leafy vegetable, Bangkok police said in a statement on Sunday.

The driver, who was arrested on Saturday, confessed that he was hired to transport the drugs for 100,000 baht (US\$3,000), police said.

The drug trafficking charges carry a maximum sentence of 15 years to life in prison.

Police said they suspected the drugs were trafficked from a neighbouring country, without specifying which one.

Thailand is a major hub for illegal drug trafficking in Southeast

Asia, and police raids and seizures of hard narcotics such as heroin and methamphetamine are common.

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said a record 236 tonnes of methamphetamine were seized in East and Southeast Asia in 2024 - a 24 percent rise from the previous year.

Thailand was the "main transit and destination point for methamphetamine" trafficked from neighbouring Myanmar and has recorded the largest quantity of seized meth in the region, according to UNODC.

– AFP

Indian court sentences 9 police to death for COVID custody killings

NEWDELHI – An Indian court has sentenced nine policemen to death for the torture and killing of a father and son in 2020 who were detained for allegedly breaching COVID lockdown rules.

The additional district judge in Madurai, in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, found the officers guilty in the custodial deaths of trader Jeyaraj, 59, and his son Benniks, 31, according to a statement by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) yesterday.

"The court upheld that the case is a clear instance of abuse of authority and falls in the rarest of the rare cases," it said following sentencing on Monday in a case that triggered outrage over police brutality.

The two men were picked up by the officers from a police station and allegedly subjected to brutal torture.

Media reports said the victims, who ran a mobile shop, were arrested for allegedly keeping

their shop open beyond permitted hours during a lockdown as the COVID-19 pandemic raged across the country.

Widespread outrage over the killings pushed the Tamil Nadu government to transfer the case to the CBI, which filed charges against nine officers within 90 days.

During the trial, the CBI examined more than 50 witnesses and argued that the killings had "shaken public conscience", warranting the severest punishment.

All nine accused were convicted of murder and destroying evidence.

India carries out executions by hanging, though they remain rare.

The last executions in India were in March 2020, when four men convicted of the 2012 gang rape and murder of a woman on a Delhi bus were hanged, in a case that sparked huge nationwide protests.

– AFP

S Korea deports alleged Thai drug kingpin

SEOUL – South Korean authorities deported to Thailand yesterday a man accused of running a major drug trafficking operation who had evaded arrest for years, Seoul's spy agency said.

The 43-year-old Thai suspect was arrested on Monday at a hotel in Seoul's affluent Gangnam district at the request of Thailand's Office of the Narcotics Control Board, South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) said.

Thai authorities had issued some 50 arrest warrants over the past

decade in a bid to apprehend the suspect, whose name was withheld, the NIS said.

Authorities described the scale of the narcotics operation as "unprecedented" for a single organisation, involving 11.5 tonnes of methamphetamine, five tonnes of ketamine and 271 million pills of "yaba" – a potent mix of methamphetamine and caffeine – over 25 years.

The suspect's organisation is believed to have trafficked narcotics across Thailand and another

country, according to the South Korean spy agency.

The NIS said the methamphetamine linked to the alleged kingpin was enough to supply up to 380 million people, putting the total value at 4.6 trillion won (US\$3.1 billion).

The volume of ketamine – an anaesthetic that can be used as a party drug – was enough for 100 million people, it added.

The suspect had entered South Korea legally using a third-country passport, the NIS said.

– AFP

Trump branded 'crazy' over apocalyptic Iran threats

Danny Kemp

WASHINGTON – Donald Trump is no stranger to provocative language. But his threat to wipe out Iranian civilisation and other recent menacing comments have prompted critics to question the US president's mental health.

The oldest elected president in American history has ramped up his apocalyptic rhetoric as his frustration grows with Tehran's refusal to make a deal to end the Middle East war.

Even some former allies have called for the 79-year-old Republican's removal from office after a series of outlandish and sometimes expletive-riddled social media posts.

The world is now guessing whether Trump will follow through when his Tuesday evening deadline for Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz expires – or back down as the former businessman has often done before.

"A whole civilisation will die tonight, never to be brought back again. I don't want that to happen, but it probably will," Trump posted on his Truth Social network 12 hours before the deadline.

As global alarm grew, the White House was forced to dismiss speculation that his statement – and comments by Vice President JD Vance about "tools in our toolkit that we so far haven't decided to use" – meant Trump was ready to use nuclear weapons.

In the past, the former New York property magnate has often trumpeted a negotiating style that relies on maximalist positions in order to extract more from a deal.

"He does seem a bit more unhinged than in the past," Peter Loge, director of George Washington University's School of Media, told AFP.

But he added that "this feels to me like a broader pattern of Trump bluster.

"My guess is as we approach one more deadline in a long series of deadlines, the president will declare victory, say I drove Iran to the bargaining table, I'll give them two more weeks.

"Then we'll see this movie again in a couple of weeks."

'Evil and madness'

Even by Trump's own outspoken

standards, the 45th and 47th US commander-in-chief has in recent days used distinctly un-presidential language.

"Open the Fuckin' Strait, you crazy bastards, or you'll be living in Hell," Trump said on Truth Social, on the morning of Easter Sunday.

Trump was barely more measured in a series of interactions with the media in the incongruous setting of an Easter Egg Roll at the White House on Monday.

Surrounded by hundreds of kids and alongside a giant Easter Bunny and First Lady Melania Trump, the president denied that targeting Iranian power plants and civil infrastructure would be a war crime.

His extreme language has prompted a slew of critics – including some one-time allies – to question Trump's sanity.

"We cannot kill an entire civilization. This is evil and madness," hard-right ex-congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, who split with Trump last year, said on X.

Former loyalists including Greene have also joined Democrats calling for Trump's cabinet to invoke the 25th amendment, which

provides for a transfer of power if a president is unable to govern, particularly in the event of illness.

Right-wing TV host Tucker Carlson called Trump's Easter Sunday comments the "first step toward nuclear war," ex-White House press secretary Anthony Scaramucci called him a "crazy person" and sought Trump's removal from office, and conspiracy theorist Alex Jones asked on his INFO WARS show: "How do we 25th Amendment his ass?"

Former Democratic vice-presidential candidate Tim Walz meanwhile said "the President has lost his mind."

But Trump himself brushed off questions about his mental health, when asked by an AFP journalist at a briefing at the White House on Monday.

"I haven't heard that," Trump said in response to a question about critics saying his mental state should be examined following his "crazy bastards" comment.

"But if that's the case, you're going to have to have more people like me."

– AFP

Israel army 'regrets' damage to Tehran synagogue



Iranian workers and volunteers gather at the site of Israeli-American strikes that according to local media reports destroyed the Rafi-Nia Synagogue and nearby residential buildings in Tehran yesterday. A synagogue in Tehran was "completely destroyed" during yesterday's Israeli-American strikes, the Mehr news agency and the daily newspaper Shargh reported on the 39th day of the war against Israel and the United States. – AFP

JERUSALEM – The Israeli military yesterday expressed regret over "collateral damage" to a synagogue in Tehran caused by an overnight strike that it said was targeting a senior Iranian commander.

"Last night [yesterday], the IDF [Israel Defence Forces] struck a senior commander in the emergency headquarters 'Khatam al-Anbiya' of the Iranian terror regime," an Israeli military spokesperson said in response to a question from AFP.

