



Anton Tai quits as secretary for economy and finance ‘for personal reasons’

Tony Wong

The State Council decided yesterday, upon the proposal of Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai, to remove Anton Tai Kin Ip from the position of the MSAR’s secretary for economy and finance after he had submitted his resignation to Sam “for personal reasons”.

In a statement yesterday, Sam said that his government was working on the nomination of a new secretary for economy and finance, and would submit the nomination to the Central People’s Government in due course for appointment.

Sam also praised Tai for his contributions to making new progress in the local government’s work in the economic and financial portfolio since Sam’s administration took office on December 20, 2024.

The State Council is synonymous with the Central People’s Government.

Tai’s resignation took effect yesterday. It has been less than 16 months since he took office as the MSAR’s secretary for economy and finance on December 20, 2024.

Before his then appointment to the secretary for economy and finance, Tai was the director of



This file photo shows Macau’s then secretary for economy and finance Anton Tai Kin Ip addressing the opening ceremony of the 14th Macao International Travel (Industry) Expo at Cotai Expo on Friday last week. – Photo: GCS

the Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED).

The Central People’s Government shall appoint or remove the MSAR’s chief executive, principal officials and prosecutor-general,

according to Article 15 of the MSAR Basic Law.

According to the MSAR Basic Law’s Article 50, the chief executive “nominates and reports to the Central People’s Government

for the appointment” of the MSAR’s principal officials and prosecutor-general, and recommends to the Central People’s Government their removal.

Xinhua released a dispatch



yesterday morning about the Central People’s Government’s decision to remove Tai from the position of the MSAR’s secretary for economy and finance, according to which the “State Council decided on April 16, 2026 to remove Tai Kin Ip from the position of secretary for economy and finance, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Basic Law of the Macau Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China and upon the recommendation of Macau Special Administrative Region Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai”.

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A fairgoer visits the international health and wellness sub-venue of the sixth China International Consumer Products Expo (CICPE) at Boao Lecheng International Medical Tourism Pilot Zone in Qionghai, Hainan Province, yesterday. More than 340 international brands from over 30 countries and regions participate in the six-day exhibition ending tomorrow, displaying over 1,300 kinds of international innovative pharmaceutical equipment, technologies and special food products. – (More on p.6) – Xinhua

Trump says Israel-Lebanon ceasefire includes Hezbollah

WASHINGTON, DC – US President Donald Trump said a 10-day ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon starting yesterday would include Iran-backed Hezbollah.

“Today they’re going to be having a ceasefire, and that’ll include Hezbollah”, Trump told reporters at the White House yesterday.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in Jerusalem yesterday that Israel would keep 10-kilometre security zone in south Lebanon. (More on pages 7 – 10) – AFP



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China secures solid Q1 growth, offering stability amid rising global volatility

China’s economy grew 5 percent in the first quarter of 2026, outpacing expectations of some foreign institutions and reinforcing the country’s role as a stabilizing force in an increasingly volatile global economy. – Story on p. 5

Bringing US, Iran back to talks is top priority: Wang Yi

Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday that the top priority is to return the United States and Iran to the negotiating table and seek a political solution. – Story on p. 7

Mozambique, China share brotherly friendship: Mozambican president

“Mozambique and China share a brotherly friendship,” Mozambican President Daniel Chapo has told Xinhua. – Story on p. 12

Sam to visit Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, Belgium

Staff Reporter

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai will depart tonight leading a delegation comprising officials from the Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Government and representatives from the business sector on an official visit to Portugal and Spain, the Macau Government Information Bureau (GCS) reconfirmed yesterday.

The MSAR Government delegation will then proceed to Geneva in Switzerland and Brussels in Belgium, before returning to Macau next Sunday, according to the statement.

The statement underlined that the local government hopes that this series of visits will further strengthen exchanges and cooperation with Portugal, Spain, the European Union (EU) as a whole, the Geneva-based World Trade Organisation (WTO), and other international organisations across multiple fields.

The 27-member EU is headquartered in the Belgian capital Brussels.

Portugal will be the first overseas destination to be visited by

officials of the current-term MSAR Government, the statement pointed out. In Lisbon, Sam will meet with leading officials of Portugal's executive, legislative and judicial branches, with the aim of deepening the already solid foundation of Macau-Portugal collaboration.

While in Lisbon, the MSAR Government will host a series of events, including a showcase highlighting Macau's successful practice of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle; business promotion forums; and cultural exchange activities, the statement noted, adding that Sam will also meet with Macau students studying in Portugal.

In the Spanish capital Madrid, Sam will meet with Spanish officials to strengthen bilateral ties and expand Macau's role as a platform for cooperation with Spanish-speaking countries, the statement said.

In Madrid, the MSAR Government will hold tourism promotion events and economic cooperation forums to broaden the source markets for visitors to

Macau, and facilitate business-matching activities between the two sides, the statement said, adding that Sam is also scheduled to meet with the Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organisation, a United Nations agency also known as UN Tourism. The 160-member organisation is headed by Shaikha Al Nowais of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

For the first time for such overseas visits, the MSAR Government has brought together representatives from major Chinese-mainland enterprises to travel alongside businesspeople from Macau and from the Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, the statement pointed out. This "joint trip" model aims to explore overseas markets together, and further enhance Macau's role as a "precision connector" between China and Portuguese-speaking and Spanish-speaking countries, the statement said.

Next Thursday, the MSAR Government delegation will travel to Geneva in Switzerland, to deepen engagement with international organisations including the WTO. Next Friday, the delegation will



Cars drive past Belém Palace in Lisbon on January 26, 2017, the official residence of the Portuguese president. MSAR Chief Executive is slated to meet President António José Seguro at the palace on the outskirts of Lisbon during his official four-nation tour of Europe. - Photo courtesy of Dguendel/Wikipedia

visit Brussels, where Sam will meet with senior Belgian and EU officials to discuss ways to strengthen cooperation.

Members of the MSAR Government delegation include Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture Wallis O Lam (who will travel only to Portugal), the Chief-

of-Office of the Chief Executive's Office, Chan Kak, as well as several bureau-level officials, the statement noted.

During Sam's absence from Macau, Secretary for Administration and Justice Wong Sio Chak will assume the duties of acting chief executive. ■

Anton Tai quits as secretary for economy and finance 'for personal reasons'

Continued from p.1

Shortly after the release of the Xinhua dispatch, Tai issued a statement confirming his resignation from the position of the MSAR's secretary for economy and finance "for personal reasons".

In his statement, Tai said that he formally requested to resign from the position of the MSAR's secretary for economy and finance from Sam "some time ago" for personal reasons.

In the statement, which was released by the Secretariat for Economy and Finance, Tai expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the Central People's Government and Sam for the trust and support they provided during his tenure as the MSAR's secretary for economy and finance.

Tai also expressed his thanks to all public servants working in the economic and financial portfolio for their efforts and cooperation, according to the statement.

In his statement, Tai also said that he will continue to care for, cooperate with, and support the MSAR's chief executive and government in exercising law-based governance, as well as the development of various undertakings in the MSAR.

Shortly after yesterday morning's release of Tai's statement, the MSAR government also issued a statement on the matter, which also said that Tai tendered his resignation to Sam "some time ago" for personal reasons. Consequently, the statement said, Sam submitted to

the Central People's Government his proposal for the removal of Tai from the position of secretary for economy and finance, in accordance with the MSAR Basic Law's Article 50.

In the statement, Sam said that since the inauguration of the current-term MSAR government on December 20, 2024, Tai, as the secretary for economy and finance, had been committed to putting into practice the MSAR government's governance philosophy and work plans, while leading public servants and officials under the economic and financial portfolio in exercising law-based governance, with a sense of responsibility, determination, and efficiency, thereby making contributions to making new progress in the local government's work in the economic and financial portfolio.

Sam, according to the statement, also expressed his sincere gratitude and full recognition for the efforts and contributions made by Tai to Macau's development.

Sam also said in the statement that the MSAR government is currently processing the nomination of a new secretary for economy and finance, and will submit the nomination to the Central People's Government in due course for appointment.

The statement also said that until the new secretary for economy and finance takes office, all functions and powers inherent to the position will be exercised by the chief executive, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the

MSAR Basic Law.

Yesterday's announcements of the removal of Tai from the position of secretary for economy and finance came on the eve of Sam's scheduled departure tonight for his working visit to Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, and Belgium.

Sam is leading a delegation comprising local officials and representatives from the business sector on his working visit to Portugal and Spain. Afterwards, the government delegation will proceed to Switzerland and Belgium, before returning to Macau next Sunday.

This trip is the current-term MSAR government's first working visit to foreign destinations.

Tai, born in 1968 in Macau, began working for the Economic Services Bureau (DSE), the predecessor of the current Economic and Technological Development Bureau (DSED), in 1995 where he was an acting deputy director between 2000 and 2009, when he was appointed as a deputy director, a position which he held until April 2016 when he became the bureau's director. Tai holds a bachelor's degree in Economics from the Catholic University of Portugal and a master's degree in Government Studies from Macau's Catholic University of Saint Joseph (USJ), formerly known as Macau Inter-University Institute.

Tai's tenure is the shortest of any policy secretary since the establishment of the MSAR in December 1999. ■

主辦單位: 澳門基金會 FUNDACÃO MACAU 協辦單位:

蓮關三宴 市集招商

潮宴

時間 - Time: 2026 18-19, 25-26/04, 01-03/05

地點 - Address: 澳門·大三巴哪咤廟前地

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- Chatbots: DeepSeek, Gemini
- Wire services - AFP, Xinhua

MACAU POST

Macau Weather

MAINLY CLOUDY. A FEW SHOWERS. POSSIBLE THUNDERSTORMS LATER. FORCE 2 TO 4 SOUTHERLY WINDS. RELATIVE HUMIDITY WILL RANGE BETWEEN 75% AND 95%.

24°C~28°C

Source: SMG

Health Bureau to set up 10 info stations to promote mosquito prevention

Armindo Neves

The Health Bureau (SSM) announced at a press conference yesterday that it will set up 10 public information stations to promote mosquito prevention.

The presser was held at the bureau's conference hall in a building adjacent to the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre (CHSCJ).

The main purpose of yesterday's press conference was to introduce the prevention and control of mosquito-borne diseases.

Leong Chon Kit, a doctor of the bureau's Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC), said in a speech during the press conference that due to the increasingly warmer weather and the arrival of the rainy season, the transmission of dengue fever and chikungunya fever has become more active in neighbouring regions, increasing the risk of these diseases reaching Macau.

Dr Leong pointed out that community engagement is central to the prevention and control system. He underlined that the bureau has

strengthened inspections of high-risk locations such as idle plots of land, schools and hotels, adding that it has also set up prevention and control teams to conduct regular inspections of construction sites, Leong said.

According to Leong, at present, larvicide oil is sprayed at least twice a month into more than 39,000 street drains across Macau. The frequency of mosquito control spraying at some notorious sanitation blackspots has already been increased to at least twice a month, and will be further increased to three times per month starting in July, he said.

According to CDC senior official Ma Cheng Man, Macau recorded 35 imported cases of dengue fever and one local case, as well as 38 imported cases and eight local cases of chikungunya fever last year. As of April 15, four imported cases of dengue fever and two imported cases of chikungunya fever have been recorded in 2026, she said.

Ma urged residents to regularly remove stagnant water in and around their homes, including water from flowerpot trays and air conditioner



The Health Bureau's (SSM) public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre (CHSCJ) physician Sam Ip Pio (second from left), Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) doctor leong Chon Kit (second from right), official Kwok Kai Leung (left) and senior official Ma Cheng Man look on during yesterday's press conference at the bureau's conference hall in a building adjacent to the public Conde de São Januário Hospital Centre (CHSCJ).
– Photo: Armindo Neves

drip trays, adding that the bureau will set up ten public information stations about the potential health threat this weekend.

CDC official Kwok Kai Leung also reminded the public that they can install window screens with a mesh size of 20* or higher as a physical barrier against mosquitoes.

Public hospital physician Sam Ip Pio recommended that anyone who develops symptoms such as fever, joint pain, or pain behind the eyes should seek medical attention as soon as possible. ■

* When a screen is rated as 20 mesh, it means there are 20 openings across one inch (2.54 cm)

of the screen. Because mesh is a grid, a 20x20 mesh screen contains 400 openings per square inch (20x20 = 400). Standard window screens are typically 18x16 mesh. While effective against flies, bees, and mosquitoes, they often fail to stop biting midges, gnats, or very small sand flies. – Gemini

FDCT doubles industry-university collaborations Jan-April

Khalel Vallo

The Science and Technology Development Fund (FDCT) facilitated 31 industry-university-research collaborations in the first four months of this year, more than doubling the figure recorded in the same period last year, according to a statement by the public fund yesterday.

The statement said that the increase reflects the growing effectiveness of its efforts to promote collaboration between local enterprises and universities, contributing to the development of an integrated innovation ecosystem in Macau.

From January to April, 31 collaboration projects were established, compared with 13 during the same period in 2025, the statement said, adding that the projects span sectors aligned with the government's "1+4"* strategy for economic diversification, including traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), high technology, modern finance and smart cultural tourism.

In order to support such collaborations, the fund has adopted a "matching services + funding" model, according to the statement. This includes an online industry-university matching platform, combined with offline support services that connect enterprises with suitable academic research teams capable of providing technical solutions.

The statement underlined that the fund has also rolled out the "Funding Scheme for Innovation and Research of Enterprises – Matching Projects", aimed at reducing research and development costs, encouraging greater participation from businesses and promoting the commercialisation of academic research.



This undated handout photo provided by the Science and Technology Development Fund (FDCT) yesterday shows its members paying a fact-finding visit to one of the fund's beneficiaries.

The projects facilitated this year are largely focused on applied research, with examples including the development of a lung-moistening TCM product, a home safety monitoring system for elderly residents living alone, an intelligent financial recommendation system and a smart cultural tourism platform, the statement noted.

According to the statement, officials said the collaborations are closely linked to social development and public well-being, while also supporting industrial upgrading and economic transformation.

Representatives from participating enterprises noted that the matching services have helped enhance research capabilities, accelerate the application of technologies and reduce risks associated with innovation, the statement said.

Moreover, university representatives said the partnerships have enabled research outcomes to be translated into practical solutions,

increasing their real-world impact, the statement noted, adding that five of the projects also involve cooperation with universities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), further strengthening regional innovation ties.

