



# Over 10 speakers explain 'holistic approach to national security' concept



Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai (centre), Liaison Office Director Zheng Xincong (to the left of Sam), Foreign Ministry Commissioner Bian Lixin (to the right of Sam), Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Macau Garrison Deputy Commander Dai Jingsong (to the left of Zheng), Legislative Assembly (AL) President André Cheong Weng Chon (to the right of Bian), and Court of Final Appeal (TUI) President Song Man Lei (to the left of Dai) pose for a group photo with the speakers addressing yesterday's session held at the University of Macau (UM) about the central authorities' holistic approach to national security. — Photo: GCS

## Tony Wong

The Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) government and the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the MSAR jointly organised a session yesterday where over 10 speakers in the field of national security, selected by the central authorities' respective entities,

delivered talks, with some of them also referring to cultural performances, with the aim of enabling the attendees to gain a deeper understanding of the central authorities' holistic approach to national security, according to a statement by the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) yesterday.

The statement did not mention the exact number of speakers who addressed the session.

According to the statement, the session, held at the University Hall on the University of Macau (UM) campus, was attended by MSAR Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai, Liaison Office Director Zheng Xincong,

Foreign Ministry Commissioner Bian Lixin, Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Macau Garrison Deputy Commander Dai Jingsong, Macau Legislative Assembly (AL) President André Cheong Weng Chon, and Macau Court of Final Appeal (TUI) President Song Man Lei.

In addition to the dignitaries, the



session, according to the statement, was attended by about 700 members in Macau's civil society, including top officials of the local government, local lawmakers, Macau deputies to the National People's Congress (NPC), Macau members of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) National Committee, as well as top representatives from other Macau-based central government entities, Macau-based Chinese mainland media organisations and Macau-based major Chinese mainland enterprises, apart from members from various other segments of Macau's civil society.

Continued on p.5

## Trump 'very optimistic' about Iran deal: NBC News

WASHINGTON – US President Donald Trump told NBC News yesterday he was "very optimistic" about a peace deal with Iran after their ceasefire, and that Israel was "scaling back" strikes in Lebanon.

Trump told the US broadcaster in a telephone interview that Iran's leaders were "much more reasonable" in private but added that "if they don't make a deal, it's going to be very painful."

Vice President JD Vance is due to hold talks with Iran in Pakistan tomorrow.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had meanwhile agreed in a call with Trump on Wednesday to "low-key it" with Lebanon after devastating strikes earlier that day, the US president said. (More on pages 8 & 10) – Xinhua



## First non-Iranian tanker transits Strait of Hormuz since ceasefire

PARIS – The first non-Iranian oil tanker passed through the Strait of Hormuz yesterday since a fragile ceasefire between Iran and the United States was announced, according to the MarineTraffic monitor.

The MSG, a Gabon-flagged oil tanker passed through the strategic waterway yesterday loaded with around 7,000 tonnes of Emirati fuel oil, and is headed to Aegis Pipavav, India, according to MarineTraffic.

Around a fifth of global crude oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) passes

through the waterway in peacetime.

But the crucial shipping has not meaningfully reopened since the two-week truce took effect on Wednesday. Just two other tankers – both Iran-flagged – and six bulk carriers have been through the strait since then, according to MarineTraffic owner Kpler.

A dozen other vessels – including another laden oil tanker – appeared yesterday to be on course to pass through, signalling no real change in daily traffic compared to the week

before the ceasefire.

The channel in peacetime sees around 120 daily transits, according to Lloyd's List, a shipping industry intelligence site.

Transit capacity is expected to remain "constrained at maximum 10-15 passages a day if the ceasefire holds," according to Kpler analyst Ana Subasic.

All vessels going through the strait were either coming from or going to Iran, or displayed ties with countries not hostile to Iran. — AFP

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## Wang Yi says China to work with DPRK to consolidate positive momentum of ties

Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday that China stands ready to work with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to continue consolidating the positive momentum in the development of China-DPRK relations. — Story on p. 7

## Emperor penguins listed as endangered species: IUCN

The emperor penguin has been declared an endangered species as climate change pushes the icon of Antarctica a step closer to extinction, the global authority on threatened wildlife announced yesterday.

— Story on p. 11

## Cape Verde inks deal with Chinese consortium to build new inter-island vessel

Cape Verde's public port company ENAPOR signed a contract on Tuesday with a Chinese consortium to construct a new vessel for inter-island maritime transport, with an investment of about US\$20 million. — Story on p. 12

# Notes of a Servant of Sport – When School Ends, Talent Disappears

**Commentary by Manuel Silvério**  
Independent sports analyst and consultant in regional development  
(Former civil servant with international experience and long-standing dedication to public policy and sports development)

In Macau, the problem is not a lack of talent – it is a lack of continuity.

And that continuity inevitably begins at school.

It is there that most young people first come into contact with sport. It is there that vocations emerge, habits are formed and the first foundations are laid. But it is also there that, far too often, the journey comes to an end. When the school cycle finishes, regular participation in sport also ends for many.

This break is not inevitable. It is, above all, the result of a system that is insufficiently connected.

In Hong Kong, for example, school sport is structured through the Schools Sports Federation of Hong Kong, China (HKSSF), an autonomous organisation that coordinates inter-school competitions and ensures the link between the education system and the sports sector. It is a model with clear responsibilities, continuity and its own institutional framework.

Funding comes from a combination of public support, government programmes and private partnerships. It is worth noting that, although entities such as the Hong Kong Jockey Club play a significant role in the broader financing of sport, school

sport itself relies above all on a stable and functional institutional structure.

This example highlights something essential: investing is not enough – organisation is what matters.

In Macau, the system remains excessively fragmented. Schools, clubs and associations often operate in parallel, with limited coordination and without a clearly defined pathway for young athletes.

There have, of course, been commendable efforts. In some disciplines, training schools have been created – both by the Sports Bureau and by clubs and associations. Football and wushu are examples. More recently, some clubs led by younger and more dynamic administrators have also begun to place greater emphasis on youth development.

Yet these cases, while positive, remain isolated.

What is missing is structure. What is missing is continuity. What is missing is consistent technical and administrative support.

Past initiatives, like the introductory sports schools run by the former Youth and Sports Department, laid the groundwork. Today, with superior resources and facilities, there is both the capacity and the need to go further.

When the associative system is unable, on its own, to ensure continuity, the role of the public sector must be clear: to establish properly structured training centres or sports schools, with defined criteria, technical supervision and integration within the overall sports system.

This is not about replacing clubs or associations, but about ensuring that no

talent is lost due to a lack of structure.

In practical terms, the priority does not need to begin with a major reform. It can – and perhaps should – start with a simple and workable mechanism: identifying, at the end of each school cycle, those students who have maintained regular sports practice, and creating an effective link between them and existing clubs, associations and training structures. This requires regular coordination between education and sports authorities, basic information sharing, the definition of priority disciplines and close technical support.

Rather than creating new and heavy structures, the focus should be on building a functional process. For example, a pilot programme in selected sports, with clear selection criteria, schedules compatible with school life, referral to clubs with training capacity and annual monitoring of outcomes. How many young people move from school into the associative system? How many remain after one or two years? How many receive adequate technical support? Without such indicators, we will continue to speak of intentions, not results.

There is also a social dimension that cannot be ignored. Many families value sport but fear that continued participation may compromise academic progress. It is therefore essential that the system provides confidence, predictability and balance. Young people should not be forced to choose too early between education and sport. A mature system is precisely one that can reconcile academic demands with sports development, without improvisation and without relying solely on individual effort.

Macau does not need to reinvent everything – it needs to know how to choose, learn, adapt and build its own model.

Examples already exist. Hong Kong is a nearby reference. Portugal also offers relevant experience in linking schools, clubs and federations. The key is not to copy, but to understand what works and adapt it to the local reality.

Because the problem is not at the starting point.

The problem lies in the transition.

While many young people enter the system, only a few manage to stay – and fewer still truly progress.

It is precisely at this stage – between school and the associative system – that Macau continues to lose talent.

More important than identifying young talent is creating the conditions for them to thrive, through regular training, technical support, a competitive framework and a clear pathway.

Without this, talent appears – but disappears just as quickly.

The real question is not whether Macau possesses young talent, but whether the system is equipped to support them beyond the point of discovery. As it stands, the answer is only partially in the affirmative.

Sport is not built on isolated moments.

It is built on processes.

And those processes require three things: organisation, consistency, and vision.

If Macau wants a stronger sporting future, it must first ensure what is still missing today: continuity.

Because talent is already here. ■

## Gongbei Customs seizes 19 kg of silver from 'pregnant' driver



These two handout photos provided by Zhuhai's Gongbei Customs on Wednesday shows 19.206 kilograms of silver granules seized from a female driver feigning to be pregnant, in arrivals of the Hengqin joint checkpoint on March 13.

**Armindo Neves**

Gongbei Customs announced on Wednesday that officers at the Hengqin checkpoint seized about 19 kilograms of silver granules from a woman feigning pregnancy.

The incident occurred on March 13, when customs officers inspecting vehicles in the arrival lane noticed a female driver who appeared unusually nervous. Officers noted that the woman's physical proportions seemed "disproportionate", prompting a secondary inspection.

Upon further investigation, officers discovered 16 packages of silver granules strapped to the woman's abdomen to simulate a pregnancy. The haul weighed a total of 19.206 kg.\*

In a formal statement, Gongbei Customs reminded the public that concealing goods to evade duties constitutes smuggling. Under mainland regulations, individuals found guilty of such acts face strict penalties, and serious cases will result in criminal prosecution. ■

\*Based on silver prices as of yesterday, 19.206 kg of silver granules was worth 373,243 patacas. – Google Gemini

## Banned driver caught after row with ex-girlfriend

**Armindo Neves**

A banned driver was apprehended last Saturday following an argument with his ex-girlfriend, Public Security Police (PSP) spokesman Lei Chan Hong revealed during a regular press conference yesterday.

The suspect, a clerk in his twenties surnamed Cheng, was identified by Lei.

According to the spokesman, the police received a report from the victim regarding a dispute at the Cheng Choi Building public car park in the Ilha Verde district earlier that day.

Upon arrival, officers located both the victim and the suspect. Both parties admitted to a verbal altercation that escalated into pushing and shoving over relationship issues.

During the investigation, the victim informed officers that Cheng had been driving a vehicle despite being under a court-ordered driving ban. Cheng subsequently admitted to the offence, noting that his licence had been suspended from January 2026 to January 2027.

Lei did not disclose the original reason for the suspect's disqualification.

The incident began at about 12:30 a.m. on the day in question, when Cheng drove to Rua de João

Lecáros to collect his ex-girlfriend. An argument broke out inside the vehicle and continued into the car park, where the physical confrontation occurred. The victim eventually called the police for assistance.

Cheng faces a charge of aggravated disobedience for violating his driving ban. He was transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) earlier this week.

Cheng faces up to two years behind bars. ■



Public Security Police (PSP) spokesman Lei Chan Hong looks on during yesterday's regular press conference.

– Photo: Armindo Neves

### Published since Aug 2004

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- Wire services – AFP, Xinhua
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# Fu Luen youth members make 1<sup>st</sup> appearance at UN to tell Macau's story

Armando Neves

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) recently hosted its 70<sup>th</sup> annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) at its New York City headquarters.

The Women's General Association of Macau (commonly known as Fu Luen) sent a 16-member exchange group to participate in the session's side events, according to an association statement released on 26 March.

The statement highlighted that this was the largest delegation ever sent by the association to the event. The 11-day meeting took place between March 9 and 19.

According to the UN Women website, the theme of this year's commission was "Ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls, including by promoting inclusive and equitable legal systems, eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices, and addressing structural barriers".

The *Post* interviewed two members of the exchange group, Olivia Lao Cheuk Chi and Shirley Ao Sut Ieng, last Tuesday at Fu Luen's headquarters on Rua da Barca. Both women, who were participating in the Commission for the first time, spoke about their experiences of promoting Macau and traditional Chinese culture on the international stage.

## Global gender equality comparison

Lao and Ao, members of Fu Luen's "International Affairs Training Programme", explained that their team spoke about Macau's progress in women's development under the "One Country, Two Systems" framework during a parallel session.

The training programme offers a wide range of workshops on communication skills, etiquette, and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Lao noted that their presentation covered family-friendly policies, gender equality milestones, and support systems for dual-income families.

During the event, the group exchanged views with participants from Africa, Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs), and other regions. Lao highlighted Macau's unique role as a platform for commercial, economic, and cultural relations between China and the world's nine PSCs. Meanwhile, Ao noted that while Macau boasts a high level of gender equality, significant room for further progress remains.

Both representatives expressed hope that international exchanges would allow Macau to adopt global best practices to continue advancing women's rights locally.

