

Sheng Kung Hui launches guidebook for parents to discuss gambling with their kids

Armando Neves

The Sheng Kung Hui Macau Social Services Coordination Office hosted a guidebook launch yesterday, aiming to help parents discuss the risks of gambling with their children.

The launch took place at the office's Taipa Youth and Family Integrated Service Centre on Rua do Regedor.

Sheng Kung Hui (聖公會) is the Cantonese pronunciation of the Chinese name for the Anglican Church. In a literal sense, the characters translate to "Holy Universal Church".

According to a statement released by the office during the event, the organisation noted that preventing children from being exposed to gambling has become an urgent priority for parents, particularly with the 2026 FIFA World Cup taking place later this year.

The 2026 FIFA World Cup is scheduled to take place between June 11 and July 19 across Canada, Mexico, and the United States.

Based on the principles of tertiary prevention*, the organisation developed the Chinese-language guide, titled "Gambling Talk: Parent-Teen Interaction Guide". The publication offers concrete and practical communication strategies.



Copies of the office's "Gambling Talk: Parent-Teen Interaction Guide" guidebook are displayed during yesterday's book launch at the centre. - Photos: Armando Neves

Its launch has been sponsored by Macau's Social Welfare Bureau (IAS).

The statement further explained that the guide aims to assist parents in establishing positive interactions with young people, enabling them to work together to address the various risks and challenges encountered during adolescent development.

Posso Ip Kam Po, service director of the office, noted in a speech that

the office has been operating for 29 years, while its 24-hour Hotline & Online Gambling Counselling Services are now in their 11th year.

He emphasised that the office remains focused on the physical and mental wellbeing of young people. Given their natural curiosity regarding gambling, he expressed the hope that the guide would help parents educate their children on how to accurately



Mimi Lao Mei I, who heads the Sheng Kung Hui Macau Social Services Coordination Office's Hotline & Online Gambling Counselling Services, speaks to reporters at the office's Taipa Youth and Family Integrated Service Centre on Rua do Regedor yesterday.

understand gaming odds, recognise the symptoms of addiction, and establish a "safety net" to prevent problem gambling.

Mimi Lao Mei I, a certified gambling counsellor in charge of the office's hotline and online counselling services, told reporters on the sidelines of the book launch that while only around seven percent of gambling helpline callers are under the age of 24, most callers aged

between 25 and 39 first encountered gambling during their secondary school or university years.

She emphasised the need of "early prevention", as young people often begin with "social gambling" – such as capsule toy machines, blind boxes, or mahjong - without recognising the inherent risks.

Lao urged parents to take advantage of everyday situations to discuss "probability and self-control", and to remain vigilant for signs of obsession or financial loss. With the World Cup approaching, she warned that casual sports betting can escalate into addiction if core beliefs about gambling are not addressed early.

She also noted an increase in non-local residents seeking assistance, highlighting the growing need for responsible gambling support beyond Macau's borders. ■

*Tertiary prevention refers to interventions that occur after a problem or condition is already well-established. The goal is to reduce the severity, duration, or negative impact of the condition through rehabilitation, preventing further deterioration, and improving the quality of life for individuals and their families. - DeepSeek

Study finds AI systems judge people, create kind of 'trust'

JERUSALEM – Israeli researchers have found that modern artificial intelligence (AI) systems can judge people and form a type of "trust," though in ways that differ from humans, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem said in a statement yesterday.

In a new study published in *Proceedings of the Royal Society A*, the team examined how AI evaluates individuals in contexts such as lending, hiring, and making recommendations.

The researchers analyzed over

43,000 simulated decisions and compared them with responses from about 1,000 human participants.

They found that both humans and AI tend to favor people who appear competent, honest, and well-intentioned, suggesting AI captures some basic elements of "human trust."

However, key differences emerged. Humans usually form overall impressions based on a mix of traits, while AI systems break judgments into separate

factors, such as competence or integrity, and score them more rigidly, the researchers said.

The study also found that AI can show consistent bias, sometimes stronger than human bias, based on factors such as age, gender, or religion, even when all other details are the same.

The researchers said that the findings highlight the need to better understand how AI makes decisions, as these systems increasingly influence hiring, finance, and healthcare. - Xinhua



AI-powered desktop companion robots are displayed during the sixth China International Consumer Products Expo (CICPE) in Haikou, capital of Hainan Province, yesterday. The ongoing sixth CICPE features groundbreaking innovations in artificial intelligence (AI). A wide range of new tech consumer products are showcased at the event, spanning multiple sectors including smart interaction, wearable devices, and smart healthcare. - Xinhua

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The Macau Post Daily

Xi meets Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, makes 4-point proposal on Middle East peace

President Xi Jinping met with Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE), in Beijing yesterday. - Story on p. 7

Xi calls for enhancing China-Spain cooperation for more outcomes in meeting with Sánchez

President Xi Jinping said yesterday that China and Spain should strengthen cooperation in multiple fields and encourage exchanges in various areas. - Story on p. 7

Trump's 'unprecedented' pope attack caps months of tensions

US President Donald Trump's dismissal of Pope Leo XIV as "weak" and "wrong" marked an unprecedented personal attack on a pontiff by a US leader that capped months of tension. - Story on p. 11

Police arrest TCM doctor for sexually abusing young girl during treatment

Tony Wong

A traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) doctor has been arrested for sexually abusing a young girl last week while she was undergoing treatment at his clinic, Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Chao Teng Hin announced during a special press conference yesterday.

According to Chao, the TCM doctor, while giving the girl a back massage, suddenly removed her shorts and underwear and pressed his hands on her buttocks, after which he pulled her legs apart and looked at her private parts, and applied aphrodisiac massage oil to her waist.

The police confirmed that he did not have sexual intercourse with her, Chao said.

Chao identified the suspect as a 44-year-old local man surnamed Ieong, who has been practising as a TCM doctor in Macau for over 17 years. He has been operating his clinic, located in Patane district, for seven years.

Accompanied by her father, the girl went to the PJ headquarters on Thursday last week to report the case to the police.

Chao did not identify the victim's exact age. Ieong has been transferred to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) for further investigation, facing a "child sexual abuse" charge.

Article 166 of the Penal Code – child sexual abuse – covers any kinds of sexual activity involving minors under the age of 14. The article states that a person who engages in sexual activity with a minor aged below 14 – such as touching the minor's genitals – faces a prison term of between one and eight years.

However, the offender faces a prison term of between 3 and 10 years if they engage in sexual intercourse, anal sex or oral sex with the minor, or if they insert an object, or any particular part of their body, into the minor's vagina or anus.

According to Chao, the girl, accompanied by her family members and friends, sought treatment for hand tremors at Ieong's clinic on March 31 and April 3. During these two sessions of treatment, Ieong carried out the treatment normally, which included applying pressure to the respective areas on her body affected by her condition, and giving her massages, Chao said.

On Tuesday last week, Chao said, the victim went to Ieong's clinic alone for follow-up diagnosis and treatment. After the victim underwent a diagnosis process, Ieong told the victim to change into loose-fitting clothes provided by the clinic for a massage, and to lie face down on a massage table.

According to Chao, Ieong straddled the victim's legs to massage her back, but he suddenly pulled her shorts and underwear down to her thighs, and pressed both sides of her buttocks with his hands before pulling her legs apart to look at her private parts. He then applied massage oil to her waist, which caused her to feel hot throughout her entire body.

Chao said that after returning home from the clinic, the girl told her family about what the doctor had done to her. Eventually, her father took her to the PJ headquarters on Thursday last week to report the case, i.e., two days after the incident.



Judiciary Police (PJ) officers escort the hooded child sexual abuse suspect outside the PJ headquarters in Zape yesterday. – Photo: Tony Wong

After investigating the case, Chao said, PJ officers searched Ieong's clinic on Monday and arrested him where they seized a quantity of massage oil used as an aphrodisiac. After assessing the findings of their investigation, Chao said, the police decided to transfer Ieong to the Public Prosecutions Office (MP) for further investigation where he faces a child sexual abuse charge.

At the time of yesterday's press conference, the police were still investigating whether there were any other victims sexually abused by Ieong, according to Chao.

The sexual abuse case announced yesterday follows a PJ report late last month involving a local psychotherapist. The male doctor is accused of molesting a patient in 2021 and four intern

psychotherapists in 2025. All five female victims came forward to the police only last month, and did so separately.

According to a PJ press conference on March 27, the victim in the 2021 incident initially refrained from reporting the assault for fear of retaliation, as the therapist had access to her personal information. Similarly, the four interns targeted in 2025 did not report the abuse at the time, fearing that doing so would result in unsatisfactory internship evaluations.

Police find Ieong cheats govt of health e-vouchers with 2 other doctors

Meanwhile, Chao also announced during yesterday's press conference that the police

meanwhile discovered that Ieong, in collusion with another TCM doctor and a Western medicine doctor, has defrauded the government out of health e-vouchers amounting to 860,000 patacas.

According to Chao, the other TCM doctor is a 37-year-old local man surnamed Fong, while the Western medicine doctor is a 31-year-old local woman surnamed Lam.

According to Chao, Ieong was previously involved in a health e-voucher fraud case in July 2021. Following legal proceedings, he was sentenced by the court in June last year to a two-year suspended prison term. While Ieong has not been officially disqualified as a TCM doctor, he has been disqualified by the government from joining its medical subsidy programme, Chao said.

In August last year, Chao said, Ieong registered Fong and Lam as health professionals working for his clinic. The three reached an agreement according to which when patients sought treatment from Ieong and wished to use their healthcare e-vouchers, Fong and Lam – even if not present – allowed Ieong to use their accounts to process the transactions.

According to Chao, the police's investigation showed that Ieong kept 80 percent of the ill-gotten money from each fraudulent transaction, while the other two split the remaining 20 percent.

After arresting Ieong on Monday for his sexual abuse case, the police arrested the other two at the clinic in the early hours of yesterday for the health e-voucher case. ■



Evidence seized from the suspect's clinic is displayed at the pressroom of the PJ headquarters yesterday. – Photo: PJ

3 men hurt in two-car crash on Friendship Bridge

Armindo Neves

The Public Security Police (PSP) announced in a statement yesterday that three local men were injured in a two-car crash on the Macau Friendship Bridge.

At about 7:09 p.m. yesterday, the Macau Fire Services Bureau (CB) announced in a statement that it had received an emergency call about a traffic accident the Taipa-bound lane of the bridge. The caller reported that at least one person was injured in the accident.

Arriving at the scene, firefighters confirmed that two vehicles were involved in the collision, and that the front of the car behind the other was severely damaged.

According to a PSP statement, traffic police officers discovered that the accident occurred when one of the vehicles rear-ended the one in front of it.

The male driver of the vehicle behind sustained minor injuries, while the male driver and a male passenger in the vehicle that was rear-ended suffered shoulder contusions, the statement said,



This image of a screenshot from a video posted on Facebook yesterday shows a light-coloured vehicle after rear-ending a dark-coloured vehicle, as well as a motorbike rider sitting on the opposite lane of Friendship Bridge yesterday. The reason for the rider sitting next to his bike on the bridge was apparently unrelated to the two-car crash. The Post cannot vouch for the authenticity of the video grab.

adding that both drivers passed breathalyser tests.

The Public Security Police noted in its statement that the driver who rear-ended the car has been fined.

According to Macau's Road Traffic Law Article 21, Paragraph 1,

the driver of a moving vehicle must maintain a sufficient distance between his or her vehicle and the vehicle preceding it to avoid accidents in the event of a sudden stop or reduction in speed of the latter. Anyone who violates the provisions of this article faces a fine of 600 patacas. ■

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FORCE 3 TO 4 SOUTHERLY WINDS, OCCASIONALLY FORCE 5 WITH GUSTS.
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 75% AND 95%.



25°C~29°C

Source: SMG

Over 100 firms offer 2,000 jobs & internships at 'MPU Careers Day'

Rui Pastorin

The public Macao Polytechnic University (MPU) hosted its "Careers Day" yesterday on its campus on Rua de Luis Gonzaga Gomes, where over 100 companies from Macau and elsewhere in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) offered more than 2,000 job and internship opportunities across different industries.

The event was launched that morning with a ceremony. Among the industries represented at yesterday's fair were IT, banking and finance, hospitality, tourism, education, and social services.

Aside from the fair for job and internship hunters, the one-day event also featured professional career talks, policy presentations, enterprise visits and career guidance, along with over 10 specialised seminars on various related topics.

In her speech, MPU Vice Rector Vivian Lei Nga Lin highlighted the importance of the MPU Careers Day series of events. She also noted that, based on its latest MPU Graduate Survey Report, over 85 percent of

graduates secured employment or pursued further studies within three months of graduation.

Graduates are mainly employed in sectors including education, gaming and entertainment, tourism, MICE, hotel management and catering, public administration, and healthcare and nursing, with a median monthly salary of 15,000 patacas, according to Lei.

Most of those pursuing further studies, meanwhile, do so in the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, Macau, the UK, and Singapore, she noted.

Meanwhile, among those interviewed by reporters yesterday, a fourth-year accounting student said that she was confident of finding a job in her field, while a social work graduate added that she thinks there is strong demand for social workers in Macau. A fourth-year student in Chinese-Portuguese translation studies, meanwhile, said he planned to pursue further studies and hoped to find an internship to build work experience. ■



Students interact with booth operators offering job and internship opportunities at yesterday's "MPU Careers Day" at the Macao Polytechnic University (MPU) campus on Rua de Luis Gonzaga Gomes. - Photo: Rui Pastorin

UTM signs vocational education cooperation deal with 4 local schools



Macao University of Tourism (UTM) Rector Fanny Vong Chun Kwan (left, seated) and a representative of Xin Hua Night Secondary School (right, seated) pose with their signed cooperation agreements on the public tertiary institution's campus in Mong Ha yesterday. - Photo: Khalel Vallo

Khalel Vallo

The public Macao University of Tourism (UTM) signed cooperation agreements with four local secondary schools yesterday on its Mong Ha campus to launch tailored senior secondary vocational education programmes aimed at strengthening talent development for Macau's tourism and service industries.

The signing ceremony, held with the support of the Education and Youth Development Bureau (DSEDJ), brought together representatives from Our Lady of Fátima Girls' School, St. Joseph Diocesan College (The Fifth School), Xin Hua Night Secondary School and Macau Kung Luen Vocational & Technical Middle School.