Looking ahead, FDCT said it will continue to expand its support model to foster collaboration, drive technological innovation and support the development of Macau's economy, the statement concluded. ■

*The local government's 1+4 model aims to consolidate and diversify the development of the city's tourism and leisure industry, i.e., the "1" element, while putting special emphasis on promoting the development of four new key industries, i.e., the "+4" elements, namely +1) big health mainly driven by traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), +2) modern finance, +3) high-tech, and +4) MICE and commerce as well as culture and sport. – MPD

Health Bureau receives report of 3 influenza-like clusters involving 19 students

Rui Pastorin

Three influenza-like illness clusters were reported to the Health Bureau (SSM) on Wednesday, altogether involving 19 students.

According to a statement by the bureau that day, the first case involves seven Form 3 students (four males, three females) from Hou Kong Middle School on Estrada de Ferreira do Amaral (亞馬喇馬路); six (four males, 2 females) Primary 1 students from The Affiliated Primary School of Lou Hau High School on Estrada do Repouso (鏡湖馬路); and six (three males, three females) Form 4B students from Lingnan Middle School on Estrada dos Parses (松山白頭馬路).

The statement noted that starting from April 9, patients started showing respiratory symptoms such as fever and cough, with some seeking medical attention. The statement said that among them, one student from the Affiliated Primary School of Lou Hau High School required

hospitalisation and was in stable condition yesterday.

The statement said that the remaining patients have mild symptoms with no reports of severe cases or serious complications. The statement said that upon investigation and rapid respiratory testing, one tested positive for Influenza A and 14 tested positive for Influenza B.

The schools involved have "strengthened infection control measures, including enhanced cleaning, disinfection, and maintaining indoor air circulation, and are strictly enforcing isolation protocols for the ill students", according to the statement.

The statement reminded that the 2025-2026 seasonal influenza vaccine provides protection against current Influenza A and B strains, being "the most effective measure to prevent infection and reduce the risk of severe illness or death". The statement strongly encouraged vaccination among those who have not had their jab since September last year. ■



This photo downloaded from Unsplash last night shows a jab being prepared.

CEM Ambassadors visit, support MASDAW

Rui Pastorin

Power utility CEM said in a statement yesterday that its Ambassadors Team recently visited the Macau Association for Stray Dogs and Animal Welfare (MASDAW), aiming to “bring warmth and support to the animals, while taking practical action to raise public awareness of the welfare of stray animals and promote the concept of ‘adopt, don’t shop’”.

CEM Senior Manager of Regulatory Affairs and Corporate Communications Office Jaclyn Iun and eight CEM Ambassadors toured MASDAW, which has over 150 dogs and 14 cats, to gain “a deeper understanding of its daily operations and challenges”, the statement noted.

Association volunteers instructed ambassadors on how to interact with the dogs, spoke about rescue

stories, and guided dog walks. Moreover, CEM Ambassadors donated specially selected dog food to the association, with the statement noting that this aimed to provide “nutritional support tailored to the health needs of senior dogs”.

Two representatives spoke about their experiences in the statement, with Dorothy Lao from CEM’s Procurement and Logistics Department reflecting on being a dog-walking volunteer, encouraging everyone to volunteer as a dog walker in their spare time as it will benefit both the dog and the volunteer, while Adrian Zhang from CEM’s Regulatory Affairs and Corporate Communications Office, pointed out the hardships faced by animal welfare groups, highlighting the importance of tangible support through means such as adoption or donations.



This photo provided by power utility CEM yesterday shows CEM Ambassadors posing with dogs housed by MASDAW during a dog-walking activity.

MGM, Poly Culture host cultural exchange programme

Rui Pastorin

Integrated resort operator MGM said in a statement on Monday that it held the “POLY MGM MUSEUM Cultural Exchange Programme 2026 – Weaving the Legacy of Silk Roads” with Poly Culture Group on Saturday at MGM MACAU, gathering over 500 attendees and speakers from the Chinese mainland, Macau, Italy, and Portugal.

According to the statement, during the event, POLY MGM MUSEUM signed cooperation agreements with five major cultural institutions across key regions in the Chinese mainland, namely Capital Museum (Beijing), Xinjiang Museum, Gansu Provincial Museum, Shaanxi History Museum, and Guangdong Museum (Guangzhou Lu Xun Museum).

“These Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) establish long term collaboration in exhibitions, academic research, resource sharing, and talent development”, the statement said, while two forums that highlighted mutual learning and cultural innovation were also held at the event and fostered discussions.

Details of the upcoming “Confluence in Glass: East-West Artistry Across Time” exhibition at POLY MGM MUSEUM were also announced, being set to open in the fourth quarter of the year. Presented in conjunction with the National Museum of China and the Zibo* Ceramic and Glass Museum, the statement noted that over 180 works will be showcased to highlight “three millennia of Chinese Zibo glassmaking craftsmanship across three thematic chapters”. Moreover, the ongoing “Silk Roads Beyond Borders Exhibition” also features new highlights.

During the event’s opening, video messages were delivered by Pansy Ho Chiu King, chairperson and executive director of MGM China Holdings Limited, vice chairman of the board committee and museum director, POLY MGM MUSEUM; and Wang Bo, chairman of Poly Culture Group and chairman of board committee, POLY MGM MUSEUM. They respectively



This photo provided by integrated resort operator MGM shows guests and representatives posing during Saturday’s “POLY MGM MUSEUM Cultural Exchange Program 2026—Weaving the Legacy of Silk Roads” held at MGM MACAU.

highlighted the important role of Macau, the museum and its efforts, and the significance and aims of the recently-held event.

Moreover, in her closing remarks, Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) President Deland Leong Wai Man said she hoped that the event’s outcomes can be leveraged to deepen cooperation and exchanges with cultural and museum institutions in the Chinese mainland and worldwide.

*Zibo (淄博) is a major prefecture-level city in central Shandong Province. It is historically famous for its ceramics and glassware production, often referred to as the “Ceramic Capital of Northern China”. – Gemini

Grand Coloane Resort to offer Indian cuisine-themed dinner buffet

Rui Pastorin

“Echoes of India · Taste of Tradition Dinner Buffet” will be hosted by Grand Coloane Resort tomorrow at Café Panorama and its Garden Lawn.

A statement by the hotel operator on Wednesday said that the event is co-organised with the Consulate General of India in Hong Kong & Macau SAR. The buffet is curated by Chef Nathi Singh and features a wide selection of Northern and Southern Indian specialties, along with specialty drinks like mango lassi*, according to the statement, with the dinner buffet starting from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.

There will also be activities and performances, with cultural activities, games and workshops held starting from 4 p.m.

Traditional dance performances by Sri Shakti Academy of Hong Kong and Hari Om Dance Society of Hong Kong, along with live music, will be featured alongside interactive experiences such as henna hand painting (@sarahs_henna_macau), herbal workshops, and classic Indian games, including Snakes and Ladders, and Ludo, as well as additional family-friendly activities.

Meanwhile, prizes will also be on offer, among which are a 1st and 2nd prizes provided by Grand Coloane Resort comprises a complimentary one-night stay in a Deluxe Suite with breakfast for two persons, and a 12-month TEE Membership for one person.

The 3rd prize is a 500 pataca dining voucher, sponsored by Woodlands Macau, while additional prizes are sponsored by Yoga and Sports General Association of Macau, China; Justindia Macau; Indian Spice Macau, and Bombay Palace.

Prices are 398 patacas per adult and 198 patacas per child aged 6 to 12. For enquiries, call 8899 1020.

*A mango lassi is a popular, yogurt-based drink originating from the Indian subcontinent. It is essentially a cross between a smoothie and a chilled yogurt drink, prized for its creamy texture and refreshing taste. – Gemini



This photo provided by Grand Coloane Resort earlier this week shows Chef Nathi Singh holding up spices.

Studio City launches Thai-themed buffet at Spotlight

Khalel Vallo

Integrated resort Studio City Macau has launched a Thailand-themed buffet experience at its Spotlight restaurant in Cotai, offering a wide selection of Southeast Asian dishes as part of its ongoing push to enhance Macau’s culinary appeal, according to a recent statement by Studio City.

The “World on A Plate – The Taste of Thailand Buffet” is running at the integrated resort until May 8, which coincided with



This undated handout photo provided by Studio City Macau last week shows ready-made meals at the Spotlight restaurant’s “The World on A Plate – The Taste of Thailand Buffet” on the integrated resort’s 1st floor in Cotai.

celebrations of the Songkran Festival. The festival, also known as Thai New Year, was celebrated between Monday and Wednesday.

The themed buffet features nearly 100 Thai dishes representing different regions of Thailand, including Chiang Mai night market barbecue, Bangkok Chinatown specialties, and Phuket seafood selections.

Signature items such as boat noodles and traditional Thai desserts are also included, alongside international offerings like fresh oysters, seafood on ice, sashimi and live-cut whole yellowfin tuna.

According to the statement, a highlight of the event is the appearance of Thai guest chef Bansani Nawisamphan, who brings over two decades of culinary experience. He is collaborating with the in-house team until tomorrow to deliver an experience that blends authentic Thai flavours with a focus on balanced and wellness-orientated cuisine, the statement noted.

In addition to dining, guests attending the dinner buffet can take part in a complimentary workshop from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m., where they can learn to prepare mango sticky rice, one of Thailand’s iconic desserts, the statement noted.

The buffet is available daily between 6 p.m. and 10 p.m., priced at 628 patacas per adult and 318 patacas for children aged 6 to 12.

Moreover, Melco Beyond members can enjoy a 10 percent discount or a “buy three, get one free” offer. More information can be found by visiting www.studiocity-macau.com/tc/offers/the-taste-of-thailand-buffet.

China secures solid Q1 growth, offering stability amid rising global volatility

BEIJING – China's economy grew 5 percent in the first quarter of 2026, outpacing expectations of some foreign institutions and reinforcing the country's role as a stabilizing force in an increasingly volatile global economy.

The world's second-largest economy generated 33.4 trillion yuan in output during the period, accelerating by 0.5 percentage points from the fourth quarter of 2025, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed yesterday. The result marks a strong opening to China's 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-2030).

In the first quarter, "the growth of production and supply accelerated, market demand continued to improve, employment was generally stable, market prices picked up moderately, and high-quality development advanced with new and positive momentum," the NBS said in a statement. "The national economy got off to a good start with the development showing greater resilience and vitality."

China's GDP grew 5 percent year on year last year. The country has targeted 2026 growth at 4.5 to 5 percent and will strive for better in practice.

BALANCED IMPROVEMENT

"China's economic performance in the first quarter was remarkable, fully demonstrating the strong resilience of the national economy," said Mao Shengyong, deputy head of the NBS, during a press conference yesterday.

According to Mao, the data reflects a marked improvement across both supply and demand. On the supply side, agricultural production remained favorable, while industrial output grew at a faster pace compared with the fourth quarter last year, with sustained rapid growth in the service sector.

On the demand side, the growth rate of retail sales of consumer goods quickened by 0.7 percentage points compared to the last three months of 2025. Fixed-asset investment swung back to growth, rising 1.7 percent, and foreign trade in goods registered the fastest quarterly growth rate in five years.

Mao emphasized that achieving such a solid start is particularly significant given the high base of the first quarter last year and the increasingly complex and challenging external environment this year.

Over the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025), China saw its economy grow at an average annual rate of 5.4 percent, well above the global average, and accounted for around 30 percent of global growth.

"However, we should be aware that the external environment is becoming more complex and volatile, the imbalance between strong supply and weak demand is still acute, and the foundation for economic growth is yet to be consolidated," Mao said.

Addressing concerns over the external environment, he acknowledged that as a major economy deeply integrated into the global system, China may face certain headwinds. Meanwhile, he emphasized that the impact would be "limited and controllable" as China still enjoys distinctive strengths – a complete

industrial chain, an optimized energy structure, and more robust supporting conditions.

He added that the factors underpinning economic development in the first quarter, especially the core growth drivers, will continue to power relatively rapid expansion.

RESILIENCE FROM WITHIN

While ongoing geopolitical conflicts have sent international energy prices soaring, triggering fuel shortages and disrupting production and life in many nations, China has remained largely unaffected by these shocks, Mao said.

He attributed this stability to China's sustained efforts to develop the new energy sector in a forward-looking manner and diversify its energy mix. Oil accounts for less than 20 percent of China's total energy consumption, limiting the economy's exposure to global price swings.

Economists and industry experts view the Q1 performance as a strong reaffirmation of China as a safe haven amid heightened geopolitical tensions, and of its status as a premier engine of global growth, which has become even more pronounced.

"China is now being redefined as an asset class with a 'safety premium,'" said Song Xuetao, chief economist at Sinolink Securities, underlining the greater resilience of China's energy structure and industrial chains than that of other major manufacturer economies.

"China not only possesses the capacity to withstand shocks but also the agility to convert challenges into opportunities," Song observed. Advances in coal-to-chemicals technology allow domestic substitution of certain petrochemical products, while the mass adoption of new energy vehicles reduces household dependence on fossil fuel.

He said economies maintaining production continuity and boasting energy substitution deserve a higher valuation premium, with Chinese assets standing as the "most representative beneficiaries of this logic."

Ji Mo, chief China economist at DBS Bank, described China's 5 percent GDP growth in the first quarter as a "stellar result" that highlighted the resilience of the Chinese economy.

In an interview with Xinhua, Ji pointed out that this performance goes far beyond a mere seasonal rebound. It serves as strong evidence of China's successful structural transformation during the 14th Five-Year Plan period, reflects the outcomes of earlier reforms, and signals a shift toward high-quality, innovation-driven development.

Against the backdrop of global geopolitical turbulence, she argued that stability has become a tangible "dividend" for China. She identified China's core strengths of robust energy supplies, rich talent pool and advanced manufacturing, which together lead to progresses in technological innovation.

"China now has multiple pillars of growth. Upgrades in consumption, technology and manufacturing have enabled the country to withstand global risks," Ji said.

— Xinhua

Enoki mushroom product from Japan may contain glass shards: IAM

Armando Neves

The Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) issued a warning on Wednesday regarding certain batches of Japanese enoki mushrooms potentially contaminated with glass shards.

An enoki is a long, thin white mushroom commonly used in East Asian cuisine.

According to the statement, the bureau has been informed by the Consumer Affairs Agency of Japan about the problematic product recently and is currently recalling it.

The bureau said that it will continue to monitor and follow up on the incident, urging businesses that stock the product to cease supplying and selling it, urging the public to stop consuming the problematic batches of the product.

The enoki mushroom product involved is branded "情熱価格"; its product name is "☆ありえ値え情熱価格超特大なめ茸" ("Unbelievably Priced / Passion Price — Extra Jumbo Enoki Mushroom"), the statement said, adding that the product, in a jar, weighs 840 grams, its product barcode being 4549777402793.