"The IDF regrets the collateral damage to the synagogue and emphasises that the strike was targeted at a senior military target within the regime's armed forces, not at any place of worship."

The military said the results of the

strike were "under review", adding that "steps were taken to mitigate harm to civilians, including the use of precise munitions and aerial surveillance".

Earlier yesterday, Iran's Shargh newspaper and Mehr news agency reported that the Rafi-Nia Synagogue in central Tehran had been "completely destroyed".

Judaism is one of Iran's legally recognised minority religions, and the country has a small Jewish community, although many members fled in the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic revolution.

There are no publicly available official numbers, but there are thought to be a few thousand Jewish people in Iran.

– AFP

Are war crimes taking place in Mideast war?

Nina Larson

GENEVA – With US and Israeli strikes on Iran's critical infrastructure already underway yesterday amid threats of more to come, the UN and other organisations have warned that such attacks could constitute war crimes.

What is a war crime

A war crime is a serious violation of international humanitarian law during times of conflict.

But "not all violations committed during war are legally considered war crimes," the Geneva-based NGO Trial International explains on its website, stressing that "to qualify, they must fulfil certain criteria of purpose and gravity".

War crimes are primarily defined by the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols, as well as by the 1998 Rome Statute, the founding treaty of the world's only permanent court for prosecuting war crimes – the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Article 8 of the Rome Statute sets out dozens of examples which could be considered a war crime.

They include wilful killing, torture, taking hostages and intentionally attacking civilians.

Also on the list are intentional "attacks against civilian objects, that is, objects which are not military objectives".

Article 54 of the first additional protocol of the Geneva Conventions meanwhile emphasises that it is "prohibited to attack, destroy, remove, or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population", including "crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works".

Situation in Middle East?

Civilian infrastructure, including power and desalination plants, have been repeatedly hit in the conflict that began when the United States and Israel launched strikes on Iran on February 28.

Trump ramped up his rhetoric towards Iran on Monday, vowing to carry out the "complete demolition" of Iran's critical infrastructure, particularly bridges and power plants if a deal was not reached by late Tuesday.

But hours before the deadline, Israel said it had already completed a broad wave of strikes targeting "infrastructure sites" across Iran.

Writing on Truth Social, Trump stated that "a whole civilisation will die tonight" if the country does not heed his call for a deal.

Without mentioning Trump by name, United Nations rights chief Volker Türk yesterday slammed the "incendiary rhetoric" expressed during the war as "sickening".

"Under international law, deliberately attacking civilians and civilian infrastructure is a war crime," Türk said, insisting that "anyone responsible for international crimes must be held to account by a competent court."

Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for UN secretary general António Guterres, also stressed that "civilian infrastructure, including energy infrastructure, may not be attacked".

Even in cases where "specific civilian infrastructure were to qualify as a military objective, international humanitarian law would still prohibit attacks against them if they [were] expected to cause excessive incidental civilian harm," he warned.

Mirjana Spoljaric, head of the International Committee of the Red Cross, denounced on Monday "deliberate threats, whether in rhetoric or in action, against essential civilian infrastructure".

Who prosecutes war crimes?

Trial International points out that "unlike other human rights violations, war crimes do not engage state responsibility but individual criminal responsibility".

Domestic courts are typically responsible for prosecuting war crimes. However, this can prove impossible during or in the aftermath of conflicts.

In such cases, one option can be universal jurisdiction, which allows countries to prosecute the most serious international crimes regardless of where they were committed.

International courts may also have jurisdiction, including the ICC.

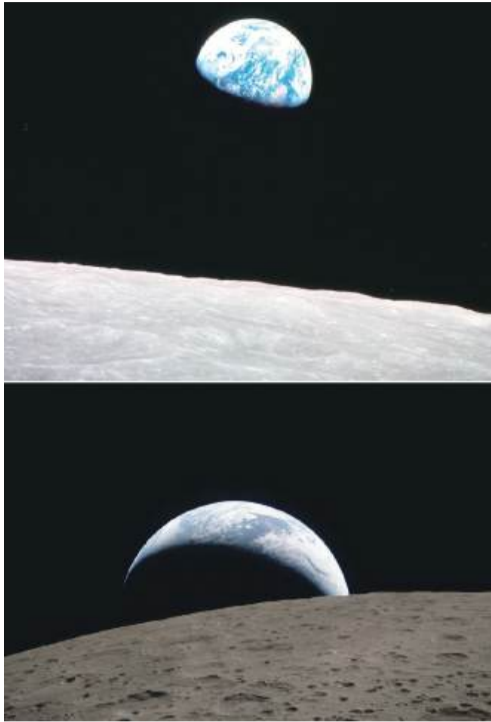
Cases can be referred to the ICC by a country that has signed up to the Rome treaty or whose citizens have been the victims of crimes.

Cases may also be referred by the UN Security Council. A non-member state can also agree to accept the court's jurisdiction.

Neither the United States, Israel nor Iran are state parties to the Rome Statute.

– AFP

Artemis II crew snaps historic Earthset photo on way home



This combination of pictures created yesterday shows (top to bottom) a NASA handout image showing Earthrise over the Moon made on Christmas Eve, December 24, 1968 from Apollo 8, the first manned mission to the Moon, as it entered lunar orbit and a NASA handout image showing Earth as it dips beyond the lunar horizon, also known as "Earthset," as seen from the Orion spacecraft on Monday. — AFP

Maggy Donaldson

HOUSTON – The Artemis II astronauts snapped a stunning shot of Earthset – the moment when the Earth dips below the Moon's horizon – on their long journey back home yesterday after wrapping up a historic lunar flyby.

NASA released the photo of Earth dropping below the rugged lunar edge in a deliberate nod to the iconic Earthrise image taken by an Apollo 8 astronaut in 1968.

That shot 57 years ago helped capture the public's imagination when it was taken by US astronaut Bill Anders during the first space mission to carry humans around the Moon.

The modern version pairs the delicate, watery planet Earth with the harsh, huge curve of the Moon, separated by black space.

"First photo from the far side of the Moon," the White House said, reposting the image.

The crew of four – US astronauts Reid Wiseman, Christina Koch, and Victor Glover, teamed with Canadian Jeremy Hansen – are on a historic mission to loop around Earth's natural satellite as part of a broader program paving the way for a Moon landing in 2028.

After completing their lunar flyby – breaking the record for distance from Earth – they were bound for home, with splashdown due in the Pacific off the coast of California on Friday.

'Hard to describe'

The crew reported in vivid detail features of the lunar surface and later witnessed a solar eclipse, when the Moon passed in front of the Sun.

They also described flashes of light – meteor strikes – on the Moon's surface.

"Humans probably have not evolved to see what we're seeing," said Victor Glover. "It is truly hard to describe. It is amazing."

On Monday, the crew got a congratulatory call from NASA administrator Jared Isaacman and US President Donald Trump, who at 79 is old enough to remember the Apollo programme.

"You've really inspired the entire world," Trump said, calling them "modern-day pioneers" who have "a lot of courage."

He probed the astronauts about their favourite moments and asked what it was like to lose connection with Earth for some 40 minutes during an expected communications blackout. Trump experienced a signal glitch of his own while calling into space.

"Might have gotten cut off," Trump said as he waited a full minute for the signal to return. "It is a long distance."