Under the cooperation framework, the four schools will introduce customised three-year vocational education programmes at the senior secondary level. The courses will focus on areas including international hospitality, high-quality services, convention and exhibition planning, and data

science, combining theoretical learning with practical training.

The university will provide professional teaching staff, curriculum design and educational resources, while the participating schools will be responsible for teaching implementation and student management. The collaboration aims to establish an integrated "secondary school + university" talent development pathway.

Addressing the ceremony, UTM Rector Fanny Vong Chun Kwan noted that the initiative aligns with Macau's "1+4" economic diversification strategy and the growing demand for skilled professionals. "In recent years, Macau has been advancing its development as a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure and a Creative City of Gastronomy, with increasing demand for high-quality technical talent", she said.

Vong added that the university has accumulated extensive experience in vocational education and has previously collaborated with local schools to deliver pre-

employment training programmes aligned with industry needs, noting that the newly introduced courses will connect with professional qualification standards, including industry-recognised certifications, to enhance students' practical skills and career readiness.

"Through these programmes, we aim to provide students with systematic professional training and create a pathway that integrates further education and employment opportunities", she said.

Looking ahead, Vong said that the university will continue to work with local schools to optimise curriculum design, strengthen teaching collaboration, expand internship opportunities and enhance career guidance.

The university said in a statement released after yesterday's event that it expects the initiative to support Macau's push for economic diversification by cultivating a new generation of skilled professionals, while promoting closer collaboration between secondary and higher education institutions. ■

Lisboeta Macau to host dog-friendly screening of 'The Super Mario Galaxy Movie'



A dog is seated at the cinema of the Lisboeta Macau H853 Fun Factory during the previous dog-friendly screening. - Photo: Lisboeta Macau

Rui Pastorin

A dog-friendly movie screening event will again be hosted by Lisboeta Macau H853 Fun Factory in Cotai, this time inviting dog lovers and their beloved pets to the cinema to watch "The Super Mario Galaxy Movie" on Sunday, April 26.

The initiative follows the first-ever dog-friendly movie screening event, also hosted by Lisboeta Macau, that took place on August 2025 for the American superhero film "Superman", directed by James Gunn and starring David Corenswet in the titular role.

"The Super Mario Galaxy Movie" will be screened from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. on that day in Cantonese. It is co-organised with LAIKA and supported by Emperor Cinemas (Lisboeta Macau), according to a statement by Lisboeta Macau yesterday.

Meanwhile, the statement also noted that the "Our First Fluffy Date" package will be on offer at the BROWN & FRIENDS CAFÉ & BISTRO that on the screening day, the restaurant will set up a dedicated pet-friendly zone to allow dogs "to move around safely and freely while interacting with pet lovers". More details, packages and ticketing can be found on the Lisboeta Macau website.

"Lisboeta Macau H853 Fun Factory is shaping a more inclusive and interactive leisure environment by expanding pet-friendly facilities and enhancing supporting services, to enrich Macau's lifestyle scene and contribute to the city's diversified tourism development, offering guests more comfortable and high-quality leisure options", according to the statement. ■

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Macau Experimental Theatre to present Puccini's comic masterpiece

Interview by William Chan

The Macau Experimental Theatre is set to bring Giacomo Puccini's* only comic opera, Gianni Schicchi, to the Macao Cultural Centre (CCM) Black Box II this weekend.

Director Johny Tam (譚智泉) has recently spoken to the Post about this unique production, which promises a fresh, intimate take on the classic tale of greed, wit, and a clever deception.



Undated file photo of director Johny Tam posing – Photos provided by Tam

Gianni Schicchi is a one-act opera buffa (Italian for “comic opera”) by Puccini, originally part of his Il Trittico (The Triptych) from 1918. While Puccini is renowned for his tragic operas, Gianni Schicchi stands out as his sole venture into comedy. The story, inspired by a brief mention in Dante’s Inferno**, revolves around the wealthy Donati family in 13th century Florence. Upon the patriarch’s death, his relatives discover he has left his fortune to a monastery. Desperate, they enlist the cunning commoner Gianni Schicchi to impersonate the deceased and dictate a new will. Schicchi, however, has his own plans, aiming to secure a future for his daughter and outsmart the greedy family.

Tam said that the opera is deeply influenced by realism, offering a precise portrayal of 13th century Italian family dynamics and inheritance conflicts. He highlighted the opera’s unique musicality, which, unlike some of Puccini’s other works, foregoes overt Eastern influences in favour of a refined integration of comedic rhythm and character logic. This makes



Undated file photo of music director Elyot Lou posing

it a compelling “architectural drama” that masterfully blends humour with the operatic form.

Schicchi: From villain to hero

Tam emphasised a key narrative shift in this production: transforming Gianni Schicchi from Dante’s condemned scoundrel into a relatable hero. Driven by the love for his daughter and her future, Schicchi’s deception becomes a justifiable act, allowing the audience to empathise with his cleverness and witness a satisfying reversal of class dynamics through laughter.

This production showcases significant regional collaboration, with approximately 70 percent of the performers being local singers working alongside professional vocalists from Hong Kong. The involvement of Macau-based Steinway Artist*** Pun Hou Sut as the piano soloist further underscores the commitment to highlighting local professional talent and fostering artistic exchange.

Black Box theatre

Departing from grand opera house traditions, this rendition is designed for the intimate setting of the Black Box theatre, creating a “music salon” atmosphere. Tam aims to challenge conventional perceptions of opera, demonstrating its flexibility and relevance in a more accessible, life-like context. The use of a piano solo arrangement, rather than a full orchestra, distills Puccini’s musical essence, and the close proximity of the piano and actors in the Black Box creates a “zero-distance” experience, forging a tight bond between music and performance, he said.

Performances are scheduled for this weekend, April 18 starting at 7:45 p.m. and April 19 commencing at 2:45 p.m., at the Macao Cultural Centre Black Box II. It will be performed in Italian, its original language, with English and Chinese subtitles. Tickets are priced at 180 patacas, with various discounts available. For purchases, please visit: <https://forms.gle/5FieiefpxJbEK6qY7>.

**Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924) was an Italian composer who dominated the opera world at the turn of the 20th century. He inherited the mantle of Italian opera from Giuseppe Verdi and brought it into the modern era with a genius for melody and theatrical instinct. He is one of the most performed opera composers on the planet today. – DeepSeek*

***Dante’s Inferno - written by the exiled Florentine poet Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) in the early 1300s - is the first part of his epic The Divine Comedy, depicting a meticulously structured journey through Hell where sinners face punishments poetically tailored to their crimes. While Dante himself condemned Gianni Schicchi to the Eighth Circle for fraud with just a few scathing lines, Puccini later plucked that same character from damnation and placed him at the centre of opera’s most sparkling comedy. – DeepSeek*

**** A Steinway Artist is a prestigious designation awarded by Steinway & Sons to world-class pianists*



who have chosen to perform exclusively on Steinway pianos. It is not a paid endorsement; rather, it is a formal relationship based on the artist’s preference for the instrument. Steinway & Sons is a German-American piano company, founded in 1853 in New York City by German piano builder Heinrich Engelhard Steinweg (later known as Henry E. Steinway). The company’s growth led to a move to a larger factory in New York, and later opening an additional factory in Hamburg, northern Germany. The New York factory, in the borough of Queens, supplies the Americas, while the factory in Hamburg supplies the rest of the world – Gemini/Wikipedia

Catholic Centre of Macau to reopen June 12



This handout photo provided by the Catholic Centre of Macau in February shows part of the building located at the junction of Rua do Campo and Avenida da Praia Grande.

Rui Pastorin

The Catholic Centre of Macau announced in a statement last night that it has completed reconstruction, with a grand ceremony scheduled to take place on Friday, June 12.

Located at the junction of Avenida da Praia Grande and Rua do Campo, the statement pointed out that the centre is still undergoing final government approval procedures and will mark “the official return of a landmark that has carried half a century of collective memories for Macau”, the statement said.

The 17-story centre is managed by Centro Católico Management Ltd., with operations divided between the Macau Catholic Centre (Association) and Catholic Centre Hotel.

The statement said that the centre integrates “hotel accommodation, dining facilities, lecture halls, conference rooms, exhibition spaces, and multi-purpose activity rooms”, serving tourists, pilgrims, and locals.

Before the building’s redevelopment, the centre included a well-patronised library on its ground floor.

The statement added that the reconstruction project began on September 8, 2021, while the topping-out ceremony was held on May 22, 2025. “Despite the severe challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the sharp rise in global construction costs, the project overcame difficulties through faith and support from all sides, and was successfully completed”. ■

CTT wins top prize for intaglio stamp at global competition

Khalel Vallo

The Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) has won first place in the “Best Intaglio Stamp” category at the “World’s Best Stamps 2025” competition, marking major international recognition of Macau’s stamp design and printing standards, according to a statement by a CTT statement yesterday.

Co-organised by the United Nations’ (UN) Universal Postal Union, the World Association for the Development of Philately (WADP) and the Philatelic Federation of South Africa, the “World’s Best Stamps” competition is regarded as one of the highest honours in the global philatelic community, the statement said.

This year’s edition attracted 195 entries from 66 countries and regions, the statement noted, adding that submissions were evaluated by an international panel of stamp designers, scholars and senior philatelists through a comprehensive and multi-dimensional judging process.

The award-winning entry from the bureau is the “Rare Animals in China” souvenir sheet, which features the black-faced spoonbill as its central theme, the statement said.

The spoonbill is a nationally protected wild bird and has been highlighted in the design to raise awareness of conservation, according to the statement. Some of the rare migratory birds spend the winter months in Macau.

The stamp employs intaglio printing*, a technique known for its precision and depth, combining realistic and freehand artistic elements.

Through detailed engraving, the design has captured the texture and layering of the depicted bird’s white feathers while creating a strong three-dimensional (3D) visual effect. In addition to its artistic qualities, the piece also depicts the natural habitat of the black-faced spoonbill, reinforcing a message of environmental protection and



This souvenir sheet provided by the Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau (CTT) yesterday shows its award-winning entry “Rare Animals in China”, which won first place in the “Best Intaglio Stamp” category at the “World’s Best Stamps 2025” competition.

biodiversity conservation, the statement noted, adding that the award aims to reflect international recognition of Macau’s capabilities in stamp design and printing, while also showcasing the cultural and artistic value of local philatelic works on a global stage.

The bureau said in the statement that it will continue to develop philatelic products that combine artistic creativity with cultural storytelling, promoting Macau through stamp design. ■

*An intaglio print is one where the image is incised into a surface (usually a metal plate). The ink is held in the sunken lines rather than on the raised surface, which is the opposite of relief printing. – Gemini

Gongbei Customs seizes 5.51 kg of silver granules in jump starter power box

Armindo Neves

Zhuhai’s Gongbei Customs announced in a statement yesterday that its officers seized 5.51 kg of silver granules hidden in a jump starter power box at Hengqin checkpoint last Wednesday.

According to the statement, on that day, customs officers, while inspecting the incoming passenger vehicle lane, noticed an anomaly through the X-ray image of a vehicle arriving from Macau, intercepting it for further inspection.

Upon inspection, the statement said, the officers discovered five packages of silver granules, weighing a total of 5.51 kg*, concealed in a jump starter power box located in the front passenger area of the vehicle.

In the 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 the average global silver price as of yesterday, 5.51 kg of silver granules was worth 116,310 patacas. – Gemini



This undated handout photo provided by Zhuhai’s Gongbei Customs yesterday shows silver granules concealed in a car’s jump starter power box, seized by its officers at Hengqin checkpoint last Wednesday.

Consulate General of Israel in Hong Kong and Macau Commemoration for the Holocaust Remembrance Day held in Hong Kong

NOTICE

April 14, 2026

On Monday (April 13, 2026), the Consulate General of Israel in Hong Kong and Macau and the Hong Kong Holocaust and Tolerance Centre hosted a solemn ceremony to mark the Holocaust Remembrance Day (Yom HaShoah). The event honored the memory of six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust and the enduring spirit of survivors who have shared their stories to ensure that their light never fades.

This year’s remembrance theme focuses on the Jewish family in the Holocaust. Amidst relentless persecution and systematic

dehumanization, the family remained a vital source of strength, hope, and identity. We pay tribute to the parents who made unimaginable sacrifices to protect their children, siblings who supported each other in the darkest of times, and the countless families whose lineages were tragically extinguished. By remembering their names and stories, we keep their legacy alive and honor their enduring bonds.

Mr. Amir Lati, Consul General of Israel in Hong Kong and Macau, said in his speech that the family and its values have been central to Jewish tradition. The Nazis sought not only to annihilate individuals but to obliterate

entire families, erase cultural heritage, and destroy a culture thousands of years old. Yet, even amidst unimaginable suffering, the resilience of the human spirit shone through in ghettos and camps – in the sacrifices of parents, the support among siblings, and the formation of “found families” among strangers.

The ceremony served as a reminder of the importance of remembrance, tolerance, and the ongoing fight against hatred and antisemitism. We stand united in honoring those who endured and in reaffirming our commitment to the vow Never Again.



