

# Sam pledges all-round development for Macau under national security framework

Tony Wong

A ceremony was held yesterday evening marking the launch of this year's National Security Education Exhibition and various other national security education activities. Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai said in a speech that the local government will ensure that safeguarding national security requirements are consistently integrated across all areas and stages of its work to advance Macau's development strategy, while continuing to improve Macau's legal systems and enforcement mechanisms for safeguarding national security.

After yesterday evening's opening ceremony, the one-month National Security Education Exhibition, being held at the Services Platform Complex for Commercial and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (aka Forum Macao Complex), will be open to members of the general public from 3 p.m. today.

The exhibition, which is open between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m. daily, will run until May 15.

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

This year's exhibition is its ninth edition since its inception.

In his speech, Sam underlined that safeguarding the nation's sovereignty, security, and development interests is the supreme principle of "One Country, Two



Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai addresses yesterday's opening ceremony of the 2026 National Security Education Exhibition at the Forum Macao complex.



Central People's Government Liaison Office in Macau Director Zheng Xincong addresses yesterday's ceremony at the Forum Macao complex. – Photos: GCS

Systems" and the solid foundation for Macau's socioeconomic development, and it concerns the fundamental interests of the MSAR and the well-being of Macau residents.

For a long time, Sam underlined, the MSAR has steadfastly fulfilled its constitutional responsibility to safeguard national security, consistently upheld its executive-led system, and constantly advanced its tasks of safeguarding national security to new heights under the guidance of the central authorities' holistic approach to national security.

Sam noted that the new Law on the MSAR's

Committee for Safeguarding National Security and its supplementary administrative regulation took effect last month, further improving the MSAR government's top-level leadership mechanism for safeguarding national security, and providing the committee with a more solid legal basis and stronger law enforcement capabilities.

Sam also underlined Macau's commitment to resolutely preventing and countering external interference, and to cracking down on collusion between anti-China, destabilising elements in Macau and external hostile forces.

By continuing to expand the local forces promoting patriotism and love for Macau, Sam said, the Macau government has been building broader social consensus to safeguard national security and Macau's harmony and stability.

Sam also noted that the world is undergoing profound changes unseen in a century at an accelerated pace. Conflicts around the world, particularly the ongoing ones in the Middle East, remind us that "we are not living in a peaceful world, but in a peaceful country", and that peace is not a given and stability is hard-won.

Continued on page 5

## Trump says will fire Fed chair if he stays beyond mandate

WASHINGTON, DC – President Donald Trump renewed pressure yesterday on Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, with the US leader threatening to fire the central bank chief if he stays beyond his mandate.

Powell's term at the helm of the Fed expires on May 15, although he can remain in his role as chairman if no successor has been confirmed.

The central banker also said last month that he would not leave his post as a Fed governor until a Justice Department investigation involving him is "well and truly over, with transparency and finality."

It is rare for a former Fed chair to remain

on its board after their term as chief expires. Powell's Fed governor term expires in 2028.

"I'll have to fire him," Trump told Fox Business, if Powell "is not leaving on time."

The president added: "I've wanted to fire him."

Trump has repeatedly lashed out at Powell over the past year for not cutting interest rates more aggressively.

The Trump administration has taken aim at the independent Fed on several levels, initiating an investigation into Powell over renovation cost overruns at the bank and seeking to oust another Fed governor, Lisa Cook.

On whether he would drop the Department of Justice probe involving Powell, Trump said: "I'm not playing. I have to find out."

Trump has named former central banker Kevin Warsh to succeed Powell, but he must be confirmed by the US Senate before taking up the role.

Warsh has a confirmation hearing before the Senate Banking Committee next Tuesday.

But he faces an uphill battle with some lawmakers criticizing the DOJ probe as political pressure on the central bank.

Senator Thom Tillis – a member of Trump's Republican party who sits on the

Senate Banking Committee – has vowed to hold up the nomination as long as the investigation remains unresolved.

"I hope that everyone will work to have [Warsh there on May 16,]" US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told a CNBC event yesterday, referring to the day after Powell's term as chairman expires.

On the impasse, Trump's top economics adviser Kevin Hassett told an Axios event: "They'll work something out."

"I have high confidence that that will happen," he said on the sidelines of the IMF and World Bank's spring meetings in Washington. – AFP

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The Macau Post Daily

**Xi urges closer, stronger China-Russia strategic coordination to defend interests, uphold Global South unity**

– Story on p. 6

**Chinese, Vietnamese top leaders hold talks on advancing wide-ranging cooperation**

China will advance high-quality comprehensive strategic cooperation with Vietnam, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and Chinese President Xi Jinping said yesterday.

– Story on p. 7

**Left-wing candidate Sánchez climbs to 2<sup>nd</sup> place in Peru vote count**

Left-wing candidate Roberto Sánchez has climbed to second place in Peru's presidential election yesterday, positioning himself to face conservative Keiko Fujimori in a June runoff.

– Story on p. 12

# National Security Public Interest Film Festival to offer free tickets

**Khalel Vallo**

The three-week “National Security Public Interest Film Festival”, which started yesterday and ends on May 10, features a raft of screenings across Macau with complimentary tickets available to the public, according to a statement by the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS).

Jointly organised by the local government and the Liaison Office of the Central People’s Government in the Macao SAR, the festival presents seven films centred on national security, the statement said.

The event opened with a special screening yesterday, followed by a series of public screenings taking place in four cinemas across Macau and Taipa. The films are being shown at Bona International Cineplex at YOHO Treasure Island Resorts World Hotel on Praça Ferreira do Amaral, Cineteatro Macau near Rua do Campo, Cinema Alegria (Wing Lok) on Estrada do Repouso, and CGV Cinema at NOVA Mall in Taipa.

Various local associations, higher education institutions and non-tertiary schools have been invited to attend, with the aim of promoting awareness of national



Pedestrians walk past Cineteatro Macau near Rua do Campo in the city centre yesterday afternoon. – Photo: Khalel Vallo

security, implementing the concept of a holistic approach to national security, and striving to reinforce the principle of “One Country, Two Systems”, the GCS statement said.

From this Saturday through May 10, a limited number of seats for each screening are reserved for the public, the statement said, noting that complimentary tickets will be distributed three days prior to each screening at the respective venues, on a first-come, first-

served basis, with a maximum of two tickets per person.

The festival seeks to engage the community through cinema while promoting national security awareness and civic values, with screenings continuing across Macau until the last day, the statement noted.

For enquiries, members of the public are welcome to contact Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) official Ms Cheong on 8399 6291 during office hours. ■

# 2 men fall victim to nude chat scam, one loses 12,800 yuan

**Armindo Neves**

Two local men separately fell victim to nude chat scams, in which one of them lost 12,800 yuan (15,150 patacas), PJ spokesman Chao Teng Hin said during a regular press conference yesterday.

Chao said that the victims comprise a middle-aged male and a young man, adding that they reported their cases to the police on Monday and Tuesday, respectively.

According to Chao, each of them met an unknown individual on a social media website. The person provided a link and invited them to engage in a nude video chat, Chao said.

After the conversation ended, according to Chao, the individual sent the victims screenshots of their chat history, mobile phone contacts, and the nude video chat.

Chao did not clarify whether the scammer was the same person in both cases.

The scammer demanded 12,800 yuan from the young man, threatening him that otherwise the photos would be sent to the contacts in his address book, Chao said, adding that the younger victim, worried about the possible

repercussions, followed the instructions and transferred the money.

After receiving the payment, the scammer continued to demand more money under various pretexts, according to Chao, but the younger victim refused to make further payments and finally reported the case to the police.

However, the middle-aged victim refused to pay and, instead, reported the attempted blackmail to the police. ■



Judiciary Police (PJ) spokesman Chao Teng Hin looks on during yesterday's regular press conference. – Photo: Armindo Neves

# Open House Macau slated for Nov 7-8

**Rui Pastorin**

The free, city-wide architecture festival “Open House Macau” is slated to take place from November 7 to 8, with a book launch to kick off the event scheduled for next Wednesday.

Open House Macau is organised by CURB – Center for Architecture and Urbanism and is part of the global

Open House Worldwide, a network of 60 organisations hosting festivals and dialogue about architecture, design and cities across the globe, according to a statement by the Macau-based non-profit institution yesterday. The upcoming event, themed “Architectural Dialogues”, will again open Macau’s buildings to the public,

“offering rare access to the city’s architecture”, the statement said.

The first Open House event in Asia was held in Macau in 2018.

“For 48 hours, an array of homes, heritage sites, workplaces, infrastructure, cultural spaces, and more will open their doors”, with participants offered the opportunity of learning about their stories under the guidance of architects, designers, owners, and volunteers, according to the event’s themed website.

The upcoming launch of the “Open House Macau Book” preceding the November event will be held at Ponte 9 – Creative Platform. It is authored by Nuno Soares, a Macau-based architect, urban planner and the head of the Department of Architecture and Design at the University of Saint Joseph (USJ). He is also the founder and director of CURB.

According to the statement, the book will revisit Macau’s first Open House through a “curated mix of photography and project documentation”, adding that the initiative has welcomed thousands of participants and gathered over 100 volunteers across 50 buildings since its launch.

The statement added that next week’s event will also include two open calls, namely “Suggest a Building”, which invites property owners, institutions, companies, and residents to propose buildings or spaces to be included in the 2026 programme, and “Volunteers”, an invitation to join the team and help welcome visitors during the date.

The open calls are due on July 19 and August 16 respectively. ■

# Local rider hurt in 3-vehicle crash on Friendship Bridge



This image posted on Facebook early yesterday afternoon shows a rider lying in front of his scooter in the wake of a three-vehicle crash on Macau’s Friendship Bridge. The Post cannot vouch for the authenticity of the image.

**Armindo Neves**

A spokesman for the Public Security Police (PSP) confirmed to the Post by phone yesterday evening that a local motorcyclist was injured in a collision involving a scooter and two cars on Macau Friendship Bridge in the afternoon.

At about 1:45 pm, the Fire Services Bureau (CB) released a statement confirming they had received an emergency call regarding a traffic accident in the Macau-bound lane of the bridge. The caller reported that at least one person had been injured in the incident.

Upon arriving at the scene near Avenida da Ponte da Amizade, firefighters confirmed that a scooter and two cars were involved in the collision. The

rider was found to be conscious at the scene.

According to the PSP spokesman, the investigations revealed that the accident occurred at 1:33 p.m. yesterday, while the scooter was travelling in the right-hand lane. The rider was reportedly unable to avoid a collision with a broken-down vehicle ahead.

The impact deflected the scooter into the left-hand lane, where it was subsequently struck by another car approaching from behind. The spokesman added that all three drivers involved are local residents.

The rider, who according to a photo circulating on social media yesterday, appeared to be a young man, was rushed to hospital for emergency treatment, the spokesman said. ■



This image provided by the by CURB – Center for Architecture and Urbanism shows the “Open House Macau Book”, which is set to be launched next week.

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## Macau Weather

**CLOUDY APART FROM SUNNY INTERVALS.  
FORCE 3 TO 4 SOUTHERLY WINDS.  
RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 75% AND 95%.**



**24°C~28°C**

Source: SMG

# Macau residents' interest in working in GBA up 160 pct from 2024: MMA survey

Armindo Neves

The Macau Management Association (MMA) hosted a press conference yesterday about the findings of its survey, which it conducted last year, showing that Macau residents' interest in working in the nine mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area has risen by 160 percent compared to 2024.

The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) is a conurbation consisting of the nation's two special administrative regions (Hong Kong and Macao) and nine cities in Guangdong Province – Dongguan, Foshan, Guangzhou, Huizhou, Jiangmen, Shenzhen, Zhaoqing Zhongshan and Zhuhai (collectively aka "9+2"), with a total population of 88 million and a land area of 56,000 km<sup>2</sup>.

With 688,900 people and 33.4 km<sup>2</sup> of land, Macau accounts for roughly 0.8 percent of the GBA's population and just 0.06 percent of its total land area.

The press conference was held at the Macau Chamber of Commerce (ACM) building in Zape. The survey aimed to analyse local residents' employment mobility. It was conducted between last May and September; 1,074 valid surveys were collected.

The findings show that while 59.5 percent of the respondents were employed full time, 20.9 percent worked part-time, 11.6 percent were self-employed, and 8.0 unemployed. More than 63 percent of the respondents had been in their latest position for three to 10 years, indicating a relatively stable job tenure, the findings show.

However, over the past three years, 40.1 percent of the respondents had changed jobs.



An advertising sign-holder in Travessa do Soriano promotes a nearby "cha chaan teng" (Hong Kong and Macau-style diner) last night. – Photo: Armindo Neves

The findings also show that employees' "pain points"\* have shifted from material concerns to psychological and developmental issues – 52.3 percent of the respondents cited work pressure as their primary pain point, while 46.0 percent expressed a need for training.

Asked by the survey to look ahead to the next 12 months, while 49.3 percent of the respondents were unsure whether they would change their job, 89.2 percent had no clear career plans.

Meanwhile, the findings also show that 42.6 percent of the respondents expressed willingness to work in the Chinese

mainland's GBA cities, representing a 160 percent increase compared to 2024. Among these, Zhuhai was the preferred destination, chosen by 48 percent of the respondents, the findings show.

However, 65.4 percent of the respondents expressed concern about losing Macau's income advantages, and 50.6 percent were unfamiliar with the Greater Bay Area.

### Recommendations for staff, firms and govt

The association put forward three recommendations for employees, companies and the local government each during the conference.

For employees, the association recommended embracing lifelong learning and making good use of training and upskilling programmes to enhance their resilience; formulate a 12-month career mobility plan and participate in job fairs and internal promotion opportunities; and join workshops in Hengqin, learn cross-border skills and launch small-scale pilot ventures.

For companies, the association recommended setting up preventive retention frameworks and strengthening compensation along with flexible benefits; launching hybrid training models and AI matching tools to improve both professional and general skills; and establishing cross-border talent networks and offering business travel and cultural training to facilitate workforce mobility.