Historic trip

The Artemis II team broke the distance record set by the 1970 Apollo 13 mission,

which they surpassed by more than 6,000 kilometres when they reached the journey's furthest distance from Earth at 406,771 kilometres.

Astronaut Jeremy Hansen said the moment should "challenge this generation and the next, to make sure this record is not long-lived."

Glover was the first person of colour to fly around the Moon, Koch was the first woman, and Canadian Hansen the first non-American.

The Orion capsule carrying the astronauts will now travel back to Earth in a so-called free-return trajectory before coming down in the ocean.

They'll be leaving something behind: names for two previously unnamed Moon craters.

The first they requested to name in honour of their spacecraft's nickname, "Integrity."

They offered a second name, "Carroll," for another crater, which they asked be named after the late wife of mission commander Wiseman, who died of cancer.

"It's a bright spot on the Moon," said Hansen, his voice breaking with emotion. "And we would like to call it Carroll."

NASA said it will formally submit the name proposals to the International Astronomical Union, the body charged with naming celestial bodies and surface features. (Another photo on p.16) — AFP

UK govt vows to cut knife crime within 10 years

LONDON – The UK government yesterday unveiled a plan to "halve knife crime within a decade" by increasing police deployment and targeting the most affected areas.

Knife crime has risen sharply over the past 15 years, particularly among young people, with Prime Minister Keir Starmer describing the scourge as a "national crisis".

To tackle the issue, the Home Office said in the statement that it would identify the most affected knife crime hotspots with precision down to small geographical areas.

"The vast majority of knife crime happens in the same place and same street, over and over again," the ministry said, announcing some £26 million (US\$35 million) in funding to support 27 police forces covering areas that account for 90 percent of such offences in England and Wales.

Those hotspots will see a "dramatic surge in police activity", including additional patrols, new CCTV coverage, the rollout of live facial recognition, and the installation of knife arches to detect weapons. No timeline has been set for these measures.

The government would "deploy state of the art mapping" to pinpoint high-risk areas and direct resources more effectively, said crime and policing minister Sarah Jones.

The strategy also includes prevention measures, with plans to establish 50 youth clubs by 2029 aimed at steering young people away from crime.

"Knife crime creates a profound and often location-based fear among young people, shaping how they move, socialise and experience their own neighbourhoods," said Patrick Green, a member of the government's Coalition to Tackle Knife Crime.

Additional funding will be directed towards school-based prevention programmes.

Last week, police launched a National Knife Crime Centre in London to crack down on the sale of banned knives and machetes, including online sales of weapons.

The government has already introduced legislation banning so-called "zombie knives" and machetes, often associated with gang culture, which came into force in September 2024.

In the year ending September 2025 there were about 50,000 knife crimes in England and Wales, according to the Office for National Statistics, with the highest rates in London

According to the Home Office, knife crime has fallen by 8.0 percent since July 2024, with more than 63,000 weapons seized, surrendered, or confiscated, the majority of them zombie-style knives and machetes. — AFP

Picasso's 'Guernica' at heart of battle in Spain over location

Marie GIFFARD

MADRID – Pablo Picasso's anti-war masterpiece "Guernica" is swept up in a conflict in Spain, where Basque leaders want the government in Madrid to move the painting to their region, whose 1937 bombing inspired it.

The mural-sized painting has been on display since 1992 at the Reina Sofia Museum in the Spanish capital, and repeated requests for it to be moved to Spain's Basque Country have been refused.

The latest demand was made by the head of the regional Basque government, Imanol Pradales, during talks with Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez.

The Basque government wants the painting to be hung in the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the April 26, 1937 bombing, in which forces from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy razed the town of Guernica to help Generalissimo Francisco Franco in the Spanish Civil War.

Bringing the painting to Bilbao from October until June would be a form of "reparation and historical memory", the Basque government said.

Sánchez – whose minority government depends on the support of two Basque parties in parliament to pass laws – did not reject the proposal outright, instead referring it to the culture ministry.

The ministry asked the Reina Sofi Museum for a technical report on the viability of the request, which once again "strongly advised" against moving the painting.

The report said the painting is too fragile to travel, citing risks of damage from vibration or movement.

Picasso's black-and-white masterpiece is the highlight of the Reina Sofia Museum,



A visitor looks at Spanish painter Pablo Picasso's master piece "Guernica" during a press conference presenting the "Year of Picasso" events, marking the 50th anniversary of the painter's death, at the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid, on September 12, 2022. — AFP

which welcomed around 1.6 million visitors last year.

The outspoken head of the regional government of Madrid, Isabel Díaz Ayuso of the conservative People's Party (PP), weighed in on Monday, calling the request to move the painting "provincial".

"It makes no sense for everything to be returned to its origin. In that case we should send all of Picasso's works to Málaga," she said, a reference to the southern Spanish city where Picasso was born.

Return from New York

Asked about the controversy yesterday, Spain's central government spokeswoman Elma Saiz said the government relies on the advice of "professionals", referring to the museum report, and "never resorts to insults".

Painted in 1937 in the aftermath of the bombing, "Guernica" debuted in Paris at the World's Fair, then was placed in the care of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

When Franco's forces overthrew the Spanish republic, Picasso stipulated that the painting should not return to Spain until democracy had been restored.

The work was moved to Spain in 1981, six years after Franco's death.

It was first displayed at the Prado Museum, then moved to the Reina Sofia Museum in 1992.

Picasso, who died in 1973, never lived to see the painting on exhibit in Spain.

In 1995, Spanish authorities refused to lend it to the Pompidou Centre in Paris, citing the damage the work could suffer during its transport. — AFP

Portuguese expert hails Chinese superbike breakthrough

LISBON – Chinese manufacturer ZXMOTO’s double victory at the Superbike World Championship Portuguese round at the end of March has drawn strong attention in Europe, with Portuguese motorcycle expert Rui Belmonte calling it a “turning point” for Chinese brands in high-performance racing.

Speaking to Xinhua in a video interview on Monday, Belmonte said ZXMOTO’s back-to-back wins in the WorldSSP class – a category traditionally dominated by European and Japanese manufacturers – marked a major breakthrough.

“We had never seen a Chinese manufacturer so dominant over a full race weekend,” he said, adding that the result surprised many in the paddock.

Belmonte said the achievement demonstrates that Chinese brands can now compete at the highest level of motorsport. “With its own rider and team, these victories show Chinese manufacturers can win in top-tier competition,” he added.

ZXMOTO, founded in Chongqing in 2024, unveiled its first model at the Chongqing International Motorcycle Trade Exhibition in September that year, with initial deliveries beginning in March 2025. It has only recently entered both the championship and the European market, making its rapid success particularly notable, Belmonte said.

The results also reflect broader changes in China’s motorcycle industry, he said, with companies

shifting from low-cost production to innovation-driven development, including advances in engine technology, lightweight materials and performance.

“In the past, Chinese brands were seen as low-spec producers,” he said. “But that mindset has clearly changed.”

He noted that Chinese motorcycles are increasingly competitive globally in terms of technology, design and reliability, and warned that established manufacturers can no longer afford to underestimate them.

“Chinese brands are improving rapidly. The progress is very clear,” he said, adding that China is likely to become a major contender in multiple racing categories. – Xinhua

Portugal to invest in strategic supercomputing, AI projects

LISBON – Portugal will invest up to 19.3 million euros (US\$22.4 million) in two strategic supercomputing and artificial intelligence (AI) projects over the coming years, according to a cabinet resolution published on Monday in the Official Gazette.