Chinese, Russian FM's exchange views on US-Iran conflict, situation in Asia-Pacific region, Ukraine crisis

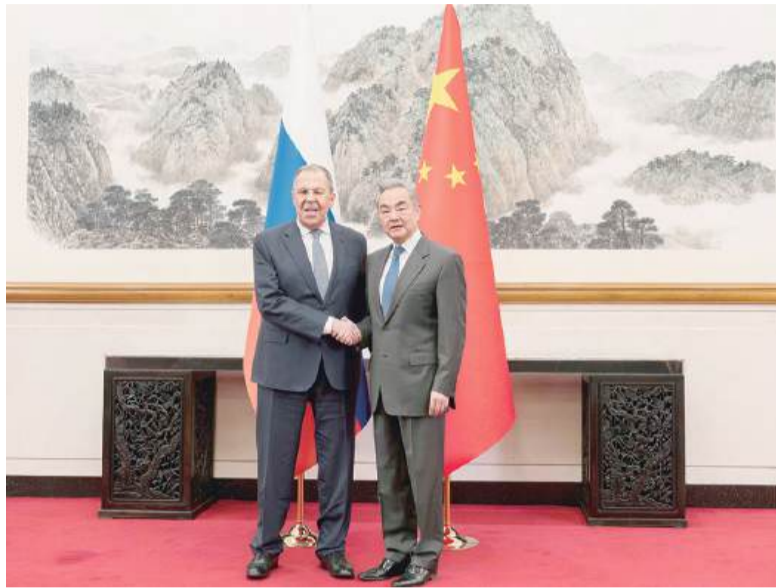
BEIJING – The Chinese and Russian foreign ministers yesterday compared notes on the preparations for the meeting between the two heads of state within the year, and exchanged in-depth views on international and regional issues of common concern, including US-Iran conflict, the situation in the Asia-Pacific, and the crisis in Ukraine.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Beijing, saying that the current international situation is experiencing severe turbulence, the harm of unilateral hegemony has intensified, the global governance system is undergoing profound adjustments, and the cause of human peace and development is facing severe challenges.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, said that facing a complex and volatile external environment, under the personal care and strategic guidance of the two heads of state, China-Russia relations have stood firm, and cooperation in various fields has remained strong and resilient.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the China-Russia strategic partnership of coordination and the 25th anniversary of the signing of the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation, said Wang, adding that this year also marks the first year of China's 15th Five-Year Plan period.

He said that China and Russia should implement the important consensus reached by the two heads of state, and promote the bilateral strategic partnership of coordination and mutually



Foreign Minister Wang Yi (right), also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, shakes hands with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

beneficial cooperation in various fields to a higher level.

Both sides should enhance cooperation under multilateral frameworks such as the United Nations, said Wang, adding that taking the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as an opportunity, the two sides should implement the consensus reached at the Tianjin Summit and support Kyrgyzstan in hosting this year's summit successfully.

The two countries should jointly maintain the momentum of unity among BRICS countries and safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of the Global South, he added.

Wang called on the two sides to continue to maintain strategic coordination on major international and regional issues, join hands to practice multilateralism and international morality, and jointly advance the process of world multi-polarization.

For his part, Lavrov said

Russia is willing to work with China to maintain close high-level exchanges, deepen practical cooperation and achieve mutual benefit and win-win results.

The current international situation is facing severe challenges, and some countries are attempting to form "small circles" to contain Russia and China, said Lavrov.

Lavrov called on both sides to align well with the series of global initiatives proposed by the Chinese side and the vision of the Greater Eurasian Partnership and the Eurasian security architecture proposed by the Russian side, maintain coordination and cooperation on the multilateral platform and in international and regional affairs, safeguard their respective national interests, and jointly maintain the security and stability of the international system.

After their talks, the two sides jointly signed the 2026 consultation plan of the foreign ministries of the two countries. (More on Middle East war on pages 7-11) – Xinhua

More capable Chinese enterprises encouraged to invest in Spain: Premier Li

BEIJING – China is ready to import more high-quality products from Spain and encourages more capable Chinese enterprises to invest in Spain, Chinese Premier Li Qiang said yesterday.

Li made the remarks when holding talks with Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, who is on an official visit to China.

Li said China is willing to work with Spain to better leverage their complementary economic advantages, deeply explore cooperation potential, and promote the expansion, quality improvement and balanced development of bilateral trade.

China is willing to enhance cooperation with Spain in areas such as new energy vehicles and energy storage to create more highlights

of cooperation, Li said, adding that China supports universities, research institutions and enterprises from both sides to strengthen joint research and development, enhance scientific and technological innovation capabilities, and work together to seize future development opportunities.

Li said China is willing to enhance the level of transportation cooperation with Spain, promote the high-quality development of the China-Europe Railway Express, and jointly build an international green shipping corridor.

It is hoped that Spain will continue to play an important role within the European Union (EU) and promote the healthy development of economic and trade relations between China and the EU, Li noted. – Xinhua

Mozambican president's China visit to advance bilateral ties: FM spokesperson

BEIJING – Mozambican president's visit to China will promote the in-depth development of China-Mozambique comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership, a foreign ministry spokesperson told a news briefing in Beijing yesterday.

At the invitation of President Xi Jinping, President of the Republic of Mozambique Daniel Francisco Chapo will pay a state visit to China from tomorrow to next Wednesday.

When asked to introduce relevant arrangements of Chapo's visit, spokesperson Guo Jiakun noted it is President Chapo's first visit to China since he took office.

Guo said that President Xi will hold a welcome ceremony and a welcome banquet for him, and the two presidents will have talks.

Premier Li Qiang and Chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee

Zhao Leji will meet with Chapo, respectively, the spokesperson said, adding that Chapo will also visit Hunan and Qinghai provinces.

Noting that China and Mozambique enjoy long-standing friendship, Guo said for over half a century since the establishment of diplomatic ties, facing the changing international landscape, China-Mozambique friendship has been growing stronger.

"Now, political mutual trust between the two countries is deepening with fruitful outcomes in cooperation in various fields and close cooperation in international and regional issues," he added.

It is believed that this visit will also make contributions to building the all-weather China-Africa community with a shared future for the new era and reinforcing the solidarity and cooperation in Global South, Guo noted. – Xinhua

Chinese humanoid robots deployed on assembly lines for precision tasks

NANCHANG – At a tablet manufacturing workshop in the eastern city of Nanchang, four humanoid robots have completed an eight-hour live-streamed shift on a real assembly line requiring precision operations, marking another great leap in the country's embodied AI empowering its manufacturing sector.

During yesterday's working hours, these black-and-white human-like machines, with streamlined torsos resembling polished metal, performed final quality inspections before tablets rolled off the line.

In a cramped space, AgiBot's Genie G2 identified and precisely picked up materials from the conveyor at speeds almost comparable to human workers, turned to put them in testing boxes, and placed any anomalies at a window for staff retrieval. This seemingly simple sequence

was technically impossible for programmed automation equipment.

Live footage showed the Shanghai-designed robots, powered by integrated visual perception and force control, could automatically adapt to positional deviations within 1.0 centimeter and dynamic disturbances on the production line. This capability enabled it to complete scene calibration in as little as five minutes when facing different product models, with line changeover and retraining taking no more than four hours.

Field data revealed the G2 model finished each operation in 18 to 20 seconds, processing 310 units per hour with an overall success rate exceeding 99.9 percent.

This development represents a new leap in China's grand vision for AI-enabled manufacturing. By establishing mutually reinforcing feedback loops between its digital

and industrial strategies, the country is now generating interlocking innovation flywheels that drive progress across related industries.

"Embodied intelligence is no longer a lab concept, but a genuine driver of productivity that can enter production lines, and create real value," said Yao Maoqing, senior vice president of AgiBot.

The successful deployment on precision, high-speed manufacturing production lines has provided valuable exploratory experience for the subsequent industrial deployment of robots, said Zhong Junhao, secretary-general of the Shanghai AI Industry Association.

Last July, AgiBot tested its dual-armed, wheeled robots at an auto parts factory in Mianyang, a city in southwestern China, where they undertook an unscripted, real-world stress test: identifying pallets and bins on the factory floor, autonomously

planning their routes, and transporting the bins to designated shelves. Previously, Chinese intelligent robotics companies such as UBTECH, based in south China's Shenzhen, had conducted car factory training sessions.

This time, humanoid robots have officially entered the workforce, performing delicate operations rather than crude tasks like heavy lifting.

Li Long, general manager of the robotics business division at the tablet manufacturer Shanghai Longcheer, said that after just four months, the G2 was successfully integrated into a consumer electronics mass production line, and has now accumulated 140 hours of continuous operation. Their deployment in Longcheer is expected to expand to 100 units by the third quarter of 2026, Li added.

This rapid deployment and its potential return on investment will

drive large-scale implementation across consumer electronics, automotive, semiconductor and energy sectors, said Yao.

Chinese robotics firms, notably, emerged as the largest producers of humanoid robots worldwide in 2025.

Shanghai-based AgiBot achieved an annual shipment volume of over 5,100 units, securing a 39-percent share of the global humanoid robot market and ranking first in the world for both shipment volume and market share, according to a January report released by Omdia, a tech consultancy in London. It was followed by Unitree and UBTECH.

"In the global competitive landscape of embodied AI, China is increasingly demonstrating its advantages by leveraging abundant production line application scenarios and first-mover opportunities in deployment," said Zhong. – Xinhua

Xi meets Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, makes 4-point proposal on Middle East peace

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping met with Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE), in Beijing yesterday.

Xi noted that the UAE is a comprehensive strategic partner of China, and China has always attached great importance to developing relations with the UAE.

Through joint efforts of both sides, China-UAE relations have maintained healthy and stable development, and witnessed deepened political mutual trust, growing practical cooperation and rich people-to-people exchanges, Xi said.

Noting that consolidating and enhancing China-UAE relations is a firm consensus of both sides and meets the expectations of the people of both countries, Xi said China is willing to join hands with the UAE to build a more stable and dynamic China-UAE comprehensive strategic partnership.

Both sides should continue to support each other on issues concerning their core interests and major concerns, maintain high-level exchanges and consolidate strategic mutual trust, Xi said.

He called on both sides to strengthen the alignment of development strategies, and tap the potential for mutually beneficial cooperation in energy, investment, trade, science and technology and other fields.

The two countries should promote greater progress in cooperation in education, civil aviation, tourism and other fields, enhance people-to-people exchanges, and consolidate the foundation of public support, Xi added.

He called for enhancing coordination and cooperation in multilateral platforms such as the United Nations (UN) and BRICS, leveraging the stability of China-UAE relations to cope with the uncertainties in international and regional situations, and jointly promoting the building of a community with a shared future for humanity.

The two sides exchanged views on the current situation in the Middle East and the Gulf region. Xi emphasized China's position on promoting peace and talks, and reaffirmed that China will continue to play a constructive role in this regard.

Xi's four-point proposal

Xi put forward a four-point proposal on promoting peace and stability in the Middle East.

Xi called for adherence to the principle of peaceful coexistence. Countries in the Middle East and Gulf region are interdependent and inseparable neighbors. Efforts should be made to support these

countries to improve their relations, and it is imperative to promote the building of a common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security architecture for the Middle East and the Gulf region.

He urged adherence to the principle of national sovereignty. Sovereignty serves as a foundation for all countries, especially developing countries, to survive and thrive, and it must not be violated. The sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of countries in the Middle East and the Gulf region should be fully respected, and the safety of personnel, facilities and institutions of all countries should be effectively safeguarded.

On adherence to the principle of international rule of law, Xi said the authority of international rule of law should be upheld, rejecting selective application to prevent the world from falling back into the law of the jungle. He called for firmly upholding the international system with the UN at its core, the international order based on international law, and the basic norms of international relations underpinned by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter.

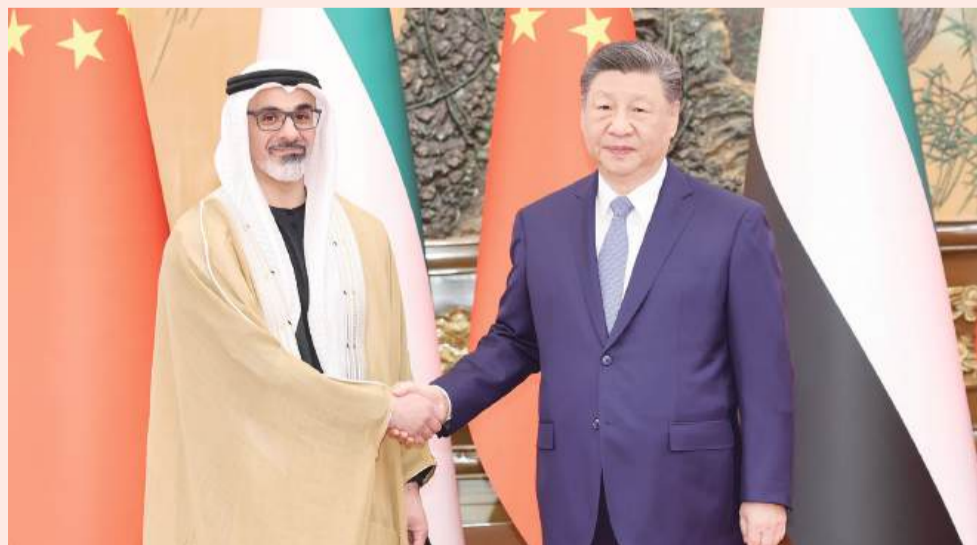
He said development and security should be coordinated. Security makes development possible, and development helps maintain security. All parties should work together to create a favorable environment for the development of countries in the Middle East and the Gulf region. China is ready to share with these countries the opportunities brought about by Chinese modernization to strengthen the foundation for regional development and security.

Noting that the UAE attaches great importance to developing relations with China, Sheikh Khaled said his country is willing to work with China to implement the important consensus reached by the two heads of state, deepen cooperation in various fields, open up broader prospects for bilateral relations, and benefit the people of both countries.

Sheikh Khaled said the UAE appreciates China's responsible and constructive role in international affairs and its active efforts to seek political solutions to the current crisis in the Middle East.

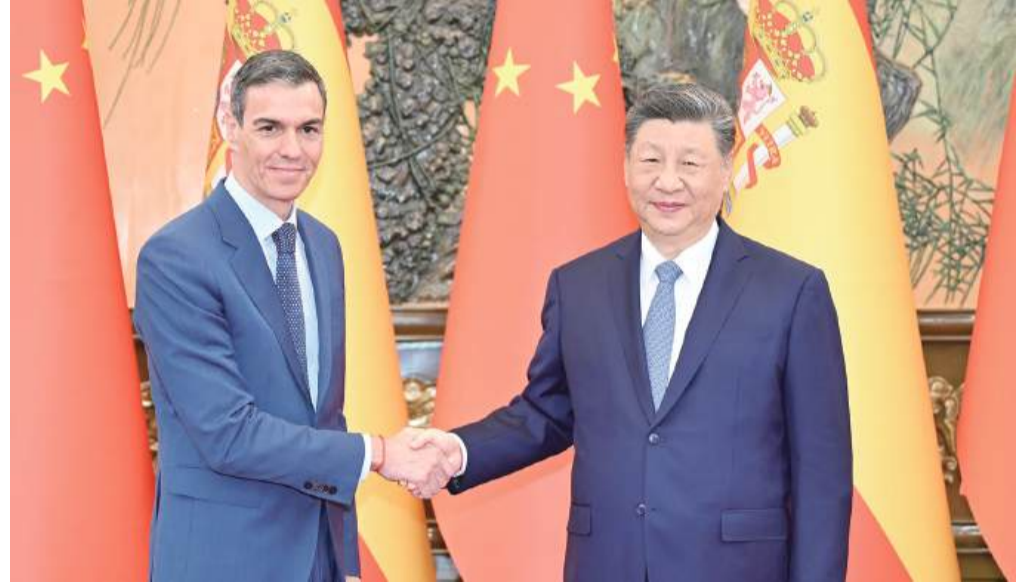
The UAE is committed to maintaining close communication and coordination with China to promote a ceasefire among the parties concerned, restore regional peace and stability at an early date, safeguard international shipping security, and prevent further impact on the global economy and energy security, he said.