For the local government, the association recommended enhancing promotion of the Greater Bay Area and introducing a "Macao and business travel" benefits protection model; establish a hybrid training fund to subsidise skills development in areas such as AI and to ensure fair employment mechanisms; and set up a GBA employment database to foster an entrepreneurial ecosystem with incubators. ■

\* "Pain points" is a term used to describe specific problems, frustrations, or challenges experienced by a particular group of people. While it originated in business and marketing to describe problems customers face, it is now used broadly in politics, urban planning, and daily life to identify areas that need improvement. – Gemini

**Exhibition on the Resonant History and Aesthetic Memory of Macao Firecrackers**

Exhibition Venue

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

Exhibition Period

**2026.03.18 - 08.31**

Opening Hours

**11:00 ~ 19:00**

# 'VANITAS' EXHIBITION SHOWCASES PHOTOS, PAINTINGS & POEMS AT FRC GALLERY



### Rui Pastorin

“VANITAS – Reflections on Transience and Legacy” is being hosted at the Rui Cunha Foundation (FRC) gallery, with only three days left to view the exhibits.

The exhibition, which kicked off last Thursday, mainly features a collection of photographs, alongside traditional Chinese paintings. Showcasing these works are six photographers alongside artists from the Macau Belt and Road Calligraphy and Painting Culture Arts Association. Poetry is also highlighted, with the book “A Oriente do Silêncio e outros Poemas” (“To the East of Silence and Other Poems”) by Rui Rocha that was launched earlier this week at the gallery.

The respective artists involved in the genres tackle the concept of “Vanitas”, which is Latin for “emptiness” or “futility” and is a genre of still-life paintings that symbolise

the transience of life and the inevitability of death. According to a recent statement on the gallery website, the genre was “initially developed by Dutch painters in the 17<sup>th</sup> century during the Baroque Period, and kept being revisited in Western and Eastern painting”.

The sombre tone represented in this concept is found across the works exhibited throughout the gallery. Starting with the photography showcased, the lensmen and lenswomen presenting their works, which are mostly in black and white, are Carmen Serejo, Gonçalo Lobo Pinheiro, Francisco Ricarte, João Palla, Sara Augusto, and Shee Va.

Among the images they captured to depict the concept are the tomb of poet Camilo Pessanha in Macau; the Egyptian rites of death showcased in an exhibition; the Santa Cruz Cemetery in East Timor; the presence of religious structures and votive symbols within Macau’s

temples and shrines; and the focus on the presence of earthly and aesthetic manifestations of Catholic rituals in the Prazeres Cemetery in Lisbon, as listed in a statement by the gallery.

Meanwhile, the association represents the related ideas through calligraphy and Chinese paintings on display. According to the organisers, the association described the concept of vanitas as an allegorical expression that “seeks to represent a higher ideal”.

The gallery is located at 749 Avenida da Praia Grande, Luen Pong Building. One can visit from Monday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturdays.

According to AI Chatbot Poe, in art and history, the vanitas genre often uses objects like skulls, fading flowers, candles, and clocks, along with mottos like memento mori, which is Latin for “remember that you [must] die”.

-Photos: Rui Pastorin



## Sam pledges all-round development for Macau under national security framework

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### Sam raises 3 points for safeguarding national security

Safeguarding national security is an ongoing mission with no endpoint, Sam said in his speech, raising three points of view for Macau's ongoing efforts to safeguard national security.

**First**, Sam said, Macau must fully understand the severe circumstances that the country is facing in safeguarding national security. Macau, Sam said, must comprehensively perceive internal and external security risks, remain mindful of potential dangers in times of peace, and adopt a mindset of worst-case scenarios, preparing robust contingency plans for various risks and challenges.

**Second**, Sam said, Macau must firmly advance high-level security development. On the one hand, Sam said, Macau must more effectively leverage the advantages of its executive-led system, and continuously improve its governance model that is led by the executive organ and complemented with coordinated participation from the legislative and judicial organs as well as various segments of civil society.

On the other hand, Sam said, various public entities of the local government must fulfil their duties with a higher degree of political awareness, a sense of big-picture thinking, and a spirit of serving duty with obedience, while solidifying responsibilities, taking initiative, and continuously modernising the MSAR's systems and capabilities for safeguarding national security.

**Third**, Sam said, Macau must build a high-quality development framework, accurately implementing the principle of consolidating security in the course of development, and coordinating the safeguarding of national security with its socioeconomic development.

Sam said that Macau must deepen the integrated development between Macau and Hengqin, creating more favourable conditions for promoting its appropriate economic diversification and boosting its economic vitality.

The Macau government must continue to enhance residents' sense of happiness and



Guided by a robot, dignitaries including (from left to right, front) Chen Wensheng, Bian Lixin, Zheng Xincong, Edmundo Ho Hau Wah, and Sam Hou Fai visit the exhibition after yesterday's ceremony. — Photo: GCS

fulfilment, resolve deep-seated socioeconomic issues, and strengthen the foundation of social stability, ensuring Macau's long-term stability, Sam said.

Moreover, Sam also said in his speech that in terms of safeguarding national security, there should be no bystanders but only guardians. Macau's experience since its return to the motherland has fully proven that only with solid national security, can the steady and far-reaching implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle be ensured, the economy and society prosper, and the well-being of the residents be effectively protected, Sam said.

Sam noted that the nation's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, which was passed by the National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing last month, draws a grand blueprint for the country's development over the next five years, while also presenting Macau with significant opportunities to advance its high-quality development and better integrate into and serve the nation's overall development.

Sam pledged that his government will fully put into practice the new tasks and requirements outlined by the nation's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, and pragmatically draw up and implement the MSAR's 3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year

Plan. The MSAR government will ensure that the requirements of national security are integrated throughout all areas and stages in Macau's development strategy, Sam said, adding that it will also accurately put into practice the central authorities' holistic approach to national security, continuously improve Macau's legal systems and enforcement mechanisms for safeguarding national security, and strengthen security capabilities across various sectors.

### Zheng raises 3 suggestions for national security

Also delivering a speech during yesterday's ceremony, Liaison Office Director Zheng Xincong raised three suggestions for Macau's work on safeguarding national security.

**First**, Zheng said, we must view Macau's coordination of development and security with a broad historical perspective.

Zheng said that on the new journey of the nation's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, we must be good at summarising historical experience and lessons, deeply grasp the theoretical, historical and practical logic embedded in the coordination of development and security, strengthen our sense of urgency, remain vigilant even in times of peace, and earnestly

place development and security on an equally important position.

**Second**, Zheng said, we must plan Macau's coordination of development and security with a strong sense of responsibility.

Zheng said that on the new journey of the nation's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, Macau must base itself on better integrating into and serving the nation's overall development, and play an irreplaceable role in helping the country seize the initiative in major-power competition and advance Chinese-style modernisation.

**Third**, Zheng said, we must advance Macau's coordination of development and security with a broad strategic vision.

On the new journey of the 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, Zheng said, Macau must seize the major historical opportunities brought by national development and align with the nation's the 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, while upholding and improving its executive-led system, solidly promoting its appropriate economic diversification, expanding the local forces promoting patriotism and love for Macau, and enhancing governance effectiveness.

Zheng also said that "looking around the world today, regional wars and conflicts are occurring frequently, bringing profound suffering and disaster to local populations. In contrast, our country enjoys peace and stability, with a unique and favourable situation. Facts have eloquently proved that only when the country is secure can families be well, and only when the great motherland is prosperous and strong can the hundreds of millions of people enjoy happy lives."

Yesterday evening's event, which lasted from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Forum Macao in Sai Van, included a 30-minute cultural stage performance by various groups as well as a 10-minute drone show near Macau Tower that displayed slogans promoting national security education.

About 480 people attended the ceremony including Edmund Ho Hau Wah, Macau's first chief executive and currently vice-chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in Beijing. Foreign Ministry Commissioner Bian Lixin and local PLA garrison commander Chen Wensheng were also in attendance. ■

## UTM signs MoU with Thai university to boost academic collaboration

Khalel Vallo

The public Macao University of Tourism (UTM) announced in a statement yesterday that it has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Thailand's Srinakharinwirot University (SWU)\* to strengthen cooperation in academic exchange and talent development.

According to the statement, the agreement was signed last Thursday at UTM's Mong-Ha Campus, during a visit by a delegation from Srinakharinwirot University. The MoU was signed by Rector Fanny Vong Chun Kwan and Associate Professor Cholvit Jearajit, president of SWU, on behalf of their respective institutions, the statement said.

Under the agreement, the two universities will collaborate on a range of initiatives, including faculty and student exchanges, joint research projects, and broader academic cooperation, the statement noted, adding that the partnership aims to facilitate the sharing of educational resources and promote mutual academic development.

Srinakharinwirot University, a public

autonomous university in Bangkok, offers programmes across multiple disciplines, including hospitality and tourism, business administration, education, and engineering, the statement highlighted.

Speaking at the ceremony, Vong said the agreement represents a step forward in the university's efforts to expand international partnerships, particularly in Southeast Asia, adding that the collaboration would provide broader opportunities for students and faculty while strengthening links between tourism and cultural education in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) and Thailand, the statement noted.

Vong expressed hope that the partnership would enhance cooperation in talent cultivation as well as teaching and research innovation, helping to nurture professionals with global perspectives, the statement added.

Following the signing ceremony, the visiting delegation toured campus facilities and expressed appreciation of the university's educational approach and achievements, as well as confidence in the future collaboration,

according to the statement. ■

\* Srinakharinwirot University (SWU) is one of Thailand's premier public research universities. Originally established in 1949 as the Advanced Teacher Training School, it was the first institution in the country

dedicated solely to teacher education before evolving into a comprehensive university in 1974. The name "Srinakharinwirot" was bestowed by King Bhumibol Adulyadej, translating from Sanskrit as "The Glory of the City". — Gemini



This handout photo provided by the public Macao University of Tourism (UTM) yesterday shows UTM Rector Fanny Vong Chun Kwan (fifth from left) and Thailand's Srinakharinwirot University Associate Professor Cholvit Jearajit (sixth from left) posing with their Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) at the university's Mong Ha campus last Thursday.

## Xi urges closer, stronger China-Russia strategic coordination to defend interests, uphold Global South unity

BEIJING – President Xi Jinping yesterday urged closer and stronger strategic coordination between China and Russia to firmly defend their legitimate interests and safeguard the unity of Global South countries.

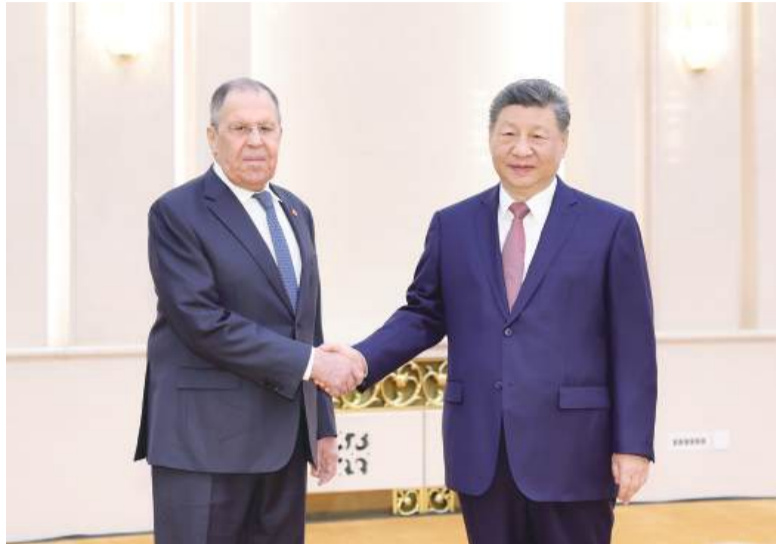
Xi made the remarks when meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Beijing.

Noting the stability and certainty of China-Russia relations are particularly valuable in a changing and turbulent international situation, Xi called on the two countries to shoulder their responsibilities as major countries and permanent members of the United Nations (UN) Security Council.

Asking Lavrov to convey sincere greetings to President Vladimir Putin, Xi hailed the development of the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination at a high level, yielding fruitful results across various fields, adding that the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation has shown greater vitality and exemplary significance.

He urged both sides to fully implement the important consensus reached by the two heads of state, enhance strategic communication, strengthen diplomatic coordination, and elevate the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination to a higher level in a steadier, more sustained manner.

Xi stressed that China and Russia should maintain strategic resolve, trust and support each other,



President Xi Jinping (right) shakes hands with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

and pursue common development. It is necessary for the two sides to fully leverage the advantages of proximity and complementarity, deepen cooperation on all fronts, and enhance the resilience of their respective development, he added.

Xi also urged the two countries to strengthen multilateral cooperation, firmly uphold and practice multilateralism, join hands to revive the authority and vitality of the UN, engage in closer coordination and cooperation within the frameworks of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS countries, and promote the development of the international order in a more just and reasonable direction.

While conveying Putin's sincere greetings and best wishes to Xi,

Lavrov said that under the strategic guidance of the two heads of state, Russia-China relations have shown a high degree of resilience amid a complex external environment, with sound momentum in trade and investment cooperation and increasingly intensive cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

He said Russia is ready to work with China to earnestly implement the important consensus reached by the two heads of state, maintain high-level exchanges, strengthen practical cooperation, promote cultural and people-to-people exchanges, and safeguard international fairness and justice, to work for further progress in the development of Russia-China relations, and make greater contributions to world peace and stability. – Xinhua

## Strengthening solidarity and cooperation is of enduring relevance in a changing world

*China Daily Editorial*

The meeting between General Secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and Chinese President Xi Jinping and General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee and Vietnamese President To Lam in Beijing yesterday reinforced the two countries' commitment to strengthening their relations.

Lam making China the destination for his first foreign trip after being elected Vietnamese president underscores the importance Vietnam attaches to its relations with China.

At a time when global uncertainties are intensifying, the willingness the two sides have shown to enhance communication and coordination through Lam's visit, particularly in his meeting with Xi, sends a strong signal of continuity and stability.