## 'Artisan Fair' at the UN

In addition to the formal sessions, the team hosted a booth themed "Traditional Chinese Culture". It showcased crochet handicrafts made by Macau volunteers, including pet collars and cheongsam-style (旗袍) keyrings.

Ao said an interactive "fortune-telling" activity also proved popular with international participants. Each fortune slip carried a message promoting gender equality, such as the equal status of maternal and paternal surnames.



Lao added that the booth featured a handmade wall hanging created by a group of volunteers in their 70s. The piece integrated elements of the Ruins of St Paul's with Chinese cultural motifs. International attendees were invited to help decorate the piece, symbolising global inclusion and cooperation.

According to Ao, attendees were deeply moved by the stories behind the handicrafts – some of which took dozens of hours to complete – and purchased the items in a show of support. All proceeds will be donated to relevant UN funds.

## 'Take the first step'

Lao and Ao admitted that standing on the United Nations stage felt "real yet surreal". They attributed the success of the journey to years of preparation through international affairs training and exchange activities in the Chinese mainland.

Lao suggested that people in Macau are often modest and sometimes require an "invitation" or a specific "opportunity" to take the first step. She expressed hope that more local young people would take the initiative to engage in international affairs.

Ao urged local youth to stay informed, read broadly, and cultivate critical thinking. By doing so, she argued, they can arm themselves with knowledge, overcome language barriers, and gain the confidence to appear on the global stage.

Macau Women's General Association's (Fu Luen) 70<sup>th</sup> annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) exchange group members Olivia Lao Cheuk Chi (left) and Shirley Ao Sut Ieng pose after an interview on March 31 at Fu Luen's headquarters on Rua da Barca.

– Photo: Armando Neves



Photos taken between March 9 and 19 at the United Nations in New York City courtesy of Fu Luen.

# Over 10 speakers explain 'holistic approach to national security' concept

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## 3 traditional fields, 17 non-traditional fields in national security

The central authorities' holistic approach to national security lists various non-traditional threats to national security that the country is facing, in addition to the traditional ones.

The three traditional fields listed by the central authorities' holistic approach to national security comprise political security, military security, and homeland security, while the 17 non-traditional fields in national security listed by the approach comprise economic security, financial security, cultural security, societal security, science and technology security, cybersecurity, food security, ecological security, resource security, nuclear security, overseas interests security, outer space security, deep sea security, polar security, biosecurity, artificial intelligence security, and data security, according to the Hong Kong government's themed website on national security.

Details in English about the 20 fields in national security are available on: [https://www.nsed.gov.hk/national\\_security/index.php?l=en&a=safety](https://www.nsed.gov.hk/national_security/index.php?l=en&a=safety)

The GCS statement said that yesterday's session was organised with the aim of enabling members of Macau's civil society to gain a deeper understanding of the central authorities' holistic approach to national security and then put it into practice, promoting in-depth and solid publicity and education on national security in Macau, and fostering social synergy for safeguarding national security and Macau's prosperity and stability.

The same as this year's annual National Security Education Exhibition, which will start next Wednesday, yesterday's session was themed "Coordinating Development and Security, Safeguarding the New Journey of the 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan".

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

Yesterday's GCS statement said that the central authorities' respective entities attached great importance to the session so that they



Dignitaries and other guests attend yesterday's session at the University Hall on the University of Macau (UM) campus.

– Photo: GCS

specially selected over 10 "outstanding" speakers in the field of national security from enterprises, higher education institutions, and scientific research institutes in the Chinese mainland to deliver talks during yesterday's session held in Macau. The statement said that the speakers comprehensively demonstrated vivid practices and real-life examples of the implementation of the holistic approach to national security in various industries and sectors across the country, covering areas such as political security, military security, homeland security, economic security, cultural security, science and technology security, and nuclear security.

## Topics covered by yesterday's session

The GCS statement mentioned examples of the topics addressed by five of the over 10 speakers during the session.

One of the speakers, drawing on personal experience of defending the border and protecting the country, demonstrated the firm commitment of military personnel in the new era to building an impregnable Great Wall of steel to safeguard every inch of the motherland, according to the statement.

Another speaker, according to the statement, recounted the glorious history of the Macau-based Nam Kwong (Group) Company Limited, bearing witness to the journey of co-existence and mutual prosperity between Chinese mainland state-owned enterprises and Macau, as well as their blood-tied bonds, demonstrating their mission and responsibility as a driving force in advancing the cause of "One Country, Two Systems".

Another speaker, according to the statement, used the life experiences of three generations of a family in Macau to illustrate how national security is intrinsically linked to the well-being of ordinary people.

Another speaker, through a stage performance, took the audience on an immersive journey into the splendid history and culture of the Temple of Confucius, eloquently explaining the profound importance of cultural security to the nation.

A fellow speaker, by exploring the historical origins of A-Ma (Mazu), demonstrated that both sides of the Strait belong to the Chinese nation and share the same devotion to their homeland, recalling that safeguarding national sovereignty and advancing the great cause of national reunification is the shared mission of

all Chinese people.

Meanwhile, a separate GCS statement yesterday announced that the opening ceremony of this year's National Security Education Exhibition will be held at 6 p.m. on Wednesday next week, April 15.

The opening ceremony, according to the statement, will also include an award presentation ceremony for an essay competition and a short video contest, with the theme being "AI Safeguarding National Security".

After the award presentation ceremony, a 30-minute cultural and artistic performance on national security will be presented, according to the statement.

Unchanged from last year, the one-month National Security Education Exhibition will be held at the Services Platform Complex for Commercial and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (aka Forum Macao Complex), located near Macau Tower, running until May 15.

After the opening ceremony on Wednesday next week, the exhibition will be open to members of the general public from 3 p.m. on the following day.

The exhibition will be open between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m. daily. ■

## Elderly patient tests positive for Legionnaires' disease

**Khalil Vallo**

The local Health Bureau (SSM) announced in a statement yesterday that a 65-year-old local male patient, who was in serious condition, tested positive for Legionnaires' disease.

According to the statement, the patient has a history of chronic illness and long-term coughing. He developed symptoms including haemoptysis\* and dizziness on April 1 and sought treatment at the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre, where a chest X-ray indicated pneumonia and he was admitted for treatment.

His condition worsened on Sunday, requiring ventilator support, and he was transferred to the intensive care unit on Wednesday, the statement said, adding that yesterday's laboratory results confirmed the presence of *Legionella pneumophila*\*\* in a bronchial sample, leading to a diagnosis of Legionnaires' disease.

The statement underlined that the patient had no recent travel history during the

incubation period, and no family members living with him have reported symptoms. The statement noted that authorities will conduct environmental sampling at the patient's residence and surrounding areas to identify the source of infection and implement targeted control measures.

According to the statement, Legionnaires' disease is an infectious disease caused by *Legionella* bacteria, first identified following an outbreak at a veterans' convention in the United States in 1976. The bacteria are commonly found in natural environments such as water and soil, and can multiply rapidly in warm and humid conditions, particularly in water temperatures between 20 and 45 degrees Celsius. Artificial water systems – including cooling towers of central air-conditioning systems, spa pools, fountains, and respiratory medical equipment – may also harbour the bacteria, especially where biofilm or sediment is present. Infection typically occurs through inhalation of contaminated aerosols\*\*\*.

However, the disease is not transmitted from person to person or through food and drink.

Symptoms may include fever, cough, difficulty breathing, fatigue, headache, muscle pain, abdominal pain and diarrhoea. The incubation period usually ranges from two to 10 days, and early antibiotic treatment can be effective.

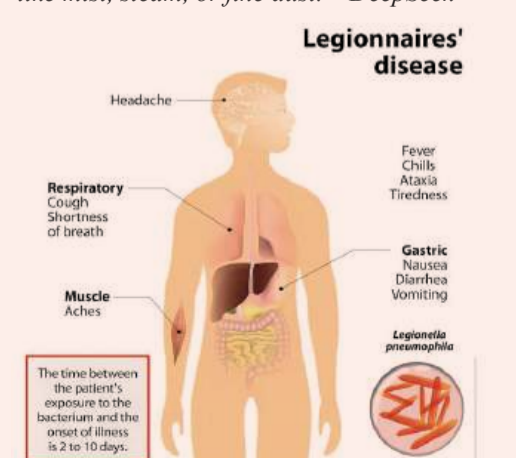
The Health Bureau urged residents to maintain properly designed and maintained water systems, avoid smoking and excessive alcohol consumption, and ensure proper cleaning of humidifiers and respiratory devices to reduce the risk of infection, the statement noted. ■

\*Haemoptysis means coughing up blood from your lungs or airways (the tubes that carry air to your lungs). It can range from small streaks of blood mixed with spit to coughing up mostly blood. – DeepSeek

\*\**Legionella pneumophila* is a type of bacteria that can cause a serious lung infection known as Legionnaires' disease. People usually catch it by breathing in tiny

water droplets (mist) from contaminated sources like hot tubs, air conditioning systems, or plumbing, not from person-to-person contact. – DeepSeek

\*\*\* aerosols are tiny, lightweight particles or droplets suspended in the air, like mist, steam, or fine dust. – DeepSeek



This downloaded image courtesy of Australia's The Conversation network of nonprofit media outlets shows a diagram of the Legionnaire's disease.

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Macau Int'l Comedy-Fest opens in Hengqin



Stage actors perform during the first day of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Macau International Comedy Festival at the Hengqin Culture and Art Complex yesterday. – Photos: Khalel Vallo

**Khalel Vallo**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Macau International Comedy Festival kicked off at the Hengqin Culture and Art Complex yesterday, featuring an opening ceremony and a string of performances aimed at nurturing comedy talent and strengthening cultural exchange, running through Sunday.

The four-day festival, co-organised by Mahua FunAge and the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC), brings together industry professionals, performers and emerging talents.

Speaking to the media after the performances, Mahua FunAge CFO Cheng Le'er highlighted the festival's focus on talent development through its "Young Performing Artists Talents Training Programme".

"This is our third year in Hengqin. Over

time, we have come to understand this place better, discovered talents here, gradually cultivated them, and introduced them to the industry", Cheng said.

Cheng said the initiative reflects the festival's broader goal of building an international platform for comedy. "Our original intention has always been to discover and cultivate young comedy talents and actors, and provide them with opportunities to enter the industry", she noted.

In addition to stage performances, the festival also features an immersive musical show set in Nam Van, combining music, dance and storytelling. The production integrates elements of Macau's over 400-year history as an East-West entrepôt, highlighting



cultural exchanges between the two sides over centuries. "We created an open-air stage, allowing audiences to feel how Eastern and Western cultures coexist in Macau", Cheng said.

She added that comedy plays a role in bridging social gaps. "Through laughter, people can better understand each other. We believe many negative emotions can be eased through comedy," she said. Cheng also emphasised the strategic role of Hengqin, noting its proximity to Macau and its creative environment. She said the collaboration between Macau and Hengqin allows local talent to reach international audiences, while also introducing global productions to the Greater Bay Area (GBA) market.

Looking ahead, Cheng said the festival aims to go beyond a short-term event and evolve into a long-term platform. "We hope it will not just be a three- or four-day event, but something continuous that brings ecological and industry development to Macau and Hengqin", she said.

Organisers said the festival will continue to expand its role in talent incubation and cultural exchange, supporting Macau's development as a city of entertainment while fostering new opportunities in the creative industry.

Moreover, US-based Chinese-Malaysian actress and producer Michelle Yeoh (楊紫瓊) will reportedly make a special appearance at the festival on Sunday. ■

## China's first national conference on service sector boosts confidence in high-quality growth

**Commentary**

BEIJING – The just-concluded national conference on the service sector in Beijing has sent a clear signal that China will promote a high-quality service sector driven by demand, reform, technology and global cooperation, to meet its own development goals and foster inclusive growth.

Amid sluggish global recovery and growing unilateralism and protectionism, the conference from Tuesday to Wednesday highlighted the importance of developing modern services, promoting its digital and intelligent transformation, strengthening producer and consumer services, and cultivating more "China Services" brands, while also promoting broader opening up of the service industry.

As an economy advances, a modern and specialized service industry becomes a key indicator of its competitiveness, stability and sustainability. The national conference has outlined clear directions, priorities and practical pathways for the development of the service sector.

The conference once again indicates that China's economy is entering a new phase of high-quality development, which values quality over speed, knowledge and innovation over imitation, and win-win cooperation over beggar-thy-neighbor approaches by certain Western powers.

China's robust service sector development has captured global attention. As foreign media have noted, China, once a major merchandise exporter, is now rapidly moving up the global ranks as a leading exporter of knowledge-intensive services. Furthermore, a global organization observed that reallocating resources to services has

helped boost China's productivity over the past two decades, and it can continue doing so in the years ahead if supportive reforms are implemented.