The funding covers two initiatives managed by the Foundation for Science and Technology – the Deucalion supercomputer in Guimaraes and the MareNostrum 5 AI Factory in Barcelona, one of Europe’s most powerful computing infrastructure.

The Deucalion supercomputer

will receive up to 3.7 million euros between 2026 and 2029. The facility, inaugurated in 2023, is designed to strengthen high-performance computing research capacity in Europe, the official gazette said.

Meanwhile, the AI Factory in Barcelona will garner up to 15.6 million euros to upgrade the MareNostrum 5 into a specialized AI platform, providing cutting-edge computing resources to startups, small and medium-sized enterprises, and the European scientific community, according to the official gazette.

– Xinhua

Portuguese parliament approves revised nationality law, tightening citizenship rules

LISBON – Portugal’s parliament last week approved a revised Nationality Law that tightens the conditions for obtaining and retaining Portuguese citizenship, after the Constitutional Court struck down an earlier version.

Two bills were passed last Wednesday with the support of the center-right Social Democratic Party (PSD), the far-right Chega party, the Liberal Initiative, and the CDS-People’s Party, securing the required two-thirds majority. Left-wing parties, including the Socialists, Livre, the Communist Party, the Left Bloc and PAN, voted against both bills.

The first bill bars individuals convicted of serious crimes and sentenced to three or more years of effective imprisonment from obtaining Portuguese nationality.

The second, which amends the Penal Code, introduces the loss of nationality as an additional penalty for those sentenced to five or more years in prison for crimes deemed very serious, including aggravated

homicide, slavery, human trafficking, rape and sexual abuse, as well as criminal association, drug trafficking, and arms trafficking.

The legislation is the result of a parliamentary agreement between PSD and Chega, after the original version approved in October last year was returned to parliament by the Constitutional Court, which unanimously found several provisions unconstitutional primarily on grounds of violating the principle of equality.

Under the deal, the PSD and the CDS-People’s Party dropped their original proposal of a six-year threshold for nationality loss, accepting Chega’s proposal of five years, and lowered from four to three years the sentencing threshold that blocks acquisition of nationality.

The approved bills will now be sent to President António José Seguro, who may promulgate, veto, or refer them to the Constitutional Court for a fresh review of their constitutionality. – Xinhua, MPD



Li Yuhao (right), a rice and agro-processing expert with the fourth batch of Chinese agricultural experts assisting Mozambique, explains rice cultivation techniques to a local agricultural technician at the Umbeluzi Agricultural Station in Maputo Province, Mozambique, last month. – Xinhua

Chinese medical team offers free clinic, promotes health awareness in Mozambique

MAPUTO – The 25th Chinese medical team in Mozambique has held a health awareness campaign and free clinic at the Confucius Institute of Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo.

During the event held on Monday, members of the medical team introduced traditional Chinese acupuncture therapy, explaining its principles and benefits to participants.

They also provided medical consultations and basic health examinations across multiple specialties, including orthopedics, plastic surgery, and obstetrics and gynecology.

Zhu Hongyu, a doctor with the Chinese medical team, said that the acupuncture lecture aimed not only to promote Chinese culture but also to help participants gain a better understanding of traditional Chinese medicine.

“It allows people to experience the unique value of traditional Chinese medicine,” she said.

To mark Mozambican Women’s Day on April 7, the medical team also organized targeted health education sessions focusing on the prevention of common diseases such as HIV/AIDS and offering

practical guidance to enhance public health awareness.

Yassine Chicombe, Mozambican director of the Confucius Institute, said that 2026 marks the China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges, noting that such activities are highly welcomed as they help strengthen cultural exchanges and improve students’ health awareness.

China has been dispatching medical teams to Mozambique since 1976, contributing to local healthcare services and promoting health cooperation between the two countries. – Xinhua

Mozambique clears debt to IMF in March

MAPUTO – Mozambique has fully repaid its outstanding debt to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in March, according to official data, a move that could help pave the way for negotiations on a new financial support program.

IMF data showed Mozambique’s credit outstanding stood at 514.04 million Special Drawing Rights at the beginning of March, but

dropped to zero by the end of the month following full repayment.

Mozambique was the only country among 85 listed in an IMF report titled “Total IMF Credit Outstanding Movement From March 01, 2026 to April 01, 2026” to have reduced its outstanding credit to zero during the period.

According to Mozambique’s national news agency AIM, under

the Extended Credit Facility program approved in 2022, the IMF committed about US\$468 million to the country. The program was suspended in April 2025 after four disbursements totaling approximately US\$343 million.

The repayment is expected to strengthen the government’s position in seeking further financial assistance from the IMF, AIM reported.

– Xinhua

Heavy rains leave 15 dead in Angola: media

LUANDA – At least 15 people were killed and 14 others injured in Angola over the past 24 hours after heavy rains battered several regions of the country, local media reported on Sunday.

According to Agora Aguenta in a social media post, 12 of the deaths were recorded in Benguela Province and three in the capital, Luanda. The injured included 10 people in Benguela, one in Huambo, and three in Luanda.

As of Sunday, five people had been reported missing, including three in Luanda and two in Benguela, the reports said.

In Luanda, authorities said about 4,180 houses were flooded, with significant damage to infrastructure, including two electrical substations. Streets were inundated and homes affected, while environmental damage included fallen trees and the overflow of two retention basins.

Emergency teams have been deployed to the worst-hit areas, particularly in the municipalities of Mulenvos, Camama, and Cacucaco in Luanda Province, where they are conducting damage assessments and assisting affected residents, the reports added.

– Xinhua

Maguire signs 1-year Man Utd contract extension

Premier League LONDON – Manchester United defender Harry Maguire is set to remain at Old Trafford for at least another season after signing a new one-year contract.

The 33-year-old England centre-back was in the final months of his current deal but Maguire, who joined United from Leicester in an £80 million (US\$106 million) move in 2019, has agreed new terms that include an option for a further year.

“Representing Manchester United is the ultimate honour,” Maguire said in a statement issued yesterday. “It is a responsibility that makes myself and my family proud every single day.”

“I am delighted to extend my journey at this incredible club to at least eight seasons and continue to play in front of our special supporters to create more amazing moments together.”

He added: “You can feel the ambition and potential of this exciting squad. The determination throughout the whole club to fight for major trophies is clear for everyone to see and I am confident that our best moments together remain ahead of us.”

Maguire has been ever-present for United since former Old Trafford favourite Michael Carrick took caretaker charge after Darren Fletcher was briefly at the helm following the end of Ruben Amorim’s turbulent 14

months’ reign in January, with the Red Devils rising to third in the Premier League and a return to the Champions League now in sight.

His form earned Maguire an England recall last month as he made his first international appearances in 18 months, when he played both friendlies at Wembley, to put himself in contention for a place at this year’s World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Maguire has so far made 266 appearances for United, including winning the FA Cup and League Cup with the English football giants.

United director of football Jason Wilcox said: “Harry represents the mentality and resilience required to perform for Manchester United.”

“He is the ultimate professional who brings invaluable experience and leadership to our young, ambitious squad.”

“Harry, like everyone at the club, is completely determined to help Manchester United to achieve regular and sustained success.”