In their meeting, Xi said that China will advance high-quality comprehensive strategic cooperation with Vietnam, and accelerate the building of a higher-level China-Vietnam community with a shared future that carries strategic significance.

The two countries' socialist systems and the leadership of their respective communist parties constitute the fundamental political foundation for bilateral relations. This not only defines the direction of their cooperation but also ensures strategic resilience in the face of external uncertainty.

The two countries have formed a comprehensive architecture linking political trust with practical outcomes through pragmatic collaboration. The expansion of cooperation into fields including public security, judicial coordination, economic development, industry and supply chains, customs, science and technology, and people's livelihoods reflects how institutional alignment enables both sides to better synergize their development strategies and jointly advance modernization.

Such collaboration helps improve the two countries' ability to uphold an open economy in the region. By strengthening supply chain connectivity and promoting emerging sectors, such as artificial intelligence, semiconductors and the internet of things, China and Vietnam are better able to jointly oppose unilateralism and protectionism. In doing so, they contribute to the multilateral trading system in the region and beyond. – Xinhua

This year marks the fifth anniversary of the establishment of the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. As Xi said, China stands ready to work with regional countries, including Vietnam, to promote the building of an even closer China-ASEAN community with a shared future.

It was good to hear Lam say that Vietnam will firmly regard the development of relations with China as an objective necessity, a strategic choice and a top priority.

Doing so can help Vietnam work with China to promote stronger political mutual trust, more substantive security cooperation, deeper practical cooperation, a more solid popular foundation, closer coordination on multilateral affairs and better management of differences. That will be conducive to making the development of the next stage of bilateral ties broader in scope and higher in quality.

The signing of a wide range of cooperation documents between the two sides further illustrates the potential of bilateral cooperation. They provide pathways for translating consensus into tangible results. While some economies advocate "decoupling" and beggar-thy-neighbor policies, the two vibrant emerging market economies have demonstrated that cooperation and common development are the right choice.

Beyond institutional cooperation, the emphasis on people-to-people exchanges, especially among the youth, adds a forward-looking dimension. The two leaders' joint meeting with representatives taking part in the "Red Study Tours" project in Beijing indicates that the healthy development of China-Vietnam relations is anchored in the younger generation.

In an era marked by geopolitical tensions and economic fragmentation, the steady development of China-Vietnam relations undoubtedly offers a meaningful reference for cooperation based on mutual respect, strategic alignment and win-win outcomes.

As both countries continue on their respective paths toward socialist modernization, their deepening partnership will help inject stability and positive energy into regional development, demonstrating the enduring relevance of solidarity and cooperation in a changing world. – Xinhua

## Peng Liyuan, Vietnam's first lady visit China's national center for performing arts

BEIJING – Peng Liyuan, wife of General Secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and Chinese President Xi Jinping, and Ngo Phuong Ly, wife of General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee and Vietnamese President To Lam, visited China's National Center for the Performing Arts (NCPA) in Beijing yesterday.

Peng and Ngo Phuong Ly visited the opera house, the virtual reality creative space and the recording studio, learning about the NCPA's efforts in supporting

artistic creation, delivering cultural services and conducting international cultural exchanges. During the tour, they watched rehearsals of a Chinese ethnic dance drama and a choir recording session, pausing from time to time to exchange views.

Peng noted that China and Vietnam are connected by mountains and rivers, share similar cultures, and their people enjoy mutual understanding and friendship. She expressed hope that cultural institutions and artists of the two countries will strengthen

exchanges and cooperation through various means to deepen the friendship between the two countries and nurture the bonds of goodwill between their people.

Ngo Phuong Ly sincerely thanked Peng for her warm and thoughtful arrangements, spoke highly of China's achievements in cultural development and artistic innovation, and expressed readiness to actively promote exchanges in the cultural and artistic fields between the two countries and advance Vietnam-China friendship. – Xinhua

## China supports momentum of ceasefire, peace talks, Wang Yi tells Iranian counterpart

BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday that China supports maintaining the momentum of ceasefire and peace talks, which serves the fundamental interests of the Iranian people and reflects the shared expectations of countries in the region and the international community.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks when

speaking to Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi over phone.

Araghchi briefed Wang on the latest developments of Iran-US negotiations and Iran's considerations, saying that Tehran is willing to continue seeking a rational and practical solution through peace talks.

Iran appreciates China's continued efforts to help ease tensions in the region, Araghchi said,

adding that Tehran expects Beijing to play a positive role in promoting peace and ending the war.

For his part, Wang said that China, as always, supports Iran in safeguarding its sovereignty security and national dignity. President Xi Jinping has put forward a four-point proposal on promoting peace and stability in the Middle East, contributing a Chinese approach to resolving the crisis, he added.

The current situation has reached a critical stage between war and peace, with a window for peace opening, Wang said.

He called for respect for and safeguarding of Iran's sovereignty security and legitimate rights as a country along the Strait of Hormuz, as well as guaranteeing the freedom and safety of international navigation through the strait.

It is a shared call of the

international community to strive to restore normal navigation through the strait, Wang added.

Following Xi's four-point proposal, China is ready to continue promoting de-escalation of the situation, facilitate improved relations among regional countries, and play a constructive role in ultimately achieving lasting peace and stability in the Middle East, Wang noted. (*More on Middle East war on pages 9 & 10*) – Xinhua

# Chinese, Vietnamese top leaders hold talks on advancing wide-ranging cooperation

BEIJING – China will advance high-quality comprehensive strategic cooperation with Vietnam, and accelerate the building of a higher-level China-Vietnam community with a shared future that carries strategic significance, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and Chinese President Xi Jinping said yesterday.

Xi made the remarks when holding talks with General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) Central Committee and Vietnamese President To Lam, who is on a state visit to China.

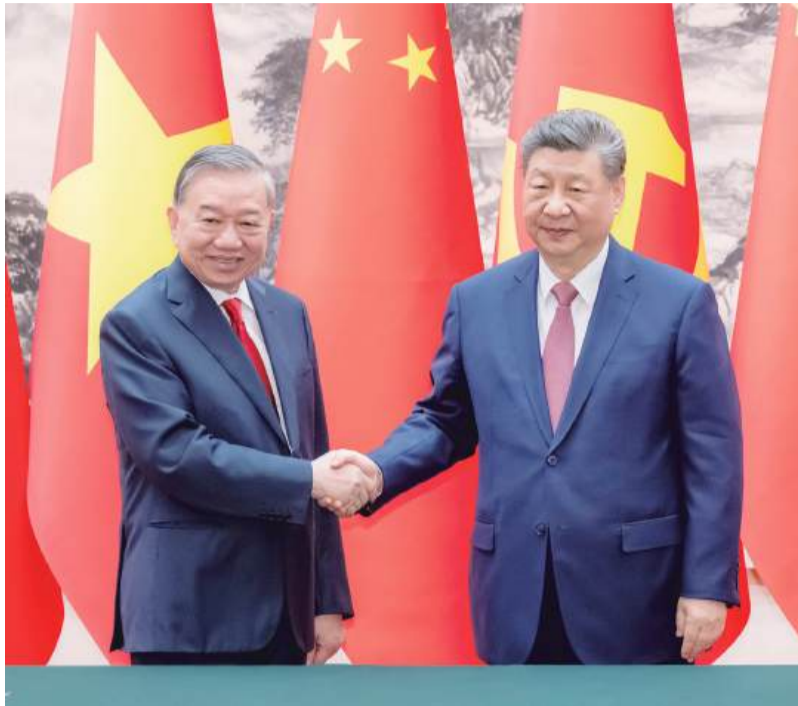
This marks the first foreign trip Lam made since being elected president of Vietnam earlier this month. The trip also comes a year after Xi's historic visit to the Southeast Asian country.

## SETTING TONE FOR BILATERAL RELATIONS

“Your visit to China at the earliest opportunity after being elected president of Vietnam demonstrates the great importance you have attached to the development of China-Vietnam relations,” Xi said, adding that China has always regarded Vietnam as a priority in its neighborhood diplomacy.

Xi expressed confidence that under the strong leadership of the CPV Central Committee headed by Lam, Vietnam will firmly follow the path of socialism and strive toward its two centennial goals.

Lam said Vietnam congratulates China on the successful completion of its 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan and its historic achievements, and believes that China will smoothly implement its 15<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, continue to advance high-quality development and socialist modernization, achieve the Second Centenary Goal



General Secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and Chinese President Xi Jinping (right) shakes hands with General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee and Vietnamese President To Lam in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

as scheduled, and become a pillar and primary driving force for world peace and development.

Vietnam will firmly regard the development of relations with China as an objective necessity, a strategic choice and a top priority, Lam said, adding that his country will continue to support the one-China policy and stands ready to strengthen strategic communication and high-level strategic coordination with China.

Xi said the leadership of the communist party is the most essential feature and the greatest strength of socialism, and defending the socialist system and the ruling position of the communist party is the greatest common strategic interest of the CPC and the CPV.

Xi said the two sides must maintain a high degree of strategic vigilance and strong strategic resolve, always remain confident in

their path and system, and ensure that all reform will not change the direction of the path or the nature of the system.

The two leaders also met with over 300 Chinese and Vietnamese youth representatives participating in the “Red Study Tours,” a program that allows young people to explore the revolutionary heritage that underpins the bilateral friendship. They encouraged the young people to contribute to the friendly ties between the two countries.

“The visit by Lam will continue to promote and give full play to the guiding role of the head-of-state diplomacy between the two countries. It will help further consolidate the development of bilateral friendly relations, and promote industrial alignment, connectivity, and people-to-people exchanges,” said Ge Hongliang,

deputy director with the College of ASEAN Studies at the Guangxi Minzu University.

## WIDE-RANGING COOPERATION

The two sides should implement the new round of cooperation plan between the CPC and the CPV, conduct in-depth exchanges and mutual learning on theories and experience in party and state governance, and make good use of the China-Vietnam “3+3” strategic dialogue on diplomacy, defense and public security, Xi said.

Xi said both countries should work together in their modernization drive, accelerate the alignment of development strategies and prioritize infrastructure connectivity.

Xi also called on both sides to strengthen cooperation in emerging fields such as artificial intelligence, semiconductors, and the Internet of Things, adding that more high-quality Vietnamese products are welcome to enter the Chinese market.

He encouraged China and Vietnam to continue strengthening friendly exchanges and cooperation in tourism, culture, media, education, health, sports and other fields, announcing the launch of the China-Vietnam tourism cooperation year for 2026-2027.

China and Vietnam should uphold the principles of peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit, and work together to oppose unilateralism and protectionism, Xi said, adding that both sides should safeguard the global free trade system and keep the industrial and supply chains stable and unimpeded.

Lam said Vietnam will work with China to upgrade the level of cooperation in economy, trade,

investment, railways and other infrastructure, as well as tourism, and step up cooperation in education, training, science and technology, people-to-people exchanges, and sub-national cooperation, adding that efforts will be made to better manage the land border and maintain maritime peace.

China has long been the largest trading partner of Vietnam, and Vietnam is China's largest trading partner in ASEAN and the fourth largest trading partner in the world. During the visit, the two countries signed cooperation documents covering a number of areas including inter-party exchanges, public security, judicial cooperation, economy, industrial and supply chain cooperation, customs cooperation, science and technology, people's livelihoods, human resources development, media, and sub-national cooperation.

Upon his arrival in Beijing on Tuesday, Lam took a high-speed train to visit Xiong'an New Area, a much-anticipated “city of the future” in Hebei Province. He will also travel to the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, which borders Vietnam, for a better understanding of China.

Lei Xiaohua, a researcher with the Guangxi Academy of Social Sciences, said that it is important for both sides to enhance exchanges on development experience, boost cooperation on major projects, and promote mutual learning on modernization paths.

“Vietnam has announced the launch of its first inter-regional high-speed rail project, and it is clear that the Vietnamese side hopes to learn more about China's mature experience in high-speed rail technology, engineering construction, and operation management,” Lei said. – Xinhua

## China to advance connectivity with Vietnam via standard-gauge railways, expressways, smart ports: Premier Li

BEIJING – Premier Li Qiang yesterday said China stands ready to work with Vietnam to accelerate the development of infrastructure connectivity in areas such as standard-gauge railways, expressways and smart ports, and to foster secure and stable industrial and supply chains.

Li made the remarks when meeting with General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee and Vietnamese President To Lam in Beijing.

Noting that the world today continues to undergo complex changes with growing instabilities and uncertainties, Li said that as traditional friendly neighbors, China and Vietnam should strengthen solidarity and coordination. He added that China stands ready to work with Vietnam to follow the strategic guidance of

the top leaders of the two parties and two countries, firmly support each other and deepen practical cooperation.

Li expressed the willingness to better synergize development strategies with Vietnam, expand and enhance two-way trade and investment, create more highlights of cooperation in artificial intelligence, new energy, critical minerals and other fields, and jointly cultivate new growth drivers for development, so as to achieve higher-level mutual benefit and win-win outcomes.

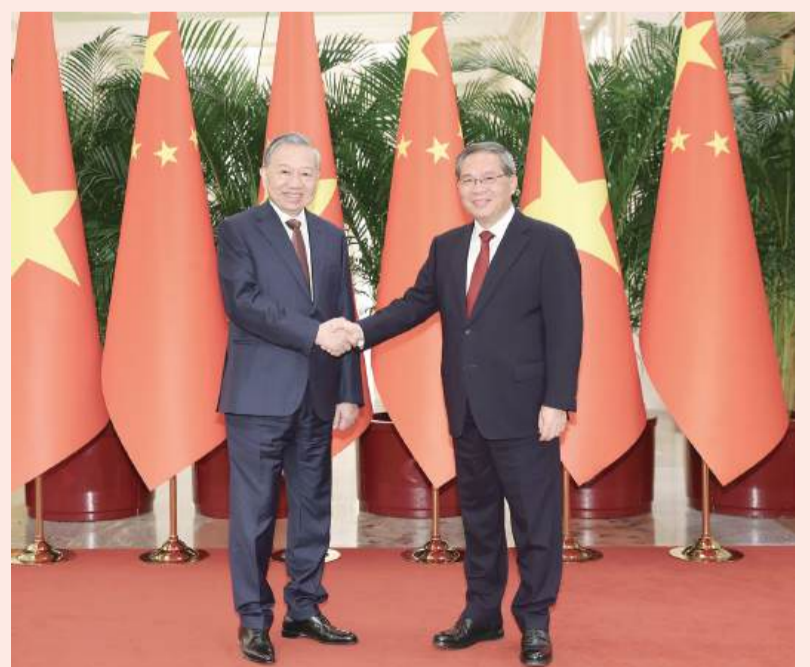
He called on both China and Vietnam, as countries that share similar views on the international order and extensive common interests, to coordinate their positions in multilateral mechanisms like the United Nations and Asia-Pacific

Economic Cooperation, and work with all parties to jointly oppose unilateralism and power politics, uphold fairness and justice, and promote openness and win-win outcomes.