The optimism is backed by solid data. In 2025, China's service sector surpassed 80 trillion yuan in added value, making up 57.7 percent of GDP and contributing 61.4 percent to its economic growth. It also provided around half of the country's total employment.

China's expansion of its service sector does not come at the expense of other countries but instead offers tremendous shared opportunities and benefits for the world at large.

No one can afford to overlook China's distinctive strengths, including its super-large market supported by 1.4 billion people and a growing middle-income group. In 2025, service consumption accounted for 46.1 percent of per capita spending by urban and rural residents, making it a key engine for expanding domestic demand.

This fertile ground has spurred demand for high-quality imported services such as tourism, transportation, intellectual property royalties and financial services, creating stable and vast market opportunities for other countries. Also, China's deficit in its service trade will bring more cooperation opportunities.

Developing the service sector is no longer a matter of whether to do it, but how to make it faster, stronger and more inclusive. As China continues to open up its service sector, it will provide stronger momentum for global economic recovery and create greater shared prosperity.

– Xinhua



Staff members train robots at the Qingdao Training Center for Elderly Care Robots in Qingdao Shandong Province, yesterday. The Qingdao Training Center for Elderly Care Robots was established in February to teach machines the delicate art of caring for aging humans. Human trainers here guide various robots through repetitions of grasping objects, maintaining balance and twisting switches while mastering the delicate motor skills humans often take for granted. The center has become a hub for tech ambition, with 45 companies, including Haier, Hisense and Agibot, deploying 210 products for modular training across ten categories such as medication delivery, emotional companionship and dementia intervention. The facility creates what officials describe as a closed loop where robots are trained and tested, data is shared, standards are verified, and products are then pushed to market. – Xinhua

## Central authorities stress regulation on competition order in power, battery energy storage sector

BEIJING – Four central authorities yesterday convened a meeting with enterprises in the power and battery energy storage sector, to better regulate competition and promote orderly industry development.

The meeting, jointly held by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT), the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), the State Administration for Market Regulation (SAMR), and the National Energy Administration (NEA), underscored the

importance and urgency of addressing involution-style competition in the sector.

It called on companies to firmly resist unreasonable and unfair competitive practices and safeguard a healthy and orderly market environment.

The meeting also stressed stronger product quality oversight, intensified efforts to combat intellectual property infringement, and measures to address the spillover of excessive competition into overseas markets.

– Xinhua, MPD

# Wang Yi says China to work with DPRK to consolidate positive momentum of ties

PYONGYANG – Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday that China stands ready to work with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to continue consolidating the positive momentum in the development of China-DPRK relations.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made the remarks in talks with DPRK Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui.

Wang noted that in early September last year, Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, and Kim Jong Un, general secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), held a historic meeting in Beijing, reaching important consensus on the overall, strategic and directional issues concerning bilateral ties.

The meeting provides important strategic guidance for further developing China-DPRK relations, pushes bilateral ties into a new stage and opens a new chapter in friendly exchanges between the two countries, which is of great and far-reaching significance, Wang added.

Wang said China stands ready to work with the DPRK to take the important consensus reached by the top leaders of the two parties and countries as fundamental guidance,

strengthen strategic communication, enhance exchanges and cooperation, create more benefits for the two peoples, and jointly promote regional peace and development.

The past year has witnessed a series of highlights in China-DPRK exchanges, which strongly demonstrated that the two countries' traditional friendship forged in blood remains everlasting and unbreakable, Wang said, noting that this year marks the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the China-DPRK Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance.

Over the past 65 years, Wang said, no matter how the international and regional situations have changed, China and the DPRK, as good neighbors, good friends and good comrades, have always trusted and supported each other, making unremitting efforts to maintain regional and world peace and stability and promote their respective development.

Wang said China is willing to work with the DPRK side to hold commemorative events for the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the treaty, strengthen high-level exchanges, enhance dialogue and practical cooperation at all levels and in various fields, deepen people-to-people exchanges and mutual understanding, and contribute to respective economic



Foreign Minister Wang Yi (left), also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, shakes hands with Foreign Minister of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Choe Son Hui in Pyongyang yesterday. – Xinhua

and social development.

For her part, Choe said that the DPRK-China friendship is based on the common socialist system and traditional friendship, describing bilateral relations as deep-rooted, solid and sustainable. It is the unwavering position of the WPK and the nation to advance DPRK-China friendship and cooperation following the trend of the times and the will of the two peoples.

Choe noted that the historic and successful meeting between the top leaders of the two parties and countries in September last year has significantly enhanced friendship and mutual trust between the two parties and two countries, pointed out a clear direction for and injecting strong impetus into the development of bilateral ties.

The DPRK, Choe said, fully supports the one-China principle,

firmly opposes any interference in China's internal affairs, and resolutely supports China's position on safeguarding sovereignty and territorial integrity concerning Taiwan, Xizang, Xinjiang, and other issues of China's core interests.

Choe said that the DPRK side fully endorses the vision of building a community with a shared future for humanity and the four global initiatives proposed by Xi, and highly values China's just position on and important role in international and regional affairs.

Choe said that the DPRK stands ready to work with China to implement the important consensus reached by the top leaders of the two parties and countries, hold commemorative events marking the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the DPRK-China Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, expand exchanges and practical cooperation across various fields, enhance coordination between diplomatic departments, strengthen multilateral communication and collaboration, and continue to make efforts to lift DPRK-China relations to higher levels and open up new prospects.

The two sides also had an in-depth exchange of views on current international and regional issues. (More on North Korea on page 9)

– Xinhua

## Commerce ministry stresses healthy China-EU trade ties

BEIJING – China hopes the European Union (EU) will work with China to promote healthy and positive bilateral economic and trade relations, the Ministry of Commerce (MOC) said yesterday.

As key trade partners, China and the EU have built their economic and trade cooperation on a solid foundation and maintained strong growth momentum over the years, said ministry spokesperson He Yadong. The two sides have deeply integrated their industrial and supply chains, fostering a relationship characterized by complementary strengths and mutual benefits, He said.

China has remained open to negotiating and signing bilateral economic and trade arrangements with the EU, and has welcomed relevant proposals from European

leaders, the spokesperson said.

“However, in recent years, the EU has used a range of economic and trade instruments to launch investigations into, and impose restrictions on, Chinese companies,” the spokesperson added.

China hopes the EU will pay greater heed to the views of its member states and European industry, abandon protectionist practices, and meet China halfway, the spokesperson said.

The EU should replace building walls and barriers with open cooperation, resolve frictions and differences through dialogue and consultation, and jointly promote the healthy and positive development of China-EU economic and trade relations, the spokesperson added.

– Xinhua

## Impressed by Shanghai's vitality, KMT leader urges cross-Straits goodwill, mutual trust

SHANGHAI – Impressed by the mainland's vitality and creativity during a tour in Shanghai, Cheng Li-wun, chairperson of the Chinese Kuomintang (KMT) party, yesterday called for building greater goodwill and mutual trust across the Taiwan Strait.

Leading a KMT delegation, Cheng arrived in Shanghai from Nanjing by high-speed train on Wednesday afternoon.

Their first stop was the Shanghai headquarters of the food delivery giant Meituan, offering Taiwan guests a glimpse into the mainland's rapidly developing smart economy.

Ordering milk tea on her phone, Cheng had it delivered by drone in about 15 minutes. “The drink is still warm!” she said after taking a sip.

“This is a rare opportunity for me to experience firsthand how the low-altitude economy operates – an industry of the future,” Cheng said. “It offers valuable reference for Taiwan.”

She urged Taiwan's service sector to deepen integration with the internet and artificial intelligence.

The delegation then visited a public space in a revitalized waterfront area along the Huangpu River, where about 20 young people from both the mainland and Taiwan were taking part in a cultural exchange event.

Several young people from Taiwan shared their experiences of work, daily life, and personal growth in Shanghai.



Cheng Li-wun (third from left), chairwoman of the Taiwan-based Chinese Kuomintang (KMT), leads a KMT delegation in a visit to the Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC) in Shanghai yesterday. – Xinhua

Cheng gave a thumbs-up to Taiwan youth on the mainland for pursuing careers they love and building connections with like-minded peers.

Yesterday morning, Cheng and her delegation toured Yangshan Port, a key hub in the global shipping market, and the Shanghai Aircraft Design and Research Institute under the Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China, Ltd., manufacturer of domestically-developed aircraft including the C919 passenger jet.

Cheng and her delegation were invited to tour the cabins of demonstration models of the aircraft.

Speaking to reporters, Cheng commended Shanghai's prosperity

and beauty, while recalling the city's wartime history and subsequent transformation.

“Peace is the most powerful force,” she said. “Given enough time, peace can make anything possible.”

She urged people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait to remain committed to peaceful development, build greater goodwill and mutual trust, and advance cooperation and exchange.

“We should not let pointless differences and misunderstandings limit our shared possibilities,” she said.

The delegation left Shanghai for Beijing on Thursday afternoon. Their mainland visit began on Tuesday and will run through Sunday. – Xinhua

## China firmly opposes US overstretching national security concept: spokesperson

BEIJING – China firmly opposes the US overstretching the concept of national security, a foreign ministry spokesperson said yesterday.

Spokesperson Mao Ning made the remarks at a regular news briefing when responding to a query about the US Federal Communications Commission's plan to vote on a proposal that would ban all Chinese

labs from testing electronic devices used in the United States.

“This type of action has severely impeded the normal economic and trade exchanges between Chinese and US companies and does not serve anyone's interests, including those of American companies and consumers. China will continue to firmly safeguard its legitimate and lawful rights and interests,” Mao said. – Xinhua

## Escaped wolf forces school closure in S Korea

SEOUL – A wolf that escaped from a zoo in South Korea remained at large yesterday, authorities said, prompting a local school to close over safety concerns as the search continued.

The male wolf – born in 2024 and weighing about 30 kilograms – escaped from a zoo at a theme park in Daejeon, about 150 kilometres south of Seoul, on Wednesday, triggering a wide search in surrounding areas.

It remained at large yesterday, authorities said, with a nearby school closing for safety.

“Daejeon Sanseong Elementary School is closed today (yesterday) following the escape of a wolf from a zoo yesterday (Wednesday),” a spokesperson for the Daejeon Metropolitan Office of Education told AFP.

More than 300 people – including firefighters, police officers and military troops – are taking part in the search operation, an official from the Daejeon Fire Headquarters said.

“We deployed drone cameras early in the morning but had to pull



This picture taken and released on Wednesday by Daejeon Fire Headquarters via Yonhap shows a wolf that escaped from a zoo walking on a road in Daejeon, South Korea. – AFP

them back due to the ongoing rain,” he told AFP.

The wolf dug into the ground and damaged the zoo’s installed fence before escaping, according to the fire official.

Images released by local media showed it wandering in the middle of a road.

In 2023, a male zebra became a global sensation after escaping from a zoo in Seoul and was seen roaming through the streets.

The zebra – named Sero – was eventually cornered in a narrow alley, safely tranquilised and returned to his enclosure without any injuries. – AFP

## N Korea holds 3 days of weapons testing: KCNA

**Kang Jin-kyu**

SEOUL – North Korea tested weapon systems over three days this week, including the firing of ballistic missiles and cluster bombs, its state media said yesterday.

A mobile short-range anti-aircraft missile system was also included in the tests, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported.

The trials took place Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, as part of regular efforts to develop and upgrade weapons systems, KCNA said.

South Korea’s military reported earlier that North Korea had fired multiple short-range ballistic missiles in two rounds on Wednesday, and an “unidentified projectile” the previous day.

According to KCNA, the exercises “confirmed that the surface-to-surface tactical ballistic missile Hwasongpho-11 Ka tipped with the cluster bomb warhead can reduce to ashes any target covering an area of 6.5-7 hectares”.

Cluster munitions disperse dozens or even hundreds of smaller submunitions over a wide area,

making them controversial because of the long-term risks they pose to civilians.

Also tested were an “electromagnetic weapon system” and “carbon fibre sham bombs scattering” that KCNA described as “special assets of strategic nature”.

The launches also involved the use of “low-cost materials” to examine the “maximum workload of the engine”, it added.

South Korea’s military said Wednesday a short-range missile fired in the second round of launches in the day flew more than 700 kilometres.

It followed an earlier launch of multiple short-range ballistic missiles towards the East Sea – also known as the Sea of Japan – which flew around 240 kilometres.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was not reported to have attended the trials.

No photos of the launches have yet been released by official media.

### Deep frustrations

Analysts said the launches, North Korea’s fourth and fifth

known ballistic missile tests this year, signalled its latest rebuff of Seoul’s attempts to repair ties with the North.