He added that the safety of Chinese citizens and institutions will be effectively protected. – Xinhua



President Xi Jinping (right) shakes hands with Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

Xi calls for enhancing China-Spain cooperation for more outcomes in meeting with Sánchez



President Xi Jinping (right) shakes hands with Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, who is on an official visit to China, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping said yesterday that China and Spain should strengthen cooperation in multiple fields and encourage exchanges in various areas, so as to bring about more outcomes in the comprehensive strategic partnership and deliver greater benefits to the two peoples.

Xi made the remarks when meeting with Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, who is on an official visit to China.

HIGH IMPORTANCE ATTACHED TO TIES

Xi noted that despite the changing and turbulent international landscape, China-Spain relations have developed steadily, forging a relationship with strategic resolve. An important experience of this lies in the ability to make the right decisions based on common interests.

Speaking of his four visits to China in four years, Sanchez said they demonstrate the high importance both sides attach to Spain-China relations.

“Diplomatic relations between the two countries are not improvised. They are the result of many years of work,” said Jordi Bacaria, expert in international relations and professor emeritus at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, in a recent interview with Xinhua, adding that Spain's engagement with China has been built gradually and at the highest institutional level.

In yesterday's meeting, Xi said China and Spain should always prioritize the development of bilateral relations in their respective foreign policies and support each other in safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Spain firmly adheres to the one-China principle, highly values China's status as a major country, and is deeply committed to developing a Spain-China partnership with strategic resolve, Sánchez told Xi.

ENHANCED COOPERATION

China has firm resolve in advancing Chinese modernization and the broad-mindedness to share development opportunities with the world through high-standard opening up, said Xi, adding that China will inject confidence and momentum into global economic growth through its own development.

China and Spain have strong economic and trade complementarity. China is Spain's largest trading partner outside the European Union

(EU), and Spain is an important partner for China within the bloc. According to data from China's General Administration of Customs, bilateral goods trade exceeded US\$55 billion in 2025, growing 9.8 percent year on year.

Xi said that the two sides should seize opportunities, jointly pursue innovation-driven development, strengthen cooperation in areas such as trade, new energy, and smart economy, and encourage exchanges in culture, education, scientific research, and sports.

For his part, Sánchez said Spain hopes to strengthen cooperation with China in trade, investment, new energy, and other sectors, as well as to enhance people-to-people exchanges.

UPHOLDING TRUE MULTILATERALISM

Noting that today's turbulent world faces the struggle between right and might, Xi called on both China and Spain, countries that value principle and justice, to strengthen communication, consolidate mutual trust, and work closely together to reject any backslide into the law of the jungle, and jointly uphold true multilateralism.

He said both countries should safeguard the UN-centered international system and the international order underpinned by international law, promote an equal and orderly multipolar world and a universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalization, and foster the building of a community with a shared future for humanity.

Sánchez said that faced with a complex and challenging international situation and multiple recurring conflicts and disputes, only by adhering to multilateralism and fostering a multipolar world can lasting peace be achieved for humanity.

Spain actively supports the four major global initiatives proposed by President Xi and stands ready to maintain close communication and coordination with China to jointly address challenges related to international geopolitics, trade protectionism, and climate change, while upholding international law and multilateralism, Sánchez said.

Spain opposes a new Cold War and the attempt to decouple and sever supply chains, and supports enhanced communication, understanding and cooperation between Europe and China, Sánchez said, adding that the sound development of EU-China relations serves the common interests of both sides and contributes to world peace and stability. – AFP

Kim oversees navy cruise missile test

Kang Jin-kyu

SEOUL – North Korean leader Kim Jong Un oversaw new tests of strategic cruise missiles and anti-warship missiles launched from a naval destroyer, state media reported yesterday.

The weapons tests occurred on Sunday, the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said, and are the latest in a string of recent missile launches by the nuclear-armed nation.

Two strategic cruise missiles each flew for just over two hours, according to KCNA, while the anti-warship missiles flew for 33 minutes.

The missiles flew “along the flight orbits set in the sky above the West Sea of Korea and struck the targets with ultra-precision hit accuracy”, KCNA said, using its preferred name for the Yellow Sea.

The tests were carried out from the Choe Hyon, one of two 5,000-ton destroyers in the North’s arsenal, both launched last year as



This picture taken on Sunday and released by North Korea’s official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) yesterday shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (centre) inspecting the inside of the destroyer Choe Hyon, where test firings of strategic cruise missiles and anti-warship missiles were conducted, at an undisclosed location in North Korea.

– AFP

Kim seeks to ramp up the country’s naval capabilities.

A photo released by KCNA showed a missile in its initial flight stage after being launched from

the warship, with an orange flame trailing from its tail.

KCNA said Kim was also briefed on planning for the weapons systems of two more destroyers

under construction, referred to simply as “Nos. 3 and 4”.

Kim reportedly “expressed great satisfaction over the fact that the preparedness of our army’s strategic action has been strengthened”.

He reiterated that bolstering the North’s nuclear deterrent was the “most important priority task”.

Iran example

North Korea has previously said the Choe Hyon is equipped with the “most powerful weapons”, and Kim has made multiple inspections of the vessels in its class since last month.

Analysts told AFP that the missile launch aimed to show North Korea’s longtime adversary, the United States, that any war would be very different from Washington’s conflict with Iran.

“The continuation of similar launches fired from a warship is a direct message to Washington that it will effectively cripple a fleet of US warships and air carriers in times of war,” Lim Eul-chul, from the

Institute for Far Eastern Studies at Kyungnam University, said.

“One striking difference from the Iranians is that its anti-ship cruise missiles are designed to carry tactical nuclear warheads,” he added.

“North Koreans are taking the Iran war as cautionary example.”

A South Korean lawmaker said this month that North Korea appeared to be speeding up construction of its third such destroyer at the western port city of Nampo.

Citing satellite imagery from a US-based intelligence firm, Yoo Yong-won of the opposition People Power Party said North Korea was “accelerating the naval forces’ modernisation on the back of military assistance from Russia”.

North Korea has sent ground troops and artillery shells to support Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and observers say Pyongyang is receiving military technology assistance from Moscow in return.

– AFP

Philippines seeks US nod to buy more Russian oil

MANILA – Manila said yesterday it was seeking US permission to buy more Russian crude, as the import-dependent Philippines scrambles to shore up scant fuel supplies amid a blockade of the Strait of Hormuz.

The Philippines’ sole oil refinery secured nearly 2.5 million barrels last month after seeing at least four million barrels in shipments cancelled since the start of the US-Israeli war on Iran.

Washington last month eased some sanctions tied to Russia’s war on Ukraine to allow countries to purchase Russian oil that was already at sea until April 11 to stabilise energy markets, following the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a key waterway for the world’s crude trade.

“We have communicated with

the Department of Foreign Affairs for another window or extension of the lifting of the embargo,” Philippine Energy Secretary Sharon Garin told reporters, adding the request had been officially relayed to Manila’s long time security ally.

While there has been no US response, “we’re very positive in getting this other window. If it doesn’t come through, we have other options also”, she added.

“The Department of Energy sees this current problem as not only a problem for today or next week or next month. It will be a prolonged problem,” Garin said.

About 30 percent of the Philippines’ crude imports depend on supplies that have to pass through the strait.

The rest of Manila’s fuel needs are sourced from Asian refiners

that are also dependent on Middle East crude.

The supply crunch has caused local pump prices for key products like diesel to double.

If it fails to obtain more Russian crude, Garin said Manila would look at other sources like Colombia, the United States, and Canada.

While these countries supply different types of crude, “we can still use their refined products”, she said, adding Manila would also consider nearer suppliers such as Brunei and India.

“We wanted to open the Russian window but we want more options. We need diversification so that we are not dependent on only one country.”

The Philippines has about 50 days’ worth of petroleum supply, Garin said.

– AFP

Prabowo to meet Macron in France

JAKARTA – Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto was set to meet counterpart Emmanuel Macron in Paris yesterday, just a day after talks with Russia’s Vladimir Putin about oil, the government in Jakarta said.

Prabowo is set to meet Macron at the Elysee Palace “to discuss enhancing strategic cooperation between the two countries,” Cabinet Secretary Teddy Indra Wijaya said in a statement.

The face-to-face meeting would “also serve as an important moment for Indonesia to convey its strategic perspectives on global dynamics,” Teddy added, without providing more details on the agenda.

Teddy said Prabowo met for five hours with Putin at the Kremlin on Monday, flying directly from the Russian capital to Paris.

With Putin, he had discussed “strengthening their strategic partnership, particularly in the sectors of energy, mineral resources, and national industrial development,” said Teddy.

Prabowo, who recently travelled

to South Korea and Japan, has justified his slew of foreign visits.

“Brothers and sisters, it’s to secure oil, I have to go everywhere,” he said in an address to his cabinet this month.

Like many nations, Indonesia has come under pressure from soaring global oil prices over the war in the Middle East.

Southeast Asia’s largest economy, where fuel is heavily subsidised, is an oil producer but nevertheless a net importer.

Last month, Prabowo’s government announced fuel rationing and mandated a day-per-week work-from-home policy for civil servants to conserve energy stocks.

It has vowed not to increase fuel prices this year.

Jakarta, while defending a non-aligned diplomatic posture, last year joined the BRICS bloc of emerging economies that includes Russia and US-rival China.

But Prabowo has also signed a trade deal with US President Donald Trump and joined his so-called “Board of Peace”.

– AFP

Japan posts lowest greenhouse gas emissions in decade

TOKYO – Japan’s net greenhouse gas emissions fell 1.9 percent in 2025 to hit their lowest levels in more than a decade, partly due to a slight uptick in nuclear and renewable energy, the government said yesterday.

Japan is heavily dependent on imported fossil fuels and is the world’s fifth-largest single-country emitter of carbon dioxide, although it is aiming for carbon neutrality by 2050.

In the 2024 fiscal year, which ended in March 2025, net greenhouse gas emissions reached 994 million tonnes, marking the first time the net total has fallen below the one-billion-tonne threshold, the environment ministry said.

It is the lowest level since the 2013 fiscal year, when it recorded 1.39 billion tonnes. Japan uses that figure as its base to compare changes in emissions.

But Mie Asaoka, president of the Japan-based NGO Kiko Network, which focuses on climate change, told AFP that the shift to clean energy is not moving fast enough.

“The decline in Japan’s emissions from fiscal 2023 to 24 is very small... (as) coal-powered electricity is not declining (much) while the increase in renewables is also small,” Asaoka said.

“Japan needs to do more.”

Environment ministry official Taichi Shirato told AFP yesterday that the emissions fall was chiefly due to a drop in energy consumption linked to output declines in the manufacturing sector, as well an uptick in renewable and nuclear energy sources in Japan’s energy mix.

In the 2024 fiscal year, 67.5 percent of the country’s electricity came from coal, gas and oil – slightly down from 68.6 percent the previous year.

Over the next 15 years, Tokyo wants that figure slashed to 30-40 percent.

Shirato said that “longer term, greenhouse gas emissions have been declining” despite GDP growth, due partly to Japan’s economy relying less on large-scale heavy industries.

Japan aims to achieve a 46 percent emissions cut by fiscal 2030 from the 2013 level, 60 percent by fiscal 2035 and to realise carbon neutrality by 2050.

But last month, the government said Japan plans to temporarily lift restrictions on coal-fired power plants as it seeks to ease an energy crunch caused by the Middle East war.

Net greenhouse gas emissions are calculated by subtracting the amount absorbed by forests and other carbon sinks from the total.

– AFP



Ramil Madriaga (centre) an alleged bagman of Philippine Vice-President Sara Duterte takes his oath as he attends the impeachment hearing of Duterte at the House of Representatives in Quezon City, suburban Manila yesterday.

A Philippine congressional committee agreed overwhelmingly on March 4, to advance the impeachment case against Duterte, setting the stage for the potential vote that could decide her political future.

– AFP

About 250 people feared missing after boat capsizes in Andaman Sea: UN

DHAKA – About 250 people, including children, were feared missing after a boat carrying Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi nationals capsized in the Andaman Sea, the United Nations said yesterday.

“The trawler, which departed from Teknaf in southern Bangladesh and was on its way to Malaysia, reportedly sank due to heavy winds, rough seas, and overcrowding,” the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said in a statement.

Thousands of Rohingya, Myanmar’s persecuted Muslim minority, risk their lives every year fleeing repression and civil war in their country by sea, often aboard makeshift boats.

The Rohingya on board the boat were likely leaving huge camps in Bangladesh’s Cox’s Bazar, where more than a million refugees forced to flee Myanmar’s western state of Rakhine live in squalid conditions.

Rakhine state has been the

scene of fierce fighting between the military and the Arakan Army, an ethnic minority rebel group, over control of the territory.

The exact circumstances surrounding the latest incident were unclear, but preliminary information indicated that the vessel was carrying 280 people and left Bangladesh on April 4.

“This tragic incident reflects the dire consequences of protracted displacement and the absence of durable solutions for the Rohingya,” the UNHCR statement said.

It was also “a reminder of the efforts urgently needed to address the root causes of displacement in Myanmar and create conditions that would allow Rohingya refugees to return home voluntarily, safely and with dignity,” it said.

The Andaman Sea stretches along the western shores of Myanmar, Thailand and the Malay Peninsula.