For his part, Lam said Vietnam attaches great importance to and regards its relations with China as the top priority in its foreign policy.

He also said Vietnam is ready to work with China to advance sustainable economic connectivity, particularly railway cooperation, enhance the level of economic, trade and investment cooperation, strengthen communication and coordination on the international stage, address issues in bilateral cooperation, maintain maritime security and stability, and enhance resilience against global security risks.

– Xinhua



Premier Li Qiang (right) shakes hands with General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee and Vietnamese President To Lam, who is on a state visit to China, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

# Indonesian police arrest six for Komodo dragon smuggling

SURABAYA – Indonesian authorities said yesterday they have arrested six people allegedly involved in smuggling endangered Komodo dragons native to the archipelago and destined for Thailand.

Two suspects were arrested in February in the port city of Surabaya on the east coast of Java island as they got off a ship with three live Komodo dragons – the world's largest living lizard.

Further investigation led to four more arrests in the weeks that followed.

Police said the animals had been obtained from “suppliers or hunters” in Indonesia's East Nusa Tenggara province, where they are native to a handful of small islands.

The suspects are accused of buying the dragons for 5.5 million rupiah (about US\$320) apiece and selling them for six times the price, apparently to be shipped to clients in Thailand.

According to East Java police, the suspects have smuggled and traded at least 20 Komodo dragons since January last year, and pocketed some US\$33,000.

They face up to five years in prison and a fine.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature lists the Komodo dragon as endangered, with a global population of about 3,400, including juveniles.

The fearsome reptiles, which can grow to three metres in length and weigh up to 90 kilograms, are

threatened by human activity and by climate change destroying their habitat.

Poachers collect them to be sold as pets or display animals.

Komodo dragons in the wild are found only in Indonesia's World Heritage-listed Komodo National Park and on neighbouring Flores island.

Police said yesterday they had also arrested two suspects for smuggling 140 kilogrammes of pangolin scales from the northwestern province of Riau to Surabaya.

Pangolins are among the world's most endangered species, and their scales are prized in countries like China and Vietnam, where they are used in traditional remedies even though they provide no scientifically proven medicinal benefit. – AFP



A Komodo dragon is displayed by nature and conservation agency officials and police officers after being seized from suspects attempting to smuggle it into Thailand, during a press conference at the regional police headquarters in Surabaya yesterday. – AFP

## N Korea calls Japan's diplomatic paper a 'grave provocation'

SEOUL – North Korea accused Japan of a “grave provocation” yesterday after Tokyo laid out its opposition to Pyongyang's nuclear programme in an annual diplomatic paper.

The countries do not have formal diplomatic relations, and Pyongyang frequently criticises Tokyo over its colonial rule of the Korean peninsula, which ended with World War II.

The Japanese foreign ministry released its annual bluebook last week, detailing Tokyo's official diplomatic views and repeating its opposition to North Korea having nuclear weapons.

The position is “a grave

provocation encroaching upon the sovereign rights, security interests and development rights of our sacred state”, an unnamed North Korean foreign ministry official said in a statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency.

North Korea's “measures for bolstering up its defence capabilities... belong to the right to self-defence”, the statement said.

It described the bluebook as “woven with conventional gangster-like logic and absurdity”.

North Korea has insisted that it will not give up its nuclear arsenal, describing its path as “irreversible” and vowing to strengthen its capabilities.

In its bluebook, Japan also expressed its unease that North Korea had sent troops and ammunition to Russia to aid its war against Ukraine.

Tokyo also downgraded its assessment of China for the first time in a decade, calling Beijing an “important neighbour” instead of “one of Japan's most important” partners.

It marked the latest deterioration in ties with Beijing since Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi indicated in November that Tokyo could intervene militarily in the event of an attack on Taiwan.

China views the self-ruled island as its territory and has not ruled out taking it by force. – AFP

## S Korea jails US streamer Johnny Somali for public nuisance

SEOUL – An American YouTuber who caused outrage for filming himself kissing a statue commemorating Korean wartime sex slaves has been sentenced to six months in prison for public nuisance and other offences, a court in Seoul said yesterday.

Johnny Somali, 25, gained notoriety several years ago for recording himself doing a series of provocative stunts in South Korea and Japan, and streaming them on platforms such as YouTube and Twitch.

South Korean authorities indicted Somali – whose real name is Ramsey Khalid Ismael – in 2024 on public order violations and obstruction of business, and banned him from leaving the country.

“The court has sentenced him to six months in prison,” a representative of the Seoul Western District Court told AFP when asked about Somali's case yesterday.

The court said in a later statement that his charges included violating the Minor Offences Act – which covers a wide variety of public order crimes – obstruction of business, and distribution of false video content.

Somali previously built a viral internet following while engaging in disruptive acts such as spilling cup noodle soup on a table at a Seoul convenience store and

playing loud North Korean music in public.

Somali issued an apology on his way into the courtroom yesterday, with local media reporting that he said: “I am remorseful... I want to apologise to the people of Korea. And I want to change my life and become a better person.”

The court said his case had not included any charges related to insulting a statue memorialising Korean “comfort women” – those forced into sexual slavery by Japanese occupying forces before and during World War II.

In October 2024, Somali uploaded a video of himself kissing and twerking beside the statue, causing strong public backlash and condemnation, and the clip was later removed.

Somali apologised at the time, saying he was “not aware of the significance of the statue”.

But attitudes towards him remained unforgiving, and he was sometimes chased and even physically assaulted by offended South Koreans, according to reports.

In 2023, Somali caused consternation in neighbouring Japan for behaviour including taunting subway commuters about Nagasaki and Hiroshima, the two cities devastated by US atomic bombs in 1945.

– AFP

## N Korea boosting ability to make nuclear arms: UN watchdog

Matthew Walsh and Jihye Shin

SEOUL – North Korea is showing a “very serious increase” in its ability to produce atomic weapons, the head of the UN nuclear watchdog said during a visit to Seoul yesterday.

Diplomatically isolated North Korea is believed to operate multiple facilities for enriching uranium, a key step in making nuclear warheads, South Korea's spy agency has said.

That includes one at the Yongbyon nuclear site, which Pyongyang purportedly decommissioned after talks but later reactivated in 2021.

“In our periodic assessments, we have been able to confirm that there's a rapid increase in the operations” of the Yongbyon reactor, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Rafael Grossi said in Seoul, where he met South Korea's foreign minister.

The agency also observed a rise in operations at Yongbyon's reprocessing unit and light-water reactor, as well as the activation of other facilities, Grossi told reporters.

“All that points to a very serious increase in the capabilities of (the) DPRK in the area of nuclear weapons production, which is

estimated at a few dozen warheads,” he said, referring to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the North's official name.

North Korea, which conducted its first nuclear test in 2006, is under rafts of UN sanctions for its banned weapons programmes.

It has declared that it will never surrender its nuclear weapons, and cut off access to IAEA inspectors in 2009.

The agency has noted the construction of a “new facility similar to the enrichment facility in Yongbyon”, Grossi said.

It was “not easy to calculate” any production increases without visiting the site.

However, “we consider, looking at external features of the facility, that there will be significant increase in the enrichment capacity of the DPRK”, he said.

The Centre for Strategic and International Studies said this week that North Korea appeared to have completed a building at Yongbyon that could be a new uranium enrichment plant.

Citing satellite imagery from April, the US-based think tank said the building had generators, fuel storage tanks and cooling units.

### Russia connection unclear

Asked whether Russia was assisting North Korea's nuclear development, Grossi said the IAEA had not seen “anything in particular in that regard”.

While the agency hoped any such cooperation would be civilian in nature, “if anything, this is too early days to judge”, he said.

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.

Grossi told South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Hyun that Pyongyang's nuclear programme “remained one of the IAEA's key issues”, a statement from the ministry said later yesterday.

Cho said Seoul was working to “end hostility and confrontation” with the North and to pursue peaceful coexistence and shared growth on the peninsula.

Separately, top naval commanders from South Korea, the United States and Japan met in Seoul yesterday to hold maritime security talks aimed at deterring North Korea's growing nuclear and missile threats, Seoul's navy said. – AFP

## Philippine's Davao City opposes foreign military facilities

MANILA – The Davao City Government in the southern Philippines has strongly opposed any proposal to establish foreign military facilities within its jurisdiction, citing concerns about the lack of direct benefits to residents, according to local media reports yesterday.

In an official statement on Tuesday, Davao City Government officials said they would not

welcome such developments.

The statement comes amid reports that the United States plans to build a fuel storage depot in the Davao region by 2028.

According to local media reports, the US Defense Logistics Agency has issued a solicitation to contractors for a proposed fuel facility in Mindanao, specifically near Davao City.

– Xinhua

## Afghans comb riverbed in search of gold dust



This photograph taken on Monday shows an Afghan man scouring for gold using the traditional gold-panning technique, after sorting nuggets from mountainside stones excavated from the Kunar riverbed in the Kharwalu area of Naray district, Kunar province, Afghanistan. — AFP

Isabelle Wesselingh

AFGHANISTAN – In the jagged Hindu Kush in eastern Afghanistan, hundreds of men dug into the rocky bed of the Kunar River searching for a few grams of gold dust as an alternative source of income.

At the foot of imposing peaks, some still covered in snow in April, they toiled near the border with Pakistan to find the valuable glinting specks in a country where wages are low.

Below a village of mud-brick houses and small terraced wheat plots in Kharwalu, Kunar province, they dug into a dry section of the riverbed before sifting through their piles of rocks using river water.

Fifty-year-old Shahzadah Gollalah was among the gold prospectors, having abandoned construction work a seven-hour drive from his home in Kabul.

“There are not many job opportunities in the country, and in this way, we have created work for ourselves,” said the father of eight.

But “the gold nuggets we find are usually smaller than a grain of wheat,” he added.

Downstream, in Ghaziabad, hundreds of men hacked into the mountain with picks, then carried a sack down on their backs along a steep slope and emptied it onto a sieve to filter gold from the sand.

Others scooped river water into yellow jerrycans attached to long wooden handles, pouring it over the sieve so that the smaller stones, which may contain gold flakes, slid down onto a mat. A nugget would sometimes appear in a metal pan after two further rounds of sifting.

Gul Ahmad Jan, 35, said he can earn a substantial amount in just a week. “We can get up to about one gram of gold,” which can fetch up to 8,000 Afghanis (US\$125), he told AFP.

Afghanistan’s resources were rarely exploited during years of conflict, although a Kunar official said gold panning has happened there for more than a decade.

Najibullah Hanif, the province’s information chief, said residents learnt the techniques from miners who arrived from gold-rich provinces.

“Some started to dig with machines, an excavator; some locals came and asked the Islamic Emirate (of Afghanistan) to stop them because it destroys the river and the mountains,” said Hanafi.

He estimated thousands of people in Kunar were gold panning, using the traditional method allowed by the authorities.

Afghanistan’s resources have attracted domestic and international investors in recent years, with the Taliban authorities promoting mining in various parts of the country. — AFP

## Sri Lanka repatriates 238 stranded Iranian sailors: minister

COLOMBO – Sri Lanka has repatriated 238 Iranian sailors stranded in the South Asian country after one of their warships was torpedoed by a US submarine, a minister told AFP yesterday.

Deputy Defence Minister Aruna Jayasekara said 32 sailors rescued from the IRIS Dena – a frigate attacked on March 4 just off Sri Lanka – and another 206 from the IRIS Bushehr left on Tuesday.

“A few sailors from the IRIS Bushehr are staying back to operate the vessel, but 206 joined those rescued from the IRIS Dena and returned home last night in a chartered aircraft,” Jayasekara said.

Official sources said 15 Iranian sailors will remain in Sri Lanka to

operate the IRIS Bushehr, which is anchored off Trincomalee in the northeast of the island.

The attack on the IRIS Dena brought the Middle East conflict into the Indian Ocean, killing 104 sailors in the early days of the US and Israeli war against Iran, according to Iranian authorities.

The bodies of 84 victims were recovered and have been repatriated.

Last month, Iran’s ambassador to Sri Lanka Alireza Delkhosh said Tehran was in talks with Colombo to repatriate sailors from the IRIS Bushehr which was given safe harbour in Sri Lanka after the IRIS Dena was sunk.

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake said the

island provided protection to the Bushehr crew on humanitarian grounds in line with the 1907 Hague Convention.

It was not immediately clear on what basis the sailors from the second Iranian vessel were allowed to leave Sri Lankan custody.

Sri Lanka has refused permission for US warplanes to use ground facilities in the country in order to maintain Colombo’s neutrality.

A third Iranian ship – the IRIS Lavan, with 183 crew members – sought shelter in India’s Kochi port in early March.

More than 100 non-essential crew of the IRIS Lavan have since left India. — AFP

## Families search for hundreds missing after boat sinks in Andaman Sea

Sheikh Sabiha Alam

DHAKA – Families were frantically searching for news of their relatives yesterday after a boat carrying about 280 Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi migrants capsized in the Andaman Sea earlier this month.

The boat, which left the southern Bangladeshi port of Teknaf on April 4 and was on its way to Malaysia, sank due to heavy winds, rough seas and overcrowding, according to the United Nations.

Bangladeshi authorities said nine people had been rescued. One survivor told AFP the boat sank nearly 10 days ago, casting gloom over the fate of the missing.