Maguire is with United in Dublin this week as the senior squad take part in a training camp during a three-and-a-half-week gap between league fixtures, created both by the recent international window and the club’s early exit from cup competitions.

United return to league action against Leeds at Old Trafford on Monday, April 13. –AFP

Conte says Italian federation should consider him for coach’s job

Football

ROME - Napoli coach Antonio Conte would be willing to take the vacant Italy job with his club president Aurelio De Laurentiis supporting the move yesterday.

Gennaro Gattuso resigned as Azzurri boss on Friday after Italy failed to reach this summer’s World Cup for a third straight time.

Conte’s deal at Napoli runs until 2027 with the Italian champions seven points off Serie A leaders Inter Milan with seven matches of the season remaining.

“It’s expected that my name appears on the list of candidates for the national team,” Conte told reporters after Monday’s 1-0 league win over AC Milan.

“If I was the federation’s president, I would consider my name.”

“But you know my contractual situation, I’ll meet with my president at the end of the season and we will see,” the 56-year-old added.

Conte was in charge of the four-time World Cup winners between 2014 and 2016 when he led the team to Euro 2016 where they were eliminated on penalties by Germany in the quarterfinals.

He led Napoli to last season’s Scudetto but was close to leaving the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona in the summer after a fall-out with De Laurentiis.

Gattuso left the job 24 hours



Napoli’s Italian coach Antonio Conte reacts from the technical area during the Italian Serie A football match against AC Milan at the Diego Armando Maradona Stadium in Naples on Monday. –AFP

after Gabriele Gravina resigned as the head of the Italian football federation (FIGC).

“If Conte asked me to allow him to become the national team coach again, I would say yes,” De Laurentiis told website Calcionapoli24.

“But as he’s very intelligent, as long as there’s no (FIGC) president, and up to now there hasn’t been, I

don’t think he sees himself in charge of something so disorganised,” Laurentiis added.

AC Milan boss Massimiliano Allegri has also been linked with the Azzurri position but Gattuso’s replacement will not be named until after June 22’s FIGC extraordinary meeting, to elect a new president for the body. –AFP

Football shorts

FIFA opens disciplinary probe against Spanish FA over offensive chants

MADRID – World football’s governing body FIFA told AFP yesterday that it had opened disciplinary proceedings against the Spanish football federation over anti-Muslim chants heard at a recent match between Spain and Egypt.

A section of fans at the RCDE stadium in Barcelona had chanted “Whoever doesn’t jump is a Muslim”, during the international friendly on March 31.

“FIFA has opened disciplinary proceedings today against the Spanish FA for the incidents in the friendly against Egypt,” the governing body told AFP.

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

Last week, Spanish police said they were investigating “Islamophobic and xenophobic” chants and Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez condemned an “unacceptable” incident while insisting that an “uncivil minority” would not be allowed to tarnish the country.

The Spanish Football Federation had also condemned

the chants while Spain forward Lamine Yamal, who is Muslim and played in the match, blasted “a lack of respect” by those who are “ignorant and racist”. –AFP

Juve’s Vlahovic suffers latest injury setback

ROME – Juventus’ Serbia attacker Dusan Vlahovic is set to be sidelined for three weeks due to a calf issue having recently recovered from a groin injury.

Vlahovic, 26, had been out since December but returned to action in mid-March before suffering this latest setback during Monday’s 2-0 Serie A win over Genoa.

According to Italian media, Vlahovic will be out for at least three weeks.

“During the warm-up held in the second half of the match against Genoa, Dusan Vlahovic felt an issue in his left calf,” Juve said.

“As a result, this morning he underwent diagnostic tests.”

“The examinations revealed low-grade damage,” they added.

According to Italian media reports Vlahovic will be out for at least three weeks.

Juve are fifth in the Italian table, one point behind Como in the final Champions League spot with seven games of the season to play. –AFP

Barca’s Flick to defend ‘emotional’ teen Yamal against criticism

Rik Sharma

BARCELONA – Barcelona coach Hansi Flick said he would defend teenage star Lamine Yamal against criticism for his occasional “emotional” outbursts, ahead of today’s Champions League quarter-final first leg against Atletico Madrid.

The 18-year-old winger did not celebrate Barca’s late winner in the 2-1 victory at Atletico in La Liga on Saturday that took the Catalans seven points clear at the top of the table.

Yamal was visibly irritated, with Spanish media reporting it was because a member of the Barcelona coaching staff admonished him from the sidelines for shooting when he could have passed.

The Spain international has also shown his anger at being substituted by Flick in the past, and the coach said he would back Yamal regardless.

“What we have to see is that Lamine is 18 years old and for me he’s an unbelievable player, you can see it when you watch the game again - what he’s doing is unbelievable,” Flick told reporters yesterday.

“But he’s only 18, sometimes he’s angry when I substitute him. He had a situation, where he dribbled past four or five players and then shot and missed.

“Sometimes he’s frustrated he didn’t score this goal and he’s like that, he’s emotional, and this is good. I will always support him.”

Flick admitted Yamal’s shows of disapproval on the sideline sometimes create headlines that are not ideal for the team.

“He’s a fantastic player, on the right [path], we will help him to develop,” the German coach said.

“Not everything that he’s doing is good as it creates this noise around our team. I know everyone is looking to him because he’s a fantastic player but we also have to see that he’s 18 years old.

“Everyone makes mistakes sometimes. I said to him, no problem you can do it and I will always protect you. This is what I want for him, show everyone one the pitch how good he is and he will be one of the best, maybe the best player in the future.”

‘Fantastic’ Rashford

Yamal shone last season as he helped Barca to the Champions League semi-finals, as close as they have come to the trophy since winning it in 2015.

Flick said the quarter-final tie against Diego Simeone’s Atletico would be tricky to navigate, starting at Camp Nou today in the first leg.

“Atleti is a tough team, they have the right attitude, a lot of intensity,

fast players, fantastic players on the pitch,” said Flick.

“On Saturday they rested many players but the quality was very high. They love to defend, they know how to defend in a deep block, it’s not so easy to score two goals at Atletico. It’s always tough.

“There will be a lot of emotions in this game because it’s two legs, we try to give our best to get a good result tomorrow. [today]”

Marcus Rashford is in line to start on the left flank in place of injured winger Raphinha.

The England international, on loan from Manchester United, scored against Atletico on Saturday.

Flick said he still needed to improve on his defensive work rate but acknowledged Rashford was doing well, although he has not said if he wants the club to execute the purchase option they have for the forward.

“[Pressing] is also a part of our game which is very important, not just with the ball [where] everyone knows he’s fantastic,” said Flick.

“[Dribbling] one on one he’s doing really good, but to defend is also part of our game and part of football.

“But he’s doing good, he’s adapted a lot, and we need him... to help his team-mate on the flank.”

The game will be played at 3 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time.

–AFP/MPD

McIlroy starting with Young, Howell in Masters repeat bid

AUGUSTA – Defending champion Rory McIlroy will tee off alongside third-ranked Cameron Young and US Amateur winner Mason Howell tomorrow in first-round tee times for the 90th Masters announced yesterday.

McIlroy, the world number two from Northern Ireland who completed a career Grand Slam last year with his first Masters title, starts in tomorrow's 15th group at 10:31 a.m. [local time] 10:31 p.m. Macau time.