Those included an expression of regret from Seoul on Monday over civilian drone incursions into the North in January.

The comments were initially described as “very fortunate and wise behaviour” by Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of North Korea’s leader.

But on Tuesday, a senior North Korean official described the South as “the enemy state most hostile” to Pyongyang, reviving a label previously used by leader Kim Jong Un.

The launches showed Pyongyang’s “deep-seated frustration” with Seoul despite the latter’s repeated overtures, Hong Tae-hwa, a fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, told AFP.

“From the North’s perspective, Seoul’s reconciliatory overtures over the years – when they happened – delivered neither sanctions relief nor security guarantees,” he said.

“North Korea has little interest in direct dialogue with Seoul, at least for now.” – AFP

## Shallow Indonesian quake damages houses, injures residents

MAUMERE, INDONESIA – A shallow 4.9-magnitude earthquake struck eastern Indonesia overnight, damaging dozens of homes and injuring multiple people, an official said yesterday.

The jolt struck at a depth of 10.4 kilometres, some 104 kilometres east of Maumere, East Nusa Tenggara, shortly before midnight on Wednesday, the US Geological

Survey (USGS) said.

Two villages on the small island of Adonara felt the biggest impact, with more than 100 houses damaged and at least 20 people injured, according to local official Ismail Daton Ban.

Indonesia and neighbouring countries experience frequent earthquakes due to their location in the Pacific “Ring of Fire” – an arc of intense seismic activity stretching

from Japan through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin.

A 9.1-magnitude quake struck the westernmost Aceh province in 2004, causing a tsunami and killing more than 170,000 people in Indonesia.

Shallow quakes tend to be more damaging, with seismic waves travelling a shorter distance through the ground and reaching the surface with more energy. – AFP

## Australian couple moves house from wrong plot

SYDNEY – An Australian couple has moved house, literally, after realising it was placed on the wrong plot of land.

Melanie and David Moor said they set up their home to “relax” at a five-acre block two hours’ drive west of Melbourne.

They put up the pre-fabricated house in March 2024, including installing the plumbing and electricity, for a new life in rural Victoria.

Five months later, they got the bad news.

“We got the call from the council to say that we had to stop works because it was on the wrong block – and we actually owned the block next door,” Melanie Moor told AFP yesterday.

“It’s just been a nightmare.”

The couple said the plot’s boundaries were unclear and they had relied on the local council and the real estate agent for the right advice.

A spokesperson for the Corangamite Shire Council declined to comment.

AFP was unable to reach the real estate agent.

The couple moved their house about 100 metres by truck to the right plot on April 2.

They are now living in a caravan while the home is secured to the correct site.

They also need to connect the house’s power, water and septic amenities – at a heavy financial cost.

Melanie Moor has an autoimmune disease, and her husband has liver disease, the couple said.

“The idea was that I could actually relax a little bit and work from home,” David Moor said.

Under an agreement with the owners of the plot where the house was originally put, the couple said they have until May 2 to restore that land to its original state.

But they are thankful their home is now in the right place.

“It was a relief seeing the truck take the house across the property,” Melanie Moor said.

– AFP



An undated handout photo received yesterday, from Melanie Moor shows a house being made ready to be moved to its correct location after being built on a neighbouring section, in Camperdown, west of Melbourne. – AFP

## Thai PM announces seizure of massive assets from cross-border scammer network

BANGKOK – Thailand’s Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul yesterday announced the seizure and freezing of assets totaling over 20 billion baht (about US\$624 million) from a cross-border scammer network, urging all agencies to strictly implement measures and enforce the law.

Anutin told a press conference that this seizure occurred in two phases, with the first involving 68 items worth a total of 12 trillion baht, and the second adding 34 items valued at 8.2 billion baht.

The prime minister expressed

gratitude to relevant agencies for their coordinated efforts, which enabled the investigation to trace the financial transactions of the suspects.

Ratchada Thanadirek, spokesperson for the prime minister’s office, said that the prime minister has designated the prevention and crackdown on cybercrime as a national agenda, in line with the policy announcement to parliament aimed at enhancing efforts against cybercrime and money laundering, thereby building public and international confidence.

– Xinhua



A mother holds a nebulizer on the face of her child receiving treatment for measles in a paediatric ward at a hospital in Dhaka, Bangladesh yesterday. Bangladesh said it suspected measles killed at least 98 children in the past three weeks, official data showed on April 5, with Dhaka ramping up vaccination efforts in the worst-affected areas. — AFP

## Bangladesh sentences 2 policemen to death for protest murder

DHAKA — Bangladesh sentenced two former policemen to death by hanging yesterday for murdering student protester Abu Sayeed, whose killing escalated the 2024 uprising that toppled the autocratic government of Sheikh Hasina.

Sayeed died aged 23 in the northern city of Rangpur, the first student demonstrator killed in the police crackdown on protests.

Footage of his last moments on July 16, 2024 — standing with his arms outstretched before he was shot at close range — was shown repeatedly on Bangladeshi television after Hasina's downfall.

Prosecutors charged 30 people

in connection with the killing, ranging from murder to command responsibility and criminal enterprise. Only six are in custody — including the two men sentenced to death.

“All 30 were convicted,” chief prosecutor Aminul Islam told reporters. “Abu Sayeed sacrificed his life to free the country from autocratic rule.”

Death sentences were handed down to two former low-level policemen, Amir Hossain and Sujan Chandra Roy, who are both in court to hear the verdict.

Their lawyer, Azizul Haque Dulu, told reporters he would file an appeal.

The court handed down prison

terms to 28 others, including several senior police officers, a doctor, as well as former staff at Begum Rokeya University, where Sayeed was studying — including its vice chancellor.

A leader of the now-banned Bangladesh Chhatra League, the student wing of Hasin's Awami League, was also sentenced.

Some must serve as much as 10 years in prison, but Sayeed's brother, Ramzan Ali, said the family wanted heavier sentences.

“The court handed lighter sentences to senior police officials and the Chhatra League leader,” he told AFP. “We will file an appeal.”

— AFP

## Nepal's labor minister sacked by PM

KATHMANDU — Nepal's Prime Minister Balendra Shah yesterday dismissed Minister for Labour, Employment and Social Security Deepak Kumar Sah over controversies surrounding him.

The prime minister acted on a recommendation from Rabi

Lamichhane, chairperson of the Rastriya Swatantra Party, to sack the minister just two weeks after his appointment.

Sah has been accused of using his position to ensure his wife continues to be a member of the Health Insurance Board. — Xinhua

## Nepal issues arrest warrant for ex-PM Deuba in graft probe

KATHMANDU — Nepal has issued an arrest warrant for former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba for alleged corruption, officials said yesterday, making him the latest high-profile figure targeted under the new government.

Deuba, 79, is abroad for medical treatment and said that “an investigation on money laundering has been initiated against me and my family”. He rejected the accusation of corruption.

“False propaganda is being spread concerning my family's property,” he said in a statement on social media.

Authorities also issued a warrant for Deuba's wife, former foreign minister Arzu Rana Deuba, court officials in Kathmandu told AFP, following a request from the Department of Money Laundering Investigation.

Deuba said he and his wife were “currently abroad for long term medical treatment”, without giving further details.

Nepali media reported that the couple was recently in Singapore,

and that police are seeking an Interpol notice.

The warrants come a month after Prime Minister Balendra Shah, a 35-year-old rapper-turned-politician, won a landslide election victory on a platform of youth-driven political change, the first elections since a deadly September 2025.

Deuba, who served five terms as prime minister, is a senior leader of the Nepali Congress party.

“My life has been an open book,” he said. “I have spent my entire life striving for the establishment of a democratic system of governance in Nepal.”

His tenure as party president ended in January, after younger members pushed for a leadership change.

Last month, authorities arrested former prime minister KP Sharma Oli and ex-home minister Ramesh Lekhak for their alleged roles in the deadly crackdown on the anti-corruption protests in September.

The youth-led uprising began in Kathmandu and was triggered

by a brief social media ban. It spread countrywide the following day, fuelled by longstanding frustration over corruption and economic hardship.

Protesters set fire to the parliament building and offices, and eventually toppled the government.

Deuba's home was among the buildings torched, and videos of protesters attacking the couple circulated widely online. Bundles of cash were reportedly discovered at the property.

In his statement to the investigation commission on the protests, Deuba said that videos circulating on social media “must be AI-generated”.

“This is a conspiracy, although I do not know who is behind it,” he said in his statement.

The commission has recommended further investigation into the cash allegedly found at Deuba's home and other properties.

Former energy minister Deepak Khadka was also arrested last month as part of a money laundering investigation. — AFP

## Storms, floods kill more than 220 in Afghanistan and Pakistan in 3 weeks

KABUL — Heavy rain, storms and floods have battered Asian neighbours Afghanistan and Pakistan in the last three weeks, killing at least 222 people, disaster officials in both countries said yesterday.

In Afghanistan, which already faces a severe humanitarian crisis, rain, floods, landslides and lightning strikes killed 148 people since March 26, the spokesman of the National Disaster Management Authority, Mohammad Yousuf Hammad, told AFP.

In Dewalak village of Jaghato district in Wardak province, one child was killed due to the collapse of a wall, according to the provincial Department of Information and Culture.

In the central province of Parwan, six people also died on Wednesday due to roof collapses, Mawlawi Abdul Aleem Afzali,

chief of the provincial disaster management agency, said.

In northern Pakistan, the death toll has risen in recent days, reaching 51 people since March 25, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial disaster management agency told AFP.

Five people also died in Pakistan-administered Kashmir since March 25, local disaster authorities said.

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, with over 370 kilometres of roads destroyed in Afghanistan as well as nearly 1,230 houses.

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



A vendor displays morning newspapers at his roadside stall in Islamabad, Pakistan on Wednesday. Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Wednesday that the United States, Iran and their allies had agreed to a ceasefire “everywhere”, including Lebanon, following mediation by his government to stop weeks of fighting. — AFP

## Modi pushes to increase number of female lawmakers

NEW DELHI — Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said yesterday he is pushing a bill to fast-track a law guaranteeing at least one-third of lawmakers are women, and potentially expanding seats by two-fifths.

If passed, the measure would sharply increase the number of women candidates and elected representatives, potentially reshaping legislative debates and policy priorities.

Modi said that parliament will hold a special session on April 16 “to discuss and pass an important bill that advances women's reservation”.

The bill proposes fast-tracking implementation of a 2023 law in the world's largest democracy, reserving 33 percent of seats for women both in the national

parliament and state assemblies.

Currently, the number of elected women is just 14 percent in India's Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament, or 75 out of 543 seats.

“Society progresses when women progress,” Modi said in a statement.

“Yet, their representation in the world of politics and legislative bodies has not always been commensurate with their role in society,” he added.

“This is particularly unfortunate because when women participate in administration and decision-making, they bring with them experiences and insights that enrich public discourse and improve the quality of governance.”

The rollout of the 2023 law

was stalled pending census data, delayed in 2021 by the COVID-19 pandemic, which was needed to delimit constituency boundaries.

India finally launched its first census in 15 years this month.

But the formidable logistical challenge will take more than three million officials a year to carry out — and even longer for the data to be processed — meaning implementation of law could be delayed beyond the next general election in 2029.

The government is proposing that delimitation be based on the last completed census, in 2011.

Indian newspapers report that the amendments could raise the number of seats in parliament's lower house from 543 to 816. — AFP

# Israel seeks Lebanon talks as its strikes threaten US-Iran truce

BEIRUT – Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered his ministers yesterday to seek direct talks with Lebanon, pushing for Hezbollah's disarmament amid mounting concern that its ongoing strikes could cause the fragile US-Iran truce to unravel and plunge the region back into all-out war.

At least 203 people were killed and 1,000 wounded in airstrikes on Wednesday, the Lebanese health ministry said, while Hezbollah said it was engaged in close quarters combat against Israeli forces on the ground yesterday in the south Lebanon town of Bint Jbeil.

Netanyahu said he had ordered his government to enter direct negotiations with Lebanon's government to be focused on disarming Hezbollah and to establish peace, according to a statement from his office, but he offered no immediate respite from the bombardment.

Even as Netanyahu spoke, Israel's military issued a new evacuation order for Beirut's southern suburbs, just a day after the wave of strikes.

"In light of Lebanon's repeated



Hezbollah supporters wave a flag bearing a portrait of slain Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah as they stage an anti-government protest outside the Lebanese governmental palace in Beirut yesterday. – AFP

requests to open direct negotiations with Israel, I instructed the cabinet yesterday to begin direct negotiations with Lebanon as soon as possible," Netanyahu said.