“I now have 70–80 photos on my mobile phone from people asking for updates on the victims,” 40-year-old Rafiqul Islam, one of the survivors, told AFP yesterday.

Islam, who sustained burn injuries as oil spilled from the trawler, said he was lured by traffickers who promised him a job in Malaysia.

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 war-torn Myanmar’s Rakhine state 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.

The Rohingya undertake perilous sea journeys every year in search of better living conditions,



Rachel Begum (left), who was rescued from a capsized boat sits inside her shelter at a refugee camp in Ukhaia, in Bangladesh’s Cox’s Bazar yesterday. — AFP

travelling aboard rickety boats often operated by trafficking networks.

Bangladesh police said yesterday they had arrested six people on suspicion of human trafficking over the incident.

“We are investigating each individual’s liability in the tragic incident,” Saiful Islam, officer-in-charge of Teknaf police station, told AFP.

### Risking lives

At the Kutupalong Rohingya camp, Jasim Uddin, 34, said he had travelled to Rafiqul Islam’s home after losing contact with his brother.

“My brother paid 350,000 taka (US\$2,850) for the trip to Malaysia to a contractor who is now avoiding us,” he told AFP.

“I showed my brother’s photo to Islam, and he confirmed that he had seen him on the boat.”

Rohingya representatives warned that worsening poverty and food aid cuts were likely to drive more refugees to undertake dangerous sea travel.

Since April 1, the UN World Food Programme has reduced monthly assistance for large sections of the over one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

“Human trafficking has never stopped, and in the near future it will escalate without a doubt as the food aid cuts remain in place,” Sayed Ullah, president of the United Council of Rohingya, told AFP.

“Desperate people will risk their lives to support their families.”

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said Tuesday the latest incident reflected the “dire consequences of protracted displacement and the absence of durable solutions for the Rohingya”. — AFP

## Indian power plant blast death toll climbs to 19: police

RAIPUR – The death toll from a boiler blast at a power plant in central India has risen to 19, a police officer said yesterday, noting 17 others were injured.

The explosion occurred Tuesday at a facility operated by Vedanta Limited, a subsidiary of London-listed Vedanta Resources, in Chhattisgarh state’s Sakti district.

“The death toll in the power plant blast has reached 19 whereas 17 are undergoing treatment in various hospitals,” district police chief Praful Thakur told AFP.

The explosion likely happened after a pipeline burst, spewing “superheated steam” on people who were having their lunch at the time, the Indian Express newspaper said.

Indian-born billionaire Anil Agarwal, chairman of Vedanta Resources, said he was “distressed by the extremely tragic accident”.

“A high-level investigation into this incident has been initiated... We will leave no stone unturned in getting to the bottom of this matter,” he said in a statement.

Chhattisgarh state authorities have also launched a probe, with chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai vowing the “strictest possible action” against those found guilty.

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. — AFP

## 9 die of monkeypox in Pakistan’s Sindh as cases rise to 25

ISLAMABAD – At least nine people have died of monkeypox in Pakistan’s southern Sindh province, where 25 cases have been confirmed so far this year, the provincial health department said on Tuesday.

According to official figures,

a total of 122 suspected cases have been reported, indicating continued transmission of the virus in different parts of the province.

Health authorities said Khairpur district remains the worst-affected area with 18 confirmed cases, followed by Sukkur with three and

Karachi with four cases.

Officials said the situation is being closely monitored, urging the public to seek immediate medical attention in case of symptoms and follow precautionary measures to limit transmission.

— Xinhua

# Teen kills 9, wounds 13 in Turkey school shooting

Fulya Ozerkan

ISTANBUL – A 14-year-old armed with five guns opened fire at a Turkish school yesterday, killing nine people, wounding 13 and sparking scenes of mayhem as students jumped out of windows to escape.

The attack in the southern province of Kahramanmaraş was Turkey's second such incident in as many days, shocking a country where school shootings are a rare occurrence.

Interior Minister Mustafa Ciftci confirmed nine deaths, with 13 wounded – six in intensive care, three of them in a critical condition.

The minister described the attacker as an "eighth grade student aged 14".

"A student came to school with guns that we believe belonged to his father in his backpack. He entered two classrooms and opened fire randomly, causing injuries and deaths," Kahramanmaraş province governor Mukerrem Unluer told reporters earlier in the day.

Dramatic video footage filmed by a resident of a nearby building and verified by AFP shows students jumping from a first-floor window of the school to escape the gunfire, while dozens of others flee through the courtyard.

About 15 gunshots can be heard in the one-and-a-half-minute video.

Unluer said the attacker was the son of a former police officer, armed with five guns and seven magazines. He died during the incident.

"He shot himself. It is not yet clear whether this was suicide or happened amid the chaos," he said.

Police detained the shooter's father, Ugur Mersinli, the official Anadolu news agency reported.

Footage released by the IHA private newswire showed a person, body and face covered, being evacuated in an ambulance during the attack, as well as tearful parents who had rushed to the school in



Families wait as Turkish anti riot police officers block a street near a school where a 14-year-old teenager opened fire in Turkey's Kahramanmaraş province yesterday. – AFP

the southern province's main city, Kahramanmaraş.

Police increased security around the building, and television footage showed ambulances in the area.

The interior and education ministers travelled to the city, while Justice Minister Akin Gurlek said prosecutors had launched an immediate investigation into the shooting.

## 'Tragic attack'

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said: "In this tragic attack, we unfortunately lost our bright young children and a devoted educator".

He said the incident would be "thoroughly clarified in all its aspects," in a message on X, while warning that the pain from this attack should "not be politicised".

The shooting came a day after an ex-student opened fire with a shotgun at his former high school in Siverek district of Sanliurfa province, in the southeast of the country.

That gunman wounded 16 people before killing himself in a showdown with police. Ten students were among the casualties.

Police detained one suspect after Tuesday's attack and suspended four officials from duty. The school was ordered closed for four days.

Main opposition CHP leader Ozgur Ozel called for broader security measures.

"At this point, it is clearly evident that violence in schools can no longer be explained by isolated incidents," he wrote on X.

"This issue has turned into a growing and deepening security vulnerability," he said.

Measures such as ensuring full control at school entrances and exits, increasing the number of security personnel, strengthening camera systems, intensifying police patrols around schools, and keeping emergency crisis plans ready are now essential, he added.

"The security of schools is entrusted to our state. No negligence or deficiency in this regard can be excused anymore," Ozel said.

School shootings in Turkey had been rare until this week. In May 2024, a former student killed a private high school principal in Istanbul with a firearm five months after he was expelled.

Turkey has strict gun laws that require licensing, registration, mental and criminal background checks, and severe penalties for illegal possession.

– AFP

# Starmer says 'won't yield' to Trump's Mideast war threats

LONDON – British Prime Minister Keir Starmer yesterday said he would not "yield" to pressure to join the Iran war after US President Donald Trump threatened to scrap a UK trade deal.

"We're not going to get dragged into this war. It is not our war," Starmer told parliament.

"I'm not going to change my mind. I'm not going to yield. It is not in our national interest to join this war," the Labour leader added.

In a phone interview with Sky News, Trump threatened to alter an agreement struck with Britain that limits the impact of his US tariffs blitz.

Trump, who has repeatedly slammed Starmer's policies, said strains in the relationship with the NATO ally would "not at all" negatively affect King Charles III's state visit to the United States this month.

In reference to the royal trip, Starmer told parliament that the two nations' "long standing bonds... are far greater than anyone who occupies any particular office at any particular time".

London and Washington concluded a trade agreement last year capping US tariffs at 10 percent on most British manufactured goods.

In return, the UK agreed to open its markets further to American ethanol and beef, sparking concerns in the country.

At the time, it was an advantageous agreement for London, which benefited from the lowest tariffs granted by the US.

This advantage has, however, been weakened since the US Supreme Court struck down some tariffs and Washington retaliated by imposing a temporary 10-percent tariff on almost all of

its imports pending a new tariff regime by July.

## No 'exit plan'

While Trump praised his good relationship with Starmer at the time of the agreement, ties have since deteriorated, particularly over the war in the Middle East.

Starmer angered Trump by refusing to allow British bases to be used for the US's initial strikes on Iran last month.

He later agreed to a US request to use two British military bases for a "specific and limited defensive purpose".

"It's a relationship where when we asked them for help, they were not there," Trump told Sky News.

"When we needed them, they were not there. When we didn't need them, they were not there. They still aren't there," he insisted.

Starmer's Labour government, which has sought to build bridges with Trump since his return to the White House in January 2025, has recently hardened its rhetoric toward its historic ally.

Finance Minister Rachel Reeves on Tuesday hit out at the "folly" of Trump launching a war with Iran "without a clear exit plan".

Starmer told parliament on Monday that Trump was wrong to threaten to destroy Iranian "civilisation", while on Sunday Health Minister Wes Streeting criticised Trump's language as "incendiary, provocative, outrageous".

Against this backdrop, Reeves was to see US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent in Washington yesterday as part of an International Monetary Fund meeting to detail the economic impact of the conflict. – AFP

# Hormuz shipping muted as US blockade takes hold: tracking data

James Pheby

PARIS – A trickle of ships crossed the Strait of Hormuz Tuesday and yesterday as a US blockade appeared to further curb traffic in the trade route already paralysed by Iranian forces, marine tracking data showed.

The crucial waterway normally sees about a fifth of global crude oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) pass through it, but traffic has been almost halted since the US and Israeli strikes on Iran sparked the war on February 28.

Here are the latest developments in the strait, using maritime data from ship tracking firm Kpler unless stated otherwise:

## US blockade enforced

The US military said the blockade of vessels either departing or destined for Iranian ports had been fully implemented during the first 48 hours.

"No vessels have made it past US forces. Additionally, 9 vessels have complied with direction from U.S. forces to turn around and return toward an Iranian port or coastal area," regional command CENTCOM said on X.

It posted photos and audio of its warships and operations in the area, saying more than 10,000 personnel were deployed for the blockade "against vessels of all nations entering or departing Iranian ports and coastal areas".

## Ships turn around

Sanctioned Chinese tanker Rich Starry, laden with methanol from Iran, crossed the Strait on Tuesday but U-turned and was close to Iran's Qeshm island yesterday evening (local time).

The Iranian-flagged container ship Golbon, sanctioned by the US, made it through the strait overnight but ground to a halt as it approached

Pakistan and was last detected close to the Iranian port of Chabahar.

The Kashan, another Iranian-flagged container ship, appeared to have made it out of the Gulf of Oman on its way to India, but made an abrupt U-turn at around 13:00 GMT and headed back towards the strait.

## Tankers enter Gulf

Petrochemical tankers G Summer, Alicia and Agios Fanourios I, all sanctioned by the US for transporting Iranian products, passed westwards through the strait towards the Gulf using the so-called "toll" route set up by Iran, although all listed their destination as Iraq.

Bulk carrier Christianna and sanctioned tanker Elpis both passed eastwards through the strait away from the Gulf, having left Iranian ports, but later appeared to be stopped close to the UAE.

The only vessel destined for an Iranian port that has made it

westwards through the strait is the Rosalina, which is laden with corn, according to Kpler.

The US has said that humanitarian shipments would be exempt from the blockade, according to news reports.

Another vessel, Seachampion, left the strait in the opposite direction having delivered soy beans to Iran, and was heading to Oman.

## Massive slowdown

Just 388 commodity carriers have passed through the Strait of Hormuz between March 1 and April 15, 255 of them oil and gas tankers, and most were heading east away from the Gulf, Kpler data showed.

Only 16 commodity vessels have made the crossing since the US blockade came into force on Monday.

## Vessels stuck

Around 670 commodity vessels sent signals from west of the strait

on Tuesday, having apparently been stuck there since the end of February, according to data from maritime companies collated by Bloomberg.

Of those, 332 were oil or gas tankers.

More than 55 very large crude carriers are stuck in the Gulf – including nine owned by Japanese companies and several owned by companies from China, Greece and South Korea, according to Bloomberg data and other maritime companies.

## Dozens of vessels targeted

No new attacks on ships have been reported since the start of a ceasefire in the US-Israeli war with Iran last week.

Some 30 commercial ships, including 13 tankers, have been attacked or reported incidents in the region since March 1, according to the IMO, the UK Maritime Trade Operations Centre and Vanguard Tech. – AFP

## Trump says Hungary's Magyar 'going to do a good job'

WASHINGTON, DC – US President Donald Trump has spoken favourably of Hungary's prime minister-elect Peter Magyar, who defeated nationalist Viktor Orban, a key Trump ally, and said the newcomer was "going to do a good job," according to an ABC interview.

Orban, who maintained close ties to Moscow, was ousted in Sunday's ballot after 16 years in power as voters handed a decisive victory to Magyar's Tisza party with a record turnout.

"I think the new man's going to do a good job – he's a good man," Trump told ABC News correspondent Jonathan Karl, who posted the remarks on X on Tuesday.

Trump noted that Magyar was formerly a member of Orban's party and had similar views on immigration, according to Karl.

"I think he's going to be good," Trump was quoted as saying.

Magyar for his part said he was heartened by the fact that Trump spoke about him "in very friendly terms."

US Vice President JD Vance visited Budapest last week to rally with Orban, and hailed the

62-year-old as a "model" for Europe.

Trump reportedly said he did not know if it would have made a difference if he had personally gone to Hungary to campaign for Orban.

"He was behind substantially," Trump told Karl. "I wasn't that involved in this one. Viktor's a good man, though."

Orban's defeat in Hungary is seen as a blow to global nationalists and appears to signal the waning allure of the Trumpism movement in Europe, raising questions about whether proximity to the US leader could be a political liability.

Vance said on Monday he was "sad" about Orban's loss but promised Washington would work with Magyar.

In his statement Magyar also said he had spoken with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, followed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Magyar said he invited numerous leaders to Budapest on October 23 to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1956 Revolution.

Netanyahu accepted the invitation, the statement said.

– AFP

## World Bank announces water security plan covering one billion people

WASHINGTON, DC – The World Bank announced a plan yesterday that aims to improve secure water access for a billion people within the next four years.