Young won last month's Players Championship while fellow American Howell captured last year's US Amateur at The Olympic Club in San Francisco aged 18.

In other groupings, top-ranked Scottie Scheffler is in the 30th and penultimate group at 1:44 p.m. alongside fellow American Gary Woodland and Scotsman Robert MacIntyre.

Two-time Masters winner Scheffler, the reigning PGA Championship and British Open champion, won at LaQuinta earlier this year.

Woodland took an emotional PGA Houston Open victory two weeks ago, his first triumph since the 2019 US Open. Earlier last month, Woodland revealed he still fights anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder following 2023 brain surgery.

MacIntyre, last year's US Open runner-up, was second in last week's Texas Open.

Following ceremonial starters Jack Nicklaus, Gary Players and Tom Watson, are the twosome of American John Keefer and China's Li Haotong.

Americans Bryson DeChambeau and Xander Schauffele and England's Matt Fitzpatrick start tomorrow at 10:07 a.m. with Americans Collin Morikawa and Russell Henley joining Japan's Hideki Matsuyama 12 minutes later in the group just ahead of McIlroy's trio.

Other later groups include Spain's Jon Rahm, Sweden's Ludvig Aberg and American Chris Gotterup at 1:08 p.m. followed by England's Justin Rose and Americans Brooks Koepka and Jordan Spieth.

– AFP/MPD



Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland plays a shot from the 12th hole tee box during a practice round prior to the 2026 Masters Tournament at Augusta National Golf Club yesterday in Augusta, Georgia, US. – AFP

Sinner and Alcaraz start fast on Monte Carlo clay in race for No.1

Tennis

MONTE CARLO – Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz continued their duel for the world number one ranking before the French Open as they opened their clay court seasons by crushing their opponents into the red Monte Carlo dirt yesterday.

With Usain Bolt in the crowd, the world's top two sprinted to second-round victories at the Masters event.

No. 2 Sinner took one hour and four minutes to dispatch Frenchman Ugo Humbert 6-3, 6-0. He was followed onto centre court by top-ranked Alcaraz, who took five minutes longer to beat Argentine Sebastian Baez 6-1, 6-3.

Sinner is chasing a first significant clay court title and seeking to dethrone defending Monte Carlo champion Alcaraz as world number one, although the Spaniard said after his match that it was inevitable the 24-year-old Italian would take top spot in the next few weeks.

Sinner came into the season's first clay court event following his impressive "Sunshine Double" in March at the Indian Wells and Miami Masters 1000 tournaments, winning the two titles without dropping a set.

His victory yesterday ran his winning streak in 1000-level events to 18 matches.

"It was a good performance from my side," Sinner said, adding the first clay event "is never easy".

"You have to change your game style a little bit, how you approach certain situations," he said.

"I come here with good feelings but, at the same time, not many expectations."

Alcaraz had no such reservations.

"It's been almost one year the last match I played on clay," he said. "To be honest, I missed it. I missed getting myself dirty a little bit."

Last season, Alcaraz entered four clay-court tournaments, winning three, including Monte Carlo, and losing the final in Barcelona.

Sinner missed the start of the 2025 clay season as he finished a ban, but returned to reach the finals in Rome, where he fell to Alcaraz, and at Roland Garros, where he led the Spaniard by two sets and had three championship points before losing a five-set, five-hour marathon.

Ranking points are wiped out after a year, but as Sinner has none to lose in Monte Carlo, Alcaraz said the Italian's return to the top is inevitable.

"I'm going to lose the number one in the world," said Alcaraz after his win. "I don't know if it's going to be in this tournament or the next one."

"It is going to be really difficult

to defend all the points and even if I do, Jannik is going to add some points in this tournament. Number one is not on my mind but to be my best on clay and let's see how the clay court season is going to be."

'I surprised myself'

Sinner took a few games to find his rhythm against Frenchman Humbert, whom he had faced only twice, the last time five years ago, but broke serve in the fifth game before holding to love and taking a 4-2 lead.

Humbert saved a double break point but eventually lost his serve again and the first set 6-3.

The second set was a one-way affair. The Italian did not concede a single game to the Frenchman, sweeping him aside 6-0 in 23 minutes.

Sinner will face either Argentine Francisco Cerundolo or Czech Tomas Machac in the next round.

Alcaraz raced through the first set but stuttered in the second before winning the last seven points to surge to victory.

"A really good start to the tournament for me," he said "I surprised myself with the level. I thought I was going to play a little bit worse."

He will next face either another Argentine, Tomas Etcheverry, or Frenchman Terence Atmane. – AFP



Groundsmen cover the pitch as rain halts play during the 2026 Indian Premier League (IPL) T20 match between Kolkata Knight Riders and Punjab Kings at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata, India on Monday. Kolkata Knight Riders picked up their first point of the IPL following the first no-result of the 2026 tournament after their match against Punjab Kings was abandoned after just 22 deliveries on Monday.

Following defeats to Mumbai Indians and Sunrisers Hyderabad in their two opening fixtures, Kolkata were in trouble at 25-2 after 3.4 overs at their Eden Gardens home ground when the rain arrived at 7:48 p.m. local time. The rain finally relented 40 minutes before the 11:14 p.m. cut-off, but there wasn't enough time to get the ground ready for a five-overs-a-side shootout. – AFP

Makhmudov hails heavyweight 'legend' Fury ahead of London clash

Boxing

LONDON – Arslanbek Makhmudov says he is relishing the chance to measure himself against boxing "legend" Tyson Fury at London's Tottenham Hotspur Stadium on Saturday.

Canada-based Russian Makhmudov, 36, will be going up against 37-year-old two-time former world heavyweight champion British boxer Fury.

Makhmudov, however believes he can beat the local hero, even if he remains seemingly unsure of his route to victory.

"I don't know how I will beat (Fury), but of course I believe I will win," Makhmudov told the *Guardian*. "This guy, he is a legend, one of the best heavyweights in history."

He added: "Tyson Fury is the professor of mind and boxing. A lot of boxing is mental and he is a master. But boxing is also spiritual. I am going to be strong, spiritual and smart."

"You can say this is a war between mental and spiritual and we'll see who is more successful.

Inshallah it is spiritual."

Makhmudov, who has lost just two of his 23 professional bouts to date and has 19 knockouts to his credit, highlighted Fury's boxing intelligence as one of the biggest threats to his hopes of victory and cited the 'Gypsy King's' victories over Wladimir Klitschko and Deontay Wilder as evidence.

He also accepts he will be fighting in front of an overwhelmingly pro-Fury crowd of some 60,000 on Saturday but has no qualms following a points win over Dave Allen in Sheffield, northern England last year.

Makhmudov endured hardship as a youngster, before moving to Montreal nine years ago, and at one point even travelled to Moscow to fight a bear.

"It was very terrible, to be honest," he recalled. "One of my friends make me an offer (to fight the bear).

He said: 'Do you want to make crazy stuff?' I said: 'OK, I cannot refuse.'

"But I will never do it again. The bear tried to bite me and it was a good thing that never happened." – AFP

Athens in running to host inaugural world marathon championships



PARIS – Negotiations are underway for Athens to host the inaugural world marathon championships in 2030, World Athletics announced yesterday.

The marathon race will remain part of the World Athletics Championships in 2027 and 2029, but from 2030 will become a standalone annual event, with men and women competing in alternate years.