The expiration date of the batch involved can be viewed through the link: <https://www.gcs.gov.mo/news/detail/zh-hant/N26DOPokUg?keyword=%E9%87%91%E9%87%9D>

The bureau recommended in the statement that consumers who have purchased the

problematic batches – whether through online shopping, purchasing agents, or other channels – to stop consuming them immediately. Businesses that stock these products should also cease their supply and sales without delay, the statement said. ■

*"情熱価格" ("Passionate Price") is the private brand product line of the Japanese discount store chain Don Quijote (aka Donki). — DeepSeek



This handout photo combo provided by the Municipal Affairs Bureau (IAM) on Wednesday shows the problematic product that may contain glass shards.

澳門浸信中學
70週年
校慶紀念音樂會
MBC 70th Anniversary Concert

時間: 2026, 04/21, Tue 20:00

ROWING FORWARD!

FOR THE LOVE OF THE MOTHERLAND

— 黃河志 祖國心 —

男中音 / 李兆康
Baritone / Lei Siu Hong

女高音 / 施欣然
Soprano / See Yan Yin

指揮 / 查偉華
Conductor / Veiga Jardim

演出團隊: 澳門浸信中學管弦樂團
MBC Orchestra

澳門浸信中學合唱團
MBC Choir

廣州番禺星海合唱團
Guangzhou Panyu Xinghai Choir

冼星海作品 Xian Xinghai:

- 第一交響曲《民族解放》, 作品編號五, 第一樂章
Symphony No 1, Op. 5 "Liberation of the Nation" (First contemporary performance)
- 《黃河大合唱》
Yellow River Cantata (Sung in English)

A組

演出地點: 澳門文化中心綜合劇院
Venue: Macau Cultural Centre Grand Auditorium

門票索取地點: 澳門浸信中學、澳門浸信教會 (免費索取, 不設劃位)
Free Admission by Tickets: Macau Baptist College & Macau Baptist Church

節目查詢: 28435601
Information: (853)28435601

主辦: 澳門浸信中學
Macau Baptist College

協辦: 澳門浸信中學校友會
Macau Baptist College Alumni Association

鳴謝: 澳門廣播電視有限公司
Macao Broadcasting Corporation

圖片來源: 魯建俊、葉雨。《黃河大合唱——冼星·奮起·抗爭2》。中國美術報, 2009。

China Focus emerges as global testbed for smart spending

Analysis

HAIKOU – At the technology exhibition zone of the ongoing sixth China International Consumer Products Expo (CICPE), a variety of innovative products featuring cutting-edge AI technologies are on display. These offerings are captivating visitors by providing a tangible vision of future daily life, while also showcasing China's emergence as a global testbed for smart consumption.

This year's standout exhibit is a flying car – once a fixture of science fiction, now a tangible innovation. ARIDGE, a pioneering developer of low-altitude mobility solutions based in south China's Guangdong Province, unveiled the world's first modular flying car at the expo. Dubbed the "Land Aircraft Carrier," the vehicle was showcased during the event, held from April 13 to 18 in Haikou, capital of Hainan Province.

The company seeks to leverage the CICPE platform to transition this flying car from a technological exploration into a product with broader consumer awareness and practical real-world applications.

The "Land Aircraft Carrier" consists of two parts: a sci-fi-looking ground vehicle and an electric vertical takeoff and landing aircraft. According to a staff member at the booth, the aircraft can be folded and stored in the trunk of the ground vehicle, and the two can automatically separate or combine within five minutes.

The ground vehicle combines transport, storage and recharging functions, making it well suited to daily commuting and other uses including off-road driving, low-altitude tourism and emergency rescue.

AI is a key technology that has made this flying car a reality. Its pioneering single-lever control system makes flying as easy as driving, while the intelligent flight control system ensures safety and lowers the learning curve. "With approved airspace and an instructor, anyone can learn to operate it quickly," ARIDGE Vice President Li Rui said.

In March this year, five "Land Aircraft Carriers" rolled off the assembly line on the same day and

completed multi-aircraft test flights at ARIDGE's mass production plant in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong, marking the product's official entry into the commercial production preparation phase. Once operating at full capacity, the plant will be able to produce one aircraft every 30 minutes, according to the company.

With over 7,000 orders already placed for the "Land Aircraft Carrier," Li is confident about the future of the low-altitude economy, which has become a national emerging pillar industry. He called for more innovators to enrich the low-altitude travel ecosystem and deliver greater convenience to the public.

AI glasses have been the most popular tech category at this year's CICPE, with leading domestic brands attracting strong interest and visitors crowding their booths to try the products firsthand.

Hangzhou Lingban Technology Ltd. from east China's Zhejiang Province made its first solo appearance at the CICPE with its Rokid AI glasses. Weighing only 49 grams and looking like regular black-framed glasses, the device supports photo and video capture, real-time navigation, translation, and payment. At this edition of the expo, Rokid also debuted a 24/7 captioning feature to assist hearing-impaired users.

The glasses integrate core AI and AR technologies to project digital information into the user's field of view, according to booth staffer Ye Ziling. With access to mainstream large language model services, including Qwen and Doubao, they offer an open smart assistant experience. Ye believes the glasses are quietly changing daily life. Cyclists, for instance, can navigate and take photos hands-free without touching their phones, making rides safer and more convenient.

"We've received significant interest from foreign users," Ye said. Currently, the AI glasses have users in over 100 countries and regions worldwide.

In addition to AI glasses from brands such as Rokid and Chinese AI company iFLYTEK, the first HarmonyOS-powered AI glasses from Huawei, set to be officially unveiled in April, made an early

debut at this year's CICPE.

The buzz at the AI glasses booths echoes the explosive growth of the consumer market last year. According to Omdia, a tech consultancy in London, global smart glasses shipments reached 8.7 million units in 2025, a year-on-year surge of 322 percent. China has become the world's fastest-growing market for AI glasses, with annual shipments approaching 1 million units.

Zhu Mingming, founder and CEO of Hangzhou Lingban Technology Ltd., revealed that Rokid AI glasses secured 300,000 orders in 2025, with shipments nine times the previous year. The user base is also expanding beyond tech circles, as the share of tech professionals fell from 50 percent to around 16 percent.

As a regular of the CICPE, Cai Yiping, head of brand management at Singapore-based massage chair brand OSIM (China), noted a significant rise in AI elements at this year's expo. In health and wellness, AI is driving a shift toward smarter and more personalized consumption.

This year, OSIM, a six-time exhibitor at the expo, launched its annual AI flagship – the uDream AI wellness chair. According to Cai, the chair can capture health data, such as heart rate, respiratory rate, and stress index, through a facial scan in just tens of seconds, enabling a physical health assessment. It then delivers a personalized massage plan tailored to the user, precisely relieving both physical fatigue and mental stress.

"China has long transcended the role of a major sales market. It has become a source of inspiration and a strategic high ground for global innovation," said Deserine Lim, OSIM general manager of HQ Management and East China. "Many of our deep insights into family health scenarios and product innovations stem from a profound understanding of the needs of Chinese consumers."

China's latest five-year plan (2026-2030) calls for the full implementation of an "AI plus" initiative to integrate AI into all sectors of the economy. Even before that, a State Council guideline last year had already set out to foster new forms of AI-powered product consumption. – AFP



A foreign buyer inquires about a firefighting drone at the 139th edition of the China Import and Export Fair in Guangzhou on Wednesday. The 139th edition of the China Import and Export Fair, also known as the Canton Fair, opened on Wednesday, drawing a record number of over 32,000 participating enterprises. – Xinhua

China intensifies push for early cancer detection, treatment

Analysis

BEIJING – On a morning earlier this week at the Sichuan Cancer Hospital in Sichuan Province, the usual quiet bustle was suddenly broken by a wave of applause and cheerful laughter.

A crowd had gathered to enjoy lively performances including crosstalk, skits and talk shows, all centered on cancer prevention. When the shows came to an end, experts from more than ten departments stepped in, offering the public face-to-face, free health consultations and cancer screenings, right on the spot.

This took place at the launch of the Sichuan branch of this year's national cancer prevention and treatment awareness week. Ranging from live performances and lectures to exhibitions, similar activities are being held across the country, aiming to help the public better understand cancer.

The theme of this year's campaign is the early prevention, screening and treatment of cancer. From national strategies to local actions, the consensus is clear: cancer control must prioritize moving the line of defense forward.

A report from the World Health Organization (WHO) showed that up to four in ten cancer cases worldwide could be prevented.

This view is echoed by China's health authorities. "Cancer is not as scary as it seems. What truly matters is prevention and catching it early through screening," said Lei Haichao, head of the National Health Commission (NHC), at a press conference on the sidelines of the annual national legislative session in March.

He advised everyone to prevent cancer by cultivating healthy lifestyles and habits. He also recommended that high-risk individuals, such as heavy smokers and drinkers, undergo regular cancer screenings.

The country has taken a raft of measures to nip cancer in the bud.

The NHC recently issued a set of codes for a cancer-preventing healthy lifestyle, which is affectionately dubbed by netizens as the national version of the "cancer prevention manual."

Since China began its free cervical and breast cancer screenings

for women in 2009, more than 300 million cervical cancer screenings and over 200 million breast cancer screenings have been conducted.

To make early cancer screening more convenient, the China-Japan Friendship Hospital, a top-notch hospital in Beijing, has introduced a one-stop early screening pathway for digestive tract cancers. The entire process, from registration to getting a gastroscopy and colonoscopy, can be done within 24 hours.

In Ganzhou, Jiangxi Province, mobile CT trucks have rolled into rural villages, bringing cancer screenings directly to people's doorsteps.

With advances in medical care, many early-stage cancers can now be effectively treated. The five-year recurrence rate for early-stage lung cancer after surgery is 20 to 30 percent, while the five-year survival rate for early-stage colorectal cancer can reach 80 to 90 percent.

These efforts to enhance early detection and treatment are paying off. China's five-year cancer survival rate rose from 40.5 percent in 2015 to 43.7 percent in 2022, with a target set to achieve 46.6 percent by 2030.

To reach this target, the Chinese government considers it essential to raise public awareness about the importance of early cancer screening and treatment.

A report released by the NHC in 2024 revealed that there was still considerable room for improvement in public health awareness, and that gaps existed between urban and rural areas as well as among different regions. For example, insufficient knowledge of diseases and a lack of attention to one's own health had allowed unhealthy lifestyles to persist.

Experts believe that improving health awareness cannot be achieved overnight. It requires joint efforts from the government, communities, families and individuals alike.

"The public needs to enhance their awareness of science-based cancer prevention. We must also bring together strengths from all sectors of society to broaden the reach of cancer screening," said Liu Hongxu, director of the office of early diagnosis and treatment at the National Cancer Center. – Xinhua



Fairgoers inquire about Iranian products during the sixth China International Consumer Products Expo (CICPE) in Haikou, Hainan Province, on Wednesday. As a major event showcasing the Hainan Free Trade Port (FTP) after it fully launched island-wide special customs operations in December last year, the sixth China International Consumer Products Expo (CICPE) kicked off on Monday in Haikou, capital of Hainan Province, attracting more than 3,400 brands from over 60 countries and regions. Themed "Opening Up Drives Global Consumption, Innovation Empowers A Better Life," this year's six-day expo ends tomorrow. Meanwhile, the 2026 "Shopping in China" International Consumption Season was launched simultaneously. The sixth CICPE has expanded in scale, with an exhibition area of 143,000 square meters, up 13,000 square meters from the previous edition. International exhibits account for 65 percent of the total, an increase of 20 percentage points from last year. – Xinhua

Bringing US, Iran back to talks is top priority: Wang Yi

BEIJING – Foreign Minister Wang Yi said yesterday that the top priority is to return the United States and Iran to the negotiating table and seek a political solution.

Wang made the remarks when meeting with Italian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Antonio Tajani in Beijing. They exchanged views on the Middle East situation.

The US-Israel war against Iran should never have happened, and its prolongation has already seriously affected both international energy security and the safety of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, said Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee.

He said China has always advocated for the political resolution of international disputes through dialogue and consultation, and opposes the use of force.

Wang also said China has consistently upheld an objective and impartial position, and actively worked to promote peace and end conflicts, adding that China supports Pakistan's mediation efforts and stands ready to maintain communication with all parties and continue playing a constructive role in this regard.

China is willing to work with Italy to implement the important common understandings between

leaders of the two countries and maintain sound and steady momentum for the development of bilateral relations, Wang said.

Since the start of this year, geopolitical conflicts have dragged on, hotspot issues have escalated, and the international order and world security are confronted with grave challenges, Wang noted.

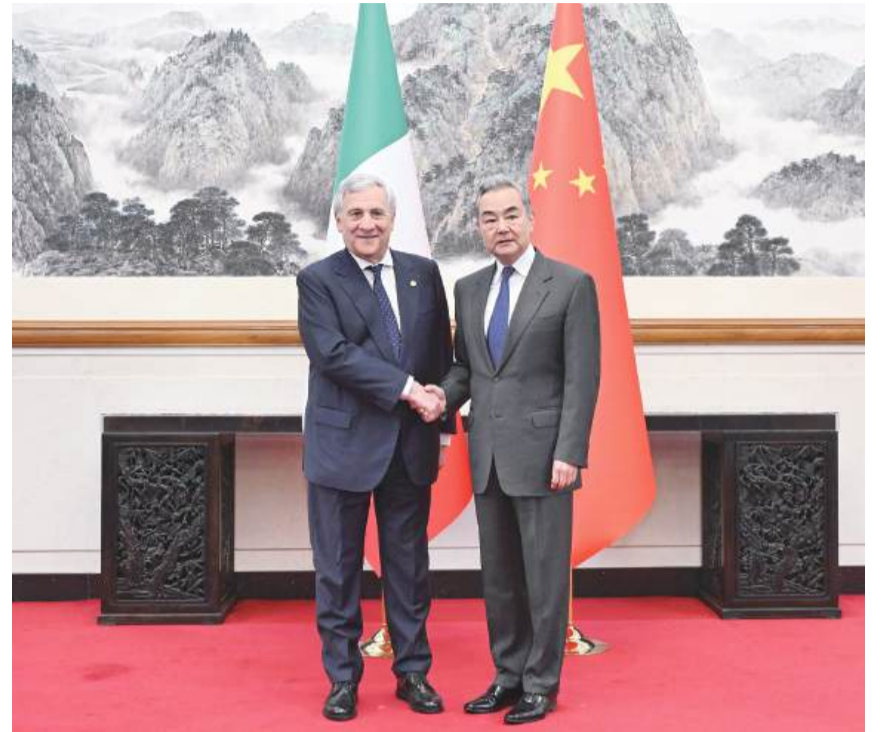
He said both China and Italy are ancient civilizations that value peace and are important forces in safeguarding multilateralism, adding that China stands ready to enhance communication and coordination with Italy on international and multilateral affairs.