The "Water Forward" programme will "expand reliable water services and strengthen systems against droughts and floods."

The bank said its own funds and technical advice would help improve water supplies to about 400 million people by 2030, with the balance coming from partners.

Water "determines whether people are healthy enough to work, whether children have a childhood to learn and to explore, and whether businesses can operate and economies can grow," World Bank President Ajay Banga said.

The programme will see countries identify areas of priority, then "development banks, governments, philanthropies, most importantly, the private sector as well, align behind that plan," he said.

The global lender did not specify how much funding it was committing to the initiative.

Other participating institutions include regional development banks, OPEC's development fund, and the BRICS-aligned New Development Bank.

Fourteen countries had already voluntarily committed to reforming and strengthening

their water sectors under the new program, the bank said.

Some four billion people – half the world's population – face water scarcity, due in part to "unclear policies, weak regulations, and financially unsustainable utilities that have slowed progress and deterred investment," the global lender said.

The focus on water governance issues – not simply physical infrastructure – is promising, said David Michel, senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"In many countries, the water sector fails to fully deploy the funds already allocated to it."

However, the bank's initiative "faces a long and difficult road ahead," he warned, noting that countries with the greatest water insecurity often have the least capacity to reform.

The issue of access to safe drinking water has been highlighted during the war in the Middle East, with desalination plants in Iran and across the region damaged in bombardments.

Beyond conflicts and immediate drinking water needs, the bank said better water security is needed to grow the global economy.

"Strong water systems are foundational to healthy economies that can attract private investment and create jobs," the bank said.

– Xinhua

## Cameroon welcomes pope on second leg of African tour

Clément Melki and Guillaume Gérard

YAOUNDÉ – Crowds lined the roads to welcome Pope Leo XIV to Cameroon yesterday for a three-day trip that includes a visit to the epicentre of a nearly decade-long separatist conflict, where he is expected to bring a message of peace.

After two days in Algeria marred by two suicide attacks and a spat with US President Donald Trump, the pontiff's plane landed in the Cameroonian capital Yaounde shortly before 3 p.m. (local time), an AFP journalist travelling on the papal plane said.

On his way to meet President Paul Biya, who has ruled the mainly French-speaking country since 1982, the US-born pope blessed the mass of faithful who had lined the route from an open-top car.

Thousands of people, some of them playing music, singing and dancing, had already gathered in the scorching sunshine outside the airport to welcome his arrival.

"It's such a relief that the pope is coming to see us, because there are so many problems in this country," Hélène Ebogo, 19, told AFP outside the airport.

In the central African country where more than a third of the around 30 million people are Catholic, the Church plays a key mediation role and runs a large network of hospitals, schools and charities.

Posters, banners and flags festooned the city in honour of the pope's visit, the fourth by a pope and the first since Pope Benedict XVI came in 2009.

Leo's meeting with 93-year-old Biya, the world's oldest head of state, has divided Catholics in the country.

Clergy members have voiced fears that it will help Biya to burnish his image, six months after violently suppressed protests against his disputed re-election to an eighth term.

The 70-year-old pope will later visit a Catholic orphanage and hold a private meeting with Cameroonian bishops.

### Separatist conflict

Today, he will make a high-security visit to a conflict zone



Pope Leo XIV (centre) meets with Cameroon's President Paul Biya (right) and first lady Chantal Biya at the Presidential Palace in Yaoundé, on the third day of an 11-day apostolic journey to Africa, yesterday. – Xinhua

where English-speaking separatists are fighting the army.

"We hope that as soon as he sets foot on Cameroonian soil, the war will stop," Bénédicte Belinka, dressed in a tunic bearing the pope's image, told AFP.

The violence has seen civilians become the target of killings and kidnappings.

Earlier this week, separatist groups announced a three-day truce starting yesterday to allow the highly symbolic visit in the western anglophone region, where nearly a fifth of the population lives.

The pope will give a speech and celebrate Mass in the main city of Bamenda, at the centre of the conflict that erupted after demonstrations in 2016 were put down by the authorities.

The crackdown led to a full-blown rift between the army and English-speaking separatists that has yet to be resolved.

The violence had caused more than 6,000 deaths by 2024, according to rights groups.

"As the pope puts his feet on the soil of Bamenda, we should have peace. All the killing, the kidnapping should stop," Giovanni Mbuna, 36, who was abducted by separatists in 2023, told AFP.

### 'Blessed are the peacemakers'

Archbishop of Bamenda Andrew Nkea has voiced hopes the visit will help bring peace to the region.

"The pope's visit will soften the hearts of the extremists so that we can find common ground... and reach a peaceful solution," Nkea said.

Tomorrow, Leo will hold Mass for hundreds of thousands in a stadium in the economic capital Douala.

He leaves Cameroon for Angola on Saturday.

His stay in Algeria was marred by twin suicide attacks in the city of Blida, southwest of the capital Algiers, on Monday.

Authorities have yet to comment but an informed source confirmed the bombings, which were not presumed related to the pontiff's presence in the mainly Muslim country.

No deaths have been confirmed, other than those of the bombers.

Leo's first international tour initially risked being overshadowed by Trump's remarks that he was "not a big fan" of the pope after the American pontiff called for peace in the Middle East.

US Vice President JD Vance also weighed in, urging the Vatican to "stick to matters of morality... and let the president of the United States stick to dictating American public policy".

Leo brushed the jibes aside, telling reporters on the papal plane as he headed to Algiers on Monday: "The Gospel says... blessed are the peacemakers."

"I have no fear, neither of the Trump administration, nor speaking out loudly about the message of the Gospel," he continued. – AFP

## BBC to cut up to 2,000 jobs in next 2 years

LONDON – The BBC revealed yesterday that the British broadcasting corporation is set to cut up to 2,000 jobs in the next two years amid a challenging media landscape.

The BBC's interim director-general Rhodri Talfan Davies said in a statement to staff that "while we still have to work through the detail, we anticipate the overall number of jobs will fall by 1,800-2,000".

The cuts were announced on screen on BBC rolling news yesterday afternoon (local time).

The acting director-general said in the statement that this was because the BBC faces "significant financial pressures, which we need to respond to at pace".

The organisation has to cut

£500 million (US\$678 million) from its operating costs of £5 billion, with most of these savings required in 2027 and 2028, he said.

It will be the biggest round of redundancies at the broadcasting corporation in almost 15 years, ITV News and The Press Association news agency reported.

The job cuts come as the BBC faces a turbulent media landscape, affected by AI and changing consumer habits.

US President Donald Trump has filed a US\$10 billion defamation lawsuit against the broadcaster over a documentary that edited his 2021 speech ahead of the US Capitol riot, making it appear he explicitly urged supporters to attack the seat of Congress.

A new director-general, former Google executive Matt Brittin, is due to take over at the BBC next month, with his appointment announced as leading the corporation "through transformation".

The BBC is funded by the public paying for a licence to view or listen to its content. It says 94 percent of UK adults use its services every month.

In a report, in March the BBC said its income from the licence fee had fallen 24 percent in real terms since 2017.

"We must reduce our total cost base by a further 10 percent by March 2029 due to licence fee headwinds and other pressures," the report said, warning "tough choices may require cuts to content and services". – AFP

# Brazil's top court orders probe into Flávio Bolsonaro for 'slander' of Lula

Lucia Lacurcia

BRASÍLIA – Brazil's Supreme Court has ordered an investigation of Flavio Bolsonaro, the main rival of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in upcoming elections, for slander over a post linking Lula to drug trafficking.

According to the Supreme Court order – obtained by AFP yesterday – the probe centres on a January 3 social media post by Bolsonaro, a right-wing senator and son of jailed former far-right president Jair Bolsonaro.

In it, the younger Bolsonaro sought to link the left-wing Lula to drug trafficking, money laundering, "support for terrorists and dictatorships" and electoral fraud.

He paired images of the left-wing Brazilian president with Venezuelan former leader Nicolás Maduro, captioned: "Lula will be exposed."

Maduro was toppled from

power in a US military operation on January 3 and whisked to the United States to face trial on drugs trafficking and weapons charges.

The Supreme Court said Justice Alexandre de Moraes ordered the investigation at the request of the justice ministry, which deemed that Flávio Bolsonaro "falsely, publicly, and disparagingly attributed criminal acts to the President of the Republic."

Flávio Bolsonaro denounced the probe – the latest ordered by the Supreme Court against the Bolsonaro clan – as a "clear attempt to restrict freedom of expression."

In a statement he insisted that he would not submit to "intimidation or the use of the police and judicial apparatus to silence the opposition" and demanded that Lula's government "explain its relations with the Venezuelan dictatorship."

Federal Police have 60 days to carry out the initial investigation



Brazilian senator Flávio Bolsonaro speaks during the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Grapevine, Texas, on March 28. – AFP

before prosecutors decide whether to bring charges.

### Tight race

The US-backed Bolsonaros and their supporters accuse the Supreme Court, and Moraes particularly,

of hounding the former president and his family to disqualify them politically.

The Brazilian left, however, sees Moraes as a fearless defender of Brazil's young democracy in the face of far-right attacks on the

country's institutions.

Bolsonaro, 44, has emerged as the leading figure on the Brazilian right after his father designated his eldest son as his political heir.

Jair Bolsonaro is serving a 27-year sentence after he was found guilty of having led a failed scheme to prevent Lula from taking office and retain power after losing 2022 presidential elections.

In elections in October, Flávio Bolsonaro is expected to be the main rival of Lula, 80, who is seeking a fourth term.

According to polling data released yesterday by the firm Genial/Quaest, Bolsonaro would currently edge Lula in a head-to-head election.

He has campaigned as a more moderate figure than his father, whose time in office was marked by rampant deforestation of the Amazon forest and COVID-19 denialism, among other controversies. – AFP

## Left-wing candidate Sánchez climbs to 2<sup>nd</sup> place in Peru vote count

LIMA – Left-wing candidate Roberto Sánchez climbed to second place in Peru's presidential election yesterday, positioning himself to face conservative Keiko Fujimori in a June runoff, while his nearest challenger threatened protests over alleged voter fraud.

With more than 90 percent of ballots tallied, the daughter of divisive former President Alberto Fujimori has garnered nearly 17 percent of the vote, followed by Sánchez with 12 percent. Ultraconservative Rafael López Aliaga was third with 11.9 percent.

Sunday's election ran into Monday in parts of the capital Lima because of delays in the delivery of ballots and other materials.

Sánchez had been steadily gaining ground in the vote count since Tuesday. His late rise appeared to be driven by strong support in Andean regions, where votes have taken longer to be processed.

"We are proceeding calmly, with composure, we are confident in the support of our people...The ballot papers do not lie," Sánchez said.

López Aliaga, meanwhile, alleged voter fraud and threatened major protests if the results are not annulled.

"I am giving them 24 hours to declare this electoral fraud null and void," López Aliaga, a fan of US President Donald Trump, said on Tuesday, surrounded by hundreds of supporters. "If it is not declared null and void tomorrow, I will call for a nationwide protest."

### Eight presidents in a decade

A record 35 candidates ran for president of the chronically



Peru's presidential candidate for the "Juntos por el Perú" ("Together for Peru") leftist party, Roberto Sánchez, gestures as he speaks during an interview with AFP at his campaign office in Lima on Tuesday.

unstable Andean nation, which has had eight presidents in the past 10 years, including four who were impeached.

The campaign was dominated by promises to tackle a surge in extortion and contract killings, and disillusionment with a political class widely seen as ineffectual and corrupt.

With no candidate winning the 50 percent of votes needed for outright victory, a second round of voting is planned in June.

Tens of thousands of people were unable to cast a ballot on Sunday because election materials arrived late or not at all.

Several polling stations reopened on Monday to allow voters to have their say.

Political scientist Eduardo Dargent told AFP the logistics mess had "given arguments...to several people who will cry fraud or worse if they are not happy with the result."

López Aliaga, a Christian nationalist widely known as

"Porky" over his self-professed resemblance to cartoon character Porky Pig, campaigned as a hardliner on crime and migration.

He suggested building penal colonies in the Amazon rainforest, surrounded by a "natural fence" of vipers.

### Sowing doubt

Some voters told AFP the electoral chaos undermined their faith in the democratic process.

"We don't know if the results are true," said Yeraldine Garrido, a 35-year-old receptionist in Lima.

"It's been a major democratic failure," said 60-year-old Luis Gómez, who is self-employed.

Police have detained one election official and raided a private contractor blamed for failing to deliver election materials on time.

The head of the European Union's election observer mission, Annalisa Corrado, said her team found no evidence of fraud. – AFP

## US names new top diplomat for Venezuela

CARACAS – The United States announced a new top diplomat yesterday for its embassy in Caracas, which was reopened in March after a US military operation ousted longtime Venezuelan strongman Nicolás Maduro.

Temporary mission head Laura Dogu said on X that she was being replaced by John Barrett, a career diplomat who has been heading the embassy in Guatemala since January.

"I am pleased to announce that John Barrett will soon arrive in Venezuela to assume the functions of chargé d'affaires," Dogu wrote in a Spanish-language statement posted on the Caracas embassy's X account.

With no formal ambassador

named to Venezuela, Barrett, like Dogu, will run the mission under the title of chargé d'affaires.

Diplomatic relations between Venezuela and the United States were broken in 2019 and restored on March 5 in the aftermath of the US military assault to arrest Maduro.

Maduro was toppled from power on January 3 and moved to the United States to face trial on drugs trafficking and weapons charges.

Venezuela is currently led by interim president Delcy Rodríguez, who is cooperating under heavy US pressure to meet President Donald Trump's demands for access to the country's oil.

Longstanding US economic sanctions on Venezuela are gradually being relaxed. – AFP

## US eases sanctions on Venezuela central bank

WASHINGTON, DC – The United States on Tuesday eased sanctions against Venezuela's central bank in the Trump administration's latest move to build ties with the oil-rich Latin American giant after toppling its longtime leader.

The Treasury Department issued a licence authorising commercial links with the central bank and other institutions including Banco Universal, Banco Digital de los Trabajadores and Banco del Tesoro.