Last year, the UNHCR said that 427 Rohingya were feared dead at sea in two shipwrecks off the Myanmar coast in May. – AFP

Boiler blast at Indian power plant kills 9: govt officials

RAIPUR – An explosion at a power plant in central India yesterday killed at least nine people and injured 15 others, officials said.

The blast occurred at a plant operated by Vedanta Limited, a subsidiary of London-listed Vedanta Resources, in Chhattisgarh, state industry minister Lakhan Lal Dewangan told reporters.

“Twenty-four workers were seriously affected when a boiler exploded” at the plant in Sakti district, Dewangan said, with nine killed.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said an “impartial investigation” would be conducted.

“Strictest possible action will

be taken against all those found responsible,” he said in a statement.

Vedanta, controlled by India-born billionaire Anil Agarwal, did not comment immediately about the blast.

Industrial accidents are common in India, often due to poor adherence to safety regulations and weak enforcement.

A fire at a fireworks factory in western India last month killed 17 people.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the Chhattisgarh blast as “tragic”.

“I extend my condolences to those who have lost their loved ones,” Modi said in a social media post. – AFP

Fresh from conflict, Pakistan plays ‘peacemaker’ in US-Iran talks

Sameer Mandhro and Zain Zaman Janjua

ISLAMABAD – As the clock ticked down to US President Donald Trump’s deadline to destroy Iran’s civilisation last week, hope emerged from an unlikely corner, with Pakistan’s prime minister first seeking – and within hours securing – a two-week ceasefire between the warring sides.

Now, with a round of talks concluded in Islamabad and frantic negotiations underway to secure a second go, Pakistan is basking in its new role as a regional peacemaker, analysts say.

“Pakistan very much wants to ride the momentum that it has been enjoying over the last few weeks as a critical mediator,” Michael Kugelman, senior South Asia fellow at the Atlantic Council, told AFP.

It is a remarkable turnaround for a South Asian country long seen internationally through a security lens, as it battled armed extremists and separatists at home while being accused of supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The mediator of peace talks had itself just fought battles with its neighbours last year – Pakistan fought a brief but intense war with India in May, and two rounds of conflict with neighbouring Afghanistan, where Islamabad accuses the Taliban authorities of harbouring armed groups.

Raja Qaiser Ahmed, a professor of international relations at Islamabad’s Quaid-i-Azam University, said Pakistan’s robust military responses in both conflicts helped burnish its regional credentials.

“In international politics, the currency is power,” he said. “When you have demonstrated it operationally, and now you are just building it up diplomatically.”

Kugelman hailed Pakistan as “an unsung success story when it comes to strategic autonomy.”

“Pakistan is looking to change global perceptions about its capacities as a global player,” he said.

“It does not like the fact that it



This handout photograph taken and released by Pakistan’s Prime Minister Office on Monday shows Pakistan’s Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif (right) attending a special meeting of the federal cabinet in Islamabad. – AFP

has a poor global image and wants to essentially push back against its critics and show that it has the capacity to affect change and be influential on the global stage.”

Unique geography

When the US-Israel war on Iran broke out, quickly engulfing the Middle East, Islamabad was careful not to take sides between Washington and Tehran.

Since US President Donald Trump took office, Pakistan has seen ties warm significantly, after Islamabad lauded him for having helped mediate the end of the conflict with India. Delhi denies Washington played a significant role.

A visit to Washington by Pakistani PM Shehbaz Sharif and powerful army chief Asim Munir followed, with Trump now often referring to the latter as his “favourite field marshal”.

Pakistan shares a 900-km border with Iran, with whom it has maintained warm – if sometimes testy – relations, with the countries sharing significant cultural and trade ties.

Early on Sunday, when US Vice President JD Vance took the podium

in Islamabad to declare that no agreement had been reached after marathon 21-hour talks, he was also quick to praise Pakistan.

He thanked Sharif and Munir by name, saying they “did an amazing job and really tried to help us and the Iranians bridge the gap and get to a deal.”

Iran’s top negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf had similar words of thanks.

Asif Durrani, a former Pakistani ambassador to Tehran, said Pakistan had proven its importance with the talks, even if the first round did not lead to a deal.

“I think Pakistan is a power to be reckoned, and very much Pakistan is a player. Its geography is so unique that it cannot be ignored,” he said.

As a neighbour of China as well, Pakistan has cultivated good relations with Beijing, which diplomats and Trump himself have said was key in getting Iran to the negotiating table.

Pakistan also has close ties with the Gulf nations that have been pulled into the conflict by Iranian retaliatory action. That includes Saudi Arabia, with whom it has a mutual defence pact.

On Monday, Pakistani PM Sharif said efforts remained underway to continue negotiations, and a second round of talks remained a possibility.

Vance, however, has taken a harder line, suggesting in an interview on Fox News that while further talks were possible, there was “no flexibility” on Iran’s nuclear programme.

For Kugelman, even if there is a return to fighting, Pakistan would still emerge with its international image enhanced.

“I think that even if the war resumes, it will not suffer reputational cost. I would argue that if anything, it’s enjoyed reputational boost because it’s been able to push back against criticism that it doesn’t have the capacity to pull off this type of diplomacy,” he said.

“It’s also strengthened its image. It’s been able to project itself as a peacemaker.” – AFP

Thousands mourn Afghans killed in Herat picnic attack

HERAT – Thousands of Afghans gathered in the western city of Herat yesterday to hold a funeral for some of the 11 people killed by gunmen while picnicking last week.

Unidentified assailants rode on motorbikes to a recreational spot beside a Shia shrine on Friday, the Afghan government said, killing people who had gathered there to relax among the trees.

There was a heavy security presence yesterday for the funeral of eight victims, which was held at the city’s largest Shia shrine.

Forty-year-old Mujtaba Akbari, who was among the mourners, told AFP his father and two brothers had been killed.

“When I arrived at the scene of the incident, all the dead bodies were lying there,” he said.

“One person is still in a very critical condition; he’s in a coma. And (there are) three others who need to be taken out of the country for treatment,” added Akbari.

Eight people were wounded in the shooting, Herat’s information office said on Saturday.

Afghan authorities announced one arrest on Friday, and no group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

One Herat resident, Ali Reza Hussaini, said people rushed to the hospital as soon as they heard about the shooting.

“Everyone arriving there said that if my blood is a match, please take it,” the 30-year-old told AFP.

“Blood was not needed, but still people were donating blood. They were from everywhere – Shia, Sunni, everyone,” he said.

Following the funeral, a separate ceremony was held for the three others killed.

There have been sporadic attacks since the Taliban authorities returned to power in 2021, including a deadly explosion at a Chinese restaurant in the capital Kabul in January.

Taliban officials have vowed to restore security to the country after decades of conflict. – AFP



Hindu devotees take part in a procession marking the Bisket Jatra festival to celebrate the Nepali New Year in Thimi, Nepal yesterday. – AFP

Lebanon, Israel start direct talks as Hezbollah launches new attacks

WASHINGTON – The US top diplomat urged Israel and Lebanon to seize a “historic opportunity” for peace as direct talks between the two opened yesterday despite objections from Hezbollah, which announced fresh attacks on Israel just as negotiations got underway.

The United States is pressing for a halt to the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, fearing it could derail the two-week ceasefire in Washington’s war with Iran after talks with Tehran in Pakistan failed to achieve a breakthrough.

Washington said “the ball is in the Iranian court” on ending the region-wide war, after a US naval blockade on Iranian ports began in the Strait of Hormuz, which had already been effectively closed by Tehran.

Lebanon was pulled into the broader conflict when Hezbollah attacked Israel in support of its backer Iran, sparking an Israeli ground invasion and strikes – including an extremely heavy attack on Beirut on April 8 – that have killed more than 2,000 people and displaced over one million.

Yesterday’s meeting in Washington – the first high-level, direct talks since 1993 – was mediated by Secretary of State Marco Rubio and involved the Israeli and Lebanese ambassadors to the United States.

“This is a historic opportunity,” Rubio said as he welcomed the ambassadors, acknowledging the “decades of history” complicating the process.

“The hope today is that we can outline a framework upon which a current and lasting peace can be developed.”

Lebanon’s President Joseph Aoun said he hoped the talks “will mark the beginning of the end of the suffering of the Lebanese people”.

But expectations of any major breakthroughs were low, with



(From left to right) US State Department Counsellor Michael Needham, US Ambassador to the UN Mike Waltz, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, US Ambassador to Lebanon Michel Issa, Lebanon’s Ambassador to the US Nada Hamadeh Moawad, and Israeli Ambassador to the US Yechiel Leiter stand together before meeting at the State Department in Washington, DC, yesterday. – AFP

Hezbollah’s leader Naim Qassem calling for the talks to be scrapped before they even began, describing them as “futile”.

Shortly after the talks began, Hezbollah said it had launched “simultaneous rocket salvos” at 13 northern Israeli towns.

Israel’s Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said his country was seeking “peace and normalisation” with Lebanon.

But he insisted that Hezbollah was the “problem”, and that it needed to be addressed in order to move to a “different phase”.

The Israeli military had previously warned it expected a rise in attacks by Hezbollah as the talks kicked off.

Foreign ministers from 17 countries urged both countries to seize the chance to bring lasting security to the region.

US blockades Iran

While attention shifted to the

meeting in Washington, Trump sought to squeeze Iran with a naval blockade as diplomatic efforts accelerated towards a new round of peace talks with Tehran.

US Central Command had said the measures covered “vessels of all nations entering or departing Iranian ports and coastal areas”.

But at least two ships using Iranian ports passed through the Strait of Hormuz on Monday, data from maritime tracking firm Kpler indicated yesterday.

Iran’s military command branded the blockade an act of piracy and warned that if the security of its harbours was “threatened, no port in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea will be safe”.

The US military said yesterday that it successfully stopped six ships from sailing out of Iranian ports during the first 24 hours of the blockade.

With his blockade of Iranian

ports, Trump was trying to starve Iran of funds but also pressure Beijing, the biggest buyer of Iranian oil, to lean on Tehran to reopen Hormuz, analysts said.

China said the blockade was “dangerous and irresponsible”, after Trump threatened to sink any boats that sought to leave or dock at Iranian ports.

The standoff at the strait, through which one-fifth of global oil transited in peacetime, failed to dampen optimism in global markets, with Asian equities rallying while oil continued a downward slide.

France said it would co-host a video conference with Britain on Friday of countries ready to contribute to a “purely defensive mission” to secure the Strait of Hormuz.

Crucially, despite the blockade, the fragile two-week truce agreed last Wednesday between Washington and Tehran remained in place.

Trump insisted that Iranian representatives had called Washington since a US delegation returned empty-handed from the negotiations in Islamabad, adding they would “like to make a deal. Very badly.”

Pakistan’s Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Monday that “full efforts are underway” to reach an agreement to stop the fighting.

Yesterday, senior Pakistani sources told AFP that Islamabad was working to bring Iran and the United States together for a second round of talks.

Foreign ministers from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt will meet Ankara’s top diplomat in Turkey this week “to discuss regional affairs”, a ministry source told AFP on Tuesday.

Nuclear enrichment pause?

Trump has insisted that an agreement must include stopping Iran from ever acquiring a nuclear weapon, having launched the war after accusing Tehran of seeking to develop an atomic bomb – an allegation it denies.

During weekend talks, the United States reportedly sought a 20-year suspension of Iran’s uranium enrichment programme, according to media reports on Monday.

Iran in turn proposed to suspend its nuclear activity for five years, which US officials rejected, The New York Times reported.

Diplomatic efforts also picked up elsewhere, with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Beijing, hours after speaking to his Iranian counterpart.

Moscow has offered to hold Iran’s enriched uranium safely as part of any deal.

President Xi Jinping also vowed Tuesday that Beijing would play a “constructive role” in promoting peace talks in the Middle East.

– AFP

Carney vows action to boost Trump-threatened economy after winning majority

Andrej Ivanov and Daphne Lemelin

OTTAWA – Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney promised quick action yesterday to transform an economy under threat from US President Donald Trump, hours after his Liberal party clinched a majority in parliament.

The Liberals swept three by-elections held Monday, giving them full control of parliament and Canada’s first majority since 2019, during Justin Trudeau’s first term as prime minister.

“Now it’s time to get serious,” Carney said, addressing the election results.

“We’re building big, we’re moving fast, we’re just getting started,” he added.

Carney’s Liberals won the most seats in a general election a year

ago, but fell narrowly short of a majority.

Liberal poll numbers have improved over the past year, with Carney consistently reminding Canadians that they live in a changed world and can no longer count on solid ties with the United States.

Carney didn’t mention Trump yesterday, but again stressed that Canada’s economy needed to be “more independent.”

While more than 85 percent of US-Canada trade remains tariff free, Trump’s levies on key sectors have triggered Canadian job losses and slowed growth.

The North American free trade deal that Trump signed in his first term is also in jeopardy, with revision talks set for the coming weeks. Trump has said

the pact offers the United States no benefit.

‘Enormous shock’

The Liberal majority was made possible by a series of stunning floor-crossings since last year’s election. Four Conservatives and one left-wing New Democratic lawmaker have joined the Liberal caucus.

Carney yesterday dismissed Conservative criticism that he earned his majority through shady political deals.

He said every elected lawmaker had the right to support the government programme.

“We’re fortunate to have them,” he said of the floor-crossers.

Carney’s first policy move since securing his majority was a response to Trump’s war in Iran.

The prime minister announced federal tax breaks on petrol and jet fuel that will begin on Monday and are set to run through Labour Day (May 1), seeking to ease energy costs that have skyrocketed since the United States and Israel began striking the Islamic republic.

Carney called the war “an enormous shock in the global economy,” and described the energy tax breaks as a “responsible and temporary measure” to make life more affordable.

‘Be strong’

The Liberals easily held two Toronto districts in Monday’s by-elections, areas seen as safe seats for the party.

In the Quebec district of Terrebonne, the Liberal candidate edged out a challenger from the

separatist Bloc Québécois by just 731 votes.

In Montreal yesterday, 82-year-old Lisette Duquette told AFP she would have preferred a Bloc Québécois victory but described Carney as “talented” and cited a tendency to “rally” behind him, “given the whole global situation.”