Tajani said Italy attaches great importance to its relations with China and firmly adheres to the one-China policy.

Tajani said Italy values China's significant influence in international affairs and in multilateral bodies such as the United Nations, and that Italy endorses the propositions and initiatives put forward by China's head of state to promote the resolution of international and regional hotspot issues.

Italy is willing to strengthen multilateral communication and coordination with China to jointly safeguard world peace, stability and development, he said.

The two sides also exchanged views on the Ukraine crisis and other issues.



Foreign Minister Wang Yi (right), also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, shakes hands with Italian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Antonio Tajani in Beijing yesterday. – Xinhua

Chinese PLA Navy to host open-ship events celebrating 77th anniversary

BEIJING – The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy will open its barracks to the public in over 10 cities nationwide around April 23, marking its 77th anniversary, with over 40 active-duty vessels set for public visits.

A variety of active combat ships will be open to visitors, including guided-missile destroyers, as well as guided-missile frigates, minesweepers, missile boats and amphibious landing ships.

Additionally, auxiliary vessels, including comprehensive supply ships, ocean-going navigation training ships and hospital ships, will also be accessible to the public.

Many of the participating ships have carried out major missions such as escort missions in the Gulf of Aden, overseas visits and joint exercises.

The open-ship events will be held in cities including Dalian, Qingdao, Shanghai, Ningbo,

Xiamen, Guangzhou and Sanya. Some vessels will be open to the public for the first time, while some will dock for the first time in the cities after which they are named.

Visitors will have opportunities to interact with naval personnel and experience naval culture.

In addition to ship visits, naval air force bases and ports will also be opened, alongside themed activities that highlight the ties between warships and their namesake cities.

Opening active-duty vessels to the public is a long-standing tradition among navies worldwide. In recent years, the PLA Navy has regularly held such events on its founding anniversary and the National Day, with growing scale and influence.

Reservation channels for this year's events have been gradually opening, and the public can register online through official platforms. – Xinhua

China to further open up telecom, biotechnology and healthcare sectors

BEIJING – China will steadily expand its pilot opening-up programs in areas including value-added telecommunications, biotechnology and wholly foreign-owned hospitals, the Ministry of Commerce said yesterday.

The decision was announced by spokesperson He Yadong in response to a media inquiry on advancing the high-quality development of China's services industry.

To further open up the industry, the ministry will also improve management of the negative list for cross-border trade in services and build national demonstration zones for the innovative development of trade in services, the spokesperson said.

On the services consumption front, the ministry will continue to foster new consumption models and scenarios, while stepping up efforts to develop high-quality, diverse and convenient lifestyle services such

as domestic services, accommodation and catering, the spokesperson said.

Citing wholesale and retail as a key component of the services industry, the spokesperson said that measures will be taken to ensure the reasonable layout of bulk commodity spot markets, diversify business models in industrial consumer goods markets, and foster major agricultural product wholesale markets.

The services industry is a pillar of China's economy. Its value-added output exceeded 80 trillion yuan (about 11.7 trillion U.S. dollars) in 2025, accounting for 57.7 percent of the country's GDP.

According to the outline of China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030), the country will comprehensively improve the quality, efficiency and competitiveness of the services industry to better support industrial upgrading, meet the livelihood needs of the people, and create employment opportunities. – Xinhua

Islam-Confucianism dialogue highlights exchanges, mutual learning between civilizations

BEIJING – Nearly 300 participants from around the world joined the Islam-Confucianism Civilizational Dialogue 2026 held in Beijing yesterday.

Under the theme "The Idea of Global Civilization: Islamic and Confucian Perspectives," the participants explored ways to enhance exchanges and mutual learning between these two civilizations.

In a video address, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said humanity's future cannot rest on economic growth or technological advance alone, but must be grounded in ethical wisdom, cultural confidence and genuine respect among civilizations.

He expressed the hope that dialogue and cooperation between Confucianism and Islam would yield inspiring outcomes and contribute to building a world in which difference is met with understanding.

Chen Lai, vice president of the International Confucian Association (ICA)

and dean of the Academy of Chinese Learning at Tsinghua University, said that Confucianism advocates "harmony without uniformity," and exchanges and integration between Chinese and Islamic civilizations represent a cultural practice of this philosophy.

Zhang Zhiqiang, council member of the ICA, said that the long history of exchanges and integration between Chinese and Islamic civilizations conveys a broad-minded view of civilization and the world.

Zhang, also director of the Institute of Philosophy at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, noted that the modern world urgently needs to draw wisdom from this practice to bridge differences.

The ICA and the International Islamic University Malaysia jointly hosted the event, which also featured three parallel sub-forums and a roundtable involving Chinese and Malaysian university presidents. – Xinhua

China to attract more foreign-funded R&D centers: MOC

BEIJING – Foreign-funded research and development (R&D) centers have become a key part of China's innovation system, with many multinational companies upgrading their operations in the country from manufacturing bases to innovation hubs, the Ministry of Commerce (MOC) said yesterday.

Spokesperson He Yadong said at a regular press conference that foreign R&D centers in China are shifting from meeting local adaptation needs to serving as pivots for global innovation.

In 2025, actual foreign investment in China's scientific research and technical services sector made up nearly one-fifth of the national total, with its share rising steadily for seven straight years, the spokesperson added.

The sector saw the establishment of 14,000 new foreign-invested enterprises in 2025, up 27.2 percent year on year, the spokesperson said, adding that a number of multinational companies, including AstraZeneca, Philips and Porsche, have established R&D centers in China in recent years.

China has continued to strengthen policy support for foreign-funded R&D centers. A revised version of the Catalogue of Encouraged Industries for Foreign Investment, which took effect on February 1 this year, added more items in areas such as the R&D of new drugs and digital creative technologies.

In February, a circular was issued to continue exempting eligible imported scientific and research supplies used by foreign-funded R&D centers from import tariffs, import value-added tax and consumption tax.

The spokesperson said that the ministry will work with relevant departments to attract more multinational companies to locate their R&D operations in China and help them leverage the country's complete industrial system, strong talent pool and rich application scenarios.

Multinational companies are encouraged to fully leverage their strengths and capabilities in China's green, digital and intelligent transformation, and to participate in the development opportunities the country offers. – Xinhua

Jeepney drivers launch strike in Philippines over rising fuel costs



Jeepney drivers peer from a window of their vehicle, plastered with placards on the first day of a three-day jeepney strike along a road in Manila on Wednesday.

Drivers began another round of transport strikes on Wednesday demanding the government rollback the oil price and remove excise tax on oil amid the war in the Middle East. — AFP

MANILA — Jeepney drivers and transport operators staged a three-day strike on Wednesday, criticizing what they described as the government's failure to curb soaring oil prices and its reliance on "band-aid solutions" amid the ongoing Middle East conflict.

Manibela, one of the most influential transport federations in the Philippines, leads the protest. However, it falls short of paralyzing public transportation in Metro Manila, as many jeepneys

continue to operate across the capital and other urban centers.

Manibela Chairman Mar Valbuena said that the transport strike would extend until tomorrow, with drivers demanding a rollback in oil prices, the abolition of the oil deregulation law, and the removal of value-added tax and excise tax on fuel products.

He said drivers have been grappling with severe financial strain since tensions in the Middle East escalated on February 28. He

cited a nearly 200 percent increase in diesel prices, which he said has significantly eroded drivers' earnings despite long hours on the road.

The three-day transport strike is the latest in a series of protests tied to rising oil prices driven by geopolitical tensions in the Middle East. Valbuena estimated that around 80,000 Manibela members would participate in the strike, which spans Metro Manila and several provinces. — Xinhua

Philippine LPG tank explosion kills 2

MANILA — Two people were killed and seven others injured after a liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) tank exploded in a residential area in Dasmarinas City in Cavite province, south of Manila, yesterday morning, the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) said.

The bureau said the explosion occurred shortly after 9 a.m. local time at a house being used as an LPG refilling station. The blast killed a 65-year-old male employee

and a 20-year-old nephew of the business owner.

The powerful blast also triggered a fire and destroyed nearby homes and parked vehicles. Firefighters brought the blaze under control in less than 45 minutes.

Initial findings showed that the homeowner had been operating an LPG tank business and storing multiple tanks inside the residence, which may have contributed to the blast's intensity.

Several houses and cars in the vicinity were destroyed or heavily damaged. One resident whose home was destroyed said the ceiling and roof collapsed during the explosion, leaving the structure uninhabitable.

The BFP said an investigation is underway to determine the exact cause of the explosion and to assess possible violations of fire safety regulations. — Xinhua

S Korean president to visit India, Vietnam

SEOUL — South Korean President Lee Jae Myung will visit India and Vietnam in the coming days, a senior official said yesterday, as Seoul seeks to secure its fuel supplies to cushion the impact of the Middle East war.

Lee will leave on Sunday for a three-day trip to India, where he will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi, National Security Adviser Wi Sung-lac told reporters.

The two leaders "are expected to reaffirm their mutual commitment to maintaining close coordination regarding energy supply chains amidst the turbulent international landscape", Wi said.

He added that the talks would seek to enhance cooperation in strategic sectors like shipbuilding, artificial intelligence and defence,

and "lay the groundwork" for doubling two-way trade to US\$50 billion by 2030.

Lee and Modi will also discuss "continuing constructive cooperation for the sake of peace on the Korean Peninsula and within the region".

Lee will arrive in Hanoi later on Tuesday and meet with Vietnamese leader To Lam the following day, Wi said.

The pair will discuss "concrete measures to strengthen strategic and reciprocal cooperation amidst global uncertainties".

The talks will focus on energy security, supply chain stability, cooperation on critical minerals and other areas.

Vietnam is South Korea's third-largest trade partner, and the countries aim to hit US\$150 billion

in annual goods and services volumes this decade.

Like many Asian economies, South Korea has faced mounting risks to its energy supplies since US-Israeli attacks on Iran in late February prompted Tehran to effectively close the crucial Strait of Hormuz.

Seoul said on Wednesday that it would procure more than 270 million barrels of crude oil via routes unaffected by the blockade of the strait, saying the move would help to stabilise domestic supply and demand.

Senior South Korean and Chinese officials will also hold economic talks next week aimed at ensuring a stable trade environment despite the shock from the war, the Yonhap news agency reported yesterday, citing Seoul's foreign ministry. — AFP

Indonesian university suspends students over viral lewd chat

JAKARTA — A leading Indonesian university suspended 16 law students yesterday after a sexually explicit group chat about their female peers went viral, sparking a debate about gender violence in the Muslim-majority country.

Screenshots of a conversation between 16 male students at the University of Indonesia (UI) were posted on social media this week, eliciting shock and anger from female peers and a wider societal discussion.

The university said in a statement yesterday it had suspended the young men for two weeks pending an investigation.

"This step was taken as part of the university's commitment to... maintaining a conducive academic environment," spokesman Erwin Agustian Panigoro said in a statement.

The students are accused of having made vulgar and explicit sexual jokes about female peers and lecturers.

One message read "silence means consent", suggesting that women who don't verbally refuse a sexual advance are implicitly agreeing to sex.

Days later, a group of women students at the university berated the men in a public forum.

A video of the confrontation, in which the accused men stare at their feet as they are chewed out by women who said they were made to feel unsafe, also went viral.

The university student body is demanding the men be brought before an ethics board and given strict sanctions.

The incident has triggered a public debate about verbal sexual abuse and harassment, often brushed off as inconsequential in conservative Indonesia.

More than a quarter of women in the country reported having experienced gender-based violence, according to the latest survey of the UN Development Program.

The Indonesian Education Monitoring Network or JPPI, an NGO, said it has recorded more than 200 cases of violence in education institutions in the past three months nationwide, nearly half involving sexual abuse.

The JPPI is demanding the government declare a state of emergency on violence in education and make it a national priority.

The country passed a law on sexual violence in 2022 that criminalised harassment, including online.

— AFP



A banner reading "Stop sexual violence and other violence" hangs along a roadside on the University of Indonesia's campus in Depok, West Java yesterday. — AFP

Indonesia arrests top anti-graft official 5 days into the job

JAKARTA — Indonesian authorities have arrested the country's chief ombudsman on bribery charges just five days after he was sworn in as the top official responsible for fighting government graft, the Attorney General's office said.

Hery Susanto, sworn in as chief ombudsman by President Prabowo Subianto last Friday, was arrested late on Wednesday over allegations he accepted bribes from a nickel company, according to Syarif Sulaeman Nahdi, director of investigations for the Attorney General's office.

Hery was accused of receiving 1.5 billion rupiah (about US\$88,000) while serving in a more junior role

in the ombudsman's office.

"We carried out a search, and we took him into custody last night at his home," Syarif told reporters in Jakarta yesterday.

Hery was paraded in front of journalists wearing a bright pink vest of the kind often worn by people arrested on corruption charges in Indonesia.

There was no immediate comment from Hery or any legal representatives about the charges. He risks prison time if convicted.

Indonesia has the world's largest nickel reserves and is the biggest producer of the metal used in electric vehicle batteries and stainless steel. — AFP

India plans parliament expansion for women, opposition cries foul

NEW DELHI — India's government was seeking to expand the size of parliament by two-fifths to increase representation of women lawmakers, but opposition parties have cried foul, saying it would benefit the ruling party.

"We're set to take historic steps to empower women," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, ahead of the special sitting of parliament yesterday, to debate constitutional amendments to both expand seats for women and the overall size of parliament to over 800.

The bill proposes fast-tracking implementation of a 2023 law in the world's largest democracy of 1.4 billion people, reserving 33 percent of seats for women.

Increasing the number of women in parliament has, in principle, broad cross-party support.

"We are all united to give rightful positions to women in India," Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said yesterday.

Women currently account for just 14 percent of India's 543 members of the Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament.

To achieve the expansion, the government said it plans to redraw parliamentary boundaries based on population, a move that would increase the number of seats by nearly 40 percent to more than 800.

Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) draws much of its support from the densely populated north, and critics say expanding seats in parliament would therefore benefit it the most.

Opposition parties, which control states in southern India

where the population is lower, fear they would lose overall power in parliament.

Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi said that while his Congress party supports increasing the number of women in parliament, the government's approach is aimed at consolidating power.

"The proposal that the government is now bringing has no connection to women's reservation," Gandhi said, in a statement on social media.

"It is merely an attempt to seize power through delimitation and gerrymandering."

M.K. Stalin, chief minister of the southern state of Tamil Nadu, and a rival to Modi's BJP, also opposed the plan.

"Let the flames of resistance spread across Tamil Nadu," Stalin said, accusing the BJP of trying to marginalise the state through redrawn boundaries. "Let the arrogance of the fascist BJP be brought down," he added on social media.