"We are delighted to be exploring the possibility of a standalone World Marathon Championships with Athens, the place where this iconic discipline was born," World Athletics president Sebastian Coe said in a statement.

The origins of the marathon - which is now run over 42.195km (26.2 miles) - go back to ancient Greece with the race for men first introduced in the modern Olympic Games in 1896.

The women's marathon made its Games debut in Los Angeles in 1984.

"Few events in sport carry the weight and resonance of the marathon; it is both a test of the very highest performance and a celebration of mass participation," said Coe.

"This is an opportunity to create a dedicated global celebration of marathon running, held in a setting that honours its heritage while shaping a modern championship that reflects the scale and spirit of the global running community."

World Athletics confirmed "the opening of formal exploratory discussions" for Athens to host the inaugural championships.

"This roadmap ensures the event meets the rigorous technical and operational standards required for the world's most prestigious stage," said World Athletics CEO Jon Ridgeon.

Agreement has also been reached with the Hellenic Athletics Federation (SEGAS) to elevate the Athens Marathon, known as 'The Authentic', to Elite Label status.

Having achieved that status, Athens is targeting a Platinum Label - the highest tier in road racing - by 2029, placing it alongside the world's most elite marathons. – AFP

AI-generated artists break through in country music

Thomas Urbain

NEW YORK – AI-generated singers routinely rank among the top-streamed country music artists in the United States – a trend that for now is limited to a genre that industry observers fear is becoming too formulaic.

Breaking Rust, Cain Walker, Aventhis, and Outlaw Gospel have more in common than cowboy hats, denim and leather. They are all completely computer-generated, from their faces to their melodies.

And they are all hitmakers.

“That’s a phenomenon I didn’t see coming,” said Jennie Hayes Kurtz of the country music band Brother and The Hayes.

“I thought AI was going to be curing cancer or something.”

Many of the AI country tunes tap into the genre’s archetype of the lone cowboy: a rugged, taciturn, plain-spoken man who, above all, refuses to apologise for simply existing.

Lyrics are delivered in raspy, gravelly voices that sound as authentic as the real thing.

“It’s scary as songwriters,” said Kassie Jordan, who forms the singing duo Blue Honey with her husband Troy Brooks.

“We are starting to see a lot of people just putting words into these

chatbots and it is writing songs for them,” she said. “As a songwriter, it’s kind of like, is anyone going to even think I really wrote this?”

Berklee College of Music professor Joe Bennett noted that a sampling of AI singers suggests that the words used to “prompt” AI songs were “not particularly detailed.”

None of the producers behind AI-generated music projects responded to AFP’s requests for comment.

So how did AI find a place in a genre that is fundamentally rooted in the human experience and storytelling, blending folk, blues, and even gospel influences?

For Bennett, the emergence of modern country music in the early 2000s – with a highly polished, more pop sound and repeated “melodic shapes” – is key.

AI models could become adept at replicating such a sound, when fuelled with those elements, he said.

‘Superficial’

Once overshadowed by rap and Latin music, and hindered by the industry’s shift to digital music formats, country music has nevertheless staged a comeback thanks to a generation of artists with stronger pop, not folk, sensibilities.

Following in the footsteps

of country-turned-pop megastar Taylor Swift, today’s headliners are more likely to sport baseball caps than wide Stetsons.

Their music breaks genre boundaries, while artists such as Beyoncé and Post Malone win fans and sell albums with their crossover efforts.

Last year, country stars Morgan Wallen and Zach Bryan were both in the top 10 most streamed artists on Spotify.

Some in the industry believe country’s rebirth signifies a dulled-down formula designed to appeal to the widest possible audience.

“The lyrics aren’t as deep as they used to be,” Jordan said.

“A big portion of popular country music has become kind of shallow, so that is pretty easy to duplicate.”

Bennett says the industry must do a better job of identifying AI-generated music, noting that Deezer is the only major streaming platform to clearly label such material.

“We need AI detection,” Bennett maintained.

“It will happen, and there is a consumer demand for it.”



This photo illustration shows a screen picture of Whiskey & Water, featuring Cain Walker (left) and Cade Winslow, in New York on Good Friday. Singers made of AI rather than flesh and blood routinely rank among top-streamed country music artists in what some see as a sign that the genre has become formulaic. Breaking Rust, Cain Walker, Aventhis, and Outlaw Gospel picture the cowboy hats and leather jackets seen as standard country singer garb. – AFP

Hayes Kurtz said there is a large audience of “passive” listeners who don’t care whether music is made by AI, but there are also “active listeners” who attend concerts, buy band merchandise, and deeply respect the integrity of the artists.

“That audience seems to really care if the music is made by the actual humans they are going to

see,” Hayes Kurtz said.

Jordan says she remains optimistic about the future.

“There’s another wave of country artists that are coming that is really into doing it the old school way and showing emotion,” she said.

“That will be harder for AI to duplicate. That might save the genre.” – AFP

‘Hacks’ has ‘perfect’ ending after 5 seasons: Jean Smart

LOS ANGELES – When the creators of the hit series “Hacks” explained their planned ending to star Jean Smart, the actress had her doubts, but she trusted the team’s vision.

“I didn’t really have an idea of how it would end. I wanted to be surprised,” she told reporters ahead of the fifth and final season of the HBO smash that has earned her four Emmy Awards.

“I’ve loved being surprised every episode for all these years.”

Smart said she was a little taken aback when she first learned how things would pan out for aging comic Deborah Vance and her mentee Ava Daniels, played by Hannah Einbinder.

“I was not sure,” she confessed. “But I said: ‘Hey, I trust you guys. Always have, always turns out great.’ And it did. And now I think it was perfect.”

“Hacks” hit HBO Max in May 2021 to widespread critical acclaim.

It triumphed in every awards season, scooping several Emmys and Golden Globes, with the show’s acting, writing, and directing all receiving recognition.

Paul W. Downs, who created the series alongside Lucia Aniello and Jen Statsky, said the finale encapsulates the ethos of the entire five-season project.

“It is about what we set out in the very first episode, which is your legacy and what you leave behind,” he said.

“We’re leaving behind a series, and we’re thinking about that for ourselves and for our characters.”

After filming more than 40 episodes, the farewell felt bittersweet for the performers.

The final season of “Hacks” will premiere tomorrow on HBO Max. – AFP

Now it’s all come together: Forgotten Beatles photos released

TOKYO – The venue that hosted The Beatles’ only concerts in Japan has released long-forgotten photos of the legendary British band six decades after the gigs.

At the height of Beatlemania in 1966, when the quartet was the world’s most famous pop group, the Beatles staged five summer performances in Tokyo in front of screaming fans.

Crowds reportedly thronged their hotel, where they stayed in the finest suite.

Then in 2009, more than 100 photos shot during the gigs “were discovered on a shelf” inside an office at the concert venue Nippon Budokan, the arena’s operator told AFP.

But the 19 rolls of negative film – reportedly wrapped in paper and labelled in such a way that it suggested they belonged to Japanese newspaper the *Yomiuri Shimbun* – remained “stored as they were” until recently, the operator said in a statement.

However, as the 60th anniversary of the Japan tour approached, the venue operator asked a Beatles expert to examine the negatives, and “his assessment revealed that the photos appear to have never been published” in newspapers or other media.