"Negotiations will focus on disarming Hezbollah and establishing peace relations between Israel and Lebanon."

Brussels, Moscow and Ankara

demanded that the two-day-old US-Iran ceasefire be extended to Lebanon.

"We view the situation in southern Lebanon with particular concern," Germany's Chancellor Friedrich Merz said, echoing statements from Paris and London.

"The severity with which Israel is waging war there could cause the peace process as a whole to fail, and that must

not be allowed to happen," he warned.

For their part, Iran's parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf warned Tehran sees Lebanon as an "inseparable part of the ceasefire" and President Masoud Pezeshkian said Israel's strikes rendered "meaningless" talks with US envoys planned for the end of the week in Pakistan.

## 'Where is Hezbollah here?'

Hezbollah said it had fired rockets towards Israel in response to what it called a violation of the ceasefire.

US President Donald Trump claimed victory in the Middle East war after agreeing a two-week truce to allow talks between US and Iranian negotiators to end a conflict that has already killed thousands and plunged the global economy into turmoil – but both Israel and the US insist the fighting in Lebanon is not covered by the ceasefire.

"We are continuing to strike Hezbollah with force, precision and determination," Netanyahu said, in a social media post.

"Our message is clear: anyone who acts against Israeli civilians, we will strike them. We will continue to hit Hezbollah wherever necessary."

Tehran's ambassador to Pakistan, meanwhile, deleted a social media post saying an Iranian delegation would arrive in Pakistan yesterday.

An official at the Iranian embassy in Islamabad told AFP the post was removed "because of some issues" and refused to say whether the delegation was still expected.

The day after the strikes, rescuers were still hard at work in the rubble

of a building hit in the heart of a seafront residential neighbourhood of Beirut.

Half the building had collapsed, some rooms sliced in two by the deadly strike, a dining room and a water fountain exposed.

The other half of the building is nothing but a heap of stone and twisted metal, a school report card here, a law course from Saint Joseph University there, a child's stuffed toy.

According to the civil defence, several bodies were still under the rubble.

"We don't know where my niece is... the rescue teams have been working tirelessly since yesterday, but they haven't found her," Taha Qarqamaz told AFP. Another of his nieces died of her injuries in hospital. Two more are in intensive care.

"Look, these are school notebooks, class notes, books! Where is Hezbollah here? There is no Hezbollah in this neighbourhood!" protested his friend, Khaled Salam.

## High-stakes talks

If the Pakistan talks go ahead, a key point of contention remains the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil as well as vast quantities of natural gas and fertiliser pass in peacetime.

Iran announced alternative routes yesterday for ships travelling through the strait, citing the risk of sea mines.

But it was unclear if Tehran was in practice allowing vessels to pass through the strait, following reports on Wednesday suggesting it was shut – something the White House called "completely unacceptable". – AFP

## Iranians pay tribute to slain supreme leader weeks after killing

### Mustafa Dadkhah

TEHRAN – Thousands of Iranians rallied yesterday in a tribute to former supreme leader Ali Khamenei, killed on the first day of the war with the United States and Israel, expressing criticism of talks expected in Pakistan this week.

Holding portraits of their deceased leader and waving the national flags of the Islamic republic, supporters of Khamenei took part in rallies across the country after he died in the US-Israeli attack on February 28.

The 40-day mourning period following a death is an important rite of passage for Muslims.

"The killing of our beloved leader was truly cowardly," Maryam Esmaili, a 33-year-old private-sector employee, told AFP, adding that the US and Israel "crossed our red line".

The most notable gatherings took place in the capital Tehran, where airstrikes have ceased since a fragile ceasefire came into effect on Tuesday night, as well as the northwest city of Urmia and northeast Gorgan.



Mourners hold portraits of Iran's slain supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei during a rally to commemorate his death in Tehran yesterday. – AFP

Khamenei was 86 years old, having led the Islamic republic for more than 36 years.

His son Mojtaba, who succeeded him in early March, was not present yesterday. He was wounded in a strike, according to Iranian officials, and has yet to appear in public since his appointment.

President Masoud Pezeshkian participated in the tribute and posed for photos with attendees, according to images broadcast on state television.

The national tribute began at 9:40 a.m. (local time), the same time that strikes killed Khamenei at his residence in Tehran along with dozens of high-ranking officers and officials.

### 'Victory'

The attack marked the beginning of a conflict that subsequently engulfed the entire Middle East, with Iran retaliating with missile and drone attacks on Israel and Gulf nations it accuses of serving as launchpads for US strikes.

A state funeral for Khamenei was initially announced but could

ultimately not be held because of the war.

"The leader is alive, he always prays for us and he is watching all of us now, and victory is definitely ours," said Nastaran Safaie, a 24-year-old university student.

Esmaili said she has little hope for the negotiations expected to take place before the end of the week in Pakistan, accusing the Americans of acting in bad faith.

"What they say about the ceasefire and its violation is a repetition of history," she said.

"It should be a lesson for the honourable people of Iran not to be fooled by the empty promises of hypocritical countries."

Others like Mahdi Mohaddes, a 41-year-old engineer, echoed her sentiment.

"I hope this [the talks] doesn't happen. If I were in the shoes of the officials, I would reconsider and not participate in these negotiations," he said.

Mohammad Hossein Bonakdar, a 44-year-old institute director, was thinking of Lebanon, where Israel killed more than 200 people on Wednesday in strikes unprecedented in its current war against Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

"Everyone is very upset and sad and expects that appropriate action will be taken," he said.

"But ultimately, any decision that the leadership of the revolution announces is obligatory and we will obey."

Mohaddes, surrounded by Hezbollah flags, said the movement allied with Tehran has given "its life and blood" to Iranians.

"Now it is our duty to act in response to this aggression," he said.

## US Democrats fail in bid to curb Trump's Iran war powers

WASHINGTON – US President Donald Trump's Republicans yesterday blocked an attempt by the opposition Democrats to curb his authority to wage war in Iran, amid mounting frustration in Congress over his handling of the Middle East conflict.

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries sought to pass a war powers resolution by "unanimous consent" – a procedure that bypasses the need to hold a recorded vote, provided no one objects – but was stopped, as expected, by the Republican majority's presiding officer.

The manoeuvre, staged during a short procedural session while lawmakers remain out of Washington, was largely symbolic but underscored growing Democratic anger over a conflict that has not been formally authorised by Congress.

Jeffries had urged colleagues to attend the session and press for immediate action, arguing a recently announced two-week ceasefire was "woefully insufficient" and calling for a permanent end to US involvement in the war.

Republicans, however, showed little appetite to challenge Trump's authority.

Some have backed the administration's handling of the conflict, while others – though uneasy about the lack of congressional

oversight – have stopped short of supporting measures that could constrain military operations.

The failed push sets the stage for a more consequential showdown next week, when lawmakers return from a two-week recess and Democrats plan to force a recorded vote on the resolution.

Jeffries has said he believes only a small number of Republicans would need to break ranks for the measure to pass.

In the Senate, Democratic Minority Leader Chuck Schumer has signalled a parallel effort, with a vote expected in the coming days.

Similar measures have struggled to gain traction in the past, and Republican opposition remains strong despite signs of unease within the party.

Under the 1973 War Powers Resolution, Congress is required to act within 60 days of the start of an unauthorised military conflict – a deadline that could intensify pressure on lawmakers if the Iran war continues.

"The American people are with us," Jeffries told left-leaning cable news network MS NOW ahead of the vote.

"They don't want to see billions of dollars being spent dropping bombs in Iran from an administration that's not willing to spend a dime to actually make life more affordable for the American people." – AFP

## UK animal charity rescues over 250 dogs from single home

LONDON – An animal welfare charity has revealed it rescued more than 250 dogs from one UK home, with a photo of the scene prompting “disbelief” and false claims that the image was generated by artificial intelligence (AI).

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) said the more than 250 poodle-cross breeds were found at the property in an undisclosed location earlier this year.

The world’s oldest animal welfare organisation, the RSPCA took in 87 of the rescued canines, while the remainder went to another charity, the Dogs Trust.

The RSPCA said the “shocking” case was just the latest example of its staff discovering large numbers of pets needing rescuing from a single home.

It responded to 4,200 incidents last year across England and Wales that involved at least 10 animals at the same address – a 70-percent rise since 2021.

Cases involving dozens and even hundreds of animals were “on the rise”, and can be linked to mental health struggles, the cost-of-living crisis, or breeders operating with poor practices, the charity said.

The RSPCA said people had incorrectly suggested the image of the rescued poodle-cross dogs was fake, after it was posted on social

media and caused “disbelief among the general public”.

It showed dozens of the dogs, many in poor physical condition, crammed into the dilapidated living room of the home.

The charity has had to respond to dozens of comments from concerned people.

“This shocking image is the reality of many multi-animal cases and the situation our frontline officers seem to be confronting more and more,” RSPCA Superintendent Jo Hirst said Wednesday after the photo went viral.

“We understand that people are so aghast they don’t believe what they are seeing,” she added in a statement. “But this photo is not AI – it’s real.”

The RSPCA has not revealed further details about the case, including the location of the home, because the people involved were considered “extremely vulnerable”, it said.

The numbers and living conditions of the dogs had rapidly grown out of control amid extenuating family circumstances, according to the charity.

Hirst said it was “the staggering reality of what can happen when even well-meaning owners become overwhelmed”.

“Over-breeding can take over, and conditions can spiral out of control,” she added. – AFP



This undated handout photo released to AFP by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) shows scores of poodle-cross dogs being kept in one home, at an undisclosed location in Britain. – AFP

## Emperor penguins listed as endangered species: IUCN

Julien Mivielle

PARIS – The emperor penguin has been declared an endangered species as climate change pushes the icon of Antarctica a step closer to extinction, the global authority on threatened wildlife announced yesterday.

Its change of status from “near threatened” to “endangered”, made by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), underscores the existential threat for ice-dependent species as global warming profoundly reshapes the frozen continent.

Emperor penguins rely on stable sea ice – essentially platforms of frozen ocean water – to live, hunt and breed.

Their numbers have plummeted as warming driven by greenhouse gas emissions has caused sea ice to break up earlier in the year.

The IUCN – a global network of scientists, governments and conservation groups – said changes in sea ice were expected to halve the emperor penguin population by the 2080s.

They “concluded that human-induced climate change poses the most significant threat to emperor penguins”, Philip Trathan, part of the IUCN expert group who worked on the Red List assessment, said in a statement.

The Red List of Threatened Species is maintained by the IUCN and is the global reference on the extinction status of plants, animals and fungi.

There are six classifications from “least concern” to “extinct”.

Emperor penguins now rank two steps below “extinction in the wild” – a species surviving in captivity only, and not in nature.

The Antarctic fur seal – once hunted to near extinction for their pelts – was also moved to “endangered”, their numbers having dropped more than 50 percent since 1999.

“The ongoing decline is due to climate change, as rising ocean temperatures and shrinking sea ice are pushing krill to greater ocean depths in search of colder water, reducing the availability of food for seals,” the IUCN said.

### ‘Icons on ice’

The largest and heaviest of the penguin species, boasting a brilliant golden-orange streak on the neck, emperor penguins have become symbolic of the fight to survive in Antarctica’s harsh climes.

They breed on the sea ice in the dead of winter, the males keeping their eggs warm beneath their feet.

The frozen surface also provides a habitat for their chicks during moulting season before they are waterproof.

Antarctic sea ice undergoes huge seasonal changes, expanding during winter and shrinking in summer.

But as global temperatures have reached new



This undated handout photograph, released by The British Antarctic Survey on Wednesday, shows emperor penguins and a chick at the Halley Research Station in Antarctica. – AFP

highs, sea ice has retreated earlier in the spring and become less stable.

Sea ice has been at record low levels since 2016 and the impact on emperor penguins has been well documented.

Satellite imagery indicates around 20,000 adults – some 10 percent of the population – disappeared between 2009 and 2018 alone, the IUCN said.

“This species is closely associated with sea ice and ice packs,” Christophe Barbraud, a scientist at French research institute CNRS, told AFP.

“However, since 2016-2017, there has been a significant decrease in the extent of sea ice around Antarctica, and therefore without sea ice, it will have great difficulty surviving.”

“The fate of these magnificent birds is in our hands,” Rod Downie from conservation group WWF said in a statement.

“With the shocking decline in Antarctic sea ice that we are currently witnessing, these icons on ice may well be heading down the slippery slope towards extinction by the end of this century – unless we act now.”

The IUCN also moved the southern elephant seal from “least concern” to “vulnerable” following sharp population declines caused by a deadly contagious pathogen. – AFP

## US envoy warns EU won’t win AI race ‘bringing others down’

BRUSSELS – The European Union will not be able to compete in the global artificial intelligence (AI) race by hurting companies in other countries, US envoy to the EU Andrew Puzder told AFP yesterday.