The bill requires a two-thirds majority to be passed, with three days of debate beginning yesterday.

The government is proposing that delimitation of new seats be based on the last completed census, in 2011, and come into effect for the next general election in 2029.

But opposition parties want the government to wait for the results of an ongoing census, which was launched this month, a formidable logistical challenge that will take a year to carry out — and even longer for the data to be processed. — AFP

Pakistan steps up mediation amid prospects for renewed US-Iran talks

Iran's envoy signals Tehran's readiness for serious talks



This handout photo taken and provided by the Office of Iranian Parliament Speaker yesterday shows Iranian Parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf (centre) speaking with Pakistan's Army Chief Asim Munir (left) during their meeting in Tehran.

Pakistan's powerful army chief met Iran's parliament speaker yesterday, Iranian state television said, after Pakistani mediators travelled to Iran to press efforts to end the war with the United States and Israel. — AFP

ISLAMABAD — Diplomatic activity intensified on Wednesday around the ongoing US-Iran conflict, as Pakistan stepped up mediation efforts amid prospects for renewed negotiations.

A high-level Pakistani delegation led by the country's Army Chief Asim Munir arrived in Tehran as part of Islamabad's continued efforts to facilitate dialogue between Washington and Tehran. The delegation, comprising senior officials from security and diplomatic institutions, is carrying key messages linked to the next phase of engagement between the two sides.

The visit follows earlier face-to-face talks hosted in Islamabad that ended without agreement, but kept diplomatic channels open. Iranian officials confirmed that exchanges with the United States are continuing through Pakistan.

The diplomatic push coincides with broader regional outreach by Pakistan's leadership. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif arrived in Jeddah on an official visit to Saudi Arabia. Later this week, he will also travel to Qatar and Türkiye, where discussions are expected to focus on bilateral ties as well as regional peace and security.

Despite these efforts, key differences between the United States and Iran remain unresolved. US President Donald Trump said the conflict was "very close" to completion, while also indicating that a new round of talks with Iran could take

place soon, potentially in Pakistan.

Iran, meanwhile, has taken a cautious position. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said no agreement has been reached on extending the current ceasefire, rejecting media reports suggesting otherwise. While expressing openness to discussing parameters of its nuclear program, Baghaei has reiterated its right to peaceful nuclear energy and called for sanctions relief as part of any broader settlement.

Although diplomatic engagement continues, no timeline has been set for the next round of talks.

Meanwhile, tensions on the ground continue to pose risks to regional stability. The United States has imposed a naval blockade targeting Iranian maritime trade, with US military officials claiming that economic activity linked to Iran by sea has been effectively halted within a short period. The move has heightened tensions in key strategic waterways.

In response, Iranian military officials warned of possible countermeasures. Ali Abdollahi, chief commander of Iran's main military command Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, said Iran could block trade flows across major maritime routes, including the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf, the Sea of Oman and the Red Sea, if restrictions on its shipping persist.

As diplomatic channels remain active but inconclusive, Pakistan's mediation efforts — alongside parallel regional and international

initiatives — are likely to play a key role in shaping whether the current pause in fighting can evolve into a broader and lasting settlement.

Tehran signals readiness for serious talks

Meanwhile, Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan Reza Amiri Moghadam yesterday said Tehran is prepared to engage in serious and constructive talks.

Speaking in an interview with official Pakistan TV after an event at the Institute of Regional Studies in Islamabad, the envoy said Iran was entering the proposed negotiations with full seriousness and a clear objective of achieving a positive outcome.

He added that Tehran's negotiating team had been defined at a senior level, with Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, speaker of the Iranian Parliament, set to lead it, while the foreign minister would be the second representative.

The ambassador said the final composition of Iran's delegation would depend on the level of representation from the other side.

Pakistan was playing the role of a "responsible state" and a "sincere mediator" in facilitating dialogue, he said.

Earlier in his address, Moghadam also underscored confidence in Pakistan's diplomatic role, saying Islamabad remained a trusted venue for dialogue. "We only trust Pakistan," he said, referring to contacts with the United States. — Xinhua

Nepal committee to probe assets of politicians and officials

KATHMANDU — Nepal's government, elected last month on an anti-corruption platform, has formed a commission to investigate the assets of politicians and officials, an official said yesterday.

Prime Minister Balendra Shah, a 35-year-old rapper-turned-politician, won a landslide election victory on a platform of youth-driven political change in the first elections since deadly 2025 anti-corruption protests ousted the government.

Led by a former Supreme Court judge, the five-member commission will examine assets of top figures who have held public office since 2006.

Dipa Dahal, press and investigation advisor to the prime minister, said the commission was ordered by cabinet on Wednesday.

"The cabinet meeting made this decision," Dahal told AFP. "We are following up to confirm its timelines and other details."

Plans to form the commission were listed in the government's 100-point reform agenda issued after Shah took office.

Earlier this month Nepal issued an arrest warrant for former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and his wife in a money laundering investigation, the latest high-profile figure targeted under the new government.

Deuba, who is abroad, has rejected the allegations.

Investigations are also ongoing into former prime minister KP Sharma Oli and ex-home minister Ramesh Lekhak over their alleged roles in the deadly crackdown on the anti-corruption protests in September 2025.

The two men were arrested last month, but they have denied all accusations and were released after a court order.

The youth-led uprising began in Kathmandu and was triggered by a brief social media ban.

It spread countrywide the following day, fuelled by longstanding frustration over corruption and economic hardship.

Nepal currently ranks 109th out of 180 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index.

— AFP

Sri Lanka arrests nine Chinese over alleged cyberscam gear

COLOMBO — Nine Chinese nationals were arrested at Sri Lanka's main international airport yesterday while attempting to smuggle in communication equipment allegedly intended for cyberscam operations, customs authorities said.

The arrests come two weeks after police detained 152 foreign nationals, mostly Chinese, for allegedly running a cyberscam operation out of a hotel in the island's northwest.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun told AFP in Beijing yesterday that they were willing to "cooperate to jointly combat criminal activities, including online fraud".

In the latest incident, Sri Lankan officers recovered 383 used mobile phones, 101 tablet computers, six

Wi-Fi routers and GPS trackers from nine arriving Chinese nationals, a customs spokesman said.

"The equipment was taped to the bodies of the suspects," the spokesman added, noting the haul was valued at 24 million rupees (US\$78,000) and was confiscated.

Separately, another six Chinese passengers were arrested yesterday while allegedly trying to smuggle in 75,900 cigarettes packed into their luggage, officials said.

The cigarettes, valued at 11.3 million rupees (US\$37,000), were confiscated.

Organised criminal gangs have used casinos, hotels and fortified compounds across Southeast Asia as bases to carry out sophisticated online scams, defrauding people through cryptocurrency investment

schemes and fake romantic relationships, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.

Until a crackdown this year, the region was the epicentre of the multibillion-dollar online scam industry, in which hundreds of thousands of fraudsters — some trafficked, others willing workers — cheat internet users globally.

"Due to Sri Lanka's well-developed telecommunications infrastructure, favourable geographical location and relatively lenient visa policies, some telecom fraud gangs have moved to Sri Lanka," the Chinese embassy in Colombo said recently.

"That is why such cases have been increasing in Sri Lanka recently," it added, noting that the scammers had been targeting Chinese nationals at home. — AFP

Trump says Israel, Lebanon agree to ceasefire

Danny Kemp and Laure Al Khoury

WASHINGTON, DC – US President Donald Trump announced that Israel and Lebanon had agreed to a ceasefire yesterday, and said he was trying to set up the first-ever meeting between the leaders of the two countries.

Following what he called “excellent” phone calls with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, Trump said the truce would begin within hours.

“These two Leaders have agreed that in order to achieve PEACE between their Countries, they will formally begin a 10 Day CEASEFIRE at 5 P.M. EST [Eastern Standard Time],” or 21:00 GMT [5 a.m. today in Macau], Trump said on his Truth Social network.

The US leader said he had directed Vice President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and top US military officer Dan Caine to work with the two countries “to achieve a Lasting PEACE.”

Shortly afterward, Trump added that “I will be inviting the Prime Minister of Israel, Bibi Netanyahu, and the President of Lebanon,

Joseph Aoun, to the White House.”

The truce announcement comes amid Washington’s continuing efforts to reach a deal to end the US-Israeli war with Iran. Tehran has insisted that a Lebanon ceasefire must be part of any agreement.

Lebanon was pulled into the Middle East war on March 2 after the Lebanon-based armed group Hezbollah, which is backed by Iran, attacked Israel.

Since then, Israeli strikes in Lebanon have killed more than 2,000 people and displaced more than a million, and Israeli ground forces have invaded the country’s south.

A lawmaker from Hezbollah told AFP the group would “cautiously adhere” to the ceasefire if Israel stopped attacks.

Ibrahim al-Moussawi thanked Iran for having applied pressure in Lebanon’s favour, adding that “the ceasefire would not have happened without Iran considering the ceasefire as equal to closing the Strait of Hormuz.”

‘Breathing room’

The first signs of movement on Lebanon came when Trump said



This combination of pictures shows (from left to right) Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Washington, DC on September 29, 2025, US President Donald Trump in Washington, DC, on April 13, 2026 and Lebanese President Joseph Aoun in New York City on September 23, 2025. – AFP

late Wednesday that Aoun and Netanyahu were due to speak the next day.

“Trying to get a little breathing room between Israel and Lebanon,” Trump said Wednesday on his Truth Social platform, referring to the two countries’ ambassadors meeting held in Washington the day before – the first meeting of its kind since 1993.

But Aoun rejected the US request for a direct phone call with Netanyahu yesterday, an official source told AFP.

Instead, Aoun’s office confirmed a call during which he thanked the US leader for his “efforts” to secure a ceasefire with Israel.

Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam welcomed Trump’s announcement of a ceasefire, saying a truce was a “key Lebanese demand that we have pursued since the very first day of the war” between Hezbollah and Israel. He also thanked European and Arab states for their involvement.

European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen hailed the

ceasefire as “a relief.”

But fighting on the ground continued right up until Trump’s announcement.

The Lebanese army said yesterday that Israeli strikes that destroyed the Qasmiyeh bridge over the southern Litani River have cut off the area from the rest of the country.

The Israeli army yesterday again called on civilians to evacuate the entire area of southern Lebanon up to the Zahrani River, about 40 kilometres north of the border.

Meanwhile, Lebanon’s state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported clashes in Bint Jbeil, a town five kilometres from the border where Hezbollah fighters are battling the Israeli army.

The White House has said it is discussing a possible second round of talks with Iran in the Pakistani capital Islamabad, after a first round last weekend failed to produce a deal.

But a senior US administration official stressed that any end to the hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon was not part of talks between Washington and Tehran. – AFP

Lebanese PM ‘welcomes’ Israel ceasefire announced by Trump

BEIRUT – Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam said he “welcomes” US President Donald Trump’s announcement of a 10-day ceasefire with Israel, which was due to start at 21:00 GMT yesterday (5 a.m. in Macau).

Salam said he welcomes the

ceasefire, “which is a key Lebanese demand that we have pursued since the very first day of the war” between Hezbollah and Israel, after Trump announced the temporary truce following phone calls with the presidents of the two countries.

“As I congratulate all Lebanese

on this achievement, I pray for mercy upon the martyrs who have fallen, and I affirm my solidarity with their families,” Salam said, thanking a number of European and Arab states for their “efforts” to reach a ceasefire.

– AFP

US House rejects bid to curb Trump’s Iran war powers

WASHINGTON, DC – The US House of Representatives yesterday rejected an effort to curb President Donald Trump’s authority to wage war in Iran, another setback in Democrats’ campaign to force Congress back into decisions over military action in the Middle East.

The vote, held after Democrats forced the issue onto the floor, came as unease over the six-week conflict continued to spread on Capitol Hill, with lawmakers wary of rising costs, an unclear endgame and the risk of a wider war.

The measure would have required Trump to end US military operations against Tehran unless Congress explicitly approved them, invoking the 1973 War Powers Resolution that limits presidential freedom to conduct prolonged hostilities without lawmakers’ consent.

It was largely party-line vote, although one of Trump’s Republicans supported the resolution and another abstained, while a Democrat voted against it.

Democrats argue that Trump launched the conflict jointly with Israel on February 28 without the congressional authorisation required by the constitution, which gives Congress sole power to declare war.

“We are standing at the edge of a cliff, and Congress must act before this president pushes us off. Every day we delay, we inch closer to a conflict with no exit ramp,” Gregory Meeks, the top Democrat on the Foreign Affairs Committee, said ahead of the vote.

The defeat came despite Democrats narrowing the margin from a previous failed House vote in March, when a similar resolution lost by seven votes.

But in the end, Republican support remained too thin.

Trump has so far retained broad backing from his party, despite frustration among some lawmakers over the administration’s refusal to publicly detail the financial and military burden of the war.

At congressional hearings on Wednesday and yesterday, White House budget director Russ Vought declined to estimate the taxpayer cost, and would not confirm an estimate by the Senate Budget Committee’s top Democrat Jeff Merkely that the figure was around US\$50 billion so far.

Democrats insist failed war powers votes are still valuable because they force lawmakers to go on the record.

The House vote came a day after the Senate again rejected its own war powers effort, though Democratic leaders in both chambers have vowed to keep bringing the issue back.

“Americans are seeing hundreds of casualties in a war that no one has given them the respect to explain,” said Democratic Whip Katherine Clark.

“But one thing is clear: Americans are being asked to foot the bill. With the lives of their sons and daughters. And with the US\$2 billion a day that we are spending on this conflict that could be going to help Americans afford to go see a doctor.” – AFP

US to blockade Iran ports ‘as long as it takes’: Pentagon chief

WASHINGTON, DC – The United States will blockade Iranian ports for “as long as it takes,” US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said yesterday, threatening renewed strikes if Tehran does not make a deal.

“If Iran chooses poorly, then they will have a blockade and bombs dropping on infrastructure, power and energy,” Hegseth told a news conference at the Pentagon.

US forces began blockading Iranian ports at 14:00 GMT on Monday after peace talks in Pakistan ended without an agreement the previous day.

General Dan Caine, the top US military officer, said the blockade “applies to all ships, regardless of nationality, heading into or from Iranian ports.”

“If you do not comply with this blockade, we will use force,” said Caine, who spoke alongside Hegseth.

The general also said that Washington’s forces would chase down ships in other areas that try to carry aid to Iran.

“In addition to this blockade, the joint force, through operations and activities in other areas of responsibility... will actively pursue any Iranian-flagged vessel, or any vessel attempting to provide material support to Iran,” Caine said.

Hegseth meanwhile said Iranian forces are attempting to dig out equipment buried during the more than five weeks of US-Israeli strikes against the Islamic republic.