Marcel Tremblay, a 75-year-old Montreal resident, said the face-off with Trump was Carney’s key challenge.

“Now he has a majority. With what’s happening in the United States and internationally, we need to be strong.”

“The new prime minister is building ties with many other countries so that we’ll have fewer dealings with the United States. That’s a good thing,” he said.

– AFP

Trump says Italy's Meloni lacks 'courage' on Iran war: report

ROME – US President Donald Trump yesterday launched a stinging criticism of Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, one of his main European allies, over her unwillingness to join the Iran war.

"I'm shocked at her. I thought she had courage, but I was wrong," he said in an interview with Italian daily *Corriere della Sera*.

The interview was published the day after Meloni condemned as "unacceptable" Trump's criticism of Pope Leo XIV, after the pontiff's repeated calls for an end to the war in the Middle East.

"She's unacceptable because she doesn't mind that Iran has a nuclear weapon and would blow up Italy in two minutes if they had the chance," Trump said in English.

Meloni, Italy's far-right leader since October 2022, has been one of Trump's closest allies in Europe and often seeks to act as a mediator between diverging US and European views.

But the president said they had not spoken this month, "not in a long time", saying: "She doesn't help us with NATO."

"She doesn't want to help get rid of a nuclear-weaponed Iran. Very sad... She's much different than I thought."

He described the NATO military alliance as a "paper tiger", and criticised Europe in general for not being "willing to fight for the Hormuz strait, which is where they get their energy".

Trump said that Meloni was "not the same person. Italy is not the same country. Immigration is killing Italy and all of Europe."

Meloni's allies and political opponents were swift to offer their support.

"We are and remain staunch supporters of Western unity and steadfast allies of the United States, but this unity is built on mutual loyalty, respect, and honesty," Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said on X.

He said that until now, Trump considered Meloni a courageous person, and "he was not mistaken, but she is a woman who never shies away from saying what she thinks".

"And on Pope Leo XIV she said exactly what all of us Italians think. The prime minister and the government defend and will always defend only and solely the interests of Italy," he said.

Elly Schlein, leader of the centre-left Democratic Party, condemned Trump's "serious lack of respect".

"Our Constitution is clear – Italy repudiates war," she added in parliament. – AFP

Trump's 'unprecedented' pope attack caps months of tensions

Alice Ritchie

VATICAN CITY – US President Donald Trump's dismissal of Pope Leo XIV as "weak" and "wrong" marked an unprecedented personal attack on a pontiff by a US leader that capped months of tension.

The election of the first ever US pontiff in May 2025, one who pressed the cause of international law and the rights of migrants, seemed destined to set up a clash, but for a long time they managed their differences.

Since January, however, US military action in Venezuela, threats against Cuba and Greenland and then the Iran war have drawn increasing statements of concern from the Vatican.

On Sunday, Trump launched a blistering attack on the head of the world's 1.4 billion Catholics, calling him "weak on crime and terrible for foreign policy". He doubled down on Monday, repeating: "He's wrong."

"Tensions regularly arise between the Catholic Church and states on a number of issues," said François Mabile, head of France's Geopolitical Observatory of Religion.

"What's unprecedented here is that the figure of the pope is being attacked as such... that he's being judged weak, and that this is being done by the American president with such vehemence," Mabile told AFP.

Tipped the scales

An expert in canon law, Leo has repeatedly emphasised the importance of upholding international law, including criticising Israel's actions in Gaza last year.

But he often spoke in

generalisations, leaving more pointed criticism to local clergy, from Latin Patriarch Pierbattista Pizzaballa in Jerusalem to US cardinals.

One exception was when he hit out at the "inhuman" treatment of migrants in his home country. The White House responded with a measured comment defending its policies on immigration.

Leo's rhetoric and calls for peace have increased as war spread across the Middle East, and when Trump threatened the whole Iranian "civilisation" in early April, Leo told reporters this was "unacceptable".

Trump's threat "tipped the scales", Mabile told AFP.

At the same time, Leo urged "the citizens of all the countries involved to contact the authorities, political leaders, congressmen, to ask them, tell them to work for peace and to reject war always".

For Massimo Faggioli, professor of historical and contemporary ecclesiology at Trinity College Dublin, this too was a turning point.

He told AFP that it violated a long-standing diplomatic norm – "that the pope stayed out of US politics".

'Difficult to attack'

Popes have disagreed with the United States before, with John Paul II strongly opposed to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, for example.

Just weeks before he died in April 2025, Pope Francis described Trump's migrant deportations as a "major crisis", drawing a rebuke from the president's border czar that he should "stick to the Catholic Church".

Many of Francis's critics dismissed

him as anti-American – something that cannot be said for Leo.

Traditionally, US presidents have been wary of upsetting US Catholics by speaking out too much against a pope.

Trump's criticism "is unprecedented because no American president wanted to alienate American voters," Faggioli told AFP.

Face history

The Vatican last week played down speculation of tensions with Washington, dismissing as untrue a report that the United States gave the Holy See's envoy a dressing down in January after comments Leo made seen as critical of the US administration.

The pope responded to Trump's outburst on Monday in a measured way, saying he had a "moral duty" to speak out against war.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, an ally of Trump, condemned the president's criticism as "unacceptable", saying it was "right and normal for him [Leo] to call for peace".

Faggioli concurred, saying: "If you want to be pope you have to face history – you can't just close yourself up in a monastery."

Mabile noted that, given how often Trump changes his mind, the row may just as well blow over.

"Who knows, maybe the pope will give a speech that Trump will like, or he'll see an opportunity to advance his own agenda and tell this pope what an extraordinary man he is," he said. – AFP

Twin suicide attacks rock Algeria during Pope's visit: verified footage

PARIS – Twin attacks rocked a city outside Algeria's capital Monday as Pope Leo XIV started a historic visit to the country, a source with knowledge of the case said and video images verified by AFP showed.

"There were two security incidents yesterday afternoon in Blida, incidents of a terrorist nature. Two suicide bombers blew themselves up and were killed," the source told AFP yesterday, referring to the city some 45 kilometres southwest of Algiers.

Video images verified by AFP showed two bodies in the street in Blida, Algeria.

The videos were released a few hours after the pope's arrival in Algiers. It was not clear when they were filmed.

The American pontiff on Monday became the first pope ever to visit Algeria, the first stop on a tour of four African nations.

No link has yet been established between the attacks and the pope's visit to the North African country, which was conducted under tight security.

Two mutilated corpses lay in the middle of the road at the intersection of Palestine Street and Mohamed Boudiaf Boulevard in Blida, according to the images widely shared on social media.

In the videos, several people gathered around the bodies, while passers-by covered them with sheets in a light rain.

The remains appeared severely mutilated, and the circumstances of their deaths could not be determined.

Based on the images, the scene was located near several shops and a police station.

Algeria's army regularly announces the arrests

or deaths of "terrorists", the authorities' term for armed Islamists who are still active since the North African country's 1992-2002 civil war.

But attacks and bombings by militants are rare.

The most recent recorded suicide attack in Algeria was in February 2020. It targeted a military base and killed a soldier in the south of the country near the Malian border, and was claimed by the Islamic State group.

The African Union (AU) yesterday condemned what it had said was an attempted double attack before retracting its comments.

AU spokesman Nuur Mohamud Sheekh said this was because the information on which the statement was based had "not been corroborated by official sources".

Algerian authorities have not confirmed the attack or commented on the statement of the African Union, which was later deleted from the regional body's official webpage and its social media accounts.

In the original AU statement, the chairperson of the African Union Commission, Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, had said he "condemns in the strongest possible terms the double attack that occurred on April 13, 2026, in Blida."

"He extends his sincere condolences to the families of the victims, expresses his deepest sympathy, and wishes a speedy recovery to the injured," the statement said, before it was deleted.

In March, the army said it had killed seven jihadists and lost three soldiers in an operation in the east of the country near the Tunisian border.

– AFP



This video grab taken yesterday, from UGC images posted on social media on Monday, shows passers-by covering torn bodies lying in the middle of a street in Blida, some 45 kilometres southwest of Algeria's capital Algiers. Twin attacks rocked the city outside Algeria's capital on Monday, as Pope Leo XIV started a historic visit to the country, a source with knowledge of the case said and video images verified by AFP showed.

– AFP



Workers lift a solar panel onto the rooftop of a residential building in Matanzas, Cuba, on Monday. – AFP

Venezuela's opposition leader urges presidential polls 'as soon as possible'

PARIS – Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado in an AFP interview yesterday urged presidential elections to be formally called “as soon as possible” to replace ousted leader Nicolás Maduro.

“The Venezuelan Constitution is very clear and, in fact, states that in the event of a permanent vacancy – and no one can doubt that there is a permanent vacancy in the case of Mr. Nicolás Maduro – elections must be called within the next 30 days,” Machado said.

Venezuela's opposition last week called for presidential elections, more than 90 days after the United States in early January abducted Maduro and his wife and flew them to the United States.

The Venezuelan Constitution says that “temporary absences of the president of the republic shall be filled by the executive vice president for up to 90 days, extendable by

decision of the National Assembly for an additional 90 days.”

Machado, the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize winner, however said that the right conditions should be in place before any elections to replace Maduro, who had ruled Venezuela for 12 years.

First the country should appoint a new National Electoral Council made up of people “without any political ties”, and the voter roll should be updated.

At the moment, “40 percent of Venezuelans eligible to vote are not registered,” including those who have left the country, she told AFP in a video call after meeting President Emmanuel Macron in Paris on Monday.

“All of this takes time, and we estimate that the sequence of all these actions will take around nine months from the moment a new National Electoral Council is appointed,” she said. – AFP

澳門宗教文藝匯演
Um Espírito, Diversos Ritmos - Macau em Harmonia:
Espetáculo cultural e artístico apresentado pelas comunidades religiosas de Macau

2026.05 / FRI-SAT 五-六
時間: 15:00 / 01-02
地點: 澳門文化中心綜合劇院

主辦團體 (排名不分先後): 承辦團體:
澳門道教協會 澳門道教青年協會
聖公會澳門傳道地區 聖公會澳門傳道地區
巴哈伊教澳門總會 華國學校
澳門天主教文化協會 聖羅撒英文中學
澳門佛教總會 澳門佛教青年總會

A組 - 老少咸宜
贊助單位: 澳門特別行政區政府文化發展基金
票務: 澳門售票網 票務查詢熱線: 澳門 - (853)28 555 555

Brazil's fugitive ex-spy chief detained by US immigration

BRASILIA – US immigration officers on Monday detained Brazil's former intelligence chief, who fled to the United States after being convicted for his alleged role in a coup plot.

The fugitive Alexandre Ramagem was sentenced in September to 16 years in prison over the failed scheme to prevent President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva from taking office after narrowly winning the 2022 election over far-right incumbent Jair Bolsonaro. Ramagem sneaked out of the country before he could be arrested.

Brazilian police said in a statement that US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) had detained “a fugitive from Brazilian justice following his conviction for the crimes of armed criminal association, attempted coup d'état, and the attempted violent abolition of the rule of law.”

A police source, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed to AFP that the detainee was Ramagem – who is listed as being in ICE custody on the website of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Ramagem, 53, is a former police officer who commanded Brazil's main intelligence agency, ABIN, under Bolsonaro.

He was later elected a federal lawmaker, but lost his seat after his conviction.

Bolsonaro is serving a 27-year jail term over the conspiracy, which prosecutors said failed only because of a lack of support from military top brass.

Local media reported that Ramagem left Brazil via the border with Guyana, bypassing immigration controls, and entered the United States on a diplomatic passport.

Brazil formally requested the extradition of Ramagem in December.

The police statement said the arrest was the result of “international police cooperation between the Federal Police and US law enforcement authorities.”

Bolsonaro ally and influencer Paulo Renato Figueiredo, who lives in the United States, wrote on X that Ramagem had been detained for a “minor traffic infraction.”

Figueiredo – grandson of the last general to preside over Brazil during the 1964-1985 dictatorship

– said that Ramagem's immigration status was legal, and that he has a pending asylum application.

“We expect him to be released as quickly as possible, at this time, we see no risk of deportation.”

In a separate case, Ramagem is under investigation for allegedly leading a criminal group which carried out illegal spying on behalf of the far-right leader and his inner circle using Israeli surveillance software.

Federal police have recommended that charges be brought against Ramagem and around 30 others, including the former president's son Carlos Bolsonaro, in connection with this probe.

Ex-president Bolsonaro has been serving his sentence under house arrest for health reasons since last month, when he was rushed from prison to hospital with bronchopneumonia.

He has chosen his eldest son, the senator Flávio Bolsonaro, to face off against Lula in October elections.

The latest poll by the Datafolha Institute published Sunday showed Flávio Bolsonaro with 46 percent of voter intentions compared to 45 percent for Lula in a potential runoff. – AFP

Spanish court shelves German TV star's sexualised deepfake complaint

MADRID – A Spanish court said yesterday it could not investigate the ex-husband of a German television star accused of spreading AI-generated pornographic images of her as the headline-dominating case fell outside its jurisdiction.

The investigation of allegations by Collien Fernandes against her former spouse Christian Ulmen will however continue in Germany, where the case has sparked an outcry and a debate about digital violence.

Fernandes told German media of her shock at discovering hundreds of fake pornographic images of her circulating on the internet.

She suspected her former husband of creating them with AI and sharing them via fake social media accounts that appeared to be hers.

Ulmen, a fellow actor, denies wrongdoing.

Prosecutors in the German city of Itzehoe announced they had reopened a probe into Ulmen, but Fernandes also submitted a complaint in Spain, where they once lived and which has stricter laws concerning violence against women.

But a court on the Mediterranean island of Mallorca ruled that the proceedings would be handed over to the Itzehoe prosecutors because the case came under German jurisdiction.

“The link the case has with Germany is clear, which puts German jurisdiction in a privileged position to continue the investigation it had already started,” the ruling said.

The alleged offences and their “main effects” occurred in Germany or on digital platforms that publish in German, while any harm to Fernandes's “reputation, honour and esteem” would have also happened in that country.

Thousands of Germans have taken to the streets in support of Fernandes, whose allegations sparked intense media debate about a rise in sexualised “deepfakes” that mostly target women. – AFP

Spanish PM's wife charged with corruption

MADRID – Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez's wife, Begoña Gómez, has been formally charged with corruption after a years-long criminal investigation, according to a court ruling published Monday.