The EU will next month unveil plans to boost Europe’s tech sector and cut what it describes as an overreliance on foreign firms, especially US tech giants.

The measures will cover the cloud, AI and semiconductor sectors. Many European companies and governments rely on US cloud providers, dominated by Amazon, Microsoft and Google.

“Europe will not be able to pull itself into the AI economy by bringing other people down,” Puzder said in an interview at the

US mission to the EU in Brussels when asked about the plans.

A major buzzword in Europe today is competitiveness and how the EU can better compete against Chinese and American rivals, but Puzder questioned whether the EU was focused more on boosting itself or on hampering foreign rivals.

“Is it making Europe more competitive or making other people less competitive? One is a good plan. The other is a bad plan,” Puzder said.

He said the United States “would love Europe to partner with us as we face off against China in this AI race” but took aim at the EU’s moves against US tech.

“To partner with us, they have to have access to the data centres and the hardware stack – and

you got to stop punishing the companies that are trying to bring those things to you,” Puzder said.

The EU has fined US companies billions of euros for violations of digital competition and online content rules in recent years.

It has been one of the biggest points of contention between Brussels and Washington, but Puzder struck a conciliatory tone after last week’s announcement of a “dialogue” between the EU and United States.

The EU last week said the two sides would tackle tensions over digital issues through talks, which Puzder echoed, though he said the process had not yet started.

“I would like us to stop talking at each other and start speaking with each other,” he said. – AFP

## Cuba accuses US of ‘extorting’ Latin America in doctors row

HAVANA – Cuba’s foreign minister yesterday accused the United States of “extorting” Latin American countries by pressuring them to cancel decades-old deals with Havana for the supply of doctors.

Bruno Rodríguez said the United States was trying to “strangle” the economy of the communist island, which reportedly earns billions of US dollars from its foreign medical missions, after several countries stopped deploying Cuban doctors.

Washington says the programme – a major source of pride, and income, in Cuba since the 1960s – amounts to forced labour.

Countries seeking to maintain strong ties to US President Donald

Trump have started to yield to pressure to pull out.

Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, and Guyana have all terminated their agreements with Cuba, which is teetering on the edge of economic collapse, partly due to a US energy blockade.

“The US government is persecuting, pressuring, and extorting other governments to end the presence of Cuban Medical Brigades in various countries, under false pretences,” Rodríguez said on X.

According to official figures, some 24,000 Cuban doctors and other healthcare professionals were deployed in 56 countries in 2025.

– AFP

# Harmonious chords – China-Brazil Cultural Year concert bridges continents through music

BRASILIA – The “China-Brazil Cultural Year” concert kicked off on Tuesday in Brasília, bringing together the rich musical traditions of both nations in a harmonious cultural exchange.

The concert, jointly presented by the China National Symphony Orchestra (CNSO) and the Cláudio Santoro National Theater Symphony Orchestra from Brazil, attracted an audience of 600 from all walks of life in Brazil and Chinese citizens living there.

“For the opening piece of the first half, I conducted the ‘Batuque,’ a dance piece well known to the local Brazilian audience, as a greeting from Chinese musicians,” said Jing Huan, principal conductor

of the China National Symphony Orchestra.

She noted that despite limited rehearsal time, they boldly attempted a more challenging interweaving and exchange of works, allowing musicians from both countries to gain a deeper understanding of each other’s musical cultures.

Brazilian conductor Cláudio Cohen said that the Cláudio Santoro National Theater Symphony Orchestra has collaborated with Chinese partners multiple times, greatly admiring the power and cultural traditions embedded in Chinese music.

“Today’s concert has brought Brazilian and Chinese cultures closely together through music,” Cohen said on Tuesday.

According to Zhu Qingqiao, China’s ambassador to Brazil, the China-Brazil relationship is in its best shape ever, as cultural exchanges have enhanced mutual understanding and friendship between the two peoples, bringing hearts closer and bonds stronger.

As a key part of the China-Brazil Cultural Year, the event is jointly organized by China’s Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Chinese Embassy in Brazil, and Brazil’s Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Tourism, and Culture.

The orchestras will also travel to the historic Brazilian cities of Natal on Thursday and Fortaleza on Saturday to perform classic works from both countries. – Xinhua



This photo taken on Tuesday shows the “China-Brazil Cultural Year” concert held at the FHE Poupex Theater in Brasília, Brazil. The “China-Brazil Cultural Year” concert opened in the Brazilian capital on Tuesday. Jointly presented by the China National Symphony Orchestra and the Cláudio Santoro National Theater Symphony Orchestra from Brazil, it showcased the cultural charm of both countries through a dialogue of music. – Xinhua



Doctors from the 25<sup>th</sup> Chinese medical team in Mozambique provide free medical care at the Confucius Institute of Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo, Mozambique, on Monday.

– Xinhua

## Cape Verde inks deal with Chinese consortium to build new inter-island vessel

PRAIA – Cape Verde’s public port company ENAPOR signed a contract on Tuesday with a Chinese consortium to construct a new vessel for inter-island maritime transport, with an investment of about 17 million euros (US\$20 million).

According to a statement released by ENAPOR, the project involves the construction of a roll-on/roll-off vessel tailored to the specific needs of the archipelago and designed for high operational versatility.

The vessel will be able to carry up to 300 passengers and 60 light vehicles, or alternatively 12 heavy trucks, the statement said.

At about 75 meters in length and equipped with modern technical

solutions, the vessel is expected to strengthen the country’s logistics capacity and contribute to territorial integration and economic activity, it added.

The contract was awarded through an international public tender to a consortium formed by Shenzhen Churui New Energy Technology Co., Ltd. and Taizhou Changlong Shipbuilding Co., Ltd. The vessel is planned to be built at Pinghu Huahai Shipbuilding Co., Ltd. in China, according to the winning companies.

Construction is expected to be completed within 21 to 24 months after validation of the detailed implementation program.

– Xinhua, MPD

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## World Bank lifts suspension on disbursements to Guinea-Bissau

BISSAU – The World Bank has lifted its suspension of disbursements for projects in Guinea-Bissau, the government said last week.

The suspension took effect on Good Friday.

The government said in a statement that the decision followed a review by the World Bank and would allow ongoing operations in

the country to resume normally.

The statement, citing a letter from World Bank Division Director Djibrilla Adamou Issa to Transitional Prime Minister and Finance Minister Ilídio Vieira Té, said payment processing and project activities under existing financing would restart immediately.

The government said the World

Bank also welcomed measures taken by the country’s authorities to facilitate the return of financing.

The World Bank suspended operations and disbursements for Guinea-Bissau in January following the country’s political turmoil in late November 2025, according to media reports.

– Xinhua

## Cape Verde, WHO sign US\$2.46-million work plan

PRAIA – The government of Cape Verde and the World Health Organization (WHO) have signed a 2026-2027 work plan valued at around US\$2.46 million in the capital Praia.

At last week’s signing ceremony, Health Minister Jorge Figueiredo said the two-year plan will help advance health sector reform, modernize services, and strengthen the country’s response capacity.

He said the funding will go toward national priorities as the health

sector faces challenges, including non-communicable diseases, mental health, aging population, and the impact of climate change.

Figueiredo added that the plan comes as Cape Verde implements its Health Charter and National Health Policy 2025-2035, which calls for better service organization, greater equity among islands, digitalization, and stronger human resources.

WHO Representative in Cape Verde Ann Lindstrand said the new plan will support efforts in

universal health coverage, primary care, service quality, digitalization, medicine regulation, and health workforce development.

She noted Cape Verde’s progress in recent years, including certification as a malaria-free country, the elimination of measles and rubella, and the country’s first kidney transplant.

Lindstrand said the WHO is also mobilizing additional international partners, including Morocco and China, to help close the remaining funding gap. – Xinhua

# Eritrea players disappear after winning AFCON qualifier

## Football

JOHANNESBURG - Only three of 10 local footballers in an Eritrea squad returned home after a 2027 Africa Cup of Nations qualifier, a Confederation of African Football (CAF) official told AFP on Wednesday.

The other seven are believed to have disappeared when the national team arrived in South Africa en route from Eswatini to Eritrea via Egypt, said the official, who requested anonymity.

"This incident is a mystery. Eritrea beat Eswatini on March 31 in Lobamba and no one seems certain what happened thereafter," he said.

"We believe all the players left Eswatini for South Africa. But when the travelling party landed in Cairo, seven players were missing."

A member of the Eritrean community in South Africa told AFP he had seen several of the missing footballers in Johannesburg, but declined to give further details, citing safety concerns.

AFP understands the seven missing players include goalkeepers Kibrom Solomon and Awet Maharena and defenders Wedeb Fessehaye, Yosief Tsegay and Nahom Awet.

Veteran midfielder Medhane Redie and striker Amanuel Benhur were the other defectors, who have

joined dozens of Eritrean footballers who abandoned national teams when in other African states.

Those who returned to Asmara were captain Ablelom Teklezghi, fellow midfielder Nahom Tadese and striker Romel Abdu.

The United Nations estimates about 80 Eritreans involved in football, including players, coaches and officials, have defected during the past 20 years.

Indefinite military service after completing schooling is cited as the main reason for the defections from the east African country.

Eritrea has been governed by President Isaias Afwerki since gaining independence from Ethiopia

in 1993 and human rights groups consistently describe his rule as "highly repressive".

During a state visit to Kenya three years ago, Afwerki said such allegations were "fantasy".

Recently appointed Eritrea coach Hesham Yakan, a defender in the Egypt 1990 World Cup squad, chose 24 players, including 14 based abroad, for the two-leg preliminary qualifier against Eswatini.

His selection included Eritreans based in Australia, Egypt, England, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, the Philippines and Sweden.

Ali Suleiman from Egyptian top-flight side Ismailia Electricity

Club scored three goals as Eritrea won 2-0 and 2-1 to qualify for the main qualifying phase, which will comprise 12 four-team groups.

The first leg against Eswatini was staged in Moroccan city Meknes because Eritrea does not have an international-standard stadium.

It was the first Cup of Nations match involving Eritrea since 2007. Subsequently, they competed in three World Cup qualifying competitions and also several regional tournaments.

During trips outside the country, players from both Eritrean senior and under-age national teams regularly disappeared and sought asylum. - AFP

## Real Madrid coach Arbeloa defends players ahead of Girona game



MADRID - Real Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa defended his players' attitude and announced changes to his starting lineup ahead of tonight's La Liga game at home to Girona.

Real Madrid goes into the match after Tuesday night's 2-1 home defeat to Bayern Munich in the Champions League and a 2-1 La Liga loss in Mallorca last weekend, which left Arbeloa's side seven points behind Barcelona in the standings with eight games to play.

Asked whether another defeat would effectively end his side's title hopes, Arbeloa insisted the players "know that every game is vital and there is less margin for error."

Arbeloa said the importance of next Wednesday's trip to Munich

would not distract from tonight's game against a rival that still has work to do to secure safety from relegation.

"The players are the first who want to play, because they know Tuesday's result wasn't what we expected. I have spoken to most of them and they want to play and offer a win to the fans," he insisted.

The Real Madrid coach also rejected suggestions that some players lacked commitment.

"It is vital in life to have a good attitude and commitment. The players are the best in the world, but talent alone isn't enough if we want to be consistent," he said.

The coach also had special words for midfielder Eduardo Camavinga, who was singled out for criticism after the last two defeats.

"He has played a lot under me and he will start tomorrow (tonight). He is an important player for me and for the club, and he has shown the quality he has. He has the confidence of everyone at the club, including the coach," said Arbeloa.

Finally, Arbeloa announced changes to tonight's side, with Jude Bellingham and Eder Militao coming into the starting lineup, although he explained that Ferland Mendy's muscle injury meant he would have to "wait until Wednesday."

Girona won at home to Villarreal Monday night, but will be without top scorer Vladislav Vanat, who will miss the rest of the season after tearing a hamstring.

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

- Xinhua/MPD



Atletico Madrid's Argentine forward Julian Alvarez (not seen) scores his team's first goal in spite of Barcelona's Spanish goalkeeper Joan Garcia during the UEFA Champions League quarter final first leg between FC Barcelona and Club Atletico de Madrid at Camp Nou Stadium in Barcelona on Wednesday. Atletico Madrid won the game 2-0. - AFP

## Uli Hoeness hopes Harry Kane scores Bayern's 102<sup>nd</sup> league record goal

Oliver Trust



BUNDESLIGA

BERLIN - Reigning German champions Bayern Munich are closing in on an iconic Bundesliga record.

While attention remains fixed on next week's second leg of Bayern's Champions League quarterfinal against Real Madrid, fans will briefly turn their focus to tomorrow's Bundesliga game against St. Pauli.