Addressing Iranian leaders directly, he said: “We know what military assets you are moving and where you are moving them to. While you are digging out – which is exactly what you’re doing, digging out of bombed out and devastated facilities – we are only getting stronger.”



US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth speaks during a press briefing at the Pentagon in Washington, DC, yesterday. – AFP

“You are digging out your remaining launchers and missiles with no ability to replace them – you have no defence industry, no ability to replenish your offensive or defensive capabilities,” Hegseth said.

Admiral Brad Cooper, the head of US Central Command, which is responsible for American forces in the Middle East, said Washington is using the ceasefire to reset.

“We’re rearming, we’re retooling, and we’re adjusting our tactics, techniques and procedures. There’s no military in the world that adjusts like we do, and that’s exactly what we’re doing right now during the ceasefire,” Cooper said. – AFP

'Endless grief' as Turkey mourns young victims of school shooting

Kahramanmaras, Turkey
Rémi Banet

KAHRAMANMARAS, Turkey – Eleven-year-old Yusuf trembled and sobbed as he clung to his father. His close friend Bayram, 10, was among eight students and a teacher killed on Wednesday when a 14-year-old student opened fire in their classroom, in an attack without precedent in Turkey.

"Our grief is endless. These children were like our own. They were all innocent," said Vezir Yucel, Yusuf's father, speaking at the funeral of four of the victims yesterday.

The shooting drew a crowd of more than a thousand mourners to the southern province of Kahramanmaras.

"Yusuf and Bayram had been playing football at the same academy for a year and a half. They also played video games together. He was a well-behaved, hardworking boy!" Yucel said, his eyes red as he held his son close.

The shock has reverberated across the country. While Turkey has endured



Family members and mourners react on the coffin of 10-year-old Belinay Nur Boyraz as they attend the funerals for nine victims killed in a school shooting by a 14-year-old, an attack that has sent shockwaves across the country, with authorities saying the suspect had referenced a US mass killer in a WhatsApp profile image, in the southern province of Kahramanmaras yesterday. The funerals took place for eight children aged 10 and 11 and a 55-year-old teacher. – AFP

repeated tragedies from earthquakes to mining disasters and terror attacks, it had never before experienced a mass killing on a school campus.

"We are deeply saddened. We didn't know the victims, but something like this should never happen to children," said Leyla Naz

Kurtgoz, a 19-year-old student who attended the funeral with her mother.

She noted that the slain students had survived the devastating earthquake that struck Kahramanmaras and several other provinces in February 2023, killing around 60,000 people in Turkey and neighbouring Syria.

The epicentre of the quake was close to Kahramanmaras, a conservative city of about 500,000 nestled at the foot of a mountain and heavily damaged by the tremor. Nearly 13,000 people died in the province.

"These children had already suffered so much because of the earthquake, which makes this even more devastating," Kurtgoz said, dressed in black.

'Apocalyptic'

Outside a large mosque, the coffins of the young victims all aged 10 and 11 were arranged side by side on the forecourt, each draped in a Turkish flag.

One father sat motionless beside the coffin of his daughter, 10-year-old Zeynep, accompanied by his young son perched silently on a stool. Nearby, other relatives pressed their faces against the coffins for a final farewell.

As an imam recited prayers, a middle-aged man in the crowd burst into tears.

"It's all piling up: the 2023 earthquake, COVID before that, and now this massacre," said Ilker Bas, 18, standing with friends.

"Mentally, we are at rock bottom."

A biology teacher from the city said her grief was "indescribable," adding that she feared the attack could inspire others.

At the city cemetery, where several of the victims were laid to rest yesterday afternoon, Nilgun Ruci sat alone, staring at the ground.

On Wednesday, the 55-year-old housewife rushed to Ayser Calik School after hearing gunshots.

"It was apocalyptic. People were running everywhere, searching for their children," she said, wiping away tears.

When she arrived, she saw the daughter of a neighbour lying gravely wounded.

"She had been shot in the leg and the shoulder," Ruci said. "At first I thought she had fainted. Today I learned that she died." – Xinhua

Greece says BBC report on migrant pushbacks 'science fiction'

ATHENS – Greece's Migration Minister Thanos Plevris yesterday slammed as "science fiction" a BBC report that Athens was deploying masked migrants to push back other migrants trying to enter from Turkey.

Greece has repeatedly been accused by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and media of using illegal means to keep migrants out of a country that is a key transit point for people trying to reach Europe.

The BBC said it had "wide-ranging" evidence that Greek police had since 2020 recruited migrants "to violently push other migrants back across its land border with Turkey".

It said that "masked" migrants

had been used to often violently push back undocumented entrants.

Plevris told the Action television channel: "The BBC essentially adopts the views of illegal migrant smugglers," adding that the report was "science fiction."

Plevris, who is known for his anti-immigration stance, said Greece "would continue to keep its borders closed for the European Union and the United Kingdom."

An investigation released in 2022 by the Lighthouse Reports media with France's *Le Monde*, German magazine *Der Spiegel* and Britain's *The Guardian* alleged similar tactics used at the Greece-Turkey frontier. – AFP

Greenland celebrates new int'l airport

QAQORTOQ, Greenland – A commercial aircraft landed yesterday for the first time in Qaqortoq, Greenland's fourth-largest town, whose new airport means that the whole of the Arctic island – coveted by US President Donald Trump – now has international connections.

The flight between Nuuk, the Greenlandic capital, and Qaqortoq, in the south of the Danish autonomous territory, lasted about 75 minutes and many residents gathered outside the airport to witness the landing, said an AFP reporter on the flight.

Greenland's Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen and Foreign Minister Mute Egede were both on the plane to the town, the main gateway to southern Greenland.

Previously accessible only by helicopter or boat, the town can now have year-round flights from Nuuk and summer connections from Iceland, the VisitGreenland tourism board said in a statement.

The Arctic island of 57,000 inhabitants relies on its 14 airports, as well as helipads, as it has no roads connecting its towns.

The airport has a 1,500-metre runway.

Its opening comes as the Narsarsuaq airport, located further north, closes.

According to local press, the United States is considering refurbishing Narsarsuaq, a former air base that was operated by the US military between 1942 and 1958.

The inauguration of Qaqortoq airport comes just over a year after

the launch of the first direct air link between Copenhagen and Nuuk.

Another international airport is also due to open this year in Ilulissat, in northwestern Greenland.

The investment in air infrastructure, partly financed by Denmark, is intended to spur the development of the local economy, especially tourism.

"With the opening of Qaqortoq Airport, we are taking an important step in the development of South Greenland. We are proud to contribute to the development of Greenland's infrastructure and look forward to seeing how these new opportunities translate into tangible growth," Jens Lauridsen, CEO of Greenland Airports, said in a statement. – AFP

Élysée worker sentenced for stealing presidential porcelain

PARIS – A Paris court yesterday handed a former silverware keeper at France's presidential palace a two-year sentence for stealing hundreds of thousands of euros worth of luxury items between 2023 and 2025.

Thomas M. was ordered to wear an electronic tag for a year, with the second year suspended, for stealing exclusive tableware and other items worth nearly 400,000 euros (US\$470,000), the court ruled.

He was also fined 10,000 euros and barred from working in a similar position and from setting foot in an auction house ever again.

His partner, Damien G., was also sentenced to two years. He was ordered to wear an electronic tag for eight months, with the remaining 16 months suspended.

The couple sold most of the stolen items via a Vinted business account and on Facebook, and said they had pocketed around 15,000 euros in profit.

A third man, Ghislain M., who bought nearly 80 of the items, was given a one-year suspended prison sentence.

The case came to light last year when the Sevres national porcelain manufacturer – which makes many of the valuable plates for the presidential palace – saw some of the items listed on auction sites.

Investigations quickly focused on Thomas M., a contract worker in the Élysée's silverware department since 2020 and the only staff member with direct access to the warehouse keys.

According to the manufacturer, the estimated value of the items was 377,370 euros – a sum the defence described as "absurd".

During the trial in February, the former maitre d'hotel said he had stolen the objects for their beauty, but decided to sell them to pay off heavy debts. – AFP

Google says AI helped it thwart billions of 'bad ads'

SAN FRANCISCO – Google yesterday said tools utilizing Gemini artificial intelligence helped it derail some 8.2 billion online ads which violated its policies last year.

"We really dove into how to rethink our systems using AI," Google's vice president of ads privacy and safety Keerat Sharma said during a briefing with journalists.

"Our latest models better understand intent, helping us spot malicious content and preemptively block it, even when it's designed to evade detection."

An annual Ads Safety Report released by Google indicated that the internet giant's systems caught more than 99 percent of ads that broke its rules before they were shown to people online.

"Our goal is to stop badness before it is ever exposed to any user," Sharma said.

Google made 35 changes to its ad policies last year in updates intended to help keep pace with evolving trends in scam marketing, according to Sharma.

Gemini-enhanced ad system tools analyse hundreds of billions of "signals," such as the age of advertiser accounts, how they are acting, and patterns in campaigns to determine if something is amiss, he explained.

"We took a step back and really re-thought how we wanted to build ad safety from a ground-up perspective," Sharma said.

"With Gemini, we've been able to take a step back and combine hundreds of billions of signals to get a much better understanding of what an advertiser's intent is based on the combination of everything that we know about the advertiser," Sharma said.

"All of that put together gives

us this really nuanced perspective as to whether the intent of a specific ad is positive or potentially harmful."

While bad actors are using generative AI to create deceptive ads at scale, Gemini helps detect and block them in real time, according to Google.

Ad tactics barred by Google policies include deepfakes of public figures or misappropriation of their genuine images.

Another layer to Google's ad defence is verifying advertisers, which account for more than 90 percent of ads served on Google, according to Sharma.

"Verification is a tool that we use to ensure that an advertiser is indeed a legitimate entity," Sharma said.

"We're continuing to evolve our defences to stay ahead of even the most advanced schemes," he said. – AFP

Mozambique, China share brotherly friendship, says Mozambican president

Interview by Xinhua writers Liu Jie, Leng Ruijie

MAPUTO – “Mozambique and China share a brotherly friendship,” and Mozambique is willing to further strengthen ties with China by promoting political, economic, social and cultural exchanges, Mozambican President Daniel Chapo says.

In a recent exclusive interview with Xinhua ahead of his state visit to China between yesterday and next Wednesday, Chapo noted that last year marked the 50th anniversary of Mozambique’s independence and the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Mozambique and China.

The two countries have a deep political and diplomatic relationship, with their traditional friendship dating back to the period when China supported Mozambique’s struggle for national independence, he said.

On June 25, 1975, the day Mozambique declared independence, it established diplomatic relations with China. In recent years, bilateral political and diplomatic relations

have become increasingly close and consolidated, he said.

Noting that this year marks the beginning of China’s 15th Five-Year Plan, Chapo said that the plan is important for Mozambique, as it aligns with Mozambique’s five-year plans and long-term strategic plans.

Mozambique’s economy is highly reliant on the extractive and natural gas industries, Chapo said, voicing hope to strengthen strategic cooperation with China in agriculture, tourism, infrastructure, industrialization and digitalization within the framework of South-South cooperation and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

“I really like a Chinese proverb that emphasizes that building roads is the first step to prosperity,” Chapo said, noting that since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, a number of landmark infrastructure projects undertaken by China have been implemented in Mozambique.

The Maputo-Katembe Bridge, built by a Chinese company, is the longest suspension bridge in Africa. Before the bridge was built, it



Mozambican President Daniel Chapo speaks during an interview with Xinhua in Maputo last Tuesday.

– Xinhua

took at least four to five hours for vehicles to cross the sea by ferry; now, it only takes five to ten minutes to drive from Maputo to Katembe.

Infrastructure projects carried out in cooperation with China, such as the Maputo-Katembe Bridge, the Maputo Ring Road, Maputo International Airport and the jetty bridge on Inhaca Island, are yielding remarkable socio-economic development results, said the president.

Regarding agriculture, Chapo noted that Mozambique possesses vast land resources, offering immense potential for cooperation with China. Mozambique is willing to explore cooperation opportunities in various agricultural products, including rice, and to create more successful projects like the Wanbao rice farm, he said.

Mozambique will also take advantage of China’s zero-tariff

policy to boost exports of its goods and services, particularly agricultural products, to China, he said.

“China’s vision for South-South cooperation emphasizes the need for countries to cooperate on the basis of equality and mutual assistance to achieve mutual benefit and win-win results,” Chapo said, highlighting the strategic importance of South-South cooperation.

Cultural exchanges between Mozambique and China have a long history, reflecting the brotherly friendship between the two countries, he said, adding that the Mozambique-China Cultural Center, jointly built by the two sides, is not only the largest cultural center in Mozambique but also an important symbol of the bilateral cultural relationship.

This year marks the China-Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges. Chapo said Mozambique will seize this opportunity to further strengthen cultural exchanges, deepen the friendship between the two peoples, and promote the steady development of bilateral relations.

– Xinhua

A visit to CECPS—widening possibilities for high-quality development both in Macao and Brazil

Commentary by Sam-Kee Cheng* and Elias Jabbour**

To further our research on the political economy of Sino-Brazilian relations, one of us made a visit to the Service Centre for Economy and Trade between China and Portuguese/Spanish-speaking countries (CECPS) to learn about the work of this newly established centre in Hengqin and the uptake so far. CECPS’s goal is to construct a “one-stop” integrated service platform that connects China with these countries and to provide practical assistance and tailored and efficient services for Chinese enterprises to expand business overseas as well as for foreign enterprises to expand into China, utilising the domestic markets and the comprehensive supply chain in China. In less than a year, the centre has received enquiries from over 300 enterprises and have signed cooperative memorandum with over 40 of them. With the growing interest and demand for services in Brazil, CECPS has opened a permanent office in Brazil to better serve the business community there.

As researchers in the political economy of China’s development and overseas investments, this centre looks like another exemplary work of the socialist market economy which is steered by planning (the new strategic positioning of “Macao+Hengqin” as stated in the guidance documents) and government funding (RMB1 billion of CECPS Investment Fund provided by the Government of the Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone and RMB 30 billion Hengqin Industrial Investment Fund) while the service centre is operated as a non-governmental entity on the market.



This file photo taken last month shows part of the Service Centre for Economy and Trade between China and Portuguese/Spanish-speaking Countries complex in Hengqin.

– Photo: Tony Wong

As mentioned by the colleagues who spoke with me in the centre themselves, there is no comparable service provider of this kind in the world. As a non-profit organisation with government resources and connections, it can focus on the needs of the enterprises and give the best advice, free from concerns for commission but with the knowledge of the most up-to-date economic and trade policies and direct communications with relevant departments and organisations both in China and overseas. The service centre is not driven by profit but the fulfilment of state’s strategy. It is part of China’s innovative planning which has matured over time with state resources as the base, including highly efficient organisations feeling the pulse of the global market, for the next stage of development for all types of enterprises, especially those aim to develop a competitive edge that matches with industrial development planning.