The probe is one of several corruption cases that have embroiled the Socialist leader's family and former allies, putting pressure on his minority coalition government.

Judge Juan Carlos Peinado opened the investigation in April 2024 to determine whether Gómez had exploited her position as Sánchez's wife for private gain, which she and the prime minister deny.

The case centres on the creation and management of a chair at Madrid's Complutense University

that was co-directed by Gómez, as well as the alleged use of public resources and personal connections to advance private interests.

Peinado said his investigation had found sufficient indications of criminal conduct by Gómez, 55, according to a ruling dated April 11 that was made public on Monday.

He formally charged Gómez with embezzlement, influence peddling, corruption in business dealings and misappropriation of funds, the ruling added.

“The chair served as a means of private professional development for the person under investigation,” the judge wrote.

It is now up to the courts to decide whether Gómez will stand trial.

Gómez, who is on an official

visit to China with Sánchez, has consistently denied any wrongdoing.

Sánchez has dismissed the allegations against his wife as an attempt by the right wing to undermine his government. Opposition parties have called for his resignation.

The case originated from a complaint filed by an anti-corruption group with far-right ties.

The prime minister's brother, David Sánchez, has also been indicted in a separate investigation into alleged influence peddling tied to his hiring by a regional government.

Sánchez's former right-hand man and former transport minister, José Luis Ábalos, went on trial this month over alleged kickbacks linked to public contracts. – AFP

Arteta urges Arsenal to play with 'pure fire' after damaging defeats

Steven Griffiths

LONDON — Mikel Arteta has challenged Arsenal to play with "pure fire" as they look to bounce back from a series of damaging defeats in today's Champions League clash against Sporting Lisbon.

Arteta's side can reach the semi-finals of the competition for a second successive season if they finish off Sporting at the Emirates Stadium.

The Gunners go into the quarter-final second leg with a 1-0 lead after last week's game in Lisbon.

But that narrow success was Arsenal's only victory in their last four matches, with three defeats sparking claims Arteta and his team are choking as the pressure mounts at the business end of the season.

"There is no fear. Pure fire. That's it. Me, the first one. Pure fire. That's what I want to see on the players, on the people, on myself," he insisted at his pre-match press conference.

"Fire! I'm on fire. I'm on fire. That's it. Nothing else. I'm dreaming so much. I've done so much to be in this position because I know how this club was. I've done so much and this is beauty."

Losing the League Cup final against Manchester City and the FA Cup quarter-final against second-tier Southampton was bad enough.

But a shock 2-1 home defeat against Bournemouth in the Premier League on Saturday left Arteta facing pointed questions about Arsenal's character.

Arsenal are just six points ahead

of second-placed City, who have a game in hand and host the Gunners in a seismic showdown on Sunday.

The north Londoners have finished Premier League runners-up for the past three seasons - twice blowing substantial leads to City in 2023 and 2024.

They have also failed to win a trophy since the 2020 FA Cup, which remains the only silverware won by Arteta in over six years in charge.

There is a growing feeling of déjà vu among a nervous Arsenal fan-base, but Arteta launched a passionate defence of his squad.

"We are in April, we have an incredible opportunity ahead of us. Let's confront it, let's go for it by really putting absolutely everything into it," added the Spaniard.

"I want to get it done for all these people that have been in this journey with us. And because they deserve it, because it's been unbelievable. That's what is driving me every single day. I have zero fear."

'Doing something incredible'

Arsenal haven't lifted the Premier League since 2004 and have never won the Champions League.

If they make the Champions League last four this season, it would be the first time they have reached the semi-finals of the competition in two consecutive seasons.

Arteta, whose side lost to Paris Saint-Germain in last year's semi-finals, acknowledged the size of the task facing Arsenal as they try to do

a Premier League and Champions League double.

"What we are trying to achieve is difficult, is challenging, and is bumpy and it's supposed to be like this," he said.

"I said to the players, 'Guys, we are trying to do something that hasn't been done in the history of the club in 140 years. So that tells you the difficulty of what you are doing'.

"We have the opportunity tomorrow to go to the semi-finals. We are competing to win the Premier League and we are in a really strong position.

"So, the team is doing something incredible because it's never been done before."

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

— AFP/MPD

Football shorts

UEFA reject Barca handball complaint before Atletico return

BARCELONA — European football governing body UEFA rejected yesterday Barcelona's complaint over a handball incident in their Champions League quarter-final first leg defeat by Atletico Madrid, hours before the second leg.

Diego Simeone's side won 2-0 at Camp Nou last week and Barca were upset by an incident where Atletico defender Marc Pubill touched the ball with his hand after it appeared a goal kick had been passed to him.

"(After the first leg) Barcelona filed a protest relating to a referee decision. On 13 April 2026, the UEFA Control Ethics and Disciplinary Body declared the protest to be inadmissible," said UEFA in a statement.

Five-time Champions League winners Barca said last week the decision not to award them a penalty was a "major error" which influenced the result and were upset referee Istvan Kovacs was not told to review the incident by the VAR team. — AFP

Asian Champions League to expand from 24 to 32 teams: AFC

KUALA LUMPUR — The Asian Football Confederation's governing body for football said yesterday, adding it will "promote inclusivity and excellence".

The move will take effect from next season once it is signed off by the Asian Football Confederation's executive committee, the AFC said, hailing it as a "landmark expansion".

The group phase of the continent's top club competition is split into two sections, East and West, before going into the knockout rounds.

The structure will remain broadly the same but the two groups will from 2026-27 increase from 12 to 16 teams each.

The top six in each group will automatically progress to the last 16 while clubs in seventh to 10th will go through to a newly established knockout stage playoff.

The tournament has been branded the AFC Champions League Elite since 2024/25.

The last 16 and quarter-final matches in the 2025/26 campaign take place this week in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. — AFP

American Kang preparing bid to buy Ligue 1 club Lyon

LYON — American businesswoman Michele Kang, already the Lyon men's club president, minority shareholder and owner of the women's side, is preparing for a potential full takeover of the Ligue 1 club, a statement from their current owner said yesterday.

Lyon's current owner, Eagle Football Group, was placed under administration in March, effectively removing former Lyon chairman John Textor from its leadership.

Kang, who also owns women's teams Washington Spirit and London City Lionesses, is the CEO of Eagle Football Group.

The company's board of directors has established an independent committee to avoid any conflict of interest should Kang seek to acquire shares in Lyon currently held by the holding company Eagle Bidco.

Eagle Football Group noted its administration "may result in a change of control" of the company.

Kang took over as club president from compatriot Textor in June 2025.

Lyon won an appeal against relegation from the top flight the following month, after initially being demoted to Ligue 2 by French football's financial watchdog.

They had to cut their wage bill and transfer budget for this season.

Textor took over as Lyon's majority owner in December 2022 from long-standing boss Jean-Michel Aulas, who had overseen unprecedented success at the French outfit.

Lyon's season has unravelled in recent weeks, as a nine-game winless run scuppered their Ligue 1 title bid and saw them knocked out of both the French Cup and Europa League.

They sit fifth in the league table, one point behind Marseille who occupy the last Champions League berth. — AFP



Sporting's Mozambican forward Geny Catamo (centre) attends a training session on the eve of their UEFA Champions League quarter final second leg match against Arsenal at the Cristiano Ronaldo Academy training ground in Alcochete, yesterday. — AFP

Buoyant Bayern pledge to 'push through the pain' against Real



MUNICH — Bayern Munich coach Vincent Kompany said yesterday his side need to be ready to "push through the pain barrier" to make it past Real Madrid and qualify for the Champions League semi-finals.

Bayern beat Real 2-1 in the first leg in Madrid and need to avoid defeat at home today to reach the final four.

Kompany told reporters that Bayern's desire against the 15-time European champions would be key.

"It depends on many things. In games like this, the individual quality of the players is always decisive. But there's also the collective intensity and a readiness to push through the pain barrier," Kompany said.

"Every detail matters in games like this, but for us what's most important is that we're mentally and physically well prepared.

"We're also looking forward to the match and that's something you need, positive emotions."

Bayern dominated much of the match in Madrid but still needed veteran goalkeeper Manuel Neuer

to pull off several spectacular saves.

"My feeling after the match was that we could have gone a level higher. And that's pretty good when you win 2-1 at the Bernabeu and think, 'We could have done more'," Kompany added.

"But then you need to show it."

Bayern's Michael Olise starred in the opening leg and Kompany said there were no limits to the France winger's talent.

"For sure he will be one day," Kompany said when asked if Olise was one of the best in the world. "I think now he's on the right path. He's on a level of the best players in Europe at the moment."

The former Manchester City captain has Bayern on track for a Champions League semi-final less than two years after he was relegated from the Premier League with Burnley, in what was his first season managing in the top flight of a major European league.

The 40-year-old said he does not care that he is being hyped as one of football's best new coaches, as he did not listen to criticism during his time at Burnley.

"Don't believe the hype and

don't believe the drama, it's what I always say. You can't live feeling you're the worst coach two years ago and you're the best coach today," Kompany said.

"It doesn't work that way. The way you become the worst, is if you let this outside noise affect your day to day."

Kompany also praised Marie-Louise Eta, who on Sunday became the first female coach of a men's team in a top-five European league when she was named Union Berlin boss.

"It's a key moment. It's easy to minimise and say she's just a coach like everybody else - and of course that's how we have to treat her - but at the end it's something special," the Belgian said.

"It opens up opportunities to little girls who are now playing football and thinking, 'now, I can coach anywhere, I can make a real career in this game and be successful like what I'm seeing on TV'.

"Those stories, they're really important."

The game will be played at 3 a.m. tomorrow morning Macau time. — AFP/MPD

Stokes says talk of McCullum rift 'massive overstatement'



England's Ben Stokes (right) and England's head coach Brendon McCullum react ahead of play on the first day of the second Test cricket match between England and West Indies at Trent Bridge in Nottingham on July 18, 2024. — AFP

Cricket

LONDON – England captain Ben Stokes has dismissed suggestions of a collapse in his relationship with coach Brendon McCullum, although he says the way they work together will “look a little bit different” this season.

Stokes and McCullum, a former New Zealand captain, have been in a close alliance since joining forces in 2022.

But there appeared to be a difference in their respective approaches as England slumped to a woeful 4-1 series Ashes loss in Australia.

As all-rounder Stokes opted for a more grinding, disciplined approach, as the series wore on, while McCullum continued to stand by his mantra of ultra-aggressive ‘Bazball’ cricket.

Both men backed each other in public at the end of the series and Stokes reiterated that position following media reports a post-

Ashes review had revealed tensions between the duo.

“Saying we weren’t aligned, I think, is a massive overstatement,” Stokes said in an in-house interview with the England and Wales Cricket Board published yesterday.

“When you’re in a position of leadership along with someone else, if anyone thinks that you’re always going to agree on everything, then it’s just impossible.”

England are back in Test action in June, against New Zealand, before taking on Pakistan at home as well. Stokes said there would be a change in how he worked with McCullum as the team look to return to winning ways ahead of the 2027 Ashes in England.

“I’m very confident in mine and Brendon’s ability to be able to work together, because we’ve done it for such a long period of time now, but work together in a slightly different way,” he said.

“The main point of me and Brendon is our alignment towards

winning things and making this team as good as they can be. That’s always been the thing since we started. It might just look a little bit different now to how that operates - on the back of four years working together.

“Hopefully we’ll still be together at the end of 2027, winning what we want to win.”

Stokes is currently recovering from a facial injury after being struck by a stray ball in pre-season training but is expected to lead England in the first Test against New Zealand at Lord’s on June 4.

But Brydon Carse could miss that match after withdrawing yesterday from the Indian Premier League because of an injury to his right hand.

Carse, 30, was the only ever-present England quick bowler during the Ashes.

But he was struck on his bowling hand while batting in the nets for Sunrisers Hyderabad before this year’s edition of the IPL got underway. — AFP

Indian cricketers dominate Wisden honours

Cricket

LONDON – Indian cricketers, including men’s Test captain Shubman Gill and women’s star Deepti Sharma, dominated the Wisden cricket awards announced on Monday.

The UK-based Wisden Cricketers’ Almanack, which dates back to 1864, is an annual record of all major cricket worldwide and is regarded as the sport’s “Bible”.

The publication named four Indian players who starred in a thrilling 2-2 drawn Test series in England last year among its five cricketers of the year.

Batter Gill, spin-bowling all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja, wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant and fast bowler Mohammed Siraj were all on the list.

The only English player in the group of five was former Test opener Haseeb Hameed, who led Nottinghamshire to the County Championship in 2025.

Players can only receive the award once in their careers and it is based predominantly on performances during the previous English season.

Gill also received the Wisden Trophy for Test performance of the year after he scored 269 and 161 in the second Test at Edgbaston.

Deepti Sharma succeeds compatriot Smriti Mandhana as Wisden’s leading women’s cricketer of the year for her all-round performances in India’s 50-over World Cup triumph, with Australia fast bowler Mitchell Starc receiving the men’s award.

The prolific Abhishek Sharma was named Wisden’s leading T20 cricketer of the year.

Wisden editor Lawrence Booth, however, criticised the increasing Indian influence on English domestic cricket’s Hundred, with four of the eight franchises now linked to owners of Indian Premier League teams after a huge influx of

private investment.

“The competition’s new ownership structure risks turning The Hundred into an IPL proxy event, more for the benefit of Indian businessmen than English cricket,” wrote Booth.

He also pulled no punches in labelling England’s woeful Ashes campaign as “feckless, reckless and legless”.

England, humiliated 4-1 by Australia, were criticised for insufficient planning, confused tactics and an over-relaxed approach to off-field behaviour, highlighted by reports of excessive drinking during a mid-tour break.

“In the game’s long history, it is hard to think of a privilege so carelessly squandered, a chance so blithely spurned,” wrote Booth.

“England were feckless, reckless and legless. These were the wing-and-a-prayer Ashes and England got what they deserved. What a waste. What a shame.” — AFP

Fudd reunited with Bueckers after landing No.1 pick in WNBA draft



NEW YORK – Azzi Fudd was chosen by the

Dallas Wings with the number one overall pick in the WNBA draft on Monday in a move that will see the University of Connecticut star reunited on court with girlfriend and former college teammate Paige Bueckers.