Bayern's 100 goals after 28 matches already represent an outstanding return this season, and it now appears only a matter of time before a 54-year-old league record falls.

Inspired by German striking great Gerd Muller's 40 goals in 34 matches, Bayern set a league record of 101 goals in the 1971-72 season.

With six rounds of matches left this season, breaking that long-standing mark looks increasingly likely, while fans are enjoying the debate over who will score the decisive goal.

Bayern supervisory board member Uli Hoeness has already made his preference clear. "I hope Harry Kane does it and scores the 102<sup>nd</sup> goal. I would wish it for him," said the 74-year-old 1974 World Cup winner.

The three-time Champions League winner and 1972 European champion praised Kane's achievements in a Bayern shirt and said the club's reported 100 million-euro investment in the former Tottenham striker had been justified. - Xinhua/MPD

"If I see who today is said to be worth 150 million euros, then Harry is worth 250," the former Bayern CEO said after Kane reached 10 goals in 11 Champions League games.

Hoeness added that Kane has earned the right to break the record and write his name into history after Bayern's rising 18-year-old talent Lennart Karl scored the club's 100<sup>th</sup> goal of the season in a dramatic 3-2 comeback win in Freiburg.

Kane currently has 31 league goals in 26 matches, while another landmark, Robert Lewandowski's 41-goal Bundesliga record from the 2020-21 season, also remains within reach.

"We enjoy the chance to achieve something good in the league. I don't want to talk too much about records, but there is this goal record that has stood for a very long time," Bayern coach Vincent Kompany said.

Kompany said he enjoyed his team's hunger, noting that it does not stop when ahead but continues pushing until the final second.

With a solid lead in the league and hopes of a treble still alive, Bayern's focus this weekend briefly returns to domestic business.

Goal-scoring this season has become something "we all enjoy despite our title chances. It's the result of a team enjoying football," the Bayern coach added.

The game will be played at 12:30 a.m. Sunday morning Macau time. - Xinhua/MPD

## Football shorts

### England set for World Cup warm-up friendlies in Florida heat

LONDON - England's final two World Cup warm-up friendlies will likely take place in sweltering Florida heat after the Three Lions' schedule was finalised yesterday.

Thomas Tuchel's men will take on New Zealand on June 6 in Tampa Bay before facing Costa Rica four days later in Orlando.

Both games will kick off at 4 p.m. local time (2000GMT) as England aim to acclimatise for punishing conditions once the competition gets underway.

Tuchel's squad will then head to Kansas City, where they will be based at the Soccer Swope Village for the duration of the tournament.

The Missouri city was the English Football Association's preferred location, despite two of their group games and several potential knockout matches being on the east coast of the United States.

England begin their quest for a first major tournament win since 1966 against Croatia in Dallas on June 17.

The side ranked fourth in the world then face Ghana in Boston and Panama in New Jersey. - AFP

### Australia's Perth to host Italian football giants

SYDNEY - Italian football titans AC Milan will face off against arch-rivals Inter Milan and Juventus in pre-season friendlies in the Australian city of Perth this August, the clubs said yesterday.

Inter Milan - currently top of the Serie A league - will take on local rivals AC Milan at the western Australian city's Optus Stadium on August 5, the club said.

It will be the third consecutive year that AC Milan have played in Australia.

"On this occasion, the Rossoneri will face Inter, taking the Milan Derby beyond national borders," the club said.

Inter will then play Juventus - on their first-ever antipodean appearance - on August 8.

The Bianconeri will then take on the Serie B southern Italian side of Palermo on August 11. - AFP

### 3 Chinese referees selected for 2026 FIFA World Cup



BEIJING - The Chinese Football Association confirmed yesterday that referees Ma Ning, Fu Ming and Zhou

Fei have been appointed as referees for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Ma will serve as a referee, Zhou as an assistant referee, and Fu as a video assistant referee.

It will mark the second time Ma has been included on the FIFA World Cup referee list after serving as a fourth official at the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar and officiating in several matches. The 46-year-old is set to become the first Chinese referee to take part in two editions of the World Cup.

Fu and Zhou, meanwhile, will both make their FIFA World Cup debuts.

In recent years, Chinese referees have made frequent appearances at major international competitions. Ma and Fu officiated at the inaugural expanded FIFA Club World Cup in 2025.

A Chinese refereeing team consisting of Ma Ning, Fu Ming, Zhou Fei and Zhang Cheng also took charge of the final of the 2023 AFC Asian Cup in Qatar, marking the first time Chinese referees had officiated the final of the tournament.

The 2026 FIFA World Cup will be held June 11-July 19 across the United States, Canada and Mexico, and will feature an expanded 48-team format. - Xinhua/MPD

## Croke Park boss eager to stage Fury-Joshua heavyweight clash in Dublin

### Boxing

LONDON – The long-awaited ‘Battle of Britain’ between former world heavyweight champions Tyson Fury and Anthony Joshua could take place outside the country at Dublin’s Croke Park, according to the stadium’s chief executive.

Fury, 39, reiterated on Wednesday ahead of his return from retirement against Arslanbek Makhmudov at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium tomorrow that he wanted to face Joshua before the end of 2026.

The duo have almost got into the same ring on several occasions, only for contract disputes, fitness issues and losses elsewhere to derail previous attempts to stage the super-fight.

Their camps had reportedly been close to an agreement before Joshua decided to take time out from boxing following a car crash which led to the death of two close friends in December.

The 36-year-old Joshua, however, is now back in training and was present for Derek Chisora’s defeat by Deontay Wilder last Saturday.

Croke Park, with a capacity of over 80,000 in the Irish capital, is one of Europe’s largest stadiums.

They are now trying to arrange a fight between Fury and Joshua, with Irish women’s boxing heroine Katie Taylor on the undercard.

“The real hope is that we will get Tyson Fury here later on in the year,” Croke Park stadium chief executive Peter McKenna

told the BBC yesterday.

“That would be such a world-billing event that we would be able to facilitate a Katie Taylor fight here.

“A lot of stars need to align. Katie’s manager needs to agree, Katie’s promoter needs to agree, Tyson Fury’s promoter needs to agree.

“I am very confident that all three are coming to the sense that this is one of Ireland’s greatest sporting athletes and it would be such a ‘wow’ to have her here and for her to finish her career here.”

A possible stumbling block is if Joshua wants a ‘warm-up’ fight before he faces Fury, with promoter Eddie Hearn suggesting earlier this week that Wilder could be an option.

Fury warned Joshua time was running out, given he will end his own 16-month absence from the ring tomorrow against Russian boxer Makhmudov.

“This fight [with Joshua] was supposed to happen so many times over the last 10 years, but then someone has had one more fight in between and someone has got knocked out or injured,” Fury said.

“I think we should get this fight on as soon as possible in case something happens in between.

“The problem is that in heavyweight boxing anything can go wrong, there are no easy fights. And if you get knocked upside down, it’s finished, it’s done. I want it as the fight next and I’m sure AJ feels the same.

“Forget Wilder, the man is a shell of himself. Forget anyone else. Let me get



British boxer Tyson Fury poses on the red carpet to attend a “Grand Arrival” event in central London on Wednesday, ahead of the heavyweight boxing match between Britain’s two-time former world heavyweight champion Fury and Russia’s Arslanbek Makhmudov on Saturday. – AFP

through Saturday and then we will do the fight before the end of the year.

“I’ve been out of the ring longer than he has, 16 months out of the ring. Let’s do it, let’s dance.”

The fight will start at 5:30 a.m. Sunday Macau time. – AFP/MPD

## 7 World Cup winners start for England in Women’s Six Nations opener



LONDON – England’s starting lineup will feature only seven Women’s Rugby World Cup winners when they begin their Six Nations title defence against Ireland at Twickenham tomorrow.

The Red Roses return to Twickenham, with 75,000 tickets already sold for the match - a new attendance record for the tournament, having lifted the World Cup there last September.

Outside centre Meg Jones leads England for the first time after replacing former captain Zoe Aldcroft, who is pregnant with her first child.

Ellie Kildunne and Jess Breach are in the back three and four forwards who

started the 33-13 victory over Canada - Amy Cokayne, Morwenna Talling, Sadia Kabeya and Alex Matthews - are in the pack.

Holly Aitchison and Lucy Packer combine at half-backs, with Natasha Hunt and Zoe Harrison providing cover from the bench.

Veteran forwards Hannah Botterman and Marlie Packer are absent from the matchday 23 entirely but teenage No 8 Haineala Lutui could make her debut off the bench.

“It’s a fantastic opportunity to be returning to Allianz Stadium (Twickenham) in front of our fans for the first time since the World Cup final,” said England coach John Mitchell after

announcing his team yesterday.

“We’ve all felt the lasting impact of 2025 and that’s reflected in the incredible ticket sales for Saturday’s match.

“The players relish and absolutely deserve the opportunity to perform in front of record crowds, but they also understand the responsibility that comes with that stage.”

England are on a record run of 33 consecutive wins since losing the COVID-delayed 2022 World Cup final to New Zealand and they are bidding for an eighth consecutive Six Nations title.

The game will be played at 9:25 p.m. tomorrow evening Macau time. – AFP/MPD

## Verstappen set for fresh F1 angst as engineer nears Red Bull exit – reports

### F1

LONDON – Four-time world champion Max Verstappen’s future in Formula One was again cast in doubt yesterday after reports emerged that his long-time race engineer is set to leave Red Bull.

Gianpiero Lambiase will take up a position with Red Bull’s rivals McLaren, the BBC, the UK Press Association and Sky Sports all reported.

Neither McLaren nor Red Bull have made a public comment, but the BBC said the move had been confirmed by “senior insiders” at both teams, speaking on condition of anonymity.

A deal appears to be in place for British-Italian Lambiase to join UK-based McLaren when his Red Bull contract

expires at the end of next season - although he could leave even sooner.

Lambiase has worked with Verstappen since the Dutchman, who won the last of his quartet of world titles in 2024, joined Red Bull a decade ago.

His impending exit raises more questions about Verstappen, who hinted during last month’s race in Japan he is ready to quit Formula One.

Verstappen, whose current Red Bull deal runs until 2028, is a lowly ninth in the championship - with just 12 points from the opening three races.

In Japan, the 28-year-old, a leading critic of this season’s new regulations, labelled his car “undriveable”.

Speaking about his overall feelings, he told reporters: “I don’t know the right

word in English for it. I don’t know what it is in Dutch either. I don’t know what to make of it to be honest.

“There are probably no words. I don’t get upset about it, and I don’t get frustrated by it anymore with what is going on. There is a lot of stuff for me personally, to figure out.”

In a subsequent BBC interview, Verstappen said: “When you just think about is it worth it? Or do I enjoy being more at home with my family? Seeing my friends more when you’re not enjoying your sport?”

Lambiase’s exit would mark the departure of yet another senior figure from Red Bull, with Christian Horner sacked as team principal last year.

Design guru Adrian Newey and sporting director Jonathan Wheatley both left their posts before Horner’s exit. – AFP

## Vitidsarn, Shi reach Badminton Asia Championships quarters

### Badminton

NINGBO – Defending champion Kunlavut Vitidsarn of Thailand and home favorite Shi Yuqi reached the men’s singles quarterfinals at the 2026 Badminton Asia Championships yesterday.

World No. 1 Vitidsarn rallied from one game down to defeat Japan’s Yushi Tanaka 8-21, 21-18, 21-5.

Vitidsarn will face China’s Weng Hongyang, who beat India’s H.S. Prannoy 21-12, 21-19.

Second seed Shi, another title contender, eased past Lee Cheuk Yiu of Hong Kong, 21-11, 21-10 and will next face Japan’s Kodai Naraoka.

“I focus on every detail, including pre-match tactical analysis and physical preparation,” Shi said. “I hope to achieve the goal of winning the title, but the process remains the priority.”

In women’s singles, second seed Wang Zhiyi of China overcame a tight first game to beat India’s P.V. Sindhu 21-18, 21-8 and book a quarterfinal berth.

“My opponent is very experienced and strong,” Wang said. “The first game was quite difficult. Against such veterans you have to be more rigorous, because they will seize any tiny opportunity to catch up.”

Compatriot Gao Fangjie survived a scare against sixth seed Putri Kusuma Wardani of Indonesia, rallying from a 21-18 first-game loss to win next two games 21-12, 21-17.

“I’m happy to have another chance to play tomorrow,” said Gao, who announced she will retire after the tournament.

Also yesterday, South Korea’s An Se-young beat Nguyen Thuy Linh of Vietnam 21-7, 21-6.