As the Macao Special Administrative Region Government plans to establish a MOP20 billion

pataca (US\$2.56 billion) government guidance fund for the promotion of economic diversification which aims to bring long-term development and more diversified employment opportunities, there is good reason for the guidance fund and service centre to work together to support new industries as well as expanding the services in human resources, market research, business matching and financing, and resolving the operational issues for overseas business expansion.

By utilising the state-led initiative and combining the development of science and technology with soft services, it creates the need for a wide pool of talents and an opportunity for MSAR government to reconstruct the human infrastructure fit for the high-quality development that generates economic, social, and industrial transformation as specified in the 15th Five-Year Plan. As for the Macao economy which has been dominated by the gaming industry for decades and has led to relatively narrow career choices for the educated youths,

the transformation is indeed much needed as diversification of job types and required skillsets in the job market will bring immediate impacts to the jobseekers and ripple effects to the society as a whole. A more equitable and sustainable development of Macao will generate support from below as the benefits of such transformation will be widely distributed.

This is the same for Brazil. It is important to enhance the economic relationship with China and at the same time diversify the bilateral trade not just in agribusiness but in a more wide range of businesses and services to offer more job opportunities for the Brazilian population, especially the younger generations which grew up in the neoliberal era with broken manufacturing, poor public services and infrastructure and the dominance of oligarchies in the economy as permanent features. Economic and trade relations with a strong economic power which can lead to developmental outcomes are badly needed in Brazil—to create a new experience of what economic growth can mean other than the depletion of resources and impoverishment with unskilled and low-paid jobs.

The Hengqin International Digital Talent Training Base in the CECPS which provides high quality training and accreditation programmes in information and communication technology (ICT) by the telecommunications giant Huawei is a good example to show that personnel upskilling and human infrastructure is also a key part of the bilateral relationship which brings better employment opportunities for the Brazilians. Over 1000 practitioners from

Portuguese/Spanish-speaking countries completed the training last year. The training base will continue to run its accreditation programme annually. This helps to address the shortage of highly skilled technicians in Latin America and other countries which suffer “brain drain” due to outflow of skilled workers to Global North.

In our latest research project, we will look at the geopolitical economy as well as some case studies in the bilateral trade and investments. One of our objectives is to see how China’s plan for high-quality development impacted on Chinese overseas investments in Brazil. Macao is given a strategic position to be the liaison between China and the Portuguese/Spanish-speaking countries. CECPS is the perfect start for our investigative research and we look forward to working closer with the colleagues in the centre on our project.

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April 16, 2026

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Messi new owner of Spanish 5th-tier club Cornella



Lionel Messi (right) of the Inter Miami CF controls the ball against Adri Mehmeti (centre) of the New York Red Bulls during the second half at Nu Stadium on April 11 in Miami, Florida. — AFP

Football

BARCELONA – Lionel Messi has bought Catalan club Cornella and become the team's new owner, the Spanish fifth-tier side announced yesterday.

The eight-time Ballon d'Or winner is still playing in the United States for Inter Miami and is expected to play a key role in Argentina's World Cup title defence this year.

"This move reinforces Messi's close ties to Barcelona and his commitment to the development of sport and local talent in Catalonia," the club said in a statement confirming the former Barcelona star's acquisition.

Several top players have come through the ranks at Cornella, based in the Barcelona suburbs, including Arsenal goalkeeper David Raya and Messi's former Barca teammate Jordi Alba.

Cornella have suffered back-to-back relegations in the past two seasons.

"Leo Messi's arrival marks the beginning of a new chapter in the club's history, aimed at driving both sporting and institutional growth, strengthening its foundations, and continuing to invest in talent," Cornella added.

"The project is guided by a long-term vision and a strategic plan that combines ambition,

sustainability, and a strong connection to its local roots."

Messi came through Barcelona's academy before spending 17 seasons in the Catalan giants' first team, becoming their all-time leading scorer with 672 goals.

The 38-year-old has previously said he would return to live in Catalonia after he retires from football.

He is set to play in his sixth World Cup when Argentina start their title defence at the tournament in the USA, Mexico and Canada against Algeria in Kansas on June 16.

Messi's great rival Cristiano Ronaldo bought a 25-percent stake in another Spanish club, second-tier Almeria, two months ago. — AFP

Iran participating in World Cup, Infantino confirms

FIFA

For the Game. For the World.

WASHINGTON

— FIFA president Gianni Infantino said Wednesday that Iran will "for sure" participate in the 2026 World Cup despite the Middle East war.

"Iran is coming for sure. We hope that by then the situation will be a peaceful situation, that would definitely help," Infantino told an economic conference organised by broadcaster CNBC.

"But Iran has to come, they represent their people, they have qualified, the players want to play," he said of the team's upcoming matches scheduled in the United States in June.

Infantino had made similar comments in March, when he attended an Iran-Costa Rica friendly in Antalya, Turkey, even though US President Donald Trump had previously suggested that Iranian players might not be "safe" in the United States.

Iran is scheduled to play its three Group G matches in the United States - two in Los Angeles, one in Seattle - with their base for the tournament in Tucson, Arizona.

'Outside of politics'

Iran's participation in the global tournament being co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico had been thrown into doubt by the conflict launched by the United States and Israel on February 28.

Iran raised the prospect of a "boycott" of the competition before asking FIFA to move its matches from the United States to Mexico, a request the world governing body rejected.

After several weeks of air strikes on Iran and Iranian reprisals against Israel and other countries in the region, a fragile truce came into effect on April 8.

But Tehran has sealed off the strategic Strait of Hormuz and since Monday Washington has imposed a blockade on ships coming from or heading to Iranian ports.

"Sports should be outside of politics," Infantino said on Wednesday.

"If there's nobody else that believes in building bridges and keeping them intact and together, we are doing the job," he said.

The World Cup, the first to feature 48 teams, starts on June 11. — AFP



Manchester United's English defender Harry Maguire (centre) is sent off after receiving a red card during the English Premier League match against Bournemouth at the Vitality Stadium in Bournemouth, southern England on March 20.

Maguire will miss Manchester United's Premier League game away to Chelsea tomorrow, after being handed an additional one-match ban for his reaction to being sent off at Bournemouth. The 33-year-old was shown a straight red card at the Vitality Stadium last month for a foul on Evanilson, with Junior Kroupi scoring from the ensuing penalty as the Cherries secured a 2-2 draw. — AFP



Union coach Eta wants focus on football after landmark appointment

BERLIN – Union Berlin coach Marie-Louise Eta said yesterday she was looking forward to questions about football rather than her pioneering role as the first female manager of a men's team in a top European league.

Eta, 34, was named Union coach on Sunday after predecessor Steffen Baumgart was fired. Speaking to the media for the first time since the announcement, Eta sought to shift the focus to tomorrow's home clash with Wolfsburg and Union's battle to beat the drop.

"I'm looking forward to the match starting and when it's finally about football," Eta told reporters.

"I know this has a social impact and significance," Eta said, but added: "For me, it's always been about football, about working with people, and about what I enjoy most: being as successful as possible together."

"They trust me here, and I'm delighted by that trust. I'm happy to be here."

Union sit seven points from the relegation playoff spot with five games remaining, while Wolfsburg are second last and are seven points from safety.

Eta, who became the first female assistant coach in Bundesliga history at Union in 2023, is still slated to take over the club's women's team in the summer regardless of how the men's side finishes the season.

The announcement has attracted major attention in Germany and abroad.

While much of the response has been positive, including from Bayern Munich manager Vincent Kompany who called the announcement "really important", it has also attracted a series of negative comments made on social media.

"There simply wasn't time to delve into anything. I've been told that there have been hate comments.

"But I also know that there have been a lot of positive comments, and I think that's wonderful and should outweigh the negative ones."

Eta told reporters the negative posts "don't bother me because they say much, much more about the people who post it rather than those it is directed at."

The coach also won support from her opposite number in tomorrow's crucial match: Wolfsburg veteran manager Dieter Hecking, who backed Eta yesterday.

"I know Marie-Louise Eta personally and I consider her very competent. She's funny, articulate and knows how to lead a team," Hecking said.

"If Union Berlin believes she has the professional and interpersonal skills to lead the team, then that says it all. And those who vent their frustrations online or on social media - their IQ is zero."

The veteran coach said the never-relegated Wolves, who won the Bundesliga title in 2009 and the German Cup in 2015 in Hecking's previous stint at the club, can still beat the drop. — AFP

Barca refile complaint to UEFA over handball decision



BARCELONA – Barcelona yesterday lodged another complaint with UEFA after their protest over a handball incident in their Champions League quarter-final, first leg defeat to Atletico Madrid was rejected this week.

The Spanish club said in a statement that several refereeing decisions across both legs of the tie which Atletico won 3-2 on aggregate "did not comply with the Laws of the Game, resulting from an incorrect application of the regulations and a lack of appropriate intervention by the VAR system in incidents of clear significance".

The Catalan club, which finished both matches with ten men after the dismissals of Pau Cubarsi and then Eric Garcia, believe they were on the wrong end of several contentious decisions, including

two potential penalty situations that did not trigger VAR intervention.

"The accumulation of these errors had a direct impact on the course of the matches and on the final outcome of the tie, causing significant sporting and financial harm to the club," the reigning Spanish champions added.

Barcelona said the club "reiterates the requests previously made to UEFA" and offer to "collaborate with the organisation with the aim of improving the refereeing system to ensure a more rigorous, fair and transparent application" of the regulations.

On Tuesday, UEFA had rejected as "inadmissible" the five-time Champions League winners' initial complaint regarding a handball on a goal kick by Atletico defender Marc Pubill in the first leg which his side won 2-0. — AFP

Former free-kick ace Nakamura to help Japan at World Cup

Football

TOKYO – Former Celtic free-kick maestro Shunsuke Nakamura will join Japan's World Cup coaching staff, the Japan Football Association said yesterday.

The former midfielder was known for his set-piece prowess and scored a memorable curling free-kick against Manchester United in the Champions League.

The JFA said Nakamura would join coach Hajime Moriyasu's

backroom staff for the World Cup, where Japan have been drawn in Group F with the Netherlands, Tunisia and Sweden.

"I gave a lot of thought to the impact my involvement might have at this crucial stage, with the World Cup finals just around the corner," the 47-year-old said.

"But after receiving a passionate and encouraging message from Moriyasu, I decided to accept."

Nakamura won 98 caps for Japan, scoring 24 goals, and played

at the 2006 and 2010 World Cups.

He joined Celtic in 2005 from Italian side Reggina and went on to win three Scottish league titles during his four seasons in Glasgow.

He retired in 2022 and became an assistant coach with Japanese side Yokohama FC.

"I am committed to sharing the same vision as the Japan players as they compete on the world stage, and I will do everything to help them achieve their goals," said Nakamura. — AFP

LIV Golf reassures players over Saudi withdrawal rumours

Golf

Andrew Marszal

LOS ANGELES – LIV Golf on Wednesday moved to reassure players and staff that it remains fully funded, as reports circulated that the breakaway tour is on the verge of collapse due to the possible withdrawal of Saudi Arabian financing.

The Saudi-backed tour has bitterly divided the world of golf since its 2022 launch, when several of the sport's biggest names were lured to defect from the traditional PGA and DP World tours with huge-money deals.

Rumours have mounted in recent days that LIV Golf's deep-pocketed backers in Riyadh have cooled on the extravagantly expensive project, which has reportedly cost them over US\$5 billion so far.

And multiple outlets including the *Financial Times*, *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* reported on Wednesday that the near-US\$1-trillion Saudi sovereign wealth fund's withdrawal was imminent, all citing anonymous sources.

"I want to be crystal clear: Our season continues exactly as planned, uninterrupted and at full throttle," LIV Golf CEO Scott O'Neil wrote in an email to staff, including players, obtained by AFP.

O'Neil's missive came as players assembled in Mexico City ahead of this week's LIV event, where tour organisers were presenting a business-as-usual front.

The tour posted first-round tee times as usual, and even poked fun at the rumours on social media.

"Slow news day? We are ON," said one post, alongside an image with the words "BREAKING NEWS. TUNE IN TOMORROW" and the Mexico City tournament's starting times.

"LIV Golf funding and operations are continuing as planned," sources familiar with the tour's workings told AFP, pointing to a doubling in tour revenue from 2024 to 2025, and recent record attendances in Australia and South Africa.

But Britain's *Telegraph* newspaper reported that LIV Golf executives had been called into a meeting in New York to discuss the potential fallout from a withdrawal of Saudi funding.

The speculation comes as the Saudi fund on Wednesday unveiled a new five-year strategy that will reorganise its investments - an announcement that came against the backdrop of war in the Middle East.

The Gulf region has been hit hard by Iranian barrages on infrastructure, including airports, energy installations and ports following the US and Israeli attack

on Iran in late February.

Even before the war, Saudi Arabia's economic reforms were coming under pressure, with persistently low oil prices in recent years shrinking government revenues.

Cracks have appeared in LIV Golf's player roster, as five-time major winner Brooks Koepka and former Masters champion Patrick Reed have recently ditched LIV for returns to the PGA Tour.

'We are pioneers'

If the LIV Golf tour were to cease operations, it is not clear how it would affect its remaining players.

LIV star Sergio Garcia told a press conference in Mexico City that players "haven't heard anything" since the start of the year, when wealth fund's leader Yasir al-Rumayyan told golfers "That he's behind us, that they have a long-term project."

In his letter, O'Neil did not directly dispute the rumours of a Saudi withdrawal, but said that "the life of a startup movement is often defined by these moments of pressure."

"We signed up for this because we believe in disrupting the status quo," wrote the executive.

"We are pioneers, and while the road isn't always smooth, the destination is worth every mile," he added. —AFP

WADA targets India's performance-enhancing drugs production



Faisal Kamal

NEW DELHI – A crackdown on India's performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs) production – the biggest globally – is key to tackling the doping menace and protect the athletes, World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) chief Witold Banka told AFP yesterday.

Banka and his team have been in New Delhi as part of their push to build stronger ties with national law and order agencies including cybercrime cells to help uphold the credibility of professional sport.

WADA has sought help from India's Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) - federal police - to curtail the initial supply chain of racketeers and agents who peddle drugs.

"We see the problem of production of performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs) - India is the biggest producer of those illegal substances," said Banka.

"That's why we collaborate with CBI, with law enforcement, to try to destroy this market and to really protect the lives of athletes and the health of society," added the 41-year-old Pole.