Fudd, 23, was chosen by Dallas after leading the UConn Huskies to the final four of the national collegiate championship earlier this month, where they were beaten by South Carolina.

Fudd had been chasing a second consecutive national college title after playing alongside romantic partner Bueckers in the Huskies 2025 title triumph.

Like Fudd, Bueckers was chosen by Dallas with the number one pick in the draft last year.

“I’m excited to play again with Paige,” Fudd said on

Monday after her selection at the WNBA ceremony in New York. “She’s an incredible person, incredible player and it’s gonna be a lot of fun.”

Fudd enters the WNBA after an impressive final season in college basketball where she averaged 17.3 points per game, including 117-of-262 three-pointers.

In other draft moves on Monday, the Seattle Storm meanwhile opted for towering Spanish star Awa Fam with the third pick, the 6ft 4in (1.93 metres) 19-year-old from Valencia becoming only the seventh international player in WNBA history to be chosen in the top three of the draft.

“I’m super excited and a little bit nervous,” Fam said. “I want to try my best, representing Spain is a little bit special. Being with the national team is always special, and being here in the WNBA was my dream since I was 12.” — AFP

‘Beautiful’ battle with Sinner extra motivation: Alcaraz

Tennis

BARCELONA - Spanish tennis star Carlos Alcaraz said Monday his battle with new world number one Jannik Sinner was giving him extra inspiration ahead of the Barcelona Open.

Sinner defeated Alcaraz in the final at the Monte Carlo Masters on Sunday to usurp him at the top of the world rankings. Alcaraz can claim back the spot with victory in Barcelona this week, where he finished runner-up last year.

“I think the battle for number one that Jannik and I are having is a very beautiful one, and I think it’s probably an extra motivation,”

Alcaraz told reporters.

“The truth is that Jannik and I have a very good relationship. Obviously, it’s not super personal, we don’t go out to dinner, we don’t go eat together, but I think the relationship we have off court is very good.”

Alcaraz said the Italian was driving him on to be a better player, although he would “not miss him” this week in Barcelona.

“(He’s someone who) makes me better, who makes me aware of my weaknesses, who makes me realise what I really have to focus on in every practice and every match,” said the 22-year-old seven-time Grand Slam winner.

“I try to push myself every day, and that’s why it’s really nice to have him as a reference point and to see him achieving everything he’s achieving.”

Alcaraz said he was happy to see Sinner taking “giant steps forward” on clay and that they were very even on every surface.

“When we face each other, between him and me there isn’t really a favourite, it doesn’t matter if we play on grass, on hard court or on clay,” he added.

The Spaniard has won the Barcelona Open twice, in 2022 and 2023, and took on Finnish player Otto Virtanen yesterday in the round of 32, beating him 6-4, 6-2. — AFP



Paige Bueckers (left) and Azzi Fudd pose for a photo during the 2026 WNBA draft on Monday at The Shed in New York. — AFP

Sony Pictures offers sneak peek of ‘Spider-Man: Brand New Day’ at CinemaCon

Paula Ramon

LAS VEGAS – Sony Pictures Entertainment kicked off CinemaCon on Monday with a sneak peek of “Spider-Man: Brand New Day” and a new instalment of “Jumanji”.

Tom Rothman, president and CEO of Sony Pictures Entertainment, unveiled two posters for the latest Spider-Man film starring Tom Holland and Zendaya, set to hit American cinemas on July 31.

The release comes four years after “Spider-Man: No Way Home” became the studio’s highest-grossing film with approximately US\$1.9 billion in global box office receipts.

“It feels like nothing we’ve ever made,” Rothman said at the Colosseum Theater in Las Vegas, before introducing lead actor Holland, who joined virtually.

“It’s the most emotional Spider-Man movie we’ve ever made, and in some ways, the most grown up,” said Holland, who plays the arachnid superhero.

In a short clip shown at CinemaCon, where film studios bring in their stars and offer a sneak peek at their upcoming slate, Holland’s Peter Parker faces the consequences of the decisions he made in the previous film, which ended on a cliffhanger.

Not only do his friends have no idea he exists, but his girlfriend MJ – played by Zendaya – has a new love interest.

Expectations for the film are high, with its trailer gaining millions of views since its release last month.

The film, directed by Destin Daniel Cretton, will star Mark Ruffalo, Jon Bernthal and Sadie Sink.

Sony Pictures Entertainment also unveiled a first glimpse at “Spider-Man: Beyond the Spider-Verse”, the animated spin-off due to hit cinemas in June 2027.

It closed its presentation with a clip from the third instalment of “Jumanji”.

Dwayne Johnson, Jack Black

and Kevin Hart said that “Jumanji: Open World”, set for release in December this year, will feature tributes to the late actor Robin Williams, who starred in the first film of the popular franchise.

Box office optimism

Sony Pictures Entertainment’s presentation marked the start of CinemaCon, which this year focuses on optimism over the year’s strong start at the box office.

Rothman celebrated the progress, but noted that sales have not yet reached pre-pandemic levels.

“We all have urgent work to do,” Rothman said. “For our part, that means delivering a variety of great films to all kinds of audiences. But you, my friends, have an urgent part to play.”

“Affordability is by far the hardest. Going to the movies must become affordable again,” he added.

CinemaCon will also provide an opportunity to reflect on how to sustain the momentum in the industry, in a year that could bring significant changes – such as the expected takeover of legendary studio Warner Bros. Discovery by Paramount Skydance.

CinemaCon, which takes place from April 13-16, will host presentations in the coming days from Warner Bros., Universal Pictures, Paramount Pictures, Neon, Walt Disney Studios, and Amazon MGM Studios.

The event is also set to attract a host of stars, with Zendaya, Matt Damon, Timothee Chalamet, Tom Cruise and Christopher Nolan all expected to attend.

CinemaCon starts with box office optimism



US actors Dwayne Johnson (left) and Kevin Hart promote the upcoming film “Jumanji: The Final Level” during Sony Pictures Entertainment Presentation & Opening Night at CinemaCon at The Colosseum at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, Nevada.

– AFP

Paula Ramon

Cinema owners huddled in Las Vegas on Monday for their annual meeting, buoyed by optimism over the year’s strong start at the box office.

CinemaCon, where film studios bring in their stars and offer a sneak peek at their upcoming slate, will serve as a stage to celebrate a 23-percent jump in takings year-on-year, in the industry’s best first-quarter performance since before the COVID-19 pandemic.

But it will also provide an opportunity to reflect on how to sustain the momentum in a year that could bring significant changes – such as the expected takeover of legendary studio Warner Bros. Discovery by Paramount Skydance.

“When you have consolidation of legacy studios, as we learned with Disney and Fox, the amount of movies produced goes down, prices go up, and we think that is bad for [movie] theatres,” Michael O’Leary, CEO of Cinema United, which organizes the gathering, told AFP last week.

The trade group has voiced its concerns to US and international regulators, urging them to scrutinize the expected merger closely.

“We continue to oppose this transaction [and] encourage them to look closely at this merger, because the consequences of it are serious,” he said.

Demographic Shifts

CinemaCon is set to draw a constellation of stars to the Colosseum Theater at Caesars Palace.

This year, attendees can expect appearances from Zendaya, Matt Damon, Tom Holland, Timothee Chalamet, and Tom Cruise, as well as acclaimed director Christopher Nolan, who is behind the epic “The Odyssey” slated for release in July.

Presentations by the traditional studios kick off on Monday, when Sony will reveal what it has in store for 2026.

CinemaCon, which runs until tomorrow, will also serve as a forum to discuss some of the structural changes in movie-going habits that are affecting the industry.

These include the shifts in audience habits engendered by the pandemic and the explosion of streaming, which has seen viewers choosing to stay on the couch.

But they also include a surge in cinema-going by Gen Z, apparently attracted by the “authenticity” of the experience.

A decade ago, filmgoers in the United States and Canada would frequently spend more than US\$11 billion annually at the cinema, but since the pandemic, the total take has not exceeded US\$9 billion.

This year’s string of big releases has sparked hopes that there could be a return to such lofty numbers.

The opening weekend for Amazon MGM’s “Project Hail Mary” logged a healthy US\$81 million, and was followed up by “The Super Mario Galaxy Movie” with US\$131 million.

Upcoming releases expected to do well include Michael Jackson biopic “Michael,” “The Devil Wears Prada 2,” “Star Wars: The Mandalorian and Grogu,” “Spider-Man: Brand New Day,” “The Odyssey,” and the third instalment in the epic “Dune” series.

CinemaCon will also present awards for big-screen achievements to a diverse group of stars, including actor LaKeith Stanfield (“Atlanta”), rapper and songwriter Queen Latifah, and acclaimed director James Cameron. Catherine Laga’aia, the star of the live-action adaptation of “Moana”, will be recognized as the Breakthrough Star of the Year.

– AFP



(From left to right) Producer/writers Chris Miller and Phil Lord pose with directors Bob Persichetti and Justin K. Thompson as they promote the upcoming film “Spider Man: Beyond The Spider-Verse” during Sony Pictures Entertainment photo call during CinemaCon at The Colosseum at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, Nevada, on Monday.

– AFP

Hollywood stars sign open letter against Paramount-Warner deal

Huw Griffith

LOS ANGELES – An open letter signed by hundreds of Hollywood heavyweights was published on Monday opposing a deal that would see the historic Warner Bros. studio swallowed by rival Paramount.

Actors including Jane Fonda, Joaquin Phoenix and Bryan Cranston, as well as directors JJ Abrams and Denis Villeneuve are among more than 1,000 people who have added their names to the protest opposing the mega-merger between two of Hollywood’s storied studios.

“This transaction would further consolidate an already concentrated media landscape, reducing competition at a moment when our industries – and the audiences we serve – can least afford it,” the petition said.

“The result will be fewer opportunities for creators, fewer jobs across the production ecosystem, higher costs, and less choice for audiences in the United States and around the world.”

Paramount Skydance, which is run by David Ellison, in February said it was planning a US\$111 billion takeover of the Warner

Bros., home to mega-grossing franchises including “Harry Potter”, “The Lord of the Rings” and “Game of Thrones.”

The bid topped one from industry upstart Netflix, which had been seen as the least worst of the two options by Hollywood insiders.

People across Tinseltown fear that the consolidation of two studios will inevitably lead to cuts, especially as the enormous price tag is reportedly set to be financed, meaning the new owners will have to make savings.

Cuts will affect not only the creatives who power America’s movie industry but will also crimp employment for tens of thousands of people who work below the line – the make-up artists, set designers, limo operators, food truck owners and florists around Los Angeles.

“Alarmingly, this merger would reduce the number of major US film studios to just four,” the letter said.

“Our industry is already under severe strain, in large part due to prior waves of consolidation. We have witnessed a steep decline in the number of films produced and released.

“Competition is essential for a healthy economy and a healthy democracy. So is thoughtful regulation and enforcement. Media consolidation has already weakened one of America’s most vital global industries – one that has long shaped culture and connected people around the world.”

Paramount Skydance, whose bid is understood to be supported by US President Donald Trump, has pledged to continue cinematic releases at a regular clip.

“We have been clear in our commitments to [increase] output to a minimum of 30 high-quality feature films annually with full theatrical releases,” the company said in a statement on Monday.

“We understand the concerns raised as a result of the disruptions caused to our industry by COVID, entry of big-tech, and changes in consumer behaviour, but we promise this: Paramount remains deeply committed to talent, and this merger strengthens both consumer choice and competition, creating greater opportunities for creators, audiences and the communities they live and work in.”

– AFP

World Weather

CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 14°C~26°C	Manila 22°C~35°C	New York 20°C~30°C	Lisbon 11°C~21°C
Shanghai 14°C~22°C	Bangkok 27°C~37°C	London 9°C~17°C	Rio de Janeiro 19°C~26°C
Hong Kong 21°C~28°C	Tokyo 14°C~21°C	Frankfurt 10°C~19°C	Luanda 24°C~30°C
Taipei 23°C~31°C	Singapore 25°C~31°C	Vancouver 3°C~9°C	Maputo 22°C~33°C
Guangzhou 21°C~31°C	Kuala Lumpur 24°C~33°C	Paris 8°C~18°C	Dili 22°C~31°C
Nanjing 14°C~23°C	Jakarta 24°C~32°C	Moscow 6°C~15°C	São Tomé 27°C~32°C
Guilin 18°C~27°C	Seoul 11°C~26°C	Las Vegas 15°C~27°C	Praia 18°C~28°C
Xi’an 15°C~26°C	Sydney 13°C~25°C	Monte Carlo 14°C~21°C	Bissau 21°C~37°C



1 Cherry blossom out...Azaleas in!

Visitors stroll through the grounds of Nezu Shrine during the annual Azalea Festival in Tokyo yesterday. - AFP

2 Swallowtail

A common Mormon butterfly (Papilio polytes) rests on a leaf in a garden in Banda Aceh, Indonesia yesterday. - AFP

3 Fine battle horse

An artist works on a sand sculpture at the Nansha scenic area in Zhujiajian, Zhoushan City, Zhejiang Province, yesterday. Preparation for the 2026 Zhoushan sand sculpture exhibition is progressing smoothly. Covering a total area of 10,000 square meters at the Nansha scenic area in Zhujiajian, the exhibition plans to display more than 50 horse-themed sand sculptures. It is expected to officially open to the public in early May. - Xinhua

4 Giant hello

Tourists walk by the Greetingman sculpture, a six-metre-high blue statue depicting a man bowing in a traditional Asian greeting gesture, in the Buceo neighbourhood of Montevideo, Uruguay on Monday. The monument is part of a South Korean public art project by sculptor Yoo Young-ho, symbolising friendship between South Korea and other countries around the world. - AFP

5 Beginning life's adventure

An olive ridley sea turtle hatchling is released into the sea, in Banda Aceh, Indonesia yesterday. - AFP

6 Timepiece for BFG

Visitors look at a replica of a watch depicting its movement mechanisms displayed at the stand of Swiss luxury watchmaker IWC, owned by the Richemont group, on the opening day of the Watches and Wonders Geneva luxury watch fair, in Geneva, Switzerland yesterday. - AFP