Among the photos released by the concert venue is a shot of John Lennon smiling beside a Japanese doll that resembles a figurine

featuring on the album cover of the 1967 album “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band”.

The global stars were under tight security during their visit, but the doll may have been purchased during a hurried shopping trip, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* daily said.

The newspaper is investigating who took the photos and why the negatives had been kept in Nippon Budokan despite being wrapped in paper labelled “The *Yomiuri Shimbun* archives room”, it said.

The photos capture “the atmosphere of that one and only Japan tour – now remembered as a historic event – as well as various moments from their stay in Japan,” the Nippon Budokan statement said. – AFP

‘Super Mario Galaxy’ blasts off in N American box office debut

LOS ANGELES – “The Super Mario Galaxy Movie,” based on the wildly popular Nintendo video game, crushed the competition at the North American box office in its opening weekend with US\$130.9 million in ticket sales, industry estimates showed on Easter Sunday.

The animated sequel from Universal and Illumination Studios tracks the adventures of Mario, Luigi and friends in outer space, where they must save Princess Rosalina. It features the voices of Jack Black, Chris Pratt, Anya Taylor-Joy and Brie Larson.

“This is a sensational opening for the second episode in an animation series,” said analyst David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research.

“Family moviegoing is leading the industry now and these series

are a lot of the reason why.”

Dropping to second place in its third week in North American cinemas is another space adventure flick, “Project Hail Mary,” which earned US\$30.7 million over the three-day Easter weekend in the United States and Canada, Exhibitor Relations reported.

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

Debuting in third place was “The Drama,” a romantic comedy starring Zendaya and Robert Pattinson about a couple unravelling just before their wedding. The A24 film earned US\$14.4 million.

“Current romantic comedies are about the misery of romance... all played by bigger-than-life stars,”

said Gross, citing past successes “Anyone but You” with Sydney Sweeney and Glen Powell, and “Ticket to Paradise” with Julia Roberts and George Clooney.

Dropping to fourth place at US\$5.8 million was Disney/Pixar animated hit “Hoppers,” the story of a young animal lover who uses technology to transfer her consciousness into a robotic beaver so she can better communicate and protect wildlife.

Fifth place went to Universal’s romance film “Reminders of Him,” with US\$2.2 million. The movie, the latest adaptation of a novel by Colleen Hoover, stars Maika Monroe and Tyriq Withers.

“Moviegoing has momentum right now. The big films are working and audiences like what they’re seeing,” Gross said. – AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 12°C~22°C	Manila 21°C~35°C	New York 1°C~9°C	Lisbon 10°C~18°C
Shanghai 15°C~19°C	Bangkok 26°C~37°C	London 10°C~24°C	Rio de Janeiro 23°C~32°C
Hong Kong 21°C~25°C	Tokyo 9°C~18°C	Frankfurt 5°C~18°C	Luanda 23°C~30°C
Taipei 20°C~27°C	Singapore 25°C~33°C	Vancouver 6°C~14°C	Maputo 19°C~27°C
Guangzhou 22°C~27°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~33°C	Paris 9°C~24°C	Dili 24°C~30°C
Nanjing 13°C~19°C	Jakarta 24°C~33°C	Moscow 1°C~5°C	São Tomé 26°C~31°C
Guilin 20°C~32°C	Seoul 6°C~16°C	Las Vegas 16°C~32°C	Praia 19°C~28°C
Xi’an 10°C~17°C	Sydney 16°C~25°C	Monte Carlo 12°C~19°C	Bissau 19°C~35°C

“We look great, mate”

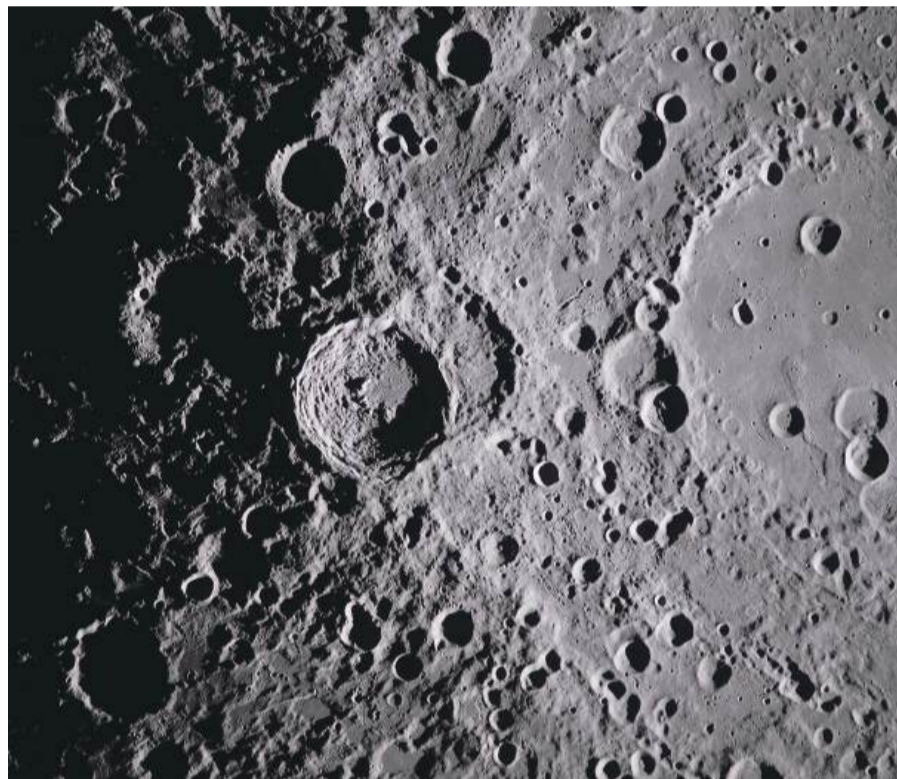
Women on horseback take part in the traditional St George's Cavalcade (Georgiritt) in Traunstein, southern Germany on Easter Monday.

The annual ride is a horse pilgrimage to honour Saint George and takes the participants from the Bavarian town of Traunstein to the chapel of Ettendorf, where they are blessed. *– AFP*



Startling scarlet

Scarlet ibises (*Eudocimus ruber*) stand on a tree in a heronry in Cumaral, Meta department, Colombia on Sunday. *– AFP*



Dark side of the Moon

This handout picture released yesterday, by NASA shows a close-up view of the Vavilov Crater on the rim of the older and larger Hertzprung basin of the Moon, as seen from the Orion spacecraft on Monday.

The Artemis II astronauts wrapped up their lunar flyby as they continue their journey back to Earth yesterday, bringing with them rich celestial observations including little-known lunar craters, a solar eclipse and meteor strikes that scientists hope will open doors. *– AFP*



Swan's embrace?

An adult and child look at Swans on Serpentine Lake in Hyde Park, London yesterday. *– AFP*



Wet Monday!

Polish bachelors wearing traditional straw costumes parade through the streets and splash water on the villagers in a ritual for fertility and a bountiful harvest as they celebrate Easter Monday in Dobra, Lesser Poland Voivodeship Monday. *– AFP*



Hats off!

People attend the Easter Parade and Bonnet Festival in New York, on Sunday. The annual Easter Parade and Bonnet Festival was held in New York City on Sunday, attracting thousands of visitors to see extravagant, hand-crafted hats to celebrate Easter and greet spring. *– Xinhua*