In the doubles draw, top-seeded pairs Kim Won-ho and Seo Seung-jae of South Korea in men’s doubles, China’s Liu Shengshu and Tan Ning in women’s doubles and Feng Yanzhe and Huang Dongping in mixed doubles all advanced to the next round.

The quarterfinals will be played today. –Xinhua

## Japan to host T20 World Cup qualifiers at new Asian Games cricket venue

### Cricket

TOKYO – Japan’s new cricket venue, built for this year’s Asian Games, will host men’s T20 internationals for the first time next month, said the International Cricket Council.

Baseball-mad Japan has constructed a cricket stadium for the Asian Games, which are being held in Nagoya and the wider Aichi region from September 19-October 4.

The new ground in Nisshin, outside Nagoya, will stage the East Asia-Pacific (EAP) qualifiers for the 2028 men’s T20 World Cup from May 8-18.

The biggest East Asia-Pacific qualifying tournament ever will see nine teams battling to move a step closer to the T20 World Cup in Australia and New Zealand.

Matches will also take place at the Japan Cricket Association’s headquarters in Sano, about 100 kilometres outside of Tokyo.

“This is an extraordinary opportunity for Japan to show our capacity to host pathway events for the EAP Region across multiple venues,” said JCA chief operations officer Alan Curr.

“We will be stretched like no time ever before, but are confident we can deliver an event that will showcase the best of the EAP region as well as create excitement for cricket at the Asian Games later this year.”

Hosts Japan will be joined at the tournament by the Cook Islands, Fiji, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, South Korea, Samoa and Vanuatu. – AFP

# BTS kick off world tour with S Korea show

Jihye Shin

GOYANG – Tens of thousands of fans filled a rainswept stadium in South Korea yesterday to watch BTS kick off their world tour, as the K-pop megastars ride the momentum of a chart-topping comeback album and a landmark performance in the heart of Seoul.

The seven-member group – widely regarded as the world’s biggest boy band – took to the stage together for the first time last month following a years-long hiatus prompted by mandatory military service, and after releasing their latest studio album “ARIRANG”.

Yesterday’s concert in Goyang, about 16 kilometres from the capital Seoul, marked the start of a tour that will span 85 shows in 34 cities worldwide.

“So many things are special... I can’t really put it into words,” said a fan from Britain, who gave her name as Janine, after the performance in the hometown of band leader RM.

“It was just fantastic.”

Abbas Manahil, 27, a physical therapist from Pakistan, said she had worried that the stars might slip due to the heavy rain, but said they handled it well.

“It was my first time seeing

them so close,” she said, recalling the moment she broke into tears. “That made my day.”

Hours before the show began, fans converged on Goyang, where landmarks have been lit up in purple – the colour symbolising BTS’s global fanbase, known as ARMY.

The concert-goers – many dressed in purple themselves – reflected the group’s global reach, with English, Spanish, Chinese and Japanese heard while they queued outside the venue.

“I think it was the hardest ticket I ever got. Even in Korea with fast Internet, I was 80,000<sup>th</sup> in line,” Evelyn Soto Villarreal, 27, a Mexican fan living in the city of Busan, told AFP.

Despite the weather, many fans without seats remained outside the stadium after the show began, listening intently to the muffled music.

## ‘Feel like home’

The tour is set to be a major money-spinner for BTS, potentially outdoing Taylor Swift’s recent Eras Tour, according to analysts.

It follows last month’s statement performance on the doorstep of the historic Gyeongbokgung Palace, which drew more than 100,000



BTS fans arrive at a stadium for a gig by K-pop boy band BTS in Goyang, South Korea, yesterday. BTS kicked off their world tour yesterday, riding the momentum of a chart-topping comeback album and a landmark performance in the heart of Seoul recently. – AFP

fans to central Seoul, according to the group’s label.

BTS will travel to cities including Tokyo, Manila, Toronto, Munich and Buenos Aires as part of the highest number of shows for a single tour by any South Korean artist, according to their label.

“Performing together as a group felt comfortable, and being in the same space with you all made it feel like home,” member Jin wrote on fan platform Weverse

after yesterday’s show.

Videos shared by fans showed the stadium awash in purple light, as lightsticks rose in waves and the crowd sang “Swim”, the latest album’s lead single.

Other footage showed the band greeting fans. “We were so worried about the rain... but what mattered was seeing you,” member Jimin said, completely drenched.

New album “ARIRANG” – also the name of the tour – is billed

as reflecting the maturing boy band’s Korean identity.

It is named after the traditional Korean folk song about longing and separation, often dubbed South Korea’s unofficial national anthem.

## Future of K-culture

The album recently helped BTS become the first K-pop act to top the US Billboard 200 for two consecutive weeks, while its tracks also secured top spots across multiple Spotify charts.

Many K-pop boy bands have faced career downturns after completing mandatory military service, in a fiercely competitive industry where momentum is hard to regain.

But BTS are proving that is not going to be the case for them, said American sociologist Sam Richards, a professor at Pennsylvania State University.

“This is extremely significant for the future of K-culture and the nation of Korea because it means that unprecedented growth in soft power will continue,” he told AFP.

The group’s official community on Weverse has over 34 million members, while their Instagram following is over 80 million.

– AFP

# Cannes Festival promises escapism in Hollywood-lite edition

Adam Plowright and Jeremy Tordjman

CANNES – The Cannes Film Festival unveiled its roster of films for this year’s edition yesterday packed with historical dramas, “gentleness” and even football, but with big Hollywood studios notable in their absence.

Festival director Thierry Frémaux unveiled 21 films in competition for the main Palme d’Or prize, featuring former winners, newcomers and strong showings from Spain and Japan.

Frontrunners for the top prize will include Japan’s Hirokazu Kore-eda with AI-themed “Sheep in the Box”, Cristian Mungiu from Romania with “Fjord”, and Russian auteur Andrey Zvyagintsev, whose film “Minotaur” focuses on wealthy Russians confronted with conscription.

Spanish veteran and Cannes favourite Pedro Almodóvar will appear for the seventh time with his “Amarga Navidad” (“Bitter Christmas”), while exiled Oscar winner Asghar Farhadi will represent Iran with “Histoires Parallèles” (“Parallel Tales”).

Commenting on the selection for the May 12-23 festival, Frémaux said many Western films would be a form of escapism from the grim reality of current affairs, with a focus on “gentleness, songs, nature”, while others were “bringing history into the present”.

Introducing the French film “Quelques Mots d’Amour” (“A Few Love Words”) by Rudi Rosenberg, he quipped: “You see? We all need some love and gentleness.”

Around 2,500 films were submitted for selection in total, which Frémaux said underlined

the vitality of the cinema industry, which is struggling with viewers switching to streaming and home entertainment.

## Hollywood

Out of competition, there will be a surprising amount of football at the high temple of French cinema, with documentaries about legendary forward Eric Cantona and the notorious England-Argentina 1986 World Cup match featuring Diego Maradona.

American A-listers will be less prominent than usual, although Woody Harrelson and Kristen Stewart are set to star in the Paris-set “Full Phil” by French director Quentin Dupieux.

“The United States will be represented. The [Hollywood] studios a bit less,” Frémaux said, while recalling the world premieres of “Top Gun: Maverick” and the last edition of “Mission: Impossible” in previous editions.

Tom Cruise arrived on the red carpet by helicopter in 2022 as eight French fighter jets flew overhead.

Some industry insiders have speculated that Hollywood majors are spurning European festivals as platforms for their film premieres, preferring their own social media-led launches as less risky options.

Plane-mad US movie legend John Travolta will bring some serious stardust to Cannes when he presents his directorial debut, “Propeller One-Way Night Coach”, about a young boy’s journey in the “golden age of aviation”.

Hollywood and Broadway legend Barbra Streisand will also be on Cannes’ famed waterfront to receive

the festival’s Honorary Palme d’Or, as will New Zealand filmmaker Peter Jackson, best known for “The Lord of the Rings” trilogy.

US director Steven Soderbergh will present a documentary on John Lennon, titled “The Last Interview”.

## Politics

Last year’s Cannes, like other European festivals in Berlin and Venice in previous years, was the scene of fierce wrangling about whether the industry and organisers should take a stronger stand on Israel’s devastation of Gaza.

Hundreds of film figures, including “Schindler’s List” actor Ralph Fiennes and Richard Gere, denounced “genocide” in the territory in an open letter released on the eve of the event.

The Berlin Film Festival in February found itself at the centre of a storm after jury president Wim Wenders, when asked about the German government’s support for Israel, replied: “We cannot really enter the field of politics.”

“People often say that Cannes is political when the films are political, when the filmmakers are political,” Frémaux told AFP yesterday, saying that in his view art was “very often political”.

The festival itself needed to remain neutral and “does not take political positions”, he added.

South Korean filmmaker Park Chan-wook (“Oldboy” and “No Other Choice”) will be head of the competition jury this year.

The 2025 edition gave the top prize to dissident Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi and his wry



Cannes film festival General Delegate Thierry Frémaux (left) and Festival President Iris Knobloch pose after a press conference to announce the official selection of the 79<sup>th</sup> edition of the Cannes Film Festival, at the Pathé Palace cinema in Paris yesterday. – AFP

thriller “It Was Just an Accident”. Artificial intelligence (AI) is also set to be a hot topic of discussion again this year due to its deepening impact on filmmaking, as well as the danger it poses for

copyright and original storytelling. “We’re not turning a blind eye, but we refuse to let it lay down the law in cinema,” Cannes president Iris Knobloch told reporters yesterday. – AFP

| World Weather             |                              |                             |                                |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| CHINA                     | ASIA-PACIFIC                 | WORLD                       | LUSOPHONE                      |
| ☀️ Beijing<br>10°C~27°C   | ☀️ Manila<br>23°C~35°C       | ☁️ New York<br>11°C~17°C    | ☁️ Lisbon<br>13°C~21°C         |
| ☁️ Shanghai<br>15°C~26°C  | ☀️ Bangkok<br>26°C~37°C      | ☁️ London<br>8°C~13°C       | ☔️ Rio de Janeiro<br>21°C~25°C |
| ☁️ Hong Kong<br>22°C~27°C | ☔️ Tokyo<br>15°C~20°C        | ☀️ Frankfurt<br>6°C~15°C    | ☔️ Luanda<br>24°C~30°C         |
| ☀️ Taipei<br>22°C~33°C    | ☔️ Singapore<br>24°C~32°C    | ☁️ Vancouver<br>11°C~18°C   | ☀️ Maputo<br>18°C~29°C         |
| ☁️ Guangzhou<br>22°C~33°C | ☔️ Kuala Lumpur<br>24°C~33°C | ☀️ Paris<br>8°C~16°C        | ☔️ Dili<br>23°C~31°C           |
| ☀️ Nanjing<br>14°C~27°C   | ☔️ Jakarta<br>23°C~33°C      | ☔️ Moscow<br>1°C~6°C        | ☔️ São Tomé<br>25°C~32°C       |
| ☀️ Guilin<br>20°C~33°C    | ☔️ Seoul<br>7°C~15°C         | ☀️ Las Vegas<br>13°C~28°C   | ☁️ Praia<br>19°C~28°C          |
| ☀️ Xi’an<br>11°C~25°C     | ☁️ Sydney<br>17°C~30°C       | ☀️ Monte Carlo<br>13°C~19°C | ☀️ Bissau<br>20°C~37°C         |



### 1. Great welcome!

A giant interactive cat art installation is seen in the arrivals hall at Hong Kong International Airport on Wednesday. - AFP

### 2. Quarter of a century wait!

This photo taken on Wednesday shows blooming *Rhododendron sinogrande* at the West China Subalpine Botanical Garden in Chengdu, Sichuan Province. A batch of *Rhododendron sinogrande*, an alpine rhododendron species, recently bloomed for the first time here after 29 years of artificial cultivation. - Xinhua

### 3. Apple honey

A bee flies as it gathers pollen from apple blossoms in a garden of Le Raincy, east of Paris, on Monday. - AFP



### 4. Style to fit the occasion

A member of the Royal Collection Trust staff poses with a 'Cherry Blossom evening dress' (centre), circa 1975, worn at a banquet in Japan, during a media preview of the exhibition 'Queen Elizabeth II: Her Life in Style' at the King's Gallery in Buckingham Palace in London yesterday. The largest exhibition showcasing Queen Elizabeth II's fashion ever staged is being held from today to October 18, 2026. - AFP

### 5. Naturalised parrot

A person feeds wild Ring Necked Parakeets in central London on Wednesday, as warm, sunny weather arrived in the capital, with a high temperature forecast in the mid-20s. - AFP

### 6. Setting stepping stones

Residents use stones to cross a path flooded by an overflowing rainwater channel following heavy rains in Peshawar, Pakistan on Tuesday. - AFP