The move will allow the Venezuelan banks to engage in previously restricted financial transactions such as wire transfers, credit and debit card services and other activities.

The move comes two weeks after the United States lifted sanctions against Venezuela's

interim President Delcy Rodríguez, who took power after Washington ousted her predecessor Nicolás Maduro in a military operation in January.

Ties between Washington and Caracas have warmed since Maduro's ouster, with Rodríguez complying with US President Donald Trump's demands for Caracas to open up its energy industry to American companies.

The United States has eased a seven-year-old oil embargo on Venezuela and issued licenses allowing a handful of multinationals to operate in the country under certain conditions.

The US embassy in Venezuela also resumed operations last month after being closed for seven years.

– AFP

## Atletico 'ready' for Champions League success at last: Simeone

MADRID – Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone said that his team was ready to finally win the Champions League after knocking out Barcelona on Tuesday to reach the semi-finals.

The Rojiblancos fell to a 2-1 quarter-final second leg defeat at home but that was enough to progress 3-2 on aggregate after their 2-0 win at Camp Nou last week.

Atletico, who have never won the competition, will face Arsenal or Sporting Lisbon in the semi-finals.

"We'll go into it with all our hope, with total belief. We know the strengths we have and our flaws," said Simeone.

"We're ready. We're going to go after what we've been chasing for many years."

Simeone led Atletico to the Champions League final in 2014 and 2016, with both ending in painful defeats by cross-town rivals Real Madrid. The last time the Rojiblancos made the semi-finals was 2017.

"It's been fourteen years now (at the helm), it still excites me to see that the team keeps competing," said the Argentine coach.

"The players have changed, we've had to start over a bunch of times, and here we are again among the four best teams in Europe."

Veteran Atletico forward Antoine Griezmann said that his team always believed they could find a way back after Barca's two early goals.

Lamine Yamal and Ferran Torres fired the five-time winners ahead on Tuesday but Ademola Lookman pulled one back for Atletico and it proved decisive.

"With our fans and the quality that we have, we could get (our) goal," Griezmann told reporters.

"We weren't comfortable with the ball, we weren't calm enough to play but we got to the semi-finals."

He added: "It was a beautiful tie and a difficult one, against a team that plays very well. It was really tough, but we got through."

Barcelona coach Hansi Flick said that he believes his eliminated team deserved to progress to the semi-finals but had to learn from their defeat.

"We played a fantastic first half, (but) we have to score more goals. It was really possible, (but) we conceded the goal we didn't expect at this moment," Flick told reporters.

"When you see both matches, we deserved to get to the semi-final. The mentality, the attitude they showed on the pitch - I'm really proud about that."

Flick said that although he was happy with his players, being knocked out was disappointing and something they had to learn from.

Barcelona finished both games with 10 men, with young defender Pau Cubarsi sent off at Camp Nou and Eric Garcia dismissed on Tuesday in the Spanish capital.

"We have to learn (from) these things, what we have to do, but we have a young team and I think we will improve next season," said the German coach.

"Every day we have to learn more, we have to be better and this is what we have to do," he continued.

"It's very disappointing for everyone and I am also disappointed. It's football, it's life, and we have to come back." – AFP

## Dembele hails PSG's ability to 'suffer' in win over Liverpool



Paris Saint-Germain's Brazilian defender Marquinhos (right) and Paris Saint-Germain's Russian goalkeeper Matvey Safonov (centre) celebrate making a combined save and block during the UEFA Champions League quarter-final, second-leg against Liverpool at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England on Tuesday. – AFP

LIVERPOOL – Double goal hero Ousmane Dembele hailed his Paris Saint-Germain teammates for holding on under pressure and in difficult conditions to beat Liverpool 2-0 at Anfield on Tuesday in the second leg of their Champions League quarter-final and reach the last four with a 4-0 aggregate triumph.

"It is the quarter-finals of the Champions League, in a stadium like this, and even though we won 2-0 in the first leg we knew it was going to be difficult," Dembele told broadcaster Canal Plus.

"In any case there are no easy matches in the Champions League. You have to suffer if you are going to go all the way in this competition."

Reigning champions PSG had a 2-0 advantage from last week's first leg and had to withstand long spells of pressure in the second half in particular, with Liverpool having a total of 21 attempts on goal on a wet and windy night.

Dembele opened the scoring in the 72<sup>nd</sup> minute before wrapping up PSG's win on the night, and passage to the semis, in stoppage time.

They will play either Real Madrid or Bayern Munich in the last four, with a first leg in Paris on April 28 and the second leg a week later.

"We had chances in the first half. I thought we controlled the game in the first half but it was more complicated in the second half, albeit that's normal because this is the Champions League," said last year's Ballon d'Or winner Dembele.

"There are only good teams in this competition but we have come away from this tie with two wins so that's great."

**3<sup>rd</sup> year running in semis**  
Dembele missed much of the first half of the season due to injury but his double against Liverpool leaves him on 16 goals for the campaign in all competitions, including 12 in 2026.

"I want to help the team in every match, whether that be by scoring a goal, setting up a goal or just pressing the goalkeeper," added the 28-year-old France forward.

"I try to give my maximum for Paris Saint-Germain and I hope to have a very, very good end to the season because there are big games to come."

PSG have now reached the Champions League semi-finals three years in a row since Luis Enrique became coach in 2023, having got that far just three times in their history before his arrival.

"Today I am very proud because especially in the first half we controlled the match, playing the game in the opposition half which is very difficult to do in a stadium like this and in this atmosphere," said the Spaniard.

"We did have to suffer in the second half as we knew we would, but we did what we had to do without the ball."  
"We knew that sooner rather than later we would have chances on the break and we would score. I think over the two games we deserve to be through."

Meanwhile, Luis Enrique said he was not yet aware of the extent of the injuries suffered by left-back Nuno Mendes and forward Desire Doue, both of whom had to come off.  
"I am not a doctor, but it is normal in a game of this intensity to have some problems. We will wait until tomorrow [yesterday] to see exactly what they have." – AFP

## Football shorts

### Asian Cup draw set for May 9 in Saudi

KUALA LUMPUR – The draw for the 2027 Asian Cup will be held in Saudi Arabia next month, Asian football officials said yesterday, after being postponed when the Middle East war broke out.

The draw was supposed to take place on April 11 in Riyadh, but the event was moved "to ensure the full participation of all key stakeholders and participating member associations", the Asian Football Confederation said.

It will now be held on May 9 at the historic At-Turaif District in ad-Dir'iyah, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Kuala Lumpur-based federation said.

The 19<sup>th</sup> edition of the Asian Cup is scheduled to take place from January 7 to February 5 next year, and 23 out of 24 participating nations have been confirmed.

The final berth is to be decided with a Group B tie between Lebanon and Yemen rescheduled to June 4, the AFC said.

Riyadh, Jeddah and Al Khobar are the host cities.

The 24 teams will be divided into six groups of four.

– AFP

### Hamano strikes as Japan end US winning streak

LOS ANGELES – Tottenham forward Maika Hamano scored the only goal as Japan ended the United States' 10-game unbeaten streak with a 1-0 victory in a friendly in Seattle on Tuesday.

Hamano's 27<sup>th</sup> minute curling strike into the top corner proved decisive in the second of three games between the two women's football powerhouses.

The United States dominated possession and had more shots but were let down by a lack of precision in front of goal before 36,128 fans at a rainswept Lumen Field in Seattle.

United States coach Emma Hayes rang the changes from the starting line-up which defeated the Japanese 2-1 in San Jose on Saturday, naming an entirely new starting eleven.

Asian champions Japan also made nine changes from the team beaten in San Jose, and started brightly, carving out a string of early openings before Hamano's goal.

The 21-year-old forward, who is on loan at Spurs from Chelsea, cut inside left back Lilly Reale before shooting into the roof of the net past goalkeeper Phallon Tullis-Joyce.

The third and final game in the series takes place in Colorado tomorrow.

– AFP

## England beat Spain in Women's World Cup qualifier

LONDON – Lauren Hemp fired England to a 1-0 win over Spain on Tuesday as the Lionesses moved closer to qualifying for the Women's World Cup.

Hemp's goal early in the first half at Wembley sealed England's third successive victory, moving them above holders Spain to the top of group A3.

It was the first time the teams had faced each other since the Lionesses' penalty shoot-out victory in last year's European Championship final.

Only the winners from each of the League A groups will earn direct passage to next year's tournament in Brazil.

Keira Walsh, who wore the captain's armband in place of the unavailable Leah Williamson, celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> England cap, and Euro 2022-winning goalkeeper Mary Earps was honoured in an

international retirement ceremony.

England took just three minutes to go in front as Alessia Russo scooped the ball into the path of Hemp, who hooked it past Cata Coll before Alexia Putellas could clear off the line.

Spain threatened an equaliser when Irene Paredes nodded just over. Hemp was inches away from doubling England's lead in the 19<sup>th</sup> minute, clipping the post after she was set up stylishly by Lucy Bronze's backheel pass.

Hannah Hampton preserved England's lead at the halfway point when she denied Patricia Guijarro at the near post.

England escaped early in the second half when Olga Carmona's effort took a deflection and cannoned off the crossbar.

Salma Paralluelo forced a good save from Hampton as Spain poured forward.

And the inspired Hampton had

the last word as she turned Edna Imade's header past her post in the final minutes.

In other matches, Ada Hegerberg scored twice as Norway thrashed Slovenia 5-0 in Group A4, while Germany remained unbeaten in the same pool with a convincing 5-1 victory over neighbours Austria.

Group A2 action saw France cede leaders' spot to the Netherlands after going down 2-1 to the Dutch, for whom Renee van Asten and Esmee Brugts scored either side of one from Sandy Baltimore.

Ireland recorded a 3-2 away win over Poland in the same pool thanks to goals from Emily Murphy, Katie McCabe and Marissa Sheva.

Denmark took control of Group A1 with a last-gasp 2-1 victory over Sweden as Janni Thomsen scored the winner in injury time. Italy pummeled Serbia 6-0 to draw level with the Swedes in second spot. – AFP

# Doubles champion Jamie Murray retires from tennis

## Tennis

LONDON – Jamie Murray, who became the first British doubles player to be ranked world number one, announced his retirement from tennis yesterday at the age of 40.

The seven-time Grand Slam champion, who had not played since last August's US Open, said he was "excited to enter the real world".

"My tennis journey comes to an end after 36 years," Murray, the older brother of British singles tennis great Andy, posted on Instagram.

"I feel very fortunate and privileged for all the amazing experiences this great sport has given me."

"Thanks Mum, Dad, Andy, Ale, Alan, Louis and Thomas for all your incredible support, efforts and sacrifices throughout my career that allowed me to achieve everything I could in the game," the Scot added.

"For everybody else that's helped and supported me – I appreciate all of you!"

Murray won two of his 34 doubles titles with Andy, and they joined forces in style as Britain won the Davis Cup in 2015 for the first time in 79 years.



Britain's Jamie Murray (left) and Switzerland's Martina Hingis hold their winner's trophies after beating Finland's Henri Kontinen and Britian's Heather Watson during their mixed doubles final match on the last day of the 2017 Wimbledon Championships at The All England Lawn Tennis Club in Wimbledon, southwest London, on July 16, 2017.

– AFP

Andy Murray, a three-time major singles champion, was in his brother's coaching box to take photos of Jamie's first Grand Slam men's doubles title at the 2016 Australian Open.

It was in the early hours of the morning and Andy was due to play Novak Djokovic in the singles final in Melbourne just 18 hours later.

"Shouldn't you be in bed?" Jamie joked, as he accepted the trophy

alongside Brazil's Bruno Soares.

The duo added the US Open title later that year and finished 2016 as the world's number one-ranked doubles team, with Andy Murray also topping the singles rankings.

Jamie Murray also won five mixed doubles titles, including two at Wimbledon - with Jelena Jankovic in 2007 and Martina Hingis 10 years later.

– AFP

# Double Olympic badminton champion Axelsen announces retirement

## Badminton

COPENHAGEN – Denmark's double Olympic badminton champion Viktor Axelsen announced his retirement at 32 yesterday, saying back problems meant he could no longer "compete and train at the highest level".

Axelsen, who won gold at the Tokyo Games in 2021 and again in Paris in 2024, had back surgery in April last year and said he had not managed to overcome his physical issues.

"Accepting this situation has been incredibly difficult," he said in a statement.

"But I have now reached a point where my body won't allow me to continue."

Axelsen retires as one of the most decorated players in history, having also won two world titles

and a bronze medal at the 2016 Rio Olympics.

He spent more than 100 consecutive weeks at the top of the men's singles world rankings, an achievement surpassed only by Malaysian great Lee Chong-wei.

Standing 194cm and making full use of his giant wingspan, Axelsen redefined what a player could do on the court.

He said he had "accomplished everything I once dreamed of, and more".

"What makes it hardest to say goodbye is not the competition itself, but everything around it, the journey, the daily grind, the people," he said.

Axelsen speaks Mandarin and is a popular figure in China.

He regularly posts about his professional and family life on online Chinese platforms.

News of his retirement sparked a wave of reaction in the country, and was among the most discussed on the social media platform Weibo yesterday afternoon.

"A true legend of badminton bids farewell," wrote one user.

"He was not only a king on the court, but also won countless hearts with his humble and friendly attitude."

Axelsen won Olympic gold at the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Games in 2021 without dropping a single game all tournament.

He beat China's Chen Long in the final, becoming the first non-Asian to claim the title since 1996.

He sobbed in disbelief after Chen hit his final shot long, then regained his composure to take a courtside phone call from Denmark's Crown Prince Frederik.

He followed that up by defending his title at the Paris Games, emulating his hero Lin Dan by winning back-to-back Olympic golds.

He then began to struggle with injuries and spent prolonged periods off the court.

"I have given everything to this sport," he said.

"It has never been just a career to me. It has been my life and I have left no stone unturned."

Axelsen retires as only the second non-Asian player after countryman Thomas Lund to win the world title twice, which he achieved in 2017 and 2022.