WADA has been aggressive in curbing the doping crisis with their Global Anti-Doping Intelligence and Investigations Network (GAIIN) initiative since 2022.

An INTERPOL-backed "operation upstream" has been a success for WADA with 250 raids around the world, 88 illicit labs dismantled and almost 90 tonnes of PEDs seized.

"We are here because India is the biggest population (1.4 billion) and we see how important it is for the Indian authorities, and we see the need to strengthen the system here - it's a common interest," Gunter Younger, head of investigations for WADA, told AFP.

"For now I see the appetite and willingness from the public authority side (in India) to work with us closely to address this issue. We know it's not only about the doping of the athletes."

'A big problem'

Younger, a former head of the Bavarian Police's Cybercrime Division, said to strike a blow

against the doping menace the focus should be shifted from athletes to the supplier of the PEDs.

"We always focus on testing, and the whole infrastructure in the last 25 years the anti-doping community was focusing on testing, and it was okay in the beginning.

"But the criminal networks, they adjust, and they adjust quite quickly.

"The fact that we have, let's say, under 1 percent hits with testing shows for me we can do better in this way.

"Therefore what we want to do with them is to strengthen their intelligence and investigations, working with the CBI, adopt a top-down strategy.

"Go for the criminal networks, and look for the clients, and target the coaches, the doctors that are responsible for providing the PEDs to the athletes, and not do a bottom-up strategy."

Not only is India the leader in manufacturing PEDs it also has the unwanted tag of topping the list of global sports drug cheats for three years in a row, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) said in 2025.

India's National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) collected 7,113 urine and blood samples out of which 260 tested positive in 2024, according to a WADA report published in December last year.

Pundits said it was a major blow to India, which is preparing to host the 2030 Commonwealth Games - an event seen as a stepping stone for the country's ambition of hosting the 2036 Olympics.

But Banka said the figures have no bearing on India winning the right to host prestigious global sporting events.

"It's no doubt that there is a big problem with doping in India. The statistics show clearly the number of positive tests," he said.

"But I will be very concerned if year by year the number of positive tests go down significantly, then I think that maybe the National Anti-Doping Agency is not doing a good job."

Banka added, "It's not that if India maintains the first place when it comes to the number of positive tests, they will not be able to host the Games or World Championships.

"It's about how the system works from the legal perspective, and this is our role as a global anti-doping regulator to assess it." —AFP



Ruslan Poltoratskii (left) of Bahrain competes against Yang Yung Wei of Chinese Taipei during the men's -60kg final at the Asian Judo Championships 2026 in Ordos, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, yesterday. —Xinhua

Joshua gets 'unbelievable lift' training with old rival Usyk - promoter

Boxing

LONDON – Anthony Joshua has resumed training with former heavyweight rival Oleksandr Usyk as he continues preparations for a return to the ring that could culminate in a 'Battle of Britain' bout against Tyson Fury later this year.

Joshua and Usyk have been in camp together in Valencia for several weeks. Joshua returned to Spain after watching fellow former world heavyweight champion Fury's unanimous points victory over Arslanbek Makhmudov from

ringside at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium on Saturday.

Olympic gold-medallist Joshua, 36, is being lined up to face Fury in November, possibly at Wembley, but would most likely have to overcome a warm-up opponent beforehand.

Joshua's next fight will mark the first time he has been back in the ring since being involved in a car crash in Nigeria in November that killed two close friends. He now hopes to receive medical clearance in the next fortnight to resume full training after suffering injuries in the accident.

World Boxing Council,

World Boxing Association and International Boxing Federation world champion Usyk beat Joshua twice in 2021 and 2022, but they have now joined forces, with the Ukrainian insisting "if we don't help each other, we are not people, we are animals".

"It just gives him an unbelievable lift. At the moment he's very happy," Eddie Hearn, Joshua's promoter, said yesterday.

"Right now, this is really what he needs. He's worked so hard to get himself physically ready to try and go back to full-time camp. It's

really good for him. When he's there and he's focused, he's got that purpose.

"When I was there I watched a session and there were times when AJ was all out on his heart rate and Usyk was going 'come on champ - push, push, push'.

"And I'm watching, thinking this is unbelievable what I'm seeing. You've got pound for pound number one. You've got the guy who he beat twice, who's probably the biggest star in the sport. It's incredible and what he's getting out of this is amazing."

Joshua filmed Fury's comeback against Makhmudov on his phone and, according to Hearn, is studying the footage in great detail.

"AJ filmed the whole thing," said Hearn. "He wasn't streaming it, it was being filmed from a different angle. He's been sending me some clips and he'll watch it over and over again.

"The build up to the Fury fight will be incredible but the fight will be incredible as well. I'm sure it means a lot to Fury, but I know what it means to AJ. He'll give everything in camp for that fight." —AFP

India's 'Maharaja in Denims' stakes claim in AI film race

Seema Sinha

MUMBAI – Many filmmakers fear the existential threat of artificial intelligence (AI), but in India the race is on to produce the first hit Bollywood feature generated by the technology.

One contender is "Maharaja in Denims", based on a popular 2014 novel by Khushwant Singh and set for cinematic release this summer.

"There is no actor fee, there is no fuss over them coming late or causing delays. There are no sets," Singh told AFP.

"It is sheer creativity of mind and the machine," said the author, who co-founded the startup Intelliflicks Studios with a former Microsoft executive to realise the project.

Indian studios, which churn out more than 2,000 movies a year, have embraced AI – unlike in Hollywood, where it has sparked huge strikes and strict union conditions around its use.

Separate projects in the country, such as the mythological "Chiranjeevi Hanuman: The Eternal" and the Kannada-language "Love You", have also been marketed as pioneering AI productions.

Another challenger, "Naisha",

had to postpone its May 2025 release date over unspecified technical issues, according to a social media post from its production studio.

Lightspeed advances in AI image generation capabilities also kept delaying the final cut of "Maharaja in Denims", the story of a privileged teenager who is a victim of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in Punjab.

"You are tempted to use the latest technology, so what was made before didn't look as appealing," Singh said.

"But then it also burns cash, because you are spending again for the software."

'Toughest' path

In 2024, Singh and Intelliflicks co-founder Gurdeep Singh Pall, once head of business AI and product incubations at Microsoft, hired a team of six people, including a director and cinematographer, to make "Maharaja in Denims".

Pall "wanted to experiment with my book", explained Singh, who is based in the northern city of Chandigarh.

The film's protagonist believes he is the reincarnation of the 19th century Sikh ruler Maharaja



Khushwant Singh, author of "Maharaja in Denims" and co-founder of AI-driven production house Intelliflicks Studios, which is set to release an AI-generated adaptation of the book envisioned as the world's first full-length AI realism film, poses at his home in Chandigarh. – AFP

Ranjit Singh – and traditionally, the movie's layered timelines and historical settings would demand a massive budget.

But Singh said AI had slashed costs to roughly a tenth.

While the startup has "cracked" the process of AI filmmaking, mythological and science-fiction films, where characters' faces are less defined, are far easier to

generate than realistic cinema, he argued.

"We chose the toughest... path of realism," Singh said.

AI models were poorly trained for Indian faces and Sikh historical figures, forcing the team to repeatedly troubleshoot.

A Western movie would be "much easier to generate, because the models are trained for that", he said.

"Had we known the challenges, we would have picked a different script."

Human music

ChatGPT maker OpenAI has backed the production of a feature-length animation called "Criterz", created largely with AI tools.

It is aiming for a premiere at this year's Cannes Film Festival in May ahead of a global release.

To retain a human touch in "Maharaja in Denims", the soundtrack will feature traditional music, with a title song by Indian singer Sukhwinder Singh.

"People in India watch music rather than just listen to it, so it's best to have it," Singh said.

Interest is already spreading beyond the film industry, and Singh says he has received emails from wealthy temple trusts keen to commission AI-generated mythological films.

Despite the hurdles, Singh believes AI will disrupt – and democratise – cinema.

"The way technology is making progress, you will have an 18-year-old sitting somewhere in a village who would be challenging the big guys," he said. – AFP

Val Kilmer returns via AI as filmmakers test Hollywood's red line

Paula Ramon

LAS VEGAS – The first images of late American film star Val Kilmer returning to the big screen courtesy of artificial intelligence (AI) were unveiled on Wednesday in Las Vegas, in what will likely stir debate over the technology's role in Hollywood.

A youthful, digital version of Kilmer appears in the trailer for "As Deep as the Grave", telling another character: "Don't fear the dead and don't fear me."

The footage premiered at CinemaCon, the annual conference where studios present upcoming releases to movie theatre owners.

Brothers Coerte and John Voorhees, director and producer of the film, said they hope to release the historical drama by the end of the year.

Kilmer, best known for his roles in "Top Gun," "Batman Forever" and "The Doors," died of pneumonia in April 2025 at the age of 65.

The project drew headlines last month when the filmmakers revealed they had recreated the actor using AI

with the consent of his family.

The use of AI remains one of the most sensitive issues in the entertainment industry and was central to the 2023 strikes that shut down Hollywood, as actors and writers warned that unchecked technology threatened their livelihoods.

"As Deep as the Grave" follows pioneering archaeologists Ann and Earl Morris – the latter credited by some with helping inspire the fictional Indiana Jones – and originally cast Kilmer before the COVID-19 pandemic to play a Catholic priest.

Health problems forced Kilmer, who was battling cancer, to step away from the role. But after pandemic delays, the Voorheeses revisited the project as AI technology advanced.

They recast Kilmer digitally as Father Fintan, an early Catholic missionary suffering from tuberculosis who, like many at the time, travelled to the US southwest for the dry climate and opened missions in the Four Corners region.

"It was a very dark time," Coerte said, adding that the character was central to the story.

The filmmakers said they approached Kilmer's children, Mercedes and Jack, after concluding the role could still be realised.

The family gave its approval and granted access to Kilmer's video archives, which were used to recreate the actor at multiple stages of his life.

Val Kilmer had spoken to his children before his death about his legacy and what he wished he could still accomplish as an actor, the brothers said.

"We were so glad they were excited and so supportive of the idea," Coerte added.

'Painstaking'

The Voorheeses did not detail the technical process behind their film, but said digitally reviving Kilmer was a "painstaking process."

"Just like any artistic endeavour, you spend a lot of time drafting and redrafting," John Voorhees said, so the performance feels faithful to how he might have done it.

They conceded the project could unsettle some people, but stressed that they followed SAG-AFTRA* guidelines, which rest on what the trade union calls the three Cs: consent, compensation and collaboration.

"Following this process, working with the family... we can actually demonstrate the right way to do it," Coerte told AFP.

"We believe artists will galvanise around that and take control back, because it's not in the hands of the artists right now. It's actually... a free-for-all," he added. – AFP

'There's more truth than fiction,' Spielberg says of 'Disclosure Day'



US filmmaker Steven Spielberg waves up arrival on stage during Universal Pictures and Focus Features presentation at CinemaCon at The Colosseum at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, Nevada, on Wednesday. – AFP

Paula Ramon

LAS VEGAS – US director Steven Spielberg offered a sneak peek of his upcoming film "Disclosure Day" on Wednesday, his latest movie about aliens and humanity since he first tapped into the genre 50 years ago.

Spielberg presented the film at CinemaCon in Las Vegas, the annual conference where movie studios present upcoming releases to movie theatre owners.

The film shows humanity crossing paths with extraterrestrial life, a plot reminiscent of his 1977 film "Close Encounters of the Third Kind."

"A half a century later, I made Disclosure Day with a lot more certainty that there's more truth than fiction in the movie," Spielberg told the crowd at the Colosseum at Caesar's Palace.

"Disclosure Day," which opens June 12 in the United States, stars Emily Blunt, Josh O'Connor, Eve Henson and Colman Domingo, among others.

"This movie is an experience, and all you need to get from the beginning to the end is a seatbelt," Spielberg said.

The 79-year-old veteran filmmaker said he's been curious about "what's happening in the night sky" since he was a child.

"I truly believe that this movie is going to answer questions, and cause you to ask a lot of questions," he teased.

The thrice Oscar-winning director received an award from the Motion Picture Association during his appearance at CinemaCon.

Spielberg also discussed the importance of long theatrical release windows, as streaming platforms continue to take a bite out of box office revenues.

"I am particularly excited that Universal has recently announced their commitment to a 45-day window for the wide releases," Spielberg said.

"But today I hear 60 days?" he joked. – AFP

World Weather			
CHINA	ASIA-PACIFIC	WORLD	LUSOPHONE
Beijing 12°C~24°C	Manila 23°C~35°C	New York 14°C~26°C	Lisbon 13°C~25°C
Shanghai 14°C~22°C	Bangkok 27°C~37°C	London 9°C~18°C	Rio de Janeiro 19°C~28°C
Hong Kong 21°C~28°C	Tokyo 11°C~19°C	Frankfurt 11°C~22°C	Luanda 24°C~30°C
Taipei 21°C~29°C	Singapore 25°C~32°C	Vancouver 6°C~12°C	Maputo 21°C~32°C
Guangzhou 21°C~29°C	Kuala Lumpur 25°C~33°C	Paris 11°C~21°C	Dili 23°C~32°C
Nanjing 13°C~23°C	Jakarta 23°C~33°C	Moscow 4°C~14°C	São Tomé 26°C~33°C
Guilin 15°C~26°C	Seoul 9°C~20°C	Las Vegas 9°C~21°C	Praia 19°C~28°C
Xi'an 12°C~28°C	Sydney 12°C~27°C	Monte Carlo 15°C~22°C	Bissau 20°C~36°C



Charging in!

A wild yak is pictured at the Bamoqongzong extinct volcanic cluster area in the Changtang National Nature Reserve, Xizang Autonomous Region, last Thursday. The Bamoqongzong extinct volcanic cluster is located deep within the Changtang National Nature Reserve, at an average elevation of approximately 5,000 meters. — Xinhua



Chariot of gold

A female representative of the New Year angel, sits on a Royal ox-cart as people parade during celebrations for the Khmer New Year, known as Nokor Sankranta, in Phnom Penh yesterday. — AFP



Head to head – Ref standing by!

Galloway cattle stand on a meadow near a stranded humpback whale pictured off the Baltic Sea coast near the island of Poel, near Wismar, northern Germany, yesterday. — AFP



Family meeting

One-horned rhinoceroses graze at Kaziranga National Park in Nagaon District of Assam, India on Wednesday. — Xinhua



Customers' ceramics

This photo taken yesterday, shows handicrafts made by customers at a handicraft store in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province. — Xinhua

Cover blown

An indigenous woman throws confetti over a member of the community security forces during a parade to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the Indigenous Social Movement in Cheran, Michoacan, Mexico on Wednesday. — AFP