He won the season-ending BWF World Tour Finals three times in a row from 2021 to 2023.

– AFP

# Verstappen understands 'bigger picture' in power unit debate: F1 boss Domenicali

## F1

PARIS – Formula 1 boss Stefano Domenicali yesterday called on drivers, including the outspoken Max Verstappen, to "be respectful" of the sport but said changes to this year's new power unit regulations needed to be made.

The Dutch four-time world champion has been the most vocal of the drivers criticising the new regulations concerning the hybrid engines, whose electric power management has posed problems for the drivers in the opening three races of the season.

Verstappen called the new style of racing "a joke" after the Chinese Grand Prix and has hinted he will take a break from F1 in 2027 if it remains the same.

"We have spoken many, many times since the beginning," Domenicali told Autosport.

"I understand his (Verstappen's) comments and he understands the bigger picture. I don't want to fall in to the trap of trying to create antagonism because that's not me.

"We're going to be together. He is the best driver, he is a multiple world champion and of course his voice has to be listened to.

"But he knows that his voice has a weight. And he needs to respect that weight (as) sometimes some people can take it the wrong way and this is something we shouldn't allow to happen."

He also urged all the drivers to "protect the jewel" of motorsport.

"What I said to them is: 'Listen, guys, don't forget that what we are doing is because we did the right things together. So be respectful of a sport that gave to all of us an incredible opportunity to grow, to make a lot of money, to develop a personality in the world that other sports cannot give'.

"I think that has been acknowledged.

"We mustn't forget this is the jewel of our sport and we need to protect that jewel."

## 'Full power'

Domenicali also said talks between the FIA, the teams and the drivers to find a solution to the current problems were "moving in the right direction".

"There are meetings this week and next week before the Miami Grand Prix to see what can be done to improve or adjust the situation."

The FIA is expected to announce changes next week which Domenicali hopes will "allow drivers to be as much as possible at full power or full braking" and during races, where there have been safety concerns.

The new hybrid engines, 50 percent internal combustion and 50 percent electric, were brought in to encourage overtaking and make races more exciting for the hundreds of millions of viewers around the world.

"The outcome is magnificent... There's a lot of action, and that's what people want to see," said Domenicali.

But an accident at Suzuka last month, involving Haas driver Oliver Bearman, who crashed at 300 km/h into the Alpine of Franco Colapinto, running 50 km/h slower, has revived paddock criticism over the large speed differences between cars and the complex management of electric energy.

"The regulations obviously need to be improved," said Domenicali.

The season was interrupted after three races because of the war in Iran and Lebanon which led to the double cancellation this month of the Bahrain and Saudi Arabian Grands Prix.

The season resumes in Miami on May 3.

– AFP

# England's Stokes 'quite lucky' to be alive after facial injury

## Cricket

LONDON – England Test captain Ben Stokes has said he feels "quite lucky" to be alive after being hit in the face by a cricket ball.

All-rounder Stokes suffered a broken cheekbone after being hit by the ball during a net session while he was coaching academy players at his county side Durham in February.

Stokes underwent surgery and is set to play in two first-class County Championship games next month, but he revealed the incident could have been so much worse.

"I copped one straight in the face," the 34-year-old told the England and Wales Cricket Board.

"Pretty nasty but, funnily, probably the best result of a bad situation, to be honest. Just a couple of inches one way or the other, I might not be here doing this interview, if I didn't turn my head round.

"All things considered, although I had pretty major facial surgery to sort it out, it was a bit of a mess under here (cheekbone), I've got out quite lucky. So pretty thankful for that."

He added: "Obviously it set everything back about a month, five weeks, with getting back to where I wanted to be to play at the start of the season for Durham, but just had to sort of quickly go back to the drawing board and put a plan together to get me ready to play a couple of games for Durham before the Test summer starts.

"At the back end of all that now but it was a pretty scary situation. Thankfully still here and everything's all right."

Stokes is expected to be fit to lead England in the first Test of their home season against New Zealand at Lord's starting on June 4 as they look to recover from their woeful 4-1 Ashes humiliation in Australia.

– AFP



Viktor Axelsen of Denmark competes during the men's singles round of 16 match against Alex Lanier of France at the China Masters 2025 in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, on September 18, 2025.

– Xinhua

## Australia police probe Katy Perry over sexual assault allegations

SYDNEY – US pop star Katy Perry is under investigation in Australia over allegations of sexual assault made by actor Ruby Rose, police and media said Wednesday.

Rose alleged in a series of widely reported but now-deleted posts on social media that the singer had assaulted her in a nightclub in Melbourne almost two decades ago.

On Tuesday, Rose – best known for her role in TV sitcom “Orange is the New Black” – said she had finalised reports to police and could therefore no longer talk publicly about the case.

In a statement to AFP, Victoria state police declined to name Perry but said they were “investigating a historical sexual assault that occurred in Melbourne in 2010”.

“As the investigation remains

ongoing, it would be inappropriate to comment further at this stage,” a spokesperson added.

A representative for Perry denied the claims in a statement to entertainment industry magazine *Variety*.

“The allegations being circulated on social media by Ruby Rose about Katy Perry are not only categorically false, they are dangerous reckless lies,” they said.

“Ms. Rose has a well-documented history of making serious public allegations on social media against various individuals, claims that have repeatedly been denied by those named.”

Perry – singer of mega hits like “Hot n Cold,” “Roar” and “I Kissed a Girl” – has drawn headlines recently for her relationship with former Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau. –AFP



French-US actor Timothee Chalamet (left) and US actress Zendaya promote the upcoming US film “Dune: Part Three” during the Warner Bros presentation at CinemaCon at The Colosseum at Caesars Palace on Tuesday in Las Vegas. “Dune: Part Three” is an epic space opera film, based on the 1969 novel “Dune Messiah” by Frank Herbert. It is the sequel to *Dune: Part Two* (2024) and the third and final film in Legendary Pictures’ *Dune* trilogy. The film stars Timothée Chalamet and Zendaya. The film is scheduled to be released in the United States and Canada on December 18, 2026. Space opera is a subgenre of science fiction and science fantasy that emphasises epic outer space adventures set in a universe in which faster-than-light travel has become common. The plots often play out against a backdrop of space warfare, alien civilisations and galactic empires. The term “space opera” does not refer to opera music, but instead originally referred to the melodrama, scope, and formulaic stories of operas, such as used in “soap opera”. –AFP

## Tom Cruise shares sneak peek of Iñárritu comedy ‘Digger’ at CinemaCon

LAS VEGAS – Hollywood superstar Tom Cruise and Mexican filmmaker Alejandro González Iñárritu thrilled CinemaCon attendees on Tuesday with a sneak peek of their comedy “Digger,” one of the releases highlighted by Warner Bros. at the Las Vegas industry convention.

The four-time Oscar nominee was unrecognisable in the clip, seen with an older, more eccentric look while cradling a white cat in a mansion filled with taxidermied animals.

“The movie is wild, it’s funny,” said Cruise, who received a standing ovation from the packed room.

Iñárritu said the role “could possibly be the most challenging” for Cruise.

“We know that he’s fearless, the stunts, the planes, the jumps, but I have to say embodying this character, this is another kind of fearless,” he said.

Warner Bros. gave a splashy presentation on the second day of CinemaCon, riding high on the recent successes of “Sinners,” “Weapons” and Oscar best picture winner “One Battle After Another.”

But the event did not address rival Paramount Skydance’s mega-bid for the legacy studio, which has sent ripples of concern through an industry wary of consolidation and fearful for the future.

Pins bearing the slogan “#BlockTheMerger” were spotted being distributed throughout Caesars Palace, where the cinema trade show is taking place.

An open letter opposing the merger was co-signed by hundreds of Hollywood stars and filmmakers, including Denis Villeneuve and J. J. Abrams – both of whom showcased upcoming releases during the Warner Bros. event.

Pam Abdy and Mike De Luca, co-chairs and CEOs of Warner Bros. Motion Pictures Group, recapped achievements from the past year and emphasised the uptick in film productions from six in 2022, when they took over, to 11 last year.

“That is what committing to originality can get you,” Abdy said.



US actor Tom Cruise (left) and Mexican filmmaker Alejandro González Iñárritu promote the upcoming film “Digger” during the Warner Bros photocall at the Colosseum at Caesar’s Palace in Las Vegas, Nevada, on Tuesday. –AFP

De Luca promised 14 releases this year, adding that the studio is aiming for 18 in 2027.

The presentation included footage from “Dune: Part Three,” introduced by director Villeneuve alongside stars Timothee Chalamet, Zendaya and Jason Momoa.

Other previews included “Practical Magic 2,” starring Nicole Kidman and Sandra Bullock, “The Great Beyond” from director Abrams, as well as “Supergirl” directed by Craig Gillespie.

### Godzilla in New York

Earlier in the day, Japan’s most famous monster thundered into CinemaCon as cinema-owners got their first look at “Godzilla Minus Zero,” which sees the creature rampage through New York.

Directed by Takashi Yamazaki, the offering from Japan’s Toho studio is a sequel to 2023’s “Godzilla Minus One”, which became an international sensation with a box office haul of US\$116 million as it bagged an Oscar for visual effects.

Yamazaki told cinema-owners that “the immense scale and terror of Godzilla, as well as the human struggle to survive... [is] going to push your screens and your audiences to their limits.”

The film – which hits US cinemas on November 6 and stars Ryunosuke Kamiki and Minami Hamabe – is set in 1949, two years after the events of “Minus One,” picking up the story of the Shikishima family as they face an even tougher challenge.

Yamazaki, who also wrote the screenplay, offered a behind-the-scenes look at the production, along with clips featuring scenes of destruction and the arrival of the imposing monster in New York.

On Tuesday, attendees at the annual get-together also got their first look at the slate of upcoming releases from indie distributor Neon.

The company – which handled the Oscar-winning films “Parasite” and “Anora” – announced it would release “Hope” this year, a South Korean sci-fi thriller starring Hwang Jung-min, Zo In-sung, Michael Fassbender, and Alicia Vikander.

It also has “I Love Boosters” in the pipeline – a film by Boots Riley about a gang of clothing thieves that promises to become a fashionista event in cinemas – as well as the thriller “A Place in Hell,” which features Michelle Williams and Daisy Edgar-Jones as rivals at a law firm. –AFP

## Oasis, Phil Collins, Luther Vandross among Rock Hall inductees

LOS ANGELES – Dad rocker Phil Collins and reformed Britpop princes Oasis led the 2026 class of Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees who were announced on live US television on Monday.

Billy Idol, chanteuse Sade, metal legends Iron Maiden and Manchester outfits Joy Division and New Order were also honoured, along with hip hop collective Wu-Tang Clan and velvet-voiced crooner Luther Vandross.

The announcements of the

honourees came in a live episode of the “American Idol” competition, helmed by rockers Pat Benatar and Neil Giraldo.

“Induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame is music’s highest honour,” said the organisation’s chairman John Sykes.

“We look forward to celebrating these remarkable artists at this year’s ceremony – it’s going to be an unforgettable night.”

The induction ceremony – which doubles as a star-studded

concert gala rife with tributes to the honourees – will be held November 14 in Los Angeles.

Eligible nominees into the Rock Hall must have released their first commercial recording at least 25 years prior to being nominated.

Phil Collins, Luther Vandross, and Wu-Tang Clan are first-time nominees. Billy Idol, Iron Maiden, Joy Division, New Order, Oasis, and Sade had all been nominated in the past, but were not selected for induction. –AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 10°C~20°C	Manila 23°C~35°C	New York 20°C~30°C	Lisbon 11°C~23°C
Shanghai 16°C~21°C	Bangkok 27°C~37°C	London 9°C~17°C	Rio de Janeiro 20°C~26°C
Hong Kong 21°C~28°C	Tokyo 7°C~22°C	Frankfurt 9°C~20°C	Luanda 24°C~29°C
Taipei 22°C~30°C	Singapore 25°C~32°C	Vancouver 5°C~11°C	Maputo 20°C~29°C
Guangzhou 20°C~31°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~34°C	Paris 8°C~20°C	Dili 22°C~32°C
Nanjing 14°C~20°C	Jakarta 24°C~33°C	Moscow 4°C~16°C	São Tomé 27°C~33°C
Guilin 18°C~25°C	Seoul 15°C~27°C	Las Vegas 9°C~27°C	Praia 18°C~28°C
Xi’an 11°C~25°C	Sydney 14°C~26°C	Monte Carlo 15°C~21°C	Bissau 21°C~38°C



**African surprise**

This photo taken on Saturday shows alpine plants in Mount Kenya National Park, Meru County, central Kenya. Located close to the Equator in central Kenya, Mount Kenya is the second-highest mountain in Africa as its highest peak, Batian, reaches 5,199 meters. — Xinhua

**Short lived beauty**

This photograph shows wild bluebells, which usually bloom around mid-April turning the forest completely blue, in the Hallerbos, also known as the "Blue Forest", near the Belgian city of Halle on Tuesday. — AFP



**Tiny tot**

In this handout photo released on Tuesday by Madrid Zoo Aquarium, Surya, a female Bornean orangutan (*Pongo pygmaeus*), cradles her newborn shortly after his birth on April 2 at the Madrid Zoo Aquarium, in Madrid. A critically endangered Borneo orangutan has been born at Madrid's zoo, described by keepers as strong and developing normally. After an eight-and-a-half-month pregnancy, mother Surya gave birth to the male orangutan weighing about 1.5 kilos on April 2, the Madrid Zoo Aquarium said in a statement. — AFP

**What's your favourite?**

This picture taken in Turin, northwestern Italy, shows Ferrero Rocher and Raffaello chocolates from Italian company Ferrero yesterday. — AFP



**Pegasus – guardian of gold**

A music box is pictured at the 6th China International Consumer Products Expo (CICPE) in Haikou, Hainan Province, yesterday. — Xinhua

**Red faced**

A man is smeared with vermillion powder during a celebration of the Sindoor Jatra festival in Bhaktapur, Nepal, yesterday. The festival is celebrated to welcome the Nepalese New Year and the beginning of spring in Nepal. — Xinhua